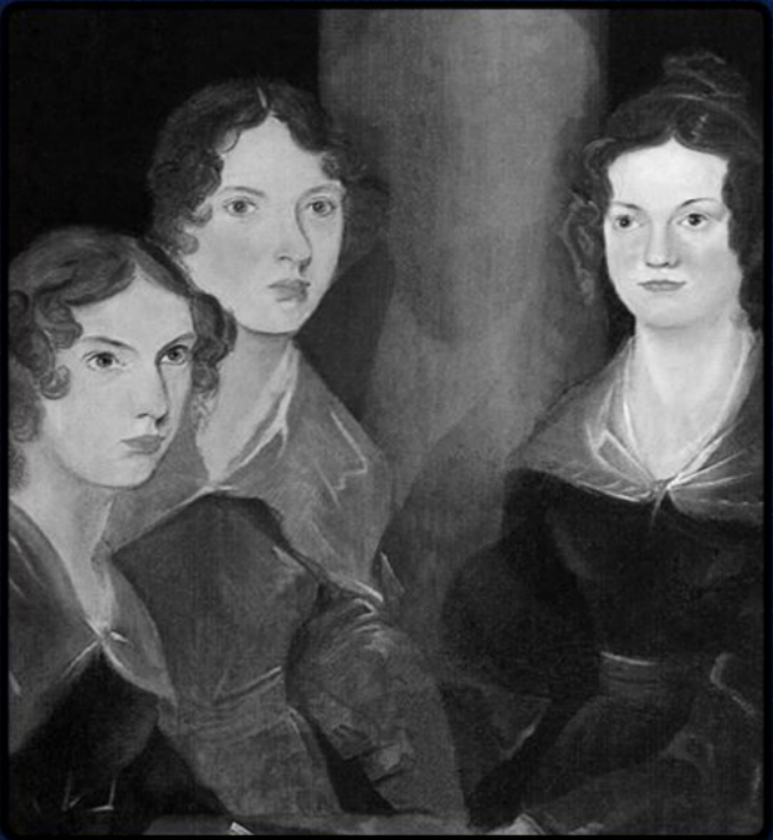
Complete Works of
THE BRONTËS



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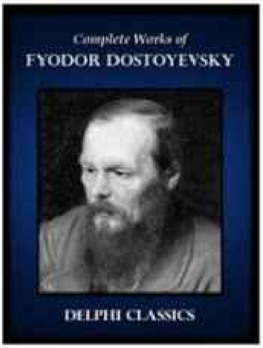
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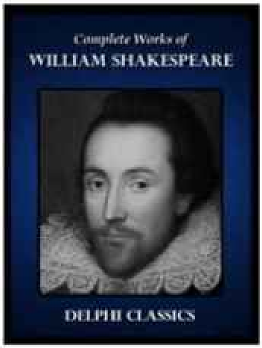
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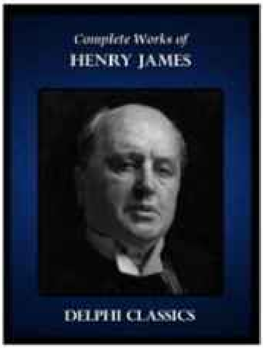
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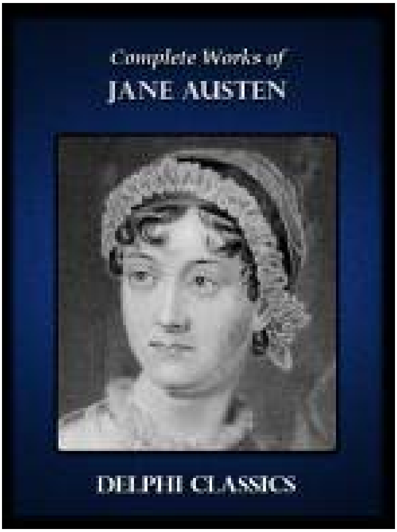
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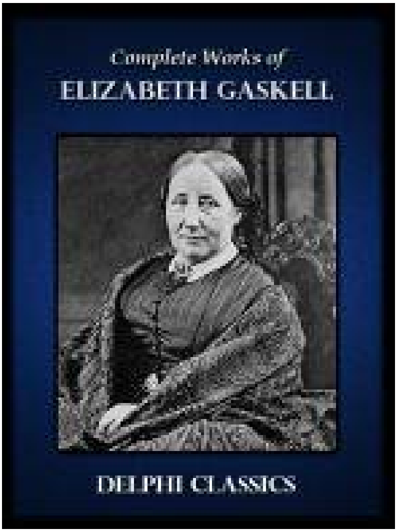
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The sisters' birthplace, Thornton, West Yorkshire

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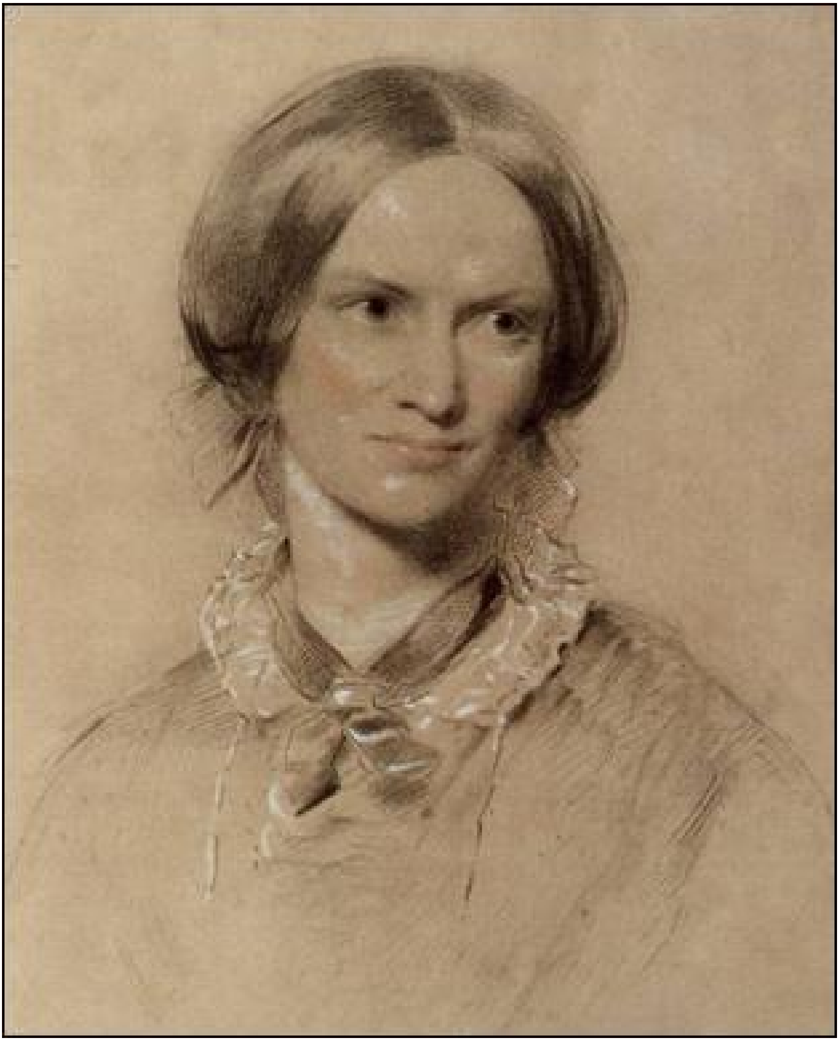
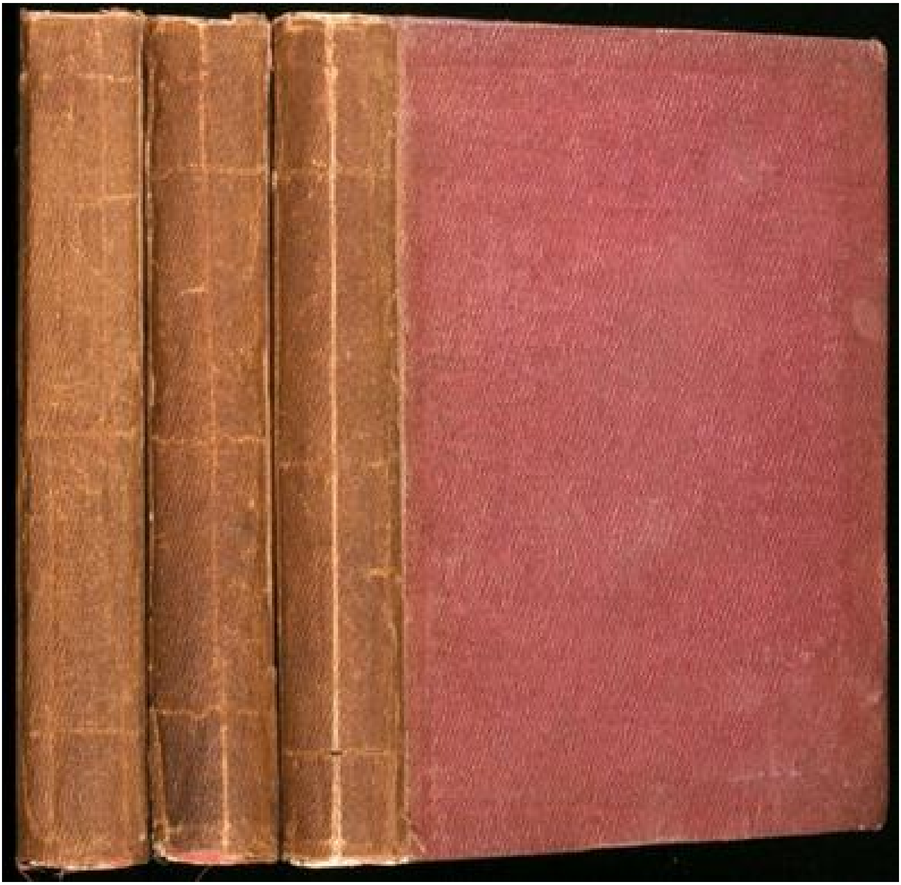


Charlotte in her twenties



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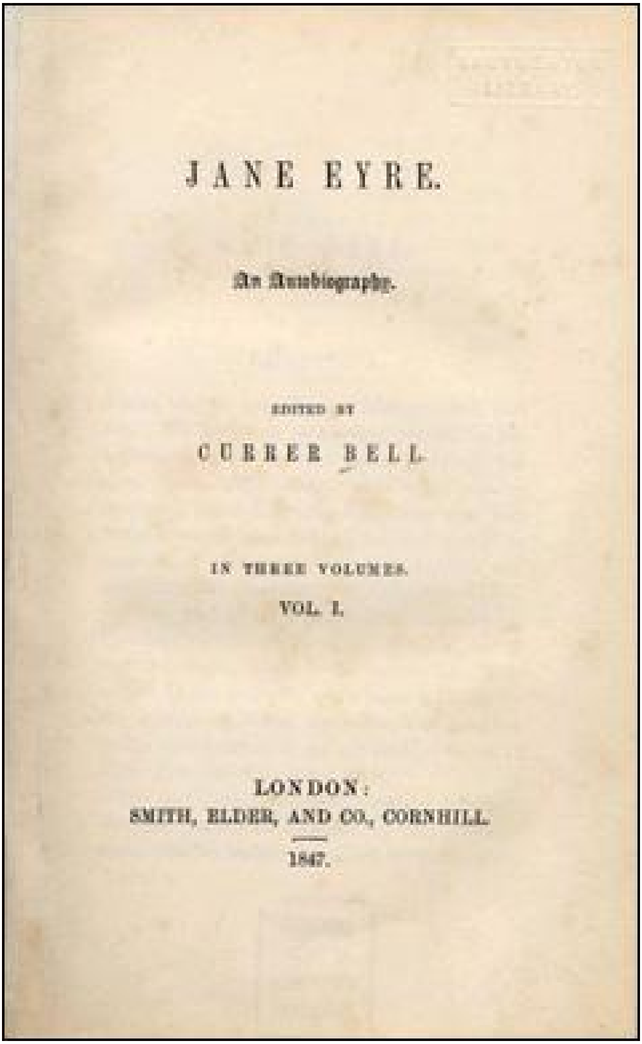

JANE EYRE.

An Autobiography.

EDITED BY
CURRER BELL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., CORNHILL.
1847.

The title page with Charlotte's male pen name

TO
W. M. THACKERAY, Esq.,
This Work
is respectfully inscribed
by
THE AUTHOR

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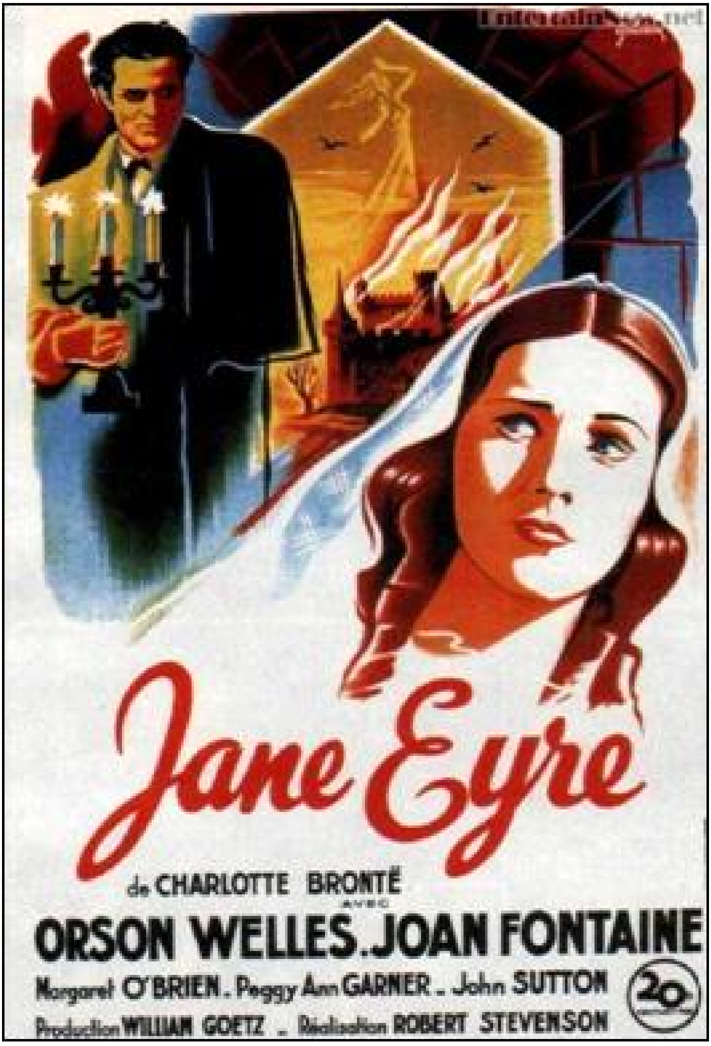
Jane Eyre
de CHARLOTTE BRONTË
avec
ORSON WELLES. JOAN FONTAINE
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Production WILLIAM GOETZ . Réalisation ROBERT STEVENSON
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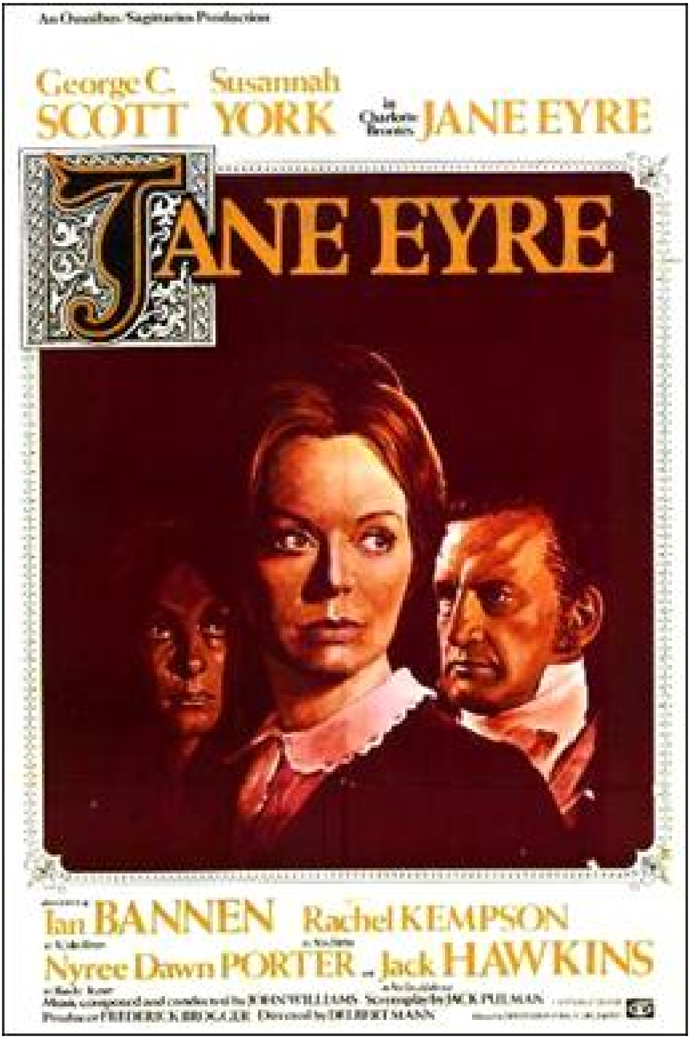
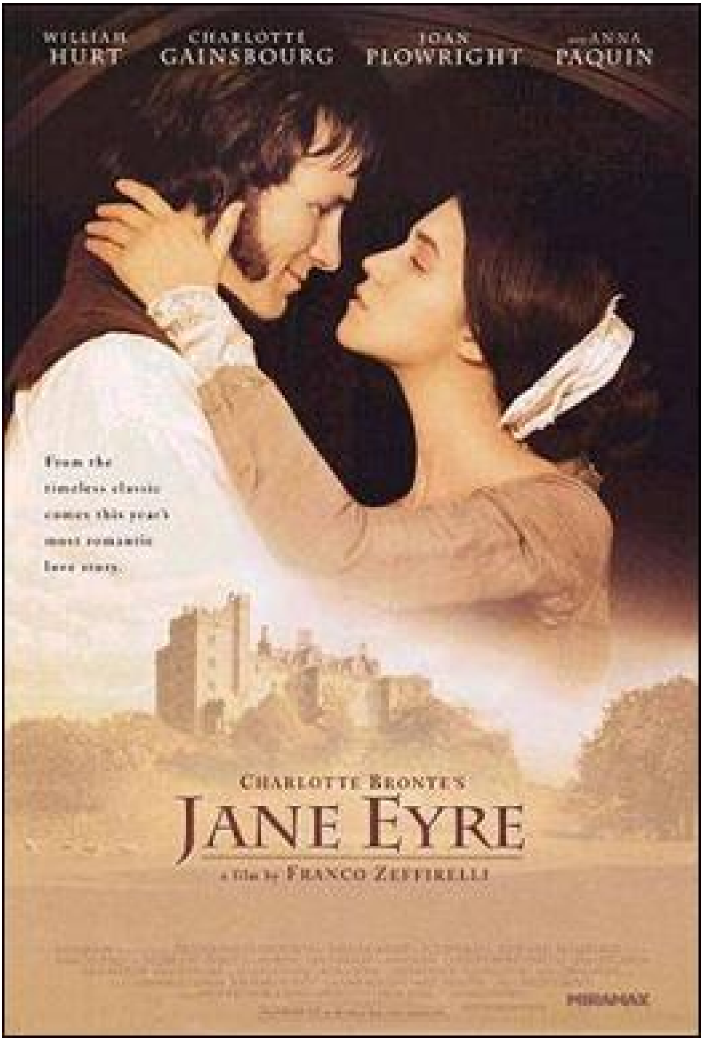
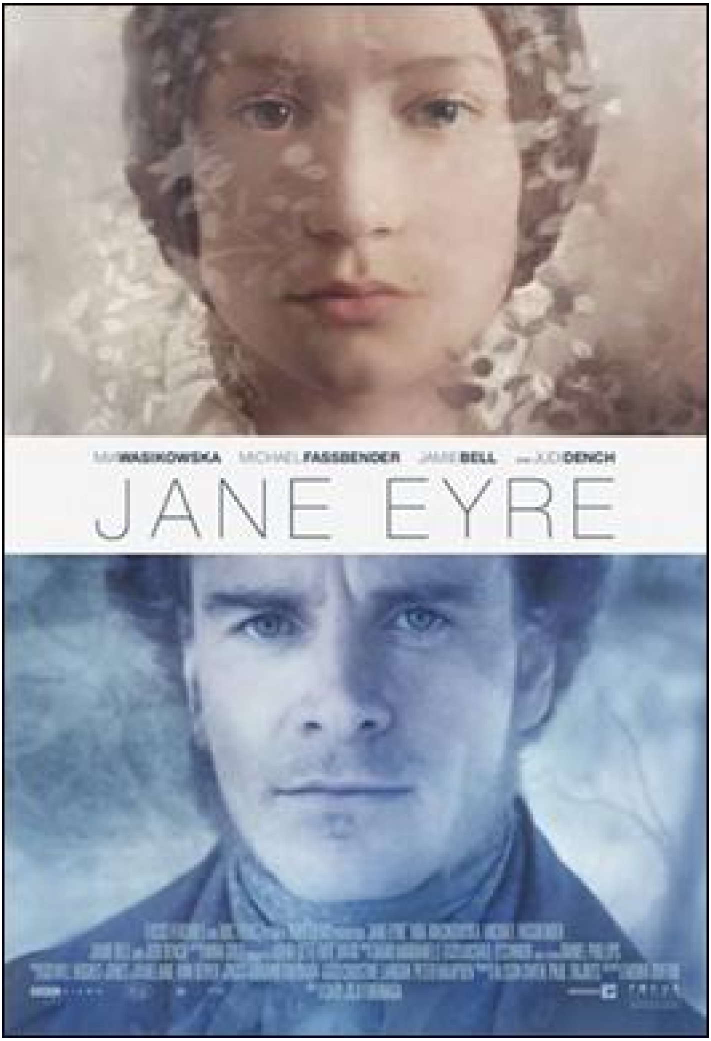
The 1943 film adaptation


An Omnibus-Sagittarius Production
George C. SCOTT
Susannah YORK
in Charlotte Brontë's JANE EYRE
JANE EYRE
Ian BANNEN
Rachel KEMPSON
Nyree Dawn PORTER
and Jack HAWKINS
Music composed and conducted by JOHN WILLIAMS
Screenplay by JACK PULMAN
Producer FREDERICK BROGGER
Directed by DELBERT MANN

The 1970 film adaptation


WILLIAM HURT
CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG
JOAN PLOWRIGHT
and ANNA PAQUIN
From the timeless classic comes this year's most romantic love story.
CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S
JANE EYRE
a film by FRANCO ZEFFIRELLI
MIRAMAX

The 1996 film adaptation


MIA WASIKOWSKA
MICHAEL FASSBENDER
JAMIE BELL
and JUDI DENCH
JANE EYRE

The 2011 film adaptation

PREFACE

A preface to the first edition of "Jane Eyre" being unnecessary, I gave none: this second edition demands a few words both of acknowledgment and miscellaneous remark.

My thanks are due in three quarters.

To the Public, for the indulgent ear it has inclined to a plain tale with few pretensions.

To the Press, for the fair field its honest suffrage has opened to an obscure aspirant.

To my Publishers, for the aid their tact, their energy, their practical sense and frank liberality have afforded an unknown and unrecommended Author.

The Press and the Public are but vague personifications for me, and I must thank them in vague terms; but my Publishers are definite: so are certain generous critics who have encouraged me as only large-hearted and high-minded men know how to encourage a struggling stranger; to them, *i.e.*, to my Publishers and the select Reviewers, I say cordially, Gentlemen, I thank you from my heart.

Having thus acknowledged what I owe those who have aided and approved me, I turn to another class; a small one, so far as I know, but not, therefore, to be overlooked. I mean the timorous or carping few who doubt the tendency of such books as "Jane Eyre:" in whose eyes whatever is unusual is wrong; whose ears detect in each protest against bigotry — that parent of crime — an insult to piety, that regent of God on earth. I would suggest to such doubters certain obvious distinctions; I would remind them of certain simple truths.

Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns.

These things and deeds are diametrically opposed: they are as distinct as is vice from virtue. Men too often confound them: they should not be confounded: appearance should not be mistaken for truth; narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the world-redeeming creed of Christ. There is — I repeat it — a difference; and it is a good, and not a bad action to mark broadly and clearly the line of separation between them.

The world may not like to see these ideas dissevered, for it has been accustomed to blend them; finding it convenient to make external show pass for sterling worth — to let white-washed walls vouch for clean shrines. It may hate him who dares to scrutinise and expose — to rase the gilding, and show base metal under it — to penetrate the sepulchre, and reveal charnel relics: but hate as it will, it is indebted to him.

Ahab did not like Micaiah, because he never prophesied good concerning him, but evil; probably he liked the sycophant son of Chenaannah better; yet might Ahab have escaped a bloody death, had he but stopped his ears to flattery, and opened them to faithful counsel.

There is a man in our own days whose words are not framed to tickle delicate ears: who, to my thinking, comes before the great ones of society, much as the son of Imlah came before the throned Kings of Judah and Israel; and who speaks truth as deep, with a power as prophet-like and as vital — a mien as dauntless and as daring. Is the satirist of "Vanity Fair" admired in high places? I cannot tell; but I think if some of those amongst whom he hurls the Greek fire of his sarcasm, and over whom he flashes the levin-brand of his denunciation, were to take his warnings in time — they or their seed might yet escape a fatal Rimoth-Gilead.

Why have I alluded to this man? I have alluded to him, Reader, because I think I see in him an intellect profounder and more unique than his contemporaries have yet recognised; because I regard him as the first social regenerator of the day — as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped system of things; because I think no commentator on his writings has yet found the comparison that suits him, the terms which rightly characterise his talent. They say he is like Fielding: they talk of his wit, humour, comic powers. He resembles Fielding as an eagle does a vulture: Fielding could stoop on carrion, but Thackeray never does. His wit is bright, his humour attractive, but both bear the same relation to his serious genius that the mere lambent sheet-lightning playing under the edge of the summer-cloud does to the electric death-spark hid in its womb. Finally, I have alluded to Mr. Thackeray, because to him — if he will accept the tribute of a total stranger — I have dedicated this second edition of "Jane Eyre."

CURRER BELL.

December 21*st*, 1847.

NOTE TO THE THIRD EDITION

I avail myself of the opportunity which a third edition of "Jane Eyre" affords me, of again addressing a word to the Public, to explain that my claim to the title of novelist rests on this one work alone. If, therefore, the authorship of other works of fiction has been attributed to me, an honour is awarded where it is not merited; and consequently, denied where it is justly due.

This explanation will serve to rectify mistakes which may already have been made, and to prevent future errors.

CURRER BELL.

April 13*th*, 1848.

St Michael's Chruch, Hathersage, Derbyshire, where Charlotte worshipped while writing 'Jane Eyre'

CHAPTER I

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.

I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had dispensed from joining the group; saying, "She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation, that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner — something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were — she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children."

"What does Bessie say I have done?" I asked.

"Jane, I don't like cavillers or questioners; besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent."

A breakfast-room adjoined the drawing-room, I slipped in there. It contained a bookcase: I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures. I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined in double retirement.

Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day. At intervals, while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.

I returned to my book — Bewick's History of British Birds: the letterpress thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank. They were those which treat of the haunts of sea-fowl; of "the solitary rocks and promontories" by them only inhabited; of the coast of Norway, studded with isles from its southern extremity, the Lindeness, or Naze, to the North Cape —

“Where the Northern Ocean, in vast whirls,
Boils round the naked, melancholy isles
Of farthest Thule; and the Atlantic surge
Pours in among the stormy Hebrides.”

Nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland, with “the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone, and those forlorn regions of dreary space, — that reservoir of frost and snow, where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters, glazed in Alpine heights above heights, surround the pole, and concentre the multiplied rigours of extreme cold.” Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children’s brains, but strangely impressive. The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.

I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quite solitary churchyard, with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two trees, its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide.

The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine phantoms.

The fiend pinning down the thief’s pack behind him, I passed over quickly: it was an object of terror.

So was the black horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying a distant crowd surrounding a gallows.

Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting: as interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings, when she chanced to be in good humour; and when, having brought her ironing-table to the nursery hearth, she allowed us to sit about it, and while she got up Mrs. Reed’s lace frills, and crimped her nightcap borders, fed our eager attention with passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and other ballads; or (as at a later period I discovered) from the pages of Pamela, and Henry, Earl of Moreland.

With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon. The breakfast-room door opened.

“Boh! Madam Mope!” cried the voice of John Reed; then he paused: he found the room apparently empty.

“Where the dickens is she!” he continued. “Lizzy! Georgy! (calling to his sisters) Joan is not here: tell mama she is run out into the rain — bad animal!”

"It is well I drew the curtain," thought I; and I wished fervently he might not discover my hiding-place: nor would John Reed have found it out himself; he was not quick either of vision or conception; but Eliza just put her head in at the door, and said at once —

"She is in the window-seat, to be sure, Jack."

And I came out immediately, for I trembled at the idea of being dragged forth by the said Jack.

"What do you want?" I asked, with awkward diffidence.

"Say, 'What do you want, Master Reed?'" was the answer. "I want you to come here;" and seating himself in an arm-chair, he intimated by a gesture that I was to approach and stand before him.

John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old; four years older than I, for I was but ten: large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious, and gave him a dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks. He ought now to have been at school; but his mama had taken him home for a month or two, "on account of his delicate health." Mr. Miles, the master, affirmed that he would do very well if he had fewer cakes and sweetmeats sent him from home; but the mother's heart turned from an opinion so harsh, and inclined rather to the more refined idea that John's sallowness was owing to over-application and, perhaps, to pining after home.

John had not much affection for his mother and sisters, and an antipathy to me. He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh in my bones shrank when he came near. There were moments when I was bewildered by the terror he inspired, because I had no appeal whatever against either his menaces or his inflictions; the servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my part against him, and Mrs. Reed was blind and deaf on the subject: she never saw him strike or heard him abuse me, though he did both now and then in her very presence, more frequently, however, behind her back.

Habitually obedient to John, I came up to his chair: he spent some three minutes in thrusting out his tongue at me as far as he could without damaging the roots: I knew he would soon strike, and while dreading the blow, I mused on the disgusting and ugly appearance of him who would presently deal it. I wonder if he read that notion in my face; for, all at once, without speaking, he struck suddenly and strongly. I tottered, and on regaining my equilibrium retired back a step or two from his chair.

"That is for your impudence in answering mama awhile since," said he, "and for your sneaking way of getting behind curtains, and for the look you had in your eyes two minutes since, you rat!"

Accustomed to John Reed's abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult.

"What were you doing behind the curtain?" he asked.

"I was reading."

"Show the book."

I returned to the window and fetched it thence.

"You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they *are* mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows."

I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded.

"Wicked and cruel boy!" I said. "You are like a murderer — you are like a slave-driver — you are like the Roman emperors!"

I had read Goldsmith's History of Rome, and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, &c. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud.

"What! what!" he cried. "Did she say that to me? Did you hear her, Eliza and Georgiana? Won't I tell mama? but first — "

He ran headlong at me: I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing. I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent suffering: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don't very well know what I did with my hands, but he called me "Rat! Rat!" and bellowed out aloud. Aid was near him: Eliza and Georgiana had run for Mrs. Reed, who was gone upstairs: she now came upon the scene, followed by Bessie and her maid Abbot. We were parted: I heard the words —

"Dear! dear! What a fury to fly at Master John!"

"Did ever anybody see such a picture of passion!"

Then Mrs. Reed subjoined —

"Take her away to the red-room, and lock her in there." Four hands were immediately laid upon me, and I was borne upstairs.

CHAPTER II

I resisted all the way: a new thing for me, and a circumstance which greatly strengthened the bad opinion Bessie and Miss Abbot were disposed to entertain of me. The fact is, I was a trifle beside myself; or rather *out* of myself, as the French would say: I was conscious that a moment's mutiny had already rendered me liable to strange penalties, and, like any other rebel slave, I felt resolved, in my desperation, to go all lengths.

"Hold her arms, Miss Abbot: she's like a mad cat."

"For shame! for shame!" cried the lady's-maid. "What shocking conduct, Miss Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your benefactress's son! Your young master."

"Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?"

"No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep. There, sit down, and think over your wickedness."

They had got me by this time into the apartment indicated by Mrs. Reed, and had thrust me upon a stool: my impulse was to rise from it like a spring; their two pair of hands arrested me instantly.

"If you don't sit still, you must be tied down," said Bessie. "Miss Abbot, lend me your garters; she would break mine directly."

Miss Abbot turned to divest a stout leg of the necessary ligature. This preparation for bonds, and the additional ignominy it inferred, took a little of the excitement out of me.

"Don't take them off," I cried; "I will not stir."

In guarantee whereof, I attached myself to my seat by my hands.

"Mind you don't," said Bessie; and when she had ascertained that I was really subsiding, she loosened her hold of me; then she and Miss Abbot stood with folded arms, looking darkly and doubtfully on my face, as incredulous of my sanity.

"She never did so before," at last said Bessie, turning to the Abigail.

"But it was always in her," was the reply. "I've told Missis often my opinion about the child, and Missis agreed with me. She's an underhand little thing: I never saw a girl of her age with so much cover."

Bessie answered not; but ere long, addressing me, she said — "You ought to be aware, Miss, that you are under obligations to Mrs. Reed: she keeps you: if she were to turn you off, you would have to go to the poorhouse."

I had nothing to say to these words: they were not new to me: my very first recollections of existence included hints of the same kind. This reproach of my dependence had become a vague sing-song in my ear: very painful and crushing, but only half intelligible. Miss Abbot joined in —

"And you ought not to think yourself on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows you to be brought up with them. They will have a great deal of money, and you will have none: it is your place to be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to them."

"What we tell you is for your good," added Bessie, in no harsh voice, "you should try to be useful and pleasant, then, perhaps, you would have a home here; but if you become passionate and rude, Missis will send you away, I am sure."

"Besides," said Miss Abbot, "God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums, and then where would she go? Come, Bessie, we will leave her: I wouldn't have her heart for anything. Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, when you are by yourself; for if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away."

They went, shutting the door, and locking it behind them.

The red-room was a square chamber, very seldom slept in, I might say never, indeed, unless when a chance influx of visitors at Gateshead Hall rendered it necessary to turn to account all the accommodation it contained: yet it was one of the largest and stateliest chambers in the mansion. A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, stood out like a tabernacle in the centre; the two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down, were half shrouded in festoons and falls of similar drapery; the carpet was red; the table at the foot of the bed was covered with a crimson cloth; the walls were a soft fawn colour with a blush of pink in it; the wardrobe, the toilet-table, the chairs were of darkly polished old mahogany. Out of these deep surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed, spread with a snowy Marseilles counterpane. Scarcely less prominent was an ample cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it; and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne.

This room was chill, because it seldom had a fire; it was silent, because remote from the nursery and kitchen; solemn, because it was known to be so seldom entered. The house-maid alone came here on Saturdays, to wipe from the mirrors and the furniture a week's quiet dust: and Mrs. Reed herself, at far intervals, visited it to review the contents of a certain secret drawer in the wardrobe, where were stored divers parchments, her jewel-casket, and a miniature of her deceased husband; and in those last words lies the secret of the red-room — the spell which kept it so lonely in spite of its grandeur.

Mr. Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this chamber he breathed his last; here he lay in state; hence his coffin was borne by the undertaker's men; and, since that day, a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion.

My seat, to which Bessie and the bitter Miss Abbot had left me riveted, was a low ottoman near the marble chimney-piece; the bed rose before me; to my right hand there was the high, dark wardrobe, with subdued, broken reflections varying the gloss of its panels; to my left were the muffled windows; a great looking-glass between them repeated the vacant majesty of the bed and room. I was not quite sure whether they had locked the door; and when I dared move, I got up and went to see. Alas! yes: no jail was ever more secure. Returning, I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie's evening stories represented as coming out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travellers. I returned to my stool.

Superstition was with me at that moment; but it was not yet her hour for complete victory: my blood was still warm; the mood of the revolted slave was still bracing me with its bitter vigour; I had to stem a rapid rush of retrospective thought before I quailed to the dismal present.

All John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sisters' proud indifference, all his mother's aversion, all the servants' partiality, turned up in my disturbed mind like a dark deposit in a turbid well. Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win any one's favour? Eliza, who was headstrong and selfish, was respected. Georgiana, who had a spoiled temper, a very acrid spite, a captious and insolent carriage, was universally indulged. Her beauty, her pink cheeks and golden curls, seemed to give delight to all who looked at her, and to purchase indemnity for every fault. John no one thwarted, much less punished; though he twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks, set the dogs at the sheep, stripped the hothouse vines of their fruit, and broke the buds off the choicest plants in the conservatory: he called his mother "old girl," too; sometimes reviled her for her dark skin, similar to his own; bluntly disregarded her wishes; not unfrequently tore and spoiled her silk attire; and he was still "her own darling." I dared commit no fault: I strove to fulfil every duty; and I was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night.

My head still ached and bled with the blow and fall I had received: no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me; and because I had turned against him to avert farther irrational violence, I was loaded with general opprobrium.

"Unjust! — unjust!" said my reason, forced by the agonising stimulus into precocious though transitory power: and Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression — as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die.

What a consternation of soul was mine that dreary afternoon! How all my brain was in tumult, and all my heart in insurrection! Yet in what darkness, what dense ignorance, was the mental battle fought! I could not answer the ceaseless inward question — *why* I thus suffered; now, at the distance of — I will not say how many years, I see it clearly.

I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathise with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment. I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child — though equally dependent and friendless — Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently; her children would have entertained for me more of the cordiality of fellow-feeling; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scapegoat of the nursery.

Daylight began to forsake the red-room; it was past four o'clock, and the beclouded afternoon was tending to drear twilight. I heard the rain still beating continuously on the staircase window, and the wind howling in the grove behind the hall; I grew by degrees cold as a stone, and then my courage sank. My habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression, fell damp on the embers of my decaying ire. All said I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so; what thought had I been but just conceiving of starving myself to death? That certainly was a crime: and was I fit to die? Or was the vault under the chancel of Gateshead Church an inviting bourne? In such vault I had been told did Mr. Reed lie buried; and led by this thought to recall his idea, I dwelt on it with gathering dread. I could not remember him; but I knew that he was my own uncle — my mother's brother — that he had taken me when a parentless infant to his house; and that in his last moments he had required a promise of Mrs. Reed that she would rear and maintain me as one of her own children. Mrs. Reed probably considered she had kept this promise; and so she had, I dare say, as well as her nature would permit her; but how could she really like an interloper not of her race, and unconnected with her, after her husband's death, by any tie? It must have been most irksome to find herself bound by a hard-wrung pledge to stand in the stead of a parent to a strange child she could not love, and to see an uncongenial alien permanently intruded on her own family group.

A singular notion dawned upon me. I doubted not — never doubted — that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly; and now, as I sat looking at the white bed and overshadowed walls — occasionally also turning a fascinated eye towards the dimly gleaning mirror — I began to recall what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed; and I thought Mr. Reed's spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode — whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed — and rise before me in this chamber. I wiped my tears and hushed my sobs, fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face, bending over me with strange pity. This idea, consolatory in theory, I felt would be terrible if realised: with all my might I endeavoured to stifle it — I endeavoured to be firm. Shaking my hair from my eyes, I lifted my head and tried to look boldly round the dark room; at this moment a light gleamed on the wall. Was it, I asked myself, a ray from the moon penetrating some aperture in the blind? No; moonlight was still, and this stirred; while I gazed, it glided up to the ceiling and quivered over my head. I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern carried by some one across the lawn: but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort. Steps came running along the outer passage; the key turned, Bessie and Abbot entered.

"Miss Eyre, are you ill?" said Bessie.

"What a dreadful noise! it went quite through me!" exclaimed Abbot.

"Take me out! Let me go into the nursery!" was my cry.

"What for? Are you hurt? Have you seen something?" again demanded Bessie.

"Oh! I saw a light, and I thought a ghost would come." I had now got hold of Bessie's hand, and she did not snatch it from me.

"She has screamed out on purpose," declared Abbot, in some disgust. "And what a scream! If she had been in great pain one would have excused it, but she only wanted to bring us all here: I know her naughty tricks."

"What is all this?" demanded another voice peremptorily; and Mrs. Reed came along the corridor, her cap flying wide, her gown rustling stormily. "Abbot and Bessie, I believe I gave orders that Jane Eyre should be left in the red-room till I came to her myself."

"Miss Jane screamed so loud, ma'am," pleaded Bessie.

"Let her go," was the only answer. "Loose Bessie's hand, child: you cannot succeed in getting out by these means, be assured. I abhor artifice, particularly in children; it is my duty to show you that tricks will not answer: you will now stay here an hour longer, and it is only on condition of perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you then."

"O aunt! have pity! Forgive me! I cannot endure it — let me be punished some other way! I shall be killed if — "

"Silence! This violence is all most repulsive:" and so, no doubt, she felt it. I was a precocious actress in her eyes; she sincerely looked on me as a compound of virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity.

Bessie and Abbot having retreated, Mrs. Reed, impatient of my now frantic anguish and wild sobs, abruptly thrust me back and locked me in, without farther parley. I heard her sweeping away; and soon after she was gone, I suppose I had a species of fit: unconsciousness closed the scene.

CHAPTER III

The next thing I remember is, waking up with a feeling as if I had had a frightful nightmare, and seeing before me a terrible red glare, crossed with thick black bars. I heard voices, too, speaking with a hollow sound, and as if muffled by a rush of wind or water: agitation, uncertainty, and an all-predominating sense of terror confused my faculties. Ere long, I became aware that some one was handling me; lifting me up and supporting me in a sitting posture, and that more tenderly than I had ever been raised or upheld before. I rested my head against a pillow or an arm, and felt easy.

In five minutes more the cloud of bewilderment dissolved: I knew quite well that I was in my own bed, and that the red glare was the nursery fire. It was night: a candle burnt on the table; Bessie stood at the bed-foot with a basin in her hand, and a gentleman sat in a chair near my pillow, leaning over me.

I felt an inexpressible relief, a soothing conviction of protection and security, when I knew that there was a stranger in the room, an individual not belonging to Gateshead, and not related to Mrs. Reed. Turning from Bessie (though her presence was far less obnoxious to me than that of Abbot, for instance, would have been), I scrutinised the face of the gentleman: I knew him; it was Mr. Lloyd, an apothecary, sometimes called in by Mrs. Reed when the servants were ailing: for herself and the children she employed a physician.

"Well, who am I?" he asked.

I pronounced his name, offering him at the same time my hand: he took it, smiling and saying, "We shall do very well by-and-by." Then he laid me down, and addressing Bessie, charged her to be very careful that I was not disturbed during the night. Having given some further directions, and intimates that he should call again the next day, he departed; to my grief: I felt so sheltered and befriended while he sat in the chair near my pillow; and as he closed the door after him, all the room darkened and my heart again sank: inexpressible sadness weighed it down.

"Do you feel as if you should sleep, Miss?" asked Bessie, rather softly.

Scarcely dared I answer her; for I feared the next sentence might be rough. "I will try."

"Would you like to drink, or could you eat anything?"

"No, thank you, Bessie."

"Then I think I shall go to bed, for it is past twelve o'clock; but you may call me if you want anything in the night."

Wonderful civility this! It emboldened me to ask a question.

"Bessie, what is the matter with me? Am I ill?"

"You fell sick, I suppose, in the red-room with crying; you'll be better soon, no doubt."

Bessie went into the housemaid's apartment, which was near. I heard her say —

"Sarah, come and sleep with me in the nursery; I daren't for my life be alone with that poor child to-night: she might die; it's such a strange thing she should have that fit: I wonder if she saw anything. Missis was rather too hard."

Sarah came back with her; they both went to bed; they were whispering together for half-an-hour before they fell asleep. I caught scraps of their conversation, from which I was able only too distinctly to infer the main subject discussed.

"Something passed her, all dressed in white, and vanished" — "A great black dog behind him" — "Three loud raps on the chamber door" — "A light in the churchyard just over his grave," &c. &c.

At last both slept: the fire and the candle went out. For me, the watches of that long night passed in ghastly wakefulness; strained by dread: such dread as children only can feel.

No severe or prolonged bodily illness followed this incident of the red-room; it only gave my nerves a shock of which I feel the reverberation to this day. Yes, Mrs. Reed, to you I owe some fearful pangs of mental suffering, but I ought to forgive you, for you knew not what you did: while rending my heart-strings, you thought you were only uprooting my bad propensities.

Next day, by noon, I was up and dressed, and sat wrapped in a shawl by the nursery hearth. I felt physically weak and broken down: but my worse ailment was an unutterable wretchedness of mind: a wretchedness which kept drawing from me silent tears; no sooner had I wiped one salt drop from my cheek than another followed. Yet, I thought, I ought to have been happy, for none of the Reeds were there, they were all gone out in the carriage with their mama. Abbot, too, was sewing in another room, and Bessie, as she moved hither and thither, putting away toys and arranging drawers, addressed to me every now and then a word of unwonted kindness. This state of things should have been to me a paradise of peace, accustomed as I was to a life of ceaseless reprimand and thankless fagging; but, in fact, my racked nerves were now in such a state that no calm could soothe, and no pleasure excite them agreeably.

Bessie had been down into the kitchen, and she brought up with her a tart on a certain brightly painted china plate, whose bird of paradise, nestling in a wreath of convolvuli and rosebuds, had been wont to stir in me a most enthusiastic sense of admiration; and which plate I had often petitioned to be allowed to take in my hand in order to examine it more closely, but had always hitherto been deemed unworthy of such a privilege. This precious vessel was now placed on my knee, and I was cordially invited to eat the circlet of delicate pastry upon it. Vain favour! coming, like most other favours long deferred and often wished for, too late! I could not eat the tart;

and the plumage of the bird, the tints of the flowers, seemed strangely faded: I put both plate and tart away. Bessie asked if I would have a book: the word *book* acted as a transient stimulus, and I begged her to fetch Gulliver's Travels from the library. This book I had again and again perused with delight. I considered it a narrative of facts, and discovered in it a vein of interest deeper than what I found in fairy tales: for as to the elves, having sought them in vain among foxglove leaves and bells, under mushrooms and beneath the ground-ivy mantling old wall-nooks, I had at length made up my mind to the sad truth, that they were all gone out of England to some savage country where the woods were wilder and thicker, and the population more scant; whereas, Lilliput and Brobdignag being, in my creed, solid parts of the earth's surface, I doubted not that I might one day, by taking a long voyage, see with my own eyes the little fields, houses, and trees, the diminutive people, the tiny cows, sheep, and birds of the one realm; and the corn-fields forest-high, the mighty mastiffs, the monster cats, the tower-like men and women, of the other. Yet, when this cherished volume was now placed in my hand — when I turned over its leaves, and sought in its marvellous pictures the charm I had, till now, never failed to find — all was eerie and dreary; the giants were gaunt goblins, the pigmies malevolent and fearful imps, Gulliver a most desolate wanderer in most dread and dangerous regions. I closed the book, which I dared no longer peruse, and put it on the table, beside the untasted tart.

Bessie had now finished dusting and tidying the room, and having washed her hands, she opened a certain little drawer, full of splendid shreds of silk and satin, and began making a new bonnet for Georgiana's doll. Meantime she sang: her song was —

"In the days when we went gipsying,
  A long time ago."

I had often heard the song before, and always with lively delight; for Bessie had a sweet voice, — at least, I thought so. But now, though her voice was still sweet, I found in its melody an indescribable sadness. Sometimes, preoccupied with her work, she sang the refrain very low, very lingeringly; "A long time ago" came out like the saddest cadence of a funeral hymn. She passed into another ballad, this time a really doleful one.

"My feet they are sore, and my limbs they are weary;
  Long is the way, and the mountains are wild;
Soon will the twilight close moonless and dreary
  Over the path of the poor orphan child.
Why did they send me so far and so lonely,
  Up where the moors spread and grey rocks are piled?
Men are hard-hearted, and kind angels only
  Watch o'er the steps of a poor orphan child.
Yet distant and soft the night breeze is blowing,
  Clouds there are none, and clear stars beam mild,
God, in His mercy, protection is showing,

Comfort and hope to the poor orphan child.
Ev'n should I fall o'er the broken bridge passing,
Or stray in the marshes, by false lights beguiled,
Still will my Father, with promise and blessing,
Take to His bosom the poor orphan child.
There is a thought that for strength should avail me,
Though both of shelter and kindred despoiled;
Heaven is a home, and a rest will not fail me;
God is a friend to the poor orphan child."

"Come, Miss Jane, don't cry," said Bessie as she finished. She might as well have said to the fire, "don't burn!" but how could she divine the morbid suffering to which I was a prey? In the course of the morning Mr. Lloyd came again.

"What, already up!" said he, as he entered the nursery. "Well, nurse, how is she?"

Bessie answered that I was doing very well.

"Then she ought to look more cheerful. Come here, Miss Jane: your name is Jane, is it not?"

"Yes, sir, Jane Eyre."

"Well, you have been crying, Miss Jane Eyre; can you tell me what about? Have you any pain?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! I daresay she is crying because she could not go out with Missis in the carriage," interposed Bessie.

"Surely not! why, she is too old for such pettishness."

I thought so too; and my self-esteem being wounded by the false charge, I answered promptly, "I never cried for such a thing in my life: I hate going out in the carriage. I cry because I am miserable."

"Oh fie, Miss!" said Bessie.

The good apothecary appeared a little puzzled. I was standing before him; he fixed his eyes on me very steadily: his eyes were small and grey; not very bright, but I dare say I should think them shrewd now: he had a hard-featured yet good-natured looking face. Having considered me at leisure, he said —

"What made you ill yesterday?"

"She had a fall," said Bessie, again putting in her word.

"Fall! why, that is like a baby again! Can't she manage to walk at her age? She must be eight or nine years old."

"I was knocked down," was the blunt explanation, jerked out of me by another pang of mortified pride; "but that did not make me ill," I added; while Mr. Lloyd helped himself to a pinch of snuff.

As he was returning the box to his waistcoat pocket, a loud bell rang for the servants' dinner; he knew what it was. "That's for you, nurse," said he; "you can go down; I'll give Miss Jane a lecture till you come back."

Bessie would rather have stayed, but she was obliged to go, because punctuality at meals was rigidly enforced at Gateshead Hall.

"The fall did not make you ill; what did, then?" pursued Mr. Lloyd when Bessie was gone.

"I was shut up in a room where there is a ghost till after dark."

I saw Mr. Lloyd smile and frown at the same time.

"Ghost! What, you are a baby after all! You are afraid of ghosts?"

"Of Mr. Reed's ghost I am: he died in that room, and was laid out there. Neither Bessie nor any one else will go into it at night, if they can help it; and it was cruel to shut me up alone without a candle, — so cruel that I think I shall never forget it."

"Nonsense! And is it that makes you so miserable? Are you afraid now in daylight?"

"No: but night will come again before long: and besides, — I am unhappy, — very unhappy, for other things."

"What other things? Can you tell me some of them?"

How much I wished to reply fully to this question! How difficult it was to frame any answer! Children can feel, but they cannot analyse their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words. Fearful, however, of losing this first and only opportunity of relieving my grief by imparting it, I, after a disturbed pause, contrived to frame a meagre, though, as far as it went, true response.

"For one thing, I have no father or mother, brothers or sisters."

"You have a kind aunt and cousins."

Again I paused; then bunglingly enounced —

"But John Reed knocked me down, and my aunt shut me up in the red-room."

Mr. Lloyd a second time produced his snuff-box.

"Don't you think Gateshead Hall a very beautiful house?" asked he. "Are you not very thankful to have such a fine place to live at?"

"It is not my house, sir; and Abbot says I have less right to be here than a servant."

"Pooh! you can't be silly enough to wish to leave such a splendid place?"

"If I had anywhere else to go, I should be glad to leave it; but I can never get away from Gateshead till I am a woman."

"Perhaps you may — who knows? Have you any relations besides Mrs. Reed?"

"I think not, sir."

"None belonging to your father?"

"I don't know. I asked Aunt Reed once, and she said possibly I might have some poor, low relations called Eyre, but she knew nothing about them."

"If you had such, would you like to go to them?"

I reflected. Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children:

they have not much idea of industrious, working, respectable poverty; they think of the word only as connected with ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners, and debasing vices: poverty for me was synonymous with degradation.

"No; I should not like to belong to poor people," was my reply.

"Not even if they were kind to you?"

I shook my head: I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind; and then to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste.

"But are your relatives so very poor? Are they working people?"

"I cannot tell; Aunt Reed says if I have any, they must be a beggarly set: I should not like to go a begging."

"Would you like to go to school?"

Again I reflected: I scarcely knew what school was: Bessie sometimes spoke of it as a place where young ladies sat in the stocks, wore backboards, and were expected to be exceedingly genteel and precise: John Reed hated his school, and abused his master; but John Reed's tastes were no rule for mine, and if Bessie's accounts of school-discipline (gathered from the young ladies of a family where she had lived before coming to Gateshead) were somewhat appalling, her details of certain accomplishments attained by these same young ladies were, I thought, equally attractive. She boasted of beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers by them executed; of songs they could sing and pieces they could play, of purses they could net, of French books they could translate; till my spirit was moved to emulation as I listened. Besides, school would be a complete change: it implied a long journey, an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life.

"I should indeed like to go to school," was the audible conclusion of my musings.

"Well, well! who knows what may happen?" said Mr. Lloyd, as he got up. "The child ought to have change of air and scene," he added, speaking to himself; "nerves not in a good state."

Bessie now returned; at the same moment the carriage was heard rolling up the gravel-walk.

"Is that your mistress, nurse?" asked Mr. Lloyd. "I should like to speak to her before I go."

Bessie invited him to walk into the breakfast-room, and led the way out. In the interview which followed between him and Mrs. Reed, I presume, from after-occurrences, that the apothecary ventured to recommend my being sent to school; and the recommendation was no doubt readily enough adopted; for as Abbot said, in discussing the subject with Bessie when both sat sewing in the nursery one night, after I was in bed, and, as they thought, asleep, "Missis was, she dared say, glad enough to get rid of such a tiresome, ill-conditioned child, who always looked as if she were watching everybody, and scheming plots underhand." Abbot, I think, gave me credit for being a sort of infantine Guy Fawkes.

On that same occasion I learned, for the first time, from Miss Abbot's communications to Bessie, that my father had been a poor clergyman; that my mother had married him against the wishes of her friends, who considered the match beneath her; that my grandfather Reed was so irritated at her disobedience, he cut her off without a shilling; that after my mother and father had been married a year, the latter caught the typhus fever while visiting among the poor of a large manufacturing town where his curacy was situated, and where that disease was then prevalent: that my mother took the infection from him, and both died within a month of each other.

Bessie, when she heard this narrative, sighed and said, "Poor Miss Jane is to be pitied, too, Abbot."

"Yes," responded Abbot; "if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that."

"Not a great deal, to be sure," agreed Bessie: "at any rate, a beauty like Miss Georgiana would be more moving in the same condition."

"Yes, I doat on Miss Georgiana!" cried the fervent Abbot. "Little darling! — with her long curls and her blue eyes, and such a sweet colour as she has; just as if she were painted! — Bessie, I could fancy a Welsh rabbit for supper."

"So could I — with a roast onion. Come, we'll go down." They went.

CHAPTER IV

From my discourse with Mr. Lloyd, and from the above reported conference between Bessie and Abbot, I gathered enough of hope to suffice as a motive for wishing to get well: a change seemed near, — I desired and waited it in silence. It tarried, however: days and weeks passed: I had regained my normal state of health, but no new allusion was made to the subject over which I brooded. Mrs. Reed surveyed me at times with a severe eye, but seldom addressed me: since my illness, she had drawn a more marked line of separation than ever between me and her own children; appointing me a small closet to sleep in by myself, condemning me to take my meals alone, and pass all my time in the nursery, while my cousins were constantly in the drawing-room. Not a hint, however, did she drop about sending me to school: still I felt an instinctive certainty that she would not long endure me under the same roof with her; for her glance, now more than ever, when turned on me, expressed an insuperable and rooted aversion.

Eliza and Georgiana, evidently acting according to orders, spoke to me as little as possible: John thrust his tongue in his cheek whenever he saw me, and once attempted chastisement; but as I instantly turned against him, roused by the same sentiment of deep ire and desperate revolt which had stirred my corruption before, he thought it better to desist, and ran from me tittering execrations, and vowing I had burst his nose. I had indeed levelled at that prominent feature as hard a blow as my knuckles could inflict; and when I saw that either that or my look daunted him, I had the greatest inclination to follow up my advantage to purpose; but he was already with his mama. I heard him in a blubbering tone commence the tale of how "that nasty Jane Eyre" had flown at him like a mad cat: he was stopped rather harshly —

"Don't talk to me about her, John: I told you not to go near her; she is not worthy of notice; I do not choose that either you or your sisters should associate with her."

Here, leaning over the banister, I cried out suddenly, and without at all deliberating on my words —

"They are not fit to associate with me."

Mrs. Reed was rather a stout woman; but, on hearing this strange and audacious declaration, she ran nimbly up the stair, swept me like a whirlwind into the nursery, and crushing me down on the edge of my crib, dared me in an emphatic voice to rise from that place, or utter one syllable during the remainder of the day.

"What would Uncle Reed say to you, if he were alive?" was my scarcely voluntary demand. I say scarcely voluntary, for it seemed as if my tongue pronounced words without my will consenting to their utterance: something spoke out of me over which I had no control.

"What?" said Mrs. Reed under her breath: her usually cold composed grey eye became troubled with a look like fear; she took her hand from my arm, and gazed at me as if she really did not know whether I were child or fiend. I was now in for it.

"My Uncle Reed is in heaven, and can see all you do and think; and so can papa and mama: they know how you shut me up all day long, and how you wish me dead."

Mrs. Reed soon rallied her spirits: she shook me most soundly, she boxed both my ears, and then left me without a word. Bessie supplied the hiatus by a homily of an hour's length, in which she proved beyond a doubt that I was the most wicked and abandoned child ever reared under a roof. I half believed her; for I felt indeed only bad feelings surging in my breast.

November, December, and half of January passed away. Christmas and the New Year had been celebrated at Gateshead with the usual festive cheer; presents had been interchanged, dinners and evening parties given. From every enjoyment I was, of course, excluded: my share of the gaiety consisted in witnessing the daily apparelling of Eliza and Georgiana, and seeing them descend to the drawing-room, dressed out in thin muslin frocks and scarlet sashes, with hair elaborately ringletted; and afterwards, in listening to the sound of the piano or the harp played below, to the passing to and fro of the butler and footman, to the jingling of glass and china as refreshments were handed, to the broken hum of conversation as the drawing-room door opened and closed. When tired of this occupation, I would retire from the stairhead to the solitary and silent nursery: there, though somewhat sad, I was not miserable. To speak truth, I had not the least wish to go into company, for in company I was very rarely noticed; and if Bessie had but been kind and companionable, I should have deemed it a treat to spend the evenings quietly with her, instead of passing them under the formidable eye of Mrs. Reed, in a room full of ladies and gentlemen. But Bessie, as soon as she had dressed her young ladies, used to take herself off to the lively regions of the kitchen and housekeeper's room, generally bearing the candle along with her. I then sat with my doll on my knee till the fire got low, glancing round occasionally to make sure that nothing worse than myself haunted the shadowy room; and when the embers sank to a dull red, I undressed hastily, tugging at knots and strings as I best might, and sought shelter from cold and darkness in my crib. To this crib I always took my doll; human beings must love something, and, in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow. It puzzles me now to remember with what absurd sincerity I doated on this little toy, half fancying it alive and capable of sensation. I could not sleep unless it was folded in my night-gown; and when it lay there safe and warm, I was comparatively happy, believing it to be happy likewise.

Long did the hours seem while I waited the departure of the company, and listened for the sound of Bessie's step on the stairs: sometimes she would come up in the interval to seek her thimble or her scissors, or perhaps to bring me something by way of supper — a bun or a cheese-cake — then she would sit on the bed while I ate it, and when I had finished, she would tuck the clothes round me, and twice she kissed me, and said, "Good night, Miss Jane." When thus gentle, Bessie seemed to me the best, prettiest, kindest being in the world; and I wished most intensely that she would always be so pleasant and amiable, and never push me about, or scold, or task me unreasonably, as she was too often wont to do. Bessie Lee must, I think, have been a girl of good natural capacity, for she was smart in all she did, and had a remarkable knack of narrative; so, at least, I judge from the impression made on me by her nursery tales. She was pretty too, if my recollections of her face and person are correct. I remember her as a slim young woman, with black hair, dark eyes, very nice features, and good, clear complexion; but she had a capricious and hasty temper, and indifferent ideas of principle or justice: still, such as she was, I preferred her to any one else at Gateshead Hall.

It was the fifteenth of January, about nine o'clock in the morning: Bessie was gone down to breakfast; my cousins had not yet been summoned to their mama; Eliza was putting on her bonnet and warm garden-coat to go and feed her poultry, an occupation of which she was fond: and not less so of selling the eggs to the housekeeper and hoarding up the money she thus obtained. She had a turn for traffic, and a marked propensity for saving; shown not only in the vending of eggs and chickens, but also in driving hard bargains with the gardener about flower-roots, seeds, and slips of plants; that functionary having orders from Mrs. Reed to buy of his young lady all the products of her parterre she wished to sell: and Eliza would have sold the hair off her head if she could have made a handsome profit thereby. As to her money, she first secreted it in odd corners, wrapped in a rag or an old curl-paper; but some of these hoards having been discovered by the housemaid, Eliza, fearful of one day losing her valued treasure, consented to intrust it to her mother, at a usurious rate of interest — fifty or sixty per cent.; which interest she exacted every quarter, keeping her accounts in a little book with anxious accuracy.

Georgiana sat on a high stool, dressing her hair at the glass, and interweaving her curls with artificial flowers and faded feathers, of which she had found a store in a drawer in the attic. I was making my bed, having received strict orders from Bessie to get it arranged before she returned (for Bessie now frequently employed me as a sort of under-nurserymaid, to tidy the room, dust the chairs, &c.). Having spread the quilt and folded my night-dress, I went to the window-seat to put in order some picture-books and doll's house furniture scattered there; an abrupt command from Georgiana to let her playthings alone (for the tiny chairs and mirrors, the fairy plates and cups, were her property) stopped my proceedings; and then, for lack of other occupation, I fell to breathing on the frost-flowers with which the window was fretted, and thus clearing a space in the glass through which I might look out on the grounds, where all was still and petrified under the influence of a hard frost.

From this window were visible the porter's lodge and the carriage-road, and just as I had dissolved so much of the silver-white foliage veiling the panes as left room to look out, I saw the gates thrown open and a carriage roll through. I watched it ascending the drive with indifference; carriages often came to Gateshead, but none ever brought visitors in whom I was interested; it stopped in front of the house, the door-bell rang loudly, the new-comer was admitted. All this being nothing to me, my vacant attention soon found livelier attraction in the spectacle of a little hungry robin, which came and chirruped on the twigs of the leafless cherry-tree nailed against the wall near the casement. The remains of my breakfast of bread and milk stood on the table, and having crumbled a morsel of roll, I was tugging at the sash to put out the crumbs on the window-sill, when Bessie came running upstairs into the nursery.

"Miss Jane, take off your pinafore; what are you doing there? Have you washed your hands and face this morning?" I gave another tug before I answered, for I wanted the bird to be secure of its bread: the sash yielded; I scattered the crumbs, some on the stone sill, some on the cherry-tree bough, then, closing the window, I replied —

"No, Bessie; I have only just finished dusting."

"Troublesome, careless child! and what are you doing now? You look quite red, as if you had been about some mischief: what were you opening the window for?"

I was spared the trouble of answering, for Bessie seemed in too great a hurry to listen to explanations; she hauled me to the washstand, inflicted a merciless, but happily brief scrub on my face and hands with soap, water, and a coarse towel; disciplined my head with a bristly brush, denuded me of my pinafore, and then hurrying me to the top of the stairs, bid me go down directly, as I was wanted in the breakfast-room.

I would have asked who wanted me: I would have demanded if Mrs. Reed was there; but Bessie was already gone, and had closed the nursery-door upon me. I slowly descended. For nearly three months, I had never been called to Mrs. Reed's presence; restricted so long to the nursery, the breakfast, dining, and drawing-rooms were become for me awful regions, on which it dismayed me to intrude.

I now stood in the empty hall; before me was the breakfast-room door, and I stopped, intimidated and trembling. What a miserable little poltroon had fear, engendered of unjust punishment, made of me in those days! I feared to return to the nursery, and feared to go forward to the parlour; ten minutes I stood in agitated hesitation; the vehement ringing of the breakfast-room bell decided me; I *must* enter.

"Who could want me?" I asked inwardly, as with both hands I turned the stiff door-handle, which, for a second or two, resisted my efforts. "What should I see besides Aunt Reed in the apartment? — a man or a woman?" The handle turned, the door unclosed, and passing through and curtseying low, I looked up at — a black pillar! — such, at least, appeared to me, at first sight, the straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital.

Mrs. Reed occupied her usual seat by the fireside; she made a signal to me to approach; I did so, and she introduced me to the stony stranger with the words: "This is the little girl respecting whom I applied to you."

He, for it was a man, turned his head slowly towards where I stood, and having examined me with the two inquisitive-looking grey eyes which twinkled under a pair of bushy brows, said solemnly, and in a bass voice, "Her size is small: what is her age?"

"Ten years."

"So much?" was the doubtful answer; and he prolonged his scrutiny for some minutes. Presently he addressed me — "Your name, little girl?"

"Jane Eyre, sir."

In uttering these words I looked up: he seemed to me a tall gentleman; but then I was very little; his features were large, and they and all the lines of his frame were equally harsh and prim.

"Well, Jane Eyre, and are you a good child?"

Impossible to reply to this in the affirmative: my little world held a contrary opinion: I was silent. Mrs. Reed answered for me by an expressive shake of the head, adding soon, "Perhaps the less said on that subject the better, Mr. Brocklehurst."

"Sorry indeed to hear it! she and I must have some talk;" and bending from the perpendicular, he installed his person in the arm-chair opposite Mrs. Reed's. "Come here," he said.

I stepped across the rug; he placed me square and straight before him. What a face he had, now that it was almost on a level with mine! what a great nose! and what a mouth! and what large prominent teeth!

"No sight so sad as that of a naughty child," he began, "especially a naughty little girl. Do you know where the wicked go after death?"

"They go to hell," was my ready and orthodox answer.

"And what is hell? Can you tell me that?"

"A pit full of fire."

"And should you like to fall into that pit, and to be burning there for ever?"

"No, sir."

"What must you do to avoid it?"

I deliberated a moment; my answer, when it did come, was objectionable: "I must keep in good health, and not die."

"How can you keep in good health? Children younger than you die daily. I buried a little child of five years old only a day or two since, — a good little child, whose soul is now in heaven. It is to be feared the same could not be said of you were you to be called hence."

Not being in a condition to remove his doubt, I only cast my eyes down on the two large feet planted on the rug, and sighed, wishing myself far enough away.

"I hope that sigh is from the heart, and that you repent of ever having been the occasion of discomfort to your excellent benefactress."

"Benefactress! benefactress!" said I inwardly: "they all call Mrs. Reed my benefactress; if so, a benefactress is a disagreeable thing."

"Do you say your prayers night and morning?" continued my interrogator.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you read your Bible?"

"Sometimes."

"With pleasure? Are you fond of it?"

"I like Revelations, and the book of Daniel, and Genesis and Samuel, and a little bit of Exodus, and some parts of Kings and Chronicles, and Job and Jonah."

"And the Psalms? I hope you like them?"

"No, sir."

"No? oh, shocking! I have a little boy, younger than you, who knows six Psalms by heart: and when you ask him which he would rather have, a gingerbread-nut to eat or a verse of a Psalm to learn, he says: 'Oh! the verse of a Psalm! angels sing Psalms;' says he, 'I wish to be a little angel here below;' he then gets two nuts in recompense for his infant piety."

"Psalms are not interesting," I remarked.

"That proves you have a wicked heart; and you must pray to God to change it: to give you a new and clean one: to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

I was about to propound a question, touching the manner in which that operation of changing my heart was to be performed, when Mrs. Reed interposed, telling me to sit down; she then proceeded to carry on the conversation herself.

"Mr. Brocklehurst, I believe I intimated in the letter which I wrote to you three weeks ago, that this little girl has not quite the character and disposition I could wish: should you admit her into Lowood school, I should be glad if the superintendent and teachers were requested to keep a strict eye on her, and, above all, to guard against her worst fault, a tendency to deceit. I mention this in your hearing, Jane, that you may not attempt to impose on Mr. Brocklehurst."

Well might I dread, well might I dislike Mrs. Reed; for it was her nature to wound me cruelly; never was I happy in her presence; however carefully I obeyed, however strenuously I strove to please her, my efforts were still repulsed and repaid by such sentences as the above. Now, uttered before a stranger, the accusation cut me to the heart; I dimly perceived that she was already obliterating hope from the new phase of existence which she destined me to enter; I felt, though I could not have expressed the feeling, that she was sowing aversion and unkindness along my future path; I saw myself transformed under Mr. Brocklehurst's eye into an artful, noxious child, and what could I do to remedy the injury?

"Nothing, indeed," thought I, as I struggled to repress a sob, and hastily wiped away some tears, the impotent evidences of my anguish.

"Deceit is, indeed, a sad fault in a child," said Mr. Brocklehurst; "it is akin to falsehood, and all liars will have their portion in the lake burning with fire and brimstone; she shall, however, be watched, Mrs. Reed. I will speak to Miss Temple and the teachers."

"I should wish her to be brought up in a manner suiting her prospects," continued my benefactress; "to be made useful, to be kept humble: as for the vacations, she will, with your permission, spend them always at Lowood."

"Your decisions are perfectly judicious, madam," returned Mr. Brocklehurst. "Humility is a Christian grace, and one peculiarly appropriate to the pupils of Lowood; I, therefore, direct that especial care shall be bestowed on its cultivation amongst them. I have studied how best to mortify in them the worldly sentiment of pride; and, only the other day, I had a pleasing proof of my success. My second daughter, Augusta, went with her mama to visit the school, and on her return she exclaimed: 'Oh, dear papa, how quiet and plain all the girls at Lowood look, with their hair combed behind their ears, and their long pinafores, and those little holland pockets outside their frocks — they are almost like poor people's children! and,' said she, 'they looked at my dress and mama's, as if they had never seen a silk gown before.'"

"This is the state of things I quite approve," returned Mrs. Reed; "had I sought all England over, I could scarcely have found a system more exactly fitting a child like Jane Eyre. Consistency, my dear Mr. Brocklehurst; I advocate consistency in all things."

"Consistency, madam, is the first of Christian duties; and it has been observed in every arrangement connected with the establishment of Lowood: plain fare, simple attire, unsophisticated accommodations, hardy and active habits; such is the order of the day in the house and its inhabitants."

"Quite right, sir. I may then depend upon this child being received as a pupil at Lowood, and there being trained in conformity to her position and prospects?"

"Madam, you may: she shall be placed in that nursery of chosen plants, and I trust she will show herself grateful for the inestimable privilege of her election."

"I will send her, then, as soon as possible, Mr. Brocklehurst; for, I assure you, I feel anxious to be relieved of a responsibility that was becoming too irksome."

"No doubt, no doubt, madam; and now I wish you good morning. I shall return to Brocklehurst Hall in the course of a week or two: my good friend, the Archdeacon, will not permit me to leave him sooner. I shall send Miss Temple notice that she is to expect a new girl, so that there will be no difficulty about receiving her. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Brocklehurst; remember me to Mrs. and Miss Brocklehurst, and to Augusta and Theodore, and Master Broughton Brocklehurst."

"I will, madam. Little girl, here is a book entitled the 'Child's Guide,' read it with prayer, especially that part containing 'An account of the awfully sudden death of Martha G — -, a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit.'"

With these words Mr. Brocklehurst put into my hand a thin pamphlet sewn in a cover, and having rung for his carriage, he departed.

Mrs. Reed and I were left alone: some minutes passed in silence; she was sewing, I was watching her. Mrs. Reed might be at that time some six or seven and thirty; she was a woman of robust frame, square-shouldered and strong-limbed, not tall, and, though stout, not obese: she had a somewhat large face, the under jaw being much developed and very solid; her brow was low, her chin large and prominent, mouth and nose sufficiently regular; under her light eyebrows glimmered an eye devoid of ruth; her skin was dark and opaque, her hair nearly flaxen; her constitution was sound as a bell — illness never came near her; she was an exact, clever manager; her household and tenantry were thoroughly under her control; her children only at times defied her authority and laughed it to scorn; she dressed well, and had a presence and port calculated to set off handsome attire.

Sitting on a low stool, a few yards from her arm-chair, I examined her figure; I perused her features. In my hand I held the tract containing the sudden death of the Liar, to which narrative my attention had been pointed as to an appropriate warning. What had just passed; what Mrs. Reed had said concerning me to Mr. Brocklehurst; the whole tenor of their conversation, was recent, raw, and stinging in my mind; I had felt every word as acutely as I had heard it plainly, and a passion of resentment fomented now within me.

Mrs. Reed looked up from her work; her eye settled on mine, her fingers at the same time suspended their nimble movements.

"Go out of the room; return to the nursery," was her mandate. My look or something else must have struck her as offensive, for she spoke with extreme though suppressed irritation. I got up, I went to the door; I came back again; I walked to the window, across the room, then close up to her.

Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely, and *must* turn: but how? What strength had I to dart retaliation at my antagonist? I gathered my energies and launched them in this blunt sentence —

"I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John

Reed; and this book about the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I."

Mrs. Reed's hands still lay on her work inactive: her eye of ice continued to dwell freezingly on mine.

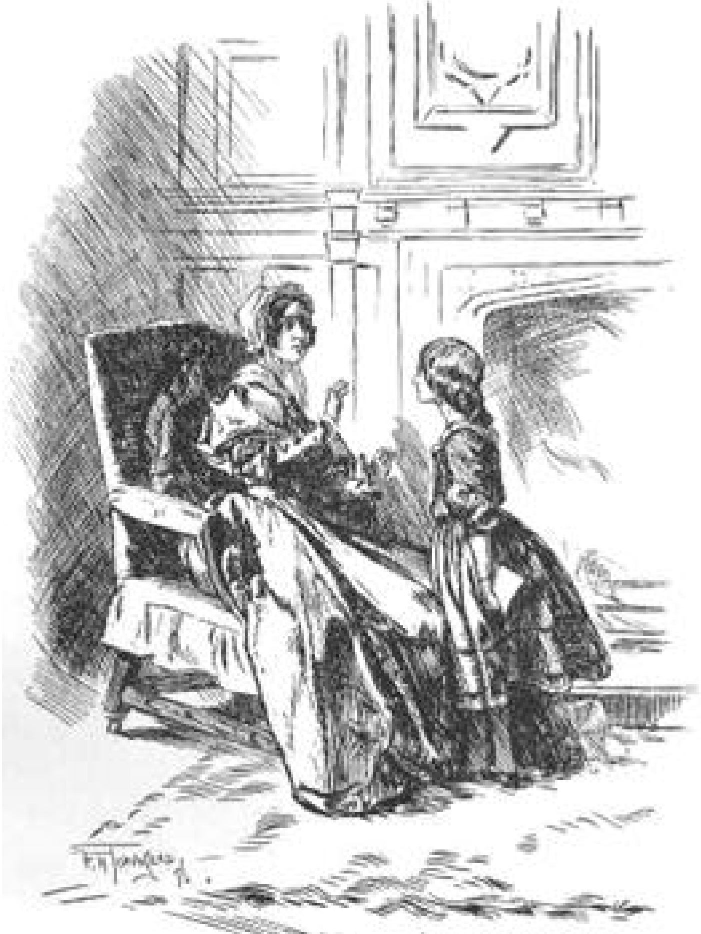
"What more have you to say?" she asked, rather in the tone in which a person might address an opponent of adult age than such as is ordinarily used to a child.

That eye of hers, that voice stirred every antipathy I had. Shaking from head to foot, thrilled with ungovernable excitement, I continued —

"I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty."

"How dare you affirm that, Jane Eyre?"

"How dare I, Mrs. Reed? How dare I? Because it is the *truth*. You think I have no feelings, and that I can do without one bit of love or kindness; but I cannot live so: and you have no pity. I shall remember how you thrust me back — roughly and violently thrust me back — into the red-room, and locked me up there, to my dying day; though I was in agony; though I cried out, while suffocating with distress, 'Have mercy! Have mercy, Aunt Reed!' And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me — knocked me down for nothing. I will tell anybody who asks me questions, this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you are bad, hard-hearted. *You* are deceitful!"



"How dare I, Mrs. Reed?
How dare I?
—Because it is the truth."

Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty. Not without cause was this sentiment: Mrs. Reed looked frightened; her work had slipped from her knee; she was lifting up her hands, rocking herself to and fro, and even twisting her face as if she would cry.

"Jane, you are under a mistake: what is the matter with you? Why do you tremble so violently? Would you like to drink some water?"

"No, Mrs. Reed."

"Is there anything else you wish for, Jane? I assure you, I desire to be your friend."

"Not you. You told Mr. Brocklehurst I had a bad character, a deceitful disposition; and I'll let everybody at Lowood know what you are, and what you have done."

"Jane, you don't understand these things: children must be corrected for their faults."

"Deceit is not my fault!" I cried out in a savage, high voice.

"But you are passionate, Jane, that you must allow: and now return to the nursery — there's a dear — and lie down a little."

"I am not your dear; I cannot lie down: send me to school soon, Mrs. Reed, for I hate to live here."

"I will indeed send her to school soon," murmured Mrs. Reed *sotto voce*; and gathering up her work, she abruptly quitted the apartment.

I was left there alone — winner of the field. It was the hardest battle I had fought, and the first victory I had gained: I stood awhile on the rug, where Mr. Brocklehurst had stood, and I enjoyed my conqueror's solitude. First, I smiled to myself and felt elate; but this fierce pleasure subsided in me as fast as did the accelerated throb of my pulses. A child cannot quarrel with its elders, as I had done; cannot give its furious feelings uncontrolled play, as I had given mine, without experiencing afterwards the pang of remorse and the chill of reaction. A ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring, would have been a meet emblem of my mind when I accused and menaced Mrs. Reed: the same ridge, black and blasted after the flames are dead, would have represented as meetly my subsequent condition, when half-an-hour's silence and reflection had shown me the madness of my conduct, and the dreariness of my hated and hating position.

Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time; as aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy: its after-flavour, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned. Willingly would I now have gone and asked Mrs. Reed's pardon; but I knew, partly from experience and partly from instinct, that was the way to make her repulse me with double scorn, thereby re-exciting every turbulent impulse of my nature.

I would fain exercise some better faculty than that of fierce speaking; fain find nourishment for some less fiendish feeling than that of sombre indignation. I took a book — some Arabian tales; I sat down and endeavoured to read. I could make no sense of the subject; my own thoughts swam always between me and the page I had usually found fascinating. I opened the glass-door in the breakfast-room: the shrubbery was quite still: the black frost reigned, unbroken by sun or breeze, through the grounds. I covered my head and arms with the skirt of my frock, and went out to walk in a part of the plantation which was quite sequestrated; but I found no pleasure in the silent trees, the falling fir-cones, the congealed relics of autumn, russet leaves, swept by past winds in heaps, and now stiffened together. I leaned against a gate, and looked into an empty field where no sheep were feeding, where the short grass was nipped and blanched. It was a very grey day; a most opaque sky, "onding on snaw," canopied all; thence flakes felt it intervals, which settled on the hard path and on the hoary lea without melting. I stood, a wretched child enough, whispering to myself over and over again, "What shall I do? — what shall I do?"

All at once I heard a clear voice call, “Miss Jane! where are you? Come to lunch!”

It was Bessie, I knew well enough; but I did not stir; her light step came tripping down the path.

“You naughty little thing!” she said. “Why don’t you come when you are called?”

Bessie’s presence, compared with the thoughts over which I had been brooding, seemed cheerful; even though, as usual, she was somewhat cross. The fact is, after my conflict with and victory over Mrs. Reed, I was not disposed to care much for the nursemaid’s transitory anger; and I *was* disposed to bask in her youthful lightness of heart. I just put my two arms round her and said, “Come, Bessie! don’t scold.”

The action was more frank and fearless than any I was habituated to indulge in: somehow it pleased her.

“You are a strange child, Miss Jane,” she said, as she looked down at me; “a little roving, solitary thing: and you are going to school, I suppose?”

I nodded.

“And won’t you be sorry to leave poor Bessie?”

“What does Bessie care for me? She is always scolding me.”

“Because you’re such a queer, frightened, shy little thing. You should be bolder.”

“What! to get more knocks?”

“Nonsense! But you are rather put upon, that’s certain. My mother said, when she came to see me last week, that she would not like a little one of her own to be in your place. — Now, come in, and I’ve some good news for you.”

“I don’t think you have, Bessie.”

“Child! what do you mean? What sorrowful eyes you fix on me! Well, but Missis and the young ladies and Master John are going out to tea this afternoon, and you shall have tea with me. I’ll ask cook to bake you a little cake, and then you shall help me to look over your drawers; for I am soon to pack your trunk. Missis intends you to leave Gateshead in a day or two, and you shall choose what toys you like to take with you.”

“Bessie, you must promise not to scold me any more till I go.”

“Well, I will; but mind you are a very good girl, and don’t be afraid of me. Don’t start when I chance to speak rather sharply; it’s so provoking.”

“I don’t think I shall ever be afraid of you again, Bessie, because I have got used to you, and I shall soon have another set of people to dread.”

“If you dread them they’ll dislike you.”

“As you do, Bessie?”

“I don’t dislike you, Miss; I believe I am fonder of you than of all the others.”

“You don’t show it.”

“You little sharp thing! you’ve got quite a new way of talking. What makes you so venturesome and hardy?”

"Why, I shall soon be away from you, and besides" — I was going to say something about what had passed between me and Mrs. Reed, but on second thoughts I considered it better to remain silent on that head.

"And so you're glad to leave me?"

"Not at all, Bessie; indeed, just now I'm rather sorry."

"Just now! and rather! How coolly my little lady says it! I dare say now if I were to ask you for a kiss you wouldn't give it me: you'd say you'd *rather* not."

"I'll kiss you and welcome: bend your head down." Bessie stooped; we mutually embraced, and I followed her into the house quite comforted. That afternoon lapsed in peace and harmony; and in the evening Bessie told me some of her most enchanting stories, and sang me some of her sweetest songs. Even for me life had its gleams of sunshine.

CHAPTER V

Five o'clock had hardly struck on the morning of the 19th of January, when Bessie brought a candle into my closet and found me already up and nearly dressed. I had risen half-an-hour before her entrance, and had washed my face, and put on my clothes by the light of a half-moon just setting, whose rays streamed through the narrow window near my crib. I was to leave Gateshead that day by a coach which passed the lodge gates at six a.m. Bessie was the only person yet risen; she had lit a fire in the nursery, where she now proceeded to make my breakfast. Few children can eat when excited with the thoughts of a journey; nor could I. Bessie, having pressed me in vain to take a few spoonfuls of the boiled milk and bread she had prepared for me, wrapped up some biscuits in a paper and put them into my bag; then she helped me on with my pelisse and bonnet, and wrapping herself in a shawl, she and I left the nursery. As we passed Mrs. Reed's bedroom, she said, "Will you go in and bid Missis good-bye?"

"No, Bessie: she came to my crib last night when you were gone down to supper, and said I need not disturb her in the morning, or my cousins either; and she told me to remember that she had always been my best friend, and to speak of her and be grateful to her accordingly."

"What did you say, Miss?"

"Nothing: I covered my face with the bedclothes, and turned from her to the wall."

"That was wrong, Miss Jane."

"It was quite right, Bessie. Your Missis has not been my friend: she has been my foe."

"O Miss Jane! don't say so!"

"Good-bye to Gateshead!" cried I, as we passed through the hall and went out at the front door.

The moon was set, and it was very dark; Bessie carried a lantern, whose light glanced on wet steps and gravel road sodden by a recent thaw. Raw and chill was the winter morning: my teeth chattered as I hastened down the drive. There was a light in the porter's lodge: when we reached it, we found the porter's wife just kindling her fire: my trunk, which had been carried down the evening before, stood corded at the door. It wanted but a few minutes of six, and shortly after that hour had struck, the distant roll of wheels announced the coming coach; I went to the door and watched its lamps approach rapidly through the gloom.

"Is she going by herself?" asked the porter's wife.

"Yes."

"And how far is it?"

"Fifty miles."

"What a long way! I wonder Mrs. Reed is not afraid to trust her so far alone."

The coach drew up; there it was at the gates with its four horses and its top laden with passengers: the guard and coachman loudly urged haste; my trunk was hoisted up; I was taken from Bessie's neck, to which I clung with kisses.

"Be sure and take good care of her," cried she to the guard, as he lifted me into the inside.

"Ay, ay!" was the answer: the door was slapped to, a voice exclaimed "All right," and on we drove. Thus was I severed from Bessie and Gateshead; thus whirled away to unknown, and, as I then deemed, remote and mysterious regions.

I remember but little of the journey; I only know that the day seemed to me of a preternatural length, and that we appeared to travel over hundreds of miles of road. We passed through several towns, and in one, a very large one, the coach stopped; the horses were taken out, and the passengers alighted to dine. I was carried into an inn, where the guard wanted me to have some dinner; but, as I had no appetite, he left me in an immense room with a fireplace at each end, a chandelier pendent from the ceiling, and a little red gallery high up against the wall filled with musical instruments. Here I walked about for a long time, feeling very strange, and mortally apprehensive of some one coming in and kidnapping me; for I believed in kidnappers, their exploits having frequently figured in Bessie's fireside chronicles. At last the guard returned; once more I was stowed away in the coach, my protector mounted his own seat, sounded his hollow horn, and away we rattled over the "stony street" of L-.

The afternoon came on wet and somewhat misty: as it waned into dusk, I began to feel that we were getting very far indeed from Gateshead: we ceased to pass through towns; the country changed; great grey hills heaved up round the horizon: as twilight deepened, we descended a valley, dark with wood, and long after night had overclouded the prospect, I heard a wild wind rushing amongst trees.

Lulled by the sound, I at last dropped asleep; I had not long slumbered when the sudden cessation of motion awoke me; the coach-door was open, and a person like a servant was standing at it: I saw her face and dress by the light of the lamps.

"Is there a little girl called Jane Eyre here?" she asked. I answered "Yes," and was then lifted out; my trunk was handed down, and the coach instantly drove away.

I was stiff with long sitting, and bewildered with the noise and motion of the coach: Gathering my faculties, I looked about me. Rain, wind, and darkness filled the air; nevertheless, I dimly discerned a wall before me and a door open in it; through this door I passed with my new guide: she shut and locked it behind her. There was now visible a house or houses — for the building spread far — with many windows, and lights burning in some; we went up a broad pebbly path, splashing wet, and were admitted at a door; then the servant led me through a passage into a room with a fire, where she left me alone.

I stood and warmed my numbed fingers over the blaze, then I looked round; there was no candle, but the uncertain light from the hearth showed, by intervals, papered walls, carpet, curtains, shining mahogany furniture: it was a parlour, not so spacious or splendid as the drawing-room at Gateshead, but comfortable enough. I was puzzling to make out the subject of a picture on the wall, when the door opened, and an individual carrying a light entered; another followed close behind.

The first was a tall lady with dark hair, dark eyes, and a pale and large forehead; her figure was partly enveloped in a shawl, her countenance was grave, her bearing erect.

"The child is very young to be sent alone," said she, putting her candle down on the table. She considered me attentively for a minute or two, then further added —

"She had better be put to bed soon; she looks tired: are you tired?" she asked, placing her hand on my shoulder.

"A little, ma'am."

"And hungry too, no doubt: let her have some supper before she goes to bed, Miss Miller. Is this the first time you have left your parents to come to school, my little girl?"

I explained to her that I had no parents. She inquired how long they had been dead: then how old I was, what was my name, whether I could read, write, and sew a little: then she touched my cheek gently with her forefinger, and saying, "She hoped I should be a good child," dismissed me along with Miss Miller.

The lady I had left might be about twenty-nine; the one who went with me appeared some years younger: the first impressed me by her voice, look, and air. Miss Miller was more ordinary; ruddy in complexion, though of a careworn countenance; hurried in gait and action, like one who had always a multiplicity of tasks on hand: she looked, indeed, what I afterwards found she really was, an under-teacher. Led by her, I passed from compartment to compartment, from passage to passage, of a large and irregular building; till, emerging from the total and somewhat dreary silence pervading that portion of the house we had traversed, we came upon the hum of many voices, and presently entered a wide, long room, with great deal tables, two at each end, on each of which burnt a pair of candles, and seated all round on benches, a congregation of girls of every age, from nine or ten to twenty. Seen by the dim light of the dips, their number to me appeared countless, though not in reality exceeding eighty; they were uniformly dressed in brown stuff frocks of quaint fashion, and long holland pinafores. It was the hour of study; they were engaged in conning over their to-morrow's task, and the hum I had heard was the combined result of their whispered repetitions.

Miss Miller signed to me to sit on a bench near the door, then walking up to the top of the long room she cried out —

"Monitors, collect the lesson-books and put them away!"

Four tall girls arose from different tables, and going round, gathered the books and removed them. Miss Miller again gave the word of command —

"Monitors, fetch the supper-trays!"

The tall girls went out and returned presently, each bearing a tray, with portions of something, I knew not what, arranged thereon, and a pitcher of water and mug in the middle of each tray. The portions were handed round; those who liked took a draught of the water, the mug being common to all. When it came to my turn, I drank, for I was thirsty, but did not touch the food, excitement and fatigue rendering me incapable of eating: I now saw, however, that it was a thin oaten cake shared into fragments.

The meal over, prayers were read by Miss Miller, and the classes filed off, two and two, upstairs. Overpowered by this time with weariness, I scarcely noticed what sort of a place the bedroom was, except that, like the schoolroom, I saw it was very long. To-night I was to be Miss Miller's bed-fellow; she helped me to undress: when laid down I glanced at the long rows of beds, each of which was quickly filled with two occupants; in ten minutes the single light was extinguished, and amidst silence and complete darkness I fell asleep.

The night passed rapidly. I was too tired even to dream; I only once awoke to hear the wind rave in furious gusts, and the rain fall in torrents, and to be sensible that Miss Miller had taken her place by my side. When I again unclosed my eyes, a loud bell was ringing; the girls were up and dressing; day had not yet begun to dawn, and a rushlight or two burned in the room. I too rose reluctantly; it was bitter cold, and I dressed as well as I could for shivering, and washed when there was a basin at liberty, which did not occur soon, as there was but one basin to six girls, on the stands down the middle of the room. Again the bell rang: all formed in file, two and two, and in that order descended the stairs and entered the cold and dimly lit schoolroom: here prayers were read by Miss Miller; afterwards she called out —

"Form classes!"

A great tumult succeeded for some minutes, during which Miss Miller repeatedly exclaimed, "Silence!" and "Order!" When it subsided, I saw them all drawn up in four semicircles, before four chairs, placed at the four tables; all held books in their hands, and a great book, like a Bible, lay on each table, before the vacant seat. A pause of some seconds succeeded, filled up by the low, vague hum of numbers; Miss Miller walked from class to class, hushing this indefinite sound.

A distant bell tinkled: immediately three ladies entered the room, each walked to a table and took her seat. Miss Miller assumed the fourth vacant chair, which was that nearest the door, and around which the smallest of the children were assembled: to this inferior class I was called, and placed at the bottom of it.

Business now began, the day's Collect was repeated, then certain texts of Scripture were said, and to these succeeded a protracted reading of chapters in the Bible, which lasted an hour. By the time that exercise was terminated, day had fully dawned. The indefatigable bell now sounded for the fourth time: the classes were marshalled and marched into another room to breakfast: how glad I was to behold a prospect of getting something to eat! I was now nearly sick from inanition, having taken so little the day before.

The refectory was a great, low-ceiled, gloomy room; on two long tables smoked basins of something hot, which, however, to my dismay, sent forth an odour far from inviting. I saw a universal manifestation of discontent when the fumes of the repast met the nostrils of those destined to swallow it; from the van of the procession, the tall girls of the first class, rose the whispered words —

"Disgusting! The porridge is burnt again!"

"Silence!" ejaculated a voice; not that of Miss Miller, but one of the upper teachers, a little and dark personage, smartly dressed, but of somewhat morose aspect, who installed herself at the top of one table, while a more buxom lady presided at the other. I looked in vain for her I had first seen the night before; she was not visible: Miss Miller occupied the foot of the table where I sat, and a strange, foreign-looking, elderly lady, the French teacher, as I afterwards found, took the corresponding seat at the other board. A long grace was said and a hymn sung; then a servant brought in some tea for the teachers, and the meal began.

Ravenous, and now very faint, I devoured a spoonful or two of my portion without thinking of its taste; but the first edge of hunger blunted, I perceived I had got in hand a nauseous mess; burnt porridge is almost as bad as rotten potatoes; famine itself soon sickens over it. The spoons were moved slowly: I saw each girl taste her food and try to swallow it; but in most cases the effort was soon relinquished. Breakfast was over, and none had breakfasted. Thanks being returned for what we had not got, and a second hymn chanted, the refectory was evacuated for the schoolroom. I was one of the last to go out, and in passing the tables, I saw one teacher take a basin of the porridge and taste it; she looked at the others; all their countenances expressed displeasure, and one of them, the stout one, whispered —

"Abominable stuff! How shameful!"

A quarter of an hour passed before lessons again began, during which the schoolroom was in a glorious tumult; for that space of time it seemed to be permitted to talk loud and more freely, and they used their privilege. The whole conversation ran on the breakfast, which one and all abused roundly. Poor things! it was the sole consolation they had. Miss Miller was now the only teacher in the room: a group of great girls standing about her spoke with serious and sullen gestures. I heard the name of Mr. Brocklehurst pronounced by some lips; at which Miss Miller shook her head disapprovingly; but she made no great effort to check the general wrath; doubtless she shared in it.

A clock in the schoolroom struck nine; Miss Miller left her circle, and standing in the middle of the room, cried —

"Silence! To your seats!"

Discipline prevailed: in five minutes the confused throng was resolved into order, and comparative silence quelled the Babel clamour of tongues. The upper teachers now punctually resumed their posts: but still, all seemed to wait. Ranged on benches down the sides of the room, the eighty girls sat motionless and erect; a quaint assemblage they appeared, all with plain locks combed from their faces, not a curl visible; in brown dresses, made high and surrounded by a narrow tucker about the throat, with little pockets of holland (shaped something like a Highlander's purse) tied in front of their frocks, and destined to serve the purpose of a work-bag: all, too, wearing woollen stockings and country-made shoes, fastened with brass buckles. Above twenty of those clad in this costume were full-grown girls, or rather young women; it suited them ill, and gave an air of oddity even to the prettiest.

I was still looking at them, and also at intervals examining the teachers — none of whom precisely pleased me; for the stout one was a little coarse, the dark one not a little fierce, the foreigner harsh and grotesque, and Miss Miller, poor thing! looked purple, weather-beaten, and over-worked — when, as my eye wandered from face to face, the whole school rose simultaneously, as if moved by a common spring.

What was the matter? I had heard no order given: I was puzzled. Ere I had gathered my wits, the classes were again seated: but as all eyes were now turned to one point, mine followed the general direction, and encountered the personage who had received me last night. She stood at the bottom of the long room, on the hearth; for there was a fire at each end; she surveyed the two rows of girls silently and gravely. Miss Miller approaching, seemed to ask her a question, and having received her answer, went back to her place, and said aloud —

"Monitor of the first class, fetch the globes!"

While the direction was being executed, the lady consulted moved slowly up the room. I suppose I have a considerable organ of veneration, for I retain yet the sense of admiring awe with which my eyes traced her steps. Seen now, in broad daylight, she looked tall, fair, and shapely; brown eyes with a benignant light in their irids, and a fine pencilling of long lashes round, relieved the whiteness of her large front; on each of her temples her hair, of a very dark brown, was clustered in round curls, according to the fashion of those times, when neither smooth bands nor long ringlets were in vogue; her dress, also in the mode of the day, was of purple cloth, relieved by a sort of Spanish trimming of black velvet; a gold watch (watches were not so common then as now) shone at her girdle. Let the reader add, to complete the picture, refined features; a complexion, if pale, clear; and a stately air and carriage, and he will have, at least, as clearly as words can give it, a correct idea of the exterior of Miss Temple — Maria Temple, as I afterwards saw the name written in a prayer-book intrusted to me to carry to church.

The superintendent of Lowood (for such was this lady) having taken her seat before a pair of globes placed on one of the tables, summoned the first class round her, and commenced giving a lesson on geography; the lower classes were called by the teachers: repetitions in history, grammar, &c., went on for an hour; writing and arithmetic succeeded, and music lessons were given by Miss Temple to some of the elder girls. The duration of each lesson was measured by the clock, which at last struck twelve. The superintendent rose —

"I have a word to address to the pupils," said she.

The tumult of cessation from lessons was already breaking forth, but it sank at her voice. She went on —

"You had this morning a breakfast which you could not eat; you must be hungry: — I have ordered that a lunch of bread and cheese shall be served to all."

The teachers looked at her with a sort of surprise.

"It is to be done on my responsibility," she added, in an explanatory tone to them, and immediately afterwards left the room.

The bread and cheese was presently brought in and distributed, to the high delight and refreshment of the whole school. The order was now given "To the garden!" Each put on a coarse straw bonnet, with strings of coloured calico, and a cloak of grey frieze. I was similarly equipped, and, following the stream, I made my way into the open air.

The garden was a wide inclosure, surrounded with walls so high as to exclude every glimpse of prospect; a covered verandah ran down one side, and broad walks bordered a middle space divided into scores of little beds: these beds were assigned as gardens for the pupils to cultivate, and each bed had an owner. When full of flowers they would doubtless look pretty; but now, at the latter end of January, all was wintry blight and brown decay. I shuddered as I stood and looked round me: it was an inclement day for outdoor exercise; not positively rainy, but darkened by a drizzling yellow fog; all under foot was still soaking wet with the floods of yesterday. The stronger among the girls ran about and engaged in active games, but sundry pale and thin ones herded together for shelter and warmth in the verandah; and amongst these, as the dense mist penetrated to their shivering frames, I heard frequently the sound of a hollow cough.

As yet I had spoken to no one, nor did anybody seem to take notice of me; I stood lonely enough: but to that feeling of isolation I was accustomed; it did not oppress me much. I leant against a pillar of the verandah, drew my grey mantle close about me, and, trying to forget the cold which nipped me without, and the unsatisfied hunger which gnawed me within, delivered myself up to the employment of watching and thinking. My reflections were too undefined and fragmentary to merit record: I hardly yet knew where I was; Gateshead and my past life seemed floated away to an immeasurable distance; the present was vague and strange, and of the future I could form no conjecture. I looked round the convent-like garden, and then up at the house — a large building, half of which seemed grey and old, the other half quite new. The new part, containing the schoolroom and dormitory, was lit by mullioned and latticed windows, which gave it a church-like aspect; a stone tablet over the door bore this inscription: —

"Lowood Institution. — This portion was rebuilt A.D. — -, by Naomi Brocklehurst, of Brocklehurst Hall, in this county." "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." — St. Matt. v. 16.

I read these words over and over again: I felt that an explanation belonged to them, and was unable fully to penetrate their import. I was still pondering the signification of "Institution," and endeavouring to make out a connection between the first words and the verse of Scripture, when the sound of a cough close behind me made me turn my head. I saw a girl sitting on a stone bench near; she was bent over a book, on the perusal of which she seemed intent: from where I stood I could see the title — it was "Rasselas;" a name that struck me as strange, and consequently attractive. In turning a leaf she happened to look up, and I said to her directly —

"Is your book interesting?" I had already formed the intention of asking her to lend it to me some day.

"I like it," she answered, after a pause of a second or two, during which she examined me.

"What is it about?" I continued. I hardly know where I found the hardihood thus to open a conversation with a stranger; the step was contrary to my nature and habits: but I think her occupation touched a chord of sympathy somewhere; for I too liked reading, though of a frivolous and childish kind; I could not digest or comprehend the serious or substantial.

"You may look at it," replied the girl, offering me the book.

I did so; a brief examination convinced me that the contents were less taking than the title: "Rasselas" looked dull to my trifling taste; I saw nothing about fairies, nothing about genii; no bright variety seemed spread over the closely-printed pages. I returned it to her; she received it quietly, and without saying anything she was about to relapse into her former studious mood: again I ventured to disturb her —

"Can you tell me what the writing on that stone over the door means? What is Lowood Institution?"

"This house where you are come to live."

"And why do they call it Institution? Is it in any way different from other schools?"

"It is partly a charity-school: you and I, and all the rest of us, are charity-children. I suppose you are an orphan: are not either your father or your mother dead?"

"Both died before I can remember."

"Well, all the girls here have lost either one or both parents, and this is called an institution for educating orphans."

"Do we pay no money? Do they keep us for nothing?"

"We pay, or our friends pay, fifteen pounds a year for each."

"Then why do they call us charity-children?"

"Because fifteen pounds is not enough for board and teaching, and the deficiency is supplied by subscription."

"Who subscribes?"

"Different benevolent-minded ladies and gentlemen in this neighbourhood and in London."

"Who was Naomi Brocklehurst?"

"The lady who built the new part of this house as that tablet records, and whose son overlooks and directs everything here."

"Why?"

"Because he is treasurer and manager of the establishment."

"Then this house does not belong to that tall lady who wears a watch, and who said we were to have some bread and cheese?"

"To Miss Temple? Oh, no! I wish it did: she has to answer to Mr. Brocklehurst for all she does. Mr. Brocklehurst buys all our food and all our clothes."

"Does he live here?"

"No — two miles off, at a large hall."

"Is he a good man?"

"He is a clergyman, and is said to do a great deal of good."

"Did you say that tall lady was called Miss Temple?"

"Yes."

"And what are the other teachers called?"

"The one with red cheeks is called Miss Smith; she attends to the work, and cuts out — for we make our own clothes, our frocks, and pelisses, and everything; the little one with black hair is Miss Scatcherd; she teaches history and grammar, and hears the second class repetitions; and the one who wears a shawl, and has a pocket-handkerchief tied to her side with a yellow ribband, is Madame Pierrot: she comes from Lisle, in France, and teaches French."

"Do you like the teachers?"

"Well enough."

"Do you like the little black one, and the Madame — -? — I cannot pronounce her name as you do."

"Miss Scatcherd is hasty — you must take care not to offend her; Madame Pierrot is not a bad sort of person."

"But Miss Temple is the best — isn't she?"

"Miss Temple is very good and very clever; she is above the rest, because she knows far more than they do."

"Have you been long here?"

"Two years."

"Are you an orphan?"

"My mother is dead."

"Are you happy here?"

"You ask rather too many questions. I have given you answers enough for the present: now I want to read."

But at that moment the summons sounded for dinner; all re-entered the house. The odour which now filled the refectory was scarcely more appetising than that which had regaled our nostrils at breakfast: the dinner was served in two huge tin-plated vessels, whence rose a strong steam redolent of rancid fat. I found the mess to consist of indifferent potatoes and strange shreds of rusty meat, mixed and cooked together. Of this preparation a tolerably abundant plateful was apportioned to each pupil. I ate what I could, and wondered within myself whether every day's fare would be like this.

After dinner, we immediately adjourned to the schoolroom: lessons recommenced, and were continued till five o'clock.

The only marked event of the afternoon was, that I saw the girl with whom I had conversed in the verandah dismissed in disgrace by Miss Scatcherd from a history class, and sent to stand in the middle of the large schoolroom. The punishment seemed to me in a high degree ignominious, especially for so great a girl — she looked thirteen or upwards. I expected she would show signs of great distress and shame; but to my surprise she neither wept nor blushed: composed, though grave, she stood, the central mark of all eyes. "How can she bear it so quietly — so firmly?" I asked of myself. "Were I in her place, it seems to me I should wish the earth to open and swallow me up. She looks as if she were thinking of something beyond her punishment — beyond her situation: of something not round her nor before her. I have heard of day-dreams — is she in a day-dream now? Her eyes are fixed on the floor, but I am sure they do not see it — her sight seems turned in, gone down into her heart: she is looking at what she can remember, I believe; not at what is really present. I wonder what sort of a girl she is — whether good or naughty."

Soon after five p.m. we had another meal, consisting of a small mug of coffee, and half-a-slice of brown bread. I devoured my bread and drank my coffee with relish; but I should have been glad of as much more — I was still hungry. Half-an-hour's recreation succeeded, then study; then the glass of water and the piece of oat-cake, prayers, and bed. Such was my first day at Lowood.

CHAPTER VI

The next day commenced as before, getting up and dressing by rushlight; but this morning we were obliged to dispense with the ceremony of washing; the water in the pitchers was frozen. A change had taken place in the weather the preceding evening, and a keen north-east wind, whistling through the crevices of our bedroom windows all night long, had made us shiver in our beds, and turned the contents of the ewers to ice.

Before the long hour and a half of prayers and Bible-reading was over, I felt ready to perish with cold. Breakfast-time came at last, and this morning the porridge was not burnt; the quality was eatable, the quantity small. How small my portion seemed! I wished it had been doubled.

In the course of the day I was enrolled a member of the fourth class, and regular tasks and occupations were assigned me: hitherto, I had only been a spectator of the proceedings at Lowood; I was now to become an actor therein. At first, being little accustomed to learn by heart, the lessons appeared to me both long and difficult; the frequent change from task to task, too, bewildered me; and I was glad when, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Miss Smith put into my hands a border of muslin two yards long, together with needle, thimble, &c., and sent me to sit in a quiet corner of the schoolroom, with directions to hem the same. At that hour most of the others were sewing likewise; but one class still stood round Miss Scatcherd's chair reading, and as all was quiet, the subject of their lessons could be heard, together with the manner in which each girl acquitted herself, and the animadversions or commendations of Miss Scatcherd on the performance. It was English history: among the readers I observed my acquaintance of the verandah: at the commencement of the lesson, her place had been at the top of the class, but for some error of pronunciation, or some inattention to stops, she was suddenly sent to the very bottom. Even in that obscure position, Miss Scatcherd continued to make her an object of constant notice: she was continually addressing to her such phrases as the following: —

"Burns" (such it seems was her name: the girls here were all called by their surnames, as boys are elsewhere), "Burns, you are standing on the side of your shoe; turn your toes out immediately." "Burns, you poke your chin most unpleasantly; draw it in." "Burns, I insist on your holding your head up; I will not have you before me in that attitude," &c. &c.

A chapter having been read through twice, the books were closed and the girls examined. The lesson had comprised part of the reign of Charles I., and there were sundry questions about tonnage and poundage and ship-money, which most of them appeared unable to answer; still, every little difficulty was solved instantly when it reached Burns: her memory seemed to have retained the substance of the whole lesson, and she was ready with answers on every point. I kept expecting that Miss Scatcherd would praise her attention; but, instead of that, she suddenly cried out —

"You dirty, disagreeable girl! you have never cleaned your nails this morning!"

Burns made no answer: I wondered at her silence. "Why," thought I, "does she not explain that she could neither clean her nails nor wash her face, as the water was frozen?"

My attention was now called off by Miss Smith desiring me to hold a skein of thread: while she was winding it, she talked to me from time to time, asking whether I had ever been at school before, whether I could mark, stitch, knit, &c.; till she dismissed me, I could not pursue my observations on Miss Scatcherd's movements. When I returned to my seat, that lady was just delivering an order of which I did not catch the import; but Burns immediately left the class, and going into the small inner room where the books were kept, returned in half a minute, carrying in her hand a bundle of twigs tied together at one end. This ominous tool she presented to Miss Scatcherd with a respectful curtesy; then she quietly, and without being told, unloosed her pinafore, and the teacher instantly and sharply inflicted on her neck a dozen strokes with the bunch of twigs. Not a tear rose to Burns' eye; and, while I paused from my sewing, because my fingers quivered at this spectacle with a sentiment of unavailing and impotent anger, not a feature of her pensive face altered its ordinary expression.

"Hardened girl!" exclaimed Miss Scatcherd; "nothing can correct you of your slatternly habits: carry the rod away."

Burns obeyed: I looked at her narrowly as she emerged from the book-closet; she was just putting back her handkerchief into her pocket, and the trace of a tear glistened on her thin cheek.

The play-hour in the evening I thought the pleasantest fraction of the day at Lowood: the bit of bread, the draught of coffee swallowed at five o'clock had revived vitality, if it had not satisfied hunger: the long restraint of the day was slackened; the schoolroom felt warmer than in the morning — its fires being allowed to burn a little more brightly, to supply, in some measure, the place of candles, not yet introduced: the ruddy gloaming, the licensed uproar, the confusion of many voices gave one a welcome sense of liberty.

On the evening of the day on which I had seen Miss Scatcherd flog her pupil, Burns, I wandered as usual among the forms and tables and laughing groups without a companion, yet not feeling lonely: when I passed the windows, I now and then lifted a blind, and looked out; it snowed fast, a drift was already forming against the lower panes; putting my ear close to the window, I could distinguish from the gleeful tumult within, the disconsolate moan of the wind outside.

Probably, if I had lately left a good home and kind parents, this would have been the hour when I should most keenly have regretted the separation;

that wind would then have saddened my heart; this obscure chaos would have disturbed my peace! as it was, I derived from both a strange excitement, and reckless and feverish, I wished the wind to howl more wildly, the gloom to deepen to darkness, and the confusion to rise to clamour.

Jumping over forms, and creeping under tables, I made my way to one of the fire-places; there, kneeling by the high wire fender, I found Burns, absorbed, silent, abstracted from all round her by the companionship of a book, which she read by the dim glare of the embers.

"Is it still 'Rasselas'?" I asked, coming behind her.

"Yes," she said, "and I have just finished it."

And in five minutes more she shut it up. I was glad of this. "Now," thought I, "I can perhaps get her to talk." I sat down by her on the floor.

"What is your name besides Burns?"

"Helen."

"Do you come a long way from here?"

"I come from a place farther north, quite on the borders of Scotland."

"Will you ever go back?"

"I hope so; but nobody can be sure of the future."

"You must wish to leave Lowood?"

"No! why should I? I was sent to Lowood to get an education; and it would be of no use going away until I have attained that object."

"But that teacher, Miss Scatcherd, is so cruel to you?"

"Cruel? Not at all! She is severe: she dislikes my faults."

"And if I were in your place I should dislike her; I should resist her. If she struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand; I should break it under her nose."

"Probably you would do nothing of the sort: but if you did, Mr. Brocklehurst would expel you from the school; that would be a great grief to your relations. It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you; and besides, the Bible bids us return good for evil."

"But then it seems disgraceful to be flogged, and to be sent to stand in the middle of a room full of people; and you are such a great girl: I am far younger than you, and I could not bear it."

"Yet it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it: it is weak and silly to say you *cannot bear* what it is your fate to be required to bear."

I heard her with wonder: I could not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; and still less could I understand or sympathise with the forbearance she expressed for her chastiser. Still I felt that Helen Burns considered things by a light invisible to my eyes. I suspected she might be right and I wrong; but I would not ponder the matter deeply; like Felix, I put it off to a more convenient season.

"You say you have faults, Helen: what are they? To me you seem very good."

"Then learn from me, not to judge by appearances: I am, as Miss Scatcherd said, slatternly; I seldom put, and never keep, things, in order; I am careless; I forget rules; I read when I should learn my lessons; I have no method; and sometimes I say, like you, I cannot *bear* to be subjected to systematic arrangements. This is all very provoking to Miss Scatcherd, who is naturally neat, punctual, and particular."

"And cross and cruel," I added; but Helen Burns would not admit my addition: she kept silence.

"Is Miss Temple as severe to you as Miss Scatcherd?"

At the utterance of Miss Temple's name, a soft smile flitted over her grave face.

"Miss Temple is full of goodness; it pains her to be severe to any one, even the worst in the school: she sees my errors, and tells me of them gently; and, if I do anything worthy of praise, she gives me my meed liberally. One strong proof of my wretchedly defective nature is, that even her expostulations, so mild, so rational, have not influence to cure me of my faults; and even her praise, though I value it most highly, cannot stimulate me to continued care and foresight."

"That is curious," said I, "it is so easy to be careful."

"For *you* I have no doubt it is. I observed you in your class this morning, and saw you were closely attentive: your thoughts never seemed to wander while Miss Miller explained the lesson and questioned you. Now, mine continually rove away; when I should be listening to Miss Scatcherd, and collecting all she says with assiduity, often I lose the very sound of her voice; I fall into a sort of dream. Sometimes I think I am in Northumberland, and that the noises I hear round me are the bubbling of a little brook which runs through Deepden, near our house; — then, when it comes to my turn to reply, I have to be awakened; and having heard nothing of what was read for listening to the visionary brook, I have no answer ready."

"Yet how well you replied this afternoon."

"It was mere chance; the subject on which we had been reading had interested me. This afternoon, instead of dreaming of Deepden, I was wondering how a man who wished to do right could act so unjustly and unwisely as Charles the First sometimes did; and I thought what a pity it was that, with his integrity and conscientiousness, he could see no farther than the prerogatives of the crown. If he had but been able to look to a distance, and see how what they call the spirit of the age was tending! Still, I like Charles — I respect him — I pity him, poor murdered king! Yes, his enemies were the worst: they shed blood they had no right to shed. How dared they kill him!"

Helen was talking to herself now: she had forgotten I could not very well understand her — that I was ignorant, or nearly so, of the subject she discussed. I recalled her to my level.

"And when Miss Temple teaches you, do your thoughts wander then?"

"No, certainly, not often; because Miss Temple has generally something to say which is newer than my own reflections; her language is singularly agreeable to me, and the information she communicates is often just what I wished to gain."

"Well, then, with Miss Temple you are good?"

"Yes, in a passive way: I make no effort; I follow as inclination guides me. There is no merit in such goodness."

"A great deal: you are good to those who are good to you. It is all I ever desire to be. If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse. When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should — so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again."

"You will change your mind, I hope, when you grow older: as yet you are but a little untaught girl."

"But I feel this, Helen; I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in disliking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it is deserved."

"Heathens and savage tribes hold that doctrine, but Christians and civilised nations disown it."

"How? I don't understand."

"It is not violence that best overcomes hate — nor vengeance that most certainly heals injury."

"What then?"

"Read the New Testament, and observe what Christ says, and how He acts; make His word your rule, and His conduct your example."

"What does He say?"

"Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you."

"Then I should love Mrs. Reed, which I cannot do; I should bless her son John, which is impossible."

In her turn, Helen Burns asked me to explain, and I proceeded forthwith to pour out, in my own way, the tale of my sufferings and resentments. Bitter and truculent when excited, I spoke as I felt, without reserve or softening.

Helen heard me patiently to the end: I expected she would then make a remark, but she said nothing.

"Well," I asked impatiently, "is not Mrs. Reed a hard-hearted, bad woman?"

"She has been unkind to you, no doubt; because you see, she dislikes your cast of character, as Miss Scatcherd does mine; but how minutely you remember all she has done and said to you! What a singularly deep impression her injustice seems to have made on your heart! No ill-usage so brands its record on my feelings. Would you not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs. We are, and must be, one and all, burdened with faults in this world: but the time will soon come when, I trust, we shall put them off in putting off our corruptible bodies; when debasement and sin will fall from us with this cumbrous frame of flesh, and only the spark of the spirit will remain, — the impalpable principle of light and thought, pure as when it left the Creator to inspire the creature: whence it came it will return; perhaps again to be communicated to some being higher than man — perhaps to pass through gradations of glory, from the pale human soul to brighten to the seraph! Surely it will never, on the contrary, be suffered to degenerate from man to fiend? No; I cannot believe that: I hold another creed: which no one ever taught me, and which I seldom mention; but in which I delight, and to which I cling: for it extends hope to all: it makes Eternity a rest — a mighty home, not a terror and an abyss. Besides, with this creed, I can so clearly distinguish between the criminal and his crime; I can so sincerely forgive the first while I abhor the last: with this creed revenge never worries my heart, degradation never too deeply disgusts me, injustice never crushes me too low: I live in calm, looking to the end."

Helen's head, always drooping, sank a little lower as she finished this sentence. I saw by her look she wished no longer to talk to me, but rather to converse with her own thoughts. She was not allowed much time for meditation: a monitor, a great rough girl, presently came up, exclaiming in a strong Cumberland accent —

"Helen Burns, if you don't go and put your drawer in order, and fold up your work this minute, I'll tell Miss Scatcherd to come and look at it!"

Helen sighed as her reverie fled, and getting up, obeyed the monitor without reply as without delay.

CHAPTER VII

My first quarter at Lowood seemed an age; and not the golden age either; it comprised an irksome struggle with difficulties in habituating myself to new rules and unwonted tasks. The fear of failure in these points harassed me worse than the physical hardships of my lot; though these were no trifles.

During January, February, and part of March, the deep snows, and, after their melting, the almost impassable roads, prevented our stirring beyond the garden walls, except to go to church; but within these limits we had to pass an hour every day in the open air. Our clothing was insufficient to protect us from the severe cold: we had no boots, the snow got into our shoes and melted there: our ungloved hands became numbed and covered with chilblains, as were our feet: I remember well the distracting irritation I endured from this cause every evening, when my feet inflamed; and the torture of thrusting the swelled, raw, and stiff toes into my shoes in the morning. Then the scanty supply of food was distressing: with the keen appetites of growing children, we had scarcely sufficient to keep alive a delicate invalid. From this deficiency of nourishment resulted an abuse, which pressed hardly on the younger pupils: whenever the famished great girls had an opportunity, they would coax or menace the little ones out of their portion. Many a time I have shared between two claimants the precious morsel of brown bread distributed at tea-time; and after relinquishing to a third half the contents of my mug of coffee, I have swallowed the remainder with an accompaniment of secret tears, forced from me by the exigency of hunger.

Sundays were dreary days in that wintry season. We had to walk two miles to Brocklebridge Church, where our patron officiated. We set out cold, we arrived at church colder: during the morning service we became almost paralysed. It was too far to return to dinner, and an allowance of cold meat and bread, in the same penurious proportion observed in our ordinary meals, was served round between the services.

At the close of the afternoon service we returned by an exposed and hilly road, where the bitter winter wind, blowing over a range of snowy summits to the north, almost flayed the skin from our faces.

I can remember Miss Temple walking lightly and rapidly along our drooping line, her plaid cloak, which the frosty wind fluttered, gathered close about her, and encouraging us, by precept and example, to keep up our spirits, and march forward, as she said, "like stalwart soldiers." The other teachers, poor things, were generally themselves too much dejected to attempt the task of cheering others.

How we longed for the light and heat of a blazing fire when we got back! But, to the little ones at least, this was denied: each hearth in the schoolroom was immediately surrounded by a double row of great girls, and behind them the younger children crouched in groups, wrapping their starved arms in their pinafores.

A little solace came at tea-time, in the shape of a double ration of bread — a whole, instead of a half, slice — with the delicious addition of a thin scrape of butter: it was the hebdomadal treat to which we all looked forward from Sabbath to Sabbath. I generally contrived to reserve a moiety of this bounteous repast for myself; but the remainder I was invariably obliged to part with.

The Sunday evening was spent in repeating, by heart, the Church Catechism, and the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew; and in listening to a long sermon, read by Miss Miller, whose irrepressible yawns attested her weariness. A frequent interlude of these performances was the enactment of the part of Eutychus by some half-dozen of little girls, who, overpowered with sleep, would fall down, if not out of the third loft, yet off the fourth form, and be taken up half dead. The remedy was, to thrust them forward into the centre of the schoolroom, and oblige them to stand there till the sermon was finished. Sometimes their feet failed them, and they sank together in a heap; they were then propped up with the monitors' high stools.

I have not yet alluded to the visits of Mr. Brocklehurst; and indeed that gentleman was from home during the greater part of the first month after my arrival; perhaps prolonging his stay with his friend the archdeacon: his absence was a relief to me. I need not say that I had my own reasons for dreading his coming: but come he did at last.

One afternoon (I had then been three weeks at Lowood), as I was sitting with a slate in my hand, puzzling over a sum in long division, my eyes, raised in abstraction to the window, caught sight of a figure just passing: I recognised almost instinctively that gaunt outline; and when, two minutes after, all the school, teachers included, rose *en masse*, it was not necessary for me to look up in order to ascertain whose entrance they thus greeted. A long stride measured the schoolroom, and presently beside Miss Temple, who herself had risen, stood the same black column which had frowned on me so ominously from the hearthrug of Gateshead. I now glanced sideways at this piece of architecture. Yes, I was right: it was Mr. Brocklehurst, buttoned up in a surtout, and looking longer, narrower, and more rigid than ever.

I had my own reasons for being dismayed at this apparition; too well I remembered the perfidious hints given by Mrs. Reed about my disposition, &c.; the promise pledged by Mr. Brocklehurst to apprise Miss Temple and the teachers of my vicious nature. All along I had been dreading the fulfilment of this promise, — I had been looking out daily for the "Coming Man," whose information respecting my past life and conversation was to brand me as a bad child for ever: now there he was.

He stood at Miss Temple's side; he was speaking low in her ear: I did not doubt he was making disclosures of my villainy; and I watched her eye with painful anxiety, expecting every moment to see its dark orb turn on me a glance of repugnance and contempt. I listened too; and as I happened to be seated quite at the top of the room, I caught most of what he said: its import relieved me from immediate apprehension.

"I suppose, Miss Temple, the thread I bought at Lowton will do; it struck me that it would be just of the quality for the calico chemises, and I sorted the needles to match. You may tell Miss Smith that I forgot to make a memorandum of the darning needles, but she shall have some papers sent in next week; and she is not, on any account, to give out more than one at a time to each pupil: if they have more, they are apt to be careless and lose them. And, O ma'am! I wish the woollen stockings were better looked to! — when I was here last, I went into the kitchen-garden and examined the clothes drying on the line; there was a quantity of black hose in a very bad state of repair: from the size of the holes in them I was sure they had not been well mended from time to time."

He paused.

"Your directions shall be attended to, sir," said Miss Temple.

"And, ma'am," he continued, "the laundress tells me some of the girls have two clean tuckers in the week: it is too much; the rules limit them to one."

"I think I can explain that circumstance, sir. Agnes and Catherine Johnstone were invited to take tea with some friends at Lowton last Thursday, and I gave them leave to put on clean tuckers for the occasion."

Mr. Brocklehurst nodded.

"Well, for once it may pass; but please not to let the circumstance occur too often. And there is another thing which surprised me; I find, in settling accounts with the housekeeper, that a lunch, consisting of bread and cheese, has twice been served out to the girls during the past fortnight. How is this? I looked over the regulations, and I find no such meal as lunch mentioned. Who introduced this innovation? and by what authority?"

"I must be responsible for the circumstance, sir," replied Miss Temple: "the breakfast was so ill prepared that the pupils could not possibly eat it; and I dared not allow them to remain fasting till dinner-time."

"Madam, allow me an instant. You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying. Should any little accidental disappointment of the appetite occur, such as the spoiling of a meal, the under or the over dressing of a dish, the incident ought not to be neutralised by replacing with something more delicate the comfort lost, thus pampering the body and obviating the aim of this institution; it ought to be improved to the spiritual edification of the pupils, by encouraging them to evince fortitude under temporary privation. A brief address on those occasions would not be mistimed, wherein a judicious instructor would take the opportunity of referring to the sufferings of the primitive Christians; to the torments of martyrs; to the exhortations of our blessed Lord Himself, calling upon His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him; to His warnings that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God; to His divine consolations, "If ye suffer hunger or thirst for My sake, happy are ye." Oh, madam, when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!"

Mr. Brocklehurst again paused — perhaps overcome by his feelings. Miss Temple had looked down when he first began to speak to her; but she now gazed straight before her, and her face, naturally pale as marble, appeared to be assuming also the coldness and fixity of that material; especially her mouth, closed as if it would have required a sculptor's chisel to open it, and her brow settled gradually into petrified severity.

Meantime, Mr. Brocklehurst, standing on the hearth with his hands behind his back, majestically surveyed the whole school. Suddenly his eye gave a blink, as if it had met something that either dazzled or shocked its pupil; turning, he said in more rapid accents than he had hitherto used —

"Miss Temple, Miss Temple, what — *what* is that girl with curled hair? Red hair, ma'am, curled — curled all over?" And extending his cane he pointed to the awful object, his hand shaking as he did so.

"It is Julia Severn," replied Miss Temple, very quietly.

"Julia Severn, ma'am! And why has she, or any other, curled hair? Why, in defiance of every precept and principle of this house, does she conform to the world so openly — here in an evangelical, charitable establishment — as to wear her hair one mass of curls?"

"Julia's hair curls naturally," returned Miss Temple, still more quietly.

"Naturally! Yes, but we are not to conform to nature; I wish these girls to be the children of Grace: and why that abundance? I have again and again intimated that I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly. Miss Temple, that girl's hair must be cut off entirely; I will send a barber to-morrow: and I see others who have far too much of the excrescence — that tall girl, tell her to turn round. Tell all the first form to rise up and direct their faces to the wall."

Miss Temple passed her handkerchief over her lips, as if to smooth away the involuntary smile that curled them; she gave the order, however, and when the first class could take in what was required of them, they obeyed. Leaning a little back on my bench, I could see the looks and grimaces with which they commented on this manoeuvre: it was a pity Mr. Brocklehurst could not see them too; he would perhaps have felt that, whatever he might do with the outside of the cup and platter, the inside was further beyond his interference than he imagined.

He scrutinised the reverse of these living medals some five minutes, then pronounced sentence. These words fell like the knell of doom —

"All those top-knots must be cut off."

Miss Temple seemed to remonstrate.

"Madam," he pursued, "I have a Master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel; and each of the young persons before us has a string of hair twisted in plaits which vanity itself might have woven; these, I repeat, must be cut off; think of the time wasted, of — "

Mr. Brocklehurst was here interrupted: three other visitors, ladies, now entered the room. They ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress, for they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs. The two younger of the trio (fine girls of sixteen and seventeen) had grey beaver hats, then in fashion, shaded with ostrich plumes, and from under the brim of this graceful head-dress fell a profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled; the elder lady was enveloped in a costly velvet shawl, trimmed with ermine, and she wore a false front of French curls.

These ladies were deferentially received by Miss Temple, as Mrs. and the Misses Brocklehurst, and conducted to seats of honour at the top of the room. It seems they had come in the carriage with their reverend relative, and had been conducting a rummaging scrutiny of the room upstairs, while he transacted business with the housekeeper, questioned the laundress, and lectured the superintendent. They now proceeded to address divers remarks and reproofs to Miss Smith, who was charged with the care of the linen and the inspection of the dormitories: but I had no time to listen to what they said; other matters called off and enchanted my attention.

Hitherto, while gathering up the discourse of Mr. Brocklehurst and Miss Temple, I had not, at the same time, neglected precautions to secure my personal safety; which I thought would be effected, if I could only elude observation. To this end, I had sat well back on the form, and while seeming to be busy with my sum, had held my slate in such a manner as to conceal my face: I might have escaped notice, had not my treacherous slate somehow happened to slip from my hand, and falling with an obtrusive crash, directly drawn every eye upon me; I knew it was all over now, and, as I stooped to pick up the two fragments of slate, I rallied my forces for the worst. It came.

"A careless girl!" said Mr. Brocklehurst, and immediately after — "It is the new pupil, I perceive." And before I could draw breath, "I must not forget I have a word to say respecting her." Then aloud: how loud it seemed to me! "Let the child who broke her slate come forward!"

Of my own accord I could not have stirred; I was paralysed: but the two great girls who sit on each side of me, set me on my legs and pushed me towards the dread judge, and then Miss Temple gently assisted me to his very feet, and I caught her whispered counsel —

"Don't be afraid, Jane, I saw it was an accident; you shall not be punished."

The kind whisper went to my heart like a dagger.

"Another minute, and she will despise me for a hypocrite," thought I; and an impulse of fury against Reed, Brocklehurst, and Co. bounded in my pulses at the conviction. I was no Helen Burns.

"Fetch that stool," said Mr. Brocklehurst, pointing to a very high one from which a monitor had just risen: it was brought.

"Place the child upon it."

And I was placed there, by whom I don't know: I was in no condition to note particulars; I was only aware that they had hoisted me up to the height of Mr. Brocklehurst's nose, that he was within a yard of me, and that a spread of shot orange and purple silk pelisses and a cloud of silvery plumage extended and waved below me.

Mr. Brocklehurst hemmed.

"Ladies," said he, turning to his family, "Miss Temple, teachers, and children, you all see this girl?"

Of course they did; for I felt their eyes directed like burning-glasses against my scorched skin.

"You see she is yet young; you observe she possesses the ordinary form of childhood; God has graciously given her the shape that He has given to all of us; no signal deformity points her out as a marked character. Who would think that the Evil One had already found a servant and agent in her? Yet such, I grieve to say, is the case."

A pause — in which I began to steady the palsy of my nerves, and to feel that the Rubicon was passed; and that the trial, no longer to be shirked, must be firmly sustained.

"My dear children," pursued the black marble clergyman, with pathos, "this is a sad, a melancholy occasion; for it becomes my duty to warn you, that this girl, who might be one of God's own lambs, is a little castaway: not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse. Teachers, you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul: if, indeed, such salvation be possible, for (my tongue falters while I tell it) this girl, this child, the native of a Christian land, worse than many a little heathen who says its prayers to Brahma and kneels before Juggernaut — this girl is — a liar!"

Now came a pause of ten minutes, during which I, by this time in perfect possession of my wits, observed all the female Brocklehursts produce their pocket-handkerchiefs and apply them to their optics, while the elderly lady swayed herself to and fro, and the two younger ones whispered, "How shocking!" Mr. Brocklehurst resumed.

"This I learned from her benefactress; from the pious and charitable lady who adopted her in her orphan state, reared her as her own daughter, and whose kindness, whose generosity the unhappy girl repaid by an ingratitude so bad, so dreadful, that at last her excellent patroness was obliged to separate her from her own young ones, fearful lest her vicious example should contaminate their purity: she has sent her here to be healed, even as the Jews of old sent their diseased to the troubled pool of Bethesda; and, teachers, superintendent, I beg of you not to allow the waters to stagnate round her."

With this sublime conclusion, Mr. Brocklehurst adjusted the top button of his surtout, muttered something to his family, who rose, bowed to Miss Temple, and then all the great people sailed in state from the room. Turning at the door, my judge said —

"Let her stand half-an-hour longer on that stool, and let no one speak to her during the remainder of the day."

There was I, then, mounted aloft; I, who had said I could not bear the shame of standing on my natural feet in the middle of the room, was now exposed to general view on a pedestal of infamy. What my sensations were no language can describe; but just as they all rose, stifling my breath and constricting my throat, a girl came up and passed me: in passing, she lifted her eyes. What a strange light inspired them! What an extraordinary sensation that ray sent through me! How the new feeling bore me up! It was as if a martyr, a hero, had passed a slave or victim, and imparted strength in the transit. I mastered the rising hysteria, lifted up my head, and took a firm stand on the stool. Helen Burns asked some slight question about her work of Miss Smith, was chidden for the triviality of the inquiry, returned to her place, and smiled at me as she again went by. What a smile! I remember it now, and I know that it was the effluence of fine intellect, of true courage; it lit up her marked lineaments, her thin face, her sunken grey eye, like a reflection from the aspect of an angel. Yet at that moment Helen Burns wore on her arm "the untidy badge;" scarcely an hour ago I had heard her condemned by Miss Scatcherd to a dinner of bread and water on the morrow because she had blotted an exercise in copying it out. Such is the imperfect nature of man! such spots are there on the disc of the clearest planet; and eyes like Miss Scatcherd's can only see those minute defects, and are blind to the full brightness of the orb.

CHAPTER VIII

Ere the half-hour ended, five o'clock struck; school was dismissed, and all were gone into the refectory to tea. I now ventured to descend: it was deep dusk; I retired into a corner and sat down on the floor. The spell by which I had been so far supported began to dissolve; reaction took place, and soon, so overwhelming was the grief that seized me, I sank prostrate with my face to the ground. Now I wept: Helen Burns was not here; nothing sustained me; left to myself I abandoned myself, and my tears watered the boards. I had meant to be so good, and to do so much at Lowood: to make so many friends, to earn respect and win affection. Already I had made visible progress: that very morning I had reached the head of my class; Miss Miller had praised me warmly; Miss Temple had smiled approbation; she had promised to teach me drawing, and to let me learn French, if I continued to make similar improvement two months longer: and then I was well received by my fellow-pupils; treated as an equal by those of my own age, and not molested by any; now, here I lay again crushed and trodden on; and could I ever rise more?

"Never," I thought; and ardently I wished to die. While sobbing out this wish in broken accents, some one approached: I started up — again Helen Burns was near me; the fading fires just showed her coming up the long, vacant room; she brought my coffee and bread.

"Come, eat something," she said; but I put both away from me, feeling as if a drop or a crumb would have choked me in my present condition. Helen regarded me, probably with surprise: I could not now abate my agitation, though I tried hard; I continued to weep aloud. She sat down on the ground near me, embraced her knees with her arms, and rested her head upon them; in that attitude she remained silent as an Indian. I was the first who spoke —

"Helen, why do you stay with a girl whom everybody believes to be a liar?"

"Everybody, Jane? Why, there are only eighty people who have heard you called so, and the world contains hundreds of millions."

"But what have I to do with millions? The eighty, I know, despise me."

"Jane, you are mistaken: probably not one in the school either despises or dislikes you: many, I am sure, pity you much."

"How can they pity me after what Mr. Brocklehurst has said?"

"Mr. Brocklehurst is not a god: nor is he even a great and admired man: he is little liked here; he never took steps to make himself liked. Had he treated you as an especial favourite, you would have found enemies, declared or covert, all around you; as it is, the greater number would offer you sympathy if they dared. Teachers and pupils may look coldly on you for a day or two, but friendly feelings are concealed in their hearts; and if you persevere in doing well, these feelings will ere long appear so much the more evidently for their temporary suppression. Besides, Jane" — she paused.

"Well, Helen?" said I, putting my hand into hers: she chafed my fingers gently to warm them, and went on —

"If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends."

"No; I know I should think well of myself; but that is not enough: if others don't love me I would rather die than live — I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen. Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest — "

"Hush, Jane! you think too much of the love of human beings; you are too impulsive, too vehement; the sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self, or than creatures feeble as you. Besides this earth, and besides the race of men, there is an invisible world and a kingdom of spirits: that world is round us, for it is everywhere; and those spirits watch us, for they are commissioned to guard us; and if we were dying in pain and shame, if scorn smote us on all sides, and hatred crushed us, angels see our tortures, recognise our innocence (if innocent we be: as I know you are of this charge which Mr. Brocklehurst has weakly and pompously repeated at second-hand from Mrs. Reed; for I read a sincere nature in your ardent eyes and on your clear front), and God waits only the separation of spirit from flesh to crown us with a full reward. Why, then, should we ever sink overwhelmed with distress, when life is so soon over, and death is so certain an entrance to happiness — to glory?"

I was silent; Helen had calmed me; but in the tranquillity she imparted there was an alloy of inexpressible sadness. I felt the impression of woe as she spoke, but I could not tell whence it came; and when, having done speaking, she breathed a little fast and coughed a short cough, I momentarily forgot my own sorrows to yield to a vague concern for her.

Resting my head on Helen's shoulder, I put my arms round her waist; she drew me to her, and we reposed in silence. We had not sat long thus, when another person came in. Some heavy clouds, swept from the sky by a rising wind, had left the moon bare; and her light, streaming in through a window near, shone full both on us and on the approaching figure, which we at once recognised as Miss Temple.

"I came on purpose to find you, Jane Eyre," said she; "I want you in my room; and as Helen Burns is with you, she may come too."

We went; following the superintendent's guidance, we had to thread some intricate passages, and mount a staircase before we reached her apartment; it contained a good fire, and looked cheerful. Miss Temple told Helen Burns to be seated in a low arm-chair on one side of the hearth, and herself taking another, she called me to her side.

"Is it all over?" she asked, looking down at my face. "Have you cried your grief away?"

"I am afraid I never shall do that."

"Why?"

"Because I have been wrongly accused; and you, ma'am, and everybody else, will now think me wicked."

"We shall think you what you prove yourself to be, my child. Continue to act as a good girl, and you will satisfy us."

"Shall I, Miss Temple?"

"You will," said she, passing her arm round me. "And now tell me who is the lady whom Mr. Brocklehurst called your benefactress?"

"Mrs. Reed, my uncle's wife. My uncle is dead, and he left me to her care."

"Did she not, then, adopt you of her own accord?"

"No, ma'am; she was sorry to have to do it: but my uncle, as I have often heard the servants say, got her to promise before he died that she would always keep me."

"Well now, Jane, you know, or at least I will tell you, that when a criminal is accused, he is always allowed to speak in his own defence. You have been charged with falsehood; defend yourself to me as well as you can. Say whatever your memory suggests is true; but add nothing and exaggerate nothing."

I resolved, in the depth of my heart, that I would be most moderate — most correct; and, having reflected a few minutes in order to arrange coherently what I had to say, I told her all the story of my sad childhood. Exhausted by emotion, my language was more subdued than it generally was when it developed that sad theme; and mindful of Helen's warnings against the indulgence of resentment, I infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. Thus restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible: I felt as I went on that Miss Temple fully believed me.

In the course of the tale I had mentioned Mr. Lloyd as having come to see me after the fit: for I never forgot the, to me, frightful episode of the red-room: in detailing which, my excitement was sure, in some degree, to break bounds; for nothing could soften in my recollection the spasm of agony which clutched my heart when Mrs. Reed spurned my wild supplication for pardon, and locked me a second time in the dark and haunted chamber.

I had finished: Miss Temple regarded me a few minutes in silence; she then said —

"I know something of Mr. Lloyd; I shall write to him; if his reply agrees with your statement, you shall be publicly cleared from every imputation; to me, Jane, you are clear now."

She kissed me, and still keeping me at her side (where I was well contented to stand, for I derived a child's pleasure from the contemplation of her face, her dress, her one or two ornaments, her white forehead, her clustered and shining curls, and beaming dark eyes), she proceeded to address Helen Burns.

“How are you to-night, Helen? Have you coughed much to-day?”

“Not quite so much, I think, ma’am.”

“And the pain in your chest?”

“It is a little better.”

Miss Temple got up, took her hand and examined her pulse; then she returned to her own seat: as she resumed it, I heard her sigh low. She was pensive a few minutes, then rousing herself, she said cheerfully —

“But you two are my visitors to-night; I must treat you as such.” She rang her bell.

“Barbara,” she said to the servant who answered it, “I have not yet had tea; bring the tray and place cups for these two young ladies.”

And a tray was soon brought. How pretty, to my eyes, did the china cups and bright teapot look, placed on the little round table near the fire! How fragrant was the steam of the beverage, and the scent of the toast! of which, however, I, to my dismay (for I was beginning to be hungry) discerned only a very small portion: Miss Temple discerned it too.

“Barbara,” said she, “can you not bring a little more bread and butter? There is not enough for three.”

Barbara went out: she returned soon —

“Madam, Mrs. Harden says she has sent up the usual quantity.”

Mrs. Harden, be it observed, was the housekeeper: a woman after Mr. Brocklehurst’s own heart, made up of equal parts of whalebone and iron.

“Oh, very well!” returned Miss Temple; “we must make it do, Barbara, I suppose.” And as the girl withdrew she added, smiling, “Fortunately, I have it in my power to supply deficiencies for this once.”

Having invited Helen and me to approach the table, and placed before each of us a cup of tea with one delicious but thin morsel of toast, she got up, unlocked a drawer, and taking from it a parcel wrapped in paper, disclosed presently to our eyes a good-sized seed-cake.

“I meant to give each of you some of this to take with you,” said she, “but as there is so little toast, you must have it now,” and she proceeded to cut slices with a generous hand.

We feasted that evening as on nectar and ambrosia; and not the least delight of the entertainment was the smile of gratification with which our hostess regarded us, as we satisfied our famished appetites on the delicate fare she liberally supplied.

Tea over and the tray removed, she again summoned us to the fire; we sat one on each side of her, and now a conversation followed between her and Helen, which it was indeed a privilege to be admitted to hear.

Miss Temple had always something of serenity in her air, of state in her mien, of refined propriety in her language, which precluded deviation into the ardent, the excited, the eager: something which chastened the pleasure of those who looked on her and listened to her, by a controlling sense of awe; and such was my feeling now: but as to Helen Burns, I was struck with wonder.

The refreshing meal, the brilliant fire, the presence and kindness of her beloved instructress, or, perhaps, more than all these, something in her own unique mind, had roused her powers within her. They woke, they kindled: first, they glowed in the bright tint of her cheek, which till this hour I had never seen but pale and bloodless; then they shone in the liquid lustre of her eyes, which had suddenly acquired a beauty more singular than that of Miss Temple's — a beauty neither of fine colour nor long eyelash, nor pencilled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance. Then her soul sat on her lips, and language flowed, from what source I cannot tell. Has a girl of fourteen a heart large enough, vigorous enough, to hold the swelling spring of pure, full, fervid eloquence? Such was the characteristic of Helen's discourse on that, to me, memorable evening; her spirit seemed hastening to live within a very brief span as much as many live during a protracted existence.

They conversed of things I had never heard of; of nations and times past; of countries far away; of secrets of nature discovered or guessed at: they spoke of books: how many they had read! What stores of knowledge they possessed! Then they seemed so familiar with French names and French authors: but my amazement reached its climax when Miss Temple asked Helen if she sometimes snatched a moment to recall the Latin her father had taught her, and taking a book from a shelf, bade her read and construe a page of Virgil; and Helen obeyed, my organ of veneration expanding at every sounding line. She had scarcely finished ere the bell announced bedtime! no delay could be admitted; Miss Temple embraced us both, saying, as she drew us to her heart —

"God bless you, my children!"

Helen she held a little longer than me: she let her go more reluctantly; it was Helen her eye followed to the door; it was for her she a second time breathed a sad sigh; for her she wiped a tear from her cheek.

On reaching the bedroom, we heard the voice of Miss Scatcherd: she was examining drawers; she had just pulled out Helen Burns's, and when we entered Helen was greeted with a sharp reprimand, and told that to-morrow she should have half-a-dozen of untidily folded articles pinned to her shoulder.

"My things were indeed in shameful disorder," murmured Helen to me, in a low voice: "I intended to have arranged them, but I forgot."

Next morning, Miss Scatcherd wrote in conspicuous characters on a piece of pasteboard the word "Slattern," and bound it like a phylactery round Helen's large, mild, intelligent, and benign-looking forehead. She wore it till evening, patient, unresentful, regarding it as a deserved punishment. The moment Miss Scatcherd withdrew after afternoon school, I ran to Helen, tore it off, and thrust it into the fire: the fury of which she was incapable had been burning in my soul all day, and tears, hot and large, had continually been scalding my cheek; for the spectacle of her sad resignation gave me an intolerable pain at the heart.

About a week subsequently to the incidents above narrated, Miss Temple, who had written to Mr. Lloyd, received his answer: it appeared that what he said went to corroborate my account. Miss Temple, having assembled the whole school, announced that inquiry had been made into the charges alleged against Jane Eyre, and that she was most happy to be able to pronounce her completely cleared from every imputation. The teachers then shook hands with me and kissed me, and a murmur of pleasure ran through the ranks of my companions.

Thus relieved of a grievous load, I from that hour set to work afresh, resolved to pioneer my way through every difficulty: I toiled hard, and my success was proportionate to my efforts; my memory, not naturally tenacious, improved with practice; exercise sharpened my wits; in a few weeks I was promoted to a higher class; in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing. I learned the first two tenses of the verb *Etre*, and sketched my first cottage (whose walls, by-the-bye, outrivalled in slope those of the leaning tower of Pisa), on the same day. That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk, with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings: I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark; all the work of my own hands: freely pencilled houses and trees, picturesque rocks and ruins, Cuyp-like groups of cattle, sweet paintings of butterflies hovering over unblown roses, of birds picking at ripe cherries, of wren's nests enclosing pearl-like eggs, wreathed about with young ivy sprays. I examined, too, in thought, the possibility of my ever being able to translate currently a certain little French story which Madame Pierrot had that day shown me; nor was that problem solved to my satisfaction ere I fell sweetly asleep.

Well has Solomon said — "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries.

CHAPTER IX

But the privations, or rather the hardships, of Lowood lessened. Spring drew on: she was indeed already come; the frosts of winter had ceased; its snows were melted, its cutting winds ameliorated. My wretched feet, flayed and swollen to lameness by the sharp air of January, began to heal and subside under the gentler breathings of April; the nights and mornings no longer by their Canadian temperature froze the very blood in our veins; we could now endure the play-hour passed in the garden: sometimes on a sunny day it began even to be pleasant and genial, and a greenness grew over those brown beds, which, freshening daily, suggested the thought that Hope traversed them at night, and left each morning brighter traces of her steps. Flowers peeped out amongst the leaves; snow-drops, crocuses, purple auriculas, and golden-eyed pansies. On Thursday afternoons (half-holidays) we now took walks, and found still sweeter flowers opening by the wayside, under the hedges.

I discovered, too, that a great pleasure, an enjoyment which the horizon only bounded, lay all outside the high and spike-guarded walls of our garden: this pleasure consisted in prospect of noble summits girdling a great hill-hollow, rich in verdure and shadow; in a bright beck, full of dark stones and sparkling eddies. How different had this scene looked when I viewed it laid out beneath the iron sky of winter, stiffened in frost, shrouded with snow! — when mists as chill as death wandered to the impulse of east winds along those purple peaks, and rolled down "ing" and holm till they blended with the frozen fog of the beck! That beck itself was then a torrent, turbid and curbless: it tore asunder the wood, and sent a raving sound through the air, often thickened with wild rain or whirling sleet; and for the forest on its banks, *that* showed only ranks of skeletons.

April advanced to May: a bright serene May it was; days of blue sky, placid sunshine, and soft western or southern gales filled up its duration. And now vegetation matured with vigour; Lowood shook loose its tresses; it became all green, all flowery; its great elm, ash, and oak skeletons were restored to majestic life; woodland plants sprang up profusely in its recesses; unnumbered varieties of moss filled its hollows, and it made a strange ground-sunshine out of the wealth of its wild primrose plants: I have seen their pale gold gleam in overshadowed spots like scatterings of the sweetest lustre. All this I enjoyed often and fully, free, unwatched, and almost alone: for this unwonted liberty and pleasure there was a cause, to which it now becomes my task to advert.

Have I not described a pleasant site for a dwelling, when I speak of it as bosomed in hill and wood, and rising from the verge of a stream? Assuredly, pleasant enough: but whether healthy or not is another question.

That forest-dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence; which, quickening with the quickening spring, crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into an hospital.

Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection: forty-five out of the eighty girls lay ill at one time. Classes were broken up, rules relaxed. The few who continued well were allowed almost unlimited license; because the medical attendant insisted on the necessity of frequent exercise to keep them in health: and had it been otherwise, no one had leisure to watch or restrain them. Miss Temple's whole attention was absorbed by the patients: she lived in the sick-room, never quitting it except to snatch a few hours' rest at night. The teachers were fully occupied with packing up and making other necessary preparations for the departure of those girls who were fortunate enough to have friends and relations able and willing to remove them from the seat of contagion. Many, already smitten, went home only to die: some died at the school, and were buried quietly and quickly, the nature of the malady forbidding delay.

While disease had thus become an inhabitant of Lowood, and death its frequent visitor; while there was gloom and fear within its walls; while its rooms and passages steamed with hospital smells, the drug and the pastille striving vainly to overcome the effluvia of mortality, that bright May shone unclouded over the bold hills and beautiful woodland out of doors. Its garden, too, glowed with flowers: hollyhocks had sprung up tall as trees, lilies had opened, tulips and roses were in bloom; the borders of the little beds were gay with pink thrift and crimson double daisies; the sweetbriars gave out, morning and evening, their scent of spice and apples; and these fragrant treasures were all useless for most of the inmates of Lowood, except to furnish now and then a handful of herbs and blossoms to put in a coffin.

But I, and the rest who continued well, enjoyed fully the beauties of the scene and season; they let us ramble in the wood, like gipsies, from morning till night; we did what we liked, went where we liked: we lived better too. Mr. Brocklehurst and his family never came near Lowood now: household matters were not scrutinised into; the cross housekeeper was gone, driven away by the fear of infection; her successor, who had been matron at the Lowton Dispensary, unused to the ways of her new abode, provided with comparative liberality. Besides, there were fewer to feed; the sick could eat little; our breakfast-basins were better filled; when there was no time to prepare a regular dinner, which often happened, she would give us a large piece of cold pie, or a thick slice of bread and cheese, and this we carried away with us to the wood, where we each chose the spot we liked best, and dined sumptuously.

My favourite seat was a smooth and broad stone, rising white and dry from the very middle of the beck, and only to be got at by wading through the water; a feat I accomplished barefoot. The stone was just broad enough to accommodate, comfortably, another girl and me, at that time my chosen comrade — one Mary Ann Wilson; a shrewd, observant personage, whose society I took pleasure in, partly because she was witty and original, and partly because she had a manner which set me at my ease. Some years older than I, she knew more of the world, and could tell me many things I liked to hear: with her my curiosity found gratification: to my faults also she gave ample indulgence, never imposing curb or rein on anything I said. She had a turn for narrative, I for analysis; she liked to inform, I to question; so we got on swimmingly together, deriving much entertainment, if not much improvement, from our mutual intercourse.

And where, meantime, was Helen Burns? Why did I not spend these sweet days of liberty with her? Had I forgotten her? or was I so worthless as to have grown tired of her pure society? Surely the Mary Ann Wilson I have mentioned was inferior to my first acquaintance: she could only tell me amusing stories, and reciprocate any racy and pungent gossip I chose to indulge in; while, if I have spoken truth of Helen, she was qualified to give those who enjoyed the privilege of her converse a taste of far higher things.

True, reader; and I knew and felt this: and though I am a defective being, with many faults and few redeeming points, yet I never tired of Helen Burns; nor ever ceased to cherish for her a sentiment of attachment, as strong, tender, and respectful as any that ever animated my heart. How could it be otherwise, when Helen, at all times and under all circumstances, evinced for me a quiet and faithful friendship, which ill-humour never soured, nor irritation never troubled? But Helen was ill at present: for some weeks she had been removed from my sight to I knew not what room upstairs. She was not, I was told, in the hospital portion of the house with the fever patients; for her complaint was consumption, not typhus: and by consumption I, in my ignorance, understood something mild, which time and care would be sure to alleviate.

I was confirmed in this idea by the fact of her once or twice coming downstairs on very warm sunny afternoons, and being taken by Miss Temple into the garden; but, on these occasions, I was not allowed to go and speak to her; I only saw her from the schoolroom window, and then not distinctly; for she was much wrapped up, and sat at a distance under the verandah.

One evening, in the beginning of June, I had stayed out very late with Mary Ann in the wood; we had, as usual, separated ourselves from the others, and had wandered far; so far that we lost our way, and had to ask it at a lonely cottage, where a man and woman lived, who looked after a herd of half-wild swine that fed on the mast in the wood. When we got back, it was after moonrise: a pony, which we knew to be the surgeon's, was standing at the garden door. Mary Ann remarked that she supposed some one must be very ill, as Mr. Bates had been sent for at that time of the evening. She went into the house; I stayed behind a few minutes to plant in my garden a handful of roots I had dug up in the forest, and which I feared would wither if I left them till the morning. This done, I lingered yet a little longer: the flowers smelt so sweet as the dew fell; it was such a pleasant evening, so serene, so warm; the still glowing west promised so fairly another fine day on the morrow; the moon rose with such majesty in the grave east. I was noting these things and enjoying them as a child might, when it entered my mind as it had never done before: —

"How sad to be lying now on a sick bed, and to be in danger of dying! This world is pleasant — it would be dreary to be called from it, and to have to go who knows where?"

And then my mind made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell; and for the first time it recoiled, baffled; and for the first time glancing behind, on each side, and before it, it saw all round an unfathomed gulf: it felt the one point where it stood — the present; all the rest was formless cloud and vacant depth; and it shuddered at the thought of tottering, and plunging amid that chaos. While pondering this new idea, I heard the front door open; Mr. Bates came out, and with him was a nurse. After she had seen him mount his horse and depart, she was about to close the door, but I ran up to her.

"How is Helen Burns?"

"Very poorly," was the answer.

"Is it her Mr. Bates has been to see?"

"Yes."

"And what does he say about her?"

"He says she'll not be here long."

This phrase, uttered in my hearing yesterday, would have only conveyed the notion that she was about to be removed to Northumberland, to her own home. I should not have suspected that it meant she was dying; but I knew instantly now! It opened clear on my comprehension that Helen Burns was numbering her last days in this world, and that she was going to be taken to the region of spirits, if such region there were. I experienced a shock of horror, then a strong thrill of grief, then a desire — a necessity to see her; and I asked in what room she lay.

"She is in Miss Temple's room," said the nurse.

"May I go up and speak to her?"

"Oh no, child! It is not likely; and now it is time for you to come in; you'll catch the fever if you stop out when the dew is falling."

The nurse closed the front door; I went in by the side entrance which led to the schoolroom: I was just in time; it was nine o'clock, and Miss Miller was calling the pupils to go to bed.

It might be two hours later, probably near eleven, when I — not having been able to fall asleep, and deeming, from the perfect silence of the dormitory, that my companions were all wrapt in profound repose — rose softly, put on my frock over my night-dress, and, without shoes, crept from the apartment, and set off in quest of Miss Temple's room. It was quite at the other end of the house; but I knew my way; and the light of the unclouded summer moon, entering here and there at passage windows, enabled me to find it without difficulty. An odour of camphor and burnt vinegar warned me when I came near the fever room: and I passed its door quickly, fearful lest the nurse who sat up all night should hear me. I dreaded being discovered and sent back; for I *must* see Helen, — I must embrace her before she died, — I must give her one last kiss, exchange with her one last word.

Having descended a staircase, traversed a portion of the house below, and succeeded in opening and shutting, without noise, two doors, I reached another flight of steps; these I mounted, and then just opposite to me was Miss Temple's room. A light shone through the keyhole and from under the door; a profound stillness pervaded the vicinity. Coming near, I found the door slightly ajar; probably to admit some fresh air into the close abode of sickness. Indisposed to hesitate, and full of impatient impulses — soul and senses quivering with keen throes — I put it back and looked in. My eye sought Helen, and feared to find death.

Close by Miss Temple's bed, and half covered with its white curtains, there stood a little crib. I saw the outline of a form under the clothes, but the face was hid by the hangings: the nurse I had spoken to in the garden sat in an easy-chair asleep; an unsnuffed candle burnt dimly on the table. Miss Temple was not to be seen: I knew afterwards that she had been called to a delirious patient in the fever-room. I advanced; then paused by the crib side: my hand was on the curtain, but I preferred speaking before I withdrew it. I still recoiled at the dread of seeing a corpse.

"Helen!" I whispered softly, "are you awake?"

She stirred herself, put back the curtain, and I saw her face, pale, wasted, but quite composed: she looked so little changed that my fear was instantly dissipated.

"Can it be you, Jane?" she asked, in her own gentle voice.

"Oh!" I thought, "she is not going to die; they are mistaken: she could not speak and look so calmly if she were."

I got on to her crib and kissed her: her forehead was cold, and her cheek both cold and thin, and so were her hand and wrist; but she smiled as of old.

"Why are you come here, Jane? It is past eleven o'clock: I heard it strike some minutes since."

"I came to see you, Helen: I heard you were very ill, and I could not sleep till I had spoken to you."

"You came to bid me good-bye, then: you are just in time probably."

"Are you going somewhere, Helen? Are you going home?"

"Yes; to my long home — my last home."

"No, no, Helen!" I stopped, distressed. While I tried to devour my tears, a fit of coughing seized Helen; it did not, however, wake the nurse; when it was over, she lay some minutes exhausted; then she whispered —

"Jane, your little feet are bare; lie down and cover yourself with my quilt."

I did so: she put her arm over me, and I nestled close to her. After a long silence, she resumed, still whispering —

"I am very happy, Jane; and when you hear that I am dead, you must be sure and not grieve: there is nothing to grieve about. We all must die one day, and the illness which is removing me is not painful; it is gentle and gradual: my mind is at rest. I leave no one to regret me much: I have only a father; and he is lately married, and will not miss me. By dying young, I shall escape great sufferings. I had not qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world: I should have been continually at fault."

"But where are you going to, Helen? Can you see? Do you know?"

"I believe; I have faith: I am going to God."

"Where is God? What is God?"

"My Maker and yours, who will never destroy what He created. I rely implicitly on His power, and confide wholly in His goodness: I count the hours till that eventful one arrives which shall restore me to Him, reveal Him to me."

"You are sure, then, Helen, that there is such a place as heaven, and that our souls can get to it when we die?"

"I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to Him without any misgiving. God is my father; God is my friend: I love Him; I believe He loves me."

"And shall I see you again, Helen, when I die?"

"You will come to the same region of happiness: be received by the same mighty, universal Parent, no doubt, dear Jane."

Again I questioned, but this time only in thought. "Where is that region? Does it exist?" And I clasped my arms closer round Helen; she seemed dearer to me than ever; I felt as if I could not let her go; I lay with my face hidden on her neck. Presently she said, in the sweetest tone —

"How comfortable I am! That last fit of coughing has tired me a little; I feel as if I could sleep: but don't leave me, Jane; I like to have you near me."

"I'll stay with you, *dear* Helen: no one shall take me away."

"Are you warm, darling?"

"Yes."

"Good-night, Jane."

"Good-night, Helen."

She kissed me, and I her, and we both soon slumbered.

When I awoke it was day: an unusual movement roused me; I looked up; I was in somebody's arms; the nurse held me; she was carrying me through the passage back to the dormitory. I was not reprimanded for leaving my bed; people had something else to think about; no explanation was afforded then to my many questions; but a day or two afterwards I learned that Miss Temple, on returning to her own room at dawn, had found me laid in the little crib; my face against Helen Burns's shoulder, my arms round her neck. I was asleep, and Helen was — dead.

Her grave is in Brocklebridge churchyard: for fifteen years after her death it was only covered by a grassy mound; but now a grey marble tablet marks the spot, inscribed with her name, and the word “Resurgam.”

CHAPTER X

Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence: to the first ten years of my life I have given almost as many chapters. But this is not to be a regular autobiography. I am only bound to invoke Memory where I know her responses will possess some degree of interest; therefore I now pass a space of eight years almost in silence: a few lines only are necessary to keep up the links of connection.

When the typhus fever had fulfilled its mission of devastation at Lowood, it gradually disappeared from thence; but not till its virulence and the number of its victims had drawn public attention on the school. Inquiry was made into the origin of the scourge, and by degrees various facts came out which excited public indignation in a high degree. The unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of the children's food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils' wretched clothing and accommodations — all these things were discovered, and the discovery produced a result mortifying to Mr. Brocklehurst, but beneficial to the institution.

Several wealthy and benevolent individuals in the county subscribed largely for the erection of a more convenient building in a better situation; new regulations were made; improvements in diet and clothing introduced; the funds of the school were intrusted to the management of a committee. Mr. Brocklehurst, who, from his wealth and family connections, could not be overlooked, still retained the post of treasurer; but he was aided in the discharge of his duties by gentlemen of rather more enlarged and sympathising minds: his office of inspector, too, was shared by those who knew how to combine reason with strictness, comfort with economy, compassion with uprightness. The school, thus improved, became in time a truly useful and noble institution. I remained an inmate of its walls, after its regeneration, for eight years: six as pupil, and two as teacher; and in both capacities I bear my testimony to its value and importance.

During these eight years my life was uniform: but not unhappy, because it was not inactive. I had the means of an excellent education placed within my reach; a fondness for some of my studies, and a desire to excel in all, together with a great delight in pleasing my teachers, especially such as I loved, urged me on: I availed myself fully of the advantages offered me. In time I rose to be the first girl of the first class; then I was invested with the office of teacher; which I discharged with zeal for two years: but at the end of that time I altered.

Miss Temple, through all changes, had thus far continued superintendent of the seminary: to her instruction I owed the best part of my acquirements; her friendship and society had been my continual solace; she had stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and, latterly, companion. At this period she married, removed with her husband (a clergyman, an excellent man, almost worthy of such a wife) to a distant county, and consequently was lost to me.

From the day she left I was no longer the same: with her was gone every settled feeling, every association that had made Lowood in some degree a home to me. I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character.

But destiny, in the shape of the Rev. Mr. Nasmyth, came between me and Miss Temple: I saw her in her travelling dress step into a post-chaise, shortly after the marriage ceremony; I watched the chaise mount the hill and disappear beyond its brow; and then retired to my own room, and there spent in solitude the greatest part of the half-holiday granted in honour of the occasion.

I walked about the chamber most of the time. I imagined myself only to be regretting my loss, and thinking how to repair it; but when my reflections were concluded, and I looked up and found that the afternoon was gone, and evening far advanced, another discovery dawned on me, namely, that in the interval I had undergone a transforming process; that my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple — or rather that she had taken with her the serene atmosphere I had been breathing in her vicinity — and that now I was left in my natural element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions. It did not seem as if a prop were withdrawn, but rather as if a motive were gone: it was not the power to be tranquil which had failed me, but the reason for tranquillity was no more. My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils.

I went to my window, opened it, and looked out. There were the two wings of the building; there was the garden; there were the skirts of Lowood; there was the hilly horizon. My eye passed all other objects to rest on those most remote, the blue peaks; it was those I longed to surmount; all within their boundary of rock and heath seemed prison-ground, exile limits. I traced the white road winding round the base of one mountain, and vanishing in a gorge between two; how I longed to follow it farther! I recalled the time when I had travelled that very road in a coach; I remembered descending that hill at twilight; an age seemed to have elapsed since the day which brought me first to Lowood, and I had never quitted it since. My vacations had all been spent at school: Mrs. Reed had never sent for me to Gateshead; neither she nor any of her family had ever been to visit me. I had had no communication by letter or message with the outer world: school-rules, school-duties, school-habits and notions, and voices, and faces, and phrases, and costumes, and preferences, and antipathies — such was what I knew of existence. And now I felt that it was not enough; I tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space: "Then," I cried, half desperate, "grant me at least a new servitude!"

Here a bell, ringing the hour of supper, called me downstairs.

I was not free to resume the interrupted chain of my reflections till bedtime: even then a teacher who occupied the same room with me kept me from the subject to which I longed to recur, by a prolonged effusion of small talk. How I wished sleep would silence her. It seemed as if, could I but go back to the idea which had last entered my mind as I stood at the window, some inventive suggestion would rise for my relief.

Miss Gryce snored at last; she was a heavy Welshwoman, and till now her habitual nasal strains had never been regarded by me in any other light than as a nuisance; to-night I hailed the first deep notes with satisfaction; I was debarrassed of interruption; my half-effaced thought instantly revived.

"A new servitude! There is something in that," I soliloquised (mentally, be it understood; I did not talk aloud), "I know there is, because it does not sound too sweet; it is not like such words as Liberty, Excitement, Enjoyment: delightful sounds truly; but no more than sounds for me; and so hollow and fleeting that it is mere waste of time to listen to them. But Servitude! That must be matter of fact. Any one may serve: I have served here eight years; now all I want is to serve elsewhere. Can I not get so much of my own will? Is not the thing feasible? Yes — yes — the end is not so difficult; if I had only a brain active enough to ferret out the means of attaining it."

I sat up in bed by way of arousing this said brain: it was a chilly night; I covered my shoulders with a shawl, and then I proceeded *to think* again with all my might.

"What do I want? A new place, in a new house, amongst new faces, under new circumstances: I want this because it is of no use wanting anything better. How do people do to get a new place? They apply to friends, I suppose: I have no friends. There are many others who have no friends, who must look about for themselves and be their own helpers; and what is their resource?"

I could not tell: nothing answered me; I then ordered my brain to find a response, and quickly. It worked and worked faster: I felt the pulses throb in my head and temples; but for nearly an hour it worked in chaos; and no result came of its efforts. Feverish with vain labour, I got up and took a turn in the room; undrew the curtain, noted a star or two, shivered with cold, and again crept to bed.

A kind fairy, in my absence, had surely dropped the required suggestion on my pillow; for as I lay down, it came quietly and naturally to my mind. — "Those who want situations advertise; you must advertise in the — *-shire Herald*."

"How? I know nothing about advertising."

Replies rose smooth and prompt now: —

"You must enclose the advertisement and the money to pay for it under a cover directed to the editor of the *Herald*; you must put it, the first opportunity you have, into the post at Lowton; answers must be addressed to J.E., at the post-office there; you can go and inquire in about a week after you send your letter, if any are come, and act accordingly."

This scheme I went over twice, thrice; it was then digested in my mind; I had it in a clear practical form: I felt satisfied, and fell asleep.

With earliest day, I was up: I had my advertisement written, enclosed, and directed before the bell rang to rouse the school; it ran thus: —

"A young lady accustomed to tuition" (had I not been a teacher two years?) "is desirous of meeting with a situation in a private family where the children are under fourteen (I thought that as I was barely eighteen, it would not do to undertake the guidance of pupils nearer my own age). She is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing, and Music" (in those days, reader, this now narrow catalogue of accomplishments, would have been held tolerably comprehensive). "Address, J.E., Post-office, Lowton, — -shire."

This document remained locked in my drawer all day: after tea, I asked leave of the new superintendent to go to Lowton, in order to perform some small commissions for myself and one or two of my fellow-teachers; permission was readily granted; I went. It was a walk of two miles, and the evening was wet, but the days were still long; I visited a shop or two, slipped the letter into the post-office, and came back through heavy rain, with streaming garments, but with a relieved heart.

The succeeding week seemed long: it came to an end at last, however, like all sublunary things, and once more, towards the close of a pleasant autumn day, I found myself afoot on the road to Lowton. A picturesque track it was, by the way; lying along the side of the beck and through the sweetest curves of the dale: but that day I thought more of the letters, that might or might not be awaiting me at the little burgh whither I was bound, than of the charms of lea and water.

My ostensible errand on this occasion was to get measured for a pair of shoes; so I discharged that business first, and when it was done, I stepped across the clean and quiet little street from the shoemaker's to the post-office: it was kept by an old dame, who wore horn spectacles on her nose, and black mittens on her hands.

"Are there any letters for J.E.?" I asked.

She peered at me over her spectacles, and then she opened a drawer and fumbled among its contents for a long time, so long that my hopes began to falter. At last, having held a document before her glasses for nearly five minutes, she presented it across the counter, accompanying the act by another inquisitive and mistrustful glance — it was for J.E.

“Is there only one?” I demanded.

“There are no more,” said she; and I put it in my pocket and turned my face homeward: I could not open it then; rules obliged me to be back by eight, and it was already half-past seven.

Various duties awaited me on my arrival. I had to sit with the girls during their hour of study; then it was my turn to read prayers; to see them to bed: afterwards I supped with the other teachers. Even when we finally retired for the night, the inevitable Miss Gryce was still my companion: we had only a short end of candle in our candlestick, and I dreaded lest she should talk till it was all burnt out; fortunately, however, the heavy supper she had eaten produced a soporific effect: she was already snoring before I had finished undressing. There still remained an inch of candle: I now took out my letter; the seal was an initial F.; I broke it; the contents were brief.

“If J.E., who advertised in the — *-shire Herald* of last Thursday, possesses the acquirements mentioned, and if she is in a position to give satisfactory references as to character and competency, a situation can be offered her where there is but one pupil, a little girl, under ten years of age; and where the salary is thirty pounds per annum. J.E. is requested to send references, name, address, and all particulars to the direction: —

“Mrs. Fairfax, Thornfield, near Millcote, — -shire.”

I examined the document long: the writing was old-fashioned and rather uncertain, like that of an elderly lady. This circumstance was satisfactory: a private fear had haunted me, that in thus acting for myself, and by my own guidance, I ran the risk of getting into some scrape; and, above all things, I wished the result of my endeavours to be respectable, proper, *en règle*. I now felt that an elderly lady was no bad ingredient in the business I had on hand. Mrs. Fairfax! I saw her in a black gown and widow’s cap; frigid, perhaps, but not uncivil: a model of elderly English respectability. Thornfield! that, doubtless, was the name of her house: a neat orderly spot, I was sure; though I failed in my efforts to conceive a correct plan of the premises. Millcote, — -shire; I brushed up my recollections of the map of England, yes, I saw it; both the shire and the town. — -shire was seventy miles nearer London than the remote county where I now resided: that was a recommendation to me. I longed to go where there was life and movement: Millcote was a large manufacturing town on the banks of the A-; a busy place enough, doubtless: so much the better; it would be a complete change at least. Not that my fancy was much captivated by the idea of long chimneys and clouds of smoke — “but,” I argued, “Thornfield will, probably, be a good way from the town.”

Here the socket of the candle dropped, and the wick went out.

Next day new steps were to be taken; my plans could no longer be confined to my own breast; I must impart them in order to achieve their success. Having sought and obtained an audience of the superintendent during the noontide recreation, I told her I had a prospect of getting a new situation where the salary would be double what I now received (for at Lowood I only got £15 per annum); and requested she would break the matter for me to Mr. Brocklehurst, or some of the committee, and ascertain whether they would permit me to mention them as references. She obligingly consented to act as mediatrix in the matter. The next day she laid the affair before Mr. Brocklehurst, who said that Mrs. Reed must be written to, as she was my natural guardian. A note was accordingly addressed to that lady, who returned for answer, that "I might do as I pleased: she had long relinquished all interference in my affairs." This note went the round of the committee, and at last, after what appeared to me most tedious delay, formal leave was given me to better my condition if I could; and an assurance added, that as I had always conducted myself well, both as teacher and pupil, at Lowood, a testimonial of character and capacity, signed by the inspectors of that institution, should forthwith be furnished me.

This testimonial I accordingly received in about a month, forwarded a copy of it to Mrs. Fairfax, and got that lady's reply, stating that she was satisfied, and fixing that day fortnight as the period for my assuming the post of governess in her house.

I now busied myself in preparations: the fortnight passed rapidly. I had not a very large wardrobe, though it was adequate to my wants; and the last day sufficed to pack my trunk, — the same I had brought with me eight years ago from Gateshead.

The box was corded, the card nailed on. In half-an-hour the carrier was to call for it to take it to Lowton, whither I myself was to repair at an early hour the next morning to meet the coach. I had brushed my black stuff travelling-dress, prepared my bonnet, gloves, and muff; sought in all my drawers to see that no article was left behind; and now having nothing more to do, I sat down and tried to rest. I could not; though I had been on foot all day, I could not now repose an instant; I was too much excited. A phase of my life was closing to-night, a new one opening to-morrow: impossible to slumber in the interval; I must watch feverishly while the change was being accomplished.

"Miss," said a servant who met me in the lobby, where I was wandering like a troubled spirit, "a person below wishes to see you."

"The carrier, no doubt," I thought, and ran downstairs without inquiry. I was passing the back-parlour or teachers' sitting-room, the door of which was half open, to go to the kitchen, when some one ran out —

"It's her, I am sure! — I could have told her anywhere!" cried the individual who stopped my progress and took my hand.

I looked: I saw a woman attired like a well-dressed servant, matronly, yet still young; very good-looking, with black hair and eyes, and lively complexion.

"Well, who is it?" she asked, in a voice and with a smile I half recognised; "you've not quite forgotten me, I think, Miss Jane?"

In another second I was embracing and kissing her rapturously: "Bessie! Bessie! Bessie!" that was all I said; whereat she half laughed, half cried, and we both went into the parlour. By the fire stood a little fellow of three years old, in plaid frock and trousers.

"That is my little boy," said Bessie directly.

"Then you are married, Bessie?"

"Yes; nearly five years since to Robert Leaven, the coachman; and I've a little girl besides Bobby there, that I've christened Jane."

"And you don't live at Gateshead?"

"I live at the lodge: the old porter has left."

"Well, and how do they all get on? Tell me everything about them, Bessie: but sit down first; and, Bobby, come and sit on my knee, will you?" but Bobby preferred sidling over to his mother.

"You're not grown so very tall, Miss Jane, nor so very stout," continued Mrs. Leaven. "I dare say they've not kept you too well at school: Miss Reed is the head and shoulders taller than you are; and Miss Georgiana would make two of you in breadth."

"Georgiana is handsome, I suppose, Bessie?"

"Very. She went up to London last winter with her mama, and there everybody admired her, and a young lord fell in love with her: but his relations were against the match; and — what do you think? — he and Miss Georgiana made it up to run away; but they were found out and stopped. It was Miss Reed that found them out: I believe she was envious; and now she and her sister lead a cat and dog life together; they are always quarrelling — "

"Well, and what of John Reed?"

"Oh, he is not doing so well as his mama could wish. He went to college, and he got — plucked, I think they call it: and then his uncles wanted him to be a barrister, and study the law: but he is such a dissipated young man, they will never make much of him, I think."

"What does he look like?"

"He is very tall: some people call him a fine-looking young man; but he has such thick lips."

"And Mrs. Reed?"

"Missis looks stout and well enough in the face, but I think she's not quite easy in her mind: Mr. John's conduct does not please her — he spends a deal of money."

"Did she send you here, Bessie?"

"No, indeed: but I have long wanted to see you, and when I heard that there had been a letter from you, and that you were going to another part of the country, I thought I'd just set off, and get a look at you before you were quite out of my reach."

"I am afraid you are disappointed in me, Bessie." I said this laughing: I perceived that Bessie's glance, though it expressed regard, did in no shape denote admiration.

"No, Miss Jane, not exactly: you are genteel enough; you look like a lady, and it is as much as ever I expected of you: you were no beauty as a child."

I smiled at Bessie's frank answer: I felt that it was correct, but I confess I was not quite indifferent to its import: at eighteen most people wish to please, and the conviction that they have not an exterior likely to second that desire brings anything but gratification.

"I dare say you are clever, though," continued Bessie, by way of solace. "What can you do? Can you play on the piano?"

"A little."

There was one in the room; Bessie went and opened it, and then asked me to sit down and give her a tune: I played a waltz or two, and she was charmed.

"The Miss Reeds could not play as well!" said she exultingly. "I always said you would surpass them in learning: and can you draw?"

"That is one of my paintings over the chimney-piece." It was a landscape in water colours, of which I had made a present to the superintendent, in acknowledgment of her obliging mediation with the committee on my behalf, and which she had framed and glazed.

"Well, that is beautiful, Miss Jane! It is as fine a picture as any Miss Reed's drawing-master could paint, let alone the young ladies themselves, who could not come near it: and have you learnt French?"

"Yes, Bessie, I can both read it and speak it."

"And you can work on muslin and canvas?"

"I can."

"Oh, you are quite a lady, Miss Jane! I knew you would be: you will get on whether your relations notice you or not. There was something I wanted to ask you. Have you ever heard anything from your father's kinsfolk, the Eyres?"

"Never in my life."

"Well, you know Missis always said they were poor and quite despicable: and they may be poor; but I believe they are as much gentry as the Reeds are; for one day, nearly seven years ago, a Mr. Eyre came to Gateshead and wanted to see you; Missis said you were at school fifty miles off; he seemed so much disappointed, for he could not stay: he was going on a voyage to a foreign country, and the ship was to sail from London in a day or two. He looked quite a gentleman, and I believe he was your father's brother."

"What foreign country was he going to, Bessie?"

"An island thousands of miles off, where they make wine — the butler did tell me — "

"Madeira?" I suggested.

"Yes, that is it — that is the very word."

"So he went?"

"Yes; he did not stay many minutes in the house: Missis was very high with him; she called him afterwards a 'sneaking tradesman.' My Robert believes he was a wine-merchant."

"Very likely," I returned; "or perhaps clerk or agent to a wine-merchant."

Bessie and I conversed about old times an hour longer, and then she was obliged to leave me: I saw her again for a few minutes the next morning at Lowton, while I was waiting for the coach. We parted finally at the door of the Brocklehurst Arms there: each went her separate way; she set off for the brow of Lowood Fell to meet the conveyance which was to take her back to Gateshead, I mounted the vehicle which was to bear me to new duties and a new life in the unknown environs of Millcote.

CHAPTER XI

A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote, with such large figured papering on the walls as inn rooms have; such a carpet, such furniture, such ornaments on the mantelpiece, such prints, including a portrait of George the Third, and another of the Prince of Wales, and a representation of the death of Wolfe. All this is visible to you by the light of an oil lamp hanging from the ceiling, and by that of an excellent fire, near which I sit in my cloak and bonnet; my muff and umbrella lie on the table, and I am warming away the numbness and chill contracted by sixteen hours' exposure to the rawness of an October day: I left Lowton at four o'clock a.m., and the Millcote town clock is now just striking eight.

Reader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind. I thought when the coach stopped here there would be some one to meet me; I looked anxiously round as I descended the wooden steps the "boots" placed for my convenience, expecting to hear my name pronounced, and to see some description of carriage waiting to convey me to Thornfield. Nothing of the sort was visible; and when I asked a waiter if any one had been to inquire after a Miss Eyre, I was answered in the negative: so I had no resource but to request to be shown into a private room: and here I am waiting, while all sorts of doubts and fears are troubling my thoughts.

It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world, cut adrift from every connection, uncertain whether the port to which it is bound can be reached, and prevented by many impediments from returning to that it has quitted. The charm of adventure sweetens that sensation, the glow of pride warms it; but then the throb of fear disturbs it; and fear with me became predominant when half-an-hour elapsed and still I was alone. I bethought myself to ring the bell.

"Is there a place in this neighbourhood called Thornfield?" I asked of the waiter who answered the summons.

"Thornfield? I don't know, ma'am; I'll inquire at the bar." He vanished, but reappeared instantly —

"Is your name Eyre, Miss?"

"Yes."

"Person here waiting for you."

I jumped up, took my muff and umbrella, and hastened into the inn-passage: a man was standing by the open door, and in the lamp-lit street I dimly saw a one-horse conveyance.

"This will be your luggage, I suppose?" said the man rather abruptly when he saw me, pointing to my trunk in the passage.

"Yes." He hoisted it on to the vehicle, which was a sort of car, and then I got in; before he shut me up, I asked him how far it was to Thornfield.

"A matter of six miles."

"How long shall we be before we get there?"

"Happen an hour and a half."

He fastened the car door, climbed to his own seat outside, and we set off. Our progress was leisurely, and gave me ample time to reflect; I was content to be at length so near the end of my journey; and as I leaned back in the comfortable though not elegant conveyance, I meditated much at my ease.

"I suppose," thought I, "judging from the plainness of the servant and carriage, Mrs. Fairfax is not a very dashing person: so much the better; I never lived amongst fine people but once, and I was very miserable with them. I wonder if she lives alone except this little girl; if so, and if she is in any degree amiable, I shall surely be able to get on with her; I will do my best; it is a pity that doing one's best does not always answer. At Lowood, indeed, I took that resolution, kept it, and succeeded in pleasing; but with Mrs. Reed, I remember my best was always spurned with scorn. I pray God Mrs. Fairfax may not turn out a second Mrs. Reed; but if she does, I am not bound to stay with her! let the worst come to the worst, I can advertise again. How far are we on our road now, I wonder?"

I let down the window and looked out; Millcote was behind us; judging by the number of its lights, it seemed a place of considerable magnitude, much larger than Lowton. We were now, as far as I could see, on a sort of common; but there were houses scattered all over the district; I felt we were in a different region to Lowood, more populous, less picturesque; more stirring, less romantic.

The roads were heavy, the night misty; my conductor let his horse walk all the way, and the hour and a half extended, I verily believe, to two hours; at last he turned in his seat and said —

"You're noan so far fro' Thornfield now."

Again I looked out: we were passing a church; I saw its low broad tower against the sky, and its bell was tolling a quarter; I saw a narrow galaxy of lights too, on a hillside, marking a village or hamlet. About ten minutes after, the driver got down and opened a pair of gates: we passed through, and they clashed to behind us. We now slowly ascended a drive, and came upon the long front of a house: candlelight gleamed from one curtained bow-window; all the rest were dark. The car stopped at the front door; it was opened by a maid-servant; I alighted and went in.

"Will you walk this way, ma'am?" said the girl; and I followed her across a square hall with high doors all round: she ushered me into a room whose double illumination of fire and candle at first dazzled me, contrasting as it did with the darkness to which my eyes had been for two hours inured; when I could see, however, a cosy and agreeable picture presented itself to my view.

A snug small room; a round table by a cheerful fire; an arm-chair high-backed and old-fashioned, wherein sat the neatest imaginable little elderly lady, in widow's cap, black silk gown, and snowy muslin apron; exactly like what I had fancied Mrs. Fairfax, only less stately and milder looking. She was occupied in knitting; a large cat sat demurely at her feet; nothing in short was wanting to complete the beau-ideal of domestic comfort. A more reassuring introduction for a new governess could scarcely be conceived; there was no grandeur to overwhelm, no stateliness to embarrass; and then, as I entered, the old lady got up and promptly and kindly came forward to meet me.

"How do you do, my dear? I am afraid you have had a tedious ride; John drives so slowly; you must be cold, come to the fire."

"Mrs. Fairfax, I suppose?" said I.

"Yes, you are right: do sit down."

She conducted me to her own chair, and then began to remove my shawl and untie my bonnet-strings; I begged she would not give herself so much trouble.

"Oh, it is no trouble; I dare say your own hands are almost numbed with cold. Leah, make a little hot negus and cut a sandwich or two: here are the keys of the storeroom."

And she produced from her pocket a most housewifely bunch of keys, and delivered them to the servant.

"Now, then, draw nearer to the fire," she continued. "You've brought your luggage with you, haven't you, my dear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'll see it carried into your room," she said, and bustled out.

"She treats me like a visitor," thought I. "I little expected such a reception; I anticipated only coldness and stiffness: this is not like what I have heard of the treatment of governesses; but I must not exult too soon."

She returned; with her own hands cleared her knitting apparatus and a book or two from the table, to make room for the tray which Leah now brought, and then herself handed me the refreshments. I felt rather confused at being the object of more attention than I had ever before received, and, that too, shown by my employer and superior; but as she did not herself seem to consider she was doing anything out of her place, I thought it better to take her civilities quietly.

"Shall I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Fairfax to-night?" I asked, when I had partaken of what she offered me.

"What did you say, my dear? I am a little deaf," returned the good lady, approaching her ear to my mouth.

I repeated the question more distinctly.

"Miss Fairfax? Oh, you mean Miss Varens! Varens is the name of your future pupil."

"Indeed! Then she is not your daughter?"

"No, — I have no family."

I should have followed up my first inquiry, by asking in what way Miss Varens was connected with her; but I recollected it was not polite to ask too many questions: besides, I was sure to hear in time.

"I am so glad," she continued, as she sat down opposite to me, and took the cat on her knee; "I am so glad you are come; it will be quite pleasant living here now with a companion. To be sure it is pleasant at any time; for Thornfield is a fine old hall, rather neglected of late years perhaps, but still it is a respectable place; yet you know in winter-time one feels dreary quite alone in the best quarters. I say alone — Leah is a nice girl to be sure, and John and his wife are very decent people; but then you see they are only servants, and one can't converse with them on terms of equality: one must keep them at due distance, for fear of losing one's authority. I'm sure last winter (it was a very severe one, if you recollect, and when it did not snow, it rained and blew), not a creature but the butcher and postman came to the house, from November till February; and I really got quite melancholy with sitting night after night alone; I had Leah in to read to me sometimes; but I don't think the poor girl liked the task much: she felt it confining. In spring and summer one got on better: sunshine and long days make such a difference; and then, just at the commencement of this autumn, little Adela Varens came and her nurse: a child makes a house alive all at once; and now you are here I shall be quite gay."

My heart really warmed to the worthy lady as I heard her talk; and I drew my chair a little nearer to her, and expressed my sincere wish that she might find my company as agreeable as she anticipated.

"But I'll not keep you sitting up late to-night," said she; "it is on the stroke of twelve now, and you have been travelling all day: you must feel tired. If you have got your feet well warmed, I'll show you your bedroom. I've had the room next to mine prepared for you; it is only a small apartment, but I thought you would like it better than one of the large front chambers: to be sure they have finer furniture, but they are so dreary and solitary, I never sleep in them myself."

I thanked her for her considerate choice, and as I really felt fatigued with my long journey, expressed my readiness to retire. She took her candle, and I followed her from the room. First she went to see if the hall-door was fastened; having taken the key from the lock, she led the way upstairs. The steps and banisters were of oak; the staircase window was high and latticed; both it and the long gallery into which the bedroom doors opened looked as if they belonged to a church rather than a house. A very chill and vault-like air pervaded the stairs and gallery, suggesting cheerless ideas of space and solitude; and I was glad, when finally ushered into my chamber, to find it of small dimensions, and furnished in ordinary, modern style.

When Mrs. Fairfax had bidden me a kind good-night, and I had fastened my door, gazed leisurely round, and in some measure effaced the eerie impression made by that wide hall, that dark and spacious staircase, and that long, cold gallery, by the livelier aspect of my little room, I remembered that, after a day of bodily fatigue and mental anxiety, I was now at last in safe haven. The impulse of gratitude swelled my heart, and I knelt down at the bedside, and offered up thanks where thanks were due; not forgetting, ere I rose, to implore aid on my further path, and the power of meriting the kindness which seemed so frankly offered me before it was earned. My couch had no thorns in it that night; my solitary room no fears. At once weary and content, I slept soon and soundly: when I awoke it was broad day.

The chamber looked such a bright little place to me as the sun shone in between the gay blue chintz window curtains, showing papered walls and a carpeted floor, so unlike the bare planks and stained plaster of Lowood, that my spirits rose at the view. Externals have a great effect on the young: I thought that a fairer era of life was beginning for me, one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils. My faculties, roused by the change of scene, the new field offered to hope, seemed all astir. I cannot precisely define what they expected, but it was something pleasant: not perhaps that day or that month, but at an indefinite future period.

I rose; I dressed myself with care: obliged to be plain — for I had no article of attire that was not made with extreme simplicity — I was still by nature solicitous to be neat. It was not my habit to be disregardful of appearance or careless of the impression I made: on the contrary, I ever wished to look as well as I could, and to please as much as my want of beauty would permit. I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer; I sometimes wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and small cherry mouth; I desired to be tall, stately, and finely developed in figure; I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked. And why had I these aspirations and these regrets? It would be difficult to say: I could not then distinctly say it to myself; yet I had a reason, and a logical, natural reason too. However, when I had brushed my hair very smooth, and put on my black frock — which, Quakerlike as it was, at least had the merit of fitting to a nicety — and adjusted my clean white tucker, I thought I should do respectably enough to appear before Mrs. Fairfax, and that my new pupil would not at least recoil from me with antipathy. Having opened my chamber window, and seen that I left all things straight and neat on the toilet table, I ventured forth.

Traversing the long and matted gallery, I descended the slippery steps of oak; then I gained the hall: I halted there a minute; I looked at some pictures on the walls (one, I remember, represented a grim man in a cuirass, and one a lady with powdered hair and a pearl necklace), at a bronze lamp pendent from the ceiling, at a great clock whose case was of oak curiously carved, and ebon black with time and rubbing. Everything appeared very stately and imposing to me; but then I was so little accustomed to grandeur. The hall-door, which was half of glass, stood open; I stepped over the threshold. It was a fine autumn morning; the early sun shone serenely on embrowned groves and still green fields; advancing on to the lawn, I looked up and surveyed the front of the mansion. It was three storeys high, of proportions not vast, though considerable: a gentleman's manor-house, not a nobleman's seat: battlements round the top gave it a picturesque look. Its grey front stood out well from the background of a rookery, whose cawing tenants were now on the wing: they flew over the lawn and grounds to alight in a great meadow, from which these were separated by a sunk fence, and where an array of mighty old thorn trees, strong, knotty, and broad as oaks, at once explained the etymology of the mansion's designation. Farther off were hills: not so lofty as those round Lowood, nor so craggy, nor so like barriers of separation from the living world; but yet quiet and lonely hills enough, and seeming to embrace Thornfield with a seclusion I had not expected to find existent so near the stirring locality of Millcote. A little hamlet, whose roofs were blent with trees, straggled up the side of one of these hills; the church of the district stood nearer Thornfield: its old tower-top looked over a knoll between the house and gates.

I was yet enjoying the calm prospect and pleasant fresh air, yet listening with delight to the cawing of the rooks, yet surveying the wide, hoary front of the hall, and thinking what a great place it was for one lonely little dame like Mrs. Fairfax to inhabit, when that lady appeared at the door.

"What! out already?" said she. "I see you are an early riser." I went up to her, and was received with an affable kiss and shake of the hand.

"How do you like Thornfield?" she asked. I told her I liked it very much.

"Yes," she said, "it is a pretty place; but I fear it will be getting out of order, unless Mr. Rochester should take it into his head to come and reside here permanently; or, at least, visit it rather oftener: great houses and fine grounds require the presence of the proprietor."

"Mr. Rochester!" I exclaimed. "Who is he?"

"The owner of Thornfield," she responded quietly. "Did you not know he was called Rochester?"

Of course I did not — I had never heard of him before; but the old lady seemed to regard his existence as a universally understood fact, with which everybody must be acquainted by instinct.

"I thought," I continued, "Thornfield belonged to you."

"To me? Bless you, child; what an idea! To me! I am only the housekeeper — the manager. To be sure I am distantly related to the Rochesters by the mother's side, or at least my husband was; he was a clergyman, incumbent of Hay — that little village yonder on the hill — and that church near the gates was his. The present Mr. Rochester's mother was a Fairfax, and second cousin to my husband: but I never presume on the connection — in fact, it is nothing to me; I consider myself quite in the light of an ordinary housekeeper: my employer is always civil, and I expect nothing more."

"And the little girl — my pupil!"

"She is Mr. Rochester's ward; he commissioned me to find a governess for her. He intended to have her brought up in — -shire, I believe. Here she comes, with her 'bonne,' as she calls her nurse." The enigma then was explained: this affable and kind little widow was no great dame; but a dependant like myself. I did not like her the worse for that; on the contrary, I felt better pleased than ever. The equality between her and me was real; not the mere result of condescension on her part: so much the better — my position was all the freer.

As I was meditating on this discovery, a little girl, followed by her attendant, came running up the lawn. I looked at my pupil, who did not at first appear to notice me: she was quite a child, perhaps seven or eight years old, slightly built, with a pale, small-featured face, and a redundancy of hair falling in curls to her waist.

"Good morning, Miss Adela," said Mrs. Fairfax. "Come and speak to the lady who is to teach you, and to make you a clever woman some day." She approached.

"C'est là ma gouverante!" said she, pointing to me, and addressing her nurse; who answered —

"Mais oui, certainement."

"Are they foreigners?" I inquired, amazed at hearing the French language.

"The nurse is a foreigner, and Adela was born on the Continent; and, I believe, never left it till within six months ago. When she first came here she could speak no English; now she can make shift to talk it a little: I don't understand her, she mixes it so with French; but you will make out her meaning very well, I dare say."

Fortunately I had had the advantage of being taught French by a French lady; and as I had always made a point of conversing with Madame Pierrot as often as I could, and had besides, during the last seven years, learnt a portion of French by heart daily — applying myself to take pains with my accent, and imitating as closely as possible the pronunciation of my teacher, I had acquired a certain degree of readiness and correctness in the language, and was not likely to be much at a loss with Mademoiselle Adela. She came and shook hand with me when she heard that I was her governess; and as I led her in to breakfast, I addressed some phrases to her in her own tongue: she replied briefly at first, but after we were seated at the table, and she had examined me some ten minutes with her large hazel eyes, she suddenly commenced chattering fluently.

"Ah!" cried she, in French, "you speak my language as well as Mr. Rochester does: I can talk to you as I can to him, and so can Sophie. She will be glad: nobody here understands her: Madame Fairfax is all English. Sophie is my nurse; she came with me over the sea in a great ship with a chimney that smoked — how it did smoke! — and I was sick, and so was Sophie, and so was Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester lay down on a sofa in a pretty room called the salon, and Sophie and I had little beds in another place. I nearly fell out of mine; it was like a shelf. And Mademoiselle — what is your name?"

"Eyre — Jane Eyre."

"Aire? Bah! I cannot say it. Well, our ship stopped in the morning, before it was quite daylight, at a great city — a huge city, with very dark houses and all smoky; not at all like the pretty clean town I came from; and Mr. Rochester carried me in his arms over a plank to the land, and Sophie came after, and we all got into a coach, which took us to a beautiful large house, larger than this and finer, called an hotel. We stayed there nearly a week: I and Sophie used to walk every day in a great green place full of trees, called the Park; and there were many children there besides me, and a pond with beautiful birds in it, that I fed with crumbs."

"Can you understand her when she runs on so fast?" asked Mrs. Fairfax.

I understood her very well, for I had been accustomed to the fluent tongue of Madame Pierrot.

"I wish," continued the good lady, "you would ask her a question or two about her parents: I wonder if she remembers them?"

"Adèle," I inquired, "with whom did you live when you were in that pretty clean town you spoke of?"

"I lived long ago with mama; but she is gone to the Holy Virgin. Mama used to teach me to dance and sing, and to say verses. A great many gentlemen and ladies came to see mama, and I used to dance before them, or to sit on their knees and sing to them: I liked it. Shall I let you hear me sing now?"

She had finished her breakfast, so I permitted her to give a specimen of her accomplishments. Descending from her chair, she came and placed herself on my knee; then, folding her little hands demurely before her, shaking back her curls and lifting her eyes to the ceiling, she commenced singing a song from some opera. It was the strain of a forsaken lady, who, after bewailing the perfidy of her lover, calls pride to her aid; desires her attendant to deck her in her brightest jewels and richest robes, and resolves to meet the false one that night at a ball, and prove to him, by the gaiety of her demeanour, how little his desertion has affected her.

The subject seemed strangely chosen for an infant singer; but I suppose the point of the exhibition lay in hearing the notes of love and jealousy warbled with the lisp of childhood; and in very bad taste that point was: at least I thought so.

Adèle sang the canzonette tunefully enough, and with the *naïveté* of her age. This achieved, she jumped from my knee and said, "Now, Mademoiselle, I will repeat you some poetry."

Assuming an attitude, she began, "La Ligue des Rats: fable de La Fontaine." She then declaimed the little piece with an attention to punctuation and emphasis, a flexibility of voice and an appropriateness of gesture, very unusual indeed at her age, and which proved she had been carefully trained.

"Was it your mama who taught you that piece?" I asked.

“Yes, and she just used to say it in this way: ‘Qu’ avez vous donc? lui dit un de ces rats; parlez!’ She made me lift my hand — so — to remind me to raise my voice at the question. Now shall I dance for you?”

“No, that will do: but after your mama went to the Holy Virgin, as you say, with whom did you live then?”

“With Madame Frédéric and her husband: she took care of me, but she is nothing related to me. I think she is poor, for she had not so fine a house as mama. I was not long there. Mr. Rochester asked me if I would like to go and live with him in England, and I said yes; for I knew Mr. Rochester before I knew Madame Frédéric, and he was always kind to me and gave me pretty dresses and toys: but you see he has not kept his word, for he has brought me to England, and now he is gone back again himself, and I never see him.”

After breakfast, Adèle and I withdrew to the library, which room, it appears, Mr. Rochester had directed should be used as the schoolroom. Most of the books were locked up behind glass doors; but there was one bookcase left open containing everything that could be needed in the way of elementary works, and several volumes of light literature, poetry, biography, travels, a few romances, &c. I suppose he had considered that these were all the governess would require for her private perusal; and, indeed, they contented me amply for the present; compared with the scanty pickings I had now and then been able to glean at Lowood, they seemed to offer an abundant harvest of entertainment and information. In this room, too, there was a cabinet piano, quite new and of superior tone; also an easel for painting and a pair of globes.

I found my pupil sufficiently docile, though disinclined to apply: she had not been used to regular occupation of any kind. I felt it would be injudicious to confine her too much at first; so, when I had talked to her a great deal, and got her to learn a little, and when the morning had advanced to noon, I allowed her to return to her nurse. I then proposed to occupy myself till dinner-time in drawing some little sketches for her use.

As I was going upstairs to fetch my portfolio and pencils, Mrs. Fairfax called to me: “Your morning school-hours are over now, I suppose,” said she. She was in a room the folding-doors of which stood open: I went in when she addressed me. It was a large, stately apartment, with purple chairs and curtains, a Turkey carpet, walnut-panelled walls, one vast window rich in slanted glass, and a lofty ceiling, nobly moulded. Mrs. Fairfax was dusting some vases of fine purple spar, which stood on a sideboard.

“What a beautiful room!” I exclaimed, as I looked round; for I had never before seen any half so imposing.

“Yes; this is the dining-room. I have just opened the window, to let in a little air and sunshine; for everything gets so damp in apartments that are seldom inhabited; the drawing-room yonder feels like a vault.”

She pointed to a wide arch corresponding to the window, and hung like it with a Tyrian-dyed curtain, now looped up. Mounting to it by two broad steps, and looking through, I thought I caught a glimpse of a fairy place, so bright to my novice-eyes appeared the view beyond. Yet it was merely a very pretty drawing-room, and within it a boudoir, both spread with white carpets, on which seemed laid brilliant garlands of flowers; both ceiled with snowy mouldings of white grapes and vine-leaves, beneath which glowed in rich contrast crimson couches and ottomans; while the ornaments on the pale Parian mantelpiece were of sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red; and between the windows large mirrors repeated the general blending of snow and fire.

"In what order you keep these rooms, Mrs. Fairfax!" said I. "No dust, no canvas coverings: except that the air feels chilly, one would think they were inhabited daily."

"Why, Miss Eyre, though Mr. Rochester's visits here are rare, they are always sudden and unexpected; and as I observed that it put him out to find everything swathed up, and to have a bustle of arrangement on his arrival, I thought it best to keep the rooms in readiness."

"Is Mr. Rochester an exacting, fastidious sort of man?"

"Not particularly so; but he has a gentleman's tastes and habits, and he expects to have things managed in conformity to them."

"Do you like him? Is he generally liked?"

"Oh, yes; the family have always been respected here. Almost all the land in this neighbourhood, as far as you can see, has belonged to the Rochesters time out of mind."

"Well, but, leaving his land out of the question, do you like him? Is he liked for himself?"

"I have no cause to do otherwise than like him; and I believe he is considered a just and liberal landlord by his tenants: but he has never lived much amongst them."

"But has he no peculiarities? What, in short, is his character?"

"Oh! his character is unimpeachable, I suppose. He is rather peculiar, perhaps: he has travelled a great deal, and seen a great deal of the world, I should think. I dare say he is clever, but I never had much conversation with him."

"In what way is he peculiar?"

"I don't know — it is not easy to describe — nothing striking, but you feel it when he speaks to you; you cannot be always sure whether he is in jest or earnest, whether he is pleased or the contrary; you don't thoroughly understand him, in short — at least, I don't: but it is of no consequence, he is a very good master."

This was all the account I got from Mrs. Fairfax of her employer and mine. There are people who seem to have no notion of sketching a character, or observing and describing salient points, either in persons or things: the good lady evidently belonged to this class; my queries puzzled, but did not draw her out. Mr. Rochester was Mr. Rochester in her eyes; a gentleman, a landed proprietor — nothing more: she inquired and searched no further, and evidently wondered at my wish to gain a more definite notion of his identity.

When we left the dining-room, she proposed to show me over the rest of the house; and I followed her upstairs and downstairs, admiring as I went; for all was well arranged and handsome. The large front chambers I thought especially grand: and some of the third-storey rooms, though dark and low, were interesting from their air of antiquity. The furniture once appropriated to the lower apartments had from time to time been removed here, as fashions changed: and the imperfect light entering by their narrow casement showed bedsteads of a hundred years old; chests in oak or walnut, looking, with their strange carvings of palm branches and cherubs' heads, like types of the Hebrew ark; rows of venerable chairs, high-backed and narrow; stools still more antiquated, on whose cushioned tops were yet apparent traces of half-effaced embroideries, wrought by fingers that for two generations had been coffin-dust. All these relics gave to the third storey of Thornfield Hall the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory. I liked the hush, the gloom, the quaintness of these retreats in the day; but I by no means coveted a night's repose on one of those wide and heavy beds: shut in, some of them, with doors of oak; shaded, others, with wrought old English hangings crusted with thick work, portraying effigies of strange flowers, and stranger birds, and strangest human beings, — all which would have looked strange, indeed, by the pallid gleam of moonlight.

"Do the servants sleep in these rooms?" I asked.

"No; they occupy a range of smaller apartments to the back; no one ever sleeps here: one would almost say that, if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt."

"So I think: you have no ghost, then?"

"None that I ever heard of," returned Mrs. Fairfax, smiling.

"Nor any traditions of one? no legends or ghost stories?"

"I believe not. And yet it is said the Rochesters have been rather a violent than a quiet race in their time: perhaps, though, that is the reason they rest tranquilly in their graves now."

"Yes — 'after life's fitful fever they sleep well,'" I muttered. "Where are you going now, Mrs. Fairfax?" for she was moving away.

"On to the leads; will you come and see the view from thence?" I followed still, up a very narrow staircase to the attics, and thence by a ladder and through a trap-door to the roof of the hall. I was now on a level with the crow colony, and could see into their nests. Leaning over the battlements and looking far down, I surveyed the grounds laid out like a map: the bright and velvet lawn closely girdling the grey base of the mansion; the field, wide as a park, dotted with its ancient timber; the wood, dun and sere, divided by a path visibly overgrown, greener with moss than the trees were with foliage; the church at the gates, the road, the tranquil hills, all reposing in the autumn day's sun; the horizon bounded by a propitious sky, azure, marbled with pearly white. No feature in the scene was extraordinary, but all was pleasing.

When I turned from it and repassed the trap-door, I could scarcely see my way down the ladder; the attic seemed black as a vault compared with that arch of blue air to which I had been looking up, and to that sunlit scene of grove, pasture, and green hill, of which the hall was the centre, and over which I had been gazing with delight.

Mrs. Fairfax stayed behind a moment to fasten the trap-door; I, by drift of groping, found the outlet from the attic, and proceeded to descend the narrow garret staircase. I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third storey: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle.

While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again, louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber; though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued.

"Mrs. Fairfax!" I called out: for I now heard her descending the great stairs. "Did you hear that loud laugh? Who is it?"

"Some of the servants, very likely," she answered: "perhaps Grace Poole."

"Did you hear it?" I again inquired.

"Yes, plainly: I often hear her: she sews in one of these rooms. Sometimes Leah is with her; they are frequently noisy together."

The laugh was repeated in its low, syllabic tone, and terminated in an odd murmur.

"Grace!" exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax.

I really did not expect any Grace to answer; for the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard; and, but that it was high noon, and that no circumstance of ghostliness accompanied the curious cachinnation; but that neither scene nor season favoured fear, I should have been superstitiously afraid. However, the event showed me I was a fool for entertaining a sense even of surprise.

The door nearest me opened, and a servant came out, — a woman of between thirty and forty; a set, square-made figure, red-haired, and with a hard, plain face: any apparition less romantic or less ghostly could scarcely be conceived.

"Too much noise, Grace," said Mrs. Fairfax. "Remember directions!" Grace curtseyed silently and went in.

"She is a person we have to sew and assist Leah in her housemaid's work," continued the widow; "not altogether unobjectionable in some points, but she does well enough. By-the-bye, how have you got on with your new pupil this morning?"

The conversation, thus turned on Adèle, continued till we reached the light and cheerful region below. Adèle came running to meet us in the hall, exclaiming —

"Mesdames, vous êtes servies!" adding, "J'ai bien faim, moi!"

We found dinner ready, and waiting for us in Mrs. Fairfax's room.

CHAPTER XII

The promise of a smooth career, which my first calm introduction to Thornfield Hall seemed to pledge, was not belied on a longer acquaintance with the place and its inmates. Mrs. Fairfax turned out to be what she appeared, a placid-tempered, kind-natured woman, of competent education and average intelligence. My pupil was a lively child, who had been spoilt and indulged, and therefore was sometimes wayward; but as she was committed entirely to my care, and no injudicious interference from any quarter ever thwarted my plans for her improvement, she soon forgot her little freaks, and became obedient and teachable. She had no great talents, no marked traits of character, no peculiar development of feeling or taste which raised her one inch above the ordinary level of childhood; but neither had she any deficiency or vice which sunk her below it. She made reasonable progress, entertained for me a vivacious, though perhaps not very profound, affection; and by her simplicity, gay prattle, and efforts to please, inspired me, in return, with a degree of attachment sufficient to make us both content in each other's society.

This, *par parenthèse*, will be thought cool language by persons who entertain solemn doctrines about the angelic nature of children, and the duty of those charged with their education to conceive for them an idolatrous devotion: but I am not writing to flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth. I felt a conscientious solicitude for Adèle's welfare and progress, and a quiet liking for her little self: just as I cherished towards Mrs. Fairfax a thankfulness for her kindness, and a pleasure in her society proportionate to the tranquil regard she had for me, and the moderation of her mind and character.

Anybody may blame me who likes, when I add further, that, now and then, when I took a walk by myself in the grounds; when I went down to the gates and looked through them along the road; or when, while Adèle played with her nurse, and Mrs. Fairfax made jellies in the storeroom, I climbed the three staircases, raised the trap-door of the attic, and having reached the leads, looked out afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line — that then I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen — that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach. I valued what was good in Mrs. Fairfax, and what was good in Adèle; but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, and what I believed in I wished to behold.

Who blames me? Many, no doubt; and I shall be called discontented. I could not help it: the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third storey, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it — and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement, which, while it swelled it in trouble, expanded it with life; and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended — a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence.

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

When thus alone, I not unfrequently heard Grace Poole's laugh: the same peal, the same low, slow ha! ha! which, when first heard, had thrilled me: I heard, too, her eccentric murmurs; stranger than her laugh. There were days when she was quite silent; but there were others when I could not account for the sounds she made. Sometimes I saw her: she would come out of her room with a basin, or a plate, or a tray in her hand, go down to the kitchen and shortly return, generally (oh, romantic reader, forgive me for telling the plain truth!) bearing a pot of porter. Her appearance always acted as a damper to the curiosity raised by her oral oddities: hard-featured and staid, she had no point to which interest could attach. I made some attempts to draw her into conversation, but she seemed a person of few words: a monosyllabic reply usually cut short every effort of that sort.

The other members of the household, viz., John and his wife, Leah the housemaid, and Sophie the French nurse, were decent people; but in no respect remarkable; with Sophie I used to talk French, and sometimes I asked her questions about her native country; but she was not of a descriptive or narrative turn, and generally gave such vapid and confused answers as were calculated rather to check than encourage inquiry.

October, November, December passed away. One afternoon in January, Mrs. Fairfax had begged a holiday for Adèle, because she had a cold; and, as Adèle seconded the request with an ardour that reminded me how precious occasional holidays had been to me in my own childhood, I accorded it, deeming that I did well in showing pliability on the point. It was a fine, calm day, though very cold; I was tired of sitting still in the library through a whole long morning: Mrs. Fairfax had just written a letter which was waiting to be posted, so I put on my bonnet and cloak and volunteered to carry it to Hay; the distance, two miles, would be a pleasant winter afternoon walk. Having seen Adèle comfortably seated in her little chair by Mrs. Fairfax's parlour fireside, and given her her best wax doll (which I usually kept enveloped in silver paper in a drawer) to play with, and a story-book for change of amusement; and having replied to her "Revenez bientôt, ma bonne amie, ma chère Mdlle. Jeannette," with a kiss I set out.

The ground was hard, the air was still, my road was lonely; I walked fast till I got warm, and then I walked slowly to enjoy and analyse the species of pleasure brooding for me in the hour and situation. It was three o'clock; the church bell tolled as I passed under the belfry: the charm of the hour lay in its approaching dimness, in the low-gliding and pale-beaming sun. I was a mile from Thornfield, in a lane noted for wild roses in summer, for nuts and blackberries in autumn, and even now possessing a few coral treasures in hips and haws, but whose best winter delight lay in its utter solitude and leafless repose. If a breath of air stirred, it made no sound here; for there was not a holly, not an evergreen to rustle, and the stripped hawthorn and hazel bushes were as still as the white, worn stones which causewayed the middle of the path. Far and wide, on each side, there were only fields, where no cattle now browsed; and the little brown birds, which stirred occasionally in the hedge, looked like single russet leaves that had forgotten to drop.

This lane inclined up-hill all the way to Hay; having reached the middle, I sat down on a stile which led thence into a field. Gathering my mantle about me, and sheltering my hands in my muff, I did not feel the cold, though it froze keenly; as was attested by a sheet of ice covering the causeway, where a little brooklet, now congealed, had overflowed after a rapid thaw some days since. From my seat I could look down on Thornfield: the grey and battlemented hall was the principal object in the vale below me; its woods and dark rookery rose against the west. I lingered till the sun went down amongst the trees, and sank crimson and clear behind them. I then turned eastward.

On the hill-top above me sat the rising moon; pale yet as a cloud, but brightening momentarily, she looked over Hay, which, half lost in trees, sent up a blue smoke from its few chimneys: it was yet a mile distant, but in the absolute hush I could hear plainly its thin murmurs of life. My ear, too, felt the flow of currents; in what dales and depths I could not tell: but there were many hills beyond Hay, and doubtless many becks threading their passes. That evening calm betrayed alike the tinkle of the nearest streams, the sough of the most remote.

A rude noise broke on these fine ripplings and whisperings, at once so far away and so clear: a positive tramp, tramp, a metallic clatter, which effaced the soft wave-wanderings; as, in a picture, the solid mass of a crag, or the rough boles of a great oak, drawn in dark and strong on the foreground, efface the aërial distance of azure hill, sunny horizon, and blended clouds where tint melts into tint.

The din was on the causeway: a horse was coming; the windings of the lane yet hid it, but it approached. I was just leaving the stile; yet, as the path was narrow, I sat still to let it go by. In those days I was young, and all sorts of fancies bright and dark tenanted my mind: the memories of nursery stories were there amongst other rubbish; and when they recurred, maturing youth added to them a vigour and vividness beyond what childhood could give. As this horse approached, and as I watched for it to appear through the dusk, I remembered certain of Bessie's tales, wherein figured a North-of-England spirit called a "Gytrash," which, in the form of horse, mule, or large dog, haunted solitary ways, and sometimes came upon belated travellers, as this horse was now coming upon me.

It was very near, but not yet in sight; when, in addition to the tramp, tramp, I heard a rush under the hedge, and close down by the hazel stems glided a great dog, whose black and white colour made him a distinct object against the trees. It was exactly one form of Bessie's Gytrash — a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head: it passed me, however, quietly enough; not staying to look up, with strange pretercanine eyes, in my face, as I half expected it would. The horse followed, — a tall steed, and on its back a rider. The man, the human being, broke the spell at once. Nothing ever rode the Gytrash: it was always alone; and goblins, to my notions, though they might tenant the dumb carcasses of beasts, could scarce covet shelter in the commonplace human form. No Gytrash was this, — only a traveller taking the short cut to Millcote. He passed, and I went on; a few steps, and I turned: a sliding sound and an exclamation of "What the deuce is to do now?" and a clattering tumble, arrested my attention. Man and horse were down; they had slipped on the sheet of ice which glazed the causeway. The dog came bounding back, and seeing his master in a predicament, and hearing the horse groan, barked till the evening hills echoed the sound, which was deep in proportion to his magnitude. He snuffed round the prostrate group, and then he ran up to me; it was all he could do, — there was no other help at hand to summon. I obeyed him, and walked down to the traveller, by this time struggling himself free of his steed. His efforts were so vigorous, I thought he could not be much hurt; but I asked him the question —

"Are you injured, sir?"

I think he was swearing, but am not certain; however, he was pronouncing some formula which prevented him from replying to me directly.

"Can I do anything?" I asked again.

"You must just stand on one side," he answered as he rose, first to his knees, and then to his feet. I did; whereupon began a heaving, stamping, clattering process, accompanied by a barking and baying which removed me effectually some yards' distance; but I would not be driven quite away till I saw the event. This was finally fortunate; the horse was re-established, and the dog was silenced with a "Down, Pilot!" The traveller now, stooping, felt his foot and leg, as if trying whether they were sound; apparently something ailed them, for he halted to the stile whence I had just risen, and sat down.

I was in the mood for being useful, or at least officious, I think, for I now drew near him again.

"If you are hurt, and want help, sir, I can fetch some one either from Thornfield Hall or from Hay."

"Thank you: I shall do: I have no broken bones, — only a sprain;" and again he stood up and tried his foot, but the result extorted an involuntary "Ugh!"

Something of daylight still lingered, and the moon was waxing bright: I could see him plainly. His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared and steel clasped; its details were not apparent, but I traced the general points of middle height and considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now; he was past youth, but had not reached middle-age; perhaps he might be thirty-five. I felt no fear of him, and but little shyness. Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked. I had hardly ever seen a handsome youth; never in my life spoken to one. I had a theoretical reverence and homage for beauty, elegance, gallantry, fascination; but had I met those qualities incarnate in masculine shape, I should have known instinctively that they neither had nor could have sympathy with anything in me, and should have shunned them as one would fire, lightning, or anything else that is bright but antipathetic.

If even this stranger had smiled and been good-humoured to me when I addressed him; if he had put off my offer of assistance gaily and with thanks, I should have gone on my way and not felt any vocation to renew inquiries: but the frown, the roughness of the traveller, set me at my ease: I retained my station when he waved to me to go, and announced —

"I cannot think of leaving you, sir, at so late an hour, in this solitary lane, till I see you are fit to mount your horse."

He looked at me when I said this; he had hardly turned his eyes in my direction before.

"I should think you ought to be at home yourself," said he, "if you have a home in this neighbourhood: where do you come from?"

"From just below; and I am not at all afraid of being out late when it is moonlight: I will run over to Hay for you with pleasure, if you wish it: indeed, I am going there to post a letter."

"You live just below — do you mean at that house with the battlements?" pointing to Thornfield Hall, on which the moon cast a hoary gleam, bringing it out distinct and pale from the woods that, by contrast with the western sky, now seemed one mass of shadow.

"Yes, sir."

"Whose house is it?"

"Mr. Rochester's."

"Do you know Mr. Rochester?"

"No, I have never seen him."

"He is not resident, then?"

"No."

"Can you tell me where he is?"

"I cannot."

"You are not a servant at the hall, of course. You are — " He stopped, ran his eye over my dress, which, as usual, was quite simple: a black merino cloak, a black beaver bonnet; neither of them half fine enough for a lady's-maid. He seemed puzzled to decide what I was; I helped him.

"I am the governess."

"Ah, the governess!" he repeated; "deuce take me, if I had not forgotten! The governess!" and again my raiment underwent scrutiny. In two minutes he rose from the stile: his face expressed pain when he tried to move.

"I cannot commission you to fetch help," he said; "but you may help me a little yourself, if you will be so kind."

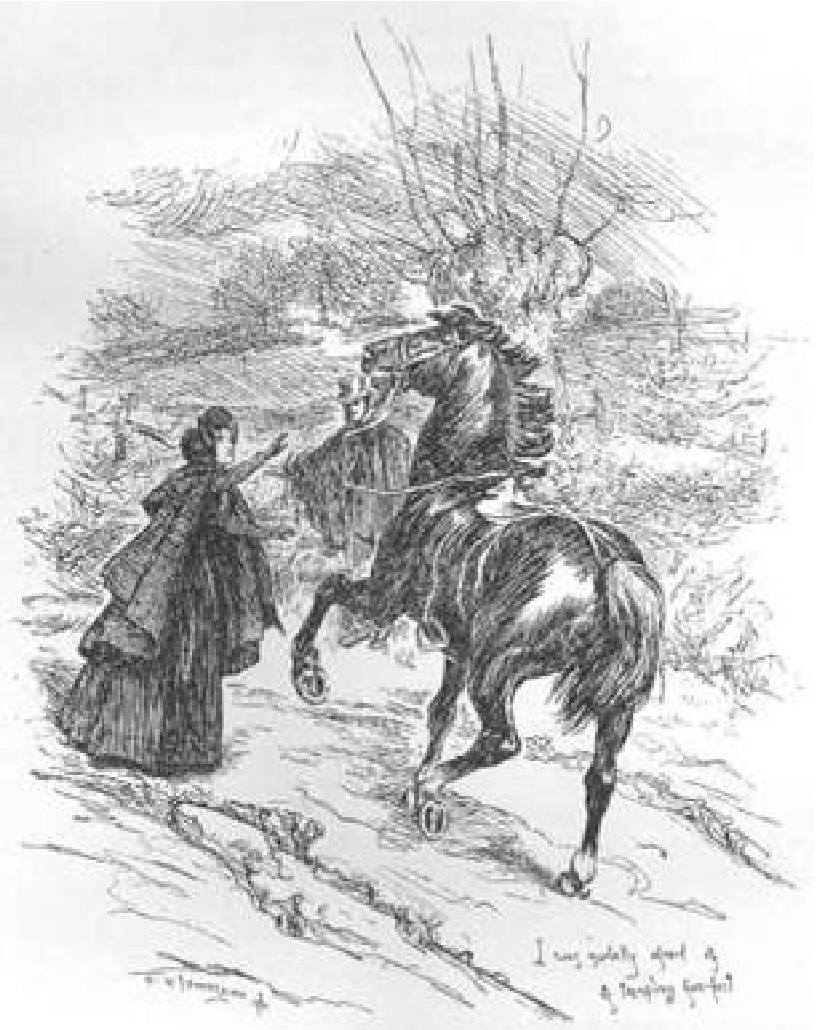
"Yes, sir."

"You have not an umbrella that I can use as a stick?"

"No."

"Try to get hold of my horse's bridle and lead him to me: you are not afraid?"

I should have been afraid to touch a horse when alone, but when told to do it, I was disposed to obey. I put down my muff on the stile, and went up to the tall steed; I endeavoured to catch the bridle, but it was a spirited thing, and would not let me come near its head; I made effort on effort, though in vain: meantime, I was mortally afraid of its trampling fore-feet. The traveller waited and watched for some time, and at last he laughed.


I was mortally afraid of its trampling forefeet

“I see,” he said, “the mountain will never be brought to Mahomet, so all you can do is to aid Mahomet to go to the mountain; I must beg of you to come here.”

I came. “Excuse me,” he continued: “necessity compels me to make you useful.” He laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and leaning on me with some stress, limped to his horse. Having once caught the bridle, he mastered it directly and sprang to his saddle; grimacing grimly as he made the effort, for it wrenched his sprain.

“Now,” said he, releasing his under lip from a hard bite, “just hand me my whip; it lies there under the hedge.”

I sought it and found it.

“Thank you; now make haste with the letter to Hay, and return as fast as you can.”

A touch of a spurred heel made his horse first start and rear, and then bound away; the dog rushed in his traces; all three vanished,

“Like heath that, in the wilderness,
The wild wind whirls away.”

I took up my muff and walked on. The incident had occurred and was gone for me: it *was* an incident of no moment, no romance, no interest in a sense; yet it marked with change one single hour of a monotonous life. My help had been needed and claimed; I had given it: I was pleased to have done something; trivial, transitory though the deed was, it was yet an active thing, and I was weary of an existence all passive. The new face, too, was like a new picture introduced to the gallery of memory; and it was dissimilar to all the others hanging there: firstly, because it was masculine; and, secondly, because it was dark, strong, and stern. I had it still before me when I entered Hay, and slipped the letter into the post-office; I saw it as I walked fast down-hill all the way home. When I came to the stile, I stopped a minute, looked round and listened, with an idea that a horse’s hoofs might ring on the causeway again, and that a rider in a cloak, and a Gytrash-like Newfoundland dog, might be again apparent: I saw only the hedge and a pollard willow before me, rising up still and straight to meet the moonbeams; I heard only the faintest waft of wind roaming fitful among the trees round Thornfield, a mile distant; and when I glanced down in the direction of the murmur, my eye, traversing the hall-front, caught a light kindling in a window: it reminded me that I was late, and I hurried on.

I did not like re-entering Thornfield. To pass its threshold was to return to stagnation; to cross the silent hall, to ascend the darksome staircase, to seek my own lonely little room, and then to meet tranquil Mrs. Fairfax, and spend the long winter evening with her, and her only, was to quell wholly the faint excitement wakened by my walk, — to slip again over my faculties the viewless fetters of an uniform and too still existence; of an existence whose very privileges of security and ease I was becoming incapable of appreciating. What good it would have done me at that time to have been tossed in the storms of an uncertain struggling life, and to have been taught by rough and bitter experience to long for the calm amidst which I now repined! Yes, just as much good as it would do a man tired of sitting still in a “too easy chair” to take a long walk: and just as natural was the wish to stir, under my circumstances, as it would be under his.

I lingered at the gates; I lingered on the lawn; I paced backwards and forwards on the pavement; the shutters of the glass door were closed; I could not see into the interior; and both my eyes and spirit seemed drawn from the gloomy house — from the grey-hollow filled with rayless cells, as it appeared to me — to that sky expanded before me, — a blue sea absolved from taint of cloud; the moon ascending it in solemn march; her orb seeming to look up as she left the hill-tops, from behind which she had come, far and farther below her, and aspired to the zenith, midnight dark in its fathomless depth and measureless distance; and for those trembling stars that followed her course; they made my heart tremble, my veins glow when I viewed them. Little things recall us to earth; the clock struck in the hall; that sufficed; I turned from moon and stars, opened a side-door, and went in.

The hall was not dark, nor yet was it lit, only by the high-hung bronze lamp; a warm glow suffused both it and the lower steps of the oak staircase. This ruddy shine issued from the great dining-room, whose two-leaved door stood open, and showed a genial fire in the grate, glancing on marble hearth and brass fire-irons, and revealing purple draperies and polished furniture, in the most pleasant radiance. It revealed, too, a group near the mantelpiece: I had scarcely caught it, and scarcely become aware of a cheerful mingling of voices, amongst which I seemed to distinguish the tones of Adèle, when the door closed.

I hastened to Mrs. Fairfax's room; there was a fire there too, but no candle, and no Mrs. Fairfax. Instead, all alone, sitting upright on the rug, and gazing with gravity at the blaze, I beheld a great black and white long-haired dog, just like the Gytrash of the lane. It was so like it that I went forward and said — "Pilot" and the thing got up and came to me and snuffed me. I caressed him, and he wagged his great tail; but he looked an eerie creature to be alone with, and I could not tell whence he had come. I rang the bell, for I wanted a candle; and I wanted, too, to get an account of this visitant. Leah entered.

"What dog is this?"

"He came with master."

"With whom?"

"With master — Mr. Rochester — he is just arrived."

"Indeed! and is Mrs. Fairfax with him?"

"Yes, and Miss Adèle; they are in the dining-room, and John is gone for a surgeon; for master has had an accident; his horse fell and his ankle is sprained."

"Did the horse fall in Hay Lane?"

"Yes, coming down-hill; it slipped on some ice."

"Ah! Bring me a candle will you Leah?"

Leah brought it; she entered, followed by Mrs. Fairfax, who repeated the news; adding that Mr. Carter the surgeon was come, and was now with Mr. Rochester: then she hurried out to give orders about tea, and I went upstairs to take off my things.

CHAPTER XIII

Mr. Rochester, it seems, by the surgeon's orders, went to bed early that night; nor did he rise soon next morning. When he did come down, it was to attend to business: his agent and some of his tenants were arrived, and waiting to speak with him.

Adèle and I had now to vacate the library: it would be in daily requisition as a reception-room for callers. A fire was lit in an apartment upstairs, and there I carried our books, and arranged it for the future schoolroom. I discerned in the course of the morning that Thornfield Hall was a changed place: no longer silent as a church, it echoed every hour or two to a knock at the door, or a clang of the bell; steps, too, often traversed the hall, and new voices spoke in different keys below; a rill from the outer world was flowing through it; it had a master: for my part, I liked it better.

Adèle was not easy to teach that day; she could not apply: she kept running to the door and looking over the banisters to see if she could get a glimpse of Mr. Rochester; then she coined pretexts to go downstairs, in order, as I shrewdly suspected, to visit the library, where I knew she was not wanted; then, when I got a little angry, and made her sit still, she continued to talk incessantly of her "ami, Monsieur Edouard Fairfax *de* Rochester," as she dubbed him (I had not before heard his prenomens), and to conjecture what presents he had brought her: for it appears he had intimated the night before, that when his luggage came from Millcote, there would be found amongst it a little box in whose contents she had an interest.

"Et cela doit signifier," said she, "qu'il y aura là dedans un cadeau pour moi, et peut-être pour vous aussi, mademoiselle. Monsieur a parlé de vous: il m'a demandé le nom de ma gouvernante, et si elle n'était pas une petite personne, assez mince et un peu pâle. J'ai dit qu'oui: car c'est vrai, n'est-ce pas, mademoiselle?"

I and my pupil dined as usual in Mrs. Fairfax's parlour; the afternoon was wild and snowy, and we passed it in the schoolroom. At dark I allowed Adèle to put away books and work, and to run downstairs; for, from the comparative silence below, and from the cessation of appeals to the door-bell, I conjectured that Mr. Rochester was now at liberty. Left alone, I walked to the window; but nothing was to be seen thence: twilight and snowflakes together thickened the air, and hid the very shrubs on the lawn. I let down the curtain and went back to the fireside.

In the clear embers I was tracing a view, not unlike a picture I remembered to have seen of the castle of Heidelberg, on the Rhine, when Mrs. Fairfax came in, breaking up by her entrance the fiery mosaic I had been piercing together, and scattering too some heavy unwelcome thoughts that were beginning to throng on my solitude.

"Mr. Rochester would be glad if you and your pupil would take tea with him in the drawing-room this evening," said she: "he has been so much engaged all day that he could not ask to see you before."

"When is his tea-time?" I inquired.

"Oh, at six o'clock: he keeps early hours in the country. You had better change your frock now; I will go with you and fasten it. Here is a candle."

"Is it necessary to change my frock?"

"Yes, you had better: I always dress for the evening when Mr. Rochester is here."

This additional ceremony seemed somewhat stately; however, I repaired to my room, and, with Mrs. Fairfax's aid, replaced my black stuff dress by one of black silk; the best and the only additional one I had, except one of light grey, which, in my Lowood notions of the toilette, I thought too fine to be worn, except on first-rate occasions.

"You want a brooch," said Mrs. Fairfax. I had a single little pearl ornament which Miss Temple gave me as a parting keepsake: I put it on, and then we went downstairs. Unused as I was to strangers, it was rather a trial to appear thus formally summoned in Mr. Rochester's presence. I let Mrs. Fairfax precede me into the dining-room, and kept in her shade as we crossed that apartment; and, passing the arch, whose curtain was now dropped, entered the elegant recess beyond.

Two wax candles stood lighted on the table, and two on the mantelpiece; basking in the light and heat of a superb fire, lay Pilot — Adèle knelt near him. Half reclined on a couch appeared Mr. Rochester, his foot supported by the cushion; he was looking at Adèle and the dog: the fire shone full on his face. I knew my traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows; his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I recognised his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, choler; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw — yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake. His shape, now divested of cloak, I perceived harmonised in squareness with his physiognomy: I suppose it was a good figure in the athletic sense of the term — broad chested and thin flanked, though neither tall nor graceful.

Mr. Rochester must have been aware of the entrance of Mrs. Fairfax and myself; but it appeared he was not in the mood to notice us, for he never lifted his head as we approached.

"Here is Miss Eyre, sir," said Mrs. Fairfax, in her quiet way. He bowed, still not taking his eyes from the group of the dog and child.

"Let Miss Eyre be seated," said he: and there was something in the forced stiff bow, in the impatient yet formal tone, which seemed further to express, "What the deuce is it to me whether Miss Eyre be there or not? At this moment I am not disposed to accost her."

I sat down quite disembarrassed. A reception of finished politeness would probably have confused me: I could not have returned or repaid it by answering grace and elegance on my part; but harsh caprice laid me under no obligation; on the contrary, a decent quiescence, under the freak of manner, gave me the advantage. Besides, the eccentricity of the proceeding was piquant: I felt interested to see how he would go on.

He went on as a statue would, that is, he neither spoke nor moved. Mrs. Fairfax seemed to think it necessary that some one should be amiable, and she began to talk. Kindly, as usual — and, as usual, rather trite — she condoled with him on the pressure of business he had had all day; on the annoyance it must have been to him with that painful sprain: then she commended his patience and perseverance in going through with it.

"Madam, I should like some tea," was the sole rejoinder she got. She hastened to ring the bell; and when the tray came, she proceeded to arrange the cups, spoons, &c., with assiduous celerity. I and Adèle went to the table; but the master did not leave his couch.

"Will you hand Mr. Rochester's cup?" said Mrs. Fairfax to me; "Adèle might perhaps spill it."

I did as requested. As he took the cup from my hand, Adèle, thinking the moment propitious for making a request in my favour, cried out —

"N'est-ce pas, monsieur, qu'il y a un cadeau pour Mademoiselle Eyre dans votre petit coffre?"

"Who talks of cadeaux?" said he gruffly. "Did you expect a present, Miss Eyre? Are you fond of presents?" and he searched my face with eyes that I saw were dark, irate, and piercing.

"I hardly know, sir; I have little experience of them: they are generally thought pleasant things."

"Generally thought? But what do *you* think?"

"I should be obliged to take time, sir, before I could give you an answer worthy of your acceptance: a present has many faces to it, has it not? and one should consider all, before pronouncing an opinion as to its nature."

"Miss Eyre, you are not so unsophisticated as Adèle: she demands a 'cadeau,' clamorously, the moment she sees me: you beat about the bush."

"Because I have less confidence in my deserts than Adèle has: she can prefer the claim of old acquaintance, and the right too of custom; for she says you have always been in the habit of giving her playthings; but if I had to make out a case I should be puzzled, since I am a stranger, and have done nothing to entitle me to an acknowledgment."

"Oh, don't fall back on over-modesty! I have examined Adèle, and find you have taken great pains with her: she is not bright, she has no talents; yet in a short time she has made much improvement."

"Sir, you have now given me my 'cadeau;' I am obliged to you: it is the meed teachers most covet — praise of their pupils' progress."

"Humph!" said Mr. Rochester, and he took his tea in silence.

"Come to the fire," said the master, when the tray was taken away, and

Mrs. Fairfax had settled into a corner with her knitting; while Adèle was leading me by the hand round the room, showing me the beautiful books and ornaments on the consoles and chiffonnières. We obeyed, as in duty bound; Adèle wanted to take a seat on my knee, but she was ordered to amuse herself with Pilot.

"You have been resident in my house three months?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you came from — ?"

"From Lowood school, in — -shire."

"Ah! a charitable concern. How long were you there?"

"Eight years."

"Eight years! you must be tenacious of life. I thought half the time in such a place would have done up any constitution! No wonder you have rather the look of another world. I marvelled where you had got that sort of face. When you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse: I am not sure yet. Who are your parents?"

"I have none."

"Nor ever had, I suppose: do you remember them?"

"No."

"I thought not. And so you were waiting for your people when you sat on that stile?"

"For whom, sir?"

"For the men in green: it was a proper moonlight evening for them. Did I break through one of your rings, that you spread that damned ice on the causeway?"

I shook my head. "The men in green all forsook England a hundred years ago," said I, speaking as seriously as he had done. "And not even in Hay Lane, or the fields about it, could you find a trace of them. I don't think either summer or harvest, or winter moon, will ever shine on their revels more."

Mrs. Fairfax had dropped her knitting, and, with raised eyebrows, seemed wondering what sort of talk this was.

"Well," resumed Mr. Rochester, "if you disown parents, you must have some sort of kinsfolk: uncles and aunts?"

"No; none that I ever saw."

"And your home?"

"I have none."

"Where do your brothers and sisters live?"

"I have no brothers or sisters."

"Who recommended you to come here?"

"I advertised, and Mrs. Fairfax answered my advertisement."

"Yes," said the good lady, who now knew what ground we were upon, "and I am daily thankful for the choice Providence led me to make. Miss Eyre has been an invaluable companion to me, and a kind and careful teacher to Adèle."

"Don't trouble yourself to give her a character," returned Mr. Rochester: "eulogiums will not bias me; I shall judge for myself. She began by felling my horse."

"Sir?" said Mrs. Fairfax.

"I have to thank her for this sprain."

The widow looked bewildered.

"Miss Eyre, have you ever lived in a town?"

"No, sir."

"Have you seen much society?"

"None but the pupils and teachers of Lowood, and now the inmates of Thornfield."

"Have you read much?"

"Only such books as came in my way; and they have not been numerous or very learned."

"You have lived the life of a nun: no doubt you are well drilled in religious forms; — Brocklehurst, who I understand directs Lowood, is a parson, is he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you girls probably worshipped him, as a convent full of religieuses would worship their director."

"Oh, no."

"You are very cool! No! What! a novice not worship her priest! That sounds blasphemous."

"I disliked Mr. Brocklehurst; and I was not alone in the feeling. He is a harsh man; at once pompous and meddling; he cut off our hair; and for economy's sake bought us bad needles and thread, with which we could hardly sew."

"That was very false economy," remarked Mrs. Fairfax, who now again caught the drift of the dialogue.

"And was that the head and front of his offending?" demanded Mr. Rochester.

"He starved us when he had the sole superintendence of the provision department, before the committee was appointed; and he bored us with long lectures once a week, and with evening readings from books of his own inditing, about sudden deaths and judgments, which made us afraid to go to bed."

"What age were you when you went to Lowood?"

"About ten."

"And you stayed there eight years: you are now, then, eighteen?"

I assented.

"Arithmetic, you see, is useful; without its aid, I should hardly have been able to guess your age. It is a point difficult to fix where the features and countenance are so much at variance as in your case. And now what did you learn at Lowood? Can you play?"

"A little."

"Of course: that is the established answer. Go into the library — I mean, if you please. — (Excuse my tone of command; I am used to say, 'Do this,' and it is done: I cannot alter my customary habits for one new inmate.) — Go, then, into the library; take a candle with you; leave the door open; sit down to the piano, and play a tune."

I departed, obeying his directions.

"Enough!" he called out in a few minutes. "You play *a little*, I see; like any other English school-girl; perhaps rather better than some, but not well."

I closed the piano and returned. Mr. Rochester continued — "Adèle showed me some sketches this morning, which she said were yours. I don't know whether they were entirely of your doing; probably a master aided you?"

"No, indeed!" I interjected.

"Ah! that pricks pride. Well, fetch me your portfolio, if you can vouch for its contents being original; but don't pass your word unless you are certain: I can recognise patchwork."

"Then I will say nothing, and you shall judge for yourself, sir."

I brought the portfolio from the library.

"Approach the table," said he; and I wheeled it to his couch. Adèle and Mrs. Fairfax drew near to see the pictures.

"No crowding," said Mr. Rochester: "take the drawings from my hand as I finish with them; but don't push your faces up to mine."

He deliberately scrutinised each sketch and painting. Three he laid aside; the others, when he had examined them, he swept from him.

"Take them off to the other table, Mrs. Fairfax," said he, "and look at them with Adèle; — you" (glancing at me) "resume your seat, and answer my questions. I perceive those pictures were done by one hand: was that hand yours?"

"Yes."

"And when did you find time to do them? They have taken much time, and some thought."

"I did them in the last two vacations I spent at Lowood, when I had no other occupation."

"Where did you get your copies?"

"Out of my head."

"That head I see now on your shoulders?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has it other furniture of the same kind within?"

"I should think it may have: I should hope — better."

He spread the pictures before him, and again surveyed them alternately.

While he is so occupied, I will tell you, reader, what they are: and first, I must premise that they are nothing wonderful. The subjects had, indeed, risen vividly on my mind. As I saw them with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them, they were striking; but my hand would not second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived.

These pictures were in water-colours. The first represented clouds low and livid, rolling over a swollen sea: all the distance was in eclipse; so, too, was the foreground; or rather, the nearest billows, for there was no land. One gleam of light lifted into relief a half-submerged mast, on which sat a cormorant, dark and large, with wings flecked with foam; its beak held a gold bracelet set with gems, that I had touched with as brilliant tints as my palette could yield, and as glittering distinctness as my pencil could impart. Sinking below the bird and mast, a drowned corpse glanced through the green water; a fair arm was the only limb clearly visible, whence the bracelet had been washed or torn.

The second picture contained for foreground only the dim peak of a hill, with grass and some leaves slanting as if by a breeze. Beyond and above spread an expanse of sky, dark blue as at twilight: rising into the sky was a woman's shape to the bust, portrayed in tints as dusk and soft as I could combine. The dim forehead was crowned with a star; the lineaments below were seen as through the suffusion of vapour; the eyes shone dark and wild; the hair streamed shadowy, like a beamless cloud torn by storm or by electric travail. On the neck lay a pale reflection like moonlight; the same faint lustre touched the train of thin clouds from which rose and bowed this vision of the Evening Star.

The third showed the pinnacle of an iceberg piercing a polar winter sky: a muster of northern lights reared their dim lances, close serried, along the horizon. Throwing these into distance, rose, in the foreground, a head, — a colossal head, inclined towards the iceberg, and resting against it. Two thin hands, joined under the forehead, and supporting it, drew up before the lower features a sable veil, a brow quite bloodless, white as bone, and an eye hollow and fixed, blank of meaning but for the glassiness of despair, alone were visible. Above the temples, amidst wreathed turban folds of black drapery, vague in its character and consistency as cloud, gleamed a ring of white flame, gemmed with sparkles of a more lurid tinge. This pale crescent was "the likeness of a kingly crown;" what it diademed was "the shape which shape had none."

"Were you happy when you painted these pictures?" asked Mr. Rochester presently.

"I was absorbed, sir: yes, and I was happy. To paint them, in short, was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known."

"That is not saying much. Your pleasures, by your own account, have been few; but I daresay you did exist in a kind of artist's dreamland while you blent and arranged these strange tints. Did you sit at them long each day?"

"I had nothing else to do, because it was the vacation, and I sat at them from morning till noon, and from noon till night: the length of the midsummer days favoured my inclination to apply."

"And you felt self-satisfied with the result of your ardent labours?"

"Far from it. I was tormented by the contrast between my idea and my handiwork: in each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realise."

"Not quite: you have secured the shadow of your thought; but no more, probably. You had not enough of the artist's skill and science to give it full being: yet the drawings are, for a school-girl, peculiar. As to the thoughts, they are elfish. These eyes in the Evening Star you must have seen in a dream. How could you make them look so clear, and yet not at all brilliant? for the planet above quells their rays. And what meaning is that in their solemn depth? And who taught you to paint wind? There is a high gale in that sky, and on this hill-top. Where did you see Latmos? For that is Latmos. There! put the drawings away!"

I had scarce tied the strings of the portfolio, when, looking at his watch, he said abruptly —

"It is nine o'clock: what are you about, Miss Eyre, to let Adèle sit up so long? Take her to bed."

Adèle went to kiss him before quitting the room: he endured the caress, but scarcely seemed to relish it more than Pilot would have done, nor so much.

"I wish you all good-night, now," said he, making a movement of the hand towards the door, in token that he was tired of our company, and wished to dismiss us. Mrs. Fairfax folded up her knitting: I took my portfolio: we curtseyed to him, received a frigid bow in return, and so withdrew.

"You said Mr. Rochester was not strikingly peculiar, Mrs. Fairfax," I observed, when I rejoined her in her room, after putting Adèle to bed.

"Well, is he?"

"I think so: he is very changeful and abrupt."

"True: no doubt he may appear so to a stranger, but I am so accustomed to his manner, I never think of it; and then, if he has peculiarities of temper, allowance should be made."

"Why?"

"Partly because it is his nature — and we can none of us help our nature; and partly because he has painful thoughts, no doubt, to harass him, and make his spirits unequal."

"What about?"

"Family troubles, for one thing."

"But he has no family."

"Not now, but he has had — or, at least, relatives. He lost his elder brother a few years since."

"His *elder* brother?"

"Yes. The present Mr. Rochester has not been very long in possession of the property; only about nine years."

"Nine years is a tolerable time. Was he so very fond of his brother as to be still inconsolable for his loss?"

"Why, no — perhaps not. I believe there were some misunderstandings between them. Mr. Rowland Rochester was not quite just to Mr. Edward; and perhaps he prejudiced his father against him. The old gentleman was fond of money, and anxious to keep the family estate together. He did not like to diminish the property by division, and yet he was anxious that Mr. Edward should have wealth, too, to keep up the consequence of the name; and, soon after he was of age, some steps were taken that were not quite fair, and made a great deal of mischief. Old Mr. Rochester and Mr. Rowland combined to bring Mr. Edward into what he considered a painful position, for the sake of making his fortune: what the precise nature of that position was I never clearly knew, but his spirit could not brook what he had to suffer in it. He is not very forgiving: he broke with his family, and now for many years he has led an unsettled kind of life. I don't think he has ever been resident at Thornfield for a fortnight together, since the death of his brother without a will left him master of the estate; and, indeed, no wonder he shuns the old place."

"Why should he shun it?"

"Perhaps he thinks it gloomy."

The answer was evasive. I should have liked something clearer; but Mrs. Fairfax either could not, or would not, give me more explicit information of the origin and nature of Mr. Rochester's trials. She averred they were a mystery to herself, and that what she knew was chiefly from conjecture. It was evident, indeed, that she wished me to drop the subject, which I did accordingly.

CHAPTER XIV

For several subsequent days I saw little of Mr. Rochester. In the mornings he seemed much engaged with business, and, in the afternoon, gentlemen from Millcote or the neighbourhood called, and sometimes stayed to dine with him. When his sprain was well enough to admit of horse exercise, he rode out a good deal; probably to return these visits, as he generally did not come back till late at night.

During this interval, even Adèle was seldom sent for to his presence, and all my acquaintance with him was confined to an occasional rencontre in the hall, on the stairs, or in the gallery, when he would sometimes pass me haughtily and coldly, just acknowledging my presence by a distant nod or a cool glance, and sometimes bow and smile with gentlemanlike affability. His changes of mood did not offend me, because I saw that I had nothing to do with their alternation; the ebb and flow depended on causes quite disconnected with me.

One day he had had company to dinner, and had sent for my portfolio; in order, doubtless, to exhibit its contents: the gentlemen went away early, to attend a public meeting at Millcote, as Mrs. Fairfax informed me; but the night being wet and inclement, Mr. Rochester did not accompany them. Soon after they were gone he rang the bell: a message came that I and Adèle were to go downstairs. I brushed Adèle's hair and made her neat, and having ascertained that I was myself in my usual Quaker trim, where there was nothing to retouch — all being too close and plain, braided locks included, to admit of disarrangement — we descended, Adèle wondering whether the *petit coffre* was at length come; for, owing to some mistake, its arrival had hitherto been delayed. She was gratified: there it stood, a little carton, on the table when we entered the dining-room. She appeared to know it by instinct.

"Ma boite! ma boite!" exclaimed she, running towards it.

"Yes, there is your 'boite' at last: take it into a corner, you genuine daughter of Paris, and amuse yourself with disembowelling it," said the deep and rather sarcastic voice of Mr. Rochester, proceeding from the depths of an immense easy-chair at the fireside. "And mind," he continued, "don't bother me with any details of the anatomical process, or any notice of the condition of the entrails: let your operation be conducted in silence: tiens-toi tranquille, enfant; comprends-tu?"

Adèle seemed scarcely to need the warning — she had already retired to a sofa with her treasure, and was busy untying the cord which secured the lid. Having removed this impediment, and lifted certain silvery envelopes of tissue paper, she merely exclaimed —

"Oh ciel! Que c'est beau!" and then remained absorbed in ecstatic contemplation.

"Is Miss Eyre there?" now demanded the master, half rising from his seat to look round to the door, near which I still stood.

"Ah! well, come forward; be seated here." He drew a chair near his own. "I am not fond of the prattle of children," he continued; "for, old bachelor as I am, I have no pleasant associations connected with their lisp. It would be intolerable to me to pass a whole evening *tête-à-tête* with a brat. Don't draw that chair farther off, Miss Eyre; sit down exactly where I placed it — if you please, that is. Confound these civilities! I continually forget them. Nor do I particularly affect simple-minded old ladies. By-the-bye, I must have mine in mind; it won't do to neglect her; she is a Fairfax, or wed to one; and blood is said to be thicker than water."

He rang, and despatched an invitation to Mrs. Fairfax, who soon arrived, knitting-basket in hand.

"Good evening, madam; I sent to you for a charitable purpose. I have forbidden Adèle to talk to me about her presents, and she is bursting with repletion: have the goodness to serve her as auditress and interlocutrice; it will be one of the most benevolent acts you ever performed."

Adèle, indeed, no sooner saw Mrs. Fairfax, than she summoned her to her sofa, and there quickly filled her lap with the porcelain, the ivory, the waxen contents of her "boite;" pouring out, meantime, explanations and raptures in such broken English as she was mistress of.

"Now I have performed the part of a good host," pursued Mr. Rochester, "put my guests into the way of amusing each other, I ought to be at liberty to attend to my own pleasure. Miss Eyre, draw your chair still a little farther forward: you are yet too far back; I cannot see you without disturbing my position in this comfortable chair, which I have no mind to do."

I did as I was bid, though I would much rather have remained somewhat in the shade; but Mr. Rochester had such a direct way of giving orders, it seemed a matter of course to obey him promptly.

We were, as I have said, in the dining-room: the lustre, which had been lit for dinner, filled the room with a festal breadth of light; the large fire was all red and clear; the purple curtains hung rich and ample before the lofty window and loftier arch; everything was still, save the subdued chat of Adèle (she dared not speak loud), and, filling up each pause, the beating of winter rain against the panes.

Mr. Rochester, as he sat in his damask-covered chair, looked different to what I had seen him look before; not quite so stern — much less gloomy. There was a smile on his lips, and his eyes sparkled, whether with wine or not, I am not sure; but I think it very probable. He was, in short, in his after-dinner mood; more expanded and genial, and also more self-indulgent than the frigid and rigid temper of the morning; still he looked preciously grim, cushioning his massive head against the swelling back of his chair, and receiving the light of the fire on his granite-hewn features, and in his great, dark eyes; for he had great, dark eyes, and very fine eyes, too — not without a certain change in their depths sometimes, which, if it was not softness, reminded you, at least, of that feeling.

He had been looking two minutes at the fire, and I had been looking the same length of time at him, when, turning suddenly, he caught my gaze fastened on his physiognomy.

"You examine me, Miss Eyre," said he: "do you think me handsome?"

I should, if I had deliberated, have replied to this question by something conventionally vague and polite; but the answer somehow slipped from my tongue before I was aware — "No, sir."

"Ah! By my word! there is something singular about you," said he: "you have the air of a little *nonnette*; quaint, quiet, grave, and simple, as you sit with your hands before you, and your eyes generally bent on the carpet (except, by-the-bye, when they are directed piercingly to my face; as just now, for instance); and when one asks you a question, or makes a remark to which you are obliged to reply, you rap out a round rejoinder, which, if not blunt, is at least brusque. What do you mean by it?"

"Sir, I was too plain; I beg your pardon. I ought to have replied that it was not easy to give an impromptu answer to a question about appearances; that tastes mostly differ; and that beauty is of little consequence, or something of that sort."

"You ought to have replied no such thing. Beauty of little consequence, indeed! And so, under pretence of softening the previous outrage, of stroking and soothing me into placidity, you stick a sly penknife under my ear! Go on: what fault do you find with me, pray? I suppose I have all my limbs and all my features like any other man?"

"Mr. Rochester, allow me to disown my first answer: I intended no pointed repartee: it was only a blunder."

"Just so: I think so: and you shall be answerable for it. Criticise me: does my forehead not please you?"

He lifted up the sable waves of hair which lay horizontally over his brow, and showed a solid enough mass of intellectual organs, but an abrupt deficiency where the suave sign of benevolence should have risen.

"Now, ma'am, am I a fool?"

"Far from it, sir. You would, perhaps, think me rude if I inquired in return whether you are a philanthropist?"

"There again! Another stick of the penknife, when she pretended to pat my head: and that is because I said I did not like the society of children and old women (low be it spoken!). No, young lady, I am not a general philanthropist; but I bear a conscience;" and he pointed to the prominences which are said to indicate that faculty, and which, fortunately for him, were sufficiently conspicuous; giving, indeed, a marked breadth to the upper part of his head: "and, besides, I once had a kind of rude tenderness of heart. When I was as old as you, I was a feeling fellow enough, partial to the unfledged, unfostered, and unlucky; but Fortune has knocked me about since: she has even kneaded me with her knuckles, and now I flatter myself I am hard and tough as an India-rubber ball; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump. Yes: does that leave hope for me?"

"Hope of what, sir?"

"Of my final re-transformation from India-rubber back to flesh?"

"Decidedly he has had too much wine," I thought; and I did not know what answer to make to his queer question: how could I tell whether he was capable of being re-transformed?

"You looked very much puzzled, Miss Eyre; and though you are not pretty any more than I am handsome, yet a puzzled air becomes you; besides, it is convenient, for it keeps those searching eyes of yours away from my physiognomy, and busies them with the worsted flowers of the rug; so puzzle on. Young lady, I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative to-night."

With this announcement he rose from his chair, and stood, leaning his arm on the marble mantelpiece: in that attitude his shape was seen plainly as well as his face; his unusual breadth of chest, disproportionate almost to his length of limb. I am sure most people would have thought him an ugly man; yet there was so much unconscious pride in his port; so much ease in his demeanour; such a look of complete indifference to his own external appearance; so haughty a reliance on the power of other qualities, intrinsic or adventitious, to atone for the lack of mere personal attractiveness, that, in looking at him, one inevitably shared the indifference, and, even in a blind, imperfect sense, put faith in the confidence.

"I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative to-night," he repeated, "and that is why I sent for you: the fire and the chandelier were not sufficient company for me; nor would Pilot have been, for none of these can talk. Adèle is a degree better, but still far below the mark; Mrs. Fairfax ditto; you, I am persuaded, can suit me if you will: you puzzled me the first evening I invited you down here. I have almost forgotten you since: other ideas have driven yours from my head; but to-night I am resolved to be at ease; to dismiss what importunes, and recall what pleases. It would please me now to draw you out — to learn more of you — therefore speak."

Instead of speaking, I smiled; and not a very complacent or submissive smile either.

"Speak," he urged.

"What about, sir?"

"Whatever you like. I leave both the choice of subject and the manner of treating it entirely to yourself."

Accordingly I sat and said nothing: "If he expects me to talk for the mere sake of talking and showing off, he will find he has addressed himself to the wrong person," I thought.

"You are dumb, Miss Eyre."

I was dumb still. He bent his head a little towards me, and with a single hasty glance seemed to dive into my eyes.

"Stubborn?" he said, "and annoyed. Ah! it is consistent. I put my request in an absurd, almost insolent form. Miss Eyre, I beg your pardon. The fact is, once for all, I don't wish to treat you like an inferior: that is" (correcting himself), "I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years' difference in age and a century's advance in experience. This is legitimate, *et j'y tiens*, as Adèle would say; and it is by virtue of this superiority, and this alone, that I desire you to have the goodness to talk to me a little now, and divert my thoughts, which are galled with dwelling on one point — cankering as a rusty nail."

He had deigned an explanation, almost an apology, and I did not feel insensible to his condescension, and would not seem so.

"I am willing to amuse you, if I can, sir — quite willing; but I cannot introduce a topic, because how do I know what will interest you? Ask me questions, and I will do my best to answer them."

"Then, in the first place, do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father, and that I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house?"

"Do as you please, sir."

"That is no answer; or rather it is a very irritating, because a very evasive one. Reply clearly."

"I don't think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience."

"Humph! Promptly spoken. But I won't allow that, seeing that it would never suit my case, as I have made an indifferent, not to say a bad, use of both advantages. Leaving superiority out of the question, then, you must still agree to receive my orders now and then, without being piqued or hurt by the tone of command. Will you?"

I smiled: I thought to myself Mr. Rochester *is* peculiar — he seems to forget that he pays me £30 per annum for receiving his orders.

"The smile is very well," said he, catching instantly the passing expression; "but speak too."

"I was thinking, sir, that very few masters would trouble themselves to inquire whether or not their paid subordinates were piqued and hurt by their orders."

"Paid subordinates! What! you are my paid subordinate, are you? Oh yes, I had forgotten the salary! Well then, on that mercenary ground, will you agree to let me hector a little?"

"No, sir, not on that ground; but, on the ground that you did forget it, and that you care whether or not a dependent is comfortable in his dependency, I agree heartily."

"And will you consent to dispense with a great many conventional forms and phrases, without thinking that the omission arises from insolence?"

"I am sure, sir, I should never mistake informality for insolence: one I rather like, the other nothing free-born would submit to, even for a salary."

"Humbug! Most things free-born will submit to anything for a salary; therefore, keep to yourself, and don't venture on generalities of which you are intensely ignorant. However, I mentally shake hands with you for your answer, despite its inaccuracy; and as much for the manner in which it was said, as for the substance of the speech; the manner was frank and sincere; one does not often see such a manner: no, on the contrary, affectation, or coldness, or stupid, coarse-minded misapprehension of one's meaning are the usual rewards of candour. Not three in three thousand raw school-girl-governesses would have answered me as you have just done. But I don't mean to flatter you: if you are cast in a different mould to the majority, it is no merit of yours: Nature did it. And then, after all, I go too fast in my conclusions: for what I yet know, you may be no better than the rest; you may have intolerable defects to counterbalance your few good points."

"And so may you," I thought. My eye met his as the idea crossed my mind: he seemed to read the glance, answering as if its import had been spoken as well as imagined —

"Yes, yes, you are right," said he; "I have plenty of faults of my own: I know it, and I don't wish to palliate them, I assure you. God wot I need not be too severe about others; I have a past existence, a series of deeds, a colour of life to contemplate within my own breast, which might well call my sneers and censures from my neighbours to myself. I started, or rather (for like other defaulters, I like to lay half the blame on ill fortune and adverse circumstances) was thrust on to a wrong tack at the age of one-and-twenty, and have never recovered the right course since: but I might have been very different; I might have been as good as you — wiser — almost as stainless. I envy you your peace of mind, your clean conscience, your unpolluted memory. Little girl, a memory without blot or contamination must be an exquisite treasure — an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment: is it not?"

"How was your memory when you were eighteen, sir?"

"All right then; limpid, salubrious: no gush of bilge water had turned it to fetid puddle. I was your equal at eighteen — quite your equal. Nature meant me to be, on the whole, a good man, Miss Eyre; one of the better kind, and you see I am not so. You would say you don't see it; at least I flatter myself I read as much in your eye (beware, by-the-bye, what you express with that organ; I am quick at interpreting its language). Then take my word for it, — I am not a villain: you are not to suppose that — not to attribute to me any such bad eminence; but, owing, I verily believe, rather to circumstances than to my natural bent, I am a trite commonplace sinner, hackneyed in all the poor petty dissipations with which the rich and worthless try to put on life. Do you wonder that I avow this to you? Know, that in the course of your future life you will often find yourself elected the involuntary confidant of your acquaintances' secrets: people will instinctively find out, as I have done, that it is not your forte to tell of yourself, but to listen while others talk of themselves; they will feel, too, that you listen with no malevolent scorn of their indiscretion, but with a kind of innate sympathy; not the less comforting and encouraging because it is very unobtrusive in its manifestations."

"How do you know? — how can you guess all this, sir?"

"I know it well; therefore I proceed almost as freely as if I were writing my thoughts in a diary. You would say, I should have been superior to circumstances; so I should — so I should; but you see I was not. When fate wronged me, I had not the wisdom to remain cool: I turned desperate; then I degenerated. Now, when any vicious simpleton excites my disgust by his paltry ribaldry, I cannot flatter myself that I am better than he: I am forced to confess that he and I are on a level. I wish I had stood firm — God knows I do! Dread remorse when you are tempted to err, Miss Eyre; remorse is the poison of life."

"Repentance is said to be its cure, sir."

"It is not its cure. Reformation may be its cure; and I could reform — I have strength yet for that — if — but where is the use of thinking of it, hampered, burdened, cursed as I am? Besides, since happiness is irrevocably denied me, I have a right to get pleasure out of life: and I *will* get it, cost what it may."

"Then you will degenerate still more, sir."

"Possibly: yet why should I, if I can get sweet, fresh pleasure? And I may get it as sweet and fresh as the wild honey the bee gathers on the moor."

"It will sting — it will taste bitter, sir."

"How do you know? — you never tried it. How very serious — how very solemn you look: and you are as ignorant of the matter as this cameo head" (taking one from the mantelpiece). "You have no right to preach to me, you neophyte, that have not passed the porch of life, and are absolutely unacquainted with its mysteries."

"I only remind you of your own words, sir: you said error brought remorse, and you pronounced remorse the poison of existence."

"And who talks of error now? I scarcely think the notion that flittered across my brain was an error. I believe it was an inspiration rather than a temptation: it was very genial, very soothing — I know that. Here it comes again! It is no devil, I assure you; or if it be, it has put on the robes of an angel of light. I think I must admit so fair a guest when it asks entrance to my heart."

"Distrust it, sir; it is not a true angel."

"Once more, how do you know? By what instinct do you pretend to distinguish between a fallen seraph of the abyss and a messenger from the eternal throne — between a guide and a seducer?"

"I judged by your countenance, sir, which was troubled when you said the suggestion had returned upon you. I feel sure it will work you more misery if you listen to it."

"Not at all — it bears the most gracious message in the world: for the rest, you are not my conscience-keeper, so don't make yourself uneasy. Here, come in, bonny wanderer!"

He said this as if he spoke to a vision, viewless to any eye but his own; then, folding his arms, which he had half extended, on his chest, he seemed to enclose in their embrace the invisible being.

"Now," he continued, again addressing me, "I have received the pilgrim — a disguised deity, as I verily believe. Already it has done me good: my heart was a sort of charnel; it will now be a shrine."

"To speak truth, sir, I don't understand you at all: I cannot keep up the conversation, because it has got out of my depth. Only one thing, I know: you said you were not as good as you should like to be, and that you regretted your own imperfection; — one thing I can comprehend: you intimated that to have a sullied memory was a perpetual bane. It seems to me, that if you tried hard, you would in time find it possible to become what you yourself would approve; and that if from this day you began with resolution to correct your thoughts and actions, you would in a few years have laid up a new and stainless store of recollections, to which you might revert with pleasure."

"Justly thought; rightly said, Miss Eyre; and, at this moment, I am paving hell with energy."

"Sir?"

"I am laying down good intentions, which I believe durable as flint. Certainly, my associates and pursuits shall be other than they have been."

"And better?"

"And better — so much better as pure ore is than foul dross. You seem to doubt me; I don't doubt myself: I know what my aim is, what my motives are; and at this moment I pass a law, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians, that both are right."

"They cannot be, sir, if they require a new statute to legalise them."

"They are, Miss Eyre, though they absolutely require a new statute: unheard-of combinations of circumstances demand unheard-of rules."

"That sounds a dangerous maxim, sir; because one can see at once that it is liable to abuse."

"Sententious sage! so it is: but I swear by my household gods not to abuse it."

"You are human and fallible."

"I am: so are you — what then?"

"The human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely intrusted."

"What power?"

"That of saying of any strange, unsanctioned line of action, — 'Let it be right.'"

"'Let it be right' — the very words: you have pronounced them."

"*May* it be right then," I said, as I rose, deeming it useless to continue a discourse which was all darkness to me; and, besides, sensible that the character of my interlocutor was beyond my penetration; at least, beyond its present reach; and feeling the uncertainty, the vague sense of insecurity, which accompanies a conviction of ignorance.

"Where are you going?"

"To put Adèle to bed: it is past her bedtime."

"You are afraid of me, because I talk like a Sphynx."

"Your language is enigmatical, sir: but though I am bewildered, I am certainly not afraid."

"You *are* afraid — your self-love dreads a blunder."

"In that sense I do feel apprehensive — I have no wish to talk nonsense."

"If you did, it would be in such a grave, quiet manner, I should mistake it for sense. Do you never laugh, Miss Eyre? Don't trouble yourself to answer — I see you laugh rarely; but you can laugh very merrily: believe me, you are not naturally austere, any more than I am naturally vicious. The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother — or father, or master, or what you will — to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly: but, in time, I think you will learn to be natural with me, as I find it impossible to be conventional with you; and then your looks and movements will have more vivacity and variety than they dare offer now. I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high. You are still bent on going?"

"It has struck nine, sir."

"Never mind, — wait a minute: Adèle is not ready to go to bed yet. My position, Miss Eyre, with my back to the fire, and my face to the room, favours observation. While talking to you, I have also occasionally watched Adèle (I have my own reasons for thinking her a curious study, — reasons that I may, nay, that I shall, impart to you some day). She pulled out of her box, about ten minutes ago, a little pink silk frock; rapture lit her face as she unfolded it; coquetry runs in her blood, blends with her brains, and seasons the marrow of her bones. 'Il faut que je l'essaie!' cried she, 'et à l'instant même!' and she rushed out of the room. She is now with Sophie, undergoing a robing process: in a few minutes she will re-enter; and I know what I shall see, — a miniature of Céline Varens, as she used to appear on the boards at the rising of — But never mind that. However, my tenderest feelings are about to receive a shock: such is my presentiment; stay now, to see whether it will be realised."

Ere long, Adèle's little foot was heard tripping across the hall. She entered, transformed as her guardian had predicted. A dress of rose-coloured satin, very short, and as full in the skirt as it could be gathered, replaced the brown frock she had previously worn; a wreath of rosebuds circled her forehead; her feet were dressed in silk stockings and small white satin sandals.

"Est-ce que ma robe va bien?" cried she, bounding forwards; "et mes souliers? et mes bas? Tenez, je crois que je vais danser!"

And spreading out her dress, she chasséed across the room till, having reached Mr. Rochester, she wheeled lightly round before him on tip-toe, then dropped on one knee at his feet, exclaiming —

"Monsieur, je vous remercie mille fois de votre bonté;" then rising, she added, "C'est comme cela que maman faisait, n'est-ce pas, monsieur?"

"Pre-cise-ly!" was the answer; "and, 'comme cela,' she charmed my English gold out of my British breeches' pocket. I have been green, too, Miss Eyre, — ay, grass green: not a more vernal tint freshens you now than once freshened me. My Spring is gone, however, but it has left me that French floweret on my hands, which, in some moods, I would fain be rid of. Not valuing now the root whence it sprang; having found that it was of a sort which nothing but gold dust could manure, I have but half a liking to the blossom, especially when it looks so artificial as just now. I keep it and rear it rather on the Roman Catholic principle of expiating numerous sins, great or small, by one good work. I'll explain all this some day. Good-night."

CHAPTER XV

Mr. Rochester did, on a future occasion, explain it. It was one afternoon, when he chanced to meet me and Adèle in the grounds: and while she played with Pilot and her shuttlecock, he asked me to walk up and down a long beech avenue within sight of her.

He then said that she was the daughter of a French opera-dancer, Céline Varens, towards whom he had once cherished what he called a "*grande passion*." This passion Céline had professed to return with even superior ardour. He thought himself her idol, ugly as he was: he believed, as he said, that she preferred his "*taille d'athlète*" to the elegance of the Apollo Belvidere.

"And, Miss Eyre, so much was I flattered by this preference of the Gallic sylph for her British gnome, that I installed her in an hotel; gave her a complete establishment of servants, a carriage, cashmeres, diamonds, dentelles, &c. In short, I began the process of ruining myself in the received style, like any other spoony. I had not, it seems, the originality to chalk out a new road to shame and destruction, but trode the old track with stupid exactness not to deviate an inch from the beaten centre. I had — as I deserved to have — the fate of all other spoonies. Happening to call one evening when Céline did not expect me, I found her out; but it was a warm night, and I was tired with strolling through Paris, so I sat down in her boudoir; happy to breathe the air consecrated so lately by her presence. No, — I exaggerate; I never thought there was any consecrating virtue about her: it was rather a sort of pastille perfume she had left; a scent of musk and amber, than an odour of sanctity. I was just beginning to stifle with the fumes of conservatory flowers and sprinkled essences, when I bethought myself to open the window and step out on to the balcony. It was moonlight and gaslight besides, and very still and serene. The balcony was furnished with a chair or two; I sat down, and took out a cigar, — I will take one now, if you will excuse me."

Here ensued a pause, filled up by the producing and lighting of a cigar; having placed it to his lips and breathed a trail of Havannah incense on the freezing and sunless air, he went on —

"I liked bonbons too in those days, Miss Eyre, and I was *croquant* — (overlook the barbarism) — *croquant* chocolate comfits, and smoking alternately, watching meantime the equipages that rolled along the fashionable streets towards the neighbouring opera-house, when in an elegant close carriage drawn by a beautiful pair of English horses, and distinctly seen in the brilliant city-night, I recognised the 'voiture' I had given Céline. She was returning: of course my heart thumped with impatience against the iron rails I leant upon. The carriage stopped, as I had expected, at the hotel door; my flame (that is the very word for an opera inamorata) alighted: though muffed in a cloak — an unnecessary encumbrance, by-the-bye, on so warm a June evening — I knew her instantly by her little foot, seen peeping from the skirt of her dress, as she skipped from the carriage-step. Bending over the balcony, I was about to murmur 'Mon ange' — in a tone, of course, which should be audible to the ear of love alone — when a figure jumped from the carriage after her; cloaked also; but that was a spurred heel which had rung on the pavement, and that was a hatted head which now passed under the arched *porte cochère* of the hotel.

"You never felt jealousy, did you, Miss Eyre? Of course not: I need not ask you; because you never felt love. You have both sentiments yet to experience: your soul sleeps; the shock is yet to be given which shall waken it. You think all existence lapses in as quiet a flow as that in which your youth has hitherto slid away. Floating on with closed eyes and muffled ears, you neither see the rocks bristling not far off in the bed of the flood, nor hear the breakers boil at their base. But I tell you — and you may mark my words — you will come some day to a craggy pass in the channel, where the whole of life's stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag points, or lifted up and borne on by some master-wave into a calmer current — as I am now.

"I like this day; I like that sky of steel; I like the sternness and stillness of the world under this frost. I like Thornfield, its antiquity, its retirement, its old crow-trees and thorn-trees, its grey façade, and lines of dark windows reflecting that metal welkin: and yet how long have I abhorred the very thought of it, shunned it like a great plague-house? How I do still abhor — "

He ground his teeth and was silent: he arrested his step and struck his boot against the hard ground. Some hated thought seemed to have him in its grip, and to hold him so tightly that he could not advance.

We were ascending the avenue when he thus paused; the hall was before us. Lifting his eye to its battlements, he cast over them a glare such as I never saw before or since. Pain, shame, ire, impatience, disgust, detestation, seemed momentarily to hold a quivering conflict in the large pupil dilating under his ebon eyebrow. Wild was the wrestle which should be paramount; but another feeling rose and triumphed: something hard and cynical: self-willed and resolute: it settled his passion and petrified his countenance: he went on —

"During the moment I was silent, Miss Eyre, I was arranging a point with my destiny. She stood there, by that beech-trunk — a hag like one of those who appeared to Macbeth on the heath of Forres. 'You like Thornfield?' she said, lifting her finger; and then she wrote in the air a memento, which ran in lurid hieroglyphics all along the house-front, between the upper and lower row of windows, 'Like it if you can! Like it if you dare!'

"'I will like it,' said I; 'I dare like it;' and" (he subjoined moodily) "I will keep my word; I will break obstacles to happiness, to goodness — yes, goodness. I wish to be a better man than I have been, than I am; as Job's leviathan broke the spear, the dart, and the habergeon, hindrances which others count as iron and brass, I will esteem but straw and rotten wood."

Adèle here ran before him with her shuttlecock. "Away!" he cried harshly; "keep at a distance, child; or go in to Sophie!" Continuing then to pursue his walk in silence, I ventured to recall him to the point whence he had abruptly diverged —

"Did you leave the balcony, sir," I asked, "when Mdlle. Varens entered?"

I almost expected a rebuff for this hardly well-timed question, but, on the contrary, waking out of his scowling abstraction, he turned his eyes towards me, and the shade seemed to clear off his brow. "Oh, I had forgotten Céline! Well, to resume. When I saw my charmer thus come in accompanied by a cavalier, I seemed to hear a hiss, and the green snake of jealousy, rising on undulating coils from the moonlit balcony, glided within my waistcoat, and ate its way in two minutes to my heart's core. Strange!" he exclaimed, suddenly starting again from the point. "Strange that I should choose you for the confidant of all this, young lady; passing strange that you should listen to me quietly, as if it were the most usual thing in the world for a man like me to tell stories of his opera-mistresses to a quaint, inexperienced girl like you! But the last singularity explains the first, as I intimated once before: you, with your gravity, considerateness, and caution were made to be the recipient of secrets. Besides, I know what sort of a mind I have placed in communication with my own: I know it is one not liable to take infection: it is a peculiar mind: it is a unique one. Happily I do not mean to harm it: but, if I did, it would not take harm from me. The more you and I converse, the better; for while I cannot blight you, you may refresh me." After this digression he proceeded —

"I remained in the balcony. 'They will come to her boudoir, no doubt,' thought I: 'let me prepare an ambush.' So putting my hand in through the open window, I drew the curtain over it, leaving only an opening through which I could take observations; then I closed the casement, all but a chink just wide enough to furnish an outlet to lovers' whispered vows: then I stole back to my chair; and as I resumed it the pair came in. My eye was quickly at the aperture. Céline's chamber-maid entered, lit a lamp, left it on the table, and withdrew. The couple were thus revealed to me clearly: both removed their cloaks, and there was 'the Varens,' shining in satin and jewels, — my gifts of course, — and there was her companion in an officer's uniform; and I knew him for a young roué of a vicomte — a brainless and vicious youth whom I had sometimes met in society, and had never thought of hating because I despised him so absolutely. On recognising him, the fang of the snake Jealousy was instantly broken; because at the same moment my love for Céline sank under an extinguisher. A woman who could betray me for such a rival was not worth contending for; she deserved only scorn; less, however, than I, who had been her dupe.

"They began to talk; their conversation eased me completely: frivolous, mercenary, heartless, and senseless, it was rather calculated to weary than enrage a listener. A card of mine lay on the table; this being perceived, brought my name under discussion. Neither of them possessed energy or wit to belabour me soundly, but they insulted me as coarsely as they could in their little way: especially Céline, who even waxed rather brilliant on my personal defects — deformities she termed them. Now it had been her custom to launch out into fervent admiration of what she called my '*beauté mâle*:' wherein she differed diametrically from you, who told me point-blank, at the second interview, that you did not think me handsome. The contrast struck me at the time and — "

Adèle here came running up again.

"Monsieur, John has just been to say that your agent has called and wishes to see you."

"Ah! in that case I must abridge. Opening the window, I walked in upon them; liberated Céline from my protection; gave her notice to vacate her hotel; offered her a purse for immediate exigencies; disregarded screams, hysterics, prayers, protestations, convulsions; made an appointment with the vicomte for a meeting at the Bois de Boulogne. Next morning I had the pleasure of encountering him; left a bullet in one of his poor etiolated arms, feeble as the wing of a chicken in the pip, and then thought I had done with the whole crew. But unluckily the Varens, six months before, had given me this filette Adèle, who, she affirmed, was my daughter; and perhaps she may be, though I see no proofs of such grim paternity written in her countenance: Pilot is more like me than she. Some years after I had broken with the mother, she abandoned her child, and ran away to Italy with a musician or singer. I acknowledged no natural claim on Adèle's part to be supported by me, nor do I now acknowledge any, for I am not her father; but hearing that she was quite destitute, I e'en took the poor thing out of the slime and mud of Paris, and transplanted it here, to grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden. Mrs. Fairfax found you to train it; but now you know that it is the illegitimate offspring of a French opera-girl, you will perhaps think differently of your post and protégée: you will be coming to me some day with notice that you have found another place — that you beg me to look out for a new governess, &c. — Eh?"

"No: Adèle is not answerable for either her mother's faults or yours: I have a regard for her; and now that I know she is, in a sense, parentless — forsaken by her mother and disowned by you, sir — I shall cling closer to her than before. How could I possibly prefer the spoilt pet of a wealthy family, who would hate her governess as a nuisance, to a lonely little orphan, who leans towards her as a friend?"

"Oh, that is the light in which you view it! Well, I must go in now; and you too: it darkens."

But I stayed out a few minutes longer with Adèle and Pilot — ran a race with her, and played a game of battledore and shuttlecock. When we went in, and I had removed her bonnet and coat, I took her on my knee; kept her there an hour, allowing her to prattle as she liked: not rebuking even some little freedoms and trivialities into which she was apt to stray when much noticed, and which betrayed in her a superficiality of character, inherited probably from her mother, hardly congenial to an English mind. Still she had her merits; and I was disposed to appreciate all that was good in her to the utmost. I sought in her countenance and features a likeness to Mr. Rochester, but found none: no trait, no turn of expression announced relationship. It was a pity: if she could but have been proved to resemble him, he would have thought more of her.

It was not till after I had withdrawn to my own chamber for the night, that I steadily reviewed the tale Mr. Rochester had told me. As he had said, there was probably nothing at all extraordinary in the substance of the narrative itself: a wealthy Englishman's passion for a French dancer, and her treachery to him, were every-day matters enough, no doubt, in society; but there was something decidedly strange in the paroxysm of emotion which had suddenly seized him when he was in the act of expressing the present contentment of his mood, and his newly revived pleasure in the old hall and its environs. I meditated wonderingly on this incident; but gradually quitting it, as I found it for the present inexplicable, I turned to the consideration of my master's manner to myself. The confidence he had thought fit to repose in me seemed a tribute to my discretion: I regarded and accepted it as such. His deportment had now for some weeks been more uniform towards me than at the first. I never seemed in his way; he did not take fits of chilling hauteur: when he met me unexpectedly, the encounter seemed welcome; he had always a word and sometimes a smile for me: when summoned by formal invitation to his presence, I was honoured by a cordiality of reception that made me feel I really possessed the power to amuse him, and that these evening conferences were sought as much for his pleasure as for my benefit.

I, indeed, talked comparatively little, but I heard him talk with relish. It was his nature to be communicative; he liked to open to a mind unacquainted with the world glimpses of its scenes and ways (I do not mean its corrupt scenes and wicked ways, but such as derived their interest from the great scale on which they were acted, the strange novelty by which they were characterised); and I had a keen delight in receiving the new ideas he offered, in imagining the new pictures he portrayed, and following him in thought through the new regions he disclosed, never startled or troubled by one noxious allusion.

The ease of his manner freed me from painful restraint: the friendly frankness, as correct as cordial, with which he treated me, drew me to him. I felt at times as if he were my relation rather than my master: yet he was imperious sometimes still; but I did not mind that; I saw it was his way. So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred: my thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength.

And was Mr. Rochester now ugly in my eyes? No, reader: gratitude, and many associations, all pleasurable and genial, made his face the object I best liked to see; his presence in a room was more cheering than the brightest fire. Yet I had not forgotten his faults; indeed, I could not, for he brought them frequently before me. He was proud, sardonic, harsh to inferiority of every description: in my secret soul I knew that his great kindness to me was balanced by unjust severity to many others. He was moody, too; unaccountably so; I more than once, when sent for to read to him, found him sitting in his library alone, with his head bent on his folded arms; and, when he looked up, a morose, almost a malignant, scowl blackened his features. But I believed that his moodiness, his harshness, and his former faults of morality (I say *former*, for now he seemed corrected of them) had their source in some cruel cross of fate. I believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged. I thought there were excellent materials in him; though for the present they hung together somewhat spoiled and tangled. I cannot deny that I grieved for his grief, whatever that was, and would have given much to assuage it.

Though I had now extinguished my candle and was laid down in bed, I could not sleep for thinking of his look when he paused in the avenue, and told how his destiny had risen up before him, and dared him to be happy at Thornfield.

“Why not?” I asked myself. “What alienates him from the house? Will he leave it again soon? Mrs. Fairfax said he seldom stayed here longer than a fortnight at a time; and he has now been resident eight weeks. If he does go, the change will be doleful. Suppose he should be absent spring, summer, and autumn: how joyless sunshine and fine days will seem!”

I hardly know whether I had slept or not after this musing; at any rate, I started wide awake on hearing a vague murmur, peculiar and lugubrious, which sounded, I thought, just above me. I wished I had kept my candle burning: the night was drearily dark; my spirits were depressed. I rose and sat up in bed, listening. The sound was hushed.

I tried again to sleep; but my heart beat anxiously: my inward tranquillity was broken. The clock, far down in the hall, struck two. Just then it seemed my chamber-door was touched; as if fingers had swept the panels in groping a way along the dark gallery outside. I said, “Who is there?” Nothing answered. I was chilled with fear.

All at once I remembered that it might be Pilot, who, when the kitchen-door chanced to be left open, not unfrequently found his way up to the threshold of Mr. Rochester’s chamber: I had seen him lying there myself in the mornings. The idea calmed me somewhat: I lay down. Silence composes the nerves; and as an unbroken hush now reigned again through the whole house, I began to feel the return of slumber. But it was not fated that I should sleep that night. A dream had scarcely approached my ear, when it fled affrighted, scared by a marrow-freezing incident enough.

This was a demoniac laugh — low, suppressed, and deep — uttered, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first the goblin-laugher stood at my bedside — or rather, crouched by my pillow: but I rose, looked round, and could see nothing; while, as I still gazed, the unnatural sound was reiterated: and I knew it came from behind the panels. My first impulse was to rise and fasten the bolt; my next, again to cry out, "Who is there?"

Something gurgled and moaned. Ere long, steps retreated up the gallery towards the third-storey staircase: a door had lately been made to shut in that staircase; I heard it open and close, and all was still.

"Was that Grace Poole? and is she possessed with a devil?" thought I. Impossible now to remain longer by myself: I must go to Mrs. Fairfax. I hurried on my frock and a shawl; I withdrew the bolt and opened the door with a trembling hand. There was a candle burning just outside, and on the matting in the gallery. I was surprised at this circumstance: but still more was I amazed to perceive the air quite dim, as if filled with smoke; and, while looking to the right hand and left, to find whence these blue wreaths issued, I became further aware of a strong smell of burning.

Something creaked: it was a door ajar; and that door was Mr. Rochester's, and the smoke rushed in a cloud from thence. I thought no more of Mrs. Fairfax; I thought no more of Grace Poole, or the laugh: in an instant, I was within the chamber. Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In the midst of blaze and vapour, Mr. Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep.

"Wake! wake!" I cried. I shook him, but he only murmured and turned: the smoke had stupefied him. Not a moment could be lost: the very sheets were kindling, I rushed to his basin and ewer; fortunately, one was wide and the other deep, and both were filled with water. I heaved them up, deluged the bed and its occupant, flew back to my own room, brought my own water-jug, baptized the couch afresh, and, by God's aid, succeeded in extinguishing the flames which were devouring it.

The hiss of the quenched element, the breakage of a pitcher which I flung from my hand when I had emptied it, and, above all, the splash of the shower-bath I had liberally bestowed, roused Mr. Rochester at last. Though it was now dark, I knew he was awake; because I heard him fulminating strange anathemas at finding himself lying in a pool of water.

"Is there a flood?" he cried.

"No, sir," I answered; "but there has been a fire: get up, do; you are quenched now; I will fetch you a candle."

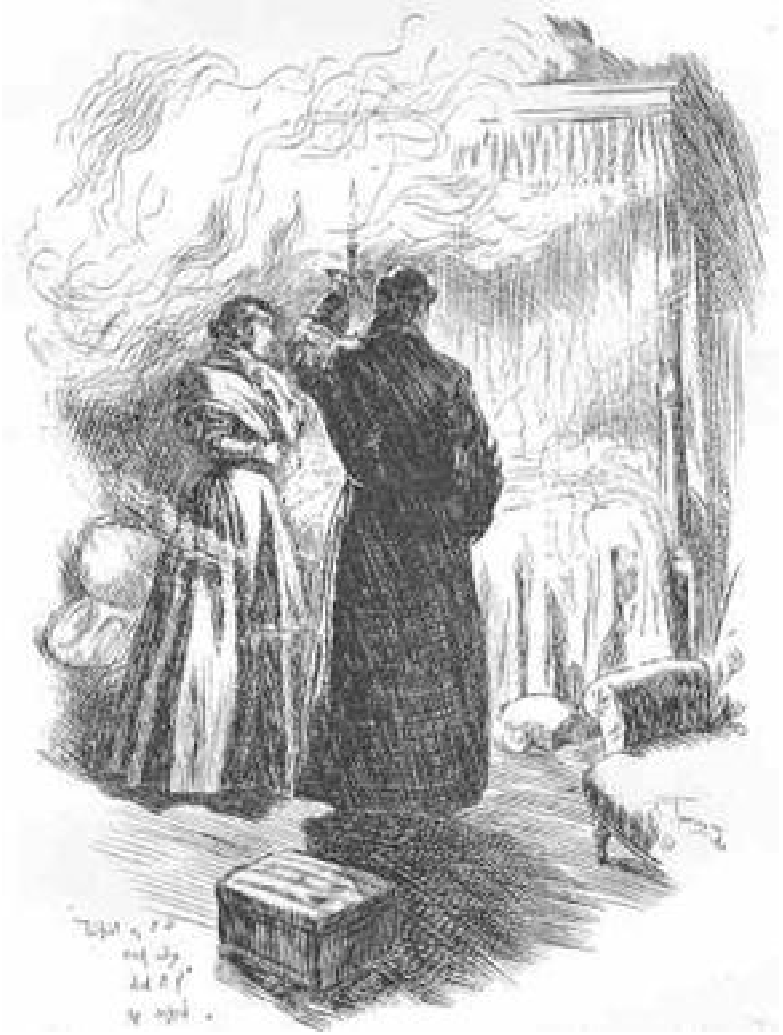
"In the name of all the elves in Christendom, is that Jane Eyre?" he demanded. "What have you done with me, witch, sorceress? Who is in the room besides you? Have you plotted to drown me?"

"I will fetch you a candle, sir; and, in Heaven's name, get up. Somebody has plotted something: you cannot too soon find out who and what it is."

"There! I am up now; but at your peril you fetch a candle yet: wait two minutes till I get into some dry garments, if any dry there be — yes, here is my dressing-gown. Now run!"

I did run; I brought the candle which still remained in the gallery. He took it from my hand, held it up, and surveyed the bed, all blackened and scorched, the sheets drenched, the carpet round swimming in water.

"What is it? and who did it?" he asked. I briefly related to him what had transpired: the strange laugh I had heard in the gallery: the step ascending to the third storey; the smoke, — the smell of fire which had conducted me to his room; in what state I had found matters there, and how I had deluged him with all the water I could lay hands on.



He listened very gravely; his face, as I went on, expressed more concern than astonishment; he did not immediately speak when I had concluded.

"Shall I call Mrs. Fairfax?" I asked.

"Mrs. Fairfax? No; what the deuce would you call her for? What can she do? Let her sleep unmolested."

"Then I will fetch Leah, and wake John and his wife."

"Not at all: just be still. You have a shawl on. If you are not warm enough, you may take my cloak yonder; wrap it about you, and sit down in the arm-chair: there, — I will put it on. Now place your feet on the stool, to keep them out of the wet. I am going to leave you a few minutes. I shall take the candle. Remain where you are till I return; be as still as a mouse. I must pay a visit to the second storey. Don't move, remember, or call any one."

He went: I watched the light withdraw. He passed up the gallery very softly, unclosed the staircase door with as little noise as possible, shut it after him, and the last ray vanished. I was left in total darkness. I listened for some noise, but heard nothing. A very long time elapsed. I grew weary: it was cold, in spite of the cloak; and then I did not see the use of staying, as I was not to rouse the house. I was on the point of risking Mr. Rochester's displeasure by disobeying his orders, when the light once more gleamed dimly on the gallery wall, and I heard his unshod feet tread the matting. "I hope it is he," thought I, "and not something worse."

He re-entered, pale and very gloomy. "I have found it all out," said he, setting his candle down on the washstand; "it is as I thought."

"How, sir?"

He made no reply, but stood with his arms folded, looking on the ground. At the end of a few minutes he inquired in rather a peculiar tone —

"I forget whether you said you saw anything when you opened your chamber door."

"No, sir, only the candlestick on the ground."

"But you heard an odd laugh? You have heard that laugh before, I should think, or something like it?"

"Yes, sir: there is a woman who sews here, called Grace Poole, — she laughs in that way. She is a singular person."

"Just so. Grace Poole — you have guessed it. She is, as you say, singular — very. Well, I shall reflect on the subject. Meantime, I am glad that you are the only person, besides myself, acquainted with the precise details of to-night's incident. You are no talking fool: say nothing about it. I will account for this state of affairs" (pointing to the bed): "and now return to your own room. I shall do very well on the sofa in the library for the rest of the night. It is near four: — in two hours the servants will be up."

"Good-night, then, sir," said I, departing.

He seemed surprised — very inconsistently so, as he had just told me to go.

"What!" he exclaimed, "are you quitting me already, and in that way?"

"You said I might go, sir."

"But not without taking leave; not without a word or two of acknowledgment and good-will: not, in short, in that brief, dry fashion. Why, you have saved my life! — snatched me from a horrible and excruciating death! and you walk past me as if we were mutual strangers! At least shake hands."

He held out his hand; I gave him mine: he took it first in one, them in both his own.

"You have saved my life: I have a pleasure in owing you so immense a debt. I cannot say more. Nothing else that has being would have been tolerable to me in the character of creditor for such an obligation: but you: it is different; — I feel your benefits no burden, Jane."

He paused; gazed at me: words almost visible trembled on his lips, — but his voice was checked.

"Good-night again, sir. There is no debt, benefit, burden, obligation, in the case."

"I knew," he continued, "you would do me good in some way, at some time; — I saw it in your eyes when I first beheld you: their expression and smile did not" — (again he stopped) — "did not" (he proceeded hastily) "strike delight to my very inmost heart so for nothing. People talk of natural sympathies; I have heard of good genii: there are grains of truth in the wildest fable. My cherished preserver, goodnight!"

Strange energy was in his voice, strange fire in his look.

"I am glad I happened to be awake," I said: and then I was going.

"What! you *will* go?"

"I am cold, sir."

"Cold? Yes, — and standing in a pool! Go, then, Jane; go!" But he still retained my hand, and I could not free it. I bethought myself of an expedient.

"I think I hear Mrs. Fairfax move, sir," said I.

"Well, leave me:" he relaxed his fingers, and I was gone.

I regained my couch, but never thought of sleep. Till morning dawned I was tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy. I thought sometimes I saw beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as the hills of Beulah; and now and then a freshening gale, wakened by hope, bore my spirit triumphantly towards the bourne: but I could not reach it, even in fancy — a counteracting breeze blew off land, and continually drove me back. Sense would resist delirium: judgment would warn passion. Too feverish to rest, I rose as soon as day dawned.

CHAPTER XVI

I both wished and feared to see Mr. Rochester on the day which followed this sleepless night: I wanted to hear his voice again, yet feared to meet his eye. During the early part of the morning, I momentarily expected his coming; he was not in the frequent habit of entering the schoolroom, but he did step in for a few minutes sometimes, and I had the impression that he was sure to visit it that day.

But the morning passed just as usual: nothing happened to interrupt the quiet course of Adèle's studies; only soon after breakfast, I heard some bustle in the neighbourhood of Mr. Rochester's chamber, Mrs. Fairfax's voice, and Leah's, and the cook's — that is, John's wife — and even John's own gruff tones. There were exclamations of "What a mercy master was not burnt in his bed!" "It is always dangerous to keep a candle lit at night." "How providential that he had presence of mind to think of the water-jug!" "I wonder he waked nobody!" "It is to be hoped he will not take cold with sleeping on the library sofa," &c.

To much confabulation succeeded a sound of scrubbing and setting to rights; and when I passed the room, in going downstairs to dinner, I saw through the open door that all was again restored to complete order; only the bed was stripped of its hangings. Leah stood up in the window-seat, rubbing the panes of glass dimmed with smoke. I was about to address her, for I wished to know what account had been given of the affair: but, on advancing, I saw a second person in the chamber — a woman sitting on a chair by the bedside, and sewing rings to new curtains. That woman was no other than Grace Poole.

There she sat, staid and taciturn-looking, as usual, in her brown stuff gown, her check apron, white handkerchief, and cap. She was intent on her work, in which her whole thoughts seemed absorbed: on her hard forehead, and in her commonplace features, was nothing either of the paleness or desperation one would have expected to see marking the countenance of a woman who had attempted murder, and whose intended victim had followed her last night to her lair, and (as I believed), charged her with the crime she wished to perpetrate. I was amazed — confounded. She looked up, while I still gazed at her: no start, no increase or failure of colour betrayed emotion, consciousness of guilt, or fear of detection. She said "Good morning, Miss," in her usual phlegmatic and brief manner; and taking up another ring and more tape, went on with her sewing.

"I will put her to some test," thought I: "such absolute impenetrability is past comprehension."

"Good morning, Grace," I said. "Has anything happened here? I thought

I heard the servants all talking together a while ago."

"Only master had been reading in his bed last night; he fell asleep with his candle lit, and the curtains got on fire; but, fortunately, he awoke before the bed-clothes or the wood-work caught, and contrived to quench the flames with the water in the ewer."

"A strange affair!" I said, in a low voice: then, looking at her fixedly — "Did Mr. Rochester wake nobody? Did no one hear him move?"

She again raised her eyes to me, and this time there was something of consciousness in their expression. She seemed to examine me warily; then she answered —

"The servants sleep so far off, you know, Miss, they would not be likely to hear. Mrs. Fairfax's room and yours are the nearest to master's; but Mrs. Fairfax said she heard nothing: when people get elderly, they often sleep heavy." She paused, and then added, with a sort of assumed indifference, but still in a marked and significant tone — "But you are young, Miss; and I should say a light sleeper: perhaps you may have heard a noise?"

"I did," said I, dropping my voice, so that Leah, who was still polishing the panes, could not hear me, "and at first I thought it was Pilot: but Pilot cannot laugh; and I am certain I heard a laugh, and a strange one."

She took a new needleful of thread, waxed it carefully, threaded her needle with a steady hand, and then observed, with perfect composure —

"It is hardly likely master would laugh, I should think, Miss, when he was in such danger: You must have been dreaming."

"I was not dreaming," I said, with some warmth, for her brazen coolness provoked me. Again she looked at me; and with the same scrutinising and conscious eye.

"Have you told master that you heard a laugh?" she inquired.

"I have not had the opportunity of speaking to him this morning."

"You did not think of opening your door and looking out into the gallery?" she further asked.

She appeared to be cross-questioning me, attempting to draw from me information unawares. The idea struck me that if she discovered I knew or suspected her guilt, she would be playing of some of her malignant pranks on me; I thought it advisable to be on my guard.

"On the contrary," said I, "I bolted my door."

"Then you are not in the habit of bolting your door every night before you get into bed?"

"Fiend! she wants to know my habits, that she may lay her plans accordingly!" Indignation again prevailed over prudence: I replied sharply, "Hitherto I have often omitted to fasten the bolt: I did not think it necessary. I was not aware any danger or annoyance was to be dreaded at Thornfield Hall: but in future" (and I laid marked stress on the words) "I shall take good care to make all secure before I venture to lie down."

"It will be wise so to do," was her answer: "this neighbourhood is as quiet as any I know, and I never heard of the hall being attempted by robbers since it was a house; though there are hundreds of pounds' worth of plate in the plate-closet, as is well known. And you see, for such a large house, there are very few servants, because master has never lived here much; and when he does come, being a bachelor, he needs little waiting on: but I always think it best to err on the safe side; a door is soon fastened, and it is as well to have a drawn bolt between one and any mischief that may be about. A deal of people, Miss, are for trusting all to Providence; but I say Providence will not dispense with the means, though He often blesses them when they are used discreetly." And here she closed her harangue: a long one for her, and uttered with the demureness of a Quakeress.

I still stood absolutely dumfoundered at what appeared to me her miraculous self-possession and most inscrutable hypocrisy, when the cook entered.

"Mrs. Poole," said she, addressing Grace, "the servants' dinner will soon be ready: will you come down?"

"No; just put my pint of porter and bit of pudding on a tray, and I'll carry it upstairs."

"You'll have some meat?"

"Just a morsel, and a taste of cheese, that's all."

"And the sago?"

"Never mind it at present: I shall be coming down before teatime: I'll make it myself."

The cook here turned to me, saying that Mrs. Fairfax was waiting for me: so I departed.

I hardly heard Mrs. Fairfax's account of the curtain conflagration during dinner, so much was I occupied in puzzling my brains over the enigmatical character of Grace Poole, and still more in pondering the problem of her position at Thornfield and questioning why she had not been given into custody that morning, or, at the very least, dismissed from her master's service. He had almost as much as declared his conviction of her criminality last night: what mysterious cause withheld him from accusing her? Why had he enjoined me, too, to secrecy? It was strange: a bold, vindictive, and haughty gentleman seemed somehow in the power of one of the meanest of his dependants; so much in her power, that even when she lifted her hand against his life, he dared not openly charge her with the attempt, much less punish her for it.

Had Grace been young and handsome, I should have been tempted to think that tenderer feelings than prudence or fear influenced Mr. Rochester in her behalf; but, hard-favoured and matronly as she was, the idea could not be admitted. "Yet," I reflected, "she has been young once; her youth would be contemporary with her master's: Mrs. Fairfax told me once, she had lived here many years. I don't think she can ever have been pretty; but, for aught I know, she may possess originality and strength of character to compensate for the want of personal advantages. Mr. Rochester is an amateur of the decided and eccentric: Grace is eccentric at least. What if a former caprice (a freak very possible to a nature so sudden and headstrong as his) has delivered him into her power, and she now exercises over his actions a secret influence, the result of his own indiscretion, which he cannot shake off, and dare not disregard?" But, having reached this point of conjecture, Mrs. Poole's square, flat figure, and uncomely, dry, even coarse face, recurred so distinctly to my mind's eye, that I thought, "No; impossible! my supposition cannot be correct. Yet," suggested the secret voice which talks to us in our own hearts, "you are not beautiful either, and perhaps Mr. Rochester approves you: at any rate, you have often felt as if he did; and last night — remember his words; remember his look; remember his voice!"

I well remembered all; language, glance, and tone seemed at the moment vividly renewed. I was now in the schoolroom; Adèle was drawing; I bent over her and directed her pencil. She looked up with a sort of start.

"Qu' avez-vous, mademoiselle?" said she. "Vos doigts tremblent comme la feuille, et vos joues sont rouges: mais, rouges comme des cerises!"

"I am hot, Adèle, with stooping!" She went on sketching; I went on thinking.

I hastened to drive from my mind the hateful notion I had been conceiving respecting Grace Poole; it disgusted me. I compared myself with her, and found we were different. Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a lady; and she spoke truth — I was a lady. And now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me; I had more colour and more flesh, more life, more vivacity, because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments.

"Evening approaches," said I, as I looked towards the window. "I have never heard Mr. Rochester's voice or step in the house to-day; but surely I shall see him before night: I feared the meeting in the morning; now I desire it, because expectation has been so long baffled that it is grown impatient."

When dusk actually closed, and when Adèle left me to go and play in the nursery with Sophie, I did most keenly desire it. I listened for the bell to ring below; I listened for Leah coming up with a message; I fancied sometimes I heard Mr. Rochester's own tread, and I turned to the door, expecting it to open and admit him. The door remained shut; darkness only came in through the window. Still it was not late; he often sent for me at seven and eight o'clock, and it was yet but six. Surely I should not be wholly disappointed to-night, when I had so many things to say to him! I wanted again to introduce the subject of Grace Poole, and to hear what he would answer; I wanted to ask him plainly if he really believed it was she who had made last night's hideous attempt; and if so, why he kept her wickedness a secret. It little mattered whether my curiosity irritated him; I knew the pleasure of vexing and soothing him by turns; it was one I chiefly delighted in, and a sure instinct always prevented me from going too far; beyond the verge of provocation I never ventured; on the extreme brink I liked well to try my skill. Retaining every minute form of respect, every propriety of my station, I could still meet him in argument without fear or uneasy restraint; this suited both him and me.

A tread creaked on the stairs at last. Leah made her appearance; but it was only to intimate that tea was ready in Mrs. Fairfax's room. Thither I repaired, glad at least to go downstairs; for that brought me, I imagined, nearer to Mr. Rochester's presence.

"You must want your tea," said the good lady, as I joined her; "you ate so little at dinner. I am afraid," she continued, "you are not well to-day: you look flushed and feverish."

"Oh, quite well! I never felt better."

"Then you must prove it by evincing a good appetite; will you fill the teapot while I knit off this needle?" Having completed her task, she rose to draw down the blind, which she had hitherto kept up, by way, I suppose, of making the most of daylight, though dusk was now fast deepening into total obscurity.

"It is fair to-night," said she, as she looked through the panes, "though not starlight; Mr. Rochester has, on the whole, had a favourable day for his journey."

"Journey! — Is Mr. Rochester gone anywhere? I did not know he was out."

"Oh, he set off the moment he had breakfasted! He is gone to the Leas, Mr. Eshton's place, ten miles on the other side Millcote. I believe there is quite a party assembled there; Lord Ingram, Sir George Lynn, Colonel Dent, and others."

"Do you expect him back to-night?"

"No — nor to-morrow either; I should think he is very likely to stay a week or more: when these fine, fashionable people get together, they are so surrounded by elegance and gaiety, so well provided with all that can please and entertain, they are in no hurry to separate. Gentlemen especially are often in request on such occasions; and Mr. Rochester is so talented and so lively in society, that I believe he is a general favourite: the ladies are very fond of him; though you would not think his appearance calculated to recommend him particularly in their eyes: but I suppose his acquirements and abilities, perhaps his wealth and good blood, make amends for any little fault of look."

"Are there ladies at the Leas?"

"There are Mrs. Eshton and her three daughters — very elegant young ladies indeed; and there are the Honourable Blanche and Mary Ingram, most beautiful women, I suppose: indeed I have seen Blanche, six or seven years since, when she was a girl of eighteen. She came here to a Christmas ball and party Mr. Rochester gave. You should have seen the dining-room that day — how richly it was decorated, how brilliantly lit up! I should think there were fifty ladies and gentlemen present — all of the first county families; and Miss Ingram was considered the belle of the evening."

"You saw her, you say, Mrs. Fairfax: what was she like?"

“Yes, I saw her. The dining-room doors were thrown open; and, as it was Christmas-time, the servants were allowed to assemble in the hall, to hear some of the ladies sing and play. Mr. Rochester would have me to come in, and I sat down in a quiet corner and watched them. I never saw a more splendid scene: the ladies were magnificently dressed; most of them — at least most of the younger ones — looked handsome; but Miss Ingram was certainly the queen.”

“And what was she like?”

“Tall, fine bust, sloping shoulders; long, graceful neck: olive complexion, dark and clear; noble features; eyes rather like Mr. Rochester’s: large and black, and as brilliant as her jewels. And then she had such a fine head of hair; raven-black and so becomingly arranged: a crown of thick plaits behind, and in front the longest, the glossiest curls I ever saw. She was dressed in pure white; an amber-coloured scarf was passed over her shoulder and across her breast, tied at the side, and descending in long, fringed ends below her knee. She wore an amber-coloured flower, too, in her hair: it contrasted well with the jetty mass of her curls.”

“She was greatly admired, of course?”

“Yes, indeed: and not only for her beauty, but for her accomplishments. She was one of the ladies who sang: a gentleman accompanied her on the piano. She and Mr. Rochester sang a duet.”

“Mr. Rochester? I was not aware he could sing.”

“Oh! he has a fine bass voice, and an excellent taste for music.”

“And Miss Ingram: what sort of a voice had she?”

“A very rich and powerful one: she sang delightfully; it was a treat to listen to her; — and she played afterwards. I am no judge of music, but Mr. Rochester is; and I heard him say her execution was remarkably good.”

“And this beautiful and accomplished lady, she is not yet married?”

“It appears not: I fancy neither she nor her sister have very large fortunes. Old Lord Ingram’s estates were chiefly entailed, and the eldest son came in for everything almost.”

“But I wonder no wealthy nobleman or gentleman has taken a fancy to her: Mr. Rochester, for instance. He is rich, is he not?”

“Oh! yes. But you see there is a considerable difference in age: Mr. Rochester is nearly forty; she is but twenty-five.”

“What of that? More unequal matches are made every day.”

“True: yet I should scarcely fancy Mr. Rochester would entertain an idea of the sort. But you eat nothing: you have scarcely tasted since you began tea.”

“No: I am too thirsty to eat. Will you let me have another cup?”

I was about again to revert to the probability of a union between Mr. Rochester and the beautiful Blanche; but Adèle came in, and the conversation was turned into another channel.

When once more alone, I reviewed the information I had got; looked into my heart, examined its thoughts and feelings, and endeavoured to bring back with a strict hand such as had been straying through imagination's boundless and trackless waste, into the safe fold of common sense.

Arraigned at my own bar, Memory having given her evidence of the hopes, wishes, sentiments I had been cherishing since last night — of the general state of mind in which I had indulged for nearly a fortnight past; Reason having come forward and told, in her own quiet way a plain, unvarnished tale, showing how I had rejected the real, and rabidly devoured the ideal; — I pronounced judgment to this effect: —

That a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life; that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar.

"*You*," I said, "a favourite with Mr. Rochester? *You* gifted with the power of pleasing him? *You* of importance to him in any way? Go! your folly sickens me. And you have derived pleasure from occasional tokens of preference — equivocal tokens shown by a gentleman of family and a man of the world to a dependent and a novice. How dared you? Poor stupid dupe! — Could not even self-interest make you wiser? You repeated to yourself this morning the brief scene of last night? — Cover your face and be ashamed! He said something in praise of your eyes, did he? Blind puppy! Open their bleared lids and look on your own accursed senselessness! It does good to no woman to be flattered by her superior, who cannot possibly intend to marry her; and it is madness in all women to let a secret love kindle within them, which, if unreturned and unknown, must devour the life that feeds it; and, if discovered and responded to, must lead, *ignis-fatus*-like, into miry wilds whence there is no extrication.

"Listen, then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence: to-morrow, place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, 'Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.'

"Afterwards, take a piece of smooth ivory — you have one prepared in your drawing-box: take your palette, mix your freshest, finest, clearest tints; choose your most delicate camel-hair pencils; delineate carefully the loveliest face you can imagine; paint it in your softest shades and sweetest lines, according to the description given by Mrs. Fairfax of Blanche Ingram; remember the raven ringlets, the oriental eye; — What! you revert to Mr. Rochester as a model! Order! No snivel! — no sentiment! — no regret! I will endure only sense and resolution. Recall the august yet harmonious lineaments, the Grecian neck and bust; let the round and dazzling arm be visible, and the delicate hand; omit neither diamond ring nor gold bracelet; portray faithfully the attire, aërial lace and glistening satin, graceful scarf and golden rose; call it 'Blanche, an accomplished lady of rank.'

"Whenever, in future, you should chance to fancy Mr. Rochester thinks well of you, take out these two pictures and compare them: say, 'Mr.

Rochester might probably win that noble lady's love, if he chose to strive for it; is it likely he would waste a serious thought on this indigent and insignificant plebeian?'"

"I'll do it," I resolved: and having framed this determination, I grew calm, and fell asleep.

I kept my word. An hour or two sufficed to sketch my own portrait in crayons; and in less than a fortnight I had completed an ivory miniature of an imaginary Blanche Ingram. It looked a lovely face enough, and when compared with the real head in chalk, the contrast was as great as self-control could desire. I derived benefit from the task: it had kept my head and hands employed, and had given force and fixedness to the new impressions I wished to stamp indelibly on my heart.

Ere long, I had reason to congratulate myself on the course of wholesome discipline to which I had thus forced my feelings to submit. Thanks to it, I was able to meet subsequent occurrences with a decent calm, which, had they found me unprepared, I should probably have been unequal to maintain, even externally.

CHAPTER XVII

A week passed, and no news arrived of Mr. Rochester: ten days, and still he did not come. Mrs. Fairfax said she should not be surprised if he were to go straight from the Leas to London, and thence to the Continent, and not show his face again at Thornfield for a year to come; he had not unfrequently quitted it in a manner quite as abrupt and unexpected. When I heard this, I was beginning to feel a strange chill and failing at the heart. I was actually permitting myself to experience a sickening sense of disappointment; but rallying my wits, and recollecting my principles, I at once called my sensations to order; and it was wonderful how I got over the temporary blunder — how I cleared up the mistake of supposing Mr. Rochester's movements a matter in which I had any cause to take a vital interest. Not that I humbled myself by a slavish notion of inferiority: on the contrary, I just said —

"You have nothing to do with the master of Thornfield, further than to receive the salary he gives you for teaching his protégée, and to be grateful for such respectful and kind treatment as, if you do your duty, you have a right to expect at his hands. Be sure that is the only tie he seriously acknowledges between you and him; so don't make him the object of your fine feelings, your raptures, agonies, and so forth. He is not of your order: keep to your caste, and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised."

I went on with my day's business tranquilly; but ever and anon vague suggestions kept wandering across my brain of reasons why I should quit Thornfield; and I kept involuntarily framing advertisements and pondering conjectures about new situations: these thoughts I did not think to check; they might germinate and bear fruit if they could.

Mr. Rochester had been absent upwards of a fortnight, when the post brought Mrs. Fairfax a letter.

"It is from the master," said she, as she looked at the direction. "Now I suppose we shall know whether we are to expect his return or not."

And while she broke the seal and perused the document, I went on taking my coffee (we were at breakfast): it was hot, and I attributed to that circumstance a fiery glow which suddenly rose to my face. Why my hand shook, and why I involuntarily spilt half the contents of my cup into my saucer, I did not choose to consider.

"Well, I sometimes think we are too quiet; but we run a chance of being busy enough now: for a little while at least," said Mrs. Fairfax, still holding the note before her spectacles.

Ere I permitted myself to request an explanation, I tied the string of

Adèle's pinafore, which happened to be loose: having helped her also to another bun and refilled her mug with milk, I said, nonchalantly —

"Mr. Rochester is not likely to return soon, I suppose?"

"Indeed he is — in three days, he says: that will be next Thursday; and not alone either. I don't know how many of the fine people at the Leas are coming with him: he sends directions for all the best bedrooms to be prepared; and the library and drawing-rooms are to be cleaned out; I am to get more kitchen hands from the George Inn, at Millcote, and from wherever else I can; and the ladies will bring their maids and the gentlemen their valets: so we shall have a full house of it." And Mrs. Fairfax swallowed her breakfast and hastened away to commence operations.

The three days were, as she had foretold, busy enough. I had thought all the rooms at Thornfield beautifully clean and well arranged; but it appears I was mistaken. Three women were got to help; and such scrubbing, such brushing, such washing of paint and beating of carpets, such taking down and putting up of pictures, such polishing of mirrors and lustres, such lighting of fires in bedrooms, such airing of sheets and feather-beds on hearths, I never beheld, either before or since. Adèle ran quite wild in the midst of it: the preparations for company and the prospect of their arrival, seemed to throw her into ecstasies. She would have Sophie to look over all her "toilettes," as she called frocks; to furbish up any that were "*passées*," and to air and arrange the new. For herself, she did nothing but caper about in the front chambers, jump on and off the bedsteads, and lie on the mattresses and piled-up bolsters and pillows before the enormous fires roaring in the chimneys. From school duties she was exonerated: Mrs. Fairfax had pressed me into her service, and I was all day in the storeroom, helping (or hindering) her and the cook; learning to make custards and cheese-cakes and French pastry, to truss game and garnish desert-dishes.

The party were expected to arrive on Thursday afternoon, in time for dinner at six. During the intervening period I had no time to nurse chimeras; and I believe I was as active and gay as anybody — Adèle excepted. Still, now and then, I received a damping check to my cheerfulness; and was, in spite of myself, thrown back on the region of doubts and portents, and dark conjectures. This was when I chanced to see the third-storey staircase door (which of late had always been kept locked) open slowly, and give passage to the form of Grace Poole, in prim cap, white apron, and handkerchief; when I watched her glide along the gallery, her quiet tread muffled in a list slipper; when I saw her look into the bustling, topsy-turvy bedrooms, — just say a word, perhaps, to the charwoman about the proper way to polish a grate, or clean a marble mantelpiece, or take stains from papered walls, and then pass on. She would thus descend to the kitchen once a day, eat her dinner, smoke a moderate pipe on the hearth, and go back, carrying her pot of porter with her, for her private solace, in her own gloomy, upper haunt. Only one hour in the twenty-four did she pass with her fellow-servants below; all the rest of her time was spent in some low-ceiled, oaken chamber of the second storey: there she sat and sewed — and probably laughed drearily to herself, — as companionless as a prisoner in his dungeon.

The strangest thing of all was, that not a soul in the house, except me, noticed her habits, or seemed to marvel at them: no one discussed her position or employment; no one pitied her solitude or isolation. I once, indeed, overheard part of a dialogue between Leah and one of the charwomen, of which Grace formed the subject. Leah had been saying something I had not caught, and the charwoman remarked —

"She gets good wages, I guess?"

"Yes," said Leah; "I wish I had as good; not that mine are to complain of, — there's no stinginess at Thornfield; but they're not one fifth of the sum Mrs. Poole receives. And she is laying by: she goes every quarter to the bank at Millcote. I should not wonder but she has saved enough to keep her independent if she liked to leave; but I suppose she's got used to the place; and then she's not forty yet, and strong and able for anything. It is too soon for her to give up business."

"She is a good hand, I daresay," said the charwoman.

"Ah! — she understands what she has to do, — nobody better," rejoined Leah significantly; "and it is not every one could fill her shoes — not for all the money she gets."

"That it is not!" was the reply. "I wonder whether the master — "

The charwoman was going on; but here Leah turned and perceived me, and she instantly gave her companion a nudge.

"Doesn't she know?" I heard the woman whisper.

Leah shook her head, and the conversation was of course dropped. All I had gathered from it amounted to this, — that there was a mystery at Thornfield; and that from participation in that mystery I was purposely excluded.

Thursday came: all work had been completed the previous evening; carpets were laid down, bed-hangings festooned, radiant white counterpanes spread, toilet tables arranged, furniture rubbed, flowers piled in vases: both chambers and saloons looked as fresh and bright as hands could make them. The hall, too, was scoured; and the great carved clock, as well as the steps and banisters of the staircase, were polished to the brightness of glass; in the dining-room, the sideboard flashed resplendent with plate; in the drawing-room and boudoir, vases of exotics bloomed on all sides.

Afternoon arrived: Mrs. Fairfax assumed her best black satin gown, her gloves, and her gold watch; for it was her part to receive the company, — to conduct the ladies to their rooms, &c. Adèle, too, would be dressed: though I thought she had little chance of being introduced to the party that day at least. However, to please her, I allowed Sophie to apparel her in one of her short, full muslin frocks. For myself, I had no need to make any change; I should not be called upon to quit my sanctum of the schoolroom; for a sanctum it was now become to me, — “a very pleasant refuge in time of trouble.”

It had been a mild, serene spring day — one of those days which, towards the end of March or the beginning of April, rise shining over the earth as heralds of summer. It was drawing to an end now; but the evening was even warm, and I sat at work in the schoolroom with the window open.

“It gets late,” said Mrs. Fairfax, entering in rustling state. “I am glad I ordered dinner an hour after the time Mr. Rochester mentioned; for it is past six now. I have sent John down to the gates to see if there is anything on the road: one can see a long way from thence in the direction of Millcote.” She went to the window. “Here he is!” said she. “Well, John” (leaning out), “any news?”

“They’re coming, ma’am,” was the answer. “They’ll be here in ten minutes.”

Adèle flew to the window. I followed, taking care to stand on one side, so that, screened by the curtain, I could see without being seen.

The ten minutes John had given seemed very long, but at last wheels were heard; four equestrians galloped up the drive, and after them came two open carriages. Fluttering veils and waving plumes filled the vehicles; two of the cavaliers were young, dashing-looking gentlemen; the third was Mr. Rochester, on his black horse, Mesrour, Pilot bounding before him; at his side rode a lady, and he and she were the first of the party. Her purple riding-habit almost swept the ground, her veil streamed long on the breeze; mingling with its transparent folds, and gleaming through them, shone rich raven ringlets.

“Miss Ingram!” exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax, and away she hurried to her post below.

The cavalcade, following the sweep of the drive, quickly turned the angle of the house, and I lost sight of it. Adèle now petitioned to go down; but I took her on my knee, and gave her to understand that she must not on any account think of venturing in sight of the ladies, either now or at any other time, unless expressly sent for: that Mr. Rochester would be very angry, &c. “Some natural tears she shed” on being told this; but as I began to look very grave, she consented at last to wipe them.

A joyous stir was now audible in the hall: gentlemen’s deep tones and ladies’ silvery accents blent harmoniously together, and distinguishable above all, though not loud, was the sonorous voice of the master of Thornfield Hall, welcoming his fair and gallant guests under its roof. Then light steps ascended the stairs; and there was a tripping through the gallery, and soft cheerful laughs, and opening and closing doors, and, for a time, a hush.

“Elles changent de toilettes,” said Adèle; who, listening attentively, had followed every movement; and she sighed.

“Chez maman,” said she, “quand il y avait du monde, je le suivais partout, au salon et à leurs chambres; souvent je regardais les femmes de chambre coiffer et habiller les dames, et c’était si amusant: comme cela on apprend.”

"Don't you feel hungry, Adèle?"

"Mais oui, mademoiselle: voilà cinq ou six heures que nous n'avons pas mangé."

"Well now, while the ladies are in their rooms, I will venture down and get you something to eat."

And issuing from my asylum with precaution, I sought a back-stairs which conducted directly to the kitchen. All in that region was fire and commotion; the soup and fish were in the last stage of projection, and the cook hung over her crucibles in a frame of mind and body threatening spontaneous combustion. In the servants' hall two coachmen and three gentlemen's gentlemen stood or sat round the fire; the abigails, I suppose, were upstairs with their mistresses; the new servants, that had been hired from Millcote, were bustling about everywhere. Threading this chaos, I at last reached the larder; there I took possession of a cold chicken, a roll of bread, some tarts, a plate or two and a knife and fork: with this booty I made a hasty retreat. I had regained the gallery, and was just shutting the back-door behind me, when an accelerated hum warned me that the ladies were about to issue from their chambers. I could not proceed to the schoolroom without passing some of their doors, and running the risk of being surprised with my cargo of victualage; so I stood still at this end, which, being windowless, was dark: quite dark now, for the sun was set and twilight gathering.

Presently the chambers gave up their fair tenants one after another: each came out gaily and airily, with dress that gleamed lustrous through the dusk. For a moment they stood grouped together at the other extremity of the gallery, conversing in a key of sweet subdued vivacity: they then descended the staircase almost as noiselessly as a bright mist rolls down a hill. Their collective appearance had left on me an impression of high-born elegance, such as I had never before received.

I found Adèle peeping through the schoolroom door, which she held ajar. "What beautiful ladies!" cried she in English. "Oh, I wish I might go to them! Do you think Mr. Rochester will send for us by-and-bye, after dinner?"

"No, indeed, I don't; Mr. Rochester has something else to think about. Never mind the ladies to-night; perhaps you will see them to-morrow: here is your dinner."

She was really hungry, so the chicken and tarts served to divert her attention for a time. It was well I secured this forage, or both she, I, and Sophie, to whom I conveyed a share of our repast, would have run a chance of getting no dinner at all: every one downstairs was too much engaged to think of us. The dessert was not carried out till after nine and at ten footmen were still running to and fro with trays and coffee-cups. I allowed Adèle to sit up much later than usual; for she declared she could not possibly go to sleep while the doors kept opening and shutting below, and people bustling about. Besides, she added, a message might possibly come from Mr. Rochester when she was undressed; "et alors quel dommage!"

I told her stories as long as she would listen to them; and then for a change I took her out into the gallery. The hall lamp was now lit, and it amused her to look over the balustrade and watch the servants passing backwards and forwards. When the evening was far advanced, a sound of music issued from the drawing-room, whither the piano had been removed; Adèle and I sat down on the top step of the stairs to listen. Presently a voice blent with the rich tones of the instrument; it was a lady who sang, and very sweet her notes were. The solo over, a duet followed, and then a glee: a joyous conversational murmur filled up the intervals. I listened long: suddenly I discovered that my ear was wholly intent on analysing the mingled sounds, and trying to discriminate amidst the confusion of accents those of Mr. Rochester; and when it caught them, which it soon did, it found a further task in framing the tones, rendered by distance inarticulate, into words.

The clock struck eleven. I looked at Adèle, whose head leant against my shoulder; her eyes were waxing heavy, so I took her up in my arms and carried her off to bed. It was near one before the gentlemen and ladies sought their chambers.

The next day was as fine as its predecessor: it was devoted by the party to an excursion to some site in the neighbourhood. They set out early in the forenoon, some on horseback, the rest in carriages; I witnessed both the departure and the return. Miss Ingram, as before, was the only lady equestrian; and, as before, Mr. Rochester galloped at her side; the two rode a little apart from the rest. I pointed out this circumstance to Mrs. Fairfax, who was standing at the window with me —

"You said it was not likely they should think of being married," said I, "but you see Mr. Rochester evidently prefers her to any of the other ladies."

"Yes, I daresay: no doubt he admires her."

"And she him," I added; "look how she leans her head towards him as if she were conversing confidentially; I wish I could see her face; I have never had a glimpse of it yet."

"You will see her this evening," answered Mrs. Fairfax. "I happened to remark to Mr. Rochester how much Adèle wished to be introduced to the ladies, and he said: 'Oh! let her come into the drawing-room after dinner; and request Miss Eyre to accompany her.'"

"Yes; he said that from mere politeness: I need not go, I am sure," I answered.

"Well, I observed to him that as you were unused to company, I did not think you would like appearing before so gay a party — all strangers; and he replied, in his quick way — 'Nonsense! If she objects, tell her it is my particular wish; and if she resists, say I shall come and fetch her in case of contumacy.'"

"I will not give him that trouble," I answered. "I will go, if no better may be; but I don't like it. Shall you be there, Mrs. Fairfax?"

"No; I pleaded off, and he admitted my plea. I'll tell you how to manage so as to avoid the embarrassment of making a formal entrance, which is the most disagreeable part of the business. You must go into the drawing-room while it is empty, before the ladies leave the dinner-table; choose your seat in any quiet nook you like; you need not stay long after the gentlemen come in, unless you please: just let Mr. Rochester see you are there and then slip away — nobody will notice you."

"Will these people remain long, do you think?"

"Perhaps two or three weeks, certainly not more. After the Easter recess, Sir George Lynn, who was lately elected member for Millcote, will have to go up to town and take his seat; I daresay Mr. Rochester will accompany him: it surprises me that he has already made so protracted a stay at Thornfield."

It was with some trepidation that I perceived the hour approach when I was to repair with my charge to the drawing-room. Adèle had been in a state of ecstasy all day, after hearing she was to be presented to the ladies in the evening; and it was not till Sophie commenced the operation of dressing her that she sobered down. Then the importance of the process quickly steadied her, and by the time she had her curls arranged in well-smoothed, drooping clusters, her pink satin frock put on, her long sash tied, and her lace mittens adjusted, she looked as grave as any judge. No need to warn her not to disarrange her attire: when she was dressed, she sat demurely down in her little chair, taking care previously to lift up the satin skirt for fear she should crease it, and assured me she would not stir thence till I was ready. This I quickly was: my best dress (the silver-grey one, purchased for Miss Temple's wedding, and never worn since) was soon put on; my hair was soon smoothed; my sole ornament, the pearl brooch, soon assumed. We descended.

Fortunately there was another entrance to the drawing-room than that through the saloon where they were all seated at dinner. We found the apartment vacant; a large fire burning silently on the marble hearth, and wax candles shining in bright solitude, amid the exquisite flowers with which the tables were adorned. The crimson curtain hung before the arch: slight as was the separation this drapery formed from the party in the adjoining saloon, they spoke in so low a key that nothing of their conversation could be distinguished beyond a soothing murmur.

Adèle, who appeared to be still under the influence of a most solemnising impression, sat down, without a word, on the footstool I pointed out to her. I retired to a window-seat, and taking a book from a table near, endeavoured to read. Adèle brought her stool to my feet; ere long she touched my knee.

"What is it, Adèle?"

"Est-ce que je ne puis pas prendrie une seule de ces fleurs magnifiques, mademoiselle? Seulement pour completer ma toilette."

"You think too much of your 'toilette,' Adèle: but you may have a flower." And I took a rose from a vase and fastened it in her sash. She sighed a sigh of ineffable satisfaction, as if her cup of happiness were now full. I turned my face away to conceal a smile I could not suppress: there was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little Parisienne's earnest and innate devotion to matters of dress.

A soft sound of rising now became audible; the curtain was swept back from the arch; through it appeared the dining-room, with its lit lustre pouring down light on the silver and glass of a magnificent dessert-service covering a long table; a band of ladies stood in the opening; they entered, and the curtain fell behind them.

There were but eight; yet, somehow, as they flocked in, they gave the impression of a much larger number. Some of them were very tall; many were dressed in white; and all had a sweeping amplitude of array that seemed to magnify their persons as a mist magnifies the moon. I rose and curtseyed to them: one or two bent their heads in return, the others only stared at me.

They dispersed about the room, reminding me, by the lightness and buoyancy of their movements, of a flock of white plumy birds. Some of them threw themselves in half-reclining positions on the sofas and ottomans: some bent over the tables and examined the flowers and books: the rest gathered in a group round the fire: all talked in a low but clear tone which seemed habitual to them. I knew their names afterwards, and may as well mention them now.

First, there was Mrs. Eshton and two of her daughters. She had evidently been a handsome woman, and was well preserved still. Of her daughters, the eldest, Amy, was rather little: naive, and child-like in face and manner, and piquant in form; her white muslin dress and blue sash became her well. The second, Louisa, was taller and more elegant in figure; with a very pretty face, of that order the French term *minois chiffoné*: both sisters were fair as lilies.

Lady Lynn was a large and stout personage of about forty, very erect, very haughty-looking, richly dressed in a satin robe of changeful sheen: her dark hair shone glossily under the shade of an azure plume, and within the circlet of a band of gems.

Mrs. Colonel Dent was less showy; but, I thought, more lady-like. She had a slight figure, a pale, gentle face, and fair hair. Her black satin dress, her scarf of rich foreign lace, and her pearl ornaments, pleased me better than the rainbow radiance of the titled dame.

But the three most distinguished — partly, perhaps, because the tallest figures of the band — were the Dowager Lady Ingram and her daughters, Blanche and Mary. They were all three of the loftiest stature of women. The Dowager might be between forty and fifty: her shape was still fine; her hair (by candle-light at least) still black; her teeth, too, were still apparently perfect. Most people would have termed her a splendid woman of her age: and so she was, no doubt, physically speaking; but then there was an expression of almost insupportable haughtiness in her bearing and countenance. She had Roman features and a double chin, disappearing into a throat like a pillar: these features appeared to me not only inflated and darkened, but even furrowed with pride; and the chin was sustained by the same principle, in a position of almost preternatural erectness. She had, likewise, a fierce and a hard eye: it reminded me of Mrs. Reed's; she mouthed her words in speaking; her voice was deep, its inflections very pompous, very dogmatical, — very intolerable, in short. A crimson velvet robe, and a shawl turban of some gold-wrought Indian fabric, invested her (I suppose she thought) with a truly imperial dignity.

Blanche and Mary were of equal stature, — straight and tall as poplars. Mary was too slim for her height, but Blanche was moulded like a Dian. I regarded her, of course, with special interest. First, I wished to see whether her appearance accorded with Mrs. Fairfax's description; secondly, whether it at all resembled the fancy miniature I had painted of her; and thirdly — it will out! — whether it were such as I should fancy likely to suit Mr. Rochester's taste.

As far as person went, she answered point for point, both to my picture and Mrs. Fairfax's description. The noble bust, the sloping shoulders, the graceful neck, the dark eyes and black ringlets were all there; — but her face? Her face was like her mother's; a youthful unfurrowed likeness: the same low brow, the same high features, the same pride. It was not, however, so saturnine a pride! she laughed continually; her laugh was satirical, and so was the habitual expression of her arched and haughty lip.

Genius is said to be self-conscious. I cannot tell whether Miss Ingram was a genius, but she was self-conscious — remarkably self-conscious indeed. She entered into a discourse on botany with the gentle Mrs. Dent. It seemed Mrs. Dent had not studied that science: though, as she said, she liked flowers, "especially wild ones;" Miss Ingram had, and she ran over its vocabulary with an air. I presently perceived she was (what is vernacularly termed) *trailing* Mrs. Dent; that is, playing on her ignorance — her *trail* might be clever, but it was decidedly not good-natured. She played: her execution was brilliant; she sang: her voice was fine; she talked French apart to her mamma; and she talked it well, with fluency and with a good accent.

Mary had a milder and more open countenance than Blanche; softer features too, and a skin some shades fairer (Miss Ingram was dark as a Spaniard) — but Mary was deficient in life: her face lacked expression, her eye lustre; she had nothing to say, and having once taken her seat, remained fixed like a statue in its niche. The sisters were both attired in spotless white.

And did I now think Miss Ingram such a choice as Mr. Rochester would be likely to make? I could not tell — I did not know his taste in female beauty. If he liked the majestic, she was the very type of majesty: then she was accomplished, sprightly. Most gentlemen would admire her, I thought; and that he *did* admire her, I already seemed to have obtained proof: to remove the last shade of doubt, it remained but to see them together.

You are not to suppose, reader, that Adèle has all this time been sitting motionless on the stool at my feet: no; when the ladies entered, she rose, advanced to meet them, made a stately reverence, and said with gravity —

"Bon jour, mesdames."

And Miss Ingram had looked down at her with a mocking air, and exclaimed, "Oh, what a little puppet!"

Lady Lynn had remarked, "It is Mr. Rochester's ward, I suppose — the little French girl he was speaking of."

Mrs. Dent had kindly taken her hand, and given her a kiss.

Amy and Louisa Eshton had cried out simultaneously — "What a love of a child!"

And then they had called her to a sofa, where she now sat, ensconced between them, chattering alternately in French and broken English; absorbing not only the young ladies' attention, but that of Mrs. Eshton and Lady Lynn, and getting spoilt to her heart's content.

At last coffee is brought in, and the gentlemen are summoned. I sit in the shade — if any shade there be in this brilliantly-lit apartment; the window-curtain half hides me. Again the arch yawns; they come. The collective appearance of the gentlemen, like that of the ladies, is very imposing: they are all costumed in black; most of them are tall, some young. Henry and Frederick Lynn are very dashing sparks indeed; and Colonel Dent is a fine soldierly man. Mr. Eshton, the magistrate of the district, is gentleman-like: his hair is quite white, his eyebrows and whiskers still dark, which gives him something of the appearance of a "père noble de théâtre." Lord Ingram, like his sisters, is very tall; like them, also, he is handsome; but he shares Mary's apathetic and listless look: he seems to have more length of limb than vivacity of blood or vigour of brain.

And where is Mr. Rochester?

He comes in last: I am not looking at the arch, yet I see him enter. I try to concentrate my attention on those netting-needles, on the meshes of the purse I am forming — I wish to think only of the work I have in my hands, to see only the silver beads and silk threads that lie in my lap; whereas, I distinctly behold his figure, and I inevitably recall the moment when I last saw it; just after I had rendered him, what he deemed, an essential service, and he, holding my hand, and looking down on my face, surveyed me with eyes that revealed a heart full and eager to overflow; in whose emotions I had a part. How near had I approached him at that moment! What had occurred since, calculated to change his and my relative positions? Yet now, how distant, how far estranged we were! So far estranged, that I did not expect him to come and speak to me. I did not wonder, when, without looking at me, he took a seat at the other side of the room, and began conversing with some of the ladies.

No sooner did I see that his attention was riveted on them, and that I might gaze without being observed, than my eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face; I could not keep their lids under control: they would rise, and the irids would fix on him. I looked, and had an acute pleasure in looking, — a precious yet poignant pleasure; pure gold, with a steely point of agony: a pleasure like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless.

Most true is it that "beauty is in the eye of the gazer." My master's colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth, — all energy, decision, will, — were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me; they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me, — that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his. I had not intended to love him; the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously arrived, green and strong! He made me love him without looking at me.

I compared him with his guests. What was the gallant grace of the Lynns, the languid elegance of Lord Ingram, — even the military distinction of Colonel Dent, contrasted with his look of native pith and genuine power? I had no sympathy in their appearance, their expression: yet I could imagine that most observers would call them attractive, handsome, imposing; while they would pronounce Mr. Rochester at once harsh-featured and melancholy-looking. I saw them smile, laugh — it was nothing; the light of the candles had as much soul in it as their smile; the tinkle of the bell as much significance as their laugh. I saw Mr. Rochester smile: — his stern features softened; his eye grew both brilliant and gentle, its ray both searching and sweet. He was talking, at the moment, to Louisa and Amy Eshton. I wondered to see them receive with calm that look which seemed to me so penetrating: I expected their eyes to fall, their colour to rise under it; yet I was glad when I found they were in no sense moved. "He is not to them what he is to me," I thought: "he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine; — I am sure he is — I feel akin to him — I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him. Did I say, a few days since, that I had nothing to do with him but to receive my salary at his hands? Did I forbid myself to think of him in any other light than as a paymaster? Blasphemy against nature! Every good, true, vigorous feeling I have gathers impulsively round him. I know I must conceal my sentiments: I must smother hope; I must remember that he cannot care much for me. For when I say that I am of his kind, I do not mean that I have his force to influence, and his spell to attract; I mean only that I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him. I must, then, repeat continually that we are for ever sundered: — and yet, while I breathe and think, I must love him."

Coffee is handed. The ladies, since the gentlemen entered, have become lively as larks; conversation waxes brisk and merry. Colonel Dent and Mr.

Eshton argue on politics; their wives listen. The two proud dowagers, Lady Lynn and Lady Ingram, confabulate together. Sir George — whom, by-the-bye, I have forgotten to describe, — a very big, and very fresh-looking country gentleman, stands before their sofa, coffee-cup in hand, and occasionally puts in a word. Mr. Frederick Lynn has taken a seat beside Mary Ingram, and is showing her the engravings of a splendid volume: she looks, smiles now and then, but apparently says little. The tall and phlegmatic Lord Ingram leans with folded arms on the chair-back of the little and lively Amy Eshton; she glances up at him, and chatters like a wren: she likes him better than she does Mr. Rochester. Henry Lynn has taken possession of an ottoman at the feet of Louisa: Adèle shares it with him: he is trying to talk French with her, and Louisa laughs at his blunders. With whom will Blanche Ingram pair? She is standing alone at the table, bending gracefully over an album. She seems waiting to be sought; but she will not wait too long: she herself selects a mate.

Mr. Rochester, having quitted the Eshtons, stands on the hearth as solitary as she stands by the table: she confronts him, taking her station on the opposite side of the mantelpiece.

"Mr. Rochester, I thought you were not fond of children?"

"Nor am I."

"Then, what induced you to take charge of such a little doll as that?" (pointing to Adèle). "Where did you pick her up?"

"I did not pick her up; she was left on my hands."

"You should have sent her to school."

"I could not afford it: schools are so dear."

"Why, I suppose you have a governess for her: I saw a person with her just now — is she gone? Oh, no! there she is still, behind the window-curtain. You pay her, of course; I should think it quite as expensive, — more so; for you have them both to keep in addition."

I feared — or should I say, hoped? — the allusion to me would make Mr. Rochester glance my way; and I involuntarily shrank farther into the shade: but he never turned his eyes.

"I have not considered the subject," said he indifferently, looking straight before him.

"No, you men never do consider economy and common sense. You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses: Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi — were they not, mama?"

"Did you speak, my own?"

The young lady thus claimed as the dowager's special property, reiterated her question with an explanation.

"My dearest, don't mention governesses; the word makes me nervous. I have suffered a martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice. I thank Heaven I have now done with them!"

Mrs. Dent here bent over to the pious lady and whispered something in her ear; I suppose, from the answer elicited, it was a reminder that one of the anathematised race was present.

“Tant pis!” said her Ladyship, “I hope it may do her good!” Then, in a lower tone, but still loud enough for me to hear, “I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class.”

“What are they, madam?” inquired Mr. Rochester aloud.

“I will tell you in your private ear,” replied she, wagging her turban three times with portentous significancy.

“But my curiosity will be past its appetite; it craves food now.”

“Ask Blanche; she is nearer you than I.”

“Oh, don’t refer him to me, mama! I have just one word to say of the whole tribe; they are a nuisance. Not that I ever suffered much from them; I took care to turn the tables. What tricks Theodore and I used to play on our Miss Wilsons, and Mrs. Greys, and Madame Jouberts! Mary was always too sleepy to join in a plot with spirit. The best fun was with Madame Joubert: Miss Wilson was a poor sickly thing, lachrymose and low-spirited, not worth the trouble of vanquishing, in short; and Mrs. Grey was coarse and insensible; no blow took effect on her. But poor Madame Joubert! I see her yet in her raging passions, when we had driven her to extremities — spilt our tea, crumbled our bread and butter, tossed our books up to the ceiling, and played a charivari with the ruler and desk, the fender and fire-irons. Theodore, do you remember those merry days?”

“Yaas, to be sure I do,” drawled Lord Ingram; “and the poor old stick used to cry out ‘Oh you villains childs!’ — and then we sermonised her on the presumption of attempting to teach such clever blades as we were, when she was herself so ignorant.”

“We did; and, Tedo, you know, I helped you in prosecuting (or persecuting) your tutor, whey-faced Mr. Vining — the parson in the pip, as we used to call him. He and Miss Wilson took the liberty of falling in love with each other — at least Tedo and I thought so; we surprised sundry tender glances and sighs which we interpreted as tokens of ‘la belle passion,’ and I promise you the public soon had the benefit of our discovery; we employed it as a sort of lever to hoist our dead-weights from the house. Dear mama, there, as soon as she got an inkling of the business, found out that it was of an immoral tendency. Did you not, my lady-mother?”

“Certainly, my best. And I was quite right: depend on that: there are a thousand reasons why liaisons between governesses and tutors should never be tolerated a moment in any well-regulated house; firstly — ”

“Oh, gracious, mama! Spare us the enumeration! *Au reste*, we all know them: danger of bad example to innocence of childhood; distractions and consequent neglect of duty on the part of the attached — mutual alliance and reliance; confidence thence resulting — insolence accompanying — mutiny and general blow-up. Am I right, Baroness Ingram, of Ingram Park?”

"My lily-flower, you are right now, as always."

"Then no more need be said: change the subject."

Amy Eshton, not hearing or not heeding this dictum, joined in with her soft, infantine tone: "Louisa and I used to quiz our governess too; but she was such a good creature, she would bear anything: nothing put her out. She was never cross with us; was she, Louisa?"

"No, never: we might do what we pleased; ransack her desk and her workbox, and turn her drawers inside out; and she was so good-natured, she would give us anything we asked for."

"I suppose, now," said Miss Ingram, curling her lip sarcastically, "we shall have an abstract of the memoirs of all the governesses extant: in order to avert such a visitation, I again move the introduction of a new topic. Mr. Rochester, do you second my motion?"

"Madam, I support you on this point, as on every other."

"Then on me be the onus of bringing it forward. Signior Eduardo, are you in voice to-night?"

"Donna Bianca, if you command it, I will be."

"Then, signior, I lay on you my sovereign behest to furbish up your lungs and other vocal organs, as they will be wanted on my royal service."

"Who would not be the Rizzio of so divine a Mary?"

"A fig for Rizzio!" cried she, tossing her head with all its curls, as she moved to the piano. "It is my opinion the fiddler David must have been an insipid sort of fellow; I like black Bothwell better: to my mind a man is nothing without a spice of the devil in him; and history may say what it will of James Hepburn, but I have a notion, he was just the sort of wild, fierce, bandit hero whom I could have consented to gift with my hand."

"Gentlemen, you hear! Now which of you most resembles Bothwell?" cried Mr. Rochester.

"I should say the preference lies with you," responded Colonel Dent.

"On my honour, I am much obliged to you," was the reply.

Miss Ingram, who had now seated herself with proud grace at the piano, spreading out her snowy robes in queenly amplitude, commenced a brilliant prelude; talking meantime. She appeared to be on her high horse to-night; both her words and her air seemed intended to excite not only the admiration, but the amazement of her auditors: she was evidently bent on striking them as something very dashing and daring indeed.

"Oh, I am so sick of the young men of the present day!" exclaimed she, rattling away at the instrument. "Poor, puny things, not fit to stir a step beyond papa's park gates: nor to go even so far without mama's permission and guardianship! Creatures so absorbed in care about their pretty faces, and their white hands, and their small feet; as if a man had anything to do with beauty! As if loveliness were not the special prerogative of woman — her legitimate appanage and heritage! I grant an ugly *woman* is a blot on the fair face of creation; but as to the *gentlemen*, let them be solicitous to possess only strength and valour: let their motto be: — Hunt, shoot, and fight: the rest is not worth a fillip. Such should be my device, were I a man."

"Whenever I marry," she continued after a pause which none interrupted, "I am resolved my husband shall not be a rival, but a foil to me. I will suffer no competitor near the throne; I shall exact an undivided homage: his devotions shall not be shared between me and the shape he sees in his mirror. Mr. Rochester, now sing, and I will play for you."

"I am all obedience," was the response.

"Here then is a Corsair-song. Know that I doat on Corsairs; and for that reason, sing it *con spirito*."

"Commands from Miss Ingram's lips would put spirit into a mug of milk and water."

"Take care, then: if you don't please me, I will shame you by showing how such things *should* be done."

"That is offering a premium on incapacity: I shall now endeavour to fail."

"Gardez-vous en bien! If you err wilfully, I shall devise a proportionate punishment."

"Miss Ingram ought to be clement, for she has it in her power to inflict a chastisement beyond mortal endurance."

"Ha! explain!" commanded the lady.

"Pardon me, madam: no need of explanation; your own fine sense must inform you that one of your frowns would be a sufficient substitute for capital punishment."

"Sing!" said she, and again touching the piano, she commenced an accompaniment in spirited style.

"Now is my time to slip away," thought I: but the tones that then severed the air arrested me. Mrs. Fairfax had said Mr. Rochester possessed a fine voice: he did — a mellow, powerful bass, into which he threw his own feeling, his own force; finding a way through the ear to the heart, and there waking sensation strangely. I waited till the last deep and full vibration had expired — till the tide of talk, checked an instant, had resumed its flow; I then quitted my sheltered corner and made my exit by the side-door, which was fortunately near. Thence a narrow passage led into the hall: in crossing it, I perceived my sandal was loose; I stopped to tie it, kneeling down for that purpose on the mat at the foot of the staircase. I heard the dining-room door unclose; a gentleman came out; rising hastily, I stood face to face with him: it was Mr. Rochester.

"How do you do?" he asked.

"I am very well, sir."

"Why did you not come and speak to me in the room?"

I thought I might have retorted the question on him who put it: but I would not take that freedom. I answered —

"I did not wish to disturb you, as you seemed engaged, sir."

"What have you been doing during my absence?"

"Nothing particular; teaching Adèle as usual."

"And getting a good deal paler than you were — as I saw at first sight. What is the matter?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Did you take any cold that night you half drowned me?"

"Not the least."

"Return to the drawing-room: you are deserting too early."

"I am tired, sir."

He looked at me for a minute.

"And a little depressed," he said. "What about? Tell me."

"Nothing — nothing, sir. I am not depressed."

"But I affirm that you are: so much depressed that a few more words would bring tears to your eyes — indeed, they are there now, shining and swimming; and a bead has slipped from the lash and fallen on to the flag. If I had time, and was not in mortal dread of some prating prig of a servant passing, I would know what all this means. Well, to-night I excuse you; but understand that so long as my visitors stay, I expect you to appear in the drawing-room every evening; it is my wish; don't neglect it. Now go, and send Sophie for Adèle. Good-night, my — " He stopped, bit his lip, and abruptly left me.

CHAPTER XVIII

Merry days were these at Thornfield Hall; and busy days too: how different from the first three months of stillness, monotony, and solitude I had passed beneath its roof! All sad feelings seemed now driven from the house, all gloomy associations forgotten: there was life everywhere, movement all day long. You could not now traverse the gallery, once so hushed, nor enter the front chambers, once so tenantless, without encountering a smart lady's-maid or a dandy valet.

The kitchen, the butler's pantry, the servants' hall, the entrance hall, were equally alive; and the saloons were only left void and still when the blue sky and halcyon sunshine of the genial spring weather called their occupants out into the grounds. Even when that weather was broken, and continuous rain set in for some days, no damp seemed cast over enjoyment: indoor amusements only became more lively and varied, in consequence of the stop put to outdoor gaiety.

I wondered what they were going to do the first evening a change of entertainment was proposed: they spoke of "playing charades," but in my ignorance I did not understand the term. The servants were called in, the dining-room tables wheeled away, the lights otherwise disposed, the chairs placed in a semicircle opposite the arch. While Mr. Rochester and the other gentlemen directed these alterations, the ladies were running up and down stairs ringing for their maids. Mrs. Fairfax was summoned to give information respecting the resources of the house in shawls, dresses, draperies of any kind; and certain wardrobes of the third storey were ransacked, and their contents, in the shape of brocaded and hooped petticoats, satin sacques, black modes, lace lappets, &c., were brought down in armfuls by the abigails; then a selection was made, and such things as were chosen were carried to the boudoir within the drawing-room.

Meantime, Mr. Rochester had again summoned the ladies round him, and was selecting certain of their number to be of his party. "Miss Ingram is mine, of course," said he: afterwards he named the two Misses Eshton, and Mrs. Dent. He looked at me: I happened to be near him, as I had been fastening the clasp of Mrs. Dent's bracelet, which had got loose.

"Will you play?" he asked. I shook my head. He did not insist, which I rather feared he would have done; he allowed me to return quietly to my usual seat.

He and his aids now withdrew behind the curtain: the other party, which was headed by Colonel Dent, sat down on the crescent of chairs. One of the gentlemen, Mr. Eshton, observing me, seemed to propose that I should be asked to join them; but Lady Ingram instantly negatived the notion.

"No," I heard her say: "she looks too stupid for any game of the sort."

Ere long a bell tinkled, and the curtain drew up. Within the arch, the bulky figure of Sir George Lynn, whom Mr. Rochester had likewise chosen, was seen enveloped in a white sheet: before him, on a table, lay open a large book; and at his side stood Amy Eshton, draped in Mr. Rochester's cloak, and holding a book in her hand. Somebody, unseen, rang the bell merrily; then Adèle (who had insisted on being one of her guardian's party), bounded forward, scattering round her the contents of a basket of flowers she carried on her arm. Then appeared the magnificent figure of Miss Ingram, clad in white, a long veil on her head, and a wreath of roses round her brow; by her side walked Mr. Rochester, and together they drew near the table. They knelt; while Mrs. Dent and Louisa Eshton, dressed also in white, took up their stations behind them. A ceremony followed, in dumb show, in which it was easy to recognise the pantomime of a marriage. At its termination, Colonel Dent and his party consulted in whispers for two minutes, then the Colonel called out —

"Bride!" Mr. Rochester bowed, and the curtain fell.

A considerable interval elapsed before it again rose. Its second rising displayed a more elaborately prepared scene than the last. The drawing-room, as I have before observed, was raised two steps above the dining-room, and on the top of the upper step, placed a yard or two back within the room, appeared a large marble basin — which I recognised as an ornament of the conservatory — where it usually stood, surrounded by exotics, and tenanted by gold fish — and whence it must have been transported with some trouble, on account of its size and weight.

Seated on the carpet, by the side of this basin, was seen Mr. Rochester, costumed in shawls, with a turban on his head. His dark eyes and swarthy skin and Paynim features suited the costume exactly: he looked the very model of an Eastern emir, an agent or a victim of the bowstring. Presently advanced into view Miss Ingram. She, too, was attired in oriental fashion: a crimson scarf tied sash-like round the waist: an embroidered handkerchief knotted about her temples; her beautifully-moulded arms bare, one of them upraised in the act of supporting a pitcher, poised gracefully on her head. Both her cast of form and feature, her complexion and her general air, suggested the idea of some Israelitish princess of the patriarchal days; and such was doubtless the character she intended to represent.

She approached the basin, and bent over it as if to fill her pitcher; she again lifted it to her head. The personage on the well-brink now seemed to accost her; to make some request: — "She hasted, let down her pitcher on her hand, and gave him to drink." From the bosom of his robe he then produced a casket, opened it and showed magnificent bracelets and earrings; she acted astonishment and admiration; kneeling, he laid the treasure at her feet; incredulity and delight were expressed by her looks and gestures; the stranger fastened the bracelets on her arms and the rings in her ears. It was Eliezer and

Rebecca: the camels only were wanting.

The divining party again laid their heads together: apparently they could not agree about the word or syllable the scene illustrated. Colonel Dent, their spokesman, demanded "the tableau of the whole;" whereupon the curtain again descended.

On its third rising only a portion of the drawing-room was disclosed; the rest being concealed by a screen, hung with some sort of dark and coarse drapery. The marble basin was removed; in its place, stood a deal table and a kitchen chair: these objects were visible by a very dim light proceeding from a horn lantern, the wax candles being all extinguished.

Amidst this sordid scene, sat a man with his clenched hands resting on his knees, and his eyes bent on the ground. I knew Mr. Rochester; though the begrimed face, the disordered dress (his coat hanging loose from one arm, as if it had been almost torn from his back in a scuffle), the desperate and scowling countenance, the rough, bristling hair might well have disguised him. As he moved, a chain clanked; to his wrists were attached fetters.

"Bridewell!" exclaimed Colonel Dent, and the charade was solved.

A sufficient interval having elapsed for the performers to resume their ordinary costume, they re-entered the dining-room. Mr. Rochester led in Miss Ingram; she was complimenting him on his acting.

"Do you know," said she, "that, of the three characters, I liked you in the last best? Oh, had you but lived a few years earlier, what a gallant gentleman-highwayman you would have made!"

"Is all the soot washed from my face?" he asked, turning it towards her.

"Alas! yes: the more's the pity! Nothing could be more becoming to your complexion than that ruffian's rouge."

"You would like a hero of the road then?"

"An English hero of the road would be the next best thing to an Italian bandit; and that could only be surpassed by a Levantine pirate."

"Well, whatever I am, remember you are my wife; we were married an hour since, in the presence of all these witnesses." She giggled, and her colour rose.

"Now, Dent," continued Mr. Rochester, "it is your turn." And as the other party withdrew, he and his band took the vacated seats. Miss Ingram placed herself at her leader's right hand; the other diviners filled the chairs on each side of him and her. I did not now watch the actors; I no longer waited with interest for the curtain to rise; my attention was absorbed by the spectators; my eyes, erewhile fixed on the arch, were now irresistibly attracted to the semicircle of chairs. What charade Colonel Dent and his party played, what word they chose, how they acquitted themselves, I no longer remember; but I still see the consultation which followed each scene: I see Mr. Rochester turn to Miss Ingram, and Miss Ingram to him; I see her incline her head towards him, till the jetty curls almost touch his shoulder and wave against his cheek; I hear their mutual whisperings; I recall their interchanged glances; and something even of the feeling roused by the spectacle returns in memory at this moment.

I have told you, reader, that I had learnt to love Mr. Rochester: I could not unlove him now, merely because I found that he had ceased to notice me — because I might pass hours in his presence, and he would never once turn his eyes in my direction — because I saw all his attentions appropriated by a great lady, who scorned to touch me with the hem of her robes as she passed; who, if ever her dark and imperious eye fell on me by chance, would withdraw it instantly as from an object too mean to merit observation. I could not unlove him, because I felt sure he would soon marry this very lady — because I read daily in her a proud security in his intentions respecting her — because I witnessed hourly in him a style of courtship which, if careless and choosing rather to be sought than to seek, was yet, in its very carelessness, captivating, and in its very pride, irresistible.

There was nothing to cool or banish love in these circumstances, though much to create despair. Much too, you will think, reader, to engender jealousy: if a woman, in my position, could presume to be jealous of a woman in Miss Ingram's. But I was not jealous: or very rarely; — the nature of the pain I suffered could not be explained by that word. Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling. Pardon the seeming paradox; I mean what I say. She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her. Too often she betrayed this, by the undue vent she gave to a spiteful antipathy she had conceived against little Adèle: pushing her away with some contumelious epithet if she happened to approach her; sometimes ordering her from the room, and always treating her with coldness and acrimony. Other eyes besides mine watched these manifestations of character — watched them closely, keenly, shrewdly. Yes; the future bridegroom, Mr. Rochester himself, exercised over his intended a ceaseless surveillance; and it was from this sagacity — this guardedness of his — this perfect, clear consciousness of his fair one's defects — this obvious absence of passion in his sentiments towards her, that my ever-torturing pain arose.

I saw he was going to marry her, for family, perhaps political reasons, because her rank and connections suited him; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure. This was the point — this was where the nerve was touched and teased — this was where the fever was sustained and fed: *she could not charm him*.

If she had managed the victory at once, and he had yielded and sincerely laid his heart at her feet, I should have covered my face, turned to the wall, and (figuratively) have died to them. If Miss Ingram had been a good and noble woman, endowed with force, fervour, kindness, sense, I should have had one vital struggle with two tigers — jealousy and despair: then, my heart torn out and devoured, I should have admired her — acknowledged her excellence, and been quiet for the rest of my days: and the more absolute her superiority, the deeper would have been my admiration — the more truly tranquil my quiescence. But as matters really stood, to watch Miss Ingram's efforts at fascinating Mr. Rochester, to witness their repeated failure — herself unconscious that they did fail; vainly fancying that each shaft launched hit the mark, and infatuatedly pluming herself on success, when her pride and self-complacency repelled further and further what she wished to allure — to witness *this*, was to be at once under ceaseless excitation and ruthless restraint.

Because, when she failed, I saw how she might have succeeded. Arrows that continually glanced off from Mr. Rochester's breast and fell harmless at his feet, might, I knew, if shot by a surer hand, have quivered keen in his proud heart — have called love into his stern eye, and softness into his sardonic face; or, better still, without weapons a silent conquest might have been won.

"Why can she not influence him more, when she is privileged to draw so near to him?" I asked myself. "Surely she cannot truly like him, or not like him with true affection! If she did, she need not coin her smiles so lavishly, flash her glances so unremittingly, manufacture airs so elaborate, graces so multitudinous. It seems to me that she might, by merely sitting quietly at his side, saying little and looking less, get nigher his heart. I have seen in his face a far different expression from that which hardens it now while she is so vivaciously accosting him; but then it came of itself: it was not elicited by meretricious arts and calculated manoeuvres; and one had but to accept it — to answer what he asked without pretension, to address him when needful without grimace — and it increased and grew kinder and more genial, and warmed one like a fostering sunbeam. How will she manage to please him when they are married? I do not think she will manage it; and yet it might be managed; and his wife might, I verily believe, be the very happiest woman the sun shines on."

I have not yet said anything condemnatory of Mr. Rochester's project of marrying for interest and connections. It surprised me when I first discovered that such was his intention: I had thought him a man unlikely to be influenced by motives so commonplace in his choice of a wife; but the longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles: I supposed, then, they had reasons for holding them such as I could not fathom. It seemed to me that, were I a gentleman like him, I would take to my bosom only such a wife as I could love; but the very obviousness of the advantages to the husband's own happiness offered by this plan convinced me that there must be arguments against its general adoption of which I was quite ignorant: otherwise I felt sure all the world would act as I wished to act.

But in other points, as well as this, I was growing very lenient to my master: I was forgetting all his faults, for which I had once kept a sharp look-out. It had formerly been my endeavour to study all sides of his character: to take the bad with the good; and from the just weighing of both, to form an equitable judgment. Now I saw no bad. The sarcasm that had repelled, the harshness that had startled me once, were only like keen condiments in a choice dish: their presence was pungent, but their absence would be felt as comparatively insipid. And as for the vague something — was it a sinister or a sorrowful, a designing or a desponding expression? — that opened upon a careful observer, now and then, in his eye, and closed again before one could fathom the strange depth partially disclosed; that something which used to make me fear and shrink, as if I had been wandering amongst volcanic-looking hills, and had suddenly felt the ground quiver and seen it gape: that something, I, at intervals, beheld still; and with throbbing heart, but not with palsied nerves. Instead of wishing to shun, I longed only to dare — to divine it; and I thought Miss Ingram happy, because one day she might look into the abyss at her leisure, explore its secrets and analyse their nature.

Meantime, while I thought only of my master and his future bride — saw only them, heard only their discourse, and considered only their movements of importance — the rest of the party were occupied with their own separate interests and pleasures. The Ladies Lynn and Ingram continued to consort in solemn conferences, where they nodded their two turbans at each other, and held up their four hands in confronting gestures of surprise, or mystery, or horror, according to the theme on which their gossip ran, like a pair of magnified puppets. Mild Mrs. Dent talked with good-natured Mrs. Eshton; and the two sometimes bestowed a courteous word or smile on me. Sir George Lynn, Colonel Dent, and Mr. Eshton discussed politics, or county affairs, or justice business. Lord Ingram flirted with Amy Eshton; Louisa played and sang to and with one of the Messrs. Lynn; and Mary Ingram listened languidly to the gallant speeches of the other. Sometimes all, as with one consent, suspended their by-play to observe and listen to the principal actors: for, after all, Mr. Rochester and — because closely connected with him — Miss Ingram were the life and soul of the party. If he was absent from the room an hour, a perceptible dulness seemed to steal over the spirits of his guests; and his re-entrance was sure to give a fresh impulse to the vivacity of conversation.

The want of his animating influence appeared to be peculiarly felt one day that he had been summoned to Millcote on business, and was not likely to return till late. The afternoon was wet: a walk the party had proposed to take to see a gipsy camp, lately pitched on a common beyond Hay, was consequently deferred. Some of the gentlemen were gone to the stables: the younger ones, together with the younger ladies, were playing billiards in the billiard-room. The dowagers Ingram and Lynn sought solace in a quiet game at cards. Blanche Ingram, after having repelled, by supercilious taciturnity, some efforts of Mrs. Dent and Mrs. Eshton to draw her into conversation, had first murmured over some sentimental tunes and airs on the piano, and then, having fetched a novel from the library, had flung herself in haughty listlessness on a sofa, and prepared to beguile, by the spell of fiction, the tedious hours of absence. The room and the house were silent: only now and then the merriment of the billiard-players was heard from above.

It was verging on dusk, and the clock had already given warning of the hour to dress for dinner, when little Adèle, who knelt by me in the drawing-room window-seat, suddenly exclaimed —

"Voilà, Monsieur Rochester, qui revient!"

I turned, and Miss Ingram darted forwards from her sofa: the others, too, looked up from their several occupations; for at the same time a crunching of wheels and a splashing tramp of horse-hoofs became audible on the wet gravel. A post-chaise was approaching.

"What can possess him to come home in that style?" said Miss Ingram. "He rode Mesrour (the black horse), did he not, when he went out? and Pilot was with him: — what has he done with the animals?"

As she said this, she approached her tall person and ample garments so near the window, that I was obliged to bend back almost to the breaking of my spine: in her eagerness she did not observe me at first, but when she did, she curled her lip and moved to another casement. The post-chaise stopped; the driver rang the door-bell, and a gentleman alighted attired in travelling garb; but it was not Mr. Rochester; it was a tall, fashionable-looking man, a stranger.

"How provoking!" exclaimed Miss Ingram: "you tiresome monkey!" (apostrophising Adèle), "who perched you up in the window to give false intelligence?" and she cast on me an angry glance, as if I were in fault.

Some parleying was audible in the hall, and soon the new-comer entered. He bowed to Lady Ingram, as deeming her the eldest lady present.

"It appears I come at an inopportune time, madam," said he, "when my friend, Mr. Rochester, is from home; but I arrive from a very long journey, and I think I may presume so far on old and intimate acquaintance as to instal myself here till he returns."

His manner was polite; his accent, in speaking, struck me as being somewhat unusual, — not precisely foreign, but still not altogether English: his age might be about Mr. Rochester's, — between thirty and forty; his complexion was singularly sallow: otherwise he was a fine-looking man, at first sight especially. On closer examination, you detected something in his face that displeased, or rather that failed to please. His features were regular, but too relaxed: his eye was large and well cut, but the life looking out of it was a tame, vacant life — at least so I thought.

The sound of the dressing-bell dispersed the party. It was not till after dinner that I saw him again: he then seemed quite at his ease. But I liked his physiognomy even less than before: it struck me as being at the same time unsettled and inanimate. His eye wandered, and had no meaning in its wandering: this gave him an odd look, such as I never remembered to have seen. For a handsome and not an unamiable-looking man, he repelled me exceedingly: there was no power in that smooth-skinned face of a full oval shape: no firmness in that aquiline nose and small cherry mouth; there was no thought on the low, even forehead; no command in that blank, brown eye.

As I sat in my usual nook, and looked at him with the light of the girandoles on the mantelpiece beaming full over him — for he occupied an arm-chair drawn close to the fire, and kept shrinking still nearer, as if he were cold, I compared him with Mr. Rochester. I think (with deference be it spoken) the contrast could not be much greater between a sleek gander and a fierce falcon: between a meek sheep and the rough-coated keen-eyed dog, its guardian.

He had spoken of Mr. Rochester as an old friend. A curious friendship theirs must have been: a pointed illustration, indeed, of the old adage that "extremes meet."

Two or three of the gentlemen sat near him, and I caught at times scraps of their conversation across the room. At first I could not make much sense of what I heard; for the discourse of Louisa Eshton and Mary Ingram, who sat nearer to me, confused the fragmentary sentences that reached me at intervals. These last were discussing the stranger; they both called him "a beautiful man." Louisa said he was "a love of a creature," and she "adored him;" and Mary instanced his "pretty little mouth, and nice nose," as her ideal of the charming.

"And what a sweet-tempered forehead he has!" cried Louisa, — "so smooth — none of those frowning irregularities I dislike so much; and such a placid eye and smile!"

And then, to my great relief, Mr. Henry Lynn summoned them to the other side of the room, to settle some point about the deferred excursion to Hay Common.

I was now able to concentrate my attention on the group by the fire, and I presently gathered that the new-comer was called Mr. Mason; then I learned that he was but just arrived in England, and that he came from some hot country: which was the reason, doubtless, his face was so sallow, and that he sat so near the hearth, and wore a surtout in the house. Presently the words Jamaica, Kingston, Spanish Town, indicated the West Indies as his residence; and it was with no little surprise I gathered, ere long, that he had there first seen and become acquainted with Mr. Rochester. He spoke of his friend's dislike of the burning heats, the hurricanes, and rainy seasons of that region. I knew Mr. Rochester had been a traveller: Mrs. Fairfax had said so; but I thought the continent of Europe had bounded his wanderings; till now I had never heard a hint given of visits to more distant shores.

I was pondering these things, when an incident, and a somewhat unexpected one, broke the thread of my musings. Mr. Mason, shivering as some one chanced to open the door, asked for more coal to be put on the fire, which had burnt out its flame, though its mass of cinder still shone hot and red. The footman who brought the coal, in going out, stopped near Mr. Eshton's chair, and said something to him in a low voice, of which I heard only the words, "old woman," — "quite troublesome."

"Tell her she shall be put in the stocks if she does not take herself off," replied the magistrate.

"No — stop!" interrupted Colonel Dent. "Don't send her away, Eshton; we might turn the thing to account; better consult the ladies." And speaking aloud, he continued — "Ladies, you talked of going to Hay Common to visit the gipsy camp; Sam here says that one of the old Mother Bunches is in the servants' hall at this moment, and insists upon being brought in before 'the quality,' to tell them their fortunes. Would you like to see her?"

"Surely, colonel," cried Lady Ingram, "you would not encourage such a low impostor? Dismiss her, by all means, at once!"

"But I cannot persuade her to go away, my lady," said the footman; "nor can any of the servants: Mrs. Fairfax is with her just now, entreating her to be gone; but she has taken a chair in the chimney-corner, and says nothing shall stir her from it till she gets leave to come in here."

"What does she want?" asked Mrs. Eshton.

"'To tell the gentry their fortunes,' she says, ma'am; and she swears she must and will do it."

"What is she like?" inquired the Misses Eshton, in a breath.

"A shockingly ugly old creature, miss; almost as black as a crock."

"Why, she's a real sorceress!" cried Frederick Lynn. "Let us have her in, of course."

"To be sure," rejoined his brother; "it would be a thousand pities to throw away such a chance of fun."

"My dear boys, what are you thinking about?" exclaimed Mrs. Lynn.

"I cannot possibly countenance any such inconsistent proceeding," chimed in the Dowager Ingram.

"Indeed, mama, but you can — and will," pronounced the haughty voice of Blanche, as she turned round on the piano-stool; where till now she had sat silent, apparently examining sundry sheets of music. "I have a curiosity to hear my fortune told: therefore, Sam, order the beldame forward."

"My darling Blanche! recollect — "

"I do — I recollect all you can suggest; and I must have my will — quick, Sam!"

"Yes — yes — yes!" cried all the juveniles, both ladies and gentlemen. "Let her come — it will be excellent sport!"

The footman still lingered. "She looks such a rough one," said he.

"Go!" ejaculated Miss Ingram, and the man went.

Excitement instantly seized the whole party: a running fire of raillery and jests was proceeding when Sam returned.

"She won't come now," said he. "She says it's not her mission to appear before the 'vulgar herd' (them's her words). I must show her into a room by herself, and then those who wish to consult her must go to her one by one."

"You see now, my queenly Blanche," began Lady Ingram, "she encroaches. Be advised, my angel girl — and — "

"Show her into the library, of course," cut in the "angel girl." "It is not my mission to listen to her before the vulgar herd either: I mean to have her all to myself. Is there a fire in the library?"

"Yes, ma'am — but she looks such a tinkler."

"Cease that chatter, blockhead! and do my bidding."

Again Sam vanished; and mystery, animation, expectation rose to full flow once more.

"She's ready now," said the footman, as he reappeared. "She wishes to know who will be her first visitor."

"I think I had better just look in upon her before any of the ladies go," said Colonel Dent.

"Tell her, Sam, a gentleman is coming."

Sam went and returned.

"She says, sir, that she'll have no gentlemen; they need not trouble themselves to come near her; nor," he added, with difficulty suppressing a titter, "any ladies either, except the young, and single."

"By Jove, she has taste!" exclaimed Henry Lynn.

Miss Ingram rose solemnly: "I go first," she said, in a tone which might have befitted the leader of a forlorn hope, mounting a breach in the van of his men.

"Oh, my best! oh, my dearest! pause — reflect!" was her mama's cry; but she swept past her in stately silence, passed through the door which Colonel Dent held open, and we heard her enter the library.

A comparative silence ensued. Lady Ingram thought it "le cas" to wring her hands: which she did accordingly. Miss Mary declared she felt, for her part, she never dared venture. Amy and Louisa Eshton tittered under their breath, and looked a little frightened.

The minutes passed very slowly: fifteen were counted before the library-door again opened. Miss Ingram returned to us through the arch.

Would she laugh? Would she take it as a joke? All eyes met her with a glance of eager curiosity, and she met all eyes with one of rebuff and coldness; she looked neither flurried nor merry: she walked stiffly to her seat, and took it in silence.

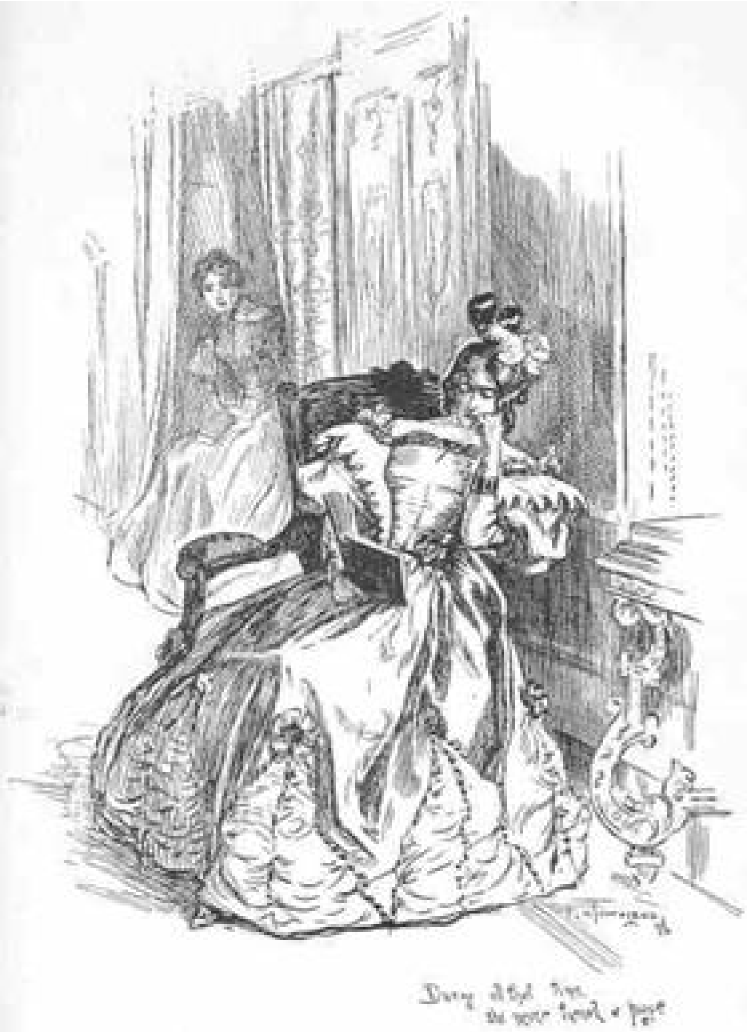
"Well, Blanche?" said Lord Ingram.

"What did she say, sister?" asked Mary.

"What did you think? How do you feel? — Is she a real fortune-teller?" demanded the Misses Eshton.

"Now, now, good people," returned Miss Ingram, "don't press upon me. Really your organs of wonder and credulity are easily excited: you seem, by the importance of you all — my good mama included — ascribe to this matter, absolutely to believe we have a genuine witch in the house, who is in close alliance with the old gentleman. I have seen a gipsy vagabond; she has practised in hackneyed fashion the science of palmistry and told me what such people usually tell. My whim is gratified; and now I think Mr. Eshton will do well to put the hag in the stocks to-morrow morning, as he threatened."

Miss Ingram took a book, leant back in her chair, and so declined further conversation. I watched her for nearly half-an-hour: during all that time she never turned a page, and her face grew momently darker, more dissatisfied, and more sourly expressive of disappointment. She had obviously not heard anything to her advantage: and it seemed to me, from her prolonged fit of gloom and taciturnity, that she herself, notwithstanding her professed indifference, attached undue importance to whatever revelations had been made her.



Meantime, Mary Ingram, Amy and Louisa Eshton, declared they dared not go alone; and yet they all wished to go. A negotiation was opened through the medium of the ambassador, Sam; and after much pacing to and fro, till, I think, the said Sam's calves must have ached with the exercise, permission was at last, with great difficulty, extorted from the rigorous Sibyl, for the three to wait upon her in a body.

Their visit was not so still as Miss Ingram's had been: we heard hysterical giggling and little shrieks proceeding from the library; and at the end of about twenty minutes they burst the door open, and came running across the hall, as if they were half-scared out of their wits.

"I am sure she is something not right!" they cried, one and all. "She told us such things! She knows all about us!" and they sank breathless into the various seats the gentlemen hastened to bring them.

Pressed for further explanation, they declared she had told them of things they had said and done when they were mere children; described books and ornaments they had in their boudoirs at home: keepsakes that different relations had presented to them. They affirmed that she had even divined their thoughts, and had whispered in the ear of each the name of the person she liked best in the world, and informed them of what they most wished for.

Here the gentlemen interposed with earnest petitions to be further enlightened on these two last-named points; but they got only blushes, ejaculations, tremors, and titters, in return for their importunity. The matrons, meantime, offered vinaigrettes and wielded fans; and again and again reiterated the expression of their concern that their warning had not been taken in time; and the elder gentlemen laughed, and the younger urged their services on the agitated fair ones.

In the midst of the tumult, and while my eyes and ears were fully engaged in the scene before me, I heard a hem close at my elbow: I turned, and saw Sam.

“If you please, miss, the gipsy declares that there is another young single lady in the room who has not been to her yet, and she swears she will not go till she has seen all. I thought it must be you: there is no one else for it. What shall I tell her?”

“Oh, I will go by all means,” I answered: and I was glad of the unexpected opportunity to gratify my much-excited curiosity. I slipped out of the room, unobserved by any eye — for the company were gathered in one mass about the trembling trio just returned — and I closed the door quietly behind me.

“If you like, miss,” said Sam, “I’ll wait in the hall for you; and if she frightens you, just call and I’ll come in.”

“No, Sam, return to the kitchen: I am not in the least afraid.” Nor was I; but I was a good deal interested and excited.

CHAPTER XIX

The library looked tranquil enough as I entered it, and the Sibyl — if Sibyl she were — was seated snugly enough in an easy-chair at the chimney-corner. She had on a red cloak and a black bonnet: or rather, a broad-brimmed gipsy hat, tied down with a striped handkerchief under her chin. An extinguished candle stood on the table; she was bending over the fire, and seemed reading in a little black book, like a prayer-book, by the light of the blaze: she muttered the words to herself, as most old women do, while she read; she did not desist immediately on my entrance: it appeared she wished to finish a paragraph.

I stood on the rug and warmed my hands, which were rather cold with sitting at a distance from the drawing-room fire. I felt now as composed as ever I did in my life: there was nothing indeed in the gipsy's appearance to trouble one's calm. She shut her book and slowly looked up; her hat-brim partially shaded her face, yet I could see, as she raised it, that it was a strange one. It looked all brown and black: elf-locks bristled out from beneath a white band which passed under her chin, and came half over her cheeks, or rather jaws: her eye confronted me at once, with a bold and direct gaze.

"Well, and you want your fortune told?" she said, in a voice as decided as her glance, as harsh as her features.

"I don't care about it, mother; you may please yourself: but I ought to warn you, I have no faith."

"It's like your impudence to say so: I expected it of you; I heard it in your step as you crossed the threshold."

"Did you? You've a quick ear."

"I have; and a quick eye and a quick brain."

"You need them all in your trade."

"I do; especially when I've customers like you to deal with. Why don't you tremble?"

"I'm not cold."

"Why don't you turn pale?"

"I am not sick."

"Why don't you consult my art?"

"I'm not silly."

The old crone "nichered" a laugh under her bonnet and bandage; she then drew out a short black pipe, and lighting it began to smoke. Having indulged a while in this sedative, she raised her bent body, took the pipe from her lips, and while gazing steadily at the fire, said very deliberately — "You are cold; you are sick; and you are silly."

"Prove it," I rejoined.

"I will, in few words. You are cold, because you are alone: no contact strikes the fire from you that is in you. You are sick; because the best of feelings, the highest and the sweetest given to man, keeps far away from you. You are silly, because, suffer as you may, you will not beckon it to approach, nor will you stir one step to meet it where it waits you."

She again put her short black pipe to her lips, and renewed her smoking with vigour.

"You might say all that to almost any one who you knew lived as a solitary dependent in a great house."

"I might say it to almost any one: but would it be true of almost any one?"

"In my circumstances."

"Yes; just so, in *your* circumstances: but find me another precisely placed as you are."

"It would be easy to find you thousands."

"You could scarcely find me one. If you knew it, you are peculiarly situated: very near happiness; yes, within reach of it. The materials are all prepared; there only wants a movement to combine them. Chance laid them somewhat apart; let them be once approached and bliss results."

"I don't understand enigmas. I never could guess a riddle in my life."

"If you wish me to speak more plainly, show me your palm."

"And I must cross it with silver, I suppose?"

"To be sure."

I gave her a shilling: she put it into an old stocking-foot which she took out of her pocket, and having tied it round and returned it, she told me to hold out my hand. I did. She approached her face to the palm, and pored over it without touching it.

"It is too fine," said she. "I can make nothing of such a hand as that; almost without lines: besides, what is in a palm? Destiny is not written there."

"I believe you," said I.

"No," she continued, "it is in the face: on the forehead, about the eyes, in the lines of the mouth. Kneel, and lift up your head."

"Ah! now you are coming to reality," I said, as I obeyed her. "I shall begin to put some faith in you presently."

I knelt within half a yard of her. She stirred the fire, so that a ripple of light broke from the disturbed coal: the glare, however, as she sat, only threw her face into deeper shadow: mine, it illumined.

"I wonder with what feelings you came to me to-night," she said, when she had examined me a while. "I wonder what thoughts are busy in your heart during all the hours you sit in yonder room with the fine people flitting before you like shapes in a magic-lantern: just as little sympathetic communion passing between you and them as if they were really mere shadows of human forms, and not the actual substance."

"I feel tired often, sleepy sometimes, but seldom sad."

"Then you have some secret hope to buoy you up and please you with whispers of the future?”

“Not I. The utmost I hope is, to save money enough out of my earnings to set up a school some day in a little house rented by myself.”

“A mean nutriment for the spirit to exist on: and sitting in that window-seat (you see I know your habits) — ”

“You have learned them from the servants.”

“Ah! you think yourself sharp. Well, perhaps I have: to speak truth, I have an acquaintance with one of them, Mrs. Poole — ”

I started to my feet when I heard the name.

“You have — have you?” thought I; “there is diablerie in the business after all, then!”

“Don’t be alarmed,” continued the strange being; “she’s a safe hand is Mrs. Poole: close and quiet; any one may repose confidence in her. But, as I was saying: sitting in that window-seat, do you think of nothing but your future school? Have you no present interest in any of the company who occupy the sofas and chairs before you? Is there not one face you study? one figure whose movements you follow with at least curiosity?”

“I like to observe all the faces and all the figures.”

“But do you never single one from the rest — or it may be, two?”

“I do frequently; when the gestures or looks of a pair seem telling a tale: it amuses me to watch them.”

“What tale do you like best to hear?”

“Oh, I have not much choice! They generally run on the same theme — courtship; and promise to end in the same catastrophe — marriage.”

“And do you like that monotonous theme?”

“Positively, I don’t care about it: it is nothing to me.”

“Nothing to you? When a lady, young and full of life and health, charming with beauty and endowed with the gifts of rank and fortune, sits and smiles in the eyes of a gentleman you — ”

“I what?”

“You know — and perhaps think well of.”

“I don’t know the gentlemen here. I have scarcely interchanged a syllable with one of them; and as to thinking well of them, I consider some respectable, and stately, and middle-aged, and others young, dashing, handsome, and lively: but certainly they are all at liberty to be the recipients of whose smiles they please, without my feeling disposed to consider the transaction of any moment to me.”

“You don’t know the gentlemen here? You have not exchanged a syllable with one of them? Will you say that of the master of the house!”

“He is not at home.”

“A profound remark! A most ingenious quibble! He went to Millcote this morning, and will be back here to-night or to-morrow: does that circumstance exclude him from the list of your acquaintance — blot him, as it were, out of existence?”

"No; but I can scarcely see what Mr. Rochester has to do with the theme you had introduced."

"I was talking of ladies smiling in the eyes of gentlemen; and of late so many smiles have been shed into Mr. Rochester's eyes that they overflow like two cups filled above the brim: have you never remarked that?"

"Mr. Rochester has a right to enjoy the society of his guests."

"No question about his right: but have you never observed that, of all the tales told here about matrimony, Mr. Rochester has been favoured with the most lively and the most continuous?"

"The eagerness of a listener quickens the tongue of a narrator." I said this rather to myself than to the gipsy, whose strange talk, voice, manner, had by this time wrapped me in a kind of dream. One unexpected sentence came from her lips after another, till I got involved in a web of mystification; and wondered what unseen spirit had been sitting for weeks by my heart watching its workings and taking record of every pulse.

"Eagerness of a listener!" repeated she: "yes; Mr. Rochester has sat by the hour, his ear inclined to the fascinating lips that took such delight in their task of communicating; and Mr. Rochester was so willing to receive and looked so grateful for the pastime given him; you have noticed this?"

"Grateful! I cannot remember detecting gratitude in his face."

"Detecting! You have analysed, then. And what did you detect, if not gratitude?"

I said nothing.

"You have seen love: have you not? — and, looking forward, you have seen him married, and beheld his bride happy?"

"Humph! Not exactly. Your witch's skill is rather at fault sometimes."

"What the devil have you seen, then?"

"Never mind: I came here to inquire, not to confess. Is it known that Mr. Rochester is to be married?"

"Yes; and to the beautiful Miss Ingram."

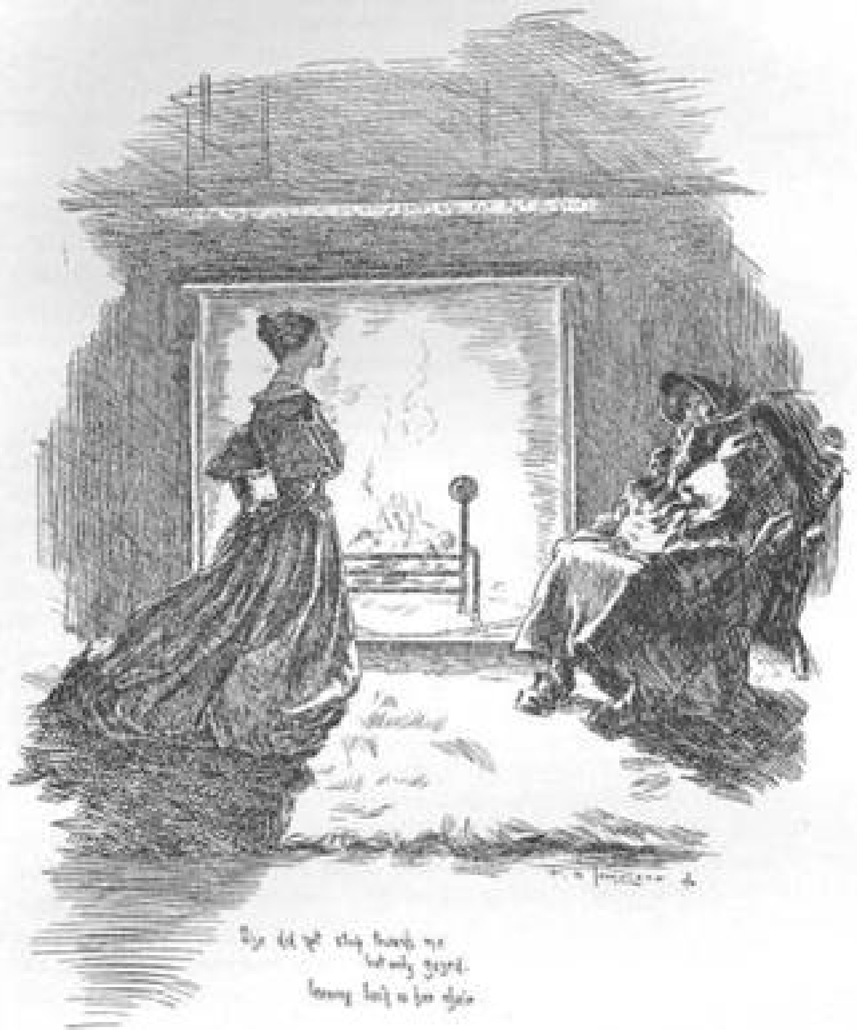
"Shortly?"

"Appearances would warrant that conclusion: and, no doubt (though, with an audacity that wants chastising out of you, you seem to question it), they will be a superlatively happy pair. He must love such a handsome, noble, witty, accomplished lady; and probably she loves him, or, if not his person, at least his purse. I know she considers the Rochester estate eligible to the last degree; though (God pardon me!) I told her something on that point about an hour ago which made her look wondrous grave: the corners of her mouth fell half an inch. I would advise her blackaviced suitor to look out: if another comes, with a longer or clearer rent-roll, — he's dished — "

"But, mother, I did not come to hear Mr. Rochester's fortune: I came to hear my own; and you have told me nothing of it."

"Your fortune is yet doubtful: when I examined your face, one trait contradicted another. Chance has meted you a measure of happiness: that I know. I knew it before I came here this evening. She has laid it carefully on one side for you. I saw her do it. It depends on yourself to stretch out your hand, and take it up: but whether you will do so, is the problem I study. Kneel again on the rug."

"Don't keep me long; the fire scorches me."



I knelt. She did not stoop towards me, but only gazed, leaning back in her chair. She began muttering, —

"The flame flickers in the eye; the eye shines like dew; it looks soft and full of feeling; it smiles at my jargon: it is susceptible; impression follows impression through its clear sphere; where it ceases to smile, it is sad; an unconscious lassitude weighs on the lid: that signifies melancholy resulting from loneliness. It turns from me; it will not suffer further scrutiny; it seems to deny, by a mocking glance, the truth of the discoveries I have already made, — to disown the charge both of sensibility and chagrin: its pride and reserve only confirm me in my opinion. The eye is favourable.

"As to the mouth, it delights at times in laughter; it is disposed to impart all that the brain conceives; though I daresay it would be silent on much the heart experiences. Mobile and flexible, it was never intended to be compressed in the eternal silence of solitude: it is a mouth which should speak much and smile often, and have human affection for its interlocutor. That feature too is propitious.

"I see no enemy to a fortunate issue but in the brow; and that brow professes to say, — 'I can live alone, if self-respect, and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld, or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give.' The forehead declares, 'Reason sits firm and holds the reins, and she will not let the feelings burst away and hurry her to wild chasms. The passions may rage furiously, like true heathens, as they are; and the desires may imagine all sorts of vain things: but judgment shall still have the last word in every argument, and the casting vote in every decision. Strong wind, earthquake-shock, and fire may pass by: but I shall follow the guiding of that still small voice which interprets the dictates of conscience.'

"Well said, forehead; your declaration shall be respected. I have formed my plans — right plans I deem them — and in them I have attended to the claims of conscience, the counsels of reason. I know how soon youth would fade and bloom perish, if, in the cup of bliss offered, but one dreg of shame, or one flavour of remorse were detected; and I do not want sacrifice, sorrow, dissolution — such is not my taste. I wish to foster, not to blight — to earn gratitude, not to wring tears of blood — no, nor of brine: my harvest must be in smiles, in endearments, in sweet — That will do. I think I rave in a kind of exquisite delirium. I should wish now to protract this moment *ad infinitum*; but I dare not. So far I have governed myself thoroughly. I have acted as I inwardly swore I would act; but further might try me beyond my strength. Rise, Miss Eyre: leave me; the play is played out'."

Where was I? Did I wake or sleep? Had I been dreaming? Did I dream still? The old woman's voice had changed: her accent, her gesture, and all were familiar to me as my own face in a glass — as the speech of my own tongue. I got up, but did not go. I looked; I stirred the fire, and I looked again: but she drew her bonnet and her bandage closer about her face, and again beckoned me to depart. The flame illuminated her hand stretched out: roused now, and on the alert for discoveries, I at once noticed that hand. It was no more the withered limb of eld than my own; it was a rounded supple member, with smooth fingers, symmetrically turned; a broad ring flashed on the little finger, and stooping forward, I looked at it, and saw a gem I had seen a hundred times before. Again I looked at the face; which was no longer turned from me — on the contrary, the bonnet was doffed, the bandage displaced, the head advanced.

"Well, Jane, do you know me?" asked the familiar voice.

"Only take off the red cloak, sir, and then — "

"But the string is in a knot — help me."

"Break it, sir."

"There, then — 'Off, ye lendings!'" And Mr. Rochester stepped out of his disguise.

"Now, sir, what a strange idea!"

"But well carried out, eh? Don't you think so?"

"With the ladies you must have managed well."

"But not with you?"

"You did not act the character of a gipsy with me."

"What character did I act? My own?"

"No; some unaccountable one. In short, I believe you have been trying to draw me out — or in; you have been talking nonsense to make me talk nonsense. It is scarcely fair, sir."

"Do you forgive me, Jane?"

"I cannot tell till I have thought it all over. If, on reflection, I find I have fallen into no great absurdity, I shall try to forgive you; but it was not right."

"Oh, you have been very correct — very careful, very sensible."

I reflected, and thought, on the whole, I had. It was a comfort; but, indeed, I had been on my guard almost from the beginning of the interview. Something of masquerade I suspected. I knew gipsies and fortune-tellers did not express themselves as this seeming old woman had expressed herself; besides I had noted her feigned voice, her anxiety to conceal her features. But my mind had been running on Grace Poole — that living enigma, that mystery of mysteries, as I considered her. I had never thought of Mr. Rochester.

"Well," said he, "what are you musing about? What does that grave smile signify?"

"Wonder and self-congratulation, sir. I have your permission to retire now, I suppose?"

"No; stay a moment; and tell me what the people in the drawing-room yonder are doing."

"Discussing the gipsy, I daresay."

"Sit down! — Let me hear what they said about me."

"I had better not stay long, sir; it must be near eleven o'clock. Oh, are you aware, Mr. Rochester, that a stranger has arrived here since you left this morning?"

"A stranger! — no; who can it be? I expected no one; is he gone?"

"No; he said he had known you long, and that he could take the liberty of installing himself here till you returned."

"The devil he did! Did he give his name?"

"His name is Mason, sir; and he comes from the West Indies; from Spanish Town, in Jamaica, I think."

Mr. Rochester was standing near me; he had taken my hand, as if to lead me to a chair. As I spoke he gave my wrist a convulsive grip; the smile on his lips froze: apparently a spasm caught his breath.

"Mason! — the West Indies!" he said, in the tone one might fancy a speaking automaton to enounce its single words; "Mason! — the West Indies!" he reiterated; and he went over the syllables three times, growing, in the intervals of speaking, whiter than ashes: he hardly seemed to know what he was doing.

"Do you feel ill, sir?" I inquired.

"Jane, I've got a blow; I've got a blow, Jane!" He staggered.

"Oh, lean on me, sir."

"Jane, you offered me your shoulder once before; let me have it now."

"Yes, sir, yes; and my arm."

He sat down, and made me sit beside him. Holding my hand in both his own, he chafed it; gazing on me, at the same time, with the most troubled and dreary look.

"My little friend!" said he, "I wish I were in a quiet island with only you; and trouble, and danger, and hideous recollections removed from me."

"Can I help you, sir? — I'd give my life to serve you."

"Jane, if aid is wanted, I'll seek it at your hands; I promise you that."

"Thank you, sir. Tell me what to do, — I'll try, at least, to do it."

"Fetch me now, Jane, a glass of wine from the dining-room: they will be at supper there; and tell me if Mason is with them, and what he is doing."

I went. I found all the party in the dining-room at supper, as Mr. Rochester had said; they were not seated at table, — the supper was arranged on the sideboard; each had taken what he chose, and they stood about here and there in groups, their plates and glasses in their hands. Every one seemed in high glee; laughter and conversation were general and animated. Mr. Mason stood near the fire, talking to Colonel and Mrs. Dent, and appeared as merry as any of them. I filled a wine-glass (I saw Miss Ingram watch me frowningly as I did so: she thought I was taking a liberty, I daresay), and I returned to the library.

Mr. Rochester's extreme pallor had disappeared, and he looked once more firm and stern. He took the glass from my hand.

"Here is to your health, ministrant spirit!" he said. He swallowed the contents and returned it to me. "What are they doing, Jane?"

"Laughing and talking, sir."

"They don't look grave and mysterious, as if they had heard something strange?"

"Not at all: they are full of jests and gaiety."

"And Mason?"

"He was laughing too."

"If all these people came in a body and spat at me, what would you do, Jane?"

"Turn them out of the room, sir, if I could."

He half smiled. "But if I were to go to them, and they only looked at me coldly, and whispered sneeringly amongst each other, and then dropped off and left me one by one, what then? Would you go with them?"

"I rather think not, sir: I should have more pleasure in staying with you."

"To comfort me?"

"Yes, sir, to comfort you, as well as I could."

"And if they laid you under a ban for adhering to me?"

"I, probably, should know nothing about their ban; and if I did, I should care nothing about it."

"Then, you could dare censure for my sake?"

"I could dare it for the sake of any friend who deserved my adherence; as you, I am sure, do."

"Go back now into the room; step quietly up to Mason, and whisper in his ear that Mr. Rochester is come and wishes to see him: show him in here and then leave me."

"Yes, sir."

I did his behest. The company all stared at me as I passed straight among them. I sought Mr. Mason, delivered the message, and preceded him from the room: I ushered him into the library, and then I went upstairs.

At a late hour, after I had been in bed some time, I heard the visitors repair to their chambers: I distinguished Mr. Rochester's voice, and heard him say, "This way, Mason; this is your room."

He spoke cheerfully: the gay tones set my heart at ease. I was soon asleep.

CHAPTER XX

I had forgotten to draw my curtain, which I usually did, and also to let down my window-blind. The consequence was, that when the moon, which was full and bright (for the night was fine), came in her course to that space in the sky opposite my casement, and looked in at me through the unveiled panes, her glorious gaze roused me. Awaking in the dead of night, I opened my eyes on her disk — silver-white and crystal clear. It was beautiful, but too solemn; I half rose, and stretched my arm to draw the curtain.

Good God! What a cry!

The night — its silence — its rest, was rent in twain by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall.

My pulse stopped: my heart stood still; my stretched arm was paralysed. The cry died, and was not renewed. Indeed, whatever being uttered that fearful shriek could not soon repeat it: not the widest-winged condor on the Andes could, twice in succession, send out such a yell from the cloud shrouding his eyrie. The thing delivering such utterance must rest ere it could repeat the effort.

It came out of the third storey; for it passed overhead. And overhead — yes, in the room just above my chamber-ceiling — I now heard a struggle: a deadly one it seemed from the noise; and a half-smothered voice shouted —

“Help! help! help!” three times rapidly.

“Will no one come?” it cried; and then, while the staggering and stamping went on wildly, I distinguished through plank and plaster: —

“Rochester! Rochester! for God’s sake, come!”

A chamber-door opened: some one ran, or rushed, along the gallery. Another step stamped on the flooring above and something fell; and there was silence.

I had put on some clothes, though horror shook all my limbs; I issued from my apartment. The sleepers were all aroused: ejaculations, terrified murmurs sounded in every room; door after door unclosed; one looked out and another looked out; the gallery filled. Gentlemen and ladies alike had quitted their beds; and “Oh! what is it?” — “Who is hurt?” — “What has happened?” — “Fetch a light!” — “Is it fire?” — “Are there robbers?” — “Where shall we run?” was demanded confusedly on all hands. But for the moonlight they would have been in complete darkness. They ran to and fro; they crowded together: some sobbed, some stumbled: the confusion was inextricable.

“Where the devil is Rochester?” cried Colonel Dent. “I cannot find him in his bed.”

“Here! here!” was shouted in return. “Be composed, all of you: I’m coming."

And the door at the end of the gallery opened, and Mr. Rochester advanced with a candle: he had just descended from the upper storey. One of the ladies ran to him directly; she seized his arm: it was Miss Ingram.

"What awful event has taken place?" said she. "Speak! let us know the worst at once!"

"But don't pull me down or strangle me," he replied: for the Misses Eshton were clinging about him now; and the two dowagers, in vast white wrappers, were bearing down on him like ships in full sail.

"All's right! — all's right!" he cried. "It's a mere rehearsal of Much Ado about Nothing. Ladies, keep off, or I shall wax dangerous."

And dangerous he looked: his black eyes darted sparks. Calming himself by an effort, he added —

"A servant has had the nightmare; that is all. She's an excitable, nervous person: she construed her dream into an apparition, or something of that sort, no doubt; and has taken a fit with fright. Now, then, I must see you all back into your rooms; for, till the house is settled, she cannot be looked after. Gentlemen, have the goodness to set the ladies the example. Miss Ingram, I am sure you will not fail in evincing superiority to idle terrors. Amy and Louisa, return to your nests like a pair of doves, as you are. Mesdames" (to the dowagers), "you will take cold to a dead certainty, if you stay in this chill gallery any longer."

And so, by dint of alternate coaxing and commanding, he contrived to get them all once more enclosed in their separate dormitories. I did not wait to be ordered back to mine, but retreated unnoticed, as unnoticed I had left it.

Not, however, to go to bed: on the contrary, I began and dressed myself carefully. The sounds I had heard after the scream, and the words that had been uttered, had probably been heard only by me; for they had proceeded from the room above mine: but they assured me that it was not a servant's dream which had thus struck horror through the house; and that the explanation Mr. Rochester had given was merely an invention framed to pacify his guests. I dressed, then, to be ready for emergencies. When dressed, I sat a long time by the window looking out over the silent grounds and silvered fields and waiting for I knew not what. It seemed to me that some event must follow the strange cry, struggle, and call.

No: stillness returned: each murmur and movement ceased gradually, and in about an hour Thornfield Hall was again as hushed as a desert. It seemed that sleep and night had resumed their empire. Meantime the moon declined: she was about to set. Not liking to sit in the cold and darkness, I thought I would lie down on my bed, dressed as I was. I left the window, and moved with little noise across the carpet; as I stooped to take off my shoes, a cautious hand tapped low at the door.

"Am I wanted?" I asked.

"Are you up?" asked the voice I expected to hear, viz., my master's.

"Yes, sir."

"And dressed?"

"Yes."

"Come out, then, quietly."

I obeyed. Mr. Rochester stood in the gallery holding a light.

"I want you," he said: "come this way: take your time, and make no noise."

My slippers were thin: I could walk the matted floor as softly as a cat. He glided up the gallery and up the stairs, and stopped in the dark, low corridor of the fateful third storey: I had followed and stood at his side.

"Have you a sponge in your room?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any salts — volatile salts?"

"Yes."

"Go back and fetch both."

I returned, sought the sponge on the washstand, the salts in my drawer, and once more retraced my steps. He still waited; he held a key in his hand: approaching one of the small, black doors, he put it in the lock; he paused, and addressed me again.

"You don't turn sick at the sight of blood?"

"I think I shall not: I have never been tried yet."

I felt a thrill while I answered him; but no coldness, and no faintness.

"Just give me your hand," he said: "it will not do to risk a fainting fit."

I put my fingers into his. "Warm and steady," was his remark: he turned the key and opened the door.

I saw a room I remembered to have seen before, the day Mrs. Fairfax showed me over the house: it was hung with tapestry; but the tapestry was now looped up in one part, and there was a door apparent, which had then been concealed. This door was open; a light shone out of the room within: I heard thence a snarling, snatching sound, almost like a dog quarrelling. Mr. Rochester, putting down his candle, said to me, "Wait a minute," and he went forward to the inner apartment. A shout of laughter greeted his entrance; noisy at first, and terminating in Grace Poole's own goblin ha! ha! *She* then was there. He made some sort of arrangement without speaking, though I heard a low voice address him: he came out and closed the door behind him.

"Here, Jane!" he said; and I walked round to the other side of a large bed, which with its drawn curtains concealed a considerable portion of the chamber. An easy-chair was near the bed-head: a man sat in it, dressed with the exception of his coat; he was still; his head leant back; his eyes were closed. Mr. Rochester held the candle over him; I recognised in his pale and seemingly lifeless face — the stranger, Mason: I saw too that his linen on one side, and one arm, was almost soaked in blood.

"Hold the candle," said Mr. Rochester, and I took it: he fetched a basin of water from the washstand: "Hold that," said he. I obeyed. He took the sponge, dipped it in, and moistened the corpse-like face; he asked for my smelling-bottle, and applied it to the nostrils. Mr. Mason shortly unclosed his eyes; he groaned. Mr. Rochester opened the shirt of the wounded man, whose arm and shoulder were bandaged: he sponged away blood, trickling fast down.

"Is there immediate danger?" murmured Mr. Mason.

"Pooh! No — a mere scratch. Don't be so overcome, man: bear up! I'll fetch a surgeon for you now, myself: you'll be able to be removed by morning, I hope. Jane," he continued.

"Sir?"

"I shall have to leave you in this room with this gentleman, for an hour, or perhaps two hours: you will sponge the blood as I do when it returns: if he feels faint, you will put the glass of water on that stand to his lips, and your salts to his nose. You will not speak to him on any pretext — and — Richard, it will be at the peril of your life if you speak to her: open your lips — agitate yourself — and I'll not answer for the consequences."

Again the poor man groaned; he looked as if he dared not move; fear, either of death or of something else, appeared almost to paralyse him. Mr. Rochester put the now bloody sponge into my hand, and I proceeded to use it as he had done. He watched me a second, then saying, "Remember! — No conversation," he left the room. I experienced a strange feeling as the key grated in the lock, and the sound of his retreating step ceased to be heard.

Here then I was in the third storey, fastened into one of its mystic cells; night around me; a pale and bloody spectacle under my eyes and hands; a murderess hardly separated from me by a single door: yes — that was appalling — the rest I could bear; but I shuddered at the thought of Grace Poole bursting out upon me.

I must keep to my post, however. I must watch this ghastly countenance — these blue, still lips forbidden to unclose — these eyes now shut, now opening, now wandering through the room, now fixing on me, and ever glazed with the dulness of horror. I must dip my hand again and again in the basin of blood and water, and wipe away the trickling gore. I must see the light of the unsnuffed candle wane on my employment; the shadows darken on the wrought, antique tapestry round me, and grow black under the hangings of the vast old bed, and quiver strangely over the doors of a great cabinet opposite — whose front, divided into twelve panels, bore, in grim design, the heads of the twelve apostles, each enclosed in its separate panel as in a frame; while above them at the top rose an ebon crucifix and a dying Christ.

According as the shifting obscurity and flickering gleam hovered here or glanced there, it was now the bearded physician, Luke, that bent his brow; now St. John's long hair that waved; and anon the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel, and seemed gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor — of Satan himself — in his subordinate's form.

Amidst all this, I had to listen as well as watch: to listen for the movements of the wild beast or the fiend in yonder side den. But since Mr. Rochester's visit it seemed spellbound: all the night I heard but three sounds at three long intervals, — a step creak, a momentary renewal of the snarling, canine noise, and a deep human groan.

Then my own thoughts worried me. What crime was this that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner? — what mystery, that broke out now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey?

And this man I bent over — this commonplace, quiet stranger — how had he become involved in the web of horror? and why had the Fury flown at him? What made him seek this quarter of the house at an untimely season, when he should have been asleep in bed? I had heard Mr. Rochester assign him an apartment below — what brought him here! And why, now, was he so tame under the violence or treachery done him? Why did he so quietly submit to the concealment Mr. Rochester enforced? Why *did* Mr. Rochester enforce this concealment? His guest had been outraged, his own life on a former occasion had been hideously plotted against; and both attempts he smothered in secrecy and sank in oblivion! Lastly, I saw Mr. Mason was submissive to Mr. Rochester; that the impetuous will of the latter held complete sway over the inertness of the former: the few words which had passed between them assured me of this. It was evident that in their former intercourse, the passive disposition of the one had been habitually influenced by the active energy of the other: whence then had arisen Mr. Rochester's dismay when he heard of Mr. Mason's arrival? Why had the mere name of this unresisting individual — whom his word now sufficed to control like a child — fallen on him, a few hours since, as a thunderbolt might fall on an oak?

Oh! I could not forget his look and his paleness when he whispered: "Jane, I have got a blow — I have got a blow, Jane." I could not forget how the arm had trembled which he rested on my shoulder: and it was no light matter which could thus bow the resolute spirit and thrill the vigorous frame of Fairfax Rochester.

"When will he come? When will he come?" I cried inwardly, as the night lingered and lingered — as my bleeding patient drooped, moaned, sickened: and neither day nor aid arrived. I had, again and again, held the water to Mason's white lips; again and again offered him the stimulating salts: my efforts seemed ineffectual: either bodily or mental suffering, or loss of blood, or all three combined, were fast prostrating his strength. He moaned so, and looked so weak, wild, and lost, I feared he was dying; and I might not even speak to him.

The candle, wasted at last, went out; as it expired, I perceived streaks of grey light edging the window curtains: dawn was then approaching. Presently I heard Pilot bark far below, out of his distant kennel in the courtyard: hope revived. Nor was it unwarranted: in five minutes more the grating key, the yielding lock, warned me my watch was relieved. It could not have lasted more than two hours: many a week has seemed shorter.

Mr. Rochester entered, and with him the surgeon he had been to fetch.

“Now, Carter, be on the alert,” he said to this last: “I give you but half-an-hour for dressing the wound, fastening the bandages, getting the patient downstairs and all.”

“But is he fit to move, sir?”

“No doubt of it; it is nothing serious; he is nervous, his spirits must be kept up. Come, set to work.”

Mr. Rochester drew back the thick curtain, drew up the holland blind, let in all the daylight he could; and I was surprised and cheered to see how far dawn was advanced: what rosy streaks were beginning to brighten the east. Then he approached Mason, whom the surgeon was already handling.

“Now, my good fellow, how are you?” he asked.

“She’s done for me, I fear,” was the faint reply.

“Not a whit! — courage! This day fortnight you’ll hardly be a pin the worse of it: you’ve lost a little blood; that’s all. Carter, assure him there’s no danger.”

“I can do that conscientiously,” said Carter, who had now undone the bandages; “only I wish I could have got here sooner: he would not have bled so much — but how is this? The flesh on the shoulder is torn as well as cut. This wound was not done with a knife: there have been teeth here!”

“She bit me,” he murmured. “She worried me like a tigress, when Rochester got the knife from her.”

“You should not have yielded: you should have grappled with her at once,” said Mr. Rochester.

“But under such circumstances, what could one do?” returned Mason. “Oh, it was frightful!” he added, shuddering. “And I did not expect it: she looked so quiet at first.”

“I warned you,” was his friend’s answer; “I said — be on your guard when you go near her. Besides, you might have waited till to-morrow, and had me with you: it was mere folly to attempt the interview to-night, and alone.”

“I thought I could have done some good.”

“You thought! you thought! Yes, it makes me impatient to hear you: but, however, you have suffered, and are likely to suffer enough for not taking my advice; so I’ll say no more. Carter — hurry! — hurry! The sun will soon rise, and I must have him off.”

“Directly, sir; the shoulder is just bandaged. I must look to this other wound in the arm: she has had her teeth here too, I think.”

“She sucked the blood: she said she’d drain my heart,” said Mason.

I saw Mr. Rochester shudder: a singularly marked expression of disgust, horror, hatred, warped his countenance almost to distortion; but he only said

—

"Come, be silent, Richard, and never mind her gibberish: don't repeat it."

"I wish I could forget it," was the answer.

"You will when you are out of the country: when you get back to Spanish Town, you may think of her as dead and buried — or rather, you need not think of her at all."

"Impossible to forget this night!"

"It is not impossible: have some energy, man. You thought you were as dead as a herring two hours since, and you are all alive and talking now. There! — Carter has done with you or nearly so; I'll make you decent in a trice. Jane" (he turned to me for the first time since his re-entrance), "take this key: go down into my bedroom, and walk straight forward into my dressing-room: open the top drawer of the wardrobe and take out a clean shirt and neck-handkerchief: bring them here; and be nimble."

I went; sought the repository he had mentioned, found the articles named, and returned with them.

"Now," said he, "go to the other side of the bed while I order his toilet; but don't leave the room: you may be wanted again."

I retired as directed.

"Was anybody stirring below when you went down, Jane?" inquired Mr. Rochester presently.

"No, sir; all was very still."

"We shall get you off cannily, Dick: and it will be better, both for your sake, and for that of the poor creature in yonder. I have striven long to avoid exposure, and I should not like it to come at last. Here, Carter, help him on with his waist-coat. Where did you leave your furred cloak? You can't travel a mile without that, I know, in this damned cold climate. In your room? — Jane, run down to Mr. Mason's room, — the one next mine, — and fetch a cloak you will see there."

Again I ran, and again returned, bearing an immense mantle lined and edged with fur.

"Now, I've another errand for you," said my untiring master; "you must away to my room again. What a mercy you are shod with velvet, Jane! — a clod-hopping messenger would never do at this juncture. You must open the middle drawer of my toilet-table and take out a little phial and a little glass you will find there, — quick!"

I flew thither and back, bringing the desired vessels.

"That's well! Now, doctor, I shall take the liberty of administering a dose myself, on my own responsibility. I got this cordial at Rome, of an Italian charlatan — a fellow you would have kicked, Carter. It is not a thing to be used indiscriminately, but it is good upon occasion: as now, for instance. Jane, a little water."

He held out the tiny glass, and I half filled it from the water-bottle on the washstand.

"That will do; — now wet the lip of the phial."

I did so; he measured twelve drops of a crimson liquid, and presented it to Mason.

"Drink, Richard: it will give you the heart you lack, for an hour or so."

"But will it hurt me? — is it inflammatory?"

"Drink! drink! drink!"

Mr. Mason obeyed, because it was evidently useless to resist. He was dressed now: he still looked pale, but he was no longer gory and sullied. Mr. Rochester let him sit three minutes after he had swallowed the liquid; he then took his arm —

"Now I am sure you can get on your feet," he said — "try."

The patient rose.

"Carter, take him under the other shoulder. Be of good cheer, Richard; step out — that's it!"

"I do feel better," remarked Mr. Mason.

"I am sure you do. Now, Jane, trip on before us away to the backstairs; unbolt the side-passage door, and tell the driver of the post-chaise you will see in the yard — or just outside, for I told him not to drive his rattling wheels over the pavement — to be ready; we are coming: and, Jane, if any one is about, come to the foot of the stairs and hem."

It was by this time half-past five, and the sun was on the point of rising; but I found the kitchen still dark and silent. The side-passage door was fastened; I opened it with as little noise as possible: all the yard was quiet; but the gates stood wide open, and there was a post-chaise, with horses ready harnessed, and driver seated on the box, stationed outside. I approached him, and said the gentlemen were coming; he nodded: then I looked carefully round and listened. The stillness of early morning slumbered everywhere; the curtains were yet drawn over the servants' chamber windows; little birds were just twittering in the blossom-blanched orchard trees, whose boughs drooped like white garlands over the wall enclosing one side of the yard; the carriage horses stamped from time to time in their closed stables: all else was still.

The gentlemen now appeared. Mason, supported by Mr. Rochester and the surgeon, seemed to walk with tolerable ease: they assisted him into the chaise; Carter followed.

"Take care of him," said Mr. Rochester to the latter, "and keep him at your house till he is quite well: I shall ride over in a day or two to see how he gets on. Richard, how is it with you?"

"The fresh air revives me, Fairfax."

"Leave the window open on his side, Carter; there is no wind — good-bye, Dick."

"Fairfax — "

"Well what is it?"

"Let her be taken care of; let her be treated as tenderly as may be: let her — " he stopped and burst into tears.

"I do my best; and have done it, and will do it," was the answer: he shut up the chaise door, and the vehicle drove away.

"Yet would to God there was an end of all this!" added Mr. Rochester, as he closed and barred the heavy yard-gates.

This done, he moved with slow step and abstracted air towards a door in the wall bordering the orchard. I, supposing he had done with me, prepared to return to the house; again, however, I heard him call "Jane!" He had opened feel portal and stood at it, waiting for me.

"Come where there is some freshness, for a few moments," he said; "that house is a mere dungeon: don't you feel it so?"

"It seems to me a splendid mansion, sir."

"The glamour of inexperience is over your eyes," he answered; "and you see it through a charmed medium: you cannot discern that the gilding is slime and the silk draperies cobwebs; that the marble is sordid slate, and the polished woods mere refuse chips and scaly bark. Now *here*" (he pointed to the leafy enclosure we had entered) "all is real, sweet, and pure."

He strayed down a walk edged with box, with apple trees, pear trees, and cherry trees on one side, and a border on the other full of all sorts of old-fashioned flowers, stocks, sweet-williams, primroses, pansies, mingled with southernwood, sweet-briar, and various fragrant herbs. They were fresh now as a succession of April showers and gleams, followed by a lovely spring morning, could make them: the sun was just entering the dappled east, and his light illumined the wreathed and dewy orchard trees and shone down the quiet walks under them.

"Jane, will you have a flower?"

He gathered a half-blown rose, the first on the bush, and offered it to me.

"Thank you, sir."

"Do you like this sunrise, Jane? That sky with its high and light clouds which are sure to melt away as the day waxes warm — this placid and balmly atmosphere?"

"I do, very much."

"You have passed a strange night, Jane."

"Yes, sir."

"And it has made you look pale — were you afraid when I left you alone with Mason?"

"I was afraid of some one coming out of the inner room."

"But I had fastened the door — I had the key in my pocket: I should have been a careless shepherd if I had left a lamb — my pet lamb — so near a wolf's den, unguarded: you were safe."

"Will Grace Poole live here still, sir?"

"Oh yes! don't trouble your head about her — put the thing out of your thoughts."

"Yet it seems to me your life is hardly secure while she stays."

"Never fear — I will take care of myself."

"Is the danger you apprehended last night gone by now, sir?"

"I cannot vouch for that till Mason is out of England: nor even then. To live, for me, Jane, is to stand on a crater-crust which may crack and spue fire any day."

"But Mr. Mason seems a man easily led. Your influence, sir, is evidently potent with him: he will never set you at defiance or wilfully injure you."

"Oh, no! Mason will not defy me; nor, knowing it, will he hurt me — but, unintentionally, he might in a moment, by one careless word, deprive me, if not of life, yet for ever of happiness."

"Tell him to be cautious, sir: let him know what you fear, and show him how to avert the danger."

He laughed sardonically, hastily took my hand, and as hastily threw it from him.

"If I could do that, simpleton, where would the danger be? Annihilated in a moment. Ever since I have known Mason, I have only had to say to him 'Do that,' and the thing has been done. But I cannot give him orders in this case: I cannot say 'Beware of harming me, Richard;' for it is imperative that I should keep him ignorant that harm to me is possible. Now you look puzzled; and I will puzzle you further. You are my little friend, are you not?"

"I like to serve you, sir, and to obey you in all that is right."

"Precisely: I see you do. I see genuine contentment in your gait and mien, your eye and face, when you are helping me and pleasing me — working for me, and with me, in, as you characteristically say, '*all that is right*:' for if I bid you do what you thought wrong, there would be no light-footed running, no neat-handed alacrity, no lively glance and animated complexion. My friend would then turn to me, quiet and pale, and would say, 'No, sir; that is impossible: I cannot do it, because it is wrong;' and would become immutable as a fixed star. Well, you too have power over me, and may injure me: yet I dare not show you where I am vulnerable, lest, faithful and friendly as you are, you should transfix me at once."

"If you have no more to fear from Mr. Mason than you have from me, sir, you are very safe."

"God grant it may be so! Here, Jane, is an arbour; sit down."

The arbour was an arch in the wall, lined with ivy; it contained a rustic seat. Mr. Rochester took it, leaving room, however, for me: but I stood before him.

"Sit," he said; "the bench is long enough for two. You don't hesitate to take a place at my side, do you? Is that wrong, Jane?"

I answered him by assuming it: to refuse would, I felt, have been unwise.

"Now, my little friend, while the sun drinks the dew — while all the flowers in this old garden awake and expand, and the birds fetch their young ones' breakfast out of the Thornfield, and the early bees do their first spell of work — I'll put a case to you, which you must endeavour to suppose your own: but first, look at me, and tell me you are at ease, and not fearing that I err in detaining you, or that you err in staying."

"No, sir; I am content."

"Well then, Jane, call to aid your fancy: — suppose you were no longer a girl well reared and disciplined, but a wild boy indulged from childhood upwards; imagine yourself in a remote foreign land; conceive that you there commit a capital error, no matter of what nature or from what motives, but one whose consequences must follow you through life and taint all your existence. Mind, I don't say a *crime*; I am not speaking of shedding of blood or any other guilty act, which might make the perpetrator amenable to the law: my word is *error*. The results of what you have done become in time to you utterly insupportable; you take measures to obtain relief: unusual measures, but neither unlawful nor culpable. Still you are miserable; for hope has quitted you on the very confines of life: your sun at noon darkens in an eclipse, which you feel will not leave it till the time of setting. Bitter and base associations have become the sole food of your memory: you wander here and there, seeking rest in exile: happiness in pleasure — I mean in heartless, sensual pleasure — such as dulls intellect and blights feeling. Heart-weary and soul-withered, you come home after years of voluntary banishment: you make a new acquaintance — how or where no matter: you find in this stranger much of the good and bright qualities which you have sought for twenty years, and never before encountered; and they are all fresh, healthy, without soil and without taint. Such society revives, regenerates: you feel better days come back — higher wishes, purer feelings; you desire to recommence your life, and to spend what remains to you of days in a way more worthy of an immortal being. To attain this end, are you justified in overleaping an obstacle of custom — a mere conventional impediment which neither your conscience sanctifies nor your judgment approves?"

He paused for an answer: and what was I to say? Oh, for some good spirit to suggest a judicious and satisfactory response! Vain aspiration! The west wind whispered in the ivy round me; but no gentle Ariel borrowed its breath as a medium of speech: the birds sang in the tree-tops; but their song, however sweet, was inarticulate.

Again Mr. Rochester propounded his query:

"Is the wandering and sinful, but now rest-seeking and repentant, man justified in daring the world's opinion, in order to attach to him for ever this gentle, gracious, genial stranger, thereby securing his own peace of mind and regeneration of life?"

"Sir," I answered, "a wanderer's repose or a sinner's reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature. Men and women die; philosophers falter in wisdom, and Christians in goodness: if any one you know has suffered and erred, let him look higher than his equals for strength to amend and solace to heal."

"But the instrument — the instrument! God, who does the work, ordains the instrument. I have myself — I tell it you without parable — been a worldly, dissipated, restless man; and I believe I have found the instrument for my cure in — ”

He paused: the birds went on carolling, the leaves lightly rustling. I almost wondered they did not check their songs and whispers to catch the suspended revelation; but they would have had to wait many minutes — so long was the silence protracted. At last I looked up at the tardy speaker: he was looking eagerly at me.

“Little friend,” said he, in quite a changed tone — while his face changed too, losing all its softness and gravity, and becoming harsh and sarcastic — “you have noticed my tender penchant for Miss Ingram: don’t you think if I married her she would regenerate me with a vengeance?”

He got up instantly, went quite to the other end of the walk, and when he came back he was humming a tune.

“Jane, Jane,” said he, stopping before me, “you are quite pale with your vigils: don’t you curse me for disturbing your rest?”

“Curse you? No, sir.”

“Shake hands in confirmation of the word. What cold fingers! They were warmer last night when I touched them at the door of the mysterious chamber. Jane, when will you watch with me again?”

“Whenever I can be useful, sir.”

“For instance, the night before I am married! I am sure I shall not be able to sleep. Will you promise to sit up with me to bear me company? To you I can talk of my lovely one: for now you have seen her and know her.”

“Yes, sir.”

“She’s a rare one, is she not, Jane?”

“Yes, sir.”

“A strapper — a real strapper, Jane: big, brown, and buxom; with hair just such as the ladies of Carthage must have had. Bless me! there’s Dent and Lynn in the stables! Go in by the shrubbery, through that wicket.”

As I went one way, he went another, and I heard him in the yard, saying cheerfully —

“Mason got the start of you all this morning; he was gone before sunrise: I rose at four to see him off.”

CHAPTER XXI

Presentiments are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs; and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life, because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies, I believe, exist (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man.

When I was a little girl, only six years old, I one night heard Bessie Leaven say to Martha Abbot that she had been dreaming about a little child; and that to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one's self or one's kin. The saying might have worn out of my memory, had not a circumstance immediately followed which served indelibly to fix it there. The next day Bessie was sent for home to the deathbed of her little sister.

Of late I had often recalled this saying and this incident; for during the past week scarcely a night had gone over my couch that had not brought with it a dream of an infant, which I sometimes hushed in my arms, sometimes dandled on my knee, sometimes watched playing with daisies on a lawn, or again, dabbling its hands in running water. It was a wailing child this night, and a laughing one the next: now it nestled close to me, and now it ran from me; but whatever mood the apparition evinced, whatever aspect it wore, it failed not for seven successive nights to meet me the moment I entered the land of slumber.

I did not like this iteration of one idea — this strange recurrence of one image, and I grew nervous as bedtime approached and the hour of the vision drew near. It was from companionship with this baby-phantom I had been roused on that moonlight night when I heard the cry; and it was on the afternoon of the day following I was summoned downstairs by a message that some one wanted me in Mrs. Fairfax's room. On repairing thither, I found a man waiting for me, having the appearance of a gentleman's servant: he was dressed in deep mourning, and the hat he held in his hand was surrounded with a crape band.

"I daresay you hardly remember me, Miss," he said, rising as I entered; "but my name is Leaven: I lived coachman with Mrs. Reed when you were at Gateshead, eight or nine years since, and I live there still."

"Oh, Robert! how do you do? I remember you very well: you used to give me a ride sometimes on Miss Georgiana's bay pony. And how is Bessie? You are married to Bessie?"

"Yes, Miss: my wife is very hearty, thank you; she brought me another little one about two months since — we have three now — and both mother and child are thriving."

"And are the family well at the house, Robert?"

"I am sorry I can't give you better news of them, Miss: they are very badly at present — in great trouble."

"I hope no one is dead," I said, glancing at his black dress. He too looked down at the crape round his hat and replied —

"Mr. John died yesterday was a week, at his chambers in London."

"Mr. John?"

"Yes."

"And how does his mother bear it?"

"Why, you see, Miss Eyre, it is not a common mishap: his life has been very wild: these last three years he gave himself up to strange ways, and his death was shocking."

"I heard from Bessie he was not doing well."

"Doing well! He could not do worse: he ruined his health and his estate amongst the worst men and the worst women. He got into debt and into jail: his mother helped him out twice, but as soon as he was free he returned to his old companions and habits. His head was not strong: the knaves he lived amongst fooled him beyond anything I ever heard. He came down to Gateshead about three weeks ago and wanted missis to give up all to him. Missis refused: her means have long been much reduced by his extravagance; so he went back again, and the next news was that he was dead. How he died, God knows! — they say he killed himself."

I was silent: the things were frightful. Robert Leaven resumed —

"Missis had been out of health herself for some time: she had got very stout, but was not strong with it; and the loss of money and fear of poverty were quite breaking her down. The information about Mr. John's death and the manner of it came too suddenly: it brought on a stroke. She was three days without speaking; but last Tuesday she seemed rather better: she appeared as if she wanted to say something, and kept making signs to my wife and mumbling. It was only yesterday morning, however, that Bessie understood she was pronouncing your name; and at last she made out the words, 'Bring Jane — fetch Jane Eyre: I want to speak to her.' Bessie is not sure whether she is in her right mind, or means anything by the words; but she told Miss Reed and Miss Georgiana, and advised them to send for you. The young ladies put it off at first; but their mother grew so restless, and said, 'Jane, Jane,' so many times, that at last they consented. I left Gateshead yesterday: and if you can get ready, Miss, I should like to take you back with me early to-morrow morning."

"Yes, Robert, I shall be ready: it seems to me that I ought to go."

"I think so too, Miss. Bessie said she was sure you would not refuse: but I suppose you will have to ask leave before you can get off?"

"Yes; and I will do it now;" and having directed him to the servants' hall, and recommended him to the care of John's wife, and the attentions of John himself, I went in search of Mr. Rochester.

He was not in any of the lower rooms; he was not in the yard, the stables, or the grounds. I asked Mrs. Fairfax if she had seen him; — yes: she believed he was playing billiards with Miss Ingram. To the billiard-room I hastened: the click of balls and the hum of voices resounded thence; Mr. Rochester, Miss Ingram, the two Misses Eshton, and their admirers, were all busied in the game. It required some courage to disturb so interesting a party; my errand, however, was one I could not defer, so I approached the master where he stood at Miss Ingram's side. She turned as I drew near, and looked at me haughtily: her eyes seemed to demand, "What can the creeping creature want now?" and when I said, in a low voice, "Mr. Rochester," she made a movement as if tempted to order me away. I remember her appearance at the moment — it was very graceful and very striking: she wore a morning robe of sky-blue crape; a gauzy azure scarf was twisted in her hair. She had been all animation with the game, and irritated pride did not lower the expression of her haughty lineaments.

"Does that person want you?" she inquired of Mr. Rochester; and Mr. Rochester turned to see who the "person" was. He made a curious grimace — one of his strange and equivocal demonstrations — threw down his cue and followed me from the room.

"Well, Jane?" he said, as he rested his back against the schoolroom door, which he had shut.

"If you please, sir, I want leave of absence for a week or two."

"What to do? — where to go?"

"To see a sick lady who has sent for me."

"What sick lady? — where does she live?"

"At Gateshead; in — -shire."

"-shire? That is a hundred miles off! Who may she be that sends for people to see her that distance?"

"Her name is Reed, sir — Mrs. Reed."

"Reed of Gateshead? There was a Reed of Gateshead, a magistrate."

"It is his widow, sir."

"And what have you to do with her? How do you know her?"

"Mr. Reed was my uncle — my mother's brother."

"The deuce he was! You never told me that before: you always said you had no relations."

"None that would own me, sir. Mr. Reed is dead, and his wife cast me off."

"Why?"

"Because I was poor, and burdensome, and she disliked me."

"But Reed left children? — you must have cousins? Sir George Lynn was talking of a Reed of Gateshead yesterday, who, he said, was one of the veriest rascals on town; and Ingram was mentioning a Georgiana Reed of the same place, who was much admired for her beauty a season or two ago in London."

"John Reed is dead, too, sir: he ruined himself and half-ruined his family, and is supposed to have committed suicide. The news so shocked his mother that it brought on an apoplectic attack."

"And what good can you do her? Nonsense, Jane! I would never think of running a hundred miles to see an old lady who will, perhaps, be dead before you reach her: besides, you say she cast you off."

"Yes, sir, but that is long ago; and when her circumstances were very different: I could not be easy to neglect her wishes now."

"How long will you stay?"

"As short a time as possible, sir."

"Promise me only to stay a week — "

"I had better not pass my word: I might be obliged to break it."

"At all events you *will* come back: you will not be induced under any pretext to take up a permanent residence with her?"

"Oh, no! I shall certainly return if all be well."

"And who goes with you? You don't travel a hundred miles alone."

"No, sir, she has sent her coachman."

"A person to be trusted?"

"Yes, sir, he has lived ten years in the family."

Mr. Rochester meditated. "When do you wish to go?"

"Early to-morrow morning, sir."

"Well, you must have some money; you can't travel without money, and I daresay you have not much: I have given you no salary yet. How much have you in the world, Jane?" he asked, smiling.

I drew out my purse; a meagre thing it was. "Five shillings, sir." He took the purse, poured the hoard into his palm, and chuckled over it as if its scantiness amused him. Soon he produced his pocket-book: "Here," said he, offering me a note; it was fifty pounds, and he owed me but fifteen. I told him I had no change.

"I don't want change; you know that. Take your wages."

I declined accepting more than was my due. He scowled at first; then, as if recollecting something, he said —

"Right, right! Better not give you all now: you would, perhaps, stay away three months if you had fifty pounds. There are ten; is it not plenty?"

"Yes, sir, but now you owe me five."

"Come back for it, then; I am your banker for forty pounds."

"Mr. Rochester, I may as well mention another matter of business to you while I have the opportunity."

"Matter of business? I am curious to hear it."

"You have as good as informed me, sir, that you are going shortly to be married?"

"Yes; what then?"

“In that case, sir, Adèle ought to go to school: I am sure you will perceive the necessity of it.”

“To get her out of my bride’s way, who might otherwise walk over her rather too emphatically? There’s sense in the suggestion; not a doubt of it. Adèle, as you say, must go to school; and you, of course, must march straight to — the devil?”

“I hope not, sir; but I must seek another situation somewhere.”

“In course!” he exclaimed, with a twang of voice and a distortion of features equally fantastic and ludicrous. He looked at me some minutes.

“And old Madam Reed, or the Misses, her daughters, will be solicited by you to seek a place, I suppose?”

“No, sir; I am not on such terms with my relatives as would justify me in asking favours of them — but I shall advertise.”

“You shall walk up the pyramids of Egypt!” he growled. “At your peril you advertise! I wish I had only offered you a sovereign instead of ten pounds. Give me back nine pounds, Jane; I’ve a use for it.”

“And so have I, sir,” I returned, putting my hands and my purse behind me. “I could not spare the money on any account.”

“Little niggard!” said he, “refusing me a pecuniary request! Give me five pounds, Jane.”

“Not five shillings, sir; nor five pence.”

“Just let me look at the cash.”

“No, sir; you are not to be trusted.”

“Jane!”

“Sir?”

“Promise me one thing.”

“I’ll promise you anything, sir, that I think I am likely to perform.”

“Not to advertise: and to trust this quest of a situation to me. I’ll find you one in time.”

“I shall be glad so to do, sir, if you, in your turn, will promise that I and Adèle shall be both safe out of the house before your bride enters it.”

“Very well! very well! I’ll pledge my word on it. You go to-morrow, then?”

“Yes, sir; early.”

“Shall you come down to the drawing-room after dinner?”

“No, sir, I must prepare for the journey.”

“Then you and I must bid good-bye for a little while?”

“I suppose so, sir.”

“And how do people perform that ceremony of parting, Jane? Teach me; I’m not quite up to it.”

“They say, Farewell, or any other form they prefer.”

“Then say it.”

“Farewell, Mr. Rochester, for the present.”

“What must I say?”

"The same, if you like, sir."

"Farewell, Miss Eyre, for the present; is that all?"

"Yes?"

"It seems stingy, to my notions, and dry, and unfriendly. I should like something else: a little addition to the rite. If one shook hands, for instance; but no — that would not content me either. So you'll do no more than say Farewell, Jane?"

"It is enough, sir: as much good-will may be conveyed in one hearty word as in many."

"Very likely; but it is blank and cool — 'Farewell.'"

"How long is he going to stand with his back against that door?" I asked myself; "I want to commence my packing." The dinner-bell rang, and suddenly away he bolted, without another syllable: I saw him no more during the day, and was off before he had risen in the morning.

I reached the lodge at Gateshead about five o'clock in the afternoon of the first of May: I stepped in there before going up to the hall. It was very clean and neat: the ornamental windows were hung with little white curtains; the floor was spotless; the grate and fire-irons were burnished bright, and the fire burnt clear. Bessie sat on the hearth, nursing her last-born, and Robert and his sister played quietly in a corner.

"Bless you! — I knew you would come!" exclaimed Mrs. Leaven, as I entered.

"Yes, Bessie," said I, after I had kissed her; "and I trust I am not too late. How is Mrs. Reed? — Alive still, I hope."

"Yes, she is alive; and more sensible and collected than she was. The doctor says she may linger a week or two yet; but he hardly thinks she will finally recover."

"Has she mentioned me lately?"

"She was talking of you only this morning, and wishing you would come, but she is sleeping now, or was ten minutes ago, when I was up at the house. She generally lies in a kind of lethargy all the afternoon, and wakes up about six or seven. Will you rest yourself here an hour, Miss, and then I will go up with you?"

Robert here entered, and Bessie laid her sleeping child in the cradle and went to welcome him: afterwards she insisted on my taking off my bonnet and having some tea; for she said I looked pale and tired. I was glad to accept her hospitality; and I submitted to be relieved of my travelling garb just as passively as I used to let her undress me when a child.

Old times crowded fast back on me as I watched her bustling about — setting out the tea-tray with her best china, cutting bread and butter, toasting a tea-cake, and, between whiles, giving little Robert or Jane an occasional tap or push, just as she used to give me in former days. Bessie had retained her quick temper as well as her light foot and good looks.

Tea ready, I was going to approach the table; but she desired me to sit still, quite in her old peremptory tones. I must be served at the fireside, she said; and she placed before me a little round stand with my cup and a plate of toast, absolutely as she used to accommodate me with some privately purloined dainty on a nursery chair: and I smiled and obeyed her as in bygone days.

She wanted to know if I was happy at Thornfield Hall, and what sort of a person the mistress was; and when I told her there was only a master, whether he was a nice gentleman, and if I liked him. I told her he was rather an ugly man, but quite a gentleman; and that he treated me kindly, and I was content. Then I went on to describe to her the gay company that had lately been staying at the house; and to these details Bessie listened with interest: they were precisely of the kind she relished.

In such conversation an hour was soon gone: Bessie restored to me my bonnet, &c., and, accompanied by her, I quitted the lodge for the hall. It was also accompanied by her that I had, nearly nine years ago, walked down the path I was now ascending. On a dark, misty, raw morning in January, I had left a hostile roof with a desperate and embittered heart — a sense of outlawry and almost of reprobation — to seek the chilly harbourage of Lowood: that bourne so far away and unexplored. The same hostile roof now again rose before me: my prospects were doubtful yet; and I had yet an aching heart. I still felt as a wanderer on the face of the earth; but I experienced firmer trust in myself and my own powers, and less withering dread of oppression. The gaping wound of my wrongs, too, was now quite healed; and the flame of resentment extinguished.

"You shall go into the breakfast-room first," said Bessie, as she preceded me through the hall; "the young ladies will be there."

In another moment I was within that apartment. There was every article of furniture looking just as it did on the morning I was first introduced to Mr. Brocklehurst: the very rug he had stood upon still covered the hearth. Glancing at the bookcases, I thought I could distinguish the two volumes of Bewick's British Birds occupying their old place on the third shelf, and Gulliver's Travels and the Arabian Nights ranged just above. The inanimate objects were not changed; but the living things had altered past recognition.

Two young ladies appeared before me; one very tall, almost as tall as Miss Ingram — very thin too, with a sallow face and severe mien. There was something ascetic in her look, which was augmented by the extreme plainness of a straight-skirted, black, stuff dress, a starched linen collar, hair combed away from the temples, and the nun-like ornament of a string of ebony beads and a crucifix. This I felt sure was Eliza, though I could trace little resemblance to her former self in that elongated and colourless visage.

The other was as certainly Georgiana: but not the Georgiana I remembered — the slim and fairy-like girl of eleven. This was a full-blown, very plump damsel, fair as waxwork, with handsome and regular features, languishing blue eyes, and ringleted yellow hair. The hue of her dress was black too; but its fashion was so different from her sister's — so much more flowing and becoming — it looked as stylish as the other's looked puritanical.

In each of the sisters there was one trait of the mother — and only one; the thin and pallid elder daughter had her parent's Cairngorm eye: the blooming and luxuriant younger girl had her contour of jaw and chin — perhaps a little softened, but still imparting an indescribable hardness to the countenance otherwise so voluptuous and buxom.

Both ladies, as I advanced, rose to welcome me, and both addressed me by the name of "Miss Eyre." Eliza's greeting was delivered in a short, abrupt voice, without a smile; and then she sat down again, fixed her eyes on the fire, and seemed to forget me. Georgiana added to her "How d'ye do?" several commonplaces about my journey, the weather, and so on, uttered in rather a drawling tone: and accompanied by sundry side-glances that measured me from head to foot — now traversing the folds of my drab merino pelisse, and now lingering on the plain trimming of my cottage bonnet. Young ladies have a remarkable way of letting you know that they think you a "quiz" without actually saying the words. A certain superciliousness of look, coolness of manner, nonchalance of tone, express fully their sentiments on the point, without committing them by any positive rudeness in word or deed.

A sneer, however, whether covert or open, had now no longer that power over me it once possessed: as I sat between my cousins, I was surprised to find how easy I felt under the total neglect of the one and the semi-sarcastic attentions of the other — Eliza did not mortify, nor Georgiana ruffle me. The fact was, I had other things to think about; within the last few months feelings had been stirred in me so much more potent than any they could raise — pains and pleasures so much more acute and exquisite had been excited than any it was in their power to inflict or bestow — that their airs gave me no concern either for good or bad.

"How is Mrs. Reed?" I asked soon, looking calmly at Georgiana, who thought fit to bridle at the direct address, as if it were an unexpected liberty.

"Mrs. Reed? Ah! mama, you mean; she is extremely poorly: I doubt if you can see her to-night."

"If," said I, "you would just step upstairs and tell her I am come, I should be much obliged to you."

Georgiana almost started, and she opened her blue eyes wild and wide. "I know she had a particular wish to see me," I added, "and I would not defer attending to her desire longer than is absolutely necessary."

"Mama dislikes being disturbed in an evening," remarked Eliza. I soon rose, quietly took off my bonnet and gloves, uninvited, and said I would just step out to Bessie — who was, I dared say, in the kitchen — and ask her to ascertain whether Mrs. Reed was disposed to receive me or not to-night. I went, and having found Bessie and despatched her on my errand, I proceeded to take further measures. It had heretofore been my habit always to shrink from arrogance: received as I had been to-day, I should, a year ago, have resolved to quit Gateshead the very next morning; now, it was disclosed to me all at once that that would be a foolish plan. I had taken a journey of a hundred miles to see my aunt, and I must stay with her till she was better — or dead: as to her daughters' pride or folly, I must put it on one side, make myself independent of it. So I addressed the housekeeper; asked her to show me a room, told her I should probably be a visitor here for a week or two, had my trunk conveyed to my chamber, and followed it thither myself: I met Bessie on the landing.

"Missis is awake," said she; "I have told her you are here: come and let us see if she will know you."

I did not need to be guided to the well-known room, to which I had so often been summoned for chastisement or reprimand in former days. I hastened before Bessie; I softly opened the door: a shaded light stood on the table, for it was now getting dark. There was the great four-post bed with amber hangings as of old; there the toilet-table, the armchair, and the footstool, at which I had a hundred times been sentenced to kneel, to ask pardon for offences by me uncommitted. I looked into a certain corner near, half-expecting to see the slim outline of a once dreaded switch which used to lurk there, waiting to leap out imp-like and lace my quivering palm or shrinking neck. I approached the bed; I opened the curtains and leant over the high-piled pillows.

Well did I remember Mrs. Reed's face, and I eagerly sought the familiar image. It is a happy thing that time quells the longings of vengeance and hushes the promptings of rage and aversion. I had left this woman in bitterness and hate, and I came back to her now with no other emotion than a sort of ruth for her great sufferings, and a strong yearning to forget and forgive all injuries — to be reconciled and clasp hands in amity.

The well-known face was there: stern, relentless as ever — there was that peculiar eye which nothing could melt, and the somewhat raised, imperious, despotic eyebrow. How often had it lowered on me menace and hate! and how the recollection of childhood's terrors and sorrows revived as I traced its harsh line now! And yet I stooped down and kissed her: she looked at me.

"Is this Jane Eyre?" she said.

"Yes, Aunt Reed. How are you, dear aunt?"

I had once vowed that I would never call her aunt again: I thought it no sin to forget and break that vow now. My fingers had fastened on her hand which lay outside the sheet: had she pressed mine kindly, I should at that moment have experienced true pleasure. But unimpressionable natures are not so soon softened, nor are natural antipathies so readily eradicated. Mrs. Reed took her hand away, and, turning her face rather from me, she remarked that the night was warm. Again she regarded me so icily, I felt at once that her opinion of me — her feeling towards me — was unchanged and unchangeable. I knew by her stony eye — opaque to tenderness, indissoluble to tears — that she was resolved to consider me bad to the last; because to believe me good would give her no generous pleasure: only a sense of mortification.

I felt pain, and then I felt ire; and then I felt a determination to subdue her — to be her mistress in spite both of her nature and her will. My tears had risen, just as in childhood: I ordered them back to their source. I brought a chair to the bed-head: I sat down and leaned over the pillow.

"You sent for me," I said, "and I am here; and it is my intention to stay till I see how you get on."

"Oh, of course! You have seen my daughters?"

"Yes."

"Well, you may tell them I wish you to stay till I can talk some things over with you I have on my mind: to-night it is too late, and I have a difficulty in recalling them. But there was something I wished to say — let me see — "

The wandering look and changed utterance told what wreck had taken place in her once vigorous frame. Turning restlessly, she drew the bedclothes round her; my elbow, resting on a corner of the quilt, fixed it down: she was at once irritated.

"Sit up!" said she; "don't annoy me with holding the clothes fast. Are you Jane Eyre?"

"I am Jane Eyre."

"I have had more trouble with that child than any one would believe. Such a burden to be left on my hands — and so much annoyance as she caused me, daily and hourly, with her incomprehensible disposition, and her sudden starts of temper, and her continual, unnatural watchings of one's movements! I declare she talked to me once like something mad, or like a fiend — no child ever spoke or looked as she did; I was glad to get her away from the house. What did they do with her at Lowood? The fever broke out there, and many of the pupils died. She, however, did not die: but I said she did — I wish she had died!"

"A strange wish, Mrs. Reed; why do you hate her so?"

"I had a dislike to her mother always; for she was my husband's only sister, and a great favourite with him: he opposed the family's disowning her when she made her low marriage; and when news came of her death, he wept like a simpleton. He would send for the baby; though I entreated him rather to put it out to nurse and pay for its maintenance. I hated it the first time I set my eyes on it — a sickly, whining, pining thing! It would wail in its cradle all night long — not screaming heartily like any other child, but whimpering and moaning. Reed pitied it; and he used to nurse it and notice it as if it had been his own: more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own at that age. He would try to make my children friendly to the little beggar: the darlings could not bear it, and he was angry with them when they showed their dislike. In his last illness, he had it brought continually to his bedside; and but an hour before he died, he bound me by vow to keep the creature. I would as soon have been charged with a pauper brat out of a workhouse: but he was weak, naturally weak. John does not at all resemble his father, and I am glad of it: John is like me and like my brothers — he is quite a Gibson. Oh, I wish he would cease tormenting me with letters for money? I have no more money to give him: we are getting poor. I must send away half the servants and shut up part of the house; or let it off. I can never submit to do that — yet how are we to get on? Two-thirds of my income goes in paying the interest of mortgages. John gambles dreadfully, and always loses — poor boy! He is beset by sharpers: John is sunk and degraded — his look is frightful — I feel ashamed for him when I see him."

She was getting much excited. "I think I had better leave her now," said I to Bessie, who stood on the other side of the bed.

"Perhaps you had, Miss: but she often talks in this way towards night — in the morning she is calmer."

I rose. "Stop!" exclaimed Mrs. Reed, "there is another thing I wished to say. He threatens me — he continually threatens me with his own death, or mine: and I dream sometimes that I see him laid out with a great wound in his throat, or with a swollen and blackened face. I am come to a strange pass: I have heavy troubles. What is to be done? How is the money to be had?"

Bessie now endeavoured to persuade her to take a sedative draught: she succeeded with difficulty. Soon after, Mrs. Reed grew more composed, and sank into a dozing state. I then left her.

More than ten days elapsed before I had again any conversation with her. She continued either delirious or lethargic; and the doctor forbade everything which could painfully excite her. Meantime, I got on as well as I could with Georgiana and Eliza. They were very cold, indeed, at first. Eliza would sit half the day sewing, reading, or writing, and scarcely utter a word either to me or her sister. Georgiana would chatter nonsense to her canary bird by the hour, and take no notice of me. But I was determined not to seem at a loss for occupation or amusement: I had brought my drawing materials with me, and they served me for both.

Provided with a case of pencils, and some sheets of paper, I used to take a seat apart from them, near the window, and busy myself in sketching fancy vignettes, representing any scene that happened momentarily to shape itself in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination: a glimpse of sea between two rocks; the rising moon, and a ship crossing its disk; a group of reeds and water-flags, and a naiad's head, crowned with lotus-flowers, rising out of them; an elf sitting in a hedge-sparrow's nest, under a wreath of hawthorn-bloom.

One morning I fell to sketching a face: what sort of a face it was to be, I did not care or know. I took a soft black pencil, gave it a broad point, and worked away. Soon I had traced on the paper a broad and prominent forehead and a square lower outline of visage: that contour gave me pleasure; my fingers proceeded actively to fill it with features. Strongly-marked horizontal eyebrows must be traced under that brow; then followed, naturally, a well-defined nose, with a straight ridge and full nostrils; then a flexible-looking mouth, by no means narrow; then a firm chin, with a decided cleft down the middle of it: of course, some black whiskers were wanted, and some jetty hair, tufted on the temples, and waved above the forehead. Now for the eyes: I had left them to the last, because they required the most careful working. I drew them large; I shaped them well: the eyelashes I traced long and sombre; the irids lustrous and large. “Good! but not quite the thing,” I thought, as I surveyed the effect: “they want more force and spirit;” and I wrought the shades blacker, that the lights might flash more brilliantly — a happy touch or two secured success. There, I had a friend’s face under my gaze; and what did it signify that those young ladies turned their backs on me? I looked at it; I smiled at the speaking likeness: I was absorbed and content.

“Is that a portrait of some one you know?” asked Eliza, who had approached me unnoticed. I responded that it was merely a fancy head, and hurried it beneath the other sheets. Of course, I lied: it was, in fact, a very faithful representation of Mr. Rochester. But what was that to her, or to any one but myself? Georgiana also advanced to look. The other drawings pleased her much, but she called that “an ugly man.” They both seemed surprised at my skill. I offered to sketch their portraits; and each, in turn, sat for a pencil outline. Then Georgiana produced her album. I promised to contribute a water-colour drawing: this put her at once into good humour. She proposed a walk in the grounds. Before we had been out two hours, we were deep in a confidential conversation: she had favoured me with a description of the brilliant winter she had spent in London two seasons ago — of the admiration she had there excited — the attention she had received; and I even got hints of the titled conquest she had made. In the course of the afternoon and evening these hints were enlarged on: various soft conversations were reported, and sentimental scenes represented; and, in short, a volume of a novel of fashionable life was that day improvised by her for my benefit. The communications were renewed from day to day: they always ran on the same theme — herself, her loves, and woes. It was strange she never once adverted either to her mother’s illness, or her brother’s death, or the present gloomy state of the family prospects. Her mind seemed wholly taken up with reminiscences of past gaiety, and aspirations after dissipations to come. She passed about five minutes each day in her mother’s sick-room, and no more.

Eliza still spoke little: she had evidently no time to talk. I never saw a busier person than she seemed to be; yet it was difficult to say what she did: or rather, to discover any result of her diligence. She had an alarm to call her up early. I know not how she occupied herself before breakfast, but after that meal she divided her time into regular portions, and each hour had its allotted task. Three times a day she studied a little book, which I found, on inspection, was a Common Prayer Book. I asked her once what was the great attraction of that volume, and she said, “the Rubric.” Three hours she gave to stitching, with gold thread, the border of a square crimson cloth, almost large enough for a carpet. In answer to my inquiries after the use of this article, she informed me it was a covering for the altar of a new church lately erected near Gateshead. Two hours she devoted to her diary; two to working by herself in the kitchen-garden; and one to the regulation of her accounts. She seemed to want no company; no conversation. I believe she was happy in her way: this routine sufficed for her; and nothing annoyed her so much as the occurrence of any incident which forced her to vary its clockwork regularity.

She told me one evening, when more disposed to be communicative than usual, that John's conduct, and the threatened ruin of the family, had been a source of profound affliction to her: but she had now, she said, settled her mind, and formed her resolution. Her own fortune she had taken care to secure; and when her mother died — and it was wholly improbable, she tranquilly remarked, that she should either recover or linger long — she would execute a long-cherished project: seek a retirement where punctual habits would be permanently secured from disturbance, and place safe barriers between herself and a frivolous world. I asked if Georgiana would accompany her.

"Of course not. Georgiana and she had nothing in common: they never had had. She would not be burdened with her society for any consideration. Georgiana should take her own course; and she, Eliza, would take hers."

Georgiana, when not unburdening her heart to me, spent most of her time in lying on the sofa, fretting about the dulness of the house, and wishing over and over again that her aunt Gibson would send her an invitation up to town. "It would be so much better," she said, "if she could only get out of the way for a month or two, till all was over." I did not ask what she meant by "all being over," but I suppose she referred to the expected decease of her mother and the gloomy sequel of funeral rites. Eliza generally took no more notice of her sister's indolence and complaints than if no such murmuring, lounging object had been before her. One day, however, as she put away her account-book and unfolded her embroidery, she suddenly took her up thus —

"Georgiana, a more vain and absurd animal than you was certainly never allowed to cumber the earth. You had no right to be born, for you make no use of life. Instead of living for, in, and with yourself, as a reasonable being ought, you seek only to fasten your feebleness on some other person's strength: if no one can be found willing to burden her or himself with such a fat, weak, puffy, useless thing, you cry out that you are ill-treated, neglected, miserable. Then, too, existence for you must be a scene of continual change and excitement, or else the world is a dungeon: you must be admired, you must be courted, you must be flattered — you must have music, dancing, and society — or you languish, you die away. Have you no sense to devise a system which will make you independent of all efforts, and all wills, but your own? Take one day; share it into sections; to each section apportion its task: leave no stray unemployed quarters of an hour, ten minutes, five minutes — include all; do each piece of business in its turn with method, with rigid regularity. The day will close almost before you are aware it has begun; and you are indebted to no one for helping you to get rid of one vacant moment: you have had to seek no one's company, conversation, sympathy, forbearance; you have lived, in short, as an independent being ought to do. Take this advice: the first and last I shall offer you; then you will not want me or any one else, happen what may. Neglect it — go on as heretofore, craving, whining, and idling — and suffer the results of your idiocy, however bad and insuperable they may be. I tell you this plainly; and listen: for though I shall no more repeat what I am now about to say, I shall steadily act on it. After my mother's death, I wash my hands of you: from the day her coffin is carried to the vault in Gateshead Church, you and I will be as separate as if we had never known each other. You need not think that because we chanced to be born of the same parents, I shall suffer you to fasten me down by even the feeblest claim: I can tell you this — if the whole human race, ourselves excepted, were swept away, and we two stood alone on the earth, I would leave you in the old world, and betake myself to the new."

She closed her lips.

"You might have spared yourself the trouble of delivering that tirade," answered Georgiana. "Everybody knows you are the most selfish, heartless creature in existence: and *I* know your spiteful hatred towards me: I have had a specimen of it before in the trick you played me about Lord Edwin Vere: you could not bear me to be raised above you, to have a title, to be received into circles where you dare not show your face, and so you acted the spy and informer, and ruined my prospects for ever." Georgiana took out her handkerchief and blew her nose for an hour afterwards; Eliza sat cold, impassable, and assiduously industrious.

True, generous feeling is made small account of by some, but here were two natures rendered, the one intolerably acrid, the other despicably savourless for the want of it. Feeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed; but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition.

It was a wet and windy afternoon: Georgiana had fallen asleep on the sofa over the perusal of a novel; Eliza was gone to attend a saint's-day service at the new church — for in matters of religion she was a rigid formalist: no weather ever prevented the punctual discharge of what she considered her devotional duties; fair or foul, she went to church thrice every Sunday, and as often on week-days as there were prayers.

I bethought myself to go upstairs and see how the dying woman sped, who lay there almost unheeded: the very servants paid her but a remittent attention: the hired nurse, being little looked after, would slip out of the room whenever she could. Bessie was faithful; but she had her own family to mind, and could only come occasionally to the hall. I found the sick-room unwatched, as I had expected: no nurse was there; the patient lay still, and seemingly lethargic; her livid face sunk in the pillows: the fire was dying in the grate. I renewed the fuel, re-arranged the bedclothes, gazed awhile on her who could not now gaze on me, and then I moved away to the window.

The rain beat strongly against the panes, the wind blew tempestuously: "One lies there," I thought, "who will soon be beyond the war of earthly elements. Whither will that spirit — now struggling to quit its material tenement — flit when at length released?"

In pondering the great mystery, I thought of Helen Burns, recalled her dying words — her faith — her doctrine of the equality of disembodied souls. I was still listening in thought to her well-remembered tones — still picturing her pale and spiritual aspect, her wasted face and sublime gaze, as she lay on her placid deathbed, and whispered her longing to be restored to her divine Father's bosom — when a feeble voice murmured from the couch behind: "Who is that?"

I knew Mrs. Reed had not spoken for days: was she reviving? I went up to her.

"It is I, Aunt Reed."

"Who — I?" was her answer. "Who are you?" looking at me with surprise and a sort of alarm, but still not wildly. "You are quite a stranger to me — where is Bessie?"

"She is at the lodge, aunt."

"Aunt," she repeated. "Who calls me aunt? You are not one of the Gibsons; and yet I know you — that face, and the eyes and forehead, are quiet familiar to me: you are like — why, you are like Jane Eyre!"

I said nothing: I was afraid of occasioning some shock by declaring my identity.

"Yet," said she, "I am afraid it is a mistake: my thoughts deceive me. I wished to see Jane Eyre, and I fancy a likeness where none exists: besides, in eight years she must be so changed." I now gently assured her that I was the person she supposed and desired me to be: and seeing that I was understood, and that her senses were quite collected, I explained how Bessie had sent her husband to fetch me from Thornfield.

"I am very ill, I know," she said ere long. "I was trying to turn myself a few minutes since, and find I cannot move a limb. It is as well I should ease my mind before I die: what we think little of in health, burdens us at such an hour as the present is to me. Is the nurse here? or is there no one in the room but you?"

I assured her we were alone.

"Well, I have twice done you a wrong which I regret now. One was in breaking the promise which I gave my husband to bring you up as my own child; the other — " she stopped. "After all, it is of no great importance, perhaps," she murmured to herself: "and then I may get better; and to humble myself so to her is painful."

She made an effort to alter her position, but failed: her face changed; she seemed to experience some inward sensation — the precursor, perhaps, of the last pang.

"Well, I must get it over. Eternity is before me: I had better tell her. — Go to my dressing-case, open it, and take out a letter you will see there."

I obeyed her directions. "Read the letter," she said.

It was short, and thus conceived: —

"Madam, — Will you have the goodness to send me the address of my niece, Jane Eyre, and to tell me how she is? It is my intention to write shortly and desire her to come to me at Madeira. Providence has blessed my endeavours to secure a competency; and as I am unmarried and childless, I wish to adopt her during my life, and bequeath her at my death whatever I may have to leave. — I am, Madam, &c., &c.,

"John Eyre, Madeira."

It was dated three years back.

"Why did I never hear of this?" I asked.

"Because I disliked you too fixedly and thoroughly ever to lend a hand in lifting you to prosperity. I could not forget your conduct to me, Jane — the fury with which you once turned on me; the tone in which you declared you abhorred me the worst of anybody in the world; the unchildlike look and voice with which you affirmed that the very thought of me made you sick, and asserted that I had treated you with miserable cruelty. I could not forget my own sensations when you thus started up and poured out the venom of your mind: I felt fear as if an animal that I had struck or pushed had looked up at me with human eyes and cursed me in a man's voice. — Bring me some water! Oh, make haste!"

"Dear Mrs. Reed," said I, as I offered her the draught she required, "think no more of all this, let it pass away from your mind. Forgive me for my passionate language: I was a child then; eight, nine years have passed since that day."

She heeded nothing of what I said; but when she had tasted the water and drawn breath, she went on thus —

"I tell you I could not forget it; and I took my revenge: for you to be adopted by your uncle, and placed in a state of ease and comfort, was what I could not endure. I wrote to him; I said I was sorry for his disappointment, but Jane Eyre was dead: she had died of typhus fever at Lowood. Now act as you please: write and contradict my assertion — expose my falsehood as soon as you like. You were born, I think, to be my torment: my last hour is racked by the recollection of a deed which, but for you, I should never have been tempted to commit."

"If you could but be persuaded to think no more of it, aunt, and to regard me with kindness and forgiveness"

"You have a very bad disposition," said she, "and one to this day I feel it impossible to understand: how for nine years you could be patient and quiescent under any treatment, and in the tenth break out all fire and violence, I can never comprehend."

"My disposition is not so bad as you think: I am passionate, but not vindictive. Many a time, as a little child, I should have been glad to love you if you would have let me; and I long earnestly to be reconciled to you now: kiss me, aunt."

I approached my cheek to her lips: she would not touch it. She said I oppressed her by leaning over the bed, and again demanded water. As I laid her down — for I raised her and supported her on my arm while she drank — I covered her ice-cold and clammy hand with mine: the feeble fingers shrank from my touch — the glazing eyes shunned my gaze.

"Love me, then, or hate me, as you will," I said at last, "you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God's, and be at peace."

Poor, suffering woman! it was too late for her to make now the effort to change her habitual frame of mind: living, she had ever hated me — dying, she must hate me still.

The nurse now entered, and Bessie followed. I yet lingered half-an-hour longer, hoping to see some sign of amity: but she gave none. She was fast relapsing into stupor; nor did her mind again rally: at twelve o'clock that night she died. I was not present to close her eyes, nor were either of her daughters. They came to tell us the next morning that all was over. She was by that time laid out. Eliza and I went to look at her: Georgiana, who had burst out into loud weeping, said she dared not go. There was stretched Sarah Reed's once robust and active frame, rigid and still: her eye of flint was covered with its cold lid; her brow and strong traits wore yet the impress of her inexorable soul. A strange and solemn object was that corpse to me. I gazed on it with gloom and pain: nothing soft, nothing sweet, nothing pitying, or hopeful, or subduing did it inspire; only a grating anguish for *her* woes — not *my* loss — and a sombre tearless dismay at the fearfulness of death in such a form.

Eliza surveyed her parent calmly. After a silence of some minutes she observed —

"With her constitution she should have lived to a good old age: her life was shortened by trouble." And then a spasm constricted her mouth for an instant: as it passed away she turned and left the room, and so did I. Neither of us had dropt a tear.

CHAPTER XXII

Mr. Rochester had given me but one week's leave of absence: yet a month elapsed before I quitted Gateshead. I wished to leave immediately after the funeral, but Georgiana entreated me to stay till she could get off to London, whither she was now at last invited by her uncle, Mr. Gibson, who had come down to direct his sister's interment and settle the family affairs. Georgiana said she dreaded being left alone with Eliza; from her she got neither sympathy in her dejection, support in her fears, nor aid in her preparations; so I bore with her feeble-minded wailings and selfish lamentations as well as I could, and did my best in sewing for her and packing her dresses. It is true, that while I worked, she would idle; and I thought to myself, "If you and I were destined to live always together, cousin, we would commence matters on a different footing. I should not settle tamely down into being the forbearing party; I should assign you your share of labour, and compel you to accomplish it, or else it should be left undone: I should insist, also, on your keeping some of those drawling, half-insincere complaints hushed in your own breast. It is only because our connection happens to be very transitory, and comes at a peculiarly mournful season, that I consent thus to render it so patient and compliant on my part."

At last I saw Georgiana off; but now it was Eliza's turn to request me to stay another week. Her plans required all her time and attention, she said; she was about to depart for some unknown bourne; and all day long she stayed in her own room, her door bolted within, filling trunks, emptying drawers, burning papers, and holding no communication with any one. She wished me to look after the house, to see callers, and answer notes of condolence.

One morning she told me I was at liberty. "And," she added, "I am obliged to you for your valuable services and discreet conduct! There is some difference between living with such an one as you and with Georgiana: you perform your own part in life and burden no one. To-morrow," she continued, "I set out for the Continent. I shall take up my abode in a religious house near Lisle — a nunnery you would call it; there I shall be quiet and unmolested. I shall devote myself for a time to the examination of the Roman Catholic dogmas, and to a careful study of the workings of their system: if I find it to be, as I half suspect it is, the one best calculated to ensure the doing of all things decently and in order, I shall embrace the tenets of Rome and probably take the veil."

I neither expressed surprise at this resolution nor attempted to dissuade her from it. "The vocation will fit you to a hair," I thought: "much good may it do you!"

When we parted, she said: "Good-bye, cousin Jane Eyre; I wish you well:

you have some sense."

I then returned: "You are not without sense, cousin Eliza; but what you have, I suppose, in another year will be walled up alive in a French convent. However, it is not my business, and so it suits you, I don't much care."

"You are in the right," said she; and with these words we each went our separate way. As I shall not have occasion to refer either to her or her sister again, I may as well mention here, that Georgiana made an advantageous match with a wealthy worn-out man of fashion, and that Eliza actually took the veil, and is at this day superior of the convent where she passed the period of her novitiate, and which she endowed with her fortune.

How people feel when they are returning home from an absence, long or short, I did not know: I had never experienced the sensation. I had known what it was to come back to Gateshead when a child after a long walk, to be scolded for looking cold or gloomy; and later, what it was to come back from church to Lowood, to long for a plenteous meal and a good fire, and to be unable to get either. Neither of these returnings was very pleasant or desirable: no magnet drew me to a given point, increasing in its strength of attraction the nearer I came. The return to Thornfield was yet to be tried.

My journey seemed tedious — very tedious: fifty miles one day, a night spent at an inn; fifty miles the next day. During the first twelve hours I thought of Mrs. Reed in her last moments; I saw her disfigured and discoloured face, and heard her strangely altered voice. I mused on the funeral day, the coffin, the hearse, the black train of tenants and servants — few was the number of relatives — the gaping vault, the silent church, the solemn service. Then I thought of Eliza and Georgiana; I beheld one the cynosure of a ball-room, the other the inmate of a convent cell; and I dwelt on and analysed their separate peculiarities of person and character. The evening arrival at the great town of — scattered these thoughts; night gave them quite another turn: laid down on my traveller's bed, I left reminiscence for anticipation.

I was going back to Thornfield: but how long was I to stay there? Not long; of that I was sure. I had heard from Mrs. Fairfax in the interim of my absence: the party at the hall was dispersed; Mr. Rochester had left for London three weeks ago, but he was then expected to return in a fortnight. Mrs. Fairfax surmised that he was gone to make arrangements for his wedding, as he had talked of purchasing a new carriage: she said the idea of his marrying Miss Ingram still seemed strange to her; but from what everybody said, and from what she had herself seen, she could no longer doubt that the event would shortly take place. "You would be strangely incredulous if you did doubt it," was my mental comment. "I don't doubt it."

The question followed, "Where was I to go?" I dreamt of Miss Ingram all the night: in a vivid morning dream I saw her closing the gates of Thornfield against me and pointing me out another road; and Mr. Rochester looked on with his arms folded — smiling sardonically, as it seemed, at both her and me.

I had not notified to Mrs. Fairfax the exact day of my return; for I did not wish either car or carriage to meet me at Millcote. I proposed to walk the distance quietly by myself; and very quietly, after leaving my box in the ostler's care, did I slip away from the George Inn, about six o'clock of a June evening, and take the old road to Thornfield: a road which lay chiefly through fields, and was now little frequented.

It was not a bright or splendid summer evening, though fair and soft: the haymakers were at work all along the road; and the sky, though far from cloudless, was such as promised well for the future: its blue — where blue was visible — was mild and settled, and its cloud strata high and thin. The west, too, was warm: no watery gleam chilled it — it seemed as if there was a fire lit, an altar burning behind its screen of marbled vapour, and out of apertures shone a golden redness.

I felt glad as the road shortened before me: so glad that I stopped once to ask myself what that joy meant: and to remind reason that it was not to my home I was going, or to a permanent resting-place, or to a place where fond friends looked out for me and waited my arrival. "Mrs. Fairfax will smile you a calm welcome, to be sure," said I; "and little Adèle will clap her hands and jump to see you: but you know very well you are thinking of another than they, and that he is not thinking of you."

But what is so headstrong as youth? What so blind as inexperience? These affirmed that it was pleasure enough to have the privilege of again looking on Mr. Rochester, whether he looked on me or not; and they added — "Hasten! hasten! be with him while you may: but a few more days or weeks, at most, and you are parted from him for ever!" And then I strangled a new-born agony — a deformed thing which I could not persuade myself to own and rear — and ran on.

They are making hay, too, in Thornfield meadows: or rather, the labourers are just quitting their work, and returning home with their rakes on their shoulders, now, at the hour I arrive. I have but a field or two to traverse, and then I shall cross the road and reach the gates. How full the hedges are of roses! But I have no time to gather any; I want to be at the house. I passed a tall briar, shooting leafy and flowery branches across the path; I see the narrow stile with stone steps; and I see — Mr. Rochester sitting there, a book and a pencil in his hand; he is writing.

Well, he is not a ghost; yet every nerve I have is unstrung: for a moment I am beyond my own mastery. What does it mean? I did not think I should tremble in this way when I saw him, or lose my voice or the power of motion in his presence. I will go back as soon as I can stir: I need not make an absolute fool of myself. I know another way to the house. It does not signify if I knew twenty ways; for he has seen me.

"Hillo!" he cries; and he puts up his book and his pencil. "There you are! Come on, if you please."

I suppose I do come on; though in what fashion I know not; being scarcely cognisant of my movements, and solicitous only to appear calm; and, above all, to control the working muscles of my face — which I feel rebel insolently against my will, and struggle to express what I had resolved to conceal. But I have a veil — it is down: I may make shift yet to behave with decent composure.

“And this is Jane Eyre? Are you coming from Millcote, and on foot? Yes — just one of your tricks: not to send for a carriage, and come clattering over street and road like a common mortal, but to steal into the vicinage of your home along with twilight, just as if you were a dream or a shade. What the deuce have you done with yourself this last month?”

“I have been with my aunt, sir, who is dead.”

“A true Janian reply! Good angels be my guard! She comes from the other world — from the abode of people who are dead; and tells me so when she meets me alone here in the gloaming! If I dared, I’d touch you, to see if you are substance or shadow, you elf! — but I’d as soon offer to take hold of a blue *ignis fatuus* light in a marsh. Truant! truant!” he added, when he had paused an instant. “Absent from me a whole month, and forgetting me quite, I’ll be sworn!”

I knew there would be pleasure in meeting my master again, even though broken by the fear that he was so soon to cease to be my master, and by the knowledge that I was nothing to him: but there was ever in Mr. Rochester (so at least I thought) such a wealth of the power of communicating happiness, that to taste but of the crumbs he scattered to stray and stranger birds like me, was to feast genially. His last words were balm: they seemed to imply that it imported something to him whether I forgot him or not. And he had spoken of Thornfield as my home — would that it were my home!

He did not leave the stile, and I hardly liked to ask to go by. I inquired soon if he had not been to London.

“Yes; I suppose you found that out by second-sight.”

“Mrs. Fairfax told me in a letter.”

“And did she inform you what I went to do?”

“Oh, yes, sir! Everybody knew your errand.”

“You must see the carriage, Jane, and tell me if you don’t think it will suit Mrs. Rochester exactly; and whether she won’t look like Queen Boadicea, leaning back against those purple cushions. I wish, Jane, I were a trifle better adapted to match with her externally. Tell me now, fairy as you are — can’t you give me a charm, or a philter, or something of that sort, to make me a handsome man?”

“It would be past the power of magic, sir;” and, in thought, I added, “A loving eye is all the charm needed: to such you are handsome enough; or rather your sternness has a power beyond beauty.”

Mr. Rochester had sometimes read my unspoken thoughts with an acumen to me incomprehensible: in the present instance he took no notice of my abrupt vocal response; but he smiled at me with a certain smile he had of his own, and which he used but on rare occasions. He seemed to think it too good for common purposes: it was the real sunshine of feeling — he shed it over me now.

“Pass, Janet,” said he, making room for me to cross the stile: “go up home, and stay your weary little wandering feet at a friend’s threshold.”

All I had now to do was to obey him in silence: no need for me to colloquise further. I got over the stile without a word, and meant to leave him calmly. An impulse held me fast — a force turned me round. I said — or something in me said for me, and in spite of me —

“Thank you, Mr. Rochester, for your great kindness. I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home — my only home.”

I walked on so fast that even he could hardly have overtaken me had he tried. Little Adèle was half wild with delight when she saw me. Mrs. Fairfax received me with her usual plain friendliness. Leah smiled, and even Sophie bid me “bon soir” with glee. This was very pleasant; there is no happiness like that of being loved by your fellow-creatures, and feeling that your presence is an addition to their comfort.

I that evening shut my eyes resolutely against the future: I stopped my cars against the voice that kept warning me of near separation and coming grief. When tea was over and Mrs. Fairfax had taken her knitting, and I had assumed a low seat near her, and Adèle, kneeling on the carpet, had nestled close up to me, and a sense of mutual affection seemed to surround us with a ring of golden peace, I uttered a silent prayer that we might not be parted far or soon; but when, as we thus sat, Mr. Rochester entered, unannounced, and looking at us, seemed to take pleasure in the spectacle of a group so amicable — when he said he supposed the old lady was all right now that she had got her adopted daughter back again, and added that he saw Adèle was “prête à croquer sa petite maman Anglaise” — I half ventured to hope that he would, even after his marriage, keep us together somewhere under the shelter of his protection, and not quite exiled from the sunshine of his presence.

A fortnight of dubious calm succeeded my return to Thornfield Hall. Nothing was said of the master’s marriage, and I saw no preparation going on for such an event. Almost every day I asked Mrs. Fairfax if she had yet heard anything decided: her answer was always in the negative. Once she said she had actually put the question to Mr. Rochester as to when he was going to bring his bride home; but he had answered her only by a joke and one of his queer looks, and she could not tell what to make of him.

One thing specially surprised me, and that was, there were no journeyings backward and forward, no visits to Ingram Park: to be sure it was twenty miles off, on the borders of another county; but what was that distance to an ardent lover? To so practised and indefatigable a horseman as Mr. Rochester, it would be but a morning’s ride. I began to cherish hopes I had no right to conceive: that the match was broken off; that rumour had been mistaken; that one or both parties had changed their minds. I used to look at my master's face to see if it were sad or fierce; but I could not remember the time when it had been so uniformly clear of clouds or evil feelings. If, in the moments I and my pupil spent with him, I lacked spirits and sank into inevitable dejection, he became even gay. Never had he called me more frequently to his presence; never been kinder to me when there — and, alas! never had I loved him so well.

CHAPTER XXIII

A splendid Midsummer shone over England: skies so pure, suns so radiant as were then seen in long succession, seldom favour even singly, our wave-girt land. It was as if a band of Italian days had come from the South, like a flock of glorious passenger birds, and lighted to rest them on the cliffs of Albion. The hay was all got in; the fields round Thornfield were green and shorn; the roads white and baked; the trees were in their dark prime; hedge and wood, full-leaved and deeply tinted, contrasted well with the sunny hue of the cleared meadows between.

On Midsummer-eve, Adèle, weary with gathering wild strawberries in Hay Lane half the day, had gone to bed with the sun. I watched her drop asleep, and when I left her, I sought the garden.

It was now the sweetest hour of the twenty-four: — "Day its fervid fires had wasted," and dew fell cool on panting plain and scorched summit. Where the sun had gone down in simple state — pure of the pomp of clouds — spread a solemn purple, burning with the light of red jewel and furnace flame at one point, on one hill-peak, and extending high and wide, soft and still softer, over half heaven. The east had its own charm or fine deep blue, and its own modest gem, a casino and solitary star: soon it would boast the moon; but she was yet beneath the horizon.

I walked a while on the pavement; but a subtle, well-known scent — that of a cigar — stole from some window; I saw the library casement open a handbreadth; I knew I might be watched thence; so I went apart into the orchard. No nook in the grounds more sheltered and more Eden-like; it was full of trees, it bloomed with flowers: a very high wall shut it out from the court, on one side; on the other, a beech avenue screened it from the lawn. At the bottom was a sunk fence; its sole separation from lonely fields: a winding walk, bordered with laurels and terminating in a giant horse-chestnut, circled at the base by a seat, led down to the fence. Here one could wander unseen. While such honey-dew fell, such silence reigned, such gloaming gathered, I felt as if I could haunt such shade for ever; but in threading the flower and fruit parterres at the upper part of the enclosure, enticed there by the light the now rising moon cast on this more open quarter, my step is stayed — not by sound, not by sight, but once more by a warning fragrance.

Sweet-briar and southernwood, jasmine, pink, and rose have long been yielding their evening sacrifice of incense: this new scent is neither of shrub nor flower; it is — I know it well — it is Mr. Rochester's cigar. I look round and I listen. I see trees laden with ripening fruit. I hear a nightingale warbling in a wood half a mile off; no moving form is visible, no coming step audible; but that perfume increases: I must flee. I make for the wicket leading to the shrubbery, and I see Mr. Rochester entering. I step aside into the ivy recess; he will not stay long: he will soon return whence he came, and if I sit still he will never see me.

But no — eventide is as pleasant to him as to me, and this antique garden as attractive; and he strolls on, now lifting the gooseberry-tree branches to look at the fruit, large as plums, with which they are laden; now taking a ripe cherry from the wall; now stooping towards a knot of flowers, either to inhale their fragrance or to admire the dew-beads on their petals. A great moth goes humming by me; it alights on a plant at Mr. Rochester's foot: he sees it, and bends to examine it.

"Now, he has his back towards me," thought I, "and he is occupied too; perhaps, if I walk softly, I can slip away unnoticed."

I trode on an edging of turf that the crackle of the pebbly gravel might not betray me: he was standing among the beds at a yard or two distant from where I had to pass; the moth apparently engaged him. "I shall get by very well," I meditated. As I crossed his shadow, thrown long over the garden by the moon, not yet risen high, he said quietly, without turning —

"Jane, come and look at this fellow."

I had made no noise: he had not eyes behind — could his shadow feel? I started at first, and then I approached him.

"Look at his wings," said he, "he reminds me rather of a West Indian insect; one does not often see so large and gay a night-rover in England; there! he is flown."

The moth roamed away. I was sheepishly retreating also; but Mr. Rochester followed me, and when we reached the wicket, he said —

"Turn back: on so lovely a night it is a shame to sit in the house; and surely no one can wish to go to bed while sunset is thus at meeting with moonrise."

It is one of my faults, that though my tongue is sometimes prompt enough at an answer, there are times when it sadly fails me in framing an excuse; and always the lapse occurs at some crisis, when a facile word or plausible pretext is specially wanted to get me out of painful embarrassment. I did not like to walk at this hour alone with Mr. Rochester in the shadowy orchard; but I could not find a reason to allege for leaving him. I followed with lagging step, and thoughts busily bent on discovering a means of extrication; but he himself looked so composed and so grave also, I became ashamed of feeling any confusion: the evil — if evil existent or prospective there was — seemed to lie with me only; his mind was unconscious and quiet.

"Jane," he recommenced, as we entered the laurel walk, and slowly strayed down in the direction of the sunk fence and the horse-chestnut, "Thornfield is a pleasant place in summer, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must have become in some degree attached to the house, — you, who have an eye for natural beauties, and a good deal of the organ of

Adhesiveness?”

“I am attached to it, indeed.”

“And though I don’t comprehend how it is, I perceive you have acquired a degree of regard for that foolish little child Adèle, too; and even for simple dame Fairfax?”

“Yes, sir; in different ways, I have an affection for both.”

“And would be sorry to part with them?”

“Yes.”

“Pity!” he said, and sighed and paused. “It is always the way of events in this life,” he continued presently: “no sooner have you got settled in a pleasant resting-place, than a voice calls out to you to rise and move on, for the hour of repose is expired.”

“Must I move on, sir?” I asked. “Must I leave Thornfield?”

“I believe you must, Jane. I am sorry, Janet, but I believe indeed you must.”

This was a blow: but I did not let it prostrate me.

“Well, sir, I shall be ready when the order to march comes.”

“It is come now — I must give it to-night.”

“Then you *are* going to be married, sir?”

“Ex-act-ly — pre-cise-ly: with your usual acuteness, you have hit the nail straight on the head.”

“Soon, sir?”

“Very soon, my — that is, Miss Eyre: and you’ll remember, Jane, the first time I, or Rumour, plainly intimated to you that it was my intention to put my old bachelor’s neck into the sacred noose, to enter into the holy estate of matrimony — to take Miss Ingram to my bosom, in short (she’s an extensive armful: but that’s not to the point — one can’t have too much of such a very excellent thing as my beautiful Blanche): well, as I was saying — listen to me, Jane! You’re not turning your head to look after more moths, are you? That was only a lady-clock, child, ‘flying away home.’ I wish to remind you that it was you who first said to me, with that discretion I respect in you — with that foresight, prudence, and humility which befit your responsible and dependent position — that in case I married Miss Ingram, both you and little Adèle had better trot forthwith. I pass over the sort of slur conveyed in this suggestion on the character of my beloved; indeed, when you are far away, Janet, I’ll try to forget it: I shall notice only its wisdom; which is such that I have made it my law of action. Adèle must go to school; and you, Miss Eyre, must get a new situation.”

“Yes, sir, I will advertise immediately: and meantime, I suppose — ” I was going to say, “I suppose I may stay here, till I find another shelter to betake myself to:” but I stopped, feeling it would not do to risk a long sentence, for my voice was not quite under command.

“In about a month I hope to be a bridegroom,” continued Mr. Rochester; “and in the interim, I shall myself look out for employment and an asylum for you."

"Thank you, sir; I am sorry to give — "

"Oh, no need to apologise! I consider that when a dependent does her duty as well as you have done yours, she has a sort of claim upon her employer for any little assistance he can conveniently render her; indeed I have already, through my future mother-in-law, heard of a place that I think will suit: it is to undertake the education of the five daughters of Mrs. Dionysius O'Gall of Bitternutt Lodge, Connaught, Ireland. You'll like Ireland, I think: they're such warm-hearted people there, they say."

"It is a long way off, sir."

"No matter — a girl of your sense will not object to the voyage or the distance."

"Not the voyage, but the distance: and then the sea is a barrier — "

"From what, Jane?"

"From England and from Thornfield: and — "

"Well?"

"From *you*, sir."

I said this almost involuntarily, and, with as little sanction of free will, my tears gushed out. I did not cry so as to be heard, however; I avoided sobbing. The thought of Mrs. O'Gall and Bitternutt Lodge struck cold to my heart; and colder the thought of all the brine and foam, destined, as it seemed, to rush between me and the master at whose side I now walked, and coldest the remembrance of the wider ocean — wealth, caste, custom intervened between me and what I naturally and inevitably loved.

"It is a long way," I again said.

"It is, to be sure; and when you get to Bitternutt Lodge, Connaught, Ireland, I shall never see you again, Jane: that's morally certain. I never go over to Ireland, not having myself much of a fancy for the country. We have been good friends, Jane; have we not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when friends are on the eve of separation, they like to spend the little time that remains to them close to each other. Come! we'll talk over the voyage and the parting quietly half-an-hour or so, while the stars enter into their shining life up in heaven yonder: here is the chestnut tree: here is the bench at its old roots. Come, we will sit there in peace to-night, though we should never more be destined to sit there together." He seated me and himself.

"It is a long way to Ireland, Janet, and I am sorry to send my little friend on such weary travels: but if I can't do better, how is it to be helped? Are you anything akin to me, do you think, Jane?"

I could risk no sort of answer by this time: my heart was still.

"Because," he said, "I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you — especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous Channel, and two hundred miles or so of land come broad between us, I am afraid that cord of communion will be snapt; and then I've a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. As for you, — you'd forget me."

"That I *never* should, sir: you know — " Impossible to proceed.

"Jane, do you hear that nightingale singing in the wood? Listen!"

In listening, I sobbed convulsively; for I could repress what I endured no longer; I was obliged to yield, and I was shaken from head to foot with acute distress. When I did speak, it was only to express an impetuous wish that I had never been born, or never come to Thornfield.

"Because you are sorry to leave it?"

The vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway, and asserting a right to predominate, to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last: yes, — and to speak.

"I grieve to leave Thornfield: I love Thornfield: — I love it, because I have lived in it a full and delightful life, — momentarily at least. I have not been trampled on. I have not been petrified. I have not been buried with inferior minds, and excluded from every glimpse of communion with what is bright and energetic and high. I have talked, face to face, with what I reverence, with what I delight in, — with an original, a vigorous, an expanded mind. I have known you, Mr. Rochester; and it strikes me with terror and anguish to feel I absolutely must be torn from you for ever. I see the necessity of departure; and it is like looking on the necessity of death."

"Where do you see the necessity?" he asked suddenly.

"Where? You, sir, have placed it before me."

"In what shape?"

"In the shape of Miss Ingram; a noble and beautiful woman, — your bride."

"My bride! What bride? I have no bride!"

"But you will have."

"Yes; — I will! — I will!" He set his teeth.

"Then I must go: — you have said it yourself."

"No: you must stay! I swear it — and the oath shall be kept."

"I tell you I must go!" I retorted, roused to something like passion. "Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? — a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! — I have as much soul as you, — and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh; — it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, — as we are!"

"As we are!" repeated Mr. Rochester — "so," he added, enclosing me in his arms. Gathering me to his breast, pressing his lips on my lips: "so, Jane!"

"Yes, so, sir," I rejoined: "and yet not so; for you are a married man — or as good as a married man, and wed to one inferior to you — to one with whom you have no sympathy — whom I do not believe you truly love; for I have seen and heard you sneer at her. I would scorn such a union: therefore I am better than you — let me go!"

"Where, Jane? To Ireland?"

"Yes — to Ireland. I have spoken my mind, and can go anywhere now."

"Jane, be still; don't struggle so, like a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation."

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you."

Another effort set me at liberty, and I stood erect before him.

"And your will shall decide your destiny," he said: "I offer you my hand, my heart, and a share of all my possessions."

"You play a farce, which I merely laugh at."

"I ask you to pass through life at my side — to be my second self, and best earthly companion."

"For that fate you have already made your choice, and must abide by it."

"Jane, be still a few moments: you are over-excited: I will be still too."

A waft of wind came sweeping down the laurel-walk, and trembled through the boughs of the chestnut: it wandered away — away — to an indefinite distance — it died. The nightingale's song was then the only voice of the hour: in listening to it, I again wept. Mr. Rochester sat quiet, looking at me gently and seriously. Some time passed before he spoke; he at last said —

"Come to my side, Jane, and let us explain and understand one another."

"I will never again come to your side: I am torn away now, and cannot return."

"But, Jane, I summon you as my wife: it is you only I intend to marry."

I was silent: I thought he mocked me.

"Come, Jane — come hither."

"Your bride stands between us."

He rose, and with a stride reached me.

"My bride is here," he said, again drawing me to him, "because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?"

Still I did not answer, and still I writhed myself from his grasp: for I was still incredulous.

"Do you doubt me, Jane?"

"Entirely."

"You have no faith in me?"

"Not a whit."

"Am I a liar in your eyes?" he asked passionately. "Little sceptic, you *shall* be convinced. What love have I for Miss Ingram? None: and that you know. What love has she for me? None: as I have taken pains to prove: I caused a rumour to reach her that my fortune was not a third of what was supposed, and after that I presented myself to see the result; it was coldness both from her and her mother. I would not — I could not — marry Miss Ingram. You — you strange, you almost unearthly thing! — I love as my own flesh. You — poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are — I entreat to accept me as a husband."

"What, me!" I ejaculated, beginning in his earnestness — and especially in his incivility — to credit his sincerity: "me who have not a friend in the world but you — if you are my friend: not a shilling but what you have given me?"

"You, Jane, I must have you for my own — entirely my own. Will you be mine? Say yes, quickly."

"Mr. Rochester, let me look at your face: turn to the moonlight."

"Why?"

"Because I want to read your countenance — turn!"

"There! you will find it scarcely more legible than a crumpled, scratched page. Read on: only make haste, for I suffer."

His face was very much agitated and very much flushed, and there were strong workings in the features, and strange gleams in the eyes.

"Oh, Jane, you torture me!" he exclaimed. "With that searching and yet faithful and generous look, you torture me!"

"How can I do that? If you are true, and your offer real, my only feelings to you must be gratitude and devotion — they cannot torture."

"Gratitude!" he ejaculated; and added wildly — "Jane accept me quickly. Say, Edward — give me my name — Edward — I will marry you."

"Are you in earnest? Do you truly love me? Do you sincerely wish me to be your wife?"

"I do; and if an oath is necessary to satisfy you, I swear it."

"Then, sir, I will marry you."

"Edward — my little wife!"

"Dear Edward!"

"Come to me — come to me entirely now," said he; and added, in his deepest tone, speaking in my ear as his cheek was laid on mine, "Make my happiness — I will make yours."

"God pardon me!" he subjoined ere long; "and man meddle not with me: I have her, and will hold her."

"There is no one to meddle, sir. I have no kindred to interfere."

"No — that is the best of it," he said. And if I had loved him less I should have thought his accent and look of exultation savage; but, sitting by him, roused from the nightmare of parting — called to the paradise of union — I thought only of the bliss given me to drink in so abundant a flow. Again and again he said, "Are you happy, Jane?" And again and again I answered, "Yes." After which he murmured, "It will atone — it will atone. Have I not found her friendless, and cold, and comfortless? Will I not guard, and cherish, and solace her? Is there not love in my heart, and constancy in my resolves? It will expiate at God's tribunal. I know my Maker sanctions what I do. For the world's judgment — I wash my hands thereof. For man's opinion — I defy it."

But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were all in shadow: I could scarcely see my master's face, near as I was. And what ailed the chestnut tree? it writhed and groaned; while wind roared in the laurel walk, and came sweeping over us.

"We must go in," said Mr. Rochester: "the weather changes. I could have sat with thee till morning, Jane."

"And so," thought I, "could I with you." I should have said so, perhaps, but a livid, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which I was looking, and there was a crack, a crash, and a close rattling peal; and I thought only of hiding my dazzled eyes against Mr. Rochester's shoulder.

The rain rushed down. He hurried me up the walk, through the grounds, and into the house; but we were quite wet before we could pass the threshold. He was taking off my shawl in the hall, and shaking the water out of my loosened hair, when Mrs. Fairfax emerged from her room. I did not observe her at first, nor did Mr. Rochester. The lamp was lit. The clock was on the stroke of twelve.

"Hasten to take off your wet things," said he; "and before you go, good-night — good-night, my darling!"

He kissed me repeatedly. When I looked up, on leaving his arms, there stood the widow, pale, grave, and amazed. I only smiled at her, and ran upstairs. "Explanation will do for another time," thought I. Still, when I reached my chamber, I felt a pang at the idea she should even temporarily misconstrue what she had seen. But joy soon effaced every other feeling; and loud as the wind blew, near and deep as the thunder crashed, fierce and frequent as the lightning gleamed, cataract-like as the rain fell during a storm of two hours' duration, I experienced no fear and little awe. Mr. Rochester came thrice to my door in the course of it, to ask if I was safe and tranquil: and that was comfort, that was strength for anything.

Before I left my bed in the morning, little Adèle came running in to tell me that the great horse-chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split away.

CHAPTER XXIV

As I rose and dressed, I thought over what had happened, and wondered if it were a dream. I could not be certain of the reality till I had seen Mr. Rochester again, and heard him renew his words of love and promise.

While arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect and life in its colour; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple. I had often been unwilling to look at my master, because I feared he could not be pleased at my look; but I was sure I might lift my face to his now, and not cool his affection by its expression. I took a plain but clean and light summer dress from my drawer and put it on: it seemed no attire had ever so well become me, because none had I ever worn in so blissful a mood.

I was not surprised, when I ran down into the hall, to see that a brilliant June morning had succeeded to the tempest of the night; and to feel, through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze. Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy. A beggar-woman and her little boy — pale, ragged objects both — were coming up the walk, and I ran down and gave them all the money I happened to have in my purse — some three or four shillings: good or bad, they must partake of my jubilee. The rooks cawed, and blither birds sang; but nothing was so merry or so musical as my own rejoicing heart.

Mrs. Fairfax surprised me by looking out of the window with a sad countenance, and saying gravely — "Miss Eyre, will you come to breakfast?" During the meal she was quiet and cool: but I could not undeceive her then. I must wait for my master to give explanations; and so must she. I ate what I could, and then I hastened upstairs. I met Adèle leaving the schoolroom.

"Where are you going? It is time for lessons."

"Mr. Rochester has sent me away to the nursery."

"Where is he?"

"In there," pointing to the apartment she had left; and I went in, and there he stood.

"Come and bid me good-morning," said he. I gladly advanced; and it was not merely a cold word now, or even a shake of the hand that I received, but an embrace and a kiss. It seemed natural: it seemed genial to be so well loved, so caressed by him.

"Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty," said he: "truly pretty this morning. Is this my pale, little elf? Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?" (I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake: for him they were new-dyed, I suppose.)

"It is Jane Eyre, sir."

"Soon to be Jane Rochester," he added: "in four weeks, Janet; not a day more. Do you hear that?"

I did, and I could not quite comprehend it: it made me giddy. The feeling, the announcement sent through me, was something stronger than was consistent with joy — something that smote and stunned. It was, I think almost fear.

"You blushed, and now you are white, Jane: what is that for?"

"Because you gave me a new name — Jane Rochester; and it seems so strange."

"Yes, Mrs. Rochester," said he; "young Mrs. Rochester — Fairfax Rochester's girl-bride."

"It can never be, sir; it does not sound likely. Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world. I was not born for a different destiny to the rest of my species: to imagine such a lot befalling me is a fairy tale — a day-dream."

"Which I can and will realise. I shall begin to-day. This morning I wrote to my banker in London to send me certain jewels he has in his keeping, — heirlooms for the ladies of Thornfield. In a day or two I hope to pour them into your lap: for every privilege, every attention shall be yours that I would accord a peer's daughter, if about to marry her."

"Oh, sir! — never rain jewels! I don't like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them."

"I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead, — which it will become: for nature, at least, has stamped her patent of nobility on this brow, Jane; and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings."

"No, no, sir! think of other subjects, and speak of other things, and in another strain. Don't address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess."

"You are a beauty in my eyes, and a beauty just after the desire of my heart, — delicate and aërial."

"Puny and insignificant, you mean. You are dreaming, sir, — or you are sneering. For God's sake don't be ironical!"

"I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty, too," he went on, while I really became uneasy at the strain he had adopted, because I felt he was either deluding himself or trying to delude me. "I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil."

"And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket — a jay in borrowed plumes. I would as soon see you, Mr. Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings, as myself clad in a court-lady's robe; and I don't call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly: far too dearly to flatter you. Don't flatter me."

He pursued his theme, however, without noticing my deprecation. "This very day I shall take you in the carriage to Millcote, and you must choose some dresses for yourself. I told you we shall be married in four weeks. The wedding is to take place quietly, in the church down below yonder; and then I shall waft you away at once to town. After a brief stay there, I shall bear my treasure to regions nearer the sun: to French vineyards and Italian plains; and she shall see whatever is famous in old story and in modern record: she shall taste, too, of the life of cities; and she shall learn to value herself by just comparison with others."

"Shall I travel? — and with you, sir?"

"You shall sojourn at Paris, Rome, and Naples: at Florence, Venice, and Vienna: all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you: wherever I stamped my hoof, your sylph's foot shall step also. Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage as my companions: now I shall revisit it healed and cleansed, with a very angel as my comforter."

I laughed at him as he said this. "I am not an angel," I asserted; "and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me — for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate."

"What do you anticipate of me?"

"For a little while you will perhaps be as you are now, — a very little while; and then you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I shall have much ado to please you: but when you get well used to me, you will perhaps like me again, — *like* me, I say, not *love* me. I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband's ardour extends. Yet, after all, as a friend and companion, I hope never to become quite distasteful to my dear master."

"Distasteful! and like you again! I think I shall like you again, and yet again: and I will make you confess I do not only *like*, but *love* you — with truth, fervour, constancy."

"Yet are you not capricious, sir?"

"To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts — when they open to me a perspective of flatness, triviality, and perhaps imbecility, coarseness, and ill-temper: but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break — at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent — I am ever tender and true."

"Had you ever experience of such a character, sir? Did you ever love such an one?"

"I love it now."

"But before me: if I, indeed, in any respect come up to your difficult standard?"

"I never met your likeness. Jane, you please me, and you master me — you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced — conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win. Why do you smile, Jane? What does that inexplicable, that uncanny turn of countenance mean?"

"I was thinking, sir (you will excuse the idea; it was involuntary), I was thinking of Hercules and Samson with their charmers — "

"You were, you little elfish — "

"Hush, sir! You don't talk very wisely just now; any more than those gentlemen acted very wisely. However, had they been married, they would no doubt by their severity as husbands have made up for their softness as suitors; and so will you, I fear. I wonder how you will answer me a year hence, should I ask a favour it does not suit your convenience or pleasure to grant."

"Ask me something now, Jane, — the least thing: I desire to be entreated — "

"Indeed I will, sir; I have my petition all ready."

"Speak! But if you look up and smile with that countenance, I shall swear concession before I know to what, and that will make a fool of me."

"Not at all, sir; I ask only this: don't send for the jewels, and don't crown me with roses: you might as well put a border of gold lace round that plain pocket handkerchief you have there."

"I might as well 'gild refined gold.' I know it: your request is granted then — for the time. I will remand the order I despatched to my banker. But you have not yet asked for anything; you have prayed a gift to be withdrawn: try again."

"Well then, sir, have the goodness to gratify my curiosity, which is much piqued on one point."

He looked disturbed. "What? what?" he said hastily. "Curiosity is a dangerous petition: it is well I have not taken a vow to accord every request — "

"But there can be no danger in complying with this, sir."

"Utter it, Jane: but I wish that instead of a mere inquiry into, perhaps, a secret, it was a wish for half my estate."

"Now, King Ahasuerus! What do I want with half your estate? Do you think I am a Jew-usurer, seeking good investment in land? I would much rather have all your confidence. You will not exclude me from your confidence if you admit me to your heart?"

"You are welcome to all my confidence that is worth having, Jane; but for God's sake, don't desire a useless burden! Don't long for poison — don't turn out a downright Eve on my hands!"

"Why not, sir? You have just been telling me how much you liked to be conquered, and how pleasant over-persuasion is to you. Don't you think I had better take advantage of the confession, and begin and coax and entreat — even cry and be sulky if necessary — for the sake of a mere essay of my power?"

"I dare you to any such experiment. Encroach, presume, and the game is up."

"Is it, sir? You soon give in. How stern you look now! Your eyebrows have become as thick as my finger, and your forehead resembles what, in some very astonishing poetry, I once saw styled, 'a blue-piled thunderloft.' That will be your married look, sir, I suppose?"

"If that will be *your* married look, I, as a Christian, will soon give up the notion of consorting with a mere sprite or salamander. But what had you to ask, thing, — out with it?"

"There, you are less than civil now; and I like rudeness a great deal better than flattery. I had rather be a *thing* than an angel. This is what I have to ask, — Why did you take such pains to make me believe you wished to marry Miss Ingram?"

"Is that all? Thank God it is no worse!" And now he unknit his black brows; looked down, smiling at me, and stroked my hair, as if well pleased at seeing a danger averted. "I think I may confess," he continued, "even although I should make you a little indignant, Jane — and I have seen what a fire-spirit you can be when you are indignant. You glowed in the cool moonlight last night, when you mutinied against fate, and claimed your rank as my equal. Janet, by-the-bye, it was you who made me the offer."

"Of course I did. But to the point if you please, sir — Miss Ingram?"

"Well, I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end."

"Excellent! Now you are small — not one whit bigger than the end of my little finger. It was a burning shame and a scandalous disgrace to act in that way. Did you think nothing of Miss Ingram's feelings, sir?"

"Her feelings are concentrated in one — pride; and that needs humbling. Were you jealous, Jane?"

"Never mind, Mr. Rochester: it is in no way interesting to you to know that. Answer me truly once more. Do you think Miss Ingram will not suffer from your dishonest coquetry? Won't she feel forsaken and deserted?"

"Impossible! — when I told you how she, on the contrary, deserted me: the idea of my insolvency cooled, or rather extinguished, her flame in a moment."

"You have a curious, designing mind, Mr. Rochester. I am afraid your principles on some points are eccentric."

"My principles were never trained, Jane: they may have grown a little awry for want of attention."

"Once again, seriously; may I enjoy the great good that has been vouchsafed to me, without fearing that any one else is suffering the bitter pain I myself felt a while ago?"

"That you may, my good little girl: there is not another being in the world has the same pure love for me as yourself — for I lay that pleasant unction to my soul, Jane, a belief in your affection."

I turned my lips to the hand that lay on my shoulder. I loved him very much — more than I could trust myself to say — more than words had power to express.

"Ask something more," he said presently; "it is my delight to be entreated, and to yield."

I was again ready with my request. "Communicate your intentions to Mrs. Fairfax, sir: she saw me with you last night in the hall, and she was shocked. Give her some explanation before I see her again. It pains me to be misjudged by so good a woman."

"Go to your room, and put on your bonnet," he replied. "I mean you to accompany me to Millcote this morning; and while you prepare for the drive, I will enlighten the old lady's understanding. Did she think, Janet, you had given the world for love, and considered it well lost?"

"I believe she thought I had forgotten my station, and yours, sir."

"Station! station! — your station is in my heart, and on the necks of those who would insult you, now or hereafter. — Go."

I was soon dressed; and when I heard Mr. Rochester quit Mrs. Fairfax's parlour, I hurried down to it. The old lady, had been reading her morning portion of Scripture — the Lesson for the day; her Bible lay open before her, and her spectacles were upon it. Her occupation, suspended by Mr. Rochester's announcement, seemed now forgotten: her eyes, fixed on the blank wall opposite, expressed the surprise of a quiet mind stirred by unwonted tidings. Seeing me, she roused herself: she made a sort of effort to smile, and framed a few words of congratulation; but the smile expired, and the sentence was abandoned unfinished. She put up her spectacles, shut the Bible, and pushed her chair back from the table.

"I feel so astonished," she began, "I hardly know what to say to you, Miss Eyre. I have surely not been dreaming, have I? Sometimes I half fall asleep when I am sitting alone and fancy things that have never happened. It has seemed to me more than once when I have been in a doze, that my dear husband, who died fifteen years since, has come in and sat down beside me; and that I have even heard him call me by my name, Alice, as he used to do. Now, can you tell me whether it is actually true that Mr. Rochester has asked you to marry him? Don't laugh at me. But I really thought he came in here five minutes ago, and said that in a month you would be his wife."

"He has said the same thing to me," I replied.

"He has! Do you believe him? Have you accepted him?"

"Yes."

She looked at me bewildered. "I could never have thought it. He is a proud man: all the Rochesters were proud: and his father, at least, liked money. He, too, has always been called careful. He means to marry you?"

"He tells me so."

She surveyed my whole person: in her eyes I read that they had there found no charm powerful enough to solve the enigma.

"It passes me!" she continued; "but no doubt, it is true since you say so. How it will answer, I cannot tell: I really don't know. Equality of position and fortune is often advisable in such cases; and there are twenty years of difference in your ages. He might almost be your father."

"No, indeed, Mrs. Fairfax!" exclaimed I, nettled; "he is nothing like my father! No one, who saw us together, would suppose it for an instant. Mr. Rochester looks as young, and is as young, as some men at five-and-twenty."

"Is it really for love he is going to marry you?" she asked.

I was so hurt by her coldness and scepticism, that the tears rose to my eyes.

"I am sorry to grieve you," pursued the widow; "but you are so young, and so little acquainted with men, I wished to put you on your guard. It is an old saying that 'all is not gold that glitters;' and in this case I do fear there will be something found to be different to what either you or I expect."

"Why? — am I a monster?" I said: "is it impossible that Mr. Rochester should have a sincere affection for me?"

"No: you are very well; and much improved of late; and Mr. Rochester, I daresay, is fond of you. I have always noticed that you were a sort of pet of his. There are times when, for your sake, I have been a little uneasy at his marked preference, and have wished to put you on your guard: but I did not like to suggest even the possibility of wrong. I knew such an idea would shock, perhaps offend you; and you were so discreet, and so thoroughly modest and sensible, I hoped you might be trusted to protect yourself. Last night I cannot tell you what I suffered when I sought all over the house, and could find you nowhere, nor the master either; and then, at twelve o'clock, saw you come in with him."

"Well, never mind that now," I interrupted impatiently; "it is enough that all was right."

"I hope all will be right in the end," she said: "but believe me, you cannot be too careful. Try and keep Mr. Rochester at a distance: distrust yourself as well as him. Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses."

I was growing truly irritated: happily, Adèle ran in.

"Let me go, — let me go to Millcote too!" she cried. "Mr. Rochester won't: though there is so much room in the new carriage. Beg him to let me go mademoiselle."

"That I will, Adèle;" and I hastened away with her, glad to quit my gloomy monitress. The carriage was ready: they were bringing it round to the front, and my master was pacing the pavement, Pilot following him backwards and forwards.

"Adèle may accompany us, may she not, sir?"

"I told her no. I'll have no brats! — I'll have only you."

"Do let her go, Mr. Rochester, if you please: it would be better."

"Not it: she will be a restraint."

He was quite peremptory, both in look and voice. The chill of Mrs. Fairfax's warnings, and the damp of her doubts were upon me: something of unsubstantiality and uncertainty had beset my hopes. I half lost the sense of power over him. I was about mechanically to obey him, without further remonstrance; but as he helped me into the carriage, he looked at my face.

"What is the matter?" he asked; "all the sunshine is gone. Do you really wish the bairn to go? Will it annoy you if she is left behind?"

"I would far rather she went, sir."

"Then off for your bonnet, and back like a flash of lightning!" cried he to Adèle.

She obeyed him with what speed she might.

"After all, a single morning's interruption will not matter much," said he, "when I mean shortly to claim you — your thoughts, conversation, and company — for life."

Adèle, when lifted in, commenced kissing me, by way of expressing her gratitude for my intercession: she was instantly stowed away into a corner on the other side of him. She then peeped round to where I sat; so stern a neighbour was too restrictive to him, in his present fractious mood, she dared whisper no observations, nor ask of him any information.

"Let her come to me," I entreated: "she will, perhaps, trouble you, sir: there is plenty of room on this side."

He handed her over as if she had been a lapdog. "I'll send her to school yet," he said, but now he was smiling.

Adèle heard him, and asked if she was to go to school "sans mademoiselle?"

"Yes," he replied, "absolutely sans mademoiselle; for I am to take mademoiselle to the moon, and there I shall seek a cave in one of the white valleys among the volcano-tops, and mademoiselle shall live with me there, and only me."

"She will have nothing to eat: you will starve her," observed Adèle.

"I shall gather manna for her morning and night: the plains and hillsides in the moon are bleached with manna, Adèle."

"She will want to warm herself: what will she do for a fire?"

"Fire rises out of the lunar mountains: when she is cold, I'll carry her up to a peak, and lay her down on the edge of a crater."

"Oh, qu' elle y sera mal — peu comfortable! And her clothes, they will wear out: how can she get new ones?"

Mr. Rochester professed to be puzzled. “Hem!” said he. “What would you do, Adèle? Cudgel your brains for an expedient. How would a white or a pink cloud answer for a gown, do you think? And one could cut a pretty enough scarf out of a rainbow.”

“She is far better as she is,” concluded Adèle, after musing some time: “besides, she would get tired of living with only you in the moon. If I were mademoiselle, I would never consent to go with you.”

“She has consented: she has pledged her word.”

“But you can’t get her there; there is no road to the moon: it is all air; and neither you nor she can fly.”

“Adèle, look at that field.” We were now outside Thornfield gates, and bowling lightly along the smooth road to Millcote, where the dust was well laid by the thunderstorm, and, where the low hedges and lofty timber trees on each side glistened green and rain-refreshed.

“In that field, Adèle, I was walking late one evening about a fortnight since — the evening of the day you helped me to make hay in the orchard meadows; and, as I was tired with raking swaths, I sat down to rest me on a stile; and there I took out a little book and a pencil, and began to write about a misfortune that befell me long ago, and a wish I had for happy days to come: I was writing away very fast, though daylight was fading from the leaf, when something came up the path and stopped two yards off me. I looked at it. It was a little thing with a veil of gossamer on its head. I beckoned it to come near me; it stood soon at my knee. I never spoke to it, and it never spoke to me, in words; but I read its eyes, and it read mine; and our speechless colloquy was to this effect —

“It was a fairy, and come from Elf-land, it said; and its errand was to make me happy: I must go with it out of the common world to a lonely place — such as the moon, for instance — and it nodded its head towards her horn, rising over Hay-hill: it told me of the alabaster cave and silver vale where we might live. I said I should like to go; but reminded it, as you did me, that I had no wings to fly.

“‘Oh,’ returned the fairy, ‘that does not signify! Here is a talisman will remove all difficulties;’ and she held out a pretty gold ring. ‘Put it,’ she said, ‘on the fourth finger of my left hand, and I am yours, and you are mine; and we shall leave earth, and make our own heaven yonder.’ She nodded again at the moon. The ring, Adèle, is in my breeches-pocket, under the disguise of a sovereign: but I mean soon to change it to a ring again.”

“But what has mademoiselle to do with it? I don’t care for the fairy: you said it was mademoiselle you would take to the moon?”

“Mademoiselle is a fairy,” he said, whispering mysteriously. Whereupon I told her not to mind his badinage; and she, on her part, evinced a fund of genuine French scepticism: denominating Mr. Rochester “un vrai menteur,” and assuring him that she made no account whatever of his “contes de fée,” and that “du reste, il n’y avait pas de fées, et quand même il y en avait:” she was sure they would never appear to him, nor ever give him rings, or offer to live with him in the moon.

The hour spent at Millcote was a somewhat harassing one to me. Mr. Rochester obliged me to go to a certain silk warehouse: there I was ordered to choose half-a-dozen dresses. I hated the business, I begged leave to defer it: no — it should be gone through with now. By dint of entreaties expressed in energetic whispers, I reduced the half-dozen to two: these however, he vowed he would select himself. With anxiety I watched his eye rove over the gay stores: he fixed on a rich silk of the most brilliant amethyst dye, and a superb pink satin. I told him in a new series of whispers, that he might as well buy me a gold gown and a silver bonnet at once: I should certainly never venture to wear his choice. With infinite difficulty, for he was stubborn as a stone, I persuaded him to make an exchange in favour of a sober black satin and pearl-grey silk. "It might pass for the present," he said; "but he would yet see me glittering like a parterre."

Glad was I to get him out of the silk warehouse, and then out of a jewellers shop: the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation. As we re-entered the carriage, and I sat back feverish and fagged, I remembered what, in the hurry of events, dark and bright, I had wholly forgotten — the letter of my uncle, John Eyre, to Mrs. Reed: his intention to adopt me and make me his legatee. "It would, indeed, be a relief," I thought, "if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me. I will write to Madeira the moment I get home, and tell my uncle John I am going to be married, and to whom: if I had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune, I could better endure to be kept by him now." And somewhat relieved by this idea (which I failed not to execute that day), I ventured once more to meet my master's and lover's eye, which most pertinaciously sought mine, though I averted both face and gaze. He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure.

"You need not look in that way," I said; "if you do, I'll wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter. I'll be married in this lilac gingham: you may make a dressing-gown for yourself out of the pearl-grey silk, and an infinite series of waistcoats out of the black satin."

He chuckled; he rubbed his hands. "Oh, it is rich to see and hear her?" he exclaimed. "Is she original? Is she piquant? I would not exchange this one little English girl for the Grand Turk's whole seraglio, gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all!"

The Eastern allusion bit me again. "I'll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio," I said; "so don't consider me an equivalent for one. If you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of

Stamboul without delay, and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here."

"And what will you do, Janet, while I am bargaining for so many tons of flesh and such an assortment of black eyes?"

"I'll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved — your harem inmates amongst the rest. I'll get admitted there, and I'll stir up mutiny; and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are, sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands: nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred."

"I would consent to be at your mercy, Jane."

"I would have no mercy, Mr. Rochester, if you supplicated for it with an eye like that. While you looked so, I should be certain that whatever charter you might grant under coercion, your first act, when released, would be to violate its conditions."

"Why, Jane, what would you have? I fear you will compel me to go through a private marriage ceremony, besides that performed at the altar. You will stipulate, I see, for peculiar terms — what will they be?"

"I only want an easy mind, sir; not crushed by crowded obligations. Do you remember what you said of Céline Varens? — of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Céline Varens. I shall continue to act as Adèle's governess; by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides. I'll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing but — "

"Well, but what?"

"Your regard; and if I give you mine in return, that debt will be quit."

"Well, for cool native impudence and pure innate pride, you haven't your equal," said he. We were now approaching Thornfield. "Will it please you to dine with me to-day?" he asked, as we re-entered the gates.

"No, thank you, sir."

"And what for, 'no, thank you?' if one may inquire."

"I never have dined with you, sir: and I see no reason why I should now: till — "

"Till what? You delight in half-phrases."

"Till I can't help it."

"Do you suppose I eat like an ogre or a ghoul, that you dread being the companion of my repast?"

"I have formed no supposition on the subject, sir; but I want to go on as usual for another month."

"You will give up your governessing slavery at once."

"Indeed, begging your pardon, sir, I shall not. I shall just go on with it as usual. I shall keep out of your way all day, as I have been accustomed to do: you may send for me in the evening, when you feel disposed to see me, and I'll come then; but at no other time."

"I want a smoke, Jane, or a pinch of snuff, to comfort me under all this, 'pour me donner une contenance,' as Adèle would say; and unfortunately I have neither my cigar-case, nor my snuff-box. But listen — whisper. It is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently; and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I'll just — figuratively speaking — attach you to a chain like this" (touching his watch-guard). "Yes, bonny wee thing, I'll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne."

He said this as he helped me to alight from the carriage, and while he afterwards lifted out Adèle, I entered the house, and made good my retreat upstairs.

He duly summoned me to his presence in the evening. I had prepared an occupation for him; for I was determined not to spend the whole time in a *tête-à-tête* conversation. I remembered his fine voice; I knew he liked to sing — good singers generally do. I was no vocalist myself, and, in his fastidious judgment, no musician, either; but I delighted in listening when the performance was good. No sooner had twilight, that hour of romance, began to lower her blue and starry banner over the lattice, than I rose, opened the piano, and entreated him, for the love of heaven, to give me a song. He said I was a capricious witch, and that he would rather sing another time; but I averred that no time was like the present.

"Did I like his voice?" he asked.

"Very much." I was not fond of pampering that susceptible vanity of his; but for once, and from motives of expediency, I would e'en soothe and stimulate it.

"Then, Jane, you must play the accompaniment."

"Very well, sir, I will try."

I did try, but was presently swept off the stool and denominated "a little bungler." Being pushed unceremoniously to one side — which was precisely what I wished — he usurped my place, and proceeded to accompany himself: for he could play as well as sing. I hied me to the window-recess. And while I sat there and looked out on the still trees and dim lawn, to a sweet air was sung in mellow tones the following strain: —

"The truest love that ever heart
  Felt at its kindled core,
Did through each vein, in quickened start,
  The tide of being pour.
Her coming was my hope each day,
  Her parting was my pain;
The chance that did her steps delay
  Was ice in every vein.
I dreamed it would be nameless bliss,
  As I loved, loved to be;
And to this object did I press
  As blind as eagerly.

But wide as pathless was the space
  That lay our lives between,
And dangerous as the foamy race
  Of ocean-surges green.
And haunted as a robber-path
  Through wilderness or wood;
For Might and Right, and Woe and Wrath,
  Between our spirits stood.
I dangers dared; I hindrance scorned;
  I omens did defy:
Whatever menaced, harassed, warned,
  I passed impetuous by.
On sped my rainbow, fast as light;
  I flew as in a dream;
For glorious rose upon my sight
  That child of Shower and Gleam.
Still bright on clouds of suffering dim
  Shines that soft, solemn joy;
Nor care I now, how dense and grim
  Disasters gather nigh.
I care not in this moment sweet,
  Though all I have rushed o'er
Should come on pinion, strong and fleet,
  Proclaiming vengeance sore:
Though haughty Hate should strike me down,
  Right, bar approach to me,
And grinding Might, with furious frown,
  Swear endless enmity.
My love has placed her little hand
  With noble faith in mine,
And vowed that wedlock's sacred band
  Our nature shall entwine.
My love has sworn, with sealing kiss,
  With me to live — to die;
I have at last my nameless bliss.
  As I love — loved am I!"

He rose and came towards me, and I saw his face all kindled, and his full falcon-eye flashing, and tenderness and passion in every lineament. I quailed momentarily — then I rallied. Soft scene, daring demonstration, I would not have; and I stood in peril of both: a weapon of defence must be prepared — I whetted my tongue: as he reached me, I asked with asperity, "whom he was going to marry now?"

"That was a strange question to be put by his darling Jane."

"Indeed! I considered it a very natural and necessary one: he had talked of his future wife dying with him. What did he mean by such a pagan idea? *I* had no intention of dying with him — he might depend on that.”

“Oh, all he longed, all he prayed for, was that I might live with him! Death was not for such as I.”

“Indeed it was: I had as good a right to die when my time came as he had: but I should bide that time, and not be hurried away in a suttee.”

“Would I forgive him for the selfish idea, and prove my pardon by a reconciling kiss?”

“No: I would rather be excused.”

Here I heard myself apostrophised as a “hard little thing;” and it was added, “any other woman would have been melted to marrow at hearing such stanzas crooned in her praise.”

I assured him I was naturally hard — very flinty, and that he would often find me so; and that, moreover, I was determined to show him divers rugged points in my character before the ensuing four weeks elapsed: he should know fully what sort of a bargain he had made, while there was yet time to rescind it.

“Would I be quiet and talk rationally?”

“I would be quiet if he liked, and as to talking rationally, I flattered myself I was doing that now.”

He fretted, pished, and pshawed. “Very good,” I thought; “you may fume and fidget as you please: but this is the best plan to pursue with you, I am certain. I like you more than I can say; but I’ll not sink into a bathos of sentiment: and with this needle of repartee I’ll keep you from the edge of the gulf too; and, moreover, maintain by its pungent aid that distance between you and myself most conducive to our real mutual advantage.”

From less to more, I worked him up to considerable irritation; then, after he had retired, in dudgeon, quite to the other end of the room, I got up, and saying, “I wish you good-night, sir,” in my natural and wonted respectful manner, I slipped out by the side-door and got away.

The system thus entered on, I pursued during the whole season of probation; and with the best success. He was kept, to be sure, rather cross and crusty; but on the whole I could see he was excellently entertained, and that a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more, would have pleased his judgment, satisfied his common-sense, and even suited his taste less.

In other people’s presence I was, as formerly, deferential and quiet; any other line of conduct being uncalled for: it was only in the evening conferences I thus thwarted and afflicted him. He continued to send for me punctually the moment the clock struck seven; though when I appeared before him now, he had no such honeyed terms as “love” and “darling” on his lips: the best words at my service were “provoking puppet,” “malicious elf,” “sprite,” “changeling,” &c. For caresses, too, I now got grimaces; for a pressure of the hand, a pinch on the arm; for a kiss on the cheek, a severe tweak of the ear. It was all right: at present I decidedly preferred these fierce favours to anything more tender. Mrs. Fairfax, I saw, approved me: her anxiety on my account vanished; therefore I was certain I did well. Meantime, Mr. Rochester affirmed I was wearing him to skin and bone, and threatened awful vengeance for my present conduct at some period fast coming. I laughed in my sleeve at his menaces. “I can keep you in reasonable check now,” I reflected; “and I don’t doubt to be able to do it hereafter: if one expedient loses its virtue, another must be devised.”

Yet after all my task was not an easy one; often I would rather have pleased than teased him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol.

CHAPTER XXV

The month of courtship had wasted: its very last hours were being numbered. There was no putting off the day that advanced — the bridal day; and all preparations for its arrival were complete. *I*, at least, had nothing more to do: there were my trunks, packed, locked, corded, ranged in a row along the wall of my little chamber; to-morrow, at this time, they would be far on their road to London: and so should I (D.V.), — or rather, not I, but one Jane Rochester, a person whom as yet I knew not. The cards of address alone remained to nail on: they lay, four little squares, in the drawer. Mr. Rochester had himself written the direction, "Mrs. Rochester, — - Hotel, London," on each: I could not persuade myself to affix them, or to have them affixed. Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she would not be born till to-morrow, some time after eight o'clock a.m.; and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive before I assigned to her all that property. It was enough that in yonder closet, opposite my dressing-table, garments said to be hers had already displaced my black stuff Lowood frock and straw bonnet: for not to me appertained that suit of wedding raiment; the pearl-coloured robe, the vapoury veil pendent from the usurped portmanteau. I shut the closet to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel it contained; which, at this evening hour — nine o'clock — gave out certainly a most ghostly shimmer through the shadow of my apartment. "I will leave you by yourself, white dream," I said. "I am feverish: I hear the wind blowing: I will go out of doors and feel it."

It was not only the hurry of preparation that made me feverish; not only the anticipation of the great change — the new life which was to commence to-morrow: both these circumstances had their share, doubtless, in producing that restless, excited mood which hurried me forth at this late hour into the darkening grounds: but a third cause influenced my mind more than they.

I had at heart a strange and anxious thought. Something had happened which I could not comprehend; no one knew of or had seen the event but myself: it had taken place the preceding night. Mr. Rochester that night was absent from home; nor was he yet returned: business had called him to a small estate of two or three farms he possessed thirty miles off — business it was requisite he should settle in person, previous to his meditated departure from England. I waited now his return; eager to disburthen my mind, and to seek of him the solution of the enigma that perplexed me. Stay till he comes, reader; and, when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence.

I sought the orchard, driven to its shelter by the wind, which all day had blown strong and full from the south, without, however, bringing a speck of rain. Instead of subsiding as night drew on, it seemed to augment its rush and deepen its roar: the trees blew steadfastly one way, never writhing round, and scarcely tossing back their boughs once in an hour; so continuous was the strain bending their branchy heads northward — the clouds drifted from pole to pole, fast following, mass on mass: no glimpse of blue sky had been visible that July day.

It was not without a certain wild pleasure I ran before the wind, delivering my trouble of mind to the measureless air-torrent thundering through space. Descending the laurel walk, I faced the wreck of the chestnut-tree; it stood up black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gasped ghastly. The cloven halves were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below; though community of vitality was destroyed — the sap could flow no more: their great boughs on each side were dead, and next winter's tempests would be sure to fell one or both to earth: as yet, however, they might be said to form one tree — a ruin, but an entire ruin.

"You did right to hold fast to each other," I said: as if the monster-splinters were living things, and could hear me. "I think, scathed as you look, and charred and scorched, there must be a little sense of life in you yet, rising out of that adhesion at the faithful, honest roots: you will never have green leaves more — never more see birds making nests and singing idyls in your boughs; the time of pleasure and love is over with you: but you are not desolate: each of you has a comrade to sympathise with him in his decay." As I looked up at them, the moon appeared momentarily in that part of the sky which filled their fissure; her disk was blood-red and half overcast; she seemed to throw on me one bewildered, dreary glance, and buried herself again instantly in the deep drift of cloud. The wind fell, for a second, round Thornfield; but far away over wood and water, poured a wild, melancholy wail: it was sad to listen to, and I ran off again.

Here and there I strayed through the orchard, gathered up the apples with which the grass round the tree roots was thickly strewn; then I employed myself in dividing the ripe from the unripe; I carried them into the house and put them away in the store-room. Then I repaired to the library to ascertain whether the fire was lit, for, though summer, I knew on such a gloomy evening Mr. Rochester would like to see a cheerful hearth when he came in: yes, the fire had been kindled some time, and burnt well. I placed his arm-chair by the chimney-corner: I wheeled the table near it: I let down the curtain, and had the candles brought in ready for lighting. More restless than ever, when I had completed these arrangements I could not sit still, nor even remain in the house: a little time-piece in the room and the old clock in the hall simultaneously struck ten.

"How late it grows!" I said. "I will run down to the gates: it is moonlight at intervals; I can see a good way on the road. He may be coming now, and to meet him will save some minutes of suspense."

The wind roared high in the great trees which embowered the gates; but the road as far as I could see, to the right hand and the left, was all still and solitary: save for the shadows of clouds crossing it at intervals as the moon looked out, it was but a long pale line, unvaried by one moving speck.

A puerile tear dimmed my eye while I looked — a tear of disappointment and impatience; ashamed of it, I wiped it away. I lingered; the moon shut herself wholly within her chamber, and drew close her curtain of dense cloud: the night grew dark; rain came driving fast on the gale.

"I wish he would come! I wish he would come!" I exclaimed, seized with hypochondriac foreboding. I had expected his arrival before tea; now it was dark: what could keep him? Had an accident happened? The event of last night again recurred to me. I interpreted it as a warning of disaster. I feared my hopes were too bright to be realised; and I had enjoyed so much bliss lately that I imagined my fortune had passed its meridian, and must now decline.

"Well, I cannot return to the house," I thought; "I cannot sit by the fireside, while he is abroad in inclement weather: better tire my limbs than strain my heart; I will go forward and meet him."

I set out; I walked fast, but not far: ere I had measured a quarter of a mile, I heard the tramp of hoofs; a horseman came on, full gallop; a dog ran by his side. Away with evil presentiment! It was he: here he was, mounted on Mesrour, followed by Pilot. He saw me; for the moon had opened a blue field in the sky, and rode in it watery bright: he took his hat off, and waved it round his head. I now ran to meet him.

"There!" he exclaimed, as he stretched out his hand and bent from the saddle: "You can't do without me, that is evident. Step on my boot-toe; give me both hands: mount!"

I obeyed: joy made me agile: I sprang up before him. A hearty kissing I got for a welcome, and some boastful triumph, which I swallowed as well as I could. He checked himself in his exultation to demand, "But is there anything the matter, Janet, that you come to meet me at such an hour? Is there anything wrong?"

"No, but I thought you would never come. I could not bear to wait in the house for you, especially with this rain and wind."

"Rain and wind, indeed! Yes, you are dripping like a mermaid; pull my cloak round you: but I think you are feverish, Jane: both your cheek and hand are burning hot. I ask again, is there anything the matter?"

"Nothing now; I am neither afraid nor unhappy."

"Then you have been both?"

"Rather: but I'll tell you all about it by-and-bye, sir; and I daresay you will only laugh at me for my pains."

"I'll laugh at you heartily when to-morrow is past; till then I dare not: my prize is not certain. This is you, who have been as slippery as an eel this last month, and as thorny as a briar-rose? I could not lay a finger anywhere but I was pricked; and now I seem to have gathered up a stray lamb in my arms. You wandered out of the fold to seek your shepherd, did you, Jane?"

"I wanted you: but don't boast. Here we are at Thornfield: now let me get down."

He landed me on the pavement. As John took his horse, and he followed me into the hall, he told me to make haste and put something dry on, and then return to him in the library; and he stopped me, as I made for the staircase, to extort a promise that I would not be long: nor was I long; in five minutes I rejoined him. I found him at supper.

"Take a seat and bear me company, Jane: please God, it is the last meal but one you will eat at Thornfield Hall for a long time."

I sat down near him, but told him I could not eat. "Is it because you have the prospect of a journey before you, Jane? Is it the thoughts of going to London that takes away your appetite?"

"I cannot see my prospects clearly to-night, sir; and I hardly know what thoughts I have in my head. Everything in life seems unreal."

"Except me: I am substantial enough — touch me."

"You, sir, are the most phantom-like of all: you are a mere dream."

He held out his hand, laughing. "Is that a dream?" said he, placing it close to my eyes. He had a rounded, muscular, and vigorous hand, as well as a long, strong arm.

"Yes; though I touch it, it is a dream," said I, as I put it down from before my face. "Sir, have you finished supper?"

"Yes, Jane."

I rang the bell and ordered away the tray. When we were again alone, I stirred the fire, and then took a low seat at my master's knee.

"It is near midnight," I said.

"Yes: but remember, Jane, you promised to wake with me the night before my wedding."

"I did; and I will keep my promise, for an hour or two at least: I have no wish to go to bed."

"Are all your arrangements complete?"

"All, sir."

"And on my part likewise," he returned, "I have settled everything; and we shall leave Thornfield to-morrow, within half-an-hour after our return from church."

"Very well, sir."

"With what an extraordinary smile you uttered that word — 'very well,' Jane! What a bright spot of colour you have on each cheek! and how strangely your eyes glitter! Are you well?"

"I believe I am."

"Believe! What is the matter? Tell me what you feel."

"I could not, sir: no words could tell you what I feel. I wish this present hour would never end: who knows with what fate the next may come charged?"

"This is hypochondria, Jane. You have been over-excited, or over-fatigued."

"Do you, sir, feel calm and happy?"

"Calm? — no: but happy — to the heart's core."

I looked up at him to read the signs of bliss in his face: it was ardent and flushed.

"Give me your confidence, Jane," he said: "relieve your mind of any weight that oppresses it, by imparting it to me. What do you fear? — that I shall not prove a good husband?"

"It is the idea farthest from my thoughts."

"Are you apprehensive of the new sphere you are about to enter? — of the new life into which you are passing?"

"No."

"You puzzle me, Jane: your look and tone of sorrowful audacity perplex and pain me. I want an explanation."

"Then, sir, listen. You were from home last night?"

"I was: I know that; and you hinted a while ago at something which had happened in my absence: — nothing, probably, of consequence; but, in short, it has disturbed you. Let me hear it. Mrs. Fairfax has said something, perhaps? or you have overheard the servants talk? — your sensitive self-respect has been wounded?"

"No, sir." It struck twelve — I waited till the time-piece had concluded its silver chime, and the clock its hoarse, vibrating stroke, and then I proceeded.

"All day yesterday I was very busy, and very happy in my ceaseless bustle; for I am not, as you seem to think, troubled by any haunting fears about the new sphere, et cetera: I think it a glorious thing to have the hope of living with you, because I love you. No, sir, don't caress me now — let me talk undisturbed. Yesterday I trusted well in Providence, and believed that events were working together for your good and mine: it was a fine day, if you recollect — the calmness of the air and sky forbade apprehensions respecting your safety or comfort on your journey. I walked a little while on the pavement after tea, thinking of you; and I beheld you in imagination so near me, I scarcely missed your actual presence. I thought of the life that lay before me — *your* life, sir — an existence more expansive and stirring than my own: as much more so as the depths of the sea to which the brook runs are than the shallows of its own strait channel. I wondered why moralists call this world a dreary wilderness: for me it blossomed like a rose. Just at sunset, the air turned cold and the sky cloudy: I went in, Sophie called me upstairs to look at my wedding-dress, which they had just brought; and under it in the box I found your present — the veil which, in your princely extravagance, you sent for from London: resolved, I suppose, since I would not have jewels, to cheat me into accepting something as costly. I smiled as I unfolded it, and devised how I would tease you about your aristocratic tastes, and your efforts to masque your plebeian bride in the attributes of a peeress. I thought how I would carry down to you the square of unembroidered blond I had myself prepared as a covering for my low-born head, and ask if that was not good enough for a woman who could bring her husband neither fortune, beauty, nor connections. I saw plainly how you would look; and heard your impetuous republican answers, and your haughty disavowal of any necessity on your part to augment your wealth, or elevate your standing, by marrying either a purse or a coronet."

"How well you read me, you witch!" interposed Mr. Rochester: "but what did you find in the veil besides its embroidery? Did you find poison, or a dagger, that you look so mournful now?"

"No, no, sir; besides the delicacy and richness of the fabric, I found nothing save Fairfax Rochester's pride; and that did not scare me, because I am used to the sight of the demon. But, sir, as it grew dark, the wind rose: it blew yesterday evening, not as it blows now — wild and high — but 'with a sullen, moaning sound' far more eerie. I wished you were at home. I came into this room, and the sight of the empty chair and fireless hearth chilled me. For some time after I went to bed, I could not sleep — a sense of anxious excitement distressed me. The gale still rising, seemed to my ear to muffle a mournful under-sound; whether in the house or abroad I could not at first tell, but it recurred, doubtful yet doleful at every lull; at last I made out it must be some dog howling at a distance. I was glad when it ceased. On sleeping, I continued in dreams the idea of a dark and gusty night. I continued also the wish to be with you, and experienced a strange, regretful consciousness of some barrier dividing us. During all my first sleep, I was following the windings of an unknown road; total obscurity environed me; rain pelted me; I was burdened with the charge of a little child: a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk, and which shivered in my cold arms, and wailed piteously in my ear. I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you, and made effort on effort to utter your name and entreat you to stop — but my movements were fettered, and my voice still died away inarticulate; while you, I felt, withdrew farther and farther every moment."

"And these dreams weigh on your spirits now, Jane, when I am close to you? Little nervous subject! Forget visionary woe, and think only of real happiness! You say you love me, Janet: yes — I will not forget that; and you cannot deny it. *Those* words did not die inarticulate on your lips. I heard them clear and soft: a thought too solemn perhaps, but sweet as music — 'I think it is a glorious thing to have the hope of living with you, Edward, because I love you.' Do you love me, Jane? — repeat it."

"I do, sir — I do, with my whole heart."

"Well," he said, after some minutes' silence, "it is strange; but that sentence has penetrated my breast painfully. Why? I think because you said it with such an earnest, religious energy, and because your upward gaze at me now is the very sublime of faith, truth, and devotion: it is too much as if some spirit were near me. Look wicked, Jane: as you know well how to look: coin one of your wild, shy, provoking smiles; tell me you hate me — tease me, vex me; do anything but move me: I would rather be incensed than saddened."

"I will tease you and vex you to your heart's content, when I have finished my tale: but hear me to the end."

"I thought, Jane, you had told me all. I thought I had found the source of your melancholy in a dream."

I shook my head. "What! is there more? But I will not believe it to be anything important. I warn you of incredulity beforehand. Go on."

The disquietude of his air, the somewhat apprehensive impatience of his manner, surprised me: but I proceeded.

"I dreamt another dream, sir: that Thornfield Hall was a dreary ruin, the retreat of bats and owls. I thought that of all the stately front nothing remained but a shell-like wall, very high and very fragile-looking. I wandered, on a moonlight night, through the grass-grown enclosure within: here I stumbled over a marble hearth, and there over a fallen fragment of cornice. Wrapped up in a shawl, I still carried the unknown little child: I might not lay it down anywhere, however tired were my arms — however much its weight impeded my progress, I must retain it. I heard the gallop of a horse at a distance on the road; I was sure it was you; and you were departing for many years and for a distant country. I climbed the thin wall with frantic perilous haste, eager to catch one glimpse of you from the top: the stones rolled from under my feet, the ivy branches I grasped gave way, the child clung round my neck in terror, and almost strangled me; at last I gained the summit. I saw you like a speck on a white track, lessening every moment. The blast blew so strong I could not stand. I sat down on the narrow ledge; I hushed the scared infant in my lap: you turned an angle of the road: I bent forward to take a last look; the wall crumbled; I was shaken; the child rolled from my knee, I lost my balance, fell, and woke."

"Now, Jane, that is all."

"All the preface, sir; the tale is yet to come. On waking, a gleam dazzled my eyes; I thought — Oh, it is daylight! But I was mistaken; it was only candlelight. Sophie, I supposed, had come in. There was a light in the dressing-table, and the door of the closet, where, before going to bed, I had hung my wedding-dress and veil, stood open; I heard a rustling there. I asked, 'Sophie, what are you doing?' No one answered; but a form emerged from the closet; it took the light, held it aloft, and surveyed the garments pendent from the portmanteau. 'Sophie! Sophie!' I again cried: and still it was silent. I had risen up in bed, I bent forward: first surprise, then bewilderment, came over me; and then my blood crept cold through my veins. Mr. Rochester, this was not Sophie, it was not Leah, it was not Mrs. Fairfax: it was not — no, I was sure of it, and am still — it was not even that strange woman, Grace Poole."

"It must have been one of them," interrupted my master.

"No, sir, I solemnly assure you to the contrary. The shape standing before me had never crossed my eyes within the precincts of Thornfield Hall before; the height, the contour were new to me."

"Describe it, Jane."

"It seemed, sir, a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back. I know not what dress she had on: it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell."

"Did you see her face?"

"Not at first. But presently she took my veil from its place; she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror. At that moment I saw the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass."

"And how were they?"

"Fearful and ghastly to me — oh, sir, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face — it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!"

"Ghosts are usually pale, Jane."

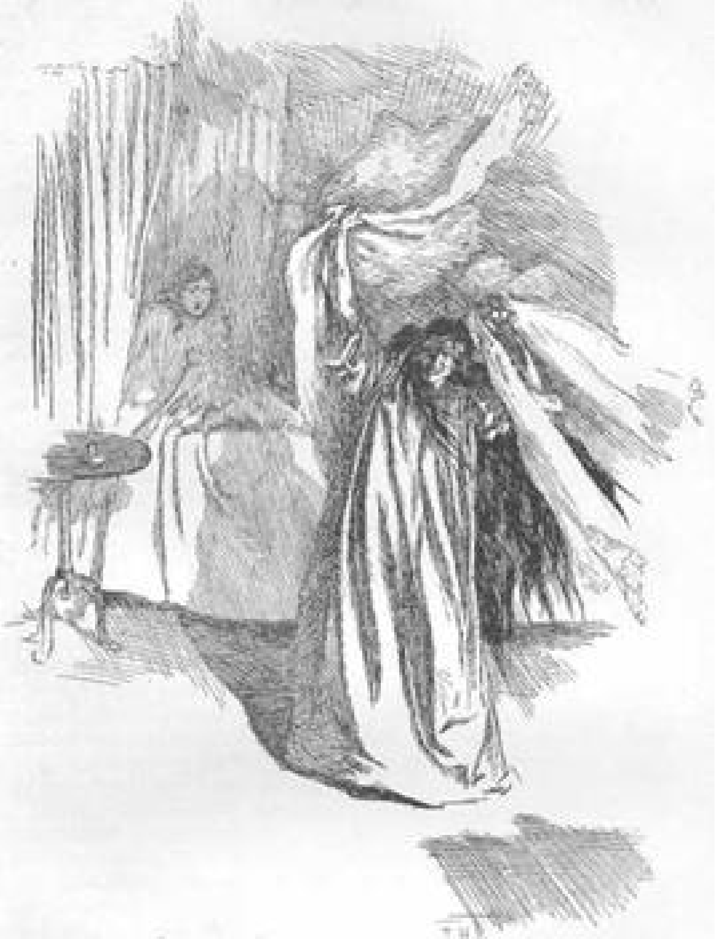
"This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes. Shall I tell you of what it reminded me?"

"You may."

"Of the foul German spectre — the Vampyre."

"Ah! — what did it do?"

"Sir, it removed my veil from its gaunt head, rent it in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them."



It removed my veil
from its gaunt head, rent it in two parts,
and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them.

“Afterwards?”

“It drew aside the window-curtain and looked out; perhaps it saw dawn approaching, for, taking the candle, it retreated to the door. Just at my bedside, the figure stopped: the fiery eyes glared upon me — she thrust up her candle close to my face, and extinguished it under my eyes. I was aware her lurid visage flamed over mine, and I lost consciousness: for the second time in my life — only the second time — I became insensible from terror.”

“Who was with you when you revived?”

“No one, sir, but the broad day. I rose, bathed my head and face in water, drank a long draught; felt that though enfeebled I was not ill, and determined that to none but you would I impart this vision. Now, sir, tell me who and what that woman was?”

“The creature of an over-stimulated brain; that is certain. I must be careful of you, my treasure: nerves like yours were not made for rough handling.”

"Sir, depend on it, my nerves were not in fault; the thing was real: the transaction actually took place."

"And your previous dreams, were they real too? Is Thornfield Hall a ruin? Am I severed from you by insuperable obstacles? Am I leaving you without a tear — without a kiss — without a word?"

"Not yet."

"Am I about to do it? Why, the day is already commenced which is to bind us indissolubly; and when we are once united, there shall be no recurrence of these mental terrors: I guarantee that."

"Mental terrors, sir! I wish I could believe them to be only such: I wish it more now than ever; since even you cannot explain to me the mystery of that awful visitant."

"And since I cannot do it, Jane, it must have been unreal."

"But, sir, when I said so to myself on rising this morning, and when I looked round the room to gather courage and comfort from the cheerful aspect of each familiar object in full daylight, there — on the carpet — I saw what gave the distinct lie to my hypothesis, — the veil, torn from top to bottom in two halves!"

I felt Mr. Rochester start and shudder; he hastily flung his arms round me. "Thank God!" he exclaimed, "that if anything malignant did come near you last night, it was only the veil that was harmed. Oh, to think what might have happened!"

He drew his breath short, and strained me so close to him, I could scarcely pant. After some minutes' silence, he continued, cheerily —

"Now, Janet, I'll explain to you all about it. It was half dream, half reality. A woman did, I doubt not, enter your room: and that woman was — must have been — Grace Poole. You call her a strange being yourself: from all you know, you have reason so to call her — what did she do to me? what to Mason? In a state between sleeping and waking, you noticed her entrance and her actions; but feverish, almost delirious as you were, you ascribed to her a goblin appearance different from her own: the long dishevelled hair, the swelled black face, the exaggerated stature, were figments of imagination; results of nightmare: the spiteful tearing of the veil was real: and it is like her. I see you would ask why I keep such a woman in my house: when we have been married a year and a day, I will tell you; but not now. Are you satisfied, Jane? Do you accept my solution of the mystery?"

I reflected, and in truth it appeared to me the only possible one: satisfied I was not, but to please him I endeavoured to appear so — relieved, I certainly did feel; so I answered him with a contented smile. And now, as it was long past one, I prepared to leave him.

"Does not Sophie sleep with Adèle in the nursery?" he asked, as I lit my candle.

"Yes, sir."

"And there is room enough in Adèle's little bed for you. You must share it with her to-night, Jane: it is no wonder that the incident you have related should make you nervous, and I would rather you did not sleep alone: promise me to go to the nursery."

"I shall be very glad to do so, sir."

"And fasten the door securely on the inside. Wake Sophie when you go upstairs, under pretence of requesting her to rouse you in good time to-morrow; for you must be dressed and have finished breakfast before eight. And now, no more sombre thoughts: chase dull care away, Janet. Don't you hear to what soft whispers the wind has fallen? and there is no more beating of rain against the window-panes: look here" (he lifted up the curtain) — "it is a lovely night!"

It was. Half heaven was pure and stainless: the clouds, now trooping before the wind, which had shifted to the west, were filing off eastward in long, silvered columns. The moon shone peacefully.

"Well," said Mr. Rochester, gazing inquiringly into my eyes, "how is my Janet now?"

"The night is serene, sir; and so am I."

"And you will not dream of separation and sorrow to-night; but of happy love and blissful union."

This prediction was but half fulfilled: I did not indeed dream of sorrow, but as little did I dream of joy; for I never slept at all. With little Adèle in my arms, I watched the slumber of childhood — so tranquil, so passionless, so innocent — and waited for the coming day: all my life was awake and astir in my frame: and as soon as the sun rose I rose too. I remember Adèle clung to me as I left her: I remember I kissed her as I loosened her little hands from my neck; and I cried over her with strange emotion, and quitted her because I feared my sobs would break her still sound repose. She seemed the emblem of my past life; and here I was now to array myself to meet, the dread, but adored, type of my unknown future day.

CHAPTER XXVI

Sophie came at seven to dress me: she was very long indeed in accomplishing her task; so long that Mr. Rochester, grown, I suppose, impatient of my delay, sent up to ask why I did not come. She was just fastening my veil (the plain square of blond after all) to my hair with a brooch; I hurried from under her hands as soon as I could.

"Stop!" she cried in French. "Look at yourself in the mirror: you have not taken one peep."

So I turned at the door: I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger. "Jane!" called a voice, and I hastened down. I was received at the foot of the stairs by Mr. Rochester.

"Lingerer!" he said, "my brain is on fire with impatience, and you tarry so long!"

He took me into the dining-room, surveyed me keenly all over, pronounced me "fair as a lily, and not only the pride of his life, but the desire of his eyes," and then telling me he would give me but ten minutes to eat some breakfast, he rang the bell. One of his lately hired servants, a footman, answered it.

"Is John getting the carriage ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is the luggage brought down?"

"They are bringing it down, sir."

"Go you to the church: see if Mr. Wood (the clergyman) and the clerk are there: return and tell me."

The church, as the reader knows, was but just beyond the gates; the footman soon returned.

"Mr. Wood is in the vestry, sir, putting on his surplice."

"And the carriage?"

"The horses are harnessing."

"We shall not want it to go to church; but it must be ready the moment we return: all the boxes and luggage arranged and strapped on, and the coachman in his seat."

"Yes, sir."

"Jane, are you ready?"

I rose. There were no groomsmen, no bridesmaids, no relatives to wait for or marshal: none but Mr. Rochester and I. Mrs. Fairfax stood in the hall as we passed. I would fain have spoken to her, but my hand was held by a grasp of iron: I was hurried along by a stride I could hardly follow; and to look at Mr. Rochester's face was to feel that not a second of delay would be tolerated for any purpose. I wonder what other bridegroom ever looked as he did — so bent up to a purpose, so grimly resolute: or who, under such steadfast brows, ever revealed such flaming and flashing eyes.

I know not whether the day was fair or foul; in descending the drive, I gazed neither on sky nor earth: my heart was with my eyes; and both seemed migrated into Mr. Rochester's frame. I wanted to see the invisible thing on which, as we went along, he appeared to fasten a glance fierce and fell. I wanted to feel the thoughts whose force he seemed breasting and resisting.

At the churchyard wicket he stopped: he discovered I was quite out of breath. "Am I cruel in my love?" he said. "Delay an instant: lean on me, Jane."

And now I can recall the picture of the grey old house of God rising calm before me, of a rook wheeling round the steeple, of a ruddy morning sky beyond. I remember something, too, of the green grave-mounds; and I have not forgotten, either, two figures of strangers straying amongst the low hillocks and reading the mementoes graven on the few mossy head-stones. I noticed them, because, as they saw us, they passed round to the back of the church; and I doubted not they were going to enter by the side-aisle door and witness the ceremony. By Mr. Rochester they were not observed; he was earnestly looking at my face from which the blood had, I daresay, momentarily fled: for I felt my forehead dewy, and my cheeks and lips cold. When I rallied, which I soon did, he walked gently with me up the path to the porch.

We entered the quiet and humble temple; the priest waited in his white surplice at the lowly altar, the clerk beside him. All was still: two shadows only moved in a remote corner. My conjecture had been correct: the strangers had slipped in before us, and they now stood by the vault of the Rochesters, their backs towards us, viewing through the rails the old time-stained marble tomb, where a kneeling angel guarded the remains of Damer de Rochester, slain at Marston Moor in the time of the civil wars, and of Elizabeth, his wife.

Our place was taken at the communion rails. Hearing a cautious step behind me, I glanced over my shoulder: one of the strangers — a gentleman, evidently — was advancing up the chancel. The service began. The explanation of the intent of matrimony was gone through; and then the clergyman came a step further forward, and, bending slightly towards Mr. Rochester, went on.

"I require and charge you both (as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed), that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not lawfully be joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it; for be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's Word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful."

He paused, as the custom is. When is the pause after that sentence ever broken by reply? Not, perhaps, once in a hundred years. And the clergyman, who had not lifted his eyes from his book, and had held his breath but for a moment, was proceeding: his hand was already stretched towards Mr. Rochester, as his lips unclosed to ask, “Wilt thou have this woman for thy wedded wife?” — when a distinct and near voice said —

“The marriage cannot go on: I declare the existence of an impediment.”

The clergyman looked up at the speaker and stood mute; the clerk did the same; Mr. Rochester moved slightly, as if an earthquake had rolled under his feet: taking a firmer footing, and not turning his head or eyes, he said, “Proceed.”

Profound silence fell when he had uttered that word, with deep but low intonation. Presently Mr. Wood said —

“I cannot proceed without some investigation into what has been asserted, and evidence of its truth or falsehood.”

“The ceremony is quite broken off,” subjoined the voice behind us. “I am in a condition to prove my allegation: an insuperable impediment to this marriage exists.”

Mr. Rochester heard, but heeded not: he stood stubborn and rigid, making no movement but to possess himself of my hand. What a hot and strong grasp he had! and how like quarried marble was his pale, firm, massive front at this moment! How his eye shone, still watchful, and yet wild beneath!

Mr. Wood seemed at a loss. “What is the nature of the impediment?” he asked. “Perhaps it may be got over — explained away?”

“Hardly,” was the answer. “I have called it insuperable, and I speak advisedly.”

The speaker came forward and leaned on the rails. He continued, uttering each word distinctly, calmly, steadily, but not loudly —

“It simply consists in the existence of a previous marriage. Mr. Rochester has a wife now living.”

My nerves vibrated to those low-spoken words as they had never vibrated to thunder — my blood felt their subtle violence as it had never felt frost or fire; but I was collected, and in no danger of swooning. I looked at Mr. Rochester: I made him look at me. His whole face was colourless rock: his eye was both spark and flint. He disavowed nothing: he seemed as if he would defy all things. Without speaking, without smiling, without seeming to recognise in me a human being, he only twined my waist with his arm and riveted me to his side.

“Who are you?” he asked of the intruder.

“My name is Briggs, a solicitor of — - Street, London.”

“And you would thrust on me a wife?”

“I would remind you of your lady’s existence, sir, which the law recognises, if you do not.”

“Favour me with an account of her — with her name, her parentage, her place of abode.”

“Certainly.” Mr. Briggs calmly took a paper from his pocket, and read out in a sort of official, nasal voice: —

"'I affirm and can prove that on the 20th of October A.D. — - (a date of fifteen years back), Edward Fairfax Rochester, of Thornfield Hall, in the county of — -, and of Ferndean Manor, in — -shire, England, was married to my sister, Bertha Antoinetta Mason, daughter of Jonas Mason, merchant, and of Antoinetta his wife, a Creole, at — - church, Spanish Town, Jamaica. The record of the marriage will be found in the register of that church — a copy of it is now in my possession. Signed, Richard Mason.'"

"That — if a genuine document — may prove I have been married, but it does not prove that the woman mentioned therein as my wife is still living."

"She was living three months ago," returned the lawyer.

"How do you know?"

"I have a witness to the fact, whose testimony even you, sir, will scarcely controvert."

"Produce him — or go to hell."

"I will produce him first — he is on the spot. Mr. Mason, have the goodness to step forward."

Mr. Rochester, on hearing the name, set his teeth; he experienced, too, a sort of strong convulsive quiver; near to him as I was, I felt the spasmodic movement of fury or despair run through his frame. The second stranger, who had hitherto lingered in the background, now drew near; a pale face looked over the solicitor's shoulder — yes, it was Mason himself. Mr. Rochester turned and glared at him. His eye, as I have often said, was a black eye: it had now a tawny, nay, a bloody light in its gloom; and his face flushed — olive cheek and hueless forehead received a glow as from spreading, ascending heart-fire: and he stirred, lifted his strong arm — he could have struck Mason, dashed him on the church-floor, shocked by ruthless blow the breath from his body — but Mason shrank away, and cried faintly, "Good God!" Contempt fell cool on Mr. Rochester — his passion died as if a blight had shrivelled it up: he only asked — "What have *you* to say?"

An inaudible reply escaped Mason's white lips.

"The devil is in it if you cannot answer distinctly. I again demand, what have you to say?"

"Sir — sir," interrupted the clergyman, "do not forget you are in a sacred place." Then addressing Mason, he inquired gently, "Are you aware, sir, whether or not this gentleman's wife is still living?"

"Courage," urged the lawyer, — "speak out."

"She is now living at Thornfield Hall," said Mason, in more articulate tones: "I saw her there last April. I am her brother."

"At Thornfield Hall!" ejaculated the clergyman. "Impossible! I am an old resident in this neighbourhood, sir, and I never heard of a Mrs. Rochester at Thornfield Hall."

I saw a grim smile contort Mr. Rochester's lips, and he muttered —

"No, by God! I took care that none should hear of it — or of her under that name." He mused — for ten minutes he held counsel with himself: he formed his resolve, and announced it —

"Enough! all shall bolt out at once, like the bullet from the barrel. Wood, close your book and take off your surplice; John Green (to the clerk), leave the church: there will be no wedding to-day." The man obeyed.

Mr. Rochester continued, hardily and recklessly: "Bigamy is an ugly word! — I meant, however, to be a bigamist; but fate has out-manoeuvred me, or Providence has checked me, — perhaps the last. I am little better than a devil at this moment; and, as my pastor there would tell me, deserve no doubt the sternest judgments of God, even to the quenchless fire and deathless worm. Gentlemen, my plan is broken up: — what this lawyer and his client say is true: I have been married, and the woman to whom I was married lives! You say you never heard of a Mrs. Rochester at the house up yonder, Wood; but I daresay you have many a time inclined your ear to gossip about the mysterious lunatic kept there under watch and ward. Some have whispered to you that she is my bastard half-sister: some, my cast-off mistress. I now inform you that she is my wife, whom I married fifteen years ago, — Bertha Mason by name; sister of this resolute personage, who is now, with his quivering limbs and white cheeks, showing you what a stout heart men may bear. Cheer up, Dick! — never fear me! — I'd almost as soon strike a woman as you. Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family; idiots and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was both a madwoman and a drunkard! — as I found out after I had wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before. Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points. I had a charming partner — pure, wise, modest: you can fancy I was a happy man. I went through rich scenes! Oh! my experience has been heavenly, if you only knew it! But I owe you no further explanation. Briggs, Wood, Mason, I invite you all to come up to the house and visit Mrs. Poole's patient, and *my wife*! You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human. This girl," he continued, looking at me, "knew no more than you, Wood, of the disgusting secret: she thought all was fair and legal and never dreamt she was going to be entrapped into a feigned union with a defrauded wretch, already bound to a bad, mad, and embruted partner! Come all of you — follow!"

Still holding me fast, he left the church: the three gentlemen came after. At the front door of the hall we found the carriage.

"Take it back to the coach-house, John," said Mr. Rochester coolly; "it will not be wanted to-day."

At our entrance, Mrs. Fairfax, Adèle, Sophie, Leah, advanced to meet and greet us.

"To the right-about — every soul!" cried the master; "away with your congratulations! Who wants them? Not I! — they are fifteen years too late!"

He passed on and ascended the stairs, still holding my hand, and still beckoning the gentlemen to follow him, which they did. We mounted the first staircase, passed up the gallery, proceeded to the third storey: the low, black door, opened by Mr. Rochester's master-key, admitted us to the tapestried room, with its great bed and its pictorial cabinet.

"You know this place, Mason," said our guide; "she bit and stabbed you here."

He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second door: this, too, he opened. In a room without a window, there burnt a fire guarded by a high and strong fender, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a chain. Grace Poole bent over the fire, apparently cooking something in a saucepan. In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.

"Good-morrow, Mrs. Poole!" said Mr. Rochester. "How are you? and how is your charge to-day?"

"We're tolerable, sir, I thank you," replied Grace, lifting the boiling mess carefully on to the hob: "rather snappish, but not 'rageous."

A fierce cry seemed to give the lie to her favourable report: the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet.

"Ah! sir, she sees you!" exclaimed Grace: "you'd better not stay."

"Only a few moments, Grace: you must allow me a few moments."

"Take care then, sir! — for God's sake, take care!"

The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. I recognised well that purple face, — those bloated features. Mrs. Poole advanced.

"Keep out of the way," said Mr. Rochester, thrusting her aside: "she has no knife now, I suppose, and I'm on my guard."

"One never knows what she has, sir: she is so cunning: it is not in mortal discretion to fathom her craft."

"We had better leave her," whispered Mason.

"Go to the devil!" was his brother-in-law's recommendation.

"'Ware!" cried Grace. The three gentlemen retreated simultaneously. Mr. Rochester flung me behind him: the lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest — more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. He could have settled her with a well-planted blow; but he would not strike: he would only wrestle. At last he mastered her arms; Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinioned them behind her: with more rope, which was at hand, he bound her to a chair. The operation was performed amidst the fiercest yells and the most convulsive plunges. Mr. Rochester then turned to the spectators: he looked at them with a smile both acrid and desolate.

"That is *my wife*," said he. "Such is the sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know — such are the endearments which are to solace my leisure hours! And *this* is what I wished to have" (laying his hand on my shoulder): "this young girl, who stands so grave and quiet at the mouth of hell, looking collectedly at the gambols of a demon, I wanted her just as a change after that fierce ragout. Wood and Briggs, look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder — this face with that mask — this form with that bulk; then judge me, priest of the gospel and man of the law, and remember with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged! Off with you now. I must shut up my prize."

We all withdrew. Mr. Rochester stayed a moment behind us, to give some further order to Grace Poole. The solicitor addressed me as he descended the stair.

"You, madam," said he, "are cleared from all blame: your uncle will be glad to hear it — if, indeed, he should be still living — when Mr. Mason returns to Madeira."

"My uncle! What of him? Do you know him?"

"Mr. Mason does. Mr. Eyre has been the Funchal correspondent of his house for some years. When your uncle received your letter intimating the contemplated union between yourself and Mr. Rochester, Mr. Mason, who was staying at Madeira to recruit his health, on his way back to Jamaica, happened to be with him. Mr. Eyre mentioned the intelligence; for he knew that my client here was acquainted with a gentleman of the name of Rochester. Mr. Mason, astonished and distressed as you may suppose, revealed the real state of matters. Your uncle, I am sorry to say, is now on a sick bed; from which, considering the nature of his disease — decline — and the stage it has reached, it is unlikely he will ever rise. He could not then hasten to England himself, to extricate you from the snare into which you had fallen, but he implored Mr. Mason to lose no time in taking steps to prevent the false marriage. He referred him to me for assistance. I used all despatch, and am thankful I was not too late: as you, doubtless, must be also. Were I not morally certain that your uncle will be dead ere you reach Madeira, I would advise you to accompany Mr. Mason back; but as it is, I think you had better remain in England till you can hear further, either from or of Mr. Eyre. Have we anything else to stay for?" he inquired of Mr. Mason.

"No, no — let us be gone," was the anxious reply; and without waiting to take leave of Mr. Rochester, they made their exit at the hall door. The clergyman stayed to exchange a few sentences, either of admonition or reproof, with his haughty parishioner; this duty done, he too departed.

I heard him go as I stood at the half-open door of my own room, to which I had now withdrawn. The house cleared, I shut myself in, fastened the bolt that none might intrude, and proceeded — not to weep, not to mourn, I was yet too calm for that, but — mechanically to take off the wedding dress, and replace it by the stuff gown I had worn yesterday, as I thought, for the last time. I then sat down: I felt weak and tired. I leaned my arms on a table, and my head dropped on them. And now I thought: till now I had only heard, seen, moved — followed up and down where I was led or dragged — watched event rush on event, disclosure open beyond disclosure: but *now*, *I thought*.

The morning had been a quiet morning enough — all except the brief scene with the lunatic: the transaction in the church had not been noisy; there was no explosion of passion, no loud altercation, no dispute, no defiance or challenge, no tears, no sobs: a few words had been spoken, a calmly pronounced objection to the marriage made; some stern, short questions put by Mr. Rochester; answers, explanations given, evidence adduced; an open admission of the truth had been uttered by my master; then the living proof had been seen; the intruders were gone, and all was over.

I was in my own room as usual — just myself, without obvious change: nothing had smitten me, or scathed me, or maimed me. And yet where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday? — where was her life? — where were her prospects?

Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman — almost a bride, was a cold, solitary girl again: her life was pale; her prospects were desolate. A Christmas frost had come at midsummer; a white December storm had whirled over June; ice glazed the ripe apples, drifts crushed the blowing roses; on hayfield and cornfield lay a frozen shroud: lanes which last night blushed full of flowers, to-day were pathless with untrodden snow; and the woods, which twelve hours since waved leafy and flagrant as groves between the tropics, now spread, waste, wild, and white as pine-forests in wintry Norway. My hopes were all dead — struck with a subtle doom, such as, in one night, fell on all the first-born in the land of Egypt. I looked on my cherished wishes, yesterday so blooming and glowing; they lay stark, chill, livid corpses that could never revive. I looked at my love: that feeling which was my master's — which he had created; it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle; sickness and anguish had seized it; it could not seek Mr. Rochester's arms — it could not derive warmth from his breast. Oh, never more could it turn to him; for faith was blighted — confidence destroyed! Mr. Rochester was not to me what he had been; for he was not what I had thought him. I would not ascribe vice to him; I would not say he had betrayed me; but the attribute of stainless truth was gone from his idea, and from his presence I must go: *that* I perceived well. When — how — whither, I could not yet discern; but he himself, I doubted not, would hurry me from Thornfield. Real affection, it seemed, he could not have for me; it had been only fitful passion: that was balked; he would want me no more. I should fear even to cross his path now: my view must be hateful to him. Oh, how blind had been my eyes! How weak my conduct!

My eyes were covered and closed: eddying darkness seemed to swim round me, and reflection came in as black and confused a flow. Self-abandoned, relaxed, and effortless, I seemed to have laid me down in the dried-up bed of a great river; I heard a flood loosened in remote mountains, and felt the torrent come: to rise I had no will, to flee I had no strength. I lay faint, longing to be dead. One idea only still throbbed life-like within me — a remembrance of God: it begot an unuttered prayer: these words went wandering up and down in my rayless mind, as something that should be whispered, but no energy was found to express them —

“Be not far from me, for trouble is near: there is none to help.”

It was near: and as I had lifted no petition to Heaven to avert it — as I had neither joined my hands, nor bent my knees, nor moved my lips — it came: in full heavy swing the torrent poured over me. The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth, “the waters came into my soul; I sank in deep mire: I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me.”

CHAPTER XXVII

Some time in the afternoon I raised my head, and looking round and seeing the western sun gilding the sign of its decline on the wall, I asked, “What am I to do?”

But the answer my mind gave — “Leave Thornfield at once” — was so prompt, so dread, that I stopped my ears. I said I could not bear such words now. “That I am not Edward Rochester’s bride is the least part of my woe,” I alleged: “that I have wakened out of most glorious dreams, and found them all void and vain, is a horror I could bear and master; but that I must leave him decidedly, instantly, entirely, is intolerable. I cannot do it.”

But, then, a voice within me averred that I could do it and foretold that I should do it. I wrestled with my own resolution: I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering I saw laid out for me; and Conscience, turned tyrant, held Passion by the throat, told her tauntingly, she had yet but dipped her dainty foot in the slough, and swore that with that arm of iron he would thrust her down to unsounded depths of agony.

“Let me be torn away,” then I cried. “Let another help me!”

“No; you shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall yourself pluck out your right eye; yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim, and you the priest to transfix it.”

I rose up suddenly, terror-struck at the solitude which so ruthless a judge haunted, — at the silence which so awful a voice filled. My head swam as I stood erect. I perceived that I was sickening from excitement and inanition; neither meat nor drink had passed my lips that day, for I had taken no breakfast. And, with a strange pang, I now reflected that, long as I had been shut up here, no message had been sent to ask how I was, or to invite me to come down: not even little Adèle had tapped at the door; not even Mrs. Fairfax had sought me. “Friends always forget those whom fortune forsakes,” I murmured, as I undrew the bolt and passed out. I stumbled over an obstacle: my head was still dizzy, my sight was dim, and my limbs were feeble. I could not soon recover myself. I fell, but not on to the ground: an outstretched arm caught me. I looked up — I was supported by Mr. Rochester, who sat in a chair across my chamber threshold.

“You come out at last,” he said. “Well, I have been waiting for you long, and listening: yet not one movement have I heard, nor one sob: five minutes more of that death-like hush, and I should have forced the lock like a burglar. So you shun me? — you shut yourself up and grieve alone! I would rather you had come and upbraided me with vehemence. You are passionate. I expected a scene of some kind. I was prepared for the hot rain of tears; only I wanted them to be shed on my breast: now a senseless floor has received them, or your drenched handkerchief. But I err: you have not wept at all! I see a white cheek and a faded eye, but no trace of tears. I suppose, then, your heart has been weeping blood?"

"Well, Jane! not a word of reproach? Nothing bitter — nothing poignant? Nothing to cut a feeling or sting a passion? You sit quietly where I have placed you, and regard me with a weary, passive look."

"Jane, I never meant to wound you thus. If the man who had but one little ewe lamb that was dear to him as a daughter, that ate of his bread and drank of his cup, and lay in his bosom, had by some mistake slaughtered it at the shambles, he would not have rued his bloody blunder more than I now rue mine. Will you ever forgive me?"

Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eye, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner; and besides, there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien — I forgave him all: yet not in words, not outwardly; only at my heart's core.

"You know I am a scoundrel, Jane?" ere long he inquired wistfully — wondering, I suppose, at my continued silence and tameness, the result rather of weakness than of will.

"Yes, sir."

"Then tell me so roundly and sharply — don't spare me."

"I cannot: I am tired and sick. I want some water." He heaved a sort of shuddering sigh, and taking me in his arms, carried me downstairs. At first I did not know to what room he had borne me; all was cloudy to my glazed sight: presently I felt the reviving warmth of a fire; for, summer as it was, I had become icy cold in my chamber. He put wine to my lips; I tasted it and revived; then I ate something he offered me, and was soon myself. I was in the library — sitting in his chair — he was quite near. "If I could go out of life now, without too sharp a pang, it would be well for me," I thought; "then I should not have to make the effort of cracking my heart-strings in rending them from among Mr. Rochester's. I must leave him, it appears. I do not want to leave him — I cannot leave him."

"How are you now, Jane?"

"Much better, sir; I shall be well soon."

"Taste the wine again, Jane."

I obeyed him; then he put the glass on the table, stood before me, and looked at me attentively. Suddenly he turned away, with an inarticulate exclamation, full of passionate emotion of some kind; he walked fast through the room and came back; he stooped towards me as if to kiss me; but I remembered caresses were now forbidden. I turned my face away and put his aside.

"What! — How is this?" he exclaimed hastily. "Oh, I know! you won't kiss the husband of Bertha Mason? You consider my arms filled and my embraces appropriated?"

"At any rate, there is neither room nor claim for me, sir."

"Why, Jane? I will spare you the trouble of much talking; I will answer for you — Because I have a wife already, you would reply. — I guess rightly?"

"Yes."

"If you think so, you must have a strange opinion of me; you must regard me as a plotting profligate — a base and low rake who has been simulating disinterested love in order to draw you into a snare deliberately laid, and strip you of honour and rob you of self-respect. What do you say to that? I see you can say nothing in the first place, you are faint still, and have enough to do to draw your breath; in the second place, you cannot yet accustom yourself to accuse and revile me, and besides, the flood-gates of tears are opened, and they would rush out if you spoke much; and you have no desire to expostulate, to upbraid, to make a scene: you are thinking how *to act* — *talking* you consider is of no use. I know you — I am on my guard."

"Sir, I do not wish to act against you," I said; and my unsteady voice warned me to curtail my sentence.

"Not in your sense of the word, but in mine you are scheming to destroy me. You have as good as said that I am a married man — as a married man you will shun me, keep out of my way: just now you have refused to kiss me. You intend to make yourself a complete stranger to me: to live under this roof only as Adèle's governess; if ever I say a friendly word to you, if ever a friendly feeling inclines you again to me, you will say, — 'That man had nearly made me his mistress: I must be ice and rock to him;' and ice and rock you will accordingly become."

I cleared and steadied my voice to reply: "All is changed about me, sir; I must change too — there is no doubt of that; and to avoid fluctuations of feeling, and continual combats with recollections and associations, there is only one way — Adèle must have a new governess, sir."

"Oh, Adèle will go to school — I have settled that already; nor do I mean to torment you with the hideous associations and recollections of Thornfield Hall — this accursed place — this tent of Achan — this insolent vault, offering the ghastliness of living death to the light of the open sky — this narrow stone hell, with its one real fiend, worse than a legion of such as we imagine. Jane, you shall not stay here, nor will I. I was wrong ever to bring you to Thornfield Hall, knowing as I did how it was haunted. I charged them to conceal from you, before I ever saw you, all knowledge of the curse of the place; merely because I feared Adèle never would have a governess to stay if she knew with what inmate she was housed, and my plans would not permit me to remove the maniac elsewhere — though I possess an old house, Ferndean Manor, even more retired and hidden than this, where I could have lodged her safely enough, had not a scruple about the unhealthiness of the situation, in the heart of a wood, made my conscience recoil from the arrangement. Probably those damp walls would soon have eased me of her charge: but to each villain his own vice; and mine is not a tendency to indirect assassination, even of what I most hate.

"Concealing the mad-woman's neighbourhood from you, however, was something like covering a child with a cloak and laying it down near a upas-tree: that demon's vicinage is poisoned, and always was. But I'll shut up Thornfield Hall: I'll nail up the front door and board the lower windows: I'll give Mrs. Poole two hundred a year to live here with *my wife*, as you term that fearful hag: Grace will do much for money, and she shall have her son, the keeper at Grimsby Retreat, to bear her company and be at hand to give her aid in the paroxysms, when *my wife* is prompted by her familiar to burn people in their beds at night, to stab them, to bite their flesh from their bones, and so on — "

"Sir," I interrupted him, "you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate — with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel — she cannot help being mad."

"Jane, my little darling (so I will call you, for so you are), you don't know what you are talking about; you misjudge me again: it is not because she is mad I hate her. If you were mad, do you think I should hate you?"

"I do indeed, sir."

"Then you are mistaken, and you know nothing about me, and nothing about the sort of love of which I am capable. Every atom of your flesh is as dear to me as my own: in pain and sickness it would still be dear. Your mind is my treasure, and if it were broken, it would be my treasure still: if you raved, my arms should confine you, and not a strait waistcoat — your grasp, even in fury, would have a charm for me: if you flew at me as wildly as that woman did this morning, I should receive you in an embrace, at least as fond as it would be restrictive. I should not shrink from you with disgust as I did from her: in your quiet moments you should have no watcher and no nurse but me; and I could hang over you with untiring tenderness, though you gave me no smile in return; and never weary of gazing into your eyes, though they had no longer a ray of recognition for me. — But why do I follow that train of ideas? I was talking of removing you from Thornfield. All, you know, is prepared for prompt departure: to-morrow you shall go. I only ask you to endure one more night under this roof, Jane; and then, farewell to its miseries and terrors for ever! I have a place to repair to, which will be a secure sanctuary from hateful reminiscences, from unwelcome intrusion — even from falsehood and slander."

"And take Adèle with you, sir," I interrupted; "she will be a companion for you."

"What do you mean, Jane? I told you I would send Adèle to school; and what do I want with a child for a companion, and not my own child, — a French dancer's bastard? Why do you importune me about her! I say, why do you assign Adèle to me for a companion?"

"You spoke of a retirement, sir; and retirement and solitude are dull: too dull for you."

"Solitude! solitude!" he reiterated with irritation. "I see I must come to an explanation. I don't know what sphynx-like expression is forming in your countenance. You are to share my solitude. Do you understand?"

I shook my head: it required a degree of courage, excited as he was becoming, even to risk that mute sign of dissent. He had been walking fast about the room, and he stopped, as if suddenly rooted to one spot. He looked at me long and hard: I turned my eyes from him, fixed them on the fire, and tried to assume and maintain a quiet, collected aspect.

"Now for the hitch in Jane's character," he said at last, speaking more calmly than from his look I had expected him to speak. "The reel of silk has run smoothly enough so far; but I always knew there would come a knot and a puzzle: here it is. Now for vexation, and exasperation, and endless trouble! By God! I long to exert a fraction of Samson's strength, and break the entanglement like tow!"

He recommenced his walk, but soon again stopped, and this time just before me.

"Jane! will you hear reason?" (he stooped and approached his lips to my ear); "because, if you won't, I'll try violence." His voice was hoarse; his look that of a man who is just about to burst an insufferable bond and plunge headlong into wild license. I saw that in another moment, and with one impetus of frenzy more, I should be able to do nothing with him. The present — the passing second of time — was all I had in which to control and restrain him — a movement of repulsion, flight, fear would have sealed my doom, — and his. But I was not afraid: not in the least. I felt an inward power; a sense of influence, which supported me. The crisis was perilous; but not without its charm: such as the Indian, perhaps, feels when he slips over the rapid in his canoe. I took hold of his clenched hand, loosened the contorted fingers, and said to him, soothingly —

"Sit down; I'll talk to you as long as you like, and hear all you have to say, whether reasonable or unreasonable."

He sat down: but he did not get leave to speak directly. I had been struggling with tears for some time: I had taken great pains to repress them, because I knew he would not like to see me weep. Now, however, I considered it well to let them flow as freely and as long as they liked. If the flood annoyed him, so much the better. So I gave way and cried heartily.

Soon I heard him earnestly entreating me to be composed. I said I could not while he was in such a passion.

"But I am not angry, Jane: I only love you too well; and you had steeled your little pale face with such a resolute, frozen look, I could not endure it. Hush, now, and wipe your eyes."

His softened voice announced that he was subdued; so I, in my turn, became calm. Now he made an effort to rest his head on my shoulder, but I would not permit it. Then he would draw me to him: no.

"Jane! Jane!" he said, in such an accent of bitter sadness it thrilled along every nerve I had; "you don't love me, then? It was only my station, and the rank of my wife, that you valued? Now that you think me disqualified to become your husband, you recoil from my touch as if I were some toad or ape."

These words cut me: yet what could I do or I say? I ought probably to have done or said nothing; but I was so tortured by a sense of remorse at thus hurting his feelings, I could not control the wish to drop balm where I had wounded.

"I *do* love you," I said, "more than ever: but I must not show or indulge the feeling: and this is the last time I must express it."

"The last time, Jane! What! do you think you can live with me, and see me daily, and yet, if you still love me, be always cold and distant?"

"No, sir; that I am certain I could not; and therefore I see there is but one way: but you will be furious if I mention it."

"Oh, mention it! If I storm, you have the art of weeping."

"Mr. Rochester, I must leave you."

"For how long, Jane? For a few minutes, while you smooth your hair — which is somewhat dishevelled; and bathe your face — which looks feverish?"

"I must leave Adèle and Thornfield. I must part with you for my whole life: I must begin a new existence among strange faces and strange scenes."

"Of course: I told you you should. I pass over the madness about parting from me. You mean you must become a part of me. As to the new existence, it is all right: you shall yet be my wife: I am not married. You shall be Mrs. Rochester — both virtually and nominally. I shall keep only to you so long as you and I live. You shall go to a place I have in the south of France: a whitewashed villa on the shores of the Mediterranean. There you shall live a happy, and guarded, and most innocent life. Never fear that I wish to lure you into error — to make you my mistress. Why did you shake your head? Jane, you must be reasonable, or in truth I shall again become frantic."

His voice and hand quivered: his large nostrils dilated; his eye blazed: still I dared to speak.

"Sir, your wife is living: that is a fact acknowledged this morning by yourself. If I lived with you as you desire, I should then be your mistress: to say otherwise is sophistical — is false."

"Jane, I am not a gentle-tempered man — you forget that: I am not long-enduring; I am not cool and dispassionate. Out of pity to me and yourself, put your finger on my pulse, feel how it throbs, and — beware!"

He bared his wrist, and offered it to me: the blood was forsaking his cheek and lips, they were growing livid; I was distressed on all hands. To agitate him thus deeply, by a resistance he so abhorred, was cruel: to yield was out of the question. I did what human beings do instinctively when they are driven to utter extremity — looked for aid to one higher than man: the words “God help me!” burst involuntarily from my lips.

“I am a fool!” cried Mr. Rochester suddenly. “I keep telling her I am not married, and do not explain to her why. I forget she knows nothing of the character of that woman, or of the circumstances attending my infernal union with her. Oh, I am certain Jane will agree with me in opinion, when she knows all that I know! Just put your hand in mine, Janet — that I may have the evidence of touch as well as sight, to prove you are near me — and I will in a few words show you the real state of the case. Can you listen to me?”

“Yes, sir; for hours if you will.”

“I ask only minutes. Jane, did you ever hear or know that I was not the eldest son of my house: that I had once a brother older than I?”

“I remember Mrs. Fairfax told me so once.”

“And did you ever hear that my father was an avaricious, grasping man?”

“I have understood something to that effect.”

“Well, Jane, being so, it was his resolution to keep the property together; he could not bear the idea of dividing his estate and leaving me a fair portion: all, he resolved, should go to my brother, Rowland. Yet as little could he endure that a son of his should be a poor man. I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage. He sought me a partner betimes. Mr. Mason, a West India planter and merchant, was his old acquaintance. He was certain his possessions were real and vast: he made inquiries. Mr. Mason, he found, had a son and daughter; and he learned from him that he could and would give the latter a fortune of thirty thousand pounds: that sufficed. When I left college, I was sent out to Jamaica, to espouse a bride already courted for me. My father said nothing about her money; but he told me Miss Mason was the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty: and this was no lie. I found her a fine woman, in the style of Blanche Ingram: tall, dark, and majestic. Her family wished to secure me because I was of a good race; and so did she. They showed her to me in parties, splendidly dressed. I seldom saw her alone, and had very little private conversation with her. She flattered me, and lavishly displayed for my pleasure her charms and accomplishments. All the men in her circle seemed to admire her and envy me. I was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her. There is no folly so besotted that the idiotic rivalries of society, the prurience, the rashness, the blindness of youth, will not hurry a man to its commission. Her relatives encouraged me; competitors piqued me; she allured me: a marriage was achieved almost before I knew where I was. Oh, I have no respect for myself when I think of that act! — an agony of inward contempt masters me. I never loved, I never esteemed, I did not even know her. I was not sure of the existence of one virtue in her nature: I had marked neither modesty, nor benevolence, nor candour, nor refinement in her mind or manners — and, I married her: — gross, grovelling, mole-eyed blockhead that I was! With less sin I might have — But let me remember to whom I am speaking.”

"My bride's mother I had never seen: I understood she was dead. The honeymoon over, I learned my mistake; she was only mad, and shut up in a lunatic asylum. There was a younger brother, too — a complete dumb idiot. The elder one, whom you have seen (and whom I cannot hate, whilst I abhor all his kindred, because he has some grains of affection in his feeble mind, shown in the continued interest he takes in his wretched sister, and also in a dog-like attachment he once bore me), will probably be in the same state one day. My father and my brother Rowland knew all this; but they thought only of the thirty thousand pounds, and joined in the plot against me."

"These were vile discoveries; but except for the treachery of concealment, I should have made them no subject of reproach to my wife, even when I found her nature wholly alien to mine, her tastes obnoxious to me, her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly incapable of being led to anything higher, expanded to anything larger — when I found that I could not pass a single evening, nor even a single hour of the day with her in comfort; that kindly conversation could not be sustained between us, because whatever topic I started, immediately received from her a turn at once coarse and trite, perverse and imbecile — when I perceived that I should never have a quiet or settled household, because no servant would bear the continued outbreaks of her violent and unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders — even then I restrained myself: I eschewed upbraiding, I curtailed remonstrance; I tried to devour my repentance and disgust in secret; I repressed the deep antipathy I felt.

"Jane, I will not trouble you with abominable details: some strong words shall express what I have to say. I lived with that woman upstairs four years, and before that time she had tried me indeed: her character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank: they were so strong, only cruelty could check them, and I would not use cruelty. What a pigmy intellect she had, and what giant propensities! How fearful were the curses those propensities entailed on me! Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste.

"My brother in the interval was dead, and at the end of the four years my father died too. I was rich enough now — yet poor to hideous indigence: a nature the most gross, impure, depraved I ever saw, was associated with mine, and called by the law and by society a part of me. And I could not rid myself of it by any legal proceedings: for the doctors now discovered that *my wife* was mad — her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity. Jane, you don't like my narrative; you look almost sick — shall I defer the rest to another day?"

"No, sir, finish it now; I pity you — I do earnestly pity you."

"Pity, Jane, from some people is a noxious and insulting sort of tribute, which one is justified in hurling back in the teeth of those who offer it; but that is the sort of pity native to callous, selfish hearts; it is a hybrid, egotistical pain at hearing of woes, crossed with ignorant contempt for those who have endured them. But that is not your pity, Jane; it is not the feeling of which your whole face is full at this moment — with which your eyes are now almost overflowing — with which your heart is heaving — with which your hand is trembling in mine. Your pity, my darling, is the suffering mother of love: its anguish is the very natal pang of the divine passion. I accept it, Jane; let the daughter have free advent — my arms wait to receive her."

"Now, sir, proceed; what did you do when you found she was mad?"

"Jane, I approached the verge of despair; a remnant of self-respect was all that intervened between me and the gulf. In the eyes of the world, I was doubtless covered with grimy dishonour; but I resolved to be clean in my own sight — and to the last I repudiated the contamination of her crimes, and wrenched myself from connection with her mental defects. Still, society associated my name and person with hers; I yet saw her and heard her daily: something of her breath (faugh!) mixed with the air I breathed; and besides, I remembered I had once been her husband — that recollection was then, and is now, inexpressibly odious to me; moreover, I knew that while she lived I could never be the husband of another and better wife; and, though five years my senior (her family and her father had lied to me even in the particular of her age), she was likely to live as long as I, being as robust in frame as she was infirm in mind. Thus, at the age of twenty-six, I was hopeless.

"One night I had been awakened by her yells — (since the medical men had pronounced her mad, she had, of course, been shut up) — it was a fiery West Indian night; one of the description that frequently precede the hurricanes of those climates. Being unable to sleep in bed, I got up and opened the window. The air was like sulphur-steams — I could find no refreshment anywhere. Mosquitoes came buzzing in and hummed sullenly round the room; the sea, which I could hear from thence, rumbled dull like an earthquake — black clouds were casting up over it; the moon was setting in the waves, broad and red, like a hot cannon-ball — she threw her last bloody glance over a world quivering with the ferment of tempest. I was physically influenced by the atmosphere and scene, and my ears were filled with the curses the maniac still shrieked out; wherein she momentarily mingled my name with such a tone of demon-hate, with such language! — no professed harlot ever had a fouler vocabulary than she: though two rooms off, I heard every word — the thin partitions of the West India house opposing but slight obstruction to her wolfish cries.

"'This life,' said I at last, 'is hell: this is the air — those are the sounds of the bottomless pit! I have a right to deliver myself from it if I can. The sufferings of this mortal state will leave me with the heavy flesh that now cumbers my soul. Of the fanatic's burning eternity I have no fear: there is not a future state worse than this present one — let me break away, and go home to God!'

"I said this whilst I knelt down at, and unlocked a trunk which contained a brace of loaded pistols: I mean to shoot myself. I only entertained the intention for a moment; for, not being insane, the crisis of exquisite and unalloyed despair, which had originated the wish and design of self-destruction, was past in a second.

"A wind fresh from Europe blew over the ocean and rushed through the open casement: the storm broke, streamed, thundered, blazed, and the air grew pure. I then framed and fixed a resolution. While I walked under the dripping orange-trees of my wet garden, and amongst its drenched pomegranates and pine-apples, and while the refulgent dawn of the tropics kindled round me — I reasoned thus, Jane — and now listen; for it was true Wisdom that consoled me in that hour, and showed me the right path to follow.

"The sweet wind from Europe was still whispering in the refreshed leaves, and the Atlantic was thundering in glorious liberty; my heart, dried up and scorched for a long time, swelled to the tone, and filled with living blood — my being longed for renewal — my soul thirsted for a pure draught. I saw hope revive — and felt regeneration possible. From a flowery arch at the bottom of my garden I gazed over the sea — bluer than the sky: the old world was beyond; clear prospects opened thus: —

"'Go,' said Hope, 'and live again in Europe: there it is not known what a sullied name you bear, nor what a filthy burden is bound to you. You may take the maniac with you to England; confine her with due attendance and precautions at Thornfield: then travel yourself to what clime you will, and form what new tie you like. That woman, who has so abused your long-suffering, so sullied your name, so outraged your honour, so blighted your youth, is not your wife, nor are you her husband. See that she is cared for as her condition demands, and you have done all that God and humanity require of you. Let her identity, her connection with yourself, be buried in oblivion: you are bound to impart them to no living being. Place her in safety and comfort: shelter her degradation with secrecy, and leave her.'

"I acted precisely on this suggestion. My father and brother had not made my marriage known to their acquaintance; because, in the very first letter I wrote to apprise them of the union — having already begun to experience extreme disgust of its consequences, and, from the family character and constitution, seeing a hideous future opening to me — I added an urgent charge to keep it secret: and very soon the infamous conduct of the wife my father had selected for me was such as to make him blush to own her as his daughter-in-law. Far from desiring to publish the connection, he became as anxious to conceal it as myself.

"To England, then, I conveyed her; a fearful voyage I had with such a monster in the vessel. Glad was I when I at last got her to Thornfield, and saw her safely lodged in that third-storey room, of whose secret inner cabinet she has now for ten years made a wild beast's den — a goblin's cell. I had some trouble in finding an attendant for her, as it was necessary to select one on whose fidelity dependence could be placed; for her ravings would inevitably betray my secret: besides, she had lucid intervals of days — sometimes weeks — which she filled up with abuse of me. At last I hired Grace Poole from the Grimbsy Retreat. She and the surgeon, Carter (who dressed Mason's wounds that night he was stabbed and worried), are the only two I have ever admitted to my confidence. Mrs. Fairfax may indeed have suspected something, but she could have gained no precise knowledge as to facts. Grace has, on the whole, proved a good keeper; though, owing partly to a fault of her own, of which it appears nothing can cure her, and which is incident to her harassing profession, her vigilance has been more than once lulled and baffled. The lunatic is both cunning and malignant; she has never failed to take advantage of her guardian's temporary lapses; once to secrete the knife with which she stabbed her brother, and twice to possess herself of the key of her cell, and issue therefrom in the night-time. On the first of these occasions, she perpetrated the attempt to burn me in my bed; on the second, she paid that ghastly visit to you. I thank Providence, who watched over you, that she then spent her fury on your wedding apparel, which perhaps brought back vague reminiscences of her own bridal days: but on what might have happened, I cannot endure to reflect. When I think of the thing which flew at my throat this morning, hanging its black and scarlet visage over the nest of my dove, my blood curdles — "

"And what, sir," I asked, while he paused, "did you do when you had settled her here? Where did you go?"

"What did I do, Jane? I transformed myself into a will-o'-the-wisp. Where did I go? I pursued wanderings as wild as those of the March-spirit. I sought the Continent, and went devious through all its lands. My fixed desire was to seek and find a good and intelligent woman, whom I could love: a contrast to the fury I left at Thornfield — "

"But you could not marry, sir."

"I had determined and was convinced that I could and ought. It was not my original intention to deceive, as I have deceived you. I meant to tell my tale plainly, and make my proposals openly: and it appeared to me so absolutely rational that I should be considered free to love and be loved, I never doubted some woman might be found willing and able to understand my case and accept me, in spite of the curse with which I was burdened."

"Well, sir?"

"When you are inquisitive, Jane, you always make me smile. You open your eyes like an eager bird, and make every now and then a restless movement, as if answers in speech did not flow fast enough for you, and you wanted to read the tablet of one's heart. But before I go on, tell me what you mean by your 'Well, sir?' It is a small phrase very frequent with you; and which many a time has drawn me on and on through interminable talk: I don't very well know why."

"I mean, — What next? How did you proceed? What came of such an event?"

"Precisely! and what do you wish to know now?"

"Whether you found any one you liked: whether you asked her to marry you; and what she said."

"I can tell you whether I found any one I liked, and whether I asked her to marry me: but what she said is yet to be recorded in the book of Fate. For ten long years I roved about, living first in one capital, then another: sometimes in St. Petersburg; oftener in Paris; occasionally in Rome, Naples, and Florence. Provided with plenty of money and the passport of an old name, I could choose my own society: no circles were closed against me. I sought my ideal of a woman amongst English ladies, French countesses, Italian signoras, and German gräfinnen. I could not find her. Sometimes, for a fleeting moment, I thought I caught a glance, heard a tone, beheld a form, which announced the realisation of my dream: but I was presently undeserved. You are not to suppose that I desired perfection, either of mind or person. I longed only for what suited me — for the antipodes of the Creole: and I longed vainly. Amongst them all I found not one whom, had I been ever so free, I — warned as I was of the risks, the horrors, the loathings of incongruous unions — would have asked to marry me. Disappointment made me reckless. I tried dissipation — never debauchery: that I hated, and hate. That was my Indian Messalina's attribute: rooted disgust at it and her restrained me much, even in pleasure. Any enjoyment that bordered on riot seemed to approach me to her and her vices, and I eschewed it.

"Yet I could not live alone; so I tried the companionship of mistresses. The first I chose was Céline Varens — another of those steps which make a man spurn himself when he recalls them. You already know what she was, and how my liaison with her terminated. She had two successors: an Italian, Giacinta, and a German, Clara; both considered singularly handsome. What was their beauty to me in a few weeks? Giacinta was unprincipled and violent: I tired of her in three months. Clara was honest and quiet; but heavy, mindless, and unimpressible: not one whit to my taste. I was glad to give her a sufficient sum to set her up in a good line of business, and so get decently rid of her. But, Jane, I see by your face you are not forming a very favourable opinion of me just now. You think me an unfeeling, loose-principled rake: don't you?"

"I don't like you so well as I have done sometimes, indeed, sir. Did it not seem to you in the least wrong to live in that way, first with one mistress and then another? You talk of it as a mere matter of course."

"It was with me; and I did not like it. It was a grovelling fashion of existence: I should never like to return to it. Hiring a mistress is the next worse thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, inferior: and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading. I now hate the recollection of the time I passed with Céline, Giacinta, and Clara."

I felt the truth of these words; and I drew from them the certain inference, that if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled into me, as — under any pretext — with any justification — through any temptation — to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory. I did not give utterance to this conviction: it was enough to feel it. I impressed it on my heart, that it might remain there to serve me as aid in the time of trial.

"Now, Jane, why don't you say 'Well, sir?' I have not done. You are looking grave. You disapprove of me still, I see. But let me come to the point. Last January, rid of all mistresses — in a harsh, bitter frame of mind, the result of a useless, roving, lonely life — corroded with disappointment, sourly disposed against all men, and especially against all womankind (for I began to regard the notion of an intellectual, faithful, loving woman as a mere dream), recalled by business, I came back to England.

"On a frosty winter afternoon, I rode in sight of Thornfield Hall. Abhorred spot! I expected no peace — no pleasure there. On a stile in Hay Lane I saw a quiet little figure sitting by itself. I passed it as negligently as I did the pollard willow opposite to it: I had no presentiment of what it would be to me; no inward warning that the arbitress of my life — my genius for good or evil — waited there in humble guise. I did not know it, even when, on the occasion of Mesrour's accident, it came up and gravely offered me help. Childish and slender creature! It seemed as if a linnet had hopped to my foot and proposed to bear me on its tiny wing. I was surly; but the thing would not go: it stood by me with strange perseverance, and looked and spoke with a sort of authority. I must be aided, and by that hand: and aided I was.

"When once I had pressed the frail shoulder, something new — a fresh sap and sense — stole into my frame. It was well I had learnt that this elf must return to me — that it belonged to my house down below — or I could not have felt it pass away from under my hand, and seen it vanish behind the dim hedge, without singular regret. I heard you come home that night, Jane, though probably you were not aware that I thought of you or watched for you. The next day I observed you — myself unseen — for half-an-hour, while you played with Adèle in the gallery. It was a snowy day, I recollect, and you could not go out of doors. I was in my room; the door was ajar: I could both listen and watch. Adèle claimed your outward attention for a while; yet I fancied your thoughts were elsewhere: but you were very patient with her, my little Jane; you talked to her and amused her a long time. When at last she left you, you lapsed at once into deep reverie: you betook yourself slowly to pace the gallery. Now and then, in passing a casement, you glanced out at the thick-falling snow; you listened to the sobbing wind, and again you paced gently on and dreamed. I think those day visions were not dark: there was a pleasurable illumination in your eye occasionally, a soft excitement in your aspect, which told of no bitter, bilious, hypochondriac brooding: your look revealed rather the sweet musings of youth when its spirit follows on willing wings the flight of Hope up and on to an ideal heaven. The voice of Mrs. Fairfax, speaking to a servant in the hall, wakened you: and how curiously you smiled to and at yourself, Janet! There was much sense in your smile: it was very shrewd, and seemed to make light of your own abstraction. It seemed to say — 'My fine visions are all very well, but I must not forget they are absolutely unreal. I have a rosy sky and a green flowery Eden in my brain; but without, I am perfectly aware, lies at my feet a rough tract to travel, and around me gather black tempests to encounter.' You ran downstairs and demanded of Mrs. Fairfax some occupation: the weekly house accounts to make up, or something of that sort, I think it was. I was vexed with you for getting out of my sight.

"Impatiently I waited for evening, when I might summon you to my presence. An unusual — to me — a perfectly new character I suspected was yours: I desired to search it deeper and know it better. You entered the room with a look and air at once shy and independent: you were quaintly dressed — much as you are now. I made you talk: ere long I found you full of strange contrasts. Your garb and manner were restricted by rule; your air was often diffident, and altogether that of one refined by nature, but absolutely unused to society, and a good deal afraid of making herself disadvantageously conspicuous by some solecism or blunder; yet when addressed, you lifted a keen, a daring, and a glowing eye to your interlocutor's face: there was penetration and power in each glance you gave; when plied by close questions, you found ready and round answers. Very soon you seemed to get used to me: I believe you felt the existence of sympathy between you and your grim and cross master, Jane; for it was astonishing to see how quickly a certain pleasant ease tranquillised your manner: snarl as I would, you showed no surprise, fear, annoyance, or displeasure at my moroseness; you watched me, and now and then smiled at me with a simple yet sagacious grace I cannot describe. I was at once content and stimulated with what I saw: I liked what I had seen, and wished to see more. Yet, for a long time, I treated you distantly, and sought your company rarely. I was an intellectual epicure, and wished to prolong the gratification of making this novel and piquant acquaintance: besides, I was for a while troubled with a haunting fear that if I handled the flower freely its bloom would fade — the sweet charm of freshness would leave it. I did not then know that it was no transitory blossom, but rather the radiant resemblance of one, cut in an indestructible gem. Moreover, I wished to see whether you would seek me if I shunned you — but you did not; you kept in the schoolroom as still as your own desk and easel; if by chance I met you, you passed me as soon, and with as little token of recognition, as was consistent with respect. Your habitual expression in those days, Jane, was a thoughtful look; not despondent, for you were not sickly; but not buoyant, for you had little hope, and no actual pleasure. I wondered what you thought of me, or if you ever thought of me, and resolved to find this out.

"I resumed my notice of you. There was something glad in your glance, and genial in your manner, when you conversed: I saw you had a social heart; it was the silent schoolroom — it was the tedium of your life — that made you mournful. I permitted myself the delight of being kind to you; kindness stirred emotion soon: your face became soft in expression, your tones gentle; I liked my name pronounced by your lips in a grateful happy accent. I used to enjoy a chance meeting with you, Jane, at this time: there was a curious hesitation in your manner: you glanced at me with a slight trouble — a hovering doubt: you did not know what my caprice might be — whether I was going to play the master and be stern, or the friend and be benignant. I was now too fond of you often to simulate the first whim; and, when I stretched my hand out cordially, such bloom and light and bliss rose to your young, wistful features, I had much ado often to avoid straining you then and there to my heart."

"Don't talk any more of those days, sir," I interrupted, furtively dashing away some tears from my eyes; his language was torture to me; for I knew what I must do — and do soon — and all these reminiscences, and these revelations of his feelings only made my work more difficult.

"No, Jane," he returned: "what necessity is there to dwell on the Past, when the Present is so much surer — the Future so much brighter?"

I shuddered to hear the infatuated assertion.

"You see now how the case stands — do you not?" he continued. "After a youth and manhood passed half in unutterable misery and half in dreary solitude, I have for the first time found what I can truly love — I have found you. You are my sympathy — my better self — my good angel. I am bound to you with a strong attachment. I think you good, gifted, lovely: a fervent, a solemn passion is conceived in my heart; it leans to you, draws you to my centre and spring of life, wraps my existence about you, and, kindling in pure, powerful flame, fuses you and me in one.

"It was because I felt and knew this, that I resolved to marry you. To tell me that I had already a wife is empty mockery: you know now that I had but a hideous demon. I was wrong to attempt to deceive you; but I feared a stubbornness that exists in your character. I feared early instilled prejudice: I wanted to have you safe before hazarding confidences. This was cowardly: I should have appealed to your nobleness and magnanimity at first, as I do now — opened to you plainly my life of agony — described to you my hunger and thirst after a higher and worthier existence — shown to you, not my *resolution* (that word is weak), but my resistless *bent* to love faithfully and well, where I am faithfully and well loved in return. Then I should have asked you to accept my pledge of fidelity and to give me yours. Jane — give it me now."

A pause.

"Why are you silent, Jane?"

I was experiencing an ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning! Not a human being that ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved; and him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped: and I must renounce love and idol. One drear word comprised my intolerable duty — "Depart!"

"Jane, you understand what I want of you? Just this promise — 'I will be yours, Mr. Rochester.'"

"Mr. Rochester, I will *not* be yours."

Another long silence.

"Jane!" recommenced he, with a gentleness that broke me down with grief, and turned me stone-cold with ominous terror — for this still voice was the pant of a lion rising — "Jane, do you mean to go one way in the world, and to let me go another?"

"I do."

"Jane" (bending towards and embracing me), "do you mean it now?"

"I do."

"And now?" softly kissing my forehead and cheek.

"I do," extricating myself from restraint rapidly and completely.

"Oh, Jane, this is bitter! This — this is wicked. It would not be wicked to love me."

"It would to obey you."

A wild look raised his brows — crossed his features: he rose; but he forebore yet. I laid my hand on the back of a chair for support: I shook, I feared — but I resolved.

"One instant, Jane. Give one glance to my horrible life when you are gone. All happiness will be torn away with you. What then is left? For a wife I have but the maniac upstairs: as well might you refer me to some corpse in yonder churchyard. What shall I do, Jane? Where turn for a companion and for some hope?"

"Do as I do: trust in God and yourself. Believe in heaven. Hope to meet again there."

"Then you will not yield?"

"No."

"Then you condemn me to live wretched and to die accursed?" His voice rose.

"I advise you to live sinless, and I wish you to die tranquil."

"Then you snatch love and innocence from me? You fling me back on lust for a passion — vice for an occupation?"

"Mr. Rochester, I no more assign this fate to you than I grasp at it for myself. We were born to strive and endure — you as well as I: do so. You will forget me before I forget you."

"You make me a liar by such language: you sully my honour. I declared I could not change: you tell me to my face I shall change soon. And what a distortion in your judgment, what a perversity in your ideas, is proved by your conduct! Is it better to drive a fellow-creature to despair than to transgress a mere human law, no man being injured by the breach? for you have neither relatives nor acquaintances whom you need fear to offend by living with me?"

This was true: and while he spoke my very conscience and reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him. They spoke almost as loud as Feeling: and that clamoured wildly. "Oh, comply!" it said. "Think of his misery; think of his danger — look at his state when left alone; remember his headlong nature; consider the recklessness following on despair — soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for *you*? or who will be injured by what you do?"

Still indomitable was the reply — "*I* care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad — as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? They have a worth — so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane — quite insane: with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs. Preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by: there I plant my foot."

I did. Mr. Rochester, reading my countenance, saw I had done so. His fury was wrought to the highest: he must yield to it for a moment, whatever followed; he crossed the floor and seized my arm and grasped my waist. He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace: mentally, I still possessed my soul, and with it the certainty of ultimate safety. The soul, fortunately, has an interpreter — often an unconscious, but still a truthful interpreter — in the eye. My eye rose to his; and while I looked in his fierce face I gave an involuntary sigh; his gripe was painful, and my over-taxed strength almost exhausted.

"Never," said he, as he ground his teeth, "never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable. A mere reed she feels in my hand!" (And he shook me with the force of his hold.) "I could bend her with my finger and thumb: and what good would it do if I bent, if I uptore, if I crushed her? Consider that eye: consider the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of it, defying me, with more than courage — with a stern triumph. Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it — the savage, beautiful creature! If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose. Conqueror I might be of the house; but the inmate would escape to heaven before I could call myself possessor of its clay dwelling-place. And it is you, spirit — with will and energy, and virtue and purity — that I want: not alone your brittle frame. Of yourself you could come with soft flight and nestle against my heart, if you would: seized against your will, you will elude the grasp like an essence — you will vanish ere I inhale your fragrance. Oh! come, Jane, come!"

As he said this, he released me from his clutch, and only looked at me. The look was far worse to resist than the frantic strain: only an idiot, however, would have succumbed now. I had dared and baffled his fury; I must elude his sorrow: I retired to the door.

"You are going, Jane?"

"I am going, sir."

"You are leaving me?"

"Yes."

"You will not come? You will not be my comforter, my rescuer? My deep love, my wild woe, my frantic prayer, are all nothing to you?"

What unutterable pathos was in his voice! How hard it was to reiterate firmly, "I am going."

"Jane!"

"Mr. Rochester!"

"Withdraw, then, — I consent; but remember, you leave me here in anguish. Go up to your own room; think over all I have said, and, Jane, cast a glance on my sufferings — think of me."

He turned away; he threw himself on his face on the sofa. "Oh, Jane! my hope — my love — my life!" broke in anguish from his lips. Then came a deep, strong sob.

I had already gained the door; but, reader, I walked back — walked back as determinedly as I had retreated. I knelt down by him; I turned his face from the cushion to me; I kissed his cheek; I smoothed his hair with my hand.

"God bless you, my dear master!" I said. "God keep you from harm and wrong — direct you, solace you — reward you well for your past kindness to me."

"Little Jane's love would have been my best reward," he answered; "without it, my heart is broken. But Jane will give me her love: yes — nobly, generously."

Up the blood rushed to his face; forth flashed the fire from his eyes; erect he sprang; he held his arms out; but I evaded the embrace, and at once quitted the room.

"Farewell!" was the cry of my heart as I left him. Despair added, "Farewell for ever!"

* * * * *

That night I never thought to sleep; but a slumber fell on me as soon as I lay down in bed. I was transported in thought to the scenes of childhood: I dreamt I lay in the red-room at Gateshead; that the night was dark, and my mind impressed with strange fears. The light that long ago had struck me into syncope, recalled in this vision, seemed glidingly to mount the wall, and tremblingly to pause in the centre of the obscured ceiling. I lifted up my head to look: the roof resolved to clouds, high and dim; the gleam was such as the moon imparts to vapours she is about to sever. I watched her come — watched with the strangest anticipation; as though some word of doom were to be written on her disk. She broke forth as never moon yet burst from cloud: a hand first penetrated the sable folds and waved them away; then, not a moon, but a white human form shone in the azure, inclining a glorious brow earthward. It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit: immeasurably distant was the tone, yet so near, it whispered in my heart —

"My daughter, flee temptation."

"Mother, I will."

So I answered after I had waked from the trance-like dream. It was yet night, but July nights are short: soon after midnight, dawn comes. "It cannot be too early to commence the task I have to fulfil," thought I. I rose: I was dressed; for I had taken off nothing but my shoes. I knew where to find in my drawers some linen, a locket, a ring. In seeking these articles, I encountered the beads of a pearl necklace Mr. Rochester had forced me to accept a few days ago. I left that; it was not mine: it was the visionary bride's who had melted in air. The other articles I made up in a parcel; my purse, containing twenty shillings (it was all I had), I put in my pocket: I tied on my straw bonnet, pinned my shawl, took the parcel and my slippers, which I would not put on yet, and stole from my room.

"Farewell, kind Mrs. Fairfax!" I whispered, as I glided past her door. "Farewell, my darling Adèle!" I said, as I glanced towards the nursery. No thought could be admitted of entering to embrace her. I had to deceive a fine ear: for aught I knew it might now be listening.

I would have got past Mr. Rochester's chamber without a pause; but my heart momentarily stopping its beat at that threshold, my foot was forced to stop also. No sleep was there: the inmate was walking restlessly from wall to wall; and again and again he sighed while I listened. There was a heaven — a temporary heaven — in this room for me, if I chose: I had but to go in and to say —

"Mr. Rochester, I will love you and live with you through life till death," and a fount of rapture would spring to my lips. I thought of this.

That kind master, who could not sleep now, was waiting with impatience for day. He would send for me in the morning; I should be gone. He would have me sought for: vainly. He would feel himself forsaken; his love rejected: he would suffer; perhaps grow desperate. I thought of this too. My hand moved towards the lock: I caught it back, and glided on.

Drearily I wound my way downstairs: I knew what I had to do, and I did it mechanically. I sought the key of the side-door in the kitchen; I sought, too, a phial of oil and a feather; I oiled the key and the lock. I got some water, I got some bread: for perhaps I should have to walk far; and my strength, sorely shaken of late, must not break down. All this I did without one sound. I opened the door, passed out, shut it softly. Dim dawn glimmered in the yard. The great gates were closed and locked; but a wicket in one of them was only latched. Through that I departed: it, too, I shut; and now I was out of Thornfield.

A mile off, beyond the fields, lay a road which stretched in the contrary direction to Millcote; a road I had never travelled, but often noticed, and wondered where it led: thither I bent my steps. No reflection was to be allowed now: not one glance was to be cast back; not even one forward. Not one thought was to be given either to the past or the future. The first was a page so heavenly sweet — so deadly sad — that to read one line of it would dissolve my courage and break down my energy. The last was an awful blank: something like the world when the deluge was gone by.

I skirted fields, and hedges, and lanes till after sunrise. I believe it was a lovely summer morning: I know my shoes, which I had put on when I left the house, were soon wet with dew. But I looked neither to rising sun, nor smiling sky, nor wakening nature. He who is taken out to pass through a fair scene to the scaffold, thinks not of the flowers that smile on his road, but of the block and axe-edge; of the disseverment of bone and vein; of the grave gaping at the end: and I thought of drear flight and homeless wandering — and oh! with agony I thought of what I left. I could not help it. I thought of him now — in his room — watching the sunrise; hoping I should soon come to say I would stay with him and be his. I longed to be his; I panted to return: it was not too late; I could yet spare him the bitter pang of bereavement. As yet my flight, I was sure, was undiscovered. I could go back and be his comforter — his pride; his redeemer from misery, perhaps from ruin. Oh, that fear of his self-abandonment — far worse than my abandonment — how it goaded me! It was a barbed arrow-head in my breast; it tore me when I tried to extract it; it sickened me when remembrance thrust it farther in. Birds began singing in brake and copse: birds were faithful to their mates; birds were emblems of love. What was I? In the midst of my pain of heart and frantic effort of principle, I abhorred myself. I had no solace from self-approbation: none even from self-respect. I had injured — wounded — left my master. I was hateful in my own eyes. Still I could not turn, nor retrace one step. God must have led me on. As to my own will or conscience, impassioned grief had trampled one and stifled the other. I was weeping wildly as I walked along my solitary way: fast, fast I went like one delirious. A weakness, beginning inwardly, extending to the limbs, seized me, and I fell: I lay on the ground some minutes, pressing my face to the wet turf. I had some fear — or hope — that here I should die: but I was soon up; crawling forwards on my hands and knees, and then again raised to my feet — as eager and as determined as ever to reach the road.

When I got there, I was forced to sit to rest me under the hedge; and while I sat, I heard wheels, and saw a coach come on. I stood up and lifted my hand; it stopped. I asked where it was going: the driver named a place a long way off, and where I was sure Mr. Rochester had no connections. I asked for what sum he would take me there; he said thirty shillings; I answered I had but twenty; well, he would try to make it do. He further gave me leave to get into the inside, as the vehicle was empty: I entered, was shut in, and it rolled on its way.

Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding, heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonised as in that hour left my lips; for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Two days are passed. It is a summer evening; the coachman has set me down at a place called Whitcross; he could take me no farther for the sum I had given, and I was not possessed of another shilling in the world. The coach is a mile off by this time; I am alone. At this moment I discover that I forgot to take my parcel out of the pocket of the coach, where I had placed it for safety; there it remains, there it must remain; and now, I am absolutely destitute.

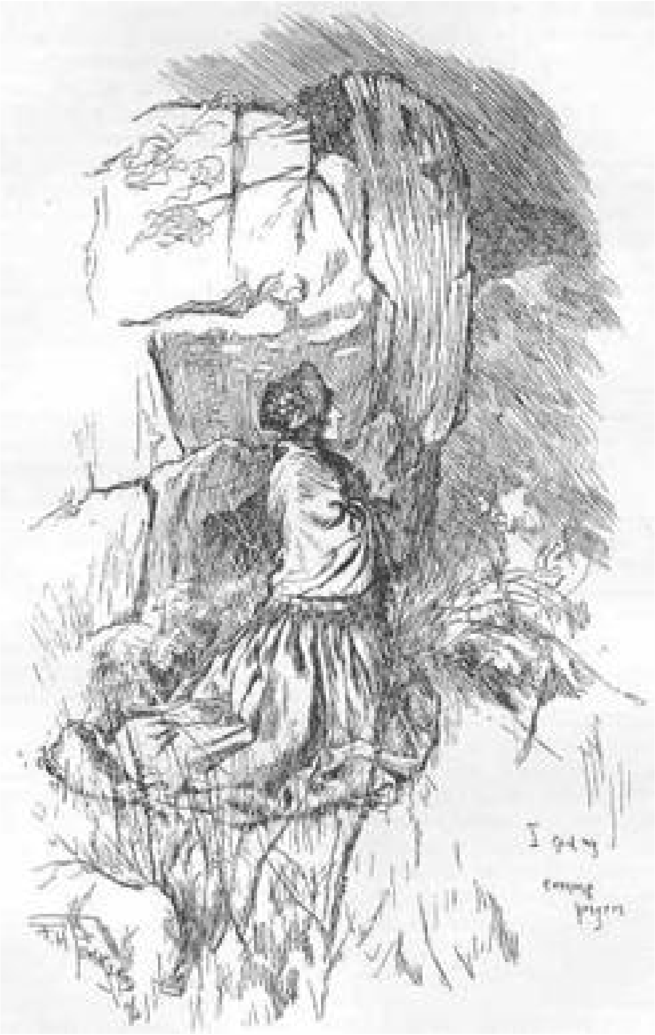
Whitcross is no town, nor even a hamlet; it is but a stone pillar set up where four roads meet: whitewashed, I suppose, to be more obvious at a distance and in darkness. Four arms spring from its summit: the nearest town to which these point is, according to the inscription, distant ten miles; the farthest, above twenty. From the well-known names of these towns I learn in what county I have lighted; a north-midland shire, dusk with moorland, ridged with mountain: this I see. There are great moors behind and on each hand of me; there are waves of mountains far beyond that deep valley at my feet. The population here must be thin, and I see no passengers on these roads: they stretch out east, west, north, and south — white, broad, lonely; they are all cut in the moor, and the heather grows deep and wild to their very verge. Yet a chance traveller might pass by; and I wish no eye to see me now: strangers would wonder what I am doing, lingering here at the sign-post, evidently objectless and lost. I might be questioned: I could give no answer but what would sound incredible and excite suspicion. Not a tie holds me to human society at this moment — not a charm or hope calls me where my fellow-creatures are — none that saw me would have a kind thought or a good wish for me. I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose.

I struck straight into the heath; I held on to a hollow I saw deeply furrowing the brown moorside; I waded knee-deep in its dark growth; I turned with its turnings, and finding a moss-blackened granite crag in a hidden angle, I sat down under it. High banks of moor were about me; the crag protected my head: the sky was over that.

Some time passed before I felt tranquil even here: I had a vague dread that wild cattle might be near, or that some sportsman or poacher might discover me. If a gust of wind swept the waste, I looked up, fearing it was the rush of a bull; if a plover whistled, I imagined it a man. Finding my apprehensions unfounded, however, and calmed by the deep silence that reigned as evening declined at nightfall, I took confidence. As yet I had not thought; I had only listened, watched, dreaded; now I regained the faculty of reflection.

What was I to do? Where to go? Oh, intolerable questions, when I could do nothing and go nowhere! — when a long way must yet be measured by my weary, trembling limbs before I could reach human habitation — when cold charity must be entreated before I could get a lodging: reluctant sympathy importuned, almost certain repulse incurred, before my tale could be listened to, or one of my wants relieved!

I touched the heath: it was dry, and yet warm with the heat of the summer day. I looked at the sky; it was pure: a kindly star twinkled just above the chasm ridge. The dew fell, but with propitious softness; no breeze whispered. Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness. To-night, at least, I would be her guest, as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price. I had one morsel of bread yet: the remnant of a roll I had bought in a town we passed through at noon with a stray penny — my last coin. I saw ripe bilberries gleaming here and there, like jet beads in the heath: I gathered a handful and ate them with the bread. My hunger, sharp before, was, if not satisfied, appeased by this hermit's meal. I said my evening prayers at its conclusion, and then chose my couch.



Beside the crag the heath was very deep: when I lay down my feet were buried in it; rising high on each side, it left only a narrow space for the night-air to invade. I folded my shawl double, and spread it over me for a coverlet; a low, mossy swell was my pillow. Thus lodged, I was not, at least — at the commencement of the night, cold.

My rest might have been blissful enough, only a sad heart broke it. It plained of its gaping wounds, its inward bleeding, its riven chords. It trembled for Mr. Rochester and his doom; it bemoaned him with bitter pity; it demanded him with ceaseless longing; and, impotent as a bird with both wings broken, it still quivered its shattered pinions in vain attempts to seek him.

Worn out with this torture of thought, I rose to my knees. Night was come, and her planets were risen: a safe, still night: too serene for the companionship of fear. We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale spread before us; and it is in the unclouded night-sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence. I had risen to my knees to pray for Mr. Rochester. Looking up, I, with tear-dimmed eyes, saw the mighty Milky-way. Remembering what it was — what countless systems there swept space like a soft trace of light — I felt the might and strength of God. Sure was I of His efficiency to save what He had made: convinced I grew that neither earth should perish, nor one of the souls it treasured. I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of spirits. Mr. Rochester was safe; he was God's, and by God would he be guarded. I again nestled to the breast of the hill; and ere long in sleep forgot sorrow.

But next day, Want came to me pale and bare. Long after the little birds had left their nests; long after bees had come in the sweet prime of day to gather the heath honey before the dew was dried — when the long morning shadows were curtailed, and the sun filled earth and sky — I got up, and I looked round me.

What a still, hot, perfect day! What a golden desert this spreading moor! Everywhere sunshine. I wished I could live in it and on it. I saw a lizard run over the crag; I saw a bee busy among the sweet bilberries. I would fain at the moment have become bee or lizard, that I might have found fitting nutriment, permanent shelter here. But I was a human being, and had a human being's wants: I must not linger where there was nothing to supply them. I rose; I looked back at the bed I had left. Hopeless of the future, I wished but this — that my Maker had that night thought good to require my soul of me while I slept; and that this weary frame, absolved by death from further conflict with fate, had now but to decay quietly, and mingle in peace with the soil of this wilderness. Life, however, was yet in my possession, with all its requirements, and pains, and responsibilities. The burden must be carried; the want provided for; the suffering endured; the responsibility fulfilled. I set out.

Whitcross regained, I followed a road which led from the sun, now fervent and high. By no other circumstance had I will to decide my choice. I walked a long time, and when I thought I had nearly done enough, and might conscientiously yield to the fatigue that almost overpowered me — might relax this forced action, and, sitting down on a stone I saw near, submit resistlessly to the apathy that clogged heart and limb — I heard a bell chime — a church bell.

I turned in the direction of the sound, and there, amongst the romantic hills, whose changes and aspect I had ceased to note an hour ago, I saw a hamlet and a spire. All the valley at my right hand was full of pasture-fields, and cornfields, and wood; and a glittering stream ran zig-zag through the varied shades of green, the mellowing grain, the sombre woodland, the clear and sunny lea. Recalled by the rumbling of wheels to the road before me, I saw a heavily-laden waggon labouring up the hill, and not far beyond were two cows and their drover. Human life and human labour were near. I must struggle on: strive to live and bend to toil like the rest.

About two o'clock p.m. I entered the village. At the bottom of its one street there was a little shop with some cakes of bread in the window. I coveted a cake of bread. With that refreshment I could perhaps regain a degree of energy: without it, it would be difficult to proceed. The wish to have some strength and some vigour returned to me as soon as I was amongst my fellow-beings. I felt it would be degrading to faint with hunger on the causeway of a hamlet. Had I nothing about me I could offer in exchange for one of these rolls? I considered. I had a small silk handkerchief tied round my throat; I had my gloves. I could hardly tell how men and women in extremities of destitution proceeded. I did not know whether either of these articles would be accepted: probably they would not; but I must try.

I entered the shop: a woman was there. Seeing a respectably-dressed person, a lady as she supposed, she came forward with civility. How could she serve me? I was seized with shame: my tongue would not utter the request I had prepared. I dared not offer her the half-worn gloves, the creased handkerchief: besides, I felt it would be absurd. I only begged permission to sit down a moment, as I was tired. Disappointed in the expectation of a customer, she coolly acceded to my request. She pointed to a seat; I sank into it. I felt sorely urged to weep; but conscious how unseasonable such a manifestation would be, I restrained it. Soon I asked her "if there were any dressmaker or plain-workwoman in the village?"

"Yes; two or three. Quite as many as there was employment for."

I reflected. I was driven to the point now. I was brought face to face with Necessity. I stood in the position of one without a resource, without a friend, without a coin. I must do something. What? I must apply somewhere. Where?

"Did she know of any place in the neighbourhood where a servant was wanted?"

"Nay; she couldn't say."

"What was the chief trade in this place? What did most of the people do?"

"Some were farm labourers; a good deal worked at Mr. Oliver's needle-factory, and at the foundry."

"Did Mr. Oliver employ women?"

"Nay; it was men's work."

"And what do the women do?"

"I knawn't," was the answer. "Some does one thing, and some another. Poor folk mun get on as they can."

She seemed to be tired of my questions: and, indeed, what claim had I to importune her? A neighbour or two came in; my chair was evidently wanted. I took leave.

I passed up the street, looking as I went at all the houses to the right hand and to the left; but I could discover no pretext, nor see an inducement to enter any. I rambled round the hamlet, going sometimes to a little distance and returning again, for an hour or more. Much exhausted, and suffering greatly now for want of food, I turned aside into a lane and sat down under the hedge. Ere many minutes had elapsed, I was again on my feet, however, and again searching something — a resource, or at least an informant. A pretty little house stood at the top of the lane, with a garden before it, exquisitely neat and brilliantly blooming. I stopped at it. What business had I to approach the white door or touch the glittering knocker? In what way could it possibly be the interest of the inhabitants of that dwelling to serve me? Yet I drew near and knocked. A mild-looking, cleanly-attired young woman opened the door. In such a voice as might be expected from a hopeless heart and fainting frame — a voice wretchedly low and faltering — I asked if a servant was wanted here?

"No," said she; "we do not keep a servant."

"Can you tell me where I could get employment of any kind?" I continued. "I am a stranger, without acquaintance in this place. I want some work: no matter what."

But it was not her business to think for me, or to seek a place for me: besides, in her eyes, how doubtful must have appeared my character, position, tale. She shook her head, she "was sorry she could give me no information," and the white door closed, quite gently and civilly: but it shut me out. If she had held it open a little longer, I believe I should have begged a piece of bread; for I was now brought low.

I could not bear to return to the sordid village, where, besides, no prospect of aid was visible. I should have longed rather to deviate to a wood I saw not far off, which appeared in its thick shade to offer inviting shelter; but I was so sick, so weak, so gnawed with nature's cravings, instinct kept me roaming round abodes where there was a chance of food. Solitude would be no solitude — rest no rest — while the vulture, hunger, thus sank beak and talons in my side.

I drew near houses; I left them, and came back again, and again I wandered away: always repelled by the consciousness of having no claim to ask — no right to expect interest in my isolated lot. Meantime, the afternoon advanced, while I thus wandered about like a lost and starving dog. In crossing a field, I saw the church spire before me: I hastened towards it. Near the churchyard, and in the middle of a garden, stood a well-built though small house, which I had no doubt was the parsonage. I remembered that strangers who arrive at a place where they have no friends, and who want employment, sometimes apply to the clergyman for introduction and aid. It is the clergyman's function to help — at least with advice — those who wished to help themselves. I seemed to have something like a right to seek counsel here. Renewing then my courage, and gathering my feeble remains of strength, I pushed on. I reached the house, and knocked at the kitchen-door. An old woman opened: I asked was this the parsonage?

"Yes."

"Was the clergyman in?"

"No."

"Would he be in soon?"

"No, he was gone from home."

"To a distance?"

"Not so far — happen three mile. He had been called away by the sudden death of his father: he was at Marsh End now, and would very likely stay there a fortnight longer."

"Was there any lady of the house?"

"Nay, there was naught but her, and she was housekeeper;" and of her, reader, I could not bear to ask the relief for want of which I was sinking; I could not yet beg; and again I crawled away.

Once more I took off my handkerchief — once more I thought of the cakes of bread in the little shop. Oh, for but a crust! for but one mouthful to allay the pang of famine! Instinctively I turned my face again to the village; I found the shop again, and I went in; and though others were there besides the woman I ventured the request — "Would she give me a roll for this handkerchief?"

She looked at me with evident suspicion: "Nay, she never sold stuff i' that way."

Almost desperate, I asked for half a cake; she again refused. "How could she tell where I had got the handkerchief?" she said.

"Would she take my gloves?"

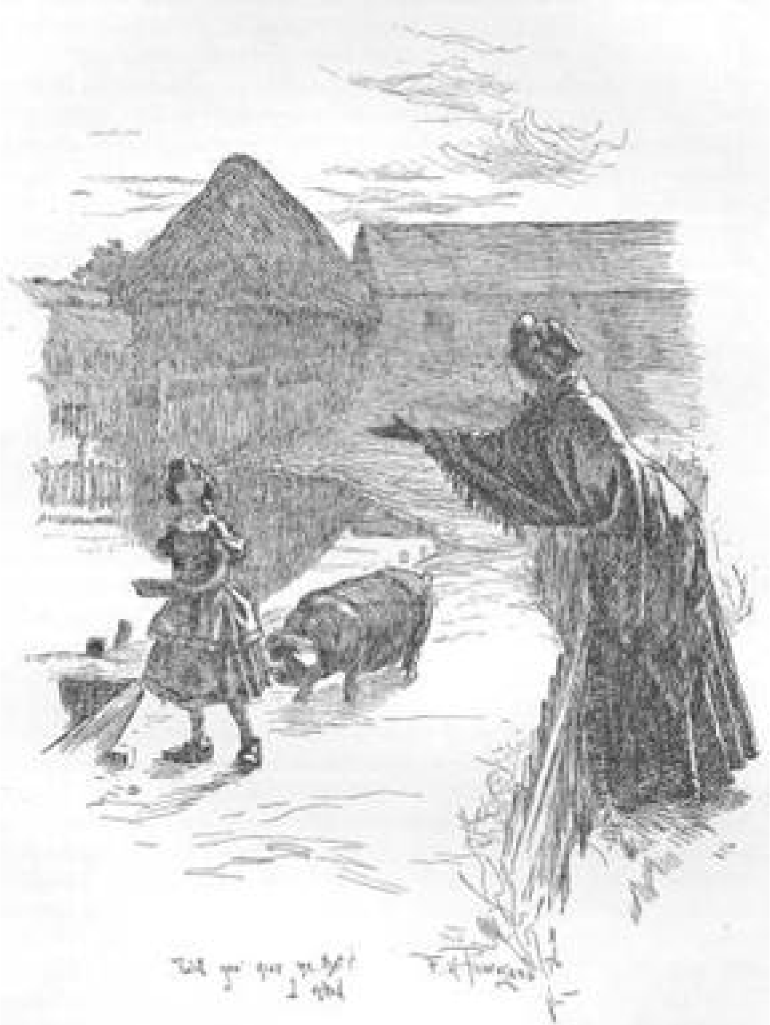
"No! what could she do with them?"

Reader, it is not pleasant to dwell on these details. Some say there is enjoyment in looking back to painful experience past; but at this day I can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude: the moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering, form too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on. I blamed none of those who repulsed me. I felt it was what was to be expected, and what could not be helped: an ordinary beggar is frequently an object of suspicion; a well-dressed beggar inevitably so. To be sure, what I begged was employment; but whose business was it to provide me with employment? Not, certainly, that of persons who saw me then for the first time, and who knew nothing about my character. And as to the woman who would not take my handkerchief in exchange for her bread, why, she was right, if the offer appeared to her sinister or the exchange unprofitable. Let me condense now. I am sick of the subject.

A little before dark I passed a farm-house, at the open door of which the farmer was sitting, eating his supper of bread and cheese. I stopped and said —

"Will you give me a piece of bread? for I am very hungry." He cast on me a glance of surprise; but without answering, he cut a thick slice from his loaf, and gave it to me. I imagine he did not think I was a beggar, but only an eccentric sort of lady, who had taken a fancy to his brown loaf. As soon as I was out of sight of his house, I sat down and ate it.

I could not hope to get a lodging under a roof, and sought it in the wood I have before alluded to. But my night was wretched, my rest broken: the ground was damp, the air cold: besides, intruders passed near me more than once, and I had again and again to change my quarters; no sense of safety or tranquillity befriended me. Towards morning it rained; the whole of the following day was wet. Do not ask me, reader, to give a minute account of that day; as before, I sought work; as before, I was repulsed; as before, I starved; but once did food pass my lips. At the door of a cottage I saw a little girl about to throw a mess of cold porridge into a pig trough. "Will you give me that?" I asked.



She stared at me. "Mother!" she exclaimed, "there is a woman wants me to give her these porridge."

"Well lass," replied a voice within, "give it her if she's a beggar. T' pig doesn’t want it.”

The girl emptied the stiffened mould into my hand, and I devoured it ravenously.

As the wet twilight deepened, I stopped in a solitary bridle-path, which I had been pursuing an hour or more.

“My strength is quite failing me,” I said in a soliloquy. “I feel I cannot go much farther. Shall I be an outcast again this night? While the rain descends so, must I lay my head on the cold, drenched ground? I fear I cannot do otherwise: for who will receive me? But it will be very dreadful, with this feeling of hunger, faintness, chill, and this sense of desolation — this total prostration of hope. In all likelihood, though, I should die before morning. And why cannot I reconcile myself to the prospect of death? Why do I struggle to retain a valueless life? Because I know, or believe, Mr. Rochester is living: and then, to die of want and cold is a fate to which nature cannot submit passively. Oh, Providence! sustain me a little longer! Aid! — direct me!”

My glazed eye wandered over the dim and misty landscape. I saw I had strayed far from the village: it was quite out of sight. The very cultivation surrounding it had disappeared. I had, by cross-ways and by-paths, once more drawn near the tract of moorland; and now, only a few fields, almost as wild and unproductive as the heath from which they were scarcely reclaimed, lay between me and the dusky hill.

“Well, I would rather die yonder than in a street or on a frequented road,” I reflected. “And far better that crows and ravens — if any ravens there be in these regions — should pick my flesh from my bones, than that they should be prisoned in a workhouse coffin and moulder in a pauper’s grave.”

To the hill, then, I turned. I reached it. It remained now only to find a hollow where I could lie down, and feel at least hidden, if not secure. But all the surface of the waste looked level. It showed no variation but of tint: green, where rush and moss overgrew the marshes; black, where the dry soil bore only heath. Dark as it was getting, I could still see these changes, though but as mere alternations of light and shade; for colour had faded with the daylight.

My eye still roved over the sullen swell and along the moor-edge, vanishing amidst the wildest scenery, when at one dim point, far in among the marshes and the ridges, a light sprang up. “That is an *ignis fatuus*,” was my first thought; and I expected it would soon vanish. It burnt on, however, quite steadily, neither receding nor advancing. “Is it, then, a bonfire just kindled?” I questioned. I watched to see whether it would spread: but no; as it did not diminish, so it did not enlarge. “It may be a candle in a house,” I then conjectured; “but if so, I can never reach it. It is much too far away: and were it within a yard of me, what would it avail? I should but knock at the door to have it shut in my face.”

And I sank down where I stood, and hid my face against the ground. I lay still a while: the night-wind swept over the hill and over me, and died moaning in the distance; the rain fell fast, wetting me afresh to the skin. Could I but have stiffened to the still frost — the friendly numbness of death — it might have pelted on; I should not have felt it; but my yet living flesh shuddered at its chilling influence. I rose ere long.

The light was yet there, shining dim but constant through the rain. I tried to walk again: I dragged my exhausted limbs slowly towards it. It led me aslant over the hill, through a wide bog, which would have been impassable in winter, and was splashy and shaking even now, in the height of summer. Here I fell twice; but as often I rose and rallied my faculties. This light was my forlorn hope: I must gain it.

Having crossed the marsh, I saw a trace of white over the moor. I approached it; it was a road or a track: it led straight up to the light, which now beamed from a sort of knoll, amidst a clump of trees — firs, apparently, from what I could distinguish of the character of their forms and foliage through the gloom. My star vanished as I drew near: some obstacle had intervened between me and it. I put out my hand to feel the dark mass before me: I discriminated the rough stones of a low wall — above it, something like palisades, and within, a high and prickly hedge. I groped on. Again a whitish object gleamed before me: it was a gate — a wicket; it moved on its hinges as I touched it. On each side stood a sable bush-holly or yew.

Entering the gate and passing the shrubs, the silhouette of a house rose to view, black, low, and rather long; but the guiding light shone nowhere. All was obscurity. Were the inmates retired to rest? I feared it must be so. In seeking the door, I turned an angle: there shot out the friendly gleam again, from the lozenged panes of a very small latticed window, within a foot of the ground, made still smaller by the growth of ivy or some other creeping plant, whose leaves clustered thick over the portion of the house wall in which it was set. The aperture was so screened and narrow, that curtain or shutter had been deemed unnecessary; and when I stooped down and put aside the spray of foliage shooting over it, I could see all within. I could see clearly a room with a sanded floor, clean scoured; a dresser of walnut, with pewter plates ranged in rows, reflecting the redness and radiance of a glowing peat-fire. I could see a clock, a white deal table, some chairs. The candle, whose ray had been my beacon, burnt on the table; and by its light an elderly woman, somewhat rough-looking, but scrupulously clean, like all about her, was knitting a stocking.

I noticed these objects cursorily only — in them there was nothing extraordinary. A group of more interest appeared near the hearth, sitting still amidst the rosy peace and warmth suffusing it. Two young, graceful women — ladies in every point — sat, one in a low rocking-chair, the other on a lower stool; both wore deep mourning of crape and bombazeen, which sombre garb singularly set off very fair necks and faces: a large old pointer dog rested its massive head on the knee of one girl — in the lap of the other was cushioned a black cat.

A strange place was this humble kitchen for such occupants! Who were they? They could not be the daughters of the elderly person at the table; for she looked like a rustic, and they were all delicacy and cultivation. I had nowhere seen such faces as theirs: and yet, as I gazed on them, I seemed intimate with every lineament. I cannot call them handsome — they were too pale and grave for the word: as they each bent over a book, they looked thoughtful almost to severity. A stand between them supported a second candle and two great volumes, to which they frequently referred, comparing them, seemingly, with the smaller books they held in their hands, like people consulting a dictionary to aid them in the task of translation. This scene was as silent as if all the figures had been shadows and the firelit apartment a picture: so hushed was it, I could hear the cinders fall from the grate, the clock tick in its obscure corner; and I even fancied I could distinguish the click-click of the woman's knitting-needles. When, therefore, a voice broke the strange stillness at last, it was audible enough to me.

"Listen, Diana," said one of the absorbed students; "Franz and old Daniel are together in the night-time, and Franz is telling a dream from which he has awakened in terror — listen!" And in a low voice she read something, of which not one word was intelligible to me; for it was in an unknown tongue — neither French nor Latin. Whether it were Greek or German I could not tell.

"That is strong," she said, when she had finished: "I relish it." The other girl, who had lifted her head to listen to her sister, repeated, while she gazed at the fire, a line of what had been read. At a later day, I knew the language and the book; therefore, I will here quote the line: though, when I first heard it, it was only like a stroke on sounding brass to me — conveying no meaning: —

"'Da trat hervor Einer, anzusehen wie die Sternen Nacht.' Good! good!" she exclaimed, while her dark and deep eye sparkled. "There you have a dim and mighty archangel fitly set before you! The line is worth a hundred pages of fustian. 'Ich wäge die Gedanken in der Schale meines Zornes und die Werke mit dem Gewichte meines Grimms.' I like it!"

Both were again silent.

"Is there ony country where they talk i' that way?" asked the old woman, looking up from her knitting.

"Yes, Hannah — a far larger country than England, where they talk in no other way."

"Well, for sure case, I knawn't how they can understand t' one t'other: and if either o' ye went there, ye could tell what they said, I guess?"

"We could probably tell something of what they said, but not all — for we are not as clever as you think us, Hannah. We don't speak German, and we cannot read it without a dictionary to help us."

"And what good does it do you?"

"We mean to teach it some time — or at least the elements, as they say;

and then we shall get more money than we do now."

"Varry like: but give ower studying; ye've done enough for to-night."

"I think we have: at least I'm tired. Mary, are you?"

"Mortally: after all, it's tough work fagging away at a language with no master but a lexicon."

"It is, especially such a language as this crabbed but glorious Deutsch. I wonder when St. John will come home."

"Surely he will not be long now: it is just ten (looking at a little gold watch she drew from her girdle). It rains fast, Hannah: will you have the goodness to look at the fire in the parlour?"

The woman rose: she opened a door, through which I dimly saw a passage: soon I heard her stir a fire in an inner room; she presently came back.

"Ah, childer!" said she, "it fair troubles me to go into yond' room now: it looks so lonesome wi' the chair empty and set back in a corner."

She wiped her eyes with her apron: the two girls, grave before, looked sad now.

"But he is in a better place," continued Hannah: "we shouldn't wish him here again. And then, nobody need to have a quieter death nor he had."

"You say he never mentioned us?" inquired one of the ladies.

"He hadn't time, bairn: he was gone in a minute, was your father. He had been a bit ailing like the day before, but naught to signify; and when Mr. St. John asked if he would like either o' ye to be sent for, he fair laughed at him. He began again with a bit of a heaviness in his head the next day — that is, a fortnight sin' — and he went to sleep and niver wakened: he wor a'most stark when your brother went into t' chamber and fand him. Ah, childer! that's t' last o' t' old stock — for ye and Mr. St. John is like of different soart to them 'at's gone; for all your mother wor mich i' your way, and a'most as book-learned. She wor the pictur' o' ye, Mary: Diana is more like your father."

I thought them so similar I could not tell where the old servant (for such I now concluded her to be) saw the difference. Both were fair complexioned and slenderly made; both possessed faces full of distinction and intelligence. One, to be sure, had hair a shade darker than the other, and there was a difference in their style of wearing it; Mary's pale brown locks were parted and braided smooth: Diana's duskier tresses covered her neck with thick curls. The clock struck ten.

"Ye'll want your supper, I am sure," observed Hannah; "and so will Mr. St. John when he comes in."

And she proceeded to prepare the meal. The ladies rose; they seemed about to withdraw to the parlour. Till this moment, I had been so intent on watching them, their appearance and conversation had excited in me so keen an interest, I had half-forgotten my own wretched position: now it recurred to me. More desolate, more desperate than ever, it seemed from contrast. And how impossible did it appear to touch the inmates of this house with concern on my behalf; to make them believe in the truth of my wants and woes — to induce them to vouchsafe a rest for my wanderings! As I groped out the door, and knocked at it hesitatingly, I felt that last idea to be a mere chimera. Hannah opened.

"What do you want?" she inquired, in a voice of surprise, as she surveyed me by the light of the candle she held.

"May I speak to your mistresses?" I said.

"You had better tell me what you have to say to them. Where do you come from?"

"I am a stranger."

"What is your business here at this hour?"

"I want a night's shelter in an out-house or anywhere, and a morsel of bread to eat."

Distrust, the very feeling I dreaded, appeared in Hannah's face. "I'll give you a piece of bread," she said, after a pause; "but we can't take in a vagrant to lodge. It isn't likely."

"Do let me speak to your mistresses."

"No, not I. What can they do for you? You should not be roving about now; it looks very ill."

"But where shall I go if you drive me away? What shall I do?"

"Oh, I'll warrant you know where to go and what to do. Mind you don't do wrong, that's all. Here is a penny; now go — "

"A penny cannot feed me, and I have no strength to go farther. Don't shut the door: — oh, don't, for God's sake!"

"I must; the rain is driving in — "

"Tell the young ladies. Let me see them — "

"Indeed, I will not. You are not what you ought to be, or you wouldn't make such a noise. Move off."

"But I must die if I am turned away."

"Not you. I'm fear'd you have some ill plans agate, that bring you about folk's houses at this time o' night. If you've any followers — housebreakers or such like — anywhere near, you may tell them we are not by ourselves in the house; we have a gentleman, and dogs, and guns." Here the honest but inflexible servant clapped the door to and bolted it within.

This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering — a throe of true despair — rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet doorstep: I groaned — I wrung my hands — I wept in utter anguish. Oh, this spectre of death! Oh, this last hour, approaching in such horror! Alas, this isolation — this banishment from my kind! Not only the anchor of hope, but the footing of fortitude was gone — at least for a moment; but the last I soon endeavoured to regain.

"I can but die," I said, "and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will in silence."

These words I not only thought, but uttered; and thrusting back all my misery into my heart, I made an effort to compel it to remain there — dumb and still.

“All men must die,” said a voice quite close at hand; “but all are not condemned to meet a lingering and premature doom, such as yours would be if you perished here of want.”

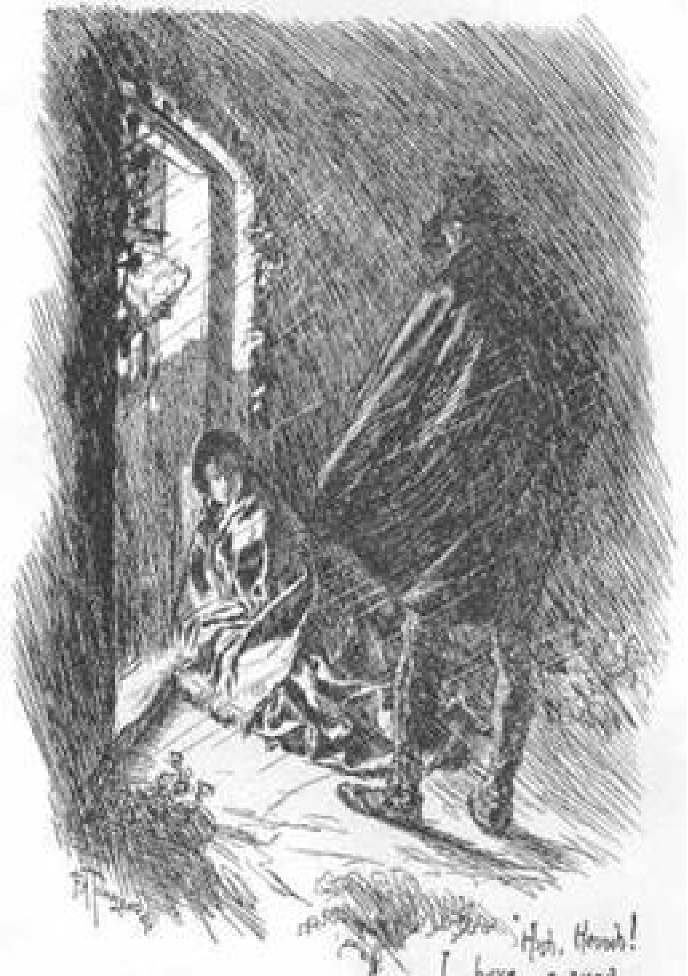
“Who or what speaks?” I asked, terrified at the unexpected sound, and incapable now of deriving from any occurrence a hope of aid. A form was near — what form, the pitch-dark night and my enfeebled vision prevented me from distinguishing. With a loud long knock, the new-comer appealed to the door.

“Is it you, Mr. St. John?” cried Hannah.

“Yes — yes; open quickly.”

“Well, how wet and cold you must be, such a wild night as it is! Come in — your sisters are quite uneasy about you, and I believe there are bad folks about. There has been a beggar-woman — I declare she is not gone yet! — laid down there. Get up! for shame! Move off, I say!”

“Hush, Hannah! I have a word to say to the woman. You have done your duty in excluding, now let me do mine in admitting her. I was near, and listened to both you and her. I think this is a peculiar case — I must at least examine into it. Young woman, rise, and pass before me into the house.”



'Hush, Hannah! I have a word to say to the woman.'

With difficulty I obeyed him. Presently I stood within that clean, bright kitchen — on the very hearth — trembling, sickening; conscious of an aspect in the last degree ghastly, wild, and weather-beaten. The two ladies, their brother, Mr. St. John, the old servant, were all gazing at me.

"St. John, who is it?" I heard one ask.

"I cannot tell: I found her at the door," was the reply.

"She does look white," said Hannah.

"As white as clay or death," was responded. "She will fall: let her sit."

And indeed my head swam: I dropped, but a chair received me. I still possessed my senses, though just now I could not speak.

"Perhaps a little water would restore her. Hannah, fetch some. But she is worn to nothing. How very thin, and how very bloodless!"

"A mere spectre!"

"Is she ill, or only famished?"

"Famished, I think. Hannah, is that milk? Give it me, and a piece of bread."

Diana (I knew her by the long curls which I saw drooping between me and the fire as she bent over me) broke some bread, dipped it in milk, and put it to my lips. Her face was near mine: I saw there was pity in it, and I felt sympathy in her hurried breathing. In her simple words, too, the same balm-like emotion spoke: "Try to eat."

"Yes — try," repeated Mary gently; and Mary's hand removed my sodden bonnet and lifted my head. I tasted what they offered me: feebly at first, eagerly soon.

"Not too much at first — restrain her," said the brother; "she has had enough." And he withdrew the cup of milk and the plate of bread.

"A little more, St. John — look at the avidity in her eyes."

"No more at present, sister. Try if she can speak now — ask her her name."

I felt I could speak, and I answered — "My name is Jane Elliott." Anxious as ever to avoid discovery, I had before resolved to assume an *alias*.

"And where do you live? Where are your friends?"

I was silent.

"Can we send for any one you know?"

I shook my head.

"What account can you give of yourself?"

Somehow, now that I had once crossed the threshold of this house, and once was brought face to face with its owners, I felt no longer outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world. I dared to put off the mendicant — to resume my natural manner and character. I began once more to know myself; and when Mr. St. John demanded an account — which at present I was far too weak to render — I said after a brief pause —

"Sir, I can give you no details to-night."

"But what, then," said he, "do you expect me to do for you?"

"Nothing," I replied. My strength sufficed for but short answers. Diana took the word —

"Do you mean," she asked, "that we have now given you what aid you require? and that we may dismiss you to the moor and the rainy night?"

I looked at her. She had, I thought, a remarkable countenance, instinct both with power and goodness. I took sudden courage. Answering her compassionate gaze with a smile, I said — "I will trust you. If I were a masterless and stray dog, I know that you would not turn me from your hearth to-night: as it is, I really have no fear. Do with me and for me as you like; but excuse me from much discourse — my breath is short — I feel a spasm when I speak." All three surveyed me, and all three were silent.

"Hannah," said Mr. St. John, at last, "let her sit there at present, and ask her no questions; in ten minutes more, give her the remainder of that milk and bread. Mary and Diana, let us go into the parlour and talk the matter over."

They withdrew. Very soon one of the ladies returned — I could not tell which. A kind of pleasant stupor was stealing over me as I sat by the genial fire. In an undertone she gave some directions to Hannah. Ere long, with the servant's aid, I contrived to mount a staircase; my dripping clothes were removed; soon a warm, dry bed received me. I thanked God — experienced amidst unutterable exhaustion a glow of grateful joy — and slept.

CHAPTER XXIX

The recollection of about three days and nights succeeding this is very dim in my mind. I can recall some sensations felt in that interval; but few thoughts framed, and no actions performed. I knew I was in a small room and in a narrow bed. To that bed I seemed to have grown; I lay on it motionless as a stone; and to have torn me from it would have been almost to kill me. I took no note of the lapse of time — of the change from morning to noon, from noon to evening. I observed when any one entered or left the apartment: I could even tell who they were; I could understand what was said when the speaker stood near to me; but I could not answer; to open my lips or move my limbs was equally impossible. Hannah, the servant, was my most frequent visitor. Her coming disturbed me. I had a feeling that she wished me away: that she did not understand me or my circumstances; that she was prejudiced against me. Diana and Mary appeared in the chamber once or twice a day. They would whisper sentences of this sort at my bedside —

"It is very well we took her in."

"Yes; she would certainly have been found dead at the door in the morning had she been left out all night. I wonder what she has gone through?"

"Strange hardships, I imagine — poor, emaciated, pallid wanderer?"

"She is not an uneducated person, I should think, by her manner of speaking; her accent was quite pure; and the clothes she took off, though splashed and wet, were little worn and fine."

"She has a peculiar face; fleshless and haggard as it is, I rather like it; and when in good health and animated, I can fancy her physiognomy would be agreeable."

Never once in their dialogues did I hear a syllable of regret at the hospitality they had extended to me, or of suspicion of, or aversion to, myself. I was comforted.

Mr. St. John came but once: he looked at me, and said my state of lethargy was the result of reaction from excessive and protracted fatigue. He pronounced it needless to send for a doctor: nature, he was sure, would manage best, left to herself. He said every nerve had been overstrained in some way, and the whole system must sleep torpid a while. There was no disease. He imagined my recovery would be rapid enough when once commenced. These opinions he delivered in a few words, in a quiet, low voice; and added, after a pause, in the tone of a man little accustomed to expansive comment, "Rather an unusual physiognomy; certainly, not indicative of vulgarity or degradation."

"Far otherwise," responded Diana. "To speak truth, St. John, my heart rather warms to the poor little soul. I wish we may be able to benefit her permanently."

"That is hardly likely," was the reply. "You will find she is some young lady who has had a misunderstanding with her friends, and has probably injudiciously left them. We may, perhaps, succeed in restoring her to them, if she is not obstinate: but I trace lines of force in her face which make me sceptical of her tractability." He stood considering me some minutes; then added, "She looks sensible, but not at all handsome."

"She is so ill, St. John."

"Ill or well, she would always be plain. The grace and harmony of beauty are quite wanting in those features."

On the third day I was better; on the fourth, I could speak, move, rise in bed, and turn. Hannah had brought me some gruel and dry toast, about, as I supposed, the dinner-hour. I had eaten with relish: the food was good — void of the feverish flavour which had hitherto poisoned what I had swallowed. When she left me, I felt comparatively strong and revived: ere long satiety of repose and desire for action stirred me. I wished to rise; but what could I put on? Only my damp and bemired apparel; in which I had slept on the ground and fallen in the marsh. I felt ashamed to appear before my benefactors so clad. I was spared the humiliation.

On a chair by the bedside were all my own things, clean and dry. My black silk frock hung against the wall. The traces of the bog were removed from it; the creases left by the wet smoothed out: it was quite decent. My very shoes and stockings were purified and rendered presentable. There were the means of washing in the room, and a comb and brush to smooth my hair. After a weary process, and resting every five minutes, I succeeded in dressing myself. My clothes hung loose on me; for I was much wasted, but I covered deficiencies with a shawl, and once more, clean and respectable looking — no speck of the dirt, no trace of the disorder I so hated, and which seemed so to degrade me, left — I crept down a stone staircase with the aid of the banisters, to a narrow low passage, and found my way presently to the kitchen.

It was full of the fragrance of new bread and the warmth of a generous fire. Hannah was baking. Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilised by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones. Hannah had been cold and stiff, indeed, at the first: latterly she had begun to relent a little; and when she saw me come in tidy and well-dressed, she even smiled.

"What, you have got up!" she said. "You are better, then. You may sit you down in my chair on the hearthstone, if you will."

She pointed to the rocking-chair: I took it. She bustled about, examining me every now and then with the corner of her eye. Turning to me, as she took some loaves from the oven, she asked bluntly —

"Did you ever go a-begging afore you came here?"

I was indignant for a moment; but remembering that anger was out of the question, and that I had indeed appeared as a beggar to her, I answered quietly, but still not without a certain marked firmness —

“You are mistaken in supposing me a beggar. I am no beggar; any more than yourself or your young ladies.”

After a pause she said, “I dunnut understand that: you’ve like no house, nor no brass, I guess?”

“The want of house or brass (by which I suppose you mean money) does not make a beggar in your sense of the word.”

“Are you book-learned?” she inquired presently.

“Yes, very.”

“But you’ve never been to a boarding-school?”

“I was at a boarding-school eight years.”

She opened her eyes wide. “Whatever cannot ye keep yourself for, then?”

“I have kept myself; and, I trust, shall keep myself again. What are you going to do with these gooseberries?” I inquired, as she brought out a basket of the fruit.

“Mak’ ’em into pies.”

“Give them to me and I’ll pick them.”

“Nay; I dunnut want ye to do nought.”

“But I must do something. Let me have them.”

She consented; and she even brought me a clean towel to spread over my dress, “lest,” as she said, “I should mucky it.”

“Ye’ve not been used to sarvant’s wark, I see by your hands,” she remarked. “Happen ye’ve been a dressmaker?”

“No, you are wrong. And now, never mind what I have been: don’t trouble your head further about me; but tell me the name of the house where we are.”

“Some calls it Marsh End, and some calls it Moor House.”

“And the gentleman who lives here is called Mr. St. John?”

“Nay; he doesn’t live here: he is only staying a while. When he is at home, he is in his own parish at Morton.”

“That village a few miles off?

“Aye.”

“And what is he?”

“He is a parson.”

I remembered the answer of the old housekeeper at the parsonage, when I had asked to see the clergyman. “This, then, was his father’s residence?”

“Aye; old Mr. Rivers lived here, and his father, and grandfather, and gurt (great) grandfather afore him.”

“The name, then, of that gentleman, is Mr. St. John Rivers?”

“Aye; St. John is like his kirstened name.”

“And his sisters are called Diana and Mary Rivers?”

“Yes.”

"Their father is dead?"

"Dead three weeks sin' of a stroke."

"They have no mother?"

"The mistress has been dead this mony a year."

"Have you lived with the family long?"

"I've lived here thirty year. I nursed them all three."

"That proves you must have been an honest and faithful servant. I will say so much for you, though you have had the incivility to call me a beggar."

She again regarded me with a surprised stare. "I believe," she said, "I was quite mista'en in my thoughts of you: but there is so mony cheats goes about, you mun forgie me."

"And though," I continued, rather severely, "you wished to turn me from the door, on a night when you should not have shut out a dog."

"Well, it was hard: but what can a body do? I thought more o' th' childer nor of mysel: poor things! They've like nobody to tak' care on 'em but me. I'm like to look sharpish."

I maintained a grave silence for some minutes.

"You munnut think too hardly of me," she again remarked.

"But I do think hardly of you," I said; "and I'll tell you why — not so much because you refused to give me shelter, or regarded me as an impostor, as because you just now made it a species of reproach that I had no 'brass' and no house. Some of the best people that ever lived have been as destitute as I am; and if you are a Christian, you ought not to consider poverty a crime."

"No more I ought," said she: "Mr. St. John tells me so too; and I see I wor wrang — but I've clear a different notion on you now to what I had. You look a raight down dacent little crater."

"That will do — I forgive you now. Shake hands."

She put her floury and horny hand into mine; another and heartier smile illumined her rough face, and from that moment we were friends.

Hannah was evidently fond of talking. While I picked the fruit, and she made the paste for the pies, she proceeded to give me sundry details about her deceased master and mistress, and "the childer," as she called the young people.

Old Mr. Rivers, she said, was a plain man enough, but a gentleman, and of as ancient a family as could be found. Marsh End had belonged to the Rivers ever since it was a house: and it was, she affirmed, "aboon two hundred year old — for all it looked but a small, humble place, naught to compare wi' Mr. Oliver's grand hall down i' Morton Vale. But she could remember Bill Oliver's father a journeyman needlemaker; and th' Rivers wor gentry i' th' owd days o' th' Henrys, as onybody might see by looking into th' registers i' Morton Church vestry." Still, she allowed, "the owd maister was like other folk — naught mich out o' t' common way: stark mad o' shooting, and farming, and sich like." The mistress was different. She was a great reader, and studied a deal; and the "bairns" had taken after her. There was nothing like them in these parts, nor ever had been; they had liked learning, all three, almost from the time they could speak; and they had always been "of a mak' of their own." Mr. St. John, when he grew up, would go to college and be a parson; and the girls, as soon as they left school, would seek places as governesses: for they had told her their father had some years ago lost a great deal of money by a man he had trusted turning bankrupt; and as he was now not rich enough to give them fortunes, they must provide for themselves. They had lived very little at home for a long while, and were only come now to stay a few weeks on account of their father's death; but they did so like Marsh End and Morton, and all these moors and hills about. They had been in London, and many other grand towns; but they always said there was no place like home; and then they were so agreeable with each other — never fell out nor "threaped." She did not know where there was such a family for being united.

Having finished my task of gooseberry picking, I asked where the two ladies and their brother were now.

"Gone over to Morton for a walk; but they would be back in half-an-hour to tea."

They returned within the time Hannah had allotted them: they entered by the kitchen door. Mr. St. John, when he saw me, merely bowed and passed through; the two ladies stopped: Mary, in a few words, kindly and calmly expressed the pleasure she felt in seeing me well enough to be able to come down; Diana took my hand: she shook her head at me.

"You should have waited for my leave to descend," she said. "You still look very pale — and so thin! Poor child! — poor girl!"

Diana had a voice toned, to my ear, like the cooing of a dove. She possessed eyes whose gaze I delighted to encounter. Her whole face seemed to me full of charm. Mary's countenance was equally intelligent — her features equally pretty; but her expression was more reserved, and her manners, though gentle, more distant. Diana looked and spoke with a certain authority: she had a will, evidently. It was my nature to feel pleasure in yielding to an authority supported like hers, and to bend, where my conscience and self-respect permitted, to an active will.

"And what business have you here?" she continued. "It is not your place. Mary and I sit in the kitchen sometimes, because at home we like to be free, even to license — but you are a visitor, and must go into the parlour."

"I am very well here."

"Not at all, with Hannah bustling about and covering you with flour."

"Besides, the fire is too hot for you," interposed Mary.

"To be sure," added her sister. "Come, you must be obedient." And still holding my hand she made me rise, and led me into the inner room.

"Sit there," she said, placing me on the sofa, "while we take our things off and get the tea ready; it is another privilege we exercise in our little moorland home — to prepare our own meals when we are so inclined, or when Hannah is baking, brewing, washing, or ironing."

She closed the door, leaving me solus with Mr. St. John, who sat opposite, a book or newspaper in his hand. I examined first, the parlour, and then its occupant.

The parlour was rather a small room, very plainly furnished, yet comfortable, because clean and neat. The old-fashioned chairs were very bright, and the walnut-wood table was like a looking-glass. A few strange, antique portraits of the men and women of other days decorated the stained walls; a cupboard with glass doors contained some books and an ancient set of china. There was no superfluous ornament in the room — not one modern piece of furniture, save a brace of workboxes and a lady's desk in rosewood, which stood on a side-table: everything — including the carpet and curtains — looked at once well worn and well saved.

Mr. St. John — sitting as still as one of the dusty pictures on the walls, keeping his eyes fixed on the page he perused, and his lips mutely sealed — was easy enough to examine. Had he been a statue instead of a man, he could not have been easier. He was young — perhaps from twenty-eight to thirty — tall, slender; his face riveted the eye; it was like a Greek face, very pure in outline: quite a straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and chin. It is seldom, indeed, an English face comes so near the antique models as did his. He might well be a little shocked at the irregularity of my lineaments, his own being so harmonious. His eyes were large and blue, with brown lashes; his high forehead, colourless as ivory, was partially streaked over by careless locks of fair hair.

This is a gentle delineation, is it not, reader? Yet he whom it describes scarcely impressed one with the idea of a gentle, a yielding, an impressible, or even of a placid nature. Quiescent as he now sat, there was something about his nostril, his mouth, his brow, which, to my perceptions, indicated elements within either restless, or hard, or eager. He did not speak to me one word, nor even direct to me one glance, till his sisters returned. Diana, as she passed in and out, in the course of preparing tea, brought me a little cake, baked on the top of the oven.

"Eat that now," she said: "you must be hungry. Hannah says you have had nothing but some gruel since breakfast."

I did not refuse it, for my appetite was awakened and keen. Mr. Rivers now closed his book, approached the table, and, as he took a seat, fixed his blue pictorial-looking eyes full on me. There was an unceremonious directness, a searching, decided steadfastness in his gaze now, which told that intention, and not diffidence, had hitherto kept it averted from the stranger.

"You are very hungry," he said.

"I am, sir." It is my way — it always was my way, by instinct — ever to meet the brief with brevity, the direct with plainness.

"It is well for you that a low fever has forced you to abstain for the last three days: there would have been danger in yielding to the cravings of your appetite at first. Now you may eat, though still not immoderately."

"I trust I shall not eat long at your expense, sir," was my very clumsily-contrived, unpolished answer.

"No," he said coolly: "when you have indicated to us the residence of your friends, we can write to them, and you may be restored to home."

"That, I must plainly tell you, is out of my power to do; being absolutely without home and friends."

The three looked at me, but not distrustfully; I felt there was no suspicion in their glances: there was more of curiosity. I speak particularly of the young ladies. St. John's eyes, though clear enough in a literal sense, in a figurative one were difficult to fathom. He seemed to use them rather as instruments to search other people's thoughts, than as agents to reveal his own: the which combination of keenness and reserve was considerably more calculated to embarrass than to encourage.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you are completely isolated from every connection?"

"I do. Not a tie links me to any living thing: not a claim do I possess to admittance under any roof in England."

"A most singular position at your age!"

Here I saw his glance directed to my hands, which were folded on the table before me. I wondered what he sought there: his words soon explained the quest.

"You have never been married? You are a spinster?"

Diana laughed. "Why, she can't be above seventeen or eighteen years old, St. John," said she.

"I am near nineteen: but I am not married. No."

I felt a burning glow mount to my face; for bitter and agitating recollections were awakened by the allusion to marriage. They all saw the embarrassment and the emotion. Diana and Mary relieved me by turning their eyes elsewhere than to my crimsoned visage; but the colder and sterner brother continued to gaze, till the trouble he had excited forced out tears as well as colour.

"Where did you last reside?" he now asked.

"You are too inquisitive, St. John," murmured Mary in a low voice; but he leaned over the table and required an answer by a second firm and piercing look.

"The name of the place where, and of the person with whom I lived, is my secret," I replied concisely.

"Which, if you like, you have, in my opinion, a right to keep, both from St. John and every other questioner," remarked Diana.

"Yet if I know nothing about you or your history, I cannot help you," he said. "And you need help, do you not?"

"I need it, and I seek it so far, sir, that some true philanthropist will put me in the way of getting work which I can do, and the remuneration for which will keep me, if but in the barest necessaries of life."

"I know not whether I am a true philanthropist; yet I am willing to aid you to the utmost of my power in a purpose so honest. First, then, tell me what you have been accustomed to do, and what you *can* do."

I had now swallowed my tea. I was mightily refreshed by the beverage; as much so as a giant with wine: it gave new tone to my unstrung nerves, and enabled me to address this penetrating young judge steadily.

"Mr. Rivers," I said, turning to him, and looking at him, as he looked at me, openly and without diffidence, "you and your sisters have done me a great service — the greatest man can do his fellow-being; you have rescued me, by your noble hospitality, from death. This benefit conferred gives you an unlimited claim on my gratitude, and a claim, to a certain extent, on my confidence. I will tell you as much of the history of the wanderer you have harboured, as I can tell without compromising my own peace of mind — my own security, moral and physical, and that of others.

"I am an orphan, the daughter of a clergyman. My parents died before I could know them. I was brought up a dependant; educated in a charitable institution. I will even tell you the name of the establishment, where I passed six years as a pupil, and two as a teacher — Lowood Orphan Asylum, — -shire: you will have heard of it, Mr. Rivers? — the Rev. Robert Brocklehurst is the treasurer."

"I have heard of Mr. Brocklehurst, and I have seen the school."

"I left Lowood nearly a year since to become a private governess. I obtained a good situation, and was happy. This place I was obliged to leave four days before I came here. The reason of my departure I cannot and ought not to explain: it would be useless, dangerous, and would sound incredible. No blame attached to me: I am as free from culpability as any one of you three. Miserable I am, and must be for a time; for the catastrophe which drove me from a house I had found a paradise was of a strange and direful nature. I observed but two points in planning my departure — speed, secrecy: to secure these, I had to leave behind me everything I possessed except a small parcel; which, in my hurry and trouble of mind, I forgot to take out of the coach that brought me to Whitcross. To this neighbourhood, then, I came, quite destitute. I slept two nights in the open air, and wandered about two days without crossing a threshold: but twice in that space of time did I taste food; and it was when brought by hunger, exhaustion, and despair almost to the last gasp, that you, Mr. Rivers, forbade me to perish of want at your door, and took me under the shelter of your roof. I know all your sisters have done for me since — for I have not been insensible during my seeming torpor — and I owe to their spontaneous, genuine, genial compassion as large a debt as to your evangelical charity."

"Don't make her talk any more now, St. John," said Diana, as I paused; "she is evidently not yet fit for excitement. Come to the sofa and sit down now, Miss Elliott."

I gave an involuntary half start at hearing the *alias*: I had forgotten my new name. Mr. Rivers, whom nothing seemed to escape, noticed it at once.

"You said your name was Jane Elliott?" he observed.

"I did say so; and it is the name by which I think it expedient to be called at present, but it is not my real name, and when I hear it, it sounds strange to me."

"Your real name you will not give?"

"No: I fear discovery above all things; and whatever disclosure would lead to it, I avoid."

"You are quite right, I am sure," said Diana. "Now do, brother, let her be at peace a while."

But when St. John had mused a few moments he recommenced as imperturbably and with as much acumen as ever.

"You would not like to be long dependent on our hospitality — you would wish, I see, to dispense as soon as may be with my sisters' compassion, and, above all, with my *charity* (I am quite sensible of the distinction drawn, nor do I resent it — it is just): you desire to be independent of us?"

"I do: I have already said so. Show me how to work, or how to seek work: that is all I now ask; then let me go, if it be but to the meanest cottage; but till then, allow me to stay here: I dread another essay of the horrors of homeless destitution."

"Indeed you *shall* stay here," said Diana, putting her white hand on my head. "You *shall*," repeated Mary, in the tone of undemonstrative sincerity which seemed natural to her.

"My sisters, you see, have a pleasure in keeping you," said Mr. St. John, "as they would have a pleasure in keeping and cherishing a half-frozen bird, some wintry wind might have driven through their casement. I feel more inclination to put you in the way of keeping yourself, and shall endeavour to do so; but observe, my sphere is narrow. I am but the incumbent of a poor country parish: my aid must be of the humblest sort. And if you are inclined to despise the day of small things, seek some more efficient succour than such as I can offer."

"She has already said that she is willing to do anything honest she can do," answered Diana for me; "and you know, St. John, she has no choice of helpers: she is forced to put up with such crusty people as you."

"I will be a dressmaker; I will be a plain-workwoman; I will be a servant, a nurse-girl, if I can be no better," I answered.

"Right," said Mr. St. John, quite coolly. "If such is your spirit, I promise to aid you, in my own time and way."

He now resumed the book with which he had been occupied before tea. I soon withdrew, for I had talked as much, and sat up as long, as my present strength would permit.

CHAPTER XXX

The more I knew of the inmates of Moor House, the better I liked them. In a few days I had so far recovered my health that I could sit up all day, and walk out sometimes. I could join with Diana and Mary in all their occupations; converse with them as much as they wished, and aid them when and where they would allow me. There was a reviving pleasure in this intercourse, of a kind now tasted by me for the first time — the pleasure arising from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles.

I liked to read what they liked to read: what they enjoyed, delighted me; what they approved, I reverenced. They loved their sequestered home. I, too, in the grey, small, antique structure, with its low roof, its latticed casements, its mouldering walls, its avenue of aged firs — all grown aslant under the stress of mountain winds; its garden, dark with yew and holly — and where no flowers but of the hardiest species would bloom — found a charm both potent and permanent. They clung to the purple moors behind and around their dwelling — to the hollow vale into which the pebbly bridle-path leading from their gate descended, and which wound between fern-banks first, and then amongst a few of the wildest little pasture-fields that ever bordered a wilderness of heath, or gave sustenance to a flock of grey moorland sheep, with their little mossy-faced lambs: — they clung to this scene, I say, with a perfect enthusiasm of attachment. I could comprehend the feeling, and share both its strength and truth. I saw the fascination of the locality. I felt the consecration of its loneliness: my eye feasted on the outline of swell and sweep — on the wild colouring communicated to ridge and dell by moss, by heath-bell, by flower-sprinkled turf, by brilliant bracken, and mellow granite crag. These details were just to me what they were to them — so many pure and sweet sources of pleasure. The strong blast and the soft breeze; the rough and the halcyon day; the hours of sunrise and sunset; the moonlight and the clouded night, developed for me, in these regions, the same attraction as for them — wound round my faculties the same spell that entranced theirs.

Indoors we agreed equally well. They were both more accomplished and better read than I was; but with eagerness I followed in the path of knowledge they had trodden before me. I devoured the books they lent me: then it was full satisfaction to discuss with them in the evening what I had perused during the day. Thought fitted thought; opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly.

If in our trio there was a superior and a leader, it was Diana. Physically, she far excelled me: she was handsome; she was vigorous. In her animal spirits there was an affluence of life and certainty of flow, such as excited my wonder, while it baffled my comprehension. I could talk a while when the evening commenced, but the first gush of vivacity and fluency gone, I was fain to sit on a stool at Diana's feet, to rest my head on her knee, and listen alternately to her and Mary, while they sounded thoroughly the topic on which I had but touched. Diana offered to teach me German. I liked to learn of her: I saw the part of instructress pleased and suited her; that of scholar pleased and suited me no less. Our natures dovetailed: mutual affection — of the strongest kind — was the result. They discovered I could draw: their pencils and colour-boxes were immediately at my service. My skill, greater in this one point than theirs, surprised and charmed them. Mary would sit and watch me by the hour together: then she would take lessons; and a docile, intelligent, assiduous pupil she made. Thus occupied, and mutually entertained, days passed like hours, and weeks like days.

As to Mr. St John, the intimacy which had arisen so naturally and rapidly between me and his sisters did not extend to him. One reason of the distance yet observed between us was, that he was comparatively seldom at home: a large proportion of his time appeared devoted to visiting the sick and poor among the scattered population of his parish.

No weather seemed to hinder him in these pastoral excursions: rain or fair, he would, when his hours of morning study were over, take his hat, and, followed by his father's old pointer, Carlo, go out on his mission of love or duty — I scarcely know in which light he regarded it. Sometimes, when the day was very unfavourable, his sisters would expostulate. He would then say, with a peculiar smile, more solemn than cheerful —

"And if I let a gust of wind or a sprinkling of rain turn me aside from these easy tasks, what preparation would such sloth be for the future I propose to myself?"

Diana and Mary's general answer to this question was a sigh, and some minutes of apparently mournful meditation.

But besides his frequent absences, there was another barrier to friendship with him: he seemed of a reserved, an abstracted, and even of a brooding nature. Zealous in his ministerial labours, blameless in his life and habits, he yet did not appear to enjoy that mental serenity, that inward content, which should be the reward of every sincere Christian and practical philanthropist. Often, of an evening, when he sat at the window, his desk and papers before him, he would cease reading or writing, rest his chin on his hand, and deliver himself up to I know not what course of thought; but that it was perturbed and exciting might be seen in the frequent flash and changeful dilation of his eye.

I think, moreover, that Nature was not to him that treasury of delight it was to his sisters. He expressed once, and but once in my hearing, a strong sense of the rugged charm of the hills, and an inborn affection for the dark roof and hoary walls he called his home; but there was more of gloom than pleasure in the tone and words in which the sentiment was manifested; and never did he seem to roam the moors for the sake of their soothing silence — never seek out or dwell upon the thousand peaceful delights they could yield.

Incommunicative as he was, some time elapsed before I had an opportunity of gauging his mind. I first got an idea of its calibre when I heard him preach in his own church at Morton. I wish I could describe that sermon: but it is past my power. I cannot even render faithfully the effect it produced on me.

It began calm — and indeed, as far as delivery and pitch of voice went, it was calm to the end: an earnestly felt, yet strictly restrained zeal breathed soon in the distinct accents, and prompted the nervous language. This grew to force — compressed, condensed, controlled. The heart was thrilled, the mind astonished, by the power of the preacher: neither were softened. Throughout there was a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness; stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines — election, predestination, reprobation — were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom. When he had done, instead of feeling better, calmer, more enlightened by his discourse, I experienced an inexpressible sadness; for it seemed to me — I know not whether equally so to others — that the eloquence to which I had been listening had sprung from a depth where lay turbid dregs of disappointment — where moved troubling impulses of insatiate yearnings and disquieting aspirations. I was sure St. John Rivers — pure-lived, conscientious, zealous as he was — had not yet found that peace of God which passeth all understanding: he had no more found it, I thought, than had I with my concealed and racking regrets for my broken idol and lost elysium — regrets to which I have latterly avoided referring, but which possessed me and tyrannised over me ruthlessly.

Meantime a month was gone. Diana and Mary were soon to leave Moor House, and return to the far different life and scene which awaited them, as governesses in a large, fashionable, south-of-England city, where each held a situation in families by whose wealthy and haughty members they were regarded only as humble dependants, and who neither knew nor sought out their innate excellences, and appreciated only their acquired accomplishments as they appreciated the skill of their cook or the taste of their waiting-woman. Mr. St. John had said nothing to me yet about the employment he had promised to obtain for me; yet it became urgent that I should have a vocation of some kind. One morning, being left alone with him a few minutes in the parlour, I ventured to approach the window-recess — which his table, chair, and desk consecrated as a kind of study — and I was going to speak, though not very well knowing in what words to frame my inquiry — for it is at all times difficult to break the ice of reserve glassing over such natures as his — when he saved me the trouble by being the first to commence a dialogue.

Looking up as I drew near — “You have a question to ask of me?” he said.

“Yes; I wish to know whether you have heard of any service I can offer myself to undertake?”

“I found or devised something for you three weeks ago; but as you seemed both useful and happy here — as my sisters had evidently become attached to you, and your society gave them unusual pleasure — I deemed it inexpedient to break in on your mutual comfort till their approaching departure from Marsh End should render yours necessary."

"And they will go in three days now?" I said.

"Yes; and when they go, I shall return to the parsonage at Morton: Hannah will accompany me; and this old house will be shut up."

I waited a few moments, expecting he would go on with the subject first broached: but he seemed to have entered another train of reflection: his look denoted abstraction from me and my business. I was obliged to recall him to a theme which was of necessity one of close and anxious interest to me.

"What is the employment you had in view, Mr. Rivers? I hope this delay will not have increased the difficulty of securing it."

"Oh, no; since it is an employment which depends only on me to give, and you to accept."

He again paused: there seemed a reluctance to continue. I grew impatient: a restless movement or two, and an eager and exacting glance fastened on his face, conveyed the feeling to him as effectually as words could have done, and with less trouble.

"You need be in no hurry to hear," he said: "let me frankly tell you, I have nothing eligible or profitable to suggest. Before I explain, recall, if you please, my notice, clearly given, that if I helped you, it must be as the blind man would help the lame. I am poor; for I find that, when I have paid my father's debts, all the patrimony remaining to me will be this crumbling grange, the row of scathed firs behind, and the patch of moorish soil, with the yew-trees and holly-bushes in front. I am obscure: Rivers is an old name; but of the three sole descendants of the race, two earn the dependant's crust among strangers, and the third considers himself an alien from his native country — not only for life, but in death. Yes, and deems, and is bound to deem, himself honoured by the lot, and aspires but after the day when the cross of separation from fleshly ties shall be laid on his shoulders, and when the Head of that church-militant of whose humblest members he is one, shall give the word, 'Rise, follow Me!'"

St. John said these words as he pronounced his sermons, with a quiet, deep voice; with an unflushed cheek, and a coruscating radiance of glance. He resumed —

"And since I am myself poor and obscure, I can offer you but a service of poverty and obscurity. *You* may even think it degrading — for I see now your habits have been what the world calls refined: your tastes lean to the ideal, and your society has at least been amongst the educated; but *I* consider that no service degrades which can better our race. I hold that the more arid and unreclaimed the soil where the Christian labourer's task of tillage is appointed him — the scantier the meed his toil brings — the higher the honour. His, under such circumstances, is the destiny of the pioneer; and the first pioneers of the Gospel were the Apostles — their captain was Jesus, the Redeemer, Himself."

"Well?" I said, as he again paused — "proceed."

He looked at me before he proceeded: indeed, he seemed leisurely to read my face, as if its features and lines were characters on a page. The conclusions drawn from this scrutiny he partially expressed in his succeeding observations.

"I believe you will accept the post I offer you," said he, "and hold it for a while: not permanently, though: any more than I could permanently keep the narrow and narrowing — the tranquil, hidden office of English country incumbent; for in your nature is an alloy as detrimental to repose as that in mine, though of a different kind."

"Do explain," I urged, when he halted once more.

"I will; and you shall hear how poor the proposal is, — how trivial — how cramping. I shall not stay long at Morton, now that my father is dead, and that I am my own master. I shall leave the place probably in the course of a twelve-month; but while I do stay, I will exert myself to the utmost for its improvement. Morton, when I came to it two years ago, had no school: the children of the poor were excluded from every hope of progress. I established one for boys: I mean now to open a second school for girls. I have hired a building for the purpose, with a cottage of two rooms attached to it for the mistress's house. Her salary will be thirty pounds a year: her house is already furnished, very simply, but sufficiently, by the kindness of a lady, Miss Oliver; the only daughter of the sole rich man in my parish — Mr. Oliver, the proprietor of a needle-factory and iron-foundry in the valley. The same lady pays for the education and clothing of an orphan from the workhouse, on condition that she shall aid the mistress in such menial offices connected with her own house and the school as her occupation of teaching will prevent her having time to discharge in person. Will you be this mistress?"

He put the question rather hurriedly; he seemed half to expect an indignant, or at least a disdainful rejection of the offer: not knowing all my thoughts and feelings, though guessing some, he could not tell in what light the lot would appear to me. In truth it was humble — but then it was sheltered, and I wanted a safe asylum: it was plodding — but then, compared with that of a governess in a rich house, it was independent; and the fear of servitude with strangers entered my soul like iron: it was not ignoble — not unworthy — not mentally degrading, I made my decision.

"I thank you for the proposal, Mr. Rivers, and I accept it with all my heart."

"But you comprehend me?" he said. "It is a village school: your scholars will be only poor girls — cottagers' children — at the best, farmers' daughters. Knitting, sewing, reading, writing, ciphering, will be all you will have to teach. What will you do with your accomplishments? What, with the largest portion of your mind — sentiments — tastes?"

"Save them till they are wanted. They will keep."

"You know what you undertake, then?"

"I do."

He now smiled: and not a bitter or a sad smile, but one well pleased and deeply gratified.

"And when will you commence the exercise of your function?"

"I will go to my house to-morrow, and open the school, if you like, next week."

"Very well: so be it."

He rose and walked through the room. Standing still, he again looked at me. He shook his head.

"What do you disapprove of, Mr. Rivers?" I asked.

"You will not stay at Morton long: no, no!"

"Why? What is your reason for saying so?"

"I read it in your eye; it is not of that description which promises the maintenance of an even tenor in life."

"I am not ambitious."

He started at the word "ambitious." He repeated, "No. What made you think of ambition? Who is ambitious? I know I am: but how did you find it out?"

"I was speaking of myself."

"Well, if you are not ambitious, you are — " He paused.

"What?"

"I was going to say, impassioned: but perhaps you would have misunderstood the word, and been displeased. I mean, that human affections and sympathies have a most powerful hold on you. I am sure you cannot long be content to pass your leisure in solitude, and to devote your working hours to a monotonous labour wholly void of stimulus: any more than I can be content," he added, with emphasis, "to live here buried in morass, pent in with mountains — my nature, that God gave me, contravened; my faculties, heaven-bestowed, paralysed — made useless. You hear now how I contradict myself. I, who preached contentment with a humble lot, and justified the vocation even of hewers of wood and drawers of water in God's service — I, His ordained minister, almost rave in my restlessness. Well, propensities and principles must be reconciled by some means."

He left the room. In this brief hour I had learnt more of him than in the whole previous month: yet still he puzzled me.

Diana and Mary Rivers became more sad and silent as the day approached for leaving their brother and their home. They both tried to appear as usual; but the sorrow they had to struggle against was one that could not be entirely conquered or concealed. Diana intimated that this would be a different parting from any they had ever yet known. It would probably, as far as St. John was concerned, be a parting for years: it might be a parting for life.

"He will sacrifice all to his long-framed resolves," she said: "natural affection and feelings more potent still. St. John looks quiet, Jane; but he hides a fever in his vitals. You would think him gentle, yet in some things he is inexorable as death; and the worst of it is, my conscience will hardly permit me to dissuade him from his severe decision: certainly, I cannot for a moment blame him for it. It is right, noble, Christian: yet it breaks my heart!" And the tears gushed to her fine eyes. Mary bent her head low over her work.

"We are now without father: we shall soon be without home and brother," she murmured.

At that moment a little accident supervened, which seemed decreed by fate purposely to prove the truth of the adage, that "misfortunes never come singly," and to add to their distresses the vexing one of the slip between the cup and the lip. St. John passed the window reading a letter. He entered.

"Our uncle John is dead," said he.

Both the sisters seemed struck: not shocked or appalled; the tidings appeared in their eyes rather momentous than afflicting.

"Dead?" repeated Diana.

"Yes."

She riveted a searching gaze on her brother's face. "And what then?" she demanded, in a low voice.

"What then, Die?" he replied, maintaining a marble immobility of feature. "What then? Why — nothing. Read."

He threw the letter into her lap. She glanced over it, and handed it to Mary. Mary perused it in silence, and returned it to her brother. All three looked at each other, and all three smiled — a dreary, pensive smile enough.

"Amen! We can yet live," said Diana at last.

"At any rate, it makes us no worse off than we were before," remarked Mary.

"Only it forces rather strongly on the mind the picture of what *might have been*," said Mr. Rivers, "and contrasts it somewhat too vividly with what *is*."

He folded the letter, locked it in his desk, and again went out.

For some minutes no one spoke. Diana then turned to me.

"Jane, you will wonder at us and our mysteries," she said, "and think us hard-hearted beings not to be more moved at the death of so near a relation as an uncle; but we have never seen him or known him. He was my mother's brother. My father and he quarrelled long ago. It was by his advice that my father risked most of his property in the speculation that ruined him. Mutual recrimination passed between them: they parted in anger, and were never reconciled. My uncle engaged afterwards in more prosperous undertakings: it appears he realised a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. He was never married, and had no near kindred but ourselves and one other person, not more closely related than we. My father always cherished the idea that he would atone for his error by leaving his possessions to us; that letter informs us that he has bequeathed every penny to the other relation, with the exception of thirty guineas, to be divided between St. John, Diana, and Mary Rivers, for the purchase of three mourning rings. He had a right, of course, to do as he pleased: and yet a momentary damp is cast on the spirits by the receipt of such news. Mary and I would have esteemed ourselves rich with a thousand pounds each; and to St. John such a sum would have been valuable, for the good it would have enabled him to do."

This explanation given, the subject was dropped, and no further reference made to it by either Mr. Rivers or his sisters. The next day I left Marsh End for Morton. The day after, Diana and Mary quitted it for distant B-. In a week, Mr. Rivers and Hannah repaired to the parsonage: and so the old grange was abandoned.

CHAPTER XXXI

My home, then, when I at last find a home, — is a cottage; a little room with whitewashed walls and a sanded floor, containing four painted chairs and a table, a clock, a cupboard, with two or three plates and dishes, and a set of tea-things in delf. Above, a chamber of the same dimensions as the kitchen, with a deal bedstead and chest of drawers; small, yet too large to be filled with my scanty wardrobe: though the kindness of my gentle and generous friends has increased that, by a modest stock of such things as are necessary.

It is evening. I have dismissed, with the fee of an orange, the little orphan who serves me as a handmaid. I am sitting alone on the hearth. This morning, the village school opened. I had twenty scholars. But three of the number can read: none write or cipher. Several knit, and a few sew a little. They speak with the broadest accent of the district. At present, they and I have a difficulty in understanding each other's language. Some of them are unmannered, rough, intractable, as well as ignorant; but others are docile, have a wish to learn, and evince a disposition that pleases me. I must not forget that these coarsely-clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence, kind feeling, are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best-born. My duty will be to develop these germs: surely I shall find some happiness in discharging that office. Much enjoyment I do not expect in the life opening before me: yet it will, doubtless, if I regulate my mind, and exert my powers as I ought, yield me enough to live on from day to day.

Was I very gleeful, settled, content, during the hours I passed in yonder bare, humble schoolroom this morning and afternoon? Not to deceive myself, I must reply — No: I felt desolate to a degree. I felt — yes, idiot that I am — I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence. I was weakly dismayed at the ignorance, the poverty, the coarseness of all I heard and saw round me. But let me not hate and despise myself too much for these feelings; I know them to be wrong — that is a great step gained; I shall strive to overcome them. To-morrow, I trust, I shall get the better of them partially; and in a few weeks, perhaps, they will be quite subdued. In a few months, it is possible, the happiness of seeing progress, and a change for the better in my scholars may substitute gratification for disgust.

Meantime, let me ask myself one question — Which is better? — To have surrendered to temptation; listened to passion; made no painful effort — no struggle; — but to have sunk down in the silken snare; fallen asleep on the flowers covering it; wakened in a southern clime, amongst the luxuries of a pleasure villa: to have been now living in France, Mr. Rochester's mistress; delirious with his love half my time — for he would — oh, yes, he would have loved me well for a while. He *did* love me — no one will ever love me so again. I shall never more know the sweet homage given to beauty, youth, and grace — for never to any one else shall I seem to possess these charms. He was fond and proud of me — it is what no man besides will ever be. — But where am I wandering, and what am I saying, and above all, feeling? Whether is it better, I ask, to be a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles — fevered with delusive bliss one hour — suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next — or to be a village-schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England?

Yes; I feel now that I was right when I adhered to principle and law, and scorned and crushed the insane promptings of a frenzied moment. God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His providence for the guidance!

Having brought my eventide musings to this point, I rose, went to my door, and looked at the sunset of the harvest-day, and at the quiet fields before my cottage, which, with the school, was distant half a mile from the village. The birds were singing their last strains —

"The air was mild, the dew was balm."

While I looked, I thought myself happy, and was surprised to find myself ere long weeping — and why? For the doom which had reft me from adhesion to my master: for him I was no more to see; for the desperate grief and fatal fury — consequences of my departure — which might now, perhaps, be dragging him from the path of right, too far to leave hope of ultimate restoration thither. At this thought, I turned my face aside from the lovely sky of eve and lonely vale of Morton — I say *lonely*, for in that bend of it visible to me there was no building apparent save the church and the parsonage, half-hid in trees, and, quite at the extremity, the roof of Vale Hall, where the rich Mr. Oliver and his daughter lived. I hid my eyes, and leant my head against the stone frame of my door; but soon a slight noise near the wicket which shut in my tiny garden from the meadow beyond it made me look up. A dog — old Carlo, Mr. Rivers' pointer, as I saw in a moment — was pushing the gate with his nose, and St. John himself leant upon it with folded arms; his brow knit, his gaze, grave almost to displeasure, fixed on me. I asked him to come in.

"No, I cannot stay; I have only brought you a little parcel my sisters left for you. I think it contains a colour-box, pencils, and paper."

I approached to take it: a welcome gift it was. He examined my face, I thought, with austerity, as I came near: the traces of tears were doubtless very visible upon it.

"Have you found your first day's work harder than you expected?" he asked.

"Oh, no! On the contrary, I think in time I shall get on with my scholars very well."

"But perhaps your accommodations — your cottage — your furniture — have disappointed your expectations? They are, in truth, scanty enough; but — " I interrupted —

"My cottage is clean and weather-proof; my furniture sufficient and commodious. All I see has made me thankful, not despondent. I am not absolutely such a fool and sensualist as to regret the absence of a carpet, a sofa, and silver plate; besides, five weeks ago I had nothing — I was an outcast, a beggar, a vagrant; now I have acquaintance, a home, a business. I wonder at the goodness of God; the generosity of my friends; the bounty of my lot. I do not repine."

"But you feel solitude an oppression? The little house there behind you is dark and empty."

"I have hardly had time yet to enjoy a sense of tranquillity, much less to grow impatient under one of loneliness."

"Very well; I hope you feel the content you express: at any rate, your good sense will tell you that it is too soon yet to yield to the vacillating fears of Lot's wife. What you had left before I saw you, of course I do not know; but I counsel you to resist firmly every temptation which would incline you to look back: pursue your present career steadily, for some months at least."

"It is what I mean to do," I answered. St. John continued —

"It is hard work to control the workings of inclination and turn the bent of nature; but that it may be done, I know from experience. God has given us, in a measure, the power to make our own fate; and when our energies seem to demand a sustenance they cannot get — when our will strains after a path we may not follow — we need neither starve from inanition, nor stand still in despair: we have but to seek another nourishment for the mind, as strong as the forbidden food it longed to taste — and perhaps purer; and to hew out for the adventurous foot a road as direct and broad as the one Fortune has blocked up against us, if rougher than it.

"A year ago I was myself intensely miserable, because I thought I had made a mistake in entering the ministry: its uniform duties wearied me to death. I burnt for the more active life of the world — for the more exciting toils of a literary career — for the destiny of an artist, author, orator; anything rather than that of a priest: yes, the heart of a politician, of a soldier, of a votary of glory, a lover of renown, a luster after power, beat under my curate's surplice. I considered; my life was so wretched, it must be changed, or I must die. After a season of darkness and struggling, light broke and relief fell: my cramped existence all at once spread out to a plain without bounds — my powers heard a call from heaven to rise, gather their full strength, spread their wings, and mount beyond ken. God had an errand for me; to bear which afar, to deliver it well, skill and strength, courage and eloquence, the best qualifications of soldier, statesman, and orator, were all needed: for these all centre in the good missionary.

"A missionary I resolved to be. From that moment my state of mind changed; the fetters dissolved and dropped from every faculty, leaving nothing of bondage but its galling soreness — which time only can heal. My father, indeed, imposed the determination, but since his death, I have not a legitimate obstacle to contend with; some affairs settled, a successor for Morton provided, an entanglement or two of the feelings broken through or cut asunder — a last conflict with human weakness, in which I know I shall overcome, because I have vowed that I *will* overcome — and I leave Europe for the East."

He said this, in his peculiar, subdued, yet emphatic voice; looking, when he had ceased speaking, not at me, but at the setting sun, at which I looked too. Both he and I had our backs towards the path leading up the field to the wicket. We had heard no step on that grass-grown track; the water running in the vale was the one lulling sound of the hour and scene; we might well then start when a gay voice, sweet as a silver bell, exclaimed —

"Good evening, Mr. Rivers. And good evening, old Carlo. Your dog is quicker to recognise his friends than you are, sir; he pricked his ears and wagged his tail when I was at the bottom of the field, and you have your back towards me now."

It was true. Though Mr. Rivers had started at the first of those musical accents, as if a thunderbolt had split a cloud over his head, he stood yet, at the close of the sentence, in the same attitude in which the speaker had surprised him — his arm resting on the gate, his face directed towards the west. He turned at last, with measured deliberation. A vision, as it seemed to me, had risen at his side. There appeared, within three feet of him, a form clad in pure white — a youthful, graceful form: full, yet fine in contour; and when, after bending to caress Carlo, it lifted up its head, and threw back a long veil, there bloomed under his glance a face of perfect beauty. Perfect beauty is a strong expression; but I do not retrace or qualify it: as sweet features as ever the temperate clime of Albion moulded; as pure hues of rose and lily as ever her humid gales and vapoury skies generated and screened, justified, in this instance, the term. No charm was wanting, no defect was perceptible; the young girl had regular and delicate lineaments; eyes shaped and coloured as we see them in lovely pictures, large, and dark, and full; the long and shadowy eyelash which encircles a fine eye with so soft a fascination; the pencilled brow which gives such clearness; the white smooth forehead, which adds such repose to the livelier beauties of tint and ray; the cheek oval, fresh, and smooth; the lips, fresh too, ruddy, healthy, sweetly formed; the even and gleaming teeth without flaw; the small dimpled chin; the ornament of rich, plenteous tresses — all advantages, in short, which, combined, realise the ideal of beauty, were fully hers. I wondered, as I looked at this fair creature: I admired her with my whole heart. Nature had surely formed her in a partial mood; and, forgetting her usual stinted step-mother dole of gifts, had endowed this, her darling, with a grand-dame's bounty.

What did St. John Rivers think of this earthly angel? I naturally asked myself that question as I saw him turn to her and look at her; and, as naturally, I sought the answer to the inquiry in his countenance. He had already withdrawn his eye from the Peri, and was looking at a humble tuft of daisies which grew by the wicket.

"A lovely evening, but late for you to be out alone," he said, as he crushed the snowy heads of the closed flowers with his foot.

"Oh, I only came home from S-" (she mentioned the name of a large town some twenty miles distant) "this afternoon. Papa told me you had opened your school, and that the new mistress was come; and so I put on my bonnet after tea, and ran up the valley to see her: this is she?" pointing to me.

"It is," said St. John.

"Do you think you shall like Morton?" she asked of me, with a direct and naive simplicity of tone and manner, pleasing, if child-like.

"I hope I shall. I have many inducements to do so."

"Did you find your scholars as attentive as you expected?"

"Quite."

"Do you like your house?"

"Very much."

"Have I furnished it nicely?"

"Very nicely, indeed."

"And made a good choice of an attendant for you in Alice Wood?"

"You have indeed. She is teachable and handy." (This then, I thought, is Miss Oliver, the heiress; favoured, it seems, in the gifts of fortune, as well as in those of nature! What happy combination of the planets presided over her birth, I wonder?)

"I shall come up and help you to teach sometimes," she added. "It will be a change for me to visit you now and then; and I like a change. Mr. Rivers, I have been *so* gay during my stay at S-. Last night, or rather this morning, I was dancing till two o'clock. The — -th regiment are stationed there since the riots; and the officers are the most agreeable men in the world: they put all our young knife-grinders and scissor merchants to shame."

It seemed to me that Mr. St. John's under lip protruded, and his upper lip curled a moment. His mouth certainly looked a good deal compressed, and the lower part of his face unusually stern and square, as the laughing girl gave him this information. He lifted his gaze, too, from the daisies, and turned it on her. An unsmiling, a searching, a meaning gaze it was. She answered it with a second laugh, and laughter well became her youth, her roses, her dimples, her bright eyes.

As he stood, mute and grave, she again fell to caressing Carlo. "Poor Carlo loves me," said she. "*He* is not stern and distant to his friends; and if he could speak, he would not be silent."

As she patted the dog's head, bending with native grace before his young and austere master, I saw a glow rise to that master's face. I saw his solemn eye melt with sudden fire, and flicker with resistless emotion. Flushed and kindled thus, he looked nearly as beautiful for a man as she for a woman. His chest heaved once, as if his large heart, weary of despotic constriction, had expanded, despite the will, and made a vigorous bound for the attainment of liberty. But he curbed it, I think, as a resolute rider would curb a rearing steed. He responded neither by word nor movement to the gentle advances made him.

"Papa says you never come to see us now," continued Miss Oliver, looking up. "You are quite a stranger at Vale Hall. He is alone this evening, and not very well: will you return with me and visit him?"

"It is not a seasonable hour to intrude on Mr. Oliver," answered St. John.

"Not a seasonable hour! But I declare it is. It is just the hour when papa most wants company: when the works are closed and he has no business to occupy him. Now, Mr. Rivers, *do* come. Why are you so very shy, and so very sombre?" She filled up the hiatus his silence left by a reply of her own.

"I forgot!" she exclaimed, shaking her beautiful curled head, as if shocked at herself. "I am so giddy and thoughtless! *Do* excuse me. It had slipped my memory that you have good reasons to be indisposed for joining in my chatter. Diana and Mary have left you, and Moor House is shut up, and you are so lonely. I am sure I pity you. Do come and see papa."

"Not to-night, Miss Rosamond, not to-night."

Mr. St. John spoke almost like an automaton: himself only knew the effort it cost him thus to refuse.

"Well, if you are so obstinate, I will leave you; for I dare not stay any longer: the dew begins to fall. Good evening!"

She held out her hand. He just touched it. "Good evening!" he repeated, in a voice low and hollow as an echo. She turned, but in a moment returned.

"Are you well?" she asked. Well might she put the question: his face was blanched as her gown.

"Quite well," he enunciated; and, with a bow, he left the gate. She went one way; he another. She turned twice to gaze after him as she tripped fairy-like down the field; he, as he strode firmly across, never turned at all.

This spectacle of another's suffering and sacrifice rapt my thoughts from exclusive meditation on my own. Diana Rivers had designated her brother "inexorable as death." She had not exaggerated.

CHAPTER XXXII

I continued the labours of the village-school as actively and faithfully as I could. It was truly hard work at first. Some time elapsed before, with all my efforts, I could comprehend my scholars and their nature. Wholly untaught, with faculties quite torpid, they seemed to me hopelessly dull; and, at first sight, all dull alike: but I soon found I was mistaken. There was a difference amongst them as amongst the educated; and when I got to know them, and they me, this difference rapidly developed itself. Their amazement at me, my language, my rules, and ways, once subsided, I found some of these heavy-looking, gaping rustics wake up into sharp-witted girls enough. Many showed themselves obliging, and amiable too; and I discovered amongst them not a few examples of natural politeness, and innate self-respect, as well as of excellent capacity, that won both my goodwill and my admiration. These soon took a pleasure in doing their work well, in keeping their persons neat, in learning their tasks regularly, in acquiring quiet and orderly manners. The rapidity of their progress, in some instances, was even surprising; and an honest and happy pride I took in it: besides, I began personally to like some of the best girls; and they liked me. I had amongst my scholars several farmers' daughters: young women grown, almost. These could already read, write, and sew; and to them I taught the elements of grammar, geography, history, and the finer kinds of needlework. I found estimable characters amongst them — characters desirous of information and disposed for improvement — with whom I passed many a pleasant evening hour in their own homes. Their parents then (the farmer and his wife) loaded me with attentions. There was an enjoyment in accepting their simple kindness, and in repaying it by a consideration — a scrupulous regard to their feelings — to which they were not, perhaps, at all times accustomed, and which both charmed and benefited them; because, while it elevated them in their own eyes, it made them emulous to merit the deferential treatment they received.

I felt I became a favourite in the neighbourhood. Whenever I went out, I heard on all sides cordial salutations, and was welcomed with friendly smiles. To live amidst general regard, though it be but the regard of working people, is like "sitting in sunshine, calm and sweet;" serene inward feelings bud and bloom under the ray. At this period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than sank with dejection: and yet, reader, to tell you all, in the midst of this calm, this useful existence — after a day passed in honourable exertion amongst my scholars, an evening spent in drawing or reading contentedly alone — I used to rush into strange dreams at night: dreams many-coloured, agitated, full of the ideal, the stirring, the stormy — dreams where, amidst unusual scenes, charged with adventure, with agitating risk and romantic chance, I still again and again met Mr. Rochester, always at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms, hearing his voice, meeting his eye, touching his hand and cheek, loving him, being loved by him — the hope of passing a lifetime at his side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire. Then I awoke. Then I recalled where I was, and how situated. Then I rose up on my curtainless bed, trembling and quivering; and then the still, dark night witnessed the convulsion of despair, and heard the burst of passion. By nine o'clock the next morning I was punctually opening the school; tranquil, settled, prepared for the steady duties of the day.

Rosamond Oliver kept her word in coming to visit me. Her call at the school was generally made in the course of her morning ride. She would canter up to the door on her pony, followed by a mounted livery servant. Anything more exquisite than her appearance, in her purple habit, with her Amazon's cap of black velvet placed gracefully above the long curls that kissed her cheek and floated to her shoulders, can scarcely be imagined: and it was thus she would enter the rustic building, and glide through the dazzled ranks of the village children. She generally came at the hour when Mr. Rivers was engaged in giving his daily catechising lesson. Keenly, I fear, did the eye of the visitress pierce the young pastor's heart. A sort of instinct seemed to warn him of her entrance, even when he did not see it; and when he was looking quite away from the door, if she appeared at it, his cheek would glow, and his marble-seeming features, though they refused to relax, changed indescribably, and in their very quiescence became expressive of a repressed fervour, stronger than working muscle or darting glance could indicate.

Of course, she knew her power: indeed, he did not, because he could not, conceal it from her. In spite of his Christian stoicism, when she went up and addressed him, and smiled gaily, encouragingly, even fondly in his face, his hand would tremble and his eye burn. He seemed to say, with his sad and resolute look, if he did not say it with his lips, "I love you, and I know you prefer me. It is not despair of success that keeps me dumb. If I offered my heart, I believe you would accept it. But that heart is already laid on a sacred altar: the fire is arranged round it. It will soon be no more than a sacrifice consumed."

And then she would pout like a disappointed child; a pensive cloud would soften her radiant vivacity; she would withdraw her hand hastily from his, and turn in transient petulance from his aspect, at once so heroic and so martyr-like. St. John, no doubt, would have given the world to follow, recall, retain her, when she thus left him; but he would not give one chance of heaven, nor relinquish, for the elysium of her love, one hope of the true, eternal Paradise. Besides, he could not bind all that he had in his nature — the rover, the aspirant, the poet, the priest — in the limits of a single passion. He could not — he would not — renounce his wild field of mission warfare for the parlours and the peace of Vale Hall. I learnt so much from himself in an inroad I once, despite his reserve, had the daring to make on his confidence.

Miss Oliver already honoured me with frequent visits to my cottage. I had learnt her whole character, which was without mystery or disguise: she was coquettish but not heartless; exacting, but not worthlessly selfish. She had been indulged from her birth, but was not absolutely spoilt. She was hasty, but good-humoured; vain (she could not help it, when every glance in the glass showed her such a flush of loveliness), but not affected; liberal-handed; innocent of the pride of wealth; ingenuous; sufficiently intelligent; gay, lively, and unthinking: she was very charming, in short, even to a cool observer of her own sex like me; but she was not profoundly interesting or thoroughly impressive. A very different sort of mind was hers from that, for instance, of the sisters of St. John. Still, I liked her almost as I liked my pupil Adèle; except that, for a child whom we have watched over and taught, a closer affection is engendered than we can give an equally attractive adult acquaintance.

She had taken an amiable caprice to me. She said I was like Mr. Rivers, only, certainly, she allowed, "not one-tenth so handsome, though I was a nice neat little soul enough, but he was an angel." I was, however, good, clever, composed, and firm, like him. I was a *lusus naturæ*, she affirmed, as a village schoolmistress: she was sure my previous history, if known, would make a delightful romance.

One evening, while, with her usual child-like activity, and thoughtless yet not offensive inquisitiveness, she was rummaging the cupboard and the table-drawer of my little kitchen, she discovered first two French books, a volume of Schiller, a German grammar and dictionary, and then my drawing-materials and some sketches, including a pencil-head of a pretty little cherub-like girl, one of my scholars, and sundry views from nature, taken in the Vale of Morton and on the surrounding moors. She was first transfixed with surprise, and then electrified with delight.

"Had I done these pictures? Did I know French and German? What a love — what a miracle I was! I drew better than her master in the first school in S-. Would I sketch a portrait of her, to show to papa?"

"With pleasure," I replied; and I felt a thrill of artist-delight at the idea of copying from so perfect and radiant a model. She had then on a dark-blue silk dress; her arms and her neck were bare; her only ornament was her chestnut tresses, which waved over her shoulders with all the wild grace of natural curls. I took a sheet of fine card-board, and drew a careful outline. I promised myself the pleasure of colouring it; and, as it was getting late then, I told her she must come and sit another day.

She made such a report of me to her father, that Mr. Oliver himself accompanied her next evening — a tall, massive-featured, middle-aged, and grey-headed man, at whose side his lovely daughter looked like a bright flower near a hoary turret. He appeared a taciturn, and perhaps a proud personage; but he was very kind to me. The sketch of Rosamond's portrait pleased him highly: he said I must make a finished picture of it. He insisted, too, on my coming the next day to spend the evening at Vale Hall.

I went. I found it a large, handsome residence, showing abundant evidences of wealth in the proprietor. Rosamond was full of glee and pleasure all the time I stayed. Her father was affable; and when he entered into conversation with me after tea, he expressed in strong terms his approbation of what I had done in Morton school, and said he only feared, from what he saw and heard, I was too good for the place, and would soon quit it for one more suitable.

“Indeed,” cried Rosamond, “she is clever enough to be a governess in a high family, papa.”

I thought I would far rather be where I am than in any high family in the land. Mr. Oliver spoke of Mr. Rivers — of the Rivers family — with great respect. He said it was a very old name in that neighbourhood; that the ancestors of the house were wealthy; that all Morton had once belonged to them; that even now he considered the representative of that house might, if he liked, make an alliance with the best. He accounted it a pity that so fine and talented a young man should have formed the design of going out as a missionary; it was quite throwing a valuable life away. It appeared, then, that her father would throw no obstacle in the way of Rosamond’s union with St. John. Mr. Oliver evidently regarded the young clergyman’s good birth, old name, and sacred profession as sufficient compensation for the want of fortune.

It was the 5th of November, and a holiday. My little servant, after helping me to clean my house, was gone, well satisfied with the fee of a penny for her aid. All about me was spotless and bright — scoured floor, polished grate, and well-rubbed chairs. I had also made myself neat, and had now the afternoon before me to spend as I would.

The translation of a few pages of German occupied an hour; then I got my palette and pencils, and fell to the more soothing, because easier occupation, of completing Rosamond Oliver’s miniature. The head was finished already: there was but the background to tint and the drapery to shade off; a touch of carmine, too, to add to the ripe lips — a soft curl here and there to the tresses — a deeper tinge to the shadow of the lash under the azured eyelid. I was absorbed in the execution of these nice details, when, after one rapid tap, my door unclosed, admitting St. John Rivers.

“I am come to see how you are spending your holiday,” he said. “Not, I hope, in thought? No, that is well: while you draw you will not feel lonely. You see, I mistrust you still, though you have borne up wonderfully so far. I have brought you a book for evening solace,” and he laid on the table a new publication — a poem: one of those genuine productions so often vouchsafed to the fortunate public of those days — the golden age of modern literature. Alas! the readers of our era are less favoured. But courage! I will not pause either to accuse or repine. I know poetry is not dead, nor genius lost; nor has Mammon gained power over either, to bind or slay: they will both assert their existence, their presence, their liberty and strength again one day. Powerful angels, safe in heaven! they smile when sordid souls triumph, and feeble ones weep over their destruction. Poetry destroyed? Genius banished? No! Mediocrity, no: do not let envy prompt you to the thought. No; they not only live, but reign and redeem: and without their divine influence spread everywhere, you would be in hell — the hell of your own meanness.

While I was eagerly glancing at the bright pages of "Marmion" (for "Marmion" it was), St. John stooped to examine my drawing. His tall figure sprang erect again with a start: he said nothing. I looked up at him: he shunned my eye. I knew his thoughts well, and could read his heart plainly; at the moment I felt calmer and cooler than he: I had then temporarily the advantage of him, and I conceived an inclination to do him some good, if I could.

"With all his firmness and self-control," thought I, "he tasks himself too far: locks every feeling and pang within — expresses, confesses, imparts nothing. I am sure it would benefit him to talk a little about this sweet Rosamond, whom he thinks he ought not to marry: I will make him talk."

I said first, "Take a chair, Mr. Rivers." But he answered, as he always did, that he could not stay. "Very well," I responded, mentally, "stand if you like; but you shall not go just yet, I am determined: solitude is at least as bad for you as it is for me. I'll try if I cannot discover the secret spring of your confidence, and find an aperture in that marble breast through which I can shed one drop of the balm of sympathy."

"Is this portrait like?" I asked bluntly.

"Like! Like whom? I did not observe it closely."

"You did, Mr. Rivers."

He almost started at my sudden and strange abruptness: he looked at me astonished. "Oh, that is nothing yet," I muttered within. "I don't mean to be baffled by a little stiffness on your part; I'm prepared to go to considerable lengths." I continued, "You observed it closely and distinctly; but I have no objection to your looking at it again," and I rose and placed it in his hand.

"A well-executed picture," he said; "very soft, clear colouring; very graceful and correct drawing."

"Yes, yes; I know all that. But what of the resemblance? Who is it like?"

Mastering some hesitation, he answered, "Miss Oliver, I presume."

"Of course. And now, sir, to reward you for the accurate guess, I will promise to paint you a careful and faithful duplicate of this very picture, provided you admit that the gift would be acceptable to you. I don't wish to throw away my time and trouble on an offering you would deem worthless."

He continued to gaze at the picture: the longer he looked, the firmer he held it, the more he seemed to covet it. "It is like!" he murmured; "the eye is well managed: the colour, light, expression, are perfect. It smiles!"

"Would it comfort, or would it wound you to have a similar painting? Tell me that. When you are at Madagascar, or at the Cape, or in India, would it be a consolation to have that memento in your possession? or would the sight of it bring recollections calculated to enervate and distress?"

He now furtively raised his eyes: he glanced at me, irresolute, disturbed: he again surveyed the picture.

"That I should like to have it is certain: whether it would be judicious or wise is another question."

Since I had ascertained that Rosamond really preferred him, and that her father was not likely to oppose the match, I — less exalted in my views than St. John — had been strongly disposed in my own heart to advocate their union. It seemed to me that, should he become the possessor of Mr. Oliver's large fortune, he might do as much good with it as if he went and laid his genius out to wither, and his strength to waste, under a tropical sun. With this persuasion I now answered —

"As far as I can see, it would be wiser and more judicious if you were to take to yourself the original at once."

By this time he had sat down: he had laid the picture on the table before him, and with his brow supported on both hands, hung fondly over it. I discerned he was now neither angry nor shocked at my audacity. I saw even that to be thus frankly addressed on a subject he had deemed unapproachable — to hear it thus freely handled — was beginning to be felt by him as a new pleasure — an unhoped-for relief. Reserved people often really need the frank discussion of their sentiments and griefs more than the expansive. The sternest-seeming stoic is human after all; and to "burst" with boldness and good-will into "the silent sea" of their souls is often to confer on them the first of obligations.

"She likes you, I am sure," said I, as I stood behind his chair, "and her father respects you. Moreover, she is a sweet girl — rather thoughtless; but you would have sufficient thought for both yourself and her. You ought to marry her."

"*Does* she like me?" he asked.

"Certainly; better than she likes any one else. She talks of you continually: there is no subject she enjoys so much or touches upon so often."

"It is very pleasant to hear this," he said — "very: go on for another quarter of an hour." And he actually took out his watch and laid it upon the table to measure the time.

"But where is the use of going on," I asked, "when you are probably preparing some iron blow of contradiction, or forging a fresh chain to fetter your heart?"

"Don't imagine such hard things. Fancy me yielding and melting, as I am doing: human love rising like a freshly opened fountain in my mind and overflowing with sweet inundation all the field I have so carefully and with such labour prepared — so assiduously sown with the seeds of good intentions, of self-denying plans. And now it is deluged with a nectarous flood — the young germs swamped — delicious poison cankering them: now

I see myself stretched on an ottoman in the drawing-room at Vale Hall at my bride Rosamond Oliver's feet: she is talking to me with her sweet voice — gazing down on me with those eyes your skilful hand has copied so well — smiling at me with these coral lips. She is mine — I am hers — this present life and passing world suffice to me. Hush! say nothing — my heart is full of delight — my senses are entranced — let the time I marked pass in peace."

I humoured him: the watch ticked on: he breathed fast and low: I stood silent. Amidst this hush the quartet sped; he replaced the watch, laid the picture down, rose, and stood on the hearth.

"Now," said he, "that little space was given to delirium and delusion. I rested my temples on the breast of temptation, and put my neck voluntarily under her yoke of flowers. I tasted her cup. The pillow was burning: there is an asp in the garland: the wine has a bitter taste: her promises are hollow — her offers false: I see and know all this."

I gazed at him in wonder.

"It is strange," pursued he, "that while I love Rosamond Oliver so wildly — with all the intensity, indeed, of a first passion, the object of which is exquisitely beautiful, graceful, fascinating — I experience at the same time a calm, unwarped consciousness that she would not make me a good wife; that she is not the partner suited to me; that I should discover this within a year after marriage; and that to twelve months' rapture would succeed a lifetime of regret. This I know."

"Strange indeed!" I could not help ejaculating.

"While something in me," he went on, "is acutely sensible to her charms, something else is as deeply impressed with her defects: they are such that she could sympathise in nothing I aspired to — co-operate in nothing I undertook. Rosamond a sufferer, a labourer, a female apostle? Rosamond a missionary's wife? No!"

"But you need not be a missionary. You might relinquish that scheme."

"Relinquish! What! my vocation? My great work? My foundation laid on earth for a mansion in heaven? My hopes of being numbered in the band who have merged all ambitions in the glorious one of bettering their race — of carrying knowledge into the realms of ignorance — of substituting peace for war — freedom for bondage — religion for superstition — the hope of heaven for the fear of hell? Must I relinquish that? It is dearer than the blood in my veins. It is what I have to look forward to, and to live for."

After a considerable pause, I said — "And Miss Oliver? Are her disappointment and sorrow of no interest to you?"

"Miss Oliver is ever surrounded by suitors and flatterers: in less than a month, my image will be effaced from her heart. She will forget me; and will marry, probably, some one who will make her far happier than I should do."

"You speak coolly enough; but you suffer in the conflict. You are wasting away."

"No. If I get a little thin, it is with anxiety about my prospects, yet unsettled — my departure, continually procrastinated. Only this morning, I received intelligence that the successor, whose arrival I have been so long expecting, cannot be ready to replace me for three months to come yet; and perhaps the three months may extend to six."

"You tremble and become flushed whenever Miss Oliver enters the schoolroom."

Again the surprised expression crossed his face. He had not imagined that a woman would dare to speak so to a man. For me, I felt at home in this sort of discourse. I could never rest in communication with strong, discreet, and refined minds, whether male or female, till I had passed the outworks of conventional reserve, and crossed the threshold of confidence, and won a place by their heart's very hearthstone.

"You are original," said he, "and not timid. There is something brave in your spirit, as well as penetrating in your eye; but allow me to assure you that you partially misinterpret my emotions. You think them more profound and potent than they are. You give me a larger allowance of sympathy than I have a just claim to. When I colour, and when I shade before Miss Oliver, I do not pity myself. I scorn the weakness. I know it is ignoble: a mere fever of the flesh: not, I declare, the convulsion of the soul. *That* is just as fixed as a rock, firm set in the depths of a restless sea. Know me to be what I am — a cold hard man."

I smiled incredulously.

"You have taken my confidence by storm," he continued, "and now it is much at your service. I am simply, in my original state — stripped of that blood-bleached robe with which Christianity covers human deformity — a cold, hard, ambitious man. Natural affection only, of all the sentiments, has permanent power over me. Reason, and not feeling, is my guide; my ambition is unlimited: my desire to rise higher, to do more than others, insatiable. I honour endurance, perseverance, industry, talent; because these are the means by which men achieve great ends and mount to lofty eminence. I watch your career with interest, because I consider you a specimen of a diligent, orderly, energetic woman: not because I deeply compassionate what you have gone through, or what you still suffer."

"You would describe yourself as a mere pagan philosopher," I said.

"No. There is this difference between me and deistic philosophers: I believe; and I believe the Gospel. You missed your epithet. I am not a pagan, but a Christian philosopher — a follower of the sect of Jesus. As His disciple I adopt His pure, His merciful, His benignant doctrines. I advocate them: I am sworn to spread them. Won in youth to religion, she has cultivated my original qualities thus: — From the minute germ, natural affection, she has developed the overshadowing tree, philanthropy. From the wild stringy root of human uprightness, she has reared a due sense of the Divine justice. Of the ambition to win power and renown for my wretched self, she has formed the ambition to spread my Master's kingdom; to achieve victories for the standard of the cross. So much has religion done for me; turning the original materials to the best account; pruning and training nature. But she could not eradicate nature: nor will it be eradicated 'till this mortal shall put on immortality.'"

Having said this, he took his hat, which lay on the table beside my palette. Once more he looked at the portrait.

"She *is* lovely," he murmured. "She is well named the Rose of the World, indeed!"

"And may I not paint one like it for you?"

"*Cui bono*? No."

He drew over the picture the sheet of thin paper on which I was accustomed to rest my hand in painting, to prevent the cardboard from being sullied. What he suddenly saw on this blank paper, it was impossible for me to tell; but something had caught his eye. He took it up with a snatch; he looked at the edge; then shot a glance at me, inexpressibly peculiar, and quite incomprehensible: a glance that seemed to take and make note of every point in my shape, face, and dress; for it traversed all, quick, keen as lightning. His lips parted, as if to speak: but he checked the coming sentence, whatever it was.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Nothing in the world," was the reply; and, replacing the paper, I saw him dexterously tear a narrow slip from the margin. It disappeared in his glove; and, with one hasty nod and "good-afternoon," he vanished.

"Well!" I exclaimed, using an expression of the district, "that caps the globe, however!"

I, in my turn, scrutinised the paper; but saw nothing on it save a few dingy stains of paint where I had tried the tint in my pencil. I pondered the mystery a minute or two; but finding it insolvable, and being certain it could not be of much moment, I dismissed, and soon forgot it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

When Mr. St. John went, it was beginning to snow; the whirling storm continued all night. The next day a keen wind brought fresh and blinding falls; by twilight the valley was drifted up and almost impassable. I had closed my shutter, laid a mat to the door to prevent the snow from blowing in under it, trimmed my fire, and after sitting nearly an hour on the hearth listening to the muffled fury of the tempest, I lit a candle, took down "Marmion," and beginning —

"Day set on Norham's castled steep,
And Tweed's fair river broad and deep,
  And Cheviot's mountains lone;
The massive towers, the donjon keep,
The flanking walls that round them sweep,
  In yellow lustre shone" —

I soon forgot storm in music.

I heard a noise: the wind, I thought, shook the door. No; it was St. John Rivers, who, lifting the latch, came in out of the frozen hurricane — the howling darkness — and stood before me: the cloak that covered his tall figure all white as a glacier. I was almost in consternation, so little had I expected any guest from the blocked-up vale that night.

"Any ill news?" I demanded. "Has anything happened?"

"No. How very easily alarmed you are!" he answered, removing his cloak and hanging it up against the door, towards which he again coolly pushed the mat which his entrance had deranged. He stamped the snow from his boots.

"I shall sully the purity of your floor," said he, "but you must excuse me for once." Then he approached the fire. "I have had hard work to get here, I assure you," he observed, as he warmed his hands over the flame. "One drift took me up to the waist; happily the snow is quite soft yet."

"But why are you come?" I could not forbear saying.

"Rather an inhospitable question to put to a visitor; but since you ask it, I answer simply to have a little talk with you; I got tired of my mute books and empty rooms. Besides, since yesterday I have experienced the excitement of a person to whom a tale has been half-told, and who is impatient to hear the sequel."

He sat down. I recalled his singular conduct of yesterday, and really I began to fear his wits were touched. If he were insane, however, his was a very cool and collected insanity: I had never seen that handsome-featured face of his look more like chiselled marble than it did just now, as he put aside his snow-wet hair from his forehead and let the firelight shine free on his pale brow and cheek as pale, where it grieved me to discover the hollow trace of care or sorrow now so plainly graved. I waited, expecting he would say something I could at least comprehend; but his hand was now at his chin, his finger on his lip: he was thinking. It struck me that his hand looked wasted like his face. A perhaps uncalled-for gush of pity came over my heart: I was moved to say —

"I wish Diana or Mary would come and live with you: it is too bad that you should be quite alone; and you are recklessly rash about your own health."

"Not at all," said he: "I care for myself when necessary. I am well now. What do you see amiss in me?"

This was said with a careless, abstracted indifference, which showed that my solicitude was, at least in his opinion, wholly superfluous. I was silenced.

He still slowly moved his finger over his upper lip, and still his eye dwelt dreamily on the glowing grate; thinking it urgent to say something, I asked him presently if he felt any cold draught from the door, which was behind him.

"No, no!" he responded shortly and somewhat testily.

"Well," I reflected, "if you won't talk, you may be still; I'll let you alone now, and return to my book."

So I snuffed the candle and resumed the perusal of "Marmion." He soon stirred; my eye was instantly drawn to his movements; he only took out a morocco pocket-book, thence produced a letter, which he read in silence, folded it, put it back, relapsed into meditation. It was vain to try to read with such an inscrutable fixture before me; nor could I, in impatience, consent to be dumb; he might rebuff me if he liked, but talk I would.

"Have you heard from Diana and Mary lately?"

"Not since the letter I showed you a week ago."

"There has not been any change made about your own arrangements? You will not be summoned to leave England sooner than you expected?"

"I fear not, indeed: such chance is too good to befall me." Baffled so far, I changed my ground. I bethought myself to talk about the school and my scholars.

"Mary Garrett's mother is better, and Mary came back to the school this morning, and I shall have four new girls next week from the Foundry Close — they would have come to-day but for the snow."

"Indeed!"

"Mr. Oliver pays for two."

"Does he?"

"He means to give the whole school a treat at Christmas."

"I know."

"Was it your suggestion?"

"No."

"Whose, then?"

"His daughter's, I think."

"It is like her: she is so good-natured."

"Yes."

Again came the blank of a pause: the clock struck eight strokes. It aroused him; he uncrossed his legs, sat erect, turned to me.

"Leave your book a moment, and come a little nearer the fire," he said.

Wondering, and of my wonder finding no end, I complied.

"Half-an-hour ago," he pursued, "I spoke of my impatience to hear the sequel of a tale: on reflection, I find the matter will be better managed by my assuming the narrator's part, and converting you into a listener. Before commencing, it is but fair to warn you that the story will sound somewhat hackneyed in your ears; but stale details often regain a degree of freshness when they pass through new lips. For the rest, whether trite or novel, it is short.

"Twenty years ago, a poor curate — never mind his name at this moment — fell in love with a rich man's daughter; she fell in love with him, and married him, against the advice of all her friends, who consequently disowned her immediately after the wedding. Before two years passed, the rash pair were both dead, and laid quietly side by side under one slab. (I have seen their grave; it formed part of the pavement of a huge churchyard surrounding the grim, soot-black old cathedral of an overgrown manufacturing town in —-shire.) They left a daughter, which, at its very birth, Charity received in her lap — cold as that of the snow-drift I almost stuck fast in to-night. Charity carried the friendless thing to the house of its rich maternal relations; it was reared by an aunt-in-law, called (I come to names now) Mrs. Reed of Gateshead. You start — did you hear a noise? I daresay it is only a rat scrambling along the rafters of the adjoining schoolroom: it was a barn before I had it repaired and altered, and barns are generally haunted by rats. — To proceed. Mrs. Reed kept the orphan ten years: whether it was happy or not with her, I cannot say, never having been told; but at the end of that time she transferred it to a place you know — being no other than Lowood School, where you so long resided yourself. It seems her career there was very honourable: from a pupil, she became a teacher, like yourself — really it strikes me there are parallel points in her history and yours — she left it to be a governess: there, again, your fates were analogous; she undertook the education of the ward of a certain Mr. Rochester."

"Mr. Rivers!" I interrupted.

"I can guess your feelings," he said, "but restrain them for a while: I have nearly finished; hear me to the end. Of Mr. Rochester's character I know nothing, but the one fact that he professed to offer honourable marriage to this young girl, and that at the very altar she discovered he had a wife yet alive, though a lunatic. What his subsequent conduct and proposals were is a matter of pure conjecture; but when an event transpired which rendered inquiry after the governess necessary, it was discovered she was gone — no one could tell when, where, or how. She had left Thornfield Hall in the night; every research after her course had been vain: the country had been scoured far and wide; no vestige of information could be gathered respecting her. Yet that she should be found is become a matter of serious urgency: advertisements have been put in all the papers; I myself have received a letter from one Mr. Briggs, a solicitor, communicating the details I have just imparted. Is it not an odd tale?"

"Just tell me this," said I, "and since you know so much, you surely can tell it me — what of Mr. Rochester? How and where is he? What is he doing? Is he well?"

"I am ignorant of all concerning Mr. Rochester: the letter never mentions him but to narrate the fraudulent and illegal attempt I have adverted to. You should rather ask the name of the governess — the nature of the event which requires her appearance."

"Did no one go to Thornfield Hall, then? Did no one see Mr. Rochester?"

"I suppose not."

"But they wrote to him?"

"Of course."

"And what did he say? Who has his letters?"

"Mr. Briggs intimates that the answer to his application was not from Mr. Rochester, but from a lady: it is signed 'Alice Fairfax.'"

I felt cold and dismayed: my worst fears then were probably true: he had in all probability left England and rushed in reckless desperation to some former haunt on the Continent. And what opiate for his severe sufferings — what object for his strong passions — had he sought there? I dared not answer the question. Oh, my poor master — once almost my husband — whom I had often called "my dear Edward!"

"He must have been a bad man," observed Mr. Rivers.

"You don't know him — don't pronounce an opinion upon him," I said, with warmth.

"Very well," he answered quietly: "and indeed my head is otherwise occupied than with him: I have my tale to finish. Since you won't ask the governess's name, I must tell it of my own accord. Stay! I have it here — it is always more satisfactory to see important points written down, fairly committed to black and white."

And the pocket-book was again deliberately produced, opened, sought through; from one of its compartments was extracted a shabby slip of paper, hastily torn off: I recognised in its texture and its stains of ultra-marine, and lake, and vermillion, the ravished margin of the portrait-cover. He got up, held it close to my eyes: and I read, traced in Indian ink, in my own handwriting, the words "Jane Eyre" — the work doubtless of some moment of abstraction.

"Briggs wrote to me of a Jane Eyre:" he said, "the advertisements demanded a Jane Eyre: I knew a Jane Elliott. — I confess I had my suspicions, but it was only yesterday afternoon they were at once resolved into certainty. You own the name and renounce the *alias*?"

"Yes — yes; but where is Mr. Briggs? He perhaps knows more of Mr. Rochester than you do."

"Briggs is in London. I should doubt his knowing anything at all about Mr. Rochester; it is not in Mr. Rochester he is interested. Meantime, you forget essential points in pursuing trifles: you do not inquire why Mr. Briggs sought after you — what he wanted with you."

"Well, what did he want?"

"Merely to tell you that your uncle, Mr. Eyre of Madeira, is dead; that he has left you all his property, and that you are now rich — merely that — nothing more."

"I! — rich?"

"Yes, you, rich — quite an heiress."

Silence succeeded.

"You must prove your identity of course," resumed St. John presently: "a step which will offer no difficulties; you can then enter on immediate possession. Your fortune is vested in the English funds; Briggs has the will and the necessary documents."

Here was a new card turned up! It is a fine thing, reader, to be lifted in a moment from indigence to wealth — a very fine thing; but not a matter one can comprehend, or consequently enjoy, all at once. And then there are other chances in life far more thrilling and rapture-giving: *this* is solid, an affair of the actual world, nothing ideal about it: all its associations are solid and sober, and its manifestations are the same. One does not jump, and spring, and shout hurrah! at hearing one has got a fortune; one begins to consider responsibilities, and to ponder business; on a base of steady satisfaction rise certain grave cares, and we contain ourselves, and brood over our bliss with a solemn brow.

Besides, the words Legacy, Bequest, go side by side with the words, Death, Funeral. My uncle I had heard was dead — my only relative; ever since being made aware of his existence, I had cherished the hope of one day seeing him: now, I never should. And then this money came only to me: not to me and a rejoicing family, but to my isolated self. It was a grand boon doubtless; and independence would be glorious — yes, I felt that — that thought swelled my heart.

"You unbend your forehead at last," said Mr. Rivers. "I thought Medusa had looked at you, and that you were turning to stone. Perhaps now you will ask how much you are worth?"

"How much am I worth?"

"Oh, a trifle! Nothing of course to speak of — twenty thousand pounds, I think they say — but what is that?"

"Twenty thousand pounds?"

Here was a new stunner — I had been calculating on four or five thousand. This news actually took my breath for a moment: Mr. St. John, whom I had never heard laugh before, laughed now.

"Well," said he, "if you had committed a murder, and I had told you your crime was discovered, you could scarcely look more aghast."

"It is a large sum — don't you think there is a mistake?"

"No mistake at all."

"Perhaps you have read the figures wrong — it may be two thousand!"

"It is written in letters, not figures, — twenty thousand."

I again felt rather like an individual of but average gastronomical powers sitting down to feast alone at a table spread with provisions for a hundred. Mr. Rivers rose now and put his cloak on.

"If it were not such a very wild night," he said, "I would send Hannah down to keep you company: you look too desperately miserable to be left alone. But Hannah, poor woman! could not stride the drifts so well as I: her legs are not quite so long: so I must e'en leave you to your sorrows. Good-night."

He was lifting the latch: a sudden thought occurred to me. "Stop one minute!" I cried.

"Well?"

"It puzzles me to know why Mr. Briggs wrote to you about me; or how he knew you, or could fancy that you, living in such an out-of-the-way place, had the power to aid in my discovery."

"Oh! I am a clergyman," he said; "and the clergy are often appealed to about odd matters." Again the latch rattled.

"No; that does not satisfy me!" I exclaimed: and indeed there was something in the hasty and unexplanatory reply which, instead of allaying, piqued my curiosity more than ever.

"It is a very strange piece of business," I added; "I must know more about it."

"Another time."

"No; to-night! — to-night!" and as he turned from the door, I placed myself between it and him. He looked rather embarrassed.

"You certainly shall not go till you have told me all," I said.

"I would rather not just now."

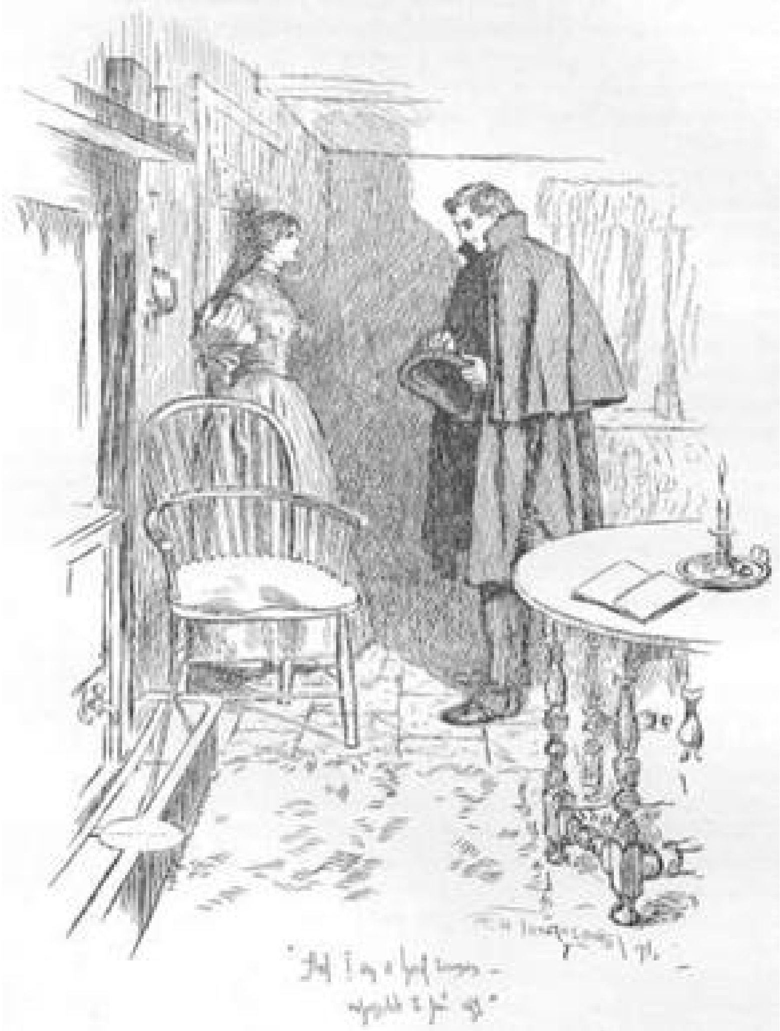
"You shall! — you must!"

"I would rather Diana or Mary informed you."

Of course these objections wrought my eagerness to a climax: gratified it must be, and that without delay; and I told him so.

"But I apprised you that I was a hard man," said he, "difficult to persuade."

"And I am a hard woman, — impossible to put off."



"And then," he pursued, "I am cold: no fervour infects me."

"Whereas I am hot, and fire dissolves ice. The blaze there has thawed all the snow from your cloak; by the same token, it has streamed on to my floor, and made it like a trampled street. As you hope ever to be forgiven, Mr. Rivers, the high crime and misdemeanour of spoiling a sanded kitchen, tell me what I wish to know."

"Well, then," he said, "I yield; if not to your earnestness, to your perseverance: as stone is worn by continual dropping. Besides, you must know some day, — as well now as later. Your name is Jane Eyre?"

"Of course: that was all settled before."

"You are not, perhaps, aware that I am your namesake? — that I was christened St. John Eyre Rivers?"

"No, indeed! I remember now seeing the letter E. comprised in your initials written in books you have at different times lent me; but I never asked for what name it stood. But what then? Surely — "

I stopped: I could not trust myself to entertain, much less to express, the thought that rushed upon me — that embodied itself, — that, in a second, stood out a strong, solid probability. Circumstances knit themselves, fitted themselves, shot into order: the chain that had been lying hitherto a formless lump of links was drawn out straight, — every ring was perfect, the connection complete. I knew, by instinct, how the matter stood, before St. John had said another word; but I cannot expect the reader to have the same intuitive perception, so I must repeat his explanation.

"My mother's name was Eyre; she had two brothers; one a clergyman, who married Miss Jane Reed, of Gateshead; the other, John Eyre, Esq., merchant, late of Funchal, Madeira. Mr. Briggs, being Mr. Eyre's solicitor, wrote to us last August to inform us of our uncle's death, and to say that he had left his property to his brother the clergyman's orphan daughter, overlooking us, in consequence of a quarrel, never forgiven, between him and my father. He wrote again a few weeks since, to intimate that the heiress was lost, and asking if we knew anything of her. A name casually written on a slip of paper has enabled me to find her out. You know the rest." Again he was going, but I set my back against the door.

"Do let me speak," I said; "let me have one moment to draw breath and reflect." I paused — he stood before me, hat in hand, looking composed enough. I resumed —

"Your mother was my father's sister?"

"Yes."

"My aunt, consequently?"

He bowed.

"My uncle John was your uncle John? You, Diana, and Mary are his sister's children, as I am his brother's child?"

"Undeniably."

"You three, then, are my cousins; half our blood on each side flows from the same source?"

"We are cousins; yes."

I surveyed him. It seemed I had found a brother: one I could be proud of, — one I could love; and two sisters, whose qualities were such, that, when I knew them but as mere strangers, they had inspired me with genuine affection and admiration. The two girls, on whom, kneeling down on the wet ground, and looking through the low, latticed window of Moor House kitchen, I had gazed with so bitter a mixture of interest and despair, were my near kinswomen; and the young and stately gentleman who had found me almost dying at his threshold was my blood relation. Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed! — wealth to the heart! — a mine of pure, genial affections. This was a blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating; — not like the ponderous gift of gold: rich and welcome enough in its way, but sobering from its weight. I now clapped my hands in sudden joy — my pulse bounded, my veins thrilled.

"Oh, I am glad! — I am glad!" I exclaimed.

St. John smiled. "Did I not say you neglected essential points to pursue trifles?" he asked. "You were serious when I told you you had got a fortune; and now, for a matter of no moment, you are excited."

"What can you mean? It may be of no moment to you; you have sisters and don't care for a cousin; but I had nobody; and now three relations, — or two, if you don't choose to be counted, — are born into my world full-grown. I say again, I am glad!"

I walked fast through the room: I stopped, half suffocated with the thoughts that rose faster than I could receive, comprehend, settle them: — thoughts of what might, could, would, and should be, and that ere long. I looked at the blank wall: it seemed a sky thick with ascending stars, — every one lit me to a purpose or delight. Those who had saved my life, whom, till this hour, I had loved barrenly, I could now benefit. They were under a yoke, — I could free them: they were scattered, — I could reunite them: the independence, the affluence which was mine, might be theirs too. Were we not four? Twenty thousand pounds shared equally would be five thousand each, justice — enough and to spare: justice would be done, — mutual happiness secured. Now the wealth did not weigh on me: now it was not a mere bequest of coin, — it was a legacy of life, hope, enjoyment.

How I looked while these ideas were taking my spirit by storm, I cannot tell; but I perceived soon that Mr. Rivers had placed a chair behind me, and was gently attempting to make me sit down on it. He also advised me to be composed; I scorned the insinuation of helplessness and distraction, shook off his hand, and began to walk about again.

"Write to Diana and Mary to-morrow," I said, "and tell them to come home directly. Diana said they would both consider themselves rich with a thousand pounds, so with five thousand they will do very well."

"Tell me where I can get you a glass of water," said St. John; "you must really make an effort to tranquillise your feelings."

"Nonsense! and what sort of an effect will the bequest have on you? Will it keep you in England, induce you to marry Miss Oliver, and settle down like an ordinary mortal?"

"You wander: your head becomes confused. I have been too abrupt in communicating the news; it has excited you beyond your strength."

"Mr. Rivers! you quite put me out of patience: I am rational enough; it is you who misunderstand, or rather who affect to misunderstand."

"Perhaps, if you explained yourself a little more fully, I should comprehend better."

"Explain! What is there to explain? You cannot fail to see that twenty thousand pounds, the sum in question, divided equally between the nephew and three nieces of our uncle, will give five thousand to each? What I want is, that you should write to your sisters and tell them of the fortune that has accrued to them."

"To you, you mean."

"I have intimated my view of the case: I am incapable of taking any other. I am not brutally selfish, blindly unjust, or fiendishly ungrateful. Besides, I am resolved I will have a home and connections. I like Moor House, and I will live at Moor House; I like Diana and Mary, and I will attach myself for life to Diana and Mary. It would please and benefit me to have five thousand pounds; it would torment and oppress me to have twenty thousand; which, moreover, could never be mine in justice, though it might in law. I abandon to you, then, what is absolutely superfluous to me. Let there be no opposition, and no discussion about it; let us agree amongst each other, and decide the point at once."

"This is acting on first impulses; you must take days to consider such a matter, ere your word can be regarded as valid."

"Oh! if all you doubt is my sincerity, I am easy: you see the justice of the case?"

"I *do* see a certain justice; but it is contrary to all custom. Besides, the entire fortune is your right: my uncle gained it by his own efforts; he was free to leave it to whom he would: he left it to you. After all, justice permits you to keep it: you may, with a clear conscience, consider it absolutely your own."

"With me," said I, "it is fully as much a matter of feeling as of conscience: I must indulge my feelings; I so seldom have had an opportunity of doing so. Were you to argue, object, and annoy me for a year, I could not forego the delicious pleasure of which I have caught a glimpse — that of repaying, in part, a mighty obligation, and winning to myself lifelong friends."

"You think so now," rejoined St. John, "because you do not know what it is to possess, nor consequently to enjoy wealth: you cannot form a notion of the importance twenty thousand pounds would give you; of the place it would enable you to take in society; of the prospects it would open to you: you cannot — "

"And you," I interrupted, "cannot at all imagine the craving I have for fraternal and sisterly love. I never had a home, I never had brothers or sisters; I must and will have them now: you are not reluctant to admit me and own me, are you?"

"Jane, I will be your brother — my sisters will be your sisters — without stipulating for this sacrifice of your just rights."

"Brother? Yes; at the distance of a thousand leagues! Sisters? Yes; slaving amongst strangers! I, wealthy — gorged with gold I never earned and do not merit! You, penniless! Famous equality and fraternisation! Close union! Intimate attachment!"

"But, Jane, your aspirations after family ties and domestic happiness may be realised otherwise than by the means you contemplate: you may marry."

"Nonsense, again! Marry! I don't want to marry, and never shall marry."

"That is saying too much: such hazardous affirmations are a proof of the excitement under which you labour."

"It is not saying too much: I know what I feel, and how averse are my inclinations to the bare thought of marriage. No one would take me for love; and I will not be regarded in the light of a mere money speculation. And I do not want a stranger — unsympathising, alien, different from me; I want my kindred: those with whom I have full fellow-feeling. Say again you will be my brother: when you uttered the words I was satisfied, happy; repeat them, if you can, repeat them sincerely."

"I think I can. I know I have always loved my own sisters; and I know on what my affection for them is grounded, — respect for their worth and admiration of their talents. You too have principle and mind: your tastes and habits resemble Diana's and Mary's; your presence is always agreeable to me; in your conversation I have already for some time found a salutary solace. I feel I can easily and naturally make room in my heart for you, as my third and youngest sister."

"Thank you: that contents me for to-night. Now you had better go; for if you stay longer, you will perhaps irritate me afresh by some mistrustful scruple."

"And the school, Miss Eyre? It must now be shut up, I suppose?"

"No. I will retain my post of mistress till you get a substitute."

He smiled approbation: we shook hands, and he took leave.

I need not narrate in detail the further struggles I had, and arguments I used, to get matters regarding the legacy settled as I wished. My task was a very hard one; but, as I was absolutely resolved — as my cousins saw at length that my mind was really and immutably fixed on making a just division of the property — as they must in their own hearts have felt the equity of the intention; and must, besides, have been innately conscious that in my place they would have done precisely what I wished to do — they yielded at length so far as to consent to put the affair to arbitration. The judges chosen were Mr. Oliver and an able lawyer: both coincided in my opinion: I carried my point. The instruments of transfer were drawn out: St. John, Diana, Mary, and I, each became possessed of a competency.

CHAPTER XXXIV

It was near Christmas by the time all was settled: the season of general holiday approached. I now closed Morton school, taking care that the parting should not be barren on my side. Good fortune opens the hand as well as the heart wonderfully; and to give somewhat when we have largely received, is but to afford a vent to the unusual ebullition of the sensations. I had long felt with pleasure that many of my rustic scholars liked me, and when we parted, that consciousness was confirmed: they manifested their affection plainly and strongly. Deep was my gratification to find I had really a place in their unsophisticated hearts: I promised them that never a week should pass in future that I did not visit them, and give them an hour's teaching in their school.

Mr. Rivers came up as, having seen the classes, now numbering sixty girls, file out before me, and locked the door, I stood with the key in my hand, exchanging a few words of special farewell with some half-dozen of my best scholars: as decent, respectable, modest, and well-informed young women as could be found in the ranks of the British peasantry. And that is saying a great deal; for after all, the British peasantry are the best taught, best mannered, most self-respecting of any in Europe: since those days I have seen paysannes and Bäuerinnen; and the best of them seemed to me ignorant, coarse, and besotted, compared with my Morton girls.

"Do you consider you have got your reward for a season of exertion?" asked Mr. Rivers, when they were gone. "Does not the consciousness of having done some real good in your day and generation give pleasure?"

"Doubtless."

"And you have only toiled a few months! Would not a life devoted to the task of regenerating your race be well spent?"

"Yes," I said; "but I could not go on for ever so: I want to enjoy my own faculties as well as to cultivate those of other people. I must enjoy them now; don't recall either my mind or body to the school; I am out of it and disposed for full holiday."

He looked grave. "What now? What sudden eagerness is this you evince? What are you going to do?"

"To be active: as active as I can. And first I must beg you to set Hannah at liberty, and get somebody else to wait on you."

"Do you want her?"

"Yes, to go with me to Moor House. Diana and Mary will be at home in a week, and I want to have everything in order against their arrival."

"I understand. I thought you were for flying off on some excursion. It is better so: Hannah shall go with you."

"Tell her to be ready by to-morrow then; and here is the schoolroom key: I will give you the key of my cottage in the morning."

He took it. "You give it up very gleefully," said he; "I don't quite understand your light-heartedness, because I cannot tell what employment you propose to yourself as a substitute for the one you are relinquishing. What aim, what purpose, what ambition in life have you now?"

"My first aim will be to *clean down* (do you comprehend the full force of the expression?) — to *clean down* Moor House from chamber to cellar; my next to rub it up with bees-wax, oil, and an indefinite number of cloths, till it glitters again; my third, to arrange every chair, table, bed, carpet, with mathematical precision; afterwards I shall go near to ruin you in coals and peat to keep up good fires in every room; and lastly, the two days preceding that on which your sisters are expected will be devoted by Hannah and me to such a beating of eggs, sorting of currants, grating of spices, compounding of Christmas cakes, chopping up of materials for mince-pies, and solemnising of other culinary rites, as words can convey but an inadequate notion of to the uninitiated like you. My purpose, in short, is to have all things in an absolutely perfect state of readiness for Diana and Mary before next Thursday; and my ambition is to give them a beau-ideal of a welcome when they come."

St. John smiled slightly: still he was dissatisfied.

"It is all very well for the present," said he; "but seriously, I trust that when the first flush of vivacity is over, you will look a little higher than domestic endearments and household joys."

"The best things the world has!" I interrupted.

"No, Jane, no: this world is not the scene of fruition; do not attempt to make it so: nor of rest; do not turn slothful."

"I mean, on the contrary, to be busy."

"Jane, I excuse you for the present: two months' grace I allow you for the full enjoyment of your new position, and for pleasing yourself with this late-found charm of relationship; but *then*, I hope you will begin to look beyond Moor House and Morton, and sisterly society, and the selfish calm and sensual comfort of civilised affluence. I hope your energies will then once more trouble you with their strength."

I looked at him with surprise. "St. John," I said, "I think you are almost wicked to talk so. I am disposed to be as content as a queen, and you try to stir me up to restlessness! To what end?"

"To the end of turning to profit the talents which God has committed to your keeping; and of which He will surely one day demand a strict account. Jane, I shall watch you closely and anxiously — I warn you of that. And try to restrain the disproportionate fervour with which you throw yourself into commonplace home pleasures. Don't cling so tenaciously to ties of the flesh; save your constancy and ardour for an adequate cause; forbear to waste them on trite transient objects. Do you hear, Jane?"

"Yes; just as if you were speaking Greek. I feel I have adequate cause to be happy, and I *will* be happy. Goodbye!"

Happy at Moor House I was, and hard I worked; and so did Hannah: she was charmed to see how jovial I could be amidst the bustle of a house turned topsy-turvy — how I could brush, and dust, and clean, and cook. And really, after a day or two of confusion worse confounded, it was delightful by degrees to invoke order from the chaos ourselves had made. I had previously taken a journey to S — - to purchase some new furniture: my cousins having given me *carte blanche* to effect what alterations I pleased, and a sum having been set aside for that purpose. The ordinary sitting-room and bedrooms I left much as they were: for I knew Diana and Mary would derive more pleasure from seeing again the old homely tables, and chairs, and beds, than from the spectacle of the smartest innovations. Still some novelty was necessary, to give to their return the piquancy with which I wished it to be invested. Dark handsome new carpets and curtains, an arrangement of some carefully selected antique ornaments in porcelain and bronze, new coverings, and mirrors, and dressing-cases, for the toilet tables, answered the end: they looked fresh without being glaring. A spare parlour and bedroom I refurnished entirely, with old mahogany and crimson upholstery: I laid canvas on the passage, and carpets on the stairs. When all was finished, I thought Moor House as complete a model of bright modest snugness within, as it was, at this season, a specimen of wintry waste and desert dreariness without.

The eventful Thursday at length came. They were expected about dark, and ere dusk fires were lit upstairs and below; the kitchen was in perfect trim; Hannah and I were dressed, and all was in readiness.

St. John arrived first. I had entreated him to keep quite clear of the house till everything was arranged: and, indeed, the bare idea of the commotion, at once sordid and trivial, going on within its walls sufficed to scare him to estrangement. He found me in the kitchen, watching the progress of certain cakes for tea, then baking. Approaching the hearth, he asked, "If I was at last satisfied with housemaid's work?" I answered by inviting him to accompany me on a general inspection of the result of my labours. With some difficulty, I got him to make the tour of the house. He just looked in at the doors I opened; and when he had wandered upstairs and downstairs, he said I must have gone through a great deal of fatigue and trouble to have effected such considerable changes in so short a time: but not a syllable did he utter indicating pleasure in the improved aspect of his abode.

This silence damped me. I thought perhaps the alterations had disturbed some old associations he valued. I inquired whether this was the case: no doubt in a somewhat crest-fallen tone.

"Not at all; he had, on the contrary, remarked that I had scrupulously respected every association: he feared, indeed, I must have bestowed more thought on the matter than it was worth. How many minutes, for instance, had I devoted to studying the arrangement of this very room? — By-the-bye, could I tell him where such a book was?"

I showed him the volume on the shelf: he took it down, and withdrawing to his accustomed window recess, he began to read it.

Now, I did not like this, reader. St. John was a good man; but I began to feel he had spoken truth of himself when he said he was hard and cold. The humanities and amenities of life had no attraction for him — its peaceful enjoyments no charm. Literally, he lived only to aspire — after what was good and great, certainly; but still he would never rest, nor approve of others resting round him. As I looked at his lofty forehead, still and pale as a white stone — at his fine lineaments fixed in study — I comprehended all at once that he would hardly make a good husband: that it would be a trying thing to be his wife. I understood, as by inspiration, the nature of his love for Miss Oliver; I agreed with him that it was but a love of the senses. I comprehended how he should despise himself for the feverish influence it exercised over him; how he should wish to stifle and destroy it; how he should mistrust its ever conducting permanently to his happiness or hers. I saw he was of the material from which nature hews her heroes — Christian and Pagan — her lawgivers, her statesmen, her conquerors: a steadfast bulwark for great interests to rest upon; but, at the fireside, too often a cold cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place.

"This parlour is not his sphere," I reflected: "the Himalayan ridge or Caffre bush, even the plague-cursed Guinea Coast swamp would suit him better. Well may he eschew the calm of domestic life; it is not his element: there his faculties stagnate — they cannot develop or appear to advantage. It is in scenes of strife and danger — where courage is proved, and energy exercised, and fortitude tasked — that he will speak and move, the leader and superior. A merry child would have the advantage of him on this hearth. He is right to choose a missionary's career — I see it now."

"They are coming! they are coming!" cried Hannah, throwing open the parlour door. At the same moment old Carlo barked joyfully. Out I ran. It was now dark; but a rumbling of wheels was audible. Hannah soon had a lantern lit. The vehicle had stopped at the wicket; the driver opened the door: first one well-known form, then another, stepped out. In a minute I had my face under their bonnets, in contact first with Mary's soft cheek, then with Diana's flowing curls. They laughed — kissed me — then Hannah: patted Carlo, who was half wild with delight; asked eagerly if all was well; and being assured in the affirmative, hastened into the house.

They were stiff with their long and jolting drive from Whitcross, and chilled with the frosty night air; but their pleasant countenances expanded to the cheerful firelight. While the driver and Hannah brought in the boxes, they demanded St. John. At this moment he advanced from the parlour. They both threw their arms round his neck at once. He gave each one quiet kiss, said in a low tone a few words of welcome, stood a while to be talked to, and then, intimating that he supposed they would soon rejoin him in the parlour, withdrew there as to a place of refuge.

I had lit their candles to go upstairs, but Diana had first to give hospitable orders respecting the driver; this done, both followed me. They were delighted with the renovation and decorations of their rooms; with the new drapery, and fresh carpets, and rich tinted china vases: they expressed their gratification ungrudgingly. I had the pleasure of feeling that my arrangements met their wishes exactly, and that what I had done added a vivid charm to their joyous return home.

Sweet was that evening. My cousins, full of exhilaration, were so eloquent in narrative and comment, that their fluency covered St. John's taciturnity: he was sincerely glad to see his sisters; but in their glow of fervour and flow of joy he could not sympathise. The event of the day — that is, the return of Diana and Mary — pleased him; but the accompaniments of that event, the glad tumult, the garrulous glee of reception irked him: I saw he wished the calmer morrow was come. In the very meridian of the night's enjoyment, about an hour after tea, a rap was heard at the door. Hannah entered with the intimation that "a poor lad was come, at that unlikely time, to fetch Mr. Rivers to see his mother, who was drawing away."

"Where does she live, Hannah?"

"Clear up at Whitcross Brow, almost four miles off, and moor and moss all the way."

"Tell him I will go."

"I'm sure, sir, you had better not. It's the worst road to travel after dark that can be: there's no track at all over the bog. And then it is such a bitter night — the keenest wind you ever felt. You had better send word, sir, that you will be there in the morning."

But he was already in the passage, putting on his cloak; and without one objection, one murmur, he departed. It was then nine o'clock: he did not return till midnight. Starved and tired enough he was: but he looked happier than when he set out. He had performed an act of duty; made an exertion; felt his own strength to do and deny, and was on better terms with himself.

I am afraid the whole of the ensuing week tried his patience. It was Christmas week: we took to no settled employment, but spent it in a sort of merry domestic dissipation. The air of the moors, the freedom of home, the dawn of prosperity, acted on Diana and Mary's spirits like some life-giving elixir: they were gay from morning till noon, and from noon till night. They could always talk; and their discourse, witty, pithy, original, had such charms for me, that I preferred listening to, and sharing in it, to doing anything else. St. John did not rebuke our vivacity; but he escaped from it: he was seldom in the house; his parish was large, the population scattered, and he found daily business in visiting the sick and poor in its different districts.

One morning at breakfast, Diana, after looking a little pensive for some minutes, asked him, "If his plans were yet unchanged."

"Unchanged and unchangeable," was the reply. And he proceeded to inform us that his departure from England was now definitively fixed for the ensuing year.

"And Rosamond Oliver?" suggested Mary, the words seeming to escape her lips involuntarily: for no sooner had she uttered them, than she made a gesture as if wishing to recall them. St. John had a book in his hand — it was his unsocial custom to read at meals — he closed it, and looked up.

"Rosamond Oliver," said he, "is about to be married to Mr. Granby, one of the best connected and most estimable residents in S-, grandson and heir to Sir Frederic Granby: I had the intelligence from her father yesterday."

His sisters looked at each other and at me; we all three looked at him: he was serene as glass.

"The match must have been got up hastily," said Diana: "they cannot have known each other long."

"But two months: they met in October at the county ball at S-. But where there are no obstacles to a union, as in the present case, where the connection is in every point desirable, delays are unnecessary: they will be married as soon as S — - Place, which Sir Frederic gives up to them, can he refitted for their reception."

The first time I found St. John alone after this communication, I felt tempted to inquire if the event distressed him: but he seemed so little to need sympathy, that, so far from venturing to offer him more, I experienced some shame at the recollection of what I had already hazarded. Besides, I was out of practice in talking to him: his reserve was again frozen over, and my frankness was congealed beneath it. He had not kept his promise of treating me like his sisters; he continually made little chilling differences between us, which did not at all tend to the development of cordiality: in short, now that I was acknowledged his kinswoman, and lived under the same roof with him, I felt the distance between us to be far greater than when he had known me only as the village schoolmistress. When I remembered how far I had once been admitted to his confidence, I could hardly comprehend his present frigidity.

Such being the case, I felt not a little surprised when he raised his head suddenly from the desk over which he was stooping, and said —

"You see, Jane, the battle is fought and the victory won."

Startled at being thus addressed, I did not immediately reply: after a moment's hesitation I answered —

"But are you sure you are not in the position of those conquerors whose triumphs have cost them too dear? Would not such another ruin you?"

"I think not; and if I were, it does not much signify; I shall never be called upon to contend for such another. The event of the conflict is decisive: my way is now clear; I thank God for it!" So saying, he returned to his papers and his silence.

As our mutual happiness (*i.e.*, Diana's, Mary's, and mine) settled into a quieter character, and we resumed our usual habits and regular studies, St. John stayed more at home: he sat with us in the same room, sometimes for hours together. While Mary drew, Diana pursued a course of encyclopædic reading she had (to my awe and amazement) undertaken, and I fagged away at German, he pondered a mystic lore of his own: that of some Eastern tongue, the acquisition of which he thought necessary to his plans.

Thus engaged, he appeared, sitting in his own recess, quiet and absorbed enough; but that blue eye of his had a habit of leaving the outlandish-looking grammar, and wandering over, and sometimes fixing upon us, his fellow-students, with a curious intensity of observation: if caught, it would be instantly withdrawn; yet ever and anon, it returned searchingly to our table. I wondered what it meant: I wondered, too, at the punctual satisfaction he never failed to exhibit on an occasion that seemed to me of small moment, namely, my weekly visit to Morton school; and still more was I puzzled when, if the day was unfavourable, if there was snow, or rain, or high wind, and his sisters urged me not to go, he would invariably make light of their solicitude, and encourage me to accomplish the task without regard to the elements.

"Jane is not such a weakling as you would make her," he would say: "she can bear a mountain blast, or a shower, or a few flakes of snow, as well as any of us. Her constitution is both sound and elastic; — better calculated to endure variations of climate than many more robust."

And when I returned, sometimes a good deal tired, and not a little weather-beaten, I never dared complain, because I saw that to murmur would be to vex him: on all occasions fortitude pleased him; the reverse was a special annoyance.

One afternoon, however, I got leave to stay at home, because I really had a cold. His sisters were gone to Morton in my stead: I sat reading Schiller; he, deciphering his crabbed Oriental scrolls. As I exchanged a translation for an exercise, I happened to look his way: there I found myself under the influence of the ever-watchful blue eye. How long it had been searching me through and through, and over and over, I cannot tell: so keen was it, and yet so cold, I felt for the moment superstitious — as if I were sitting in the room with something uncanny.

"Jane, what are you doing?"

"Learning German."

"I want you to give up German and learn Hindostanee."

"You are not in earnest?"

"In such earnest that I must have it so: and I will tell you why."

He then went on to explain that Hindostanee was the language he was himself at present studying; that, as he advanced, he was apt to forget the commencement; that it would assist him greatly to have a pupil with whom he might again and again go over the elements, and so fix them thoroughly in his mind; that his choice had hovered for some time between me and his sisters; but that he had fixed on me because he saw I could sit at a task the longest of the three. Would I do him this favour? I should not, perhaps, have to make the sacrifice long, as it wanted now barely three months to his departure.

St. John was not a man to be lightly refused: you felt that every impression made on him, either for pain or pleasure, was deep-graved and permanent. I consented. When Diana and Mary returned, the former found her scholar transferred from her to her brother: she laughed, and both she and Mary agreed that St. John should never have persuaded them to such a step. He answered quietly —

"I know it."

I found him a very patient, very forbearing, and yet an exacting master: he expected me to do a great deal; and when I fulfilled his expectations, he, in his own way, fully testified his approbation. By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference. I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by, because a tiresomely importunate instinct reminded me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him. I was so fully aware that only serious moods and occupations were acceptable, that in his presence every effort to sustain or follow any other became vain: I fell under a freezing spell. When he said "go," I went; "come," I came; "do this," I did it. But I did not love my servitude: I wished, many a time, he had continued to neglect me.

One evening when, at bedtime, his sisters and I stood round him, bidding him good-night, he kissed each of them, as was his custom; and, as was equally his custom, he gave me his hand. Diana, who chanced to be in a frolicsome humour (*she* was not painfully controlled by his will; for hers, in another way, was as strong), exclaimed —

"St. John! you used to call Jane your third sister, but you don't treat her as such: you should kiss her too."

She pushed me towards him. I thought Diana very provoking, and felt uncomfortably confused; and while I was thus thinking and feeling, St. John bent his head; his Greek face was brought to a level with mine, his eyes questioned my eyes piercingly — he kissed me. There are no such things as marble kisses or ice kisses, or I should say my ecclesiastical cousin's salute belonged to one of these classes; but there may be experiment kisses, and his was an experiment kiss. When given, he viewed me to learn the result; it was not striking: I am sure I did not blush; perhaps I might have turned a little pale, for I felt as if this kiss were a seal affixed to my fetters. He never omitted the ceremony afterwards, and the gravity and quiescence with which I underwent it, seemed to invest it for him with a certain charm.

As for me, I daily wished more to please him; but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation. He wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach; it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted. The thing was as impossible as to mould my irregular features to his correct and classic pattern, to give to my changeable green eyes the sea-blue tint and solemn lustre of his own.

Not his ascendancy alone, however, held me in thrall at present. Of late it had been easy enough for me to look sad: a cankering evil sat at my heart and drained my happiness at its source — the evil of suspense.

Perhaps you think I had forgotten Mr. Rochester, reader, amidst these changes of place and fortune. Not for a moment. His idea was still with me, because it was not a vapour sunshine could disperse, nor a sand-traced effigy storms could wash away; it was a name graven on a tablet, fated to last as long as the marble it inscribed. The craving to know what had become of him followed me everywhere; when I was at Morton, I re-entered my cottage every evening to think of that; and now at Moor House, I sought my bedroom each night to brood over it.

In the course of my necessary correspondence with Mr. Briggs about the will, I had inquired if he knew anything of Mr. Rochester's present residence and state of health; but, as St. John had conjectured, he was quite ignorant of all concerning him. I then wrote to Mrs. Fairfax, entreating information on the subject. I had calculated with certainty on this step answering my end: I felt sure it would elicit an early answer. I was astonished when a fortnight passed without reply; but when two months wore away, and day after day the post arrived and brought nothing for me, I fell a prey to the keenest anxiety.

I wrote again: there was a chance of my first letter having missed. Renewed hope followed renewed effort: it shone like the former for some weeks, then, like it, it faded, flickered: not a line, not a word reached me. When half a year wasted in vain expectancy, my hope died out, and then I felt dark indeed.

A fine spring shone round me, which I could not enjoy. Summer approached; Diana tried to cheer me: she said I looked ill, and wished to accompany me to the sea-side. This St. John opposed; he said I did not want dissipation, I wanted employment; my present life was too purposeless, I required an aim; and, I suppose, by way of supplying deficiencies, he prolonged still further my lessons in Hindostanee, and grew more urgent in requiring their accomplishment: and I, like a fool, never thought of resisting him — I could not resist him.

One day I had come to my studies in lower spirits than usual; the ebb was occasioned by a poignantly felt disappointment. Hannah had told me in the morning there was a letter for me, and when I went down to take it, almost certain that the long-looked for tidings were vouchsafed me at last, I found only an unimportant note from Mr. Briggs on business. The bitter check had wrung from me some tears; and now, as I sat poring over the crabbed characters and flourishing tropes of an Indian scribe, my eyes filled again.

St. John called me to his side to read; in attempting to do this my voice failed me: words were lost in sobs. He and I were the only occupants of the parlour: Diana was practising her music in the drawing-room, Mary was gardening — it was a very fine May day, clear, sunny, and breezy. My companion expressed no surprise at this emotion, nor did he question me as to its cause; he only said —

"We will wait a few minutes, Jane, till you are more composed." And while I smothered the paroxysm with all haste, he sat calm and patient, leaning on his desk, and looking like a physician watching with the eye of science an expected and fully understood crisis in a patient's malady. Having stifled my sobs, wiped my eyes, and muttered something about not being very well that morning, I resumed my task, and succeeded in completing it. St. John put away my books and his, locked his desk, and said —

"Now, Jane, you shall take a walk; and with me."

"I will call Diana and Mary."

"No; I want only one companion this morning, and that must be you. Put on your things; go out by the kitchen-door: take the road towards the head of Marsh Glen: I will join you in a moment."

I know no medium: I never in my life have known any medium in my dealings with positive, hard characters, antagonistic to my own, between absolute submission and determined revolt. I have always faithfully observed the one, up to the very moment of bursting, sometimes with volcanic vehemence, into the other; and as neither present circumstances warranted, nor my present mood inclined me to mutiny, I observed careful obedience to St. John's directions; and in ten minutes I was treading the wild track of the glen, side by side with him.

The breeze was from the west: it came over the hills, sweet with scents of heath and rush; the sky was of stainless blue; the stream descending the ravine, swelled with past spring rains, poured along plentiful and clear, catching golden gleams from the sun, and sapphire tints from the firmament. As we advanced and left the track, we trod a soft turf, mossy fine and emerald green, minutely enamelled with a tiny white flower, and spangled with a star-like yellow blossom: the hills, meantime, shut us quite in; for the glen, towards its head, wound to their very core.

"Let us rest here," said St. John, as we reached the first stragglers of a battalion of rocks, guarding a sort of pass, beyond which the beck rushed down a waterfall; and where, still a little farther, the mountain shook off turf and flower, had only heath for raiment and crag for gem — where it exaggerated the wild to the savage, and exchanged the fresh for the frowning — where it guarded the forlorn hope of solitude, and a last refuge for silence.

I took a seat: St. John stood near me. He looked up the pass and down the hollow; his glance wandered away with the stream, and returned to traverse the unclouded heaven which coloured it: he removed his hat, let the breeze stir his hair and kiss his brow. He seemed in communion with the genius of the haunt: with his eye he bade farewell to something.

"And I shall see it again," he said aloud, "in dreams when I sleep by the Ganges: and again in a more remote hour — when another slumber overcomes me — on the shore of a darker stream!"

Strange words of a strange love! An austere patriot's passion for his fatherland! He sat down; for half-an-hour we never spoke; neither he to me nor I to him: that interval past, he recommenced —

"Jane, I go in six weeks; I have taken my berth in an East Indiaman which sails on the 20th of June."

"God will protect you; for you have undertaken His work," I answered.

"Yes," said he, "there is my glory and joy. I am the servant of an infallible Master. I am not going out under human guidance, subject to the defective laws and erring control of my feeble fellow-worms: my king, my lawgiver, my captain, is the All-perfect. It seems strange to me that all round me do not burn to enlist under the same banner, — to join in the same enterprise."

"All have not your powers, and it would be folly for the feeble to wish to march with the strong."

"I do not speak to the feeble, or think of them: I address only such as are worthy of the work, and competent to accomplish it."

"Those are few in number, and difficult to discover."

"You say truly; but when found, it is right to stir them up — to urge and exhort them to the effort — to show them what their gifts are, and why they were given — to speak Heaven's message in their ear, — to offer them, direct from God, a place in the ranks of His chosen."

"If they are really qualified for the task, will not their own hearts be the first to inform them of it?"

I felt as if an awful charm was framing round and gathering over me: I trembled to hear some fatal word spoken which would at once declare and rivet the spell.

"And what does *your* heart say?" demanded St. John.

"My heart is mute, — my heart is mute," I answered, struck and thrilled.

"Then I must speak for it," continued the deep, relentless voice. "Jane, come with me to India: come as my helpmeet and fellow-labourer."

The glen and sky spun round: the hills heaved! It was as if I had heard a summons from Heaven — as if a visionary messenger, like him of Macedonia, had enounced, "Come over and help us!" But I was no apostle, — I could not behold the herald, — I could not receive his call.

"Oh, St. John!" I cried, "have some mercy!"

I appealed to one who, in the discharge of what he believed his duty, knew neither mercy nor remorse. He continued —

"God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary's wife you must — shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you — not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service."

"I am not fit for it: I have no vocation," I said.

He had calculated on these first objections: he was not irritated by them. Indeed, as he leaned back against the crag behind him, folded his arms on his chest, and fixed his countenance, I saw he was prepared for a long and trying opposition, and had taken in a stock of patience to last him to its close — resolved, however, that that close should be conquest for him.

"Humility, Jane," said he, "is the groundwork of Christian virtues: you say right that you are not fit for the work. Who is fit for it? Or who, that ever was truly called, believed himself worthy of the summons? I, for instance, am but dust and ashes. With St. Paul, I acknowledge myself the chiefest of sinners; but I do not suffer this sense of my personal vileness to daunt me. I know my Leader: that He is just as well as mighty; and while He has chosen a feeble instrument to perform a great task, He will, from the boundless stores of His providence, supply the inadequacy of the means to the end. Think like me, Jane — trust like me. It is the Rock of Ages I ask you to lean on: do not doubt but it will bear the weight of your human weakness."

"I do not understand a missionary life: I have never studied missionary labours."

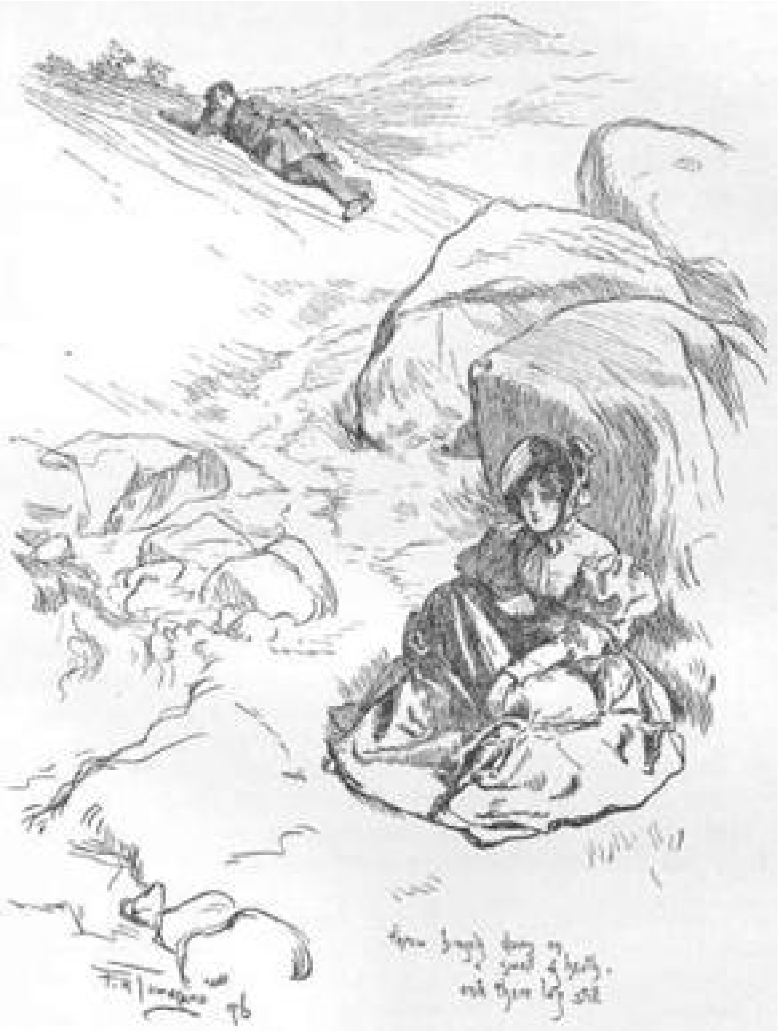
"There I, humble as I am, can give you the aid you want: I can set you your task from hour to hour; stand by you always; help you from moment to moment. This I could do in the beginning: soon (for I know your powers) you would be as strong and apt as myself, and would not require my help."

"But my powers — where are they for this undertaking? I do not feel them. Nothing speaks or stirs in me while you talk. I am sensible of no light kindling — no life quickening — no voice counselling or cheering. Oh, I wish I could make you see how much my mind is at this moment like a rayless dungeon, with one shrinking fear fettered in its depths — the fear of being persuaded by you to attempt what I cannot accomplish!"

"I have an answer for you — hear it. I have watched you ever since we first met: I have made you my study for ten months. I have proved you in that time by sundry tests: and what have I seen and elicited? In the village school I found you could perform well, punctually, uprightly, labour uncongenial to your habits and inclinations; I saw you could perform it with capacity and tact: you could win while you controlled. In the calm with which you learnt you had become suddenly rich, I read a mind clear of the vice of Demas: — lucre had no undue power over you. In the resolute readiness with which you cut your wealth into four shares, keeping but one to yourself, and relinquishing the three others to the claim of abstract justice, I recognised a soul that revelled in the flame and excitement of sacrifice. In the tractability with which, at my wish, you forsook a study in which you were interested, and adopted another because it interested me; in the untiring assiduity with which you have since persevered in it — in the unflagging energy and unshaken temper with which you have met its difficulties — I acknowledge the complement of the qualities I seek. Jane, you are docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant, and courageous; very gentle, and very heroic: cease to mistrust yourself — I can trust you unreservedly. As a conductress of Indian schools, and a helper amongst Indian women, your assistance will be to me invaluable."

My iron shroud contracted round me; persuasion advanced with slow sure step. Shut my eyes as I would, these last words of his succeeded in making the way, which had seemed blocked up, comparatively clear. My work, which had appeared so vague, so hopelessly diffuse, condensed itself as he proceeded, and assumed a definite form under his shaping hand. He waited for an answer. I demanded a quarter of an hour to think, before I again hazarded a reply.

"Very willingly," he rejoined; and rising, he strode a little distance up the pass, threw himself down on a swell of heath, and there lay still.


threw himself down on a swell of heath, and there lay still
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"I *can* do what he wants me to do: I am forced to see and acknowledge that," I meditated, — "that is, if life be spared me. But I feel mine is not the existence to be long protracted under an Indian sun. What then? He does not care for that: when my time came to die, he would resign me, in all serenity and sanctity, to the God who gave me. The case is very plain before me. In leaving England, I should leave a loved but empty land — Mr. Rochester is not there; and if he were, what is, what can that ever be to me? My business is to live without him now: nothing so absurd, so weak as to drag on from day to day, as if I were waiting some impossible change in circumstances, which might reunite me to him. Of course (as St. John once said) I must seek another interest in life to replace the one lost: is not the occupation he now offers me truly the most glorious man can adopt or God assign? Is it not, by its noble cares and sublime results, the one best calculated to fill the void left by uptorn affections and demolished hopes? I believe I must say, Yes — and yet I shudder. Alas! If I join St. John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death. And how will the interval between leaving England for India, and India for the grave, be filled? Oh, I know well! That, too, is very clear to my vision. By straining to satisfy St. John till my sinews ache, I *shall* satisfy him — to the finest central point and farthest outward circle of his expectations. If I *do* go with him — if I *do* make the sacrifice he urges, I will make it absolutely: I will throw all on the altar — heart, vitals, the entire victim. He will never love me; but he shall approve me; I will show him energies he has not yet seen, resources he has never suspected. Yes, I can work as hard as he can, and with as little grudging.

"Consent, then, to his demand is possible: but for one item — one dreadful item. It is — that he asks me to be his wife, and has no more of a husband's heart for me than that frowning giant of a rock, down which the stream is foaming in yonder gorge. He prizes me as a soldier would a good weapon; and that is all. Unmarried to him, this would never grieve me; but can I let him complete his calculations — coolly put into practice his plans — go through the wedding ceremony? Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. As his sister, I might accompany him — not as his wife: I will tell him so."

I looked towards the knoll: there he lay, still as a prostrate column; his face turned to me: his eye beaming watchful and keen. He started to his feet and approached me.

"I am ready to go to India, if I may go free."

"Your answer requires a commentary," he said; "it is not clear."

"You have hitherto been my adopted brother — I, your adopted sister: let us continue as such: you and I had better not marry."

He shook his head. "Adopted fraternity will not do in this case. If you were my real sister it would be different: I should take you, and seek no wife. But as it is, either our union must be consecrated and sealed by marriage, or it cannot exist: practical obstacles oppose themselves to any other plan. Do you not see it, Jane? Consider a moment — your strong sense will guide you."

I did consider; and still my sense, such as it was, directed me only to the fact that we did not love each other as man and wife should: and therefore it inferred we ought not to marry. I said so. "St. John," I returned, "I regard you as a brother — you, me as a sister: so let us continue."

"We cannot — we cannot," he answered, with short, sharp determination: "it would not do. You have said you will go with me to India: remember — you have said that."

"Conditionally."

"Well — well. To the main point — the departure with me from England, the co-operation with me in my future labours — you do not object. You have already as good as put your hand to the plough: you are too consistent to withdraw it. You have but one end to keep in view — how the work you have undertaken can best be done. Simplify your complicated interests, feelings, thoughts, wishes, aims; merge all considerations in one purpose: that of fulfilling with effect — with power — the mission of your great Master. To do so, you must have a coadjutor: not a brother — that is a loose tie — but a husband. I, too, do not want a sister: a sister might any day be taken from me. I want a wife: the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in life, and retain absolutely till death."

I shuddered as he spoke: I felt his influence in my marrow — his hold on my limbs.

"Seek one elsewhere than in me, St. John: seek one fitted to you."

"One fitted to my purpose, you mean — fitted to my vocation. Again I tell you it is not the insignificant private individual — the mere man, with the man's selfish senses — I wish to mate: it is the missionary."

"And I will give the missionary my energies — it is all he wants — but not myself: that would be only adding the husk and shell to the kernel. For them he has no use: I retain them."

"You cannot — you ought not. Do you think God will be satisfied with half an oblation? Will He accept a mutilated sacrifice? It is the cause of God I advocate: it is under His standard I enlist you. I cannot accept on His behalf a divided allegiance: it must be entire."

"Oh! I will give my heart to God," I said. "*You* do not want it."

I will not swear, reader, that there was not something of repressed sarcasm both in the tone in which I uttered this sentence, and in the feeling that accompanied it. I had silently feared St. John till now, because I had not understood him. He had held me in awe, because he had held me in doubt. How much of him was saint, how much mortal, I could not heretofore tell: but revelations were being made in this conference: the analysis of his nature was proceeding before my eyes. I saw his fallibilities: I comprehended them. I understood that, sitting there where I did, on the bank of heath, and with that handsome form before me, I sat at the feet of a man, caring as I. The veil fell from his hardness and despotism. Having felt in him the presence of these qualities, I felt his imperfection and took courage. I was with an equal — one with whom I might argue — one whom, if I saw good, I might resist.

He was silent after I had uttered the last sentence, and I presently risked an upward glance at his countenance.

His eye, bent on me, expressed at once stern surprise and keen inquiry. "Is she sarcastic, and sarcastic to *me*!" it seemed to say. "What does this signify?"

"Do not let us forget that this is a solemn matter," he said ere long; "one of which we may neither think nor talk lightly without sin. I trust, Jane, you are in earnest when you say you will serve your heart to God: it is all I want. Once wrench your heart from man, and fix it on your Maker, the advancement of that Maker's spiritual kingdom on earth will be your chief delight and endeavour; you will be ready to do at once whatever furthers that end. You will see what impetus would be given to your efforts and mine by our physical and mental union in marriage: the only union that gives a character of permanent conformity to the destinies and designs of human beings; and, passing over all minor caprices — all trivial difficulties and delicacies of feeling — all scruple about the degree, kind, strength or tenderness of mere personal inclination — you will hasten to enter into that union at once."

"Shall I?" I said briefly; and I looked at his features, beautiful in their harmony, but strangely formidable in their still severity; at his brow, commanding but not open; at his eyes, bright and deep and searching, but never soft; at his tall imposing figure; and fancied myself in idea *his wife*. Oh! it would never do! As his curate, his comrade, all would be right: I would cross oceans with him in that capacity; toil under Eastern suns, in Asian deserts with him in that office; admire and emulate his courage and devotion and vigour; accommodate quietly to his masterhood; smile undisturbed at his ineradicable ambition; discriminate the Christian from the man: profoundly esteem the one, and freely forgive the other. I should suffer often, no doubt, attached to him only in this capacity: my body would be under rather a stringent yoke, but my heart and mind would be free. I should still have my unblighted self to turn to: my natural unenslaved feelings with which to communicate in moments of loneliness. There would be recesses in my mind which would be only mine, to which he never came, and sentiments growing there fresh and sheltered which his austerity could never blight, nor his measured warrior-march trample down: but as his wife — at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked — forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital — *this* would be unendurable.

"St. John!" I exclaimed, when I had got so far in my meditation.

"Well?" he answered icily.

"I repeat I freely consent to go with you as your fellow-missionary, but not as your wife; I cannot marry you and become part of you."

"A part of me you must become," he answered steadily; "otherwise the whole bargain is void. How can I, a man not yet thirty, take out with me to

India a girl of nineteen, unless she be married to me? How can we be for ever together — sometimes in solitudes, sometimes amidst savage tribes — and unwed?"

"Very well," I said shortly; "under the circumstances, quite as well as if I were either your real sister, or a man and a clergyman like yourself."

"It is known that you are not my sister; I cannot introduce you as such: to attempt it would be to fasten injurious suspicions on us both. And for the rest, though you have a man's vigorous brain, you have a woman's heart and — it would not do."

"It would do," I affirmed with some disdain, "perfectly well. I have a woman's heart, but not where you are concerned; for you I have only a comrade's constancy; a fellow-soldier's frankness, fidelity, fraternity, if you like; a neophyte's respect and submission to his hierophant: nothing more — don't fear."

"It is what I want," he said, speaking to himself; "it is just what I want. And there are obstacles in the way: they must be hewn down. Jane, you would not repent marrying me — be certain of that; we *must* be married. I repeat it: there is no other way; and undoubtedly enough of love would follow upon marriage to render the union right even in your eyes."

"I scorn your idea of love," I could not help saying, as I rose up and stood before him, leaning my back against the rock. "I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it."

He looked at me fixedly, compressing his well-cut lips while he did so. Whether he was incensed or surprised, or what, it was not easy to tell: he could command his countenance thoroughly.

"I scarcely expected to hear that expression from you," he said: "I think I have done and uttered nothing to deserve scorn."

I was touched by his gentle tone, and overawed by his high, calm mien.

"Forgive me the words, St. John; but it is your own fault that I have been roused to speak so unguardedly. You have introduced a topic on which our natures are at variance — a topic we should never discuss: the very name of love is an apple of discord between us. If the reality were required, what should we do? How should we feel? My dear cousin, abandon your scheme of marriage — forget it."

"No," said he; "it is a long-cherished scheme, and the only one which can secure my great end: but I shall urge you no further at present. To-morrow, I leave home for Cambridge: I have many friends there to whom I should wish to say farewell. I shall be absent a fortnight — take that space of time to consider my offer: and do not forget that if you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God. Through my means, He opens to you a noble career; as my wife only can you enter upon it. Refuse to be my wife, and you limit yourself for ever to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity. Tremble lest in that case you should be numbered with those who have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels!"

He had done. Turning from me, he once more

"Looked to river, looked to hill."

But this time his feelings were all pent in his heart: I was not worthy to hear them uttered. As I walked by his side homeward, I read well in his iron silence all he felt towards me: the disappointment of an austere and despotic nature, which has met resistance where it expected submission — the disapprobation of a cool, inflexible judgment, which has detected in another feelings and views in which it has no power to sympathise: in short, as a man, he would have wished to coerce me into obedience: it was only as a sincere Christian he bore so patiently with my perversity, and allowed so long a space for reflection and repentance.

That night, after he had kissed his sisters, he thought proper to forget even to shake hands with me, but left the room in silence. I — who, though I had no love, had much friendship for him — was hurt by the marked omission: so much hurt that tears started to my eyes.

"I see you and St. John have been quarrelling, Jane," said Diana, "during your walk on the moor. But go after him; he is now lingering in the passage expecting you — he will make it up."

I have not much pride under such circumstances: I would always rather be happy than dignified; and I ran after him — he stood at the foot of the stairs.

"Good-night, St. John," said I.

"Good-night, Jane," he replied calmly.

"Then shake hands," I added.

What a cold, loose touch, he impressed on my fingers! He was deeply displeased by what had occurred that day; cordiality would not warm, nor tears move him. No happy reconciliation was to be had with him — no cheering smile or generous word: but still the Christian was patient and placid; and when I asked him if he forgave me, he answered that he was not in the habit of cherishing the remembrance of vexation; that he had nothing to forgive, not having been offended.

And with that answer he left me. I would much rather he had knocked me down.

CHAPTER XXXV

He did not leave for Cambridge the next day, as he had said he would. He deferred his departure a whole week, and during that time he made me feel what severe punishment a good yet stern, a conscientious yet implacable man can inflict on one who has offended him. Without one overt act of hostility, one upbraiding word, he contrived to impress me momently with the conviction that I was put beyond the pale of his favour.

Not that St. John harboured a spirit of unchristian vindictiveness — not that he would have injured a hair of my head, if it had been fully in his power to do so. Both by nature and principle, he was superior to the mean gratification of vengeance: he had forgiven me for saying I scorned him and his love, but he had not forgotten the words; and as long as he and I lived he never would forget them. I saw by his look, when he turned to me, that they were always written on the air between me and him; whenever I spoke, they sounded in my voice to his ear, and their echo toned every answer he gave me.

He did not abstain from conversing with me: he even called me as usual each morning to join him at his desk; and I fear the corrupt man within him had a pleasure unimparted to, and unshared by, the pure Christian, in evincing with what skill he could, while acting and speaking apparently just as usual, extract from every deed and every phrase the spirit of interest and approval which had formerly communicated a certain austere charm to his language and manner. To me, he was in reality become no longer flesh, but marble; his eye was a cold, bright, blue gem; his tongue a speaking instrument — nothing more.

All this was torture to me — refined, lingering torture. It kept up a slow fire of indignation and a trembling trouble of grief, which harassed and crushed me altogether. I felt how — if I were his wife, this good man, pure as the deep sunless source, could soon kill me, without drawing from my veins a single drop of blood, or receiving on his own crystal conscience the faintest stain of crime. Especially I felt this when I made any attempt to propitiate him. No ruth met my ruth. *He* experienced no suffering from estrangement — no yearning after reconciliation; and though, more than once, my fast falling tears blistered the page over which we both bent, they produced no more effect on him than if his heart had been really a matter of stone or metal. To his sisters, meantime, he was somewhat kinder than usual: as if afraid that mere coldness would not sufficiently convince me how completely I was banished and banned, he added the force of contrast; and this I am sure he did not by force, but on principle.

The night before he left home, happening to see him walking in the garden about sunset, and remembering, as I looked at him, that this man, alienated as he now was, had once saved my life, and that we were near relations, I was moved to make a last attempt to regain his friendship. I went out and approached him as he stood leaning over the little gate; I spoke to the point at once.

"St. John, I am unhappy because you are still angry with me. Let us be friends."

"I hope we are friends," was the unmoved reply; while he still watched the rising of the moon, which he had been contemplating as I approached.

"No, St. John, we are not friends as we were. You know that."

"Are we not? That is wrong. For my part, I wish you no ill and all good."

"I believe you, St. John; for I am sure you are incapable of wishing any one ill; but, as I am your kinswoman, I should desire somewhat more of affection than that sort of general philanthropy you extend to mere strangers."

"Of course," he said. "Your wish is reasonable, and I am far from regarding you as a stranger."

This, spoken in a cool, tranquil tone, was mortifying and baffling enough. Had I attended to the suggestions of pride and ire, I should immediately have left him; but something worked within me more strongly than those feelings could. I deeply venerated my cousin's talent and principle. His friendship was of value to me: to lose it tried me severely. I would not so soon relinquish the attempt to reconquer it.

"Must we part in this way, St. John? And when you go to India, will you leave me so, without a kinder word than you have yet spoken?"

He now turned quite from the moon and faced me.

"When I go to India, Jane, will I leave you! What! do you not go to India?"

"You said I could not unless I married you."

"And you will not marry me! You adhere to that resolution?"

Reader, do you know, as I do, what terror those cold people can put into the ice of their questions? How much of the fall of the avalanche is in their anger? of the breaking up of the frozen sea in their displeasure?

"No. St. John, I will not marry you. I adhere to my resolution."

The avalanche had shaken and slid a little forward, but it did not yet crash down.

"Once more, why this refusal?" he asked.

"Formerly," I answered, "because you did not love me; now, I reply, because you almost hate me. If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now."

His lips and cheeks turned white — quite white.

"*I should kill you — I am killing you*? Your words are such as ought not to be used: violent, unfeminine, and untrue. They betray an unfortunate state of mind: they merit severe reproof: they would seem inexcusable, but that it is the duty of man to forgive his fellow even until seventy-and-seven times."

I had finished the business now. While earnestly wishing to erase from his mind the trace of my former offence, I had stamped on that tenacious surface another and far deeper impression, I had burnt it in.

"Now you will indeed hate me," I said. "It is useless to attempt to conciliate you: I see I have made an eternal enemy of you."

A fresh wrong did these words inflict: the worse, because they touched on the truth. That bloodless lip quivered to a temporary spasm. I knew the steely ire I had whetted. I was heart-wrung.

"You utterly misinterpret my words," I said, at once seizing his hand: "I have no intention to grieve or pain you — indeed, I have not."

Most bitterly he smiled — most decidedly he withdrew his hand from mine. "And now you recall your promise, and will not go to India at all, I presume?" said he, after a considerable pause.

"Yes, I will, as your assistant," I answered.

A very long silence succeeded. What struggle there was in him between Nature and Grace in this interval, I cannot tell: only singular gleams scintillated in his eyes, and strange shadows passed over his face. He spoke at last.

"I before proved to you the absurdity of a single woman of your age proposing to accompany abroad a single man of mine. I proved it to you in such terms as, I should have thought, would have prevented your ever again alluding to the plan. That you have done so, I regret — for your sake."

I interrupted him. Anything like a tangible reproach gave me courage at once. "Keep to common sense, St. John: you are verging on nonsense. You pretend to be shocked by what I have said. You are not really shocked: for, with your superior mind, you cannot be either so dull or so conceited as to misunderstand my meaning. I say again, I will be your curate, if you like, but never your wife."

Again he turned lividly pale; but, as before, controlled his passion perfectly. He answered emphatically but calmly —

"A female curate, who is not my wife, would never suit me. With me, then, it seems, you cannot go: but if you are sincere in your offer, I will, while in town, speak to a married missionary, whose wife needs a coadjutor. Your own fortune will make you independent of the Society's aid; and thus you may still be spared the dishonour of breaking your promise and deserting the band you engaged to join."

Now I never had, as the reader knows, either given any formal promise or entered into any engagement; and this language was all much too hard and much too despotic for the occasion. I replied —

"There is no dishonour, no breach of promise, no desertion in the case. I am not under the slightest obligation to go to India, especially with strangers. With you I would have ventured much, because I admire, confide in, and, as a sister, I love you; but I am convinced that, go when and with whom I would, I should not live long in that climate."

"Ah! you are afraid of yourself," he said, curling his lip.

"I am. God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you wish me would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide. Moreover, before I definitively resolve on quitting England, I will know for certain whether I cannot be of greater use by remaining in it than by leaving it."

"What do you mean?"

"It would be fruitless to attempt to explain; but there is a point on which I have long endured painful doubt, and I can go nowhere till by some means that doubt is removed."

"I know where your heart turns and to what it clings. The interest you cherish is lawless and unconsecrated. Long since you ought to have crushed it: now you should blush to allude to it. You think of Mr. Rochester?"

It was true. I confessed it by silence.

"Are you going to seek Mr. Rochester?"

"I must find out what is become of him."

"It remains for me, then," he said, "to remember you in my prayers, and to entreat God for you, in all earnestness, that you may not indeed become a castaway. I had thought I recognised in you one of the chosen. But God sees not as man sees: *His* will be done — "

He opened the gate, passed through it, and strayed away down the glen. He was soon out of sight.

On re-entering the parlour, I found Diana standing at the window, looking very thoughtful. Diana was a great deal taller than I: she put her hand on my shoulder, and, stooping, examined my face.

"Jane," she said, "you are always agitated and pale now. I am sure there is something the matter. Tell me what business St. John and you have on hands. I have watched you this half hour from the window; you must forgive my being such a spy, but for a long time I have fancied I hardly know what. St. John is a strange being — "

She paused — I did not speak: soon she resumed —

"That brother of mine cherishes peculiar views of some sort respecting you, I am sure: he has long distinguished you by a notice and interest he never showed to any one else — to what end? I wish he loved you — does he, Jane?"

I put her cool hand to my hot forehead; "No, Die, not one whit."

"Then why does he follow you so with his eyes, and get you so frequently alone with him, and keep you so continually at his side? Mary and I had both concluded he wished you to marry him."

"He does — he has asked me to be his wife."

Diana clapped her hands. "That is just what we hoped and thought! And you will marry him, Jane, won't you? And then he will stay in England."

"Far from that, Diana; his sole idea in proposing to me is to procure a fitting fellow-labourer in his Indian toils."

"What! He wishes you to go to India?"

"Yes."

"Madness!" she exclaimed. "You would not live three months there, I am certain. You never shall go: you have not consented, have you, Jane?"

"I have refused to marry him — "

"And have consequently displeased him?" she suggested.

"Deeply: he will never forgive me, I fear: yet I offered to accompany him as his sister."

"It was frantic folly to do so, Jane. Think of the task you undertook — one of incessant fatigue, where fatigue kills even the strong, and you are weak. St. John — you know him — would urge you to impossibilities: with him there would be no permission to rest during the hot hours; and unfortunately, I have noticed, whatever he exacts, you force yourself to perform. I am astonished you found courage to refuse his hand. You do not love him then, Jane?"

"Not as a husband."

"Yet he is a handsome fellow."

"And I am so plain, you see, Die. We should never suit."

"Plain! You? Not at all. You are much too pretty, as well as too good, to be grilled alive in Calcutta." And again she earnestly conjured me to give up all thoughts of going out with her brother.

"I must indeed," I said; "for when just now I repeated the offer of serving him for a deacon, he expressed himself shocked at my want of decency. He seemed to think I had committed an impropriety in proposing to accompany him unmarried: as if I had not from the first hoped to find in him a brother, and habitually regarded him as such."

"What makes you say he does not love you, Jane?"

"You should hear himself on the subject. He has again and again explained that it is not himself, but his office he wishes to mate. He has told me I am formed for labour — not for love: which is true, no doubt. But, in my opinion, if I am not formed for love, it follows that I am not formed for marriage. Would it not be strange, Die, to be chained for life to a man who regarded one but as a useful tool?"

"Insupportable — unnatural — out of the question!"

"And then," I continued, "though I have only sisterly affection for him now, yet, if forced to be his wife, I can imagine the possibility of conceiving an inevitable, strange, torturing kind of love for him, because he is so talented; and there is often a certain heroic grandeur in his look, manner, and conversation. In that case, my lot would become unspeakably wretched. He would not want me to love him; and if I showed the feeling, he would make me sensible that it was a superfluity, unrequired by him, unbecoming in me. I know he would."

"And yet St. John is a good man," said Diana.

"He is a good and a great man; but he forgets, pitilessly, the feelings and claims of little people, in pursuing his own large views. It is better, therefore, for the insignificant to keep out of his way, lest, in his progress, he should trample them down. Here he comes! I will leave you, Diana." And I hastened upstairs as I saw him entering the garden.

But I was forced to meet him again at supper. During that meal he appeared just as composed as usual. I had thought he would hardly speak to me, and I was certain he had given up the pursuit of his matrimonial scheme: the sequel showed I was mistaken on both points. He addressed me precisely in his ordinary manner, or what had, of late, been his ordinary manner — one scrupulously polite. No doubt he had invoked the help of the Holy Spirit to subdue the anger I had roused in him, and now believed he had forgiven me once more.

For the evening reading before prayers, he selected the twenty-first chapter of Revelation. It was at all times pleasant to listen while from his lips fell the words of the Bible: never did his fine voice sound at once so sweet and full — never did his manner become so impressive in its noble simplicity, as when he delivered the oracles of God: and to-night that voice took a more solemn tone — that manner a more thrilling meaning — as he sat in the midst of his household circle (the May moon shining in through the uncurtained window, and rendering almost unnecessary the light of the candle on the table): as he sat there, bending over the great old Bible, and described from its page the vision of the new heaven and the new earth — told how God would come to dwell with men, how He would wipe away all tears from their eyes, and promised that there should be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain, because the former things were passed away.

The succeeding words thrilled me strangely as he spoke them: especially as I felt, by the slight, indescribable alteration in sound, that in uttering them, his eye had turned on me.

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But," was slowly, distinctly read, "the fearful, the unbelieving, &c., shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Henceforward, I knew what fate St. John feared for me.

A calm, subdued triumph, blent with a longing earnestness, marked his enunciation of the last glorious verses of that chapter. The reader believed his name was already written in the Lamb's book of life, and he yearned after the hour which should admit him to the city to which the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour; which has no need of sun or moon to shine in it, because the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

In the prayer following the chapter, all his energy gathered — all his stern zeal woke: he was in deep earnest, wrestling with God, and resolved on a conquest. He supplicated strength for the weak-hearted; guidance for wanderers from the fold: a return, even at the eleventh hour, for those whom the temptations of the world and the flesh were luring from the narrow path. He asked, he urged, he claimed the boon of a brand snatched from the burning. Earnestness is ever deeply solemn: first, as I listened to that prayer, I wondered at his; then, when it continued and rose, I was touched by it, and at last awed. He felt the greatness and goodness of his purpose so sincerely: others who heard him plead for it, could not but feel it too.

The prayer over, we took leave of him: he was to go at a very early hour in the morning. Diana and Mary having kissed him, left the room — in compliance, I think, with a whispered hint from him: I tendered my hand, and wished him a pleasant journey.

"Thank you, Jane. As I said, I shall return from Cambridge in a fortnight: that space, then, is yet left you for reflection. If I listened to human pride, I should say no more to you of marriage with me; but I listen to my duty, and keep steadily in view my first aim — to do all things to the glory of God. My Master was long-suffering: so will I be. I cannot give you up to perdition as a vessel of wrath: repent — resolve, while there is yet time. Remember, we are bid to work while it is day — warned that 'the night cometh when no man shall work.' Remember the fate of Dives, who had his good things in this life. God give you strength to choose that better part which shall not be taken from you!"

He laid his hand on my head as he uttered the last words. He had spoken earnestly, mildly: his look was not, indeed, that of a lover beholding his mistress, but it was that of a pastor recalling his wandering sheep — or better, of a guardian angel watching the soul for which he is responsible. All men of talent, whether they be men of feeling or not; whether they be zealots, or aspirants, or despots — provided only they be sincere — have their sublime moments, when they subdue and rule. I felt veneration for St. John — veneration so strong that its impetus thrust me at once to the point I had so long shunned. I was tempted to cease struggling with him — to rush down the torrent of his will into the gulf of his existence, and there lose my own. I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by another. I was a fool both times. To have yielded then would have been an error of principle; to have yielded now would have been an error of judgment. So I think at this hour, when I look back to the crisis through the quiet medium of time: I was unconscious of folly at the instant.

I stood motionless under my hierophant's touch. My refusals were forgotten — my fears overcome — my wrestlings paralysed. The Impossible — *i.e.*, my marriage with St. John — was fast becoming the Possible. All was changing utterly with a sudden sweep. Religion called — Angels beckoned — God commanded — life rolled together like a scroll — death's gates opening, showed eternity beyond: it seemed, that for safety and bliss there, all here might be sacrificed in a second. The dim room was full of visions.

"Could you decide now?" asked the missionary. The inquiry was put in gentle tones: he drew me to him as gently. Oh, that gentleness! how far more potent is it than force! I could resist St. John's wrath: I grew pliant as a reed under his kindness. Yet I knew all the time, if I yielded now, I should not the less be made to repent, some day, of my former rebellion. His nature was not changed by one hour of solemn prayer: it was only elevated.

"I could decide if I were but certain," I answered: "were I but convinced that it is God's will I should marry you, I could vow to marry you here and now — come afterwards what would!"

"My prayers are heard!" ejaculated St. John. He pressed his hand firmer on my head, as if he claimed me: he surrounded me with his arm, *almost* as if he loved me (I say *almost* — I knew the difference — for I had felt what it was to be loved; but, like him, I had now put love out of the question, and thought only of duty). I contended with my inward dimness of vision, before which clouds yet rolled. I sincerely, deeply, fervently longed to do what was right; and only that. "Show me, show me the path!" I entreated of Heaven. I was excited more than I had ever been; and whether what followed was the effect of excitement the reader shall judge.

All the house was still; for I believe all, except St. John and myself, were now retired to rest. The one candle was dying out: the room was full of moonlight. My heart beat fast and thick: I heard its throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock, but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor, from which they were now summoned and forced to wake. They rose expectant: eye and ear waited while the flesh quivered on my bones.

"What have you heard? What do you see?" asked St. John. I saw nothing, but I heard a voice somewhere cry —

"Jane! Jane! Jane!" — nothing more.

"O God! what is it?" I gasped.

I might have said, "Where is it?" for it did not seem in the room — nor in the house — nor in the garden; it did not come out of the air — nor from under the earth — nor from overhead. I had heard it — where, or whence, for ever impossible to know! And it was the voice of a human being — a known, loved, well-remembered voice — that of Edward Fairfax Rochester; and it spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently.

"I am coming!" I cried. "Wait for me! Oh, I will come!" I flew to the door and looked into the passage: it was dark. I ran out into the garden: it was void.

"Where are you?" I exclaimed.

The hills beyond Marsh Glen sent the answer faintly back — "Where are you?" I listened. The wind sighed low in the firs: all was moorland loneliness and midnight hush.

"Down superstition!" I commented, as that spectre rose up black by the black yew at the gate. "This is not thy deception, nor thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature. She was roused, and did — no miracle — but her best."

I broke from St. John, who had followed, and would have detained me. It was *my* time to assume ascendency. *My* powers were in play and in force. I told him to forbear question or remark; I desired him to leave me: I must and would be alone. He obeyed at once. Where there is energy to command well enough, obedience never fails. I mounted to my chamber; locked myself in; fell on my knees; and prayed in my way — a different way to St. John's, but effective in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit; and my soul rushed out in gratitude at His feet. I rose from the thanksgiving — took a resolve — and lay down, unscared, enlightened — eager but for the daylight.

CHAPTER XXXVI

The daylight came. I rose at dawn. I busied myself for an hour or two with arranging my things in my chamber, drawers, and wardrobe, in the order wherein I should wish to leave them during a brief absence. Meantime, I heard St. John quit his room. He stopped at my door: I feared he would knock — no, but a slip of paper was passed under the door. I took it up. It bore these words —

"You left me too suddenly last night. Had you stayed but a little longer, you would have laid your hand on the Christian's cross and the angel's crown. I shall expect your clear decision when I return this day fortnight. Meantime, watch and pray that you enter not into temptation: the spirit, I trust, is willing, but the flesh, I see, is weak. I shall pray for you hourly. — Yours, St. John."

"My spirit," I answered mentally, "is willing to do what is right; and my flesh, I hope, is strong enough to accomplish the will of Heaven, when once that will is distinctly known to me. At any rate, it shall be strong enough to search — inquire — to grope an outlet from this cloud of doubt, and find the open day of certainty."

It was the first of June; yet the morning was overcast and chilly: rain beat fast on my casement. I heard the front-door open, and St. John pass out. Looking through the window, I saw him traverse the garden. He took the way over the misty moors in the direction of Whitcross — there he would meet the coach.

"In a few more hours I shall succeed you in that track, cousin," thought I: "I too have a coach to meet at Whitcross. I too have some to see and ask after in England, before I depart for ever."

It wanted yet two hours of breakfast-time. I filled the interval in walking softly about my room, and pondering the visitation which had given my plans their present bent. I recalled that inward sensation I had experienced: for I could recall it, with all its unspeakable strangeness. I recalled the voice I had heard; again I questioned whence it came, as vainly as before: it seemed in *me* — not in the external world. I asked was it a mere nervous impression — a delusion? I could not conceive or believe: it was more like an inspiration. The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas's prison; it had opened the doors of the soul's cell and loosed its bands — it had wakened it out of its sleep, whence it sprang trembling, listening, aghast; then vibrated thrice a cry on my startled ear, and in my quaking heart and through my spirit, which neither feared nor shook, but exulted as if in joy over the success of one effort it had been privileged to make, independent of the cumbrous body.

"Ere many days," I said, as I terminated my musings, "I will know something of him whose voice seemed last night to summon me. Letters have proved of no avail — personal inquiry shall replace them."

At breakfast I announced to Diana and Mary that I was going a journey, and should be absent at least four days.

"Alone, Jane?" they asked.

"Yes; it was to see or hear news of a friend about whom I had for some time been uneasy."

They might have said, as I have no doubt they thought, that they had believed me to be without any friends save them: for, indeed, I had often said so; but, with their true natural delicacy, they abstained from comment, except that Diana asked me if I was sure I was well enough to travel. I looked very pale, she observed. I replied, that nothing ailed me save anxiety of mind, which I hoped soon to alleviate.

It was easy to make my further arrangements; for I was troubled with no inquiries — no surmises. Having once explained to them that I could not now be explicit about my plans, they kindly and wisely acquiesced in the silence with which I pursued them, according to me the privilege of free action I should under similar circumstances have accorded them.

I left Moor House at three o'clock p.m., and soon after four I stood at the foot of the sign-post of Whitcross, waiting the arrival of the coach which was to take me to distant Thornfield. Amidst the silence of those solitary roads and desert hills, I heard it approach from a great distance. It was the same vehicle whence, a year ago, I had alighted one summer evening on this very spot — how desolate, and hopeless, and objectless! It stopped as I beckoned. I entered — not now obliged to part with my whole fortune as the price of its accommodation. Once more on the road to Thornfield, I felt like the messenger-pigeon flying home.

It was a journey of six-and-thirty hours. I had set out from Whitcross on a Tuesday afternoon, and early on the succeeding Thursday morning the coach stopped to water the horses at a wayside inn, situated in the midst of scenery whose green hedges and large fields and low pastoral hills (how mild of feature and verdant of hue compared with the stern North-Midland moors of Morton!) met my eye like the lineaments of a once familiar face. Yes, I knew the character of this landscape: I was sure we were near my bourne.

"How far is Thornfield Hall from here?" I asked of the ostler.

"Just two miles, ma'am, across the fields."

"My journey is closed," I thought to myself. I got out of the coach, gave a box I had into the ostler's charge, to be kept till I called for it; paid my fare; satisfied the coachman, and was going: the brightening day gleamed on the sign of the inn, and I read in gilt letters, "The Rochester Arms." My heart leapt up: I was already on my master's very lands. It fell again: the thought struck it: —

"Your master himself may be beyond the British Channel, for aught you know: and then, if he is at Thornfield Hall, towards which you hasten, who besides him is there? His lunatic wife: and you have nothing to do with him: you dare not speak to him or seek his presence. You have lost your labour — you had better go no farther," urged the monitor. "Ask information of the people at the inn; they can give you all you seek: they can solve your doubts at once. Go up to that man, and inquire if Mr. Rochester be at home."

The suggestion was sensible, and yet I could not force myself to act on it. I so dreaded a reply that would crush me with despair. To prolong doubt was to prolong hope. I might yet once more see the Hall under the ray of her star. There was the stile before me — the very fields through which I had hurried, blind, deaf, distracted with a revengeful fury tracking and scourging me, on the morning I fled from Thornfield: ere I well knew what course I had resolved to take, I was in the midst of them. How fast I walked! How I ran sometimes! How I looked forward to catch the first view of the well-known woods! With what feelings I welcomed single trees I knew, and familiar glimpses of meadow and hill between them!

At last the woods rose; the rookery clustered dark; a loud cawing broke the morning stillness. Strange delight inspired me: on I hastened. Another field crossed — a lane threaded — and there were the courtyard walls — the back offices: the house itself, the rookery still hid. "My first view of it shall be in front," I determined, "where its bold battlements will strike the eye nobly at once, and where I can single out my master's very window: perhaps he will be standing at it — he rises early: perhaps he is now walking in the orchard, or on the pavement in front. Could I but see him! — but a moment! Surely, in that case, I should not be so mad as to run to him? I cannot tell — I am not certain. And if I did — what then? God bless him! What then? Who would be hurt by my once more tasting the life his glance can give me? I rave: perhaps at this moment he is watching the sun rise over the Pyrenees, or on the tideless sea of the south."

I had coasted along the lower wall of the orchard — turned its angle: there was a gate just there, opening into the meadow, between two stone pillars crowned by stone balls. From behind one pillar I could peep round quietly at the full front of the mansion. I advanced my head with precaution, desirous to ascertain if any bedroom window-blinds were yet drawn up: battlements, windows, long front — all from this sheltered station were at my command.

The crows sailing overhead perhaps watched me while I took this survey. I wonder what they thought. They must have considered I was very careful and timid at first, and that gradually I grew very bold and reckless. A peep, and then a long stare; and then a departure from my niche and a straying out into the meadow; and a sudden stop full in front of the great mansion, and a protracted, hardy gaze towards it. "What affectation of diffidence was this at first?" they might have demanded; "what stupid regardlessness now?"

Hear an illustration, reader.

A lover finds his mistress asleep on a mossy bank; he wishes to catch a glimpse of her fair face without waking her. He steals softly over the grass, careful to make no sound; he pauses — fancying she has stirred: he withdraws: not for worlds would he be seen. All is still: he again advances: he bends above her; a light veil rests on her features: he lifts it, bends lower; now his eyes anticipate the vision of beauty — warm, and blooming, and lovely, in rest. How hurried was their first glance! But how they fix! How he starts! How he suddenly and vehemently clasps in both arms the form he dared not, a moment since, touch with his finger! How he calls aloud a name, and drops his burden, and gazes on it wildly! He thus grasps and cries, and gazes, because he no longer fears to waken by any sound he can utter — by any movement he can make. He thought his love slept sweetly: he finds she is stone dead.

I looked with timorous joy towards a stately house: I saw a blackened ruin.

No need to cower behind a gate-post, indeed! — to peep up at chamber lattices, fearing life was astir behind them! No need to listen for doors opening — to fancy steps on the pavement or the gravel-walk! The lawn, the grounds were trodden and waste: the portal yawned void. The front was, as I had once seen it in a dream, but a well-like wall, very high and very fragile-looking, perforated with paneless windows: no roof, no battlements, no chimneys — all had crashed in.

And there was the silence of death about it: the solitude of a lonesome wild. No wonder that letters addressed to people here had never received an answer: as well despatch epistles to a vault in a church aisle. The grim blackness of the stones told by what fate the Hall had fallen — by conflagration: but how kindled? What story belonged to this disaster? What loss, besides mortar and marble and wood-work had followed upon it? Had life been wrecked as well as property? If so, whose? Dreadful question: there was no one here to answer it — not even dumb sign, mute token.

In wandering round the shattered walls and through the devastated interior, I gathered evidence that the calamity was not of late occurrence. Winter snows, I thought, had drifted through that void arch, winter rains beaten in at those hollow casements; for, amidst the drenched piles of rubbish, spring had cherished vegetation: grass and weed grew here and there between the stones and fallen rafters. And oh! where meantime was the hapless owner of this wreck? In what land? Under what auspices? My eye involuntarily wandered to the grey church tower near the gates, and I asked, "Is he with Damer de Rochester, sharing the shelter of his narrow marble house?"

Some answer must be had to these questions. I could find it nowhere but at the inn, and thither, ere long, I returned. The host himself brought my breakfast into the parlour. I requested him to shut the door and sit down: I had some questions to ask him. But when he complied, I scarcely knew how to begin; such horror had I of the possible answers. And yet the spectacle of desolation I had just left prepared me in a measure for a tale of misery. The host was a respectable-looking, middle-aged man.

"You know Thornfield Hall, of course?" I managed to say at last.

"Yes, ma'am; I lived there once."

"Did you?" Not in my time, I thought: you are a stranger to me.

"I was the late Mr. Rochester's butler," he added.

The late! I seem to have received, with full force, the blow I had been trying to evade.

"The late!" I gasped. "Is he dead?"

"I mean the present gentleman, Mr. Edward's father," he explained. I breathed again: my blood resumed its flow. Fully assured by these words that Mr. Edward — *my* Mr. Rochester (God bless him, wherever he was!) — was at least alive: was, in short, "the present gentleman." Gladdening words! It seemed I could hear all that was to come — whatever the disclosures might be — with comparative tranquillity. Since he was not in the grave, I could bear, I thought, to learn that he was at the Antipodes.

"Is Mr. Rochester living at Thornfield Hall now?" I asked, knowing, of course, what the answer would be, but yet desirous of deferring the direct question as to where he really was.

"No, ma'am — oh, no! No one is living there. I suppose you are a stranger in these parts, or you would have heard what happened last autumn, — Thornfield Hall is quite a ruin: it was burnt down just about harvest-time. A dreadful calamity! such an immense quantity of valuable property destroyed: hardly any of the furniture could be saved. The fire broke out at dead of night, and before the engines arrived from Millcote, the building was one mass of flame. It was a terrible spectacle: I witnessed it myself."

"At dead of night!" I muttered. Yes, that was ever the hour of fatality at Thornfield. "Was it known how it originated?" I demanded.

"They guessed, ma'am: they guessed. Indeed, I should say it was ascertained beyond a doubt. You are not perhaps aware," he continued, edging his chair a little nearer the table, and speaking low, "that there was a lady — a — a lunatic, kept in the house?"

"I have heard something of it."

"She was kept in very close confinement, ma'am: people even for some years was not absolutely certain of her existence. No one saw her: they only knew by rumour that such a person was at the Hall; and who or what she was it was difficult to conjecture. They said Mr. Edward had brought her from abroad, and some believed she had been his mistress. But a queer thing happened a year since — a very queer thing."

I feared now to hear my own story. I endeavoured to recall him to the main fact.

"And this lady?"

"This lady, ma'am," he answered, "turned out to be Mr. Rochester's wife! The discovery was brought about in the strangest way. There was a young lady, a governess at the Hall, that Mr. Rochester fell in — ”

“But the fire,” I suggested.

“I’m coming to that, ma’am — that Mr. Edward fell in love with. The servants say they never saw anybody so much in love as he was: he was after her continually. They used to watch him — servants will, you know, ma’am — and he set store on her past everything: for all, nobody but him thought her so very handsome. She was a little small thing, they say, almost like a child. I never saw her myself; but I’ve heard Leah, the house-maid, tell of her. Leah liked her well enough. Mr. Rochester was about forty, and this governess not twenty; and you see, when gentlemen of his age fall in love with girls, they are often like as if they were bewitched. Well, he would marry her.”

“You shall tell me this part of the story another time,” I said; “but now I have a particular reason for wishing to hear all about the fire. Was it suspected that this lunatic, Mrs. Rochester, had any hand in it?”

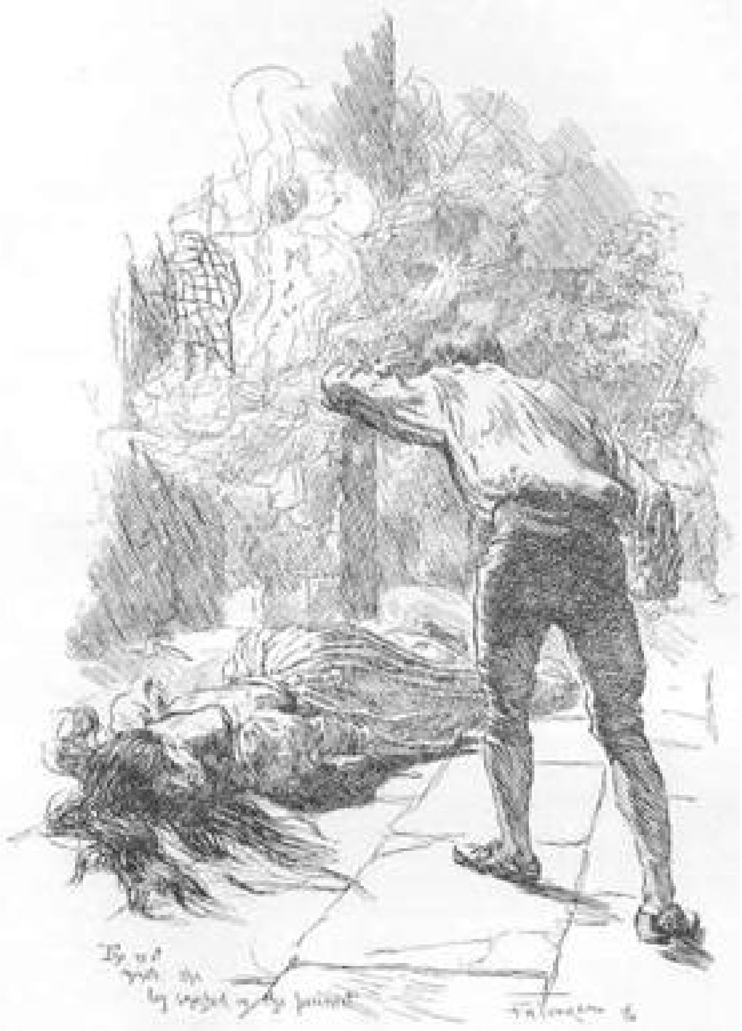
“You’ve hit it, ma’am: it’s quite certain that it was her, and nobody but her, that set it going. She had a woman to take care of her called Mrs. Poole — an able woman in her line, and very trustworthy, but for one fault — a fault common to a deal of them nurses and matrons — she *kept a private bottle of gin by her*, and now and then took a drop over-much. It is excusable, for she had a hard life of it: but still it was dangerous; for when Mrs. Poole was fast asleep after the gin and water, the mad lady, who was as cunning as a witch, would take the keys out of her pocket, let herself out of her chamber, and go roaming about the house, doing any wild mischief that came into her head. They say she had nearly burnt her husband in his bed once: but I don’t know about that. However, on this night, she set fire first to the hangings of the room next her own, and then she got down to a lower storey, and made her way to the chamber that had been the governess’s — (she was like as if she knew somehow how matters had gone on, and had a spite at her) — and she kindled the bed there; but there was nobody sleeping in it, fortunately. The governess had run away two months before; and for all Mr. Rochester sought her as if she had been the most precious thing he had in the world, he never could hear a word of her; and he grew savage — quite savage on his disappointment: he never was a wild man, but he got dangerous after he lost her. He would be alone, too. He sent Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, away to her friends at a distance; but he did it handsomely, for he settled an annuity on her for life: and she deserved it — she was a very good woman. Miss Adèle, a ward he had, was put to school. He broke off acquaintance with all the gentry, and shut himself up like a hermit at the Hall.”

“What! did he not leave England?”

“Leave England? Bless you, no! He would not cross the door-stones of the house, except at night, when he walked just like a ghost about the grounds and in the orchard as if he had lost his senses — which it is my opinion he had; for a more spirited, bolder, keener gentleman than he was before that midge of a governess crossed him, you never saw, ma’am. He was not a man given to wine, or cards, or racing, as some are, and he was not so very handsome; but he had a courage and a will of his own, if ever man had. I knew him from a boy, you see: and for my part, I have often wished that Miss Eyre had been sunk in the sea before she came to Thornfield Hall."

"Then Mr. Rochester was at home when the fire broke out?"

"Yes, indeed was he; and he went up to the attics when all was burning above and below, and got the servants out of their beds and helped them down himself, and went back to get his mad wife out of her cell. And then they called out to him that she was on the roof, where she was standing, waving her arms, above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off: I saw her and heard her with my own eyes. She was a big woman, and had long black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood. I witnessed, and several more witnessed, Mr. Rochester ascend through the sky-light on to the roof; we heard him call 'Bertha!' We saw him approach her; and then, ma'am, she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement."



“Dead?”

“Dead! Ay, dead as the stones on which her brains and blood were scattered.”

“Good God!”

“You may well say so, ma’am: it was frightful!”

He shuddered.

“And afterwards?” I urged.

“Well, ma’am, afterwards the house was burnt to the ground: there are only some bits of walls standing now.”

“Were any other lives lost?”

“No — perhaps it would have been better if there had.”

“What do you mean?”

“Poor Mr. Edward!” he ejaculated, “I little thought ever to have seen it! Some say it was a just judgment on him for keeping his first marriage secret, and wanting to take another wife while he had one living: but I pity him, for my part."

"You said he was alive?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, yes: he is alive; but many think he had better be dead."

"Why? How?" My blood was again running cold. "Where is he?" I demanded. "Is he in England?"

"Ay — ay — he's in England; he can't get out of England, I fancy — he's a fixture now."

What agony was this! And the man seemed resolved to protract it.

"He is stone-blind," he said at last. "Yes, he is stone-blind, is Mr. Edward."

I had dreaded worse. I had dreaded he was mad. I summoned strength to ask what had caused this calamity.

"It was all his own courage, and a body may say, his kindness, in a way, ma'am: he wouldn't leave the house till every one else was out before him. As he came down the great staircase at last, after Mrs. Rochester had flung herself from the battlements, there was a great crash — all fell. He was taken out from under the ruins, alive, but sadly hurt: a beam had fallen in such a way as to protect him partly; but one eye was knocked out, and one hand so crushed that Mr. Carter, the surgeon, had to amputate it directly. The other eye inflamed: he lost the sight of that also. He is now helpless, indeed — blind and a cripple."

"Where is he? Where does he now live?"

"At Ferndean, a manor-house on a farm he has, about thirty miles off: quite a desolate spot."

"Who is with him?"

"Old John and his wife: he would have none else. He is quite broken down, they say."

"Have you any sort of conveyance?"

"We have a chaise, ma'am, a very handsome chaise."

"Let it be got ready instantly; and if your post-boy can drive me to Ferndean before dark this day, I'll pay both you and him twice the hire you usually demand."

CHAPTER XXXVII

The manor-house of Ferndean was a building of considerable antiquity, moderate size, and no architectural pretensions, deep buried in a wood. I had heard of it before. Mr. Rochester often spoke of it, and sometimes went there. His father had purchased the estate for the sake of the game covers. He would have let the house, but could find no tenant, in consequence of its ineligible and insalubrious site. Ferndean then remained uninhabited and unfurnished, with the exception of some two or three rooms fitted up for the accommodation of the squire when he went there in the season to shoot.

To this house I came just ere dark on an evening marked by the characteristics of sad sky, cold gale, and continued small penetrating rain. The last mile I performed on foot, having dismissed the chaise and driver with the double remuneration I had promised. Even when within a very short distance of the manor-house, you could see nothing of it, so thick and dark grew the timber of the gloomy wood about it. Iron gates between granite pillars showed me where to enter, and passing through them, I found myself at once in the twilight of close-ranked trees. There was a grass-grown track descending the forest aisle between hoar and knotty shafts and under branched arches. I followed it, expecting soon to reach the dwelling; but it stretched on and on, it would far and farther: no sign of habitation or grounds was visible.

I thought I had taken a wrong direction and lost my way. The darkness of natural as well as of sylvan dusk gathered over me. I looked round in search of another road. There was none: all was interwoven stem, columnar trunk, dense summer foliage — no opening anywhere.

I proceeded: at last my way opened, the trees thinned a little; presently I beheld a railing, then the house — scarce, by this dim light, distinguishable from the trees; so dank and green were its decaying walls. Entering a portal, fastened only by a latch, I stood amidst a space of enclosed ground, from which the wood swept away in a semicircle. There were no flowers, no garden-beds; only a broad gravel-walk girdling a grass-plat, and this set in the heavy frame of the forest. The house presented two pointed gables in its front; the windows were latticed and narrow: the front door was narrow too, one step led up to it. The whole looked, as the host of the Rochester Arms had said, "quite a desolate spot." It was as still as a church on a week-day: the pattering rain on the forest leaves was the only sound audible in its vicinage.

"Can there be life here?" I asked.

Yes, life of some kind there was; for I heard a movement — that narrow front-door was unclosing, and some shape was about to issue from the grange.

It opened slowly: a figure came out into the twilight and stood on the step; a man without a hat: he stretched forth his hand as if to feel whether it rained.

Dusk as it was, I had recognised him — it was my master, Edward Fairfax Rochester, and no other.

I stayed my step, almost my breath, and stood to watch him — to examine him, myself unseen, and alas! to him invisible. It was a sudden meeting, and one in which rapture was kept well in check by pain. I had no difficulty in restraining my voice from exclamation, my step from hasty advance.

His form was of the same strong and stalwart contour as ever: his port was still erect, his hair was still raven black; nor were his features altered or sunk: not in one year's space, by any sorrow, could his athletic strength be quelled or his vigorous prime blighted. But in his countenance I saw a change: that looked desperate and brooding — that reminded me of some wronged and fettered wild beast or bird, dangerous to approach in his sullen woe. The caged eagle, whose gold-ringed eyes cruelty has extinguished, might look as looked that sightless Samson.

And, reader, do you think I feared him in his blind ferocity? — if you do, you little know me. A soft hope blest with my sorrow that soon I should dare to drop a kiss on that brow of rock, and on those lips so sternly sealed beneath it: but not yet. I would not accost him yet.

He descended the one step, and advanced slowly and gropingly towards the grass-plat. Where was his daring stride now? Then he paused, as if he knew not which way to turn. He lifted his hand and opened his eyelids; gazed blank, and with a straining effort, on the sky, and toward the amphitheatre of trees: one saw that all to him was void darkness. He stretched his right hand (the left arm, the mutilated one, he kept hidden in his bosom); he seemed to wish by touch to gain an idea of what lay around him: he met but vacancy still; for the trees were some yards off where he stood. He relinquished the endeavour, folded his arms, and stood quiet and mute in the rain, now falling fast on his uncovered head. At this moment John approached him from some quarter.

"Will you take my arm, sir?" he said; "there is a heavy shower coming on: had you not better go in?"

"Let me alone," was the answer.

John withdrew without having observed me. Mr. Rochester now tried to walk about: vainly, — all was too uncertain. He groped his way back to the house, and, re-entering it, closed the door.

I now drew near and knocked: John's wife opened for me. "Mary," I said, "how are you?"

She started as if she had seen a ghost: I calmed her. To her hurried "Is it really you, miss, come at this late hour to this lonely place?" I answered by taking her hand; and then I followed her into the kitchen, where John now sat by a good fire. I explained to them, in few words, that I had heard all which had happened since I left Thornfield, and that I was come to see Mr. Rochester. I asked John to go down to the turn-pike-house, where I had dismissed the chaise, and bring my trunk, which I had left there: and then, while I removed my bonnet and shawl, I questioned Mary as to whether I could be accommodated at the Manor House for the night; and finding that arrangements to that effect, though difficult, would not be impossible, I informed her I should stay. Just at this moment the parlour-bell rang.

"When you go in," said I, "tell your master that a person wishes to speak to him, but do not give my name."

"I don't think he will see you," she answered; "he refuses everybody."

When she returned, I inquired what he had said. "You are to send in your name and your business," she replied. She then proceeded to fill a glass with water, and place it on a tray, together with candles.

"Is that what he rang for?" I asked.

"Yes: he always has candles brought in at dark, though he is blind."

"Give the tray to me; I will carry it in."

I took it from her hand: she pointed me out the parlour door. The tray shook as I held it; the water spilt from the glass; my heart struck my ribs loud and fast. Mary opened the door for me, and shut it behind me.

This parlour looked gloomy: a neglected handful of fire burnt low in the grate; and, leaning over it, with his head supported against the high, old-fashioned mantelpiece, appeared the blind tenant of the room. His old dog, Pilot, lay on one side, removed out of the way, and coiled up as if afraid of being inadvertently trodden upon. Pilot pricked up his ears when I came in: then he jumped up with a yelp and a whine, and bounded towards me: he almost knocked the tray from my hands. I set it on the table; then patted him, and said softly, "Lie down!" Mr. Rochester turned mechanically to *see* what the commotion was: but as he *saw* nothing, he returned and sighed.

"Give me the water, Mary," he said.

I approached him with the now only half-filled glass; Pilot followed me, still excited.

"What is the matter?" he inquired.

"Down, Pilot!" I again said. He checked the water on its way to his lips, and seemed to listen: he drank, and put the glass down. "This is you, Mary, is it not?"

"Mary is in the kitchen," I answered.

He put out his hand with a quick gesture, but not seeing where I stood, he did not touch me. "Who is this? Who is this?" he demanded, trying, as it seemed, to *see* with those sightless eyes — unavailing and distressing attempt! "Answer me — speak again!" he ordered, imperiously and aloud.

"Will you have a little more water, sir? I spilt half of what was in the glass," I said.

"*Who* is it? *What* is it? Who speaks?"

"Pilot knows me, and John and Mary know I am here. I came only this evening," I answered.

"Great God! — what delusion has come over me? What sweet madness has seized me?"

"No delusion — no madness: your mind, sir, is too strong for delusion, your health too sound for frenzy."

"And where is the speaker? Is it only a voice? Oh! I *cannot* see, but I must feel, or my heart will stop and my brain burst. Whatever — whoever you are — be perceptible to the touch or I cannot live!"

He groped; I arrested his wandering hand, and prisoned it in both mine.

"Her very fingers!" he cried; "her small, slight fingers! If so there must be more of her."

The muscular hand broke from my custody; my arm was seized, my shoulder — neck — waist — I was entwined and gathered to him.

"Is it Jane? *What* is it? This is her shape — this is her size — "

"And this her voice," I added. "She is all here: her heart, too. God bless you, sir! I am glad to be so near you again."

"Jane Eyre! — Jane Eyre," was all he said.

"My dear master," I answered, "I am Jane Eyre: I have found you out — I am come back to you."

"In truth? — in the flesh? My living Jane?"

"You touch me, sir, — you hold me, and fast enough: I am not cold like a corpse, nor vacant like air, am I?"

"My living darling! These are certainly her limbs, and these her features; but I cannot be so blest, after all my misery. It is a dream; such dreams as I have had at night when I have clasped her once more to my heart, as I do now; and kissed her, as thus — and felt that she loved me, and trusted that she would not leave me."

"Which I never will, sir, from this day."

"Never will, says the vision? But I always woke and found it an empty mockery; and I was desolate and abandoned — my life dark, lonely, hopeless — my soul athirst and forbidden to drink — my heart famished and never to be fed. Gentle, soft dream, nestling in my arms now, you will fly, too, as your sisters have all fled before you: but kiss me before you go — embrace me, Jane."

"There, sir — and there!'"

I pressed my lips to his once brilliant and now rayless eyes — I swept his hair from his brow, and kissed that too. He suddenly seemed to arouse himself: the conviction of the reality of all this seized him.

"It is you — is it, Jane? You are come back to me then?"

"I am."

"And you do not lie dead in some ditch under some stream? And you are not a pining outcast amongst strangers?"

"No, sir! I am an independent woman now."

"Independent! What do you mean, Jane?"

"My uncle in Madeira is dead, and he left me five thousand pounds."

"Ah! this is practical — this is real!" he cried: "I should never dream that. Besides, there is that peculiar voice of hers, so animating and piquant, as well as soft: it cheers my withered heart; it puts life into it. — What, Janet! Are you an independent woman? A rich woman?"

"If you won't let me live with you, I can build a house of my own close up to your door, and you may come and sit in my parlour when you want company of an evening."

"But as you are rich, Jane, you have now, no doubt, friends who will look after you, and not suffer you to devote yourself to a blind lameter like me?"

"I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress."

"And you will stay with me?"

"Certainly — unless you object. I will be your neighbour, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion — to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live."

He replied not: he seemed serious — abstracted; he sighed; he half-opened his lips as if to speak: he closed them again. I felt a little embarrassed. Perhaps I had too rashly over-leaped conventionalities; and he, like St. John, saw impropriety in my inconsiderateness. I had indeed made my proposal from the idea that he wished and would ask me to be his wife: an expectation, not the less certain because unexpressed, had buoyed me up, that he would claim me at once as his own. But no hint to that effect escaping him and his countenance becoming more overcast, I suddenly remembered that I might have been all wrong, and was perhaps playing the fool unwittingly; and I began gently to withdraw myself from his arms — but he eagerly snatched me closer.

"No — no — Jane; you must not go. No — I have touched you, heard you, felt the comfort of your presence — the sweetness of your consolation: I cannot give up these joys. I have little left in myself — I must have you. The world may laugh — may call me absurd, selfish — but it does not signify. My very soul demands you: it will be satisfied, or it will take deadly vengeance on its frame."

"Well, sir, I will stay with you: I have said so."

"Yes — but you understand one thing by staying with me; and I understand another. You, perhaps, could make up your mind to be about my hand and chair — to wait on me as a kind little nurse (for you have an affectionate heart and a generous spirit, which prompt you to make sacrifices for those you pity), and that ought to suffice for me no doubt. I suppose I should now entertain none but fatherly feelings for you: do you think so? Come — tell me."

"I will think what you like, sir: I am content to be only your nurse, if you think it better."

"But you cannot always be my nurse, Janet: you are young — you must marry one day."

"I don't care about being married."

"You should care, Janet: if I were what I once was, I would try to make you care — but — a sightless block!"

He relapsed again into gloom. I, on the contrary, became more cheerful, and took fresh courage: these last words gave me an insight as to where the difficulty lay; and as it was no difficulty with me, I felt quite relieved from my previous embarrassment. I resumed a livelier vein of conversation.

"It is time some one undertook to rehumanise you," said I, parting his thick and long uncut locks; "for I see you are being metamorphosed into a lion, or something of that sort. You have a 'faux air' of Nebuchadnezzar in the fields about you, that is certain: your hair reminds me of eagles' feathers; whether your nails are grown like birds' claws or not, I have not yet noticed."

"On this arm, I have neither hand nor nails," he said, drawing the mutilated limb from his breast, and showing it to me. "It is a mere stump — a ghastly sight! Don't you think so, Jane?"

"It is a pity to see it; and a pity to see your eyes — and the scar of fire on your forehead: and the worst of it is, one is in danger of loving you too well for all this; and making too much of you."

"I thought you would be revolted, Jane, when you saw my arm, and my cicatrised visage."

"Did you? Don't tell me so — lest I should say something disparaging to your judgment. Now, let me leave you an instant, to make a better fire, and have the hearth swept up. Can you tell when there is a good fire?"

"Yes; with the right eye I see a glow — a ruddy haze."

"And you see the candles?"

"Very dimly — each is a luminous cloud."

"Can you see me?"

"No, my fairy: but I am only too thankful to hear and feel you."

"When do you take supper?"

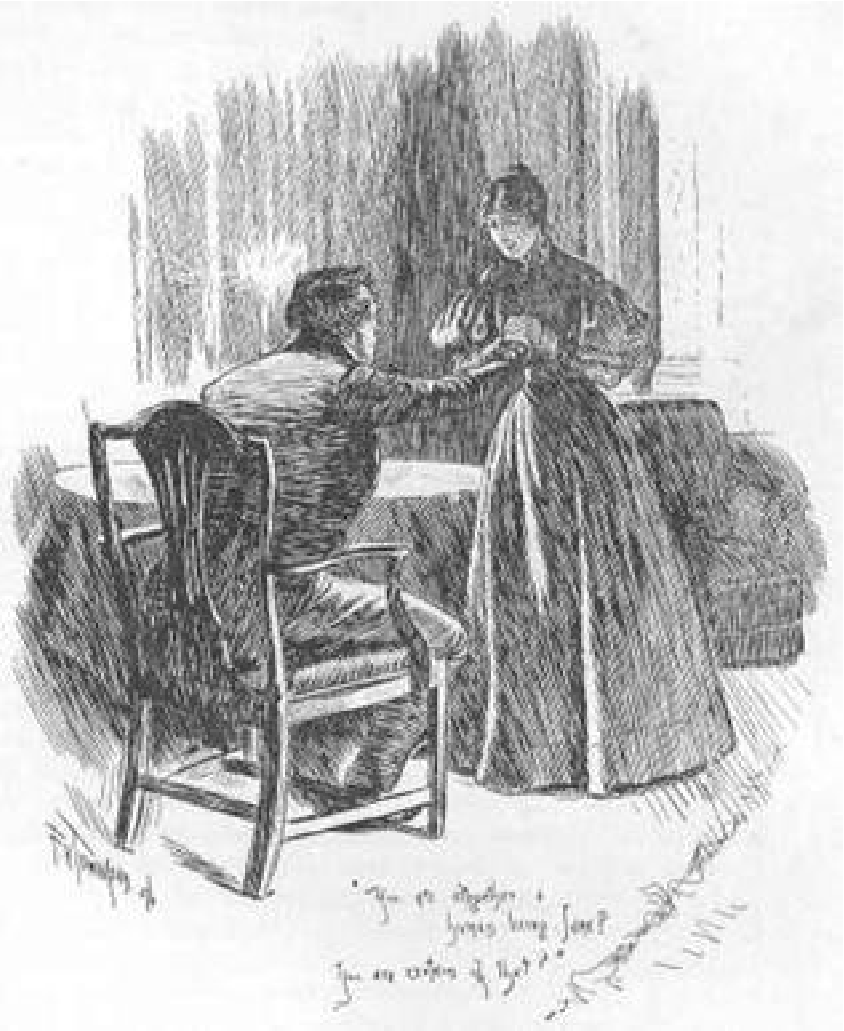
"I never take supper."

"But you shall have some to-night. I am hungry: so are you, I daresay, only you forget."

Summoning Mary, I soon had the room in more cheerful order: I prepared him, likewise, a comfortable repast. My spirits were excited, and with pleasure and ease I talked to him during supper, and for a long time after. There was no harassing restraint, no repressing of glee and vivacity with him; for with him I was at perfect ease, because I knew I suited him; all I said or did seemed either to console or revive him. Delightful consciousness! It brought to life and light my whole nature: in his presence I thoroughly lived; and he lived in mine. Blind as he was, smiles played over his face, joy dawned on his forehead: his lineaments softened and warmed.

After supper, he began to ask me many questions, of where I had been, what I had been doing, how I had found him out; but I gave him only very partial replies: it was too late to enter into particulars that night. Besides, I wished to touch no deep-thrilling chord — to open no fresh well of emotion in his heart: my sole present aim was to cheer him. Cheered, as I have said, he was: and yet but by fits. If a moment's silence broke the conversation, he would turn restless, touch me, then say, "Jane."

"You are altogether a human being, Jane? You are certain of that?"



"I conscientiously believe so, Mr. Rochester."

"Yet how, on this dark and doleful evening, could you so suddenly rise on my lone hearth? I stretched my hand to take a glass of water from a hireling, and it was given me by you: I asked a question, expecting John's wife to answer me, and your voice spoke at my ear."

"Because I had come in, in Mary's stead, with the tray."

"And there is enchantment in the very hour I am now spending with you. Who can tell what a dark, dreary, hopeless life I have dragged on for months past? Doing nothing, expecting nothing; merging night in day; feeling but the sensation of cold when I let the fire go out, of hunger when I forgot to eat: and then a ceaseless sorrow, and, at times, a very delirium of desire to behold my

Jane again. Yes: for her restoration I longed, far more than for that of my lost sight. How can it be that Jane is with me, and says she loves me? Will she not depart as suddenly as she came? To-morrow, I fear I shall find her no more."

A commonplace, practical reply, out of the train of his own disturbed ideas, was, I was sure, the best and most reassuring for him in this frame of mind. I passed my finger over his eyebrows, and remarked that they were scorched, and that I would apply something which would make them grow as broad and black as ever.

"Where is the use of doing me good in any way, beneficent spirit, when, at some fatal moment, you will again desert me — passing like a shadow, whither and how to me unknown, and for me remaining afterwards undiscoverable?

"Have you a pocket-comb about you, sir?"

"What for, Jane?"

"Just to comb out this shaggy black mane. I find you rather alarming, when I examine you close at hand: you talk of my being a fairy, but I am sure, you are more like a brownie."

"Am I hideous, Jane?"

"Very, sir: you always were, you know."

"Humph! The wickedness has not been taken out of you, wherever you have sojourned."

"Yet I have been with good people; far better than you: a hundred times better people; possessed of ideas and views you never entertained in your life: quite more refined and exalted."

"Who the deuce have you been with?"

"If you twist in that way you will make me pull the hair out of your head; and then I think you will cease to entertain doubts of my substantiality."

"Who have you been with, Jane?"

"You shall not get it out of me to-night, sir; you must wait till to-morrow; to leave my tale half told, will, you know, be a sort of security that I shall appear at your breakfast table to finish it. By the bye, I must mind not to rise on your hearth with only a glass of water then: I must bring an egg at the least, to say nothing of fried ham."

"You mocking changeling — fairy-born and human-bred! You make me feel as I have not felt these twelve months. If Saul could have had you for his David, the evil spirit would have been exorcised without the aid of the harp."

"There, sir, you are redd up and made decent. Now I'll leave you: I have been travelling these last three days, and I believe I am tired. Good night."

"Just one word, Jane: were there only ladies in the house where you have been?"

I laughed and made my escape, still laughing as I ran upstairs. "A good idea!" I thought with glee. "I see I have the means of fretting him out of his melancholy for some time to come."

Very early the next morning I heard him up and astir, wandering from one room to another. As soon as Mary came down I heard the question: "Is Miss Eyre here?" Then: "Which room did you put her into? Was it dry? Is she up? Go and ask if she wants anything; and when she will come down."

I came down as soon as I thought there was a prospect of breakfast. Entering the room very softly, I had a view of him before he discovered my presence. It was mournful, indeed, to witness the subjugation of that vigorous spirit to a corporeal infirmity. He sat in his chair — still, but not at rest: expectant evidently; the lines of now habitual sadness marking his strong features. His countenance reminded one of a lamp quenched, waiting to be re-lit — and alas! it was not himself that could now kindle the lustre of animated expression: he was dependent on another for that office! I had meant to be gay and careless, but the powerlessness of the strong man touched my heart to the quick: still I accosted him with what vivacity I could.

"It is a bright, sunny morning, sir," I said. "The rain is over and gone, and there is a tender shining after it: you shall have a walk soon."

I had wakened the glow: his features beamed.

"Oh, you are indeed there, my skylark! Come to me. You are not gone: not vanished? I heard one of your kind an hour ago, singing high over the wood: but its song had no music for me, any more than the rising sun had rays. All the melody on earth is concentrated in my Jane's tongue to my ear (I am glad it is not naturally a silent one): all the sunshine I can feel is in her presence."

The water stood in my eyes to hear this avowal of his dependence; just as if a royal eagle, chained to a perch, should be forced to entreat a sparrow to become its purveyor. But I would not be lachrymose: I dashed off the salt drops, and busied myself with preparing breakfast.

Most of the morning was spent in the open air. I led him out of the wet and wild wood into some cheerful fields: I described to him how brilliantly green they were; how the flowers and hedges looked refreshed; how sparklingly blue was the sky. I sought a seat for him in a hidden and lovely spot, a dry stump of a tree; nor did I refuse to let him, when seated, place me on his knee. Why should I, when both he and I were happier near than apart? Pilot lay beside us: all was quiet. He broke out suddenly while clasping me in his arms —

"Cruel, cruel deserter! Oh, Jane, what did I feel when I discovered you had fled from Thornfield, and when I could nowhere find you; and, after examining your apartment, ascertained that you had taken no money, nor anything which could serve as an equivalent! A pearl necklace I had given you lay untouched in its little casket; your trunks were left corded and locked as they had been prepared for the bridal tour. What could my darling do, I asked, left destitute and penniless? And what did she do? Let me hear now."

Thus urged, I began the narrative of my experience for the last year. I softened considerably what related to the three days of wandering and starvation, because to have told him all would have been to inflict unnecessary pain: the little I did say lacerated his faithful heart deeper than I wished.

I should not have left him thus, he said, without any means of making my way: I should have told him my intention. I should have confided in him: he would never have forced me to be his mistress. Violent as he had seemed in his despair, he, in truth, loved me far too well and too tenderly to constitute himself my tyrant: he would have given me half his fortune, without demanding so much as a kiss in return, rather than I should have flung myself friendless on the wide world. I had endured, he was certain, more than I had confessed to him.

"Well, whatever my sufferings had been, they were very short," I answered: and then I proceeded to tell him how I had been received at Moor House; how I had obtained the office of schoolmistress, &c. The accession of fortune, the discovery of my relations, followed in due order. Of course, St. John Rivers' name came in frequently in the progress of my tale. When I had done, that name was immediately taken up.

"This St. John, then, is your cousin?"

"Yes."

"You have spoken of him often: do you like him?"

"He was a very good man, sir; I could not help liking him."

"A good man. Does that mean a respectable well-conducted man of fifty? Or what does it mean?"

"St John was only twenty-nine, sir."

"'*Jeune encore*,' as the French say. Is he a person of low stature, phlegmatic, and plain. A person whose goodness consists rather in his guiltlessness of vice, than in his prowess in virtue."

"He is untiringly active. Great and exalted deeds are what he lives to perform."

"But his brain? That is probably rather soft? He means well: but you shrug your shoulders to hear him talk?"

"He talks little, sir: what he does say is ever to the point. His brain is first-rate, I should think not impressible, but vigorous."

"Is he an able man, then?"

"Truly able."

"A thoroughly educated man?"

"St. John is an accomplished and profound scholar."

"His manners, I think, you said are not to your taste? — priggish and parsonic?"

"I never mentioned his manners; but, unless I had a very bad taste, they must suit it; they are polished, calm, and gentlemanlike."

"His appearance, — I forget what description you gave of his appearance; — a sort of raw curate, half strangled with his white neckcloth, and stilted up on his thick-soled high-lows, eh?"

"St. John dresses well. He is a handsome man: tall, fair, with blue eyes, and a Grecian profile."

(Aside.) "Damn him!" — (To me.) "Did you like him, Jane?"

"Yes, Mr. Rochester, I liked him: but you asked me that before."

I perceived, of course, the drift of my interlocutor. Jealousy had got hold of him: she stung him; but the sting was salutary: it gave him respite from the gnawing fang of melancholy. I would not, therefore, immediately charm the snake.

"Perhaps you would rather not sit any longer on my knee, Miss Eyre?" was the next somewhat unexpected observation.

"Why not, Mr. Rochester?"

"The picture you have just drawn is suggestive of a rather too overwhelming contrast. Your words have delineated very prettily a graceful Apollo: he is present to your imagination, — tall, fair, blue-eyed, and with a Grecian profile. Your eyes dwell on a Vulcan, — a real blacksmith, brown, broad-shouldered: and blind and lame into the bargain."

"I never thought of it, before; but you certainly are rather like Vulcan, sir."

"Well, you can leave me, ma'am: but before you go" (and he retained me by a firmer grasp than ever), "you will be pleased just to answer me a question or two." He paused.

"What questions, Mr. Rochester?"

Then followed this cross-examination.

"St. John made you schoolmistress of Morton before he knew you were his cousin?"

"Yes."

"You would often see him? He would visit the school sometimes?"

"Daily."

"He would approve of your plans, Jane? I know they would be clever, for you are a talented creature!"

"He approved of them — yes."

"He would discover many things in you he could not have expected to find? Some of your accomplishments are not ordinary."

"I don't know about that."

"You had a little cottage near the school, you say: did he ever come there to see you?"

"Now and then?"

"Of an evening?"

"Once or twice."

A pause.

"How long did you reside with him and his sisters after the cousinship was discovered?"

"Five months."

"Did Rivers spend much time with the ladies of his family?"

"Yes; the back parlour was both his study and ours: he sat near the window, and we by the table."

"Did he study much?"

"A good deal."

"What?"

"Hindostanee."

"And what did you do meantime?"

"I learnt German, at first."

"Did he teach you?"

"He did not understand German."

"Did he teach you nothing?"

"A little Hindostanee."

"Rivers taught you Hindostanee?"

"Yes, sir."

"And his sisters also?"

"No."

"Only you?"

"Only me."

"Did you ask to learn?"

"No."

"He wished to teach you?"

"Yes."

A second pause.

"Why did he wish it? Of what use could Hindostanee be to you?"

"He intended me to go with him to India."

"Ah! here I reach the root of the matter. He wanted you to marry him?"

"He asked me to marry him."

"That is a fiction — an impudent invention to vex me."

"I beg your pardon, it is the literal truth: he asked me more than once, and was as stiff about urging his point as ever you could be."

"Miss Eyre, I repeat it, you can leave me. How often am I to say the same thing? Why do you remain pertinaciously perched on my knee, when I have given you notice to quit?"

"Because I am comfortable there."

"No, Jane, you are not comfortable there, because your heart is not with me: it is with this cousin — this St. John. Oh, till this moment, I thought my little Jane was all mine! I had a belief she loved me even when she left me: that was an atom of sweet in much bitter. Long as we have been parted, hot tears as I have wept over our separation, I never thought that while I was mourning her, she was loving another! But it is useless grieving. Jane, leave me: go and marry Rivers."

"Shake me off, then, sir, — push me away, for I'll not leave you of my own accord."

"Jane, I ever like your tone of voice: it still renews hope, it sounds so truthful. When I hear it, it carries me back a year. I forget that you have formed a new tie. But I am not a fool — go — ”

“Where must I go, sir?”

“Your own way — with the husband you have chosen.”

“Who is that?”

“You know — this St. John Rivers.”

“He is not my husband, nor ever will be. He does not love me: I do not love him. He loves (as he *can* love, and that is not as you love) a beautiful young lady called Rosamond. He wanted to marry me only because he thought I should make a suitable missionary’s wife, which she would not have done. He is good and great, but severe; and, for me, cold as an iceberg. He is not like you, sir: I am not happy at his side, nor near him, nor with him. He has no indulgence for me — no fondness. He sees nothing attractive in me; not even youth — only a few useful mental points. — Then I must leave you, sir, to go to him?”

I shuddered involuntarily, and clung instinctively closer to my blind but beloved master. He smiled.

“What, Jane! Is this true? Is such really the state of matters between you and Rivers?”

“Absolutely, sir! Oh, you need not be jealous! I wanted to tease you a little to make you less sad: I thought anger would be better than grief. But if you wish me to love you, could you but see how much I *do* love you, you would be proud and content. All my heart is yours, sir: it belongs to you; and with you it would remain, were fate to exile the rest of me from your presence for ever.”

Again, as he kissed me, painful thoughts darkened his aspect.

“My seared vision! My crippled strength!” he murmured regretfully.

I caressed, in order to soothe him. I knew of what he was thinking, and wanted to speak for him, but dared not. As he turned aside his face a minute, I saw a tear slide from under the sealed eyelid, and trickle down the manly cheek. My heart swelled.

“I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard,” he remarked ere long. “And what right would that ruin have to bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness?”

“You are no ruin, sir — no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots, whether you ask them or not, because they take delight in your bountiful shadow; and as they grow they will lean towards you, and wind round you, because your strength offers them so safe a prop.”

Again he smiled: I gave him comfort.

“You speak of friends, Jane?” he asked.

“Yes, of friends,” I answered rather hesitatingly: for I knew I meant more than friends, but could not tell what other word to employ. He helped me.

“Ah! Jane. But I want a wife.”

“Do you, sir?”

"Yes: is it news to you?"

"Of course: you said nothing about it before."

"Is it unwelcome news?"

"That depends on circumstances, sir — on your choice."

"Which you shall make for me, Jane. I will abide by your decision."

"Choose then, sir — *her who loves you best*."

"I will at least choose — *her I love best*. Jane, will you marry me?"

"Yes, sir."

"A poor blind man, whom you will have to lead about by the hand?"

"Yes, sir."

"A crippled man, twenty years older than you, whom you will have to wait on?"

"Yes, sir."

"Truly, Jane?"

"Most truly, sir."

"Oh! my darling! God bless you and reward you!"

"Mr. Rochester, if ever I did a good deed in my life — if ever I thought a good thought — if ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer — if ever I wished a righteous wish, — I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth."

"Because you delight in sacrifice."

"Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice? Famine for food, expectation for content. To be privileged to put my arms round what I value — to press my lips to what I love — to repose on what I trust: is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice."

"And to bear with my infirmities, Jane: to overlook my deficiencies."

"Which are none, sir, to me. I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector."

"Hitherto I have hated to be helped — to be led: henceforth, I feel I shall hate it no more. I did not like to put my hand into a hireling's, but it is pleasant to feel it circled by Jane's little fingers. I preferred utter loneliness to the constant attendance of servants; but Jane's soft ministry will be a perpetual joy. Jane suits me: do I suit her?"

"To the finest fibre of my nature, sir."

"The case being so, we have nothing in the world to wait for: we must be married instantly."

He looked and spoke with eagerness: his old impetuosity was rising.

"We must become one flesh without any delay, Jane: there is but the licence to get — then we marry."

"Mr. Rochester, I have just discovered the sun is far declined from its meridian, and Pilot is actually gone home to his dinner. Let me look at your watch."

"Fasten it into your girdle, Janet, and keep it henceforward: I have no use for it."

"It is nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, sir. Don't you feel hungry?"

"The third day from this must be our wedding-day, Jane. Never mind fine clothes and jewels, now: all that is not worth a fillip."

"The sun has dried up all the rain-drops, sir. The breeze is still: it is quite hot."

"Do you know, Jane, I have your little pearl necklace at this moment fastened round my bronze scrag under my cravat? I have worn it since the day I lost my only treasure, as a memento of her."

"We will go home through the wood: that will be the shadiest way."

He pursued his own thoughts without heeding me.

"Jane! you think me, I daresay, an irreligious dog: but my heart swells with gratitude to the beneficent God of this earth just now. He sees not as man sees, but far clearer: judges not as man judges, but far more wisely. I did wrong: I would have sullied my innocent flower — breathed guilt on its purity: the Omnipotent snatched it from me. I, in my stiff-necked rebellion, almost cursed the dispensation: instead of bending to the decree, I defied it. Divine justice pursued its course; disasters came thick on me: I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. *His* chastisements are mighty; and one smote me which has humbled me for ever. You know I was proud of my strength: but what is it now, when I must give it over to foreign guidance, as a child does its weakness? Of late, Jane — only — only of late — I began to see and acknowledge the hand of God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance; the wish for reconcilement to my Maker. I began sometimes to pray: very brief prayers they were, but very sincere.

"Some days since: nay, I can number them — four; it was last Monday night, a singular mood came over me: one in which grief replaced frenzy — sorrow, sullenness. I had long had the impression that since I could nowhere find you, you must be dead. Late that night — perhaps it might be between eleven and twelve o'clock — ere I retired to my dreary rest, I supplicated God, that, if it seemed good to Him, I might soon be taken from this life, and admitted to that world to come, where there was still hope of rejoining Jane.

"I was in my own room, and sitting by the window, which was open: it soothed me to feel the balmy night-air; though I could see no stars and only by a vague, luminous haze, knew the presence of a moon. I longed for thee, Janet! Oh, I longed for thee both with soul and flesh! I asked of God, at once in anguish and humility, if I had not been long enough desolate, afflicted, tormented; and might not soon taste bliss and peace once more. That I merited all I endured, I acknowledged — that I could scarcely endure more, I pleaded; and the alpha and omega of my heart's wishes broke involuntarily from my lips in the words — 'Jane! Jane! Jane!'"

"Did you speak these words aloud?"

"I did, Jane. If any listener had heard me, he would have thought me mad: I pronounced them with such frantic energy."

"And it was last Monday night, somewhere near midnight?"

"Yes; but the time is of no consequence: what followed is the strange point. You will think me superstitious, — some superstition I have in my blood, and always had: nevertheless, this is true — true at least it is that I heard what I now relate.

"As I exclaimed 'Jane! Jane! Jane!' a voice — I cannot tell whence the voice came, but I know whose voice it was — replied, 'I am coming: wait for me;' and a moment after, went whispering on the wind the words — 'Where are you?'

"I'll tell you, if I can, the idea, the picture these words opened to my mind: yet it is difficult to express what I want to express. Ferndean is buried, as you see, in a heavy wood, where sound falls dull, and dies unreverberating. 'Where are you?' seemed spoken amongst mountains; for I heard a hill-sent echo repeat the words. Cooler and fresher at the moment the gale seemed to visit my brow: I could have deemed that in some wild, lone scene, I and Jane were meeting. In spirit, I believe we must have met. You no doubt were, at that hour, in unconscious sleep, Jane: perhaps your soul wandered from its cell to comfort mine; for those were your accents — as certain as I live — they were yours!"

Reader, it was on Monday night — near midnight — that I too had received the mysterious summons: those were the very words by which I replied to it. I listened to Mr. Rochester's narrative, but made no disclosure in return. The coincidence struck me as too awful and inexplicable to be communicated or discussed. If I told anything, my tale would be such as must necessarily make a profound impression on the mind of my hearer: and that mind, yet from its sufferings too prone to gloom, needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural. I kept these things then, and pondered them in my heart.

"You cannot now wonder," continued my master, "that when you rose upon me so unexpectedly last night, I had difficulty in believing you any other than a mere voice and vision, something that would melt to silence and annihilation, as the midnight whisper and mountain echo had melted before. Now, I thank God! I know it to be otherwise. Yes, I thank God!"

He put me off his knee, rose, and reverently lifting his hat from his brow, and bending his sightless eyes to the earth, he stood in mute devotion. Only the last words of the worship were audible.

"I thank my Maker, that, in the midst of judgment, he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto!"

Then he stretched his hand out to be led. I took that dear hand, held it a moment to my lips, then let it pass round my shoulder: being so much lower of stature than he, I served both for his prop and guide. We entered the wood, and wended homeward.

CHAPTER XXXVIII — CONCLUSION

Reader, I married him. A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present. When we got back from church, I went into the kitchen of the manor-house, where Mary was cooking the dinner and John cleaning the knives, and I said —

“Mary, I have been married to Mr. Rochester this morning.” The housekeeper and her husband were both of that decent phlegmatic order of people, to whom one may at any time safely communicate a remarkable piece of news without incurring the danger of having one’s ears pierced by some shrill ejaculation, and subsequently stunned by a torrent of wordy wonderment. Mary did look up, and she did stare at me: the ladle with which she was basting a pair of chickens roasting at the fire, did for some three minutes hang suspended in air; and for the same space of time John’s knives also had rest from the polishing process: but Mary, bending again over the roast, said only —

“Have you, Miss? Well, for sure!”

A short time after she pursued — “I seed you go out with the master, but I didn’t know you were gone to church to be wed;” and she basted away. John, when I turned to him, was grinning from ear to ear.

“I telled Mary how it would be,” he said: “I knew what Mr. Edward” (John was an old servant, and had known his master when he was the cadet of the house, therefore, he often gave him his Christian name) — “I knew what Mr. Edward would do; and I was certain he would not wait long neither: and he’s done right, for aught I know. I wish you joy, Miss!” and he politely pulled his forelock.

“Thank you, John. Mr. Rochester told me to give you and Mary this.” I put into his hand a five-pound note. Without waiting to hear more, I left the kitchen. In passing the door of that sanctum some time after, I caught the words —

“She’ll happen do better for him nor ony o’t’ grand ladies.” And again, “If she ben’t one o’ th’ handsomest, she’s noan faâl and varry good-natured; and i’ his een she’s fair beautiful, onybody may see that.”

I wrote to Moor House and to Cambridge immediately, to say what I had done: fully explaining also why I had thus acted. Diana and Mary approved the step unreservedly. Diana announced that she would just give me time to get over the honeymoon, and then she would come and see me.

“She had better not wait till then, Jane,” said Mr. Rochester, when I read her letter to him; “if she does, she will be too late, for our honeymoon will shine our life long: its beams will only fade over your grave or mine.”

How St. John received the news, I don’t know: he never answered the letter in which I communicated it: yet six months after he wrote to me, without, however, mentioning Mr. Rochester's name or alluding to my marriage. His letter was then calm, and, though very serious, kind. He has maintained a regular, though not frequent, correspondence ever since: he hopes I am happy, and trusts I am not of those who live without God in the world, and only mind earthly things.

You have not quite forgotten little Adèle, have you, reader? I had not; I soon asked and obtained leave of Mr. Rochester, to go and see her at the school where he had placed her. Her frantic joy at beholding me again moved me much. She looked pale and thin: she said she was not happy. I found the rules of the establishment were too strict, its course of study too severe for a child of her age: I took her home with me. I meant to become her governess once more, but I soon found this impracticable; my time and cares were now required by another — my husband needed them all. So I sought out a school conducted on a more indulgent system, and near enough to permit of my visiting her often, and bringing her home sometimes. I took care she should never want for anything that could contribute to her comfort: she soon settled in her new abode, became very happy there, and made fair progress in her studies. As she grew up, a sound English education corrected in a great measure her French defects; and when she left school, I found in her a pleasing and obliging companion: docile, good-tempered, and well-principled. By her grateful attention to me and mine, she has long since well repaid any little kindness I ever had it in my power to offer her.

My tale draws to its close: one word respecting my experience of married life, and one brief glance at the fortunes of those whose names have most frequently recurred in this narrative, and I have done.

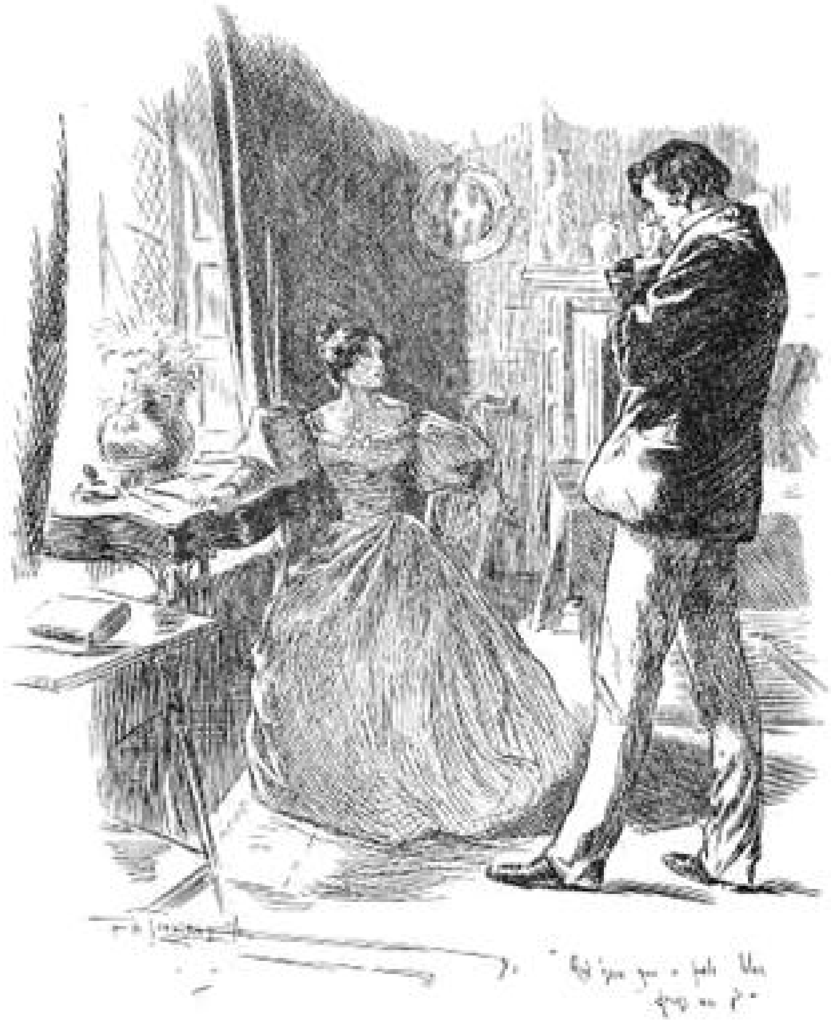
I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest — blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character — perfect concord is the result.

Mr. Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union; perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near — that knit us so very close: for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand. Literally, I was (what he often called me) the apple of his eye. He saw nature — he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river, cloud, sunbeam — of the landscape before us; of the weather round us — and impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. Never did I weary of reading to him; never did I weary of conducting him where he wished to go: of doing for him what he wished to be done. And there was a pleasure in my services, most full, most exquisite, even though sad — because he claimed these services without painful shame or damping humiliation. He loved me so truly, that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance: he felt I loved him so fondly, that to yield that attendance was to indulge my sweetest wishes.

One morning at the end of the two years, as I was writing a letter to his dictation, he came and bent over me, and said — “Jane, have you a glittering ornament round your neck?”

I had a gold watch-chain: I answered “Yes.”

“And have you a pale blue dress on?”



I had. He informed me then, that for some time he had fancied the obscurity clouding one eye was becoming less dense; and that now he was sure of it.

He and I went up to London. He had the advice of an eminent oculist; and he eventually recovered the sight of that one eye. He cannot now see very distinctly: he cannot read or write much; but he can find his way without being led by the hand: the sky is no longer a blank to him — the earth no longer a void. When his first-born was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they once were — large, brilliant, and black. On that occasion, he again, with a full heart, acknowledged that God had tempered judgment with mercy.

My Edward and I, then, are happy: and the more so, because those we most love are happy likewise. Diana and Mary Rivers are both married: alternately, once every year, they come to see us, and we go to see them. Diana's husband is a captain in the navy, a gallant officer and a good man. Mary's is a clergyman, a college friend of her brother's, and, from his attainments and principles, worthy of the connection. Both Captain Fitzjames and Mr. Wharton love their wives, and are loved by them.

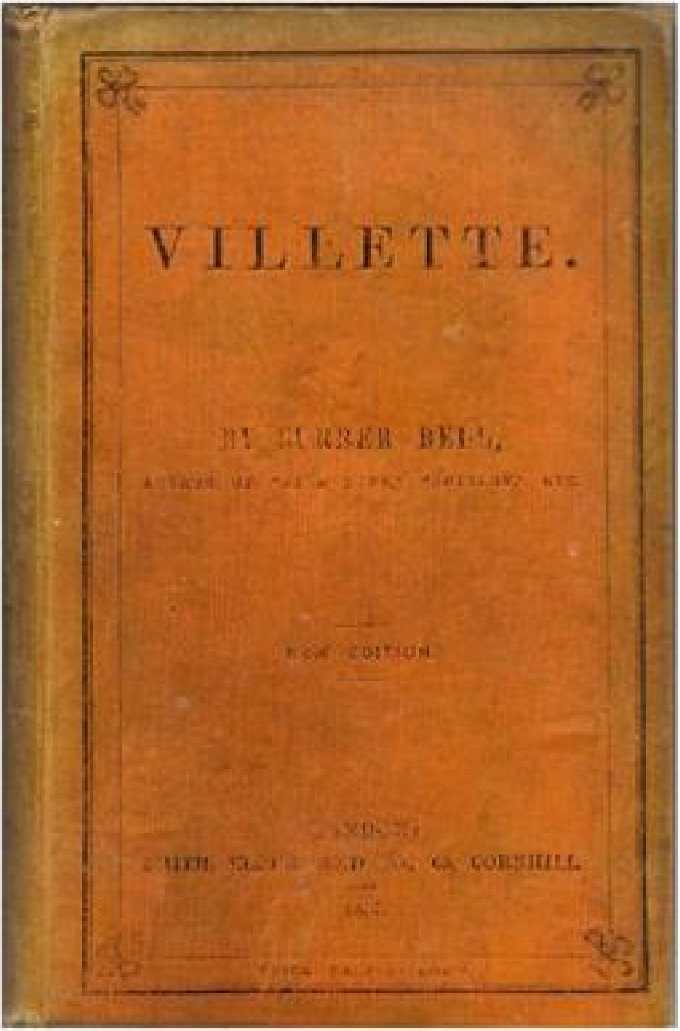
As to St. John Rivers, he left England: he went to India. He entered on the path he had marked for himself; he pursues it still. A more resolute, indefatigable pioneer never wrought amidst rocks and dangers. Firm, faithful, and devoted, full of energy, and zeal, and truth, he labours for his race; he clears their painful way to improvement; he hews down like a giant the prejudices of creed and caste that encumber it. He may be stern; he may be exacting; he may be ambitious yet; but his is the sternness of the warrior Greatheart, who guards his pilgrim convoy from the onslaught of Apollyon. His is the exaction of the apostle, who speaks but for Christ, when he says — "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." His is the ambition of the high master-spirit, which aims to fill a place in the first rank of those who are redeemed from the earth — who stand without fault before the throne of God, who share the last mighty victories of the Lamb, who are called, and chosen, and faithful.

St. John is unmarried: he never will marry now. Himself has hitherto sufficed to the toil, and the toil draws near its close: his glorious sun hastens to its setting. The last letter I received from him drew from my eyes human tears, and yet filled my heart with divine joy: he anticipated his sure reward, his incorruptible crown. I know that a stranger's hand will write to me next, to say that the good and faithful servant has been called at length into the joy of his Lord. And why weep for this? No fear of death will darken St. John's last hour: his mind will be unclouded, his heart will be undaunted, his hope will be sure, his faith steadfast. His own words are a pledge of this —

"My Master," he says, "has forewarned me. Daily He announces more distinctly, — 'Surely I come quickly!' and hourly I more eagerly respond, — 'Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus!'"

SHIRLEY

This 1849 social novel is Charlotte Brontë's second novel, also published under pseudonym Currer Bell. The novel is set in Yorkshire in the period 1811–12, during the industrial depression resulting from the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812. The novel's popularity led to Shirley becoming a woman's name. In the novel, Shirley Keeldar, the heroine was given the name that her father had intended to give a son. Before the publication of the novel, Shirley was an uncommon – but distinctly male – name and would have been an unusual name for a woman. Today it is regarded as a distinctly female name and an uncommon male name.


VILLETTE.
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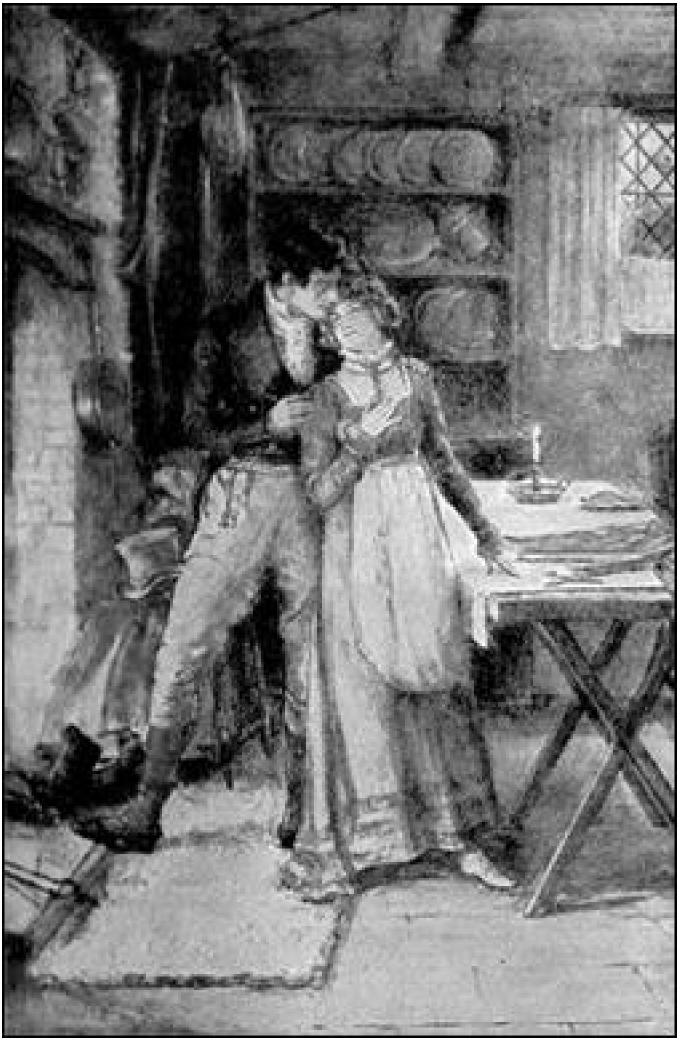


"Moore placed his hand on his cousin's shoulder, stooped, and left a kiss on her forehead."

CHAPTER I.

LEVITICAL.

Of late years an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England: they lie very thick on the hills; every parish has one or more of them; they are young enough to be very active, and ought to be doing a great deal of good. But not of late years are we about to speak; we are going back to the beginning of this century: late years — present years are dusty, sunburnt, hot, arid; we will evade the noon, forget it in siesta, pass the midday in slumber, and dream of dawn.

If you think, from this prelude, that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when all who have work wake with the consciousness that they must rise and betake themselves thereto. It is not positively affirmed that you shall not have a taste of the exciting, perhaps towards the middle and close of the meal, but it is resolved that the first dish set upon the table shall be one that a Catholic — ay, even an Anglo-Catholic — might eat on Good Friday in Passion Week: it shall be cold lentils and vinegar without oil; it shall be unleavened bread with bitter herbs, and no roast lamb.

Of late years, I say, an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England; but in eighteen-hundred-eleven-twelve that affluent rain had not descended. Curates were scarce then: there was no Pastoral Aid — no Additional Curates' Society to stretch a helping hand to worn-out old rectors and incumbents, and give them the wherewithal to pay a vigorous young colleague from Oxford or Cambridge. The present successors of the apostles, disciples of Dr. Pusey and tools of the Propaganda, were at that time being hatched under cradle-blankets, or undergoing regeneration by nursery-baptism in wash-hand basins. You could not have guessed by looking at any one of them that the Italian-ironed double frills of its net-cap surrounded the brows of a preordained, specially-sanctified successor of St. Paul, St. Peter, or St. John; nor could you have foreseen in the folds of its long night-gown the white surplice in which it was hereafter cruelly to exercise the souls of its parishioners, and strangely to nonplus its old-fashioned vicar by flourishing aloft in a pulpit the shirt-like raiment which had never before waved higher than the reading-desk.

Yet even in those days of scarcity there were curates: the precious plant was rare, but it might be found. A certain favoured district in the West Riding of Yorkshire could boast three rods of Aaron blossoming within a circuit of twenty miles. You shall see them, reader. Step into this neat garden-house on the skirts of Whinbury, walk forward into the little parlour. There they are at dinner. Allow me to introduce them to you: Mr. Donne, curate of Whinbury; Mr. Malone, curate of Briarfield; Mr. Sweeting, curate of Nunnely. These are Mr. Donne's lodgings, being the habitation of one John Gale, a small clothier. Mr. Donne has kindly invited his brethren to regale with him. You and I will join the party, see what is to be seen, and hear what is to be heard. At present, however, they are only eating; and while they eat we will talk aside.

These gentlemen are in the bloom of youth; they possess all the activity of that interesting age — an activity which their moping old vicars would fain turn into the channel of their pastoral duties, often expressing a wish to see it expended in a diligent superintendence of the schools, and in frequent visits to the sick of their respective parishes. But the youthful Levites feel this to be dull work; they prefer lavishing their energies on a course of proceeding which, though to other eyes it appear more heavy with *ennui*, more cursed with monotony, than the toil of the weaver at his loom, seems to yield them an unfailing supply of enjoyment and occupation.

I allude to a rushing backwards and forwards, amongst themselves, to and from their respective lodgings — not a round, but a triangle of visits, which they keep up all the year through, in winter, spring, summer, and autumn. Season and weather make no difference; with unintelligible zeal they dare snow and hail, wind and rain, mire and dust, to go and dine, or drink tea, or sup with each other. What attracts them it would be difficult to say. It is not friendship, for whenever they meet they quarrel. It is not religion — the thing is never named amongst them; theology they may discuss occasionally, but piety — never. It is not the love of eating and drinking: each might have as good a joint and pudding, tea as potent, and toast as succulent, at his own lodgings, as is served to him at his brother's. Mrs. Gale, Mrs. Hogg, and Mrs. Whipp — their respective landladies — affirm that "it is just for naught else but to give folk trouble." By "folk" the good ladies of course mean themselves, for indeed they are kept in a continual "fry" by this system of mutual invasion.

Mr. Donne and his guests, as I have said, are at dinner; Mrs. Gale waits on them, but a spark of the hot kitchen fire is in her eye. She considers that the privilege of inviting a friend to a meal occasionally, without additional charge (a privilege included in the terms on which she lets her lodgings), has been quite sufficiently exercised of late. The present week is yet but at Thursday, and on Monday Mr. Malone, the curate of Briarfield, came to breakfast and stayed dinner; on Tuesday Mr. Malone and Mr. Sweeting of Nunnely came to tea, remained to supper, occupied the spare bed, and favoured her with their company to breakfast on Wednesday morning; now, on Thursday, they are both here at dinner, and she is almost certain they will stay all night. “C’en est trop,” she would say, if she could speak French.

Mr. Sweeting is mincing the slice of roast beef on his plate, and complaining that it is very tough; Mr. Donne says the beer is flat. Ay, that is the worst of it: if they would only be civil Mrs. Gale wouldn’t mind it so much, if they would only seem satisfied with what they get she wouldn’t care; but “these young parsons is so high and so scornful, they set everybody beneath their ‘fit.’ They treat her with less than civility, just because she doesn’t keep a servant, but does the work of the house herself, as her mother did afore her; then they are always speaking against Yorkshire ways and Yorkshire folk,” and by that very token Mrs. Gale does not believe one of them to be a real gentleman, or come of gentle kin. “The old parsons is worth the whole lump of college lads; they know what belongs to good manners, and is kind to high and low.”

“More bread!” cries Mr. Malone, in a tone which, though prolonged but to utter two syllables, proclaims him at once a native of the land of shamrocks and potatoes. Mrs. Gale hates Mr. Malone more than either of the other two; but she fears him also, for he is a tall, strongly-built personage, with real Irish legs and arms, and a face as genuinely national — not the Milesian face, not Daniel O’Connell’s style, but the high-featured, North-American-Indian sort of visage, which belongs to a certain class of the Irish gentry, and has a petrified and proud look, better suited to the owner of an estate of slaves than to the landlord of a free peasantry. Mr. Malone’s father termed himself a gentleman: he was poor and in debt, and besottedly arrogant; and his son was like him.

Mrs. Gale offered the loaf.

“Cut it, woman,” said her guest; and the “woman” cut it accordingly. Had she followed her inclinations, she would have cut the parson also; her Yorkshire soul revolted absolutely from his manner of command.

The curates had good appetites, and though the beef was “tough,” they ate a great deal of it. They swallowed, too, a tolerable allowance of the “flat beer,” while a dish of Yorkshire pudding, and two tureens of vegetables, disappeared like leaves before locusts. The cheese, too, received distinguished marks of their attention; and a “spice-cake,” which followed by way of dessert, vanished like a vision, and was no more found. Its elegy was chanted in the kitchen by Abraham, Mrs. Gale’s son and heir, a youth of six summers; he had reckoned upon the reversion thereof, and when his mother brought down the empty platter, he lifted up his voice and wept sore.

The curates, meantime, sat and sipped their wine, a liquor of unpretending vintage, moderately enjoyed. Mr. Malone, indeed, would much rather have had whisky; but Mr. Donne, being an Englishman, did not keep the beverage. While they sipped they argued, not on politics, nor on philosophy, nor on literature — these topics were now, as ever, totally without interest for them — not even on theology, practical or doctrinal, but on minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all save themselves. Mr. Malone, who contrived to secure two glasses of wine, when his brethren contented themselves with one, waxed by degrees hilarious after his fashion; that is, he grew a little insolent, said rude things in a hectoring tone, and laughed clamorously at his own brilliancy.

Each of his companions became in turn his butt. Malone had a stock of jokes at their service, which he was accustomed to serve out regularly on convivial occasions like the present, seldom varying his wit; for which, indeed, there was no necessity, as he never appeared to consider himself monotonous, and did not at all care what others thought. Mr. Donne he favoured with hints about his extreme meagreness, allusions to his turned-up nose, cutting sarcasms on a certain threadbare chocolate surtout which that gentleman was accustomed to sport whenever it rained or seemed likely to rain, and criticisms on a choice set of cockney phrases and modes of pronunciation, Mr. Donne's own property, and certainly deserving of remark for the elegance and finish they communicated to his style.

Mr. Sweeting was bantered about his stature — he was a little man, a mere boy in height and breadth compared with the athletic Malone; rallied on his musical accomplishments — he played the flute and sang hymns like a seraph, some young ladies of his parish thought; sneered at as "the ladies' pet;" teased about his mamma and sisters, for whom poor Mr. Sweeting had some lingering regard, and of whom he was foolish enough now and then to speak in the presence of the priestly Paddy, from whose anatomy the bowels of natural affection had somehow been omitted.

The victims met these attacks each in his own way: Mr. Donne with a stilted self-complacency and half-sullen phlegm, the sole props of his otherwise somewhat rickety dignity; Mr. Sweeting with the indifference of a light, easy disposition, which never professed to have any dignity to maintain.

When Malone's raillery became rather too offensive, which it soon did, they joined, in an attempt to turn the tables on him by asking him how many boys had shouted "Irish Peter!" after him as he came along the road that Malone); requesting to be informed whether it was the mode in Ireland for clergymen to carry loaded pistols in their pockets, and a shillelah in their hands, when they made pastoral visits; inquiring the signification of such words as vele, firrum, hellum, storrum (so Mr. Malone invariably pronounced veil, firm, helm, storm), and employing such other methods of retaliation as the innate refinement of their minds suggested.

This, of course, would not do. Malone, being neither good-natured nor phlegmatic, was presently in a towering passion. He vociferated, gesticulated; Donne and Sweeting laughed. He reviled them as Saxons and snobs at the very top pitch of his high Celtic voice; they taunted him with being the native of a conquered land. He menaced rebellion in the name of his "counthry," vented bitter hatred against English rule; they spoke of rags, beggary, and pestilence. The little parlour was in an uproar; you would have thought a duel must follow such virulent abuse; it seemed a wonder that Mr. and Mrs. Gale did not take alarm at the noise, and send for a constable to keep the peace. But they were accustomed to such demonstrations; they well knew that the curates never dined or took tea together without a little exercise of the sort, and were quite easy as to consequences, knowing that these clerical quarrels were as harmless as they were noisy, that they resulted in nothing, and that, on whatever terms the curates might part to-night, they would be sure to meet the best friends in the world to-morrow morning.

As the worthy pair were sitting by their kitchen fire, listening to the repeated and sonorous contact of Malone’s fist with the mahogany plane of the parlour table, and to the consequent start and jingle of decanters and glasses following each assault, to the mocking laughter of the allied English disputants, and the stuttering declamation of the isolated Hibernian — as they thus sat, a foot was heard on the outer door-step, and the knocker quivered to a sharp appeal.

Mr. Gale went and opened.

“Whom have you upstairs in the parlour?” asked a voice — a rather remarkable voice, nasal in tone, abrupt in utterance.

“O Mr. Helstone, is it you, sir? I could hardly see you for the darkness; it is so soon dark now. Will you walk in, sir?”

“I want to know first whether it is worth my while walking in. Whom have you upstairs?”

“The curates, sir.”

“What! all of them?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Been dining here?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That will do.”

With these words a person entered — a middle-aged man, in black. He walked straight across the kitchen to an inner door, opened it, inclined his head forward, and stood listening. There was something to listen to, for the noise above was just then louder than ever.

“Hey!” he ejaculated to himself; then turning to Mr. Gale — “Have you often this sort of work?”

Mr. Gale had been a churchwarden, and was indulgent to the clergy.

“They’re young, you know, sir — they’re young,” said he deprecatingly.

“Young! They want caning. Bad boys — bad boys! And if you were a Dissenter, John Gale, instead of being a good Churchman, they’d do the like — they’d expose themselves; but I’ll — — “

By way of finish to this sentence, he passed through the inner door, drew it after him, and mounted the stair. Again he listened a few minutes when he arrived at the upper room. Making entrance without warning, he stood before the curates.

And they were silent; they were transfixed; and so was the invader. He —

a personage short of stature, but straight of port, and bearing on broad shoulders a hawk's head, beak, and eye, the whole surmounted by a Rehoboam, or shovel hat, which he did not seem to think it necessary to lift or remove before the presence in which he then stood — *he* folded his arms on his chest and surveyed his young friends, if friends they were, much at his leisure.

"What!" he began, delivering his words in a voice no longer nasal, but deep — more than deep — a voice made purposely hollow and cavernous — "what! has the miracle of Pentecost been renewed? Have the cloven tongues come down again? Where are they? The sound filled the whole house just now. I heard the seventeen languages in full action: Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians; every one of these must have had its representative in this room two minutes since."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Helstone," began Mr. Donne; "take a seat, pray, sir. Have a glass of wine?"

His civilities received no answer. The falcon in the black coat proceeded, —

"What do I talk about the gift of tongues? Gift, indeed! I mistook the chapter, and book, and Testament — gospel for law, Acts for Genesis, the city of Jerusalem for the plain of Shinar. It was no gift but the confusion of tongues which has gabbled me deaf as a post. *You*, apostles? What! you three? Certainly not; three presumptuous Babylonish masons — neither more nor less!"

"I assure you, sir, we were only having a little chat together over a glass of wine after a friendly dinner — settling the Dissenters!"

"Oh! settling the Dissenters, were you? Was Malone settling the Dissenters? It sounded to me much more like settling his co-apostles. You were quarrelling together, making almost as much noise — you three alone — as Moses Barraclough, the preaching tailor, and all his hearers are making in the Methodist chapel down yonder, where they are in the thick of a revival. I know whose fault it is. — It is yours, Malone."

"Mine, sir?"

"Yours, sir. Donne and Sweeting were quiet before you came, and would be quiet if you were gone. I wish, when you crossed the Channel, you had left your Irish habits behind you. Dublin student ways won't do here. The proceedings which might pass unnoticed in a wild bog and mountain district in Connaught will, in a decent English parish, bring disgrace on those who indulge in them, and, what is far worse, on the sacred institution of which they are merely the humble appendages."

There was a certain dignity in the little elderly gentleman's manner of rebuking these youths, though it was not, perhaps, quite the dignity most appropriate to the occasion. Mr. Helstone, standing straight as a ramrod, looking keen as a kite, presented, despite his clerical hat, black coat, and gaiters, more the air of a veteran officer chiding his subalterns than of a venerable priest exhorting his sons in the faith. Gospel mildness, apostolic benignity, never seemed to have breathed their influence over that keen brown visage, but firmness had fixed the features, and sagacity had carved her own lines about them.

"I met Supplehough," he continued, "plodding through the mud this wet night, going to preach at Milldean opposition shop. As I told you, I heard Barraclough bellowing in the midst of a conventicle like a possessed bull; and I find *you*, gentlemen, tarrying over your half-pint of muddy port wine, and scolding like angry old women. No wonder Supplehough should have dipped sixteen adult converts in a day — which he did a fortnight since; no wonder Barraclough, scamp and hypocrite as he is, should attract all the weaver-girls in their flowers and ribbons, to witness how much harder are his knuckles than the wooden brim of his tub; as little wonder that *you*, when you are left to yourselves, without your rectors — myself, and Hall, and Boultby — to back you, should too often perform the holy service of our church to bare walls, and read your bit of a dry discourse to the clerk, and the organist, and the beadle. But enough of the subject. I came to see Malone. — I have an errand unto thee, O captain!"

"What is it?" inquired Malone discontentedly. "There can be no funeral to take at this time of day."

"Have you any arms about you?"

"Arms, sir? — yes, and legs." And he advanced the mighty members.

"Bah! weapons I mean."

"I have the pistols you gave me yourself. I never part with them. I lay them ready cocked on a chair by my bedside at night. I have my blackthorn."

"Very good. Will you go to Hollow's Mill?"

"What is stirring at Hollow's Mill?"

"Nothing as yet, nor perhaps will be; but Moore is alone there. He has sent all the workmen he can trust to Stilbro'; there are only two women left about the place. It would be a nice opportunity for any of his well-wishers to pay him a visit, if they knew how straight the path was made before them."

"I am none of his well-wishers, sir. I don't care for him."

"Soh! Malone, you are afraid."

"You know me better than that. If I really thought there was a chance of a row I would go: but Moore is a strange, shy man, whom I never pretend to understand; and for the sake of his sweet company only I would not stir a step."

"But there *is* a chance of a row; if a positive riot does not take place — of which, indeed, I see no signs — yet it is unlikely this night will pass quite tranquilly. You know Moor has resolved to have new machinery, and he expects two wagon-loads of frames and shears from Stilbro' this evening. Scott, the overlooker, and a few picked men are gone to fetch them."

"They will bring them in safely and quietly enough, sir."

"Moore says so, and affirms he wants nobody. Some one, however, he must have, if it were only to bear evidence in case anything should happen. I call him very careless. He sits in the counting-house with the shutters unclosed; he goes out here and there after dark, wanders right up the hollow, down Fieldhead Lane, among the plantations, just as if he were the darling of the neighbourhood, or — being, as he is, its detestation — bore a 'charmed life,' as they say in tale-books. He takes no warning from the fate of Pearson, nor from that of Armitage — shot, one in his own house and the other on the moor."

"But he should take warning, sir, and use precautions too," interposed Mr. Sweeting; "and I think he would if he heard what I heard the other day."

"What did you hear, Davy?"

"You know Mike Hartley, sir?"

"The Antinomian weaver? Yes."

"When Mike has been drinking for a few weeks together, he generally winds up by a visit to Nunnely vicarage, to tell Mr. Hall a piece of his mind about his sermons, to denounce the horrible tendency of his doctrine of works, and warn him that he and all his hearers are sitting in outer darkness."

"Well, that has nothing to do with Moore."

"Besides being an Antinomian, he is a violent Jacobin and leveller, sir."

"I know. When he is very drunk, his mind is always running on regicide. Mike is not unacquainted with history, and it is rich to hear him going over the list of tyrants of whom, as he says, 'the revenger of blood has obtained satisfaction.' The fellow exults strangely in murder done on crowned heads or on any head for political reasons. I have already heard it hinted that he seems to have a queer hankering after Moore. Is that what you allude to, Sweeting?"

"You use the proper term, sir. Mr. Hall thinks Mike has no personal hatred of Moore. Mike says he even likes to talk to him and run after him, but he has a *hankering* that Moore should be made an example of. He was extolling him to Mr. Hall the other day as the mill-owner with the most brains in Yorkshire, and for that reason he affirms Moore should be chosen as a sacrifice, an oblation of a sweet savour. Is Mike Hartley in his right mind, do you think, sir?" inquired Sweeting simply.

"Can't tell, Davy. He may be crazed, or he may be only crafty, or perhaps a little of both."

"He talks of seeing visions, sir."

"Ay! He is a very Ezekiel or Daniel for visions. He came just when I was going to bed last Friday night to describe one that had been revealed to him in Nunnely Park that very afternoon."

"Tell it, sir. What was it?" urged Sweeting.

"Davy, thou hast an enormous organ of wonder in thy cranium. Malone, you see, has none. Neither murders nor visions interest him. See what a big vacant Saph he looks at this moment."

"Saph! Who was Saph, sir?"

"I thought you would not know. You may find it out. It is biblical. I know nothing more of him than his name and race; but from a boy upwards I have always attached a personality to Saph. Depend on it he was honest, heavy, and luckless. He met his end at Gob by the hand of Sibbechai."

"But the vision, sir?"

"Davy, thou shalt hear. Donne is biting his nails, and Malone yawning, so I will tell it but to thee. Mike is out of work, like many others, unfortunately. Mr. Grame, Sir Philip Nunnely's steward, gave him a job about the priory. According to his account, Mike was busy hedging rather late in the afternoon, but before dark, when he heard what he thought was a band at a distance — bugles, fifes, and the sound of a trumpet; it came from the forest, and he wondered that there should be music there. He looked up. All amongst the trees he saw moving objects, red, like poppies, or white, like may-blossom. The wood was full of them; they poured out and filled the park. He then perceived they were soldiers — thousands and tens of thousands; but they made no more noise than a swarm of midges on a summer evening. They formed in order, he affirmed, and marched, regiment after regiment, across the park. He followed them to Nunnely Common; the music still played soft and distant. On the common he watched them go through a number of evolutions. A man clothed in scarlet stood in the centre and directed them. They extended, he declared, over fifty acres. They were in sight half an hour; then they marched away quite silently. The whole time he heard neither voice nor tread — nothing but the faint music playing a solemn march."

"Where did they go, sir?"

"Towards Briarfield. Mike followed them. They seemed passing Fieldhead, when a column of smoke, such as might be vomited by a park of artillery, spread noiseless over the fields, the road, the common, and rolled, he said, blue and dim, to his very feet. As it cleared away he looked again for the soldiers, but they were vanished; he saw them no more. Mike, like a wise Daniel as he is, not only rehearsed the vision but gave the interpretation thereof. It signifies, he intimated, bloodshed and civil conflict."

"Do you credit it, sir?" asked Sweeting.

"Do you, Davy? — But come, Malone; why are you not off?"

"I am rather surprised, sir, you did not stay with Moore yourself. You like this kind of thing."

"So I should have done, had I not unfortunately happened to engage Boultby to sup with me on his way home from the Bible Society meeting at Nunnely. I promised to send you as my substitute; for which, by-the-bye, he did not thank me. He would much rather have had me than you, Peter. Should there be any real need of help I shall join you. The mill-bell will give warning. Meantime, go — unless (turning suddenly to Messrs. Sweeting and Donne) — unless Davy Sweeting or Joseph Donne prefers going. — What do you say, gentlemen? The commission is an honourable one, not without the seasoning of a little real peril; for the country is in a queer state, as you all know, and Moore and his mill and his machinery are held in sufficient odium. There are chivalric sentiments, there is high-beating courage, under those waistcoats of yours, I doubt not. Perhaps I am too partial to my favourite Peter. Little David shall be the champion, or spotless Joseph. — Malone, you are but a great floundering Saul after all, good only to lend your armour. Out with your firearms; fetch your shillelah. It is there — in the corner."

With a significant grin Malone produced his pistols, offering one to each of his brethren. They were not readily seized on. With graceful modesty each gentleman retired a step from the presented weapon.

"I never touch them. I never did touch anything of the kind," said Mr. Donne.

"I am almost a stranger to Mr. Moore," murmured Sweeting.

"If you never touched a pistol, try the feel of it now, great satrap of Egypt. As to the little minstrel, he probably prefers encountering the Philistines with no other weapon than his flute. — Get their hats, Peter. They'll both of 'em go."

"No, sir; no, Mr. Helstone. My mother wouldn't like it," pleaded Sweeting.

"And I make it a rule never to get mixed up in affairs of the kind," observed Donne.

Helstone smiled sardonically; Malone laughed a horse-laugh. He then replaced his arms, took his hat and cudgel, and saying that "he never felt more in tune for a shindy in his life, and that he wished a score of greasy cloth-dressers might beat up Moore's quarters that night," he made his exit, clearing the stairs at a stride or two, and making the house shake with the bang of the front-door behind him.

CHAPTER II.

THE WAGONS.

The evening was pitch dark: star and moon were quenched in gray rain-clouds — gray they would have been by day; by night they looked sable. Malone was not a man given to close observation of nature; her changes passed, for the most part, unnoticed by him. He could walk miles on the most varying April day and never see the beautiful dallying of earth and heaven — never mark when a sunbeam kissed the hill-tops, making them smile clear in green light, or when a shower wept over them, hiding their crests with the low-hanging, dishevelled tresses of a cloud. He did not, therefore, care to contrast the sky as it now appeared — a muffled, streaming vault, all black, save where, towards the east, the furnaces of Stilbro' ironworks threw a tremulous lurid shimmer on the horizon — with the same sky on an unclouded frosty night. He did not trouble himself to ask where the constellations and the planets were gone, or to regret the "black-blue" serenity of the air-ocean which those white islets stud, and which another ocean, of heavier and denser element, now rolled below and concealed. He just doggedly pursued his way, leaning a little forward as he walked, and wearing his hat on the back of his head, as his Irish manner was. "Tramp, tramp," he went along the causeway, where the road boasted the privilege of such an accommodation; "splash, splash," through the mire-filled cart ruts, where the flags were exchanged for soft mud. He looked but for certain landmarks — the spire of Briarfield Church; farther on, the lights of Redhouse. This was an inn; and when he reached it, the glow of a fire through a half-curtained window, a vision of glasses on a round table, and of revellers on an oaken settle, had nearly drawn aside the curate from his course. He thought longingly of a tumbler of whisky-and-water. In a strange place he would instantly have realized the dream; but the company assembled in that kitchen were Mr. Helstone's own parishioners; they all knew him. He sighed, and passed on.

The highroad was now to be quitted, as the remaining distance to Hollow's Mill might be considerably reduced by a short cut across fields. These fields were level and monotonous. Malone took a direct course through them, jumping hedge and wall. He passed but one building here, and that seemed large and hall-like, though irregular. You could see a high gable, then a long front, then a low gable, then a thick, lofty stack of chimneys. There were some trees behind it. It was dark; not a candle shone from any window. It was absolutely still; the rain running from the eaves, and the rather wild but very low whistle of the wind round the chimneys and through the boughs were the sole sounds in its neighbourhood.

This building passed, the fields, hitherto flat, declined in a rapid descent. Evidently a vale lay below, through which you could hear the water run. One light glimmered in the depth. For that beacon Malone steered.

He came to a little white house — you could see it was white even through this dense darkness — and knocked at the door. A fresh-faced servant opened it. By the candle she held was revealed a narrow passage, terminating in a narrow stair. Two doors covered with crimson baize, a strip of crimson carpet down the steps, contrasted with light-coloured walls and white floor, made the little interior look clean and fresh.

"Mr. Moore is at home, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, but he is not in."

"Not in! Where is he then?"

"At the mill — in the counting-house."

Here one of the crimson doors opened.

"Are the wagons come, Sarah?" asked a female voice, and a female head at the same time was apparent. It might not be the head of a goddess — indeed a screw of curl-paper on each side the temples quite forbade that supposition — but neither was it the head of a Gorgon; yet Malone seemed to take it in the latter light. Big as he was, he shrank bashfully back into the rain at the view thereof, and saying, "I'll go to him," hurried in seeming trepidation down a short lane, across an obscure yard, towards a huge black mill.

The work-hours were over; the "hands" were gone. The machinery was at rest, the mill shut up. Malone walked round it. Somewhere in its great sooty flank he found another chink of light; he knocked at another door, using for the purpose the thick end of his shillelah, with which he beat a rousing tattoo. A key turned; the door unclosed.

"Is it Joe Scott? What news of the wagons, Joe?"

"No; it's myself. Mr. Helstone would send me."

"Oh! Mr. Malone." The voice in uttering this name had the slightest possible cadence of disappointment. After a moment's pause it continued, politely but a little formally, —

"I beg you will come in, Mr. Malone. I regret extremely Mr. Helstone should have thought it necessary to trouble you so far. There was no necessity — I told him so — and on such a night; but walk forwards."

Through a dark apartment, of aspect undistinguishable, Malone followed the speaker into a light and bright room within — very light and bright indeed it seemed to eyes which, for the last hour, had been striving to penetrate the double darkness of night and fog; but except for its excellent fire, and for a lamp of elegant design and vivid lustre burning on a table, it was a very plain place. The boarded floor was carpetless; the three or four stiff-backed, green-painted chairs seemed once to have furnished the kitchen of some farm-house;

a desk of strong, solid formation, the table aforesaid, and some framed sheets on the stone-coloured walls, bearing plans for building, for gardening, designs of machinery, etc., completed the furniture of the place.

Plain as it was, it seemed to satisfy Malone, who, when he had removed and hung up his wet surtout and hat, drew one of the rheumatic-looking chairs to the hearth, and set his knees almost within the bars of the red grate.

"Comfortable quarters you have here, Mr. Moore; and all snug to yourself."

"Yes, but my sister would be glad to see you, if you would prefer stepping into the house."

"Oh no! The ladies are best alone, I never was a lady's man. You don't mistake me for my friend Sweeting, do you, Mr. Moore?"

"Sweeting! Which of them is that? The gentleman in the chocolate overcoat, or the little gentleman?"

"The little one — he of Nunnely; the cavalier of the Misses Sykes, with the whole six of whom he is in love, ha! ha!"

"Better be generally in love with all than specially with one, I should think, in that quarter."

"But he is specially in love with one besides, for when I and Donne urged him to make a choice amongst the fair bevy, he named — which do you think?"

With a queer, quiet smile Mr. Moore replied, "Dora, of course, or Harriet."

"Ha! ha! you've an excellent guess. But what made you hit on those two?"

"Because they are the tallest, the handsomest, and Dora, at least, is the stoutest; and as your friend Mr. Sweeting is but a little slight figure, I concluded that, according to a frequent rule in such cases, he preferred his contrast."

"You are right; Dora it is. But he has no chance, has he, Moore?"

"What has Mr. Sweeting besides his curacy?"

This question seemed to tickle Malone amazingly. He laughed for full three minutes before he answered it.

"What has Sweeting? Why, David has his harp, or flute, which comes to the same thing. He has a sort of pinchbeck watch; ditto, ring; ditto, eyeglass. That's what he has."

"How would he propose to keep Miss Sykes in gowns only?"

"Ha! ha! Excellent! I'll ask him that next time I see him. I'll roast him for his presumption. But no doubt he expects old Christopher Sykes would do something handsome. He is rich, is he not? They live in a large house."

"Sykes carries on an extensive concern."

"Therefore he must be wealthy, eh?"

"Therefore he must have plenty to do with his wealth, and in these times would be about as likely to think of drawing money from the business to give dowries to his daughters as I should be to dream of pulling down the cottage there, and constructing on its ruins a house as large as Fieldhead."

"Do you know what I heard, Moore, the other day?"

"No. Perhaps that I *was* about to effect some such change. Your Briarfield gossips are capable of saying that or sillier things."

"That you were going to take Fieldhead on a lease (I thought it looked a dismal place, by-the-bye, to-night, as I passed it), and that it was your intention to settle a Miss Sykes there as mistress — to be married, in short, ha! ha! Now, which is it? Dora, I am sure. You said she was the handsomest."

"I wonder how often it has been settled that I was to be married since I came to Briarfield. They have assigned me every marriageable single woman by turns in the district. Now it was the two Misses Wynns — first the dark, then the light one; now the red-haired Miss Armitage; then the mature Ann Pearson. At present you throw on my shoulders all the tribe of the Misses Sykes. On what grounds this gossip rests God knows. I visit nowhere; I seek female society about as assiduously as you do, Mr. Malone. If ever I go to Whinbury, it is only to give Sykes or Pearson a call in their counting-house, where our discussions run on other topics than matrimony, and our thoughts are occupied with other things than courtships, establishments, dowries. The cloth we can't sell, the hands we can't employ, the mills we can't run, the perverse course of events generally, which we cannot alter, fill our hearts, I take it, pretty well at present, to the tolerably complete exclusion of such figments as love-making, etc."

"I go along with you completely, Moore. If there is one notion I hate more than another, it is that of marriage — I mean marriage in the vulgar weak sense, as a mere matter of sentiment — two beggarly fools agreeing to unite their indigence by some fantastic tie of feeling. Humbug! But an advantageous connection, such as can be formed in consonance with dignity of views and permanency of solid interests, is not so bad — eh?"

"No," responded Moore, in an absent manner. The subject seemed to have no interest for him; he did not pursue it. After sitting for some time gazing at the fire with a preoccupied air, he suddenly turned his head.

"Hark!" said he. "Did you hear wheels?"

Rising, he went to the window, opened it, and listened. He soon closed it. "It is only the sound of the wind rising," he remarked, "and the rivulet a little swollen, rushing down the hollow. I expected those wagons at six; it is near nine now."

"Seriously, do you suppose that the putting up of this new machinery will bring you into danger?" inquired Malone. "Helstone seems to think it will."

"I only wish the machines — the frames — were safe here, and lodged within the walls of this mill. Once put up, I defy the frame-breakers. Let them only pay me a visit and take the consequences. My mill is my castle."

"One despises such low scoundrels," observed Malone, in a profound vein of reflection. "I almost wish a party would call upon you to-night; but the road seemed extremely quiet as I came along. I saw nothing astir."

"You came by the Redhouse?"

"Yes."

"There would be nothing on that road. It is in the direction of Stilbro' the risk lies."

"And you think there is risk?"

"What these fellows have done to others they may do to me. There is only this difference: most of the manufacturers seem paralyzed when they are attacked. Sykes, for instance, when his dressing-shop was set on fire and burned to the ground, when the cloth was torn from his tenters and left in shreds in the field, took no steps to discover or punish the miscreants: he gave up as tamely as a rabbit under the jaws of a ferret. Now I, if I know myself, should stand by my trade, my mill, and my machinery."

"Helstone says these three are your gods; that the 'Orders in Council' are with you another name for the seven deadly sins; that Castlereagh is your Antichrist, and the war-party his legions."

"Yes; I abhor all these things because they ruin me. They stand in my way. I cannot get on. I cannot execute my plans because of them. I see myself baffled at every turn by their untoward effects."

"But you are rich and thriving, Moore?"

"I am very rich in cloth I cannot sell. You should step into my warehouse yonder, and observe how it is piled to the roof with pieces. Roakes and Pearson are in the same condition. America used to be their market, but the Orders in Council have cut that off."

Malone did not seem prepared to carry on briskly a conversation of this sort. He began to knock the heels of his boots together, and to yawn.

"And then to think," continued Mr. Moore who seemed too much taken up with the current of his own thoughts to note the symptoms of his guest's *ennui* — "to think that these ridiculous gossips of Whinbury and Briarfield will keep pestering one about being married! As if there was nothing to be done in life but to 'pay attention,' as they say, to some young lady, and then to go to church with her, and then to start on a bridal tour, and then to run through a round of visits, and then, I suppose, to be 'having a family.' Oh, que le diable emporte!" He broke off the aspiration into which he was launching with a certain energy, and added, more calmly, "I believe women talk and think only of these things, and they naturally fancy men's minds similarly occupied."

"Of course — of course," assented Malone; "but never mind them." And he whistled, looked impatiently round, and seemed to feel a great want of something. This time Moore caught and, it appeared, comprehended his demonstrations.

"Mr. Malone," said he, "you must require refreshment after your wet walk. I forget hospitality."

"Not at all," rejoined Malone; but he looked as if the right nail was at last hit on the head, nevertheless. Moore rose and opened a cupboard.

“It is my fancy,” said he, “to have every convenience within myself, and not to be dependent on the feminity in the cottage yonder for every mouthful I eat or every drop I drink. I often spend the evening and sup here alone, and sleep with Joe Scott in the mill. Sometimes I am my own watchman. I require little sleep, and it pleases me on a fine night to wander for an hour or two with my musket about the hollow. Mr. Malone, can you cook a mutton chop?”

“Try me. I’ve done it hundreds of times at college.”

“There’s a dishful, then, and there’s the gridiron. Turn them quickly. You know the secret of keeping the juices in?”

“Never fear me; you shall see. Hand a knife and fork, please.”

The curate turned up his coat-cuffs, and applied himself to the cookery with vigour. The manufacturer placed on the table plates, a loaf of bread, a black bottle, and two tumblers. He then produced a small copper kettle — still from the same well-stored recess, his cupboard — filled it with water from a large stone jar in a corner, set it on the fire beside the hissing gridiron, got lemons, sugar, and a small china punch-bowl; but while he was brewing the punch a tap at the door called him away.

“Is it you, Sarah?”

“Yes, sir. Will you come to supper, please, sir?”

“No; I shall not be in to-night; I shall sleep in the mill. So lock the doors, and tell your mistress to go to bed.”

He returned.

“You have your household in proper order,” observed Malone approvingly, as, with his fine face ruddy as the embers over which he bent, he assiduously turned the mutton chops. “You are not under petticoat government, like poor Sweeting, a man — whew! how the fat spits! it has burnt my hand — destined to be ruled by women. Now you and I, Moore — there’s a fine brown one for you, and full of gravy — you and I will have no gray mares in our stables when we marry.”

“I don’t know; I never think about it. If the gray mare is handsome and tractable, why not?”

“The chops are done. Is the punch brewed?”

“There is a glassful. Taste it. When Joe Scott and his minions return they shall have a share of this, provided they bring home the frames intact.”

Malone waxed very exultant over the supper. He laughed aloud at trifles, made bad jokes and applauded them himself, and, in short, grew unmeaningly noisy. His host, on the contrary, remained quiet as before. It is time, reader, that you should have some idea of the appearance of this same host. I must endeavour to sketch him as he sits at table.

He is what you would probably call, at first view, rather a strange-looking man; for he is thin, dark, sallow, very foreign of aspect, with shadowy hair carelessly streaking his forehead. It appears that he spends but little time at his toilet, or he would arrange it with more taste. He seems unconscious that his features are fine, that they have a southern symmetry, clearness, regularity in their chiselling; nor does a spectator become aware of this advantage till he has examined him well, for an anxious countenance and a hollow, somewhat haggard, outline of face disturb the idea of beauty with one of care. His eyes are large, and grave, and gray; their expression is intent and meditative, rather searching than soft, rather thoughtful than genial. When he parts his lips in a smile, his physiognomy is agreeable — not that it is frank or cheerful even then, but you feel the influence of a certain sedate charm, suggestive, whether truly or delusively, of a considerate, perhaps a kind nature, of feelings that may wear well at home — patient, forbearing, possibly faithful feelings. He is still young — not more than thirty; his stature is tall, his figure slender. His manner of speaking displeases. He has an outlandish accent, which, notwithstanding a studied carelessness of pronunciation and diction, grates on a British, and especially on a Yorkshire, ear.

Mr. Moore, indeed, was but half a Briton, and scarcely that. He came of a foreign ancestry by the mother's side, and was himself born and partly reared on a foreign soil. A hybrid in nature, it is probable he had a hybrid's feeling on many points — patriotism for one; it is likely that he was unapt to attach himself to parties, to sects, even to climes and customs; it is not impossible that he had a tendency to isolate his individual person from any community amidst which his lot might temporarily happen to be thrown, and that he felt it to be his best wisdom to push the interests of Robert Gérard Moore, to the exclusion of philanthropic consideration for general interests, with which he regarded the said Gérard Moore as in a great measure disconnected. Trade was Mr. Moore's hereditary calling: the Gérards of Antwerp had been merchants for two centuries back. Once they had been wealthy merchants; but the uncertainties, the involvements, of business had come upon them; disastrous speculations had loosened by degrees the foundations of their credit. The house had stood on a tottering base for a dozen years; and at last, in the shock of the French Revolution, it had rushed down a total ruin. In its fall was involved the English and Yorkshire firm of Moore, closely connected with the Antwerp house, and of which one of the partners, resident in Antwerp, Robert Moore, had married Hortense Gérard, with the prospect of his bride inheriting her father Constantine Gérard's share in the business. She inherited, as we have seen, but his share in the liabilities of the firm; and these liabilities, though duly set aside by a composition with creditors, some said her son Robert accepted, in his turn, as a legacy, and that he aspired one day to discharge them, and to rebuild the fallen house of Gérard and Moore on a scale at least equal to its former greatness. It was even supposed that he took by-past circumstances much to heart; and if a childhood passed at the side of a saturnine mother, under foreboding of coming evil, and a manhood drenched and blighted by the pitiless descent of the storm, could painfully impress the mind, *his* probably was impressed in no golden characters.

If, however, he had a great end of restoration in view, it was not in his power to employ great means for its attainment. He was obliged to be content with the day of small things. When he came to Yorkshire, he — whose ancestors had owned warehouses in this seaport, and factories in that inland town, had possessed their town-house and their country-seat — saw no way open to him but to rent a cloth-mill in an out-of-the-way nook of an out-of-the-way district; to take a cottage adjoining it for his residence, and to add to his possessions, as pasture for his horse, and space for his cloth-tenters, a few acres of the steep, rugged land that lined the hollow through which his mill-stream brawled. All this he held at a somewhat high rent (for these war times were hard, and everything was dear) of the trustees of the Fieldhead estate, then the property of a minor.

At the time this history commences, Robert Moore had lived but two years in the district, during which period he had at least proved himself possessed of the quality of activity. The dingy cottage was converted into a neat, tasteful residence. Of part of the rough land he had made garden-ground, which he cultivated with singular, even with Flemish, exactness and care. As to the mill, which was an old structure, and fitted up with old machinery, now become inefficient and out of date, he had from the first evinced the strongest contempt for all its arrangements and appointments. His aim had been to effect a radical reform, which he had executed as fast as his very limited capital would allow; and the narrowness of that capital, and consequent check on his progress, was a restraint which galled his spirit sorely. Moore ever wanted to push on. "Forward" was the device stamped upon his soul; but poverty curbed him. Sometimes (figuratively) he foamed at the mouth when the reins were drawn very tight.

In this state of feeling, it is not to be expected that he would deliberate much as to whether his advance was or was not prejudicial to others. Not being a native, nor for any length of time a resident of the neighbourhood, he did not sufficiently care when the new inventions threw the old workpeople out of employ. He never asked himself where those to whom he no longer paid weekly wages found daily bread; and in this negligence he only resembled thousands besides, on whom the starving poor of Yorkshire seemed to have a closer claim.

The period of which I write was an overshadowed one in British history, and especially in the history of the northern provinces. War was then at its height. Europe was all involved therein. England, if not weary, was worn with long resistance — yes, and half her people were weary too, and cried out for peace on any terms. National honour was become a mere empty name, of no value in the eyes of many, because their sight was dim with famine; and for a morsel of meat they would have sold their birthright.

The "Orders in Council," provoked by Napoleon's Milan and Berlin decrees, and forbidding neutral powers to trade with France, had, by offending America, cut off the principal market of the Yorkshire woollen trade, and brought it consequently to the verge of ruin. Minor foreign markets were glutted, and would receive no more. The Brazils, Portugal, Sicily, were all overstocked by nearly two years' consumption. At this crisis certain inventions in machinery were introduced into the staple manufactures of the north, which, greatly reducing the number of hands necessary to be employed, threw thousands out of work, and left them without legitimate means of sustaining life. A bad harvest supervened. Distress reached its climax. Endurance, overgoaded, stretched the hand of fraternity to sedition. The throes of a sort of moral earthquake were felt heaving under the hills of the northern counties. But, as is usual in such cases, nobody took much notice. When a food-riot broke out in a manufacturing town, when a gig-mill was burnt to the ground, or a manufacturer's house was attacked, the furniture thrown into the streets, and the family forced to flee for their lives, some local measures were or were not taken by the local magistracy. A ringleader was detected, or more frequently suffered to elude detection; newspaper paragraphs were written on the subject, and there the thing stopped. As to the sufferers, whose sole inheritance was labour, and who had lost that inheritance — who could not get work, and consequently could not get wages, and consequently could not get bread — they were left to suffer on, perhaps inevitably left. It would not do to stop the progress of invention, to damage science by discouraging its improvements; the war could not be terminated; efficient relief could not be raised. There was no help then; so the unemployed underwent their destiny — ate the bread and drank the waters of affliction.

Misery generates hate. These sufferers hated the machines which they believed took their bread from them; they hated the buildings which contained those machines; they hated the manufacturers who owned those buildings. In the parish of Briarfield, with which we have at present to do, Hollow's Mill was the place held most abominable; Gérard Moore, in his double character of semi-foreigner and thorough-going progressist, the man most abominated. And it perhaps rather agreed with Moore's temperament than otherwise to be generally hated, especially when he believed the thing for which he was hated a right and an expedient thing; and it was with a sense of warlike excitement he, on this night, sat in his counting-house waiting the arrival of his frame-laden wagons. Malone's coming and company were, it may be, most unwelcome to him. He would have preferred sitting alone; for he liked a silent, sombre, unsafe solitude. His watchman's musket would have been company enough for him; the full-flowing beck in the den would have delivered continuously the discourse most genial to his ear.

With the queerest look in the world had the manufacturer for some ten minutes been watching the Irish curate, as the latter made free with the punch, when suddenly that steady gray eye changed, as if another vision came between it and Malone. Moore raised his hand.

"Chut!" he said in his French fashion, as Malone made a noise with his glass. He listened a moment, then rose, put his hat on, and went out at the counting-house door.

The night was still, dark, and stagnant: the water yet rushed on full and fast; its flow almost seemed a flood in the utter silence. Moore's ear, however, caught another sound, very distant but yet dissimilar, broken and rugged — in short, a sound of heavy wheels crunching a stony road. He returned to the counting-house and lit a lantern, with which he walked down the mill-yard, and proceeded to open the gates. The big wagons were coming on; the dray-horses' huge hoofs were heard splashing in the mud and water. Moore hailed them.

"Hey, Joe Scott! Is all right?"

Probably Joe Scott was yet at too great a distance to hear the inquiry. He did not answer it.

"Is all right, I say?" again asked Moore, when the elephant-like leader's nose almost touched his.

Some one jumped out from the foremost wagon into the road; a voice cried aloud, "Ay, ay, divil; all's raight! We've smashed 'em."

And there was a run. The wagons stood still; they were now deserted.

"Joe Scott!" No Joe Scott answered. "Murgatroyd! Pighills! Sykes!" No reply. Mr. Moore lifted his lantern and looked into the vehicles. There was neither man nor machinery; they were empty and abandoned.

Now Mr. Moore loved his machinery. He had risked the last of his capital on the purchase of these frames and shears which to-night had been expected. Speculations most important to his interests depended on the results to be wrought by them. Where were they?

The words "we've smashed 'em" rang in his ears. How did the catastrophe affect him? By the light of the lantern he held were his features visible, relaxing to a singular smile — the smile the man of determined spirit wears when he reaches a juncture in his life where this determined spirit is to feel a demand on its strength, when the strain is to be made, and the faculty must bear or break. Yet he remained silent, and even motionless; for at the instant he neither knew what to say nor what to do. He placed the lantern on the ground, and stood with his arms folded, gazing down and reflecting.

An impatient trampling of one of the horses made him presently look up. His eye in the moment caught the gleam of something white attached to a part of the harness. Examined by the light of the lantern this proved to be a folded paper — a billet. It bore no address without; within was the superscription: —

"To the Divil of Hollow's Miln."

We will not copy the rest of the orthography, which was very peculiar, but translate it into legible English. It ran thus: —

"Your hellish machinery is shivered to smash on Stilbro' Moor, and your men are lying bound hand and foot in a ditch by the roadside. Take this as a warning from men that are starving, and have starving wives and children to go home to when they have done this deed. If you get new machines, or if you otherwise go on as you have done, you shall hear from us again. Beware!"

"Hear from you again? Yes, I'll hear from you again, and you shall hear from me. I'll speak to you directly. On Stilbro' Moor you shall hear from me in a moment."

Having led the wagons within the gates, he hastened towards the cottage. Opening the door, he spoke a few words quickly but quietly to two females who ran to meet him in the passage. He calmed the seeming alarm of one by a brief palliative account of what had taken place; to the other he said, "Go into the mill, Sarah — there is the key — and ring the mill-bell as loud as you can. Afterwards you will get another lantern and help me to light up the front."

Returning to his horses, he unharnessed, fed, and stabled them with equal speed and care, pausing occasionally, while so occupied, as if to listen for the mill-bell. It clanged out presently, with irregular but loud and alarming din. The hurried, agitated peal seemed more urgent than if the summons had been steadily given by a practised hand. On that still night, at that unusual hour, it was heard a long way round. The guests in the kitchen of the Redhouse were startled by the clamour, and declaring that "there must be summat more nor common to do at Hollow's Miln," they called for lanterns, and hurried to the spot in a body. And scarcely had they thronged into the yard with their gleaming lights, when the tramp of horses was heard, and a little man in a shovel hat, sitting erect on the back of a shaggy pony, "rode lightly in," followed by an aide-de-camp mounted on a larger steed.

Mr. Moore, meantime, after stabling his dray-horses, had saddled his hackney, and with the aid of Sarah, the servant, lit up his mill, whose wide and long front now glared one great illumination, throwing a sufficient light on the yard to obviate all fear of confusion arising from obscurity. Already a deep hum of voices became audible. Mr. Malone had at length issued from the counting-house, previously taking the precaution to dip his head and face in the stone water-jug; and this precaution, together with the sudden alarm, had nearly restored to him the possession of those senses which the punch had partially scattered. He stood with his hat on the back of his head, and his shillelah grasped in his dexter fist, answering much at random the questions of the newly-arrived party from the Redhouse. Mr. Moore now appeared, and was immediately confronted by the shovel hat and the shaggy pony.

"Well, Moore, what is your business with us? I thought you would want us to-night — me and the hetman here (patting his pony's neck), and Tom and his charger. When I heard your mill-bell I could sit still no longer, so I left Boultby to finish his supper alone. But where is the enemy? I do not see a mask or a smutted face present; and there is not a pane of glass broken in your windows. Have you had an attack, or do you expect one?"

"Oh, not at all! I have neither had one nor expect one," answered Moore coolly. "I only ordered the bell to be rung because I want two or three neighbours to stay here in the Hollow while I and a couple or so more go over to Stilbro' Moor."

"To Stilbro' Moor! What to do? To meet the wagons?"

"The wagons are come home an hour ago."

"Then all's right. What more would you have?"

"They came home empty; and Joe Scott and company are left on the moor, and so are the frames. Read that scrawl."

Mr. Helstone received and perused the document of which the contents have before been given.

"Hum! They've only served you as they serve others. But, however, the poor fellows in the ditch will be expecting help with some impatience. This is a wet night for such a berth. I and Tom will go with you. Malone may stay behind and take care of the mill. What is the matter with him? His eyes seem starting out of his head."

"He has been eating a mutton chop."

"Indeed! — Peter Augustus, be on your guard. Eat no more mutton chops to-night. You are left here in command of these premises — an honourable post!"

"Is anybody to stay with me?"

"As many of the present assemblage as choose. — My lads, how many of you will remain here, and how many will go a little way with me and Mr. Moore on the Stilbro' road, to meet some men who have been waylaid and assaulted by frame-breakers?"

The small number of three volunteered to go; the rest preferred staying behind. As Mr. Moore mounted his horse, the rector asked him in a low voice whether he had locked up the mutton chops, so that Peter Augustus could not get at them? The manufacturer nodded an affirmative, and the rescue-party set out.

CHAPTER III.

MR. YORKE.

Cheerfulness, it would appear, is a matter which depends fully as much on the state of things within as on the state of things without and around us. I make this trite remark, because I happen to know that Messrs. Helstone and Moore trotted forth from the mill-yard gates, at the head of their very small company, in the best possible spirits. When a ray from a lantern (the three pedestrians of the party carried each one) fell on Mr. Moore's face, you could see an unusual, because a lively, spark dancing in his eyes, and a new-found vivacity mantling on his dark physiognomy; and when the rector's visage was illuminated, his hard features were revealed all agrin and ashine with glee. Yet a drizzling night, a somewhat perilous expedition, you would think were not circumstances calculated to enliven those exposed to the wet and engaged in the adventure. If any member or members of the crew who had been at work on Stilbro' Moor had caught a view of this party, they would have had great pleasure in shooting either of the leaders from behind a wall: and the leaders knew this; and the fact is, being both men of steely nerves and steady-beating hearts, were elate with the knowledge.

I am aware, reader, and you need not remind me, that it is a dreadful thing for a person to be warlike; I am aware that he should be a man of peace. I have some faint outline of an idea of what a clergyman's mission is amongst mankind, and I remember distinctly whose servant he is, whose message he delivers, whose example he should follow; yet, with all this, if you are a parson-hater, you need not expect me to go along with you every step of your dismal, downward-tending, unchristian road; you need not expect me to join in your deep anathemas, at once so narrow and so sweeping, in your poisonous rancour, so intense and so absurd, against "the cloth;" to lift up my eyes and hands with a Supplehough, or to inflate my lungs with a Barraclough, in horror and denunciation of the diabolical rector of Briarfield.

He was not diabolical at all. The evil simply was — he had missed his vocation. He should have been a soldier, and circumstances had made him a priest. For the rest, he was a conscientious, hard-headed, hard-handed, brave, stern, implacable, faithful little man; a man almost without sympathy, ungentle, prejudiced, and rigid, but a man true to principle, honourable, sagacious, and sincere. It seems to me, reader, that you cannot always cut out men to fit their profession, and that you ought not to curse them because their profession sometimes hangs on them ungracefully. Nor will I curse Helstone, clerical Cossack as he was. Yet he *was* cursed, and by many of his own parishioners, as by others he was adored — which is the frequent fate of men who show partiality in friendship and bitterness in enmity, who are equally attached to principles and adherent to prejudices.

Helstone and Moore being both in excellent spirits, and united for the present in one cause, you would expect that, as they rode side by side, they would converse amicably. Oh no! These two men, of hard, bilious natures both, rarely came into contact but they chafed each other's moods. Their frequent bone of contention was the war. Helstone was a high Tory (there were Tories in those days), and Moore was a bitter Whig — a Whig, at least, as far as opposition to the war-party was concerned, that being the question which affected his own interest; and only on that question did he profess any British politics at all. He liked to infuriate Helstone by declaring his belief in the invincibility of Bonaparte, by taunting England and Europe with the impotence of their efforts to withstand him, and by coolly advancing the opinion that it was as well to yield to him soon as late, since he must in the end crush every antagonist, and reign supreme.

Helstone could not bear these sentiments. It was only on the consideration of Moore being a sort of outcast and alien, and having but half measure of British blood to temper the foreign gall which corroded his veins, that he brought himself to listen to them without indulging the wish he felt to cane the speaker. Another thing, too, somewhat allayed his disgust — namely, a fellow-feeling for the dogged tone with which these opinions were asserted, and a respect for the consistency of Moore's crabbed contumacy.

As the party turned into the Stilbro' road, they met what little wind there was; the rain dashed in their faces. Moore had been fretting his companion previously, and now, braced up by the raw breeze, and perhaps irritated by the sharp drizzle, he began to goad him.

"Does your Peninsular news please you still?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" was the surly demand of the rector.

"I mean, have you still faith in that Baal of a Lord Wellington?"

"And what do you mean now?"

"Do you still believe that this wooden-faced and pebble-hearted idol of England has power to send fire down from heaven to consume the French holocaust you want to offer up?"

"I believe Wellington will flog Bonaparte's marshals into the sea the day it pleases him to lift his arm."

"But, my dear sir, you can't be serious in what you say. Bonaparte's marshals are great men, who act under the guidance of an omnipotent master-spirit. Your Wellington is the most humdrum of commonplace martinets, whose slow, mechanical movements are further cramped by an ignorant home government."

"Wellington is the soul of England. Wellington is the right champion of a good cause, the fit representative of a powerful, a resolute, a sensible, and an honest nation.”

“Your good cause, as far as I understand it, is simply the restoration of that filthy, feeble Ferdinand to a throne which he disgraced. Your fit representative of an honest people is a dull-witted drover, acting for a duller-witted farmer; and against these are arrayed victorious supremacy and invincible genius.”

“Against legitimacy is arrayed usurpation; against modest, single-minded, righteous, and brave resistance to encroachment is arrayed boastful, double-tongued, selfish, and treacherous ambition to possess. God defend the right!”

“God often defends the powerful.”

“What! I suppose the handful of Israelites standing dryshod on the Asiatic side of the Red Sea was more powerful than the host of the Egyptians drawn up on the African side? Were they more numerous? Were they better appointed? Were they more mighty, in a word — eh? Don’t speak, or you’ll tell a lie, Moore; you know you will. They were a poor, overwrought band of bondsmen. Tyrants had oppressed them through four hundred years; a feeble mixture of women and children diluted their thin ranks; their masters, who roared to follow them through the divided flood, were a set of pampered Ethiops, about as strong and brutal as the lions of Libya. They were armed, horsed, and charioted; the poor Hebrew wanderers were afoot. Few of them, it is likely, had better weapons than their shepherds’ crooks or their masons’ building-tools; their meek and mighty leader himself had only his rod. But bethink you, Robert Moore, right was with them; the God of battles was on their side. Crime and the lost archangel generalled the ranks of Pharaoh, and which triumphed? We know that well. ‘The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore’ — yea, ‘the depths covered them, they sank to the bottom as a stone.’ The right hand of the Lord became glorious in power; the right hand of the Lord dashed in pieces the enemy!”

“You are all right; only you forget the true parallel. France is Israel, and Napoleon is Moses. Europe, with her old overgorged empires and rotten dynasties, is corrupt Egypt; gallant France is the Twelve Tribes, and her fresh and vigorous Usurper the Shepherd of Horeb.”

“I scorn to answer you.”

Moore accordingly answered himself — at least, he subjoined to what he had just said an additional observation in a lower voice.

“Oh, in Italy he was as great as any Moses! He was the right thing there, fit to head and organize measures for the regeneration of nations. It puzzles me to this day how the conqueror of Lodi should have condescended to become an emperor, a vulgar, a stupid humbug; and still more how a people who had once called themselves republicans should have sunk again to the grade of mere slaves. I despise France! If England had gone as far on the march of civilization as France did, she would hardly have retreated so shamelessly.”

"You don't mean to say that besotted imperial France is any worse than bloody republican France?" demanded Helstone fiercely.

"I mean to say nothing, but I can think what I please, you know, Mr. Helstone, both about France and England; and about revolutions, and regicides, and restorations in general; and about the divine right of kings, which you often stickle for in your sermons, and the duty of non-resistance, and the sanity of war, and — — "

Mr. Moore's sentence was here cut short by the rapid rolling up of a gig, and its sudden stoppage in the middle of the road. Both he and the rector had been too much occupied with their discourse to notice its approach till it was close upon them.

"Nah, maister; did th' wagons hit home?" demanded a voice from the vehicle.

"Can that be Joe Scott?"

"Ay, ay!" returned another voice; for the gig contained two persons, as was seen by the glimmer of its lamp. The men with the lanterns had now fallen into the rear, or rather, the equestrians of the rescue-party had outridden the pedestrians. "Ay, Mr. Moore, it's Joe Scott. I'm bringing him back to you in a bonny pickle. I fand him on the top of the moor yonder, him and three others. What will you give me for restoring him to you?"

"Why, my thanks, I believe; for I could better have afforded to lose a better man. That is you, I suppose, Mr. Yorke, by your voice?"

"Ay, lad, it's me. I was coming home from Stilbro' market, and just as I got to the middle of the moor, and was whipping on as swift as the wind (for these, they say, are not safe times, thanks to a bad government!), I heard a groan. I pulled up. Some would have whipt on faster; but I've naught to fear that I know of. I don't believe there's a lad in these parts would harm me — at least, I'd give them as good as I got if they offered to do it. I said, 'Is there aught wrong anywhere?' ''Deed is there,' somebody says, speaking out of the ground, like. 'What's to do? Be sharp and tell me,' I ordered. 'Nobbut four on us ligging in a ditch,' says Joe, as quiet as could be. I telled 'em more shame to 'em, and bid them get up and move on, or I'd lend them a lick of the gig-whip; for my notion was they were all fresh. 'We'd ha' done that an hour sin', but we're teed wi' a bit o' band,' says Joe. So in a while I got down and loosed 'em wi' my penknife; and Scott would ride wi' me, to tell me all how it happened; and t' others are coming on as fast as their feet will bring them."

"Well, I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Yorke."

"Are you, my lad? You know you're not. However, here are the rest approaching. And here, by the Lord, is another set with lights in their pitchers, like the army of Gideon; and as we've th' parson wi', us — good-evening, Mr. Helstone — we'se do."

Mr. Helstone returned the salutation of the individual in the gig very stiffly indeed. That individual proceeded, —

"We're eleven strong men, and there's both horses and chariots amang us.

If we could only fall in wi' some of these starved ragamuffins of frame-breakers we could win a grand victory. We could iv'ry one be a Wellington — that would please ye, Mr. Helstone — and sich paragraphs as we could contrive for t' papers! Briarfield suld be famous. But we'se hev a column and a half i' th' *Stilbro' Courier* ower this job, as it is, I dare say. I'se expect no less."

"And I'll promise you no less, Mr. Yorke, for I'll write the article myself," returned the rector.

"To be sure — sartainly! And mind ye recommend weel that them 'at brake t' bits o' frames, and teed Joe Scott's legs wi' band, suld be hung without benefit o' clergy. It's a hanging matter, or suld be. No doubt o' that."

"If I judged them I'd give them short shrift!" cried Moore. "But I mean to let them quite alone this bout, to give them rope enough, certain that in the end they will hang themselves."

"Let them alone, will ye, Moore? Do you promise that?"

"Promise! No. All I mean to say is, I shall give myself no particular trouble to catch them; but if one falls in my way — — "

"You'll snap him up, of course. Only you would rather they would do something worse than merely stop a wagon before you reckon with them. Well, we'll say no more on the subject at present. Here we are at my door, gentlemen, and I hope you and the men will step in. You will none of you be the worse of a little refreshment."

Moore and Helstone opposed this proposition as unnecessary. It was, however, pressed on them so courteously, and the night, besides, was so inclement, and the gleam from the muslin-curtained windows of the house before which they had halted looked so inviting, that at length they yielded. Mr. Yorke, after having alighted from his gig, which he left in charge of a man who issued from an outbuilding on his arrival, led the way in.

It will have been remarked that Mr. Yorke varied a little in his phraseology. Now he spoke broad Yorkshire, and anon he expressed himself in very pure English. His manner seemed liable to equal alternations. He could be polite and affable, and he could be blunt and rough. His station then you could not easily determine by his speech and demeanour. Perhaps the appearance of his residence may decide it.

The men he recommended to take the kitchen way, saying that he would "see them served wi' summat to taste presently." The gentlemen were ushered in at the front entrance. They found themselves in a matted hall, lined almost to the ceiling with pictures. Through this they were conducted to a large parlour, with a magnificent fire in the grate — the most cheerful of rooms it appeared as a whole, and when you came to examine details, the enlivening effect was not diminished. There was no splendour, but there was taste everywhere, unusual taste — the taste, you would have said, of a travelled man, a scholar, and a gentleman. A series of Italian views decked the walls. Each of these was a specimen of true art. A connoisseur had selected them;

they were genuine and valuable. Even by candle-light the bright clear skies, the soft distances, with blue air quivering between the eye and the hills, the fresh tints, and well-massed lights and shadows, charmed the view. The subjects were all pastoral, the scenes were all sunny. There was a guitar and some music on a sofa; there were cameos, beautiful miniatures; a set of Grecian-looking vases on the mantelpiece; there were books well arranged in two elegant bookcases.

Mr. Yorke bade his guests be seated. He then rang for wine. To the servant who brought it he gave hospitable orders for the refreshment of the men in the kitchen. The rector remained standing; he seemed not to like his quarters; he would not touch the wine his host offered him.

"E'en as you will," remarked Mr. Yorke. "I reckon you're thinking of Eastern customs, Mr. Helstone, and you'll not eat nor drink under my roof, feared we suld be forced to be friends; but I am not so particular or superstitious. You might sup the contents of that decanter, and you might give me a bottle of the best in your own cellar, and I'd hold myself free to oppose you at every turn still — in every vestry-meeting and justice-meeting where we encountered one another."

"It is just what I should expect of you, Mr. Yorke."

"Does it agree wi' ye now, Mr. Helstone, to be riding out after rioters, of a wet night, at your age?"

"It always agrees with me to be doing my duty; and in this case my duty is a thorough pleasure. To hunt down vermin is a noble occupation, fit for an archbishop."

"Fit for ye, at ony rate. But where's t' curate? He's happen gone to visit some poor body in a sick gird, or he's happen hunting down vermin in another direction."

"He is doing garrison-duty at Hollow's Mill."

"You left him a sup o' wine, I hope, Bob" (turning to Mr. Moore), "to keep his courage up?"

He did not pause for an answer, but continued, quickly, still addressing Moore, who had thrown himself into an old-fashioned chair by the fireside — "Move it, Robert! Get up, my lad! That place is mine. Take the sofa, or three other chairs, if you will, but not this. It belangs to me, and nob'dy else."

"Why are you so particular to that chair, Mr. Yorke?" asked Moore, lazily vacating the place in obedience to orders.

"My father war afore me, and that's all t' answer I sall gie thee; and it's as good a reason as Mr. Helstone can give for the main feck o' his notions."

"Moore, are you ready to go?" inquired the rector.

"Nay; Robert's not ready, or rather, I'm not ready to part wi' him. He's an ill lad, and wants correcting."

"Why, sir? What have I done?"

"Made thyself enemies on every hand."

"What do I care for that? What difference does it make to me whether your Yorkshire louts hate me or like me?"

"Ay, there it is. The lad is a mak' of an alien amang us. His father would never have talked i' that way. — Go back to Antwerp, where you were born and bred, mauvaise tête!"

"Mauvaise tête vous-même; je ne fais que mon devoir; quant à vos lourdauds de paysans, je m'en moque!"

"En ravanche, mon garçon, nos lourdauds de paysans se moqueront de toi; sois en certain," replied Yorke, speaking with nearly as pure a French accent as Gérard Moore.

"C'est bon! c'est bon! Et puisque cela m'est égal, que mes amis ne s'en inquiètent pas."

"Tes amis! Où sont-ils, tes amis?"

"Je fais écho, où sont-ils? et je suis fort aise que l'écho seul y répond. Au diable les amis! Je me souviens encore du moment où mon père et mes oncles Gérard appellèrent autour d'eux leurs amis, et Dieu sait si les amis se sont empressés d'accourir à leur secours! Tenez, M. Yorke, ce mot, ami, m'irrite trop; ne m'en parlez plus."

"Comme tu voudras."

And here Mr. Yorke held his peace; and while he sits leaning back in his three-cornered carved oak chair, I will snatch my opportunity to sketch the portrait of this French-speaking Yorkshire gentleman.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. YORKE (*continued*).

A Yorkshire gentleman he was, *par excellence*, in every point; about fifty-five years old, but looking at first sight still older, for his hair was silver white. His forehead was broad, not high; his face fresh and hale; the harshness of the north was seen in his features, as it was heard in his voice; every trait was thoroughly English — not a Norman line anywhere; it was an inelegant, unclassic, unaristocratic mould of visage. Fine people would perhaps have called it vulgar; sensible people would have termed it characteristic; shrewd people would have delighted in it for the pith, sagacity, intelligence, the rude yet real originality marked in every lineament, latent in every furrow. But it was an indocile, a scornful, and a sarcastic face — the face of a man difficult to lead, and impossible to drive. His stature was rather tall, and he was well made and wiry, and had a stately integrity of port; there was not a suspicion of the clown about him anywhere.

I did not find it easy to sketch Mr. Yorke's person, but it is more difficult to indicate his mind. If you expect to be treated to a Perfection, reader, or even to a benevolent, philanthropic old gentleman in him, you are mistaken. He has spoken with some sense and with some good feeling to Mr. Moore, but you are not thence to conclude that he always spoke and thought justly and kindly.

Mr. Yorke, in the first place, was without the organ of veneration — a great want, and which throws a man wrong on every point where veneration is required. Secondly, he was without the organ of comparison — a deficiency which strips a man of sympathy; and thirdly, he had too little of the organs of benevolence and ideality, which took the glory and softness from his nature, and for him diminished those divine qualities throughout the universe.

The want of veneration made him intolerant to those above him — kings and nobles and priests, dynasties and parliaments and establishments, with all their doings, most of their enactments, their forms, their rights, their claims, were to him an abomination, all rubbish; he found no use or pleasure in them, and believed it would be clear gain, and no damage to the world, if its high places were razed, and their occupants crushed in the fall. The want of veneration, too, made him dead at heart to the electric delight of admiring what is admirable; it dried up a thousand pure sources of enjoyment; it withered a thousand vivid pleasures. He was not irreligious, though a member of no sect; but his religion could not be that of one who knows how to venerate. He believed in God and heaven; but his God and heaven were those of a man in whom awe, imagination, and tenderness lack.

The weakness of his powers of comparison made him inconsistent; while he professed some excellent general doctrines of mutual toleration and forbearance, he cherished towards certain classes a bigoted antipathy. He spoke of “parsons” and all who belonged to parsons, of “lords” and the appendages of lords, with a harshness, sometimes an insolence, as unjust as it was insufferable. He could not place himself in the position of those he vituperated; he could not compare their errors with their temptations, their defects with their disadvantages; he could not realize the effect of such and such circumstances on himself similarly situated, and he would often express the most ferocious and tyrannical wishes regarding those who had acted, as he thought, ferociously and tyrannically. To judge by his threats, he would have employed arbitrary, even cruel, means to advance the cause of freedom and equality. Equality! yes, Mr. Yorke talked about equality, but at heart he was a proud man — very friendly to his workpeople, very good to all who were beneath him, and submitted quietly to be beneath him, but haughty as Beelzebub to whomsoever the world deemed (for he deemed no man) his superior. Revolt was in his blood: he could not bear control; his father, his grandfather before him, could not bear it, and his children after him never could.

The want of general benevolence made him very impatient of imbecility, and of all faults which grated on his strong, shrewd nature; it left no check to his cutting sarcasm. As he was not merciful, he would sometimes wound and wound again, without noticing how much he hurt, or caring how deep he thrust.

As to the paucity of ideality in his mind, that can scarcely be called a fault: a fine ear for music, a correct eye for colour and form, left him the quality of taste; and who cares for imagination? Who does not think it a rather dangerous, senseless attribute, akin to weakness, perhaps partaking of frenzy — a disease rather than a gift of the mind?

Probably all think it so but those who possess, or fancy they possess, it. To hear them speak, you would believe that their hearts would be cold if that elixir did not flow about them, that their eyes would be dim if that flame did not refine their vision, that they would be lonely if this strange companion abandoned them. You would suppose that it imparted some glad hope to spring, some fine charm to summer, some tranquil joy to autumn, some consolation to winter, which you do not feel. An illusion, of course; but the fanatics cling to their dream, and would not give it for gold.

As Mr. Yorke did not possess poetic imagination himself, he considered it a most superfluous quality in others. Painters and musicians he could tolerate, and even encourage, because he could relish the results of their art; he could see the charm of a fine picture, and feel the pleasure of good music; but a quiet poet — whatever force struggled, whatever fire glowed, in his breast — if he could not have played the man in the counting-house, of the tradesman in the Piece Hall, might have lived despised, and died scorned, under the eyes of Hiram Yorke.

And as there are many Hiram Yorkes in the world, it is well that the true poet, quiet externally though he may be, has often a truculent spirit under his placidity, and is full of shrewdness in his meekness, and can measure the whole stature of those who look down on him, and correctly ascertain the weight and value of the pursuits they disdain him for not having followed. It is happy that he can have his own bliss, his own society with his great friend and goddess Nature, quite independent of those who find little pleasure in him, and in whom he finds no pleasure at all. It is just that while the world and circumstances often turn a dark, cold side to him — and properly, too, because he first turns a dark, cold, careless side to them — he should be able to maintain a festal brightness and cherishing glow in his bosom, which makes all bright and genial for him; while strangers, perhaps, deem his existence a Polar winter never gladdened by a sun. The true poet is not one whit to be pitied, and he is apt to laugh in his sleeve when any misguided sympathizer whines over his wrongs. Even when utilitarians sit in judgment on him, and pronounce him and his art useless, he hears the sentence with such a hard derision, such a broad, deep, comprehensive, and merciless contempt of the unhappy Pharisees who pronounce it, that he is rather to be chidden than condoled with. These, however, are not Mr. Yorke's reflections, and it is with Mr. Yorke we have at present to do.

I have told you some of his faults, reader: as to his good points, he was one of the most honourable and capable men in Yorkshire; even those who disliked him were forced to respect him. He was much beloved by the poor, because he was thoroughly kind and very fatherly to them. To his workmen he was considerate and cordial. When he dismissed them from an occupation, he would try to set them on to something else, or, if that was impossible, help them to remove with their families to a district where work might possibly be had. It must also be remarked that if, as sometimes chanced, any individual amongst his "hands" showed signs of insubordination, Yorke — who, like many who abhor being controlled, knew how to control with vigour — had the secret of crushing rebellion in the germ, of eradicating it like a bad weed, so that it never spread or developed within the sphere of his authority. Such being the happy state of his own affairs, he felt himself at liberty to speak with the utmost severity of those who were differently situated, to ascribe whatever was unpleasant in their position entirely to their own fault, to sever himself from the masters, and advocate freely the cause of the operatives.

Mr. Yorke's family was the first and oldest in the district; and he, though not the wealthiest, was one of the most influential men. His education had been good. In his youth, before the French Revolution, he had travelled on the Continent. He was an adept in the French and Italian languages. During a two years' sojourn in Italy he had collected many good paintings and tasteful rarities, with which his residence was now adorned. His manners, when he liked, were those of a finished gentleman of the old school; his conversation, when he was disposed to please, was singularly interesting and original; and if he usually expressed himself in the Yorkshire dialect, it was because he chose to do so, preferring his native Doric to a more refined vocabulary, "A Yorkshire burr," he affirmed, "was as much better than a cockney's lisp as a bull's bellow than a raton's squeak."

Mr. Yorke knew every one, and was known by every one, for miles round; yet his intimate acquaintances were very few. Himself thoroughly original, he had no taste for what was ordinary: a racy, rough character, high or low, ever found acceptance with him; a refined, insipid personage, however exalted in station, was his aversion. He would spend an hour any time in talking freely with a shrewd workman of his own, or with some queer, sagacious old woman amongst his cottagers, when he would have grudged a moment to a commonplace fine gentleman or to the most fashionable and elegant, if frivolous, lady. His preferences on these points he carried to an extreme, forgetting that there may be amiable and even admirable characters amongst those who cannot be original. Yet he made exceptions to his own rule. There was a certain order of mind, plain, ingenuous, neglecting refinement, almost devoid of intellectuality, and quite incapable of appreciating what was intellectual in him, but which, at the same time, never felt disgust at his rudeness, was not easily wounded by his sarcasm, did not closely analyze his sayings, doings, or opinions, with which he was peculiarly at ease, and, consequently, which he peculiarly preferred. He was lord amongst such characters. They, while submitting implicitly to his influence, never acknowledged, because they never reflected on, his superiority; they were quite tractable, therefore, without running the smallest danger of being servile; and their unthinking, easy, artless insensibility was as acceptable, because as convenient, to Mr. Yorke as that of the chair he sat on, or of the floor he trod.

It will have been observed that he was not quite uncordial with Mr. Moore. He had two or three reasons for entertaining a faint partiality to that gentleman. It may sound odd, but the first of these was that Moore spoke English with a foreign, and French with a perfectly pure, accent; and that his dark, thin face, with its fine though rather wasted lines, had a most anti-British and anti-Yorkshire look. These points seem frivolous, unlikely to influence a character like Yorke's; but the fact is they recalled old, perhaps pleasurable, associations — they brought back his travelling, his youthful days. He had seen, amidst Italian cities and scenes, faces like Moore's; he had heard, in Parisian cafés and theatres, voices like his. He was young then, and when he looked at and listened to the alien, he seemed young again.

Secondly, he had known Moore's father, and had had dealings with him. That was a more substantial, though by no means a more agreeable tie; for as his firm had been connected with Moore's in business, it had also, in some measure, been implicated in its losses.

Thirdly, he had found Robert himself a sharp man of business. He saw reason to anticipate that he would, in the end, by one means or another, make money; and he respected both his resolution and acuteness — perhaps, also, his hardness. A fourth circumstance which drew them together was that of Mr. Yorke being one of the guardians of the minor on whose estate Hollow's Mill was situated; consequently Moore, in the course of his alterations and improvements, had frequent occasion to consult him.

As to the other guest now present in Mr. Yorke's parlour, Mr. Helstone, between him and his host there existed a double antipathy — the antipathy of nature and that of circumstances. The free-thinker hated the formalist; the lover of liberty detested the disciplinarian. Besides, it was said that in former years they had been rival suitors of the same lady.

Mr. Yorke, as a general rule, was, when young, noted for his preference of sprightly and dashing women: a showy shape and air, a lively wit, a ready tongue, chiefly seemed to attract him. He never, however, proposed to any of these brilliant belles whose society he sought; and all at once he seriously fell in love with and eagerly wooed a girl who presented a complete contrast to those he had hitherto noticed — a girl with the face of a Madonna; a girl of living marble — stillness personified. No matter that, when he spoke to her, she only answered him in monosyllables; no matter that his sighs seemed unheard, that his glances were unreturned, that she never responded to his opinions, rarely smiled at his jests, paid him no respect and no attention; no matter that she seemed the opposite of everything feminine he had ever in his whole life been known to admire. For him Mary Cave was perfect, because somehow, for some reason — no doubt he had a reason — he loved her.

Mr. Helstone, at that time curate of Briarfield, loved Mary too — or, at any rate, he fancied her. Several others admired her, for she was beautiful as a monumental angel; but the clergyman was preferred for his office's sake — that office probably investing him with some of the illusion necessary to allure to the commission of matrimony, and which Miss Cave did not find in any of the young wool-staplers, her other adorers. Mr. Helstone neither had, nor professed to have, Mr. Yorke's absorbing passion for her. He had none of the humble reverence which seemed to subdue most of her suitors; he saw her more as she really was than the rest did. He was, consequently, more master of her and himself. She accepted him at the first offer, and they were married.

Nature never intended Mr. Helstone to make a very good husband, especially to a quiet wife. He thought so long as a woman was silent nothing ailed her, and she wanted nothing. If she did not complain of solitude, solitude, however continued, could not be irksome to her. If she did not talk and put herself forward, express a partiality for this, an aversion to that, she had no partialities or aversions, and it was useless to consult her tastes. He made no pretence of comprehending women, or comparing them with men. They were a different, probably a very inferior, order of existence. A wife could not be her husband's companion, much less his confidante, much less his stay. *His* wife, after a year or two, was of no great importance to him in any shape; and when she one day, as he thought, suddenly — for he had scarcely noticed her decline — but, as others thought, gradually, took her leave of him and of life, and there was only a still, beautiful-featured mould of clay left, cold and white, in the conjugal couch, he felt his bereavement — who shall say how little? Yet, perhaps, more than he seemed to feel it; for he was not a man from whom grief easily wrung tears.

His dry-eyed and sober mourning scandalized an old housekeeper, and likewise a female attendant, who had waited upon Mrs. Helstone in her sickness, and who, perhaps, had had opportunities of learning more of the deceased lady's nature, of her capacity for feeling and loving, than her husband knew. They gossiped together over the corpse, related anecdotes, with embellishments of her lingering decline, and its real or supposed cause. In short, they worked each other up to some indignation against the austere little man, who sat examining papers in an adjoining room, unconscious of what opprobrium he was the object.

Mrs. Helstone was hardly under the sod when rumours began to be rife in the neighbourhood that she had died of a broken heart. These magnified quickly into reports of hard usage, and, finally, details of harsh treatment on the part of her husband — reports grossly untrue, but not the less eagerly received on that account. Mr. Yorke heard them, partly believed them. Already, of course, he had no friendly feeling to his successful rival. Though himself a married man now, and united to a woman who seemed a complete contrast to Mary Cave in all respects, he could not forget the great disappointment of his life; and when he heard that what would have been so precious to him had been neglected, perhaps abused, by another, he conceived for that other a rooted and bitter animosity.

Of the nature and strength of this animosity Mr. Helstone was but half aware. He neither knew how much Yorke had loved Mary Cave, what he had felt on losing her, nor was he conscious of the calumnies concerning his treatment of her, familiar to every ear in the neighbourhood but his own. He believed political and religious differences alone separated him and Mr. Yorke. Had he known how the case really stood, he would hardly have been induced by any persuasion to cross his former rival's threshold.

Mr. Yorke did not resume his lecture of Robert Moore. The conversation ere long recommenced in a more general form, though still in a somewhat disputative tone. The unquiet state of the country, the various depredations lately committed on mill-property in the district, supplied abundant matter for disagreement, especially as each of the three gentlemen present differed more or less in his views on these subjects. Mr. Helstone thought the masters aggrieved, the workpeople unreasonable; he condemned sweepingly the widespread spirit of disaffection against constituted authorities, the growing indisposition to bear with patience evils he regarded as inevitable. The cures he prescribed were vigorous government interference, strict magisterial vigilance; when necessary, prompt military coercion.

Mr. Yorke wished to know whether this interference, vigilance, and coercion would feed those who were hungry, give work to those who wanted work, and whom no man would hire. He scouted the idea of inevitable evils. He said public patience was a camel, on whose back the last atom that could be borne had already been laid, and that resistance was now a duty; the widespread spirit of disaffection against constituted authorities he regarded as the most promising sign of the times; the masters, he allowed, were truly aggrieved, but their main grievances had been heaped on them by a "corrupt, base, and bloody" government (these were Mr. Yorke's epithets). Madmen like Pitt, demons like Castlereagh, mischievous idiots like Perceval, were the tyrants, the curses of the country, the destroyers of her trade. It was their infatuated perseverance in an unjustifiable, a hopeless, a ruinous war, which had brought the nation to its present pass. It was their monstrously oppressive taxation, it was the infamous "Orders in Council" — the originators of which deserved impeachment and the scaffold, if ever public men did — that hung a millstone about England's neck.

"But where was the use of talking?" he demanded. "What chance was there of reason being heard in a land that was king-ridden, priest-ridden, peer-ridden; where a lunatic was the nominal monarch, an unprincipled debauchee the real ruler; where such an insult to common sense as hereditary legislators was tolerated; where such a humbug as a bench of bishops, such an arrogant abuse as a pampered, persecuting established church was endured and venerated; where a standing army was maintained, and a host of lazy parsons and their pauper families were kept on the fat of the land?"

Mr. Helstone, rising up and putting on his shovel-hat, observed in reply, "that in the course of his life he had met with two or three instances where sentiments of this sort had been very bravely maintained so long as health, strength, and worldly prosperity had been the allies of him who professed them; but there came a time," he said, "to all men, 'when the keepers of the house should tremble; when they should be afraid of that which is high, and fear should be in the way;' and that time was the test of the advocate of anarchy and rebellion, the enemy of religion and order. Ere now," he affirmed, "he had been called upon to read those prayers our church has provided for the sick by the miserable dying-bed of one of her most rancorous foes; he had seen such a one stricken with remorse, solicitous to discover a place for repentance, and unable to find any, though he sought it carefully with tears. He must forewarn Mr. Yorke that blasphemy against God and the king was a deadly sin, and that there was such a thing as 'judgment to come.'"

Mr. Yorke "believed fully that there was such a thing as judgment to come. If it were otherwise, it would be difficult to imagine how all the scoundrels who seemed triumphant in this world, who broke innocent hearts with impunity, abused unmerited privileges, were a scandal to honourable callings, took the bread out of the mouths of the poor, browbeat the humble, and truckled meanly to the rich and proud, were to be properly paid off in such coin as they had earned. But," he added, "whenever he got low-spirited about such-like goings-on, and their seeming success in this mucky lump of a planet, he just reached down t' owd book" (pointing to a great Bible in the bookcase), "opened it like at a chance, and he was sure to light of a verse blazing wi' a blue brimstone low that set all straight. He knew," he said, "where some folk war bound for, just as weel as if an angel wi' great white wings had come in ower t' door-stone and told him."

"Sir," said Mr. Helstone, collecting all his dignity — "sir, the great knowledge of man is to know himself, and the bourne whither his own steps tend."

"Ay, ay. You'll recollect, Mr. Helstone, that Ignorance was carried away from the very gates of heaven, borne through the air, and thrust in at a door in the side of the hill which led down to hell."

"Nor have I forgotten, Mr. Yorke, that Vain-Confidence, not seeing the way before him, fell into a deep pit, which was on purpose there made by the prince of the grounds, to catch vainglorious fools withal, and was dashed to pieces with his fall."

"Now," interposed Mr. Moore, who had hitherto sat a silent but amused spectator of this worldly combat, and whose indifference to the party politics of the day, as well as to the gossip of the neighbourhood, made him an impartial, if apathetic, judge of the merits of such an encounter, "you have both sufficiently blackballed each other, and proved how cordially you detest each other, and how wicked you think each other. For my part, my hate is still running in such a strong current against the fellows who have broken my frames that I have none to spare for my private acquaintance, and still less for such a vague thing as a sect or a government. But really, gentlemen, you both seem very bad by your own showing — worse than ever I suspected you to be. — I dare not stay all night with a rebel and blasphemer like you, Yorke; and I hardly dare ride home with a cruel and tyrannical ecclesiastic like Mr. Helstone."

"I am going, however, Mr. Moore," said the rector sternly. "Come with me or not, as you please."

"Nay, he shall not have the choice; he *shall* go with you," responded Yorke. "It's midnight, and past; and I'll have nob'dy staying up i' my house any longer. Ye mun all go."

He rang the bell.

"Deb," said he to the servant who answered it, "clear them folk out o' t' kitchen, and lock t' doors, and be off to bed. — Here is your way, gentlemen," he continued to his guests; and, lighting them through the passage, he fairly put them out at his front door.

They met their party hurrying out pell-mell by the back way. Their horses stood at the gate; they mounted, and rode off, Moore laughing at their abrupt dismissal, Helstone deeply indignant thereat.

CHAPTER V.

HOLLOW'S COTTAGE.

Moore's good spirits were still with him when he rose next morning. He and Joe Scott had both spent the night in the mill, availing themselves of certain sleeping accommodations producible from recesses in the front and back counting-houses. The master, always an early riser, was up somewhat sooner even than usual. He awoke his man by singing a French song as he made his toilet.

"Ye're not custen dahn, then, maister?" cried Joe.

"Not a stiver, mon garçon — which means, my lad. Get up, and we'll take a turn through the mill before the hands come in, and I'll explain my future plans. We'll have the machinery yet, Joseph. You never heard of Bruce, perhaps?"

"And th' arrand (spider)? Yes, but I hev. I've read th' history o' Scotland, and happen knaw as mich on't as ye; and I understand ye to mean to say ye'll persevere."

"I do."

"Is there mony o' your mak' i' your country?" inquired Joe, as he folded up his temporary bed, and put it away.

"In my country! Which is my country?"

"Why, France — isn't it?"

"Not it, indeed! The circumstance of the French having seized Antwerp, where I was born, does not make me a Frenchman."

"Holland, then?"

"I am not a Dutchman. Now you are confounding Antwerp with Amsterdam."

"Flanders?"

"I scorn the insinuation, Joe! I a Flamand! Have I a Flemish face — the clumsy nose standing out, the mean forehead falling back, the pale blue eyes 'à fleur de tête'? Am I all body and no legs, like a Flamand? But you don't know what they are like, those Netherlanders. Joe, I'm an Anversois. My mother was an Anversoise, though she came of French lineage, which is the reason I speak French."

"But your father war Yorkshire, which maks ye a bit Yorkshire too; and onybody may see ye're akin to us, ye're so keen o' making brass, and getting forrards."

"Joe, you're an impudent dog; but I've always been accustomed to a boorish sort of insolence from my youth up. The ‘classe ouvrière’ — that is, the working people in Belgium — bear themselves brutally towards their employers; and by *brutally*, Joe, I mean *brutalement* — which, perhaps, when properly translated, should be *roughly*.”

“We allus speak our minds i’ this country; and them young parsons and grand folk fro’ London is shocked at wer ‘incivility;’ and we like weel enough to gi’e ‘em summat to be shocked at, ‘cause it’s sport to us to watch ‘em turn up the whites o’ their een, and spreed out their bits o’ hands, like as they’re flayed wi’ bogards, and then to hear ‘em say, nipping off their words short like, ‘Dear! dear! Whet seveges! How very corse!’”

“You *are* savages, Joe. You don’t suppose you’re civilized, do you?”

“Middling, middling, maister. I reckon ‘at us manufacturing lads i’ th’ north is a deal more intelligent, and knaws a deal more nor th’ farming folk i’ th’ south. Trade sharpens wer wits; and them that’s mechanics like me is forced to think. Ye know, what wi’ looking after machinery and sich like, I’ve getten into that way that when I see an effect, I look straight out for a cause, and I oft lig hold on’t to purpose; and then I like reading, and I’m curious to knaw what them that reckons to govern us aims to do for us and wi’ us. And there’s many ‘cuter nor me; there’s many a one amang them greasy chaps ‘at smells o’ oil, and amang them dyers wi’ blue and black skins, that has a long head, and that can tell what a fooil of a law is, as well as ye or old Yorke, and a deal better nor soft uns like Christopher Sykes o’ Whinbury, and greet hectoring nowts like yond’ Irish Peter, Helstone’s curate.”

“You think yourself a clever fellow, I know, Scott.”

“Ay! I’m fairish. I can tell cheese fro’ chalk, and I’m varry weel aware that I’ve improved sich opportunities as I have had, a deal better nor some ‘at reckons to be aboon me; but there’s thousands i’ Yorkshire that’s as good as me, and a two-three that’s better.”

“You’re a great man — you’re a sublime fellow; but you’re a prig, a conceited noodle with it all, Joe! You need not to think that because you’ve picked up a little knowledge of practical mathematics, and because you have found some scantling of the elements of chemistry at the bottom of a dyeing vat, that therefore you’re a neglected man of science; and you need not to suppose that because the course of trade does not always run smooth, and you, and such as you, are sometimes short of work and of bread, that therefore your class are martyrs, and that the whole form of government under which you live is wrong. And, moreover, you need not for a moment to insinuate that the virtues have taken refuge in cottages and wholly abandoned slated houses. Let me tell you, I particularly abominate that sort of trash, because I know so well that human nature is human nature everywhere, whether under tile or thatch, and that in every specimen of human nature that breathes, vice and virtue are ever found blended, in smaller or greater proportions, and that the proportion is not determined by station. I have seen villains who were rich, and I have seen villains who were poor, and I have seen villains who were neither rich nor poor, but who had realized Agar's wish, and lived in fair and modest competency. The clock is going to strike six. Away with you, Joe, and ring the mill bell."

It was now the middle of the month of February; by six o'clock therefore dawn was just beginning to steal on night, to penetrate with a pale ray its brown obscurity, and give a demi-translucence to its opaque shadows. Pale enough that ray was on this particular morning: no colour tinged the east, no flush warmed it. To see what a heavy lid day slowly lifted, what a wan glance she flung along the hills, you would have thought the sun's fire quenched in last night's floods. The breath of this morning was chill as its aspect; a raw wind stirred the mass of night-cloud, and showed, as it slowly rose, leaving a colourless, silver-gleaming ring all round the horizon, not blue sky, but a stratum of paler vapour beyond. It had ceased to rain, but the earth was sodden, and the pools and rivulets were full.

The mill-windows were alight, the bell still rung loud, and now the little children came running in, in too great a hurry, let us hope, to feel very much nipped by the inclement air; and indeed, by contrast, perhaps the morning appeared rather favourable to them than otherwise, for they had often come to their work that winter through snow-storms, through heavy rain, through hard frost.

Mr. Moore stood at the entrance to watch them pass. He counted them as they went by. To those who came rather late he said a word of reprimand, which was a little more sharply repeated by Joe Scott when the lingerers reached the work-rooms. Neither master nor overlooker spoke savagely. They were not savage men either of them, though it appeared both were rigid, for they fined a delinquent who came considerably too late. Mr. Moore made him pay his penny down ere he entered, and informed him that the next repetition of the fault would cost him twopence.

Rules, no doubt, are necessary in such cases, and coarse and cruel masters will make coarse and cruel rules, which, at the time we treat of at least, they used sometimes to enforce tyrannically; but though I describe imperfect characters (every character in this book will be found to be more or less imperfect, my pen refusing to draw anything in the model line), I have not undertaken to handle degraded or utterly infamous ones. Child-torturers, slave masters and drivers, I consign to the hands of jailers. The novelist may be excused from sullying his page with the record of their deeds.

Instead, then, of harrowing up my reader's soul and delighting his organ of wonder with effective descriptions of stripes and scourgings, I am happy to be able to inform him that neither Mr. Moore nor his overlooker ever struck a child in their mill. Joe had, indeed, once very severely flogged a son of his own for telling a lie and persisting in it; but, like his employer, he was too phlegmatic, too calm, as well as too reasonable a man, to make corporal chastisement other than the exception to his treatment of the young.

Mr. Moore haunted his mill, his mill-yard, his dye-house, and his warehouse till the sickly dawn strengthened into day. The sun even rose — at least a white disc, clear, tintless, and almost chill-looking as ice, peeped over the dark crest of a hill, changed to silver the livid edge of the cloud above it, and looked solemnly down the whole length of the den, or narrow dale, to whose strait bounds we are at present limited. It was eight o'clock; the mill lights were all extinguished; the signal was given for breakfast; the children, released for half an hour from toil, betook themselves to the little tin cans which held their coffee, and to the small baskets which contained their allowance of bread. Let us hope they have enough to eat; it would be a pity were it otherwise.

And now at last Mr. Moore quitted the mill-yard, and bent his steps to his dwelling-house. It was only a short distance from the factory, but the hedge and high bank on each side of the lane which conducted to it seemed to give it something of the appearance and feeling of seclusion. It was a small, whitewashed place, with a green porch over the door; scanty brown stalks showed in the garden soil near this porch, and likewise beneath the windows — stalks budless and flowerless now, but giving dim prediction of trained and blooming creepers for summer days. A grass plat and borders fronted the cottage. The borders presented only black mould yet, except where, in sheltered nooks, the first shoots of snowdrop or crocus peeped, green as emerald, from the earth. The spring was late; it had been a severe and prolonged winter; the last deep snow had but just disappeared before yesterday's rains; on the hills, indeed, white remnants of it yet gleamed, flecking the hollows and crowning the peaks; the lawn was not verdant, but bleached, as was the grass on the bank, and under the hedge in the lane. Three trees, gracefully grouped, rose beside the cottage. They were not lofty, but having no rivals near, they looked well and imposing where they grew. Such was Mr. Moore's home — a snug nest for content and contemplation, but one within which the wings of action and ambition could not long lie folded.

Its air of modest comfort seemed to possess no particular attraction for its owner. Instead of entering the house at once he fetched a spade from a little shed and began to work in the garden. For about a quarter of an hour he dug on uninterrupted. At length, however, a window opened, and a female voice called to him, —

"Eh, bien! Tu ne déjeûnes pas ce matin?"

The answer, and the rest of the conversation, was in French; but as this is an English book, I shall translate it into English.

"Is breakfast ready, Hortense?"

"Certainly; it has been ready half an hour."

"Then I am ready too. I have a canine hunger."

He threw down his spade, and entered the house. The narrow passage conducted him to a small parlour, where a breakfast of coffee and bread and butter, with the somewhat un-English accompaniment of stewed pears, was spread on the table. Over these viands presided the lady who had spoken from the window. I must describe her before I go any farther.

She seemed a little older than Mr. Moore — perhaps she was thirty-five, tall, and proportionately stout; she had very black hair, for the present twisted up in curl-papers, a high colour in her cheeks, a small nose, a pair of little black eyes. The lower part of her face was large in proportion to the upper; her forehead was small and rather corrugated; she had a fretful though not an ill-natured expression of countenance; there was something in her whole appearance one felt inclined to be half provoked with and half amused at. The strangest point was her dress — a stuff petticoat and a striped cotton camisole. The petticoat was short, displaying well a pair of feet and ankles which left much to be desired in the article of symmetry.

You will think I have depicted a remarkable slattern, reader. Not at all. Hortense Moore (she was Mr. Moore's sister) was a very orderly, economical person. The petticoat, camisole, and curl-papers were her morning costume, in which, of forenoons, she had always been accustomed to "go her household ways" in her own country. She did not choose to adopt English fashions because she was obliged to live in England; she adhered to her old Belgian modes, quite satisfied that there was a merit in so doing.

Mademoiselle had an excellent opinion of herself — an opinion not wholly undeserved, for she possessed some good and sterling qualities; but she rather over-estimated the kind and degree of these qualities, and quite left out of the account sundry little defects which accompanied them. You could never have persuaded her that she was a prejudiced and narrow-minded person, that she was too susceptible on the subject of her own dignity and importance, and too apt to take offence about trifles; yet all this was true. However, where her claims to distinction were not opposed, and where her prejudices were not offended, she could be kind and friendly enough. To her two brothers (for there was another Gérard Moore besides Robert) she was very much attached. As the sole remaining representatives of their decayed family, the persons of both were almost sacred in her eyes. Of Louis, however, she knew less than of Robert. He had been sent to England when a mere boy, and had received his education at an English school. His education not being such as to adapt him for trade, perhaps, too, his natural bent not inclining him to mercantile pursuits, he had, when the blight of hereditary prospects rendered it necessary for him to push his own fortune, adopted the very arduous and very modest career of a teacher. He had been usher in a school, and was said now to be tutor in a private family. Hortense, when she mentioned Louis, described him as having what she called "des moyens," but as being too backward and quiet. Her praise of Robert was in a different strain, less qualified: she was very proud of him; she regarded him as the greatest man in Europe; all he said and did was remarkable in her eyes, and she expected others to behold him from the same point of view; nothing could be more irrational, monstrous, and infamous than opposition from any quarter to Robert, unless it were opposition to herself.

Accordingly, as soon as the said Robert was seated at the breakfast-table, and she had helped him to a portion of stewed pears, and cut him a good-sized Belgian tartine, she began to pour out a flood of amazement and horror at the transaction of last night, the destruction of the frames.

"Quelle idée! to destroy them. Quelle action honteuse! On voyait bien que les ouvriers de ce pays étaient à la fois betes et méchants. C'était absolument comme les domestiques anglais, les servantes surtout: rien d'insupportable comme cette Sara, par exemple!"

"She looks clean and industrious," Mr. Moore remarked.

"Looks! I don't know how she looks, and I do not say that she is altogether dirty or idle, mais elle est d'une insolence! She disputed with me a quarter of an hour yesterday about the cooking of the beef; she said I boiled it to rags, that English people would never be able to eat such a dish as our bouilli, that the bouillon was no better than greasy warm water, and as to the choucroute, she affirms she cannot touch it! That barrel we have in the cellar — delightfully prepared by my own hands — she termed a tub of hog-wash, which means food for pigs. I am harassed with the girl, and yet I cannot part with her lest I should get a worse. You are in the same position with your workmen, pauvre cher frère!"

"I am afraid you are not very happy in England, Hortense."

"It is my duty to be happy where you are, brother; but otherwise there are certainly a thousand things which make me regret our native town. All the world here appears to me ill-bred (mal-élevé). I find my habits considered ridiculous. If a girl out of your mill chances to come into the kitchen and find me in my jupon and camisole preparing dinner (for you know I cannot trust Sarah to cook a single dish), she sneers. If I accept an invitation out to tea, which I have done once or twice, I perceive I am put quite into the background; I have not that attention paid me which decidedly is my due. Of what an excellent family are the Gérards, as we know, and the Moores also! They have a right to claim a certain respect, and to feel wounded when it is withheld from them. In Antwerp I was always treated with distinction; here, one would think that when I open my lips in company I speak English with a ridiculous accent, whereas I am quite assured that I pronounce it perfectly."

"Hortense, in Antwerp we were known rich; in England we were never known but poor."

"Precisely, and thus mercenary are mankind. Again, dear brother, last Sunday, if you recollect, was very wet; accordingly I went to church in my neat black sabots, objects one would not indeed wear in a fashionable city, but which in the country I have ever been accustomed to use for walking in dirty roads. Believe me, as I paced up the aisle, composed and tranquil, as I am always, four ladies, and as many gentlemen, laughed and hid their faces behind their prayer-books."

"Well, well! don't put on the sabots again. I told you before I thought they were not quite the thing for this country."

"But, brother, they are not common sabots, such as the peasantry wear. I tell you, they are sabots noirs, très propres, très convenables. At Mons and Leuze — cities not very far removed from the elegant capital of Brussels — it is very seldom that the respectable people wear anything else for walking in winter. Let any one try to wade the mud of the Flemish chaussées in a pair of Paris brodequins, on m'en dirait des nouvelles!"

"Never mind Mons and Leuze and the Flemish chaussées; do at Rome as the Romans do. And as to the camisole and jupon, I am not quite sure about them either. I never see an English lady dressed in such garments. Ask Caroline Helstone."

"Caroline! *I* ask Caroline? *I* consult her about my dress? It is *she* who on all points should consult *me*. She is a child."

"She is eighteen, or at least seventeen — old enough to know all about gowns, petticoats, and chaussures."

"Do not spoil Caroline, I entreat you, brother. Do not make her of more consequence than she ought to be. At present she is modest and unassuming: let us keep her so."

"With all my heart. Is she coming this morning?"

"She will come at ten, as usual, to take her French lesson."

"You don't find that she sneers at you, do you?"

"She does not. She appreciates me better than any one else here; but then she has more intimate opportunities of knowing me. She sees that I have education, intelligence, manner, principles — all, in short, which belongs to a person well born and well bred."

"Are you at all fond of her?"

"For *fond* I cannot say. I am not one who is prone to take violent fancies, and, consequently, my friendship is the more to be depended on. I have a regard for her as my relative; her position also inspires interest, and her conduct as my pupil has hitherto been such as rather to enhance than diminish the attachment that springs from other causes."

"She behaves pretty well at lessons?"

"To *me* she behaves very well; but you are conscious, brother, that I have a manner calculated to repel over-familiarity, to win esteem, and to command respect. Yet, possessed of penetration, I perceive clearly that Caroline is not perfect, that there is much to be desired in her."

"Give me a last cup of coffee, and while I am drinking it amuse me with an account of her faults."

"Dear brother, I am happy to see you eat your breakfast with relish, after the fatiguing night you have passed. Caroline, then, is defective; but with my forming hand and almost motherly care she may improve. There is about her an occasional something — a reserve, I think — which I do not quite like, because it is not sufficiently girlish and submissive; and there are glimpses of an unsettled hurry in her nature, which put me out. Yet she is usually most tranquil, too dejected and thoughtful indeed sometimes. In time, I doubt not, I shall make her uniformly sedate and decorous, without being unaccountably pensive. I ever disapprove what is not intelligible."

"I don't understand your account in the least. What do you mean by 'unsettled hurries,' for instance?"

"An example will, perhaps, be the most satisfactory explanation. I sometimes, you are aware, make her read French poetry by way of practice in pronunciation. She has in the course of her lessons gone through much of Corneille and Racine, in a very steady, sober spirit, such as I approve. Occasionally she showed, indeed, a degree of languor in the perusal of those esteemed authors, partaking rather of apathy than sobriety; and apathy is what I cannot tolerate in those who have the benefit of my instructions — besides, one should not be apathetic in studying standard works. The other day I put into her hands a volume of short fugitive pieces. I sent her to the window to learn one by heart, and when I looked up I saw her turning the leaves over impatiently, and curling her lip, absolutely with scorn, as she surveyed the little poems cursorily. I chid her. 'Ma cousine,' said she, 'tout cela m'ennuie à la mort.' I told her this was improper language. 'Dieu!' she exclaimed, 'il n'y a donc pas deux lignes de poësie dans toute la littérature française?' I inquired what she meant. She begged my pardon with proper submission. Ere long she was still. I saw her smiling to herself over the book. She began to learn assiduously. In half an hour she came and stood before me, presented the volume, folded her hands, as I always require her to do, and commenced the repetition of that short thing by Chénier, 'La Jeune Captive.' If you had heard the manner in which she went through this, and in which she uttered a few incoherent comments when she had done, you would have known what I meant by the phrase 'unsettled hurry.' One would have thought Chénier was more moving than all Racine and all Corneille. You, brother, who have so much sagacity, will discern that this disproportionate preference argues an ill-regulated mind; but she is fortunate in her preceptress. I will give her a system, a method of thought, a set of opinions; I will give her the perfect control and guidance of her feelings."

"Be sure you do, Hortense. Here she comes. That was her shadow passed the window, I believe."

"Ah! truly. She is too early — half an hour before her time. — My child, what brings you here before I have breakfasted?"

This question was addressed to an individual who now entered the room, a young girl, wrapped in a winter mantle, the folds of which were gathered with some grace round an apparently slender figure.

"I came in haste to see how you were, Hortense, and how Robert was too. I was sure you would be both grieved by what happened last night. I did not hear till this morning. My uncle told me at breakfast."

"Ah! it is unspeakable. You sympathize with us? Your uncle sympathizes with us?"

"My uncle is very angry — but he was with Robert, I believe, was he not?

— Did he not go with you to Stilbro' Moor?"

"Yes, we set out in very martial style, Caroline; but the prisoners we went to rescue met us half-way."

"Of course nobody was hurt?"

"Why, no; only Joe Scott's wrists were a little galled with being pinioned too tightly behind his back."

"You were not there? You were not with the wagons when they were attacked?"

"No. One seldom has the fortune to be present at occurrences at which one would particularly wish to assist."

"Where are you going this morning? I saw Murgatroyd saddling your horse in the yard."

"To Whinbury. It is market day."

"Mr. Yorke is going too. I met him in his gig. Come home with him."

"Why?"

"Two are better than one, and nobody dislikes Mr. Yorke — at least, poor people do not dislike him."

"Therefore he would be a protection to me, who am hated?"

"Who are *misunderstood*. That, probably, is the word. Shall you be late? — Will he be late, Cousin Hortense?"

"It is too probable. He has often much business to transact at Whinbury. Have you brought your exercise-book, child?"

"Yes. — What time will you return, Robert?"

"I generally return at seven. Do you wish me to be at home earlier?"

"Try rather to be back by six. It is not absolutely dark at six now, but by seven daylight is quite gone."

"And what danger is to be apprehended, Caroline, when daylight *is* gone? What peril do you conceive comes as the companion of darkness for me?"

"I am not sure that I can define my fears, but we all have a certain anxiety at present about our friends. My uncle calls these times dangerous. He says, too, that mill-owners are unpopular."

"And I am one of the most unpopular? Is not that the fact? You are reluctant to speak out plainly, but at heart you think me liable to Pearson's fate, who was shot at — not, indeed, from behind a hedge, but in his own house, through his staircase window, as he was going to bed."

"Anne Pearson showed me the bullet in the chamber-door," remarked Caroline gravely, as she folded her mantle and arranged it and her muff on a side-table. "You know," she continued, "there is a hedge all the way along the road from here to Whinbury, and there are the Fieldhead plantations to pass; but you will be back by six — or before?"

"Certainly he will," affirmed Hortense. "And now, my child, prepare your lessons for repetition, while I put the peas to soak for the purée at dinner."

With this direction she left the room.

"You suspect I have many enemies, then, Caroline," said Mr. Moore, "and doubtless you know me to be destitute of friends?"

"Not destitute, Robert. There is your sister, your brother Louis, whom I have never seen; there is Mr. Yorke, and there is my uncle — besides, of course, many more."

Robert smiled. "You would be puzzled to name your 'many more,'" said he. "But show me your exercise-book. What extreme pains you take with the writing! My sister, I suppose, exacts this care. She wants to form you in all things after the model of a Flemish school-girl. What life are you destined for, Caroline? What will you do with your French, drawing, and other accomplishments, when they are acquired?"

"You may well say, when they are acquired; for, as you are aware, till Hortense began to teach me, I knew precious little. As to the life I am destined for, I cannot tell. I suppose to keep my uncle's house till — — " She hesitated.

"Till what? Till he dies?"

"No. How harsh to say that! I never think of his dying. He is only fifty-five. But till — in short, till events offer other occupations for me."

"A remarkably vague prospect! Are you content with it?"

"I used to be, formerly. Children, you know, have little reflection, or rather their reflections run on ideal themes. There are moments *now* when I am not quite satisfied."

"Why?"

"I am making no money — earning nothing."

"You come to the point, Lina. You too, then, wish to make money?"

"I do. I should like an occupation; and if I were a boy, it would not be so difficult to find one. I see such an easy, pleasant way of learning a business, and making my war in life."

"Go on. Let us hear what way."

"I could be apprenticed to your trade — the cloth-trade. I could learn it of you, as we are distant relations. I would do the counting-house work, keep the books, and write the letters, while you went to market. I know you greatly desire to be rich, in order to pay your father's debts; perhaps I could help you to get rich."

"Help *me*? You should think of yourself."

"I do think of myself; but must one for ever think only of oneself?"

"Of whom else do I think? Of whom else *dare* I think? The poor ought to have no large sympathies; it is their duty to be narrow."

"No, Robert — — "

"Yes, Caroline. Poverty is necessarily selfish, contracted, grovelling, anxious. Now and then a poor man's heart, when certain beams and dews visit it, may smell like the budding vegetation in yonder garden on this spring day, may feel ripe to evolve in foliage, perhaps blossom; but he must not encourage the pleasant impulse; he must invoke Prudence to check it, with that frosty breath of hers, which is as nipping as any north wind."

"No cottage would be happy then."

"When I speak of poverty, I do not so much mean the natural, habitual poverty of the working-man, as the embarrassed penury of the man in debt. My grub-worm is always a straitened, struggling, care-worn tradesman."

"Cherish hope, not anxiety. Certain ideas have become too fixed in your mind. It may be presumptuous to say it, but I have the impression that there is something wrong in your notions of the best means of attaining happiness, as there is in — — " Second hesitation.

"I am all ear, Caroline."

"In (courage! let me speak the truth) — in your manner — mind, I say only *manner* — to these Yorkshire workpeople."

"You have often wanted to tell me that, have you not?"

"Yes; often — very often."

"The faults of my manner are, I think, only negative. I am not proud. What has a man in my position to be proud of? I am only taciturn, phlegmatic, and joyless."

"As if your living cloth-dressers were all machines like your frames and shears. In your own house you seem different."

"To those of my own house I am no alien, which I am to these English clowns. I might act the benevolent with them, but acting is not my *forte*. I find them irrational, perverse; they hinder me when I long to hurry forward. In treating them justly I fulfil my whole duty towards them."

"You don't expect them to love you, of course?"

"Nor wish it."

"Ah!" said the monitress, shaking her head and heaving a deep sigh. With this ejaculation, indicative that she perceived a screw to be loose somewhere, but that it was out of her reach to set it right, she bent over her grammar, and sought the rule and exercise for the day.

"I suppose I am not an affectionate man, Caroline. The attachment of a very few suffices me."

"If you please, Robert, will you mend me a pen or two before you go?"

"First let me rule your book, for you always contrive to draw the lines aslant. There now. And now for the pens. You like a fine one, I think?"

"Such as you generally make for me and Hortense; not your own broad points."

"If I were of Louis's calling I might stay at home and dedicate this morning to you and your studies, whereas I must spend it in Skyes's wool-warehouse."

"You will be making money."

"More likely losing it."

As he finished mending the pens, a horse, saddled and bridled, was brought up to the garden-gate.

"There, Fred is ready for me; I must go. I'll take one look to see what the spring has done in the south border, too, first."

He quitted the room, and went out into the garden ground behind the mill. A sweet fringe of young verdure and opening flowers — snowdrop, crocus, even primrose — bloomed in the sunshine under the hot wall of the factory Moore plucked here and there a blossom and leaf, till he had collected a little bouquet. He returned to the parlour, pilfered a thread of silk from his sister's work-basket, tied the flowers, and laid them on Caroline's desk.

"Now, good-morning."

"Thank you, Robert. It is pretty; it looks, as it lies there, like sparkles of sunshine and blue sky. Good-morning."

He went to the door, stopped, opened his lips as if to speak, said nothing, and moved on. He passed through the wicket, and mounted his horse. In a second he had flung himself from his saddle again, transferred the reins to Murgatroyd, and re-entered the cottage.

"I forgot my gloves," he said, appearing to take something from the side-table; then, as an impromptu thought, he remarked, "You have no binding engagement at home perhaps, Caroline?"

"I never have. Some children's socks, which Mrs. Ramsden has ordered, to knit for the Jew's basket; but they will keep."

"Jew's basket be — sold! Never was utensil better named. Anything more Jewish than it — its contents and their prices — cannot be conceived. But I see something, a very tiny curl, at the corners of your lip, which tells me that you know its merits as well as I do. Forget the Jew's basket, then, and spend the day here as a change. Your uncle won't break his heart at your absence?"

She smiled. "No."

"The old Cossack! I dare say not," muttered Moore.

"Then stay and dine with Hortense; she will be glad of your company. I shall return in good time. We will have a little reading in the evening. The moon rises at half-past eight, and I will walk up to the rectory with you at nine. Do you agree?"

She nodded her head, and her eyes lit up.

Moore lingered yet two minutes. He bent over Caroline's desk and glanced at her grammar, he fingered her pen, he lifted her bouquet and played with it; his horse stamped impatient; Fred Murgatroyd hemmed and coughed at the gate, as if he wondered what in the world his master was doing. "Good-morning," again said Moore, and finally vanished.

Hortense, coming in ten minutes after, found, to her surprise, that Caroline had not yet commenced her exercise.

CHAPTER VI.

CORIOLANUS.

Mademoiselle Moore had that morning a somewhat absent-minded pupil. Caroline forgot, again and again, the explanations which were given to her. However, she still bore with unclouded mood the chidings her inattention brought upon her. Sitting in the sunshine near the window, she seemed to receive with its warmth a kind influence, which made her both happy and good. Thus disposed, she looked her best, and her best was a pleasing vision.

To her had not been denied the gift of beauty. It was not absolutely necessary to know her in order to like her; she was fair enough to please, even at the first view. Her shape suited her age: it was girlish, light, and pliant; every curve was neat, every limb proportionate; her face was expressive and gentle; her eyes were handsome, and gifted at times with a winning beam that stole into the heart, with a language that spoke softly to the affections. Her mouth was very pretty; she had a delicate skin, and a fine flow of brown hair, which she knew how to arrange with taste; curls became her, and she possessed them in picturesque profusion. Her style of dress announced taste in the wearer — very unobtrusive in fashion, far from costly in material, but suitable in colour to the fair complexion with which it contrasted, and in make to the slight form which it draped. Her present winter garb was of merino — the same soft shade of brown as her hair; the little collar round her neck lay over a pink ribbon, and was fastened with a pink knot. She wore no other decoration.

So much for Caroline Helstone’s appearance. As to her character or intellect, if she had any, they must speak for themselves in due time.

Her connections are soon explained. She was the child of parents separated soon after her birth, in consequence of disagreement of disposition. Her mother was the half-sister of Mr. Moore’s father; thus, though there was no mixture of blood, she was, in a distant sense, the cousin of Robert, Louis, and Hortense. Her father was the brother of Mr. Helstone — a man of the character friends desire not to recall, after death has once settled all earthly accounts. He had rendered his wife unhappy. The reports which were known to be true concerning him had given an air of probability to those which were falsely circulated respecting his better-principled brother. Caroline had never known her mother, as she was taken from her in infancy, and had not since seen her; her father died comparatively young, and her uncle, the rector, had for some years been her sole guardian. He was not, as we are aware, much adapted, either by nature or habits, to have the charge of a young girl. He had taken little trouble about her education; probably he would have taken none if she, finding herself neglected, had not grown anxious on her own account, and asked, every now and then, for a little attention, and for the means of acquiring such amount of knowledge as could not be dispensed with. Still, she had a depressing feeling that she was inferior, that her attainments were fewer than were usually possessed by girls of her age and station; and very glad was she to avail herself of the kind offer made by her cousin Hortense, soon after the arrival of the latter at Hollow's Mill, to teach her French and fine needlework. Mdlle. Moore, for her part, delighted in the task, because it gave her importance; she liked to lord it a little over a docile yet quick pupil. She took Caroline precisely at her own estimate, as an irregularly-taught, even ignorant girl; and when she found that she made rapid and eager progress, it was to no talent, no application, in the scholar she ascribed the improvement, but entirely to her own superior method of teaching. When she found that Caroline, unskilled in routine, had a knowledge of her own, desultory but varied, the discovery caused her no surprise, for she still imagined that from her conversation had the girl unawares gleaned these treasures. She thought it even when forced to feel that her pupil knew much on subjects whereof she knew little. The idea was not logical, but Hortense had perfect faith in it.

Mademoiselle, who prided herself on possessing "un esprit positif," and on entertaining a decided preference for dry studies, kept her young cousin to the same as closely as she could. She worked her unrelentingly at the grammar of the French language, assigning her, as the most improving exercise she could devise, interminable "analyses logiques." These "analyses" were by no means a source of particular pleasure to Caroline; she thought she could have learned French just as well without them, and grudged excessively the time spent in pondering over "propositions, principales, et incidents;" in deciding the "incidente determinative," and the "incidente applicative;" in examining whether the proposition was "pleine," "elliptique," or "implicite." Sometimes she lost herself in the maze, and when so lost she would, now and then (while Hortense was rummaging her drawers upstairs — an unaccountable occupation in which she spent a large portion of each day, arranging, disarranging, rearranging, and counter-arranging), carry her book to Robert in the counting-house, and get the rough place made smooth by his aid. Mr. Moore possessed a clear, tranquil brain of his own. Almost as soon as he looked at Caroline's little difficulties they seemed to dissolve beneath his eye. In two minutes he would explain all, in two words give the key to the puzzle. She thought if Hortense could only teach like him, how much faster she might learn! Repaying him by an admiring and grateful smile, rather shed at his feet than lifted to his face, she would leave the mill reluctantly to go back to the cottage, and then, while she completed the exercise, or worked out the sum (for Mdlle. Moore taught her arithmetic too), she would wish nature had made her a boy instead of a girl, that she might ask Robert to let her be his clerk, and sit with him in the counting-house, instead of sitting with

Hortense in the parlour.

Occasionally — but this happened very rarely — she spent the evening at Hollow's Cottage. Sometimes during these visits Moore was away attending a market; sometimes he was gone to Mr. Yorke's; often he was engaged with a male visitor in another room; but sometimes, too, he was at home, disengaged, free to talk with Caroline. When this was the case, the evening hours passed on wings of light; they were gone before they were counted. There was no room in England so pleasant as that small parlour when the three cousins occupied it. Hortense, when she was not teaching, or scolding, or cooking, was far from ill-humoured; it was her custom to relax towards evening, and to be kind to her young English kinswoman. There was a means, too, of rendering her delightful, by inducing her to take her guitar and sing and play. She then became quite good-natured. And as she played with skill, and had a well-toned voice, it was not disagreeable to listen to her. It would have been absolutely agreeable, except that her formal and self-important character modulated her strains, as it impressed her manners and moulded her countenance.

Mr. Moore, released from the business yoke, was, if not lively himself, a willing spectator of Caroline's liveliness, a complacent listener to her talk, a ready respondent to her questions. He was something agreeable to sit near, to hover round, to address and look at. Sometimes he was better than this — almost animated, quite gentle and friendly.

The drawback was that by the next morning he was sure to be frozen up again; and however much he seemed, in his quiet way, to enjoy these social evenings, he rarely contrived their recurrence. This circumstance puzzled the inexperienced head of his cousin. "If I had a means of happiness at my command," she thought, "I would employ that means often. I would keep it bright with use, and not let it lie for weeks aside, till it gets rusty."

Yet she was careful not to put in practice her own theory. Much as she liked an evening visit to the cottage, she never paid one unasked. Often, indeed, when pressed by Hortense to come, she would refuse, because Robert did not second, or but slightly seconded the request. This morning was the first time he had ever, of his own unprompted will, given her an invitation; and then he had spoken so kindly that in hearing him she had received a sense of happiness sufficient to keep her glad for the whole day.

The morning passed as usual. Mademoiselle, ever breathlessly busy, spent it in bustling from kitchen to parlour, now scolding Sarah, now looking over Caroline's exercise or hearing her repetition-lesson. However faultlessly these tasks were achieved, she never commended: it was a maxim with her that praise is inconsistent with a teacher's dignity, and that blame, in more or less unqualified measure, is indispensable to it. She thought incessant reprimand, severe or slight, quite necessary to the maintenance of her authority; and if no possible error was to be found in the lesson, it was the pupil's carriage, or air, or dress, or mien, which required correction.

The usual affray took place about the dinner, which meal, when Sarah at last brought it into the room, she almost flung upon the table, with a look that expressed quite plainly, “I never dished such stuff i’ my life afore; it’s not fit for dogs.” Notwithstanding Sarah’s scorn, it was a savoury repast enough. The soup was a sort of purée of dried peas, which mademoiselle had prepared amidst bitter lamentations that in this desolate country of England no haricot beans were to be had. Then came a dish of meat — nature unknown, but supposed to be miscellaneous — singularly chopped up with crumbs of bread, seasoned uniquely though not unpleasantly, and baked in a mould — a queer but by no means unpalatable dish. Greens, oddly bruised, formed the accompanying vegetable; and a pâté of fruit, conserved after a recipe devised by Madame Gérard Moore’s “grand’mère,” and from the taste of which it appeared probable that “mélasse” had been substituted for sugar, completed the dinner.

Caroline had no objection to this Belgian cookery — indeed she rather liked it for a change; and it was well she did so, for had she evinced any disrelish thereof, such manifestation would have injured her in mademoiselle’s good graces for ever; a positive crime might have been more easily pardoned than a symptom of distaste for the foreign comestibles.

Soon after dinner Caroline coaxed her governess-cousin upstairs to dress. This manœuvre required management. To have hinted that the jupon, camisole, and curl-papers were odious objects, or indeed other than quite meritorious points, would have been a felony. Any premature attempt to urge their disappearance was therefore unwise, and would be likely to issue in the persevering wear of them during the whole day. Carefully avoiding rocks and quicksands, however, the pupil, on pretence of requiring a change of scene, contrived to get the teacher aloft; and, once in the bedroom, she persuaded her that it was not worth while returning thither, and that she might as well make her toilet now; and while mademoiselle delivered a solemn homily on her own surpassing merit in disregarding all frivolities of fashion, Caroline denuded her of the camisole, invested her with a decent gown, arranged her collar, hair, etc., and made her quite presentable. But Hortense would put the finishing touches herself, and these finishing touches consisted in a thick handkerchief tied round the throat, and a large, servant-like black apron, which spoiled everything. On no account would mademoiselle have appeared in her own house without the thick handkerchief and the voluminous apron. The first was a positive matter of morality — it was quite improper not to wear a fichu; the second was the ensign of a good housewife — she appeared to think that by means of it she somehow effected a large saving in her brother’s income. She had, with her own hands, made and presented to Caroline similar equipments; and the only serious quarrel they had ever had, and which still left a soreness in the elder cousin’s soul, had arisen from the refusal of the younger one to accept of and profit by these elegant presents.

“I wear a high dress and a collar,” said Caroline, “and I should feel suffocated with a handkerchief in addition; and my short aprons do quite as well as that very long one. I would rather make no change."

Yet Hortense, by dint of perseverance, would probably have compelled her to make a change, had not Mr. Moore chanced to overhear a dispute on the subject, and decided that Caroline's little aprons would suffice, and that, in his opinion, as she was still but a child, she might for the present dispense with the fichu, especially as her curls were long, and almost touched her shoulders.

There was no appeal against Robert's opinion, therefore his sister was compelled to yield; but she disapproved entirely of the piquant neatness of Caroline's costume, and the ladylike grace of her appearance. Something more solid and homely she would have considered "beaucoup plus convenable."

The afternoon was devoted to sewing. Mademoiselle, like most Belgian ladies, was specially skilful with her needle. She by no means thought it waste of time to devote unnumbered hours to fine embroidery, sight-destroying lace-work, marvellous netting and knitting, and, above all, to most elaborate stocking-mending. She would give a day to the mending of two holes in a stocking any time, and think her "mission" nobly fulfilled when she had accomplished it. It was another of Caroline's troubles to be condemned to learn this foreign style of darning, which was done stitch by stitch, so as exactly to imitate the fabric of the stocking itself — a wearifu' process, but considered by Hortense Gérard, and by her ancestresses before her for long generations back, as one of the first "duties of a woman." She herself had had a needle, cotton, and a fearfully torn stocking put into her hand while she yet wore a child's coif on her little black head; her "hauts faits" in the darning line had been exhibited to company ere she was six years old; and when she first discovered that Caroline was profoundly ignorant of this most essential of attainments, she could have wept with pity over her miserably-neglected youth.

No time did she lose in seeking up a hopeless pair of hose, of which the heels were entirely gone, and in setting the ignorant English girl to repair the deficiency. This task had been commenced two years ago, and Caroline had the stockings in her work-bag yet. She did a few rows every day, by way of penance for the expiation of her sins. They were a grievous burden to her; she would much have liked to put them in the fire; and once Mr. Moore, who had observed her sitting and sighing over them, had proposed a private incremation in the counting-house; but to this proposal Caroline knew it would have been impolitic to accede — the result could only be a fresh pair of hose, probably in worse condition. She adhered, therefore, to the ills she knew.

All the afternoon the two ladies sat and sewed, till the eyes and fingers, and even the spirits of one of them, were weary. The sky since dinner had darkened; it had begun to rain again, to pour fast. Secret fears began to steal on Caroline that Robert would be persuaded by Mr. Sykes or Mr. Yorke to remain at Whinbury till it cleared, and of that there appeared no present chance. Five o'clock struck, and time stole on; still the clouds streamed. A sighing wind whispered in the roof-trees of the cottage; day seemed already closing; the parlour fire shed on the clear hearth a glow ruddy as at twilight.

"It will not be fair till the moon rises," pronounced Mademoiselle Moore, "consequently I feel assured that my brother will not return till then. Indeed I should be sorry if he did. We will have coffee. It would be vain to wait for him."

"I am tired. May I leave my work now, cousin?"

"You may, since it grows too dark to see to do it well. Fold it up; put it carefully in your bag; then step into the kitchen and desire Sarah to bring in the goûter, or tea, as you call it."

"But it has not yet struck six. He may still come."

"He will not, I tell you. I can calculate his movements. I understand my brother."

Suspense is irksome, disappointment bitter. All the world has, some time or other, felt that. Caroline, obedient to orders, passed into the kitchen. Sarah was making a dress for herself at the table.

"You are to bring in coffee," said the young lady in a spiritless tone; and then she leaned her arm and head against the kitchen mantelpiece, and hung listlessly over the fire.

"How low you seem, miss! But it's all because your cousin keeps you so close to work. It's a shame!"

"Nothing of the kind, Sarah," was the brief reply.

"Oh! but I know it is. You're fit to cry just this minute, for nothing else but because you've sat still the whole day. It would make a kitten dull to be mewed up so."

"Sarah, does your master often come home early from market when it is wet?"

"Never, hardly; but just to-day, for some reason, he has made a difference."

"What do you mean?"

"He is come. I am certain I saw Murgatroyd lead his horse into the yard by the back-way, when I went to get some water at the pump five minutes since. He was in the counting-house with Joe Scott, I believe."

"You are mistaken."

"What should I be mistaken for? I know his horse surely?"

"But you did not see himself?"

"I heard him speak, though. He was saying something to Joe Scott about having settled all concerning ways and means, and that there would be a new set of frames in the mill before another week passed, and that this time he would get four soldiers from Stilbro' barracks to guard the wagon."

"Sarah, are you making a gown?"

“Yes. Is it a handsome one?”

“Beautiful! Get the coffee ready. I’ll finish cutting out that sleeve for you, and I’ll give you some trimming for it. I have some narrow satin ribbon of a colour that will just match it.”

“You’re very kind, miss.”

“Be quick; there’s a good girl. But first put your master’s shoes on the hearth: he will take his boots off when he comes in. I hear him; he is coming.”

“Miss, you are cutting the stuff wrong.”

“So I am; but it is only a snip. There is no harm done.”

The kitchen door opened; Mr. Moore entered, very wet and cold. Caroline half turned from her dressmaking occupation, but renewed it for a moment, as if to gain a minute’s time for some purpose. Bent over the dress, her face was hidden; there was an attempt to settle her features and veil their expression, which failed. When she at last met Mr. Moore, her countenance beamed.

“We had ceased to expect you. They asserted you would not come,” she said.

“But I promised to return soon. *You* expected me, I suppose?”

“No, Robert; I dared not when it rained so fast. And you are wet and chilled. Change everything. If you took cold, I should — we should blame ourselves in some measure.”

“I am not wet through: my riding-coat is waterproof. Dry shoes are all I require. There — the fire is pleasant after facing the cold wind and rain for a few miles.”

He stood on the kitchen hearth; Caroline stood beside him. Mr. Moore, while enjoying the genial glow, kept his eyes directed towards the glittering brasses on the shelf above. Chancing for an instant to look down, his glance rested on an uplifted face, flushed, smiling, happy, shaded with silky curls, lit with fine eyes. Sarah was gone into the parlour with the tray; a lecture from her mistress detained her there. Moore placed his hand a moment on his young cousin’s shoulder, stooped, and left a kiss on her forehead.

“Oh!” said she, as if the action had unsealed her lips, “I was miserable when I thought you would not come. I am almost too happy now. Are you happy, Robert? Do you like to come home?”

“I think I do — to-night, at least.”

“Are you certain you are not fretting about your frames, and your business, and the war?”

“Not just now.”

“Are you positive you don’t feel Hollow’s Cottage too small for you, and narrow, and dismal?”

“At this moment, no.”

“Can you affirm that you are not bitter at heart because rich and great people forget you?”

“No more questions. You are mistaken if you think I am anxious to curry favour with rich and great people. I only want means — a position — a career."

"Which your own talent and goodness shall win you. You were made to be great; you *shall* be great."

"I wonder now, if you spoke honestly out of your heart, what recipe you would give me for acquiring this same greatness; but I know it — better than you know it yourself. Would it be efficacious? Would it work? Yes — poverty, misery, bankruptcy. Oh, life is not what you think it, Lina!"

"But you are what I think you."

"I am not."

"You are better, then?"

"Far worse."

"No; far better. I know you are good."

"How do you know it?"

"You look so, and I feel you *are* so."

"Where do you feel it?"

"In my heart."

"Ah! You judge me with your heart, Lina: you should judge me with your head."

"I do; and then I am quite proud of you. Robert, you cannot tell all my thoughts about you."

Mr. Moore's dark face mustered colour; his lips smiled, and yet were compressed; his eyes laughed, and yet he resolutely knit his brow.

"Think meanly of me, Lina," said he. "Men, in general, are a sort of scum, very different to anything of which you have an idea. I make no pretension to be better than my fellows."

"If you did, I should not esteem you so much. It is because you are modest that I have such confidence in your merit."

"Are you flattering me?" he demanded, turning sharply upon her, and searching her face with an eye of acute penetration.

"No," she said softly, laughing at his sudden quickness. She seemed to think it unnecessary to proffer any eager disavowal of the charge.

"You don't care whether I think you flatter me or not?"

"No."

"You are so secure of your own intentions?"

"I suppose so."

"What are they, Caroline?"

"Only to ease my mind by expressing for once part of what I think, and then to make you better satisfied with yourself."

"By assuring me that my kinswoman is my sincere friend?"

"Just so. I am your sincere friend, Robert."

"And I am — what chance and change shall make me, Lina."

"Not my enemy, however?"

The answer was cut short by Sarah and her mistress entering the kitchen together in some commotion. They had been improving the time which Mr.

Moore and Miss Helstone had spent in dialogue by a short dispute on the subject of “café au lait,” which Sarah said was the queerest mess she ever saw, and a waste of God’s good gifts, as it was “the nature of coffee to be boiled in water,” and which mademoiselle affirmed to be “un breuvage royal,” a thousand times too good for the mean person who objected to it.

The former occupants of the kitchen now withdrew into the parlour. Before Hortense followed them thither, Caroline had only time again to question, “Not my enemy, Robert?” And Moore, Quaker-like, had replied with another query, “Could I be?” And then, seating himself at the table, had settled Caroline at his side.

Caroline scarcely heard mademoiselle’s explosion of wrath when she rejoined them; the long declamation about the “conduite indigne de cette méchante créature” sounded in her ear as confusedly as the agitated rattling of the china. Robert laughed a little at it, in very subdued sort, and then, politely and calmly entreating his sister to be tranquil, assured her that if it would yield her any satisfaction, she should have her choice of an attendant amongst all the girls in his mill. Only he feared they would scarcely suit her, as they were most of them, he was informed, completely ignorant of household work; and pert and self-willed as Sarah was, she was, perhaps, no worse than the majority of the women of her class.

Mademoiselle admitted the truth of this conjecture: according to her, “ces paysannes anglaises étaient tout insupportables.” What would she not give for some “bonne cuisinière anversoise,” with the high cap, short petticoat, and decent sabots proper to her class — something better, indeed, than an insolent coquette in a flounced gown, and absolutely without cap! (For Sarah, it appears, did not partake the opinion of St. Paul that “it is a shame for a woman to go with her head uncovered;” but, holding rather a contrary doctrine, resolutely refused to imprison in linen or muslin the plentiful tresses of her yellow hair, which it was her wont to fasten up smartly with a comb behind, and on Sundays to wear curled in front.)

“Shall I try and get you an Antwerp girl?” asked Mr. Moore, who, stern in public, was on the whole very kind in private.

“Merci du cadeau!” was the answer. “An Antwerp girl would not stay here ten days, sneered at as she would be by all the young coquines in your factory;” then softening, “You are very good, dear brother — excuse my petulance — but truly my domestic trials are severe, yet they are probably my destiny; for I recollect that our revered mother experienced similar sufferings, though she had the choice of all the best servants in Antwerp. Domestics are in all countries a spoiled and unruly set.”

Mr. Moore had also certain reminiscences about the trials of his revered mother. A good mother she had been to him, and he honoured her memory; but he recollected that she kept a hot kitchen of it in Antwerp, just as his faithful sister did here in England. Thus, therefore, he let the subject drop, and when the coffee-service was removed, proceeded to console Hortense by fetching her music-book and guitar; and having arranged the ribbon of the instrument round her neck with a quiet fraternal kindness he knew to be all-powerful in soothing her most ruffled moods, he asked her to give him some of their mother's favourite songs.

Nothing refines like affection. Family jarring vulgarizes; family union elevates. Hortense, pleased with her brother, and grateful to him, looked, as she touched her guitar, almost graceful, almost handsome; her everyday fretful look was gone for a moment, and was replaced by a "sourire plein de bonté." She sang the songs he asked for, with feeling; they reminded her of a parent to whom she had been truly attached; they reminded her of her young days. She observed, too, that Caroline listened with naïve interest; this augmented her good-humour; and the exclamation at the close of the song, "I wish I could sing and play like Hortense!" achieved the business, and rendered her charming for the evening.

It is true a little lecture to Caroline followed, on the vanity of *wishing* and the duty of *trying*. "As Rome," it was suggested, "had not been built in a day, so neither had Mademoiselle Gérard Moore's education been completed in a week, or by merely *wishing* to be clever. It was effort that had accomplished that great work. She was ever remarkable for her perseverance, for her industry. Her masters had remarked that it was as delightful as it was uncommon to find so much talent united with so much solidity, and so on." Once on the theme of her own merits, mademoiselle was fluent.

Cradled at last in blissful self-complacency, she took her knitting, and sat down tranquil. Drawn curtains, a clear fire, a softly-shining lamp, gave now to the little parlour its best, its evening charm. It is probable that the three there present felt this charm. They all looked happy.

"What shall we do now, Caroline?" asked Mr. Moore, returning to his seat beside his cousin.

"What shall we do, Robert?" repeated she playfully. "You decide."

"Not play at chess?"

"No."

"Nor draughts, nor backgammon?"

"No, no; we both hate silent games that only keep one's hands employed, don't we?"

"I believe we do. Then shall we talk scandal?"

"About whom? Are we sufficiently interested in anybody to take a pleasure in pulling their character to pieces?"

"A question that comes to the point. For my part, unamiable as it sounds, I must say no."

"And I too. But it is strange, though we want no third — fourth, I mean (she hastily and with contrition glanced at Hortense), living person among us — so selfish we are in our happiness — though we don't want to think of the present existing world, it would be pleasant to go back to the past, to hear people that have slept for generations in graves that are perhaps no longer graves now, but gardens and fields, speak to us and tell us their thoughts, and impart their ideas."

"Who shall be the speaker? What language shall he utter? French?"

"Your French forefathers don't speak so sweetly, nor so solemnly, nor so impressively as your English ancestors, Robert. To-night you shall be entirely English. You shall read an English book."

"An old English book?"

"Yes, an old English book — one that you like; and I will choose a part of it that is toned quite in harmony with something in you. It shall waken your nature, fill your mind with music; it shall pass like a skilful hand over your heart, and make its strings sound. Your heart is a lyre, Robert; but the lot of your life has not been a minstrel to sweep it, and it is often silent. Let glorious William come near and touch it. You will see how he will draw the English power and melody out of its chords."

"I must read Shakespeare?"

"You must have his spirit before you; you must hear his voice with your mind's ear; you must take some of his soul into yours."

"With a view to making me better? Is it to operate like a sermon?"

"It is to stir you, to give you new sensations. It is to make you feel your life strongly — not only your virtues, but your vicious, perverse points."

"Dieu! que dit-elle?" cried Hortense, who hitherto had been counting stitches in her knitting, and had not much attended to what was said, but whose ear these two strong words caught with a tweak.

"Never mind her, sister; let her talk. Now just let her say anything she pleases to-night. She likes to come down hard upon your brother sometimes. It amuses me, so let her alone."

Caroline, who, mounted on a chair, had been rummaging the bookcase, returned with a book.

"Here's Shakespeare," she said, "and there's 'Coriolanus.' Now, read, and discover by the feelings the reading will give you at once how low and how high you are."

"Come, then, sit near me, and correct when I mispronounce."

"I am to be the teacher then, and you my pupil?"

"Ainsi, soit-il!"

"And Shakespeare is our science, since we are going to study?"

"It appears so."

"And you are not going to be French, and sceptical, and sneering? You are not going to think it a sign of wisdom to refuse to admire?"

"I don't know."

"If you do, Robert, I'll take Shakespeare away; and I'll shrivel up within myself, and put on my bonnet and go home."

"Sit down. Here I begin."

"One minute, if you please, brother," interrupted mademoiselle. "When the gentleman of a family reads, the ladies should always sew. — Caroline, dear child, take your embroidery. You may get three sprigs done to-night."

Caroline looked dismayed. "I can't see by lamp-light; my eyes are tired, and I can't do two things well at once. If I sew, I cannot listen; if I listen, I cannot sew."

"Fi, donc! Quel enfantillage!" began Hortense. Mr. Moore, as usual, suavely interposed.

"Permit her to neglect the embroidery for this evening. I wish her whole attention to be fixed on my accent; and to ensure this, she must follow the reading with her eyes — she must look at the book."

He placed it between them, reposed his arm on the back of Caroline's chair, and thus began to read.

The very first scene in "Coriolanus" came with smart relish to his intellectual palate, and still as he read he warmed. He delivered the haughty speech of Caius Marcius to the starving citizens with unction; he did not say he thought his irrational pride right, but he seemed to feel it so. Caroline looked up at him with a singular smile.

"There's a vicious point hit already," she said. "You sympathize with that proud patrician who does not sympathize with his famished fellow-men, and insults them. There, go on." He proceeded. The warlike portions did not rouse him much; he said all that was out of date, or should be; the spirit displayed was barbarous; yet the encounter single-handed between Marcius and Tullus Aufidius he delighted in. As he advanced, he forgot to criticise; it was evident he appreciated the power, the truth of each portion; and, stepping out of the narrow line of private prejudices, began to revel in the large picture of human nature, to feel the reality stamped upon the characters who were speaking from that page before him.

He did not read the comic scenes well; and Caroline, taking the book out of his hand, read these parts for him. From her he seemed to enjoy them, and indeed she gave them with a spirit no one could have expected of her, with a pithy expression with which she seemed gifted on the spot, and for that brief moment only. It may be remarked, in passing, that the general character of her conversation that evening, whether serious or sprightly, grave or gay, was as of something untaught, unstudied, intuitive, fitful — when once gone, no more to be reproduced as it had been than the glancing ray of the meteor, than the tints of the dew-gem, than the colour or form of the sunset cloud, than the fleeting and glittering ripple varying the flow of a rivulet.

Coriolanus in glory, Coriolanus in disaster, Coriolanus banished, followed like giant shades one after the other. Before the vision of the banished man Moore's spirit seemed to pause. He stood on the hearth of Aufidius's hall, facing the image of greatness fallen, but greater than ever in that low estate. He saw "the grim appearance," the dark face "bearing command in it," "the noble vessel with its tackle torn." With the revenge of Caius Marcius, Moore perfectly sympathized; he was not scandalized by it; and again Caroline whispered, "There I see another glimpse of brotherhood in error."

The march on Rome, the mother's supplication, the long resistance, the final yielding of bad passions to good, which ever must be the case in a nature worthy the epithet of noble, the rage of Aufidius at what he considered his ally's weakness, the death of Coriolanus, the final sorrow of his great enemy — all scenes made of condensed truth and strength — came on in succession and carried with them in their deep, fast flow the heart and mind of reader and listener.

"Now, have you felt Shakespeare?" asked Caroline, some ten minutes after her cousin had closed the book.

"I think so."

"And have you felt anything in Coriolanus like you?"

"Perhaps I have."

"Was he not faulty as well as great?"

Moore nodded.

"And what was his fault? What made him hated by the citizens? What caused him to be banished by his countrymen?"

"What do you think it was?"

"I ask again —

'Whether was it pride,
Which out of daily fortune ever taints
The happy man? whether defect of judgment,
To fail in the disposing of those chances
Which he was lord of? or whether nature,
Not to be other than one thing, not moving
From the casque to the cushion, but commanding peace
Even with the same austerity and garb
As he controlled the war?'"

"Well, answer yourself, Sphinx."

"It was a spice of all; and you must not be proud to your workpeople; you must not neglect chances of soothing them; and you must not be of an inflexible nature, uttering a request as austerely as if it were a command."

"That is the moral you tack to the play. What puts such notions into your head?"

"A wish for your good, a care for your safety, dear Robert, and a fear, caused by many things which I have heard lately, that you will come to harm."

"Who tells you these things?"

"I hear my uncle talk about you. He praises your hard spirit, your determined cast of mind, your scorn of low enemies, your resolution not 'to truckle to the mob,' as he says."

"And would you have me truckle to them?"

"No, not for the world. I never wish you to lower yourself; but somehow I cannot help thinking it unjust to include all poor working-people under the general and insulting name of ‘the mob,’ and continually to think of them and treat them haughtily.”

“You are a little democrat, Caroline. If your uncle knew, what would he say?”

“I rarely talk to my uncle, as you know, and never about such things. He thinks everything but sewing and cooking above women’s comprehension, and out of their line.”

“And do you fancy you comprehend the subjects on which you advise me?”

“As far as they concern you, I comprehend them. I know it would be better for you to be loved by your workpeople than to be hated by them, and I am sure that kindness is more likely to win their regard than pride. If you were proud and cold to me and Hortense, should we love you? When you are cold to me, as you *are* sometimes, can I venture to be affectionate in return?”

“Now, Lina, I’ve had my lesson both in languages and ethics, with a touch on politics; it is your turn. Hortense tells me you were much taken by a little piece of poetry you learned the other day, a piece by poor André Chénier — ‘La Jeune Captive.’ Do you remember it still?”

“I think so.”

“Repeat it, then. Take your time and mind your accent; especially let us have no English *u*’s.”

Caroline, beginning in a low, rather tremulous voice, but gaining courage as she proceeded, repeated the sweet verses of Chénier. The last three stanzas she rehearsed well.

“Mon beau voyage encore est si loin de sa fin!
Je pars, et des ormeaux qui bordent le chemin
J’ai passé le premiers à peine.
Au banquet de la vie à peine commencé,
Un instant seulement mes lèvres ont pressé
La coupe en mes mains encore pleine.
“Je ne suis qu’au printemps — je veux voir la moisson;
Et comme le soleil, de saison en saison,
Je veux achever mon année,
Brillante sur ma tige, et l’honneur du jardin
Je n’ai vu luire encore que les feux du matin,
Je veux achever ma journée!”

Moore listened at first with his eyes cast down, but soon he furtively raised them. Leaning back in his chair he could watch Caroline without her perceiving where his gaze was fixed. Her cheek had a colour, her eyes a light, her countenance an expression this evening which would have made even plain features striking; but there was not the grievous defect of plainness to pardon in her case. The sunshine was not shed on rough barrenness; it fell on soft bloom. Each lineament was turned with grace; the whole aspect was pleasing. At the present moment — animated, interested, touched — she might be called beautiful. Such a face was calculated to awaken not only the calm sentiment of esteem, the distant one of admiration, but some feeling more tender, genial, intimate — friendship, perhaps, affection, interest. When she had finished, she turned to Moore, and met his eye.

"Is that pretty well repeated?" she inquired, smiling like any happy, docile child.

"I really don't know."

"Why don't you know? Have you not listened?"

"Yes — and looked. You are fond of poetry, Lina?"

"When I meet with *real* poetry, I cannot rest till I have learned it by heart, and so made it partly mine."

Mr. Moore now sat silent for several minutes. It struck nine o'clock. Sarah entered, and said that Mr. Helstone's servant was come for Miss Caroline.

"Then the evening is gone already," she observed, "and it will be long, I suppose, before I pass another here."

Hortense had been for some time nodding over her knitting; fallen into a doze now, she made no response to the remark.

"You would have no objection to come here oftener of an evening?" inquired Robert, as he took her folded mantle from the side-table, where it still lay, and carefully wrapped it round her.

"I like to come here; but I have no desire to be intrusive. I am not hinting to be asked; you must understand that."

"Oh! I understand thee, child. You sometimes lecture me for wishing to be rich, Lina; but if I *were* rich, you should live here always — at any rate, you should live with me wherever my habitation might be."

"That would be pleasant; and if you were poor — ever so poor — it would still be pleasant. Good-night, Robert."

"I promised to walk with you up to the rectory."

"I know you did; but I thought you had forgotten, and I hardly knew how to remind you, though I wished to do it. But would you like to go? It is a cold night, and as Fanny is come, there is no necessity — — "

"Here is your muff; don't wake Hortense — come."

The half mile to the rectory was soon traversed. They parted in the garden without kiss, scarcely with a pressure of hands; yet Robert sent his cousin in excited and joyously troubled. He had been singularly kind to her that day — not in phrase, compliment, profession, but in manner, in look, and in soft and friendly tones.

For himself, he came home grave, almost morose. As he stood leaning on his own yard-gate, musing in the watery moonlight all alone, the hushed, dark mill before him, the hill-environed hollow round, he exclaimed, abruptly, —

"This won't do! There's weakness — there's downright ruin in all this. However," he added, dropping his voice, "the frenzy is quite temporary. I know it very well; I have had it before. It will be gone to-morrow."

CHAPTER VII.

THE CURATES AT TEA.

Caroline Helstone was just eighteen years old, and at eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to be commenced. Before that time we sit listening to a tale, a marvellous fiction, delightful sometimes, and sad sometimes, almost always unreal. Before that time our world is heroic, its inhabitants half-divine or semi-demon; its scenes are dream-scenes; darker woods and stranger hills, brighter skies, more dangerous waters, sweeter flowers, more tempting fruits, wider plains, drearier deserts, sunnier fields than are found in nature, overspread our enchanted globe. What a moon we gaze on before that time! How the trembling of our hearts at her aspect bears witness to its unutterable beauty! As to our sun, it is a burning heaven — the world of gods.

At that time, at eighteen, drawing near the confines of illusive, void dreams, Elf-land lies behind us, the shores of Reality rise in front. These shores are yet distant; they look so blue, soft, gentle, we long to reach them. In sunshine we see a greenness beneath the azure, as of spring meadows; we catch glimpses of silver lines, and imagine the roll of living waters. Could we but reach this land, we think to hunger and thirst no more; whereas many a wilderness, and often the flood of death, or some stream of sorrow as cold and almost as black as death, is to be crossed ere true bliss can be tasted. Every joy that life gives must be earned ere it is secured; and how hardly earned, those only know who have wrestled for great prizes. The heart's blood must gem with red beads the brow of the combatant, before the wreath of victory rustles over it.

At eighteen we are not aware of this. Hope, when she smiles on us, and promises happiness to-morrow, is implicitly believed; Love, when he comes wandering like a lost angel to our door, is at once admitted, welcomed, embraced. His quiver is not seen; if his arrows penetrate, their wound is like a thrill of new life. There are no fears of poison, none of the barb which no leech's hand can extract. That perilous passion — an agony ever in some of its phases; with many, an agony throughout — is believed to be an unqualified good. In short, at eighteen the school of experience is to be entered, and her humbling, crushing, grinding, but yet purifying and invigorating lessons are yet to be learned.

Alas, Experience! No other mentor has so wasted and frozen a face as yours, none wears a robe so black, none bears a rod so heavy, none with hand so inexorable draws the novice so sternly to his task, and forces him with authority so resistless to its acquirement. It is by your instructions alone that man or woman can ever find a safe track through life's wilds; without it, how they stumble, how they stray! On what forbidden grounds do they intrude, down what dread declivities are they hurled!

Caroline, having been convoyed home by Robert, had no wish to pass what remained of the evening with her uncle. The room in which he sat was very sacred ground to her; she seldom intruded on it; and to-night she kept aloof till the bell rang for prayers. Part of the evening church service was the form of worship observed in Mr. Helstone's household. He read it in his usual nasal voice, clear, loud, and monotonous. The rite over, his niece, according to her wont, stepped up to him.

"Good-night, uncle."

"Hey! You've been gadding abroad all day — visiting, dining out, and what not!"

"Only at the cottage."

"And have you learned your lessons?"

"Yes."

"And made a shirt?"

"Only part of one."

"Well, that will do. Stick to the needle, learn shirt-making and gown-making and piecrust-making, and you'll be a clever woman some day. Go to bed now. I'm busy with a pamphlet here."

Presently the niece was enclosed in her small bedroom, the door bolted, her white dressing-gown assumed, her long hair loosened and falling thick, soft, and wavy to her waist; and as, resting from the task of combing it out, she leaned her check on her hand and fixed her eyes on the carpet, before her rose, and close around her drew, the visions we see at eighteen years.

Her thoughts were speaking with her, speaking pleasantly, as it seemed, for she smiled as she listened. She looked pretty meditating thus; but a brighter thing than she was in that apartment — the spirit of youthful Hope. According to this flattering prophet, she was to know disappointment, to feel chill no more; she had entered on the dawn of a summer day — no false dawn, but the true spring of morning — and her sun would quickly rise. Impossible for her now to suspect that she was the sport of delusion; her expectations seemed warranted, the foundation on which they rested appeared solid.

"When people love, the next step is they marry," was her argument. "Now, I love Robert, and I feel sure that Robert loves me. I have thought so many a time before; to-day I *felt* it. When I looked up at him after repeating Chénier's poem, his eyes (what handsome eyes he has!) sent the truth through my heart. Sometimes I am afraid to speak to him, lest I should be too frank, lest I should seem forward — for I have more than once regretted bitterly overflowing, superfluous words, and feared I had said more than he expected me to say, and that he would disapprove what he might deem my indiscretion; now, to-night I could have ventured to express any thought, he was so indulgent. How kind he was as we walked up the lane! He does not flatter or say foolish things; his love-making (friendship, I mean; of course I don't yet account him my lover, but I hope he will be so some day) is not like what we read of in books, — it is far better — original, quiet, manly, sincere. I *do* like him; I would be an excellent wife to him if he did marry me; I would tell him of his faults (for he has a few faults), but I would study his comfort, and cherish him, and do my best to make him happy. Now, I am sure he will not be cold to-morrow. I feel almost certain that to-morrow evening he will either come here, or ask me to go there."

She recommenced combing her hair, long as a mermaid's. Turning her head as she arranged it she saw her own face and form in the glass. Such reflections are soberizing to plain people: their own eyes are not enchanted with the image; they are confident then that the eyes of others can see in it no fascination. But the fair must naturally draw other conclusions: the picture is charming, and must charm. Caroline saw a shape, a head, that, daguerreotyped in that attitude and with that expression, would have been lovely. She could not choose but derive from the spectacle confirmation to her hopes. It was then in undiminished gladness she sought her couch.

And in undiminished gladness she rose the next day. As she entered her uncle's breakfast-room, and with soft cheerfulness wished him good-morning, even that little man of bronze himself thought, for an instant, his niece was growing "a fine girl." Generally she was quiet and timid with him — very docile, but not communicative; this morning, however, she found many things to say. Slight topics alone might be discussed between them; for with a woman — a girl — Mr. Helstone would touch on no other. She had taken an early walk in the garden, and she told him what flowers were beginning to spring there; she inquired when the gardener was to come and trim the borders; she informed him that certain starlings were beginning to build their nests in the church-tower (Briarfield church was close to Briarfield rectory); she wondered the tolling of the bells in the belfry did not scare them.

Mr. Helstone opined that "they were like other fools who had just paired — insensible to inconvenience just for the moment." Caroline, made perhaps a little too courageous by her temporary good spirits, here hazarded a remark of a kind she had never before ventured to make on observations dropped by her revered relative.

"Uncle," said she, "whenever you speak of marriage you speak of it scornfully. Do you think people shouldn't marry?"

"It is decidedly the wisest plan to remain single, especially for women."

"Are all marriages unhappy?"

"Millions of marriages are unhappy. If everybody confessed the truth, perhaps all are more or less so."

"You are always vexed when you are asked to come and marry a couple. Why?"

"Because one does not like to act as accessory to the commission of a piece of pure folly."

Mr. Helstone spoke so readily, he seemed rather glad of the opportunity to give his niece a piece of his mind on this point. Emboldened by the impunity which had hitherto attended her questions, she went a little further.

"But why," said she, "should it be pure folly? If two people like each other, why shouldn't they consent to live together?"

"They tire of each other — they tire of each other in a month. A yokefellow is not a companion; he or she is a fellow-sufferer."

It was by no means naïve simplicity which inspired Caroline's next remark; it was a sense of antipathy to such opinions, and of displeasure at him who held them.

"One would think you had never been married, uncle. One would think you were an old bachelor."

"Practically, I am so."

"But you have been married. Why were you so inconsistent as to marry?"

"Every man is mad once or twice in his life."

"So you tired of my aunt, and my aunt of you, and you were miserable together?"

Mr. Helstone pushed out his cynical lip, wrinkled his brown forehead, and gave an inarticulate grunt.

"Did she not suit you? Was she not good-tempered? Did you not get used to her? Were you not sorry when she died?"

"Caroline," said Mr. Helstone, bringing his hand slowly down to within an inch or two of the table, and then smiting it suddenly on the mahogany, "understand this: it is vulgar and puerile to confound generals with particulars. In every case there is the rule and there are the exceptions. Your questions are stupid and babyish. Ring the bell, if you have done breakfast."

The breakfast was taken away, and that meal over, it was the general custom of uncle and niece to separate, and not to meet again till dinner; but to-day the niece, instead of quitting the room, went to the window-seat, and sat down there. Mr. Helstone looked round uneasily once or twice, as if he wished her away; but she was gazing from the window, and did not seem to mind him: so he continued the perusal of his morning paper — a particularly interesting one it chanced to be, as new movements had just taken place in the Peninsula, and certain columns of the journal were rich in long dispatches from General Lord Wellington. He little knew, meantime, what thoughts were busy in his niece's mind — thoughts the conversation of the past half-hour had revived but not generated; tumultuous were they now, as disturbed bees in a hive, but it was years since they had first made their cells in her brain.

She was reviewing his character, his disposition, repeating his sentiments on marriage. Many a time had she reviewed them before, and sounded the gulf between her own mind and his; and then, on the other side of the wide and deep chasm, she had seen, and she now saw, another figure standing beside her uncle's — a strange shape, dim, sinister, scarcely earthly — the half-remembered image of her own father, James Helstone, Matthewson Helstone's brother.

Rumours had reached her ear of what that father's character was; old servants had dropped hints; she knew, too, that he was not a good man, and that he was never kind to her. She recollected — a dark recollection it was — some weeks that she had spent with him in a great town somewhere, when she had had no maid to dress her or take care of her; when she had been shut up, day and night, in a high garret-room, without a carpet, with a bare uncurtained bed, and scarcely any other furniture; when he went out early every morning, and often forgot to return and give her her dinner during the day, and at night, when he came back, was like a madman, furious, terrible, or — still more painful — like an idiot, imbecile, senseless. She knew she had fallen ill in this place, and that one night, when she was very sick he had come raving into the room, and said he would kill her, for she was a burden to him. Her screams had brought aid; and from the moment she was then rescued from him she had never seen him, except as a dead man in his coffin.

That was her father. Also she had a mother, though Mr. Helstone never spoke to her of that mother, though she could not remember having seen her; but that she was alive she knew. This mother was then the drunkard's wife. What had *their* marriage been? Caroline, turning from the lattice, whence she had been watching the starlings (though without seeing them), in a low voice, and with a sad, bitter tone, thus broke the silence of the room, —

"You term marriage miserable, I suppose, from what you saw of my father and mother's. If my mother suffered what I suffered when I was with papa, she must have had a dreadful life."

Mr. Helstone, thus addressed, wheeled about in his chair, and looked over his spectacles at his niece. He was taken aback.

Her father and mother! What had put it into her head to mention her father and mother, of whom he had never, during the twelve years she had lived with him, spoken to her? That the thoughts were self-matured, that she had any recollections or speculations about her parents, he could not fancy.

"Your father and mother? Who has been talking to you about them?"

"Nobody; but I remember something of what papa was, and I pity mamma. Where is she?"

This "Where is she?" had been on Caroline's lips hundreds of times before, but till now she had never uttered it.

"I hardly know," returned Mr. Helstone; "I was little acquainted with her. I have not heard from her for years: but wherever she is, she thinks nothing of you; she never inquires about you. I have reason to believe she does not wish to see you. Come, it is school-time. You go to your cousin at ten, don't you? The clock has struck."

Perhaps Caroline would have said more; but Fanny, coming in, informed her master that the churchwardens wanted to speak to him in the vestry. He hastened to join them, and his niece presently set out for the cottage.

The road from the rectory to Hollow's Mill inclined downwards; she ran, therefore, almost all the way. Exercise, the fresh air, the thought of seeing Robert, at least of being on his premises, in his vicinage, revived her somewhat depressed spirits quickly. Arriving in sight of the white house, and within hearing of the thundering mill and its rushing watercourse, the first thing she saw was Moore at his garden gate. There he stood, in his belted Holland blouse, a light cap covering his head, which undress costume suited him. He was looking down the lane, not in the direction of his cousin's approach. She stopped, withdrawing a little behind a willow, and studied his appearance.

"He has not his peer," she thought. "He is as handsome as he is intelligent. What a keen eye he has! What clearly-cut, spirited features — thin and serious, but graceful! I do like his face, I do like his aspect, I do like him so much — better than any of those shuffling curates, for instance — better than anybody; bonny Robert!"

She sought "bonny Robert's" presence speedily. For his part, when she challenged his sight, I believe he would have passed from before her eyes like a phantom, if he could; but being a tall fact, and no fiction, he was obliged to stand the greeting. He made it brief. It was cousin-like, brother-like, friend-like, anything but lover-like. The nameless charm of last night had left his manner: he was no longer the same man: or, at any rate, the same heart did not beat in his breast. Rude disappointment, sharp cross! At first the eager girl would not believe in the change, though she saw and felt it. It was difficult to withdraw her hand from his, till he had bestowed at least something like a kind pressure; it was difficult to turn her eyes from his eyes, till his looks had expressed something more and fonder than that cool welcome.

A lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation, a lover feminine can say nothing; if she did, the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. Nature would brand such demonstration as a rebellion against her instincts, and would vindictively repay it afterwards by the thunderbolt of self-contempt smiting suddenly in secret. Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions, utter no remonstrances; it is your best wisdom. You expected bread, and you have got a stone: break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyrized; do not doubt that your mental stomach — if you have such a thing — is strong as an ostrich's; the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind; in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without a sob. For the whole remnant of your life, if you survive the test — some, it is said, die under it — you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive. This you are not aware of, perhaps, at the time, and so cannot borrow courage of that hope. Nature, however, as has been intimated, is an excellent friend in such cases, sealing the lips, interdicting utterance, commanding a placid dissimulation — a dissimulation often wearing an easy and gay mien at first, settling down to sorrow and paleness in time, then passing away, and leaving a convenient stoicism, not the less fortifying because it is half-bitter.

Half-bitter! Is that wrong? No; it should be bitter: bitterness is strength — it is a tonic. Sweet, mild force following acute suffering you find nowhere; to talk of it is delusion. There may be apathetic exhaustion after the rack. If energy remains, it will be rather a dangerous energy — deadly when confronted with injustice.

Who has read the ballad of "Puir Mary Lee" — that old Scotch ballad, written I know not in what generation nor by what hand? Mary had been ill-used — probably in being made to believe that truth which was falsehood. She is not complaining, but she is sitting alone in the snowstorm, and you hear her thoughts. They are not the thoughts of a model heroine under her circumstances, but they are those of a deeply-feeling, strongly-resentful peasant-girl. Anguish has driven her from the ingle-nook of home to the white-shrouded and icy hills. Crouched under the "cauld drift," she recalls every image of horror — "the yellow-wymed ask," "the hairy adder," "the auld moon-bowing tyke," "the ghaist at e'en,", "the sour bullister," "the milk on the taed's back." She hates these, but "waur she hates Robin-a-Ree."

"Oh, ance I lived happily by yon bonny burn —
The warld was in love wi' me;
But now I maun sit 'neath the cauld drift and mourn,
And curse black Robin-a-Ree!
"Then whudder awa, thou bitter biting blast,
And sough through the scrunty tree,
And smoor me up in the snaw fu' fast,
And n'er let the sun me see!
"Oh, never melt awa, thou wreath o' snaw,
That's sae kind in graving me;
But hide me frae the scorn and guffaw
O' villains like Robin-a-Ree!"

But what has been said in the last page or two is not germane to Caroline Helstone's feelings, or to the state of things between her and Robert Moore. Robert had done her no wrong; he had told her no lie; it was she that was to blame, if any one was. What bitterness her mind distilled should and would be poured on her own head. She had loved without being asked to love — a natural, sometimes an inevitable chance, but big with misery.

Robert, indeed, had sometimes seemed to be fond of her; but why? Because she had made herself so pleasing to him, he could not, in spite of all his efforts, help testifying a state of feeling his judgment did not approve nor his will sanction. He was about to withdraw decidedly from intimate communication with her, because he did not choose to have his affections inextricably entangled, nor to be drawn, despite his reason, into a marriage he believed imprudent. Now, what was she to do? To give way to her feelings, or to vanquish them? To pursue him, or to turn upon herself? If she is weak, she will try the first expedient — will lose his esteem and win his aversion; if she has sense, she will be her own governor, and resolve to subdue and bring under guidance the disturbed realm of her emotions. She will determine to look on life steadily, as it is; to begin to learn its severe truths seriously, and to study its knotty problems closely, conscientiously.

It appeared she had a little sense, for she quitted Robert quietly, without complaint or question, without the alteration of a muscle or the shedding of a tear, betook herself to her studies under Hortense as usual, and at dinner-time went home without lingering.

When she had dined, and found herself in the rectory drawing-room alone, having left her uncle over his temperate glass of port wine, the difficulty that occurred to and embarrassed her was, "How am I to get through this day?"

Last night she had hoped it would be spent as yesterday was, that the evening would be again passed with happiness and Robert. She had learned her mistake this morning; and yet she could not settle down, convinced that no chance would occur to recall her to Hollow's Cottage, or to bring Moore again into her society.

He had walked up after tea more than once to pass an hour with her uncle. The door-bell had rung, his voice had been heard in the passage just at twilight, when she little expected such a pleasure; and this had happened twice after he had treated her with peculiar reserve; and though he rarely talked to her in her uncle's presence, he had looked at her relentingly as he sat opposite her work-table during his stay. The few words he had spoken to her were comforting; his manner on bidding her good-night was genial. Now, he might come this evening, said False Hope. She almost knew it was False Hope which breathed the whisper, and yet she listened.

She tried to read — her thoughts wandered; she tried to sew — every stitch she put in was an *ennui*, the occupation was insufferably tedious; she opened her desk and attempted to write a French composition — she wrote nothing but mistakes.

Suddenly the door-bell sharply rang; her heart leaped; she sprang to the drawing-room door, opened it softly, peeped through the aperture. Fanny was admitting a visitor — a gentleman — a tall man — just the height of Robert. For one second she thought it was Robert — for one second she exulted; but the voice asking for Mr. Helstone undeceived her. That voice was an Irish voice, consequently not Moore's, but the curate's — Malone's. He was ushered into the dining-room, where, doubtless, he speedily helped his rector to empty the decanters.

It was a fact to be noted, that at whatever house in Briarfield, Whinbury, or Nunnely one curate dropped in to a meal — dinner or tea, as, the case might be — another presently followed, often two more. Not that they gave each other the rendezvous, but they were usually all on the run at the same time; and when Donne, for instance, sought Malone at his lodgings and found him not, he inquired whither he had posted, and having learned of the landlady his destination, hastened with all speed after him. The same causes operated in the same way with Sweeting. Thus it chanced on that afternoon that Caroline's ears were three times tortured with the ringing of the bell and the advent of undesired guests; for Donne followed Malone, and Sweeting followed Donne; and more wine was ordered up from the cellar into the dining-room (for though old Helstone chid the inferior priesthood when he found them "carousing," as he called it, in their own tents, yet at his hierarchical table he ever liked to treat them to a glass of his best), and through the closed doors Caroline heard their boyish laughter, and the vacant cackle of their voices. Her fear was lest they should stay to tea, for she had no pleasure in making tea for that particular trio. What distinctions people draw! These three were men — young men — educated men, like Moore; yet, for her, how great the difference! Their society was a bore — his a delight.

Not only was she destined to be favoured with their clerical company, but Fortune was at this moment bringing her four other guests — lady guests, all packed in a pony-phaeton now rolling somewhat heavily along the road from Whinbury: an elderly lady and three of her buxom daughters were coming to see her "in a friendly way," as the custom of that neighbourhood was. Yes, a fourth time the bell clanged. Fanny brought the present announcement to the drawing-room, —

"Mrs. Sykes and the three Misses Sykes."

When Caroline was going to receive company, her habit was to wring her hands very nervously, to flush a little, and come forward hurriedly yet hesitatingly, wishing herself meantime at Jericho. She was, at such crises, sadly deficient in finished manner, though she had once been at school a year. Accordingly, on this occasion, her small white hands sadly maltreated each other, while she stood up, waiting the entrance of Mrs. Sykes.

In stalked that lady, a tall, bilious gentlewoman, who made an ample and not altogether insincere profession of piety, and was greatly given to hospitality towards the clergy. In sailed her three daughters, a showy trio, being all three well-grown, and more or less handsome.

In English country ladies there is this point to be remarked. Whether young or old, pretty or plain, dull or sprightly, they all (or almost all) have a certain expression stamped on their features, which seems to say, "I know — I do not boast of it, but I *know* that I am the standard of what is proper; let every one therefore whom I approach, or who approaches me, keep a sharp lookout, for wherein they differ from me — be the same in dress, manner, opinion, principle, or practice — therein they are wrong."

Mrs. and Misses Sykes, far from being exceptions to this observation, were pointed illustrations of its truth. Miss Mary — a well-looked, well-meant, and, on the whole, well-dispositioned girl — wore her complacency with some state, though without harshness. Miss Harriet — a beauty — carried it more overbearingly; she looked high and cold. Miss Hannah, who was conceited, dashing, pushing, flourished hers consciously and openly. The mother evinced it with the gravity proper to her age and religious fame.

The reception was got through somehow. Caroline "was glad to see them" (an unmitigated fib), hoped they were well, hoped Mrs. Sykes's cough was better (Mrs. Sykes had had a cough for the last twenty years), hoped the Misses Sykes had left their sisters at home well; to which inquiry the Misses Sykes, sitting on three chairs opposite the music-stool, whereon Caroline had undesignedly come to anchor, after wavering for some seconds between it and a large arm-chair, into which she at length recollected she ought to induct Mrs. Sykes — and indeed that lady saved her the trouble by depositing herself therein — the Misses Sykes replied to Caroline by one simultaneous bow, very majestic and mighty awful. A pause followed. This bow was of a character to ensure silence for the next five minutes, and it did. Mrs. Sykes then inquired after Mr. Helstone, and whether he had had any return of rheumatism, and whether preaching twice on a Sunday fatigued him, and if he was capable of taking a full service now; and on being assured he was, she and all her daughters, combining in chorus, expressed their opinion that he was "a wonderful man of his years."

Pause second.

Miss Mary, getting up the steam in her turn, asked whether Caroline had attended the Bible Society meeting which had been held at Nunnely last Thursday night. The negative answer which truth compelled Caroline to utter — for last Thursday evening she had been sitting at home, reading a novel which Robert had lent her — elicited a simultaneous expression of surprise from the lips of the four ladies.

"We were all there," said Miss Mary — "mamma and all of us. We even persuaded papa to go. Hannah would insist upon it. But he fell asleep while Mr. Langweilig, the German Moravian minister, was speaking. I felt quite ashamed, he nodded so."

"And there was Dr. Broadbent," cried Hannah — "such a beautiful speaker! You couldn't expect it of him, for he is almost a vulgar-looking man."

"But such a dear man," interrupted Mary.

"And such a good man, such a useful man," added her mother.

"Only like a butcher in appearance," interposed the fair, proud Harriet. "I couldn't bear to look at him. I listened with my eyes shut."

Miss Helstone felt her ignorance and incompetency. Not having seen Dr. Broadbent, she could not give her opinion. Pause third came on. During its continuance, Caroline was feeling at her heart's core what a dreaming fool she was, what an unpractical life she led, how little fitness there was in her for ordinary intercourse with the ordinary world. She was feeling how exclusively she had attached herself to the white cottage in the Hollow, how in the existence of one inmate of that cottage she had pent all her universe. She was sensible that this would not do, and that some day she would be forced to make an alteration. It could not be said that she exactly wished to resemble the ladies before her, but she wished to become superior to her present self, so as to feel less scared by their dignity.

The sole means she found of reviving the flagging discourse was by asking them if they would all stay to tea; and a cruel struggle it cost her to perform this piece of civility. Mrs. Sykes had begun, "We are much obliged to you, but — — " when in came Fanny once more.

"The gentlemen will stay the evening, ma'am," was the message she brought from Mr. Helstone.

"What gentlemen have you?" now inquired Mrs. Sykes. Their names were specified; she and her daughters interchanged glances. The curates were not to them what they were to Caroline. Mr. Sweeting was quite a favourite with them; even Mr. Malone rather so, because he was a clergyman. "Really, since you have company already, I think we will stay," remarked Mrs. Sykes. "We shall be quite a pleasant little party. I always like to meet the clergy."

And now Caroline had to usher them upstairs, to help them to unshawl, smooth their hair, and make themselves smart; to reconduct them to the drawing-room, to distribute amongst them books of engravings, or odd things purchased from the Jew-basket. She was obliged to be a purchaser, though she was but a slack contributor; and if she had possessed plenty of money, she would rather, when it was brought to the rectory — an awful incubus! — have purchased the whole stock than contributed a single pin-cushion.

It ought perhaps to be explained in passing, for the benefit of those who are not *au fait* to the mysteries of the "Jew-basket" and "missionary-basket," that these *meubles* are willow repositories, of the capacity of a good-sized family clothes-basket, dedicated to the purpose of conveying from house to house a monster collection of pin-cushions, needle-books, card-racks, workbags, articles of infant wear, etc., etc., etc., made by the willing or reluctant hands of the Christian ladies of a parish, and sold perforce to the heathenish gentlemen thereof, at prices unblushingly exorbitant. The proceeds of such compulsory sales are applied to the conversion of the Jews, the seeking up of the ten missing tribes, or to the regeneration of the interesting coloured population of the globe. Each lady contributor takes it in her turn to keep the basket a month, to sew for it, and to foist off its contents on a shrinking male public. An exciting time it is when that turn comes round. Some active-minded woman, with a good trading spirit, like it, and enjoy exceedingly the fun of making hard-handed worsted-spinners cash up, to the tune of four or five hundred per cent. above cost price, for articles quite useless to them; other feebler souls object to it, and would rather see the prince of darkness himself at their door any morning than that phantom basket, brought with "Mrs. Rouse's compliments; and please, ma'am, she says it's your turn now."

Miss Helstone's duties of hostess performed, more anxiously than cheerily, she betook herself to the kitchen, to hold a brief privy-council with Fanny and Eliza about the tea.

"What a lot on 'em!" cried Eliza, who was cook. "And I put off the baking to-day because I thought there would be bread plenty to fit while morning. We shall never have enow."

"Are there any tea-cakes?" asked the young mistress.

"Only three and a loaf. I wish these fine folk would stay at home till they're asked; and I want to finish trimming my hat" (bonnet she meant).

"Then," suggested Caroline, to whom the importance of the emergency gave a certain energy, "Fanny must run down to Briarfield and buy some muffins and crumpets and some biscuits. And don't be cross, Eliza; we can't help it now."

"And which tea-things are we to have?"

"Oh, the best, I suppose. I'll get out the silver service." And she ran upstairs to the plate-closet, and presently brought down teapot, cream-ewer, and sugar-basin.

"And mun we have th' urn?"

"Yes; and now get it ready as quickly as you can, for the sooner we have tea over the sooner they will go — at least, I hope so. Heigh-ho! I wish they were gone," she sighed, as she returned to the drawing-room. "Still," she thought, as she paused at the door ere opening it, "if Robert would but come even now how bright all would be! How comparatively easy the task of amusing these people if he were present! There would be an interest in hearing him talk (though he never says much in company) and in talking in his presence. There can be no interest in hearing any of them, or in speaking to them. How they will gabble when the curates come in, and how weary I shall grow with listening to them! But I suppose I am a selfish fool. These are very respectable gentlefolks. I ought, no doubt, to be proud of their countenance. I don't say they are not as good as I am — far from it — but they are different from me."

She went in.

Yorkshire people in those days took their tea round the table, sitting well into it, with their knees duly introduced under the mahogany. It was essential to have a multitude of plates of bread and butter, varied in sorts and plentiful in quantity. It was thought proper, too, that on the centre plate should stand a glass dish of marmalade. Among the viands was expected to be found a small assortment of cheesecakes and tarts. If there was also a plate of thin slices of pink ham garnished with green parsley, so much the better.

Eliza, the rector's cook, fortunately knew her business as provider. She had been put out of humour a little at first, when the invaders came so unexpectedly in such strength; but it appeared that she regained her cheerfulness with action, for in due time the tea was spread forth in handsome style, and neither ham, tarts, nor marmalade were wanting among its accompaniments.

The curates, summoned to this bounteous repast, entered joyous; but at once, on seeing the ladies, of whose presence they had not been forewarned, they came to a stand in the doorway. Malone headed the party; he stopped short and fell back, almost capsizing Donne, who was behind him. Donne, staggering three paces in retreat, sent little Sweeting into the arms of old Helstone, who brought up the rear. There was some expostulation, some tittering. Malone was desired to mind what he was about, and urged to push forward, which at last he did, though colouring to the top of his peaked forehead a bluish purple. Helstone, advancing, set the shy curates aside, welcomed all his fair guests, shook hands and passed a jest with each, and seated himself snugly between the lovely Harriet and the dashing Hannah. Miss Mary he requested to move to the seat opposite to him, that he might see her if he couldn't be near her. Perfectly easy and gallant, in his way, were his manners always to young ladies, and most popular was he amongst them; yet at heart he neither respected nor liked the sex, and such of them as circumstances had brought into intimate relation with him had ever feared rather than loved him.

The curates were left to shift for themselves. Sweeting, who was the least embarrassed of the three, took refuge beside Mrs. Sykes, who, he knew, was almost as fond of him as if he had been her son. Donne, after making his general bow with a grace all his own, and saying in a high, pragmatical voice, "How d'ye do, Miss Helstone?" dropped into a seat at Caroline's elbow, to her unmitigated annoyance, for she had a peculiar antipathy to Donne, on account of his stultified and immovable self-conceit and his incurable narrowness of mind. Malone, grinning most unmeaningly, inducted himself into the corresponding seat on the other side. She was thus blessed in a pair of supporters, neither of whom, she knew, would be of any mortal use, whether for keeping up the conversation, handing cups, circulating the muffins, or even lifting the plate from the slop-basin. Little Sweeting, small and boyish as he was, would have been worth twenty of them.

Malone, though a ceaseless talker when there were only men present, was usually tongue-tied in the presence of ladies. Three phrases, however, he had ready cut and dried, which he never failed to produce: —

1stly. "Have you had a walk to-day, Miss Helstone?"

2ndly. "Have you seen your cousin Moore lately?"

3rdly. "Does your class at the Sunday school keep up its number?"

These three questions being put and responded to, between Caroline and Malone reigned silence.

With Donne it was otherwise; he was troublesome, exasperating. He had a stock of small-talk on hand, at once the most trite and perverse that can well be imagined — abuse of the people of Briarfield; of the natives of Yorkshire generally; complaints of the want of high society; of the backward state of civilization in these districts; murmurings against the disrespectful conduct of the lower orders in the north toward their betters; silly ridicule of the manner of living in these parts — the want of style, the absence of elegance, as if he, Donne, had been accustomed to very great doings indeed, an insinuation which his somewhat underbred manner and aspect failed to bear out. These strictures, he seemed to think, must raise him in the estimation of Miss Helstone or of any other lady who heard him; whereas with her, at least, they brought him to a level below contempt, though sometimes, indeed, they incensed her; for, a Yorkshire girl herself, she hated to hear Yorkshire abused by such a pitiful prater; and when wrought up to a certain pitch, she would turn and say something of which neither the matter nor the manner recommended her to Mr. Donne's good-will. She would tell him it was no proof of refinement to be ever scolding others for vulgarity, and no sign of a good pastor to be eternally censuring his flock. She would ask him what he had entered the church for, since he complained there were only cottages to visit, and poor people to preach to — whether he had been ordained to the ministry merely to wear soft clothing and sit in king's houses. These questions were considered by all the curates as, to the last degree, audacious and impious.

Tea was a long time in progress; all the guests gabbled as their hostess had expected they would. Mr. Helstone, being in excellent spirits — when, indeed, was he ever otherwise in society, attractive female society? it being only with the one lady of his own family that he maintained a grim taciturnity — kept up a brilliant flow of easy prattle with his right-hand and left-hand neighbours, and even with his *vis-à-vis*, Miss Mary; though, as Mary was the most sensible, the least coquettish, of the three, to her the elderly widower was the least attentive. At heart he could not abide sense in women. He liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible, because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be — inferior, toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour, and to be thrown away.

Hannah was his favourite. Harriet, though beautiful, egotistical, and self-satisfied, was not quite weak enough for him. She had some genuine self-respect amidst much false pride, and if she did not talk like an oracle, neither would she babble like one crazy; she would not permit herself to be treated quite as a doll, a child, a plaything; she expected to be bent to like a queen.

Hannah, on the contrary, demanded no respect, only flattery. If her admirers only *told* her that she was an angel, she would let them *treat* her like an idiot. So very credulous and frivolous was she, so very silly did she become when besieged with attention, flattered and admired to the proper degree, that there were moments when Helstone actually felt tempted to commit matrimony a second time, and to try the experiment of taking her for his second helpmeet; but fortunately the salutary recollection of the *ennuis* of his first marriage, the impression still left on him of the weight of the millstone he had once worn round his neck, the fixity of his feelings respecting the insufferable evils of conjugal existence, operated as a check to his tenderness, suppressed the sigh heaving his old iron lungs, and restrained him from whispering to Hannah proposals it would have been high fun and great satisfaction to her to hear.

It is probable she would have married him if he had asked her; her parents would have quite approved the match. To them his fifty-five years, his bend-leather heart, could have presented no obstacles; and as he was a rector, held an excellent living, occupied a good house, and was supposed even to have private property (though in that the world was mistaken; every penny of the £5,000 inherited by him from his father had been devoted to the building and endowing of a new church at his native village in Lancashire — for he could show a lordly munificence when he pleased, and if the end was to his liking, never hesitated about making a grand sacrifice to attain it) — her parents, I say, would have delivered Hannah over to his lovingkindness and his tender mercies without one scruple; and the second Mrs. Helstone, inverting the natural order of insect existence, would have fluttered through the honeymoon a bright, admired butterfly, and crawled the rest of her days a sordid, trampled worm.

Little Mr. Sweeting, seated between Mrs. Sykes and Miss Mary, both of whom were very kind to him, and having a dish of tarts before him, and marmalade and crumpet upon his plate, looked and felt more content than any monarch. He was fond of all the Misses Sykes; they were all fond of him. He thought them magnificent girls, quite proper to mate with one of his inches. If he had a cause of regret at this blissful moment, it was that Miss Dora happened to be absent — Dora being the one whom he secretly hoped one day to call Mrs. David Sweeting, with whom he dreamt of taking stately walks, leading her like an empress through the village of Nunnely; and an empress she would have been, if size could make an empress. She was vast, ponderous. Seen from behind, she had the air of a very stout lady of forty; but withal she possessed a good face, and no unkindly character.

The meal at last drew to a close. It would have been over long ago if Mr. Donne had not persisted in sitting with his cup half full of cold tea before him, long after the rest had finished and after he himself had discussed such allowance of viands as he felt competent to swallow — long, indeed, after signs of impatience had been manifested all round the board, till chairs were pushed back, till the talk flagged, till silence fell. Vainly did Caroline inquire repeatedly if he would have another cup, if he would take a little hot tea, as that must be cold, etc.; he would neither drink it nor leave it. He seemed to think that this isolated position of his gave him somehow a certain importance, that it was dignified and stately to be the last, that it was grand to keep all the others waiting. So long did he linger, that the very urn died; it ceased to hiss. At length, however, the old rector himself, who had hitherto been too pleasantly engaged with Hannah to care for the delay, got impatient.

"For whom are we waiting?" he asked.

"For me, I believe," returned Donne complacently, appearing to think it much to his credit that a party should thus be kept dependent on his movements.

"Tut!" cried Helstone. Then standing up, "Let us return thanks," said he; which he did forthwith, and all quitted the table. Donne, nothing abashed, still sat ten minutes quite alone, whereupon Mr. Helstone rang the bell for the things to be removed. The curate at length saw himself forced to empty his cup, and to relinquish the *rôle* which, he thought, had given him such a felicitous distinction, drawing upon him such flattering general notice.

And now, in the natural course of events (Caroline, knowing how it would be, had opened the piano, and produced music-books in readiness), music was asked for. This was Mr. Sweeting's chance for showing off. He was eager to commence. He undertook, therefore, the arduous task of persuading the young ladies to favour the company with an air — a song. *Con amore* he went through the whole business of begging, praying, resisting excuses, explaining away difficulties, and at last succeeded in persuading Miss Harriet to allow herself to be led to the instrument. Then out came the pieces of his flute (he always carried them in his pocket, as unfailingly as he carried his handkerchief). They were screwed and arranged, Malone and Donne meanwhile herding together and sneering at him, which the little man, glancing over his shoulder, saw, but did not heed at all. He was persuaded their sarcasm all arose from envy. They could not accompany the ladies as he could; he was about to enjoy a triumph over them.

The triumph began. Malone, much chagrined at hearing him pipe up in most superior style, determined to earn distinction too, if possible, and all at once assuming the character of a swain (which character he had endeavoured to enact once or twice before, but in which he had not hitherto met with the success he doubtless opined his merits deserved), approached a sofa on which Miss Helstone was seated, and depositing his great Irish frame near her, tried his hand (or rather tongue) at a fine speech or two, accompanied by grins the most extraordinary and incomprehensible. In the course of his efforts to render himself agreeable, he contrived to possess himself of the two long sofa cushions and a square one; with which, after rolling them about for some time with strange gestures, he managed to erect a sort of barrier between himself and the object of his attentions. Caroline, quite willing that they should be sundered, soon devised an excuse for stepping over to the opposite side of the room, and taking up a position beside Mrs. Sykes, of which good lady she entreated some instruction in a new stitch in ornamental knitting, a favour readily granted; and thus Peter Augustus was thrown out.

Very sullenly did his countenance lower when he saw himself abandoned — left entirely to his own resources, on a large sofa, with the charge of three small cushions on his hands. The fact was, he felt disposed seriously to cultivate acquaintance with Miss Helstone, because he thought, in common with others, that her uncle possessed money, and concluded that, since he had no children, he would probably leave it to his niece. Gérard Moore was better instructed on this point: he had seen the neat church that owed its origin to the rector's zeal and cash, and more than once, in his inmost soul, had cursed an expensive caprice which crossed his wishes.

The evening seemed long to one person in that room. Caroline at intervals dropped her knitting on her lap, and gave herself up to a sort of brain-lethargy — closing her eyes and depressing her head — caused by what seemed to her the unmeaning hum around her, — the inharmonious, tasteless rattle of the piano keys, the squeaking and gasping notes of the flute, the laughter and mirth of her uncle, and Hannah, and Mary, she could not tell whence originating, for she heard nothing comic or gleeful in their discourse; and more than all, by the interminable gossip of Mrs. Sykes murmured close at her ear, gossip which rang the changes on four subjects — her own health and that of the various members of her family; the missionary and Jew baskets and their contents; the late meeting at Nunnely, and one which was expected to come off next week at Whinbury.

Tired at length to exhaustion, she embraced the opportunity of Mr. Sweeting coming up to speak to Mrs. Sykes to slip quietly out of the apartment, and seek a moment's respite in solitude. She repaired to the dining-room, where the clear but now low remnant of a fire still burned in the grate. The place was empty and quiet, glasses and decanters were cleared from the table, the chairs were put back in their places, all was orderly. Caroline sank into her uncle's large easy-chair, half shut her eyes, and rested herself — rested at least her limbs, her senses, her hearing, her vision — weary with listening to nothing, and gazing on vacancy. As to her mind, that flew directly to the Hollow. It stood on the threshold of the parlour there, then it passed to the counting-house, and wondered which spot was blessed by the presence of Robert. It so happened that neither locality had that honour; for Robert was half a mile away from both, and much nearer to Caroline than her deadened spirit suspected. He was at this moment crossing the churchyard, approaching the rectory garden-gate — not, however, coming to see his cousin, but intent solely on communicating a brief piece of intelligence to the rector.

Yes, Caroline; you hear the wire of the bell vibrate; it rings again for the fifth time this afternoon. You start, and you are certain now that this must be he of whom you dream. Why you are so certain you cannot explain to yourself, but you know it. You lean forward, listening eagerly as Fanny opens the door. Right! That is *the* voice — low, with the slight foreign accent, but so sweet, as you fancy. You half rise. "Fanny will tell him Mr. Helstone is with company, and then he will go away." Oh! she cannot let him go. In spite of herself, in spite of her reason, she walks half across the room; she stands ready to dart out in case the step should retreat; but he enters the passage. "Since your master is engaged," he says, "just show me into the dining-room. Bring me pen and ink. I will write a short note and leave it for him."

Now, having caught these words, and hearing him advance, Caroline, if there was a door within the dining-room, would glide through it and disappear. She feels caught, hemmed in; she dreads her unexpected presence may annoy him. A second since she would have flown to him; that second past, she would flee from him. She cannot. There is no way of escape. The dining-room has but one door, through which now enters her cousin. The look of troubled surprise she expected to see in his face has appeared there, has shocked her, and is gone. She has stammered a sort of apology: —

"I only left the drawing-room a minute for a little quiet."

There was something so diffident and downcast in the air and tone with which she said this, any one might perceive that some saddening change had lately passed over her prospects, and that the faculty of cheerful self-possession had left her. Mr. Moore, probably, remembered how she had formerly been accustomed to meet him with gentle ardour and hopeful confidence. He must have seen how the check of this morning had operated. Here was an opportunity for carrying out his new system with effect, if he chose to improve it. Perhaps he found it easier to practise that system in broad daylight, in his mill-yard, amidst busy occupations, than in a quiet parlour, disengaged, at the hour of eventide. Fanny lit the candles, which before had stood unlit on the table, brought writing materials, and left the room. Caroline was about to follow her. Moore, to act consistently, should have let her go; whereas he stood in the doorway, and, holding out his hand, gently kept her back. He did not ask her to stay, but he would not let her go.

"Shall I tell my uncle you are here?" asked she, still in the same subdued voice.

"No; I can say to you all I had to say to him. You will be my messenger?"

"Yes, Robert."

"Then you may just inform him that I have got a clue to the identity of one, at least, of the men who broke my frames; that he belongs to the same gang who attacked Sykes and Pearson's dressing-shop, and that I hope to have him in custody to-morrow. You can remember that?"

"Oh yes!" These two monosyllables were uttered in a sadder tone than ever; and as she said them she shook her head slightly and sighed. "Will you prosecute him?"

"Doubtless."

"No, Robert."

"And why no, Caroline?"

"Because it will set all the neighbourhood against you more than ever."

"That is no reason why I should not do my duty, and defend my property. This fellow is a great scoundrel, and ought to be incapacitated from perpetrating further mischief."

"But his accomplices will take revenge on you. You do not know how the people of this country bear malice. It is the boast of some of them that they can keep a stone in their pocket seven years, turn it at the end of that time, keep it seven years longer, and hurl it and hit their mark 'at last.'"

Moore laughed.

"A most pithy vaunt," said he — "one that redounds vastly to the credit of your dear Yorkshire friends. But don't fear for me, Lina. I am on my guard against these lamb-like compatriots of yours. Don't make yourself uneasy about me."

"How can I help it? You are my cousin. If anything happened — — " She stopped.

"Nothing will happen, Lina. To speak in your own language, there is a Providence above all — is there not?"

"Yes, dear Robert. May He guard you!"

"And if prayers have efficacy, yours will benefit me. You pray for me sometimes?"

"Not *sometimes*, Robert. You, and Louis, and Hortense are *always* remembered."

"So I have often imagined. It has occurred to me when, weary and vexed, I have myself gone to bed like a heathen, that another had asked forgiveness for my day, and safety for my night. I don't suppose such vicarial piety will avail much, but the petitions come out of a sincere breast, from innocent lips. They should be acceptable as Abel's offering; and doubtless would be, if the object deserved them."

"Annihilate that doubt. It is groundless."

"When a man has been brought up only to make money, and lives to make it, and for nothing else, and scarcely breathes any other air than that of mills and markets, it seems odd to utter his name in a prayer, or to mix his idea with anything divine; and very strange it seems that a good, pure heart should take him in and harbour him, as if he had any claim to that sort of nest. If I could guide that benignant heart, I believe I should counsel it to exclude one who does not profess to have any higher aim in life than that of patching up his broken fortune, and wiping clean from his *bourgeois* scutcheon the foul stain of bankruptcy."

The hint, though conveyed thus tenderly and modestly (as Caroline thought), was felt keenly and comprehended clearly.

"Indeed, I only think — or I *will only* think — of you as my cousin," was the quick answer. "I am beginning to understand things better than I did, Robert, when you first came to England — better than I did a week, a day ago. I know it is your duty to try to get on, and that it won't do for you to be romantic; but in future you must not misunderstand me if I seem friendly. You misunderstood me this morning, did you not?"

"What made you think so?"

"Your look — your manner."

"But look at me now — — "

"Oh! you are different now. At present I dare speak to you."

"Yet I am the same, except that I have left the tradesman behind me in the

Hollow. Your kinsman alone stands before you."

"My cousin Robert — not Mr. Moore."

"Not a bit of Mr. Moore. Caroline — — "

Here the company was heard rising in the other room. The door was opened; the pony-carriage was ordered; shawls and bonnets were demanded; Mr. Helstone called for his niece.

"I must go, Robert."

"Yes, you must go, or they will come in and find us here; and I, rather than meet all that host in the passage, will take my departure through the window. Luckily it opens like a door. One minute only — put down the candle an instant — good-night. I kiss you because we are cousins, and, being cousins, one — two — three kisses are allowable. Caroline, good-night."

CHAPTER VIII.

NOAH AND MOSES.

The next day Moore had risen before the sun, and had taken a ride to Whinbury and back ere his sister had made the café au lait or cut the tartines for his breakfast. What business he transacted there he kept to himself. Hortense asked no questions: it was not her wont to comment on his movements, nor his to render an account of them. The secrets of business — complicated and often dismal mysteries — were buried in his breast, and never came out of their sepulchre save now and then to scare Joe Scott, or give a start to some foreign correspondent. Indeed, a general habit of reserve on whatever was important seemed bred in his mercantile blood.

Breakfast over, he went to his counting-house. Henry, Joe Scott's boy, brought in the letters and the daily papers; Moore seated himself at his desk, broke the seals of the documents, and glanced them over. They were all short, but not, it seemed, sweet — probably rather sour, on the contrary, for as Moore laid down the last, his nostrils emitted a derisive and defiant snuff, and though he burst into no soliloquy, there was a glance in his eye which seemed to invoke the devil, and lay charges on him to sweep the whole concern to Gehenna. However, having chosen a pen and stripped away the feathered top in a brief spasm of finger-fury (only finger-fury — his face was placid), he dashed off a batch of answers, sealed them, and then went out and walked through the mill. On coming back he sat down to read his newspaper.

The contents seemed not absorbingly interesting; he more than once laid it across his knee, folded his arms, and gazed into the fire; he occasionally turned his head towards the window; he looked at intervals at his watch; in short, his mind appeared preoccupied. Perhaps he was thinking of the beauty of the weather — for it was a fine and mild morning for the season — and wishing to be out in the fields enjoying it. The door of his counting-house stood wide open. The breeze and sunshine entered freely; but the first visitant brought no spring perfume on its wings, only an occasional sulphur-puff from the soot-thick column of smoke rushing sable from the gaunt mill-chimney.

A dark-blue apparition (that of Joe Scott, fresh from a dyeing vat) appeared momentarily at the open door, uttered the words "He's comed, sir," and vanished.

Mr. Moore raised not his eyes from the paper. A large man, broad-shouldered and massive-limbed, clad in fustian garments and gray worsted stockings, entered, who was received with a nod, and desired to take a seat, which he did, making the remark, as he removed his hat (a very bad one), stowed it away under his chair, and wiped his forehead with a spotted cotton handkerchief extracted from the hat-crown, that it was "raight dahn warm for Febewerry." Mr. Moore assented — at least he uttered some slight sound, which, though inarticulate, might pass for an assent. The visitor now carefully deposited in the corner beside him an official-looking staff which he bore in his hand; this done, he whistled, probably by way of appearing at his ease.

"You have what is necessary, I suppose?" said Mr. Moore.

"Ay, ay! all's right."

He renewed his whistling, Mr. Moore his reading. The paper apparently had become more interesting. Presently, however, he turned to his cupboard, which was within reach of his long arm, opened it without rising, took out a black bottle — the same he had produced for Malone's benefit — a tumbler, and a jug, placed them on the table, and said to his guest, —

"Help yourself; there's water in that jar in the corner."

"I dunnut knaw that there's mich need, for all a body is dry (thirsty) in a morning," said the fustian gentleman, rising and doing as requested.

"Will you tak naught yourseln, Mr. Moore?" he inquired, as with skilled hand he mixed a portion, and having tested it by a deep draught, sank back satisfied and bland in his seat. Moore, chary of words, replied by a negative movement and murmur.

"Yah'd as good," continued his visitor; "it 'uld set ye up wald a sup o' this stuff. Uncommon good hollands. Ye get it fro' furrin parts, I'se think?"

"Ay!"

"Tak my advice and try a glass on't. Them lads 'at's coming 'll keep ye talking, nob'dy knows how long. Ye'll need propping."

"Have you seen Mr. Sykes this morning?" inquired Moore.

"I seed him a hauf an hour — nay, happen a quarter of an hour sin', just afore I set off. He said he aimed to come here, and I sudn't wonder but ye'll have old Helstone too. I seed 'em saddling his little nag as I passed at back o' t' rectory."

The speaker was a true prophet, for the trot of a little nag's hoofs was, five minutes after, heard in the yard. It stopped, and a well-known nasal voice cried aloud, "Boy" (probably addressing Harry Scott, who usually hung about the premises from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.), "take my horse and lead him into the stable."

Helstone came in marching nimbly and erect, looking browner, keener, and livelier than usual.

"Beautiful morning, Moore. How do, my boy? Ha! whom have we here?" (turning to the personage with the staff). "Sugden! What! you're going to work directly? On my word, you lose no time. But I come to ask explanations. Your message was delivered to me. Are you sure you are on the right scent? How do you mean to set about the business? Have you got a warrant?"

"Sugden has."

"Then you are going to seek him now? I'll accompany you."

"You will be spared that trouble, sir; he is coming to seek me. I'm just now sitting in state waiting his arrival."

"And who is it? One of my parishioners?"

Joe Scott had entered unobserved. He now stood, a most sinister phantom, half his person being dyed of the deepest tint of indigo, leaning on the desk. His master's answer to the rector's question was a smile. Joe took the word. Putting on a quiet but pawky look, he said, —

"It's a friend of yours, Mr. Helstone, a gentleman you often speak of."

"Indeed! His name, Joe? You look well this morning."

"Only the Rev. Moses Barraclough; t' tub orator you call him sometimes, I think."

"Ah!" said the rector, taking out his snuff-box, and administering to himself a very long pinch — "ah! couldn't have supposed it. Why, the pious man never was a workman of yours, Moore. He's a tailor by trade."

"And so much the worse grudge I owe him, for interfering and setting my discarded men against me."

"And Moses was actually present at the battle of Stilbro' Moor? He went there, wooden leg and all?"

"Ay, sir," said Joe; "he went there on horseback, that his leg mightn't be noticed. He was the captain, and wore a mask. The rest only had their faces blackened."

"And how was he found out?"

"I'll tell you, sir," said Joe. "T' maister's not so fond of talking. I've no objections. He courted Sarah, Mr. Moore's sarvant lass, and so it seems she would have nothing to say to him; she either didn't like his wooden leg or she'd some notion about his being a hypocrite. Happen (for women is queer hands; we may say that amang werseln when there's none of 'em nigh) she'd have encouraged him, in spite of his leg and his deceit, just to pass time like. I've known some on 'em do as mich, and some o' t' bonniest and mimmest-looking, too — ay, I've seen clean, trim young things, that looked as denty and pure as daisies, and wi' time a body fun' 'em out to be nowt but stinging, venomed nettles."

"Joe's a sensible fellow," interjected Helstone.

"Howsiver, Sarah had another string to her bow. Fred Murgatroyd, one of our lads, is for her; and as women judge men by their faces — and Fred has a middling face, while Moses is none so handsome, as we all knaw — the lass took on wi' Fred. A two-three months sin', Murgatroyd and Moses chanced to meet one Sunday night; they'd both come lurking about these premises wi' the notion of counselling Sarah to tak a bit of a walk wi' them. They fell out, had a tussle, and Fred was worsted, for he's young and small, and Barraclough, for all he has only one leg, is almost as strong as Sugden there — indeed, anybody that hears him roaring at a revival or a love-feast may be sure he's no weakling."

"Joe, you're insupportable," here broke in Mr. Moore. "You spin out your explanation as Moses spins out his sermons. The long and short of it is, Murgatroyd was jealous of Barraclough; and last night, as he and a friend took shelter in a barn from a shower, they heard and saw Moses conferring with some associates within. From their discourse it was plain he had been the leader, not only at Stilbro' Moor, but in the attack on Sykes's property. Moreover they planned a deputation to wait on me this morning, which the tailor is to head, and which, in the most religious and peaceful spirit, is to entreat me to put the accursed thing out of my tent. I rode over to Whinbury this morning, got a constable and a warrant, and I am now waiting to give my friend the reception he deserves. Here, meantime, comes Sykes. Mr. Helstone, you must spirit him up. He feels timid at the thoughts of prosecuting."

A gig was heard to roll into the yard. Mr. Sykes entered — a tall stout man of about fifty, comely of feature, but feeble of physiognomy. He looked anxious.

"Have they been? Are they gone? Have you got him? Is it over?" he asked.

"Not yet," returned Moore with phlegm. "We are waiting for them."

"They'll not come; it's near noon. Better give it up. It will excite bad feeling — make a stir — cause perhaps fatal consequences."

"*You* need not appear," said Moore. "I shall meet them in the yard when they come; *you* can stay here."

"But my name must be seen in the law proceedings. A wife and family, Mr. Moore — a wife and family make a man cautious."

Moore looked disgusted. "Give way, if you please," said he; "leave me to myself. I have no objection to act alone; only be assured you will not find safety in submission. Your partner Pearson gave way, and conceded, and forbore. Well, that did not prevent them from attempting to shoot him in his own house."

"My dear sir, take a little wine and water," recommended Mr. Helstone. The wine and water was hollands and water, as Mr. Sykes discovered when he had compounded and swallowed a brimming tumbler thereof. It transfigured him in two minutes, brought the colour back to his face, and made him at least *word*-valiant. He now announced that he hoped he was above being trampled on by the common people; he was determined to endure the insolence of the working-classes no longer; he had considered of it, and made up his mind to go all lengths; if money and spirit could put down these rioters, they should be put down; Mr. Moore might do as he liked, but *he* — Christie Sykes — would spend his last penny in law before he would be beaten; he'd settle them, or he'd see.

"Take another glass," urged Moore.

Mr. Sykes didn't mind if he did. This was a cold morning (Sugden had found it a warm one); it was necessary to be careful at this season of the year — it was proper to take something to keep the damp out; he had a little cough already (here he coughed in attestation of the fact); something of this sort (lifting the black bottle) was excellent, taken medicinally (he poured the physic into his tumbler); he didn't make a practice of drinking spirits in a morning, but occasionally it really was prudent to take precautions.

"Quite prudent, and take them by all means," urged the host.

Mr. Sykes now addressed Mr. Helstone, who stood on the hearth, his shovel-hat on his head, watching him significantly with his little, keen eyes.

"You, sir, as a clergyman," said he, "may feel it disagreeable to be present amidst scenes of hurry and flurry, and, I may say, peril. I dare say your nerves won't stand it. You're a man of peace, sir; but we manufacturers, living in the world, and always in turmoil, get quite belligerent. Really, there's an ardour excited by the thoughts of danger that makes my heart pant. When Mrs. Sykes is afraid of the house being attacked and broke open — as she is every night — I get quite excited. I couldn't describe to you, sir, my feelings. Really, if anybody was to come — thieves or anything — I believe I should enjoy it, such is my spirit."

The hardest of laughs, though brief and low, and by no means insulting, was the response of the rector. Moore would have pressed upon the heroic mill-owner a third tumbler, but the clergyman, who never transgressed, nor would suffer others in his presence to transgress, the bounds of decorum, checked him.

"Enough is as good as a feast, is it not, Mr. Sykes?" he said; and Mr. Sykes assented, and then sat and watched Joe Scott remove the bottle at a sign from Helstone, with a self-satisfied simper on his lips and a regretful glisten in his eye. Moore looked as if he should have liked to fool him to the top of his bent. What would a certain young kinswoman of his have said could she have seen her dear, good, great Robert — her Coriolanus — just now? Would she have acknowledged in that mischievous, sardonic visage the same face to which she had looked up with such love, which had bent over her with such gentleness last night? Was that the man who had spent so quiet an evening with his sister and his cousin — so suave to one, so tender to the other — reading Shakespeare and listening to Chénier?

Yes, it was the same man, only seen on a different side — a side Caroline had not yet fairly beheld, though perhaps she had enough sagacity faintly to suspect its existence. Well, Caroline had, doubtless, her defective side too. She was human. She must, then, have been very imperfect; and had she seen Moore on his very worst side, she would probably have said this to herself and excused him. Love can excuse anything except meanness; but meanness kills love, cripples even natural affection; without esteem true love cannot exist. Moore, with all his faults, might be esteemed; for he had no moral scrofula in his mind, no hopeless polluting taint — such, for instance, as that of falsehood; neither was he the slave of his appetites. The active life to which he had been born and bred had given him something else to do than to join the futile chase of the pleasure-hunter. He was a man undegraded, the disciple of reason, *not* the votary of sense. The same might be said of old Helstone.

Neither of these two would look, think, or speak a lie; for neither of them had the wretched black bottle, which had just been put away, any charms. Both might boast a valid claim to the proud title of "lord of the creation," for no animal vice was lord of them; they looked and were superior beings to poor Sykes.

A sort of gathering and trampling sound was heard in the yard, and then a pause. Moore walked to the window; Helstone followed. Both stood on one side, the tall junior behind the under-sized senior, looking forth carefully, so that they might not be visible from without. Their sole comment on what they saw was a cynical smile flashed into each other's stern eyes.

A flourishing oratorical cough was now heard, followed by the interjection "Whisht!" designed, as it seemed, to still the hum of several voices. Moore opened his casement an inch or two to admit sound more freely.

"Joseph Scott," began a snuffling voice — Scott was standing sentinel at the counting-house door — "might we inquire if your master be within, and is to be spoken to?"

"He's within, ay," said Joe nonchalantly.

"Would you then, if *you* please" (emphasis on "you"), "have the goodness to tell *him* that twelve gentlemen wants to see him."

"He'd happen ax what for," suggested Joe. "I mught as weel tell him that at t' same time."

"For a purpose," was the answer. Joe entered.

"Please, sir, there's twelve gentlemen wants to see ye, 'for a purpose.'"

"Good, Joe; I'm their man. — Sugden, come when I whistle."

Moore went out, chuckling dryly. He advanced into the yard, one hand in his pocket, the other in his waistcoat, his cap brim over his eyes, shading in some measure their deep dancing ray of scorn. Twelve men waited in the yard, some in their shirt-sleeves, some in blue aprons. Two figured conspicuously in the van of the party. One, a little dapper strutting man with a turned-up nose; the other a broad-shouldered fellow, distinguished no less by his demure face and cat like, trustless eyes than by a wooden leg and stout crutch. There was a kind of leer about his lips; he seemed laughing in his sleeve at some person or thing; his whole air was anything but that of a true man.

"Good-morning, Mr. Barraclough," said Moore debonairly, for him.

"Peace be unto you!" was the answer, Mr. Barraclough entirely closing his naturally half-shut eyes as he delivered it.

"I'm obliged to you. Peace is an excellent thing; there's nothing I more wish for myself. But that is not all you have to say to me, I suppose? I imagine peace is not your purpose?"

"As to our purpose," began Barraclough, "it's one that may sound strange and perhaps foolish to ears like yours, for the childer of this world is wiser in their generation than the childer of light."

"To the point, if you please, and let me hear what it is."

"Ye'se hear, sir. If I cannot get it off, there's eleven behint can help me. It is a grand purpose, and" (changing his voice from a half-sneer to a whine) "it's the Looard's own purpose, and that's better."

"Do you want a subscription to a new Ranter's chapel, Mr. Barraclough? Unless your errand be something of that sort, I cannot see what you have to do with it."

"I hadn't that duty on my mind, sir; but as Providence has led ye to mention the subject, I'll make it i' my way to tak ony trifle ye may have to spare; the smallest contribution will be acceptable."

With that he doffed his hat, and held it out as a begging-box, a brazen grin at the same time crossing his countenance.

"If I gave you sixpence you would drink it."

Barraclough uplifted the palms of his hands and the whites of his eyes, evincing in the gesture a mere burlesque of hypocrisy.

"You seem a fine fellow," said Moore, quite coolly and dryly; "you don't care for showing me that you are a double-dyed hypocrite, that your trade is fraud. You expect indeed to make me laugh at the cleverness with which you play your coarsely farcical part, while at the same time you think you are deceiving the men behind you."

Moses' countenance lowered. He saw he had gone too far. He was going to answer, when the second leader, impatient of being hitherto kept in the background, stepped forward. This man did not look like a traitor, though he had an exceedingly self-confident and conceited air.

"Mr. Moore," commenced he, speaking also in his throat and nose, and enunciating each word very slowly, as if with a view to giving his audience time to appreciate fully the uncommon elegance of the phraseology, "it might, perhaps, justly be said that reason rather than peace is our purpose. We come, in the first place, to request you to hear reason; and should *you* refuse, it is my duty to warn *you*, in very decided terms, that measures will be had resort to" (he meant recourse) "which will probably terminate in — in bringing *you* to a sense of the unwisdom, of the — the foolishness which seems to guide and guard your proceedings as a tradesman in this manufacturing part of the country. Hem! Sir, I would beg to allude that as a furriner, coming from a distant coast, another quarter and hemisphere of this globe, thrown, as I may say, a perfect outcast on these shores — the cliffs of Albion — you have not that understanding of huz and wer ways which might conduce to the benefit of the working-classes. If, to come at once to partic'lars, you'd consider to give up this here miln, and go without further protractions straight home to where you belong, it 'ud happen be as well. I can see naught ageean such a plan. — What hev ye to say tull't, lads?" turning round to the other members of the deputation, who responded unanimously, "Hear, hear!"

"Brayvo, Noah o' Tim's!" murmured Joe Scott, who stood behind Mr. Moore. "Moses'll niver beat that. Cliffs o' Albion, and t' other hemisphere!

My certy! Did ye come fro' th' Antarctic Zone, maister? Moses is dished."

Moses, however, refused to be dished. He thought he would try again. Casting a somewhat ireful glance at "Noah o' Tim's," he launched out in his turn; and now he spoke in a serious tone, relinquishing the sarcasm which he found had not answered.

"Or iver you set up the pole o' your tent amang us, Mr. Moore, we lived i' peace and quietness — yea, I may say, in all loving-kindness. I am not myself an aged person as yet, but I can remember as far back as maybe some twenty year, when hand-labour were encouraged and respected, and no mischief-maker had ventured to introduce these here machines which is so pernicious. Now, I'm not a cloth-dresser myself, but by trade a tailor. Howsiver, my heart is of a softish nature. I'm a very feeling man, and when I see my brethren oppressed, like my great namesake of old, I stand up for 'em; for which intent I this day speak with you face to face, and advises you to part wi' your infernal machinery, and tak on more hands."

"What if I don't follow your advice, Mr. Barraclough?"

"The Looard pardon you! The Looard soften your heart, sir!"

"Are you in connection with the Wesleyans now, Mr. Barraclough?"

"Praise God! Bless His name! I'm a joined Methody!"

"Which in no respect prevents you from being at the same time a drunkard and a swindler. I saw you one night a week ago laid dead-drunk by the roadside, as I returned from Stilbro' market; and while you preach peace, you make it the business of your life to stir up dissension. You no more sympathize with the poor who are in distress than you sympathize with me. You incite them to outrage for bad purposes of your own; so does the individual called Noah of Tim's. You two are restless, meddling, impudent scoundrels, whose chief motive-principle is a selfish ambition, as dangerous as it is puerile. The persons behind you are some of them honest though misguided men; but you two I count altogether bad."

Barraclough was going to speak.

"Silence! You have had your say, and now I will have mine. As to being dictated to by you, or any Jack, Jem, or Jonathan on earth, I shall not suffer it for a moment. You desire me to quit the country; you request me to part with my machinery. In case I refuse, you threaten me. I *do* refuse — point-blank! Here I stay, and by this mill I stand, and into it will I convey the best machinery inventors can furnish. What will you do? The utmost you *can* do — and this you will never *dare* to do — is to burn down my mill, destroy its contents, and shoot me. What then? Suppose that building was a ruin and I was a corpse — what then, you lads behind these two scamps? Would that stop invention or exhaust science? Not for the fraction of a second of time! Another and better gig-mill would rise on the ruins of this, and perhaps a more enterprising owner come in my place. Hear me! I'll make my cloth as I please, and according to the best lights I have. In its manufacture I will employ what means I choose. Whoever, after hearing this, shall dare to interfere with me may just take the consequences. An example shall prove I'm in earnest."

He whistled shrill and loud. Sugden, his staff and warrant, came on the scene.

Moore turned sharply to Barraclough. "You were at Stilbro'," said he; "I have proof of that. You were on the moor, you wore a mask, you knocked down one of my men with your own hand — you! a preacher of the gospel! — Sugden, arrest him!"

Moses was captured. There was a cry and a rush to rescue, but the right hand which all this while had lain hidden in Moore's breast, reappearing, held out a pistol.

"Both barrels are loaded," said he. "I'm quite determined! Keep off!"

Stepping backwards, facing the foe as he went, he guarded his prey to the counting-house. He ordered Joe Scott to pass in with Sugden and the prisoner, and to bolt the door inside. For himself, he walked backwards and forwards along the front of the mill, looking meditatively on the ground, his hand hanging carelessly by his side, but still holding the pistol. The eleven remaining deputies watched him some time, talking under their breath to each other. At length one of them approached. This man looked very different from either of the two who had previously spoken; he was hard-favoured, but modest and manly-looking.

"I've not much faith i' Moses Barraclough," said he, "and I would speak a word to you myseln, Mr. Moore. It's out o' no ill-will that I'm here, for my part; it's just to mak a effort to get things straightened, for they're sorely a-crooked. Ye see we're ill off — varry ill off; wer families is poor and pined. We're thrown out o' work wi' these frames; we can get nought to do; we can earn nought. What is to be done? Mun we say, wisht! and lig us down and dee? Nay; I've no grand words at my tongue's end, Mr. Moore, but I feel that it wad be a low principle for a reasonable man to starve to death like a dumb cratur. I willn't do't. I'm not for shedding blood: I'd neither kill a man nor hurt a man; and I'm not for pulling down mills and breaking machines — for, as ye say, that way o' going on'll niver stop invention; but I'll talk — I'll mak as big a din as ever I can. Invention may be all right, but I know it isn't right for poor folks to starve. Them that governs mun find a way to help us; they mun make fresh orderations. Ye'll say that's hard to do. So mich louder mun we shout out then, for so much slacker will t' Parliament-men be to set on to a tough job."

"Worry the Parliament-men as much as you please," said Moore; "but to worry the mill-owners is absurd, and I for one won't stand it."

"Ye're a raight hard un!" returned the workman. "Willn't ye gie us a bit o' time? Willn't ye consent to mak your changes rather more slowly?"

"Am I the whole body of clothiers in Yorkshire? Answer me that."

"Ye're yourseln."

"And only myself. And if I stopped by the way an instant, while others are rushing on, I should be trodden down. If I did as you wish me to do, I should be bankrupt in a month; and would my bankruptcy put bread into your hungry children's mouths? William Farren, neither to your dictation nor to that of any other will I submit. Talk to me no more about machinery. I will have my own way. I shall get new frames in to-morrow. If you broke these, I would still get more. *I'll never give in.*"

Here the mill-bell rang twelve o'clock. It was the dinner-hour. Moore abruptly turned from the deputation and re-entered his counting-house.

His last words had left a bad, harsh impression; he, at least, had "failed in the disposing of a chance he was lord of." By speaking kindly to William Farren — who was a very honest man, without envy or hatred of those more happily circumstanced than himself, thinking it no hardship and no injustice to be forced to live by labour, disposed to be honourably content if he could but get work to do — Moore might have made a friend. It seemed wonderful how he could turn from such a man without a conciliatory or a sympathizing expression. The poor fellow's face looked haggard with want; he had the aspect of a man who had not known what it was to live in comfort and plenty for weeks, perhaps months, past, and yet there was no ferocity, no malignity in his countenance; it was worn, dejected, austere, but still patient. How could Moore leave him thus, with the words, "I'll never give in," and not a whisper of good-will, or hope, or aid?

Farren, as he went home to his cottage — once, in better times, a decent, clean, pleasant place, but now, though still clean, very dreary, because so poor — asked himself this question. He concluded that the foreign mill-owner was a selfish, an unfeeling, and, he thought, too, a foolish man. It appeared to him that emigration, had he only the means to emigrate, would be preferable to service under such a master. He felt much cast down — almost hopeless.

On his entrance his wife served out, in orderly sort, such dinner as she had to give him and the bairns. It was only porridge, and too little of that. Some of the younger children asked for more when they had done their portion — an application which disturbed William much. While his wife quieted them as well as she could, he left his seat and went to the door. He whistled a cheery stave, which did not, however, prevent a broad drop or two (much more like the "first of a thunder-shower" than those which oozed from the wound of the gladiator) from gathering on the lids of his gray eyes, and plashing thence to the threshold. He cleared his vision with his sleeve, and the melting mood over, a very stern one followed.

He still stood brooding in silence, when a gentleman in black came up — a clergyman, it might be seen at once, but neither Helstone, nor Malone, nor Donne, nor Sweeting. He might be forty years old; he was plain-looking, dark-complexioned, and already rather gray-haired. He stooped a little in walking. His countenance, as he came on, wore an abstracted and somewhat doleful air; but in approaching Farren he looked up, and then a hearty expression illuminated the preoccupied, serious face.

"Is it you, William? How are you?" he asked.

"Middling, Mr. Hall. How are *ye*? Will ye step in and rest ye?"

Mr. Hall, whose name the reader has seen mentioned before (and who, indeed, was vicar of Nunnely, of which parish Farren was a native, and from whence he had removed but three years ago to reside in Briarfield, for the convenience of being near Hollow's Mill, where he had obtained work), entered the cottage, and having greeted the good-wife and the children, sat down. He proceeded to talk very cheerfully about the length of time that had elapsed since the family quitted his parish, the changes which had occurred since; he answered questions touching his sister Margaret, who was inquired after with much interest; he asked questions in his turn, and at last, glancing hastily and anxiously round through his spectacles (he wore spectacles, for he was short-sighted) at the bare room, and at the meagre and wan faces of the circle about him — for the children had come round his knee, and the father and mother stood before him — he said abruptly, —

"And how are you all? How do you get on?"

Mr. Hall, be it remarked, though an accomplished scholar, not only spoke with a strong northern accent, but, on occasion, used freely north-country expressions.

"We get on poorly," said William; "we're all out of work. I've selled most o' t' household stuff, as ye may see; and what we're to do next, God knows."

"Has Mr. Moore turned you off?"

"He has turned us off; and I've sich an opinion of him now that I think if he'd tak me on again to-morrow I wouldn't work for him."

"It is not like you to say so, William."

"I know it isn't; but I'm getting different to mysel'; I feel I am changing. I wadn't heed if t' bairns and t' wife had enough to live on; but they're pinched — they're pined — — "

"Well, my lad, and so are you; I see you are. These are grievous times; I see suffering wherever I turn. William, sit down. Grace, sit down. Let us talk it over."

And in order the better to talk it over, Mr. Hall lifted the least of the children on to his knee, and placed his hand on the head of the next least; but when the small things began to chatter to him he bade them "Whisht!" and fixing his eyes on the grate, he regarded the handful of embers which burned there very gravely.

"Sad times," he said, "and they last long. It is the will of God. His will be done. But He tries us to the utmost."

Again he reflected.

"You've no money, William, and you've nothing you could sell to raise a small sum?"

"No. I've selled t' chest o' drawers, and t' clock, and t' bit of a mahogany stand, and t' wife's bonny tea-tray and set o' cheeney 'at she brought for a portion when we were wed."

"And if somebody lent you a pound or two, could you make any good use of it? Could you get into a new way of doing something?"

Farren did not answer, but his wife said quickly, "Ay, I'm sure he could, sir. He's a very contriving chap is our William. If he'd two or three pounds he could begin selling stuff."

"Could you, William?"

"Please God," returned William deliberately, "I could buy groceries, and bits o' tapes, and thread, and what I thought would sell, and I could begin hawking at first."

"And you know, sir," interposed Grace, "you're sure William would neither drink, nor idle, nor waste, in any way. He's my husband, and I shouldn't praise him; but I *will* say there's not a soberer, honester man i' England nor he is."

"Well, I'll speak to one or two friends, and I think I can promise to let him have £5 in a day or two — as a loan, ye mind, not a gift. He must pay it back."

"I understand, sir. I'm quite agreeable to that."

"Meantime, there's a few shillings for you, Grace, just to keep the pot boiling till custom comes. — Now, bairns, stand up in a row and say your catechism, while your mother goes and buys some dinner; for you've not had much to-day, I'll be bound. — You begin, Ben. What is your name?"

Mr. Hall stayed till Grace came back; then he hastily took his leave, shaking hands with both Farren and his wife. Just at the door he said to them a few brief but very earnest words of religious consolation and exhortation. With a mutual "God bless you, sir!" "God bless you, my friends!" they separated.

CHAPTER IX.

BRIARMAINS.

Messrs. Helstone and Sykes began to be extremely jocose and congratulatory with Mr. Moore when he returned to them after dismissing the deputation. He was so quiet, however, under their compliments upon his firmness, etc., and wore a countenance so like a still, dark day, equally beamless and breezeless, that the rector, after glancing shrewdly into his eyes, buttoned up his felicitations with his coat, and said to Sykes, whose senses were not acute enough to enable him to discover unassisted where his presence and conversation were a nuisance, "Come, sir; your road and mine lie partly together. Had we not better bear each other company? We'll bid Moore good-morning, and leave him to the happy fancies he seems disposed to indulge."

"And where is Sugden?" demanded Moore, looking up.

"Ah, ha!" cried Helstone. "I've not been quite idle while you were busy. I've been helping you a little; I flatter myself not injudiciously. I thought it better not to lose time; so, while you were parleying with that down-looking gentleman — Farren I think his name is — I opened this back window, shouted to Murgatroyd, who was in the stable, to bring Mr. Sykes's gig round; then I smuggled Sugden and brother Moses — wooden leg and all — through the aperture, and saw them mount the gig (always with our good friend Sykes's permission, of course). Sugden took the reins — he drives like Jehu — and in another quarter of an hour Barraclough will be safe in Stilbro' jail."

"Very good; thank you," said Moore; "and good-morning, gentlemen," he added, and so politely conducted them to the door, and saw them clear of his premises.

He was a taciturn, serious man the rest of the day. He did not even bandy a repartee with Joe Scott, who, for his part, said to his master only just what was absolutely necessary to the progress of business, but looked at him a good deal out of the corners of his eyes, frequently came to poke the counting-house fire for him, and once, as he was locking up for the day (the mill was then working short time, owing to the slackness of trade), observed that it was a grand evening, and he "could wish Mr. Moore to take a bit of a walk up th' Hollow. It would do him good."

At this recommendation Mr. Moore burst into a short laugh, and after demanding of Joe what all this solicitude meant, and whether he took him for a woman or a child, seized the keys from his hand, and shoved him by the shoulders out of his presence. He called him back, however, ere he had reached the yard-gate.

"Joe, do you know those Farrens? They are not well off, I suppose?"

"They cannot be well off, sir, when they've not had work as a three month. Ye'd see yoursel' 'at William's sorely changed — fair paired. They've selled most o' t' stuff out o' th' house."

"He was not a bad workman?"

"Ye never had a better, sir, sin' ye began trade."

"And decent people — the whole family?"

"Niver dacenter. Th' wife's a raight cant body, and as clean — ye mught eat your porridge off th' house floor. They're sorely comed down. I wish William could get a job as gardener or summat i' that way; he understands gardening weel. He once lived wi' a Scotchman that tached him the mysteries o' that craft, as they say."

"Now, then, you can go, Joe. You need not stand there staring at me."

"Ye've no orders to give, sir?"

"None, but for you to take yourself off."

Which Joe did accordingly.

Spring evenings are often cold and raw, and though this had been a fine day, warm even in the morning and meridian sunshine, the air chilled at sunset, the ground crisped, and ere dusk a hoar frost was insidiously stealing over growing grass and unfolding bud. It whitened the pavement in front of Briarmains (Mr. Yorke's residence), and made silent havoc among the tender plants in his garden, and on the mossy level of his lawn. As to that great tree, strong-trunked and broad-armed, which guarded the gable nearest the road, it seemed to defy a spring-night frost to harm its still bare boughs; and so did the leafless grove of walnut-trees rising tall behind the house.

In the dusk of the moonless if starry night, lights from windows shone vividly. This was no dark or lonely scene, nor even a silent one. Briarmains stood near the highway. It was rather an old place, and had been built ere that highway was cut, and when a lane winding up through fields was the only path conducting to it. Briarfield lay scarce a mile off; its hum was heard, its glare distinctly seen. Briar Chapel, a large, new, raw Wesleyan place of worship, rose but a hundred yards distant; and as there was even now a prayer-meeting being held within its walls, the illumination of its windows cast a bright reflection on the road, while a hymn of a most extraordinary description, such as a very Quaker might feel himself moved by the Spirit to dance to, roused cheerily all the echoes of the vicinage. The words were distinctly audible by snatches. Here is a quotation or two from different strains; for the singers passed jauntily from hymn to hymn and from tune to tune, with an ease and buoyancy all their own: —

"Oh! who can explain
This struggle for life,
This travail and pain,
This trembling and strife?

Plague, earthquake, and famine,
And tumult and war,
The wonderful coming
Of Jesus declare!
"For every fight
Is dreadful and loud:
The warrior's delight
Is slaughter and blood,
His foes overturning,
Till all shall expire:
And this is with burning,
And fuel, and fire!"

Here followed an interval of clamorous prayer, accompanied by fearful groans. A shout of "I've found liberty!" "Doad o' Bill's has fun' liberty!" rang from the chapel, and out all the assembly broke again.

"What a mercy is this!
What a heaven of bliss!
How unspeakably happy am I!
Gathered into the fold,
With Thy people enrolled,
With Thy people to live and to die!
"Oh, the goodness of God
In employing a clod
His tribute of glory to raise;
His standard to bear,
And with triumph declare
His unspeakable riches of grace!
"Oh, the fathomless love
That has deigned to approve
And prosper the work of my hands.
With my pastoral crook
I went over the brook,
And behold I am spread into bands!
"Who, I ask in amaze,
Hath begotten me these?
And inquire from what quarter they came.
My full heart it replies,
They are born from the skies,
And gives glory to God and the Lamb!"

The stanza which followed this, after another and longer interregnum of shouts, yells, ejaculations, frantic cries, agonized groans, seemed to cap the climax of noise and zeal.

"Sleeping on the brink of sin,
Tophet gaped to take us in;

Mercy to our rescue flew,
Broke the snare, and brought us through.
“Here, as in a lion’s den,
Undevoured we still remain,
Pass secure the watery flood,
Hanging on the arm of God.
“Here — — “

(Terrible, most distracting to the ear, was the strained shout in which the last stanza was given.)

“Here we raise our voices higher,
Shout in the refiner’s fire,
Clap our hands amidst the flame,
Glory give to Jesus’ name!”

The roof of the chapel did *not* fly off, which speaks volumes in praise of its solid slating.

But if Briar Chapel seemed alive, so also did Briarmains, though certainly the mansion appeared to enjoy a quieter phase of existence than the temple. Some of its windows too were aglow; the lower casements opened upon the lawn; curtains concealed the interior, and partly obscured the ray of the candles which lit it, but they did not entirely muffle the sound of voice and laughter. We are privileged to enter that front door, and to penetrate to the domestic sanctum.

It is not the presence of company which makes Mr. Yorke’s habitation lively, for there is none within it save his own family, and they are assembled in that farthest room to the right, the back parlour.

This is the usual sitting-room of an evening. Those windows would be seen by daylight to be of brilliantly-stained glass, purple and amber the predominant hues, glittering round a gravely-tinted medallion in the centre of each, representing the suave head of William Shakespeare, and the serene one of John Milton. Some Canadian views hung on the walls — green forest and blue water scenery — and in the midst of them blazes a night-eruption of Vesuvius; very ardently it glows, contrasted with the cool foam and azure of cataracts, and the dusky depths of woods.

The fire illuminating this room, reader, is such as, if you be a southern, you do not often see burning on the hearth of a private apartment. It is a clear, hot coal fire, heaped high in the ample chimney. Mr. Yorke *will* have such fires even in warm summer weather. He sits beside it with a book in his hand, a little round stand at his elbow supporting a candle; but he is not reading — he is watching his children. Opposite to him sits his lady — a personage whom I might describe minutely, but I feel no vocation to the task. I see her, though, very plainly before me — a large woman of the gravest aspect, care on her front and on her shoulders, but not overwhelming, inevitable care, rather the sort of voluntary, exemplary cloud and burden people ever carry who deem it their duty to be gloomy. Ah, well-a-day! Mrs. Yorke had that notion, and grave as Saturn she was, morning, noon, and, night; and hard things she thought if any unhappy wight — especially of the female sex — who dared in her presence to show the light of a gay heart on a sunny countenance. In her estimation, to be mirthful was to be profane, to be cheerful was to be frivolous. She drew no distinctions. Yet she was a very good wife, a very careful mother, looked after her children unceasingly, was sincerely attached to her husband; only the worst of it was, if she could have had her will, she would not have permitted him to have any friend in the world beside herself. All his relations were insupportable to her, and she kept them at arm's length.

Mr. Yorke and she agreed perfectly well, yet he was naturally a social, hospitable man, an advocate for family unity; and in his youth, as has been said, he liked none but lively, cheerful women. Why he chose her, how they contrived to suit each other, is a problem puzzling enough, but which might soon be solved if one had time to go into the analysis of the case. Suffice it here to say that Yorke had a shadowy side as well as a sunny side to his character, and that his shadowy side found sympathy and affinity in the whole of his wife's uniformly overcast nature. For the rest, she was a strong-minded woman; never said a weak or a trite thing; took stern, democratic views of society, and rather cynical ones of human nature; considered herself perfect and safe, and the rest of the world all wrong. Her main fault was a brooding, eternal, immitigable suspicion of all men, things, creeds, and parties; this suspicion was a mist before her eyes, a false guide in her path, wherever she looked, wherever she turned.

It may be supposed that the children of such a pair were not likely to turn out quite ordinary, commonplace beings; and they were not. You see six of them, reader. The youngest is a baby on the mother's knee. It is all her own yet, and that one she has not yet begun to doubt, suspect, condemn; it derives its sustenance from her, it hangs on her, it clings to her, it loves her above everything else in the world. She is sure of that, because, as it lives by her, it cannot be otherwise, therefore she loves it.

The two next are girls, Rose and Jessy; they are both now at their father's knee; they seldom go near their mother, except when obliged to do so. Rose, the elder, is twelve years old; she is like her father — the most like him of the whole group — but it is a granite head copied in ivory; all is softened in colour and line. Yorke himself has a harsh face — his daughter's is not harsh, neither is it quite pretty; it is simple, childlike in feature; the round cheeks bloom: as to the gray eyes, they are otherwise than childlike; a serious soul lights them — a young soul yet, but it will mature, if the body lives; and neither father nor mother have a spirit to compare with it. Partaking of the essence of each, it will one day be better than either — stronger, much purer, more aspiring. Rose is a still, sometimes a stubborn, girl now. Her mother wants to make of her such a woman as she is herself — a woman of dark and dreary duties; and Rose has a mind full-set, thick-sown with the germs of ideas her mother never knew. It is agony to her often to have these ideas trampled on and repressed. She has never rebelled yet; but if hard driven, she will rebel one day, and then it will be once for all. Rose loves her father: her father does not rule her with a rod of iron; he is good to her. He sometimes fears she will not live, so bright are the sparks of intelligence which, at moments, flash from her glance and gleam in her language. This idea makes him often sadly tender to her.

He has no idea that little Jessy will die young, she is so gay and chattering, arch, original even now; passionate when provoked, but most affectionate if caressed; by turns gentle and rattling; exacting, yet generous; fearless — of her mother, for instance, whose irrationally hard and strict rule she has often defied — yet reliant on any who will help her. Jessy, with her little piquant face, engaging prattle, and winning ways, is made to be a pet, and her father's pet she accordingly is. It is odd that the doll should resemble her mother feature by feature, as Rose resembles her father, and yet the physiognomy — how different!

Mr. Yorke, if a magic mirror were now held before you, and if therein were shown you your two daughters as they will be twenty years from this night, what would you think? The magic mirror is here: you shall learn their destinies — and first that of your little life, Jessy.

Do you know this place? No, you never saw it; but you recognize the nature of these trees, this foliage — the cypress, the willow, the yew. Stone crosses like these are not unfamiliar to you, nor are these dim garlands of everlasting flowers. Here is the place — green sod and a gray marble headstone. Jessy sleeps below. She lived through an April day; much loved was she, much loving. She often, in her brief life, shed tears, she had frequent sorrows; she smiled between, gladdening whatever saw her. Her death was tranquil and happy in Rose's guardian arms, for Rose had been her stay and defence through many trials. The dying and the watching English girls were at that hour alone in a foreign country, and the soil of that country gave Jessy a grave.

Now, behold Rose two years later. The crosses and garlands looked strange, but the hills and woods of this landscape look still stranger. This, indeed, is far from England; remote must be the shores which wear that wild, luxuriant aspect. This is some virgin solitude. Unknown birds flutter round the skirts of that forest; no European river this, on whose banks Rose sits thinking. The little quiet Yorkshire girl is a lonely emigrant in some region of the southern hemisphere. Will she ever come back?

The three eldest of the family are all boys — Matthew, Mark, and Martin. They are seated together in that corner, engaged in some game. Observe their three heads: much alike at a first glance; at a second, different; at a third, contrasted. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, red-cheeked are the whole trio; small English features they all possess; all own a blended resemblance to sire and mother; and yet a distinctive physiognomy, mark of a separate character, belongs to each.

I shall not say much about Matthew, the first-born of the house, though it is impossible to avoid gazing at him long, and conjecturing what qualities that visage hides or indicates. He is no plain-looking boy: that jet-black hair, white brow, high-coloured cheek, those quick, dark eyes, are good points in their way. How is it that, look as long as you will, there is but one object in the room, and that the most sinister, to which Matthew's face seems to bear an affinity, and of which, ever and anon, it reminds you strangely — the eruption of Vesuvius? Flame and shadow seem the component parts of that lad's soul — no daylight in it, and no sunshine, and no pure, cool moonbeam ever shone there. He has an English frame, but, apparently, not an English mind — you would say, an Italian stiletto in a sheath of British workmanship. He is crossed in the game — look at his scowl. Mr. Yorke sees it, and what does he say? In a low voice he pleads, "Mark and Martin, don't anger your brother." And this is ever the tone adopted by both parents. Theoretically, they decry partiality — no rights of primogeniture are to be allowed in that house; but Matthew is never to be vexed, never to be opposed; they avert provocation from him as assiduously as they would avert fire from a barrel of gunpowder. "Concede, conciliate," is their motto wherever he is concerned. The republicans are fast making a tyrant of their own flesh and blood. This the younger scions know and feel, and at heart they all rebel against the injustice. They cannot read their parents' motives; they only see the difference of treatment. The dragon's teeth are already sown amongst Mr. Yorke's young olive-branches; discord will one day be the harvest.

Mark is a bonny-looking boy, the most regular-featured of the family. He is exceedingly calm; his smile is shrewd; he can say the driest, most cutting things in the quietest of tones. Despite his tranquillity, a somewhat heavy brow speaks temper, and reminds you that the smoothest waters are not always the safest. Besides, he is too still, unmoved, phlegmatic, to be happy. Life will never have much joy in it for Mark. By the time he is five-and-twenty he will wonder why people ever laugh, and think all fools who seem merry. Poetry will not exist for Mark, either in literature or in life; its best effusions will sound to him mere rant and jargon. Enthusiasm will be his aversion and contempt. Mark will have no youth; while he looks juvenile and blooming, he will be already middle-aged in mind. His body is now fourteen years of age, but his soul is already thirty.

Martin, the youngest of the three, owns another nature. Life may, or may not, be brief for him, but it will certainly be brilliant. He will pass through all its illusions, half believe in them, wholly enjoy them, then outlive them. That boy is not handsome — not so handsome as either of his brothers. He is plain; there is a husk upon him, a dry shell, and he will wear it till he is near twenty, then he will put it off. About that period he will make himself handsome. He will wear uncouth manners till that age, perhaps homely garments; but the chrysalis will retain the power of transfiguring itself into the butterfly, and such transfiguration will, in due season, take place. For a space he will be vain, probably a downright puppy, eager for pleasure and desirous of admiration, athirst, too, for knowledge. He will want all that the world can give him, both of enjoyment and lore; he will, perhaps, take deep draughts at each fount. That thirst satisfied, what next? I know not. Martin might be a remarkable man. Whether he will or not, the seer is powerless to predict: on that subject there has been no open vision.

Take Mr. Yorke's family in the aggregate: there is as much mental power in those six young heads, as much originality, as much activity and vigour of brain, as — divided amongst half a dozen commonplace broods — would give to each rather more than an average amount of sense and capacity. Mr. Yorke knows this, and is proud of his race. Yorkshire has such families here and there amongst her hills and wolds — peculiar, racy, vigorous; of good blood and strong brain; turbulent somewhat in the pride of their strength, and intractable in the force of their native powers; wanting polish, wanting consideration, wanting docility, but sound, spirited, and true-bred as the eagle on the cliff or the steed in the steppe.

A low tap is heard at the parlour door; the boys have been making such a noise over their game, and little Jessy, besides, has been singing so sweet a Scotch song to her father — who delights in Scotch and Italian songs, and has taught his musical little daughter some of the best — that the ring at the outer door was not observed.

"Come in," says Mrs. Yorke, in that conscientiously constrained and solemnized voice of hers, which ever modulates itself to a funereal dreariness of tone, though the subject it is exercised upon be but to give orders for the making of a pudding in the kitchen, to bid the boys hang up their caps in the hall, or to call the girls to their sewing — "come in!" And in came Robert Moore.

Moore's habitual gravity, as well as his abstemiousness (for the case of spirit decanters is never ordered up when he pays an evening visit), has so far recommended him to Mrs. Yorke that she has not yet made him the subject of private animadversions with her husband; she has not yet found out that he is hampered by a secret intrigue which prevents him from marrying, or that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing — discoveries which she made at an early date after marriage concerning most of her husband's bachelor friends, and excluded them from her board accordingly; which part of her conduct, indeed, might be said to have its just and sensible as well as its harsh side.

"Well, is it you?" she says to Mr. Moore, as he comes up to her and gives his hand. "What are you roving about at this time of night for? You should be at home."

"Can a single man be said to have a home, madam?" he asks.

"Pooh!" says Mrs. Yorke, who despises conventional smoothness quite as much as her husband does, and practises it as little, and whose plain speaking on all occasions is carried to a point calculated, sometimes, to awaken admiration, but oftener alarm — “pooh! you need not talk nonsense to me; a single man can have a home if he likes. Pray, does not your sister make a home for you?”

“Not she,” joined in Mr. Yorke. “Hortense is an honest lass. But when I was Robert’s age I had five or six sisters, all as decent and proper as she is; but you see, Hesther, for all that it did not hinder me from looking out for a wife.”

“And sorely he has repented marrying me,” added Mrs. Yorke, who liked occasionally to crack a dry jest against matrimony, even though it should be at her own expense. “He has repented it in sackcloth and ashes, Robert Moore, as you may well believe when you see his punishment” (here she pointed to her children). “Who would burden themselves with such a set of great, rough lads as those, if they could help it? It is not only bringing them into the world, though that is bad enough, but they are all to feed, to clothe, to rear, to settle in life. Young sir, when you feel tempted to marry, think of our four sons and two daughters, and look twice before you leap.”

“I am not tempted now, at any rate. I think these are not times for marrying or giving in marriage.”

A lugubrious sentiment of this sort was sure to obtain Mrs. Yorke’s approbation. She nodded and groaned acquiescence; but in a minute she said, “I make little account of the wisdom of a Solomon of your age; it will be upset by the first fancy that crosses you. Meantime, sit down, sir. You can talk, I suppose, as well sitting as standing?”

This was her way of inviting her guest to take a chair. He had no sooner obeyed her than little Jessy jumped from her father’s knee and ran into Mr. Moore’s arms, which were very promptly held out to receive her.

“You talk of marrying him,” said she to her mother, quite indignantly, as she was lifted lightly to his knee, “and he is married now, or as good. He promised that I should be his wife last summer, the first time he saw me in my new white frock and blue sash. Didn’t he, father?” (These children were not accustomed to say papa and mamma; their mother would allow no such “namby-pamby.”)

“Ay, my little lassie, he promised; I’ll bear witness. But make him say it over again now, Jessy. Such as he are only false loons.”

“He is not false. He is too bonny to be false,” said Jessy, looking up to her tall sweetheart with the fullest confidence in his faith.

“Bonny!” cried Mr. Yorke. “That’s the reason that he should be, and proof that he is, a scoundrel.”

“But he looks too sorrowful to be false,” here interposed a quiet voice from behind the father’s chair. “If he was always laughing, I should think he forgot promises soon, but Mr. Moore never laughs.”

“Your sentimental buck is the greatest cheat of all, Rose,” remarked Mr. Yorke.

“He’s not sentimental,” said Rose.

Mr. Moore turned to her with a little surprise, smiling at the same time.

“How do you know I am not sentimental, Rose?”

“Because I heard a lady say you were not.”

“Voilà, qui devient intéressant!” exclaimed Mr. Yorke, hitching his chair nearer the fire. “A lady! That has quite a romantic twang. We must guess who it is. — Rosy, whisper the name low to your father. Don’t let *him* hear.”

“Rose, don’t be too forward to talk,” here interrupted Mrs. Yorke, in her usual kill-joy fashion, “nor Jessy either. It becomes all children, especially girls, to be silent in the presence of their elders.”

“Why have we tongues, then?” asked Jessy pertly; while Rose only looked at her mother with an expression that seemed to say she should take that maxim in and think it over at her leisure. After two minutes’ grave deliberation, she asked, “And why especially girls, mother?”

“Firstly, because I say so; and secondly, because discretion and reserve are a girl’s best wisdom.”

“My dear madam,” observed Moore, “what you say is excellent — it reminds me, indeed, of my dear sister’s observations; but really it is not applicable to these little ones. Let Rose and Jessy talk to me freely, or my chief pleasure in coming here is gone. I like their prattle; it does me good.”

“Does it not?” asked Jessy. “More good than if the rough lads came round you. — You call them rough, mother, yourself.”

“Yes, mignonne, a thousand times more good. I have rough lads enough about me all day long, poulet.”

“There are plenty of people,” continued she, “who take notice of the boys. All my uncles and aunts seem to think their nephews better than their nieces, and when gentlemen come here to dine, it is always Matthew, and Mark, and Martin that are talked to, and never Rose and me. Mr. Moore is *our* friend, and we’ll keep him. — But mind, Rose, he’s not so much your friend as he is mine. He is my *particular acquaintance*; remember that!” And she held up her small hand with an admonitory gesture.

Rose was quite accustomed to be admonished by that small hand. Her will daily bent itself to that of the impetuous little Jessy. She was guided, overruled by Jessy in a thousand things. On all occasions of show and pleasure Jessy took the lead, and Rose fell quietly into the background; whereas, when the disagreeables of life — its work and privations — were in question, Rose instinctively took upon her, in addition to her own share, what she could of her sister’s. Jessy had already settled it in her mind that she, when she was old enough, was to be married; Rose, she decided, must be an old maid, to live with her, look after her children, keep her house. This state of things is not uncommon between two sisters, where one is plain and the other pretty; but in this case, if there *was* a difference in external appearance, Rose had the advantage: her face was more regular-featured than that of the piquant little Jessy. Jessy, however, was destined to possess, along with sprightly intelligence and vivacious feeling, the gift of fascination, the power to charm when, where, and whom she would. Rose was to have a fine, generous soul, a noble intellect profoundly cultivated, a heart as true as steel, but the manner to attract was not to be hers.

"Now, Rose, tell me the name of this lady who denied that I was sentimental," urged Mr. Moore.

Rose had no idea of tantalization, or she would have held him a while in doubt. She answered briefly, "I can't. I don't know her name."

"Describe her to me. What was she like? Where did you see her?"

"When Jessy and I went to spend the day at Whinbury with Kate and Susan Pearson, who were just come home from school, there was a party at Mrs. Pearson's, and some grown-up ladies were sitting in a corner of the drawing-room talking about you."

"Did you know none of them?"

"Hannah, and Harriet, and Dora, and Mary Sykes."

"Good. Were they abusing me, Rosy?"

"Some of them were. They called you a misanthrope. I remember the word. I looked for it in the dictionary when I came home. It means a man-hater."

"What besides?"

"Hannah Sykes said you were a solemn puppy."

"Better!" cried Mr. Yorke, laughing. "Oh, excellent! Hannah! that's the one with the red hair — a fine girl, but half-witted."

"She has wit enough for me, it appears," said Moore. "A solemn puppy, indeed! Well, Rose, go on."

"Miss Pearson said she believed there was a good deal of affectation about you, and that with your dark hair and pale face you looked to her like some sort of a sentimental noodle."

Again Mr. Yorke laughed. Mrs. Yorke even joined in this time. "You see in what esteem you are held behind your back," said she; "yet I believe *that* Miss Pearson would like to catch you. She set her cap at you when you first came into the country, old as she is."

"And who contradicted her, Rosy?" inquired Moore.

"A lady whom I don't know, because she never visits here, though I see her every Sunday at church. She sits in the pew near the pulpit. I generally look at her, instead of looking at my prayer-book, for she is like a picture in our dining-room, that woman with the dove in her hand — at least she has eyes like it, and a nose too, a straight nose, that makes all her face look, somehow, what I call clear."

"And you don't know her!" exclaimed Jessy, in a tone of exceeding surprise. "That's so like Rose. Mr. Moore, I often wonder in what sort of a world my sister lives. I am sure she does not live all her time in this. One is continually finding out that she is quite ignorant of some little matter which everybody else knows. To think of her going solemnly to church every Sunday, and looking all service-time at one particular person, and never so much as asking that person's name. She means Caroline Helstone, the rector's niece. I remember all about it. Miss Helstone was quite angry with Anne Pearson. She said, 'Robert Moore is neither affected nor sentimental; you mistake his character utterly, or rather not one of you here knows anything about it.' Now, shall I tell you what she is like? I can tell what people are like, and how they are dressed, better than Rose can."

"Let us hear."

"She is nice; she is fair; she has a pretty white slender throat; she has long curls, not stiff ones — they hang loose and soft, their colour is brown but not dark; she speaks quietly, with a clear tone; she never makes a bustle in moving; she often wears a gray silk dress; she is neat all over — her gowns, and her shoes, and her gloves always fit her. She is what I call a lady, and when I am as tall as she is, I mean to be like her. Shall I suit you if I am? Will you really marry me?"

Moore stroked Jessy's hair. For a minute he seemed as if he would draw her nearer to him, but instead he put her a little farther off.

"Oh! you won't have me? You push me away."

"Why, Jessy, you care nothing about me. You never come to see me now at the Hollow."

"Because you don't ask me."

Hereupon Mr. Moore gave both the little girls an invitation to pay him a visit next day, promising that, as he was going to Stilbro' in the morning, he would buy them each a present, of what nature he would not then declare, but they must come and see. Jessy was about to reply, when one of the boys unexpectedly broke in, —

"I know that Miss Helstone you have all been palavering about. She's an ugly girl. I hate her. I hate all womenites. I wonder what they were made for."

"Martin!" said his father, for Martin it was. The lad only answered by turning his cynical young face, half-arch, half-truculent, towards the paternal chair. "Martin, my lad, thou'rt a swaggering whelp now; thou wilt some day be an outrageous puppy. But stick to those sentiments of thine. See, I'll write down the words now i' my pocket-book." (The senior took out a morocco-covered book, and deliberately wrote therein.) "Ten years hence, Martin, if thou and I be both alive at that day, I'll remind thee of that speech."

"I'll say the same then. I mean always to hate women. They're such dolls; they do nothing but dress themselves finely, and go swimming about to be admired. I'll never marry. I'll be a bachelor."

"Stick to it! stick to it! — Hesther" (addressing his wife), "I was like him when I was his age — a regular misogamist; and, behold! by the time I was three-and-twenty — being then a tourist in France and Italy, and the Lord knows where — I curled my hair every night before I went to bed, and wore a ring i' my ear, and would have worn one i' my nose if it had been the fashion, and all that I might make myself pleasing and charming to the ladies. Martin will do the like."

"Will I? Never! I've more sense. What a guy you were, father! As to dressing, I make this vow: I'll never dress more finely than as you see me at present. — Mr. Moore, I'm clad in blue cloth from top to toe, and they laugh at me, and call me sailor at the grammar-school. I laugh louder at them, and say they are all magpies and parrots, with their coats one colour, and their waistcoats another, and their trousers a third. I'll always wear blue cloth, and nothing but blue cloth. It is beneath a human being's dignity to dress himself in parti-coloured garments."

"Ten years hence, Martin, no tailor's shop will have choice of colours varied enough for thy exacting taste; no perfumer's stores essences exquisite enough for thy fastidious senses."

Martin looked disdain, but vouchsafed no further reply. Meantime Mark, who for some minutes had been rummaging amongst a pile of books on a side-table, took the word. He spoke in a peculiarly slow, quiet voice, and with an expression of still irony in his face not easy to describe.

"Mr. Moore," said he, "you think perhaps it was a compliment on Miss Caroline Helstone's part to say you were not sentimental. I thought you appeared confused when my sisters told you the words, as if you felt flattered. You turned red, just like a certain vain little lad at our school, who always thinks proper to blush when he gets a rise in the class. For your benefit, Mr. Moore, I've been looking up the word 'sentimental' in the dictionary, and I find it to mean 'tinctured with sentiment.' On examining further, 'sentiment' is explained to be thought, idea, notion. A sentimental man, then, is one who has thoughts, ideas, notions; an unsentimental man is one destitute of thought, idea, or notion."

And Mark stopped. He did not smile, he did not look round for admiration. He had said his say, and was silent.

"Ma foi! mon ami," observed Mr. Moore to Yorke, "ce sont vraiment des enfants terribles, que les vôtres!"

Rose, who had been listening attentively to Mark's speech, replied to him, "There are different kinds of thoughts, ideas, and notions," said she, "good and bad. Sentimental must refer to the bad, or Miss Helstone must have taken it in that sense, for she was not blaming Mr. Moore; she was defending him."

"That's my kind little advocate!" said Moore, taking Rose's hand.

"She was defending him," repeated Rose, "as I should have done had I been in her place, for the other ladies seemed to speak spitefully."

"Ladies always do speak spitefully," observed Martin. "It is the nature of womenites to be spiteful."

Matthew now, for the first time, opened his lips. "What a fool Martin is, to be always gabbling about what he does not understand!"

"It is my privilege, as a freeman, to gabble on whatever subject I like," responded Martin.

"You use it, or rather abuse it, to such an extent," rejoined the elder brother, "that you prove you ought to have been a slave."

"A slave! a slave! That to a Yorke, and from a Yorke! This fellow," he added, standing up at the table, and pointing across it to Matthew — "this fellow forgets, what every cottier in Briarfield knows, that all born of our house have that arched instep under which water can flow — proof that there has not been a slave of the blood for three hundred years."

"Mountebank!" said Matthew.

"Lads, be silent!" exclaimed Mr. Yorke. — "Martin, you are a mischief-maker. There would have been no disturbance but for you."

"Indeed! Is that correct? Did I begin, or did Matthew? Had I spoken to him when he accused me of gabbling like a fool?"

"A presumptuous fool!" repeated Matthew.

Here Mrs. Yorke commenced rocking herself — rather a portentous movement with her, as it was occasionally followed, especially when Matthew was worsted in a conflict, by a fit of hysterics.

"I don't see why I should bear insolence from Matthew Yorke, or what right he has to use bad language to me," observed Martin.

"He has no right, my lad; but forgive your brother until seventy-and-seven times," said Mr. Yorke soothingly.

"Always alike, and theory and practice always adverse!" murmured Martin as he turned to leave the room.

"Where art thou going, my son?" asked the father.

"Somewhere where I shall be safe from insult, if in this house I can find any such place."

Matthew laughed very insolently. Martin threw a strange look at him, and trembled through all his slight lad's frame; but he restrained himself.

"I suppose there is no objection to my withdrawing?" he inquired.

"No. Go, my lad; but remember not to bear malice."

Martin went, and Matthew sent another insolent laugh after him. Rose, lifting her fair head from Moore's shoulder, against which, for a moment, it had been resting, said, as she directed a steady gaze to Matthew, "Martin is grieved, and you are glad; but I would rather be Martin than you. I dislike your nature."

Here Mr. Moore, by way of averting, or at least escaping, a scene — which a sob from Mrs. Yorke warned him was likely to come on — rose, and putting Jessy off his knee, he kissed her and Rose, reminding them, at the same time, to be sure and come to the Hollow in good time to-morrow afternoon; then, having taken leave of his hostess, he said to Mr. Yorke, "May I speak a word with you?" and was followed by him from the room. Their brief conference took place in the hall.

"Have you employment for a good workman?" asked Moore.

"A nonsense question in these times, when you know that every master has many good workmen to whom he cannot give full employment."

"You must oblige me by taking on this man, if possible."

"My lad, I can take on no more hands to oblige all England."

"It does not signify; I must find him a place somewhere."

"Who is he?"

"William Farren."

"I know William. A right-down honest man is William."

"He has been out of work three months. He has a large family. We are sure they cannot live without wages. He was one of the deputation of cloth-dressers who came to me this morning to complain and threaten. William did not threaten. He only asked me to give them rather more time — to make my changes more slowly. You know I cannot do that: straitened on all sides as I am, I have nothing for it but to push on. I thought it would be idle to palaver long with them. I sent them away, after arresting a rascal amongst them, whom I hope to transport — a fellow who preaches at the chapel yonder sometimes."

"Not Moses Barraclough?"

"Yes."

"Ah! you've arrested him? Good! Then out of a scoundrel you're going to make a martyr. You've done a wise thing."

"I've done a right thing. Well, the short and the long of it is, I'm determined to get Farren a place, and I reckon on you to give him one."

"This is cool, however!" exclaimed Mr. Yorke. "What right have you to reckon on me to provide for your dismissed workmen? What do I know about your Farrens and your Williams? I've heard he's an honest man, but am I to support all the honest men in Yorkshire? You may say that would be no great charge to undertake; but great or little, I'll none of it."

"Come, Mr. Yorke, what can you find for him to do?"

"*I* find! You'll make me use language I'm not accustomed to use. I wish you would go home. Here is the door; set off."

Moore sat down on one of the hall chairs.

"You can't give him work in your mill — good; but you have land. Find him some occupation on your land, Mr. Yorke."

"Bob, I thought you cared nothing about our *lourdauds de paysans*. I don't understand this change."

"I do. The fellow spoke to me nothing but truth and sense. I answered him just as roughly as I did the rest, who jabbered mere gibberish. I couldn't make distinctions there and then. His appearance told what he had gone through lately clearer than his words; but where is the use of explaining? Let him have work."

"Let him have it yourself. If you are so very much in earnest, strain a point."

"If there was a point left in my affairs to strain, I would strain it till it cracked again; but I received letters this morning which showed me pretty clearly where I stand, and it is not far off the end of the plank. My foreign market, at any rate, is gorged. If there is no change — if there dawns no prospect of peace — if the Orders in Council are not, at least, suspended, so as to open our way in the West — I do not know where I am to turn. I see no more light than if I were sealed in a rock, so that for me to pretend to offer a man a livelihood would be to do a dishonest thing."

"Come, let us take a turn on the front. It is a starlight night," said Mr. Yorke.

They passed out, closing the front door after them, and side by side paced the frost-white pavement to and fro.

"Settle about Farren at once," urged Mr. Moore. "You have large fruit-gardens at Yorke Mills. He is a good gardener. Give him work there."

"Well, so be it. I'll send for him to-morrow, and we'll see. And now, my lad, you're concerned about the condition of your affairs?"

"Yes, a second failure — which I may delay, but which, at this moment, I see no way finally to avert — would blight the name of Moore completely; and you are aware I had fine intentions of paying off every debt and re-establishing the old firm on its former basis."

"You want capital — that's all you want."

"Yes; but you might as well say that breath is all a dead man wants to live."

"I know — I know capital is not to be had for the asking; and if you were a married man, and had a family, like me, I should think your case pretty nigh desperate; but the young and unencumbered have chances peculiar to themselves. I hear gossip now and then about your being on the eve of marriage with this miss and that; but I suppose it is none of it true?"

"You may well suppose that. I think I am not in a position to be dreaming of marriage. Marriage! I cannot bear the word; it sounds so silly and utopian. I have settled it decidedly that marriage and love are superfluities, intended only for the rich, who live at ease, and have no need to take thought for the morrow; or desperations — the last and reckless joy of the deeply wretched, who never hope to rise out of the slough of their utter poverty."

"I should not think so if I were circumstanced as you are. I should think I could very likely get a wife with a few thousands, who would suit both me and my affairs."

"I wonder where?"

"Would you try if you had a chance?"

"I don't know. It depends on — in short, it depends on many things."

"Would you take an old woman?"

"I'd rather break stones on the road."

"So would I. Would you take an ugly one?"

"Bah! I hate ugliness and delight in beauty. My eyes and heart, Yorke, take pleasure in a sweet, young, fair face, as they are repelled by a grim, rugged, meagre one. Soft delicate lines and hues please, harsh ones prejudice me. I won't have an ugly wife."

"Not if she were rich?"

"Not if she were dressed in gems. I could not love — I could not fancy —

I could not endure her. My taste must have satisfaction, or disgust would break out in despotism, or worse — freeze to utter iciness."

"What! Bob, if you married an honest, good-natured, and wealthy lass, though a little hard-favoured, couldn't you put up with the high cheek-bones, the rather wide mouth, and reddish hair?"

"I'll never try, I tell you. Grace at least I *will* have, and youth and symmetry — yes, and what I call beauty."

"And poverty, and a nursery full of bairns you can neither clothe nor feed, and very soon an anxious, faded mother; and then bankruptcy, discredit — a life-long struggle."

"Let me alone, Yorke."

"If you are romantic, Robert, and especially if you are already in love, it is of no use talking."

"I am not romantic. I am stripped of romance as bare as the white tenters in that field are of cloth."

"Always use such figures of speech, lad; I can understand them. And there is no love affair to disturb your judgment?"

"I thought I had said enough on that subject before. Love for me? Stuff!"

"Well, then, if you are sound both in heart and head, there is no reason why you should not profit by a good chance if it offers; therefore, wait and see."

"You are quite oracular, Yorke."

"I think I am a bit i' that line. I promise ye naught and I advise ye naught; but I bid ye keep your heart up, and be guided by circumstances."

"My namesake the physician's almanac could not speak more guardedly."

"In the meantime, I care naught about ye, Robert Moore: ye are nothing akin to me or mine, and whether ye lose or find a fortune it maks no difference to me. Go home, now. It has stricken ten. Miss Hortense will be wondering where ye are."

CHAPTER X.

OLD MAIDS.

Time wore on, and spring matured. The surface of England began to look pleasant: her fields grew green, her hills fresh, her gardens blooming; but at heart she was no better. Still her poor were wretched, still their employers were harassed. Commerce, in some of its branches, seemed threatened with paralysis, for the war continued; England's blood was shed and her wealth lavished — all, it seemed, to attain most inadequate ends. Some tidings there were indeed occasionally of successes in the Peninsula, but these came in slowly; long intervals occurred between, in which no note was heard but the insolent self-felicitations of Bonaparte on his continued triumphs. Those who suffered from the results of the war felt this tedious, and, as they thought, hopeless struggle against what their fears or their interests taught them to regard as an invincible power, most insufferable. They demanded peace on any terms. Men like Yorke and Moore — and there were thousands whom the war placed where it placed them, shuddering on the verge of bankruptcy — insisted on peace with the energy of desperation.

They held meetings, they made speeches, they got up petitions to extort this boon; on what terms it was made they cared not.

All men, taken singly, are more or less selfish; and taken in bodies, they are intensely so. The British merchant is no exception to this rule: the mercantile classes illustrate it strikingly. These classes certainly think too exclusively of making money; they are too oblivious of every national consideration but that of extending England's — that is, their own — commerce. Chivalrous feeling, disinterestedness, pride in honour, is too dead in their hearts. A land ruled by them alone would too often make ignominious submission — not at all from the motives Christ teaches, but rather from those Mammon instils. During the late war, the tradesmen of England would have endured buffets from the French on the right cheek and on the left; their cloak they would have given to Napoleon, and then have politely offered him their coat also, nor would they have withheld their waistcoat if urged; they would have prayed permission only to retain their one other garment, for the sake of the purse in its pocket. Not one spark of spirit, not one symptom of resistance, would they have shown till the hand of the Corsican bandit had grasped that beloved purse; *then*, perhaps, transfigured at once into British bulldogs, they would have sprung at the robber's throat, and there they would have fastened, and there hung, inveterate, insatiable, till the treasure had been restored. Tradesmen, when they speak against war, always profess to hate it because it is a bloody and barbarous proceeding. You would think, to hear them talk, that they are peculiarly civilized — especially gentle and kindly of disposition to their fellow-men. This is not the case. Many of them are extremely narrow and cold-hearted; have no good feeling for any class but their own; are distant, even hostile, to all others; call them useless; seem to question their right to exist; seem to grudge them the very air they breathe, and to think the circumstance of their eating, drinking, and living in decent houses quite unjustifiable. They do not know what others do in the way of helping, pleasing, or teaching their race; they will not trouble themselves to inquire. Whoever is not in trade is accused of eating the bread of idleness, of passing a useless existence. Long may it be ere England really becomes a nation of shop-keepers!

We have already said that Moore was no self-sacrificing patriot, and we have also explained what circumstances rendered him specially prone to confine his attention and efforts to the furtherance of his individual interest; accordingly, when he felt himself urged a second time to the brink of ruin, none struggled harder than he against the influences which would have thrust him over. What he *could* do towards stirring agitation in the north against the war he did, and he instigated others whose money and connections gave them more power than he possessed. Sometimes, by flashes, he felt there was little reason in the demands his party made on Government. When he heard of all Europe threatened by Bonaparte, and of all Europe arming to resist him; when he saw Russia menaced, and beheld Russia rising, incensed and stern, to defend her frozen soil, her wild provinces of serfs, her dark native despotism, from the tread, the yoke, the tyranny of a foreign victor — he knew that England, a free realm, could not *then* depute her sons to make concessions and propose terms to the unjust, grasping French leader. When news came from time to time of the movements of that man then representing England in the Peninsula, of his advance from success to success — that advance so deliberate but so unswerving, so circumspect but so certain, so "unhasting" but so "unresting;" when he read Lord Wellington's own dispatches in the columns of the newspapers, documents written by modesty to the dictation of truth — Moore confessed at heart that a power was with the troops of Britain, of that vigilant, enduring, genuine, unostentatious sort, which must win victory to the side it led, in the end. In the end! But that end, he thought, was yet far off; and meantime he, Moore, as an individual, would be crushed, his hopes ground to dust. It was himself he had to care for, his hopes he had to pursue; and he would fulfil his destiny.

He fulfilled it so vigorously that ere long he came to a decisive rupture with his old Tory friend the rector. They quarrelled at a public meeting, and afterwards exchanged some pungent letters in the newspapers. Mr. Helstone denounced Moore as a Jacobin, ceased to see him, would not even speak to him when they met. He intimated also to his niece, very distinctly, that her communications with Hollow's Cottage must for the present cease; she must give up taking French lessons. The language, he observed, was a bad and frivolous one at the best, and most of the works it boasted were bad and frivolous, highly injurious in their tendency to weak female minds. He wondered (he remarked parenthetically) what noodle first made it the fashion to teach women French. Nothing was more improper for them. It was like feeding a rickety child on chalk and water gruel. Caroline must give it up, and give up her cousins too. They were dangerous people.

Mr. Helstone quite expected opposition to this order; he expected tears. Seldom did he trouble himself about Caroline's movements, but a vague idea possessed him that she was fond of going to Hollow's Cottage; also he suspected that she liked Robert Moore's occasional presence at the rectory. The Cossack had perceived that whereas if Malone stepped in of an evening to make himself sociable and charming, by pinching the ears of an aged black cat, which usually shared with Miss Helstone's feet the accommodation of her footstool, or by borrowing a fowling-piece, and banging away at a tool shed door in the garden while enough of daylight remained to show that conspicuous mark, keeping the passage and sitting-room doors meantime uncomfortably open for the convenience of running in and out to announce his failures and successes with noisy *brusquerie* — he had observed that under such entertaining circumstances Caroline had a trick of disappearing, tripping noiselessly upstairs, and remaining invisible till called down to supper. On the other hand, when Robert Moore was the guest, though he elicited no vivacities from the cat, did nothing to it, indeed, beyond occasionally coaxing it from the stool to his knee, and there letting it purr, climb to his shoulder, and rub its head against his cheek; though there was no ear-splitting cracking off of firearms, no diffusion of sulphurous gunpowder perfume, no noise, no boasting during his stay — that still Caroline sat in the room, and seemed to find wondrous content in the stitching of Jew-basket pin-cushions and the knitting of missionary-basket socks.

She was very quiet, and Robert paid her little attention, scarcely ever addressing his discourse to her; but Mr. Helstone, not being one of those elderly gentlemen who are easily blinded — on the contrary, finding himself on all occasions extremely wide-awake — had watched them when they bade each other good-night. He had just seen their eyes meet once — only once. Some natures would have taken pleasure in the glance then surprised, because there was no harm and some delight in it. It was by no means a glance of mutual intelligence, for mutual love secrets existed not between them. There was nothing then of craft and concealment to offend: only Mr. Moore's eyes, looking into Caroline's, felt they were clear and gentle; and Caroline's eyes, encountering Mr. Moore's, confessed they were manly and searching. Each acknowledged the charm in his or her own way. Moore smiled slightly, and Caroline coloured as slightly. Mr. Helstone could, on the spot, have rated them both. They annoyed him. Why? Impossible to say. If you had asked him what Moore merited at that moment, he would have said a "horsewhip;" if you had inquired into Caroline’s deserts, he would have adjudged her a box on the ear; if you had further demanded the reason of such chastisements, he would have stormed against flirtation and love-making, and vowed he would have no such folly going on under his roof.

These private considerations, combined with political reasons, fixed his resolution of separating the cousins. He announced his will to Caroline one evening as she was sitting at work near the drawing-room window. Her face was turned towards him, and the light fell full upon it. It had struck him a few minutes before that she was looking paler and quieter than she used to look. It had not escaped him either that Robert Moore’s name had never, for some three weeks past, dropped from her lips; nor during the same space of time had that personage made his appearance at the rectory. Some suspicion of clandestine meetings haunted his mind. Having but an indifferent opinion of women, he always suspected them. He thought they needed constant watching. It was in a tone dryly significant he desired her to cease her daily visits to the Hollow. He expected a start, a look of depreciation. The start he saw, but it was a very slight one; no look whatever was directed to him.

“Do you hear me?” he asked.

“Yes, uncle.”

“Of course you mean to attend to what I say?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“And there must be no letter-scribbling to your cousin Hortense — no intercourse whatever. I do not approve of the principles of the family. They are Jacobinical.”

“Very well,” said Caroline quietly. She acquiesced then. There was no vexed flushing of the face, no gathering tears; the shadowy thoughtfulness which had covered her features ere Mr. Helstone spoke remained undisturbed; she was obedient.

Yes, perfectly; because the mandate coincided with her own previous judgment; because it was now become pain to her to go to Hollow’s Cottage; nothing met her there but disappointment. Hope and love had quitted that little tenement, for Robert seemed to have deserted its precincts. Whenever she asked after him — which she very seldom did, since the mere utterance of his name made her face grow hot — the answer was, he was from home, or he was quite taken up with business. Hortense feared he was killing himself by application. He scarcely ever took a meal in the house; he lived in the counting-house.

At church only Caroline had the chance of seeing him, and there she rarely looked at him. It was both too much pain and too much pleasure to look — it excited too much emotion; and that it was all wasted emotion she had learned well to comprehend.

Once, on a dark, wet Sunday, when there were few people at church, and when especially certain ladies were absent, of whose observant faculties and tomahawk tongues Caroline stood in awe, she had allowed her eye to seek

Robert's pew, and to rest awhile on its occupant. He was there alone. Hortense had been kept at home by prudent considerations relative to the rain and a new spring *chapeau*. During the sermon he sat with folded arms and eyes cast down, looking very sad and abstracted. When depressed, the very hue of his face seemed more dusk than when he smiled, and to-day cheek and forehead wore their most tintless and sober olive. By instinct Caroline knew, as she examined that clouded countenance, that his thoughts were running in no familiar or kindly channel; that they were far away, not merely from her, but from all which she could comprehend, or in which she could sympathize. Nothing that they had ever talked of together was now in his mind: he was wrapt from her by interests and responsibilities in which it was deemed such as she could have no part.

Caroline meditated in her own way on the subject; speculated on his feelings, on his life, on his fears, on his fate; mused over the mystery of "business," tried to comprehend more about it than had ever been told her — to understand its perplexities, liabilities, duties, exactions; endeavoured to realize the state of mind of a "man of business," to enter into it, feel what he would feel, aspire to what he would aspire. Her earnest wish was to see things as they were, and not to be romantic. By dint of effort she contrived to get a glimpse of the light of truth here and there, and hoped that scant ray might suffice to guide her.

"Different, indeed," she concluded, "is Robert's mental condition to mine. I think only of him; he has no room, no leisure, to think of me. The feeling called love is and has been for two years the predominant emotion of my heart — always there, always awake, always astir. Quite other feelings absorb his reflections and govern his faculties. He is rising now, going to leave the church, for service is over. Will he turn his head towards this pew? No, not once. He has not one look for me. That is hard. A kind glance would have made me happy till to-morrow. I have not got it; he would not give it; he is gone. Strange that grief should now almost choke me, because another human being's eye has failed to greet mine."

That Sunday evening, Mr. Malone coming, as usual, to pass it with his rector, Caroline withdrew after tea to her chamber. Fanny, knowing her habits, had lit her a cheerful little fire, as the weather was so gusty and chill. Closeted there, silent and solitary, what could she do but think? She noiselessly paced to and fro the carpeted floor, her head drooped, her hands folded. It was irksome to sit; the current of reflection ran rapidly through her mind; to-night she was mutely excited.

Mute was the room, mute the house. The double door of the study muffled the voices of the gentlemen. The servants were quiet in the kitchen, engaged with books their young mistress had lent them — books which she had told them were "fit for Sunday reading." And she herself had another of the same sort open on the table, but she could not read it. Its theology was incomprehensible to her, and her own mind was too busy, teeming, wandering, to listen to the language of another mind.

Then, too, her imagination was full of pictures — images of Moore, scenes where he and she had been together; winter fireside sketches; a glowing landscape of a hot summer afternoon passed with him in the bosom of Nunnely Wood; divine vignettes of mild spring or mellow autumn moments, when she had sat at his side in Hollow's Copse, listening to the call of the May cuckoo, or sharing the September treasure of nuts and ripe blackberries — a wild dessert which it was her morning's pleasure to collect in a little basket, and cover with green leaves and fresh blossoms, and her afternoon's delight to administer to Moore, berry by berry, and nut by nut, like a bird feeding its fledgling.

Robert's features and form were with her; the sound of his voice was quite distinct in her ear; his few caresses seemed renewed. But these joys, being hollow, were, ere long, crushed in. The pictures faded, the voice failed, the visionary clasp melted chill from her hand, and where the warm seal of lips had made impress on her forehead, it felt now as if a sleety rain-drop had fallen. She returned from an enchanted region to the real world: for Nunnely Wood in June she saw her narrow chamber; for the songs of birds in alleys she heard the rain on her casement; for the sigh of the south wind came the sob of the mournful east; and for Moore's manly companionship she had the thin illusion of her own dim shadow on the wall. Turning from the pale phantom which reflected herself in its outline, and her reverie in the drooped attitude of its dim head and colourless tresses, she sat down — inaction would suit the frame of mind into which she was now declining — she said to herself, "I have to live, perhaps, till seventy years. As far as I know, I have good health; half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads between me and the grave?"

She reflected.

"I shall not be married, it appears," she continued. "I suppose, as Robert does not care for me, I shall never have a husband to love, nor little children to take care of. Till lately I had reckoned securely on the duties and affections of wife and mother to occupy my existence. I considered, somehow, as a matter of course, that I was growing up to the ordinary destiny, and never troubled myself to seek any other; but now I perceive plainly I may have been mistaken. Probably I shall be an old maid. I shall live to see Robert married to some one else, some rich lady. I shall never marry. What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?"

She mused again.

"Ah! I see," she pursued presently; "that is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve. Other people solve it for them by saying, 'Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted.' That is right in some measure, and a very convenient doctrine for the people who hold it; but I perceive that certain sets of human beings are very apt to maintain that other sets should give up their lives to them and their service, and then they requite them by praise; they call them devoted and virtuous. Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. Undue humility makes tyranny; weak concession creates selfishness. The Romish religion especially teaches renunciation of self, submission to others, and nowhere are found so many grasping tyrants as in the ranks of the Romish priesthood. Each human being has his share of rights. I suspect it would conduce to the happiness and welfare of all if each knew his allotment, and held to it as tenaciously as the martyr to his creed. Queer thoughts these that surge in my mind. Are they right thoughts? I am not certain.

"Well, life is short at the best. Seventy years, they say, pass like a vapour, like a dream when one awaketh; and every path trod by human feet terminates in one bourne — the grave, the little chink in the surface of this great globe, the furrow where the mighty husbandman with the scythe deposits the seed he has shaken from the ripe stem; and there it falls, decays, and thence it springs again, when the world has rolled round a few times more. So much for the body. The soul meantime wings its long flight upward, folds its wings on the brink of the sea of fire and glass, and gazing down through the burning clearness, finds there mirrored the vision of the Christian's triple Godhead — the sovereign Father, the mediating Son, the Creator Spirit. Such words, at least, have been chosen to express what is inexpressible, to describe what baffles description. The soul's real hereafter who shall guess?"

Her fire was decayed to its last cinder; Malone had departed; and now the study bell rang for prayers.

The next day Caroline had to spend altogether alone, her uncle being gone to dine with his friend Dr. Boultby, vicar of Whinbury. The whole time she was talking inwardly in the same strain — looking forwards, asking what she was to do with life. Fanny, as she passed in and out of the room occasionally, intent on housemaid errands, perceived that her young mistress sat very still. She was always in the same place, always bent industriously over a piece of work. She did not lift her head to speak to Fanny, as her custom was; and when the latter remarked that the day was fine, and she ought to take a walk, she only said, "It is cold."

"You are very diligent at that sewing, Miss Caroline," continued the girl, approaching her little table.

"I am tired of it, Fanny."

"Then why do you go on with it? Put it down. Read, or do something to amuse you."

"It is solitary in this house, Fanny. Don't you think so?"

"I don't find it so, miss. Me and Eliza are company for one another; but you are quite too still. You should visit more. Now, be persuaded: go upstairs and dress yourself smart, and go and take tea, in a friendly way, with Miss Mann or Miss Ainley. I am certain either of those ladies would be delighted to see you."

"But their houses are dismal: they are both old maids. I am certain old maids are a very unhappy race."

"Not they, miss. They can't be unhappy; they take such care of themselves. They are all selfish."

"Miss Ainley is not selfish, Fanny. She is always doing good. How devotedly kind she was to her step-mother as long as the old lady lived; and now when she is quite alone in the world, without brother or sister, or any one to care for her, how charitable she is to the poor, as far as her means permit! Still nobody thinks much of her, or has pleasure in going to see her; and how gentlemen always sneer at her!"

"They shouldn't, miss. I believe she is a good woman. But gentlemen think only of ladies' looks."

"I'll go and see her," exclaimed Caroline, starting up; "and if she asks me to stay to tea, I'll stay. How wrong it is to neglect people because they are not pretty, and young, and merry! And I will certainly call to see Miss Mann too. She may not be amiable, but what has made her unamiable? What has life been to her?"

Fanny helped Miss Helstone to put away her work, and afterwards assisted her to dress.

"*You*'ll not be an old maid, Miss Caroline," she said, as she tied the sash of her brown silk frock, having previously smoothed her soft, full, and shining curls; "there are no signs of an old maid about you."

Caroline looked at the little mirror before her, and she thought there were some signs. She could see that she was altered within the last month; that the hues of her complexion were paler, her eyes changed — a wan shade seemed to circle them; her countenance was dejected — she was not, in short, so pretty or so fresh as she used to be. She distantly hinted this to Fanny, from whom she got no direct answer, only a remark that people did vary in their looks, but that at her age a little falling away signified nothing; she would soon come round again, and be plumper and rosier than ever. Having given this assurance, Fanny showed singular zeal in wrapping her up in warm shawls and handkerchiefs, till Caroline, nearly smothered with the weight, was fain to resist further additions.

She paid her visits — first to Miss Mann, for this was the most difficult point. Miss Mann was certainly not quite a lovable person. Till now, Caroline had always unhesitatingly declared she disliked her, and more than once she had joined her cousin Robert in laughing at some of her peculiarities. Moore was not habitually given to sarcasm, especially on anything humbler or weaker than himself; but he had once or twice happened to be in the room when Miss Mann had made a call on his sister, and after listening to her conversation and viewing her features for a time, he had gone out into the garden where his little cousin was tending some of his favourite flowers, and while standing near and watching her he had amused himself with comparing fair youth, delicate and attractive, with shrivelled eld, livid and loveless, and in jestingly repeating to a smiling girl the vinegar discourse of a cankered old maid. Once on such an occasion Caroline had said to him, looking up from the luxuriant creeper she was binding to its frame, "Ah! Robert, you do not like old maids. I, too, should come under the lash of your sarcasm if I were an old maid."

"You an old maid!" he had replied. "A piquant notion suggested by lips of that tint and form. I can fancy you, though, at forty, quietly dressed, pale and sunk, but still with that straight nose, white forehead, and those soft eyes. I suppose, too, you will keep your voice, which has another 'timbre' than that hard, deep organ of Miss Mann's. Courage, Cary! Even at fifty you will not be repulsive."

"Miss Mann did not make herself, or tune her voice, Robert."

"Nature made her in the mood in which she makes her briars and thorns; whereas for the creation of some women she reserves the May morning hours, when with light and dew she wooes the primrose from the turf and the lily from the wood-moss."

Ushered into Miss Mann's little parlour, Caroline found her, as she always found her, surrounded by perfect neatness, cleanliness, and comfort (after all, is it not a virtue in old maids that solitude rarely makes them negligent or disorderly?) — no dust on her polished furniture, none on her carpet, fresh flowers in the vase on her table, a bright fire in the grate. She herself sat primly and somewhat grimly-tidy in a cushioned rocking-chair, her hands busied with some knitting. This was her favourite work, as it required the least exertion. She scarcely rose as Caroline entered. To avoid excitement was one of Miss Mann's aims in life. She had been composing herself ever since she came down in the morning, and had just attained a certain lethargic state of tranquillity when the visitor's knock at the door startled her, and undid her day's work. She was scarcely pleased, therefore, to see Miss Helstone. She received her with reserve, bade her be seated with austerity, and when she got her placed opposite, she fixed her with her eye.

This was no ordinary doom — to be fixed with Miss Mann's eye. Robert Moore had undergone it once, and had never forgotten the circumstance.

He considered it quite equal to anything Medusa could do. He professed to doubt whether, since that infliction, his flesh had been quite what it was before — whether there was not something stony in its texture. The gaze had had such an effect on him as to drive him promptly from the apartment and house; it had even sent him straightway up to the rectory, where he had appeared in Caroline's presence with a very queer face, and amazed her by demanding a cousinly salute on the spot, to rectify a damage that had been done him.

Certainly Miss Mann had a formidable eye for one of the softer sex. It was prominent, and showed a great deal of the white, and looked as steadily, as unwinkingly, at you as if it were a steel ball soldered in her head; and when, while looking, she began to talk in an indescribably dry, monotonous tone — a tone without vibration or inflection — you felt as if a graven image of some bad spirit were addressing you. But it was all a figment of fancy, a matter of surface. Miss Mann's goblin grimness scarcely went deeper than the angel sweetness of hundreds of beauties. She was a perfectly honest, conscientious woman, who had performed duties in her day from whose severe anguish many a human Peri, gazelle-eyed, silken-tressed, and silver-tongued, would have shrunk appalled. She had passed alone through protracted scenes of suffering, exercised rigid self-denial, made large sacrifices of time, money, health for those who had repaid her only by ingratitude, and now her main — almost her sole — fault was that she was censorious.

Censorious she certainly was. Caroline had not sat five minutes ere her hostess, still keeping her under the spell of that dread and Gorgon gaze, began flaying alive certain of the families in the neighbourhood. She went to work at this business in a singularly cool, deliberate manner, like some surgeon practising with his scalpel on a lifeless subject. She made few distinctions; she allowed scarcely any one to be good; she dissected impartially almost all her acquaintance. If her auditress ventured now and then to put in a palliative word she set it aside with a certain disdain. Still, though thus pitiless in moral anatomy, she was no scandal-monger. She never disseminated really malignant or dangerous reports. It was not her heart so much as her temper that was wrong.

Caroline made this discovery for the first time to-day, and moved thereby to regret divers unjust judgments she had more than once passed on the crabbed old maid, she began to talk to her softly, not in sympathizing words, but with a sympathizing voice. The loneliness of her condition struck her visitor in a new light, as did also the character of her ugliness — a bloodless pallor of complexion, and deeply worn lines of feature. The girl pitied the solitary and afflicted woman; her looks told what she felt. A sweet countenance is never so sweet as when the moved heart animates it with compassionate tenderness. Miss Mann, seeing such a countenance raised to her, was touched in her turn. She acknowledged her sense of the interest thus unexpectedly shown in her, who usually met with only coldness and ridicule, by replying to her candidly. Communicative on her own affairs she usually was not, because no one cared to listen to her; but to-day she became so, and her confidante shed tears as she heard her speak, for she told of cruel, slow-wasting, obstinate sufferings. Well might she be corpse-like; well might she look grim, and never smile; well might she wish to avoid excitement, to gain and retain composure! Caroline, when she knew all, acknowledged that Miss Mann was rather to be admired for fortitude than blamed for moroseness.

Reader! when you behold an aspect for whose constant gloom and frown you cannot account, whose unvarying cloud exasperates you by its apparent causelessness, be sure that there is a canker somewhere, and a canker not the less deeply corroding because concealed.

Miss Mann felt that she was understood partly, and wished to be understood further; for, however old, plain, humble, desolate, afflicted we may be, so long as our hearts preserve the feeblest spark of life, they preserve also, shivering near that pale ember, a starved, ghostly longing for appreciation and affection. To this extenuated spectre, perhaps, a crumb is not thrown once a year, but when ahungered and athirst to famine — when all humanity has forgotten the dying tenant of a decaying house — Divine mercy remembers the mourner, and a shower of manna falls for lips that earthly nutriment is to pass no more. Biblical promises, heard first in health, but then unheeded, come whispering to the couch of sickness; it is felt that a pitying God watches what all mankind have forsaken. The tender compassion of Jesus is recalled and relied on; the faded eye, gazing beyond time, sees a home, a friend, a refuge in eternity.

Miss Mann, drawn on by the still attention of her listener, proceeded to allude to circumstances in her past life. She spoke like one who tells the truth — simply, and with a certain reserve; she did not boast, nor did she exaggerate. Caroline found that the old maid had been a most devoted daughter and sister, an unwearied watcher by lingering deathbeds; that to prolonged and unrelaxing attendance on the sick the malady that now poisoned her own life owed its origin; that to one wretched relative she had been a support and succour in the depths of self-earned degradation, and that it was still her hand which kept him from utter destitution. Miss Helstone stayed the whole evening, omitting to pay her other intended visit; and when she left Miss Mann it was with the determination to try in future to excuse her faults; never again to make light of her peculiarities or to laugh at her plainness; and, above all things, not to neglect her, but to come once a week, and to offer her, from one human heart at least, the homage of affection and respect. She felt she could now sincerely give her a small tribute of each feeling.

Caroline, on her return, told Fanny she was very glad she had gone out, as she felt much better for the visit. The next day she failed not to seek Miss Ainley. This lady was in narrower circumstances than Miss Mann, and her dwelling was more humble. It was, however, if possible, yet more exquisitely clean, though the decayed gentlewoman could not afford to keep a servant, but waited on herself, and had only the occasional assistance of a little girl who lived in a cottage near.

Not only was Miss Ainley poorer, but she was even plainer than the other old maid. In her first youth she must have been ugly; now, at the age of fifty, she was *very* ugly. At first sight, all but peculiarly well-disciplined minds were apt to turn from her with annoyance, to conceive against her a prejudice, simply on the ground of her unattractive look. Then she was prim in dress and manner; she looked, spoke, and moved the complete old maid.

Her welcome to Caroline was formal, even in its kindness — for it was kind; but Miss Helstone excused this. She knew something of the benevolence of the heart which beat under that starched kerchief; all the neighbourhood — at least all the female neighbourhood — knew something of it. No one spoke against Miss Ainley except lively young gentlemen and inconsiderate old ones, who declared her hideous.

Caroline was soon at home in that tiny parlour. A kind hand took from her her shawl and bonnet, and installed her in the most comfortable seat near the fire. The young and the antiquated woman were presently deep in kindly conversation, and soon Caroline became aware of the power a most serene, unselfish, and benignant mind could exercise over those to whom it was developed. She talked never of herself, always of others. Their faults she passed over. Her theme was their wants, which she sought to supply; their sufferings, which she longed to alleviate. She was religious, a professor of religion — what some would call "a saint;" and she referred to religion often in sanctioned phrase — in phrase which those who possess a perception of the ridiculous, without owning the power of exactly testing and truly judging character, would certainly have esteemed a proper subject for satire, a matter for mimicry and laughter. They would have been hugely mistaken for their pains. Sincerity is never ludicrous; it is always respectable. Whether truth — be it religious or moral truth — speak eloquently and in well-chosen language or not, its voice should be heard with reverence. Let those who cannot nicely, and with certainty, discern the difference between the tones of hypocrisy and those of sincerity, never presume to laugh at all, lest they should have the miserable misfortune to laugh in the wrong place, and commit impiety when they think they are achieving wit.

Not from Miss Ainley's own lips did Caroline hear of her good works, but she knew much of them nevertheless. Her beneficence was the familiar topic of the poor in Briarfield. They were not works of almsgiving. The old maid was too poor to give much, though she straitened herself to privation that she might contribute her mite when needful. They were the works of a Sister of Charity — far more difficult to perform than those of a Lady Bountiful. She would watch by any sick-bed; she seemed to fear no disease. She would nurse the poorest whom none else would nurse. She was serene, humble, kind, and equable through everything.

For this goodness she got but little reward in this life. Many of the poor became so accustomed to her services that they hardly thanked her for them. The rich heard them mentioned with wonder, but were silent, from a sense of shame at the difference between her sacrifices and their own. Many ladies, however, respected her deeply. They could not help it. One gentleman — one only — gave her his friendship and perfect confidence. This was Mr. Hall, the vicar of Nunnely. He said, and said truly, that her life came nearer the life of

Christ than that of any other human being he had ever met with. You must not think, reader, that ill sketching Miss Ainley's character I depict a figment of imagination. No. We seek the originals of such portraits in real life only.

Miss Helstone studied well the mind and heart now revealed to her. She found no high intellect to admire — the old maid was merely sensible — but she discovered so much goodness, so much usefulness, so much mildness, patience, truth, that she bent her own mind before Miss Ainley's in reverence. What was her love of nature, what was her sense of beauty, what were her more varied and fervent emotions, what was her deeper power of thought, what her wider capacity to comprehend, compared to the practical excellence of this good woman? Momently, they seemed only beautiful forms of selfish delight; mentally, she trod them under foot.

It is true she still felt with pain that the life which made Miss Ainley happy could not make her happy. Pure and active as it was, in her heart she deemed it deeply dreary, because it was so loveless — to her ideas, so forlorn. Yet, doubtless, she reflected, it needed only habit to make it practicable and agreeable to any one. It was despicable, she felt, to pine sentimentally, to cherish secret griefs, vain memories, to be inert, to waste youth in aching languor, to grow old doing nothing.

"I will bestir myself," was her resolution, "and try to be wise if I cannot be good."

She proceeded to make inquiry of Miss Ainley if she could help her in anything. Miss Ainley, glad of an assistant, told her that she could, and indicated some poor families in Briarfield that it was desirable she should visit, giving her likewise, at her further request, some work to do for certain poor women who had many children, and who were unskilled in using the needle for themselves.

Caroline went home, laid her plans, and took a resolve not to swerve from them. She allotted a certain portion of her time for her various studies, and a certain portion for doing anything Miss Ainley might direct her to do. The remainder was to be spent in exercise; not a moment was to be left for the indulgence of such fevered thoughts as had poisoned last Sunday evening.

To do her justice, she executed her plans conscientiously, perseveringly. It was very hard work at first — it was even hard work to the end — but it helped her to stem and keep down anguish; it forced her to be employed; it forbade her to brood; and gleams of satisfaction chequered her gray life here and there when she found she had done good, imparted pleasure, or allayed suffering.

Yet I must speak truth. These efforts brought her neither health of body nor continued peace of mind. With them all she wasted, grew more joyless and more wan; with them all her memory kept harping on the name of Robert Moore; an elegy over the past still rung constantly in her ear; a funereal inward cry haunted and harassed her; the heaviness of a broken spirit, and of pining and palsying faculties, settled slow on her buoyant youth. Winter seemed conquering her spring; the mind’s soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation.

CHAPTER XI.

FIELDHEAD.

Yet Caroline refused tamely to succumb. She had native strength in her girl's heart, and she used it. Men and women never struggle so hard as when they struggle alone, without witness, counsellor, or confidant, unencouraged, unadvised, and unpitied.

Miss Helstone was in this position. Her sufferings were her only spur, and being very real and sharp, they roused her spirit keenly. Bent on victory over a mortal pain, she did her best to quell it. Never had she been seen so busy, so studious, and, above all, so active. She took walks in all weathers, long walks in solitary directions. Day by day she came back in the evening, pale and wearied-looking, yet seemingly not fatigued; for still, as soon as she had thrown off her bonnet and shawl, she would, instead of resting, begin to pace her apartment. Sometimes she would not sit down till she was literally faint. She said she did this to tire herself well, that she might sleep soundly at night. But if that was her aim it was unattained; for at night, when others slumbered, she was tossing on her pillow, or sitting at the foot of her couch in the darkness, forgetful, apparently, of the necessity of seeking repose. Often, unhappy girl! she was crying — crying in a sort of intolerable despair, which, when it rushed over her, smote down her strength, and reduced her to childlike helplessness.

When thus prostrate, temptations besieged her. Weak suggestions whispered in her weary heart to write to Robert, and say that she was unhappy because she was forbidden to see him and Hortense, and that she feared he would withdraw his friendship (not love) from her, and forget her entirely, and begging him to remember her, and sometimes to write to her. One or two such letters she actually indited, but she never sent them: shame and good sense forbade.

At last the life she led reached the point when it seemed she could bear it no longer, that she must seek and find a change somehow, or her heart and head would fail under the pressure which strained them. She longed to leave Briarfield, to go to some very distant place. She longed for something else — the deep, secret, anxious yearning to discover and know her mother strengthened daily; but with the desire was coupled a doubt, a dread — if she knew her, could she love her? There was cause for hesitation, for apprehension on this point. Never in her life had she heard that mother praised; whoever mentioned her mentioned her coolly. Her uncle seemed to regard his sister-in-law with a sort of tacit antipathy; an old servant, who had lived with Mrs. James Helstone for a short time after her marriage, whenever she referred to her former mistress, spoke with chilling reserve — sometimes she called her "queer," sometimes she said she did not understand her. These expressions were ice to the daughter's heart; they suggested the conclusion that it was perhaps better never to know her parent than to know her and not like her.

But one project could she frame whose execution seemed likely to bring her a hope of relief: it was to take a situation, to be a governess; she could do nothing else. A little incident brought her to the point, when she found courage to break her design to her uncle.

Her long and late walks lay always, as has been said, on lonely roads; but in whatever direction she had rambled — whether along the drear skirts of Stilbro' Moor or over the sunny stretch of Nunnely Common — her homeward path was still so contrived as to lead her near the Hollow. She rarely descended the den, but she visited its brink at twilight almost as regularly as the stars rose over the hillcrests. Her resting-place was at a certain stile under a certain old thorn. Thence she could look down on the cottage, the mill, the dewy garden-ground, the still, deep dam; thence was visible the well-known counting-house window, from whose panes at a fixed hour shot, suddenly bright, the ray of the well-known lamp. Her errand was to watch for this ray, her reward to catch it, sometimes sparkling bright in clear air, sometimes shimmering dim through mist, and anon flashing broken between slant lines of rain — for she came in all weathers.

There were nights when it failed to appear. She knew then that Robert was from home, and went away doubly sad; whereas its kindling rendered her elate, as though she saw in it the promise of some indefinite hope. If, while she gazed, a shadow bent between the light and lattice, her heart leaped. That eclipse was Robert; she had seen him. She would return home comforted, carrying in her mind a clearer vision of his aspect, a distincter recollection of his voice, his smile, his bearing; and blent with these impressions was often a sweet persuasion that, if she could get near him, his heart might welcome her presence yet, that at this moment he might be willing to extend his hand and draw her to him, and shelter her at his side as he used to do. That night, though she might weep as usual, she would fancy her tears less scalding; the pillow they watered seemed a little softer; the temples pressed to that pillow ached less.

The shortest path from the Hollow to the rectory wound near a certain mansion, the same under whose lone walls Malone passed on that night-journey mentioned in an early chapter of this work — the old and tenantless dwelling yclept Fieldhead. Tenantless by the proprietor it had been for ten years, but it was no ruin. Mr. Yorke had seen it kept in good repair, and an old gardener and his wife had lived in it, cultivated the grounds, and maintained the house in habitable condition.

If Fieldhead had few other merits as a building, it might at least be termed picturesque. Its regular architecture, and the gray and mossy colouring communicated by time, gave it a just claim to this epithet. The old latticed windows, the stone porch, the walls, the roof, the chimney-stacks, were rich in crayon touches and sepia lights and shades. The trees behind were fine, bold, and spreading; the cedar on the lawn in front was grand; and the granite urns on the garden wall, the fretted arch of the gateway, were, for an artist, as the very desire of the eye.

One mild May evening Caroline, passing near about moonrise, and feeling, though weary, unwilling yet to go home, where there was only the bed of thorns and the night of grief to anticipate, sat down on the mossy ground near the gate, and gazed through towards cedar and mansion. It was a still night — calm, dewy, cloudless; the gables, turned to the west, reflected the clear amber of the horizon they faced; the oaks behind were black; the cedar was blacker. Under its dense, raven boughs a glimpse of sky opened gravely blue. It was full of the moon, which looked solemnly and mildly down on Caroline from beneath that sombre canopy.

She felt this night and prospect mournfully lovely. She wished she could be happy; she wished she could know inward peace; she wondered Providence had no pity on her, and would not help or console her. Recollections of happy trysts of lovers, commemorated in old ballads, returned on her mind; she thought such tryst in such scene would be blissful. Where now was Robert? she asked. Not at the Hollow; she had watched for his lamp long, and had not seen it. She questioned within herself whether she and Moore were ever destined to meet and speak again. Suddenly the door within the stone porch of the hall opened, and two men came out — one elderly and white-headed, the other young, dark-haired, and tall. They passed across the lawn, out through a portal in the garden wall. Caroline saw them cross the road, pass the stile, descend the fields; she saw them disappear. Robert Moore had passed before her with his friend Mr. Yorke. Neither had seen her.

The apparition had been transient — scarce seen ere gone; but its electric passage left her veins kindled, her soul insurgent. It found her despairing, it left her desperate — two different states.

“Oh, had he but been alone! had he but seen me!” was her cry. “He would have said something. He would have given me his hand. He *does*, he *must*, love me a little. He would have shown some token of affection. In his eye, on his lips, I should have read comfort; but the chance is lost. The wind, the cloud’s shadow, does not pass more silently, more emptily than he. I have been mocked, and Heaven is cruel!”

Thus, in the utter sickness of longing and disappointment, she went home.

The next morning at breakfast, where she appeared white-cheeked and miserable-looking as one who had seen a ghost, she inquired of Mr. Helstone, “Have you any objection, uncle, to my inquiring for a situation in a family?”

Her uncle, ignorant as the table supporting his coffee-cup of all his niece had undergone and was undergoing, scarcely believed his ears.

"What whim now?" he asked. "Are you bewitched? What can you mean?"

"I am not well, and need a change," she said.

He examined her. He discovered she had *experienced* a change, at any rate. Without his being aware of it, the rose had dwindled and faded to a mere snowdrop; bloom had vanished, flesh wasted; she sat before him drooping, colourless, and thin. But for the soft expression of her brown eyes, the delicate lines of her features, and the flowing abundance of her hair, she would no longer have possessed a claim to the epithet pretty.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" he asked. "What is wrong? How are you ailing?"

No answer; only the brown eyes filled, the faintly-tinted lips trembled.

"Look out for a situation, indeed! For what situation are you fit? What have you been doing with yourself? You are not well."

"I should be well if I went from home."

"These women are incomprehensible. They have the strangest knack of startling you with unpleasant surprises. To-day you see them bouncing, buxom, red as cherries, and round as apples; to-morrow they exhibit themselves effete as dead weeds, blanched and broken down. And the reason of it all? That's the puzzle. She has her meals, her liberty, a good house to live in, and good clothes to wear, as usual. A while since that sufficed to keep her handsome and cheery, and there she sits now a poor, little, pale, puling chit enough. Provoking! Then comes the question, What is to be done? I suppose I must send for advice. Will you have a doctor, child?"

"No, uncle, I don't want one. A doctor could do me no good. I merely want change of air and scene."

"Well, if that be the caprice, it shall be gratified. You shall go to a watering-place. I don't mind the expense. Fanny shall accompany you."

"But, uncle, some day I must do something for myself; I have no fortune. I had better begin now."

"While I live, you shall not turn out as a governess, Caroline. I will not have it said that my niece is a governess."

"But the later in life one makes a change of that sort, uncle, the more difficult and painful it is. I should wish to get accustomed to the yoke before any habits of ease and independence are formed."

"I beg you will not harass me, Caroline. I mean to provide for you. I have always meant to provide for you. I will purchase an annuity. Bless me! I am but fifty-five; my health and constitution are excellent. There is plenty of time to save and take measures. Don't make yourself anxious respecting the future. Is that what frets you?"

"No, uncle; but I long for a change."

He laughed. "There speaks the woman!" cried he, "the very woman! A change! a change! Always fantastical and whimsical! Well, it's in her sex."

"But it is not fantasy and whim, uncle."

"What is it then?"

"Necessity, I think. I feel weaker than formerly. I believe I should have more to do."

"Admirable! She feels weak, and *therefore* she should be set to hard labour — 'clair comme le jour,' as Moore — confound Moore! You shall go to Cliff Bridge; and there are two guineas to buy a new frock. Come, Cary, never fear. We'll find balm in Gilead."

"Uncle, I wish you were less generous and more — — "

"More what?"

Sympathizing was the word on Caroline's lips, but it was not uttered. She checked herself in time. Her uncle would indeed have laughed if that namby-pamby word had escaped her. Finding her silent, he said, "The fact is, you don't know precisely what you want."

"Only to be a governess."

"Pooh! mere nonsense! I'll not hear of governessing. Don't mention it again. It is rather too feminine a fancy. I have finished breakfast. Ring the bell. Put all crotchets out of your head, and run away and amuse yourself."

"What with? My doll?" asked Caroline to herself as she quitted the room.

A week or two passed; her bodily and mental health neither grew worse nor better. She was now precisely in that state when, if her constitution had contained the seeds of consumption, decline, or slow fever, those diseases would have been rapidly developed, and would soon have carried her quietly from the world. People never die of love or grief alone, though some die of inherent maladies which the tortures of those passions prematurely force into destructive action. The sound by nature undergo these tortures, and are racked, shaken, shattered; their beauty and bloom perish, but life remains untouched. They are brought to a certain point of dilapidation; they are reduced to pallor, debility, and emaciation. People think, as they see them gliding languidly about, that they will soon withdraw to sick-beds, perish there, and cease from among the healthy and happy. This does not happen. They live on; and though they cannot regain youth and gaiety, they may regain strength and serenity. The blossom which the March wind nips, but fails to sweep away, may survive to hang a withered apple on the tree late into autumn: having braved the last frosts of spring, it may also brave the first of winter.

Every one noticed the change in Miss Helstone's appearance, and most people said she was going to die. She never thought so herself. She felt in no dying case; she had neither pain nor sickness. Her appetite was diminished; she knew the reason. It was because she wept so much at night. Her strength was lessened; she could account for it. Sleep was coy and hard to be won; dreams were distressing and baleful. In the far future she still seemed to anticipate a time when this passage of misery should be got over, and when she should once more be calm, though perhaps never again happy.

Meanwhile her uncle urged her to visit, to comply with the frequent invitations of their acquaintance. This she evaded doing. She could not be cheerful in company; she felt she was observed there with more curiosity than sympathy. Old ladies were always offering her their advice, recommending this or that nostrum; young ladies looked at her in a way she understood, and from which she shrank. Their eyes said they knew she had been "disappointed," as custom phrases it; by whom, they were not certain.

Commonplace young ladies can be quite as hard as commonplace young gentlemen — quite as worldly and selfish. Those who suffer should always avoid them. Grief and calamity they despise; they seem to regard them as the judgments of God on the lowly. With them, to "love" is merely to contrive a scheme for achieving a good match; to be "disappointed" is to have their scheme seen through and frustrated. They think the feelings and projects of others on the subject of love similar to their own, and judge them accordingly.

All this Caroline knew, partly by instinct, partly by observation. She regulated her conduct by her knowledge, keeping her pale face and wasted figure as much out of sight as she could. Living thus in complete seclusion, she ceased to receive intelligence of the little transactions of the neighbourhood.

One morning her uncle came into the parlour, where she sat endeavouring to find some pleasure in painting a little group of wild flowers, gathered under a hedge at the top of the Hollow fields, and said to her in his abrupt manner, "Come, child, you are always stooping over palette, or book, or sampler; leave that tinting work. By-the-bye, do you put your pencil to your lips when you paint?"

"Sometimes, uncle, when I forget."

"Then it is that which is poisoning you. The paints are deleterious, child. There is white lead and red lead, and verdigris, and gamboge, and twenty other poisons in those colour cakes. Lock them up! lock them up! Get your bonnet on. I want you to make a call with me."

"With *you*, uncle?"

This question was asked in a tone of surprise. She was not accustomed to make calls with her uncle. She never rode or walked out with him on any occasion.

"Quick! quick! I am always busy, you know. I have no time to lose."

She hurriedly gathered up her materials, asking, meantime, where they were going.

"To Fieldhead."

"Fieldhead! What! to see old James Booth, the gardener? Is he ill?"

"We are going to see Miss Shirley Keeldar."

"Miss Keeldar! Is she coming to Yorkshire? Is she at Fieldhead?"

"She is. She has been there a week. I met her at a party last night — that party to which you would not go. I was pleased with her. I choose that you shall make her acquaintance. It will do you good."

"She is now come of age, I suppose?"

"She is come of age, and will reside for a time on her property. I lectured her on the subject; I showed her her duty. She is not intractable. She is rather a fine girl; she will teach you what it is to have a sprightly spirit. Nothing lackadaisical about *her*."

"I don't think she will want to see me, or to have me introduced to her. What good can I do her? How can I amuse her?"

"Pshaw! Put your bonnet on."

"Is she proud, uncle?"

"Don't know. You hardly imagine she would show her pride to me, I suppose? A chit like that would scarcely presume to give herself airs with the rector of her parish, however rich she might be."

"No. But how did she behave to other people?"

"Didn't observe. She holds her head high, and probably can be saucy enough where she dare. She wouldn't be a woman otherwise. There! Away now for your bonnet at once!"

Not naturally very confident, a failure of physical strength and a depression of spirits had not tended to increase Caroline's presence of mind and ease of manner, or to give her additional courage to face strangers, and she quailed, in spite of self-remonstrance, as she and her uncle walked up the broad, paved approach leading from the gateway of Fieldhead to its porch. She followed Mr. Helstone reluctantly through that porch into the sombre old vestibule beyond.

Very sombre it was — long, vast, and dark; one latticed window lit it but dimly. The wide old chimney contained now no fire, for the present warm weather needed it not; it was filled instead with willow-boughs. The gallery on high, opposite the entrance, was seen but in outline, so shadowy became this hall towards its ceiling. Carved stags' heads, with real antlers, looked down grotesquely from the walls. This was neither a grand nor a comfortable house; within as without it was antique, rambling, and incommodious. A property of a thousand a year belonged to it, which property had descended, for lack of male heirs, on a female. There were mercantile families in the district boasting twice the income, but the Keeldars, by virtue of their antiquity, and their distinction of lords of the manor, took the precedence of all.

Mr. and Miss Helstone were ushered into a parlour. Of course, as was to be expected in such a Gothic old barrack, this parlour was lined with oak: fine, dark, glossy panels compassed the walls gloomily and grandly. Very handsome, reader, these shining brown panels are, very mellow in colouring and tasteful in effect, but — if you know what a "spring clean" is — very execrable and inhuman. Whoever, having the bowels of humanity, has seen servants scrubbing at these polished wooden walls with beeswaxed cloths on a warm May day must allow that they are "intolerable and not to be endured;" and I cannot but secretly applaud the benevolent barbarian who had painted another and larger apartment of Fieldhead — the drawing-room, to wit, formerly also an oak-room — of a delicate pinky white, thereby earning for himself the character of a Hun, but mightily enhancing the cheerfulness of that portion of his abode, and saving future housemaids a world of toil.

The brown-panelled parlour was furnished all in old style, and with real old furniture. On each side of the high mantelpiece stood two antique chairs of oak, solid as silvan thrones, and in one of these sat a lady. But if this were Miss Keeldar, she must have come of age at least some twenty years ago. She was of matronly form, and though she wore no cap, and possessed hair of quite an undimmed auburn, shading small and naturally young-looking features, she had no youthful aspect, nor apparently the wish to assume it. You could have wished her attire of a newer fashion. In a well-cut, well-made gown hers would have been no uncomely presence. It puzzled you to guess why a garment of handsome materials should be arranged in such scanty folds, and devised after such an obsolete mode. You felt disposed to set down the wearer as somewhat eccentric at once.

This lady received the visitors with a mixture of ceremony and diffidence quite English. No middle-aged matron who was not an Englishwoman *could* evince precisely the same manner — a manner so uncertain of herself, of her own merits, of her power to please, and yet so anxious to be proper, and, if possible, rather agreeable than otherwise. In the present instance, however, more embarrassment was shown than is usual even with diffident Englishwomen. Miss Helstone felt this, sympathized with the stranger, and knowing by experience what was good for the timid, took a seat quietly near her, and began to talk to her with a gentle ease, communicated for the moment by the presence of one less self-possessed than herself.

She and this lady would, if alone, have at once got on extremely well together. The lady had the clearest voice imaginable — infinitely softer and more tuneful than could have been reasonably expected from forty years — and a form decidedly inclined to *embonpoint*. This voice Caroline liked; it atoned for the formal, if correct, accent and language. The lady would soon have discovered she liked it and her, and in ten minutes they would have been friends. But Mr. Helstone stood on the rug looking at them both, looking especially at the strange lady with his sarcastic, keen eye, that clearly expressed impatience of her chilly ceremony, and annoyance at her want of *aplomb*. His hard gaze and rasping voice discomfited the lady more and more. She tried, however, to get up little speeches about the weather, the aspect of the country, etc.; but the impracticable Mr. Helstone presently found himself somewhat deaf. Whatever she said he affected not to hear distinctly, and she was obliged to go over each elaborately-constructed nothing twice. The effort soon became too much for her. She was just rising in a perplexed flutter, nervously murmuring that she knew not what detained Miss Keeldar, that she would go and look for her, when Miss Keeldar saved her the trouble by appearing. It was to be presumed at least that she who now came in through a glass door from the garden owned that name.

There is real grace in ease of manner, and so old Helstone felt when an erect, slight girl walked up to him, retaining with her left hand her little silk apron full of flowers, and, giving him her right hand, said pleasantly, “I knew you would come to see me, though you *do* think Mr. Yorke has made me a Jacobin. Good-morning.”

“But we’ll not have you a Jacobin,” returned he. “No, Miss Shirley; they shall not steal the flower of my parish from me. Now that you are amongst us, you shall be my pupil in politics and religion; I’ll teach you sound doctrine on both points.”

“Mrs. Pryor has anticipated you,” she replied, turning to the elder lady. “Mrs. Pryor, you know, was my governess, and is still my friend; and of all the high and rigid Tories she is queen; of all the stanch churchwomen she is chief. I have been well drilled both in theology and history, I assure you, Mr. Helstone.”

The rector immediately bowed very low to Mrs. Pryor, and expressed himself obliged to her.

The ex-governess disclaimed skill either in political or religious controversy, explained that she thought such matters little adapted for female minds, but avowed herself in general terms the advocate of order and loyalty, and, of course, truly attached to the Establishment. She added she was ever averse to change under any circumstances, and something scarcely audible about the extreme danger of being too ready to take up new ideas closed her sentence.

“Miss Keeldar thinks as you think, I hope, madam.”

“Difference of age and difference of temperament occasion difference of sentiment,” was the reply. “It can scarcely be expected that the eager and young should hold the opinions of the cool and middle-aged.”

“Oh! oh! we are independent; we think for ourselves!” cried Mr. Helstone. “We are a little Jacobin, for anything I know — a little freethinker, in good earnest. Let us have a confession of faith on the spot.”

And he took the heiress’s two hands — causing her to let fall her whole cargo of flowers — and seated her by him on the sofa.

“Say your creed,” he ordered.

“The Apostles’ Creed?”

“Yes.”

She said it like a child.

“Now for St. Athanasius’s. That’s the test!”

“Let me gather up my flowers. Here is Tartar coming; he will tread upon them.”

Tartar was a rather large, strong, and fierce-looking dog, very ugly, being of a breed between mastiff and bulldog, who at this moment entered through the glass door, and posting directly to the rug, snuffed the fresh flowers scattered there. He seemed to scorn them as food; but probably thinking their velvety petals might be convenient as litter, he was turning round preparatory to depositing his tawny bulk upon them, when Miss Helstone and Miss Keeldar simultaneously stooped to the rescue.

“Thank you,” said the heiress, as she again held out her little apron for Caroline to heap the blossoms into it. “Is this your daughter, Mr. Helstone?” she asked.

“My niece Caroline.”

Miss Keeldar shook hands with her, and then looked at her. Caroline also looked at her hostess.

Shirley Keeldar (she had no Christian name but Shirley: her parents, who had wished to have a son, finding that, after eight years of marriage, Providence had granted them only a daughter, bestowed on her the same masculine family cognomen they would have bestowed on a boy, if with a boy they had been blessed) — Shirley Keeldar was no ugly heiress. She was agreeable to the eye. Her height and shape were not unlike Miss Helstone’s; perhaps in stature she might have the advantage by an inch or two. She was gracefully made, and her face, too, possessed a charm as well described by the word grace as any other. It was pale naturally, but intelligent, and of varied expression. She was not a blonde, like Caroline. Clear and dark were the characteristics of her aspect as to colour. Her face and brow were clear, her eyes of the darkest gray (no green lights in them — transparent, pure, neutral gray), and her hair of the darkest brown. Her features were distinguished — by which I do not mean that they were high, bony, and Roman, being indeed rather small and slightly marked than otherwise, but only that they were, to use a few French words, “fins, gracieux, spirituels” — mobile they were and speaking; but their changes were not to be understood nor their language interpreted all at once. She examined Caroline seriously, inclining her head a little to one side, with a thoughtful air.

“You see she is only a feeble chick,” observed Mr. Helstone.

“She looks young — younger than I. — How old are you?” she inquired in a manner that would have been patronizing if it had not been extremely solemn and simple.

“Eighteen years and six months.”

“And I am twenty-one.”

She said no more. She had now placed her flowers on the table, and was busied in arranging them.

“And St. Athanasius’s Creed?” urged the rector. “You believe it all, don’t you?”

“I can’t remember it quite all. I will give you a nosegay, Mr. Helstone, when I have given your niece one.”

She had selected a little bouquet of one brilliant and two or three delicate flowers, relieved by a spray of dark verdure. She tied it with silk from her work-box, and placed it on Caroline’s lap; and then she put her hands behind her, and stood bending slightly towards her guest, still regarding her, in the attitude and with something of the aspect of a grave but gallant little cavalier. This temporary expression of face was aided by the style in which she wore her hair, parted on one temple, and brushed in a glossy sweep above the forehead, whence it fell in curls that looked natural, so free were their wavy undulations.

"Are you tired with your walk?" she inquired.

"No — not in the least. It is but a short distance — but a mile."

"You look pale. — Is she always so pale?" she asked, turning to the rector.

"She used to be as rosy as the reddest of your flowers."

"Why is she altered? What has made her pale? Has she been ill?"

"She tells me she wants a change."

"She ought to have one. You ought to give her one. You should send her to the sea-coast."

"I will, ere summer is over. Meantime, I intend her to make acquaintance with you, if you have no objection."

"I am sure Miss Keeldar will have no objection," here observed Mrs. Pryor. "I think I may take it upon me to say that Miss Helstone's frequent presence at Fieldhead will be esteemed a favour."

"You speak my sentiments precisely, ma'am," said Shirley, "and I thank you for anticipating me. — Let me tell you," she continued, turning again to Caroline, "that you also ought to thank my governess. It is not every one she would welcome as she has welcomed you. You are distinguished more than you think. This morning, as soon as you are gone, I shall ask Mrs. Pryor's opinion of you. I am apt to rely on her judgment of character, for hitherto I have found it wondrous accurate. Already I foresee a favourable answer to my inquiries. — Do I not guess rightly, Mrs. Pryor?"

"My dear, you said but now you would ask my opinion when Miss Helstone was gone. I am scarcely likely to give it in her presence."

"No; and perhaps it will be long enough before I obtain it. — I am sometimes sadly tantalized, Mr. Helstone, by Mrs. Pryor's extreme caution. Her judgments ought to be correct when they come, for they are often as tardy of delivery as a Lord Chancellor's. On some people's characters I cannot get her to pronounce a sentence, entreat as I may."

Mrs. Pryor here smiled.

"Yes," said her pupil, "I know what that smile means. You are thinking of my gentleman-tenant. — Do you know Mr. Moore of the Hollow?" she asked Mr. Helstone.

"Ay! ay! Your tenant — so he is. You have seen a good deal of him, no doubt, since you came?"

"I have been obliged to see him. There was business to transact. Business! Really the word makes me conscious I am indeed no longer a girl, but quite a woman and something more. I am an esquire! Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man's name; I hold a man's position.

It is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood; and when I see such people as that stately Anglo-Belgian — that Gérard Moore — before me, gravely talking to me of business, really I feel quite gentlemanlike. You must choose me for your churchwarden, Mr. Helstone, the next time you elect new ones. They ought to make me a magistrate and a captain of yeomanry. Tony Lumpkin's mother was a colonel, and his aunt a justice of the peace. Why shouldn't I be?"

"With all my heart. If you choose to get up a requisition on the subject, I promise to head the list of signatures with my name. But you were speaking of Moore?"

"Ah! yes. I find it a little difficult to understand Mr. Moore, to know what to think of him, whether to like him or not. He seems a tenant of whom any proprietor might be proud — and proud of him I am, in that sense; but as a neighbour, what is he? Again and again I have entreated Mrs. Pryor to say what she thinks of him, but she still evades returning a direct answer. I hope you will be less oracular, Mr. Helstone, and pronounce at once. Do you like him?"

"Not at all, just now. His name is entirely blotted from my good books."

"What is the matter? What has he done?"

"My uncle and he disagree on politics," interposed the low voice of Caroline. She had better not have spoken just then. Having scarcely joined in the conversation before, it was not apropos to do it now. She felt this with nervous acuteness as soon as she had spoken, and coloured to the eyes.

"What are Moore's politics?" inquired Shirley.

"Those of a tradesman," returned the rector — "narrow, selfish, and unpatriotic. The man is eternally writing and speaking against the continuance of the war. I have no patience with him."

"The war hurts his trade. I remember he remarked that only yesterday. But what other objection have you to him?"

"That is enough."

"He looks the gentleman, in my sense of the term," pursued Shirley, "and it pleases me to think he is such."

Caroline rent the Tyrian petals of the one brilliant flower in her bouquet, and answered in distinct tones, "Decidedly he is." Shirley, hearing this courageous affirmation, flashed an arch, searching glance at the speaker from her deep, expressive eyes.

"*You* are his friend, at any rate," she said. "You defend him in his absence."

"I am both his friend and his relative," was the prompt reply. "Robert Moore is my cousin."

"Oh, then, you can tell me all about him. Just give me a sketch of his character."

Insuperable embarrassment seized Caroline when this demand was made. She could not, and did not, attempt to comply with it. Her silence was immediately covered by Mrs. Pryor, who proceeded to address sundry questions to Mr. Helstone regarding a family or two in the neighbourhood, with whose connections in the south she said she was acquainted. Shirley soon withdrew her gaze from Miss Helstone's face. She did not renew her interrogations, but returning to her flowers, proceeded to choose a nosegay for the rector. She presented it to him as he took leave, and received the homage of a salute on the hand in return.

"Be sure you wear it for my sake," said she.

"Next my heart, of course," responded Helstone. — "Mrs. Pryor, take care of this future magistrate, this churchwarden in perspective, this captain of yeomanry, this young squire of Briarfield, in a word. Don't let him exert himself too much; don't let him break his neck in hunting; especially, let him mind how he rides down that dangerous hill near the Hollow."

"I like a descent," said Shirley; "I like to clear it rapidly; and especially I like that romantic Hollow with all my heart."

"Romantic, with a mill in it?"

"Romantic with a mill in it. The old mill and the white cottage are each admirable in its way."

"And the counting-house, Mr. Keeldar?"

"The counting-house is better than my bloom-coloured drawing-room. I adore the counting-house."

"And the trade? The cloth, the greasy wool, the polluting dyeing-vats?"

"The trade is to be thoroughly respected."

"And the tradesman is a hero? Good!"

"I am glad to hear you say so. I thought the tradesman looked heroic."

Mischief, spirit, and glee sparkled all over her face as she thus bandied words with the old Cossack, who almost equally enjoyed the tilt.

"Captain Keeldar, you have no mercantile blood in your veins. Why are you so fond of trade?"

"Because I am a mill-owner, of course. Half my income comes from the works in that Hollow."

"Don't enter into partnership — that's all."

"You've put it into my head! you've put it into my head!" she exclaimed, with a joyous laugh. "It will never get out. Thank you." And waving her hand, white as a lily and fine as a fairy's, she vanished within the porch, while the rector and his niece passed out through the arched gateway.

CHAPTER XII.

SHIRLEY AND CAROLINE.

Shirley showed she had been sincere in saying she should be glad of Caroline’s society, by frequently seeking it; and, indeed, if she had not sought it, she would not have had it, for Miss Helstone was slow to make fresh acquaintance. She was always held back by the idea that people could not want her, that she could not amuse them; and a brilliant, happy, youthful creature like the heiress of Fieldhead seemed to her too completely independent of society so uninteresting as hers ever to find it really welcome.

Shirley might be brilliant, and probably happy likewise, but no one is independent of genial society; and though in about a month she had made the acquaintance of most of the families round, and was on quite free and easy terms with all the Misses Sykes, and all the Misses Pearson, and the two superlative Misses Wynne of Walden Hall, yet, it appeared, she found none amongst them very genial: she fraternized with none of them, to use her own words. If she had had the bliss to be really Shirley Keeldar, Esq., lord of the manor of Briarfield, there was not a single fair one in this and the two neighbouring parishes whom she should have felt disposed to request to become Mrs. Keeldar, lady of the manor. This declaration she made to Mrs. Pryor, who received it very quietly, as she did most of her pupil’s off-hand speeches, responding, “My dear, do not allow that habit of alluding to yourself as a gentleman to be confirmed. It is a strange one. Those who do not know you, hearing you speak thus, would think you affected masculine manners.”

Shirley never laughed at her former governess; even the little formalities and harmless peculiarities of that lady were respectable in her eyes. Had it been otherwise, she would have proved herself a weak character at once; for it is only the weak who make a butt of quiet worth. Therefore she took her remonstrance in silence. She stood quietly near the window, looking at the grand cedar on her lawn watching a bird on one of its lower boughs. Presently she began to chirrup to the bird; soon her chirrup grew clearer; ere long she was whistling; the whistle struck into a tune, and very sweetly and deftly it was executed.

“My dear!” expostulated Mrs. Pryor.

“Was I whistling?” said Shirley. “I forgot. I beg your pardon, ma’am. I had resolved to take care not to whistle before you.”

“But, Miss Keeldar, where did you learn to whistle? You must have got the habit since you came down into Yorkshire. I never knew you guilty of it before."

"Oh! I learned to whistle a long while ago."

"Who taught you?"

"No one. I took it up by listening, and I had laid it down again. But lately, yesterday evening, as I was coming up our lane, I heard a gentleman whistling that very tune in the field on the other side of the hedge, and that reminded me."

"What gentleman was it?"

"We have only one gentleman in this region, ma'am, and that is Mr. Moore — at least he is the only gentleman who is not gray-haired. My two venerable favourites, Mr. Helstone and Mr. Yorke, it is true, are fine old beaus, infinitely better than any of the stupid young ones."

Mrs. Pryor was silent.

"You do not like Mr. Helstone, ma'am?"

"My dear, Mr. Helstone's office secures him from criticism."

"You generally contrive to leave the room when he is announced."

"Do you walk out this morning, my dear?"

"Yes, I shall go to the rectory, and seek and find Caroline Helstone, and make her take some exercise. She shall have a breezy walk over Nunnely Common."

"If you go in that direction, my dear, have the goodness to remind Miss Helstone to wrap up well, as there is a fresh wind, and she appears to me to require care."

"You shall be minutely obeyed, Mrs. Pryor. Meantime, will you not accompany us yourself?"

"No, my love; I should be a restraint upon you. I am stout, and cannot walk so quickly as you would wish to do."

Shirley easily persuaded Caroline to go with her, and when they were fairly out on the quiet road, traversing the extensive and solitary sweep of Nunnely Common, she as easily drew her into conversation. The first feelings of diffidence overcome, Caroline soon felt glad to talk with Miss Keeldar. The very first interchange of slight observations sufficed to give each an idea of what the other was. Shirley said she liked the green sweep of the common turf, and, better still, the heath on its ridges, for the heath reminded her of moors. She had seen moors when she was travelling on the borders near Scotland. She remembered particularly a district traversed one long afternoon, on a sultry but sunless day in summer. They journeyed from noon till sunset, over what seemed a boundless waste of deep heath, and nothing had they seen but wild sheep, nothing heard but the cries of wild birds.

"I know how the heath would look on such a day," said Caroline; "purple-black — a deeper shade of the sky-tint, and that would be livid."

"Yes, quite livid, with brassy edges to the clouds, and here and there a white gleam, more ghastly than the lurid tinge, which, as you looked at it, you momentarily expected would kindle into blinding lightning."

"Did it thunder?"

"It muttered distant peals, but the storm did not break till evening, after we had reached our inn — that inn being an isolated house at the foot of a range of mountains."

"Did you watch the clouds come down over the mountains?"

"I did. I stood at the window an hour watching them. The hills seemed rolled in a sullen mist, and when the rain fell in whitening sheets, suddenly they were blotted from the prospect; they were washed from the world."

"I have seen such storms in hilly districts in Yorkshire; and at their riotous climax, while the sky was all cataract, the earth all flood, I have remembered the Deluge."

"It is singularly reviving after such hurricanes to feel calm return, and from the opening clouds to receive a consolatory gleam, softly testifying that the sun is not quenched."

"Miss Keeldar, just stand still now, and look down at Nunnely dale and wood."

They both halted on the green brow of the common. They looked down on the deep valley robed in May raiment; on varied meads, some pearled with daisies, and some golden with king-cups. To-day all this young verdure smiled clear in sunlight; transparent emerald and amber gleams played over it. On Nunnwood — the sole remnant of antique British forest in a region whose lowlands were once all silvan chase, as its highlands were breast-deep heather — slept the shadow of a cloud; the distant hills were dappled, the horizon was shaded and tinted like mother-of-pearl; silvery blues, soft purples, evanescent greens and rose-shades, all melting into fleeces of white cloud, pure as azury snow, allured the eye as with a remote glimpse of heaven's foundations. The air blowing on the brow was fresh, and sweet, and bracing.

"Our England is a bonny island," said Shirley, "and Yorkshire is one of her bonniest nooks."

"You are a Yorkshire girl too?"

"I am — Yorkshire in blood and birth. Five generations of my race sleep under the aisles of Briarfield Church. I drew my first breath in the old black hall behind us."

Hereupon Caroline presented her hand, which was accordingly taken and shaken. "We are compatriots," said she.

"Yes," agreed Shirley, with a grave nod.

"And that," asked Miss Keeldar, pointing to the forest — "that is Nunnwood?"

"It is."

"Were you ever there?"

"Many a time."

"In the heart of it?"

"Yes."

"What is it like?"

"It is like an encampment of forest sons of Anak. The trees are huge and old. When you stand at their roots, the summits seem in another region. The trunks remain still and firm as pillars, while the boughs sway to every breeze. In the deepest calm their leaves are never quite hushed, and in high wind a flood rushes, a sea thunders above you."

"Was it not one of Robin Hood's haunts?"

"Yes, and there are mementos of him still existing. To penetrate into Nunnwood, Miss Keeldar, is to go far back into the dim days of old. Can you see a break in the forest, about the centre?"

"Yes, distinctly."

"That break is a dell — a deep, hollow cup, lined with turf as green and short as the sod of this common. The very oldest of the trees, gnarled mighty oaks, crowd about the brink of this dell. In the bottom lie the ruins of a nunnery."

"We will go — you and I alone, Caroline — to that wood, early some fine summer morning, and spend a long day there. We can take pencils and sketch-books, and any interesting reading book we like; and of course we shall take something to eat. I have two little baskets, in which Mrs. Gill, my housekeeper, might pack our provisions, and we could each carry our own. It would not tire you too much to walk so far?"

"Oh no; especially if we rested the whole day in the wood. And I know all the pleasantest spots. I know where we could get nuts in nutting time; I know where wild strawberries abound; I know certain lonely, quite untrodden glades, carpeted with strange mosses, some yellow as if gilded, some a sober gray, some gem-green. I know groups of trees that ravish the eye with their perfect, picture-like effects — rude oak, delicate birch, glossy beech, clustered in contrast; and ash trees stately as Saul, standing isolated; and superannuated wood-giants clad in bright shrouds of ivy. Miss Keeldar, I could guide you."

"You would be dull with me alone?"

"I should not. I think we should suit; and what third person is there whose presence would not spoil our pleasure?"

"Indeed, I know of none about our own ages — no lady at least; and as to gentlemen — — "

"An excursion becomes quite a different thing when there are gentlemen of the party," interrupted Caroline.

"I agree with you — quite a different thing to what we were proposing."

"We were going simply to see the old trees, the old ruins; to pass a day in old times, surrounded by olden silence, and above all by quietude."

"You are right; and the presence of gentlemen dispels the last charm, I think. If they are of the wrong sort, like your Malones, and your young Sykes, and Wynnes, irritation takes the place of serenity. If they are of the right sort, there is still a change; I can hardly tell what change — one easy to feel, difficult to describe."

"We forget Nature, *imprimis*."

“And then Nature forgets us, covers her vast calm brow with a dim veil, conceals her face, and withdraws the peaceful joy with which, if we had been content to worship her only, she would have filled our hearts.”

“What does she give us instead?”

“More elation and more anxiety; an excitement that steals the hours away fast, and a trouble that ruffles their course.”

“Our power of being happy lies a good deal in ourselves, I believe,” remarked Caroline sagely. “I have gone to Nunnwood with a large party — all the curates and some other gentry of these parts, together with sundry ladies — and I found the affair insufferably tedious and absurd; and I have gone quite alone, or accompanied but by Fanny, who sat in the woodman’s hut and sewed, or talked to the goodwife, while I roamed about and made sketches, or read; and I have enjoyed much happiness of a quiet kind all day long. But that was when I was young — two years ago.”

“Did you ever go with your cousin, Robert Moore?”

“Yes; once.”

“What sort of a companion is he on these occasions?”

“A cousin, you know, is different to a stranger.”

“I am aware of that; but cousins, if they are stupid, are still more insupportable than strangers, because you cannot so easily keep them at a distance. But your cousin is not stupid?”

“No; but — — “

“Well?”

“If the company of fools irritates, as you say, the society of clever men leaves its own peculiar pain also. Where the goodness or talent of your friend is beyond and above all doubt, your own worthiness to be his associate often becomes a matter of question.”

“Oh! there I cannot follow you. That crotchet is not one I should choose to entertain for an instant. I consider myself not unworthy to be the associate of the best of them — of gentlemen, I mean — though that is saying a great deal. Where they are good, they are very good, I believe. Your uncle, by-the-bye, is not a bad specimen of the elderly gentleman. I am always glad to see his brown, keen, sensible old face, either in my own house or any other. Are you fond of him? Is he kind to you? Now, speak the truth.”

“He has brought me up from childhood, I doubt not, precisely as he would have brought up his own daughter, if he had had one; and that is kindness. But I am not fond of him. I would rather be out of his presence than in it.”

“Strange, when he has the art of making himself so agreeable.”

“Yes, in company; but he is stern and silent at home. As he puts away his cane and shovel-hat in the rectory hall, so he locks his liveliness in his book-case and study-desk: the knitted brow and brief word for the fireside; the smile, the jest, the witty sally for society.”

“Is he tyrannical?”

"Not in the least. He is neither tyrannical nor hypocritical. He is simply a man who is rather liberal than good-natured, rather brilliant than genial, rather scrupulously equitable than truly just — if you can understand such superfine distinctions."

"Oh yes! Good-nature implies indulgence, which he has not; geniality, warmth of heart, which he does not own; and genuine justice is the offspring of sympathy and considerateness, of which, I can well conceive, my bronzed old friend is quite innocent."

"I often wonder, Shirley, whether most men resemble my uncle in their domestic relations; whether it is necessary to be new and unfamiliar to them in order to seem agreeable or estimable in their eyes; and whether it is impossible to their natures to retain a constant interest and affection for those they see every day."

"I don't know. I can't clear up your doubts. I ponder over similar ones myself sometimes. But, to tell you a secret, if I were convinced that they are necessarily and universally different from us — fickle, soon petrifying, unsympathizing — I would never marry. I should not like to find out that what I loved did not love me, that it was weary of me, and that whatever effort I might make to please would hereafter be worse than useless, since it was inevitably in its nature to change and become indifferent. That discovery once made, what should I long for? To go away, to remove from a presence where my society gave no pleasure."

"But you could not if you were married."

"No, I could not. There it is. I could never be my own mistress more. A terrible thought! It suffocates me! Nothing irks me like the idea of being a burden and a bore — an inevitable burden, a ceaseless bore! Now, when I feel my company superfluous, I can comfortably fold my independence round me like a mantle, and drop my pride like a veil, and withdraw to solitude. If married, that could not be."

"I wonder we don't all make up our minds to remain single," said Caroline. "We should if we listened to the wisdom of experience. My uncle always speaks of marriage as a burden; and I believe whenever he hears of a man being married he invariably regards him as a fool, or, at any rate, as doing a foolish thing."

"But, Caroline, men are not all like your uncle. Surely not. I hope not."

She paused and mused.

"I suppose we each find an exception in the one we love, till we *are* married," suggested Caroline.

"I suppose so. And this exception we believe to be of sterling materials. We fancy it like ourselves; we imagine a sense of harmony. We think his voice gives the softest, truest promise of a heart that will never harden against us; we read in his eyes that faithful feeling — affection. I don't think we should trust to what they call passion at all, Caroline. I believe it is a mere fire of dry sticks, blazing up and vanishing. But we watch him, and see him kind to animals, to little children, to poor people. He is kind to us likewise, good, considerate. He does not flatter women, but he is patient with them, and he seems to be easy in their presence, and to find their company genial. He likes them not only for vain and selfish reasons, but as *we* like him — because we like him. Then we observe that he is just, that he always speaks the truth, that he is conscientious. We feel joy and peace when he comes into a room; we feel sadness and trouble when he leaves it. We know that this man has been a kind son, that he is a kind brother. Will any one dare to tell me that he will not be a kind husband?"

"My uncle would affirm it unhesitatingly. 'He will be sick of you in a month,' he would say."

"Mrs. Pryor would seriously intimate the same."

"Mrs. Yorke and Miss Mann would darkly suggest ditto."

"If they are true oracles, it is good never to fall in love."

"Very good, if you can avoid it."

"I choose to doubt their truth."

"I am afraid that proves you are already caught."

"Not I. But if I were, do you know what soothsayers I would consult?"

"Let me hear."

"Neither man nor woman, elderly nor young: the little Irish beggar that comes barefoot to my door; the mouse that steals out of the cranny in the wainscot; the bird that in frost and snow pecks at my window for a crumb; the dog that licks my hand and sits beside my knee."

"Did you ever see any one who was kind to such things?"

"Did you ever see any one whom such things seemed instinctively to follow, like, rely on?"

"We have a black cat and an old dog at the rectory. I know somebody to whose knee that black cat loves to climb, against whose shoulder and cheek it likes to purr. The old dog always comes out of his kennel and wags his tail, and whines affectionately when somebody passes."

"And what does that somebody do?"

"He quietly strokes the cat, and lets her sit while he conveniently can; and when he must disturb her by rising, he puts her softly down, and never flings her from him roughly. He always whistles to the dog and gives him a caress."

"Does he? It is not Robert?"

"But it is Robert."

"Handsome fellow!" said Shirley, with enthusiasm. Her eyes sparkled.

"Is he not handsome? Has he not fine eyes and well-cut features, and a clear, princely forehead?"

"He has all that, Caroline. Bless him! he is both graceful and good."

"I was sure you would see that he was. When I first looked at your face I knew you would."

"I was well inclined to him before I saw him. I liked him when I did see him. I admire him now. There is charm in beauty for itself, Caroline; when it is blent with goodness, there is a powerful charm."

"When mind is added, Shirley?"

"Who can resist it?"

"Remember my uncle, Mesdames Pryor, Yorke, and Mann."

"Remember the croaking of the frogs of Egypt. He is a noble being. I tell you when they *are* good they are the lords of the creation — they are the sons of God. Moulded in their Maker's image, the minutest spark of His spirit lifts them almost above mortality. Indisputably, a great, good, handsome man is the first of created things."

"Above us?"

"I would scorn to contend for empire with him — I would scorn it. Shall my left hand dispute for precedence with my right? Shall my heart quarrel with my pulse? Shall my veins be jealous of the blood which fills them?"

"Men and women, husbands and wives, quarrel horribly, Shirley."

"Poor things! Poor, fallen, degenerate things! God made them for another lot, for other feelings."

"But are we men's equals, or are we not?"

"Nothing ever charms me more than when I meet my superior — one who makes me sincerely feel that he is my superior."

"Did you ever meet him?"

"I should be glad to see him any day. The higher above me, so much the better. It degrades to stoop; it is glorious to look up. What frets me is, that when I try to esteem, I am baffled; when religiously inclined, there are but false gods to adore. I disdain to be a pagan."

"Miss Keeldar, will you come in? We are here at the rectory gates."

"Not to-day, but to-morrow I shall fetch you to spend the evening with me. Caroline Helstone, if you really are what at present to me you seem, you and I will suit. I have never in my whole life been able to talk to a young lady as I have talked to you this morning. Kiss me — and good-bye."

Mrs. Pryor seemed as well disposed to cultivate Caroline's acquaintance as Shirley. She, who went nowhere else, called on an early day at the rectory. She came in the afternoon, when the rector happened to be out. It was rather a close day; the heat of the weather had flushed her, and she seemed fluttered too by the circumstance of entering a strange house, for it appeared her habits were most retiring and secluded. When Miss Helstone went to her in the dining-room she found her seated on the sofa, trembling, fanning herself with her handkerchief, and seeming to contend with a nervous discomposure that threatened to become hysterical.

Caroline marvelled somewhat at this unusual want of self-command in a lady of her years, and also at the lack of real strength in one who appeared almost robust — for Mrs. Pryor hastened to allege the fatigue of her walk, the heat of the sun, etc., as reasons for her temporary indisposition; and still as, with more hurry than coherence, she again and again enumerated these causes of exhaustion, Caroline gently sought to relieve her by opening her shawl and removing her bonnet. Attentions of this sort Mrs. Pryor would not have accepted from every one. In general she recoiled from touch or close approach with a mixture of embarrassment and coldness far from flattering to those who offered her aid. To Miss Helstone's little light hand, however, she yielded tractably, and seemed soothed by its contact. In a few minutes she ceased to tremble, and grew quiet and tranquil.

Her usual manner being resumed, she proceeded to talk of ordinary topics. In a miscellaneous company Mrs. Pryor rarely opened her lips, or, if obliged to speak, she spoke under restraint, and consequently not well; in dialogue she was a good converser. Her language, always a little formal, was well chosen; her sentiments were just; her information was varied and correct. Caroline felt it pleasant to listen to her, more pleasant than she could have anticipated.

On the wall opposite the sofa where they sat hung three pictures — the centre one, above the mantelpiece, that of a lady; the two others, male portraits.

"That is a beautiful face," said Mrs. Pryor, interrupting a brief pause which had followed half an hour's animated conversation. "The features may be termed perfect; no statuary's chisel could improve them. It is a portrait from the life, I presume?"

"It is a portrait of Mrs. Helstone."

"Of Mrs. Matthewson Helstone? Of your uncle's wife?"

"It is, and is said to be a good likeness. Before her marriage she was accounted the beauty of the district."

"I should say she merited the distinction. What accuracy in all the lineaments! It is, however, a passive face. The original could not have been what is generally termed 'a woman of spirit.'"

"I believe she was a remarkably still, silent person."

"One would scarcely have expected, my dear, that your uncle's choice should have fallen on a partner of that description. Is he not fond of being amused by lively chat?"

"In company he is. But he always says he could never do with a talking wife. He must have quiet at home. You go out to gossip, he affirms; you come home to read and reflect."

"Mrs. Matthewson lived but a few years after her marriage, I think I have heard?"

"About five years."

"Well, my dear," pursued Mrs. Pryor, rising to go, "I trust it is understood that you will frequently come to Fieldhead. I hope you will. You must feel lonely here, having no female relative in the house; you must necessarily pass much of your time in solitude."

"I am inured to it. I have grown up by myself. May I arrange your shawl for you?"

Mrs. Pryor submitted to be assisted.

"Should you chance to require help in your studies," she said, "you may command me."

Caroline expressed her sense of such kindness.

"I hope to have frequent conversations with you. I should wish to be of use to you."

Again Miss Helstone returned thanks. She thought what a kind heart was hidden under her visitor's seeming chilliness. Observing that Mrs. Pryor again glanced with an air of interest towards the portraits, as she walked down the room, Caroline casually explained: "The likeness that hangs near the window, you will see, is my uncle, taken twenty years ago; the other, to the left of the mantelpiece, is his brother James, my father."

"They resemble each other in some measure," said Mrs. Pryor; "yet a difference of character may be traced in the different mould of the brow and mouth."

"What difference?" inquired Caroline, accompanying her to the door. "James Helstone — that is, my father — is generally considered the best-looking of the two. Strangers, I remark, always exclaim, 'What a handsome man!' Do you think his picture handsome, Mrs. Pryor?"

"It is much softer or finer featured than that of your uncle."

"But where or what is the difference of character to which you alluded? Tell me. I wish to see if you guess right."

"My dear, your uncle is a man of principle. His forehead and his lips are firm, and his eye is steady."

"Well, and the other? Do not be afraid of offending me. I always like the truth."

"Do you like the truth? It is well for you. Adhere to that preference — never swerve thence. The other, my dear, if he had been living now, would probably have furnished little support to his daughter. It is, however, a graceful head — taken in youth, I should think. My dear" (turning abruptly), "you acknowledge an inestimable value in principle?"

"I am sure no character can have true worth without it."

"You feel what you say? You have considered the subject?"

"Often. Circumstances early forced it upon my attention."

"The lesson was not lost, then, though it came so prematurely. I suppose the soil is not light nor stony, otherwise seed falling in that season never would have borne fruit. My dear, do not stand in the air of the door; you will take cold. Good-afternoon."

Miss Helstone's new acquaintance soon became of value to her: their society was acknowledged a privilege. She found she would have been in error indeed to have let slip this chance of relief, to have neglected to avail herself of this happy change. A turn was thereby given to her thoughts; a new channel was opened for them, which, diverting a few of them at least from the one direction in which all had hitherto tended, abated the impetuosity of their rush, and lessened the force of their pressure on one worn-down point.

Soon she was content to spend whole days at Fieldhead, doing by turns whatever Shirley or Mrs. Pryor wished her to do; and now one would claim her, now the other. Nothing could be less demonstrative than the friendship of the elder lady, but also nothing could be more vigilant, assiduous, untiring. I have intimated that she was a peculiar personage, and in nothing was her peculiarity more shown than in the nature of the interest she evinced for Caroline. She watched all her movements; she seemed as if she would have guarded all her steps. It gave her pleasure to be applied to by Miss Helstone for advice and assistance. She yielded her aid, when asked, with such quiet yet obvious enjoyment that Caroline ere long took delight in depending on her.

Shirley Keeldar's complete docility with Mrs. Pryor had at first surprised Miss Helstone, and not less the fact of the reserved ex-governess being so much at home and at ease in the residence of her young pupil, where she filled with such quiet independency a very dependent post; but she soon found that it needed but to know both ladies to comprehend fully the enigma. Every one, it seemed to her, must like, must love, must prize Mrs. Pryor when they knew her. No matter that she perseveringly wore old-fashioned gowns; that her speech was formal and her manner cool; that she had twenty little ways such as nobody else had: she was still such a stay, such a counsellor, so truthful, so kind in her way, that, in Caroline's idea, none once accustomed to her presence could easily afford to dispense with it.

As to dependency or humiliation, Caroline did not feel it in her intercourse with Shirley, and why should Mrs. Pryor? The heiress was rich — very rich — compared with her new friend: one possessed a clear thousand a year, the other not a penny; and yet there was a safe sense of equality experienced in her society, never known in that of the ordinary Briarfield and Whinbury gentry.

The reason was, Shirley's head ran on other things than money and position. She was glad to be independent as to property; by fits she was even elated at the notion of being lady of the manor, and having tenants and an estate. She was especially tickled with an agreeable complacency when reminded of "all that property" down in the Hollow, "comprising an excellent cloth-mill, dyehouse, warehouse, together with the messuage, gardens, and outbuildings, termed Hollow's Cottage;" but her exultation being quite undisguised was singularly inoffensive; and, for her serious thoughts, they tended elsewhere. To admire the great, reverence the good, and be joyous with the genial, was very much the bent of Shirley's soul: she mused, therefore, on the means of following this bent far oftener than she pondered on her social superiority.

In Caroline Miss Keeldar had first taken an interest because she was quiet, retiring, looked delicate, and seemed as if she needed some one to take care of her. Her predilection increased greatly when she discovered that her own way of thinking and talking was understood and responded to by this new acquaintance. She had hardly expected it. Miss Helstone, she fancied, had too pretty a face, manners and voice too soft, to be anything out of the common way in mind and attainments; and she very much wondered to see the gentle features light up archly to the reveille of a dry sally or two risked by herself; and more did she wonder to discover the self-won knowledge treasured, and the untaught speculations working in that girlish, curl-veiled head. Caroline's instinct of taste, too, was like her own. Such books as Miss Keeldar had read with the most pleasure were Miss Helstone's delight also. They held many aversions too in common, and could have the comfort of laughing together over works of false sentimentality and pompous pretension.

Few, Shirley conceived, men or women have the right taste in poetry, the right sense for discriminating between what is real and what is false. She had again and again heard very clever people pronounce this or that passage, in this or that versifier, altogether admirable, which, when she read, her soul refused to acknowledge as anything but cant, flourish, and tinsel, or at the best elaborate wordiness, curious, clever, learned, perhaps, haply even tinged with the fascinating hues of fancy, but, God knows, as different from real poetry as the gorgeous and massy vase of mosaic is from the little cup of pure metal; or, to give the reader a choice of similes, as the milliner's artificial wreath is from the fresh-gathered lily of the field.

Caroline, she found, felt the value of the true ore, and knew the deception of the flashy dross. The minds of the two girls being toned in harmony often chimed very sweetly together.

One evening they chanced to be alone in the oak-parlour. They had passed a long wet day together without *ennui*. It was now on the edge of dark; candles were not yet brought in; both, as twilight deepened, grew meditative and silent. A western wind roared high round the hall, driving wild clouds and stormy rain up from the far-remote ocean; all was tempest outside the antique lattices, all deep peace within. Shirley sat at the window, watching the rack in heaven, the mist on earth, listening to certain notes of the gale that plained like restless spirits — notes which, had she not been so young, gay, and healthy, would have swept her trembling nerves like some omen, some anticipatory dirge. In this her prime of existence and bloom of beauty they but subdued vivacity to pensiveness. Snatches of sweet ballads haunted her ear; now and then she sang a stanza. Her accents obeyed the fitful impulse of the wind; they swelled as its gusts rushed on, and died as they wandered away. Caroline, withdrawn to the farthest and darkest end of the room, her figure just discernible by the ruby shine of the flameless fire, was pacing to and fro, muttering to herself fragments of well-remembered poetry. She spoke very low, but Shirley heard her; and while singing softly, she listened. This was the strain: —

"Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,

Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left."

Here the fragment stopped, because Shirley's song, erewhile somewhat full and thrilling, had become delicately faint.

"Go on," said she.

"Then you go on too. I was only repeating 'The Castaway.'"

"I know. If you can remember it all, say it all."

And as it was nearly dark, and, after all, Miss Keeldar was no formidable auditor, Caroline went through it. She went through it as she should have gone through it. The wild sea, the drowning mariner, the reluctant ship swept on in the storm, you heard were realized by her; and more vividly was realized the heart of the poet, who did not weep for "The Castaway," but who, in an hour of tearless anguish, traced a semblance to his own God-abandoned misery in the fate of that man-forsaken sailor, and cried from the depths where he struggled, —

"No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished — each alone!
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he."

"I hope William Cowper is safe and calm in heaven now," said Caroline.

"Do you pity what he suffered on earth?" asked Miss Keeldar.

"Pity him, Shirley? What can I do else? He was nearly broken-hearted when he wrote that poem, and it almost breaks one's heart to read it. But he found relief in writing it — I know he did; and that gift of poetry — the most divine bestowed on man — was, I believe, granted to allay emotions when their strength threatens harm. It seems to me, Shirley, that nobody should write poetry to exhibit intellect or attainment. Who cares for that sort of poetry? Who cares for learning — who cares for fine words in poetry? And who does not care for feeling — real feeling — however simply, even rudely expressed?"

"It seems you care for it, at all events; and certainly, in hearing that poem, one discovers that Cowper was under an impulse strong as that of the wind which drove the ship — an impulse which, while it would not suffer him to stop to add ornament to a single stanza, filled him with force to achieve the whole with consummate perfection. You managed to recite it with a steady voice, Caroline. I wonder thereat."

"Cowper's hand did not tremble in writing the lines. Why should my voice falter in repeating them? Depend on it, Shirley, no tear blistered the manuscript of 'The Castaway.' I hear in it no sob of sorrow, only the cry of despair; but, that cry uttered, I believe the deadly spasm passed from his heart, that he wept abundantly, and was comforted."

Shirley resumed her ballad minstrelsy. Stopping short, she remarked ere long, “One could have loved Cowper, if it were only for the sake of having the privilege of comforting him.”

“You never would have loved Cowper,” rejoined Caroline promptly. “He was not made to be loved by woman.”

“What do you mean?”

“What I say. I know there is a kind of natures in the world — and very noble, elevated natures too — whom love never comes near. You might have sought Cowper with the intention of loving him, and you would have looked at him, pitied him, and left him, forced away by a sense of the impossible, the incongruous, as the crew were borne from their drowning comrade by ‘the furious blast.’”

“You may be right. Who told you this?”

“And what I say of Cowper, I should say of Rousseau. Was Rousseau ever loved? He loved passionately; but was his passion ever returned? I am certain, never. And if there were any female Cowpers and Rousseaus, I should assert the same of them.”

“Who told you this, I ask? Did Moore?”

“Why should anybody have told me? Have I not an instinct? Can I not divine by analogy? Moore never talked to me either about Cowper, or Rousseau, or love. The voice we hear in solitude told me all I know on these subjects.”

“Do you like characters of the Rousseau order, Caroline?”

“Not at all, as a whole. I sympathize intensely with certain qualities they possess. Certain divine sparks in their nature dazzle my eyes, and make my soul glow. Then, again, I scorn them. They are made of clay and gold. The refuse and the ore make a mass of weakness: taken altogether, I feel them unnatural, unhealthy, repulsive.”

“I dare say I should be more tolerant of a Rousseau than you would, Cary. Submissive and contemplative yourself, you like the stern and the practical. By the way, you must miss that Cousin Robert of yours very much, now that you and he never meet.”

“I do.”

“And he must miss you?”

“That he does not.”

“I cannot imagine,” pursued Shirley, who had lately got a habit of introducing Moore’s name into the conversation, even when it seemed to have no business there — “I cannot imagine but that he was fond of you, since he took so much notice of you, talked to you, and taught you so much.”

“He never was fond of me; he never professed to be fond of me. He took pains to prove that he only just tolerated me.”

Caroline, determined not to err on the flattering side in estimating her cousin’s regard for her, always now habitually thought of it and mentioned it in the most scanty measure. She had her own reasons for being less sanguine than ever in hopeful views of the future, less indulgent to pleasurable retrospections of the past.

"Of course, then," observed Miss Keeldar, "you only just tolerated him in return?"

"Shirley, men and women are so different; they are in such a different position. Women have so few things to think about, men so many. You may have a friendship for a man, while he is almost indifferent to you. Much of what cheers your life may be dependent on him, while not a feeling or interest of moment in his eyes may have reference to you. Robert used to be in the habit of going to London, sometimes for a week or a fortnight together. Well, while he was away, I found his absence a void. There was something wanting; Briarfield was duller. Of course, I had my usual occupations; still I missed him. As I sat by myself in the evenings, I used to feel a strange certainty of conviction I cannot describe, that if a magician or a genius had, at that moment, offered me Prince Ali's tube (you remember it in the 'Arabian Nights'?), and if, with its aid, I had been enabled to take a view of Robert — to see where he was, how occupied — I should have learned, in a startling manner, the width of the chasm which gaped between such as he and such as I. I knew that, however my thoughts might adhere to him, his were effectually sundered from me."

"Caroline," demanded Miss Keeldar abruptly, "don't you wish you had a profession — a trade?"

"I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands and to occupy my thoughts."

"Can labour alone make a human being happy?"

"No; but it can give varieties of pain, and prevent us from breaking our hearts with a single tyrant master-torture. Besides, successful labour has its recompense; a vacant, weary, lonely, hopeless life has none."

"But hard labour and learned professions, they say, make women masculine, coarse, unwomanly."

"And what does it signify whether unmarried and never-to-be-married women are unattractive and inelegant or not? Provided only they are decent, decorous, and neat, it is enough. The utmost which ought to be required of old maids, in the way of appearance, is that they should not absolutely offend men's eyes as they pass them in the street; for the rest, they should be allowed, without too much scorn, to be as absorbed, grave, plain-looking, and plain-dressed as they please."

"You might be an old maid yourself, Caroline, you speak so earnestly."

"I shall be one. It is my destiny. I will never marry a Malone or a Sykes; and no one else will ever marry me."

Here fell a long pause. Shirley broke it. Again the name by which she seemed bewitched was almost the first on her lips.

"Lina — did not Moore call you Lina sometimes?"

"Yes. It is sometimes used as the abbreviation of Caroline in his native country."

"Well, Lina, do you remember my one day noticing an inequality in your hair — a curl wanting on that right side — and your telling me that it was Robert's fault, as he had once cut therefrom a long lock?"

"Yes."

"If he is, and always was, as indifferent to you as you say, why did he steal your hair?"

"I don't know — yes, I do. It was my doing, not his. Everything of that sort always was my doing. He was going from home — to London, as usual; and the night before he went, I had found in his sister's workbox a lock of black hair — a short, round curl. Hortense told me it was her brother's, and a keepsake. He was sitting near the table. I looked at his head. He has plenty of hair; on the temples were many such round curls. I thought he could spare me one. I knew I should like to have it, and I asked for it. He said, on condition that he might have his choice of a tress from my head. So he got one of my long locks of hair, and I got one of his short ones. I keep his, but I dare say he has lost mine. It was my doing, and one of those silly deeds it distresses the heart and sets the face on fire to think of; one of those small but sharp recollections that return, lacerating your self-respect like tiny penknives, and forcing from your lips, as you sit alone, sudden, insane-sounding interjections."

"Caroline!"

"I *do* think myself a fool, Shirley, in some respects; I *do* despise myself. But I said I would not make you my confessor, for you cannot reciprocate foible for foible; you are not weak. How steadily you watch me now! Turn aside your clear, strong, she-eagle eye; it is an insult to fix it on me thus."

"What a study of character you are — weak, certainly, but not in the sense you think! — Come in!"

This was said in answer to a tap at the door. Miss Keeldar happened to be near it at the moment, Caroline at the other end of the room. She saw a note put into Shirley's hands, and heard the words, "From Mr. Moore, ma'am."

"Bring candles," said Miss Keeldar.

Caroline sat expectant.

"A communication on business," said the heiress; but when candles were brought, she neither opened nor read it. The rector's Fanny was presently announced, and the rector's niece went home.

CHAPTER XIII.

FURTHER COMMUNICATIONS ON BUSINESS.

In Shirley's nature prevailed at times an easy indolence. There were periods when she took delight in perfect vacancy of hand and eye — moments when her thoughts, her simple existence, the fact of the world being around and heaven above her, seemed to yield her such fullness of happiness that she did not need to lift a finger to increase the joy. Often, after an active morning, she would spend a sunny afternoon in lying stirless on the turf, at the foot of some tree of friendly umbrage. No society did she need but that of Caroline, and it sufficed if she were within call; no spectacle did she ask but that of the deep blue sky, and such cloudlets as sailed afar and aloft across its span; no sound but that of the bee's hum, the leaf's whisper. Her sole book in such hours was the dim chronicle of memory or the sibyl page of anticipation. From her young eyes fell on each volume a glorious light to read by; round her lips at moments played a smile which revealed glimpses of the tale or prophecy. It was not sad, not dark. Fate had been benign to the blissful dreamer, and promised to favour her yet again. In her past were sweet passages, in her future rosy hopes.

Yet one day when Caroline drew near to rouse her, thinking she had lain long enough, behold, as she looked down, Shirley's cheek was wet as if with dew; those fine eyes of hers shone humid and brimming.

"Shirley, why do *you* cry?" asked Caroline, involuntarily laying stress on *you*.

Miss Keeldar smiled, and turned her picturesque head towards the questioner. "Because it pleases me mightily to cry," she said. "My heart is both sad and glad. But why, you good, patient child — why do you not bear me company? I only weep tears, delightful and soon wiped away; you might weep gall, if you choose."

"Why should I weep gall?"

"Mateless, solitary bird!" was the only answer.

"And are not you too mateless, Shirley?"

"At heart — no."

"Oh! who nestles there, Shirley?"

But Shirley only laughed gaily at this question, and alertly started up.

"I have dreamed," she said, "a mere day-dream — certainly bright, probably baseless!"

Miss Helstone was by this time free enough from illusions: she took a sufficiently grave view of the future, and fancied she knew pretty well how her own destiny and that of some others were tending. Yet old associations retained their influence over her, and it was these and the power of habit which still frequently drew her of an evening to the field-style and the old thorn overlooking the Hollow.

One night, the night after the incident of the note, she had been at her usual post, watching for her beacon — watching vainly: that evening no lamp was lit. She waited till the rising of certain constellations warned her of lateness and signed her away. In passing Fieldhead, on her return, its moonlight beauty attracted her glance, and stayed her step an instant. Tree and hall rose peaceful under the night sky and clear full orb; pearly paleness gilded the building; mellow brown gloom bosomed it round; shadows of deep green brooded above its oak-wreathed roof. The broad pavement in front shone pale also; it gleamed as if some spell had transformed the dark granite to glistering Parian. On the silvery space slept two sable shadows, thrown sharply defined from two human figures. These figures when first seen were motionless and mute; presently they moved in harmonious step, and spoke low in harmonious key. Earnest was the gaze that scrutinized them as they emerged from behind the trunk of the cedar. “Is it Mrs. Pryor and Shirley?”

Certainly it is Shirley. Who else has a shape so lithe, and proud, and graceful? And her face, too, is visible — her countenance careless and pensive, and musing and mirthful, and mocking and tender. Not fearing the dew, she has not covered her head; her curls are free — they veil her neck and caress her shoulder with their tendril rings. An ornament of gold gleams through the half-closed folds of the scarf she has wrapped across her bust, and a large bright gem glitters on the white hand which confines it. Yes, that is Shirley.

Her companion then is, of course, Mrs. Pryor?

Yes, if Mrs. Pryor owns six feet of stature, and if she has changed her decent widow’s weeds for masculine disguise. The figure walking at Miss Keeldar’s side is a man — a tall, young, stately man; it is her tenant, Robert Moore.

The pair speak softly; their words are not distinguishable. To remain a moment to gaze is not to be an eavesdropper; and as the moon shines so clearly and their countenances are so distinctly apparent, who can resist the attraction of such interest? Caroline, it seems, cannot, for she lingers.

There was a time when, on summer nights, Moore had been wont to walk with his cousin, as he was now walking with the heiress. Often had she gone up the Hollow with him after sunset, to scent the freshness of the earth, where a growth of fragrant herbage carpeted a certain narrow terrace, edging a deep ravine, from whose rifted gloom was heard a sound like the spirit of the lonely watercourse, moaning amongst its wet stones, and between its weedy banks, and under its dark bower of alders.

“But I used to be closer to him,” thought Caroline. “He felt no obligation to treat me with homage; I needed only kindness. He used to hold my hand; he does not touch hers. And yet Shirley is not proud where she loves. There is no haughtiness in her aspect now, only a little in her port — what is natural to and inseparable from her, what she retains in her most careless as in her most guarded moments. Robert must think, as I think, that he is at this instant looking down on a fine face; and he must think it with a man's brain, not with mine. She has such generous yet soft fire in her eyes. She smiles — what makes her smile so sweet? I saw that Robert felt its beauty, and he must have felt it with his man's heart, not with my dim woman's perceptions. They look to me like two great happy spirits. Yonder silvered pavement reminds me of that white shore we believe to be beyond the death-flood. They have reached it; they walk there united. And what am I, standing here in shadow, shrinking into concealment, my mind darker than my hiding-place? I am one of this world, no spirit — a poor doomed mortal, who asks, in ignorance and hopelessness, wherefore she was born, to what end she lives; whose mind for ever runs on the question, how she shall at last encounter, and by whom be sustained through death.

"This is the worst passage I have come to yet; still I was quite prepared for it. I gave Robert up, and gave him up to Shirley, the first day I heard she was come, the first moment I saw her — rich, youthful, and lovely. She has him now. He is her lover. She is his darling. She will be far more his darling yet when they are married. The more Robert knows of Shirley the more his soul will cleave to her. They will both be happy, and I do not grudge them their bliss; but I groan under my own misery. Some of my suffering is very acute. Truly I ought not to have been born; they should have smothered me at the first cry."

Here, Shirley stepping aside to gather a dewy flower, she and her companion turned into a path that lay nearer the gate. Some of their conversation became audible. Caroline would not stay to listen. She passed away noiselessly, and the moonlight kissed the wall which her shadow had dimmed. The reader is privileged to remain, and try what he can make of the discourse.

"I cannot conceive why nature did not give you a bulldog's head, for you have all a bulldog's tenacity," said Shirley.

"Not a flattering idea. Am I so ignoble?"

"And something also you have of the same animal's silent ways of going about its work. You give no warning; you come noiselessly behind, seize fast, and hold on."

"This is guess-work. You have witnessed no such feat on my part. In your presence I have been no bulldog."

"Your very silence indicates your race. How little you talk in general, yet how deeply you scheme! You are far-seeing; you are calculating."

"I know the ways of these people. I have gathered information of their intentions. My note last night informed you that Barraclough's trial had ended in his conviction and sentence to transportation. His associates will plot vengeance. I shall lay my plans so as to counteract or at least be prepared for theirs — that is all. Having now given you as clear an explanation as I can, am I to understand that for what I propose doing I have your approbation?"

"I shall stand by you so long as you remain on the defensive. Yes."

"Good! Without any aid — even opposed or disapproved by you — I believe I should have acted precisely as I now intend to act, but in another spirit. I now feel satisfied. On the whole, I relish the position."

"I dare say you do. That is evident. You relish the work which lies before you still better than you would relish the execution of a government order for army-cloth."

"I certainly feel it congenial."

"So would old Helstone. It is true there is a shade of difference in your motives — many shades, perhaps. Shall I speak to Mr. Helstone? I will, if you like."

"Act as you please. Your judgment, Miss Keeldar, will guide you accurately. I could rely on it myself in a more difficult crisis. But I should inform you Mr. Helstone is somewhat prejudiced against me at present."

"I am aware — I have heard all about your differences. Depend upon it, they will melt away. He cannot resist the temptation of an alliance under present circumstances."

"I should be glad to have him; he is of true metal."

"I think so also."

"An old blade, and rusty somewhat, but the edge and temper still excellent."

"Well, you shall have him, Mr. Moore — that is, if I can win him."

"Whom can you not win?"

"Perhaps not the rector; but I will make the effort."

"Effort! He will yield for a word — a smile."

"By no means. It will cost me several cups of tea, some toast and cake, and an ample measure of remonstrances, expostulations, and persuasions. It grows rather chill."

"I perceive you shiver. Am I acting wrongly to detain you here? Yet it is so calm — I even feel it warm — and society such as yours is a pleasure to me so rare. If you were wrapped in a thicker shawl — — "

"I might stay longer, and forget how late it is, which would chagrin Mrs. Pryor. We keep early and regular hours at Fieldhead, Mr. Moore; and so, I am sure, does your sister at the cottage."

"Yes; but Hortense and I have an understanding the most convenient in the world, that we shall each do as we please."

"How do you please to do?"

"Three nights in the week I sleep in the mill — but I require little rest — and when it is moonlight and mild I often haunt the Hollow till daybreak."

"When I was a very little girl, Mr. Moore, my nurse used to tell me tales of fairies being seen in that Hollow. That was before my father built the mill, when it was a perfectly solitary ravine. You will be falling under enchantment."

"I fear it is done," said Moore, in a low voice.

"But there are worse things than fairies to be guarded against," pursued Miss Keeldar.

"Things more perilous," he subjoined.

"Far more so. For instance, how would you like to meet Michael Hartley, that mad Calvinist and Jacobin weaver? They say he is addicted to poaching, and often goes abroad at night with his gun."

"I have already had the luck to meet him. We held a long argument together one night. A strange little incident it was; I liked it."

"Liked it? I admire your taste! Michael is not sane. Where did you meet him?"

"In the deepest, shadiest spot in the glen, where the water runs low, under brushwood. We sat down near that plank bridge. It was moonlight, but clouded, and very windy. We had a talk."

"On politics?"

"And religion. I think the moon was at the full, and Michael was as near crazed as possible. He uttered strange blasphemy in his Antinomian fashion."

"Excuse me, but I think you must have been nearly as mad as he, to sit listening to him."

"There is a wild interest in his ravings. The man would be half a poet, if he were not wholly a maniac; and perhaps a prophet, if he were not a profligate. He solemnly informed me that hell was foreordained my inevitable portion; that he read the mark of the beast on my brow; that I had been an outcast from the beginning. God's vengeance, he said, was preparing for me, and affirmed that in a vision of the night he had beheld the manner and the instrument of my doom. I wanted to know further, but he left me with these words, 'The end is not yet.'"

"Have you ever seen him since?"

"About a month afterwards, in returning from market, I encountered him and Moses Barraclough, both in an advanced stage of inebriation. They were praying in frantic sort at the roadside. They accosted me as Satan, bid me avaunt, and clamoured to be delivered from temptation. Again, but a few days ago, Michael took the trouble of appearing at the counting-house door, hatless, in his shirt-sleeves — his coat and castor having been detained at the public-house in pledge. He delivered himself of the comfortable message that he could wish Mr. Moore to set his house in order, as his soul was likely shortly to be required of him."

"Do you make light of these things?"

"The poor man had been drinking for weeks, and was in a state bordering on delirium tremens."

"What then? He is the more likely to attempt the fulfilment of his own prophecies."

"It would not do to permit incidents of this sort to affect one's nerves."

"Mr. Moore, go home!"

"So soon?"

"Pass straight down the fields, not round by the lade and plantations."

"It is early yet."

"It is late. For my part, I am going in. Will you promise me not to wander in the Hollow to-night?"

"If you wish it."

"I do wish it. May I ask whether you consider life valueless?"

"By no means. On the contrary, of late I regard my life as invaluable."

"Of late?"

"Existence is neither aimless nor hopeless to me now, and it was both three months ago. I was then drowning, and rather wished the operation over. All at once a hand was stretched to me — such a delicate hand I scarcely dared trust it; its strength, however, has rescued me from ruin."

"Are you really rescued?"

"For the time. Your assistance has given me another chance."

"Live to make the best of it. Don't offer yourself as a target to Michael Hartley; and good-night!"

Miss Helstone was under a promise to spend the evening of the next day at Fieldhead. She kept her promise. Some gloomy hours had she spent in the interval. Most of the time had been passed shut up in her own apartment, only issuing from it, indeed, to join her uncle at meals, and anticipating inquiries from Fanny by telling her that she was busy altering a dress, and preferred sewing upstairs, to avoid interruption.

She did sew. She plied her needle continuously, ceaselessly, but her brain worked faster than her fingers. Again, and more intensely than ever, she desired a fixed occupation, no matter how onerous, how irksome. Her uncle must be once more entreated, but first she would consult Mrs. Pryor. Her head laboured to frame projects as diligently as her hands to plait and stitch the thin texture of the muslin summer dress spread on the little white couch at the foot of which she sat. Now and then, while thus doubly occupied, a tear would fill her eyes and fall on her busy hands; but this sign of emotion was rare and quickly effaced. The sharp pang passed; the dimness cleared from her vision. She would re-thread her needle, rearrange tuck and trimming, and work on.

Late in the afternoon she dressed herself. She reached Fieldhead, and appeared in the oak parlour just as tea was brought in. Shirley asked her why she came so late.

"Because I have been making my dress," said she. "These fine sunny days began to make me ashamed of my winter merino, so I have furbished up a lighter garment."

"In which you look as I like to see you," said Shirley. "You are a lady-like little person, Caroline. — Is she not, Mrs. Pryor?"

Mrs. Pryor never paid compliments, and seldom indulged in remarks, favourable or otherwise, on personal appearance. On the present occasion she only swept Caroline's curls from her cheek as she took a seat near her, caressed the oval outline, and observed, "You get somewhat thin, my love, and somewhat pale. Do you sleep well? your eyes have a languid look." And she gazed at her anxiously.

"I sometimes dream melancholy dreams," answered Caroline; "and if I lie awake for an hour or two in the night, I am continually thinking of the rectory as a dreary old place. You know it is very near the churchyard. The back part of the house is extremely ancient, and it is said that the out-kitchens there were once enclosed in the churchyard, and that there are graves under them. I rather long to leave the rectory."

"My dear, you are surely not superstitious?"

"No, Mrs. Pryor; but I think I grow what is called nervous. I see things under a darker aspect than I used to do. I have fears I never used to have — not of ghosts, but of omens and disastrous events; and I have an inexpressible weight on my mind which I would give the world to shake off, and I cannot do it."

"Strange!" cried Shirley. "I never feel so." Mrs. Pryor said nothing.

"Fine weather, pleasant days, pleasant scenes, are powerless to give me pleasure," continued Caroline. "Calm evenings are not calm to me. Moonlight, which I used to think mild, now only looks mournful. Is this weakness of mind, Mrs. Pryor, or what is it? I cannot help it. I often struggle against it. I reason; but reason and effort make no difference."

"You should take more exercise," said Mrs. Pryor.

"Exercise! I exercise sufficiently. I exercise till I am ready to drop."

"My dear, you should go from home."

"Mrs. Pryor, I should like to go from home, but not on any purposeless excursion or visit. I wish to be a governess, as you have been. It would oblige me greatly if you would speak to my uncle on the subject."

"Nonsense!" broke in Shirley. "What an idea! Be a governess! Better be a slave at once. Where is the necessity of it? Why should you dream of such a painful step?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Pryor, "you are very young to be a governess, and not sufficiently robust. The duties a governess undertakes are often severe."

"And I believe I want severe duties to occupy me."

"Occupy you!" cried Shirley. "When are you idle? I never saw a more industrious girl than you. You are always at work. Come," she continued — "come and sit by my side, and take some tea to refresh you. You don't care much for my friendship, then, that you wish to leave me?"

"Indeed I do, Shirley; and I don't wish to leave you. I shall never find another friend so dear."

At which words Miss Keeldar put her hand into Caroline's with an impulsively affectionate movement, which was well seconded by the expression of her face.

“If you think so, you had better make much of me,” she said, “and not run away from me. I hate to part with those to whom I am become attached. Mrs. Pryor there sometimes talks of leaving me, and says I might make a more advantageous connection than herself. I should as soon think of exchanging an old-fashioned mother for something modish and stylish. As for you — why, I began to flatter myself we were thoroughly friends; that you liked Shirley almost as well as Shirley likes you, and she does not stint her regard.”

“I *do* like Shirley. I like her more and more every day. But that does not make me strong or happy.”

“And would it make you strong or happy to go and live as a dependent amongst utter strangers? It would not. And the experiment must not be tried; I tell you it would fail. It is not in your nature to bear the desolate life governesses generally lead; you would fall ill. I won’t hear of it.”

And Miss Keeldar paused, having uttered this prohibition very decidedly. Soon she recommenced, still looking somewhat *courroucée*, “Why, it is my daily pleasure now to look out for the little cottage bonnet and the silk scarf glancing through the trees in the lane, and to know that my quiet, shrewd, thoughtful companion and monitress is coming back to me; that I shall have her sitting in the room to look at, to talk to or to let alone, as she and I please. This may be a selfish sort of language — I know it is — but it is the language which naturally rises to my lips, therefore I utter it.”

“I would write to you, Shirley.”

“And what are letters? Only a sort of *pis aller*. Drink some tea, Caroline. Eat something — you eat nothing. Laugh and be cheerful, and stay at home.”

Miss Helstone shook her head and sighed. She felt what difficulty she would have to persuade any one to assist or sanction her in making that change in her life which she believed desirable. Might she only follow her own judgment, she thought she should be able to find perhaps a harsh but an effectual cure for her sufferings. But this judgment, founded on circumstances she could fully explain to none, least of all to Shirley, seemed, in all eyes but her own, incomprehensible and fantastic, and was opposed accordingly.

There really was no present pecuniary need for her to leave a comfortable home and “take a situation;” and there was every probability that her uncle might, in some way, permanently provide for her. So her friends thought, and, as far as their lights enabled them to see, they reasoned correctly; but of Caroline’s strange sufferings, which she desired so eagerly to overcome or escape, they had no idea, of her racked nights and dismal days no suspicion. It was at once impossible and hopeless to explain; to wait and endure was her only plan. Many that want food and clothing have cheerier lives and brighter prospects than she had; many, harassed by poverty, are in a strait less afflictive.

“Now, is your mind quieted?” inquired Shirley. “Will you consent to stay at home?"

"I shall not leave it against the approbation of my friends," was the reply; "but I think in time they will be obliged to think as I do."

During this conversation Mrs. Pryor looked far from easy. Her extreme habitual reserve would rarely permit her to talk freely or to interrogate others closely. She could think a multitude of questions she never ventured to put, give advice in her mind which her tongue never delivered. Had she been alone with Caroline, she might possibly have said something to the point: Miss Keeldar's presence, accustomed as she was to it, sealed her lips. Now, as on a thousand other occasions, inexplicable nervous scruples kept her back from interfering. She merely showed her concern for Miss Helstone in an indirect way, by asking her if the fire made her too warm, placing a screen between her chair and the hearth, closing a window whence she imagined a draught proceeded, and often and restlessly glancing at her. Shirley resumed: "Having destroyed your plan," she said, "which I hope I have done, I shall construct a new one of my own. Every summer I make an excursion. This season I propose spending two months either at the Scotch lochs or the English lakes — that is, I shall go there provided you consent to accompany me. If you refuse, I shall not stir a foot."

"You are very good, Shirley."

"I would be very good if you would let me. I have every disposition to be good. It is my misfortune and habit, I know, to think of myself paramount to anybody else; but who is not like me in that respect? However, when Captain Keeldar is made comfortable, accommodated with all he wants, including a sensible, genial comrade, it gives him a thorough pleasure to devote his spare efforts to making that comrade happy. And should we not be happy, Caroline, in the Highlands? We will go to the Highlands. We will, if you can bear a sea-voyage, go to the Isles — the Hebrides, the Shetland, the Orkney Islands. Would you not like that? I see you would. — Mrs. Pryor, I call you to witness. Her face is all sunshine at the bare mention of it."

"I should like it much," returned Caroline, to whom, indeed, the notion of such a tour was not only pleasant, but gloriously reviving. Shirley rubbed her hands.

"Come; I can bestow a benefit," she exclaimed. "I can do a good deed with my cash. My thousand a year is not merely a matter of dirty bank-notes and jaundiced guineas (let me speak respectfully of both, though, for I adore them), but, it may be, health to the drooping, strength to the weak, consolation to the sad. I was determined to make something of it better than a fine old house to live in, than satin gowns to wear, better than deference from acquaintance and homage from the poor. Here is to begin. This summer, Caroline, Mrs. Pryor and I go out into the North Atlantic, beyond the Shetland, perhaps to the Faroe Isles. We will see seals in Suderoe, and, doubtless, mermaids in Stromoe. — Caroline is laughing, Mrs. Pryor. *I* made her laugh; *I* have done her good."

"I shall like to go, Shirley," again said Miss Helstone. "I long to hear the sound of waves — ocean-waves — and to see them as I have imagined them in dreams, like tossing banks of green light, strewed with vanishing and reappearing wreaths of foam, whiter than lilies. I shall delight to pass the shores of those lone rock-islets where the sea-birds live and breed unmolested. We shall be on the track of the old Scandinavians — of the Norsemen. We shall almost see the shores of Norway. This is a very vague delight that I feel, communicated by your proposal, but it *is* a delight."

"Will you think of Fitful Head now when you lie awake at night, of gulls shrieking round it, and waves tumbling in upon it, rather than of the graves under the rectory back-kitchen?"

"I will try; and instead of musing about remnants of shrouds, and fragments of coffins, and human bones and mould, I will fancy seals lying in the sunshine on solitary shores, where neither fisherman nor hunter ever come; of rock crevices full of pearly eggs bedded in seaweed; of unscared birds covering white sands in happy flocks."

"And what will become of that inexpressible weight you said you had on your mind?"

"I will try to forget it in speculation on the sway of the whole great deep above a herd of whales rushing through the livid and liquid thunder down from the frozen zone — a hundred of them, perhaps, wallowing, flashing, rolling in the wake of a patriarch bull, huge enough to have been spawned before the Flood, such a creature as poor Smart had in his mind when he said, —

'Strong against tides, the enormous whale
Emerges as he goes.'"

"I hope our bark will meet with no such shoal, or herd as you term it, Caroline. (I suppose you fancy the sea-mammoths pasturing about the bases of the 'everlasting hills,' devouring strange provender in the vast valleys through and above which sea-billows roll.) I should not like to be capsized by the patriarch bull."

"I suppose you expect to see mermaids, Shirley?"

"One of them, at any rate — I do not bargain for less — and she is to appear in some such fashion as this. I am to be walking by myself on deck, rather late of an August evening, watching and being watched by a full harvest moon. Something is to rise white on the surface of the sea, over which that moon mounts silent and hangs glorious. The object glitters and sinks. It rises again. I think I hear it cry with an articulate voice; I call you up from the cabin; I show you an image, fair as alabaster, emerging from the dim wave. We both see the long hair, the lifted and foam-white arm, the oval mirror brilliant as a star. It glides nearer; a human face is plainly visible — a face in the style of yours — whose straight, pure (excuse the word, it is appropriate) — whose straight, pure lineaments paleness does not disfigure. It looks at us, but not with your eyes. I see a preternatural lure in its wily glance. It beckons.

Were we men, we should spring at the sign — the cold billow would be dared for the sake of the colder enchantress; being women, we stand safe, though not dreadless. She comprehends our unmoved gaze; she feels herself powerless; anger crosses her front; she cannot charm, but she will appal us; she rises high, and glides all revealed on the dark wave-ridge. Temptress-terror! monstrous likeness of ourselves! Are you not glad, Caroline, when at last, and with a wild shriek, she dives?"

"But, Shirley, she is not like us. We are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters."

"Some of our kind, it is said, are all three. There are men who ascribe to 'woman,' in general, such attributes."

"My dears," here interrupted Mrs. Pryor, "does it not strike you that your conversation for the last ten minutes has been rather fanciful?"

"But there is no harm in our fancies; is there, ma'am?"

"We are aware that mermaids do not exist; why speak of them as if they did? How can you find interest in speaking of a nonentity?"

"I don't know," said Shirley.

"My dear, I think there is an arrival. I heard a step in the lane while you were talking; and is not that the garden-gate which creaks?"

Shirley stepped to the window.

"Yes, there is some one," said she, turning quietly away; and as she resumed her seat a sensitive flush animated her face, while a trembling ray at once kindled and softened her eye. She raised her hand to her chin, cast her gaze down, and seemed to think as she waited.

The servant announced Mr. Moore, and Shirley turned round when Mr. Moore appeared at the door. His figure seemed very tall as he entered, and stood in contrast with the three ladies, none of whom could boast a stature much beyond the average. He was looking well, better than he had been known to look for the past twelve months. A sort of renewed youth glowed in his eye and colour, and an invigorated hope and settled purpose sustained his bearing. Firmness his countenance still indicated, but not austerity. It looked as cheerful as it was earnest.

"I am just returned from Stilbro'," he said to Miss Keeldar, as he greeted her; "and I thought I would call to impart to you the result of my mission."

"You did right not to keep me in suspense," she said, "and your visit is well timed. Sit down. We have not finished tea. Are you English enough to relish tea, or do you faithfully adhere to coffee?"

Moore accepted tea.

"I am learning to be a naturalized Englishman," said he; "my foreign habits are leaving me one by one."

And now he paid his respects to Mrs. Pryor, and paid them well, with a grave modesty that became his age compared with hers. Then he looked at Caroline — not, however, for the first time: his glance had fallen upon her before. He bent towards her as she sat, gave her his hand, and asked her how she was. The light from the window did not fall upon Miss Helstone; her back was turned towards it. A quiet though rather low reply, a still demeanour, and the friendly protection of early twilight kept out of view each traitorous symptom. None could affirm that she had trembled or blushed, that her heart had quaked or her nerves thrilled; none could prove emotion; a greeting showing less effusion was never interchanged. Moore took the empty chair near her, opposite Miss Keeldar. He had placed himself well. His neighbour, screened by the very closeness of his vicinage from his scrutiny, and sheltered further by the dusk which deepened each moment, soon regained not merely *seeming* but *real* mastery of the feelings which had started into insurrection at the first announcement of his name.

He addressed his conversation to Miss Keeldar.

"I went to the barracks," he said, "and had an interview with Colonel Ryde. He approved my plans, and promised the aid I wanted. Indeed, he offered a more numerous force than I require — half a dozen will suffice. I don't intend to be swamped by redcoats. They are needed for appearance rather than anything else. My main reliance is on my own civilians."

"And on their captain," interposed Shirley.

"What, Captain Keeldar?" inquired Moore, slightly smiling, and not lifting his eyes. The tone of raillery in which he said this was very respectful and suppressed.

"No," returned Shirley, answering the smile; "Captain Gérard Moore, who trusts much to the prowess of his own right arm, I believe."

"Furnished with his counting-house ruler," added Moore. Resuming his usual gravity, he went on: "I received by this evening's post a note from the Home Secretary in answer to mine. It appears they are uneasy at the state of matters here in the north; they especially condemn the supineness and pusillanimity of the mill-owners. They say, as I have always said, that inaction, under present circumstances, is criminal, and that cowardice is cruelty, since both can only encourage disorder, and lead finally to sanguinary outbreaks. There is the note — I brought it for your perusal; and there is a batch of newspapers, containing further accounts of proceedings in Nottingham, Manchester, and elsewhere."

He produced letters and journals, and laid them before Miss Keeldar. While she perused them he took his tea quietly; but though his tongue was still, his observant faculties seemed by no means off duty. Mrs. Pryor, sitting in the background, did not come within the range of his glance, but the two younger ladies had the full benefit thereof.

Miss Keeldar, placed directly opposite, was seen without effort. She was the object his eyes, when lifted, naturally met first; and as what remained of daylight — the gilding of the west — was upon her, her shape rose in relief from the dark panelling behind. Shirley's clear cheek was tinted yet with the colour which had risen into it a few minutes since. The dark lashes of her eyes looking down as she read, the dusk yet delicate line of her eyebrows, the almost sable gloss of her curls, made her heightened complexion look fine as the bloom of a red wild flower by contrast. There was natural grace in her attitude, and there was artistic effect in the ample and shining folds of her silk dress — an attire simply fashioned, but almost splendid from the shifting brightness of its dye, warp and woof being of tints deep and changing as the hue on a pheasant's neck. A glancing bracelet on her arm produced the contrast of gold and ivory. There was something brilliant in the whole picture. It is to be supposed that Moore thought so, as his eye dwelt long on it, but he seldom permitted his feelings or his opinions to exhibit themselves in his face. His temperament boasted a certain amount of phlegm, and he preferred an undemonstrative, not ungentle, but serious aspect to any other.

He could not, by looking straight before him, see Caroline, as she was close at his side. It was necessary, therefore, to manœuvre a little to get her well within the range of his observation. He leaned back in his chair, and looked down on her. In Miss Helstone neither he nor any one else could discover brilliancy. Sitting in the shade, without flowers or ornaments, her attire the modest muslin dress, colourless but for its narrow stripe of pale azure, her complexion unflushed, unexcited, the very brownness of her hair and eyes invisible by this faint light, she was, compared with the heiress, as a graceful pencil sketch compared with a vivid painting. Since Robert had seen her last a great change had been wrought in her. Whether he perceived it might not be ascertained. He said nothing to that effect.

"How is Hortense?" asked Caroline softly.

"Very well; but she complains of being unemployed. She misses you."

"Tell her that I miss her, and that I write and read a portion of French every day."

"She will ask if you sent your love; she is always particular on that point. You know she likes attention."

"My best love — my very best. And say to her that whenever she has time to write me a little note I shall be glad to hear from her."

"What if I forget? I am not the surest messenger of compliments."

"No, don't forget, Robert. It is no compliment; it is in good earnest."

"And must, therefore, be delivered punctually."

"If you please."

"Hortense will be ready to shed tears. She is tenderhearted on the subject of her pupil; yet she reproaches you sometimes for obeying your uncle's injunctions too literally. Affection, like love, will be unjust now and then."

And Caroline made no answer to this observation; for indeed her heart was troubled, and to her eyes she would have raised her handkerchief if she had dared. If she had dared, too, she would have declared how the very flowers in the garden of Hollow's Cottage were dear to her; how the little parlour of that house was her earthly paradise; how she longed to return to it, as much almost as the first woman, in her exile, must have longed to revisit Eden. Not daring, however, to say these things, she held her peace; she sat quiet at Robert's side, waiting for him to say something more. It was long since this proximity had been hers — long since his voice had addressed her; could she, with any show of probability, even of possibility, have imagined that the meeting gave him pleasure, to her it would have given deep bliss. Yet, even in doubt that it pleased, in dread that it might annoy him, she received the boon of the meeting as an imprisoned bird would the admission of sunshine to its cage. It was of no use arguing, contending against the sense of present happiness; to be near Robert was to be revived.

Miss Keeldar laid down the papers.

"And are you glad or sad for all these menacing tidings?" she inquired of her tenant.

"Not precisely either; but I certainly am instructed. I see that our only plan is to be firm. I see that efficient preparation and a resolute attitude are the best means of averting bloodshed."

He then inquired if she had observed some particular paragraph, to which she replied in the negative, and he rose to show it to her. He continued the conversation standing before her. From the tenor of what he said, it appeared evident that they both apprehended disturbances in the neighbourhood of Briarfield, though in what form they expected them to break out was not specified. Neither Caroline nor Mrs. Pryor asked questions. The subject did not appear to be regarded as one ripe for free discussion; therefore the lady and her tenant were suffered to keep details to themselves, unimportuned by the curiosity of their listeners.

Miss Keeldar, in speaking to Mr. Moore, took a tone at once animated and dignified, confidential and self-respecting. When, however, the candles were brought in, and the fire was stirred up, and the fullness of light thus produced rendered the expression of her countenance legible, you could see that she was all interest, life, and earnestness. There was nothing coquettish in her demeanour; whatever she felt for Moore she felt it seriously. And serious, too, were his feelings, and settled were his views, apparently, for he made no petty effort to attract, dazzle, or impress. He contrived, notwithstanding, to command a little; because the deeper voice, however mildly modulated, the somewhat harder mind, now and then, though involuntarily and unintentionally, bore down by some peremptory phrase or tone the mellow accents and susceptible, if high, nature of Shirley. Miss Keeldar looked happy in conversing with him, and her joy seemed twofold — a joy of the past and present, of memory and of hope.

What I have just said are Caroline's ideas of the pair. She felt what has just been described. In thus feeling she tried not to suffer, but suffered sharply nevertheless. She suffered, indeed, miserably. A few minutes before her famished heart had tasted a drop and crumb of nourishment, that, if freely given, would have brought back abundance of life where life was failing; but the generous feast was snatched from her, spread before another, and she remained but a bystander at the banquet.

The clock struck nine; it was Caroline's time for going home. She gathered up her work, put the embroidery, the scissors, the thimble into her bag. She bade Mrs. Pryor a quiet good-night, receiving from that lady a warmer pressure of the hand than usual. She stepped up to Miss Keeldar.

"Good-night, Shirley!"

Shirley started up. "What! so soon? Are you going already?"

"It is past nine."

"I never heard the clock. You will come again to-morrow, and you will be happy to-night, will you not? Remember our plans."

"Yes," said Caroline; "I have not forgotten."

Her mind misgave her that neither those plans nor any other could permanently restore her mental tranquillity. She turned to Robert, who stood close behind her. As he looked up, the light of the candles on the mantelpiece fell full on her face. All its paleness, all its change, all its forlorn meaning were clearly revealed. Robert had good eyes, and might have seen it if he would; whether he did see it, nothing indicated.

"Good-night!" she said, shaking like a leaf, offering her thin hand hastily, anxious to part from him quickly.

"You are going home?" he asked, not touching her hand.

"Yes."

"Is Fanny come for you?"

"Yes."

"I may as well accompany you a step of the way; not up to the rectory, though, lest my old friend Helstone should shoot me from the window."

He laughed, and took his hat. Caroline spoke of unnecessary trouble; he told her to put on her bonnet and shawl. She was quickly ready, and they were soon both in the open air. Moore drew her hand under his arm, just in his old manner — that manner which she ever felt to be so kind.

"You may run on, Fanny," he said to the housemaid; "we shall overtake you." And when the girl had got a little in advance, he enclosed Caroline's hand in his, and said he was glad to find she was a familiar guest at Fieldhead. He hoped her intimacy with Miss Keeldar would continue; such society would be both pleasant and improving.

Caroline replied that she liked Shirley.

"And there is no doubt the liking is mutual," said Moore. "If she professes friendship, be certain she is sincere. She cannot feign; she scorns hypocrisy. And, Caroline, are we never to see you at Hollow's Cottage again?"

"I suppose not, unless my uncle should change his mind."

"Are you much alone now?"

"Yes, a good deal. I have little pleasure in any society but Miss Keeldar's."

"Have you been quite well lately?"

"Quite."

"You must take care of yourself. Be sure not to neglect exercise. Do you know I fancied you somewhat altered — a little fallen away, and pale. Is your uncle kind to you?"

"Yes; he is just as he always is."

"Not too tender, that is to say — not too protective and attentive. And what ails you, then? Tell me, Lina."

"Nothing, Robert." But her voice faltered.

"That is to say, nothing that you will tell me. I am not to be taken into confidence. Separation is then quite to estrange us, is it?"

"I do not know. Sometimes I almost fear it is."

"But it ought not to have that effect. 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and days o' lang syne?'"

"Robert, I don't forget."

"It is two months, I should think, Caroline, since you were at the cottage."

"Since I was *within* it — yes."

"Have you ever passed that way in your walk?"

"I have come to the top of the fields sometimes of an evening and looked down. Once I saw Hortense in the garden watering her flowers, and I know at what time you light your lamp in the counting-house. I have waited for it to shine out now and then, and I have seen you bend between it and the window. I knew it was you; I could almost trace the outline of your form."

"I wonder I never encountered you. I occasionally walk to the top of the Hollow's fields after sunset."

"I know you do. I had almost spoken to you one night, you passed so near me."

"Did I? I passed near you, and did not see you! Was I alone?"

"I saw you twice, and neither time were you alone."

"Who was my companion? Probably nothing but Joe Scott, or my own shadow by moonlight."

"No; neither Joe Scott nor your shadow, Robert. The first time you were with Mr. Yorke; and the second time what you call your shadow was a shape with a white forehead and dark curls, and a sparkling necklace round its neck. But I only just got a glimpse of you and that fairy shadow; I did not wait to hear you converse."

"It appears you walk invisible. I noticed a ring on your hand this evening; can it be the ring of Gyges? Henceforth, when sitting in the counting-house by myself, perhaps at dead of night, I shall permit myself to imagine that Caroline may be leaning over my shoulder reading with me from the same book, or sitting at my side engaged in her own particular task, and now and then raising her unseen eyes to my face to read there my thoughts."

"You need fear no such infliction. I do not come near you; I only stand afar off, watching what may become of you."

"When I walk out along the hedgerows in the evening after the mill is shut, or at night when I take the watchman's place, I shall fancy the flutter of every little bird over its nest, the rustle of every leaf, a movement made by you; tree-shadows will take your shape; in the white sprays of hawthorn I shall imagine glimpses of you. Lina, you will haunt me."

"I will never be where you would not wish me to be, nor see nor hear what you would wish unseen and unheard."

"I shall see you in my very mill in broad daylight. Indeed, I have seen you there once. But a week ago I was standing at the top of one of my long rooms; girls were working at the other end, and amongst half a dozen of them, moving to and fro, I seemed to see a figure resembling yours. It was some effect of doubtful light or shade, or of dazzling sunbeam. I walked up to this group. What I sought had glided away; I found myself between two buxom lasses in pinafores."

"I shall not follow you into your mill, Robert, unless you call me there."

"Nor is that the only occasion on which imagination has played me a trick. One night, when I came home late from market, I walked into the cottage parlour thinking to find Hortense; but instead of her I thought I found you. There was no candle in the room; my sister had taken the light upstairs with her. The window-blind was not drawn, and broad moonbeams poured through the panes. There you were, Lina, at the casement, shrinking a little to one side in an attitude not unusual with you. You were dressed in white, as I have seen you dressed at an evening party. For half a second your fresh, living face seemed turned towards me, looking at me; for half a second my idea was to go and take your hand, to chide you for your long absence, and welcome your present visit. Two steps forward broke the spell. The drapery of the dress changed outline; the tints of the complexion dissolved, and were formless. Positively, as I reached the spot, there was nothing left but the sweep of a white muslin curtain, and a balsam plant in a flower-pot, covered with a flush of bloom. 'Sic transit,' et cetera."

"It was not my wraith, then? I almost thought it was."

"No; only gauze, crockery, and pink blossom — a sample of earthly illusions."

"I wonder you have time for such illusions, occupied as your mind must be."

"So do I. But I find in myself, Lina, two natures — one for the world and business, and one for home and leisure. Gérard Moore is a hard dog, brought up to mill and market; the person you call your cousin Robert is sometimes a dreamer, who lives elsewhere than in Cloth-hall and counting-house."

"Your two natures agree with you. I think you are looking in good spirits and health. You have quite lost that harassed air which it often pained one to see in your face a few months ago."

"Do you observe that? Certainly I am disentangled of some difficulties. I have got clear of some shoals, and have more sea-room."

"And, with a fair wind, you may now hope to make a prosperous voyage?"

"I may *hope* it — yes — but hope is deceptive. There is no controlling wind or wave. Gusts and swells perpetually trouble the mariner's course; he dare not dismiss from his mind the expectation of tempest."

"But you are ready for a breeze; you are a good seaman, an able commander. You are a skilful pilot, Robert; you will weather the storm."

"My kinswoman always thinks the best of me, but I will take her words for a propitious omen. I will consider that in meeting her to-night I have met with one of those birds whose appearance is to the sailor the harbinger of good luck."

"A poor harbinger of good luck is she who can do nothing, who has no power. I feel my incapacity. It is of no use saying I have the will to serve you when I cannot prove it. Yet I have that will. I wish you success. I wish you high fortune and true happiness."

"When did you ever wish me anything else? What is Fanny waiting for? I told her to walk on. Oh! we have reached the churchyard. Then we are to part here, I suppose. We might have sat a few minutes in the church porch, if the girl had not been with us. It is so fine a night, so summer-mild and still, I have no particular wish to return yet to the Hollow."

"But we cannot sit in the porch now, Robert."

Caroline said this because Moore was turning her round towards it.

"Perhaps not. But tell Fanny to go in. Say we are coming. A few minutes will make no difference."

The church clock struck ten.

"My uncle will be coming out to take his usual sentinel round, and he always surveys the church and churchyard."

"And if he does? If it were not for Fanny, who knows we are here, I should find pleasure in dodging and eluding him. We could be under the east window when he is at the porch; as he came round to the north side we could wheel off to the south; we might at a pinch hide behind some of the monuments. That tall erection of the Wynnes would screen us completely."

"Robert, what good spirits you have! Go! go!" added Caroline hastily. "I hear the front door — — "

"I don't want to go; on the contrary, I want to stay."

"You know my uncle will be terribly angry. He forbade me to see you because you are a Jacobin."

"A queer Jacobin!"

"Go, Robert, he is coming; I hear him cough."

"Diable! It is strange — what a pertinacious wish I feel to stay!"

"You remember what he did to Fanny's — " began Caroline, and stopped abruptly short. "Sweetheart" was the word that ought to have followed, but she could not utter it. It seemed calculated to suggest ideas she had no intention to suggest — ideas delusive and disturbing. Moore was less scrupulous. "Fanny's sweetheart?" he said at once. "He gave him a shower-bath under the pump, did he not? He'd do as much for me, I dare say, with pleasure. I should like to provoke the old Turk — not, however, against you. But he would make a distinction between a cousin and a lover, would he not?"

"Oh, he would not think of you in that way, of course not; his quarrel with you is entirely political. Yet I should not like the breach to be widened, and he is so testy. Here he is at the garden gate. For your own sake and mine, Robert, go!"

The beseeching words were aided by a beseeching gesture and a more beseeching look. Moore covered her clasped hands an instant with his, answered her upward by a downward gave, gaze said "Good-night!" and went.

Caroline was in a moment at the kitchen door behind Fanny. The shadow of the shovel-hat at that very instant fell on a moonlit tomb. The rector emerged, erect as a cane, from his garden, and proceeded in slow march, his hands behind him, down the cemetery. Moore was almost caught. He had to "dodge" after all, to coast round the church, and finally to bend his tall form behind the Wynnes' ambitious monument. There he was forced to hide full ten minutes, kneeling with one knee on the turf, his hat off, his curls bare to the dew, his dark eye shining, and his lips parted with inward laughter at his position; for the rector meantime stood coolly star-gazing, and taking snuff within three feet of him.

It happened, however, that Mr. Helstone had no suspicion whatever on his mind; for being usually but vaguely informed of his niece's movements, not thinking it worth while to follow them closely, he was not aware that she had been out at all that day, and imagined her then occupied with book or work in her chamber — where, indeed, she was by this time, though not absorbed in the tranquil employment he ascribed to her, but standing at her window with fast-throbbing heart, peeping anxiously from behind the blind, watching for her uncle to re-enter and her cousin to escape. And at last she was gratified. She heard Mr. Helstone come in; she saw Robert stride the tombs and vault the wall; she then went down to prayers. When she returned to her chamber, it was to meet the memory of Robert. Slumber's visitation was long averted. Long she sat at her lattice, long gazed down on the old garden and older church, on the tombs laid out all gray and calm, and clear in moonlight. She followed the steps of the night, on its pathway of stars, far into the "wee sma' hours ayont the twal'." She was with Moore, in spirit, the whole time; she was at his side; she heard his voice; she gave her hand into his hand; it rested warm in his fingers. When the church clock struck, when any other sound stirred, when a little mouse familiar to her chamber — an intruder for which she would never permit Fanny to lay a trap — came rattling amongst the links of her locket-chain, her one ring, and another trinket or two on the toilet-table, to nibble a bit of biscuit laid ready for it, she looked up, recalled momentarily to the real. Then she said half aloud, as if deprecating the accusation of some unseen and unheard monitor, "I am not cherishing love dreams; I am only thinking because I cannot sleep. Of course, I know he will marry Shirley."

With returning silence, with the lull of the chime, and the retreat of her small untamed and unknown *protégé*, she still resumed the dream, nestling to the vision's side — listening to, conversing with it. It paled at last. As dawn approached, the setting stars and breaking day dimmed the creation of fancy; the wakened song of birds hushed her whispers. The tale full of fire, quick with interest, borne away by the morning wind, became a vague murmur. The shape that, seen in a moonbeam, lived, had a pulse, had movement, wore health's glow and youth's freshness, turned cold and ghostly gray, confronted with the red of sunrise. It wasted. She was left solitary at last. She crept to her couch, chill and dejected.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHIRLEY SEEKS TO BE SAVED BY WORKS.

“Of course, I know he will marry Shirley,” were her first words when she rose in the morning. “And he ought to marry her. She can help him,” she added firmly. “But I shall be forgotten when they *are* married,” was the cruel succeeding thought. “Oh! I shall be wholly forgotten! And what — *what* shall I do when Robert is taken quite from me? Where shall I turn? *My* Robert! I wish I could justly call him mine. But I am poverty and incapacity; Shirley is wealth and power. And she is beauty too, and love. I cannot deny it. This is no sordid suit. She loves him — not with inferior feelings. She loves, or *will* love, as he must feel proud to be loved. Not a valid objection can be made. Let them be married, then. But afterwards I shall be nothing to him. As for being his sister, and all that stuff, I despise it. I will either be all or nothing to a man like Robert; no feeble shuffling or false cant is endurable. Once let that pair be united, and I will certainly leave them. As for lingering about, playing the hypocrite, and pretending to calm sentiments of friendship, when my soul will be wrung with other feelings, I shall not descend to such degradation. As little could I fill the place of their mutual friend as that of their deadly foe; as little could I stand between them as trample over them. Robert is a first-rate man — in my eyes. I *have* loved, *do* love, and *must* love him. I would be his wife if I could; as I cannot, I must go where I shall never see him. There is but one alternative — to cleave to him as if I were a part of him, or to be sundered from him wide as the two poles of a sphere. — Sunder me then, Providence. Part us speedily.”

Some such aspirations as these were again working in her mind late in the afternoon, when the apparition of one of the personages haunting her thoughts passed the parlour window. Miss Keeldar sauntered slowly by, her gait, her countenance, wearing that mixture of wistfulness and carelessness which, when quiescent, was the wonted cast of her look and character of her bearing. When animated, the carelessness quite vanished, the wistfulness became blent with a genial gaiety, seasoning the laugh, the smile, the glance, with a unique flavour of sentiment, so that mirth from her never resembled “the crackling of thorns under a pot.”

“What do you mean by not coming to see me this afternoon, as you promised?” was her address to Caroline as she entered the room.

“I was not in the humour,” replied Miss Helstone, very truly.

Shirley had already fixed on her a penetrating eye.

“No,” she said; “I see you are not in the humour for loving me. You are in one of your sunless, inclement moods, when one feels a fellow-creature's presence is not welcome to you. You have such moods. Are you aware of it?"

"Do you mean to stay long, Shirley?"

"Yes. I am come to have my tea, and must have it before I go. I shall take the liberty, then, of removing my bonnet, without being asked."

And this she did, and then stood on the rug with her hands behind her.

"A pretty expression you have in your countenance," she went on, still gazing keenly, though not inimically — rather indeed pityingly — at Caroline. "Wonderfully self-supported you look, you solitude-seeking, wounded deer. Are you afraid Shirley will worry you if she discovers that you are hurt, and that you bleed?"

"I never do fear Shirley."

"But sometimes you dislike her; often you avoid her. Shirley can feel when she is slighted and shunned. If you had not walked home in the company you did last night, you would have been a different girl to-day. What time did you reach the rectory?"

"By ten."

"Humph! You took three-quarters of an hour to walk a mile. Was it you, or Moore, who lingered so?"

"Shirley, you talk nonsense."

"*He* talked nonsense — that I doubt not; or he looked it, which is a thousand times worse. I see the reflection of his eyes on your forehead at this moment. I feel disposed to call him out, if I could only get a trustworthy second. I feel desperately irritated. I felt so last night, and have felt it all day."

"You don't ask me why," she proceeded, after a pause, "you little silent, over-modest thing; and you don't deserve that I should pour out my secrets into your lap without an invitation. Upon my word, I could have found it in my heart to have dogged Moore yesterday evening with dire intent. I have pistols, and can use them."

"Stuff, Shirley! Which would you have shot — me or Robert?"

"Neither, perhaps. Perhaps myself — more likely a bat or a tree-bough. He is a puppy, your cousin — a quiet, serious, sensible, judicious, ambitious puppy. I see him standing before me, talking his half-stern, half-gentle talk, bearing me down (as I am very conscious he does) with his fixity of purpose, etc.; and then — I have no patience with him!"

Miss Keeldar started off on a rapid walk through the room, repeating energetically that she had no patience with men in general, and with her tenant in particular.

"You are mistaken," urged Caroline, in some anxiety. "Robert is no puppy or male flirt; I can vouch for that."

"*You* vouch for it! Do you think I'll take your word on the subject? There is no one's testimony I would not credit sooner than yours. To advance Moore's fortune you would cut off your right hand."

"But not tell lies. And if I speak the truth, I must assure you that he was just civil to me last night — that was all."

"I never asked what he was. I can guess. I saw him from the window take your hand in his long fingers, just as he went out at my gate."

"That is nothing. I am not a stranger, you know. I am an old acquaintance, and his cousin."

"I feel indignant, and that is the long and short of the matter," responded Miss Keeldar. "All my comfort," she added presently, "is broken up by his manœuvres. He keeps intruding between you and me. Without him we should be good friends; but that six feet of puppyhood makes a perpetually-recurring eclipse of our friendship. Again and again he crosses and obscures the disc I want always to see clear; ever and anon he renders me to you a mere bore and nuisance."

"No, Shirley, no."

"He does. You did not want my society this afternoon, and I feel it hard. You are naturally somewhat reserved, but I am a social personage, who cannot live alone. If we were but left unmolested, I have that regard for you that I could bear you in my presence for ever, and not for the fraction of a second do I ever wish to be rid of you. You cannot say as much respecting me."

"Shirley, I can say anything you wish. Shirley, I like you."

"You will wish me at Jericho to-morrow, Lina."

"I shall not. I am every day growing more accustomed to — fonder of you. You know I am too English to get up a vehement friendship all at once; but you are so much better than common — you are so different to every-day young ladies — I esteem you, I value you; you are never a burden to me — never. Do you believe what I say?"

"Partly," replied Miss Keeldar, smiling rather incredulously; "but you are a peculiar personage. Quiet as you look, there is both a force and a depth somewhere within not easily reached or appreciated. Then you certainly are not happy."

"And unhappy people are rarely good. Is that what you mean?"

"Not at all. I mean rather that unhappy people are often preoccupied, and not in the mood for discoursing with companions of my nature. Moreover, there is a sort of unhappiness which not only depresses, but corrodes; and that, I fear, is your portion. Will pity do you any good, Lina? If it will, take some from Shirley; she offers largely, and warrants the article genuine."

"Shirley, I never had a sister — you never had a sister; but it flashes on me at this moment how sisters feel towards each other — affection twined with their life, which no shocks of feeling can uproot, which little quarrels only trample an instant, that it may spring more freshly when the pressure is removed; affection that no passion can ultimately outrival, with which even love itself cannot do more than compete in force and truth. Love hurts us so, Shirley. It is so tormenting, so racking, and it burns away our strength with its flame. In affection is no pain and no fire, only sustenance and balm. I am supported and soothed when you — that is, *you only* — are near, Shirley. Do you believe me now?"

"I am always easy of belief when the creed pleases me. We really are friends, then, Lina, in spite of the black eclipse?"

"We really are," returned the other, drawing Shirley towards her, and making her sit down, "chance what may."

"Come, then; we will talk of something else than the Troubler." But at this moment the rector came in, and the "something else" of which Miss Keeldar was about to talk was not again alluded to till the moment of her departure. She then delayed a few minutes in the passage to say, "Caroline, I wish to tell you that I have a great weight on my mind; my conscience is quite uneasy as if I had committed, or was going to commit, a crime. It is not my *private* conscience, you must understand, but my landed-proprietor and lord-of-the-manor conscience. I have got into the clutch of an eagle with iron talons. I have fallen under a stern influence, which I scarcely approve, but cannot resist. Something will be done ere long, I fear, which it by no means pleases me to think of. To ease my mind, and to prevent harm as far as I can, I mean to enter on a series of good works. Don't be surprised, therefore, if you see me all at once turn outrageously charitable. I have no idea how to begin, but you must give me some advice. We will talk more on the subject to-morrow; and just ask that excellent person, Miss Ainley, to step up to Fieldhead. I have some notion of putting myself under her tuition. Won't she have a precious pupil? Drop a hint to her, Lina, that, though a well-meaning, I am rather a neglected character, and then she will feel less scandalized at my ignorance about clothing societies and such things."

On the morrow Caroline found Shirley sitting gravely at her desk, with an account-book, a bundle of banknotes, and a well-filled purse before her. She was looking mighty serious, but a little puzzled. She said she had been "casting an eye" over the weekly expenditure in housekeeping at the hall, trying to find out where she could retrench; that she had also just given audience to Mrs. Gill, the cook, and had sent that person away with a notion that her (Shirley's) brain was certainly crazed. "I have lectured her on the duty of being careful," said she, "in a way quite new to her. So eloquent was I on the text of economy that I surprised myself; for, you see, it is altogether a fresh idea. I never thought, much less spoke, on the subject till lately. But it is all theory; for when I came to the practical part I could retrench nothing. I had not firmness to take off a single pound of butter, or to prosecute to any clear result an inquest into the destiny of either dripping, lard, bread, cold meat, or other kitchen perquisite whatever. I know we never get up illuminations at Fieldhead, but I could not ask the meaning of sundry quite unaccountable pounds of candles. We do not wash for the parish, yet I viewed in silence items of soap and bleaching-powder calculated to satisfy the solicitude of the most anxious inquirer after our position in reference to those articles. Carnivorous I am not, nor is Mrs. Pryor, nor is Mrs. Gill herself, yet I only hemmed and opened my eyes a little wide when I saw butchers' bills whose figures seemed to prove that fact — falsehood, I mean. Caroline, you may laugh at me, but you can't change me. I am a poltroon on certain points; I feel it. There is a base alloy of moral cowardice in my composition. I blushed and hung my head before Mrs. Gill, when she ought to have been faltering confessions to me. I found it impossible to get up the spirit even to hint, much less to prove, to her that she was a cheat. I have no calm dignity, no true courage about me."

"Shirley, what fit of self-injustice is this? My uncle, who is not given to speak well of women, says there are not ten thousand men in England as genuinely fearless as you."

"I am fearless, physically; I am never nervous about danger. I was not startled from self-possession when Mr. Wynne's great red bull rose with a bellow before my face, as I was crossing the cowslip lea alone, stooped his begrimed, sullen head, and made a run at me; but I was afraid of seeing Mrs. Gill brought to shame and confusion of face. You have twice — ten times — my strength of mind on certain subjects, Caroline. You, whom no persuasion can induce to pass a bull, however quiet he looks, would have firmly shown my housekeeper she had done wrong; then you would have gently and wisely admonished her; and at last, I dare say, provided she had seemed penitent, you would have very sweetly forgiven her. Of this conduct I am incapable. However, in spite of exaggerated imposition, I still find we live within our means. I have money in hand, and I really must do some good with it. The Briarfield poor are badly off; they must be helped. What ought I to do, think you, Lina? Had I not better distribute the cash at once?"

"No, indeed, Shirley; you will not manage properly. I have often noticed that your only notion of charity is to give shillings and half-crowns in a careless, free-handed sort of way, which is liable to continual abuse. You must have a prime minister, or you will get yourself into a series of scrapes. You suggested Miss Ainley yourself; to Miss Ainley I will apply. And, meantime, promise to keep quiet, and not begin throwing away your money. What a great deal you have, Shirley! You must feel very rich with all that?"

"Yes; I feel of consequence. It is not an immense sum, but I feel responsible for its disposal; and really this responsibility weighs on my mind more heavily than I could have expected. They say that there are some families almost starving to death in Briarfield. Some of my own cottagers are in wretched circumstances. I must and will help them."

"Some people say we shouldn't give alms to the poor, Shirley."

"They are great fools for their pains. For those who are not hungry, it is easy to palaver about the degradation of charity, and so on: but they forget the brevity of life, as well as its bitterness. We have none of us long to live. Let us help each other through seasons of want and woe as well as we can, without heeding in the least the scruples of vain philosophy."

"But you do help others, Shirley. You give a great deal as it is."

"Not enough. I must give more, or, I tell you, my brother's blood will some day be crying to Heaven against me. For, after all, if political incendiaries come here to kindle conflagration in the neighbourhood, and my property is attacked, I shall defend it like a tigress — I know I shall. Let me listen to Mercy as long as she is near me. Her voice once drowned by the shout of ruffian defiance, and I shall be full of impulses to resist and quell. If once the poor gather and rise in the form of the mob, I shall turn against them as an aristocrat; if they bully me, I must defy: if they attack, I must resist, and I will."

"You talk like Robert."

"I feel like Robert, only more fierily. Let them meddle with Robert, or Robert's mill, or Robert's interests, and I shall hate them. At present I am no patrician, nor do I regard the poor around me as plebeians; but if once they violently wrong me or mine, and then presume to dictate to us, I shall quite forget pity for their wretchedness and respect for their poverty, in scorn of their ignorance and wrath at their insolence."

"Shirley, how your eyes flash!"

"Because my soul burns. Would you, any more than me, let Robert be borne down by numbers?"

"If I had your power to aid Robert, I would use it as you mean to use it. If I could be such a friend to him as you can be, I would stand by him, as you mean to stand by him, till death."

"And now, Lina, though your eyes don't flash, they glow. You drop your lids; but I saw a kindled spark. However, it is not yet come to fighting. What I want to do is to *prevent* mischief. I cannot forget, either day or night, that these embittered feelings of the poor against the rich have been generated in suffering: they would neither hate nor envy us if they did not deem us so much happier than themselves. To allay this suffering, and thereby lessen this hate, let me, out of my abundance, give abundantly; and that the donation may go farther, let it be made wisely. To that intent, we must introduce some clear, calm, practical sense into our councils. So go and fetch Miss Ainley."

Without another word Caroline put on her bonnet and departed. It may, perhaps, appear strange that neither she nor Shirley thought of consulting Mrs. Pryor on their scheme; but they were wise in abstaining. To have consulted her — and this they knew by instinct — would only have been to involve her in painful embarrassment. She was far better informed, better read, a deeper thinker than Miss Ainley, but of administrative energy, of executive activity, she had none. She would subscribe her own modest mite to a charitable object willingly — secret almsgiving suited her; but in public plans, on a large scale, she could take no part; as to originating them, that was out of the question. This Shirley knew, and therefore she did not trouble Mrs. Pryor by unavailing conferences, which could only remind her of her own deficiencies, and do no good.

It was a bright day for Miss Ainley when she was summoned to Fieldhead to deliberate on projects so congenial to her; when she was seated with all honour and deference at a table with paper, pen, ink, and — what was best of all — cash before her, and requested to draw up a regular plan for administering relief to the destitute poor of Briarfield. She, who knew them all, had studied their wants, had again and again felt in what way they might best be succoured, could the means of succour only be found, was fully competent to the undertaking, and a meek exultation gladdened her kind heart as she felt herself able to answer clearly and promptly the eager questions put by the two young girls, as she showed them in her answers how much and what serviceable knowledge she had acquired of the condition of her fellow-creatures around her.

Shirley placed at her disposal £300, and at sight of the money Miss Ainley's eyes filled with joyful tears; for she already saw the hungry fed, the naked clothed, the sick comforted thereby. She quickly drew up a simple, sensible plan for its expenditure; and she assured them brighter times would now come round, for she doubted not the lady of Fieldhead's example would be followed by others. She should try to get additional subscriptions, and to form a fund; but first she must consult the clergy. Yes, on that point she was peremptory. Mr. Helstone, Dr. Boultby, Mr. Hall, *must* be consulted (for not only must Briarfield be relieved, but Whinbury and Nunnely). It would, she averred, be presumption in her to take a single step unauthorized by them.

The clergy were sacred beings in Miss Ainley's eyes; no matter what might be the insignificance of the individual, his station made him holy. The very curates — who, in their trivial arrogance, were hardly worthy to tie her patten-strings, or carry her cotton umbrella, or check woollen shawl — she, in her pure, sincere enthusiasm, looked upon as sucking saints. No matter how clearly their little vices and enormous absurdities were pointed out to her, she could not see them; she was blind to ecclesiastical defects; the white surplice covered a multitude of sins.

Shirley, knowing this harmless infatuation on the part of her recently-chosen prime minister, stipulated expressly that the curates were to have no voice in the disposal of the money, that their meddling fingers were not to be inserted into the pie. The rectors, of course, must be paramount, and they might be trusted. They had some experience, some sagacity, and Mr. Hall, at least, had sympathy and loving-kindness for his fellow-men; but as for the youth under them, they must be set aside, kept down, and taught that subordination and silence best became their years and capacity.

It was with some horror Miss Ainley heard this language. Caroline, however, interposing with a mild word or two in praise of Mr Sweeting, calmed her again. Sweeting was, indeed, her own favourite. She endeavoured to respect Messrs. Malone and Donne, but the slices of sponge-cake and glasses of cowslip or primrose wine she had at different times administered to Sweeting, when he came to see her in her little cottage, were ever offered with sentiments of truly motherly regard. The same innocuous collation she had once presented to Malone; but that personage evinced such open scorn of the offering, she had never ventured to renew it. To Donne she always served the treat, and was happy to see his approbation of it proved beyond a doubt by the fact of his usually eating two pieces of cake, and putting a third in his pocket.

Indefatigable in her exertions where good was to be done, Miss Ainley would immediately have set out on a walk of ten miles round to the three rectors, in order to show her plan, and humbly solicit their approval; but Miss Keeldar interdicted this, and proposed, as an amendment, to collect the clergy in a small select reunion that evening at Fieldhead. Miss Ainley was to meet them, and the plan was to be discussed in full privy council.

Shirley managed to get the senior priesthood together accordingly, and before the old maid's arrival, she had, further, talked all the gentlemen into the most charming mood imaginable. She herself had taken in hand Dr. Boultby and Mr. Helstone. The first was a stubborn old Welshman, hot, opinionated, and obstinate, but withal a man who did a great deal of good, though not without making some noise about it. The latter we know. She had rather a friendly feeling for both, especially for old Helstone; and it cost her no trouble to be quite delightful to them. She took them round the garden; she gathered them flowers; she was like a kind daughter to them. Mr. Hall she left to Caroline — or rather, it was to Caroline's care Mr. Hall consigned himself.

He generally sought Caroline in every party where she and he happened to be. He was not in general a lady's man, though all ladies liked him; something of a book-worm he was, near-sighted, spectacled, now and then abstracted. To old ladies he was kind as a son. To men of every occupation and grade he was acceptable. The truth, simplicity, frankness of his manners, the nobleness of his integrity, the reality and elevation of his piety, won him friends in every grade. His poor clerk and sexton delighted in him; the noble patron of his living esteemed him highly. It was only with young, handsome, fashionable, and stylish ladies he felt a little shy. Being himself a plain man — plain in aspect, plain in manners, plain in speech — he seemed to fear their dash, elegance, and airs. But Miss Helstone had neither dash nor airs, and her native elegance was of a very quiet order — quiet as the beauty of a ground-loving hedge-flower. He was a fluent, cheerful, agreeable talker. Caroline could talk too in a *tête-à-tête*. She liked Mr. Hall to come and take the seat next her in a party, and thus secure her from Peter Augustus Malone, Joseph Donne, or John Sykes; and Mr. Hall never failed to avail himself of this privilege when he possibly could. Such preference shown by a single gentleman to a single lady would certainly, in ordinary cases, have set in motion the tongues of the gossips; but Cyril Hall was forty-five years old, slightly bald, and slightly gray, and nobody ever said or thought he was likely to be married to Miss Helstone. Nor did he think so himself. He was wedded already to his books and his parish. His kind sister Margaret, spectacled and learned like himself, made him happy in his single state; he considered it too late to change. Besides, he had known Caroline as a pretty little girl. She had sat on his knee many a time; he had bought her toys and given her books; he felt that her friendship for him was mixed with a sort of filial respect; he could not have brought himself to attempt to give another colour to her sentiments, and his serene mind could glass a fair image without feeling its depths troubled by the reflection.

When Miss Ainley arrived, she was made kindly welcome by every one. Mrs. Pryor and Margaret Hall made room for her on the sofa between them; and when the three were seated, they formed a trio which the gay and thoughtless would have scorned, indeed, as quite worthless and unattractive — a middle-aged widow and two plain, spectacled old maids — yet which had its own quiet value, as many a suffering and friendless human being knew.

Shirley opened the business and showed the plan.

"I know the hand which drew up that," said Mr. Hall, glancing at Miss Ainley, and smiling benignantly. His approbation was won at once. Boultby heard and deliberated with bent brow and protruded under lip. His consent he considered too weighty to be given in a hurry. Helstone glanced sharply round with an alert, suspicious expression, as if he apprehended that female craft was at work, and that something in petticoats was somehow trying underhand to acquire too much influence, and make itself of too much importance. Shirley caught and comprehended the expression. "This scheme is nothing," said she carelessly. "It is only an outline — a mere suggestion. You, gentlemen, are requested to draw up rules of your own."

And she directly fetched her writing-case, smiling queerly to herself as she bent over the table where it stood. She produced a sheet of paper, a new pen, drew an arm-chair to the table, and presenting her hand to old Helstone, begged permission to install him in it. For a minute he was a little stiff, and stood wrinkling his copper-coloured forehead strangely. At last he muttered, "Well, you are neither my wife nor my daughter, so I'll be led for once; but mind — I know I *am* led. Your little female manœuvres don't blind me."

"Oh!" said Shirley, dipping the pen in the ink, and putting it into his hand, "you must regard me as Captain Keeldar to-day. This is quite a gentleman's affair — yours and mine entirely, doctor" (so she had dubbed the rector). "The ladies there are only to be our aides-de-camp, and at their peril they speak, till we have settled the whole business."

He smiled a little grimly, and began to write. He soon interrupted himself to ask questions, and consult his brethren, disdainfully lifting his glance over the curly heads of the two girls and the demure caps of the elder ladies, to meet the winking glasses and gray pates of the priests. In the discussion which ensued, all three gentlemen, to their infinite credit, showed a thorough acquaintance with the poor of their parishes — an even minute knowledge of their separate wants. Each rector knew where clothing was needed, where food would be most acceptable, where money could be bestowed with a probability of it being judiciously laid out. Wherever their memories fell short, Miss Ainley or Miss Hall, if applied to, could help them out; but both ladies took care not to speak unless spoken to. Neither of them wanted to be foremost, but each sincerely desired to be useful; and useful the clergy consented to make them — with which boon they were content.

Shirley stood behind the rectors, leaning over their shoulders now and then to glance at the rules drawn up and the list of cases making out, listening to all they said, and still at intervals smiling her queer smile — a smile not ill-natured, but significant — too significant to be generally thought amiable. Men rarely like such of their fellows as read their inward nature too clearly and truly. It is good for women, especially, to be endowed with a soft blindness; to have mild, dim eyes, that never penetrate below the surface of things — that take all for what it seems. Thousands, knowing this, keep their eyelids drooped on system; but the most downcast glance has its loophole, through which it can, on occasion, take its sentinel-survey of life. I remember once seeing a pair of blue eyes, that were usually thought sleepy, secretly on the alert, and I knew by their expression — an expression which chilled my blood, it was in that quarter so wondrously unexpected — that for years they had been accustomed to silent soul-reading. The world called the owner of these blue eyes *bonne petite femme* (she was not an Englishwoman). I learned her nature afterwards — got it off by heart — studied it in its farthest, most hidden recesses. She was the finest, deepest, subtlest schemer in Europe.

When all was at length settled to Miss Keeldar's mind, and the clergy had entered so fully into the spirit of her plans as to head the subscription-list with their signatures for £50 each, she ordered supper to be served, having previously directed Mrs. Gill to exercise her utmost skill in the preparation of this repast. Mr. Hall was no *bon vivant* — he was naturally an abstemious man, indifferent to luxury; but Boultby and Helstone both liked good cookery. The *recherché* supper consequently put them into excellent humour. They did justice to it, though in a gentlemanly way — not in the mode Mr. Donne would have done had he been present. A glass of fine wine was likewise tasted, with discerning though most decorous relish. Captain Keeldar was complimented on his taste; the compliment charmed him. It had been his aim to gratify and satisfy his priestly guests. He had succeeded, and was radiant with glee.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. DONNE'S EXODUS.

The next day Shirley expressed to Caroline how delighted she felt that the little party had gone off so well.

"I rather like to entertain a circle of gentlemen," said she. "It is amusing to observe how they enjoy a judiciously concocted repast. For ourselves, you see, these choice wines and these scientific dishes are of no importance to us; but gentlemen seem to retain something of the *naïveté* of children about food, and one likes to please them — that is, when they show the becoming, decent self-government of our admirable rectors. I watch Moore sometimes, to try and discover how he can be pleased; but he has not that child's simplicity about him. Did you ever find out his accessible point, Caroline? you have seen more of him than I."

"It is not, at any rate, that of my uncle and Dr. Boultby," returned Caroline, smiling. She always felt a sort of shy pleasure in following Miss Keeldar's lead respecting the discussion of her cousin's character. Left to herself, she would never have touched on the subject; but when invited, the temptation of talking about him of whom she was ever thinking was irresistible. "But," she added, "I really don't know what it is, for I never watched Robert in my life but my scrutiny was presently baffled by finding he was watching me."

"There it is!" exclaimed Shirley. "You can't fix your eyes on him but his presently flash on you. He is never off his guard. He won't give you an advantage. Even when he does not look at you, his thoughts seem to be busy amongst your own thoughts, tracing your words and actions to their source, contemplating your motives at his ease. Oh! I know that sort of character, or something in the same style. It is one that piques me singularly. How does it affect you?"

This question was a specimen of one of Shirley's sharp, sudden turns. Caroline used to be fluttered by them at first, but she had now got into the way of parrying these home-thrusts like a little Quakeress.

"Pique you? In what way does it pique you?" she said.

"Here he comes!" suddenly exclaimed Shirley, breaking off, starting up and running to the window. "Here comes a diversion. I never told you of a superb conquest I have made lately — made at those parties to which I can never persuade you to accompany me; and the thing has been done without effort or intention on my part — that I aver. There is the bell — and, by all that's delicious! there are two of them. Do they never hunt, then, except in couples? You may have one, Lina, and you may take your choice. I hope I am generous enough. Listen to Tartar!"

The black-muzzled, tawny dog, a glimpse of which was seen in the chapter which first introduced its mistress to the reader, here gave tongue in the hall, amidst whose hollow space the deep bark resounded formidably. A growl more terrible than the bark, menacing as muttered thunder, succeeded.

"Listen!" again cried Shirley, laughing. "You would think that the prelude to a bloody onslaught. They will be frightened. They don't know old Tartar as I do. They are not aware his uproars are all sound and fury, signifying nothing!"

Some bustle was heard. "Down, sir, down!" exclaimed a high-toned, imperious voice, and then came a crack of a cane or whip. Immediately there was a yell — a scutter — a run — a positive tumult.

"O Malone, Malone!"

"Down! down! down!" cried the high voice.

"He really is worrying them!" exclaimed Shirley. "They have struck him. A blow is what he is not used to, and will not take."

Out she ran. A gentleman was fleeing up the oak staircase, making for refuge in the gallery or chambers in hot haste; another was backing fast to the stairfoot, wildly flourishing a knotty stick, at the same time reiterating, "Down! down! down!" while the tawny dog bayed, bellowed, howled at him, and a group of servants came bundling from the kitchen. The dog made a spring; the second gentleman turned tail and rushed after his comrade. The first was already safe in a bedroom; he held the door against his fellow — nothing so merciless as terror. But the other fugitive struggled hard; the door was about to yield to his strength.

"Gentlemen," was uttered in Miss Keeldar's silvery but vibrating tones, "spare my locks, if you please. Calm yourselves! Come down! Look at Tartar; he won't harm a cat."

She was caressing the said Tartar. He lay crouched at her feet, his fore paws stretched out, his tail still in threatening agitation, his nostrils snorting, his bulldog eyes conscious of a dull fire. He was an honest, phlegmatic, stupid, but stubborn canine character. He loved his mistress and John — the man who fed him — but was mostly indifferent to the rest of the world. Quiet enough he was, unless struck or threatened with a stick, and that put a demon into him at once.

"Mr. Malone, how do you do?" continued Shirley, lifting up her mirth-lit face to the gallery. "That is not the way to the oak parlour; that is Mrs. Pryor's apartment. Request your friend Mr. Donne to evacuate. I shall have the greatest pleasure in receiving him in a lower room."

"Ha! ha!" cried Malone, in hollow laughter, quitting the door, and leaning over the massive balustrade. "Really that animal alarmed Donne. He is a little timid," he proceeded, stiffening himself, and walking trimly to the stairhead. "I thought it better to follow, in order to reassure him."

"It appears you did. Well, come down, if you please. — John" (turning to her manservant), "go upstairs and liberate Mr. Donne. — Take care, Mr. Malone; the stairs are slippery."

In truth they were, being of polished oak. The caution came a little late for Malone. He had slipped already in his stately descent, and was only saved from falling by a clutch at the banisters, which made the whole structure creak again.

Tartar seemed to think the visitor's descent effected with unwarranted *éclat*, and accordingly he growled once more. Malone, however, was no coward. The spring of the dog had taken him by surprise, but he passed him now in suppressed fury rather than fear. If a look could have strangled Tartar, he would have breathed no more. Forgetting politeness in his sullen rage, Malone pushed into the parlour before Miss Keeldar. He glanced at Miss Helstone; he could scarcely bring himself to bend to her. He glared on both the ladies. He looked as if, had either of them been his wife, he would have made a glorious husband at the moment. In each hand he seemed as if he would have liked to clutch one and gripe her to death.

However, Shirley took pity. She ceased to laugh; and Caroline was too true a lady to smile even at any one under mortification. Tartar was dismissed; Peter Augustus was soothed — for Shirley had looks and tones that might soothe a very bull. He had sense to feel that, since he could not challenge the owner of the dog, he had better be civil. And civil he tried to be; and his attempts being well received, he grew presently *very* civil and quite himself again. He had come, indeed, for the express purpose of making himself charming and fascinating. Rough portents had met him on his first admission to Fieldhead; but that passage got over, charming and fascinating he resolved to be. Like March, having come in like a lion, he purposed to go out like a lamb.

For the sake of air, as it appeared, or perhaps for that of ready exit in case of some new emergency arising, he took his seat, — not on the sofa, where Miss Keeldar offered him enthronization, nor yet near the fireside, to which Caroline, by a friendly sign, gently invited him, but on a chair close to the door. Being no longer sullen or furious, he grew, after his fashion, constrained and embarrassed. He talked to the ladies by fits and starts, choosing for topics whatever was most intensely commonplace. He sighed deeply, significantly, at the close of every sentence; he sighed in each pause; he sighed ere he opened his mouth. At last, finding it desirable to add ease to his other charms, he drew forth to aid him an ample silk pocket-handkerchief. This was to be the graceful toy with which his unoccupied hands were to trifle. He went to work with a certain energy. He folded the red-and-yellow square cornerwise; he whipped it open with a waft; again he folded it in narrower compass; he made of it a handsome band. To what purpose would he proceed to apply the ligature? Would he wrap it about his throat — his head? Should it be a comforter or a turban? Neither. Peter Augustus had an inventive, an original genius. He was about to show the ladies graces of action possessing at least the charm of novelty. He sat on the chair with his athletic Irish legs crossed, and these legs, in that attitude, he circled with the bandana and bound firmly together. It was evident he felt this device to be worth an encore; he repeated it more than once. The second performance sent Shirley to the window, to laugh her silent but irrepressible laugh unseen; it turned Caroline's head aside, that her long curls might screen the smile mantling on her features. Miss Helstone, indeed, was amused by more than one point in Peter's demeanour. She was edified at the complete though abrupt diversion of his homage from herself to the heiress. The £5,000 he supposed her likely one day to inherit were not to be weighed in the balance against Miss Keeldar's estate and hall. He took no pains to conceal his calculations and tactics. He pretended to no gradual change of views; he wheeled about at once. The pursuit of the lesser fortune was openly relinquished for that of the greater. On what grounds he expected to succeed in his chase himself best knew; certainly not by skilful management.

From the length of time that elapsed, it appeared that John had some difficulty in persuading Mr. Donne to descend. At length, however, that gentleman appeared; nor, as he presented himself at the oak-parlour door, did he seem in the slightest degree ashamed or confused — not a whit. Donne, indeed, was of that coldly phlegmatic, immovably complacent, densely self-satisfied nature which is insensible to shame. He had never blushed in his life; no humiliation could abash him; his nerves were not capable of sensation enough to stir his life and make colour mount to his cheek; he had no fire in his blood and no modesty in his soul; he was a frontless, arrogant, decorous slip of the commonplace — conceited, inane, insipid; and this gentleman had a notion of wooing Miss Keeldar! He knew no more, however, how to set about the business than if he had been an image carved in wood. He had no idea of a taste to be pleased, a heart to be reached in courtship. His notion was, when he should have formally visited her a few times, to write a letter proposing marriage. Then he calculated she would accept him for love of his office; then they would be married; then he should be master of Fieldhead; and he should live very comfortably, have servants at his command, eat and drink of the best, and be a great man. You would not have suspected his intentions when he addressed his intended bride in an impertinent, injured tone — "A very dangerous dog that, Miss Keeldar. I wonder you should keep such an animal."

"Do you, Mr. Donne? Perhaps you will wonder more when I tell you I am very fond of him."

"I should say you are not serious in the assertion. Can't fancy a lady fond of that brute — 'tis so ugly — a mere carter's dog. Pray hang him."

"Hang what I am fond of!"

"And purchase in his stead some sweetly pooty pug or poodle — something appropriate to the fair sex. Ladies generally like lap-dogs."

“Perhaps I am an exception.”

“Oh, you can’t be, you know. All ladies are alike in those matters. That is universally allowed.”

“Tartar frightened you terribly, Mr. Donne. I hope you won’t take any harm.”

“That I shall, no doubt. He gave me a turn I shall not soon forget. When I *sor* him” (such was Mr. Donne’s pronunciation) “about to spring, I thought I should have fainted.”

“Perhaps you did faint in the bedroom; you were a long time there.”

“No; I bore up that I might hold the door fast. I was determined not to let any one enter. I thought I would keep a barrier between me and the enemy.”

“But what if your friend Mr. Malone had been worried?”

“Malone must take care of himself. Your man persuaded me to come out at last by saying the dog was chained up in his kennel. If I had not been assured of this, I would have remained all day in the chamber. But what is that? I declare the man has told a falsehood! The dog is there!”

And indeed Tartar walked past the glass door opening to the garden, stiff, tawny, and black-muzzled as ever. He still seemed in bad humour. He was growling again, and whistling a half-strangled whistle, being an inheritance from the bulldog side of his ancestry.

“There are other visitors coming,” observed Shirley, with that provoking coolness which the owners of formidable-looking dogs are apt to show while their animals are all bristle and bay. Tartar sprang down the pavement towards the gate, bellowing *avec explosion*. His mistress quietly opened the glass door, and stepped out chirruping to him. His bellow was already silenced, and he was lifting up his huge, blunt, stupid head to the new callers to be patted.

“What! Tartar, Tartar!” said a cheery, rather boyish voice, “don’t you know us? Good-morning, old boy!”

And little Mr. Sweeting, whose conscious good nature made him comparatively fearless of man, woman, child, or brute, came through the gate, caressing the guardian. His vicar, Mr. Hall, followed. He had no fear of Tartar either, and Tartar had no ill-will to him. He snuffed both the gentlemen round, and then, as if concluding that they were harmless, and might be allowed to pass, he withdrew to the sunny front of the hall, leaving the archway free. Mr. Sweeting followed, and would have played with him; but Tartar took no notice of his caresses. It was only his mistress’s hand whose touch gave him pleasure; to all others he showed himself obstinately insensible.

Shirley advanced to meet Messrs. Hall and Sweeting, shaking hands with them cordially. They were come to tell her of certain successes they had achieved that morning in applications for subscriptions to the fund. Mr. Hall’s eyes beamed benignantly through his spectacles, his plain face looked positively handsome with goodness; and when Caroline, seeing who was come, ran out to meet him, and put both her hands into his, he gazed down on her with a gentle, serene, affectionate expression that gave him the aspect of a smiling Melanchthon.

Instead of re-entering the house, they strayed through the garden, the ladies walking one on each side of Mr. Hall. It was a breezy sunny day; the air freshened the girls' cheeks and gracefully dishevelled their ringlets. Both of them looked pretty — one gay. Mr. Hall spoke oftenest to his brilliant companion, looked most frequently at the quiet one. Miss Keeldar gathered handfuls of the profusely blooming flowers whose perfume filled the enclosure. She gave some to Caroline, telling her to choose a nosegay for Mr. Hall; and with her lap filled with delicate and splendid blossoms, Caroline sat down on the steps of a summer-house. The vicar stood near her, leaning on his cane.

Shirley, who could not be inhospitable, now called out the neglected pair in the oak parlour. She convoyed Donne past his dread enemy Tartar, who, with his nose on his fore paws, lay snoring under the meridian sun. Donne was not grateful — he never *was* grateful for kindness and attention — but he was glad of the safeguard. Miss Keeldar, desirous of being impartial, offered the curates flowers. They accepted them with native awkwardness. Malone seemed specially at a loss, when a bouquet filled one hand, while his shillelah occupied the other. Donne's "Thank you!" was rich to hear. It was the most fatuous and arrogant of sounds, implying that he considered this offering a homage to his merits, and an attempt on the part of the heiress to ingratiate herself into his priceless affections. Sweeting alone received the posy like a smart, sensible little man, as he was, putting it gallantly and nattily into his buttonhole.

As a reward for his good manners, Miss Keeldar, beckoning him apart, gave him some commission, which made his eyes sparkle with glee. Away he flew, round by the courtyard to the kitchen. No need to give him directions; he was always at home everywhere. Ere long he reappeared, carrying a round table, which he placed under the cedar; then he collected six garden-chairs from various nooks and bowers in the grounds, and placed them in a circle. The parlour-maid — Miss Keeldar kept no footman — came out, bearing a napkin-covered tray. Sweeting's nimble fingers aided in disposing glasses, plates, knives, and forks; he assisted her too in setting forth a neat luncheon, consisting of cold chicken, ham, and tarts.

This sort of impromptu regale it was Shirley's delight to offer any chance guests; and nothing pleased her better than to have an alert, obliging little friend, like Sweeting, to run about her hand, cheerily receive and briskly execute her hospitable hints. David and she were on the best terms in the world; and his devotion to the heiress was quite disinterested, since it prejudiced in nothing his faithful allegiance to the magnificent Dora Sykes.

The repast turned out a very merry one. Donne and Malone, indeed, contributed but little to its vivacity, the chief part they played in it being what concerned the knife, fork, and wine-glass; but where four such natures as Mr. Hall, David Sweeting, Shirley, and Caroline were assembled in health and amity, on a green lawn, under a sunny sky, amidst a wilderness of flowers, there could not be ungenial dullness.

In the course of conversation Mr. Hall reminded the ladies that Whitsuntide was approaching, when the grand united Sunday-school tea-drinking and procession of the three parishes of Briarfield, Whinbury, and Nunnely were to take place. Caroline, he knew, would be at her post as teacher, he said, and he hoped Miss Keeldar would not be wanting. He hoped she would make her first public appearance amongst them at that time. Shirley was not the person to miss an occasion of this sort. She liked festive excitement, a gathering of happiness, a concentration and combination of pleasant details, a throng of glad faces, a muster of elated hearts. She told Mr. Hall they might count on her with security. She did not know what she would have to do, but they might dispose of her as they pleased.

"And," said Caroline, "you will promise to come to my table, and to sit near me, Mr. Hall?"

"I shall not fail, *Deo volente*," said he. — "I have occupied the place on her right hand at these monster tea-drinkings for the last six years," he proceeded, turning to Miss Keeldar. "They made her a Sunday-school teacher when she was a little girl of twelve. She is not particularly self-confident by nature, as you may have observed; and the first time she had to 'take a tray,' as the phrase is, and make tea in public, there was some piteous trembling and flushing. I observed the speechless panic, the cups shaking in the little hand, and the overflowing teapot filled too full from the urn. I came to her aid, took a seat near her, managed the urn and the slop-basin, and in fact made the tea for her like any old woman."

"I was very grateful to you," interposed Caroline.

"You were. You told me so with an earnest sincerity that repaid me well, inasmuch as it was not like the majority of little ladies of twelve, whom you may help and caress for ever without their evincing any quicker sense of the kindness done and meant than if they were made of wax and wood instead of flesh and nerves. — She kept close to me, Miss Keeldar, the rest of the evening, walking with me over the grounds where the children were playing; she followed me into the vestry when all were summoned into church; she would, I believe, have mounted with me to the pulpit, had I not taken the previous precaution of conducting her to the rectory pew."

"And he has been my friend ever since," said Caroline.

"And always sat at her table, near her tray, and handed the cups — that is the extent of my services. The next thing I do for her will be to marry her some day to some curate or mill-owner. — But mind, Caroline, I shall inquire about the bridegroom's character; and if he is not a gentleman likely to render happy the little girl who walked with me hand in hand over Nunnely Common, I will not officiate. So take care."

"The caution is useless. I am not going to be married. I shall live single, like your sister Margaret, Mr. Hall."

"Very well. You might do worse. Margaret is not unhappy. She has her books for a pleasure, and her brother for a care, and is content. If ever you want a home, if the day should come when Briarfield rectory is yours no longer, come to Nunnely vicarage. Should the old maid and bachelor be still living, they will make you tenderly welcome."

"There are your flowers. Now," said Caroline, who had kept the nosegay she had selected for him till this moment, "*you* don't care for a bouquet, but you must give it to Margaret; only — to be sentimental for once — keep that little forget-me-not, which is a wild flower I gathered from the grass; and — to be still more sentimental — let me take two or three of the blue blossoms and put them in my souvenir."

And she took out a small book with enamelled cover and silver clasp, wherein, having opened it, she inserted the flowers, writing round them in pencil, "To be kept for the sake of the Rev. Cyril Hall, my friend. May — , 18 — ."

The Rev. Cyril Hall, on his part, also placed a sprig in safety between the leaves of a pocket Testament. He only wrote on the margin, "Caroline."

"Now," said he, smiling, "I trust we are romantic enough. Miss Keeldar," he continued (the curates, by-the-bye, during this conversation, were too much occupied with their own jokes to notice what passed at the other end of the table), "I hope you are laughing at this trait of '*exaltation*' in the old gray-headed vicar; but the fact is, I am so used to comply with the requests of this young friend of yours, I don't know how to refuse her when she tells me to do anything. You would say it is not much in my way to traffic with flowers and forget-me-nots; but, you see, when requested to be sentimental, I am obedient."

"He is naturally rather sentimental," remarked Caroline. "Margaret told me so, and I know what pleases him."

"That you should be good and happy? Yes; that is one of my greatest pleasures. May God long preserve to you the blessings of peace and innocence! By which phrase I mean *comparative* innocence; for in His sight, I am well aware, *none* are pure. What to our human perceptions looks spotless as we fancy angels, is to Him but frailty, needing the blood of His Son to cleanse, and the strength of His Spirit to sustain. Let us each and all cherish humility — I, as you, my young friends; and we may well do it when we look into our own hearts, and see there temptations, inconsistencies, propensities, even we blush to recognize. And it is not youth, nor good looks, nor grace, nor any gentle outside charm which makes either beauty or goodness in God's eyes. — Young ladies, when your mirror or men's tongues flatter you, remember that, in the sight of her Maker, Mary Ann Ainley — a woman whom neither glass nor lips have ever panegyrized — is fairer and better than either of you. She is indeed," he added, after a pause — "she is indeed. You young things, wrapt up in yourselves and in earthly hopes, scarcely live as Christ lived. Perhaps you cannot do it yet, while existence is so sweet and earth so smiling to you; it would be too much to expect. She, with meek heart and due reverence, treads close in her Redeemer's steps."

Here the harsh voice of Donne broke in on the mild tones of Mr. Hall. "Ahem!" he began, clearing his throat evidently for a speech of some importance — "ahem! Miss Keeldar, your attention an instant, if you please."

"Well," said Shirley nonchalantly, "what is it? I listen. All of me is ear that is not eye."

"I hope part of you is hand also," returned Donne, in his vulgarly presumptuous and familiar style, "and part purse. It is to the hand and purse I propose to appeal. I came here this morning with a view to beg of you — — "

"You should have gone to Mrs. Gill; she is my almoner."

"To beg of you a subscription to a school. I and Dr. Boultby intend to erect one in the hamlet of Ecclefigg, which is under our vicarage of Whinbury. The Baptists have got possession of it. They have a chapel there, and we want to dispute the ground."

"But I have nothing to do with Ecclefigg. I possess no property there."

"What does that signify? You're a churchwoman, ain't you?"

"Admirable creature!" muttered Shirley, under her breath. "Exquisite address! Fine style! What raptures he excites in me!" Then aloud, "I am a churchwoman, certainly."

"Then you can't refuse to contribute in this case. The population of Ecclefigg are a parcel of brutes; we want to civilize them."

"Who is to be the missionary?"

"Myself, probably."

"You won't fail through lack of sympathy with your flock."

"I hope not — I expect success; but we must have money. There is the paper. Pray give a handsome sum."

When asked for money, Shirley rarely held back. She put down her name for £5. After the £300 she had lately given, and the many smaller sums she was giving constantly, it was as much as she could at present afford. Donne looked at it, declared the subscription "shabby," and clamorously demanded more. Miss Keeldar flushed up with some indignation and more astonishment.

"At present I shall give no more," said she.

"Not give more! Why, I expected you to head the list with a cool hundred. With your property, you should never put down a signature for less."

She was silent.

"In the south," went on Donne, "a lady with a thousand a year would be ashamed to give five pounds for a public object."

Shirley, so rarely haughty, looked so now. Her slight frame became nerved; her distinguished face quickened with scorn.

"Strange remarks?" said she — "most inconsiderate! Reproach in return for bounty is misplaced."

"Bounty! Do you call five pounds bounty?"

"I do; and bounty which, had I not given it to Dr. Boultby's intended school, of the erection of which I approve, and in no sort to his curate, who seems ill-advised in his manner of applying for, or rather extorting, subscriptions — bounty, I repeat, which, but for this consideration, I should instantly reclaim."

Donne was thick-skinned. He did not feel all or half that the tone, air, glance of the speaker expressed. He knew not on what ground he stood.

"Wretched place this Yorkshire," he went on. "I could never have formed an idea*r* of the country had I not seen it. And the people — rich and poor — what a set! How *corse* and uncultivated! They would be scouted in the south."

Shirley leaned forwards on the table, her nostrils dilating a little, her taper fingers interlaced and compressing each other hard.

"The rich," pursued the infatuated and unconscious Donne, "are a parcel of misers, never living as persons with their incomes ought to live. You scarsley" — (you must excuse Mr. Donne's pronunciation, reader; it was very choice; he considered it genteel, and prided himself on his southern accent; northern ears received with singular sensations his utterance of certain words) — "you scarsley ever see a fam'ly where a propa carriage or a reg'la butla is kep; and as to the poor — just look at them when they come crowding about the church doors on the occasion of a marriage or a funeral, clattering in clogs; the men in their shirt-sleeves and wool-combers' aprons, the women in mob-caps and bed-gowns. They positively deserve that one should turn a mad cow in amongst them to rout their rabble-ranks. He-he! what fun it would be!"

"There! you have reached the climax," said Shirley quietly. "You have reached the climax," she repeated, turning her glowing glance towards him. "You cannot go beyond it, and," she added with emphasis, "you *shall* not, in my house."

Up she rose — nobody could control her now, for she was exasperated — straight she walked to her garden gates, wide she flung them open.

"Walk through," she said austerely, "and pretty quickly, and set foot on this pavement no more."

Donne was astounded. He had thought all the time he was showing himself off to high advantage, as a lofty-souled person of the first "ton;" he imagined he was producing a crushing impression. Had he not expressed disdain of everything in Yorkshire? What more conclusive proof could be given that he was better than anything there? And yet here was he about to be turned like a dog out of a Yorkshire garden! Where, under such circumstances, was the "concatenation accordingly"?

"Rid me of you instantly — instantly!" reiterated Shirley, as he lingered.

"Madam — a clergyman! turn out a clergyman!"

"Off! Were you an archbishop you have proved yourself no gentleman, and must go. Quick!"

She was quite resolved. There was no trifling with her. Besides, Tartar was again rising; he perceived symptoms of a commotion; he manifested a disposition to join in. There was evidently nothing for it but to go, and Donne made his exodus, the heiress sweeping him a deep curtsy as she closed the gates on him.

"How dare the pompous priest abuse his flock! How dare the lisping cockney revile Yorkshire!" was her sole observation on the circumstance, as she returned to the table.

Ere long the little party broke up; Miss Keeldar's ruffled and darkened brow, curled lip, and incensed eye gave no invitation to further social enjoyment.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHITSUNTIDE.

The fund prospered. By dint of Miss Keeldar's example, the three rectors' vigorous exertions, and the efficient though quiet aid of their spinster and spectacled lieutenants, Mary Ann Ainley and Margaret Hall, a handsome sum was raised; and this being judiciously managed, served for the present greatly to alleviate the distress of the unemployed poor. The neighbourhood seemed to grow calmer. For a fortnight past no cloth had been destroyed; no outrage on mill or mansion had been committed in the three parishes. Shirley was sanguine that the evil she wished to avert was almost escaped, that the threatened storm was passing over. With the approach of summer she felt certain that trade would improve — it always did; and then this weary war could not last for ever; peace must return one day. With peace, what an impulse would be given to commerce!

Such was the usual tenor of her observations to her tenant, Gérard Moore, whenever she met him where they could converse; and Moore would listen very quietly — too quietly to satisfy her. She would then by her impatient glance demand something more from him — some explanation, or at least some additional remark. Smiling in his way, with that expression which gave a remarkable cast of sweetness to his mouth, while his brow remained grave, he would answer to the effect that himself too trusted in the finite nature of the war; that it was indeed on that ground the anchor of his hopes was fixed; thereon his speculations depended. "For you are aware," he would continue, "that I now work Hollow's Mill entirely on speculation. I sell nothing; there is no market for my goods. I manufacture for a future day. I make myself ready to take advantage of the first opening that shall occur. Three months ago this was impossible to me; I had exhausted both credit and capital. You well know who came to my rescue, from what hand I received the loan which saved me. It is on the strength of that loan I am enabled to continue the bold game which, a while since, I feared I should never play more. Total ruin I know will follow loss, and I am aware that gain is doubtful; but I am quite cheerful. So long as I can be active, so long as I can strive, so long, in short, as my hands are not tied, it is impossible for me to be depressed. One year — nay, but six months — of the reign of the olive, and I am safe; for, as you say, peace will give an impulse to commerce. In this you are right; but as to the restored tranquillity of the neighbourhood, as to the permanent good effect of your charitable fund, I doubt. Eleemosynary relief never yet tranquillized the working-classes — it never made them grateful; it is not in human nature that it should. I suppose, were all things ordered aright, they ought not to be in a position to need that humiliating relief; and this they feel. We should feel it were we so placed. Besides, to whom should they be grateful? To you, to the clergy perhaps, but not to us mill-owners. They hate us worse than ever. Then the disaffected here are in correspondence with the disaffected elsewhere. Nottingham is one of their headquarters, Manchester another, Birmingham a third. The subalterns receive orders from their chiefs; they are in a good state of discipline; no blow is struck without mature deliberation. In sultry weather you have seen the sky threaten thunder day by day, and yet night after night the clouds have cleared, and the sun has set quietly; but the danger was not gone — it was only delayed. The long-threatening storm is sure to break at last. There is analogy between the moral and physical atmosphere."

"Well, Mr. Moore" (so these conferences always ended), "take care of yourself. If you think that I have ever done you any good, reward me by promising to take care of yourself."

"I do; I will take close and watchful care. I wish to live, not to die. The future opens like Eden before me; and still, when I look deep into the shades of my paradise, I see a vision that I like better than seraph or cherub glide across remote vistas."

"Do you? Pray, what vision?"

"I see — — "

The maid came bustling in with the tea-things.

The early part of that May, as we have seen, was fine; the middle was wet; but in the last week, at change of moon, it cleared again. A fresh wind swept off the silver-white, deep-piled rain-clouds, bearing them, mass on mass, to the eastern horizon, on whose verge they dwindled, and behind whose rim they disappeared, leaving the vault behind all pure blue space, ready for the reign of the summer sun. That sun rose broad on Whitsuntide. The gathering of the schools was signalized by splendid weather.

Whit-Tuesday was the great day, in preparation for which the two large schoolrooms of Briarfield, built by the present rector, chiefly at his own expense, were cleaned out, whitewashed, repainted, and decorated with flowers and evergreens — some from the rectory garden, two cartloads from Fieldhead, and a wheel-barrowful from the more stingy domain of De Walden, the residence of Mr. Wynne. In these schoolrooms twenty tables, each calculated to accommodate twenty guests, were laid out, surrounded with benches, and covered with white cloths. Above them were suspended at least some twenty cages, containing as many canaries, according to a fancy of the district, specially cherished by Mr. Helstone's clerk, who delighted in the piercing song of these birds, and knew that amidst confusion of tongues they always carolled loudest. These tables, be it understood, were not spread for the twelve hundred scholars to be assembled from the three parishes, but only for the patrons and teachers of the schools. The children's feast was to be spread in the open air. At one o'clock the troops were to come in; at two they were to be marshalled; till four they were to parade the parish; then came the feast, and afterwards the meeting, with music and speechifying in the church.

Why Briarfield was chosen for the point of rendezvous — the scene of the *fête* — should be explained. It was not because it was the largest or most populous parish — Whinbury far outdid it in that respect; nor because it was the oldest, antique as were the hoary church and rectory — Nunnely's low-roofed temple and mossy parsonage, buried both in coeval oaks, outstanding sentinels of Nunnwood, were older still. It was simply because Mr. Helstone willed it so, and Mr. Helstone's will was stronger than that of Boultby or Hall; the former *could* not, the latter *would* not, dispute a point of precedence with their resolute and imperious brother. They let him lead and rule.

This notable anniversary had always hitherto been a trying day to Caroline Helstone, because it dragged her perforce into public, compelling her to face all that was wealthy, respectable, influential in the neighbourhood; in whose presence, but for the kind countenance of Mr. Hall, she would have appeared unsupported. Obliged to be conspicuous; obliged to walk at the head of her regiment as the rector's niece, and first teacher of the first class; obliged to make tea at the first table for a mixed multitude of ladies and gentlemen, and to do all this without the countenance of mother, aunt, or other chaperon — she, meantime, being a nervous person, who mortally feared publicity — it will be comprehended that, under these circumstances, she trembled at the approach of Whitsuntide.

But this year Shirley was to be with her, and that changed the aspect of the trial singularly — it changed it utterly. It was a trial no longer — it was almost an enjoyment. Miss Keeldar was better in her single self than a host of ordinary friends. Quite self-possessed, and always spirited and easy; conscious of her social importance, yet never presuming upon it — it would be enough to give one courage only to look at her. The only fear was lest the heiress should not be punctual to tryst. She often had a careless way of lingering behind time, and Caroline knew her uncle would not wait a second for any one. At the moment of the church clock tolling two, the bells would clash out and the march begin. She must look after Shirley, then, in this matter, or her expected companion would fail her.

Whit-Tuesday saw her rise almost with the sun. She, Fanny, and Eliza were busy the whole morning arranging the rectory parlours in first-rate company order, and setting out a collation of cooling refreshments — wine, fruit, cakes — on the dining-room sideboard. Then she had to dress in her freshest and fairest attire of white muslin: the perfect fineness of the day and the solemnity of the occasion warranted, and even exacted, such costume. Her new sash — a birthday present from Margaret Hall, which she had reason to believe Cyril himself had bought, and in return for which she had indeed given him a set of cambric bands in a handsome case — was tied by the dexterous fingers of Fanny, who took no little pleasure in arraying her fair young mistress for the occasion. Her simple bonnet had been trimmed to correspond with her sash; her pretty but inexpensive scarf of white crape suited her dress. When ready she formed a picture, not bright enough to dazzle, but fair enough to interest; not brilliantly striking, but very delicately pleasing — a picture in which sweetness of tint, purity of air, and grace of mien atoned for the absence of rich colouring and magnificent contour. What her brown eye and clear forehead showed of her mind was in keeping with her dress and face — modest, gentle, and, though pensive, harmonious. It appeared that neither lamb nor dove need fear her, but would welcome rather, in her look of simplicity and softness, a sympathy with their own natures, or with the natures we ascribe to them.

After all, she was an imperfect, faulty human being, fair enough of form, hue, and array, but, as Cyril Hall said, neither so good nor so great as the withered Miss Ainley, now putting on her best black gown and Quaker drab shawl and bonnet in her own narrow cottage chamber.

Away Caroline went, across some very sequestered fields and through some quite hidden lanes, to Fieldhead. She glided quickly under the green hedges and across the greener leas. There was no dust, no moisture, to soil the hem of her stainless garment, or to damp her slender sandal. After the late rains all was clean, and under the present glowing sun all was dry. She walked fearlessly, then, on daisy and turf, and through thick plantations; she reached Fieldhead, and penetrated to Miss Keeldar's dressing-room.

It was well she had come, or Shirley would have been too late. Instead of making ready with all speed, she lay stretched on a couch, absorbed in reading. Mrs. Pryor stood near, vainly urging her to rise and dress. Caroline wasted no words. She immediately took the book from her, and with her own hands commenced the business of disrobing and rerobing her. Shirley, indolent with the heat, and gay with her youth and pleasurable nature, wanted to talk, laugh, and linger; but Caroline, intent on being in time, persevered in dressing her as fast as fingers could fasten strings or insert pins. At length, as she united a final row of hooks and eyes, she found leisure to chide her, saying she was very naughty to be so unpunctual, that she looked even now the picture of incorrigible carelessness; and so Shirley did, but a very lovely picture of that tiresome quality.

She presented quite a contrast to Caroline. There was style in every fold of her dress and every line of her figure. The rich silk suited her better than a simpler costume; the deep embroidered scarf became her. She wore it negligently but gracefully. The wreath on her bonnet crowned her well. The attention to fashion, the tasteful appliance of ornament in each portion of her dress, were quite in place with her. All this suited her, like the frank light in her eyes, the rallying smile about her lips, like her shaft-straight carriage and lightsome step. Caroline took her hand when she was dressed, hurried her downstairs, out of doors; and thus they sped through the fields, laughing as they went, and looking very much like a snow-white dove and gem-tinted bird of paradise joined in social flight.

Thanks to Miss Helstone's promptitude, they arrived in good time. While yet trees hid the church, they heard the bell tolling a measured but urgent summons for all to assemble. The trooping in of numbers, the trampling of many steps and murmuring of many voices, were likewise audible. From a rising ground, they presently saw, on the Whinbury road, the Whinbury school approaching. It numbered five hundred souls. The rector and curate, Boultby and Donne, headed it — the former looming large in full canonicals, walking as became a beneficed priest, under the canopy of a shovel-hat, with the dignity of an ample corporation, the embellishment of the squarest and vastest of black coats, and the support of the stoutest of gold-headed canes. As the doctor walked, he now and then slightly flourished his cane, and inclined his shovel-hat with a dogmatical wag towards his aide-de-camp. That aide-de-camp — Donne, to wit — narrow as the line of his shape was, compared to the broad bulk of his principal, contrived, notwithstanding, to look every inch a curate. All about him was pragmatical and self-complacent, from his turned-up nose and elevated chin to his clerical black gaiters, his somewhat short, strapless trousers, and his square-toed shoes.

Walk on, Mr. Donne! You have undergone scrutiny. You think you look well. Whether the white and purple figures watching you from yonder hill think so is another question.

These figures come running down when the regiment has marched by. The churchyard is full of children and teachers, all in their very best holiday attire; and, distressed as is the district, bad as are the times, it is wonderful to see how respectably, how handsomely even, they have contrived to clothe themselves. That British love of decency will work miracles. The poverty which reduces an Irish girl to rags is impotent to rob the English girl of the neat wardrobe she knows necessary to her self-respect. Besides, the lady of the manor — that Shirley, now gazing with pleasure on this well-dressed and happy-looking crowd — has really done them good. Her seasonable bounty consoled many a poor family against the coming holiday, and supplied many a child with a new frock or bonnet for the occasion. She knows it, and is elate with the consciousness — glad that her money, example, and influence have really, substantially, benefited those around her. She cannot be charitable like Miss Ainley: it is not in her nature. It relieves her to feel that there is another way of being charitable, practicable for other characters, and under other circumstances.

Caroline, too, is pleased, for she also has done good in her small way — robbed herself of more than one dress, ribbon, or collar she could ill spare, to aid in fitting out the scholars of her class; and as she could not give money, she has followed Miss Ainley's example in giving her time and her industry to sew for the children.

Not only is the churchyard full, but the rectory garden is also thronged. Pairs and parties of ladies and gentlemen are seen walking amongst the waving lilacs and laburnums. The house also is occupied: at the wide-open parlour windows gay groups are standing. These are the patrons and teachers, who are to swell the procession. In the parson's croft, behind the rectory, are the musicians of the three parish bands, with their instruments. Fanny and Eliza, in the smartest of caps and gowns, and the whitest of aprons, move amongst them, serving out quarts of ale, whereof a stock was brewed very sound and strong some weeks since by the rector's orders, and under his special superintendence. Whatever he had a hand in must be managed handsomely. "Shabby doings" of any description were not endured under his sanction. From the erection of a public building, a church, school, or court-house, to the cooking of a dinner, he still advocated the lordly, liberal, and effective. Miss Keeldar was like him in this respect, and they mutually approved each other's arrangements.

Caroline and Shirley were soon in the midst of the company. The former met them very easily for her. Instead of sitting down in a retired corner, or stealing away to her own room till the procession should be marshalled, according to her wont, she moved through the three parlours, conversed and smiled, absolutely spoke once or twice ere she was spoken to, and, in short, seemed a new creature. It was Shirley's presence which thus transformed her; the view of Miss Keeldar's air and manner did her a world of good. Shirley had no fear of her kind, no tendency to shrink from, to avoid it. All human beings — men, women, or children — whom low breeding or coarse presumption did not render positively offensive, were welcome enough to her — some much more so than others, of course; but, generally speaking, till a man had indisputably proved himself bad and a nuisance, Shirley was willing to think him good and an acquisition, and to treat him accordingly. This disposition made her a general favourite, for it robbed her very raillery of its sting, and gave her serious or smiling conversation a happy charm; nor did it diminish the value of her intimate friendship, which was a distinct thing from this social benevolence — depending, indeed, on quite a different part of her character. Miss Helstone was the choice of her affection and intellect; the Misses Pearson, Sykes, Wynne, etc., etc., only the profiteers by her good-nature and vivacity.

Donne happened to come into the drawing-room while Shirley, sitting on the sofa, formed the centre of a tolerably wide circle. She had already forgotten her exasperation against him, and she bowed and smiled good-humouredly. The disposition of the man was then seen. He knew neither how to decline the advance with dignity, as one whose just pride has been wounded, nor how to meet it with frankness, as one who is glad to forget and forgive. His punishment had impressed him with no sense of shame, and he did not experience that feeling on encountering his chastiser. He was not vigorous enough in evil to be actively malignant — he merely passed by sheepishly with a rated, scowling look. Nothing could ever again reconcile him to his enemy; while no passion of resentment, for even sharper and more ignominious inflictions, could his lymphatic nature know.

"He was not worth a scene!" said Shirley to Caroline. "What a fool I was! To revenge on poor Donne his silly spite at Yorkshire is something like crushing a gnat for attacking the hide of a rhinoceros. Had I been a gentleman, I believe I should have helped him off the premises by dint of physical force. I am glad now I only employed the moral weapon. But he must come near me no more. I don't like him. He irritates me. There is not even amusement to be had out of him. Malone is better sport."

It seemed as if Malone wished to justify the preference, for the words were scarcely out of the speaker's mouth when Peter Augustus came up, all in *grande tenue*, gloved and scented, with his hair oiled and brushed to perfection, and bearing in one hand a huge bunch of cabbage-roses, five or six in full blow. These he presented to the heiress with a grace to which the most cunning pencil could do but defective justice. And who, after this, could dare to say that Peter was not a lady's man? He had gathered and he had given flowers; he had offered a sentimental, a poetic tribute at the shrine of Love or Mammon. Hercules holding the distaff was but a faint type of Peter bearing the roses. He must have thought this himself, for he seemed amazed at what he had done. He backed without a word; he was going away with a husky chuckle of self-satisfaction; then he bethought himself to stop and turn, to ascertain by ocular testimony that he really had presented a bouquet. Yes, there were the six red cabbages on the purple satin lap, a very white hand, with some gold rings on the fingers, slightly holding them together, and streaming ringlets, half hiding a laughing face, drooped over them. Only *half* hiding! Peter saw the laugh; it was unmistakable. He was made a joke of; his gallantry, his chivalry, were the subject of a jest for a petticoat — for two petticoats: Miss Helstone too was smiling. Moreover, he felt he was seen through, and Peter grew black as a thunder-cloud. When Shirley looked up, a fell eye was fastened on her. Malone, at least, had energy enough in hate. She saw it in his glance.

"Peter *is* worth a scene, and shall have it, if he likes, one day," she whispered to her friend.

And now — solemn and sombre as to their colour, though bland enough as to their faces — appeared at the dining-room door the three rectors. They had hitherto been busy in the church, and were now coming to take some little refreshment for the body, ere the march commenced. The large morocco-covered easy-chair had been left vacant for Dr. Boultby. He was put into it, and Caroline, obeying the instigations of Shirley, who told her now was the time to play the hostess, hastened to hand to her uncle's vast, revered, and, on the whole, worthy friend, a glass of wine and a plate of macaroons. Boultby's churchwardens, patrons of the Sunday school both, as he insisted on their being, were already beside him; Mrs. Sykes and the other ladies of his congregation were on his right hand and on his left, expressing their hopes that he was not fatigued, their fears that the day would be too warm for him. Mrs. Boultby, who held an opinion that when her lord dropped asleep after a good dinner his face became as the face of an angel, was bending over him, tenderly wiping some perspiration, real or imaginary, from his brow. Boultby, in short, was in his glory, and in a round, sound *voix de poitrine* he rumbled out thanks for attentions and assurances of his tolerable health. Of Caroline he took no manner of notice as she came near, save to accept what she offered. He did not see her — he never did see her; he hardly knew that such a person existed. He saw the macaroons, however, and being fond of sweets, possessed himself of a small handful thereof. The wine Mrs. Boultby insisted on mingling with hot water, and qualifying with sugar and nutmeg.

Mr. Hall stood near an open window, breathing the fresh air and scent of flowers, and talking like a brother to Miss Ainley. To him Caroline turned her attention with pleasure. "What should she bring him? He must not help himself — he must be served by her." And she provided herself with a little salver, that she might offer him variety. Margaret Hall joined them; so did Miss Keeldar. The four ladies stood round their favourite pastor. They also had an idea that they looked on the face of an earthly angel. Cyril Hall was their pope, infallible to them as Dr. Thomas Boultby to his admirers. A throng, too, enclosed the rector of Briarfield — twenty or more pressed round him; and no parson was ever more potent in a circle than old Helstone. The curates, herding together after their manner, made a constellation of three lesser planets. Divers young ladies watched them afar off, but ventured not nigh.

Mr. Helstone produced his watch. "Ten minutes to two," he announced aloud. "Time for all to fall into line. Come." He seized his shovel-hat and marched away. All rose and followed *en masse*.

The twelve hundred children were drawn up in three bodies of four hundred souls each; in the rear of each regiment was stationed a band; between every twenty there was an interval, wherein Helstone posted the teachers in pairs. To the van of the armies he summoned, —

"Grace Boultby and Mary Sykes lead out Whinbury.

"Margaret Hall and Mary Ann Ainley conduct Nunnely.

"Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar head Briarfield."

Then again he gave command, —

"Mr. Donne to Whinbury; Mr. Sweeting to Nunnely; Mr. Malone to Briarfield."

And these gentlemen stepped up before the lady-generals.

The rectors passed to the full front; the parish clerks fell to the extreme rear. Helstone lifted his shovel-hat. In an instant out clashed the eight bells in the tower, loud swelled the sounding bands, flute spoke and clarion answered, deep rolled the drums, and away they marched.

The broad white road unrolled before the long procession, the sun and sky surveyed it cloudless, the wind tossed the tree boughs above it, and the twelve hundred children and one hundred and forty adults of which it was composed trod on in time and tune, with gay faces and glad hearts. It was a joyous scene, and a scene to do good. It was a day of happiness for rich and poor — the work, first of God, and then of the clergy. Let England's priests have their due. They are a faulty set in some respects, being only of common flesh and blood like us all; but the land would be badly off without them. Britain would miss her church, if that church fell. God save it! God also reform it!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SCHOOL FEAST.

Not on combat bent, nor of foemen in search, was this priest-led and woman-officered company; yet their music played martial tunes, and, to judge by the eyes and carriage of some — Miss Keeldar, for instance — these sounds awoke, if not a martial, yet a longing spirit. Old Helstone, turning by chance, looked into her face; and he laughed, and she laughed at him.

"There is no battle in prospect," he said; "our country does not want us to fight for it. No foe or tyrant is questioning or threatening our liberty. There is nothing to be done. We are only taking a walk. Keep your hand on the reins, captain, and slack the fire of that spirit. It is not wanted, the more's the pity."

"Take your own advice, doctor," was Shirley's response. To Caroline she murmured, "I'll borrow of imagination what reality will not give me. We are not soldiers — bloodshed is not my desire — or if we are, we are soldiers of the Cross. Time has rolled back some hundreds of years, and we are bound on a pilgrimage to Palestine. But no; that is too visionary. I need a sterner dream. We are Lowlanders of Scotland, following a Covenanting captain up into the hills to hold a meeting out of the reach of persecuting troopers. We know that battle may follow prayer; and as we believe that in the worst issue of battle heaven must be our reward, we are ready and willing to redden the peat-moss with our blood. That music stirs my soul; it wakens all my life; it makes my heart beat — not with its temperate daily pulse, but with a new, thrilling vigour. I almost long for danger — for a faith, a land, or at least a lover to defend."

"Look, Shirley!" interrupted Caroline. "What is that red speck above Stilbro' Brow? You have keener sight than I. Just turn your eagle eye to it."

Miss Keeldar looked. "I see," she said; then added presently, "there is a line of red. They are soldiers — cavalry soldiers," she subjoined quickly. "They ride fast. There are six of them. They will pass us. No; they have turned off to the right. They saw our procession, and avoid it by making a circuit. Where are they going?"

"Perhaps they are only exercising their horses."

"Perhaps so. We see them no more now."

Mr. Helstone here spoke.

"We shall pass through Royd Lane, to reach Nunnely Common by a short cut," said he.

And into the straits of Royd Lane they accordingly defiled. It was very narrow — so narrow that only two could walk abreast without falling into the ditch which ran along each side. They had gained the middle of it, when excitement became obvious in the clerical commanders. Boultby's spectacles and Helstone's Rehoboam were agitated; the curates nudged each other; Mr. Hall turned to the ladies and smiled.

"What is the matter?" was the demand.

He pointed with his staff to the end of the lane before them. Lo and behold! another, an opposition, procession was there entering, headed also by men in black, and followed also, as they could now hear, by music.

"Is it our double?" asked Shirley, "our manifold wraith? Here is a card turned up."

"If you wanted a battle, you are likely to get one — at least of looks," whispered Caroline, laughing.

"They shall not pass us!" cried the curates unanimously; "we'll not give way!"

"Give way!" retorted Helstone sternly, turning round; "who talks of giving way? You, boys, mind what you are about. The ladies, I know, will be firm. I can trust them. There is not a churchwoman here but will stand her ground against these folks, for the honour of the Establishment. — What does Miss Keeldar say?"

"She asks what is it."

"The Dissenting and Methodist schools, the Baptists, Independents, and Wesleyans, joined in unholy alliance, and turning purposely into this lane with the intention of obstructing our march and driving us back."

"Bad manners!" said Shirley, "and I hate bad manners. Of course, they must have a lesson."

"A lesson in politeness," suggested Mr. Hall, who was ever for peace; "not an example of rudeness."

Old Helstone moved on. Quickening his step, he marched some yards in advance of his company. He had nearly reached the other sable leaders, when he who appeared to act as the hostile commander-in-chief — a large, greasy man, with black hair combed flat on his forehead — called a halt. The procession paused. He drew forth a hymn book, gave out a verse, set a tune, and they all struck up the most dolorous of canticles.

Helstone signed to his bands. They clashed out with all the power of brass. He desired them to play "Rule, Britannia!" and ordered the children to join in vocally, which they did with enthusiastic spirit. The enemy was sung and stormed down, his psalm quelled. As far as noise went, he was conquered.

"Now, follow me!" exclaimed Helstone; "not at a run, but at a firm, smart pace. Be steady, every child and woman of you. Keep together. Hold on by each other's skirts, if necessary."

And he strode on with such a determined and deliberate gait, and was, besides, so well seconded by his scholars and teachers, who did exactly as he told them, neither running nor faltering, but marching with cool, solid impetus — the curates, too, being compelled to do the same, as they were between two fires, Helstone and Miss Keeldar, both of whom watched any deviation with lynx-eyed vigilance, and were ready, the one with his cane, the other with her parasol, to rebuke the slightest breach of orders, the least independent or irregular demonstration — that the body of Dissenters were first amazed, then alarmed, then borne down and pressed back, and at last forced to turn tail and leave the outlet from Royd Lane free. Boultby suffered in the onslaught, but Helstone and Malone, between them, held him up, and brought him through the business, whole in limb, though sorely tried in wind.

The fat Dissenter who had given out the hymn was left sitting in the ditch. He was a spirit merchant by trade, a leader of the Nonconformists, and, it was said, drank more water in that one afternoon than he had swallowed for a twelvemonth before. Mr. Hall had taken care of Caroline, and Caroline of him. He and Miss Ainley made their own quiet comments to each other afterwards on the incident. Miss Keeldar and Mr. Helstone shook hands heartily when they had fairly got the whole party through the lane. The curates began to exult, but Mr. Helstone presently put the curb on their innocent spirits. He remarked that they never had sense to know what to say, and had better hold their tongues; and he reminded them that the business was none of their managing.

About half-past three the procession turned back, and at four once more regained the starting-place. Long lines of benches were arranged in the close-shorn fields round the school. There the children were seated, and huge baskets, covered up with white cloths, and great smoking tin vessels were brought out. Ere the distribution of good things commenced, a brief grace was pronounced by Mr. Hall and sung by the children. Their young voices sounded melodious, even touching, in the open air. Large currant buns and hot, well-sweetened tea were then administered in the proper spirit of liberality. No stinting was permitted on this day, at least; the rule for each child’s allowance being that it was to have about twice as much as it could possibly eat, thus leaving a reserve to be carried home for such as age, sickness, or other impediment prevented from coming to the feast. Buns and beer circulated, meantime, amongst the musicians and church-singers; afterwards the benches were removed, and they were left to unbend their spirits in licensed play.

A bell summoned the teachers, patrons, and patronesses to the schoolroom. Miss Keeldar, Miss Helstone, and many other ladies were already there, glancing over the arrangement of their separate trays and tables. Most of the female servants of the neighbourhood, together with the clerks’, the singers’, and the musicians’ wives, had been pressed into the service of the day as waiters. Each vied with the other in smartness and daintiness of dress, and many handsome forms were seen amongst the younger ones. About half a score were cutting bread and butter, another half-score supplying hot water, brought from the coppers of the rector’s kitchen. The profusion of flowers and evergreens decorating the white walls, the show of silver teapots and bright porcelain on the tables, the active figures, blithe faces, gay dresses flitting about everywhere, formed altogether a refreshing and lively spectacle. Everybody talked, not very loudly, but merrily, and the canary birds sang shrill in their high-hung cages.

Caroline, as the rector's niece, took her place at one of the three first tables; Mrs. Boultby and Margaret Hall officiated at the others. At these tables the *élite* of the company were to be entertained, strict rules of equality not being more in fashion at Briarfield than elsewhere. Miss Helstone removed her bonnet and scarf, that she might be less oppressed with the heat. Her long curls, falling on her neck, served almost in place of a veil; and for the rest, her muslin dress was fashioned modestly as a nun's robe, enabling her thus to dispense with the encumbrance of a shawl.

The room was filling. Mr. Hall had taken his post beside Caroline, who now, as she rearranged the cups and spoons before her, whispered to him in a low voice remarks on the events of the day. He looked a little grave about what had taken place in Royd Lane, and she tried to smile him out of his seriousness. Miss Keeldar sat near — for a wonder, neither laughing nor talking; on the contrary, very still, and gazing round her vigilantly. She seemed afraid lest some intruder should take a seat she apparently wished to reserve next her own. Ever and anon she spread her satin dress over an undue portion of the bench, or laid her gloves or her embroidered handkerchief upon it. Caroline noticed this *manège* at last, and asked her what friend she expected. Shirley bent towards her, almost touched her ear with her rosy lips, and whispered with a musical softness that often characterized her tones when what she said tended even remotely to stir some sweet secret source of feeling in her heart, "I expect Mr. Moore. I saw him last night, and I made him promise to come with his sister, and to sit at our table. He won't fail me, I feel certain; but I apprehend his coming too late, and being separated from us. Here is a fresh batch arriving; every place will be taken. Provoking!"

In fact, Mr. Wynne the magistrate, his wife, his son, and his two daughters now entered in high state. They were Briarfield gentry. Of course their place was at the first table, and being conducted thither, they filled up the whole remaining space. For Miss Keeldar's comfort, Mr. Sam Wynne inducted himself into the very vacancy she had kept for Moore, planting himself solidly on her gown, her gloves, and her handkerchief. Mr. Sam was one of the objects of her aversion, and the more so because he showed serious symptoms of an aim at her hand. The old gentleman, too, had publicly declared that the Fieldhead estate and the De Walden estate were delightfully *contagious* — a malapropism which rumour had not failed to repeat to Shirley.

Caroline's ears yet rung with that thrilling whisper, "I expect Mr. Moore," her heart yet beat and her cheek yet glowed with it, when a note from the organ pealed above the confused hum of the place. Dr. Boultby, Mr. Helstone, and Mr. Hall rose, so did all present, and grace was sung to the accompaniment of the music; and then tea began. She was kept too busy with her office for a while to have leisure for looking round, but the last cup being filled, she threw a restless glance over the room. There were some ladies and several gentlemen standing about yet unaccommodated with seats. Amidst a group she recognized her spinster friend, Miss Mann, whom the fine weather had tempted, or some urgent friend had persuaded, to leave her drear solitude for one hour of social enjoyment. Miss Mann looked tired of standing; a lady in a yellow bonnet brought her a chair. Caroline knew well that *chapeau en satin jaune*; she knew the black hair, and the kindly though rather opinionated and froward-looking face under it; she knew that *robe de soie noire*, she knew even that *schall gris de lin*; she knew, in short, Hortense Moore, and she wanted to jump up and run to her and kiss her — to give her one embrace for her own sake and two for her brother's. She half rose, indeed, with a smothered exclamation, and perhaps — for the impulse was very strong — she would have run across the room and actually saluted her; but a hand replaced her in her seat, and a voice behind her whispered, "Wait till after tea, Lina, and then I'll bring her to you."

And when she *could* look up she did, and there was Robert himself close behind, smiling at her eagerness, looking better than she had ever seen him look — looking, indeed, to her partial eyes, so very handsome that she dared not trust herself to hazard a second glance; for his image struck on her vision with painful brightness, and pictured itself on her memory as vividly as if there daguerreotyped by a pencil of keen lightning.

He moved on, and spoke to Miss Keeldar. Shirley, irritated by some unwelcome attentions from Sam Wynne, and by the fact of that gentleman being still seated on her gloves and handkerchief — and probably, also, by Moore's want of punctuality — was by no means in good humour. She first shrugged her shoulders at him, and then she said a bitter word or two about his "insupportable tardiness." Moore neither apologized nor retorted. He stood near her quietly, as if waiting to see whether she would recover her temper; which she did in little more than three minutes, indicating the change by offering him her hand. Moore took it with a smile, half-corrective, half-grateful. The slightest possible shake of the head delicately marked the former quality; it is probable a gentle pressure indicated the latter.

"You may sit where you can now, Mr. Moore," said Shirley, also smiling. "You see there is not an inch of room for you here; but I discern plenty of space at Mrs. Boultby's table, between Miss Armitage and Miss Birtwhistle. Go! John Sykes will be your *vis-à-vis*, and you will sit with your back towards us."

Moore, however, preferred lingering about where he was. He now and then took a turn down the long room, pausing in his walk to interchange greetings with other gentlemen in his own placeless predicament; but still he came back to the magnet, Shirley, bringing with him, each time he returned, observations it was necessary to whisper in her ear.

Meantime poor Sam Wynne looked far from comfortable. His fair neighbour, judging from her movements, appeared in a mood the most unquiet and unaccommodating. She would not sit still two seconds. She was hot; she fanned herself; complained of want of air and space. She remarked that, in her opinion, when people had finished their tea they ought to leave the tables, and announced distinctly that she expected to faint if the present state of things continued. Mr. Sam offered to accompany her into the open air; just the way to give her her death of cold, she alleged. In short, his post became untenable; and having swallowed his quantum of tea, he judged it expedient to evacuate.

Moore should have been at hand, whereas he was quite at the other extremity of the room, deep in conference with Christopher Sykes. A large corn-factor, Timothy Ramsden, Esq., happened to be nearer; and feeling himself tired of standing, he advanced to fill the vacant seat. Shirley's expedients did not fail her. A sweep of her scarf upset her teacup: its contents were shared between the bench and her own satin dress. Of course, it became necessary to call a waiter to remedy the mischief. Mr. Ramsden, a stout, puffy gentleman, as large in person as he was in property, held aloof from the consequent commotion. Shirley, usually almost culpably indifferent to slight accidents affecting dress, etc., now made a commotion that might have become the most delicate and nervous of her sex. Mr. Ramsden opened his mouth, withdrew slowly, and, as Miss Keeldar again intimated her intention to "give way" and swoon on the spot, he turned on his heel, and beat a heavy retreat.

Moore at last returned. Calmly surveying the bustle, and somewhat quizzically scanning Shirley's enigmatical-looking countenance, he remarked that in truth this was the hottest end of the room, that he found a climate there calculated to agree with none but cool temperaments like his own; and putting the waiters, the napkins, the satin robe — the whole turmoil, in short — to one side, he installed himself where destiny evidently decreed he should sit. Shirley subsided; her features altered their lines; the raised knit brow and inexplicable curve of the mouth became straight again; wilfulness and roguery gave place to other expressions; and all the angular movements with which she had vexed the soul of Sam Wynne were conjured to rest as by a charm. Still no gracious glance was cast on Moore. On the contrary, he was accused of giving her a world of trouble, and roundly charged with being the cause of depriving her of the esteem of Mr. Ramsden and the invaluable friendship of Mr. Samuel Wynne.

"Wouldn't have offended either gentleman for the world," she averred. "I have always been accustomed to treat both with the most respectful consideration, and there, owing to you, how they have been used! I shall not be happy till I have made it up. I never am happy till I am friends with my neighbours. So to-morrow I must make a pilgrimage to Royd corn-mill, soothe the miller, and praise the grain; and next day I must call at De Walden

— where I hate to go — and carry in my reticule half an oatcake to give to Mr. Sam's favourite pointers."

"You know the surest path to the heart of each swain, I doubt not," said Moore quietly. He looked very content to have at last secured his present place; but he made no fine speech expressive of gratification, and offered no apology for the trouble he had given. His phlegm became him wonderfully. It made him look handsomer, he was so composed; it made his vicinage pleasant, it was so peace-restoring. You would not have thought, to look at him, that he was a poor, struggling man seated beside a rich woman; the calm of equality stilled his aspect; perhaps that calm, too, reigned in his soul. Now and then, from the way in which he looked down on Miss Keeldar as he addressed her, you would have fancied his station towered above hers as much as his stature did. Almost stern lights sometimes crossed his brow and gleamed in his eyes. Their conversation had become animated, though it was confined to a low key; she was urging him with questions — evidently he refused to her curiosity all the gratification it demanded. She sought his eye once with hers. You read, in its soft yet eager expression, that it solicited clearer replies. Moore smiled pleasantly, but his lips continued sealed. Then she was piqued, and turned away; but he recalled her attention in two minutes. He seemed making promises, which he soothed her into accepting in lieu of information.

It appeared that the heat of the room did not suit Miss Helstone. She grew paler and paler as the process of tea-making was protracted. The moment thanks were returned she quitted the table, and hastened to follow her cousin Hortense, who, with Miss Mann, had already sought the open air. Robert Moore had risen when she did — perhaps he meant to speak to her; but there was yet a parting word to exchange with Miss Keeldar, and while it was being uttered Caroline had vanished.

Hortense received her former pupil with a demeanour of more dignity than warmth. She had been seriously offended by Mr. Helstone's proceedings, and had all along considered Caroline to blame in obeying her uncle too literally.

"You are a very great stranger," she said austerely, as her pupil held and pressed her hand. The pupil knew her too well to remonstrate or complain of coldness. She let the punctilious whim pass, sure that her natural *bonté* (I use this French word because it expresses just what I mean — neither goodness nor good-nature, but something between the two) would presently get the upper hand. It did. Hortense had no sooner examined her face well, and observed the change its somewhat wasted features betrayed, than her mien softened. Kissing her on both cheeks, she asked anxiously after her health. Caroline answered gaily. It would, however, have been her lot to undergo a long cross-examination, followed by an endless lecture on this head, had not Miss Mann called off the attention of the questioner by requesting to be conducted home. The poor invalid was already fatigued. Her weariness made her cross — too cross almost to speak to Caroline; and besides, that young person's white dress and lively look were displeasing in the eyes of Miss Mann. The everyday garb of brown stuff or gray gingham, and the everyday air of melancholy, suited the solitary spinster better; she would hardly know her young friend to-night, and quitted her with a cool nod. Hortense having promised to accompany her home, they departed together.

Caroline now looked round for Shirley. She saw the rainbow scarf and purple dress in the centre of a throng of ladies, all well known to herself, but all of the order whom she systematically avoided whenever avoidance was possible. Shyer at some moments than at others, she felt just now no courage at all to join this company. She could not, however, stand alone where all others went in pairs or parties; so she approached a group of her own scholars, great girls, or rather young women, who were standing watching some hundreds of the younger children playing at blind-man's buff.

Miss Helstone knew these girls liked her, yet she was shy even with them out of school. They were not more in awe of her than she of them. She drew near them now, rather to find protection in their company than to patronize them with her presence. By some instinct they knew her weakness, and with natural politeness they respected it. Her knowledge commanded their esteem when she taught them; her gentleness attracted their regard; and because she was what they considered wise and good when *on* duty, they kindly overlooked her evident timidity when off. They did not take advantage of it. Peasant girls as they were, they had too much of our own English sensibility to be guilty of the coarse error. They stood round her still, civil, friendly, receiving her slight smiles and rather hurried efforts to converse with a good feeling and good breeding — the last quality being the result of the first — which soon set her at her ease.

Mr. Sam Wynne coming up with great haste, to insist on the elder girls joining in the game as well as the younger ones, Caroline was again left alone. She was meditating a quiet retreat to the house, when Shirley, perceiving from afar her isolation, hastened to her side.

"Let us go to the top of the fields," she said. "I know you don't like crowds, Caroline."

"But it will be depriving you of a pleasure, Shirley, to take you from all these fine people, who court your society so assiduously, and to whom you can, without art or effort, make yourself so pleasant."

"Not quite without effort; I am already tired of the exertion. It is but insipid, barren work, talking and laughing with the good gentlefolks of Briarfield. I have been looking out for your white dress for the last ten minutes. I like to watch those I love in a crowd, and to compare them with others. I have thus compared you. You resemble none of the rest, Lina. There are some prettier faces than yours here. You are not a model beauty like Harriet Sykes, for instance — beside her your person appears almost insignificant — but you look agreeable, you look reflective, you look what I call interesting."

"Hush, Shirley! you flatter me."

"I don't wonder that your scholars like you."

"Nonsense, Shirley! Talk of something else."

"We will talk of Moore, then, and we will watch him. I see him even now."

"Where?" And as Caroline asked the question she looked not over the fields, but into Miss Keeldar's eyes, as was her wont whenever Shirley mentioned any object she descried afar. Her friend had quicker vision than herself, and Caroline seemed to think that the secret of her eagle acuteness might be read in her dark gray irides, or rather, perhaps, she only sought guidance by the direction of those discriminating and brilliant spheres.

"There is Moore," said Shirley, pointing right across the wide field where a thousand children were playing, and now nearly a thousand adult spectators walking about. "There — can you miss the tall stature and straight port? He looks amidst the set that surround him like Eliab amongst humbler shepherds — like Saul in a war-council; and a war-council it is, if I am not mistaken."

"Why so, Shirley?" asked Caroline, whose eye had at last caught the object it sought. "Robert is just now speaking to my uncle, and they are shaking hands. They are then reconciled."

"Reconciled not without good reason, depend on it — making common cause against some common foe. And why, think you, are Messrs. Wynne and Sykes, and Armitage and Ramsden, gathered in such a close circle round them? And why is Malone beckoned to join them? Where *he* is summoned, be sure a strong arm is needed."

Shirley, as she watched, grew restless; her eyes flashed.

"They won't trust me," she said. "That is always the way when it comes to the point."

"What about?"

"Cannot you feel? There is some mystery afloat; some event is expected; some preparation is to be made, I am certain. I saw it all in Mr. Moore's manner this evening. He was excited, yet hard."

"Hard to *you*, Shirley?"

"Yes, to *me*. He often is hard to me. We seldom converse *tête-à-tête* but I am made to feel that the basis of his character is not of eider down."

"Yet he seemed to talk to you softly."

"Did he not? Very gentle tones and quiet manner. Yet the man is peremptory and secret: his secrecy vexes me."

"Yes, Robert is secret."

"Which he has scarcely a right to be with me, especially as he commenced by giving me his confidence. Having done nothing to forfeit that confidence, it ought not to be withdrawn; but I suppose I am not considered iron-souled enough to be trusted in a crisis."

"He fears, probably, to occasion you uneasiness."

"An unnecessary precaution. I am of elastic materials, not soon crushed. He ought to know that. But the man is proud. He has his faults, say what you will, Lina. Observe how engaged that group appear. They do not know we are watching them."

"If we keep on the alert, Shirley, we shall perhaps find the clue to their secret."

"There will be some unusual movements ere long — perhaps to-morrow, possibly to-night. But my eyes and ears are wide open. Mr. Moore, you shall be under surveillance. Be you vigilant also, Lina."

"I will. Robert is going; I saw him turn. I believe he noticed us. They are shaking hands."

"Shaking hands, with emphasis," added Shirley, "as if they were ratifying some solemn league and covenant."

They saw Robert quit the group, pass through a gate, and disappear.

"And he has not bid us good-bye," murmured Caroline.

Scarcely had the words escaped her lips when she tried by a smile to deny the confession of disappointment they seemed to imply. An unbidden suffusion for one moment both softened and brightened her eyes.

"Oh, that is soon remedied!" exclaimed Shirley: "we'll *make* him bid us good-bye."

"*Make* him! That is not the same thing," was the answer.

"It *shall* be the same thing."

"But he is gone; you can't overtake him."

"I know a shorter way than that he has taken. We will intercept him."

"But, Shirley, I would rather not go."

Caroline said this as Miss Keeldar seized her arm and hurried her down the fields. It was vain to contend. Nothing was so wilful as Shirley when she took a whim into her head. Caroline found herself out of sight of the crowd almost before she was aware, and ushered into a narrow shady spot, embowered above with hawthorns, and enamelled under foot with daisies. She took no notice of the evening sun chequering the turf, nor was she sensible of the pure incense exhaling at this hour from tree and plant; she only heard the wicket opening at one end, and knew Robert was approaching. The long sprays of the hawthorns, shooting out before them, served as a screen. They saw him before he observed them. At a glance Caroline perceived that his social hilarity was gone; he had left it behind him in the joy-echoing fields round the school. What remained now was his dark, quiet, business countenance. As Shirley had said, a certain hardness characterized his air, while his eye was excited, but austere. So much the worse timed was the present freak of Shirley's. If he had looked disposed for holiday mirth, it would not have mattered much; but now — —

"I told you not to come," said Caroline, somewhat bitterly, to her friend. She seemed truly perturbed. To be intruded on Robert thus, against her will and his expectation, and when he evidently would rather not be delayed, keenly annoyed her. It did not annoy Miss Keeldar in the least. She stepped forward and faced her tenant, barring his way. “You omitted to bid us good-bye,” she said.

“Omitted to bid you good-bye! Where did you come from? Are you fairies? I left two like you, one in purple and one in white, standing at the top of a bank, four fields off, but a minute ago.”

“You left us there and find us here. We have been watching you, and shall watch you still. You must be questioned one day, but not now. At present all you have to do is to say good-night, and then pass.”

Moore glanced from one to the other without unbending his aspect. “Days of fête have their privileges, and so have days of hazard,” observed he gravely.

“Come, don’t moralize. Say good-night, and pass,” urged Shirley.

“Must I say good-night to you, Miss Keeldar?”

“Yes, and to Caroline likewise. It is nothing new, I hope. You have bid us both good-night before.”

He took her hand, held it in one of his, and covered it with the other. He looked down at her gravely, kindly, yet commandingly. The heiress could not make this man her subject. In his gaze on her bright face there was no servility, hardly homage; but there were interest and affection, heightened by another feeling. Something in his tone when he spoke, as well as in his words, marked that last sentiment to be gratitude.

“Your debtor bids you good-night! May you rest safely and serenely till morning.”

“And you, Mr. Moore — what are you going to do? What have you been saying to Mr. Helstone, with whom I saw you shake hands? Why did all those gentlemen gather round you? Put away reserve for once. Be frank with me.”

“Who can resist you? I will be frank. To-morrow, if there is anything to relate, you shall hear it.”

“Just now,” pleaded Shirley; “don’t procrastinate.”

“But I could only tell half a tale. And my time is limited; I have not a moment to spare. Hereafter I will make amends for delay by candour.”

“But are you going home?”

“Yes.”

“Not to leave it any more to-night?”

“Certainly not. At present, farewell to both of you.”

He would have taken Caroline’s hand and joined it in the same clasp in which he held Shirley’s, but somehow it was not ready for him. She had withdrawn a few steps apart. Her answer to Moore’s adieu was only a slight bend of the head and a gentle, serious smile. He sought no more cordial token. Again he said “Farewell,” and quitted them both.

“There! it is over,” said Shirley when he was gone. “We have made him bid us good-night, and yet not lost ground in his esteem, I think, Cary.”

“I hope not,” was the brief reply.

"I consider you very timid and undemonstrative," remarked Miss Keeldar. "Why did you not give Moore your hand when he offered you his? He is your cousin; you like him. Are you ashamed to let him perceive your affection?"

"He perceives all of it that interests him. No need to make a display of feeling."

"You are laconic; you would be stoical if you could. Is love, in your eyes, a crime, Caroline?"

"Love a crime! No, Shirley; love is a divine virtue. But why drag that word into the conversation? It is singularly irrelevant."

"Good!" pronounced Shirley.

The two girls paced the green lane in silence. Caroline first resumed.

"Obtrusiveness is a crime, forwardness is a crime, and both disgust; but love! no purest angel need blush to love. And when I see or hear either man or woman couple shame with love, I know their minds are coarse, their associations debased. Many who think themselves refined ladies and gentlemen, and on whose lips the word 'vulgarity' is for ever hovering, cannot mention 'love' without betraying their own innate and imbecile degradation. It is a low feeling in their estimation, connected only with low ideas for them."

"You describe three-fourths of the world, Caroline."

"They are cold — they are cowardly — they are stupid on the subject, Shirley! They never loved — they never were loved!"

"Thou art right, Lina. And in their dense ignorance they blaspheme living fire, seraph-brought from a divine altar."

"They confound it with sparks mounting from Tophet."

The sudden and joyous clash of bells here stopped the dialogue by summoning all to the church.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH THE GENTEEL READER IS RECOMMENDED TO SKIP, LOW PERSONS BEING HERE INTRODUCED.

The evening was still and warm; close and sultry it even promised to become. Round the descending sun the clouds glowed purple; summer tints, rather Indian than English, suffused the horizon, and cast rosy reflections on hillside, house-front, tree-bole, on winding road and undulating pasture-ground. The two girls came down from the fields slowly. By the time they reached the churchyard the bells were hushed; the multitudes were gathered into the church. The whole scene was solitary.

"How pleasant and calm it is!" said Caroline.

"And how hot it will be in the church!" responded Shirley. "And what a dreary long speech Dr. Boultby will make! And how the curates will hammer over their prepared orations! For my part, I would rather not enter."

"But my uncle will be angry if he observes our absence."

"I will bear the brunt of his wrath; he will not devour me. I shall be sorry to miss his pungent speech. I know it will be all sense for the church, and all causticity for schism. He'll not forget the battle of Royd Lane. I shall be sorry also to deprive you of Mr. Hall's sincere friendly homily, with all its racy Yorkshireisms; but here I must stay. The gray church and grayer tombs look divine with this crimson gleam on them. Nature is now at her evening prayers; she is kneeling before those red hills. I see her prostrate on the great steps of her altar, praying for a fair night for mariners at sea, for travellers in deserts, for lambs on moors, and unfledged birds in woods. Caroline, I see her, and I will tell you what she is like. She is like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth."

"And that is not Milton's Eve, Shirley."

"Milton's Eve! Milton's Eve! I repeat. No, by the pure Mother of God, she is not! Cary, we are alone; we may speak what we think. Milton was great; but was he good? His brain was right; how was his heart? He saw heaven; he looked down on hell. He saw Satan, and Sin his daughter, and Death their horrible offspring. Angels serried before him their battalions; the long lines of adamantine shields flashed back on his blind eyeballs the unutterable splendour of heaven. Devils gathered their legions in his sight; their dim, discrowned, and tarnished armies passed rank and file before him. Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not."

"You are bold to say so, Shirley."

"Not more bold than faithful. It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, as I have seen her, making custards, in the heat of summer, in the cool dairy, with rose-trees and nasturtiums about the latticed window, preparing a cold collation for the rectors — preserves and 'dulcet creams;' puzzled 'what choice to choose for delicacy best; what order so contrived as not to mix tastes, not well-joined, inelegant, but bring taste after taste, upheld with kindliest change.'"

"All very well too, Shirley."

"I would beg to remind him that the first men of the earth were Titans, and that Eve was their mother; from her sprang Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus; she bore Prometheus — — "

"Pagan that you are! what does that signify?"

"I say, there were giants on the earth in those days — giants that strove to scale heaven. The first woman's breast that heaved with life on this world yielded the daring which could contend with Omnipotence, the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage, the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages, the unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence, sisters to immortality, which, after millenniums of crimes, struggles, and woes, could conceive and bring forth a Messiah. The first woman was heaven-born. Vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations, and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation."

"She coveted an apple, and was cheated by a snake; but you have got such a hash of Scripture and mythology into your head that there is no making any sense of you. You have not yet told me what you saw kneeling on those hills."

"I saw — I now see — a woman-Titan. Her robe of blue air spreads to the outskirts of the heath, where yonder flock is grazing; a veil white as an avalanche sweeps from her head to her feet, and arabesques of lightning flame on its borders. Under her breast I see her zone, purple like that horizon; through its blush shines the star of evening. Her steady eyes I cannot picture. They are clear, they are deep as lakes, they are lifted and full of worship, they tremble with the softness of love and the lustre of prayer. Her forehead has the expanse of a cloud, and is paler than the early moon, risen long before dark gathers. She reclines her bosom on the ridge of Stilbro' Moor; her mighty hands are joined beneath it. So kneeling, face to face she speaks with God. That Eve is Jehovah's daughter, as Adam was His son."

"She is very vague and visionary. Come, Shirley, we ought to go into church."

"Caroline, I will not; I will stay out here with my mother Eve, in these days called Nature. I love her — undying, mighty being! Heaven may have faded from her brow when she fell in paradise, but all that is glorious on earth shines there still. She is taking me to her bosom, and showing me her heart.

Hush, Caroline! You will see her and feel as I do, if we are both silent."

"I will humour your whim; but you will begin talking again ere ten minutes are over."

Miss Keeldar, on whom the soft excitement of the warm summer evening seemed working with unwonted power, leaned against an upright headstone; she fixed her eyes on the deep-burning west, and sank into a pleasurable trance. Caroline, going a little apart, paced to and fro beneath the rectory garden wall, dreaming too in her way. Shirley had mentioned the word "mother." That word suggested to Caroline's imagination not the mighty and mystical parent of Shirley's visions, but a gentle human form — the form she ascribed to her own mother, unknown, unloved, but not unlonged for.

"Oh that the day would come when she would remember her child! Oh that I might know her, and knowing, love her!"

Such was her aspiration.

The longing of her childhood filled her soul again. The desire which many a night had kept her awake in her crib, and which fear of its fallacy had of late years almost extinguished, relit suddenly, and glowed warm in her heart, that her mother might come some happy day, and send for her to her presence, look upon her fondly with loving eyes, and say to her tenderly, in a sweet voice, "Caroline, my child, I have a home for you; you shall live with me. All the love you have needed, and not tasted, from infancy, I have saved for you carefully. Come; it shall cherish you now."

A noise on the road roused Caroline from her filial hopes, and Shirley from her Titan visions. They listened, and heard the tramp of horses. They looked, and saw a glitter through the trees. They caught through the foliage glimpses of martial scarlet; helm shone, plume waved. Silent and orderly, six soldiers rode softly by.

"The same we saw this afternoon," whispered Shirley. "They have been halting somewhere till now. They wish to be as little noticed as possible, and are seeking their rendezvous at this quiet hour, while the people are at church. Did I not say we should see unusual things ere long?"

Scarcely were sight and sound of the soldiers lost, when another and somewhat different disturbance broke the night-hush — a child's impatient scream. They looked. A man issued from the church, carrying in his arms an infant — a robust, ruddy little boy of some two years old — roaring with all the power of his lungs. He had probably just awaked from a church-sleep. Two little girls, of nine and ten, followed. The influence of the fresh air, and the attraction of some flowers gathered from a grave, soon quieted the child. The man sat down with him, dandling him on his knee as tenderly as any woman; the two little girls took their places one on each side.

"Good-evening, William," said Shirley, after due scrutiny of the man. He had seen her before, and apparently was waiting to be recognized. He now took off his hat, and grinned a smile of pleasure. He was a rough-headed, hard-featured personage, not old, but very weather-beaten. His attire was decent and clean; that of his children singularly neat. It was our old friend Farren. The young ladies approached him.

“You are not going into the church?” he inquired, gazing at them complacently, yet with a mixture of bashfulness in his look — a sentiment not by any means the result of awe of their station, but only of appreciation of their elegance and youth. Before gentlemen — such as Moore or Helstone, for instance — William was often a little dogged; with proud or insolent ladies, too, he was quite unmanageable, sometimes very resentful; but he was most sensible of, most tractable to, good-humour and civility. His nature — a stubborn one — was repelled by inflexibility in other natures; for which reason he had never been able to like his former master, Moore; and unconscious of that gentleman’s good opinion of himself, and of the service he had secretly rendered him in recommending him as gardener to Mr. Yorke, and by this means to other families in the neighbourhood, he continued to harbour a grudge against his austerity. Latterly he had often worked at Fieldhead. Miss Keeldar’s frank, hospitable manners were perfectly charming to him. Caroline he had known from her childhood; unconsciously she was his ideal of a lady. Her gentle mien, step, gestures, her grace of person and attire, moved some artist-fibres about his peasant heart. He had a pleasure in looking at her, as he had in examining rare flowers or in seeing pleasant landscapes. Both the ladies liked William; it was their delight to lend him books, to give him plants; and they preferred his conversation far before that of many coarse, hard, pretentious people immeasurably higher in station.

“Who was speaking, William, when you came out?” asked Shirley.

“A gentleman ye set a deal of store on, Miss Shirley — Mr. Donne.”

“You look knowing, William. How did you find out my regard for Mr. Donne?”

“Ay, Miss Shirley, there’s a gleg light i’ your een sometimes which betrays you. You look raight down scornful sometimes when Mr. Donne is by.”

“Do you like him yourself, William?”

“Me? I’m stalled o’ t’ curates, and so is t’ wife. They’ve no manners. They talk to poor folk fair as if they thought they were beneath them. They’re allus magnifying their office. It is a pity but their office could magnify them; but it does nought o’ t’ soart. I fair hate pride.”

“But you are proud in your own way yourself,” interposed Caroline. “You are what you call house-proud: you like to have everything handsome about you. Sometimes you look as if you were almost too proud to take your wages. When you were out of work, you were too proud to get anything on credit. But for your children, I believe you would rather have starved than gone to the shops without money; and when I wanted to give you something, what a difficulty I had in making you take it!”

“It is partly true, Miss Caroline. Ony day I’d rather give than take, especially from sich as ye. Look at t’ difference between us. Ye’re a little, young, slender lass, and I'm a great strong man; I'm rather more nor twice your age. It is not *my* part, then, I think, to tak fro' *ye* — to be under obligations (as they say) to *ye*. And that day ye came to our house, and called me to t' door, and offered me five shillings, which I doubt ye could ill spare — for ye've no fortin', I know — that day I war fair a rebel, a radical, an insurrectionist; and *ye* made me so. I thought it shameful that, willing and able as I was to work, I suld be i' such a condition that a young cratur about the age o' my own eldest lass suld think it needful to come and offer me her bit o' brass."

"I suppose you were angry with me, William?"

"I almost was, in a way. But I forgave ye varry soon. Ye meant well. Ay, *I am* proud, and so are *ye*; but your pride and mine is t' raight mak — what we call i' Yorkshire clean pride — such as Mr. Malone and Mr. Donne knows nought about. Theirs is mucky pride. Now, I shall teach my lasses to be as proud as Miss Shirley there, and my lads to be as proud as myseln; but I dare ony o' 'em to be like t' curates. I'd lick little Michael if I seed him show any signs o' that feeling."

"What is the difference, William?"

"Ye know t' difference weel enow, but ye want me to get a gate o' talking. Mr. Malone and Mr. Donne is almost too proud to do aught for theirseln; *we* are almost too proud to let anybody do aught for us. T' curates can hardly bide to speak a civil word to them they think beneath them; *we* can hardly bide to tak an uncivil word fro' them that thinks themseln aboon us."

"Now, William, be humble enough to tell me truly how you are getting on in the world. Are you well off?"

"Miss Shirley, I am varry well off. Since I got into t' gardening line, wi' Mr. Yorke's help, and since Mr. Hall (another o' t' raight sort) helped my wife to set up a bit of a shop, I've nought to complain of. My family has plenty to eat and plenty to wear. My pride makes me find means to have an odd pound now and then against rainy days; for I think I'd die afore I'd come to t' parish; and me and mine is content. But t' neighbours is poor yet. I see a great deal of distress."

"And, consequently, there is still discontent, I suppose?" inquired Miss Keeldar.

"*Consequently* — ye say right — *consequently*. In course, starving folk cannot be satisfied or settled folk. The country's not in a safe condition — I'll say so mich!"

"But what can be done? What more can I do, for instance?"

"Do? Ye can do not mich, poor young lass! Ye've gi'en your brass; ye've done well. If ye could transport your tenant, Mr. Moore, to Botany Bay, ye'd happen do better. Folks hate him."

"William, for shame!" exclaimed Caroline warmly. "If folks *do* hate him, it is to their disgrace, not his. Mr. Moore himself hates nobody. He only wants to do his duty, and maintain his rights. You are wrong to talk so."

"I talk as I think. He has a cold, unfeeling heart, yond' Moore."

"But," interposed Shirley, "supposing Moore was driven from the country, and his mill razed to the ground, would people have more work?"

"They'd have less. I know that, and they know that; and there is many an honest lad driven desperate by the certainty that whichever way he turns he cannot better himself; and there is dishonest men plenty to guide them to the devil, scoundrels that reckons to be the 'people's friends,' and that knows nought about the people, and is as insincere as Lucifer. I've lived aboon forty year in the world, and I believe that 'the people' will never have any true friends but theirseln and them two or three good folk i' different stations that is friends to all the world. Human natur', taking it i' th' lump, is nought but selfishness. It is but excessive few, it is but just an exception here and there, now and then, sich as ye two young uns and me, that, being in a different sphere, can understand t' one t' other, and be friends wi'out slavishness o' one hand or pride o' t' other. Them that reckons to be friends to a lower class than their own fro' political motives is never to be trusted; they always try to make their inferiors tools. For my own part, I will neither be patronized nor misled for no man's pleasure. I've had overtures made to me lately that I saw were treacherous, and I flung 'em back i' the faces o' them that offered 'em."

"You won't tell us what overtures?"

"I will not. It would do no good. It would mak no difference. Them they concerned can look after theirseln."

"Ay, we'se look after werseln," said another voice. Joe Scott had sauntered forth from the church to get a breath of fresh air, and there he stood.

"I'll warrant *ye*, Joe," observed William, smiling.

"And I'll warrant my maister," was the answer. — "Young ladies," continued Joe, assuming a lordly air, "ye'd better go into th' house."

"I wonder what for?" inquired Shirley, to whom the overlooker's somewhat pragmatical manners were familiar, and who was often at war with him; for Joe, holding supercilious theories about women in general, resented greatly, in his secret soul, the fact of his master and his master's mill being, in a manner, under petticoat government, and had felt as wormwood and gall certain business visits of the heiress to the Hollow's counting-house.

"Because there is nought agate that fits women to be consarned in."

"Indeed! There is prayer and preaching agate in that church. Are we not concerned in that?"

"Ye have been present neither at the prayer nor preaching, ma'am, if I have observed aright. What I alluded to was politics. William Farren here was touching on that subject, if I'm not mista'en."

"Well, what then? Politics are our habitual study, Joe. Do you know I see a newspaper every day, and two of a Sunday?"

"I should think you'll read the marriages, probably, miss, and the murders, and the accidents, and sich like?"

"I read the leading articles, Joe, and the foreign intelligence, and I look over the market prices. In short, I read just what gentlemen read."

Joe looked as if he thought this talk was like the chattering of a pie. He replied to it by a disdainful silence.

"Joe," continued Miss Keeldar, "I never yet could ascertain properly whether you are a Whig or a Tory. Pray, which party has the honour of your alliance?"

"It is rayther difficult to explain where you are sure not to be understood," was Joe's haughty response; "but as to being a Tory, I'd as soon be an old woman, or a young one, which is a more flimsier article still. It is the Tories that carries on the war and ruins trade; and if I be of any party — though political parties is all nonsense — I'm of that which is most favourable to peace, and, by consequence, to the mercantile interests of this here land."

"So am I, Joe," replied Shirley, who had rather a pleasure in teasing the overlooker, by persisting in talking on subjects with which he opined she, as a woman, had no right to meddle — "partly, at least. I have rather a leaning to the agricultural interest, too; as good reason is, seeing that I don't desire England to be under the feet of France, and that if a share of my income comes from Hollow's Mill, a larger share comes from the landed estate around it. It would not do to take any measures injurious to the farmers, Joe, I think?"

"The dews at this hour is unwholesome for females," observed Joe.

"If you make that remark out of interest in me, I have merely to assure you that I am impervious to cold. I should not mind taking my turn to watch the mill one of these summer nights, armed with your musket, Joe."

Joe Scott's chin was always rather prominent. He poked it out, at this speech, some inches farther than usual.

"But — to go back to my sheep," she proceeded — "clothier and mill-owner as I am, besides farmer, I cannot get out of my head a certain idea that we manufacturers and persons of business are sometimes a little — a *very little* — selfish and short-sighted in our views, and rather *too* regardless of human suffering, rather heartless in our pursuit of gain. Don't you agree with me, Joe?"

"I cannot argue where I cannot be comprehended," was again the answer.

"Man of mystery! Your master will argue with me sometimes, Joe. He is not so stiff as you are."

"Maybe not. We've all our own ways."

"Joe, do you seriously think all the wisdom in the world is lodged in male skulls?"

"I think that women are a kittle and a froward generation; and I've a great respect for the doctrines delivered in the second chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to Timothy."

"What doctrines, Joe?"

"'Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For

Adam was first formed, then Eve.'"

"What has that to do with the business?" interjected Shirley. "That smacks of rights of primogeniture. I'll bring it up to Mr. Yorke the first time he inveighs against those rights."

"And," continued Joe Scott, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

"More shame to Adam to sin with his eyes open!" cried Miss Keeldar. "To confess the honest truth, Joe, I never was easy in my mind concerning that chapter. It puzzles me."

"It is very plain, miss. He that runs may read."

"He may read it in his own fashion," remarked Caroline, now joining in the dialogue for the first time. "You allow the right of private judgment, I suppose, Joe?"

"My certy, that I do! I allow and claim it for every line of the holy Book."

"Women may exercise it as well as men?"

"Nay. Women is to take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion. It's wholesomest for them."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed both Shirley and Caroline.

"To be sure; no doubt on't," persisted the stubborn overlooker.

"Consider yourself groaned down, and cried shame over, for such a stupid observation," said Miss Keeldar. "You might as well say men are to take the opinions of their priests without examination. Of what value would a religion so adopted be? It would be mere blind, besotted superstition."

"And what is *your* reading, Miss Helstone, o' these words o' St. Paul's?"

"Hem! I — I account for them in this way. He wrote that chapter for a particular congregation of Christians, under peculiar circumstances; and besides, I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misapprehended altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, with a little ingenuity, to give the passage quite a contrary turn — to make it say, 'Let the woman speak out whenever she sees fit to make an objection.' 'It is permitted to a woman to teach and to exercise authority as much as may be. Man, meantime, cannot do better than hold his peace;' and so on."

"That willn't wash, miss."

"I dare say it will. My notions are dyed in faster colours than yours, Joe. Mr. Scott, you are a thoroughly dogmatical person, and always were. I like William better than you."

"Joe is well enough in his own house," said Shirley. "I have seen him as quiet as a lamb at home. There is not a better nor a kinder husband in Briarfield. He does not dogmatize to his wife."

"My wife is a hard-working, plain woman; time and trouble has ta'en all the conceit out of her. But that is not the case with you, young misses. And then you reckon to have so much knowledge; and i' my thoughts it's only superficial sort o' vanities you're acquainted with. I can tell — happen a year sin' — one day Miss Caroline coming into our counting-house when I war packing up summat behind t' great desk, and she didn't see me, and she brought a slate wi' a sum on it to t' maister. It war only a bit of a sum in practice, that our Harry would have settled i' two minutes. She couldn't do it. Mr. Moore had to show her how. And when he did show her, she couldn't understand him."

"Nonsense, Joe!"

"Nay, it's no nonsense. And Miss Shirley there reckons to hearken to t' maister when he's talking ower trade, so attentive like, as if she followed him word for word, and all war as clear as a lady's looking-glass to her een; and all t' while she's peeping and peeping out o' t' window to see if t' mare stands quiet; and then looking at a bit of a splash on her riding-skirt; and then glancing glegly round at wer counting-house cobwebs and dust, and thinking what mucky folk we are, and what a grand ride she'll have just i' now ower Nunnely Common. She hears no more o' Mr. Moore's talk nor if he spake Hebrew."

"Joe, you are a real slanderer. I would give you your answer, only the people are coming out of church. We must leave you. Man of prejudice, good-bye. — William, good-bye. — Children, come up to Fieldhead to-morrow, and you shall choose what you like best out of Mrs. Gill's store-room."

CHAPTER XIX.

A SUMMER NIGHT.

The hour was now that of dusk. A clear air favoured the kindling of the stars.

"There will be just light enough to show me the way home," said Miss Keeldar, as she prepared to take leave of Caroline at the rectory garden door.

"You must not go alone, Shirley; Fanny shall accompany you."

"That she shall not. Of what need I be afraid in my own parish? I would walk from Fieldhead to the church any fine midsummer night, three hours later than this, for the mere pleasure of seeing the stars and the chance of meeting a fairy."

"But just wait till the crowd is cleared away."

"Agreed. There are the five Misses Armitage streaming by. Here comes Mrs. Sykes's phaeton, Mr. Wynne's close carriage, Mrs. Birtwhistle's car. I don't wish to go through the ceremony of bidding them all good-bye, so we will step into the garden and take shelter amongst the laburnums for an instant."

The rectors, their curates, and their churchwardens now issued from the church porch. There was a great confabulation, shaking of hands, congratulation on speeches, recommendation to be careful of the night air, etc. By degrees the throng dispersed, the carriages drove off. Miss Keeldar was just emerging from her flowery refuge when Mr. Helstone entered the garden and met her.

"Oh, I want you!" he said. "I was afraid you were already gone. — Caroline, come here."

Caroline came, expecting, as Shirley did, a lecture on not having been visible at church. Other subjects, however, occupied the rector's mind.

"I shall not sleep at home to-night," he continued. "I have just met with an old friend, and promised to accompany him. I shall return probably about noon to-morrow. Thomas, the clerk, is engaged, and I cannot get him to sleep in the house, as I usually do when I am absent for a night. Now — — "

"Now," interrupted Shirley, "you want me as a gentleman — the first gentleman in Briarfield, in short — to supply your place, be master of the rectory and guardian of your niece and maids while you are away?"

"Exactly, captain. I thought the post would suit you. Will you favour Caroline so far as to be her guest for one night? Will you stay here instead of going back to Fieldhead?"

"And what will Mrs. Pryor do? she expects me home."

"I will send her word. Come, make up your mind to stay. It grows late;

the dew falls heavily. You and Caroline will enjoy each other's society, I doubt not."

"I promise you, then, to stay with Caroline," replied Shirley. "As you say, we shall enjoy each other's society. We will not be separated to-night. Now, rejoin your old friend, and fear nothing for us."

"If there should chance to be any disturbance in the night, captain; if you should hear the picking of a lock, the cutting out of a pane of glass, a stealthy tread of steps about the house (and I need not fear to tell *you*, who bear a well-tempered, mettlesome heart under your girl's ribbon sash, that such little incidents are very possible in the present time), what would you do?"

"Don't know; faint, perhaps — fall down, and have to be picked up again. But, doctor, if you assign me the post of honour, you must give me arms. What weapons are there in your stronghold?"

"You could not wield a sword?"

"No; I could manage the carving-knife better."

"You will find a good one in the dining-room sideboard — a lady's knife, light to handle, and as sharp-pointed as a poniard."

"It will suit Caroline. But you must give me a brace of pistols. I know you have pistols."

"I have two pairs. One pair I can place at your disposal. You will find them suspended over the mantelpiece of my study in cloth cases."

"Loaded?"

"Yes, but not on the cock. Cock them before you go to bed. It is paying you a great compliment, captain, to lend you these. Were you one of the awkward squad you should not have them."

"I will take care. You need delay no longer, Mr. Helstone. You may go now. — He is gracious to me to lend me his pistols," she remarked, as the rector passed out at the garden gate. "But come, Lina," she continued, "let us go in and have some supper. I was too much vexed at tea with the vicinage of Mr. Sam Wynne to be able to eat, and now I am really hungry."

Entering the house, they repaired to the darkened dining-room, through the open windows of which apartment stole the evening air, bearing the perfume of flowers from the garden, the very distant sound of far-retreating steps from the road, and a soft, vague murmur whose origin Caroline explained by the remark, uttered as she stood listening at the casement, "Shirley, I hear the beck in the Hollow."

Then she rang the bell, asked for a candle and some bread and milk — Miss Keeldar's usual supper and her own. Fanny, when she brought in the tray, would have closed the windows and the shutters, but was requested to desist for the present. The twilight was too calm, its breath too balmy to be yet excluded. They took their meal in silence. Caroline rose once to remove to the window-sill a glass of flowers which stood on the sideboard, the exhalation from the blossoms being somewhat too powerful for the sultry room. In returning she half opened a drawer, and took from it something that glittered clear and keen in her hand.

"You assigned this to me, then, Shirley, did you? It is bright, keen-edged, finely tapered; it is dangerous-looking. I never yet felt the impulse which could move me to direct this against a fellow-creature. It is difficult to fancy that circumstances could nerve my arm to strike home with this long knife."

"I should hate to do it," replied Shirley, "but I think I could do it, if goaded by certain exigencies which I can imagine." And Miss Keeldar quietly sipped her glass of new milk, looking somewhat thoughtful and a little pale; though, indeed, when did she not look pale? She was never florid.

The milk sipped and the bread eaten, Fanny was again summoned. She and Eliza were recommended to go to bed, which they were quite willing to do, being weary of the day's exertions, of much cutting of currant-buns, and filling of urns and teapots, and running backwards and forwards with trays. Ere long the maids' chamber door was heard to close. Caroline took a candle and went quietly all over the house, seeing that every window was fast and every door barred. She did not even evade the haunted back kitchen nor the vault-like cellars. These visited, she returned.

"There is neither spirit nor flesh in the house at present," she said, "which should not be there. It is now near eleven o'clock, fully bedtime; yet I would rather sit up a little longer, if you do not object, Shirley. Here," she continued, "I have brought the brace of pistols from my uncle's study. You may examine them at your leisure."

She placed them on the table before her friend.

"Why would you rather sit up longer?" asked Miss Keeldar, taking up the firearms, examining them, and again laying them down.

"Because I have a strange, excited feeling in my heart."

"So have I."

"Is this state of sleeplessness and restlessness caused by something electrical in the air, I wonder?"

"No; the sky is clear, the stars numberless. It is a fine night."

"But very still. I hear the water fret over its stony bed in Hollow's Copse as distinctly as if it ran below the churchyard wall."

"I am glad it is so still a night. A moaning wind or rushing rain would vex me to fever just now."

"Why, Shirley?"

"Because it would baffle my efforts to listen."

"Do you listen towards the Hollow?"

"Yes; it is the only quarter whence we can hear a sound just now."

"The only one, Shirley."

They both sat near the window, and both leaned their arms on the sill, and both inclined their heads towards the open lattice. They saw each other's young faces by the starlight and that dim June twilight which does not wholly fade from the west till dawn begins to break in the east.

"Mr. Helstone thinks we have no idea which way he is gone," murmured

Miss Keeldar, "nor on what errand, nor with what expectations, nor how prepared. But I guess much; do not you?"

"I guess something."

"All those gentlemen — your cousin Moore included — think that you and I are now asleep in our beds, unconscious."

"Caring nothing about them — hoping and fearing nothing for them," added Caroline.

Both kept silent for full half an hour. The night was silent too; only the church clock measured its course by quarters. Some words were interchanged about the chill of the air. They wrapped their scarves closer round them, resumed their bonnets, which they had removed, and again watched.

Towards midnight the teasing, monotonous bark of the house-dog disturbed the quietude of their vigil. Caroline rose, and made her way noiselessly through the dark passages to the kitchen, intending to appease him with a piece of bread. She succeeded. On returning to the dining-room she found it all dark, Miss Keeldar having extinguished the candle. The outline of her shape was visible near the still open window, leaning out. Miss Helstone asked no questions; she stole to her side. The dog recommenced barking furiously. Suddenly he stopped, and seemed to listen. The occupants of the dining-room listened too, and not merely now to the flow of the mill-stream. There was a nearer, though a muffled, sound on the road below the churchyard — a measured, beating, approaching sound — a dull tramp of marching feet.

It drew near. Those who listened by degrees comprehended its extent. It was not the tread of two, nor of a dozen, nor of a score of men; it was the tread of hundreds. They could see nothing; the high shrubs of the garden formed a leafy screen between them and the road. To hear, however, was not enough, and this they felt as the troop trod forwards, and seemed actually passing the rectory. They felt it more when a human voice — though that voice spoke but one word — broke the hush of the night.

"Halt!"

A halt followed. The march was arrested. Then came a low conference, of which no word was distinguishable from the dining-room.

"We *must* hear this," said Shirley.

She turned, took her pistols from the table, silently passed out through the middle window of the dining-room, which was, in fact, a glass door, stole down the walk to the garden wall, and stood listening under the lilacs. Caroline would not have quitted the house had she been alone, but where Shirley went she would go. She glanced at the weapon on the sideboard, but left it behind her, and presently stood at her friend's side. They dared not look over the wall, for fear of being seen; they were obliged to crouch behind it. They heard these words, —

"It looks a rambling old building. Who lives in it besides the damned parson?"

"Only three women — his niece and two servants."

"Do you know where they sleep?"

"The lasses behind; the niece in a front room."

"And Helstone?"

"Yonder is his chamber. He was burning a light, but I see none now."

"Where would you get in?"

"If I were ordered to do his job — and he desarves it — I'd try yond' long window; it opens to the dining-room. I could grope my way upstairs, and I know his chamber."

"How would you manage about the women folk?"

"Let 'em alone except they shrieked, and then I'd soon quieten 'em. I could wish to find the old chap asleep. If he waked, he'd be dangerous."

"Has he arms?"

"Firearms, allus — and allus loadened."

"Then you're a fool to stop us here. A shot would give the alarm. Moore would be on us before we could turn round. We should miss our main object."

"You might go on, I tell you. I'd engage Helstone alone."

A pause. One of the party dropped some weapon, which rang on the stone causeway. At this sound the rectory dog barked again furiously — fiercely.

"That spoils all!" said the voice. "He'll awake. A noise like that might rouse the dead. You did not say there was a dog. Damn you! Forward!"

Forward they went — tramp, tramp — with mustering, manifold, slow-filing tread. They were gone.

Shirley stood erect, looked over the wall, along the road.

"Not a soul remains," she said.

She stood and mused. "Thank God!" was the next observation.

Caroline repeated the ejaculation — not in so steady a tone. She was trembling much. Her heart was beating fast and thick; her face was cold, her forehead damp.

"Thank God for us!" she reiterated. "But what will happen elsewhere? They have passed us by that they may make sure of others."

"They have done well," returned Shirley, with composure. "The others will defend themselves. They can do it. They are prepared for them. With us it is otherwise. My finger was on the trigger of this pistol. I was quite ready to give that man, if he had entered, such a greeting as he little calculated on; but behind him followed three hundred. I had neither three hundred hands nor three hundred weapons. I could not have effectually protected either you, myself, or the two poor women asleep under that roof. Therefore I again earnestly thank God for insult and peril escaped."

After a second pause she continued: "What is it my duty and wisdom to do next? Not to stay here inactive, I am glad to say, but, of course, to walk over to the Hollow."

"To the Hollow, Shirley?"

"To the Hollow. Will you go with me?"

"Where those men are gone?"

"They have taken the highway; we should not encounter them. The road over the fields is as safe, silent, and solitary as a path through the air would be. Will you go?"

"Yes," was the answer, given mechanically, not because the speaker wished or was prepared to go, or, indeed, was otherwise than scared at the prospect of going, but because she felt she could not abandon Shirley.

"Then we must fasten up these windows, and leave all as secure as we can behind us. Do you know what we are going for, Cary?"

"Yes — no — because you wish it."

"Is that all? And are you so obedient to a mere caprice of mine? What a docile wife you would make to a stern husband! The moon's face is not whiter than yours at this moment, and the aspen at the gate does not tremble more than your busy fingers; and so, tractable and terror-struck, and dismayed and devoted, you would follow me into the thick of real danger! Cary, let me give your fidelity a motive. We are going for Moore's sake — to see if we can be of use to him, to make an effort to warn him of what is coming."

"To be sure! I am a blind, weak fool, and you are acute and sensible, Shirley. I will go with you; I will gladly go with you!"

"I do not doubt it. You would die blindly and meekly for me, but you would intelligently and gladly die for Moore. But, in truth, there is no question of death to-night; we run no risk at all."

Caroline rapidly closed shutter and lattice. "Do not fear that I shall not have breath to run as fast as you can possibly run, Shirley. Take my hand. Let us go straight across the fields."

"But you cannot climb walls?"

"To-night I can."

"You are afraid of hedges, and the beck which we shall be forced to cross?"

"I can cross it."

They started; they ran. Many a wall checked but did not baffle them. Shirley was surefooted and agile; she could spring like a deer when she chose. Caroline, more timid and less dexterous, fell once or twice, and bruised herself; but she rose again directly, saying she was not hurt. A quickset hedge bounded the last field; they lost time in seeking a gap in it. The aperture, when found, was narrow, but they worked their way through. The long hair, the tender skin, the silks and the muslins suffered; but what was chiefly regretted was the impediment this difficulty had caused to speed. On the other side they met the beck, flowing deep in a rough bed. At this point a narrow plank formed the only bridge across it. Shirley had trodden the plank successfully and fearlessly many a time before; Caroline had never yet dared to risk the transit.

"I will carry you across," said Miss Keeldar. "You are light, and I am not weak. Let me try."

"If I fall in, you may fish me out," was the answer, as a grateful squeeze compressed her hand. Caroline, without pausing, trod forward on the trembling plank as if it were a continuation of the firm turf. Shirley, who followed, did not cross it more resolutely or safely. In their present humour, on their present errand, a strong and foaming channel would have been a barrier to neither. At the moment they were above the control either of fire or water. All Stilbro' Moor, alight and aglow with bonfires, would not have stopped them, nor would Calder or Aire thundering in flood. Yet one sound made them pause. Scarce had they set foot on the solid opposite bank when a shot split the air from the north. One second elapsed. Further off burst a like note in the south. Within the space of three minutes similar signals boomed in the east and west.

"I thought we were dead at the first explosion," observed Shirley, drawing a long breath. "I felt myself hit in the temples, and I concluded your heart was pierced; but the reiterated voice was an explanation. Those are signals — it is their way — the attack must be near. We should have had wings. Our feet have not borne us swiftly enough."

A portion of the copse was now to clear. When they emerged from it the mill lay just below them. They could look down upon the buildings, the yard; they could see the road beyond. And the first glance in that direction told Shirley she was right in her conjecture. They were already too late to give warning. It had taken more time than they calculated on to overcome the various obstacles which embarrassed the short cut across the fields.

The road, which should have been white, was dark with a moving mass. The rioters were assembled in front of the closed yard gates, and a single figure stood within, apparently addressing them. The mill itself was perfectly black and still. There was neither life, light, nor motion around it.

"Surely he is prepared. Surely that is not Moore meeting them alone?" whispered Shirley.

"It is. We must go to him. I *will* go to him."

"*That* you will not."

"Why did I come, then? I came only for him. I shall join him."

"Fortunately it is out of your power. There is no entrance to the yard."

"There *is* a small entrance at the back, besides the gates in front. It opens by a secret method which I know. I will try it."

"Not with my leave."

Miss Keeldar clasped her round the waist with both arms and held her back. "Not one step shall you stir," she went on authoritatively. "At this moment Moore would be both shocked and embarrassed if he saw either you or me. Men never want women near them in time of real danger."

"I would not trouble — I would help him," was the reply.

"How? — by inspiring him with heroism? Pooh! these are not the days of chivalry. It is not a tilt at a tournament we are going to behold, but a struggle about money, and food, and life."

"It is natural that I should be at his side."

"As queen of his heart? His mill is his lady-love, Cary! Backed by his factory and his frames, he has all the encouragement he wants or can know. It is not for love or beauty, but for ledger and broadcloth, he is going to break a spear. Don't be sentimental; Robert is not so."

"I *could* help him; I *will* seek him."

"Off then — I let you go — seek Moore. You'll not find him."

She loosened her hold. Caroline sped like levelled shaft from bent bow; after her rang a jesting, gibing laugh. "Look well there is no mistake!" was the warning given.

But there *was* a mistake. Miss Helstone paused, hesitated, gazed. The figure had suddenly retreated from the gate, and was running back hastily to the mill.

"Make haste, Lina!" cried Shirley; "meet him before he enters."

Caroline slowly returned. "It is not Robert," she said. "It has neither his height, form, nor bearing."

"I saw it was not Robert when I let you go. How could you imagine it? It is a shabby little figure of a private soldier; they had posted him as sentinel. He is safe in the mill now. I saw the door open and admit him. My mind grows easier. Robert is prepared. Our warning would have been superfluous; and now I am thankful we came too late to give it. It has saved us the trouble of a scene. How fine to have entered the counting-house *toute éperdue*, and to have found oneself in presence of Messrs. Armitage and Ramsden smoking, Malone swaggering, your uncle sneering, Mr. Sykes sipping a cordial, and Moore himself in his cold man-of-business vein! I am glad we missed it all."

"I wonder if there are many in the mill, Shirley!"

"Plenty to defend it. The soldiers we have twice seen to-day were going there, no doubt, and the group we noticed surrounding your cousin in the fields will be with him."

"What are they doing now, Shirley? What is that noise?"

"Hatchets and crowbars against the yard gates. They are forcing them. Are you afraid?"

"No; but my heart throbs fast. I have a difficulty in standing. I will sit down. Do you feel unmoved?"

"Hardly that; but I am glad I came. We shall see what transpires with our own eyes. We are here on the spot, and none know it. Instead of amazing the curate, the clothier, and the corn-dealer with a romantic rush on the stage, we stand alone with the friendly night, its mute stars, and these whispering trees, whose report our friends will not come to gather."

"Shirley, Shirley, the gates are down! That crash was like the felling of great trees. Now they are pouring through. They will break down the mill doors as they have broken the gate. What can Robert do against so many? Would to God I were a little nearer him — could hear him speak — could speak to him! With my will — my longing to serve him — I could not be a useless burden in his way; I could be turned to some account."

"They come on!" cried Shirley. "How steadily they march in! There is discipline in their ranks. I will not say there is courage — hundreds against tens are no proof of that quality — but" (she dropped her voice) "there is suffering and desperation enough amongst them. These goads will urge them forwards."

"Forwards against Robert; and they hate him. Shirley, is there much danger they will win the day?"

"We shall see. Moore and Helstone are of 'earth's first blood' — no bunglers — no cravens — — "

A crash — smash — shiver — stopped their whispers. A simultaneously hurled volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice lay in shattered and pounded fragments. A yell followed this demonstration — a rioters' yell — a north-of-England, a Yorkshire, a West-Riding, a West-Riding-clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters' yell.

You never heard that sound, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears — perhaps for your heart, since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men or principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well, wrath wakens to the cry of hate; the lion shakes his mane, and rises to the howl of the hyena; caste stands up, ireful against caste; and the indignant, wronged spirit of the middle rank bears down in zeal and scorn on the famished and furious mass of the operative class. It is difficult to be tolerant, difficult to be just, in such moments.

Caroline rose; Shirley put her arm round her: they stood together as still as the straight stems of two trees. That yell was a long one, and when it ceased the night was yet full of the swaying and murmuring of a crowd.

"What next?" was the question of the listeners. Nothing came yet. The mill remained mute as a mausoleum.

"He *cannot* be alone!" whispered Caroline.

"I would stake all I have that he is as little alone as he is alarmed," responded Shirley.

Shots were discharged by the rioters. Had the defenders waited for this signal? It seemed so. The hitherto inert and passive mill woke; fire flashed from its empty window-frames; a volley of musketry pealed sharp through the Hollow.

"Moore speaks at last!" said Shirley, "and he seems to have the gift of tongues. That was not a single voice."

"He has been forbearing. No one can accuse him of rashness," alleged Caroline. "Their discharge preceded his. They broke his gates and his windows. They fired at his garrison before he repelled them."

What was going on now? It seemed difficult, in the darkness, to distinguish; but something terrible, a still-renewing tumult, was obvious — fierce attacks, desperate repulses. The mill-yard, the mill itself, was full of battle movement. There was scarcely any cessation now of the discharge of firearms; and there was struggling, rushing, trampling, and shouting between. The aim of the assailants seemed to be to enter the mill, that of the defenders to beat them off. They heard the rebel leader cry, "To the back, lads!" They heard a voice retort, "Come round; we will meet you."

"To the counting-house!" was the order again.

"Welcome! we shall have you there!" was the response. And accordingly the fiercest blaze that had yet glowed, the loudest rattle that had yet been heard, burst from the counting-house front when the mass of rioters rushed up to it.

The voice that had spoken was Moore's own voice. They could tell by its tones that his soul was now warm with the conflict; they could guess that the fighting animal was roused in every one of those men there struggling together, and was for the time quite paramount above the rational human being.

Both the girls felt their faces glow and their pulses throb; both knew they would do no good by rushing down into the *mêlée*. They desired neither to deal nor to receive blows; but they could not have run away — Caroline no more than Shirley; they could not have fainted; they could not have taken their eyes from the dim, terrible scene — from the mass of cloud, of smoke, the musket-lightning — for the world.

"How and when would it end?" was the demand throbbing in their throbbing pulses. "Would a juncture arise in which they could be useful?" was what they waited to see; for though Shirley put off their too-late arrival with a jest, and was ever ready to satirize her own or any other person's enthusiasm, she would have given a farm of her best land for a chance of rendering good service.

The chance was not vouchsafed her; the looked-for juncture never came. It was not likely. Moore had expected this attack for days, perhaps weeks; he was prepared for it at every point. He had fortified and garrisoned his mill, which in itself was a strong building. He was a cool, brave man; he stood to the defence with unflinching firmness. Those who were with him caught his spirit, and copied his demeanour. The rioters had never been so met before. At other mills they had attacked they had found no resistance; an organized, resolute defence was what they never dreamed of encountering. When their leaders saw the steady fire kept up from the mill, witnessed the composure and determination of its owner, heard themselves coolly defied and invited on to death, and beheld their men falling wounded round them, they felt that nothing was to be done here. In haste they mustered their forces, drew them away from the building. A roll was called over, in which the men answered to figures instead of names. They dispersed wide over the fields, leaving silence and ruin behind them. The attack, from its commencement to its termination, had not occupied an hour.

Day was by this time approaching; the west was dim, the east beginning to gleam. It would have seemed that the girls who had watched this conflict would now wish to hasten to the victors, on whose side all their interest had been enlisted; but they only very cautiously approached the now battered mill, and when suddenly a number of soldiers and gentlemen appeared at the great door opening into the yard, they quickly stepped aside into a shed, the deposit of old iron and timber, whence they could see without being seen.

It was no cheering spectacle. These premises were now a mere blot of desolation on the fresh front of the summer dawn. All the copse up the Hollow was shady and dewy, the hill at its head was green; but just here, in the centre of the sweet glen, Discord, broken loose in the night from control, had beaten the ground with his stamping hoofs, and left it waste and pulverized. The mill yawned all ruinous with unglazed frames; the yard was thickly bestrewn with stones and brickbats; and close under the mill, with the glittering fragments of the shattered windows, muskets and other weapons lay here and there. More than one deep crimson stain was visible on the gravel, a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates, and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust.

Miss Keeldar's countenance changed at this view. It was the after-taste of the battle, death and pain replacing excitement and exertion. It was the blackness the bright fire leaves when its blaze is sunk, its warmth failed, and its glow faded.

"This is what I wished to prevent," she said, in a voice whose cadence betrayed the altered impulse of her heart.

"But you could not prevent it; you did your best — it was in vain," said Caroline comfortingly. "Don't grieve, Shirley."

"I am sorry for those poor fellows," was the answer, while the spark in her glance dissolved to dew. "Are any within the mill hurt, I wonder? Is that your uncle?"

"It is, and there is Mr. Malone; and, O Shirley, there is Robert!"

"Well" (resuming her former tone), "don't squeeze your fingers quite into my hand. I see. There is nothing wonderful in that. We knew he, at least, was here, whoever might be absent."

"He is coming here towards us, Shirley!"

"Towards the pump, that is to say, for the purpose of washing his hands and his forehead, which has got a scratch, I perceive."

"He bleeds, Shirley. Don't hold me. I must go."

"Not a step."

"He is hurt, Shirley!"

"Fiddlestick!"

"But I *must* go to him. I wish to go so much. I cannot bear to be restrained."

"What for?"

"To speak to him, to ask how he is, and what I can do for him."

"To tease and annoy him; to make a spectacle of yourself and him before those soldiers, Mr. Malone, your uncle, et cetera. Would he like it, think you?

Would you like to remember it a week hence?"

"Am I always to be curbed and kept down?" demanded Caroline, a little passionately.

"For his sake, yes; and still more for your own. I tell you, if you showed yourself now you would repent it an hour hence, and so would Robert."

"You think he would not like it, Shirley?"

"Far less than he would like our stopping him to say good-night, which you were so sore about."

"But that was all play; there was no danger."

"And this is serious work; he must be unmolested."

"I only wish to go to him because he is my cousin — you understand?"

"I quite understand. But now, watch him. He has bathed his forehead, and the blood has ceased trickling. His hurt is really a mere graze; I can see it from hence. He is going to look after the wounded men."

Accordingly Mr. Moore and Mr. Helstone went round the yard, examining each prostrate form. They then gave directions to have the wounded taken up and carried into the mill. This duty being performed, Joe Scott was ordered to saddle his master's horse and Mr. Helstone's pony, and the two gentlemen rode away full gallop, to seek surgical aid in different directions.

Caroline was not yet pacified.

"Shirley, Shirley, I should have liked to speak one word to him before he went," she murmured, while the tears gathered glittering in her eyes.

"Why do you cry, Lina?" asked Miss Keeldar a little sternly. "You ought to be glad instead of sorry. Robert has escaped any serious harm; he is victorious; he has been cool and brave in combat; he is now considerate in triumph. Is this a time — are these causes for weeping?"

"You do not know what I have in my heart," pleaded the other — "what pain, what distraction — nor whence it arises. I can understand that you should exult in Robert's greatness and goodness; so do I, in one sense, but in another I feel *so* miserable. I am too far removed from him. I used to be nearer. Let me alone, Shirley. Do let me cry a few minutes; it relieves me."

Miss Keeldar, feeling her tremble in every limb, ceased to expostulate with her. She went out of the shed, and left her to weep in peace. It was the best plan. In a few minutes Caroline rejoined her, much calmer. She said, with her natural, docile, gentle manner, "Come, Shirley, we will go home now. I promise not to try to see Robert again till he asks for me. I never will try to push myself on him. I thank you for restraining me just now."

"I did it with a good intention," returned Miss Keeldar.

"Now, dear Lina," she continued, "let us turn our faces to the cool morning breeze, and walk very quietly back to the rectory. We will steal in as we stole out. None shall know where we have been or what we have seen to-night; neither taunt nor misconstruction can consequently molest us. To-morrow we will see Robert, and be of good cheer; but I will say no more, lest

I should begin to cry too. I seem hard towards you, but I am not so.”

CHAPTER XX.

TO-MORROW.

The two girls met no living soul on their way back to the rectory. They let themselves in noiselessly; they stole upstairs unheard — the breaking morning gave them what light they needed. Shirley sought her couch immediately; and though the room was strange — for she had never slept at the rectory before — and though the recent scene was one unparalleled for excitement and terror by any it had hitherto been her lot to witness, yet scarce was her head laid on the pillow ere a deep, refreshing sleep closed her eyes and calmed her senses.

Perfect health was Shirley's enviable portion. Though warm-hearted and sympathetic, she was not nervous; powerful emotions could rouse and sway without exhausting her spirit. The tempest troubled and shook her while it lasted, but it left her elasticity unbent, and her freshness quite unblighted. As every day brought her stimulating emotion, so every night yielded her recreating rest. Caroline now watched her sleeping, and read the serenity of her mind in the beauty of her happy countenance.

For herself, being of a different temperament, she could not sleep. The commonplace excitement of the tea-drinking and school-gathering would alone have sufficed to make her restless all night; the effect of the terrible drama which had just been enacted before her eyes was not likely to quit her for days. It was vain even to try to retain a recumbent posture; she sat up by Shirley's side, counting the slow minutes, and watching the June sun mount the heavens.

Life wastes fast in such vigils as Caroline had of late but too often kept — vigils during which the mind, having no pleasant food to nourish it, no manna of hope, no hived-honey of joyous memories, tries to live on the meagre diet of wishes, and failing to derive thence either delight or support, and feeling itself ready to perish with craving want, turns to philosophy, to resolution, to resignation; calls on all these gods for aid, calls vainly — is unheard, unhelped, and languishes.

Caroline was a Christian; therefore in trouble she framed many a prayer after the Christian creed, preferred it with deep earnestness, begged for patience, strength, relief. This world, however, we all know, is the scene of trial and probation; and, for any favourable result her petitions had yet wrought, it seemed to her that they were unheard and unaccepted. She believed, sometimes, that God had turned His face from her. At moments she was a Calvinist, and, sinking into the gulf of religious despair, she saw darkening over her the doom of reprobation.

Most people have had a period or periods in their lives when they have felt thus forsaken — when, having long hoped against hope, and still seen the day of fruition deferred, their hearts have truly sickened within them. This is a terrible hour, but it is often that darkest point which precedes the rise of day — that turn of the year when the icy January wind carries over the waste at once the dirge of departing winter and the prophecy of coming spring. The perishing birds, however, cannot thus understand the blast before which they shiver; and as little can the suffering soul recognize, in the climax of its affliction, the dawn of its deliverance. Yet, let whoever grieves still cling fast to love and faith in God. God will never deceive, never finally desert him. "Whom He loveth, He chasteneth." These words are true, and should not be forgotten.

The household was astir at last; the servants were up; the shutters were opened below. Caroline, as she quitted the couch, which had been but a thorny one to her, felt that revival of spirits which the return of day, of action, gives to all but the wholly despairing or actually dying. She dressed herself, as usual, carefully, trying so to arrange her hair and attire that nothing of the forlornness she felt at heart should be visible externally. She looked as fresh as Shirley when both were dressed, only that Miss Keeldar's eyes were lively, and Miss Helstone's languid.

"To-day I shall have much to say to Moore," were Shirley's first words; and you could see in her face that life was full of interest, expectation, and occupation for her. "He will have to undergo cross-examination," she added. "I dare say he thinks he has outwitted me cleverly. And this is the way men deal with women — still concealing danger from them — thinking, I suppose, to spare them pain. They imagined we little knew where they were to-night. We *know* they little conjectured where we were. Men, I believe, fancy women's minds something like those of children. Now, that is a mistake."

This was said as she stood at the glass, training her naturally waved hair into curls, by twining it round her fingers. She took up the theme again five minutes after, as Caroline fastened her dress and clasped her girdle.

"If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women. They do not read them in a true light; they misapprehend them, both for good and evil. Their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. Then to hear them fall into ecstasies with each other's creations — worshipping the heroine of such a poem, novel, drama — thinking it fine, divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial — false as the rose in my best bonnet there. If I spoke all I think on this point, if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour."

"Shirley, you chatter so, I can't fasten you. Be still. And, after all, authors' heroines are almost as good as authoresses' heroes."

"Not at all. Women read men more truly than men read women. I'll prove that in a magazine paper some day when I've time; only it will never be inserted. It will be 'declined with thanks,' and left for me at the publisher's."

"To be sure. You could not write cleverly enough. You don't know enough. You are not learned, Shirley."

"God knows I can't contradict you, Cary; I'm as ignorant as a stone. There's one comfort, however: you are not much better."

They descended to breakfast.

"I wonder how Mrs. Pryor and Hortense Moore have passed the night," said Caroline, as she made the coffee. "Selfish being that I am, I never thought of either of them till just now. They will have heard all the tumult, Fieldhead and the cottage are so near; and Hortense is timid in such matters — so, no doubt, is Mrs. Pryor."

"Take my word for it, Lina, Moore will have contrived to get his sister out of the way. She went home with Miss Mann. He will have quartered her there for the night. As to Mrs. Pryor, I own I am uneasy about her; but in another half-hour we will be with her."

By this time the news of what had happened at the Hollow was spread all over the neighbourhood. Fanny, who had been to Fieldhead to fetch the milk, returned in panting haste with tidings that there had been a battle in the night at Mr. Moore's mill, and that some said twenty men were killed. Eliza, during Fanny's absence, had been apprised by the butcher's boy that the mill was burnt to the ground. Both women rushed into the parlour to announce these terrible facts to the ladies, terminating their clear and accurate narrative by the assertion that they were sure master must have been in it all. He and Thomas, the clerk, they were confident, must have gone last night to join Mr. Moore and the soldiers. Mr. Malone, too, had not been heard of at his lodgings since yesterday afternoon; and Joe Scott's wife and family were in the greatest distress, wondering what had become of their head.

Scarcely was this information imparted when a knock at the kitchen door announced the Fieldhead errand-boy, arrived in hot haste, bearing a billet from Mrs. Pryor. It was hurriedly written, and urged Miss Keeldar to return directly, as the neighbourhood and the house seemed likely to be all in confusion, and orders would have to be given which the mistress of the hall alone could regulate. In a postscript it was entreated that Miss Helstone might not be left alone at the rectory. She had better, it was suggested, accompany Miss Keeldar.

"There are not two opinions on that head," said Shirley, as she tied on her own bonnet, and then ran to fetch Caroline's.

"But what will Fanny and Eliza do? And if my uncle returns?"

"Your uncle will not return yet; he has other fish to fry. He will be galloping backwards and forwards from Briarfield to Stilbro' all day, rousing the magistrates in the court-house and the officers at the barracks; and Fanny and Eliza can have in Joe Scott's and the clerk's wives to bear them company. Besides, of course, there is no real danger to be apprehended now. Weeks will elapse before the rioters can again rally, or plan any other attempt; and I am much mistaken if Moore and Mr. Helstone will not take advantage of last night's outbreak to quell them altogether. They will frighten the authorities of Stilbro' into energetic measures. I only hope they will not be too severe — not pursue the discomfited too relentlessly."

"Robert will not be cruel. We saw that last night," said Caroline.

"But he will be hard," retorted Shirley; "and so will your uncle."

As they hurried along the meadow and plantation path to Fieldhead, they saw the distant highway already alive with an unwonted flow of equestrians and pedestrians, tending in the direction of the usually solitary Hollow. On reaching the hall, they found the backyard gates open, and the court and kitchen seemed crowded with excited milk-fetchers — men, women, and children — whom Mrs. Gill, the housekeeper, appeared vainly persuading to take their milk-cans and depart. (It *is*, or *was*, by-the-bye, the custom in the north of England for the cottagers on a country squire's estate to receive their supplies of milk and butter from the dairy of the manor house, on whose pastures a herd of milch kine was usually fed for the convenience of the neighbourhood. Miss Keeldar owned such a herd — all deep-dewlapped, Craven cows, reared on the sweet herbage and clear waters of bonny Airedale; and very proud she was of their sleek aspect and high condition.) Seeing now the state of matters, and that it was desirable to effect a clearance of the premises, Shirley stepped in amongst the gossiping groups. She bade them good-morning with a certain frank, tranquil ease — the natural characteristic of her manner when she addressed numbers, especially if those numbers belonged to the working-class; she was cooler amongst her equals, and rather proud to those above her. She then asked them if they had all got their milk measured out; and understanding that they had, she further observed that she "wondered what they were waiting for, then."

"We're just talking a bit over this battle there has been at your mill, mistress," replied a man.

"Talking a bit! Just like you!" said Shirley. "It is a queer thing all the world is so fond of *talking* over events. You *talk* if anybody dies suddenly; you *talk* if a fire breaks out; you *talk* if a mill-owner fails; you *talk* if he's murdered. What good does your talking do?"

There is nothing the lower orders like better than a little downright good-humoured rating. Flattery they scorn very much; honest abuse they enjoy. They call it speaking plainly, and take a sincere delight in being the objects thereof. The homely harshness of Miss Keeldar's salutation won her the ear of the whole throng in a second.

"We're no war nor some 'at is aboon us, are we?" asked a man, smiling.

"Nor a whit better. You that should be models of industry are just as gossip-loving as the idle. Fine, rich people that have nothing to do may be partly excused for trifling their time away; you who have to earn your bread with the sweat of your brow are quite inexcusable."

"That's queer, mistress. Suld we never have a holiday because we work hard?"

"*Never*," was the prompt answer; "unless," added the "mistress," with a smile that half belied the severity of her speech — "unless you knew how to make a better use of it than to get together over rum and tea if you are women, or over beer and pipes if you are men, and *talk* scandal at your neighbours' expense. Come, friends," she added, changing at once from bluntness to courtesy, "oblige me by taking your cans and going home. I expect several persons to call to-day, and it will be inconvenient to have the avenues to the house crowded."

Yorkshire people are as yielding to persuasion as they are stubborn against compulsion. The yard was clear in five minutes.

"Thank you, and good-bye to you, friends," said Shirley, as she closed the gates on a quiet court.

Now, let me hear the most refined of cockneys presume to find fault with Yorkshire manners. Taken as they ought to be, the majority of the lads and lasses of the West Riding are gentlemen and ladies, every inch of them. It is only against the weak affectation and futile pomposity of a would-be aristocrat they turn mutinous.

Entering by the back way, the young ladies passed through the kitchen (or *house*, as the inner kitchen is called) to the hall. Mrs. Pryor came running down the oak staircase to meet them. She was all unnerved; her naturally sanguine complexion was pale; her usually placid, though timid, blue eye was wandering, unsettled, alarmed. She did not, however, break out into any exclamations, or hurried narrative of what had happened. Her predominant feeling had been in the course of the night, and was now this morning, a sense of dissatisfaction with herself that she could not feel firmer, cooler, more equal to the demands of the occasion.

"You are aware," she began with a trembling voice, and yet the most conscientious anxiety to avoid exaggeration in what she was about to say, "that a body of rioters has attacked Mr. Moore's mill to-night. We heard the firing and confusion very plainly here; we none of us slept. It was a sad night. The house has been in great bustle all the morning with people coming and going. The servants have applied to me for orders and directions, which I really did not feel warranted in giving. Mr. Moore has, I believe, sent up for refreshments for the soldiers and others engaged in the defence, for some conveniences also for the wounded. I could not undertake the responsibility of giving orders or taking measures. I fear delay may have been injurious in some instances; but this is not my house. You were absent, my dear Miss Keeldar. What could I do?"

"Were no refreshments sent?" asked Shirley, while her countenance, hitherto so clear, propitious, and quiet, even while she was rating the milk-fetchers, suddenly turned dark and warm.

"I think not, my dear."

"And nothing for the wounded — no linen, no wine, no bedding?"

"I think not. I cannot tell what Mrs. Gill did; but it seemed impossible to me, at the moment, to venture to dispose of your property by sending supplies to soldiers. Provisions for a company of soldiers sounds formidable. How many there are I did not ask; but I could not think of allowing them to pillage the house, as it were. I intended to do what was right, yet I did not see the case quite clearly, I own."

"It lies in a nutshell, notwithstanding. These soldiers have risked their lives in defence of my property: I suppose they have a right to my gratitude. The wounded are our fellow-creatures: I suppose we should aid them. — Mrs. Gill!"

She turned, and called in a voice more clear than soft. It rang through the thick oak of the hall and kitchen doors more effectually than a bell's summons. Mrs. Gill, who was deep in bread-making, came with hands and apron in culinary case, not having dared to stop to rub the dough from the one or to shake the flour from the other. Her mistress had never called a servant in that voice save once before, and that was when she had seen from the window Tartar in full tug with two carriers' dogs, each of them a match for him in size, if not in courage, and their masters standing by, encouraging their animals, while hers was unbefriended. Then indeed she had summoned John as if the Day of Judgment were at hand. Nor had she waited for the said John's coming, but had walked out into the lane bonnetless, and after informing the carriers that she held them far less of men than the three brutes whirling and worrying in the dust before them, had put her hands round the thick neck of the largest of the curs, and given her whole strength to the essay of choking it from Tartar's torn and bleeding eye, just above and below which organ the vengeful fangs were inserted. Five or six men were presently on the spot to help her, but she never thanked one of them. "They might have come before if their will had been good," she said. She had not a word for anybody during the rest of the day, but sat near the hall fire till evening watching and tending Tartar, who lay all gory, stiff, and swelled on a mat at her feet. She wept furtively over him sometimes, and murmured the softest words of pity and endearment, in tones whose music the old, scarred, canine warrior acknowledged by licking her hand or her sandal alternately with his own red wounds. As to John, his lady turned a cold shoulder on him for a week afterwards.

Mrs. Gill, remembering this little episode, came "all of a tremble," as she said herself. In a firm, brief voice Miss Keeldar proceeded to put questions and give orders. That at such a time Fieldhead should have evinced the inhospitality of a miser's hovel stung her haughty spirit to the quick; and the revolt of its pride was seen in the heaving of her heart, stirred stormily under the lace and silk which veiled it.

"How long is it since that message came from the mill?"

"Not an hour yet, ma'am," answered the housekeeper soothingly.

"Not an hour! You might almost as well have said not a day. They will have applied elsewhere by this time. Send a man instantly down to tell them that everything this house contains is at Mr. Moore's, Mr. Helstone's, and the soldiers' service. Do that first."

While the order was being executed, Shirley moved away from her friends, and stood at the hall-window, silent, unapproachable. When Mrs. Gill came back, she turned. The purple flush which painful excitement kindles on a pale cheek glowed on hers; the spark which displeasure lights in a dark eye fired her glance.

"Let the contents of the larder and the wine-cellar be brought up, put into the hay-carts, and driven down to the Hollow. If there does not happen to be much bread or much meat in the house, go to the butcher and baker, and desire them to send what they have. But I will see for myself."

She moved off.

"All will be right soon; she will get over it in an hour," whispered Caroline to Mrs. Pryor. "Go upstairs, dear madam," she added affectionately, "and try to be as calm and easy as you can. The truth is, Shirley will blame herself more than you before the day is over."

By dint of a few more gentle assurances and persuasions, Miss Helstone contrived to soothe the agitated lady. Having accompanied her to her apartment, and promised to rejoin her there when things were settled, Caroline left her to see, as she said, "if she could be useful." She presently found that she could be very useful; for the retinue of servants at Fieldhead was by no means numerous, and just now their mistress found plenty of occupation for all the hands at her command, and for her own also. The delicate good-nature and dexterous activity which Caroline brought to the aid of the housekeeper and maids — all somewhat scared by their lady's unwonted mood — did a world of good at once; it helped the assistants and appeased the directress. A chance glance and smile from Caroline moved Shirley to an answering smile directly. The former was carrying a heavy basket up the cellar stairs.

"This is a shame!" cried Shirley, running to her. "It will strain your arm."

She took it from her, and herself bore it out into the yard. The cloud of temper was dispelled when she came back; the flash in her eye was melted; the shade on her forehead vanished. She resumed her usual cheerful and cordial manner to those about her, tempering her revived spirits with a little of the softness of shame at her previous unjust anger.

She was still superintending the lading of the cart, when a gentleman entered the yard and approached her ere she was aware of his presence.

"I hope I see Miss Keeldar well this morning?" he said, examining with rather significant scrutiny her still flushed face.

She gave him a look, and then again bent to her employment without reply. A pleasant enough smile played on her lips, but she hid it. The gentleman repeated his salutation, stooping, that it might reach her ear with more facility.

"Well enough, if she be good enough," was the answer; "and so is Mr. Moore too, I dare say. To speak truth, I am not anxious about him; some slight mischance would be only his just due. His conduct has been — we will say *strange* just now, till we have time to characterize it by a more exact epithet. Meantime, may I ask what brings him here?"

"Mr. Helstone and I have just received your message that everything at Fieldhead was at our service. We judged, by the unlimited wording of the gracious intimation, that you would be giving yourself too much trouble. I perceive our conjecture was correct. We are not a regiment, remember — only about half a dozen soldiers and as many civilians. Allow me to retrench something from these too abundant supplies."

Miss Keeldar blushed, while she laughed at her own over-eager generosity and most disproportionate calculations. Moore laughed too, very quietly though; and as quietly he ordered basket after basket to be taken from the cart, and remanded vessel after vessel to the cellar.

"The rector must hear of this," he said; "he will make a good story of it. What an excellent army contractor Miss Keeldar would have been!" Again he laughed, adding, "It is precisely as I conjectured."

"You ought to be thankful," said Shirley, "and not mock me. What could I do? How could I gauge your appetites or number your band? For aught I knew, there might have been fifty of you at least to victual. You told me nothing; and then an application to provision soldiers naturally suggests large ideas."

"It appears so," remarked Moore, levelling another of his keen, quiet glances at the discomfited Shirley. — "Now," he continued, addressing the carter, "I think you may take what remains to the Hollow. Your load will be somewhat lighter than the one Miss Keeldar destined you to carry."

As the vehicle rumbled out of the yard, Shirley, rallying her spirits, demanded what had become of the wounded.

"There was not a single man hurt on our side," was the answer.

"You were hurt yourself, on the temples," interposed a quick, low voice — that of Caroline, who, having withdrawn within the shade of the door, and behind the large person of Mrs. Gill, had till now escaped Moore's notice. When she spoke, his eye searched the obscurity of her retreat.

"Are you much hurt?" she inquired.

"As you might scratch your finger with a needle in sewing."

"Lift your hair and let us see."

He took his hat off, and did as he was bid, disclosing only a narrow slip of court-plaster. Caroline indicated, by a slight movement of the head, that she was satisfied, and disappeared within the clear obscure of the interior.

"How did she know I was hurt?" asked Moore.

"By rumour, no doubt. But it is too good in her to trouble herself about you. For my part, it was of your victims I was thinking when I inquired after the wounded. What damage have your opponents sustained?"

"One of the rioters, or victims as you call them, was killed, and six were hurt."

"What have you done with them?"

"What you will perfectly approve. Medical aid was procured immediately; and as soon as we can get a couple of covered wagons and some clean straw, they will be removed to Stilbro'."

"Straw! You must have beds and bedding. I will send my wagon directly, properly furnished; and Mr. Yorke, I am sure, will send his."

"You guess correctly; he has volunteered already. And Mrs. Yorke — who, like you, seems disposed to regard the rioters as martyrs, and me, and especially Mr. Helstone, as murderers — is at this moment, I believe, most assiduously engaged in fitting it up with feather-beds, pillows, bolsters, blankets, etc. The *victims* lack no attentions, I promise you. Mr. Hall, your favourite parson, has been with them ever since six o'clock, exhorting them, praying with them, and even waiting on them like any nurse; and Caroline's good friend, Miss Ainley, that *very* plain old maid, sent in a stock of lint and linen, something in the proportion of another lady's allowance of beef and wine."

"That will do. Where is your sister?"

"Well cared for. I had her securely domiciled with Miss Mann. This very morning the two set out for Wormwood Wells [a noted watering-place], and will stay there some weeks."

"So Mr. Helstone domiciled me at the rectory! Mighty clever you gentlemen think you are! I make you heartily welcome to the idea, and hope its savour, as you chew the cud of reflection upon it, gives you pleasure. Acute and astute, why are you not also omniscient? How is it that events transpire, under your very noses, of which you have no suspicion? It should be so, otherwise the exquisite gratification of outmanœuvring you would be unknown. Ah, friend, you may search my countenance, but you cannot read it."

Moore, indeed, looked as if he could not.

"You think me a dangerous specimen of my sex. Don't you now?"

"A peculiar one, at least."

"But Caroline — is she peculiar?"

"In her way — yes."

"Her way! What is her way?"

"You know her as well as I do."

"And knowing her, I assert that she is neither eccentric nor difficult of control. Is she?"

"That depends — — "

"However, there is nothing masculine about *her*?"

"Why lay such emphasis on *her*? Do you consider her a contrast, in that respect, to yourself?"

"You do, no doubt; but that does not signify. Caroline is neither masculine, nor of what they call the spirited order of women."

"I have seen her flash out."

"So have I, but not with manly fire. It was a short, vivid, trembling glow, that shot up, shone, vanished — — "

"And left her scared at her own daring. You describe others besides Caroline."

"The point I wish to establish is, that Miss Helstone, though gentle, tractable, and candid enough, is still perfectly capable of defying even Mr. Moore's penetration."

"What have you and she been doing?" asked Moore suddenly.

"Have you had any breakfast?"

"What is your mutual mystery?"

"If you are hungry, Mrs. Gill will give you something to eat here. Step into the oak parlour, and ring the bell. You will be served as if at an inn; or, if you like better, go back to the Hollow."

"The alternative is not open to me; I *must* go back. Good-morning. The first leisure I have I will see you again."

CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. PRYOR.

While Shirley was talking with Moore, Caroline rejoined Mrs. Pryor upstairs. She found that lady deeply depressed. She would not say that Miss Keeldar's hastiness had hurt her feelings, but it was evident an inward wound galled her. To any but a congenial nature she would have seemed insensible to the quiet, tender attentions by which Miss Helstone sought to impart solace; but Caroline knew that, unmoved or slightly moved as she looked, she felt, valued, and was healed by them.

"I am deficient in self-confidence and decision," she said at last. "I always have been deficient in those qualities. Yet I think Miss Keeldar should have known my character well enough by this time to be aware that I always feel an even painful solicitude to do right, to act for the best. The unusual nature of the demand on my judgment puzzled me, especially following the alarms of the night. I could not venture to act promptly for another; but I trust no serious harm will result from my lapse of firmness."

A gentle knock was here heard at the door. It was half opened.

"Caroline, come here," said a low voice.

Miss Helstone went out. There stood Shirley in the gallery, looking contrite, ashamed, sorry as any repentant child.

"How is Mrs. Pryor?" she asked.

"Rather out of spirits," said Caroline.

"I have behaved very shamefully, very ungenerously, very ungratefully to her," said Shirley. "How insolent in me to turn on her thus for what, after all, was no fault — only an excess of conscientiousness on her part. But I regret my error most sincerely. Tell her so, and ask if she will forgive me."

Caroline discharged the errand with heartfelt pleasure. Mrs. Pryor rose, came to the door. She did not like scenes; she dreaded them as all timid people do. She said falteringly, "Come in, my dear."

Shirley did come in with some impetuosity. She threw her arms round her governess, and while she kissed her heartily she said, "You know you *must* forgive me, Mrs. Pryor. I could not get on at all if there was a misunderstanding between you and me."

"I have nothing to forgive," was the reply. "We will pass it over now, if you please. The final result of the incident is that it proves more plainly than ever how unequal I am to certain crises."

And that was the painful feeling which *would* remain on Mrs. Pryor's mind. No effort of Shirley's or Caroline's could efface it thence. She could forgive her offending pupil, not her innocent self.

Miss Keeldar, doomed to be in constant request during the morning, was presently summoned downstairs again. The rector called first. A lively welcome and livelier reprimand were at his service. He expected both, and, being in high spirits, took them in equally good part.

In the course of his brief visit he quite forgot to ask after his niece; the riot, the rioters, the mill, the magistrates, the heiress, absorbed all his thoughts to the exclusion of family ties. He alluded to the part himself and curate had taken in the defence of the Hollow.

"The vials of pharisaical wrath will be emptied on our heads for our share in this business," he said; "but I defy every calumniator. I was there only to support the law, to play my part as a man and a Briton; which characters I deem quite compatible with those of the priest and Levite, in their highest sense. Your tenant Moore," he went on, "has won my approbation. A cooler commander I would not wish to see, nor a more determined. Besides, the man has shown sound judgment and good sense — first, in being thoroughly prepared for the event which has taken place; and subsequently, when his well-concerted plans had secured him success, in knowing how to use without abusing his victory. Some of the magistrates are now well frightened, and, like all cowards, show a tendency to be cruel. Moore restrains them with admirable prudence. He has hitherto been very unpopular in the neighbourhood; but, mark my words, the tide of opinion will now take a turn in his favour. People will find out that they have not appreciated him, and will hasten to remedy their error; and he, when he perceives the public disposed to acknowledge his merits, will show a more gracious mien than that with which he has hitherto favoured us."

Mr. Helstone was about to add to this speech some half-jesting, half-serious warnings to Miss Keeldar on the subject of her rumoured partiality for her talented tenant, when a ring at the door, announcing another caller, checked his raillery; and as that other caller appeared in the form of a white-haired elderly gentleman, with a rather truculent countenance and disdainful eye — in short, our old acquaintance, and the rector's old enemy, Mr. Yorke — the priest and Levite seized his hat, and with the briefest of adieus to Miss Keeldar and the sternest of nods to her guest took an abrupt leave.

Mr. Yorke was in no mild mood, and in no measured terms did he express his opinion on the transaction of the night. Moore, the magistrates, the soldiers, the mob leaders, each and all came in for a share of his invectives; but he reserved his strongest epithets — and real racy Yorkshire Doric adjectives they were — for the benefit of the fighting parsons, the "sanguinary, demoniac" rector and curate. According to him, the cup of ecclesiastical guilt was now full indeed.

"The church," he said, "was in a bonny pickle now. It was time it came down when parsons took to swaggering amang soldiers, blazing away wi' bullet and gunpowder, taking the lives of far honester men than themselves."

"What would Moore have done if nobody had helped him?" asked Shirley.

"Drunk as he'd brewed, eaten as he'd baked."

"Which means you would have left him by himself to face that mob. Good! He has plenty of courage, but the greatest amount of gallantry that ever garrisoned one human breast could scarce avail against two hundred."

"He had the soldiers, those poor slaves who hire out their own blood and spill other folk's for money."

"You abuse soldiers almost as much as you abuse clergymen. All who wear red coats are national refuse in your eyes, and all who wear black are national swindlers. Mr. Moore, according to you, did wrong to get military aid, and he did still worse to accept of any other aid. Your way of talking amounts to this: he should have abandoned his mill and his life to the rage of a set of misguided madmen, and Mr. Helstone and every other gentleman in the parish should have looked on, and seen the building razed and its owner slaughtered, and never stirred a finger to save either."

"If Moore had behaved to his men from the beginning as a master ought to behave, they never would have entertained their present feelings towards him."

"Easy for you to talk," exclaimed Miss Keeldar, who was beginning to wax warm in her tenant's cause — "you, whose family have lived at Briarmains for six generations, to whose person the people have been accustomed for fifty years, who know all their ways, prejudices, and preferences — easy, indeed, for *you* to act so as to avoid offending them. But Mr. Moore came a stranger into the district; he came here poor and friendless, with nothing but his own energies to back him, nothing but his honour, his talent, and his industry to make his way for him. A monstrous crime indeed that, under such circumstances, he could not popularize his naturally grave, quiet manners all at once; could not be jocular, and free, and cordial with a strange peasantry, as you are with your fellow-townsmen! An unpardonable transgression that when he introduced improvements he did not go about the business in quite the most politic way, did not graduate his changes as delicately as a rich capitalist might have done! For errors of this sort is he to be the victim of mob outrage? Is he to be denied even the privilege of defending himself? Are those who have the hearts of men in their breasts (and Mr. Helstone, say what you will of him, has such a heart) to be reviled like malefactors because they stand by him, because they venture to espouse the cause of one against two hundred?"

"Come, come now, be cool," said Mr. Yorke, smiling at the earnestness with which Shirley multiplied her rapid questions.

"Cool! Must I listen coolly to downright nonsense — to dangerous nonsense? No. I like you very well, Mr. Yorke, as you know, but I thoroughly dislike some of your principles. All that cant — excuse me, but I repeat the word — all that *cant* about soldiers and parsons is most offensive in my ears.

All ridiculous, irrational crying up of one class, whether the same be aristocrat or democrat — all howling down of another class, whether clerical or military — all exacting injustice to individuals, whether monarch or mendicant — is really sickening to me; all arraying of ranks against ranks, all party hatreds, all tyrannies disguised as liberties, I reject and wash my hands of. *You* think you are a philanthropist; *you* think you are an advocate of liberty; but I will tell you this — Mr. Hall, the parson of Nunnely, is a better friend both of man and freedom than Hiram Yorke, the reformer of Briarfield."

From a man Mr. Yorke would not have borne this language very patiently, nor would he have endured it from some women; but he accounted Shirley both honest and pretty, and her plain-spoken ire amused him. Besides, he took a secret pleasure in hearing her defend her tenant, for we have already intimated he had Robert Moore's interest very much at heart. Moreover, if he wished to avenge himself for her severity, he knew the means lay in his power: a word, he believed, would suffice to tame and silence her, to cover her frank forehead with the rosy shadow of shame, and veil the glow of her eye under down-drooped lid and lash.

"What more hast thou to say?" he inquired, as she paused, rather, it appeared, to take breath than because her subject or her zeal was exhausted.

"Say, Mr. Yorke!" was the answer, the speaker meantime walking fast from wall to wall of the oak parlour — "say? I have a great deal to say, if I could get it out in lucid order, which I never *can* do. I have to say that your views, and those of most extreme politicians, are such as none but men in an irresponsible position *can* advocate; that they are purely opposition views, meant only to be talked about, and never intended to be acted on. Make you Prime Minister of England to-morrow, and you would have to abandon them. You abuse Moore for defending his mill. Had you been in Moore's place you could not with honour or sense have acted otherwise than he acted. You abuse Mr. Helstone for everything he does. Mr. Helstone has his faults; he sometimes does wrong, but oftener right. Were you ordained vicar of Briarfield, you would find it no easy task to sustain all the active schemes for the benefit of the parish planned and persevered in by your predecessor. I wonder people cannot judge more fairly of each other and themselves. When I hear Messrs. Malone and Donne chatter about the authority of the church, the dignity and claims of the priesthood, the deference due to them as clergymen; when I hear the outbreaks of their small spite against Dissenters; when I witness their silly, narrow jealousies and assumptions; when their palaver about forms, and traditions, and superstitions is sounding in my ear; when I behold their insolent carriage to the poor, their often base servility to the rich — I think the Establishment is indeed in a poor way, and both she and her sons appear in the utmost need of reformation. Turning away distressed from minster tower and village spire — ay, as distressed as a churchwarden who feels the exigence of white-wash and has not wherewithal to purchase lime — I recall your senseless sarcasms on the 'fat bishops,' the 'pampered parsons,' ‘old mother church,’ etc. I remember your strictures on all who differ from you, your sweeping condemnation of classes and individuals, without the slightest allowance made for circumstances or temptations; and then, Mr. Yorke, doubt clutches my inmost heart as to whether men exist clement, reasonable, and just enough to be entrusted with the task of reform. I don’t believe *you* are of the number.”

“You have an ill opinion of me, Miss Shirley. You never told me so much of your mind before.”

“I never had an opening. But I have sat on Jessy’s stool by your chair in the back-parlour at Briarmains, for evenings together, listening excitedly to your talk, half admiring what you said, and half rebelling against it. I think you a fine old Yorkshireman, sir. I am proud to have been born in the same county and parish as yourself. Truthful, upright, independent you are, as a rock based below seas; but also you are harsh, rude, narrow, and merciless.”

“Not to the poor, lass, nor to the meek of the earth; only to the proud and high-minded.”

“And what right have you, sir, to make such distinctions? A prouder, a higher-minded man than yourself does not exist. You find it easy to speak comfortably to your inferiors; you are too haughty, too ambitious, too jealous to be civil to those above you. But you are all alike. Helstone also is proud and prejudiced. Moore, though juster and more considerate than either you or the rector, is still haughty, stern, and, in a public sense, selfish. It is well there are such men as Mr. Hall to be found occasionally — men of large and kind hearts, who can love their whole race, who can forgive others for being richer, more prosperous, or more powerful than they are. Such men may have less originality, less force of character than you, but they are better friends to mankind.”

“And when is it to be?” said Mr. Yorke, now rising.

“When is what to be?”

“The wedding.”

“Whose wedding?”

“Only that of Robert Gérard Moore, Esq., of Hollow’s Cottage, with Miss Keeldar, daughter and heiress of the late Charles Cave Keeldar of Fieldhead Hall.”

Shirley gazed at the questioner with rising colour. But the light in her eye was not faltering; it shone steadily — yes, it burned deeply.

“That is your revenge,” she said slowly; then added, “Would it be a bad match, unworthy of the late Charles Cave Keeldar’s representative?”

“My lass, Moore is a gentleman; his blood is pure and ancient as mine or thine.”

“And we two set store by ancient blood? We have family pride, though one of us at least is a republican?”

Yorke bowed as he stood before her. His lips were mute, but his eye confessed the impeachment. Yes, he had family pride; you saw it in his whole bearing.

"Moore *is* a gentleman," echoed Shirley, lifting her head with glad grace. She checked herself. Words seemed crowding to her tongue. She would not give them utterance; but her look spoke much at the moment. What, Yorke tried to read, but could not. The language was there, visible, but untranslatable — a poem, a fervid lyric, in an unknown tongue. It was not a plain story, however, no simple gush of feeling, no ordinary love-confession — that was obvious. It was something other, deeper, more intricate than he guessed at. He felt his revenge had not struck home. He felt that Shirley triumphed. She held him at fault, baffled, puzzled. *She* enjoyed the moment, not *he*.

"And if Moore *is* a gentleman, you *can* be only a lady; therefore — — "

"Therefore there would be no inequality in our union."

"None."

"Thank you for your approbation. Will you give me away when I relinquish the name of Keeldar for that of Moore?"

Mr. Yorke, instead of replying, gazed at her much puzzled. He could not divine what her look signified — whether she spoke in earnest or in jest. There were purpose and feeling, banter and scoff, playing, mingled, on her mobile lineaments.

"I don't understand thee," he said, turning away.

She laughed. "Take courage, sir; you are not singular in your ignorance. But I suppose if Moore understands me that will do, will it not?"

"Moore may settle his own matters henceforward for me; I'll neither meddle nor make with them further."

A new thought crossed her. Her countenance changed magically. With a sudden darkening of the eye and austere fixing of the features she demanded, "Have you been asked to interfere? Are you questioning me as another's proxy?"

"The Lord save us! Whoever weds thee must look about him! Keep all your questions for Robert; I'll answer no more on 'em. Good-day, lassie!"

The day being fine, or at least fair — for soft clouds curtained the sun, and a dim but not chill or waterish haze slept blue on the hills — Caroline, while Shirley was engaged with her callers, had persuaded Mrs. Pryor to assume her bonnet and summer shawl, and to take a walk with her up towards the narrow end of the Hollow.

Here the opposing sides of the glen, approaching each other and becoming clothed with brushwood and stunted oaks, formed a wooded ravine, at the bottom of which ran the mill-stream, in broken, unquiet course, struggling with many stones, chafing against rugged banks, fretting with gnarled tree-roots, foaming, gurgling, battling as it went. Here, when you had wandered half a mile from the mill, you found a sense of deep solitude — found it in the shade of unmolested trees, received it in the singing of many birds, for which that shade made a home. This was no trodden way. The freshness of the wood flowers attested that foot of man seldom pressed them; the abounding wild roses looked as if they budded, bloomed, and faded under the watch of solitude, as if in a sultan's harem. Here you saw the sweet azure of blue-bells, and recognized in pearl-white blossoms, spangling the grass, a humble type of some starlit spot in space.

Mrs. Pryor liked a quiet walk. She ever shunned high-roads, and sought byways and lonely lanes. One companion she preferred to total solitude, for in solitude she was nervous; a vague fear of annoying encounters broke the enjoyment of quite lonely rambles. But she feared nothing with Caroline. When once she got away from human habitations, and entered the still demesne of nature accompanied by this one youthful friend, a propitious change seemed to steal over her mind and beam in her countenance. When with Caroline — and Caroline only — her heart, you would have said, shook off a burden, her brow put aside a veil, her spirits too escaped from a restraint. With her she was cheerful; with her, at times, she was tender; to her she would impart her knowledge, reveal glimpses of her experience, give her opportunities for guessing what life she had lived, what cultivation her mind had received, of what calibre was her intelligence, how and where her feelings were vulnerable.

To-day, for instance, as they walked along, Mrs. Pryor talked to her companion about the various birds singing in the trees, discriminated their species, and said something about their habits and peculiarities. English natural history seemed familiar to her. All the wild flowers round their path were recognized by her; tiny plants springing near stones and peeping out of chinks in old walls — plants such as Caroline had scarcely noticed before — received a name and an intimation of their properties. It appeared that she had minutely studied the botany of English fields and woods. Having reached the head of the ravine, they sat down together on a ledge of gray and mossy rock jutting from the base of a steep green hill which towered above them. She looked round her, and spoke of the neighbourhood as she had once before seen it long ago. She alluded to its changes, and compared its aspect with that of other parts of England, revealing in quiet, unconscious touches of description a sense of the picturesque, an appreciation of the beautiful or commonplace, a power of comparing the wild with the cultured, the grand with the tame, that gave to her discourse a graphic charm as pleasant as it was unpretending.

The sort of reverent pleasure with which Caroline listened — so sincere, so quiet, yet so evident — stirred the elder lady's faculties to gentle animation. Rarely, probably, had she, with her chill, repellent outside, her diffident mien, and incommunicative habits, known what it was to excite in one whom she herself could love feelings of earnest affection and admiring esteem. Delightful, doubtless, was the consciousness that a young girl towards whom it seemed, judging by the moved expression of her eyes and features, her heart turned with almost a fond impulse, looked up to her as an instructor, and clung to her as a friend. With a somewhat more marked accent of interest than she often permitted herself to use, she said, as she bent towards her youthful companion, and put aside from her forehead a pale brown curl which had strayed from the confining comb, "I do hope this sweet air blowing from the hill will do you good, my dear Caroline. I wish I could see something more of colour in these cheeks; but perhaps you were never florid?"

"I had red cheeks once," returned Miss Helstone, smiling. "I remember a year — two years ago — when I used to look in the glass, I saw a different face there to what I see now — rounder and rosier. But when we are young," added the girl of eighteen, "our minds are careless and our lives easy."

"Do you," continued Mrs. Pryor, mastering by an effort that tyrant timidity which made it difficult for her, even under present circumstances, to attempt the scrutiny of another's heart — "do you, at your age, fret yourself with cares for the future? Believe me, you had better not. Let the morrow take thought for the things of itself."

"True, dear madam. It is not over the future I pine. The evil of the day is sometimes oppressive — too oppressive — and I long to escape it."

"That is — the evil of the day — that is — your uncle perhaps is not — you find it difficult to understand — he does not appreciate — — "

Mrs. Pryor could not complete her broken sentences; she could not manage to put the question whether Mr. Helstone was too harsh with his niece. But Caroline comprehended.

"Oh, that is nothing," she replied. "My uncle and I get on very well. We never quarrel — I don't call him harsh — he never scolds me. Sometimes I wish somebody in the world loved me, but I cannot say that I particularly wish him to have more affection for me than he has. As a child, I should perhaps have felt the want of attention, only the servants were very kind to me; but when people are long indifferent to us, we grow indifferent to their indifference. It is my uncle's way not to care for women and girls, unless they be ladies that he meets in company. He could not alter, and I have no wish that he should alter, as far as I am concerned. I believe it would merely annoy and frighten me were he to be affectionate towards me now. But you know, Mrs. Pryor, it is scarcely *living* to measure time as I do at the rectory. The hours pass, and I get them over somehow, but I do not *live*. I endure existence, but I rarely enjoy it. Since Miss Keeldar and you came I have been — I was going to say happier, but that would be untrue." She paused.

"How untrue? You are fond of Miss Keeldar, are you not, my dear?"

"Very fond of Shirley. I both like and admire her. But I am painfully circumstanced. For a reason I cannot explain I want to go away from this place, and to forget it."

"You told me before you wished to be a governess; but, my dear, if you remember, I did not encourage the idea. I have been a governess myself great part of my life. In Miss Keeldar's acquaintance I esteem myself most fortunate. Her talents and her really sweet disposition have rendered my office easy to me; but when I was young, before I married, my trials were severe, poignant. I should not like a — — I should not like you to endure similar ones. It was my lot to enter a family of considerable pretensions to good birth and mental superiority, and the members of which also believed that ‘on them was perceptible’ an unusual endowment of the ‘Christian graces;’ that all their hearts were regenerate, and their spirits in a peculiar state of discipline. I was early given to understand that ‘as I was not their equal,’ so I could not expect ‘to have their sympathy.’ It was in no sort concealed from me that I was held a ‘burden and a restraint in society.’ The gentlemen, I found, regarded me as a ‘tabooed woman,’ to whom ‘they were interdicted from granting the usual privileges of the sex,’ and yet ‘who annoyed them by frequently crossing their path.’ The ladies too made it plain that they thought me ‘a bore.’ The servants, it was signified, ‘detested me;’ *why*, I could never clearly comprehend. My pupils, I was told, ‘however much they might love me, and how deep soever the interest I might take in them, could not be my friends.’ It was intimated that I must ‘live alone, and never transgress the invisible but rigid line which established the difference between me and my employers.’ My life in this house was sedentary, solitary, constrained, joyless, toilsome. The dreadful crushing of the animal spirits, the ever-prevailing sense of friendlessness and homelessness consequent on this state of things began ere long to produce mortal effects on my constitution. I sickened. The lady of the house told me coolly I was the victim of ‘wounded vanity.’ She hinted that if I did not make an effort to quell my ‘ungodly discontent,’ to cease ‘murmuring against God’s appointment,’ and to cultivate the profound humility befitting my station, my mind would very likely ‘go to pieces’ on the rock that wrecked most of my sisterhood — morbid self-esteem — and that I should die an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

“I said nothing to Mrs. Hardman — it would have been useless; but to her eldest daughter I one day dropped a few observations, which were answered thus. There were hardships, she allowed, in the position of a governess. ‘Doubtless they had their trials; but,’ she averred, with a manner it makes me smile now to recall — ‘but it must be so. *She*’ (Miss H.) ‘had neither view, hope, nor *wish* to see these things remedied; for in the inherent constitution of English habits, feelings, and prejudices there was no possibility that they should be. Governesses,’ she observed, ‘must ever be kept in a sort of isolation. It is the only means of maintaining that distance which the reserve of English manners and the decorum of English families exact.’

“I remember I sighed as Miss Hardman quitted my bedside. She caught the sound, and turning, said severely, ‘I fear, Miss Grey, you have inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature — the sin of pride. You are proud, and therefore you are ungrateful too. Mamma pays you a handsome salary, and if you had average sense you would thankfully put up with much that is fatiguing to do and irksome to bear, since it is so well made worth your while.’

"Miss Hardman, my love, was a very strong-minded young lady, of most distinguished talents. The aristocracy are decidedly a very superior class, you know, both physically, and morally, and mentally; as a high Tory I acknowledge that. I could not describe the dignity of her voice and mien as she addressed me thus; still, I fear she was selfish, my dear. I would never wish to speak ill of my superiors in rank, but I think she was a little selfish."

"I remember," continued Mrs. Pryor, after a pause, "another of Miss H.'s observations, which she would utter with quite a grand air. 'We,' she would say — 'we need the imprudences, extravagances, mistakes, and crimes of a certain number of fathers to sow the seed from which we reap the harvest of governesses. The daughters of trades-people, however well educated, must necessarily be underbred, and as such unfit to be inmates of our dwellings, or guardians of our children's minds and persons. We shall ever prefer to place those about OUR offspring who have been born and bred with somewhat of the same refinement as ourselves.'"

"Miss Hardman must have thought herself something better than her fellow-creatures, ma'am, since she held that their calamities, and even crimes, were necessary to minister to her convenience. You say she was religious. Her religion must have been that of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as other men are, nor even as that publican."

"My dear, we will not discuss the point. I should be the last person to wish to instil into your mind any feeling of dissatisfaction with your lot in life, or any sentiment of envy or insubordination towards your superiors. Implicit submission to authorities, scrupulous deference to our betters (under which term I, of course, include the higher classes of society), are, in my opinion, indispensable to the well-being of every community. All I mean to say, my dear, is that you had better not attempt to be a governess, as the duties of the position would be too severe for your constitution. Not one word of disrespect would I breathe towards either Mrs. or Miss Hardman; only, recalling my own experience, I cannot but feel that, were you to fall under auspices such as theirs, you would contend a while courageously with your doom, then you would pine and grow too weak for your work; you would come home — if you still had a home — broken down. Those languishing years would follow of which none but the invalid and her immediate friends feel the heart-sickness and know the burden. Consumption or decline would close the chapter. Such is the history of many a life. I would not have it yours. My dear, we will now walk about a little, if you please."

They both rose, and slowly paced a green natural terrace bordering the chasm.

"My dear," ere long again began Mrs. Pryor, a sort of timid, embarrassed abruptness marking her manner as she spoke, "the young, especially those to whom nature has been favourable, often — frequently — anticipate — look forward to — to marriage as the end, the goal of their hopes."

And she stopped. Caroline came to her relief with promptitude, showing a great deal more self-possession and courage than herself on the formidable topic now broached.

"They do, and naturally," she replied, with a calm emphasis that startled Mrs. Pryor. "They look forward to marriage with some one they love as the brightest, the only bright destiny that can await them. Are they wrong?"

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Pryor, clasping her hands; and again she paused. Caroline turned a searching, an eager eye on the face of her friend: that face was much agitated. "My dear," she murmured, "life is an illusion."

"But not love! Love is real — the most real, the most lasting, the sweetest and yet the bitterest thing we know."

"My dear, it is very bitter. It is said to be strong — strong as death! Most of the cheats of existence are strong. As to their sweetness, nothing is so transitory; its date is a moment, the twinkling of an eye. The sting remains for ever. It may perish with the dawn of eternity, but it tortures through time into its deepest night."

"Yes, it tortures through time," agreed Caroline, "except when it is mutual love."

"Mutual love! My dear, romances are pernicious. You do not read them, I hope?"

"Sometimes — whenever I can get them, indeed. But romance-writers might know nothing of love, judging by the way in which they treat of it."

"Nothing whatever, my dear," assented Mrs. Pryor eagerly, "nor of marriage; and the false pictures they give of those subjects cannot be too strongly condemned. They are not like reality. They show you only the green, tempting surface of the marsh, and give not one faithful or truthful hint of the slough underneath."

"But it is not always slough," objected Caroline. "There are happy marriages. Where affection is reciprocal and sincere, and minds are harmonious, marriage *must* be happy."

"It is never wholly happy. Two people can never literally be as one. There is, perhaps, a possibility of content under peculiar circumstances, such as are seldom combined; but it is as well not to run the risk — you may make fatal mistakes. Be satisfied, my dear. Let all the single be satisfied with their freedom."

"You echo my uncle's words!" exclaimed Caroline, in a tone of dismay. "You speak like Mrs. Yorke in her most gloomy moments, like Miss Mann when she is most sourly and hypochondriacally disposed. This is terrible!"

"No, it is only true. O child, you have only lived the pleasant morning time of life; the hot, weary noon, the sad evening, the sunless night, are yet to come for you. Mr. Helstone, you say, talks as I talk; and I wonder how Mrs. Matthewson Helstone would have talked had she been living. She died! she died!"

"And, alas! my own mother and father — — " exclaimed Caroline, struck by a sombre recollection.

"What of them?"

"Did I never tell you that they were separated?"

"I have heard it."

"They must, then, have been very miserable."

"You see all *facts* go to prove what I say."

"In this case there ought to be no such thing as marriage."

"There ought, my dear, were it only to prove that this life is a mere state of probation, wherein neither rest nor recompense is to be vouchsafed."

"But your own marriage, Mrs. Pryor?"

Mrs. Pryor shrank and shuddered as if a rude finger had pressed a naked nerve. Caroline felt she had touched what would not bear the slightest contact.

"My marriage was unhappy," said the lady, summoning courage at last; "but yet — — " She hesitated.

"But yet," suggested Caroline, "not immitigably wretched?"

"Not in its results, at least. No," she added, in a softer tone; "God mingles something of the balm of mercy even in vials of the most corrosive woe. He can so turn events that from the very same blind, rash act whence sprang the curse of half our life may flow the blessing of the remainder. Then I am of a peculiar disposition — I own that — far from facile, without address, in some points eccentric. I ought never to have married. Mine is not the nature easily to find a duplicate or likely to assimilate with a contrast. I was quite aware of my own ineligibility; and if I had not been so miserable as a governess, I never should have married; and then — — "

Caroline's eyes asked her to proceed. They entreated her to break the thick cloud of despair which her previous words had seemed to spread over life.

"And then, my dear, Mr. — that is, the gentleman I married — was, perhaps, rather an exceptional than an average character. I hope, at least, the experience of few has been such as mine was, or that few have felt their sufferings as I felt mine. They nearly shook my mind; relief was so hopeless, redress so unattainable. But, my dear, I do not wish to dishearten; I only wish to warn you, and to prove that the single should not be too anxious to change their state, as they may change for the worse."

"Thank you, my dear madam. I quite understand your kind intentions, but there is no fear of my falling into the error to which you allude. I, at least, have no thoughts of marriage, and for that reason I want to make myself a position by some other means."

"My dear, listen to me. On what I am going to say I have carefully deliberated, having, indeed, revolved the subject in my thoughts ever since you first mentioned your wish to obtain a situation. You know I at present reside with Miss Keeldar in the capacity of companion. Should she marry (and that she *will* marry ere long many circumstances induce me to conclude), I shall cease to be necessary to her in that capacity. I must tell you that I possess a small independency, arising partly from my own savings, and partly from a legacy left me some years since. Whenever I leave Fieldhead I shall take a house of my own. I could not endure to live in solitude. I have no relations whom I care to invite to close intimacy; for, as you must have observed, and as I have already avowed, my habits and tastes have their peculiarities. To you, my dear, I need not say I am attached; with you I am happier than I have ever been with any living thing" (this was said with marked emphasis). "Your society I should esteem a very dear privilege — an inestimable privilege, a comfort, a blessing. You shall come to me, then. Caroline, do you refuse me? I hope you can love me?"

And with these two abrupt questions she stopped.

"Indeed, I *do* love you," was the reply. "I should like to live with you. But you are too kind."

"All I have," went on Mrs. Pryor, "I would leave to you. You should be provided for. But never again say I am *too kind*. You pierce my heart, child!"

"But, my dear madam — this generosity — I have no claim — — "

"Hush! you must not talk about it. There are some things we cannot bear to hear. Oh! it is late to begin, but I may yet live a few years. I can never wipe out the past, but perhaps a brief space in the future may yet be mine."

Mrs. Pryor seemed deeply agitated. Large tears trembled in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Caroline kissed her, in her gentle, caressing way, saying softly, "I love you dearly. Don't cry."

But the lady's whole frame seemed shaken. She sat down, bent her head to her knee, and wept aloud. Nothing could console her till the inward storm had had its way. At last the agony subsided of itself.

"Poor thing!" she murmured, returning Caroline's kiss, "poor lonely lamb! But come," she added abruptly — "come; we must go home."

For a short distance Mrs. Pryor walked very fast. By degrees, however, she calmed down to her wonted manner, fell into her usual characteristic pace — a peculiar one, like all her movements — and by the time they reached Fieldhead she had re-entered into herself. The outside was, as usual, still and shy.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO LIVES.

Only half of Moore's activity and resolution had been seen in his defence of the mill; he showed the other half (and a terrible half it was) in the indefatigable, the relentless assiduity with which he pursued the leaders of the riot. The mob, the mere followers, he let alone. Perhaps an innate sense of justice told him that men misled by false counsel and goaded by privations are not fit objects of vengeance, and that he who would visit an even violent act on the bent head of suffering is a tyrant, not a judge. At all events, though he knew many of the number, having recognized them during the latter part of the attack when day began to dawn, he let them daily pass him on street and road without notice or threat.

The leaders he did not know. They were strangers — emissaries from the large towns. Most of these were not members of the operative class. They were chiefly "down-draughts," bankrupts, men always in debt and often in drink, men who had nothing to lose, and much, in the way of character, cash, and cleanliness, to gain. These persons Moore hunted like any sleuth-hound, and well he liked the occupation. Its excitement was of a kind pleasant to his nature. He liked it better than making cloth.

His horse must have hated these times, for it was ridden both hard and often. He almost lived on the road, and the fresh air was as welcome to his lungs as the policeman's quest to his mood; he preferred it to the steam of dye-houses. The magistrates of the district must have dreaded him. They were slow, timid men; he liked both to frighten and to rouse them. He liked to force them to betray a certain fear, which made them alike falter in resolve and recoil in action — the fear, simply, of assassination. This, indeed, was the dread which had hitherto hampered every manufacturer and almost every public man in the district. Helstone alone had ever repelled it. The old Cossack knew well he might be shot. He knew there was risk; but such death had for his nerves no terrors. It would have been his chosen, might he have had a choice.

Moore likewise knew his danger. The result was an unquenchable scorn of the quarter whence such danger was to be apprehended. The consciousness that he hunted assassins was the spur in his high-mettled temper's flank. As for fear, he was too proud, too hard-natured (if you will), too phlegmatic a man to fear. Many a time he rode belated over the moors, moonlit or moonless as the case might be, with feelings far more elate, faculties far better refreshed, than when safety and stagnation environed him in the counting-house. Four was the number of the leaders to be accounted for. Two, in the course of a fortnight, were brought to bay near Stilbro'; the remaining two it was necessary to seek farther off. Their haunts were supposed to lie near Birmingham.

Meantime the clothier did not neglect his battered mill. Its reparation was esteemed a light task, carpenters' and glaziers' work alone being needed. The rioters not having succeeded in effecting an entrance, his grim metal darlings — the machines — had escaped damage.

Whether during this busy life — whether while stern justice and exacting business claimed his energies and harassed his thoughts — he now and then gave one moment, dedicated one effort, to keep alive gentler fires than those which smoulder in the fane of Nemesis, it was not easy to discover. He seldom went near Fieldhead; if he did, his visits were brief. If he called at the rectory, it was only to hold conferences with the rector in his study. He maintained his rigid course very steadily. Meantime the history of the year continued troubled. There was no lull in the tempest of war; her long hurricane still swept the Continent. There was not the faintest sign of serene weather, no opening amid "the clouds of battle-dust and smoke," no fall of pure dews genial to the olive, no cessation of the red rain which nourishes the baleful and glorious laurel. Meantime, Ruin had her sappers and miners at work under Moore's feet, and whether he rode or walked, whether he only crossed his counting-house hearth or galloped over sullen Rushedge, he was aware of a hollow echo, and felt the ground shake to his tread.

While the summer thus passed with Moore, how did it lapse with Shirley and Caroline? Let us first visit the heiress. How does she look? Like a love-lorn maiden, pale and pining for a neglectful swain? Does she sit the day long bent over some sedentary task? Has she for ever a book in her hand, or sewing on her knee, and eyes only for that, and words for nothing, and thoughts unspoken?

By no means. Shirley is all right. If her wistful cast of physiognomy is not gone, no more is her careless smile. She keeps her dark old manor-house light and bright with her cheery presence. The gallery and the low-ceiled chambers that open into it have learned lively echoes from her voice; the dim entrance-hall, with its one window, has grown pleasantly accustomed to the frequent rustle of a silk dress, as its wearer sweeps across from room to room, now carrying flowers to the barbarous peach-bloom salon, now entering the dining-room to open its casements and let in the scent of mignonette and sweet-briar, anon bringing plants from the staircase window to place in the sun at the open porch door.

She takes her sewing occasionally; but, by some fatality, she is doomed never to sit steadily at it for above five minutes at a time. Her thimble is scarcely fitted on, her needle scarce threaded, when a sudden thought calls her upstairs. Perhaps she goes to seek some just-then-remembered old ivory-backed needle-book or older china-topped work-box, quite unneeded, but which seems at the moment indispensable; perhaps to arrange her hair, or a drawer which she recollects to have seen that morning in a state of curious confusion; perhaps only to take a peep from a particular window at a particular view, whence Briarfield church and rectory are visible, pleasantly bowered in trees. She has scarcely returned, and again taken up the slip of cambric or square of half-wrought canvas, when Tartar's bold scrape and strangled whistle are heard at the porch door, and she must run to open it for him. It is a hot day; he comes in panting; she must convoy him to the kitchen, and see with her own eyes that his water-bowl is replenished. Through the open kitchen door the court is visible, all sunny and gay, and people with turkeys and their poults, peahens and their chicks, pearl-flecked Guinea-fowls, and a bright variety of pure white, and purple-necked, and blue and cinnamon plumed pigeons. Irresistible spectacle to Shirley! She runs to the pantry for a roll, and she stands on the door step scattering crumbs. Around her throng her eager, plump, happy feathered vassals John is about the stables, and John must be talked to, and her mare looked at. She is still petting and patting it when the cows come in to be milked. This is important; Shirley must stay and take a review of them all. There are perhaps some little calves, some little new-yeaned lambs — it may be twins, whose mothers have rejected them. Miss Keeldar must be introduced to them by John, must permit herself the treat of feeding them with her own hand, under the direction of her careful foreman. Meantime John moots doubtful questions about the farming of certain "crofts," and "ings," and "holmes," and his mistress is necessitated to fetch her garden-hat — a gipsy straw — and accompany him, over stile and along hedgerow, to hear the conclusion of the whole agricultural matter on the spot, and with the said "crofts," "ings," and "holms" under her eye. Bright afternoon thus wears into soft evening, and she comes home to a late tea, and after tea she never sews.

After tea Shirley reads, and she is just about as tenacious of her book as she is lax of her needle. Her study is the rug, her seat a footstool, or perhaps only the carpet at Mrs. Pryor's feet: there she always learned her lessons when a child, and old habits have a strong power over her. The tawny and lionlike bulk of Tartar is ever stretched beside her, his negro muzzle laid on his fore paws — straight, strong, and shapely as the limbs of an Alpine wolf. One hand of the mistress generally reposes on the loving serf's rude head, because if she takes it away he groans and is discontented. Shirley's mind is given to her book. She lifts not her eyes; she neither stirs nor speaks — unless, indeed, it be to return a brief respectful answer to Mrs. Pryor, who addresses deprecatory phrases to her now and then.

"My dear, you had better not have that great dog so near you; he is crushing the border of your dress."

"Oh, it is only muslin. I can put a clean one on to-morrow."

"My dear, I wish you could acquire the habit of sitting to a table when you read."

"I will try, ma'am, some time; but it is so comfortable to do as one has always been accustomed to do."

"My dear, let me beg of you to put that book down. You are trying your eyes by the doubtful firelight."

"No, ma'am, not at all; my eyes are never tired."

At last, however, a pale light falls on the page from the window. She looks; the moon is up. She closes the volume, rises, and walks through the room. Her book has perhaps been a good one; it has refreshed, refilled, rewarmed her heart; it has set her brain astir, furnished her mind with pictures. The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky, and showing its "sweet regent," new throned and glorious, suffice to make earth an Eden, life a poem, for Shirley. A still, deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins, unmingled, untroubled, not to be reached or ravished by human agency, because by no human agency bestowed — the pure gift of God to His creature, the free dower of Nature to her child. This joy gives her experience of a genii-life. Buoyant, by green steps, by glad hills, all verdure and light, she reaches a station scarcely lower than that whence angels looked down on the dreamer of Bethel, and her eye seeks, and her soul possesses, the vision of life as she wishes it. No, not as she wishes it; she has not time to wish. The swift glory spreads out, sweeping and kindling, and multiplies its splendours faster than Thought can effect his combinations, faster than Aspiration can utter her longings. Shirley says nothing while the trance is upon her — she is quite mute; but if Mrs. Pryor speaks to her now, she goes out quietly, and continues her walk upstairs in the dim gallery.

If Shirley were not an indolent, a reckless, an ignorant being, she would take a pen at such moments, or at least while the recollection of such moments was yet fresh on her spirit. She would seize, she would fix the apparition, tell the vision revealed. Had she a little more of the organ of acquisitiveness in her head, a little more of the love of property in her nature, she would take a good-sized sheet of paper and write plainly out, in her own queer but clear and legible hand, the story that has been narrated, the song that has been sung to her, and thus possess what she was enabled to create. But indolent she is, reckless she is, and most ignorant; for she does not know her dreams are rare, her feelings peculiar. She does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green.

Shirley takes life easily. Is not that fact written in her eye? In her good-tempered moments is it not as full of lazy softness as in her brief fits of anger it is fulgent with quick-flashing fire? Her nature is in her eye. So long as she is calm, indolence, indulgence, humour, and tenderness possess that large gray sphere; incense her, a red ray pierces the dew, it quickens instantly to flame.

Ere the month of July was past, Miss Keeldar would probably have started with Caroline on that northern tour they had planned; but just at that epoch an invasion befell Fieldhead. A genteel foraging party besieged Shirley in her castle, and compelled her to surrender at discretion. An uncle, an aunt, and two cousins from the south — a Mr., Mrs., and two Misses Sympson, of Sympson Grove, — — shire — came down upon her in state. The laws of hospitality obliged her to give in, which she did with a facility which somewhat surprised Caroline, who knew her to be prompt in action and fertile in expedient where a victory was to be gained for her will. Miss Helstone even asked her how it was she submitted so readily. She answered, old feelings had their power; she had passed two years of her early youth at Sympson Grove.

"How did she like her relatives?"

She had nothing in common with them, she replied. Little Harry Sympson, indeed, the sole son of the family, was very unlike his sisters, and of him she had formerly been fond; but he was not coming to Yorkshire — at least not yet.

The next Sunday the Fieldhead pew in Briarfield Church appeared peopled with a prim, trim, fidgety, elderly gentleman, who shifted his spectacles, and changed his position every three minutes; a patient, placid-looking elderly lady in brown satin; and two pattern young ladies, in pattern attire, with pattern deportment. Shirley had the air of a black swan or a white crow in the midst of this party, and very forlorn was her aspect. Having brought her into respectable society, we will leave her there a while, and look after Miss Helstone.

Separated from Miss Keeldar for the present, as she could not seek her in the midst of her fine relatives, scared away from Fieldhead by the visiting commotion which the new arrivals occasioned in the neighbourhood, Caroline was limited once more to the gray rectory, the solitary morning walk in remote by-paths, the long, lonely afternoon sitting in a quiet parlour which the sun forsook at noon, or in the garden alcove where it shone bright, yet sad, on the ripening red currants trained over the trellis, and on the fair monthly roses entwined between, and through them fell chequered on Caroline sitting in her white summer dress, still as a garden statue. There she read old books, taken from her uncle's library. The Greek and Latin were of no use to her, and its collection of light literature was chiefly contained on a shelf which had belonged to her aunt Mary — some venerable Lady's Magazines, that had once performed a sea-voyage with their owner, and undergone a storm, and whose pages were stained with salt water; some mad Methodist Magazines, full of miracles and apparitions, of preternatural warnings, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticism; the equally mad letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living; a few old English classics. From these faded flowers Caroline had in her childhood extracted the honey; they were tasteless to her now. By way of change, and also of doing good, she would sew — make garments for the poor, according to good Miss Ainley's direction. Sometimes, as she felt and saw her tears fall slowly on her work, she would wonder how the excellent woman who had cut it out and arranged it for her managed to be so equably serene in *her* solitude.

"I never find Miss Ainley oppressed with despondency or lost in grief," she thought; "yet her cottage is a still, dim little place, and she is without a bright hope or near friend in the world. I remember, though, she told me once she had tutored her thoughts to tend upwards to heaven. She allowed there was, and ever had been, little enjoyment in this world for her, and she looks, I suppose, to the bliss of the world to come. So do nuns, with their close cell, their iron lamp, their robe strait as a shroud, their bed narrow as a coffin. She says often she has no fear of death — no dread of the grave; no more, doubtless, had St. Simeon Stylites, lifted up terrible on his wild column in the wilderness; no more has the Hindu votary stretched on his couch of iron spikes. Both these having violated nature, their natural likings and antipathies are reversed; they grow altogether morbid. I do fear death as yet, but I believe it is because I am young. Poor Miss Ainley would cling closer to life if life had more charms for her. God surely did not create us and cause us to live with the sole end of wishing always to die. I believe in my heart we were intended to prize life and enjoy it so long as we retain it. Existence never was originally meant to be that useless, blank, pale, slow-trailing thing it often becomes to many, and is becoming to me among the rest.

"Nobody," she went on — "nobody in particular is to blame, that I can see, for the state in which things are; and I cannot tell, however much I puzzle over it, how they are to be altered for the better; but I feel there is something wrong somewhere. I believe single women should have more to do — better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now. And when I speak thus I have no impression that I displease God by my words; that I am either impious or impatient, irreligious or sacrilegious. My consolation is, indeed, that God hears many a groan, and compassionates much grief which man stops his ears against, or frowns on with impotent contempt. I say *impotent*, for I observe that to such grievances as society cannot readily cure it usually forbids utterance, on pain of its scorn, this scorn being only a sort of tinselled cloak to its deformed weakness. People hate to be reminded of ills they are unable or unwilling to remedy. Such reminder, in forcing on them a sense of their own incapacity, or a more painful sense of an obligation to make some unpleasant effort, troubles their ease and shakes their self-complacency. Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world; the demand disturbs the happy and rich — it disturbs parents. Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood — the Armitages, the Birtwhistles, the Sykeses. The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do. Their sisters have no earthly employment but household work and sewing, no earthly pleasure but an unprofitable visiting, and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health. They are never well, and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness. The great wish, the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry; they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule; they don't want them; they hold them very cheap. They say — I have heard them say it with sneering laughs many a time — the matrimonial market is overstocked. Fathers say so likewise, and are angry with their daughters when they observe their manœuvres — they order them to stay at home. What do they expect them to do at home? If you ask, they would answer, sew and cook. They expect them to do this, and this only, contentedly, regularly, uncomplainingly, all their lives long, as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else — a doctrine as reasonable to hold as it would be that the fathers have no faculties but for eating what their daughters cook or for wearing what they sew. Could men live so themselves? Would they not be very weary? And when there came no relief to their weariness, but only reproaches at its slightest manifestation, would not their weariness ferment it time to frenzy? Lucretia, spinning at midnight in the midst of her maidens, and Solomon's virtuous woman are often quoted as patterns of what 'the sex,' as they say, ought to be. I don't know. Lucretia, I dare say, was a most worthy sort of person, much like my cousin Hortense Moore; but she kept her servants up very late. I should not have liked to be amongst the number of the maidens. Hortense would just work me and Sarah in that fashion, if she could, and neither of us would bear it. The 'virtuous woman,' again, had her household up in the very middle of the night; she 'got breakfast over,' as Mrs. Sykes says, before one o'clock a.m.; but *she* had something more to do than spin and give out portions. She was a manufacturer — she made fine linen and sold it; she was an agriculturist — she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager. She was what the matrons hereabouts call 'a clever woman.' On the whole, I like her a good deal better than Lucretia; but I don't believe either Mr. Armitage or Mr. Sykes could have got the advantage of her in a bargain. Yet I like her. 'Strength and honour were her clothing; the heart of her husband safely trusted in her. She opened her mouth with wisdom; in her tongue was the law of kindness; her children rose up and called her blessed; her husband also praised her.' King of Israel! your model of a woman is a worthy model! But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her? Men of Yorkshire! do your daughters reach this royal standard? Can they reach it? Can you help them to reach it? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids — envious, back-biting, wretched, because life is a desert to them; or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage which to celibacy is denied. Fathers! cannot you alter these things? Perhaps not all at once; but consider the matter well when it is brought before you, receive it as a theme worthy of thought; do not dismiss it with an idle jest or an unmanly insult. You would wish to be proud of your daughters, and not to blush for them; then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manœuvrer, the mischief-making tale-bearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered; they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you. Cultivate them — give them scope and work; they will be your gayest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most faithful prop in age."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN EVENING OUT.

One fine summer day that Caroline had spent entirely alone (her uncle being at Whinbury), and whose long, bright, noiseless, breezeless, cloudless hours (how many they seemed since sunrise!) had been to her as desolate as if they had gone over her head in the shadowless and trackless wastes of Sahara, instead of in the blooming garden of an English home, she was sitting in the alcove — her task of work on her knee, her fingers assiduously plying the needle, her eyes following and regulating their movements, her brain working restlessly — when Fanny came to the door, looked round over the lawn and borders, and not seeing her whom she sought, called out, “Miss Caroline!”

A low voice answered “Fanny!” It issued from the alcove, and thither Fanny hastened, a note in her hand, which she delivered to fingers that hardly seemed to have nerve to hold it. Miss Helstone did not ask whence it came, and she did not look at it; she let it drop amongst the folds of her work.

“Joe Scott’s son, Harry, brought it,” said Fanny.

The girl was no enchantress, and knew no magic spell; yet what she said took almost magical effect on her young mistress. She lifted her head with the quick motion of revived sensation; she shot, not a languid, but a lifelike, questioning glance at Fanny.

“Harry Scott! who sent him?”

“He came from the Hollow.”

The dropped note was snatched up eagerly, the seal was broken — it was read in two seconds. An affectionate billet from Hortense, informing her young cousin that she was returned from Wormwood Wells; that she was alone to-day, as Robert was gone to Whinbury market; that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to have Caroline’s company to tea, and the good lady added, she was quite sure such a change would be most acceptable and beneficial to Caroline, who must be sadly at a loss both for safe guidance and improving society since the misunderstanding between Robert and Mr. Helstone had occasioned a separation from her “meilleure amie, Hortense Gérard Moore.” In a postscript she was urged to put on her bonnet and run down directly.

Caroline did not need the injunction. Glad was she to lay by the brown holland child’s slip she was trimming with braid for the Jew’s basket, to hasten upstairs, cover her curls with her straw bonnet, and throw round her shoulders the black silk scarf, whose simple drapery suited as well her shape as its dark hue set off the purity of her dress and the fairness of her face; glad was she to escape for a few hours the solitude, the sadness, the nightmare of her life; glad to run down the green lane sloping to the Hollow, to scent the fragrance of hedge flowers sweeter than the perfume of moss-rose or lily. True, she knew Robert was not at the cottage; but it was delight to go where he had lately been. So long, so totally separated from him, merely to see his home, to enter the room where he had that morning sat, felt like a reunion. As such it revived her; and then Illusion was again following her in Peri mask. The soft agitation of wings caressed her cheek, and the air, breathing from the blue summer sky, bore a voice which whispered, "Robert may come home while you are in his house, and then, at least, you may look in his face — at least you may give him your hand; perhaps, for a minute, you may sit beside him."

"Silence!" was her austere response; but she loved the comforter and the consolation.

Miss Moore probably caught from the window the gleam and flutter of Caroline's white attire through the branchy garden shrubs, for she advanced from the cottage porch to meet her. Straight, unbending, phlegmatic as usual, she came on. No haste or ecstasy was ever permitted to disorder the dignity of *her* movements; but she smiled, well pleased to mark the delight of her pupil, to feel her kiss and the gentle, genial strain of her embrace. She led her tenderly in, half deceived and wholly flattered. Half deceived! had it not been so she would in all probability have put her to the wicket, and shut her out. Had she known clearly to whose account the chief share of this childlike joy was to be placed, Hortense would most likely have felt both shocked and incensed. Sisters do not like young ladies to fall in love with their brothers. It seems, if not presumptuous, silly, weak, a delusion, an absurd mistake. *They* do not love these gentlemen — whatever sisterly affection they may cherish towards them — and that others should, repels them with a sense of crude romance. The first movement, in short, excited by such discovery (as with many parents on finding their children to be in love) is one of mixed impatience and contempt. Reason — if they be rational people — corrects the false feeling in time; but if they be irrational, it is never corrected, and the daughter or sister-in-law is disliked to the end.

"You would expect to find me alone, from what I said in my note," observed Miss Moore, as she conducted Caroline towards the parlour; "but it was written this morning: since dinner, company has come in."

And opening the door she made visible an ample spread of crimson skirts overflowing the elbow-chair at the fireside, and above them, presiding with dignity, a cap more awful than a crown. That cap had never come to the cottage under a bonnet; no, it had been brought in a vast bag, or rather a middle-sized balloon of black silk, held wide with whalebone. The screed, or frill of the cap, stood a quarter of a yard broad round the face of the wearer. The ribbon, flourishing in puffs and bows about the head, was of the sort called love-ribbon. There was a good deal of it, I may say, a very great deal.

Mrs. Yorke wore the cap — it became her; she wore the gown also — it suited her no less.

That great lady was come in a friendly way to take tea with Miss Moore. It was almost as great and as rare a favour as if the queen were to go uninvited to share pot-luck with one of her subjects. A higher mark of distinction she could not show — she who in general scorned visiting and tea-drinking, and held cheap and stigmatized as "gossips" every maid and matron of the vicinage.

There was no mistake, however; Miss Moore *was* a favourite with her. She had evinced the fact more than once — evinced it by stopping to speak to her in the churchyard on Sundays; by inviting her, almost hospitably, to come to Briarmains; evinced it to-day by the grand condescension of a personal visit. Her reasons for the preference, as assigned by herself, were that Miss Moore was a woman of steady deportment, without the least levity of conversation or carriage; also that, being a foreigner, she must feel the want of a friend to countenance her. She might have added that her plain aspect, homely, precise dress, and phlegmatic, unattractive manner were to her so many additional recommendations. It is certain, at least, that ladies remarkable for the opposite qualities of beauty, lively bearing, and elegant taste in attire were not often favoured with her approbation. Whatever gentlemen are apt to admire in women, Mrs. Yorke condemned; and what they overlook or despise, she patronized.

Caroline advanced to the mighty matron with some sense of diffidence. She knew little of Mrs. Yorke, and, as a parson's niece, was doubtful what sort of a reception she might get. She got a very cool one, and was glad to hide her discomfiture by turning away to take off her bonnet. Nor, upon sitting down, was she displeased to be immediately accosted by a little personage in a blue frock and sash, who started up like some fairy from the side of the great dame's chair, where she had been sitting on a footstool, screened from view by the folds of the wide red gown, and running to Miss Helstone, unceremoniously threw her arms round her neck and demanded a kiss.

"My mother is not civil to you," said the petitioner, as she received and repaid a smiling salute, "and Rose there takes no notice of you; it is their way. If, instead of you, a white angel, with a crown of stars, had come into the room, mother would nod stiffly, and Rose never lift her head at all; but I will be your friend — I have always liked you."

"Jessie, curb that tongue of yours, and repress your forwardness!" said Mrs. Yorke.

"But, mother, you are so frozen!" expostulated Jessie. "Miss Helstone has never done you any harm; why can't you be kind to her? You sit so stiff, and look so cold, and speak so dry — what for? That's just the fashion in which you treat Miss Shirley Keeldar and every other young lady who comes to our house. And Rose there is such an aut — aut — I have forgotten the word, but it means a machine in the shape of a human being. However, between you,

you will drive every soul away from Briarmains; Martin often says so."

"I am an automaton? Good! Let me alone, then," said Rose, speaking from a corner where she was sitting on the carpet at the foot of a bookcase, with a volume spread open on her knee. — "Miss Helstone, how do you do?" she added, directing a brief glance to the person addressed, and then again casting down her gray, remarkable eyes on the book and returning to the study of its pages.

Caroline stole a quiet gaze towards her, dwelling on her young, absorbed countenance, and observing a certain unconscious movement of the mouth as she read — a movement full of character. Caroline had tact, and she had fine instinct. She felt that Rose Yorke was a peculiar child — one of the unique; she knew how to treat her. Approaching quietly, she knelt on the carpet at her side, and looked over her little shoulder at her book. It was a romance of Mrs. Radcliffe's — "The Italian."

Caroline read on with her, making no remark. Presently Rose showed her the attention of asking, ere she turned the leaf, "Are you ready?"

Caroline only nodded.

"Do you like it?" inquired Rose ere long.

"Long since, when I read it as a child, I was wonderfully taken with it."

"Why?"

"It seemed to open with such promise — such foreboding of a most strange tale to be unfolded."

"And in reading it you feel as if you were far away from England — really in Italy — under another sort of sky — that blue sky of the south which travellers describe."

"You are sensible of that, Rose?"

"It makes me long to travel, Miss Helstone."

"When you are a woman, perhaps, you may be able to gratify your wish."

"I mean to make a way to do so, if one is not made for me. I cannot live always in Briarfield. The whole world is not very large compared with creation. I must see the outside of our own round planet, at least."

"How much of its outside?"

"First this hemisphere where we live; then the other. I am resolved that my life shall be a life. Not a black trance like the toad's, buried in marble; nor a long, slow death like yours in Briarfield rectory."

"Like mine! what can you mean, child?"

"Might you not as well be tediously dying as for ever shut up in that glebe-house — a place that, when I pass it, always reminds me of a windowed grave? I never see any movement about the door. I never hear a sound from the wall. I believe smoke never issues from the chimneys. What do you do there?"

"I sew, I read, I learn lessons."

"Are you happy?"

"Should I be happy wandering alone in strange countries as you wish to do?"

"Much happier, even if you did nothing but wander. Remember, however, that I shall have an object in view; but if you only went on and on, like some enchanted lady in a fairy tale, you might be happier than now. In a day's wandering you would pass many a hill, wood, and watercourse, each perpetually altering in aspect as the sun shone out or was overcast; as the weather was wet or fair, dark or bright. Nothing changes in Briarfield rectory. The plaster of the parlour ceilings, the paper on the walls, the curtains, carpets, chairs, are still the same."

"Is change necessary to happiness?"

"Yes."

"Is it synonymous with it?"

"I don't know; but I feel monotony and death to be almost the same."

Here Jessie spoke.

"Isn't she mad?" she asked.

"But, Rose," pursued Caroline, "I fear a wanderer's life, for me at least, would end like that tale you are reading — in disappointment, vanity, and vexation of spirit."

"Does 'The Italian' so end?"

"I thought so when I read it."

"Better to try all things and find all empty than to try nothing and leave your life a blank. To do this is to commit the sin of him who buried his talent in a napkin — despicable sluggard!"

"Rose," observed Mrs. Yorke, "solid satisfaction is only to be realized by doing one's duty."

"Right, mother! And if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make them ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. I will *not* deposit it in a broken-spouted teapot, and shut it up in a china closet among tea-things. I will *not* commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woollen hose. I will *not* prison it in the linen press to find shrouds among the sheets. And least of all, mother" (she got up from the floor) — "least of all will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes, to be ranged with bread, butter, pastry, and ham on the shelves of the larder."

She stopped, then went on, "Mother, the Lord who gave each of us our talents will come home some day, and will demand from all an account. The teapot, the old stocking-foot, the linen rag, the willow-pattern tureen will yield up their barren deposit in many a house. Suffer your daughters, at least, to put their money to the exchangers, that they may be enabled at the Master's coming to pay Him His own with usury."

"Rose, did you bring your sampler with you, as I told you?"

"Yes, mother."

"Sit down, and do a line of marking."

Rose sat down promptly, and wrought according to orders. After a busy pause of ten minutes, her mother asked, "Do you think yourself oppressed now — a victim?"

"No, mother."

"Yet, as far as I understood your tirade, it was a protest against all womanly and domestic employment."

"You misunderstood it, mother. I should be sorry not to learn to sew. You do right to teach me, and to make me work."

"Even to the mending of your brothers' stockings and the making of sheets?"

"Yes."

"Where is the use of ranting and spouting about it, then?"

"Am I to do nothing but that? I will do that, and then I will do more. Now, mother, I have said my say. I am twelve years old at present, and not till I am sixteen will I speak again about talents. For four years I bind myself an industrious apprentice to all you can teach me."

"You see what my daughters are, Miss Helstone," observed Mrs. Yorke; "how precociously wise in their own conceits! 'I would rather this, I prefer that' — such is Jessie's cuckoo song; while Rose utters the bolder cry, 'I *will*, and I will *not*!'"

"I render a reason, mother; besides, if my cry is bold, it is only heard once in a twelvemonth. About each birthday the spirit moves me to deliver one oracle respecting my own instruction and management. I utter it and leave it; it is for you, mother, to listen or not."

"I would advise all young ladies," pursued Mrs. Yorke, "to study the characters of such children as they chance to meet with before they marry and have any of their own to consider well how they would like the responsibility of guiding the careless, the labour of persuading the stubborn, the constant burden and task of training the best."

"But with love it need not be so very difficult," interposed Caroline. "Mothers love their children most dearly — almost better than they love themselves."

"Fine talk! very sentimental! There is the rough, practical part of life yet to come for you, young miss."

"But, Mrs. Yorke, if I take a little baby into my arms — any poor woman's infant, for instance — I feel that I love that helpless thing quite peculiarly, though I am not its mother. I could do almost anything for it willingly, if it were delivered over entirely to my care — if it were quite dependent on me."

"You *feel*! Yes, yes! I dare say, now. You are led a great deal by your *feelings*, and you think yourself a very sensitive personage, no doubt. Are you aware that, with all these romantic ideas, you have managed to train your features into an habitually lackadaisical expression, better suited to a novel-heroine than to a woman who is to make her way in the real world by dint of common sense?"

"No; I am not at all aware of that, Mrs. Yorke."

"Look in the glass just behind you. Compare the face you see there with that of any early-rising, hard-working milkmaid."

"My face is a pale one, but it is *not* sentimental; and most milkmaids, however red and robust they may be, are more stupid and less practically fitted to make their way in the world than I am. I think more, and more correctly, than milkmaids in general do; consequently, where they would often, for want of reflection, act weakly, I, by dint of reflection, should act judiciously."

"Oh no! you would be influenced by your feelings; you would be guided by impulse."

"Of course I should often be influenced by my feelings. They were given me to that end. Whom my feelings teach me to love I *must* and *shall* love; and I hope, if ever I have a husband and children, my feelings will induce me to love them. I hope, in that case, all my impulses will be strong in compelling me to love."

Caroline had a pleasure in saying this with emphasis; she had a pleasure in daring to say it in Mrs. Yorke's presence. She did not care what unjust sarcasm might be hurled at her in reply. She flushed, not with anger but excitement, when the ungenial matron answered coolly, "Don't waste your dramatic effects. That was well said — it was quite fine; but it is lost on two women — an old wife and an old maid. There should have been a disengaged gentleman present. — Is Mr. Robert nowhere hid behind the curtains, do you think, Miss Moore?"

Hortense, who during the chief part of the conversation had been in the kitchen superintending the preparations for tea, did not yet quite comprehend the drift of the discourse. She answered, with a puzzled air, that Robert was at Whinbury. Mrs. Yorke laughed her own peculiar short laugh.

"Straightforward Miss Moore!" said she patronizingly. "It is like you to understand my question so literally and answer it so simply. *Your* mind comprehends nothing of intrigue. Strange things might go on around you without your being the wiser; you are not of the class the world calls sharp-witted."

These equivocal compliments did not seem to please Hortense. She drew herself up, puckered her black eyebrows, but still looked puzzled.

"I have ever been noted for sagacity and discernment from childhood," she returned; for, indeed, on the possession of these qualities she peculiarly piqued herself.

"You never plotted to win a husband, I'll be bound," pursued Mrs. Yorke; "and you have not the benefit of previous experience to aid you in discovering when others plot."

Caroline felt this kind language where the benevolent speaker intended she should feel it — in her very heart. She could not even parry the shafts; she was defenceless for the present. To answer would have been to avow that the cap fitted. Mrs. Yorke, looking at her as she sat with troubled, downcast eyes, and cheek burning painfully, and figure expressing in its bent attitude and unconscious tremor all the humiliation and chagrin she experienced, felt the sufferer was fair game. The strange woman had a natural antipathy to a shrinking, sensitive character — a nervous temperament; nor was a pretty, delicate, and youthful face a passport to her affections. It was seldom she met with all these obnoxious qualities combined in one individual; still more seldom she found that individual at her mercy, under circumstances in which she could crush her well. She happened this afternoon to be specially bilious and morose — as much disposed to gore as any vicious "mother of the herd." Lowering her large head she made a new charge.

"Your cousin Hortense is an excellent sister, Miss Helstone. Such ladies as come to try their life's luck here at Hollow's Cottage may, by a very little clever female artifice, cajole the mistress of the house, and have the game all in their own hands. You are fond of your cousin's society, I dare say, miss?"

"Of which cousin's?"

"Oh, of the lady's, *of course*."

"Hortense is, and always has been, most kind to me."

"Every sister with an eligible single brother is considered most kind by her spinster friends."

"Mrs. Yorke," said Caroline, lifting her eyes slowly, their blue orbs at the same time clearing from trouble, and shining steady and full, while the glow of shame left her cheek, and its hue turned pale and settled — "Mrs. Yorke, may I ask what you mean?"

"To give you a lesson on the cultivation of rectitude, to disgust you with craft and false sentiment."

"Do I need this lesson?"

"Most young ladies of the present day need it. You are quite a modern young lady — morbid, delicate, professing to like retirement; which implies, I suppose, that you find little worthy of your sympathies in the ordinary world. The ordinary world — every-day honest folks — are better than you think them, much better than any bookish, romancing chit of a girl can be who hardly ever puts her nose over her uncle the parson's garden wall."

"Consequently of whom you know nothing. Excuse me — indeed, it does not matter whether you excuse me or not — you have attacked me without provocation; I shall defend myself without apology. Of my relations with my two cousins you are ignorant. In a fit of ill-humour you have attempted to poison them by gratuitous insinuations, which are far more crafty and false than anything with which you can justly charge me. That I happen to be pale, and sometimes to look diffident, is no business of yours; that I am fond of books, and indisposed for common gossip, is still less your business; that I am a 'romancing chit of a girl' is a mere conjecture on your part. I never romanced to you nor to anybody you know. That I am the parson's niece is not a crime, though you may be narrow-minded enough to think it so. You dislike me. You have no just reason for disliking me; therefore keep the expression of your aversion to yourself. If at any time in future you evince it annoyingly, I shall answer even less scrupulously than I have done now."

She ceased, and sat in white and still excitement. She had spoken in the clearest of tones, neither fast nor loud; but her silver accents thrilled the ear. The speed of the current in her veins was just then as swift as it was viewless.

Mrs. Yorke was not irritated at the reproof, worded with a severity so simple, dictated by a pride so quiet. Turning coolly to Miss Moore, she said, nodding her cap approvingly, "She has spirit in her, after all. — Always speak as honestly as you have done just now," she continued, "and you'll do."

"I repel a recommendation so offensive," was the answer, delivered in the same pure key, with the same clear look. "I reject counsel poisoned by insinuation. It is my right to speak as I think proper; nothing binds me to converse as you dictate. So far from always speaking as I have done just now, I shall never address any one in a tone so stern or in language so harsh, unless in answer to unprovoked insult."

"Mother, you have found your match," pronounced little Jessie, whom the scene appeared greatly to edify. Rose had heard the whole with an unmoved face. She now said, "No; Miss Helstone is not my mother's match, for she allows herself to be vexed. My mother would wear her out in a few weeks. Shirley Keeldar manages better. — Mother, you have never hurt Miss Keeldar's feelings yet. She wears armour under her silk dress that you cannot penetrate."

Mrs. Yorke often complained that her children were mutinous. It was strange that with all her strictness, with all her "strong-mindedness," she could gain no command over them. A look from their father had more influence with them than a lecture from her.

Miss Moore — to whom the position of witness to an altercation in which she took no part was highly displeasing, as being an unimportant secondary post — now rallying her dignity, prepared to utter a discourse which was to prove both parties in the wrong, and to make it clear to each disputant that she had reason to be ashamed of herself, and ought to submit humbly to the superior sense of the individual then addressing her. Fortunately for her audience, she had not harangued above ten minutes when Sarah's entrance with the tea-tray called her attention, first to the fact of that damsel having a gilt comb in her hair and a red necklace round her throat, and secondly, and subsequently to a pointed remonstrance, to the duty of making tea. After the meal Rose restored her to good-humour by bringing her guitar and asking for a song, and afterwards engaging her in an intelligent and sharp cross-examination about guitar-playing and music in general.

Jessie, meantime, directed her assiduities to Caroline. Sitting on a stool at her feet, she talked to her, first about religion and then about politics. Jessie was accustomed at home to drink in a great deal of what her father said on these subjects, and afterwards in company to retail, with more wit and fluency than consistency or discretion, his opinions, antipathies, and preferences. She rated Caroline soundly for being a member of the Established Church, and for having an uncle a clergyman. She informed her that she lived on the country, and ought to work for her living honestly, instead of passing a useless life, and eating the bread of idleness in the shape of tithes. Thence Jessie passed to a review of the ministry at that time in office, and a consideration of its deserts. She made familiar mention of the names of Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Perceval. Each of these personages she adorned with a character that might have separately suited Moloch and Belial. She denounced the war as wholesale murder, and Lord Wellington as a "hired butcher."

Her auditress listened with exceeding edification. Jessie had something of the genius of humour in her nature. It was inexpressibly comic to hear her repeating her sire's denunciations in his nervous northern Doric; as hearty a little Jacobin as ever pent a free mutinous spirit in a muslin frock and sash. Not malignant by nature, her language was not so bitter as it was racy, and the expressive little face gave a piquancy to every phrase which held a beholder's interest captive.

Caroline chid her when she abused Lord Wellington; but she listened delighted to a subsequent tirade against the Prince Regent. Jessie quickly read, in the sparkle of her hearer's eye and the laughter hovering round her lips, that at last she had hit on a topic that pleased. Many a time had she heard the fat "Adonis of fifty" discussed at her father's breakfast-table, and she now gave Mr. Yorke's comments on the theme — genuine as uttered by his Yorkshire lips.

But, Jessie, I will write about you no more. This is an autumn evening, wet and wild. There is only one cloud in the sky, but it curtains it from pole to pole. The wind cannot rest; it hurries sobbing over hills of sullen outline, colourless with twilight and mist. Rain has beat all day on that church tower. It rises dark from the stony enclosure of its graveyard. The nettles, the long grass, and the tombs all drip with wet. This evening reminds me too forcibly of another evening some years ago — a howling, rainy autumn evening too — when certain who had that day performed a pilgrimage to a grave new-made in a heretic cemetery sat near a wood fire on the hearth of a foreign dwelling. They were merry and social, but they each knew that a gap, never to be filled, had been made in their circle. They knew they had lost something whose absence could never be quite atoned for so long as they lived; and they knew that heavy falling rain was soaking into the wet earth which covered their lost darling, and that the sad, sighing gale was mourning above her buried head. The fire warmed them; life and friendship yet blessed them; but Jessie lay cold, coffined, solitary — only the sod screening her from the storm.

Mrs. Yorke folded up her knitting, cut short the music lesson and the lecture on politics, and concluded her visit to the cottage, at an hour early enough to ensure her return to Briarmains before the blush of sunset should quite have faded in heaven, or the path up the fields have become thoroughly moist with evening dew.

The lady and her daughters being gone, Caroline felt that she also ought to resume her scarf, kiss her cousin's cheek, and trip away homeward. If she lingered much later dusk would draw on, and Fanny would be put to the trouble of coming to fetch her. It was both baking and ironing day at the rectory, she remembered — Fanny would be busy. Still, she could not quit her seat at the little parlour window. From no point of view could the west look so lovely as from that lattice with the garland of jessamine round it, whose white stars and green leaves seemed now but gray pencil outlines — graceful in form, but colourless in tint — against the gold incarnadined of a summer evening — against the fire-tinged blue of an August sky at eight o'clock p.m.

Caroline looked at the wicket-gate, beside which holly-oaks spired up tall. She looked at the close hedge of privet and laurel fencing in the garden; her eyes longed to see something more than the shrubs before they turned from that limited prospect. They longed to see a human figure, of a certain mould and height, pass the hedge and enter the gate. A human figure she at last saw — nay, two. Frederick Murgatroyd went by, carrying a pail of water; Joe Scott followed, dangling on his forefinger the keys of the mill. They were going to lock up mill and stables for the night, and then betake themselves home.

"So must I," thought Caroline, as she half rose and sighed.

"This is all folly — heart-breaking folly," she added. "In the first place, though I should stay till dark there will be no arrival; because I feel in my heart, Fate has written it down in to-day's page of her eternal book, that I am not to have the pleasure I long for. In the second place, if he stepped in this moment, my presence here would be a chagrin to him, and the consciousness that it must be so would turn half my blood to ice. His hand would, perhaps, be loose and chill if I put mine into it; his eye would be clouded if I sought its beam. I should look up for that kindling, something I have seen in past days, when my face, or my language, or my disposition had at some happy moment pleased him; I should discover only darkness. I had better go home."

She took her bonnet from the table where it lay, and was just fastening the ribbon, when Hortense, directing her attention to a splendid bouquet of flowers in a glass on the same table, mentioned that Miss Keeldar had sent them that morning from Fieldhead; and went on to comment on the guests that lady was at present entertaining, on the bustling life she had lately been leading; adding divers conjectures that she did not very well like it, and much wonderment that a person who was so fond of her own way as the heiress did not find some means of sooner getting rid of this *cortége* of relatives.

"But they say she actually will not let Mr. Sympson and his family go," she added. "They wanted much to return to the south last week, to be ready for the reception of the only son, who is expected home from a tour. She insists that her cousin Henry shall come and join his friends here in Yorkshire.

I dare say she partly does it to oblige Robert and myself."

"How to oblige Robert and you?" inquired Caroline.

"Why, my child, you are dull. Don't you know — you must often have heard — — "

"Please, ma'am," said Sarah, opening the door, "the preserves that you told me to boil in treacle — the congfiters, as you call them — is all burnt to the pan."

"Les confitures! Elles sont brûlées? Ah, quelle négligence coupable! Coquine de cuisinière, fille insupportable!"

And mademoiselle, hastily taking from a drawer a large linen apron, and tying it over her black apron, rushed *éperdue* into the kitchen, whence, to speak truth, exhaled an odour of calcined sweets rather strong than savoury.

The mistress and maid had been in full feud the whole day, on the subject of preserving certain black cherries, hard as marbles, sour as sloes. Sarah held that sugar was the only orthodox condiment to be used in that process; mademoiselle maintained — and proved it by the practice and experience of her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother — that treacle, "mélasse," was infinitely preferable. She had committed an imprudence in leaving Sarah in charge of the preserving-pan, for her want of sympathy in the nature of its contents had induced a degree of carelessness in watching their confection, whereof the result was — dark and cindery ruin. Hubbub followed; high upbraiding, and sobs rather loud than deep or real.

Caroline, once more turning to the little mirror, was shading her ringlets from her cheek to smooth them under her cottage bonnet, certain that it would not only be useless but unpleasant to stay longer, when, on the sudden opening of the back-door, there fell an abrupt calm in the kitchen. The tongues were checked, pulled up as with bit and bridle. "Was it — was it — Robert?" He often — almost always — entered by the kitchen way on his return from market. No; it was only Joe Scott, who, having hemmed significantly thrice — every hem being meant as a lofty rebuke to the squabbling womankind — said, "Now, I thowt I heerd a crack?"

None answered.

"And," he continued pragmatically, "as t' maister's comed, and as he'll enter through this hoyle, I *con*sidered it desirable to step in and let ye know. A household o' women is nivver fit to be comed on wi'out warning. Here he is. — Walk forrard, sir. They war playing up queerly, but I think I've quietened 'em."

Another person, it was now audible, entered. Joe Scott proceeded with his rebukes.

"What d'ye mean by being all i' darkness? Sarah, thou quean, canst t' not light a candle? It war sundown an hour syne. He'll brak his shins agean some o' yer pots, and tables, and stuff. — Tak tent o' this baking-bowl, sir; they've set it i' yer way, fair as if they did it i' malice."

To Joe's observations succeeded a confused sort of pause, which

Caroline, though she was listening with both her ears, could not understand. It was very brief. A cry broke it — a sound of surprise, followed by the sound of a kiss; ejaculations, but half articulate, succeeded.

“Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Est-ce que je m’y attendais?” were the words chiefly to be distinguished.

“Et tu te portes toujours bien, bonne sœur?” inquired another voice — Robert’s, certainly.

Caroline was puzzled. Obeying an impulse the wisdom of which she had not time to question, she escaped from the little parlour, by way of leaving the coast clear, and running upstairs took up a position at the head of the banisters, whence she could make further observations ere presenting herself. It was considerably past sunset now; dusk filled the passage, yet not such deep dusk but that she could presently see Robert and Hortense traverse it.

“Caroline! Caroline!” called Hortense, a moment afterwards, “venez voir mon frère!”

“Strange,” commented Miss Helstone, “passing strange! What does this unwonted excitement about such an every-day occurrence as a return from market portend? She has not lost her senses, has she? Surely the burnt treacle has not crazed her?”

She descended in a subdued flutter. Yet more was she fluttered when Hortense seized her hand at the parlour door, and leading her to Robert, who stood in bodily presence, tall and dark against the one window, presented her with a mixture of agitation and formality, as though they had been utter strangers, and this was their first mutual introduction.

Increasing puzzle! He bowed rather awkwardly, and turning from her with a stranger’s embarrassment, he met the doubtful light from the window. It fell on his face, and the enigma of the dream (a dream it seemed) was at its height. She saw a visage like and unlike — Robert, and no Robert.

“What is the matter?” said Caroline. “Is my sight wrong? Is it my cousin?”

“Certainly it is your cousin,” asserted Hortense.

Then who was this now coming through the passage — now entering the room? Caroline, looking round, met a new Robert — the real Robert, as she felt at once.

“Well,” said he, smiling at her questioning, astonished face, “which is which?”

“Ah, this is *you*!” was the answer.

He laughed. “I believe it is *me*. And do you know who *he* is? You never saw him before, but you have heard of him.”

She had gathered her senses now.

“It *can* be only one person — your brother, since it is so like you; my other cousin, Louis.”

“Clever little Œdipus! you would have baffled the Sphinx! But now, see us together. — Change places; change again, to confuse her, Louis. — Which is the old love now, Lina?"

"As if it were possible to make a mistake when you speak! You should have told Hortense to ask. But you are not so much alike. It is only your height, your figure, and complexion that are so similar."

"And I am Robert, am I not?" asked the newcomer, making a first effort to overcome what seemed his natural shyness.

Caroline shook her head gently. A soft, expressive ray from her eye beamed on the real Robert. It said much.

She was not permitted to quit her cousins soon. Robert himself was peremptory in obliging her to remain. Glad, simple, and affable in her demeanour (glad for this night, at least), in light, bright spirits for the time, she was too pleasant an addition to the cottage circle to be willingly parted with by any of them. Louis seemed naturally rather a grave, still, retiring man; but the Caroline of this evening, which was not (as you know, reader) the Caroline of every day, thawed his reserve, and cheered his gravity soon. He sat near her and talked to her. She already knew his vocation was that of tuition. She learned now he had for some years been the tutor of Mr. Sympson's son; that he had been travelling with him, and had accompanied him to the north. She inquired if he liked his post, but got a look in reply which did not invite or license further question. The look woke Caroline's ready sympathy. She thought it a very sad expression to pass over so sensible a face as Louis's; for he *had* a sensible face, though not handsome, she considered, when seen near Robert's. She turned to make the comparison. Robert was leaning against the wall, a little behind her, turning over the leaves of a book of engravings, and probably listening, at the same time, to the dialogue between her and Louis.

"How could I think them alike?" she asked herself. "I see now it is Hortense Louis resembles, not Robert."

And this was in part true. He had the shorter nose and longer upper lip of his sister rather than the fine traits of his brother. He had her mould of mouth and chin — all less decisive, accurate, and clear than those of the young mill-owner. His air, though deliberate and reflective, could scarcely be called prompt and acute. You felt, in sitting near and looking up at him, that a slower and probably a more benignant nature than that of the elder Moore shed calm on your impressions.

Robert — perhaps aware that Caroline's glance had wandered towards and dwelt upon him, though he had neither met nor answered it — put down the book of engravings, and approaching, took a seat at her side. She resumed her conversation with Louis, but while she talked to him her thoughts were elsewhere. Her heart beat on the side from which her face was half averted. She acknowledged a steady, manly, kindly air in Louis; but she bent before the secret power of Robert. To be so near him — though he was silent, though he did not touch so much as her scarf-fringe or the white hem of her dress — affected her like a spell. Had she been obliged to speak to him *only*, it would have quelled, but, at liberty to address another, it excited her. Her discourse flowed freely; it was gay, playful, eloquent. The indulgent look and placid manner of her auditor encouraged her to ease; the sober pleasure expressed by his smile drew out all that was brilliant in her nature. She felt that this evening she appeared to advantage, and as Robert was a spectator, the consciousness contented her. Had he been called away, collapse would at once have succeeded stimulus.

But her enjoyment was not long to shine full-orbed; a cloud soon crossed it.

Hortense, who for some time had been on the move ordering supper, and was now clearing the little table of some books, etc., to make room for the tray, called Robert's attention to the glass of flowers, the carmine and snow and gold of whose petals looked radiant indeed by candlelight.

"They came from Fieldhead," she said, "intended as a gift to you, no doubt. We know who is the favourite there; not I, I'm sure."

It was a wonder to hear Hortense jest — a sign that her spirits were at high-water mark indeed.

"We are to understand, then, that Robert is the favourite?" observed Louis.

"Mon cher," replied Hortense, "Robert — c'est tout ce qu'il y a de plus précieux au monde; à côté de lui le reste du genre humain n'est que du rebut. — N'ai-je pas raison, mon enfant?" she added, appealing to Caroline.

Caroline was obliged to reply, "Yes," and her beacon was quenched. Her star withdrew as she spoke.

"Et toi, Robert?" inquired Louis.

"When you shall have an opportunity, ask herself," was the quiet answer. Whether he reddened or paled Caroline did not examine. She discovered that it was late, and she must go home. Home she would go; not even Robert could detain her now.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

The future sometimes seems to sob a low warning of the events it is bringing us, like some gathering though yet remote storm, which, in tones of the wind, in flushings of the firmament, in clouds strangely torn, announces a blast strong to strew the sea with wrecks; or commissioned to bring in fog the yellow taint of pestilence covering white Western isles with the poisoned exhalations of the East, dimming the lattices of English homes with the breath of Indian plague. At other times this future bursts suddenly, as if a rock had rent, and in it a grave had opened, whence issues the body of one that slept. Ere you are aware you stand face to face with a shrouded and unthought-of calamity — a new Lazarus.

Caroline Helstone went home from Hollow's Cottage in good health, as she imagined. On waking the next morning she felt oppressed with unwonted languor. At breakfast, at each meal of the following day, she missed all sense of appetite. Palatable food was as ashes and sawdust to her.

"Am I ill?" she asked, and looked at herself in the glass. Her eyes were bright, their pupils dilated, her cheeks seemed rosier, and fuller than usual. "I look well; why can I not eat?"

She felt a pulse beat fast in her temples; she felt, too, her brain in strange activity. Her spirits were raised; hundreds of busy and broken but brilliant thoughts engaged her mind. A glow rested on them, such as tinged her complexion.

Now followed a hot, parched, thirsty, restless night. Towards morning one terrible dream seized her like a tiger; when she woke, she felt and knew she was ill.

How she had caught the fever (fever it was) she could not tell. Probably in her late walk home, some sweet, poisoned breeze, redolent of honey-dew and miasma, had passed into her lungs and veins, and finding there already a fever of mental excitement, and a languor of long conflict and habitual sadness, had fanned the spark to flame, and left a well-lit fire behind it.

It seemed, however, but a gentle fire. After two hot days and worried nights, there was no violence in the symptoms, and neither her uncle, nor Fanny, nor the doctor, nor Miss Keeldar, when she called, had any fear for her. A few days would restore her, every one believed.

The few days passed, and — though it was still thought it could not long delay — the revival had not begun. Mrs. Pryor, who had visited her daily — being present in her chamber one morning when she had been ill a fortnight

— watched her very narrowly for some minutes. She took her hand and placed her finger on her wrist; then, quietly leaving the chamber, she went to Mr. Helstone's study. With him she remained closeted a long time — half the morning. On returning to her sick young friend, she laid aside shawl and bonnet. She stood awhile at the bedside, one hand placed in the other, gently rocking herself to and fro, in an attitude and with a movement habitual to her. At last she said, "I have sent Fanny to Fieldhead to fetch a few things for me, such as I shall want during a short stay here. It is my wish to remain with you till you are better. Your uncle kindly permits my attendance. Will it to yourself be acceptable, Caroline?"

"I am sorry you should take such needless trouble. I do not feel very ill, but I cannot refuse resolutely. It will be such comfort to know you are in the house, to see you sometimes in the room; but don't confine yourself on my account, dear Mrs. Pryor. Fanny nurses me very well."

Mrs. Pryor, bending over the pale little sufferer, was now smoothing the hair under her cap, and gently raising her pillow. As she performed these offices, Caroline, smiling, lifted her face to kiss her.

"Are you free from pain? Are you tolerably at ease?" was inquired in a low, earnest voice, as the self-elected nurse yielded to the caress.

"I think I am almost happy."

"You wish to drink? Your lips are parched."

She held a glass filled with some cooling beverage to her mouth.

"Have you eaten anything to-day, Caroline?"

"I cannot eat."

"But soon your appetite will return; it *must* return — that is, I pray God it may."

In laying her again on the couch, she encircled her in her arms; and while so doing, by a movement which seemed scarcely voluntary, she drew her to her heart, and held her close gathered an instant.

"I shall hardly wish to get well, that I may keep you always," said Caroline.

Mrs. Pryor did not smile at this speech. Over her features ran a tremor, which for some minutes she was absorbed in repressing.

"You are more used to Fanny than to me," she remarked ere long. "I should think my attendance must seem strange, officious?"

"No; quite natural, and very soothing. You must have been accustomed to wait on sick people, ma'am. You move about the room so softly, and you speak so quietly, and touch me so gently."

"I am dexterous in nothing, my dear. You will often find me awkward, but never negligent."

Negligent, indeed, she was not. From that hour Fanny and Eliza became ciphers in the sick-room. Mrs. Pryor made it her domain; she performed all its duties; she lived in it day and night. The patient remonstrated — faintly, however, from the first, and not at all ere long. Loneliness and gloom were now banished from her bedside; protection and solace sat there instead. She and her nurse coalesced in wondrous union. Caroline was usually pained to require or receive much attendance. Mrs. Pryor, under ordinary circumstances, had neither the habit nor the art of performing little offices of service; but all now passed with such ease, so naturally, that the patient was as willing to be cherished as the nurse was bent on cherishing; no sign of weariness in the latter ever reminded the former that she ought to be anxious. There was, in fact, no very hard duty to perform; but a hireling might have found it hard.

With all this care it seemed strange the sick girl did not get well; yet such was the case. She wasted like any snow-wreath in thaw; she faded like any flower in drought. Miss Keeldar, on whose thoughts danger or death seldom intruded, had at first entertained no fears at all for her friend; but seeing her change and sink from time to time when she paid her visits, alarm clutched her heart. She went to Mr. Helstone and expressed herself with so much energy that that gentleman was at last obliged, however unwillingly, to admit the idea that his niece was ill of something more than a migraine; and when Mrs. Pryor came and quietly demanded a physician, he said she might send for two if she liked. One came, but that one was an oracle. He delivered a dark saying of which the future was to solve the mystery, wrote some prescriptions, gave some directions — the whole with an air of crushing authority — pocketed his fee, and went. Probably he knew well enough he could do no good, but didn't like to say so.

Still, no rumour of serious illness got wind in the neighbourhood. At Hollow's Cottage it was thought that Caroline had only a severe cold, she having written a note to Hortense to that effect; and mademoiselle contented herself with sending two pots of currant jam, a recipe for a tisane, and a note of advice.

Mrs. Yorke being told that a physician had been summoned, sneered at the hypochondriac fancies of the rich and idle, who, she said, having nothing but themselves to think about, must needs send for a doctor if only so much as their little finger ached.

The "rich and idle," represented in the person of Caroline, were meantime falling fast into a condition of prostration, whose quickly consummated debility puzzled all who witnessed it except one; for that one alone reflected how liable is the undermined structure to sink in sudden ruin.

Sick people often have fancies inscrutable to ordinary attendants, and Caroline had one which even her tender nurse could not at first explain. On a certain day in the week, at a certain hour, she would — whether worse or better — entreat to be taken up and dressed, and suffered to sit in her chair near the window. This station she would retain till noon was past. Whatever degree of exhaustion or debility her wan aspect betrayed, she still softly put off all persuasion to seek repose until the church clock had duly tolled midday. The twelve strokes sounded, she grew docile, and would meekly lie down. Returned to the couch, she usually buried her face deep in the pillow, and drew the coverlets close round her, as if to shut out the world and sun, of which she was tired. More than once, as she thus lay, a slight convulsion shook the sick-bed, and a faint sob broke the silence round it. These things were not unnoted by Mrs. Pryor.

One Tuesday morning, as usual, she had asked leave to rise, and now she sat wrapped in her white dressing-gown, leaning forward in the easy-chair, gazing steadily and patiently from the lattice. Mrs. Pryor was seated a little behind, knitting as it seemed, but, in truth, watching her. A change crossed her pale, mournful brow, animating its languor; a light shot into her faded eyes, reviving their lustre; she half rose and looked earnestly out. Mrs. Pryor, drawing softly near, glanced over her shoulder. From this window was visible the churchyard, beyond it the road; and there, riding sharply by, appeared a horseman. The figure was not yet too remote for recognition. Mrs. Pryor had long sight; she knew Mr. Moore. Just as an intercepting rising ground concealed him from view, the clock struck twelve.

“May I lie down again?” asked Caroline.

Her nurse assisted her to bed. Having laid her down and drawn the curtain, she stood listening near. The little couch trembled, the suppressed sob stirred the air. A contraction as of anguish altered Mrs. Pryor’s features; she wrung her hands; half a groan escaped her lips. She now remembered that Tuesday was Whinbury market day. Mr. Moore must always pass the rectory on his way thither, just ere noon of that day.

Caroline wore continually round her neck a slender braid of silk, attached to which was some trinket. Mrs. Pryor had seen the bit of gold glisten, but had not yet obtained a fair view of it. Her patient never parted with it. When dressed it was hidden in her bosom; as she lay in bed she always held it in her hand. That Tuesday afternoon the transient doze — more like lethargy than sleep — which sometimes abridged the long days, had stolen over her. The weather was hot. While turning in febrile restlessness, she had pushed the coverlets a little aside. Mrs. Pryor bent to replace them. The small, wasted hand, lying nerveless on the sick girl’s breast, clasped as usual her jealously-guarded treasure. Those fingers whose attenuation it gave pain to see were now relaxed in sleep. Mrs. Pryor gently disengaged the braid, drawing out a tiny locket — a slight thing it was, such as it suited her small purse to purchase. Under its crystal face appeared a curl of black hair, too short and crisp to have been severed from a female head.

Some agitated movement occasioned a twitch of the silken chain. The sleeper started and woke. Her thoughts were usually now somewhat scattered on waking, her look generally wandering. Half rising, as if in terror, she exclaimed, “Don’t take it from me, Robert! Don’t! It is my last comfort; let me keep it. I never tell any one whose hair it is; I never show it.”

Mrs. Pryor had already disappeared behind the curtain. Reclining far back in a deep arm-chair by the bedside, she was withdrawn from view. Caroline looked abroad into the chamber; she thought it empty. As her stray ideas returned slowly, each folding its weak wings on the mind's sad shore, like birds exhausted, beholding void, and perceiving silence round her, she believed herself alone. Collected she was not yet; perhaps healthy self-possession and self-control were to be hers no more; perhaps that world the strong and prosperous live in had already rolled from beneath her feet for ever. So, at least, it often seemed to herself. In health she had never been accustomed to think aloud, but now words escaped her lips unawares.

"Oh, I *should* see him once more before all is over! Heaven *might* favour me thus far!" she cried. "God grant me a little comfort before I die!" was her humble petition.

"But he will not know I am ill till I am gone, and he will come when they have laid me out, and I am senseless, cold, and stiff.

"What can my departed soul feel then? Can it see or know what happens to the clay? Can spirits, through any medium, communicate with living flesh? Can the dead at all revisit those they leave? Can they come in the elements? Will wind, water, fire, lend me a path to Moore?

"Is it for nothing the wind sounds almost articulately sometimes — sings as I have lately heard it sing at night — or passes the casement sobbing, as if for sorrow to come? Does nothing, then, haunt it, nothing inspire it?

"Why, it suggested to me words one night; it poured a strain which I could have written down, only I was appalled, and dared not rise to seek pencil and paper by the dim watch-light.

"What is that electricity they speak of, whose changes make us well or ill, whose lack or excess blasts, whose even balance revives? What are all those influences that are about us in the atmosphere, that keep playing over our nerves like fingers on stringed instruments, and call forth now a sweet note, and now a wail — now an exultant swell, and anon the saddest cadence?

"*Where is* the other world? In *what* will another life consist? Why do I ask? Have I not cause to think that the hour is hasting but too fast when the veil must be rent for me? Do I not know the Grand Mystery is likely to burst prematurely on me? Great Spirit, in whose goodness I confide, whom, as my Father, I have petitioned night and morning from early infancy, help the weak creation of Thy hands! Sustain me through the ordeal I dread and must undergo! Give me strength! Give me patience! Give me — oh, *give me* faith!"

She fell back on her pillow. Mrs. Pryor found means to steal quietly from the room. She re-entered it soon after, apparently as composed as if she had really not overheard this strange soliloquy.

The next day several callers came. It had become known that Miss Helstone was worse. Mr. Hall and his sister Margaret arrived. Both, after they had been in the sickroom, quitted it in tears; they had found the patient more altered than they expected. Hortense Moore came. Caroline seemed stimulated by her presence. She assured her, smiling, she was not dangerously ill; she talked to her in a low voice, but cheerfully. During her stay, excitement kept up the flush of her complexion; she looked better.

"How is Mr. Robert?" asked Mrs. Pryor, as Hortense was preparing to take leave.

"He was very well when he left."

"Left! Is he gone from home?"

It was then explained that some police intelligence about the rioters of whom he was in pursuit had, that morning, called him away to Birmingham, and probably a fortnight might elapse ere he returned.

"He is not aware that Miss Helstone is very ill?"

"Oh no! He thought, like me, that she had only a bad cold."

After this visit, Mrs. Pryor took care not to approach Caroline's couch for above an hour. She heard her weep, and dared not look on her tears.

As evening closed in, she brought her some tea. Caroline, opening her eyes from a moment's slumber, viewed her nurse with an unrecognizing glance.

"I smelt the honeysuckles in the glen this summer morning," she said, "as I stood at the counting-house window."

Strange words like these from pallid lips pierce a loving listener's heart more poignantly than steel. They sound romantic, perhaps, in books; in real life they are harrowing.

"My darling, do you know me?" said Mrs. Pryor.

"I went in to call Robert to breakfast. I have been with him in the garden. He asked me to go. A heavy dew has refreshed the flowers. The peaches are ripening."

"My darling! my darling!" again and again repeated the nurse.

"I thought it was daylight — long after sunrise. It looks dark. Is the moon now set?"

That moon, lately risen, was gazing full and mild upon her. Floating in deep blue space, it watched her unclouded.

"Then it is not morning? I am not at the cottage? Who is this? I see a shape at my bedside."

"It is myself — it is your friend — your nurse — your — — Lean your head on my shoulder. Collect yourself." In a lower tone — "O God, take pity! Give *her* life, and *me* strength! Send me courage! Teach me words!"

Some minutes passed in silence. The patient lay mute and passive in the trembling arms, on the throbbing bosom of the nurse.

"I am better now," whispered Caroline at last, "much better. I feel where I am. This is Mrs. Pryor near me. I was dreaming. I talk when I wake up from dreams; people often do in illness. How fast your heart beats, ma'am! Do not be afraid."

"It is not fear, child — only a little anxiety, which will pass. I have brought you some tea, Cary. Your uncle made it himself. You know he says he can make a better cup of tea than any housewife can. Taste it. He is concerned to hear that you eat so little; he would be glad if you had a better appetite."

"I am thirsty. Let me drink."

She drank eagerly.

"What o'clock is it, ma'am?" she asked.

"Past nine."

"Not later? Oh! I have yet a long night before me. But the tea has made me strong. I will sit up."

Mrs. Pryor raised her, and arranged her pillows.

"Thank Heaven! I am not always equally miserable, and ill, and hopeless. The afternoon has been bad since Hortense went; perhaps the evening may be better. It is a fine night, I think? The moon shines clear."

"Very fine — a perfect summer night. The old church-tower gleams white almost as silver."

"And does the churchyard look peaceful?"

"Yes, and the garden also. Dew glistens on the foliage."

"Can you see many long weeds and nettles amongst the graves? or do they look turfy and flowery?"

"I see closed daisy-heads gleaming like pearls on some mounds. Thomas has mown down the dock-leaves and rank grass, and cleared all away."

"I always like that to be done; it soothes one's mind to see the place in order. And, I dare say, within the church just now that moonlight shines as softly as in my room. It will fall through the east window full on the Helstone monument. When I close my eyes I seem to see poor papa's epitaph in black letters on the white marble. There is plenty of room for other inscriptions underneath."

"William Farren came to look after your flowers this morning. He was afraid, now you cannot tend them yourself, they would be neglected. He has taken two of your favourite plants home to nurse for you."

"If I were to make a will, I would leave William all my plants; Shirley my trinkets — except one, which must not be taken off my neck; and you, ma'am, my books." After a pause — "Mrs. Pryor, I feel a longing wish for something."

"For what, Caroline?"

"You know I always delight to hear you sing. Sing me a hymn just now. Sing that hymn which begins, —

'Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
Our refuge, haven, home!'"

Mrs. Pryor at once complied.

No wonder Caroline liked to hear her sing. Her voice, even in speaking, was sweet and silver clear; in song it was almost divine. Neither flute nor dulcimer has tones so pure. But the tone was secondary, compared to the expression which trembled through — a tender vibration from a feeling heart.

The servants in the kitchen, hearing the strain, stole to the stair-foot to listen. Even old Helstone, as he walked in the garden, pondering over the unaccountable and feeble nature of women, stood still amongst his borders to catch the mournful melody more distinctly. Why it reminded him of his forgotten dead wife, he could not tell; nor why it made him more concerned than he had hitherto been for Caroline's fading girlhood. He was glad to recollect that he had promised to pay Wynne, the magistrate, a visit that evening. Low spirits and gloomy thoughts were very much his aversion. When they attacked him he usually found means to make them march in double-quick time. The hymn followed him faintly as he crossed the fields. He hastened his customary sharp pace, that he might get beyond its reach.

"Thy word commands our flesh to dust, —
'Return, ye sons of men;'
All nations rose from earth at first,
And turn to earth again.
"A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone —
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.
"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.
"Like flowery fields, the nations stand,
Fresh in the morning light;
The flowers beneath the mower's hand
Lie withering ere 'tis night.
"Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last —
O Father, be our home!"

"Now sing a song — a Scottish song," suggested Caroline, when the hymn was over — "'Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon.'"

Again Mrs. Pryor obeyed, or essayed to obey. At the close of the first stanza she stopped. She could get no further. Her full heart flowed over.

"You are weeping at the pathos of the air. Come here, and I will comfort you," said Caroline, in a pitying accent. Mrs. Pryor came. She sat down on the edge of her patient's bed, and allowed the wasted arms to encircle her.

"You often soothe me; let me soothe you," murmured the young girl, kissing her cheek. "I hope," she added, "it is not for me you weep?"

No answer followed.

"Do you think I shall not get better? I do not feel *very* ill — only weak."

"But your mind, Caroline — your mind is crushed. Your heart is almost broken; you have been so neglected, so repulsed, left so desolate."

"I believe grief is, and always has been, my worst ailment. I sometimes think if an abundant gush of happiness came on me I could revive yet."

"Do you wish to live?"

"I have no object in life."

"You love me, Caroline?"

"Very much — very truly — inexpressibly sometimes. Just now I feel as if I could almost grow to your heart."

"I will return directly, dear," remarked Mrs. Pryor, as she laid Caroline down.

Quitting her, she glided to the door, softly turned the key in the lock, ascertained that it was fast, and came back. She bent over her. She threw back the curtain to admit the moonlight more freely. She gazed intently on her face.

"Then, if you love me," said she, speaking quickly, with an altered voice; "if you feel as if, to use your own words, you could 'grow to my heart,' it will be neither shock nor pain for you to know that *that* heart is the source whence yours was filled; that from *my* veins issued the tide which flows in *yours*; that you are *mine* — my daughter — my own child."

"Mrs. Pryor — — "

"My own child!"

"That is — that means — you have adopted me?"

"It means that, if I have given you nothing else, I at least gave you life; that I bore you, nursed you; that I am your true mother. No other woman can claim the title; it is *mine*."

"But Mrs. James Helstone — but my father's wife, whom I do not remember ever to have seen, she is my mother?"

"She *is* your mother. James Helstone was *my* husband. I say you are *mine*. I have proved it. I thought perhaps you were all his, which would have been a cruel dispensation for me. I find it is *not* so. God permitted me to be the parent of my child's mind. It belongs to me; it is my property — my *right*. These features are James's own. He had a fine face when he was young, and not altered by error. Papa, my darling, gave you your blue eyes and soft brown hair; he gave you the oval of your face and the regularity of your lineaments — the outside *he* conferred; but the heart and the brain are *mine*. The germs are from *me*, and they are improved, they are developed to excellence. I esteem and approve my child as highly as I do most fondly love her."

"Is what I hear true? Is it no dream?"

"I wish it were as true that the substance and colour of health were restored to your cheek."

"My own mother! is she one I can be so fond of as I can of you? People generally did not like her — so I have been given to understand."

"They told you that? Well, your mother now tells you that, not having the gift to please people generally, for their approbation she does not care. Her thoughts are centred in her child. Does that child welcome or reject her?"

"But if you *are* my mother, the world is all changed to me. Surely I can live. I should like to recover — — "

"You *must* recover. You drew life and strength from my breast when you were a tiny, fair infant, over whose blue eyes I used to weep, fearing I beheld in your very beauty the sign of qualities that had entered my heart like iron, and pierced through my soul like a sword. Daughter! we have been long parted; I return now to cherish you again."

She held her to her bosom; she cradled her in her arms; she rocked her softly, as if lulling a young child to sleep.

"My mother — my own mother!"

The offspring nestled to the parent; that parent, feeling the endearment and hearing the appeal, gathered her closer still. She covered her with noiseless kisses; she murmured love over her, like a cushat fostering its young.

There was silence in the room for a long while.

"Does my uncle know?"

"Your uncle knows. I told him when I first came to stay with you here."

"Did you recognize me when we first met at Fieldhead?"

"How could it be otherwise? Mr. and Miss Helstone being announced, I was prepared to see my child."

"It was that, then, which moved you. I saw you disturbed."

"You saw nothing, Caroline; I can cover my feelings. You can never tell what an age of strange sensation I lived, during the two minutes that elapsed between the report of your name and your entrance. You can never tell how your look, mien, carriage, shook me."

"Why? Were you disappointed?"

"What will she be like? I had asked myself; and when I saw what you were like, I could have dropped."

"Mamma, why?"

"I trembled in your presence. I said, I will never own her; she shall never know me."

"But I said and did nothing remarkable. I felt a little diffident at the thought of an introduction to strangers — that was all."

"I soon saw you were diffident. That was the first thing which reassured me. Had you been rustic, clownish, awkward, I should have been content."

"You puzzle me."

"I had reason to dread a fair outside, to mistrust a popular bearing, to shudder before distinction, grace, and courtesy. Beauty and affability had come in my way when I was recluse, desolate, young, and ignorant — a toil-worn governess perishing of uncheered labour, breaking down before her time. These, Caroline, when they smiled on me, I mistook for angels. I followed them home; and when into their hands I had given without reserve my whole chance of future happiness, it was my lot to witness a transfiguration on the domestic hearth — to see the white mask lifted, the bright disguise put away, and opposite me sat down — — O God, I *have* suffered!"

She sank on the pillow.

"I *have* suffered! None saw — none knew. There was no sympathy, no redemption, no redress!"

"Take comfort, mother. It is over now."

"It is over, and not fruitlessly. I tried to keep the word of His patience. He kept me in the days of my anguish. I was afraid with terror — I was troubled. Through great tribulation He brought me through to a salvation revealed in this last time. My fear had torment; He has cast it out. He has given me in its stead perfect love. But, Caroline — — "

Thus she invoked her daughter after a pause.

"Mother!"

"I charge you, when you next look on your father's monument, to respect the name chiselled there. To you he did only good. On you he conferred his whole treasure of beauties, nor added to them one dark defect. All *you* derived from him is excellent. You owe him gratitude. Leave, between him and me, the settlement of our mutual account. Meddle not. God is the arbiter. This world's laws never came near us — never! They were powerless as a rotten bulrush to protect me — impotent as idiot babblings to restrain him! As you said, it is all over now; the grave lies between us. There he sleeps, in that church. To his dust I say this night, what I have never said before, 'James, slumber peacefully! See! your terrible debt is cancelled! Look! I wipe out the long, black account with my own hand! James, your child atones. This living likeness of you — this thing with your perfect features — this one good gift you gave me has nestled affectionately to my heart, and tenderly called me "mother." Husband, rest forgiven!'"

"Dearest mother, that is right! Can papa's spirit hear us? Is he comforted to know that we still love him?"

"I said nothing of love. I spoke of forgiveness. Mind the truth, child; I said nothing of love! On the threshold of eternity, should he be there to see me enter, will I maintain that."

"O mother, you must have suffered!"

"O child, the human heart *can* suffer! It can hold more tears than the ocean holds waters. We never know how deep, how wide it is, till misery begins to unbind her clouds, and fill it with rushing blackness."

"Mother, forget."

"Forget!" she said, with the strangest spectre of a laugh. "The north pole will rush to the south, and the headlands of Europe be locked into the bays of Australia ere I forget."

"Hush, mother! Rest! Be at peace!"

And the child lulled the parent, as the parent had erst lulled the child. At last Mrs. Pryor wept. She then grew calmer. She resumed those tender cares agitation had for a moment suspended. Replacing her daughter on the couch, she smoothed the pillow and spread the sheet. The soft hair whose locks were loosened she rearranged, the damp brow she refreshed with a cool, fragrant essence.

“Mamma, let them bring a candle, that I may see you; and tell my uncle to come into this room by-and-by. I want to hear him say that I am your daughter. And, mamma, take your supper here. Don’t leave me for one minute to-night.”

“O Caroline, it is well you are gentle! You will say to me, Go, and I shall go; Come, and I shall come; Do this, and I shall do it. You inherit a certain manner as well as certain features. It will always be ‘mamma’ prefacing a mandate — softly spoken, though, from you, thank God! Well,” she added, under her breath, “he spoke softly too, once, like a flute breathing tenderness; and then, when the world was not by to listen, discords that split the nerves and curdled the blood — sounds to inspire insanity.”

“It seems so natural, mamma, to ask you for this and that. I shall want nobody but you to be near me, or to do anything for me. But do not let me be troublesome. Check me if I encroach.”

“You must not depend on me to check you; you must keep guard over yourself. I have little moral courage; the want of it is my bane. It is that which has made me an unnatural parent — which has kept me apart from my child during the ten years which have elapsed since my husband’s death left me at liberty to claim her. It was that which first unnerved my arms and permitted the infant I might have retained a while longer to be snatched prematurely from their embrace.”

“How, mamma?”

“I let you go as a babe, because you were pretty, and I feared your loveliness, deeming it the stamp of perversity. They sent me your portrait, taken at eight years old; that portrait confirmed my fears. Had it shown me a sunburnt little rustic — a heavy, blunt-featured, commonplace child — I should have hastened to claim you; but there, under the silver paper, I saw blooming the delicacy of an aristocratic flower — ‘little lady’ was written on every trait. I had too recently crawled from under the yoke of the fine gentleman — escaped galled, crushed, paralyzed, dying — to dare to encounter his still finer and most fairy-like representative. My sweet little lady overwhelmed me with dismay; her air of native elegance froze my very marrow. In my experience I had not met with truth, modesty, good principle as the concomitants of beauty. A form so straight and fine, I argued, must conceal a mind warped and cruel. I had little faith in the power of education to rectify such a mind; or rather, I entirely misdoubted my own ability to influence it. Caroline, I dared not undertake to rear you. I resolved to leave you in your uncle’s hands. Matthewson Helstone I knew, if an austere, was an upright man. He and all the world thought hardly of me for my strange, unmotherly resolve, and I deserved to be misjudged.”

“Mamma, why did you call yourself Mrs. Pryor?”

"It was a name in my mother's family. I adopted it that I might live unmolested. My married name recalled too vividly my married life; I could not bear it. Besides, threats were uttered of forcing me to return to bondage. It could not be. Rather a bier for a bed, the grave for a home. My new name sheltered me. I resumed under its screen my old occupation of teaching. At first it scarcely procured me the means of sustaining life; but how savoury was hunger when I fasted in peace! How safe seemed the darkness and chill of an unkindled hearth when no lurid reflection from terror crimsoned its desolation! How serene was solitude, when I feared not the irruption of violence and vice!"

"But, mamma, you have been in this neighbourhood before. How did it happen that when you reappeared here with Miss Keeldar you were not recognized?"

"I only paid a short visit, as a bride, twenty years ago, and then I was very different to what I am now — slender, almost as slender as my daughter is at this day. My complexion, my very features are changed; my hair, my style of dress — everything is altered. You cannot fancy me a slim young person, attired in scanty drapery of white muslin, with bare arms, bracelets and necklace of beads, and hair disposed in round Grecian curls above my forehead?"

"You must, indeed, have been different. Mamma, I heard the front door open. If it is my uncle coming in, just ask him to step upstairs, and let me hear his assurance that I am truly awake and collected, and not dreaming or delirious."

The rector, of his own accord, was mounting the stairs, and Mrs. Pryor summoned him to his niece's apartment.

"She's not worse, I hope?" he inquired hastily.

"I think her better. She is disposed to converse; she seems stronger."

"Good!" said he, brushing quickly into the room. — "Ha, Cary! how do? Did you drink my cup of tea? I made it for you just as I like it myself."

"I drank it every drop, uncle. It did me good; it has made me quite alive. I have a wish for company, so I begged Mrs. Pryor to call you in."

The respected ecclesiastic looked pleased, and yet embarrassed. He was willing enough to bestow his company on his sick niece for ten minutes, since it was her whim to wish it; but what means to employ for her entertainment he knew not. He hemmed — he fidgeted.

"You'll be up in a trice," he observed, by way of saying something. "The little weakness will soon pass off; and then you must drink port wine — a pipe, if you can — and eat game and oysters. I'll get them for you, if they are to be had anywhere. Bless me! we'll make you as strong as Samson before we're done with you."

"Who is that lady, uncle, standing beside you at the bed-foot?"

"Good God!" he ejaculated. "She's not wandering, is she, ma'am?"

Mrs. Pryor smiled.

"I am wandering in a pleasant world," said Caroline, in a soft, happy voice, "and I want you to tell me whether it is real or visionary. What lady is that? Give her a name, uncle."

"We must have Dr. Rile again, ma'am; or better still, MacTurk. He's less of a humbug. Thomas must saddle the pony and go for him."

"No; I don't want a doctor. Mamma shall be my only physician. Now, do you understand, uncle?"

Mr. Helstone pushed up his spectacles from his nose to his forehead, handled his snuff-box, and administered to himself a portion of the contents. Thus fortified, he answered briefly, "I see daylight. You've told her then, ma'am?"

"And is it *true*?" demanded Caroline, rising on her pillow. "Is she *really* my mother?"

"You won't cry, or make any scene, or turn hysterical, if I answer Yes?"

"Cry! I'd cry if you said *No*. It would be terrible to be disappointed now. But give her a name. How do you call her?"

"I call this stout lady in a quaint black dress, who looks young enough to wear much smarter raiment, if she would — I call her Agnes Helstone. She married my brother James, and is his widow."

"And my mother?"

"What a little sceptic it is! Look at her small face, Mrs. Pryor, scarcely larger than the palm of my hand, alive with acuteness and eagerness." To Caroline — "She had the trouble of bringing you into the world at any rate. Mind you show your duty to her by quickly getting well, and repairing the waste of these cheeks. — Heigh-ho! she used to be plump. What she has done with it all I can't, for the life of me, divine."

"If *wishing* to get well will help me, I shall not be long sick. This morning I had no reason and no strength to wish it."

Fanny here tapped at the door, and said that supper was ready.

"Uncle, if you please, you may send me a little bit of supper — anything you like, from your own plate. That is wiser than going into hysterics, is it not?"

"It is spoken like a sage, Cary. See if I don't cater for you judiciously. When women are sensible, and, above all, intelligible, I can get on with them. It is only the vague, superfine sensations, and extremely wire-drawn notions, that put me about. Let a woman ask me to give her an edible or a wearable — be the same a roc's egg or the breastplate of Aaron, a share of St. John's locusts and honey or the leathern girdle about his loins — I can, at least, understand the demand; but when they pine for they know not what — sympathy, sentiment, some of these indefinite abstractions — I can't do it; I don't know it; I haven't got it. — Madam, accept my arm."

Mrs. Pryor signified that she should stay with her daughter that evening. Helstone, accordingly, left them together. He soon returned, bringing a plate in his own consecrated hand.

“This is chicken,” he said, “but we’ll have partridge to-morrow. — Lift her up, and put a shawl over her. On my word, I understand nursing. — Now, here is the very same little silver fork you used when you first came to the rectory. That strikes me as being what you may call a happy thought — a delicate attention. Take it, Cary, and munch away cleverly.”

Caroline did her best. Her uncle frowned to see that her powers were so limited. He prophesied, however, great things for the future; and as she praised the morsel he had brought, and smiled gratefully in his face, he stooped over her pillow, kissed her, and said, with a broken, rugged accent, “Good-night, bairnie! God bless thee!”

Caroline enjoyed such peaceful rest that night, circled by her mother’s arms, and pillowed on her breast, that she forgot to wish for any other stay; and though more than one feverish dream came to her in slumber, yet, when she woke up panting, so happy and contented a feeling returned with returning consciousness that her agitation was soothed almost as soon as felt.

As to the mother, she spent the night like Jacob at Peniel. Till break of day she wrestled with God in earnest prayer.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WEST WIND BLOWS.

Not always do those who dare such divine conflict prevail. Night after night the sweat of agony may burst dark on the forehead; the supplicant may cry for mercy with that soundless voice the soul utters when its appeal is to the Invisible. "Spare my beloved," it may implore. "Heal my life's life. Rend not from me what long affection entwines with my whole nature. God of heaven, bend, hear, be clement!" And after this cry and strife the sun may rise and see him worsted. That opening morn, which used to salute him with the whisper of zephyrs, the carol of skylarks, may breathe, as its first accents, from the dear lips which colour and heat have quitted, "Oh! I have had a suffering night. This morning I am worse. I have tried to rise. I cannot. Dreams I am unused to have troubled me."

Then the watcher approaches the patient's pillow, and sees a new and strange moulding of the familiar features, feels at once that the insufferable moment draws nigh, knows that it is God's will his idol shall be broken, and bends his head, and subdues his soul to the sentence he cannot avert and scarce can bear.

Happy Mrs. Pryor! She was still praying, unconscious that the summer sun hung above the hills, when her child softly woke in her arms. No piteous, unconscious moaning — sound which so wastes our strength that, even if we have sworn to be firm, a rush of unconquerable tears sweeps away the oath — preceded her waking. No space of deaf apathy followed. The first words spoken were not those of one becoming estranged from this world, and already permitted to stray at times into realms foreign to the living. Caroline evidently remembered with clearness what had happened.

"Mamma, I have slept *so* well. I only dreamed and woke twice."

Mrs. Pryor rose with a start, that her daughter might not see the joyful tears called into her eyes by that affectionate word "mamma," and the welcome assurance that followed it.

For many days the mother dared rejoice only with trembling. That first revival seemed like the flicker of a dying lamp. If the flame streamed up bright one moment, the next it sank dim in the socket. Exhaustion followed close on excitement.

There was always a touching endeavour to *appear* better, but too often ability refused to second will; too often the attempt to bear up failed. The effort to eat, to talk, to look cheerful, was unsuccessful. Many an hour passed during which Mrs. Pryor feared that the chords of life could never more be strengthened, though the time of their breaking might be deferred.

During this space the mother and daughter seemed left almost alone in the neighbourhood. It was the close of August; the weather was fine — that is to say, it was very dry and very dusty, for an arid wind had been blowing from the east this month past; very cloudless, too, though a pale haze, stationary in the atmosphere, seemed to rob of all depth of tone the blue of heaven, of all freshness the verdure of earth, and of all glow the light of day. Almost every family in Briarfield was absent on an excursion. Miss Keeldar and her friends were at the seaside; so were Mrs. Yorke's household. Mr. Hall and Louis Moore, between whom a spontaneous intimacy seemed to have arisen — the result, probably, of harmony of views and temperament — were gone "up north" on a pedestrian excursion to the Lakes. Even Hortense, who would fain have stayed at home and aided Mrs. Pryor in nursing Caroline, had been so earnestly entreated by Miss Mann to accompany her once more to Wormwood Wells, in the hope of alleviating sufferings greatly aggravated by the insalubrious weather, that she felt obliged to comply; indeed, it was not in her nature to refuse a request that at once appealed to her goodness of heart, and, by a confession of dependency, flattered her *amour propre*. As for Robert, from Birmingham he had gone on to London, where he still sojourned.

So long as the breath of Asiatic deserts parched Caroline's lips and fevered her veins, her physical convalescence could not keep pace with her returning mental tranquillity; but there came a day when the wind ceased to sob at the eastern gable of the rectory, and at the oriel window of the church. A little cloud like a man's hand arose in the west; gusts from the same quarter drove it on and spread it wide; wet and tempest prevailed a while. When that was over the sun broke out genially, heaven regained its azure, and earth its green; the livid cholera-tint had vanished from the face of nature; the hills rose clear round the horizon, absolved from that pale malaria-haze.

Caroline's youth could now be of some avail to her, and so could her mother's nurture. Both, crowned by God's blessing, sent in the pure west wind blowing soft as fresh through the ever-open chamber lattice, rekindled her long-languishing energies. At last Mrs. Pryor saw that it was permitted to hope: a genuine, material convalescence had commenced. It was not merely Caroline's smile which was brighter, or her spirits which were cheered, but a certain look had passed from her face and eye — a look dread and indescribable, but which will easily be recalled by those who have watched the couch of dangerous disease. Long before the emaciated outlines of her aspect began to fill, or its departed colour to return, a more subtle change took place; all grew softer and warmer. Instead of a marble mask and glassy eye, Mrs. Pryor saw laid on the pillow a face pale and wasted enough, perhaps more haggard than the other appearance, but less awful; for it was a sick, living girl, not a mere white mould or rigid piece of statuary.

Now, too, she was not always petitioning to drink. The words, "I am *so* thirsty," ceased to be her plaint. Sometimes, when she had swallowed a morsel, she would say it had revived her. All descriptions of food were no longer equally distasteful; she could be induced, sometimes, to indicate a preference. With what trembling pleasure and anxious care did not her nurse prepare what was selected! How she watched her as she partook of it!

Nourishment brought strength. She could sit up. Then she longed to breathe the fresh air, to revisit her flowers, to see how the fruit had ripened. Her uncle, always liberal, had bought a garden-chair for her express use. He carried her down in his own arms, and placed her in it himself, and William Farren was there to wheel her round the walks, to show her what he had done amongst her plants, to take her directions for further work.

William and she found plenty to talk about. They had a dozen topics in common — interesting to them, unimportant to the rest of the world. They took a similar interest in animals, birds, insects, and plants; they held similar doctrines about humanity to the lower creation, and had a similar turn for minute observation on points of natural history. The nest and proceedings of some ground-bees, which had burrowed in the turf under an old cherry-tree, was one subject of interest; the haunts of certain hedge-sparrows, and the welfare of certain pearly eggs and callow fledglings, another.

Had *Chambers's Journal* existed in those days, it would certainly have formed Miss Helstone's and Farren's favourite periodical. She would have subscribed for it, and to him each number would duly have been lent; both would have put implicit faith and found great savour in its marvellous anecdotes of animal sagacity.

This is a digression, but it suffices to explain why Caroline would have no other hand than William's to guide her chair, and why his society and conversation sufficed to give interest to her garden-airings.

Mrs. Pryor, walking near, wondered how her daughter could be so much at ease with a "man of the people." *She* found it impossible to speak to him otherwise than stiffly. She felt as if a great gulf lay between her caste and his, and that to cross it or meet him half-way would be to degrade herself. She gently asked Caroline, "Are you not afraid, my dear, to converse with that person so unreservedly? He may presume, and become troublesomely garrulous."

"William presume, mamma? You don't know him. He never presumes. He is altogether too proud and sensitive to do so. William has very fine feelings."

And Mrs. Pryor smiled sceptically at the naïve notion of that rough-handed, rough-headed, fustian-clad clown having "fine feelings."

Farren, for his part, showed Mrs. Pryor only a very sulky brow. He knew when he was misjudged, and was apt to turn unmanageable with such as failed to give him his due.

The evening restored Caroline entirely to her mother, and Mrs. Pryor liked the evening; for then, alone with her daughter, no human shadow came between her and what she loved. During the day she would have her stiff demeanour and cool moments, as was her wont. Between her and Mr. Helstone a very respectful but most rigidly ceremonious intercourse was kept up. Anything like familiarity would have bred contempt at once in one or both these personages; but by dint of strict civility and well-maintained distance they got on very smoothly.

Towards the servants Mrs. Pryor's bearing was not uncourteous, but shy, freezing, ungenial. Perhaps it was diffidence rather than pride which made her appear so haughty; but, as was to be expected, Fanny and Eliza failed to make the distinction, and she was unpopular with them accordingly. She felt the effect produced; it rendered her at times dissatisfied with herself for faults she could not help, and with all else dejected, chill, and taciturn.

This mood changed to Caroline's influence, and to that influence alone. The dependent fondness of her nursling, the natural affection of her child, came over her suavely. Her frost fell away, her rigidity unbent; she grew smiling and pliant. Not that Caroline made any wordy profession of love — that would ill have suited Mrs. Pryor; she would have read therein the proof of insincerity — but she hung on her with easy dependence; she confided in her with fearless reliance. These things contented the mother's heart.

She liked to hear her daughter say, "Mamma, do this;" "Please, mamma, fetch me that;" "Mamma, read to me;" "Sing a little, mamma."

Nobody else — not one living thing — had ever so claimed her services, so looked for help at her hand. Other people were always more or less reserved and stiff with her, as she was reserved and stiff with them; other people betrayed consciousness of and annoyance at her weak points. Caroline no more showed such wounding sagacity or reproachful sensitiveness now than she had done when a suckling of three months old.

Yet Caroline could find fault. Blind to the constitutional defects that were incurable, she had her eyes wide open to the acquired habits that were susceptible of remedy. On certain points she would quite artlessly lecture her parent; and that parent, instead of being hurt, felt a sensation of pleasure in discovering that the girl *dared* lecture her, that she was so much at home with her.

"Mamma, I am determined you shall not wear that old gown any more. Its fashion is not becoming; it is too strait in the skirt. You shall put on your black silk every afternoon. In that you look nice; it suits you. And you shall have a black satin dress for Sundays — a real satin, not a satinet or any of the shams. And, mamma, when you get the new one, mind you must wear it."

"My dear, I thought of the black silk serving me as a best dress for many years yet, and I wished to buy you several things."

"Nonsense, mamma. My uncle gives me cash to get what I want. You know he is generous enough; and I have set my heart on seeing you in a black satin. Get it soon, and let it be made by a dressmaker of my recommending. Let me choose the pattern. You always want to disguise yourself like a grandmother. You would persuade one that you are old and ugly. Not at all!

On the contrary, when well dressed and cheerful you are very comely indeed; your smile is so pleasant, your teeth are so white, your hair is still such a pretty light colour. And then you speak like a young lady, with such a clear, fine tone, and you sing better than any young lady I ever heard. Why do you wear such dresses and bonnets, mamma, such as nobody else ever wears?"

"Does it annoy you, Caroline?"

"Very much; it vexes me even. People say you are miserly; and yet you are not, for you give liberally to the poor and to religious societies — though your gifts are conveyed so secretly and quietly that they are known to few except the receivers. But I will be your lady's-maid myself. When I get a little stronger I will set to work, and you must be good, mamma, and do as I bid you."

And Caroline, sitting near her mother, rearranged her muslin handkerchief and resmoothed her hair.

"My own mamma," then she went on, as if pleasing herself with the thought of their relationship, "who belongs to me, and to whom I belong! I am a rich girl now. I have something I can love well, and not be afraid of loving. Mamma, who gave you this little brooch? Let me unpin it and look at it."

Mrs. Pryor, who usually shrank from meddling fingers and near approach, allowed the license complacently.

"Did papa give you this, mamma?"

"My sister gave it me — my only sister, Cary. Would that your Aunt Caroline had lived to see her niece!"

"Have you nothing of papa's — no trinket, no gift of his?"

"I have one thing."

"That you prize?"

"That I prize."

"Valuable and pretty?"

"Invaluable and sweet to me."

"Show it, mamma. Is it here or at Fieldhead?"

"It is talking to me now, leaning on me. Its arms are round me."

"Ah, mamma, you mean your teasing daughter, who will never let you alone; who, when you go into your room, cannot help running to seek for you; who follows you upstairs and down, like a dog."

"Whose features still give me such a strange thrill sometimes. I half fear your fair looks yet, child."

"You don't; you can't. Mamma, I am sorry papa was not good. I do so wish he had been. Wickedness spoils and poisons all pleasant things. It kills love. If you and I thought each other wicked, we could not love each other, could we?"

"And if we could not trust each other, Cary?"

"How miserable we should be! Mother, before I knew you I had an apprehension that you were not good — that I could not esteem you. That dread damped my wish to see you. And now my heart is elate because I find you perfect — almost; kind, clever, nice. Your sole fault is that you are old-fashioned, and of that I shall cure you. Mamma, put your work down; read to me. I like your southern accent; it is so pure, so soft. It has no rugged burr, no nasal twang, such as almost every one's voice here in the north has. My uncle and Mr. Hall say that you are a fine reader, mamma. Mr. Hall said he never heard any lady read with such propriety of expression or purity of accent."

"I wish I could reciprocate the compliment, Cary; but, really, the first time I heard your truly excellent friend read and preach I could not understand his broad northern tongue."

"Could you understand me, mamma? Did I seem to speak roughly?"

"No. I almost wished you had, as I wished you had looked unpolished. Your father, Caroline, naturally spoke well, quite otherwise than your worthy uncle — correctly, gently, smoothly. You inherit the gift."

"Poor papa! When he was so agreeable, why was he not good?"

"Why he was *as* he was — and happily of that you, child, can form no conception — I cannot tell. It is a deep mystery. The key is in the hands of his Maker. There I leave it."

"Mamma, you will keep stitching, stitching away. Put down the sewing; I am an enemy to it. It cumbers your lap, and I want it for my head; it engages your eyes, and I want them for a book. Here is your favourite — Cowper."

These importunities were the mother's pleasure. If ever she delayed compliance, it was only to hear them repeated, and to enjoy her child's soft, half-playful, half-petulant urgency. And then, when she yielded, Caroline would say archly, "You will spoil me, mamma. I always thought I should like to be spoiled, and I find it very sweet." So did Mrs. Pryor.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OLD COPY-BOOKS.

By the time the Fieldhead party returned to Briarfield Caroline was nearly well. Miss Keeldar, who had received news by post of her friend's convalescence, hardly suffered an hour to elapse between her arrival at home and her first call at the rectory.

A shower of rain was falling gently, yet fast, on the late flowers and russet autumn shrubs, when the garden wicket was heard to swing open, and Shirley's well-known form passed the window. On her entrance her feelings were evinced in her own peculiar fashion. When deeply moved by serious fears or joys she was not garrulous. The strong emotion was rarely suffered to influence her tongue, and even her eye refused it more than a furtive and fitful conquest. She took Caroline in her arms, gave her one look, one kiss, then said, "You are better."

And a minute after, "I see you are safe now; but take care. God grant your health may be called on to sustain no more shocks!"

She proceeded to talk fluently about the journey. In the midst of vivacious discourse her eye still wandered to Caroline. There spoke in its light a deep solicitude, some trouble, and some amaze.

"She may be better," it said, "but how weak she still is! What peril she has come through!"

Suddenly her glance reverted to Mrs. Pryor. It pierced her through.

"When will my governess return to me?" she asked.

"May I tell her all?" demanded Caroline of her mother. Leave being signified by a gesture, Shirley was presently enlightened on what had happened in her absence.

"Very good," was the cool comment — "very good! But it is no news to me."

"What! did you know?"

"I guessed long since the whole business. I have heard somewhat of Mrs. Pryor's history — not from herself, but from others. With every detail of Mr. James Helstone's career and character I was acquainted. An afternoon's sitting and conversation with Miss Mann had rendered me familiar therewith; also he is one of Mrs. Yorke's warning examples — one of the blood-red lights she hangs out to scare young ladies from matrimony. I believe I should have been sceptical about the truth of the portrait traced by such fingers — both these ladies take a dark pleasure in offering to view the dark side of life — but I questioned Mr. Yorke on the subject, and he said, 'Shirley, my woman, if you want to know aught about yond' James Helstone, I can only say he was a man-tiger. He was handsome, dissolute, soft, treacherous, courteous, cruel — — ' Don't cry, Cary; we'll say no more about it."

"I am not crying, Shirley; or if I am, it is nothing. Go on; you are no friend if you withhold from me the truth. I hate that false plan of disguising, mutilating the truth."

"Fortunately I have said pretty nearly all that I have to say, except that your uncle himself confirmed Mr. Yorke's words; for he too scorns a lie, and deals in none of those conventional subterfuges that are shabbier than lies."

"But papa is dead; they should let him alone now."

"They should; and we *will* let him alone. Cry away, Cary; it will do you good. It is wrong to check natural tears. Besides, I choose to please myself by sharing an idea that at this moment beams in your mother's eye while she looks at you. Every drop blots out a sin. Weep! your tears have the virtue which the rivers of Damascus lacked. Like Jordan, they can cleanse a leprous memory."

"Madam," she continued, addressing Mrs. Pryor, "did you think I could be daily in the habit of seeing you and your daughter together — marking your marvellous similarity in many points, observing (pardon me) your irrepressible emotions in the presence and still more in the absence of your child — and not form my own conjectures? I formed them, and they are literally correct. I shall begin to think myself shrewd."

"And you said nothing?" observed Caroline, who soon regained the quiet control of her feelings.

"Nothing. I had no warrant to breathe a word on the subject. *My* business it was not; I abstained from making it such."

"You guessed so deep a secret, and did not hint that you guessed it?"

"Is that so difficult?"

"It is not like you."

"How do you know?"

"You are not reserved; you are frankly communicative."

"I may be communicative, yet know where to stop. In showing my treasure I may withhold a gem or two — a curious, unbought graven stone — an amulet of whose mystic glitter I rarely permit even myself a glimpse. Good-day."

Caroline thus seemed to get a view of Shirley's character under a novel aspect. Ere long the prospect was renewed; it opened upon her.

No sooner had she regained sufficient strength to bear a change of scene — the excitement of a little society — than Miss Keeldar sued daily for her presence at Fieldhead. Whether Shirley had become wearied of her honoured relatives is not known. She did not say she was; but she claimed and retained Caroline with an eagerness which proved that an addition to that worshipful company was not unwelcome.

The Sympsons were church people. Of course the rector's niece was received by them with courtesy. Mr. Sympson proved to be a man of spotless respectability, worrying temper, pious principles, and worldly views; his lady was a very good woman — patient, kind, well-bred. She had been brought up on a narrow system of views, starved on a few prejudices — a mere handful of bitter herbs; a few preferences, soaked till their natural flavour was extracted, and with no seasoning added in the cooking; some excellent principles, made up in a stiff raised crust of bigotry difficult to digest. Far too submissive was she to complain of this diet or to ask for a crumb beyond it.

The daughters were an example to their sex. They were tall, with a Roman nose apiece. They had been educated faultlessly. All they did was well done. History and the most solid books had cultivated their minds. Principles and opinions they possessed which could not be mended. More exactly-regulated lives, feelings, manners, habits, it would have been difficult to find anywhere. They knew by heart a certain young-ladies'-schoolroom code of laws on language, demeanour, etc.; themselves never deviated from its curious little pragmatical provisions, and they regarded with secret whispered horror all deviations in others. The Abomination of Desolation was no mystery to them; they had discovered that unutterable Thing in the characteristic others call Originality. Quick were they to recognize the signs of this evil; and wherever they saw its trace — whether in look, word, or deed; whether they read it in the fresh, vigorous style of a book, or listened to it in interesting, unhackneyed, pure, expressive language — they shuddered, they recoiled. Danger was above their heads, peril about their steps. What was this strange thing? Being unintelligible it must be bad. Let it be denounced and chained up.

Henry Sympson, the only son and youngest child of the family, was a boy of fifteen. He generally kept with his tutor. When he left him, he sought his cousin Shirley. This boy differed from his sisters. He was little, lame, and pale; his large eyes shone somewhat languidly in a wan orbit. They were, indeed, usually rather dim, but they were capable of illumination. At times they could not only shine, but blaze. Inward emotion could likewise give colour to his cheek and decision to his crippled movements. Henry's mother loved him; she thought his peculiarities were a mark of election. He was not like other children, she allowed. She believed him regenerate — a new Samuel — called of God from his birth. He was to be a clergyman. Mr. and the Misses Sympson, not understanding the youth, let him much alone. Shirley made him her pet, and he made Shirley his playmate.

In the midst of this family circle, or rather outside it, moved the tutor — the satellite.

Yes, Louis Moore was a satellite of the house of Sympson — connected, yet apart; ever attendant, ever distant. Each member of that correct family treated him with proper dignity. The father was austerely civil, sometimes irritable; the mother, being a kind woman, was attentive, but formal; the daughters saw in him an abstraction, not a man. It seemed, by their manner, that their brother's tutor did not live for them. They were learned; so was he — but not for them. They were accomplished; he had talents too, imperceptible to their senses. The most spirited sketch from his fingers was a blank to their eyes; the most original observation from his lips fell unheard on their ears. Nothing could exceed the propriety of their behaviour.

I should have said nothing could have equalled it; but I remember a fact which strangely astonished Caroline Helstone. It was — to discover that her cousin had absolutely *no* sympathizing friend at Fieldhead; that to Miss Keeldar he was as much a mere teacher, as little a gentleman, as little a man, as to the estimable Misses Sympson.

What had befallen the kind-hearted Shirley that she should be so indifferent to the dreary position of a fellow-creature thus isolated under her roof? She was not, perhaps, haughty to him, but she never noticed him — she let him alone. He came and went, spoke or was silent, and she rarely recognized his existence.

As to Louis Moore himself, he had the air of a man used to this life, and who had made up his mind to bear it for a time. His faculties seemed walled up in him, and were unmurmuring in their captivity. He never laughed; he seldom smiled; he was uncomplaining. He fulfilled the round of his duties scrupulously. His pupil loved him; he asked nothing more than civility from the rest of the world. It even appeared that he would accept nothing more — in that abode at least; for when his cousin Caroline made gentle overtures of friendship, he did not encourage them — he rather avoided than sought her. One living thing alone, besides his pale, crippled scholar, he fondled in the house, and that was the ruffianly Tartar, who, sullen and impracticable to others, acquired a singular partiality for him — a partiality so marked that sometimes, when Moore, summoned to a meal, entered the room and sat down unwelcomed, Tartar would rise from his lair at Shirley's feet and betake himself to the taciturn tutor. Once — but once — she noticed the desertion, and holding out her white hand, and speaking softly, tried to coax him back. Tartar looked, slavered, and sighed, as his manner was, but yet disregarded the invitation, and coolly settled himself on his haunches at Louis Moore's side. That gentleman drew the dog's big, black-muzzled head on to his knee, patted him, and smiled one little smile to himself.

An acute observer might have remarked, in the course of the same evening, that after Tartar had resumed his allegiance to Shirley, and was once more couched near her footstool, the audacious tutor by one word and gesture fascinated him again. He pricked up his ears at the word; he started erect at the gesture, and came, with head lovingly depressed, to receive the expected caress. As it was given, the significant smile again rippled across Moore's quiet face.

"Shirley," said Caroline one day, as they two were sitting alone in the summer-house, “did you know that my cousin Louis was tutor in your uncle’s family before the Sympsons came down here?”

Shirley’s reply was not so prompt as her responses usually were, but at last she answered, “Yes — of course; I knew it well.”

“I thought you must have been aware of the circumstance.”

“Well! what then?”

“It puzzles me to guess how it chanced that you never mentioned it to me.”

“Why should it puzzle you?”

“It seems odd. I cannot account for it. You talk a great deal — you talk freely. How was that circumstance never touched on?”

“Because it never was,” and Shirley laughed.

“You are a singular being!” observed her friend. “I thought I knew you quite well; I begin to find myself mistaken. You were silent as the grave about Mrs. Pryor, and now again here is another secret. But why you made it a secret is the mystery to me.”

“I never made it a secret; I had no reason for so doing. If you had asked me who Henry’s tutor was, I would have told you. Besides, I thought you knew.”

“I am puzzled about more things than one in this matter. You don’t like poor Louis. Why? Are you impatient at what you perhaps consider his *servile* position? Do you wish that Robert’s brother were more highly placed?”

“Robert’s brother, indeed!” was the exclamation, uttered in a tone like the accents of scorn; and with a movement of proud impatience Shirley snatched a rose from a branch peeping through the open lattice.

“Yes,” repeated Caroline, with mild firmness, “Robert’s brother. He *is* thus closely related to Gérard Moore of the Hollow, though nature has not given him features so handsome or an air so noble as his kinsman; but his blood is as good, and he is as much a gentleman were he free.”

“Wise, humble, pious Caroline!” exclaimed Shirley ironically. “Men and angels, hear her! We should not despise plain features, nor a laborious yet honest occupation, should we? Look at the subject of your panegyric. He is there in the garden,” she continued, pointing through an aperture in the clustering creepers; and by that aperture Louis Moore was visible, coming slowly down the walk.

“He is not ugly, Shirley,” pleaded Caroline; “he is not ignoble. He is sad; silence seals his mind. But I believe him to be intelligent; and be certain, if he had not something very commendable in his disposition, Mr. Hall would never seek his society as he does.”

Shirley laughed; she laughed again, each time with a slightly sarcastic sound. “Well, well,” was her comment. “On the plea of the man being Cyril Hall’s friend and Robert Moore’s brother, we’ll just tolerate his existence; won’t we, Cary? You believe him to be intelligent, do you? Not quite an idiot — eh? Something commendable in his disposition! — *id est*, not an absolute ruffian. Good! Your representations have weight with me; and to prove that they have, should he come this way I will speak to him."

He approached the summer-house. Unconscious that it was tenanted, he sat down on the step. Tartar, now his customary companion, had followed him, and he couched across his feet.

"Old boy!" said Louis, pulling his tawny ear, or rather the mutilated remains of that organ, torn and chewed in a hundred battles, "the autumn sun shines as pleasantly on us as on the fairest and richest. This garden is none of ours, but we enjoy its greenness and perfume, don't we?"

He sat silent, still caressing Tartar, who slobbered with exceeding affection. A faint twittering commenced among the trees round. Something fluttered down as light as leaves. They were little birds, which, lighting on the sward at shy distance, hopped as if expectant.

"The small brown elves actually remember that I fed them the other day," again soliloquized Louis. "They want some more biscuit. To-day I forgot to save a fragment. Eager little sprites, I have not a crumb for you."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew it out empty.

"A want easily supplied," whispered the listening Miss Keeldar.

She took from her reticule a morsel of sweet-cake; for that repository was never destitute of something available to throw to the chickens, young ducks, or sparrows. She crumbled it, and bending over his shoulder, put the crumbs into his hand.

"There," said she — "there is a providence for the improvident."

"This September afternoon is pleasant," observed Louis Moore, as, not at all discomposed, he calmly cast the crumbs on to the grass.

"Even for you?"

"As pleasant for me as for any monarch."

"You take a sort of harsh, solitary triumph in drawing pleasure out of the elements and the inanimate and lower animate creation."

"Solitary, but not harsh. With animals I feel I am Adam's son, the heir of him to whom dominion was given over 'every living thing that moveth upon the earth.' Your dog likes and follows me. When I go into that yard, the pigeons from your dovecot flutter at my feet. Your mare in the stable knows me as well as it knows you, and obeys me better."

"And my roses smell sweet to you, and my trees give you shade."

"And," continued Louis, "no caprice can withdraw these pleasures from me; they are *mine*."

He walked off. Tartar followed him, as if in duty and affection bound, and Shirley remained standing on the summer-house step. Caroline saw her face as she looked after the rude tutor. It was pale, as if her pride bled inwardly.

"You see," remarked Caroline apologetically, "his feelings are so often hurt it makes him morose."

"You see," retorted Shirley, with ire, "he is a topic on which you and I shall quarrel if we discuss it often; so drop it henceforward and for ever."

"I suppose he has more than once behaved in this way," thought Caroline to herself, "and that renders Shirley so distant to him. Yet I wonder she cannot make allowance for character and circumstances. I wonder the general modesty, manliness, sincerity of his nature do not plead with her in his behalf. She is not often so inconsiderate, so irritable."

The verbal testimony of two friends of Caroline's to her cousin's character augmented her favourable opinion of him. William Farren, whose cottage he had visited in company with Mr. Hall, pronounced him a "real gentleman;" there was not such another in Briarfield. He — William — "could do aught for that man. And then to see how t' bairns liked him, and how t' wife took to him first minute she saw him. He never went into a house but t' childer wor about him directly. Them little things wor like as if they'd a keener sense nor grown-up folks i' finding our folk's natures."

Mr. Hall, in answer to a question of Miss Helstone's as to what he thought of Louis Moore, replied promptly that he was the best fellow he had met with since he left Cambridge.

"But he is so grave," objected Caroline.

"Grave! the finest company in the world! Full of odd, quiet, out-of-the-way humour. Never enjoyed an excursion so much in my life as the one I took with him to the Lakes. His understanding and tastes are so superior, it does a man good to be within their influence; and as to his temper and nature, I call them fine."

"At Fieldhead he looks gloomy, and, I believe, has the character of being misanthropical."

"Oh! I fancy he is rather out of place there — in a false position. The Sympsons are most estimable people, but not the folks to comprehend him. They think a great deal about form and ceremony, which are quite out of Louis's way."

"I don't think Miss Keeldar likes him."

"She doesn't know him — she doesn't know him; otherwise she has sense enough to do justice to his merits."

"Well, I suppose she doesn't know him," mused Caroline to herself, and by this hypothesis she endeavoured to account for what seemed else unaccountable. But such simple solution of the difficulty was not left her long. She was obliged to refuse Miss Keeldar even this negative excuse for her prejudice.

One day she chanced to be in the schoolroom with Henry Sympson, whose amiable and affectionate disposition had quickly recommended him to her regard. The boy was busied about some mechanical contrivance; his lameness made him fond of sedentary occupation. He began to ransack his tutor's desk for a piece of wax or twine necessary to his work. Moore happened to be absent. Mr. Hall, indeed, had called for him to take a long walk. Henry could not immediately find the object of his search. He rummaged compartment after compartment; and at last, opening an inner drawer, he came upon — not a ball of cord or a lump of beeswax, but a little bundle of small marble-coloured cahiers, tied with tape. Henry looked at them. “What rubbish Mr. Moore stores up in his desk!” he said. “I hope he won’t keep my old exercises so carefully.”

“What is it?”

“Old copy-books.”

He threw the bundle to Caroline. The packet looked so neat externally her curiosity was excited to see its contents.

“If they are only copy-books, I suppose I may open them?”

“Oh yes, quite freely. Mr. Moore’s desk is half mine — for he lets me keep all sorts of things in it — and I give you leave.”

On scrutiny they proved to be French compositions, written in a hand peculiar but compact, and exquisitely clean and clear. The writing was recognizable. She scarcely needed the further evidence of the name signed at the close of each theme to tell her whose they were. Yet that name astonished her — “Shirley Keeldar, Sympson Grove, — — shire” (a southern county), and a date four years back.

She tied up the packet, and held it in her hand, meditating over it. She half felt as if, in opening it, she had violated a confidence.

“They are Shirley’s, you see,” said Henry carelessly.

“Did *you* give them to Mr. Moore? She wrote them with Mrs. Pryor, I suppose?”

“She wrote them in my schoolroom at Sympson Grove, when she lived with us there. Mr. Moore taught her French; it is his native language.”

“I know. Was she a good pupil, Henry?”

“She was a wild, laughing thing, but pleasant to have in the room. She made lesson-time charming. She learned fast — you could hardly tell when or how. French was nothing to her. She spoke it quick, quick — as quick as Mr. Moore himself.”

“Was she obedient? Did she give trouble?”

“She gave plenty of trouble, in a way. She was giddy, but I liked her. I’m desperately fond of Shirley.”

“*Desperately* fond — you small simpleton! You don’t know what you say.”

“I *am desperately* fond of her. She is the light of my eyes. I said so to Mr. Moore last night.”

“He would reprove you for speaking with exaggeration.”

“He didn’t. He never reproves and reproves, as girls’ governesses do. He was reading, and he only smiled into his book, and said that if Miss Keeldar was no more than that, she was less than he took her to be; for I was but a dim-eyed, short-sighted little chap. I’m afraid I am a poor unfortunate, Miss Caroline Helstone. I am a cripple, you know.”

“Never mind, Henry, you are a very nice little fellow; and if God has not given you health and strength, He has given you a good disposition and an excellent heart and brain."

"I shall be despised. I sometimes think both Shirley and you despise me."

"Listen, Henry. Generally, I don't like schoolboys. I have a great horror of them. They seem to me little ruffians, who take an unnatural delight in killing and tormenting birds, and insects, and kittens, and whatever is weaker than themselves. But you are so different I am quite fond of you. You have almost as much sense as a man (far more, God wot," she muttered to herself, "than many men); you are fond of reading, and you can talk sensibly about what you read."

"I *am* fond of reading. I know I have sense, and I know I have feeling."

Miss Keeldar here entered.

"Henry," she said, "I have brought your lunch here. I shall prepare it for you myself."

She placed on the table a glass of new milk, a plate of something which looked not unlike leather, and a utensil which resembled a toasting-fork.

"What are you two about," she continued, "ransacking Mr. Moore's desk?"

"Looking at your old copy-books," returned Caroline.

"My old copy-books?"

"French exercise-books. Look here! They must be held precious; they are kept carefully."

She showed the bundle. Shirley snatched it up. "Did not know one was in existence," she said. "I thought the whole lot had long since lit the kitchen fire, or curled the maid's hair at Sympson Grove. — What made you keep them, Henry?"

"It is not my doing. I should not have thought of it. It never entered my head to suppose copy-books of value. Mr. Moore put them by in the inner drawer of his desk. Perhaps he forgot them."

"C'est cela. He forgot them, no doubt," echoed Shirley. "They are extremely well written," she observed complacently.

"What a giddy girl you were, Shirley, in those days! I remember you so well. A slim, light creature whom, though you were so tall, I could lift off the floor. I see you with your long, countless curls on your shoulders, and your streaming sash. You used to make Mr. Moore lively — that is, at first. I believe you grieved him after a while."

Shirley turned the closely-written pages and said nothing. Presently she observed, "That was written one winter afternoon. It was a description of a snow scene."

"I remember," said Henry. "Mr. Moore, when he read it, cried, 'Voilà le Français gagné!' He said it was well done. Afterwards you made him draw, in sepia, the landscape you described."

"You have not forgotten, then, Hal?"

"Not at all. We were all scolded that day for not coming down to tea when called. I can remember my tutor sitting at his easel, and you standing behind him, holding the candle, and watching him draw the snowy cliff, the pine, the deer couched under it, and the half-moon hung above."

"Where are his drawings, Harry? Caroline should see them."

"In his portfolio. But it is padlocked; he has the key."

"Ask him for it when he comes in."

"You should ask him, Shirley. You are shy of him now. You are grown a proud lady to him; I notice that."

"Shirley, you are a real enigma," whispered Caroline in her ear. "What queer discoveries I make day by day now! — I who thought I had your confidence. Inexplicable creature! even this boy reproves you."

"I have forgotten 'auld lang syne,' you see, Harry," said Miss Keeldar, answering young Sympson, and not heeding Caroline.

"Which you never should have done. You don't deserve to be a man's morning star if you have so short a memory."

"A man's morning star, indeed! and by 'a man' is meant your worshipful self, I suppose? Come, drink your new milk while it is warm."

The young cripple rose and limped towards the fire; he had left his crutch near the mantelpiece.

"My poor lame darling!" murmured Shirley, in her softest voice, aiding him.

"Whether do you like me or Mr. Sam Wynne best, Shirley?" inquired the boy, as she settled him in an arm-chair.

"O Harry, Sam Wynne is my aversion; you are my pet."

"Me or Mr. Malone?"

"You again, a thousand times."

"Yet they are great whiskered fellows, six feet high each."

"Whereas, as long as you live, Harry, you will never be anything more than a little pale lameter."

"Yes, I know."

"You need not be sorrowful. Have I not often told you who was almost as little, as pale, as suffering as you, and yet potent as a giant and brave as a lion?"

"Admiral Horatio?"

"Admiral Horatio, Viscount Nelson, and Duke of Bronte; great at heart as a Titan; gallant and heroic as all the world and age of chivalry; leader of the might of England; commander of her strength on the deep; hurler of her thunder over the flood."

"A great man. But I am not warlike, Shirley; and yet my mind is so restless I burn day and night — for what I can hardly tell — to be — to do — to suffer, I think."

"Harry, it is your mind, which is stronger and older than your frame, that troubles you. It is a captive; it lies in physical bondage. But it will work its own redemption yet. Study carefully not only books but the world. You love nature; love her without fear. Be patient — wait the course of time. You will not be a soldier or a sailor, Henry; but if you live you will be — listen to my prophecy — you will be an author, perhaps a poet."

"An author! It is a flash — a flash of light to me! I will — I *will*! I'll write a book that I may dedicate it to you."

"You will write it that you may give your soul its natural release. Bless me! what am I saying? more than I understand, I believe, or can make good. Here, Hal — here is your toasted oatcake; eat and live!"

"Willingly!" here cried a voice outside the open window. "I know that fragrance of meal bread. Miss Keeldar, may I come in and partake?"

"Mr. Hall" — it was Mr. Hall, and with him was Louis Moore, returned from their walk — "there is a proper luncheon laid out in the dining-room and there are proper people seated round it. You may join that society and share that fare if you please; but if your ill-regulated tastes lead you to prefer ill-regulated proceedings, step in here, and do as we do."

"I approve the perfume, and therefore shall suffer myself to be led by the nose," returned Mr. Hall, who presently entered, accompanied by Louis Moore. That gentleman's eye fell on his desk, pillaged.

"Burglars!" said he. — "Henry, you merit the ferule."

"Give it to Shirley and Caroline; they did it," was alleged, with more attention to effect than truth.

"Traitor and false witness!" cried both the girls. "We never laid hands on a thing, except in the spirit of laudable inquiry!"

"Exactly so," said Moore, with his rare smile. "And what have you ferreted out, in your 'spirit of laudable inquiry'?"

He perceived the inner drawer open.

"This is empty," said he. "Who has taken — — "

"Here, here!" Caroline hastened to say, and she restored the little packet to its place. He shut it up; he locked it in with a small key attached to his watch-guard; he restored the other papers to order, closed the repository, and sat down without further remark.

"I thought you would have scolded much more, sir," said Henry. "The girls deserve reprimand."

"I leave them to their own consciences."

"It accuses them of crimes intended as well as perpetrated, sir. If I had not been here, they would have treated your portfolio as they have done your desk; but I told them it was padlocked."

"And will you have lunch with us?" here interposed Shirley, addressing Moore, and desirous, as it seemed, to turn the conversation.

"Certainly, if I may."

"You will be restricted to new milk and Yorkshire oatcake."

"Va — pour le lait frais!" said Louis. "But for your oatcake!" and he made a grimace.

"He cannot eat it," said Henry. "He thinks it is like bran, raised with sour yeast."

"Come, then; by special dispensation we will allow him a few cracknels, but nothing less homely."

The hostess rang the bell and gave her frugal orders, which were presently executed. She herself measured out the milk, and distributed the bread round the cosy circle now enclosing the bright little schoolroom fire. She then took the post of toaster-general; and kneeling on the rug, fork in hand, fulfilled her office with dexterity. Mr. Hall, who relished any homely innovation on ordinary usages, and to whom the husky oatcake was from custom suave as manna, seemed in his best spirits. He talked and laughed gleefully — now with Caroline, whom he had fixed by his side, now with Shirley, and again with Louis Moore. And Louis met him in congenial spirit. He did not laugh much, but he uttered in the quietest tone the wittiest things. Gravely spoken sentences, marked by unexpected turns and a quite fresh flavour and poignancy, fell easily from his lips. He proved himself to be — what Mr. Hall had said he was — excellent company. Caroline marvelled at his humour, but still more at his entire self-possession. Nobody there present seemed to impose on him a sensation of unpleasant restraint. Nobody seemed a bore — a check — a chill to him; and yet there was the cool and lofty Miss Keeldar kneeling before the fire, almost at his feet.

But Shirley was cool and lofty no longer, at least not at this moment. She appeared unconscious of the humility of her present position; or if conscious, it was only to taste a charm in its lowliness. It did not revolt her pride that the group to whom she voluntarily officiated as handmaid should include her cousin's tutor. It did not scare her that while she handed the bread and milk to the rest, she had to offer it to him also; and Moore took his portion from her hand as calmly as if he had been her equal.

"You are overheated now," he said, when she had retained the fork for some time; "let me relieve you."

And he took it from her with a sort of quiet authority, to which she submitted passively, neither resisting him nor thanking him.

"I should like to see your pictures, Louis," said Caroline, when the sumptuous luncheon was discussed. — "Would not you, Mr. Hall?"

"To please you, I should; but, for my own part, I have cut him as an artist. I had enough of him in that capacity in Cumberland and Westmoreland. Many a wetting we got amongst the mountains because he would persist in sitting on a camp-stool, catching effects of rain-clouds, gathering mists, fitful sunbeams, and what not."

"Here is the portfolio," said Henry, bringing it in one hand and leaning on his crutch with the other.

Louis took it, but he still sat as if he wanted another to speak. It seemed as if he would not open it unless the proud Shirley deigned to show herself interested in the exhibition.

"He makes us wait to whet our curiosity," she said.

"You understand opening it," observed Louis, giving her the key. "You spoiled the lock for me once; try now."

He held it. She opened it, and, monopolizing the contents, had the first view of every sketch herself. She enjoyed the treat — if treat it were — in silence, without a single comment. Moore stood behind her chair and looked over her shoulder, and when she had done and the others were still gazing, he left his post and paced through the room.

A carriage was heard in the lane — the gate-bell rang. Shirley started.

"There are callers," she said, "and I shall be summoned to the room. A pretty figure — as they say — I am to receive company. I and Henry have been in the garden gathering fruit half the morning. Oh for rest under my own vine and my own fig-tree! Happy is the slave-wife of the Indian chief, in that she has no drawing-room duty to perform, but can sit at ease weaving mats, and stringing beads, and peacefully flattening her pickaninny's head in an unmolested corner of her wigwam. I'll emigrate to the western woods."

Louis Moore laughed.

"To marry a White Cloud or a Big Buffalo, and after wedlock to devote yourself to the tender task of digging your lord's maize-field while he smokes his pipe or drinks fire-water."

Shirley seemed about to reply, but here the schoolroom door unclosed, admitting Mr. Sympson. That personage stood aghast when he saw the group around the fire.

"I thought you alone, Miss Keeldar," he said. "I find quite a party."

And evidently from his shocked, scandalized air, had he not recognized in one of the party a clergyman, he would have delivered an extempore philippic on the extraordinary habits of his niece: respect for the cloth arrested him.

"I merely wished to announce," he proceeded coldly, "that the family from De Walden Hall, Mr., Mrs., the Misses, and Mr. Sam Wynne, are in the drawing-room." And he bowed and withdrew.

"The family from De Walden Hall! Couldn't be a worse set," murmured Shirley.

She sat still, looking a little contumacious, and very much indisposed to stir. She was flushed with the fire. Her dark hair had been more than once dishevelled by the morning wind that day. Her attire was a light, neatly fitting, but amply flowing dress of muslin; the shawl she had worn in the garden was still draped in a careless fold round her. Indolent, wilful, picturesque, and singularly pretty was her aspect — prettier than usual, as if some soft inward emotion, stirred who knows how, had given new bloom and expression to her features.

"Shirley, Shirley, you ought to go," whispered Caroline.

"I wonder why?"

She lifted her eyes, and saw in the glass over the fireplace both Mr. Hall and Louis Moore gazing at her gravely.

"If," she said, with a yielding smile — "if a majority of the present company maintain that the De Walden Hall people have claims on my civility, I will subdue my inclinations to my duty. Let those who think I ought to go hold up their hands."

Again consulting the mirror, it reflected an unanimous vote against her.

"You must go," said Mr. Hall, "and behave courteously too. You owe many duties to society. It is not permitted you to please only yourself."

Louis Moore assented with a low "Hear, hear!"

Caroline, approaching her, smoothed her wavy curls, gave to her attire a less artistic and more domestic grace, and Shirley was put out of the room, protesting still, by a pouting lip, against her dismissal.

"There is a curious charm about her," observed Mr. Hall, when she was gone. "And now," he added, "I must away; for Sweeting is off to see his mother, and there are two funerals."

"Henry, get your books; it is lesson-time," said Moore, sitting down to his desk.

"A curious charm!" repeated the pupil, when he and his master were left alone. "True. Is she not a kind of white witch?" he asked.

"Of whom are you speaking, sir?"

"Of my cousin Shirley."

"No irrelevant questions; study in silence."

Mr. Moore looked and spoke sternly — sourly. Henry knew this mood. It was a rare one with his tutor; but when it came he had an awe of it. He obeyed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIRST BLUESTOCKING.

Miss Keeldar and her uncle had characters that would not harmonize, that never had harmonized. He was irritable, and she was spirited. He was despotic, and she liked freedom. He was worldly, and she, perhaps, romantic.

Not without purpose had he come down to Yorkshire. His mission was clear, and he intended to discharge it conscientiously. He anxiously desired to have his niece married, to make for her a suitable match, give her in charge to a proper husband, and wash his hands of her for ever.

The misfortune was, from infancy upwards, Shirley and he had disagreed on the meaning of the words "suitable" and "proper." She never yet had accepted his definition; and it was doubtful whether, in the most important step of her life, she would consent to accept it.

The trial soon came.

Mr. Wynne proposed in form for his son, Samuel Fawthrop Wynne.

"Decidedly suitable! most proper!" pronounced Mr. Sympson. "A fine unencumbered estate, real substance, good connections. *It must be done!*"

He sent for his niece to the oak parlour; he shut himself up there with her alone; he communicated the offer; he gave his opinion; he claimed her consent.

It was withheld.

"No; I shall not marry Samuel Fawthrop Wynne."

"I ask why. I must have a reason. In all respects he is more than worthy of you."

She stood on the hearth. She was pale as the white marble slab and cornice behind her; her eyes flashed large, dilated, unsmiling.

"And *I* ask in what sense that young man is worthy of *me*?"

"He has twice your money, twice your common sense, equal connections, equal respectability."

"Had he my money counted fivescore times I would take no vow to love him."

"Please to state your objections."

"He has run a course of despicable, commonplace profligacy. Accept that as the first reason why I spurn him."

"Miss Keeldar, you shock me!"

"That conduct alone sinks him in a gulf of immeasurable inferiority. His intellect reaches no standard I can esteem: there is a second stumbling-block. His views are narrow, his feelings are blunt, his tastes are coarse, his manners vulgar."

"The man is a respectable, wealthy man! To refuse him is presumption on your part."

"I refuse point-blank! Cease to annoy me with the subject; I forbid it!"

"Is it your intention ever to marry; or do you prefer celibacy?"

"I deny your right to claim an answer to that question."

"May I ask if you expect some man of title — some peer of the realm — to demand your hand?"

"I doubt if the peer breathes on whom I would confer it."

"Were there insanity in the family, I should believe you mad. Your eccentricity and conceit touch the verge of frenzy."

"Perhaps, ere I have finished, you will see me over-leap it."

"I anticipate no less. Frantic and impracticable girl! Take warning! I dare you to sully our name by a *mésalliance*!"

"*Our* name! Am *I* called Sympson?"

"God be thanked that you are not! But be on your guard; I will not be trifled with!"

"What, in the name of common law and common sense, would you or could you do if my pleasure led me to a choice you disapproved?"

"Take care! take care!" warning her with voice and hand that trembled alike.

"Why? What shadow of power have *you* over me? Why should I fear you?"

"Take care, madam!"

"Scrupulous care I will take, Mr. Sympson. Before I marry I am resolved to esteem — to admire — to *love*."

"Preposterous stuff! indecorous, unwomanly!"

"To love with my whole heart. I know I speak in an unknown tongue; but I feel indifferent whether I am comprehended or not."

"And if this love of yours should fall on a beggar?"

"On a beggar it will never fall. Mendicancy is not estimable."

"On a low clerk, a play-actor, a play-writer, or — or — — "

"Take courage, Mr. Sympson! Or what?"

"Any literary scrub, or shabby, whining artist."

"For the scrubby, shabby, whining I have no taste; for literature and the arts I have. And there I wonder how your Fawthrop Wynne would suit me. He cannot write a note without orthographical errors; he reads only a sporting paper; he was the booby of Stilbro' grammar school!"

"Unladylike language! Great God! to what will she come?" He lifted hands and eyes.

"Never to the altar of Hymen with Sam Wynne."

"To what will she come? Why are not the laws more stringent, that I might compel her to hear reason?"

"Console yourself, uncle. Were Britain a serfdom and you the Czar, you could not *compel* me to this step. *I* will write to Mr. Wynne. Give yourself no further trouble on the subject."

Fortune is proverbially called changeful, yet her caprice often takes the form of repeating again and again a similar stroke of luck in the same quarter. It appeared that Miss Keeldar — or her fortune — had by this time made a sensation in the district, and produced an impression in quarters by her unthought of. No less than three offers followed Mr. Wynne's, all more or less eligible. All were in succession pressed on her by her uncle, and all in succession she refused. Yet amongst them was more than one gentleman of unexceptionable character as well as ample wealth. Many besides her uncle asked what she meant, and whom she expected to entrap, that she was so insolently fastidious.

At last the gossips thought they had found the key to her conduct, and her uncle was sure of it; and what is more, the discovery showed his niece to him in quite a new light, and he changed his whole deportment to her accordingly.

Fieldhead had of late been fast growing too hot to hold them both. The suave aunt could not reconcile them; the daughters froze at the view of their quarrels. Gertrude and Isabella whispered by the hour together in their dressing-room, and became chilled with decorous dread if they chanced to be left alone with their audacious cousin. But, as I have said, a change supervened. Mr. Sympson was appeased and his family tranquillized.

The village of Nunnely has been alluded to — its old church, its forest, its monastic ruins. It had also its hall, called the priory — an older, a larger, a more lordly abode than any Briarfield or Whinbury owned; and what is more, it had its man of title — its baronet, which neither Briarfield nor Whinbury could boast. This possession — its proudest and most prized — had for years been nominal only. The present baronet, a young man hitherto resident in a distant province, was unknown on his Yorkshire estate.

During Miss Keeldar's stay at the fashionable watering-place of Cliffbridge, she and her friends had met with and been introduced to Sir Philip Nunnely. They encountered him again and again on the sands, the cliffs, in the various walks, sometimes at the public balls of the place. He seemed solitary. His manner was very unpretending — too simple to be termed affable; rather timid than proud. He did not *condescend* to their society; he seemed *glad* of it.

With any unaffected individual Shirley could easily and quickly cement an acquaintance. She walked and talked with Sir Philip; she, her aunt, and cousins sometimes took a sail in his yacht. She liked him because she found him kind and modest, and was charmed to feel she had the power to amuse him.

One slight drawback there was — where is the friendship without it? — Sir Philip had a literary turn. He wrote poetry — sonnets, stanzas, ballads. Perhaps Miss Keeldar thought him a little too fond of reading and reciting these compositions; perhaps she wished the rhyme had possessed more accuracy, the measure more music, the tropes more freshness, the inspiration more fire. At any rate, she always winced when he recurred to the subject of his poems, and usually did her best to divert the conversation into another channel.

He would beguile her to take moonlight walks with him on the bridge, for the sole purpose, as it seemed, of pouring into her ear the longest of his ballads. He would lead her away to sequestered rustic seats, whence the rush of the surf to the sands was heard soft and soothing; and when he had her all to himself, and the sea lay before them, and the scented shade of gardens spread round, and the tall shelter of cliffs rose behind them, he would pull out his last batch of sonnets, and read them in a voice tremulous with emotion. He did not seem to know that though they might be rhyme they were not poetry. It appeared, by Shirley's downcast eye and disturbed face, that she knew it, and felt heartily mortified by the single foible of this good and amiable gentleman.

Often she tried, as gently as might be, to wean him from this fanatic worship of the Muses. It was his monomania; on all ordinary subjects he was sensible enough, and fain was she to engage him in ordinary topics. He questioned her sometimes about his place at Nunnely; she was but too happy to answer his interrogatories at length. She never wearied of describing the antique priory, the wild silvan park, the hoary church and hamlet; nor did she fail to counsel him to come down and gather his tenantry about him in his ancestral halls.

Somewhat to her surprise, Sir Philip followed her advice to the letter, and actually, towards the close of September, arrived at the priory.

He soon made a call at Fieldhead, and his first visit was not his last. He said — when he had achieved the round of the neighbourhood — that under no roof had he found such pleasant shelter as beneath the massive oak beams of the gray manor-house of Briarfield; a cramped, modest dwelling enough compared with his own, but he liked it.

Presently it did not suffice to sit with Shirley in her panelled parlour, where others came and went, and where he could rarely find a quiet moment to show her the latest production of his fertile muse; he must have her out amongst the pleasant pastures, and lead her by the still waters. *Tête-à-tête* ramblings she shunned, so he made parties for her to his own grounds, his glorious forest; to remoter scenes — woods severed by the Wharfe, vales watered by the Aire.

Such assiduity covered Miss Keeldar with distinction. Her uncle's prophetic soul anticipated a splendid future. He already scented the time afar off when, with nonchalant air, and left foot nursed on his right knee, he should be able to make dashingly-familiar allusion to his "nephew the baronet." Now his niece dawned upon him no longer "a mad girl," but a "most sensible woman." He termed her, in confidential dialogues with Mrs. Sympson, "a truly superior person; peculiar, but very clever." He treated her with exceeding deference; rose reverently to open and shut doors for her; reddened his face and gave himself headaches with stooping to pick up gloves, handkerchiefs, and other loose property, whereof Shirley usually held but insecure tenure. He would cut mysterious jokes about the superiority of woman's wit over man's wisdom; commence obscure apologies for the blundering mistake he had committed respecting the generalship, the tactics, of "a personage not a hundred miles from Fieldhead." In short, he seemed elate as any "midden-cock on pattens."

His niece viewed his manœuvres and received his innuendoes with phlegm; apparently she did not above half comprehend to what aim they tended. When plainly charged with being the preferred of the baronet, she said she believed he did like her, and for her part she liked him. She had never thought a man of rank — the only son of a proud, fond mother, the only brother of doting sisters — could have so much goodness, and, on the whole, so much sense.

Time proved, indeed, that Sir Philip liked her. Perhaps he had found in her that "curious charm" noticed by Mr. Hall. He sought her presence more and more, and at last with a frequency that attested it had become to him an indispensable stimulus. About this time strange feelings hovered round Fieldhead; restless hopes and haggard anxieties haunted some of its rooms. There was an unquiet wandering of some of the inmates among the still fields round the mansion; there was a sense of expectancy that kept the nerves strained.

One thing seemed clear: Sir Philip was not a man to be despised. He was amiable; if not highly intellectual, he was intelligent. Miss Keeldar could not affirm of him, what she had so bitterly affirmed of Sam Wynne, that his feelings were blunt, his tastes coarse, and his manners vulgar. There was sensibility in his nature; there was a very real, if not a very discriminating, love of the arts; there was the English gentleman in all his deportment. As to his lineage and wealth, both were, of course, far beyond her claims.

His appearance had at first elicited some laughing though not ill-natured remarks from the merry Shirley. It was boyish. His features were plain and slight, his hair sandy, his stature insignificant. But she soon checked her sarcasm on this point; she would even fire up if any one else made uncomplimentary allusion thereto. He had "a pleasing countenance," she affirmed; "and there was that in his heart which was better than three Roman noses, than the locks of Absalom or the proportions of Saul." A spare and rare shaft she still reserved for his unfortunate poetic propensity; but even here she would tolerate no irony save her own.

In short, matters had reached a point which seemed fully to warrant an observation made about this time by Mr. Yorke to the tutor, Louis.

"Yond' brother Robert of yours seems to me to be either a fool or a madman. Two months ago I could have sworn he had the game all in his own hands; and there he runs the country, and quarters himself up in London for weeks together, and by the time he comes back he'll find himself checkmated. Louis, 'there is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune, but, once let slip, never returns again.' I'd write to Robert, if I were you, and remind him of that."

"Robert had views on Miss Keeldar?" inquired Louis, as if the idea was new to him.

"Views I suggested to him myself, and views he might have realized, for she liked him."

"As a neighbour?"

"As more than that. I have seen her change countenance and colour at the mere mention of his name. Write to the lad, I say, and tell him to come home. He is a finer gentleman than this bit of a baronet, after all."

"Does it not strike you, Mr. Yorke, that for a mere penniless adventurer to aspire to a rich woman's hand is presumptuous — contemptible?"

"Oh, if you are for high notions and double-refined sentiment, I've naught to say. I'm a plain, practical man myself, and if Robert is willing to give up that royal prize to a lad-rival — a puling slip of aristocracy — I am quite agreeable. At *his* age, in *his* place, with *his* inducements, I would have acted differently. Neither baronet, nor duke, nor prince should have snatched my sweetheart from me without a struggle. But you tutors are such solemn chaps; it is almost like speaking to a parson to consult with you."

Flattered and fawned upon as Shirley was just now, it appeared she was not absolutely spoiled — that her better nature did not quite leave her. Universal report had indeed ceased to couple her name with that of Moore, and this silence seemed sanctioned by her own apparent oblivion of the absentee; but that she had not *quite* forgotten him — that she still regarded him, if not with love, yet with interest — seemed proved by the increased attention which at this juncture of affairs a sudden attack of illness induced her to show that tutor-brother of Robert's, to whom she habitually bore herself with strange alternations of cool reserve and docile respect — now sweeping past him in all the dignity of the moneyed heiress and prospective Lady Nunnely, and anon accosting him as abashed school-girls are wont to accost their stern professors; bridling her neck of ivory and curling her lip of carmine, if he encountered her glance, one minute, and the next submitting to the grave rebuke of his eye with as much contrition as if he had the power to inflict penalties in case of contumacy.

Louis Moore had perhaps caught the fever, which for a few days laid him low, in one of the poor cottages of the district, which he, his lame pupil, and Mr. Hall were in the habit of visiting together. At any rate he sickened, and after opposing to the malady a taciturn resistance for a day or two, was obliged to keep his chamber.

He lay tossing on his thorny bed one evening, Henry, who would not quit him, watching faithfully beside him, when a tap — too light to be that of Mrs.

Gill or the housemaid — summoned young Sympson to the door.

"How is Mr. Moore to-night?" asked a low voice from the dark gallery.

"Come in and see him yourself."

"Is he asleep?"

"I wish he could sleep. Come and speak to him, Shirley."

"He would not like it."

But the speaker stepped in, and Henry, seeing her hesitate on the threshold, took her hand and drew her to the couch.

The shaded light showed Miss Keeldar's form but imperfectly; yet it revealed her in elegant attire. There was a party assembled below, including Sir Philip Nunnely; the ladies were now in the drawing-room, and their hostess had stolen from them to visit Henry's tutor. Her pure white dress, her fair arms and neck, the trembling chainlet of gold circling her throat and quivering on her breast, glistened strangely amid the obscurity of the sickroom. Her mien was chastened and pensive. She spoke gently.

"Mr. Moore, how are you to-night?"

"I have not been very ill, and am now better."

"I heard that you complained of thirst. I have brought you some grapes; can you taste one?"

"No; but I thank you for remembering me."

"Just one."

From the rich cluster that filled a small basket held in her hand she severed a berry and offered it to his lips. He shook his head, and turned aside his flushed face.

"But what, then, can I bring you instead? You have no wish for fruit; yet I see that your lips are parched. What beverage do you prefer?"

"Mrs. Gill supplies me with toast-and-water. I like it best."

Silence fell for some minutes.

"Do you suffer? — have you pain?"

"Very little."

"What made you ill?"

Silence.

"I wonder what caused this fever? To what do you attribute it?"

"Miasma, perhaps — malaria. This is autumn, a season fertile in fevers."

"I hear you often visit the sick in Briarfield, and Nunnely too, with Mr. Hall. You should be on your guard; temerity is not wise."

"That reminds me, Miss Keeldar, that perhaps you had better not enter this chamber or come near this couch. I do not believe my illness is infectious. I scarcely fear" — with a sort of smile — "*you* will take it; but why should you run even the shadow of a risk? Leave me."

"Patience, I will go soon; but I should like to do something for you before I depart — any little service — — "

"They will miss you below."

"No; the gentlemen are still at table."

"They will not linger long. Sir Philip Nunnely is no wine-bibber, and I hear him just now pass from the dining-room to the drawing-room."

"It is a servant."

"It is Sir Philip; I know his step."

"Your hearing is acute."

"It is never dull, and the sense seems sharpened at present. Sir Philip was here to tea last night. I heard you sing to him some song which he had brought you. I heard him, when he took his departure at eleven o'clock, call you out on to the pavement, to look at the evening star."

"You must be nervously sensitive."

"I heard him kiss your hand."

"Impossible!"

"No: my chamber is over the hall, the window just above the front door; the sash was a little raised, for I felt feverish. You stood ten minutes with him on the steps. I heard your discourse, every word, and I heard the salute. — Henry, give me some water."

"Let me give it him."

But he half rose to take the glass from young Sympson, and declined her attendance.

"And can I do nothing?"

"Nothing; for you cannot guarantee me a night's peaceful rest, and it is all I at present want."

"You do not sleep well?"

"Sleep has left me."

"Yet you said you were not very ill?"

"I am often sleepless when in high health."

"If I had power, I would lap you in the most placid slumber — quite deep and hushed, without a dream."

"Blank annihilation! I do not ask that."

"With dreams of all you most desire."

"Monstrous delusions! The sleep would be delirium, the waking death."

"Your wishes are not so chimerical; you are no visionary."

"Miss Keeldar, I suppose you think so; but my character is not, perhaps, quite as legible to you as a page of the last new novel might be."

"That is possible. But this sleep — I *should* like to woo it to your pillow, to win for you its favour. If I took a book and sat down and read some pages? I can well spare half an hour."

"Thank you, but I will not detain you."

"I would read softly."

"It would not do. I am too feverish and excitable to bear a soft, cooing, vibrating voice close at my ear. You had better leave me."

"Well, I will go."

"And no good-night?"

"Yes, sir, yes. Mr. Moore, good-night." (Exit Shirley.)

"Henry, my boy, go to bed now; it is time you had some repose."

"Sir, it would please me to watch at your bedside all night."

"Nothing less called for. I am getting better. There, go."

"Give me your blessing, sir."

"God bless you, my best pupil!"

"You never call me your dearest pupil!"

"No, nor ever shall."

Possibly Miss Keeldar resented her former teacher's rejection of her courtesy. It is certain she did not repeat the offer of it. Often as her light step traversed the gallery in the course of a day, it did not again pause at his door; nor did her "cooing, vibrating voice" disturb a second time the hush of the sickroom. A sickroom, indeed, it soon ceased to be; Mr. Moore's good constitution quickly triumphed over his indisposition. In a few days he shook it off, and resumed his duties as tutor.

That "auld lang syne" had still its authority both with preceptor and scholar was proved by the manner in which he sometimes promptly passed the distance she usually maintained between them, and put down her high reserve with a firm, quiet hand.

One afternoon the Sympson family were gone out to take a carriage airing. Shirley, never sorry to snatch a reprieve from their society, had remained behind, detained by business, as she said. The business — a little letter-writing — was soon dispatched after the yard gates had closed on the carriage; Miss Keeldar betook herself to the garden.

It was a peaceful autumn day. The gilding of the Indian summer mellowed the pastures far and wide. The russet woods stood ripe to be stripped, but were yet full of leaf. The purple of heath-bloom, faded but not withered, tinged the hills. The beck wandered down to the Hollow, through a silent district; no wind followed its course or haunted its woody borders. Fieldhead gardens bore the seal of gentle decay. On the walks, swept that morning, yellow leaves had fluttered down again. Its time of flowers, and even of fruits, was over; but a scantling of apples enriched the trees. Only a blossom here and there expanded pale and delicate amidst a knot of faded leaves.

These single flowers — the last of their race — Shirley culled as she wandered thoughtfully amongst the beds. She was fastening into her girdle a hueless and scentless nosegay, when Henry Sympson called to her as he came limping from the house.

"Shirley, Mr. Moore would be glad to see you in the schoolroom and to hear you read a little French, if you have no more urgent occupation."

The messenger delivered his commission very simply, as if it were a mere matter of course.

"Did Mr. Moore tell you to say that?"

"Certainly; why not? And now, do come, and let us once more be as we were at Sympson Grove. We used to have pleasant school-hours in those days."

Miss Keeldar perhaps thought that circumstances were changed since then; however, she made no remark, but after a little reflection quietly followed Henry.

Entering the schoolroom, she inclined her head with a decent obeisance, as had been her wont in former times. She removed her bonnet, and hung it up beside Henry's cap. Louis Moore sat at his desk, turning the leaves of a book, open before him, and marking passages with his pencil. He just moved, in acknowledgment of her curtsy, but did not rise.

"You proposed to read to me a few nights ago," said he. "I could not hear you then. My attention is now at your service. A little renewed practice in French may not be unprofitable. Your accent, I have observed, begins to rust."

"What book shall I take?"

"Here are the posthumous works of St. Pierre. Read a few pages of the 'Fragments de l'Amazone.'"

She accepted the chair which he had placed in readiness near his own; the volume lay on his desk — there was but one between them; her sweeping curls dropped so low as to hide the page from him.

"Put back your hair," he said.

For one moment Shirley looked not quite certain whether she would obey the request or disregard it. A flicker of her eye beamed furtive on the professor's face. Perhaps if he had been looking at her harshly or timidly, or if one undecided line had marked his countenance, she would have rebelled, and the lesson had ended there and then; but he was only awaiting her compliance — as calm as marble, and as cool. She threw the veil of tresses behind her ear. It was well her face owned an agreeable outline, and that her cheek possessed the polish and the roundness of early youth, or, thus robbed of a softening shade, the contours might have lost their grace. But what mattered that in the present society? Neither Calypso nor Eucharis cared to fascinate Mentor.

She began to read. The language had become strange to her tongue; it faltered; the lecture flowed unevenly, impeded by hurried breath, broken by Anglicized tones. She stopped.

"I can't do it. Read me a paragraph, if you please, Mr. Moore."

What *he* read *she* repeated. She caught his accent in three minutes.

"Très bien," was the approving comment at the close of the piece.

"C'est presque le Français rattrapé, n'est-ce pas?"

"You could not write French as you once could, I dare say?"

"Oh no! I should make strange work of my concords now."

"You could not compose the *devoir* of 'La Première Femme Savante'?"

"Do you still remember that rubbish?"

"Every line."

"I doubt you."

"I will engage to repeat it word for word."

"You would stop short at the first line."

"Challenge me to the experiment."

"I challenge you."

He proceeded to recite the following. He gave it in French, but we must translate, on pain of being unintelligible to some readers.

"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."

This was in the dawn of time, before the morning stars were set, and while they yet sang together.

The epoch is so remote, the mists and dewy gray of matin twilight veil it with so vague an obscurity, that all distinct feature of custom, all clear line of locality, evade perception and baffle research. It must suffice to know that the world then existed; that men peopled it; that man's nature, with its passions, sympathies, pains, and pleasures, informed the planet and gave it soul.

A certain tribe colonized a certain spot on the globe; of what race this tribe — unknown; in what region that spot — untold. We usually think of the East when we refer to transactions of that date; but who shall declare that there was no life in the West, the South, the North? What is to disprove that this tribe, instead of camping under palm groves in Asia, wandered beneath island oak woods rooted in our own seas of Europe?

It is no sandy plain, nor any circumscribed and scant oasis I seem to realize. A forest valley, with rocky sides and brown profundity of shade, formed by tree crowding on tree, descends deep before me. Here, indeed, dwell human beings, but so few, and in alleys so thick branched and overarched, they are neither heard nor seen. Are they savage? Doubtless. They live by the crook and the bow; half shepherds, half hunters, their flocks wander wild as their prey. Are they happy? No, not more happy than we are at this day. Are they good? No, not better than ourselves. Their nature is our nature — human both. There is one in this tribe too often miserable — a child bereaved of both parents. None cares for this child. She is fed sometimes, but oftener forgotten. A hut rarely receives her; the hollow tree and chill cavern are her home. Forsaken, lost, and wandering, she lives more with the wild beast and bird than with her own kind. Hunger and cold are her comrades; sadness hovers over, and solitude besets her round. Unheeded and unvalued, she should die; but she both lives and grows. The green wilderness nurses her, and becomes to her a mother; feeds her on juicy berry, on saccharine root and nut.

There is something in the air of this clime which fosters life kindly. There must be something, too, in its dews which heals with sovereign balm. Its gentle seasons exaggerate no passion, no sense; its temperature tends to harmony; its breezes, you would say, bring down from heaven the germ of pure thought and purer feeling. Not grotesquely fantastic are the forms of cliff and foliage, not violently vivid the colouring of flower and bird. In all the grandeur of these forests there is repose; in all their freshness there is tenderness.

The gentle charm vouchsafed to flower and tree, bestowed on deer and dove, has not been denied to the human nursling. All solitary, she has sprung up straight and graceful. Nature cast her features in a fine mould; they have matured in their pure, accurate first lines, unaltered by the shocks of disease. No fierce dry blast has dealt rudely with the surface of her frame; no burning sun has crisped or withered her tresses. Her form gleams ivory-white through the trees; her hair flows plenteous, long, and glossy; her eyes, not dazzled by vertical fires, beam in the shade large and open, and full and dewy. Above those eyes, when the breeze bares her forehead, shines an expanse fair and ample — a clear, candid page, whereon knowledge, should knowledge ever come, might write a golden record. You see in the desolate young savage nothing vicious or vacant. She haunts the wood harmless and thoughtful, though of what one so untaught can think it is not easy to divine.

On the evening of one summer day, before the Flood, being utterly alone — for she had lost all trace of her tribe, who had wandered leagues away, she knew not where — she went up from the vale, to watch Day take leave and Night arrive. A crag overspread by a tree was her station. The oak roots, turfed and mossed, gave a seat; the oak boughs, thick-leaved, wove a canopy.

Slow and grand the Day withdrew, passing in purple fire, and parting to the farewell of a wild, low chorus from the woodlands. Then Night entered, quiet as death. The wind fell, the birds ceased singing. Now every nest held happy mates, and hart and hind slumbered blissfully safe in their lair.

The girl sat, her body still, her soul astir; occupied, however, rather in feeling than in thinking, in wishing than hoping, in imagining than projecting. She felt the world, the sky, the night, boundlessly mighty. Of all things herself seemed to herself the centre — a small, forgotten atom of life, a spark of soul, emitted inadvertent from the great creative source, and now burning unmarked to waste in the heart of a black hollow. She asked, was she thus to burn out and perish, her living light doing no good, never seen, never needed — a star in an else starless firmament, which nor shepherd, nor wanderer, nor sage, nor priest tracked as a guide or read as a prophecy? Could this be, she demanded, when the flame of her intelligence burned so vivid; when her life beat so true, and real, and potent; when something within her stirred disquieted, and restlessly asserted a God-given strength, for which it insisted she should find exercise?

She gazed abroad on Heaven and Evening. Heaven and Evening gazed back on her. She bent down, searching bank, hill, river, spread dim below. All she questioned responded by oracles. She heard — she was impressed; but she could not understand. Above her head she raised her hands joined together.

“Guidance — help — comfort — come!” was her cry.

There was no voice, nor any that answered.

She waited, kneeling, steadfastly looking up. Yonder sky was sealed; the solemn stars shone alien and remote.

At last one overstretched chord of her agony slacked; she thought Something above relented; she felt as if Something far round drew nigher; she heard as if Silence spoke. There was no language, no word, only a tone.

Again — a fine, full, lofty tone, a deep, soft sound, like a storm whispering, made twilight undulate.

Once more, profounder, nearer, clearer, it rolled harmonious.

Yet again — a distinct voice passed between Heaven and Earth.

"Eva!"

If Eva were not this woman's name, she had none. She rose. "Here am I."

"Eva!"

"O Night (it can be but Night that speaks), I am here!"

The voice, descending, reached Earth.

"Eva!"

"Lord," she cried, "behold thine handmaid!"

She had her religion — all tribes held some creed.

"I come — a Comforter!"

"Lord, come quickly!"

The Evening flushed full of hope; the Air panted; the Moon — rising before — ascended large, but her light showed no shape.

"Lean towards me, Eva. Enter my arms; repose thus."

"Thus I lean, O Invisible but felt! And what art thou?"

"Eva, I have brought a living draught from heaven. Daughter of Man, drink of my cup!"

"I drink: it is as if sweetest dew visited my lips in a full current. My arid heart revives; my affliction is lightened; my strait and struggle are gone. And the night changes! the wood, the hill, the moon, the wide sky — all change!"

"All change, and for ever. I take from thy vision darkness; I loosen from thy faculties fetters! I level in thy path obstacles; I with my presence fill vacancy. I claim as mine the lost atom of life. I take to myself the spark of soul — burning heretofore forgotten!"

"O take me! O claim me! This is a god."

"This is a son of God — one who feels himself in the portion of life that stirs you. He is suffered to reclaim his own, and so to foster and aid that it shall not perish hopeless."

"A son of God! Am I indeed chosen?"

"Thou only in this land. I saw thee that thou wert fair; I knew thee that thou wert mine. To me it is given to rescue, to sustain, to cherish mine own. Acknowledge in me that Seraph on earth named Genius."

"My glorious Bridegroom! true Dayspring from on high! All I would have at last I possess. I receive a revelation. The dark hint, the obscure whisper, which have haunted me from childhood, are interpreted. Thou art He

I sought. Godborn, take me, thy bride!"

"Unhumbled, I can take what is mine. Did I not give from the altar the very flame which lit Eva's being? Come again into the heaven whence thou wert sent."

That Presence, invisible but mighty, gathered her in like a lamb to the fold; that voice, soft but all-pervading, vibrated through her heart like music. Her eye received no image; and yet a sense visited her vision and her brain as of the serenity of stainless air, the power of sovereign seas, the majesty of marching stars, the energy of colliding elements, the rooted endurance of hills wide based, and, above all, as of the lustre of heroic beauty rushing victorious on the Night, vanquishing its shadows like a diviner sun.

Such was the bridal hour of Genius and Humanity. Who shall rehearse the tale of their after-union? Who shall depict its bliss and bale? Who shall tell how He between whom and the Woman God put enmity forged deadly plots to break the bond or defile its purity? Who shall record the long strife between Serpent and Seraph: — How still the Father of Lies insinuated evil into good, pride into wisdom, grossness into glory, pain into bliss, poison into passion? How the "dreadless Angel" defied, resisted, and repelled? How again and again he refined the polluted cup, exalted the debased emotion, rectified the perverted impulse, detected the lurking venom, baffled the frontless temptation — purified, justified, watched, and withstood? How, by his patience, by his strength, by that unutterable excellence he held from God — his Origin — this faithful Seraph fought for Humanity a good fight through time; and, when Time's course closed, and Death was encountered at the end, barring with fleshless arm the portals of Eternity, how Genius still held close his dying bride, sustained her through the agony of the passage, bore her triumphant into his own home, Heaven; restored her, redeemed, to Jehovah, her Maker; and at last, before Angel and Archangel, crowned her with the crown of Immortality?

Who shall of these things write the chronicle?

"I never could correct that composition," observed Shirley, as Moore concluded. "Your censor-pencil scored it with condemnatory lines, whose signification I strove vainly to fathom."

She had taken a crayon from the tutor's desk, and was drawing little leaves, fragments of pillars, broken crosses, on the margin of the book.

"French may be half forgotten, but the habits of the French lesson are retained, I see," said Louis. "My books would now, as erst, be unsafe with you. My newly-bound St. Pierre would soon be like my Racine — Miss Keeldar, her mark, traced on every page."

Shirley dropped her crayon as if it burned her fingers.

"Tell me what were the faults of that *devoir*?" she asked. "Were they grammatical errors, or did you object to the substance?"

"I never said that the lines I drew were indications of faults at all. You would have it that such was the case, and I refrained from contradiction."

"What else did they denote?"

"No matter now."

"Mr. Moore," cried Henry, "make Shirley repeat some of the pieces she used to say so well by heart."

"If I ask for any, it will be 'Le Cheval Dompté,'" said Moore, trimming with his penknife the pencil Miss Keeldar had worn to a stump.

She turned aside her head; the neck, the clear cheek, forsaken by their natural veil, were seen to flush warm.

"Ah! she has not forgotten, you see, sir," said Henry, exultant. "She knows how naughty she was."

A smile, which Shirley would not permit to expand, made her lip tremble; she bent her face, and hid it half with her arms, half in her curls, which, as she stooped, fell loose again. "Certainly I was a rebel," she answered.

"A rebel!" repeated Henry. "Yes; you and papa had quarrelled terribly, and you set both him and mamma, and Mrs. Pryor, and everybody, at defiance. You said he had insulted you — — "

"He *had* insulted me," interposed Shirley.

"And you wanted to leave Sympson Grove directly. You packed your things up, and papa threw them out of your trunk; mamma cried, Mrs. Pryor cried; they both stood wringing their hands begging you to be patient; and you knelt on the floor with your things and your up-turned box before you, looking, Shirley, looking — why, in one of *your* passions. Your features, in such passions, are not distorted; they are fixed, but quite beautiful. You scarcely look angry, only resolute, and in a certain haste; yet one feels that at such times an obstacle cast across your path would be split as with lightning. Papa lost heart, and called Mr. Moore."

"Enough, Henry."

"No, it is not enough. I hardly know how Mr. Moore managed, except that I recollect he suggested to papa that agitation would bring on his gout; and then he spoke quietly to the ladies, and got them away; and afterwards he said to you, Miss Shirley, that it was of no use talking or lecturing now, but that the tea-things were just brought into the schoolroom, and he was very thirsty, and he would be glad if you would leave your packing for the present and come and make a cup of tea for him and me. You came; you would not talk at first, but soon you softened and grew cheerful. Mr. Moore began to tell us about the Continent, the war, and Bonaparte — subjects we were both fond of listening to. After tea he said we should neither of us leave him that evening; he would not let us stray out of his sight, lest we should again get into mischief. We sat one on each side of him. We were so happy. I never passed so pleasant an evening. The next day he gave you, missy, a lecture of an hour, and wound it up by marking you a piece to learn in Bossuet as a punishment-lesson — 'Le Cheval Dompté.' You learned it instead of packing up, Shirley. We heard no more of your running away. Mr. Moore used to tease you on the subject for a year afterwards."

"She never said a lesson with greater spirit," subjoined Moore. "She then, for the first time, gave me the treat of hearing my native tongue spoken without accent by an English girl."

"She was as sweet as summer cherries for a month afterwards," struck in Henry: "a good hearty quarrel always left Shirley's temper better than it found it."

"You talk of me as if I were not present," observed Miss Keeldar, who had not yet lifted her face.

"Are you sure you *are* present?" asked Moore. "There have been moments since my arrival here when I have been tempted to inquire of the lady of Fieldhead if she knew what had become of my former pupil."

"She is here now."

"I see her, and humble enough; but I would neither advise Harry nor others to believe too implicitly in the humility which one moment can hide its blushing face like a modest little child, and the next lift it pale and lofty as a marble Juno."

"One man in times of old, it is said, imparted vitality to the statue he had chiselled; others may have the contrary gift of turning life to stone."

Moore paused on this observation before he replied to it. His look, at once struck and meditative, said, "A strange phrase; what may it mean?" He turned it over in his mind, with thought deep and slow, as some German pondering metaphysics.

"You mean," he said at last, "that some men inspire repugnance, and so chill the kind heart."

"Ingenious!" responded Shirley. "If the interpretation pleases you, you are welcome to hold it valid. *I* don't care."

And with that she raised her head, lofty in look and statue-like in hue, as Louis had described it.

"Behold the metamorphosis!" he said; "scarce imagined ere it is realized: a lowly nymph develops to an inaccessible goddess. But Henry must not be disappointed of his recitation, and Olympia will deign to oblige him. Let us begin."

"I have forgotten the very first line."

"Which I have not. *My* memory, if a slow, is a retentive one. I acquire deliberately both knowledge and liking. The acquisition grows into my brain, and the sentiment into my breast; and it is not as the rapid-springing produce which, having no root in itself, flourishes verdurous enough for a time, but too soon falls withered away. Attention, Henry! Miss Keeldar consents to favour you. 'Voyez ce cheval ardent et impétueux,' so it commences."

Miss Keeldar did consent to make the effort; but she soon stopped.

"Unless I heard the whole repeated I cannot continue it," she said.

"Yet it was quickly learned — 'soon gained, soon gone,'" moralized the tutor. He recited the passage deliberately, accurately, with slow, impressive emphasis.

Shirley, by degrees, inclined her ear as he went on. Her face, before turned from him, *re*turned towards him. When he ceased, she took the word up as if from his lips; she took his very tone; she seized his very accent; she delivered the periods as he had delivered them; she reproduced his manner, his pronunciation, his expression.

It was now her turn to petition.

"Recall 'Le Songe d'Athalie,'" she entreated, "and say it."

He said it for her. She took it from him; she found lively excitement in the pleasure of making his language her own. She asked for further indulgence; all the old school pieces were revived, and with them Shirley's old school days.

He had gone through some of the best passages of Racine and Corneille, and then had heard the echo of his own deep tones in the girl's voice, that modulated itself faithfully on his. "Le chêne et le Roseau," that most beautiful of La Fontaine's fables, had been recited, well recited, by the tutor, and the pupil had animatedly availed herself of the lesson. Perhaps a simultaneous feeling seized them now, that their enthusiasm had kindled to a glow, which the slight fuel of French poetry no longer sufficed to feed; perhaps they longed for a trunk of English oak to be thrown as a Yule log to the devouring flame. Moore observed, "And these are our best pieces! And we have nothing more dramatic, nervous, natural!"

And then he smiled and was silent. His whole nature seemed serenely alight. He stood on the hearth, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, musing not unblissfully.

Twilight was closing on the diminished autumn day. The schoolroom windows — darkened with creeping plants, from which no high October winds had as yet swept the sere foliage — admitted scarce a gleam of sky; but the fire gave light enough to talk by.

And now Louis Moore addressed his pupil in French, and she answered at first with laughing hesitation and in broken phrase. Moore encouraged while he corrected her. Henry joined in the lesson; the two scholars stood opposite the master, their arms round each other's waists. Tartar, who long since had craved and obtained admission, sat sagely in the centre of the rug, staring at the blaze which burst fitful from morsels of coal among the red cinders. The group were happy enough, but —

"Pleasures are like poppies spread;
You seize the flower — its bloom is shed."

The dull, rumbling sound of wheels was heard on the pavement in the yard.

"It is the carriage returned," said Shirley; "and dinner must be just ready, and I am not dressed."

A servant came in with Mr. Moore's candle and tea; for the tutor and his pupil usually dined at luncheon time.

"Mr. Sympson and the ladies are returned," she said, "and Sir Philip Nunnely is with them."

"How you did start, and how your hand trembled, Shirley!" said Henry, when the maid had closed the shutter and was gone. "But I know why — don't you, Mr. Moore? I know what papa intends. He is a little ugly man, that Sir Philip. I wish he had not come. I wish sisters and all of them had stayed at De Walden Hall to dine. — Shirley should once more have made tea for you and me, Mr. Moore, and we would have had a happy evening of it."

Moore was locking up his desk and putting away his St. Pierre. "That was *your* plan, was it, my boy?"

"Don't you approve it, sir?"

"I approve nothing utopian. Look Life in its iron face; stare Reality out of its brassy countenance. Make the tea, Henry; I shall be back in a minute."

He left the room; so did Shirley, by another door.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PHŒBE.

Shirley probably got on pleasantly with Sir Philip that evening, for the next morning she came down in one of her best moods.

"Who will take a walk with me?" she asked, after breakfast. "Isabella and Gertrude, will you?"

So rare was such an invitation from Miss Keeldar to her female cousins that they hesitated before they accepted it. Their mamma, however, signifying acquiescence in the project, they fetched their bonnets, and the trio set out.

It did not suit these three young persons to be thrown much together. Miss Keeldar liked the society of few ladies; indeed, she had a cordial pleasure in that of none except Mrs. Pryor and Caroline Helstone. She was civil, kind, attentive even to her cousins; but still she usually had little to say to them. In the sunny mood of this particular morning, she contrived to entertain even the Misses Sympson. Without deviating from her wonted rule of discussing with them only ordinary themes, she imparted to these themes an extraordinary interest; the sparkle of her spirit glanced along her phrases.

What made her so joyous? All the cause must have been in herself. The day was not bright. It was dim — a pale, waning autumn day. The walks through the dun woods were damp; the atmosphere was heavy, the sky overcast; and yet it seemed that in Shirley's heart lived all the light and azure of Italy, as all its fervour laughed in her gray English eye.

Some directions necessary to be given to her foreman, John, delayed her behind her cousins as they neared Fieldhead on their return. Perhaps an interval of twenty minutes elapsed between her separation from them and her re-entrance into the house. In the meantime she had spoken to John, and then she had lingered in the lane at the gate. A summons to luncheon called her in. She excused herself from the meal, and went upstairs.

"Is not Shirley coming to luncheon?" asked Isabella. "She said she was hungry."

An hour after, as she did not quit her chamber, one of her cousins went to seek her there. She was found sitting at the foot of the bed, her head resting on her hand; she looked quite pale, very thoughtful, almost sad.

"You are not ill?" was the question put.

"A little sick," replied Miss Keeldar.

Certainly she was not a little changed from what she had been two hours before.

This change, accounted for only by those three words, explained no otherwise; this change — whencesoever springing, effected in a brief ten minutes — passed like no light summer cloud. She talked when she joined her friends at dinner, talked as usual. She remained with them during the evening. When again questioned respecting her health, she declared herself perfectly recovered. It had been a mere passing faintness, a momentary sensation, not worth a thought; yet it was felt there was a difference in Shirley.

The next day — the day, the week, the fortnight after — this new and peculiar shadow lingered on the countenance, in the manner of Miss Keeldar. A strange quietude settled over her look, her movements, her very voice. The alteration was not so marked as to court or permit frequent questioning, yet it *was* there, and it would not pass away. It hung over her like a cloud which no breeze could stir or disperse. Soon it became evident that to notice this change was to annoy her. First she shrank from remark; and, if persisted in, she, with her own peculiar *hauteur*, repelled it. "Was she ill?" The reply came with decision.

"I *am not*."

"Did anything weigh on her mind? Had anything happened to affect her spirits?"

She scornfully ridiculed the idea. "What did they mean by spirits? She had no spirits, black or white, blue or gray, to affect."

"Something must be the matter — she was so altered."

"She supposed she had a right to alter at her ease. She knew she was plainer. If it suited her to grow ugly, why need others fret themselves on the subject?"

"There must be a cause for the change. What was it?"

She peremptorily requested to be let alone.

Then she would make every effort to appear quite gay, and she seemed indignant at herself that she could not perfectly succeed. Brief self-spurning epithets burst from her lips when alone. "Fool! coward!" she would term herself. "Poltroon!" she would say, "if you must tremble, tremble in secret! Quail where no eye sees you!"

"How dare you," she would ask herself — "how dare you show your weakness and betray your imbecile anxieties? Shake them off; rise above them. If you cannot do this, hide them."

And to hide them she did her best. She once more became resolutely lively in company. When weary of effort and forced to relax, she sought solitude — not the solitude of her chamber (she refused to mope, shut up between four walls), but that wilder solitude which lies out of doors, and which she could chase, mounted on Zoë, her mare. She took long rides of half a day. Her uncle disapproved, but he dared not remonstrate. It was never pleasant to face Shirley's anger, even when she was healthy and gay; but now that her face showed thin, and her large eye looked hollow, there was something in the darkening of that face and kindling of that eye which touched as well as alarmed.

To all comparative strangers who, unconscious of the alterations in her spirits, commented on the alteration in her looks, she had one reply, —

"I am perfectly well; I have not an ailment."

And health, indeed, she must have had, to be able to bear the exposure to the weather she now encountered. Wet or fair, calm or storm, she took her daily ride over Stilbro' Moor, Tartar keeping up at her side, with his wolf-like gallop, long and untiring.

Twice, three times, the eyes of gossips — those eyes which are everywhere, in the closet and on the hill-top — noticed that instead of turning on Rushedge, the top ridge of Stilbro' Moor, she rode forwards all the way to the town. Scouts were not wanting to mark her destination there. It was ascertained that she alighted at the door of one Mr. Pearson Hall, a solicitor, related to the vicar of Nunnely. This gentleman and his ancestors had been the agents of the Keeldar family for generations back. Some people affirmed that Miss Keeldar was become involved in business speculations connected with Hollow's Mill — that she had lost money, and was constrained to mortgage her land. Others conjectured that she was going to be married, and that the settlements were preparing.

Mr. Moore and Henry Sympson were together in the schoolroom. The tutor was waiting for a lesson which the pupil seemed busy in preparing.

"Henry, make haste. The afternoon is getting on."

"Is it, sir?"

"Certainly. Are you nearly ready with that lesson?"

"No."

"Not *nearly* ready?"

"I have not construed a line."

Mr. Moore looked up. The boy's tone was rather peculiar.

"The task presents no difficulties, Henry; or, if it does, bring them to me. We will work together."

"Mr. Moore, I can do no work."

"My boy, you are ill."

"Sir, I am not worse in bodily health than usual, but my heart is full."

"Shut the book. Come hither, Harry. Come to the fireside."

Harry limped forward. His tutor placed him in a chair; his lips were quivering, his eyes brimming. He laid his crutch on the floor, bent down his head, and wept.

"This distress is not occasioned by physical pain, you say, Harry? You have a grief; tell it me."

"Sir, I have such a grief as I never had before. I wish it could be relieved in some way; I can hardly bear it."

"Who knows but, if we talk it over, we may relieve it? What is the cause? Whom does it concern?"

"The cause, sir, is Shirley; it concerns Shirley."

"Does it? You think her changed?"

"All who know her think her changed — you too, Mr. Moore."

"Not seriously — no. I see no alteration but such as a favourable turn might repair in a few weeks; besides, her own word must go for something: she says she is well."

"There it is, sir. As long as she maintained she was well, I believed her. When I was sad out of her sight, I soon recovered spirits in her presence. Now — — "

"Well, Harry, now. Has she said anything to you? You and she were together in the garden two hours this morning. I saw her talking, and you listening. Now, my dear Harry, if Miss Keeldar has said she is ill, and enjoined you to keep her secret, do not obey her. For her life's sake, avow everything. Speak, my boy."

"*She* say she is ill! I believe, sir, if she were dying, she would smile, and aver, 'Nothing ails me.'"

"What have you learned then? What new circumstance?"

"I have learned that she has just made her will."

"Made her will?"

The tutor and pupil were silent.

"She told you that?" asked Moore, when some minutes had elapsed.

"She told me quite cheerfully, not as an ominous circumstance, which I felt it to be. She said I was the only person besides her solicitor, Pearson Hall, and Mr. Helstone and Mr. Yorke, who knew anything about it; and to me, she intimated, she wished specially to explain its provisions."

"Go on, Harry."

"'Because,' she said, looking down on me with her beautiful eyes — oh! they *are* beautiful, Mr. Moore! I love them! I love her! She is my star! Heaven must not claim her! She is lovely in this world, and fitted for this world. Shirley is not an angel; she is a woman, and she shall live with men. Seraphs shall not have her! Mr. Moore, if one of the 'sons of God,' with wings wide and bright as the sky, blue and sounding as the sea, having seen that she was fair, descended to claim her, his claim should be withstood — withstood by me — boy and cripple as I am."

"Henry Sympson, go on, when I tell you."

"'Because,' she said, 'if I made no will, and died before you, Harry, all my property would go to you; and I do not intend that it should be so, though your father would like it. But you,' she said, 'will have his whole estate, which is large — larger than Fieldhead. Your sisters will have nothing; so I have left them some money, though I do not love them, both together, half so much as I love one lock of your fair hair.' She said these words, and she called me her 'darling,' and let me kiss her. She went on to tell me that she had left Caroline Helstone some money too; that this manor house, with its furniture and books, she had bequeathed to me, as she did not choose to take the old family place from her own blood; and that all the rest of her property, amounting to about twelve thousand pounds, exclusive of the legacies to my sisters and Miss Helstone, she had willed, not to me, seeing I was already rich, but to a good man, who would make the best use of it that any human being could do — a man, she said, that was both gentle and brave, strong and merciful — a man that might not profess to be pious, but she knew he had the secret of religion pure and undefiled before God. The spirit of love and peace was with him. He visited the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and kept himself unspotted from the world. Then she asked, 'Do you approve what I have done, Harry?' I could not answer. My tears choked me, as they do now."

Mr. Moore allowed his pupil a moment to contend with and master his emotion. He then demanded, "What else did she say?"

"When I had signified my full consent to the conditions of her will, she told me I was a generous boy, and she was proud of me. 'And now,' she added, 'in case anything should happen, you will know what to say to Malice when she comes whispering hard things in your ear, insinuating that Shirley has wronged you, that she did not love you. You will know that I *did* love you, Harry; that no sister could have loved you better — my own treasure.' Mr. Moore, sir, when I remember her voice, and recall her look, my heart beats as if it would break its strings. She *may* go to heaven before me — if God commands it, she *must*; but the rest of my life — and my life will not be long, I am glad of that now — shall be a straight, quick, thoughtful journey in the path her step has pressed. I thought to enter the vault of the Keeldars before her. Should it be otherwise, lay my coffin by Shirley's side."

Moore answered him with a weighty calm, that offered a strange contrast to the boy's perturbed enthusiasm.

"You are wrong, both of you — you harm each other. If youth once falls under the influence of a shadowy terror, it imagines there will never be full sunlight again; its first calamity it fancies will last a lifetime. What more did she say? Anything more?"

"We settled one or two family points between ourselves."

"I should rather like to know what — — "

"But, Mr. Moore, you smile. *I* could not smile to see Shirley in such a mood."

"My boy, I am neither nervous, nor poetic, nor inexperienced. I see things as they are; you don't as yet. Tell me these family points."

"Only, sir, she asked me whether I considered myself most of a Keeldar or a Sympson; and I answered I was Keeldar to the core of the heart and to the marrow of the bones. She said she was glad of it; for, besides her, I was the only Keeldar left in England. And then we agreed on some matters."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, that if I lived to inherit my father's estate, and her house, I was to take the name of Keeldar, and to make Fieldhead my residence. Henry Shirley Keeldar I said I would be called; and I will. Her name and her manor house are ages old, and Sympson and Sympson Grove are of yesterday."

"Come, you are neither of you going to heaven yet. I have the best hopes of you both, with your proud distinctions — a pair of half-fledged eaglets. Now, what is your inference from all you have told me? Put it into words."

"That Shirley thinks she is going to die."

"She referred to her health?"

"Not once; but I assure you she is wasting. Her hands are grown quite thin, and so is her cheek."

"Does she ever complain to your mother or sisters?"

"Never. She laughs at them when they question her. Mr. Moore, she is a strange being, so fair and girlish — not a man-like woman at all, not an Amazon, and yet lifting her head above both help and sympathy."

"Do you know where she is now, Henry? Is she in the house, or riding out?"

"Surely not out, sir. It rains fast."

"True; which, however, is no guarantee that she is not at this moment cantering over Rushedge. Of late she has never permitted weather to be a hindrance to her rides."

"You remember, Mr. Moore, how wet and stormy it was last Wednesday — so wild, indeed, that she would not permit Zoë to be saddled? Yet the blast she thought too tempestuous for her mare she herself faced on foot; that afternoon she walked nearly as far as Nunnely. I asked her, when she came in, if she was not afraid of taking cold. 'Not I,' she said. 'It would be too much good luck for me. I don't know, Harry, but the best thing that could happen to me would be to take a good cold and fever, and so pass off like other Christians.' She is reckless, you see, sir."

"Reckless indeed! Go and find out where she is, and if you can get an opportunity of speaking to her without attracting attention, request her to come here a minute."

"Yes, sir."

He snatched his crutch, and started up to go.

"Harry!"

He returned.

"Do not deliver the message formally. Word it as, in former days, you would have worded an ordinary summons to the schoolroom."

"I see, sir. She will be more likely to obey."

"And, Harry — — "

"Sir?"

"I will call you when I want you. Till then, you are dispensed from lessons."

He departed. Mr. Moore, left alone, rose from his desk.

"I can be very cool and very supercilious with Henry," he said. "I can seem to make light of his apprehensions, and look down *du haut de ma grandeur* on his youthful ardour. To *him* I can speak as if, in my eyes, they were both children. Let me see if I can keep up the same rôle with her. I have known the moment when I seemed about to forget it, when Confusion and Submission seemed about to crush me with their soft tyranny, when my tongue faltered, and I have almost let the mantle drop, and stood in her presence, not master — no — but something else. I trust I shall never so play the fool. It is well for a Sir Philip Nunnely to redden when he meets her eye. He may permit himself the indulgence of submission. He may even, without disgrace, suffer his hand to tremble when it touches hers; but if one of her farmers were to show himself susceptible and sentimental, he would merely prove his need of a strait waistcoat. So far I have always done very well. She has sat near me, and I have not shaken — more than my desk. I have encountered her looks and smiles like — why, like a tutor, as I am. Her hand I never yet touched — never underwent that test. Her farmer or her footman I am not — no serf nor servant of hers have I ever been; but I am poor, and it behoves me to look to my self-respect — not to compromise an inch of it. What did she mean by that allusion to the cold people who petrify flesh to marble? It pleased me — I hardly know why; I would not permit myself to inquire. I never do indulge in scrutiny either of her language or countenance; for if I did, I should sometimes forget common sense and believe in romance. A strange, secret ecstasy steals through my veins at moments. I'll not encourage — I'll not remember it. I am resolved, as long as may be, to retain the right to say with Paul, 'I am not mad, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.'"

He paused, listening.

"Will she come, or will she not come?" he inquired. "How will she take the message? Naïvely or disdainfully? Like a child or like a queen? Both characters are in her nature.

"If she comes, what shall I say to her? How account, firstly, for the freedom of the request? Shall I apologize to her? I could in all humility; but would an apology tend to place us in the positions we ought relatively to occupy in this matter? I *must* keep up the professor, otherwise — — I hear a door."

He waited. Many minutes passed.

"She will refuse me. Henry is entreating her to come; she declines. My petition is presumption in her eyes. Let her *only* come, I can teach her to the contrary. I would rather she were a little perverse; it will steel me. I prefer her cuirassed in pride, armed with a taunt. Her scorn startles me from my dreams; I stand up myself. A sarcasm from her eyes or lips puts strength into every nerve and sinew I have. Some step approaches, and not Henry's."

The door unclosed; Miss Keeldar came in. The message, it appeared, had found her at her needle; she brought her work in her hand. That day she had not been riding out; she had evidently passed it quietly. She wore her neat indoor dress and silk apron. This was no Thalestris from the fields, but a quiet domestic character from the fireside. Mr. Moore had her at advantage. He should have addressed her at once in solemn accents, and with rigid mien.

Perhaps he would, had she looked saucy; but her air never showed less of *crânerie*. A soft kind of youthful shyness depressed her eyelid and mantled on her cheek. The tutor stood silent.

She made a full stop between the door and his desk.

“Did you want me, sir?” she asked.

“I ventured, Miss Keeldar, to send for you — that is, to ask an interview of a few minutes.”

She waited; she plied her needle.

“Well, sir” (not lifting her eyes), “what about?”

“Be seated first. The subject I would broach is one of some moment. Perhaps I have hardly a right to approach it. It is possible I ought to frame an apology; it is possible no apology can excuse me. The liberty I have taken arises from a conversation with Henry. The boy is unhappy about your health; all your friends are unhappy on that subject. It is of your health I would speak.”

“I am quite well,” she said briefly.

“Yet changed.”

“That matters to none but myself. We all change.”

“Will you sit down? Formerly, Miss Keeldar, I had some influence with you: have I any now? May I feel that what I am saying is not accounted positive presumption?”

“Let me read some French, Mr. Moore, or I will even take a spell at the Latin grammar, and let us proclaim a truce to all sanitary discussions.”

“No, no. It is time there were discussions.”

“Discuss away, then, but do not choose me for your text. I am a healthy subject.”

“Do you not think it wrong to affirm and reaffirm what is substantially untrue?”

“I say I am well. I have neither cough, pain, nor fever.”

“Is there no equivocation in that assertion? Is it the direct truth?”

“The direct truth.”

Louis Moore looked at her earnestly.

“I can myself,” he said, “trace no indications of actual disease. But why, then, are you altered?”

“*Am* I altered?”

“We will try. We will seek a proof.”

“How?”

“I ask, in the first place, do you sleep as you used to?”

“I do not; but it is not because I am ill.”

“Have you the appetite you once had?”

“No; but it is not because I am ill.”

“You remember this little ring fastened to my watch-chain? It was my mother’s, and is too small to pass the joint of my little finger. You have many a time sportively purloined it. It fitted your fore-finger. Try now.”

She permitted the test. The ring dropped from the wasted little hand. Louis picked it up, and reattached it to the chain. An uneasy flush coloured his brow. Shirley again said, “It is not because I am ill.”

“Not only have you lost sleep, appetite, and flesh,” proceeded Moore, “but your spirits are always at ebb. Besides, there is a nervous alarm in your eye, a nervous disquiet in your manner. These peculiarities were not formerly yours.”

“Mr. Moore, we will pause here. You have exactly hit it. I am nervous. Now, talk of something else. What wet weather we have — steady, pouring rain!”

“*You* nervous? Yes; and if Miss Keeldar is nervous, it is not without a cause. Let me reach it. Let me look nearer. The ailment is not physical. I have suspected that. It came in one moment. I know the day. I noticed the change. Your pain is mental.”

“Not at all. It is nothing so dignified — merely nervous. Oh! dismiss the topic.”

“When it is exhausted; not till then. Nervous alarms should always be communicated, that they may be dissipated. I wish I had the gift of persuasion, and could incline you to speak willingly. I believe confession, in your case, would be half equivalent to cure.”

“No,” said Shirley abruptly. “I wish that were at all probable; but I am afraid it is not.”

She suspended her work a moment. She was now seated. Resting her elbow on the table, she leaned her head on her hand. Mr. Moore looked as if he felt he had at last gained some footing in this difficult path. She was serious, and in her wish was implied an important admission; after that she could no longer affirm that *nothing* ailed her.

The tutor allowed her some minutes for repose and reflection ere he returned to the charge. Once his lips moved to speak, but he thought better of it, and prolonged the pause. Shirley lifted her eye to his. Had he betrayed injudicious emotion, perhaps obstinate persistence in silence would have been the result; but he looked calm, strong, trustworthy.

“I had better tell *you* than my aunt,” she said, “or than my cousins, or my uncle. They would all make such a bustle, and it is that very bustle I dread — the alarm, the flurry, the *éclat*. In short, I never liked to be the centre of a small domestic whirlpool. You can bear a little shock — eh?”

“A great one, if necessary.”

Not a muscle of the man’s frame moved, and yet his large heart beat fast in his deep chest. What was she going to tell him? Was irremediable mischief done?

“Had I thought it right to go to you, I would never have made a secret of the matter one moment,” she continued. “I would have told you at once, and asked advice.”

“Why was it not right to come to me?”

"It might be *right* — I do not mean that; but I could not do it. I seemed to have no title to trouble you. The mishap concerned me only. I wanted to keep it to myself, and people will not let me. I tell you, I hate to be an object of worrying attention, or a theme for village gossip. Besides, it may pass away without result — God knows!"

Moore, though tortured with suspense, did not demand a quick explanation. He suffered neither gesture, glance, nor word to betray impatience. His tranquillity tranquillized Shirley; his confidence reassured her.

"Great effects may spring from trivial causes," she remarked, as she loosened a bracelet from her wrist. Then, unfastening her sleeve, and partially turning it up, "Look here, Mr. Moore."

She showed a mark in her white arm — rather a deep though healed-up indentation — something between a burn and a cut.

"I would not show that to any one in Briarfield but you, because you can take it quietly."

"Certainly there is nothing in the little mark to shock. Its history will explain."

"Small as it is, it has taken my sleep away, and made me nervous, thin, and foolish; because, on account of that little mark, I am obliged to look forward to a possibility that has its terrors."

The sleeve was readjusted, the bracelet replaced.

"Do you know that you try me?" he said, smiling. "I am a patient sort of man, but my pulse is quickening."

"Whatever happens, you will befriend me, Mr. Moore? You will give me the benefit of your self-possession, and not leave me at the mercy of agitated cowards?"

"I make no promise now. Tell me the tale, and then exact what pledge you will."

"It is a very short tale. I took a walk with Isabella and Gertrude one day, about three weeks ago. They reached home before me; I stayed behind to speak to John. After leaving him, I pleased myself with lingering in the lane, where all was very still and shady. I was tired of chattering to the girls, and in no hurry to rejoin them. As I stood leaning against the gate-pillar, thinking some very happy thoughts about my future life — for that morning I imagined that events were beginning to turn as I had long wished them to turn — — "

"Ah! Nunnely had been with her the evening before!" thought Moore parenthetically.

"I heard a panting sound; a dog came running up the lane. I know most of the dogs in this neighbourhood. It was Phœbe, one of Mr. Sam Wynne's pointers. The poor creature ran with her head down, her tongue hanging out; she looked as if bruised and beaten all over. I called her. I meant to coax her into the house and give her some water and dinner. I felt sure she had been ill-used. Mr. Sam often flogs his pointers cruelly. She was too flurried to know me; and when I attempted to pat her head, she turned and snatched at my arm. She bit it so as to draw blood, then ran panting on. Directly after, Mr. Wynne's keeper came up, carrying a gun. He asked if I had seen a dog. I told him I had seen Phœbe.

"'You had better chain up Tartar, ma'am,' he said, 'and tell your people to keep within the house. I am after Phœbe to shoot her, and the groom is gone another way. She is raging mad.'"

Mr. Moore leaned back in his chair and folded his arms across his chest. Miss Keeldar resumed her square of silk canvas, and continued the creation of a wreath of Parmese violets.

"And you told no one, sought no help, no cure? You would not come to me?"

"I got as far as the schoolroom door; there my courage failed. I preferred to cushion the matter."

"Why? What can I demand better in this world than to be of use to you?"

"I had no claim."

"Monstrous! And you did nothing?"

"Yes. I walked straight into the laundry, where they are ironing most of the week, now that I have so many guests in the house. While the maid was busy crimping or starching, I took an Italian iron from the fire, and applied the light scarlet glowing tip to my arm. I bored it well in. It cauterized the little wound. Then I went upstairs."

"I dare say you never once groaned?"

"I am sure I don't know. I was very miserable — not firm or tranquil at all, I think. There was no calm in my mind."

"There was calm in your person. I remember listening the whole time we sat at luncheon, to hear if you moved in the room above. All was quiet."

"I was sitting at the foot of the bed, wishing Phœbe had not bitten me."

"And alone. You like solitude."

"Pardon me."

"You disdain sympathy."

"Do I, Mr. Moore?"

"With your powerful mind you must feel independent of help, of advice, of society."

"So be it, since it pleases you."

She smiled. She pursued her embroidery carefully and quickly, but her eyelash twinkled, and then it glittered, and then a drop fell.

Mr. Moore leaned forward on his desk, moved his chair, altered his attitude.

"If it is not so," he asked, with a peculiar, mellow change in his voice, "how is it, then?"

"I don't know."

"You do know, but you won't speak. All must be locked up in yourself."

"Because it is not worth sharing."

"Because nobody can give the high price you require for your confidence. Nobody is rich enough to purchase it. Nobody has the honour, the intellect, the power you demand in your adviser. There is not a shoulder in England on which you would rest your hand for support, far less a bosom which you would permit to pillow your head. Of course you must live alone."

"I *can* live alone, if need be. But the question is not how to live, but how to die alone. That strikes me in a more grisly light."

"You apprehend the effects of the virus? You anticipate an indefinitely threatening, dreadful doom?"

She bowed.

"You are very nervous and womanish."

"You complimented me two minutes since on my powerful mind."

"You are very womanish. If the whole affair were coolly examined and discussed, I feel assured it would turn out that there is no danger of your dying at all."

"Amen! I am very willing to live, if it please God. I have felt life sweet."

"How can it be otherwise than sweet with your endowments and nature? Do you truly expect that you will be seized with hydrophobia, and die raving mad?"

"I *expect* it, and have *feared* it. Just now I fear nothing."

"Nor do I, on your account. I doubt whether the smallest particle of virus mingled with your blood; and if it did, let me assure you that, young, healthy, faultlessly sound as you are, no harm will ensue. For the rest, I shall inquire whether the dog was really mad. I hold she was not mad."

"Tell nobody that she bit me."

"Why should I, when I believe the bite innocuous as a cut of this penknife? Make yourself easy. *I* am easy, though I value your life as much as I do my own chance of happiness in eternity. Look up."

"Why, Mr. Moore?"

"I wish to see if you are cheered. Put your work down; raise your head."

"There — — "

"Look at me. Thank you. And is the cloud broken?"

"I fear nothing."

"Is your mind restored to its own natural sunny clime?"

"I am very content; but I want your promise."

"Dictate."

"You know, in case the worst I *have* feared should happen, they will smother me. You need not smile. They will; they always do. My uncle will be full of horror, weakness, precipitation; and that is the only expedient which will suggest itself to him. Nobody in the house will be self-possessed but you. Now promise to befriend me — to keep Mr. Sympson away from me, not to let Henry come near, lest I should hurt him. Mind — *mind* that you take care of yourself too. But I shall not injure you; I know I shall not. Lock the chamber door against the surgeons; turn them out if they get in. Let neither the young nor the old MacTurk lay a finger on me; nor Mr. Greaves, their colleague; and lastly, if I give trouble, with your own hand administer to me a strong narcotic — such a sure dose of laudanum as shall leave no mistake. *Promise to do this.*"

Moore left his desk, and permitted himself the recreation of one or two turns through the room. Stopping behind Shirley's chair, he bent over her, and said, in a low, emphatic voice, "I promise all you ask — without comment, without reservation."

"If female help is needed, call in my housekeeper, Mrs. Gill. Let her lay me out if I die. She is attached to me. She wronged me again and again, and again and again I forgave her. She now loves me, and would not defraud me of a pin. Confidence has made her honest; forbearance has made her kind-hearted. At this day I can trust both her integrity, her courage, and her affection. Call her; but keep my good aunt and my timid cousins away. Once more, promise."

"I promise."

"That is good in you," she said, looking up at him as he bent over her, and smiling.

"Is it good? Does it comfort?"

"Very much."

"I will be with you — I and Mrs. Gill only — in any, in every extremity where calm and fidelity are needed. No rash or coward hand shall meddle."

"Yet you think me childish?"

"I do."

"Ah! you despise me."

"Do we despise children?"

"In fact, I am neither so strong, nor have I such pride in my strength, as people think, Mr. Moore; nor am I so regardless of sympathy. But when I have any grief, I fear to impart it to those I love, lest it should pain them; and to those whom I view with indifference I cannot condescend to complain. After all, you should not taunt me with being childish, for if you were as unhappy as I have been for the last three weeks, you too would want some friend."

"We all want a friend, do we not?"

"All of us that have anything good in our natures."

"Well, you have Caroline Helstone."

"Yes. And you have Mr. Hall."

"Yes. Mrs. Pryor is a wise, good woman. She can counsel you when you need counsel."

"For your part, you have your brother Robert."

"For any right-hand defections, there is the Rev. Matthewson Helstone, M.A., to lean upon; for any left-hand fallings-off there is Hiram Yorke, Esq. Both elders pay you homage."

"I never saw Mrs. Yorke so motherly to any young man as she is to you. I don’t know how you have won her heart, but she is more tender to you than she is to her own sons. You have, besides, your sister Hortense.”

“It appears we are both well provided.”

“It appears so.”

“How thankful we ought to be!”

“Yes.”

“How contented!”

“Yes.”

“For my part, I am almost contented just now, and very thankful. Gratitude is a divine emotion. It fills the heart, but not to bursting; it warms it, but not to fever. I like to taste leisurely of bliss. Devoured in haste, I do not know its flavour.”

Still leaning on the back of Miss Keeldar’s chair, Moore watched the rapid motion of her fingers, as the green and purple garland grew beneath them. After a prolonged pause, he again asked, “Is the shadow *quite* gone?”

“Wholly. As I *was* two hours since, and as I *am* now, are two different states of existence. I believe, Mr. Moore, griefs and fears nursed in silence grow like Titan infants.”

“You will cherish such feelings no more in silence?”

“Not if I dare speak.”

“In using the word ‘*dare*,’ to whom do you allude?”

“To you.”

“How is it applicable to me?”

“On account of your austerity and shyness.”

“Why am I austere and shy?”

“Because you are proud.”

“Why am I proud?”

“I should like to know. Will you be good enough to tell me?”

“Perhaps, because I am poor, for one reason. Poverty and pride often go together.”

“That is such a nice reason. I should be charmed to discover another that would pair with it. Mate that turtle, Mr. Moore.”

“Immediately. What do you think of marrying to sober Poverty many-tinted Caprice?”

“Are you capricious?”

“*You* are.”

“A libel. I am steady as a rock, fixed as the polar star.”

“I look out at some early hour of the day, and see a fine, perfect rainbow, bright with promise, gloriously spanning the beclouded welkin of life. An hour afterwards I look again: half the arch is gone, and the rest is faded. Still later, the stern sky denies that it ever wore so benign a symbol of hope.”

“Well, Mr. Moore, you should contend against these changeful humours. They are your besetting sin. One never knows where to have you.”

“Miss Keeldar, I had once, for two years, a pupil who grew very dear to me. Henry is dear, but she was dearer. Henry never gives me trouble; she — well, she did. I think she vexed me twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four — — “

“She was never with you above three hours, or at the most six at a time.”

“She sometimes spilled the draught from my cup, and stole the food from my plate; and when she had kept me unfed for a day (and that did not suit me, for I am a man accustomed to take my meals with reasonable relish, and to ascribe due importance to the rational enjoyment of creature comforts) — — “

“I know you do. I can tell what sort of dinners you like best — perfectly well. I know precisely the dishes you prefer — — “

“She robbed these dishes of flavour, and made a fool of me besides. I like to sleep well. In my quiet days, when I was my own man, I never quarrelled with the night for being long, nor cursed my bed for its thorns. She changed all this.”

“Mr. Moore — — “

“And having taken from me peace of mind and ease of life, she took from me herself — quite coolly, just as if, when she was gone, the world would be all the same to me. I knew I should see her again at some time. At the end of two years, it fell out that we encountered again under her own roof, where she was mistress. How do you think she bore herself towards me, Miss Keeldar?”

“Like one who had profited well by lessons learned from yourself.”

“She received me haughtily. She meted out a wide space between us, and kept me aloof by the reserved gesture, the rare and alienated glance, the word calmly civil.”

“She was an excellent pupil! Having seen you distant, she at once learned to withdraw. Pray, sir, admire in her *hauteur* a careful improvement on your own coolness.”

“Conscience, and honour, and the most despotic necessity dragged me apart from her, and kept me sundered with ponderous fetters. She was free: she might have been clement.”

“Never free to compromise her self-respect, to seek where she had been shunned.”

“Then she was inconsistent; she tantalized as before. When I thought I had made up my mind to seeing in her only a lofty stranger, she would suddenly show me such a glimpse of loving simplicity — she would warm me with such a beam of reviving sympathy, she would gladden an hour with converse so gentle, gay, and kindly — that I could no more shut my heart on her image than I could close that door against her presence. Explain why she distressed me so.”

“She could not bear to be quite outcast; and then she would sometimes get a notion into her head, on a cold, wet day, that the schoolroom was no cheerful place, and feel it incumbent on her to go and see if you and Henry kept up a good fire; and once there, she liked to stay.”

"But she should not be changeful. If she came at all, she should come oftener."

"There is such a thing as intrusion."

"To-morrow you will not be as you are to-day."

"I don't know. Will you?"

"I am not mad, most noble Berenice! We may give one day to dreaming, but the next we must awake; and I shall awake to purpose the morning you are married to Sir Philip Nunnely. The fire shines on you and me, and shows us very clearly in the glass, Miss Keeldar; and I have been gazing on the picture all the time I have been talking. Look up! What a difference between your head and mine! I look old for thirty!"

"You are so grave; you have such a square brow; and your face is sallow. I never regard you as a young man, nor as Robert's junior."

"Don't you? I thought not. Imagine Robert's clear-cut, handsome face looking over my shoulder. Does not the apparition make vividly manifest the obtuse mould of my heavy traits? There!" (he started), "I have been expecting that wire to vibrate this last half-hour."

The dinner-bell rang, and Shirley rose.

"Mr. Moore," she said, as she gathered up her silks, "have you heard from your brother lately? Do you know what he means by staying in town so long? Does he talk of returning?"

"He talks of returning; but what has caused his long absence I cannot tell. To speak the truth, I thought none in Yorkshire knew better than yourself why he was reluctant to come home."

A crimson shadow passed across Miss Keeldar's cheek.

"Write to him and urge him to come," she said. "I know there has been no impolicy in protracting his absence thus far. It is good to let the mill stand, while trade is so bad; but he must not abandon the county."

"I am aware," said Louis, "that he had an interview with you the evening before he left, and I saw him quit Fieldhead afterwards. I read his countenance, or *tried* to read it. He turned from me. I divined that he would be long away. Some fine, slight fingers have a wondrous knack at pulverizing a man's brittle pride. I suppose Robert put too much trust in his manly beauty and native gentlemanhood. Those are better off who, being destitute of advantage, cannot cherish delusion. But I will write, and say you advise his return."

"Do not say *I* advise his return, but that his return is advisable."

The second bell rang, and Miss Keeldar obeyed its call.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LOUIS MOORE.

Louis Moore was used to a quiet life. Being a quiet man, he endured it better than most men would. Having a large world of his own in his own head and heart, he tolerated confinement to a small, still corner of the real world very patiently.

How hushed is Fieldhead this evening! All but Moore — Miss Keeldar, the whole family of the Sympsons, even Henry — are gone to Nunnely. Sir Philip would have them come; he wished to make them acquainted with his mother and sisters, who are now at the priory. Kind gentleman as the baronet is, he asked the tutor too; but the tutor would much sooner have made an appointment with the ghost of the Earl of Huntingdon to meet him, and a shadowy ring of his merry men, under the canopy of the thickest, blackest, oldest oak in Nunnely Forest. Yes, he would rather have appointed tryst with a phantom abbess, or mist-pale nun, among the wet and weedy relics of that ruined sanctuary of theirs, mouldering in the core of the wood. Louis Moore longs to have something near him to-night; but not the boy-baronet, nor his benevolent but stern mother, nor his patrician sisters, nor one soul of the Sympsons.

This night is not calm; the equinox still struggles in its storms. The wild rains of the day are abated; the great single cloud disparts and rolls away from heaven, not passing and leaving a sea all sapphire, but tossed buoyant before a continued, long-sounding, high-rushing moonlight tempest. The moon reigns glorious, glad of the gale, as glad as if she gave herself to his fierce caress with love. No Endymion will watch for his goddess to-night. There are no flocks out on the mountains; and it is well, for to-night she welcomes Æolus.

Moore, sitting in the schoolroom, heard the storm roar round the other gable and along the hall-front. This end was sheltered. He wanted no shelter; he desired no subdued sounds or screened position.

“All the parlours are empty,” said he. “I am sick at heart of this cell.”

He left it, and went where the casements, larger and freer than the branch-screened lattice of his own apartment, admitted unimpeded the dark-blue, the silver-fleeced, the stirring and sweeping vision of the autumn night-sky. He carried no candle; unneeded was lamp or fire. The broad and clear though cloud-crossed and fluctuating beam of the moon shone on every floor and wall.

Moore wanders through all the rooms. He seems following a phantom from parlour to parlour. In the oak room he stops. This is not chill, and polished, and fireless like the *salon*. The hearth is hot and ruddy; the cinders tinkle in the intense heat of their clear glow; near the rug is a little work-table, a desk upon it, a chair near it.

Does the vision Moore has tracked occupy that chair? You would think so, could you see him standing before it. There is as much interest now in his eye, and as much significance in his face, as if in this household solitude he had found a living companion, and was going to speak to it.

He makes discoveries. A bag — a small satin bag — hangs on the chair-back. The desk is open, the keys are in the lock. A pretty seal, a silver pen, a crimson berry or two of ripe fruit on a green leaf, a small, clean, delicate glove — these trifles at once decorate and disarrange the stand they strew. Order forbids details in a picture — she puts them tidily away; but details give charm.

Moore spoke.

“Her mark,” he said. “Here she has been — careless, attractive thing! — called away in haste, doubtless, and forgetting to return and put all to rights. Why does she leave fascination in her footprints? Whence did she acquire the gift to be heedless and never offend? There is always something to chide in her, and the reprimand never settles in displeasure on the heart, but, for her lover or her husband, when it had trickled a while in words, would naturally melt from his lips in a kiss. Better pass half an hour in remonstrating with her than a day in admiring or praising any other woman alive. Am I muttering? soliloquizing? Stop that.”

He did stop it. He stood thinking, and then he made an arrangement for his evening’s comfort.

He dropped the curtains over the broad window and regal moon. He shut out sovereign and court and starry armies; he added fuel to the hot but fast-wasting fire; he lit a candle, of which there were a pair on the table; he placed another chair opposite that near the workstand; and then he sat down. His next movement was to take from his pocket a small, thick book of blank paper, to produce a pencil, and to begin to write in a cramp, compact hand. Come near, by all means, reader. Do not be shy. Stoop over his shoulder fearlessly, and read as he scribbles.

“It is nine o’clock; the carriage will not return before eleven, I am certain. Freedom is mine till then; till then I may occupy her room, sit opposite her chair, rest my elbow on her table, have her little mementoes about me.

“I used rather to like Solitude — to fancy her a somewhat quiet and serious, yet fair nymph; an Oread, descending to me from lone mountain-passes, something of the blue mist of hills in her array and of their chill breeze in her breath, but much also of their solemn beauty in her mien. I once could court her serenely, and imagine my heart easier when I held her to it — all mute, but majestic.

“Since that day I called S. to me in the schoolroom, and she came and sat so near my side; since she opened the trouble of her mind to me, asked my protection, appealed to my strength — since that hour I abhor Solitude. Cold abstraction, fleshless skeleton, daughter, mother, and mate of Death!

"It is pleasant to write about what is near and dear as the core of my heart. None can deprive me of this little book, and through this pencil I can say to it what I will — say what I dare utter to nothing living — say what I dare not *think* aloud.

"We have scarcely encountered each other since that evening. Once, when I was alone in the drawing-room, seeking a book of Henry's, she entered, dressed for a concert at Stilbro'. Shyness — *her* shyness, not mine — drew a silver veil between us. Much cant have I heard and read about 'maiden modesty,' but, properly used, and not hackneyed, the words are good and appropriate words. As she passed to the window, after tacitly but gracefully recognizing me, I could call her nothing in my own mind save 'stainless virgin.' To my perception, a delicate splendour robed her, and the modesty of girlhood was her halo. I may be the most fatuous, as I am one of the plainest, of men, but in truth that shyness of hers touched me exquisitely; it flattered my finest sensations. I looked a stupid block, I dare say. I was alive with a life of Paradise, as she turned *her* glance from *my* glance, and softly averted her head to hide the suffusion of her cheek.

"I know this is the talk of a dreamer — of a rapt, romantic lunatic. I *do* dream. I *will* dream now and then; and if she has inspired romance into my prosaic composition, how can I help it?

"What a child she is sometimes! What an unsophisticated, untaught thing! I see her now looking up into my face, and entreating me to prevent them from smothering her, and to be sure and give her a strong narcotic. I see her confessing that she was not so self-sufficing, so independent of sympathy, as people thought. I see the secret tear drop quietly from her eyelash. She said I thought her childish, and I did. She imagined I despised her. Despised her! It was unutterably sweet to feel myself at once near her and above her — to be conscious of a natural right and power to sustain her, as a husband should sustain his wife.

"I worship her perfections; but it is her faults, or at least her foibles, that bring her near to me, that nestle her to my heart, that fold her about with my love, and that for a most selfish but deeply-natural reason. These faults are the steps by which I mount to ascendency over her. If she rose a trimmed, artificial mound, without inequality, what vantage would she offer the foot? It is the natural hill, with its mossy breaks and hollows, whose slope invites ascent, whose summit it is pleasure to gain.

"To leave metaphor. It delights my eye to look on her. She suits me. If I were a king and she the housemaid that swept my palace-stairs, across all that space between us my eye would recognize her qualities; a true pulse would beat for her in my heart, though an unspanned gulf made acquaintance impossible. If I were a gentleman, and she waited on me as a servant, I could not help liking that Shirley. Take from her her education; take her ornaments, her sumptuous dress, all extrinsic advantages; take all grace, but such as the symmetry of her form renders inevitable; present her to me at a cottage door, in a stuff gown; let her offer me there a draught of water, with that smile, with that warm good-will with which she now dispenses manorial hospitality — I should like her. I should wish to stay an hour; I should linger to talk with that rustic. I should not feel as I *now* do; I should find in her nothing divine; but whenever I met the young peasant, it would be with pleasure; whenever I left her, it would be with regret.

"How culpably careless in her to leave her desk open, where I know she has money! In the lock hang the keys of all her repositories, of her very jewel-casket. There is a purse in that little satin bag; I see the tassel of silver beads hanging out. That spectacle would provoke my brother Robert. All her little failings would, I know, be a source of irritation to him. If they vex me it is a most pleasurable vexation. I delight to find her at fault; and were I always resident with her, I am aware she would be no niggard in thus ministering to my enjoyment. She would just give me something to do, to rectify — a theme for my tutor lectures. I never lecture Henry, never feel disposed to do so. If he does wrong — and that is very seldom, dear, excellent lad! — a word suffices. Often I do no more than shake my head. But the moment her *minois mutin* meets my eye, expostulatory words crowd to my lips. From a taciturn man I believe she would transform me into a talker. Whence comes the delight I take in that talk? It puzzles myself sometimes. The more *crâne, malin, taquin* is her mood, consequently the clearer occasion she gives me for disapprobation, the more I seek her, the better I like her. She is never wilder than when equipped in her habit and hat, never less manageable than when she and Zoë come in fiery from a race with the wind on the hills; and I confess it — to this mute page I may confess it — I have waited an hour in the court for the chance of witnessing her return, and for the dearer chance of receiving her in my arms from the saddle. I have noticed (again it is to this page only I would make the remark) that she will never permit any man but myself to render her that assistance. I have seen her politely decline Sir Philip Nunnely's aid. She is always mighty gentle with her young baronet, mighty tender for his feelings, forsooth, and of his very thin-skinned *amour propre*. I have marked her haughtily reject Sam Wynne's. Now I know — my heart knows it, for it has felt it — that she resigns herself to me unreluctantly. Is she conscious how my strength rejoices to serve her? I myself am not her slave — I declare it — but my faculties gather to her beauty, like the genii to the glisten of the lamp. All my knowledge, all my prudence, all my calm, and all my power stand in her presence humbly waiting a task. How glad they are when a mandate comes! What joy they take in the toils she assigns! Does she know it?

"I have called her careless. It is remarkable that her carelessness never compromises her refinement. Indeed, through this very loophole of character, the reality, depth, genuineness of that refinement may be ascertained. A whole garment sometimes covers meagreness and malformation; through a rent sleeve a fair round arm may be revealed. I have seen and handled many of her possessions, because they are frequently astray. I never saw anything that did not proclaim the lady — nothing sordid, nothing soiled. In one sense she is as scrupulous as, in another, she is unthinking. As a peasant girl, she would go ever trim and cleanly. Look at the pure kid of this little glove, at the fresh, unsullied satin of the bag.

"What a difference there is between S. and that pearl C. H.! Caroline, I fancy, is the soul of conscientious punctuality and nice exactitude. She would precisely suit the domestic habits of a certain fastidious kinsman of mine — so delicate, dexterous, quaint, quick, quiet — all done to a minute, all arranged to a strawbreadth. She would suit Robert. But what could *I* do with anything so nearly faultless? *She* is my equal, poor as myself. She is certainly pretty: a little Raffaelle head hers — Raffaelle in feature, quite English in expression, all insular grace and purity; but where is there anything to alter, anything to endure, anything to reprimand, to be anxious about? There she is, a lily of the valley, untinted, needing no tint. What change could improve her? What pencil dare to paint? *My* sweetheart, if I ever have one, must bear nearer affinity to the rose — a sweet, lively delight guarded with prickly peril. *My* wife, if I ever marry, must stir my great frame with a sting now and then; she must furnish use to her husband's vast mass of patience. I was not made so enduring to be mated with a lamb; I should find more congenial responsibility in the charge of a young lioness or leopardess. I like few things sweet but what are likewise pungent — few things bright but what are likewise hot. I like the summer day, whose sun makes fruit blush and corn blanch. Beauty is never so beautiful as when, if I tease it, it wreathes back on me with spirit. Fascination is never so imperial as when, roused and half ireful, she threatens transformation to fierceness. I fear I should tire of the mute, monotonous innocence of the lamb; I should ere long feel as burdensome the nestling dove which never stirred in my bosom; but my patience would exult in stilling the flutterings and training the energies of the restless merlin. In managing the wild instincts of the scarce manageable *bête fauve* my powers would revel.

"O my pupil! O Peri! too mutinous for heaven, too innocent for hell, never shall I do more than see, and worship, and wish for thee. Alas! knowing I could make thee happy, will it be my doom to see thee possessed by those who have not that power?

"However kindly the hand, if it is feeble, it cannot bend Shirley; and she must be bent. It cannot curb her; and she must be curbed.

"Beware, Sir Philip Nunnely! I never see you walking or sitting at her side, and observe her lips compressed, or her brow knit, in resolute endurance of some trait of your character which she neither admires nor likes, in determined toleration of some weakness she believes atoned for by a virtue, but which annoys her despite that belief; I never mark the grave glow of her face, the unsmiling sparkle of her eye, the slight recoil of her whole frame when you draw a little too near, and gaze a little too expressively, and whisper a little too warmly — I never witness these things but I think of the fable of Semele reversed.

"It is not the daughter of Cadmus I see, nor do I realize her fatal longing to look on Jove in the majesty of his god-head. It is a priest of Juno that stands before me, watching late and lone at a shrine in an Argive temple. For years of solitary ministry he has lived on dreams. There is divine madness upon him. He loves the idol he serves, and prays day and night that his frenzy may be fed, and that the Ox-eyed may smile on her votary. She has heard; she will be propitious. All Argos slumbers. The doors of the temple are shut; the priest waits at the altar.

"A shock of heaven and earth is felt — not by the slumbering city, only by that lonely watcher, brave and unshaken in his fanaticism. In the midst of silence, with no preluding sound, he is wrapped in sudden light. Through the roof, through the rent, wide-yawning, vast, white-blazing blue of heaven above, pours a wondrous descent, dread as the downrushing of stars. He has what he asked. Withdraw — forbear to look — I am blinded. I hear in that fane an unspeakable sound. Would that I could not hear it! I see an insufferable glory burning terribly between the pillars. Gods be merciful and quench it!

"A pious Argive enters to make an early offering in the cool dawn of morning. There was thunder in the night; the bolt fell here. The shrine is shivered, the marble pavement round split and blackened. Saturnia's statue rises chaste, grand, untouched; at her feet piled ashes lie pale. No priest remains; he who watched will be seen no more.

"There is the carriage! Let me lock up the desk and pocket the keys. She will be seeking them to-morrow; she will have to come to me. I hear her: 'Mr. Moore, have you seen my keys?'

"So she will say, in her clear voice, speaking with reluctance, looking ashamed, conscious that this is the twentieth time of asking. I will tantalize her, keep her with me, expecting, doubting; and when I *do* restore them, it shall not be without a lecture. Here is the bag, too, and the purse; the glove — pen — seal. She shall wring them all out of me slowly and separately — only by confession, penitence, entreaty. I never can touch her hand, or a ringlet of her head, or a ribbon of her dress, but I will make privileges for myself. Every feature of her face, her bright eyes, her lips, shall go through each change they know, for my pleasure — display each exquisite variety of glance and curve, to delight, thrill, perhaps more hopelessly to enchain me. If I must be her slave, I will not lose my freedom for nothing."

He locked the desk, pocketed all the property, and went.

CHAPTER XXX.

RUSHEDGE — A CONFESSIONAL.

Everybody said it was high time for Mr. Moore to return home. All Briarfield wondered at his strange absence, and Whinbury and Nunnely brought each its separate contribution of amazement.

Was it known why he stayed away? Yes. It was known twenty — forty times over, there being at least forty plausible reasons adduced to account for the unaccountable circumstance. Business it was not — *that* the gossips agreed. He had achieved the business on which he departed long ago. His four ringleaders he had soon scented out and run down. He had attended their trial, heard their conviction and sentence, and seen them safely shipped prior to transportation.

This was known at Briarfield. The newspapers had reported it. The *Stilbro' Courier* had given every particular, with amplifications. None applauded his perseverance or hailed his success, though the mill-owners were glad of it, trusting that the terrors of law vindicated would henceforward paralyze the sinister valour of disaffection. Disaffection, however, was still heard muttering to himself. He swore ominous oaths over the drugged beer of alehouses, and drank strange toasts in fiery British gin.

One report affirmed that Moore *dared* not come to Yorkshire; he knew his life was not worth an hour's purchase if he did.

"I'll tell him that," said Mr. Yorke, when his foreman mentioned the rumour; "and if *that* does not bring him home full gallop, nothing will."

Either that or some other motive prevailed at last to recall him. He announced to Joe Scott the day he should arrive at Stilbro', desiring his hackney to be sent to the George for his accommodation; and Joe Scott having informed Mr. Yorke, that gentleman made it in his way to meet him.

It was market-day. Moore arrived in time to take his usual place at the market dinner. As something of a stranger, and as a man of note and action, the assembled manufacturers received him with a certain distinction. Some, who in public would scarcely have dared to acknowledge his acquaintance, lest a little of the hate and vengeance laid up in store for him should perchance have fallen on them, in private hailed him as in some sort their champion. When the wine had circulated, their respect would have kindled to enthusiasm had not Moore's unshaken nonchalance held it in a damp, low, smouldering state.

Mr. Yorke, the permanent president of these dinners, witnessed his young friend's bearing with exceeding complacency. If one thing could stir his temper or excite his contempt more than another, it was to see a man befooled by flattery or elate with popularity. If one thing smoothed, soothed, and charmed him especially, it was the spectacle of a public character incapable of relishing his publicity — *incapable*, I say. Disdain would but have incensed; it was indifference that appeased his rough spirit.

Robert, leaning back in his chair, quiet and almost surly, while the clothiers and blanket-makers vaunted his prowess and rehearsed his deeds — many of them interspersing their flatteries with coarse invectives against the operative class — was a delectable sight for Mr. Yorke. His heart tingled with the pleasing conviction that these gross eulogiums shamed Moore deeply, and made him half scorn himself and his work. On abuse, on reproach, on calumny, it is easy to smile; but painful indeed is the panegyric of those we contemn. Often had Moore gazed with a brilliant countenance over howling crowds from a hostile hustings. He had breasted the storm of unpopularity with gallant bearing and soul elate; but he drooped his head under the half-bred tradesmen's praise, and shrank chagrined before their congratulations.

Yorke could not help asking him how he liked his supporters, and whether he did not think they did honour to his cause. "But it is a pity, lad," he added, "that you did not hang these four samples of the unwashed. If you had managed *that* feat, the gentry here would have riven the horses out of the coach, yoked to a score of asses, and drawn you into Stilbro' like a conquering general."

Moore soon forsook the wine, broke from the party, and took the road. In less than five minutes Mr. Yorke followed him. They rode out of Stilbro' together.

It was early to go home, but yet it was late in the day. The last ray of the sun had already faded from the cloud-edges, and the October night was casting over the moorlands the shadow of her approach.

Mr. Yorke, moderately exhilarated with his moderate libations, and not displeased to see young Moore again in Yorkshire, and to have him for his comrade during the long ride home, took the discourse much to himself. He touched briefly, but scoffingly, on the trials and the conviction; he passed thence to the gossip of the neighbourhood, and ere long he attacked Moore on his own personal concerns.

"Bob, I believe you are worsted, and you deserve it. All was smooth. Fortune had fallen in love with you. She had decreed you the first prize in her wheel — twenty thousand pounds; she only required that you should hold your hand out and take it. And what did you do? You called for a horse and rode a-hunting to Warwickshire. Your sweetheart — Fortune, I mean — was perfectly indulgent. She said, 'I'll excuse him; he's young.' She waited, like 'Patience on a monument,' till the chase was over and the vermin-prey run down. She expected you would come back then, and be a good lad. You might still have had her first prize.

"It capped her beyond expression, and me too, to find that, instead of thundering home in a breakneck gallop and laying your assize laurels at her feet, you coolly took coach up to London. What you have done there Satan knows; nothing in this world, I believe, but sat and sulked. Your face was never lily fair, but it is olive green now. You're not as bonny as you were, man."

"And who is to have this prize you talk so much about?"

"Only a baronet; that is all. I have not a doubt in my own mind you've lost her. She will be Lady Nunnely before Christmas."

"Hem! Quite probable."

"But she need not to have been. Fool of a lad! I swear you might have had her."

"By what token, Mr. Yorke?"

"By every token — by the light of her eyes, the red of her cheeks. Red they grew when your name was mentioned, though of custom they are pale."

"My chance is quite over, I suppose?"

"It ought to be. But try; it is worth trying. I call this Sir Philip milk and water. And then he writes verses, they say — tags rhymes. *You* are above that, Bob, at all events."

"Would you advise me to propose, late as it is, Mr. Yorke — at the eleventh hour?"

"You can but make the experiment, Robert. If she has a fancy for you — and, on my conscience, I believe she has or had — she will forgive much. But, my lad, you are laughing. Is it at me? You had better grin at your own perverseness. I see, however, you laugh at the wrong side of your mouth. You have as sour a look at this moment as one need wish to see."

"I have so quarrelled with myself, Yorke. I have so kicked against the pricks, and struggled in a strait waistcoat, and dislocated my wrists with wrenching them in handcuffs, and battered my hard head by driving it against a harder wall."

"Ha! I'm glad to hear that. Sharp exercise yon! I hope it has done you good — ta'en some of the self-conceit out of you?"

"Self-conceit? What is it? Self-respect, self-tolerance even, what are they? Do you sell the articles? Do you know anybody who does? Give an indication. They would find in me a liberal chapman. I would part with my last guinea this minute to buy."

"Is it so with you, Robert? I find that spicy. I like a man to speak his mind. What has gone wrong?"

"The machinery of all my nature; the whole enginery of this human mill; the boiler, which I take to be the heart, is fit to burst."

"That suld be putten i' print; it's striking. It's almost blank verse. Ye'll be jingling into poetry just e'now. If the afflatus comes, give way, Robert. Never heed me; I'll bear it this whet [time]."

"Hideous, abhorrent, base blunder! You may commit in a moment what you will rue for years — what life cannot cancel."

“Lad, go on. I call it pie, nuts, sugar-candy. I like the taste uncommonly. Go on. It will do you good to talk. The moor is before us now, and there is no life for many a mile round.”

“I *will* talk. I am not ashamed to tell. There is a sort of wild cat in my breast, and I choose that you shall hear how it can yell.”

“To me it is music. What grand voices you and Louis have! When Louis sings — tones off like a soft, deep bell — I’ve felt myself tremble again. The night is still. It listens. It is just leaning down to you, like a black priest to a blacker penitent. Confess, lad. Smooth naught down. Be candid as a convicted, justified, sanctified Methody at an experience meeting. Make yourself as wicked as Beelzebub. It will ease your mind.”

“As mean as Mammon, you would say. Yorke, if I got off horseback and laid myself down across the road, would you have the goodness to gallop over me, backwards and forwards, about twenty times?”

“Wi’ all the pleasure in life, if there were no such thing as a coroner’s inquest.”

“Hiram Yorke, I certainly believed she loved me. I have seen her eyes sparkle radiantly when she has found me out in a crowd; she has flushed up crimson when she has offered me her hand, and said, ‘How do you do, Mr. Moore?’

“My name had a magical influence over her. When others uttered it she changed countenance — I know she did. She pronounced it herself in the most musical of her many musical tones. She was cordial to me; she took an interest in me; she was anxious about me; she wished me well; she sought, she seized every opportunity to benefit me. I considered, paused, watched, weighed, wondered. I could come to but one conclusion — this is love.

“I looked at her, Yorke. I saw in her youth and a species of beauty. I saw power in her. Her wealth offered me the redemption of my honour and my standing. I owed her gratitude. She had aided me substantially and effectually by a loan of five thousand pounds. Could I remember these things? Could I believe she loved me? Could I hear wisdom urge me to marry her, and disregard every dear advantage, disbelieve every flattering suggestion, disdain every well-weighed counsel, turn and leave her? Young, graceful, gracious — my benefactress, attached to me, enamoured of me. I used to say so to myself; dwell on the word; mouth it over and over again; swell over it with a pleasant, pompous complacency, with an admiration dedicated entirely to myself, and unimpaired even by esteem for her; indeed I smiled in deep secrecy at her *naïveté* and simplicity in being the first to love, and to show it. That whip of yours seems to have a good heavy handle, Yorke; you can swing it about your head and knock me out of the saddle, if you choose. I should rather relish a loundering whack.”

“Tak patience, Robert, till the moon rises and I can see you. Speak plain out — did you love her or not? I could like to know. I feel curious.”

“Sir — sir — I say — she is very pretty, in her own style, and very attractive. She has a look, at times, of a thing made out of fire and air, at which I stand and marvel, without a thought of clasping and kissing it. I felt in her a powerful magnet to my interest and vanity. I never felt as if nature meant her to be my other and better self. When a question on that head rushed upon me, I flung it off, saying brutally I should be rich with her and ruined without her — vowing I would be practical, and not romantic."

"A very sensible resolve. What mischief came of it, Bob?"

"With this sensible resolve I walked up to Fieldhead one night last August. It was the very eve of my departure for Birmingham; for, you see, I wanted to secure Fortune's splendid prize. I had previously dispatched a note requesting a private interview. I found her at home, and alone.

"She received me without embarrassment, for she thought I came on business. *I* was embarrassed enough, but determined. I hardly know how I got the operation over; but I went to work in a hard, firm fashion — frightful enough, I dare say. I sternly offered myself — my fine person — with my debts, of course, as a settlement.

"It vexed me, it kindled my ire, to find that she neither blushed, trembled, nor looked down. She responded, 'I doubt whether I have understood you, Mr. Moore.'

"And I had to go over the whole proposal twice, and word it as plainly as A B C, before she would fully take it in. And then, what did she do? Instead of faltering a sweet Yes, or maintaining a soft, confused silence (which would have been as good), she started up, walked twice fast through the room, in the way that *she* only does, and no other woman, and ejaculated, 'God bless me!'

"Yorke, I stood on the hearth, backed by the mantelpiece; against it I leaned, and prepared for anything — everything. I knew my doom, and I knew myself. There was no misunderstanding her aspect and voice. She stopped and looked at me.

"'God bless me!' she piteously repeated, in that shocked, indignant, yet saddened accent. 'You have made a strange proposal — strange from *you*; and if you knew how strangely you worded it and looked it, you would be startled at yourself. You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse rather than like a lover who asked my heart.'

"A queer sentence, was it not, Yorke? And I knew, as she uttered it, it was true as queer. Her words were a mirror in which I saw myself.

"I looked at her, dumb and wolfish. She at once enraged and shamed me.

"'Gérard Moore, you know you don't love Shirley Keeldar.' I might have broken out into false swearing — vowed that I did love her; but I could not lie in her pure face. I could not perjure myself in her truthful presence. Besides, such hollow oaths would have been vain as void. She would no more have believed me than she would have believed the ghost of Judas, had he broken from the night and stood before her. Her female heart had finer perceptions than to be cheated into mistaking my half-coarse, half-cold admiration for true-throbbing, manly love.

"What next happened? you will say, Mr. Yorke.

"Why, she sat down in the window-seat and cried. She cried passionately. Her eyes not only rained but lightened. They flashed, open, large, dark, haughty, upon me. They said, 'You have pained me; you have outraged me; you have deceived me.'

"She added words soon to looks.

"'I *did* respect — I *did* admire — I *did* like you,' she said — 'yes, as much as if you were my brother; and *you* — *you* want to make a speculation of me. You would immolate me to that mill, your Moloch!'

"I had the common sense to abstain from any word of excuse, any attempt at palliation. I stood to be scorned.

"Sold to the devil for the time being, I was certainly infatuated. When I did speak, what do you think I said?

"'Whatever my own feelings were, I was persuaded *you* loved *me*, Miss Keeldar.'

"Beautiful, was it not? She sat quite confounded. 'Is it Robert Moore that speaks?' I heard her mutter. 'Is it a man — or something lower?'

"'Do you mean,' she asked aloud — 'do you mean you thought I loved you as we love those we wish to marry?'

"It *was* my meaning, and I said so.

"'You conceived an idea obnoxious to a woman's feelings,' was her answer. 'You have announced it in a fashion revolting to a woman's soul. You insinuate that all the frank kindness I have shown you has been a complicated, a bold, and an immodest manœuvre to ensnare a husband. You imply that at last you come here out of pity to offer me your hand, because I have courted you. Let me say this: Your sight is jaundiced; you have seen wrong. Your mind is warped; you have judged wrong. Your tongue betrays you; you now speak wrong. I never loved you. Be at rest there. My heart is as pure of passion for you as yours is barren of affection for me.'

"I hope I was answered, Yorke?

"'I seem to be a blind, besotted sort of person,' was my remark.

"'*Loved* you!' she cried. 'Why, I have been as frank with you as a sister — never shunned you, never feared you. You cannot,' she affirmed triumphantly — 'you cannot make me tremble with your coming, nor accelerate my pulse by your influence.'

"I alleged that often, when she spoke to me, she blushed, and that the sound of my name moved her.

"'Not for *your* sake!' she declared briefly. I urged explanation, but could get none.

"'When I sat beside you at the school feast, did you think I loved you then? When I stopped you in Maythorn Lane, did you think I loved you then? When I called on you in the counting-house, when I walked with you on the pavement, did you think I loved you then?'

"So she questioned me; and I said I did.

"By the Lord! Yorke, she rose, she grew tall, she expanded and refined almost to flame. There was a trembling all through her, as in live coal when its vivid vermilion is hottest.

"'That is to say that you have the worst opinion of me; that you deny me the possession of all I value most. That is to say that I am a traitor to all my sisters; that I have acted as no woman can act without degrading herself and her sex; that I have sought where the incorrupt of my kind naturally scorn and abhor to seek.' She and I were silent for many a minute. 'Lucifer, Star of the Morning,' she went on, 'thou art fallen! You, once high in my esteem, are hurled down; you, once intimate in my friendship, are cast out. Go!'

"I went not. I had heard her voice tremble, seen her lip quiver. I knew another storm of tears would fall, and then I believed some calm and some sunshine must come, and I would wait for it.

"As fast, but more quietly than before, the warm rain streamed down. There was another sound in her weeping — a softer, more regretful sound. While I watched, her eyes lifted to me a gaze more reproachful than haughty, more mournful than incensed.

"'O Moore!' said she. It was worse than 'Et tu, Brute!'

"I relieved myself by what should have been a sigh, but it became a groan. A sense of Cain-like desolation made my breast ache.

"'There has been error in what I have done,' I said, 'and it has won me bitter wages, which I will go and spend far from her who gave them.'

"I took my hat. All the time I could not have borne to depart so, and I believed she would not let me. Nor would she but for the mortal pang I had given her pride, that cowed her compassion and kept her silent.

"I was obliged to turn back of my own accord when I reached the door, to approach her, and to say, 'Forgive me.'

"'I could, if there was not myself to forgive too,' was her reply; 'but to mislead a sagacious man so far I must have done wrong.'

"I broke out suddenly with some declamation I do not remember. I know that it was sincere, and that my wish and aim were to absolve her to herself. In fact, in her case self-accusation was a chimera.

"At last she extended her hand. For the first time I wished to take her in my arms and kiss her. I *did* kiss her hand many times.

"'Some day we shall be friends again,' she said, 'when you have had time to read my actions and motives in a true light, and not so horribly to misinterpret them. Time may give you the right key to all. Then, perhaps, you will comprehend me, and then we shall be reconciled.'

"Farewell drops rolled slow down her cheeks. She wiped them away.

"'I am sorry for what has happened — deeply sorry,' she sobbed. So was I, God knows! Thus were we severed."

"A queer tale!" commented Mr. Yorke.

"I'll do it no more," vowed his companion; "never more will I mention marriage to a woman unless I feel love. Henceforth credit and commerce may take care of themselves. Bankruptcy may come when it lists. I have done with slavish fear of disaster. I mean to work diligently, wait patiently, bear steadily. Let the worst come, I will take my axe and an emigrant's berth, and go out with Louis to the West; he and I have settled it. No woman shall ever again look at me as Miss Keeldar looked, ever again feel towards me as Miss Keeldar felt. In no woman's presence will I ever again stand at once such a fool and such a knave, such a brute and such a puppy."

"Tut!" said the imperturbable Yorke, "you make too much of it; but still, I say, I am capped. Firstly, that she did not love you; and secondly, that you did not love her. You are both young; you are both handsome; you are both well enough for wit and even for temper — take you on the right side. What ailed you that you could not agree?"

"We never *have* been, never *could* be *at home* with each other, Yorke. Admire each other as we might at a distance, still we jarred when we came very near. I have sat at one side of a room and observed her at the other, perhaps in an excited, genial moment, when she had some of her favourites round her — her old beaux, for instance, yourself and Helstone, with whom she is so playful, pleasant, and eloquent. I have watched her when she was most natural, most lively, and most lovely; my judgment has pronounced her beautiful. Beautiful she is at times, when her mood and her array partake of the splendid. I have drawn a little nearer, feeling that our terms of acquaintance gave me the right of approach. I have joined the circle round her seat, caught her eye, and mastered her attention; then we have conversed; and others, thinking me, perhaps, peculiarly privileged, have withdrawn by degrees, and left us alone. Were we happy thus left? For myself, I must say No. Always a feeling of constraint came over me; always I was disposed to be stern and strange. We talked politics and business. No soft sense of domestic intimacy ever opened our hearts, or thawed our language and made it flow easy and limpid. If we had confidences, they were confidences of the counting-house, not of the heart. Nothing in her cherished affection in me, made me better, gentler; she only stirred my brain and whetted my acuteness. She never crept into my heart or influenced its pulse; and for this good reason, no doubt, because I had not the secret of making her love me."

"Well, lad, it is a queer thing. I might laugh at thee, and reckon to despise thy refinements; but as it is dark night and we are by ourselves, I don't mind telling thee that thy talk brings back a glimpse of my own past life. Twenty-five years ago I tried to persuade a beautiful woman to love me, and she would not. I had not the key to her nature; she was a stone wall to me, doorless and windowless."

"But you loved *her*, Yorke; you worshipped Mary Cave. Your conduct, after all, was that of a man — never of a fortune-hunter."

"Ay, I *did* love her; but then she was beautiful as the moon we do *not* see to-night. There is naught like her in these days. Miss Helstone, maybe, has a look of her, but nobody else."

"Who has a look of her?"

"That black-coated tyrant's niece — that quiet, delicate Miss Helstone. Many a time I have put on my spectacles to look at the lassie in church, because she has gentle blue een, wi' long lashes; and when she sits in shadow, and is very still and very pale, and is, happen, about to fall asleep wi' the length of the sermon and the heat of the biggin', she is as like one of Canova's marbles as aught else."

"Was Mary Cave in that style?"

"Far grander! — less lass-like and flesh-like. You wondered why she hadn't wings and a crown. She was a stately, peaceful angel was my Mary."

"And you could not persuade her to love you?"

"Not with all I could do, though I prayed Heaven many a time, on my bended knees, to help me."

"Mary Cave was not what you think her, Yorke. I have seen her picture at the rectory. She is no angel, but a fair, regular-featured, taciturn-looking woman — rather too white and lifeless for my taste. But, supposing she had been something better than she was — — "

"Robert," interrupted Yorke, "I could fell you off your horse at this moment. However, I'll hold my hand. Reason tells me you are right and I am wrong. I know well enough that the passion I still have is only the remnant of an illusion. If Miss Cave had possessed either feeling or sense, she could not have been so perfectly impassible to my regard as she showed herself; she must have preferred me to that copper-faced despot."

"Supposing, Yorke, she had been educated (no women were educated in those days); supposing she had possessed a thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge, a wish for information, which she took an artless delight in receiving from your lips, and having measured out to her by your hand; supposing her conversation, when she sat at your side, was fertile, varied, imbued with a picturesque grace and genial interest, quiet flowing but clear and bounteous; supposing that when you stood near her by chance, or when you sat near her by design, comfort at once became your atmosphere, and content your element; supposing that whenever her face was under your gaze, or her idea filled your thoughts, you gradually ceased to be hard and anxious, and pure affection, love of home, thirst for sweet discourse, unselfish longing to protect and cherish, replaced the sordid, cankering calculations of your trade; supposing, with all this, that many a time, when you had been so happy as to possess your Mary's little hand, you had felt it tremble as you held it, just as a warm little bird trembles when you take it from its nest; supposing you had noticed her shrink into the background on your entrance into a room, yet if you sought her in her retreat she welcomed you with the sweetest smile that ever lit a fair virgin face, and only turned her eyes from the encounter of your own lest their clearness should reveal too much; supposing, in short, your Mary had been not cold, but modest; not vacant, but reflective; not obtuse, but sensitive; not inane, but innocent; not prudish, but pure, — would you have left her to court another woman for her wealth?”

Mr. Yorke raised his hat, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

“The moon is up,” was his first not quite relevant remark, pointing with his whip across the moor. “There she is, rising into the haze, staring at us wi’ a strange red glower. She is no more silver than old Helstone’s brow is ivory. What does she mean by leaning her cheek on Rushedge i’ that way, and looking at us wi’ a scowl and a menace?”

“Yorke, if Mary had loved you silently yet faithfully, chastely yet fervently, as you would wish your wife to love, would you have left her?”

“Robert!” — he lifted his arm, he held it suspended, and paused — “Robert! this is a queer world, and men are made of the queerest dregs that Chaos churned up in her ferment. I might swear sounding oaths — oaths that would make the poachers think there was a bittern booming in Bilberry Moss — that, in the case you put, death only should have parted me from Mary. But I have lived in the world fifty-five years; I have been forced to study human nature; and, to speak a dark truth, the odds are, if Mary had loved and not scorned me, if I had been secure of her affection, certain of her constancy, been irritated by no doubts, stung by no humiliations — the odds are” (he let his hand fall heavy on the saddle) — “the odds are I should have left her!”

They rode side by side in silence. Ere either spoke again they were on the other side of Rushedge. Briarfield lights starred the purple skirt of the moor. Robert, being the youngest, and having less of the past to absorb him than his comrade, recommenced first.

“I believe — I daily find it proved — that we can get nothing in this world worth keeping, not so much as a principle or a conviction, except out of purifying flame or through strengthening peril. We err, we fall, we are humbled; then we walk more carefully. We greedily eat and drink poison out of the gilded cup of vice or from the beggar’s wallet of avarice. We are sickened, degraded; everything good in us rebels against us; our souls rise bitterly indignant against our bodies; there is a period of civil war; if the soul has strength, it conquers and rules thereafter.”

“What art thou going to do now, Robert? What are thy plans?”

“For my private plans, I’ll keep them to myself — which is very easy, as at present I have none. No private life is permitted a man in my position — a man in debt. For my public plans, my views are a little altered. While I was in Birmingham I looked a little into reality, considered closely and at their source the causes of the present troubles of this country. I did the same in London. Unknown, I could go where I pleased, mix with whom I would. I went where there was want of food, of fuel, of clothing; where there was no occupation and no hope. I saw some, with naturally elevated tendencies and good feelings, kept down amongst sordid privations and harassing griefs. I saw many originally low, and to whom lack of education left scarcely anything but animal wants, disappointed in those wants, ahungered, athirst, and desperate as famished animals. I saw what taught my brain a new lesson, and filled my breast with fresh feelings. I have no intention to profess more softness or sentiment than I have hitherto professed; mutiny and ambition I regard as I have always regarded them. I should resist a riotous mob just as heretofore; I should open on the scent of a runaway ringleader as eagerly as ever, and run him down as relentlessly, and follow him up to condign punishment as rigorously; but I should do it now chiefly for the sake and the security of those he misled. Something there is to look to, Yorke, beyond a man's personal interest, beyond the advancement of well-laid schemes, beyond even the discharge of dishonouring debts. To respect himself, a man must believe he renders justice to his fellow-men. Unless I am more considerate to ignorance, more forbearing to suffering, than I have hitherto been, I shall scorn myself as grossly unjust. — What now?" he said, addressing his horse, which, hearing the ripple of water, and feeling thirsty, turned to a wayside trough, where the moonbeam was playing in a crystal eddy.

"Yorke," pursued Moore, "ride on; I must let him drink."

Yorke accordingly rode slowly forwards, occupying himself as he advanced in discriminating, amongst the many lights now spangling the distance, those of Briarmains. Stilbro' Moor was left behind; plantations rose dusk on either hand; they were descending the hill; below them lay the valley with its populous parish: they felt already at home.

Surrounded no longer by heath, it was not startling to Mr. Yorke to see a hat rise, and to hear a voice speak behind the wall. The words, however, were peculiar.

"When the wicked perisheth there is shouting," it said; and added, "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more" (with a deeper growl): "terrors take hold of him as waters; hell is naked before him. He shall die without knowledge."

A fierce flash and sharp crack violated the calm of night. Yorke, ere he turned, knew the four convicts of Birmingham were avenged.

CHAPTER XXXI.

UNCLE AND NIECE.

The die was cast. Sir Philip Nunnely knew it; Shirley knew it; Mr. Sympson knew it. That evening, when all the Fieldhead family dined at Nunnely Priory, decided the business.

Two or three things conduced to bring the baronet to a point. He had observed that Miss Keeldar looked pensive and delicate. This new phase in her demeanour smote him on his weak or poetic side. A spontaneous sonnet brewed in his brain; and while it was still working there, one of his sisters persuaded his lady-love to sit down to the piano and sing a ballad — one of Sir Philip's own ballads. It was the least elaborate, the least affected — out of all comparison the best of his numerous efforts.

It chanced that Shirley, the moment before, had been gazing from a window down on the park. She had seen that stormy moonlight which "le Professeur Louis" was perhaps at the same instant contemplating from her own oak-parlour lattice; she had seen the isolated trees of the domain — broad, strong, spreading oaks, and high-towering heroic beeches — wrestling with the gale. Her ear had caught the full roar of the forest lower down; the swift rushing of clouds, the moon, to the eye, hasting swifter still, had crossed her vision. She turned from sight and sound — touched, if not rapt; wakened, if not inspired.

She sang, as requested. There was much about love in the ballad — faithful love that refused to abandon its object; love that disaster could not shake; love that in calamity waxed fonder, in poverty clung closer. The words were set to a fine old air; in themselves they were simple and sweet. Perhaps, when read, they wanted force; when *well* sung, they wanted nothing. Shirley sang them well. She breathed into the feeling softness; she poured round the passion force. Her voice was fine that evening, its expression dramatic. She impressed all, and charmed one.

On leaving the instrument she went to the fire, and sat down on a seat — semi-stool, semi-cushion. The ladies were round her; none of them spoke. The Misses Sympson and the Misses Nunnely looked upon her as quiet poultry might look on an egret, an ibis, or any other strange fowl. What made her sing so? *They* never sang so. Was it *proper* to sing with such expression, with such originality — so unlike a school-girl? Decidedly not. It was strange, it was unusual. What was *strange* must be *wrong*; what was *unusual* must be *improper*. Shirley was judged.

Moreover, old Lady Nunnely eyed her stonily from her great chair by the fireside. Her gaze said, “This woman is not of mine or my daughters’ kind. I object to her as my son’s wife.”

Her son, catching the look, read its meaning. He grew alarmed. What he so wished to win there was danger he might lose. He must make haste.

The room they were in had once been a picture-gallery. Sir Philip’s father — Sir Monckton — had converted it into a saloon; but still it had a shadowy, long-withdrawing look. A deep recess with a window — a recess that held one couch, one table, and a fairy cabinet — formed a room within a room. Two persons standing there might interchange a dialogue, and, so it were neither long nor loud, none be the wiser.

Sir Philip induced two of his sisters to perpetrate a duet. He gave occupation to the Misses Sympson. The elder ladies were conversing together. He was pleased to remark that meantime Shirley rose to look at the pictures. He had a tale to tell about one ancestress, whose dark beauty seemed as that of a flower of the south. He joined her, and began to tell it.

There were mementoes of the same lady in the cabinet adorning the recess; and while Shirley was stooping to examine the missal and the rosary on the inlaid shelf, and while the Misses Nunnely indulged in a prolonged screech, guiltless of expression, pure of originality, perfectly conventional and absolutely unmeaning, Sir Philip stooped too, and whispered a few hurried sentences. At first Miss Keeldar was struck so still you might have fancied that whisper a charm which had changed her to a statue; but she presently looked up and answered. They parted. Miss Keeldar returned to the fire, and resumed her seat. The baronet gazed after her, then went and stood behind his sisters. Mr. Sympson — Mr. Sympson only — had marked the pantomime.

That gentleman drew his own conclusions. Had he been as acute as he was meddling, as profound as he was prying, he might have found that in Sir Philip’s face whereby to correct his inference. Ever shallow, hasty, and positive, he went home quite cock-a-hoop.

He was not a man that kept secrets well. When elate on a subject, he could not avoid talking about it. The next morning, having occasion to employ his son’s tutor as his secretary, he must needs announce to him, in mouthing accents, and with much flimsy pomp of manner, that he had better hold himself prepared for a return to the south at an early day, as the important business which had detained him (Mr. Sympson) so long in Yorkshire was now on the eve of fortunate completion. His anxious and laborious efforts were likely, at last, to be crowned with the happiest success. A truly eligible addition was about to be made to the family connections.

“In Sir Philip Nunnely?” Louis Moore conjectured.

Whereupon Mr. Sympson treated himself simultaneously to a pinch of snuff and a chuckling laugh, checked only by a sudden choke of dignity, and an order to the tutor to proceed with business.

For a day or two Mr. Sympson continued as bland as oil, but also he seemed to sit on pins, and his gait, when he walked, emulated that of a hen treading a hot girdle. He was for ever looking out of the window and listening for chariot-wheels. Bluebeard's wife — Sisera's mother — were nothing to him. He waited when the matter should be opened in form, when himself should be consulted, when lawyers should be summoned, when settlement discussions and all the delicious worldly fuss should pompously begin.

At last there came a letter. He himself handed it to Miss Keeldar out of the bag. He knew the handwriting; he knew the crest on the seal. He did not see it opened and read, for Shirley took it to her own room; nor did he see it answered, for she wrote her reply shut up, and was very long about it — the best part of a day. He questioned her whether it was answered; she responded, "Yes."

Again he waited — waited in silence, absolutely not daring to speak, kept mute by something in Shirley's face — a very awful something — inscrutable to him as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar. He was moved more than once to call Daniel, in the person of Louis Moore, and to ask an interpretation; but his dignity forbade the familiarity. Daniel himself, perhaps, had his own private difficulties connected with that baffling bit of translation; he looked like a student for whom grammars are blank and dictionaries dumb.

Mr. Sympson had been out, to while away an anxious hour in the society of his friends at De Walden Hall. He returned a little sooner than was expected. His family and Miss Keeldar were assembled in the oak parlour. Addressing the latter, he requested her to step with him into another room. He wished to have with her a "*strictly* private interview."

She rose, asking no questions and professing no surprise.

"Very well, sir," she said, in the tone of a determined person who is informed that the dentist is come to extract that large double tooth of his, from which he has suffered such a purgatory this month past. She left her sewing and her thimble in the window-seat, and followed her uncle where he led.

Shut into the drawing-room, the pair took seats, each in an arm-chair, placed opposite, a few yards between them.

"I have been to De Walden Hall," said Mr. Sympson. He paused. Miss Keeldar's eyes were on the pretty white-and-green carpet. *That* information required no response. She gave none.

"I have learned," he went on slowly — "I have learned a circumstance which surprises me."

Resting her cheek on her forefinger, she waited to be told *what* circumstance.

"It seems that Nunnely Priory is shut up — that the family are gone back to their place in — — shire. It seems that the baronet — that the baronet — that Sir Philip himself has accompanied his mother and sisters."

"Indeed!" said Shirley.

"May I ask if you share the amazement with which I received this news?"

"No, sir."

"*Is* it news to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I mean — I mean," pursued Mr. Sympson, now fidgeting in his chair, quitting his hitherto brief and tolerably clear phraseology, and returning to his customary wordy, confused, irritable style — "I mean to have a *thorough* explanation. I will *not* be put off. I — I — shall *insist* on being heard, and on — on having my own way. My questions *must* be answered. I will have clear, satisfactory replies. I am not to be trifled with. (Silence.)

"It is a strange and an extraordinary thing — a very singular — a most odd thing! I thought all was right, knew no other; and there — the family are gone!"

"I suppose, sir, they had a right to go."

"*Sir Philip is gone!*" (with emphasis).

Shirley raised her brows. "*Bon voyage!*" said she.

"This will not do; this must be altered, ma'am."

He drew his chair forward; he pushed it back; he looked perfectly incensed, and perfectly helpless.

"Come, come now, uncle," expostulated Shirley, "do not begin to fret and fume, or we shall make no sense of the business. Ask me what you want to know. I am as willing to come to an explanation as you. I promise you truthful replies."

"I want — I demand to know, Miss Keeldar, whether Sir Philip has made you an offer?"

"He has."

"You avow it?"

"I avow it. But now, go on. Consider that point settled."

"He made you an offer that night we dined at the priory?"

"It is enough to say that he made it. Go on."

"He proposed in the recess — in the room that used to be a picture-gallery — that Sir Monckton converted into it saloon?"

No answer.

"You were both examining a cabinet. I saw it all. My sagacity was not at fault — it never is. Subsequently you received a letter from him. On what subject — of what nature were the contents?"

"No matter."

"Ma'am, is that the way in which you speak to me?"

Shirley's foot tapped quick on the carpet.

"There you sit, silent and sullen — *you* who promised truthful replies."

"Sir, I have answered you thus far. Proceed."

"I should like to see that letter."

"You *cannot* see it."

"I *must* and *shall*, ma'am; I am your guardian."

"Having ceased to be a ward, I have no guardian."

"Ungrateful being! Reared by me as my own daughter — — "

"Once more, uncle, have the kindness to keep to the point. Let us both remain cool. For my part, I do not wish to get into a passion; but, you know, once drive me beyond certain bounds, I care little what I say — I am not then soon checked. Listen! You have asked me whether Sir Philip made me an offer. That question is answered. What do you wish to know next?"

"I desire to know whether you accepted or refused him, and know it I will."

"Certainly, you ought to know it. I refused him."

"Refused him! You — *you*, Shirley Keeldar, *refused* Sir Philip Nunnely?"

"I did."

The poor gentleman bounced from his chair, and first rushed and then trotted through the room.

"There it is! There it is! There it is!"

"Sincerely speaking, I am sorry, uncle, you are so disappointed."

Concession, contrition, never do any good with some people. Instead of softening and conciliating, they but embolden and harden them. Of that number was Mr. Sympson.

"*I* disappointed? What is it to me? Have *I* an interest in it? You would insinuate, perhaps, that I have motives?"

"Most people have motives of some sort for their actions."

"She accuses me to my face! I, that have been a parent to her, she charges with bad motives!"

"*Bad* motives I did not say."

"And now you prevaricate; you have no principles!"

"Uncle, you tire me. I want to go away."

"Go you shall not! I will be answered. What are your intentions, Miss Keeldar?"

"In what respect?"

"In respect of matrimony?"

"To be quiet, and to do just as I please."

"Just as you please! The words are to the last degree indecorous."

"Mr. Sympson, I advise you not to become insulting. You know I will not bear that."

"You read French. Your mind is poisoned with French novels. You have imbibed French principles."

"The ground you are treading now returns a mighty hollow sound under your feet. Beware!"

"It will end in infamy, sooner or later. I have foreseen it all along."

"Do you assert, sir, that something in which *I* am concerned will end in infamy?"

"That it will — that it will. You said just now you would act as you please. You acknowledge no rules — no limitations."

"Silly stuff, and vulgar as silly!"

"Regardless of decorum, you are prepared to fly in the face of propriety."

"You tire me, uncle."

"What, madam — *what* could be your reasons for refusing Sir Philip?"

"At last there is another sensible question; I shall be glad to reply to it. Sir Philip is too young for me. I regard him as a boy. All his relations — his mother especially — would be annoyed if he married me. Such a step would embroil him with them. I am not his equal in the world's estimation."

"Is that all?"

"Our dispositions are not compatible."

"Why, a more amiable gentleman never breathed."

"He is very amiable — very excellent — truly estimable; but *not my master* — not in one point. I could not trust myself with his happiness. I would not undertake the keeping of it for thousands. I will accept no hand which cannot hold me in check."

"I thought you liked to do as you please. You are vastly inconsistent."

"When I promise to obey, it shall be under the conviction that I can keep that promise. I could not obey a youth like Sir Philip. Besides, he would never command me. He would expect me always to rule — to guide — and I have no taste whatever for the office."

"*You* no taste for swaggering, and subduing, and ordering, and ruling?"

"Not my husband; only my uncle."

"Where is the difference?"

"There *is* a slight difference — that is certain. And I know full well any man who wishes to live in decent comfort with me as a husband must be able to control me."

"I wish you had a real tyrant."

"A tyrant would not hold me for a day, not for an hour. I would rebel — break from him — defy him."

"Are you not enough to bewilder one's brain with your self-contradiction?"

"It is evident I bewilder your brain."

"You talk of Sir Philip being young. He is two-and-twenty."

"My husband must be thirty, with the sense of forty."

"You had better pick out some old man — some white-headed or bald-headed swain."

"No, thank you."

"You could lead some doting fool; you might pin him to your apron."

"I might do that with a boy; but it is not my vocation. Did I not say I prefer a *master* — one in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good; one whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge; a man whose approbation can reward, whose displeasure punish me; a man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear?"

"What is there to hinder you from doing all this with Sir Philip? He is a baronet — a man of rank, property, connections far above yours. If you talk of intellect, he is a poet — he writes verses; which you, I take it, cannot do, with all your cleverness."

"Neither his title, wealth, pedigree, nor poetry avail to invest him with the power I describe. These are feather-weights; they want ballast. A measure of sound, solid, practical sense would have stood him in better stead with me."

"You and Henry rave about poetry! You used to catch fire like tinder on the subject when you were a girl."

"O uncle, there is nothing really valuable in this world, there is nothing glorious in the world to come that is not poetry!"

"Marry a poet, then, in God's name!"

"Show him me, and I will."

"Sir Philip."

"Not at all. You are almost as good a poet as he."

"Madam, you are wandering from the point."

"Indeed, uncle, I wanted to do so, and I shall be glad to lead you away with me. Do not let us get out of temper with each other; it is not worth while."

"Out of temper, Miss Keeldar! I should be glad to know who is out of temper."

"*I* am not, yet."

"If you mean to insinuate that *I* am, I consider that you are guilty of impertinence."

"You will be soon, if you go on at that rate."

"There it is! With your pert tongue you would try the patience of a Job."

"I know I should."

"No levity, miss! This is not a laughing matter. It is an affair I am resolved to probe thoroughly, convinced that there is mischief at the bottom. You described just now, with far too much freedom for your years and sex, the sort of individual you would prefer as a husband. Pray, did you paint from the life?"

Shirley opened her lips, but instead of speaking she only glowed rose-red.

"I shall have an answer to that question," affirmed Mr. Sympson, assuming vast courage and consequence on the strength of this symptom of confusion.

"It was an historical picture, uncle, from several originals."

"Several originals! Bless my heart!"

"I have been in love several times."

"This is cynical."

"With heroes of many nations."

"What next — — "

"And philosophers."

"She is mad — — "

"Don't ring the bell, uncle; you will alarm my aunt."

"Your poor dear aunt, what a niece has she!"

"Once I loved Socrates."

"Pooh! no trifling, ma'am."

"I admired Themistocles, Leonidas, Epaminondas."

"Miss Keeldar — — "

"To pass over a few centuries, Washington was a plain man, but I liked him; but to speak of the actual present — — "

"Ah! the actual present."

"To quit crude schoolgirl fancies, and come to realities."

"Realities! That is the test to which you shall be brought, ma'am."

"To avow before what altar I now kneel — to reveal the present idol of my soul — — "

"You will make haste about it, if you please. It is near luncheon time, and confess *you shall*."

"Confess I must. My heart is full of the secret. It must be spoken. I only wish you were Mr. Helstone instead of Mr. Sympson; you would sympathize with me better."

"Madam, it is a question of common sense and common prudence, not of sympathy and sentiment, and so on. Did you say it was Mr. Helstone?"

"Not precisely, but as near as may be; they are rather alike."

"I will know the name; I will have particulars."

"They positively *are* rather alike. Their very faces are not dissimilar — a pair of human falcons — and dry, direct, decided both. But my hero is the mightier of the two. His mind has the clearness of the deep sea, the patience of its rocks, the force of its billows."

"Rant and fustian!"

"I dare say he can be harsh as a saw-edge and gruff as a hungry raven."

"Miss Keeldar, does the person reside in Briarfield? Answer me that."

"Uncle, I am going to tell you; his name is trembling on my tongue."

"Speak, girl!"

"That was well said, uncle. 'Speak, girl!' It is quite tragic. England has howled savagely against this man, uncle, and she will one day roar exultingly over him. He has been unscared by the howl, and he will be unelated by the shout."

"I said she was mad. She is."

"This country will change and change again in her demeanour to him; he will never change in his duty to her. Come, cease to chafe, uncle, I'll tell you his name."

"You shall tell me, or — — "

"Listen! Arthur Wellesley, Lord Wellington."

Mr. Sympson rose up furious. He bounced out of the room, but immediately bounced back again, shut the door, and resumed his seat.

"Ma'am, you *shall* tell me *this*. Will your principles permit you to marry a man without money — a man below you?"

"Never a man below me."

(In a high voice.) "Will you, Miss Keeldar, marry a poor man?"

"What right have you, Mr. Sympson, to ask me?"

"I insist upon knowing."

"You don't go the way to know."

"My family respectability shall not be compromised."

"A good resolution; keep it."

"Madam, it is *you* who shall keep it."

"Impossible, sir, since I form no part of your family."

"Do you disown us?"

"I disdain your dictatorship."

"Whom *will* you marry, Miss Keeldar?"

"Not Mr. Sam Wynne, because I scorn him; not Sir Philip Nunnely, because I *only* esteem him."

"Whom have you in your eye?"

"Four rejected candidates."

"Such obstinacy could not be unless you were under improper influence."

"What do you mean? There are certain phrases potent to make my blood boil. Improper influence! What old woman's cackle is that?"

"Are you a young lady?"

"I am a thousand times better: I am an honest woman, and as such I will be treated."

"Do you know" (leaning mysteriously forward, and speaking with ghastly solemnity) — "do you know the whole neighbourhood teems with rumours respecting you and a bankrupt tenant of yours, the foreigner Moore?"

"Does it?"

"It does. Your name is in every mouth."

"It honours the lips it crosses, and I wish to the gods it may purify them."

"Is it *that* person who has power to influence you?"

"Beyond any whose cause you have advocated."

"Is it he you will marry?"

"He is handsome, and manly, and commanding."

"You declare it to my face! The Flemish knave! the low trader!"

"He is talented, and venturous, and resolute. Prince is on his brow, and ruler in his bearing."

"She glories in it! She conceals nothing! No shame, no fear!"

"When we speak the name of Moore, shame should be forgotten and fear discarded. The Moores know only honour and courage."

"I say she is mad."

"You have taunted me till my blood is up; you have worried me till I turn again."

"That Moore is the brother of my son's tutor. Would you let the usher call you sister?"

Bright and broad shone Shirley's eye as she fixed it on her questioner now.

"No, no; not for a province of possession, not for a century of life."

"You cannot separate the husband from his family."

"What then?"

"Mr. Louis Moore's sister you will be."

"Mr. Sympson, I am sick at heart with all this weak trash; I will bear no more. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your aims are not my aims, your gods are not my gods. We do not view things in the same light; we do not measure them by the same standard; we hardly speak in the same tongue. Let us part."

"It is not," she resumed, much excited — "it is not that I hate you; you are a good sort of man. Perhaps you mean well in your way. But we cannot suit; we are ever at variance. You annoy me with small meddling, with petty tyranny; you exasperate my temper, and make and keep me passionate. As to your small maxims, your narrow rules, your little prejudices, aversions, dogmas, bundle them off. Mr. Sympson, go, offer them a sacrifice to the deity you worship; I'll none of them. I wash my hands of the lot. I walk by another creed, light, faith, and hope than you."

"Another creed! I believe she is an infidel."

"An infidel to *your* religion, an atheist to *your* god."

"*An — atheist!!!*"

"Your god, sir, is the world. In my eyes you too, if not an infidel, are an idolater. I conceive that you ignorantly worship; in all things you appear to me too superstitious. Sir, your god, your great Bel, your fish-tailed Dagon, rises before me as a demon. You, and such as you, have raised him to a throne, put on him a crown, given him a sceptre. Behold how hideously he governs! See him busied at the work he likes best — making marriages. He binds the young to the old, the strong to the imbecile. He stretches out the arm of Mezentius, and fetters the dead to the living. In his realm there is hatred — secret hatred; there is disgust — unspoken disgust; there is treachery — family treachery; there is vice — deep, deadly domestic vice. In his dominions children grow unloving between parents who have never loved; infants are nursed on deception from their very birth; they are reared in an atmosphere corrupt with lies. Your god rules at the bridal of kings; look at your royal dynasties! Your deity is the deity of foreign aristocracies; analyze the blue blood of Spain! Your god is the Hymen of France; what is French domestic life? All that surrounds him hastens to decay; all declines and degenerates under his sceptre. *Your* god is a masked Death."

"This language is terrible! My daughters and you must associate no longer, Miss Keeldar; there is danger in such companionship. Had I known you a little earlier — but, extraordinary as I thought you, I could not have believed — — "

"Now, sir, do you begin to be aware that it is useless to scheme for me; that in doing so you but sow the wind to reap the whirlwind? I sweep your cobweb projects from my path, that I may pass on unsullied. I am anchored on a resolve you cannot shake. My heart, my conscience shall dispose of my hand — *they only*. Know this at last."

Mr. Sympson was becoming a little bewildered.

"Never heard such language!" he muttered again and again; "never was so addressed in my life — never was so used!"

"You are quite confused, sir. You had better withdraw, or I will."

He rose hastily. "We must leave this place; they must pack up at once."

"Do not hurry my aunt and cousins; give them time."

"No more intercourse; she's not proper."

He made his way to the door. He came back for his handkerchief. He dropped his snuff-box, leaving the contents scattered on the carpet; he stumbled out. Tartar lay outside across the mat; Mr. Sympson almost fell over him. In the climax of his exasperation he hurled an oath at the dog and a coarse epithet at his mistress.

"Poor Mr. Sympson! he is both feeble and vulgar," said Shirley to herself. "My head aches, and I am tired," she added; and leaning her head upon a cushion, she softly subsided from excitement to repose. One, entering the room a quarter of an hour afterwards, found her asleep. When Shirley had been agitated, she generally took this natural refreshment; it would come at her call.

The intruder paused in her unconscious presence, and said, "Miss Keeldar."

Perhaps his voice harmonized with some dream into which she was passing. It did not startle, it hardly roused her. Without opening her eyes, she but turned her head a little, so that her cheek and profile, before hidden by her arm, became visible. She looked rosy, happy, half smiling, but her eyelashes were wet. She had wept in slumber; or perhaps, before dropping asleep, a few natural tears had fallen after she had heard that epithet. No man — no woman — is always strong, always able to bear up against the unjust opinion, the vilifying word. Calumny, even from the mouth of a fool, will sometimes cut into unguarded feelings. Shirley looked like a child that had been naughty and punished, but was now forgiven and at rest.

"Miss Keeldar," again said the voice. This time it woke her. She looked up, and saw at her side Louis Moore — not close at her side, but standing, with arrested step, two or three yards from her.

"O Mr. Moore!" she said. "I was afraid it was my uncle again: he and I have quarrelled."

"Mr. Sympson should let you alone," was the reply. "Can he not see that you are as yet far from strong?"

"I assure you he did not find me weak. I did not cry when he was here."

"He is about to evacuate Fieldhead — so he says. He is now giving orders to his family. He has been in the schoolroom issuing commands in a manner which, I suppose, was a continuation of that with which he has harassed you."

"Are you and Henry to go?"

"I believe, as far as Henry is concerned, that was the tenor of his scarcely intelligible directions; but he may change all to-morrow. He is just in that mood when you cannot depend on his consistency for two consecutive hours. I doubt whether he will leave you for weeks yet. To myself he addressed some words which will require a little attention and comment by-and-by, when I have time to bestow on them. At the moment he came in I was busied with a note I had got from Mr. Yorke — so fully busied that I cut short the interview with him somewhat abruptly. I left him raving. Here is the note. I wish you to see it. It refers to my brother Robert." And he looked at Shirley.

"I shall be glad to hear news of him. Is he coming home?"

"He is come. He is in Yorkshire. Mr. Yorke went yesterday to Stilbro' to meet him."

"Mr. Moore, something is wrong — — "

"Did my voice tremble? He is now at Briarmains, and I am going to see him."

"What has occurred?"

"If you turn so pale I shall be sorry I have spoken. It might have been worse. Robert is not dead, but much hurt."

"O sir, it is you who are pale. Sit down near me."

"Read the note. Let me open it."

Miss Keeldar read the note. It briefly signified that last night Robert Moore had been shot at from behind the wall of Milldean plantation, at the foot of the Brow; that he was wounded severely, but it was hoped not fatally. Of the assassin, or assassins, nothing was known; they had escaped. "No doubt," Mr. Yorke observed, "it was done in revenge. It was a pity ill-will had ever been raised; but that could not be helped now."

"He is my only brother," said Louis, as Shirley returned the note. "I cannot hear unmoved that ruffians have laid in wait for him, and shot him down, like some wild beast from behind a wall."

"Be comforted; be hopeful. He will get better — I know he will."

Shirley, solicitous to soothe, held her hand over Mr. Moore's as it lay on the arm of the chair. She just touched it lightly, scarce palpably.

"Well, give me your hand," he said. "It will be for the first time; it is in a moment of calamity. Give it me."

Awaiting neither consent nor refusal, he took what he asked.

"I am going to Briarmains now," he went on. "I want you to step over to the rectory and tell Caroline Helstone what has happened. Will you do this? She will hear it best from you."

"Immediately," said Shirley, with docile promptitude. "Ought I to say that there is no danger?"

"Say so."

"You will come back soon, and let me know more?"

"I will either come or write."

"Trust me for watching over Caroline. I will communicate with your sister too; but doubtless she is already with Robert?"

"Doubtless, or will be soon. Good-morning now."

"You will bear up, come what may."

"We shall see that."

Shirley's fingers were obliged to withdraw from the tutor's. Louis was obliged to relinquish that hand folded, clasped, hidden in his own.

"I thought I should have had to support her," he said, as he walked towards Briarmains, "and it is she who has made me strong. That look of pity, that gentle touch! No down was ever softer, no elixir more potent! It lay like a snowflake; it thrilled like lightning. A thousand times I have longed to possess that hand — to have it in mine. I *have* possessed it; for five minutes I held it. Her fingers and mine can never be strangers more. Having met once they must meet again."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SCHOOLBOY AND THE WOOD-NYMPH.

Briarmains being nearer than the Hollow, Mr. Yorke had conveyed his young comrade there. He had seen him laid in the best bed of the house, as carefully as if he had been one of his own sons. The sight of his blood, welling from the treacherously inflicted wound, made him indeed the son of the Yorkshire gentleman's heart. The spectacle of the sudden event, of the tall, straight shape prostrated in its pride across the road, of the fine southern head laid low in the dust, of that youth in prime flung at once before him pallid, lifeless, helpless — this was the very combination of circumstances to win for the victim Mr. Yorke's liveliest interest.

No other hand was there to raise — to aid, no other voice to question kindly, no other brain to concert measures; he had to do it all himself. This utter dependence of the speechless, bleeding youth (as a youth he regarded him) on his benevolence secured that benevolence most effectually. Well did Mr. Yorke like to have power, and to use it. He had now between his hands power over a fellow-creature's life. It suited him.

No less perfectly did it suit his saturnine better half. The incident was quite in her way and to her taste. Some women would have been terror-struck to see a gory man brought in over their threshold, and laid down in their hall in the "howe of the night." There, you would suppose, was subject-matter for hysterics. No. Mrs. Yorke went into hysterics when Jessie would not leave the garden to come to her knitting, or when Martin proposed starting for Australia, with a view to realize freedom and escape the tyranny of Matthew; but an attempted murder near her door — a half-murdered man in her best bed — set her straight, cheered her spirits, gave her cap the dash of a turban.

Mrs. Yorke was just the woman who, while rendering miserable the drudging life of a simple maid-servant, would nurse like a heroine a hospital full of plague patients. She almost loved Moore. Her tough heart almost yearned towards him when she found him committed to her charge — left in her arms, as dependent on her as her youngest-born in the cradle. Had she seen a domestic or one of her daughters give him a draught of water or smooth his pillow, she would have boxed the intruder's ears. She chased Jessie and Rose from the upper realm of the house; she forbade the housemaids to set their foot in it.

Now, if the accident had happened at the rectory gates, and old Helstone had taken in the martyr, neither Yorke nor his wife would have pitied him. They would have adjudged him right served for his tyranny and meddling. As it was, he became, for the present, the apple of their eye.

Strange! Louis Moore was permitted to come — to sit down on the edge of the bed and lean over the pillow; to hold his brother's hand, and press his pale forehead with his fraternal lips; and Mrs. Yorke bore it well. She suffered him to stay half the day there; she once suffered him to sit up all night in the chamber; she rose herself at five o'clock of a wet November morning, and with her own hands lit the kitchen fire, and made the brothers a breakfast, and served it to them herself. Majestically arrayed in a boundless flannel wrapper, a shawl, and her nightcap, she sat and watched them eat, as complacently as a hen beholds her chickens feed. Yet she gave the cook warning that day for venturing to make and carry up to Mr. Moore a basin of sago-gruel; and the housemaid lost her favour because, when Mr. Louis was departing, she brought him his surtout aired from the kitchen, and, like a "forward piece" as she was, helped him on with it, and accepted in return a smile, a "Thank you, my girl," and a shilling. Two ladies called one day, pale and anxious, and begged earnestly, humbly, to be allowed to see Mr. Moore one instant. Mrs. Yorke hardened her heart, and sent them packing — not without opprobrium.

But how was it when Hortense Moore came? Not so bad as might have been expected. The whole family of the Moores really seemed to suit Mrs. Yorke so as no other family had ever suited her. Hortense and she possessed an exhaustless mutual theme of conversation in the corrupt propensities of servants. Their views of this class were similar; they watched them with the same suspicion, and judged them with the same severity. Hortense, too, from the very first showed no manner of jealousy of Mrs. Yorke's attentions to Robert — she let her keep the post of nurse with little interference; and, for herself, found ceaseless occupation in fidgeting about the house, holding the kitchen under surveillance, reporting what passed there, and, in short, making herself generally useful. Visitors they both of them agreed in excluding sedulously from the sickroom. They held the young mill-owner captive, and hardly let the air breathe or the sun shine on him.

Mr. MacTurk, the surgeon to whom Moore's case had been committed, pronounced his wound of a dangerous, but, he trusted, not of a hopeless character. At first he wished to place with him a nurse of his own selection; but this neither Mrs. Yorke nor Hortense would hear of. They promised faithful observance of directions. He was left, therefore, for the present in their hands.

Doubtless they executed the trust to the best of their ability; but something got wrong. The bandages were displaced or tampered with; great loss of blood followed. MacTurk, being summoned, came with steed afoam. He was one of those surgeons whom it is dangerous to vex — abrupt in his best moods, in his worst savage. On seeing Moore's state he relieved his feelings by a little flowery language, with which it is not necessary to strew the present page. A bouquet or two of the choicest blossoms fell on the unperturbed head of one Mr. Graves, a stony young assistant he usually carried about with him; with a second nosegay he gifted another young gentleman in his train — an interesting fac-simile of himself, being indeed his own son; but the full *corbeille* of blushing bloom fell to the lot of meddling womankind, *en masse*.

For the best part of one winter night himself and satellites were busied about Moore. There at his bedside, shut up alone with him in his chamber, they wrought and wrangled over his exhausted frame. They three were on one side of the bed, and Death on the other. The conflict was sharp; it lasted till day broke, when the balance between the belligerents seemed so equal that both parties might have claimed the victory.

At dawn Graves and young MacTurk were left in charge of the patient, while the senior went himself in search of additional strength, and secured it in the person of Mrs. Horsfall, the best nurse on his staff. To this woman he gave Moore in charge, with the sternest injunctions respecting the responsibility laid on her shoulders. She took this responsibility stolidly, as she did also the easy-chair at the bedhead. That moment she began her reign.

Mrs. Horsfall had one virtue — orders received from MacTurk she obeyed to the letter. The ten commandments were less binding in her eyes than her surgeon's dictum. In other respects she was no woman, but a dragon. Hortense Moore fell effaced before her; Mrs. Yorke withdrew — crushed; yet both these women were personages of some dignity in their own estimation, and of some bulk in the estimation of others. Perfectly cowed by the breadth, the height, the bone, and the brawn of Mrs. Horsfall, they retreated to the back parlour. She, for her part, sat upstairs when she liked, and downstairs when she preferred it. She took her dram three times a day, and her pipe of tobacco four times.

As to Moore, no one now ventured to inquire about him. Mrs. Horsfall had him at dry-nurse. It was she who was to do for him, and the general conjecture now ran that she did for him accordingly.

Morning and evening MacTurk came to see him. His case, thus complicated by a new mischance, was become one of interest in the surgeon's eyes. He regarded him as a damaged piece of clockwork, which it would be creditable to his skill to set agoing again. Graves and young MacTurk — Moore's sole other visitors — contemplated him in the light in which they were wont to contemplate the occupant for the time being of the dissecting-room at Stilbro' Infirmary.

Robert Moore had a pleasant time of it — in pain, in danger, too weak to move, almost too weak to speak, a sort of giantess his keeper, the three surgeons his sole society. Thus he lay through the diminishing days and lengthening nights of the whole drear month of November.

In the commencement of his captivity Moore used feebly to resist Mrs. Horsfall. He hated the sight of her rough bulk, and dreaded the contact of her hard hands; but she taught him docility in a trice. She made no account whatever of his six feet, his manly thews and sinews; she turned him in his bed as another woman would have turned a babe in its cradle. When he was good she addressed him as "my dear" and "honey," and when he was bad she sometimes shook him. Did he attempt to speak when MacTurk was there, she lifted her hand and bade him "Hush!" like a nurse checking a forward child. If she had not smoked, if she had not taken gin, it would have been better, he thought; but she did both. Once, in her absence, he intimated to MacTurk that "that woman was a dram-drinker."

"Pooh! my dear sir, they are all so," was the reply he got for his pains. "But Horsfall has this virtue," added the surgeon — "drunk or sober, she always remembers to obey *me*."

At length the latter autumn passed; its fogs, its rains withdrew from England their mourning and their tears; its winds swept on to sigh over lands far away. Behind November came deep winter — clearness, stillness, frost accompanying.

A calm day had settled into a crystalline evening. The world wore a North Pole colouring; all its lights and tints looked like the *reflets* of white, or violet, or pale green gems. The hills wore a lilac blue; the setting sun had purple in its red; the sky was ice, all silvered azure; when the stars rose, they were of white crystal, not gold; gray, or cerulean, or faint emerald hues — cool, pure, and transparent — tinged the mass of the landscape.

Find me an English word as good, reader, and I will gladly dispense with the French word. "Reflections" won't do.

What is this by itself in a wood no longer green, no longer even russet, a wood neutral tint — this dark blue moving object? Why, it is a schoolboy — a Briarfield grammar-school boy — who has left his companions, now trudging home by the highroad, and is seeking a certain tree, with a certain mossy mound at its root, convenient as a seat. Why is he lingering here? The air is cold and the time wears late. He sits down. What is he thinking about? Does he feel the chaste charm Nature wears to-night? A pearl-white moon smiles through the gray trees; does he care for her smile?

Impossible to say; for he is silent, and his countenance does not speak. As yet it is no mirror to reflect sensation, but rather a mask to conceal it. This boy is a stripling of fifteen — slight, and tall of his years. In his face there is as little of amenity as of servility, his eye seems prepared to note any incipient attempt to control or overreach him, and the rest of his features indicate faculties alert for resistance. Wise ushers avoid unnecessary interference with that lad. To break him in by severity would be a useless attempt; to win him by flattery would be an effort worse than useless. He is best let alone. Time will educate and experience train him.

Professedly Martin Yorke (it is a young Yorke, of course) tramples on the name of poetry. Talk sentiment to him, and you would be answered by sarcasm. Here he is, wandering alone, waiting duteously on Nature, while she unfolds a page of stern, of silent, and of solemn poetry beneath his attentive gaze.

Being seated, he takes from his satchel a book — not the Latin grammar, but a contraband volume of fairy tales. There will be light enough yet for an hour to serve his keen young vision. Besides, the moon waits on him; her beam, dim and vague as yet, fills the glade where he sits.

He reads. He is led into a solitary mountain region; all round him is rude and desolate, shapeless, and almost colourless. He hears bells tinkle on the wind. Forth-riding from the formless folds of the mist dawns on him the brightest vision — a green-robed lady, on a snow-white palfrey. He sees her dress, her gems, and her steed. She arrests him with some mysterious question. He is spell-bound, and must follow her into fairyland.

A second legend bears him to the sea-shore. There tumbles in a strong tide, boiling at the base of dizzy cliffs. It rains and blows. A reef of rocks, black and rough, stretches far into the sea. All along, and among, and above these crags dash and flash, sweep and leap, swells, wreaths, drifts of snowy spray. Some lone wanderer is out on these rocks, treading with cautious step the wet, wild seaweed; glancing down into hollows where the brine lies fathoms deep and emerald clear, and seeing there wilder and stranger and huger vegetation than is found on land, with treasure of shells — some green, some purple, some pearly — clustered in the curls of the snaky plants. He hears a cry. Looking up and forward, he sees, at the bleak point of the reef, a tall, pale thing — shaped like man, but made of spray — transparent, tremulous, awful. It stands not alone. They are all human figures that wanton in the rocks — a crowd of foam-women — a band of white, evanescent Nereids.

Hush! Shut the book; hide it in the satchel. Martin hears a tread. He listens. No — yes. Once more the dead leaves, lightly crushed, rustle on the wood path. Martin watches; the trees part, and a woman issues forth.

She is a lady dressed in dark silk, a veil covering her face. Martin never met a lady in this wood before — nor any female, save, now and then, a village girl come to gather nuts. To-night the apparition does not displease him. He observes, as she approaches, that she is neither old nor plain, but, on the contrary, very youthful; and, but that he now recognizes her for one whom he has often wilfully pronounced ugly, he would deem that he discovered traits of beauty behind the thin gauze of that veil.

She passes him and says nothing. He knew she would. All women are proud monkeys, and he knows no more conceited doll than that Caroline Helstone. The thought is hardly hatched in his mind when the lady retraces those two steps she had got beyond him, and raising her veil, reposes her glance on his face, while she softly asks, “Are you one of Mr. Yorke’s sons?”

No human evidence would ever have been able to persuade Martin Yorke that he blushed when thus addressed; yet blush he did, to the ears.

“I am,” he said bluntly, and encouraged himself to wonder, superciliously, what would come next.

"You are Martin, I think?" was the observation that followed.

It could not have been more felicitous. It was a simple sentence — very artlessly, a little timidly, pronounced; but it chimed in harmony to the youth's nature. It stilled him like a note of music.

Martin had a keen sense of his personality; he felt it right and sensible that the girl should discriminate him from his brothers. Like his father, he hated ceremony. It was acceptable to hear a lady address him as "Martin," and not Mr. Martin or Master Martin, which form would have lost her his good graces for ever. Worse, if possible, than ceremony was the other extreme of slipshod familiarity. The slight tone of bashfulness, the scarcely perceptible hesitation, was considered perfectly in place.

"I am Martin," he said.

"Are your father and mother well?" (it was lucky she did not say *papa* and *mamma*; that would have undone all); "and Rose and Jessie?"

"I suppose so."

"My cousin Hortense is still at Briarmains?"

"Oh yes."

Martin gave a comic half-smile and demi-groan. The half-smile was responded to by the lady, who could guess in what sort of odour Hortense was likely to be held by the young Yorkes.

"Does your mother like her?"

"They suit so well about the servants they can't help liking each other."

"It is cold to-night."

"Why are you out so late?"

"I lost my way in this wood."

Now, indeed, Martin allowed himself a refreshing laugh of scorn.

"Lost your way in the mighty forest of Briarmains! You deserve never more to find it."

"I never was here before, and I believe I am trespassing now. You might inform against me if you chose, Martin, and have me fined. It is your father's wood."

"I should think I knew that. But since you are so simple as to lose your way, I will guide you out."

"You need not. I have got into the track now. I shall be right. Martin" (a little quickly), "how is Mr. Moore?"

Martin had heard certain rumours; it struck him that it might be amusing to make an experiment.

"Going to die. Nothing can save him. All hope flung overboard!"

She put her veil aside. She looked into his eyes, and said, "To die!"

"To die. All along of the women, my mother and the rest. They did something about his bandages that finished everything. He would have got better but for them. I am sure they should be arrested, cribbed, tried, and brought in for Botany Bay, at the very least."

The questioner, perhaps, did nor hear this judgment. She stood motionless. In two minutes, without another word, she moved forwards; no good-night, no further inquiry. This was not amusing, nor what Martin had calculated on. He expected something dramatic and demonstrative. It was hardly worth while to frighten the girl if she would not entertain him in return. He called, "Miss Helstone!"

She did not hear or turn. He hastened after and overtook her.

"Come; are you uneasy about what I said?"

"You know nothing about death, Martin; you are too young for me to talk to concerning such a thing."

"Did you believe me? It's all flummery! Moore eats like three men. They are always making sago or tapioca or something good for him. I never go into the kitchen but there is a saucepan on the fire, cooking him some dainty. I think I will play the old soldier, and be fed on the fat of the land like him."

"Martin! Martin!" Here her voice trembled, and she stopped.

"It is exceedingly wrong of you, Martin. You have almost killed me."

Again she stopped. She leaned against a tree, trembling, shuddering, and as pale as death.

Martin contemplated her with inexpressible curiosity. In one sense it was, as he would have expressed it, "nuts" to him to see this. It told him so much, and he was beginning to have a great relish for discovering secrets. In another sense it reminded him of what he had once felt when he had heard a blackbird lamenting for her nestlings, which Matthew had crushed with a stone, and that was not a pleasant feeling. Unable to find anything very appropriate to *say* in order to comfort her, he began to cast about in his mind what he could *do*. He smiled. The lad's smile gave wondrous transparency to his physiognomy.

"Eureka!" he cried. "I'll set all straight by-and-by. You are better now, Miss Caroline. Walk forward," he urged.

Not reflecting that it would be more difficult for Miss Helstone than for himself to climb a wall or penetrate a hedge, he piloted her by a short cut which led to no gate. The consequence was he had to help her over some formidable obstacles, and while he railed at her for helplessness, he perfectly liked to feel himself of use.

"Martin, before we separate, assure me seriously, and on your word of honour, that Mr. Moore is better."

"How very much you think of that Moore!"

"No — but — many of his friends may ask me, and I wish to be able to give an authentic answer."

"You may tell them he is well enough, only idle. You may tell them that he takes mutton chops for dinner, and the best of arrowroot for supper. I intercepted a basin myself one night on its way upstairs, and ate half of it."

"And who waits on him, Martin? who nurses him?"

"Nurses him? The great baby! Why, a woman as round and big as our largest water-butt — a rough, hard-favoured old girl. I make no doubt she leads him a rich life. Nobody else is let near him. He is chiefly in the dark. It is my belief she knocks him about terribly in that chamber. I listen at the wall sometimes when I am in bed, and I think I hear her thumping him. You should see her fist. She could hold half a dozen hands like yours in her one palm. After all, notwithstanding the chops and jellies he gets, I would not be in his shoes. In fact, it is my private opinion that she eats most of what goes up on the tray to Mr. Moore. I wish she may not be starving him."

Profound silence and meditation on Caroline's part, and a sly watchfulness on Martin's.

"You never see him, I suppose, Martin?"

"I? No. I don't care to see him, for my own part."

Silence again.

"Did not you come to our house once with Mrs. Pryor, about five weeks since, to ask after him?" again inquired Martin.

"Yes."

"I dare say you wished to be shown upstairs?"

"We *did* wish it. We entreated it; but your mother declined."

"Ay! she declined. I heard it all. She treated you as it is her pleasure to treat visitors now and then. She behaved to you rudely and harshly."

"She was not kind; for you know, Martin, we are relations, and it is natural we should take an interest in Mr. Moore. But here we must part; we are at your father's gate."

"Very well, what of that? I shall walk home with you."

"They will miss you, and wonder where you are."

"Let them. I can take care of myself, I suppose."

Martin knew that he had already incurred the penalty of a lecture, and dry bread for his tea. No matter; the evening had furnished him with an adventure. It was better than muffins and toast.

He walked home with Caroline. On the way he promised to see Mr. Moore, in spite of the dragon who guarded his chamber, and appointed an hour on the next day when Caroline was to come to Briarmains Wood and get tidings of him. He would meet her at a certain tree. The scheme led to nothing; still he liked it.

Having reached home, the dry bread and the lecture were duly administered to him, and he was dismissed to bed at an early hour. He accepted his punishment with the toughest stoicism.

Ere ascending to his chamber he paid a secret visit to the dining-room, a still, cold, stately apartment, seldom used, for the family customarily dined in the back parlour. He stood before the mantelpiece, and lifted his candle to two pictures hung above — female heads: one, a type of serene beauty, happy and innocent; the other, more lovely, but forlorn and desperate.

"She looked like *that*," he said, gazing on the latter sketch, "when she sobbed, turned white, and leaned against the tree."

"I suppose," he pursued, when he was in his room, and seated on the edge of his pallet-bed — "I suppose she is what they call '*in love*' — yes, *in love* with that long thing in the next chamber. Whisht! is that Horsfall clattering him? I wonder he does not yell out. It really sounds as if she had fallen on him tooth and nail; but I suppose she is making the bed. I saw her at it once. She hit into the mattresses as if she was boxing. It is queer, Zillah (they call her Zillah) — Zillah Horsfall is a woman, and Caroline Helstone is a woman; they are two individuals of the same species — not much alike though. Is she a pretty girl, that Caroline? I suspect she is; very nice to look at — something so clear in her face, so soft in her eyes. I approve of her looking at me; it does me good. She has long eyelashes. Their shadow seems to rest where she gazes, and to instil peace and thought. If she behaves well, and continues to suit me as she has suited me to-day, I may do her a good turn. I rather relish the notion of circumventing my mother and that ogress old Horsfall. Not that I like humouring Moore; but whatever I do I'll be paid for, and in coin of my own choosing. I know what reward I will claim — one displeasing to Moore, and agreeable to myself."

He turned into bed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MARTIN'S TACTICS.

It was necessary to the arrangement of Martin's plan that he should stay at home that day. Accordingly, he found no appetite for breakfast, and just about school-time took a severe pain about his heart, which rendered it advisable that, instead of setting out to the grammar school with Mark, he should succeed to his father's arm-chair by the fireside, and also to his morning paper. This point being satisfactorily settled, and Mark being gone to Mr. Summer's class, and Matthew and Mr. Yorke withdrawn to the counting-house, three other exploits — nay, four — remained to be achieved.

The first of these was to realize the breakfast he had not yet tasted, and with which his appetite of fifteen could ill afford to dispense; the second, third, fourth, to get his mother, Miss Moore, and Mrs. Horsfall successfully out of the way before four o'clock that afternoon.

The first was, for the present, the most pressing, since the work before him demanded an amount of energy which the present empty condition of his youthful stomach did not seem likely to supply.

Martin knew the way to the larder, and knowing this way he took it. The servants were in the kitchen, breakfasting solemnly with closed doors; his mother and Miss Moore were airing themselves on the lawn, and discussing the closed doors aforesaid. Martin, safe in the larder, made fastidious selection from its stores. His breakfast had been delayed; he was determined it should be *recherché*. It appeared to him that a variety on his usual somewhat insipid fare of bread and milk was both desirable and advisable; the savoury and the salutary he thought might be combined. There was store of rosy apples laid in straw upon a shelf; he picked out three. There was pastry upon a dish; he selected an apricot puff and a damson tart. On the plain household bread his eye did not dwell; but he surveyed with favour some currant tea-cakes, and condescended to make choice of one. Thanks to his clasp-knife, he was able to appropriate a wing of fowl and a slice of ham; a cantlet of cold custard-pudding he thought would harmonize with these articles; and having made this final addition to his booty, he at length sallied forth into the hall.

He was already half-way across — three steps more would have anchored him in the harbour of the back parlour — when the front door opened, and there stood Matthew. Better far had it been the Old Gentleman, in full equipage of horns, hoofs, and tail.

Matthew, sceptic and scoffer, had already failed to subscribe a prompt belief in that pain about the heart. He had muttered some words, amongst which the phrase “shamming Abraham” had been very distinctly audible, and the succession to the armchair and newspaper had appeared to affect him with mental spasms. The spectacle now before him — the apples, the tarts, the tea-cakes, the fowl, ham, and pudding — offered evidence but too well calculated to inflate his opinion of his own sagacity.

Martin paused *interdit* one minute, one instant; the next he knew his ground, and pronounced all well. With the true perspicacity *des âmes élites*, he at once saw how this at first sight untoward event might be turned to excellent account. He saw how it might be so handled as to secure the accomplishment of his second task — namely, the disposal of his mother. He knew that a collision between him and Matthew always suggested to Mrs. Yorke the propriety of a fit of hysterics. He further knew that, on the principle of calm succeeding to storm, after a morning of hysterics his mother was sure to indulge in an afternoon of bed. This would accommodate him perfectly.

The collision duly took place in the hall. A dry laugh, an insulting sneer, a contemptuous taunt, met by a nonchalant but most cutting reply, were the signals. They rushed at it. Martin, who usually made little noise on these occasions, made a great deal now. In flew the servants, Mrs. Yorke, Miss Moore. No female hand could separate them. Mr. Yorke was summoned.

“Sons,” said he, “one of you must leave my roof if this occurs again. I will have no Cain and Abel strife here.”

Martin now allowed himself to be taken off. He had been hurt; he was the youngest and slightest. He was quite cool, in no passion; he even smiled, content that the most difficult part of the labour he had set himself was over.

Once he seemed to flag in the course of the morning.

“It is not worth while to bother myself for that Caroline,” he remarked. But a quarter of an hour afterwards he was again in the dining-room, looking at the head with dishevelled tresses, and eyes turbid with despair.

“Yes,” he said, “I made her sob, shudder, almost faint. I’ll see her smile before I’ve done with her; besides, I want to outwit all these womenites.”

Directly after dinner Mrs. Yorke fulfilled her son’s calculation by withdrawing to her chamber. Now for Hortense.

That lady was just comfortably settled to stocking-mending in the back parlour, when Martin — laying down a book which, stretched on the sofa (he was still indisposed, according to his own account), he had been perusing in all the voluptuous ease of a yet callow pacha — lazily introduced some discourse about Sarah, the maid at the Hollow. In the course of much verbal meandering he insinuated information that this damsel was said to have three suitors — Frederic Murgatroyd, Jeremiah Pighills, and John-of-Mally’s-of-Hannah’s-of-Deb’s; and that Miss Mann had affirmed she knew for a fact that, now the girl was left in sole charge of the cottage, she often had her swains to meals, and entertained them with the best the house afforded.

It needed no more. Hortense could not have lived another hour without betaking herself to the scene of these nefarious transactions, and inspecting the state of matters in person. Mrs. Horsfall remained.

Martin, master of the field now, extracted from his mother's work-basket a bunch of keys; with these he opened the sideboard cupboard, produced thence a black bottle and a small glass, placed them on the table, nimbly mounted the stairs, made for Mr. Moore's door, tapped; the nurse opened.

"If you please, ma'am, you are invited to step into the back parlour and take some refreshment. You will not be disturbed; the family are out."

He watched her down; he watched her in; himself shut the door. He knew she was safe.

The hard work was done; now for the pleasure. He snatched his cap, and away for the wood.

It was yet but half-past three. It had been a fine morning, but the sky looked dark now. It was beginning to snow; the wind blew cold; the wood looked dismal, the old tree grim. Yet Martin approved the shadow on his path. He found a charm in the spectral aspect of the doddered oak.

He had to wait. To and fro he walked, while the flakes fell faster; and the wind, which at first had but moaned, pitifully howled.

"She is long in coming," he muttered, as he glanced along the narrow track. "I wonder," he subjoined, "what I wish to see her so much for? She is not coming for me. But I have power over her, and I want her to come that I may use that power."

He continued his walk.

"Now," he resumed, when a further period had elapsed, "if she fails to come, I shall hate and scorn her."

It struck four. He heard the church clock far away. A step so quick, so light, that, but for the rustling of leaves, it would scarcely have sounded on the wood-walk, checked his impatience. The wind blew fiercely now, and the thickening white storm waxed bewildering; but on she came, and not dismayed.

"Well, Martin," she said eagerly, "how is he?"

"It is queer how she thinks of *him*," reflected Martin. "The blinding snow and bitter cold are nothing to her, I believe; yet she is but a 'chitty-faced creature,' as my mother would say. I could find in my heart to wish I had a cloak to wrap her in."

Thus meditating to himself, he neglected to answer Miss Helstone.

"You have seen him?"

"No."

"Oh! you promised you would."

"I mean to do better by you than that. Didn't I say *I* don't care to see him?"

"But now it will be so long before I get to know any thing certain about him, and I am sick of waiting. Martin, *do* see him, and give him Caroline Helstone's regards, and say she wished to know how he was, and if anything could be done for his comfort."

"I won't."

"You are changed. You were so friendly last night."

"Come, we must not stand in this wood; it is too cold."

"But before I go promise me to come again to-morrow with news."

"No such thing. I am much too delicate to make and keep such appointments in the winter season. If you knew what a pain I had in my chest this morning, and how I went without breakfast, and was knocked down besides, you'd feel the impropriety of bringing me here in the snow. Come, I say."

"Are you really delicate, Martin?"

"Don't I look so?"

"You have rosy cheeks."

"That's hectic. Will you come — or you won't?"

"Where?"

"With me. I was a fool not to bring a cloak. I would have made you cosy."

"You are going home; my nearest road lies in the opposite direction."

"Put your arm through mine; I'll take care of you."

"But the wall — the hedge — it is such hard work climbing, and you are too slender and young to help me without hurting yourself."

"You shall go through the gate."

"But — — "

"But, but — will you trust me or not?"

She looked into his face.

"I think I will. Anything rather than return as anxious as I came."

"I can't answer for that. This, however, I promise you: be ruled by me, and you shall see Moore yourself."

"See him myself?"

"Yourself."

"But, dear Martin, does he know?"

"Ah! I'm dear now. No, he doesn't know."

"And your mother and the others?"

"All is right."

Caroline fell into a long, silent fit of musing, but still she walked on with her guide. They came in sight of Briarmains.

"Have you made up your mind?" he asked.

She was silent.

"Decide; we are just on the spot. I *won't* see him — that I tell you — except to announce your arrival."

"Martin, you are a strange boy, and this is a strange step; but all I feel *is* and *has* been, for a long time, strange. I will see him."

"Having said that, you will neither hesitate nor retract?"

"No."

"Here we are, then. Do not be afraid of passing the parlour window; no one will see you. My father and Matthew are at the mill, Mark is at school, the servants are in the back kitchen, Miss Moore is at the cottage, my mother in her bed, and Mrs. Horsfall in paradise. Observe — I need not ring. I open the door; the hall is empty, the staircase quiet; so is the gallery. The whole house and all its inhabitants are under a spell, which I will not break till you are gone."

"Martin, I trust you."

"You never said a better word. Let me take your shawl. I will shake off the snow and dry it for you. You are cold and wet. Never mind; there is a fire upstairs. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Follow me."

He left his shoes on the mat, mounted the stair unshod. Caroline stole after, with noiseless step. There was a gallery, and there was a passage; at the end of that passage Martin paused before a door and tapped. He had to tap twice — thrice. A voice, known to one listener, at last said, "Come in."

The boy entered briskly.

"Mr. Moore, a lady called to inquire after you. None of the women were about. It is washing-day, and the maids are over the crown of the head in soap-suds in the back kitchen, so I asked her to step up."

"Up here, sir?"

"Up here, sir; but if you object, she shall go down again."

"Is this a place or am I a person to bring a lady to, you absurd lad?"

"No; so I'll take her off."

"Martin, you will stay here. Who is she?"

"Your grandmother from that château on the Scheldt Miss Moore talks about."

"Martin," said the softest whisper at the door, "don't be foolish."

"Is she there?" inquired Moore hastily. He had caught an imperfect sound.

"She is there, fit to faint. She is standing on the mat, shocked at your want of filial affection."

"Martin, you are an evil cross between an imp and a page. What is she like?"

"More like me than you; for she is young and beautiful."

"You are to show her forward. Do you hear?"

"Come, Miss Caroline."

"Miss Caroline!" repeated Moore.

And when Miss Caroline entered she was encountered in the middle of the chamber by a tall, thin, wasted figure, who took both her hands.

"I give you a quarter of an hour," said Martin, as he withdrew, "no more. Say what you have to say in that time. Till it is past I will wait in the gallery; nothing shall approach; I'll see you safe away. Should you persist in staying longer, I leave you to your fate."

He shut the door. In the gallery he was as elate as a king. He had never been engaged in an adventure he liked so well, for no adventure had ever invested him with so much importance or inspired him with so much interest.

"You are come at last," said the meagre man, gazing on his visitress with hollow eyes.

"Did you expect me before?"

"For a month, near two months, we have been very near; and I have been in sad pain, and danger, and misery, Cary."

"I could not come."

"Couldn't you? But the rectory and Briarmains are very near — not two miles apart."

There was pain and there was pleasure in the girl's face as she listened to these implied reproaches. It was sweet, it was bitter to defend herself.

"When I say I could not come, I mean I could not see you; for I came with mamma the very day we heard what had happened. Mr. MacTurk then told us it was impossible to admit any stranger."

"But afterwards — every fine afternoon these many weeks past I have waited and listened. Something here, Cary" — laying his hand on his breast — "told me it was impossible but that you should think of me. Not that I merit thought; but we are old acquaintance — we are cousins."

"I came again, Robert; mamma and I came again."

"Did you? Come, that is worth hearing. Since you came again, we will sit down and talk about it."

They sat down. Caroline drew her chair up to his. The air was now dark with snow; an Iceland blast was driving it wildly. This pair neither heard the long "wuthering" rush, nor saw the white burden it drifted. Each seemed conscious but of one thing — the presence of the other.

"So mamma and you came again?"

"And Mrs. Yorke did treat us strangely. We asked to see you. 'No,' said she, 'not in my house. I am at present responsible for his life; it shall not be forfeited for half an hour's idle gossip.' But I must not tell you all she said; it was very disagreeable. However, we came yet again — mamma, Miss Keeldar, and I. This time we thought we should conquer, as we were three against one, and Shirley was on our side. But Mrs. Yorke opened such a battery."

Moore smiled. "What did she say?"

"Things that astonished us. Shirley laughed at last; I cried; mamma was seriously annoyed. We were all three driven from the field. Since that time I have only walked once a day past the house, just for the satisfaction of looking up at your window, which I could distinguish by the drawn curtains. I really dared not come in."

"I *have* wished for you, Caroline."

"I did not know that; I never dreamt one instant that you thought of me. If I had but most distantly imagined such a possibility — — "

"Mrs. Yorke would still have beaten you."

"She would not. Stratagem should have been tried, if persuasion failed. I would have come to the kitchen door; the servants should have let me in, and I would have walked straight upstairs. In fact, it was far more the fear of intrusion — the fear of yourself — that baffled me than the fear of Mrs. Yorke."

"Only last night I despaired of ever seeing you again. Weakness has wrought terrible depression in me — terrible depression."

"And you sit alone?"

"Worse than alone."

"But you must be getting better, since you can leave your bed?"

"I doubt whether I shall live. I see nothing for it, after such exhaustion, but decline."

"You — you shall go home to the Hollow."

"Dreariness would accompany, nothing cheerful come near me."

"I *will* alter this. This *shall* be altered, were there ten Mrs. Yorkes to do battle with."

"Cary, you make me smile."

"Do smile; smile again. Shall I tell you what I should like?"

"Tell me anything — only keep talking. I am Saul; but for music I should perish."

"I should like you to be brought to the rectory, and given to me and mamma."

"A precious gift! I have not laughed since they shot me till now."

"Do you suffer pain, Robert?"

"Not so much pain now; but I am hopelessly weak, and the state of my mind is inexpressible — dark, barren, impotent. Do you not read it all in my face? I look a mere ghost."

"Altered; yet I should have known you anywhere. But I understand your feelings; I experienced something like it. Since we met, I too have been very ill."

"*Very* ill?"

"I thought I should die. The tale of my life seemed told. Every night, just at midnight, I used to wake from awful dreams; and the book lay open before me at the last page, where was written 'Finis.' I had strange feelings."

"You speak my experience."

"I believed I should never see you again; and I grew so thin — as thin as you are now. I could do nothing for myself — neither rise nor lie down; and I could not eat. Yet you see I am better."

"Comforter — sad as sweet. I am too feeble to say what I feel; but while you speak I *do* feel."

"Here I am at your side, where I thought never more to be. Here I speak to you. I see you listen to me willingly — look at me kindly. Did I count on that? I despaired."

Moore sighed — a sigh so deep it was nearly a groan. He covered his eyes with his hand.

“May I be spared to make some atonement.”

Such was his prayer.

“And for what?”

“We will not touch on it now, Cary; unmanned as I am, I have not the power to cope with such a topic. Was Mrs. Pryor with you during your illness?”

“Yes” — Caroline smiled brightly — “you know she is mamma?”

“I have heard — Hortense told me; but that tale too I will receive from yourself. Does she add to your happiness?”

“What! mamma? She is *dear* to me; *how* dear I cannot say. I was altogether weary, and she held me up.”

“I deserve to hear that in a moment when I can scarce lift my hand to my head. I deserve it.”

“It is no reproach against you.”

“It is a coal of fire heaped on my head; and so is every word you address to me, and every look that lights your sweet face. Come still nearer, Lina; and give me your hand — if my thin fingers do not scare you.”

She took those thin fingers between her two little hands; she bent her head *et les effleura de ses lèvres*. (I put that in French because the word *effleurer* is an exquisite word.) Moore was much moved. A large tear or two coursed down his hollow cheek.

“I’ll keep these things in my heart, Cary; that kiss I will put by, and you shall hear of it again one day.”

“Come out!” cried Martin, opening the door — “come away; you have had twenty minutes instead of a quarter of an hour.”

“She will not stir yet, you hempseed.”

“I dare not stay longer, Robert.”

“Can you promise to return?”

“No, she can’t,” responded Martin. “The thing mustn’t become customary. I can’t be troubled. It’s very well for once; I’ll not have it repeated.”

“*You*’ll not have it repeated.”

“Hush! don’t vex him; we could not have met to-day but for him. But I will come again, if it is your wish that I should come.”

“It *is* my wish — my *one* wish — almost the only wish I can feel.”

“Come this minute. My mother has coughed, got up, set her feet on the floor. Let her only catch you on the stairs, Miss Caroline. You’re not to bid him good-bye” — stepping between her and Moore — “you are to march.”

“My shawl, Martin.”

“I have it. I’ll put it on for you when you are in the hall.”

He made them part. He would suffer no farewell but what could be expressed in looks. He half carried Caroline down the stairs. In the hall he wrapped her shawl round her, and, but that his mother's tread then creaked in the gallery, and but that a sentiment of diffidence — the proper, natural, therefore the noble impulse of his boy's heart — held him back, he would have claimed his reward; he would have said, "Now, Miss Caroline, for all this give me one kiss." But ere the words had passed his lips she was across the snowy road, rather skimming than wading the drifts.

"She is my debtor, and I *will* be paid."

He flattered himself that it was opportunity, not audacity, which had failed him. He misjudged the quality of his own nature, and held it for something lower than it was.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CASE OF DOMESTIC PERSECUTION — REMARKABLE INSTANCE OF PIOUS PERSEVERANCE IN THE DISCHARGE OF RELIGIOUS DUTIES.

Martin, having known the taste of excitement, wanted a second draught; having felt the dignity of power, he loathed to relinquish it. Miss Helstone — that girl he had always called ugly, and whose face was now perpetually before his eyes, by day and by night, in dark and in sunshine — had once come within his sphere. It fretted him to think the visit might never be repeated.

Though a schoolboy he was no ordinary schoolboy; he was destined to grow up an original. At a few years' later date he took great pains to pare and polish himself down to the pattern of the rest of the world, but he never succeeded; an unique stamp marked him always. He now sat idle at his desk in the grammar school, casting about in his mind for the means of adding another chapter to his commenced romance. He did not yet know how many commenced life-romances are doomed never to get beyond the first, or at most the second chapter. His Saturday half-holiday he spent in the wood with his book of fairy legends, and that other unwritten book of his imagination.

Martin harboured an irreligious reluctance to see the approach of Sunday. His father and mother, while disclaiming community with the Establishment, failed not duly, once on the sacred day, to fill their large pew in Briarfield Church with the whole of their blooming family. Theoretically, Mr. Yorke placed all sects and churches on a level. Mrs. Yorke awarded the palm to Moravians and Quakers, on account of that crown of humility by these worthies worn. Neither of them were ever known, however, to set foot in a conventicle.

Martin, I say, disliked Sunday, because the morning service was long, and the sermon usually little to his taste. This Saturday afternoon, however, his woodland musings disclosed to him a new-found charm in the coming day.

It proved a day of deep snow — so deep that Mrs. Yorke during breakfast announced her conviction that the children, both boys and girls, would be better at home; and her decision that, instead of going to church, they should sit silent for two hours in the back parlour, while Rose and Martin alternately read a succession of sermons — John Wesley's "Sermons." John Wesley, being a reformer and an agitator, had a place both in her own and her husband's favour.

"Rose will do as she pleases," said Martin, not looking up from the book which, according to his custom then and in after-life, he was studying over his bread and milk.

"Rose will do as she is told, and Martin too," observed the mother.

"I am going to church."

So her son replied, with the ineffable quietude of a true Yorke, who knows his will and means to have it, and who, if pushed to the wall, will let himself be crushed to death, provided no way of escape can be found, but will never capitulate.

"It is not fit weather," said the father.

No answer. The youth read studiously; he slowly broke his bread and sipped his milk.

"Martin hates to go to church, but he hates still more to obey," said Mrs. Yorke.

"I suppose I am influenced by pure perverseness?"

"Yes, you are."

"Mother, *I am not*."

"By what, then, are you influenced?"

"By a complication of motives, the intricacies of which I should as soon think of explaining to you as I should of turning myself inside out to exhibit the internal machinery of my frame."

"Hear Martin! hear him!" cried Mr. Yorke. "I must see and have this lad of mine brought up to the bar. Nature meant him to live by his tongue. Hesther, your third son must certainly be a lawyer; he has the stock-in-trade — brass, self-conceit, and words — words — words."

"Some bread, Rose, if you please," requested Martin, with intense gravity, serenity, phlegm. The boy had naturally a low, plaintive voice, which in his "dour moods" rose scarcely above a lady's whisper. The more inflexibly stubborn the humour, the softer, the sadder the tone. He rang the bell, and gently asked for his walking-shoes.

"But, Martin," urged his sire, "there is drift all the way; a man could hardly wade through it. However, lad," he continued, seeing that the boy rose as the church bell began to toll, "this is a case wherein I would by no means balk the obdurate chap of his will. Go to church by all means. There is a pitiless wind, and a sharp, frozen sleet, besides the depth under foot. Go out into it, since thou prefers it to a warm fireside."

Martin quietly assumed his cloak, comforter, and cap, and deliberately went out.

"My father has more sense than my mother," he pronounced. "How women miss it! They drive the nail into the flesh, thinking they are hammering away at insensate stone."

He reached church early.

"Now, if the weather frightens her (and it is a real December tempest), or if that Mrs. Pryor objects to her going out, and I should miss her after all, it will vex me; but, tempest or tornado, hail or ice, she *ought* to come, and if she has a mind worthy of her eyes and features she *will* come. She will be here for the chance of seeing me, as I am here for the chance of seeing her. She will want to get a word respecting her confounded sweetheart, as I want to get another flavour of what I think the essence of life — a taste of existence, with the spirit preserved in it, and not evaporated. Adventure is to stagnation what champagne is to flat porter."

He looked round. The church was cold, silent, empty, but for one old woman. As the chimes subsided and the single bell tolled slowly, another and another elderly parishioner came dropping in, and took a humble station in the free sittings. It is always the frailest, the oldest, and the poorest that brave the worst weather, to prove and maintain their constancy to dear old mother church. This wild morning not one affluent family attended, not one carriage party appeared — all the lined and cushioned pews were empty; only on the bare oaken seats sat ranged the gray-haired elders and feeble paupers.

"I'll scorn her if she doesn't come," muttered Martin, shortly and savagely, to himself. The rector's shovel-hat had passed the porch. Mr. Helstone and his clerk were in the vestry.

The bells ceased — the reading-desk was filled — the doors were closed — the service commenced. Void stood the rectory pew — she was not there. Martin scorned her.

"Worthless thing! vapid thing! commonplace humbug! Like all other girls — weakly, selfish, shallow!"

Such was Martin's liturgy.

"She is not like our picture. Her eyes are not large and expressive; her nose is not straight, delicate, Hellenic; her mouth has not that charm I thought it had, which I imagined could beguile me of sullenness in my worst moods. What is she? A thread-paper, a doll, a toy, a *girl*, in short."

So absorbed was the young cynic he forgot to rise from his knees at the proper place, and was still in an exemplary attitude of devotion when, the litany over, the first hymn was given out. To be so caught did not contribute to soothe him. He started up red (for he was as sensitive to ridicule as any girl). To make the matter worse, the church door had reopened, and the aisles were filling: patter, patter, patter, a hundred little feet trotted in. It was the Sunday scholars. According to Briarfield winter custom, these children had till now been kept where there was a warm stove, and only led into church just before the communion and sermon.

The little ones were settled first, and at last, when the boys and the younger girls were all arranged — when the organ was swelling high, and the choir and congregation were rising to uplift a spiritual song — a tall class of young women came quietly in, closing the procession. Their teacher, having seen them seated, passed into the rectory pew. The French-gray cloak and small beaver bonnet were known to Martin; it was the very costume his eyes had ached to catch. Miss Helstone had not suffered the storm to prove an impediment. After all, she was come to church. Martin probably whispered his satisfaction to his hymn book; at any rate, he therewith hid his face two minutes.

Satisfied or not, he had time to get very angry with her again before the sermon was over. She had never once looked his way; at least he had not been so lucky as to encounter a glance.

"If," he said — "if she takes no notice of me, if she shows I am not in her thoughts, I shall have a worse, a meaner opinion of her than ever. Most despicable would it be to come for the sake of those sheep-faced Sunday scholars, and not for my sake or that long skeleton Moore's."

The sermon found an end; the benediction was pronounced; the congregation dispersed. She had not been near him.

Now, indeed, as Martin set his face homeward, he felt that the sleet was sharp and the east wind cold.

His nearest way lay through some fields. It was a dangerous, because an untrodden way. He did not care; he would take it. Near the second stile rose a clump of trees. Was that an umbrella waiting there? Yes, an umbrella, held with evident difficulty against the blast; behind it fluttered a French-gray cloak. Martin grinned as he toiled up the steep, encumbered field, difficult to the foot as a slope in the upper realms of Etna. There was an inimitable look in his face when, having gained the stile, he seated himself coolly thereupon, and thus opened a conference which, for his own part, he was willing to prolong indefinitely.

"I think you had better strike a bargain. Exchange me for Mrs. Pryor."

"I was not sure whether you would come this way, Martin, but I thought I would run the chance. There is no such thing as getting a quiet word spoken in the church or churchyard."

"Will you agree? — make over Mrs. Pryor to my mother, and put me in her skirts?"

"As if I could understand you! What puts Mrs. Pryor into your head?"

"You call her 'mamma,' don't you?"

"She *is* my mamma."

"Not possible — or so inefficient, so careless a mamma; I should make a five times better one. You *may* laugh. I have no objection to see you laugh. Your teeth — I hate ugly teeth; but yours are as pretty as a pearl necklace, and a necklace of which the pearls are very fair, even, and well matched too."

"Martin, what now? I thought the Yorkes never paid compliments?"

"They have not done till this generation; but I feel as if it were my vocation to turn out a new variety of the Yorke species. I am rather tired of my own ancestors. We have traditions going back for four ages — tales of Hiram, which was the son of Hiram, which was the son of Samuel, which was the son of John, which was the son of Zerubbabel Yorke. All, from

Zerubbabel down to the last Hiram, were such as you see my father. Before that there was a Godfrey. We have his picture; it hangs in Moore's bedroom; it is like me. Of his character we know nothing; but I am sure it was different to his descendants. He has long, curling dark hair; he is carefully and cavalierly dressed. Having said that he is like me, I need not add that he is handsome."

"You are not handsome, Martin."

"No; but wait awhile — just let me take my time. I mean to begin from this day to cultivate, to polish, and we shall see."

"You are a very strange, a very unaccountable boy, Martin. But don't imagine you ever will be handsome; you cannot."

"I mean to try. But we were talking about Mrs. Pryor. She must be the most unnatural mamma in existence, coolly to let her daughter come out in this weather. Mine was in such a rage because I would go to church; she was fit to fling the kitchen brush after me."

"Mamma was very much concerned about me; but I am afraid I was obstinate. I *would* go."

"To see me?"

"Exactly; I thought of nothing else. I greatly feared the snow would hinder you from coming. You don't know how pleased I was to see you all by yourself in the pew."

"*I* came to fulfil my duty, and set the parish a good example. And so you were obstinate, were you? I should like to see you obstinate, I should. Wouldn't I have you in good discipline if I owned you? Let me take the umbrella."

"I can't stay two minutes; our dinner will be ready."

"And so will ours; and we have always a hot dinner on Sundays. Roast goose to-day, with apple-pie and rice-pudding. I always contrive to know the bill of fare. Well, I like these things uncommonly; but I'll make the sacrifice, if you will."

"We have a cold dinner. My uncle will allow no unnecessary cooking on the Sabbath. But I must return; the house would be in commotion if I failed to appear."

"So will Briarmains, bless you! I think I hear my father sending out the overlooker and five of the dyers, to look in six directions for the body of his prodigal son in the snow; and my mother repenting her of her many misdeeds towards me, now I am gone."

"Martin, how is Mr. Moore?"

"*That* is what you came for, just to say that word."

"Come, tell me quickly."

"Hang him! he is no worse; but as ill-used as ever — mewed up, kept in solitary confinement. They mean to make either an idiot or a maniac of him, and take out a commission of lunacy. Horsfall starves him; you saw how thin he was."

"You were very good the other day, Martin."

"What day? I am always good — a model."

"When will you be so good again?"

"I see what you are after; but you'll not wheedle me — I am no cat's-paw."

"But it must be done. It is quite a right thing, and a necessary thing."

"How you encroach! Remember, I managed the matter of my own free will before."

"And you will again."

"I won't. The business gave me far too much trouble. I like my ease."

"Mr. Moore wishes to see me, Martin, and I wish to see him."

"I dare say" (coolly).

"It is too bad of your mother to exclude his friends."

"Tell her so."

"His own relations."

"Come and blow her up."

"You know that would advance nothing. Well, I shall stick to my point. See him I will. If you won't help me, I'll manage without help."

"Do; there is nothing like self-reliance, self-dependence."

"I have no time to reason with you now; but I consider you provoking. Good-morning."

Away she went, the umbrella shut, for she could not carry it against the wind.

"She is not vapid; she is not shallow," said Martin. "I shall like to watch, and mark how she will work her way without help. If the storm were not of snow, but of fire — such as came refreshingly down on the cities of the plain — she would go through it to procure five minutes' speech of that Moore. Now, I consider I have had a pleasant morning. The disappointments got time on; the fears and fits of anger only made that short discourse pleasanter, when it came at last. She expected to coax me at once. She'll not manage that in one effort. She shall come again, again, and yet again. It would please me to put her in a passion — to make her cry. I want to discover how far she will go — what she will do and dare — to get her will. It seems strange and new to find one human being thinking so much about another as she thinks about Moore. But it is time to go home; my appetite tells me the hour. Won't I walk into that goose? and we'll try whether Matthew or I shall get the largest cut of the apple-pie to-day."

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHEREIN MATTERS MAKE SOME PROGRESS, BUT NOT MUCH.

Martin had planned well. He had laid out a dexterously concerted scheme for his private amusement. But older and wiser schemers than he are often doomed to see their finest-spun projects swept to annihilation by the sudden broom of Fate, that fell housewife whose red arm none can control. In the present instance this broom was manufactured out of the tough fibres of Moore's own stubborn purpose, bound tight with his will. He was now resuming his strength, and making strange head against Mrs. Horsfall. Each morning he amazed that matron with a fresh astonishment. First he discharged her from her valet duties; he would dress himself. Then he refused the coffee she brought him; he would breakfast with the family. Lastly, he forbade her his chamber. On the same day, amidst the outcries of all the women in the place, he put his head out of doors. The morning after, he followed Mr. Yorke to his counting-house, and requested an envoy to fetch a chaise from the Red House Inn. He was resolved, he said, to return home to the Hollow that very afternoon. Mr. Yorke, instead of opposing, aided and abetted him. The chaise was sent for, though Mrs. Yorke declared the step would be his death. It came. Moore, little disposed to speak, made his purse do duty for his tongue. He expressed his gratitude to the servants and to Mrs. Horsfall by the chink of his coin. The latter personage approved and understood this language perfectly; it made amends for all previous contumacy. She and her patient parted the best friends in the world.

The kitchen visited and soothed, Moore betook himself to the parlour. He had Mrs. Yorke to appease; not quite so easy a task as the pacification of her housemaids. There she sat plunged in sullen dudgeon, the gloomiest speculations on the depths of man's ingratitude absorbing her thoughts. He drew near and bent over her; she was obliged to look up, if it were only to bid him "avaunt." There was beauty still in his pale, wasted features; there was earnestness and a sort of sweetness — for he was smiling — in his hollow eyes.

"Good-bye!" he said, and as he spoke the smile glittered and melted. He had no iron mastery of his sensations now; a trifling emotion made itself apparent in his present weak state.

"And what are you going to leave us for?" she asked. "We will keep you, and do anything in the world for you, if you will only stay till you are stronger."

"Good-bye!" he again said; and added, "You have been a mother to me; give your wilful son one embrace."

Like a foreigner, as he was, he offered her first one cheek, then the other. She kissed him.

"What a trouble — what a burden I have been to you!" he muttered.

"You are the worst trouble now, headstrong youth!" was the answer. "I wonder who is to nurse you at Hollow's Cottage? Your sister Hortense knows no more about such matters than a child."

"Thank God! for I have had nursing enough to last me my life."

Here the little girls came in — Jessie crying, Rose quiet but grave. Moore took them out into the hall to soothe, pet, and kiss them. He knew it was not in their mother's nature to bear to see any living thing caressed but herself. She would have felt annoyed had he fondled a kitten in her presence.

The boys were standing about the chaise as Moore entered it; but for them he had no farewell. To Mr. Yorke he only said, "You have a good riddance of me. That was an unlucky shot for you, Yorke; it turned Briarmains into an hospital. Come and see me at the cottage soon."

He drew up the glass; the chaise rolled away. In half an hour he alighted at his own garden wicket. Having paid the driver and dismissed the vehicle, he leaned on that wicket an instant, at once to rest and to muse.

"Six months ago I passed out at this gate," said he, "a proud, angry, disappointed man. I come back sadder and wiser; weakly enough, but not worried. A cold, gray, yet quiet world lies round — a world where, if I hope little, I fear nothing. All slavish terrors of embarrassment have left me. Let the worst come, I can work, as Joe Scott does, for an honourable living; in such doom I yet see some hardship but no degradation. Formerly, pecuniary ruin was equivalent in my eyes to personal dishonour. It is not so now; I know the difference. Ruin *is* an evil, but one for which I am prepared; the day of whose coming I know, for I have calculated. I can yet put it off six months — not an hour longer. If things by that time alter, which is not probable; if fetters, which now seem indissoluble, should be loosened from our trade (of all things the most unlikely to happen), I might conquer in this long struggle yet — I might — good God! what might I not do? But the thought is a brief madness; let me see things with sane eyes. Ruin will come, lay her axe to my fortune's roots, and hew them down. I shall snatch a sapling, I shall cross the sea, and plant it in American woods. Louis will go with me. Will none but Louis go? I cannot tell — I have no right to ask."

He entered the house.

It was afternoon, twilight yet out of doors — starless and moonless twilight; for though keenly freezing with a dry, black frost, heaven wore a mask of clouds congealed and fast locked. The mill-dam too was frozen. The Hollow was very still. Indoors it was already dark. Sarah had lit a good fire in the parlour; she was preparing tea in the kitchen.

"Hortense," said Moore, as his sister bustled up to help him off with his cloak, "I am pleased to come home."

Hortense did not feel the peculiar novelty of this expression coming from her brother, who had never before called the cottage his home, and to whom its narrow limits had always heretofore seemed rather restrictive than protective. Still, whatever contributed to his happiness pleased her, and she expressed herself to that effect.

He sat down, but soon rose again. He went to the window; he came back to the fire.

"Hortense!"

"Mon frère?"

"This little parlour looks very clean and pleasant — unusually bright, somehow."

"It is true, brother; I have had the whole house thoroughly and scrupulously cleaned in your absence."

"Sister, I think on this first day of your return home you ought to have a friend or so to tea, if it were only to see how fresh and spruce you have made the little place."

"True, brother. If it were not late I might send for Miss Mann."

"So you might; but it really is too late to disturb that good lady, and the evening is much too cold for her to come out."

"How thoughtful in you, dear Gérard! We must put it off till another day."

"I want some one to-day, dear sister — some quiet guest, who would tire neither of us."

"Miss Ainley?"

"An excellent person, they say; but she lives too far off. Tell Harry Scott to step up to the rectory with a request from you that Caroline Helstone should come and spend the evening with you."

"Would it not be better to-morrow, dear brother?"

"I should like her to see the place as it is just now; its brilliant cleanliness and perfect neatness are so much to your credit."

"It might benefit her in the way of example."

"It might and must; she ought to come."

He went into the kitchen.

"Sarah, delay tea half an hour." He then commissioned her to dispatch Harry Scott to the rectory, giving her a twisted note hastily scribbled in pencil by himself, and addressed "Miss Helstone."

Scarcely had Sarah time to get impatient under the fear of damage to her toast already prepared when the messenger returned, and with him the invited guest.

She entered through the kitchen, quietly tripped up Sarah's stairs to take off her bonnet and furs, and came down as quietly, with her beautiful curls nicely smoothed, her graceful merino dress and delicate collar all trim and spotless, her gay little work-bag in her hand. She lingered to exchange a few kindly words with Sarah, and to look at the new tortoise-shell kitten basking on the kitchen hearth, and to speak to the canary-bird, which a sudden blaze from the fire had startled on its perch; and then she betook herself to the parlour.

The gentle salutation, the friendly welcome, were interchanged in such tranquil sort as befitted cousins meeting; a sense of pleasure, subtle and quiet as a perfume, diffused itself through the room; the newly-kindled lamp burnt up bright; the tray and the singing urn were brought in.

"I am pleased to come home," repeated Mr. Moore.

They assembled round the table. Hortense chiefly talked. She congratulated Caroline on the evident improvement in her health. Her colour and her plump cheeks were returning, she remarked. It was true. There was an obvious change in Miss Helstone. All about her seemed elastic; depression, fear, forlornness, were withdrawn. No longer crushed, and saddened, and slow, and drooping, she looked like one who had tasted the cordial of heart's ease, and been lifted on the wing of hope.

After tea Hortense went upstairs. She had not rummaged her drawers for a month past, and the impulse to perform that operation was now become resistless. During her absence the talk passed into Caroline's hands. She took it up with ease; she fell into her best tone of conversation. A pleasing facility and elegance of language gave fresh charm to familiar topics; a new music in the always soft voice gently surprised and pleasingly captivated the listener; unwonted shades and lights of expression elevated the young countenance with character, and kindled it with animation.

"Caroline, you look as if you had heard good tidings," said Moore, after earnestly gazing at her for some minutes.

"Do I?"

"I sent for you this evening that I might be cheered; but you cheer me more than I had calculated."

"I am glad of that. And I *really* cheer you?"

"You look brightly, move buoyantly, speak musically."

"It is pleasant to be here again."

"Truly it is pleasant; I feel it so. And to see health on your cheek and hope in your eye is pleasant, Cary; but what is this hope, and what is the source of this sunshine I perceive about you?"

"For one thing, I am happy in mamma. I love her so much, and she loves me. Long and tenderly she nursed me. Now, when her care has made me well, I can occupy myself for and with her all the day. I say it is my turn to attend to her; and I *do* attend to her. I am her waiting-woman as well as her child. I like — you would laugh if you knew what pleasure I have in making dresses and sewing for her. She looks so nice now, Robert; I will not let her be old-fashioned. And then, she is charming to talk to — full of wisdom, ripe in judgment, rich in information, exhaustless in stores her observant faculties have quietly amassed. Every day that I live with her I like her better, I esteem her more highly, I love her more tenderly."

"*That* for one thing, then, Cary. You talk in such a way about 'mamma' it is enough to make one jealous of the old lady."

"She is not old, Robert."

"Of the young lady, then."

"She does not pretend to be young."

"Well, of the matron. But you said 'mamma's' affection was *one* thing that made you happy; now for the other thing."

"I am glad you are better."

"What besides?"

"I am glad we are friends."

"You and I?"

"Yes. I once thought we never should be."

"Cary, some day I mean to tell you a thing about myself that is not to my credit, and consequently will not please you."

"Ah, don't! I cannot bear to think ill of you."

"And I cannot bear that you should think better of me than I deserve."

"Well, but I half know your 'thing;' indeed, I believe I know all about it."

"You do not."

"I believe I do."

"Whom does it concern besides me?"

She coloured; she hesitated; she was silent.

"Speak, Cary! Whom does it concern?"

She tried to utter a name, and could not.

"Tell me; there is none present but ourselves. Be frank."

"But if I guess wrong?"

"I will forgive. Whisper, Cary."

He bent his ear to her lips. Still she would not, or could not, speak clearly to the point. Seeing that Moore waited and was resolved to hear something, she at last said, "Miss Keeldar spent a day at the rectory about a week since. The evening came on very wintry, and we persuaded her to stay all night."

"And you and she curled your hair together?"

"How do you know that?"

"And then you chattered, and she told you — — "

"It was not at curling-hair time, so you are not as wise as you think; and, besides, she didn't tell me."

"You slept together afterwards?"

"We occupied the same room and bed. We did not sleep much; we talked the whole night through."

"I'll be sworn you did! And then it all came out — *tant pis*. I would rather you had heard it from myself."

"You are quite wrong. She did not tell me what you suspect — she is not the person to proclaim such things; but yet I inferred something from parts of her discourse. I gathered more from rumour, and I made out the rest by instinct."

"But if she did not tell you that I wanted to marry her for the sake of her money, and that she refused me indignantly and scornfully (you need neither start nor blush; nor yet need you prick your trembling fingers with your needle. That is the plain truth, whether you like it or not) — if such was not the subject of her august confidences, on what point did they turn? You say you talked the whole night through; what about?"

"About things we never thoroughly discussed before, intimate friends as we have been; but you hardly expect I should tell you?"

"Yes, yes, Cary; you will tell me. You said we were friends, and friends should always confide in each other."

"But you are sure you won't repeat it?"

"Quite sure."

"Not to Louis?"

"Not even to Louis. What does Louis care for young ladies' secrets?"

"Robert, Shirley is a curious, magnanimous being."

"I dare say. I can imagine there are both odd points and grand points about her."

"I have found her chary in showing her feelings; but when they rush out, river-like, and pass full and powerful before you — almost without leave from her — you gaze, wonder; you admire, and — I think — love her."

"You saw this spectacle?"

"Yes; at dead of night, when all the house was silent, and starlight and the cold reflection from the snow glimmered in our chamber, then I saw Shirley's heart."

"Her heart's core? Do you think she showed you that?"

"Her heart's core."

"And how was it?"

"Like a shrine, for it was holy; like snow, for it was pure; like flame, for it was warm; like death, for it was strong."

"Can she love? tell me that."

"What think you?"

"She has loved none that have loved her yet."

"Who are those that have loved her?"

He named a list of gentlemen, closing with Sir Philip Nunnely.

"She has loved none of these."

"Yet some of them were worthy of a woman's affection."

"Of some women's, but not of Shirley's."

"Is she better than others of her sex?"

"She is peculiar, and more dangerous to take as a wife — rashly."

"I can imagine that."

"She spoke of you — — "

"Oh, she did! I thought you denied it."

"She did not speak in the way you fancy; but I asked her, and I would make her tell me what she thought of you, or rather how she felt towards you. I wanted to know; I had long wanted to know."

"So had I; but let us hear. She thinks meanly, she feels contemptuously, doubtless?"

"She thinks of you almost as highly as a woman can think of a man. You know she can be eloquent. I yet feel in fancy the glow of the language in which her opinion was conveyed."

"But how does she feel?"

"Till you shocked her (she said you had shocked her, but she would not tell me how) she felt as a sister feels towards a brother of whom she is at once fond and proud."

"I'll shock her no more, Cary, for the shock rebounded on myself till I staggered again. But that comparison about sister and brother is all nonsense. She is too rich and proud to entertain fraternal sentiments for me."

"You don't know her, Robert; and, somehow, I fancy now (I had other ideas formerly) that you cannot know her. You and she are not so constructed as to be able thoroughly to understand each other."

"It may be so. I esteem her, I admire her; and yet my impressions concerning her are harsh — perhaps uncharitable. I believe, for instance, that she is incapable of love — — "

"Shirley incapable of love!"

"That she will never marry. I imagine her jealous of compromising her pride, of relinquishing her power, of sharing her property."

"Shirley has hurt your *amour propre*."

"She did hurt it; though I had not an emotion of tenderness, nor a spark of passion for her."

"Then, Robert, it was very wicked in you to want to marry her."

"And very mean, my little pastor, my pretty priestess. I never wanted to kiss Miss Keeldar in my life, though she has fine lips, scarlet and round as ripe cherries; or, if I did wish it, it was the mere desire of the eye."

"I doubt, now, whether you are speaking the truth. The grapes or the cherries are sour — 'hung too high.'"

"She has a pretty figure, a pretty face, beautiful hair. I acknowledge all her charms and feel none of them, or only feel them in a way she would disdain. I suppose I was truly tempted by the mere gilding of the bait. Caroline, what a noble fellow your Robert is — great, good, disinterested, and then so pure!"

"But not perfect. He made a great blunder once, and we will hear no more about it."

"And shall we think no more about it, Cary? Shall we not despise him in our heart — gentle but just, compassionate but upright?"

"Never! We will remember that with what measure we mete it shall be measured unto us, and so we will give no scorn, only affection."

"Which won't satisfy, I warn you of that. Something besides affection —

something far stronger, sweeter, warmer — will be demanded one day. Is it there to give?"

Caroline was moved, much moved.

"Be calm, Lina," said Moore soothingly. "I have no intention, because I have no right, to perturb your mind now, nor for months to come. Don't look as if you would leave me. We will make no more agitating allusions; we will resume our gossip. Do not tremble; look me in the face. See what a poor, pale, grim phantom I am — more pitiable than formidable."

She looked shyly. "There is something formidable still, pale as you are," she said, as her eye fell under his.

"To return to Shirley," pursued Moore: "is it your opinion that she is ever likely to marry?"

"She loves."

"Platonically — theoretically — all humbug!"

"She loves what I call sincerely."

"Did she say so?"

"I cannot affirm that she said so. No such confession as 'I love this man or that' passed her lips."

"I thought not."

"But the feeling made its way in spite of her, and I saw it. She spoke of one man in a strain not to be misunderstood. Her voice alone was sufficient testimony. Having wrung from her an opinion on your character, I demanded a second opinion of — another person about whom I had my conjectures, though they were the most tangled and puzzled conjectures in the world. I would *make* her speak. I shook her, I chid her, I pinched her fingers when she tried to put me off with gibes and jests in her queer provoking way, and at last out it came. The voice, I say, was enough; hardly raised above a whisper, and yet such a soft vehemence in its tones. There was no confession, no confidence, in the matter. To these things she cannot condescend; but I am sure that man's happiness is dear to her as her own life."

"Who is it?"

"I charged her with the fact. She did not deny, she did not avow, but looked at me. I saw her eyes by the snow-gleam. It was quite enough. I triumphed over her mercilessly."

"What right had *you* to triumph? Do you mean to say *you* are fancy free?"

"Whatever *I* am, Shirley is a bondswoman. Lioness, she has found her captor. Mistress she may be of all round her, but her own mistress she is not."

"So you exulted at recognizing a fellow-slave in one so fair and imperial?"

"I did; Robert, you say right, in one so fair and imperial."

"You confess it — a *fellow*-slave?"

"I confess nothing; but I say that haughty Shirley is no more free than was Hagar."

"And who, pray, is the Abraham, the hero of a patriarch who has achieved such a conquest?"

"You still speak scornfully, and cynically, and sorely; but I will make you change your note before I have done with you."

"We will see that. Can she marry this Cupidon?"

"Cupidon! he is just about as much a Cupidon as you are a Cyclops."

"Can she marry him?"

"You will see."

"I want to know his name, Cary."

"Guess it."

"Is it any one in this neighbourhood?"

"Yes, in Briarfield parish."

"Then it is some person unworthy of her. I don't know a soul in Briarfield parish her equal."

"Guess."

"Impossible. I suppose she is under a delusion, and will plunge into some absurdity, after all."

Caroline smiled.

"Do *you* approve the choice?" asked Moore.

"Quite, *quite*."

"Then I *am* puzzled; for the head which owns this bounteous fall of hazel curls is an excellent little thinking machine, most accurate in its working. It boasts a correct, steady judgment, inherited from 'mamma,' I suppose."

"And I *quite* approve, and mamma was charmed."

"'Mamma' charmed — Mrs. Pryor! It can't be romantic, then?"

"It *is* romantic, but it is also right."

"Tell me, Cary — tell me out of pity; I am too weak to be tantalized."

"You shall be tantalized — it will do you no harm; you are not so weak as you pretend."

"I have twice this evening had some thoughts of falling on the floor at your feet."

"You had better not. I shall decline to help you up."

"And worshipping you downright. My mother was a Roman Catholic. You look like the loveliest of her pictures of the Virgin. I think I will embrace her faith and kneel and adore."

"Robert, Robert, sit still; don't be absurd. I will go to Hortense if you commit extravagances."

"You have stolen my senses. Just now nothing will come into my mind but *les litanies de la sainte Vièrge. Rose céleste, reine des anges*!"

"*Tour d'ivoire, maison d'or* — is not that the jargon? Well, sit down quietly, and guess your riddle."

"But 'mamma' charmed — there's the puzzle."

"I'll tell you what mamma said when I told her. 'Depend upon it, my dear, such a choice will make the happiness of Miss Keeldar's life.'"

"I'll guess once, and no more. It is old Helstone. She is going to be your aunt."

"I'll tell my uncle; I'll tell Shirley!" cried Caroline, laughing gleefully. "Guess again, Robert; your blunders are charming."

"It is the parson — Hall."

"Indeed, no; he is mine, if you please."

"Yours! Ay, the whole generation of women in Briarfield seem to have made an idol of that priest. I wonder why; he is bald, sand-blind, gray-haired."

"Fanny will be here to fetch me before you have solved the riddle, if you don't make haste."

"I'll guess no more — I am tired; and then I don't care. Miss Keeldar may marry *le grand Turc* for me."

"Must I whisper?"

"That you must, and quickly. Here comes Hortense; come near, a little nearer, my own Lina. I care for the whisper more than the words."

She whispered. Robert gave a start, a flash of the eye, a brief laugh. Miss Moore entered, and Sarah followed behind, with information that Fanny was come. The hour of converse was over.

Robert found a moment to exchange a few more whispered sentences. He was waiting at the foot of the staircase as Caroline descended after putting on her shawl.

"Must I call Shirley a noble creature now?" he asked.

"If you wish to speak the truth, certainly."

"Must I forgive her?"

"Forgive her? Naughty Robert! Was she in the wrong, or were you?"

"Must I at length love her downright, Cary?"

Caroline looked keenly up, and made a movement towards him, something between the loving and the petulant.

"Only give the word, and I'll try to obey you."

"Indeed, you must not love her; the bare idea is perverse."

"But then she is handsome, peculiarly handsome. Hers is a beauty that grows on you. You think her but graceful when you first see her; you discover her to be beautiful when you have known her for a year."

"It is not you who are to say these things. Now, Robert, be good."

"O Cary, I have no love to give. Were the goddess of beauty to woo me, I could not meet her advances. There is no heart which I can call mine in this breast."

"So much the better; you are a great deal safer without. Good-night."

"Why must you always go, Lina, at the very instant when I most want you to stay?"

"Because you most wish to retain when you are most certain to lose."

"Listen; one other word. Take care of your own heart — do you hear me?"

"There is no danger."

"I am not convinced of that. The Platonic parson, for instance."

“Who — Malone?”

“Cyril Hall. I owe more than one twinge of jealousy to that quarter.”

“As to you, you have been flirting with Miss Mann. She showed me the other day a plant you had given her. — Fanny, I am ready.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WRITTEN IN THE SCHOOLROOM.

Louis Moore's doubts respecting the immediate evacuation of Fieldhead by Mr. Sympson turned out to be perfectly well founded. The very next day after the grand quarrel about Sir Philip Nunnely a sort of reconciliation was patched up between uncle and niece. Shirley, who could never find it in her heart to be or to seem inhospitable (except in the single instance of Mr. Donne), begged the whole party to stay a little longer. She begged in such earnest it was evident she wished it for some reason. They took her at her word. Indeed, the uncle could not bring himself to leave her quite unwatched — at full liberty to marry Robert Moore as soon as that gentleman should be able (Mr. Sympson piously prayed this might never be the case) to reassert his supposed pretensions to her hand. They all stayed.

In his first rage against all the house of Moore, Mr. Sympson had so conducted himself towards Mr. Louis that that gentleman — patient of labour or suffering, but intolerant of coarse insolence — had promptly resigned his post, and could now be induced to resume and retain it only till such time as the family should quit Yorkshire. Mrs. Sympson's entreaties prevailed with him thus far; his own attachment to his pupil constituted an additional motive for concession; and probably he had a third motive, stronger than either of the other two. Probably he would have found it very hard indeed to leave Fieldhead just now.

Things went on for some time pretty smoothly. Miss Keeldar's health was re-established; her spirits resumed their flow. Moore had found means to relieve her from every nervous apprehension; and, indeed, from the moment of giving him her confidence, every fear seemed to have taken wing. Her heart became as lightsome, her manner as careless, as those of a little child, that, thoughtless of its own life or death, trusts all responsibility to its parents. He and William Farren — through whose medium he made inquiries concerning the state of Phœbe — agreed in asserting that the dog was not mad, that it was only ill-usage which had driven her from home; for it was proved that her master was in the frequent habit of chastising her violently. Their assertion might or might not be true. The groom and gamekeeper affirmed to the contrary — both asserting that, if hers was not a clear case of hydrophobia, there was no such disease. But to this evidence Louis Moore turned an incredulous ear. He reported to Shirley only what was encouraging. She believed him; and, right or wrong, it is certain that in her case the bite proved innocuous.

November passed; December came. The Sympsons were now really departing. It was incumbent on them to be at home by Christmas. Their packages were preparing; they were to leave in a few days. One winter evening, during the last week of their stay, Louis Moore again took out his little blank book, and discoursed with it as follows: —

"She is lovelier than ever. Since that little cloud was dispelled all the temporary waste and wanness have vanished. It was marvellous to see how soon the magical energy of youth raised her elastic and revived her blooming.

"After breakfast this morning, when I had seen her, and listened to her, and, so to speak, felt her, in every sentient atom of my frame, I passed from her sunny presence into the chill drawing-room. Taking up a little gilt volume, I found it to contain a selection of lyrics. I read a poem or two; whether the spell was in me or in the verse I know not, but my heart filled genially, my pulse rose. I glowed, notwithstanding the frost air. I, too, am young as yet. Though she said she never considered me young, I am barely thirty. There are moments when life, for no other reason than my own youth, beams with sweet hues upon me.

"It was time to go to the schoolroom. I went. That same schoolroom is rather pleasant in a morning. The sun then shines through the low lattice; the books are in order; there are no papers strewn about; the fire is clear and clean; no cinders have fallen, no ashes accumulated. I found Henry there, and he had brought with him Miss Keeldar. They were together.

"I said she was lovelier than ever. She is. A fine rose, not deep but delicate, opens on her cheek. Her eye, always dark, clear, and speaking, utters now a language I cannot render; it is the utterance, seen not heard, through which angels must have communed when there was 'silence in heaven.' Her hair was always dusk as night and fine as silk, her neck was always fair, flexible, polished; but both have now a new charm. The tresses are soft as shadow, the shoulders they fall on wear a goddess grace. Once I only *saw* her beauty, now I *feel* it.

"Henry was repeating his lesson to her before bringing it to me. One of her hands was occupied with the book; he held the other. That boy gets more than his share of privileges; he dares caress and is caressed. What indulgence and compassion she shows him! Too much. If this went on, Henry in a few years, when his soul was formed, would offer it on her altar, as I have offered mine.

"I saw her eyelid flitter when I came in, but she did not look up; *now* she hardly ever gives me a glance. She seems to grow silent too; to *me* she rarely speaks, and when I am present, she says little to others. In my gloomy moments I attribute this change to indifference, aversion, what not? In my sunny intervals I give it another meaning. I say, were I her equal, I could find in this shyness coyness, and in that coyness love. As it is, dare I look for it? What could I do with it if found?

"This morning I dared at least contrive an hour's communion for her and me; I dared not only *wish* but *will* an interview with her. I dared summon solitude to guard us. Very decidedly I called Henry to the door. Without hesitation I said, 'Go where you will, my boy; but, till I call you, return not here.'

"Henry, I could see, did not like his dismissal. That boy is young, but a thinker; his meditative eye shines on me strangely sometimes. He half feels what links me to Shirley; he half guesses that there is a dearer delight in the reserve with which I am treated than in all the endearments he is allowed. The young, lame, half-grown lion would growl at me now and then, because I have tamed his lioness and am her keeper, did not the habit of discipline and the instinct of affection hold him subdued. Go, Henry; you must learn to take your share of the bitter of life with all of Adam's race that have gone before or will come after you. Your destiny can be no exception to the common lot; be grateful that your love is overlooked thus early, before it can claim any affinity to passion. An hour's fret, a pang of envy, suffice to express what you feel. Jealousy hot as the sun above the line, rage destructive as the tropic storm, the clime of your sensations ignores — as yet.

"I took my usual seat at the desk, quite in my usual way. I am blessed in that power to cover all inward ebullition with outward calm. No one who looks at my slow face can guess the vortex sometimes whirling in my heart, and engulfing thought and wrecking prudence. Pleasant is it to have the gift to proceed peacefully and powerfully in your course without alarming by one eccentric movement. It was not my present intention to utter one word of love to her, or to reveal one glimpse of the fire in which I wasted. Presumptuous I never have been; presumptuous I never will be. Rather than even *seem* selfish and interested, I would resolutely rise, gird my loins, part and leave her, and seek, on the other side of the globe, a new life, cold and barren as the rock the salt tide daily washes. My design this morning was to take of her a near scrutiny — to read a line in the page of her heart. Before I left I determined to know *what* I was leaving.

"I had some quills to make into pens. Most men's hands would have trembled when their hearts were so stirred; mine went to work steadily, and my voice, when I called it into exercise, was firm.

"'This day week you will be alone at Fieldhead, Miss Keeldar.'

"'Yes: I rather think my uncle's intention to go is a settled one now.'

"'He leaves you dissatisfied.'

"'He is not pleased with me.'

"'He departs as he came — no better for his journey. This is mortifying.'

"'I trust the failure of his plans will take from him all inclination to lay new ones.'

"'In his way Mr. Sympson honestly wished you well. All he has done or intended to do he believed to be for the best.'

"'You are kind to undertake the defence of a man who has permitted himself to treat you with so much insolence.’

“‘I never feel shocked at, or bear malice for, what is spoken in character; and most perfectly in character was that vulgar and violent onset against me, when he had quitted you worsted.’

“‘You cease now to be Henry’s tutor?’

“‘I shall be parted from Henry for a while (if he and I live we shall meet again somehow, for we love each other) and be ousted from the bosom of the Sympson family for ever. Happily this change does not leave me stranded; it but hurries into premature execution designs long formed.’

“‘No change finds you off your guard. I was sure, in your calm way, you would be prepared for sudden mutation. I always think you stand in the world like a solitary but watchful, thoughtful archer in a wood. And the quiver on your shoulder holds more arrows than one; your bow is provided with a second string. Such too is your brother’s wont. You two might go forth homeless hunters to the loneliest western wilds; all would be well with you. The hewn tree would make you a hut, the cleared forest yield you fields from its stripped bosom, the buffalo would feel your rifle-shot, and with lowered horns and hump pay homage at your feet.’

“‘And any Indian tribe of Blackfeet or Flatheads would afford us a bride, perhaps?’

“‘No’ (hesitating), ‘I think not. The savage is sordid. I think — that is, I *hope* — you would neither of you share your hearth with that to which you could not give your heart.’

“‘What suggested the wild West to your mind, Miss Keeldar? Have you been with me in spirit when I did not see you? Have you entered into my day-dreams, and beheld my brain labouring at its scheme of a future?’

“She had separated a slip of paper for lighting tapers — a spill, as it is called — into fragments. She threw morsel by morsel into the fire, and stood pensively watching them consume. She did not speak.

“‘How did you learn what you seem to know about my intentions?’

“‘I know nothing. I am only discovering them now. I spoke at hazard.’

“‘Your hazard sounds like divination. A tutor I will never be again; never take a pupil after Henry and yourself; not again will I sit habitually at another man’s table — no more be the appendage of a family. I am now a man of thirty; I have never been free since I was a boy of ten. I have such a thirst for freedom, such a deep passion to know her and call her mine, such a day-desire and night-longing to win her and possess her, I will not refuse to cross the Atlantic for her sake; her I will follow deep into virgin woods. Mine it shall not be to accept a savage girl as a slave — she could not be a wife. I know no white woman whom I love that would accompany me; but I am certain Liberty will await me, sitting under a pine. When I call her she will come to my loghouse, and she shall fill my arms.’

“She could not hear me speak so unmoved, and she *was* moved. It was right — I meant to move her. She could not answer me, nor could she look at me. I should have been sorry if she could have done either. Her cheek glowed as if a crimson flower through whose petals the sun shone had cast its light upon it. On the white lid and dark lashes of her downcast eye trembled all that is graceful in the sense of half-painful, half-pleasing shame.

"Soon she controlled her emotion, and took all her feelings under command. I saw she had felt insurrection, and was waking to empire. She sat down. There was that in her face which I could read. It said, I see the line which is my limit; nothing shall make me pass it. I feel — I know how far I may reveal my feelings, and when I must clasp the volume. I have advanced to a certain distance, as far as the true and sovereign and undegraded nature of my kind permits; now here I stand rooted. My heart may break if it is baffled; let it break. It shall never dishonour me; it shall never dishonour my sisterhood in me. Suffering before degradation! death before treachery!

"I, for my part, said, 'If she were poor, I would be at her feet; if she were lowly, I would take her in my arms. Her gold and her station are two griffins that guard her on each side. Love looks and longs, and dares not; Passion hovers round, and is kept at bay; Truth and Devotion are scared. There is nothing to lose in winning her, no sacrifice to make. It is all clear gain, and therefore unimaginably difficult.'

"Difficult or not, something must be done, something must be said. I could not, and would not, sit silent with all that beauty modestly mute in my presence. I spoke thus, and still I spoke with calm. Quiet as my words were, I could hear they fell in a tone distinct, round, and deep.

"'Still, I know I shall be strangely placed with that mountain nymph Liberty. She is, I suspect, akin to that Solitude which I once wooed, and from which I now seek a divorce. These Oreads are peculiar. They come upon you with an unearthly charm, like some starlight evening; they inspire a wild but not warm delight; their beauty is the beauty of spirits; their grace is not the grace of life, but of seasons or scenes in nature. Theirs is the dewy bloom of morning, the languid flush of evening, the peace of the moon, the changefulness of clouds. I want and will have something different. This elfish splendour looks chill to my vision, and feels frozen to my touch. I am not a poet; I cannot live with abstractions. You, Miss Keeldar, have sometimes, in your laughing satire, called me a material philosopher, and implied that I live sufficiently for the substantial. Certainly I feel material from head to foot; and glorious as Nature is, and deeply as I worship her with the solid powers of a solid heart, I would rather behold her through the soft human eyes of a loved and lovely wife than through the wild orbs of the highest goddess of Olympus.'

"'Juno could not cook a buffalo steak as you like it,' said she.

"'She could not; but I will tell you who could — some young, penniless, friendless orphan girl. I wish I could find such a one — pretty enough for me to love, with something of the mind and heart suited to my taste; not uneducated — honest and modest. I care nothing for attainments, but I would fain have the germ of those sweet natural powers which nothing acquired can rival; any temper Fate wills — I can manage the hottest. To such a creature as this I should like to be first tutor and then husband. I would teach her my language, my habits and my principles, and then I would reward her with my love.'

"'*Reward* her, lord of the creation — *reward* her!'" ejaculated she, with a curled lip.

"'And be repaid a thousandfold.'

"'If she willed it, monseigneur.'

"'And she *should* will it.'

"'You have stipulated for any temper Fate wills. Compulsion is flint and a blow to the metal of some souls.'

"'And love the spark it elicits.'

"'Who cares for the love that is but a spark — seen, flown upward, and gone?'

"'I must find my orphan girl. Tell me how, Miss Keeldar.'

"'Advertise; and be sure you add, when you describe the qualifications, she must be a good plain cook.'

"'I must find her; and when I do find her I shall marry her.'

"'Not you!' and her voice took a sudden accent of peculiar scorn.

"I liked this. I had roused her from the pensive mood in which I had first found her. I would stir her further.

"'Why doubt it?'

"'*You* marry!'

"'Yes, of course; nothing more evident than that I can and shall.'

"'The contrary is evident, Mr. Moore.'

"She charmed me in this mood — waxing disdainful, half insulting; pride, temper, derision, blent in her large fine eye, that had just now the look of a merlin's.

"'Favour me with your reasons for such an opinion, Miss Keeldar.'

"'How will *you* manage to marry, I wonder?'

"'I shall manage it with ease and speed when I find the proper person.'

"'Accept celibacy!' (and she made a gesture with her hand as if she gave me something) 'take it as your doom!'

"'No; you cannot give what I already have. Celibacy has been mine for thirty years. If you wish to offer me a gift, a parting present, a keepsake, you must change the boon.'

"'Take worse, then!'

"'How — what?'

"I now felt, and looked, and spoke eagerly. I was unwise to quit my sheet-anchor of calm even for an instant; it deprived me of an advantage and transferred it to her. The little spark of temper dissolved in sarcasm, and eddied over her countenance in the ripples of a mocking smile.

"'Take a wife that has paid you court to save your modesty, and thrust herself upon you to spare your scruples.'

"'Only show me where.'

"'Any stout widow that has had a few husbands already, and can manage these things.'

"'She must not be rich, then. Oh these riches!'

"'Never would you have gathered the produce of the gold-bearing garden. You have not courage to confront the sleepless dragon; you have not craft to borrow the aid of Atlas.'

"'You look hot and haughty.'

"'And you far haughtier. Yours is the monstrous pride which counterfeits humility.'

"'I am a dependant; I know my place.'

"'I am a woman; I know mine.'

"'I am poor; I must be proud.'

"'I have received ordinances, and own obligations stringent as yours.'

"We had reached a critical point now, and we halted and looked at each other. *She* would not give in, I felt. Beyond this I neither felt nor saw. A few moments yet were mine. The end was coming — I heard its rush — but not come. I would dally, wait, talk, and when impulse urged I would act. I am never in a hurry; I never was in a hurry in my whole life. Hasty people drink the nectar of existence scalding hot; I taste it cool as dew. I proceeded: 'Apparently, Miss Keeldar, you are as little likely to marry as myself. I know you have refused three — nay, four — advantageous offers, and, I believe, a fifth. Have you rejected Sir Philip Nunnely?'

"I put this question suddenly and promptly.

"'Did you think I should take him?'

"'I thought you might.'

"'On what grounds, may I ask?'

"'Conformity of rank, age, pleasing contrast of temper — for *he* is mild and amiable — harmony of intellectual tastes.'

"'A beautiful sentence! Let us take it to pieces. "Conformity of rank." He is quite above me. Compare my grange with his palace, if you please. I am disdained by his kith and kin. "Suitability of age." We were born in the same year; consequently he is still a boy, while I am a woman — ten years his senior to all intents and purposes. "Contrast of temper." Mild and amiable, is he; I — what? Tell me.'

"'Sister of the spotted, bright, quick, fiery leopard.'

"'And you would mate me with a kid — the millennium being yet millions of centuries from mankind; being yet, indeed, an archangel high in the seventh heaven, uncommissioned to descend? Unjust barbarian! "Harmony of intellectual tastes." He is fond of poetry, and I hate it — — '

"'Do you? That is news.'

"'I absolutely shudder at the sight of metre or at the sound of rhyme whenever I am at the priory or Sir Philip at Fieldhead. Harmony, indeed!

When did I whip up syllabub sonnets or string stanzas fragile as fragments of glass? and when did I betray a belief that those penny-beads were genuine brilliants?'

"'You might have the satisfaction of leading him to a higher standard, of improving his tastes.'

"'Leading and improving! teaching and tutoring! bearing and forbearing! Pah! my husband is not to be my baby. I am not to set him his daily lesson and see that he learns it, and give him a sugar-plum if he is good, and a patient, pensive, pathetic lecture if he is bad. But it is like a tutor to talk of the "satisfaction of teaching." I suppose *you* think it the finest employment in the world. I don't. I reject it. Improving a husband! No. I shall insist upon my husband improving me, or else we part.'

"'God knows it is needed!'

"'What do you mean by that, Mr. Moore?'

"'What I say. Improvement is imperatively needed.'

"'If you were a woman you would school *monsieur, votre mari*, charmingly. It would just suit you; schooling is your vocation.'

"'May I ask whether, in your present just and gentle mood, you mean to taunt me with being a tutor?'

"'Yes, bitterly; and with anything else you please — any defect of which you are painfully conscious.'

"'With being poor, for instance?'

"'Of course; that will sting you. You are sore about your poverty; you brood over that.'

"'With having nothing but a very plain person to offer the woman who may master my heart?'

"'Exactly. You have a habit of calling yourself plain. You are sensitive about the cut of your features because they are not quite on an Apollo pattern. You abase them more than is needful, in the faint hope that others may say a word in their behalf — which won't happen. Your face is nothing to boast of, certainly — not a pretty line nor a pretty tint to be found therein.'

"'Compare it with your own.'

"'It looks like a god of Egypt — a great sand-buried stone head; or rather I will compare it to nothing so lofty. It looks like Tartar. You are my mastiff's cousin. I think you as much like him as a man can be like a dog.'

"'Tartar is your dear companion. In summer, when you rise early, and run out into the fields to wet your feet with the dew, and freshen your cheek and uncurl your hair with the breeze, you always call him to follow you. You call him sometimes with a whistle that you learned from me. In the solitude of your wood, when you think nobody but Tartar is listening, you whistle the very tunes you imitated from my lips, or sing the very songs you have caught up by ear from my voice. I do not ask whence flows the feeling which you pour into these songs, for I know it flows out of your heart, Miss Keeldar. In the winter evenings Tartar lies at your feet. You suffer him to rest his head on your perfumed lap; you let him couch on the borders of your satin raiment. His rough hide is familiar with the contact of your hand. I once saw you kiss him on that snow-white beauty spot which stars his broad forehead. It is dangerous to say I am like Tartar; it suggests to me a claim to be treated like Tartar.'

"'Perhaps, sir, you can extort as much from your penniless and friendless young orphan girl, when you find her.'

"'Oh could I find her such as I image her! Something to tame first, and teach afterwards; to break in, and then to fondle. To lift the destitute proud thing out of poverty; to establish power over and then to be indulgent to the capricious moods that never were influenced and never indulged before; to see her alternately irritated and subdued about twelve times in the twenty-four hours; and perhaps, eventually, when her training was accomplished, to behold her the exemplary and patient mother of about a dozen children, only now and then lending little Louis a cordial cuff by way of paying the interest of the vast debt she owes his father. Oh' (I went on), 'my orphan girl would give me many a kiss; she would watch on the threshold for my coming home of an evening; she would run into my arms; she would keep my hearth as bright as she would make it warm. God bless the sweet idea! Find her I must.'

"Her eyes emitted an eager flash, her lips opened; but she reclosed them, and impetuously turned away.

"'Tell me, tell me where she is, Miss Keeldar!'

"Another movement, all haughtiness and fire and impulse.

"'I must know. You *can* tell me; you *shall* tell me.'

"'I *never will.*'

"She turned to leave me. Could I now let her part as she had always parted from me? No. I had gone too far not to finish; I had come too near the end not to drive home to it. All the encumbrance of doubt, all the rubbish of indecision, must be removed at once, and the plain truth must be ascertained. She must take her part, and tell me what it was; I must take mine and adhere to it.

"'A minute, madam,' I said, keeping my hand on the door-handle before I opened it. 'We have had a long conversation this morning, but the last word has not been spoken yet. It is yours to speak it.'

"'May I pass?'

"'No; I guard the door. I would almost rather die than let you leave me just now, without speaking the word I demand.'

"'What dare you expect me to say?'

"'What I am dying and perishing to hear; what I *must* and *will* hear; what you dare not now suppress.'

"'Mr. Moore, I hardly know what you mean. You are not like yourself.'

"I suppose I hardly was like my usual self, for I scared her — that I could see. It was right: she must be scared to be won.

"'You *do* know what I mean, and for the first time I stand before you *myself*. I have flung off the tutor, and beg to introduce you to the man. And remember, he is a gentleman.'

"She trembled. She put her hand to mine as if to remove it from the lock. She might as well have tried to loosen, by her soft touch, metal welded to metal. She felt she was powerless, and receded; and again she trembled.

"What change I underwent I cannot explain, but out of her emotion passed into me a new spirit. I neither was crushed nor elated by her lands and gold; I thought not of them, cared not for them. They were nothing — dross that could not dismay me. I saw only herself — her young beautiful form, the grace, the majesty, the modesty of her girlhood.

"'My pupil,' I said.

"'My master,' was the low answer.

"'I have a thing to tell you.'

"She waited with declined brow and ringlets drooped.

"'I have to tell you that for four years you have been growing into your tutor's heart, and that you are rooted there now. I have to declare that you have bewitched me, in spite of sense, and experience, and difference of station and estate. You have so looked, and spoken, and moved; so shown me your faults and your virtues — beauties rather, they are hardly so stern as virtues — that I love you — love you with my life and strength. It is out now.'

"She sought what to say, but could not find a word. She tried to rally, but vainly. I passionately repeated that I loved her.

"'Well, Mr. Moore, what then?' was the answer I got, uttered in a tone that would have been petulant if it had not faltered.

"'Have you nothing to say to me? Have you no love for me?'

"'A little bit.'

"'I am not to be tortured. I will not even play at present.'

"'I don't want to play; I want to go.'

"'I wonder you dare speak of going at this moment. *You* go! What! with my heart in your hand, to lay it on your toilet and pierce it with your pins? From my presence you do not stir, out of my reach you do not stray, till I receive a hostage — pledge for pledge — your heart for mine.'

"'The thing you want is mislaid — lost some time since. Let me go and seek it.'

"'Declare that it is where your keys often are — in my possession.'

"'You ought to know. And where are my keys, Mr. Moore? Indeed and truly I have lost them again; and Mrs. Gill wants some money, and I have none, except this sixpence.'

"She took the coin out of her apron pocket, and showed it in her palm. I could have trifled with her, but it would not do; life and death were at stake. Mastering at once the sixpence and the hand that held it, I demanded, 'Am I to die without you, or am I to live for you?'

"'Do as you please. Far be it from me to dictate your choice.'

"'You shall tell me with your own lips whether you doom me to exile or call me to hope.’

“‘Go; I can bear to be left.’

“‘Perhaps I too *can* bear to leave you. But reply, Shirley, my pupil, my sovereign — reply.’

“‘Die without me if you will; live for me if you dare.’

“‘I am not afraid of you, my leopardess. I *dare* live for and with you, from this hour till my death. Now, then, I have you. You are mine. I will never let you go. Wherever my home be, I have chosen my wife. If I stay in England, in England you will stay; if I cross the Atlantic, you will cross it also. Our lives are riveted, our lots intertwined.’

“‘And are we equal, then, sir? are we equal at last?’

“‘You are younger, frailer, feebler, more ignorant than I.’

“‘Will you be good to me, and never tyrannize?’

“‘Will you let me breathe, and not bewilder me? You must not smile at present. The world swims and changes round me. The sun is a dizzying scarlet blaze, the sky a violet vortex whirling over me.’

“I am a strong man, but I staggered as I spoke. All creation was exaggerated. Colour grew more vivid, motion more rapid, life itself more vital. I hardly saw her for a moment, but I heard her voice — pitilessly sweet. She would not subdue one of her charms in compassion. Perhaps she did not know what I felt.

“‘You name me leopardess. Remember, the leopardess is tameless,’ said she.

“‘Tame or fierce, wild or subdued, you are *mine*.’

“‘I am glad I know my keeper and am used to him. Only his voice will I follow; only his hand shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose.’

“I took her back to her seat, and sat down by her side. I wanted to hear her speak again. I could never have enough of her voice and her words.

“‘How much do you love me?’ I asked.

“‘Ah! you know. I will not gratify you — I will not flatter.’

“‘I don’t know half enough; my heart craves to be fed. If you knew how hungry and ferocious it is, you would hasten to stay it with a kind word or two.’

“‘Poor Tartar!’ said she, touching and patting my hand — ‘poor fellow, stalwart friend, Shirley’s pet and favourite, lie down!’

“‘But I will not lie down till I am fed with one sweet word.’

“And at last she gave it.

“‘Dear Louis, be faithful to me; never leave me. I don’t care for life unless I may pass it at your side.’

“‘Something more.’

“She gave me a change; it was not her way to offer the same dish twice.

“‘Sir,’ she said, starting up, ‘at your peril you ever again name such sordid things as money, or poverty, or inequality. It will be absolutely dangerous to torment me with these maddening scruples. I defy you to do it.’

"My face grew hot. I did once more wish I were not so poor or she were not so rich. She saw the transient misery; and then, indeed, she caressed me. Blent with torment, I experienced rapture.

"'Mr. Moore,' said she, looking up with a sweet, open, earnest countenance, 'teach me and help me to be good. I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property, but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to sustain my part well. Your judgment is well balanced, your heart is kind, your principles are sound. I know you are wise; I feel you are benevolent; I believe you are conscientious. Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant; be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!'

"'So help me God, I will!'"

Yet again a passage from the blank book if you like, reader; if you don't like it, pass it over: —

"The Sympsons are gone, but not before discovery and explanation. My manner must have betrayed something, or my looks. I was quiet, but I forgot to be guarded sometimes. I stayed longer in the room than usual; I could not bear to be out of her presence; I returned to it, and basked in it, like Tartar in the sun. If she left the oak parlour, instinctively I rose and left it too. She chid me for this procedure more than once. I did it with a vague, blundering idea of getting a word with her in the hall or elsewhere. Yesterday towards dusk I had her to myself for five minutes by the hall fire. We stood side by side; she was railing at me, and I was enjoying the sound of her voice. The young ladies passed, and looked at us; we did not separate. Ere long they repassed, and again looked. Mrs. Sympson came; we did not move. Mr. Sympson opened the dining-room door. Shirley flashed him back full payment for his spying gaze. She curled her lip and tossed her tresses. The glance she gave was at once explanatory and defiant. It said: 'I like Mr. Moore's society, and I dare you to find fault with my taste.'

"I asked, 'Do you mean him to understand how matters are?'

"'I do,' said she; 'but I leave the development to chance. There will be a scene. I neither invite it nor fear it; only, you must be present, for I am inexpressibly tired of facing him solus. I don't like to see him in a rage. He then puts off all his fine proprieties and conventional disguises, and the real human being below is what you would call *commun, plat, bas — vilain et un peu méchant*. His ideas are not clean, Mr. Moore; they want scouring with soft soap and fuller's earth. I think, if he could add his imagination to the contents of Mrs. Gill's bucking-basket, and let her boil it in her copper, with rain-water and bleaching-powder (I hope you think me a tolerable laundress), it would do him incalculable good.'

"This morning, fancying I heard her descend somewhat early, I was down instantly. I had not been deceived. There she was, busy at work in the breakfast-parlour, of which the housemaid was completing the arrangement and dusting. She had risen betimes to finish some little keepsake she intended for Henry. I got only a cool reception, which I accepted till the girl was gone, taking my book to the window-seat very quietly. Even when we were alone I was slow to disturb her. To sit with her in sight was happiness, and the proper happiness, for early morning — serene, incomplete, but progressive. Had I been obtrusive, I knew I should have encountered rebuff. 'Not at home to suitors' was written on her brow. Therefore I read on, stole now and then a look, watched her countenance soften and open as she felt I respected her mood, and enjoyed the gentle content of the moment.

"The distance between us shrank, and the light hoar-frost thawed insensibly. Ere an hour elapsed I was at her side, watching her sew, gathering her sweet smiles and her merry words, which fell for me abundantly. We sat, as we had a right to sit, side by side; my arm rested on her chair; I was near enough to count the stitches of her work, and to discern the eye of her needle. The door suddenly opened.

"I believe, if I had just then started from her, she would have despised me. Thanks to the phlegm of my nature, I rarely start. When I am well-off, *bien*, comfortable, I am not soon stirred. *Bien* I was — *très bien* — consequently immutable. No muscle moved. I hardly looked to the door.

"'Good-morning, uncle,' said she, addressing that personage, who paused on the threshold in a state of petrifaction.

"'Have you been long downstairs, Miss Keeldar, and alone with Mr. Moore?'

"'Yes, a very long time. We both came down early; it was scarcely light.'

"'The proceeding is improper — — '

"'It was at first, I was rather cross, and not civil; but you will perceive that we are now friends.'

"'I perceive more than you would wish me to perceive.'

"'Hardly, sir,' said I; 'we have no disguises. Will you permit me to intimate that any further observations you have to make may as well be addressed to me? Henceforward I stand between Miss Keeldar and all annoyance.'

"'*You!* What have *you* to do with Miss Keeldar?'

"'To protect, watch over, serve her.'

"'You, sir — you, the tutor?'

"'Not one word of insult, sir,' interposed she; 'not one syllable of disrespect to Mr. Moore in this house.'

"'Do you take his part?'

"'*His* part? oh yes!'

"She turned to me with a sudden fond movement, which I met by circling her with my arm. She and I both rose.

"'Good Ged!' was the cry from the morning-gown standing quivering at the door. *Ged*, I think, must be the cognomen of Mr. Sympson's Lares. When hard pressed he always invokes this idol.

"'Come forward, uncle; you shall hear all. — Tell him all, Louis.'

"'I dare him to speak — the beggar! the knave! the specious hypocrite! the vile, insinuating, infamous menial! — Stand apart from my niece, sir. Let her go!'

"She clung to me with energy. 'I am near my future husband,' she said. 'Who dares touch him or me?'

"'Her husband!' He raised and spread his hands. He dropped into a seat.

"'A while ago you wanted much to know whom I meant to marry. My intention was then formed, but not mature for communication. Now it is ripe, sun-mellowed, perfect. Take the crimson peach — take Louis Moore!'

"'But' (savagely) 'you *shall not* have him; he *shall not* have you.'

"'I would die before I would have another. I would die if I might not have him.'

"He uttered words with which this page shall never be polluted.

"She turned white as death; she shook all over; she lost her strength. I laid her down on the sofa; just looked to ascertain that she had not fainted — of which, with a divine smile, she assured me. I kissed her; and then, if I were to perish, I cannot give a clear account of what happened in the course of the next five minutes. She has since — through tears, laughter, and trembling — told me that I turned terrible, and gave myself to the demon. She says I left her, made one bound across the room; that Mr. Sympson vanished through the door as if shot from a cannon. I also vanished, and she heard Mrs. Gill scream.

"Mrs. Gill was still screaming when I came to my senses. I was then in another apartment — the oak parlour, I think. I held Sympson before me crushed into a chair, and my hand was on his cravat. His eyes rolled in his head; I was strangling him, I think. The housekeeper stood wringing her hands, entreating me to desist. I desisted that moment, and felt at once as cool as stone. But I told Mrs. Gill to fetch the Red-House Inn chaise instantly, and informed Mr. Sympson he must depart from Fieldhead the instant it came. Though half frightened out of his wits, he declared he would not. Repeating the former order, I added a commission to fetch a constable. I said, 'You *shall* go, by fair means or foul.'

"He threatened prosecution; I cared for nothing. I had stood over him once before, not quite so fiercely as now, but full as austerely. It was one night when burglars attempted the house at Sympson Grove, and in his wretched cowardice he would have given a vain alarm, without daring to offer defence. I had then been obliged to protect his family and his abode by mastering himself — and I had succeeded. I now remained with him till the chaise came. I marshalled him to it, he scolding all the way. He was terribly bewildered, as well as enraged. He would have resisted me, but knew not how. He called for his wife and daughters to come. I said they should follow him as soon as they could prepare. The smoke, the fume, the fret of his demeanour was inexpressible, but it was a fury incapable of producing a deed. That man, properly handled, must ever remain impotent. I know he will never touch me with the law. I know his wife, over whom he tyrannizes in trifles, guides him in matters of importance. I have long since earned her undying mother's gratitude by my devotion to her boy. In some of Henry's ailments I have nursed him — better, she said, than any woman could nurse. She will never forget that. She and her daughters quitted me to-day, in mute wrath and consternation; but she respects me. When Henry clung to my neck as I lifted him into the carriage and placed him by her side, when I arranged her own wrapping to make her warm, though she turned her head from me, I saw the tears start to her eyes. She will but the more zealously advocate my cause because she has left me in anger. I am glad of this — not for my own sake, but for that of my life and idol — my Shirley."

Once again he writes, a week after: — "I am now at Stilbro'. I have taken up my temporary abode with a friend — a professional man, in whose business I can be useful. Every day I ride over to Fieldhead. How long will it be before I can call that place my home, and its mistress mine? I am not easy, not tranquil; I am tantalized, sometimes tortured. To see her now, one would think she had never pressed her cheek to my shoulder, or clung to me with tenderness or trust. I feel unsafe; she renders me miserable. I am shunned when I visit her; she withdraws from my reach. Once this day I lifted her face, resolved to get a full look down her deep, dark eyes. Difficult to describe what I read there! Pantheress! beautiful forest-born! wily, tameless, peerless nature! She gnaws her chain; I see the white teeth working at the steel! She has dreams of her wild woods and pinings after virgin freedom. I wish Sympson would come again, and oblige her again to entwine her arms about me. I wish there was danger she should lose me, as there is risk I shall lose her. No; final loss I do not fear, but long delay — —

"It is now night — midnight. I have spent the afternoon and evening at Fieldhead. Some hours ago she passed me, coming down the oak staircase to the hall. She did not know I was standing in the twilight, near the staircase window, looking at the frost-bright constellations. How closely she glided against the banisters! How shyly shone her large eyes upon me! How evanescent, fugitive, fitful she looked — slim and swift as a northern streamer!

"I followed her into the drawing-room. Mrs. Pryor and Caroline Helstone were both there; she has summoned them to bear her company awhile. In her white evening dress, with her long hair flowing full and wavy, with her noiseless step, her pale cheek, her eye full of night and lightning, she looked, I thought, spirit-like — a thing made of an element, the child of a breeze and a flame, the daughter of ray and raindrop — a thing never to be overtaken, arrested, fixed. I wished I could avoid following her with my gaze as she moved here and there, but it was impossible. I talked with the other ladies as well as I could, but still I looked at her. She was very silent; I think she never spoke to me — not even when she offered me tea. It happened that she was called out a minute by Mrs. Gill. I passed into the moonlit hall, with the design of getting a word as she returned; nor in this did I fail.

"'Miss Keeldar, stay one instant,' said I, meeting her.

"'Why? the hall is too cold.'

"'It is not cold for me; at my side it should not be cold for you.'

"'But I shiver.'

"'With fear, I believe. What makes you fear me? You are quiet and distant. Why?'

"'I may well fear what looks like a great dark goblin meeting me in the moonlight.'

"'*Do not — do not* pass! Stay with me awhile. Let us exchange a few quiet words. It is three days since I spoke to you alone. Such changes are cruel.'

"'I have no wish to be cruel,' she responded, softly enough. Indeed there was softness in her whole deportment — in her face, in her voice; but there was also reserve, and an air fleeting, evanishing, intangible.

"'You certainly give me pain,' said I. 'It is hardly a week since you called me your future husband and treated me as such. Now I am once more the tutor for you. I am addressed as Mr. Moore and sir. Your lips have forgotten Louis.'

"'No, Louis, no. It is an easy, liquid name — not soon forgotten.'

"'Be cordial to Louis, then; approach him — let him approach.'

"'I *am* cordial,' said she, hovering aloof like a white shadow.

"'Your voice is very sweet and very low,' I answered, quietly advancing. 'You seem subdued, but still startled.'

"'No — quite calm, and afraid of nothing,' she assured me.

"'Of nothing but your votary.'

"I bent a knee to the flags at her feet.

"'You see I am in a new world, Mr. Moore. I don't know myself; I don't know you. But rise. When you do so I feel troubled and disturbed.'

"I obeyed. It would not have suited me to retain that attitude long. I courted serenity and confidence for her, and not vainly. She trusted and clung to me again.

"'Now, Shirley,' I said, 'you can conceive I am far from happy in my present uncertain, unsettled state.'

"'Oh yes, you *are* happy!' she cried hastily. 'You don't know how happy you are. Any change will be for the worse.'

"'Happy or not, I cannot bear to go on so much longer. You are too generous to require it.'

"'Be reasonable, Louis; be patient! I like you because you are patient.'

"'Like me no longer, then; love me instead. Fix our marriage day; think of it to-night, and decide.'

"She breathed a murmur, inarticulate yet expressive; darted, or melted, from my arms — and I lost her."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE WINDING-UP.

Yes, reader, we must settle accounts now. I have only briefly to narrate the final fates of some of the personages whose acquaintance we have made in this narrative, and then you and I must shake hands, and for the present separate.

Let us turn to the curates — to the much-loved, though long-neglected. Come forward, modest merit! Malone, I see, promptly answers the invocation. He knows his own description when he hears it.

No, Peter Augustus; we can have nothing to say to you. It won't do. Impossible to trust ourselves with the touching tale of your deeds and destinies. Are you not aware, Peter, that a discriminating public has its crotchets; that the unvarnished truth does not answer; that plain facts will not digest? Do you not know that the squeak of the real pig is no more relished now than it was in days of yore? Were I to give the catastrophe of your life and conversation, the public would sweep off in shrieking hysterics, and there would be a wild cry for sal-volatile and burnt feathers. "Impossible!" would be pronounced here; "untrue!" would be responded there; "inartistic!" would be solemnly decided. Note well. Whenever you present the actual, simple truth, it is, somehow, always denounced as a lie — they disown it, cast it off, throw it on the parish; whereas the product of your own imagination, the mere figment, the sheer fiction, is adopted, petted, termed pretty, proper, sweetly natural — the little, spurious wretch gets all the comfits, the honest, lawful bantling all the cuffs. Such is the way of the world, Peter; and as you are the legitimate urchin, rude, unwashed, and naughty, you must stand down.

Make way for Mr. Sweeting.

Here he comes, with his lady on his arm — the most splendid and the weightiest woman in Yorkshire — Mrs. Sweeting, formerly Miss Dora Sykes. They were married under the happiest auspices, Mr. Sweeting having been just inducted to a comfortable living, and Mr. Sykes being in circumstances to give Dora a handsome portion. They lived long and happily together, beloved by their parishioners and by a numerous circle of friends.

There! I think the varnish has been put on very nicely.

Advance, Mr. Donne.

This gentleman turned out admirably — far better than either you or I could possibly have expected, reader. He, too, married a most sensible, quiet, lady-like little woman. The match was the making of him. He became an exemplary domestic character, and a truly active parish priest (as a pastor he, to his dying day, conscientiously refused to act). The outside of the cup and platter he burnished up with the best polishing-powder; the furniture of the altar and temple he looked after with the zeal of an upholsterer, the care of a cabinet-maker. His little school, his little church, his little parsonage, all owed their erection to him; and they did him credit. Each was a model in its way. If uniformity and taste in architecture had been the same thing as consistency and earnestness in religion, what a shepherd of a Christian flock Mr. Donne would have made! There was one art in the mastery of which nothing mortal ever surpassed Mr. Donne: it was that of begging. By his own unassisted efforts he begged all the money for all his erections. In this matter he had a grasp of plan, a scope of action quite unique. He begged of high and low — of the shoeless cottage brat and the coroneted duke. He sent out begging-letters far and wide — to old Queen Charlotte, to the princesses her daughters, to her sons the royal dukes, to the Prince Regent, to Lord Castlereagh, to every member of the ministry then in office; and, what is more remarkable, he screwed something out of every one of these personages. It is on record that he got five pounds from the close-fisted old lady Queen Charlotte, and two guineas from the royal profligate her eldest son. When Mr. Donne set out on begging expeditions, he armed himself in a complete suit of brazen mail. That you had given a hundred pounds yesterday was with him no reason why you should not give two hundred to-day. He would tell you so to your face, and, ten to one, get the money out of you. People gave to get rid of him. After all, he did some good with the cash. He was useful in his day and generation.

Perhaps I ought to remark that on the premature and sudden vanishing of Mr. Malone from the stage of Briarfield parish (you cannot know how it happened, reader; your curiosity must be robbed to pay your elegant love of the pretty and pleasing), there came as his successor another Irish curate, Mr. Macarthey. I am happy to be able to inform you, *with truth*, that this gentleman did as much credit to his country as Malone had done it discredit. He proved himself as decent, decorous, and conscientious as Peter was rampant, boisterous, and — — This last epithet I choose to suppress, because it would let the cat out of the bag. He laboured faithfully in the parish. The schools, both Sunday and day schools, flourished under his sway like green bay trees. Being human, of course he had his faults. These, however, were proper, steady-going, clerical faults — what many would call virtues. The circumstance of finding himself invited to tea with a Dissenter would unhinge him for a week. The spectacle of a Quaker wearing his hat in the church, the thought of an unbaptized fellow-creature being interred with Christian rites — these things could make strange havoc in Mr. Macarthey’s physical and mental economy. Otherwise he was sane and rational, diligent and charitable.

I doubt not a justice-loving public will have remarked, ere this, that I have thus far shown a criminal remissness in pursuing, catching, and bringing to condign punishment the would-be assassin of Mr. Robert Moore. Here was a fine opening to lead my willing readers a dance, at once decorous and exciting

— a dance of law and gospel, of the dungeon, the dock, and the “dead-thraw.” You might have liked it, reader, but *I* should not. I and my subject would presently have quarrelled, and then I should have broken down. I was happy to find that facts perfectly exonerated me from the attempt. The murderer was never punished, for the good reason that he was never caught — the result of the further circumstance that he was never pursued. The magistrates made a shuffling, as if they were going to rise and do valiant things; but since Moore himself, instead of urging and leading them as heretofore, lay still on his little cottage-couch, laughing in his sleeve, and sneering with every feature of his pale, foreign face, they considered better of it, and after fulfilling certain indispensable forms, prudently resolved to let the matter quietly drop, which they did.

Mr. Moore knew who had shot him, and all Briarfield knew. It was no other than Michael Hartley, the half-crazed weaver once before alluded to, a frantic Antinomian in religion, and a mad leveller in politics. The poor soul died of delirium tremens a year after the attempt on Moore, and Robert gave his wretched widow a guinea to bury him.

The winter is over and gone; spring has followed with beamy and shadowy, with flowery and showery flight. We are now in the heart of summer — in mid-June — the June of 1812.

It is burning weather. The air is deep azure and red gold. It fits the time; it fits the age; it fits the present spirit of the nations. The nineteenth century wantons in its giant adolescence; the Titan boy uproots mountains in his game, and hurls rocks in his wild sport. This summer Bonaparte is in the saddle; he and his host scour Russian deserts. He has with him Frenchmen and Poles, Italians and children of the Rhine, six hundred thousand strong. He marches on old Moscow. Under old Moscow’s walls the rude Cossack waits him. Barbarian stoic! he waits without fear of the boundless ruin rolling on. He puts his trust in a snow-cloud; the wilderness, the wind, and the hail-storm are his refuge; his allies are the elements — air, fire, water. And what are these? Three terrible archangels ever stationed before the throne of Jehovah. They stand clothed in white, girdled with golden girdles; they uplift vials, brimming with the wrath of God. Their time is the day of vengeance; their signal, the word of the Lord of hosts, “thundering with the voice of His excellency.”

“Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?

“Go your ways. Pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.”

It is done. The earth is scorched with fire; the sea becomes “as the blood of a dead man;” the islands flee away; the mountains are not found.

In this year, Lord Wellington assumed the reins in Spain. They made him generalissimo, for their own salvation’s sake. In this year he took Badajos, he fought the field of Vittoria, he captured Pampeluna, he stormed San Sebastian; in this year he won Salamanca.

Men of Manchester, I beg your pardon for this slight *résumé* of warlike facts, but it is of no consequence. Lord Wellington is, for you, only a decayed old gentleman now. I rather think some of you have called him a "dotard;" you have taunted him with his age and the loss of his physical vigour. What fine heroes you are yourselves! Men like you have a right to trample on what is mortal in a demigod. Scoff at your ease; your scorn can never break his grand old heart.

But come, friends, whether Quakers or cotton-printers, let us hold a peace-congress, and let out our venom quietly. We have been talking with unseemly zeal about bloody battles and butchering generals; we arrive now at a triumph in your line. On the 18th of June 1812 the Orders in Council were repealed, and the blockaded ports thrown open. You know very well — such of you as are old enough to remember — you made Yorkshire and Lancashire shake with your shout on that occasion. The ringers cracked a bell in Briarfield belfry; it is dissonant to this day. The Association of Merchants and Manufacturers dined together at Stilbro', and one and all went home in such a plight as their wives would never wish to witness more. Liverpool started and snorted like a river-horse roused amongst his reeds by thunder. Some of the American merchants felt threatenings of apoplexy, and had themselves bled — all, like wise men, at this first moment of prosperity, prepared to rush into the bowels of speculation, and to delve new difficulties, in whose depths they might lose themselves at some future day. Stocks which had been accumulating for years now went off in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Warehouses were lightened, ships were laden; work abounded, wages rose; the good time seemed come. These prospects might be delusive, but they were brilliant — to some they were even true. At that epoch, in that single month of June, many a solid fortune was realized.

When a whole province rejoices, the humblest of its inhabitants tastes a festal feeling; the sound of public bells rouses the most secluded abode, as if with a call to be gay. And so Caroline Helstone thought, when she dressed herself more carefully than usual on the day of this trading triumph, and went, attired in her neatest muslin, to spend the afternoon at Fieldhead, there to superintend certain millinery preparations for a great event, the last appeal in these matters being reserved for her unimpeachable taste. She decided on the wreath, the veil, the dress to be worn at the altar. She chose various robes and fashions for more ordinary occasions, without much reference to the bride's opinion — that lady, indeed, being in a somewhat impracticable mood.

Louis had presaged difficulties, and he had found them — in fact, his mistress had shown herself exquisitely provoking, putting off her marriage day by day, week by week, month by month, at first coaxing him with soft pretences of procrastination, and in the end rousing his whole deliberate but determined nature to revolt against her tyranny, at once so sweet and so intolerable.

It had needed a sort of tempest-shock to bring her to the point; but there she was at last, fettered to a fixed day. There she lay, conquered by love, and bound with a vow.

Thus vanquished and restricted, she pined, like any other chained denizen of deserts. Her captor alone could cheer her; his society only could make amends for the lost privilege of liberty. In his absence she sat or wandered alone, spoke little, and ate less.

She furthered no preparations for her nuptials; Louis was himself obliged to direct all arrangements. He was virtually master of Fieldhead weeks before he became so nominally — the least presumptuous, the kindest master that ever was, but with his lady absolute. She abdicated without a word or a struggle. "Go to Mr. Moore, ask Mr. Moore," was her answer when applied to for orders. Never was wooer of wealthy bride so thoroughly absolved from the subaltern part, so inevitably compelled to assume a paramount character.

In all this Miss Keeldar partly yielded to her disposition; but a remark she made a year afterwards proved that she partly also acted on system. "Louis," she said, "would never have learned to rule if she had not ceased to govern. The incapacity of the sovereign had developed the powers of the premier."

It had been intended that Miss Helstone should act as bridesmaid at the approaching nuptials, but Fortune had destined her another part.

She came home in time to water her plants. She had performed this little task. The last flower attended to was a rose-tree, which bloomed in a quiet green nook at the back of the house. This plant had received the refreshing shower; she was now resting a minute. Near the wall stood a fragment of sculptured stone — a monkish relic — once, perhaps, the base of a cross. She mounted it, that she might better command the view. She had still the watering pot in one hand; with the other her pretty dress was held lightly aside, to avoid trickling drops. She gazed over the wall, along some lonely fields; beyond three dusk trees, rising side by side against the sky; beyond a solitary thorn at the head of a solitary lane far off. She surveyed the dusk moors, where bonfires were kindling. The summer evening was warm; the bell-music was joyous; the blue smoke of the fires looked soft, their red flame bright. Above them, in the sky whence the sun had vanished, twinkled a silver point — the star of love.

Caroline was not unhappy that evening — far otherwise; but as she gazed she sighed, and as she sighed a hand circled her, and rested quietly on her waist. Caroline thought she knew who had drawn near; she received the touch unstartled.

"I am looking at Venus, mamma. See, she is beautiful. How white her lustre is, compared with the deep red of the bonfires!"

The answer was a closer caress; and Caroline turned, and looked, not into Mrs. Pryor's matron face, but up at a dark manly visage. She dropped her watering-pot and stepped down from the pedestal.

"I have been sitting with 'mamma' an hour," said the intruder. "I have had a long conversation with her. Where, meantime, have you been?"

"To Fieldhead. Shirley is as naughty as ever, Robert. She will neither say Yes nor No to any question put. She sits alone. I cannot tell whether she is melancholy or nonchalant. If you rouse her or scold her, she gives you a look, half wistful, half reckless, which sends you away as queer and crazed as herself. What Louis will make of her, I cannot tell. For my part, if I were a gentleman, I think I would not dare undertake her."

"Never mind them. They were cut out for each other. Louis, strange to say, likes her all the better for these freaks. He will manage her, if any one can. She tries him, however. He has had a stormy courtship for such a calm character; but you see it all ends in victory for him. Caroline, I have sought you to ask an audience. Why are those bells ringing?"

"For the repeal of your terrible law — the Orders you hate so much. You are pleased, are you not?"

"Yesterday evening at this time I was packing some books for a sea-voyage. They were the only possessions, except some clothes, seeds, roots, and tools, which I felt free to take with me to Canada. I was going to leave you."

"To leave me? To leave *me*?"

Her little fingers fastened on his arm; she spoke and looked affrighted.

"Not now — not now. Examine my face — yes, look at me well. Is the despair of parting legible thereon?"

She looked into an illuminated countenance, whose characters were all beaming, though the page itself was dusk. This face, potent in the majesty of its traits, shed down on her hope, fondness, delight.

"Will the repeal do you good — *much* good, *immediate* good?" she inquired.

"The repeal of the Orders in Council saves me. Now I shall not turn bankrupt; now I shall not give up business; now I shall not leave England; now I shall be no longer poor; now I can pay my debts; now all the cloth I have in my warehouses will be taken off my hands, and commissions given me for much more. This day lays for my fortunes a broad, firm foundation, on which, for the first time in my life, I can securely build."

Caroline devoured his words; she held his hand in hers; she drew a long breath.

"You are saved? Your heavy difficulties are lifted?"

"They are lifted. I breathe. I can act."

"At last! Oh, Providence is kind! Thank Him, Robert."

"I do thank Providence."

"And I also, for your sake!" She looked up devoutly.

"Now I can take more workmen, give better wages, lay wiser and more liberal plans, do some good, be less selfish. *Now*, Caroline, I can have a house

— a home which I can truly call mine — and *now* — — "

He paused, for his deep voice was checked.

"And *now*," he resumed — "now I can think of marriage, *now* I can seek a wife."

This was no moment for her to speak. She did not speak.

"Will Caroline, who meekly hopes to be forgiven as she forgives — will she pardon all I have made her suffer, all that long pain I have wickedly caused her, all that sickness of body and mind she owed to me? Will she forget what she knows of my poor ambition, my sordid schemes? Will she let me expiate these things? Will she suffer me to prove that, as I once deserted cruelly, trifled wantonly, injured basely, I can now love faithfully, cherish fondly, treasure tenderly?"

His hand was in Caroline's still; a gentle pressure answered him.

"Is Caroline mine?"

"Caroline is yours."

"I will prize her. The sense of her value is here, in my heart; the necessity for her society is blended with my life. Not more jealous shall I be of the blood whose flow moves my pulses than of her happiness and well-being."

"I love you, too, Robert, and will take faithful care of you."

"Will you take faithful care of me? Faithful care! As if that rose should promise to shelter from tempest this hard gray stone! But she *will* care for me, in her way. These hands will be the gentle ministrants of every comfort I can taste. I know the being I seek to entwine with my own will bring me a solace, a charity, a purity, to which, of myself, I am a stranger."

Suddenly Caroline was troubled; her lip quivered.

"What flutters my dove?" asked Moore, as she nestled to and then uneasily shrank from him.

"Poor mamma! I am all mamma has. Must I leave her?"

"Do you know, I thought of that difficulty. I and 'mamma' have discussed it."

"Tell me what you wish, what you would like, and I will consider if it is possible to consent. But I cannot desert her, even for you. I cannot break her heart, even for your sake."

"She was faithful when I was false — was she not? I never came near your sick-bed, and she watched it ceaselessly."

"What must I do? Anything but leave her."

"At my wish you never shall leave her."

"She may live very near us?"

"With us — only she will have her own rooms and servant. For this she stipulates herself."

"You know she has an income, that, with her habits, makes her quite independent?"

"She told me that, with a gentle pride that reminded me of somebody else."

“She is not at all interfering, and incapable of gossip.”

“I know her, Cary. But if, instead of being the personification of reserve and discretion, she were something quite opposite, I should not fear her.”

“Yet she will be your mother-in-law?” The speaker gave an arch little nod. Moore smiled.

“Louis and I are not of the order of men who fear their mothers-in-law, Cary. Our foes never have been, nor will be, those of our own household. I doubt not my mother-in-law will make much of me.”

“That she will — in her quiet way, you know. She is not demonstrative; and when you see her silent, or even cool, you must not fancy her displeased; it is only a manner she has. Be sure to let me interpret for her whenever she puzzles you; always believe my account of the matter, Robert.”

“Oh, implicitly! Jesting apart, I feel that she and I will suit — *on ne peut mieux*. Hortense, you know, is exquisitely susceptible — in our French sense of the word — and not, perhaps, always reasonable in her requirements; yet, dear, honest girl, I never painfully wounded her feelings or had a serious quarrel with her in my life.”

“No; you are most generously considerate, indeed, most tenderly indulgent to her; and you will be considerate with mamma. You are a gentleman all through, Robert, to the bone, and nowhere so perfect a gentleman as at your own fireside.”

“A eulogium I like; it is very sweet. I am well pleased my Caroline should view me in this light.”

“Mamma just thinks of you as I do.”

“Not quite, I hope?”

“She does not want to marry you — don’t be vain; but she said to me the other day, ‘My dear, Mr. Moore has pleasing manners; he is one of the few gentlemen I have seen who combine politeness with an air of sincerity.’”

“‘Mamma’ is rather a misanthropist, is she not? Not the best opinion of the sterner sex?”

“She forbears to judge them as a whole, but she has her exceptions whom she admires — Louis and Mr. Hall, and, of late, yourself. She did not like you once; I knew that, because she would never speak of you. But, Robert — — “

“Well, what now? What is the new thought?”

“You have not seen my uncle yet?”

“I have. ‘Mamma’ called him into the room. He consents conditionally. If I prove that I can keep a wife, I may have her; and I *can* keep her better than he thinks — better than I choose to boast.”

“If you get rich you will do good with your money, Robert?”

“I *will* do good; you shall tell me how. Indeed, I have some schemes of my own, which you and I will talk about on our own hearth one day. I have seen the necessity of doing good; I have learned the downright folly of being selfish. Caroline, I foresee what I will now foretell. This war *must* ere long draw to a close. Trade is likely to prosper for some years to come. There may be a brief misunderstanding between England and America, but that will not last. What would you think if, one day — perhaps ere another ten years elapse — Louis and I divide Briarfield parish betwixt us? Louis, at any rate, is certain of power and property. He will not bury his talents. He is a benevolent fellow, and has, besides, an intellect of his own of no trifling calibre. His mind is slow but strong. It must work. It may work deliberately, but it will work well. He will be made magistrate of the district — Shirley says he shall. She would proceed impetuously and prematurely to obtain for him this dignity, if he would let her, but he will not. As usual, he will be in no haste. Ere he has been master of Fieldhead a year all the district will feel his quiet influence, and acknowledge his unassuming superiority. A magistrate is wanted; they will, in time, invest him with the office voluntarily and unreluctantly. Everybody admires his future wife, and everybody will, in time, like him. He is of the *pâte* generally approved, *bon comme le pain* — daily bread for the most fastidious, good for the infant and the aged, nourishing for the poor, wholesome for the rich. Shirley, in spite of her whims and oddities, her dodges and delays, has an infatuated fondness for him. She will one day see him as universally beloved as even *she* could wish. He will also be universally esteemed, considered, consulted, depended on — too much so. His advice will be always judicious, his help always good-natured. Ere long both will be in inconvenient request. He will have to impose restrictions. As for me, if I succeed as I intend to do, my success will add to his and Shirley's income. I can double the value of their mill property. I can line yonder barren Hollow with lines of cottages and rows of cottage-gardens — — "

"Robert! And root up the copse?"

"The copse shall be firewood ere five years elapse. The beautiful wild ravine shall be a smooth descent; the green natural terrace shall be a paved street. There shall be cottages in the dark ravine, and cottages on the lonely slopes. The rough pebbled track shall be an even, firm, broad, black, sooty road, bedded with the cinders from my mill; and my mill, Caroline — my mill shall fill its present yard."

"Horrible! You will change our blue hill-country air into the Stilbro' smoke atmosphere."

"I will pour the waters of Pactolus through the valley of Briarfield."

"I like the beck a thousand times better."

"I will get an Act for enclosing Nunnely Common, and parcelling it out into farms."

"Stilbro' Moor, however, defies you, thank Heaven! What can you grow in Bilberry Moss? What will flourish on Rushedge?"

"Caroline, the houseless, the starving, the unemployed shall come to Hollow's Mill from far and near; and Joe Scott shall give them work, and Louis Moore, Esq., shall let them a tenement, and Mrs. Gill shall mete them a portion till the first pay-day."

She smiled up in his face.

"Such a Sunday school as you will have, Cary! such collections as you will get! such a day school as you and Shirley and Miss Ainley will have to manage between you! The mill shall find salaries for a master and mistress, and the squire or the clothier shall give a treat once a quarter."

She mutely offered a kiss — an offer taken unfair advantage of, to the extortion of about a hundred kisses.

"Extravagant day-dreams," said Moore, with a sigh and smile, "yet perhaps we may realize some of them. Meantime, the dew is falling. Mrs. Moore, I shall take you in."

It is August. The bells clash out again, not only through Yorkshire, but through England. From Spain the voice of a trumpet has sounded long; it now waxes louder and louder; it proclaims Salamanca won. This night is Briarfield to be illuminated. On this day the Fieldhead tenantry dine together; the Hollow's Mill workpeople will be assembled for a like festal purpose; the schools have a grand treat. This morning there were two marriages solemnized in Briarfield church — Louis Gérard Moore, Esq., late of Antwerp, to Shirley, daughter of the late Charles Cave Keeldar, Esq., of Fieldhead; Robert Gérard Moore, Esq., of Hollow's Mill, to Caroline, niece of the Rev. Matthewson Helstone, M.A., rector of Briarfield.

The ceremony, in the first instance, was performed by Mr. Helstone, Hiram Yorke, Esq., of Briarmains, giving the bride away. In the second instance, Mr. Hall, vicar of Nunnely, officiated. Amongst the bridal train the two most noticeable personages were the youthful bridesmen, Henry Sympson and Martin Yorke.

I suppose Robert Moore's prophecies were, partially at least, fulfilled. The other day I passed up the Hollow, which tradition says was once green, and lone, and wild; and there I saw the manufacturer's day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick and ashes — the cinder-black highway, the cottages, and the cottage gardens; there I saw a mighty mill, and a chimney ambitious as the tower of Babel. I told my old housekeeper when I came home where I had been.

"Ay," said she, "this world has queer changes. I can remember the old mill being built — the very first it was in all the district; and then I can remember it being pulled down, and going with my lake-lasses [companions] to see the foundation-stone of the new one laid. The two Mr. Moores made a great stir about it. They were there, and a deal of fine folk besides, and both their ladies; very bonny and grand they looked. But Mrs. Louis was the grandest; she always wore such handsome dresses. Mrs. Robert was quieter like. Mrs. Louis smiled when she talked. She had a real, happy, glad, good-natured look; but she had een that pierced a body through. There is no such ladies nowadays."

"What was the Hollow like then, Martha?"

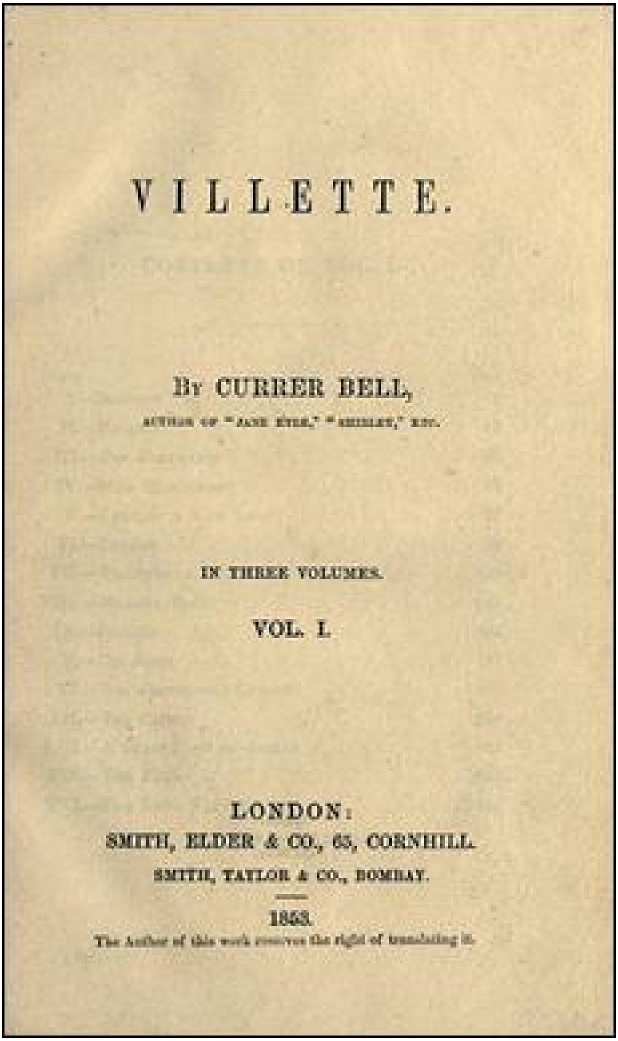
"Different to what it is now; but I can tell of it clean different again, when there was neither mill, nor cot, nor hall, except Fieldhead, within two miles of it. I can tell, one summer evening, fifty years syne, my mother coming running in just at the edge of dark, almost fleyed out of her wits, saying she had seen a fairish [fairy] in Fieldhead Hollow; and that was the last fairish that ever was seen on this countryside (though they've been heard within these forty years). A lonesome spot it was, and a bonny spot, full of oak trees and nut trees. It is altered now."

The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the quest!

THE END.

VILLETTE

This novel was published in 1853. After an unspecified family disaster, protagonist Lucy Snowe travels to the fictional city of Villette to teach at an all-girls school where she is unwillingly pulled into both adventure and romance. The novel is celebrated not so much for its plot as its acute tracing of Lucy's psychology, particularly Brontë's use of Gothic doubling to represent externally what her protagonist is suffering internally.



VILLETTE.

By CURRER BELL,

AUTHOR OF "JANE EYRE," "SHIRLEY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

BRETTON.

My godmother lived in a handsome house in the clean and ancient town of Bretton. Her husband's family had been residents there for generations, and bore, indeed, the name of their birthplace — Bretton of Bretton: whether by coincidence, or because some remote ancestor had been a personage of sufficient importance to leave his name to his neighbourhood, I know not.

When I was a girl I went to Bretton about twice a year, and well I liked the visit. The house and its inmates specially suited me. The large peaceful rooms, the well-arranged furniture, the clear wide windows, the balcony outside, looking down on a fine antique street, where Sundays and holidays seemed always to abide — so quiet was its atmosphere, so clean its pavement — these things pleased me well.

One child in a household of grown people is usually made very much of, and in a quiet way I was a good deal taken notice of by Mrs. Bretton, who had been left a widow, with one son, before I knew her; her husband, a physician, having died while she was yet a young and handsome woman.

She was not young, as I remember her, but she was still handsome, tall, well-made, and though dark for an Englishwoman, yet wearing always the clearness of health in her brunette cheek, and its vivacity in a pair of fine, cheerful black eyes. People esteemed it a grievous pity that she had not conferred her complexion on her son, whose eyes were blue — though, even in boyhood, very piercing — and the colour of his long hair such as friends did not venture to specify, except as the sun shone on it, when they called it golden. He inherited the lines of his mother's features, however; also her good teeth, her stature (or the promise of her stature, for he was not yet full-grown), and, what was better, her health without flaw, and her spirits of that tone and equality which are better than a fortune to the possessor.

In the autumn of the year — — I was staying at Bretton; my godmother having come in person to claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence. I believe she then plainly saw events coming, whose very shadow I scarce guessed; yet of which the faint suspicion sufficed to impart unsettled sadness, and made me glad to change scene and society.

Time always flowed smoothly for me at my godmother's side; not with tumultuous swiftness, but blandly, like the gliding of a full river through a plain. My visits to her resembled the sojourn of Christian and Hopeful beside a certain pleasant stream, with "green trees on each bank, and meadows beautified with lilies all the year round." The charm of variety there was not, nor the excitement of incident; but I liked peace so well, and sought stimulus so little, that when the latter came I almost felt it a disturbance, and wished rather it had still held aloof.

One day a letter was received of which the contents evidently caused Mrs. Bretton surprise and some concern. I thought at first it was from home, and trembled, expecting I know not what disastrous communication: to me, however, no reference was made, and the cloud seemed to pass.

The next day, on my return from a long walk, I found, as I entered my bedroom, an unexpected change. In, addition to my own French bed in its shady recess, appeared in a corner a small crib, draped with white; and in addition to my mahogany chest of drawers, I saw a tiny rosewood chest. I stood still, gazed, and considered.

"Of what are these things the signs and tokens?" I asked. The answer was obvious. "A second guest is coming: Mrs. Bretton expects other visitors."

On descending to dinner, explanations ensued. A little girl, I was told, would shortly be my companion: the daughter of a friend and distant relation of the late Dr. Bretton's. This little girl, it was added, had recently lost her mother; though, indeed, Mrs. Bretton ere long subjoined, the loss was not so great as might at first appear. Mrs. Home (Home it seems was the name) had been a very pretty, but a giddy, careless woman, who had neglected her child, and disappointed and disheartened her husband. So far from congenial had the union proved, that separation at last ensued — separation by mutual consent, not after any legal process. Soon after this event, the lady having over-exerted herself at a ball, caught cold, took a fever, and died after a very brief illness. Her husband, naturally a man of very sensitive feelings, and shocked inexpressibly by too sudden communication of the news, could hardly, it seems, now be persuaded but that some over-severity on his part — some deficiency in patience and indulgence — had contributed to hasten her end. He had brooded over this idea till his spirits were seriously affected; the medical men insisted on travelling being tried as a remedy, and meanwhile Mrs. Bretton had offered to take charge of his little girl. "And I hope," added my godmother in conclusion, "the child will not be like her mamma; as silly and frivolous a little flirt as ever sensible man was weak enough to marry. For," said she, "Mr. Home is a sensible man in his way, though not very practical: he is fond of science, and lives half his life in a laboratory trying experiments — a thing his butterfly wife could neither comprehend nor endure; and indeed" confessed my godmother, "I should not have liked it myself."

In answer to a question of mine, she further informed me that her late husband used to say, Mr. Home had derived this scientific turn from a maternal uncle, a French savant; for he came, it seems; of mixed French and Scottish origin, and had connections now living in France, of whom more than one wrote de before his name, and called himself noble.

That same evening at nine o'clock, a servant was despatched to meet the coach by which our little visitor was expected. Mrs. Bretton and I sat alone in the drawing-room waiting her coming; John Graham Bretton being absent on a visit to one of his schoolfellows who lived in the country. My godmother read the evening paper while she waited; I sewed. It was a wet night; the rain lashed the panes, and the wind sounded angry and restless.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Bretton from time to time. "What weather for her journey! I wish she were safe here."

A little before ten the door-bell announced Warren's return. No sooner was the door opened than I ran down into the hall; there lay a trunk and some band-boxes, beside them stood a person like a nurse-girl, and at the foot of the staircase was Warren with a shawled bundle in his arms.

"Is that the child?" I asked.

"Yes, miss."

I would have opened the shawl, and tried to get a peep at the face, but it was hastily turned from me to Warren's shoulder.

"Put me down, please," said a small voice when Warren opened the drawing-room door, "and take off this shawl," continued the speaker, extracting with its minute hand the pin, and with a sort of fastidious haste doffing the clumsy wrapping. The creature which now appeared made a deft attempt to fold the shawl; but the drapery was much too heavy and large to be sustained or wielded by those hands and arms. "Give it to Harriet, please," was then the direction, "and she can put it away." This said, it turned and fixed its eyes on Mrs. Bretton.

"Come here, little dear," said that lady. "Come and let me see if you are cold and damp: come and let me warm you at the fire."

The child advanced promptly. Relieved of her wrapping, she appeared exceedingly tiny; but was a neat, completely-fashioned little figure, light, slight, and straight. Seated on my godmother's ample lap, she looked a mere doll; her neck, delicate as wax, her head of silky curls, increased, I thought, the resemblance.

Mrs. Bretton talked in little fond phrases as she chafed the child's hands, arms, and feet; first she was considered with a wistful gaze, but soon a smile answered her. Mrs. Bretton was not generally a caressing woman: even with her deeply-cherished son, her manner was rarely sentimental, often the reverse; but when the small stranger smiled at her, she kissed it, asking, "What is my little one's name?"

"Missy."

"But besides Missy?"

"Polly, papa calls her."

"Will Polly be content to live with me?"

"Not always; but till papa comes home. Papa is gone away." She shook her head expressively.

"He will return to Polly, or send for her."

"Will he, ma'am? Do you know he will?"

"I think so."

"But Harriet thinks not: at least not for a long while. He is ill."

Her eyes filled. She drew her hand from Mrs. Bretton's and made a movement to leave her lap; it was at first resisted, but she said — "Please, I wish to go: I can sit on a stool."

She was allowed to slip down from the knee, and taking a footstool, she carried it to a corner where the shade was deep, and there seated herself. Mrs. Bretton, though a commanding, and in grave matters even a peremptory woman, was often passive in trifles: she allowed the child her way. She said to me, "Take no notice at present." But I did take notice: I watched Polly rest her small elbow on her small knee, her head on her hand; I observed her draw a square inch or two of pocket-handkerchief from the doll-pocket of her doll-skirt, and then I heard her weep. Other children in grief or pain cry aloud, without shame or restraint; but this being wept: the tiniest occasional sniff testified to her emotion. Mrs. Bretton did not hear it: which was quite as well. Ere long, a voice, issuing from the corner, demanded — "May the bell be rung for Harriet!"

I rang; the nurse was summoned and came.

"Harriet, I must be put to bed," said her little mistress. "You must ask where my bed is."

Harriet signified that she had already made that inquiry.

"Ask if you sleep with me, Harriet."

"No, Missy," said the nurse: "you are to share this young lady's room," designating me.

Missy did not leave her seat, but I saw her eyes seek me. After some minutes' silent scrutiny, she emerged from her corner.

"I wish you, ma'am, good night," said she to Mrs. Bretton; but she passed me mute.

"Good-night, Polly," I said.

"No need to say good-night, since we sleep in the same chamber," was the reply, with which she vanished from the drawing-room. We heard Harriet propose to carry her up-stairs. "No need," was again her answer — "no need, no need:" and her small step toiled wearily up the staircase.

On going to bed an hour afterwards, I found her still wide awake. She had arranged her pillows so as to support her little person in a sitting posture: her hands, placed one within the other, rested quietly on the sheet, with an old-fashioned calm most unchildlike. I abstained from speaking to her for some time, but just before extinguishing the light, I recommended her to lie down.

"By and by," was the answer.

"But you will take cold, Missy."

She took some tiny article of raiment from the chair at her crib side, and with it covered her shoulders. I suffered her to do as she pleased. Listening awhile in the darkness, I was aware that she still wept, — wept under restraint, quietly and cautiously.

On awaking with daylight, a trickling of water caught my ear. Behold! there she was risen and mounted on a stool near the washstand, with pains and difficulty inclining the ewer (which she could not lift) so as to pour its contents into the basin. It was curious to watch her as she washed and dressed, so small, busy, and noiseless. Evidently she was little accustomed to perform her own toilet; and the buttons, strings, hooks and eyes, offered difficulties which she encountered with a perseverance good to witness. She folded her night-dress, she smoothed the drapery of her couch quite neatly; withdrawing into a corner, where the sweep of the white curtain concealed her, she became still. I half rose, and advanced my, head to see how she was occupied. On her knees, with her forehead bent on her hands, I perceived that she was praying.

Her nurse tapped at the door. She started up.

"I am dressed, Harriet," said she; "I have dressed myself, but I do not feel neat. Make me neat!"

"Why did you dress yourself, Missy?"

"Hush! speak low, Harriet, for fear of waking the girl" (meaning me, who now lay with my eyes shut). "I dressed myself to learn, against the time you leave me."

"Do you want me to go?"

"When you are cross, I have many a time wanted you to go, but not now.

Tie my sash straight; make my hair smooth, please."

"Your sash is straight enough. What a particular little body you are!"

"It must be tied again. Please to tie it."

"There, then. When I am gone you must get that young lady to dress you."

"On no account."

"Why? She is a very nice young lady. I hope you mean to behave prettily to her, Missy, and not show your airs."

"She shall dress me on no account."

"Comical little thing!"

"You are not passing the comb straight through my hair, Harriet; the line will be crooked."

"Ay, you are ill to please. Does that suit?"

"Pretty well. Where should I go now that I am dressed?"

"I will take you into the breakfast-room."

"Come, then."

They proceeded to the door. She stopped.

"Oh! Harriet, I wish this was papa's house! I don't know these people."

"Be a good child, Missy."

"I am good, but I ache here;" putting her hand to her heart, and moaning while she reiterated, "Papa! papa!"

I roused myself and started up, to check this scene while it was yet within bounds.

“Say good-morning to the young lady,” dictated Harriet. She said, “Good-morning,” and then followed her nurse from the room. Harriet temporarily left that same day, to go to her own friends, who lived in the neighbourhood.

On descending, I found Paulina (the child called herself Polly, but her full name was Paulina Mary) seated at the breakfast-table, by Mrs. Bretton’s side; a mug of milk stood before her, a morsel of bread filled her hand, which lay passive on the table-cloth: she was not eating.

“How we shall conciliate this little creature,” said Mrs. Bretton to me, “I don’t know: she tastes nothing, and by her looks, she has not slept.”

I expressed my confidence in the effects of time and kindness.

“If she were to take a fancy to anybody in the house, she would soon settle; but not till then,” replied Mrs. Bretton.

CHAPTER II.

PAULINA.

Some days elapsed, and it appeared she was not likely to take much of a fancy to anybody in the house. She was not exactly naughty or wilful: she was far from disobedient; but an object less conducive to comfort — to tranquillity even — than she presented, it was scarcely possible to have before one's eyes. She moped: no grown person could have performed that uncheering business better; no furrowed face of adult exile, longing for Europe at Europe's antipodes, ever bore more legibly the signs of home sickness than did her infant visage. She seemed growing old and unearthly. I, Lucy Snowe, plead guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination; but whenever, opening a room-door, I found her seated in a corner alone, her head in her pigmy hand, that room seemed to me not inhabited, but haunted.

And again, when of moonlight nights, on waking, I beheld her figure, white and conspicuous in its night-dress, kneeling upright in bed, and praying like some Catholic or Methodist enthusiast — some precocious fanatic or untimely saint — I scarcely know what thoughts I had; but they ran risk of being hardly more rational and healthy than that child's mind must have been.

I seldom caught a word of her prayers, for they were whispered low: sometimes, indeed, they were not whispered at all, but put up unuttered; such rare sentences as reached my ear still bore the burden, "Papa; my dear papa!" This, I perceived, was a one-idea'd nature; betraying that monomaniac tendency I have ever thought the most unfortunate with which man or woman can be cursed.

What might have been the end of this fretting, had it continued unchecked, can only be conjectured: it received, however, a sudden turn.

One afternoon, Mrs. Bretton, coaxing her from her usual station in a corner, had lifted her into the window-seat, and, by way of occupying her attention, told her to watch the passengers and count how many ladies should go down the street in a given time. She had sat listlessly, hardly looking, and not counting, when — my eye being fixed on hers — I witnessed in its iris and pupil a startling transfiguration. These sudden, dangerous natures — sensitive as they are called — offer many a curious spectacle to those whom a cooler temperament has secured from participation in their angular vagaries. The fixed and heavy gaze swum, trembled, then glittered in fire; the small, overcast brow cleared; the trivial and dejected features lit up; the sad countenance vanished, and in its place appeared a sudden eagerness, an intense expectancy. "It is!" were her words.

Like a bird or a shaft, or any other swift thing, she was gone from the room, How she got the house-door open I cannot tell; probably it might be ajar; perhaps Warren was in the way and obeyed her behest, which would be impetuous enough. I — watching calmly from the window — saw her, in her black frock and tiny braided apron (to pinafores she had an antipathy), dart half the length of the street; and, as I was on the point of turning, and quietly announcing to Mrs. Bretton that the child was run out mad, and ought instantly to be pursued, I saw her caught up, and rapt at once from my cool observation, and from the wondering stare of the passengers. A gentleman had done this good turn, and now, covering her with his cloak, advanced to restore her to the house whence he had seen her issue.

I concluded he would leave her in a servant's charge and withdraw; but he entered: having tarried a little while below, he came up-stairs.

His reception immediately explained that he was known to Mrs. Bretton. She recognised him; she greeted him, and yet she was fluttered, surprised, taken unawares. Her look and manner were even expostulatory; and in reply to these, rather than her words, he said, — "I could not help it, madam: I found it impossible to leave the country without seeing with my own eyes how she settled."

"But you will unsettle her."

"I hope not. And how is papa's little Polly?"

This question he addressed to Paulina, as he sat down and placed her gently on the ground before him.

"How is Polly's papa?" was the reply, as she leaned on his knee, and gazed up into his face.

It was not a noisy, not a wordy scene: for that I was thankful; but it was a scene of feeling too brimful, and which, because the cup did not foam up high or furiously overflow, only oppressed one the more. On all occasions of vehement, unrestrained expansion, a sense of disdain or ridicule comes to the weary spectator's relief; whereas I have ever felt most burdensome that sort of sensibility which bends of its own will, a giant slave under the sway of good sense.

Mr. Home was a stern-featured — perhaps I should rather say, a hard-featured man: his forehead was knotty, and his cheekbones were marked and prominent. The character of his face was quite Scotch; but there was feeling in his eye, and emotion in his now agitated countenance. His northern accent in speaking harmonised with his physiognomy. He was at once proud-looking and homely-looking. He laid his hand on the child's uplifted head. She said — "Kiss Polly."

He kissed her. I wished she would utter some hysterical cry, so that I might get relief and be at ease. She made wonderfully little noise: she seemed to have got what she wanted — all she wanted, and to be in a trance of content. Neither in mien nor in features was this creature like her sire, and yet she was of his strain: her mind had been filled from his, as the cup from the flagon.

Indisputably, Mr. Home owned manly self-control, however he might secretly feel on some matters. “Polly,” he said, looking down on his little girl, “go into the hall; you will see papa’s great-coat lying on a chair; put your hand into the pockets, you will find a pocket-handkerchief there; bring it to me.”

She obeyed; went and returned deftly and nimbly. He was talking to Mrs. Bretton when she came back, and she waited with the handkerchief in her hand. It was a picture, in its way, to see her, with her tiny stature, and trim, neat shape, standing at his knee. Seeing that he continued to talk, apparently unconscious of her return, she took his hand, opened the unresisting fingers, insinuated into them the handkerchief, and closed them upon it one by one. He still seemed not to see or to feel her; but by-and-by, he lifted her to his knee; she nestled against him, and though neither looked at nor spoke to the other for an hour following, I suppose both were satisfied.

During tea, the minute thing’s movements and behaviour gave, as usual, full occupation to the eye. First she directed Warren, as he placed the chairs.

“Put papa’s chair here, and mine near it, between papa and Mrs.

Bretton: I must hand his tea.”

She took her own seat, and beckoned with her hand to her father.

“Be near me, as if we were at home, papa.”

And again, as she intercepted his cup in passing, and would stir the sugar, and put in the cream herself, “I always did it for you at home; papa: nobody could do it as well, not even your own self.”

Throughout the meal she continued her attentions: rather absurd they were. The sugar-tongs were too wide for one of her hands, and she had to use both in wielding them; the weight of the silver cream-ewer, the bread-and-butter plates, the very cup and saucer, tasked her insufficient strength and dexterity; but she would lift this, hand that, and luckily contrived through it all to break nothing. Candidly speaking, I thought her a little busy-body; but her father, blind like other parents, seemed perfectly content to let her wait on him, and even wonderfully soothed by her offices.

“She is my comfort!” he could not help saying to Mrs. Bretton. That lady had her own “comfort” and nonpareil on a much larger scale, and, for the moment, absent; so she sympathised with his foible.

This second “comfort” came on the stage in the course of the evening. I knew this day had been fixed for his return, and was aware that Mrs. Bretton had been expecting him through all its hours. We were seated round the fire, after tea, when Graham joined our circle: I should rather say, broke it up — for, of course, his arrival made a bustle; and then, as Mr. Graham was fasting, there was refreshment to be provided. He and Mr. Home met as old acquaintance; of the little girl he took no notice for a time.

His meal over, and numerous questions from his mother answered, he turned from the table to the hearth. Opposite where he had placed himself was seated Mr. Home, and at his elbow, the child. When I say child I use an inappropriate and undescriptive term — a term suggesting any picture rather than that of the demure little person in a mourning frock and white chemisette, that might just have fitted a good-sized doll — perched now on a high chair beside a stand, whereon was her toy work-box of white varnished wood, and holding in her hands a shred of a handkerchief, which she was professing to hem, and at which she bored perseveringly with a needle, that in her fingers seemed almost a skewer, pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots; occasionally starting when the perverse weapon — swerving from her control — inflicted a deeper stab than usual; but still silent, diligent, absorbed, womanly.

Graham was at that time a handsome, faithless-looking youth of sixteen. I say faithless-looking, not because he was really of a very perfidious disposition, but because the epithet strikes me as proper to describe the fair, Celtic (not Saxon) character of his good looks; his waved light auburn hair, his supple symmetry, his smile frequent, and destitute neither of fascination nor of subtlety (in no bad sense). A spoiled, whimsical boy he was in those days.

"Mother," he said, after eyeing the little figure before him in silence for some time, and when the temporary absence of Mr. Home from the room relieved him from the half-laughing bashfulness, which was all he knew of timidity — -"Mother, I see a young lady in the present society to whom I have not been introduced."

"Mr. Home's little girl, I suppose you mean," said his mother.

"Indeed, ma'am," replied her son, "I consider your expression of the least ceremonious: Miss Home I should certainly have said, in venturing to speak of the gentlewoman to whom I allude."

"Now, Graham, I will not have that child teased. Don't flatter yourself that I shall suffer you to make her your butt."

"Miss Home," pursued Graham, undeterred by his mother's remonstrance, "might I have the honour to introduce myself, since no one else seems willing to render you and me that service? Your slave, John Graham Bretton."

She looked at him; he rose and bowed quite gravely. She deliberately put down thimble, scissors, work; descended with precaution from her perch, and curtsying with unspeakable seriousness, said, "How do you do?"

"I have the honour to be in fair health, only in some measure fatigued with a hurried journey. I hope, ma'am, I see you well?"

"Tor-rer-ably well," was the ambitious reply of the little woman and she now essayed to regain her former elevation, but finding this could not be done without some climbing and straining — a sacrifice of decorum not to be thought of — and being utterly disdainful of aid in the presence of a strange young gentleman, she relinquished the high chair for a low stool: towards that low stool Graham drew in his chair.

"I hope, ma'am, the present residence, my mother's house, appears to you a convenient place of abode?"

"Not par-tic-er-er-ly; I want to go home."

"A natural and laudable desire, ma'am; but one which, notwithstanding, I shall do my best to oppose. I reckon on being able to get out of you a little of that precious commodity called amusement, which mamma and Mistress Snowe there fail to yield me."

"I shall have to go with papa soon: I shall not stay long at your mother's."

"Yes, yes; you will stay with me, I am sure. I have a pony on which you shall ride, and no end of books with pictures to show you."

"Are you going to live here now?"

"I am. Does that please you? Do you like me?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I think you queer."

"My face, ma'am?"

"Your face and all about you: You have long red hair."

"Auburn hair, if you please: mamma, calls it auburn, or golden, and so do all her friends. But even with my 'long red hair'" (and he waved his mane with a sort of triumph — tawny he himself well knew that it was, and he was proud of the leonine hue), "I cannot possibly be queerer than is your ladyship."

"You call me queer?"

"Certainly."

(After a pause), "I think I shall go to bed."

"A little thing like you ought to have been in bed many hours since; but you probably sat up in the expectation of seeing me?"

"No, indeed."

"You certainly wished to enjoy the pleasure of my society. You knew I was coming home, and would wait to have a look at me."

"I sat up for papa, and not for you."

"Very good, Miss Home. I am going to be a favourite: preferred before papa soon, I daresay."

She wished Mrs. Bretton and myself good-night; she seemed hesitating whether Graham's deserts entitled him to the same attention, when he caught her up with one hand, and with that one hand held her poised aloft above his head. She saw herself thus lifted up on high, in the glass over the fireplace. The suddenness, the freedom, the disrespect of the action were too much.

"For shame, Mr. Graham!" was her indignant cry, "put me down!" — and when again on her feet, "I wonder what you would think of me if I were to treat you in that way, lifting you with my hand" (raising that mighty member) "as Warren lifts the little cat."

So saying, she departed.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLAYMATES.

Mr. Home stayed two days. During his visit he could not be prevailed on to go out: he sat all day long by the fireside, sometimes silent, sometimes receiving and answering Mrs. Bretton's chat, which was just of the proper sort for a man in his morbid mood — not over-sympathetic, yet not too uncongenial, sensible; and even with a touch of the motherly — she was sufficiently his senior to be permitted this touch.

As to Paulina, the child was at once happy and mute, busy and watchful. Her father frequently lifted her to his knee; she would sit there till she felt or fancied he grew restless; then it was — "Papa, put me down; I shall tire you with my weight."

And the mighty burden slid to the rug, and establishing itself on carpet or stool just at "papa's" feet, the white work-box and the scarlet-speckled handkerchief came into play. This handkerchief, it seems, was intended as a keepsake for "papa," and must be finished before his departure; consequently the demand on the sempstress's industry (she accomplished about a score of stitches in half-an-hour) was stringent.

The evening, by restoring Graham to the maternal roof (his days were passed at school), brought us an accession of animation — a quality not diminished by the nature of the scenes pretty sure to be enacted between him and Miss Paulina.

A distant and haughty demeanour had been the result of the indignity put upon her the first evening of his arrival: her usual answer, when he addressed her, was — "I can't attend to you; I have other things to think about." Being implored to state what things:

"Business."

Graham would endeavour to seduce her attention by opening his desk and displaying its multifarious contents: seals, bright sticks of wax, pen-knives, with a miscellany of engravings — some of them gaily coloured — which he had amassed from time to time. Nor was this powerful temptation wholly unavailing: her eyes, furtively raised from her work, cast many a peep towards the writing-table, rich in scattered pictures. An etching of a child playing with a Blenheim spaniel happened to flutter to the floor.

"Pretty little dog!" said she, delighted.

Graham prudently took no notice. Ere long, stealing from her corner, she approached to examine the treasure more closely. The dog's great eyes and long ears, and the child's hat and feathers, were irresistible.

"Nice picture!" was her favourable criticism.

"Well — you may have it," said Graham.

She seemed to hesitate. The wish to possess was strong, but to accept would be a compromise of dignity. No. She put it down and turned away.

"You won't have it, then, Polly?"

"I would rather not, thank you."

"Shall I tell you what I will do with the picture if you refuse it?"

She half turned to listen.

"Cut it into strips for lighting the taper."

"No!"

"But I shall."

"Please — don't."

Graham waxed inexorable on hearing the pleading tone; he took the scissors from his mother's work-basket.

"Here goes!" said he, making a menacing flourish. "Right through Fido's head, and splitting little Harry's nose."

"No! No! NO!"

"Then come to me. Come quickly, or it is done."

She hesitated, lingered, but complied.

"Now, will you have it?" he asked, as she stood before him.

"Please."

"But I shall want payment."

"How much?"

"A kiss."

"Give the picture first into my hand."

Polly, as she said this, looked rather faithless in her turn. Graham gave it. She absconded a debtor, darted to her father, and took refuge on his knee. Graham rose in mimic wrath and followed. She buried her face in Mr. Home's waistcoat.

"Papa — papa — send him away!"

"I'll not be sent away," said Graham.

With face still averted, she held out her hand to keep him off

"Then, I shall kiss the hand," said he; but that moment it became a miniature fist, and dealt him payment in a small coin that was not kisses.

Graham — not failing in his way to be as wily as his little playmate — retreated apparently quite discomfited; he flung himself on a sofa, and resting his head against the cushion, lay like one in pain. Polly, finding him silent, presently peeped at him. His eyes and face were covered with his hands. She turned on her father's knee, and gazed at her foe anxiously and long. Graham groaned.

"Papa, what is the matter?" she whispered.

"You had better ask him, Polly."

"Is he hurt?" (groan second.)

"He makes a noise as if he were," said Mr. Home.

"Mother," suggested Graham, feebly, "I think you had better send for the doctor. Oh my eye!" (renewed silence, broken only by sighs from Graham.)

"If I were to become blind — — ?" suggested this last.

His chastiser could not bear the suggestion. She was beside him directly.

"Let me see your eye: I did not mean to touch it, only your mouth; and I did not think I hit so very hard."

Silence answered her. Her features worked, — "I am sorry; I am sorry!"

Then succeeded emotion, faltering; weeping.

"Have done trying that child, Graham," said Mrs. Bretton.

"It is all nonsense, my pet," cried Mr. Home.

And Graham once more snatched her aloft, and she again punished him; and while she pulled his lion's locks, termed him — "The naughtiest, rudest, worst, untruest person that ever was."

* * * * *

On the morning of Mr. Home's departure, he and his daughter had some conversation in a window-recess by themselves; I heard part of it.

"Couldn't I pack my box and go with you, papa?" she whispered earnestly.

He shook his head.

"Should I be a trouble to you?"

"Yes, Polly."

"Because I am little?"

"Because you are little and tender. It is only great, strong people that should travel. But don't look sad, my little girl; it breaks my heart. Papa, will soon come back to his Polly."

"Indeed, indeed, I am not sad, scarcely at all."

"Polly would be sorry to give papa pain; would she not?"

"Sorrier than sorry."

"Then Polly must be cheerful: not cry at parting; not fret afterwards. She must look forward to meeting again, and try to be happy meanwhile. Can she do this?"

"She will try."

"I see she will. Farewell, then. It is time to go."

"Now? — just now?

"Just now."

She held up quivering lips. Her father sobbed, but she, I remarked, did not. Having put her down, he shook hands with the rest present, and departed.

When the street-door closed, she dropped on her knees at a chair with a cry — "Papa!"

It was low and long; a sort of "Why hast thou forsaken me?" During an ensuing space of some minutes, I perceived she endured agony. She went through, in that brief interval of her infant life, emotions such as some never feel; it was in her constitution: she would have more of such instants if she lived. Nobody spoke. Mrs. Bretton, being a mother, shed a tear or two. Graham, who was writing, lifted up his eyes and gazed at her. I, Lucy Snowe, was calm.

The little creature, thus left unharassed, did for herself what none other could do — contended with an intolerable feeling; and, ere long, in some degree, repressed it. That day she would accept solace from none; nor the next day: she grew more passive afterwards.

On the third evening, as she sat on the floor, worn and quiet, Graham, coming in, took her up gently, without a word. She did not resist: she rather nestled in his arms, as if weary. When he sat down, she laid her head against him; in a few minutes she slept; he carried her upstairs to bed. I was not surprised that, the next morning, the first thing she demanded was, “Where is Mr. Graham?”

It happened that Graham was not coming to the breakfast-table; he had some exercises to write for that morning’s class, and had requested his mother to send a cup of tea into the study. Polly volunteered to carry it: she must be busy about something, look after somebody. The cup was entrusted to her; for, if restless, she was also careful. As the study was opposite the breakfast-room, the doors facing across the passage, my eye followed her.

“What are you doing?” she asked, pausing on the threshold.

“Writing,” said Graham.

“Why don’t you come to take breakfast with your mamma?”

“Too busy.”

“Do you want any breakfast?”

“Of course.”

“There, then.”

And she deposited the cup on the carpet, like a jailor putting a prisoner’s pitcher of water through his cell-door, and retreated. Presently she returned.

“What will you have besides tea — what to eat?”

“Anything good. Bring me something particularly nice; that’s a kind little woman.”

She came back to Mrs. Bretton.

“Please, ma’am, send your boy something good.”

“You shall choose for him, Polly; what shall my boy have?”

She selected a portion of whatever was best on the table; and, ere long, came back with a whispered request for some marmalade, which was not there. Having got it, however, (for Mrs. Bretton refused the pair nothing), Graham was shortly after heard lauding her to the skies; promising that, when he had a house of his own, she should be his housekeeper, and perhaps — if she showed any culinary genius — his cook; and, as she did not return, and I went to look after her, I found Graham and her breakfasting tête-à-tête — she standing at his elbow, and sharing his fare: excepting the marmalade, which she delicately refused to touch, lest, I suppose, it should appear that she had procured it as much on her own account as his. She constantly evinced these nice perceptions and delicate instincts.

The league of acquaintanceship thus struck up was not hastily dissolved; on the contrary, it appeared that time and circumstances served rather to cement than loosen it. Ill-assimilated as the two were in age, sex, pursuits, &c., they somehow found a great deal to say to each other. As to Paulina, I observed that her little character never properly came out, except with young Bretton. As she got settled, and accustomed to the house, she proved tractable enough with Mrs. Bretton; but she would sit on a stool at that lady's feet all day long, learning her task, or sewing, or drawing figures with a pencil on a slate, and never kindling once to originality, or showing a single gleam of the peculiarities of her nature. I ceased to watch her under such circumstances: she was not interesting. But the moment Graham's knock sounded of an evening, a change occurred; she was instantly at the head of the staircase. Usually her welcome was a reprimand or a threat.

"You have not wiped your shoes properly on the mat. I shall tell your mamma."

"Little busybody! Are you there?"

"Yes — and you can't reach me: I am higher up than you" (peeping between the rails of the banister; she could not look over them).

"Polly!"

"My dear boy!" (such was one of her terms for him, adopted in imitation of his mother.)

"I am fit to faint with fatigue," declared Graham, leaning against the passage-wall in seeming exhaustion. "Dr. Digby" (the headmaster) "has quite knocked me up with overwork. Just come down and help me to carry up my books."

"Ah! you're cunning!"

"Not at all, Polly — it is positive fact. I'm as weak as a rush. Come down."

"Your eyes are quiet like the cat's, but you'll spring."

"Spring? Nothing of the kind: it isn't in me. Come down."

"Perhaps I may — if you'll promise not to touch — not to snatch me up, and not to whirl me round."

"I? I couldn't do it!" (sinking into a chair.)

"Then put the books down on the first step, and go three yards off"

This being done, she descended warily, and not taking her eyes from the feeble Graham. Of course her approach always galvanized him to new and spasmodic life: the game of romps was sure to be exacted. Sometimes she would be angry; sometimes the matter was allowed to pass smoothly, and we could hear her say as she led him up-stairs: "Now, my dear boy, come and take your tea — I am sure you must want something."

It was sufficiently comical to observe her as she sat beside Graham, while he took that meal. In his absence she was a still personage, but with him the most officious, fidgety little body possible. I often wished she would mind herself and be tranquil; but no — herself was forgotten in him: he could not be sufficiently well waited on, nor carefully enough looked after; he was more than the Grand Turk in her estimation. She would gradually assemble the various plates before him, and, when one would suppose all he could possibly desire was within his reach, she would find out something else: "Ma'am," she would whisper to Mrs. Bretton, — "perhaps your son would like a little cake — sweet cake, you know — there is some in there" (pointing to the sideboard cupboard). Mrs. Bretton, as a rule, disapproved of sweet cake at tea, but still the request was urged, — "One little piece — only for him — as he goes to school: girls — such as me and Miss Snowe — don't need treats, but he would like it."

Graham did like it very well, and almost always got it. To do him justice, he would have shared his prize with her to whom he owed it; but that was never allowed: to insist, was to ruffle her for the evening. To stand by his knee, and monopolize his talk and notice, was the reward she wanted — not a share of the cake.

With curious readiness did she adapt herself to such themes as interested him. One would have thought the child had no mind or life of her own, but must necessarily live, move, and have her being in another: now that her father was taken from her, she nestled to Graham, and seemed to feel by his feelings: to exist in his existence. She learned the names of all his schoolfellows in a trice: she got by heart their characters as given from his lips: a single description of an individual seemed to suffice. She never forgot, or confused identities: she would talk with him the whole evening about people she had never seen, and appear completely to realise their aspect, manners, and dispositions. Some she learned to mimic: an under-master, who was an aversion of young Bretton's, had, it seems, some peculiarities, which she caught up in a moment from Graham's representation, and rehearsed for his amusement; this, however, Mrs. Bretton disapproved and forbade.

The pair seldom quarrelled; yet once a rupture occurred, in which her feelings received a severe shock.

One day Graham, on the occasion of his birthday, had some friends — lads of his own age — to dine with him. Paulina took much interest in the coming of these friends; she had frequently heard of them; they were amongst those of whom Graham oftenest spoke. After dinner, the young gentlemen were left by themselves in the dining-room, where they soon became very merry and made a good deal of noise. Chancing to pass through the hall, I found Paulina sitting alone on the lowest step of the staircase, her eyes fixed on the glossy panels of the dining-room door, where the reflection of the hall-lamp was shining; her little brow knit in anxious, meditation.

"What are you thinking about, Polly?"

"Nothing particular; only I wish that door was clear glass — that I might see through it. The boys seem very cheerful, and I want to go to them: I want to be with Graham, and watch his friends."

"What hinders you from going?"

"I feel afraid: but may I try, do you think? May I knock at the door, and ask to be let in?"

I thought perhaps they might not object to have her as a playmate, and therefore encouraged the attempt.

She knocked — too faintly at first to be heard, but on a second essay the door unclosed; Graham's head appeared; he looked in high spirits, but impatient.

"What do you want, you little monkey?"

"To come to you."

"Do you indeed? As if I would be troubled with you! Away to mamma and Mistress Snowe, and tell them to put you to bed." The auburn head and bright flushed face vanished, — the door shut peremptorily. She was stunned.

"Why does he speak so? He never spoke so before," she said in consternation. "What have I done?"

"Nothing, Polly; but Graham is busy with his school-friends."

"And he likes them better than me! He turns me away now they are here!"

I had some thoughts of consoling her, and of improving the occasion by inculcating some of those maxims of philosophy whereof I had ever a tolerable stock ready for application. She stopped me, however, by putting her fingers in her ears at the first words I uttered, and then lying down on the mat with her face against the flags; nor could either Warren or the cook root her from that position: she was allowed to lie, therefore, till she chose to rise of her own accord.

Graham forgot his impatience the same evening, and would have accosted her as usual when his friends were gone, but she wrenched herself from his hand; her eye quite flashed; she would not bid him good-night; she would not look in his face. The next day he treated her with indifference, and she grew like a bit of marble. The day after, he teased her to know what was the matter; her lips would not unclose. Of course he could not feel real anger on his side: the match was too unequal in every way; he tried soothing and coaxing. "Why was she so angry? What had he done?" By-and-by tears answered him; he petted her, and they were friends. But she was one on whom such incidents were not lost: I remarked that never after this rebuff did she seek him, or follow him, or in any way solicit his notice. I told her once to carry a book or some other article to Graham when he was shut up in his study.

"I shall wait till he comes out," said she, proudly; "I don't choose to give him the trouble of rising to open the door."

Young Bretton had a favourite pony on which he often rode out; from the window she always watched his departure and return. It was her ambition to be permitted to have a ride round the courtyard on this pony; but far be it from her to ask such a favour. One day she descended to the yard to watch him dismount; as she leaned against the gate, the longing wish for the indulgence of a ride glittered in her eye.

"Come, Polly, will you have a canter?" asked Graham, half carelessly.

I suppose she thought he was too careless.

"No, thank you," said she, turning away with the utmost coolness.

"You'd better," pursued he. "You will like it, I am sure."

"Don't think I should care a fig about it," was the response.

"That is not true. You told Lucy Snowe you longed to have a ride."

"Lucy Snowe is a tatter-box," I heard her say (her imperfect articulation was the least precocious thing she had about her); and with this; she walked into the house.

Graham, coming in soon after, observed to his mother, — "Mamma, I believe that creature is a changeling: she is a perfect cabinet of oddities; but I should be dull without her: she amuses me a great deal more than you or Lucy Snowe."

* * * * *

"Miss Snowe," said Paulina to me (she had now got into the habit of occasionally chatting with me when we were alone in our room at night), "do you know on what day in the week I like Graham best?"

"How can I possibly know anything so strange? Is there one day out of the seven when he is otherwise than on the other six?"

"To be sure! Can't you see? Don't you know? I find him the most excellent on a Sunday; then we have him the whole day, and he is quiet, and, in the evening, so kind."

This observation was not altogether groundless: going to church, &c., kept Graham quiet on the Sunday, and the evening he generally dedicated to a serene, though rather indolent sort of enjoyment by the parlour fireside. He would take possession of the couch, and then he would call Polly.

Graham was a boy not quite as other boys are; all his delight did not lie in action: he was capable of some intervals of contemplation; he could take a pleasure too in reading, nor was his selection of books wholly indiscriminate: there were glimmerings of characteristic preference, and even of instinctive taste in the choice. He rarely, it is true, remarked on what he read, but I have seen him sit and think of it.

Polly, being near him, kneeling on a little cushion or the carpet, a conversation would begin in murmurs, not inaudible, though subdued. I caught a snatch of their tenor now and then; and, in truth, some influence better and finer than that of every day, seemed to soothe Graham at such times into no ungentle mood.

"Have you learned any hymns this week, Polly?"

"I have learned a very pretty one, four verses long. Shall I say it?"

"Speak nicely, then: don't be in a hurry."

The hymn being rehearsed, or rather half-chanted, in a little singing voice, Graham would take exceptions at the manner, and proceed to give a lesson in recitation. She was quick in learning, apt in imitating; and, besides, her pleasure was to please Graham: she proved a ready scholar. To the hymn would succeed some reading — perhaps a chapter in the Bible; correction was seldom required here, for the child could read any simple narrative chapter very well; and, when the subject was such as she could understand and take an interest in, her expression and emphasis were something remarkable. Joseph cast into the pit; the calling of Samuel; Daniel in the lions' den; — these were favourite passages: of the first especially she seemed perfectly to feel the pathos.

"Poor Jacob!" she would sometimes say, with quivering lips. "How he loved his son Joseph! As much," she once added — "as much, Graham, as I love you: if you were to die" (and she re-opened the book, sought the verse, and read), "I should refuse to be comforted, and go down into the grave to you mourning."

With these words she gathered Graham in her little arms, drawing his long-tressed head towards her. The action, I remember, struck me as strangely rash; exciting the feeling one might experience on seeing an animal dangerous by nature, and but half-tamed by art, too heedlessly fondled. Not that I feared Graham would hurt, or very roughly check her; but I thought she ran risk of incurring such a careless, impatient repulse, as would be worse almost to her than a blow. On: the whole, however, these demonstrations were borne passively: sometimes even a sort of complacent wonder at her earnest partiality would smile not unkindly in his eyes. Once he said: — "You like me almost as well as if you were my little sister, Polly."

"Oh! I do like you," said she; "I do like you very much."

I was not long allowed the amusement of this study of character. She had scarcely been at Bretton two months, when a letter came from Mr. Home, signifying that he was now settled amongst his maternal kinsfolk on the Continent; that, as England was become wholly distasteful to him, he had no thoughts of returning hither, perhaps, for years; and that he wished his little girl to join him immediately.

"I wonder how she will take this news?" said Mrs. Bretton, when she had read the letter. I wondered, too, and I took upon myself to communicate it.

Repairing to the drawing-room — in which calm and decorated apartment she was fond of being alone, and where she could be implicitly trusted, for she fingered nothing, or rather soiled nothing she fingered — I found her seated, like a little Odalisque, on a couch, half shaded by the drooping draperies of the window near. She seemed happy; all her appliances for occupation were about her; the white wood workbox, a shred or two of muslin, an end or two of ribbon collected for conversion into doll-millinery. The doll, duly night-capped and night-gowned, lay in its cradle; she was rocking it to sleep, with an air of the most perfect faith in its possession of sentient and somnolent faculties; her eyes, at the same time, being engaged with a picture-book, which lay open on her lap.

"Miss Snowe," said she in a whisper, "this is a wonderful book. Candace" (the doll, christened by Graham; for, indeed, its begrimed complexion gave it much of an Ethiopian aspect) — "Candace is asleep now, and I may tell you about it; only we must both speak low, lest she should waken. This book was given me by Graham; it tells about distant countries, a long, long way from England, which no traveller can reach without sailing thousands of miles over the sea. Wild men live in these countries, Miss Snowe, who wear clothes different from ours: indeed, some of them wear scarcely any clothes, for the sake of being cool, you know; for they have very hot weather. Here is a picture of thousands gathered in a desolate place — a plain, spread with sand — round a man in black, — a good, good Englishman — a missionary, who is preaching to them under a palm-tree." (She showed a little coloured cut to that effect.) "And here are pictures" (she went on) "more stranger" (grammar was occasionally forgotten) "than that. There is the wonderful Great Wall of China; here is a Chinese lady, with a foot littler than mine. There is a wild horse of Tartary; and here, most strange of all — is a land of ice and snow, without green fields, woods, or gardens. In this land, they found some mammoth bones: there are no mammoths now. You don't know what it was; but I can tell you, because Graham told me. A mighty, goblin creature, as high as this room, and as long as the hall; but not a fierce, flesh-eating thing, Graham thinks. He believes, if I met one in a forest, it would not kill me, unless I came quite in its way; when it would trample me down amongst the bushes, as I might tread on a grasshopper in a hayfield without knowing it."

Thus she rambled on.

"Polly," I interrupted, "should you like to travel?"

"Not just yet," was the prudent answer; "but perhaps in twenty years, when I am grown a woman, as tall as Mrs. Bretton, I may travel with Graham. We intend going to Switzerland, and climbing Mount Blanck; and some day we shall sail over to South America, and walk to the top of Kim-kim-borazo."

"But how would you like to travel now, if your papa was with you?"

Her reply — not given till after a pause — evinced one of those unexpected turns of temper peculiar to her.

"Where is the good of talking in that silly way?" said she. "Why do you mention papa? What is papa to you? I was just beginning to be happy, and not think about him so much; and there it will be all to do over again!"

Her lip trembled. I hastened to disclose the fact of a letter having been received, and to mention the directions given that she and Harriet should immediately rejoin this dear papa. "Now, Polly, are you not glad?" I added.

She made no answer. She dropped her book and ceased to rock her doll; she gazed at me with gravity and earnestness.

"Shall not you like to go to papa?"

"Of course," she said at last in that trenchant manner she usually employed in speaking to me; and which was quite different from that she used with Mrs. Bretton, and different again from the one dedicated to Graham. I wished to ascertain more of what she thought but no: she would converse no more. Hastening to Mrs. Bretton, she questioned her, and received the confirmation of my news. The weight and importance of these tidings kept her perfectly serious the whole day. In the evening, at the moment Graham's entrance was heard below, I found her at my side. She began to arrange a locket-ribbon about my neck, she displaced and replaced the comb in my hair; while thus busied, Graham entered.

"Tell him by-and-by," she whispered; "tell him I am going."

In the course of tea-time I made the desired communication. Graham, it chanced, was at that time greatly preoccupied about some school-prize, for which he was competing. The news had to be told twice before it took proper hold of his attention, and even then he dwelt on it but momently.

"Polly going? What a pity! Dear little Mousie, I shall be sorry to lose her: she must come to us again, mamma."

And hastily swallowing his tea, he took a candle and a small table to himself and his books, and was soon buried in study.

"Little Mousie" crept to his side, and lay down on the carpet at his feet, her face to the floor; mute and motionless she kept that post and position till bed-time. Once I saw Graham — wholly unconscious of her proximity — push her with his restless foot. She receded an inch or two. A minute after one little hand stole out from beneath her face, to which it had been pressed, and softly caressed the heedless foot. When summoned by her nurse she rose and departed very obediently, having bid us all a subdued good-night.

I will not say that I dreaded going to bed, an hour later; yet I certainly went with an unquiet anticipation that I should find that child in no peaceful sleep. The forewarning of my instinct was but fulfilled, when I discovered her, all cold and vigilant, perched like a white bird on the outside of the bed. I scarcely knew how to accost her; she was not to be managed like another child. She, however, accosted me. As I closed the door, and put the light on the dressing-table, she turned tome with these words: — "I cannot — cannot sleep; and in this way I cannot — cannot live!"

I asked what ailed her.

"Dedful miz-er-y!" said she, with her piteous lisp.

"Shall I call Mrs. Bretton?"

"That is downright silly," was her impatient reply; and, indeed, I well knew that if she had heard Mrs. Bretton's foot approach, she would have nestled quiet as a mouse under the bedclothes. Whilst lavishing her eccentricities regardlessly before me — for whom she professed scarcely the semblance of affection — she never showed my godmother one glimpse of her inner self: for her, she was nothing but a docile, somewhat quaint little maiden. I examined her; her cheek was crimson; her dilated eye was both troubled and glowing, and painfully restless: in this state it was obvious she must not be left till morning. I guessed how the case stood.

“Would you like to bid Graham good-night again?” I asked. “He is not gone to his room yet.”

She at once stretched out her little arms to be lifted. Folding a shawl round her, I carried her back to the drawing-room. Graham was just coming out.

“She cannot sleep without seeing and speaking to you once more,” I said. “She does not like the thought of leaving you.”

“I’ve spoilt her,” said he, taking her from me with good humour, and kissing her little hot face and burning lips. “Polly, you care for me more than for papa, now — “

“I do care for you, but you care nothing for me,” was her whisper.

She was assured to the contrary, again kissed, restored to me, and I carried her away; but, alas! not soothed.

When I thought she could listen to me, I said — “Paulina, you should not grieve that Graham does not care for you so much as you care for him. It must be so.”

Her lifted and questioning eyes asked why.

“Because he is a boy and you are a girl; he is sixteen and you are only six; his nature is strong and gay, and yours is otherwise.”

“But I love him so much; he should love me a little.”

“He does. He is fond of you. You are his favourite.”

“Am I Graham’s favourite?”

“Yes, more than any little child I know.”

The assurance soothed her; she smiled in her anguish.

“But,” I continued, “don’t fret, and don’t expect too much of him, or else he will feel you to be troublesome, and then it is all over.”

“All over!” she echoed softly; “then I’ll be good. I’ll try to be good,

Lucy Snowe.”

I put her to bed.

“Will he forgive me this one time?” she asked, as I undressed myself. I assured her that he would; that as yet he was by no means alienated; that she had only to be careful for the future.

“There is no future,” said she: “I am going. Shall I ever — ever — see him again, after I leave England?”

I returned an encouraging response. The candle being extinguished, a still half-hour elapsed. I thought her asleep, when the little white shape once more lifted itself in the crib, and the small voice asked — “Do you like Graham, Miss Snowe?”

“Like him! Yes, a little.”

“Only a little! Do you like him as I do?”

“I think not. No: not as you do.”

“Do you like him much?”

“I told you I liked him a little. Where is the use of caring for him so very much: he is full of faults.”

"Is he?"

"All boys are."

"More than girls?"

"Very likely. Wise people say it is folly to think anybody perfect; and as to likes and dislikes, we should be friendly to all, and worship none."

"Are you a wise person?"

"I mean to try to be so. Go to sleep."

"I cannot go to sleep. Have you no pain just here" (laying her elfish hand on her elfish breast,) "when you think you shall have to leave Graham; for your home is not here?"

"Surely, Polly," said I, "you should not feel so much pain when you are very soon going to rejoin your father. Have you forgotten him? Do you no longer wish to be his little companion?"

Dead silence succeeded this question.

"Child, lie down and sleep," I urged.

"My bed is cold," said she. "I can't warm it."

I saw the little thing shiver. "Come to me," I said, wishing, yet scarcely hoping, that she would comply: for she was a most strange, capricious, little creature, and especially whimsical with me. She came, however, instantly, like a small ghost gliding over the carpet. I took her in. She was chill: I warmed her in my arms. She trembled nervously; I soothed her. Thus tranquillized and cherished she at last slumbered.

"A very unique child," thought I, as I viewed her sleeping countenance by the fitful moonlight, and cautiously and softly wiped her glittering eyelids and her wet cheeks with my handkerchief. "How will she get through this world, or battle with this life? How will she bear the shocks and repulses, the humiliations and desolations, which books, and my own reason, tell me are prepared for all flesh?"

She departed the next day; trembling like a leaf when she took leave, but exercising self-command.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS MARCHMONT.

On quitting Bretton, which I did a few weeks after Paulina's departure — little thinking then I was never again to visit it; never more to tread its calm old streets — I betook myself home, having been absent six months. It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred. Well! the amiable conjecture does no harm, and may therefore be safely left uncontradicted. Far from saying nay, indeed, I will permit the reader to picture me, for the next eight years, as a bark slumbering through halcyon weather, in a harbour still as glass — the steersman stretched on the little deck, his face up to heaven, his eyes closed: buried, if you will, in a long prayer. A great many women and girls are supposed to pass their lives something in that fashion; why not I with the rest?

Picture me then idle, basking, plump, and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen overboard, or that there must have been wreck at last. I too well remember a time — a long time — of cold, of danger, of contention. To this hour, when I have the nightmare, it repeats the rush and saltness of briny waves in my throat, and their icy pressure on my lungs. I even know there was a storm, and that not of one hour nor one day. For many days and nights neither sun nor stars appeared; we cast with our own hands the tackling out of the ship; a heavy tempest lay on us; all hope that we should be saved was taken away. In fine, the ship was lost, the crew perished.

As far as I recollect, I complained to no one about these troubles. Indeed, to whom could I complain? Of Mrs. Bretton I had long lost sight. Impediments, raised by others, had, years ago, come in the way of our intercourse, and cut it off. Besides, time had brought changes for her, too: the handsome property of which she was left guardian for her son, and which had been chiefly invested in some joint-stock undertaking, had melted, it was said, to a fraction of its original amount. Graham, I learned from incidental rumours, had adopted a profession; both he and his mother were gone from Bretton, and were understood to be now in London. Thus, there remained no possibility of dependence on others; to myself alone could I look. I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature; but self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances, as they are upon thousands besides; and when Miss Marchmont, a maiden lady of our neighbourhood, sent for me, I obeyed her behest, in the hope that she might assign me some task I could undertake.

Miss Marchmont was a woman of fortune, and lived in a handsome residence; but she was a rheumatic cripple, impotent, foot and hand, and had been so for twenty years. She always sat upstairs: her drawing-room adjoined her bed-room. I had often heard of Miss Marchmont, and of her peculiarities (she had the character of being very eccentric), but till now had never seen her. I found her a furrowed, grey-haired woman, grave with solitude, stern with long affliction, irritable also, and perhaps exacting. It seemed that a maid, or rather companion, who had waited on her for some years, was about to be married; and she, hearing of my bereaved lot, had sent for me, with the idea that I might supply this person's place. She made the proposal to me after tea, as she and I sat alone by her fireside.

"It will not be an easy life;" said she candidly, "for I require a good deal of attention, and you will be much confined; yet, perhaps, contrasted with the existence you have lately led, it may appear tolerable."

I reflected. Of course it ought to appear tolerable, I argued inwardly; but somehow, by some strange fatality, it would not. To live here, in this close room, the watcher of suffering — sometimes, perhaps, the butt of temper — through all that was to come of my youth; while all that was gone had passed, to say the least, not blissfully! My heart sunk one moment, then it revived; for though I forced myself to realise evils, I think I was too prosaic to idealise, and consequently to exaggerate them.

"My doubt is whether I should have strength for the undertaking," I observed.

"That is my own scruple," said she; "for you look a worn-out creature."

So I did. I saw myself in the glass, in my mourning-dress, a faded, hollow-eyed vision. Yet I thought little of the wan spectacle. The blight, I believed, was chiefly external: I still felt life at life's sources.

"What else have you in view — anything?"

"Nothing clear as yet: but I may find something."

"So you imagine: perhaps you are right. Try your own method, then; and if it does not succeed, test mine. The chance I have offered shall be left open to you for three months."

This was kind. I told her so, and expressed my gratitude. While I was speaking, a paroxysm of pain came on. I ministered to her; made the necessary applications, according to her directions, and, by the time she was relieved, a sort of intimacy was already formed between us. I, for my part, had learned from the manner in which she bore this attack, that she was a firm, patient woman (patient under physical pain, though sometimes perhaps excitable under long mental canker); and she, from the good-will with which I succoured her, discovered that she could influence my sympathies (such as they were). She sent for me the next day; for five or six successive days she claimed my company. Closer acquaintance, while it developed both faults and eccentricities, opened, at the same time, a view of a character I could respect.

Stern and even morose as she sometimes was, I could wait on her and sit beside her with that calm which always blesses us when we are sensible that our manners, presence, contact, please and soothe the persons we serve. Even when she scolded me — which she did, now and then, very tartly — it was in such a way as did not humiliate, and left no sting; it was rather like an irascible mother rating her daughter, than a harsh mistress lecturing a dependant: lecture, indeed, she could not, though she could occasionally storm. Moreover, a vein of reason ever ran through her passion: she was logical even when fierce. Ere long a growing sense of attachment began to present the thought of staying with her as companion in quite a new light; in another week I had agreed to remain.

Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty — her pain, my suffering — her relief, my hope — her anger, my punishment — her regard, my reward. I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an ever-changing sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick chamber; I was almost content to forget it. All within me became narrowed to my lot. Tame and still by habit, disciplined by destiny, I demanded no walks in the fresh air; my appetite needed no more than the tiny messes served for the invalid. In addition, she gave me the originality of her character to study: the steadiness of her virtues, I will add, the power of her passions, to admire; the truth of her feelings to trust. All these things she had, and for these things I clung to her.

For these things I would have crawled on with her for twenty years, if for twenty years longer her life of endurance had been protracted. But another decree was written. It seemed I must be stimulated into action. I must be goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy. My little morsel of human affection, which I prized as if it were a solid pearl, must melt in my fingers and slip thence like a dissolving hailstone. My small adopted duty must be snatched from my easily contented conscience. I had wanted to compromise with Fate: to escape occasional great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains. Fate would not so be pacified; nor would Providence sanction this shrinking sloth and cowardly indolence.

One February night — I remember it well — there came a voice near Miss Marchmont's house, heard by every inmate, but translated, perhaps, only by one. After a calm winter, storms were ushering in the spring. I had put Miss Marchmont to bed; I sat at the fireside sewing. The wind was wailing at the windows; it had wailed all day; but, as night deepened, it took a new tone — an accent keen, piercing, almost articulate to the ear; a plaint, piteous and disconsolate to the nerves, trilled in every gust.

"Oh, hush! hush!" I said in my disturbed mind, dropping my work, and making a vain effort to stop my ears against that subtle, searching cry. I had heard that very voice ere this, and compulsory observation had forced on me a theory as to what it boded. Three times in the course of my life, events had taught me that these strange accents in the storm — this restless, hopeless cry

— denote a coming state of the atmosphere unpropitious to life. Epidemic diseases, I believed, were often heralded by a gasping, sobbing, tormented, long-lamenting east wind. Hence, I inferred, arose the legend of the Banshee. I fancied, too, I had noticed — but was not philosopher enough to know whether there was any connection between the circumstances — that we often at the same time hear of disturbed volcanic action in distant parts of the world; of rivers suddenly rushing above their banks; and of strange high tides flowing furiously in on low sea-coasts. “Our globe,” I had said to myself, “seems at such periods torn and disordered; the feeble amongst us wither in her distempered breath, rushing hot from steaming volcanoes.”

I listened and trembled; Miss Marchmont slept.

About midnight, the storm in one half-hour fell to a dead calm. The fire, which had been burning dead, glowed up vividly. I felt the air change, and become keen. Raising blind and curtain, I looked out, and saw in the stars the keen sparkle of a sharp frost.

Turning away, the object that met my eyes was Miss Marchmont awake, lifting her head from the pillow, and regarding me with unusual earnestness.

“Is it a fine night?” she asked.

I replied in the affirmative.

“I thought so,” she said; “for I feel so strong, so well. Raise me. I feel young to-night,” she continued: “young, light-hearted, and happy. What if my complaint be about to take a turn, and I am yet destined to enjoy health? It would be a miracle!”

“And these are not the days of miracles,” I thought to myself, and wondered to hear her talk so. She went on directing her conversation to the past, and seeming to recall its incidents, scenes, and personages, with singular vividness.

“I love Memory to-night,” she said: “I prize her as my best friend. She is just now giving me a deep delight: she is bringing back to my heart, in warm and beautiful life, realities — not mere empty ideas, but what were once realities, and that I long have thought decayed, dissolved, mixed in with grave-mould. I possess just now the hours, the thoughts, the hopes of my youth. I renew the love of my life — its only love — almost its only affection; for I am not a particularly good woman: I am not amiable. Yet I have had my feelings, strong and concentrated; and these feelings had their object; which, in its single self, was dear to me, as to the majority of men and women, are all the unnumbered points on which they dissipate their regard. While I loved, and while I was loved, what an existence I enjoyed! What a glorious year I can recall — how bright it comes back to me! What a living spring — what a warm, glad summer — what soft moonlight, silvering the autumn evenings — what strength of hope under the ice-bound waters and frost-hoar fields of that year’s winter! Through that year my heart lived with Frank’s heart. O my noble Frank — my faithful Frank — my good Frank! so much better than myself — his standard in all things so much higher! This I can now see and say: if few women have suffered as I did in his loss, few have enjoyed what I did in his love. It was a far better kind of love than common; I had no doubts about it or him: it was such a love as honoured, protected, and elevated, no less than it gladdened her to whom it was given. Let me now ask, just at this moment, when my mind is so strangely clear, — let me reflect why it was taken from me? For what crime was I condemned, after twelve months of bliss, to undergo thirty years of sorrow?

"I do not know," she continued after a pause: "I cannot — cannot see the reason; yet at this hour I can say with sincerity, what I never tried to say before, Inscrutable God, Thy will be done! And at this moment I can believe that death will restore me to Frank. I never believed it till now."

"He is dead, then?" I inquired in a low voice.

"My dear girl," she said, "one happy Christmas Eve I dressed and decorated myself, expecting my lover, very soon to be my husband, would come that night to visit me. I sat down to wait. Once more I see that moment — I see the snow twilight stealing through the window over which the curtain was not dropped, for I designed to watch him ride up the white walk; I see and feel the soft firelight warming me, playing on my silk dress, and fitfully showing me my own young figure in a glass. I see the moon of a calm winter night, float full, clear, and cold, over the inky mass of shrubbery, and the silvered turf of my grounds. I wait, with some impatience in my pulse, but no doubt in my breast. The flames had died in the fire, but it was a bright mass yet; the moon was mounting high, but she was still visible from the lattice; the clock neared ten; he rarely tarried later than this, but once or twice he had been delayed so long.

"Would he for once fail me? No — not even for once; and now he was coming — and coming fast-to atone for lost time. 'Frank! you furious rider,' I said inwardly, listening gladly, yet anxiously, to his approaching gallop, 'you shall be rebuked for this: I will tell you it is my neck you are putting in peril; for whatever is yours is, in a dearer and tenderer sense, mine.' There he was: I saw him; but I think tears were in my eyes, my sight was so confused. I saw the horse; I heard it stamp — I saw at least a mass; I heard a clamour. Was it a horse? or what heavy, dragging thing was it, crossing, strangely dark, the lawn. How could I name that thing in the moonlight before me? or how could I utter the feeling which rose in my soul?

"I could only run out. A great animal — truly, Frank's black horse — stood trembling, panting, snorting before the door; a man held it Frank, as I thought.

"'What is the matter?' I demanded. Thomas, my own servant, answered by saying sharply, 'Go into the house, madam.' And then calling to another servant, who came hurrying from the kitchen as if summoned by some instinct, 'Ruth, take missis into the house directly.' But I was kneeling down in the snow, beside something that lay there — something that I had seen dragged along the ground — something that sighed, that groaned on my breast, as I lifted and drew it to me. He was not dead; he was not quite unconscious. I had him carried in; I refused to be ordered about and thrust from him. I was quite collected enough, not only to be my own mistress but the mistress of others. They had begun by trying to treat me like a child, as they always do with people struck by God's hand; but I gave place to none except the surgeon; and when he had done what he could, I took my dying Frank to myself. He had strength to fold me in his arms; he had power to speak my name; he heard me as I prayed over him very softly; he felt me as I tenderly and fondly comforted him.

"'Maria,' he said, 'I am dying in Paradise.' He spent his last breath in faithful words for me. When the dawn of Christmas morning broke, my Frank was with God.

"And that," she went on, "happened thirty years ago. I have suffered since. I doubt if I have made the best use of all my calamities. Soft, amiable natures they would have refined to saintliness; of strong, evil spirits they would have made demons; as for me, I have only been a woe-struck and selfish woman."

"You have done much good," I said; for she was noted for her liberal almsgiving.

"I have not withheld money, you mean, where it could assuage affliction. What of that? It cost me no effort or pang to give. But I think from this day I am about to enter a better frame of mind, to prepare myself for reunion with Frank. You see I still think of Frank more than of God; and unless it be counted that in thus loving the creature so much, so long, and so exclusively, I have not at least blasphemed the Creator, small is my chance of salvation. What do you think, Lucy, of these things? Be my chaplain, and tell me."

This question I could not answer: I had no words. It seemed as if she thought I had answered it.

"Very right, my child. We should acknowledge God merciful, but not always for us comprehensible. We should accept our own lot, whatever it be, and try to render happy that of others. Should we not? Well, to-morrow I will begin by trying to make you happy. I will endeavour to do something for you, Lucy: something that will benefit you when I am dead. My head aches now with talking too much; still I am happy. Go to bed. The clock strikes two. How late you sit up; or rather how late I, in my selfishness, keep you up. But go now; have no more anxiety for me; I feel I shall rest well."

She composed herself as if to slumber. I, too, retired to my crib in a closet within her room. The night passed in quietness; quietly her doom must at last have come: peacefully and painlessly: in the morning she was found without life, nearly cold, but all calm and undisturbed. Her previous excitement of spirits and change of mood had been the prelude of a fit; one stroke sufficed to sever the thread of an existence so long fretted by affliction.

CHAPTER V.

TURNING A NEW LEAF.

My mistress being dead, and I once more alone, I had to look out for a new place. About this time I might be a little — a very little — shaken in nerves. I grant I was not looking well, but, on the contrary, thin, haggard, and hollow-eyed; like a sitter-up at night, like an overwrought servant, or a placeless person in debt. In debt, however, I was not; nor quite poor; for though Miss Marchmont had not had time to benefit me, as, on that last night, she said she intended, yet, after the funeral, my wages were duly paid by her second cousin, the heir, an avaricious-looking man, with pinched nose and narrow temples, who, indeed, I heard long afterwards, turned out a thorough miser: a direct contrast to his generous kinswoman, and a foil to her memory, blessed to this day by the poor and needy. The possessor, then, of fifteen pounds; of health, though worn, not broken, and of a spirit in similar condition; I might still; in comparison with many people, be regarded as occupying an enviable position. An embarrassing one it was, however, at the same time; as I felt with some acuteness on a certain day, of which the corresponding one in the next week was to see my departure from my present abode, while with another I was not provided.

In this dilemma I went, as a last and sole resource, to see and consult an old servant of our family; once my nurse, now housekeeper at a grand mansion not far from Miss Marchmont's. I spent some hours with her; she comforted, but knew not how to advise me. Still all inward darkness, I left her about twilight; a walk of two miles lay before me; it was a clear, frosty night. In spite of my solitude, my poverty, and my perplexity, my heart, nourished and nerved with the vigour of a youth that had not yet counted twenty-three summers, beat light and not feebly. Not feebly, I am sure, or I should have trembled in that lonely walk, which lay through still fields, and passed neither village nor farmhouse, nor cottage: I should have quailed in the absence of moonlight, for it was by the leading of stars only I traced the dim path; I should have quailed still more in the unwonted presence of that which to-night shone in the north, a moving mystery — the Aurora Borealis. But this solemn stranger influenced me otherwise than through my fears. Some new power it seemed to bring. I drew in energy with the keen, low breeze that blew on its path. A bold thought was sent to my mind; my mind was made strong to receive it.

"Leave this wilderness," it was said to me, "and go out hence."

"Where?" was the query.

I had not very far to look; gazing from this country parish in that flat, rich middle of England — I mentally saw within reach what I had never yet beheld with my bodily eyes: I saw London.

The next day I returned to the hall, and asking once more to see the housekeeper, I communicated to her my plan.

Mrs. Barrett was a grave, judicious woman, though she knew little more of the world than myself; but grave and judicious as she was, she did not charge me with being out of my senses; and, indeed, I had a staid manner of my own which ere now had been as good to me as cloak and hood of hodden grey, since under its favour I had been enabled to achieve with impunity, and even approbation, deeds that, if attempted with an excited and unsettled air, would in some minds have stamped me as a dreamer and zealot.

The housekeeper was slowly propounding some difficulties, while she prepared orange-rind for marmalade, when a child ran past the window and came bounding into the room. It was a pretty child, and as it danced, laughing, up to me — for we were not strangers (nor, indeed, was its mother — a young married daughter of the house — a stranger) — I took it on my knee.

Different as were our social positions now, this child's mother and I had been schoolfellows, when I was a girl of ten and she a young lady of sixteen; and I remembered her, good-looking, but dull, in a lower class than mine.

I was admiring the boy's handsome dark eyes, when the mother, young Mrs. Leigh, entered. What a beautiful and kind-looking woman was the good-natured and comely, but unintellectual, girl become! Wifehood and maternity had changed her thus, as I have since seen them change others even less promising than she. Me she had forgotten. I was changed too, though not, I fear, for the better. I made no attempt to recall myself to her memory; why should I? She came for her son to accompany her in a walk, and behind her followed a nurse, carrying an infant. I only mention the incident because, in addressing the nurse, Mrs. Leigh spoke French (very bad French, by the way, and with an incorrigibly bad accent, again forcibly reminding me of our school-days): and I found the woman was a foreigner. The little boy chattered volubly in French too. When the whole party were withdrawn, Mrs. Barrett remarked that her young lady had brought that foreign nurse home with her two years ago, on her return from a Continental excursion; that she was treated almost as well as a governess, and had nothing to do but walk out with the baby and chatter French with Master Charles; "and," added Mrs. Barrett, "she says there are many Englishwomen in foreign families as well placed as she."

I stored up this piece of casual information, as careful housewives store seemingly worthless shreds and fragments for which their prescient minds anticipate a possible use some day. Before I left my old friend, she gave me the address of a respectable old-fashioned inn in the City, which, she said, my uncles used to frequent in former days.

In going to London, I ran less risk and evinced less enterprise than the reader may think. In fact, the distance was only fifty miles. My means would suffice both to take me there, to keep me a few days, and also to bring me back if I found no inducement to stay. I regarded it as a brief holiday, permitted for once to work-weary faculties, rather than as an adventure of life and death. There is nothing like taking all you do at a moderate estimate: it keeps mind and body tranquil; whereas grandiloquent notions are apt to hurry both into fever.

Fifty miles were then a day's journey (for I speak of a time gone by: my hair, which, till a late period, withstood the frosts of time, lies now, at last white, under a white cap, like snow beneath snow). About nine o'clock of a wet February night I reached London.

My reader, I know, is one who would not thank me for an elaborate reproduction of poetic first impressions; and it is well, inasmuch as I had neither time nor mood to cherish such; arriving as I did late, on a dark, raw, and rainy evening, in a Babylon and a wilderness, of which the vastness and the strangeness tried to the utmost any powers of clear thought and steady self-possession with which, in the absence of more brilliant faculties, Nature might have gifted me.

When I left the coach, the strange speech of the cabmen and others waiting round, seemed to me odd as a foreign tongue. I had never before heard the English language chopped up in that way. However, I managed to understand and to be understood, so far as to get myself and trunk safely conveyed to the old inn whereof I had the address. How difficult, how oppressive, how puzzling seemed my flight! In London for the first time; at an inn for the first time; tired with travelling; confused with darkness; palsied with cold; unfurnished with either experience or advice to tell me how to act, and yet — to act obliged.

Into the hands of common sense I confided the matter. Common sense, however, was as chilled and bewildered as all my other faculties, and it was only under the spur of an inexorable necessity that she spasmodically executed her trust. Thus urged, she paid the porter: considering the crisis, I did not blame her too much that she was hugely cheated; she asked the waiter for a room; she timorously called for the chambermaid; what is far more, she bore, without being wholly overcome, a highly supercilious style of demeanour from that young lady, when she appeared.

I recollect this same chambermaid was a pattern of town prettiness and smartness. So trim her waist, her cap, her dress — I wondered how they had all been manufactured. Her speech had an accent which in its mincing glibness seemed to rebuke mine as by authority; her spruce attire flaunted an easy scorn to my plain country garb.

"Well, it can't be helped," I thought, "and then the scene is new, and the circumstances; I shall gain good."

Maintaining a very quiet manner towards this arrogant little maid, and subsequently observing the same towards the parsonic-looking, black-coated, white-neckclothed waiter, I got civility from them ere long. I believe at first they thought I was a servant; but in a little while they changed their minds, and hovered in a doubtful state between patronage and politeness.

I kept up well till I had partaken of some refreshment, warmed myself by a fire, and was fairly shut into my own room; but, as I sat down by the bed and rested my head and arms on the pillow, a terrible oppression overcame me. All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous, desolate, almost blank of hope it stood. What was I doing here alone in great London? What should I do on the morrow? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on, earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do?

I wet the pillow, my arms, and my hair, with rushing tears. A dark interval of most bitter thought followed this burst; but I did not regret the step taken, nor wish to retract it A strong, vague persuasion that it was better to go forward than backward, and that I could go forward — that a way, however narrow and difficult, would in time open — predominated over other feelings: its influence hushed them so far, that at last I became sufficiently tranquil to be able to say my prayers and seek my couch. I had just extinguished my candle and lain down, when a deep, low, mighty tone swung through the night. At first I knew it not; but it was uttered twelve times, and at the twelfth colossal hum and trembling knell, I said: “I lie in the shadow of St. Paul’s.”

CHAPTER VI.

LONDON.

The next day was the first of March, and when I awoke, rose, and opened my curtain, I saw the risen sun struggling through fog. Above my head, above the house-tops, co-elevate almost with the clouds, I saw a solemn, orbed mass, dark blue and dim — THE DOME. While I looked, my inner self moved; my spirit shook its always-fettered wings half loose; I had a sudden feeling as if I, who never yet truly lived, were at last about to taste life. In that morning my soul grew as fast as Jonah's gourd.

"I did well to come," I said, proceeding to dress with speed and care. "I like the spirit of this great London which I feel around me. Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets; and for ever abandon his faculties to the eating rust of obscurity?"

Being dressed, I went down; not travel-worn and exhausted, but tidy and refreshed. When the waiter came in with my breakfast, I managed to accost him sedately, yet cheerfully; we had ten minutes' discourse, in the course of which we became usefully known to each other.

He was a grey-haired, elderly man; and, it seemed, had lived in his present place twenty years. Having ascertained this, I was sure he must remember my two uncles, Charles and Wilmot, who, fifteen, years ago, were frequent visitors here. I mentioned their names; he recalled them perfectly, and with respect. Having intimated my connection, my position in his eyes was henceforth clear, and on a right footing. He said I was like my uncle Charles: I suppose he spoke truth, because Mrs. Barrett was accustomed to say the same thing. A ready and obliging courtesy now replaced his former uncomfortably doubtful manner; henceforth I need no longer be at a loss for a civil answer to a sensible question.

The street on which my little sitting-room window looked was narrow, perfectly quiet, and not dirty: the few passengers were just such as one sees in provincial towns: here was nothing formidable; I felt sure I might venture out alone.

Having breakfasted, out I went. Elation and pleasure were in my heart: to walk alone in London seemed of itself an adventure. Presently I found myself in Paternoster Row — classic ground this. I entered a bookseller's shop, kept by one Jones: I bought a little book — a piece of extravagance I could ill afford; but I thought I would one day give or send it to Mrs. Barrett. Mr. Jones, a dried-in man of business, stood behind his desk: he seemed one of the greatest, and I one of the happiest of beings.

Prodigious was the amount of life I lived that morning. Finding myself before St. Paul's, I went in; I mounted to the dome: I saw thence London, with its river, and its bridges, and its churches; I saw antique Westminster, and the green Temple Gardens, with sun upon them, and a glad, blue sky, of early spring above; and between them and it, not too dense, a cloud of haze.

Descending, I went wandering whither chance might lead, in a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment; and I got — I know not how — I got into the heart of city life. I saw and felt London at last: I got into the Strand; I went up Cornhill; I mixed with the life passing along; I dared the perils of crossings. To do this, and to do it utterly alone, gave me, perhaps an irrational, but a real pleasure. Since those days, I have seen the West End, the parks, the fine squares; but I love the city far better. The city seems so much more in earnest: its business, its rush, its roar, are such serious things, sights, and sounds. The city is getting its living — the West End but enjoying its pleasure. At the West End you may be amused, but in the city you are deeply excited.

Faint, at last, and hungry (it was years since I had felt such healthy hunger), I returned, about two o'clock, to my dark, old, and quiet inn. I dined on two dishes — a plain joint and vegetables; both seemed excellent: how much better than the small, dainty messes Miss Marchmont's cook used to send up to my kind, dead mistress and me, and to the discussion of which we could not bring half an appetite between us! Delightfully tired, I lay down, on three chairs for an hour (the room did not boast a sofa). I slept, then I woke and thought for two hours.

My state of mind, and all accompanying circumstances, were just now such as most to favour the adoption of a new, resolute, and daring — perhaps desperate — line of action. I had nothing to lose. Unutterable loathing of a desolate existence past, forbade return. If I failed in what I now designed to undertake, who, save myself, would suffer? If I died far away from — home, I was going to say, but I had no home — from England, then, who would weep?

I might suffer; I was inured to suffering: death itself had not, I thought, those terrors for me which it has for the softly reared. I had, ere this, looked on the thought of death with a quiet eye. Prepared, then, for any consequences, I formed a project.

That same evening I obtained from my friend, the waiter, information respecting, the sailing of vessels for a certain continental port, Boue-Marine. No time, I found, was to be lost: that very night I must take my berth. I might, indeed, have waited till the morning before going on board, but would not run the risk of being too late.

"Better take your berth at once, ma'am," counselled the waiter. I agreed with him, and having discharged my bill, and acknowledged my friend's services at a rate which I now know was princely, and which in his eyes must have seemed absurd — and indeed, while pocketing the cash, he smiled a faint smile which intimated his opinion of the donor's savoir-faire — he proceeded to call a coach. To the driver he also recommended me, giving at the same time an injunction about taking me, I think, to the wharf, and not leaving me to the watermen; which that functionary promised to observe, but failed in keeping his promise: on the contrary, he offered me up as an oblation, served me as a dripping roast, making me alight in the midst of a throng of watermen.

This was an uncomfortable crisis. It was a dark night. The coachman instantly drove off as soon as he had got his fare: the watermen commenced a struggle for me and my trunk. Their oaths I hear at this moment: they shook my philosophy more than did the night, or the isolation, or the strangeness of the scene. One laid hands on my trunk. I looked on and waited quietly; but when another laid hands on me, I spoke up, shook off his touch, stepped at once into a boat, desired austerely that the trunk should be placed beside me — "Just there," — which was instantly done; for the owner of the boat I had chosen became now an ally: I was rowed off.

Black was the river as a torrent of ink; lights glanced on it from the piles of building round, ships rocked on its bosom. They rowed me up to several vessels; I read by lantern-light their names painted in great white letters on a dark ground. "The Ocean," "The Phoenix," "The Consort," "The Dolphin," were passed in turns; but "The Vivid" was my ship, and it seemed she lay further down.

Down the sable flood we glided, I thought of the Styx, and of Charon rowing some solitary soul to the Land of Shades. Amidst the strange scene, with a chilly wind blowing in my face and midnight clouds dropping rain above my head; with two rude rowers for companions, whose insane oaths still tortured my ear, I asked myself if I was wretched or terrified. I was neither. Often in my life have I been far more so under comparatively safe circumstances. "How is this?" said I. "Methinks I am animated and alert, instead of being depressed and apprehensive?" I could not tell how it was.

"THE VIVID" started out, white and glaring, from the black night at last. — "Here you are!" said the waterman, and instantly demanded six shillings.

"You ask too much," I said. He drew off from the vessel and swore he would not embark me till I paid it. A young man, the steward as I found afterwards, was looking over the ship's side; he grinned a smile in anticipation of the coming contest; to disappoint him, I paid the money. Three times that afternoon I had given crowns where I should have given shillings; but I consoled myself with the reflection, "It is the price of experience."

"They've cheated you!" said the steward exultingly when I got on board.

I answered phlegmatically that "I knew it," and went below.

A stout, handsome, and showy woman was in the ladies' cabin. I asked to be shown my berth; she looked hard at me, muttered something about its being unusual for passengers to come on board at that hour, and seemed disposed to be less than civil. What a face she had — so comely — so insolent and so selfish!

"Now that I am on board, I shall certainly stay here," was my answer.

"I will trouble you to show me my berth."

She complied, but sullenly. I took off my bonnet, arranged my things, and lay down. Some difficulties had been passed through; a sort of victory was won: my homeless, anchorless, unsupported mind had again leisure for a brief repose. Till the "Vivid" arrived in harbour, no further action would be required of me; but then…. Oh! I could not look forward. Harassed, exhausted, I lay in a half-trance.

The stewardess talked all night; not to me but to the young steward, her son and her very picture. He passed in and out of the cabin continually: they disputed, they quarrelled, they made it up again twenty times in the course of the night. She professed to be writing a letter home — she said to her father; she read passages of it aloud, heeding me no more than a stock — perhaps she believed me asleep. Several of these passages appeared to comprise family secrets, and bore special reference to one "Charlotte," a younger sister who, from the bearing of the epistle, seemed to be on the brink of perpetrating a romantic and imprudent match; loud was the protest of this elder lady against the distasteful union. The dutiful son laughed his mother's correspondence to scorn. She defended it, and raved at him. They were a strange pair. She might be thirty-nine or forty, and was buxom and blooming as a girl of twenty. Hard, loud, vain and vulgar, her mind and body alike seemed brazen and imperishable. I should think, from her childhood, she must have lived in public stations; and in her youth might very likely have been a barmaid.

Towards morning her discourse ran on a new theme: "the Watsons," a certain expected family-party of passengers, known to her, it appeared, and by her much esteemed on account of the handsome profit realized in their fees. She said, "It was as good as a little fortune to her whenever this family crossed."

At dawn all were astir, and by sunrise the passengers came on board. Boisterous was the welcome given by the stewardess to the "Watsons," and great was the bustle made in their honour. They were four in number, two males and two females. Besides them, there was but one other passenger — a young lady, whom a gentlemanly, though languid-looking man escorted. The two groups offered a marked contrast. The Watsons were doubtless rich people, for they had the confidence of conscious wealth in their bearing; the women — youthful both of them, and one perfectly handsome, as far as physical beauty went — were dressed richly, gaily, and absurdly out of character for the circumstances. Their bonnets with bright flowers, their velvet cloaks and silk dresses, seemed better suited for park or promenade than for a damp packet deck. The men were of low stature, plain, fat, and vulgar; the oldest, plainest, greasiest, broadest, I soon found was the husband — the bridegroom I suppose, for she was very young — of the beautiful girl. Deep was my amazement at this discovery; and deeper still when I perceived that, instead of being desperately wretched in such a union, she was gay even to giddiness. “Her laughter,” I reflected, “must be the mere frenzy of despair.” And even while this thought was crossing my mind, as I stood leaning quiet and solitary against the ship’s side, she came tripping up to me, an utter stranger, with a camp-stool in her hand, and smiling a smile of which the levity puzzled and startled me, though it showed a perfect set of perfect teeth, she offered me the accommodation of this piece of furniture. I declined it of course, with all the courtesy I could put into my manner; she danced off heedless and lightsome. She must have been good-natured; but what had made her marry that individual, who was at least as much like an oil-barrel as a man?

The other lady passenger, with the gentleman-companion, was quite a girl, pretty and fair: her simple print dress, untrimmed straw-bonnet and large shawl, gracefully worn, formed a costume plain to quakerism: yet, for her, becoming enough. Before the gentleman quitted her, I observed him throwing a glance of scrutiny over all the passengers, as if to ascertain in what company his charge would be left. With a most dissatisfied air did his eye turn from the ladies with the gay flowers; he looked at me, and then he spoke to his daughter, niece, or whatever she was: she also glanced in my direction, and slightly curled her short, pretty lip. It might be myself, or it might be my homely mourning habit, that elicited this mark of contempt; more likely, both. A bell rang; her father (I afterwards knew that it was her father) kissed her, and returned to land. The packet sailed.

Foreigners say that it is only English girls who can thus be trusted to travel alone, and deep is their wonder at the daring confidence of English parents and guardians. As for the “jeunes Meess,” by some their intrepidity is pronounced masculine and “inconvenant,” others regard them as the passive victims of an educational and theological system which wantonly dispenses with proper “surveillance.” Whether this particular young lady was of the sort that can the most safely be left unwatched, I do not know: or, rather did not then know; but it soon appeared that the dignity of solitude was not to her taste. She paced the deck once or twice backwards and forwards; she looked with a little sour air of disdain at the flaunting silks and velvets, and the bears which thereon danced attendance, and eventually she approached me and spoke.

“Are you fond of a sea-voyage?” was her question.

I explained that my fondness for a sea-voyage had yet to undergo the test of experience; I had never made one.

“Oh, how charming!” cried she. “I quite envy you the novelty: first impressions, you know, are so pleasant. Now I have made so many, I quite forget the first: I am quite blasée about the sea and all that.”

I could not help smiling.

“Why do you laugh at me?” she inquired, with a frank testiness that pleased me better than her other talk.

"Because you are so young to be blasée about anything."

"I am seventeen" (a little piqued).

"You hardly look sixteen. Do you like travelling alone?"

"Bah! I care nothing about it. I have crossed the Channel ten times, alone; but then I take care never to be long alone: I always make friends."

"You will scarcely make many friends this voyage, I think" (glancing at the Watson-group, who were now laughing and making a great deal of noise on deck).

"Not of those odious men and women," said she: "such people should be steerage passengers. Are you going to school?"

"No."

"Where are you going?"

"I have not the least idea — beyond, at least, the port of Boue-Marine."

She stared, then carelessly ran on:

"I am going to school. Oh, the number of foreign schools I have been at in my life! And yet I am quite an ignoramus. I know nothing — nothing in the world — I assure you; except that I play and dance beautifully, — and French and German of course I know, to speak; but I can't read or write them very well. Do you know they wanted me to translate a page of an easy German book into English the other day, and I couldn't do it. Papa was so mortified: he says it looks as if M. de Bassompierre — my godpapa, who pays all my school-bills — had thrown away all his money. And then, in matters of information — in history, geography, arithmetic, and so on, I am quite a baby; and I write English so badly — such spelling and grammar, they tell me. Into the bargain I have quite forgotten my religion; they call me a Protestant, you know, but really I am not sure whether I am one or not: I don't well know the difference between Romanism and Protestantism. However, I don't in the least care for that. I was a Lutheran once at Bonn — dear Bonn! — charming Bonn! — where there were so many handsome students. Every nice girl in our school had an admirer; they knew our hours for walking out, and almost always passed us on the promenade: 'Schönes Mädchen,' we used to hear them say. I was excessively happy at Bonn!"

"And where are you now?" I inquired.

"Oh! at — chose," said she.

Now, Miss Ginevra Fanshawe (such was this young person's name) only substituted this word "chose" in temporary oblivion of the real name. It was a habit she had: "chose" came in at every turn in her conversation — the convenient substitute for any missing word in any language she might chance at the time to be speaking. French girls often do the like; from them she had caught the custom. "Chose," however, I found in this instance, stood for Villette — the great capital of the great kingdom of Labassecour.

"Do you like Villette?" I asked.

"Pretty well. The natives, you know, are intensely stupid and vulgar; but there are some nice English families."

"Are you in a school?"

"Yes."

"A good one?"

"Oh, no! horrid: but I go out every Sunday, and care nothing about the maîtresses or the professeurs, or the élèves, and send lessons au diable (one daren't say that in English, you know, but it sounds quite right in French); and thus I get on charmingly…. You are laughing at me again?"

"No — I am only smiling at my own thoughts."

"What are they?" (Without waiting for an answer) — "Now, do tell me where you are going."

"Where Fate may lead me. My business is to earn a living where I can find it."

"To earn!" (in consternation) "are you poor, then?"

"As poor as Job."

(After a pause) — "Bah! how unpleasant! But I know what it is to be poor: they are poor enough at home — papa and mamma, and all of them. Papa is called Captain Fanshawe; he is an officer on half-pay, but well-descended, and some of our connections are great enough; but my uncle and godpapa De Bassompierre, who lives in France, is the only one that helps us: he educates us girls. I have five sisters and three brothers. By-and-by we are to marry — rather elderly gentlemen, I suppose, with cash: papa and mamma manage that. My sister Augusta is married now to a man much older-looking than papa. Augusta is very beautiful — not in my style — but dark; her husband, Mr. Davies, had the yellow fever in India, and he is still the colour of a guinea; but then he is rich, and Augusta has her carriage and establishment, and we all think she has done perfectly well. Now, this is better than 'earning a living,' as you say. By the way, are you clever?"

"No — not at all."

"You can play, sing, speak three or four languages?"

"By no means."

"Still I think you are clever" (a pause and a yawn).

"Shall you be sea-sick?"

"Shall you?"

"Oh, immensely! as soon as ever we get in sight of the sea: I begin, indeed, to feel it already. I shall go below; and won't I order about that fat odious stewardess! Heureusement je sais faire aller mon monde."

Down she went.

It was not long before the other passengers followed her: throughout the afternoon I remained on deck alone. When I recall the tranquil, and even happy mood in which I passed those hours, and remember, at the same time, the position in which I was placed; its hazardous — some would have said its hopeless — character; I feel that, as —

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars — a cage,

so peril, loneliness, an uncertain future, are not oppressive evils, so long as the frame is healthy and the faculties are employed; so long, especially, as Liberty lends us her wings, and Hope guides us by her star.

I was not sick till long after we passed Margate, and deep was the pleasure I drank in with the sea-breeze; divine the delight I drew from the heaving Channel waves, from the sea-birds on their ridges, from the white sails on their dark distance, from the quiet yet beclouded sky, overhanging all. In my reverie, methought I saw the continent of Europe, like a wide dreamland, far away. Sunshine lay on it, making the long coast one line of gold; tiniest tracery of clustered town and snow-gleaming tower, of woods deep massed, of heights serrated, of smooth pasturage and veiny stream, embossed the metal-bright prospect. For background, spread a sky, solemn and dark blue, and — grand with imperial promise, soft with tints of enchantment — strode from north to south a God-bent bow, an arch of hope.

Cancel the whole of that, if you please, reader — or rather let it stand, and draw thence a moral — an alliterative, text-hand copy —

Day-dreams are delusions of the demon.

Becoming excessively sick, I faltered down into the cabin.

Miss Fanshawe's berth chanced to be next mine; and, I am sorry to say, she tormented me with an unsparing selfishness during the whole time of our mutual distress. Nothing could exceed her impatience and fretfulness. The Watsons, who were very sick too, and on whom the stewardess attended with shameless partiality, were stoics compared with her. Many a time since have I noticed, in persons of Ginevra Fanshawe's light, careless temperament, and fair, fragile style of beauty, an entire incapacity to endure: they seem to sour in adversity, like small beer in thunder. The man who takes such a woman for his wife, ought to be prepared to guarantee her an existence all sunshine. Indignant at last with her teasing peevishness, I curtly requested her "to hold her tongue." The rebuff did her good, and it was observable that she liked me no worse for it.

As dark night drew on, the sea roughened: larger waves swayed strong against the vessel's side. It was strange to reflect that blackness and water were round us, and to feel the ship ploughing straight on her pathless way, despite noise, billow, and rising gale. Articles of furniture began to fall about, and it became needful to lash them to their places; the passengers grew sicker than ever; Miss Fanshawe declared, with groans, that she must die.

"Not just yet, honey," said the stewardess. "We're just in port." Accordingly, in another quarter of an hour, a calm fell upon us all; and about midnight the voyage ended.

I was sorry: yes, I was sorry. My resting-time was past; my difficulties — my stringent difficulties — recommenced. When I went on deck, the cold air and black scowl of the night seemed to rebuke me for my presumption in being where I was: the lights of the foreign sea-port town, glimmering round the foreign harbour, met me like unnumbered threatening eyes. Friends came on board to welcome the Watsons; a whole family of friends surrounded and bore away Miss Fanshawe; I — but I dared not for one moment dwell on a comparison of positions.

Yet where should I go? I must go somewhere. Necessity dare not be nice. As I gave the stewardess her fee — and she seemed surprised at receiving a coin of more value than, from such a quarter, her coarse calculations had probably reckoned on — I said, “Be kind enough to direct me to some quiet, respectable inn, where I can go for the night.”

She not only gave me the required direction, but called a commissionaire, and bid him take charge of me, and — not my trunk, for that was gone to the custom-house.

I followed this man along a rudely-paved street, lit now by a fitful gleam of moonlight; he brought me to the inn. I offered him sixpence, which he refused to take; supposing it not enough, I changed it for a shilling; but this also he declined, speaking rather sharply, in a language to me unknown. A waiter, coming forward into the lamp-lit inn-passage, reminded me, in broken English, that my money was foreign money, not current here. I gave him a sovereign to change. This little matter settled, I asked for a bedroom; supper I could not take: I was still sea-sick and unnerved, and trembling all over. How deeply glad I was when the door of a very small chamber at length closed on me and my exhaustion. Again I might rest: though the cloud of doubt would be as thick to-morrow as ever; the necessity for exertion more urgent, the peril (of destitution) nearer, the conflict (for existence) more severe.

CHAPTER VII.

VILLETTE.

I awoke next morning with courage revived and spirits refreshed: physical debility no longer enervated my judgment; my mind felt prompt and clear. Just as I finished dressing, a tap came to the door: I said, "Come in," expecting the chambermaid, whereas a rough man walked in and said, —

"Gif me your keys, Meess."

"Why?" I asked.

"Gif!" said he impatiently; and as he half-snatched them from my hand, he added, "All right! haf your tronc soon."

Fortunately it did turn out all right: he was from the custom-house. Where to go to get some breakfast I could not tell; but I proceeded, not without hesitation, to descend.

I now observed, what I had not noticed in my extreme weariness last night, viz. that this inn was, in fact, a large hotel; and as I slowly descended the broad staircase, halting on each step (for I was in wonderfully little haste to get down), I gazed at the high ceiling above me, at the painted walls around, at the wide windows which filled the house with light, at the veined marble I trod (for the steps were all of marble, though uncarpeted and not very clean), and contrasting all this with the dimensions of the closet assigned to me as a chamber, with the extreme modesty of its appointments, I fell into a philosophizing mood.

Much I marvelled at the sagacity evinced by waiters and chamber-maids in proportioning the accommodation to the guest. How could inn-servants and ship-stewardesses everywhere tell at a glance that I, for instance, was an individual of no social significance, and little burdened by cash? They did know it evidently: I saw quite well that they all, in a moment's calculation, estimated me at about the same fractional value. The fact seemed to me curious and pregnant: I would not disguise from myself what it indicated, yet managed to keep up my spirits pretty well under its pressure.

Having at last landed in a great hall, full of skylight glare, I made my way somehow to what proved to be the coffee-room. It cannot be denied that on entering this room I trembled somewhat; felt uncertain, solitary, wretched; wished to Heaven I knew whether I was doing right or wrong; felt convinced that it was the last, but could not help myself. Acting in the spirit and with the calm of a fatalist, I sat down at a small table, to which a waiter presently brought me some breakfast; and I partook of that meal in a frame of mind not greatly calculated to favour digestion. There were many other people breakfasting at other tables in the room; I should have felt rather more happy if amongst them all I could have seen any women; however, there was not one — all present were men. But nobody seemed to think I was doing anything strange; one or two gentlemen glanced at me occasionally, but none stared obtrusively: I suppose if there was anything eccentric in the business, they accounted for it by this word "Anglaise!"

Breakfast over, I must again move — in what direction? "Go to Villette," said an inward voice; prompted doubtless by the recollection of this slight sentence uttered carelessly and at random by Miss Fanshawe, as she bid me good-by: "I wish you would come to Madame Beck's; she has some marmots whom you might look after; she wants an English gouvernante, or was wanting one two months ago."

Who Madame Beck was, where she lived, I knew not; I had asked, but the question passed unheard: Miss Fanshawe, hurried away by her friends, left it unanswered. I presumed Villette to be her residence — to Villette I would go. The distance was forty miles. I knew I was catching at straws; but in the wide and weltering deep where I found myself, I would have caught at cobwebs. Having inquired about the means of travelling to Villette, and secured a seat in the diligence, I departed on the strength of this outline — this shadow of a project. Before you pronounce on the rashness of the proceeding, reader, look back to the point whence I started; consider the desert I had left, note how little I perilled: mine was the game where the player cannot lose and may win.

Of an artistic temperament, I deny that I am; yet I must possess something of the artist's faculty of making the most of present pleasure: that is to say, when it is of the kind to my taste. I enjoyed that day, though we travelled slowly, though it was cold, though it rained. Somewhat bare, flat, and treeless was the route along which our journey lay; and slimy canals crept, like half-torpid green snakes, beside the road; and formal pollard willows edged level fields, tilled like kitchen-garden beds. The sky, too, was monotonously gray; the atmosphere was stagnant and humid; yet amidst all these deadening influences, my fancy budded fresh and my heart basked in sunshine. These feelings, however, were well kept in check by the secret but ceaseless consciousness of anxiety lying in wait on enjoyment, like a tiger crouched in a jungle. The breathing of that beast of prey was in my ear always; his fierce heart panted close against mine; he never stirred in his lair but I felt him: I knew he waited only for sun-down to bound ravenous from his ambush.

I had hoped we might reach Villette ere night set in, and that thus I might escape the deeper embarrassment which obscurity seems to throw round a first arrival at an unknown bourne; but, what with our slow progress and long stoppages — what with a thick fog and small, dense rain — darkness, that might almost be felt, had settled on the city by the time we gained its suburbs.

I know we passed through a gate where soldiers were stationed — so much I could see by lamplight; then, having left behind us the miry Chaussée, we rattled over a pavement of strangely rough and flinty surface. At a bureau, the diligence stopped, and the passengers alighted. My first business was to get my trunk; a small matter enough, but important to me. Understanding that it was best not to be importunate or over-eager about luggage, but to wait and watch quietly the delivery of other boxes till I saw my own, and then promptly claim and secure it, I stood apart; my eye fixed on that part of the vehicle in which I had seen my little portmanteau safely stowed, and upon which piles of additional bags and boxes were now heaped. One by one, I saw these removed, lowered, and seized on.

I was sure mine ought to be by this time visible: it was not. I had tied on the direction-card with a piece of green ribbon, that I might know it at a glance: not a fringe or fragment of green was perceptible. Every package was removed; every tin-case and brown-paper parcel; the oilcloth cover was lifted; I saw with distinct vision that not an umbrella, cloak, cane, hat-box or band-box remained.

And my portmanteau, with my few clothes and little pocket-book enclasping the remnant of my fifteen pounds, where were they?

I ask this question now, but I could not ask it then. I could say nothing whatever; not possessing a phrase of speaking French: and it was French, and French only, the whole world seemed now gabbling around me. What should I do? Approaching the conductor, I just laid my hand on his arm, pointed to a trunk, thence to the diligence-roof, and tried to express a question with my eyes. He misunderstood me, seized the trunk indicated, and was about to hoist it on the vehicle.

"Let that alone — will you?" said a voice in good English; then, in correction, "Qu'est-ce que vous faîtes donc? Cette malle est à moi."

But I had heard the Fatherland accents; they rejoiced my heart; I turned: "Sir," said I, appealing to the stranger, without, in my distress, noticing what he was like, "I cannot speak French. May I entreat you to ask this man what he has done with my trunk?"

Without discriminating, for the moment, what sort of face it was to which my eyes were raised and on which they were fixed, I felt in its expression half-surprise at my appeal and half-doubt of the wisdom of interference.

"Do ask him; I would do as much for you," said I.

I don't know whether he smiled, but he said in a gentlemanly tone — that is to say, a tone not hard nor terrifying, — "What sort of trunk was yours?"

I described it, including in my description the green ribbon. And forthwith he took the conductor under hand, and I felt, through all the storm of French which followed, that he raked him fore and aft. Presently he returned to me.

"The fellow avers he was overloaded, and confesses that he removed your trunk after you saw it put on, and has left it behind at Boue-Marine with other parcels; he has promised, however, to forward it to-morrow; the day after, therefore, you will find it safe at this bureau."

"Thank you," said I: but my heart sank.

Meantime what should I do? Perhaps this English gentleman saw the failure of courage in my face; he inquired kindly, “Have you any friends in this city?”

“No, and I don’t know where to go.”

There was a little pause, in the course of which, as he turned more fully to the light of a lamp above him, I saw that he was a young, distinguished, and handsome man; he might be a lord, for anything I knew: nature had made him good enough for a prince, I thought. His face was very pleasant; he looked high but not arrogant, manly but not overbearing. I was turning away, in the deep consciousness of all absence of claim to look for further help from such a one as he.

“Was all your money in your trunk?” he asked, stopping me.

How thankful was I to be able to answer with truth — “No. I have enough in my purse” (for I had near twenty francs) “to keep me at a quiet inn till the day after to-morrow; but I am quite a stranger in Villette, and don’t know the streets and the inns.”

“I can give you the address of such an inn as you want,” said he; “and it is not far off: with my direction you will easily find it.”

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book, wrote a few words and gave it to me. I did think him kind; and as to distrusting him, or his advice, or his address, I should almost as soon have thought of distrusting the Bible. There was goodness in his countenance, and honour in his bright eyes.

“Your shortest way will be to follow the Boulevard and cross the park,” he continued; “but it is too late and too dark for a woman to go through the park alone; I will step with you thus far.”

He moved on, and I followed him, through the darkness and the small soaking rain. The Boulevard was all deserted, its path miry, the water dripping from its trees; the park was black as midnight. In the double gloom of trees and fog, I could not see my guide; I could only follow his tread. Not the least fear had I: I believe I would have followed that frank tread, through continual night, to the world’s end.

“Now,” said he, when the park was traversed, “you will go along this broad street till you come to steps; two lamps will show you where they are: these steps you will descend: a narrower street lies below; following that, at the bottom you will find your inn. They speak English there, so your difficulties are now pretty well over. Good-night.”

“Good-night, sir,” said I: “accept my sincerest thanks.” And we parted.

The remembrance of his countenance, which I am sure wore a light not unbenignant to the friendless — the sound in my ear of his voice, which spoke a nature chivalric to the needy and feeble, as well as the youthful and fair — were a sort of cordial to me long after. He was a true young English gentleman.

On I went, hurrying fast through a magnificent street and square, with the grandest houses round, and amidst them the huge outline of more than one overbearing pile; which might be palace or church — I could not tell. Just as I passed a portico, two mustachioed men came suddenly from behind the pillars; they were smoking cigars: their dress implied pretensions to the rank of gentlemen, but, poor things! they were very plebeian in soul. They spoke with insolence, and, fast as I walked, they kept pace with me a long way. At last I met a sort of patrol, and my dreaded hunters were turned from the pursuit; but they had driven me beyond my reckoning: when I could collect my faculties, I no longer knew where I was; the staircase I must long since have passed. Puzzled, out of breath, all my pulses throbbing in inevitable agitation, I knew not where to turn. It was terrible to think of again encountering those bearded, sneering simpletons; yet the ground must be retraced, and the steps sought out.

I came at last to an old and worn flight, and, taking it for granted that this must be the one indicated, I descended them. The street into which they led was indeed narrow, but it contained no inn. On I wandered. In a very quiet and comparatively clean and well-paved street, I saw a light burning over the door of a rather large house, loftier by a story than those round it. This might be the inn at last. I hastened on: my knees now trembled under me: I was getting quite exhausted.

No inn was this. A brass-plate embellished the great porte-cochère:

"Pensionnat de Demoiselles" was the inscription; and beneath, a name,

"Madame Beck."

I started. About a hundred thoughts volleyed through my mind in a moment. Yet I planned nothing, and considered nothing: I had not time. Providence said, "Stop here; this is your inn." Fate took me in her strong hand; mastered my will; directed my actions: I rang the door-bell.

While I waited, I would not reflect. I fixedly looked at the street-stones, where the door-lamp shone, and counted them and noted their shapes, and the glitter of wet on their angles. I rang again. They opened at last. A bonne in a smart cap stood before me.

"May I see Madame Beck?" I inquired.

I believe if I had spoken French she would not have admitted me; but, as I spoke English, she concluded I was a foreign teacher come on business connected with the pensionnat, and, even at that late hour, she let me in, without a word of reluctance, or a moment of hesitation.

The next moment I sat in a cold, glittering salon, with porcelain stove, unlit, and gilded ornaments, and polished floor. A pendule on the mantel-piece struck nine o'clock.

A quarter of an hour passed. How fast beat every pulse in my frame! How I turned cold and hot by turns! I sat with my eyes fixed on the door — a great white folding-door, with gilt mouldings: I watched to see a leaf move and open. All had been quiet: not a mouse had stirred; the white doors were closed and motionless.

"You ayre Engliss?" said a voice at my elbow. I almost bounded, so unexpected was the sound; so certain had I been of solitude.

No ghost stood beside me, nor anything of spectral aspect; merely a motherly, dumpy little woman, in a large shawl, a wrapping-gown, and a clean, trim nightcap.

I said I was English, and immediately, without further prelude, we fell to a most remarkable conversation. Madame Beck (for Madame Beck it was — she had entered by a little door behind me, and, being shod with the shoes of silence, I had heard neither her entrance nor approach) — Madame Beck had exhausted her command of insular speech when she said, "You ayre Engliss," and she now proceeded to work away volubly in her own tongue. I answered in mine. She partly understood me, but as I did not at all understand her — though we made together an awful clamour (anything like Madame's gift of utterance I had not hitherto heard or imagined) — we achieved little progress. She rang, ere long, for aid; which arrived in the shape of a "maîtresse," who had been partly educated in an Irish convent, and was esteemed a perfect adept in the English language. A bluff little personage this maîtresse was — Labassecourienne from top to toe: and how she did slaughter the speech of Albion! However, I told her a plain tale, which she translated. I told her how I had left my own country, intent on extending my knowledge, and gaining my bread; how I was ready to turn my hand to any useful thing, provided it was not wrong or degrading; how I would be a child's-nurse, or a lady's-maid, and would not refuse even housework adapted to my strength. Madame heard this; and, questioning her countenance, I almost thought the tale won her ear:

"Il n'y a que les Anglaises pour ces sortes d'entreprises," said she: "sont-elles donc intrépides ces femmes là!"

She asked my name, my age; she sat and looked at me — not pityingly, not with interest: never a gleam of sympathy, or a shade of compassion, crossed her countenance during the interview. I felt she was not one to be led an inch by her feelings: grave and considerate, she gazed, consulting her judgment and studying my narrative. A bell rang.

"Voilà pour la prière du soir!" said she, and rose. Through her interpreter, she desired me to depart now, and come back on the morrow; but this did not suit me: I could not bear to return to the perils of darkness and the street. With energy, yet with a collected and controlled manner, I said, addressing herself personally, and not the maîtresse: "Be assured, madame, that by instantly securing my services, your interests will be served and not injured: you will find me one who will wish to give, in her labour, a full equivalent for her wages; and if you hire me, it will be better that I should stay here this night: having no acquaintance in Villette, and not possessing the language of the country, how can I secure a lodging?"

"It is true," said she; "but at least you can give a reference?"

"None."

She inquired after my luggage: I told her when it would arrive. She mused. At that moment a man's step was heard in the vestibule, hastily proceeding to the outer door. (I shall go on with this part of my tale as if I had understood all that passed; for though it was then scarce intelligible to me, I heard it translated afterwards).

"Who goes out now?" demanded Madame Beck, listening to the tread.

"M. Paul," replied the teacher. "He came this evening to give a reading to the first class."

"The very man I should at this moment most wish to see. Call him."

The teacher ran to the salon door. M. Paul was summoned. He entered: a small, dark and spare man, in spectacles.

"Mon cousin," began Madame, "I want your opinion. We know your skill in physiognomy; use it now. Read that countenance."

The little man fixed on me his spectacles: A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him.

"I read it," he pronounced.

"Et qu'en dites vous?"

"Mais — bien des choses," was the oracular answer.

"Bad or good?"

"Of each kind, without doubt," pursued the diviner.

"May one trust her word?"

"Are you negotiating a matter of importance?"

"She wishes me to engage her as bonne or gouvernante; tells a tale full of integrity, but gives no reference."

"She is a stranger?"

"An Englishwoman, as one may see."

"She speaks French?"

"Not a word."

"She understands it?"

"No."

"One may then speak plainly in her presence?"

"Doubtless."

He gazed steadily. "Do you need her services?"

"I could do with them. You know I am disgusted with Madame Svini."

Still he scrutinized. The judgment, when it at last came, was as indefinite as what had gone before it.

"Engage her. If good predominates in that nature, the action will bring its own reward; if evil — eh bien! ma cousine, ce sera toujours une bonne oeuvre." And with a bow and a "bon soir," this vague arbiter of my destiny vanished.

And Madame did engage me that very night — by God's blessing I was spared the necessity of passing forth again into the lonesome, dreary, hostile street.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME BECK.

Being delivered into the charge of the maîtresse, I was led through a long narrow passage into a foreign kitchen, very clean but very strange. It seemed to contain no means of cooking — neither fireplace nor oven; I did not understand that the great black furnace which filled one corner, was an efficient substitute for these. Surely pride was not already beginning its whispers in my heart; yet I felt a sense of relief when, instead of being left in the kitchen, as I half anticipated, I was led forward to a small inner room termed a "cabinet." A cook in a jacket, a short petticoat and sabots, brought my supper: to wit — some meat, nature unknown, served in an odd and acid, but pleasant sauce; some chopped potatoes, made savoury with, I know not what: vinegar and sugar, I think: a tartine, or slice of bread and butter, and a baked pear. Being hungry, I ate and was grateful.

After the "prière du soir," Madame herself came to have another look at me. She desired me to follow her up-stairs. Through a series of the queerest little dormitories — which, I heard afterwards, had once been nuns' cells: for the premises were in part of ancient date — and through the oratory — a long, low, gloomy room, where a crucifix hung, pale, against the wall, and two tapers kept dim vigils — she conducted me to an apartment where three children were asleep in three tiny beds. A heated stove made the air of this room oppressive; and, to mend matters, it was scented with an odour rather strong than delicate: a perfume, indeed, altogether surprising and unexpected under the circumstances, being like the combination of smoke with some spirituous essence — a smell, in short, of whisky.

Beside a table, on which flared the remnant of a candle guttering to waste in the socket, a coarse woman, heterogeneously clad in a broad striped showy silk dress, and a stuff apron, sat in a chair fast asleep. To complete the picture, and leave no doubt as to the state of matters, a bottle and an empty glass stood at the sleeping beauty's elbow.

Madame contemplated this remarkable tableau with great calm; she neither smiled nor scowled; no impress of anger, disgust, or surprise, ruffled the equality of her grave aspect; she did not even wake the woman! Serenely pointing to a fourth bed, she intimated that it was to be mine; then, having extinguished the candle and substituted for it a night-lamp, she glided through an inner door, which she left ajar — the entrance to her own chamber, a large, well-furnished apartment; as was discernible through the aperture.

My devotions that night were all thanksgiving. Strangely had I been led since morning — unexpectedly had I been provided for. Scarcely could I believe that not forty-eight hours had elapsed since I left London, under no other guardianship than that which protects the passenger-bird — with no prospect but the dubious cloud-tracery of hope.

I was a light sleeper; in the dead of night I suddenly awoke. All was hushed, but a white figure stood in the room — Madame in her night-dress. Moving without perceptible sound, she visited the three children in the three beds; she approached me: I feigned sleep, and she studied me long. A small pantomime ensued, curious enough. I daresay she sat a quarter of an hour on the edge of my bed, gazing at my face. She then drew nearer, bent close over me; slightly raised my cap, and turned back the border so as to expose my hair; she looked at my hand lying on the bedclothes. This done, she turned to the chair where my clothes lay: it was at the foot of the bed. Hearing her touch and lift them, I opened my eyes with precaution, for I own I felt curious to see how far her taste for research would lead her. It led her a good way: every article did she inspect. I divined her motive for this proceeding, viz. the wish to form from the garments a judgment respecting the wearer, her station, means, neatness, &c. The end was not bad, but the means were hardly fair or justifiable. In my dress was a pocket; she fairly turned it inside out: she counted the money in my purse; she opened a little memorandum-book, coolly perused its contents, and took from between the leaves a small plaited lock of Miss Marchmont's grey hair. To a bunch of three keys, being those of my trunk, desk, and work-box, she accorded special attention: with these, indeed, she withdrew a moment to her own room. I softly rose in my bed and followed her with my eye: these keys, reader, were not brought back till they had left on the toilet of the adjoining room the impress of their wards in wax. All being thus done decently and in order, my property was returned to its place, my clothes were carefully refolded. Of what nature were the conclusions deduced from this scrutiny? Were they favourable or otherwise? Vain question. Madame's face of stone (for of stone in its present night aspect it looked: it had been human, and, as I said before, motherly, in the salon) betrayed no response.

Her duty done — I felt that in her eyes this business was a duty — she rose, noiseless as a shadow: she moved towards her own chamber; at the door, she turned, fixing her eye on the heroine of the bottle, who still slept and loudly snored. Mrs. Svini (I presume this was Mrs. Svini, Anglicé or Hibernicé, Sweeny) — Mrs. Sweeny's doom was in Madame Beck's eye — an immutable purpose that eye spoke: Madame's visitations for shortcomings might be slow, but they were sure. All this was very un-English: truly I was in a foreign land.

The morrow made me further acquainted with Mrs. Sweeny. It seems she had introduced herself to her present employer as an English lady in reduced circumstances: a native, indeed, of Middlesex, professing to speak the English tongue with the purest metropolitan accent. Madame — reliant on her own infallible expedients for finding out the truth in time — had a singular intrepidity in hiring service off-hand (as indeed seemed abundantly proved in my own case). She received Mrs. Sweeny as nursery-governess to her three children. I need hardly explain to the reader that this lady was in effect a native of Ireland; her station I do not pretend to fix: she boldly declared that she had "had the bringing-up of the son and daughter of a marquis." I think myself, she might possibly have been a hanger-on, nurse, fosterer, or washerwoman, in some Irish family: she spoke a smothered tongue, curiously overlaid with mincing cockney inflections. By some means or other she had acquired, and now held in possession, a wardrobe of rather suspicious splendour — gowns of stiff and costly silk, fitting her indifferently, and apparently made for other proportions than those they now adorned; caps with real lace borders, and — the chief item in the inventory, the spell by which she struck a certain awe through the household, quelling the otherwise scornfully disposed teachers and servants, and, so long as her broad shoulders wore the folds of that majestic drapery, even influencing Madame herself — a real Indian shawl — "un véritable cachemire," as Madame Beck said, with unmixed reverence and amaze. I feel quite sure that without this "cachemire" she would not have kept her footing in the pensionnat for two days: by virtue of it, and it only, she maintained the same a month.

But when Mrs. Sweeny knew that I was come to fill her shoes, then it was that she declared herself — then did she rise on Madame Beck in her full power — then come down on me with her concentrated weight. Madame bore this revelation and visitation so well, so stoically, that I for very shame could not support it otherwise than with composure. For one little moment Madame Beck absented herself from the room; ten minutes after, an agent of the police stood in the midst of us. Mrs. Sweeny and her effects were removed. Madame's brow had not been ruffled during the scene — her lips had not dropped one sharply-accented word.

This brisk little affair of the dismissal was all settled before breakfast: order to march given, policeman called, mutineer expelled; "chambre d'enfans" fumigated and cleansed, windows thrown open, and every trace of the accomplished Mrs. Sweeny — even to the fine essence and spiritual fragrance which gave token so subtle and so fatal of the head and front of her offending — was annihilated from the Rue Fossette: all this, I say, was done between the moment of Madame Beck's issuing like Aurora from her chamber, and that in which she coolly sat down to pour out her first cup of coffee.

About noon, I was summoned to dress Madame. (It appeared my place was to be a hybrid between gouvernante and lady's-maid.) Till noon, she haunted the house in her wrapping-gown, shawl, and soundless slippers. How would the lady-chief of an English school approve this custom?

The dressing of her hair puzzled me; she had plenty of it: auburn, unmixed with grey: though she was forty years old. Seeing my embarrassment, she said, “You have not been a femme-de-chambre in your own country?” And taking the brush from my hand, and setting me aside, not ungently or disrespectfully, she arranged it herself. In performing other offices of the toilet, she half-directed, half-aided me, without the least display of temper or impatience. N.B. — That was the first and last time I was required to dress her. Henceforth, on Rosine, the portress, devolved that duty.

When attired, Madame Beck appeared a personage of a figure rather short and stout, yet still graceful in its own peculiar way; that is, with the grace resulting from proportion of parts. Her complexion was fresh and sanguine, not too rubicund; her eye, blue and serene; her dark silk dress fitted her as a French sempstress alone can make a dress fit; she looked well, though a little bourgeoise; as bourgeoise, indeed, she was. I know not what of harmony pervaded her whole person; and yet her face offered contrast, too: its features were by no means such as are usually seen in conjunction with a complexion of such blended freshness and repose: their outline was stern: her forehead was high but narrow; it expressed capacity and some benevolence, but no expanse; nor did her peaceful yet watchful eye ever know the fire which is kindled in the heart or the softness which flows thence. Her mouth was hard: it could be a little grim; her lips were thin. For sensibility and genius, with all their tenderness and temerity, I felt somehow that Madame would be the right sort of Minos in petticoats.

In the long run, I found she was something else in petticoats too. Her name was Modeste Maria Beck, née Kint: it ought to have been Ignacia. She was a charitable woman, and did a great deal of good. There never was a mistress whose rule was milder. I was told that she never once remonstrated with the intolerable Mrs. Sweeny, despite her tipsiness, disorder, and general neglect; yet Mrs. Sweeny had to go the moment her departure became convenient. I was told, too, that neither masters nor teachers were found fault with in that establishment; yet both masters and teachers were often changed: they vanished and others filled their places, none could well explain how.

The establishment was both a pensionnat and an externat: the externes or day-pupils exceeded one hundred in number; the boarders were about a score. Madame must have possessed high administrative powers: she ruled all these, together with four teachers, eight masters, six servants, and three children, managing at the same time to perfection the pupils’ parents and friends; and that without apparent effort; without bustle, fatigue, fever, or any symptom of undue, excitement: occupied she always was — busy, rarely. It is true that Madame had her own system for managing and regulating this mass of machinery; and a very pretty system it was: the reader has seen a specimen of it, in that small affair of turning my pocket inside out, and reading my private memoranda. “Surveillance,” “espionage,” — these were her watchwords.

Still, Madame knew what honesty was, and liked it — that is, when it did not obtrude its clumsy scruples in the way of her will and interest. She had a respect for “Angleterre;” and as to “les Anglaises,” she would have the women of no other country about her own children, if she could help it.

Often in the evening, after she had been plotting and counter-plotting, spying and receiving the reports of spies all day, she would come up to my room — a trace of real weariness on her brow — and she would sit down and listen while the children said their little prayers to me in English: the Lord's Prayer, and the hymn beginning "Gentle Jesus," these little Catholics were permitted to repeat at my knee; and, when I had put them to bed, she would talk to me (I soon gained enough French to be able to understand, and even answer her) about England and Englishwomen, and the reasons for what she was pleased to term their superior intelligence, and more real and reliable probity. Very good sense she often showed; very sound opinions she often broached: she seemed to know that keeping girls in distrustful restraint, in blind ignorance, and under a surveillance that left them no moment and no corner for retirement, was not the best way to make them grow up honest and modest women; but she averred that ruinous consequences would ensue if any other method were tried with continental children: they were so accustomed to restraint, that relaxation, however guarded, would be misunderstood and fatally presumed on. She was sick, she would declare, of the means she had to use, but use them she must; and after discoursing, often with dignity and delicacy, to me, she would move away on her "souliers de silence," and glide ghost-like through the house, watching and spying everywhere, peering through every keyhole, listening behind every door.

After all, Madame's system was not bad — let me do her justice. Nothing could be better than all her arrangements for the physical well-being of her scholars. No minds were overtasked: the lessons were well distributed and made incomparably easy to the learner; there was a liberty of amusement, and a provision for exercise which kept the girls healthy; the food was abundant and good: neither pale nor puny faces were anywhere to be seen in the Rue Fossette. She never grudged a holiday; she allowed plenty of time for sleeping, dressing, washing, eating; her method in all these matters was easy, liberal, salutary, and rational: many an austere English school-mistress would do vastly well to imitate her — and I believe many would be glad to do so, if exacting English parents would let them.

As Madame Beck ruled by espionage, she of course had her staff of spies: she perfectly knew the quality of the tools she used, and while she would not scruple to handle the dirtiest for a dirty occasion — flinging this sort from her like refuse rind, after the orange has been duly squeezed — I have known her fastidious in seeking pure metal for clean uses; and when once a bloodless and rustless instrument was found, she was careful of the prize, keeping it in silk and cotton-wool. Yet, woe be to that man or woman who relied on her one inch beyond the point where it was her interest to be trustworthy: interest was the master-key of Madame's nature — the mainspring of her motives — the alpha and omega of her life. I have seen her feelings appealed to, and I have smiled in half-pity, half-scorn at the appellants. None ever gained her ear through that channel, or swayed her purpose by that means. On the contrary, to attempt to touch her heart was the surest way to rouse her antipathy, and to make of her a secret foe. It proved to her that she had no heart to be touched: it reminded her where she was impotent and dead. Never was the distinction between charity and mercy better exemplified than in her. While devoid of sympathy, she had a sufficiency of rational benevolence: she would give in the readiest manner to people she had never seen — rather, however, to classes than to individuals. "Pour les pauvres," she opened her purse freely — against the poor man, as a rule, she kept it closed. In philanthropic schemes for the benefit of society at large she took a cheerful part; no private sorrow touched her: no force or mass of suffering concentrated in one heart had power to pierce hers. Not the agony in Gethsemane, not the death on Calvary, could have wrung from her eyes one tear.

I say again, Madame was a very great and a very capable woman. That school offered her for her powers too limited a sphere; she ought to have swayed a nation: she should have been the leader of a turbulent legislative assembly. Nobody could have browbeaten her, none irritated her nerves, exhausted her patience, or over-reached her astuteness. In her own single person, she could have comprised the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police. Wise, firm, faithless; secret, crafty, passionless; watchful and inscrutable; acute and insensate — withal perfectly decorous — what more could be desired?

The sensible reader will not suppose that I gained all the knowledge here condensed for his benefit in one month, or in one half-year. No! what I saw at first was the thriving outside of a large and flourishing educational establishment. Here was a great house, full of healthy, lively girls, all well-dressed and many of them handsome, gaining knowledge by a marvellously easy method, without painful exertion or useless waste of spirits; not, perhaps, making very rapid progress in anything; taking it easy, but still always employed, and never oppressed. Here was a corps of teachers and masters, more stringently tasked, as all the real head-labour was to be done by them, in order to save the pupils, yet having their duties so arranged that they relieved each other in quick succession whenever the work was severe: here, in short, was a foreign school; of which the life, movement, and variety made it a complete and most charming contrast to many English institutions of the same kind.

Behind the house was a large garden, and, in summer, the pupils almost lived out of doors amongst the rose-bushes and the fruit-trees. Under the vast and vine-draped berceau, Madame would take her seat on summer afternoons, and send for the classes, in turns, to sit round her and sew and read. Meantime, masters came and went, delivering short and lively lectures, rather than lessons, and the pupils made notes of their instructions, or did not make them — just as inclination prompted; secure that, in case of neglect, they could copy the notes of their companions. Besides the regular monthly jours de sortie, the Catholic fête-days brought a succession of holidays all the year round; and sometimes on a bright summer morning, or soft summer evening; the boarders were taken out for a long walk into the country, regaled with gaufres and vin blanc, or new milk and pain bis, or pistolets au beurre (rolls) and coffee. All this seemed very pleasant, and Madame appeared goodness itself; and the teachers not so bad but they might be worse; and the pupils, perhaps, a little noisy and rough, but types of health and glee.

Thus did the view appear, seen through the enchantment of distance; but there came a time when distance was to melt for me — when I was to be called down from my watch-tower of the nursery, whence I had hitherto made my observations, and was to be compelled into closer intercourse with this little world of the Rue Fossette.

I was one day sitting up-stairs, as usual, hearing the children their English lessons, and at the same time turning a silk dress for Madame, when she came sauntering into the room with that absorbed air and brow of hard thought she sometimes wore, and which made her look so little genial. Dropping into a seat opposite mine, she remained some minutes silent. Désirée, the eldest girl, was reading to me some little essay of Mrs. Barbauld's, and I was making her translate currently from English to French as she proceeded, by way of ascertaining that she comprehended what she read: Madame listened.

Presently, without preface or prelude, she said, almost in the tone of one making an accusation, "Meess, in England you were a governess?"

"No, Madame," said I smiling, "you are mistaken."

"Is this your first essay at teaching — this attempt with my children?"

I assured her it was. Again she became silent; but looking up, as I took a pin from the cushion, I found myself an object of study: she held me under her eye; she seemed turning me round in her thoughts — measuring my fitness for a purpose, weighing my value in a plan. Madame had, ere this, scrutinized all I had, and I believe she esteemed herself cognizant of much that I was; but from that day, for the space of about a fortnight, she tried me by new tests. She listened at the nursery door when I was shut in with the children; she followed me at a cautious distance when I walked out with them, stealing within ear-shot whenever the trees of park or boulevard afforded a sufficient screen: a strict preliminary process having thus been observed, she made a move forward.

One morning, coming on me abruptly, and with the semblance of hurry, she said she found herself placed in a little dilemma. Mr. Wilson, the English master, had failed to come at his hour, she feared he was ill; the pupils were waiting in classe; there was no one to give a lesson; should I, for once, object to giving a short dictation exercise, just that the pupils might not have it to say they had missed their English lesson?

"In classe, Madame?" I asked.

"Yes, in classe: in the second division."

"Where there are sixty pupils," said I; for I knew the number, and with my usual base habit of cowardice, I shrank into my sloth like a snail into its shell, and alleged incapacity and impracticability as a pretext to escape action. If left to myself, I should infallibly have let this chance slip. Inadventurous, unstirred by impulses of practical ambition, I was capable of sitting twenty years teaching infants the hornbook, turning silk dresses and making children's frocks. Not that true contentment dignified this infatuated resignation: my work had neither charm for my taste, nor hold on my interest; but it seemed to me a great thing to be without heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial: the negation of severe suffering was the nearest approach to happiness I expected to know. Besides, I seemed to hold two lives — the life of thought, and that of reality; and, provided the former was nourished with a sufficiency of the strange necromantic joys of fancy, the privileges of the latter might remain limited to daily bread, hourly work, and a roof of shelter.

"Come," said Madame, as I stooped more busily than ever over the cutting-out of a child's pinafore, "leave that work."

"But Fifine wants it, Madame."

"Fifine must want it, then, for I want you."

And as Madame Beck did really want and was resolved to have me — as she had long been dissatisfied with the English master, with his shortcomings in punctuality, and his careless method of tuition — as, too, she did not lack resolution and practical activity, whether I lacked them or not — she, without more ado, made me relinquish thimble and needle; my hand was taken into hers, and I was conducted down-stairs. When we reached the carré, a large square hall between the dwelling-house and the pensionnat, she paused, dropped my hand, faced, and scrutinized me. I was flushed, and tremulous from head to foot: tell it not in Gath, I believe I was crying. In fact, the difficulties before me were far from being wholly imaginary; some of them were real enough; and not the least substantial lay in my want of mastery over the medium through which I should be obliged to teach. I had, indeed, studied French closely since my arrival in Villette; learning its practice by day, and its theory in every leisure moment at night, to as late an hour as the rule of the house would allow candle-light; but I was far from yet being able to trust my powers of correct oral expression.

"Dîtes donc," said Madame sternly, "vous sentez vous réellement trop faible?"

I might have said "Yes," and gone back to nursery obscurity, and there, perhaps, mouldered for the rest of my life; but looking up at Madame, I saw in her countenance a something that made me think twice ere I decided. At that instant she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's. Power of a particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits, and that power was not my kind of power: neither sympathy, nor congeniality, nor submission, were the emotions it awakened. I stood — not soothed, nor won, nor overwhelmed. It seemed as if a challenge of strength between opposing gifts was given, and

I suddenly felt all the dishonour of my diffidence — all the pusillanimity of my slackness to aspire.

"Will you," she said, "go backward or forward?" indicating with her hand, first, the small door of communication with the dwelling-house, and then the great double portals of the classes or schoolrooms.

"En avant," I said.

"But," pursued she, cooling as I warmed, and continuing the hard look, from very antipathy to which I drew strength and determination, "can you face the classes, or are you over-excited?"

She sneered slightly in saying this: nervous excitability was not much to Madame's taste.

"I am no more excited than this stone," I said, tapping the flag with my toe: "or than you," I added, returning her look.

"Bon! But let me tell you these are not quiet, decorous, English girls you are going to encounter. Ce sont des Labassecouriennes, rondes, franches, brusques, et tant soit peu rebelles."

I said: "I know; and I know, too, that though I have studied French hard since I came here, yet I still speak it with far too much hesitation — too little accuracy to be able to command their respect I shall make blunders that will lay me open to the scorn of the most ignorant. Still I mean to give the lesson."

"They always throw over timid teachers," said she.

"I know that too, Madame; I have heard how they rebelled against and persecuted Miss Turner" — a poor friendless English teacher, whom Madame had employed, and lightly discarded; and to whose piteous history I was no stranger.

"C'est vrai," said she, coolly. "Miss Turner had no more command over them than a servant from the kitchen would have had. She was weak and wavering; she had neither tact nor intelligence, decision nor dignity. Miss Turner would not do for these girls at all."

I made no reply, but advanced to the closed schoolroom door.

"You will not expect aid from me, or from any one," said Madame. "That would at once set you down as incompetent for your office."

I opened the door, let her pass with courtesy, and followed her. There were three schoolrooms, all large. That dedicated to the second division, where I was to figure, was considerably the largest, and accommodated an assemblage more numerous, more turbulent, and infinitely more unmanageable than the other two. In after days, when I knew the ground better, I used to think sometimes (if such a comparison may be permitted), that the quiet, polished, tame first division was to the robust, riotous, demonstrative second division, what the English House of Lords is to the House of Commons.

The first glance informed me that many of the pupils were more than girls — quite young women; I knew that some of them were of noble family (as nobility goes in Labassecour), and I was well convinced that not one amongst them was ignorant of my position in Madame's household. As I mounted the estràde (a low platform, raised a step above the flooring), where stood the teacher's chair and desk, I beheld opposite to me a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather — eyes full of an insolent light, and brows hard and unblushing as marble. The continental "female" is quite a different being to the insular "female" of the same age and class: I never saw such eyes and brows in England. Madame Beck introduced me in one cool phrase, sailed from the room, and left me alone in my glory.

I shall never forget that first lesson, nor all the under-current of life and character it opened up to me. Then first did I begin rightly to see the wide difference that lies between the novelist's and poet's ideal "jeune fille" and the said "jeune fille" as she really is.

It seems that three titled belles in the first row had sat down predetermined that a bonne d'enfants should not give them lessons in English. They knew they had succeeded in expelling obnoxious teachers before now; they knew that Madame would at any time throw overboard a professeur or maitresse who became unpopular with the school — that she never assisted a weak official to retain his place — that if he had not strength to fight, or tact to win his way, down he went: looking at "Miss Snowe," they promised themselves an easy victory.

Mesdemoiselles Blanche, Virginie, and Angélique opened the campaign by a series of titterings and whisperings; these soon swelled into murmurs and short laughs, which the remoter benches caught up and echoed more loudly. This growing revolt of sixty against one, soon became oppressive enough; my command of French being so limited, and exercised under such cruel constraint.

Could I but have spoken in my own tongue, I felt as if I might have gained a hearing; for, in the first place, though I knew I looked a poor creature, and in many respects actually was so, yet nature had given me a voice that could make itself heard, if lifted in excitement or deepened by emotion. In the second place, while I had no flow, only a hesitating trickle of language, in ordinary circumstances, yet — under stimulus such as was now rife through the mutinous mass — I could, in English, have rolled out readily phrases stigmatizing their proceedings as such proceedings deserved to be stigmatized; and then with some sarcasm, flavoured with contemptuous bitterness for the ringleaders, and relieved with easy banter for the weaker but less knavish followers, it seemed to me that one might possibly get command over this wild herd, and bring them into training, at least. All I could now do was to walk up to Blanche — Mademoiselle de Melcy, a young baronne — the eldest, tallest, handsomest, and most vicious — stand before her desk, take from under her hand her exercise-book, remount the estrade, deliberately read the composition, which I found very stupid, and, as deliberately, and in the face of the whole school, tear the blotted page in two.

This action availed to draw attention and check noise. One girl alone, quite in the background, persevered in the riot with undiminished energy. I looked at her attentively. She had a pale face, hair like night, broad strong eyebrows, decided features, and a dark, mutinous, sinister eye: I noted that she sat close by a little door, which door, I was well aware, opened into a small closet where books were kept. She was standing up for the purpose of conducting her clamour with freer energies. I measured her stature and calculated her strength She seemed both tall and wiry; but, so the conflict were brief and the attack unexpected, I thought I might manage her.

Advancing up the room, looking as cool and careless as I possibly could, in short, ayant l'air de rien, I slightly pushed the door and found it was ajar. In an instant, and with sharpness, I had turned on her. In another instant she occupied the closet, the door was shut, and the key in my pocket.

It so happened that this girl, Dolores by name, and a Catalonian by race, was the sort of character at once dreaded and hated by all her associates; the act of summary justice above noted proved popular: there was not one present but, in her heart, liked to see it done. They were stilled for a moment; then a smile — not a laugh — passed from desk to desk: then — when I had gravely and tranquilly returned to the estrade, courteously requested silence, and commenced a dictation as if nothing at all had happened — the pens travelled peacefully over the pages, and the remainder of the lesson passed in order and industry.

"C'est bien," said Madame Beck, when I came out of class, hot and a little exhausted. "Ca ira."

She had been listening and peeping through a spy-hole the whole time.

From that day I ceased to be nursery governess, and became English teacher. Madame raised my salary; but she got thrice the work out of me she had extracted from Mr. Wilson, at half the expense.

CHAPTER IX.

ISIDORE.

My time was now well and profitably filled up. What with teaching others and studying closely myself, I had hardly a spare moment. It was pleasant. I felt I was getting, on; not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use. Experience of a certain kind lay before me, on no narrow scale. Villette is a cosmopolitan city, and in this school were girls of almost every European nation, and likewise of very varied rank in life. Equality is much practised in Labassecour; though not republican in form, it is nearly so in substance, and at the desks of Madame Beck's establishment the young countess and the young bourgeoise sat side by side. Nor could you always by outward indications decide which was noble and which plebeian; except that, indeed, the latter had often franker and more courteous manners, while the former bore away the bell for a delicately-balanced combination of insolence and deceit. In the former there was often quick French blood mixed with the marsh-phlegm: I regret to say that the effect of this vivacious fluid chiefly appeared in the oilier glibness with which flattery and fiction ran from the tongue, and in a manner lighter and livelier, but quite heartless and insincere.

To do all parties justice, the honest aboriginal Labassecouriennes had an hypocrisy of their own, too; but it was of a coarse order, such as could deceive few. Whenever a lie was necessary for their occasions, they brought it out with a careless ease and breadth altogether untroubled by the rebuke of conscience. Not a soul in Madame Beck's house, from the scullion to the directress herself, but was above being ashamed of a lie; they thought nothing of it: to invent might not be precisely a virtue, but it was the most venial of faults. "J'ai menti plusieurs fois," formed an item of every girl's and woman's monthly confession: the priest heard unshocked, and absolved unreluctant. If they had missed going to mass, or read a chapter of a novel, that was another thing: these were crimes whereof rebuke and penance were the unfailing weed.

While yet but half-conscious of this state of things, and unlearned in its results, I got on in my new sphere very well. After the first few difficult lessons, given amidst peril and on the edge of a moral volcano that rumbled under my feet and sent sparks and hot fumes into my eyes, the eruptive spirit seemed to subside, as far as I was concerned. My mind was a good deal bent on success: I could not bear the thought of being baffled by mere undisciplined disaffection and wanton indocility, in this first attempt to get on in life. Many hours of the night I used to lie awake, thinking what plan I had best adopt to get a reliable hold on these mutineers, to bring this stiff-necked tribe under permanent influence. In, the first place, I saw plainly that aid in no shape was to be expected from Madame: her righteous plan was to maintain an unbroken popularity with the pupils, at any and every cost of justice or comfort to the teachers. For a teacher to seek her alliance in any crisis of insubordination was equivalent to securing her own expulsion. In intercourse with her pupils, Madame only took to herself what was pleasant, amiable, and recommendatory; rigidly requiring of her lieutenants sufficiency for every annoying crisis, where to act with adequate promptitude was to be unpopular. Thus, I must look only to myself.

Imprimis — it was clear as the day that this swinish multitude were not to be driven by force. They were to be humoured, borne with very patiently: a courteous though sedate manner impressed them; a very rare flash of raillery did good. Severe or continuous mental application they could not, or would not, bear: heavy demand on the memory, the reason, the attention, they rejected point-blank. Where an English girl of not more than average capacity and docility would quietly take a theme and bind herself to the task of comprehension and mastery, a Labassecourienne would laugh in your face, and throw it back to you with the phrase, — "Dieu, que c'est difficile! Je n'en veux pas. Cela m'ennuie trop."

A teacher who understood her business would take it back at once, without hesitation, contest, or expostulation — proceed with even exaggerated care to smoothe every difficulty, to reduce it to the level of their understandings, return it to them thus modified, and lay on the lash of sarcasm with unsparing hand. They would feel the sting, perhaps wince a little under it; but they bore no malice against this sort of attack, provided the sneer was not sour, but hearty, and that it held well up to them, in a clear, light, and bold type, so that she who ran might read, their incapacity, ignorance, and sloth. They would riot for three additional lines to a lesson; but I never knew them rebel against a wound given to their self-respect: the little they had of that quality was trained to be crushed, and it rather liked the pressure of a firm heel than otherwise.

By degrees, as I acquired fluency and freedom in their language, and could make such application of its more nervous idioms as suited their case, the elder and more intelligent girls began rather to like me in their way: I noticed that whenever a pupil had been roused to feel in her soul the stirring of worthy emulation, or the quickening of honest shame, from that date she was won. If I could but once make their (usually large) ears burn under their thick glossy hair, all was comparatively well. By-and-by bouquets began to be laid on my desk in the morning; by way of acknowledgment for this little foreign attention, I used sometimes to walk with a select few during recreation. In the course of conversation it befel once or twice that I made an unpremeditated attempt to rectify some of their singularly distorted notions of principle; especially I expressed my ideas of the evil and baseness of a lie. In an unguarded moment, I chanced to say that, of the two errors; I considered falsehood worse than an occasional lapse in church-attendance. The poor girls were tutored to report in Catholic ears whatever the Protestant teacher said. An edifying consequence ensued. Something — an unseen, an indefinite, a nameless — something stole between myself and these my best pupils: the bouquets continued to be offered, but conversation thenceforth became impracticable. As I paced the alleys or sat in the berceau, a girl never came to my right hand but a teacher, as if by magic, appeared at my left. Also, wonderful to relate, Madame's shoes of silence brought her continually to my back, as quick, as noiseless and unexpected, as some wandering zephyr.

The opinion of my Catholic acquaintance concerning my spiritual prospects was somewhat naïvely expressed to me on one occasion. A pensionnaire, to whom I had rendered some little service, exclaimed one day as she sat beside me: "Mademoiselle, what a pity you are a Protestant!"

"Why, Isabelle?"

"Parceque, quand vous serez morte — vous brûlerez tout de suite dans l'Enfer."

"Croyez-vous?"

"Certainement que j'y crois: tout le monde le sait; et d'ailleurs le prêtre me l'a dit."

Isabelle was an odd, blunt little creature. She added, sotto voce: "Pour assurer votre salut là-haut, on ferait bien de vous brûler toute vive ici-bas."

I laughed, as, indeed, it was impossible to do otherwise.

* * * * *

Has the reader forgotten Miss Ginevra Fanshawe? If so, I must be allowed to re-introduce that young lady as a thriving pupil of Madame Beck's; for such she was. On her arrival in the Rue Fossette, two or three days after my sudden settlement there, she encountered me with very little surprise. She must have had good blood in her veins, for never was any duchess more perfectly, radically, unaffectedly nonchalante than she: a weak, transient amaze was all she knew of the sensation of wonder. Most of her other faculties seemed to be in the same flimsy condition: her liking and disliking, her love and hate, were mere cobweb and gossamer; but she had one thing about her that seemed strong and durable enough, and that was — her selfishness.

She was not proud; and — bonne d'enfants as I was — she would forthwith have made of me a sort of friend and confidant. She teased me with a thousand vapid complaints about school-quarrels and household economy: the cookery was not to her taste; the people about her, teachers and pupils, she held to be despicable, because they were foreigners. I bore with her abuse of the Friday's salt fish and hard eggs — with her invective against the soup, the bread, the coffee — with some patience for a time; but at last, wearied by iteration, I turned crusty, and put her to rights: a thing I ought to have done in the very beginning, for a salutary setting down always agreed with her.

Much longer had I to endure her demands on me in the way of work. Her wardrobe, so far as concerned articles of external wear, was well and elegantly supplied; but there were other habiliments not so carefully provided: what she had, needed frequent repair. She hated needle-drudgery herself, and she would bring her hose, &c. to me in heaps, to be mended. A compliance of some weeks threatening to result in the establishment of an intolerable bore — I at last distinctly told her she must make up her mind to mend her own garments. She cried on receiving this information, and accused me of having ceased to be her friend; but I held by my decision, and let the hysterics pass as they could.

Notwithstanding these foibles, and various others needless to mention — but by no means of a refined or elevating character — how pretty she was! How charming she looked, when she came down on a sunny Sunday morning, well-dressed and well-humoured, robed in pale lilac silk, and with her fair long curls reposing on her white shoulders. Sunday was a holiday which she always passed with friends resident in town; and amongst these friends she speedily gave me to understand was one who would fain become something more. By glimpses and hints it was shown me, and by the general buoyancy of her look and manner it was ere long proved, that ardent admiration — perhaps genuine love — was at her command. She called her suitor "Isidore:" this, however, she intimated was not his real name, but one by which it pleased her to baptize him — his own, she hinted, not being "very pretty." Once, when she had been bragging about the vehemence of "Isidore's" attachment, I asked if she loved him in return.

"Comme cela," said she: "he is handsome, and he loves me to distraction, so that I am well amused. Ca suffit."

Finding that she carried the thing on longer than, from her very fickle tastes, I had anticipated, I one day took it upon me to make serious inquiries as to whether the gentleman was such as her parents, and especially her uncle — on whom, it appeared, she was dependent — would be likely to approve. She allowed that this was very doubtful, as she did not believe "Isidore" had much money.

"Do you encourage him?" I asked.

"Furieusement sometimes," said she.

"Without being certain that you will be permitted to marry him?"

"Oh, how dowdyish you are! I don't want to be married. I am too young."

"But if he loves you as much as you say, and yet it comes to nothing in the end, he will be made miserable."

"Of course he will break his heart. I should be shocked and, disappointed if he didn't."

"I wonder whether this M. Isidore is a fool?" said I.

"He is, about me; but he is wise in other things, à ce qu'on dit. Mrs. Cholmondeley considers him extremely clever: she says he will push his way by his talents; all I know is, that he does little more than sigh in my presence, and that I can wind him round my little finger."

Wishing to get a more definite idea of this love-stricken M. Isidore; whose position seemed to me of the least secure, I requested her to favour me with a personal description; but she could not describe: she had neither words nor the power of putting them together so as to make graphic phrases. She even seemed not properly to have noticed him: nothing of his looks, of the changes in his countenance, had touched her heart or dwelt in her memory — that he was "beau, mais plutôt bel homme que joli garçon," was all she could assert. My patience would often have failed, and my interest flagged, in listening to her, but for one thing. All the hints she dropped, all the details she gave, went unconsciously to prove, to my thinking, that M. Isidore's homage was offered with great delicacy and respect. I informed her very plainly that I believed him much too good for her, and intimated with equal plainness my impression that she was but a vain coquette. She laughed, shook her curls from her eyes, and danced away as if I had paid her a compliment.

Miss Ginevra's school-studies were little better than nominal; there were but three things she practised in earnest, viz. music, singing, and dancing; also embroidering the fine cambric handkerchiefs which she could not afford to buy ready worked: such mere trifles as lessons in history, geography, grammar, and arithmetic, she left undone, or got others to do for her. Very much of her time was spent in visiting. Madame, aware that her stay at school was now limited to a certain period, which would not be extended whether she made progress or not, allowed her great licence in this particular. Mrs. Cholmondeley — her chaperon — a gay, fashionable lady, invited her whenever she had company at her own house, and sometimes took her to evening-parties at the houses of her acquaintance. Ginevra perfectly approved this mode of procedure: it had but one inconvenience; she was obliged to be well dressed, and she had not money to buy variety of dresses. All her thoughts turned on this difficulty; her whole soul was occupied with expedients for effecting its solution. It was wonderful to witness the activity of her otherwise indolent mind on this point, and to see the much-daring intrepidity to which she was spurred by a sense of necessity, and the wish to shine.

She begged boldly of Mrs. Cholmondeley — boldly, I say: not with an air of reluctant shame, but in this strain: —

"My darling Mrs. C., I have nothing in the world fit to wear for your party next week; you must give me a book-muslin dress, and then a ceinture bleu celeste: do — there's an angel! will you?"

The "darling Mrs. C." yielded at first; but finding that applications increased as they were complied with, she was soon obliged, like all Miss Fanshawe's friends, to oppose resistance to encroachment. After a while I heard no more of Mrs. Cholmondeley’s presents; but still, visiting went on, and the absolutely necessary dresses continued to be supplied: also many little expensive etcetera — gloves, bouquets, even trinkets. These things, contrary to her custom, and even nature — for she was not secretive — were most sedulously kept out of sight for a time; but one evening, when she was going to a large party for which particular care and elegance of costume were demanded, she could not resist coming to my chamber to show herself in all her splendour.

Beautiful she looked: so young, so fresh, and with a delicacy of skin and flexibility of shape altogether English, and not found in the list of continental female charms. Her dress was new, costly, and perfect. I saw at a glance that it lacked none of those finishing details which cost so much, and give to the general effect such an air of tasteful completeness.

I viewed her from top to toe. She turned airily round that I might survey her on all sides. Conscious of her charms, she was in her best humour: her rather small blue eyes sparkled gleefully. She was going to bestow on me a kiss, in her school-girl fashion of showing her delights but I said, “Steady! Let us be Steady, and know what we are about, and find out the meaning of our magnificence” — and so put her off at arm’s length, to undergo cooler inspection.

“Shall I do?” was her question.

“Do?” said I. “There are different ways of doing; and, by my word, I don’t understand yours.”

“But how do I look?”

“You look well dressed.”

She thought the praise not warm enough, and proceeded to direct attention to the various decorative points of her attire. “Look at this parure,” said she. “The brooch, the ear-rings, the bracelets: no one in the school has such a set — not Madame herself.”

“I see them all.” (Pause.) “Did M. de Bassompierre give you those jewels?”

“My uncle knows nothing about them.”

“Were they presents from Mrs. Cholmondeley?”

“Not they, indeed. Mrs. Cholmondeley is a mean, stingy creature; she never gives me anything now.”

I did not choose to ask any further questions, but turned abruptly away.

“Now, old Crusty — old Diogenes” (these were her familiar terms for me when we disagreed), “what is the matter now?”

“Take yourself away. I have no pleasure in looking at you or your parure.”

For an instant, she seemed taken by surprise.

“What now, Mother Wisdom? I have not got into debt for it — that is, not for the jewels, nor the gloves, nor the bouquet. My dress is certainly not paid for, but uncle de Bassompierre will pay it in the bill: he never notices items, but just looks at the total; and he is so rich, one need not care about a few guineas more or less."

"Will you go? I want to shut the door.... Ginevra, people may tell you you are very handsome in that ball-attire; but, in my eyes, you will never look so pretty as you did in the gingham gown and plain straw bonnet you wore when I first saw you."

"Other people have not your puritanical tastes," was her angry reply.

"And, besides, I see no right you have to sermonize me."

"Certainly! I have little right; and you, perhaps, have still less to come flourishing and fluttering into my chamber — a mere jay in borrowed plumes. I have not the least respect for your feathers, Miss Fanshawe; and especially the peacock's eyes you call a parure: very pretty things, if you had bought them with money which was your own, and which you could well spare, but not at all pretty under present circumstances."

"On est là pour Mademoiselle Fanshawe!" was announced by the portress, and away she tripped.

This semi-mystery of the parure was not solved till two or three days afterwards, when she came to make a voluntary confession.

"You need not be sulky with me," she began, "in the idea that I am running somebody, papa or M. de Bassompierre, deeply into debt. I assure you nothing remains unpaid for, but the few dresses I have lately had: all the rest is settled."

"There," I thought, "lies the mystery; considering that they were not given you by Mrs. Cholmondeley, and that your own means are limited to a few shillings, of which I know you to be excessively careful."

"Ecoutez!" she went on, drawing near and speaking in her most confidential and coaxing tone; for my "sulkiness" was inconvenient to her: she liked me to be in a talking and listening mood, even if I only talked to chide and listened to rail. "Ecoutez, chère grogneuse! I will tell you all how and about it; and you will then see, not only how right the whole thing is, but how cleverly managed. In the first place, I must go out. Papa himself said that he wished me to see something of the world; he particularly remarked to Mrs. Cholmondeley, that, though I was a sweet creature enough, I had rather a bread-and-butter-eating, school-girl air; of which it was his special desire that I should get rid, by an introduction to society here, before I make my regular début in England. Well, then, if I go out, I must dress. Mrs. Cholmondeley is turned shabby, and will give nothing more; it would be too hard upon uncle to make him pay for all the things I need: that you can't deny — that agrees with your own preachments. Well, but SOMEBODY who heard me (quite by chance, I assure you) complaining to Mrs. Cholmondeley of my distressed circumstances, and what straits I was put to for an ornament or two — somebody, far from grudging one a present, was quite delighted at the idea of being permitted to offer some trifle. You should have seen what a blanc-bec he looked when he first spoke of it: how he hesitated and blushed, and positively trembled from fear of a repulse."

"That will do, Miss Fanshawe. I suppose I am to understand that M. Isidore is the benefactor: that it is from him you have accepted that costly parure; that he supplies your bouquets and your gloves?"

"You express yourself so disagreeably," said she, "one hardly knows how to answer; what I mean to say is, that I occasionally allow Isidore the pleasure and honour of expressing his homage by the offer of a trifle."

"It comes to the same thing…. Now, Ginevra, to speak the plain truth, I don't very well understand these matters; but I believe you are doing very wrong — seriously wrong. Perhaps, however, you now feel certain that you will be able to marry M. Isidore; your parents and uncle have given their consent, and, for your part, you love him entirely?"

"Mais pas du tout!" (she always had recourse to French when about to say something specially heartless and perverse). "Je suis sa reine, mais il n'est pas mon roi."

"Excuse me, I must believe this language is mere nonsense and coquetry. There is nothing great about you, yet you are above profiting by the good nature and purse of a man to whom you feel absolute indifference. You love M. Isidore far more than you think, or will avow."

"No. I danced with a young officer the other night, whom I love a thousand times more than he. I often wonder why I feel so very cold to Isidore, for everybody says he is handsome, and other ladies admire him; but, somehow, he bores me: let me see now how it is…."

And she seemed to make an effort to reflect. In this I encouraged her.

"Yes!" I said, "try to get a clear idea of the state of your mind. To me it seems in a great mess — chaotic as a rag-bag."

"It is something in this fashion," she cried out ere long: "the man is too romantic and devoted, and he expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be. He thinks I am perfect: furnished with all sorts of sterling qualities and solid virtues, such as I never had, nor intend to have. Now, one can't help, in his presence, rather trying to justify his good opinion; and it does so tire one to be goody, and to talk sense, — for he really thinks I am sensible. I am far more at my ease with you, old lady — you, you dear crosspatch — who take me at my lowest, and know me to be coquettish, and ignorant, and flirting, and fickle, and silly, and selfish, and all the other sweet things you and I have agreed to be a part of my character."

"This is all very well," I said, making a strenuous effort to preserve that gravity and severity which ran risk of being shaken by this whimsical candour, "but it does not alter that wretched business of the presents. Pack them up, Ginevra, like a good, honest girl, and send them back."

"Indeed, I won't," said she, stoutly.

"Then you are deceiving M. Isidore. It stands to reason that by accepting his presents you give him to understand he will one day receive an equivalent, in your regard…"

“But he won’t,” she interrupted: “he has his equivalent now, in the pleasure of seeing me wear them — quite enough for him: he is only bourgeois.”

This phrase, in its senseless arrogance, quite cured me of the temporary weakness which had made me relax my tone and aspect. She rattled on:

“My present business is to enjoy youth, and not to think of fettering myself, by promise or vow, to this man or that. When first I saw Isidore, I believed he would help me to enjoy it I believed he would be content with my being a pretty girl; and that we should meet and part and flutter about like two butterflies, and be happy. Lo, and behold! I find him at times as grave as a judge, and deep-feeling and thoughtful. Bah! Les penseurs, les hommes profonds et passionnés ne sont pas à mon goût. Le Colonel Alfred de Hamal suits me far better. Va pour les beaux fats et les jolis fripons! Vive les joies et les plaisirs! A bas les grandes passions et les sévères vertus!”

She looked for an answer to this tirade. I gave none.

“J’aime mon beau Colonel,” she went on: “je n’aimerai jamais son rival.

Je ne serai jamais femme de bourgeois, moi!”

I now signified that it was imperatively necessary my apartment should be relieved of the honour of her presence: she went away laughing.

CHAPTER X.

DR JOHN.

Madame Beck was a most consistent character; forbearing with all the world, and tender to no part of it. Her own children drew her into no deviation from the even tenor of her stoic calm. She was solicitous about her family, vigilant for their interests and physical well-being; but she never seemed to know the wish to take her little children upon her lap, to press their rosy lips with her own, to gather them in a genial embrace, to shower on them softly the benignant caress, the loving word.

I have watched her sometimes sitting in the garden, viewing the little bees afar off, as they walked in a distant alley with Trinette, their bonne; in her mien spoke care and prudence. I know she often pondered anxiously what she called "leur avenir;" but if the youngest, a puny and delicate but engaging child, chancing to spy her, broke from its nurse, and toddling down the walk, came all eager and laughing and panting to clasp her knee, Madame would just calmly put out one hand, so as to prevent inconvenient concussion from the child's sudden onset: "Prends garde, mon enfant!" she would say unmoved, patiently permit it to stand near her a few moments, and then, without smile or kiss, or endearing syllable, rise and lead it back to Trinette.

Her demeanour to the eldest girl was equally characteristic in another way. This was a vicious child. "Quelle peste que cette Désirée! Quel poison que cet enfant là!" were the expressions dedicated to her, alike in kitchen and in schoolroom. Amongst her other endowments she boasted an exquisite skill in the art, of provocation, sometimes driving her bonne and the servants almost wild. She would steal to their attics, open their drawers and boxes, wantonly tear their best caps and soil their best shawls; she would watch her opportunity to get at the buffet of the salle-à-manger, where she would smash articles of porcelain or glass — or to the cupboard of the storeroom, where she would plunder the preserves, drink the sweet wine, break jars and bottles, and so contrive as to throw the onus of suspicion on the cook and the kitchen-maid. All this when Madame saw, and of which when she received report, her sole observation, uttered with matchless serenity, was:

"Désirée a besoin d'une surveillance toute particulière." Accordingly she kept this promising olive-branch a good deal at her side. Never once, I believe, did she tell her faithfully of her faults, explain the evil of such habits, and show the results which must thence ensue. Surveillance must work the whole cure. It failed of course. Désirée was kept in some measure from the servants, but she teased and pillaged her mamma instead. Whatever belonging to Madame’s work-table or toilet she could lay her hands on, she stole and hid. Madame saw all this, but she still pretended not to see: she had not rectitude of soul to confront the child with her vices. When an article disappeared whose value rendered restitution necessary, she would profess to think that Désirée had taken it away in play, and beg her to restore it. Désirée was not to be so cheated: she had learned to bring falsehood to the aid of theft, and would deny having touched the brooch, ring, or scissors. Carrying on the hollow system, the mother would calmly assume an air of belief, and afterwards ceaselessly watch and dog the child till she tracked her: to her hiding-places — some hole in the garden-wall — some chink or cranny in garret or out-house. This done, Madame would send Désirée out for a walk with her bonne, and profit by her absence to rob the robber. Désirée proved herself the true daughter of her astute parent, by never suffering either her countenance or manner to betray the least sign of mortification on discovering the loss.

The second child, Fifine, was said to be like its dead father. Certainly, though the mother had given it her healthy frame, her blue eye and ruddy cheek, not from her was derived its moral being. It was an honest, gleeful little soul: a passionate, warm-tempered, bustling creature it was too, and of the sort likely to blunder often into perils and difficulties. One day it bethought itself to fall from top to bottom of a steep flight of stone steps; and when Madame, hearing the noise (she always heard every noise), issued from the salle-à-manger and picked it up, she said quietly, — “Cet enfant a un os cassé.”

At first we hoped this was not the case. It was, however, but too true: one little plump arm hung powerless.

“Let Meess” (meaning me) “take her,” said Madame; “et qu’on aille tout de suite chercher un fiacre.”

In a fiacre she promptly, but with admirable coolness and self-possession, departed to fetch a surgeon.

It appeared she did not find the family-surgeon at home; but that mattered not: she sought until she laid her hand on a substitute to her mind, and brought him back with her. Meantime I had cut the child’s sleeve from its arm, undressed and put it to bed.

We none of us, I suppose (by we I mean the bonne, the cook, the portress, and myself, all which personages were now gathered in the small and heated chamber), looked very scrutinizingly at the new doctor when he came into the room. I, at least, was taken up with endeavouring to soothe Fifine; whose cries (for she had good lungs) were appalling to hear. These cries redoubled in intensity as the stranger approached her bed; when he took her up, “Let alone!” she cried passionately, in her broken English (for she spoke English as did the other children). “I will not you: I will Dr. Pillule!”

“And Dr. Pillule is my very good friend,” was the answer, in perfect English; “but he is busy at a place three leagues off, and I am come in his stead. So now, when we get a little calmer, we must commence business; and we will soon have that unlucky little arm bandaged and in right order."

Hereupon he called for a glass of eau sucrée, fed her with some teaspoonfuls of the sweet liquid (Fifine was a frank gourmande; anybody could win her heart through her palate), promised her more when the operation should be over, and promptly went to work. Some assistance being needed, he demanded it of the cook, a robust, strong-armed woman; but she, the portress, and the nurse instantly fled. I did not like to touch that small, tortured limb, but thinking there was no alternative, my hand was already extended to do what was requisite. I was anticipated; Madame Beck had put out her own hand: hers was steady while mine trembled.

"Ca vaudra mieux," said the doctor, turning from me to her.

He showed wisdom in his choice. Mine would have been feigned stoicism, forced fortitude. Hers was neither forced nor feigned.

"Merci, Madame; très bien, fort bien!" said the operator when he had finished. "Voilà un sang-froid bien opportun, et qui vaut mille élans de sensibilité déplacée."

He was pleased with her firmness, she with his compliment. It was likely, too, that his whole general appearance, his voice, mien, and manner, wrought impressions in his favour. Indeed, when you looked well at him, and when a lamp was brought in — for it was evening and now waxing dusk — you saw that, unless Madame Beck had been less than woman, it could not well be otherwise. This young doctor (he was young) had no common aspect. His stature looked imposingly tall in that little chamber, and amidst that group of Dutch-made women; his profile was clear, fine and expressive: perhaps his eye glanced from face to face rather too vividly, too quickly, and too often; but it had a most pleasant character, and so had his mouth; his chin was full, cleft, Grecian, and perfect. As to his smile, one could not in a hurry make up one's mind as to the descriptive epithet it merited; there was something in it that pleased, but something too that brought surging up into the mind all one's foibles and weak points: all that could lay one open to a laugh. Yet Fifine liked this doubtful smile, and thought the owner genial: much as he had hurt her, she held out her hand to bid him a friendly good-night. He patted the little hand kindly, and then he and Madame went down-stairs together; she talking in her highest tide of spirits and volubility, he listening with an air of good-natured amenity, dashed with that unconscious roguish archness I find it difficult to describe.

I noticed that though he spoke French well, he spoke English better; he had, too, an English complexion, eyes, and form. I noticed more. As he passed me in leaving the room, turning his face in my direction one moment — not to address me, but to speak to Madame, yet so standing, that I almost necessarily looked up at him — a recollection which had been struggling to form in my memory, since the first moment I heard his voice, started up perfected. This was the very gentleman to whom I had spoken at the bureau; who had helped me in the matter of the trunk; who had been my guide through the dark, wet park. Listening, as he passed down the long vestibule out into the street, I recognised his very tread: it was the same firm and equal stride I had followed under the dripping trees.

* * * * *

It was, to be concluded that this young surgeon-physician's first visit to the Rue Fossette would be the last. The respectable Dr. Pillule being expected home the next day, there appeared no reason why his temporary substitute should again represent him; but the Fates had written their decree to the contrary.

Dr. Pillule had been summoned to see a rich old hypochondriac at the antique university town of Bouquin-Moisi, and upon his prescribing change of air and travel as remedies, he was retained to accompany the timid patient on a tour of some weeks; it but remained, therefore, for the new doctor to continue his attendance at the Rue Fossette.

I often saw him when he came; for Madame would not trust the little invalid to Trinette, but required me to spend much of my time in the nursery. I think he was skilful. Fifine recovered rapidly under his care, yet even her convalescence did not hasten his dismissal. Destiny and Madame Beck seemed in league, and both had ruled that he should make deliberate acquaintance with the vestibule, the private staircase and upper chambers of the Rue Fossette.

No sooner did Fifine emerge from his hands than Désirée declared herself ill. That possessed child had a genius for simulation, and captivated by the attentions and indulgences of a sick-room, she came to the conclusion that an illness would perfectly accommodate her tastes, and took her bed accordingly. She acted well, and her mother still better; for while the whole case was transparent to Madame Beck as the day, she treated it with an astonishingly well-assured air of gravity and good faith.

What surprised me was, that Dr. John (so the young Englishman had taught Fifine to call him, and we all took from her the habit of addressing him by this name, till it became an established custom, and he was known by no other in the Rue Fossette) — that Dr. John consented tacitly to adopt Madame's tactics, and to fall in with her manoeuvres. He betrayed, indeed, a period of comic doubt, cast one or two rapid glances from the child to the mother, indulged in an interval of self-consultation, but finally resigned himself with a good grace to play his part in the farce. Désirée eat like a raven, gambolled day and night in her bed, pitched tents with the sheets and blankets, lounged like a Turk amidst pillows and bolsters, diverted herself with throwing her shoes at her bonne and grimacing at her sisters — overflowed, in short, with unmerited health and evil spirits; only languishing when her mamma and the physician paid their diurnal visit. Madame Beck, I knew, was glad, at any price, to have her daughter in bed out of the way of mischief; but I wondered that Dr. John did not tire of the business.

Every day, on this mere pretext of a motive, he gave punctual attendance; Madame always received him with the same empressement, the same sunshine for himself, the same admirably counterfeited air of concern for her child. Dr. John wrote harmless prescriptions for the patient, and viewed her mother with a shrewdly sparkling eye. Madame caught his rallying looks without resenting them — she had too much good sense for that. Supple as the young doctor seemed, one could not despise him — this pliant part was evidently not adopted in the design to curry favour with his employer: while he liked his office at the pensionnat, and lingered strangely about the Rue Fossette, he was independent, almost careless in his carriage there; and yet, too, he was often thoughtful and preoccupied.

It was not perhaps my business to observe the mystery of his bearing, or search out its origin or aim; but, placed as I was, I could hardly help it. He laid himself open to my observation, according to my presence in the room just that degree of notice and consequence a person of my exterior habitually expects: that is to say, about what is given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner's work, and carpets of no striking pattern. Often, while waiting for Madame, he would muse, smile, watch, or listen like a man who thinks himself alone. I, meantime, was free to puzzle over his countenance and movements, and wonder what could be the meaning of that peculiar interest and attachment — all mixed up with doubt and strangeness, and inexplicably ruled by some presiding spell — which wedded him to this demi-convent, secluded in the built-up core of a capital. He, I believe, never remembered that I had eyes in my head, much less a brain behind them.

Nor would he ever have found this out, but that one day, while he sat in the sunshine and I was observing the colouring of his hair, whiskers, and complexion — the whole being of such a tone as a strong light brings out with somewhat perilous force (indeed I recollect I was driven to compare his beamy head in my thoughts to that of the "golden image" which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up), an idea new, sudden, and startling, riveted my attention with an over-mastering strength and power of attraction. I know not to this day how I looked at him: the force of surprise, and also of conviction, made me forget myself; and I only recovered wonted consciousness when I saw that his notice was arrested, and that it had caught my movement in a clear little oval mirror fixed in the side of the window recess — by the aid of which reflector Madame often secretly spied persons walking in the garden below. Though of so gay and sanguine a temperament, he was not without a certain nervous sensitiveness which made him ill at ease under a direct, inquiring gaze. On surprising me thus, he turned and said, in a tone which, though courteous, had just so much dryness in it as to mark a shade of annoyance, as well as to give to what was said the character of rebuke, "Mademoiselle does not spare me: I am not vain enough to fancy that it is my merits which attract her attention; it must then be some defect. Dare I ask — what?”

I was confounded, as the reader may suppose, yet not with an irrecoverable confusion; being conscious that it was from no emotion of incautious admiration, nor yet in a spirit of unjustifiable inquisitiveness, that I had incurred this reproof. I might have cleared myself on the spot, but would not. I did not speak. I was not in the habit of speaking to him. Suffering him, then, to think what he chose and accuse me of what he would, I resumed some work I had dropped, and kept my head bent over it during the remainder of his stay. There is a perverse mood of the mind which is rather soothed than irritated by misconstruction; and in quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure, I think, in being consummately ignored. What honest man, on being casually taken for a housebreaker, does not feel rather tickled than vexed at the mistake?

CHAPTER XI.

THE PORTRESS'S CABINET.

It was summer and very hot. Georgette, the youngest of Madame Beck's children, took a fever. Désirée, suddenly cured of her ailments, was, together with Fifine, packed off to Bonne-Maman, in the country, by way of precaution against infection. Medical aid was now really needed, and Madame, choosing to ignore the return of Dr. Pillule, who had been at home a week, conjured his English rival to continue his visits. One or two of the pensionnaires complained of headache, and in other respects seemed slightly to participate in Georgette's ailment. "Now, at last," I thought, "Dr. Pillule must be recalled: the prudent directress will never venture to permit the attendance of so young a man on the pupils."

The directress was very prudent, but she could also be intrepidly venturous. She actually introduced Dr. John to the school-division of the premises, and established him in attendance on the proud and handsome Blanche de Melcy, and the vain, flirting Angélique, her friend. Dr. John, I thought, testified a certain gratification at this mark of confidence; and if discretion of bearing could have justified the step, it would by him have been amply justified. Here, however, in this land of convents and confessionals, such a presence as his was not to be suffered with impunity in a "pensionnat de demoiselles." The school gossiped, the kitchen whispered, the town caught the rumour, parents wrote letters and paid visits of remonstrance. Madame, had she been weak, would now have been lost: a dozen rival educational houses were ready to improve this false step — if false step it were — to her ruin; but Madame was not weak, and little Jesuit though she might be, yet I clapped the hands of my heart, and with its voice cried "brava!" as I watched her able bearing, her skilled management, her temper and her firmness on this occasion.

She met the alarmed parents with a good-humoured, easy grace for nobody matched her in, I know not whether to say the possession or the assumption of a certain "rondeur et franchise de bonne femme;" which on various occasions gained the point aimed at with instant and complete success, where severe gravity and serious reasoning would probably have failed.

"Ce pauvre Docteur Jean!" she would say, chuckling and rubbing joyously her fat little white hands; "ce cher jeune homme! le meilleur créature du monde!" and go on to explain how she happened to be employing him for her own children, who were so fond of him they would scream themselves into fits at the thought of another doctor; how, where she had confidence for her own, she thought it natural to repose trust for others, and au reste, it was only the most temporary expedient in the world; Blanche and Angélique had the migraine; Dr. John had written a prescription; voilà tout!

The parents' mouths were closed. Blanche and Angélique saved her all remaining trouble by chanting loud duets in their physician's praise; the other pupils echoed them, unanimously declaring that when they were ill they would have Dr. John and nobody else; and Madame laughed, and the parents laughed too. The Labassecouriens must have a large organ of philoprogenitiveness: at least the indulgence of offspring is carried by them to excessive lengths; the law of most households being the children's will. Madame now got credit for having acted on this occasion in a spirit of motherly partiality: she came off with flying colours; people liked her as a directress better than ever.

To this day I never fully understood why she thus risked her interest for the sake of Dr. John. What people said, of course I know well: the whole house — pupils, teachers, servants included — affirmed that she was going to marry him. So they had settled it; difference of age seemed to make no obstacle in their eyes: it was to be so.

It must be admitted that appearances did not wholly discountenance this idea; Madame seemed so bent on retaining his services, so oblivious of her former protégé, Pillule. She made, too, such a point of personally receiving his visits, and was so unfailingly cheerful, blithe, and benignant in her manner to him. Moreover, she paid, about this time, marked attention to dress: the morning dishabille, the nightcap and shawl, were discarded; Dr. John's early visits always found her with auburn braids all nicely arranged, silk dress trimly fitted on, neat laced brodequins in lieu of slippers: in short the whole toilette complete as a model, and fresh as a flower. I scarcely think, however, that her intention in this went further than just to show a very handsome man that she was not quite a plain woman; and plain she was not. Without beauty of feature or elegance of form, she pleased. Without youth and its gay graces, she cheered. One never tired of seeing her: she was never monotonous, or insipid, or colourless, or flat. Her unfaded hair, her eye with its temperate blue light, her cheek with its wholesome fruit-like bloom — these things pleased in moderation, but with constancy.

Had she, indeed, floating visions of adopting Dr. John as a husband, taking him to her well-furnished home, endowing him with her savings, which were said to amount to a moderate competency, and making him comfortable for the rest of his life? Did Dr. John suspect her of such visions? I have met him coming out of her presence with a mischievous half-smile about his lips, and in his eyes a look as of masculine vanity elate and tickled. With all his good looks and good-nature, he was not perfect; he must have been very imperfect if he roguishly encouraged aims he never intended to be successful. But did he not intend them to be successful? People said he had no money, that he was wholly dependent upon his profession. Madame — though perhaps some fourteen years his senior — was yet the sort of woman never to grow old, never to wither, never to break down. They certainly were on good terms. He perhaps was not in love; but how many people ever do love, or at least marry for love, in this world. We waited the end.

For what he waited, I do not know, nor for what he watched; but the peculiarity of his manner, his expectant, vigilant, absorbed, eager look, never wore off: it rather intensified. He had never been quite within the compass of my penetration, and I think he ranged farther and farther beyond it.

One morning little Georgette had been more feverish and consequently more peevish; she was crying, and would not be pacified. I thought a particular draught ordered, disagreed with her, and I doubted whether it ought to be continued; I waited impatiently for the doctor's coming in order to consult him.

The door-bell rang, he was admitted; I felt sure of this, for I heard his voice addressing the portress. It was his custom to mount straight to the nursery, taking about three degrees of the staircase at once, and coming upon us like a cheerful surprise. Five minutes elapsed — ten — and I saw and heard nothing of him. What could he be doing? Possibly waiting in the corridor below. Little Georgette still piped her plaintive wail, appealing to me by her familiar term, "Minnie, Minnie, me very poorly!" till my heart ached. I descended to ascertain why he did not come. The corridor was empty. Whither was he vanished? Was he with Madame in the salle-à-manger? Impossible: I had left her but a short time since, dressing in her own chamber. I listened. Three pupils were just then hard at work practising in three proximate rooms — the dining-room and the greater and lesser drawing-rooms, between which and the corridor there was but the portress's cabinet communicating with the salons, and intended originally for a boudoir. Farther off, at a fourth instrument in the oratory, a whole class of a dozen or more were taking a singing lesson, and just then joining in a "barcarole" (I think they called it), whereof I yet remember these words "fraîchë," "brisë," and "Venisë." Under these circumstances, what could I hear? A great deal, certainly; had it only been to the purpose.

Yes; I heard a giddy treble laugh in the above-mentioned little cabinet, close by the door of which I stood — that door half-unclosed; a man's voice in a soft, deep, pleading tone, uttered some, words, whereof I only caught the adjuration, "For God's sake!" Then, after a second's pause, forth issued Dr. John, his eye full shining, but not with either joy or triumph; his fair English cheek high-coloured; a baffled, tortured, anxious, and yet a tender meaning on his brow.

The open door served me as a screen; but had I been full in his way, I believe he would have passed without seeing me. Some mortification, some strong vexation had hold of his soul: or rather, to write my impressions now as I received them at the time I should say some sorrow, some sense of injustice. I did not so much think his pride was hurt, as that his affections had been wounded — cruelly wounded, it seemed to me. But who was the torturer? What being in that house had him so much in her power? Madame I believed to be in her chamber; the room whence he had stepped was dedicated to the portress's sole use; and she, Rosine Matou, an unprincipled though pretty little French grisette, airy, fickle, dressy, vain, and mercenary — it was not, surely, to her hand he owed the ordeal through which he seemed to have passed?

But while I pondered, her voice, clear, though somewhat sharp, broke out in a lightsome French song, trilling through the door still ajar: I glanced in, doubting my senses. There at the table she sat in a smart dress of "jaconas rose," trimming a tiny blond cap: not a living thing save herself was in the room, except indeed some gold fish in a glass globe, some flowers in pots, and a broad July sunbeam.

Here was a problem: but I must go up-stairs to ask about the medicine.

Dr. John sat in a chair at Georgette's bedside; Madame stood before him; the little patient had been examined and soothed, and now lay composed in her crib. Madame Beck, as I entered, was discussing the physician's own health, remarking on some real or fancied change in his looks, charging him with over-work, and recommending rest and change of air. He listened good-naturedly, but with laughing indifference, telling her that she was "trop bonne," and that he felt perfectly well. Madame appealed to me — Dr. John following her movement with a slow glance which seemed to express languid surprise at reference being made to a quarter so insignificant.

"What do you think, Miss Lucie?" asked Madame. "Is he not paler and thinner?"

It was very seldom that I uttered more than monosyllables in Dr. John's presence; he was the kind of person with whom I was likely ever to remain the neutral, passive thing he thought me. Now, however, I took licence to answer in a phrase: and a phrase I purposely made quite significant.

"He looks ill at this moment; but perhaps it is owing to some temporary cause: Dr. John may have been vexed or harassed." I cannot tell how he took this speech, as I never sought his face for information. Georgette here began to ask me in her broken English if she might have a glass of eau sucrée. I answered her in English. For the first time, I fancy, he noticed that I spoke his language; hitherto he had always taken me for a foreigner, addressing me as "Mademoiselle," and giving in French the requisite directions about the children's treatment. He seemed on the point of making a remark; but thinking better of it, held his tongue.

Madame recommenced advising him; he shook his head, laughing, rose and bid her good-morning, with courtesy, but still with the regardless air of one whom too much unsolicited attention was surfeiting and spoiling.

When he was gone, Madame dropped into the chair he had just left; she rested her chin in her hand; all that was animated and amiable vanished from her face: she looked stony and stern, almost mortified and morose. She sighed; a single, but a deep sigh. A loud bell rang for morning-school. She got up; as she passed a dressing-table with a glass upon it, she looked at her reflected image. One single white hair streaked her nut-brown tresses; she plucked it out with a shudder. In the full summer daylight, her face, though it still had the colour, could plainly be seen to have lost the texture of youth; and then, where were youth's contours? Ah, Madame! wise as you were, even you knew weakness. Never had I pitied Madame before, but my heart softened towards her, when she turned darkly from the glass. A calamity had come upon her. That hag Disappointment was greeting her with a grisly "All-hail," and her soul rejected the intimacy.

But Rosine! My bewilderment there surpasses description. I embraced five opportunities of passing her cabinet that day, with a view to contemplating her charms, and finding out the secret of their influence. She was pretty, young, and wore a well-made dress. All very good points, and, I suppose, amply sufficient to account, in any philosophic mind, for any amount of agony and distraction in a young man, like Dr. John. Still, I could not help forming half a wish that the said doctor were my brother; or at least that he had a sister or a mother who would kindly sermonize him. I say half a wish; I broke it, and flung it away before it became a whole one, discovering in good time its exquisite folly. "Somebody," I argued, "might as well sermonize Madame about her young physician: and what good would that do?"

I believe Madame sermonized herself. She did not behave weakly, or make herself in any shape ridiculous. It is true she had neither strong feelings to overcome, nor tender feelings by which to be miserably pained. It is true likewise that she had an important avocation, a real business to fill her time, divert her thoughts, and divide her interest. It is especially true that she possessed a genuine good sense which is not given to all women nor to all men; and by dint of these combined advantages she behaved wisely — she behaved well. Brava! once more, Madame Beck. I saw you matched against an Apollyon of a predilection; you fought a good fight, and you overcame!

CHAPTER XII.

THE CASKET.

Behind the house at the Rue Fossette there was a garden — large, considering that it lay in the heart of a city, and to my recollection at this day it seems pleasant: but time, like distance, lends to certain scenes an influence so softening; and where all is stone around, blank wall and hot pavement, how precious seems one shrub, how lovely an enclosed and planted spot of ground!

There went a tradition that Madame Beck's house had in old days been a convent. That in years gone by — how long gone by I cannot tell, but I think some centuries — before the city had over-spread this quarter, and when it was tilled ground and avenue, and such deep and leafy seclusion as ought to embosom a religious house-that something had happened on this site which, rousing fear and inflicting horror, had left to the place the inheritance of a ghost-story. A vague tale went of a black and white nun, sometimes, on some night or nights of the year, seen in some part of this vicinage. The ghost must have been built out some ages ago, for there were houses all round now; but certain convent-relics, in the shape of old and huge fruit-trees, yet consecrated the spot; and, at the foot of one — a Methuselah of a pear-tree, dead, all but a few boughs which still faithfully renewed their perfumed snow in spring, and their honey-sweet pendants in autumn — you saw, in scraping away the mossy earth between the half-bared roots, a glimpse of slab, smooth, hard, and black. The legend went, unconfirmed and unaccredited, but still propagated, that this was the portal of a vault, imprisoning deep beneath that ground, on whose surface grass grew and flowers bloomed, the bones of a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear middle ages had here buried alive for some sin against her vow. Her shadow it was that tremblers had feared, through long generations after her poor frame was dust; her black robe and white veil that, for timid eyes, moonlight and shade had mocked, as they fluctuated in the night-wind through the garden-thicket.

Independently of romantic rubbish, however, that old garden had its charms. On summer mornings I used to rise early, to enjoy them alone; on summer evenings, to linger solitary, to keep tryste with the rising moon, or taste one kiss of the evening breeze, or fancy rather than feel the freshness of dew descending. The turf was verdant, the gravelled walks were white; sun-bright nasturtiums clustered beautiful about the roots of the doddered orchard giants. There was a large berceau, above which spread the shade of an acacia; there was a smaller, more sequestered bower, nestled in the vines which ran all along a high and grey wall, and gathered their tendrils in a knot of beauty, and hung their clusters in loving profusion about the favoured spot where jasmine and ivy met and married them.

Doubtless at high noon, in the broad, vulgar middle of the day, when Madame Beck's large school turned out rampant, and externes and pensionnaires were spread abroad, vying with the denizens of the boys' college close at hand, in the brazen exercise of their lungs and limbs — doubtless then the garden was a trite, trodden-down place enough. But at sunset or the hour of salut, when the externes were gone home, and the boarders quiet at their studies; pleasant was it then to stray down the peaceful alleys, and hear the bells of St. Jean Baptiste peal out with their sweet, soft, exalted sound.

I was walking thus one evening, and had been detained farther within the verge of twilight than usual, by the still-deepening calm, the mellow coolness, the fragrant breathing with which flowers no sunshine could win now answered the persuasion of the dew. I saw by a light in the oratory window that the Catholic household were then gathered to evening prayer — a rite, from attendance on which, I now and then, as a Protestant, exempted myself.

"One moment longer," whispered solitude and the summer moon, "stay with us: all is truly quiet now; for another quarter of an hour your presence will not be missed: the day's heat and bustle have tired you; enjoy these precious minutes."

The windowless backs of houses built in this garden, and in particular the whole of one side, was skirted by the rear of a long line of premises — being the boarding-houses of the neighbouring college. This rear, however, was all blank stone, with the exception of certain attic loopholes high up, opening from the sleeping-rooms of the women-servants, and also one casement in a lower story said to mark the chamber or study of a master. But, though thus secure, an alley, which ran parallel with the very high wall on that side the garden, was forbidden to be entered by the pupils. It was called indeed "l'allée défendue," and any girl setting foot there would have rendered herself liable to as severe a penalty as the mild rules of Madame Beck's establishment permitted. Teachers might indeed go there with impunity; but as the walk was narrow, and the neglected shrubs were grown very thick and close on each side, weaving overhead a roof of branch and leaf which the sun's rays penetrated but in rare chequers, this alley was seldom entered even during day, and after dusk was carefully shunned.

From the first I was tempted to make an exception to this rule of avoidance: the seclusion, the very gloom of the walk attracted me. For a long time the fear of seeming singular scared me away; but by degrees, as people became accustomed to me and my habits, and to such shades of peculiarity as were engrained in my nature — shades, certainly not striking enough to interest, and perhaps not prominent enough to offend, but born in and with me, and no more to be parted with than my identity — by slow degrees I became a frequenter of this strait and narrow path. I made myself gardener of some tintless flowers that grew between its closely-ranked shrubs; I cleared away the relics of past autumns, choking up a rustic seat at the far end. Borrowing of Goton, the cuisinière, a pail of water and a scrubbing-brush, I made this seat clean. Madame saw me at work and smiled approbation: whether sincerely or not I don't know; but she seemed sincere.

"Voyez-vous," cried she, "comme elle est propre, cette demoiselle Lucie? Vous aimez done cette allée, Meess?" "Yes," I said, "it is quiet and shady."

"C'est juste," cried she with an air of bonté; and she kindly recommended me to confine myself to it as much as I chose, saying, that as I was not charged with the surveillance, I need not trouble myself to walk with the pupils: only I might permit her children to come there, to talk English with me.

On the night in question, I was sitting on the hidden seat reclaimed from fungi and mould, listening to what seemed the far-off sounds of the city. Far off, in truth, they were not: this school was in the city's centre; hence, it was but five minutes' walk to the park, scarce ten to buildings of palatial splendour. Quite near were wide streets brightly lit, teeming at this moment with life: carriages were rolling through them to balls or to the opera. The same hour which tolled curfew for our convent, which extinguished each lamp, and dropped the curtain round each couch, rang for the gay city about us the summons to festal enjoyment. Of this contrast I thought not, however: gay instincts my nature had few; ball or opera I had never seen; and though often I had heard them described, and even wished to see them, it was not the wish of one who hopes to partake a pleasure if she could only reach it — who feels fitted to shine in some bright distant sphere, could she but thither win her way; it was no yearning to attain, no hunger to taste; only the calm desire to look on a new thing.

A moon was in the sky, not a full moon, but a young crescent. I saw her through a space in the boughs overhead. She and the stars, visible beside her, were no strangers where all else was strange: my childhood knew them. I had seen that golden sign with the dark globe in its curve leaning back on azure, beside an old thorn at the top of an old field, in Old England, in long past days, just as it now leaned back beside a stately spire in this continental capital.

Oh, my childhood! I had feelings: passive as I lived, little as I spoke, cold as I looked, when I thought of past days, I could feel. About the present, it was better to be stoical; about the future — such a future as mine — to be dead. And in catalepsy and a dead trance, I studiously held the quick of my nature.

At that time, I well remember whatever could excite — certain accidents of the weather, for instance, were almost dreaded by me, because they woke the being I was always lulling, and stirred up a craving cry I could not satisfy. One night a thunder-storm broke; a sort of hurricane shook us in our beds: the

Catholics rose in panic and prayed to their saints. As for me, the tempest took hold of me with tyranny: I was roughly roused and obliged to live. I got up and dressed myself, and creeping outside the casement close by my bed, sat on its ledge, with my feet on the roof of a lower adjoining building. It was wet, it was wild, it was pitch-dark. Within the dormitory they gathered round the night-lamp in consternation, praying loud. I could not go in: too resistless was the delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, pealing out such an ode as language never delivered to man — too terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts.

I did long, achingly, then and for four and twenty hours afterwards, for something to fetch me out of my present existence, and lead me upwards and onwards. This longing, and all of a similar kind, it was necessary to knock on the head; which I did, figuratively, after the manner of Jael to Sisera, driving a nail through their temples. Unlike Sisera, they did not die: they were but transiently stunned, and at intervals would turn on the nail with a rebellious wrench: then did the temples bleed, and the brain thrill to its core.

To-night, I was not so mutinous, nor so miserable. My Sisera lay quiet in the tent, slumbering; and if his pain ached through his slumbers, something like an angel — the ideal — knelt near, dropping balm on the soothed temples, holding before the sealed eyes a magic glass, of which the sweet, solemn visions were repeated in dreams, and shedding a reflex from her moonlight wings and robe over the transfixed sleeper, over the tent threshold, over all the landscape lying without. Jael, the stern woman; sat apart, relenting somewhat over her captive; but more prone to dwell on the faithful expectation of Heber coming home. By which words I mean that the cool peace and dewy sweetness of the night filled me with a mood of hope: not hope on any definite point, but a general sense of encouragement and heart-ease.

Should not such a mood, so sweet, so tranquil, so unwonted, have been the harbinger of good? Alas, no good came of it! I Presently the rude Real burst coarsely in — all evil grovelling and repellent as she too often is.

Amid the intense stillness of that pile of stone overlooking the walk, the trees, the high wall, I heard a sound; a casement [all the windows here are casements, opening on hinges] creaked. Ere I had time to look up and mark where, in which story, or by whom unclosed, a tree overhead shook, as if struck by a missile; some object dropped prone at my feet.

Nine was striking by St. Jean Baptiste's clock; day was fading, but it was not dark: the crescent moon aided little, but the deep gilding of that point in heaven where the sun beamed last, and the crystalline clearness of a wide space above, sustained the summer twilight; even in my dark walk I could, by approaching an opening, have managed to read print of a small type. Easy was it to see then that the missile was a box, a small box of white and coloured ivory; its loose lid opened in my hand; violets lay within, violets smothering a closely folded bit of pink paper, a note, superscribed, "Pour la robe grise." I wore indeed a dress of French grey.

Good. Was this a billet-doux? A thing I had heard of, but hitherto had not had the honour of seeing or handling. Was it this sort of commodity I held between my finger and thumb at this moment?

Scarcely: I did not dream it for a moment. Suitor or admirer my very thoughts had not conceived. All the teachers had dreams of some lover; one (but she was naturally of a credulous turn) believed in a future husband. All the pupils above fourteen knew of some prospective bridegroom; two or three were already affianced by their parents, and had been so from childhood: but into the realm of feelings and hopes which such prospects open, my speculations, far less my presumptions, had never once had warrant to intrude. If the other teachers went into town, or took a walk on the boulevards, or only attended mass, they were very certain (according to the accounts brought back) to meet with some individual of the "opposite sex," whose rapt, earnest gaze assured them of their power to strike and to attract. I can't say that my experience tallied with theirs, in this respect. I went to church and I took walks, and am very well convinced that nobody minded me. There was not a girl or woman in the Rue Fossette who could not, and did not testify to having received an admiring beam from our young doctor's blue eyes at one time or other. I am obliged, however humbling it may sound, to except myself: as far as I was concerned, those blue eyes were guiltless, and calm as the sky, to whose tint theirs seemed akin. So it came to pass that I heard the others talk, wondered often at their gaiety, security, and self-satisfaction, but did not trouble myself to look up and gaze along the path they seemed so certain of treading. This then was no billet-doux; and it was in settled conviction to the contrary that I quietly opened it. Thus it ran — I translate: —

"Angel of my dreams! A thousand, thousand thanks for the promise kept: scarcely did I venture to hope its fulfilment. I believed you, indeed, to be half in jest; and then you seemed to think the enterprise beset with such danger — the hour so untimely, the alley so strictly secluded — often, you said, haunted by that dragon, the English teacher — une véritable bégueule Britannique à ce que vous dites — espèce de monstre, brusque et rude comme un vieux caporal de grenadiers, et revêche comme une religieuse" (the reader will excuse my modesty in allowing this flattering sketch of my amiable self to retain the slight veil of the original tongue). "You are aware," went on this precious effusion, "that little Gustave, on account of his illness, has been removed to a master's chamber — that favoured chamber, whose lattice overlooks your prison-ground. There, I, the best uncle in the world, am admitted to visit him. How tremblingly I approached the window and glanced into your Eden — an Eden for me, though a desert for you! — how I feared to behold vacancy, or the dragon aforesaid! How my heart palpitated with delight when, through apertures in the envious boughs, I at once caught the gleam of your graceful straw-hat, and the waving of your grey dress — dress that I should recognise amongst a thousand. But why, my angel, will you not look up? Cruel, to deny me one ray of those adorable eyes! — how a single glance would have revived me! I write this in fiery haste; while the physician examines Gustave, I snatch an opportunity to enclose it in a small casket, together with a bouquet of flowers, the sweetest that blow — yet less sweet than thee, my Peri — my all-charming! ever thine-thou well knowest whom!"

"I wish I did know whom," was my comment; and the wish bore even closer reference to the person addressed in this choice document, than to the writer thereof. Perhaps it was from the fiancé of one of the engaged pupils; and, in that case, there was no great harm done or intended — only a small irregularity. Several of the girls, the majority, indeed, had brothers or cousins at the neighbouring college. But "la robe grise, le chapeau de paille," here surely was a clue — a very confusing one. The straw-hat was an ordinary garden head-screen, common to a score besides myself. The grey dress hardly gave more definite indication. Madame Beck herself ordinarily wore a grey dress just now; another teacher, and three of the pensionnaires, had had grey dresses purchased of the same shade and fabric as mine: it was a sort of every-day wear which happened at that time to be in vogue.

Meanwhile, as I pondered, I knew I must go in. Lights, moving in the dormitory, announced that prayers were over, and the pupils going to bed. Another half-hour and all doors would be locked — all lights extinguished. The front door yet stood open, to admit into the heated house the coolness of the summer night; from the portress's cabinet close by shone a lamp, showing the long vestibule with the two-leaved drawing-room doors on one side, the great street-door closing the vista.

All at once, quick rang the bell — quick, but not loud — a cautious tinkle — a sort of warning metal whisper. Rosine darted from her cabinet and ran to open. The person she admitted stood with her two minutes in parley: there seemed a demur, a delay. Rosine came to the garden door, lamp in hand; she stood on the steps, lifting her lamp, looking round vaguely.

"Quel conte!" she cried, with a coquettish laugh. "Personne n'y a été."

"Let me pass," pleaded a voice I knew: "I ask but five minutes;" and a familiar shape, tall and grand (as we of the Rue Fossette all thought it), issued from the house, and strode down amongst the beds and walks. It was sacrilege — the intrusion of a man into that spot, at that hour; but he knew himself privileged, and perhaps he trusted to the friendly night. He wandered down the alleys, looking on this side and on that — he was lost in the shrubs, trampling flowers and breaking branches in his search — he penetrated at last the "forbidden walk." There I met him, like some ghost, I suppose.

"Dr. John! it is found."

He did not ask by whom, for with his quick eye he perceived that I held it in my hand.

"Do not betray her," he said, looking at me as if I were indeed a dragon.

"Were I ever so disposed to treachery, I cannot betray what I do not know," was my answer. "Read the note, and you will see how little it reveals."

"Perhaps you have read it," I thought to myself; and yet I could not believe he wrote it: that could hardly be his style: besides, I was fool enough to think there would be a degree of hardship in his calling me such names. His own look vindicated him; he grew hot, and coloured as he read.

"This is indeed too much: this is cruel, this is humiliating," were the words that fell from him.

I thought it was cruel, when I saw his countenance so moved. No matter whether he was to blame or not; somebody, it seemed to me, must be more to blame.

"What shall you do about it?" he inquired of me. "Shall you tell Madame

Beck what you have found, and cause a stir — an esclandre?"

I thought I ought to tell, and said so; adding that I did not believe there would be either stir or esclandre: Madame was much too prudent to make a noise about an affair of that sort connected with her establishment.

He stood looking down and meditating. He was both too proud and too honourable to entreat my secresy on a point which duty evidently commanded me to communicate. I wished to do right, yet loathed to grieve or injure him. Just then Rosine glanced out through the open door; she could not see us, though between the trees I could plainly see her: her dress was grey, like mine. This circumstance, taken in connection with prior transactions, suggested to me that perhaps the case, however deplorable, was one in which I was under no obligation whatever to concern myself. Accordingly, I said, —
"If you can assure me that none of Madame Beck's pupils are implicated in this business, I shall be very happy to stand aloof from all interference. Take the casket, the bouquet, and the billet; for my part, I gladly forget the whole affair."

"Look there!" he whispered suddenly, as his hand closed on what I offered, and at the same time he pointed through the boughs.

I looked. Behold Madame, in shawl, wrapping-gown, and slippers, softly descending the steps, and stealing like a cat round the garden: in two minutes she would have been upon Dr. John. If she were like a cat, however, he, quite as much, resembled a leopard: nothing could be lighter than his tread when he chose. He watched, and as she turned a corner, he took the garden at two noiseless bounds. She reappeared, and he was gone. Rosine helped him, instantly interposing the door between him and his huntress. I, too, might have got, away, but I preferred to meet Madame openly.

Though it was my frequent and well-known custom to spend twilight in the garden, yet, never till now, had I remained so late. Full sure was I that Madame had missed — was come in search of me, and designed now to pounce on the defaulter unawares. I expected a reprimand. No. Madame was all goodness. She tendered not even a remonstrance; she testified no shade of surprise. With that consummate tact of hers, in which I believe she was never surpassed by living thing, she even professed merely to have issued forth to taste "la brise du soir."

“Quelle belle nuit!” cried she, looking up at the stars — the moon was now gone down behind the broad tower of Jean Baptiste. “Qu’il fait bon? que l’air est frais!”

And, instead of sending me in, she detained me to take a few turns with her down the principal alley. When at last we both re-entered, she leaned affably on my shoulder by way of support in mounting the front-door steps; at parting, her cheek was presented to my lips, and “Bon soir, my bonne amie; dormez bien!” was her kindly adieu for the night.

I caught myself smiling as I lay awake and thoughtful on my couch — smiling at Madame. The unction, the suavity of her behaviour offered, for one who knew her, a sure token that suspicion of some kind was busy in her brain. From some aperture or summit of observation, through parted bough or open window, she had doubtless caught a glimpse, remote or near, deceptive or instructive, of that night’s transactions. Finely accomplished as she was in the art of surveillance, it was next to impossible that a casket could be thrown into her garden, or an interloper could cross her walks to seek it, without that she, in shaken branch, passing shade, unwonted footfall, or stilly murmur (and though Dr. John had spoken very low in the few words he dropped me, yet the hum of his man’s voice pervaded, I thought, the whole conventual ground) — without, I say, that she should have caught intimation of things extraordinary transpiring on her premises. What things, she might by no means see, or at that time be able to discover; but a delicious little ravelled plot lay tempting her to disentanglement; and in the midst, folded round and round in cobwebs, had she not secured “Meess Lucie” clumsily involved, like the foolish fly she was?

CHAPTER XIII.

A SNEEZE OUT OF SEASON.

I had occasion to smile — nay, to laugh, at Madame again, within the space of four and twenty hours after the little scene treated of in the last chapter.

Villette owns a climate as variable, though not so humid, as that of any English town. A night of high wind followed upon that soft sunset, and all the next day was one of dry storm — dark, beclouded, yet rainless, — the streets were dim with sand and dust, whirled from the boulevards. I know not that even lovely weather would have tempted me to spend the evening-time of study and recreation where I had spent it yesterday. My alley, and, indeed, all the walks and shrubs in the garden, had acquired a new, but not a pleasant interest; their seclusion was now become precarious; their calm — insecure. That casement which rained billets, had vulgarized the once dear nook it overlooked; and elsewhere, the eyes of the flowers had gained vision, and the knots in the tree-boles listened like secret ears. Some plants there were, indeed, trodden down by Dr. John in his search, and his hasty and heedless progress, which I wished to prop up, water, and revive; some footmarks, too, he had left on the beds: but these, in spite of the strong wind, I found a moment's leisure to efface very early in the morning, ere common eyes had discovered them. With a pensive sort of content, I sat down to my desk and my German, while the pupils settled to their evening lessons; and the other teachers took up their needlework.

The scene of the "etude du soir" was always the refectory, a much smaller apartment than any of the three classes or schoolrooms; for here none, save the boarders, were ever admitted, and these numbered only a score. Two lamps hung from the ceiling over the two tables; these were lit at dusk, and their kindling was the signal for school-books being set aside, a grave demeanour assumed, general silence enforced, and then commenced "la lecture pieuse." This said "lecture pieuse" was, I soon found, mainly designed as a wholesome mortification of the Intellect, a useful humiliation of the Reason; and such a dose for Common Sense as she might digest at her leisure, and thrive on as she best could.

The book brought out (it was never changed, but when finished, recommenced) was a venerable volume, old as the hills — grey as the Hôtel de Ville.

I would have given two francs for the chance of getting that book once into my bands, turning over the sacred yellow leaves, ascertaining the title, and perusing with my own eyes the enormous figments which, as an unworthy heretic, it was only permitted me to drink in with my bewildered ears. This book contained legends of the saints. Good God! (I speak the words reverently) what legends they were. What gasconading rascals those saints must have been, if they first boasted these exploits or invented these miracles. These legends, however, were no more than monkish extravagances, over which one laughed inwardly; there were, besides, priestly matters, and the priestcraft of the book was far worse than its monkery. The ears burned on each side of my head as I listened, perforce, to tales of moral martyrdom inflicted by Rome; the dread boasts of confessors, who had wickedly abused their office, trampling to deep degradation high-born ladies, making of countesses and princesses the most tormented slaves under the sun. Stories like that of Conrad and Elizabeth of Hungary, recurred again and again, with all its dreadful viciousness, sickening tyranny and black impiety: tales that were nightmares of oppression, privation, and agony.

I sat out this “lecture pieuse” for some nights as well as I could, and as quietly too; only once breaking off the points of my scissors by involuntarily sticking them somewhat deep in the worm-eaten board of the table before me. But, at last, it made me so burning hot, and my temples, and my heart, and my wrist throbbed so fast, and my sleep afterwards was so broken with excitement, that I could sit no longer. Prudence recommended henceforward a swift clearance of my person from the place, the moment that guilty old book was brought out. No Mause Headrigg ever felt a stronger call to take up her testimony against Sergeant Bothwell, than I — to speak my mind in this matter of the popish “lecture pieuse.” However, I did manage somehow to curb and rein in; and though always, as soon as Rosine came to light the lamps, I shot from the room quickly, yet also I did it quietly; seizing that vantage moment given by the little bustle before the dead silence, and vanishing whilst the boarders put their books away.

When I vanished — it was into darkness; candles were not allowed to be carried about, and the teacher who forsook the refectory, had only the unlit hall, schoolroom, or bedroom, as a refuge. In winter I sought the long classes, and paced them fast to keep myself warm — fortunate if the moon shone, and if there were only stars, soon reconciled to their dim gleam, or even to the total eclipse of their absence. In summer it was never quite dark, and then I went up-stairs to my own quarter of the long dormitory, opened my own casement (that chamber was lit by five casements large as great doors), and leaning out, looked forth upon the city beyond the garden, and listened to band-music from the park or the palace-square, thinking meantime my own thoughts, living my own life, in my own still, shadow-world.

This evening, fugitive as usual before the Pope and his works, I mounted the staircase, approached the dormitory, and quietly opened the door, which was always kept carefully shut, and which, like every other door in this house, revolved noiselessly on well-oiled hinges. Before I saw, I felt that life was in the great room, usually void: not that there was either stir or breath, or rustle of sound, but Vacuum lacked, Solitude was not at home. All the white beds — the “lits d’ange,” as they were poetically termed — lay visible at a glance; all were empty: no sleeper reposed therein. The sound of a drawer cautiously slid out struck my ear; stepping a little to one side, my vision took a free range, unimpeded by falling curtains. I now commanded my own bed and my own toilet, with a locked work-box upon it, and locked drawers underneath.

Very good. A dumpy, motherly little body, in decent shawl and the cleanest of possible nightcaps, stood before this toilet, hard at work apparently doing me the kindness of “tidying out” the “meuble.” Open stood the lid of the work-box, open the top drawer; duly and impartially was each succeeding drawer opened in turn: not an article of their contents but was lifted and unfolded, not a paper but was glanced over, not a little box but was unlidded; and beautiful was the adroitness, exemplary the care with which the search was accomplished. Madame wrought at it like a true star, “unhasting yet unresting.” I will not deny that it was with a secret glee I watched her. Had I been a gentleman I believe Madame would have found favour in my eyes, she was so handy, neat, thorough in all she did: some people’s movements provoke the soul by their loose awkwardness, hers — satisfied by their trim compactness. I stood, in short, fascinated; but it was necessary to make an effort to break this spell a retreat must be beaten. The searcher might have turned and caught me; there would have been nothing for it then but a scene, and she and I would have had to come all at once, with a sudden clash, to a thorough knowledge of each other: down would have gone conventionalities, away swept disguises, and I should have looked into her eyes, and she into mine — we should have known that we could work together no more, and parted in this life for ever.

Where was the use of tempting such a catastrophe? I was not angry, and had no wish in the world to leave her. I could hardly get another employer whose yoke would be so light and so, easy of carriage; and truly I liked Madame for her capital sense, whatever I might think of her principles: as to her system, it did me no harm; she might work me with it to her heart’s content: nothing would come of the operation. Loverless and inexpectant of love, I was as safe from spies in my heart-poverty, as the beggar from thieves in his destitution of purse. I turned, then, and fled; descending the stairs with progress as swift and soundless as that of the spider, which at the same instant ran down the bannister.

How I laughed when I reached the schoolroom. I knew now she had certainly seen Dr. John in the garden; I knew what her thoughts were. The spectacle of a suspicious nature so far misled by its own inventions, tickled me much. Yet as the laugh died, a kind of wrath smote me, and then bitterness followed: it was the rock struck, and Meribah’s waters gushing out. I never had felt so strange and contradictory an inward tumult as I felt for an hour that evening: soreness and laughter, and fire, and grief, shared my heart between them. I cried hot tears: not because Madame mistrusted me — I did not care twopence for her mistrust — but for other reasons. Complicated, disquieting thoughts broke up the whole repose of my nature. However, that turmoil subsided: next day I was again Lucy Snowe.

On revisiting my drawers, I found them all securely locked; the closest subsequent examination could not discover change or apparent disturbance in the position of one object. My few dresses were folded as I had left them; a certain little bunch of white violets that had once been silently presented to me by a stranger (a stranger to me, for we had never exchanged words), and which I had dried and kept for its sweet perfume between the folds of my best dress, lay there unstirred; my black silk scarf, my lace chemisette and collars, were unrumpled. Had she creased one solitary article, I own I should have felt much greater difficulty in forgiving her; but finding all straight and orderly, I said, "Let bygones be bygones. I am unharmed: why should I bear malice?"

* * * * *

A thing there was which puzzled myself, and I sought in my brain a key to that riddle almost as sedulously as Madame had sought a guide to useful knowledge in my toilet drawers. How was it that Dr. John, if he had not been accessory to the dropping of that casket into the garden, should have known that it was dropped, and appeared so promptly on the spot to seek it? So strong was the wish to clear up this point that I began to entertain this daring suggestion: "Why may I not, in case I should ever have the opportunity, ask Dr. John himself to explain this coincidence?"

And so long as Dr. John was absent, I really believed I had courage to test him with such a question.

Little Georgette was now convalescent; and her physician accordingly made his visits very rare: indeed, he would have ceased them altogether, had not Madame insisted on his giving an occasional call till the child should be quite well.

She came into the nursery one evening just after I had listened to Georgette's lisped and broken prayer, and had put her to bed. Taking the little one's hand, she said, "Cette enfant a toujours un peu de fièvre." And presently afterwards, looking at me with a quicker glance than was habitual to her quiet eye, "Le Docteur John l'a-t-il vue dernièrement? Non, n'est-ce pas?"

Of course she knew this better than any other person in the house. "Well," she continued, "I am going out, pour faire quelques courses en fiacre. I shall call on Dr. John, and send him to the child. I will that he sees her this evening; her cheeks are flushed, her pulse is quick; you will receive him — for my part, I shall be from home."

Now the child was well enough, only warm with the warmth of July; it was scarcely less needful to send for a priest to administer extreme unction than for a doctor to prescribe a dose; also Madame rarely made "courses," as she called them, in the evening: moreover, this was the first time she had chosen to absent herself on the occasion of a visit from Dr. John. The whole arrangement indicated some plan; this I saw, but without the least anxiety. “Ha! ha! Madame,” laughed Light-heart the Beggar, “your crafty wits are on the wrong tack.”

She departed, attired very smartly, in a shawl of price, and a certain chapeau vert tendre — hazardous, as to its tint, for any complexion less fresh than her own, but, to her, not unbecoming. I wondered what she intended: whether she really would send Dr. John or not; or whether indeed he would come: he might be engaged.

Madame had charged me not to let Georgette sleep till the doctor came; I had therefore sufficient occupation in telling her nursery tales and palavering the little language for her benefit. I affected Georgette; she was a sensitive and a loving child: to hold her in my lap, or carry her in my arms, was to me a treat. To-night she would have me lay my head on the pillow of her crib; she even put her little arms round my neck. Her clasp, and the nestling action with which she pressed her cheek to mine, made me almost cry with a tender pain. Feeling of no kind abounded in that house; this pure little drop from a pure little source was too sweet: it penetrated deep, and subdued the heart, and sent a gush to the eyes. Half an hour or an hour passed; Georgette murmured in her soft lisp that she was growing sleepy. “And you shall sleep,” thought I, “malgré maman and médecin, if they are not here in ten minutes.”

Hark! There was the ring, and there the tread, astonishing the staircase by the fleetness with which it left the steps behind. Rosine introduced Dr. John, and, with a freedom of manner not altogether peculiar to herself, but characteristic of the domestics of Villette generally, she stayed to hear what he had to say. Madame’s presence would have awed her back to her own realm of the vestibule and the cabinet — for mine, or that of any other teacher or pupil, she cared not a jot. Smart, trim and pert, she stood, a hand in each pocket of her gay grisette apron, eyeing Dr. John with no more fear or shyness than if he had been a picture instead of a living gentleman.

“Le marmot n’a rien, nest-ce pas?” said she, indicating Georgette with a jerk of her chin.

“Pas beaucoup,” was the answer, as the doctor hastily scribbled with his pencil some harmless prescription.

“Eh bien!” pursued Rosine, approaching him quite near, while he put up his pencil. “And the box — did you get it? Monsieur went off like a coup-de-vent the other night; I had not time to ask him.”

“I found it: yes.”

“And who threw it, then?” continued Rosine, speaking quite freely the very words I should so much have wished to say, but had no address or courage to bring it out: how short some people make the road to a point which, for others, seems unattainable!

“That may be my secret,” rejoined Dr. John briefly, but with no, sort of hauteur: he seemed quite to understand the Rosine or grisette character.

“Mais enfin,” continued she, nothing abashed, “monsieur knew it was thrown, since he came to seek it — how did he know?”

“I was attending a little patient in the college near,” said he, “and saw it dropped out of his chamber window, and so came to pick it up.”

How simple the whole explanation! The note had alluded to a physician as then examining “Gustave.”

“Ah ça!” pursued Rosine; “il n’y a donc rien là-dessous: pas de mystère, pas d’amourette, par exemple?”

“Pas plus que sur ma main,” responded the doctor, showing his palm.

“Quel dommage!” responded the grisette: “et moi — à qui tout cela commençait à donner des idées.”

“Vraiment! vous en êtes pour vos frais,” was the doctor’s cool rejoinder.

She pouted. The doctor could not help laughing at the sort of “moue” she made: when he laughed, he had something peculiarly good-natured and genial in his look. I saw his hand incline to his pocket.

“How many times have you opened the door for me within this last month?” he asked.

“Monsieur ought to have kept count of that,” said Rosine, quite readily.

“As if I had not something better to do!” rejoined he; but I saw him give her a piece of gold, which she took unscrupulously, and then danced off to answer the door-bell, ringing just now every five minutes, as the various servants came to fetch the half-boarders.

The reader must not think too hardly of Rosine; on the whole, she was not a bad sort of person, and had no idea there could be any disgrace in grasping at whatever she could get, or any effrontery in chattering like a pie to the best gentleman in Christendom.

I had learnt something from the above scene besides what concerned the ivory box: viz., that not on the robe de jaconas, pink or grey, nor yet on the frilled and pocketed apron, lay the blame of breaking Dr. John’s heart: these items of array were obviously guiltless as Georgette’s little blue tunic. So much the better. But who then was the culprit? What was the ground — what the origin — what the perfect explanation of the whole business? Some points had been cleared, but how many yet remained obscure as night!

“However,” I said to myself, “it is no affair of yours;” and turning from the face on which I had been unconsciously dwelling with a questioning gaze, I looked through the window which commanded the garden below. Dr. John, meantime, standing by the bed-side, was slowly drawing on his gloves and watching his little patient, as her eyes closed and her rosy lips parted in coming sleep. I waited till he should depart as usual, with a quick bow and scarce articulate “good-night.”. Just as he took his hat, my eyes, fixed on the tall houses bounding the garden, saw the one lattice, already commemorated, cautiously open; forth from the aperture projected a hand and a white handkerchief; both waved. I know not whether the signal was answered from some viewless quarter of our own dwelling; but immediately after there fluttered from, the lattice a falling object, white and light — billet the second, of course.

"There!" I ejaculated involuntarily.

"Where?", asked Dr. John with energy, making direct for the window.

"What, is it?"

"They have gone and done it again," was my reply. "A handkerchief waved and something fell:" and I pointed to the lattice, now closed and looking hypocritically blank.

"Go, at once; pick it up and bring it here," was his prompt direction; adding, "Nobody will take notice of you: I should be seen."

Straight I went. After some little search, I found a folded paper, lodged on the lower branch of a shrub; I seized and brought it direct to Dr. John. This time, I believe not even Rosine saw me.

He instantly tore the billet into small pieces, without reading it. "It is not in the least her fault, you must remember," he said, looking at me.

"Whose fault?" I asked. "Who is it?"

"You don't yet know, then?"

"Not in the least."

"Have you no guess?"

"None."

"If I knew you better, I might be tempted to risk some confidence, and thus secure you as guardian over a most innocent and excellent, but somewhat inexperienced being."

"As a duenna?" I asked.

"Yes," said he abstractedly. "What snares are round her!" he added, musingly: and now, certainly for the first time, he examined my face, anxious, doubtless, to see if any kindly expression there, would warrant him in recommending to my care and indulgence some ethereal creature, against whom powers of darkness were plotting. I felt no particular vocation to undertake the surveillance of ethereal creatures; but recalling the scene at the bureau, it seemed to me that I owed him a good turn: if I could help him then I would, and it lay not with me to decide how. With as little reluctance as might be, I intimated that "I was willing to do what I could towards taking care of any person in whom he might be interested.".

"I am no farther interested than as a spectator," said he, with a modesty, admirable, as I thought, to witness. "I happen to be acquainted with the rather worthless character of the person, who, from the house opposite, has now twice invaded the sanctity of this place; I have also met in society the object at whom these vulgar attempts are aimed. Her exquisite superiority and innate refinement ought, one would think, to scare impertinence from her very idea. It is not so, however; and innocent, unsuspicious as she is, I would guard her from evil if I could. In person, however, I can do nothing I cannot come near her" — he paused.

"Well, I am willing to help you," said I, "only tell me how." And busily, in my own mind, I ran over the list of our inmates, seeking this paragon, this pearl of great price, this gem without flaw. “It must be Madame,” I concluded. “She only, amongst us all, has the art even to seem superior: but as to being unsuspicious, inexperienced, &c., Dr. John need not distract himself about that. However, this is just his whim, and I will not contradict him; he shall be humoured: his angel shall be an angel.

“Just notify the quarter to which my care is to be directed,” I continued gravely: chuckling, however, to myself over the thought of being set to chaperon Madame Beck or any of her pupils. Now Dr. John had a fine set of nerves, and he at once felt by instinct, what no more coarsely constituted mind would have detected; namely, that I was a little amused at him. The colour rose to his cheek; with half a smile he turned and took his hat — he was going. My heart smote me.

“I will — I will help you,” said I eagerly. “I will do what you wish. I will watch over your angel; I will take care of her, only tell me who she is.”

“But you must know,” said he then with earnestness, yet speaking very low. “So spotless, so good, so unspeakably beautiful! impossible that one house should contain two like her. I allude, of course — “

Here the latch of Madame Beck’s chamber-door (opening into the nursery) gave a sudden click, as if the hand holding it had been slightly convulsed; there was the suppressed explosion of an irrepressible sneeze. These little accidents will happen to the best of us. Madame — excellent woman! was then on duty. She had come home quietly, stolen up-stairs on tip-toe; she was in her chamber. If she had not sneezed, she would have heard all, and so should I; but that unlucky sternutation routed Dr. John. While he stood aghast, she came forward alert, composed, in the best yet most tranquil spirits: no novice to her habits but would have thought she had just come in, and scouted the idea of her ear having been glued to the key-hole for at least ten minutes. She affected to sneeze again, declared she was “enrhumée,” and then proceeded volubly to recount her “courses en fiacre.” The prayer-bell rang, and I left her with the doctor.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FÊTE.

As soon as Georgette was well, Madame sent her away into the country. I was sorry; I loved the child, and her loss made me poorer than before. But I must not complain. I lived in a house full of robust life; I might have had companions, and I chose solitude. Each of the teachers in turn made me overtures of special intimacy; I tried them all. One I found to be an honest woman, but a narrow thinker, a coarse feeler, and an egotist. The second was a Parisienne, externally refined — at heart, corrupt — without a creed, without a principle, without an affection: having penetrated the outward crust of decorum in this character, you found a slough beneath. She had a wonderful passion for presents; and, in this point, the third teacher — a person otherwise characterless and insignificant — closely resembled her. This last-named had also one other distinctive property — that of avarice. In her reigned the love of money for its own sake. The sight of a piece of gold would bring into her eyes a green glisten, singular to witness. She once, as a mark of high favour, took me up-stairs, and, opening a secret door, showed me a hoard — a mass of coarse, large coin — about fifteen guineas, in five-franc pieces. She loved this hoard as a bird loves its eggs. These were her savings. She would come and talk to me about them with an infatuated and persevering dotage, strange to behold in a person not yet twenty-five.

The Parisienne, on the other hand, was prodigal and profligate (in disposition, that is: as to action, I do not know). That latter quality showed its snake-head to me but once, peeping out very cautiously. A curious kind of reptile it seemed, judging from the glimpse I got; its novelty whetted my curiosity: if it would have come out boldly, perhaps I might philosophically have stood my ground, and coolly surveyed the long thing from forked tongue to scaly tail-tip; but it merely rustled in the leaves of a bad novel; and, on encountering a hasty and ill-advised demonstration of wrath, recoiled and vanished, hissing. She hated me from that day.

This Parisienne was always in debt; her salary being anticipated, not only in dress, but in perfumes, cosmetics, confectionery, and condiments. What a cold, callous epicure she was in all things! I see her now. Thin in face and figure, sallow in complexion, regular in features, with perfect teeth, lips like a thread, a large, prominent chin, a well-opened, but frozen eye, of light at once craving and ingrate. She mortally hated work, and loved what she called pleasure; being an insipid, heartless, brainless dissipation of time.

Madame Beck knew this woman's character perfectly well. She once talked to me about her, with an odd mixture of discrimination, indifference, and antipathy. I asked why she kept her in the establishment. She answered plainly, “because it suited her interest to do so;” and pointed out a fact I had already noticed, namely, that Mademoiselle St. Pierre possessed, in an almost unique degree, the power of keeping order amongst her undisciplined ranks of scholars. A certain petrifying influence accompanied and surrounded her: without passion, noise, or violence, she held them in check as a breezeless frost-air might still a brawling stream. She was of little use as far as communication of knowledge went, but for strict surveillance and maintenance of rules she was invaluable. “Je sais bien qu’elle n’a pas de principes, ni, peut-être, de moeurs,” admitted Madame frankly; but added with philosophy, “son maintien en classe est toujours convenable et rempli même d’une certaine dignité: c’est tout ce qu’il faut. Ni les élèves ni les parents ne regardent plus loin; ni, par conséquent, moi non plus.”

* * * * *

A strange, frolicsome, noisy little world was this school: great pains were taken to hide chains with flowers: a subtle essence of Romanism pervaded every arrangement: large sensual indulgence (so to speak) was permitted by way of counterpoise to jealous spiritual restraint. Each mind was being reared in slavery; but, to prevent reflection from dwelling on this fact, every pretext for physical recreation was seized and made the most of. There, as elsewhere, the CHURCH strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning. “Eat, drink, and live!” she says. “Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me. I hold their cure — guide their course: I guarantee their final fate.” A bargain, in which every true Catholic deems himself a gainer. Lucifer just offers the same terms: “All this power will I give thee, and the glory of it; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou, therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be thine!”

About this time — in the ripest glow of summer — Madame Beck’s house became as merry a place as a school could well be. All day long the broad folding-doors and the two-leaved casements stood wide open: settled sunshine seemed naturalized in the atmosphere; clouds were far off, sailing away beyond sea, resting, no doubt, round islands such as England — that dear land of mists — but withdrawn wholly from the drier continent. We lived far more in the garden than under a roof: classes were held, and meals partaken of, in the “grand berceau.” Moreover, there was a note of holiday preparation, which almost turned freedom into licence. The autumnal long vacation was but two months distant; but before that, a great day — an important ceremony — none other than the fête of Madame — awaited celebration.

The conduct of this fête devolved chiefly on Mademoiselle St. Pierre:

Madame herself being supposed to stand aloof, disinterestedly unconscious of what might be going forward in her honour. Especially, she never knew, never in the least suspected, that a subscription was annually levied on the whole school for the purchase of a handsome present. The polite tact of the reader will please to leave out of the account a brief, secret consultation on this point in Madame's own chamber.

"What will you have this year?" was asked by her Parisian lieutenant.

"Oh, no matter! Let it alone. Let the poor children keep their francs,"

And Madame looked benign and modest.

The St. Pierre would here protrude her chin; she knew Madame by heart; she always called her airs of "bonté" — "des grimaces." She never even professed to respect them one instant.

"Vite!" she would say coldly. "Name the article. Shall it be jewellery or porcelain, haberdashery or silver?"

"Eh bien! Deux ou trois cuillers, et autant de fourchettes en argent."

And the result was a handsome case, containing 300 francs worth of plate.

The programme of the fête-day's proceedings comprised: Presentation of plate, collation in the garden, dramatic performance (with pupils and teachers for actors), a dance and supper. Very gorgeous seemed the effect of the whole to me, as I well remember. Zélie St. Pierre understood these things and managed them ably.

The play was the main point; a month's previous drilling being there required. The choice, too, of the actors required knowledge and care; then came lessons in elocution, in attitude, and then the fatigue of countless rehearsals. For all this, as may well be supposed, St. Pierre did not suffice: other management, other accomplishments than hers were requisite here. They were supplied in the person of a master — M. Paul Emanuel, professor of literature. It was never my lot to be present at the histrionic lessons of M. Paul, but I often saw him as he crossed the carré (a square hall between the dwelling-house and school-house). I heard him, too, in the warm evenings, lecturing with open doors, and his name, with anecdotes of him, resounded in ones ears from all sides. Especially our former acquaintance, Miss Ginevra Fanshawe, — who had been selected to take a prominent part in the play — used, in bestowing upon me a large portion of her leisure, to lard her discourse with frequent allusions to his sayings and doings. She esteemed him hideously plain, and used to profess herself frightened almost into hysterics at the sound of his step or voice. A dark little man he certainly was; pungent and austere. Even to me he seemed a harsh apparition, with his close-shorn, black head, his broad, sallow brow, his thin cheek, his wide and quivering nostril, his thorough glance, and hurried bearing. Irritable he was; one heard that, as he apostrophized with vehemence the awkward squad under his orders. Sometimes he would break out on these raw amateur actresses with a passion of impatience at their falseness of conception, their coldness of emotion, their feebleness of delivery. "Ecoutez!" he would cry; and then his voice rang through the premises like a trumpet; and when, mimicking it, came the small pipe of a Ginevra, a Mathilde, or a Blanche, one understood why a hollow groan of scorn, or a fierce hiss of rage, rewarded the tame echo.

"Vous n'êtes donc que des poupées," I heard him thunder. "Vous n'avez pas de passions — vous autres. Vous ne sentez donc rien? Votre chair est de neige, votre sang de glace! Moi, je veux que tout cela s'allume, qu'il ait une vie, une âme!"

Vain resolve! And when he at last found it was vain, he suddenly broke the whole business down. Hitherto he had been teaching them a grand tragedy; he tore the tragedy in morsels, and came next day with a compact little comic trifle. To this they took more kindly; he presently knocked it all into their smooth round pates.

Mademoiselle St. Pierre always presided at M. Emanuel's lessons, and I was told that the polish of her manner, her seeming attention, her tact and grace, impressed that gentleman very favourably. She had, indeed, the art of pleasing, for a given time, whom she would; but the feeling would not last: in an hour it was dried like dew, vanished like gossamer.

The day preceding Madame's fête was as much a holiday as the fête itself. It was devoted to clearing out, cleaning, arranging and decorating the three schoolrooms. All within-doors was the gayest bustle; neither up-stairs nor down could a quiet, isolated person find rest for the sole of her foot; accordingly, for my part, I took refuge in the garden. The whole day did I wander or sit there alone, finding warmth in the sun, shelter among the trees, and a sort of companionship in my own thoughts. I well remember that I exchanged but two sentences that day with any living being: not that I felt solitary; I was glad to be quiet. For a looker-on, it sufficed to pass through the rooms once or twice, observe what changes were being wrought, how a green-room and a dressing-room were being contrived, a little stage with scenery erected, how M. Paul Emanuel, in conjunction with Mademoiselle St. Pierre, was directing all, and how an eager band of pupils, amongst them Ginevra Fanshawe, were working gaily under his control.

The great day arrived. The sun rose hot and unclouded, and hot and unclouded it burned on till evening. All the doors and all the windows were set open, which gave a pleasant sense of summer freedom — and freedom the most complete seemed indeed the order of the day. Teachers and pupils descended to breakfast in dressing-gowns and curl-papers: anticipating "avec délices" the toilette of the evening, they seemed to take a pleasure in indulging that forenoon in a luxury of slovenliness; like aldermen fasting in preparation for a feast. About nine o'clock A.M., an important functionary, the "coiffeur," arrived. Sacrilegious to state, he fixed his head-quarters in the oratory, and there, in presence of bénitier, candle, and crucifix, solemnised the mysteries of his art. Each girl was summoned in turn to pass through his hands; emerging from them with head as smooth as a shell, intersected by faultless white lines, and wreathed about with Grecian plaits that shone as if lacquered. I took my turn with the rest, and could hardly believe what the glass said when I applied to it for information afterwards; the lavished garlandry of woven brown hair amazed me — I feared it was not all my own, and it required several convincing pulls to give assurance to the contrary. I then acknowledged in the coiffeur a first-rate artist — one who certainly made the most of indifferent materials.

The oratory closed, the dormitory became the scene of ablutions, arrayings and bedizenings curiously elaborate. To me it was, and ever must be an enigma, how they contrived to spend so much time in doing so little. The operation seemed close, intricate, prolonged: the result simple. A clear white muslin dress, a blue sash (the Virgin's colours), a pair of white, or straw-colour kid gloves — such was the gala uniform, to the assumption whereof that houseful of teachers and pupils devoted three mortal hours. But though simple, it must be allowed the array was perfect — perfect in fashion, fit, and freshness; every head being also dressed with exquisite nicety, and a certain compact taste — suiting the full, firm comeliness of Labassecourien contours, though too stiff for any more flowing and flexible style of beauty — the general effect was, on the whole, commendable.

In beholding this diaphanous and snowy mass, I well remember feeling myself to be a mere shadowy spot on a field of light; the courage was not in me to put on a transparent white dress: something thin I must wear — the weather and rooms being too hot to give substantial fabrics sufferance, so I had sought through a dozen shops till I lit upon a crape-like material of purple-gray — the colour, in short, of dun mist, lying on a moor in bloom. My tailleuse had kindly made it as well as she could: because, as she judiciously observed, it was "si triste — si pen voyant," care in the fashion was the more imperative: it was well she took this view of the matter, for I, had no flower, no jewel to relieve it: and, what was more, I had no natural rose of complexion.

We become oblivious of these deficiencies in the uniform routine of daily drudgery, but they will force upon us their unwelcome blank on those bright occasions when beauty should shine.

However, in this same gown of shadow, I felt at home and at ease; an advantage I should not have enjoyed in anything more brilliant or striking. Madame Beck, too, kept me in countenance; her dress was almost as quiet as mine, except that she wore a bracelet, and a large brooch bright with gold and fine stones. We chanced to meet on the stairs, and she gave me a nod and smile of approbation. Not that she thought I was looking well — a point unlikely to engage her interest — but she considered me dressed "convenablement," "décemment," and la Convenance et la Décence were the two calm deities of Madame's worship. She even paused, laid on my shoulder her gloved hand, holding an embroidered and perfumed handkerchief, and confided to my ear a sarcasm on the other teachers (whom she had just been complimenting to their faces). "Nothing so absurd," she said, "as for des femmes mûres 'to dress themselves like girls of fifteen' — quant à la. St. Pierre, elle a l'air d'une vieille coquette qui fait l'ingénue."

Being dressed at least a couple of hours before anybody else, I felt a pleasure in betaking myself — not to the garden, where servants were busy propping up long tables, placing seats, and spreading cloths in readiness for the collation but to the schoolrooms, now empty, quiet, cool, and clean; their walls fresh stained, their planked floors fresh scoured and scarce dry; flowers fresh gathered adorning the recesses in pots, and draperies, fresh hung, beautifying the great windows.

Withdrawing to the first classe, a smaller and neater room than the others, and taking from the glazed bookcase, of which I kept the key, a volume whose title promised some interest, I sat down to read. The glass-door of this "classe," or schoolroom, opened into the large berceau; acacia-boughs caressed its panes, as they stretched across to meet a rose-bush blooming by the opposite lintel: in this rose-bush bees murmured busy and happy. I commenced reading. Just as the stilly hum, the embowering shade, the warm, lonely calm of my retreat were beginning to steal meaning from the page, vision from my eyes, and to lure me along the track of reverie, down into some deep dell of dreamland — just then, the sharpest ring of the street-door bell to which that much-tried instrument had ever thrilled, snatched me back to consciousness.

Now the bell had been ringing all the morning, as workmen, or servants, or coiffeurs, or tailleuses, went and came on their several errands. Moreover, there was good reason to expect it would ring all the afternoon, since about one hundred externes were yet to arrive in carriages or fiacres: nor could it be expected to rest during the evening, when parents and friends would gather thronging to the play. Under these circumstances, a ring — even a sharp ring — was a matter of course: yet this particular peal had an accent of its own, which chased my dream, and startled my book from my knee.

I was stooping to pick up this last, when — firm, fast, straight — right on through vestibule — along corridor, across carré, through first division, second division, grand salle — strode a step, quick, regular, intent. The closed door of the first classe — my sanctuary — offered no obstacle; it burst open, and a paletôt and a bonnet grec filled the void; also two eyes first vaguely struck upon, and then hungrily dived into me.

"C'est cela!" said a voice. "Je la connais: c'est l'Anglaise. Tant pis. Toute Anglaise, et, par conséquent, toute bégueule qu'elle soit — elle fera mon affaire, ou je saurai pourquoi."

Then, with a certain stern politeness (I suppose he thought I had not caught the drift of his previous uncivil mutterings), and in a jargon the most execrable that ever was heard, "Meess — — , play you must: I am planted there."

"What can I do for you, M. Paul Emanuel?" I inquired: for M. Paul Emanuel it was, and in a state of no little excitement.

"Play you must. I will not have you shrink, or frown, or make the prude. I read your skull that night you came; I see your moyens: play you can; play you must."

"But how, M. Paul? What do you mean?"

"There is no time to be lost," he went on, now speaking in French; "and let us thrust to the wall all reluctance, all excuses, all minauderies. You must take a part."

"In the vaudeville?"

"In the vaudeville. You have said it."

I gasped, horror-struck. What did the little man mean?

"Listen!" he said. "The case shall be stated, and you shall then answer me Yes, or No; and according to your answer shall I ever after estimate you."

The scarce-suppressed impetus of a most irritable nature glowed in his cheek, fed with sharp shafts his glances, a nature — the injudicious, the mawkish, the hesitating, the sullen, the affected, above all, the unyielding, might quickly render violent and implacable. Silence and attention was the best balm to apply: I listened.

"The whole matter is going to fail," he began. "Louise Vanderkelkov has fallen ill — at least so her ridiculous mother asserts; for my part, I feel sure she might play if she would: it is only good-will that lacks. She was charged with a rôle, as you know, or do not know — it is equal: without that rôle the play is stopped. There are now but a few hours in which to learn it: not a girl in this school would hear reason, and accept the task. Forsooth, it is not an interesting, not an amiable, part; their vile amour-propre — that base quality of which women have so much — would revolt from it. Englishwomen are either the best or the worst of their sex. Dieu sait que je les déteste comme la peste, ordinairement" (this between his recreant teeth). "I apply to an Englishwoman to rescue me. What is her answer — Yes, or No?"

A thousand objections rushed into my mind. The foreign language, the limited time, the public display… Inclination recoiled, Ability faltered, Self-respect (that "vile quality") trembled. "Non, non, non!" said all these; but looking up at M. Paul, and seeing in his vexed, fiery, and searching eye, a sort of appeal behind all its menace, my lips dropped the word "oui". For a moment his rigid countenance relaxed with a quiver of content: quickly bent up again, however, he went on, —

"Vite à l'ouvrage! Here is the book; here is your rôle: read." And I read. He did not commend; at some passages he scowled and stamped. He gave me a lesson: I diligently imitated. It was a disagreeable part — a man's — an empty-headed fop's. One could put into it neither heart nor soul: I hated it. The play — a mere trifle — ran chiefly on the efforts of a brace of rivals to gain the hand of a fair coquette. One lover was called the "Ours," a good and gallant but unpolished man, a sort of diamond in the rough; the other was a butterfly, a talker, and a traitor: and I was to be the butterfly, talker, and traitor.

I did my best — which was bad, I know: it provoked M. Paul; he fumed. Putting both — hands to the work, I endeavoured to do better than my best; I presume he gave me credit for good intentions; he professed to be partially content. “Ca ira!” he cried; and as voices began sounding from the garden, and white dresses fluttering among the trees, he added: “You must withdraw: you must be alone to learn this. Come with me.”

Without being allowed time or power to deliberate, I found myself in the same breath convoyed along as in a species of whirlwind, up-stairs, up two pair of stairs, nay, actually up three (for this fiery little man seemed as by instinct to know his way everywhere); to the solitary and lofty attic was I borne, put in and locked in, the key being, in the door, and that key he took with him and vanished.

The attic was no pleasant place: I believe he did not know how unpleasant it was, or he never would have locked me in with so little ceremony. In this summer weather, it was hot as Africa; as in winter, it was always cold as Greenland. Boxes and lumber filled it; old dresses draped its unstained wall — cobwebs its unswept ceiling. Well was it known to be tenanted by rats, by black beetles, and by cockroaches — nay, rumour affirmed that the ghostly Nun of the garden had once been seen here. A partial darkness obscured one end, across which, as for deeper mystery, an old russet curtain was drawn, by way of screen to a sombre band of winter cloaks, pendent each from its pin, like a malefactor from his gibbet. From amongst these cloaks, and behind that curtain, the Nun was said to issue. I did not believe this, nor was I troubled by apprehension thereof; but I saw a very dark and large rat, with a long tail, come gliding out from that squalid alcove; and, moreover, my eye fell on many a black-beetle, dotting the floor. These objects discomposed me more, perhaps, than it would be wise to say, as also did the dust, lumber, and stifling heat of the place. The last inconvenience would soon have become intolerable, had I not found means to open and prop up the skylight, thus admitting some freshness. Underneath this aperture I pushed a large empty chest, and having mounted upon it a smaller box, and wiped from both the dust, I gathered my dress (my best, the reader must remember, and therefore a legitimate object of care) fastidiously around me, ascended this species of extempore throne, and being seated, commenced the acquisition of my task; while I learned, not forgetting to keep a sharp look-out on the black-beetles and cockroaches, of which, more even, I believe, than of the rats, I sat in mortal dread.

My impression at first was that I had undertaken what it really was impossible to perform, and I simply resolved to do my best and be resigned to fail. I soon found, however, that one part in so short a piece was not more than memory could master at a few hours’ notice. I learned and learned on, first in a whisper, and then aloud. Perfectly secure from human audience, I acted my part before the garret-vermin. Entering into its emptiness, frivolity, and falsehood, with a spirit inspired by scorn and impatience, I took my revenge on this “fat,” by making him as fatuitous as I possibly could.

In this exercise the afternoon passed: day began to glide into evening; and I, who had eaten nothing since breakfast, grew excessively hungry. Now I thought of the collation, which doubtless they were just then devouring in the garden far below. (I had seen in the vestibule a basketful of small pâtés à la crême, than which nothing in the whole range of cookery seemed to me better). A pâté, or a square of cake, it seemed to me would come very àpropos; and as my relish for those dainties increased, it began to appear somewhat hard that I should pass my holiday, fasting and in prison. Remote as was the attic from the street-door and vestibule, yet the ever-tinkling bell was faintly audible here; and also the ceaseless roll of wheels, on the tormented pavement. I knew that the house and garden were thronged, and that all was gay and glad below; here it began to grow dusk: the beetles were fading from my sight; I trembled lest they should steal on me a march, mount my throne unseen, and, unsuspected, invade my skirts. Impatient and apprehensive, I recommenced the rehearsal of my part merely to kill time. Just as I was concluding, the long-delayed rattle of the key in the lock came to my ear — no unwelcome sound. M. Paul (I could just see through the dusk that it was M. Paul, for light enough still lingered to show the velvet blackness of his close-shorn head, and the sallow ivory of his brow) looked in.

“Brava!” cried he, holding the door open and remaining at the threshold. “J’ai tout entendu. C’est assez bien. Encore!”

A moment I hesitated.

“Encore!” said he sternly. “Et point de grimaces! A bas la timidité!”

Again I went through the part, but not half so well as I had spoken it alone.

“Enfin, elle sait,” said he, half dissatisfied, “and one cannot be fastidious or exacting under the circumstances.” Then he added, “You may yet have twenty minutes for preparation: au revoir!” And he was going.

“Monsieur,” I called out, taking courage.

“Eh bien! Qu’est-ce que c’est, Mademoiselle?”

“J’ai bien faim.”

“Comment, vous avez faim! Et la collation?”

“I know nothing about it. I have not seen it, shut up here.”

“Ah! C’est vrai,” cried he.

In a moment my throne was abdicated, the attic evacuated; an inverse repetition of the impetus which had brought me up into the attic, instantly took me down — down — down to the very kitchen. I thought I should have gone to the cellar. The cook was imperatively ordered to produce food, and I, as imperatively, was commanded to eat. To my great joy this food was limited to coffee and cake: I had feared wine and sweets, which I did not like. How he guessed that I should like a petit pâté à la crême I cannot tell; but he went out and procured me one from some quarter. With considerable willingness I ate and drank, keeping the petit pâté till the last, as a bonne bouche. M. Paul superintended my repast, and almost forced upon me more than I could swallow.

"A la bonne heure," he cried, when I signified that I really could take no more, and, with uplifted hands, implored to be spared the additional roll on which he had just spread butter. "You will set me down as a species of tyrant and Bluebeard, starving women in a garret; whereas, after all, I am no such thing. Now, Mademoiselle, do you feel courage and strength to appear?"

I said, I thought I did; though, in truth, I was perfectly confused, and could hardly tell how I felt: but this little man was of the order of beings who must not be opposed, unless you possessed an all-dominant force sufficient to crush him at once.

"Come then," said he, offering his hand.

I gave him mine, and he set off with a rapid walk, which obliged me to run at his side in order to keep pace. In the carré he stopped a moment: it was lit with large lamps; the wide doors of the classes were open, and so were the equally wide garden-doors; orange-trees in tubs, and tall flowers in pots, ornamented these portals on each side; groups of ladies and gentlemen in evening-dress stood and walked amongst the flowers. Within, the long vista of the school-rooms presented a thronging, undulating, murmuring, waving, streaming multitude, all rose, and blue, and half translucent white. There were lustres burning overhead; far off there was a stage, a solemn green curtain, a row of footlights.

"Nest-ce pas que c'est beau?" demanded my companion.

I should have said it was, but my heart got up into my throat. M. Paul discovered this, and gave me a side-scowl and a little shake for my pains.

"I will do my best, but I wish it was over," said I; then I asked: "Are we to walk through that crowd?"

"By no means: I manage matters better: we pass through the garden — here."

In an instant we were out of doors: the cool, calm night revived me somewhat. It was moonless, but the reflex from the many glowing windows lit the court brightly, and even the alleys — dimly. Heaven was cloudless, and grand with the quiver of its living fires. How soft are the nights of the Continent! How bland, balmy, safe! No sea-fog; no chilling damp: mistless as noon, and fresh as morning.

Having crossed court and garden, we reached the glass door of the first classe. It stood open, like all other doors that night; we passed, and then I was ushered into a small cabinet, dividing the first classe from the grand salle. This cabinet dazzled me, it was so full of light: it deafened me, it was clamorous with voices: it stifled me, it was so hot, choking, thronged.

"De l'ordre! Du silence!" cried M. Paul. "Is this chaos?", he demanded; and there was a hush. With a dozen words, and as many gestures, he turned out half the persons present, and obliged the remnant to fall into rank. Those left were all in costume: they were the performers, and this was the green-room. M. Paul introduced me. All stared and some tittered. It was a surprise: they had not expected the Englishwoman would play in a vaudeville. Ginevra Fanshawe, beautifully dressed for her part, and looking fascinatingly pretty, turned on me a pair of eyes as round as beads. In the highest spirit, unperturbed by fear or bashfulness, delighted indeed at the thought of shining off before hundreds — my entrance seemed to transfix her with amazement in the midst of her joy. She would have exclaimed, but M. Paul held her and all the rest in check.

Having surveyed and criticized the whole troop, he turned to me.

“You, too, must be dressed for your part.”

“Dressed — dressed like a man!” exclaimed Zélie St. Pierre, darting forwards; adding with officiousness, “I will dress her myself.”

To be dressed like a man did not please, and would not suit me. I had consented to take a man’s name and part; as to his dress — halte là! No. I would keep my own dress, come what might. M. Paul might storm, might rage: I would keep my own dress. I said so, with a voice as resolute in intent, as it was low, and perhaps unsteady in utterance.

He did not immediately storm or rage, as I fully thought he would he stood silent. But Zélie again interposed.

“She will make a capital petit-maître. Here are the garments, all — all complete: somewhat too large, but — I will arrange all that. Come, chère amie — belle Anglaise!”

And she sneered, for I was not “belle.” She seized my hand, she was drawing me away. M. Paul stood impassable — neutral.

“You must not resist,” pursued St. Pierre — for resist I did. “You will spoil all, destroy the mirth of the piece, the enjoyment of the company, sacrifice everything to your amour-propre. This would be too bad — monsieur will never permit this?”

She sought his eye. I watched, likewise, for a glance. He gave her one, and then he gave me one. “Stop!” he said slowly, arresting St. Pierre, who continued her efforts to drag me after her. Everybody awaited the decision. He was not angry, not irritated; I perceived that, and took heart.

“You do not like these clothes?” he asked, pointing to the masculine vestments.

“I don’t object to some of them, but I won’t have them all.”

“How must it be, then? How accept a man’s part, and go on the stage dressed as a woman? This is an amateur affair, it is true — a vaudeville de pensionnat; certain modifications I might sanction, yet something you must have to announce you as of the nobler sex.”

“And I will, Monsieur; but it must be arranged in my own way: nobody must meddle; the things must not be forced upon me. Just let me dress myself.”

Monsieur, without another word, took the costume from St. Pierre, gave it to me, and permitted me to pass into the dressing-room. Once alone, I grew calm, and collectedly went to work. Retaining my woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed, in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletôt of small dimensions; the whole being the costume of a brother of one of the pupils. Having loosened my hair out of its braids, made up the long back-hair close, and brushed the front hair to one side, I took my hat and gloves in my hand and came out. M. Paul was waiting, and so were the others. He looked at me. "That may pass in a pensionnat," he pronounced. Then added, not unkindly, "Courage, mon ami! Un peu de sangfroid — un peu d'aplomb, M. Lucien, et tout ira bien."

St. Pierre sneered again, in her cold snaky manner.

I was irritable, because excited, and I could not help turning upon her and saying, that if she were not a lady and I a gentleman, I should feel disposed to call her out.

"After the play, after the play," said M. Paul. "I will then divide my pair of pistols between you, and we will settle the dispute according to form: it will only be the old quarrel of France and England."

But now the moment approached for the performance to commence. M. Paul, setting us before him, harangued us briefly, like a general addressing soldiers about to charge. I don't know what he said, except that he recommended each to penetrate herself with a sense of her personal insignificance. God knows I thought this advice superfluous for some of us. A bell tinkled. I and two more were ushered on to the stage. The bell tinkled again. I had to speak the very first words.

"Do not look at the crowd, nor think of it," whispered M. Paul in my ear. "Imagine yourself in the garret, acting to the rats."

He vanished. The curtain drew up — shrivelled to the ceiling: the bright lights, the long room, the gay throng, burst upon us. I thought of the black-beetles, the old boxes, the worm-eaten bureau. I said my say badly; but I said it. That first speech was the difficulty; it revealed to me this fact, that it was not the crowd I feared so much as my own voice. Foreigners and strangers, the crowd were nothing to me. Nor did I think of them. When my tongue once got free, and my voice took its true pitch, and found its natural tone, I thought of nothing but the personage I represented — and of M. Paul, who was listening, watching, prompting in the side-scenes.

By-and-by, feeling the right power come — the spring demanded gush and rise inwardly — I became sufficiently composed to notice my fellow-actors. Some of them played very well; especially Ginevra Fanshawe, who had to coquette between two suitors, and managed admirably: in fact she was in her element. I observed that she once or twice threw a certain marked fondness and pointed partiality into her manner towards me — the fop. With such emphasis and animation did she favour me, such glances did she dart out into the listening and applauding crowd, that to me — who knew her — it presently became evident she was acting at some one; and I followed her eye, her smile, her gesture, and ere long discovered that she had at least singled out a handsome and distinguished aim for her shafts; full in the path of those arrows — taller than other spectators, and therefore more sure to receive them — stood, in attitude quiet but intent, a well-known form — that of Dr. John.

The spectacle seemed somehow suggestive. There was language in Dr. John's look, though I cannot tell what he said; it animated me: I drew out of it a history; I put my idea into the part I per formed; I threw it into my wooing of Ginevra. In the "Ours," or sincere lover, I saw Dr. John. Did I pity him, as erst? No, I hardened my heart, rivalled and out-rivalled him. I knew myself but a fop, but where he was outcast I could please. Now I know acted as if wishful and resolute to win and conquer. Ginevra seconded me; between us we half-changed the nature of the rôle, gilding it from top to toe. Between the acts M. Paul, told us he knew not what possessed us, and half expostulated. "C'est peut-être plus beau que votre modèle," said he, "mais ce n'est pas juste." I know not what possessed me either; but somehow, my longing was to eclipse the "Ours," i.e., Dr. John. Ginevra was tender; how could I be otherwise than chivalric? Retaining the letter, I recklessly altered the spirit of the rôle. Without heart, without interest, I could not play it at all. It must be played — in went the yearned-for seasoning — thus favoured, I played it with relish.

What I felt that night, and what I did, I no more expected to feel and do, than to be lifted in a trance to the seventh heaven. Cold, reluctant, apprehensive, I had accepted a part to please another: ere long, warming, becoming interested, taking courage, I acted to please myself. Yet the next day, when I thought it over, I quite disapproved of these amateur performances; and though glad that I had obliged M. Paul, and tried my own strength for once, I took a firm resolution, never to be drawn into a similar affair. A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by, and fastened them in with the lock of a resolution which neither Time nor Temptation has since picked.

No sooner was the play over, and well over, than the choleric and arbitrary M. Paul underwent a metamorphosis. His hour of managerial responsibility past, he at once laid aside his magisterial austerity; in a moment he stood amongst us, vivacious, kind, and social, shook hands with us all round, thanked us separately, and announced his determination that each of us should in turn be his partner in the coming ball. On his claiming my promise, I told him I did not dance. "For once I must," was the answer; and if I had not slipped aside and kept out of his way, he would have compelled me to this second performance. But I had acted enough for one evening; it was time I retired into myself and my ordinary life. My dun-coloured dress did well enough under a paletôt on the stage, but would not suit a waltz or a quadrille. Withdrawing to a quiet nook, whence unobserved I could observe — the ball, its splendours and its pleasures, passed before me as a spectacle.

Again Ginevra Fanshawe was the belle, the fairest and the gayest present; she was selected to open the ball: very lovely she looked, very gracefully she danced, very joyously she smiled. Such scenes were her triumphs — she was the child of pleasure. Work or suffering found her listless and dejected, powerless and repining; but gaiety expanded her butterfly's wings, lit up their gold-dust and bright spots, made her flash like a gem, and flush like a flower. At all ordinary diet and plain beverage she would pout; but she fed on creams and ices like a humming-bird on honey-paste: sweet wine was her element, and sweet cake her daily bread. Ginevra lived her full life in a ball-room; elsewhere she drooped dispirited.

Think not, reader, that she thus bloomed and sparkled for the mere sake of M. Paul, her partner, or that she lavished her best graces that night for the edification of her companions only, or for that of the parents and grand-parents, who filled the carré, and lined the ball-room; under circumstances so insipid and limited, with motives so chilly and vapid, Ginevra would scarce have deigned to walk one quadrille, and weariness and fretfulness would have replaced animation and good-humour, but she knew of a leaven in the otherwise heavy festal mass which lighted the whole; she tasted a condiment which gave it zest; she perceived reasons justifying the display of her choicest attractions.

In the ball-room, indeed, not a single male spectator was to be seen who was not married and a father — M. Paul excepted — that gentleman, too, being the sole creature of his sex permitted to lead out a pupil to the dance; and this exceptional part was allowed him, partly as a matter of old-established custom (for he was a kinsman of Madame Beck's, and high in her confidence), partly because he would always have his own way and do as he pleased, and partly because — wilful, passionate, partial, as he might be — he was the soul of honour, and might be trusted with a regiment of the fairest and purest; in perfect security that under his leadership they would come to no harm. Many of the girls — it may be noted in parenthesis — were not pure-minded at all, very much otherwise; but they no more dare betray their natural coarseness in M. Paul's presence, than they dare tread purposely on his corns, laugh in his face during a stormy apostrophe, or speak above their breath while some crisis of irritability was covering his human visage with the mask of an intelligent tiger. M. Paul, then, might dance with whom he would — and woe be to the interference which put him out of step.

Others there were admitted as spectators — with (seeming) reluctance, through prayers, by influence, under restriction, by special and difficult exercise of Madame Beck's gracious good-nature, and whom she all the evening — with her own personal surveillance — kept far aloof at the remotest, drearest, coldest, darkest side of the carré — a small, forlorn band of "jeunes gens;" these being all of the best families, grown-up sons of mothers present, and whose sisters were pupils in the school. That whole evening was Madame on duty beside these "jeunes gens" — attentive to them as a mother, but strict with them as a dragon. There was a sort of cordon stretched before them, which they wearied her with prayers to be permitted to pass, and just to revive themselves by one dance with that “belle blonde,” or that “jolie brune,” or “cette jeune fille magnifique aux cheveux noirs comme le jais.”

“Taisez-vous!” Madame would reply, heroically and inexorably. “Vous ne passerez pas à moins que ce ne soit sur mon cadavre, et vous ne danserez qu’avec la nonnette du jardin” (alluding to the legend). And she majestically walked to and fro along their disconsolate and impatient line, like a little Bonaparte in a mouse-coloured silk gown.

Madame knew something of the world; Madame knew much of human nature. I don’t think that another directress in Villette would have dared to admit a “jeune homme” within her walls; but Madame knew that by granting such admission, on an occasion like the present, a bold stroke might be struck, and a great point gained.

In the first place, the parents were made accomplices to the deed, for it was only through their mediation it was brought about. Secondly: the admission of these rattlesnakes, so fascinating and so dangerous, served to draw out Madame precisely in her strongest character — that of a first-rate surveillante. Thirdly: their presence furnished a most piquant ingredient to the entertainment: the pupils knew it, and saw it, and the view of such golden apples shining afar off, animated them with a spirit no other circumstance could have kindled. The children’s pleasure spread to the parents; life and mirth circulated quickly round the ball-room; the “jeunes gens” themselves, though restrained, were amused: for Madame never permitted them to feel dull — and thus Madame Beck’s fête annually ensured a success unknown to the fête of any other directress in the land.

I observed that Dr. John was at first permitted to walk at large through the classes: there was about him a manly, responsible look, that redeemed his youth, and half-expiated his beauty; but as soon as the ball began, Madame ran up to him.

“Come, Wolf; come,” said she, laughing: “you wear sheep’s clothing, but you must quit the fold notwithstanding. Come; I have a fine menagerie of twenty here in the carré: let me place you amongst my collection.”

“But first suffer me to have one dance with one pupil of my choice.”

“Have you the face to ask such a thing? It is madness: it is impiety.

Sortez, sortez, au plus vite.”

She drove him before her, and soon had him enclosed within the cordon.

Ginevra being, I suppose, tired with dancing, sought me out in my retreat. She threw herself on the bench beside me, and (a demonstration I could very well have dispensed with) cast her arms round my neck.

“Lucy Snowe! Lucy Snowe!” she cried in a somewhat sobbing voice, half hysterical.

“What in the world is the matter?” I drily said.

“How do I look — how do I look to-night?” she demanded.

"As usual," said I; "preposterously vain."

"Caustic creature! You never have a kind word for me; but in spite of you, and all other envious detractors, I know I am beautiful; I feel it, I see it — for there is a great looking-glass in the dressing-room, where I can view my shape from head to foot. Will you go with me now, and let us two stand before it?"

"I will, Miss Fanshawe: you shall be humoured even to the top of your bent."

The dressing-room was very near, and we stepped in. Putting her arm through mine, she drew me to the mirror. Without resistance remonstrance, or remark, I stood and let her self-love have its feast and triumph: curious to see how much it could swallow — whether it was possible it could feed to satiety — whether any whisper of consideration for others could penetrate her heart, and moderate its vainglorious exultation.

Not at all. She turned me and herself round; she viewed us both on all sides; she smiled, she waved her curls, she retouched her sash, she spread her dress, and finally, letting go my arm, and curtseying with mock respect, she said: "I would not be you for a kingdom."

The remark was too naïve to rouse anger; I merely said: "Very good."

"And what would you give to be ME?" she inquired.

"Not a bad sixpence — strange as it may sound," I replied. "You are but a poor creature."

"You don't think so in your heart."

"No; for in my heart you have not the outline of a place: I only occasionally turn you over in my brain."

"Well, but," said she, in an expostulatory tone, "just listen to the difference of our positions, and then see how happy am I, and how miserable are you."

"Go on; I listen."

"In the first place: I am the daughter of a gentleman of family, and though my father is not rich, I have expectations from an uncle. Then, I am just eighteen, the finest age possible. I have had a continental education, and though I can't spell, I have abundant accomplishments. I am pretty; you can't deny that; I may have as many admirers as I choose. This very night I have been breaking the hearts of two gentlemen, and it is the dying look I had from one of them just now, which puts me in such spirits. I do so like to watch them turn red and pale, and scowl and dart fiery glances at each other, and languishing ones at me. There is me — happy ME; now for you, poor soul!

"I suppose you are nobody's daughter, since you took care of little children when you first came to Villette: you have no relations; you can't call yourself young at twenty-three; you have no attractive accomplishments — no beauty. As to admirers, you hardly know what they are; you can't even talk on the subject: you sit dumb when the other teachers quote their conquests. I believe you never were in love, and never will be: you don't know the feeling, and so much the better, for though you might have your own heart broken, no living heart will you ever break. Isn't it all true?"

"A good deal of it is true as gospel, and shrewd besides. There must be good in you, Ginevra, to speak so honestly; that snake, Zélie St. Pierre, could not utter what you have uttered. Still, Miss Fanshawe, hapless as I am, according to your showing, sixpence I would not give to purchase you, body and soul."

"Just because I am not clever, and that is all you think of. Nobody in the world but you cares for cleverness."

"On the contrary, I consider you are clever, in your way — very smart indeed. But you were talking of breaking hearts — that edifying amusement into the merits of which I don't quite enter; pray on whom does your vanity lead you to think you have done execution to-night?"

She approached her lips to my ear — "Isidore and Alfred de Hamal are both here?" she whispered.

"Oh! they are? I should like to see them."

"There's a dear creature! your curiosity is roused at last. Follow me,

I will point them out."

She proudly led the way — "But you cannot see them well from the classes," said she, turning, "Madame keeps them too far off. Let us cross the garden, enter by the corridor, and get close to them behind: we shall be scolded if we are seen, but never mind."

For once, I did not mind. Through the garden we went — penetrated into the corridor by a quiet private entrance, and approaching the carré, yet keeping in the corridor shade, commanded a near view of the band of "jeunes gens."

I believe I could have picked out the conquering de Hamal even undirected. He was a straight-nosed, very correct-featured little dandy. I say little dandy, though he was not beneath the middle standard in stature; but his lineaments were small, and so were his hands and feet; and he was pretty and smooth, and as trim as a doll: so nicely dressed, so nicely curled, so booted and gloved and cravated — he was charming indeed. I said so. "What, a dear personage!" cried I, and commended Ginevra's taste warmly; and asked her what she thought de Hamal might have done with the precious fragments of that heart she had broken — whether he kept them in a scent-vial, and conserved them in otto of roses? I observed, too, with deep rapture of approbation, that the colonel's hands were scarce larger than Miss Fanshawe's own, and suggested that this circumstance might be convenient, as he could wear her gloves at a pinch. On his dear curls, I told her I doated: and as to his low, Grecian brow, and exquisite classic headpiece, I confessed I had no language to do such perfections justice.

"And if he were your lover?" suggested the cruelly exultant Ginevra.

"Oh! heavens, what bliss!" said I; "but do not be inhuman, Miss Fanshawe: to put such thoughts into my head is like showing poor outcast

Cain a far, glimpse of Paradise."

"You like him, then?"

"As I like sweets, and jams, and comfits, and conservatory flowers."

Ginevra admired my taste, for all these things were her adoration; she could then readily credit that they were mine too.

"Now for Isidore," I went on. I own I felt still more curious to see him than his rival; but Ginevra was absorbed in the latter.

"Alfred was admitted here to-night," said she, "through the influence of his aunt, Madame la Baronne de Dorlodot; and now, having seen him, can you not understand why I have been in such spirits all the evening, and acted so well, and danced with such life, and why I am now happy as a queen? Dieu! Dieu! It was such good fun to glance first at him and then at the other, and madden them both."

"But that other — where is he? Show me Isidore."

"I don't like."

"Why not?"

"I am ashamed of him."

"For what reason?"

"Because — because" (in a whisper) "he has such — such whiskers, orange — red — there now!"

"The murder is out," I subjoined. "Never mind, show him all the same; I engage not to faint."

She looked round. Just then an English voice spoke behind her and me.

"You are both standing in a draught; you must leave this corridor."

"There is no draught, Dr. John," said I, turning.

"She takes cold so easily," he pursued, looking at Ginevra with extreme kindness. "She is delicate; she must be cared for: fetch her a shawl."

"Permit me to judge for myself," said Miss Fanshawe, with hauteur. "I want no shawl."

"Your dress is thin, you have been dancing, you are heated."

"Always preaching," retorted she; "always coddling and admonishing."

The answer Dr. John would have given did not come; that his heart was hurt became evident in his eye; darkened, and saddened, and pained, he turned a little aside, but was patient. I knew where there were plenty of shawls near at hand; I ran and fetched one.

"She shall wear this, if I have strength to make her," said I, folding it well round her muslin dress, covering carefully her neck and her arms. "Is that Isidore?" I asked, in a somewhat fierce whisper.

She pushed up her lip, smiled, and nodded.

"Is that Isidore?" I repeated, giving her a shake: I could have given her a dozen.

"C'est lui-même," said she. "How coarse he is, compared with the
Colonel-Count! And then — oh ciel! — the whiskers!"

Dr. John now passed on.

"The Colonel-Count!" I echoed. "The doll — the puppet — the manikin — the poor inferior creature! A mere lackey for Dr. John his valet, his foot-boy! Is it possible that fine generous gentleman — handsome as a vision — offers you his honourable hand and gallant heart, and promises to protect your flimsy person and feckless mind through the storms and struggles of life — and you hang back — you scorn, you sting, you torture him! Have you power to do this? Who gave you that power? Where is it? Does it lie all in your beauty — your pink and white complexion, and your yellow hair? Does this bind his soul at your feet, and bend his neck under your yoke? Does this purchase for you his affection, his tenderness, his thoughts, his hopes, his interest, his noble, cordial love — and will you not have it? Do you scorn it? You are only dissembling: you are not in earnest: you love him; you long for him; but you trifle with his heart to make him more surely yours?"

"Bah! How you run on! I don't understand half you have said."

I had got her out into the garden ere this. I now set her down on a seat and told her she should not stir till she had avowed which she meant in the end to accept — the man or the monkey.

"Him you call the man," said she, "is bourgeois, sandy-haired, and answers to the name of John! — cela suffit: je n'en veux pas. Colonel de Hamal is a gentleman of excellent connections, perfect manners, sweet appearance, with pale interesting face, and hair and eyes like an Italian. Then too he is the most delightful company possible — a man quite in my way; not sensible and serious like the other; but one with whom I can talk on equal terms — who does not plague and bore, and harass me with depths, and heights, and passions, and talents for which I have no taste. There now. Don't hold me so fast."

I slackened my grasp, and she darted off. I did not care to pursue her.

Somehow I could not avoid returning once more in the direction of the corridor to get another glimpse of Dr. John; but I met him on the garden-steps, standing where the light from a window fell broad. His well-proportioned figure was not to be mistaken, for I doubt whether there was another in that assemblage his equal. He carried his hat in his hand; his uncovered head, his face and fine brow were most handsome and manly. His features were not delicate, not slight like those of a woman, nor were they cold, frivolous, and feeble; though well cut, they were not so chiselled, so frittered away, as to lose in expression or significance what they gained in unmeaning symmetry. Much feeling spoke in them at times, and more sat silent in his eye. Such at least were my thoughts of him: to me he seemed all this. An inexpressible sense of wonder occupied me, as I looked at this man, and reflected that he could not be slighted.

It was, not my intention to approach or address him in the garden, our terms of acquaintance not warranting such a step; I had only meant to view him in the crowd — myself unseen: coming upon him thus alone, I withdrew. But he was looking out for me, or rather for her who had been with me:

therefore he descended the steps, and followed me down the alley.

"You know Miss Fanshawe? I have often wished to ask whether you knew her," said he.

"Yes: I know her."

"Intimately?"

"Quite as intimately as I wish."

"What have you done with her now?"

"Am I her keeper?" I felt inclined to ask; but I simply answered, "I have shaken her well, and would have shaken her better, but she escaped out of my hands and ran away."

"Would you favour me," he asked, "by watching over her this one evening, and observing that she does nothing imprudent — does not, for instance, run out into the night-air immediately after dancing?"

"I may, perhaps, look after her a little; since you wish it; but she likes her own way too well to submit readily to control."

"She is so young, so thoroughly artless," said he.

"To me she is an enigma," I responded.

"Is she?" he asked — much interested. "How?"

"It would be difficult to say how — difficult, at least, to tell you how."

"And why me?"

"I wonder she is not better pleased that you are so much her friend."

"But she has not the slightest idea how much I am her friend. That is precisely the point I cannot teach her. May I inquire did she ever speak of me to you?"

"Under the name of 'Isidore' she has talked about you often; but I must add that it is only within the last ten minutes I have discovered that you and 'Isidore' are identical. It is only, Dr. John, within that brief space of time I have learned that Ginevra Fanshawe is the person, under this roof, in whom you have long been interested — that she is the magnet which attracts you to the Rue Fossette, that for her sake you venture into this garden, and seek out caskets dropped by rivals."

"You know all?"

"I know so much."

"For more than a year I have been accustomed to meet her in society. Mrs. Cholmondeley, her friend, is an acquaintance of mine; thus I see her every Sunday. But you observed that under the name of 'Isidore' she often spoke of me: may I — without inviting you to a breach of confidence — inquire what was the tone, what the feeling of her remarks? I feel somewhat anxious to know, being a little tormented with uncertainty as to how I stand with her."

"Oh, she varies: she shifts and changes like the wind."

"Still, you can gather some general idea — ?"

"I can," thought I, "but it would not do to communicate that general idea to you. Besides, if I said she did not love you, I know you would not believe me."

"You are silent," he pursued. "I suppose you have no good news to impart. No matter. If she feels for me positive coldness and aversion, it is a sign I do not deserve her."

"Do you doubt yourself? Do you consider yourself the inferior of Colonel de Hamal?"

"I love Miss Fanshawe far more than de Hamal loves any human being, and would care for and guard her better than he. Respecting de Hamal, I fear she is under an illusion; the man's character is known to me, all his antecedents, all his scrapes. He is not worthy of your beautiful young friend."

"My 'beautiful young friend' ought to know that, and to know or feel who is worthy of her," said I. "If her beauty or her brains will not serve her so far, she merits the sharp lesson of experience."

"Are you not a little severe?"

"I am excessively severe — more severe than I choose to show you. You should hear the strictures with which I favour my 'beautiful young friend,' only that you would be unutterably shocked at my want of tender considerateness for her delicate nature."

"She is so lovely, one cannot but be loving towards her. You — every woman older than herself, must feel for such a simple, innocent, girlish fairy a sort of motherly or elder-sisterly fondness. Graceful angel! Does not your heart yearn towards her when she pours into your ear her pure, childlike confidences? How you are privileged!" And he sighed.

"I cut short these confidences somewhat abruptly now and then," said I. "But excuse me, Dr. John, may I change the theme for one instant? What a god-like person is that de Hamal! What a nose on his face — perfect! Model one in putty or clay, you could not make a better or straighter, or neater; and then, such classic lips and chin — and his bearing — sublime."

"De Hamal is an unutterable puppy, besides being a very white-livered hero."

"You, Dr. John, and every man of a less-refined mould than he, must feel for him a sort of admiring affection, such as Mars and the coarser deities may be supposed to have borne the young, graceful Apollo."

"An unprincipled, gambling little jackanapes!" said Dr. John curtly, "whom, with one hand, I could lift up by the waistband any day, and lay low in the kennel if I liked."

"The sweet seraph!" said I. "What a cruel idea! Are you not a little severe, Dr. John?"

And now I paused. For the second time that night I was going beyond myself — venturing out of what I looked on as my natural habits — speaking in an unpremeditated, impulsive strain, which startled me strangely when I halted to reflect. On rising that morning, had I anticipated that before night I should have acted the part of a gay lover in a vaudeville; and an hour after, frankly discussed with Dr. John the question of his hapless suit, and rallied him on his illusions? I had no more presaged such feats than I had looked forward to an ascent in a balloon, or a voyage to Cape Horn.

The Doctor and I, having paced down the walk, were now returning; the reflex from the window again lit his face: he smiled, but his eye was melancholy. How I wished that he could feel heart's-ease! How I grieved that he brooded over pain, and pain from such a cause! He, with his great advantages, he to love in vain! I did not then know that the pensiveness of reverse is the best phase for some minds; nor did I reflect that some herbs, "though scentless when entire, yield fragrance when they're bruised."

"Do not be sorrowful, do not grieve," I broke out. "If there is in Ginevra one spark of worthiness of your affection, she will — she must feel devotion in return. Be cheerful, be hopeful, Dr. John. Who should hope, if not you?"

In return for this speech I got — what, it must be supposed, I deserved — a look of surprise: I thought also of some disapprobation. We parted, and I went into the house very chill. The clocks struck and the bells tolled midnight; people were leaving fast: the fête was over; the lamps were fading. In another hour all the dwelling-house, and all the pensionnat, were dark and hushed. I too was in bed, but not asleep. To me it was not easy to sleep after a day of such excitement.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LONG VACATION.

Following Madame Beck's fête, with its three preceding weeks of relaxation, its brief twelve hours' burst of hilarity and dissipation, and its one subsequent day of utter languor, came a period of reaction; two months of real application, of close, hard study. These two months, being the last of the "année scolaire," were indeed the only genuine working months in the year. To them was procrastinated — into them concentrated, alike by professors, mistresses, and pupils — the main burden of preparation for the examinations preceding the distribution of prizes. Candidates for rewards had then to work in good earnest; masters and teachers had to set their shoulders to the wheel, to urge on the backward, and diligently aid and train the more promising. A showy demonstration — a telling exhibition — must be got up for public view, and all means were fair to this end.

I scarcely noted how the other teachers went to work; I had my own business to mind; and my task was not the least onerous, being to imbue some ninety sets of brains with a due tincture of what they considered a most complicated and difficult science, that of the English language; and to drill ninety tongues in what, for them, was an almost impossible pronunciation — the lisping and hissing dentals of the Isles.

The examination-day arrived. Awful day! Prepared for with anxious care, dressed for with silent despatch — nothing vaporous or fluttering now — no white gauze or azure streamers; the grave, close, compact was the order of the toilette. It seemed to me that I was this day, especially doomed — the main burden and trial falling on me alone of all the female teachers. The others were not expected to examine in the studies they taught; the professor of literature, M. Paul, taking upon himself this duty. He, this school autocrat, gathered all and sundry reins into the hollow of his one hand; he irefully rejected any colleague; he would not have help. Madame herself, who evidently rather wished to undertake the examination in geography — her favourite study, which she taught well — was forced to succumb, and be subordinate to her despotic kinsman's direction. The whole staff of instructors, male and female, he set aside, and stood on the examiner's estrade alone. It irked him that he was forced to make one exception to this rule. He could not manage English: he was obliged to leave that branch of education in the English teacher's hands; which he did, not without a flash of naïve jealousy.

A constant crusade against the "amour-propre" of every human being but himself, was the crotchet of this able, but fiery and grasping little man. He had a strong relish for public representation in his own person, but an extreme abhorrence of the like display in any other. He quelled, he kept down when he could; and when he could not, he fumed like a bottled storm.

On the evening preceding the examination-day, I was walking in the garden, as were the other teachers and all the boarders. M. Emanuel joined me in the "allée défendue;" his cigar was at his lips; his paletôt — a most characteristic garment of no particular shape — hung dark and menacing; the tassel of his bonnet grec sternly shadowed his left temple; his black whiskers curled like those of a wrathful cat; his blue eye had a cloud in its glitter.

"Ainsi," he began, abruptly fronting and arresting me, "vous allez trôner comme une reine; demain — trôner à mes côtés? Sans doute vous savourez d'avance les délices de l'autorité. Je crois voir en je ne sais quoi de rayonnante, petite ambitieuse!"

Now the fact was, he happened to be entirely mistaken. I did not — could not — estimate the admiration or the good opinion of tomorrow's audience at the same rate he did. Had that audience numbered as many personal friends and acquaintance for me as for him, I know not how it might have been: I speak of the case as it stood. On me school-triumphs shed but a cold lustre. I had wondered — and I wondered now — how it was that for him they seemed to shine as with hearth-warmth and hearth-glow. He cared for them perhaps too much; I, probably, too little. However, I had my own fancies as well as he. I liked, for instance, to see M. Emanuel jealous; it lit up his nature, and woke his spirit; it threw all sorts of queer lights and shadows over his dun face, and into his violet-azure eyes (he used to say that his black hair and blue eyes were "une de ses beautés"). There was a relish in his anger; it was artless, earnest, quite unreasonable, but never hypocritical. I uttered no disclaimer then of the complacency he attributed to me; I merely asked where the English examination came in — whether at the commencement or close of the day?

"I hesitate," said he, "whether at the very beginning, before many persons are come, and when your aspiring nature will not be gratified by a large audience, or quite at the close, when everybody is tired, and only a jaded and worn-out attention will be at your service."

"Que vous êtes dur, Monsieur!" I said, affecting dejection.

"One ought to be 'dur' with you. You are one of those beings who must be kept down. I know you! I know you! Other people in this house see you pass, and think that a colourless shadow has gone by. As for me, I scrutinized your face once, and it sufficed."

"You are satisfied that you understand me?"

Without answering directly, he went on, "Were you not gratified when you succeeded in that vaudeville? I watched you and saw a passionate ardour for triumph in your physiognomy. What fire shot into the glance! Not mere light, but flame: je me tiens pour averti."

"What feeling I had on that occasion, Monsieur — and pardon me, if I say, you immensely exaggerate both its quality and quantity — was quite abstract. I did not care for the vaudeville. I hated the part you assigned me. I had not the slightest sympathy with the audience below the stage. They are good people, doubtless, but do I know them? Are they anything to me? Can I care for being brought before their view again to-morrow? Will the examination be anything but a task to me — a task I wish well over?"

"Shall I take it out of your hands?"

"With all my heart; if you do not fear failure."

"But I should fail. I only know three phrases of English, and a few words: par exemple, de sonn, de mone, de stares — est-ce bien dit? My opinion is that it would be better to give up the thing altogether: to have no English examination, eh?"

"If Madame consents, I consent."

"Heartily?"

"Very heartily."

He smoked his cigar in silence. He turned suddenly.

"Donnez-moi la main," said he, and the spite and jealousy melted out of his face, and a generous kindliness shone there instead.

"Come, we will not be rivals, we will be friends," he pursued. "The examination shall take place, and I will choose a good moment; and instead of vexing and hindering, as I felt half-inclined ten minutes ago — for I have my malevolent moods: I always had from childhood — I will aid you sincerely. After all, you are solitary and a stranger, and have your way to make and your bread to earn; it may be well that you should become known. We will be friends: do you agree?"

"Out of my heart, Monsieur. I am glad of a friend. I like that better than a triumph."

"Pauvrette?" said he, and turned away and left the alley.

The examination passed over well; M. Paul was as good as his word, and did his best to make my part easy. The next day came the distribution of prizes; that also passed; the school broke up; the pupils went home, and now began the long vacation.

That vacation! Shall I ever forget it? I think not. Madame Beck went, the first day of the holidays, to join her children at the sea-side; all the three teachers had parents or friends with whom they took refuge; every professor quitted the city; some went to Paris, some to Boue-Marine; M. Paul set forth on a pilgrimage to Rome; the house was left quite empty, but for me, a servant, and a poor deformed and imbecile pupil, a sort of crétin, whom her stepmother in a distant province would not allow to return home.

My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! How gloomy the forsaken garden — grey now with the dust of a town summer departed. Looking forward at the commencement of those eight weeks, I hardly knew how I was to live to the end. My spirits had long been gradually sinking; now that the prop of employment was withdrawn, they went down fast. Even to look forward was not to hope: the dumb future spoke no comfort, offered no promise, gave no inducement to bear present evil in reliance on future good. A sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed on me — a despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly. Alas! When I had full leisure to look on life as life must be looked on by such as me, I found it but a hopeless desert: tawny sands, with no green fields, no palm-tree, no well in view. The hopes which are dear to youth, which bear it up and lead it on, I knew not and dared not know. If they knocked at my heart sometimes, an inhospitable bar to admission must be inwardly drawn. When they turned away thus rejected, tears sad enough sometimes flowed: but it could not be helped: I dared not give such guests lodging. So mortally did I fear the sin and weakness of presumption.

Religious reader, you will preach to me a long sermon about what I have just written, and so will you, moralist: and you, stern sage: you, stoic, will frown; you, cynic, sneer; you, epicure, laugh. Well, each and all, take it your own way. I accept the sermon, frown, sneer, and laugh; perhaps you are all right: and perhaps, circumstanced like me, you would have been, like me, wrong. The first month was, indeed, a long, black, heavy month to me.

The crétin did not seem unhappy. I did my best to feed her well and keep her warm, and she only asked food and sunshine, or when that lacked, fire. Her weak faculties approved of inertion: her brain, her eyes, her ears, her heart slept content; they could not wake to work, so lethargy was their Paradise.

Three weeks of that vacation were hot, fair, and dry, but the fourth and fifth were tempestuous and wet. I do not know why that change in the atmosphere made a cruel impression on me, why the raging storm and beating rain crushed me with a deadlier paralysis than I had experienced while the air had remained serene; but so it was; and my nervous system could hardly support what it had for many days and nights to undergo in that huge empty house. How I used to pray to Heaven for consolation and support! With what dread force the conviction would grasp me that Fate was my permanent foe, never to be conciliated. I did not, in my heart, arraign the mercy or justice of God for this; I concluded it to be a part of his great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live, and I thrilled in the certainty that of this number, I was one.

It was some relief when an aunt of the crétin, a kind old woman, came one day, and took away my strange, deformed companion. The hapless creature had been at times a heavy charge; I could not take her out beyond the garden, and I could not leave her a minute alone: for her poor mind, like her body, was warped: its propensity was to evil. A vague bent to mischief, an aimless malevolence, made constant vigilance indispensable. As she very rarely spoke, and would sit for hours together moping and mowing, and distorting her features with indescribable grimaces, it was more like being prisoned with some strange tameless animal, than associating with a human being. Then there were personal attentions to be rendered which required the nerve of a hospital nurse; my resolution was so tried, it sometimes fell dead-sick. These duties should not have fallen on me; a servant, now absent, had rendered them hitherto, and in the hurry of holiday departure, no substitute to fill this office had been provided. This tax and trial were by no means the least I have known in life. Still, menial and distasteful as they were, my mental pain was far more wasting and wearing. Attendance on the crétin deprived me often of the power and inclination to swallow a meal, and sent me faint to the fresh air, and the well or fountain in the court; but this duty never wrung my heart, or brimmed my eyes, or scalded my cheek with tears hot as molten metal.

The crétin being gone, I was free to walk out. At first I lacked courage to venture very far from the Rue Fossette, but by degrees I sought the city gates, and passed them, and then went wandering away far along chaussées, through fields, beyond cemeteries, Catholic and Protestant, beyond farmsteads, to lanes and little woods, and I know not where. A goad thrust me on, a fever forbade me to rest; a want of companionship maintained in my soul the cravings of a most deadly famine. I often walked all day, through the burning noon and the arid afternoon, and the dusk evening, and came back with moonrise.

While wandering in solitude, I would sometimes picture the present probable position of others, my acquaintance. There was Madame Beck at a cheerful watering-place with her children, her mother, and a whole troop of friends who had sought the same scene of relaxation. Zélie St. Pierre was at Paris, with her relatives; the other teachers were at their homes. There was Ginevra Fanshawe, whom certain of her connections had carried on a pleasant tour southward. Ginevra seemed to me the happiest. She was on the route of beautiful scenery; these September suns shone for her on fertile plains, where harvest and vintage matured under their mellow beam. These gold and crystal moons rose on her vision over blue horizons waved in mounted lines.

But all this was nothing; I too felt those autumn suns and saw those harvest moons, and I almost wished to be covered in with earth and turf, deep out of their influence; for I could not live in their light, nor make them comrades, nor yield them affection. But Ginevra had a kind of spirit with her, empowered to give constant strength and comfort, to gladden daylight and embalm darkness; the best of the good genii that guard humanity curtained her with his wings, and canopied her head with his bending form. By True Love was Ginevra followed: never could she be alone. Was she insensible to this presence? It seemed to me impossible: I could not realize such deadness. I imagined her grateful in secret, loving now with reserve; but purposing one day to show how much she loved: I pictured her faithful hero half conscious of her coy fondness, and comforted by that consciousness: I conceived an electric chord of sympathy between them, a fine chain of mutual understanding, sustaining union through a separation of a hundred leagues — carrying, across mound and hollow, communication by prayer and wish. Ginevra gradually became with me a sort of heroine. One day, perceiving this growing illusion, I said, "I really believe my nerves are getting overstretched: my mind has suffered somewhat too much a malady is growing upon it — what shall I do? How shall I keep well?"

Indeed there was no way to keep well under the circumstances. At last a day and night of peculiarly agonizing depression were succeeded by physical illness, I took perforce to my bed. About this time the Indian summer closed and the equinoctial storms began; and for nine dark and wet days, of which the hours rushed on all turbulent, deaf, dishevelled — bewildered with sounding hurricane — I lay in a strange fever of the nerves and blood. Sleep went quite away. I used to rise in the night, look round for her, beseech her earnestly to return. A rattle of the window, a cry of the blast only replied — -Sleep never came!

I err. She came once, but in anger. Impatient of my importunity she brought with her an avenging dream. By the clock of St. Jean Baptiste, that dream remained scarce fifteen minutes — a brief space, but sufficing to wring my whole frame with unknown anguish; to confer a nameless experience that had the hue, the mien, the terror, the very tone of a visitation from eternity. Between twelve and one that night a cup was forced to my lips, black, strong, strange, drawn from no well, but filled up seething from a bottomless and boundless sea. Suffering, brewed in temporal or calculable measure, and mixed for mortal lips, tastes not as this suffering tasted. Having drank and woke, I thought all was over: the end come and past by. Trembling fearfully — as consciousness returned — ready to cry out on some fellow-creature to help me, only that I knew no fellow-creature was near enough to catch the wild summons — Goton in her far distant attic could not hear — I rose on my knees in bed. Some fearful hours went over me: indescribably was I torn, racked and oppressed in mind. Amidst the horrors of that dream I think the worst lay here. Methought the well-loved dead, who had loved me well in life, met me elsewhere, alienated: galled was my inmost spirit with an unutterable sense of despair about the future. Motive there was none why I should try to recover or wish to live; and yet quite unendurable was the pitiless and haughty voice in which Death challenged me to engage his unknown terrors. When I tried to pray I could only utter these words: "From my youth up Thy terrors have I suffered with a troubled mind."

Most true was it.

On bringing me my tea next morning Goton urged me to call in a doctor.

I would not: I thought no doctor could cure me.

One evening — and I was not delirious: I was in my sane mind, I got up — I dressed myself, weak and shaking. The solitude and the stillness of the long dormitory could not be borne any longer; the ghastly white beds were turning into spectres — the coronal of each became a death's-head, huge and sun-bleached — dead dreams of an elder world and mightier race lay frozen in their wide gaping eyeholes. That evening more firmly than ever fastened into my soul the conviction that Fate was of stone, and Hope a false idol — blind, bloodless, and of granite core. I felt, too, that the trial God had appointed me was gaining its climax, and must now be turned by my own hands, hot, feeble, trembling as they were. It rained still, and blew; but with more clemency, I thought, than it had poured and raged all day. Twilight was falling, and I deemed its influence pitiful; from the lattice I saw coming night-clouds trailing low like banners drooping. It seemed to me that at this hour there was affection and sorrow in Heaven above for all pain suffered on earth beneath; the weight of my dreadful dream became alleviated — that insufferable thought of being no more loved — no more owned, half-yielded to hope of the contrary — I was sure this hope would shine clearer if I got out from under this house-roof, which was crushing as the slab of a tomb, and went outside the city to a certain quiet hill, a long way distant in the fields. Covered with a cloak (I could not be delirious, for I had sense and recollection to put on warm clothing), forth I set. The bells of a church arrested me in passing; they seemed to call me in to the salut, and I went in. Any solemn rite, any spectacle of sincere worship, any opening for appeal to God was as welcome to me then as bread to one in extremity of want. I knelt down with others on the stone pavement. It was an old solemn church, its pervading gloom not gilded but purpled by light shed through stained glass.

Few worshippers were assembled, and, the salut over, half of them departed. I discovered soon that those left remained to confess. I did not stir. Carefully every door of the church was shut; a holy quiet sank upon, and a solemn shade gathered about us. After a space, breathless and spent in prayer, a penitent approached the confessional. I watched. She whispered her avowal; her shrift was whispered back; she returned consoled. Another went, and another. A pale lady, kneeling near me, said in a low, kind voice: — "Go you now, I am not quite prepared."

Mechanically obedient, I rose and went. I knew what I was about; my mind had run over the intent with lightning-speed. To take this step could not make me more wretched than I was; it might soothe me.

The priest within the confessional never turned his eyes to regard me; he only quietly inclined his ear to my lips. He might be a good man, but this duty had become to him a sort of form: he went through it with the phlegm of custom. I hesitated; of the formula of confession I was ignorant: instead of commencing, then, with the prelude usual, I said: — "Mon père, je suis Protestante."

He directly turned. He was not a native priest: of that class, the cast of physiognomy is, almost invariably, grovelling: I saw by his profile and brow he was a Frenchman; though grey and advanced in years, he did not, I think, lack feeling or intelligence. He inquired, not unkindly, why, being a Protestant, I came to him?

I said I was perishing for a word of advice or an accent of comfort. I had been living for some weeks quite alone; I had been ill; I had a pressure of affliction on my mind of which it would hardly any longer endure the weight.

"Was it a sin, a crime?" he inquired, somewhat startled. I reassured him on this point, and, as well as I could, I showed him the mere outline of my experience.

He looked thoughtful, surprised, puzzled. "You take me unawares," said he. "I have not had such a case as yours before: ordinarily we know our routine, and are prepared; but this makes a great break in the common course of confession. I am hardly furnished with counsel fitting the circumstances."

Of course, I had not expected he would be; but the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient, yet consecrated — the mere pouring out of some portion of long accumulating, long pent-up pain into a vessel whence it could not be again diffused — had done me good. I was already solaced.

"Must I go, father?" I asked of him as he sat silent.

"My daughter," he said kindly — and I am sure he was a kind man: he had a compassionate eye — "for the present you had better go: but I assure you your words have struck me. Confession, like other things, is apt to become formal and trivial with habit. You have come and poured your heart out; a thing seldom done. I would fain think your case over, and take it with me to my oratory. Were you of our faith I should know what to say — a mind so tossed can find repose but in the bosom of retreat, and the punctual practice of piety. The world, it is well known, has no satisfaction for that class of natures. Holy men have bidden penitents like you to hasten their path upward by penance, self-denial, and difficult good works. Tears are given them here for meat and drink — bread of affliction and waters of affliction — their recompence comes hereafter. It is my own conviction that these impressions under which you are smarting are messengers from God to bring you back to the true Church. You were made for our faith: depend upon it our faith alone could heal and help you — Protestantism is altogether too dry, cold, prosaic for you. The further I look into this matter, the more plainly I see it is entirely out of the common order of things. On no account would I lose sight of you. Go, my daughter, for the present; but return to me again."

I rose and thanked him. I was withdrawing when he signed me to return.

"You must not come to this church," said he: "I see you are ill, and this church is too cold; you must come to my house: I live — — " (and he gave me his address). "Be there to-morrow morning at ten."

In reply to this appointment, I only bowed; and pulling down my veil, and gathering round me my cloak, I glided away.

Did I, do you suppose, reader, contemplate venturing again within that worthy priest's reach? As soon should I have thought of walking into a

Babylonish furnace. That priest had arms which could influence me: he was naturally kind, with a sentimental French kindness, to whose softness I knew myself not wholly impervious. Without respecting some sorts of affection, there was hardly any sort having a fibre of root in reality, which I could rely on my force wholly to withstand. Had I gone to him, he would have shown me all that was tender, and comforting, and gentle, in the honest Popish superstition. Then he would have tried to kindle, blow and stir up in me the zeal of good works. I know not how it would all have ended. We all think ourselves strong in some points; we all know ourselves weak in many; the probabilities are that had I visited Numero 10, Rue des Mages, at the hour and day appointed, I might just now, instead of writing this heretic narrative, be counting my beads in the cell of a certain Carmelite convent on the Boulevard of Crécy, in Villette. There was something of Fénélon about that benign old priest; and whatever most of his brethren may be, and whatever I may think of his Church and creed (and I like neither), of himself I must ever retain a grateful recollection. He was kind when I needed kindness; he did me good. May Heaven bless him!

Twilight had passed into night, and the lamps were lit in the streets ere I issued from that sombre church. To turn back was now become possible to me; the wild longing to breathe this October wind on the little hill far without the city walls had ceased to be an imperative impulse, and was softened into a wish with which Reason could cope: she put it down, and I turned, as I thought, to the Rue Fossette. But I had become involved in a part of the city with which I was not familiar; it was the old part, and full of narrow streets of picturesque, ancient, and mouldering houses. I was much too weak to be very collected, and I was still too careless of my own welfare and safety to be cautious; I grew embarrassed; I got immeshed in a network of turns unknown. I was lost and had no resolution to ask guidance of any passenger.

If the storm had lulled a little at sunset, it made up now for lost time. Strong and horizontal thundered the current of the wind from north-west to south-east; it brought rain like spray, and sometimes a sharp hail, like shot: it was cold and pierced me to the vitals. I bent my head to meet it, but it beat me back. My heart did not fail at all in this conflict; I only wished that I had wings and could ascend the gale, spread and repose my pinions on its strength, career in its course, sweep where it swept. While wishing this, I suddenly felt colder where before I was cold, and more powerless where before I was weak. I tried to reach the porch of a great building near, but the mass of frontage and the giant spire turned black and vanished from my eyes. Instead of sinking on the steps as I intended, I seemed to pitch headlong down an abyss. I remember no more.

CHAPTER XVI.

AULD LANG SYNE.

Where my soul went during that swoon I cannot tell. Whatever she saw, or wherever she travelled in her trance on that strange night she kept her own secret; never whispering a word to Memory, and baffling imagination by an indissoluble silence. She may have gone upward, and come in sight of her eternal home, hoping for leave to rest now, and deeming that her painful union with matter was at last dissolved. While she so deemed, an angel may have warned her away from heaven's threshold, and, guiding her weeping down, have bound her, once more, all shuddering and unwilling, to that poor frame, cold and wasted, of whose companionship she was grown more than weary.

I know she re-entered her prison with pain, with reluctance, with a moan and a long shiver. The divorced mates, Spirit and Substance, were hard to re-unite: they greeted each other, not in an embrace, but a racking sort of struggle. The returning sense of sight came upon me, red, as if it swam in blood; suspended hearing rushed back loud, like thunder; consciousness revived in fear: I sat up appalled, wondering into what region, amongst what strange beings I was waking. At first I knew nothing I looked on: a wall was not a wall — a lamp not a lamp. I should have understood what we call a ghost, as well as I did the commonest object: which is another way of intimating that all my eye rested on struck it as spectral. But the faculties soon settled each in his place; the life-machine presently resumed its wonted and regular working.

Still, I knew not where I was; only in time I saw I had been removed from the spot where I fell: I lay on no portico-step; night and tempest were excluded by walls, windows, and ceiling. Into some house I had been carried — but what house?

I could only think of the pensionnat in the Rue Fossette. Still half-dreaming, I tried hard to discover in what room they had put me; whether the great dormitory, or one of the little dormitories. I was puzzled, because I could not make the glimpses of furniture I saw accord with my knowledge of any of these apartments. The empty white beds were wanting, and the long line of large windows. "Surely," thought I, "it is not to Madame Beck's own chamber they have carried me!" And here my eye fell on an easy-chair covered with blue damask. Other seats, cushioned to match, dawned on me by degrees; and at last I took in the complete fact of a pleasant parlour, with a wood fire on a clear-shining hearth, a carpet where arabesques of bright blue relieved a ground of shaded fawn; pale walls over which a slight but endless garland of azure forget-me-nots ran mazed and bewildered amongst myriad gold leaves and tendrils. A gilded mirror filled up the space between two windows, curtained amply with blue damask. In this mirror I saw myself laid, not in bed, but on a sofa. I looked spectral; my eyes larger and more hollow, my hair darker than was natural, by contrast with my thin and ashen face. It was obvious, not only from the furniture, but from the position of windows, doors, and fireplace, that this was an unknown room in an unknown house.

Hardly less plain was it that my brain was not yet settled; for, as I gazed at the blue arm-chair, it appeared to grow familiar; so did a certain scroll-couch, and not less so the round centre-table, with a blue-covering, bordered with autumn-tinted foliage; and, above all, two little footstools with worked covers, and a small ebony-framed chair, of which the seat and back were also worked with groups of brilliant flowers on a dark ground.

Struck with these things, I explored further. Strange to say, old acquaintance were all about me, and "auld lang syne" smiled out of every nook. There were two oval miniatures over the mantel-piece, of which I knew by heart the pearls about the high and powdered "heads;" the velvets circling the white throats; the swell of the full muslin kerchiefs: the pattern of the lace sleeve-ruffles. Upon the mantel-shelf there were two china vases, some relics of a diminutive tea-service, as smooth as enamel and as thin as egg-shell, and a white centre ornament, a classic group in alabaster, preserved under glass. Of all these things I could have told the peculiarities, numbered the flaws or cracks, like any clairvoyante. Above all, there was a pair of handscreens, with elaborate pencil-drawings finished like line engravings; these, my very eyes ached at beholding again, recalling hours when they had followed, stroke by stroke and touch by touch, a tedious, feeble, finical, school-girl pencil held in these fingers, now so skeleton-like.

Where was I? Not only in what spot of the world, but in what year of our Lord? For all these objects were of past days, and of a distant country. Ten years ago I bade them good-by; since my fourteenth year they and I had never met. I gasped audibly, "Where am I?"

A shape hitherto unnoticed, stirred, rose, came forward: a shape inharmonious with the environment, serving only to complicate the riddle further. This was no more than a sort of native bonne, in a common-place bonne's cap and print-dress. She spoke neither French nor English, and I could get no intelligence from her, not understanding her phrases of dialect. But she bathed my temples and forehead with some cool and perfumed water, and then she heightened the cushion on which I reclined, made signs that I was not to speak, and resumed her post at the foot of the sofa.

She was busy knitting; her eyes thus drawn from me, I could gaze on her without interruption. I did mightily wonder how she came there, or what she could have to do among the scenes, or with the days of my girlhood. Still more I marvelled what those scenes and days could now have to do with me.

Too weak to scrutinize thoroughly the mystery, I tried to settle it by saying it was a mistake, a dream, a fever-fit; and yet I knew there could be no mistake, and that I was not sleeping, and I believed I was sane. I wished the room had not been so well lighted, that I might not so clearly have seen the little pictures, the ornaments, the screens, the worked chair. All these objects, as well as the blue-damask furniture, were, in fact, precisely the same, in every minutest detail, with those I so well remembered, and with which I had been so thoroughly intimate, in the drawing-room of my godmother's house at Bretton. Methought the apartment only was changed, being of different proportions and dimensions.

I thought of Bedreddin Hassan, transported in his sleep from Cairo to the gates of Damascus. Had a Genius stooped his dark wing down the storm to whose stress I had succumbed, and gathering me from the church-steps, and "rising high into the air," as the eastern tale said, had he borne me over land and ocean, and laid me quietly down beside a hearth of Old England? But no; I knew the fire of that hearth burned before its Lares no more — it went out long ago, and the household gods had been carried elsewhere.

The bonne turned again to survey me, and seeing my eyes wide open, and, I suppose, deeming their expression perturbed and excited, she put down her knitting. I saw her busied for a moment at a little stand; she poured out water, and measured drops from a phial: glass in hand, she approached me. What dark-tinged draught might she now be offering? what Genii-elixir or Magi-distillation?

It was too late to inquire — I had swallowed it passively, and at once. A tide of quiet thought now came gently caressing my brain; softer and softer rose the flow, with tepid undulations smoother than balm. The pain of weakness left my limbs, my muscles slept. I lost power to move; but, losing at the same time wish, it was no privation. That kind bonne placed a screen between me and the lamp; I saw her rise to do this, but do not remember seeing her resume her place: in the interval between the two acts, I "fell on sleep."

* * * * *

At waking, lo! all was again changed. The light of high day surrounded me; not, indeed, a warm, summer light, but the leaden gloom of raw and blustering autumn. I felt sure now that I was in the pensionnat — sure by the beating rain on the casement; sure by the "wuther" of wind amongst trees, denoting a garden outside; sure by the chill, the whiteness, the solitude, amidst which I lay. I say whiteness — for the dimity curtains, dropped before a French bed, bounded my view.

I lifted them; I looked out. My eye, prepared to take in the range of a long, large, and whitewashed chamber, blinked baffled, on encountering the limited area of a small cabinet — a cabinet with seagreen walls; also, instead of five wide and naked windows, there was one high lattice, shaded with muslin festoons: instead of two dozen little stands of painted wood, each holding a basin and an ewer, there was a toilette-table dressed, like a lady for a ball, in a white robe over a pink skirt; a polished and large glass crowned, and a pretty pin-cushion frilled with lace, adorned it. This toilette, together with a small, low, green and white chintz arm-chair, a washstand topped with a marble slab, and supplied with utensils of pale greenware, sufficiently furnished the tiny chamber.

Reader; I felt alarmed! Why? you will ask. What was there in this simple and somewhat pretty sleeping-closet to startle the most timid? Merely this — These articles of furniture could not be real, solid arm-chairs, looking-glasses, and washstands — they must be the ghosts of such articles; or, if this were denied as too wild an hypothesis — and, confounded as I was, I did deny it — there remained but to conclude that I had myself passed into an abnormal state of mind; in short, that I was very ill and delirious: and even then, mine was the strangest figment with which delirium had ever harassed a victim.

I knew — I was obliged to know — the green chintz of that little chair; the little snug chair itself, the carved, shining-black, foliated frame of that glass; the smooth, milky-green of the china vessels on the stand; the very stand too, with its top of grey marble, splintered at one corner; — all these I was compelled to recognise and to hail, as last night I had, perforce, recognised and hailed the rosewood, the drapery, the porcelain, of the drawing-room.

Bretton! Bretton! and ten years ago shone reflected in that mirror. And why did Bretton and my fourteenth year haunt me thus? Why, if they came at all, did they not return complete? Why hovered before my distempered vision the mere furniture, while the rooms and the locality were gone? As to that pincushion made of crimson satin, ornamented with gold beads and frilled with thread-lace, I had the same right to know it as to know the screens — I had made it myself. Rising with a start from the bed, I took the cushion in my hand and examined it. There was the cipher "L. L. B." formed in gold beds, and surrounded with an oval wreath embroidered in white silk. These were the initials of my godmother's name — Lonisa Lucy Bretton.

"Am I in England? Am I at Bretton?" I muttered; and hastily pulling up the blind with which the lattice was shrouded, I looked out to try and discover where I was; half-prepared to meet the calm, old, handsome buildings and clean grey pavement of St. Ann's Street, and to see at the end the towers of the minster: or, if otherwise, fully expectant of a town view somewhere, a rue in Villette, if not a street in a pleasant and ancient English city.

I looked, on the contrary, through a frame of leafage, clustering round the high lattice, and forth thence to a grassy mead-like level, a lawn-terrace with trees rising from the lower ground beyond — high forest-trees, such as I had not seen for many a day. They were now groaning under the gale of October, and between their trunks I traced the line of an avenue, where yellow leaves lay in heaps and drifts, or were whirled singly before the sweeping west wind. Whatever landscape might lie further must have been flat, and these tall beeches shut it out. The place seemed secluded, and was to me quite strange: I did not know it at all.

Once more I lay down. My bed stood in a little alcove; on turning my face to the wall, the room with its bewildering accompaniments became excluded. Excluded? No! For as I arranged my position in this hope, behold, on the green space between the divided and looped-up curtains, hung a broad, gilded picture-frame enclosing a portrait. It was drawn — well drawn, though but a sketch — in water-colours; a head, a boy's head, fresh, life-like, speaking, and animated. It seemed a youth of sixteen, fair-complexioned, with sanguine health in his cheek; hair long, not dark, and with a sunny sheen; penetrating eyes, an arch mouth, and a gay smile. On the whole a most pleasant face to look at, especially for, those claiming a right to that youth's affections — parents, for instance, or sisters. Any romantic little school-girl might almost have loved it in its frame. Those eyes looked as if when somewhat older they would flash a lightning-response to love: I cannot tell whether they kept in store the steady-beaming shine of faith. For whatever sentiment met him in form too facile, his lips menaced, beautifully but surely, caprice and light esteem.

Striving to take each new discovery as quietly as I could, I whispered to myself —

"Ah! that portrait used to hang in the breakfast-room, over the mantel-piece: somewhat too high, as I thought. I well remember how I used to mount a music-stool for the purpose of unhooking it, holding it in my hand, and searching into those bonny wells of eyes, whose glance under their hazel lashes seemed like a pencilled laugh; and well I liked to note the colouring of the cheek, and the expression of the mouth." I hardly believed fancy could improve on the curve of that mouth, or of the chin; even my ignorance knew that both were beautiful, and pondered perplexed over this doubt: "How it was that what charmed so much, could at the same time so keenly pain?" Once, by way of test, I took little Missy Home, and, lifting her in my arms, told her to look at the picture.

"Do you like it, Polly?" I asked. She never answered, but gazed long, and at last a darkness went trembling through her sensitive eye, as she said, "Put me down." So I put her down, saying to myself: "The child feels it too."

All these things do I now think over, adding, "He had his faults, yet scarce ever was a finer nature; liberal, suave, impressible." My reflections closed in an audibly pronounced word, "Graham!"

"Graham!" echoed a sudden voice at the bedside. "Do you want Graham?"

I looked. The plot was but thickening; the wonder but culminating. If it was strange to see that well-remembered pictured form on the wall, still stranger was it to turn and behold the equally well-remembered living form opposite — a woman, a lady, most real and substantial, tall, well-attired, wearing widow's silk, and such a cap as best became her matron and motherly braids of hair. Hers, too, was a good face; too marked, perhaps, now for beauty, but not for sense or character. She was little changed; something sterner, something more robust — but she was my godmother: still the distinct vision of Mrs. Bretton.

I kept quiet, yet internally I was much agitated: my pulse fluttered, and the blood left my cheek, which turned cold.

"Madam, where am I?" I inquired.

"In a very safe asylum; well protected for the present; make your mind quite easy till you get a little better; you look ill this morning."

"I am so entirely bewildered, I do not know whether I can trust my senses at all, or whether they are misleading me in every particular: but you speak English, do you not, madam?"

"I should think you might hear that: it would puzzle me to hold a long discourse in French."

"You do not come from England?"

"I am lately arrived thence. Have you been long in this country? You seem to know my son?"

"Do, I, madam? Perhaps I do. Your son — the picture there?"

"That is his portrait as a youth. While looking at it, you pronounced his name."

"Graham Bretton?"

She nodded.

"I speak to Mrs. Bretton, formerly of Bretton, — — shire?"

"Quite right; and you, I am told, are an English teacher in a foreign school here: my son recognised you as such."

"How was I found, madam, and by whom?"

"My son shall tell you that by-and-by," said she; "but at present you are too confused and weak for conversation: try to eat some breakfast, and then sleep."

Notwithstanding all I had undergone — the bodily fatigue, the perturbation of spirits, the exposure to weather — it seemed that I was better: the fever, the real malady which had oppressed my frame, was abating; for, whereas during the last nine days I had taken no solid food, and suffered from continual thirst, this morning, on breakfast being offered, I experienced a craving for nourishment: an inward faintness which caused me eagerly to taste the tea this lady offered, and to eat the morsel of dry toast she allowed in accompaniment. It was only a morsel, but it sufficed; keeping up my strength till some two or three hours afterwards, when the bonne brought me a little cup of broth and a biscuit.

As evening began to darken, and the ceaseless blast still blew wild and cold, and the rain streamed on, deluge-like, I grew weary — very weary of my bed. The room, though pretty, was small: I felt it confining: I longed for a change. The increasing chill and gathering gloom, too, depressed me; I wanted to see — to feel firelight. Besides, I kept thinking of the son of that tall matron: when should I see him? Certainly not till I left my room.

At last the bonne came to make my bed for the night. She prepared to wrap me in a blanket and place me in the little chintz chair; but, declining these attentions, I proceeded to dress myself:

The business was just achieved, and I was sitting down to take breath, when Mrs. Bretton once more appeared.

"Dressed!" she exclaimed, smiling with that smile I so well knew — a pleasant smile, though not soft. "You are quite better then? Quite strong — eh?"

She spoke to me so much as of old she used to speak that I almost fancied she was beginning to know me. There was the same sort of patronage in her voice and manner that, as a girl, I had always experienced from her — a patronage I yielded to and even liked; it was not founded on conventional grounds of superior wealth or station (in the last particular there had never been any inequality; her degree was mine); but on natural reasons of physical advantage: it was the shelter the tree gives the herb. I put a request without further ceremony.

"Do let me go down-stairs, madam; I am so cold and dull here."

"I desire nothing better, if you are strong enough to bear the change," was her reply. "Come then; here is an arm." And she offered me hers: I took it, and we descended one flight of carpeted steps to a landing where a tall door, standing open, gave admission into the blue-damask room. How pleasant it was in its air of perfect domestic comfort! How warm in its amber lamp-light and vermilion fire-flush! To render the picture perfect, tea stood ready on the table — an English tea, whereof the whole shining service glanced at me familiarly; from the solid silver urn, of antique pattern, and the massive pot of the same metal, to the thin porcelain cups, dark with purple and gilding. I knew the very seed-cake of peculiar form, baked in a peculiar mould, which always had a place on the tea-table at Bretton. Graham liked it, and there it was as of yore — set before Graham's plate with the silver knife and fork beside it. Graham was then expected to tea: Graham was now, perhaps, in the house; ere many minutes I might see him.

"Sit down — sit down," said my conductress, as my step faltered a little in passing to the hearth. She seated me on the sofa, but I soon passed behind it, saying the fire was too hot; in its shade I found another seat which suited me better. Mrs. Bretton was never wont to make a fuss about any person or anything; without remonstrance she suffered me to have my own way. She made the tea, and she took up the newspaper. I liked to watch every action of my godmother; all her movements were so young: she must have been now above fifty, yet neither her sinews nor her spirit seemed yet touched by the rust of age. Though portly, she was alert, and though serene, she was at times impetuous — good health and an excellent temperament kept her green as in her spring.

While she read, I perceived she listened — listened for her son. She was not the woman ever to confess herself uneasy, but there was yet no lull in the weather, and if Graham were out in that hoarse wind — roaring still unsatisfied — I well knew his mother's heart would be out with him.

"Ten minutes behind his time," said she, looking at her watch; then, in another minute, a lifting of her eyes from the page, and a slight inclination of her head towards the door, denoted that she heard some sound. Presently her brow cleared; and then even my ear, less practised, caught the iron clash of a gate swung to, steps on gravel, lastly the door-bell. He was come. His mother filled the teapot from the urn, she drew nearer the hearth the stuffed and cushioned blue chair — her own chair by right, but I saw there was one who might with impunity usurp it. And when that one came up the stairs — which he soon did, after, I suppose, some such attention to the toilet as the wild and wet night rendered necessary, and strode straight in —

"Is it you, Graham?" said his mother, hiding a glad smile and speaking curtly.

"Who else should it be, mamma?" demanded the Unpunctual, possessing himself irreverently of the abdicated throne.

"Don't you deserve cold tea, for being late?"

"I shall not get my deserts, for the urn sings cheerily."

"Wheel yourself to the table, lazy boy: no seat will serve you but mine; if you had one spark of a sense of propriety, you would always leave that chair for the Old Lady."

"So I should; only the dear Old Lady persists in leaving it for me. How is your patient, mamma?"

"Will she come forward and speak for herself?" said Mrs. Bretton, turning to my corner; and at this invitation, forward I came. Graham courteously rose up to greet me. He stood tall on the hearth, a figure justifying his mother's unconcealed pride.

"So you are come down," said he; "you must be better then — much better. I scarcely expected we should meet thus, or here. I was alarmed last night, and if I had not been forced to hurry away to a dying patient, I certainly would not have left you; but my mother herself is something of a doctress, and Martha an excellent nurse. I saw the case was a fainting-fit, not necessarily dangerous. What brought it on, I have yet to learn, and all particulars; meantime, I trust you really do feel better?"

"Much better," I said calmly. "Much better, I thank you, Dr. John."

For, reader, this tall young man — this darling son — this host of mine — this Graham Bretton, was Dr. John: he, and no other; and, what is more, I ascertained this identity scarcely with surprise. What is more, when I heard Graham's step on the stairs, I knew what manner of figure would enter, and for whose aspect to prepare my eyes. The discovery was not of to-day, its dawn had penetrated my perceptions long since. Of course I remembered young Bretton well; and though ten years (from sixteen to twenty-six) may greatly change the boy as they mature him to the man, yet they could bring no such utter difference as would suffice wholly to blind my eyes, or baffle my memory. Dr. John Graham Bretton retained still an affinity to the youth of sixteen: he had his eyes; he had some of his features; to wit, all the excellently-moulded lower half of the face; I found him out soon. I first recognised him on that occasion, noted several chapters back, when my unguardedly-fixed attention had drawn on me the mortification of an implied rebuke. Subsequent observation confirmed, in every point, that early surmise. I traced in the gesture, the port, and the habits of his manhood, all his boy's promise. I heard in his now deep tones the accent of former days. Certain turns of phrase, peculiar to him of old, were peculiar to him still; and so was many a trick of eye and lip, many a smile, many a sudden ray levelled from the irid, under his well-charactered brow.

To say anything on the subject, to hint at my discovery, had not suited my habits of thought, or assimilated with my system of feeling. On the contrary, I had preferred to keep the matter to myself. I liked entering his presence covered with a cloud he had not seen through, while he stood before me under a ray of special illumination which shone all partial over his head, trembled about his feet, and cast light no farther.

Well I knew that to him it could make little difference, were I to come forward and announce, "This is Lucy Snowe!" So I kept back in my teacher's place; and as he never asked my name, so I never gave it. He heard me called "Miss," and "Miss Lucy;" he never heard the surname, "Snowe." As to spontaneous recognition — though I, perhaps, was still less changed than he — the idea never approached his mind, and why should I suggest it?

During tea, Dr. John was kind, as it was his nature to be; that meal over, and the tray carried out, he made a cosy arrangement of the cushions in a corner of the sofa, and obliged me to settle amongst them. He and his mother also drew to the fire, and ere we had sat ten minutes, I caught the eye of the latter fastened steadily upon me. Women are certainly quicker in some things than men.

"Well," she exclaimed, presently, "I have seldom seen a stronger likeness! Graham, have you observed it?"

"Observed what? What ails the Old Lady now? How you stare, mamma! One would think you had an attack of second sight."

"Tell me, Graham, of whom does that young lady remind you?" pointing to me.

"Mamma, you put her out of countenance. I often tell you abruptness is your fault; remember, too, that to you she is a stranger, and does not know your ways."

"Now, when she looks down; now, when she turns sideways, who is she like, Graham?"

"Indeed, mamma, since you propound the riddle, I think you ought to solve it!"

"And you have known her some time, you say — ever since you first began to attend the school in the Rue Fossette: — yet you never mentioned to me that singular resemblance!"

"I could not mention a thing of which I never thought, and which I do not now acknowledge. What can you mean?"

"Stupid boy! look at her."

Graham did look: but this was not to be endured; I saw how it must end, so I thought it best to anticipate.

"Dr. John," I said, "has had so much to do and think of, since he and I shook hands at our last parting in St. Ann's Street, that, while I readily found out Mr. Graham Bretton, some months ago, it never occurred to me as possible that he should recognise Lucy Snowe."

"Lucy Snowe! I thought so! I knew it!" cried Mrs. Bretton. And she at once stepped across the hearth and kissed me. Some ladies would, perhaps, have made a great bustle upon such a discovery without being particularly glad of it; but it was not my godmother's habit to make a bustle, and she preferred all sentimental demonstrations in bas-relief. So she and I got over the surprise with few words and a single salute; yet I daresay she was pleased, and I know I was. While we renewed old acquaintance, Graham, sitting opposite, silently disposed of his paroxysm of astonishment.

"Mamma calls me a stupid boy, and I think I am so," at length he said; "for, upon my honour, often as I have seen you, I never once suspected this fact: and yet I perceive it all now. Lucy Snowe! To be sure! I recollect her perfectly, and there she sits; not a doubt of it. But," he added, "you surely have not known me as an old acquaintance all this time, and never mentioned it."

"That I have," was my answer.

Dr. John commented not. I supposed he regarded my silence as eccentric, but he was indulgent in refraining from censure. I daresay, too, he would have deemed it impertinent to have interrogated me very closely, to have asked me the why and wherefore of my reserve; and, though he might feel a little curious, the importance of the case was by no means such as to tempt curiosity to infringe on discretion.

For my part, I just ventured to inquire whether he remembered the circumstance of my once looking at him very fixedly; for the slight annoyance he had betrayed on that occasion still lingered sore on my mind.

"I think I do!" said he: "I think I was even cross with you."

"You considered me a little bold; perhaps?" I inquired.

"Not at all. Only, shy and retiring as your general manner was, I wondered what personal or facial enormity in me proved so magnetic to your usually averted eyes."

"You see how it was now?"

"Perfectly."

And here Mrs. Bretton broke in with many, many questions about past times; and for her satisfaction I had to recur to gone-by troubles, to explain causes of seeming estrangement, to touch on single-handed conflict with Life, with Death, with Grief, with Fate. Dr. John listened, saying little. He and she then told me of changes they had known: even with them all had not gone smoothly, and fortune had retrenched her once abundant gifts. But so courageous a mother, with such a champion in her son, was well fitted to fight a good fight with the world, and to prevail ultimately. Dr. John himself was one of those on whose birth benign planets have certainly smiled. Adversity might set against him her most sullen front: he was the man to beat her down with smiles. Strong and cheerful, and firm and courteous; not rash, yet valiant; he was the aspirant to woo Destiny herself, and to win from her stone eyeballs a beam almost loving.

In the profession he had adopted, his success was now quite decided. Within the last three months he had taken this house (a small château, they told me, about half a league without the Porte de Crécy); this country site being chosen for the sake of his mother's health, with which town air did not now agree. Hither he had invited Mrs. Bretton, and she, on leaving England, had brought with her such residue furniture of the former St. Ann's Street mansion as she had thought fit to keep unsold. Hence my bewilderment at the phantoms of chairs, and the wraiths of looking-glasses, tea-urns, and teacups.

As the clock struck eleven, Dr. John stopped his mother.

"Miss Snowe must retire now," he said; "she is beginning to look very pale. To-morrow I will venture to put some questions respecting the cause of her loss of health. She is much changed, indeed, since last July, when I saw her enact with no little spirit the part of a very killing fine gentleman. As to last night's catastrophe, I am sure thereby hangs a tale, but we will inquire no further this evening. Good-night, Miss Lucy."

And so he kindly led me to the door, and holding a wax-candle, lighted me up the one flight of stairs.

When I had said my prayers, and when I was undressed and laid down, I felt that I still had friends. Friends, not professing vehement attachment, not offering the tender solace of well-matched and congenial relationship; on whom, therefore, but moderate demand of affection was to be made, of whom but moderate expectation formed; but towards whom my heart softened instinctively, and yearned with an importunate gratitude, which I entreated Reason betimes to check.

"Do not let me think of them too often, too much, too fondly," I implored: "let me be content with a temperate draught of this living stream: let me not run athirst, and apply passionately to its welcome waters: let me not imagine in them a sweeter taste than earth's fountains know. Oh! would to God I may be enabled to feel enough sustained by an occasional, amicable intercourse, rare, brief, unengrossing and tranquil: quite tranquil!"

Still repeating this word, I turned to my pillow; and still repeating it, I steeped that pillow with tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

LA TERRASSE.

These struggles with the natural character, the strong native bent of the heart, may seem futile and fruitless, but in the end they do good. They tend, however slightly, to give the actions, the conduct, that turn which Reason approves, and which Feeling, perhaps, too often opposes: they certainly make a difference in the general tenour of a life, and enable it to be better regulated, more equable, quieter on the surface; and it is on the surface only the common gaze will fall. As to what lies below, leave that with God. Man, your equal, weak as you, and not fit to be your judge, may be shut out thence: take it to your Maker — show Him the secrets of the spirit He gave — ask Him how you are to bear the pains He has appointed — kneel in His presence, and pray with faith for light in darkness, for strength in piteous weakness, for patience in extreme need. Certainly, at some hour, though perhaps not your hour, the waiting waters will stir; in some shape, though perhaps not the shape you dreamed, which your heart loved, and for which it bled, the healing herald will descend, the cripple and the blind, and the dumb, and the possessed will be led to bathe. Herald, come quickly! Thousands lie round the pool, weeping and despairing, to see it, through slow years, stagnant. Long are the "times" of Heaven: the orbits of angel messengers seem wide to mortal vision; they may enring ages: the cycle of one departure and return may clasp unnumbered generations; and dust, kindling to brief suffering life, and through pain, passing back to dust, may meanwhile perish out of memory again, and yet again. To how many maimed and mourning millions is the first and sole angel visitant, him easterns call Azrael!

I tried to get up next morning, but while I was dressing, and at intervals drinking cold water from the carafe on my washstand, with design to brace up that trembling weakness which made dressing so difficult, in came Mrs. Bretton.

"Here is an absurdity!" was her morning accost. "Not so," she added, and dealing with me at once in her own brusque, energetic fashion — that fashion which I used formerly to enjoy seeing applied to her son, and by him vigorously resisted — in two minutes she consigned me captive to the French bed.

"There you lie till afternoon," said she. "My boy left orders before he went out that such should be the case, and I can assure you my son is master and must be obeyed. Presently you shall have breakfast."

Presently she brought that meal — brought it with her own active hands

— not leaving me to servants. She seated herself on the bed while I ate. Now it is not everybody, even amongst our respected friends and esteemed acquaintance, whom we like to have near us, whom we like to watch us, to wait on us, to approach us with the proximity of a nurse to a patient. It is not every friend whose eye is a light in a sick room, whose presence is there a solace: but all this was Mrs. Bretton to me; all this she had ever been. Food or drink never pleased me so well as when it came through her hands. I do not remember the occasion when her entrance into a room had not made that room cheerier. Our natures own predilections and antipathies alike strange. There are people from whom we secretly shrink, whom we would personally avoid, though reason confesses that they are good people: there are others with faults of temper, &c., evident enough, beside whom we live content, as if the air about them did us good. My godmother's lively black eye and clear brunette cheek, her warm, prompt hand, her self-reliant mood, her decided bearing, were all beneficial to me as the atmosphere of some salubrious climate. Her son used to call her "the old lady;" it filled me with pleasant wonder to note how the alacrity and power of five-and-twenty still breathed from her and around her.

"I would bring my work here," she said, as she took from me the emptied teacup, "and sit with you the whole day, if that overbearing John Graham had not put his veto upon such a proceeding. 'Now, mamma,' he said, when he went out, 'take notice, you are not to knock up your god-daughter with gossip,' and he particularly desired me to keep close to my own quarters, and spare you my fine company. He says, Lucy, he thinks you have had a nervous fever, judging from your look, — is that so?"

I replied that I did not quite know what my ailment had been, but that I had certainly suffered a good deal especially in mind. Further, on this subject, I did not consider it advisable to dwell, for the details of what I had undergone belonged to a portion of my existence in which I never expected my godmother to take a share. Into what a new region would such a confidence have led that hale, serene nature! The difference between her and me might be figured by that between the stately ship cruising safe on smooth seas, with its full complement of crew, a captain gay and brave, and venturous and provident; and the life-boat, which most days of the year lies dry and solitary in an old, dark boat-house, only putting to sea when the billows run high in rough weather, when cloud encounters water, when danger and death divide between them the rule of the great deep. No, the "Louisa Bretton" never was out of harbour on such a night, and in such a scene: her crew could not conceive it; so the half-drowned life-boat man keeps his own counsel, and spins no yarns.

She left me, and I lay in bed content: it was good of Graham to remember me before he went out.

My day was lonely, but the prospect of coming evening abridged and cheered it. Then, too, I felt weak, and rest seemed welcome; and after the morning hours were gone by, — those hours which always bring, even to the necessarily unoccupied, a sense of business to be done, of tasks waiting fulfilment, a vague impression of obligation to be employed — when this stirring time was past, and the silent descent of afternoon hushed housemaid steps on the stairs and in the chambers, I then passed into a dreamy mood, not unpleasant.

My calm little room seemed somehow like a cave in the sea. There was no colour about it, except that white and pale green, suggestive of foam and deep water; the blanched cornice was adorned with shell-shaped ornaments, and there were white mouldings like dolphins in the ceiling-angles. Even that one touch of colour visible in the red satin pincushion bore affinity to coral; even that dark, shining glass might have mirrored a mermaid. When I closed my eyes, I heard a gale, subsiding at last, bearing upon the house-front like a settling swell upon a rock-base. I heard it drawn and withdrawn far, far off, like a tide retiring from a shore of the upper world — a world so high above that the rush of its largest waves, the dash of its fiercest breakers, could sound down in this submarine home, only like murmurs and a lullaby.

Amidst these dreams came evening, and then Martha brought a light; with her aid I was quickly dressed, and stronger now than in the morning, I made my way down to the blue saloon unassisted.

Dr. John, it appears, had concluded his round of professional calls earlier than usual; his form was the first object that met my eyes as I entered the parlour; he stood in that window-recess opposite the door, reading the close type of a newspaper by such dull light as closing day yet gave. The fire shone clear, but the lamp stood on the table unlit, and tea was not yet brought up.

As to Mrs. Bretton, my active godmother — who, I afterwards found, had been out in the open air all day — lay half-reclined in her deep-cushioned chair, actually lost in a nap. Her son seeing me, came forward. I noticed that he trod carefully, not to wake the sleeper; he also spoke low: his mellow voice never had any sharpness in it; modulated as at present, it was calculated rather to soothe than startle slumber.

“This is a quiet little château,” he observed, after inviting me to sit near the casement. “I don’t know whether you may have noticed it in your walks: though, indeed, from the chaussée it is not visible; just a mile beyond the Porte de Crécy, you turn down a lane which soon becomes an avenue, and that leads you on, through meadow and shade, to the very door of this house. It is not a modern place, but built somewhat in the old style of the Basse-Ville. It is rather a manoir than a château; they call it ‘La Terrasse,’ because its front rises from a broad turfed walk, whence steps lead down a grassy slope to the avenue. See yonder! The moon rises: she looks well through the tree-boles.”

Where, indeed, does the moon not look well? What is the scene, confined or expansive, which her orb does not hallow? Rosy or fiery, she mounted now above a not distant bank; even while we watched her flushed ascent, she cleared to gold, and in very brief space, floated up stainless into a now calm sky. Did moonlight soften or sadden Dr. Bretton? Did it touch him with romance? I think it did. Albeit of no sighing mood, he sighed in watching it: sighed to himself quietly. No need to ponder the cause or the course of that sigh; I knew it was wakened by beauty; I knew it pursued Ginevra. Knowing this, the idea pressed upon me that it was in some sort my duty to speak the name he meditated. Of course he was ready for the subject: I saw in his countenance a teeming plenitude of comment, question and interest; a pressure of language and sentiment, only checked, I thought, by sense of embarrassment how to begin. To spare him this embarrassment was my best, indeed my sole use. I had but to utter the idol's name, and love's tender litany would flow out. I had just found a fitting phrase, "You know that Miss Fanshawe is gone on a tour with the Cholmondeleys," and was opening my lips to speak to it, when he scattered my plans by introducing another theme.

"The first thing this morning," said he, putting his sentiment in his pocket, turning from the moon, and sitting down, "I went to the Rue Fossette, and told the cuisinière that you were safe and in good hands. Do you know that I actually found that she had not yet discovered your absence from the house: she thought you safe in the great dormitory. With what care you must have been waited on!"

"Oh! all that is very conceivable," said I. "Goton could do nothing for me but bring me a little tisane and a crust of bread, and I had rejected both so often during the past week, that the good woman got tired of useless journeys from the dwelling-house kitchen to the school-dormitory, and only came once a day at noon to make my bed. I believe, however, that she is a good-natured creature, and would have been delighted to cook me côtelettes de mouton, if I could have eaten them."

"What did Madame Beck mean by leaving you alone?"

"Madame Beck could not foresee that I should fall ill."

"Your nervous system bore a good share of the suffering?"

"I am not quite sure what my nervous system is, but I was dreadfully low-spirited."

"Which disables me from helping you by pill or potion. Medicine can give nobody good spirits. My art halts at the threshold of Hypochondria: she just looks in and sees a chamber of torture, but can neither say nor do much. Cheerful society would be of use; you should be as little alone as possible; you should take plenty of exercise."

Acquiescence and a pause followed these remarks. They sounded all right, I thought, and bore the safe sanction of custom, and the well-worn stamp of use.

"Miss Snowe," recommenced Dr. John — my health, nervous system included, being now, somewhat to my relief, discussed and done with — "is it permitted me to ask what your religion is? Are you a Catholic?"

I looked up in some surprise — "A Catholic? No! Why suggest such an idea?"

"The manner in which you were consigned to me last night made me doubt."

"I consigned to you? But, indeed, I forget. It yet remains for me to learn how I fell into your hands."

"Why, under circumstances that puzzled me. I had been in attendance all day yesterday on a case of singularly interesting and critical character; the disease being rare, and its treatment doubtful: I saw a similar and still finer case in a hospital in Paris; but that will not interest you. At last a mitigation of the patient's most urgent symptoms (acute pain is one of its accompaniments) liberated me, and I set out homeward. My shortest way lay through the Basse-Ville, and as the night was excessively dark, wild, and wet, I took it. In riding past an old church belonging to a community of Béguines, I saw by a lamp burning over the porch or deep arch of the entrance, a priest lifting some object in his arms. The lamp was bright enough to reveal the priest's features clearly, and I recognised him; he was a man I have often met by the sick beds of both rich and poor: and chiefly the latter. He is, I think, a good old man, far better than most of his class in this country; superior, indeed, in every way, better informed, as well as more devoted to duty. Our eyes met; he called on me to stop: what he supported was a woman, fainting or dying. I alighted.

"'This person is one of your countrywomen,' he said: 'save her, if she is not dead.'

"My countrywoman, on examination, turned out to be the English teacher at Madame Beck's pensionnat. She was perfectly unconscious, perfectly bloodless, and nearly cold.

"'What does it all mean?' was my inquiry.

"He communicated a curious account; that you had been to him that evening at confessional; that your exhausted and suffering appearance, coupled with some things you had said — "

"Things I had said? I wonder what things!"

"Awful crimes, no doubt; but he did not tell me what: there, you know, the seal of the confessional checked his garrulity, and my curiosity. Your confidences, however, had not made an enemy of the good father; it seems he was so struck, and felt so sorry that you should be out on such a night alone, that he had esteemed it a Christian duty to watch you when you quitted the church, and so to manage as not to lose sight of you, till you should have reached home. Perhaps the worthy man might, half unconsciously, have blent in this proceeding some little of the subtlety of his class: it might have been his resolve to learn the locality of your home — did you impart that in your confession?"

"I did not: on the contrary, I carefully avoided the shadow of any indication: and as to my confession, Dr. John, I suppose you will think me mad for taking such a step, but I could not help it: I suppose it was all the fault of what you call my 'nervous system.' I cannot put the case into words, but my days and nights were grown intolerable: a cruel sense of desolation pained my mind: a feeling that would make its way, rush out, or kill me — like (and this you will understand, Dr. John) the current which passes through the heart, and which, if aneurism or any other morbid cause obstructs its natural channels, seeks abnormal outlet. I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel. I could find none of these in closet or chamber, so I went and sought them in church and confessional. As to what I said, it was no confidence, no narrative. I have done nothing wrong: my life has not been active enough for any dark deed, either of romance or reality: all I poured out was a dreary, desperate complaint."

"Lucy, you ought to travel for about six months: why, your calm nature is growing quite excitable! Confound Madame Beck! Has the little buxom widow no bowels, to condemn her best teacher to solitary confinement?"

"It was not Madame Beck's fault," said I; "it is no living being's fault, and I won't hear any one blamed."

"Who is in the wrong, then, Lucy?"

"Me — Dr. John — me; and a great abstraction on whose wide shoulders I like to lay the mountains of blame they were sculptured to bear: me and Fate."

"'Me' must take better care in future," said Dr. John — smiling, I suppose, at my bad grammar.

"Change of air — change of scene; those are my prescriptions," pursued the practical young doctor. "But to return to our muttons, Lucy. As yet, Père Silas, with all his tact (they say he is a Jesuit), is no wiser than you choose him to be; for, instead of returning to the Rue Fossette, your fevered wanderings — there must have been high fever — "

"No, Dr. John: the fever took its turn that night — now, don't make out that I was delirious, for I know differently."

"Good! you were as collected as myself at this moment, no doubt. Your wanderings had taken an opposite direction to the pensionnat. Near the Béguinage, amidst the stress of flood and gust, and in the perplexity of darkness, you had swooned and fallen. The priest came to your succour, and the physician, as we have seen, supervened. Between us we procured a fiacre and brought you here. Père Silas, old as he is, would carry you up-stairs, and lay you on that couch himself. He would certainly have remained with you till suspended animation had been restored: and so should I, but, at that juncture, a hurried messenger arrived from the dying patient I had scarcely left — the last duties were called for — the physician's last visit and the priest's last rite; extreme unction could not be deferred. Père Silas and myself departed together, my mother was spending the evening abroad; we gave you in charge to Martha, leaving directions, which it seems she followed successfully. Now, are you a Catholic?"

"Not yet," said I, with a smile. "And never let Père Silas know where I live, or he will try to convert me; but give him my best and truest thanks when you see him, and if ever I get rich I will send him money for his charities. See, Dr. John, your mother wakes; you ought to ring for tea."

Which he did; and, as Mrs. Bretton sat up — astonished and indignant at herself for the indulgence to which she had succumbed, and fully prepared to deny that she had slept at all — her son came gaily to the attack.

"Hushaby, mamma! Sleep again. You look the picture of innocence in your slumbers."

"My slumbers, John Graham! What are you talking about? You know I never do sleep by day: it was the slightest doze possible."

"Exactly! a seraph's gentle lapse — a fairy's dream. Mamma, under such circumstances, you always remind me of Titania."

"That is because you, yourself, are so like Bottom."

"Miss Snowe — did you ever hear anything like mamma's wit? She is a most sprightly woman of her size and age."

"Keep your compliments to yourself, sir, and do not neglect your own size: which seems to me a good deal on the increase. Lucy, has he not rather the air of an incipient John Bull? He used to be slender as an eel, and now I fancy in him a sort of heavy dragoon bent — a beef-eater tendency. Graham, take notice! If you grow fat I disown you."

"As if you could not sooner disown your own personality! I am indispensable to the old lady's happiness, Lucy. She would pine away in green and yellow melancholy if she had not my six feet of iniquity to scold. It keeps her lively — it maintains the wholesome ferment of her spirits."

The two were now standing opposite to each other, one on each side the fire-place; their words were not very fond, but their mutual looks atoned for verbal deficiencies. At least, the best treasure of Mrs. Bretton's life was certainly casketed in her son's bosom; her dearest pulse throbbed in his heart. As to him, of course another love shared his feelings with filial love, and, no doubt, as the new passion was the latest born, so he assigned it in his emotions Benjamin's portion. Ginevra! Ginevra! Did Mrs. Bretton yet know at whose feet her own young idol had laid his homage? Would she approve that choice? I could not tell; but I could well guess that if she knew Miss Fanshawe's conduct towards Graham: her alternations between coldness and coaxing, and repulse and allurement; if she could at all suspect the pain with which she had tried him; if she could have seen, as I had seen, his fine spirits subdued and harassed, his inferior preferred before him, his subordinate made the instrument of his humiliation — then Mrs. Bretton would have pronounced Ginevra imbecile, or perverted, or both. Well — I thought so too.

That second evening passed as sweetly as the first — more sweetly indeed: we enjoyed a smoother interchange of thought; old troubles were not reverted to, acquaintance was better cemented; I felt happier, easier, more at home. That night — instead of crying myself asleep — I went down to dreamland by a pathway bordered with pleasant thoughts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE QUARREL.

During the first days of my stay at the Terrace, Graham never took a seat near me, or in his frequent pacing of the room approached the quarter where I sat, or looked pre-occupied, or more grave than usual, but I thought of Miss Fanshawe and expected her name to leap from his lips. I kept my ear and mind in perpetual readiness for the tender theme; my patience was ordered to be permanently under arms, and my sympathy desired to keep its cornucopia replenished and ready for outpouring. At last, and after a little inward struggle, which I saw and respected, he one day launched into the topic. It was introduced delicately; anonymously as it were.

"Your friend is spending her vacation in travelling, I hear?"

"Friend, forsooth!" thought I to myself: but it would not do to contradict; he must have his own way; I must own the soft impeachment: friend let it be. Still, by way of experiment, I could not help asking whom he meant?

He had taken a seat at my work-table; he now laid hands on a reel of thread which he proceeded recklessly to unwind.

"Ginevra — Miss Fanshawe, has accompanied the Cholmondeleys on a tour through the south of France?"

"She has."

"Do you and she correspond?"

"It will astonish you to hear that I never once thought of making application for that privilege."

"You have seen letters of her writing?"

"Yes; several to her uncle."

"They will not be deficient in wit and naïveté; there is so much sparkle, and so little art in her soul?"

"She writes comprehensively enough when she writes to M. de Bassompierre: he who runs may read." (In fact, Ginevra's epistles to her wealthy kinsman were commonly business documents, unequivocal applications for cash.)

"And her handwriting? It must be pretty, light, ladylike, I should think?"

It was, and I said so.

"I verily believe that all she does is well done," said Dr. John; and as I seemed in no hurry to chime in with this remark, he added "You, who know her, could you name a point in which she is deficient?"

"She does several things very well." ("Flirtation amongst the rest," subjoined I, in thought.)

"When do you suppose she will return to town?" he soon inquired.

"Pardon me, Dr. John, I must explain. You honour me too much in ascribing to me a degree of intimacy with Miss Fanshawe I have not the felicity to enjoy. I have never been the depositary of her plans and secrets. You will find her particular friends in another sphere than mine: amongst the Cholmondeleys, for instance."

He actually thought I was stung with a kind of jealous pain similar to his own!

"Excuse her," he said; "judge her indulgently; the glitter of fashion misleads her, but she will soon find out that these people are hollow, and will return to you with augmented attachment and confirmed trust. I know something of the Cholmondeleys: superficial, showy, selfish people; depend on it, at heart Ginevra values you beyond a score of such."

"You are very kind," I said briefly.

A disclaimer of the sentiments attributed to me burned on my lips, but I extinguished the flame. I submitted to be looked upon as the humiliated, cast-off, and now pining confidante of the distinguished Miss Fanshawe: but, reader, it was a hard submission.

"Yet, you see," continued Graham, "while I comfort you, I cannot take the same consolation to myself; I cannot hope she will do me justice. De Hamal is most worthless, yet I fear he pleases her: wretched delusion!"

My patience really gave way, and without notice: all at once. I suppose illness and weakness had worn it and made it brittle.

"Dr. Bretton," I broke out, "there is no delusion like your own. On all points but one you are a man, frank, healthful, right-thinking, clear-sighted: on this exceptional point you are but a slave. I declare, where Miss Fanshawe is concerned, you merit no respect; nor have you mine."

I got up, and left the room very much excited.

This little scene took place in the morning; I had to meet him again in the evening, and then I saw I had done mischief. He was not made of common clay, not put together out of vulgar materials; while the outlines of his nature had been shaped with breadth and vigour, the details embraced workmanship of almost feminine delicacy: finer, much finer, than you could be prepared to meet with; than you could believe inherent in him, even after years of acquaintance. Indeed, till some over-sharp contact with his nerves had betrayed, by its effects, their acute sensibility, this elaborate construction must be ignored; and the more especially because the sympathetic faculty was not prominent in him: to feel, and to seize quickly another's feelings, are separate properties; a few constructions possess both, some neither. Dr. John had the one in exquisite perfection; and because I have admitted that he was not endowed with the other in equal degree, the reader will considerately refrain from passing to an extreme, and pronouncing him _un_sympathizing, unfeeling: on the contrary, he was a kind, generous man. Make your need known, his hand was open. Put your grief into words, he turned no deaf ear.

Expect refinements of perception, miracles of intuition, and realize disappointment. This night, when Dr. John entered the room, and met the evening lamp, I saw well and at one glance his whole mechanism.

To one who had named him "slave," and, on any point, banned him from respect, he must now have peculiar feelings. That the epithet was well applied, and the ban just, might be; he put forth no denial that it was so: his mind even candidly revolved that unmanning possibility. He sought in this accusation the cause of that ill-success which had got so galling a hold on his mental peace: Amid the worry of a self-condemnatory soliloquy, his demeanour seemed grave, perhaps cold, both to me and his mother. And yet there was no bad feeling, no malice, no rancour, no littleness in his countenance, beautiful with a man's best beauty, even in its depression. When I placed his chair at the table, which I hastened to do, anticipating the servant, and when I handed him his tea, which I did with trembling care, he said: "Thank you, Lucy," in as kindly a tone of his full pleasant voice as ever my ear welcomed.

For my part, there was only one plan to be pursued; I must expiate my culpable vehemence, or I must not sleep that night. This would not do at all; I could not stand it: I made no pretence of capacity to wage war on this footing. School solitude, conventual silence and stagnation, anything seemed preferable to living embroiled with Dr. John. As to Ginevra, she might take the silver wings of a dove, or any other fowl that flies, and mount straight up to the highest place, among the highest stars, where her lover's highest flight of fancy chose to fix the constellation of her charms: never more be it mine to dispute the arrangement. Long I tried to catch his eye. Again and again that eye just met mine; but, having nothing to say, it withdrew, and I was baffled. After tea, he sat, sad and quiet, reading a book. I wished I could have dared to go and sit near him, but it seemed that if I ventured to take that step, he would infallibly evince hostility and indignation. I longed to speak out, and I dared not whisper. His mother left the room; then, moved by insupportable regret, I just murmured the words "Dr. Bretton."

He looked up from his book; his eyes were not cold or malevolent, his mouth was not cynical; he was ready and willing to hear what I might have to say: his spirit was of vintage too mellow and generous to sour in one thunder-clap.

"Dr. Bretton, forgive my hasty words: do, do forgive them."

He smiled that moment I spoke. "Perhaps I deserved them, Lucy. If you don't respect me, I am sure it is because I am not respectable. I fear, I am an awkward fool: I must manage badly in some way, for where I wish to please, it seems I don't please."

"Of that you cannot be sure; and even if such be the case, is it the fault of your character, or of another's perceptions? But now, let me unsay what I said in anger. In one thing, and in all things, I deeply respect you. If you think scarcely enough of yourself, and too much of others, what is that but an excellence?”

“Can I think too much of Ginevra?”

“I believe you may; you believe you can’t. Let us agree to differ. Let me be pardoned; that is what I ask.”

“Do you think I cherish ill-will for one warm word?”

“I see you do not and cannot; but just say, ‘Lucy, I forgive you!’ Say that, to ease me of the heart-ache.”

“Put away your heart-ache, as I will put away mine; for you wounded me a little, Lucy. Now, when the pain is gone, I more than forgive: I feel grateful, as to a sincere well-wisher.”

“I am your sincere well-wisher: you are right.”

Thus our quarrel ended.

Reader, if in the course of this work, you find that my opinion of Dr. John undergoes modification, excuse the seeming inconsistency. I give the feeling as at the time I felt it; I describe the view of character as it appeared when discovered.

He showed the fineness of his nature by being kinder to me after that misunderstanding than before. Nay, the very incident which, by my theory, must in some degree estrange me and him, changed, indeed, somewhat our relations; but not in the sense I painfully anticipated. An invisible, but a cold something, very slight, very transparent, but very chill: a sort of screen of ice had hitherto, all through our two lives, glazed the medium through which we exchanged intercourse. Those few warm words, though only warm with anger, breathed on that frail frost-work of reserve; about this time, it gave note of dissolution. I think from that day, so long as we continued friends, he never in discourse stood on topics of ceremony with me. He seemed to know that if he would but talk about himself, and about that in which he was most interested, my expectation would always be answered, my wish always satisfied. It follows, as a matter of course, that I continued to hear much of “Ginevra.”

“Ginevra!” He thought her so fair, so good; he spoke so lovingly of her charms, her sweetness, her innocence, that, in spite of my plain prose knowledge of the reality, a kind of reflected glow began to settle on her idea, even for me. Still, reader, I am free to confess, that he often talked nonsense; but I strove to be unfailingly patient with him. I had had my lesson: I had learned how severe for me was the pain of crossing, or grieving, or disappointing him. In a strange and new sense, I grew most selfish, and quite powerless to deny myself the delight of indulging his mood, and being pliant to his will. He still seemed to me most absurd when he obstinately doubted, and desponded about his power to win in the end Miss Fanshawe’s preference. The fancy became rooted in my own mind more stubbornly than ever, that she was only coquetting to goad him, and that, at heart, she coveted everyone of his words and looks. Sometimes he harassed me, in spite of my resolution to bear and hear; in the midst of the indescribable gall-honey pleasure of thus bearing and hearing, he struck so on the flint of what firmness I owned, that it emitted fire once and again. I chanced to assert one day, with a view to stilling his impatience, that in my own mind, I felt positive Miss Fanshawe must intend eventually to accept him.

"Positive! It was easy to say so, but had I any grounds for such assurance?"

"The best grounds."

"Now, Lucy, do tell me what!"

"You know them as well as I; and, knowing them, Dr. John, it really amazes me that you should not repose the frankest confidence in her fidelity. To doubt, under the circumstances, is almost to insult."

"Now you are beginning to speak fast and to breathe short; but speak a little faster and breathe a little shorter, till you have given an explanation — a full explanation: I must have it."

"You shall, Dr. John. In some cases, you are a lavish, generous man: you are a worshipper ever ready with the votive offering should Père Silas ever convert you, you will give him abundance of alms for his poor, you will supply his altar with tapers, and the shrine of your favourite saint you will do your best to enrich: Ginevra, Dr. John — "

"Hush!" said he, "don't go on."

"Hush, I will not: and go on I will: Ginevra has had her hands filled from your hands more times than I can count. You have sought for her the costliest flowers; you have busied your brain in devising gifts the most delicate: such, one would have thought, as only a woman could have imagined; and in addition, Miss Fanshawe owns a set of ornaments, to purchase which your generosity must have verged on extravagance."

The modesty Ginevra herself had never evinced in this matter, now flushed all over the face of her admirer.

"Nonsense!" he said, destructively snipping a skein of silk with my scissors. "I offered them to please myself: I felt she did me a favour in accepting them."

"She did more than a favour, Dr. John: she pledged her very honour that she would make you some return; and if she cannot pay you in affection, she ought to hand out a business-like equivalent, in the shape of some rouleaux of gold pieces."

"But you don't understand her; she is far too disinterested to care for my gifts, and too simple-minded to know their value."

I laughed out: I had heard her adjudge to every jewel its price; and well I knew money-embarrassment, money-schemes; money's worth, and endeavours to realise supplies, had, young as she was, furnished the most frequent, and the favourite stimulus of her thoughts for years.

He pursued. "You should have seen her whenever I have laid on her lap some trifle; so cool, so unmoved: no eagerness to take, not even pleasure in contemplating. Just from amiable reluctance to grieve me, she would permit the bouquet to lie beside her, and perhaps consent to bear it away. Or, if I achieved the fastening of a bracelet on her ivory arm, however pretty the trinket might be (and I always carefully chose what seemed to me pretty, and what of course was not valueless), the glitter never dazzled her bright eyes: she would hardly cast one look on my gift."

"Then, of course, not valuing it, she would unloose, and return it to you?"

"No; for such a repulse she was too good-natured. She would consent to seem to forget what I had done, and retain the offering with lady-like quiet and easy oblivion. Under such circumstances, how can a man build on acceptance of his presents as a favourable symptom? For my part, were I to offer her all I have, and she to take it, such is her incapacity to be swayed by sordid considerations, I should not venture to believe the transaction advanced me one step."

"Dr. John," I began, "Love is blind;" but just then a blue subtle ray sped sideways from Dr. John's eye: it reminded me of old days, it reminded me of his picture: it half led me to think that part, at least, of his professed persuasion of Miss Fanshawe's naïveté was assumed; it led me dubiously to conjecture that perhaps, in spite of his passion for her beauty, his appreciation of her foibles might possibly be less mistaken, more clear-sighted, than from his general language was presumable. After all it might be only a chance look, or at best the token of a merely momentary impression. Chance or intentional real or imaginary, it closed the conversation.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLEOPATRA.

My stay at La Terrasse was prolonged a fortnight beyond the close of the vacation. Mrs. Bretton's kind management procured me this respite. Her son having one day delivered the dictum that "Lucy was not yet strong enough to go back to that den of a pensionnat," she at once drove over to the Rue Fossette, had an interview with the directress, and procured the indulgence, on the plea of prolonged rest and change being necessary to perfect recovery. Hereupon, however, followed an attention I could very well have dispensed with, viz — a polite call from Madame Beck.

That lady — one fine day — actually came out in a fiacre as far as the château. I suppose she had resolved within herself to see what manner of place Dr. John inhabited. Apparently, the pleasant site and neat interior surpassed her expectations; she eulogized all she saw, pronounced the blue salon "une pièce magnifique," profusely congratulated me on the acquisition of friends, "tellement dignes, aimables, et respectables," turned also a neat compliment in my favour, and, upon Dr. John coming in, ran up to him with the utmost buoyancy, opening at the same time such a fire of rapid language, all sparkling with felicitations and protestations about his "château," — "madame sa mère, la digne châtelaine:" also his looks; which, indeed, were very flourishing, and at the moment additionally embellished by the good-natured but amused smile with which he always listened to Madame's fluent and florid French. In short, Madame shone in her very best phase that day, and came in and went out quite a living catherine-wheel of compliments, delight, and affability. Half purposely, and half to ask some question about school-business, I followed her to the carriage, and looked in after she was seated and the door closed. In that brief fraction of time what a change had been wrought! An instant ago, all sparkles and jests, she now sat sterner than a judge and graver than a sage. Strange little woman!

I went back and teased Dr. John about Madame's devotion to him. How he laughed! What fun shone in his eyes as he recalled some of her fine speeches, and repeated them, imitating her voluble delivery! He had an acute sense of humour, and was the finest company in the world — when he could forget Miss Fanshawe.

* * * * *

To "sit in sunshine calm and sweet" is said to be excellent for weak people; it gives them vital force. When little Georgette Beck was recovering from her illness, I used to take her in my arms and walk with her in the garden by the hour together, beneath a certain wall hung with grapes, which the Southern sun was ripening: that sun cherished her little pale frame quite as effectually as it mellowed and swelled the clustering fruit.

There are human tempers, bland, glowing, and genial, within whose influence it is as good for the poor in spirit to live, as it is for the feeble in frame to bask in the glow of noon. Of the number of these choice natures were certainly both Dr. Bretton's and his mother's. They liked to communicate happiness, as some like to occasion misery: they did it instinctively; without fuss, and apparently with little consciousness; the means to give pleasure rose spontaneously in their minds. Every day while I stayed with them, some little plan was proposed which resulted in beneficial enjoyment. Fully occupied as was Dr. John's time, he still made it in his way to accompany us in each brief excursion. I can hardly tell how he managed his engagements; they were numerous, yet by dint of system, he classed them in an order which left him a daily period of liberty. I often saw him hard-worked, yet seldom over-driven, and never irritated, confused, or oppressed. What he did was accomplished with the ease and grace of all-sufficing strength; with the bountiful cheerfulness of high and unbroken energies. Under his guidance I saw, in that one happy fortnight, more of Villette, its environs, and its inhabitants, than I had seen in the whole eight months of my previous residence. He took me to places of interest in the town, of whose names I had not before so much as heard; with willingness and spirit he communicates much noteworthy information. He never seemed to think it a trouble to talk to me, and, I am sure, it was never a task to me to listen. It was not his way to treat subjects coldly and vaguely; he rarely generalized, never prosed. He seemed to like nice details almost as much as I liked them myself: he seemed observant of character: and not superficially observant, either. These points gave the quality of interest to his discourse; and the fact of his speaking direct from his own resources, and not borrowing or stealing from books — here a dry fact, and there a trite phrase, and elsewhere a hackneyed opinion — ensured a freshness, as welcome as it was rare. Before my eyes, too, his disposition seemed to unfold another phase; to pass to a fresh day: to rise in new and nobler dawn.

His mother possessed a good development of benevolence, but he owned a better and larger. I found, on accompanying him to the Basse-Ville — the poor and crowded quarter of the city — that his errands there were as much those of the philanthropist as the physician. I understood presently that cheerfully, habitually, and in single-minded unconsciousness of any special merit distinguishing his deeds — he was achieving, amongst a very wretched population, a world of active good. The lower orders liked him well; his poor, patients in the hospitals welcomed him with a sort of enthusiasm.

But stop — I must not, from the faithful narrator, degenerate into the partial eulogist. Well, full well, do I know that Dr. John was not perfect, anymore than I am perfect. Human fallibility leavened him throughout: there was no hour, and scarcely a moment of the time I spent with him that in act or speech, or look, he did not betray something that was not of a god. A god could not have the cruel vanity of Dr. John, nor his sometime levity., No immortal could have resembled him in his occasional temporary oblivion of all but the present — in his passing passion for that present; shown not coarsely, by devoting it to material indulgence, but selfishly, by extracting from it whatever it could yield of nutriment to his masculine self-love: his delight was to feed that ravenous sentiment, without thought of the price of provender, or care for the cost of keeping it sleek and high-pampered.

The reader is requested to note a seeming contradiction in the two views which have been given of Graham Bretton — the public and private — the out-door and the in-door view. In the first, the public, he is shown oblivious of self; as modest in the display of his energies, as earnest in their exercise. In the second, the fireside picture, there is expressed consciousness of what he has and what he is; pleasure in homage, some recklessness in exciting, some vanity in receiving the same. Both portraits are correct.

It was hardly possible to oblige Dr. John quietly and in secret. When you thought that the fabrication of some trifle dedicated to his use had been achieved unnoticed, and that, like other men, he would use it when placed ready for his use, and never ask whence it came, he amazed you by a smilingly-uttered observation or two, proving that his eye had been on the work from commencement to close: that he had noted the design, traced its progress, and marked its completion. It pleased him to be thus served, and he let his pleasure beam in his eye and play about his mouth.

This would have been all very well, if he had not added to such kindly and unobtrusive evidence a certain wilfulness in discharging what he called debts. When his mother worked for him, he paid her by showering about her his bright animal spirits, with even more affluence than his gay, taunting, teasing, loving wont. If Lucy Snowe were discovered to have put her hand to such work, he planned, in recompence, some pleasant recreation.

I often felt amazed at his perfect knowledge of Villette; a knowledge not merely confined to its open streets, but penetrating to all its galleries, salles, and cabinets: of every door which shut in an object worth seeing, of every museum, of every hall, sacred to art or science, he seemed to possess the “Open! Sesame.” I never had a head for science, but an ignorant, blind, fond instinct inclined me to art. I liked to visit the picture-galleries, and I dearly liked to be left there alone. In company, a wretched idiosyncracy forbade me to see much or to feel anything. In unfamiliar company, where it was necessary to maintain a flow of talk on the subjects in presence, half an hour would knock me up, with a combined pressure of physical lassitude and entire mental incapacity. I never yet saw the well-reared child, much less the educated adult, who could not put me to shame, by the sustained intelligence of its demeanour under the ordeal of a conversable, sociable visitation of pictures, historical sights or buildings, or any lions of public interest. Dr. Bretton was a cicerone after my own heart; he would take me betimes, ere the galleries were filled, leave me there for two or three hours, and call for me when his own engagements were discharged. Meantime, I was happy; happy, not always in admiring, but in examining, questioning, and forming conclusions. In the commencement of these visits, there was some misunderstanding and consequent struggle between Will and Power. The former faculty exacted approbation of that which it was considered orthodox to admire; the latter groaned forth its utter inability to pay the tax; it was then self-sneered at, spurred up, goaded on to refine its taste, and whet its zest. The more it was chidden, however, the more it wouldn't praise. Discovering gradually that a wonderful sense of fatigue resulted from these conscientious efforts, I began to reflect whether I might not dispense with that great labour, and concluded eventually that I might, and so sank supine into a luxury of calm before ninety-nine out of a hundred of the exhibited frames.

It seemed to me that an original and good picture was just as scarce as an original and good book; nor did I, in the end, tremble to say to myself, standing before certain chef-d'oeuvres bearing great names, "These are not a whit like nature. Nature's daylight never had that colour: never was made so turbid, either by storm or cloud, as it is laid out there, under a sky of indigo: and that indigo is not ether; and those dark weeds plastered upon it are not trees." Several very well executed and complacent-looking fat women struck me as by no means the goddesses they appeared to consider themselves. Many scores of marvellously-finished little Flemish pictures, and also of sketches, excellent for fashion-books displaying varied costumes in the handsomest materials, gave evidence of laudable industry whimsically applied. And yet there were fragments of truth here and there which satisfied the conscience, and gleams of light that cheered the vision. Nature's power here broke through in a mountain snow-storm; and there her glory in a sunny southern day. An expression in this portrait proved clear insight into character; a face in that historical painting, by its vivid filial likeness, startlingly reminded you that genius gave it birth. These exceptions I loved: they grew dear as friends.

One day, at a quiet early hour, I found myself nearly alone in a certain gallery, wherein one particular picture of portentous size, set up in the best light, having a cordon of protection stretched before it, and a cushioned bench duly set in front for the accommodation of worshipping connoisseurs, who, having gazed themselves off their feet, might be fain to complete the business sitting: this picture, I say, seemed to consider itself the queen of the collection.

It represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought, than the life. I calculated that this lady, put into a scale of magnitude, suitable for the reception of a commodity of bulk, would infallibly turn from fourteen to sixteen stone. She was, indeed, extremely well fed: very much butcher's meat — to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids — must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that affluence of flesh. She lay half-reclined on a couch: why, it would be difficult to say; broad daylight blazed round her; she appeared in hearty health, strong enough to do the work of two plain cooks; she could not plead a weak spine; she ought to have been standing, or at least sitting bolt upright. She, had no business to lounge away the noon on a sofa. She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case: out of abundance of material — seven-and-twenty yards, I should say, of drapery — she managed to make inefficient raiment. Then, for the wretched untidiness surrounding her, there could be no excuse. Pots and pans — perhaps I ought to say vases and goblets — were rolled here and there on the foreground; a perfect rubbish of flowers was mixed amongst them, and an absurd and disorderly mass of curtain upholstery smothered the couch and cumbered the floor. On referring to the catalogue, I found that this notable production bore the name "Cleopatra."

Well, I was sitting wondering at it (as the bench was there, I thought I might as well take advantage of its accommodation), and thinking that while some of the details — as roses, gold cups, jewels, &c., were very prettily painted, it was on the whole an enormous piece of claptrap; the room, almost vacant when I entered, began to fill. Scarcely noticing this circumstance (as, indeed, it did not matter to me) I retained my seat; rather to rest myself than with a view to studying this huge, dark-complexioned gipsy-queen; of whom, indeed, I soon tired, and betook myself for refreshment to the contemplation of some exquisite little pictures of still life: wild-flowers, wild-fruit, mossy woodnests, casketing eggs that looked like pearls seen through clear green sea-water; all hung modestly beneath that coarse and preposterous canvas.

Suddenly a light tap visited my shoulder. Starting, turning, I met a face bent to encounter mine; a frowning, almost a shocked face it was.

"Que faites-vous ici?" said a voice.

"Mais, Monsieur, je m'amuse."

"Vous vous amusez! et à quoi, s'il vous plait? Mais d'abord, faites-moi le plaisir de vous lever; prenez mon bras, et allons de l'autre côté."

I did precisely as I was bid. M. Paul Emanuel (it was he) returned from Rome, and now a travelled man, was not likely to be less tolerant of insubordination now, than before this added distinction laurelled his temples.

"Permit me to conduct you to your party," said he, as we crossed the room.

"I have no party."

"You are not alone?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Did you come here unaccompanied?"

"No, Monsieur. Dr. Bretton brought me here."

"Dr. Bretton and Madame his mother, of course?"

"No; only Dr. Bretton."

“And he told you to look at that picture?”

“By no means; I found it out for myself.”

M. Paul’s hair was shorn close as raven down, or I think it would have bristled on his head. Beginning now to perceive his drift, I had a certain pleasure in keeping cool, and working him up.

“Astounding insular audacity!” cried the Professor. “Singulières femmes que ces Anglaises!”

“What is the matter, Monsieur?”

“Matter! How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at that picture?”

“It is a very ugly picture, but I cannot at all see why I should not look at it.”

“Bon! bon! Speak no more of it. But you ought not to be here alone.”

“If, however, I have no society — no party, as you say? And then, what does it signify whether I am alone, or accompanied? nobody meddles with me.”

“Taisez-vous, et asseyez-vous là — là!” — setting down a chair with emphasis in a particularly dull corner, before a series of most specially dreary “cadres.”

“Mais, Monsieur?”

“Mais, Mademoiselle, asseyez-vous, et ne bougez pas — entendez-vous? — jusqu’à ce qu’on vienne vous chercher, ou que je vous donne la permission.”

“Quel triste coin!” cried I, “et quelles laids tableaux!”

And “laids,” indeed, they were; being a set of four, denominated in the catalogue “La vie d’une femme.” They were painted rather in a remarkable style — flat, dead, pale, and formal. The first represented a “Jeune Fille,” coming out of a church-door, a missal in her hand, her dress very prim, her eyes cast down, her mouth pursed up — the image of a most villanous little precocious she-hypocrite. The second, a “Mariée,” with a long white veil, kneeling at a prie-dieu in her chamber, holding her hands plastered together, finger to finger, and showing the whites of her eyes in a most exasperating manner. The third, a “Jeune Mère,” hanging disconsolate over a clayey and puffy baby with a face like an unwholesome full moon. The fourth, a “Veuve,” being a black woman, holding by the hand a black little girl, and the twain studiously surveying an elegant French monument, set up in a corner of some Père la Chaise. All these four “Anges” were grim and grey as burglars, and cold and vapid as ghosts. What women to live with! insincere, ill-humoured, bloodless, brainless nonentities! As bad in their way as the indolent gipsy-giantess, the Cleopatra, in hers.

It was impossible to keep one’s attention long confined to these master-pieces, and so, by degrees, I veered round, and surveyed the gallery.

A perfect crowd of spectators was by this time gathered round the Lioness, from whose vicinage I had been banished; nearly half this crowd were ladies, but M. Paul afterwards told me, these were "des dames," and it was quite proper for them to contemplate what no "demoiselle" ought to glance at. I assured him plainly I could not agree in this doctrine, and did not see the sense of it; whereupon, with his usual absolutism, he merely requested my silence, and also, in the same breath, denounced my mingled rashness and ignorance. A more despotic little man than M. Paul never filled a professor's chair. I noticed, by the way, that he looked at the picture himself quite at his ease, and for a very long while: he did not, however, neglect to glance from time to time my way, in order, I suppose, to make sure that I was obeying orders, and not breaking bounds. By-and-by, he again accosted me.

"Had I not been ill?" he wished to know: "he understood I had."

"Yes, but I was now quite well."

"Where had I spent the vacation?"

"Chiefly in the Rue Fossette; partly with Madame Bretton."

"He had heard that I was left alone in the Rue Fossette; was that so?"

"Not quite alone: Marie Broc" (the crétin) "was with me."

He shrugged his shoulders; varied and contradictory expressions played rapidly over his countenance. Marie Broc was well known to M. Paul; he never gave a lesson in the third division (containing the least advanced pupils), that she did not occasion in him a sharp conflict between antagonistic impressions. Her personal appearance, her repulsive manners, her often unmanageable disposition, irritated his temper, and inspired him with strong antipathy; a feeling he was too apt to conceive when his taste was offended or his will thwarted. On the other hand, her misfortunes, constituted a strong claim on his forbearance and compassion — such a claim as it was not in his nature to deny; hence resulted almost daily drawn battles between impatience and disgust on the one hand, pity and a sense of justice on the other; in which, to his credit be it said, it was very seldom that the former feelings prevailed: when they did, however, M. Paul showed a phase of character which had its terrors. His passions were strong, his aversions and attachments alike vivid; the force he exerted in holding both in check by no means mitigated an observer's sense of their vehemence. With such tendencies, it may well be supposed he often excited in ordinary minds fear and dislike; yet it was an error to fear him: nothing drove him so nearly frantic as the tremor of an apprehensive and distrustful spirit; nothing soothed him like confidence tempered with gentleness. To evince these sentiments, however, required a thorough comprehension of his nature; and his nature was of an order rarely comprehended.

"How did you get on with Marie Broc?" he asked, after some minutes' silence.

"Monsieur, I did my best; but it was terrible to be alone with her!"

"You have, then, a weak heart! You lack courage; and, perhaps, charity.

Yours are not the qualities which might constitute a Sister of Mercy."

[He was a religious little man, in his way: the self-denying and self-sacrificing part of the Catholic religion commanded the homage of his soul.]

"I don't know, indeed: I took as good care of her as I could; but when her aunt came to fetch her away, it was a great relief."

"Ah! you are an egotist. There are women who have nursed hospitals-full of similar unfortunates. You could not do that?"

"Could Monsieur do it himself?"

"Women who are worthy the name ought infinitely to surpass; our coarse, fallible, self-indulgent sex, in the power to perform such duties."

"I washed her, I kept her clean, I fed her, I tried to amuse her; but she made mouths at me instead of speaking."

"You think you did great things?"

"No; but as great as I could do."

"Then limited are your powers, for in tending one idiot you fell sick."

"Not with that, Monsieur; I had a nervous fever: my mind was ill."

"Vraiment! Vous valez peu de chose. You are not cast in an heroic mould; your courage will not avail to sustain you in solitude; it merely gives you the temerity to gaze with sang-froid at pictures of Cleopatra."

It would have been easy to show anger at the teasing, hostile tone of the little man. I had never been angry with him yet, however, and had no present disposition to begin.

"Cleopatra!" I repeated, quietly. "Monsieur, too, has been looking at
Cleopatra; what does he think of her?"

"Cela ne vaut rien," he responded. "Une femme superbe — une taille d'impératrice, des formes de Junon, mais une personne dont je ne voudrais ni pour femme, ni pour fille, ni pour soeur. Aussi vous ne jeterez plus un seul coup d'oeil de sa côté."

"But I have looked at her a great many times while Monsieur has been talking: I can see her quite well from this corner."

"Turn to the wall and study your four pictures of a woman's life."

"Excuse me, M. Paul; they are too hideous: but if you admire them, allow me to vacate my seat and leave you to their contemplation."

"Mademoiselle," he said, grimacing a half-smile, or what he intended for a smile, though it was but a grim and hurried manifestation. "You nurslings of Protestantism astonish me. You unguarded Englishwomen walk calmly amidst red-hot ploughshares and escape burning. I believe, if some of you were thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's hottest furnace you would issue forth untraversed by the smell of fire."

"Will Monsieur have the goodness to move an inch to one side?"

"How! At what are you gazing now? You are not recognising an acquaintance amongst that group of jeunes gens?"

"I think so — Yes, I see there a person I know."

In fact, I had caught a glimpse of a head too pretty to belong to any other than the redoubted Colonel de Hamal. What a very finished, highly polished little pate it was! What a figure, so trim and natty! What womanish feet and hands! How daintily he held a glass to one of his optics! with what admiration he gazed upon the Cleopatra! and then, how engagingly he tittered and whispered a friend at his elbow! Oh, the man of sense! Oh, the refined gentleman of superior taste and tact! I observed him for about ten minutes, and perceived that he was exceedingly taken with this dusk and portly Venus of the Nile. So much was I interested in his bearing, so absorbed in divining his character by his looks and movements, I temporarily forgot M. Paul; in the interim a group came between that gentleman and me; or possibly his scruples might have received another and worse shock from my present abstraction, causing him to withdraw voluntarily: at any rate, when I again looked round, he was gone.

My eye, pursuant of the search, met not him, but another and dissimilar figure, well seen amidst the crowd, for the height as well as the port lent each its distinction. This way came Dr. John, in visage, in shape, in hue, as unlike the dark, acerb, and caustic little professor, as the fruit of the Hesperides might be unlike the sloe in the wild thicket; as the high-couraged but tractable Arabian is unlike the rude and stubborn "sheltie." He was looking for me, but had not yet explored the corner where the schoolmaster had just put me. I remained quiet; yet another minute I would watch.

He approached de Hamal; he paused near him; I thought he had a pleasure in looking over his head; Dr. Bretton, too, gazed on the Cleopatra. I doubt if it were to his taste: he did not simper like the little Count; his mouth looked fastidious, his eye cool; without demonstration he stepped aside, leaving room for others to approach. I saw now that he was waiting, and, rising, I joined him.

We took one turn round the gallery; with Graham it was very pleasant to take such a turn. I always liked dearly to hear what he had to say about either pictures or books; because without pretending to be a connoisseur, he always spoke his thought, and that was sure to be fresh: very often it was also just and pithy. It was pleasant also to tell him some things he did not know — he listened so kindly, so teachably; unformalized by scruples lest so to bend his bright handsome head, to gather a woman's rather obscure and stammering explanation, should imperil the dignity of his manhood. And when he communicated information in return, it was with a lucid intelligence that left all his words clear graven on the memory; no explanation of his giving, no fact of his narrating, did I ever forget.

As we left the gallery, I asked him what he thought of the Cleopatra (after making him laugh by telling him how Professor Emanuel had sent me to the right about, and taking him to see the sweet series of pictures recommended to my attention.)

> "Pooh!" said he. "My mother is a better-looking woman. I heard some French fops, yonder, designating her as 'le type du voluptueux;' if so, I can only say, 'le voluptueux' is little to my liking. Compare that mulatto with Ginevra!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONCERT.

One morning, Mrs. Bretton, coming promptly into my room, desired me to open my drawers and show her my dresses; which I did, without a word.

"That will do," said she, when she had turned them over. "You must have a new one."

She went out. She returned presently with a dressmaker. She had me measured. "I mean," said she, "to follow my own taste, and to have my own way in this little matter."

Two days after came home — a pink dress!

"That is not for me," I said, hurriedly, feeling that I would almost as soon clothe myself in the costume of a Chinese lady of rank.

"We shall see whether it is for you or not," rejoined my godmother, adding with her resistless decision: "Mark my words. You will wear it this very evening."

I thought I should not; I thought no human force should avail to put me into it. A pink dress! I knew it not. It knew not me. I had not proved it.

My godmother went on to decree that I was to go with her and Graham to a concert that same night: which concert, she explained, was a grand affair to be held in the large salle, or hall, of the principal musical society. The most advanced of the pupils of the Conservatoire were to perform: it was to be followed by a lottery "au bénéfice des pauvres;" and to crown all, the King, Queen, and Prince of Labassecour were to be present. Graham, in sending tickets, had enjoined attention to costume as a compliment due to royalty: he also recommended punctual readiness by seven o'clock.

About six, I was ushered upstairs. Without any force at all, I found myself led and influenced by another's will, unconsulted, unpersuaded, quietly overruled. In short, the pink dress went on, softened by some drapery of black lace. I was pronounced to be en grande tenue, and requested to look in the glass. I did so with some fear and trembling; with more fear and trembling, I turned away. Seven o'clock struck; Dr. Bretton was come; my godmother and I went down. She was clad in brown velvet; as I walked in her shadow, how I envied her those folds of grave, dark majesty! Graham stood in the drawing-room doorway.

"I do hope he will not think I have been decking myself out to draw attention," was my uneasy aspiration.

"Here, Lucy, are some flowers," said he, giving me a bouquet. He took no further notice of my dress than was conveyed in a kind smile and satisfied nod, which calmed at once my sense of shame and fear of ridicule. For the rest; the dress was made with extreme simplicity, guiltless of flounce or furbelow; it was but the light fabric and bright tint which scared me, and since Graham found in it nothing absurd, my own eye consented soon to become reconciled.

I suppose people who go every night to places of public amusement, can hardly enter into the fresh gala feeling with which an opera or a concert is enjoyed by those for whom it is a rarity: I am not sure that I expected great pleasure from the concert, having but a very vague notion of its nature, but I liked the drive there well. The snug comfort of the close carriage on a cold though fine night, the pleasure of setting out with companions so cheerful and friendly, the sight of the stars glinting fitfully through the trees as we rolled along the avenue; then the freer burst of the night-sky when we issued forth to the open chaussée, the passage through the city gates, the lights there burning, the guards there posted, the pretence of inspection, to which we there submitted, and which amused us so much — all these small matters had for me, in their novelty, a peculiarly exhilarating charm. How much of it lay in the atmosphere of friendship diffused about me, I know not: Dr. John and his mother were both in their finest mood, contending animatedly with each other the whole way, and as frankly kind to me as if I had been of their kin.

Our way lay through some of the best streets of Villette, streets brightly lit, and far more lively now than at high noon. How brilliant seemed the shops! How glad, gay, and abundant flowed the tide of life along the broad pavement! While I looked, the thought of the Rue Fossette came across me — of the walled-in garden and school-house, and of the dark, vast “classes,” where, as at this very hour, it was my wont to wander all solitary, gazing at the stars through the high, blindless windows, and listening to the distant voice of the reader in the refectory, monotonously exercised upon the “lecture pieuse.” Thus must I soon again listen and wander; and this shadow of the future stole with timely sobriety across the radiant present.

By this time we had got into a current of carriages all tending in one direction, and soon the front of a great illuminated building blazed before us. Of what I should see within this building, I had, as before intimated, but an imperfect idea; for no place of public entertainment had it ever been my lot to enter yet.

We alighted under a portico where there was a great bustle and a great crowd, but I do not distinctly remember further details, until I found myself mounting a majestic staircase wide and easy of ascent, deeply and softly carpeted with crimson, leading up to great doors closed solemnly, and whose panels were also crimson-clothed.

I hardly noticed by what magic these doors were made to roll back — Dr. John managed these points; roll back they did, however, and within was disclosed a hall — grand, wide, and high, whose sweeping circular walls, and domed hollow ceiling, seemed to me all dead gold (thus with nice art was it stained), relieved by cornicing, fluting, and garlandry, either bright, like gold burnished, or snow-white, like alabaster, or white and gold mingled in wreaths of gilded leaves and spotless lilies: wherever drapery hung, wherever carpets were spread, or cushions placed, the sole colour employed was deep crimson. Pendent from the dome, flamed a mass that dazzled me — a mass, I thought, of rock-crystal, sparkling with facets, streaming with drops, ablaze with stars, and gorgeously tinged with dews of gems dissolved, or fragments of rainbows shivered. It was only the chandelier, reader, but for me it seemed the work of eastern genii: I almost looked to see if a huge, dark, cloudy hand — that of the Slave of the Lamp — were not hovering in the lustrous and perfumed atmosphere of the cupola, guarding its wondrous treasure.

We moved on — I was not at all conscious whither — but at some turn we suddenly encountered another party approaching from the opposite direction. I just now see that group, as it flashed — upon me for one moment. A handsome middle-aged lady in dark velvet; a gentleman who might be her son — the best face, the finest figure, I thought, I had ever seen; a third person in a pink dress and black lace mantle.

I noted them all — the third person as well as the other two — and for the fraction of a moment believed them all strangers, thus receiving an impartial impression of their appearance. But the impression was hardly felt and not fixed, before the consciousness that I faced a great mirror, filling a compartment between two pillars, dispelled it: the party was our own party. Thus for the first, and perhaps only time in my life, I enjoyed the “giftie” of seeing myself as others see me. No need to dwell on the result. It brought a jar of discord, a pang of regret; it was not flattering, yet, after all, I ought to be thankful; it might have been worse.

At last, we were seated in places commanding a good general view of that vast and dazzling, but warm and cheerful hall. Already it was filled, and filled with a splendid assemblage. I do not know that the women were very beautiful, but their dresses were so perfect; and foreigners, even such as are ungraceful in domestic privacy, seem to posses the art of appearing graceful in public: however blunt and boisterous those every-day and home movements connected with peignoir and papillotes, there is a slide, a bend, a carriage of the head and arms, a mien of the mouth and eyes, kept nicely in reserve for gala use — always brought out with the grande toilette, and duly put on with the “parure.”

Some fine forms there were here and there, models of a peculiar style of beauty; a style, I think, never seen in England; a solid, firm-set, sculptural style. These shapes have no angles: a caryatid in marble is almost as flexible; a Phidian goddess is not more perfect in a certain still and stately sort. They have such features as the Dutch painters give to their madonnas: low-country classic features, regular but round, straight but stolid; and for their depth of expressionless calm, of passionless peace, a polar snow-field could alone offer a type. Women of this order need no ornament, and they seldom wear any; the smooth hair, closely braided, supplies a sufficient contrast to the smoother cheek and brow; the dress cannot be too simple; the rounded arm and perfect neck require neither bracelet nor chain.

With one of these beauties I once had the honour and rapture to be perfectly acquainted: the inert force of the deep, settled love she bore herself, was wonderful; it could only be surpassed by her proud impotency to care for any other living thing. Of blood, her cool veins conducted no flow; placid lymph filled and almost obstructed her arteries.

Such a Juno as I have described sat full in our view — a sort of mark for all eyes, and quite conscious that so she was, but proof to the magnetic influence of gaze or glance: cold, rounded, blonde, and beauteous as the white column, capitalled with gilding, which rose at her side.

Observing that Dr. John's attention was much drawn towards her, I entreated him in a low voice "for the love of heaven to shield well his heart. You need not fall in love with that lady," I said, "because, I tell you beforehand, you might die at her feet, and she would not love you again."

"Very well," said he, "and how do you know that the spectacle of her grand insensibility might not with me be the strongest stimulus to homage? The sting of desperation is, I think, a wonderful irritant to my emotions: but" (shrugging his shoulders) "you know nothing about these things; I'll address myself to my mother. Mamma, I'm in a dangerous way."

"As if that interested me!" said Mrs. Bretton.

"Alas! the cruelty of my lot!" responded her son. "Never man had a more unsentimental mother than mine: she never seems to think that such a calamity can befall her as a daughter-in-law."

"If I don't, it is not for want of having that same calamity held over my head: you have threatened me with it for the last ten years. 'Mamma, I am going to be married soon!' was the cry before you were well out of jackets."

"But, mother, one of these days it will be realized. All of a sudden, when you think you are most secure, I shall go forth like Jacob or Esau, or any other patriarch, and take me a wife: perhaps of these which are of the daughters of the land."

"At your peril, John Graham! that is all."

"This mother of mine means me to be an old bachelor. What a jealous old lady it is! But now just look at that splendid creature in the pale blue satin dress, and hair of paler brown, with 'reflets satinés' as those of her robe. Would you not feel proud, mamma, if I were to bring that goddess home some day, and introduce her to you as Mrs. Bretton, junior?"

"You will bring no goddess to La Terrasse: that little château will not contain two mistresses; especially if the second be of the height, bulk, and circumference of that mighty doll in wood and wax, and kid and satin."

"Mamma, she would fill your blue chair so admirably!"

"Fill my chair? I defy the foreign usurper! a rueful chair should it be for her: but hush, John Graham! Hold your tongue, and use your eyes."

During the above skirmish, the hall, which, I had thought, seemed full at the entrance, continued to admit party after party, until the semicircle before the stage presented one dense mass of heads, sloping from floor to ceiling. The stage, too, or rather the wide temporary platform, larger than any stage, desert half an hour since, was now overflowing with life; round two grand pianos, placed about the centre, a white flock of young girls, the pupils of the Conservatoire, had noiselessly poured. I had noticed their gathering, while Graham and his mother were engaged in discussing the belle in blue satin, and had watched with interest the process of arraying and marshalling them. Two gentlemen, in each of whom I recognised an acquaintance, officered this virgin troop. One, an artistic-looking man, bearded, and with long hair, was a noted pianiste, and also the first music-teacher in Villette; he attended twice a week at Madame Beck's pensionnat, to give lessons to the few pupils whose parents were rich enough to allow their daughters the privilege of his instructions; his name was M. Josef Emanuel, and he was half-brother to M. Paul: which potent personage was now visible in the person of the second gentleman.

M. Paul amused me; I smiled to myself as I watched him, he seemed so thoroughly in his element — standing conspicuous in presence of a wide and grand assemblage, arranging, restraining, over-aweing about one hundred young ladies. He was, too, so perfectly in earnest — so energetic, so intent, and, above all, so absolute: and yet what business had he there? What had he to do with music or the Conservatoirehe who could hardly distinguish one note from another? I knew that it was his love of display and authority which had brought him there — a love not offensive, only because so naive. It presently became obvious that his brother, M. Josef, was as much under his control as were the girls themselves. Never was such a little hawk of a man as that M. Paul! Ere long, some noted singers and musicians dawned upon the platform: as these stars rose, the comet-like professor set. Insufferable to him were all notorieties and celebrities: where he could not outshine, he fled.

And now all was prepared: but one compartment of the hall waited to be filled — a compartment covered with crimson, like the grand staircase and doors, furnished with stuffed and cushioned benches, ranged on each side of two regal chairs, placed solemnly under a canopy.

A signal was given, the doors rolled back, the assembly stood up, the orchestra burst out, and, to the welcome of a choral burst, enter the King, the Queen, the Court of Labassecour.

Till then, I had never set eyes on living king or queen; it may consequently be conjectured how I strained my powers of vision to take in these specimens of European royalty. By whomsoever majesty is beheld for the first time, there will always be experienced a vague surprise bordering on disappointment, that the same does not appear seated, en permanence, on a throne, bonneted with a crown, and furnished, as to the hand, with a sceptre. Looking out for a king and queen, and seeing only a middle-aged soldier and a rather young lady, I felt half cheated, half pleased.

Well do I recall that King — a man of fifty, a little bowed, a little grey: there was no face in all that assembly which resembled his. I had never read, never been told anything of his nature or his habits; and at first the strong hieroglyphics graven as with iron stylet on his brow, round his eyes, beside his mouth, puzzled and baffled instinct. Ere long, however, if I did not know, at least I felt, the meaning of those characters written without hand. There sat a silent sufferer — a nervous, melancholy man. Those eyes had looked on the visits of a certain ghost — had long waited the comings and goings of that strangest spectre, Hypochondria. Perhaps he saw her now on that stage, over against him, amidst all that brilliant throng. Hypochondria has that wont, to rise in the midst of thousands — dark as Doom, pale as Malady, and well-nigh strong as Death. Her comrade and victim thinks to be happy one moment — "Not so," says she; "I come." And she freezes the blood in his heart, and beclouds the light in his eye.

Some might say it was the foreign crown pressing the King's brows which bent them to that peculiar and painful fold; some might quote the effects of early bereavement. Something there might be of both these; but these are embittered by that darkest foe of humanity — constitutional melancholy. The Queen, his wife, knew this: it seemed to me, the reflection of her husband's grief lay, a subduing shadow, on her own benignant face. A mild, thoughtful, graceful woman that princess seemed; not beautiful, not at all like the women of solid charms and marble feelings described a page or two since. Hers was a somewhat slender shape; her features, though distinguished enough, were too suggestive of reigning dynasties and royal lines to give unqualified pleasure. The expression clothing that profile was agreeable in the present instance; but you could not avoid connecting it with remembered effigies, where similar lines appeared, under phase ignoble; feeble, or sensual, or cunning, as the case might be. The Queen's eye, however, was her own; and pity, goodness, sweet sympathy, blessed it with divinest light. She moved no sovereign, but a lady — kind, loving, elegant. Her little son, the Prince of Labassecour, and young Duc de Dindonneau, accompanied her: he leaned on his mother's knee; and, ever and anon, in the course of that evening, I saw her observant of the monarch at her side, conscious of his beclouded abstraction, and desirous to rouse him from it by drawing his attention to their son. She often bent her head to listen to the boy's remarks, and would then smilingly repeat them to his sire. The moody King started, listened, smiled, but invariably relapsed as soon as his good angel ceased speaking. Full mournful and significant was that spectacle! Not the less so because, both for the aristocracy and the honest bourgeoisie of Labassecour, its peculiarity seemed to be wholly invisible: I could not discover that one soul present was either struck or touched.

With the King and Queen had entered their court, comprising two or three foreign ambassadors; and with them came the elite of the foreigners then resident in Villette. These took possession of the crimson benches; the ladies were seated; most of the men remained standing: their sable rank, lining the background, looked like a dark foil to the splendour displayed in front. Nor was this splendour without varying light and shade and gradation: the middle distance was filled with matrons in velvets and satins, in plumes and gems; the benches in the foreground, to the Queen's right hand, seemed devoted exclusively to young girls, the flower — perhaps, I should rather say, the bud — of Villette aristocracy. Here were no jewels, no head-dresses, no velvet pile or silken sheen purity, simplicity, and aërial grace reigned in that virgin band. Young heads simply braided, and fair forms (I was going to write sylph forms, but that would have been quite untrue: several of these "jeunes filles," who had not numbered more than sixteen or seventeen years, boasted contours as robust and solid as those of a stout Englishwoman of five-and-twenty) — fair forms robed in white, or pale rose, or placid blue, suggested thoughts of heaven and angels. I knew a couple, at least, of these "rose et blanche" specimens of humanity. Here was a pair of Madame Beck's late pupils — Mesdemoiselles Mathilde and Angélique: pupils who, during their last year at school, ought to have been in the first class, but whose brains never got them beyond the second division. In English, they had been under my own charge, and hard work it was to get them to translate rationally a page of The Vicar of Wakefield. Also during three months I had one of them for my vis-à-vis at table, and the quantity of household bread, butter, and stewed fruit, she would habitually consume at "second déjeuner" was a real world's wonder — to be exceeded only by the fact of her actually pocketing slices she could not eat. Here be truths — wholesome truths, too.

I knew another of these seraphs — the prettiest, or, at any rate, the least demure and hypocritical looking of the lot: she was seated by the daughter of an English peer, also an honest, though haughty-looking girl: both had entered in the suite of the British embassy. She (i.e. my acquaintance) had a slight, pliant figure, not at all like the forms of the foreign damsels: her hair, too, was not close-braided, like a shell or a skull-cap of satin; it looked like hair, and waved from her head, long, curled, and flowing. She chatted away volubly, and seemed full of a light-headed sort of satisfaction with herself and her position. I did not look at Dr. Bretton; but I knew that he, too, saw Ginevra Fanshawe: he had become so quiet, he answered so briefly his mother's remarks, he so often suppressed a sigh. Why should he sigh? He had confessed a taste for the pursuit of love under difficulties; here was full gratification for that taste. His lady-love beamed upon him from a sphere above his own: he could not come near her; he was not certain that he could win from her a look. I watched to see if she would so far favour him. Our seat was not far from the crimson benches; we must inevitably be seen thence, by eyes so quick and roving as Miss Fanshawe's, and very soon those optics of hers were upon us: at least, upon Dr. and Mrs. Bretton. I kept rather in the shade and out of sight, not wishing to be immediately recognised: she looked quite steadily at Dr. John, and then she raised a glass to examine his mother; a minute or two afterwards she laughingly whispered her neighbour; upon the performance commencing, her rambling attention was attracted to the platform.

On the concert I need not dwell; the reader would not care to have my impressions thereanent: and, indeed, it would not be worth while to record them, as they were the impressions of an ignorance crasse. The young ladies of the Conservatoire, being very much frightened, made rather a tremulous exhibition on the two grand pianos. M. Josef Emanuel stood by them while they played; but he had not the tact or influence of his kinsman, who, under similar circumstances, would certainly have compelled pupils of his to demean themselves with heroism and self-possession. M. Paul would have placed the hysteric débutantes between two fires — terror of the audience, and terror of himself — and would have inspired them with the courage of desperation, by making the latter terror incomparably the greater: M. Josef could not do this.

Following the white muslin pianistes, came a fine, full-grown, sulky lady in white satin. She sang. Her singing just affected me like the tricks of a conjuror: I wondered how she did it — how she made her voice run up and down, and cut such marvellous capers; but a simple Scotch melody, played by a rude street minstrel, has often moved me more deeply.

Afterwards stepped forth a gentleman, who, bending his body a good deal in the direction of the King and Queen, and frequently approaching his white-gloved hand to the region of his heart, vented a bitter outcry against a certain “fausse Isabelle.” I thought he seemed especially to solicit the Queen’s sympathy; but, unless I am egregiously mistaken, her Majesty lent her attention rather with the calm of courtesy than the earnestness of interest. This gentleman’s state of mind was very harrowing, and I was glad when he wound up his musical exposition of the same.

Some rousing choruses struck me as the best part of the evening’s entertainment. There were present deputies from all the best provincial choral societies; genuine, barrel-shaped, native Labassecouriens. These worthies gave voice without mincing the matter their hearty exertions had at least this good result — the ear drank thence a satisfying sense of power.

Through the whole performance — timid instrumental duets, conceited vocal solos, sonorous, brass-lunged choruses — my attention gave but one eye and one ear to the stage, the other being permanently retained in the service of Dr. Bretton: I could not forget him, nor cease to question how he was feeling, what he was thinking, whether he was amused or the contrary. At last he spoke.

“And how do you like it all, Lucy? You are very quiet,” he said, in his own cheerful tone.

“I am quiet,” I said, “because I am so very, very much interested: not merely with the music, but with everything about me.”

He then proceeded to make some further remarks, with so much equanimity and composure that I began to think he had really not seen what I had seen, and I whispered — “Miss Fanshawe is here: have you noticed her?”

“Oh, yes! and I observed that you noticed her too?”

“Is she come with Mrs. Cholmondeley, do you think?”

“Mrs. Cholmondeley is there with a very grand party. Yes; Ginevra was in her train; and Mrs. Cholmondeley was in Lady — — ‘s train, who was in the Queen’s train. If this were not one of the compact little minor European courts, whose very formalities are little more imposing than familiarities, and whose gala grandeur is but homeliness in Sunday array, it would sound all very fine.”

“Ginevra saw you, I think?”

“So do I think so. I have had my eye on her several times since you withdrew yours; and I have had the honour of witnessing a little spectacle which you were spared.”

I did not ask what; I waited voluntary information, which was presently given.

“Miss Fanshawe,” he said, “has a companion with her — a lady of rank. I happen to know Lady Sara by sight; her noble mother has called me in professionally. She is a proud girl, but not in the least insolent, and I doubt whether Ginevra will have gained ground in her estimation by making a butt of her neighbours.”

“What neighbours?”

“Merely myself and my mother. As to me it is all very natural: nothing, I suppose, can be fairer game than the young bourgeois doctor; but my mother! I never saw her ridiculed before. Do you know, the curling lip, and sarcastically levelled glass thus directed, gave me a most curious sensation?”

“Think nothing of it, Dr. John: it is not worth while. If Ginevra were in a giddy mood, as she is eminently to-night, she would make no scruple of laughing at that mild, pensive Queen, or that melancholy King. She is not actuated by malevolence, but sheer, heedless folly. To a feather-brained school-girl nothing is sacred.”

“But you forget: I have not been accustomed to look on Miss Fanshawe in the light of a feather-brained school-girl. Was she not my divinity — the angel of my career?”

“Hem! There was your mistake.”

“To speak the honest truth, without any false rant or assumed romance, there actually was a moment, six months ago, when I thought her divine. Do you remember our conversation about the presents? I was not quite open with you in discussing that subject: the warmth with which you took it up amused me. By way of having the full benefit of your lights, I allowed you to think me more in the dark than I really was. It was that test of the presents which first proved Ginevra mortal. Still her beauty retained its fascination: three days — three hours ago, I was very much her slave. As she passed me to-night, triumphant in beauty, my emotions did her homage; but for one luckless sneer, I should yet be the humblest of her servants. She might have scoffed at me, and, while wounding, she would not soon have alienated me: through myself, she could not in ten years have done what, in a moment, she has done through my mother."

He held his peace awhile. Never before had I seen so much fire, and so little sunshine in Dr. John's blue eye as just now.

"Lucy," he recommenced, "look well at my mother, and say, without fear or favour, in what light she now appears to you."

"As she always does — an English, middle-class gentlewoman; well, though gravely dressed, habitually independent of pretence, constitutionally composed and cheerful."

"So she seems to me — bless her! The merry may laugh with mamma, but the weak only will laugh at her. She shall not be ridiculed, with my consent, at least; nor without my — my scorn — my antipathy — my — "

He stopped: and it was time — for he was getting excited — more it seemed than the occasion warranted. I did not then know that he had witnessed double cause for dissatisfaction with Miss Fanshawe. The glow of his complexion, the expansion of his nostril, the bold curve which disdain gave his well-cut under lip, showed him in a new and striking phase. Yet the rare passion of the constitutionally suave and serene, is not a pleasant spectacle; nor did I like the sort of vindictive thrill which passed through his strong young frame.

"Do I frighten you, Lucy?" he asked.

"I cannot tell why you are so very angry."

"For this reason," he muttered in my ear. "Ginevra is neither a pure angel, nor a pure-minded woman."

"Nonsense! you exaggerate: she has no great harm in her."

"Too much for me. I can see where you are blind. Now dismiss the subject. Let me amuse myself by teasing mamma: I will assert that she is flagging. Mamma, pray rouse yourself."

"John, I will certainly rouse you if you are not better conducted. Will you and Lucy be silent, that I may hear the singing?"

They were then thundering in a chorus, under cover of which all the previous dialogue had taken place.

"You hear the singing, mamma! Now, I will wager my studs, which are genuine, against your paste brooch — "

"My paste brooch, Graham? Profane boy! you know that it is a stone of value."

"Oh! that is one of your superstitions: you were cheated in the business."

"I am cheated in fewer things than you imagine. How do you happen to be acquainted with young ladies of the court, John? I have observed two of them pay you no small attention during the last half-hour."

"I wish you would not observe them."

"Why not? Because one of them satirically levels her eyeglass at me? She is a pretty, silly girl: but are you apprehensive that her titter will discomfit the old lady?"

"The sensible, admirable old lady! Mother, you are better to me than ten wives yet."

"Don't be demonstrative, John, or I shall faint, and you will have to carry me out; and if that burden were laid upon you, you would reverse your last speech, and exclaim, 'Mother, ten wives could hardly be worse to me than you are!'"

* * * * *

The concert over, the Lottery "au bénéfice des pauvres" came next: the interval between was one of general relaxation, and the pleasantest imaginable stir and commotion. The white flock was cleared from the platform; a busy throng of gentlemen crowded it instead, making arrangements for the drawing; and amongst these — the busiest of all — re-appeared that certain well-known form, not tall but active, alive with the energy and movement of three tall men. How M. Paul did work! How he issued directions, and, at the same time, set his own shoulder to the wheel! Half-a-dozen assistants were at his beck to remove the pianos, &c.; no matter, he must add to their strength his own. The redundancy of his alertness was half-vexing, half-ludicrous: in my mind I both disapproved and derided most of this fuss. Yet, in the midst of prejudice and annoyance, I could not, while watching, avoid perceiving a certain not disagreeable naïveté in all he did and said; nor could I be blind to certain vigorous characteristics of his physiognomy, rendered conspicuous now by the contrast with a throng of tamer faces: the deep, intent keenness of his eye, the power of his forehead, pale, broad, and full — the mobility of his most flexible mouth. He lacked the calm of force, but its movement and its fire he signally possessed.

Meantime the whole hall was in a stir; most people rose and remained standing, for a change; some walked about, all talked and laughed. The crimson compartment presented a peculiarly animated scene. The long cloud of gentlemen, breaking into fragments, mixed with the rainbow line of ladies; two or three officer-like men approached the King and conversed with him. The Queen, leaving her chair, glided along the rank of young ladies, who all stood up as she passed; and to each in turn I saw her vouchsafe some token of kindness — a gracious word, look or smile. To the two pretty English girls, Lady Sara and Ginevra Fanshawe, she addressed several sentences; as she left them, both, and especially the latter, seemed to glow all over with gratification. They were afterwards accosted by several ladies, and a little circle of gentlemen gathered round them; amongst these — the nearest to Ginevra — stood the Count de Hamal.

"This room is stiflingly hot," said Dr. Bretton, rising with sudden impatience. "Lucy — mother — will you come a moment to the fresh air?"

"Go with him, Lucy," said Mrs. Bretton. "I would rather keep my seat."

Willingly would I have kept mine also, but Graham's desire must take precedence of my own; I accompanied him.

We found the night-air keen; or at least I did: he did not seem to feel it; but it was very still, and the star-sown sky spread cloudless. I was wrapped in a fur shawl. We took some turns on the pavement; in passing under a lamp, Graham encountered my eye.

"You look pensive, Lucy: is it on my account?"

"I was only fearing that you were grieved."

"Not at all: so be of good cheer — as I am. Whenever I die, Lucy, my persuasion is that it will not be of heart-complaint. I may be stung, I may seem to droop for a time, but no pain or malady of sentiment has yet gone through my whole system. You have always seen me cheerful at home?"

"Generally."

"I am glad she laughed at my mother. I would not give the old lady for a dozen beauties. That sneer did me all the good in the world. Thank you, Miss Fanshawe!" And he lifted his hat from his waved locks, and made a mock reverence.

"Yes," he said, "I thank her. She has made me feel that nine parts in ten of my heart have always been sound as a bell, and the tenth bled from a mere puncture: a lancet-prick that will heal in a trice."

"You are angry just now, heated and indignant; you will think and feel differently to-morrow."

"I heated and indignant! You don't know me. On the contrary, the heat is gone: I am as cool as the night — which, by the way, may be too cool for you. We will go back."

"Dr. John, this is a sudden change."

"Not it: or if it be, there are good reasons for it — two good reasons:

I have told you one. But now let us re-enter."

We did not easily regain our seats; the lottery was begun, and all was excited confusion; crowds blocked the sort of corridor along which we had to pass: it was necessary to pause for a time. Happening to glance round — indeed I half fancied I heard my name pronounced — I saw quite near, the ubiquitous, the inevitable M. Paul. He was looking at me gravely and intently: at me, or rather at my pink dress — sardonic comment on which gleamed in his eye. Now it was his habit to indulge in strictures on the dress, both of the teachers and pupils, at Madame Beck's — a habit which the former, at least, held to be an offensive impertinence: as yet I had not suffered from it — my sombre daily attire not being calculated to attract notice. I was in no mood to permit any new encroachment to-night: rather than accept his banter, I would ignore his presence, and accordingly steadily turned my face to the sleeve of Dr. John's coat; finding in that same black sleeve a prospect more redolent of pleasure and comfort, more genial, more friendly, I thought, than was offered by the dark little Professor's unlovely visage. Dr. John seemed unconsciously to sanction the preference by looking down and saying in his kind voice, "Ay, keep close to my side, Lucy: these crowding burghers are no respecters of persons."

I could not, however, be true to myself. Yielding to some influence, mesmeric or otherwise — an influence unwelcome, displeasing, but effective — I again glanced round to see if M. Paul was gone. No, there he stood on the same spot, looking still, but with a changed eye; he had penetrated my thought, and read my wish to shun him. The mocking but not ill-humoured gaze was turned to a swarthy frown, and when I bowed, with a view to conciliation, I got only the stiffest and sternest of nods in return.

"Whom have you made angry, Lucy?" whispered Dr. Bretton, smiling. "Who is that savage-looking friend of yours?"

"One of the professors at Madame Beck's: a very cross little man."

"He looks mighty cross just now: what have you done to him? What is it all about? Ah, Lucy, Lucy! tell me the meaning of this."

"No mystery, I assure you. M. Emanuel is very exigeant, and because I looked at your coat-sleeve, instead of curtseying and dipping to him, he thinks I have failed in respect."

"The little — " began Dr. John: I know not what more he would have added, for at that moment I was nearly thrown down amongst the feet of the crowd. M. Paul had rudely pushed past, and was elbowing his way with such utter disregard to the convenience and security of all around, that a very uncomfortable pressure was the consequence.

"I think he is what he himself would call 'méchant,'" said Dr. Bretton.

I thought so, too.

Slowly and with difficulty we made our way along the passage, and at last regained our seats. The drawing of the lottery lasted nearly an hour; it was an animating and amusing scene; and as we each held tickets, we shared in the alternations of hope and fear raised by each turn of the wheel. Two little girls, of five and six years old, drew the numbers: and the prizes were duly proclaimed from the platform. These prizes were numerous, though of small value. It so fell out that Dr. John and I each gained one: mine was a cigar-case, his a lady's head-dress — a most airy sort of blue and silver turban, with a streamer of plumage on one side, like a snowy cloud. He was excessively anxious to make an exchange; but I could not be brought to hear reason, and to this day I keep my cigar-case: it serves, when I look at it, to remind me of old times, and one happy evening.

Dr. John, for his part, held his turban at arm's length between his finger and thumb, and looked at it with a mixture of reverence and embarrassment highly provocative of laughter. The contemplation over, he was about coolly to deposit the delicate fabric on the ground between his feet; he seemed to have no shadow of an idea of the treatment or stowage it ought to receive: if his mother had not come to the rescue, I think he would finally have crushed it under his arm like an opera-hat; she restored it to the band-box whence it had issued.

Graham was quite cheerful all the evening, and his cheerfulness seemed natural and unforced. His demeanour, his look, is not easily described; there was something in it peculiar, and, in its way, original. I read in it no common mastery of the passions, and a fund of deep and healthy strength which, without any exhausting effort, bore down Disappointment and extracted her fang. His manner, now, reminded me of qualities I had noticed in him when professionally engaged amongst the poor, the guilty, and the suffering, in the Basse-Ville: he looked at once determined, enduring, and sweet-tempered. Who could help liking him? He betrayed no weakness which harassed all your feelings with considerations as to how its faltering must be propped; from him broke no irritability which startled calm and quenched mirth; his lips let fall no caustic that burned to the bone; his eye shot no morose shafts that went cold, and rusty, and venomed through your heart: beside him was rest and refuge — around him, fostering sunshine.

And yet he had neither forgiven nor forgotten Miss Fanshawe. Once angered, I doubt if Dr. Bretton were to be soon propitiated — once alienated, whether he were ever to be reclaimed. He looked at her more than once; not stealthily or humbly, but with a movement of hardy, open observation. De Hamal was now a fixture beside her; Mrs. Cholmondeley sat near, and they and she were wholly absorbed in the discourse, mirth, and excitement, with which the crimson seats were as much astir as any plebeian part of the hall. In the course of some apparently animated discussion, Ginevra once or twice lifted her hand and arm; a handsome bracelet gleamed upon the latter. I saw that its gleam flickered in Dr. John's eye — quickening therein a derisive, ireful sparkle; he laughed: — —

"I think," he said, "I will lay my turban on my wonted altar of offerings; there, at any rate, it would be certain to find favour: no grisette has a more facile faculty of acceptance. Strange! for after all, I know she is a girl of family."

"But you don't know her education, Dr. John," said I. "Tossed about all her life from one foreign school to another, she may justly proffer the plea of ignorance in extenuation of most of her faults. And then, from what she says, I believe her father and mother were brought up much as she has been brought up."

"I always understood she had no fortune; and once I had pleasure in the thought," said he.

"She tells me," I answered, "that they are poor at home; she always speaks quite candidly on such points: you never find her lying, as these foreigners will often lie. Her parents have a large family: they occupy such a station and possess such connections as, in their opinion, demand display; stringent necessity of circumstances and inherent thoughtlessness of disposition combined, have engendered reckless unscrupulousness as to how they obtain the means of sustaining a good appearance. This is the state of things, and the only state of things, she has seen from childhood upwards."

"I believe it — and I thought to mould her to something better: but, Lucy, to speak the plain truth, I have felt a new thing to-night, in looking at her and de Hamal. I felt it before noticing the impertinence directed at my mother. I saw a look interchanged between them immediately after their entrance, which threw a most unwelcome light on my mind."

"How do you mean? You have been long aware of the flirtation they keep up?"

"Ay, flirtation! That might be an innocent girlish wile to lure on the true lover; but what I refer to was not flirtation: it was a look marking mutual and secret understanding — it was neither girlish nor innocent. No woman, were she as beautiful as Aphrodite, who could give or receive such a glance, shall ever be sought in marriage by me: I would rather wed a paysanne in a short petticoat and high cap — and be sure that she was honest."

I could not help smiling. I felt sure he now exaggerated the case: Ginevra, I was certain, was honest enough, with all her giddiness. I told him so. He shook his head, and said he would not be the man to trust her with his honour.

"The only thing," said I, "with which you may safely trust her. She would unscrupulously damage a husband's purse and property, recklessly try his patience and temper: I don't think she would breathe, or let another breathe, on his honour."

"You are becoming her advocate," said he. "Do you wish me to resume my old chains?"

"No: I am glad to see you free, and trust that free you will long remain. Yet be, at the same time, just."

"I am so: just as Rhadamanthus, Lucy. When once I am thoroughly estranged, I cannot help being severe. But look! the King and Queen are rising. I like that Queen: she has a sweet countenance. Mamma, too, is excessively tired; we shall never get the old lady home if we stay longer."

"I tired, John?" cried Mrs. Bretton, looking at least as animated and as wide-awake as her son. "I would undertake to sit you out yet: leave us both here till morning, and we should see which would look the most jaded by sunrise."

"I should not like to try the experiment; for, in truth, mamma, you are the most unfading of evergreens and the freshest of matrons. It must then be on the plea of your son's delicate nerves and fragile constitution that I found a petition for our speedy adjournment."

"Indolent young man! You wish you were in bed, no doubt; and I suppose you must be humoured. There is Lucy, too, looking quite done up. For shame, Lucy! At your age, a week of evenings-out would not have made me a shade paler. Come away, both of you; and you may laugh at the old lady as much as you please, but, for my part, I shall take charge of the bandbox and turban."

Which she did accordingly. I offered to relieve her, but was shaken off with kindly contempt: my godmother opined that I had enough to do to take care of myself. Not standing on ceremony now, in the midst of the gay “confusion worse confounded” succeeding to the King and Queen’s departure, Mrs. Bretton preceded us, and promptly made us a lane through the crowd. Graham followed, apostrophizing his mother as the most flourishing grisette it had ever been his good fortune to see charged with carriage of a bandbox; he also desired me to mark her affection for the sky-blue turban, and announced his conviction that she intended one day to wear it.

The night was now very cold and very dark, but with little delay we found the carriage. Soon we were packed in it, as warm and as snug as at a fire-side; and the drive home was, I think, still pleasanter than the drive to the concert. Pleasant it was, even though the coachman — having spent in the shop of a “marchand de vin” a portion of the time we passed at the concert — drove us along the dark and solitary chaussée far past the turn leading down to La Terrasse; we, who were occupied in talking and laughing, not noticing the aberration till, at last, Mrs. Bretton intimated that, though she had always thought the château a retired spot, she did not know it was situated at the world’s end, as she declared seemed now to be the case, for she believed we had been an hour and a half en route, and had not yet taken the turn down the avenue.

Then Graham looked out, and perceiving only dim-spread fields, with unfamiliar rows of pollards and limes ranged along their else invisible sunk-fences, began to conjecture how matters were, and calling a halt and descending, he mounted the box and took the reins himself. Thanks to him, we arrived safe at home about an hour and a half beyond our time.

Martha had not forgotten us; a cheerful fire was burning, and a neat supper spread in the dining-room: we were glad of both. The winter dawn was actually breaking before we gained our chambers. I took off my pink dress and lace mantle with happier feelings than I had experienced in putting them on. Not all, perhaps, who had shone brightly arrayed at that concert could say the same; for not all had been satisfied with friendship — with its calm comfort and modest hope.

CHAPTER XXI.

REACTION.

Yet three days, and then I must go back to the pensionnat. I almost numbered the moments of these days upon the clock; fain would I have retarded their flight; but they glided by while I watched them: they were already gone while I yet feared their departure.

"Lucy will not leave us to-day," said Mrs. Bretton, coaxingly at breakfast; "she knows we can procure a second respite."

"I would not ask for one if I might have it for a word," said I. "I long to get the good-by over, and to be settled in the Rue Fossette again. I must go this morning: I must go directly; my trunk is packed and corded."

It appeared; however, that my going depended upon Graham; he had said he would accompany, me, and it so fell out that he was engaged all day, and only returned home at dusk. Then ensued a little combat of words. Mrs. Bretton and her son pressed me to remain one night more. I could have cried, so irritated and eager was I to be gone. I longed to leave them as the criminal on the scaffold longs for the axe to descend: that is, I wished the pang over. How much I wished it, they could not tell. On these points, mine was a state of mind out of their experience.

It was dark when Dr. John handed me from the carriage at Madame Beck's door. The lamp above was lit; it rained a November drizzle, as it had rained all day: the lamplight gleamed on the wet pavement. Just such a night was it as that on which, not a year ago, I had first stopped at this very threshold; just similar was the scene. I remembered the very shapes of the paving-stones which I had noted with idle eye, while, with a thick-beating heart, I waited the unclosing of that door at which I stood — a solitary and a suppliant. On that night, too, I had briefly met him who now stood with me. Had I ever reminded him of that rencontre, or explained it? I had not, nor ever felt the inclination to do so: it was a pleasant thought, laid by in my own mind, and best kept there.

Graham rung the bell. The door was instantly opened, for it was just that period of the evening when the half-boarders took their departure — consequently, Rosine was on the alert.

"Don't come in," said I to him; but he stepped a moment into the well-lighted vestibule. I had not wished him to see that "the water stood in my eyes," for his was too kind a nature ever to be needlessly shown such signs of sorrow. He always wished to heal — to relieve — when, physician as he was, neither cure nor alleviation were, perhaps, in his power.

"Keep up your courage, Lucy. Think of my mother and myself as true friends. We will not forget you."

"Nor will I forget you, Dr. John."

My trunk was now brought in. We had shaken hands; he had turned to go, but he was not satisfied: he had not done or said enough to content his generous impulses.

"Lucy," — stepping after me — "shall you feel very solitary here?"

"At first I shall."

"Well, my mother will soon call to see you; and, meantime, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll write — just any cheerful nonsense that comes into my head — shall I?"

"Good, gallant heart!" thought I to myself; but I shook my head, smiling, and said, "Never think of it: impose on yourself no such task. You write to me! — you'll not have time."

"Oh! I will find or make time. Good-by!"

He was gone. The heavy door crashed to: the axe had fallen — the pang was experienced.

Allowing myself no time to think or feel — swallowing tears as if they had been wine — I passed to Madame's sitting-room to pay the necessary visit of ceremony and respect. She received me with perfectly well-acted cordiality — was even demonstrative, though brief, in her welcome. In ten minutes I was dismissed. From the salle-à-manger I proceeded to the refectory, where pupils and teachers were now assembled for evening study: again I had a welcome, and one not, I think, quite hollow. That over, I was free to repair to the dormitory.

"And will Graham really write?" I questioned, as I sank tired on the edge of the bed.

Reason, coming stealthily up to me through the twilight of that long, dim chamber, whispered sedately — "He may write once. So kind is his nature, it may stimulate him for once to make the effort. But it cannot be continued — it may not be repeated. Great were that folly which should build on such a promise — insane that credulity which should mistake the transitory rain-pool, holding in its hollow one draught, for the perennial spring yielding the supply of seasons."

I bent my head: I sat thinking an hour longer. Reason still whispered me, laying on my shoulder a withered hand, and frostily touching my ear with the chill blue lips of eld.

"If," muttered she, "if he should write, what then? Do you meditate pleasure in replying? Ah, fool! I warn you! Brief be your answer. Hope no delight of heart — no indulgence of intellect: grant no expansion to feeling — give holiday to no single faculty: dally with no friendly exchange: foster no genial intercommunion…."

"But I have talked to Graham and you did not chide," I pleaded.

"No," said she, "I needed not. Talk for you is good discipline. You converse imperfectly. While you speak, there can be no oblivion of inferiority — no encouragement to delusion: pain, privation, penury stamp your language…."

"But," I again broke in, "where the bodily presence is weak and the speech contemptible, surely there cannot be error in making written language the medium of better utterance than faltering lips can achieve?"

Reason only answered, "At your peril you cherish that idea, or suffer its influence to animate any writing of yours!"

"But if I feel, may I never express?"

"Never!" declared Reason.

I groaned under her bitter sternness. Never — never — oh, hard word! This hag, this Reason, would not let me look up, or smile, or hope: she could not rest unless I were altogether crushed, cowed, broken-in, and broken-down. According to her, I was born only to work for a piece of bread, to await the pains of death, and steadily through all life to despond. Reason might be right; yet no wonder we are glad at times to defy her, to rush from under her rod and give a truant hour to Imagination — her soft, bright foe, our sweet Help, our divine Hope. We shall and must break bounds at intervals, despite the terrible revenge that awaits our return. Reason is vindictive as a devil: for me she was always envenomed as a step-mother. If I have obeyed her it has chiefly been with the obedience of fear, not of love. Long ago I should have died of her ill-usage her stint, her chill, her barren board, her icy bed, her savage, ceaseless blows; but for that kinder Power who holds my secret and sworn allegiance. Often has Reason turned me out by night, in mid-winter, on cold snow, flinging for sustenance the gnawed bone dogs had forsaken: sternly has she vowed her stores held nothing more for me — harshly denied my right to ask better things…. Then, looking up, have I seen in the sky a head amidst circling stars, of which the midmost and the brightest lent a ray sympathetic and attent. A spirit, softer and better than Human Reason, has descended with quiet flight to the waste — bringing all round her a sphere of air borrowed of eternal summer; bringing perfume of flowers which cannot fade — fragrance of trees whose fruit is life; bringing breezes pure from a world whose day needs no sun to lighten it. My hunger has this good angel appeased with food, sweet and strange, gathered amongst gleaning angels, garnering their dew-white harvest in the first fresh hour of a heavenly day; tenderly has she assuaged the insufferable fears which weep away life itself — kindly given rest to deadly weariness — generously lent hope and impulse to paralyzed despair. Divine, compassionate, succourable influence! When I bend the knee to other than God, it shall be at thy white and winged feet, beautiful on mountain or on plain. Temples have been reared to the Sun — altars dedicated to the Moon. Oh, greater glory! To thee neither hands build, nor lips consecrate: but hearts, through ages, are faithful to thy worship. A dwelling thou hast, too wide for walls, too high for dome — a temple whose floors are space — rites whose mysteries transpire in presence, to the kindling, the harmony of worlds!

Sovereign complete! thou hadst, for endurance, thy great army of martyrs; for achievement, thy chosen band of worthies. Deity unquestioned, thine essence foils decay!

This daughter of Heaven remembered me to-night; she saw me weep, and she came with comfort: “Sleep,” she said. “Sleep, sweetly — I gild thy dreams!”

She kept her word, and watched me through a night’s rest; but at dawn Reason relieved the guard. I awoke with a sort of start; the rain was dashing against the panes, and the wind uttering a peevish cry at intervals; the night-lamp was dying on the black circular stand in the middle of the dormitory: day had already broken. How I pity those whom mental pain stuns instead of rousing! This morning the pang of waking snatched me out of bed like a hand with a giant’s gripe. How quickly I dressed in the cold of the raw dawn! How deeply I drank of the ice-cold water in my carafe! This was always my cordial, to which, like other dram-drinkers, I had eager recourse when unsettled by chagrin.

Ere long the bell rang its réveillée to the whole school. Being dressed, I descended alone to the refectory, where the stove was lit and the air was warm; through the rest of the house it was cold, with the nipping severity of a continental winter: though now but the beginning of November, a north wind had thus early brought a wintry blight over Europe: I remember the black stoves pleased me little when I first came; but now I began to associate with them a sense of comfort, and liked them, as in England we like a fireside.

Sitting down before this dark comforter, I presently fell into a deep argument with myself on life and its chances, on destiny and her decrees. My mind, calmer and stronger now than last night, made for itself some imperious rules, prohibiting under deadly penalties all weak retrospect of happiness past; commanding a patient journeying through the wilderness of the present, enjoining a reliance on faith — a watching of the cloud and pillar which subdue while they guide, and awe while they illumine — hushing the impulse to fond idolatry, checking the longing out-look for a far-off promised land whose rivers are, perhaps, never to be, reached save in dying dreams, whose sweet pastures are to be viewed but from the desolate and sepulchral summit of a Nebo.

By degrees, a composite feeling of blended strength and pain wound itself wirily round my heart, sustained, or at least restrained, its throbbings, and made me fit for the day’s work. I lifted my head.

As I said before, I was sitting near the stove, let into the wall beneath the refectory and the carré, and thus sufficing to heat both apartments. Piercing the same wall, and close beside the stove, was a window, looking also into the carré; as I looked up a cap-tassel, a brow, two eyes, filled a pane of that window; the fixed gaze of those two eyes hit right against my own glance: they were watching me. I had not till that moment known that tears were on my cheek, but I felt them now.

This was a strange house, where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine. And this new, this out-door, this male spy, what business had brought him to the premises at this unwonted hour? What possible right had he to intrude on me thus? No other professor would have dared to cross the carré before the class-bell rang. M. Emanuel took no account of hours nor of claims: there was some book of reference in the first-class library which he had occasion to consult; he had come to seek it: on his way he passed the refectory. It was very much his habit to wear eyes before, behind, and on each side of him: he had seen me through the little window — he now opened the refectory door, and there he stood.

“Mademoiselle, vous êtes triste.”

“Monsieur, j’en ai bien le droit.”

“Vous êtes malade de coeur et d’humeur,” he pursued. “You are at once mournful and mutinous. I see on your cheek two tears which I know are hot as two sparks, and salt as two crystals of the sea. While I speak you eye me strangely. Shall I tell you of what I am reminded while watching you?”

“Monsieur, I shall be called away to prayers shortly; my time for conversation is very scant and brief at this hour — excuse — — “

“I excuse everything,” he interrupted; “my mood is so meek, neither rebuff nor, perhaps, insult could ruffle it. You remind me, then, of a young she wild creature, new caught, untamed, viewing with a mixture of fire and fear the first entrance of the breaker-in.”

Unwarrantable accost! — rash and rude if addressed to a pupil; to a teacher inadmissible. He thought to provoke a warm reply; I had seen him vex the passionate to explosion before now. In me his malice should find no gratification; I sat silent.

“You look,” said he, “like one who would snatch at a draught of sweet poison, and spurn wholesome bitters with disgust.

“Indeed, I never liked bitters; nor do I believe them wholesome. And to whatever is sweet, be it poison or food, you cannot, at least, deny its own delicious quality — sweetness. Better, perhaps, to die quickly a pleasant death, than drag on long a charmless life.”

“Yet,” said he, “you should take your bitter dose duly and daily, if I had the power to administer it; and, as to the well-beloved poison, I would, perhaps, break the very cup which held it.”

I sharply turned my head away, partly because his presence utterly displeased me, and partly because I wished to shun questions: lest, in my present mood, the effort of answering should overmaster self-command.

“Come,” said he, more softly, “tell me the truth — you grieve at being parted from friends — is it not so?”

The insinuating softness was not more acceptable than the inquisitorial curiosity. I was silent. He came into the room, sat down on the bench about two yards from me, and persevered long, and, for him, patiently, in attempts to draw me into conversation — attempts necessarily unavailing, because I could not talk. At last I entreated to be let alone. In uttering the request, my voice faltered, my head sank on my arms and the table. I wept bitterly, though quietly. He sat a while longer. I did not look up nor speak, till the closing door and his retreating step told me that he was gone. These tears proved a relief.

I had time to bathe my eyes before breakfast, and I suppose I appeared at that meal as serene as any other person: not, however, quite as jocund-looking as the young lady who placed herself in the seat opposite mine, fixed on me a pair of somewhat small eyes twinkling gleefully, and frankly stretched across the table a white hand to be shaken. Miss Fanshawe's travels, gaieties, and flirtations agreed with her mightily; she had become quite plump, her cheeks looked as round as apples. I had seen her last in elegant evening attire. I don't know that she looked less charming now in her school-dress, a kind of careless peignoir of a dark-blue material, dimly and dingily plaided with black. I even think this dusky wrapper gave her charms a triumph; enhancing by contrast the fairness of her skin, the freshness of her bloom, the golden beauty of her tresses.

"I am glad you are come back, Timon," said she. Timon was one of her dozen names for me. "You don't know how often I have wanted you in this dismal hole."

"Oh, have you? Then, of course, if you wanted me, you have something for me to do: stockings to mend, perhaps." I never gave Ginevra a minute's or a farthing's credit for disinterestedness.

"Crabbed and crusty as ever!" said she. "I expected as much: it would not be you if you did not snub one. But now, come, grand-mother, I hope you like coffee as much, and pistolets as little as ever: are you disposed to barter?"

"Take your own way."

This way consisted in a habit she had of making me convenient. She did not like the morning cup of coffee; its school brewage not being strong or sweet enough to suit her palate; and she had an excellent appetite, like any other healthy school-girl, for the morning pistolets or rolls, which were new-baked and very good, and of which a certain allowance was served to each. This allowance being more than I needed, I gave half to Ginevra; never varying in my preference, though many others used to covet the superfluity; and she in return would sometimes give me a portion of her coffee. This morning I was glad of the draught; hunger I had none, and with thirst I was parched. I don't know why I chose to give my bread rather to Ginevra than to another; nor why, if two had to share the convenience of one drinking-vessel, as sometimes happened — for instance, when we took a long walk into the country, and halted for refreshment at a farm — I always contrived that she should be my convive, and rather liked to let her take the lion's share, whether of the white beer, the sweet wine, or the new milk: so it was, however, and she knew it; and, therefore, while we wrangled daily, we were never alienated.

After breakfast my custom was to withdraw to the first classe, and sit and read, or think (oftenest the latter) there alone, till the nine-o'clock bell threw open all doors, admitted the gathered rush of externes and demi-pensionnaires, and gave the signal for entrance on that bustle and business to which, till five P.M., there was no relax.

I was just seated this morning, when a tap came to the door.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," said a pensionnaire, entering gently; and having taken from her desk some necessary book or paper, she withdrew on tip-toe, murmuring as she passed me, "Que mademoiselle est appliquée!"

Appliquée, indeed! The means of application were spread before me, but I was doing nothing; and had done nothing, and meant to do nothing. Thus does the world give us credit for merits we have not. Madame Beck herself deemed me a regular bas-bleu, and often and solemnly used to warn me not to study too much, lest "the blood should all go to my head." Indeed, everybody in the Rue Fossette held a superstition that "Meess Lucie" was learned; with the notable exception of M. Emanuel, who, by means peculiar to himself, and quite inscrutable to me, had obtained a not inaccurate inkling of my real qualifications, and used to take quiet opportunities of chuckling in my ear his malign glee over their scant measure. For my part, I never troubled myself about this penury. I dearly like to think my own thoughts; I had great pleasure in reading a few books, but not many: preferring always those on whose style or sentiment the writer's individual nature was plainly stamped; flagging inevitably over characterless books, however clever and meritorious: perceiving well that, as far as my own mind was concerned, God had limited its powers and, its action — thankful, I trust, for the gift bestowed, but unambitious of higher endowments, not restlessly eager after higher culture.

The polite pupil was scarcely gone, when, unceremoniously, without tap, in burst a second intruder. Had I been blind I should have known who this was. A constitutional reserve of manner had by this time told with wholesome and, for me, commodious effect, on the manners of my co-inmates; rarely did I now suffer from rude or intrusive treatment. When I first came, it would happen once and again that a blunt German would clap me on the shoulder, and ask me to run a race; or a riotous Labassecourienne seize me by the arm and drag me towards the playground: urgent proposals to take a swing at the "Pas de Géant," or to join in a certain romping hide-and-seek game called "Un, deux, trois," were formerly also of hourly occurrence; but all these little attentions had ceased some time ago — ceased, too, without my finding it necessary to be at the trouble of point-blank cutting them short. I had now no familiar demonstration to dread or endure, save from one quarter; and as that was English I could bear it. Ginevra Fanshawe made no scruple of — at times — catching me as I was crossing the carré, whirling me round in a compulsory waltz, and heartily enjoying the mental and physical discomfiture her proceeding induced. Ginevra Fanshawe it was who now broke in upon "my learned leisure." She carried a huge music-book under her arm.

"Go to your practising," said I to her at once: "away with you to the little salon!"

"Not till I have had a talk with you, chère amie. I know where you have been spending your vacation, and how you have commenced sacrificing to the graces, and enjoying life like any other belle. I saw you at the concert the other night, dressed, actually, like anybody else. Who is your tailleuse?"

"Tittle-tattle: how prettily it begins! My tailleuse! — a fiddlestick!

Come, sheer off, Ginevra. I really don't want your company."

"But when I want yours so much, ange farouche, what does a little reluctance on your part signify? Dieu merci! we know how to manoeuvre with our gifted compatriote — the learned 'ourse Britannique.' And so, Ourson, you know Isidore?"

"I know John Bretton."

"Oh, hush!" (putting her fingers in her ears) "you crack my tympanums with your rude Anglicisms. But, how is our well-beloved John? Do tell me about him. The poor man must be in a sad way. What did he say to my behaviour the other night? Wasn't I cruel?"

"Do you think I noticed you?"

"It was a delightful evening. Oh, that divine de Hamal! And then to watch the other sulking and dying in the distance; and the old lady — my future mamma-in-law! But I am afraid I and Lady Sara were a little rude in quizzing her."

"Lady Sara never quizzed her at all; and for what you did, don't make yourself in the least uneasy: Mrs. Bretton will survive your sneer."

"She may: old ladies are tough; but that poor son of hers! Do tell me what he said: I saw he was terribly cut up."

"He said you looked as if at heart you were already Madame de Hamal."

"Did he?" she cried with delight. "He noticed that? How charming! I thought he would be mad with jealousy?"

"Ginevra, have you seriously done with Dr. Bretton? Do you want him to give you up?"

"Oh! you know he can't do that: but wasn't he mad?"

"Quite mad," I assented; "as mad as a March hare."

"Well, and how ever did you get him home?"

"How ever, indeed! Have you no pity on his poor mother and me? Fancy us holding him tight down in the carriage, and he raving between us, fit to drive everybody delirious. The very coachman went wrong, somehow, and we lost our way."

"You don't say so? You are laughing at me. Now, Lucy Snowe — "

"I assure you it is fact — and fact, also, that Dr. Bretton would not stay in the carriage: he broke from us, and would ride outside."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards — when he did reach home — the scene transcends description."

"Oh, but describe it — you know it is such fun!"

"Fun for you, Miss Fanshawe? but" (with stern gravity) "you know the proverb — 'What is sport to one may be death to another.'"

"Go on, there's a darling Timon."

"Conscientiously, I cannot, unless you assure me you have some heart."

"I have — such an immensity, you don't know!"

"Good! In that case, you will be able to conceive Dr. Graham Bretton rejecting his supper in the first instance — the chicken, the sweetbread prepared for his refreshment, left on the table untouched. Then — — but it is of no use dwelling at length on the harrowing details. Suffice it to say, that never, in the most stormy fits and moments of his infancy, had his mother such work to tuck the sheets about him as she had that night."

"He wouldn't lie still?"

"He wouldn't lie still: there it was. The sheets might be tucked in, but the thing was to keep them tucked in."

"And what did he say?"

"Say! Can't you imagine him demanding his divine Ginevra, anathematizing that demon, de Hamal — raving about golden locks, blue eyes, white arms, glittering bracelets?"

"No, did he? He saw the bracelet?"

"Saw the bracelet? Yes, as plain as I saw it: and, perhaps, for the first time, he saw also the brand-mark with which its pressure has encircled your arm. Ginevra" (rising, and changing my tone), "come, we will have an end of this. Go away to your practising."

And I opened the door.

"But you have not told me all."

"You had better not wait until I do tell you all. Such extra communicativeness could give you no pleasure. March!"

"Cross thing!" said she; but she obeyed: and, indeed, the first classe was my territory, and she could not there legally resist a notice of quittance from me.

Yet, to speak the truth, never had I been less dissatisfied with her than I was then. There was pleasure in thinking of the contrast between the reality and my description — to remember Dr. John enjoying the drive home, eating his supper with relish, and retiring to rest with Christian composure. It was only when I saw him really unhappy that I felt really vexed with the fair, frail cause of his suffering.

* * * * *

A fortnight passed; I was getting once more inured to the harness of school, and lapsing from the passionate pain of change to the palsy of custom. One afternoon, in crossing the carré, on my way to the first classe, where I was expected to assist at a lesson of "style and literature," I saw, standing by one of the long and large windows, Rosine, the portress. Her attitude, as usual, was quite nonchalante. She always "stood at ease;" one of her hands rested in her apron-pocket, the other at this moment held to her eyes a letter, whereof Mademoiselle coolly perused the address, and deliberately studied the seal.

A letter! The shape of a letter similar to that had haunted my brain in its very core for seven days past. I had dreamed of a letter last night. Strong magnetism drew me to that letter now; yet, whether I should have ventured to demand of Rosine so much as a glance at that white envelope, with the spot of red wax in the middle, I know not. No; I think I should have sneaked past in terror of a rebuff from Disappointment: my heart throbbed now as if I already heard the tramp of her approach. Nervous mistake! It was the rapid step of the Professor of Literature measuring the corridor. I fled before him. Could I but be seated quietly at my desk before his arrival, with the class under my orders all in disciplined readiness, he would, perhaps, exempt me from notice; but, if caught lingering in the carré, I should be sure to come in for a special harangue. I had time to get seated, to enforce perfect silence, to take out my work, and to commence it amidst the profoundest and best trained hush, ere M. Emanuel entered with his vehement burst of latch and panel, and his deep, redundant bow, prophetic of choler.

As usual he broke upon us like a clap of thunder; but instead of flashing lightning-wise from the door to the estrade, his career halted midway at my desk. Setting his face towards me and the window, his back to the pupils and the room, he gave me a look — such a look as might have licensed me to stand straight up and demand what he meant — a look of scowling distrust.

"Voilà! pour vous," said he, drawing his hand from his waist-coat, and placing on my desk a letter — the very letter I had seen in Rosine's hand — the letter whose face of enamelled white and single Cyclop's-eye of vermilion-red had printed themselves so clear and perfect on the retina of an inward vision. I knew it, I felt it to be the letter of my hope, the fruition of my wish, the release from my doubt, the ransom from my terror. This letter M. Paul, with his unwarrantably interfering habits, had taken from the portress, and now delivered it himself.

I might have been angry, but had not a second for the sensation. Yes: I held in my hand not a slight note, but an envelope, which must, at least, contain a sheet: it felt not flimsy, but firm, substantial, satisfying. And here was the direction, "Miss Lucy Snowe," in a clean, clear, equal, decided hand; and here was the seal, round, full, deftly dropped by untremulous fingers, stamped with the well-cut impress of initials, "J. G. B." I experienced a happy feeling — a glad emotion which went warm to my heart, and ran lively through all my veins. For once a hope was realized. I held in my hand a morsel of real solid joy: not a dream, not an image of the brain, not one of those shadowy chances imagination pictures, and on which humanity starves but cannot live; not a mess of that manna I drearily eulogized awhile ago — which, indeed, at first melts on the lips with an unspeakable and preternatural sweetness, but which, in the end, our souls full surely loathe; longing deliriously for natural and earth-grown food, wildly praying Heaven's Spirits to reclaim their own spirit-dew and essence — an aliment divine, but for mortals deadly. It was neither sweet hail nor small coriander-seed — neither slight wafer, nor luscious honey, I had lighted on; it was the wild, savoury mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining. It was what the old dying patriarch demanded of his son Esau, promising in requital the blessing of his last breath. It was a godsend; and I inwardly thanked the God who had vouchsafed it. Outwardly I only thanked man, crying, "Thank you, thank you, Monsieur!"

Monsieur curled his lip, gave me a vicious glance of the eye, and strode to his estrade. M. Paul was not at all a good little man, though he had good points.

Did I read my letter there and then? Did I consume the venison at once and with haste, as if Esau's shaft flew every day?

I knew better. The cover with its address — the seal, with its three clear letters — was bounty and abundance for the present. I stole from the room, I procured the key of the great dormitory, which was kept locked by day. I went to my bureau; with a sort of haste and trembling lest Madame should creep up-stairs and spy me, I opened a drawer, unlocked a box, and took out a case, and — having feasted my eyes with one more look, and approached the seal with a mixture of awe and shame and delight, to my lips — I folded the untasted treasure, yet all fair and inviolate, in silver paper, committed it to the case, shut up box and drawer, reclosed, relocked the dormitory, and returned to class, feeling as if fairy tales were true, and fairy gifts no dream. Strange, sweet insanity! And this letter, the source of my joy, I had not yet read: did not yet know the number of its lines.

When I re-entered the schoolroom, behold M. Paul raging like a pestilence! Some pupil had not spoken audibly or distinctly enough to suit his ear and taste, and now she and others were weeping, and he was raving from his estrade, almost livid. Curious to mention, as I appeared, he fell on me.

"Was I the mistress of these girls? Did I profess to teach them the conduct befitting ladies? — and did I permit and, he doubted not, encourage them to strangle their mother-tongue in their throats, to mince and mash it between their teeth, as if they had some base cause to be ashamed of the words they uttered? Was this modesty? He knew better. It was a vile pseudo sentiment — the offspring or the forerunner of evil. Rather than submit to this mopping and mowing, this mincing and grimacing, this, grinding of a noble tongue, this general affectation and sickening stubbornness of the pupils of the first class, he would throw them up for a set of insupportable petites maîtresses, and confine himself to teaching the ABC to the babies of the third division."

What could I say to all this? Really nothing; and I hoped he would allow me to be silent. The storm recommenced.

"Every answer to his queries was then refused? It seemed to be considered in that place — that conceited boudoir of a first classe, with its pretentious book-cases, its green-baized desks, its rubbish of flower-stands, its trash of framed pictures and maps, and its foreign surveillante, forsooth! — it seemed to be the fashion to think there that the Professor of Literature was not worthy of a reply! These were new ideas; imported, he did not doubt, straight from 'la Grande Bretagne:' they savoured of island insolence and arrogance."

Lull the second — the girls, not one of whom was ever known to weep a tear for the rebukes of any other master, now all melting like snow-statues before the intemperate heat of M. Emanuel: I not yet much shaken, sitting down, and venturing to resume my work.

Something — either in my continued silence or in the movement of my hand, stitching — transported M. Emanuel beyond the last boundary of patience; he actually sprang from his estrade. The stove stood near my desk, he attacked it; the little iron door was nearly dashed from its hinges, the fuel was made to fly.

"Est-ce que vous avez l'intention de m'insulter?" said he to me, in a low, furious voice, as he thus outraged, under pretence of arranging the fire.

It was time to soothe him a little if possible.

"Mais, Monsieur," said I, "I would not insult you for the world. I remember too well that you once said we should be friends."

I did not intend my voice to falter, but it did: more, I think, through the agitation of late delight than in any spasm of present fear. Still there certainly was something in M. Paul's anger — a kind of passion of emotion — that specially tended to draw tears. I was not unhappy, nor much afraid, yet I wept.

"Allons, allons!" said he presently, looking round and seeing the deluge universal. "Decidedly I am a monster and a ruffian. I have only one pocket-handkerchief," he added, "but if I had twenty, I would offer you each one. Your teacher shall be your representative. Here, Miss Lucy."

And he took forth and held out to me a clean silk handkerchief. Now a person who did not know M. Paul, who was unused to him and his impulses, would naturally have bungled at this offer — declined accepting the same — et cetera. But I too plainly felt this would never do: the slightest hesitation would have been fatal to the incipient treaty of peace. I rose and met the handkerchief half-way, received it with decorum, wiped therewith my eyes, and, resuming my seat, and retaining the flag of truce in my hand and on my lap, took especial care during the remainder of the lesson to touch neither needle nor thimble, scissors nor muslin. Many a jealous glance did M. Paul cast at these implements; he hated them mortally, considering sewing a source of distraction from the attention due to himself. A very eloquent lesson he gave, and very kind and friendly was he to the close. Ere he had done, the clouds were dispersed and the sun shining out — tears were exchanged for smiles.

In quitting the room he paused once more at my desk.

"And your letter?" said he, this time not quite fiercely.

"I have not yet read it, Monsieur."

"Ah! it is too good to read at once; you save it, as, when I was a boy,

I used to save a peach whose bloom was very ripe?"

The guess came so near the truth, I could not prevent a suddenly-rising warmth in my face from revealing as much.

"You promise yourself a pleasant moment," said he, "in reading that letter; you will open it when alone — n'est-ce pas? Ah! a smile answers. Well, well! one should not be too harsh; 'la jeunesse n'a qu'un temps.'"

"Monsieur, Monsieur!" I cried, or rather whispered after him, as he turned to go, "do not leave me under a mistake. This is merely a friend's letter. Without reading it, I can vouch for that."

"Je conçois, je conçois: on sait ce que c'est qu'un ami. Bonjour,

Mademoiselle!"

"But, Monsieur, here is your handkerchief."

"Keep it, keep it, till the letter is read, then bring it me; I shall read the billet's tenor in your eyes."

When he was gone, the pupils having already poured out of the schoolroom into the berceau, and thence into the garden and court to take their customary recreation before the five-o'clock dinner, I stood a moment thinking, and absently twisting the handkerchief round my arm. For some reason — gladdened, I think, by a sudden return of the golden glimmer of childhood, roused by an unwonted renewal of its buoyancy, made merry by the liberty of the closing hour, and, above all, solaced at heart by the joyous consciousness of that treasure in the case, box, drawer up-stairs, — I fell to playing with the handkerchief as if it were a ball, casting it into the air and catching it — as it fell. The game was stopped by another hand than mine-a hand emerging from a paletôt-sleeve and stretched over my shoulder; it caught the extemporised plaything and bore it away with these sullen words:

"Je vois bien que vous vous moquez de moi et de mes effets."

Really that little man was dreadful: a mere sprite of caprice and, ubiquity: one never knew either his whim or his whereabout.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LETTER.

When all was still in the house; when dinner was over and the noisy recreation-hour past; when darkness had set in, and the quiet lamp of study was lit in the refectory; when the externes were gone home, the clashing door and clamorous bell hushed for the evening; when Madame was safely settled in the salle-à-manger in company with her mother and some friends; I then glided to the kitchen, begged a bougie for one half-hour for a particular occasion, found acceptance of my petition at the hands of my friend Goton, who answered, "Mais certainement, chou-chou, vous en aurez deux, si vous voulez;" and, light in hand, I mounted noiseless to the dormitory.

Great was my chagrin to find in that apartment a pupil gone to bed indisposed, — greater when I recognised, amid the muslin nightcap borders, the "figure chiffonnée" of Mistress Ginevra Fanshawe; supine at this moment, it is true — but certain to wake and overwhelm me with chatter when the interruption would be least acceptable: indeed, as I watched her, a slight twinkling of the eyelids warned me that the present appearance of repose might be but a ruse, assumed to cover sly vigilance over "Timon's" movements; she was not to be trusted. And I had so wished to be alone, just to read my precious letter in peace.

Well, I must go to the classes. Having sought and found my prize in its casket, I descended. Ill-luck pursued me. The classes were undergoing sweeping and purification by candle-light, according to hebdomadal custom: benches were piled on desks, the air was dim with dust, damp coffee-grounds (used by Labassecourien housemaids instead of tea-leaves) darkened the floor; all was hopeless confusion. Baffled, but not beaten, I withdrew, bent as resolutely as ever on finding solitude somewhere.

Taking a key whereof I knew the repository, I mounted three staircases in succession, reached a dark, narrow, silent landing, opened a worm-eaten door, and dived into the deep, black, cold garret. Here none would follow me — none interrupt — not Madame herself. I shut the garret-door; I placed my light on a doddered and mouldy chest of drawers; I put on a shawl, for the air was ice-cold; I took my letter; trembling with sweet impatience, I broke its seal.

"Will it be long — will it be short?" thought I, passing my hand across my eyes to dissipate the silvery dimness of a suave, south-wind shower.

It was long.

"Will it be cool? — will it be kind?"

It was kind.

To my checked, bridled, disciplined expectation, it seemed very kind: to my longing and famished thought it seemed, perhaps, kinder than it was.

So little had I hoped, so much had I feared; there was a fulness of delight in this taste of fruition — such, perhaps, as many a human being passes through life without ever knowing. The poor English teacher in the frosty garret, reading by a dim candle guttering in the wintry air, a letter simply good-natured — nothing more; though that good-nature then seemed to me godlike — was happier than most queens in palaces.

Of course, happiness of such shallow origin could be but brief; yet, while it lasted it was genuine and exquisite: a bubble — but a sweet bubble — of real honey-dew. Dr. John had written to me at length; he had written to me with pleasure; he had written with benignant mood, dwelling with sunny satisfaction on scenes that had passed before his eyes and mine, — on places we had visited together — on conversations we had held — on all the little subject-matter, in short, of the last few halcyon weeks. But the cordial core of the delight was, a conviction the blithe, genial language generously imparted, that it had been poured out not merely to content me — but to gratify himself. A gratification he might never more desire, never more seek — an hypothesis in every point of view approaching the certain; but that concerned the future. This present moment had no pain, no blot, no want; full, pure, perfect, it deeply blessed me. A passing seraph seemed to have rested beside me, leaned towards my heart, and reposed on its throb a softening, cooling, healing, hallowing wing. Dr. John, you pained me afterwards: forgiven be every ill — freely forgiven — for the sake of that one dear remembered good!

Are there wicked things, not human, which envy human bliss? Are there evil influences haunting the air, and poisoning it for man? What was near me?

Something in that vast solitary garret sounded strangely. Most surely and certainly I heard, as it seemed, a stealthy foot on that floor: a sort of gliding out from the direction of the black recess haunted by the malefactor cloaks. I turned: my light was dim; the room was long — but as I live! I saw in the middle of that ghostly chamber a figure all black and white; the skirts straight, narrow, black; the head bandaged, veiled, white.

Say what you will, reader — tell me I was nervous or mad; affirm that I was unsettled by the excitement of that letter; declare that I dreamed; this I vow — I saw there — in that room — on that night — an image like — a NUN.

I cried out; I sickened. Had the shape approached me I might have swooned. It receded: I made for the door. How I descended all the stairs I know not. By instinct I shunned the refectory, and shaped my course to Madame's sitting-room: I burst in. I said —

"There is something in the grenier; I have been there: I saw something.

Go and look at it, all of you!"

I said, "All of you;" for the room seemed to me full of people, though in truth there were but four present: Madame Beck; her mother, Madame Kint, who was out of health, and now staying with her on a visit; her brother, M. Victor Kint, and another gentleman, who, when I entered the room, was conversing with the old lady, and had his back towards the door.

My mortal fear and faintness must have made me deadly pale. I felt cold and shaking. They all rose in consternation; they surrounded me. I urged them to go to the grenier; the sight of the gentlemen did me good and gave me courage: it seemed as if there were some help and hope, with men at hand. I turned to the door, beckoning them to follow. They wanted to stop me, but I said they must come this way: they must see what I had seen — -something strange, standing in the middle of the garret. And, now, I remembered my letter, left on the drawers with the light. This precious letter! Flesh or spirit must be defied for its sake. I flew up-stairs, hastening the faster as I knew I was followed: they were obliged to come.

Lo! when I reached the garret-door, all within was dark as a pit: the light was out. Happily some one — Madame, I think, with her usual calm sense — had brought a lamp from the room; speedily, therefore, as they came up, a ray pierced the opaque blackness. There stood the bougie quenched on the drawers; but where was the letter? And I looked for that now, and not for the nun.

“My letter! my letter!” I panted and plained, almost beside myself. I groped on the floor, wringing my hands wildly. Cruel, cruel doom! To have my bit of comfort preternaturally snatched from me, ere I had well tasted its virtue!

I don’t know what the others were doing; I could not watch them: they asked me questions I did not answer; they ransacked all corners; they prattled about this and that disarrangement of cloaks, a breach or crack in the sky-light — I know not what. “Something or somebody has been here,” was sagely averred.

“Oh! they have taken my letter!” cried the grovelling, groping, monomaniac.

“What letter, Lucy? My dear girl, what letter?” asked a known voice in my ear. Could I believe that ear? No: and I looked up. Could I trust my eyes? Had I recognised the tone? Did I now look on the face of the writer of that very letter? Was this gentleman near me in this dim garret, John Graham — Dr. Bretton himself?

Yes: it was. He had been called in that very evening to prescribe for some access of illness in old Madame Kint; he was the second gentleman present in the salle-à-manger when I entered.

“Was it my letter, Lucy?”

“Your own: yours — the letter you wrote to me. I had come here to read it quietly. I could not find another spot where it was possible to have it to myself. I had saved it all day — never opened it till this evening: it was scarcely glanced over: I cannot bear to lose it. Oh, my letter!”

“Hush! don’t cry and distress yourself so cruelly. What is it worth? Hush!

Come out of this cold room; they are going to send for the police now to examine further: we need not stay here — come, we will go down."

A warm hand, taking my cold fingers, led me down to a room where there was a fire. Dr. John and I sat before the stove. He talked to me and soothed me with unutterable goodness, promising me twenty letters for the one lost. If there are words and wrongs like knives, whose deep-inflicted lacerations never heal — cutting injuries and insults of serrated and poison-dripping edge — so, too, there are consolations of tone too fine for the ear not fondly and for ever to retain their echo: caressing kindnesses — loved, lingered over through a whole life, recalled with unfaded tenderness, and answering the call with undimmed shine, out of that raven cloud foreshadowing Death himself. I have been told since that Dr. Bretton was not nearly so perfect as I thought him: that his actual character lacked the depth, height, compass, and endurance it possessed in my creed. I don't know: he was as good to me as the well is to the parched wayfarer — as the sun to the shivering jailbird. I remember him heroic. Heroic at this moment will I hold him to be.

He asked me, smiling, why I cared for his letter so very much. I thought, but did not say, that I prized it like the blood in my veins. I only answered that I had so few letters to care for.

"I am sure you did not read it," said he; "or you would think nothing of it!"

"I read it, but only once. I want to read it again. I am sorry it is lost." And I could not help weeping afresh.

"Lucy, Lucy, my poor little god-sister (if there be such a relationship), here — here is your letter. Why is it not better worth such tears, and such tenderly exaggerating faith?"

Curious, characteristic manoeuvre! His quick eye had seen the letter on the floor where I sought it; his hand, as quick, had snatched it up. He had hidden it in his waistcoat pocket. If my trouble had wrought with a whit less stress and reality, I doubt whether he would ever have acknowledged or restored it. Tears of temperature one degree cooler than those I shed would only have amused Dr. John.

Pleasure at regaining made me forget merited reproach for the teasing torment; my joy was great; it could not be concealed: yet I think it broke out more in countenance than language. I said little.

"Are you satisfied now?" asked Dr. John.

I replied that I was — satisfied and happy.

"Well then," he proceeded, "how do you feel physically? Are you growing calmer? Not much: for you tremble like a leaf still."

It seemed to me, however, that I was sufficiently calm: at least I felt no longer terrified. I expressed myself composed.

"You are able, consequently, to tell me what you saw? Your account was quite vague, do you know? You looked white as the wall; but you only spoke of 'something,' not defining what. Was it a man? Was it an animal? What was it?”

“I never will tell exactly what I saw,” said I, “unless some one else sees it too, and then I will give corroborative testimony; but otherwise, I shall be discredited and accused of dreaming.”

“Tell me,” said Dr. Bretton; “I will hear it in my professional character: I look on you now from a professional point of view, and I read, perhaps, all you would conceal — in your eye, which is curiously vivid and restless: in your cheek, which the blood has forsaken; in your hand, which you cannot steady. Come, Lucy, speak and tell me.”

“You would laugh — ?”

“If you don’t tell me you shall have no more letters.”

“You are laughing now.”

“I will again take away that single epistle: being mine, I think I have a right to reclaim it.”

I felt raillery in his words: it made me grave and quiet; but I folded up the letter and covered it from sight.

“You may hide it, but I can possess it any moment I choose. You don’t know my skill in sleight of hand; I might practise as a conjuror if I liked. Mamma says sometimes, too, that I have a harmonizing property of tongue and eye; but you never saw that in me — did you, Lucy?”

“Indeed — indeed — when you were a mere boy I used to see both: far more then than now — for now you are strong, and strength dispenses with subtlety. But still, — Dr. John, you have what they call in this country ‘un air fin,’ that nobody can, mistake. Madame Beck saw it, and — -”

“And liked it,” said he, laughing, “because she has it herself. But,

Lucy, give me that letter — you don’t really care for it.”

To this provocative speech I made no answer. Graham in mirthful mood must not be humoured too far. Just now there was a new sort of smile playing about his lips — very sweet, but it grieved me somehow — a new sort of light sparkling in his eyes: not hostile, but not reassuring. I rose to go — I bid him good-night a little sadly.

His sensitiveness — that peculiar, apprehensive, detective faculty of his — felt in a moment the unspoken complaint — the scarce-thought reproach. He asked quietly if I was offended. I shook my head as implying a negative.

“Permit me, then, to speak a little seriously to you before you go. You are in a highly nervous state. I feel sure from what is apparent in your look and manner, however well controlled, that whilst alone this evening in that dismal, perishing sepulchral garret — that dungeon under the leads, smelling of damp and mould, rank with phthisis and catarrh: a place you never ought to enter — that you saw, or thought you saw, some appearance peculiarly calculated to impress the imagination. I know that you are not, nor ever were, subject to material terrors, fears of robbers, &c. — I am not so sure that a visitation, bearing a spectral character, would not shake your very mind. Be calm now. This is all a matter of the nerves, I see: but just specify the vision.”

"You will tell nobody?"

"Nobody — most certainly. You may trust me as implicitly as you did Père Silas. Indeed, the doctor is perhaps the safer confessor of the two, though he has not grey hair."

"You will not laugh?"

"Perhaps I may, to do you good: but not in scorn. Lucy, I feel as a friend towards you, though your timid nature is slow to trust."

He now looked like a friend: that indescribable smile and sparkle were gone; those formidable arched curves of lip, nostril, eyebrow, were depressed; repose marked his attitude — attention sobered his aspect. Won to confidence, I told him exactly what I had seen: ere now I had narrated to him the legend of the house — whiling away with that narrative an hour of a certain mild October afternoon, when he and I rode through Bois l'Etang.

He sat and thought, and while he thought, we heard them all coming down-stairs.

"Are they going to interrupt?" said he, glancing at the door with an annoyed expression.

"They will not come here," I answered; for we were in the little salon where Madame never sat in the evening, and where it was by mere chance that heat was still lingering in the stove. They passed the door and went on to the salle-à-manger.

"Now," he pursued, "they will talk about thieves, burglars, and so on: let them do so — mind you say nothing, and keep your resolution of describing your nun to nobody. She may appear to you again: don't start."

"You think then," I said, with secret horror, "she came out of my brain, and is now gone in there, and may glide out again at an hour and a day when I look not for her?"

"I think it a case of spectral illusion: I fear, following on and resulting from long-continued mental conflict."

"Oh, Doctor John — I shudder at the thought of being liable to such an illusion! It seemed so real. Is there no cure? — no preventive?"

"Happiness is the cure — a cheerful mind the preventive: cultivate both."

No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to cultivate happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven. She is a divine dew which the soul, on certain of its summer mornings, feels dropping upon it from the amaranth bloom and golden fruitage of Paradise.

"Cultivate happiness!" I said briefly to the doctor: "do you cultivate happiness? How do you manage?"

"I am a cheerful fellow by nature: and then ill-luck has never dogged me. Adversity gave me and my mother one passing scowl and brush, but we defied her, or rather laughed at her, and she went by.".

"There is no cultivation in all this."

"I do not give way to melancholy."

"Yes: I have seen you subdued by that feeling."

"About Ginevra Fanshawe — eh?"

"Did she not sometimes make you miserable?"

"Pooh! stuff! nonsense! You see I am better now."

If a laughing eye with a lively light, and a face bright with beaming and healthy energy, could attest that he was better, better he certainly was.

"You do not look much amiss, or greatly out of condition," I allowed.

"And why, Lucy, can't you look and feel as I do — buoyant, courageous, and fit to defy all the nuns and flirts in Christendom? I would give gold on the spot just to see you snap your fingers. Try the manoeuvre."

"If I were to bring Miss Fanshawe into your presence just now?"

"I vow, Lucy, she should not move me: or, she should move me but by one thing — true, yes, and passionate love. I would accord forgiveness at no less a price."

"Indeed! a smile of hers would have been a fortune to you a while since."

"Transformed, Lucy: transformed! Remember, you once called me a slave! but I am a free man now!"

He stood up: in the port of his head, the carriage of his figure, in his beaming eye and mien, there revealed itself a liberty which was more than ease — a mood which was disdain of his past bondage.

"Miss Fanshawe," he pursued, "has led me through a phase of feeling which is over: I have entered another condition, and am now much disposed to exact love for love — passion for passion — and good measure of it, too."

"Ah, Doctor! Doctor! you said it was your nature to pursue Love under difficulties — to be charmed by a proud insensibility!".

He laughed, and answered, "My nature varies: the mood of one hour is sometimes the mockery of the next. Well, Lucy" (drawing on his gloves), "will the Nun come again to-night, think you?"

"I don't think she will."

"Give her my compliments, if she does — Dr. John's compliments — and entreat her to have the goodness to wait a visit from him. Lucy, was she a pretty nun? Had she a pretty face? You have not told me that yet; and that is the really important point."

"She had a white cloth over her face," said I, "but her eyes glittered."

"Confusion to her goblin trappings!" cried he, irreverently: "but at least she had handsome eyes — bright and soft."

"Cold and fixed," was the reply.

"No, no, we'll none of her: she shall not haunt you, Lucy. Give her that shake of the hand, if she comes again. Will she stand that, do you think?"

I thought it too kind and cordial for a ghost to stand: and so was the smile which matched it, and accompanied his "Good-night."

* * * * *

And had there been anything in the garret? What did they discover? I believe, on the closest examination, their discoveries amounted to very little. They talked, at first, of the cloaks being disturbed; but Madame Beck told me afterwards she thought they hung much as usual: and as for the broken pane in the skylight, she affirmed that aperture was rarely without one or more panes broken or cracked: and besides, a heavy hail-storm had fallen a few days ago. Madame questioned me very closely as to what I had seen, but I only described an obscure figure clothed in black: I took care not to breathe the word “nun,” certain that this word would at once suggest to her mind an idea of romance and unreality. She charged me to say nothing on the subject to any servant, pupil, or teacher, and highly commended my discretion in coming to her private salle-à-manger, instead of carrying the tale of horror to the school refectory. Thus the subject dropped. I was left secretly and sadly to wonder, in my own mind, whether that strange thing was of this world, or of a realm beyond the grave; or whether indeed it was only the child of malady, and I of that malady the prey.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VASHTI.

To wonder sadly, did I say? No: a new influence began to act upon my life, and sadness, for a certain space, was held at bay. Conceive a dell, deep-hollowed in forest secresy; it lies in dimness and mist: its turf is dank, its herbage pale and humid. A storm or an axe makes a wide gap amongst the oak-trees; the breeze sweeps in; the sun looks down; the sad, cold dell becomes a deep cup of lustre; high summer pours her blue glory and her golden light out of that beauteous sky, which till now the starved hollow never saw.

A new creed became mine — a belief in happiness.

It was three weeks since the adventure of the garret, and I possessed in that case, box, drawer up-stairs, casketed with that first letter, four companions like to it, traced by the same firm pen, sealed with the same clear seal, full of the same vital comfort. Vital comfort it seemed to me then: I read them in after years; they were kind letters enough — pleasing letters, because composed by one well pleased; in the two last there were three or four closing lines half-gay, half-tender, "by feeling touched, but not subdued." Time, dear reader, mellowed them to a beverage of this mild quality; but when I first tasted their elixir, fresh from the fount so honoured, it seemed juice of a divine vintage: a draught which Hebe might fill, and the very gods approve.

Does the reader, remembering what was said some pages back, care to ask how I answered these letters: whether under the dry, stinting check of Reason, or according to the full, liberal impulse of Feeling?

To speak truth, I compromised matters; I served two masters: I bowed down in the houses of Rimmon, and lifted the heart at another shrine. I wrote to these letters two answers — one for my own relief, the other for Graham's perusal.

To begin with: Feeling and I turned Reason out of doors, drew against her bar and bolt, then we sat down, spread our paper, dipped in the ink an eager pen, and, with deep enjoyment, poured out our sincere heart. When we had done — when two sheets were covered with the language of a strongly-adherent affection, a rooted and active gratitude — (once, for all, in this parenthesis, I disclaim, with the utmost scorn, every sneaking suspicion of what are called "warmer feelings:" women do not entertain these "warmer feelings" where, from the commencement, through the whole progress of an acquaintance, they have never once been cheated of the conviction that, to do so would be to commit a mortal absurdity: nobody ever launches into Love unless he has seen or dreamed the rising of Hope's star over Love's troubled waters) — when, then, I had given expression to a closely-clinging and deeply-honouring attachment — an attachment that wanted to attract to itself and take to its own lot all that was painful in the destiny of its object; that would, if it could, have absorbed and conducted away all storms and lightnings from an existence viewed with a passion of solicitude — then, just at that moment, the doors of my heart would shake, bolt and bar would yield, Reason would leap in vigorous and revengeful, snatch the full sheets, read, sneer, erase, tear up, re-write, fold, seal, direct, and send a terse, curt missive of a page. She did right.

I did not live on letters only: I was visited, I was looked after; once a week I was taken out to La Terrasse; always I was made much of. Dr. Bretton failed not to tell me why he was so kind: "To keep away the nun," he said; "he was determined to dispute with her her prey. He had taken," he declared, "a thorough dislike to her, chiefly on account of that white face-cloth, and those cold grey eyes: the moment he heard of those odious particulars," he affirmed, "consummate disgust had incited him to oppose her; he was determined to try whether he or she was the cleverest, and he only wished she would once more look in upon me when he was present:" but that she never did. In short, he regarded me scientifically in the light of a patient, and at once exercised his professional skill, and gratified his natural benevolence, by a course of cordial and attentive treatment.

One evening, the first in December, I was walking by myself in the carré; it was six o'clock; the classe-doors were closed; but within, the pupils, rampant in the licence of evening recreation, were counterfeiting a miniature chaos. The carré was quite dark, except a red light shining under and about the stove; the wide glass-doors and the long windows were frosted over; a crystal sparkle of starlight, here and there spangling this blanched winter veil, and breaking with scattered brilliance the paleness of its embroidery, proved it a clear night, though moonless. That I should dare to remain thus alone in darkness, showed that my nerves were regaining a healthy tone: I thought of the nun, but hardly feared her; though the staircase was behind me, leading up, through blind, black night, from landing to landing, to the haunted grenier. Yet I own my heart quaked, my pulse leaped, when I suddenly heard breathing and rustling, and turning, saw in the deep shadow of the steps a deeper shadow still — a shape that moved and descended. It paused a while at the classe-door, and then it glided before me. Simultaneously came a clangor of the distant door-bell. Life-like sounds bring life-like feelings: this shape was too round and low for my gaunt nun: it was only Madame Beck on duty.

"Mademoiselle Lucy!" cried Rosine, bursting in, lamp in hand, from the corridor, "on est là pour vous au salon."

Madame saw me, I saw Madame, Rosine saw us both: there was no mutual recognition. I made straight for the salon. There I found what I own I anticipated I should find — Dr. Bretton; but he was in evening-dress.

“The carriage is at the door,” said he; “my mother has sent it to take you to the theatre; she was going herself, but an arrival has prevented her: she immediately said, ‘Take Lucy in my place.’ Will you go?”

“Just now? I am not dressed,” cried I, glancing despairingly at my dark merino.

“You have half an hour to dress. I should have given you notice, but I only determined on going since five o’clock, when I heard there was to be a genuine regale in the presence of a great actress.”

And he mentioned a name that thrilled me — a name that, in those days, could thrill Europe. It is hushed now: its once restless echoes are all still; she who bore it went years ago to her rest: night and oblivion long since closed above her; but then her day — a day of Sirius — stood at its full height, light and fervour.

“I’ll go; I will be ready in ten minutes,” I vowed. And away I flew, never once checked, reader, by the thought which perhaps at this moment checks you: namely, that to go anywhere with Graham and without Mrs. Bretton could be objectionable. I could not have conceived, much less have expressed to Graham, such thought — such scruple — without risk of exciting a tyrannous self-contempt: of kindling an inward fire of shame so quenchless, and so devouring, that I think it would soon have licked up the very life in my veins. Besides, my godmother, knowing her son, and knowing me, would as soon have thought of chaperoning a sister with a brother, as of keeping anxious guard over our incomings and outgoings.

The present was no occasion for showy array; my dun mist crape would suffice, and I sought the same in the great oak-wardrobe in the dormitory, where hung no less than forty dresses. But there had been changes and reforms, and some innovating hand had pruned this same crowded wardrobe, and carried divers garments to the grenier — my crape amongst the rest. I must fetch it. I got the key, and went aloft fearless, almost thoughtless. I unlocked the door, I plunged in. The reader may believe it or not, but when I thus suddenly entered, that garret was not wholly dark as it should have been: from one point there shone a solemn light, like a star, but broader. So plainly it shone, that it revealed the deep alcove with a portion of the tarnished scarlet curtain drawn over it. Instantly, silently, before my eyes, it vanished; so did the curtain and alcove: all that end of the garret became black as night. I ventured no research; I had not time nor will; snatching my dress, which hung on the wall, happily near the door, I rushed out, relocked the door with convulsed haste, and darted downwards to the dormitory.

But I trembled too much to dress myself: impossible to arrange hair or fasten hooks-and-eyes with such fingers, so I called Rosine and bribed her to help me. Rosine liked a bribe, so she did her best, smoothed and plaited my hair as well as a coiffeur would have done, placed the lace collar mathematically straight, tied the neck-ribbon accurately — in short, did her work like the neat-handed Phillis she could be when she those. Having given me my handkerchief and gloves, she took the candle and lighted me downstairs. After all, I had forgotten my shawl; she ran back to fetch it; and I stood with Dr. John in the vestibule, waiting.

"What is this, Lucy?" said he, looking down at me narrowly. "Here is the old excitement. Ha! the nun again?"

But I utterly denied the charge: I was vexed to be suspected of a second illusion. He was sceptical.

"She has been, as sure as I live," said he; "her figure crossing your eyes leaves on them a peculiar gleam and expression not to be mistaken."

"She has not been," I persisted: for, indeed, I could deny her apparition with truth.

"The old symptoms are there," he affirmed: "a particular pale, and what the Scotch call a 'raised' look."

He was so obstinate, I thought it better to tell him what I really had seen. Of course with him it was held to be another effect of the same cause: it was all optical illusion — nervous malady, and so on. Not one bit did I believe him; but I dared not contradict: doctors are so self-opinionated, so immovable in their dry, materialist views.

Rosine brought the shawl, and I was bundled into the carriage.

* * * * *

The theatre was full — crammed to its roof: royal and noble were there: palace and hotel had emptied their inmates into those tiers so thronged and so hushed. Deeply did I feel myself privileged in having a place before that stage; I longed to see a being of whose powers I had heard reports which made me conceive peculiar anticipations. I wondered if she would justify her renown: with strange curiosity, with feelings severe and austere, yet of riveted interest, I waited. She was a study of such nature as had not encountered my eyes yet: a great and new planet she was: but in what shape? I waited her rising.

She rose at nine that December night: above the horizon I saw her come. She could shine yet with pale grandeur and steady might; but that star verged already on its judgment-day. Seen near, it was a chaos — hollow, half-consumed: an orb perished or perishing — half lava, half glow.

I had heard this woman termed "plain," and I expected bony harshness and grimness — something large, angular, sallow. What I saw was the shadow of a royal Vashti: a queen, fair as the day once, turned pale now like twilight, and wasted like wax in flame.

For awhile — a long while — I thought it was only a woman, though an unique woman, Who moved in might and grace before this multitude. By-and-by I recognised my mistake. Behold! I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength — for she was but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the pit! They wrote HELL on her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate and Murder and Madness incarnate she stood.

It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation.

It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral.

Swordsmen thrust through, and dying in their blood on the arena sand; bulls goring horses disembowelled, made a meeker vision for the public — a milder condiment for a people's palate — than Vashti torn by seven devils: devils which cried sore and rent the tenement they haunted, but still refused to be exorcised.

Suffering had struck that stage empress; and she stood before her audience neither yielding to, nor enduring, nor, in finite measure, resenting it: she stood locked in struggle, rigid in resistance. She stood, not dressed, but draped in pale antique folds, long and regular like sculpture. A background and entourage and flooring of deepest crimson threw her out, white like alabaster — like silver: rather, be it said, like Death.

Where was the artist of the Cleopatra? Let him come and sit down and study this different vision. Let him seek here the mighty brawn, the muscle, the abounding blood, the full-fed flesh he worshipped: let all materialists draw nigh and look on.

I have said that she does not resent her grief. No; the weakness of that word would make it a lie. To her, what hurts becomes immediately embodied: she looks on it as a thing that can be attacked, worried down, torn in shreds. Scarcely a substance herself, she grapples to conflict with abstractions. Before calamity she is a tigress; she rends her woes, shivers them in convulsed abhorrence. Pain, for her, has no result in good: tears water no harvest of wisdom: on sickness, on death itself, she looks with the eye of a rebel. Wicked, perhaps, she is, but also she is strong; and her strength has conquered Beauty, has overcome Grace, and bound both at her side, captives peerlessly fair, and docile as fair. Even in the uttermost frenzy of energy is each maenad movement royally, imperially, incedingly upborne. Her hair, flying loose in revel or war, is still an angel's hair, and glorious under a halo. Fallen, insurgent, banished, she remembers the heaven where she rebelled. Heaven's light, following her exile, pierces its confines, and discloses their forlorn remoteness.

Place now the Cleopatra, or any other slug, before her as an obstacle, and see her cut through the pulpy mass as the scimitar of Saladin clove the down cushion. Let Paul Peter Rubens wake from the dead, let him rise out of his cerements, and bring into this presence all the army of his fat women; the magian power or prophet-virtue gifting that slight rod of Moses, could, at one waft, release and re-mingle a sea spell-parted, whelming the heavy host with the down-rush of overthrown sea-ramparts.

Vashti was not good, I was told; and I have said she did not look good:

though a spirit, she was a spirit out of Tophet. Well, if so much of unholy force can arise from below, may not an equal efflux of sacred essence descend one day from above?

What thought Dr. Graham of this being?

For long intervals I forgot to look how he demeaned himself, or to question what he thought. The strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit; the sunflower turned from the south to a fierce light, not solar — a rushing, red, cometary light — hot on vision and to sensation. I had seen acting before, but never anything like this: never anything which astonished Hope and hushed Desire; which outstripped Impulse and paled Conception; which, instead of merely irritating imagination with the thought of what might be done, at the same time fevering the nerves because it was not done, disclosed power like a deep, swollen winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steelly sweep of its descent.

Miss Fanshawe, with her usual ripeness of judgment, pronounced Dr. Bretton a serious, impassioned man, too grave and too impressible. Not in such light did I ever see him: no such faults could I lay to his charge. His natural attitude was not the meditative, nor his natural mood the sentimental; impressionable he was as dimpling water, but, almost as water, unimpressible: the breeze, the sun, moved him — metal could not grave, nor fire brand.

Dr. John could think and think well, but he was rather a man of action than of thought; he could feel, and feel vividly in his way, but his heart had no chord for enthusiasm: to bright, soft, sweet influences his eyes and lips gave bright, soft, sweet welcome, beautiful to see as dyes of rose and silver, pearl and purple, imbuing summer clouds; for what belonged to storm, what was wild and intense, dangerous, sudden, and flaming, he had no sympathy, and held with it no communion. When I took time and regained inclination to glance at him, it amused and enlightened me to discover that he was watching that sinister and sovereign Vashti, not with wonder, nor worship, nor yet dismay, but simply with intense curiosity. Her agony did not pain him, her wild moan — worse than a shriek — did not much move him; her fury revolted him somewhat, but not to the point of horror. Cool young Briton! The pale cliffs of his own England do not look down on the tides of the Channel more calmly than he watched the Pythian inspiration of that night.

Looking at his face, I longed to know his exact opinions, and at last I put a question tending to elicit them. At the sound of my voice he awoke as if out of a dream; for he had been thinking, and very intently thinking, his own thoughts, after his own manner. "How did he like Vashti?" I wished to know.

"Hm-m-m," was the first scarce articulate but expressive answer; and then such a strange smile went wandering round his lips, a smile so critical, so almost callous! I suppose that for natures of that order his sympathies were callous. In a few terse phrases he told me his opinion of, and feeling towards, the actress: he judged her as a woman, not an artist: it was a branding judgment.

That night was already marked in my book of life, not with white, but with a deep-red cross. But I had not done with it yet; and other memoranda were destined to be set down in characters of tint indelible.

Towards midnight, when the deepening tragedy blackened to the death-scene, and all held their breath, and even Graham bit his under-lip, and knit his brow, and sat still and struck — when the whole theatre was hushed, when the vision of all eyes centred in one point, when all ears listened towards one quarter — nothing being seen but the white form sunk on a seat, quivering in conflict with her last, her worst-hated, her visibly-conquering foe — nothing heard but her throes, her gaspings, breathing yet of mutiny, panting still defiance; when, as it seemed, an inordinate will, convulsing a perishing mortal frame, bent it to battle with doom and death, fought every inch of ground, sold every drop of blood, resisted to the latest the rape of every faculty, would see, would hear, would breathe, would live, up to, within, well-nigh beyond the moment when death says to all sense and all being — “Thus far and no farther!” —

Just then a stir, pregnant with omen, rustled behind the scenes — feet ran, voices spoke. What was it? demanded the whole house. A flame, a smell of smoke replied.

“Fire!” rang through the gallery. “Fire!” was repeated, re-echoed, yelled forth: and then, and faster than pen can set it down, came panic, rushing, crushing — a blind, selfish, cruel chaos.

And Dr. John? Reader, I see him yet, with his look of comely courage and cordial calm.

“Lucy will sit still, I know,” said he, glancing down at me with the same serene goodness, the same repose of firmness that I have seen in him when sitting at his side amid the secure peace of his mother’s hearth. Yes, thus adjured, I think I would have sat still under a rocking crag: but, indeed, to sit still in actual circumstances was my instinct; and at the price of my very life, I would not have moved to give him trouble, thwart his will, or make demands on his attention. We were in the stalls, and for a few minutes there was a most terrible, ruthless pressure about us.

“How terrified are the women!” said he; “but if the men were not almost equally so, order might be maintained. This is a sorry scene: I see fifty selfish brutes at this moment, each of whom, if I were near, I could conscientiously knock down. I see some women braver than some men. There is one yonder — Good God!”

While Graham was speaking, a young girl who had been very quietly and steadily clinging to a gentleman before us, was suddenly struck from her protector’s arms by a big, butcherly intruder, and hurled under the feet of the crowd. Scarce two seconds lasted her disappearance. Graham rushed forwards; he and the gentleman, a powerful man though grey-haired, united their strength to thrust back the throng; her head and long hair fell back over his shoulder: she seemed unconscious.

"Trust her with me; I am a medical man," said Dr. John.

"If you have no lady with you, be it so," was the answer. "Hold her, and I will force a passage: we must get her to the air."

"I have a lady," said Graham; "but she will be neither hindrance nor incumbrance."

He summoned me with his eye: we were separated. Resolute, however, to rejoin him, I penetrated the living barrier, creeping under where I could not get between or over.

"Fasten on me, and don't leave go," he said; and I obeyed him.

Our pioneer proved strong and adroit; he opened the dense mass like a wedge; with patience and toil he at last bored through the flesh-and-blood rock — so solid, hot, and suffocating — and brought us to the fresh, freezing night.

"You are an Englishman!" said he, turning shortly on Dr. Bretton, when we got into the street.

"An Englishman. And I speak to a countryman?" was the reply.

"Right. Be good enough to stand here two minutes, whilst I find my carriage."

"Papa, I am not hurt," said a girlish voice; "am I with papa?"

"You are with a friend, and your father is close at hand."

"Tell him I am not hurt, except just in my shoulder. Oh, my shoulder!

They trod just here."

"Dislocation, perhaps!" muttered the Doctor: "let us hope there is no worse injury done. Lucy, lend a hand one instant."

And I assisted while he made some arrangement of drapery and position for the ease of his suffering burden. She suppressed a moan, and lay in his arms quietly and patiently.

"She is very light," said Graham, "like a child!" and he asked in my ear, "Is she a child, Lucy? Did you notice her age?"

"I am not a child — I am a person of seventeen," responded the patient, demurely and with dignity. Then, directly after: "Tell papa to come; I get anxious."

The carriage drove up; her father relieved Graham; but in the exchange from one bearer to another she was hurt, and moaned again.

"My darling!" said the father, tenderly; then turning to Graham, "You said, sir, you are a medical man?"

"I am: Dr. Bretton, of La Terrasse."

"Good. Will you step into my carriage?"

"My own carriage is here: I will seek it, and accompany you."

"Be pleased, then, to follow us." And he named his address: "The Hôtel Crécy, in the Rue Crécy."

We followed; the carriage drove fast; myself and Graham were silent.

This seemed like an adventure.

Some little time being lost in seeking our own equipage, we reached the hotel perhaps about ten minutes after these strangers. It was an hotel in the foreign sense: a collection of dwelling-houses, not an inn — a vast, lofty pile, with a huge arch to its street-door, leading through a vaulted covered way, into a square all built round.

We alighted, passed up a wide, handsome public staircase, and stopped at Numéro 2 on the second landing; the first floor comprising the abode of I know not what "prince Russe," as Graham informed me. On ringing the bell at a second great door, we were admitted to a suite of very handsome apartments. Announced by a servant in livery, we entered a drawing-room whose hearth glowed with an English fire, and whose walls gleamed with foreign mirrors. Near the hearth appeared a little group: a slight form sunk in a deep arm-chair, one or two women busy about it, the iron-grey gentleman anxiously looking on.

"Where is Harriet? I wish Harriet would come to me," said the girlish voice, faintly.

"Where is Mrs. Hurst?" demanded the gentleman impatiently and somewhat sternly of the man-servant who had admitted us.

"I am sorry to say she is gone out of town, sir; my young lady gave her leave till to-morrow."

"Yes — I did — I did. She is gone to see her sister; I said she might go: I remember now," interposed the young lady; "but I am so sorry, for Manon and Louison cannot understand a word I say, and they hurt me without meaning to do so."

Dr. John and the gentleman now interchanged greetings; and while they passed a few minutes in consultation, I approached the easy-chair, and seeing what the faint and sinking girl wished to have done, I did it for her.

I was still occupied in the arrangement, when Graham drew near; he was no less skilled in surgery than medicine, and, on examination, found that no further advice than his own was necessary to the treatment of the present case. He ordered her to be carried to her chamber, and whispered to me: — "Go with the women, Lucy; they seem but dull; you can at least direct their movements, and thus spare her some pain. She must be touched very tenderly."

The chamber was a room shadowy with pale-blue hangings, vaporous with curtainings and veilings of muslin; the bed seemed to me like snow-drift and mist — spotless, soft, and gauzy. Making the women stand apart, I undressed their mistress, without their well-meaning but clumsy aid. I was not in a sufficiently collected mood to note with separate distinctness every detail of the attire I removed, but I received a general impression of refinement, delicacy, and perfect personal cultivation; which, in a period of after-thought, offered in my reflections a singular contrast to notes retained of Miss Ginevra Fanshawe's appointments.

The girl was herself a small, delicate creature, but made like a model. As

I folded back her plentiful yet fine hair, so shining and soft, and so exquisitely tended, I had under my observation a young, pale, weary, but high-bred face. The brow was smooth and clear; the eyebrows were distinct, but soft, and melting to a mere trace at the temples; the eyes were a rich gift of nature — fine and full, large, deep, seeming to hold dominion over the slighter subordinate features — capable, probably, of much significance at another hour and under other circumstances than the present, but now languid and suffering. Her skin was perfectly fair, the neck and hands veined finely like the petals of a flower; a thin glazing of the ice of pride polished this delicate exterior, and her lip wore a curl — I doubt not inherent and unconscious, but which, if I had seen it first with the accompaniments of health and state, would have struck me as unwarranted, and proving in the little lady a quite mistaken view of life and her own consequence.

Her demeanour under the Doctor's hands at first excited a smile; it was not puerile — rather, on the whole, patient and firm — but yet, once or twice she addressed him with suddenness and sharpness, saying that he hurt her, and must contrive to give her less pain; I saw her large eyes, too, settle on his face like the solemn eyes of some pretty, wondering child. I know not whether Graham felt this examination: if he did, he was cautious not to check or discomfort it by any retaliatory look. I think he performed his work with extreme care and gentleness, sparing her what pain he could; and she acknowledged as much, when he had done, by the words: — "Thank you, Doctor, and good-night," very gratefully pronounced as she uttered them, however, it was with a repetition of the serious, direct gaze, I thought, peculiar in its gravity and intentness.

The injuries, it seems, were not dangerous: an assurance which her father received with a smile that almost made one his friend — it was so glad and gratified. He now expressed his obligations to Graham with as much earnestness as was befitting an Englishman addressing one who has served him, but is yet a stranger; he also begged him to call the next day.

"Papa," said a voice from the veiled couch, "thank the lady, too; is she there?"

I opened the curtain with a smile, and looked in at her. She lay now at comparative ease; she looked pretty, though pale; her face was delicately designed, and if at first sight it appeared proud, I believe custom might prove it to be soft.

"I thank the lady very sincerely," said her father: "I fancy she has been very good to my child. I think we scarcely dare tell Mrs. Hurst who has been her substitute and done her work; she will feel at once ashamed and jealous."

And thus, in the most friendly spirit, parting greetings were interchanged; and refreshment having been hospitably offered, but by us, as it was late, refused, we withdrew from the Hôtel Crécy.

On our way back we repassed the theatre. All was silence and darkness: the roaring, rushing crowd all vanished and gone — the damps, as well as the incipient fire, extinct and forgotten. Next morning's papers explained that it was but some loose drapery on which a spark had fallen, and which had blazed up and been quenched in a moment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

M. DE BASSOMPIERRE.

Those who live in retirement, whose lives have fallen amid the seclusion of schools or of other walled-in and guarded dwellings, are liable to be suddenly and for a long while dropped out of the memory of their friends, the denizens of a freer world. Unaccountably, perhaps, and close upon some space of unusually frequent intercourse — some congeries of rather exciting little circumstances, whose natural sequel would rather seem to be the quickening than the suspension of communication — there falls a stilly pause, a wordless silence, a long blank of oblivion. Unbroken always is this blank; alike entire and unexplained. The letter, the message once frequent, are cut off; the visit, formerly periodical, ceases to occur; the book, paper, or other token that indicated remembrance, comes no more.

Always there are excellent reasons for these lapses, if the hermit but knew them. Though he is stagnant in his cell, his connections without are whirling in the very vortex of life. That void interval which passes for him so slowly that the very clocks seem at a stand, and the wingless hours plod by in the likeness of tired tramps prone to rest at milestones — that same interval, perhaps, teems with events, and pants with hurry for his friends.

The hermit — if he be a sensible hermit — will swallow his own thoughts, and lock up his own emotions during these weeks of inward winter. He will know that Destiny designed him to imitate, on occasion, the dormouse, and he will be conformable: make a tidy ball of himself, creep into a hole of life's wall, and submit decently to the drift which blows in and soon blocks him up, preserving him in ice for the season.

Let him say, "It is quite right: it ought to be so, since so it is." And, perhaps, one day his snow-sepulchre will open, spring's softness will return, the sun and south-wind will reach him; the budding of hedges, and carolling of birds, and singing of liberated streams, will call him to kindly resurrection. Perhaps this may be the case, perhaps not: the frost may get into his heart and never thaw more; when spring comes, a crow or a pie may pick out of the wall only his dormouse-bones. Well, even in that case, all will be right: it is to be supposed he knew from the first he was mortal, and must one day go the way of all flesh, "As well soon as syne."

Following that eventful evening at the theatre, came for me seven weeks as bare as seven sheets of blank paper: no word was written on one of them; not a visit, not a token.

About the middle of that time I entertained fancies that something had happened to my friends at La Terrasse. The mid-blank is always a beclouded point for the solitary: his nerves ache with the strain of long expectancy; the doubts hitherto repelled gather now to a mass and — strong in accumulation — roll back upon him with a force which savours of vindictiveness. Night, too, becomes an unkindly time, and sleep and his nature cannot agree: strange starts and struggles harass his couch: the sinister band of bad dreams, with horror of calamity, and sick dread of entire desertion at their head, join the league against him. Poor wretch! He does his best to bear up, but he is a poor, pallid, wasting wretch, despite that best.

Towards the last of these long seven weeks I admitted, what through the other six I had jealously excluded — the conviction that these blanks were inevitable: the result of circumstances, the fiat of fate, a part of my life's lot and — above all — a matter about whose origin no question must ever be asked, for whose painful sequence no murmur ever uttered. Of course I did not blame myself for suffering: I thank God I had a truer sense of justice than to fall into any imbecile extravagance of self-accusation; and as to blaming others for silence, in my reason I well knew them blameless, and in my heart acknowledged them so: but it was a rough and heavy road to travel, and I longed for better days.

I tried different expedients to sustain and fill existence: I commenced an elaborate piece of lace-work, I studied German pretty hard, I undertook a course of regular reading of the driest and thickest books in the library; in all my efforts I was as orthodox as I knew how to be. Was there error somewhere? Very likely. I only know the result was as if I had gnawed a file to satisfy hunger, or drank brine to quench thirst.

My hour of torment was the post-hour. Unfortunately, I knew it too well, and tried as vainly as assiduously to cheat myself of that knowledge; dreading the rack of expectation, and the sick collapse of disappointment which daily preceded and followed upon that well-recognised ring.

I suppose animals kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always upon the verge of famine, await their food as I awaited a letter. Oh! — to speak truth, and drop that tone of a false calm which long to sustain, outwears nature's endurance — I underwent in those seven weeks bitter fears and pains, strange inward trials, miserable defections of hope, intolerable encroachments of despair. This last came so near me sometimes that her breath went right through me. I used to feel it like a baleful air or sigh, penetrate deep, and make motion pause at my heart, or proceed only under unspeakable oppression. The letter — the well-beloved letter — would not come; and it was all of sweetness in life I had to look for.

In the very extremity of want, I had recourse again, and yet again, to the little packet in the case — the five letters. How splendid that month seemed whose skies had beheld the rising of these five stars! It was always at night I visited them, and not daring to ask every evening for a candle in the kitchen, I bought a wax taper and matches to light it, and at the study-hour stole up to the dormitory and feasted on my crust from the Barmecide's loaf. It did not nourish me: I pined on it, and got as thin as a shadow: otherwise I was not ill.

Reading there somewhat late one evening, and feeling that the power to read was leaving me — for the letters from incessant perusal were losing all sap and significance: my gold was withering to leaves before my eyes, and I was sorrowing over the disillusion — suddenly a quick tripping foot ran up the stairs. I knew Ginevra Fanshawe's step: she had dined in town that afternoon; she was now returned, and would come here to replace her shawl, &c. in the wardrobe.

Yes: in she came, dressed in bright silk, with her shawl falling from her shoulders, and her curls, half-uncurled in the damp of night, drooping careless and heavy upon her neck. I had hardly time to recasket my treasures and lock them up when she was at my side her humour seemed none of the best.

"It has been a stupid evening: they are stupid people," she began.

"Who? Mrs. Cholmondeley? I thought you always found her house charming?"

"I have not been to Mrs. Cholmondeley's."

"Indeed! Have you made new acquaintance?"

"My uncle de Bassompierre is come."

"Your uncle de Bassompierre! Are you not glad? — I thought he was a favourite."

"You thought wrong: the man is odious; I hate him."

"Because he is a foreigner? or for what other reason of equal weight?"

"He is not a foreigner. The man is English enough, goodness knows; and had an English name till three or four years ago; but his mother was a foreigner, a de Bassompierre, and some of her family are dead and have left him estates, a title, and this name: he is quite a great man now."

"Do you hate him for that reason?"

"Don't I know what mamma says about him? He is not my own uncle, but married mamma's sister. Mamma detests him; she says he killed aunt Ginevra with unkindness: he looks like a bear. Such a dismal evening!" she went on. "I'll go no more to his big hotel. Fancy me walking into a room alone, and a great man fifty years old coming forwards, and after a few minutes' conversation actually turning his back upon me, and then abruptly going out of the room. Such odd ways! I daresay his conscience smote him, for they all say at home I am the picture of aunt Ginevra. Mamma often declares the likeness is quite ridiculous."

"Were you the only visitor?"

"The only visitor? Yes; then there was missy, my cousin: little spoiled, pampered thing."

"M. de Bassompierre has a daughter?"

"Yes, yes: don't tease one with questions. Oh, dear! I am so tired."

She yawned. Throwing herself without ceremony on my bed she added, "It seems Mademoiselle was nearly crushed to a jelly in a hubbub at the theatre some weeks ago."

"Ah! indeed. And they live at a large hotel in the Rue Crécy?"

"Justement. How do you know?"

"I have been there."

"Oh, you have? Really! You go everywhere in these days. I suppose Mother Bretton took you. She and Esculapius have the entrée of the de Bassompierre apartments: it seems 'my son John' attended missy on the occasion of her accident — Accident? Bah! All affectation! I don't think she was squeezed more than she richly deserves for her airs. And now there is quite an intimacy struck up: I heard something about 'auld lang syne,' and what not. Oh, how stupid they all were!"

"All! You said you were the only visitor."

"Did I? You see one forgets to particularize an old woman and her boy."

"Dr. and Mrs. Bretton were at M. de Bassompierre's this evening?"

"Ay, ay! as large as life; and missy played the hostess. What a conceited doll it is!"

Soured and listless, Miss Fanshawe was beginning to disclose the causes of her prostrate condition. There had been a retrenchment of incense, a diversion or a total withholding of homage and attention coquetry had failed of effect, vanity had undergone mortification. She lay fuming in the vapours.

"Is Miss de Bassompierre quite well now?" I asked.

"As well as you or I, no doubt; but she is an affected little thing, and gave herself invalid airs to attract medical notice. And to see the old dowager making her recline on a couch, and 'my son John' prohibiting excitement, etcetera — faugh! the scene was quite sickening."

"It would not have been so if the object of attention had been changed: if you had taken Miss de Bassompierre's place."

"Indeed! I hate 'my son John!'"

"'My son John!' — whom do you indicate by that name? Dr. Bretton's mother never calls him so."

"Then she ought. A clownish, bearish John he is."

"You violate the truth in saying so; and as the whole of my patience is now spun off the distaff, I peremptorily desire you to rise from that bed, and vacate this room."

"Passionate thing! Your face is the colour of a coquelicot. I wonder what always makes you so mighty testy à l'endroit du gros Jean? 'John Anderson, my Joe, John!' Oh, the distinguished name!"

Thrilling with exasperation, to which it would have been sheer folly to have given vent — for there was no contending with that unsubstantial feather, that mealy-winged moth — I extinguished my taper, locked my bureau, and left her, since she would not leave me. Small-beer as she was, she had turned insufferably acid.

The morrow was Thursday and a half-holiday. Breakfast was over; I had withdrawn to the first classe. The dreaded hour, the post-hour, was nearing, and I sat waiting it, much as a ghost-seer might wait his spectre. Less than ever was a letter probable; still, strive as I would, I could not forget that it was possible. As the moments lessened, a restlessness and fear almost beyond the average assailed me. It was a day of winter east wind, and I had now for some time entered into that dreary fellowship with the winds and their changes, so little known, so incomprehensible to the healthy. The north and east owned a terrific influence, making all pain more poignant, all sorrow sadder. The south could calm, the west sometimes cheer: unless, indeed, they brought on their wings the burden of thunder-clouds, under the weight and warmth of which all energy died.

Bitter and dark as was this January day, I remember leaving the classe, and running down without bonnet to the bottom of the long garden, and then lingering amongst the stripped shrubs, in the forlorn hope that the postman's ring might occur while I was out of hearing, and I might thus be spared the thrill which some particular nerve or nerves, almost gnawed through with the unremitting tooth of a fixed idea, were becoming wholly unfit to support. I lingered as long as I dared without fear of attracting attention by my absence. I muffled my head in my apron, and stopped my ears in terror of the torturing clang, sure to be followed by such blank silence, such barren vacuum for me. At last I ventured to re-enter the first classe, where, as it was not yet nine o'clock, no pupils had been admitted. The first thing seen was a white object on my black desk, a white, flat object. The post had, indeed, arrived; by me unheard. Rosine had visited my cell, and, like some angel, had left behind her a bright token of her presence. That shining thing on the desk was indeed a letter, a real letter; I saw so much at the distance of three yards, and as I had but one correspondent on earth, from that one it must come. He remembered me yet. How deep a pulse of gratitude sent new life through my heart.

Drawing near, bending and looking on the letter, in trembling but almost certain hope of seeing a known hand, it was my lot to find, on the contrary, an autograph for the moment deemed unknown — a pale female scrawl, instead of a firm, masculine character. I then thought fate was too hard for me, and I said, audibly, "This is cruel."

But I got over that pain also. Life is still life, whatever its pangs: our eyes and ears and their use remain with us, though the prospect of what pleases be wholly withdrawn, and the sound of what consoles be quite silenced.

I opened the billet: by this time I had recognised its handwriting as perfectly familiar. It was dated "La Terrasse," and it ran thus: —

"DEAR LUCY, — It occurs to me to inquire what you have been doing with yourself for the last month or two? Not that I suspect you would have the least difficulty in giving an account of your proceedings. I daresay you have been just as busy and as happy as ourselves at La Terrasse. As to Graham, his professional connection extends daily: he is so much sought after, so much engaged, that I tell him he will grow quite conceited. Like a right good mother, as I am, I do my best to keep him down: no flattery does he get from me, as you know. And yet, Lucy, he is a fine fellow: his mother's heart dances at the sight of him. After being hurried here and there the whole day, and passing the ordeal of fifty sorts of tempers, and combating a hundred caprices, and sometimes witnessing cruel sufferings — perhaps, occasionally, as I tell him, inflicting them — at night he still comes home to me in such kindly, pleasant mood, that really, I seem to live in a sort of moral antipodes, and on these January evenings my day rises when other people's night sets in.

"Still he needs keeping in order, and correcting, and repressing, and I do him that good service; but the boy is so elastic there is no such thing as vexing him thoroughly. When I think I have at last driven him to the sullens, he turns on me with jokes for retaliation: but you know him and all his iniquities, and I am but an elderly simpleton to make him the subject of this epistle.

"As for me, I have had my old Bretton agent here on a visit, and have been plunged overhead and ears in business matters. I do so wish to regain for Graham at least some part of what his father left him. He laughs to scorn my anxiety on this point, bidding me look and see how he can provide for himself and me too, and asking what the old lady can possibly want that she has not; hinting about sky-blue turbans; accusing me of an ambition to wear diamonds, keep livery servants, have an hotel, and lead the fashion amongst the English clan in Villette.

"Talking of sky-blue turbans, I wish you had been with us the other evening. He had come in really tired, and after I had given him his tea, he threw himself into my chair with his customary presumption. To my great delight, he dropped asleep. (You know how he teases me about being drowsy; I, who never, by any chance, close an eye by daylight.) While he slept, I thought he looked very bonny, Lucy: fool as I am to be so proud of him; but who can help it? Show me his peer. Look where I will, I see nothing like him in Villette. Well, I took it into my head to play him a trick: so I brought out the sky-blue turban, and handling it with gingerly precaution, I managed to invest his brows with this grand adornment. I assure you it did not at all misbecome him; he looked quite Eastern, except that he is so fair. Nobody, however, can accuse him of having red hair now — it is genuine chestnut — a dark, glossy chestnut; and when I put my large cashmere about him, there was as fine a young bey, dey, or pacha improvised as you would wish to see.

"It was good entertainment; but only half-enjoyed, since I was alone: you should have been there.

"In due time my lord awoke: the looking-glass above the fireplace soon intimated to him his plight: as you may imagine, I now live under threat and dread of vengeance.

"But to come to the gist of my letter. I know Thursday is a half-holiday in the Rue Fossette: be ready, then, by five in the afternoon, at which hour I will send the carriage to take you out to La Terrasse. Be sure to come: you may meet some old acquaintance. Good-by, my wise, dear, grave little god-daughter. — Very truly yours, "LOUISA BRETTON.".

Now, a letter like that sets one to rights! I might still be sad after reading that letter, but I was more composed; not exactly cheered, perhaps, but relieved. My friends, at least, were well and happy: no accident had occurred to Graham; no illness had seized his mother-calamities that had so long been my dream and thought. Their feelings for me too were — as they had been. Yet, how strange it was to look on Mrs. Bretton's seven weeks and contrast them with my seven weeks! Also, how very wise it is in people placed in an exceptional position to hold their tongues and not rashly declare how such position galls them! The world can understand well enough the process of perishing for want of food: perhaps few persons can enter into or follow out that of going mad from solitary confinement. They see the long-buried prisoner disinterred, a maniac or an idiot! — how his senses left him — how his nerves, first inflamed, underwent nameless agony, and then sunk to palsy — is a subject too intricate for examination, too abstract for popular comprehension. Speak of it! you might almost as well stand up in an European market-place, and propound dark sayings in that language and mood wherein Nebuchadnezzar, the imperial hypochondriac, communed with his baffled Chaldeans. And long, long may the minds to whom such themes are no mystery — by whom their bearings are sympathetically seized — be few in number, and rare of rencounter. Long may it be generally thought that physical privations alone merit compassion, and that the rest is a figment. When the world was younger and haler than now, moral trials were a deeper mystery still: perhaps in all the land of Israel there was but one Saul — certainly but one David to soothe or comprehend him.

The keen, still cold of the morning was succeeded, later in the day, by a sharp breathing from Russian wastes: the cold zone sighed over the temperate zone, and froze it fast. A heavy firmament, dull, and thick with snow, sailed up from the north, and settled over expectant Europe. Towards afternoon began the descent. I feared no carriage would come, the white tempest raged so dense and wild. But trust my godmother! Once having asked, she would have her guest. About six o'clock I was lifted from the carriage over the already blocked-up front steps of the château, and put in at the door of La Terrasse.

Running through the vestibule, and up-stairs to the drawing-room, there I found Mrs. Bretton — a summer-day in her own person. Had I been twice as cold as I was, her kind kiss and cordial clasp would have warmed me. Inured now for so long a time to rooms with bare boards, black benches, desks, and stoves, the blue saloon seemed to me gorgeous. In its Christmas-like fire alone there was a clear and crimson splendour which quite dazzled me.

When my godmother had held my hand for a little while, and chatted with me, and scolded me for having become thinner than when she last saw me, she professed to discover that the snow-wind had disordered my hair, and sent me up-stairs to make it neat and remove my shawl.

Repairing to my own little sea-green room, there also I found a bright fire, and candles too were lit: a tall waxlight stood on each side the great looking glass; but between the candles, and before the glass, appeared something dressing itself — an airy, fairy thing — small, slight, white — a winter spirit.

I declare, for one moment I thought of Graham and his spectral illusions. With distrustful eye I noted the details of this new vision. It wore white, sprinkled slightly with drops of scarlet; its girdle was red; it had something in its hair leafy, yet shining — a little wreath with an evergreen gloss. Spectral or not, here truly was nothing frightful, and I advanced.

Turning quick upon me, a large eye, under long lashes, flashed over me, the intruder: the lashes were as dark as long, and they softened with their pencilling the orb they guarded.

“Ah! you are come!” she breathed out, in a soft, quiet voice, and she smiled slowly, and gazed intently.

I knew her now. Having only once seen that sort of face, with that cast of fine and delicate featuring, I could not but know her.

“Miss de Bassompierre,” I pronounced.

“No,” was the reply, “not Miss de Bassompierre for you!” I did not inquire who then she might be, but waited voluntary information.

“You are changed, but still you are yourself,” she said, approaching nearer. “I remember you well — your countenance, the colour of your hair, the outline of your face….”

I had moved to the fire, and she stood opposite, and gazed into me; and as she gazed, her face became gradually more and more expressive of thought and feeling, till at last a dimness quenched her clear vision.

“It makes me almost cry to look so far back,” said she: “but as to being sorry, or sentimental, don’t think it: on the contrary, I am quite pleased and glad.”

Interested, yet altogether at fault, I knew not what to say. At last I stammered, “I think I never met you till that night, some weeks ago, when you were hurt…?”

She smiled. “You have forgotten then that I have sat on your knee, been lifted in your arms, even shared your pillow? You no longer remember the night when I came crying, like a naughty little child as I was, to your bedside, and you took me in. You have no memory for the comfort and protection by which you soothed an acute distress? Go back to Bretton. Remember Mr. Home.”

At last I saw it all. “And you are little Polly?”

“I am Paulina Mary Home de Bassompierre.”

How time can change! Little Polly wore in her pale, small features, her fairy symmetry, her varying expression, a certain promise of interest and grace; but Paulina Mary was become beautiful — not with the beauty that strikes the eye like a rose — orbed, ruddy, and replete; not with the plump, and pink, and flaxen attributes of her blond cousin Ginevra; but her seventeen years had brought her a refined and tender charm which did not lie in complexion, though hers was fair and clear; nor in outline, though her features were sweet, and her limbs perfectly turned; but, I think, rather in a subdued glow from the soul outward. This was not an opaque vase, of material however costly, but a lamp chastely lucent, guarding from extinction, yet not hiding from worship, a flame vital and vestal. In speaking of her attractions, I would not exaggerate language; but, indeed, they seemed to me very real and engaging. What though all was on a small scale, it was the perfume which gave this white violet distinction, and made it superior to the broadest camelia — the fullest dahlia that ever bloomed.

"Ah! and you remember the old time at Bretton?"

"Better," said she, "better, perhaps, than you. I remember it with minute distinctness: not only the time, but the days of the time, and the hours of the days."

"You must have forgotten some things?"

"Very little, I imagine."

"You were then a little creature of quick feelings: you must, long ere this, have outgrown the impressions with which joy and grief, affection and bereavement, stamped your mind ten years ago."

"You think I have forgotten whom I liked, and in what degree I liked them when a child?"

"The sharpness must be gone — the point, the poignancy — the deep imprint must be softened away and effaced?"

"I have a good memory for those days."

She looked as if she had. Her eyes were the eyes of one who can remember; one whose childhood does not fade like a dream, nor whose youth vanish like a sunbeam. She would not take life, loosely and incoherently, in parts, and let one season slip as she entered on another: she would retain and add; often review from the commencement, and so grow in harmony and consistency as she grew in years. Still I could not quite admit the conviction that all the pictures which now crowded upon me were vivid and visible to her. Her fond attachments, her sports and contests with a well-loved playmate, the patient, true devotion of her child's heart, her fears, her delicate reserves, her little trials, the last piercing pain of separation…. I retraced these things, and shook my head incredulous. She persisted. "The child of seven years lives yet in the girl of seventeen," said she.

"You used to be excessively fond of Mrs. Bretton," I remarked, intending to test her. She set me right at once.

"Not excessively fond," said she; "I liked her: I respected her as I should do now: she seems to me very little altered."

"She is not much changed," I assented.

We were silent a few minutes. Glancing round the room she said, "There are several things here that used to be at Bretton! I remember that pincushion and that looking-glass."

Evidently she was not deceived in her estimate of her own memory; not, at least, so far.

"You think, then, you would have known Mrs. Bretton?" I went on.

"I perfectly remembered her; the turn of her features, her olive complexion, and black hair, her height, her walk, her voice."

"Dr. Bretton, of course," I pursued, "would be out of the question: and, indeed, as I saw your first interview with him, I am aware that he appeared to you as a stranger."

"That first night I was puzzled," she answered.

"How did the recognition between him and your father come about?"

"They exchanged cards. The names Graham Bretton and Home de Bassompierre gave rise to questions and explanations. That was on the second day; but before then I was beginning to know something."

"How — know something?"

"Why," she said, "how strange it is that most people seem so slow to feel the truth — not to see, but feel! When Dr. Bretton had visited me a few times, and sat near and talked to me; when I had observed the look in his eyes, the expression about his mouth, the form of his chin, the carriage of his head, and all that we do observe in persons who approach us — how could I avoid being led by association to think of Graham Bretton? Graham was slighter than he, and not grown so tall, and had a smoother face, and longer and lighter hair, and spoke — not so deeply — more like a girl; but yet he is Graham, just as I am little Polly, or you are Lucy Snowe."

I thought the same, but I wondered to find my thoughts hers: there are certain things in which we so rarely meet with our double that it seems a miracle when that chance befalls.

"You and Graham were once playmates."

"And do you remember that?" she questioned in her turn.

"No doubt he will remember it also," said I.

"I have not asked him: few things would surprise me so much as to find that he did. I suppose his disposition is still gay and careless?"

"Was it so formerly? Did it so strike you? Do you thus remember him?"

"I scarcely remember him in any other light. Sometimes he was studious; sometimes he was merry: but whether busy with his books or disposed for play, it was chiefly the books or game he thought of; not much heeding those with whom he read or amused himself."

"Yet to you he was partial."

"Partial to me? Oh, no! he had other playmates — his school-fellows; I was of little consequence to him, except on Sundays: yes, he was kind on Sundays. I remember walking with him hand-in-hand to St. Mary's, and his finding the places in my prayer-book; and how good and still he was on Sunday evenings! So mild for such a proud, lively boy; so patient with all my blunders in reading; and so wonderfully to be depended on, for he never spent those evenings from home: I had a constant fear that he would accept some invitation and forsake us; but he never did, nor seemed ever to wish to do it. Thus, of course, it can be no more. I suppose Sunday will now be Dr. Bretton's dining-out day….?"

"Children, come down!" here called Mrs. Bretton from below. Paulina would still have lingered, but I inclined to descend: we went down.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LITTLE COUNTESS.

Cheerful as my godmother naturally was, and entertaining as, for our sakes, she made a point of being, there was no true enjoyment that evening at La Terrasse, till, through the wild howl of the winter-night, were heard the signal sounds of arrival. How often, while women and girls sit warm at snug firesides, their hearts and imaginations are doomed to divorce from the comfort surrounding their persons, forced out by night to wander through dark ways, to dare stress of weather, to contend with the snow-blast, to wait at lonely gates and stiles in wildest storms, watching and listening to see and hear the father, the son, the husband coming home.

Father and son came at last to the château: for the Count de Bassompierre that night accompanied Dr. Bretton. I know not which of our trio heard the horses first; the asperity, the violence of the weather warranted our running down into the hall to meet and greet the two riders as they came in; but they warned us to keep our distance: both were white — two mountains of snow; and indeed Mrs. Bretton, seeing their condition, ordered them instantly to the kitchen; prohibiting them, at their peril, from setting foot on her carpeted staircase till they had severally put off that mask of Old Christmas they now affected. Into the kitchen, however, we could not help following them: it was a large old Dutch kitchen, picturesque and pleasant. The little white Countess danced in a circle about her equally white sire, clapping her hands and crying, "Papa, papa, you look like an enormous Polar bear."

The bear shook himself, and the little sprite fled far from the frozen shower. Back she came, however, laughing, and eager to aid in removing the arctic disguise. The Count, at last issuing from his dreadnought, threatened to overwhelm her with it as with an avalanche.

"Come, then," said she, bending to invite the fall, and when it was playfully advanced above her head, bounding out of reach like some little chamois.

Her movements had the supple softness, the velvet grace of a kitten; her laugh was clearer than the ring of silver and crystal; as she took her sire's cold hands and rubbed them, and stood on tiptoe to reach his lips for a kiss, there seemed to shine round her a halo of loving delight. The grave and reverend seignor looked down on her as men do look on what is the apple of their eye.

"Mrs. Bretton," said he: "what am I to do with this daughter or daughterling of mine? She neither grows in wisdom nor in stature. Don't you find her pretty nearly as much the child as she was ten years ago?"

"She cannot be more the child than this great boy of mine," said Mrs. Bretton, who was in conflict with her son about some change of dress she deemed advisable, and which he resisted. He stood leaning against the Dutch dresser, laughing and keeping her at arm's length.

"Come, mamma," said he, "by way of compromise, and to secure for us inward as well as outward warmth, let us have a Christmas wassail-cup, and toast Old England here, on the hearth."

So, while the Count stood by the fire, and Paulina Mary still danced to and fro — happy in the liberty of the wide hall-like kitchen — Mrs. Bretton herself instructed Martha to spice and heat the wassail-bowl, and, pouring the draught into a Bretton flagon, it was served round, reaming hot, by means of a small silver vessel, which I recognised as Graham's christening-cup.

"Here's to Auld Lang Syne!" said the Count; holding the glancing cup on high. Then, looking at Mrs. Bretton. —

"We twa ha' paidlet i' the burn
Fra morning sun till dine,
But seas between us braid ha' roared
Sin' auld lane syne.
"And surely ye'll be your pint-stoup,
And surely I'll be mine;
And we'll taste a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne."

"Scotch! Scotch!" cried Paulina; "papa is talking Scotch; and Scotch he is, partly. We are Home and de Bassompierre, Caledonian and Gallic."

"And is that a Scotch reel you are dancing, you Highland fairy?" asked her father. "Mrs. Bretton, there will be a green ring growing up in the middle of your kitchen shortly. I would not answer for her being quite cannie: she is a strange little mortal."

"Tell Lucy to dance with me, papa; there is Lucy Snowe."

Mr. Home (there was still quite as much about him of plain Mr. Home as of proud Count de Bassompierre) held his hand out to me, saying kindly, "he remembered me well; and, even had his own memory been less trustworthy, my name was so often on his daughter's lips, and he had listened to so many long tales about me, I should seem like an old acquaintance."

Every one now had tasted the wassail-cup except Paulina, whose pas de fée, ou de fantaisie, nobody thought of interrupting to offer so profanatory a draught; but she was not to be overlooked, nor baulked of her mortal privileges.

"Let me taste," said she to Graham, as he was putting the cup on the shelf of the dresser out of her reach.

Mrs. Bretton and Mr. Home were now engaged in conversation. Dr. John had not been unobservant of the fairy's dance; he had watched it, and he had liked it. To say nothing of the softness and beauty of the movements, eminently grateful to his grace-loving eye, that ease in his mother's house charmed him, for it set him at ease: again she seemed a child for him — again, almost his playmate. I wondered how he would speak to her; I had not yet seen him address her; his first words proved that the old days of "little Polly" had been recalled to his mind by this evening's child-like light-heartedness.

"Your ladyship wishes for the tankard?"

"I think I said so. I think I intimated as much."

"Couldn't consent to a step of the kind on any account. Sorry for it, but couldn't do it."

"Why? I am quite well now: it can't break my collar-bone again, or dislocate my shoulder. Is it wine?"

"No; nor dew."

"I don't want dew; I don't like dew: but what is it?"

"Ale — strong ale — old October; brewed, perhaps, when I was born."

"It must be curious: is it good?"

"Excessively good."

And he took it down, administered to himself a second dose of this mighty elixir, expressed in his mischievous eyes extreme contentment with the same, and solemnly replaced the cup on the shelf.

"I should like a little," said Paulina, looking up; "I never had any 'old October:' is it sweet?"

"Perilously sweet," said Graham.

She continued to look up exactly with the countenance of a child that longs for some prohibited dainty. At last the Doctor relented, took it down, and indulged himself in the gratification of letting her taste from his hand; his eyes, always expressive in the revelation of pleasurable feelings, luminously and smilingly avowed that it was a gratification; and he prolonged it by so regulating the position of the cup that only a drop at a time could reach the rosy, sipping lips by which its brim was courted.

"A little more — a little more," said she, petulantly touching his hand with the forefinger, to make him incline the cup more generously and yieldingly. "It smells of spice and sugar, but I can't taste it; your wrist is so stiff, and you are so stingy."

He indulged her, whispering, however, with gravity: "Don't tell my mother or Lucy; they wouldn't approve."

"Nor do I," said she, passing into another tone and manner as soon as she had fairly assayed the beverage, just as if it had acted upon her like some disenchanting draught, undoing the work of a wizard: "I find it anything but sweet; it is bitter and hot, and takes away my breath. Your old October was only desirable while forbidden. Thank you, no more."

And, with a slight bend — careless, but as graceful as her dance — she glided from him and rejoined her father.

I think she had spoken truth: the child of seven was in the girl of seventeen.

Graham looked after her a little baffled, a little puzzled; his eye was on her a good deal during the rest of the evening, but she did not seem to notice him.

As we ascended to the drawing-room for tea, she took her father's arm: her natural place seemed to be at his side; her eyes and her ears were dedicated to him. He and Mrs. Bretton were the chief talkers of our little party, and Paulina was their best listener, attending closely to all that was said, prompting the repetition of this or that trait or adventure.

"And where were you at such a time, papa? And what did you say then? And tell Mrs. Bretton what happened on that occasion." Thus she drew him out.

She did not again yield to any effervescence of glee; the infantine sparkle was exhaled for the night: she was soft, thoughtful, and docile. It was pretty to see her bid good-night; her manner to Graham was touched with dignity: in her very slight smile and quiet bow spoke the Countess, and Graham could not but look grave, and bend responsive. I saw he hardly knew how to blend together in his ideas the dancing fairy and delicate dame.

Next day, when we were all assembled round the breakfast-table, shivering and fresh from the morning's chill ablutions, Mrs. Bretton pronounced a decree that nobody, who was not forced by dire necessity, should quit her house that day.

Indeed, egress seemed next to impossible; the drift darkened the lower panes of the casement, and, on looking out, one saw the sky and air vexed and dim, the wind and snow in angry conflict. There was no fall now, but what had already descended was torn up from the earth, whirled round by brief shrieking gusts, and cast into a hundred fantastic forms.

The Countess seconded Mrs. Bretton.

"Papa shall not go out," said she, placing a seat for herself beside her father's arm-chair. "I will look after him. You won't go into town, will you, papa?"

"Ay, and No," was the answer. "If you and Mrs. Bretton are very good to me, Polly — kind, you know, and attentive; if you pet me in a very nice manner, and make much of me, I may possibly be induced to wait an hour after breakfast and see whether this razor-edged wind settles. But, you see, you give me no breakfast; you offer me nothing: you let me starve."

"Quick! please, Mrs. Bretton, and pour out the coffee," entreated Paulina, "whilst I take care of the Count de Bassompierre in other respects: since he grew into a Count, he has needed so much attention."

She separated and prepared a roll.

"There, papa, are your 'pistolets' charged," said she. "And there is some marmalade, just the same sort of marmalade we used to have at Bretton, and which you said was as good as if it had been conserved in Scotland — "

"And which your little ladyship used to beg for my boy — do you remember that?" interposed Mrs. Bretton. "Have you forgotten how you would come to my elbow and touch my sleeve with the whisper, ‘Please, ma’am, something good for Graham — a little marmalade, or honey, or jam?”‘

“No, mamma,” broke in Dr. John, laughing, yet reddening; “it surely was not so: I could not have cared for these things.”

“Did he or did he not, Paulina?”

“He liked them,” asserted Paulina.

“Never blush for it, John,” said Mr. Home, encouragingly. “I like them myself yet, and always did. And Polly showed her sense in catering for a friend’s material comforts: it was I who put her into the way of such good manners — nor do I let her forget them. Polly, offer me a small slice of that tongue.”

“There, papa: but remember you are only waited upon with this assiduity; on condition of being persuadable, and reconciling yourself to La Terrasse for the day.”

“Mrs. Bretton,” said the Count, “I want to get rid of my daughter — to send her to school. Do you know of any good school?”

“There is Lucy’s place — Madame Beck’s.”

“Miss Snowe is in a school?”

“I am a teacher,” I said, and was rather glad of the opportunity of saying this. For a little while I had been feeling as if placed in a false position. Mrs. Bretton and son knew my circumstances; but the Count and his daughter did not. They might choose to vary by some shades their hitherto cordial manner towards me, when aware of my grade in society. I spoke then readily: but a swarm of thoughts I had not anticipated nor invoked, rose dim at the words, making me sigh involuntarily. Mr. Home did not lift his eyes from his breakfast-plate for about two minutes, nor did he speak; perhaps he had not caught the words — perhaps he thought that on a confession of that nature, politeness would interdict comment: the Scotch are proverbially proud; and homely as was Mr. Home in look, simple in habits and tastes, I have all along intimated that he was not without his share of the national quality. Was his a pseudo pride? was it real dignity? I leave the question undecided in its wide sense. Where it concerned me individually I can only answer: then, and always, he showed himself a true-hearted gentleman.

By nature he was a feeler and a thinker; over his emotions and his reflections spread a mellowing of melancholy; more than a mellowing: in trouble and bereavement it became a cloud. He did not know much about Lucy Snowe; what he knew, he did not very accurately comprehend: indeed his misconceptions of my character often made me smile; but he saw my walk in life lay rather on the shady side of the hill: he gave me credit for doing my endeavour to keep the course honestly straight; he would have helped me if he could: having no opportunity of helping, he still wished me well. When he did look at me, his eye was kind; when he did speak, his voice was benevolent.

“Yours,” said he, “is an arduous calling. I wish you health and strength to win in it — success.”

His fair little daughter did not take the information quite so composedly: she fixed on me a pair of eyes wide with wonder — almost with dismay.

“Are you a teacher?” cried she. Then, having paused on the unpalatable idea, “Well, I never knew what you were, nor ever thought of asking: for me, you were always Lucy Snowe.”

“And what am I now?” I could not forbear inquiring.

“Yourself, of course. But do you really teach here, in Villette?”

“I really do.”

“And do you like it?”

“Not always.”

“And why do you go on with it?”

Her father looked at, and, I feared, was going to check her; but he only said, “Proceed, Polly, proceed with that catechism — prove yourself the little wiseacre you are. If Miss Snowe were to blush and look confused, I should have to bid you hold your tongue; and you and I would sit out the present meal in some disgrace; but she only smiles, so push her hard, multiply the cross-questions. Well, Miss Snowe, why do you go on with it?”

“Chiefly, I fear, for the sake of the money I get.”

“Not then from motives of pure philanthropy? Polly and I were clinging to that hypothesis as the most lenient way of accounting for your eccentricity.”

“No — no, sir. Rather for the roof of shelter I am thus enabled to keep over my head; and for the comfort of mind it gives me to think that while I can work for myself, I am spared the pain of being a burden to anybody.”

“Papa, say what you will, I pity Lucy.”

“Take up that pity, Miss de Bassompierre; take it up in both hands, as you might a little callow gosling squattering out of bounds without leave; put it back in the warm nest of a heart whence it issued, and receive in your ear this whisper. If my Polly ever came to know by experience the uncertain nature of this world’s goods, I should like her to act as Lucy acts: to work for herself, that she might burden neither kith nor kin.”

“Yes, papa,” said she, pensively and tractably. “But poor Lucy! I thought she was a rich lady, and had rich friends.”

“You thought like a little simpleton. I never thought so. When I had time to consider Lucy’s manner and aspect, which was not often, I saw she was one who had to guard and not be guarded; to act and not be served: and this lot has, I imagine, helped her to an experience for which, if she live long enough to realize its full benefit, she may yet bless Providence. But this school,” he pursued, changing his tone from grave to gay: “would Madame Beck admit my Polly, do you think, Miss Lucy?”

I said, there needed but to try Madame; it would soon be seen: she was fond of English pupils. “If you, sir,” I added, “will but take Miss de Bassompierre in your carriage this very afternoon, I think I can answer for it that Rosine, the portress, will not be very slow in answering your ring; and Madame, I am sure, will put on her best pair of gloves to come into the salon to receive you."

"In that case," responded Mr. Home, "I see no sort of necessity there is for delay. Mrs. Hurst can send what she calls her young lady's 'things' after her; Polly can settle down to her horn-book before night; and you, Miss Lucy, I trust, will not disdain to cast an occasional eye upon her, and let me know, from time to time, how she gets on. I hope you approve of the arrangement, Countess de Bassompierre?"

The Countess hemmed and hesitated. "I thought," said she, "I thought I had finished my education — "

"That only proves how much we may be mistaken in our thoughts I hold a far different opinion, as most of these will who have been auditors of your profound knowledge of life this morning. Ah, my little girl, thou hast much to learn; and papa ought to have taught thee more than he has done! Come, there is nothing for it but to try Madame Beck; and the weather seems settling, and I have finished my breakfast — "

"But, papa!"

"Well?"

"I see an obstacle."

"I don't at all."

"It is enormous, papa; it can never be got over; it is as large as you in your greatcoat, and the snowdrift on the top."

"And, like that snowdrift, capable of melting?"

"No! it is of too — too solid flesh: it is just your own self. Miss Lucy, warn Madame Beck not to listen to any overtures about taking me, because, in the end, it would turn out that she would have to take papa too: as he is so teasing, I will just tell tales about him. Mrs. Bretton and all of you listen: About five years ago, when I was twelve years old, he took it into his head that he was spoiling me; that I was growing unfitted for the world, and I don't know what, and nothing would serve or satisfy him, but I must go to school. I cried, and so on; but M. de Bassompierre proved hard-hearted, quite firm and flinty, and to school I went. What was the result? In the most admirable manner, papa came to school likewise: every other day he called to see me. Madame Aigredoux grumbled, but it was of no use; and so, at last, papa and I were both, in a manner, expelled. Lucy can just tell Madame Beck this little trait: it is only fair to let her know what she has to expect."

Mrs. Bretton asked Mr. Home what he had to say in answer to this statement. As he made no defence, judgment was given against him, and Paulina triumphed.

But she had other moods besides the arch and naïve. After breakfast; when the two elders withdrew — I suppose to talk over certain of Mrs. Bretton's business matters — and the Countess, Dr. Bretton, and I, were for a short time alone together — all the child left her; with us, more nearly her companions in age, she rose at once to the little lady: her very face seemed to alter; that play of feature, and candour of look, which, when she spoke to her father, made it quite dimpled and round, yielded to an aspect more thoughtful, and lines distincter and less mobile.

No doubt Graham noted the change as well as I. He stood for some minutes near the window, looking out at the snow; presently he, approached the hearth, and entered into conversation, but not quite with his usual ease: fit topics did not seem to rise to his lips; he chose them fastidiously, hesitatingly, and consequently infelicitously: he spoke vaguely of Villette — its inhabitants, its notable sights and buildings. He was answered by Miss de Bassompierre in quite womanly sort; with intelligence, with a manner not indeed wholly disindividualized: a tone, a glance, a gesture, here and there, rather animated and quick than measured and stately, still recalled little Polly; but yet there was so fine and even a polish, so calm and courteous a grace, gilding and sustaining these peculiarities, that a less sensitive man than Graham would not have ventured to seize upon them as vantage points, leading to franker intimacy.

Yet while Dr. Bretton continued subdued, and, for him, sedate, he was still observant. Not one of those petty impulses and natural breaks escaped him. He did not miss one characteristic movement, one hesitation in language, or one lisp in utterance. At times, in speaking fast, she still lisped; but coloured whenever such lapse occurred, and in a painstaking, conscientious manner, quite as amusing as the slight error, repeated the word more distinctly.

Whenever she did this, Dr. Bretton smiled. Gradually, as they conversed, the restraint on each side slackened: might the conference have but been prolonged, I believe it would soon have become genial: already to Paulina's lip and cheek returned the wreathing, dimpling smile; she lisped once, and forgot to correct herself. And Dr. John, I know not how he changed, but change he did. He did not grow gayer — no raillery, no levity sparkled across his aspect — but his position seemed to become one of more pleasure to himself, and he spoke his augmented comfort in readier language, in tones more suave. Ten years ago this pair had always found abundance to say to each other; the intervening decade had not narrowed the experience or impoverished the intelligence of either: besides, there are certain natures of which the mutual influence is such, that the more they say, the more they have to say. For these out of association grows adhesion, and out of adhesion, amalgamation.

Graham, however, must go: his was a profession whose claims are neither to be ignored nor deferred. He left the room; but before he could leave the house there was a return. I am sure he came back — not for the paper, or card in his desk, which formed his ostensible errand — but to assure himself, by one more glance, that Paulina's aspect was really such as memory was bearing away: that he had not been viewing her somehow by a partial, artificial light, and making a fond mistake. No! he found the impression true — rather, indeed, he gained than lost by this return: he took away with him a parting look — shy, but very soft — as beautiful, as innocent, as any little fawn could lift out of its cover of fern, or any lamb from its meadow-bed.

Being left alone, Paulina and I kept silence for some time: we both took out some work, and plied a mute and diligent task. The white-wood workbox of old days was now replaced by one inlaid with precious mosaic, and furnished with implements of gold; the tiny and trembling fingers that could scarce guide the needle, though tiny still, were now swift and skilful: but there was the same busy knitting of the brow, the same little dainty mannerisms, the same quick turns and movements — now to replace a stray tress, and anon to shake from the silken skirt some imaginary atom of dust — some clinging fibre of thread.

That morning I was disposed for silence: the austere fury of the winter-day had on me an awing, hushing influence. That passion of January, so white and so bloodless, was not yet spent: the storm had raved itself hoarse, but seemed no nearer exhaustion. Had Ginevra Fanshawe been my companion in that drawing-room, she would not have suffered me to muse and listen undisturbed. The presence just gone from us would have been her theme; and how she would have rung the changes on one topic! how she would have pursued and pestered me with questions and surmises — worried and oppressed me with comments and confidences I did not want, and longed to avoid.

Paulina Mary cast once or twice towards me a quiet but penetrating glance of her dark, full eye; her lips half opened, as if to the impulse of coming utterance: but she saw and delicately respected my inclination for silence.

"This will not hold long," I thought to myself; for I was not accustomed to find in women or girls any power of self-control, or strength of self-denial. As far as I knew them, the chance of a gossip about their usually trivial secrets, their often very washy and paltry feelings, was a treat not to be readily foregone.

The little Countess promised an exception: she sewed till she was tired of sewing, and then she took a book.

As chance would have it, she had sought it in Dr. Bretton's own compartment of the bookcase; and it proved to be an old Bretton book — some illustrated work of natural history. Often had I seen her standing at Graham's side, resting that volume on his knee, and reading to his tuition; and, when the lesson was over, begging, as a treat, that he would tell her all about the pictures. I watched her keenly: here was a true test of that memory she had boasted would her recollections now be faithful?

Faithful? It could not be doubted. As she turned the leaves, over her face passed gleam after gleam of expression, the least intelligent of which was a full greeting to the Past. And then she turned to the title-page, and looked at the name written in the schoolboy hand. She looked at it long; nor was she satisfied with merely looking: she gently passed over the characters the tips of her fingers, accompanying the action with an unconscious but tender smile, which converted the touch into a caress. Paulina loved the Past; but the peculiarity of this little scene was, that she said nothing: she could feel without pouring out her feelings in a flux of words.

She now occupied herself at the bookcase for nearly an hour; taking down volume after volume, and renewing her acquaintance with each. This done, she seated herself on a low stool, rested her cheek on her hand, and thought, and still was mute.

The sound of the front door opened below, a rush of cold wind, and her father's voice speaking to Mrs. Bretton in the hall, startled her at last. She sprang up: she was down-stairs in one second.

"Papa! papa! you are not going out?"

"My pet, I must go into town."

"But it is too — too cold, papa."

And then I heard M. de Bassompierre showing to her how he was well provided against the weather; and how he was going to have the carriage, and to be quite snugly sheltered; and, in short, proving that she need not fear for his comfort.

"But you will promise to come back here this evening, before it is quite dark; — you and Dr. Bretton, both, in the carriage? It is not fit to ride."

"Well, if I see the Doctor, I will tell him a lady has laid on him her commands to take care of his precious health and come home early under my escort."

"Yes, you must say a lady; and he will think it is his mother, and be obedient And, papa, mind to come soon, for I shall watch and listen."

The door closed, and the carriage rolled softly through the snow; and back returned the Countess, pensive and anxious.

She did listen, and watch, when evening closed; but it was in stillest sort: walking the drawing-room with quite noiseless step. She checked at intervals her velvet march; inclined her ear, and consulted the night sounds: I should rather say, the night silence; for now, at last, the wind was fallen. The sky, relieved of its avalanche, lay naked and pale: through the barren boughs of the avenue we could see it well, and note also the polar splendour of the new-year moon — an orb white as a world of ice. Nor was it late when we saw also the return of the carriage.

Paulina had no dance of welcome for this evening. It was with a sort of gravity that she took immediate possession of her father, as he entered the room; but she at once made him her entire property, led him to the seat of her choice, and, while softly showering round him honeyed words of commendation for being so good and coming home so soon, you would have thought it was entirely by the power of her little hands he was put into his chair, and settled and arranged; for the strong man seemed to take pleasure in wholly yielding himself to this dominion-potent only by love.

Graham did not appear till some minutes after the Count. Paulina half turned when his step was heard: they spoke, but only a word or two; their fingers met a moment, but obviously with slight contact. Paulina remained beside her father; Graham threw himself into a seat on the other side of the room.

It was well that Mrs. Bretton and Mr. Home had a great deal to say to each other-almost an inexhaustible fund of discourse in old recollections; otherwise, I think, our party would have been but a still one that evening.

After tea, Paulina's quick needle and pretty golden thimble were busily plied by the lamp-light, but her tongue rested, and her eyes seemed reluctant to raise often their lids, so smooth and so full-fringed. Graham, too, must have been tired with his day's work: he listened dutifully to his elders and betters, said very little himself, and followed with his eye the gilded glance of Paulina's thimble; as if it had been some bright moth on the wing, or the golden head of some darting little yellow serpent.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BURIAL.

From this date my life did not want variety; I went out a good deal, with the entire consent of Madame Beck, who perfectly approved the grade of my acquaintance. That worthy directress had never from the first treated me otherwise than with respect; and when she found that I was liable to frequent invitations from a château and a great hotel, respect improved into distinction.

Not that she was fulsome about it: Madame, in all things worldly, was in nothing weak; there was measure and sense in her hottest pursuit of self-interest, calm and considerateness in her closest clutch of gain; without, then, laying herself open to my contempt as a time-server and a toadie, she marked with tact that she was pleased people connected with her establishment should frequent such associates as must cultivate and elevate, rather than those who might deteriorate and depress. She never praised either me or my friends; only once when she was sitting in the sun in the garden, a cup of coffee at her elbow and the Gazette in her hand, looking very comfortable, and I came up and asked leave of absence for the evening, she delivered herself in this gracious sort: —

"Oui, oui, ma bonne amie: je vous donne la permission de coeur et de gré. Votre travail dans ma maison a toujours été admirable, rempli de zèle et de discrétion: vous avez bien le droit de vous amuser. Sortez donc tant que vous voudrez. Quant à votre choix de connaissances, j'en suis contente; c'est sage, digne, laudable."

She closed her lips and resumed the Gazette.

The reader will not too gravely regard the little circumstance that about this time the triply-enclosed packet of five letters temporarily disappeared from my bureau. Blank dismay was naturally my first sensation on making the discovery; but in a moment I took heart of grace.

"Patience!" whispered I to myself. "Let me say nothing, but wait peaceably; they will come back again."

And they did come back: they had only been on a short visit to Madame's chamber; having passed their examination, they came back duly and truly: I found them all right the next day.

I wonder what she thought of my correspondence? What estimate did she form of Dr. John Bretton's epistolary powers? In what light did the often very pithy thoughts, the generally sound, and sometimes original opinions, set, without pretension, in an easily-flowing, spirited style, appear to her? How did she like that genial, half humorous vein, which to me gave such delight? What did she think of the few kind words scattered here and there-not thickly, as the diamonds were scattered in the valley of Sindbad, but sparely, as those gems lie in unfabled beds? Oh, Madame Beck! how seemed these things to you?

I think in Madame Beck's eyes the five letters found a certain favour. One day after she had borrowed them of me (in speaking of so suave a little woman, one ought to use suave terms), I caught her examining me with a steady contemplative gaze, a little puzzled, but not at all malevolent. It was during that brief space between lessons, when the pupils turned out into the court for a quarter of an hour's recreation; she and I remained in the first classe alone: when I met her eye, her thoughts forced themselves partially through her lips.

"Il y a," said she, "quelquechose de bien remarquable dans le caractère Anglais."

"How, Madame?"

She gave a little laugh, repeating the word "how" in English.

"Je ne saurais vous dire 'how;' mais, enfin, les Anglais ont des idées à eux, en amitié, en amour, en tout. Mais au moins il n'est pas besoin de les surveiller," she added, getting up and trotting away like the compact little pony she was.

"Then I hope," murmured I to myself, "you will graciously let alone my letters for the future."

Alas! something came rushing into my eyes, dimming utterly their vision, blotting from sight the schoolroom, the garden, the bright winter sun, as I remembered that never more would letters, such as she had read, come to me. I had seen the last of them. That goodly river on whose banks I had sojourned, of whose waves a few reviving drops had trickled to my lips, was bending to another course: it was leaving my little hut and field forlorn and sand-dry, pouring its wealth of waters far away. The change was right, just, natural; not a word could be said: but I loved my Rhine, my Nile; I had almost worshipped my Ganges, and I grieved that the grand tide should roll estranged, should vanish like a false mirage. Though stoical, I was not quite a stoic; drops streamed fast on my hands, on my desk: I wept one sultry shower, heavy and brief.

But soon I said to myself, "The Hope I am bemoaning suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome."

Welcome I endeavoured to make it. Indeed, long pain had made patience a habit. In the end I closed the eyes of my dead, covered its face, and composed its limbs with great calm.

The letters, however, must be put away, out of sight: people who have undergone bereavement always jealously gather together and lock away mementos: it is not supportable to be stabbed to the heart each moment by sharp revival of regret.

One vacant holiday afternoon (the Thursday) going to my treasure, with intent to consider its final disposal, I perceived — and this time with a strong impulse of displeasure — that it had been again tampered with: the packet was there, indeed, but the ribbon which secured it had been untied and retied; and by other symptoms I knew that my drawer had been visited.

This was a little too much. Madame Beck herself was the soul of discretion, besides having as strong a brain and sound a judgment as ever furnished a human head; that she should know the contents of my casket, was not pleasant, but might be borne. Little Jesuit inquisitress as she was, she could see things in a true light, and understand them in an unperverted sense; but the idea that she had ventured to communicate information, thus gained, to others; that she had, perhaps, amused herself with a companion over documents, in my eyes most sacred, shocked me cruelly. Yet, that such was the case I now saw reason to fear; I even guessed her confidant. Her kinsman, M. Paul Emanuel, had spent yesterday evening with her: she was much in the habit of consulting him, and of discussing with him matters she broached to no one else. This very morning, in class, that gentleman had favoured me with a glance which he seemed to have borrowed from Vashti, the actress; I had not at the moment comprehended that blue, yet lurid, flash out of his angry eye; but I read its meaning now. He, I believed, was not apt to regard what concerned me from a fair point of view, nor to judge me with tolerance and candour: I had always found him severe and suspicious: the thought that these letters, mere friendly letters as they were, had fallen once, and might fall again, into his hands, jarred my very soul.

What should I do to prevent this? In what corner of this strange house was it possible to find security or secresy? Where could a key be a safeguard, or a padlock a barrier?

In the grenier? No, I did not like the grenier. Besides, most of the boxes and drawers there were mouldering, and did not lock. Rats, too, gnawed their way through the decayed wood; and mice made nests amongst the litter of their contents: my dear letters (most dear still, though Ichabod was written on their covers) might be consumed by vermin; certainly the writing would soon become obliterated by damp. No; the grenier would not do — but where then?

While pondering this problem, I sat in the dormitory window-seat. It was a fine frosty afternoon; the winter sun, already setting, gleamed pale on the tops of the garden-shrubs in the “allée défendue.” One great old pear-tree — the nun’s pear-tree — stood up a tall dryad skeleton, grey, gaunt, and stripped. A thought struck me — one of those queer fantastic thoughts that will sometimes strike solitary people. I put on my bonnet, cloak, and furs, and went out into the city.

Bending my steps to the old historical quarter of the town, whose hoax and overshadowed precincts I always sought by instinct in melancholy moods, I wandered on from street to street, till, having crossed a half deserted “place” or square, I found myself before a sort of broker’s shop; an ancient place, full of ancient things. What I wanted was a metal box which might be soldered, or a thick glass jar or bottle which might be stoppered or sealed hermetically. Amongst miscellaneous heaps, I found and purchased the latter article.

I then made a little roll of my letters, wrapped them in oiled silk, bound them with twine, and, having put them in the bottle, got the old Jew broker to stopper, seal, and make it air-tight. While obeying my directions, he glanced at me now and then suspiciously from under his frost-white eyelashes. I believe he thought there was some evil deed on hand. In all this I had a dreary something — not pleasure — but a sad, lonely satisfaction. The impulse under which I acted, the mood controlling me, were similar to the impulse and the mood which had induced me to visit the confessional. With quick walking I regained the pensionnat just at dark, and in time for dinner.

At seven o'clock the moon rose. At half-past seven, when the pupils and teachers were at study, and Madame Beck was with her mother and children in the salle-à-manger, when the half-boarders were all gone home, and Rosine had left the vestibule, and all was still — I shawled myself, and, taking the sealed jar, stole out through the first-classe door, into the berceau and thence into the "allée défendue."

Methusaleh, the pear-tree, stood at the further end of this walk, near my seat: he rose up, dim and gray, above the lower shrubs round him. Now Methusaleh, though so very old, was of sound timber still; only there was a hole, or rather a deep hollow, near his root. I knew there was such a hollow, hidden partly by ivy and creepers growing thick round; and there I meditated hiding my treasure. But I was not only going to hide a treasure — I meant also to bury a grief. That grief over which I had lately been weeping, as I wrapped it in its winding-sheet, must be interred.

Well, I cleared away the ivy, and found the hole; it was large enough to receive the jar, and I thrust it deep in. In a tool-shed at the bottom of the garden, lay the relics of building-materials, left by masons lately employed to repair a part of the premises. I fetched thence a slate and some mortar, put the slate on the hollow, secured it with cement, covered the hole with black mould, and, finally, replaced the ivy. This done, I rested, leaning against the tree; lingering, like any other mourner, beside a newly-sodded grave.

The air of the night was very still, but dim with a peculiar mist, which changed the moonlight into a luminous haze. In this air, or this mist, there was some quality — electrical, perhaps — which acted in strange sort upon me. I felt then as I had felt a year ago in England — on a night when the aurora borealis was streaming and sweeping round heaven, when, belated in lonely fields, I had paused to watch that mustering of an army with banners — that quivering of serried lances — that swift ascent of messengers from below the north star to the dark, high keystone of heaven's arch. I felt, not happy, far otherwise, but strong with reinforced strength.

If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my winter-quarters — to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain. But what road was open? — what plan available?

On this question I was still pausing, when the moon, so dim hitherto, seemed to shine out somewhat brighter: a ray gleamed even white before me, and a shadow became distinct and marked. I looked more narrowly, to make out the cause of this well-defined contrast appearing a little suddenly in the obscure alley: whiter and blacker it grew on my eye: it took shape with instantaneous transformation. I stood about three yards from a tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman.

Five minutes passed. I neither fled nor shrieked. She was there still.

I spoke.

"Who are you? and why do you come to me?"

She stood mute. She had no face — no features: all below her brow was masked with a white cloth; but she had eyes, and they viewed me.

I felt, if not brave, yet a little desperate; and desperation will often suffice to fill the post and do the work of courage. I advanced one step. I stretched out my hand, for I meant to touch her. She seemed to recede. I drew nearer: her recession, still silent, became swift. A mass of shrubs, full-leaved evergreens, laurel and dense yew, intervened between me and what I followed. Having passed that obstacle, I looked and saw nothing. I waited. I said, — "If you have any errand to men, come back and deliver it." Nothing spoke or re-appeared.

This time there was no Dr. John to whom to have recourse: there was no one to whom I dared whisper the words, "I have again seen the nun."

* * * * *

Paulina Mary sought my frequent presence in the Rue Crécy. In the old Bretton days, though she had never professed herself fond of me, my society had soon become to her a sort of unconscious necessary. I used to notice that if I withdrew to my room, she would speedily come trotting after me, and opening the door and peeping in, say, with her little peremptory accent, — "Come down. Why do you sit here by yourself? You must come into the parlour."

In the same spirit she urged me now — "Leave the Rue Fossette," she said, "and come and live with us. Papa would give you far more than Madame Beck gives you."

Mr. Home himself offered me a handsome sum — thrice my present salary — if I would accept the office of companion to his daughter. I declined. I think I should have declined had I been poorer than I was, and with scantier fund of resource, more stinted narrowness of future prospect. I had not that vocation. I could teach; I could give lessons; but to be either a private governess or a companion was unnatural to me. Rather than fill the former post in any great house, I would deliberately have taken a housemaid's place, bought a strong pair of gloves, swept bedrooms and staircases, and cleaned stoves and locks, in peace and independence. Rather than be a companion, I would have made shirts and starved.

I was no bright lady's shadow — not Miss de Bassompierre's. Overcast enough it was my nature often to be; of a subdued habit I was: but the dimness and depression must both be voluntary — such as kept me docile at my desk, in the midst of my now well-accustomed pupils in Madame Beck's fist classe; or alone, at my own bedside, in her dormitory, or in the alley and seat which were called mine, in her garden: my qualifications were not convertible, nor adaptable; they could not be made the foil of any gem, the adjunct of any beauty, the appendage of any greatness in Christendom. Madame Beck and I, without assimilating, understood each other well. I was not her companion, nor her children's governess; she left me free: she tied me to nothing — not to herself — not even to her interests: once, when she had for a fortnight been called from home by a near relation's illness, and on her return, all anxious and full of care about her establishment, lest something in her absence should have gone wrong finding that matters had proceeded much as usual, and that there was no evidence of glaring neglect — she made each of the teachers a present, in acknowledgment of steadiness. To my bedside she came at twelve o'clock at night, and told me she had no present for me: "I must make fidelity advantageous to the St. Pierre," said she; "if I attempt to make it advantageous to you, there will arise misunderstanding between us — perhaps separation. One thing, however, I can do to please you — leave you alone with your liberty: c'est-ce que je ferai." She kept her word. Every slight shackle she had ever laid on me, she, from that time, with quiet hand removed. Thus I had pleasure in voluntarily respecting her rules: gratification in devoting double time, in taking double pains with the pupils she committed to my charge.

As to Mary de Bassompierre, I visited her with pleasure, though I would not live with her. My visits soon taught me that it was unlikely even my occasional and voluntary society would long be indispensable to her. M. de Bassompierre, for his part, seemed impervious to this conjecture, blind to this possibility; unconscious as any child to the signs, the likelihoods, the fitful beginnings of what, when it drew to an end, he might not approve.

Whether or not he would cordially approve, I used to speculate. Difficult to say. He was much taken up with scientific interests; keen, intent, and somewhat oppugnant in what concerned his favourite pursuits, but unsuspicious and trustful in the ordinary affairs of life. From all I could gather, he seemed to regard his "daughterling" as still but a child, and probably had not yet admitted the notion that others might look on her in a different light: he would speak of what should be done when "Polly" was a woman, when she should be grown up; and "Polly," standing beside his chair, would sometimes smile and take his honoured head between her little hands, and kiss his iron-grey locks; and, at other times, she would pout and toss her curls: but she never said, “Papa, I am grown up.”

She had different moods for different people. With her father she really was still a child, or child-like, affectionate, merry, and playful. With me she was serious, and as womanly as thought and feeling could make her. With Mrs. Bretton she was docile and reliant, but not expansive. With Graham she was shy, at present very shy; at moments she tried to be cold; on occasion she endeavoured to shun him. His step made her start; his entrance hushed her; when he spoke, her answers failed of fluency; when he took leave, she remained self-vexed and disconcerted. Even her father noticed this demeanour in her.

“My little Polly,” he said once, “you live too retired a life; if you grow to be a woman with these shy manners, you will hardly be fitted for society. You really make quite a stranger of Dr. Bretton: how is this? Don’t you remember that, as a little girl, you used to be rather partial to him?”

“Rather, papa,” echoed she, with her slightly dry, yet gentle and simple tone.

“And you don’t like him now? What has he done?”

“Nothing. Y — e — s, I like him a little; but we are grown strange to each other.”

“Then rub it off, Polly; rub the rust and the strangeness off. Talk away when he is here, and have no fear of him?”

“He does not talk much. Is he afraid of me, do you think, papa?”

“Oh, to be sure, what man would not be afraid of such a little silent lady?”

“Then tell him some day not to mind my being silent. Say that it is my way, and that I have no unfriendly intention.”

“Your way, you little chatter-box? So far from being your way, it is only your whim!”

“Well, I’ll improve, papa.”

And very pretty was the grace with which, the next day, she tried to keep her word. I saw her make the effort to converse affably with Dr. John on general topics. The attention called into her guest’s face a pleasurable glow; he met her with caution, and replied to her in his softest tones, as if there was a kind of gossamer happiness hanging in the air which he feared to disturb by drawing too deep a breath. Certainly, in her timid yet earnest advance to friendship, it could not be denied that there was a most exquisite and fairy charm.

When the Doctor was gone, she approached her father’s chair.

“Did I keep my word, papa? Did I behave better?”

“My Polly behaved like a queen. I shall become quite proud of her if this improvement continues. By-and-by we shall see her receiving my guests with quite a calm, grand manner. Miss Lucy and I will have to look about us, and polish up all our best airs and graces lest we should be thrown into the shade. Still, Polly, there is a little flutter, a little tendency to stammer now and then, and even, to lisp as you lisped when you were six years old."

"No, papa," interrupted she indignantly, "that can't be true."

"I appeal to Miss Lucy. Did she not, in answering Dr. Bretton's question as to whether she had ever seen the palace of the Prince of Bois l'Etang, say, 'yeth,' she had been there 'theveral' times?"

"Papa, you are satirical, you are méchant! I can pronounce all the letters of the alphabet as clearly as you can. But tell me this you are very particular in making me be civil to Dr. Bretton, do you like him yourself?"

"To be sure: for old acquaintance sake I like him: then he is a very good son to his mother; besides being a kind-hearted fellow and clever in his profession: yes, the callant is well enough."

"Callant! Ah, Scotchman! Papa, is it the Edinburgh or the Aberdeen accent you have?"

"Both, my pet, both: and doubtless the Glaswegian into the bargain. It is that which enables me to speak French so well: a gude Scots tongue always succeeds well at the French."

"The French! Scotch again: incorrigible papa. You, too, need schooling."

"Well, Polly, you must persuade Miss Snowe to undertake both you and me; to make you steady and womanly, and me refined and classical."

The light in which M. de Bassompierre evidently regarded "Miss Snowe," used to occasion me much inward edification. What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr. Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional, perhaps, too strict, limited, and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature — adventurous, indocile, and audacious. I smiled at them all. If any one knew me it was little Paulina Mary.

As I would not be Paulina's nominal and paid companion, genial and harmonious as I began to find her intercourse, she persuaded me to join her in some study, as a regular and settled means of sustaining communication: she proposed the German language, which, like myself, she found difficult of mastery. We agreed to take our lessons in the Rue Crécy of the same mistress; this arrangement threw us together for some hours of every week. M. de Bassompierre seemed quite pleased: it perfectly met his approbation, that Madame Minerva Gravity should associate a portion of her leisure with that of his fair and dear child.

That other self-elected judge of mine, the professor in the Rue Fossette, discovering by some surreptitious spying means, that I was no longer so stationary as hitherto, but went out regularly at certain hours of certain days, took it upon himself to place me under surveillance. People said M. Emanuel had been brought up amongst Jesuits. I should more readily have accredited this report had his manoeuvres been better masked. As it was, I doubted it. Never was a more undisguised schemer, a franker, looser intriguer. He would analyze his own machinations: elaborately contrive plots, and forthwith indulge in explanatory boasts of their skill. I know not whether I was more amused or provoked, by his stepping up to me one morning and whispering solemnly that he "had his eye on me: he at least would discharge the duty of a friend, and not leave me entirely to my own devices. My, proceedings seemed at present very unsettled: he did not know what to make of them: he thought his cousin Beck very much to blame in suffering this sort of fluttering inconsistency in a teacher attached to her house. What had a person devoted to a serious calling, that of education, to do with Counts and Countesses, hotels and châteaux? To him, I seemed altogether 'en l'air.' On his faith, he believed I went out six days in the seven."

I said, "Monsieur exaggerated. I certainly had enjoyed the advantage of a little change lately, but not before it had become necessary; and the privilege was by no means exercised in excess."

"Necessary! How was it necessary? I was well enough, he supposed? Change necessary! He would recommend me to look at the Catholic 'religieuses,' and study their lives. They asked no change."

I am no judge of what expression crossed my face when he thus spoke, but it was one which provoked him: he accused me of being reckless, worldly, and epicurean; ambitious of greatness, and feverishly athirst for the pomps and vanities of life. It seems I had no "dévouement," no "récueillement" in my character; no spirit of grace, faith, sacrifice, or self-abasement. Feeling the inutility of answering these charges, I mutely continued the correction of a pile of English exercises.

"He could see in me nothing Christian: like many other Protestants, I revelled in the pride and self-will of paganism."

I slightly turned from him, nestling still closer under the wing of silence.

A vague sound grumbled between his teeth; it could not surely be a "juron:" he was too religious for that; but I am certain I heard the word sacré. Grievous to relate, the same word was repeated, with the unequivocal addition of mille something, when I passed him about two hours afterwards in the corridor, prepared to go and take my German lesson in the Rue Crécy. Never was a better little man, in some points, than M. Paul: never, in others, a more waspish little despot.

* * * * *

Our German mistress, Fräulein Anna Braun, was a worthy, hearty woman, of about forty-five; she ought, perhaps, to have lived in the days of Queen Elizabeth, as she habitually consumed, for her first and second breakfasts, beer and beef: also, her direct and downright Deutsch nature seemed to suffer a sensation of cruel restraint from what she called our

English reserve; though we thought we were very cordial with her: but we did not slap her on the shoulder, and if we consented to kiss her cheek, it was done quietly, and without any explosive smack. These omissions oppressed and depressed her considerably; still, on the whole, we got on very well. Accustomed to instruct foreign girls, who hardly ever will think and study for themselves — who have no idea of grappling with a difficulty, and overcoming it by dint of reflection or application — our progress, which in truth was very leisurely, seemed to astound her. In her eyes, we were a pair of glacial prodigies, cold, proud, and preternatural.

The young Countess was a little proud, a little fastidious: and perhaps, with her native delicacy and beauty, she had a right to these feelings; but I think it was a total mistake to ascribe them to me. I never evaded the morning salute, which Paulina would slip when she could; nor was a certain little manner of still disdain a weapon known in my armoury of defence; whereas, Paulina always kept it clear, fine, and bright, and any rough German sally called forth at once its steelly glisten.

Honest Anna Braun, in some measure, felt this difference; and while she half-feared, half-worshipped Paulina, as a sort of dainty nymph — an Undine — she took refuge with me, as a being all mortal, and of easier mood.

A book we liked well to read and translate was Schiller's Ballads; Paulina soon learned to read them beautifully; the Fräulein would listen to her with a broad smile of pleasure, and say her voice sounded like music. She translated them, too, with a facile flow of language, and in a strain of kindred and poetic fervour: her cheek would flush, her lips tremblingly smile, her beauteous eyes kindle or melt as she went on. She learnt the best by heart, and would often recite them when we were alone together. One she liked well was "Des Mädchens Klage:" that is, she liked well to repeat the words, she found plaintive melody in the sound; the sense she would criticise. She murmured, as we sat over the fire one evening: —

Du Heilige, rufe dein Kind zurück,
Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück,
Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!

"Lived and loved!" said she, "is that the summit of earthly happiness, the end of life — to love? I don't think it is. It may be the extreme of mortal misery, it may be sheer waste of time, and fruitless torture of feeling. If Schiller had said to be loved, he might have come nearer the truth. Is not that another thing, Lucy, to be loved?"

"I suppose it may be: but why consider the subject? What is love to you? What do you know about it?"

She crimsoned, half in irritation, half in shame.

"Now, Lucy," she said, "I won't take that from you. It may be well for papa to look on me as a baby: I rather prefer that he should thus view me; but you know and shall learn to acknowledge that I am verging on my nineteenth year."

"No matter if it were your twenty-ninth; we will anticipate no feelings by discussion and conversation; we will not talk about love."

"Indeed, indeed!" said she — all in hurry and heat — "you may think to check and hold me in, as much as you please; but I have talked about it, and heard about it too; and a great deal and lately, and disagreeably and detrimentally: and in a way you wouldn't approve."

And the vexed, triumphant, pretty, naughty being laughed. I could not discern what she meant, and I would not ask her: I was nonplussed. Seeing, however, the utmost innocence in her countenance — combined with some transient perverseness and petulance — I said at last, —

"Who talks to you disagreeably and detrimentally on such matters? Who that has near access to you would dare to do it?"

"Lucy," replied she more softly, "it is a person who makes me miserable sometimes; and I wish she would keep away — I don't want her."

"But who, Paulina, can it be? You puzzle me much."

"It is — it is my cousin Ginevra. Every time she has leave to visit Mrs. Cholmondeley she calls here, and whenever she finds me alone she begins to talk about her admirers. Love, indeed! You should hear all she has to say about love."

"Oh, I have heard it," said I, quite coolly; "and on the whole, perhaps it is as well you should have heard it too: it is not to be regretted, it is all right. Yet, surely, Ginevra's mind cannot influence yours. You can look over both her head and her heart."

"She does influence me very much. She has the art of disturbing my happiness and unsettling my opinions. She hurts me through the feelings and people dearest to me."

"What does she say, Paulina? Give me some idea. There may be counteraction of the damage done."

"The people I have longest and most esteemed are degraded by her. She does not spare Mrs. Bretton — she does not spare…. Graham."

"No, I daresay: and how does she mix up these with her sentiment and her….love? She does mix them, I suppose?"

"Lucy, she is insolent; and, I believe, false. You know Dr. Bretton. We both know him. He may be careless and proud; but when was he ever mean or slavish? Day after day she shows him to me kneeling at her feet, pursuing her like her shadow. She — repulsing him with insult, and he imploring her with infatuation. Lucy, is it true? Is any of it true?"

"It may be true that he once thought her handsome: does she give him out as still her suitor?"

"She says she might marry him any day: he only waits her consent."

"It is these tales which have caused that reserve in your manner towards Graham which your father noticed."

"They have certainly made me all doubtful about his character. As

Ginevra speaks, they do not carry with them the sound of unmixed truth:

I believe she exaggerates — perhaps invents — but I want to know how far.”

“Suppose we bring Miss Fanshawe to some proof. Give her an opportunity of displaying the power she boasts.”

“I could do that to-morrow. Papa has asked some gentlemen to dinner, all savants. Graham, who, papa is beginning to discover, is a savant, too — skilled, they say, in more than one branch of science — is among the number. Now I should be miserable to sit at table unsupported, amidst such a party. I could not talk to Messieurs A — — and Z — — , the Parisian Academicians: all my new credit for manner would be put in peril. You and Mrs. Bretton must come for my sake; Ginevra, at a word, will join you.”

“Yes; then I will carry a message of invitation, and she shall have the chance of justifying her character for veracity.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HÔTEL CRÉCY.

The morrow turned out a more lively and busy day than we — or than I, at least-had anticipated. It seems it was the birthday of one of the young princes of Labassecour-the eldest, I think, the Duc de Dindonneau, and a general holiday was given in his honour at the schools, and especially at the principal "Athénée," or college. The youth of that institution had also concocted, and were to present a loyal address; for which purpose they were to be assembled in the public building where the yearly examinations were conducted, and the prizes distributed. After the ceremony of presentation, an oration, or "discours," was to follow from one of the professors.

Several of M. de Bassompierre's friends-the savants-being more or less connected with the Athénée, they were expected to attend on this occasion; together with the worshipful municipality of Villette, M. le Chevalier Staas, the burgomaster, and the parents and kinsfolk of the Athenians in general. M. de Bassompierre was engaged by his friends to accompany them; his fair daughter would, of course, be of the party, and she wrote a little note to Ginevra and myself, bidding us come early that we might join her.

As Miss Fanshawe and I were dressing in the dormitory of the Rue
Fossette, she (Miss F.) suddenly burst into a laugh.

"What now?" I asked; for she had suspended the operation of arranging her attire, and was gazing at me.

"It seems so odd," she replied, with her usual half-honest half-insolent unreserve, "that you and I should now be so much on a level, visiting in the same sphere; having the same connections."

"Why, yes," said I; "I had not much respect for the connections you chiefly frequented awhile ago: Mrs. Cholmondeley and Co. would never have suited me at all."

"Who are you, Miss Snowe?" she inquired, in a tone of such undisguised and unsophisticated curiosity, as made me laugh in my turn.

"You used to call yourself a nursery governess; when you first came here you really had the care of the children in this house: I have seen you carry little Georgette in your arms, like a bonne — few governesses would have condescended so far — and now Madame Beck treats you with more courtesy than she treats the Parisienne, St. Pierre; and that proud chit, my cousin, makes you her bosom friend!"

"Wonderful!" I agreed, much amused at her mystification. "Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don't look the character."

"I wonder you are not more flattered by all this," she went on; "you take it with strange composure. If you really are the nobody I once thought you, you must be a cool hand."

"The nobody you once thought me!" I repeated, and my face grew a little hot; but I would not be angry: of what importance was a school-girl's crude use of the terms nobody and somebody? I confined myself, therefore, to the remark that I had merely met with civility; and asked "what she saw in civility to throw the recipient into a fever of confusion?"

"One can't help wondering at some things," she persisted.

"Wondering at marvels of your own manufacture. Are you ready at last?"

"Yes; let me take your arm."

"I would rather not: we will walk side by side."

When she took my arm, she always leaned upon me her whole weight; and, as I was not a gentleman, or her lover, I did not like it.

"There, again!" she cried. "I thought, by offering to take your arm, to intimate approbation of your dress and general appearance: I meant it as a compliment."

"You did? You meant, in short, to express that you are not ashamed to be seen in the street with me? That if Mrs. Cholmondeley should be fondling her lapdog at some window, or Colonel de Hamal picking his teeth in a balcony, and should catch a glimpse of us, you would not quite blush for your companion?"

"Yes," said she, with that directness which was her best point — which gave an honest plainness to her very fibs when she told them — which was, in short, the salt, the sole preservative ingredient of a character otherwise not formed to keep.

I delegated the trouble of commenting on this "yes" to my countenance; or rather, my under-lip voluntarily anticipated my tongue of course, reverence and solemnity were not the feelings expressed in the look I gave her.

"Scornful, sneering creature!" she went on, as we crossed a great square, and entered the quiet, pleasant park, our nearest way to the Rue Crécy. "Nobody in this world was ever such a Turk to me as you are!"

"You bring it on yourself: let me alone: have the sense to be quiet: I will let you alone."

"As if one could let you alone, when you are so peculiar and so mysterious!"

"The mystery and peculiarity being entirely the conception of your own brain — maggots — neither more nor less, be so good as to keep them out of my sight."

"But are you anybody?" persevered she, pushing her hand, in spite of me, under my arm; and that arm pressed itself with inhospitable closeness against my side, by way of keeping out the intruder.

"Yes," I said, "I am a rising character: once an old lady's companion, then a nursery-governess, now a school-teacher."

“Do — do tell me who you are? I’ll not repeat it,” she urged, adhering with ludicrous tenacity to the wise notion of an incognito she had got hold of; and she squeezed the arm of which she had now obtained full possession, and coaxed and conjured till I was obliged to pause in the park to laugh. Throughout our walk she rang the most fanciful changes on this theme; proving, by her obstinate credulity, or incredulity, her incapacity to conceive how any person not bolstered up by birth or wealth, not supported by some consciousness of name or connection, could maintain an attitude of reasonable integrity. As for me, it quite sufficed to my mental tranquillity that I was known where it imported that known I should be; the rest sat on me easily: pedigree, social position, and recondite intellectual acquisition, occupied about the same space and place in my interests and thoughts; they were my third-class lodgers — to whom could be assigned only the small sitting-room and the little back bedroom: even if the dining and drawing-rooms stood empty, I never confessed it to them, as thinking minor accommodations better suited to their circumstances. The world, I soon learned, held a different estimate: and I make no doubt, the world is very right in its view, yet believe also that I am not quite wrong in mine.

There are people whom a lowered position degrades morally, to whom loss of connection costs loss of self-respect: are not these justified in placing the highest value on that station and association which is their safeguard from debasement? If a man feels that he would become contemptible in his own eyes were it generally known that his ancestry were simple and not gentle, poor and not rich, workers and not capitalists, would it be right severely to blame him for keeping these fatal facts out of sight — for starting, trembling, quailing at the chance which threatens exposure? The longer we live, the more out experience widens; the less prone are we to judge our neighbour’s conduct, to question the world’s wisdom: wherever an accumulation of small defences is found, whether surrounding the prude’s virtue or the man of the world’s respectability, there, be sure, it is needed.

We reached the Hôtel Crécy; Paulina was ready; Mrs. Bretton was with her; and, under her escort and that of M. de Bassompierre, we were soon conducted to the place of assembly, and seated in good seats, at a convenient distance from the Tribune. The youth of the Athénée were marshalled before us, the municipality and their bourgmestre were in places of honour, the young princes, with their tutors, occupied a conspicuous position, and the body of the building was crowded with the aristocracy and first burghers of the town.

Concerning the identity of the professor by whom the “discours” was to be delivered, I had as yet entertained neither care nor question. Some vague expectation I had that a savant would stand up and deliver a formal speech, half dogmatism to the Athenians, half flattery to the princes.

The Tribune was yet empty when we entered, but in ten minutes after it was filled; suddenly, in a second of time, a head, chest, and arms grew above the crimson desk. This head I knew: its colour, shape, port, expression, were familiar both to me and Miss Fanshawe; the blackness and closeness of cranium, the amplitude and paleness of brow, the blueness and fire of glance, were details so domesticated in the memory, and so knit with many a whimsical association, as almost by this their sudden apparition, to tickle fancy to a laugh. Indeed, I confess, for my part, I did laugh till I was warm; but then I bent my head, and made my handkerchief and a lowered veil the sole confidants of my mirth.

I think I was glad to see M. Paul; I think it was rather pleasant than otherwise, to behold him set up there, fierce and frank, dark and candid, testy and fearless, as when regnant on his estrade in class. His presence was such a surprise: I had not once thought of expecting him, though I knew he filled the chair of Belles Lettres in the college. With him in that Tribune, I felt sure that neither formalism nor flattery would be our doom; but for what was vouchsafed us, for what was poured suddenly, rapidly, continuously, on our heads — I own I was not prepared.

He spoke to the princes, the nobles, the magistrates, and the burghers, with just the same ease, with almost the same pointed, choleric earnestness, with which he was wont to harangue the three divisions of the Rue Fossette. The collegians he addressed, not as schoolboys, but as future citizens and embryo patriots. The times which have since come on Europe had not been foretold yet, and M. Emanuel's spirit seemed new to me. Who would have thought the flat and fat soil of Labassecour could yield political convictions and national feelings, such as were now strongly expressed? Of the bearing of his opinions I need here give no special indication; yet it may be permitted me to say that I believed the little man not more earnest than right in what he said: with all his fire he was severe and sensible; he trampled Utopian theories under his heel; he rejected wild dreams with scorn; — but when he looked in the face of tyranny — oh, then there opened a light in his eye worth seeing; and when he spoke of injustice, his voice gave no uncertain sound, but reminded me rather of the band-trumpet, ringing at twilight from the park.

I do not think his audience were generally susceptible of sharing his flame in its purity; but some of the college youth caught fire as he eloquently told them what should be their path and endeavour in their country's and in Europe's future. They gave him a long, loud, ringing cheer, as he concluded: with all his fierceness, he was their favourite professor.

As our party left the Hall, he stood at the entrance; he saw and knew me, and lifted his hat; he offered his hand in passing, and uttered the words "Qu'en dites vous?" — question eminently characteristic, and reminding me, even in this his moment of triumph, of that inquisitive restlessness, that absence of what I considered desirable self-control, which were amongst his faults. He should not have cared just then to ask what I thought, or what anybody thought, but he did care, and he was too natural to conceal, too impulsive to repress his wish. Well! if I blamed his over-eagerness, I liked his naiveté. I would have praised him: I had plenty of praise in my heart; but, alas! no words on my lips. Who has words at the right moment? I stammered some lame expressions; but was truly glad when other people, coming up with profuse congratulations, covered my deficiency by their redundancy.

A gentleman introduced him to M. de Bassompierre; and the Count, who had likewise been highly gratified, asked him to join his friends (for the most part M. Emanuel's likewise), and to dine with them at the Hôtel Crécy. He declined dinner, for he was a man always somewhat shy at meeting the advances of the wealthy: there was a strength of sturdy independence in the stringing of his sinews — not obtrusive, but pleasant enough to discover as one advanced in knowledge of his character; he promised, however, to step in with his friend, M. A — — , a French Academician, in the course of the evening.

At dinner that day, Ginevra and Paulina each looked, in her own way, very beautiful; the former, perhaps, boasted the advantage in material charms, but the latter shone pre-eminent for attractions more subtle and spiritual: for light and eloquence of eye, for grace of mien, for winning variety of expression. Ginevra's dress of deep crimson relieved well her light curls, and harmonized with her rose-like bloom. Paulina's attire — in fashion close, though faultlessly neat, but in texture clear and white — made the eye grateful for the delicate life of her complexion, for the soft animation of her countenance, for the tender depth of her eyes, for the brown shadow and bounteous flow of her hair — darker than that of her Saxon cousin, as were also her eyebrows, her eyelashes, her full irids, and large mobile pupils. Nature having traced all these details slightly, and with a careless hand, in Miss Fanshawe's case; and in Miss de Bassompierre's, wrought them to a high and delicate finish.

Paulina was awed by the savants, but not quite to mutism: she conversed modestly, diffidently; not without effort, but with so true a sweetness, so fine and penetrating a sense, that her father more than once suspended his own discourse to listen, and fixed on her an eye of proud delight. It was a polite Frenchman, M. Z — — , a very learned, but quite a courtly man, who had drawn her into discourse. I was charmed with her French; it was faultless — the structure correct, the idioms true, the accent pure; Ginevra, who had lived half her life on the Continent, could do nothing like it not that words ever failed Miss Fanshawe, but real accuracy and purity she neither possessed, nor in any number of years would acquire. Here, too, M. de Bassompierre was gratified; for, on the point of language, he was critical.

Another listener and observer there was; one who, detained by some exigency of his profession, had come in late to dinner. Both ladies were quietly scanned by Dr. Bretton, at the moment of taking his seat at the table; and that guarded survey was more than once renewed. His arrival roused Miss Fanshawe, who had hitherto appeared listless: she now became smiling and complacent, talked — though what she said was rarely to the purpose — or rather, was of a purpose somewhat mortifyingly below the standard of the occasion. Her light, disconnected prattle might have gratified Graham once; perhaps it pleased him still: perhaps it was only fancy which suggested the thought that, while his eye was filled and his ear fed, his taste, his keen zest, his lively intelligence, were not equally consulted and regaled. It is certain that, restless and exacting as seemed the demand on his attention, he yielded courteously all that was required: his manner showed neither pique nor coolness: Ginevra was his neighbour, and to her, during dinner, he almost exclusively confined his notice. She appeared satisfied, and passed to the drawing-room in very good spirits.

Yet, no sooner had we reached that place of refuge, than she again became flat and listless: throwing herself on a couch, she denounced both the "discours" and the dinner as stupid affairs, and inquired of her cousin how she could hear such a set of prosaic "gros-bonnets" as her father gathered about him. The moment the gentlemen were heard to move, her railings ceased: she started up, flew to the piano, and dashed at it with spirit. Dr. Bretton entering, one of the first, took up his station beside her. I thought he would not long maintain that post: there was a position near the hearth to which I expected to see him attracted: this position he only scanned with his eye; while he looked, others drew in. The grace and mind of Paulina charmed these thoughtful Frenchmen: the fineness of her beauty, the soft courtesy of her manner, her immature, but real and inbred tact, pleased their national taste; they clustered about her, not indeed to talk science; which would have rendered her dumb, but to touch on many subjects in letters, in arts, in actual life, on which it soon appeared that she had both read and reflected. I listened. I am sure that though Graham stood aloof, he listened too: his hearing as well as his vision was very fine, quick, discriminating. I knew he gathered the conversation; I felt that the mode in which it was sustained suited him exquisitely — pleased him almost to pain.

In Paulina there was more force, both of feeling and character; than most people thought — than Graham himself imagined — than she would ever show to those who did not wish to see it. To speak truth, reader, there is no excellent beauty, no accomplished grace, no reliable refinement, without strength as excellent, as complete, as trustworthy. As well might you look for good fruit and blossom on a rootless and sapless tree, as for charms that will endure in a feeble and relaxed nature. For a little while, the blooming semblance of beauty may flourish round weakness; but it cannot bear a blast: it soon fades, even in serenest sunshine. Graham would have started had any suggestive spirit whispered of the sinew and the stamina sustaining that delicate nature; but I who had known her as a child, knew or guessed by what a good and strong root her graces held to the firm soil of reality.

While Dr. Bretton listened, and waited an opening in the magic circle, his glance restlessly sweeping the room at intervals, lighted by chance on me, where I sat in a quiet nook not far from my godmother and M. de

Bassompierre, who, as usual, were engaged in what Mr. Home called “a two-handed crack:” what the Count would have interpreted as a tête-à-tête. Graham smiled recognition, crossed the room, asked me how I was, told me I looked pale. I also had my own smile at my own thought: it was now about three months since Dr. John had spoken to me-a lapse of which he was not even conscious. He sat down, and became silent. His wish was rather to look than converse. Ginevra and Paulina were now opposite to him: he could gaze his fill: he surveyed both forms — studied both faces.

Several new guests, ladies as well as gentlemen, had entered the room since dinner, dropping in for the evening conversation; and amongst the gentlemen, I may incidentally observe, I had already noticed by glimpses, a severe, dark, professorial outline, hovering aloof in an inner saloon, seen only in vista. M. Emanuel knew many of the gentlemen present, but I think was a stranger to most of the ladies, excepting myself; in looking towards the hearth, he could not but see me, and naturally made a movement to approach; seeing, however, Dr. Bretton also, he changed his mind and held back. If that had been all, there would have been no cause for quarrel; but not satisfied with holding back, he puckered up his eyebrows, protruded his lip, and looked so ugly that I averted my eyes from the displeasing spectacle. M. Joseph Emanuel had arrived, as well as his austere brother, and at this very moment was relieving Ginevra at the piano. What a master-touch succeeded her school-girl jingle! In what grand, grateful tones the instrument acknowledged the hand of the true artist!

“Lucy,” began Dr. Bretton, breaking silence and smiling, as Ginevra glided before him, casting a glance as she passed by, “Miss Fanshawe is certainly a fine girl.”

Of course I assented.

“Is there,” he pursued, “another in the room as lovely?”

“I think there is not another as handsome.”

“I agree with you, Lucy: you and I do often agree in opinion, in taste,

I think; or at least in judgment.”

“Do we?” I said, somewhat doubtfully.

“I believe if you had been a boy, Lucy, instead of a girl — my mother’s god-son instead of her god-daughter, we should have been good friends: our opinions would have melted into each other.”

He had assumed a bantering air: a light, half-caressing, half-ironic, shone aslant in his eye. Ah, Graham! I have given more than one solitary moment to thoughts and calculations of your estimate of Lucy Snowe: was it always kind or just? Had Lucy been intrinsically the same but possessing the additional advantages of wealth and station, would your manner to her, your value for her, have been quite what they actually were? And yet by these questions I would not seriously infer blame. No; you might sadden and trouble me sometimes; but then mine was a soon-depressed, an easily-deranged temperament — it fell if a cloud crossed the sun. Perhaps before the eye of severe equity I should stand more at fault than you.

Trying, then, to keep down the unreasonable pain which thrilled my heart, on thus being made to feel that while Graham could devote to others the most grave and earnest, the manliest interest, he had no more than light raillery for Lucy, the friend of lang syne, I inquired calmly, — “On what points are we so closely in accordance?”

“We each have an observant faculty. You, perhaps, don’t give me credit for the possession; yet I have it.”

“But you were speaking of tastes: we may see the same objects, yet estimate them differently?”

“Let us bring it to the test. Of course, you cannot but render homage to the merits of Miss Fanshawe: now, what do you think of others in the room? — my mother, for instance; or the lions yonder, Messieurs A — — and Z — — ; or, let us say, that pale little lady, Miss de Bassompierre?”

“You know what I think of your mother. I have not thought of Messieurs A — — and Z — — .”

“And the other?”

“I think she is, as you say, a pale little lady — pale, certainly, just now, when she is fatigued with over-excitement.”

“You don’t remember her as a child?”

“I wonder, sometimes, whether you do.”

“I had forgotten her; but it is noticeable, that circumstances, persons, even words and looks, that had slipped your memory, may, under certain conditions, certain aspects of your own or another’s mind, revive.”

“That is possible enough.”

“Yet,” he continued, “the revival is imperfect — needs confirmation, partakes so much of the dim character of a dream, or of the airy one of a fancy, that the testimony of a witness becomes necessary for corroboration. Were you not a guest at Bretton ten years ago, when Mr. Home brought his little girl, whom we then called ‘little Polly,’ to stay with mamma?”

“I was there the night she came, and also the morning she went away.”

“Rather a peculiar child, was she not? I wonder how I treated her. Was I fond of children in those days? Was there anything gracious or kindly about me — great, reckless, schoolboy as I was? But you don’t recollect me, of course?”

“You have seen your own picture at La Terrasse. It is like you personally. In manner, you were almost the same yesterday as to-day.”

“But, Lucy, how is that? Such an oracle really whets my curiosity. What am I to-day? What was I the yesterday of ten years back?”

“Gracious to whatever pleased you — unkindly or cruel to nothing.”

“There you are wrong; I think I was almost a brute to you, for instance.”

“A brute! No, Graham: I should never have patiently endured brutality.”

“This, however, I do remember: quiet Lucy Snowe tasted nothing of my grace.”

"As little of your cruelty."

"Why, had I been Nero himself, I could not have tormented a being inoffensive as a shadow."

I smiled; but I also hushed a groan. Oh! — I just wished he would let me alone — cease allusion to me. These epithets — these attributes I put from me. His "quiet Lucy Snowe," his "inoffensive shadow," I gave him back; not with scorn, but with extreme weariness: theirs was the coldness and the pressure of lead; let him whelm me with no such weight. Happily, he was soon on another theme.

"On what terms were 'little Polly' and I? Unless my recollections deceive me, we were not foes — "

"You speak very vaguely. Do you think little Polly's memory, not more definite?"

"Oh! we don't talk of 'little Polly' now. Pray say, Miss de Bassompierre; and, of course, such a stately personage remembers nothing of Bretton. Look at her large eyes, Lucy; can they read a word in the page of memory? Are they the same which I used to direct to a horn-book? She does not know that I partly taught her to read."

"In the Bible on Sunday nights?"

"She has a calm, delicate, rather fine profile now: once what a little restless, anxious countenance was hers! What a thing is a child's preference — what a bubble! Would you believe it? that lady was fond of me!"

"I think she was in some measure fond of you," said I, moderately.

"You don't remember then? I had forgotten; but I remember now. She liked me the best of whatever there was at Bretton."

"You thought so."

"I quite well recall it. I wish I could tell her all I recall; or rather, I wish some one, you for instance, would go behind and whisper it all in her ear, and I could have the delight — here, as I sit — of watching her look under the intelligence. Could you manage that, think you, Lucy, and make me ever grateful?"

"Could I manage to make you ever grateful?" said I. "No, I could not." And I felt my fingers work and my hands interlock: I felt, too, an inward courage, warm and resistant. In this matter I was not disposed to gratify Dr. John: not at all. With now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a role not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke. Leaning towards me coaxingly, he said, softly, "Do content me, Lucy."

And I would have contented, or, at least, I would clearly have enlightened him, and taught him well never again to expect of me the part of officious soubrette in a love drama; when, following his, soft, eager, murmur, meeting almost his pleading, mellow — "Do content me, Lucy!" a sharp hiss pierced my ear on the other side.

"Petite chatte, doucerette, coquette!" sibillated the sudden boa-constrictor; "vous avez l'air bien triste, soumis, rêveur, mais vous ne l'êtes pas: c'est moi qui vous le dis: Sauvage! la flamme à l'âme, l'éclair aux yeux!"

"Oui; j'ai la flamme à l'âme, et je dois l'avoir!" retorted I, turning in just wrath: but Professor Emanuel had hissed his insult and was gone.

The worst of the matter was, that Dr. Bretton, whose ears, as I have said, were quick and fine, caught every word of this apostrophe; he put his handkerchief to his face, and laughed till he shook.

"Well done, Lucy," cried he; "capital! petite chatte, petite coquette! Oh, I must tell my mother! Is it true, Lucy, or half-true? I believe it is: you redden to the colour of Miss Fanshawe's gown. And really, by my word, now I examine him, that is the same little man who was so savage with you at the concert: the very same, and in his soul he is frantic at this moment because he sees me laughing. Oh! I must tease him."

And Graham, yielding to his bent for mischief, laughed, jested, and whispered on till I could bear no more, and my eyes filled.

Suddenly he was sobered: a vacant space appeared near Miss de Bassompierre; the circle surrounding her seemed about to dissolve. This movement was instantly caught by Graham's eye — ever-vigilant, even while laughing; he rose, took his courage in both hands, crossed the room, and made the advantage his own. Dr. John, throughout his whole life, was a man of luck — a man of success. And why? Because he had the eye to see his opportunity, the heart to prompt to well-timed action, the nerve to consummate a perfect work. And no tyrant-passion dragged him back; no enthusiasms, no foibles encumbered his way. How well he looked at this very moment! When Paulina looked up as he reached her side, her glance mingled at once with an encountering glance, animated, yet modest; his colour, as he spoke to her, became half a blush, half a glow. He stood in her presence brave and bashful: subdued and unobtrusive, yet decided in his purpose and devoted in his ardour. I gathered all this by one view. I did not prolong my observation — time failed me, had inclination served: the night wore late; Ginevra and I ought already to have been in the Rue Fossette. I rose, and bade good-night to my godmother and M. de Bassompierre.

I know not whether Professor Emanuel had noticed my reluctant acceptance of Dr. Bretton's badinage, or whether he perceived that I was pained, and that, on the whole, the evening had not been one flow of exultant enjoyment for the volatile, pleasure-loving Mademoiselle Lucie; but, as I was leaving the room, he stepped up and inquired whether I had any one to attend me to the Rue Fossette. The professor now spoke politely, and even deferentially, and he looked apologetic and repentant; but I could not recognise his civility at a word, nor meet his contrition with crude, premature oblivion. Never hitherto had I felt seriously disposed to resent his brusqueries, or freeze before his fierceness; what he had said to-night, however, I considered unwarranted: my extreme disapprobation of the proceeding must be marked, however slightly. I merely said: — "I am provided with attendance."

Which was true, as Ginevra and I were to be sent home in the carriage; and I passed him with the sliding obeisance with which he was wont to be saluted in classe by pupils crossing his estrade.

Having sought my shawl, I returned to the vestibule. M. Emanuel stood there as if waiting. He observed that the night was fine.

"Is it?" I said, with a tone and manner whose consummate chariness and frostiness I could not but applaud. It was so seldom I could properly act out my own resolution to be reserved and cool where I had been grieved or hurt, that I felt almost proud of this one successful effort. That "Is it?" sounded just like the manner of other people. I had heard hundreds of such little minced, docked, dry phrases, from the pursed-up coral lips of a score of self-possessed, self-sufficing misses and mesdemoiselles. That M. Paul would not stand any prolonged experience of this sort of dialogue I knew; but he certainly merited a sample of the curt and arid. I believe he thought so himself, for he took the dose quietly. He looked at my shawl and objected to its lightness. I decidedly told him it was as heavy as I wished. Receding aloof, and standing apart, I leaned on the banister of the stairs, folded my shawl about me, and fixed my eyes on a dreary religious painting darkening the wall.

Ginevra was long in coming: tedious seemed her loitering. M. Paul was still there; my ear expected from his lips an angry tone. He came nearer. "Now for another hiss!" thought I: had not the action been too uncivil I could have, stopped my ears with my fingers in terror of the thrill. Nothing happens as we expect: listen for a coo or a murmur; it is then you will hear a cry of prey or pain. Await a piercing shriek, an angry threat, and welcome an amicable greeting, a low kind whisper. M. Paul spoke gently: — "Friends," said he, "do not quarrel for a word. Tell me, was it I or ce grand fat d'Anglais" (so he profanely denominated Dr. Bretton), "who made your eyes so humid, and your cheeks so hot as they are even now?"

"I am not conscious of you, monsieur, or of any other having excited such emotion as you indicate," was my answer; and in giving it, I again surpassed my usual self, and achieved a neat, frosty falsehood.

"But what did I say?" he pursued; "tell me: I was angry: I have forgotten my words; what were they?"

"Such as it is best to forget!" said I, still quite calm and chill.

"Then it was my words which wounded you? Consider them unsaid: permit my retractation; accord my pardon."

"I am not angry, Monsieur."

"Then you are worse than angry — grieved. Forgive me, Miss Lucy."

"M. Emanuel, I do forgive you."

"Let me hear you say, in the voice natural to you, and not in that alien tone, 'Mon ami, je vous pardonne.'"

He made me smile. Who could help smiling at his wistfulness, his simplicity, his earnestness?

"Bon!" he cried. "Voilà que le jour va poindre! Dites donc, mon ami."

"Monsieur Paul, je vous pardonne."

"I will have no monsieur: speak the other word, or I shall not believe you sincere: another effort — mon ami, or else in English, — my friend!"

Now, "my friend" had rather another sound and significancy than "mon ami;" it did not breathe the same sense of domestic and intimate affection; "mon ami" I could not say to M. Paul; "my friend," I could, and did say without difficulty. This distinction existed not for him, however, and he was quite satisfied with the English phrase. He smiled. You should have seen him smile, reader; and you should have marked the difference between his countenance now, and that he wore half an hour ago. I cannot affirm that I had ever witnessed the smile of pleasure, or content, or kindness round M. Paul's lips, or in his eyes before. The ironic, the sarcastic, the disdainful, the passionately exultant, I had hundreds of times seen him express by what he called a smile, but any illuminated sign of milder or warmer feelings struck me as wholly new in his visage. It changed it as from a mask to a face: the deep lines left his features; the very complexion seemed clearer and fresher; that swart, sallow, southern darkness which spoke his Spanish blood, became displaced by a lighter hue. I know not that I have ever seen in any other human face an equal metamorphosis from a similar cause. He now took me to the carriage: at the same moment M. de Bassompierre came out with his niece.

In a pretty humour was Mistress Fanshawe; she had found the evening a grand failure: completely upset as to temper, she gave way to the most uncontrolled moroseness as soon as we were seated, and the carriage-door closed. Her invectives against Dr. Bretton had something venomous in them. Having found herself impotent either to charm or sting him, hatred was her only resource; and this hatred she expressed in terms so unmeasured and proportion so monstrous, that, after listening for a while with assumed stoicism, my outraged sense of justice at last and suddenly caught fire. An explosion ensued: for I could be passionate, too; especially with my present fair but faulty associate, who never failed to stir the worst dregs of me. It was well that the carriage-wheels made a tremendous rattle over the flinty Choseville pavement, for I can assure the reader there was neither dead silence nor calm discussion within the vehicle. Half in earnest, half in seeming, I made it my business to storm down Ginevra. She had set out rampant from the Rue Crécy; it was necessary to tame her before we reached the Rue Fossette: to this end it was indispensable to show up her sterling value and high deserts; and this must be done in language of which the fidelity and homeliness might challenge comparison with the compliments of a John Knox to a Mary Stuart. This was the right discipline for Ginevra; it suited her. I am quite sure she went to bed that night all the better and more settled in mind and mood, and slept all the more sweetly for having undergone a sound moral drubbing.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WATCHGUARD.

M. Paul Emanuel owned an acute sensitiveness to the annoyance of interruption, from whatsoever cause occurring, during his lessons: to pass through the classe under such circumstances was considered by the teachers and pupils of the school, individually and collectively, to be as much as a woman's or girl's life was worth.

Madame Beck herself, if forced to the enterprise, would "skurry" through, retrenching her skirts, and carefully coasting the formidable estrade, like a ship dreading breakers. As to Rosine, the portress — on whom, every half-hour, devolved the fearful duty of fetching pupils out of the very heart of one or other of the divisions to take their music-lessons in the oratory, the great or little saloon, the salle-à-manger, or some other piano-station — she would, upon her second or third attempt, frequently become almost tongue-tied from excess of consternation — a sentiment inspired by the unspeakable looks levelled at her through a pair of dart-dealing spectacles.

One morning I was sitting in the carré, at work upon a piece of embroidery which one of the pupils had commenced but delayed to finish, and while my fingers wrought at the frame, my ears regaled themselves with listening to the crescendos and cadences of a voice haranguing in the neighbouring classe, in tones that waxed momentarily more unquiet, more ominously varied. There was a good strong partition-wall between me and the gathering storm, as well as a facile means of flight through the glass-door to the court, in case it swept this way; so I am afraid I derived more amusement than alarm from these thickening symptoms. Poor Rosine was not safe: four times that blessed morning had she made the passage of peril; and now, for the fifth time, it became her dangerous duty to snatch, as it were, a brand from the burning — a pupil from under M. Paul's nose.

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" cried she. "Que vais-je devenir? Monsieur va me tuer, je suis sûre; car il est d'une colère!"

Nerved by the courage of desperation, she opened the door.

"Mademoiselle La Malle au piano!" was her cry.

Ere she could make good her retreat, or quite close the door, this voice uttered itself: —

"Dès ce moment! — la classe est défendue. La première qui ouvrira cette porte, ou passera par cette division, sera pendue — fut-ce Madame Beck elle-même!"

Ten minutes had not succeeded the promulgation of this decree when

Rosine's French pantoufles were again heard shuffling along the corridor.

"Mademoiselle," said she, "I would not for a five-franc piece go into that classe again just now: Monsieur's lunettes are really terrible; and here is a commissionaire come with a message from the Athénée. I have told Madame Beck I dare not deliver it, and she says I am to charge you with it."

"Me? No, that is rather too bad! It is not in my line of duty. Come, come, Rosine! bear your own burden. Be brave — charge once more!"

"I, Mademoiselle? — impossible! Five times I have crossed him this day. Madame must really hire a gendarme for this service. Ouf! Je n'en puis plus!"

"Bah! you are only a coward. What is the message?"

"Precisely of the kind with which Monsieur least likes to be pestered: an urgent summons to go directly to the Athénée, as there is an official visitor — inspector — I know not what — arrived, and Monsieur must meet him: you know how he hates a must."

Yes, I knew well enough. The restive little man detested spur or curb: against whatever was urgent or obligatory, he was sure to revolt. However, I accepted the responsibility — not, certainly, without fear, but fear blent with other sentiments, curiosity, amongst them. I opened the door, I entered, I closed it behind me as quickly and quietly as a rather unsteady hand would permit; for to be slow or bustling, to rattle a latch, or leave a door gaping wide, were aggravations of crime often more disastrous in result than the main crime itself. There I stood then, and there he sat; his humour was visibly bad — almost at its worst; he had been giving a lesson in arithmetic — for he gave lessons on any and every subject that struck his fancy — and arithmetic being a dry subject, invariably disagreed with him: not a pupil but trembled when he spoke of figures. He sat, bent above his desk: to look up at the sound of an entrance, at the occurrence of a direct breach of his will and law, was an effort he could not for the moment bring himself to make. It was quite as well: I thus gained time to walk up the long classe; and it suited my idiosyncracy far better to encounter the near burst of anger like his, than to bear its menace at a distance.

At his estrade I paused, just in front; of course I was not worthy of immediate attention: he proceeded with his lesson. Disdain would not do: he must hear and he must answer my message.

Not being quite tall enough to lift my head over his desk, elevated upon the estrade, and thus suffering eclipse in my present position, I ventured to peep round, with the design, at first, of merely getting a better view of his face, which had struck me when I entered as bearing a close and picturesque resemblance to that of a black and sallow tiger. Twice did I enjoy this side-view with impunity, advancing and receding unseen; the third time my eye had scarce dawned beyond the obscuration of the desk, when it was caught and transfixed through its very pupil — transfixed by the "lunettes." Rosine was right; these utensils had in them a blank and immutable terror, beyond the mobile wrath of the wearer's own unglazed eyes.

I now found the advantage of proximity: these short-sighted "lunettes" were useless for the inspection of a criminal under Monsieur's nose; accordingly, he doffed them, and he and I stood on more equal terms.

I am glad I was not really much afraid of him — that, indeed, close in his presence, I felt no terror at all; for upon his demanding cord and gibbet to execute the sentence recently pronounced, I was able to furnish him with a needleful of embroidering thread with such accommodating civility as could not but allay some portion at least of his surplus irritation. Of course I did not parade this courtesy before public view: I merely handed the thread round the angle of the desk, and attached it, ready noosed, to the barred back of the Professor's chair.

"Que me voulez-vous?" said he in a growl of which the music was wholly confined to his chest and throat, for he kept his teeth clenched; and seemed registering to himself an inward vow that nothing earthly should wring from him a smile.

My answer commenced uncompromisingly: "Monsieur," I said, "je veux l'impossible, des choses inouïes;" and thinking it best not to mince matters, but to administer the "douche" with decision, in a low but quick voice, I delivered the Athenian message, floridly exaggerating its urgency.

Of course, he would not hear a word of it. "He would not go; he would not leave his present class, let all the officials of Villette send for him. He would not put himself an inch out of his way at the bidding of king, cabinet, and chambers together."

I knew, however, that he must go; that, talk as he would, both his duty and interest commanded an immediate and literal compliance with the summons: I stood, therefore, waiting in silence, as if he had not yet spoken. He asked what more I wanted.

"Only Monsieur's answer to deliver to the commissionaire."

He waved an impatient negative.

I ventured to stretch my hand to the bonnet-grec which lay in grim repose on the window-sill. He followed this daring movement with his eye, no doubt in mixed pity and amazement at its presumption.

"Ah!" he muttered, "if it came to that — if Miss Lucy meddled with his bonnet-grec — she might just put it on herself, turn garçon for the occasion, and benevolently go to the Athénée in his stead."

With great respect, I laid the bonnet on the desk, where its tassel seemed to give me an awful nod.

"I'll write a note of apology — that will do!" said he, still bent on evasion.

Knowing well it would not do, I gently pushed the bonnet towards his hand. Thus impelled, it slid down the polished slope of the varnished and unbaized desk, carried before it the light steel-framed "lunettes," and, fearful to relate, they fell to the estrade. A score of times ere now had I seen them fall and receive no damage — this time, as Lucy Snowe's hapless luck would have it, they so fell that each clear pebble became a shivered and shapeless star.

Now, indeed, dismay seized me — dismay and regret. I knew the value of these "lunettes": M. Paul's sight was peculiar, not easily fitted, and these glasses suited him. I had heard him call them his treasures: as I picked them up, cracked and worthless, my hand trembled. Frightened through all my nerves I was to see the mischief I had done, but I think I was even more sorry than afraid. For some seconds I dared not look the bereaved Professor in the face; he was the first to speak.

"Là!" said he: "me voilà veuf de mes lunettes! I think Mademoiselle Lucy will now confess that the cord and gallows are amply earned; she trembles in anticipation of her doom. Ah, traitress! traitress! You are resolved to have me quite blind and helpless in your hands!"

I lifted my eyes: his face, instead of being irate, lowering, and furrowed, was overflowing with the smile, coloured with the bloom I had seen brightening it that evening at the Hotel Crécy. He was not angry — not even grieved. For the real injury he showed himself full of clemency; under the real provocation, patient as a saint. This event, which seemed so untoward — which I thought had ruined at once my chance of successful persuasion — proved my best help. Difficult of management so long as I had done him no harm, he became graciously pliant as soon as I stood in his presence a conscious and contrite offender.

Still gently railing at me as "une forte femme — une Anglaise terrible — une petite casse-tout" — he declared that he dared not but obey one who had given such an instance of her dangerous prowess; it was absolutely like the "grand Empereur smashing the vase to inspire dismay." So, at last, crowning himself with his bonnet-grec, and taking his ruined "lunettes" from my hand with a clasp of kind pardon and encouragement, he made his bow, and went off to the Athénée in first-rate humour and spirits.

* * * * *

After all this amiability, the reader will be sorry for my sake to hear that I was quarrelling with M. Paul again before night; yet so it was, and I could not help it.

It was his occasional custom — and a very laudable, acceptable custom, too — to arrive of an evening, always à l'improviste, unannounced, burst in on the silent hour of study, establish a sudden despotism over us and our occupations, cause books to be put away, work-bags to be brought out, and, drawing forth a single thick volume, or a handful of pamphlets, substitute for the besotted "lecture pieuse," drawled by a sleepy pupil, some tragedy made grand by grand reading, ardent by fiery action — some drama, whereof, for my part, I rarely studied the intrinsic merit; for M. Emanuel made it a vessel for an outpouring, and filled it with his native verve and passion like a cup with a vital brewage. Or else he would flash through our conventual darkness a reflex of a brighter world, show us a glimpse of the current literature of the day, read us passages from some enchanting tale, or the last witty feuilleton which had awakened laughter in the saloons of Paris; taking care always to expunge, with the severest hand, whether from tragedy, melodrama, tale, or essay, whatever passage, phrase, or word, could be deemed unsuited to an audience of "jeunes filles." I noticed more than once, that where retrenchment without substitute would have left unmeaning vacancy, or introduced weakness, he could, and did, improvise whole paragraphs, no less vigorous than irreproachable; the dialogue — the description — he engrafted was often far better than that he pruned away.

Well, on the evening in question, we were sitting silent as nuns in a "retreat," the pupils studying, the teachers working. I remember my work; it was a slight matter of fancy, and it rather interested me; it had a purpose; I was not doing it merely to kill time; I meant it when finished as a gift; and the occasion of presentation being near, haste was requisite, and my fingers were busy.

We heard the sharp bell-peal which we all knew; then the rapid step familiar to each ear: the words "Voilà Monsieur!" had scarcely broken simultaneously from every lip, when the two-leaved door split (as split it always did for his admission — such a slow word as "open" is inefficient to describe his movements), and he stood in the midst of us.

There were two study tables, both long and flanked with benches; over the centre of each hung a lamp; beneath this lamp, on either side the table, sat a teacher; the girls were arranged to the right hand and the left; the eldest and most studious nearest the lamps or tropics; the idlers and little ones towards the north and south poles. Monsieur's habit was politely to hand a chair to some teacher, generally Zélie St. Pierre, the senior mistress; then to take her vacated seat; and thus avail himself of the full beam of Cancer or Capricorn, which, owing to his near sight, he needed.

As usual, Zélie rose with alacrity, smiling to the whole extent of her mouth, and the full display of her upper and under rows of teeth — that strange smile which passes from ear to ear, and is marked only by a sharp thin curve, which fails to spread over the countenance, and neither dimples the cheek nor lights the eye. I suppose Monsieur did not see her, or he had taken a whim that he would not notice her, for he was as capricious as women are said to be; then his "lunettes" (he had got another pair) served him as an excuse for all sorts of little oversights and shortcomings. Whatever might be his reason, he passed by Zélie, came to the other side of the table, and before I could start up to clear the way, whispered, "Ne bougez pas," and established himself between me and Miss Fanshawe, who always would be my neighbour, and have her elbow in my side, however often I declared to her, "Ginevra, I wish you were at Jericho."

It was easy to say, "Ne bougez pas;" but how could I help it? I must make him room, and I must request the pupils to recede that I might recede. It was very well for Ginevra to be gummed to me, "keeping herself warm," as she said, on the winter evenings, and harassing my very heart with her fidgetings and pokings, obliging me, indeed, sometimes to put an artful pin in my girdle by way of protection against her elbow; but I suppose M. Emanuel was not to be subjected to the same kind of treatment, so I swept away my working materials, to clear space for his book, and withdrew myself to make room for his person; not, however, leaving more than a yard of interval, just what any reasonable man would have regarded as a convenient, respectful allowance of bench. But M. Emanuel never was reasonable; flint and tinder that he was! he struck and took fire directly.

"Vous ne voulez pas de moi pour voisin," he growled: "vous vous donnez des airs de caste; vous me traitez en paria;" he scowled. "Soit! je vais arranger la chose!" And he set to work.

"Levez vous toutes, Mesdemoiselles!" cried he.

The girls rose. He made them all file off to the other table. He then placed me at one extremity of the long bench, and having duly and carefully brought me my work-basket, silk, scissors, all my implements, he fixed himself quite at the other end.

At this arrangement, highly absurd as it was, not a soul in the room dared to laugh; luckless for the giggler would have been the giggle. As for me, I took it with entire coolness. There I sat, isolated and cut off from human intercourse; I sat and minded my work, and was quiet, and not at all unhappy.

"Est ce assez de distance?" he demanded.

"Monsieur en est l'arbitre," said I.

"Vous savez bien que non. C'est vous qui avez crée ce vide immense: moi je n'y ai pas mis la main."

And with this assertion he commenced the reading.

For his misfortune he had chosen a French translation of what he called "un drame de Williams Shackspire; le faux dieu," he further announced, "de ces sots païens, les Anglais." How far otherwise he would have characterized him had his temper not been upset, I scarcely need intimate.

Of course, the translation being French, was very inefficient; nor did I make any particular effort to conceal the contempt which some of its forlorn lapses were calculated to excite. Not that it behoved or beseemed me to say anything: but one can occasionally look the opinion it is forbidden to embody in words. Monsieur's lunettes being on the alert, he gleaned up every stray look; I don't think he lost one: the consequence was, his eyes soon discarded a screen, that their blaze might sparkle free, and he waxed hotter at the north pole to which he had voluntarily exiled himself, than, considering the general temperature of the room, it would have been reasonable to become under the vertical ray of Cancer itself.

The reading over, it appeared problematic whether he would depart with his anger unexpressed, or whether he would give it vent. Suppression was not much in his habits; but still, what had been done to him definite enough to afford matter for overt reproof? I had not uttered a sound, and could not justly be deemed amenable to reprimand or penalty for having permitted a slightly freer action than usual to the muscles about my eyes and mouth.

The supper, consisting of bread, and milk diluted with tepid water, was brought in. In respectful consideration of the Professor's presence, the rolls and glasses were allowed to stand instead of being immediately handed round.

"Take your supper, ladies," said he, seeming to be occupied in making marginal notes to his "Williams Shackspire." They took it. I also accepted a roll and glass, but being now more than ever interested in my work, I kept my seat of punishment, and wrought while I munched my bread and sipped my beverage, the whole with easy sang-froid; with a certain snugness of composure, indeed, scarcely in my habits, and pleasantly novel to my feelings. It seemed as if the presence of a nature so restless, chafing, thorny as that of M. Paul absorbed all feverish and unsettling influences like a magnet, and left me none but such as were placid and harmonious.

He rose. "Will he go away without saying another word?" Yes; he turned to the door.

No: he re-turned on his steps; but only, perhaps, to take his pencil-case, which had been left on the table.

He took it — shut the pencil in and out, broke its point against the wood, re-cut and pocketed it, and . . . walked promptly up to me.

The girls and teachers, gathered round the other table, were talking pretty freely: they always talked at meals; and, from the constant habit of speaking fast and loud at such times, did not now subdue their voices much.

M. Paul came and stood behind me. He asked at what I was working; and I said I was making a watchguard.

He asked, "For whom?" And I answered, "For a gentleman — one of my friends."

M. Paul stooped down and proceeded — as novel-writers say, and, as was literally true in his case — to "hiss" into my ear some poignant words.

He said that, of all the women he knew, I was the one who could make herself the most consummately unpleasant: I was she with whom it was least possible to live on friendly terms. I had a "caractère intraitable," and perverse to a miracle. How I managed it, or what possessed me, he, for his part, did not know; but with whatever pacific and amicable intentions a person accosted me — crac! I turned concord to discord, good-will to enmity. He was sure, he — M. Paul — wished me well enough; he had never done me any harm that he knew of; he might, at least, he supposed, claim a right to be regarded as a neutral acquaintance, guiltless of hostile sentiments: yet, how I behaved to him! With what pungent vivacities — what an impetus of mutiny — what a "fougue" of injustice!

Here I could not avoid opening my eyes somewhat wide, and even slipping in a slight interjectional observation: "Vivacities? Impetus? Fougue?

I didn't know…."

"Chut! à l'instant! There! there I went — vive comme la poudre!" He was sorry — he was very sorry: for my sake he grieved over the hapless peculiarity. This "emportement," this "chaleur" — generous, perhaps, but excessive — would yet, he feared, do me a mischief. It was a pity: I was not — he believed, in his soul — wholly without good qualities: and would I but hear reason, and be more sedate, more sober, less "en l'air," less "coquette," less taken by show, less prone to set an undue value on outside excellence — to make much of the attentions of people remarkable chiefly for so many feet of stature, "des couleurs de poupée," "un nez plus ou moins bien fait," and an enormous amount of fatuity — I might yet prove an useful, perhaps an exemplary character. But, as it was — And here, the little man's voice was for a minute choked.

I would have looked up at him, or held out my hand, or said a soothing word; but I was afraid, if I stirred, I should either laugh or cry; so odd, in all this, was the mixture of the touching and the absurd.

I thought he had nearly done: but no; he sat down that he might go on at his ease.

"While he, M. Paul, was on these painful topics, he would dare my anger for the sake of my good, and would venture to refer to a change he had noticed in my dress. He was free to confess that when he first knew me — or, rather, was in the habit of catching a passing glimpse of me from time to time — I satisfied him on this point: the gravity, the austere simplicity, obvious in this particular, were such as to inspire the highest hopes for my best interests. What fatal influence had impelled me lately to introduce flowers under the brim of my bonnet, to wear 'des cols brodés,' and even to appear on one occasion in a scarlet gown — he might indeed conjecture, but, for the present, would not openly declare."

Again I interrupted, and this time not without an accent at once indignant and horror-struck.

"Scarlet, Monsieur Paul? It was not scarlet! It was pink, and pale pink to: and further subdued by black lace."

"Pink or scarlet, yellow or crimson, pea-green or sky-blue, it was all one: these were all flaunting, giddy colours; and as to the lace I talked of, that was but a 'colifichet de plus.'" And he sighed over my degeneracy. "He could not, he was sorry to say, be so particular on this theme as he could wish: not possessing the exact names of these 'babioles,' he might run into small verbal errors which would not fail to lay him open to my sarcasm, and excite my unhappily sudden and passionate disposition. He would merely say, in general terms — and in these general terms he knew he was correct — that my costume had of late assumed 'des façons mondaines,' which it wounded him to see."

What "façons mondaines" he discovered in my present winter merino and plain white collar, I own it puzzled me to guess: and when I asked him, he said it was all made with too much attention to effect — and besides, "had I not a bow of ribbon at my neck?"

"And if you condemn a bow of ribbon for a lady, Monsieur, you would necessarily disapprove of a thing like this for a gentleman?" — holding up my bright little chainlet of silk and gold. His sole reply was a groan — I suppose over my levity.

After sitting some minutes in silence, and watching the progress of the chain, at which I now wrought more assiduously than ever, he inquired: "Whether what he had just said would have the effect of making me entirely detest him?"

I hardly remember what answer I made, or how it came about; I don't think I spoke at all, but I know we managed to bid good-night on friendly terms: and, even after M. Paul had reached the door, he turned back just to explain, "that he would not be understood to speak in entire condemnation of the scarlet dress" ("Pink! pink!" I threw in); "that he had no intention to deny it the merit of looking rather well" (the fact was, M. Emanuel's taste in colours decidedly leaned to the brilliant); "only he wished to counsel me, whenever, I wore it, to do so in the same spirit as if its material were 'bure,' and its hue 'gris de poussière.'"

"And the flowers under my bonnet, Monsieur?" I asked. "They are very little ones — ?"

"Keep them little, then," said he. "Permit them not to become full-blown."

"And the bow, Monsieur — the bit of ribbon?"

"Va pour le ruban!" was the propitious answer.

And so we settled it.

* * * * *

"Well done, Lucy Snowe!" cried I to myself; "you have come in for a pretty lecture — brought on yourself a 'rude savant,' and all through your wicked fondness for worldly vanities! Who would have thought it? You deemed yourself a melancholy sober-sides enough! Miss Fanshawe there regards you as a second Diogenes. M. de Bassompierre, the other day, politely turned the conversation when it ran on the wild gifts of the actress Vashti, because, as he kindly said, 'Miss Snowe looked uncomfortable.' Dr. John Bretton knows you only as 'quiet Lucy' — 'a creature inoffensive as a shadow;' he has said, and you have heard him say it: 'Lucy's disadvantages spring from over-gravity in tastes and manner — want of colour in character and costume.' Such are your own and your friends' impressions; and behold! there starts up a little man, differing diametrically from all these, roundly charging you with being too airy and cheery — too volatile and versatile — too flowery and coloury. This harsh little man — this pitiless censor — gathers up all your poor scattered sins of vanity, your luckless chiffon of rose-colour, your small fringe of a wreath, your small scrap of ribbon, your silly bit of lace, and calls you to account for the lot, and for each item. You are well habituated to be passed by as a shadow in Life's sunshine: it its a new thing to see one testily lifting his hand to screen his eyes, because you tease him with an obtrusive ray."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MONSIEUR'S FÊTE.

I was up the next morning an hour before daybreak, and finished my guard, kneeling on the dormitory floor beside the centre stand, for the benefit of such expiring glimmer as the night-lamp afforded in its last watch.

All my materials — my whole stock of beads and silk — were used up before the chain assumed the length and richness I wished; I had wrought it double, as I knew, by the rule of contraries, that to, suit the particular taste whose gratification was in view, an effective appearance was quite indispensable. As a finish to the ornament, a little gold clasp was needed; fortunately I possessed it in the fastening of my sole necklace; I duly detached and re-attached it, then coiled compactly the completed guard; and enclosed it in a small box I had bought for its brilliancy, made of some tropic shell of the colour called "nacarat," and decked with a little coronal of sparkling blue stones. Within the lid of the box, I carefully graved with my scissors' point certain initials.

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The reader will, perhaps, remember the description of Madame Beck's fête; nor will he have forgotten that at each anniversary, a handsome present was subscribed for and offered by the school. The observance of this day was a distinction accorded to none but Madame, and, in a modified form, to her kinsman and counsellor, M. Emanuel. In the latter case it was an honour spontaneously awarded, not plotted and contrived beforehand, and offered an additional proof, amongst many others, of the estimation in which — despite his partialities, prejudices, and irritabilities — the professor of literature was held by his pupils. No article of value was offered to him: he distinctly gave it to be understood, that he would accept neither plate nor jewellery. Yet he liked a slight tribute; the cost, the money-value, did not touch him: a diamond ring, a gold snuff-box, presented, with pomp, would have pleased him less than a flower, or a drawing, offered simply and with sincere feelings. Such was his nature. He was a man, not wise in his generation, yet could he claim a filial sympathy with "the dayspring on high."

M. Paul's fête fell on the first of March and a Thursday. It proved a fine sunny day; and being likewise the morning on which it was customary to attend mass; being also otherwise distinguished by the half-holiday which permitted the privilege of walking out, shopping, or paying visits in the afternoon: these combined considerations induced a general smartness and freshness of dress. Clean collars were in vogue; the ordinary dingy woollen classe-dress was exchanged for something lighter and clearer. Mademoiselle Zélie St. Pierre, on this particular Thursday, even assumed a "robe de soie," deemed in economical Labassecour an article of hazardous splendour and luxury; nay, it was remarked that she sent for a "coiffeur" to dress her hair that morning; there were pupils acute enough to discover that she had bedewed her handkerchief and her hands with a new and fashionable perfume. Poor Zélie! It was much her wont to declare about this time, that she was tired to death of a life of seclusion and labour; that she longed to have the means and leisure for relaxation; to have some one to work for her — a husband who would pay her debts (she was woefully encumbered with debt), supply her wardrobe, and leave her at liberty, as she said, to "goûter un peu les plaisirs." It had long been rumoured, that her eye was upon M. Emanuel. Monsieur Emanuel's eye was certainly often upon her. He would sit and watch her perseveringly for minutes together. I have seen him give her a quarter-of-an-hour's gaze, while the class was silently composing, and he sat throned on his estrade, unoccupied. Conscious always of this basilisk attention, she would writhe under it, half-flattered, half-puzzled, and Monsieur would follow her sensations, sometimes looking appallingly acute; for in some cases, he had the terrible unerring penetration of instinct, and pierced in its hiding-place the last lurking thought of the heart, and discerned under florid veilings the bare; barren places of the spirit: yes, and its perverted tendencies, and its hidden false curves — all that men and women would not have known — the twisted spine, the malformed limb that was born with them, and far worse, the stain or disfigurement they have perhaps brought on themselves. No calamity so accursed but M. Emanuel could pity and forgive, if it were acknowledged candidly; but where his questioning eyes met dishonest denial — where his ruthless researches found deceitful concealment — oh, then, he could be cruel, and I thought wicked! he would exultantly snatch the screen from poor shrinking wretches, passionately hurry them to the summit of the mount of exposure, and there show them all naked, all false — poor living lies — the spawn of that horrid Truth which cannot be looked on unveiled. He thought he did justice; for my part I doubt whether man has a right to do such justice on man: more than once in these his visitations, I have felt compelled to give tears to his victims, and not spared ire and keen reproach to himself. He deserved it; but it was difficult to shake him in his firm conviction that the work was righteous and needed.

Breakfast being over and mass attended, the school-bell rang and the rooms filled: a very pretty spectacle was presented in classe. Pupils and teachers sat neatly arrayed, orderly and expectant, each bearing in her hand the bouquet of felicitation — the prettiest spring-flowers all fresh, and filling the air with their fragrance: I only had no bouquet. I like to see flowers growing, but when they are gathered, they cease to please. I look on them as things rootless and perishable; their likeness to life makes me sad. I never offer flowers to those I love; I never wish to receive them from hands dear to me. Mademoiselle St. Pierre marked my empty hands — she could not believe I had been so remiss; with avidity her eye roved over and round me: surely I must have some solitary symbolic flower somewhere: some small knot of violets, something to win myself praise for taste, commendation for ingenuity. The unimaginative "Anglaise" proved better than the Parisienne's fears: she sat literally unprovided, as bare of bloom or leaf as the winter tree. This ascertained, Zélie smiled, well pleased.

"How wisely you have acted to keep your money, Miss Lucie," she said: "silly I have gone and thrown away two francs on a bouquet of hot-house flowers!"

And she showed with pride her splendid nosegay.

But hush! a step: the step. It came prompt, as usual, but with a promptitude, we felt disposed to flatter ourselves, inspired by other feelings than mere excitability of nerve and vehemence of intent. We thought our Professor's "foot-fall" (to speak romantically) had in it a friendly promise this morning; and so it had.

He entered in a mood which made him as good as a new sunbeam to the already well-lit first classe. The morning light playing amongst our plants and laughing on our walls, caught an added lustre from M. Paul's all-benignant salute. Like a true Frenchman (though I don't know why I should say so, for he was of strain neither French nor Labassecourien), he had dressed for the "situation" and the occasion. Not by the vague folds, sinister and conspirator-like, of his soot-dark paletôt were the outlines of his person obscured; on the contrary, his figure (such as it was, I don't boast of it) was well set off by a civilized coat and a silken vest quite pretty to behold. The defiant and pagan bonnet-grec had vanished: bare-headed, he came upon us, carrying a Christian hat in his gloved hand. The little man looked well, very well; there was a clearness of amity in his blue eye, and a glow of good feeling on his dark complexion, which passed perfectly in the place of beauty: one really did not care to observe that his nose, though far from small, was of no particular shape, his cheek thin, his brow marked and square, his mouth no rose-bud: one accepted him as he was, and felt his presence the reverse of damping or insignificant.

He passed to his desk; he placed on the same his hat and gloves. "Bon jour, mes amies," said he, in a tone that somehow made amends to some amongst us for many a sharp snap and savage snarl: not a jocund, good-fellow tone, still less an unctuous priestly, accent, but a voice he had belonging to himself — a voice used when his heart passed the words to his lips. That same heart did speak sometimes; though an irritable, it was not an ossified organ: in its core was a place, tender beyond a man's tenderness; a place that humbled him to little children, that bound him to girls and women to whom, rebel as he would, he could not disown his affinity, nor quite deny that, on the whole, he was better with them than with his own sex.

“We all wish Monsieur a good day, and present to him our congratulations on the anniversary of his fête,” said Mademoiselle Zélie, constituting herself spokeswoman of the assembly; and advancing with no more twists of affectation than were with her indispensable to the achievement of motion, she laid her costly bouquet before him. He bowed over it.

The long train of offerings followed: all the pupils, sweeping past with the gliding step foreigners practise, left their tributes as they went by. Each girl so dexterously adjusted her separate gift, that when the last bouquet was laid on the desk, it formed the apex to a blooming pyramid — a pyramid blooming, spreading, and towering with such exuberance as, in the end, to eclipse the hero behind it. This ceremony over, seats were resumed, and we sat in dead silence, expectant of a speech.

I suppose five minutes might have elapsed, and the hush remained unbroken; ten — and there was no sound.

Many present began, doubtless, to wonder for what Monsieur waited; as well they might. Voiceless and viewless, stirless and wordless, he kept his station behind the pile of flowers.

At last there issued forth a voice, rather deep, as if it spoke out of a hollow: —

“Est-ce là tout?”

Mademoiselle Zélie looked round.

“You have all presented your bouquets?” inquired she of the pupils.

Yes; they had all given their nosegays, from the eldest to the youngest, from the tallest to the most diminutive. The senior mistress signified as much.

“Est-ce là tout?” was reiterated in an intonation which, deep before, had now descended some notes lower.

“Monsieur,” said Mademoiselle St. Pierre, rising, and this time speaking with her own sweet smile, “I have the honour to tell you that, with a single exception, every person in classe has offered her bouquet. For Meess Lucie, Monsieur will kindly make allowance; as a foreigner she probably did not know our customs, or did not appreciate their significance. Meess Lucie has regarded this ceremony as too frivolous to be honoured by her observance.”

“Famous!” I muttered between my teeth: “you are no bad speaker, Zélie, when you begin.”

The answer vouchsafed to Mademoiselle St Pierre from the estrade was given in the gesticulation of a hand from behind the pyramid. This manual action seemed to deprecate words, to enjoin silence.

A form, ere long, followed the hand. Monsieur emerged from his eclipse; and producing himself on the front of his estrade, and gazing straight and fixedly before him at a vast “mappe-monde” covering the wall opposite, he demanded a third time, and now in really tragic tones —

“Est-ce là tout?”

I might yet have made all right, by stepping forwards and slipping into his hand the ruddy little shell-box I at that moment held tight in my own. It was what I had fully purposed to do; but, first, the comic side of Monsieur's behaviour had tempted me to delay, and now, Mademoiselle St. Pierre's affected interference provoked contumacity. The reader not having hitherto had any cause to ascribe to Miss Snowe's character the most distant pretensions to perfection, will be scarcely surprised to learn that she felt too perverse to defend herself from any imputation the Parisienne might choose to insinuate and besides, M. Paul was so tragic, and took my defection so seriously, he deserved to be vexed. I kept, then, both my box and my countenance, and sat insensate as any stone.

"It is well!" dropped at length from the lips of M. Paul; and having uttered this phrase, the shadow of some great paroxysm — the swell of wrath, scorn, resolve — passed over his brow, rippled his lips, and lined his cheeks. Gulping down all further comment, he launched into his customary "discours."

I can't at all remember what this "discours" was; I did not listen to it: the gulping-down process, the abrupt dismissal of his mortification or vexation, had given me a sensation which half-counteracted the ludicrous effect of the reiterated "Est-ce là tout?"

Towards the close of the speech there came a pleasing diversion my attention was again amusingly arrested.

Owing to some little accidental movement — I think I dropped my thimble on the floor, and in stooping to regain it, hit the crown of my head against the sharp corner of my desk; which casualties (exasperating to me, by rights, if to anybody) naturally made a slight bustle — M. Paul became irritated, and dismissing his forced equanimity, and casting to the winds that dignity and self-control with which he never cared long to encumber himself, he broke forth into the strain best calculated to give him ease.

I don't know how, in the progress of his "discours," he had contrived to cross the Channel and land on British ground; but there I found him when I began to listen.

Casting a quick, cynical glance round the room — a glance which scathed, or was intended to scathe, as it crossed me — he fell with fury upon "les Anglaises."

Never have I heard English women handled as M. Paul that morning handled them: he spared nothing — neither their minds, morals, manners, nor personal appearance. I specially remember his abuse of their tall stature, their long necks, their thin arms, their slovenly dress, their pedantic education, their impious scepticism(!), their insufferable pride, their pretentious virtue: over which he ground his teeth malignantly, and looked as if, had he dared, he would have said singular things. Oh! he was spiteful, acrid, savage; and, as a natural consequence, detestably ugly.

"Little wicked venomous man!" thought I; "am I going to harass myself with fears of displeasing you, or hurting your feelings? No, indeed; you shall be indifferent to me, as the shabbiest bouquet in your pyramid."

I grieve to say I could not quite carry out this resolution. For some time the abuse of England and the English found and left me stolid: I bore it some fifteen minutes stoically enough; but this hissing cockatrice was determined to sting, and he said such things at last — fastening not only upon our women, but upon our greatest names and best men; sullying, the shield of Britannia, and dabbling the union jack in mud — that I was stung. With vicious relish he brought up the most spicy current continental historical falsehoods — than which nothing can be conceived more offensive. Zélie, and the whole class, became one grin of vindictive delight; for it is curious to discover how these clowns of Labassecour secretly hate England. At last, I struck a sharp stroke on my desk, opened my lips, and let loose this cry: —

"Vive l'Angleterre, l'Histoire et les Héros! A bas la France, la
Fiction et les Faquins!"

The class was struck of a heap. I suppose they thought me mad. The Professor put up his handkerchief, and fiendishly smiled into its folds. Little monster of malice! He now thought he had got the victory, since he had made me angry. In a second he became good-humoured. With great blandness he resumed the subject of his flowers; talked poetically and symbolically of their sweetness, perfume, purity, etcetera; made Frenchified comparisons between the "jeunes filles" and the sweet blossoms before him; paid Mademoiselle St. Pierre a very full-blown compliment on the superiority of her bouquet; and ended by announcing that the first really fine, mild, and balmy morning in spring, he intended to take the whole class out to breakfast in the country. "Such of the class, at least," he added, with emphasis, "as he could count amongst the number of his friends."

"Donc je n'y serai pas," declared I, involuntarily.

"Soit!" was his response; and, gathering his flowers in his arms, he flashed out of classe; while I, consigning my work, scissors, thimble, and the neglected little box, to my desk, swept up-stairs. I don't know whether he felt hot and angry, but I am free to confess that I did.

Yet with a strange evanescent anger, I had not sat an hour on the edge of my bed, picturing and repicturing his look, manner, words ere I smiled at the whole scene. A little pang of regret I underwent that the box had not been offered. I had meant to gratify him. Fate would not have it so.

In the course of the afternoon, remembering that desks in classe were by no means inviolate repositories, and thinking that it was as well to secure the box, on account of the initials in the lid, P. C. D. E., for Paul Carl (or Carlos) David Emanuel — such was his full name — these foreigners must always have a string of baptismals — I descended to the schoolroom.

It slept in holiday repose. The day pupils were all gone home, the boarders were out walking, the teachers, except the surveillante of the week, were in town, visiting or shopping; the suite of divisions was vacant; so was the grande salle, with its huge solemn globe hanging in the midst, its pair of many-branched chandeliers, and its horizontal grand piano closed, silent, enjoying its mid-week Sabbath. I rather wondered to find the first classe door ajar; this room being usually locked when empty, and being then inaccessible to any save Madame Beck and myself, who possessed a duplicate key. I wondered still more, on approaching, to hear a vague movement as of life — a step, a chair stirred, a sound like the opening of a desk.

"It is only Madame Beck doing inspection duty," was the conclusion following a moment's reflection. The partially-opened door gave opportunity for assurance on this point. I looked. Behold! not the inspecting garb of Madame Beck — the shawl and the clean cap — but the coat, and the close-shorn, dark head of a man. This person occupied my chair; his olive hand held my desk open, his nose was lost to view amongst my papers. His back was towards me, but there could not be a moment's question about identity. Already was the attire of ceremony discarded: the cherished and ink-stained paletôt was resumed; the perverse bonnet-grec lay on the floor, as if just dropped from the hand, culpably busy.

Now I knew, and I had long known, that that hand of M. Emanuel's was on the most intimate terms with my desk; that it raised and lowered the lid, ransacked and arranged the contents, almost as familiarly as my own. The fact was not dubious, nor did he wish it to be so: he left signs of each visit palpable and unmistakable; hitherto, however, I had never caught him in the act: watch as I would, I could not detect the hours and moments of his coming. I saw the brownie's work in exercises left overnight full of faults, and found next morning carefully corrected: I profited by his capricious good-will in loans full welcome and refreshing. Between a sallow dictionary and worn-out grammar would magically grow a fresh interesting new work, or a classic, mellow and sweet in its ripe age. Out of my work-basket would laughingly peep a romance, under it would lurk the pamphlet, the magazine, whence last evening's reading had been extracted. Impossible to doubt the source whence these treasures flowed: had there been no other indication, one condemning and traitor peculiarity, common to them all, settled the question — they smelt of cigars. This was very shocking, of course: I thought so at first, and used to open the window with some bustle, to air my desk, and with fastidious finger and thumb, to hold the peccant brochures forth to the purifying breeze. I was cured of that formality suddenly. Monsieur caught me at it one day, understood the inference, instantly relieved my hand of its burden, and, in another moment, would have thrust the same into the glowing stove. It chanced to be a book, on the perusal of which I was bent; so for once I proved as decided and quicker than himself; recaptured the spoil, and — having saved this volume — never hazarded a second. With all this, I had never yet been able to arrest in his visits the freakish, friendly, cigar-loving phantom.

But now at last I had him: there he was — the very brownie himself; and there, curling from his lips, was the pale blue breath of his Indian darling: he was smoking into my desk: it might well betray him. Provoked at this particular, and yet pleased to surprise him — pleased, that is, with the mixed feeling of the housewife who discovers at last her strange elfin ally busy in the dairy at the untimely churn — I softly stole forward, stood behind him, bent with precaution over his shoulder.

My heart smote me to see that — after this morning's hostility, after my seeming remissness, after the puncture experienced by his feelings, and the ruffling undergone by his temper — he, all willing to forget and forgive, had brought me a couple of handsome volumes, of which the title and authorship were guarantees for interest. Now, as he sat bending above the desk, he was stirring up its contents; but with gentle and careful hand; disarranging indeed, but not harming. My heart smote me: as I bent over him, as he sat unconscious, doing me what good he could, and I daresay not feeling towards me unkindly, my morning's anger quite melted: I did not dislike Professor Emanuel.

I think he heard me breathe. He turned suddenly: his temperament was nervous, yet he never started, and seldom changed colour: there was something hardy about him.

"I thought you were gone into town with the other teachers," said he, taking a grim gripe of his self-possession, which half-escaped him — "It is as well you are not. Do you think I care for being caught? Not I. I often visit your desk."

"Monsieur, I know it."

"You find a brochure or tome now and then; but you don't read them, because they have passed under this?" — touching his cigar.

"They have, and are no better for the process; but I read them."

"Without pleasure?"

"Monsieur must not be contradicted."

"Do you like them, or any of them? — are they acceptable?" "Monsieur has seen me reading them a hundred times, and knows I have not so many recreations as to undervalue those he provides."

"I mean well; and, if you see that I mean well, and derive some little amusement from my efforts, why can we not be friends?"

"A fatalist would say — because we cannot."

"This morning," he continued, "I awoke in a bright mood, and came into classe happy; you spoiled my day."

"No, Monsieur, only an hour or two of it, and that unintentionally."

"Unintentionally! No. It was my fête-day; everybody wished me happiness but you. The little children of the third division gave each her knot of violets, lisped each her congratulation: — you — nothing. Not a bud, leaf, whisper — not a glance. Was this unintentional?"

"I meant no harm."

"Then you really did not know our custom? You were unprepared? You would willingly have laid out a few centimes on a flower to give me pleasure, had you been aware that it was expected? Say so, and all is forgotten, and the pain soothed."

"I did know that it was expected: I was prepared; yet I laid out no centimes on flowers."

"It is well — you do right to be honest. I should almost have hated you had you flattered and lied. Better declare at once 'Paul Carl Emanuel — je te déteste, mon garçon!' — than smile an interest, look an affection, and be false and cold at heart. False and cold I don't think you are; but you have made a great mistake in life, that I believe; I think your judgment is warped — that you are indifferent where you ought to be grateful — and perhaps devoted and infatuated, where you ought to be cool as your name. Don't suppose that I wish you to have a passion for me, Mademoiselle; Dieu vous en garde! What do you start for? Because I said passion? Well, I say it again. There is such a word, and there is such a thing — though not within these walls, thank heaven! You are no child that one should not speak of what exists; but I only uttered the word — the thing, I assure you, is alien to my whole life and views. It died in the past — in the present it lies buried — its grave is deep-dug, well-heaped, and many winters old: in the future there will be a resurrection, as I believe to my souls consolation; but all will then be changed — form and feeling: the mortal will have put on immortality — it will rise, not for earth, but heaven. All I say to you, Miss Lucy Snowe, is — that you ought to treat Professor Paul Emanuel decently."

I could not, and did not contradict such a sentiment.

"Tell me," he pursued, "when it is your fête-day, and I will not grudge a few centimes for a small offering."

"You will be like me, Monsieur: this cost more than a few centimes, and

I did not grudge its price."

And taking from the open desk the little box, I put it into his hand.

"It lay ready in my lap this morning," I continued; "and if Monsieur had been rather more patient, and Mademoiselle St. Pierre less interfering — perhaps I should say, too, if I had been calmer and wiser — I should have given it then."

He looked at the box: I saw its clear warm tint and bright azure circlet, pleased his eyes. I told him to open it.

"My initials!" said he, indicating the letters in the lid. "Who told you I was called Carl David?"

"A little bird, Monsieur."

"Does it fly from me to you? Then one can tie a message under its wing when needful.",

He took out the chain — a trifle indeed as to value, but glossy with silk and sparkling with beads. He liked that too — admired it artlessly, like a child.

"For me?"

"Yes, for you."

"This is the thing you were working at last night?"

"The same."

"You finished it this morning?"

"I did."

"You commenced it with the intention that it should be mine?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And offered on my fête-day?"

"Yes."

"This purpose continued as you wove it?"

Again I assented.

"Then it is not necessary that I should cut out any portion — saying, this part is not mine: it was plaited under the idea and for the adornment of another?"

"By no means. It is neither necessary, nor would it be just."

"This object is all mine?"

"That object is yours entirely."

Straightway Monsieur opened his paletôt, arranged the guard splendidly across his chest, displaying as much and suppressing as little as he could: for he had no notion of concealing what he admired and thought decorative. As to the box, he pronounced it a superb bonbonnière — he was fond of bonbons, by the way — and as he always liked to share with others what pleased himself, he would give his "dragées" as freely as he lent his books. Amongst the kind brownie's gifts left in my desk, I forgot to enumerate many a paper of chocolate comfits. His tastes in these matters were southern, and what we think infantine. His simple lunch consisted frequently of a "brioche," which, as often as not, to shared with some child of the third division.

"A présent c'est un fait accompli," said he, re-adjusting his paletôt; and we had no more words on the subject. After looking over the two volumes he had brought, and cutting away some pages with his penknife (he generally pruned before lending his books, especially if they were novels, and sometimes I was a little provoked at the severity of his censorship, the retrenchments interrupting the narrative), he rose, politely touched his bonnet-grec, and bade me a civil good-day.

"We are friends now," thought I, "till the next time we quarrel."

We might have quarrelled again that very same evening, but, wonderful to relate, failed, for once, to make the most of our opportunity.

Contrary to all expectation, M. Paul arrived at the study-hour. Having seen so much of him in the morning, we did not look for his presence at night. No sooner were we seated at lessons, however, than he appeared. I own I was glad to see him, so glad that I could not help greeting his arrival with a smile; and when he made his way to the same seat about which so serious a misunderstanding had formerly arisen, I took good care not to make too much room for him; he watched with a jealous, side-long look, to see whether I shrank away, but I did not, though the bench was a little crowded. I was losing the early impulse to recoil from M. Paul. Habituated to the paletôt and bonnet-grec, the neighbourhood of these garments seemed no longer uncomfortable or very formidable. I did not now sit restrained, “asphyxiée” (as he used to say) at his side; I stirred when I wished to stir, coughed when it was necessary, even yawned when I was tired — did, in short, what I pleased, blindly reliant upon his indulgence. Nor did my temerity, this evening at least, meet the punishment it perhaps merited; he was both indulgent and good-natured; not a cross glance shot from his eyes, not a hasty word left his lips. Till the very close of the evening, he did not indeed address me at all, yet I felt, somehow, that he was full of friendliness. Silence is of different kinds, and breathes different meanings; no words could inspire a pleasanter content than did M. Paul’s worldless presence. When the tray came in, and the bustle of supper commenced, he just said, as he retired, that he wished me a good night and sweet dreams; and a good night and sweet dreams I had.

CHAPTER XXX.

M. PAUL.

Yet the reader is advised not to be in any hurry with his kindly conclusions, or to suppose, with an over-hasty charity, that from that day M. Paul became a changed character — easy to live with, and no longer apt to flash danger and discomfort round him.

No; he was naturally a little man of unreasonable moods. When overwrought, which he often was, he became acutely irritable; and, besides, his veins were dark with a livid belladonna tincture, the essence of jealousy. I do not mean merely the tender jealousy of the heart, but that sterner, narrower sentiment whose seat is in the head.

I used to think, as I Sat looking at M. Paul, while he was knitting his brow or protruding his lip over some exercise of mine, which had not as many faults as he wished (for he liked me to commit faults: a knot of blunders was sweet to him as a cluster of nuts), that he had points of resemblance to Napoleon Bonaparte. I think so still.

In a shameless disregard of magnanimity, he resembled the great Emperor. M. Paul would have quarrelled with twenty learned women, would have unblushingly carried on a system of petty bickering and recrimination with a whole capital of coteries, never troubling himself about loss or lack of dignity. He would have exiled fifty Madame de Staëls, if, they had annoyed, offended, outrivalled, or opposed him.

I well remember a hot episode of his with a certain Madame Panache — a lady temporarily employed by Madame Beck to give lessons in history. She was clever — that is, she knew a good deal; and, besides, thoroughly possessed the art of making the most of what she knew; of words and confidence she held unlimited command. Her personal appearance was far from destitute of advantages; I believe many people would have pronounced her “a fine woman;” and yet there were points in her robust and ample attractions, as well as in her bustling and demonstrative presence, which, it appeared, the nice and capricious tastes of M. Paul could not away with. The sound of her voice, echoing through the carré, would put him into a strange taking; her long free step — almost stride — along the corridor, would often make him snatch up his papers and decamp on the instant.

With malicious intent he bethought himself, one day, to intrude on her class; as quick as lightning he gathered her method of instruction; it differed from a pet plan of his own. With little ceremony, and less courtesy, he pointed out what he termed her errors. Whether he expected submission and attention, I know not; he met an acrid opposition, accompanied by a round reprimand for his certainly unjustifiable interference.

Instead of withdrawing with dignity, as he might still have done, he threw down the gauntlet of defiance. Madame Panache, bellicose as a Penthesilea, picked it up in a minute. She snapped her fingers in the intermeddler’s face; she rushed upon him with a storm of words. M. Emanuel was eloquent; but Madame Panache was voluble. A system of fierce antagonism ensued. Instead of laughing in his sleeve at his fair foe, with all her sore amour-propre and loud self-assertion, M. Paul detested her with intense seriousness; he honoured her with his earnest fury; he pursued her vindictively and implacably, refusing to rest peaceably in his bed, to derive due benefit from his meals, or even serenely to relish his cigar, till she was fairly rooted out of the establishment. The Professor conquered, but I cannot say that the laurels of this victory shadowed gracefully his temples. Once I ventured to hint as much. To my great surprise he allowed that I might be right, but averred that when brought into contact with either men or women of the coarse, self-complacent quality, whereof Madame Panache was a specimen, he had no control over his own passions; an unspeakable and active aversion impelled him to a war of extermination.

Three months afterwards, hearing that his vanquished foe had met with reverses, and was likely to be really distressed for want of employment, he forgot his hatred, and alike active in good and evil, he moved heaven and earth till he found her a place. Upon her coming to make up former differences, and thank him for his recent kindness, the old voice — a little loud — the old manner — a little forward — so acted upon him that in ten minutes he started up and bowed her, or rather himself, out of the room, in a transport of nervous irritation.

To pursue a somewhat audacious parallel, in a love of power, in an eager grasp after supremacy, M. Emanuel was like Bonaparte. He was a man not always to be submitted to. Sometimes it was needful to resist; it was right to stand still, to look up into his eyes and tell him that his requirements went beyond reason — that his absolutism verged on tyranny.

The dawnings, the first developments of peculiar talent appearing within his range, and under his rule, curiously excited, even disturbed him. He watched its struggle into life with a scowl; he held back his hand — perhaps said, “Come on if you have strength,” but would not aid the birth.

When the pang and peril of the first conflict were over, when the breath of life was drawn, when he saw the lungs expand and contract, when he felt the heart beat and discovered life in the eye, he did not yet offer to foster.

“Prove yourself true ere I cherish you,” was his ordinance; and how difficult he made that proof! What thorns and briers, what flints, he strewed in the path of feet not inured to rough travel! He watched tearlessly — ordeals that he exacted should be passed through — fearlessly. He followed footprints that, as they approached the bourne, were sometimes marked in blood —

followed them grimly, holding the austerest police-watch over the pain-pressed pilgrim. And when at last he allowed a rest, before slumber might close the eyelids, he opened those same lids wide, with pitiless finger and thumb, and gazed deep through the pupil and the irids into the brain, into the heart, to search if Vanity, or Pride, or Falsehood, in any of its subtlest forms, was discoverable in the furthest recess of existence. If, at last, he let the neophyte sleep, it was but a moment; he woke him suddenly up to apply new tests: he sent him on irksome errands when he was staggering with weariness; he tried the temper, the sense, and the health; and it was only when every severest test had been applied and endured, when the most corrosive aquafortis had been used, and failed to tarnish the ore, that he admitted it genuine, and, still in clouded silence, stamped it with his deep brand of approval.

I speak not ignorant of these evils.

Till the date at which the last chapter closes, M. Paul had not been my professor — he had not given me lessons, but about that time, accidentally hearing me one day acknowledge an ignorance of some branch of education (I think it was arithmetic), which would have disgraced a charity-school boy, as he very truly remarked, he took me in hand, examined me first, found me, I need not say, abundantly deficient, gave me some books and appointed me some tasks.

He did this at first with pleasure, indeed with unconcealed exultation, condescending to say that he believed I was “bonne et pas trop faible” (i.e. well enough disposed, and not wholly destitute of parts), but, owing he supposed to adverse circumstances, “as yet in a state of wretchedly imperfect mental development.”

The beginning of all effort has indeed with me been marked by a preternatural imbecility. I never could, even in forming a common acquaintance, assert or prove a claim to average quickness. A depressing and difficult passage has prefaced every new page I have turned in life.

So long as this passage lasted, M. Paul was very kind, very good, very forbearing; he saw the sharp pain inflicted, and felt the weighty humiliation imposed by my own sense of incapacity; and words can hardly do justice to his tenderness and helpfulness. His own eyes would moisten, when tears of shame and effort clouded mine; burdened as he was with work, he would steal half his brief space of recreation to give to me.

But, strange grief! when that heavy and overcast dawn began at last to yield to day; when my faculties began to struggle themselves, free, and my time of energy and fulfilment came; when I voluntarily doubled, trebled, quadrupled the tasks he set, to please him as I thought, his kindness became sternness; the light changed in his eyes from a beam to a spark; he fretted, he opposed, he curbed me imperiously; the more I did, the harder I worked, the less he seemed content. Sarcasms of which the severity amazed and puzzled me, harassed my ears; then flowed out the bitterest inuendoes against the "pride of intellect." I was vaguely threatened with I know not what doom, if I ever trespassed the limits proper to my sex, and conceived a contraband appetite for unfeminine knowledge. Alas! I had no such appetite. What I loved, it joyed me by any effort to content; but the noble hunger for science in the abstract — the godlike thirst after discovery — these feelings were known to me but by briefest flashes.

Yet, when M. Paul sneered at me, I wanted to possess them more fully; his injustice stirred in me ambitious wishes — it imparted a strong stimulus — it gave wings to aspiration.

In the beginning, before I had penetrated to motives, that uncomprehended sneer of his made my heart ache, but by-and-by it only warmed the blood in my veins, and sent added action to my pulses. Whatever my powers — feminine or the contrary — God had given them, and I felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of his bestowal.

The combat was very sharp for a time. I seemed to have lost M. Paul's affection; he treated me strangely. In his most unjust moments he would insinuate that I had deceived him when I appeared, what he called "faible" — that is incompetent; he said I had feigned a false incapacity. Again, he would turn suddenly round and accuse me of the most far-fetched imitations and impossible plagiarisms, asserting that I had extracted the pith out of books I had not so much as heard of — and over the perusal of which I should infallibly have fallen down in a sleep as deep as that of Eutychus.

Once, upon his preferring such an accusation, I turned upon him — I rose against him. Gathering an armful of his books out of my desk, I filled my apron and poured them in a heap upon his estrade, at his feet.

"Take them away, M. Paul," I said, "and teach me no more. I never asked to be made learned, and you compel me to feel very profoundly that learning is not happiness."

And returning to my desk, I laid my head on my arms, nor would I speak to him for two days afterwards. He pained and chagrined me. His affection had been very sweet and dear — a pleasure new and incomparable: now that this seemed withdrawn, I cared not for his lessons.

The books, however, were not taken away; they were all restored with careful hand to their places, and he came as usual to teach me. He made his peace somehow — too readily, perhaps: I ought to have stood out longer, but when he looked kind and good, and held out his hand with amity, memory refused to reproduce with due force his oppressive moments. And then, reconcilement is always sweet!

On a certain morning a message came from my godmother, inviting me to attend some notable lecture to be delivered in the same public rooms before described. Dr. John had brought the message himself, and delivered it verbally to Rosine, who had not scrupled to follow the steps of M. Emanuel, then passing to the first classe, and, in his presence, stand "carrément" before my desk, hand in apron-pocket, and rehearse the same, saucily and aloud, concluding with the words, “Qu’il est vraiment beau, Mademoiselle, ce jeune docteur! Quels yeux — quel regard! Tenez! J’en ai le coeur tout ému!”

When she was gone, my professor demanded of me why I suffered “cette fille effrontée, cette créature sans pudeur,” to address me in such terms.

I had no pacifying answer to give. The terms were precisely such as Rosine — a young lady in whose skull the organs of reverence and reserve were not largely developed — was in the constant habit of using. Besides, what she said about the young doctor was true enough. Graham was handsome; he had fine eyes and a thrilling: glance. An observation to that effect actually formed itself into sound on my lips.

“Elle ne dit que la vérité,” I said.

“Ah! vous trouvez?”

“Mais, sans doute.”

The lesson to which we had that day to submit was such as to make us very glad when it terminated. At its close, the released, pupils rushed out, half-trembling, half-exultant. I, too, was going. A mandate to remain arrested me. I muttered that I wanted some fresh air sadly — the stove was in a glow, the classe over-heated. An inexorable voice merely recommended silence; and this salamander — for whom no room ever seemed too hot — sitting down between my desk and the stove — a situation in which he ought to have felt broiled, but did not — proceeded to confront me with — a Greek quotation!

In M. Emanuel’s soul rankled a chronic suspicion that I knew both Greek and Latin. As monkeys are said to have the power of speech if they would but use it, and are reported to conceal this faculty in fear of its being turned to their detriment, so to me was ascribed a fund of knowledge which I was supposed criminally and craftily to conceal. The privileges of a “classical education,” it was insinuated, had been mine; on flowers of Hymettus I had revelled; a golden store, hived in memory, now silently sustained my efforts, and privily nurtured my wits.

A hundred expedients did M. Paul employ to surprise my secret — to wheedle, to threaten, to startle it out of me. Sometimes he placed Greek and Latin books in my way, and then watched me, as Joan of Arc’s jailors tempted her with the warrior’s accoutrements, and lay in wait for the issue. Again he quoted I know not what authors and passages, and while rolling out their sweet and sounding lines (the classic tones fell musically from his lips — for he had a good voice — remarkable for compass, modulation, and matchless expression), he would fix on me a vigilant, piercing, and often malicious eye. It was evident he sometimes expected great demonstrations; they never occurred, however; not comprehending, of course I could neither be charmed nor annoyed.

Baffled — almost angry — he still clung to his fixed idea; my susceptibilities were pronounced marble — my face a mask. It appeared as if he could not be brought to accept the homely truth, and take me for what I was: men, and women too, must have delusion of some sort; if not made ready to their hand, they will invent exaggeration for themselves.

At moments I did wish that his suspicions had been better founded. There were times when I would have given my right hand to possess the treasures he ascribed to me. He deserved condign punishment for his testy crotchets. I could have gloried in bringing home to him his worst apprehensions astoundingly realized. I could have exulted to burst on his vision, confront and confound his “lunettes,” one blaze of acquirements. Oh! why did nobody undertake to make me clever while I was young enough to learn, that I might, by one grand, sudden, inhuman revelation — one cold, cruel, overwhelming triumph — have for ever crushed the mocking spirit out of Paul Carl David Emanuel!

Alas! no such feat was in my power. To-day, as usual, his quotations fell ineffectual: he soon shifted his ground.

“Women of intellect” was his next theme: here he was at home. A “woman of intellect,” it appeared, was a sort of “lusus naturae,” a luckless accident, a thing for which there was neither place nor use in creation, wanted neither as wife nor worker. Beauty anticipated her in the first office. He believed in his soul that lovely, placid, and passive feminine mediocrity was the only pillow on which manly thought and sense could find rest for its aching temples; and as to work, male mind alone could work to any good practical result — hein?

This “hein?” was a note of interrogation intended to draw from me contradiction or objection. However, I only said — “Cela ne me regarde pas: je ne m’en soucie pas;” and presently added — “May I go, Monsieur? They have rung the bell for the second déjeuner” (i.e. luncheon).

“What of that? You are not hungry?”

“Indeed I was,” I said; “I had had nothing since breakfast, at seven, and should have nothing till dinner, at five, if I missed this bell.”

“Well, he was in the same plight, but I might share with him.”

And he broke in two the “brioche” intended for his own refreshment, and gave me half. Truly his bark was worse than his bite; but the really formidable attack was yet to come. While eating his cake, I could not forbear expressing my secret wish that I really knew all of which he accused me.

“Did I sincerely feel myself to be an ignoramus?” he asked, in a softened tone.

If I had replied meekly by an unqualified affirmative, I believe he would have stretched out his hand, and we should have been friends on the spot, but I answered —

“Not exactly. I am ignorant, Monsieur, in the knowledge you ascribe to me, but I sometimes, not always, feel a knowledge of my own.”

“What did I mean?” he inquired, sharply.

Unable to answer this question in a breath, I evaded it by change of subject. He had now finished his half of the brioche feeling sure that on so trifling a fragment he could not have satisfied his appetite, as indeed I had not appeased mine, and inhaling the fragrance of baked apples afar from the refectory, I ventured to inquire whether he did not also perceive that agreeable odour. He confessed that he did. I said if he would let me out by the garden-door, and permit me just to run across the court, I would fetch him a plateful; and added that I believed they were excellent, as Goton had a very good method of baking, or rather stewing fruit, putting in a little spice, sugar, and a glass or two of vin blanc — might I go?

"Petite gourmande!" said he, smiling, "I have not forgotten how pleased you were with the pâté â la crême I once gave you, and you know very well, at this moment, that to fetch the apples for me will be the same as getting them for yourself. Go, then, but come back quickly."

And at last he liberated me on parole. My own plan was to go and return with speed and good faith, to put the plate in at the door, and then to vanish incontinent, leaving all consequences for future settlement.

That intolerably keen instinct of his seemed to have anticipated my scheme: he met me at the threshold, hurried me into the room, and fixed me in a minute in my former seat. Taking the plate of fruit from my hand, he divided the portion intended only for himself, and ordered me to eat my share. I complied with no good grace, and vexed, I suppose, by my reluctance, he opened a masked and dangerous battery. All he had yet said, I could count as mere sound and fury, signifying nothing: not so of the present attack.

It consisted in an unreasonable proposition with which he had before afflicted me: namely, that on the next public examination-day I should engage — foreigner as I was — to take my place on the first form of first-class pupils, and with them improvise a composition in French, on any subject any spectator might dictate, without benefit of grammar or lexicon.

I knew what the result of such an experiment would be. I, to whom nature had denied the impromptu faculty; who, in public, was by nature a cypher; whose time of mental activity, even when alone, was not under the meridian sun; who needed the fresh silence of morning, or the recluse peace of evening, to win from the Creative Impulse one evidence of his presence, one proof of his force; I, with whom that Impulse was the most intractable, the most capricious, the most maddening of masters (him before me always excepted) — a deity which sometimes, under circumstances — apparently propitious, would not speak when questioned, would not hear when appealed to, would not, when sought, be found; but would stand, all cold, all indurated, all granite, a dark Baal with carven lips and blank eye-balls, and breast like the stone face of a tomb; and again, suddenly, at some turn, some sound, some long-trembling sob of the wind, at some rushing past of an unseen stream of electricity, the irrational demon would wake unsolicited, would stir strangely alive, would rush from its pedestal like a perturbed Dagon, calling to its votary for a sacrifice, whatever the hour — to its victim for some blood, or some breath, whatever the circumstance or scene — rousing its priest, treacherously promising vaticination, perhaps filling its temple with a strange hum of oracles, but sure to give half the significance to fateful winds, and grudging to the desperate listener even a miserable remnant — yielding it sordidly, as though each word had been a drop of the deathless ichor of its own dark veins. And this tyrant I was to compel into bondage, and make it improvise a theme, on a school estrade, between a Mathilde and a Coralie, under the eye of a Madame Beck, for the pleasure, and to the inspiration of a bourgeois of Labassecour!

Upon this argument M. Paul and I did battle more than once — strong battle, with confused noise of demand and rejection, exaction and repulse.

On this particular day I was soundly rated. "The obstinacy of my whole sex," it seems, was concentrated in me; I had an "orgueil de diable." I feared to fail, forsooth! What did it matter whether I failed or not? Who was I that I should not fail, like my betters? It would do me good to fail. He wanted to see me worsted (I knew he did), and one minute he paused to take breath.

"Would I speak now, and be tractable?"

"Never would I be tractable in this matter. Law itself should not compel me. I would pay a fine, or undergo an imprisonment, rather than write for a show and to order, perched up on a platform."

"Could softer motives influence me? Would I yield for friendship's sake?"

"Not a whit, not a hair-breadth. No form of friendship under the sun had a right to exact such a concession. No true friendship would harass me thus."

He supposed then (with a sneer — M. Paul could sneer supremely, curling his lip, opening his nostrils, contracting his eyelids) — he supposed there was but one form of appeal to which I would listen, and of that form it was not for him to make use.

"Under certain persuasions, from certain quarters, je vous vois d'ici," said he, "eagerly subscribing to the sacrifice, passionately arming for the effort."

"Making a simpleton, a warning, and an example of myself, before a hundred and fifty of the 'papas' and 'mammas' of Villette."

And here, losing patience, I broke out afresh with a cry that I wanted to be liberated — to get out into the air — I was almost in a fever.

"Chut!" said the inexorable, "this was a mere pretext to run away; he was not hot, with the stove close at his back; how could I suffer, thoroughly screened by his person?"

"I did not understand his constitution. I knew nothing of the natural history of salamanders. For my own part, I was a phlegmatic islander, and sitting in an oven did not agree with me; at least, might I step to the well, and get a glass of water — the sweet apples had made me thirsty?"

"If that was all, he would do my errand."

He went to fetch the water. Of course, with a door only on the latch behind me, I lost not my opportunity. Ere his return, his half-worried prey had escaped.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DRYAD.

The spring was advancing, and the weather had turned suddenly warm. This change of temperature brought with it for me, as probably for many others, temporary decrease of strength. Slight exertion at this time left me overcome with fatigue — sleepless nights entailed languid days.

One Sunday afternoon, having walked the distance of half a league to the Protestant church, I came back weary and exhausted; and taking refuge in my solitary sanctuary, the first classe, I was glad to sit down, and to make of my desk a pillow for my arms and head.

Awhile I listened to the lullaby of bees humming in the berceau, and watched, through the glass door and the tender, lightly-strewn spring foliage, Madame Beck and a gay party of friends, whom she had entertained that day at dinner after morning mass, walking in the centre-alley under orchard boughs dressed at this season in blossom, and wearing a colouring as pure and warm as mountain-snow at sun-rise.

My principal attraction towards this group of guests lay, I remember, in one figure — that of a handsome young girl whom I had seen before as a visitor at Madame Beck's, and of whom I had been vaguely told that she was a "filleule," or god-daughter, of M. Emanuel's, and that between her mother, or aunt, or some other female relation of hers, and the Professor, had existed of old a special friendship. M. Paul was not of the holiday band to-day, but I had seen this young girl with him ere now, and as far as distant observation could enable me to judge, she seemed to enjoy him with the frank ease of a ward with an indulgent guardian. I had seen her run up to him, put her arm through his, and hang upon him. Once, when she did so, a curious sensation had struck through me — a disagreeable anticipatory sensation — one of the family of presentiments, I suppose — but I refused to analyze or dwell upon it. While watching this girl, Mademoiselle Sauveur by name, and following the gleam of her bright silk robe (she was always richly dressed, for she was said to be wealthy) through the flowers and the glancing leaves of tender emerald, my eyes became dazzled — they closed; my lassitude, the warmth of the day, the hum of bees and birds, all lulled me, and at last I slept.

Two hours stole over me. Ere I woke, the sun had declined out of sight behind the towering houses, the garden and the room were grey, bees had gone homeward, and the flowers were closing; the party of guests, too, had vanished; each alley was void.

On waking, I felt much at ease — not chill, as I ought to have been after sitting so still for at least two hours; my cheek and arms were not benumbed by pressure against the hard desk. No wonder. Instead of the bare wood on which I had laid them, I found a thick shawl, carefully folded, substituted for support, and another shawl (both taken from the corridor where such things hung) wrapped warmly round me.

Who had done this? Who was my friend? Which of the teachers? Which of the pupils? None, except St. Pierre, was inimical to me; but which of them had the art, the thought, the habit, of benefiting thus tenderly? Which of them had a step so quiet, a hand so gentle, but I should have heard or felt her, if she had approached or touched me in a day-sleep?

As to Ginevra Fanshawe, that bright young creature was not gentle at all, and would certainly have pulled me out of my chair, if she had meddled in the matter. I said at last: "It is Madame Beck's doing; she has come in, seen me asleep, and thought I might take cold. She considers me a useful machine, answering well the purpose for which it was hired; so would not have me needlessly injured. And now," methought, "I'll take a walk; the evening is fresh, and not very chill."

So I opened the glass door and stepped into the berceau.

I went to my own alley: had it been dark, or even dusk, I should have hardly ventured there, for I had not yet forgotten the curious illusion of vision (if illusion it were) experienced in that place some months ago. But a ray of the setting sun burnished still the grey crown of Jean Baptiste; nor had all the birds of the garden yet vanished into their nests amongst the tufted shrubs and thick wall-ivy. I paced up and down, thinking almost the same thoughts I had pondered that night when I buried my glass jar — how I should make some advance in life, take another step towards an independent position; for this train of reflection, though not lately pursued, had never by me been wholly abandoned; and whenever a certain eye was averted from me, and a certain countenance grew dark with unkindness and injustice, into that track of speculation did I at once strike; so that, little by little, I had laid half a plan.

"Living costs little," said I to myself, "in this economical town of Villette, where people are more sensible than I understand they are in dear old England — infinitely less worried about appearance, and less emulous of display — where nobody is in the least ashamed to be quite as homely and saving as he finds convenient. House-rent, in a prudently chosen situation, need not be high. When I shall have saved one thousand francs, I will take a tenement with one large room, and two or three smaller ones, furnish the first with a few benches and desks, a black tableau, an estrade for myself; upon it a chair and table, with a sponge and some white chalks; begin with taking day-pupils, and so work my way upwards. Madame Beck's commencement was — as I have often heard her say — from no higher starting-point, and where is she now? All these premises and this garden are hers, bought with her money; she has a competency already secured for old age, and a flourishing establishment under her direction, which will furnish a career for her children.

“Courage, Lucy Snowe! With self-denial and economy now, and steady exertion by-and-by, an object in life need not fail you. Venture not to complain that such an object is too selfish, too limited, and lacks interest; be content to labour for independence until you have proved, by winning that prize, your right to look higher. But afterwards, is there nothing more for me in life — no true home — nothing to be dearer to me than myself, and by its paramount preciousness, to draw from me better things than I care to culture for myself only? Nothing, at whose feet I can willingly lay down the whole burden of human egotism, and gloriously take up the nobler charge of labouring and living for others? I suppose, Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded: for you, the crescent-phase must suffice. Very good. I see a huge mass of my fellow-creatures in no better circumstances. I see that a great many men, and more women, hold their span of life on conditions of denial and privation. I find no reason why I should be of the few favoured. I believe in some blending of hope and sunshine sweetening the worst lots. I believe that this life is not all; neither the beginning nor the end. I believe while I tremble; I trust while I weep.”

So this subject is done with. It is right to look our life-accounts bravely in the face now and then, and settle them honestly. And he is a poor self-swindler who lies to himself while he reckons the items, and sets down under the head — happiness that which is misery. Call anguish — anguish, and despair — despair; write both down in strong characters with a resolute pen: you will the better pay your debt to Doom. Falsify: insert “privilege” where you should have written “pain;” and see if your mighty creditor will allow the fraud to pass, or accept the coin with which you would cheat him. Offer to the strongest — if the darkest angel of God’s host — water, when he has asked blood — will he take it? Not a whole pale sea for one red drop. I settled another account.

Pausing before Methusaleh — the giant and patriarch of the garden — and leaning my brow against his knotty trunk, my foot rested on the stone sealing the small sepulchre at his root; and I recalled the passage of feeling therein buried; I recalled Dr. John; my warm affection for him; my faith in his excellence; my delight in his grace. What was become of that curious one-sided friendship which was half marble and half life; only on one hand truth, and on the other perhaps a jest?

Was this feeling dead? I do not know, but it was buried. Sometimes I thought the tomb unquiet, and dreamed strangely of disturbed earth, and of hair, still golden, and living, obtruded through coffin-chinks.

Had I been too hasty? I used to ask myself; and this question would occur with a cruel sharpness after some brief chance interview with Dr. John. He had still such kind looks, such a warm hand; his voice still kept so pleasant a tone for my name; I never liked “Lucy” so well as when he uttered it. But I learned in time that this benignity, this cordiality, this music, belonged in no shape to me: it was a part of himself; it was the honey of his temper; it was the balm of his mellow mood; he imparted it, as the ripe fruit rewards with sweetness the rifling bee; he diffused it about him, as sweet plants shed their perfume. Does the nectarine love either the bee or bird it feeds? Is the sweetbriar enamoured of the air?

"Good-night, Dr. John; you are good, you are beautiful; but you are not mine. Good-night, and God bless you!"

Thus I closed my musings. "Good-night" left my lips in sound; I heard the words spoken, and then I heard an echo — quite close.

"Good-night, Mademoiselle; or, rather, good-evening — the sun is scarce set; I hope you slept well?"

I started, but was only discomposed a moment; I knew the voice and speaker.

"Slept, Monsieur! When? where?"

"You may well inquire when — where. It seems you turn day into night, and choose a desk for a pillow; rather hard lodging — ?"

"It was softened for me, Monsieur, while I slept. That unseen, gift-bringing thing which haunts my desk, remembered me. No matter how I fell asleep; I awoke pillowed and covered."

"Did the shawls keep you warm?"

"Very warm. Do you ask thanks for them?"

"No. You looked pale in your slumbers: are you home-sick?"

"To be home-sick, one must have a home; which I have not."

"Then you have more need of a careful friend. I scarcely know any one, Miss Lucy, who needs a friend more absolutely than you; your very faults imperatively require it. You want so much checking, regulating, and keeping down."

This idea of "keeping down" never left M. Paul's head; the most habitual subjugation would, in my case, have failed to relieve him of it. No matter; what did it signify? I listened to him, and did not trouble myself to be too submissive; his occupation would have been gone had I left him nothing to "keep down."

"You need watching, and watching over," he pursued; "and it is well for you that I see this, and do my best to discharge both duties. I watch you and others pretty closely, pretty constantly, nearer and oftener than you or they think. Do you see that window with a light in it?"

He pointed to a lattice in one of the college boarding-houses.

"That," said he, "is a room I have hired, nominally for a study — virtually for a post of observation. There I sit and read for hours together: it is my way — my taste. My book is this garden; its contents are human nature — female human nature. I know you all by heart. Ah! I know you well — St. Pierre, the Parisienne — cette maîtresse-femme, my cousin Beck herself."

"It is not right, Monsieur."

"Comment? it is not right? By whose creed? Does some dogma of Calvin or Luther condemn it? What is that to me? I am no Protestant. My rich father (for, though I have known poverty, and once starved for a year in a garret in Rome — starved wretchedly, often on a meal a day, and sometimes not that — yet I was born to wealth) — my rich father was a good Catholic; and he gave me a priest and a Jesuit for a tutor. I retain his lessons; and to what discoveries, grand Dieu! have they not aided me!"

"Discoveries made by stealth seem to me dishonourable discoveries."

"Puritaine! I doubt it not. Yet see how my Jesuit's system works. You know the St. Pierre?"

"Partially."

He laughed. "You say right — 'partially'; whereas I know her thoroughly; there is the difference. She played before me the amiable; offered me patte de velours; caressed, flattered, fawned on me. Now, I am accessible to a woman's flattery — accessible against my reason. Though never pretty, she was — when I first knew her — young, or knew how to look young. Like all her countrywomen, she had the art of dressing — she had a certain cool, easy, social assurance, which spared me the pain of embarrassment — "

"Monsieur, that must have been unnecessary. I never saw you embarrassed in my life."

"Mademoiselle, you know little of me; I can be embarrassed as a petite pensionnaire; there is a fund of modesty and diffidence in my nature — "

"Monsieur, I never saw it."

"Mademoiselle, it is there. You ought to have seen it."

"Monsieur, I have observed you in public — on platforms, in tribunes, before titles and crowned heads — and you were as easy as you are in the third division."

"Mademoiselle, neither titles nor crowned heads excite my modesty; and publicity is very much my element. I like it well, and breathe in it quite freely; — but — but, in short, here is the sentiment brought into action, at this very moment; however, I disdain to be worsted by it. If, Mademoiselle, I were a marrying man (which I am not; and you may spare yourself the trouble of any sneer you may be contemplating at the thought), and found it necessary to ask a lady whether she could look upon me in the light of a future husband, then would it be proved that I am as I say — modest."

I quite believed him now; and, in believing, I honoured him with a sincerity of esteem which made my heart ache.

"As to the St. Pierre," he went on, recovering himself, for his voice had altered a little, "she once intended to be Madame Emanuel; and I don't know whither I might have been led, but for yonder little lattice with the light. Ah, magic lattice! what miracles of discovery hast thou wrought! Yes," he pursued, "I have seen her rancours, her vanities, her levities — not only here, but elsewhere: I have witnessed what bucklers me against all her arts: I am safe from poor Zélie."

"And my pupils," he presently recommenced, "those blondes jeunes filles — so mild and meek — I have seen the most reserved — romp like boys, the demurest — snatch grapes from the walls, shake pears from the trees. When the English teacher came, I saw her, marked her early preference for this alley, noticed her taste for seclusion, watched her well, long before she and I came to speaking terms; do you recollect my once coming silently and offering you a little knot of white violets when we were strangers?"

"I recollect it. I dried the violets, kept them, and have them still."

"It pleased me when you took them peacefully and promptly, without prudery — that sentiment which I ever dread to excite, and which, when it is revealed in eye or gesture, I vindictively detest. To return. Not only did I watch you; but often — especially at eventide — another guardian angel was noiselessly hovering near: night after night my cousin Beck has stolen down yonder steps, and glidingly pursued your movements when you did not see her."

"But, Monsieur, you could not from the distance of that window see what passed in this garden at night?"

"By moonlight I possibly might with a glass — I use a glass — but the garden itself is open to me. In the shed, at the bottom, there is a door leading into a court, which communicates with the college; of that door I possess the key, and thus come and go at pleasure. This afternoon I came through it, and found you asleep in classe; again this evening I have availed myself of the same entrance."

I could not help saying, "If you were a wicked, designing man, how terrible would all this be!"

His attention seemed incapable of being arrested by this view of the subject: he lit his cigar, and while he puffed it, leaning against a tree, and looking at me in a cool, amused way he had when his humour was tranquil, I thought proper to go on sermonizing him: he often lectured me by the hour together — I did not see why I should not speak my mind for once. So I told him my impressions concerning his Jesuit-system.

"The knowledge it brings you is bought too dear, Monsieur; this coming and going by stealth degrades your own dignity."

"My dignity!" he cried, laughing; "when did you ever see me trouble my head about my dignity? It is you, Miss Lucy, who are 'digne.' How often, in your high insular presence, have I taken a pleasure in trampling upon, what you are pleased to call, my dignity; tearing it, scattering it to the winds, in those mad transports you witness with such hauteur, and which I know you think very like the ravings of a third-rate London actor."

"Monsieur, I tell you every glance you cast from that lattice is a wrong done to the best part of your own nature. To study the human heart thus, is to banquet secretly and sacrilegiously on Eve's apples. I wish you were a Protestant."

Indifferent to the wish, he smoked on. After a space of smiling yet thoughtful silence, he said, rather suddenly — "I have seen other things."

"What other things?"

Taking the weed from his lips, he threw the remnant amongst the shrubs, where, for a moment, it lay glowing in the gloom.

"Look, at it," said he: "is not that spark like an eye watching you and me?"

He took a turn down the walk; presently returning, he went on: — "I have seen, Miss Lucy, things to me unaccountable, that have made me watch all night for a solution, and I have not yet found it."

The tone was peculiar; my veins thrilled; he saw me shiver.

"Are you afraid? Whether is it of my words or that red jealous eye just winking itself out?"

"I am cold; the night grows dark and late, and the air is changed; it is time to go in."

"It is little past eight, but you shall go in soon. Answer me only this question."

Yet he paused ere he put it. The garden was truly growing dark; dusk had come on with clouds, and drops of rain began to patter through the trees. I hoped he would feel this, but, for the moment, he seemed too much absorbed to be sensible of the change.

"Mademoiselle, do you Protestants believe in the supernatural?"

"There is a difference of theory and belief on this point amongst Protestants as amongst other sects," I answered. "Why, Monsieur, do you ask such a question?"

"Why do you shrink and speak so faintly? Are you superstitious?"

"I am constitutionally nervous. I dislike the discussion of such subjects. I dislike it the more because — "

"You believe?"

"No: but it has happened to me to experience impressions — "

"Since you came here?"

"Yes; not many months ago."

"Here? — in this house?"

"Yes."

"Bon! I am glad of it. I knew it, somehow; before you told me. I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike — there is affinity between us. Do you see it, Mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine — that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star. Yes, you were born under my star! Tremble! for where that is the case with mortals, the threads of their destinies are difficult to disentangle; knottings and catchings occur — sudden breaks leave damage in the web. But these 'impressions,' as you say, with English caution. I, too, have had my 'impressions.'"

"Monsieur, tell me them."

"I desire no better, and intend no less. You know the legend of this house and garden?"

"I know it. Yes. They say that hundreds of years ago a nun was buried here alive at the foot of this very tree, beneath the ground which now bears us."

"And that in former days a nun's ghost used to come and go here."

"Monsieur, what if it comes and goes here still?"

"Something comes and goes here: there is a shape frequenting this house by night, different to any forms that show themselves by day. I have indisputably seen a something, more than once; and to me its conventual weeds were a strange sight, saying more than they can do to any other living being. A nun!"

"Monsieur, I, too, have seen it."

"I anticipated that. Whether this nun be flesh and blood, or something that remains when blood is dried, and flesh is wasted, her business is as much with you as with me, probably. Well, I mean to make it out; it has baffled me so far, but I mean to follow up the mystery. I mean — "

Instead of telling what he meant, he raised his head suddenly; I made the same movement in the same instant; we both looked to one point — the high tree shadowing the great berceau, and resting some of its boughs on the roof of the first classe. There had been a strange and inexplicable sound from that quarter, as if the arms of that tree had swayed of their own motion, and its weight of foliage had rushed and crushed against the massive trunk. Yes; there scarce stirred a breeze, and that heavy tree was convulsed, whilst the feathery shrubs stood still. For some minutes amongst the wood and leafage a rending and heaving went on. Dark as it was, it seemed to me that something more solid than either night-shadow, or branch-shadow, blackened out of the boles. At last the struggle ceased. What birth succeeded this travail? What Dryad was born of these throes? We watched fixedly. A sudden bell rang in the house — the prayer-bell. Instantly into our alley there came, out of the berceau, an apparition, all black and white. With a sort of angry rush-close, close past our faces — swept swiftly the very NUN herself! Never had I seen her so clearly. She looked tall of stature, and fierce of gesture. As she went, the wind rose sobbing; the rain poured wild and cold; the whole night seemed to feel her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FIRST LETTER.

Where, it becomes time to inquire, was Paulina Mary? How fared my intercourse with the sumptuous Hôtel Crécy? That intercourse had, for an interval, been suspended by absence; M. and Miss de Bassompierre had been travelling, dividing some weeks between the provinces and capital of France. Chance apprised me of their return very shortly after it took place.

I was walking one mild afternoon on a quiet boulevard, wandering slowly on, enjoying the benign April sun, and some thoughts not unpleasing, when I saw before me a group of riders, stopping as if they had just encountered, and exchanging greetings in the midst of the broad, smooth, linden-bordered path; on one side a middle-aged gentleman and young lady, on the other — a young and handsome man. Very graceful was the lady's mien, choice her appointments, delicate and stately her whole aspect. Still, as I looked, I felt they were known to me, and, drawing a little nearer, I fully recognised them all: the Count Home de Bassompierre, his daughter, and Dr. Graham Bretton.

How animated was Graham's face! How true, how warm, yet how retiring the joy it expressed! This was the state of things, this the combination of circumstances, at once to attract and enchain, to subdue and excite Dr. John. The pearl he admired was in itself of great price and truest purity, but he was not the man who, in appreciating the gem, could forget its setting. Had he seen Paulina with the same youth, beauty, and grace, but on foot, alone, unguarded, and in simple attire, a dependent worker, a demi-grisette, he would have thought her a pretty little creature, and would have loved with his eye her movements and her mien, but it required other than this to conquer him as he was now vanquished, to bring him safe under dominion as now, without loss, and even with gain to his manly honour, one saw that he was reduced; there was about Dr. John all the man of the world; to satisfy himself did not suffice; society must approve — the world must admire what he did, or he counted his measures false and futile. In his victrix he required all that was here visible — the imprint of high cultivation, the consecration of a careful and authoritative protection, the adjuncts that Fashion decrees, Wealth purchases, and Taste adjusts; for these conditions his spirit stipulated ere it surrendered: they were here to the utmost fulfilled; and now, proud, impassioned, yet fearing, he did homage to Paulina as his sovereign. As for her, the smile of feeling, rather than of conscious power, slept soft in her eyes.

They parted. He passed me at speed, hardly feeling the earth he skimmed, and seeing nothing on either hand. He looked very handsome; mettle and purpose were roused in him fully.

"Papa, there is Lucy!" cried a musical, friendly voice. "Lucy, dear

Lucy — do come here!"

I hastened to her. She threw back her veil, and stooped from her saddle to kiss me.

"I was coming to see you to-morrow," said she; "but now to-morrow you will come and see me."

She named the hour, and I promised compliance.

The morrow's evening found me with her — she and I shut into her own room. I had not seen her since that occasion when her claims were brought into comparison with those of Ginevra Fanshawe, and had so signally prevailed; she had much to tell me of her travels in the interval. A most animated, rapid speaker was she in such a tête-à-tête, a most lively describer; yet with her artless diction and clear soft voice, she never seemed to speak too fast or to say too much. My own attention I think would not soon have flagged, but by-and-by, she herself seemed to need some change of subject; she hastened to wind up her narrative briefly. Yet why she terminated with so concise an abridgment did not immediately appear; silence followed — a restless silence, not without symptoms of abstraction. Then, turning to me, in a diffident, half-appealing voice — "Lucy — "

"Well, I am at your side."

"Is my cousin Ginevra still at Madame Beck's?"

"Your cousin is still there; you must be longing to see her."

"No — not much."

"You want to invite her to spend another evening?"

"No… I suppose she still talks about being married?"

"Not to any one you care for."

"But of course she still thinks of Dr. Bretton? She cannot have changed her mind on that point, because it was so fixed two months ago."

"Why, you know, it does not matter. You saw the terms on which they stood."

"There was a little misunderstanding that evening, certainly; does she seem unhappy?"

"Not she. To change the subject. Have you heard or seen nothing of, or from. Graham during your absence?"

"Papa had letters from him once or twice about business, I think. He undertook the management of some affair which required attention while we were away. Dr. Bretton seems to respect papa, and to have pleasure in obliging him."

"Yes: you met him yesterday on the boulevard; you would be able to judge from his aspect that his friends need not be painfully anxious about his health?"

"Papa seems to have thought with you. I could not help smiling. He is not particularly observant, you know, because he is often thinking of other things than what pass before his eyes; but he said, as Dr. Bretton rode away, ‘Really it does a man good to see the spirit and energy of that boy.’ He called Dr. Bretton a boy; I believe he almost thinks him so, just as he thinks me a little girl; he was not speaking to me, but dropped that remark to himself. Lucy….”

Again fell the appealing accent, and at the same instant she left her chair, and came and sat on the stool at my feet.

I liked her. It is not a declaration I have often made concerning my acquaintance, in the course of this book: the reader will bear with it for once. Intimate intercourse, close inspection, disclosed in Paulina only what was delicate, intelligent, and sincere; therefore my regard for her lay deep. An admiration more superficial might have been more demonstrative; mine, however, was quiet.

“What have you to ask of Lucy?” said I; “be brave, and speak out”

But there was no courage in her eye; as it met mine, it fell; and there was no coolness on her cheek — not a transient surface-blush, but a gathering inward excitement raised its tint and its temperature.

“Lucy, I do wish to know your thoughts of Dr. Bretton. Do, do give me your real opinion of his character, his disposition.”

“His character stands high, and deservedly high.”

“And his disposition? Tell me about his disposition,” she urged; “you know him well.”

“I know him pretty well.”

“You know his home-side. You have seen him with his mother; speak of him as a son.”

“He is a fine-hearted son; his mother’s comfort and hope, her pride and pleasure.”

She held my hand between hers, and at each favourable word gave it a little caressing stroke.

“In what other way is he good, Lucy?”

“Dr. Bretton is benevolent — humanely disposed towards all his race, Dr. Bretton would have benignity for the lowest savage, or the worst criminal.”

“I heard some gentlemen, some of papa’s friends, who were talking about him, say the same. They say many of the poor patients at the hospitals, who tremble before some pitiless and selfish surgeons, welcome him.”

“They are right; I have witnessed as much. He once took me over a hospital; I saw how he was received: your father’s friends are right.”

The softest gratitude animated her eye as she lifted it a moment. She had yet more to say, but seemed hesitating about time and place. Dusk was beginning to reign; her parlour fire already glowed with twilight ruddiness; but I thought she wished the room dimmer, the hour later.

“How quiet and secluded we feel here!” I remarked, to reassure her.

“Do we? Yes; it is a still evening, and I shall not be called down to tea; papa is dining out.”

Still holding my hand, she played with the fingers unconsciously, dressed them, now in her own rings, and now circled them with a twine of her beautiful hair; she patted the palm against her hot cheek, and at last, having cleared a voice that was naturally liquid as a lark's, she said: —

"You must think it rather strange that I should talk so much about Dr. Bretton, ask so many questions, take such an interest, but — ".

"Not at all strange; perfectly natural; you like him."

"And if I did," said she, with slight quickness, "is that a reason why I should talk? I suppose you think me weak, like my cousin Ginevra?"

"If I thought you one whit like Madame Ginevra, I would not sit here waiting for your communications. I would get up, walk at my ease about the room, and anticipate all you had to say by a round lecture. Go on."

"I mean to go on," retorted she; "what else do you suppose I mean to do?"

And she looked and spoke — the little Polly of Bretton — petulant, sensitive.

"If," said she, emphatically, "if I liked Dr. John till I was fit to die for liking him, that alone could not license me to be otherwise than dumb — dumb as the grave — dumb as you, Lucy Snowe — you know it — and you know you would despise me if I failed in self-control, and whined about some rickety liking that was all on my side."

"It is true I little respect women or girls who are loquacious either in boasting the triumphs, or bemoaning the mortifications, of feelings. But as to you, Paulina, speak, for I earnestly wish to hear you. Tell me all it will give you pleasure or relief to tell: I ask no more."

"Do you care for me, Lucy?"

"Yes, I do, Paulina."

"And I love you. I had an odd content in being with you even when I was a little, troublesome, disobedient girl; it was charming to me then to lavish on you my naughtiness and whims. Now you are acceptable to me, and I like to talk with and trust you. So listen, Lucy."

And she settled herself, resting against my arm — resting gently, not with honest Mistress Fanshawe's fatiguing and selfish weight.

"A few minutes since you asked whether we had not heard from Graham during our absence, and I said there were two letters for papa on business; this was true, but I did not tell you all."

"You evaded?"

"I shuffled and equivocated, you know. However, I am going to speak the truth now; it is getting darker; one can talk at one's ease. Papa often lets me open the letter-bag and give him out the contents. One morning, about three weeks ago, you don't know how surprised I was to find, amongst a dozen letters for M. de Bassompierre, a note addressed to Miss de Bassompierre. I spied it at once, amidst all the rest; the handwriting was not strange; it attracted me directly. I was going to say, 'Papa, here is another letter from Dr. Bretton;' but the 'Miss' struck me mute. I actually never received a letter from a gentleman before. Ought I to have shown it to papa, and let him open it and read it first? I could not for my life, Lucy. I know so well papa's ideas about me: he forgets my age; he thinks I am a mere school-girl; he is not aware that other people see I am grown up as tall as I shall be; so, with a curious mixture of feelings, some of them self-reproachful, and some so fluttering and strong, I cannot describe them, I gave papa his twelve letters — his herd of possessions — and kept back my one, my ewe-lamb. It lay in my lap during breakfast, looking up at me with an inexplicable meaning, making me feel myself a thing double-existent — a child to that dear papa, but no more a child to myself. After breakfast I carried my letter up-stairs, and having secured myself by turning the key in the door, I began to study the outside of my treasure: it was some minutes before I could get over the direction and penetrate the seal; one does not take a strong place of this kind by instant storm — one sits down awhile before it, as beleaguers say. Graham's hand is like himself, Lucy, and so is his seal — all clear, firm, and rounded — no slovenly splash of wax — a full, solid, steady drop — a distinct impress; no pointed turns harshly pricking the optic nerve, but a clean, mellow, pleasant manuscript, that soothes you as you read. It is like his face — just like the chiselling of his features: do you know his autograph?"

"I have seen it: go on."

"The seal was too beautiful to be broken, so I cut it round with my scissors. On the point of reading the letter at last, I once more drew back voluntarily; it was too soon yet to drink that draught — the sparkle in the cup was so beautiful — I would watch it yet a minute. Then I remembered all at once that I had not said my prayers that morning. Having heard papa go down to breakfast a little earlier than usual, I had been afraid of keeping him waiting, and had hastened to join him as soon as dressed, thinking no harm to put off prayers till afterwards. Some people would say I ought to have served God first and then man; but I don't think heaven could be jealous of anything I might do for papa. I believe I am superstitious. A voice seemed now to say that another feeling than filial affection was in question — to urge me to pray before I dared to read what I so longed to read — to deny myself yet a moment, and remember first a great duty. I have had these impulses ever since I can remember. I put the letter down and said my prayers, adding, at the end, a strong entreaty that whatever happened, I might not be tempted or led to cause papa any sorrow, and might never, in caring for others, neglect him. The very thought of such a possibility, so pierced my heart that it made me cry. But still, Lucy, I felt that in time papa would have to be taught the truth, managed, and induced to hear reason.

"I read the letter. Lucy, life is said to be all disappointment. I was not disappointed. Ere I read, and while I read, my heart did more than throb — it trembled fast — every quiver seemed like the pant of an animal athirst, laid down at a well and drinking; and the well proved quite full, gloriously clear; it rose up munificently of its own impulse; I saw the sun through its gush, and not a mote, Lucy, no moss, no insect, no atom in the thrice-refined golden gurgle.

"Life," she went on, "is said to be full of pain to some. I have read biographies where the wayfarer seemed to journey on from suffering to suffering; where Hope flew before him fast, never alighting so near, or lingering so long, as to give his hand a chance of one realizing grasp. I have read of those who sowed in tears, and whose harvest, so far from being reaped in joy, perished by untimely blight, or was borne off by sudden whirlwind; and, alas! some of these met the winter with empty garners, and died of utter want in the darkest and coldest of the year."

"Was it their fault, Paulina, that they of whom you speak thus died?"

"Not always their fault. Some of them were good endeavouring people. I am not endeavouring, nor actively good, yet God has caused me to grow in sun, due moisture, and safe protection, sheltered, fostered, taught, by my dear father; and now — now — another comes. Graham loves me."

For some minutes we both paused on this climax.

"Does your father know?" I inquired, in a low voice.

"Graham spoke with deep respect of papa, but implied that he dared not approach that quarter as yet; he must first prove his worth: he added that he must have some light respecting myself and my own feelings ere he ventured to risk a step in the matter elsewhere."

"How did you reply?"

"I replied briefly, but I did not repulse him. Yet I almost trembled for fear of making the answer too cordial: Graham's tastes are so fastidious. I wrote it three times — chastening and subduing the phrases at every rescript; at last, having confected it till it seemed to me to resemble a morsel of ice flavoured with ever so slight a zest of fruit or sugar, I ventured to seal and despatch it."

"Excellent, Paulina! Your instinct is fine; you understand Dr. Bretton."

"But how must I manage about papa? There I am still in pain."

"Do not manage at all. Wait now. Only maintain no further correspondence till your father knows all, and gives his sanction."

"Will he ever give it?"

"Time will show. Wait."

"Dr. Bretton wrote one other letter, deeply grateful for my calm, brief note; but I anticipated your advice, by saying, that while my sentiments continued the same, I could not, without my fathers knowledge, write again."

"You acted as you ought to have done; so Dr. Bretton will feel: it will increase his pride in you, his love for you, if either be capable of increase. Paulina, that gentle hoar-frost of yours, surrounding so much pure, fine flame, is a priceless privilege of nature."

"You see I feel Graham's disposition," said she. "I feel that no delicacy can be too exquisite for his treatment."

"It is perfectly proved that you comprehend him, and then — whatever Dr. Bretton's disposition, were he one who expected to be more nearly met — you would still act truthfully, openly, tenderly, with your father."

"Lucy, I trust I shall thus act always. Oh, it will be pain to wake papa from his dream, and tell him I am no more a little girl!"

"Be in no hurry to do so, Paulina. Leave the revelation to Time and your kind Fate. I also have noticed the gentleness of her cares for you: doubt not she will benignantly order the circumstances, and fitly appoint the hour. Yes: I have thought over your life just as you have yourself thought it over; I have made comparisons like those to which you adverted. We know not the future, but the past has been propitious.

"As a child I feared for you; nothing that has life was ever more susceptible than your nature in infancy: under harshness or neglect, neither your outward nor your inward self would have ripened to what they now are. Much pain, much fear, much struggle, would have troubled the very lines of your features, broken their regularity, would have harassed your nerves into the fever of habitual irritation you would have lost in health and cheerfulness, in grace and sweetness. Providence has protected and cultured you, not only for your own sake, but I believe for Graham's. His star, too, was fortunate: to develop fully the best of his nature, a companion like you was needed: there you are, ready. You must be united. I knew it the first day I saw you together at La Terrasse. In all that mutually concerns you and Graham there seems to me promise, plan, harmony. I do not think the sunny youth of either will prove the forerunner of stormy age. I think it is deemed good that you two should live in peace and be happy — not as angels, but as few are happy amongst mortals. Some lives are thus blessed: it is God's will: it is the attesting trace and lingering evidence of Eden. Other lives run from the first another course. Other travellers encounter weather fitful and gusty, wild and variable — breast adverse winds, are belated and overtaken by the early closing winter night. Neither can this happen without the sanction of God; and I know that, amidst His boundless works, is somewhere stored the secret of this last fate's justice: I know that His treasures contain the proof as the promise of its mercy."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

M. PAUL KEEPS HIS PROMISE.

On the first of May, we had all — i.e. the twenty boarders and the four teachers — notice to rise at five o'clock of the morning, to be dressed and ready by six, to put ourselves under the command of M. le Professeur Emanuel, who was to head our march forth from Villette, for it was on this day he proposed to fulfil his promise of taking us to breakfast in the country. I, indeed, as the reader may perhaps remember, had not had the honour of an invitation when this excursion was first projected — rather the contrary; but on my now making allusion to this fact, and wishing to know how it was to be, my ear received a pull, of which I did not venture to challenge the repetition by raising, further difficulties.

"Je vous conseille de vous faire prier," said M. Emanuel, imperially menacing the other ear. One Napoleonic compliment, however, was enough, so I made up my mind to be of the party.

The morning broke calm as summer, with singing of birds in the garden, and a light dew-mist that promised heat. We all said it would be warm, and we all felt pleasure in folding away heavy garments, and in assuming the attire suiting a sunny season. The clean fresh print dress, and the light straw bonnet, each made and trimmed as the French workwoman alone can make and trim, so as to unite the utterly unpretending with the perfectly becoming, was the rule of costume. Nobody flaunted in faded silk; nobody wore a second-hand best article.

At six the bell rang merrily, and we poured down the staircase, through the carré, along the corridor, into the vestibule. There stood our Professor, wearing, not his savage-looking paletôt and severe bonnet-grec, but a young-looking belted blouse and cheerful straw hat. He had for us all the kindest good-morrow, and most of us for him had a thanksgiving smile. We were marshalled in order and soon started.

The streets were yet quiet, and the boulevards were fresh and peaceful as fields. I believe we were very happy as we walked along. This chief of ours had the secret of giving a certain impetus to happiness when he would; just as, in an opposite mood, he could give a thrill to fear.

He did not lead nor follow us, but walked along the line, giving a word to every one, talking much to his favourites, and not wholly neglecting even those he disliked. It was rather my wish, for a reason I had, to keep slightly aloof from notice, and being paired with Ginevra Fanshawe, bearing on my arm the dear pressure of that angel's not unsubstantial limb — (she continued in excellent case, and I can assure the reader it was no trifling business to bear the burden of her loveliness; many a time in the course of that warm day I wished to goodness there had been less of the charming commodity) — however, having her, as I said, I tried to make her useful by interposing her always between myself and M. Paul, shifting my place, according as I heard him coming up to the right hand or the left. My private motive for this manoeuvre might be traced to the circumstance of the new print dress I wore, being pink in colour — a fact which, under our present convoy, made me feel something as I have felt, when, clad in a shawl with a red border, necessitated to traverse a meadow where pastured a bull.

For awhile, the shifting system, together with some modifications in the arrangement of a black silk scarf, answered my purpose; but, by-and-by, he found out, that whether he came to this side or to that, Miss Fanshawe was still his neighbour. The course of acquaintance between Ginevra and him had never run so smooth that his temper did not undergo a certain crisping process whenever he heard her English accent: nothing in their dispositions fitted; they jarred if they came in contact; he held her empty and affected; she deemed him bearish, meddling, repellent.

At last, when he had changed his place for about the sixth time, finding still the same untoward result to the experiment — he thrust his head forward, settled his eyes on mine, and demanded with impatience, "Qu'est-ce que c'est? Vous me jouez des tours?"

The words were hardly out of his mouth, however, ere, with his customary quickness, he seized the root of this proceeding: in vain I shook out the long fringe, and spread forth the broad end of my scarf. "A-h-h! c'est la robe rose!" broke from his lips, affecting me very much like the sudden and irate low of some lord of the meadow.

"It is only cotton," I alleged, hurriedly; "and cheaper, and washes better than any other colour."

"Et Mademoiselle Lucy est coquette comme dix Parisiennes," he answered. "A-t-on jamais vu une Anglaise pareille. Regardez plutôt son chapeau, et ses gants, et ses brodequins!" These articles of dress were just like what my companions wore; certainly not one whit smarter — perhaps rather plainer than most — but Monsieur had now got hold of his text, and I began to chafe under the expected sermon. It went off, however, as mildly as the menace of a storm sometimes passes on a summer day. I got but one flash of sheet lightning in the shape of a single bantering smile from his eyes; and then he said, "Courage! — à vrai dire je ne suis pas fâché, peut-être même suis je content qu'on s'est fait si belle pour ma petite fête."

"Mais ma robe n'est pas belle, Monsieur — elle n'est que propre."

"J'aime la propreté," said he. In short, he was not to be dissatisfied; the sun of good humour was to triumph on this auspicious morning; it consumed scudding clouds ere they sullied its disk.

And now we were in the country, amongst what they called "les bois et les petits sentiers." These woods and lanes a month later would offer but a dusty and doubtful seclusion: now, however, in their May greenness and morning repose, they looked very pleasant.

We reached a certain well, planted round, in the taste of Labassecour, with an orderly circle of lime-trees: here a halt was called; on the green swell of ground surrounding this well, we were ordered to be seated, Monsieur taking his place in our midst, and suffering us to gather in a knot round him. Those who liked him more than they feared, came close, and these were chiefly little ones; those who feared more than they liked, kept somewhat aloof; those in whom much affection had given, even to what remained of fear, a pleasurable zest, observed the greatest distance.

He began to tell us a story. Well could he narrate: in such a diction as children love, and learned men emulate; a diction simple in its strength, and strong in its simplicity. There were beautiful touches in that little tale; sweet glimpses of feeling and hues of description that, while I listened, sunk into my mind, and since have never faded. He tinted a twilight scene — I hold it in memory still — such a picture I have never looked on from artist's pencil.

I have said, that, for myself, I had no impromptu faculty; and perhaps that very deficiency made me marvel the more at one who possessed it in perfection. M. Emanuel was not a man to write books; but I have heard him lavish, with careless, unconscious prodigality, such mental wealth as books seldom boast; his mind was indeed my library, and whenever it was opened to me, I entered bliss. Intellectually imperfect as I was, I could read little; there were few bound and printed volumes that did not weary me — whose perusal did not fag and blind — but his tomes of thought were collyrium to the spirit's eyes; over their contents, inward sight grew clear and strong. I used to think what a delight it would be for one who loved him better than he loved himself, to gather and store up those handfuls of gold-dust, so recklessly flung to heaven's reckless winds.

His story done, he approached the little knoll where I and Ginevra sat apart. In his usual mode of demanding an opinion (he had not reticence to wait till it was voluntarily offered) he asked, "Were you interested?"

According to my wonted undemonstrative fashion, I simply answered — "Yes."

"Was it good?"

"Very good."

"Yet I could not write that down," said he.

"Why not, Monsieur?"

"I hate the mechanical labour; I hate to stoop and sit still. I could dictate it, though, with pleasure, to an amanuensis who suited me. Would Mademoiselle Lucy write for me if I asked her?"

"Monsieur would be too quick; he would urge me, and be angry if my pen did not keep pace with his lips."

"Try some day; let us see the monster I can make of myself under the circumstances. But just now, there is no question of dictation; I mean to make you useful in another office. Do you see yonder farm-house?"

"Surrounded with trees? Yes.".

"There we are to breakfast; and while the good fermière makes the café au lait in a caldron, you and five others, whom I shall select, will spread with butter half a hundred rolls."

Having formed his troop into line once more, he marched us straight on the farm, which, on seeing our force, surrendered without capitulation.

Clean knives and plates, and fresh butter being provided, half-a-dozen of us, chosen by our Professor, set to work under his directions, to prepare for breakfast a huge basket of rolls, with which the baker had been ordered to provision the farm, in anticipation of our coming. Coffee and chocolate were already made hot; cream and new-laid eggs were added to the treat, and M. Emanuel, always generous, would have given a large order for "jambon" and "confitures" in addition, but that some of us, who presumed perhaps upon our influence, insisted that it would be a most reckless waste of victual. He railed at us for our pains, terming us "des ménagères avares;" but we let him talk, and managed the economy of the repast our own way.

With what a pleasant countenance he stood on the farm-kitchen hearth looking on! He was a man whom it made happy to see others happy; he liked to have movement, animation, abundance and enjoyment round him. We asked where he would sit. He told us, we knew well he was our slave, and we his tyrants, and that he dared not so much as choose a chair without our leave; so we set him the farmer's great chair at the head of the long table, and put him into it.

Well might we like him, with all his passions and hurricanes, when he could be so benignant and docile at times, as he was just now. Indeed, at the worst, it was only his nerves that were irritable, not his temper that was radically bad; soothe, comprehend, comfort him, and he was a lamb; he would not harm a fly. Only to the very stupid, perverse, or unsympathizing, was he in the slightest degree dangerous.

Mindful always of his religion, he made the youngest of the party say a little prayer before we began breakfast, crossing himself as devotedly as a woman. I had never seen him pray before, or make that pious sign; he did it so simply, with such child-like faith, I could not help smiling pleasurably as I watched; his eyes met my smile; he just stretched out his kind hand, saying, "Donnez-moi la main! I see we worship the same God, in the same spirit, though by different rites."

Most of M. Emanuel's brother Professors were emancipated free-thinkers, infidels, atheists; and many of them men whose lives would not bear scrutiny; he was more like a knight of old, religious in his way, and of spotless fame. Innocent childhood, beautiful youth were safe at his side. He had vivid passions, keen feelings, but his pure honour and his artless piety were the strong charm that kept the lions couchant.

That breakfast was a merry meal, and the merriment was not mere vacant clatter: M. Paul originated, led, controlled and heightened it; his social, lively temper played unfettered and unclouded; surrounded only by women and children there was nothing to cross and thwart him; he had his own way, and a pleasant way it was.

The meal over, the party were free to run and play in the meadows; a few stayed to help the farmer's wife to put away her earthenware. M. Paul called me from among these to come out and sit near him under a tree — whence he could view the troop gambolling, over a wide pasture — and read to him whilst he took his cigar. He sat on a rustic bench, and I at the tree-root. While I read (a pocket-classic — a Corneille — I did not like it, but he did, finding therein beauties I never could be brought to perceive), he listened with a sweetness of calm the more impressive from the impetuosity of his general nature; the deepest happiness filled his blue eye and smoothed his broad forehead. I, too, was happy — happy with the bright day, happier with his presence, happiest with his kindness.

He asked, by-and-by, if I would not rather run to my companions than sit there? I said, no; I felt content to be where he was. He asked whether, if I were his sister, I should always be content to stay with a brother such as he. I said, I believed I should; and I felt it. Again, he inquired whether, if he were to leave Villette, and go far away, I should be sorry; and I dropped Corneille, and made no reply.

"Petite soeur," said he; "how long could you remember me if we were separated?"

"That, Monsieur, I can never tell, because I do not know how long it will be before I shall cease to remember everything earthly."

"If I were to go beyond seas for two — three — five years, should you welcome me on my return?"

"Monsieur, how could I live in the interval?"

"Pourtant j'ai été pour vous bien dur, bien exigeant."

I hid my face with the book, for it was covered with tears. I asked him why he talked so; and he said he would talk so no more, and cheered me again with the kindest encouragement. Still, the gentleness with which he treated me during the rest of the day, went somehow to my heart. It was too tender. It was mournful. I would rather he had been abrupt, whimsical, and irate as was his wont.

When hot noon arrived — for the day turned out as we had anticipated, glowing as June — our shepherd collected his sheep from the pasture, and proceeded to lead us all softly home. But we had a whole league to walk, thus far from Villette was the farm where he had breakfasted; the children, especially, were tired with their play; the spirits of most flagged at the prospect of this mid-day walk over chaussées flinty, glaring, and dusty. This state of things had been foreseen and provided for. Just beyond the boundary of the farm we met two spacious vehicles coming to fetch us — such conveyances as are hired out purposely for the accommodation of school-parties; here, with good management, room was found for all, and in another hour M. Paul made safe consignment of his charge at the Rue Fossette. It had been a pleasant day: it would have been perfect, but for the breathing of melancholy which had dimmed its sunshine a moment.

That tarnish was renewed the same evening.

Just about sunset, I saw M. Emanuel come out of the front-door, accompanied by Madame Beck. They paced the centre-alley for nearly an hour, talking earnestly: he — looking grave, yet restless; she — wearing an amazed, expostulatory, dissuasive air.

I wondered what was under discussion; and when Madame Beck re-entered the house as it darkened, leaving her kinsman Paul yet lingering in the garden, I said to myself — "He called me 'petite soeur' this morning. If he were really my brother, how I should like to go to him just now, and ask what it is that presses on his mind. See how he leans against that tree, with his arms crossed and his brow bent. He wants consolation, I know: Madame does not console: she only remonstrates. What now — — ?"

Starting from quiescence to action, M. Paul came striding erect and quick down the garden. The carré doors were yet open: I thought he was probably going to water the orange-trees in the tubs, after his occasional custom; on reaching the court, however, he took an abrupt turn and made for the berceau and the first-classe glass door. There, in that first classe I was, thence I had been watching him; but there I could not find courage to await his approach. He had turned so suddenly, he strode so fast, he looked so strange; the coward within me grew pale, shrank and — not waiting to listen to reason, and hearing the shrubs crush and the gravel crunch to his advance — she was gone on the wings of panic.

Nor did I pause till I had taken sanctuary in the oratory, now empty. Listening there with beating pulses, and an unaccountable, undefined apprehension, I heard him pass through all the schoolrooms, clashing the doors impatiently as he went; I heard him invade the refectory which the "lecture pieuse" was now holding under hallowed constraint; I heard him pronounce these words — "Où est Mademoiselle Lucie?"

And just as, summoning my courage, I was preparing to go down and do what, after all, I most wished to do in the world — viz., meet him — the wiry voice of St. Pierre replied glibly and falsely, "Elle est au lit." And he passed, with the stamp of vexation, into the corridor. There Madame Beck met, captured, chid, convoyed to the street-door, and finally dismissed him.

As that street-door closed, a sudden amazement at my own perverse proceeding struck like a blow upon me. I felt from the first it was me he wanted — me he was seeking — and had not I wanted him too? What, then, had carried me away? What had rapt me beyond his reach? He had something to tell: he was going to tell me that something: my ear strained its nerve to hear it, and I had made the confidence impossible. Yearning to listen and console, while I thought audience and solace beyond hope’s reach — no sooner did opportunity suddenly and fully arrive, than I evaded it as I would have evaded the levelled shaft of mortality.

Well, my insane inconsistency had its reward. Instead of the comfort, the certain satisfaction, I might have won — could I but have put choking panic down, and stood firm two minutes — here was dead blank, dark doubt, and drear suspense.

I took my wages to my pillow, and passed the night counting them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MALEVOLA.

Madame Beck called me on Thursday afternoon, and asked whether I had any occupation to hinder me from going into town and executing some little commissions for her at the shops.

Being disengaged, and placing myself at her service, I was presently furnished with a list of the wools, silks, embroidering thread, etcetera, wanted in the pupils' work, and having equipped myself in a manner suiting the threatening aspect of a cloudy and sultry day, I was just drawing the spring-bolt of the street-door, in act to issue forth, when Madame's voice again summoned me to the salle-à-manger.

"Pardon, Meess Lucie!" cried she, in the seeming haste of an impromptu thought, "I have just recollected one more errand for you, if your good-nature will not deem itself over-burdened?"

Of course I "confounded myself" in asseverations to the contrary; and Madame, running into the little salon, brought thence a pretty basket, filled with fine hothouse fruit, rosy, perfect, and tempting, reposing amongst the dark green, wax-like leaves, and pale yellow stars of, I know not what, exotic plant.

"There," she said, "it is not heavy, and will not shame your neat toilette, as if it were a household, servant-like detail. Do me the favour to leave this little basket at the house of Madame Walravens, with my felicitations on her fête. She lives down in the old town, Numéro 3, Rue des Mages. I fear you will find the walk rather long, but you have the whole afternoon before you, and do not hurry; if you are not back in time for dinner, I will order a portion to be saved, or Goton, with whom you are a favourite, will have pleasure in tossing up some trifle, for your especial benefit. You shall not be forgotten, ma bonne Meess. And oh! please!" (calling me back once more) "be sure to insist on seeing Madame Walravens herself, and giving the basket into her own hands, in order that there may be no mistake, for she is rather a punctilious personage. Adieu! Au revoir!"

And at last I got away. The shop commissions took some time to execute, that choosing and matching of silks and wools being always a tedious business, but at last I got through my list. The patterns for the slippers, the bell-ropes, the cabas were selected — the slides and tassels for the purses chosen — the whole "tripotage," in short, was off my mind; nothing but the fruit and the felicitations remained to be attended to.

I rather liked the prospect of a long walk, deep into the old and grim

Basse-Ville; and I liked it no worse because the evening sky, over the city, was settling into a mass of black-blue metal, heated at the rim, and inflaming slowly to a heavy red.

I fear a high wind, because storm demands that exertion of strength and use of action I always yield with pain; but the sullen down-fall, the thick snow-descent, or dark rush of rain, ask only resignation — the quiet abandonment of garments and person to be, drenched. In return, it sweeps a great capital clean before you; it makes you a quiet path through broad, grand streets; it petrifies a living city as if by eastern enchantment; it transforms a Villette into a Tadmor. Let, then, the rains fall, and the floods descend — only I must first get rid of this basket of fruit.

An unknown clock from an unknown tower (Jean Baptiste's voice was now too distant to be audible) was tolling the third quarter past five, when I reached that street and house whereof Madame Beck had given me the address. It was no street at all; it seemed rather to be part of a square: it was quiet, grass grew between the broad grey flags, the houses were large and looked very old — behind them rose the appearance of trees, indicating gardens at the back. Antiquity brooded above this region, business was banished thence. Rich men had once possessed this quarter, and once grandeur had made her seat here. That church, whose dark, half-ruinous turrets overlooked the square, was the venerable and formerly opulent shrine of the Magi. But wealth and greatness had long since stretched their gilded pinions and fled hence, leaving these their ancient nests, perhaps to house Penury for a time, or perhaps to stand cold and empty, mouldering untenanted in the course of winters.

As I crossed this deserted "place," on whose pavement drops almost as large as a five-franc piece were now slowly darkening, I saw, in its whole expanse, no symptom or evidence of life, except what was given in the figure of an infirm old priest, who went past, bending and propped on a staff — the type of eld and decay.

He had issued from the very house to which I was directed; and when I paused before the door just closed after him, and rang the bell, he turned to look at me. Nor did he soon avert his gaze; perhaps he thought me, with my basket of summer fruit, and my lack of the dignity age confers, an incongruous figure in such a scene. I know, had a young ruddy-faced bonne opened the door to admit me, I should have thought such a one little in harmony with her dwelling; but, when I found myself confronted by a very old woman, wearing a very antique peasant costume, a cap alike hideous and costly, with long flaps of native lace, a petticoat and jacket of cloth, and sabots more like little boats than shoes, it seemed all right, and soothingly in character.

The expression of her face was not quite so soothing as the cut of her costume; anything more cantankerous I have seldom seen; she would scarcely reply to my inquiry after Madame Walravens; I believe she would have snatched the basket of fruit from my hand, had not the old priest, hobbling up, checked her, and himself lent an ear to the message with which I was charged.

His apparent deafness rendered it a little difficult to make him fully understand that I must see Madame Walravens, and consign the fruit into her own hands. At last, however, he comprehended the fact that such were my orders, and that duty enjoined their literal fulfilment. Addressing the aged bonne, not in French, but in the aboriginal tongue of Labassecour, he persuaded her, at last, to let me cross the inhospitable threshold, and himself escorting me up-stairs, I was ushered into a sort of salon, and there left.

The room was large, and had a fine old ceiling, and almost church-like windows of coloured-glass; but it was desolate, and in the shadow of a coming storm, looked strangely lowering. Within — opened a smaller room; there, however, the blind of the single casement was closed; through the deep gloom few details of furniture were apparent. These few I amused myself by puzzling to make out; and, in particular, I was attracted by the outline of a picture on the wall.

By-and-by the picture seemed to give way: to my bewilderment, it shook, it sunk, it rolled back into nothing; its vanishing left an opening arched, leading into an arched passage, with a mystic winding stair; both passage and stair were of cold stone, uncarpeted and unpainted. Down this donjon stair descended a tap, tap, like a stick; soon there fell on the steps a shadow, and last of all, I was aware of a substance.

Yet, was it actual substance, this appearance approaching me? this obstruction, partially darkening the arch?

It drew near, and I saw it well. I began to comprehend where I was. Well might this old square be named quarter of the Magi — well might the three towers, overlooking it, own for godfathers three mystic sages of a dead and dark art. Hoar enchantment here prevailed; a spell had opened for me elf-land — that cell-like room, that vanishing picture, that arch and passage, and stair of stone, were all parts of a fairy tale. Distincter even than these scenic details stood the chief figure — Cunegonde, the sorceress! Malevola, the evil fairy. How was she?

She might be three feet high, but she had no shape; her skinny hands rested upon each other, and pressed the gold knob of a wand-like ivory staff. Her face was large, set, not upon her shoulders, but before her breast; she seemed to have no neck; I should have said there were a hundred years in her features, and more perhaps in her eyes — her malign, unfriendly eyes, with thick grey brows above, and livid lids all round. How severely they viewed me, with a sort of dull displeasure!

This being wore a gown of brocade, dyed bright blue, full-tinted as the gentianella flower, and covered with satin foliage in a large pattern; over the gown a costly shawl, gorgeously bordered, and so large for her, that its many-coloured fringe swept the floor. But her chief points were her jewels: she had long, clear earrings, blazing with a lustre which could not be borrowed or false; she had rings on her skeleton hands, with thick gold hoops, and stones — purple, green, and blood-red. Hunchbacked, dwarfish, and doting, she was adorned like a barbarian queen.

“Que me voulez-vous?” said she, hoarsely, with the voice rather of male than of female old age; and, indeed, a silver beard bristled her chin.

I delivered my basket and my message.

“Is that all?” she demanded.

“It is all,” said I.

“Truly, it was well worth while,” she answered. “Return to Madame Beck, and tell her I can buy fruit when I want it, et quant à ses félicitations, je m’en moque!” And this courteous dame turned her back.

Just as she turned, a peal of thunder broke, and a flash of lightning blazed broad over salon and boudoir. The tale of magic seemed to proceed with due accompaniment of the elements. The wanderer, decoyed into the enchanted castle, heard rising, outside, the spell-wakened tempest.

What, in all this, was I to think of Madame Beck? She owned strange acquaintance; she offered messages and gifts at an unique shrine, and inauspicious seemed the bearing of the uncouth thing she worshipped. There went that sullen Sidonia, tottering and trembling like palsy incarnate, tapping her ivory staff on the mosaic parquet, and muttering venomously as she vanished.

Down washed the rain, deep lowered the welkin; the clouds, ruddy a while ago, had now, through all their blackness, turned deadly pale, as if in terror. Notwithstanding my late boast about not fearing a shower, I hardly liked to go out under this waterspout. Then the gleams of lightning were very fierce, the thunder crashed very near; this storm had gathered immediately above Villette; it seemed to have burst at the zenith; it rushed down prone; the forked, slant bolts pierced athwart vertical torrents; red zigzags interlaced a descent blanched as white metal: and all broke from a sky heavily black in its swollen abundance.

Leaving Madame Walravens’ inhospitable salon, I betook myself to her cold staircase; there was a seat on the landing — there I waited. Somebody came gliding along the gallery just above; it was the old priest.

“Indeed Mademoiselle shall not sit there,” said he. “It would displeasure our benefactor if he knew a stranger was so treated in this house.”

And he begged me so earnestly to return to the salon, that, without discourtesy, I could not but comply. The smaller room was better furnished and more habitable than the larger; thither he introduced me. Partially withdrawing the blind, he disclosed what seemed more like an oratory than a boudoir, a very solemn little chamber, looking as if it were a place rather dedicated to relics and remembrance, than designed for present use and comfort.

The good father sat down, as if to keep me company; but instead of conversing, he took out a book, fastened on the page his eyes, and employed his lips in whispering — what sounded like a prayer or litany. A yellow electric light from the sky gilded his bald head; his figure remained in shade — deep and purple; he sat still as sculpture; he seemed to forget me for his prayers; he only looked up when a fiercer bolt, or a harsher, closer rattle told of nearing danger; even then, it was not in fear, but in seeming awe, he raised his eyes. I too was awe-struck; being, however, under no pressure of slavish terror, my thoughts and observations were free.

To speak truth, I was beginning to fancy that the old priest resembled that Père Silas, before whom I had kneeled in the church of the Béguinage. The idea was vague, for I had seen my confessor only in dusk and in profile, yet still I seemed to trace a likeness: I thought also I recognized the voice. While I watched him, he betrayed, by one lifted look, that he felt my scrutiny; I turned to note the room; that too had its half mystic interest.

Beside a cross of curiously carved old ivory, yellow with time, and sloped above a dark-red prie-dieu, furnished duly, with rich missal and ebon rosary — hung the picture whose dim outline had drawn my eyes before — the picture which moved, fell away with the wall and let in phantoms. Imperfectly seen, I had taken it for a Madonna; revealed by clearer light, it proved to be a woman's portrait in a nun's dress. The face, though not beautiful, was pleasing; pale, young, and shaded with the dejection of grief or ill health. I say again it was not beautiful; it was not even intellectual; its very amiability was the amiability of a weak frame, inactive passions, acquiescent habits: yet I looked long at that picture, and could not choose but look.

The old priest, who at first had seemed to me so deaf and infirm, must yet have retained his faculties in tolerable preservation; absorbed in his book as he appeared, without once lifting his head, or, as far as I knew, turning his eyes, he perceived the point towards which my attention was drawn, and, in a slow distinct voice, dropped, concerning it, these four observations: —

"She was much beloved.

"She gave herself to God.

"She died young.

"She is still remembered, still wept."

"By that aged lady, Madame Walravens?" I inquired, fancying that I had discovered in the incurable grief of bereavement, a key to that same aged lady's desperate ill-humour.

The father shook his head with half a smile.

"No, no," said he; "a grand-dame's affection for her children's children may be great, and her sorrow for their loss, lively; but it is only the affianced lover, to whom Fate, Faith, and Death have trebly denied the bliss of union, who mourns what he has lost, as Justine Marie is still mourned."

I thought the father rather wished to be questioned, and therefore I inquired who had lost and who still mourned "Justine Marie." I got, in reply, quite a little romantic narrative, told not unimpressively, with the accompaniment of the now subsiding storm. I am bound to say it might have been made much more truly impressive, if there had been less French, Rousseau-like sentimentalizing and wire-drawing; and rather more healthful carelessness of effect. But the worthy father was obviously a Frenchman born and bred (I became more and more persuaded of his resemblance to my confessor) — he was a true son of Rome; when he did lift his eyes, he looked at me out of their corners, with more and sharper subtlety than, one would have thought, could survive the wear and tear of seventy years. Yet, I believe, he was a good old man.

The hero of his tale was some former pupil of his, whom he now called his benefactor, and who, it appears, had loved this pale Justine Marie, the daughter of rich parents, at a time when his own worldly prospects were such as to justify his aspiring to a well-dowered hand. The pupil's father — once a rich banker — had failed, died, and left behind him only debts and destitution. The son was then forbidden to think of Marie; especially that old witch of a grand-dame I had seen, Madame Walravens, opposed the match with all the violence of a temper which deformity made sometimes demoniac. The mild Marie had neither the treachery to be false, nor the force to be quite staunch to her lover; she gave up her first suitor, but, refusing to accept a second with a heavier purse, withdrew to a convent, and there died in her noviciate.

Lasting anguish, it seems, had taken possession of the faithful heart which worshipped her, and the truth of that love and grief had been shown in a manner which touched even me, as I listened.

Some years after Justine Marie's death, ruin had come on her house too: her father, by nominal calling a jeweller, but who also dealt a good deal on the Bourse, had been concerned in some financial transactions which entailed exposure and ruinous fines. He died of grief for the loss, and shame for the infamy. His old hunchbacked mother and his bereaved wife were left penniless, and might have died too of want; but their lost daughter's once-despised, yet most true-hearted suitor, hearing of the condition of these ladies, came with singular devotedness to the rescue. He took on their insolent pride the revenge of the purest charity — housing, caring for, befriending them, so as no son could have done it more tenderly and efficiently. The mother — on the whole a good woman — died blessing him; the strange, godless, loveless, misanthrope grandmother lived still, entirely supported by this self-sacrificing man. Her, who had been the bane of his life, blighting his hope, and awarding him, for love and domestic happiness, long mourning and cheerless solitude, he treated with the respect a good son might offer a kind mother. He had brought her to this house, "and," continued the priest, while genuine tears rose to his eyes, "here, too, he shelters me, his old tutor, and Agnes, a superannuated servant of his father's family. To our sustenance, and to other charities, I know he devotes three-parts of his income, keeping only the fourth to provide himself with bread and the most modest accommodations. By this arrangement he has rendered it impossible to himself ever to marry: he has given himself to God and to his angel-bride as much as if he were a priest, like me."

The father had wiped away his tears before he uttered these last words, and in pronouncing them, he for one instant raised his eyes to mine. I caught this glance, despite its veiled character; the momentary gleam shot a meaning which struck me.

These Romanists are strange beings. Such a one among them — whom you know no more than the last Inca of Peru, or the first Emperor of China — knows you and all your concerns; and has his reasons for saying to you so and so, when you simply thought the communication sprang impromptu from the instant's impulse: his plan in bringing it about that you shall come on such a day, to such a place, under such and such circumstances, when the whole arrangement seems to your crude apprehension the ordinance of chance, or the sequel of exigency. Madame Beck's suddenly-recollected message and present, my artless embassy to the Place of the Magi, the old priest accidentally descending the steps and crossing the square, his interposition on my behalf with the bonne who would have sent me away, his reappearance on the staircase, my introduction to this room, the portrait, the narrative so affably volunteered — all these little incidents, taken as they fell out, seemed each independent of its successor; a handful of loose beads: but threaded through by that quick-shot and crafty glance of a Jesuit-eye, they dropped pendent in a long string, like that rosary on the prie-dieu. Where lay the link of junction, where the little clasp of this monastic necklace? I saw or felt union, but could not yet find the spot, or detect the means of connection.

Perhaps the musing-fit into which I had by this time fallen, appeared somewhat suspicious in its abstraction; he gently interrupted: "Mademoiselle," said he, "I trust you have not far to go through these inundated streets?"

"More than half a league."

"You live — — ?"

"In the Rue Fossette."

"Not" (with animation), "not at the pensionnat of Madame Beck?"

"The same."

"Donc" (clapping his hands), "donc, vous devez connaître mon noble élève, mon Paul?"

"Monsieur Paul Emanuel, Professor of Literature?"

"He and none other."

A brief silence fell. The spring of junction seemed suddenly to have become palpable; I felt it yield to pressure.

"Was it of M. Paul you have been speaking?" I presently inquired. "Was he your pupil and the benefactor of Madame Walravens?"

"Yes, and of Agnes, the old servant: and moreover, (with a certain emphasis), he was and is the lover, true, constant and eternal, of that saint in heaven — Justine Marie."

"And who, father, are you?" I continued; and though I accentuated the question, its utterance was well nigh superfluous; I was ere this quite prepared for the answer which actually came.

"I, daughter, am Père Silas; that unworthy son of Holy Church whom you once honoured with a noble and touching confidence, showing me the core of a heart, and the inner shrine of a mind whereof, in solemn truth, I coveted the direction, in behalf of the only true faith. Nor have I for a day lost sight of you, nor for an hour failed to take in you a rooted interest. Passed under the discipline of Rome, moulded by her high training, inoculated with her salutary doctrines, inspired by the zeal she alone gives — I realize what then might be your spiritual rank, your practical value; and I envy Heresy her prey."

This struck me as a special state of things — I half-realized myself in that condition also; passed under discipline, moulded, trained, inoculated, and so on. "Not so," thought I, but I restrained deprecation, and sat quietly enough.

"I suppose M. Paul does not live here?" I resumed, pursuing a theme which I thought more to the purpose than any wild renegade dreams.

"No; he only comes occasionally to worship his beloved saint, to make his confession to me, and to pay his respects to her he calls his mother. His own lodging consists but of two rooms: he has no servant, and yet he will not suffer Madame Walravens to dispose of those splendid jewels with which you see her adorned, and in which she takes a puerile pride as the ornaments of her youth, and the last relics of her son the jeweller's wealth."

"How often," murmured I to myself, "has this man, this M. Emanuel, seemed to me to lack magnanimity in trifles, yet how great he is in great things!"

I own I did not reckon amongst the proofs of his greatness, either the act of confession, or the saint-worship.

"How long is it since that lady died?" I inquired, looking at Justine Marie.

"Twenty years. She was somewhat older than M. Emanuel; he was then very young, for he is not much beyond forty."

"Does he yet weep her?"

"His heart will weep her always: the essence of Emanuel's nature is — constancy."

This was said with marked emphasis.

And now the sun broke out pallid and waterish; the rain yet fell, but there was no more tempest: that hot firmament had cloven and poured out its lightnings. A longer delay would scarce leave daylight for my return, so I rose, thanked the father for his hospitality and his tale, was benignantly answered by a "pax vobiscum," which I made kindly welcome, because it seemed uttered with a true benevolence; but I liked less the mystic phrase accompanying it.

"Daughter, you shall be what you shall be!" an oracle that made me shrug my shoulders as soon as I had got outside the door. Few of us know what we are to come to certainly, but for all that had happened yet, I had good hopes of living and dying a sober-minded Protestant: there was a hollowness within, and a flourish around "Holy Church" which tempted me but moderately. I went on my way pondering many things. Whatever Romanism may be, there are good Romanists: this man, Emanuel, seemed of the best; touched with superstition, influenced by priestcraft, yet wondrous for fond faith, for pious devotion, for sacrifice of self, for charity unbounded. It remained to see how Rome, by her agents, handled such qualities; whether she cherished them for their own sake and for God's, or put them out to usury and made booty of the interest.

By the time I reached home, it was sundown. Goton had kindly saved me a portion of dinner, which indeed I needed. She called me into the little cabinet to partake of it, and there Madame Beck soon made her appearance, bringing me a glass of wine.

"Well," began she, chuckling, "and what sort of a reception did Madame Walravens give you? Elle est drôle, n'est-ce pas?"

I told her what had passed, delivering verbatim the courteous message with which I had been charged.

"Oh la singulière petite bossue!" laughed she. "Et figurez-vous qu'elle me déteste, parcequ'elle me croit amoureuse de mon cousin Paul; ce petit dévot qui n'ose pas bouger, à moins que son confesseur ne lui donne la permission! Au reste" (she went on), "if he wanted to marry ever so much — soit moi, soit une autre — he could not do it; he has too large a family already on his hands: Mère Walravens, Père Silas, Dame Agnes, and a whole troop of nameless paupers. There never was a man like him for laying on himself burdens greater than he can bear, voluntarily incurring needless responsibilities. Besides, he harbours a romantic idea about some pale-faced Marie Justine — personnage assez niaise à ce que je pense" (such was Madame's irreverent remark), "who has been an angel in heaven, or elsewhere, this score of years, and to whom he means to go, free from all earthly ties, pure comme un lis, à ce qu'il dit. Oh, you would laugh could you but know half M. Emanuel's crotchets and eccentricities! But I hinder you from taking refreshment, ma bonne Meess, which you must need; eat your supper, drink your wine, oubliez les anges, les bossues, et surtout, les Professeurs — et bon soir!"

CHAPTER XXXV

FRATERNITY.

“Oubliez les Professeurs.” So said Madame Beck. Madame Beck was a wise woman, but she should not have uttered those words. To do so was a mistake. That night she should have left me calm — not excited, indifferent, not interested, isolated in my own estimation and that of others — not connected, even in idea, with this second person whom I was to forget.

Forget him? Ah! they took a sage plan to make me forget him — the wiseheads! They showed me how good he was; they made of my dear little man a stainless little hero. And then they had prated about his manner of loving. What means had I, before this day, of being certain whether he could love at all or not?

I had known him jealous, suspicious; I had seen about him certain tendernesses, fitfulnesses — a softness which came like a warm air, and a ruth which passed like early dew, dried in the heat of his irritabilities: this was all I had seen. And they, Père Silas and Modeste Maria Beck (that these two wrought in concert I could not doubt) opened up the adytum of his heart — showed me one grand love, the child of this southern nature’s youth, born so strong and perfect, that it had laughed at Death himself, despised his mean rape of matter, clung to immortal spirit, and in victory and faith, had watched beside a tomb twenty years.

This had been done — not idly: this was not a mere hollow indulgence of sentiment; he had proven his fidelity by the consecration of his best energies to an unselfish purpose, and attested it by limitless personal sacrifices: for those once dear to her he prized — he had laid down vengeance, and taken up a cross.

Now, as for Justine Marie, I knew what she was as well as if I had seen her. I knew she was well enough; there were girls like her in Madame Beck’s school — phlegmatics — pale, slow, inert, but kind-natured, neutral of evil, undistinguished for good.

If she wore angels’ wings, I knew whose poet-fancy conferred them. If her forehead shone luminous with the reflex of a halo, I knew in the fire of whose irids that circlet of holy flame had generation.

Was I, then, to be frightened by Justine Marie? Was the picture of a pale dead nun to rise, an eternal barrier? And what of the charities which absorbed his worldly goods? What of his heart sworn to virginity?

Madame Beck — Père Silas — you should not have suggested these questions. They were at once the deepest puzzle, the strongest obstruction, and the keenest stimulus, I had ever felt. For a week of nights and days I fell asleep — I dreamt, and I woke upon these two questions. In the whole world there was no answer to them, except where one dark little man stood, sat, walked, lectured, under the head-piece of a bandit bonnet-grec, and within the girth of a sorry paletôt, much be-inked, and no little adust.

After that visit to the Rue des Mages, I did want to see him again. I felt as if — knowing what I now knew — his countenance would offer a page more lucid, more interesting than ever; I felt a longing to trace in it the imprint of that primitive devotedness, the signs of that half-knightly, half-saintly chivalry which the priest's narrative imputed to his nature. He had become my Christian hero: under that character I wanted to view him.

Nor was opportunity slow to favour; my new impressions underwent her test the next day. Yes: I was granted an interview with my "Christian hero" — an interview not very heroic, or sentimental, or biblical, but lively enough in its way.

About three o'clock of the afternoon, the peace of the first classe — safely established, as it seemed, under the serene sway of Madame Beck, who, in propriâ personâ was giving one of her orderly and useful lessons — this peace, I say, suffered a sudden fracture by the wild inburst of a paletôt.

Nobody at the moment was quieter than myself. Eased of responsibility by Madame Beck's presence, soothed by her uniform tones, pleased and edified with her clear exposition of the subject in hand (for she taught well), I sat bent over my desk, drawing — that is, copying an elaborate line engraving, tediously working up my copy to the finish of the original, for that was my practical notion of art; and, strange to say, I took extreme pleasure in the labour, and could even produce curiously finical Chinese facsimiles of steel or mezzotint plates — things about as valuable as so many achievements in worsted-work, but I thought pretty well of them in those days.

What was the matter? My drawing, my pencils, my precious copy, gathered into one crushed-up handful, perished from before my sight; I myself appeared to be shaken or emptied out of my chair, as a solitary and withered nutmeg might be emptied out of a spice-box by an excited cook. That chair and my desk, seized by the wild paletôt, one under each sleeve, were borne afar; in a second, I followed the furniture; in two minutes they and I were fixed in the centre of the grand salle — a vast adjoining room, seldom used save for dancing and choral singing-lessons — fixed with an emphasis which seemed to prohibit the remotest hope of our ever being permitted to stir thence again.

Having partially collected my scared wits, I found myself in the presence of two men, gentlemen, I suppose I should say — one dark, the other light — one having a stiff, half-military air, and wearing a braided surtout; the other partaking, in garb and bearing, more of the careless aspect of the student or artist class: both flourishing in full magnificence of moustaches, whiskers, and imperial. M. Emanuel stood a little apart from these; his countenance and eyes expressed strong choler; he held forth his hand with his tribune gesture.

“Mademoiselle,” said he, “your business is to prove to these gentlemen that I am no liar. You will answer, to the best of your ability, such questions as they shall put. You will also write on such theme as they shall select. In their eyes, it appears, I hold the position of an unprincipled impostor. I write essays; and, with deliberate forgery, sign to them my pupils’ names, and boast of them as their work. You will disprove this charge.”

Grand ciel! Here was the show-trial, so long evaded, come on me like a thunder-clap. These two fine, braided, mustachioed, sneering personages, were none other than dandy professors of the college — Messieurs Boissec and Rochemorte — a pair of cold-blooded fops and pedants, sceptics, and scoffers. It seems that M. Paul had been rashly exhibiting something I had written — something, he had never once praised, or even mentioned, in my hearing, and which I deemed forgotten. The essay was not remarkable at all; it only seemed remarkable, compared with the average productions of foreign school-girls; in an English establishment it would have passed scarce noticed. Messieurs Boissec and Rochemorte had thought proper to question its genuineness, and insinuate a cheat; I was now to bear my testimony to the truth, and to be put to the torture of their examination.

A memorable scene ensued.

They began with classics. A dead blank. They went on to French history. I hardly knew Mérovée from Pharamond. They tried me in various ‘ologies, and still only got a shake of the head, and an unchanging “Je n’en sais rien.”

After an expressive pause, they proceeded to matters of general information, broaching one or two subjects which I knew pretty well, and on which I had often reflected. M. Emanuel, who had hitherto stood looking on, dark as the winter-solstice, brightened up somewhat; he thought I should now show myself at least no fool.

He learned his error. Though answers to the questions surged up fast, my mind filling like a rising well, ideas were there, but not words. I either could not, or would not speak — I am not sure which: partly, I think, my nerves had got wrong, and partly my humour was crossed.

I heard one of my examiners — he of the braided surtout — whisper to his co-professor, “Est-elle donc idiote?”

“Yes,” I thought, “an idiot she is, and always will be, for such as you.”

But I suffered — suffered cruelly; I saw the damps gather on M. Paul’s brow, and his eye spoke a passionate yet sad reproach. He would not believe in my total lack of popular cleverness; he thought I could be prompt if I would.

At last, to relieve him, the professors, and myself, I stammered out:

“Gentlemen, you had better let me go; you will get no good of me; as you say, I am an idiot.”

I wish I could have spoken with calm and dignity, or I wish my sense had sufficed to make me hold my tongue; that traitor tongue tripped, faltered.

Beholding the judges cast on M. Emanuel a hard look of triumph, and hearing the distressed tremor of my own voice, out I burst in a fit of choking tears. The emotion was far more of anger than grief; had I been a man and strong, I could have challenged that pair on the spot — but it was emotion, and I would rather have been scourged than betrayed it.

The incapables! Could they not see at once the crude hand of a novice in that composition they called a forgery? The subject was classical. When M. Paul dictated the trait on which the essay was to turn, I heard it for the first time; the matter was new to me, and I had no material for its treatment. But I got books, read up the facts, laboriously constructed a skeleton out of the dry bones of the real, and then clothed them, and tried to breathe into them life, and in this last aim I had pleasure. With me it was a difficult and anxious time till my facts were found, selected, and properly jointed; nor could I rest from research and effort till I was satisfied of correct anatomy; the strength of my inward repugnance to the idea of flaw or falsity sometimes enabled me to shun egregious blunders; but the knowledge was not there in my head, ready and mellow; it had not been sown in Spring, grown in Summer, harvested in Autumn, and garnered through Winter; whatever I wanted I must go out and gather fresh; glean of wild herbs my lapful, and shred them green into the pot. Messieurs Boissec and Rochemorte did not perceive this. They mistook my work for the work of a ripe scholar.

They would not yet let me go: I must sit down and write before them. As I dipped my pen in the ink with a shaking hand, and surveyed the white paper with eyes half-blinded and overflowing, one of my judges began mincingly to apologize for the pain he caused.

“Nous agissons dans l’intérêt de la vérité. Nous ne voulons pas vous blesser,” said he.

Scorn gave me nerve. I only answered, —

“Dictate, Monsieur.”

Rochemorte named this theme: “Human Justice.”

Human Justice! What was I to make of it? Blank, cold abstraction, unsuggestive to me of one inspiring idea; and there stood M. Emanuel, sad as Saul, and stern as Joab, and there triumphed his accusers.

At these two I looked. I was gathering my courage to tell them that I would neither write nor speak another word for their satisfaction, that their theme did not suit, nor their presence inspire me, and that, notwithstanding, whoever threw the shadow of a doubt on M. Emanuel’s honour, outraged that truth of which they had announced themselves the — champions: I meant to utter all this, I say, when suddenly, a light darted on memory.

Those two faces looking out of the forest of long hair, moustache, and whisker — those two cold yet bold, trustless yet presumptuous visages — were the same faces, the very same that, projected in full gaslight from behind the pillars of a portico, had half frightened me to death on the night of my desolate arrival in Villette. These, I felt morally certain, were the very heroes who had driven a friendless foreigner beyond her reckoning and her strength, chased her breathless over a whole quarter of the town.

“Pious mentors!” thought I. “Pure guides for youth! If ‘Human Justice’ were what she ought to be, you two would scarce hold your present post, or enjoy your present credit.”

An idea once seized, I fell to work. “Human Justice” rushed before me in novel guise, a red, random beldame, with arms akimbo. I saw her in her house, the den of confusion: servants called to her for orders or help which she did not give; beggars stood at her door waiting and starving unnoticed; a swarm of children, sick and quarrelsome, crawled round her feet, and yelled in her ears appeals for notice, sympathy, cure, redress. The honest woman cared for none of these things. She had a warm seat of her own by the fire, she had her own solace in a short black pipe, and a bottle of Mrs. Sweeny’s soothing syrup; she smoked and she sipped, and she enjoyed her paradise; and whenever a cry of the suffering souls about her ‘pierced her ears too keenly — my jolly dame seized the poker or the hearth-brush: if the offender was weak, wronged, and sickly, she effectually settled him: if he was strong, lively, and violent, she only menaced, then plunged her hand in her deep pouch, and flung a liberal shower of sugar-plums.

Such was the sketch of “Human Justice,” scratched hurriedly on paper, and placed at the service of Messrs. Boissec and Rochemorte. M. Emanuel read it over my shoulder. Waiting no comment, I curtsied to the trio, and withdrew.

After school that day, M. Paul and I again met. Of course the meeting did not at first run smooth; there was a crow to pluck with him; that forced examination could not be immediately digested. A crabbed dialogue terminated in my being called “une petite moqueuse et sans-coeur,” and in Monsieur’s temporary departure.

Not wishing him to go quite away, only desiring he should feel that such a transport as he had that day given way to, could not be indulged with perfect impunity, I was not sorry to see him, soon after, gardening in the berceau. He approached the glass door; I drew near also. We spoke of some flowers growing round it. By-and-by Monsieur laid down his spade; by-and-by he recommenced conversation, passed to other subjects, and at last touched a point of interest.

Conscious that his proceeding of that day was specially open to a charge of extravagance, M. Paul half apologized; he half regretted, too, the fitfulness of his moods at all times, yet he hinted that some allowance ought to be made for him. “But,” said he, “I can hardly expect it at your hands, Miss Lucy; you know neither me, nor my position, nor my history.”

His history. I took up the word at once; I pursued the idea.

“No, Monsieur,” I rejoined. “Of course, as you say, I know neither your history, nor your position, nor your sacrifices, nor any of your sorrows, or trials, or affections, or fidelities. Oh, no! I know nothing about you; you are for me altogether a stranger."

"Hein?" he murmured, arching his brows in surprise.

"You know, Monsieur, I only see you in classe — stern, dogmatic, hasty, imperious. I only hear of you in town as active and wilful, quick to originate, hasty to lead, but slow to persuade, and hard to bend. A man like you, without ties, can have no attachments; without dependants, no duties. All we, with whom you come in contact, are machines, which you thrust here and there, inconsiderate of their feelings. You seek your recreations in public, by the light of the evening chandelier: this school and yonder college are your workshops, where you fabricate the ware called pupils. I don't so much as know where you live; it is natural to take it for granted that you have no home, and need none."

"I am judged," said he. "Your opinion of me is just what I thought it was. For you I am neither a man nor a Christian. You see me void of affection and religion, unattached by friend or family, unpiloted by principle or faith. It is well, Mademoiselle; such is our reward in this life."

"You are a philosopher, Monsieur; a cynic philosopher" (and I looked at his paletôt, of which he straightway brushed the dim sleeve with his hand), "despising the foibles of humanity — above its luxuries — independent of its comforts."

"Et vous, Mademoiselle? vous êtes proprette et douillette, et affreusement insensible, par-dessus le marché."

"But, in short, Monsieur, now I think of it, you must live somewhere?

Do tell me where; and what establishment of servants do you keep?"

With a fearful projection of the under-lip, implying an impetus of scorn the most decided, he broke out —

"Je vis dans un trou! I inhabit a den, Miss — a cavern, where you would not put your dainty nose. Once, with base shame of speaking the whole truth, I talked about my 'study' in that college: know now that this 'study' is my whole abode; my chamber is there and my drawing-room. As for my 'establishment of servants'" (mimicking my voice) "they number ten; les voilà."

And he grimly spread, close under my eyes, his ten fingers.

"I black my boots," pursued he savagely. "I brush my paletôt."

"No, Monsieur, it is too plain; you never do that," was my parenthesis.

"Je fais mon lit et mon ménage; I seek my dinner in a restaurant; my supper takes care, of itself; I pass days laborious and loveless; nights long and lonely; I am ferocious, and bearded and monkish; and nothing now living in this world loves me, except some old hearts worn like my own, and some few beings, impoverished, suffering, poor in purse and in spirit, whom the kingdoms of this world own not, but to whom a will and testament not to be disputed has bequeathed the kingdom of heaven."

"Ah, Monsieur; but I know!"

"What do you know? many things, I verily believe; yet not me, Lucy!"

"I know that you have a pleasant old house in a pleasant old square of the Basse-Ville — why don't you go and live there?"

"Hein?" muttered he again.

"I liked it much, Monsieur; with the steps ascending to the door, the grey flags in front, the nodding trees behind — real trees, not shrubs — trees dark, high, and of old growth. And the boudoir-oratoire — you should make that room your study; it is so quiet and solemn."

He eyed me closely; he half-smiled, half-coloured. "Where did you pick up all that? Who told you?" he asked.

"Nobody told me. Did I dream it, Monsieur, do you think?"

"Can I enter into your visions? Can I guess a woman's waking thoughts, much less her sleeping fantasies?"

"If I dreamt it, I saw in my dream human beings as well as a house. I saw a priest, old, bent, and grey, and a domestic — old, too, and picturesque; and a lady, splendid but strange; her head would scarce reach to my elbow — her magnificence might ransom a duke. She wore a gown bright as lapis-lazuli — a shawl worth a thousand francs: she was decked with ornaments so brilliant, I never saw any with such a beautiful sparkle; but her figure looked as if it had been broken in two and bent double; she seemed also to have outlived the common years of humanity, and to have attained those which are only labour and sorrow. She was become morose — almost malevolent; yet somebody, it appears, cared for her in her infirmities — somebody forgave her trespasses, hoping to have his trespasses forgiven. They lived together, these three people — the mistress, the chaplain, the servant — all old, all feeble, all sheltered under one kind wing."

He covered with his hand the upper part of his face, but did not conceal his mouth, where I saw hovering an expression I liked.

"I see you have entered into my secrets," said he, "but how was it done?"

So I told him how — the commission on which I had been sent, the storm which had detained me, the abruptness of the lady, the kindness of the priest.

"As I sat waiting for the rain to cease, Père Silas whiled away the time with a story," I said.

"A story! What story? Père Silas is no romancist."

"Shall I tell Monsieur the tale?"

"Yes: begin at the beginning. Let me hear some of Miss Lucy's French — her best or her worst — I don't much care which: let us have a good poignée of barbarisms, and a bounteous dose of the insular accent."

"Monsieur is not going to be gratified by a tale of ambitious proportions, and the spectacle of the narrator sticking fast in the midst. But I will tell him the title — the 'Priest's Pupil.'"

"Bah!" said he, the swarthy flush again dyeing his dark cheek. "The good old father could not have chosen a worse subject; it is his weak point. But what of the 'Priest's Pupil?'"

"Oh! many things."

"You may as well define what things. I mean to know."

"There was the pupil's youth, the pupil's manhood; — his avarice, his ingratitude, his implacability, his inconstancy. Such a bad pupil, Monsieur! — so thankless, cold-hearted, unchivalrous, unforgiving!

"Et puis?" said he, taking a cigar.

"Et puis," I pursued, "he underwent calamities which one did not pity — bore them in a spirit one did not admire — endured wrongs for which one felt no sympathy; finally took the unchristian revenge of heaping coals of fire on his adversary's head."

"You have not told me all," said he.

"Nearly all, I think: I have indicated the heads of Père Silas's chapters."

"You have forgotten one-that which touched on the pupil's lack of affection — on his hard, cold, monkish heart."

"True; I remember now. Père Silas did say that his vocation was almost that of a priest — that his life was considered consecrated."

"By what bonds or duties?"

"By the ties of the past and the charities of the present."

"You have, then, the whole situation?"

"I have now told Monsieur all that was told me."

Some meditative minutes passed.

"Now, Mademoiselle Lucy, look at me, and with that truth which I believe you never knowingly violate, answer me one question. Raise your eyes; rest them on mine; have no hesitation; fear not to trust me — I am a man to be trusted."

I raised my eyes.

"Knowing me thoroughly now — all my antecedents, all my responsibilities — having long known my faults, can you and I still be friends?"

"If Monsieur wants a friend in me, I shall be glad to have a friend in him."

"But a close friend I mean — intimate and real — kindred in all but blood. Will Miss Lucy be the sister of a very poor, fettered, burdened, encumbered man?"

I could not answer him in words, yet I suppose I did answer him; he took my hand, which found comfort, in the shelter of his. His friendship was not a doubtful, wavering benefit — a cold, distant hope — a sentiment so brittle as not to bear the weight of a finger: I at once felt (or thought I felt) its support like that of some rock.

"When I talk of friendship, I mean true friendship," he repeated emphatically; and I could hardly believe that words so earnest had blessed my ear; I hardly could credit the reality of that kind, anxious look he gave. If he really wished for my confidence and regard, and really would give me his — why, it seemed to me that life could offer nothing more or better. In that case, I was become strong and rich: in a moment I was made substantially happy.

To ascertain the fact, to fix and seal it, I asked —

“Is Monsieur quite serious? Does he really think he needs me, and can take an interest in me as a sister?”

“Surely, surely,” said he; “a lonely man like me, who has no sister, must be but too glad to find in some woman’s heart a sister’s pure affection.”

“And dare I rely on Monsieur’s regard? Dare I speak to him when I am so inclined?”

“My little sister must make her own experiments,” said he; “I will give no promises. She must tease and try her wayward brother till she has drilled him into what she wishes. After all, he is no inductile material in some hands.”

While he spoke, the tone of his voice, the light of his now affectionate eye, gave me such a pleasure as, certainly, I had never felt. I envied no girl her lover, no bride her bridegroom, no wife her husband; I was content with this my voluntary, self-offering friend. If he would but prove reliable, and he looked reliable, what, beyond his friendship, could I ever covet? But, if all melted like a dream, as once before had happened — ?

“Qu’est-ce donc? What is it?” said he, as this thought threw its weight on my heart, its shadow on my countenance. I told him; and after a moment’s pause, and a thoughtful smile, he showed me how an equal fear — lest I should weary of him, a man of moods so difficult and fitful — had haunted his mind for more than one day, or one month.

On hearing this, a quiet courage cheered me. I ventured a word of reassurance. That word was not only tolerated; its repetition was courted. I grew quite happy — strangely happy — in making him secure, content, tranquil. Yesterday, I could not have believed that earth held, or life afforded, moments like the few I was now passing. Countless times it had been my lot to watch apprehended sorrow close darkly in; but to see unhoped-for happiness take form, find place, and grow more real as the seconds sped, was indeed a new experience.

“Lucy,” said M. Paul, speaking low, and still holding my hand, “did you see a picture in the boudoir of the old house?”

“I did; a picture painted on a panel.”

“The portrait of a nun?”

“Yes.”

“You heard her history?”

“Yes.”

“You remember what we saw that night in the berceau?”

“I shall never forget it.”

“You did not connect the two ideas; that would be folly?”

“I thought of the apparition when I saw the portrait,” said I; which was true enough.

“You did not, nor will you fancy,” pursued he, “that a saint in heaven perturbs herself with rivalries of earth? Protestants are rarely superstitious; these morbid fancies will not beset you?”

“I know not what to think of this matter; but I believe a perfectly natural solution of this seeming mystery will one day be arrived at.”

“Doubtless, doubtless. Besides, no good-living woman — much less a pure, happy spirit-would trouble amity like ours n’est-il pas vrai?”

Ere I could answer, Fifine Beck burst in, rosy and abrupt, calling out that I was wanted. Her mother was going into town to call on some English family, who had applied for a prospectus: my services were needed as interpreter. The interruption was not unseasonable: sufficient for the day is always the evil; for this hour, its good sufficed. Yet I should have liked to ask M. Paul whether the “morbid fancies,” against which he warned me, wrought in his own brain.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE APPLE OF DISCORD.

Besides Fifine Beck's mother, another power had a word to say to M. Paul and me, before that covenant of friendship could be ratified. We were under the surveillance of a sleepless eye: Rome watched jealously her son through that mystic lattice at which I had knelt once, and to which M. Emanuel drew nigh month by month — the sliding panel of the confessional.

"Why were you so glad to be friends with M. Paul?" asks the reader. "Had he not long been a friend to you? Had he not given proof on proof of a certain partiality in his feelings?"

Yes, he had; but still I liked to hear him say so earnestly — that he was my close, true friend; I liked his modest doubts, his tender deference — that trust which longed to rest, and was grateful when taught how. He had called me "sister." It was well. Yes; he might call me what he pleased, so long as he confided in me. I was willing to be his sister, on condition that he did not invite me to fill that relation to some future wife of his; and tacitly vowed as he was to celibacy, of this dilemma there seemed little danger.

Through most of the succeeding night I pondered that evening's interview. I wanted much the morning to break, and then listened for the bell to ring; and, after rising and dressing, I deemed prayers and breakfast slow, and all the hours lingering, till that arrived at last which brought me the lesson of literature. My wish was to get a more thorough comprehension of this fraternal alliance: to note with how much of the brother he would demean himself when we met again; to prove how much of the sister was in my own feelings; to discover whether I could summon a sister's courage, and he a brother's frankness.

He came. Life is so constructed, that the event does not, cannot, will not, match the expectation. That whole day he never accosted me. His lesson was given rather more quietly than usual, more mildly, and also more gravely. He was fatherly to his pupils, but he was not brotherly to me. Ere he left the classe, I expected a smile, if not a word; I got neither: to my portion fell one nod — hurried, shy.

This distance, I argued, is accidental — it is involuntary; patience, and it will vanish. It vanished not; it continued for days; it increased. I suppressed my surprise, and swallowed whatever other feelings began to surge.

Well might I ask when he offered fraternity — "Dare I rely on you?" Well might he, doubtless knowing himself, withhold all pledge. True, he had bid me make my own experiments — tease and try him. Vain injunction!

Privilege nominal and unavailable! Some women might use it! Nothing in my powers or instinct placed me amongst this brave band. Left alone, I was passive; repulsed, I withdrew; forgotten — my lips would not utter, nor my eyes dart a reminder. It seemed there had been an error somewhere in my calculations, and I wanted for time to disclose it.

But the day came when, as usual, he was to give me a lesson. One evening in seven he had long generously bestowed on me, devoting it to the examination of what had been done in various studies during the past week, and to the preparation of work for the week in prospect. On these occasions my schoolroom was anywhere, wherever the pupils and the other teachers happened to be, or in their close vicinage, very often in the large second division, where it was easy to choose a quiet nook when the crowding day pupils were absent, and the few boarders gathered in a knot about the surveillante's estrade.

On the customary evening, hearing the customary hour strike, I collected my books and papers, my pen and ink, and sought the large division.

In classe there was no one, and it lay all in cool deep shadow; but through the open double doors was seen the carré, filled with pupils and with light; over hall and figures blushed the westering sun. It blushed so ruddily and vividly, that the hues of the walls and the variegated tints of the dresses seemed all fused in one warm glow. The girls were seated, working or studying; in the midst of their circle stood M. Emanuel, speaking good-humouredly to a teacher. His dark paletôt, his jetty hair, were tinged with many a reflex of crimson; his Spanish face, when he turned it momentarily, answered the sun's animated kiss with an animated smile. I took my place at a desk.

The orange-trees, and several plants, full and bright with bloom, basked also in the sun's laughing bounty; they had partaken it the whole day, and now asked water. M. Emanuel had a taste for gardening; he liked to tend and foster plants. I used to think that working amongst shrubs with a spade or a watering-pot soothed his nerves; it was a recreation to which he often had recourse; and now he looked to the orange-trees, the geraniums, the gorgeous cactuses, and revived them all with the refreshment their drought needed. His lips meantime sustained his precious cigar, that (for him) first necessary and prime luxury of life; its blue wreaths curled prettily enough amongst the flowers, and in the evening light. He spoke no more to the pupils, nor to the mistresses, but gave many an endearing word to a small spanieless (if one may coin a word), that nominally belonged to the house, but virtually owned him as master, being fonder of him than any inmate. A delicate, silky, loving, and lovable little doggie she was, trotting at his side, looking with expressive, attached eyes into his face; and whenever he dropped his bonnet-grec or his handkerchief, which he occasionally did in play, crouching beside it with the air of a miniature lion guarding a kingdom's flag.

There were many plants, and as the amateur gardener fetched all the water from the well in the court, with his own active hands, his work spun on to some length. The great school-clock ticked on. Another hour struck. The carré and the youthful group lost the illusion of sunset. Day was drooping. My lesson, I perceived, must to-night be very short; but the orange-trees, the cacti, the camelias were all served now. Was it my turn?

Alas! in the garden were more plants to be looked after, — favourite rose-bushes, certain choice flowers; little Sylvie's glad bark and whine followed the receding paletôt down the alleys. I put up some of my books; I should not want them all; I sat and thought; and waited, involuntarily deprecating the creeping invasion of twilight.

Sylvie, gaily frisking, emerged into view once more, heralding the returning paletôt; the watering-pot was deposited beside the well; it had fulfilled its office; how glad I was! Monsieur washed his hands in a little stone bowl. There was no longer time for a lesson now; ere long the prayer-bell must ring; but still we should meet; he would speak; a chance would be offered of reading in his eyes the riddle of his shyness. His ablutions over, he stood, slowly re-arranging his cuffs, looking at the horn of a young moon, set pale in the opal sky, and glimmering faint on the oriel of Jean Baptiste. Sylvie watched the mood contemplative; its stillness irked her; she whined and jumped to break it. He looked down.

"Petite exigeante," said he; "you must not be forgotten one moment, it seems."

He stopped, lifted her in his arms, sauntered across the court, within a yard of the line of windows near one of which I sat: he sauntered lingeringly, fondling the spaniel in his bosom, calling her tender names in a tender voice. On the front-door steps he turned; once again he looked at the moon, at the grey cathedral, over the remoter spires and house-roofs fading into a blue sea of night-mist; he tasted the sweet breath of dusk, and noted the folded bloom of the garden; he suddenly looked round; a keen beam out of his eye rased the white façade of the classes, swept the long line of croisées. I think he bowed; if he did, I had no time to return the courtesy. In a moment he was gone; the moonlit threshold lay pale and shadowless before the closed front door.

Gathering in my arms all that was spread on the desk before me, I carried back the unused heap to its place in the third classe. The prayer-bell rang; I obeyed its summons.

The morrow would not restore him to the Rue Fossette, that day being devoted entirely to his college. I got through my teaching; I got over the intermediate hours; I saw evening approaching, and armed myself for its heavy ennuis. Whether it was worse to stay with my co-inmates, or to sit alone, I had not considered; I naturally took up the latter alternative; if there was a hope of comfort for any moment, the heart or head of no human being in this house could yield it; only under the lid of my desk could it harbour, nestling between the leaves of some book, gilding a pencil-point, the nib of a pen, or tinging the black fluid in that ink-glass. With a heavy heart I opened my desk-lid; with a weary hand I turned up its contents.

One by one, well-accustomed books, volumes sewn in familiar covers, were taken out and put back hopeless: they had no charm; they could not comfort. Is this something new, this pamphlet in lilac? I had not seen it before, and I re-arranged my desk this very day — this very afternoon; the tract must have been introduced within the last hour, while we were at dinner.

I opened it. What was it? What would it say to me?

It was neither tale nor poem, neither essay nor history; it neither sung, nor related, not discussed. It was a theological work; it preached and it persuaded.

I lent to it my ear very willingly, for, small as it was, it possessed its own spell, and bound my attention at once. It preached Romanism; it persuaded to conversion. The voice of that sly little book was a honeyed voice; its accents were all unction and balm. Here roared no utterance of Rome's thunders, no blasting of the breath of her displeasure. The Protestant was to turn Papist, not so much in fear of the heretic's hell, as on account of the comfort, the indulgence, the tenderness Holy Church offered: far be it from her to threaten or to coerce; her wish was to guide and win. She persecute? Oh dear no! not on any account!

This meek volume was not addressed to the hardened and worldly; it was not even strong meat for the strong: it was milk for babes: the mild effluence of a mother's love towards her tenderest and her youngest; intended wholly and solely for those whose head is to be reached through the heart. Its appeal was not to intellect; it sought to win the affectionate through their affections, the sympathizing through their sympathies: St. Vincent de Paul, gathering his orphans about him, never spoke more sweetly.

I remember one capital inducement to apostacy was held out in the fact that the Catholic who had lost dear friends by death could enjoy the unspeakable solace of praying them out of purgatory. The writer did not touch on the firmer peace of those whose belief dispenses with purgatory altogether: but I thought of this; and, on the whole, preferred the latter doctrine as the most consolatory. The little book amused, and did not painfully displease me. It was a canting, sentimental, shallow little book, yet something about it cheered my gloom and made me smile; I was amused with the gambols of this unlicked wolf-cub muffled in the fleece, and mimicking the bleat of a guileless lamb. Portions of it reminded me of certain Wesleyan Methodist tracts I had once read when a child; they were flavoured with about the same seasoning of excitation to fanaticism. He that had written it was no bad man, and while perpetually betraying the trained cunning — the cloven hoof of his system — I should pause before accusing himself of insincerity. His judgment, however, wanted surgical props; it was rickety.

I smiled then over this dose of maternal tenderness, coming from the ruddy old lady of the Seven Hills; smiled, too, at my own disinclination, not to say disability, to meet these melting favours. Glancing at the title-page, I found the name of "Père Silas." A fly-leaf bore in small, but clear and well-known pencil characters: “From P. C. D. E. to L — y.” And when I saw this I laughed: but not in my former spirit. I was revived.

A mortal bewilderment cleared suddenly from my head and vision; the solution of the Sphinx-riddle was won; the conjunction of those two names, Père Silas and Paul Emanuel, gave the key to all. The penitent had been with his director; permitted to withhold nothing; suffered to keep no corner of his heart sacred to God and to himself; the whole narrative of our late interview had been drawn from him; he had avowed the covenant of fraternity, and spoken of his adopted sister. How could such a covenant, such adoption, be sanctioned by the Church? Fraternal communion with a heretic! I seemed to hear Père Silas annulling the unholy pact; warning his penitent of its perils; entreating, enjoining reserve, nay, by the authority of his office, and in the name, and by the memory of all M. Emanuel held most dear and sacred, commanding the enforcement of that new system whose frost had pierced to the marrow of my bones.

These may not seem pleasant hypotheses; yet, by comparison, they were welcome. The vision of a ghostly troubler hovering in the background, was as nothing, matched with the fear of spontaneous change arising in M. Paul himself.

At this distance of time, I cannot be sure how far the above conjectures were self-suggested: or in what measure they owed their origin and confirmation to another quarter. Help was not wanting.

This evening there was no bright sunset: west and east were one cloud; no summer night-mist, blue, yet rose-tinged, softened the distance; a clammy fog from the marshes crept grey round Villette. To-night the watering-pot might rest in its niche by the well: a small rain had been drizzling all the afternoon, and still it fell fast and quietly. This was no weather for rambling in the wet alleys, under the dripping trees; and I started to hear Sylvie’s sudden bark in the garden — her bark of welcome. Surely she was not accompanied and yet this glad, quick bark was never uttered, save in homage to one presence.

Through the glass door and the arching berceau, I commanded the deep vista of the allée défendue: thither rushed Sylvie, glistening through its gloom like a white guelder-rose. She ran to and fro, whining, springing, harassing little birds amongst the bushes. I watched five minutes; no fulfilment followed the omen. I returned to my books; Sylvie’s sharp bark suddenly ceased. Again I looked up. She was standing not many yards distant, wagging her white feathery tail as fast as the muscle would work, and intently watching the operations of a spade, plied fast by an indefatigable hand. There was M. Emanuel, bent over the soil, digging in the wet mould amongst the rain-laden and streaming shrubs, working as hard as if his day’s pittance were yet to earn by the literal sweat of his brow.

In this sign I read a ruffled mood. He would dig thus in frozen snow on the coldest winter day, when urged inwardly by painful emotion, whether of nervous excitation, or, sad thoughts of self-reproach. He would dig by the hour, with knit brow and set teeth, nor once lift his head, or open his lips.

Sylvie watched till she was tired. Again scampering devious, bounding here, rushing there, snuffing and sniffing everywhere; she at last discovered me in classe. Instantly she flew barking at the panes, as if to urge me forth to share her pleasure or her master's toil; she had seen me occasionally walking in that alley with M. Paul; and I doubt not, considered it my duty to join him now, wet as it was.

She made such a bustle that M. Paul at last looked up, and of course perceived why, and at whom she barked. He whistled to call her off; she only barked the louder. She seemed quite bent upon having the glass door opened. Tired, I suppose, with her importunity, he threw down his spade, approached, and pushed the door ajar. Sylvie burst in all impetuous, sprang to my lap, and with her paws at my neck, and her little nose and tongue somewhat overpoweringly busy about my face, mouth, and eyes, flourished her bushy tail over the desk, and scattered books and papers far and wide.

M. Emanuel advanced to still the clamour and repair the disarrangement. Having gathered up the books, he captured Sylvie, and stowed her away under his paletôt, where she nestled as quiet as a mouse, her head just peeping forth. She was very tiny, and had the prettiest little innocent face, the silkiest long ears, the finest dark eyes in the world. I never saw her, but I thought of Paulina de Bassompierre: forgive the association, reader, it would occur.

M. Paul petted and patted her; the endearments she received were not to be wondered at; she invited affection by her beauty and her vivacious life.

While caressing the spaniel, his eye roved over the papers and books just replaced; it settled on the religious tract. His lips moved; he half checked the impulse to speak. What! had he promised never to address me more? If so, his better nature pronounced the vow "more honoured in the breach than in the observance," for with a second effort, he spoke. — "You have not yet read the brochure, I presume? It is not sufficiently inviting?"

I replied that I had read it.

He waited, as if wishing me to give an opinion upon it unasked. Unasked, however, I was in no mood to do or say anything. If any concessions were to be made — if any advances were demanded — that was the affair of the very docile pupil of Père Silas, not mine. His eye settled upon me gently: there was mildness at the moment in its blue ray — there was solicitude — a shade of pathos; there were meanings composite and contrasted — reproach melting into remorse. At the moment probably, he would have been glad to see something emotional in me. I could not show it. In another minute, however, I should have betrayed confusion, had I not bethought myself to take some quill-pens from my desk, and begin soberly to mend them.

I knew that action would give a turn to his mood. He never liked to see me mend pens; my knife was always dull-edged — my hand, too, was unskilful; I hacked and chipped. On this occasion I cut my own finger — half on purpose. I wanted to restore him to his natural state, to set him at his ease, to get him to chide.

"Maladroit!" he cried at last, "she will make mincemeat of her hands."

He put Sylvie down, making her lie quiet beside his bonnet-grec, and, depriving me of the pens and penknife, proceeded to slice, nib, and point with the accuracy and celerity of a machine.

"Did I like the little book?" he now inquired.

Suppressing a yawn, I said I hardly knew.

"Had it moved me?"

"I thought it had made me a little sleepy."

(After a pause:) "Allons donc! It was of no use taking that tone with him. Bad as I was — and he should be sorry to have to name all my faults at a breath — God and nature had given me 'trop de sensibilité et de sympathie' not to be profoundly affected by an appeal so touching."

"Indeed!" I responded, rousing myself quickly, "I was not affected at all — not a whit."

And in proof, I drew from my pocket a perfectly dry handkerchief, still clean and in its folds.

Hereupon I was made the object of a string of strictures rather piquant than polite. I listened with zest. After those two days of unnatural silence, it was better than music to hear M. Paul haranguing again just in his old fashion. I listened, and meantime solaced myself and Sylvie with the contents of a bonbonnière, which M. Emanuel's gifts kept well supplied with chocolate comfits: It pleased him to see even a small matter from his hand duly appreciated. He looked at me and the spaniel while we shared the spoil; he put up his penknife. Touching my hand with the bundle of new-cut quills, he said: — "Dites donc, petite soeur — speak frankly — what have you thought of me during the last two days?"

But of this question I would take no manner of notice; its purport made my eyes fill. I caressed Sylvie assiduously. M. Paul, leaning — over the desk, bent towards me: — "I called myself your brother," he said: "I hardly know what I am — brother — friend — I cannot tell. I know I think of you — I feel I wish, you well — but I must check myself; you are to be feared. My best friends point out danger, and whisper caution."

"You do right to listen to your friends. By all means be cautious."

"It is your religion — your strange, self-reliant, invulnerable creed, whose influence seems to clothe you in, I know not what, unblessed panoply. You are good — Père Silas calls you good, and loves you — but your terrible, proud, earnest Protestantism, there is the danger. It expresses itself by your eye at times; and again, it gives you certain tones and certain gestures that make my flesh creep. You are not demonstrative, and yet, just now — when you handled that tract — my God! I thought Lucifer smiled."

"Certainly I don't respect that tract — what then?"

"Not respect that tract? But it is the pure essence of faith, love, charity! I thought it would touch you: in its gentleness, I trusted that it could not fail. I laid it in your desk with a prayer: I must indeed be a sinner: Heaven will not hear the petitions that come warmest from my heart. You scorn my little offering. Oh, cela me fait mal!"

"Monsieur, I don't scorn it — at least, not as your gift. Monsieur, sit down; listen to me. I am not a heathen, I am not hard-hearted, I am not unchristian, I am not dangerous, as they tell you; I would not trouble your faith; you believe in God and Christ and the Bible, and so do I."

"But do you believe in the Bible? Do you receive Revelation? What limits are there to the wild, careless daring of your country and sect. Père Silas dropped dark hints."

By dint of persuasion, I made him half-define these hints; they amounted to crafty Jesuit-slanders. That night M. Paul and I talked seriously and closely. He pleaded, he argued. I could not argue — a fortunate incapacity; it needed but triumphant, logical opposition to effect all the director wished to be effected; but I could talk in my own way — the way M. Paul was used to — and of which he could follow the meanderings and fill the hiatus, and pardon the strange stammerings, strange to him no longer. At ease with him, I could defend my creed and faith in my own fashion; in some degree I could lull his prejudices. He was not satisfied when he went away, hardly was he appeased; but he was made thoroughly to feel that Protestants were not necessarily the irreverent Pagans his director had insinuated; he was made to comprehend something of their mode of honouring the Light, the Life, the Word; he was enabled partly to perceive that, while their veneration for things venerable was not quite like that cultivated in his Church, it had its own, perhaps, deeper power — its own more solemn awe.

I found that Père Silas (himself, I must repeat, not a bad man, though the advocate of a bad cause) had darkly stigmatized Protestants in general, and myself by inference, with strange names, had ascribed to us strange "isms;" Monsieur Emanuel revealed all this in his frank fashion, which knew not secretiveness, looking at me as he spoke with a kind, earnest fear, almost trembling lest there should be truth in the charges. Père Silas, it seems, had closely watched me, had ascertained that I went by turns, and indiscriminately, to the three Protestant Chapels of Villette — the French, German, and English — id est, the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopalian. Such liberality argued in the father's eyes profound indifference — who tolerates all, he reasoned, can be attached to none. Now, it happened that I had often secretly wondered at the minute and unimportant character of the differences between these three sects — at the unity and identity of their vital doctrines: I saw nothing to hinder them from being one day fused into one grand Holy Alliance, and I respected them all, though I thought that in each there were faults of form, incumbrances, and trivialities. Just what I thought, that did I tell M. Emanuel, and explained to him that my own last appeal, the guide to which I looked, and the teacher which I owned, must always be the Bible itself, rather than any sect, of whatever name or nation.

He left me soothed, yet full of solicitude, breathing a wish, as strong as a prayer, that if I were wrong, Heaven would lead me right. I heard, poured forth on the threshold, some fervid murmurings to "Marie, Reine du Ciel," some deep aspiration that his hope might yet be mine.

Strange! I had no such feverish wish to turn him from the faith of his fathers. I thought Romanism wrong, a great mixed image of gold and clay; but it seemed to me that this Romanist held the purer elements of his creed with an innocency of heart which God must love.

The preceding conversation passed between eight and nine o'clock of the evening, in a schoolroom of the quiet Rue Fossette, opening on a sequestered garden. Probably about the same, or a somewhat later hour of the succeeding evening, its echoes, collected by holy obedience, were breathed verbatim in an attent ear, at the panel of a confessional, in the hoary church of the Magi. It ensued that Père Silas paid a visit to Madame Beck, and stirred by I know not what mixture of motives, persuaded her to let him undertake for a time the Englishwoman's spiritual direction.

Hereupon I was put through a course of reading — that is, I just glanced at the books lent me; they were too little in my way to be thoroughly read, marked, learned, or inwardly digested. And besides, I had a book up-stairs, under my pillow, whereof certain chapters satisfied my needs in the article of spiritual lore, furnishing such precept and example as, to my heart's core, I was convinced could not be improved on.

Then Père Silas showed me the fair side of Rome, her good works; and bade me judge the tree by its fruits.

In answer, I felt and I avowed that these works were not the fruits of Rome; they were but her abundant blossoming, but the fair promise she showed the world, That bloom, when set, savoured not of charity; the apple full formed was ignorance, abasement, and bigotry. Out of men's afflictions and affections were forged the rivets of their servitude. Poverty was fed and clothed, and sheltered, to bind it by obligation to "the Church;" orphanage was reared and educated that it might grow up in the fold of "the Church;" sickness was tended that it might die after the formula and in the ordinance of "the Church;" and men were overwrought, and women most murderously sacrificed, and all laid down a world God made pleasant for his creatures' good, and took up a cross, monstrous in its galling weight, that they might serve Rome, prove her sanctity, confirm her power, and spread the reign of her tyrant "Church."

For man's good was little done; for God's glory, less. A thousand ways were opened with pain, with blood-sweats, with lavishing of life; mountains were cloven through their breasts, and rocks were split to their base; and all for what? That a Priesthood might march straight on and straight upward to an all-dominating eminence, whence they might at last stretch the sceptre of their Moloch "Church."

It will not be. God is not with Rome, and, were human sorrows still for the Son of God, would he not mourn over her cruelties and ambitions, as once he mourned over the crimes and woes of doomed Jerusalem!

Oh, lovers of power! Oh, mitred aspirants for this world's kingdoms! an hour will come, even to you, when it will be well for your hearts — pausing faint at each broken beat — that there is a Mercy beyond human compassions, a Love, stronger than this strong death which even you must face, and before it, fall; a Charity more potent than any sin, even yours; a Pity which redeems worlds — nay, absolves Priests.

* * * * *

My third temptation was held out in the pomp of Rome — the glory of her kingdom. I was taken to the churches on solemn occasions — days of fête and state; I was shown the Papal ritual and ceremonial. I looked at it.

Many people — men and women — no doubt far my superiors in a thousand ways, have felt this display impressive, have declared that though their Reason protested, their Imagination was subjugated. I cannot say the same. Neither full procession, nor high mass, nor swarming tapers, nor swinging censers, nor ecclesiastical millinery, nor celestial jewellery, touched my imagination a whit. What I saw struck me as tawdry, not grand; as grossly material, not poetically spiritual.

This I did not tell Père Silas; he was old, he looked venerable: through every abortive experiment, under every repeated disappointment, he remained personally kind to me, and I felt tender of hurting his feelings. But on the evening of a certain day when, from the balcony of a great house, I had been made to witness a huge mingled procession of the church and the army — priests with relics, and soldiers with weapons, an obese and aged archbishop, habited in cambric and lace, looking strangely like a grey daw in bird-of-paradise plumage, and a band of young girls fantastically robed and garlanded — then I spoke my mind to M. Paul.

"I did not like it," I told him; "I did not respect such ceremonies; I wished to see no more."

And having relieved my conscience by this declaration, I was able to go on, and, speaking more currently and clearly than my wont, to show him that I had a mind to keep to my reformed creed; the more I saw of Popery the closer I clung to Protestantism; doubtless there were errors in every church, but I now perceived by contrast how severely pure was my own, compared with her whose painted and meretricious face had been unveiled for my admiration. I told him how we kept fewer forms between us and God; retaining, indeed, no more than, perhaps, the nature of mankind in the mass rendered necessary for due observance. I told him I could not look on flowers and tinsel, on wax-lights and embroidery, at such times and under such circumstances as should be devoted to lifting the secret vision to Him whose home is Infinity, and His being — Eternity. That when I thought of sin and sorrow, of earthly corruption, mortal depravity, weighty temporal woe — I could not care for chanting priests or mumming officials; that when the pains of existence and the terrors of dissolution pressed before me — when the mighty hope and measureless doubt of the future arose in view — then, even the scientific strain, or the prayer in a language learned and dead, harassed: with hindrance a heart which only longed to cry — "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

When I had so spoken, so declared my faith, and so widely severed myself, from him I addressed — then, at last, came a tone accordant, an echo responsive, one sweet chord of harmony in two conflicting spirits.

"Whatever say priests or controversialists," murmured M. Emanuel, "God is good, and loves all the sincere. Believe, then, what you can; believe it as you can; one prayer, at least, we have in common; I also cry — 'O Dieu, sois appaisé envers moi qui suis pécheur!'"

He leaned on the back of my chair. After some thought he again spoke:

"How seem in the eyes of that God who made all firmaments, from whose nostrils issued whatever of life is here, or in the stars shining yonder — how seem the differences of man? But as Time is not for God, nor Space, so neither is Measure, nor Comparison. We abase ourselves in our littleness, and we do right; yet it may be that the constancy of one heart, the truth and faith of one mind according to the light He has appointed, import as much to Him as the just motion of satellites about their planets, of planets about their suns, of suns around that mighty unseen centre incomprehensible, irrealizable, with strange mental effort only divined.

"God guide us all! God bless you, Lucy!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SUNSHINE.

It was very, well for Paulina to decline further correspondence with Graham till her father had sanctioned the intercourse. But Dr. Bretton could not live within a league of the Hôtel Crécy, and not contrive to visit there often. Both lovers meant at first, I believe, to be distant; they kept their intention so far as demonstrative courtship went, but in feeling they soon drew very near.

All that was best in Graham sought Paulina; whatever in him was noble, awoke, and grew in her presence. With his past admiration of Miss Fanshawe, I suppose his intellect had little to do, but his whole intellect, and his highest tastes, came in question now. These, like all his faculties, were active, eager for nutriment, and alive to gratification when it came.

I cannot say that Paulina designedly led him to talk of books, or formally proposed to herself for a moment the task of winning him to reflection, or planned the improvement of his mind, or so much as fancied his mind could in any one respect be improved. She thought him very perfect; it was Graham himself, who, at first by the merest chance, mentioned some book he had been reading, and when in her response sounded a welcome harmony of sympathies, something, pleasant to his soul, he talked on, more and better perhaps than he had ever talked before on such subjects. She listened with delight, and answered with animation. In each successive answer, Graham heard a music waxing finer and finer to his sense; in each he found a suggestive, persuasive, magic accent that opened a scarce-known treasure-house within, showed him unsuspected power in his own mind, and what was better, latent goodness in his heart. Each liked the way in which the other talked; the voice, the diction, the expression pleased; each keenly relished the flavour of the other's wit; they met each other's meaning with strange quickness, their thoughts often matched like carefully-chosen pearls. Graham had wealth of mirth by nature; Paulina possessed no such inherent flow of animal spirits — unstimulated, she inclined to be thoughtful and pensive — but now she seemed merry as a lark; in her lover's genial presence, she glanced like some soft glad light. How beautiful she grew in her happiness, I can hardly express, but I wondered to see her. As to that gentle ice of hers — that reserve on which she had depended; where was it now? Ah! Graham would not long bear it; he brought with him a generous influence that soon thawed the timid, self-imposed restriction.

Now were the old Bretton days talked over; perhaps brokenly at first, with a sort of smiling diffidence, then with opening candour and still growing confidence. Graham had made for himself a better opportunity than that he had wished me to give; he had earned independence of the collateral help that disobliging Lucy had refused; all his reminiscences of "little Polly" found their proper expression in his own pleasant tones, by his own kind and handsome lips; how much better than if suggested by me.

More than once when we were alone, Paulina would tell me how wonderful and curious it was to discover the richness and accuracy of his memory in this matter. How, while he was looking at her, recollections would seem to be suddenly quickened in his mind. He reminded her that she had once gathered his head in her arms, caressed his leonine graces, and cried out, "Graham, I do like you!" He told her how she would set a footstool beside him, and climb by its aid to his knee. At this day he said he could recall the sensation of her little hands smoothing his cheek, or burying themselves in his thick mane. He remembered the touch of her small forefinger, placed half tremblingly, half curiously, in the cleft in his chin, the lisp, the look with which she would name it "a pretty dimple," then seek his eyes and question why they pierced so, telling him he had a "nice, strange face; far nicer, far stranger, than either his mamma or Lucy Snowe."

"Child as I was," remarked Paulina, "I wonder how I dared be so venturous. To me he seems now all sacred, his locks are inaccessible, and, Lucy, I feel a sort of fear, when I look at his firm, marble chin, at his straight Greek features. Women are called beautiful, Lucy; he is not like a woman, therefore I suppose he is not beautiful, but what is he, then? Do other people see him with my eyes? Do you admire him?"

"I'll tell you what I do, Paulina," was once my answer to her many questions. "I never see him. I looked at him twice or thrice about a year ago, before he recognised me, and then I shut my eyes; and if he were to cross their balls twelve times between each day's sunset and sunrise, except from memory, I should hardly know what shape had gone by."

"Lucy, what do you mean?" said she, under her breath.

"I mean that I value vision, and dread being struck stone blind."

It was best to answer her strongly at once, and to silence for ever the tender, passionate confidences which left her lips sweet honey, and sometimes dropped in my ear — molten lead. To me, she commented no more on her lover's beauty.

Yet speak of him she would; sometimes shyly, in quiet, brief phrases; sometimes with a tenderness of cadence, and music of voice exquisite in itself; but which chafed me at times miserably; and then, I know, I gave her stern looks and words; but cloudless happiness had dazzled her native clear sight, and she only thought Lucy — fitful.

"Spartan girl! Proud Lucy!" she would say, smiling at me. "Graham says you are the most peculiar, capricious little woman he knows; but yet you are excellent; we both think so."

"You both think you know not what," said I. "Have the goodness to make me as little the subject of your mutual talk and thoughts as possible. I have my sort of life apart from yours."

"But ours, Lucy, is a beautiful life, or it will be; and you shall share it."

"I shall share no man's or woman's life in this world, as you understand sharing. I think I have one friend of my own, but am not sure; and till I am sure, I live solitary."

"But solitude is sadness."

"Yes; it is sadness. Life, however; has worse than that. Deeper than melancholy, lies heart-break."

"Lucy, I wonder if anybody will ever comprehend you altogether."

There is, in lovers, a certain infatuation of egotism; they will have a witness of their happiness, cost that witness what it may. Paulina had forbidden letters, yet Dr. Bretton wrote; she had resolved against correspondence, yet she answered, were it only to chide. She showed me these letters; with something of the spoiled child's wilfulness, and of the heiress's imperiousness, she made me read them. As I read Graham's, I scarce wondered at her exaction, and understood her pride: they were fine letters — manly and fond — modest and gallant. Hers must have appeared to him beautiful. They had not been written to show her talents; still less, I think, to express her love. On the contrary, it appeared that she had proposed to herself the task of hiding that feeling, and bridling her lover's ardour. But how could such letters serve such a purpose? Graham was become dear as her life; he drew her like a powerful magnet. For her there was influence unspeakable in all he uttered, wrote, thought, or looked. With this unconfessed confession, her letters glowed; it kindled them, from greeting to adieu.

"I wish papa knew; I do wish papa knew!" began now to be her anxious murmur. "I wish, and yet I fear. I can hardly keep Graham back from telling him. There is nothing I long for more than to have this affair settled — to speak out candidly; and yet I dread the crisis. I know, I am certain, papa will be angry at the first; I fear he will dislike me almost; it will seem to him an untoward business; it will be a surprise, a shock: I can hardly foresee its whole effect on him."

The fact was — her father, long calm, was beginning to be a little stirred: long blind on one point, an importunate light was beginning to trespass on his eye.

To her, he said nothing; but when she was not looking at, or perhaps thinking of him, I saw him gaze and meditate on her.

One evening — Paulina was in her dressing-room, writing, I believe, to Graham; she had left me in the library, reading — M. de Bassompierre came in; he sat down: I was about to withdraw; he requested me to remain — gently, yet in a manner which showed he wished compliance. He had taken his seat near the window, at a distance from me; he opened a desk; he took from it what looked like a memorandum-book; of this book he studied a certain entry for several minutes.

"Miss Snowe," said he, laying it down, "do you know my little girl's age?"

"About eighteen, is it not, sir?"

"It seems so. This old pocket-book tells me she was born on the 5th of May, in the year 18 — , eighteen years ago. It is strange; I had lost the just reckoning of her age. I thought of her as twelve — fourteen — an indefinite date; but she seemed a child."

"She is about eighteen," I repeated. "She is grown up; she will be no taller."

"My little jewel!" said M. de Bassompierre, in a tone which penetrated like some of his daughter's accents.

He sat very thoughtful.

"Sir, don't grieve," I said; for I knew his feelings, utterly unspoken as they were.

"She is the only pearl I have," he said; "and now others will find out that she is pure and of price: they will covet her."

I made no answer. Graham Bretton had dined with us that day; he had shone both in converse and looks: I know not what pride of bloom embellished his aspect and mellowed his intercourse. Under the stimulus of a high hope, something had unfolded in his whole manner which compelled attention. I think he had purposed on that day to indicate the origin of his endeavours, and the aim of his ambition. M. de Bassompierre had found himself forced, in a manner, to descry the direction and catch the character of his homage. Slow in remarking, he was logical in reasoning: having once seized the thread, it had guided him through a long labyrinth.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"She is up-stairs."

"What is she doing?"

"She is writing."

"She writes, does she? Does she receive letters?"

"None but such as she can show me. And — sir — she — they have long wanted to consult you."

"Pshaw! They don't think of me — an old father! I am in the way."

"Ah, M. de Bassompierre — not so — that can't be! But Paulina must speak for herself: and Dr. Bretton, too, must be his own advocate."

"It is a little late. Matters are advanced, it seems."

"Sir, till you approve, nothing is done — only they love each other."

"Only!" he echoed.

Invested by fate with the part of confidante and mediator, I was obliged to go on: "Hundreds of times has Dr. Bretton been on the point of appealing to you, sir; but, with all his high courage, he fears you mortally."

"He may well — he may well fear me. He has touched the best thing I have. Had he but let her alone, she would have remained a child for years yet. So. Are they engaged?"

"They could not become engaged without your permission."

"It is well for you, Miss Snowe, to talk and think with that propriety which always characterizes you; but this matter is a grief to me; my little girl was all I had: I have no more daughters and no son; Bretton might as well have looked elsewhere; there are scores of rich and pretty women who would not, I daresay, dislike him: he has looks, and conduct, and connection. Would nothing serve him but my Polly?"

"If he had never seen your 'Polly,' others might and would have pleased him — your niece, Miss Fanshawe, for instance."

"Ah! I would have given him Ginevra with all my heart; but Polly! — I can't let him have her. No — I can't. He is not her equal," he affirmed, rather gruffly. "In what particular is he her match? They talk of fortune! I am not an avaricious or interested man, but the world thinks of these things — and Polly will be rich."

"Yes, that is known," said I: "all Villette knows her as an heiress."

"Do they talk of my little girl in that light?"

"They do, sir."

He fell into deep thought. I ventured to say, "Would you, sir, think any one Paulina's match? Would you prefer any other to Dr. Bretton? Do you think higher rank or more wealth would make much difference in your feelings towards a future son-in-law?"

"You touch me there," said he.

"Look at the aristocracy of Villette — you would not like them, sir?"

"I should not — never a duc, baron, or vicomte of the lot."

"I am told many of these persons think about her, sir," I went on, gaining courage on finding that I met attention rather than repulse. "Other suitors will come, therefore, if Dr. Bretton is refused. Wherever you go, I suppose, aspirants will not be wanting. Independent of heiress-ship, it appears to me that Paulina charms most of those who see her."

"Does she? How? My little girl is not thought a beauty."

"Sir, Miss de Bassompierre is very beautiful."

"Nonsense! — begging your pardon, Miss Snowe, but I think you are too partial. I like Polly: I like all her ways and all her looks — but then I am her father; and even I never thought about beauty. She is amusing, fairy-like, interesting to me; — you must be mistaken in supposing her handsome?"

"She attracts, sir: she would attract without the advantages of your wealth and position."

"My wealth and position! Are these any bait to Graham? If I thought so — — "

"Dr. Bretton knows these points perfectly, as you may be sure, M. de Bassompierre, and values them as any gentleman would — as you would yourself, under the same circumstances — but they are not his baits. He loves your daughter very much; he feels her finest qualities, and they influence him worthily."

"What! has my little pet 'fine qualities?'"

"Ah, sir! did you observe her that evening when so many men of eminence and learning dined here?"

"I certainly was rather struck and surprised with her manner that day; its womanliness made me smile."

"And did you see those accomplished Frenchmen gather round her in the drawing-room?"

"I did; but I thought it was by way of relaxation — as one might amuse one's self with a pretty infant."

"Sir, she demeaned herself with distinction; and I heard the French gentlemen say she was 'pétrie d'esprit et de graces.' Dr. Bretton thought the same."

"She is a good, dear child, that is certain; and I do believe she has some character. When I think of it, I was once ill; Polly nursed me; they thought I should die; she, I recollect, grew at once stronger and tenderer as I grew worse in health. And as I recovered, what a sunbeam she was in my sick-room! Yes; she played about my chair as noiselessly and as cheerful as light. And now she is sought in marriage! I don't want to part with her," said he, and he groaned.

"You have known Dr. and Mrs. Bretton so long," I suggested, "it would be less like separation to give her to him than to another."

He reflected rather gloomily.

"True. I have long known Louisa Bretton," he murmured. "She and I are indeed old, old friends; a sweet, kind girl she was when she was young. You talk of beauty, Miss Snowe! she was handsome, if you will — tall, straight, and blooming — not the mere child or elf my Polly seems to me: at eighteen, Louisa had a carriage and stature fit for a princess. She is a comely and a good woman now. The lad is like her; I have always thought so, and favoured and wished him well. Now he repays me by this robbery! My little treasure used to love her old father dearly and truly. It is all over now, doubtless — I am an incumbrance."

The door opened — his "little treasure" came in. She was dressed, so to speak, in evening beauty; that animation which sometimes comes with the close of day, warmed her eye and cheek; a tinge of summer crimson heightened her complexion; her curls fell full and long on her lily neck; her white dress suited the heat of June. Thinking me alone, she had brought in her hand the letter just written — brought it folded but unsealed. I was to read it. When she saw her father, her tripping step faltered a little, paused a moment — the colour in her cheek flowed rosy over her whole face.

"Polly," said M. de Bassompierre, in a low voice, with a grave smile, "do you blush at seeing papa? That is something new."

"I don't blush — I never do blush," affirmed she, while another eddy from the heart sent up its scarlet. "But I thought you were in the dining-room, and I wanted Lucy."

"You thought I was with John Graham Bretton, I suppose? But he has just been called out: he will be back soon, Polly. He can post your letter for you; it will save Matthieu a 'course,' as he calls it."

"I don't post letters," said she, rather pettishly.

"What do you do with them, then? — come here and tell me."

Both her mind and gesture seemed to hesitate a second — to say "Shall I come?" — but she approached.

"How long is it since you became a letter-writer, Polly? It only seems yesterday when you were at your pot-hooks, labouring away absolutely with both hands at the pen."

"Papa, they are not letters to send to the post in your letter-bag; they are only notes, which I give now and then into the person's hands, just to satisfy."

"The person! That means Miss Snowe, I suppose?"

"No, papa — not Lucy."

"Who then? Perhaps Mrs. Bretton?"

"No, papa — not Mrs. Bretton."

"Who, then, my little daughter? Tell papa the truth."

"Oh, papa!" she cried with earnestness, "I will — I will tell you the truth — all the truth; I am glad to tell you — glad, though I tremble."

She did tremble: growing excitement, kindling feeling, and also gathering courage, shook her.

"I hate to hide my actions from you, papa. I fear you and love you above everything but God. Read the letter; look at the address."

She laid it on his knee. He took it up and read it through; his hand shaking, his eyes glistening meantime.

He re-folded it, and viewed the writer with a strange, tender, mournful amaze.

"Can she write so — the little thing that stood at my knee but yesterday? Can she feel so?"

"Papa, is it wrong? Does it pain you?"

"There is nothing wrong in it, my innocent little Mary; but it pains me."

"But, papa, listen! You shall not be pained by me. I would give up everything — almost" (correcting herself); "I would die rather than make you unhappy; that would be too wicked!"

She shuddered.

"Does the letter not please you? Must it not go? Must it be torn? It shall, for your sake, if you order it."

"I order nothing."

"Order something, papa; express your wish; only don't hurt, don't grieve Graham. I cannot, cannot bear that. I love you, papa; but I love Graham too — because — because — it is impossible to help it."

"This splendid Graham is a young scamp, Polly — that is my present notion of him: it will surprise you to hear that, for my part, I do not love him one whit. Ah! years ago I saw something in that lad's eye I never quite fathomed — something his mother has not — a depth which warned a man not to wade into that stream too far; now, suddenly, I find myself taken over the crown of the head."

"Papa, you don't — you have not fallen in; you are safe on the bank; you can do as you please; your power is despotic; you can shut me up in a convent, and break Graham's heart to-morrow, if you choose to be so cruel. Now, autocrat, now czar, will you do this?"

"Off with him to Siberia, red whiskers and all; I say, I don't like him, Polly, and I wonder that you should."

"Papa," said she, "do you know you are very naughty? I never saw you look so disagreeable, so unjust, so almost vindictive before. There is an expression in your face which does not belong to you."

"Off with him!" pursued Mr. Home, who certainly did look sorely crossed and annoyed — even a little bitter; "but, I suppose, if he went, Polly would pack a bundle and run after him; her heart is fairly won — won, and weaned from her old father."

"Papa, I say it is naughty, it is decidedly wrong, to talk in that way. I am not weaned from you, and no human being and no mortal influence can wean me."

"Be married, Polly! Espouse the red whiskers. Cease to be a daughter; go and be a wife!"

"Red whiskers! I wonder what you mean, papa. You should take care of prejudice. You sometimes say to me that all the Scotch, your countrymen, are the victims of prejudice. It is proved now, I think, when no distinction is to be made between red and deep nut-brown."

"Leave the prejudiced old Scotchman; go away."

She stood looking at him a minute. She wanted to show firmness, superiority to taunts; knowing her father's character, guessing his few foibles, she had expected the sort of scene which was now transpiring; it did not take her by surprise, and she desired to let it pass with dignity, reliant upon reaction. Her dignity stood her in no stead. Suddenly her soul melted in her eyes; she fell on his neck: — "I won't leave you, papa; I'll never leave you. I won't pain you! I'll never pain you!" was her cry.

"My lamb! my treasure!" murmured the loving though rugged sire. He said no more for the moment; indeed, those two words were hoarse.

The room was now darkening. I heard a movement, a step without. Thinking it might be a servant coming with candles, I gently opened, to prevent intrusion. In the ante-room stood no servant: a tall gentleman was placing his hat on the table, drawing off his gloves slowly — lingering, waiting, it seemed to me. He called me neither by sign nor word; yet his eye said: — "Lucy, come here." And I went.

Over his face a smile flowed, while he looked down on me: no temper, save his own, would have expressed by a smile the sort of agitation which now fevered him.

"M. de Bassompierre is there — is he not?" he inquired, pointing to the library.

"Yes."

"He noticed me at dinner? He understood me?"

"Yes, Graham."

"I am brought up for judgment, then, and so is she?"

"Mr. Home" (we now and always continued to term him Mr. Home at times) "is talking to his daughter."

"Ha! These are sharp moments, Lucy!"

He was quite stirred up; his young hand trembled; a vital (I was going to write mortal, but such words ill apply to one all living like him) — a vital suspense now held, now hurried, his breath: in all this trouble his smile never faded.

"Is he very angry, Lucy?"

"She is very faithful, Graham."

"What will be done unto me?"

"Graham, your star must be fortunate."

"Must it? Kind prophet! So cheered, I should be a faint heart indeed to quail. I think I find all women faithful, Lucy. I ought to love them, and I do. My mother is good; she is divine; and you are true as steel. Are you not?"

"Yes, Graham."

"Then give me thy hand, my little god-sister: it is a friendly little hand to me, and always has been. And now for the great venture. God be with the right. Lucy, say Amen!"

He turned, and waited till I said "Amen!" — which I did to please him: the old charm, in doing as he bid me, came back. I wished him success; and successful I knew he would be. He was born victor, as some are born vanquished.

"Follow me!" he said; and I followed him into Mr. Home's presence.

"Sir," he asked, "what is my sentence?"

The father looked at him: the daughter kept her face hid.

"Well, Bretton," said Mr. Home, "you have given me the usual reward of hospitality. I entertained you; you have taken my best. I was always glad to see you; you were glad to see the one precious thing I had. You spoke me fair; and, meantime, I will not say you robbed me, but I am bereaved, and what I have lost, you, it seems, have won."

"Sir, I cannot repent."

"Repent! Not you! You triumph, no doubt: John Graham, you descended partly from a Highlander and a chief, and there is a trace of the Celt in all you look, speak, and think. You have his cunning and his charm. The red — (Well then, Polly, the fair) hair, the tongue of guile, and brain of wile, are all come down by inheritance."

"Sir, I feel honest enough," said Graham; and a genuine English blush covered his face with its warm witness of sincerity. "And yet," he added, "I won't deny that in some respects you accuse me justly. In your presence I have always had a thought which I dared not show you. I did truly regard you as the possessor of the most valuable thing the world owns for me. I wished for it: I tried for it. Sir, I ask for it now."

"John, you ask much."

"Very much, sir. It must come from your generosity, as a gift; from your justice, as a reward. I can never earn it."

"Ay! Listen to the Highland tongue!" said Mr. Home. "Look up, Polly!

Answer this 'braw wooer;' send him away!"

She looked up. She shyly glanced at her eager, handsome suitor. She gazed tenderly on her furrowed sire.

"Papa, I love you both," said she; "I can take care of you both. I need not send Graham away — he can live here; he will be no inconvenience," she alleged with that simplicity of phraseology which at times was wont to make both her father and Graham smile. They smiled now.

"He will be a prodigious inconvenience to me," still persisted Mr. Home. "I don't want him, Polly, he is too tall; he is in my way. Tell him to march."

"You will get used to him, papa. He seemed exceedingly tall to me at first — like a tower when I looked up at him; but, on the whole, I would rather not have him otherwise."

"I object to him altogether, Polly; I can do without a son-in-law. I should never have requested the best man in the land to stand to me in that relation. Dismiss this gentleman."

"But he has known you so long, papa, and suits you so well."

"Suits me, forsooth! Yes; he has pretended to make my opinions and tastes his own. He has humoured me for good reasons. I think, Polly, you and I will bid him good-by."

"Till to-morrow only. Shake hands with Graham, papa."

"No: I think not: I am not friends with him. Don't think to coax me between you."

"Indeed, indeed, you are friends. Graham, stretch out your right hand. Papa, put out yours. Now, let them touch. Papa, don't be stiff; close your fingers; be pliant — there! But that is not a clasp — it is a grasp? Papa, you grasp like a vice. You crush Graham's hand to the bone; you hurt him!"

He must have hurt him; for he wore a massive ring, set round with brilliants, of which the sharp facets cut into Graham's flesh and drew blood: but pain only made Dr. John laugh, as anxiety had made him smile.

"Come with me into my study," at last said Mr. Home to the doctor. They went. Their intercourse was not long, but I suppose it was conclusive. The suitor had to undergo an interrogatory and a scrutiny on many things. Whether Dr. Bretton was at times guileful in look and language or not, there was a sound foundation below. His answers, I understood afterwards, evinced both wisdom and integrity. He had managed his affairs well. He had struggled through entanglements; his fortunes were in the way of retrieval; he proved himself in a position to marry.

Once more the father and lover appeared in the library. M. de Bassompierre shut the door; he pointed to his daughter.

"Take her," he said. "Take her, John Bretton: and may God deal with you as you deal with her!"

* * * * *

Not long after, perhaps a fortnight, I saw three persons, Count de Bassompierre, his daughter, and Dr. Graham Bretton, sitting on one seat, under a low-spreading and umbrageous tree, in the grounds of the palace at Bois l'Etang. They had come thither to enjoy a summer evening: outside the magnificent gates their carriage waited to take them home; the green sweeps of turf spread round them quiet and dim; the palace rose at a distance, white as a crag on Pentelicus; the evening star shone above it; a forest of flowering shrubs embalmed the climate of this spot; the hour was still and sweet; the scene, but for this group, was solitary.

Paulina sat between the two gentlemen: while they conversed, her little hands were busy at some work; I thought at first she was binding a nosegay. No; with the tiny pair of scissors, glittering in her lap, she had severed spoils from each manly head beside her, and was now occupied in plaiting together the grey lock and the golden wave. The plait woven — no silk-thread being at hand to bind it — a tress of her own hair was made to serve that purpose; she tied it like a knot, prisoned it in a locket, and laid it on her heart.

"Now," said she, "there is an amulet made, which has virtue to keep you two always friends. You can never quarrel so long as I wear this."

An amulet was indeed made, a spell framed which rendered enmity impossible. She was become a bond to both, an influence over each, a mutual concord. From them she drew her happiness, and what she borrowed, she, with interest, gave back.

"Is there, indeed, such happiness on earth?" I asked, as I watched the father, the daughter, the future husband, now united — all blessed and blessing.

Yes; it is so. Without any colouring of romance, or any exaggeration of fancy, it is so. Some real lives do — for some certain days or years — actually anticipate the happiness of Heaven; and, I believe, if such perfect happiness is once felt by good people (to the wicked it never comes), its sweet effect is never wholly lost. Whatever trials follow, whatever pains of sickness or shades of death, the glory precedent still shines through, cheering the keen anguish, and tinging the deep cloud.

I will go farther. I do believe there are some human beings so born, so reared, so guided from a soft cradle to a calm and late grave, that no excessive suffering penetrates their lot, and no tempestuous blackness overcasts their journey. And often, these are not pampered, selfish beings, but Nature's elect, harmonious and benign; men and women mild with charity, kind agents of God's kind attributes.

Let me not delay the happy truth. Graham Bretton and Paulina de Bassompierre were married, and such an agent did Dr. Bretton prove. He did not with time degenerate; his faults decayed, his virtues ripened; he rose in intellectual refinement, he won in moral profit: all dregs filtered away, the clear wine settled bright and tranquil. Bright, too, was the destiny of his sweet wife. She kept her husband's love, she aided in his progress — of his happiness she was the corner stone.

This pair was blessed indeed, for years brought them, with great prosperity, great goodness: they imparted with open hand, yet wisely. Doubtless they knew crosses, disappointments, difficulties; but these were well borne. More than once, too, they had to look on Him whose face flesh scarce can see and live: they had to pay their tribute to the King of Terrors. In the fulness of years, M. de Bassompierre was taken: in ripe old age departed Louisa Bretton. Once even there rose a cry in their halls, of Rachel weeping for her children; but others sprang healthy and blooming to replace the lost: Dr. Bretton saw himself live again in a son who inherited his looks and his disposition; he had stately daughters, too, like himself: these children he reared with a suave, yet a firm hand; they grew up according to inheritance and nurture.

In short, I do but speak the truth when I say that these two lives of Graham and Paulina were blessed, like that of Jacob's favoured son, with "blessings of Heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies under." It was so, for God saw that it was good.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CLOUD.

But it is not so for all. What then? His will be done, as done it surely will be, whether we humble ourselves to resignation or not. The impulse of creation forwards it; the strength of powers, seen and unseen, has its fulfilment in charge. Proof of a life to come must be given. In fire and in blood, if needful, must that proof be written. In fire and in blood do we trace the record throughout nature. In fire and in blood does it cross our own experience. Sufferer, faint not through terror of this burning evidence. Tired wayfarer, gird up thy loins; look upward, march onward. Pilgrims and brother mourners, join in friendly company. Dark through the wilderness of this world stretches the way for most of us: equal and steady be our tread; be our cross our banner. For staff we have His promise, whose "word is tried, whose way perfect:" for present hope His providence, "who gives the shield of salvation, whose gentleness makes great;" for final home His bosom, who "dwells in the height of Heaven;" for crowning prize a glory, exceeding and eternal. Let us so run that we may obtain: let us endure hardness as good soldiers; let us finish our course, and keep the faith, reliant in the issue to come off more than conquerors: "Art thou not from everlasting mine Holy One? WE SHALL NOT DIE!"

On a Thursday morning we were all assembled in classe, waiting for the lesson of literature. The hour was come; we expected the master.

The pupils of the first classe sat very still; the cleanly-written compositions prepared since the last lesson lay ready before them, neatly tied with ribbon, waiting to be gathered by the hand of the Professor as he made his rapid round of the desks. The month was July, the morning fine, the glass-door stood ajar, through it played a fresh breeze, and plants, growing at the lintel, waved, bent, looked in, seeming to whisper tidings.

M. Emanuel was not always quite punctual; we scarcely wondered at his being a little late, but we wondered when the door at last opened and, instead of him with his swiftness and his fire, there came quietly upon us the cautious Madame Beck.

She approached M. Paul's desk; she stood before it; she drew round her the light shawl covering her shoulders; beginning to speak in low, yet firm tones, and with a fixed gaze, she said, "This morning there will be no lesson of literature."

The second paragraph of her address followed, after about two minutes' pause.

"It is probable the lessons will be suspended for a week. I shall require at least that space of time to find an efficient substitute for M. Emanuel. Meanwhile, it shall be our study to fill the blanks usefully.

"Your Professor, ladies," she went on, "intends, if possible, duly to take leave of you. At the present moment he has not leisure for that ceremony. He is preparing for a long voyage. A very sudden and urgent summons of duty calls him to a great distance. He has decided to leave Europe for an indefinite time. Perhaps he may tell you more himself. Ladies, instead of the usual lesson with M. Emanuel, you will, this morning, read English with Mademoiselle Lucy."

She bent her head courteously, drew closer the folds of her shawl, and passed from the classe.

A great silence fell: then a murmur went round the room: I believe some pupils wept.

Some time elapsed. The noise, the whispering, the occasional sobbing increased. I became conscious of a relaxation of discipline, a sort of growing disorder, as if my girls felt that vigilance was withdrawn, and that surveillance had virtually left the classe. Habit and the sense of duty enabled me to rally quickly, to rise in my usual way, to speak in my usual tone, to enjoin, and finally to establish quiet. I made the English reading long and close. I kept them at it the whole morning. I remember feeling a sentiment of impatience towards the pupils who sobbed. Indeed, their emotion was not of much value: it was only an hysteric agitation. I told them so unsparingly. I half ridiculed them. I was severe. The truth was, I could not do with their tears, or that gasping sound; I could not bear it. A rather weak-minded, low-spirited pupil kept it up when the others had done; relentless necessity obliged and assisted me so to accost her, that she dared not carry on the demonstration, that she was forced to conquer the convulsion.

That girl would have had a right to hate me, except that, when school was over and her companions departing, I ordered her to stay, and when they were gone, I did what I had never done to one among them before — pressed her to my heart and kissed her cheek. But, this impulse yielded to, I speedily put her out of the classe, for, upon that poignant strain, she wept more bitterly than ever.

I filled with occupation every minute of that day, and should have liked to sit up all night if I might have kept a candle burning; the night, however, proved a bad time, and left bad effects, preparing me ill for the next day's ordeal of insufferable gossip. Of course this news fell under general discussion. Some little reserve had accompanied the first surprise: that soon wore off; every mouth opened; every tongue wagged; teachers, pupils, the very servants, mouthed the name of "Emanuel." He, whose connection with the school was contemporary with its commencement, thus suddenly to withdraw! All felt it strange.

They talked so much, so long, so often, that, out of the very multitude of their words and rumours, grew at last some intelligence. About the third day I heard it said that he was to sail in a week; then — that he was bound for the West Indies. I looked at Madame Beck's face, and into her eyes, for disproof or confirmation of this report; I perused her all over for information, but no part of her disclosed more than what was unperturbed and commonplace.

"This secession was an immense loss to her," she alleged. "She did not know how she should fill up the vacancy. She was so used to her kinsman, he had become her right hand; what should she do without him? She had opposed the step, but M. Paul had convinced her it was his duty."

She said all this in public, in classe, at the dinner-table, speaking audibly to Zélie St. Pierre.

"Why was it his duty?" I could have asked her that. I had impulses to take hold of her suddenly, as she calmly passed me in classe, to stretch out my hand and grasp her fast, and say, "Stop. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Why is it his duty to go into banishment?" But Madame always addressed some other teacher, and never looked at me, never seemed conscious I could have a care in the question.

The week wore on. Nothing more was said about M. Emanuel coming to bid us good-by; and none seemed anxious for his coming; none questioned whether or not he would come; none betrayed torment lest he should depart silent and unseen; incessantly did they talk, and never, in all their talk, touched on this vital point. As to Madame, she of course could see him, and say to him as much as she pleased. What should she care whether or not he appeared in the schoolroom?

The week consumed. We were told that he was going on such a day, that his destination was "Basseterre in Guadaloupe:" the business which called him abroad related to a friend's interests, not his own: I thought as much.

"Basseterre in Guadaloupe." I had little sleep about this time, but whenever I did slumber, it followed infallibly that I was quickly roused with a start, while the words "Basseterre," "Guadaloupe," seemed pronounced over my pillow, or ran athwart the darkness round and before me, in zigzag characters of red or violet light.

For what I felt there was no help, and how could I help feeling? M. Emanuel had been very kind to me of late days; he had been growing hourly better and kinder. It was now a month since we had settled the theological difference, and in all that time there had been no quarrel. Nor had our peace been the cold daughter of divorce; we had not lived aloof; he had come oftener, he had talked with me more than before; he had spent hours with me, with temper soothed, with eye content, with manner home-like and mild. Kind subjects of conversation had grown between us; he had inquired into my plans of life, and I had communicated them; the school project pleased him; he made me repeat it more than once, though he called it an Alnaschar dream. The jar was over; the mutual understanding was settling and fixing; feelings of union and hope made themselves profoundly felt in the heart; affection and deep esteem and dawning trust had each fastened its bond.

What quiet lessons I had about this time! No more taunts on my "intellect," no more menaces of grating public shows! How sweetly, for the jealous gibe, and the more jealous, half-passionate eulogy, were substituted a mute, indulgent help, a fond guidance, and a tender forbearance which forgave but never praised. There were times when he would sit for many minutes and not speak at all; and when dusk or duty brought separation, he would leave with words like these, "Il est doux, le repos! Il est précieux le calme bonheur!"

One evening, not ten short days since, he joined me whilst walking in my alley. He took my hand. I looked up in his face. I thought he meant to arrest my attention.

"Bonne petite amie!" said he, softly; "douce consolatrice!" But through his touch, and with his words, a new feeling and a strange thought found a course. Could it be that he was becoming more than friend or brother? Did his look speak a kindness beyond fraternity or amity?

His eloquent look had more to say, his hand drew me forward, his interpreting lips stirred. No. Not now. Here into the twilight alley broke an interruption: it came dual and ominous: we faced two bodeful forms — a woman's and a priest's — Madame Beck and Père Silas.

The aspect of the latter I shall never forget. On the first impulse it expressed a Jean-Jacques sensibility, stirred by the signs of affection just surprised; then, immediately, darkened over it the jaundice of ecclesiastical jealousy. He spoke to me with unction. He looked on his pupil with sternness. As to Madame Beck, she, of course, saw nothing — nothing; though her kinsman retained in her presence the hand of the heretic foreigner, not suffering withdrawal, but clasping it close and fast.

Following these incidents, that sudden announcement of departure had struck me at first as incredible. Indeed, it was only frequent repetition, and the credence of the hundred and fifty minds round me, which forced on me its full acceptance. As to that week of suspense, with its blank, yet burning days, which brought from him no word of explanation — I remember, but I cannot describe its passage.

The last day broke. Now would he visit us. Now he would come and speak his farewell, or he would vanish mute, and be seen by us nevermore.

This alternative seemed to be present in the mind of not a living creature in that school. All rose at the usual hour; all breakfasted as usual; all, without reference to, or apparent thought of their late Professor, betook themselves with wonted phlegm to their ordinary duties.

So oblivious was the house, so tame, so trained its proceedings, so inexpectant its aspect — I scarce knew how to breathe in an atmosphere thus stagnant, thus smothering. Would no one lend me a voice? Had no one a wish, no one a word, no one a prayer to which I could say — Amen?

I had seen them unanimous in demand for the merest trifle — a treat, a holiday, a lesson's remission; they could not, they would not now band to besiege Madame Beck, and insist on a last interview with a Master who had certainly been loved, at least by some — loved as they could love — but, oh! what is the love of the multitude?

I knew where he lived: I knew where he was to be heard of, or communicated with; the distance was scarce a stone's-throw: had it been in the next room — unsummoned, I could make no use of my knowledge. To follow, to seek out, to remind, to recall — for these things I had no faculty.

M. Emanuel might have passed within reach of my arm: had he passed silent and unnoticing, silent and stirless should I have suffered him to go by.

Morning wasted. Afternoon came, and I thought all was over. My heart trembled in its place. My blood was troubled in its current. I was quite sick, and hardly knew how to keep at my post — or do my work. Yet the little world round me plodded on indifferent; all seemed jocund, free of care, or fear, or thought: the very pupils who, seven days since, had wept hysterically at a startling piece of news, appeared quite to have forgotten the news, its import, and their emotion.

A little before five o'clock, the hour of dismissal, Madame Beck sent for me to her chamber, to read over and translate some English letter she had received, and to write for her the answer. Before settling to this work, I observed that she softly closed the two doors of her chamber; she even shut and fastened the casement, though it was a hot day, and free circulation of air was usually regarded by her as indispensable. Why this precaution? A keen suspicion, an almost fierce distrust, suggested such question. Did she want to exclude sound? what sound?

I listened as I had never listened before; I listened like the evening and winter-wolf, snuffing the snow, scenting prey, and hearing far off the traveller's tramp. Yet I could both listen and write. About the middle of the letter I heard — what checked my pen — a tread in the vestibule. No door-bell had rung; Rosine — acting doubtless by orders — had anticipated such réveillée. Madame saw me halt. She coughed, made a bustle, spoke louder. The tread had passed on to the classes.

"Proceed," said Madame; but my hand was fettered, my ear enchained, my thoughts were carried off captive.

The classes formed another building; the hall parted them from the dwelling-house: despite distance and partition, I heard the sudden stir of numbers, a whole division rising at once.

"They are putting away work," said Madame.

It was indeed the hour to put away work, but why that sudden hush — that instant quell of the tumult?

"Wait, Madame — I will see what it is."

And I put down my pen and left her. Left her? No: she would not be left: powerless to detain me, she rose and followed, close as my shadow. I turned on the last step of the stair.

“Are you coming, too?” I asked.

“Yes,” said she; meeting my glance with a peculiar aspect — a look, clouded, yet resolute.

We proceeded then, not together, but she walked in my steps.

He was come. Entering the first classe, I saw him. There, once more appeared the form most familiar. I doubt not they had tried to keep him away, but he was come.

The girls stood in a semicircle; he was passing round, giving his farewells, pressing each hand, touching with his lips each cheek. This last ceremony, foreign custom permitted at such a parting — so solemn, to last so long.

I felt it hard that Madame Beck should dog me thus; following and watching me close; my neck and shoulder shrunk in fever under her breath; I became terribly goaded.

He was approaching; the semicircle was almost travelled round; he came to the last pupil; he turned. But Madame was before me; she had stepped out suddenly; she seemed to magnify her proportions and amplify her drapery; she eclipsed me; I was hid. She knew my weakness and deficiency; she could calculate the degree of moral paralysis — the total default of self-assertion — with which, in a crisis, I could be struck. She hastened to her kinsman, she broke upon him volubly, she mastered his attention, she hurried him to the door — the glass-door opening on the garden. I think he looked round; could I but have caught his eye, courage, I think, would have rushed in to aid feeling, and there would have been a charge, and, perhaps, a rescue; but already the room was all confusion, the semicircle broken into groups, my figure was lost among thirty more conspicuous. Madame had her will; yes, she got him away, and he had not seen me; he thought me absent. Five o’clock struck, the loud dismissal-bell rang, the school separated, the room emptied.

There seems, to my memory, an entire darkness and distraction in some certain minutes I then passed alone — a grief inexpressible over a loss unendurable. What should I do; oh! what should I do; when all my life’s hope was thus torn by the roots out of my riven, outraged heart?

What I should have done, I know not, when a little child — the least child in the school — broke with its simplicity and its unconsciousness into the raging yet silent centre of that inward conflict.

“Mademoiselle,” lisped the treble voice, “I am to give you that. M. Paul said I was to seek you all over the house, from the grenier to the cellar, and when I found you, to give you that.”

And the child delivered a note; the little dove dropped on my knee, its olive leaf plucked off. I found neither address nor name, only these words: —

“It was not my intention to take leave of you when I said good-by to the rest, but I hoped to see you in classe. I was disappointed. The interview is deferred. Be ready for me. Ere I sail, I must see you at leisure, and speak with you at length. Be ready; my moments are numbered, and, just now, monopolized; besides, I have a private business on hand which I will not share with any, nor communicate — even to you. — PAUL.”

“Be ready?” Then it must be this evening: was he not to go on the morrow? Yes; of that point I was certain. I had seen the date of his vessel’s departure advertised. Oh! I would be ready, but could that longed-for meeting really be achieved? the time was so short, the schemers seemed so watchful, so active, so hostile; the way of access appeared strait as a gully, deep as a chasm — Apollyon straddled across it, breathing flames. Could my Greatheart overcome? Could my guide reach me?

Who might tell? Yet I began to take some courage, some comfort; it seemed to me that I felt a pulse of his heart beating yet true to the whole throb of mine.

I waited my champion. Apollyon came trailing his Hell behind him. I think if Eternity held torment, its form would not be fiery rack, nor its nature despair. I think that on a certain day amongst those days which never dawned, and will not set, an angel entered Hades — stood, shone, smiled, delivered a prophecy of conditional pardon, kindled a doubtful hope of bliss to come, not now, but at a day and hour unlooked for, revealed in his own glory and grandeur the height and compass of his promise: spoke thus — then towering, became a star, and vanished into his own Heaven. His legacy was suspense — a worse boon than despair.

All that evening I waited, trusting in the dove-sent olive-leaf, yet in the midst of my trust, terribly fearing. My fear pressed heavy. Cold and peculiar, I knew it for the partner of a rarely-belied presentiment. The first hours seemed long and slow; in spirit I clung to the flying skirts of the last. They passed like drift cloud — like the wrack scudding before a storm.

They passed. All the long, hot summer day burned away like a Yule-log; the crimson of its close perished; I was left bent among the cool blue shades, over the pale and ashen gleams of its night.

Prayers were over; it was bed-time; my co-inmates were all retired. I still remained in the gloomy first classe, forgetting, or at least disregarding, rules I had never forgotten or disregarded before.

How long I paced that classe I cannot tell; I must have been afoot many hours; mechanically had I moved aside benches and desks, and had made for myself a path down its length. There I walked, and there, when certain that the whole household were abed, and quite out of hearing — there, I at last wept. Reliant on Night, confiding in Solitude, I kept my tears sealed, my sobs chained, no longer; they heaved my heart; they tore their way. In this house, what grief could be sacred?

Soon after eleven o’clock — a very late hour in the Rue Fossette — the door unclosed, quietly but not stealthily; a lamp’s flame invaded the moonlight; Madame Beck entered, with the same composed air, as if coming on an ordinary occasion, at an ordinary season. Instead of at once addressing me, she went to her desk, took her keys, and seemed to seek something: she loitered over this feigned search long, too long. She was calm, too calm; my mood scarce endured the pretence; driven beyond common range, two hours since I had left behind me wonted respects and fears. Led by a touch, and ruled by a word, under usual circumstances, no yoke could now be borne — no curb obeyed.

“It is more than time for retirement,” said Madame; “the rule of the house has already been transgressed too long.”

Madame met no answer: I did not check my walk; when she came in my way,

I put her out of it.

“Let me persuade you to calm, Meess; let me lead you to your chamber,” said she, trying to speak softly.

“No!” I said; “neither you nor another shall persuade or lead me.”

“Your bed shall be warmed. Goton is sitting up still. She shall make you comfortable: she shall give you a sedative.”

“Madame,” I broke out, “you are a sensualist. Under all your serenity, your peace, and your decorum, you are an undenied sensualist. Make your own bed warm and soft; take sedatives and meats, and drinks spiced and sweet, as much as you will. If you have any sorrow or disappointment — and, perhaps, you have — nay, I know you have — seek your own palliatives, in your own chosen resources. Leave me, however. Leave me, I say!”

“I must send another to watch you, Meess: I must send Goton.”

“I forbid it. Let me alone. Keep your hand off me, and my life, and my troubles. Oh, Madame! in your hand there is both chill and poison. You envenom and you paralyze.”

“What have I done, Meess? You must not marry Paul. He cannot marry.”

“Dog in the manger!” I said: for I knew she secretly wanted him, and had always wanted him. She called him “insupportable:” she railed at him for a “dévot:” she did not love, but she wanted to marry, that she might bind him to her interest. Deep into some of Madame’s secrets I had entered — I know not how: by an intuition or an inspiration which came to me — I know not whence. In the course of living with her too, I had slowly learned, that, unless with an inferior, she must ever be a rival. She was my rival, heart and soul, though secretly, under the smoothest bearing, and utterly unknown to all save her and myself.

Two minutes I stood over Madame, feeling that the whole woman was in my power, because in some moods, such as the present — in some stimulated states of perception, like that of this instant — her habitual disguise, her mask and her domino, were to me a mere network reticulated with holes; and I saw underneath a being heartless, self-indulgent, and ignoble. She quietly retreated from me: meek and self-possessed, though very uneasy, she said, “If I would not be persuaded to take rest, she must reluctantly leave me.” Which she did incontinent, perhaps even more glad to get away, than I was to see her vanish.

This was the sole flash-eliciting, truth-extorting, rencontre which ever occurred between me and Madame Beck: this short night-scene was never repeated. It did not one whit change her manner to me. I do not know that she revenged it. I do not know that she hated me the worse for my fell candour. I think she bucklered herself with the secret philosophy of her strong mind, and resolved to forget what it irked her to remember. I know that to the end of our mutual lives there occurred no repetition of, no allusion to, that fiery passage.

That night passed: all nights — even the starless night before dissolution — must wear away. About six o'clock, the hour which called up the household, I went out to the court, and washed my face in its cold, fresh well-water. Entering by the carré, a piece of mirror-glass, set in an oaken cabinet, repeated my image. It said I was changed: my cheeks and lips were sodden white, my eyes were glassy, and my eyelids swollen and purple.

On rejoining my companions, I knew they all looked at me — my heart seemed discovered to them: I believed myself self-betrayed. Hideously certain did it seem that the very youngest of the school must guess why and for whom I despaired.

"Isabelle," the child whom I had once nursed in sickness, approached me. Would she, too, mock me!

"Que vous êtes pâle! Vous êtes donc bien malade, Mademoiselle!" said she, putting her finger in her mouth, and staring with a wistful stupidity which at the moment seemed to me more beautiful than the keenest intelligence.

Isabelle did not long stand alone in the recommendation of ignorance: before the day was over, I gathered cause of gratitude towards the whole blind household. The multitude have something else to do than to read hearts and interpret dark sayings. Who wills, may keep his own counsel — be his own secret's sovereign. In the course of that day, proof met me on proof, not only that the cause of my present sorrow was unguessed, but that my whole inner life for the last six months, was still mine only. It was not known — it had not been noted — that I held in peculiar value one life among all lives. Gossip had passed me by; curiosity had looked me over; both subtle influences, hovering always round, had never become centred upon me. A given organization may live in a full fever-hospital, and escape typhus. M. Emanuel had come and gone: I had been taught and sought; in season and out of season he had called me, and I had obeyed him: "M. Paul wants Miss Lucy" — "Miss Lucy is with M. Paul" — such had been the perpetual bulletin; and nobody commented, far less condemned. Nobody hinted, nobody jested. Madame Beck read the riddle: none else resolved it. What I now suffered was called illness — a headache: I accepted the baptism.

But what bodily illness was ever like this pain? This certainty that he was gone without a farewell — this cruel conviction that fate and pursuing furies — a woman's envy and a priest's bigotry — would suffer me to see him no more? What wonder that the second evening found me like the first — untamed, tortured, again pacing a solitary room in an unalterable passion of silent desolation?

Madame Beck did not herself summon me to bed that night — she did not come near me: she sent Ginevra Fanshawe — a more efficient agent for the purpose she could not have employed. Ginevra's first words — "Is your headache very bad to-night?" (for Ginevra, like the rest, thought I had a headache — an intolerable headache which made me frightfully white in the face, and insanely restless in the foot) — her first words, I say, inspired the impulse to flee anywhere, so that it were only out of reach. And soon, what followed — plaints about her own headaches — completed the business.

I went up-stairs. Presently I was in my bed — my miserable bed — haunted with quick scorpions. I had not been laid down five minutes, when another emissary arrived: Goton came, bringing me something to drink. I was consumed with thirst — I drank eagerly; the beverage was sweet, but I tasted a drug.

"Madame says it will make you sleep, chou-chou," said Goton, as she received back the emptied cup.

Ah! the sedative had been administered. In fact, they had given me a strong opiate. I was to be held quiet for one night.

The household came to bed, the night-light was lit, the dormitory hushed. Sleep soon reigned: over those pillows, sleep won an easy supremacy: contented sovereign over heads and hearts which did not ache — he passed by the unquiet.

The drug wrought. I know not whether Madame had overcharged or under-charged the dose; its result was not that she intended. Instead of stupor, came excitement. I became alive to new thought — to reverie peculiar in colouring. A gathering call ran among the faculties, their bugles sang, their trumpets rang an untimely summons. Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous. With scorn she looked on Matter, her mate — "Rise!" she said. "Sluggard! this night I will have my will; nor shalt thou prevail."

"Look forth and view the night!" was her cry; and when I lifted the heavy blind from the casement close at hand — with her own royal gesture, she showed me a moon supreme, in an element deep and splendid.

To my gasping senses she made the glimmering gloom, the narrow limits, the oppressive heat of the dormitory, intolerable. She lured me to leave this den and follow her forth into dew, coolness, and glory.

She brought upon me a strange vision of Villette at midnight. Especially she showed the park, the summer-park, with its long alleys all silent, lone and safe; among these lay a huge stone basin — that basin I knew, and beside which I had often stood — deep-set in the tree-shadows, brimming with cool water, clear, with a green, leafy, rushy bed. What of all this? The park-gates were shut up, locked, sentinelled: the place could not be entered.

Could it not? A point worth considering; and while revolving it, I mechanically dressed. Utterly incapable of sleeping or lying still — excited from head to foot — what could I do better than dress?

The gates were locked, soldiers set before them: was there, then, no admission to the park?

The other day, in walking past, I had seen, without then attending to the circumstance, a gap in the paling — one stake broken down: I now saw this gap again in recollection — saw it very plainly — the narrow, irregular aperture visible between the stems of the lindens, planted orderly as a colonnade. A man could not have made his way through that aperture, nor could a stout woman, perhaps not Madame Beck; but I thought I might: I fancied I should like to try, and once within, at this hour the whole park would be mine — the moonlight, midnight park!

How soundly the dormitory slept! What deep slumbers! What quiet breathing! How very still the whole large house! What was the time? I felt restless to know. There stood a clock in the classe below: what hindered me from venturing down to consult it? By such a moon, its large white face and jet black figures must be vividly distinct.

As for hindrance to this step, there offered not so much as a creaking hinge or a clicking latch. On these hot July nights, close air could not be tolerated, and the chamber-door stood wide open. Will the dormitory-planks sustain my tread untraitorous? Yes. I know wherever a board is loose, and will avoid it. The oak staircase creaks somewhat as I descend, but not much: — I am in the carré.

The great classe-doors are close shut: they are bolted. On the other hand, the entrance to the corridor stands open. The classes seem to my thought, great dreary jails, buried far back beyond thoroughfares, and for me, filled with spectral and intolerable Memories, laid miserable amongst their straw and their manacles. The corridor offers a cheerful vista, leading to the high vestibule which opens direct upon the street.

Hush! — the clock strikes. Ghostly deep as is the stillness of this convent, it is only eleven. While my ear follows to silence the hum of the last stroke, I catch faintly from the built-out capital, a sound like bells or like a band — a sound where sweetness, where victory, where mourning blend. Oh, to approach this music nearer, to listen to it alone by the rushy basin! Let me go — oh, let me go! What hinders, what does not aid freedom?

There, in the corridor, hangs my garden-costume, my large hat, my shawl. There is no lock on the huge, heavy, porte-cochère; there is no key to seek: it fastens with a sort of spring-bolt, not to be opened from the outside, but which, from within, may be noiselessly withdrawn. Can I manage it? It yields to my hand, yields with propitious facility. I wonder as that portal seems almost spontaneously to unclose — I wonder as I cross the threshold and step on the paved street, wonder at the strange ease with which this prison has been forced. It seems as if I had been pioneered invisibly, as if some dissolving force had gone before me: for myself, I have scarce made an effort.

Quiet Rue Fossette! I find on this pavement that wanderer-wooing summer night of which I mused; I see its moon over me; I feel its dew in the air. But here I cannot stay; I am still too near old haunts: so close under the dungeon, I can hear the prisoners moan. This solemn peace is not what I seek, it is not what I can bear: to me the face of that sky bears the aspect of a world's death. The park also will be calm — I know, a mortal serenity prevails everywhere — yet let me seek the park.

I took a route well known, and went up towards the palatial and royal Haute-Ville; thence the music I had heard certainly floated; it was hushed now, but it might re-waken. I went on: neither band nor bell music came to meet me; another sound replaced it, a sound like a strong tide, a great flow, deepening as I proceeded. Light broke, movement gathered, chimes pealed — to what was I coming? Entering on the level of a Grande Place, I found myself, with the suddenness of magic, plunged amidst a gay, living, joyous crowd.

Villette is one blaze, one broad illumination; the whole world seems abroad; moonlight and heaven are banished: the town, by her own flambeaux, beholds her own splendour — gay dresses, grand equipages, fine horses and gallant riders throng the bright streets. I see even scores of masks. It is a strange scene, stranger than dreams. But where is the park? — I ought to be near it. In the midst of this glare the park must be shadowy and calm — there, at least, are neither torches, lamps, nor crowd?

I was asking this question when an open carriage passed me filled with known faces. Through the deep throng it could pass but slowly; the spirited horses fretted in their curbed ardour. I saw the occupants of that carriage well: me they could not see, or, at least, not know, folded close in my large shawl, screened with my straw hat (in that motley crowd no dress was noticeably strange). I saw the Count de Bassompierre; I saw my godmother, handsomely apparelled, comely and cheerful; I saw, too, Paulina Mary, compassed with the triple halo of her beauty, her youth, and her happiness. In looking on her countenance of joy, and eyes of festal light, one scarce remembered to note the gala elegance of what she wore; I know only that the drapery floating about her was all white and light and bridal; seated opposite to her I saw Graham Bretton; it was in looking up at him her aspect had caught its lustre — the light repeated in her eyes beamed first out of his.

It gave me strange pleasure to follow these friends viewlessly, and I did follow them, as I thought, to the park. I watched them alight (carriages were inadmissible) amidst new and unanticipated splendours. Lo! the iron gateway, between the stone columns, was spanned by a flaming arch built of massed stars; and, following them cautiously beneath that arch, where were they, and where was I?

In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest architectural wealth — of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphinx: incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed throughout the park of Villette.

No matter that in five minutes the secret was mine — the key of the mystery picked up, and its illusion unveiled — no matter that I quickly recognised the material of these solemn fragments — the timber, the paint, and the pasteboard — these inevitable discoveries failed to quite destroy the charm, or undermine the marvel of that night. No matter that I now seized the explanation of the whole great fête — a fête of which the conventual Rue Fossette had not tasted, though it had opened at dawn that morning, and was still in full vigour near midnight.

In past days there had been, said history, an awful crisis in the fate of Labassecour, involving I know not what peril to the rights and liberties of her gallant citizens. Rumours of wars there had been, if not wars themselves; a kind of struggling in the streets — a bustle — a running to and fro, some rearing of barricades, some burgher-rioting, some calling out of troops, much interchange of brickbats, and even a little of shot. Tradition held that patriots had fallen: in the old Basse-Ville was shown an enclosure, solemnly built in and set apart, holding, it was said, the sacred bones of martyrs. Be this as it may, a certain day in the year was still kept as a festival in honour of the said patriots and martyrs of somewhat apocryphal memory — the morning being given to a solemn Te Deum in St. Jean Baptiste, the evening devoted to spectacles, decorations, and illuminations, such as these I now saw.

While looking up at the image of a white ibis, fixed on a column — while fathoming the deep, torch-lit perspective of an avenue, at the close of which was couched a sphinx — I lost sight of the party which, from the middle of the great square, I had followed — or, rather, they vanished like a group of apparitions. On this whole scene was impressed a dream-like character: every shape was wavering, every movement floating, every voice echo-like — half-mocking, half-uncertain. Paulina and her friends being gone, I scarce could avouch that I had really seen them; nor did I miss them as guides through the chaos, far less regret them as protectors amidst the night.

That festal night would have been safe for a very child. Half the peasantry had come in from the outlying environs of Villette, and the decent burghers were all abroad and around, dressed in their best. My straw-hat passed amidst cap and jacket, short petticoat, and long calico mantle, without, perhaps, attracting a glance; I only took the precaution to bind down the broad leaf gipsy-wise, with a supplementary ribbon — and then I felt safe as if masked.

Safe I passed down the avenues — safe I mixed with the crowd where it was deepest. To be still was not in my power, nor quietly to observe. I took a revel of the scene; I drank the elastic night-air — the swell of sound, the dubious light, now flashing, now fading. As to Happiness or Hope, they and I had shaken hands, but just now — I scorned Despair.

My vague aim, as I went, was to find the stone-basin, with its clear depth and green lining: of that coolness and verdure I thought, with the passionate thirst of unconscious fever. Amidst the glare, and hurry, and throng, and noise, I still secretly and chiefly longed to come on that circular mirror of crystal, and surprise the moon glassing therein her pearly front.

I knew my route, yet it seemed as if I was hindered from pursuing it direct: now a sight, and now a sound, called me aside, luring me down this alley and down that. Already I saw the thick-planted trees which framed this tremulous and rippled glass, when, choiring out of a glade to the right, broke such a sound as I thought might be heard if Heaven were to open — such a sound, perhaps, as was heard above the plain of Bethlehem, on the night of glad tidings.

The song, the sweet music, rose afar, but rushing swiftly on fast-strengthening pinions — there swept through these shades so full a storm of harmonies that, had no tree been near against which to lean, I think I must have dropped. Voices were there, it seemed to me, unnumbered; instruments varied and countless — bugle, horn, and trumpet I knew. The effect was as a sea breaking into song with all its waves.

The swaying tide swept this way, and then it fell back, and I followed its retreat. It led me towards a Byzantine building — a sort of kiosk near the park's centre. Round about stood crowded thousands, gathered to a grand concert in the open air. What I had heard was, I think, a wild Jäger chorus; the night, the space, the scene, and my own mood, had but enhanced the sounds and their impression.

Here were assembled ladies, looking by this light most beautiful: some of their dresses were gauzy, and some had the sheen of satin, the flowers and the blond trembled, and the veils waved about their decorated bonnets, as that host-like chorus, with its greatly-gathering sound, sundered the air above them. Most of these ladies occupied the little light park-chairs, and behind and beside them stood guardian gentlemen. The outer ranks of the crowd were made up of citizens, plebeians and police.

In this outer rank I took my place. I rather liked to find myself the silent, unknown, consequently unaccosted neighbour of the short petticoat and the sabot; and only the distant gazer at the silk robe, the velvet mantle, and the plumed chapeau. Amidst so much life and joy, too, it suited me to be alone — quite alone. Having neither wish nor power to force my way through a mass so close-packed, my station was on the farthest confines, where, indeed, I might hear, but could see little.

“Mademoiselle is not well placed,” said a voice at my elbow. Who dared accost me, a being in a mood so little social? I turned, rather to repel than to reply. I saw a man — a burgher — an entire stranger, as I deemed him for one moment, but the next, recognised in him a certain tradesman — a bookseller, whose shop furnished the Rue Fossette with its books and stationery; a man notorious in our pensionnat for the excessive brittleness of his temper, and frequent snappishness of his manner, even to us, his principal customers: but whom, for my solitary self, I had ever been disposed to like, and had always found civil, sometimes kind; once, in aiding me about some troublesome little exchange of foreign money, he had done me a service. He was an intelligent man; under his asperity, he was a good-hearted man; the thought had sometimes crossed me, that a part of his nature bore affinity to a part of M. Emanuel's (whom he knew well, and whom I had often seen sitting on Miret's counter, turning over the current month's publications); and it was in this affinity I read the explanation of that conciliatory feeling with which I instinctively regarded him.

Strange to say, this man knew me under my straw-hat and closely-folded shawl; and, though I deprecated the effort, he insisted on making a way for me through the crowd, and finding me a better situation. He carried his disinterested civility further; and, from some quarter, procured me a chair. Once and again, I have found that the most cross-grained are by no means the worst of mankind; nor the humblest in station, the least polished in feeling. This man, in his courtesy, seemed to find nothing strange in my being here alone; only a reason for extending to me, as far as he could, a retiring, yet efficient attention. Having secured me a place and a seat, he withdrew without asking a question, without obtruding a remark, without adding a superfluous word. No wonder that Professor Emanuel liked to take his cigar and his lounge, and to read his feuilleton in M. Miret's shop — the two must have suited.

I had not been seated five minutes, ere I became aware that chance and my worthy burgher friend had brought me once more within view of a familiar and domestic group. Right before me sat the Brettons and de Bassompierres. Within reach of my hand — had I chosen to extend it — sat a figure like a fairy-queen, whose array, lilies and their leaves seemed to have suggested; whatever was not spotless white, being forest-green. My godmother, too, sat so near, that, had I leaned forward, my breath might have stirred the ribbon of her bonnet. They were too near; having been just recognised by a comparative stranger, I felt uneasy at this close vicinage of intimate acquaintance.

It made me quite start when Mrs. Bretton, turning to Mr. Home, and speaking out of a kind impulse of memory, said, — "I wonder what my steady little Lucy would say to all this if she were here? I wish we had brought her, she would have enjoyed it much."

"So she would, so she would, in her grave sensible fashion; it is a pity but we had asked her," rejoined the kind gentleman; and added, "I like to see her so quietly pleased; so little moved, yet so content."

Dear were they both to me, dear are they to this day in their remembered benevolence. Little knew they the rack of pain which had driven Lucy almost into fever, and brought her out, guideless and reckless, urged and drugged to the brink of frenzy. I had half a mind to bend over the elders' shoulders, and answer their goodness with the thanks of my eyes. M. de Bassompierre did not well know me, but I knew him, and honoured and admired his nature, with all its plain sincerity, its warm affection, and unconscious enthusiasm.

Possibly I might have spoken, but just then Graham turned; he turned with one of his stately firm movements, so different from those, of a sharp-tempered under-sized man: there was behind him a throng, a hundred ranks deep; there were thousands to meet his eye and divide its scrutiny — why then did he concentrate all on me — oppressing me with the whole force of that full, blue, steadfast orb? Why, if he would look, did not one glance satisfy him? why did he turn on his chair, rest his elbow on its back, and study me leisurely? He could not see my face, I held it down; surely, he could not recognise me: I stooped, I turned, I would not be known. He rose, by some means he contrived to approach, in two minutes he would have had my secret: my identity would have been grasped between his, never tyrannous, but always powerful hands. There was but one way to evade or to check him. I implied, by a sort of supplicatory gesture, that it was my prayer to be let alone; after that, had he persisted, he would perhaps have seen the spectacle of Lucy incensed: not all that was grand, or good, or kind in him (and Lucy felt the full amount) should have kept her quite tame, or absolutely inoffensive and shadowlike. He looked, but he desisted. He shook his handsome head, but he was mute. He resumed his seat, nor did he again turn or disturb me by a glance, except indeed for one single instant, when a look, rather solicitous than curious, stole my way — speaking what somehow stilled my heart like “the south-wind quieting the earth.” Graham’s thoughts of me were not entirely those of a frozen indifference, after all. I believe in that goodly mansion, his heart, he kept one little place under the sky-lights where Lucy might have entertainment, if she chose to call. It was not so handsome as the chambers where he lodged his male friends; it was not like the hall where he accommodated his philanthropy, or the library where he treasured his science, still less did it resemble the pavilion where his marriage feast was splendidly spread; yet, gradually, by long and equal kindness, he proved to me that he kept one little closet, over the door of which was written “Lucy’s Room.” I kept a place for him, too — a place of which I never took the measure, either by rule or compass: I think it was like the tent of Peri-Banou. All my life long I carried it folded in the hollow of my hand yet, released from that hold and constriction, I know not but its innate capacity for expanse might have magnified it into a tabernacle for a host.

Forbearing as he was to-night, I could not stay in this proximity; this dangerous place and seat must be given up: I watched my opportunity, rose, and stole away. He might think, he might even believe that Lucy was contained within that shawl, and sheltered under that hat; he never could be certain, for he did not see my face.

Surely the spirit of restlessness was by this time appeased? Had I not had enough of adventure? Did I not begin to flag, quail, and wish for safety under a roof? Not so. I still loathed my bed in the school dormitory more than words can express: I clung to whatever could distract thought. Somehow I felt, too, that the night’s drama was but begun, that the prologue was scarce spoken:

throughout this woody and turfy theatre reigned a shadow of mystery; actors and incidents unlooked-for, waited behind the scenes: I thought so foreboding told me as much.

Straying at random, obeying the push of every chance elbow, I was brought to a quarter where trees planted in clusters, or towering singly, broke up somewhat the dense packing of the crowd, and gave it a more scattered character. These confines were far from the music, and somewhat aloof even from the lamps, but there was sound enough to soothe, and with that full, high moon, lamps were scarce needed. Here had chiefly settled family-groups, burgher-parents; some of them, late as was the hour, actually surrounded by their children, with whom it had not been thought advisable to venture into the closer throng.

Three fine tall trees growing close, almost twined stem within stem, lifted a thick canopy of shade above a green knoll, crowned with a seat — a seat which might have held several, yet it seemed abandoned to one, the remaining members of the fortunate party in possession of this site standing dutifully round; yet, amongst this reverend circle was a lady, holding by the hand a little girl.

When I caught sight of this little girl, she was twisting herself round on her heel, swinging from her conductress's hand, flinging herself from side to side with wanton and fantastic gyrations. These perverse movements arrested my attention, they struck me as of a character fearfully familiar. On close inspection, no less so appeared the child's equipment; the lilac silk pelisse, the small swansdown boa, the white bonnet — the whole holiday toilette, in short, was the gala garb of a cherub but too well known, of that tadpole, Désirée Beck — and Désirée Beck it was — she, or an imp in her likeness.

I might have taken this discovery as a thunder-clap, but such hyperbole would have been premature; discovery was destined to rise more than one degree, ere it reached its climax.

On whose hand could the amiable Désirée swing thus selfishly, whose glove could she tear thus recklessly, whose arm thus strain with impunity, or on the borders of whose dress thus turn and trample insolently, if not the hand, glove, arm, and robe of her lady-mother? And there, in an Indian shawl and a pale-green crape bonnet — there, fresh, portly, blithe, and pleasant — there stood Madame Beck.

Curious! I had certainly deemed Madame in her bed, and Désirée in her crib, at this blessed minute, sleeping, both of them, the sleep of the just, within the sacred walls, amidst the profound seclusion of the Rue Fossette. Most certainly also they did not picture "Meess Lucie" otherwise engaged; and here we all three were taking our "ébats" in the fête-blazing park at midnight!

The fact was, Madame was only acting according to her quite justifiable wont. I remembered now I had heard it said among the teachers — though without at the time particularly noticing the gossip — that often, when we thought Madame in her chamber, sleeping, she was gone, full-dressed, to take her pleasure at operas, or plays, or balls. Madame had no sort of taste for a monastic life, and took care — largely, though discreetly — to season her existence with a relish of the world.

Half a dozen gentlemen of her friends stood about her. Amongst these, I was not slow to recognise two or three. There was her brother, M. Victor Kint; there was another person, moustached and with long hair — a calm, taciturn man, but whose traits bore a stamp and a semblance I could not mark unmoved. Amidst reserve and phlegm, amidst contrasts of character and of countenance, something there still was which recalled a face — mobile, fervent, feeling — a face changeable, now clouded, and now alight — a face from my world taken away, for my eyes lost, but where my best spring-hours of life had alternated in shadow and in glow; that face, where I had often seen movements so near the signs of genius — that why there did not shine fully out the undoubted fire, the thing, the spirit, and the secret itself — I could never tell. Yes — this Josef Emanuel — this man of peace — reminded me of his ardent brother.

Besides Messieurs Victor and Josef, I knew another of this party. This third person stood behind and in the shade, his attitude too was stooping, yet his dress and bald white head made him the most conspicuous figure of the group. He was an ecclesiastic: he was Père Silas. Do not fancy, reader, that there was any inconsistency in the priest's presence at this fête. This was not considered a show of Vanity Fair, but a commemoration of patriotic sacrifice. The Church patronised it, even with ostentation. There were troops of priests in the park that night.

Père Silas stooped over the seat with its single occupant, the rustic bench and that which sat upon it: a strange mass it was — bearing no shape, yet magnificent. You saw, indeed, the outline of a face, and features, but these were so cadaverous and so strangely placed, you could almost have fancied a head severed from its trunk, and flung at random on a pile of rich merchandise. The distant lamp-rays glanced on clear pendants, on broad rings; neither the chasteness of moonlight, nor the distance of the torches, could quite subdue the gorgeous dyes of the drapery. Hail, Madame Walravens! I think you looked more witch-like than ever. And presently the good lady proved that she was indeed no corpse or ghost, but a harsh and hardy old woman; for, upon some aggravation in the clamorous petition of Désirée Beck to her mother, to go to the kiosk and take sweetmeats, the hunchback suddenly fetched her a resounding rap with her gold-knobbed cane.

There, then, were Madame Walravens, Madame Beck, Père Silas — the whole conjuration, the secret junta. The sight of them thus assembled did me good. I cannot say that I felt weak before them, or abashed, or dismayed. They outnumbered me, and I was worsted and under their feet; but, as yet, I was not dead.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OLD AND NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

Fascinated as by a basilisk with three heads, I could not leave this clique; the ground near them seemed to hold my feet. The canopy of entwined trees held out shadow, the night whispered a pledge of protection, and an officious lamp flashed just one beam to show me an obscure, safe seat, and then vanished. Let me now briefly tell the reader all that, during the past dark fortnight, I have been silently gathering from Rumour, respecting the origin and the object of M. Emanuel's departure. The tale is short, and not new: its alpha is Mammon, and its omega Interest.

If Madame Walravens was hideous as a Hindoo idol, she seemed also to possess, in the estimation of these her votaries, an idol's consequence. The fact was, she had been rich — very rich; and though, for the present, without the command of money, she was likely one day to be rich again. At Basseterre, in Guadaloupe, she possessed a large estate, received in dowry on her marriage sixty years ago, sequestered since her husband's failure; but now, it was supposed, cleared of claim, and, if duly looked after by a competent agent of integrity, considered capable of being made, in a few years, largely productive.

Père Silas took an interest in this prospective improvement for the sake of religion and the church, whereof Magliore Walravens was a devout daughter. Madame Beck, distantly related to the hunchback and knowing her to be without family of her own, had long brooded over contingencies with a mother's calculating forethought, and, harshly treated as she was by Madame Walravens, never ceased to court her for interest's sake. Madame Beck and the priest were thus, for money reasons, equally and sincerely interested in the nursing of the West Indian estate.

But the distance was great, and the climate hazardous. The competent and upright agent wanted, must be a devoted man. Just such a man had Madame Walravens retained for twenty years in her service, blighting his life, and then living on him, like an old fungus; such a man had Père Silas trained, taught, and bound to him by the ties of gratitude, habit, and belief. Such a man Madame Beck knew, and could in some measure influence. "My pupil," said Père Silas, "if he remains in Europe, runs risk of apostacy, for he has become entangled with a heretic." Madame Beck made also her private comment, and preferred in her own breast her secret reason for desiring expatriation. The thing she could not obtain, she desired not another to win: rather would she destroy it. As to Madame Walravens, she wanted her money and her land, and knew Paul, if he liked, could make the best and faithfullest steward: so the three self-seekers banded and beset the one unselfish. They reasoned, they appealed, they implored; on his mercy they cast themselves, into his hands they confidingly thrust their interests. They asked but two or three years of devotion — after that, he should live for himself: one of the number, perhaps, wished that in the meantime he might die.

No living being ever humbly laid his advantage at M. Emanuel's feet, or confidingly put it into his hands, that he spurned the trust or repulsed the repository. What might be his private pain or inward reluctance to leave Europe — what his calculations for his own future — none asked, or knew, or reported. All this was a blank to me. His conferences with his confessor I might guess; the part duty and religion were made to play in the persuasions used, I might conjecture. He was gone, and had made no sign. There my knowledge closed.

* * * * *

With my head bent, and my forehead resting on my hands, I sat amidst grouped tree-stems and branching brushwood. Whatever talk passed amongst my neighbours, I might hear, if I would; I was near enough; but for some time, there was scarce motive to attend. They gossiped about the dresses, the music, the illuminations, the fine night. I listened to hear them say, "It is calm weather for his voyage; the Antigua" (his ship) "will sail prosperously." No such remark fell; neither the Antigua, nor her course, nor her passenger were named.

Perhaps the light chat scarcely interested old Madame Walravens more than it did me; she appeared restless, turning her head now to this side, now that, looking through the trees, and among the crowd, as if expectant of an arrival and impatient of delay. "Où sont-ils? Pourquoi ne viennent-ils?" I heard her mutter more than once; and at last, as if determined to have an answer to her question — which hitherto none seemed to mind, she spoke aloud this phrase — a phrase brief enough, simple enough, but it sent a shock through me — "Messieurs et mesdames," said she, "où donc est Justine Marie?"

"Justine Marie!" What was this? Justine Marie — the dead nun — where was she? Why, in her grave, Madame Walravens — what can you want with her? You shall go to her, but she shall not come to you.

Thus I should have answered, had the response lain with me, but nobody seemed to be of my mind; nobody seemed surprised, startled, or at a loss. The quietest commonplace answer met the strange, the dead-disturbing, the Witch-of-Endor query of the hunchback.

"Justine Marie," said one, "is coming; she is in the kiosk; she will be here presently."

Out of this question and reply sprang a change in the chat — chat it still remained, easy, desultory, familiar gossip. Hint, allusion, comment, went round the circle, but all so broken, so dependent on references to persons not named, or circumstances not defined, that listen as intently as I would — and I did listen now with a fated interest — I could make out no more than that some scheme was on foot, in which this ghostly Justine Marie — dead or alive — was concerned. This family-junta seemed grasping at her somehow, for some reason; there seemed question of a marriage, of a fortune — for whom I could not quite make out-perhaps for Victor Kint, perhaps for Josef Emanuel — both were bachelors. Once I thought the hints and jests rained upon a young fair-haired foreigner of the party, whom they called Heinrich Mühler. Amidst all the badinage, Madame Walravens still obtruded from time to time, hoarse, cross-grained speeches; her impatience being diverted only by an implacable surveillance of Désirée, who could not stir but the old woman menaced her with her staff.

"La voilà!" suddenly cried one of the gentlemen, "voilà Justine Marie qui arrive!"

This moment was for me peculiar. I called up to memory the pictured nun on the panel; present to my mind was the sad love-story; I saw in thought the vision of the garret, the apparition of the alley, the strange birth of the berceau; I underwent a presentiment of discovery, a strong conviction of coming disclosure. Ah! when imagination once runs riot where do we stop? What winter tree so bare and branchless — what way-side, hedge-munching animal so humble, that Fancy, a passing cloud, and a struggling moonbeam, will not clothe it in spirituality, and make of it a phantom?

With solemn force pressed on my heart, the expectation of mystery breaking up: hitherto I had seen this spectre only through a glass darkly; now was I to behold it face to face. I leaned forward; I looked.

"She comes!" cried Josef Emanuel.

The circle opened as if opening to admit a new and welcome member. At this instant a torch chanced to be carried past; its blaze aided the pale moon in doing justice to the crisis, in lighting to perfection the dénouement pressing on. Surely those near me must have felt some little of the anxiety I felt, in degree so unmeted. Of that group the coolest must have "held his breath for a time!" As for me, my life stood still.

It is over. The moment and the nun are come. The crisis and the revelation are passed by.

The flambeau glares still within a yard, held up in a park-keeper's
hand; its long eager tongue of flame almost licks the figure of the
Expected — there — where she stands full in my sight. What is she like?
What does she wear? How does she look? Who is she?

There are many masks in the park to-night, and as the hour wears late, so strange a feeling of revelry and mystery begins to spread abroad, that scarce would you discredit me, reader, were I to say that she is like the nun of the attic, that she wears black skirts and white head-clothes, that she looks the resurrection of the flesh, and that she is a risen ghost.

All falsities — all figments! We will not deal in this gear. Let us be honest, and cut, as heretofore, from the homely web of truth.

Homely, though, is an ill-chosen word. What I see is not precisely homely. A girl of Villette stands there — a girl fresh from her pensionnat. She is very comely, with the beauty indigenous to this country. She looks well-nourished, fair, and fat of flesh. Her cheeks are round, her eyes good; her hair is abundant. She is handsomely dressed. She is not alone; her escort consists of three persons — two being elderly; these she addresses as "Mon Oncle" and "Ma Tante." She laughs, she chats; good-humoured, buxom, and blooming, she looks, at all points, the bourgeoise belle.

"So much for Justine Marie;" so much for ghosts and mystery: not that this last was solved — this girl certainly is not my nun: what I saw in the garret and garden must have been taller by a span.

We have looked at the city belle; we have cursorily glanced at the respectable old uncle and aunt. Have we a stray glance to give to the third member of this company? Can we spare him a moment's notice? We ought to distinguish him so far, reader; he has claims on us; we do not now meet him for the first time. I clasped my hands very hard, and I drew my breath very deep: I held in the cry, I devoured the ejaculation, I forbade the start, I spoke and I stirred no more than a stone; but I knew what I looked on; through the dimness left in my eyes by many nights' weeping, I knew him. They said he was to sail by the Antigua. Madame Beck said so. She lied, or she had uttered what was once truth, and failed to contradict it when it became false. The Antigua was gone, and there stood Paul Emanuel.

Was I glad? A huge load left me. Was it a fact to warrant joy? I know not. Ask first what were the circumstances attendant on this respite? How far did this delay concern me? Were there not those whom it might touch more nearly?

After all, who may this young girl, this Justine Marie, be? Not a stranger, reader; she is known to me by sight; she visits at the Rue Fossette: she is often of Madame Beck's Sunday parties. She is a relation of both the Becks and Walravens; she derives her baptismal name from the sainted nun who would have been her aunt had she lived; her patronymic is Sauveur; she is an heiress and an orphan, and M. Emanuel is her guardian; some say her godfather.

The family junta wish this heiress to be married to one of their band — which is it? Vital question — which is it?

I felt very glad now, that the drug administered in the sweet draught had filled me with a possession which made bed and chamber intolerable. I always, through my whole life, liked to penetrate to the real truth; I like seeking the goddess in her temple, and handling the veil, and daring the dread glance. O Titaness among deities! the covered outline of thine aspect sickens often through its uncertainty, but define to us one trait, show us one lineament, clear in awful sincerity; we may gasp in untold terror, but with that gasp we drink in a breath of thy divinity; our heart shakes, and its currents sway like rivers lifted by earthquake, but we have swallowed strength. To see and know the worst is to take from Fear her main advantage.

The Walravens' party, augmented in numbers, now became very gay. The gentlemen fetched refreshments from the kiosk, all sat down on the turf under the trees; they drank healths and sentiments; they laughed, they jested. M. Emanuel underwent some raillery, half good-humoured, half, I thought, malicious, especially on Madame Beck's part. I soon gathered that his voyage had been temporarily deferred of his own will, without the concurrence, even against the advice, of his friends; he had let the Antigua go, and had taken his berth in the Paul et Virginie, appointed to sail a fortnight later. It was his reason for this resolve which they teased him to assign, and which he would only vaguely indicate as "the settlement of a little piece of business which he had set his heart upon." What was this business? Nobody knew. Yes, there was one who seemed partly, at least, in his confidence; a meaning look passed between him and Justine Marie. "La petite va m'aider — n'est-ce pas?" said he. The answer was prompt enough, God knows?

"Mais oui, je vous aiderai de tout mon coeur. Vous ferez de moi tout ce que vous voudrez, mon parrain."

And this dear "parrain" took her hand and lifted it to his grateful lips. Upon which demonstration, I saw the light-complexioned young Teuton, Heinrich Mühler, grow restless, as if he did not like it. He even grumbled a few words, whereat M. Emanuel actually laughed in his face, and with the ruthless triumph of the assured conqueror, he drew his ward nearer to him.

M. Emanuel was indeed very joyous that night. He seemed not one whit subdued by the change of scene and action impending. He was the true life of the party; a little despotic, perhaps, determined to be chief in mirth, as well as in labour, yet from moment to moment proving indisputably his right of leadership. His was the wittiest word, the pleasantest anecdote, the frankest laugh. Restlessly active, after his manner, he multiplied himself to wait on all; but oh! I saw which was his favourite. I saw at whose feet he lay on the turf, I saw whom he folded carefully from the night air, whom he tended, watched, and cherished as the apple of his eye.

Still, hint and raillery flew thick, and still I gathered that while M. Paul should be absent, working for others, these others, not quite ungrateful, would guard for him the treasure he left in Europe. Let him bring them an Indian fortune: they would give him in return a young bride and a rich inheritance. As for the saintly consecration, the vow of constancy, that was forgotten: the blooming and charming Present prevailed over the Past; and, at length, his nun was indeed buried.

Thus it must be. The revelation was indeed come. Presentiment had not been mistaken in her impulse: there is a kind of presentiment which never is mistaken; it was I who had for a moment miscalculated; not seeing the true bearing of the oracle, I had thought she muttered of vision when, in truth, her prediction touched reality.

I might have paused longer upon what I saw; I might have deliberated ere I drew inferences. Some, perhaps, would have held the premises doubtful, the proofs insufficient; some slow sceptics would have incredulously examined ere they conclusively accepted the project of a marriage between a poor and unselfish man of forty, and his wealthy ward of eighteen; but far from me such shifts and palliatives, far from me such temporary evasion of the actual, such coward fleeing from the dread, the swift-footed, the all-overtaking Fact, such feeble suspense of submission to her the sole sovereign, such paltering and faltering resistance to the Power whose errand is to march conquering and to conquer, such traitor defection from the TRUTH.

No. I hastened to accept the whole plan. I extended my grasp and took it all in. I gathered it to me with a sort of rage of haste, and folded it round me, as the soldier struck on the field folds his colours about his breast. I invoked Conviction to nail upon me the certainty, abhorred while embraced, to fix it with the strongest spikes her strongest strokes could drive; and when the iron had entered well my soul, I stood up, as I thought, renovated.

In my infatuation, I said, "Truth, you are a good mistress to your faithful servants! While a Lie pressed me, how I suffered! Even when the Falsehood was still sweet, still flattering to the fancy, and warm to the feelings, it wasted me with hourly torment. The persuasion that affection was won could not be divorced from the dread that, by another turn of the wheel, it might be lost. Truth stripped away Falsehood, and Flattery, and Expectancy, and here I stand — free!"

Nothing remained now but to take my freedom to my chamber, to carry it with me to my bed and see what I could make of it. The play was not yet, indeed, quite played out. I might have waited and watched longer that love-scene under the trees, that sylvan courtship. Had there been nothing of love in the demonstration, my Fancy in this hour was so generous, so creative, she could have modelled for it the most salient lineaments, and given it the deepest life and highest colour of passion. But I would not look; I had fixed my resolve, but I would not violate my nature. And then — something tore me so cruelly under my shawl, something so dug into my side, a vulture so strong in beak and talon, I must be alone to grapple with it. I think I never felt jealousy till now. This was not like enduring the endearments of Dr. John and Paulina, against which while I sealed my eyes and my ears, while I withdrew thence my thoughts, my sense of harmony still acknowledged in it a charm. This was an outrage. The love born of beauty was not mine; I had nothing in common with it: I could not dare to meddle with it, but another love, venturing diffidently into life after long acquaintance, furnace-tried by pain, stamped by constancy, consolidated by affection's pure and durable alloy, submitted by intellect to intellect's own tests, and finally wrought up, by his own process, to his own unflawed completeness, this Love that laughed at Passion, his fast frenzies and his hot and hurried extinction, in this Love I had a vested interest; and whatever tended either to its culture or its destruction, I could not view impassibly.

I turned from the group of trees and the “merrie companie” in its shade. Midnight was long past; the concert was over, the crowds were thinning. I followed the ebb. Leaving the radiant park and well-lit Haute-Ville (still well lit, this it seems was to be a “nuit blanche” in Villette), I sought the dim lower quarter.

Dim I should not say, for the beauty of moonlight — forgotten in the park — here once more flowed in upon perception. High she rode, and calm and stainlessly she shone. The music and the mirth of the fête, the fire and bright hues of those lamps had out-done and out-shone her for an hour, but now, again, her glory and her silence triumphed. The rival lamps were dying: she held her course like a white fate. Drum, trumpet, bugle, had uttered their clangour, and were forgotten; with pencil-ray she wrote on heaven and on earth records for archives everlasting. She and those stars seemed to me at once the types and witnesses of truth all regnant. The night-sky lit her reign: like its slow-wheeling progress, advanced her victory — that onward movement which has been, and is, and will be from eternity to eternity.

These oil-twinkling streets are very still: I like them for their lowliness and peace. Homeward-bound burghers pass me now and then, but these companies are pedestrians, make little noise, and are soon gone. So well do I love Villette under her present aspect, not willingly would I re-enter under a roof, but that I am bent on pursuing my strange adventure to a successful close, and quietly regaining my bed in the great dormitory, before Madame Beck comes home.

Only one street lies between me and the Rue Fossette; as I enter it, for the first time, the sound of a carriage tears up the deep peace of this quarter. It comes this way — comes very fast. How loud sounds its rattle on the paved path! The street is narrow, and I keep carefully to the causeway. The carriage thunders past, but what do I see, or fancy I see, as it rushes by? Surely something white fluttered from that window — surely a hand waved a handkerchief. Was that signal meant for me? Am I known? Who could recognise me? That is not M. de Bassompierre’s carriage, nor Mrs. Bretton’s; and besides, neither the Hôtel Crécy nor the château of La Terrasse lies in that direction. Well, I have no time for conjecture; I must hurry home.

Gaining the Rue Fossette, reaching the pensionnat, all there was still; no fiacre had yet arrived with Madame and Désirée. I had left the great door ajar; should I find it thus? Perhaps the wind or some other accident may have thrown it to with sufficient force to start the spring-bolt? In that case, hopeless became admission; my adventure must issue in catastrophe. I lightly pushed the heavy leaf; would it yield?

Yes. As soundless, as unresisting, as if some propitious genius had waited on a sesame-charm, in the vestibule within. Entering with bated breath, quietly making all fast, shoelessly mounting the staircase, I sought the dormitory, and reached my couch.

* * * * *

Ay! I reached it, and once more drew a free inspiration. The next moment, I almost shrieked — almost, but not quite, thank Heaven!

Throughout the dormitory, throughout the house, there reigned at this hour the stillness of death. All slept, and in such hush, it seemed that none dreamed. Stretched on the nineteen beds lay nineteen forms, at full-length and motionless. On mine — the twentieth couch — nothing ought to have lain: I had left it void, and void should have found it. What, then; do I see between the half-drawn curtains? What dark, usurping shape, supine, long, and strange? Is it a robber who has made his way through the open street-door, and lies there in wait? It looks very black, I think it looks — not human. Can it be a wandering dog that has come in from the street and crept and nestled hither? Will it spring, will it leap out if I approach? Approach I must. Courage! One step! —

My head reeled, for by the faint night-lamp, I saw stretched on my bed the old phantom — the NUN.

A cry at this moment might have ruined me. Be the spectacle what it might, I could afford neither consternation, scream, nor swoon. Besides, I was not overcome. Tempered by late incidents, my nerves disdained hysteria. Warm from illuminations, and music, and thronging thousands, thoroughly lashed up by a new scourge, I defied spectra. In a moment, without exclamation, I had rushed on the haunted couch; nothing leaped out, or sprung, or stirred; all the movement was mine, so was all the life, the reality, the substance, the force; as my instinct felt. I tore her up — the incubus! I held her on high — the goblin! I shook her loose — the mystery! And down she fell — down all around me — down in shreds and fragments — and I trode upon her.

Here again — behold the branchless tree, the unstabled Rosinante; the film of cloud, the flicker of moonshine. The long nun proved a long bolster dressed in a long black stole, and artfully invested with a white veil. The garments in very truth, strange as it may seem, were genuine nun's garments, and by some hand they had been disposed with a view to illusion. Whence came these vestments? Who contrived this artifice? These questions still remained. To the head-bandage was pinned a slip of paper: it bore in pencil these mocking words —

"The nun of the attic bequeaths to Lucy Snowe her wardrobe. She will be seen in the Rue Fossette no more."

And what and who was she that had haunted me? She, I had actually seen three times. Not a woman of my acquaintance had the stature of that ghost. She was not of a female height. Not to any man I knew could the machination, for a moment, be attributed.

Still mystified beyond expression, but as thoroughly, as suddenly, relieved from all sense of the spectral and unearthly; scorning also to wear out my brain with the fret of a trivial though insoluble riddle, I just bundled together stole, veil, and bandages, thrust them beneath my pillow, lay down, listened till I heard the wheels of Madame's home-returning fiacre, then turned, and worn out by many nights' vigils, conquered, too, perhaps, by the now reacting narcotic, I deeply slept.

CHAPTER XL.

THE HAPPY PAIR.

The day succeeding this remarkable Midsummer night, proved no common day. I do not mean that it brought signs in heaven above, or portents on the earth beneath; nor do I allude to meteorological phenomena, to storm, flood, or whirlwind. On the contrary: the sun rose jocund, with a July face. Morning decked her beauty with rubies, and so filled her lap with roses, that they fell from her in showers, making her path blush: the Hours woke fresh as nymphs, and emptying on the early hills their dew-vials, they stepped out dismantled of vapour: shadowless, azure, and glorious, they led the sun's steeds on a burning and unclouded course.

In short, it was as fine a day as the finest summer could boast; but I doubt whether I was not the sole inhabitant of the Rue Fossette, who cared or remembered to note this pleasant fact. Another thought busied all other heads; a thought, indeed, which had its share in my meditations; but this master consideration, not possessing for me so entire a novelty, so overwhelming a suddenness, especially so dense a mystery, as it offered to the majority of my co-speculators thereon, left me somewhat more open than the rest to any collateral observation or impression.

Still, while walking in the garden, feeling the sunshine, and marking the blooming and growing plants, I pondered the same subject the whole house discussed.

What subject?

Merely this. When matins came to be said, there was a place vacant in the first rank of boarders. When breakfast was served, there remained a coffee-cup unclaimed. When the housemaid made the beds, she found in one, a bolster laid lengthwise, clad in a cap and night-gown; and when Ginevra Fanshawe's music-mistress came early, as usual, to give the morning lesson, that accomplished and promising young person, her pupil, failed utterly to be forthcoming.

High and low was Miss Fanshawe sought; through length and breadth was the house ransacked; vainly; not a trace, not an indication, not so much as a scrap of a billet rewarded the search; the nymph was vanished, engulfed in the past night, like a shooting star swallowed up by darkness.

Deep was the dismay of surveillante teachers, deeper the horror of the defaulting directress. Never had I seen Madame Beck so pale or so appalled. Here was a blow struck at her tender part, her weak side; here was damage done to her interest. How, too, had the untoward event happened? By what outlet had the fugitive taken wing? Not a casement was found unfastened, not a pane of glass broken; all the doors were bolted secure. Never to this day has Madame Beck obtained satisfaction on this point, nor indeed has anybody else concerned, save and excepting one, Lucy Snowe, who could not forget how, to facilitate a certain enterprise, a certain great door had been drawn softly to its lintel, closed, indeed, but neither bolted nor secure. The thundering carriage-and-pair encountered were now likewise recalled, as well as that puzzling signal, the waved handkerchief.

From these premises, and one or two others, inaccessible to any but myself, I could draw but one inference. It was a case of elopement. Morally certain on this head, and seeing Madame Beck's profound embarrassment, I at last communicated my conviction. Having alluded to M. de Hamal's suit, I found, as I expected, that Madame Beck was perfectly au fait to that affair. She had long since discussed it with Mrs. Cholmondeley, and laid her own responsibility in the business on that lady's shoulders. To Mrs. Cholmondeley and M. de Bassompierre she now had recourse.

We found that the Hôtel Crécy was already alive to what had happened. Ginevra had written to her cousin Paulina, vaguely signifying hymeneal intentions; communications had been received from the family of de Hamal; M. de Bassompierre was on the track of the fugitives. He overtook them too late.

In the course of the week, the post brought me a note. I may as well transcribe it; it contains explanation on more than one point: —

'DEAR OLD TIM "(short for Timon), — " I am off you see — gone like a shot. Alfred and I intended to be married in this way almost from the first; we never meant to be spliced in the humdrum way of other people; Alfred has too much spirit for that, and so have I — Dieu merci! Do you know, Alfred, who used to call you 'the dragon,' has seen so much of you during the last few months, that he begins to feel quite friendly towards you. He hopes you won't miss him now that he has gone; he begs to apologize for any little trouble he may have given you. He is afraid he rather inconvenienced you once when he came upon you in the grenier, just as you were reading a letter seemingly of the most special interest; but he could not resist the temptation to give you a start, you appeared so wonderfully taken up with your correspondent. En revanche, he says you once frightened him by rushing in for a dress or a shawl, or some other chiffon, at the moment when he had struck a light, and was going to take a quiet whiff of his cigar, while waiting for me.

"Do you begin to comprehend by this time that M. le Comte de Hamal was the nun of the attic, and that he came to see your humble servant? I will tell you how he managed it. You know he has the entrée of the Athénée, where two or three of his nephews, the sons of his eldest sister, Madame de Melcy, are students. You know the court of the Athénée is on the other side of the high wall bounding your walk, the allée défendue. Alfred can climb as well as he can dance or fence: his amusement was to make the escalade of our pensionnat by mounting, first the wall; then — by the aid of that high tree overspreading the grand berceau, and resting some of its boughs on the roof of the lower buildings of our premises — he managed to scale the first classe and the grand salle. One night, by the way, he fell out of this tree, tore down some of the branches, nearly broke his own neck, and after all, in running away, got a terrible fright, and was nearly caught by two people, Madame Beck and M. Emanuel, he thinks, walking in the alley. From the grande salle the ascent is not difficult to the highest block of building, finishing in the great garret. The skylight, you know, is, day and night, left half open for air; by the skylight he entered. Nearly a year ago I chanced to tell him our legend of the nun; that suggested his romantic idea of the spectral disguise, which I think you must allow he has very cleverly carried out.

"But for the nun's black gown and white veil, he would have been caught again and again both by you and that tiger-Jesuit, M. Paul. He thinks you both capital ghost-seers, and very brave. What I wonder at is, rather your secretiveness than your courage. How could you endure the visitations of that long spectre, time after time, without crying out, telling everybody, and rousing the whole house and neighbourhood?

"Oh, and how did you like the nun as a bed-fellow? I dressed her up: didn't I do it well? Did you shriek when you saw her: I should have gone mad; but then you have such nerves! — real iron and bend-leather! I believe you feel nothing. You haven't the same sensitiveness that a person of my constitution has. You seem to me insensible both to pain and fear and grief. You are a real old Diogenes.

"Well, dear grandmother! and are you not mightily angry at my moonlight flitting and run away match? I assure you it is excellent fun, and I did it partly to spite that minx, Paulina, and that bear, Dr. John: to show them that, with all their airs, I could get married as well as they. M. de Bassompierre was at first in a strange fume with Alfred; he threatened a prosecution for 'détournement de mineur,' and I know not what; he was so abominably in earnest, that I found myself forced to do a little bit of the melodramatic — go down on my knees, sob, cry, drench three pocket-handkerchiefs. Of course, 'mon oncle' soon gave in; indeed, where was the use of making a fuss? I am married, and that's all about it. He still says our marriage is not legal, because I am not of age, forsooth! As if that made any difference! I am just as much married as if I were a hundred. However, we are to be married again, and I am to have a trousseau, and Mrs. Cholmondeley is going to superintend it; and there are some hopes that M. de Bassompierre will give me a decent portion, which will be very convenient, as dear Alfred has nothing but his nobility, native and hereditary, and his pay. I only wish uncle would do things unconditionally, in a generous, gentleman-like fashion; he is so disagreeable as to make the dowry depend on Alfred's giving his written promise that he will never touch cards or dice from the day it is paid down. They accuse my angel of a tendency to play: I don't know anything about that, but I do know he is a dear, adorable creature.

"I cannot sufficiently extol the genius with which de Hamal managed our flight. How clever in him to select the night of the fête, when Madame (for he knows her habits), as he said, would infallibly be absent at the concert in the park. I suppose you must have gone with her. I watched you rise and leave the dormitory about eleven o'clock. How you returned alone, and on foot, I cannot conjecture. That surely was you we met in the narrow old Rue St. Jean? Did you see me wave my handkerchief from the carriage window?

"Adieu! Rejoice in my good luck: congratulate me on my supreme happiness, and believe me, dear cynic and misanthrope, yours, in the best of health and spirits,

GINEVRA LAURA DE HAMAL, née FANSHAWE.

"P.S. — Remember, I am a countess now. Papa, mamma, and the girls at home, will be delighted to hear that. 'My daughter the Countess!' 'My sister the Countess!' Bravo! Sounds rather better than Mrs. John Bretton, hein?"

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In winding up Mistress Fanshawe's memoirs, the reader will no doubt expect to hear that she came finally to bitter expiation of her youthful levities. Of course, a large share of suffering lies in reserve for her future.

A few words will embody my farther knowledge respecting her.

I saw her towards the close of her honeymoon. She called on Madame Beck, and sent for me into the salon. She rushed into my arms laughing. She looked very blooming and beautiful: her curls were longer, her cheeks rosier than ever: her white bonnet and her Flanders veil, her orange-flowers and her bride's dress, became her mightily.

"I have got my portion!" she cried at once; (Ginevra ever stuck to the substantial; I always thought there was a good trading element in her composition, much as she scorned the "bourgeoise;") "and uncle de Bassompierre is quite reconciled. I don't mind his calling Alfred a 'nincompoop' — that's only his coarse Scotch breeding; and I believe Paulina envies me, and Dr. John is wild with jealousy — fit to blow his brains out — and I'm so happy! I really think I've hardly anything left to wish for — unless it be a carriage and an hotel, and, oh! I — must introduce you to 'mon mari.' Alfred, come here!"

And Alfred appeared from the inner salon, where he was talking to Madame Beck, receiving the blended felicitations and reprimands of that lady. I was presented under my various names: the Dragon, Diogenes, and Timon. The young Colonel was very polite. He made me a prettily-turned, neatly-worded apology, about the ghost-visits, &c., concluding with saying that "the best excuse for all his iniquities stood there!" pointing to his bride.

And then the bride sent him back to Madame Beck, and she took me to herself, and proceeded literally to suffocate me with her unrestrained spirits, her girlish, giddy, wild nonsense. She showed her ring exultingly; she called herself Madame la Comtesse de Hamal, and asked how it sounded, a score of times. I said very little. I gave her only the crust and rind of my nature. No matter she expected of me nothing better — she knew me too well to look for compliments — my dry gibes pleased her well enough and the more impassible and prosaic my mien, the more merrily she laughed.

Soon after his marriage, M. de Hamal was persuaded to leave the army as the surest way of weaning him from certain unprofitable associates and habits; a post of attaché was procured for him, and he and his young wife went abroad. I thought she would forget me now, but she did not. For many years, she kept up a capricious, fitful sort of correspondence. During the first year or two, it was only of herself and Alfred she wrote; then, Alfred faded in the background; herself and a certain, new comer prevailed; one Alfred Fanshawe de Bassompierre de Hamal began to reign in his father's stead. There were great boastings about this personage, extravagant amplifications upon miracles of precocity, mixed with vehement objurgations against the phlegmatic incredulity with which I received them. I didn't know "what it was to be a mother;" "unfeeling thing that I was, the sensibilities of the maternal heart were Greek and Hebrew to me," and so on. In due course of nature this young gentleman took his degrees in teething, measles, hooping-cough: that was a terrible time for me — the mamma's letters became a perfect shout of affliction; never woman was so put upon by calamity: never human being stood in such need of sympathy. I was frightened at first, and wrote back pathetically; but I soon found out there was more cry than wool in the business, and relapsed into my natural cruel insensibility. As to the youthful sufferer, he weathered each storm like a hero. Five times was that youth "in articulo mortis," and five times did he miraculously revive.

In the course of years there arose ominous murmurings against Alfred the First; M. de Bassompierre had to be appealed to, debts had to be paid, some of them of that dismal and dingy order called "debts of honour;" ignoble plaints and difficulties became frequent. Under every cloud, no matter what its nature, Ginevra, as of old, called out lustily for sympathy and aid. She had no notion of meeting any distress single-handed. In some shape, from some quarter or other, she was pretty sure to obtain her will, and so she got on — fighting the battle of life by proxy, and, on the whole, suffering as little as any human being I have ever known.

CHAPTER XLI.

FAUBOURG CLOTILDE.

Must I, ere I close, render some account of that Freedom and Renovation which I won on the fête-night? Must I tell how I and the two stalwart companions I brought home from the illuminated park bore the test of intimate acquaintance?

I tried them the very next day. They had boasted their strength loudly when they reclaimed me from love and its bondage, but upon my demanding deeds, not words, some evidence of better comfort, some experience of a relieved life — Freedom excused himself, as for the present impoverished and disabled to assist; and Renovation never spoke; he had died in the night suddenly.

I had nothing left for it then but to trust secretly that conjecture might have hurried me too fast and too far, to sustain the oppressive hour by reminders of the distorting and discolouring magic of jealousy. After a short and vain struggle, I found myself brought back captive to the old rack of suspense, tied down and strained anew.

Shall I yet see him before he goes? Will he bear me in mind? Does he purpose to come? Will this day — will the next hour bring him? or must I again assay that corroding pain of long attent — that rude agony of rupture at the close, that mute, mortal wrench, which, in at once uprooting hope and doubt, shakes life; while the hand that does the violence cannot be caressed to pity, because absence interposes her barrier!

It was the Feast of the Assumption; no school was held. The boarders and teachers, after attending mass in the morning, were gone a long walk into the country to take their goûter, or afternoon meal, at some farm-house. I did not go with them, for now but two days remained ere the Paul et Virginie must sail, and I was clinging to my last chance, as the living waif of a wreck clings to his last raft or cable.

There was some joiners' work to do in the first classe, some bench or desk to repair; holidays were often turned to account for the performance of these operations, which could not be executed when the rooms were filled with pupils. As I sat solitary, purposing to adjourn to the garden and leave the coast clear, but too listless to fulfil my own intent, I heard the workmen coming.

Foreign artisans and servants do everything by couples: I believe it would take two Labassecourien carpenters to drive a nail. While tying on my bonnet, which had hitherto hung by its ribbons from my idle hand, I vaguely and momentarily wondered to hear the step of but one "ouvrier." I noted, too — as captives in dungeons find sometimes dreary leisure to note the merest trifles — that this man wore shoes, and not sabots: I concluded that it must be the master-carpenter, coming to inspect before he sent his journeymen. I threw round me my scarf. He advanced; he opened the door; my back was towards it; I felt a little thrill — a curious sensation, too quick and transient to be analyzed. I turned, I stood in the supposed master-artisan's presence: looking towards the door-way, I saw it filled with a figure, and my eyes printed upon my brain the picture of M. Paul.

Hundreds of the prayers with which we weary Heaven bring to the suppliant no fulfilment. Once haply in life, one golden gift falls prone in the lap — one boon full and bright, perfect from Fruition's mint.

M. Emanuel wore the dress in which he probably purposed to travel — a surtout, guarded with velvet; I thought him prepared for instant departure, and yet I had understood that two days were yet to run before the ship sailed. He looked well and cheerful. He looked kind and benign: he came in with eagerness; he was close to me in one second; he was all amity. It might be his bridegroom mood which thus brightened him. Whatever the cause, I could not meet his sunshine with cloud. If this were my last moment with him, I would not waste it in forced, unnatural distance. I loved him well — too well not to smite out of my path even Jealousy herself, when she would have obstructed a kind farewell. A cordial word from his lips, or a gentle look from his eyes, would do me good, for all the span of life that remained to me; it would be comfort in the last strait of loneliness; I would take it — I would taste the elixir, and pride should not spill the cup.

The interview would be short, of course: he would say to me just what he had said to each of the assembled pupils; he would take and hold my hand two minutes; he would touch my cheek with his lips for the first, last, only time — and then — no more. Then, indeed, the final parting, then the wide separation, the great gulf I could not pass to go to him — across which, haply, he would not glance, to remember me.

He took my hand in one of his, with the other he put back my bonnet; he looked into my face, his luminous smile went out, his lips expressed something almost like the wordless language of a mother who finds a child greatly and unexpectedly changed, broken with illness, or worn out by want. A check supervened.

"Paul, Paul!" said a woman's hurried voice behind, "Paul, come into the salon; I have yet a great many things to say to you — conversation for the whole day — and so has Victor; and Josef is here. Come Paul, come to your friends."

Madame Beck, brought to the spot by vigilance or an inscrutable instinct, pressed so near, she almost thrust herself between me and M. Emanuel.

"Come, Paul!" she reiterated, her eye grazing me with its hard ray like a steel stylet. She pushed against her kinsman. I thought he receded; I thought he would go. Pierced deeper than I could endure, made now to feel what defied suppression, I cried —

"My heart will break!"

What I felt seemed literal heart-break; but the seal of another fountain yielded under the strain: one breath from M. Paul, the whisper, "Trust me!" lifted a load, opened an outlet. With many a deep sob, with thrilling, with icy shiver, with strong trembling, and yet with relief — I wept.

"Leave her to me; it is a crisis: I will give her a cordial, and it will pass," said the calm Madame Beck.

To be left to her and her cordial seemed to me something like being left to the poisoner and her bowl. When M. Paul answered deeply, harshly, and briefly — "Laissez-moi!" in the grim sound I felt a music strange, strong, but life-giving.

"Laissez-moi!" he repeated, his nostrils opening, and his facial muscles all quivering as he spoke.

"But this will never do," said Madame, with sternness. More sternly rejoined her kinsman —

"Sortez d'ici!"

"I will send for Père Silas: on the spot I will send for him," she threatened pertinaciously.

"Femme!" cried the Professor, not now in his deep tones, but in his highest and most excited key, "Femme! sortez à l'instant!"

He was roused, and I loved him in his wrath with a passion beyond what I had yet felt.

"What you do is wrong," pursued Madame; "it is an act characteristic of men of your unreliable, imaginative temperament; a step impulsive, injudicious, inconsistent — a proceeding vexatious, and not estimable in the view of persons of steadier and more resolute character."

"You know not what I have of steady and resolute in me," said he, "but you shall see; the event shall teach you. Modeste," he continued less fiercely, "be gentle, be pitying, be a woman; look at this poor face, and relent. You know I am your friend, and the friend of your friends; in spite of your taunts, you well and deeply know I may be trusted. Of sacrificing myself I made no difficulty but my heart is pained by what I see; it must have and give solace. Leave me!"

This time, in the "leave me" there was an intonation so bitter and so imperative, I wondered that even Madame Beck herself could for one moment delay obedience; but she stood firm; she gazed upon him dauntless; she met his eye, forbidding and fixed as stone. She was opening her lips to retort; I saw over all M. Paul's face a quick rising light and fire; I can hardly tell how he managed the movement; it did not seem violent; it kept the form of courtesy; he gave his hand; it scarce touched her I thought; she ran, she whirled from the room; she was gone, and the door shut, in one second.

The flash of passion was all over very soon. He smiled as he told me to wipe my eyes; he waited quietly till I was calm, dropping from time to time a stilling, solacing word. Ere long I sat beside him once more myself — re-assured, not desperate, nor yet desolate; not friendless, not hopeless, not sick of life, and seeking death.

"It made you very sad then to lose your friend?" said he.

"It kills me to be forgotten, Monsieur," I said. "All these weary days I have not heard from you one word, and I was crushed with the possibility, growing to certainty, that you would depart without saying farewell!"

"Must I tell you what I told Modeste Beck — that you do not know me? Must I show and teach you my character? You will have proof that I can be a firm friend? Without clear proof this hand will not lie still in mine, it will not trust my shoulder as a safe stay? Good. The proof is ready. I come to justify myself."

"Say anything, teach anything, prove anything, Monsieur; I can listen now."

"Then, in the first place, you must go out with me a good distance into the town. I came on purpose to fetch you."

Without questioning his meaning, or sounding his plan, or offering the semblance of an objection, I re-tied my bonnet: I was ready.

The route he took was by the boulevards: he several times made me sit down on the seats stationed under the lime-trees; he did not ask if I was tired, but looked, and drew his own conclusions.

"All these weary days," said he, repeating my words, with a gentle, kindly mimicry of my voice and foreign accent, not new from his lips, and of which the playful banter never wounded, not even when coupled, as it often was, with the assertion, that however I might write his language, I spoke and always should speak it imperfectly and hesitatingly. "'All these weary days' I have not for one hour forgotten you. Faithful women err in this, that they think themselves the sole faithful of God's creatures. On a very fervent and living truth to myself, I, too, till lately scarce dared count, from any quarter; but — — look at me.",

I lifted my happy eyes: they were happy now, or they would have been no interpreters of my heart.

"Well," said he, after some seconds' scrutiny, "there is no denying that signature: Constancy wrote it: her pen is of iron. Was the record painful?"

"Severely painful," I said, with truth. "Withdraw her hand, Monsieur; I can bear its inscribing force no more."

"Elle est toute pâle," said he, speaking to himself; "cette figure-là me fait mal."

"Ah! I am not pleasant to look at — — ?"

I could not help saying this; the words came unbidden: I never remember the time when I had not a haunting dread of what might be the degree of my outward deficiency; this dread pressed me at the moment with special force.

A great softness passed upon his countenance; his violet eyes grew suffused and glistening under their deep Spanish lashes: he started up; "Let us walk on."

"Do I displease your eyes much?" I took courage to urge: the point had its vital import for me.

He stopped, and gave me a short, strong answer; an answer which silenced, subdued, yet profoundly satisfied. Ever after that I knew what I was for him; and what I might be for the rest of the world, I ceased painfully to care. Was it weak to lay so much stress on an opinion about appearance? I fear it might be; I fear it was; but in that case I must avow no light share of weakness. I must own great fear of displeasing — a strong wish moderately to please M. Paul.

Whither we rambled, I scarce knew. Our walk was long, yet seemed short; the path was pleasant, the day lovely. M. Emanuel talked of his voyage — he thought of staying away three years. On his return from Guadaloupe, he looked forward to release from liabilities and a clear course; and what did I purpose doing in the interval of his absence? he asked. I had talked once, he reminded me, of trying to be independent and keeping a little school of my own: had I dropped the idea?

"Indeed, I had not: I was doing my best to save what would enable me to put it in practice."

"He did not like leaving me in the Rue Fossette; he feared I should miss him there too much — I should feel desolate — I should grow sad — ?"

This was certain; but I promised to do my best to endure.

"Still," said he, speaking low, "there is another objection to your present residence. I should wish to write to you sometimes: it would not be well to have any uncertainty about the safe transmission of letters; and in the Rue Fossette — in short, our Catholic discipline in certain matters — though justifiable and expedient — might possibly, under peculiar circumstances, become liable to misapplication — perhaps abuse."

"But if you write," said I, "I must have your letters; and I will have them: ten directors, twenty directresses, shall not keep them from me. I am a Protestant: I will not bear that kind of discipline: Monsieur, I will not."

"Doucement — doucement," rejoined he; "we will contrive a plan; we have our resources: soyez tranquille."

So speaking, he paused.

We were now returning from the long walk. We had reached the middle of a clean Faubourg, where the houses were small, but looked pleasant. It was before the white door-step of a very neat abode that M. Paul had halted.

"I call here," said he.

He did not knock, but taking from his pocket a key, he opened and entered at once. Ushering me in, he shut the door behind us. No servant appeared. The vestibule was small, like the house, but freshly and tastefully painted; its vista closed in a French window with vines trained about the panes, tendrils, and green leaves kissing the glass. Silence reigned in this dwelling.

Opening an inner door, M. Paul disclosed a parlour, or salon — very tiny, but I thought, very pretty. Its delicate walls were tinged like a blush; its floor was waxed; a square of brilliant carpet covered its centre; its small round table shone like the mirror over its hearth; there was a little couch, a little chiffonnière, the half-open, crimson-silk door of which, showed porcelain on the shelves; there was a French clock, a lamp; there were ornaments in biscuit china; the recess of the single ample window was filled with a green stand, bearing three green flower-pots, each filled with a fine plant glowing in bloom; in one corner appeared a guéridon with a marble top, and upon it a work-box, and a glass filled with violets in water. The lattice of this room was open; the outer air breathing through, gave freshness, the sweet violets lent fragrance.

"Pretty, pretty place!" said I. M. Paul smiled to see me so pleased.

"Must we sit down here and wait?" I asked in a whisper, half awed by the deep pervading hush.

"We will first peep into one or two other nooks of this nutshell," he replied.

"Dare you take the freedom of going all over the house?" I inquired.

"Yes, I dare," said he, quietly.

He led the way. I was shown a little kitchen with a little stove and oven, with few but bright brasses, two chairs and a table. A small cupboard held a diminutive but commodious set of earthenware.

"There is a coffee service of china in the salon," said M. Paul, as I looked at the six green and white dinner-plates; the four dishes, the cups and jugs to match.

Conducted up the narrow but clean staircase, I was permitted a glimpse of two pretty cabinets of sleeping-rooms; finally, I was once more led below, and we halted with a certain ceremony before a larger door than had yet been opened.

Producing a second key, M. Emanuel adjusted it to the lock of this door. He opened, put me in before him.

"Voici!" he cried.

I found myself in a good-sized apartment, scrupulously clean, though bare, compared with those I had hitherto seen. The well-scoured boards were carpetless; it contained two rows of green benches and desks, with an alley down the centre, terminating in an estrade, a teacher's chair and table; behind them a tableau, On the walls hung two maps; in the windows flowered a few hardy plants; in short, here was a miniature classe — complete, neat, pleasant.

"It is a school then?" said I. "Who keeps it? I never heard of an establishment in this faubourg."

"Will you have the goodness to accept of a few prospectuses for distribution in behalf of a friend of mine?" asked he, taking from his surtout-pocket some quires of these documents, and putting them into my hand. I looked, I read — printed in fair characters: —

“Externat de demoiselles. Numéro 7, Faubourg Clotilde, Directrice,
Mademoiselle Lucy Snowe.”

* * * * *

And what did I say to M. Paul Emanuel?

Certain junctures of our lives must always be difficult of recall to memory. Certain points, crises, certain feelings, joys, griefs, and amazements, when reviewed, must strike us as things wildered and whirling, dim as a wheel fast spun.

I can no more remember the thoughts or the words of the ten minutes succeeding this disclosure, than I can retrace the experience of my earliest year of life: and yet the first thing distinct to me is the consciousness that I was speaking very fast, repeating over and over again: —

“Did you do this, M. Paul? Is this your house? Did you furnish it? Did you get these papers printed? Do you mean me? Am I the directress? Is there another Lucy Snowe? Tell me: say something.”

But he would not speak. His pleased silence, his laughing down-look, his attitude, are visible to me now.

“How is it? I must know all — all,” I cried.

The packet of papers fell on the floor. He had extended his hand, and I had fastened thereon, oblivious of all else.

“Ah! you said I had forgotten you all these weary days,” said he. “Poor old Emanuel! These are the thanks he gets for trudging about three mortal weeks from house-painter to upholsterer, from cabinet-maker to charwoman. Lucy and Lucy’s cot, the sole thoughts in his head!”

I hardly knew what to do. I first caressed the soft velvet on his cuff, and then. I stroked the hand it surrounded. It was his foresight, his goodness, his silent, strong, effective goodness, that overpowered me by their proved reality. It was the assurance of his sleepless interest which broke on me like a light from heaven; it was his — I will dare to say it — his fond, tender look, which now shook me indescribably. In the midst of all I forced myself to look at the practical.

“The trouble!” I cried, “and the cost! Had you money, M. Paul?”

“Plenty of money!” said he heartily. “The disposal of my large teaching connection put me in possession of a handsome sum with part of it I determined to give myself the richest treat that I have known or shall know. I like this. I have reckoned on this hour day and night lately. I would not come near you, because I would not forestall it. Reserve is neither my virtue nor my vice. If I had put myself into your power, and you had begun with your questions of look and lip — Where have you been, M. Paul? What have you been doing? What is your mystery? — my solitary first and last secret would presently have unravelled itself in your lap. Now,” he pursued, “you shall live here and have a school; you shall employ yourself while I am away; you shall think of me sometimes; you shall mind your health and happiness for my sake, and when I come back — “

There he left a blank.

I promised to do all he told me. I promised to work hard and willingly. “I will be your faithful steward,” I said; “I trust at your coming the account will be ready. Monsieur, monsieur, you are too good!”

In such inadequate language my feelings struggled for expression: they could not get it; speech, brittle and unmalleable, and cold as ice, dissolved or shivered in the effort. He watched me, still; he gently raised his hand to stroke my hair; it touched my lips in passing; I pressed it close, I paid it tribute. He was my king; royal for me had been that hand’s bounty; to offer homage was both a joy and a duty.

* * * * *

The afternoon hours were over, and the stiller time of evening shaded the quiet faubourg. M. Paul claimed my hospitality; occupied and afoot since morning, he needed refreshment; he said I should offer him chocolate in my pretty gold and white china service. He went out and ordered what was needful from the restaurant; he placed the small guéridon and two chairs in the balcony outside the French window under the screening vines. With what shy joy i accepted my part as hostess, arranged the salver, served the benefactor-guest.

This balcony was in the rear of the house, the gardens of the faubourg were round us, fields extended beyond. The air was still, mild, and fresh. Above the poplars, the laurels, the cypresses, and the roses, looked up a moon so lovely and so halcyon, the heart trembled under her smile; a star shone subject beside her, with the unemulous ray of pure love. In a large garden near us, a jet rose from a well, and a pale statue leaned over the play of waters.

M. Paul talked to me. His voice was so modulated that it mixed harmonious with the silver whisper, the gush, the musical sigh, in which light breeze, fountain and foliage intoned their lulling vesper:

Happy hour — stay one moment! droop those plumes, rest those wings; incline to mine that brow of Heaven! White Angel! let thy light linger; leave its reflection on succeeding clouds; bequeath its cheer to that time which needs a ray in retrospect!

Our meal was simple: the chocolate, the rolls, the plate of fresh summer fruit, cherries and strawberries bedded in green leaves formed the whole: but it was what we both liked better than a feast, and I took a delight inexpressible in tending M. Paul. I asked him whether his friends, Père Silas and Madame Beck, knew what he had done — whether they had seen my house?

“Mon amie,” said he, “none knows what I have done save you and myself: the pleasure is consecrated to us two, unshared and unprofaned. To speak truth, there has been to me in this matter a refinement of enjoyment I would not make vulgar by communication. Besides" (smiling) "I wanted to prove to Miss Lucy that I could keep a secret. How often has she taunted me with lack of dignified reserve and needful caution! How many times has she saucily insinuated that all my affairs are the secret of Polichinelle!"

This was true enough: I had not spared him on this point, nor perhaps on any other that was assailable. Magnificent-minded, grand-hearted, dear, faulty little man! You deserved candour, and from me always had it.

Continuing my queries, I asked to whom the house belonged, who was my landlord, the amount of my rent. He instantly gave me these particulars in writing; he had foreseen and prepared all things.

The house was not M. Paul's — that I guessed: he was hardly the man to become a proprietor; I more than suspected in him a lamentable absence of the saving faculty; he could get, but not keep; he needed a treasurer. The tenement, then, belonged to a citizen in the Basse-Ville — a man of substance, M. Paul said; he startled me by adding: "a friend of yours, Miss Lucy, a person who has a most respectful regard for you." And, to my pleasant surprise, I found the landlord was none other than M. Miret, the short-tempered and kind-hearted bookseller, who had so kindly found me a seat that eventful night in the park. It seems M. Miret was, in his station, rich, as well as much respected, and possessed several houses in this faubourg; the rent was moderate, scarce half of what it would have been for a house of equal size nearer the centre of Villette.

"And then," observed M. Paul, "should fortune not favour you, though I think she will, I have the satisfaction to think you are in good hands; M. Miret will not be extortionate: the first year's rent you have already in your savings; afterwards Miss Lucy must trust God, and herself. But now, what will you do for pupils?"

"I must distribute my prospectuses."

"Right! By way of losing no time, I gave one to M. Miret yesterday.

Should you object to beginning with three petite bourgeoises, the

Demoiselles Miret? They are at your service."

"Monsieur, you forget nothing; you are wonderful. Object? It would become me indeed to object! I suppose I hardly expect at the outset to number aristocrats in my little day-school; I care not if they never come. I shall be proud to receive M. Miret's daughters."

"Besides these," pursued he, "another pupil offers, who will come daily to take lessons in English; and as she is rich, she will pay handsomely. I mean my god-daughter and ward, Justine Marie Sauveur."

What is in a name? — what in three words? Till this moment I had listened with living joy — I had answered with gleeful quickness; a name froze me; three words struck me mute. The effect could not be hidden, and indeed I scarce tried to hide it.

"What now?" said M. Paul.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing! Your countenance changes: your colour and your very eyes fade. Nothing! You must be ill; you have some suffering; tell me what.”

I had nothing to tell.

He drew his chair nearer. He did not grow vexed, though I continued silent and icy. He tried to win a word; he entreated with perseverance, he waited with patience.

“Justine Marie is a good girl,” said he, “docile and amiable; not quick — but you will like her.”

“I think not. I think she must not come here.”

Such was my speech.

“Do you wish to puzzle me? Do you know her? But, in truth, there is something. Again you are pale as that statue. Rely on Paul Carlos; tell him the grief.”

His chair touched mine; his hand, quietly advanced, turned me towards him.

“Do you know Marie Justine?” said he again.

The name re-pronounced by his lips overcame me unaccountably. It did not prostrate — no, it stirred me up, running with haste and heat through my veins — recalling an hour of quick pain, many days and nights of heart-sickness. Near me as he now sat, strongly and closely as he had long twined his life in mine — far as had progressed, and near as was achieved our minds’ and affections’ assimilation — the very suggestion of interference, of heart-separation, could be heard only with a fermenting excitement, an impetuous throe, a disdainful resolve, an ire, a resistance of which no human eye or cheek could hide the flame, nor any truth-accustomed human tongue curb the cry.

“I want to tell you something,” I said: “I want to tell you all.”

“Speak, Lucy; come near; speak. Who prizes you, if I do not? Who is your friend, if not Emanuel? Speak!”

I spoke. All escaped from my lips. I lacked not words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale; it streamed on my tongue. I went back to the night in the park; I mentioned the medicated draught — why it was given — its goading effect — how it had torn rest from under my head, shaken me from my couch, carried me abroad with the lure of a vivid yet solemn fancy — a summer-night solitude on turf, under trees, near a deep, cool lakelet. I told the scene realized; the crowd, the masques, the music, the lamps, the splendours, the guns booming afar, the bells sounding on high. All I had encountered I detailed, all I had recognised, heard, and seen; how I had beheld and watched himself: how I listened, how much heard, what conjectured; the whole history, in brief, summoned to his confidence, rushed thither, truthful, literal, ardent, bitter.

Still as I narrated, instead of checking, he incited me to proceed he spurred me by the gesture, the smile, the half-word. Before I had half done, he held both my hands, he consulted my eyes with a most piercing glance: there was something in his face which tended neither to calm nor to put me down; he forgot his own doctrine, he forsook his own system of repression when I most challenged its exercise. I think I deserved strong reproof; but when have we our deserts? I merited severity; he looked indulgence. To my very self I seemed imperious and unreasonable, for I forbade Justine Marie my door and roof; he smiled, betraying delight. Warm, jealous, and haughty, I knew not till now that my nature had such a mood: he gathered me near his heart. I was full of faults; he took them and me all home. For the moment of utmost mutiny, he reserved the one deep spell of peace. These words caressed my ear: —

"Lucy, take my love. One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth."

We walked back to the Rue Fossette by moonlight — such moonlight as fell on Eden — shining through the shades of the Great Garden, and haply gilding a path glorious for a step divine — a Presence nameless. Once in their lives some men and women go back to these first fresh days of our great Sire and Mother — taste that grand morning's dew — bathe in its sunrise.

In the course of the walk I was told how Justine Marie Sauveur had always been regarded with the affection proper to a daughter — how, with M. Paul's consent, she had been affianced for months to one Heinrich Mühler, a wealthy young German merchant, and was to be married in the course of a year. Some of M. Emanuel's relations and connections would, indeed, it seems, have liked him to marry her, with a view to securing her fortune in the family; but to himself the scheme was repugnant, and the idea totally inadmissible.

We reached Madame Beck's door. Jean Baptiste's clock tolled nine. At this hour, in this house, eighteen months since, had this man at my side bent before me, looked into my face and eyes, and arbitered my destiny. This very evening he had again stooped, gazed, and decreed. How different the look — how far otherwise the fate!

He deemed me born under his star: he seemed to have spread over me its beam like a banner. Once — unknown, and unloved, I held him harsh and strange; the low stature, the wiry make, the angles, the darkness, the manner, displeased me. Now, penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection, having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart — I preferred him before all humanity.

We parted: he gave me his pledge, and then his farewell. We parted: the next day — he sailed.

CHAPTER XLII.

FINIS.

Man cannot prophesy. Love is no oracle. Fear sometimes imagines a vain thing. Those years of absence! How had I sickened over their anticipation! The woe they must bring seemed certain as death. I knew the nature of their course: I never had doubt how it would harrow as it went. The juggernaut on his car towered there a grim load. Seeing him draw nigh, burying his broad wheels in the oppressed soil — I, the prostrate votary — felt beforehand the annihilating craunch.

Strange to say — strange, yet true, and owning many parallels in life's experience — that anticipatory craunch proved all — yes — nearly all the torture. The great Juggernaut, in his great chariot, drew on lofty, loud, and sullen. He passed quietly, like a shadow sweeping the sky, at noon. Nothing but a chilling dimness was seen or felt. I looked up. Chariot and demon charioteer were gone by; the votary still lived.

M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox? Listen. I commenced my school; I worked — I worked hard. I deemed myself the steward of his property, and determined, God willing, to render a good account. Pupils came — burghers at first — a higher class ere long. About the middle of the second year an unexpected chance threw into my hands an additional hundred pounds: one day I received from England a letter containing that sum. It came from Mr. Marchmont, the cousin and heir of my dear and dead mistress. He was just recovering from a dangerous illness; the money was a peace-offering to his conscience, reproaching him in the matter of, I know not what, papers or memoranda found after his kinswoman's death — naming or recommending Lucy Snowe. Mrs. Barrett had given him my address. How far his conscience had been sinned against, I never inquired. I asked no questions, but took the cash and made it useful.

With this hundred pounds I ventured to take the house adjoining mine. I would not leave that which M. Paul had chosen, in which he had left, and where he expected again to find me. My externat became a pensionnat; that also prospered.

The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart. The spring which moved my energies lay far away beyond seas, in an Indian isle. At parting, I had been left a legacy; such a thought for the present, such a hope for the future, such a motive for a persevering, a laborious, an enterprising, a patient and a brave course — I could not flag. Few things shook me now; few things had importance to vex, intimidate, or depress me: most things pleased — mere trifles had a charm.

Do not think that this genial flame sustained itself, or lived wholly on a bequeathed hope or a parting promise. A generous provider supplied bounteous fuel. I was spared all chill, all stint; I was not suffered to fear penury; I was not tried with suspense. By every vessel he wrote; he wrote as he gave and as he loved, in full-handed, full-hearted plenitude. He wrote because he liked to write; he did not abridge, because he cared not to abridge. He sat down, he took pen and paper, because he loved Lucy and had much to say to her; because he was faithful and thoughtful, because he was tender and true. There was no sham and no cheat, and no hollow unreal in him. Apology never dropped her slippery oil on his lips — never proffered, by his pen, her coward feints and paltry nullities: he would give neither a stone, nor an excuse — neither a scorpion; nor a disappointment; his letters were real food that nourished, living water that refreshed.

And was I grateful? God knows! I believe that scarce a living being so remembered, so sustained, dealt with in kind so constant, honourable and noble, could be otherwise than grateful to the death.

Adherent to his own religion (in him was not the stuff of which is made the facile apostate), he freely left me my pure faith. He did not tease nor tempt. He said: —

"Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for 'Lucy.'"

All Rome could not put into him bigotry, nor the Propaganda itself make him a real Jesuit. He was born honest, and not false — artless, and not cunning — a freeman, and not a slave. His tenderness had rendered him ductile in a priest's hands, his affection, his devotedness, his sincere pious enthusiasm blinded his kind eyes sometimes, made him abandon justice to himself to do the work of craft, and serve the ends of selfishness; but these are faults so rare to find, so costly to their owner to indulge, we scarce know whether they will not one day be reckoned amongst the jewels.

* * * * *

And now the three years are past: M. Emanuel's return is fixed. It is Autumn; he is to be with me ere the mists of November come. My school flourishes, my house is ready: I have made him a little library, filled its shelves with the books he left in my care: I have cultivated out of love for him (I was naturally no florist) the plants he preferred, and some of them are yet in bloom. I thought I loved him when he went away; I love him now in another degree: he is more my own.

The sun passes the equinox; the days shorten, the leaves grow sere; but —-he is coming.

Frosts appear at night; November has sent his fogs in advance; the wind takes its autumn moan; but — he is coming.

The skies hang full and dark — a wrack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange forms — arches and broad radiations; there rise resplendent mornings — glorious, royal, purple as monarch in his state; the heavens are one flame; so wild are they, they rival battle at its thickest — so bloody, they shame Victory in her pride. I know some signs of the sky; I have noted them ever since childhood. God watch that sail! Oh! guard it!

The wind shifts to the west. Peace, peace, Banshee — "keening" at every window! It will rise — it will swell — it shrieks out long: wander as I may through the house this night, I cannot lull the blast. The advancing hours make it strong: by midnight, all sleepless watchers hear and fear a wild south-west storm. That storm roared frenzied, for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full of sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder — the tremor of whose plumes was storm.

Peace, be still! Oh! a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered — not uttered till; when the hush came, some could not feel it: till, when the sun returned, his light was night to some!

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life.

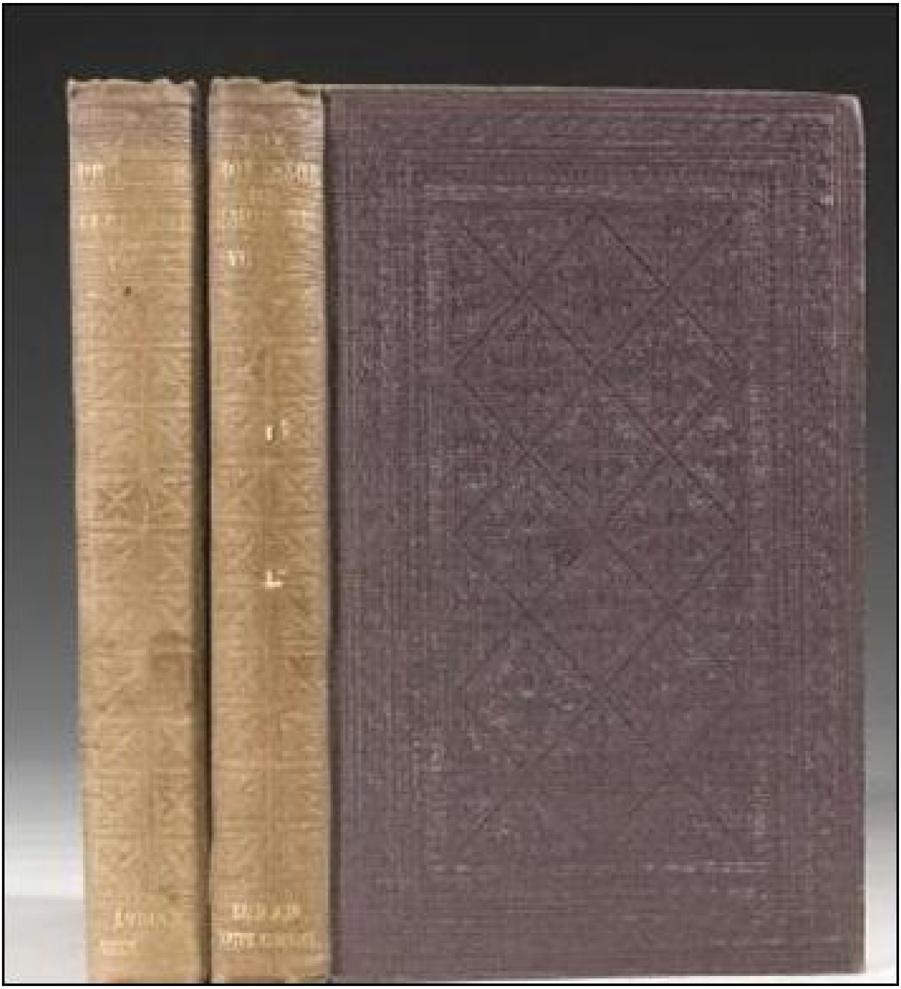
Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas;

Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell.

THE END

THE PROFESSOR

This was Charlotte’s first novel, written before *Jane Eyre* and rejected by many publishing houses, but was eventually published posthumously in 1857. The narrative features the young man William Crimsworth and is told from a first-person perspective, concerning his maturation, his loves and his eventual career as a professor at an all-girl’s school.



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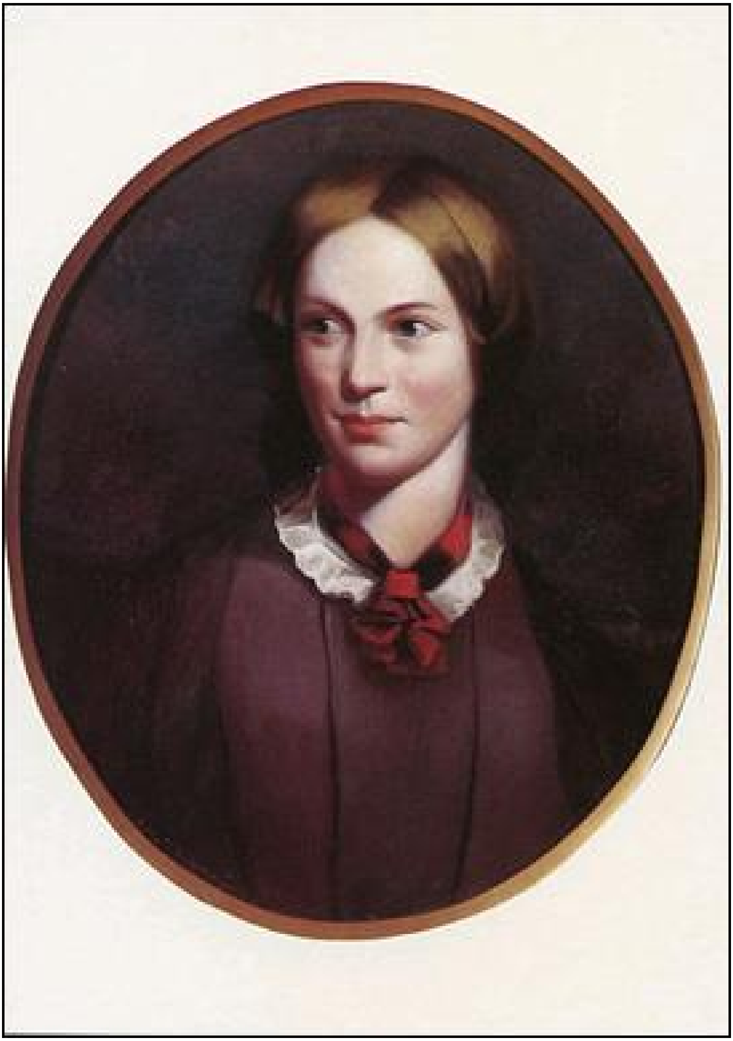

Charlotte by J. H. Thompson

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PREFACE.

This little book was written before either “Jane Eyre” or “Shirley,” and yet no indulgence can be solicited for it on the plea of a first attempt. A first attempt it certainly was not, as the pen which wrote it had been previously worn a good deal in a practice of some years. I had not indeed published anything before I commenced “The Professor,” but in many a crude effort, destroyed almost as soon as composed, I had got over any such taste as I might once have had for ornamented and redundant composition, and come to prefer what was plain and homely. At the same time I had adopted a set of principles on the subject of incident, &c., such as would be generally approved in theory, but the result of which, when carried out into practice, often procures for an author more surprise than pleasure.

I said to myself that my hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs — that he should never get a shilling he had not earned — that no sudden turns should lift him in a moment to wealth and high station; that whatever small competency he might gain, should be won by the sweat of his brow; that, before he could find so much as an arbour to sit down in, he should master at least half the ascent of “the Hill of Difficulty;” that he should not even marry a beautiful girl or a lady of rank. As Adam’s son he should share Adam’s doom, and drain throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment.

In the sequel, however, I find that publishers in general scarcely approved of this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical — something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a taste for pathos, with sentiments more tender, elevated, unworldly. Indeed, until an author has tried to dispose of a manuscript of this kind, he can never know what stores of romance and sensibility lie hidden in breasts he would not have suspected of casketing such treasures. Men in business are usually thought to prefer the real; on trial the idea will be often found fallacious: a passionate preference for the wild, wonderful, and thrilling — the strange, startling, and harrowing — agitates divers souls that show a calm and sober surface.

Such being the case, the reader will comprehend that to have reached him in the form of a printed book, this brief narrative must have gone through some struggles — which indeed it has. And after all, its worst struggle and strongest ordeal is yet to come but it takes comfort — subdues fear — leans on the staff of a moderate expectation — and mutters under its breath, while lifting its eye to that of the public,

“He that is low need fear no fall.”

CURRER BELL.

The foregoing preface was written by my wife with a view to the publication of “The Professor,” shortly after the appearance of “Shirley.” Being dissuaded from her intention, the authoress made some use of the materials in a subsequent work — “Villette,” As, however, these two stories are in most respects unlike, it has been represented to me that I ought not to withhold “The Professor” from the public. I have therefore consented to its publication.

A. B. NICHOLLS
Haworth Parsonage,
September 22nd, 1856.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTORY.

THE other day, in looking over my papers, I found in my desk the following copy of a letter, sent by me a year since to an old school acquaintance: —

“DEAR CHARLES,

“I think when you and I were at Eton together, we were neither of us what could be called popular characters: you were a sarcastic, observant, shrewd, cold-blooded creature; my own portrait I will not attempt to draw, but I cannot recollect that it was a strikingly attractive one — can you? What animal magnetism drew thee and me together I know not; certainly I never experienced anything of the Pylades and Orestes sentiment for you, and I have reason to believe that you, on your part, were equally free from all romantic regard to me. Still, out of school hours we walked and talked continually together; when the theme of conversation was our companions or our masters we understood each other, and when I recurred to some sentiment of affection, some vague love of an excellent or beautiful object, whether in animate or inanimate nature, your sardonic coldness did not move me. I felt myself superior to that check THEN as I do NOW.

“It is a long time since I wrote to you, and a still longer time since I saw you. Chancing to take up a newspaper of your county the other day, my eye fell upon your name. I began to think of old times; to run over the events which have transpired since we separated; and I sat down and commenced this letter. What you have been doing I know not; but you shall hear, if you choose to listen, how the world has wagged with me.

“First, after leaving Eton, I had an interview with my maternal uncles, Lord Tynedale and the Hon. John Seacombe. They asked me if I would enter the Church, and my uncle the nobleman offered me the living of Seacombe, which is in his gift, if I would; then my other uncle, Mr. Seacombe, hinted that when I became rector of Seacombe-cum-Scaife, I might perhaps be allowed to take, as mistress of my house and head of my parish, one of my six cousins, his daughters, all of whom I greatly dislike.

“I declined both the Church and matrimony. A good clergyman is a good thing, but I should have made a very bad one. As to the wife — oh how like a night-mare is the thought of being bound for life to one of my cousins! No doubt they are accomplished and pretty; but not an accomplishment, not a charm of theirs, touches a chord in my bosom. To think of passing the winter evenings by the parlour fire-side of Seacombe Rectory alone with one of them — for instance, the large and well-modelled statue, Sarah — no; I should be a bad husband, under such circumstances, as well as a bad clergyman.

“When I had declined my uncles’ offers they asked me ‘what I intended to do?’ I said I should reflect. They reminded me that I had no fortune, and no expectation of any, and, after a considerable pause, Lord Tynedale demanded sternly, ‘Whether I had thoughts of following my father’s steps and engaging in trade?’ Now, I had had no thoughts of the sort. I do not think that my turn of mind qualifies me to make a good tradesman; my taste, my ambition does not lie in that way; but such was the scorn expressed in Lord Tynedale’s countenance as he pronounced the word TRADE — such the contemptuous sarcasm of his tone — that I was instantly decided. My father was but a name to me, yet that name I did not like to hear mentioned with a sneer to my very face. I answered then, with haste and warmth, ‘I cannot do better than follow in my father’s steps; yes, I will be a tradesman.’ My uncles did not remonstrate; they and I parted with mutual disgust. In reviewing this transaction, I find that I was quite right to shake off the burden of Tynedale’s patronage, but a fool to offer my shoulders instantly for the reception of another burden — one which might be more intolerable, and which certainly was yet untried.

“I wrote instantly to Edward — you know Edward — my only brother, ten years my senior, married to a rich mill-owner’s daughter, and now possessor of the mill and business which was my father’s before he failed. You are aware that my father-once reckoned a Croesus of wealth — became bankrupt a short time previous to his death, and that my mother lived in destitution for some six months after him, unhelped by her aristocratical brothers, whom she had mortally offended by her union with Crimsworth, the — — shire manufacturer. At the end of the six months she brought me into the world, and then herself left it without, I should think, much regret, as it contained little hope or comfort for her.

“My father’s relations took charge of Edward, as they did of me, till I was nine years old. At that period it chanced that the representation of an important borough in our county fell vacant; Mr. Seacombe stood for it. My uncle Crimsworth, an astute mercantile man, took the opportunity of writing a fierce letter to the candidate, stating that if he and Lord Tynedale did not consent to do something towards the support of their sister’s orphan children, he would expose their relentless and malignant conduct towards that sister, and do his best to turn the circumstances against Mr. Seacombe’s election. That gentleman and Lord T. knew well enough that the Crimsworths were an unscrupulous and determined race; they knew also that they had influence in the borough of X — — ; and, making a virtue of necessity, they consented to defray the expenses of my education. I was sent to Eton, where I remained ten years, during which space of time Edward and I never met. He, when he grew up, entered into trade, and pursued his calling with such diligence, ability, and success, that now, in his thirtieth year, he was fast making a fortune. Of this I was apprised by the occasional short letters I received from him, some three or four times a year; which said letters never concluded without some expression of determined enmity against the house of Seacombe, and some reproach to me for living, as he said, on the bounty of that house. At first, while still in boyhood, I could not understand why, as I had no parents, I should not be indebted to my uncles Tynedale and Seacombe for my education; but as I grew up, and heard by degrees of the persevering hostility, the hatred till death evinced by them against my father — of the sufferings of my mother — of all the wrongs, in short, of our house — then did I conceive shame of the dependence in which I lived, and form a resolution no more to take bread from hands which had refused to minister to the necessities of my dying mother. It was by these feelings I was influenced when I refused the Rectory of Seacombe, and the union with one of my patrician cousins.

"An irreparable breach thus being effected between my uncles and myself, I wrote to Edward; told him what had occurred, and informed him of my intention to follow his steps and be a tradesman. I asked, moreover, if he could give me employment. His answer expressed no approbation of my conduct, but he said I might come down to — — shire, if I liked, and he would 'see what could be done in the way of furnishing me with work.' I repressed all — even mental comment on his note — packed my trunk and carpet-bag, and started for the North directly.

"After two days' travelling (railroads were not then in existence) I arrived, one wet October afternoon, in the town of X — — . I had always understood that Edward lived in this town, but on inquiry I found that it was only Mr. Crimsworth's mill and warehouse which were situated in the smoky atmosphere of Bigben Close; his RESIDENCE lay four miles out, in the country.

"It was late in the evening when I alighted at the gates of the habitation designated to me as my brother's. As I advanced up the avenue, I could see through the shades of twilight, and the dark gloomy mists which deepened those shades, that the house was large, and the grounds surrounding it sufficiently spacious. I paused a moment on the lawn in front, and leaning my back against a tall tree which rose in the centre, I gazed with interest on the exterior of Crimsworth Hall.

"Edward is rich," thought I to myself. 'I believed him to be doing well — but I did not know he was master of a mansion like this.' Cutting short all marvelling; speculation, conjecture, &c., I advanced to the front door and rang. A man-servant opened it — I announced myself — he relieved me of my wet cloak and carpet-bag, and ushered me into a room furnished as a library, where there was a bright fire and candles burning on the table; he informed me that his master was not yet returned from X — — market, but that he would certainly be at home in the course of half an hour.

"Being left to myself, I took the stuffed easy chair, covered with red morocco, which stood by the fireside, and while my eyes watched the flames dart from the glowing coals, and the cinders fall at intervals on the hearth, my mind busied itself in conjectures concerning the meeting about to take place. Amidst much that was doubtful in the subject of these conjectures, there was one thing tolerably certain — I was in no danger of encountering severe disappointment; from this, the moderation of my expectations guaranteed me. I anticipated no overflowings of fraternal tenderness; Edward's letters had always been such as to prevent the engendering or harbouring of delusions of this sort. Still, as I sat awaiting his arrival, I felt eager — very eager — I cannot tell you why; my hand, so utterly a stranger to the grasp of a kindred hand, clenched itself to repress the tremor with which impatience would fain have shaken it.

"I thought of my uncles; and as I was engaged in wondering whether Edward's indifference would equal the cold disdain I had always experienced from them, I heard the avenue gates open: wheels approached the house; Mr. Crimsworth was arrived; and after the lapse of some minutes, and a brief dialogue between himself and his servant in the hall, his tread drew near the library door — that tread alone announced the master of the house.

"I still retained some confused recollection of Edward as he was ten years ago — a tall, wiry, raw youth; NOW, as I rose from my seat and turned towards the library door, I saw a fine-looking and powerful man, light-complexioned, well-made, and of athletic proportions; the first glance made me aware of an air of promptitude and sharpness, shown as well in his movements as in his port, his eye, and the general expression of his face. He greeted me with brevity, and, in the moment of shaking hands, scanned me from head to foot; he took his seat in the morocco covered arm-chair, and motioned me to another sent.

"'I expected you would have called at the counting-house in the Close,' said he; and his voice, I noticed, had an abrupt accent, probably habitual to him; he spoke also with a guttural northern tone, which sounded harsh in my ears, accustomed to the silvery utterance of the South.

"'The landlord of the inn, where the coach stopped, directed me here,' said I. 'I doubted at first the accuracy of his information, not being aware that you had such a residence as this.'

"'Oh, it is all right!' he replied, 'only I was kept half an hour behind time, waiting for you — that is all. I thought you must be coming by the eight o'clock coach.'

"I expressed regret that he had had to wait; he made no answer, but stirred the fire, as if to cover a movement of impatience; then he scanned me again.

"I felt an inward satisfaction that I had not, in the first moment of meeting, betrayed any warmth, any enthusiasm; that I had saluted this man with a quiet and steady phlegm.

"'Have you quite broken with Tynedale and Seacombe?' he asked hastily.

"'I do not think I shall have any further communication with them; my refusal of their proposals will, I fancy, operate as a barrier against all future intercourse.'

"'Why,' said he, 'I may as well remind you at the very outset of our connection, that "no man can serve two masters." Acquaintance with Lord Tynedale will be incompatible with assistance from me.' There was a kind of gratuitous menace in his eye as he looked at me in finishing this observation.

"Feeling no disposition to reply to him, I contented myself with an inward speculation on the differences which exist in the constitution of men's minds. I do not know what inference Mr. Crimsworth drew from my silence — whether he considered it a symptom of contumacity or an evidence of my being cowed by his peremptory manner. After a long and hard stare at me, he rose sharply from his seat.

"'To-morrow,' said he, 'I shall call your attention to some other points; but now it is supper time, and Mrs. Crimsworth is probably waiting; will you come?'

"He strode from the room, and I followed. In crossing the hall, I wondered what Mrs. Crimsworth might be. 'Is she,' thought I, 'as alien to what I like as Tynedale, Seacombe, the Misses Seacombe — as the affectionate relative now striding before me? or is she better than these? Shall I, in conversing with her, feel free to show something of my real nature; or — ' Further conjectures were arrested by my entrance into the dining-room.

"A lamp, burning under a shade of ground-glass, showed a handsome apartment, wainscoted with oak; supper was laid on the table; by the fire-place, standing as if waiting our entrance, appeared a lady; she was young, tall, and well shaped; her dress was handsome and fashionable: so much my first glance sufficed to ascertain. A gay salutation passed between her and Mr. Crimsworth; she chid him, half playfully, half poutingly, for being late; her voice (I always take voices into the account in judging of character) was lively — it indicated, I thought, good animal spirits. Mr. Crimsworth soon checked her animated scolding with a kiss — a kiss that still told of the bridegroom (they had not yet been married a year); she took her seat at the supper-table in first-rate spirits. Perceiving me, she begged my pardon for not noticing me before, and then shook hands with me, as ladies do when a flow of good-humour disposes them to be cheerful to all, even the most indifferent of their acquaintance. It was now further obvious to me that she had a good complexion, and features sufficiently marked but agreeable; her hair was red — quite red. She and Edward talked much, always in a vein of playful contention; she was vexed, or pretended to be vexed, that he had that day driven a vicious horse in the gig, and he made light of her fears. Sometimes she appealed to me.

"'Now, Mr. William, isn't it absurd in Edward to talk so? He says he will drive Jack, and no other horse, and the brute has thrown him twice already.

"She spoke with a kind of lisp, not disagreeable, but childish. I soon saw also that there was more than girlish — a somewhat infantine expression in her by no means small features; this lisp and expression were, I have no doubt, a charm in Edward's eyes, and would be so to those: of most men, but they were not to mine. I sought her eye, desirous to read there the intelligence which I could not discern in her face or hear in her conversation; it was merry, rather small; by turns I saw vivacity, vanity, coquetry, look out through its irid, but I watched in vain for a glimpse of soul. I am no Oriental; white necks, carmine lips and cheeks, clusters of bright curls, do not suffice for me without that Promethean spark which will live after the roses and lilies are faded, the burnished hair grown grey. In sunshine, in prosperity, the flowers are very well; but how many wet days are there in life — November seasons of disaster, when a man's hearth and home would be cold indeed, without the clear, cheering gleam of intellect.

"Having perused the fair page of Mrs. Crimsworth's face, a deep, involuntary sigh announced my disappointment; she took it as a homage to her beauty, and Edward, who was evidently proud of his rich and handsome young wife, threw on me a glance — half ridicule, half ire.

"I turned from them both, and gazing wearily round the room, I saw two pictures set in the oak panelling — one on each side the mantel-piece. Ceasing to take part in the bantering conversation that flowed on between Mr. and Mrs. Crimsworth, I bent my thoughts to the examination of these pictures. They were portraits — a lady and a gentleman, both costumed in the fashion of twenty years ago. The gentleman was in the shade. I could not see him well. The lady had the benefit of a full beam from the softly shaded lamp. I presently recognised her; I had seen this picture before in childhood; it was my mother; that and the companion picture being the only heir-looms saved out of the sale of my father's property.

"The face, I remembered, had pleased me as a boy, but then I did not understand it; now I knew how rare that class of face is in the world, and I appreciated keenly its thoughtful, yet gentle expression. The serious grey eye possessed for me a strong charm, as did certain lines in the features indicative of most true and tender feeling. I was sorry it was only a picture.

"I soon left Mr. and Mrs. Crimsworth to themselves; a servant conducted me to my bed-room; in closing my chamber-door, I shut out all intruders — you, Charles, as well as the rest.

"Good-bye for the present,

"WILLIAM CRIMSWORTH."

To this letter I never got an answer; before my old friend received it, he had accepted a Government appointment in one of the colonies, and was already on his way to the scene of his official labours. What has become of him since, I know not.

The leisure time I have at command, and which I intended to employ for his private benefit, I shall now dedicate to that of the public at large. My narrative is not exciting, and above all, not marvellous; but it may interest some individuals, who, having toiled in the same vocation as myself, will find in my experience frequent reflections of their own. The above letter will serve as an introduction. I now proceed.

CHAPTER II.

A FINE October morning succeeded to the foggy evening that had witnessed my first introduction to Crimsworth Hall. I was early up and walking in the large park-like meadow surrounding the house. The autumn sun, rising over the — — shire hills, disclosed a pleasant country; woods brown and mellow varied the fields from which the harvest had been lately carried; a river, gliding between the woods, caught on its surface the somewhat cold gleam of the October sun and sky; at frequent intervals along the banks of the river, tall, cylindrical chimneys, almost like slender round towers, indicated the factories which the trees half concealed; here and there mansions, similar to Crimsworth Hall, occupied agreeable sites on the hill-side; the country wore, on the whole, a cheerful, active, fertile look. Steam, trade, machinery had long banished from it all romance and seclusion. At a distance of five miles, a valley, opening between the low hills, held in its cups the great town of X — — . A dense, permanent vapour brooded over this locality — there lay Edward's "Concern."

I forced my eye to scrutinize this prospect, I forced my mind to dwell on it for a time, and when I found that it communicated no pleasurable emotion to my heart — that it stirred in me none of the hopes a man ought to feel, when he sees laid before him the scene of his life's career — I said to myself, "William, you are a rebel against circumstances; you are a fool, and know not what you want; you have chosen trade and you shall be a tradesman. Look!" I continued mentally — "Look at the sooty smoke in that hollow, and know that there is your post! There you cannot dream, you cannot speculate and theorize — there you shall out and work!"

Thus self-schooled, I returned to the house. My brother was in the breakfast-room. I met him collectedly — I could not meet him cheerfully; he was standing on the rug, his back to the fire — how much did I read in the expression of his eye as my glance encountered his, when I advanced to bid him good morning; how much that was contradictory to my nature! He said "Good morning" abruptly and nodded, and then he snatched, rather than took, a newspaper from the table, and began to read it with the air of a master who seizes a pretext to escape the bore of conversing with an underling. It was well I had taken a resolution to endure for a time, or his manner would have gone far to render insupportable the disgust I had just been endeavouring to subdue. I looked at him: I measured his robust frame and powerful proportions; I saw my own reflection in the mirror over the mantel-piece; I amused myself with comparing the two pictures. In face I resembled him, though I was not so handsome; my features were less regular; I had a darker eye, and a broader brow — in form I was greatly inferior — thinner, slighter, not so tall. As an animal, Edward excelled me far; should he prove as paramount in mind as in person I must be a slave — for I must expect from him no lion-like generosity to one weaker than himself; his cold, avaricious eye, his stern, forbidding manner told me he would not spare. Had I then force of mind to cope with him? I did not know; I had never been tried.

Mrs. Crimsworth's entrance diverted my thoughts for a moment. She looked well, dressed in white, her face and her attire shining in morning and bridal freshness. I addressed her with the degree of ease her last night's careless gaiety seemed to warrant, but she replied with coolness and restraint: her husband had tutored her; she was not to be too familiar with his clerk.

As soon as breakfast was over Mr. Crimsworth intimated to me that they were bringing the gig round to the door, and that in five minutes he should expect me to be ready to go down with him to X — — . I did not keep him waiting; we were soon dashing at a rapid rate along the road. The horse he drove was the same vicious animal about which Mrs. Crimsworth had expressed her fears the night before. Once or twice Jack seemed disposed to turn restive, but a vigorous and determined application of the whip from the ruthless hand of his master soon compelled him to submission, and Edward's dilated nostril expressed his triumph in the result of the contest; he scarcely spoke to me during the whole of the brief drive, only opening his lips at intervals to damn his horse.

X — — was all stir and bustle when we entered it; we left the clean streets where there were dwelling-houses and shops, churches, and public buildings; we left all these, and turned down to a region of mills and warehouses; thence we passed through two massive gates into a great paved yard, and we were in Bigben Close, and the mill was before us, vomiting soot from its long chimney, and quivering through its thick brick walls with the commotion of its iron bowels. Workpeople were passing to and fro; a waggon was being laden with pieces. Mr. Crimsworth looked from side to side, and seemed at one glance to comprehend all that was going on; he alighted, and leaving his horse and gig to the care of a man who hastened to take the reins from his hand, he bid me follow him to the counting-house. We entered it; a very different place from the parlours of Crimsworth Hall — a place for business, with a bare, planked floor, a safe, two high desks and stools, and some chairs. A person was seated at one of the desks, who took off his square cap when Mr. Crimsworth entered, and in an instant was again absorbed in his occupation of writing or calculating — I know not which.

Mr. Crimsworth, having removed his mackintosh, sat down by the fire. I remained standing near the hearth; he said presently —

"Steighton, you may leave the room; I have some business to transact with this gentleman. Come back when you hear the bell."

The individual at the desk rose and departed, closing the door as he went out. Mr. Crimsworth stirred the fire, then folded his arms, and sat a moment thinking, his lips compressed, his brow knit. I had nothing to do but to watch him — how well his features were cut! what a handsome man he was! Whence, then, came that air of contraction — that narrow and hard aspect on his forehead, in all his lineaments?

Turning to me he began abruptly:

"You are come down to — — shire to learn to be a tradesman?"

"Yes, I am."

"Have you made up your mind on the point? Let me know that at once."

"Yes."

"Well, I am not bound to help you, but I have a place here vacant, if you are qualified for it. I will take you on trial. What can you do? Do you know anything besides that useless trash of college learning — Greek, Latin, and so forth?"

"I have studied mathematics."

"Stuff! I dare say you have."

"I can read and write French and German."

"Hum!" He reflected a moment, then opening a drawer in a desk near him took out a letter, and gave it to me.

"Can you read that?" he asked.

It was a German commercial letter; I translated it; I could not tell whether he was gratified or not — his countenance remained fixed.

"It is well;" he-said, after a pause, "that you are acquainted with something useful, something that may enable you to earn your board and lodging: since you know French and German, I will take you as second clerk to manage the foreign correspondence of the house. I shall give you a good salary — 90l. a year — and now," he continued, raising his voice, "hear once for all what I have to say about our relationship, and all that sort of humbug! I must have no nonsense on that point; it would never suit me. I shall excuse you nothing on the plea of being my brother; if I find you stupid, negligent, dissipated, idle, or possessed of any faults detrimental to the interests of the house, I shall dismiss you as I would any other clerk. Ninety pounds a year are good wages, and I expect to have the full value of my money out of you; remember, too, that things are on a practical footing in my establishment — business-like habits, feelings, and ideas, suit me best. Do you understand?"

"Partly," I replied. "I suppose you mean that I am to do my work for my wages; not to expect favour from you, and not to depend on you for any help but what I earn; that suits me exactly, and on these terms I will consent to be your clerk."

I turned on my heel, and walked to the window; this time I did not consult his face to learn his opinion: what it was I do not know, nor did I then care. After a silence of some minutes he recommenced: —

"You perhaps expect to be accommodated with apartments at Crimsworth Hall, and to go and come with me in the gig. I wish you, however, to be aware that such an arrangement would be quite inconvenient to me. I like to have the seat in my gig at liberty for any gentleman whom for business reasons I may wish to take down to the hall for a night or so. You will seek out lodgings in X— —."

Quitting the window, I walked back to the hearth.

"Of course I shall seek out lodgings in X— —," I answered. "It would not suit me either to lodge at Crimsworth Hall."

My tone was quiet. I always speak quietly. Yet Mr. Crimsworth's blue eye became incensed; he took his revenge rather oddly. Turning to me he said bluntly —

"You are poor enough, I suppose; how do you expect to live till your quarter's salary becomes due?"

"I shall get on," said I.

"How do you expect to live?" he repeated in a louder voice.

"As I can, Mr. Crimsworth."

"Get into debt at your peril! that's all," he answered. "For aught I know you may have extravagant aristocratic habits: if you have, drop them; I tolerate nothing of the sort here, and I will never give you a shilling extra, whatever liabilities you may incur — mind that."

"Yes, Mr. Crimsworth, you will find I have a good memory."

I said no more. I did not think the time was come for much parley. I had an instinctive feeling that it would be folly to let one's temper effervesce often with such a man as Edward. I said to myself, "I will place my cup under this continual dropping; it shall stand there still and steady; when full, it will run over of itself — meantime patience. Two things are certain. I am capable of performing the work Mr. Crimsworth has set me; I can earn my wages conscientiously, and those wages are sufficient to enable me to live. As to the fact of my brother assuming towards me the bearing of a proud, harsh master, the fault is his, not mine; and shall his injustice, his bad feeling, turn me at once aside from the path I have chosen? No; at least, ere I deviate, I will advance far enough to see whither my career tends. As yet I am only pressing in at the entrance — a strait gate enough; it ought to have a good terminus." While I thus reasoned, Mr. Crimsworth rang a bell; his first clerk, the individual dismissed previously to our conference, re-entered.

"Mr. Steighton," said he, "show Mr. William the letters from Voss, Brothers, and give him English copies of the answers; he will translate them."

Mr. Steighton, a man of about thirty-five, with a face at once sly and heavy, hastened to execute this order; he laid the letters on the desk, and I was soon seated at it, and engaged in rendering the English answers into German. A sentiment of keen pleasure accompanied this first effort to earn my own living — a sentiment neither poisoned nor weakened by the presence of the taskmaster, who stood and watched me for some time as I wrote. I thought he was trying to read my character, but I felt as secure against his scrutiny as if I had had on a casque with the visor down-or rather I showed him my countenance with the confidence that one would show an unlearned man a letter written in Greek; he might see lines, and trace characters, but he could make nothing of them; my nature was not his nature, and its signs were to him like the words of an unknown tongue. Ere long he turned away abruptly, as if baffled, and left the counting-house; he returned to it but twice in the course of that day; each time he mixed and swallowed a glass of brandy-and-water, the materials for making which he extracted from a cupboard on one side of the fireplace; having glanced at my translations — he could read both French and German — he went out again in silence.

CHAPTER III.

I SERVED Edward as his second clerk faithfully, punctually, diligently. What was given me to do I had the power and the determination to do well. Mr. Crimsworth watched sharply for defects, but found none; he set Timothy Steighton, his favourite and head man, to watch also. Tim was baffled; I was as exact as himself, and quicker. Mr. Crimsworth made inquiries as to how I lived, whether I got into debt — no, my accounts with my landlady were always straight. I had hired small lodgings, which I contrived to pay for out of a slender fund — the accumulated savings of my Eton pocket-money; for as it had ever been abhorrent to my nature to ask pecuniary assistance, I had early acquired habits of self-denying economy; husbanding my monthly allowance with anxious care, in order to obviate the danger of being forced, in some moment of future exigency, to beg additional aid. I remember many called me miser at the time, and I used to couple the reproach with this consolation — better to be misunderstood now than repulsed hereafter. At this day I had my reward; I had had it before, when on parting with my irritated uncles one of them threw down on the table before me a 5l. note, which I was able to leave there, saying that my travelling expenses were already provided for. Mr. Crimsworth employed Tim to find out whether my landlady had any complaint to make on the score of my morals; she answered that she believed I was a very religious man, and asked Tim, in her turn, if he thought I had any intention of going into the Church some day; for, she said, she had had young curates to lodge in her house who were nothing equal to me for steadiness and quietness. Tim was "a religious man" himself; indeed, he was "a joined Methodist," which did not (be it understood) prevent him from being at the same time an engrained rascal, and he came away much posed at hearing this account of my piety. Having imparted it to Mr. Crimsworth, that gentleman, who himself frequented no place of worship, and owned no God but Mammon, turned the information into a weapon of attack against the equability of my temper. He commenced a series of covert sneers, of which I did not at first perceive the drift, till my landlady happened to relate the conversation she had had with Mr. Steighton; this enlightened me; afterwards I came to the counting-house prepared, and managed to receive the millowner's blasphemous sarcasms, when next levelled at me, on a buckler of impenetrable indifference. Ere long he tired of wasting his ammunition on a statue, but he did not throw away the shafts — he only kept them quiet in his quiver.

Once during my clerkship I had an invitation to Crimsworth Hall; it was on the occasion of a large party given in honour of the master's birthday; he had always been accustomed to invite his clerks on similar anniversaries, and could not well pass me over; I was, however, kept strictly in the background. Mrs. Crimsworth, elegantly dressed in satin and lace, blooming in youth and health, vouchsafed me no more notice than was expressed by a distant move; Crimsworth, of course, never spoke to me; I was introduced to none of the band of young ladies, who, enveloped in silvery clouds of white gauze and muslin, sat in array against me on the opposite side of a long and large room; in fact, I was fairly isolated, and could but contemplate the shining ones from affar, and when weary of such a dazzling scene, turn for a change to the consideration of the carpet pattern. Mr. Crimsworth, standing on the rug, his elbow supported by the marble mantelpiece, and about him a group of very pretty girls, with whom he conversed gaily — Mr. Crimsworth, thus placed, glanced at me; I looked weary, solitary, kept down like some desolate tutor or governess; he was satisfied.

Dancing began; I should have liked well enough to be introduced to some pleasing and intelligent girl, and to have freedom and opportunity to show that I could both feel and communicate the pleasure of social intercourse — that I was not, in short, a block, or a piece of furniture, but an acting, thinking, sentient man. Many smiling faces and graceful figures glided past me, but the smiles were lavished on other eyes, the figures sustained by other hands than mine. I turned away tantalized, left the dancers, and wandered into the oak-panelled dining-room. No fibre of sympathy united me to any living thing in this house; I looked for and found my mother's picture. I took a wax taper from a stand, and held it up. I gazed long, earnestly; my heart grew to the image. My mother, I perceived, had bequeathed to me much of her features and countenance — her forehead, her eyes, her complexion. No regular beauty pleases egotistical human beings so much as a softened and refined likeness of themselves; for this reason, fathers regard with complacency the lineaments of their daughters' faces, where frequently their own similitude is found flatteringly associated with softness of hue and delicacy of outline. I was just wondering how that picture, to me so interesting, would strike an impartial spectator, when a voice close behind me pronounced the words —

"Humph! there's some sense in that face."

I turned; at my elbow stood a tall man, young, though probably five or six years older than I — in other respects of an appearance the opposite to common place; though just now, as I am not disposed to paint his portrait in detail, the reader must be content with the silhouette I have just thrown off; it was all I myself saw of him for the moment: I did not investigate the colour of his eyebrows, nor of his eyes either; I saw his stature, and the outline of his shape; I saw, too, his fastidious-looking RETROUSSE nose; these observations, few in number, and general in character (the last excepted), sufficed, for they enabled me to recognize him.

"Good evening, Mr. Hunsden," muttered I with a bow, and then, like a shy noodle as I was, I began moving away — and why? Simply because Mr. Hunsden was a manufacturer and a millowner, and I was only a clerk, and my instinct propelled me from my superior. I had frequently seen Hunsden in Bigben Close, where he came almost weekly to transact business with Mr. Crimsworth, but I had never spoken to him, nor he to me, and I owed him a sort of involuntary grudge, because he had more than once been the tacit witness of insults offered by Edward to me. I had the conviction that he could only regard me as a poor-spirited slave, wherefore I now went about to shun his presence and eschew his conversation.

"Where are you going?" asked he, as I edged off sideways. I had already noticed that Mr. Hunsden indulged in abrupt forms of speech, and I perversely said to myself —

"He thinks he may speak as he likes to a poor clerk; but my mood is not, perhaps, so supple as he deems it, and his rough freedom pleases me not at all."

I made some slight reply, rather indifferent than courteous, and continued to move away. He coolly planted himself in my path.

"Stay here awhile," said he: "it is so hot in the dancing-room; besides, you don't dance; you have not had a partner to-night."

He was right, and as he spoke neither his look, tone, nor manner displeased me; my AMOUR-PROPRE was propitiated; he had not addressed me out of condescension, but because, having repaired to the cool dining-room for refreshment, he now wanted some one to talk to, by way of temporary amusement. I hate to be condescended to, but I like well enough to oblige; I stayed.

"That is a good picture," he continued, recurring to the portrait.

"Do you consider the face pretty?" I asked.

"Pretty! no — how can it be pretty, with sunk eyes and hollow cheeks? but it is peculiar; it seems to think. You could have a talk with that woman, if she were alive, on other subjects than dress, visiting, and compliments."

I agreed with him, but did not say so. He went on.

"Not that I admire a head of that sort; it wants character and force; there's too much of the sen-si-tive (so he articulated it, curling his lip at the same time) in that mouth; besides, there is Aristocrat written on the brow and defined in the figure; I hate your aristocrats."

"You think, then, Mr. Hunsden, that patrician descent may be read in a distinctive cast of form and features?"

"Patrician descent be hanged! Who doubts that your lordlings may have their 'distinctive cast of form and features' as much as we — — shire tradesmen have ours? But which is the best? Not theirs assuredly. As to their women, it is a little different: they cultivate beauty from childhood upwards, and may by care and training attain to a certain degree of excellence in that point, just like the oriental odalisques. Yet even this superiority is doubtful. Compare the figure in that frame with Mrs. Edward Crimsworth — which is the finer animal?"

I replied quietly: "Compare yourself and Mr. Edward Crimsworth, Mr

Hunsden."

"Oh, Crimsworth is better filled up than I am, I know besides he has a straight nose, arched eyebrows, and all that; but these advantages — if they are advantages — he did not inherit from his mother, the patrician, but from his father, old Crimsworth, who, MY father says, was as veritable a — —shire blue-dyer as ever put indigo in a vat yet withal the handsomest man in the three Ridings. It is you, William, who are the aristocrat of your family, and you are not as fine a fellow as your plebeian brother by long chalk."

There was something in Mr. Hunsden's point-blank mode of speech which rather pleased me than otherwise because it set me at my ease. I continued the conversation with a degree of interest.

"How do you happen to know that I am Mr. Crimsworth's brother? I thought you and everybody else looked upon me only in the light of a poor clerk."

"Well, and so we do; and what are you but a poor clerk? You do Crimsworth's work, and he gives you wages — shabby wages they are, too."

I was silent. Hunsden's language now bordered on the impertinent, still his manner did not offend me in the least — it only piqued my curiosity; I wanted him to go on, which he did in a little while.

"This world is an absurd one," said he.

"Why so, Mr. Hunsden?"

"I wonder you should ask: you are yourself a strong proof of the absurdity I allude to."

I was determined he should explain himself of his own accord, without my pressing him so to do — so I resumed my silence.

"Is it your intention to become a tradesman?" he inquired presently.

"It was my serious intention three months ago."

"Humph! the more fool you — you look like a tradesman! What a practical business-like face you have!"

"My face is as the Lord made it, Mr. Hunsden."

"The Lord never made either your face or head for X — — What good can your bumps of ideality, comparison, self-esteem, conscientiousness, do you here? But if you like Bigben Close, stay there; it's your own affair, not mine."

"Perhaps I have no choice."

"Well, I care nought about it — it will make little difference to me what you do or where you go; but I'm cool now — I want to dance again; and I see such a fine girl sitting in the corner of the sofa there by her mamma; see if I don't get her for a partner in a jiffy! There's Waddy — Sam Waddy making up to her; won't I cut him out?"

And Mr. Hunsden strode away. I watched him through the open folding-doors; he outstripped Waddy, applied for the hand of the fine girl, and led her off triumphant. She was a tall, well-made, full-formed, dashingly-dressed young woman, much in the style of Mrs. E. Crimsworth; Hunsden whirled her through the waltz with spirit; he kept at her side during the remainder of the evening, and I read in her animated and gratified countenance that he succeeded in making himself perfectly agreeable. The mamma too (a stout person in a turban — Mrs. Lupton by name) looked well pleased; prophetic visions probably flattered her inward eye. The Hunsdens were of an old stem; and scornful as Yorke (such was my late interlocutor's name) professed to be of the advantages of birth, in his secret heart he well knew and fully appreciated the distinction his ancient, if not high lineage conferred on him in a mushroom-place like X — — , concerning whose inhabitants it was proverbially said, that not one in a thousand knew his own grandfather. Moreover the Hunsdens, once rich, were still independent; and report affirmed that Yorke bade fair, by his success in business, to restore to pristine prosperity the partially decayed fortunes of his house. These circumstances considered, Mrs. Lupton's broad face might well wear a smile of complacency as she contemplated the heir of Hunsden Wood occupied in paying assiduous court to her darling Sarah Martha. I, however, whose observations being less anxious, were likely to be more accurate, soon saw that the grounds for maternal self-congratulation were slight indeed; the gentleman appeared to me much more desirous of making, than susceptible of receiving an impression. I know not what it was in Mr. Hunsden that, as I watched him (I had nothing better to do), suggested to me, every now and then, the idea of a foreigner. In form and features he might be pronounced English, though even there one caught a dash of something Gallic; but he had no English shyness: he had learnt somewhere, somehow, the art of setting himself quite at his ease, and of allowing no insular timidity to intervene as a barrier between him and his convenience or pleasure. Refinement he did not affect, yet vulgar he could not be called; he was not odd — no quiz — yet he resembled no one else I had ever seen before; his general bearing intimated complete, sovereign satisfaction with himself; yet, at times, an indescribable shade passed like an eclipse over his countenance, and seemed to me like the sign of a sudden and strong inward doubt of himself, his words and actions-an energetic discontent at his life or his social position, his future prospects or his mental attainments — I know not which; perhaps after all it might only be a bilious caprice.

CHAPTER IV.

No man likes to acknowledge that he has made a mistake in the choice of his profession, and every man, worthy of the name, will row long against wind and tide before he allows himself to cry out, “I am baffled!” and submits to be floated passively back to land. From the first week of my residence in X —— I felt my occupation irksome. The thing itself — the work of copying and translating business-letters — was a dry and tedious task enough, but had that been all, I should long have borne with the nuisance; I am not of an impatient nature, and influenced by the double desire of getting my living and justifying to myself and others the resolution I had taken to become a tradesman, I should have endured in silence the rust and cramp of my best faculties; I should not have whispered, even inwardly, that I longed for liberty; I should have pent in every sigh by which my heart might have ventured to intimate its distress under the closeness, smoke, monotony and joyless tumult of Bigben Close, and its panting desire for freer and fresher scenes; I should have set up the image of Duty, the fetish of Perseverance, in my small bedroom at Mrs. King’s lodgings, and they two should have been my household gods, from which my darling, my cherished-in-secret, Imagination, the tender and the mighty, should never, either by softness or strength, have severed me. But this was not all; the antipathy which had sprung up between myself and my employer striking deeper root and spreading denser shade daily, excluded me from every glimpse of the sunshine of life; and I began to feel like a plant growing in humid darkness out of the slimy walls of a well.

Antipathy is the only word which can express the feeling Edward Crimsworth had for me — a feeling, in a great measure, involuntary, and which was liable to be excited by every, the most trifling movement, look, or word of mine. My southern accent annoyed him; the degree of education evinced in my language irritated him; my punctuality, industry, and accuracy, fixed his dislike, and gave it the high flavour and poignant relish of envy; he feared that I too should one day make a successful tradesman. Had I been in anything inferior to him, he would not have hated me so thoroughly, but I knew all that he knew, and, what was worse, he suspected that I kept the padlock of silence on mental wealth in which he was no sharer. If he could have once placed me in a ridiculous or mortifying position, he would have forgiven me much, but I was guarded by three faculties — Caution, Tact, Observation; and prowling and prying as was Edward’s malignity, it could never baffle the lynx-eyes of these, my natural sentinels. Day by day did his malice watch my tact, hoping it would sleep, and prepared to steal snake-like on its slumber; but tact, if it be genuine, never sleeps.

I had received my first quarter’s wages, and was returning to my lodgings, possessed heart and soul with the pleasant feeling that the master who had paid me grudged every penny of that hard-earned pittance — (I had long ceased to regard Mr. Crimsworth as my brother — he was a hard, grinding master; he wished to be an inexorable tyrant: that was all). Thoughts, not varied but strong, occupied my mind; two voices spoke within me; again and again they uttered the same monotonous phrases. One said: "William, your life is intolerable." The other: "What can you do to alter it?" I walked fast, for it was a cold, frosty night in January; as I approached my lodgings, I turned from a general view of my affairs to the particular speculation as to whether my fire would be out; looking towards the window of my sitting-room, I saw no cheering red gleam.

"That slut of a servant has neglected it as usual," said I, "and I shall see nothing but pale ashes if I go in; it is a fine starlight night — I will walk a little farther."

It WAS a fine night, and the streets were dry and even clean for X — — ; there was a crescent curve of moonlight to be seen by the parish church tower, and hundreds of stars shone keenly bright in all quarters of the sky.

Unconsciously I steered my course towards the country; I had got into Grove-street, and began to feel the pleasure of seeing dim trees at the extremity, round a suburban house, when a person leaning over the iron gate of one of the small gardens which front the neat dwelling-houses in this street, addressed me as I was hurrying with quick stride past.

"What the deuce is the hurry? Just so must Lot have left Sodom, when he expected fire to pour down upon it, out of burning brass clouds."

I stopped short, and looked towards the speaker. I smelt the fragrance, and saw the red spark of a cigar; the dusk outline of a man, too, bent towards me over the wicket.

"You see I am meditating in the field at eventide," continued this shade. "God knows it's cool work! especially as instead of Rebecca on a camel's hump, with bracelets on her arms and a ring in her nose, Fate sends me only a counting-house clerk, in a grey tweed wrapper." The voice was familiar to me — its second utterance enabled me to seize the speaker's identity.

"Mr. Hunsden! good evening."

"Good evening, indeed! yes, but you would have passed me without recognition if I had not been so civil as to speak first."

"I did not know you."

"A famous excuse! You ought to have known me; I knew you, though you were going ahead like a steam-engine. Are the police after you?"

"It wouldn't be worth their while; I'm not of consequence enough to attract them.

"Alas, poor shepherd! Alack and well-a-day! What a theme for regret, and how down in the mouth you must be, judging from the sound of your voice! But since you're not running from the police, from whom are you running? the devil?"

"On the contrary, I am going post to him."

"That is well — you're just in luck: this is Tuesday evening; there are scores of market gigs and carts returning to Dinneford to-night; and he, or some of his, have a seat in all regularly; so, if you'll step in and sit half-an-hour in my bachelor's parlour, you may catch him as he passes without much trouble. I think though you'd better let him alone to-night, he'll have so many customers to serve; Tuesday is his busy day in X— — and Dinneford; come in at all events."

He swung the wicket open as he spoke.

"Do you really wish me to go in?" I asked.

"As you please — I'm alone; your company for an hour or two would be agreeable to me; but, if you don't choose to favour me so far, I'll not press the point. I hate to bore any one."

It suited me to accept the invitation as it suited Hunsden to give it. I passed through the gate, and followed him to the front door, which he opened; thence we traversed a passage, and entered his parlour; the door being shut, he pointed me to an arm-chair by the hearth; I sat down, and glanced round me.

It was a comfortable room, at once snug and handsome; the bright grate was filled with a genuine — — shire fire, red, clear, and generous, no penurious South-of-England embers heaped in the corner of a grate. On the table a shaded lamp diffused around a soft, pleasant, and equal light; the furniture was almost luxurious for a young bachelor, comprising a couch and two very easy chairs; bookshelves filled the recesses on each side of the mantelpiece; they were well-furnished, and arranged with perfect order. The neatness of the room suited my taste; I hate irregular and slovenly habits. From what I saw I concluded that Hunsden's ideas on that point corresponded with my own. While he removed from the centre-table to the side-board a few pamphlets and periodicals, I ran my eye along the shelves of the book-case nearest me. French and German works predominated, the old French dramatists, sundry modern authors, Thiers, Villemain, Paul de Kock, George Sand, Eugene Sue; in German — Goethe, Schiller, Zschokke, Jean Paul Richter; in English there were works on Political Economy. I examined no further, for Mr. Hunsden himself recalled my attention.

"You shall have something," said he, "for you ought to feel disposed for refreshment after walking nobody knows how far on such a Canadian night as this; but it shall not be brandy-and-water, and it shall not be a bottle of port, nor ditto of sherry. I keep no such poison. I have Rhein-wein for my own drinking, and you may choose between that and coffee."

Here again Hunsden suited me: if there was one generally received practice I abhorred more than another, it was the habitual imbibing of spirits and strong wines. I had, however, no fancy for his acid German nectar, but I liked coffee, so I responded —

"Give me some coffee, Mr. Hunsden."

I perceived my answer pleased him; he had doubtless expected to see a chilling effect produced by his steady announcement that he would give me neither wine nor spirits; he just shot one searching glance at my face to ascertain whether my cordiality was genuine or a mere feint of politeness. I smiled, because I quite understood him; and, while I honoured his conscientious firmness, I was amused at his mistrust; he seemed satisfied, rang the bell, and ordered coffee, which was presently brought; for himself, a bunch of grapes and half a pint of something sour sufficed. My coffee was excellent; I told him so, and expressed the shuddering pity with which his anchorite fare inspired me. He did not answer, and I scarcely think heard my remark. At that moment one of those momentary eclipses I before alluded to had come over his face, extinguishing his smile, and replacing, by an abstracted and alienated look, the customarily shrewd, bantering glance of his eye. I employed the interval of silence in a rapid scrutiny of his physiognomy. I had never observed him closely before; and, as my sight is very short, I had gathered only a vague, general idea of his appearance; I was surprised now, on examination, to perceive how small, and even feminine, were his lineaments; his tall figure, long and dark locks, his voice and general bearing, had impressed me with the notion of something powerful and massive; not at all: — my own features were cast in a harsher and squarer mould than his. I discerned that there would be contrasts between his inward and outward man; contentions, too; for I suspected his soul had more of will and ambition than his body had of fibre and muscle. Perhaps, in these incompatibilities of the "physique" with the "morale," lay the secret of that fitful gloom; he WOULD but COULD not, and the athletic mind scowled scorn on its more fragile companion. As to his good looks, I should have liked to have a woman's opinion on that subject; it seemed to me that his face might produce the same effect on a lady that a very piquant and interesting, though scarcely pretty, female face would on a man. I have mentioned his dark locks — they were brushed sideways above a white and sufficiently expansive forehead; his cheek had a rather hectic freshness; his features might have done well on canvas, but indifferently in marble: they were plastic; character had set a stamp upon each; expression re-cast them at her pleasure, and strange metamorphoses she wrought, giving him now the mien of a morose bull, and anon that of an arch and mischievous girl; more frequently, the two semblances were blent, and a queer, composite countenance they made.

Starting from his silent fit, he began: —

"William! what a fool you are to live in those dismal lodgings of Mrs. King's, when you might take rooms here in Grove Street, and have a garden like me!"

"I should be too far from the mill."

"What of that? It would do you good to walk there and back two or three times a day; besides, are you such a fossil that you never wish to see a flower or a green leaf?"

"I am no fossil."

“What are you then? You sit at that desk in Crimsworth’s counting-house day by day and week by week, scraping with a pen on paper, just like an automaton; you never get up; you never say you are tired; you never ask for a holiday; you never take change or relaxation; you give way to no excess of an evening; you neither keep wild company, nor indulge in strong drink.”

“Do you, Mr. Hunsden?”

“Don’t think to pose me with short questions; your case and mine are diametrically different, and it is nonsense attempting to draw a parallel. I say, that when a man endures patiently what ought to be unendurable, he is a fossil.”

“Whence do you acquire the knowledge of my patience?”

“Why, man, do you suppose you are a mystery? The other night you seemed surprised at my knowing to what family you belonged; now you find subject for wonderment in my calling you patient. What do you think I do with my eyes and ears? I’ve been in your counting-house more than once when Crimsworth has treated you like a dog; called for a book, for instance, and when you gave him the wrong one, or what he chose to consider the wrong one, flung it back almost in your face; desired you to shut or open the door as if you had been his flunkey; to say nothing of your position at the party about a month ago, where you had neither place nor partner, but hovered about like a poor, shabby hanger-on; and how patient you were under each and all of these circumstances!”

“Well, Mr. Hunsden, what then?”

“I can hardly tell you what then; the conclusion to be drawn as to your character depends upon the nature of the motives which guide your conduct; if you are patient because you expect to make something eventually out of Crimsworth, notwithstanding his tyranny, or perhaps by means of it, you are what the world calls an interested and mercenary, but may be a very wise fellow; if you are patient because you think it a duty to meet insult with submission, you are an essential sap, and in no shape the man for my money; if you are patient because your nature is phlegmatic, flat, inexcitable, and that you cannot get up to the pitch of resistance, why, God made you to be crushed; and lie down by all means, and lie flat, and let Juggernaut ride well over you.”

Mr. Hunsden’s eloquence was not, it will be perceived, of the smooth and oily order. As he spoke, he pleased me ill. I seem to recognize in him one of those characters who, sensitive enough themselves, are selfishly relentless towards the sensitiveness of others. Moreover, though he was neither like Crimsworth nor Lord Tynedale, yet he was acrid, and, I suspected, overbearing in his way: there was a tone of despotism in the urgency of the very reproaches by which, he aimed at goading the oppressed into rebellion against the oppressor. Looking at him still more fixedly than I had yet done, I saw written in his eye and mien a resolution to arrogate to himself a freedom so unlimited that it might often trench on the just liberty of his neighbours. I rapidly ran over these thoughts, and then I laughed a low and involuntary laugh, moved thereto by a slight inward revelation of the inconsistency of man. It was as I thought: Hunsden had expected me to take with calm his incorrect and offensive surmises, his bitter and haughty taunts; and himself was chafed by a laugh, scarce louder than a whisper.

His brow darkened, his thin nostril dilated a little.

"Yes," he began, "I told you that you were an aristocrat, and who but an aristocrat would laugh such a laugh as that, and look such a look? A laugh frigidly jeering; a look lazily mutinous; gentlemanlike irony, patrician resentment. What a nobleman you would have made, William Crimsworth! You are cut out for one; pity Fortune has baulked Nature! Look at the features, figure, even to the hands — distinction all over — ugly distinction! Now, if you'd only an estate and a mansion, and a park, and a title, how you could play the exclusive, maintain the rights of your class, train your tenantry in habits of respect to the peerage, oppose at every step the advancing power of the people, support your rotten order, and be ready for its sake to wade knee-deep in churls' blood; as it is, you've no power; you can do nothing; you're wrecked and stranded on the shores of commerce; forced into collision with practical men, with whom you cannot cope, for YOU'LL NEVER BE A TRADESMAN."

The first part of Hunsden's speech moved me not at all, or, if it did, it was only to wonder at the perversion into which prejudice had twisted his judgment of my character; the concluding sentence, however, not only moved, but shook me; the blow it gave was a severe one, because Truth wielded the weapon. If I smiled now, it, was only in disdain of myself.

Hunsden saw his advantage; he followed it up.

"You'll make nothing by trade," continued he; "nothing more than the crust of dry bread and the draught of fair water on which you now live; your only chance of getting a competency lies in marrying a rich widow, or running away with an heiress."

"I leave such shifts to be put in practice by those who devise them," said I, rising.

"And even that is hopeless," he went on coolly. "What widow would have you? Much less, what heiress? You're not bold and venturesome enough for the one, nor handsome and fascinating enough for the other. You think perhaps you look intelligent and polished; carry your intellect and refinement to market, and tell me in a private note what price is bid for them."

Mr. Hunsden had taken his tone for the night; the string he struck was out of tune, he would finger no other. Averse to discord, of which I had enough every day and all day long, I concluded, at last, that silence and solitude were preferable to jarring converse; I bade him good-night.

"What! Are you going, lad? Well, good-night: you'll find the door." And he sat still in front of the fire, while I left the room and the house. I had got a good way on my return to my lodgings before I found out that I was walking very fast, and breathing very hard, and that my nails were almost stuck into the palms of my clenched hands, and that my teeth were set fast; on making this discovery, I relaxed both my pace, fists, and jaws, but I could not so soon cause the regrets rushing rapidly through my mind to slacken their tide. Why did I make myself a tradesman? Why did I enter Hunsden's house this evening? Why, at dawn to-morrow, must I repair to Crimsworth's mill? All that night did I ask myself these questions, and all that night fiercely demanded of my soul an answer. I got no sleep; my head burned, my feet froze; at last the factory bells rang, and I sprang from my bed with other slaves.

CHAPTER V.

THERE is a climax to everything, to every state of feeling as well as to every position in life. I turned this truism over in my mind as, in the frosty dawn of a January morning, I hurried down the steep and now icy street which descended from Mrs. King's to the Close. The factory workpeople had preceded me by nearly an hour, and the mill was all lighted up and in full operation when I reached it. I repaired to my post in the counting-house as usual; the fire there, but just lit, as yet only smoked; Steighton had not yet arrived. I shut the door and sat down at the desk; my hands, recently washed in half-frozen water, were still numb; I could not write till they had regained vitality, so I went on thinking, and still the theme of my thoughts was the "climax." Self-dissatisfaction troubled exceedingly the current of my meditations.

"Come, William Crimsworth," said my conscience, or whatever it is that within ourselves takes ourselves to task — "come, get a clear notion of what you would have, or what you would not have. You talk of a climax; pray has your endurance reached its climax? It is not four months old. What a fine resolute fellow you imagined yourself to be when you told Tynedale you would tread in your father's steps, and a pretty treading you are likely to make of it! How well you like X — — ! Just at this moment how redolent of pleasant associations are its streets, its shops, its warehouses, its factories! How the prospect of this day cheers you! Letter-copying till noon, solitary dinner at your lodgings, letter-copying till evening, solitude; for you neither find pleasure in Brown's, nor Smith's, nor Nicholl's, nor Eccle's company; and as to Hunsden, you fancied there was pleasure to be derived from his society — he! he! how did you like the taste you had of him last night? was it sweet? Yet he is a talented, an original-minded man, and even he does not like you; your self-respect defies you to like him; he has always seen you to disadvantage; he always will see you to disadvantage; your positions are unequal, and were they on the same level your minds could not; assimilate; never hope, then, to gather the honey of friendship out of that thorn-guarded plant. Hello, Crimsworth! where are your thoughts tending? You leave the recollection of Hunsden as a bee would a rock, as a bird a desert; and your aspirations spread eager wings towards a land of visions where, now in advancing daylight — in X — — daylight — you dare to dream of congeniality, repose, union. Those three you will never meet in this world; they are angels. The souls of just men made perfect may encounter them in heaven, but your soul will never be made perfect. Eight o'clock strikes! your hands are thawed, get to work!"

"Work? why should I work?" said I sullenly: "I cannot please though I toil like a slave." "Work, work!" reiterated the inward voice. "I may work, it will do no good," I growled; but nevertheless I drew out a packet of letters and commenced my task — task thankless and bitter as that of the Israelite crawling over the sun-baked fields of Egypt in search of straw and stubble wherewith to accomplish his tale of bricks.

About ten o'clock I heard Mr. Crimsworth's gig turn into the yard, and in a minute or two he entered the counting-house. It was his custom to glance his eye at Steighton and myself, to hang up his mackintosh, stand a minute with his back to the fire, and then walk out. Today he did not deviate from his usual habits; the only difference was that when he looked at me, his brow, instead of being merely hard, was surly; his eye, instead of being cold, was fierce. He studied me a minute or two longer than usual, but went out in silence.

Twelve o'clock arrived; the bell rang for a suspension of labour; the workpeople went off to their dinners; Steighton, too, departed, desiring me to lock the counting-house door, and take the key with me. I was tying up a bundle of papers, and putting them in their place, preparatory to closing my desk, when Crimsworth reappeared at the door, and entering closed it behind him.

"You'll stay here a minute," said he, in a deep, brutal voice, while his nostrils distended and his eye shot a spark of sinister fire.

Alone with Edward I remembered our relationship, and remembering that forgot the difference of position; I put away deference and careful forms of speech; I answered with simple brevity.

"It is time to go home," I said, turning the key in my desk.

"You'll stay here!" he reiterated. "And take your hand off that key! leave it in the lock!"

"Why?" asked I. "What cause is there for changing my usual plans?"

"Do as I order," was the answer, "and no questions! You are my servant, obey me! What have you been about — ?" He was going on in the same breath, when an abrupt pause announced that rage had for the moment got the better of articulation.

"You may look, if you wish to know," I replied. "There is the open desk, there are the papers."

"Confound your insolence! What have you been about?"

"Your work, and have done it well."

"Hypocrite and twaddler! Smooth-faced, snivelling greasehorn!" (this last term is, I believe, purely — — shire, and alludes to the horn of black, rancid whale-oil, usually to be seen suspended to cart-wheels, and employed for greasing the same.)

"Come, Edward Crimsworth, enough of this. It is time you and I wound up accounts. I have now given your service three months' trial, and I find it the most nauseous slavery under the sun. Seek another clerk. I stay no longer."

"What I do you dare to give me notice? Stop at least for your wages." He took down the heavy gig whip hanging beside his mackintosh.

I permitted myself to laugh with a degree of scorn I took no pains to temper or hide. His fury boiled up, and when he had sworn half-a-dozen vulgar, impious oaths, without, however, venturing to lift the whip, he continued:

"I've found you out and know you thoroughly, you mean, whining lickspittle! What have you been saying all over X — — about me? answer me that!"

"You? I have neither inclination nor temptation to talk about you."

"You lie! It is your practice to talk about me; it is your constant habit to make public complaint of the treatment you receive at my hands. You have gone and told it far and near that I give you low wages and knock you about like a dog. I wish you were a dog! I'd set-to this minute, and never stir from the spot till I'd cut every strip of flesh from your bones with this whip."

He flourished his tool. The end of the lash just touched my forehead. A warm excited thrill ran through my veins, my blood seemed to give abound, and then raced fast and hot along its channels. I got up nimbly, came round to where he stood, and faced him.

"Down with your whip!" said I, "and explain this instant what you mean."

"Sirrah! to whom are you speaking?"

"To you. There is no one else present, I think. You say I have been calumniating you — complaining of your low wages and bad treatment. Give your grounds for these assertions."

Crimsworth had no dignity, and when I sternly demanded an explanation, he gave one in a loud, scolding voice.

"Grounds! you shall have them; and turn to the light that I may see your brazen face blush black, when you hear yourself proved to be a liar and a hypocrite. At a public meeting in the Town-hall yesterday, I had the pleasure of hearing myself insulted by the speaker opposed to me in the question under discussion, by allusions to my private affairs; by cant about monsters without natural affection, family despots, and such trash; and when I rose to answer, I was met by a shout from the filthy mob, where the mention of your name enabled me at once to detect the quarter in which this base attack had originated. When I looked round, I saw that treacherous villain, Hunsden acting as fugleman. I detected you in close conversation with Hunsden at my house a month ago, and I know that you were at Hunsden's rooms last night. Deny it if you dare."

"Oh, I shall not deny it! And if Hunsden hounded on the people to hiss you, he did quite right. You deserve popular execration; for a worse man, a harder master, a more brutal brother than you are has seldom existed."

"Sirrah! sirrah!" reiterated Crimsworth; and to complete his apostrophe, he cracked the whip straight over my head.

A minute sufficed to wrest it from him, break it in two pieces, and throw it under the grate. He made a headlong rush at me, which I evaded, and said

“Touch me, and I’ll have you up before the nearest magistrate.”

Men like Crimsworth, if firmly and calmly resisted, always abate something of their exorbitant insolence; he had no mind to be brought before a magistrate, and I suppose he saw I meant what I said. After an odd and long stare at me, at once bull-like and amazed, he seemed to bethink himself that, after all, his money gave him sufficient superiority over a beggar like me, and that he had in his hands a surer and more dignified mode of revenge than the somewhat hazardous one of personal chastisement.

“Take your hat,” said he. “Take what belongs to you, and go out at that door; get away to your parish, you pauper: beg, steal, starve, get transported, do what you like; but at your peril venture again into my sight! If ever I hear of your setting foot on an inch of ground belonging to me, I’ll hire a man to cane you.”

“It is not likely you’ll have the chance; once off your premises, what temptation can I have to return to them? I leave a prison, I leave a tyrant; I leave what is worse than the worst that can lie before me, so no fear of my coming back.”

“Go, or I’ll make you!” exclaimed Crimsworth.

I walked deliberately to my desk, took out such of its contents as were my own property, put them in my pocket, locked the desk, and placed the key on the top.

“What are you abstracting from that desk?” demanded the millowner. “Leave all behind in its place, or I’ll send for a policeman to search you.”

“Look sharp about it, then,” said I, and I took down my hat, drew on my gloves, and walked leisurely out of the counting-house — walked out of it to enter it no more.

I recollect that when the mill-bell rang the dinner hour, before Mr. Crimsworth entered, and the scene above related took place, I had had rather a sharp appetite, and had been waiting somewhat impatiently to hear the signal of feeding time. I forgot it now, however; the images of potatoes and roast mutton were effaced from my mind by the stir and tumult which the transaction of the last half-hour had there excited. I only thought of walking, that the action of my muscles might harmonize with the action of my nerves; and walk I did, fast and far. How could I do otherwise? A load was lifted off my heart; I felt light and liberated. I had got away from Bigben Close without a breach of resolution; without injury to my self-respect. I had not forced circumstances; circumstances had freed me. Life was again open to me; no longer was its horizon limited by the high black wall surrounding Crimsworth’s mill. Two hours had elapsed before my sensations had so far subsided as to leave me calm enough to remark for what wider and clearer boundaries I had exchanged that sooty girdle. When I did look up, lo! straight before me lay Grovetown, a village of villas about five miles out of X — — . The short winter day, as I perceived from the far-declined sun, was already approaching its close; a chill frost-mist was rising from the river on which X — — stands, and along whose banks the road I had taken lay; it dimmed the earth, but did not obscure the clear icy blue of the January sky. There was a great stillness near and far; the time of the day favoured tranquillity, as the people were all employed within-doors, the hour of evening release from the factories not being yet arrived; a sound of full-flowing water alone pervaded the air, for the river was deep and abundant, swelled by the melting of a late snow. I stood awhile, leaning over a wall; and looking down at the current: I watched the rapid rush of its waves. I desired memory to take a clear and permanent impression of the scene, and treasure it for future years. Grovetown church clock struck four; looking up, I beheld the last of that day's sun, glinting red through the leafless boughs of some very old oak trees surrounding the church — its light coloured and characterized the picture as I wished. I paused yet a moment, till the sweet, slow sound of the bell had quite died out of the air; then ear, eye and feeling satisfied, I quitted the wall and once more turned my face towards X — — .

CHAPTER VI.

I RE-ENTERED the town a hungry man; the dinner I had forgotten recurred seductively to my recollection; and it was with a quick step and sharp appetite I ascended the narrow street leading to my lodgings. It was dark when I opened the front door and walked into the house. I wondered how my fire would be; the night was cold, and I shuddered at the prospect of a grate full of sparkless cinders. To my joyful surprise, I found, on entering my sitting-room, a good fire and a clean hearth. I had hardly noticed this phenomenon, when I became aware of another subject for wonderment; the chair I usually occupied near the hearth was already filled; a person sat there with his arms folded on his chest, and his legs stretched out on the rug. Short-sighted as I am, doubtful as was the gleam of the firelight, a moment's examination enabled me to recognize in this person my acquaintance, Mr. Hunsden. I could not of course be much pleased to see him, considering the manner in which I had parted from him the night before, and as I walked to the hearth, stirred the fire, and said coolly, "Good evening," my demeanour evinced as little cordiality as I felt; yet I wondered in my own mind what had brought him there; and I wondered, also, what motives had induced him to interfere so actively between me and Edward; it was to him, it appeared, that I owed my welcome dismissal; still I could not bring myself to ask him questions, to show any eagerness of curiosity; if he chose to explain, he might, but the explanation should be a perfectly voluntary one on his part; I thought he was entering upon it.

"You owe me a debt of gratitude," were his first words.

"Do I?" said I; "I hope it is not a large one, for I am much too poor to charge myself with heavy liabilities of any kind."

"Then declare yourself bankrupt at once, for this liability is a ton weight at least. When I came in I found your fire out, and I had it lit again, and made that sulky drab of a servant stay and blow at it with the bellows till it had burnt up properly; now, say 'Thank you!'"

"Not till I have had something to eat; I can thank nobody while I am so famished."

I rang the bell and ordered tea and some cold meat.

"Cold meat!" exclaimed Hunsden, as the servant closed the door, "what a glutton you are; man! Meat with tea! you'll die of eating too much."

"No, Mr. Hunsden, I shall not." I felt a necessity for contradicting him; I was irritated with hunger, and irritated at seeing him there, and irritated at the continued roughness of his manner.

"It is over-eating that makes you so ill-tempered," said he.

"How do you know?" I demanded. "It is like you to give a pragmatical opinion without being acquainted with any of the circumstances of the case; I have had no dinner."

What I said was petulant and snappish enough, and Hunsden only replied by looking in my face and laughing.

"Poor thing!" he whined, after a pause. "It has had no dinner, has it? What! I suppose its master would not let it come home. Did Crimsworth order you to fast by way of punishment, William!"

"No, Mr. Hunsden. Fortunately at this sulky juncture, tea, was brought in, and I fell to upon some bread and butter and cold beef directly. Having cleared a plateful, I became so far humanized as to intimate to Mr. Hunsden that he need not sit there staring, but might come to the table and do as I did, if he liked."

"But I don't like in the least," said he, and therewith he summoned the servant by a fresh pull of the bell-rope, and intimated a desire to have a glass of toast-and-water. "And some more coal," he added; "Mr. Crimsworth shall keep a good fire while I stay."

His orders being executed, he wheeled his chair round to the table, so as to be opposite me.

"Well," he proceeded. "You are out of work, I suppose."

"Yes," said I; and not disposed to show the satisfaction I felt on this point, I, yielding to the whim of the moment, took up the subject as though I considered myself aggrieved rather than benefited by what had been done. "Yes — thanks to you, I am. Crimsworth turned me off at a minute's notice, owing to some interference of yours at a public meeting, I understand."

"Ah! what! he mentioned that? He observed me signalling the lads, did he? What had he to say about his friend Hunsden — anything sweet?"

"He called you a treacherous villain."

"Oh, he hardly knows me yet! I'm one of those shy people who don't come out all at once, and he is only just beginning to make my acquaintance, but he'll find I've some good qualities — excellent ones! The Hunsdens were always unrivalled at tracking a rascal; a downright, dishonourable villain is their natural prey — they could not keep off him wherever they met him; you used the word pragmatical just now — that word is the property of our family; it has been applied to us from generation to generation; we have fine noses for abuses; we scent a scoundrel a mile off; we are reformers born, radical reformers; and it was impossible for me to live in the same town with Crimsworth, to come into weekly contact with him, to witness some of his conduct to you (for whom personally I care nothing; I only consider the brutal injustice with which he violated your natural claim to equality) — I say it was impossible for me to be thus situated and not feel the angel or the demon of my race at work within me. I followed my instinct, opposed a tyrant, and broke a chain."

Now this speech interested me much, both because it brought out Hunsden's character, and because it explained his motives; it interested me so much that I forgot to reply to it, and sat silent, pondering over a throng of ideas it had suggested.

"Are you grateful to me?" he asked, presently.

In fact I was grateful, or almost so, and I believe I half liked him at the moment, notwithstanding his proviso that what he had done was not out of regard for me. But human nature is perverse. Impossible to answer his blunt question in the affirmative, so I disclaimed all tendency to gratitude, and advised him if he expected any reward for his championship, to look for it in a better world, as he was not likely to meet with it here. In reply he termed me "a dry-hearted aristocratic scamp," whereupon I again charged him with having taken the bread out of my mouth.

"Your bread was dirty, man!" cried Hunsden — "dirty and unwholesome! It came through the hands of a tyrant, for I tell you Crimsworth is a tyrant, — a tyrant to his workpeople, a tyrant to his clerks, and will some day be a tyrant to his wife."

"Nonsense! bread is bread, and a salary is a salary. I've lost mine, and through your means."

"There's sense in what you say, after all," rejoined Hunsden. "I must say I am rather agreeably surprised to hear you make so practical an observation as that last. I had imagined now, from my previous observation of your character, that the sentimental delight you would have taken in your newly regained liberty would, for a while at least, have effaced all ideas of forethought and prudence. I think better of you for looking steadily to the needful."

"Looking steadily to the needful! How can I do otherwise? I must live, and to live I must have what you call 'the needful,' which I can only get by working. I repeat it, you have taken my work from me."

"What do you mean to do?" pursued Hunsden coolly. "You have influential relations; I suppose they'll soon provide you with another place."

"Influential relations? Who? I should like to know their names."

"The Seacombes."

"Stuff! I have cut them."

Hunsden looked at me incredulously.

"I have," said I, "and that definitively."

"You must mean they have cut you, William."

"As you please. They offered me their patronage on condition of my entering the Church; I declined both the terms and the recompence; I withdrew from my cold uncles, and preferred throwing myself into my elder brother's arms, from whose affectionate embrace I am now torn by the cruel intermeddling of a stranger — of yourself, in short."

I could not repress a half-smile as I said this; a similar demi-manifestation of feeling appeared at the same moment on Hunsden's lips.

"Oh, I see!" said he, looking into my eyes, and it was evident he did see right down into my heart. Having sat a minute or two with his chin resting on his hand, diligently occupied in the continued perusal of my countenance, he went on:

"Seriously, have you then nothing to expect from the Seacombes?"

"Yes, rejection and repulsion. Why do you ask me twice? How can hands stained with the ink of a counting-house, soiled with the grease of a wool-warehouse, ever again be permitted to come into contact with aristocratic palms?"

"There would be a difficulty, no doubt; still you are such a complete Seacombe in appearance, feature, language, almost manner, I wonder they should disown you."

"They have disowned me; so talk no more about it."

"Do you regret it, William?"

"No."

"Why not, lad?"

"Because they are not people with whom I could ever have had any sympathy."

"I say you are one of them."

"That merely proves that you know nothing at all about it; I am my mother's son, but not my uncles' nephew."

"Still — one of your uncles is a lord, though rather an obscure and not a very wealthy one, and the other a right honourable: you should consider worldly interest."

"Nonsense, Mr. Hunsden. You know or may know that even had I desired to be submissive to my uncles, I could not have stooped with a good enough grace ever to have won their favour. I should have sacrificed my own comfort and not have gained their patronage in return."

"Very likely — so you calculated your wisest plan was to follow your own devices at once?"

"Exactly. I must follow my own devices — I must, till the day of my death; because I can neither comprehend, adopt, nor work out those of other people."

Hunsden yawned. "Well," said he, "in all this, I see but one thing clearly-that is, that the whole affair is no business of mine." He stretched himself and again yawned. "I wonder what time it is," he went on: "I have an appointment for seven o'clock."

"Three quarters past six by my watch."

"Well, then I'll go." He got up. "You'll not meddle with trade again?" said he, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece.

"No; I think not."

"You would be a fool if you did. Probably, after all, you'll think better of your uncles' proposal and go into the Church."

"A singular regeneration must take place in my whole inner and outer man before I do that. A good clergyman is one of the best of men."

"Indeed! Do you think so?" interrupted Hunsden, scoffingly.

"I do, and no mistake. But I have not the peculiar points which go to make a good clergyman; and rather than adopt a profession for which I have no vocation, I would endure extremities of hardship from poverty."

"You're a mighty difficult customer to suit. You won't be a tradesman or a parson; you can't be a lawyer, or a doctor, or a gentleman, because you've no money. I'd recommend you to travel."

"What! without money?"

"You must travel in search of money, man. You can speak French — with a vile English accent, no doubt — still, you can speak it. Go on to the Continent, and see what will turn up for you there."

"God knows I should like to go!" exclaimed I with involuntary ardour.

"Go: what the deuce hinders you? You may get to Brussels, for instance, for five or six pounds, if you know how to manage with economy."

"Necessity would teach me if I didn't."

"Go, then, and let your wits make a way for you when you get there. I know Brussels almost as well as I know X— —, and I am sure it would suit such a one as you better than London."

"But occupation, Mr. Hunsden! I must go where occupation is to be had; and how could I get recommendation, or introduction, or employment at Brussels?"

"There speaks the organ of caution. You hate to advance a step before you know every inch of the way. You haven't a sheet of paper and a pen-and-ink?"

"I hope so," and I produced writing materials with alacrity; for I guessed what he was going to do. He sat down, wrote a few lines, folded, sealed, and addressed a letter, and held it out to me.

"There, Prudence, there's a pioneer to hew down the first rough difficulties of your path. I know well enough, lad, you are not one of those who will run their neck into a noose without seeing how they are to get it out again, and you're right there. A reckless man is my aversion, and nothing should ever persuade me to meddle with the concerns of such a one. Those who are reckless for themselves are generally ten times more so for their friends."

"This is a letter of introduction, I suppose?" said I, taking the epistle.

"Yes. With that in your pocket you will run no risk of finding yourself in a state of absolute destitution, which, I know, you will regard as a degradation — so should I, for that matter. The person to whom you will present it generally has two or three respectable places depending upon his recommendation."

"That will just suit me," said I.

"Well, and where's your gratitude?" demanded Mr. Hunsden; "don't you know how to say 'Thank you?'"

"I've fifteen pounds and a watch, which my godmother, whom I never saw, gave me eighteen years ago," was my rather irrelevant answer; and I further avowed myself a happy man, and professed that I did not envy any being in Christendom.

"But your gratitude?"

"I shall be off presently, Mr. Hunsden — to-morrow, if all be well: I'll not stay a day longer in X — — than I'm obliged."

"Very good — but it will be decent to make due acknowledgment for the assistance you have received; be quick! It is just going to strike seven: I'm waiting to be thanked."

"Just stand out of the way, will you, Mr. Hunsden: I want a key there is on the corner of the mantelpiece. I'll pack my portmanteau before I go to bed."

The house clock struck seven.

"The lad is a heathen," said Hunsden, and taking his hat from a sideboard, he left the room, laughing to himself. I had half an inclination to follow him: I really intended to leave X — — the next morning, and should certainly not have another opportunity of bidding him good-bye. The front door banged to.

"Let him go," said I, "we shall meet again some day."

CHAPTER VII.

READER, perhaps you were never in Belgium? Haply you don't know the physiognomy of the country? You have not its lineaments defined upon your memory, as I have them on mine?

Three — nay four — pictures line the four-walled cell where are stored for me the records of the past. First, Eton. All in that picture is in far perspective, receding, diminutive; but freshly coloured, green, dewy, with a spring sky, piled with glittering yet showery clouds; for my childhood was not all sunshine — it had its overcast, its cold, its stormy hours. Second, X — — , huge, dingy; the canvas cracked and smoked; a yellow sky, sooty clouds; no sun, no azure; the verdure of the suburbs blighted and sullied — a very dreary scene.

Third, Belgium; and I will pause before this landscape. As to the fourth, a curtain covers it, which I may hereafter withdraw, or may not, as suits my convenience and capacity. At any rate, for the present it must hang undisturbed. Belgium! name unromantic and unpoetic, yet name that whenever uttered has in my ear a sound, in my heart an echo, such as no other assemblage of syllables, however sweet or classic, can produce. Belgium! I repeat the word, now as I sit alone near midnight. It stirs my world of the past like a summons to resurrection; the graves unclose, the dead are raised; thoughts, feelings, memories that slept, are seen by me ascending from the clouds — haloed most of them — but while I gaze on their vapoury forms, and strive to ascertain definitely their outline, the sound which wakened them dies, and they sink, each and all, like a light wreath of mist, absorbed in the mould, recalled to urns, resealed in monuments. Farewell, luminous phantoms!

This is Belgium, reader. Look! don't call the picture a flat or a dull one — it was neither flat nor dull to me when I first beheld it. When I left Ostend on a mild February morning, and found myself on the road to Brussels, nothing could look vapid to me. My sense of enjoyment possessed an edge whetted to the finest, untouched, keen, exquisite. I was young; I had good health; pleasure and I had never met; no indulgence of hers had enervated or sated one faculty of my nature. Liberty I clasped in my arms for the first time, and the influence of her smile and embrace revived my life like the sun and the west wind. Yes, at that epoch I felt like a morning traveller who doubts not that from the hill he is ascending he shall behold a glorious sunrise; what if the track be strait, steep, and stony? he sees it not; his eyes are fixed on that summit, flushed already, flushed and gilded, and having gained it he is certain of the scene beyond. He knows that the sun will face him, that his chariot is even now coming over the eastern horizon, and that the herald breeze he feels on his cheek is opening for the god's career a clear, vast path of azure, amidst clouds soft as pearl and warm as flame. Difficulty and toil were to be my lot, but sustained by energy, drawn on by hopes as bright as vague, I deemed such a lot no hardship. I mounted now the hill in shade; there were pebbles, inequalities, briars in my path, but my eyes were fixed on the crimson peak above; my imagination was with the refulgent firmament beyond, and I thought nothing of the stones turning under my feet, or of the thorns scratching my face and hands.

I gazed often, and always with delight, from the window of the diligence (these, be it remembered, were not the days of trains and railroads). Well! and what did I see? I will tell you faithfully. Green, reedy swamps; fields fertile but flat, cultivated in patches that made them look like magnified kitchen-gardens; belts of cut trees, formal as pollard willows, skirting the horizon; narrow canals, gliding slow by the road-side; painted Flemish farmhouses; some very dirty hovels; a gray, dead sky; wet road, wet fields, wet house-tops: not a beautiful, scarcely a picturesque object met my eye along the whole route; yet to me, all was beautiful, all was more than picturesque. It continued fair so long as daylight lasted, though the moisture of many preceding damp days had sodden the whole country; as it grew dark, however, the rain recommenced, and it was through streaming and starless darkness my eye caught the first gleam of the lights of Brussels. I saw little of the city but its lights that night. Having alighted from the diligence, a fiacre conveyed me to the Hotel de — — , where I had been advised by a fellow-traveller to put up; having eaten a traveller's supper, I retired to bed, and slept a traveller's sleep.

Next morning I awoke from prolonged and sound repose with the impression that I was yet in X — — , and perceiving it to be broad daylight I started up, imagining that I had overslept myself and should be behind time at the counting-house. The momentary and painful sense of restraint vanished before the revived and reviving consciousness of freedom, as, throwing back the white curtains of my bed, I looked forth into a wide, lofty foreign chamber; how different from the small and dingy, though not uncomfortable, apartment I had occupied for a night or two at a respectable inn in London while waiting for the sailing of the packet! Yet far be it from me to profane the memory of that little dingy room! It, too, is dear to my soul; for there, as I lay in quiet and darkness, I first heard the great bell of St. Paul's telling London it was midnight, and well do I recall the deep, deliberate tones, so full charged with colossal phlegm and force. From the small, narrow window of that room, I first saw THE dome, looming through a London mist. I suppose the sensations, stirred by those first sounds, first sights, are felt but once; treasure them, Memory; seal them in urns, and keep them in safe niches! Well — I rose. Travellers talk of the apartments in foreign dwellings being bare and uncomfortable; I thought my chamber looked stately and cheerful. It had such large windows — CROISEES that opened like doors, with such broad, clear panes of glass; such a great looking-glass stood on my dressing-table — such a fine mirror glittered over the mantelpiece — the painted floor looked so clean and glossy; when I had dressed and was descending the stairs, the broad marble steps almost awed me, and so did the lofty hall into which they conducted. On the first landing I met a Flemish housemaid: she had wooden shoes, a short red petticoat, a printed cotton bedgown, her face was broad, her physiognomy eminently stupid; when I spoke to her in French, she answered me in Flemish, with an air the reverse of civil; yet I thought her charming; if she was not pretty or polite, she was, I conceived, very picturesque; she reminded me of the female figures in certain Dutch paintings I had seen in other years at Seacombe Hall.

I repaired to the public room; that, too, was very large and very lofty, and warmed by a stove; the floor was black, and the stove was black, and most of the furniture was black: yet I never experienced a freer sense of exhilaration than when I sat down at a very long, black table (covered, however, in part by a white cloth), and, having ordered breakfast, began to pour out my coffee from a little black coffee-pot. The stove might be dismal-looking to some eyes, not to mine, but it was indisputably very warm, and there were two gentlemen seated by it talking in French; impossible to follow their rapid utterance, or comprehend much of the purport of what they said — yet French, in the mouths of Frenchmen, or Belgians (I was not then sensible of the horrors of the Belgian accent) was as music to my ears. One of these gentlemen presently discerned me to be an Englishman — no doubt from the fashion in which I addressed the waiter; for I would persist in speaking French in my execrable South-of-England style, though the man understood English. The gentleman, after looking towards me once or twice, politely accosted me in very good English; I remember I wished to God that I could speak French as well; his fluency and correct pronunciation impressed me for the first time with a due notion of the cosmopolitan character of the capital I was in; it was my first experience of that skill in living languages I afterwards found to be so general in Brussels.

I lingered over my breakfast as long as I could; while it was there on the table, and while that stranger continued talking to me, I was a free, independent traveller; but at last the things were removed, the two gentlemen left the room; suddenly the illusion ceased, reality and business came back. I, a bondsman just released from the yoke, freed for one week from twenty-one years of constraint, must, of necessity, resume the fetters of dependency. Hardly had I tasted the delight of being without a master when duty issued her stern mandate: “Go forth and seek another service.” I never linger over a painful and necessary task; I never take pleasure before business, it is not in my nature to do so; impossible to enjoy a leisurely walk over the city, though I perceived the morning was very fine, until I had first presented Mr. Hunsden’s letter of introduction, and got fairly on to the track of a new situation. Wrenching my mind from liberty and delight, I seized my hat, and forced my reluctant body out of the Hotel de — — into the foreign street.

It was a fine day, but I would not look at the blue sky or at the stately houses round me; my mind was bent on one thing, finding out "Mr. Brown, Numero — , Rue Royale," for so my letter was addressed. By dint of inquiry I succeeded; I stood at last at the desired door, knocked, asked for Mr. Brown, and was admitted.

Being shown into a small breakfast-room, I found myself in the presence of an elderly gentleman — very grave, business-like, and respectable-looking. I presented Mr. Hunsden's letter; he received me very civilly. After a little desultory conversation he asked me if there was anything in which his advice or experience could be of use. I said, "Yes," and then proceeded to tell him that I was not a gentleman of fortune, travelling for pleasure, but an ex-counting-house clerk, who wanted employment of some kind, and that immediately too. He replied that as a friend of Mr. Hunsden's he would be willing to assist me as well as he could. After some meditation he named a place in a mercantile house at Liege, and another in a bookseller's shop at Louvain.

"Clerk and shopman!" murmured I to myself. "No." I shook my head. I had tried the high stool; I hated it; I believed there were other occupations that would suit me better; besides I did not wish to leave Brussels.

"I know of no place in Brussels," answered Mr. Brown, "unless indeed you were disposed to turn your attention to teaching. I am acquainted with the director of a large establishment who is in want of a professor of English and Latin."

I thought two minutes, then I seized the idea eagerly.

"The very thing, sir!" said I.

"But," asked he, "do you understand French well enough to teach Belgian boys English?"

Fortunately I could answer this question in the affirmative; having studied French under a Frenchman, I could speak the language intelligibly though not fluently. I could also read it well, and write it decently.

"Then," pursued Mr. Brown, "I think I can promise you the place, for Monsieur Pelet will not refuse a professor recommended by me; but come here again at five o'clock this afternoon, and I will introduce you to him."

The word "professor" struck me. "I am not a professor," said I.

"Oh," returned Mr. Brown, "professor, here in Belgium, means a teacher, that is all."

My conscience thus quieted, I thanked Mr. Brown, and, for the present, withdrew. This time I stepped out into the street with a relieved heart; the task I had imposed on myself for that day was executed. I might now take some hours of holiday. I felt free to look up. For the first time I remarked the sparkling clearness of the air, the deep blue of the sky, the gay clean aspect of the white-washed or painted houses; I saw what a fine street was the Rue Royale, and, walking leisurely along its broad pavement, I continued to survey its stately hotels, till the palisades, the gates, and trees of the park appearing in sight, offered to my eye a new attraction. I remember, before entering the park, I stood awhile to contemplate the statue of General Belliard, and then I advanced to the top of the great staircase just beyond, and I looked down into a narrow back street, which I afterwards learnt was called the Rue d'Isabelle. I well recollect that my eye rested on the green door of a rather large house opposite, where, on a brass plate, was inscribed, "Pensionnat de Demoiselles." Pensionnat! The word excited an uneasy sensation in my mind; it seemed to speak of restraint. Some of the demoiselles, externats no doubt, were at that moment issuing from the door — I looked for a pretty face amongst them, but their close, little French bonnets hid their features; in a moment they were gone.

I had traversed a good deal of Brussels before five o'clock arrived, but punctually as that hour struck I was again in the Rue Royale. Re-admitted to Mr. Brown's breakfast-room, I found him, as before, seated at the table, and he was not alone — a gentleman stood by the hearth. Two words of introduction designated him as my future master. "M. Pelet, Mr. Crimsworth; Mr. Crimsworth, M. Pelet" a bow on each side finished the ceremony. I don't know what sort of a bow I made; an ordinary one, I suppose, for I was in a tranquil, commonplace frame of mind; I felt none of the agitation which had troubled my first interview with Edward Crimsworth. M. Pelet's bow was extremely polite, yet not theatrical, scarcely French; he and I were presently seated opposite to each other. In a pleasing voice, low, and, out of consideration to my foreign ears, very distinct and deliberate, M. Pelet intimated that he had just been receiving from "le respectable M. Brown," an account of my attainments and character, which relieved him from all scruple as to the propriety of engaging me as professor of English and Latin in his establishment; nevertheless, for form's sake, he would put a few questions to test; my powers. He did, and expressed in flattering terms his satisfaction at my answers. The subject of salary next came on; it was fixed at one thousand francs per annum, besides board and lodging. "And in addition," suggested M. Pelet, "as there will be some hours in each day during which your services will not be required in my establishment, you may, in time, obtain employment in other seminaries, and thus turn your vacant moments to profitable account."

I thought this very kind, and indeed I found afterwards that the terms on which M. Pelet had engaged me were really liberal for Brussels; instruction being extremely cheap there on account of the number of teachers. It was further arranged that I should be installed in my new post the very next day, after which M. Pelet and I parted.

Well, and what was he like? and what were my impressions concerning him? He was a man of about forty years of age, of middle size, and rather emaciated figure; his face was pale, his cheeks were sunk, and his eyes hollow; his features were pleasing and regular, they had a French turn (for M. Pelet was no Fleming, but a Frenchman both by birth and parentage), yet the degree of harshness inseparable from Gallic lineaments was, in his case, softened by a mild blue eye, and a melancholy, almost suffering, expression of countenance; his physiognomy was “fine et spirituelle.” I use two French words because they define better than any English terms the species of intelligence with which his features were imbued. He was altogether an interesting and prepossessing personage. I wondered only at the utter absence of all the ordinary characteristics of his profession, and almost feared he could not be stern and resolute enough for a schoolmaster. Externally at least M. Pelet presented an absolute contrast to my late master, Edward Crimsworth.

Influenced by the impression I had received of his gentleness, I was a good deal surprised when, on arriving the next day at my new employer’s house, and being admitted to a first view of what was to be the sphere of my future labours, namely the large, lofty, and well lighted schoolrooms, I beheld a numerous assemblage of pupils, boys of course, whose collective appearance showed all the signs of a full, flourishing, and well-disciplined seminary. As I traversed the classes in company with M. Pelet, a profound silence reigned on all sides, and if by chance a murmur or a whisper arose, one glance from the pensive eye of this most gentle pedagogue stilled it instantly. It was astonishing, I thought, how so mild a check could prove so effectual. When I had perambulated the length and breadth of the classes, M. Pelet turned and said to me —

“Would you object to taking the boys as they are, and testing their proficiency in English?”

The proposal was unexpected. I had thought I should have been allowed at least 3 days to prepare; but it is a bad omen to commence any career by hesitation, so I just stepped to the professor’s desk near which we stood, and faced the circle of my pupils. I took a moment to collect my thoughts, and likewise to frame in French the sentence by which I proposed to open business. I made it as short as possible: —

“Messieurs, prenez vos livres de lecture.”

“Anglais ou Francais, monsieur?” demanded a thickset, moon-faced young Flamand in a blouse. The answer was fortunately easy: —

“Anglais.”

I determined to give myself as little trouble as possible in this lesson; it would not do yet to trust my unpractised tongue with the delivery of explanations; my accent and idiom would be too open to the criticisms of the young gentlemen before me, relative to whom I felt already it would be necessary at once to take up an advantageous position, and I proceeded to employ means accordingly.

“Commencez!” cried I, when they had all produced their books. The moon-faced youth (by name Jules Vanderkelkov, as I afterwards learnt) took the first sentence. The “livre de lecture” was the “Vicar of Wakefield,” much used in foreign schools because it is supposed to contain prime samples of conversational English; it might, however, have been a Runic scroll for any resemblance the words, as enunciated by Jules, bore to the language in ordinary use amongst the natives of Great Britain. My God! how he did snuffle, snort, and wheeze! All he said was said in his throat and nose, for it is thus the Flamands speak, but I heard him to the end of his paragraph without proffering a word of correction, whereat he looked vastly self-complacent, convinced, no doubt, that he had acquitted himself like a real born and bred "Anglais." In the same unmoved silence I listened to a dozen in rotation, and when the twelfth had concluded with splutter, hiss, and mumble, I solemnly laid down the book.

"Arretez!" said I. There was a pause, during which I regarded them all with a steady and somewhat stern gaze; a dog, if stared at hard enough and long enough, will show symptoms of embarrassment, and so at length did my bench of Belgians. Perceiving that some of the faces before me were beginning to look sullen, and others ashamed, I slowly joined my hands, and ejaculated in a deep "voix de poitrine" —

"Comme c'est affreux!"

They looked at each other, pouted, coloured, swung their heels; they were not pleased, I saw, but they were impressed, and in the way I wished them to be. Having thus taken them down a peg in their self-conceit, the next step was to raise myself in their estimation; not a very easy thing, considering that I hardly dared to speak for fear of betraying my own deficiencies.

"Ecoutez, messieurs!" said I, and I endeavoured to throw into my accents the compassionate tone of a superior being, who, touched by the extremity of the helplessness, which at first only excited his scorn, deigns at length to bestow aid. I then began at the very beginning of the "Vicar of Wakefield," and read, in a slow, distinct voice, some twenty pages, they all the while sitting mute and listening with fixed attention; by the time I had done nearly an hour had elapsed. I then rose and said: —

"C'est assez pour aujourd'hui, messieurs; demain nous recommencerons, et j'espere que tout ira bien."

With this oracular sentence I bowed, and in company with M. Pelet quitted the school-room.

"C'est bien! c'est tres bien!" said my principal as we entered his parlour. "Je vois que monsieur a de l'adresse; cela, me plait, car, dans l'instruction, l'adresse fait tout autant que le savoir."

From the parlour M. Pelet conducted me to my apartment, my "chambre," as Monsieur said with a certain air of complacency. It was a very small room, with an excessively small bed, but M. Pelet gave me to understand that I was to occupy it quite alone, which was of course a great comfort. Yet, though so limited in dimensions, it had two windows. Light not being taxed in Belgium, the people never grudge its admission into their houses; just here, however, this observation is not very APROPOS, for one of these windows was boarded up; the open windows looked into the boys' playground. I glanced at the other, as wondering what aspect it would present if disencumbered of the boards. M. Pelet read, I suppose, the expression of my eye; he explained: —

“La fenetre fermee donne sur un jardin appartenant a un pensionnat de demoiselles,” said he, “et les convenances exigent — enfin, vous comprenez — n’est-ce pas, monsieur?”

“Oui, oui,” was my reply, and I looked of course quite satisfied; but when M. Pelet had retired and closed the door after him, the first thing I did was to scrutinize closely the nailed boards, hoping to find some chink or crevice which I might enlarge, and so get a peep at the consecrated ground. My researches were vain, for the boards were well joined and strongly nailed. It is astonishing how disappointed I felt. I thought it would have been so pleasant to have looked out upon a garden planted with flowers and trees, so amusing to have watched the demoiselles at their play; to have studied female character in a variety of phases, myself the while sheltered from view by a modest muslin curtain, whereas, owing doubtless to the absurd scruples of some old duenna of a directress, I had now only the option of looking at a bare gravelled court, with an enormous “pas de geant” in the middle, and the monotonous walls and windows of a boys’ school-house round. Not only then, but many a time after, especially in moments of weariness and low spirits, did I look with dissatisfied eyes on that most tantalizing board, longing to tear it away and get a glimpse of the green region which I imagined to lie beyond. I knew a tree grew close up to the window, for though there were as yet no leaves to rustle, I often heard at night the tapping of branches against the panes. In the daytime, when I listened attentively, I could hear, even through the boards, the voices of the demoiselles in their hours of recreation, and, to speak the honest truth, my sentimental reflections were occasionally a trifle disarranged by the not quite silvery, in fact the too often brazen sounds, which, rising from the unseen paradise below, penetrated clamorously into my solitude. Not to mince matters, it really seemed to me a doubtful case whether the lungs of Mdlle. Reuter’s girls or those of M. Pelet’s boys were the strongest, and when it came to shrieking the girls indisputably beat the boys hollow. I forgot to say, by-the-by, that Reuter was the name of the old lady who had had my window bearded up. I say old, for such I, of course, concluded her to be, judging from her cautious, chaperon-like proceedings; besides, nobody ever spoke of her as young. I remember I was very much amused when I first heard her Christian name; it was Zoraide — Mademoiselle Zoraide Reuter. But the continental nations do allow themselves vagaries in the choice of names, such as we sober English never run into. I think, indeed, we have too limited a list to choose from.

Meantime my path was gradually growing smooth before me. I, in a few weeks, conquered the teasing difficulties inseparable from the commencement of almost every career. Ere long I had acquired as much facility in speaking French as set me at my ease with my pupils; and as I had encountered them on a right footing at the very beginning, and continued tenaciously to retain the advantage I had early gained, they never attempted mutiny, which circumstance, all who are in any degree acquainted with the ongoings of Belgian schools, and who know the relation in which professors and pupils too frequently stand towards each other in those establishments, will consider an important and uncommon one. Before concluding this chapter I will say a word on the system I pursued with regard to my classes: my experience may possibly be of use to others.

It did not require very keen observation to detect the character of the youth of Brabant, but it needed a certain degree of tact to adopt one's measures to their capacity. Their intellectual faculties were generally weak, their animal propensities strong; thus there was at once an impotence and a kind of inert force in their natures; they were dull, but they were also singularly stubborn, heavy as lead and, like lead, most difficult to move. Such being the case, it would have been truly absurd to exact from them much in the way of mental exertion; having short memories, dense intelligence, feeble reflective powers, they recoiled with repugnance from any occupation that demanded close study or deep thought. Had the abhorred effort been extorted from them by injudicious and arbitrary measures on the part of the Professor, they would have resisted as obstinately, as clamorously, as desperate swine; and though not brave singly, they were relentless acting EN MASSE.

I understood that before my arrival in M. Pelet's establishment, the combined insubordination of the pupils had effected the dismissal of more than one English master. It was necessary then to exact only the most moderate application from natures so little qualified to apply — to assist, in every practicable way, understandings so opaque and contracted — to be ever gentle, considerate, yielding even, to a certain point, with dispositions so irrationally perverse; but, having reached that culminating point of indulgence, you must fix your foot, plant it, root it in rock — become immutable as the towers of Ste. Gudule; for a step — but half a step farther, and you would plunge headlong into the gulf of imbecility; there lodged, you would speedily receive proofs of Flemish gratitude and magnanimity in showers of Brabant saliva and handfuls of Low Country mud. You might smooth to the utmost the path of learning, remove every pebble from the track; but then you must finally insist with decision on the pupil taking your arm and allowing himself to be led quietly along the prepared road. When I had brought down my lesson to the lowest level of my dullest pupil's capacity — when I had shown myself the mildest, the most tolerant of masters — a word of impertinence, a movement of disobedience, changed me at once into a despot. I offered then but one alternative — submission and acknowledgment of error, or ignominious expulsion. This system answered, and my influence, by degrees, became established on a firm basis. "The boy is father to the man," it is said; and so I often thought when looked at my boys and remembered the political history of their ancestors. Pelet's school was merely an epitome of the Belgian nation.

CHAPTER VIII.

AND Pelet himself? How did I continue to like him? Oh, extremely well! Nothing could be more smooth, gentlemanlike, and even friendly, than his demeanour to me. I had to endure from him neither cold neglect, irritating interference, nor pretentious assumption of superiority. I fear, however, two poor, hard-worked Belgian ushers in the establishment could not have said as much; to them the director's manner was invariably dry, stern, and cool. I believe he perceived once or twice that I was a little shocked at the difference he made between them and me, and accounted for it by saying, with a quiet sarcastic smile —

"Ce ne sont que des Flamands — allez!"

And then he took his cigar gently from his lips and spat on the painted floor of the room in which we were sitting. Flamands certainly they were, and both had the true Flamand physiognomy, where intellectual inferiority is marked in lines none can mistake; still they were men, and, in the main, honest men; and I could not see why their being aboriginals of the flat, dull soil should serve as a pretext for treating them with perpetual severity and contempt. This idea, of injustice somewhat poisoned the pleasure I might otherwise have derived from Pelet's soft affable manner to myself. Certainly it was agreeable, when the day's work was over, to find one's employer an intelligent and cheerful companion; and if he was sometimes a little sarcastic and sometimes a little too insinuating, and if I did discover that his mildness was more a matter of appearance than of reality — if I did occasionally suspect the existence of flint or steel under an external covering of velvet — still we are none of us perfect; and weary as I was of the atmosphere of brutality and insolence in which I had constantly lived at X — — , I had no inclination now, on casting anchor in calmer regions, to institute at once a prying search after defects that were scrupulously withdrawn and carefully veiled from my view. I was willing to take Pelet for what he seemed — to believe him benevolent and friendly until some untoward event should prove him otherwise. He was not married, and I soon perceived he had all a Frenchman's, all a Parisian's notions about matrimony and women. I suspected a degree of laxity in his code of morals, there was something so cold and BLASE in his tone whenever he alluded to what he called "le beau sexe;" but he was too gentlemanlike to intrude topics I did not invite, and as he was really intelligent and really fond of intellectual subjects of discourse, he and I always found enough to talk about, without seeking themes in the mire. I hated his fashion of mentioning love; I abhorred, from my soul, mere licentiousness. He felt the difference of our notions, and, by mutual consent, we kept off ground debateable.

Pelet's house was kept and his kitchen managed by his mother, a real old Frenchwoman; she had been handsome — at least she told me so, and I strove to believe her; she was now ugly, as only continental old women can be; perhaps, though, her style of dress made her look uglier than she really was. Indoors she would go about without cap, her grey hair strangely dishevelled; then, when at home, she seldom wore a gown — only a shabby cotton camisole; shoes, too, were strangers to her feet, and in lieu of them she sported roomy slippers, trodden down at the heels. On the other hand, whenever it was her pleasure to appear abroad, as on Sundays and fete-days, she would put on some very brilliant-coloured dress, usually of thin texture, a silk bonnet with a wreath of flowers, and a very fine shawl. She was not, in the main, an ill-natured old woman, but an incessant and most indiscreet talker; she kept chiefly in and about the kitchen, and seemed rather to avoid her son's august presence; of him, indeed, she evidently stood in awe. When he reproved her, his reproofs were bitter and unsparing; but he seldom gave himself that trouble.

Madame Pelet had her own society, her own circle of chosen visitors, whom, however, I seldom saw, as she generally entertained them in what she called her "cabinet," a small den of a place adjoining the kitchen, and descending into it by one or two steps. On these steps, by-the-by, I have not unfrequently seen Madame Pelet seated with a trencher on her knee, engaged in the threefold employment of eating her dinner, gossiping with her favourite servant, the housemaid, and scolding her antagonist, the cook; she never dined, and seldom indeed took any meal with her son; and as to showing her face at the boys' table, that was quite out of the question. These details will sound very odd in English ears, but Belgium is not England, and its ways are not our ways.

Madame Pelet's habits of life, then, being taken into consideration, I was a good deal surprised when, one Thursday evening (Thursday was always a half-holiday), as I was sitting all alone in my apartment, correcting a huge pile of English and Latin exercises, a servant tapped at the door, and, on its being opened, presented Madame Pelet's compliments, and she would be happy to see me to take my "gouter" (a meal which answers to our English "tea") with her in the dining-room.

"Plait-il?" said I, for I thought I must have misunderstood, the message and invitation were so unusual; the same words were repeated. I accepted, of course, and as I descended the stairs, I wondered what whim had entered the old lady's brain; her son was out — gone to pass the evening at the Salle of the Grande Harmonie or some other club of which he was a member. Just as I laid my hand on the handle of the dining-room door, a queer idea glanced across my mind.

"Surely she's not going to make love to me," said I. "I've heard of old Frenchwomen doing odd things in that line; and the gouter? They generally begin such affairs with eating and drinking, I believe."

There was a fearful dismay in this suggestion of my excited imagination, and if I had allowed myself time to dwell upon it, I should no doubt have cut there and then, rushed back to my chamber, and bolted myself in; but whenever a danger or a horror is veiled with uncertainty, the primary wish of the mind is to ascertain first the naked truth, reserving the expedient of flight for the moment when its dread anticipation shall be realized. I turned the door-handle, and in an instant had crossed the fatal threshold, closed the door behind me, and stood in the presence of Madame Pelet.

Gracious heavens! The first view of her seemed to confirm my worst apprehensions. There she sat, dressed out in a light green muslin gown, on her head a lace cap with flourishing red roses in the frill; her table was carefully spread; there were fruit, cakes, and coffee, with a bottle of something — I did not know what. Already the cold sweat started on my brow, already I glanced back over my shoulder at the closed door, when, to my unspeakable relief, my eye, wandering mildly in the direction of the stove, rested upon a second figure, seated in a large fauteuil beside it. This was a woman, too, and, moreover, an old woman, and as fat and as rubicund as Madame Pelet was meagre and yellow; her attire was likewise very fine, and spring flowers of different hues circled in a bright wreath the crown of her violet-coloured velvet bonnet.

I had only time to make these general observations when Madame Pelet, coming forward with what she intended should be a graceful and elastic step, thus accosted me:

“Monsieur is indeed most obliging to quit his books, his studies, at the request of an insignificant person like me — will Monsieur complete his kindness by allowing me to present him to my dear friend Madame Reuter, who resides in the neighbouring house — the young ladies’ school.”

“Ah!” thought I, “I knew she was old,” and I bowed and took my seat. Madame Reuter placed herself at the table opposite to me.

“How do you like Belgium, Monsieur?” asked she, in an accent of the broadest Bruxellois. I could now well distinguish the difference between the fine and pure Parisian utterance of M. Pelet, for instance, and the guttural enunciation of the Flamands. I answered politely, and then wondered how so coarse and clumsy an old woman as the one before me should be at the head of a ladies’ seminary, which I had always heard spoken of in terms of high commendation. In truth there was something to wonder at. Madame Reuter looked more like a joyous, free-living old Flemish fermiere, or even a maitresse d’auberge, than a staid, grave, rigid directrice de pensionnat. In general the continental, or at least the Belgian old women permit themselves a licence of manners, speech, and aspect, such as our venerable granddames would recoil from as absolutely disreputable, and Madame Reuter’s jolly face bore evidence that she was no exception to the rule of her country; there was a twinkle and leer in her left eye; her right she kept habitually half shut, which I thought very odd indeed. After several vain attempts to comprehend the motives of these two droll old creatures for inviting me to join them at their gouter, I at last fairly gave it up, and resigning myself to inevitable mystification, I sat and looked first at one, then at the other, taking care meantime to do justice to the confitures, cakes, and coffee, with which they amply supplied me. They, too, ate, and that with no delicate appetite, and having demolished a large portion of the solids, they proposed a "petit verre." I declined. Not so Mesdames Pelet and Reuter; each mixed herself what I thought rather a stiff tumbler of punch, and placing it on a stand near the stove, they drew up their chairs to that convenience, and invited me to do the same. I obeyed; and being seated fairly between them, I was thus addressed first by Madame Pelet, then by Madame Reuter.

"We will now speak of business," said Madame Pelet, and she went on to make an elaborate speech, which, being interpreted, was to the effect that she had asked for the pleasure of my company that evening in order to give her friend Madame Reuter an opportunity of broaching an important proposal, which might turn out greatly to my advantage.

"Pourvu que vous soyez sage," said Madame Reuter, "et a vrai dire, vous en avez bien l'air. Take one drop of the punch" (or ponche, as she pronounced it); "it is an agreeable and wholesome beverage after a full meal."

I bowed, but again declined it. She went on:

"I feel," said she, after a solemn sip — "I feel profoundly the importance of the commission with which my dear daughter has entrusted me, for you are aware, Monsieur, that it is my daughter who directs the establishment in the next house?"

"Ah! I thought it was yourself, madame." Though, indeed, at that moment I recollected that it was called Mademoiselle, not Madame Reuter's pensionnat.

"I! Oh, no! I manage the house and look after the servants, as my friend Madame Pelet does for Monsieur her son — nothing more. Ah! you thought I gave lessons in class — did you?"

And she laughed loud and long, as though the idea tickled her fancy amazingly.

"Madame is in the wrong to laugh," I observed; "if she does not give lessons, I am sure it is not because she cannot;" and I whipped out a white pocket-handkerchief and wafted it, with a French grace, past my nose, bowing at the name time.

"Quel charmant jeune homme!" murmured Madame Pelet in a low voice. Madame Reuter, being less sentimental, as she was Flamand and not French, only laughed again.

"You are a dangerous person, I fear," said she; "if you can forge compliments at that rate, Zoraide will positively be afraid of you; but if you are good, I will keep your secret, and not tell her how well you can flatter. Now, listen what sort of a proposal she makes to you. She has heard that you are an excellent professor, and as she wishes to get the very beet masters for her school (car Zoraide fait tout comme une reine, c'est une veritable maitresse-femme), she has commissioned me to step over this afternoon, and sound Madame Pelet as to the possibility of engaging you. Zoraide is a wary general; she never advances without first examining well her ground I don't think she would be pleased if she knew I had already disclosed her intentions to you; she did not order me to go so far, but I thought there would be no harm in letting you into the secret, and Madame Pelet was of the same opinion. Take care, however, you don't betray either of us to Zoraide — to my daughter, I mean; she is so discreet and circumspect herself, she cannot understand that one should find a pleasure in gossiping a little — "

"C'est absolument comme mon fils!" cried Madame Pelet.

"All the world is so changed since our girlhood!" rejoined the other: "young people have such old heads now. But to return, Monsieur. Madame Pelet will mention the subject of your giving lessons in my daughter's establishment to her son, and he will speak to you; and then to-morrow, you will step over to our house, and ask to see my daughter, and you will introduce the subject as if the first intimation of it had reached you from M. Pelet himself, and be sure you never mention my name, for I would not displease Zoraide on any account.

"Bien! bien!" interrupted I — for all this chatter and circumlocution began to bore me very much; "I will consult M. Pelet, and the thing shall be settled as you desire. Good evening, mesdames — I am infinitely obliged to you."

"Comment! vous vous en allez deja?" exclaimed Madame Pelet.

"Prenez encore quelquechose, monsieur; une pomme cuite, des biscuits, encore une tasse de cafe?"

"Merci, merci, madame — au revoir." And I backed at last out of the apartment.

Having regained my own room, I set myself to turn over in my mind the incident of the evening. It seemed a queer affair altogether, and queerly managed; the two old women had made quite a little intricate mess of it; still I found that the uppermost feeling in my mind on the subject was one of satisfaction. In the first place it would be a change to give lessons in another seminary, and then to teach young ladies would be an occupation so interesting — to be admitted at all into a ladies' boarding-school would be an incident so new in my life. Besides, thought I, as I glanced at the boarded window, "I shall now at last see the mysterious garden: I shall gaze both on the angels and their Eden."

CHAPTER IX.

M. PELET could not of course object to the proposal made by Mdlle. Reuter; permission to accept such additional employment, should it offer, having formed an article of the terms on which he had engaged me. It was, therefore, arranged in the course of next day that I should be at liberty to give lessons in Mdlle. Reuter's establishment four afternoons in every week.

When evening came I prepared to step over in order to seek a conference with Mademoiselle herself on the subject; I had not had time to pay the visit before, having been all day closely occupied in class. I remember very well that before quitting my chamber, I held a brief debate with myself as to whether I should change my ordinary attire for something smarter. At last I concluded it would be a waste of labour. "Doubtless," thought I, "she is some stiff old maid; for though the daughter of Madame Reuter, she may well number upwards of forty winters; besides, if it were otherwise, if she be both young and pretty, I am not handsome, and no dressing can make me so, therefore I'll go as I am." And off I started, cursorily glancing sideways as I passed the toilet-table, surmounted by a looking-glass: a thin irregular face I saw, with sunk, dark eyes under a large, square forehead, complexion destitute of bloom or attraction; something young, but not youthful, no object to win a lady's love, no butt for the shafts of Cupid.

I was soon at the entrance of the pensionnat, in a moment I had pulled the bell; in another moment the door was opened, and within appeared a passage paved alternately with black and white marble; the walls were painted in imitation of marble also; and at the far end opened a glass door, through which I saw shrubs and a grass-plat, looking pleasant in the sunshine of the mild spring evening-for it was now the middle of April.

This, then, was my first glimpse of the garden; but I had not time to look long, the portress, after having answered in the affirmative my question as to whether her mistress was at home, opened the folding-doors of a room to the left, and having ushered me in, closed them behind me. I found myself in a salon with a very well-painted, highly varnished floor; chairs and sofas covered with white draperies, a green porcelain stove, walls hung with pictures in gilt frames, a gilt pendule and other ornaments on the mantelpiece, a large lustre pendent from the centre of the ceiling, mirrors, consoles, muslin curtains, and a handsome centre table completed the inventory of furniture. All looked extremely clean and glittering, but the general effect would have been somewhat chilling had not a second large pair of folding-doors, standing wide open, and disclosing another and smaller salon, more snugly furnished, offered some relief to the eye. This room was carpeted, and therein was a piano, a couch, a chiffonniere — above all, it contained a lofty window with a crimson curtain, which, being undrawn, afforded another glimpse of the garden, through the large, clear panes, round which some leaves of ivy, some tendrils of vine were trained.

"Monsieur Creemsvort, n'est ce pas?" said a voice behind me; and, starting involuntarily, I turned. I had been so taken up with the contemplation of the pretty little salon that I had not noticed the entrance of a person into the larger room. It was, however, Mdlle. Reuter who now addressed me, and stood close beside me; and when I had bowed with instantaneously recovered sang-froid — for I am not easily embarrassed — I commenced the conversation by remarking on the pleasant aspect of her little cabinet, and the advantage she had over M. Pelet in possessing a garden.

"Yes," she said, "she often thought so;" and added, "it is my garden, monsieur, which makes me retain this house, otherwise I should probably have removed to larger and more commodious premises long since; but you see I could not take my garden with me, and I should scarcely find one so large and pleasant anywhere else in town."

I approved her judgment.

"But you have not seen it yet," said she, rising; "come to the window and take a better view." I followed her; she opened the sash, and leaning out I saw in full the enclosed demesne which had hitherto been to me an unknown region. It was a long, not very broad strip of cultured ground, with an alley bordered by enormous old fruit trees down the middle; there was a sort of lawn, a parterre of rose-trees, some flower-borders, and, on the far side, a thickly planted copse of lilacs, laburnums, and acacias. It looked pleasant, to me — very pleasant, so long a time had elapsed since I had seen a garden of any sort. But it was not only on Mdlle. Reuter's garden that my eyes dwelt; when I had taken a view of her well-trimmed beds and budding shrubberies, I allowed my glance to come back to herself, nor did I hastily withdraw it.

I had thought to see a tall, meagre, yellow, conventual image in black, with a close white cap, bandaged under the chin like a nun's head-gear; whereas, there stood by me a little and roundly formed woman, who might indeed be older than I, but was still young; she could not, I thought, be more than six or seven and twenty; she was as fair as a fair Englishwoman; she had no cap; her hair was nut-brown, and she wore it in curls; pretty her features were not, nor very soft, nor very regular, but neither were they in any degree plain, and I already saw cause to deem them expressive. What was their predominant cast? Was it sagacity? — sense? Yes, I thought so; but I could scarcely as yet be sure. I discovered, however, that there was a certain serenity of eye, and freshness of complexion, most pleasing to behold. The colour on her cheek was like the bloom on a good apple, which is as sound at the core as it is red on the rind.

Mdlle. Reuter and I entered upon business. She said she was not absolutely certain of the wisdom of the step she was about to take, because I was so young, and parents might possibly object to a professor like me for their daughters: “But it is often well to act on one’s own judgment,” said she, “and to lead parents, rather than be led by them. The fitness of a professor is not a matter of age; and, from what I have heard, and from what I observe myself, I would much rather trust you than M. Ledru, the music-master, who is a married man of near fifty.”

I remarked that I hoped she would find me worthy of her good opinion; that if I knew myself, I was incapable of betraying any confidence reposed in me. “Du reste,” said she, “the surveillance will be strictly attended to.” And then she proceeded to discuss the subject of terms. She was very cautious, quite on her guard; she did not absolutely bargain, but she warily sounded me to find out what my expectations might be; and when she could not get me to name a sum, she reasoned and reasoned with a fluent yet quiet circumlocution of speech, and at last nailed me down to five hundred francs per annum — not too much, but I agreed. Before the negotiation was completed, it began to grow a little dusk. I did not hasten it, for I liked well enough to sit and hear her talk; I was amused with the sort of business talent she displayed. Edward could not have shown himself more practical, though he might have evinced more coarseness and urgency; and then she had so many reasons, so many explanations; and, after all, she succeeded in proving herself quite disinterested and even liberal. At last she concluded, she could say no more, because, as I acquiesced in all things, there was no further ground for the exercise of her parts of speech. I was obliged to rise. I would rather have sat a little longer; what had I to return to but my small empty room? And my eyes had a pleasure in looking at Mdlle. Reuter, especially now, when the twilight softened her features a little, and, in the doubtful dusk, I could fancy her forehead as open as it was really elevated, her mouth touched with turns of sweetness as well as defined in lines of sense. When I rose to go, I held out my hand, on purpose, though I knew it was contrary to the etiquette of foreign habits; she smiled, and said —

“Ah! c’est comme tous les Anglais,” but gave me her hand very kindly.

“It is the privilege of my country, Mademoiselle,” said I; “and, remember, I shall always claim it.”

She laughed a little, quite good-naturedly, and with the sort of tranquillity obvious in all she did — a tranquillity which soothed and suited me singularly, at least I thought so that evening. Brussels seemed a very pleasant place to me when I got out again into the street, and it appeared as if some cheerful, eventful, upward-tending career were even then opening to me, on that selfsame mild, still April night. So impressionable a being is man, or at least such a man as I was in those days.

CHAPTER X.

NEXT day the morning hours seemed to pass very slowly at M. Pelet's; I wanted the afternoon to come that I might go again to the neighbouring pensionnat and give my first lesson within its pleasant precincts; for pleasant they appeared to me. At noon the hour of recreation arrived; at one o'clock we had lunch; this got on the time, and at last St. Gudule's deep bell, tolling slowly two, marked the moment for which I had been waiting.

At the foot of the narrow back-stairs that descended from my room, I met M. Pelet.

"Comme vous avez l'air rayonnant!" said he. "Je ne vous ai jamais vu aussi gai. Que s'est-il donc passe?"

"Apparemment que j'aime les changements," replied I.

"Ah! je comprends — c'est cela-soyez sage seulement. Vous etes bien jeune — trop jeune pour le role que vous allez jouer; il faut prendre garde — savez-vous?"

"Mais quel danger y a-t-il?"

"Je n'en sais rien — ne vous laissez pas aller a de vives impressions — voila tout."

I laughed: a sentiment of exquisite pleasure played over my nerves at the thought that "vives impressions" were likely to be created; it was the deadness, the sameness of life's daily ongoings that had hitherto been my bane; my blouse-clad "eleves" in the boys' seminary never stirred in me any "vives impressions" except it might be occasionally some of anger. I broke from M. Pelet, and as I strode down the passage he followed me with one of his laughs — a very French, rakish, mocking sound.

Again I stood at the neighbouring door, and soon was re-admitted into the cheerful passage with its clear dove-colour imitation marble walls. I followed the portress, and descending a step, and making a turn, I found myself in a sort of corridor; a side-door opened, Mdlle. Reuter's little figure, as graceful as it was plump, appeared. I could now see her dress in full daylight; a neat, simple mousseline-laine gown fitted her compact round shape to perfection — delicate little collar and manchettes of lace, trim Parisian brodequins showed her neck, wrists, and feet, to complete advantage; but how grave was her face as she came suddenly upon me! Solicitude and business were in her eye — on her forehead; she looked almost stern. Her "Bon jour, monsieur," was quite polite, but so orderly, so commonplace, it spread directly a cool, damp towel over my "vives impressions." The servant turned back when her mistress appeared, and I walked slowly along the corridor, side by side with Mdlle. Reuter.

"Monsieur will give a lesson in the first class to-day," said she; "dictation or reading will perhaps be the best thing to begin with, for those are the easiest forms of communicating instruction in a foreign language; and, at the first, a master naturally feels a little unsettled."

She was quite right, as I had found from experience; it only remained for me to acquiesce. We proceeded now in silence. The corridor terminated in a hall, large, lofty, and square; a glass door on one side showed within a long narrow refectory, with tables, an armoire, and two lamps; it was empty; large glass doors, in front, opened on the playground and garden; a broad staircase ascended spirally on the opposite side; the remaining wall showed a pair of great folding-doors, now closed, and admitting: doubtless, to the classes.

Mdlle. Reuter turned her eye laterally on me, to ascertain, probably, whether I was collected enough to be ushered into her sanctum sanctorum. I suppose she judged me to be in a tolerable state of self-government, for she opened the door, and I followed her through. A rustling sound of uprising greeted our entrance; without looking to the right or left, I walked straight up the lane between two sets of benches and desks, and took possession of the empty chair and isolated desk raised on an estrade, of one step high, so as to command one division; the other division being under the surveillance of a maitresse similarly elevated. At the back of the estrade, and attached to a moveable partition dividing this schoolroom from another beyond, was a large tableau of wood painted black and varnished; a thick crayon of white chalk lay on my desk for the convenience of elucidating any grammatical or verbal obscurity which might occur in my lessons by writing it upon the tableau; a wet sponge appeared beside the chalk, to enable me to efface the marks when they had served the purpose intended.

I carefully and deliberately made these observations before allowing myself to take one glance at the benches before me; having handled the crayon, looked back at the tableau, fingered the sponge in order to ascertain that it was in a right state of moisture, I found myself cool enough to admit of looking calmly up and gazing deliberately round me.

And first I observed that Mdlle. Reuter had already glided away, she was nowhere visible; a maitresse or teacher, the one who occupied the corresponding estrade to my own, alone remained to keep guard over me; she was a little in the shade, and, with my short sight, I could only see that she was of a thin bony figure and rather tallowy complexion, and that her attitude, as she sat, partook equally of listlessness and affectation. More obvious, more prominent, shone on by the full light of the large window, were the occupants of the benches just before me, of whom some were girls of fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, some young women from eighteen (as it appeared to me) up to twenty; the most modest attire, the simplest fashion of wearing the hair, were apparent in all; and good features, ruddy, blooming complexions, large and brilliant eyes, forms full, even to solidity, seemed to abound. I did not bear the first view like a stoic; I was dazzled, my eyes fell, and in a voice somewhat too low I murmured —

"Prenez vos cahiers de dictee, mesdemoiselles."

Not so had I bid the boys at Pelet's take their reading-books. A rustle followed, and an opening of desks; behind the lifted lids which momentarily screened the heads bent down to search for exercise-books, I heard tittering and whispers.

"Eulalie, je suis prete a pamer de rire," observed one.

"Comme il a rougi en parlant!"

"Oui, c'est un veritable blanc-bec."

"Tais-toi, Hortense — il nous ecoute."

And now the lids sank and the heads reappeared; I had marked three, the whisperers, and I did not scruple to take a very steady look at them as they emerged from their temporary eclipse. It is astonishing what ease and courage their little phrases of flippancy had given me; the idea by which I had been awed was that the youthful beings before me, with their dark nun-like robes and softly braided hair, were a kind of half-angels. The light titter, the giddy whisper, had already in some measure relieved my mind of that fond and oppressive fancy.

The three I allude to were just in front, within half a yard of my estrade, and were among the most womanly-looking present. Their names I knew afterwards, and may as well mention now; they were Eulalie, Hortense, Caroline. Eulalie was tall, and very finely shaped: she was fair, and her features were those of a Low Country Madonna; many a "figure de Vierge" have I seen in Dutch pictures exactly resembling hers; there were no angles in her shape or in her face, all was curve and roundness — neither thought, sentiment, nor passion disturbed by line or flush the equality of her pale, clear skin; her noble bust heaved with her regular breathing, her eyes moved a little — by these evidences of life alone could I have distinguished her from some large handsome figure moulded in wax. Hortense was of middle size and stout, her form was ungraceful, her face striking, more alive and brilliant than Eulalie's, her hair was dark brown, her complexion richly coloured; there were frolic and mischief in her eye: consistency and good sense she might possess, but none of her features betokened those qualities.

Caroline was little, though evidently full grown; raven-black hair, very dark eyes, absolutely regular features, with a colourless olive complexion, clear as to the face and sallow about the neck, formed in her that assemblage of points whose union many persons regard as the perfection of beauty. How, with the tintless pallor of her skin and the classic straightness of her lineaments, she managed to look sensual, I don't know. I think her lips and eyes contrived the affair between them, and the result left no uncertainty on the beholder's mind. She was sensual now, and in ten years' time she would be coarse — promise plain was written in her face of much future folly.

If I looked at these girls with little scruple, they looked at me with still less. Eulalie raised her unmoved eye to mine, and seemed to expect, passively but securely, an impromptu tribute to her majestic charms. Hortense regarded me boldly, and giggled at the same time, while she said, with an air of impudent freedom —

“Dictez-nous quelquechose de facile pour commencer, monsieur.”

Caroline shook her loose ringlets of abundant but somewhat coarse hair over her rolling black eyes; parting her lips, as full as those of a hot-blooded Maroon, she showed her well-set teeth sparkling between them, and treated me at the same time to a smile “de sa facon.” Beautiful as Pauline Borghese, she looked at the moment scarcely purer than Lucrece de Borgia. Caroline was of noble family. I heard her lady-mother’s character afterwards, and then I ceased to wonder at the precocious accomplishments of the daughter. These three, I at once saw, deemed themselves the queens of the school, and conceived that by their splendour they threw all the rest into the shade. In less than five minutes they had thus revealed to me their characters, and in less than five minutes I had buckled on a breast-plate of steely indifference, and let down a visor of impassible austerity.

“Take your pens and commence writing,” said I, in as dry and trite a voice as if I had been addressing only Jules Vanderkelkov and Co.

The dictee now commenced. My three belles interrupted me perpetually with little silly questions and uncalled-for remarks, to some of which I made no answer, and to others replied very quietly and briefly. “Comment dit-on point et virgule en Anglais, monsieur?”

“Semi-colon, mademoiselle.”

“Semi-collong? Ah, comme c’est drole!” (giggle.)

“J’ai une si mauvaise plume — impossible d’ecrire!”

“Mais, monsieur — je ne sais pas suivre — vous allez si vite.”

“Je n’ai rien compris, moi!”

Here a general murmur arose, and the teacher, opening her lips for the first time, ejaculated —

“Silence, mesdemoiselles!”

No silence followed — on the contrary, the three ladies in front began to talk more loudly.

“C’est si difficile, l’Anglais!”

“Je deteste la dictee.”

“Quel ennui d’ecrire quelquechose que l’on ne comprend pas!”

Some of those behind laughed: a degree of confusion began to pervade the class; it was necessary to take prompt measures.

“Donnez-moi votre cahier,” said I to Eulalie in an abrupt tone; and bending over, I took it before she had time to give it.

“Et vous, mademoiselle-donnez-moi le votre,” continued I, more mildly, addressing a little pale, plain looking girl who sat in the first row of the other division, and whom I had remarked as being at once the ugliest and the most attentive in the room; she rose up, walked over to me, and delivered her book with a grave, modest curtsey. I glanced over the two dictations; Eulalie’s was slurred, blotted, and full of silly mistakes — Sylvie’s (such was the name of the ugly little girl) was clearly written, it contained no error against sense, and but few faults of orthography. I coolly read aloud both exercises, marking the faults — then I looked at Eulalie:

"C'est honteux!" said I, and I deliberately tore her dictation in four parts, and presented her with the fragments. I returned Sylvie her book with a smile, saying —

"C'est bien — je suis content de vous."

Sylvie looked calmly pleased, Eulalie swelled like an incensed turkey, but the mutiny was quelled: the conceited coquetry and futile flirtation of the first bench were exchanged for a taciturn sullenness, much more convenient to me, and the rest of my lesson passed without interruption.

A bell clanging out in the yard announced the moment for the cessation of school labours. I heard our own bell at the same time, and that of a certain public college immediately after. Order dissolved instantly; up started every pupil, I hastened to seize my hat, bow to the maitresse, and quit the room before the tide of externats should pour from the inner class, where I knew near a hundred were prisoned, and whose rising tumult I already heard.

I had scarcely crossed the hall and gained the corridor, when Mdlle. Reuter came again upon me.

"Step in here a moment," said she, and she held open the door of the side room from whence she had issued on my arrival; it was a SALLE-A-MANGER, as appeared from the beaufet and the armoire vitree, filled with glass and china, which formed part of its furniture. Ere she had closed the door on me and herself, the corridor was already filled with day-pupils, tearing down their cloaks, bonnets, and cabas from the wooden pegs on which they were suspended; the shrill voice of a maitresse was heard at intervals vainly endeavouring to enforce some sort of order; vainly, I say: discipline there was none in these rough ranks, and yet this was considered one of the best-conducted schools in Brussels.

"Well, you have given your first lesson," began Mdlle. Reuter in the most calm, equable voice, as though quite unconscious of the chaos from which we were separated only by a single wall.

"Were you satisfied with your pupils, or did any circumstance in their conduct give you cause for complaint? Conceal nothing from me, repose in me entire confidence."

Happily, I felt in myself complete power to manage my pupils without aid; the enchantment, the golden haze which had dazzled my perspicuity at first, had been a good deal dissipated. I cannot say I was chagrined or downcast by the contrast which the reality of a pensionnat de demoiselles presented to my vague ideal of the same community; I was only enlightened and amused; consequently, I felt in no disposition to complain to Mdlle. Reuter, and I received her considerate invitation to confidence with a smile.

"A thousand thanks, mademoiselle, all has gone very smoothly."

She looked more than doubtful.

"Et les trois demoiselles du premier banc?" said she.

"Ah! tout va au mieux!" was my answer, and Mdlle. Reuter ceased to question me; but her eye — not large, not brilliant, not melting, or kindling, but astute, penetrating, practical, showed she was even with me; it let out a momentary gleam, which said plainly, "Be as close as you like, I am not dependent on your candour; what you would conceal I already know."

By a transition so quiet as to be scarcely perceptible, the directress's manner changed; the anxious business-air passed from her face, and she began chatting about the weather and the town, and asking in neighbourly wise after M. and Madame Pelet. I answered all her little questions; she prolonged her talk, I went on following its many little windings; she sat so long, said so much, varied so often the topics of discourse, that it was not difficult to perceive she had a particular aim in thus detaining me. Her mere words could have afforded no clue to this aim, but her countenance aided; while her lips uttered only affable commonplaces, her eyes reverted continually to my face. Her glances were not given in full, but out of the corners, so quietly, so stealthily, yet I think I lost not one. I watched her as keenly as she watched me; I perceived soon that she was feeling after my real character; she was searching for salient points, and weak; points, and eccentric points; she was applying now this test, now that, hoping in the end to find some chink, some niche, where she could put in her little firm foot and stand upon my neck — mistress of my nature, Do not mistake me, reader, it was no amorous influence she wished to gain — at that time it was only the power of the politician to which she aspired; I was now installed as a professor in her establishment, and she wanted to know where her mind was superior to mine — by what feeling or opinion she could lead me.

I enjoyed the game much, and did not hasten its conclusion; sometimes I gave her hopes, beginning a sentence rather weakly, when her shrewd eye would light up — she thought she had me; having led her a little way, I delighted to turn round and finish with sound, hard sense, whereat her countenance would fall. At last a servant entered to announce dinner; the conflict being thus necessarily terminated, we parted without having gained any advantage on either side: Mdlle. Reuter had not even given me an opportunity of attacking her with feeling, and I had managed to baffle her little schemes of craft. It was a regular drawn battle. I again held out my hand when I left the room, she gave me hers; it was a small and white hand, but how cool! I met her eye too in full — obliging her to give me a straightforward look; this last test went against me: it left her as it found her — moderate, temperate, tranquil; me it disappointed.

"I am growing wiser," thought I, as I walked back to M. Pelet's. "Look at this little woman; is she like the women of novelists and romancers? To read of female character as depicted in Poetry and Fiction, one would think it was made up of sentiment, either for good or bad — here is a specimen, and a most sensible and respectable specimen, too, whose staple ingredient is abstract reason. No Talleyrand was ever more passionless than Zoraide Reuter!” So I thought then; I found afterwards that blunt susceptibilities are very consistent with strong propensities.

CHAPTER XI.

I HAD indeed had a very long talk with the crafty little politician, and on regaining my quarters, I found that dinner was half over. To be late at meals was against a standing rule of the establishment, and had it been one of the Flemish ushers who thus entered after the removal of the soup and the commencement of the first course, M. Pelet would probably have greeted him with a public rebuke, and would certainly have mulcted him both of soup and fish; as it was, that polite though partial gentleman only shook his head, and as I took my place, unrolled my napkin, and said my heretical grace to myself, he civilly despatched a servant to the kitchen, to bring me a plate of "puree aux carottes" (for this was a maigre-day), and before sending away the first course, reserved for me a portion of the stock-fish of which it consisted. Dinner being over, the boys rushed out for their evening play; Kint and Vandam (the two ushers) of course followed them. Poor fellows! if they had not looked so very heavy, so very soulless, so very indifferent to all things in heaven above or in the earth beneath, I could have pitied them greatly for the obligation they were under to trail after those rough lads everywhere and at all times; even as it was, I felt disposed to scout myself as a privileged prig when I turned to ascend to my chamber, sure to find there, if not enjoyment, at least liberty; but this evening (as had often happened before) I was to be still farther distinguished.

"Eh bien, mauvais sujet!" said the voice of M. Pelet behind me, as I set my foot on the first step of the stair, "ou allez-vous? Venez a la salle-a-manger, que je vous gronde un peu."

"I beg pardon, monsieur," said I, as I followed him to his private sitting-room, "for having returned so late — it was not my fault."

"That is just what I want to know," rejoined M. Pelet, as he ushered me into the comfortable parlour with a good wood-fire — for the stove had now been removed for the season. Having rung the bell he ordered "Coffee for two," and presently he and I were seated, almost in English comfort, one on each side of the hearth, a little round table between us, with a coffee-pot, a sugar-basin, and two large white china cups. While M. Pelet employed himself in choosing a cigar from a box, my thoughts reverted to the two outcast ushers, whose voices I could hear even now crying hoarsely for order in the playground.

"C'est une grande responsabilite, que la surveillance," observed I.

"Plait-il?" dit M. Pelet.

I remarked that I thought Messieurs Vandam and Kint must sometimes be a little fatigued with their labours.

"Des betes de somme, — des betes de somme," murmured scornfully the director. Meantime I offered him his cup of coffee.

"Servez-vous mon garcon," said he blandly, when I had put a couple of huge lumps of continental sugar into his cup. "And now tell me why you stayed so long at Mdlle. Reuter's. I know that lessons conclude, in her establishment as in mine, at four o'clock, and when you returned it was past five."

"Mdlle. wished to speak with me, monsieur."

"Indeed! on what subject? if one may ask."

"Mademoiselle talked about nothing, monsieur."

"A fertile topic! and did she discourse thereon in the schoolroom, before the pupils?"

"No; like you, monsieur, she asked me to walk into her parlour."

"And Madame Reuter — the old duenna — my mother's gossip, was there, of course?"

"No, monsieur; I had the honour of being quite alone with mademoiselle."

"C'est joli — cela," observed M. Pelet, and he smiled and looked into the fire.

"Honi soit qui mal y pense," murmured I, significantly.

"Je connais un peu ma petite voisine — voyez-vous."

"In that case, monsieur will be able to aid me in finding out what was mademoiselle's reason for making me sit before her sofa one mortal hour, listening to the most copious and fluent dissertation on the merest frivolities."

"She was sounding your character."

"I thought so, monsieur."

"Did she find out your weak point?"

"What is my weak point?"

"Why, the sentimental. Any woman sinking her shaft deep enough, will at last reach a fathomless spring of sensibility in thy breast, Crimsworth."

I felt the blood stir about my heart and rise warm to my cheek.

"Some women might, monsieur."

"Is Mdlle. Reuter of the number? Come, speak frankly, mon fils; elle est encore jeune, plus agee que toi peut-etre, mais juste asset pour unir la tendresse d'une petite maman a l'amour d'une epouse devouee; n'est-ce pas que cela t'irait superieurement?"

"No, monsieur; I should like my wife to be my wife, and not half my mother."

"She is then a little too old for you?"

"No, monsieur, not a day too old if she suited me in other things."

"In what does she not suit you, William? She is personally agreeable, is she not?"

"Very; her hair and complexion are just what I admire; and her turn of form, though quite Belgian, is full of grace."

"Bravo! and her face? her features? How do you like them?"

"A little harsh, especially her mouth."

"Ah, yes! her mouth," said M. Pelet, and he chuckled inwardly. "There is character about her mouth — firmness — but she has a very pleasant smile; don't you think so?"

"Rather crafty."

"True, but that expression of craft is owing to her eyebrows; have you remarked her eyebrows?"

I answered that I had not.

"You have not seen her looking down then?" said he.

"No."

"It is a treat, notwithstanding. Observe her when she has some knitting, or some other woman's work in hand, and sits the image of peace, calmly intent on her needles and her silk, some discussion meantime going on around her, in the course of which peculiarities of character are being developed, or important interests canvassed; she takes no part in it; her humble, feminine mind is wholly with her knitting; none of her features move; she neither presumes to smile approval, nor frown disapprobation; her little hands assiduously ply their unpretending task; if she can only get this purse finished, or this bonnet-grec completed, it is enough for her. If gentlemen approach her chair, a deeper quiescence, a meeker modesty settles on her features, and clothes her general mien; observe then her eyebrows, et dites-moi s'il n'y a pas du chat dans l'un et du renard dans l'autre."

"I will take careful notice the first opportunity," said I.

"And then," continued M. Pelet, "the eyelid will flicker, the light-coloured lashes be lifted a second, and a blue eye, glancing out from under the screen, will take its brief, sly, searching survey, and retreat again."

I smiled, and so did Pelet, and after a few minutes' silence, I asked:

"Will she ever marry, do you think?"

"Marry! Will birds pair? Of course it is both her intention and resolution to marry when she finds a suitable match, and no one is better aware than herself of the sort of impression she is capable of producing; no one likes better to captivate in a quiet way. I am mistaken if she will not yet leave the print of her stealing steps on thy heart, Crimsworth."

"Of her steps? Confound it, no! My heart is not a plank to be walked on."

"But the soft touch of a patte de velours will do it no harm."

"She offers me no patte de velours; she is all form and reserve with me."

"That to begin with; let respect be the foundation, affection the first floor, love the superstructure; Mdlle. Reuter is a skilful architect."

"And interest, M. Pelet — interest. Will not mademoiselle consider that point?"

"Yes, yes, no doubt; it will be the cement between every stone. And now we have discussed the directress, what of the pupils? N'y-a-t-il pas de belles etudes parmi ces jeunes tetes?"

"Studies of character? Yes; curious ones, at least, I imagine; but one cannot divine much from a first interview."

"Ah, you affect discretion; but tell me now, were you not a little abashed before these blooming young creatures?

"At first, yes; but I rallied and got through with all due sang-froid."

"I don't believe you."

"It is true, notwithstanding. At first I thought them angels, but they did not leave me long under that delusion; three of the eldest and handsomest undertook the task of setting me right, and they managed so cleverly that in five minutes I knew them, at least, for what they were — three arrant coquettes."

"Je les connais!" exclaimed M. Pelet. "Elles sont toujours au premier rang a l'eglise et a la promenade; une blonde superbe, une jolie espiegle, une belle brune."

"Exactly."

"Lovely creatures all of them — heads for artists; what a group they would make, taken together! Eulalie (I know their names), with her smooth braided hair and calm ivory brow. Hortense, with her rich chesnut locks so luxuriantly knotted, plaited, twisted, as if she did not know how to dispose of all their abundance, with her vermilion lips, damask cheek, and roguish laughing eye. And Caroline de Blemont! Ah, there is beauty! beauty in perfection. What a cloud of sable curls about the face of a houri! What fascinating lips! What glorious black eyes! Your Byron would have worshipped her, and you — you cold, frigid islander! — you played the austere, the insensible in the presence of an Aphrodite so exquisite?"

I might have laughed at the director's enthusiasm had I believed it real, but there was something in his tone which indicated got-up raptures. I felt he was only affecting fervour in order to put me off my guard, to induce me to come out in return, so I scarcely even smiled. He went on:

"Confess, William, do not the mere good looks of Zoraide Reuter appear dowdyish and commonplace compared with the splendid charms of some of her pupils?"

The question discomposed me, but I now felt plainly that my principal was endeavouring (for reasons best known to himself — at that time I could not fathom them) to excite ideas and wishes in my mind alien to what was right and honourable. The iniquity of the instigation proved its antidote, and when he further added: —

"Each of those three beautiful girls will have a handsome fortune; and with a little address, a gentlemanlike, intelligent young fellow like you might make himself master of the hand, heart, and purse of any one of the trio."

I replied by a look and an interrogative "Monsieur?" which startled him.

He laughed a forced laugh, affirmed that he had only been joking, and demanded whether I could possibly have thought him in earnest. Just then the bell rang; the play-hour was over; it was an evening on which M. Pelet was accustomed to read passages from the drama and the belles lettres to his pupils. He did not wait for my answer, but rising, left the room, humming as he went some gay strain of Beranger's.

CHAPTER XII.

DAILY, as I continued my attendance at the seminary of Mdlle. Reuter, did I find fresh occasions to compare the ideal with the real. What had I known of female character previously to my arrival at Brussels? Precious little. And what was my notion of it? Something vague, slight, gauzy, glittering; now when I came in contact with it I found it to be a palpable substance enough; very hard too sometimes, and often heavy; there was metal in it, both lead and iron.

Let the idealists, the dreamers about earthly angel and human flowers, just look here while I open my portfolio and show them a sketch or two, pencilled after nature. I took these sketches in the second-class schoolroom of Mdlle. Reuter's establishment, where about a hundred specimens of the genus "jeune fille" collected together, offered a fertile variety of subject. A miscellaneous assortment they were, differing both in caste and country; as I sat on my estrade and glanced over the long range of desks, I had under my eye French, English, Belgians, Austrians, and Prussians. The majority belonged to the class bourgeois; but there were many countesses, there were the daughters of two generals and of several colonels, captains, and government EMPLOYES; these ladies sat side by side with young females destined to be demoiselles de magasins, and with some Flamandes, genuine aborigines of the country. In dress all were nearly similar, and in manners there was small difference; exceptions there were to the general rule, but the majority gave the tone to the establishment, and that tone was rough, boisterous, masked by a point-blank disregard of all forbearance towards each other or their teachers; an eager pursuit by each individual of her own interest and convenience; and a coarse indifference to the interest and convenience of every one else. Most of them could lie with audacity when it appeared advantageous to do so. All understood the art of speaking fair when a point was to be gained, and could with consummate skill and at a moment's notice turn the cold shoulder the instant civility ceased to be profitable. Very little open quarrelling ever took place amongst them; but backbiting and talebearing were universal. Close friendships were forbidden by the rules of the school, and no one girl seemed to cultivate more regard for another than was just necessary to secure a companion when solitude would have been irksome. They were each and all supposed to have been reared in utter unconsciousness of vice. The precautions used to keep them ignorant, if not innocent, were innumerable. How was it, then, that scarcely one of those girls having attained the age of fourteen could look a man in the face with modesty and propriety? An air of bold, impudent flirtation, or a loose, silly leer, was sure to answer the most ordinary glance from a masculine eye. I know nothing of the arcana of the

Roman Catholic religion, and I am not a bigot in matters of theology, but I suspect the root of this precocious impurity, so obvious, so general in Popish countries, is to be found in the discipline, if not the doctrines of the Church of Rome. I record what I have seen: these girls belonged to what are called the respectable ranks of society; they had all been carefully brought up, yet was the mass of them mentally depraved. So much for the general view: now for one or two selected specimens.

The first picture is a full length of Aurelia Koslow, a German fraulein, or rather a half-breed between German and Russian. She is eighteen years of age, and has been sent to Brussels to finish her education; she is of middle size, stiffly made, body long, legs short, bust much developed but not compactly moulded, waist disproportionately compressed by an inhumanly braced corset, dress carefully arranged, large feet tortured into small bottines, head small, hair smoothed, braided, oiled, and gummed to perfection; very low forehead, very diminutive and vindictive grey eyes, somewhat Tartar features, rather flat nose, rather high-cheek bones, yet the ensemble not positively ugly; tolerably good complexion. So much for person. As to mind, deplorably ignorant and ill-informed: incapable of writing or speaking correctly even German, her native tongue, a dunce in French, and her attempts at learning English a mere farce, yet she has been at school twelve years; but as she invariably gets her exercises, of every description, done by a fellow pupil, and reads her lessons off a book; concealed in her lap, it is not wonderful that her progress has been so snail-like. I do not know what Aurelia’s daily habits of life are, because I have not the opportunity of observing her at all times; but from what I see of the state of her desk, books, and papers, I should say she is slovenly and even dirty; her outward dress, as I have said, is well attended to, but in passing behind her bench, I have remarked that her neck is gray for want of washing, and her hair, so glossy with gum and grease, is not such as one feels tempted to pass the hand over, much less to run the fingers through. Aurelia’s conduct in class, at least when I am present, is something extraordinary, considered as an index of girlish innocence. The moment I enter the room, she nudges her next neighbour and indulges in a half-suppressed laugh. As I take my seat on the estrade, she fixes her eye on me; she seems resolved to attract, and, if possible, monopolize my notice: to this end she launches at me all sorts of looks, languishing, provoking, leering, laughing. As I am found quite proof against this sort of artillery — for we scorn what, unasked, is lavishly offered — she has recourse to the expedient of making noises; sometimes she sighs, sometimes groans, sometimes utters inarticulate sounds, for which language has no name. If, in walking up the schoolroom, I pass near her, she puts out her foot that it may touch mine; if I do not happen to observe the manoeuvre, and my boot comes in contact with her brodequin, she affects to fall into convulsions of suppressed laughter; if I notice the snare and avoid it, she expresses her mortification in sullen muttering, where I hear myself abused in bad French, pronounced with an intolerable Low German accent.

Not far from Mdlle. Koslow sits another young lady by name Adele Dronsart: this is a Belgian, rather low of stature, in form heavy, with broad waist, short neck and limbs, good red and white complexion, features well chiselled and regular, well-cut eyes of a clear brown colour, light brown hair, good teeth, age not much above fifteen, but as full-grown as a stout young Englishwoman of twenty. This portrait gives the idea of a somewhat dumpy but good-looking damsel, does it not? Well, when I looked along the row of young heads, my eye generally stopped at this of Adele's; her gaze was ever waiting for mine, and it frequently succeeded in arresting it. She was an unnatural-looking being — so young, fresh, blooming, yet so Gorgon-like. Suspicion, sullen ill-temper were on her forehead, vicious propensities in her eye, envy and panther-like deceit about her mouth. In general she sat very still; her massive shape looked as if it could not bend much, nor did her large head — so broad at the base, so narrow towards the top — seem made to turn readily on her short neck. She had but two varieties of expression; the prevalent one a forbidding, dissatisfied scowl, varied sometimes by a most pernicious and perfidious smile. She was shunned by her fellow-pupils, for, bad as many of them were, few were as bad as she.

Aurelia and Adele were in the first division of the second class; the second division was headed by a pensionnaire named Juanna Trista. This girl was of mixed Belgian and Spanish origin; her Flemish mother was dead, her Catalonian father was a merchant residing in the — — Isles, where Juanna had been born and whence she was sent to Europe to be educated. I wonder that any one, looking at that girl's head and countenance, would have received her under their roof. She had precisely the same shape of skull as Pope Alexander the Sixth; her organs of benevolence, veneration, conscientiousness, adhesiveness, were singularly small, those of self-esteem, firmness, destructiveness, combativeness, preposterously large; her head sloped up in the penthouse shape, was contracted about the forehead, and prominent behind; she had rather good, though large and marked features; her temperament was fibrous and bilious, her complexion pale and dark, hair and eyes black, form angular and rigid but proportionate, age fifteen.

Juanna was not very thin, but she had a gaunt visage, and her "regard" was fierce and hungry; narrow as was her brow, it presented space enough for the legible graving of two words, Mutiny and Hate; in some one of her other lineaments I think the eye — cowardice had also its distinct cipher. Mdlle. Trista thought fit to trouble my first lessons with a coarse work-day sort of turbulence; she made noises with her mouth like a horse, she ejected her saliva, she uttered brutal expressions; behind and below her were seated a band of very vulgar, inferior-looking Flamandes, including two or three examples of that deformity of person and imbecility of intellect whose frequency in the Low Countries would seem to furnish proof that the climate is such as to induce degeneracy of the human mind and body; these, I soon found, were completely under her influence, and with their aid she got up and sustained a swinish tumult, which I was constrained at last to quell by ordering her and two of her tools to rise from their seats, and, having kept them standing five minutes, turning them bodily out of the schoolroom: the accomplices into a large place adjoining called the grands salle; the principal into a cabinet, of which I closed the door and pocketed the key. This judgment I executed in the presence of Mdlle. Reuter, who looked much aghast at beholding so decided a proceeding — the most severe that had ever been ventured on in her establishment. Her look of affright I answered with one of composure, and finally with a smile, which perhaps flattered, and certainly soothed her. Juanna Trista remained in Europe long enough to repay, by malevolence and ingratitude, all who had ever done her a good turn; and she then went to join her father in the — — Isles, exulting in the thought that she should there have slaves, whom, as she said, she could kick and strike at will.

These three pictures are from the life. I possess others, as marked and as little agreeable, but I will spare my reader the exhibition of them.

Doubtless it will be thought that I ought now, by way of contrast, to show something charming; some gentle virgin head, circled with a halo, some sweet personification of innocence, clasping the dove of peace to her bosom. No: I saw nothing of the sort, and therefore cannot portray it. The pupil in the school possessing the happiest disposition was a young girl from the country, Louise Path; she was sufficiently benevolent and obliging, but not well taught nor well mannered; moreover, the plague-spot of dissimulation was in her also; honour and principle were unknown to her, she had scarcely heard their names. The least exceptionable pupil was the poor little Sylvie I have mentioned once before. Sylvie was gentle in manners, intelligent in mind; she was even sincere, as far as her religion would permit her to be so, but her physical organization was defective; weak health stunted her growth and chilled her spirits, and then, destined as she was for the cloister, her whole soul was warped to a conventual bias, and in the tame, trained subjection of her manner, one read that she had already prepared herself for her future course of life, by giving up her independence of thought and action into the hands of some despotic confessor. She permitted herself no original opinion, no preference of companion or employment; in everything she was guided by another. With a pale, passive, automaton air, she went about all day long doing what she was bid; never what she liked, or what, from innate conviction, she thought it right to do. The poor little future religieuse had been early taught to make the dictates of her own reason and conscience quite subordinate to the will of her spiritual director. She was the model pupil of Mdlle. Reuter's establishment; pale, blighted image, where life lingered feebly, but whence the soul had been conjured by Romish wizard-craft!

A few English pupils there were in this school, and these might be divided into two classes. 1st. The continental English — the daughters chiefly of broken adventurers, whom debt or dishonour had driven from their own country. These poor girls had never known the advantages of settled homes, decorous example, or honest Protestant education; resident a few months now in one Catholic school, now in another, as their parents wandered from land to land — from France to Germany, from Germany to Belgium — they had picked up some scanty instruction, many bad habits, losing every notion even of the first elements of religion and morals, and acquiring an imbecile indifference to every sentiment that can elevate humanity; they were distinguishable by an habitual look of sullen dejection, the result of crushed self-respect and constant browbeating from their Popish fellow-pupils, who hated them as English, and scorned them as heretics.

The second class were British English. Of these I did not encounter half a dozen during the whole time of my attendance at the seminary; their characteristics were clean but careless dress, ill-arranged hair (compared with the tight and trim foreigners), erect carriage, flexible figures, white and taper hands, features more irregular, but also more intellectual than those of the Belgians, grave and modest countenances, a general air of native propriety and decency; by this last circumstance alone I could at a glance distinguish the daughter of Albion and nursling of Protestantism from the foster-child of Rome, the PROTEGEE of Jesuistry: proud, too, was the aspect of these British girls; at once envied and ridiculed by their continental associates, they warded off insult with austere civility, and met hate with mute disdain; they eschewed company-keeping, and in the midst of numbers seemed to dwell isolated.

The teachers presiding over this mixed multitude were three in number, all French — their names Mdlles. Zephyrine, Pelagie, and Suzette; the two last were commonplace personages enough; their look was ordinary, their manner was ordinary, their temper was ordinary, their thoughts, feelings, and views were all ordinary — were I to write a chapter on the subject I could not elucidate it further. Zephyrine was somewhat more distinguished in appearance and deportment than Pelagie and Suzette, but in character genuine Parisian coquette, perfidious, mercenary, and dry-hearted. A fourth maitresse I sometimes saw who seemed to come daily to teach needlework, or netting, or lace-mending, or some such flimsy art; but of her I never had more than a passing glimpse, as she sat in the CARRE, with her frames and some dozen of the elder pupils about her, consequently I had no opportunity of studying her character, or even of observing her person much; the latter, I remarked, had a very English air for a maitresse, otherwise it was not striking; of character I should think; she possessed but little, as her pupils seemed constantly "en revolte" against her authority. She did not reside in the house; her name, I think, was Mdlle. Henri.

Amidst this assemblage of all that was insignificant and defective, much that was vicious and repulsive (by that last epithet many would have described the two or three stiff, silent, decently behaved, ill-dressed British girls), the sensible, sagacious, affable directress shone like a steady star over a marsh full of Jack-o'-lanthorns; profoundly aware of her superiority, she derived an inward bliss from that consciousness which sustained her under all the care and responsibility inseparable from her position; it kept her temper calm, her brow smooth, her manner tranquil. She liked — as who would not? — on entering the school-room, to feel that her sole presence sufficed to diffuse that order and quiet which all the remonstrances, and even commands, of her underlings frequently failed to enforce; she liked to stand in comparison, or rather — contrast, with those who surrounded her, and to know that in personal as well as mental advantages, she bore away the undisputed palm of preference — (the three teachers were all plain.) Her pupils she managed with such indulgence and address, taking always on herself the office of recompenser and eulogist, and abandoning to her subalterns every invidious task of blame and punishment, that they all regarded her with deference, if not with affection; her teachers did not love her, but they submitted because they were her inferiors in everything; the various masters who attended her school were each and all in some way or other under her influence; over one she had acquired power by her skilful management of his bad temper; over another by little attentions to his petty caprices; a third she had subdued by flattery; a fourth — a timid man — she kept in awe by a sort of austere decision of mien; me, she still watched, still tried by the most ingenious tests — she roved round me, baffled, yet persevering; I believe she thought I was like a smooth and bare precipice, which offered neither jutting stone nor tree-root, nor tuft of grass to aid the climber. Now she flattered with exquisite tact, now she moralized, now she tried how far I was accessible to mercenary motives, then she disported on the brink of affection — knowing that some men are won by weakness — anon, she talked excellent sense, aware that others have the folly to admire judgment. I found it at once pleasant and easy to evade all these efforts; it was sweet, when she thought me nearly won, to turn round and to smile in her very eyes, half scornfully, and then to witness her scarcely veiled, though mute mortification. Still she persevered, and at last, I am bound to confess it, her finger, essaying, proving every atom of the casket, touched its secret spring, and for a moment the lid sprung open; she laid her hand on the jewel within; whether she stole and broke it, or whether the lid shut again with a snap on her fingers, read on, and you shall know.

It happened that I came one day to give a lesson when I was indisposed; I had a bad cold and a cough; two hours' incessant talking left me very hoarse and tired; as I quitted the schoolroom, and was passing along the corridor, I met Mdlle. Reuter; she remarked, with an anxious air, that I looked very pale and tired. "Yes," I said, "I was fatigued;" and then, with increased interest, she rejoined, "You shall not go away till you have had some refreshment." She persuaded me to step into the parlour, and was very kind and gentle while I stayed. The next day she was kinder still; she came herself into the class to see that the windows were closed, and that there was no draught; she exhorted me with friendly earnestness not to over-exert myself; when I went away, she gave me her hand unasked, and I could not but mark, by a respectful and gentle pressure, that I was sensible of the favour, and grateful for it. My modest demonstration kindled a little merry smile on her countenance; I thought her almost charming. During the remainder of the evening, my mind was full of impatience for the afternoon of the next day to arrive, that I might see her again.

I was not disappointed, for she sat in the class during the whole of my subsequent lesson, and often looked at me almost with affection. At four o'clock she accompanied me out of the schoolroom, asking with solicitude after my health, then scolding me sweetly because I spoke too loud and gave myself too much trouble; I stopped at the glass-door which led into the garden, to hear her lecture to the end; the door was open, it was a very fine day, and while I listened to the soothing reprimand, I looked at the sunshine and flowers, and felt very happy. The day-scholars began to pour from the schoolrooms into the passage.

"Will you go into the garden a minute or two," asked she, "till they are gone?"

I descended the steps without answering, but I looked back as much as to say —

"You will come with me?"

In another minute I and the directress were walking side by side down the alley bordered with fruit-trees, whose white blossoms were then in full blow as well as their tender green leaves. The sky was blue, the air still, the May afternoon was full of brightness and fragrance. Released from the stifling class, surrounded with flowers and foliage, with a pleasing, smiling, affable woman at my side — how did I feel? Why, very enviably. It seemed as if the romantic visions my imagination had suggested of this garden, while it was yet hidden from me by the jealous boards, were more than realized; and, when a turn in the alley shut out the view of the house, and some tall shrubs excluded M. Pelet's mansion, and screened us momentarily from the other houses, rising amphitheatre-like round this green spot, I gave my arm to Mdlle. Reuter, and led her to a garden-chair, nestled under some lilacs near. She sat down; I took my place at her side. She went on talking to me with that ease which communicates ease, and, as I listened, a revelation dawned in my mind that I was on the brink of falling in love. The dinner-bell rang, both at her house and M. Pelet's; we were obliged to part; I detained her a moment as she was moving away.

"I want something," said I.

"What?" asked Zoraide naively.

"Only a flower."

"Gather it then — or two, or twenty, if you like."

"No — one will do-but you must gather it, and give it to me."

"What a caprice!" she exclaimed, but she raised herself on her tip-toes, and, plucking a beautiful branch of lilac, offered it to me with grace. I took it, and went away, satisfied for the present, and hopeful for the future.

Certainly that May day was a lovely one, and it closed in moonlight night of summer warmth and serenity. I remember this well; for, having sat up late that evening, correcting devoirs, and feeling weary and a little oppressed with the closeness of my small room, I opened the often-mentioned boarded window, whose boards, however, I had persuaded old Madame Pelet to have removed since I had filled the post of professor in the pensionnat de demoiselles, as, from that time, it was no longer "inconvenient" for me to overlook my own pupils at their sports. I sat down in the window-seat, rested my arm on the sill, and leaned out: above me was the clear-obscure of a cloudless night sky — splendid moonlight subdued the tremulous sparkle of the stars — below lay the garden, varied with silvery lustre and deep shade, and all fresh with dew — a grateful perfume exhaled from the closed blossoms of the fruit-trees — not a leaf stirred, the night was breezeless. My window looked directly down upon a certain walk of Mdlle. Reuter's garden, called "l'allee defendue," so named because the pupils were forbidden to enter it on account of its proximity to the boys' school. It was here that the lilacs and laburnums grew especially thick; this was the most sheltered nook in the enclosure, its shrubs screened the garden-chair where that afternoon I had sat with the young directress. I need not say that my thoughts were chiefly with her as I leaned from the lattice, and let my eye roam, now over the walks and borders of the garden, now along the many-windowed front of the house which rose white beyond the masses of foliage. I wondered in what part of the building was situated her apartment; and a single light, shining through the persiennes of one croisee, seemed to direct me to it.

"She watches late," thought I, "for it must be now near midnight. She is a fascinating little woman," I continued in voiceless soliloquy; "her image forms a pleasant picture in memory; I know she is not what the world calls pretty — no matter, there is harmony in her aspect, and I like it; her brown hair, her blue eye, the freshness of her cheek, the whiteness of her neck, all suit my taste. Then I respect her talent; the idea of marrying a doll or a fool was always abhorrent to me: I know that a pretty doll, a fair fool, might do well enough for the honeymoon; but when passion cooled, how dreadful to find a lump of wax and wood laid in my bosom, a half idiot clasped in my arms, and to remember that I had made of this my equal — nay, my idol — to know that I must pass the rest of my dreary life with a creature incapable of understanding what I said, of appreciating what I thought, or of sympathizing with what I felt! "Now, Zoraide Reuter," thought I, "has tact, CARACTERE, judgment, discretion; has she heart? What a good, simple little smile played about her lips when she gave me the branch of lilacs! I have thought her crafty, dissembling, interested sometimes, it is true; but may not much that looks like cunning and dissimulation in her conduct be only the efforts made by a bland temper to traverse quietly perplexing difficulties? And as to interest, she wishes to make her way in the world, no doubt, and who can blame her? Even if she be truly deficient in sound principle, is it not rather her misfortune than her fault? She has been brought up a Catholic: had she been born an Englishwoman, and reared a Protestant, might she not have added straight integrity to all her other excellences? Supposing she were to marry an English and Protestant husband, would she not, rational, sensible as she is, quickly acknowledge the superiority of right over expediency, honesty over policy? It would be worth a man's while to try the experiment; to-morrow I will renew my observations. She knows that I watch her: how calm she is under scrutiny! it seems rather to gratify than annoy her." Here a strain of music stole in upon my monologue, and suspended it; it was a bugle, very skilfully played, in the neighbourhood of the park, I thought, or on the Place Royale. So sweet were the tones, so subduing their effect at that hour, in the midst of silence and under the quiet reign of moonlight, I ceased to think, that I might listen more intently. The strain retreated, its sound waxed fainter and was soon gone; my ear prepared to repose on the absolute hush of midnight once more. No. What murmur was that which, low, and yet near and approaching nearer, frustrated the expectation of total silence? It was some one conversing — yes, evidently, an audible, though subdued voice spoke in the garden immediately below me. Another answered; the first voice was that of a man, the second that of a woman; and a man and a woman I saw coming slowly down the alley. Their forms were at first in shade, I could but discern a dusk outline of each, but a ray of moonlight met them at the termination of the walk, when they were under my very nose, and revealed very plainly, very unequivocally, Mdlle. Zoraide Reuter, arm-in-arm, or hand-in-hand (I forget which) with my principal, confidant, and counsellor, M. Francois Pelet. And M. Pelet was saying —

"A quand donc le jour des noces, ma bien-aimee?"

And Mdlle. Reuter answered —

"Mais, Francois, tu sais bien qu'il me serait impossible de me marier avant les vacances."

"June, July, August, a whole quarter!" exclaimed the director. "How can I wait so long? — I who am ready, even now, to expire at your feet with impatience!"

"Ah! if you die, the whole affair will be settled without any trouble about notaries and contracts; I shall only have to order a slight mourning dress, which will be much sooner prepared than the nuptial trousseau."

"Cruel Zoraide! you laugh at the distress of one who loves you so devotedly as I do: my torment is your sport; you scruple not to stretch my soul on the rack of jealousy; for, deny it as you will, I am certain you have cast encouraging glances on that school-boy, Crimsworth; he has presumed to fall in love, which he dared not have done unless you had given him room to hope."

"What do you say, Francois? Do you say Crimsworth is in love with me?"

"Over head and ears."

"Has he told you so?"

"No — but I see it in his face: he blushes whenever your name is mentioned." A little laugh of exulting coquetry announced Mdlle. Reuter's gratification at this piece of intelligence (which was a lie, by-the-by — I had never been so far gone as that, after all). M. Pelet proceeded to ask what she intended to do with me, intimating pretty plainly, and not very gallantly, that it was nonsense for her to think of taking such a "blanc-bec" as a husband, since she must be at least ten years older than I (was she then thirty-two? I should not have thought it). I heard her disclaim any intentions on the subject — the director, however, still pressed her to give a definite answer.

"Francois," said she, "you are jealous," and still she laughed; then, as if suddenly recollecting that this coquetry was not consistent with the character for modest dignity she wished to establish, she proceeded, in a demure voice: "Truly, my dear Francois, I will not deny that this young Englishman may have made some attempts to ingratiate himself with me; but, so far from giving him any encouragement, I have always treated him with as much reserve as it was possible to combine with civility; affianced as I am to you, I would give no man false hopes; believe me, dear friend." Still Pelet uttered murmurs of distrust — so I judged, at least, from her reply.

"What folly! How could I prefer an unknown foreigner to you? And then — not to flatter your vanity — Crimsworth could not bear comparison with you either physically or mentally; he is not a handsome man at all; some may call him gentleman-like and intelligent-looking, but for my part — "

The rest of the sentence was lost in the distance, as the pair, rising from the chair in which they had been seated, moved away. I waited their return, but soon the opening and shutting of a door informed me that they had re-entered the house; I listened a little longer, all was perfectly still; I listened more than an hour — at last I heard M. Pelet come in and ascend to his chamber. Glancing once more towards the long front of the garden-house, I perceived that its solitary light was at length extinguished; so, for a time, was my faith in love and friendship. I went to bed, but something feverish and fiery had got into my veins which prevented me from sleeping much that night.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEXT morning I rose with the dawn, and having dressed myself and stood half-an-hour, my elbow leaning on the chest of drawers, considering what means I should adopt to restore my spirits, fagged with sleeplessness, to their ordinary tone — for I had no intention of getting up a scene with M. Pelet, reproaching him with perfidy, sending him a challenge, or performing other gambadoes of the sort — I hit at last on the expedient of walking out in the cool of the morning to a neighbouring establishment of baths, and treating myself to a bracing plunge. The remedy produced the desired effect. I came back at seven o'clock steadied and invigorated, and was able to greet M. Pelet, when he entered to breakfast, with an unchanged and tranquil countenance; even a cordial offering of the hand and the flattering appellation of "mon fils," pronounced in that caressing tone with which Monsieur had, of late days especially, been accustomed to address me, did not elicit any external sign of the feeling which, though subdued, still glowed at my heart. Not that I nursed vengeance — no; but the sense of insult and treachery lived in me like a kindling, though as yet smothered coal. God knows I am not by nature vindictive; I would not hurt a man because I can no longer trust or like him; but neither my reason nor feelings are of the vacillating order — they are not of that sand-like sort where impressions, if soon made, are as soon effaced. Once convinced that my friend's disposition is incompatible with my own, once assured that he is indelibly stained with certain defects obnoxious to my principles, and I dissolve the connection. I did so with Edward. As to Pelet, the discovery was yet new; should I act thus with him? It was the question I placed before my mind as I stirred my cup of coffee with a half-pistolet (we never had spoons), Pelet meantime being seated opposite, his pallid face looking as knowing and more haggard than usual, his blue eye turned, now sternly on his boys and ushers, and now graciously on me.

"Circumstances must guide me," said I; and meeting Pelet's false glance and insinuating smile, I thanked heaven that I had last night opened my window and read by the light of a full moon the true meaning of that guileful countenance. I felt half his master, because the reality of his nature was now known to me; smile and flatter as he would, I saw his soul lurk behind his smile, and heard in every one of his smooth phrases a voice interpreting their treacherous import.

But Zoraide Reuter? Of course her defection had cut me to the quick? That stint; must have gone too deep for any consolations of philosophy to be available in curing its smart? Not at all. The night fever over, I looked about for balm to that wound also, and found some nearer home than at Gilead. Reason was my physician; she began by proving that the prize I had missed was of little value: she admitted that, physically, Zoraide might have suited me, but affirmed that our souls were not in harmony, and that discord must have resulted from the union of her mind with mine. She then insisted on the suppression of all repining, and commanded me rather to rejoice that I had escaped a snare. Her medicament did me good. I felt its strengthening effect when I met the directress the next day; its stringent operation on the nerves suffered no trembling, no faltering; it enabled me to face her with firmness, to pass her with ease. She had held out her hand to me — that I did not choose to see. She had greeted me with a charming smile — it fell on my heart like light on stone. I passed on to the estrade, she followed me; her eye, fastened on my face, demanded of every feature the meaning of my changed and careless manner. "I will give her an answer," thought I; and, meeting her gaze full, arresting, fixing her glance, I shot into her eyes, from my own, a look, where there was no respect, no love, no tenderness, no gallantry; where the strictest analysis could detect nothing but scorn, hardihood, irony. I made her bear it, and feel it; her steady countenance did not change, but her colour rose, and she approached me as if fascinated. She stepped on to the estrade, and stood close by my side; she had nothing to say. I would not relieve her embarrassment, and negligently turned over the leaves of a book.

"I hope you feel quite recovered to-day," at last she said, in a low tone.

"And I, mademoiselle, hope that you took no cold last night in consequence of your late walk in the garden."

Quick enough of comprehension, she understood me directly; her face became a little blanched — a very little — but no muscle in her rather marked features moved; and, calm and self-possessed, she retired from the estrade, taking her seat quietly at a little distance, and occupying herself with netting a purse. I proceeded to give my lesson; it was a "Composition," i.e., I dictated certain general questions, of which the pupils were to compose the answers from memory, access to books being forbidden. While Mdlle. Eulalie, Hortense, Caroline, &c., were pondering over the string of rather abstruse grammatical interrogatories I had propounded, I was at liberty to employ the vacant half hour in further observing the directress herself. The green silk purse was progressing fast in her hands; her eyes were bent upon it; her attitude, as she sat netting within two yards of me, was still yet guarded; in her whole person were expressed at once, and with equal clearness, vigilance and repose — a rare union! Looking at her, I was forced, as I had often been before, to offer her good sense, her wondrous self-control, the tribute of involuntary admiration. She had felt that I had withdrawn from her my esteem; she had seen contempt and coldness in my eye, and to her, who coveted the approbation of all around her, who thirsted after universal good opinion, such discovery must have been an acute wound. I had witnessed its effect in the momentary pallor of her cheek-cheek unused to vary; yet how quickly, by dint of self-control, had she recovered her composure! With what quiet dignity she now sat, almost at my side, sustained by her sound and vigorous sense; no trembling in her somewhat lengthened, though shrewd upper lip, no coward shame on her austere forehead!

“There is metal there,” I said, as I gazed. “Would that there were fire also, living ardour to make the steel glow — then I could love her.”

Presently I discovered that she knew I was watching her, for she stirred not, she lifted not her crafty eyelid; she had glanced down from her netting to her small foot, peeping from the soft folds of her purple merino gown; thence her eye reverted to her hand, ivory white, with a bright garnet ring on the forefinger, and a light frill of lace round the wrist; with a scarcely perceptible movement she turned her head, causing her nut-brown curls to wave gracefully. In these slight signs I read that the wish of her heart, the design of her brain, was to lure back the game she had scared. A little incident gave her the opportunity of addressing me again.

While all was silence in the class — silence, but for the rustling of copy-books and the travelling of pens over their pages — a leaf of the large folding-door, opening from the hall, unclosed, admitting a pupil who, after making a hasty obeisance, ensconced herself with some appearance of trepidation, probably occasioned by her entering so late, in a vacant seat at the desk nearest the door. Being seated, she proceeded, still with an air of hurry and embarrassment, to open her cabas, to take out her books; and, while I was waiting for her to look up, in order to make out her identity — for, shortsighted as I was, I had not recognized her at her entrance — Mdlle. Reuter, leaving her chair, approached the estrade.

“Monsieur Creemsvort,” said she, in a whisper: for when the schoolrooms were silent, the directress always moved with velvet tread, and spoke in the most subdued key, enforcing order and stillness fully as much by example as precept: “Monsieur Creemsvort, that young person, who has just entered, wishes to have the advantage of taking lessons with you in English; she is not a pupil of the house; she is, indeed, in one sense, a teacher, for she gives instruction in lace-mending, and in little varieties of ornamental needle-work. She very properly proposes to qualify herself for a higher department of education, and has asked permission to attend your lessons, in order to perfect her knowledge of English, in which language she has, I believe, already made some progress; of course it is my wish to aid her in an effort so praiseworthy; you will permit her then to benefit by your instruction — n’est ce pas, monsieur?” And Mdlle. Reuter’s eyes were raised to mine with a look at once naive, benign, and beseeching.

I replied, “Of course,” very laconically, almost abruptly.

“Another word,” she said, with softness: “Mdlle. Henri has not received a regular education; perhaps her natural talents are not of the highest order: but I can assure you of the excellence of her intentions, and even of the amiability of her disposition. Monsieur will then, I am sure, have the goodness to be considerate with her at first, and not expose her backwardness, her inevitable deficiencies, before the young ladies, who, in a sense, are her pupils. Will

Monsieur Creemsvort favour me by attending to this hint?" I nodded. She continued with subdued earnestness —

"Pardon me, monsieur, if I venture to add that what I have just said is of importance to the poor girl; she already experiences great difficulty in impressing these giddy young things with a due degree of deference for her authority, and should that difficulty be increased by new discoveries of her incapacity, she might find her position in my establishment too painful to be retained; a circumstance I should much regret for her sake, as she can ill afford to lose the profits of her occupation here."

Mdlle. Reuter possessed marvellous tact; but tact the most exclusive, unsupported by sincerity, will sometimes fail of its effect; thus, on this occasion, the longer she preached about the necessity of being indulgent to the governess pupil, the more impatient I felt as I listened. I discerned so clearly that while her professed motive was a wish to aid the dull, though well-meaning Mdlle. Henri, her real one was no other than a design to impress me with an idea of her own exalted goodness and tender considerateness; so having again hastily nodded assent to her remarks, I obviated their renewal by suddenly demanding the compositions, in a sharp accent, and stepping from the estrade, I proceeded to collect them. As I passed the governess-pupil, I said to her —

"You have come in too late to receive a lesson to-day; try to be more punctual next time."

I was behind her, and could not read in her face the effect of my not very civil speech. Probably I should not have troubled myself to do so, had I been full in front; but I observed that she immediately began to slip her books into her cabas again; and, presently, after I had returned to the estrade, while I was arranging the mass of compositions, I heard the folding-door again open and close; and, on looking up, I perceived her place vacant. I thought to myself, "She will consider her first attempt at taking a lesson in English something of a failure;" and I wondered whether she had departed in the sulks, or whether stupidity had induced her to take my words too literally, or, finally, whether my irritable tone had wounded her feelings. The last notion I dismissed almost as soon as I had conceived it, for not having seen any appearance of sensitiveness in any human face since my arrival in Belgium, I had begun to regard it almost as a fabulous quality. Whether her physiognomy announced it I could not tell, for her speedy exit had allowed me no time to ascertain the circumstance. I had, indeed, on two or three previous occasions, caught a passing view of her (as I believe has been mentioned before); but I had never stopped to scrutinize either her face or person, and had but the most vague idea of her general appearance. Just as I had finished rolling up the compositions, the four o'clock bell rang; with my accustomed alertness in obeying that signal, I grasped my hat and evacuated the premises.

CHAPTER XIV.

IF I was punctual in quitting Mdlle. Reuter's domicile, I was at least equally punctual in arriving there; I came the next day at five minutes before two, and on reaching the schoolroom door, before I opened it, I heard a rapid, gabbling sound, which warned me that the "priere du midi" was not yet concluded. I waited the termination thereof; it would have been impious to intrude my heretical presence during its progress. How the repeater of the prayer did cackle and splutter! I never before or since heard language enounced with such steam-engine haste. "Notre Pere qui etes au ciel" went off like a shot; then followed an address to Marie "vierge celeste, reine des anges, maison d'or, tour d'ivoire!" and then an invocation to the saint of the day; and then down they all sat, and the solemn (?) rite was over; and I entered, flinging the door wide and striding in fast, as it was my wont to do now; for I had found that in entering with aplomb, and mounting the estrade with emphasis, consisted the grand secret of ensuring immediate silence. The folding-doors between the two classes, opened for the prayer, were instantly closed; a maitresse, work-box in hand, took her seat at her appropriate desk; the pupils sat still with their pens and books before them; my three beauties in the van, now well humbled by a demeanour of consistent coolness, sat erect with their hands folded quietly on their knees; they had given up giggling and whispering to each other, and no longer ventured to utter pert speeches in my presence; they now only talked to me occasionally with their eyes, by means of which organs they could still, however, say very audacious and coquettish things. Had affection, goodness, modesty, real talent, ever employed those bright orbs as interpreters, I do not think I could have refrained from giving a kind and encouraging, perhaps an ardent reply now and then; but as it was, I found pleasure in answering the glance of vanity with the gaze of stoicism. Youthful, fair, brilliant, as were many of my pupils, I can truly say that in me they never saw any other bearing than such as an austere, though just guardian, might have observed towards them. If any doubt the accuracy of this assertion, as inferring more conscientious self-denial or Scipio-like self-control than they feel disposed to give me credit for, let them take into consideration the following circumstances, which, while detracting from my merit, justify my veracity.

Know, O incredulous reader! that a master stands in a somewhat different relation towards a pretty, light-headed, probably ignorant girl, to that occupied by a partner at a ball, or a gallant on the promenade. A professor does not meet his pupil to see her dressed in satin and muslin, with hair perfumed and curled, neck scarcely shaded by aerial lace, round white arms circled with bracelets, feet dressed for the gliding dance. It is not his business to whirl her through the waltz, to feed her with compliments, to heighten her beauty by the flush of gratified vanity. Neither does he encounter her on the smooth-rolled, tree shaded Boulevard, in the green and sunny park, whither she repairs clad in her becoming walking dress, her scarf thrown with grace over her shoulders, her little bonnet scarcely screening her curls, the red rose under its brim adding a new tint to the softer rose on her cheek; her face and eyes, too, illumined with smiles, perhaps as transient as the sunshine of the gala-day, but also quite as brilliant; it is not his office to walk by her side, to listen to her lively chat, to carry her parasol, scarcely larger than a broad green leaf, to lead in a ribbon her Blenheim spaniel or Italian greyhound. No: he finds her in the schoolroom, plainly dressed, with books before her. Owing to her education or her nature books are to her a nuisance, and she opens them with aversion, yet her teacher must instil into her mind the contents of these books; that mind resists the admission of grave information, it recoils, it grows restive, sullen tempers are shown, disfiguring frowns spoil the symmetry of the face, sometimes coarse gestures banish grace from the deportment, while muttered expressions, redolent of native and ineradicable vulgarity, desecrate the sweetness of the voice. Where the temperament is serene though the intellect be sluggish, an unconquerable dullness opposes every effort to instruct. Where there is cunning but not energy, dissimulation, falsehood, a thousand schemes and tricks are put in play to evade the necessity of application; in short, to the tutor, female youth, female charms are like tapestry hangings, of which the wrong side is continually turned towards him; and even when he sees the smooth, neat external surface he so well knows what knots, long stitches, and jagged ends are behind that he has scarce a temptation to admire too fondly the seemly forms and bright colours exposed to general view.

Our likings are regulated by our circumstances. The artist prefers a hilly country because it is picturesque; the engineer a flat one because it is convenient; the man of pleasure likes what he calls “a fine woman” — she suits him; the fashionable young gentleman admires the fashionable young lady — she is of his kind; the toil-worn, fagged, probably irritable tutor, blind almost to beauty, insensible to airs and graces, glories chiefly in certain mental qualities: application, love of knowledge, natural capacity, docility, truthfulness, gratefulness, are the charms that attract his notice and win his regard. These he seeks, but seldom meets; these, if by chance he finds, he would fain retain for ever, and when separation deprives him of them he feels as if some ruthless hand had snatched from him his only ewe-lamb. Such being the case, and the case it is, my readers will agree with me that there was nothing either very meritorious or very marvellous in the integrity and moderation of my conduct at Mdlle. Reuter’s pensionnat de demoiselles.

My first business this afternoon consisted in reading the list of places for the month, determined by the relative correctness of the compositions given the preceding day. The list was headed, as usual, by the name of Sylvie, that plain, quiet little girl I have described before as being at once the best and ugliest pupil in the establishment; the second place had fallen to the lot of a certain Leonie Ledru, a diminutive, sharp-featured, and parchment-skinned creature of quick wits, frail conscience, and indurated feelings; a lawyer-like thing, of whom I used to say that, had she been a boy, she would have made a model of an unprincipled, clever attorney. Then came Eulalie, the proud beauty, the Juno of the school, whom six long years of drilling in the simple grammar of the English language had compelled, despite the stiff phlegm of her intellect, to acquire a mechanical acquaintance with most of its rules. No smile, no trace of pleasure or satisfaction appeared in Sylvie's nun-like and passive face as she heard her name read first. I always felt saddened by the sight of that poor girl's absolute quiescence on all occasions, and it was my custom to look at her, to address her, as seldom as possible; her extreme docility, her assiduous perseverance, would have recommended her warmly to my good opinion; her modesty, her intelligence, would have induced me to feel most kindly — most affectionately towards her, notwithstanding the almost ghastly plainness of her features, the disproportion of her form, the corpse-like lack of animation in her countenance, had I not been aware that every friendly word, every kindly action, would be reported by her to her confessor, and by him misinterpreted and poisoned. Once I laid my hand on her head, in token of approbation; I thought Sylvie was going to smile, her dim eye almost kindled; but, presently, she shrank from me; I was a man and a heretic; she, poor child! a destined nun and devoted Catholic: thus a four-fold wall of separation divided her mind from mine. A pert smirk, and a hard glance of triumph, was Leonie's method of testifying her gratification; Eulalie looked sullen and envious — she had hoped to be first. Hortense and Caroline exchanged a reckless grimace on hearing their names read out somewhere near the bottom of the list; the brand of mental inferiority was considered by them as no disgrace, their hopes for the future being based solely on their personal attractions.

This affair arranged, the regular lesson followed. During a brief interval, employed by the pupils in ruling their books, my eye, ranging carelessly over the benches, observed, for the first time, that the farthest seat in the farthest row — a seat usually vacant — was again filled by the new scholar, the Mdlle. Henri so ostentatiously recommended to me by the directress. To-day I had on my spectacles; her appearance, therefore, was clear to me at the first glance; I had not to puzzle over it. She looked young; yet, had I been required to name her exact age, I should have been somewhat nonplussed; the slightness of her figure might have suited seventeen; a certain anxious and pre-occupied expression of face seemed the indication of riper years. She was dressed, like all the rest, in a dark stuff gown and a white collar; her features were dissimilar to any there, not so rounded, more defined, yet scarcely regular. The shape of her head too was different, the superior part more developed, the base considerably less. I felt assured, at first sight, that she was not a Belgian; her complexion, her countenance, her lineaments, her figure, were all distinct from theirs, and, evidently, the type of another race — of a race less gifted with fullness of flesh and plenitude of blood; less jocund, material, unthinking. When I first cast my eyes on her, she sat looking fixedly down, her chin resting on her hand, and she did not change her attitude till I commenced the lesson. None of the Belgian girls would have retained one position, and that a reflective one, for the same length of time. Yet, having intimated that her appearance was peculiar, as being unlike that of her Flemish companions, I have little more to say respecting it; I can pronounce no encomiums on her beauty, for she was not beautiful; nor offer condolence on her plainness, for neither was she plain; a careworn character of forehead, and a corresponding moulding of the mouth, struck me with a sentiment resembling surprise, but these traits would probably have passed unnoticed by any less crotchety observer.

Now, reader, though I have spent more than a page in describing Mdlle. Henri, I know well enough that I have left on your mind's eye no distinct picture of her; I have not painted her complexion, nor her eyes, nor her hair, nor even drawn the outline of her shape. You cannot tell whether her nose was aquiline or retrousse, whether her chin was long or short, her face square or oval; nor could I the first day, and it is not my intention to communicate to you at once a knowledge I myself gained by little and little.

I gave a short exercise: which they all wrote down. I saw the new pupil was puzzled at first with the novelty of the form and language; once or twice she looked at me with a sort of painful solicitude, as not comprehending at all what I meant; then she was not ready when the others were, she could not write her phrases so fast as they did; I would not help her, I went on relentless. She looked at me; her eye said most plainly, "I cannot follow you." I disregarded the appeal, and, carelessly leaning back in my chair, glancing from time to time with a NONCHALANT air out of the window, I dictated a little faster. On looking towards her again, I perceived her face clouded with embarrassment, but she was still writing on most diligently; I paused a few seconds; she employed the interval in hurriedly re-perusing what she had written, and shame and discomfiture were apparent in her countenance; she evidently found she had made great nonsense of it. In ten minutes more the dictation was complete, and, having allowed a brief space in which to correct it, I took their books; it was with a reluctant hand Mdlle. Henri gave up hers, but, having once yielded it to my possession, she composed her anxious face, as if, for the present she had resolved to dismiss regret, and had made up her mind to be thought unprecedentedly stupid. Glancing over her exercise, I found that several lines had been omitted, but what was written contained very few faults; I instantly inscribed "Bon" at the bottom of the page, and returned it to her; she smiled, at first incredulously, then as if reassured, but did not lift her eyes; she could look at me, it seemed, when perplexed and bewildered, but not when gratified; I thought that scarcely fair.

CHAPTER XV.

SOME time elapsed before I again gave a lesson in the first class; the holiday of Whitsuntide occupied three days, and on the fourth it was the turn of the second division to receive my instructions. As I made the transit of the CARRE, I observed, as usual, the band of sewers surrounding Mdlle. Henri; there were only about a dozen of them, but they made as much noise as might have sufficed for fifty; they seemed very little under her control; three or four at once assailed her with importunate requirements; she looked harassed, she demanded silence, but in vain. She saw me, and I read in her eye pain that a stranger should witness the insubordination of her pupils; she seemed to entreat order — her prayers were useless; then I remarked that she compressed her lips and contracted her brow; and her countenance, if I read it correctly, said — "I have done my best; I seem to merit blame notwithstanding; blame me then who will." I passed on; as I closed the school-room door, I heard her say, suddenly and sharply, addressing one of the eldest and most turbulent of the lot —

"Amelie Mullenberg, ask me no question, and request of me no assistance, for a week to come; during that space of time I will neither speak to you nor help you."

The words were uttered with emphasis — nay, with vehemence — and a comparative silence followed; whether the calm was permanent, I know not; two doors now closed between me and the CARRE.

Next day was appropriated to the first class; on my arrival, I found the directress seated, as usual, in a chair between the two estrades, and before her was standing Mdlle. Henri, in an attitude (as it seemed to me) of somewhat reluctant attention. The directress was knitting and talking at the same time. Amidst the hum of a large school-room, it was easy so to speak in the ear of one person, as to be heard by that person alone, and it was thus Mdlle. Reuter parleyed with her teacher. The face of the latter was a little flushed, not a little troubled; there was vexation in it, whence resulting I know not, for the directress looked very placid indeed; she could not be scolding in such gentle whispers, and with so equable a mien; no, it was presently proved that her discourse had been of the most friendly tendency, for I heard the closing words —

"C'est assez, ma bonne amie; a present je ne veux pas vous retenir davantage."

Without reply, Mdlle. Henri turned away; dissatisfaction was plainly evinced in her face, and a smile, slight and brief, but bitter, distrustful, and, I thought, scornful, curled her lip as she took her place in the class; it was a secret, involuntary smile, which lasted but a second; an air of depression succeeded, chased away presently by one of attention and interest, when I gave the word for all the pupils to take their reading-books. In general I hated the reading-lesson, it was such a torture to the ear to listen to their uncouth mouthing of my native tongue, and no effort of example or precept on my part ever seemed to effect the slightest improvement in their accent. To-day, each in her appropriate key, lisped, stuttered, mumbled, and jabbered as usual; about fifteen had racked me in turn, and my auricular nerve was expecting with resignation the discords of the sixteenth, when a full, though low voice, read out, in clear correct English.

"On his way to Perth, the king was met by a Highland woman, calling herself a prophetess; she stood at the side of the ferry by which he was about to travel to the north, and cried with a loud voice, 'My lord the king, if you pass this water you will never return again alive!'" — (VIDE the HISTORY OF SCOTLAND).

I looked up in amazement; the voice was a voice of Albion; the accent was pure and silvery; it only wanted firmness, and assurance, to be the counterpart of what any well-educated lady in Essex or Middlesex might have enounced, yet the speaker or reader was no other than Mdlle. Henri, in whose grave, joyless face I saw no mark of consciousness that she had performed any extraordinary feat. No one else evinced surprise either. Mdlle. Reuter knitted away assiduously; I was aware, however, that at the conclusion of the paragraph, she had lifted her eyelid and honoured me with a glance sideways; she did not know the full excellency of the teacher's style of reading, but she perceived that her accent was not that of the others, and wanted to discover what I thought; I masked my visage with indifference, and ordered the next girl to proceed.

When the lesson was over, I took advantage of the confusion caused by breaking up, to approach Mdlle. Henri; she was standing near the window and retired as I advanced; she thought I wanted to look out, and did not imagine that I could have anything to say to her. I took her exercise-book; out of her hand; as I turned over the leaves I addressed her: —

"You have had lessons in English before?" I asked.

"No, sir."

"No! you read it well; you have been in England?"

"Oh, no!" with some animation.

"You have been in English families?"

Still the answer was "No." Here my eye, resting on the flyleaf of the book, saw written, "Frances Evan Henri."

"Your name?" I asked

"Yes, sir."

My interrogations were cut short; I heard a little rustling behind me, and close at my back was the directress, professing to be examining the interior of a desk.

"Mademoiselle," said she, looking up and addressing the teacher, "Will you have the goodness to go and stand in the corridor, while the young ladies are putting on their things, and try to keep some order?”

Mdlle. Henri obeyed.

“What splendid weather!” observed the directress cheerfully, glancing at the same time from the window. I assented and was withdrawing. “What of your new pupil, monsieur?” continued she, following my retreating steps. “Is she likely to make progress in English?”

“Indeed I can hardly judge. She possesses a pretty good accent; of her real knowledge of the language I have as yet had no opportunity of forming an opinion.”

“And her natural capacity, monsieur? I have had my fears about that: can you relieve me by an assurance at least of its average power?”

“I see no reason to doubt its average power, mademoiselle, but really I scarcely know her, and have not had time to study the calibre of her capacity. I wish you a very good afternoon.”

She still pursued me. “You will observe, monsieur, and tell me what you think; I could so much better rely on your opinion than on my own; women cannot judge of these things as men can, and, excuse my pertinacity, monsieur, but it is natural I should feel interested about this poor little girl (pauvre petite); she has scarcely any relations, her own efforts are all she has to look to, her acquirements must be her sole fortune; her present position has once been mine, or nearly so; it is then but natural I should sympathize with her; and sometimes when I see the difficulty she has in managing pupils, I reel quite chagrined. I doubt not she does her best, her intentions are excellent; but, monsieur, she wants tact and firmness. I have talked to her on the subject, but I am not fluent, and probably did not express myself with clearness; she never appears to comprehend me. Now, would you occasionally, when you see an opportunity, slip in a word of advice to her on the subject; men have so much more influence than women have — they argue so much more logically than we do; and you, monsieur, in particular, have so paramount a power of making yourself obeyed; a word of advice from you could not but do her good; even if she were sullen and headstrong (which I hope she is not), she would scarcely refuse to listen to you; for my own part, I can truly say that I never attend one of your lessons without deriving benefit from witnessing your management of the pupils. The other masters are a constant source of anxiety to me; they cannot impress the young ladies with sentiments of respect, nor restrain the levity natural to youth: in you, monsieur, I feel the most absolute confidence; try then to put this poor child into the way of controlling our giddy, high-spirited Brabantoises. But, monsieur, I would add one word more; don’t alarm her AMOUR PROPRE; beware of inflicting a wound there. I reluctantly admit that in that particular she is blameably — some would say ridiculously — susceptible. I fear I have touched this sore point inadvertently, and she cannot get over it.”

During the greater part of this harangue my hand was on the lock of the outer door; I now turned it.

"Au revoir, mademoiselle," said I, and I escaped. I saw the directress's stock of words was yet far from exhausted. She looked after me, she would fain have detained me longer. Her manner towards me had been altered ever since I had begun to treat her with hardness and indifference: she almost cringed to me on every occasion; she consulted my countenance incessantly, and beset me with innumerable little officious attentions. Servility creates despotism. This slavish homage, instead of softening my heart, only pampered whatever was stern and exacting in its mood. The very circumstance of her hovering round me like a fascinated bird, seemed to transform me into a rigid pillar of stone; her flatteries irritated my scorn, her blandishments confirmed my reserve. At times I wondered what she meant by giving herself such trouble to win me, when the more profitable Pelet was already in her nets, and when, too, she was aware that I possessed her secret, for I had not scrupled to tell her as much: but the fact is that as it was her nature to doubt the reality and under-value the worth of modesty, affection, disinterestedness — to regard these qualities as foibles of character — so it was equally her tendency to consider pride, hardness, selfishness, as proofs of strength. She would trample on the neck of humility, she would kneel at the feet of disdain; she would meet tenderness with secret contempt, indifference she would woo with ceaseless assiduities. Benevolence, devotedness, enthusiasm, were her antipathies; for dissimulation and self-interest she had a preference — they were real wisdom in her eyes; moral and physical degradation, mental and bodily inferiority, she regarded with indulgence; they were foils capable of being turned to good account as set-offs for her own endowments. To violence, injustice, tyranny, she succumbed — they were her natural masters; she had no propensity to hate, no impulse to resist them; the indignation their behests awake in some hearts was unknown in hers. From all this it resulted that the false and selfish called her wise, the vulgar and debased termed her charitable, the insolent and unjust dubbed her amiable, the conscientious and benevolent generally at first accepted as valid her claim to be considered one of themselves; but ere long the plating of pretension wore off, the real material appeared below, and they laid her aside as a deception.

CHAPTER XVI.

In the course of another fortnight I had seen sufficient of Frances Evans Henri, to enable me to form a more definite opinion of her character. I found her possessed in a somewhat remarkable degree of at least two good points, viz., perseverance and a sense of duty; I found she was really capable of applying to study, of contending with difficulties. At first I offered her the same help which I had always found it necessary to confer on the others; I began with unloosing for her each knotty point, but I soon discovered that such help was regarded by my new pupil as degrading; she recoiled from it with a certain proud impatience. Hereupon I appointed her long lessons, and left her to solve alone any perplexities they might present. She set to the task with serious ardour, and having quickly accomplished one labour, eagerly demanded more. So much for her perseverance; as to her sense of duty, it evinced itself thus: she liked to learn, but hated to teach; her progress as a pupil depended upon herself, and I saw that on herself she could calculate with certainty; her success as a teacher rested partly, perhaps chiefly, upon the will of others; it cost her a most painful effort to enter into conflict with this foreign will, to endeavour to bend it into subjection to her own; for in what regarded people in general the action of her will was impeded by many scruples; it was as unembarrassed as strong where her own affairs were concerned, and to it she could at any time subject her inclination, if that inclination went counter to her convictions of right; yet when called upon to wrestle with the propensities, the habits, the faults of others, of children especially, who are deaf to reason, and, for the most part, insensate to persuasion, her will sometimes almost refused to act; then came in the sense of duty, and forced the reluctant will into operation. A wasteful expense of energy and labour was frequently the consequence; Frances toiled for and with her pupils like a drudge, but it was long ere her conscientious exertions were rewarded by anything like docility on their part, because they saw that they had power over her, inasmuch as by resisting her painful attempts to convince, persuade, control — by forcing her to the employment of coercive measures — they could inflict upon her exquisite suffering. Human beings — human children especially — seldom deny themselves the pleasure of exercising a power which they are conscious of possessing, even though that power consist only in a capacity to make others wretched; a pupil whose sensations are duller than those of his instructor, while his nerves are tougher and his bodily strength perhaps greater, has an immense advantage over that instructor, and he will generally use it relentlessly, because the very young, very healthy, very thoughtless, know neither how to sympathize nor how to spare. Frances, I fear, suffered much; a continual weight seemed to oppress her spirits; I have said she did not live in the house, and whether in her own abode, wherever that might be, she wore the same preoccupied, unsmiling, sorrowfully resolved air that always shaded her features under the roof of Mdlle. Reuter, I could not tell.

One day I gave, as a devoir, the trite little anecdote of Alfred tending cakes in the herdsman's hut, to be related with amplifications. A singular affair most of the pupils made of it; brevity was what they had chiefly studied; the majority of the narratives were perfectly unintelligible; those of Sylvie and Leonie Ledru alone pretended to anything like sense and connection. Eulalie, indeed, had hit, upon a clever expedient for at once ensuring accuracy and saving trouble; she had obtained access somehow to an abridged history of England, and had copied the anecdote out fair. I wrote on the margin of her production "Stupid and deceitful," and then tore it down the middle.

Last in the pile of single-leaved devoirs, I found one of several sheets, neatly written out and stitched together; I knew the hand, and scarcely needed the evidence of the signature "Frances Evans Henri" to confirm my conjecture as to the writer's identity.

Night was my usual time for correcting devoirs, and my own room the usual scene of such task — task most onerous hitherto; and it seemed strange to me to feel rising within me an incipient sense of interest, as I snuffed the candle and addressed myself to the perusal of the poor teacher's manuscript.

"Now," thought I, "I shall see a glimpse of what she really is; I shall get an idea of the nature and extent of her powers; not that she can be expected to express herself well in a foreign tongue, but still, if she has any mind, here will be a reflection of it."

The narrative commenced by a description of a Saxon peasant's hut, situated within the confines of a great, leafless, winter forest; it represented an evening in December; flakes of snow were falling, and the herdsman foretold a heavy storm; he summoned his wife to aid him in collecting their flock, roaming far away on the pastoral banks of the Thone; he warns her that it will be late ere they return. The good woman is reluctant to quit her occupation of baking cakes for the evening meal; but acknowledging the primary importance of securing the herds and flocks, she puts on her sheep-skin mantle; and, addressing a stranger who rests half reclined on a bed of rushes near the hearth, bids him mind the bread till her return.

"Take care, young man," she continues, "that you fasten the door well after us; and, above all, open to none in our absence; whatever sound you hear, stir not, and look not out. The night will soon fall; this forest is most wild and lonely; strange noises are often heard therein after sunset; wolves haunt these glades, and Danish warriors infest the country; worse things are talked of; you might chance to hear, as it were, a child cry, and on opening the door to afford it succour, a greet black bull, or a shadowy goblin dog, might rush over the threshold; or, more awful still, if something flapped, as with wings, against the lattice, and then a raven or a white dove flew in and settled on the hearth, such a visitor would be a sure sign of misfortune to the house;

therefore, heed my advice, and lift the latchet for nothing."

Her husband calls her away, both depart. The stranger, left alone, listens awhile to the muffled snow-wind, the remote, swollen sound of the river, and then he speaks.

"It is Christmas Eve," says he, "I mark the date; here I sit alone on a rude couch of rushes, sheltered by the thatch of a herdsman's hut; I, whose inheritance was a kingdom, owe my night's harbourage to a poor serf; my throne is usurped, my crown presses the brow of an invader; I have no friends; my troops wander broken in the hills of Wales; reckless robbers spoil my country; my subjects lie prostrate, their breasts crushed by the heel of the brutal Dane. Fate! thou hast done thy worst, and now thou standest before me resting thy hand on thy blunted blade. Ay; I see thine eye confront mine and demand why I still live, why I still hope. Pagan demon, I credit not thine omnipotence, and so cannot succumb to thy power. My God, whose Son, as on this night, took on Him the form of man, and for man vouchsafed to suffer and bleed, controls thy hand, and without His behest thou canst not strike a stroke. My God is sinless, eternal, all-wise — in Him is my trust; and though stripped and crushed by thee — though naked, desolate, void of resource — I do not despair, I cannot despair: were the lance of Guthrum now wet with my blood, I should not despair. I watch, I toil, I hope, I pray; Jehovah, in his own time, will aid."

I need not continue the quotation; the whole devoir was in the same strain. There were errors of orthography, there were foreign idioms, there were some faults of construction, there were verbs irregular transformed into verbs regular; it was mostly made up, as the above example shows, of short and somewhat rude sentences, and the style stood in great need of polish and sustained dignity; yet such as it was, I had hitherto seen nothing like it in the course of my professorial experience. The girl's mind had conceived a picture of the hut, of the two peasants, of the crownless king; she had imagined the wintry forest, she had recalled the old Saxon ghost-legends, she had appreciated Alfred's courage under calamity, she had remembered his Christian education, and had shown him, with the rooted confidence of those primitive days, relying on the scriptural Jehovah for aid against the mythological Destiny. This she had done without a hint from me: I had given the subject, but not said a word about the manner of treating it.

"I will find, or make, an opportunity of speaking to her," I said to myself as I rolled the devoir up; "I will learn what she has of English in her besides the name of Frances Evans; she is no novice in the language, that is evident, yet she told me she had neither been in England, nor taken lessons in English, nor lived in English families."

In the course of my next lesson, I made a report of the other devoirs, dealing out praise and blame in very small retail parcels, according to my custom, for there was no use in blaming severely, and high encomiums were rarely merited. I said nothing of Mdlle. Henri's exercise, and, spectacles on nose, I endeavoured to decipher in her countenance her sentiments at the omission. I wanted to find out whether in her existed a consciousness of her own talents. "If she thinks she did a clever thing in composing that devoir, she will now look mortified," thought I. Grave as usual, almost sombre, was her face; as usual, her eyes were fastened on the cahier open before her; there was something, I thought, of expectation in her attitude, as I concluded a brief review of the last devoir, and when, casting it from me and rubbing my hands, I bade them take their grammars, some slight change did pass over her air and mien, as though she now relinquished a faint prospect of pleasant excitement; she had been waiting for something to be discussed in which she had a degree of interest; the discussion was not to come on, so expectation sank back, shrunk and sad, but attention, promptly filling up the void, repaired in a moment the transient collapse of feature; still, I felt, rather than saw, during the whole course of the lesson, that a hope had been wrenched from her, and that if she did not show distress, it was because she would not.

At four o'clock, when the bell rang and the room was in immediate tumult, instead of taking my hat and starting from the estrade, I sat still a moment. I looked at Frances, she was putting her books into her cabas; having fastened the button, she raised her head; encountering my eye, she made a quiet, respectful obeisance, as bidding good afternoon, and was turning to depart: —

"Come here," said I, lifting my finger at the same time. She hesitated; she could not hear the words amidst the uproar now pervading both school-rooms; I repeated the sign; she approached; again she paused within half a yard of the estrade, and looked shy, and still doubtful whether she had mistaken my meaning.

"Step up," I said, speaking with decision. It is the only way of dealing with diffident, easily embarrassed characters, and with some slight manual aid I presently got her placed just where I wanted her to be, that is, between my desk and the window, where she was screened from the rush of the second division, and where no one could sneak behind her to listen.

"Take a seat," I said, placing a tabouret; and I made her sit down. I knew what I was doing would be considered a very strange thing, and, what was more, I did not care. Frances knew it also, and, I fear, by an appearance of agitation and trembling, that she cared much. I drew from my pocket the rolled-up devoir.

"This it, yours, I suppose?" said I, addressing her in English, for I now felt sure she could speak English.

"Yes," she answered distinctly; and as I unrolled it and laid it out flat on the desk before her with my hand upon it, and a pencil in that hand, I saw her moved, and, as it were, kindled; her depression beamed as a cloud might behind which the sun is burning.

"This devoir has numerous faults," said I. "It will take you some years of careful study before you are in a condition to write English with absolute correctness. Attend: I will point out some principal defects." And I went through it carefully, noting every error, and demonstrating why they were errors, and how the words or phrases ought to have been written. In the course of this sobering process she became calm. I now went on:

"As to the substance of your devoir, Mdlle. Henri, it has surprised me; I perused it with pleasure, because I saw in it some proofs of taste and fancy. Taste and fancy are not the highest gifts of the human mind, but such as they are you possess them — not probably in a paramount degree, but in a degree beyond what the majority can boast. You may then take courage; cultivate the faculties that God and nature have bestowed on you, and do not fear in any crisis of suffering, under any pressure of injustice, to derive free and full consolation from the consciousness of their strength and rarity."

"Strength and rarity!" I repeated to myself; "ay, the words are probably true," for on looking up, I saw the sun had dissevered its screening cloud, her countenance was transfigured, a smile shone in her eyes — a smile almost triumphant; it seemed to say —

"I am glad you have been forced to discover so much of my nature; you need not so carefully moderate your language. Do you think I am myself a stranger to myself? What you tell me in terms so qualified, I have known fully from a child."

She did say this as plainly as a frank and flashing glance could, but in a moment the glow of her complexion, the radiance of her aspect, had subsided; if strongly conscious of her talents, she was equally conscious of her harassing defects, and the remembrance of these obliterated for a single second, now reviving with sudden force, at once subdued the too vivid characters in which her sense of her powers had been expressed. So quick was the revulsion of feeling, I had not time to check her triumph by reproof; ere I could contract my brows to a frown she had become serious and almost mournful-looking.

"Thank you, sir," said she, rising. There was gratitude both in her voice and in the look with which she accompanied it. It was time, indeed, for our conference to terminate; for, when I glanced around, behold all the boarders (the day-scholars had departed) were congregated within a yard or two of my desk, and stood staring with eyes and mouths wide open; the three maitresses formed a whispering knot in one corner, and, close at my elbow, was the directress, sitting on a low chair, calmly clipping the tassels of her finished purse.

CHAPTER XVII.

AFTER all I had profited but imperfectly by the opportunity I had so boldly achieved of speaking to Mdlle. Henri; it was my intention to ask her how she came to be possessed of two English baptismal names, Frances and Evans, in addition to her French surname, also whence she derived her good accent. I had forgotten both points, or, rather, our colloquy had been so brief that I had not had time to bring them forward; moreover, I had not half tested her powers of speaking English; all I had drawn from her in that language were the words "Yes," and "Thank you, sir." "No matter," I reflected. "What has been left incomplete now, shall be finished another day." Nor did I fail to keep the promise thus made to myself. It was difficult to get even a few words of particular conversation with one pupil among so many; but, according to the old proverb, "Where there is a will, there is a way;" and again and again I managed to find an opportunity for exchanging a few words with Mdlle. Henri, regardless that envy stared and detraction whispered whenever I approached her.

"Your book an instant." Such was the mode in which I often began these brief dialogues; the time was always just at the conclusion of the lesson; and motioning to her to rise, I installed myself in her place, allowing her to stand deferentially at my side; for I esteemed it wise and right in her case to enforce strictly all forms ordinarily in use between master and pupil; the rather because I perceived that in proportion as my manner grew austere and magisterial, hers became easy and self-possessed — an odd contradiction, doubtless, to the ordinary effect in such cases; but so it was.

"A pencil," said I, holding out my hand without looking at her. (I am now about to sketch a brief report of the first of these conferences.) She gave me one, and while I underlined some errors in a grammatical exercise she had written, I observed —

"You are not a native of Belgium?"

"No."

"Nor of France?"

"No."

"Where, then, is your birthplace?"

"I was born at Geneva."

"You don't call Frances and Evans Swiss names, I presume?"

"No, sir; they are English names."

"Just so; and is it the custom of the Genevese to give their children English appellatives?"

"Non, Monsieur; mais — "

"Speak English, if you please."

“Mais — “

“English — “

“But” (slowly and with embarrassment) “my parents were not all the two Genevese.”

“Say BOTH, instead of ‘all the two,’ mademoiselle.”

“Not BOTH Swiss: my mother was English.”

“Ah! and of English extraction?”

“Yes — her ancestors were all English.”

“And your father?”

“He was Swiss.”

“What besides? What was his profession?”

“Ecclesiastic — pastor — he had a church.”

“Since your mother is an Englishwoman, why do you not speak English with more facility?”

“Maman est morte, il y a dix ans.”

“And you do homage to her memory by forgetting her language. Have the goodness to put French out of your mind so long as I converse with you — keep to English.”

“C’est si difficile, monsieur, quand on n’en a plus l’habitude.”

“You had the habitude formerly, I suppose? Now answer me in your mother tongue.”

“Yes, sir, I spoke the English more than the French when I was a child.”

“Why do you not speak it now?”

“Because I have no English friends.”

“You live with your father, I suppose?”

“My father is dead.”

“You have brothers and sisters?”

“Not one.”

“Do you live alone?”

“No — I have an aunt — ma tante Julienne.”

“Your father’s sister?”

“Justement, monsieur.”

“Is that English?”

“No — but I forget — “

“For which, mademoiselle, if you were a child I should certainly devise some slight punishment; at your age — you must be two or three and twenty, I should think?”

“Pas encore, monsieur — en un mois j’aurai dix-neuf ans.”

“Well, nineteen is a mature age, and, having attained it, you ought to be so solicitous for your own improvement, that it should not be needful for a master to remind you twice of the expediency of your speaking English whenever practicable.”

To this wise speech I received no answer; and, when I looked up, my pupil was smiling to herself a much-meaning, though not very gay smile; it seemed to say, "He talks of he knows not what:" it said this so plainly, that I determined to request information on the point concerning which my ignorance seemed to be thus tacitly affirmed.

"Are you solicitous for your own improvement?"

"Rather."

"How do you prove it, mademoiselle?"

An odd question, and bluntly put; it excited a second smile.

"Why, monsieur, I am not inattentive — am I? I learn my lessons well — "

"Oh, a child can do that! and what more do you do?"

"What more can I do?"

"Oh, certainly, not much; but you are a teacher, are you not, as well as a pupil?"

"Yes."

"You teach lace-mending?"

"Yes."

"A dull, stupid occupation; do you like it?"

"No — it is tedious."

"Why do you pursue it? Why do you not rather teach history, geography, grammar, even arithmetic?"

"Is monsieur certain that I am myself thoroughly acquainted with these studies?"

"I don't know; you ought to be at your age."

"But I never was at school, monsieur — "

"Indeed! What then were your friends — what was your aunt about? She is very much to blame."

"No monsieur, no — my aunt is good — she is not to blame — she does what she can; she lodges and nourishes me" (I report Mdlle. Henri's phrases literally, and it was thus she translated from the French). "She is not rich; she has only an annuity of twelve hundred francs, and it would be impossible for her to send me to school."

"Rather," thought I to myself on hearing this, but I continued, in the dogmatical tone I had adopted: —

"It is sad, however, that you should be brought up in ignorance of the most ordinary branches of education; had you known something of history and grammar you might, by degrees, have relinquished your lace-mending drudgery, and risen in the world."

"It is what I mean to do."

"How? By a knowledge of English alone? That will not suffice; no respectable family will receive a governess whose whole stock of knowledge consists in a familiarity with one foreign language."

"Monsieur, I know other things."

"Yes, yes, you can work with Berlin wools, and embroider handkerchiefs and collars — that will do little for you."

Mdlle. Henri's lips were unclosed to answer, but she checked herself, as thinking the discussion had been sufficiently pursued, and remained silent.

"Speak," I continued, impatiently; "I never like the appearance of acquiescence when the reality is not there; and you had a contradiction at your tongue's end."

"Monsieur, I have had many lessons both in grammar, history, geography, and arithmetic. I have gone through a course of each study."

"Bravo! but how did you manage it, since your aunt could not afford lo send you to school?"

"By lace-mending; by the thing monsieur despises so much."

"Truly! And now, mademoiselle, it will be a good exercise for you to explain to me in English how such a result was produced by such means."

"Monsieur, I begged my aunt to have me taught lace-mending soon after we came to Brussels, because I knew it was a METIER, a trade which was easily learnt, and by which I could earn some money very soon. I learnt it in a few days, and I quickly got work, for all the Brussels ladies have old lace — very precious — which must be mended all the times it is washed. I earned money a little, and this money I grave for lessons in the studies I have mentioned; some of it I spent in buying books, English books especially; soon I shall try to find a place of governess, or school-teacher, when I can write and speak English well; but it will be difficult, because those who know I have been a lace-mender will despise me, as the pupils here despise me. Pourtant j'ai mon projet," she added in a lower tone.

"What is it?"

"I will go and live in England; I will teach French there."

The words were pronounced emphatically. She said "England" as you might suppose an Israelite of Moses' days would have said Canaan.

"Have you a wish to see England?"

"Yes, and an intention."

And here a voice, the voice of the directress, interposed:

"Mademoiselle Henri, je crois qu'il va pleuvoir; vous feriez bien, ma bonne amie, de retourner chez vous tout de suite."

In silence, without a word of thanks for this officious warning, Mdlle. Henri collected her books; she moved to me respectfully, endeavoured to move to her superior, though the endeavour was almost a failure, for her head seemed as if it would not bend, and thus departed.

Where there is one grain of perseverance or wilfulness in the composition, trifling obstacles are ever known rather to stimulate than discourage. Mdlle. Reuter might as well have spared herself the trouble of giving that intimation about the weather (by-the-by her prediction was falsified by the event — it did not rain that evening). At the close of the next lesson I was again at Mdlle. Henri's desk. Thus did I accost her: —

"What is your idea of England, mademoiselle? Why do you wish to go there?"

Accustomed by this time to the calculated abruptness of my manner, it no longer discomposed or surprised her, and she answered with only so much of hesitation as was rendered inevitable by the difficulty she experienced in improvising the translation of her thoughts from French to English.

"England is something unique, as I have heard and read; my idea of it is vague, and I want to go there to render my idea clear, definite."

"Hum! How much of England do you suppose you could see if you went there in the capacity of a teacher? A strange notion you must have of getting a clear and definite idea of a country! All you could see of Great Britain would be the interior of a school, or at most of one or two private dwellings."

"It would be an English school; they would be English dwellings."

"Indisputably; but what then? What would be the value of observations made on a scale so narrow?"

"Monsieur, might not one learn something by analogy? An-echantillon — a — a sample often serves to give an idea of the whole; besides, narrow and wide are words comparative, are they not? All my life would perhaps seem narrow in your eyes — all the life of a — that little animal subterranean — une taupe — comment dit-on?"

"Mole."

"Yes — a mole, which lives underground would seem narrow even to me."

"Well, mademoiselle — what then? Proceed."

"Mais, monsieur, vous me comprenez."

"Not in the least; have the goodness to explain."

"Why, monsieur, it is just so. In Switzerland I have done but little, learnt but little, and seen but little; my life there was in a circle; I walked the same round every day; I could not get out of it; had I rested — remained there even till my death, I should never have enlarged it, because I am poor and not skilful, I have not great acquirements; when I was quite tired of this round, I begged my aunt to go to Brussels; my existence is no larger here, because I am no richer or higher; I walk in as narrow a limit, but the scene is changed; it would change again if I went to England. I knew something of the bourgeois of Geneva, now I know something of the bourgeois of Brussels; if I went to London, I would know something of the bourgeois of London. Can you make any sense out of what I say, monsieur, or is it all obscure?"

"I see, I see — now let us advert to another subject; you propose to devote your life to teaching, and you are a most unsuccessful teacher; you cannot keep your pupils in order."

A flush of painful confusion was the result of this harsh remark; she bent her head to the desk, but soon raising it replied —

"Monsieur, I am not a skilful teacher, it is true, but practice improves; besides, I work under difficulties; here I only teach sewing, I can show no power in sewing, no superiority — it is a subordinate art; then I have no associates in this house, I am isolated; I am too a heretic, which deprives me of influence.”

“And in England you would be a foreigner; that too would deprive you of influence, and would effectually separate you from all round you; in England you would have as few connections, as little importance as you have here.”

“But I should be learning something; for the rest, there are probably difficulties for such as I everywhere, and if I must contend, and perhaps: be conquered, I would rather submit to English pride than to Flemish coarseness; besides, monsieur — “

She stopped — not evidently from any difficulty in finding words to express herself, but because discretion seemed to say, “You have said enough.”

“Finish your phrase,” I urged.

“Besides, monsieur, I long to live once more among Protestants; they are more honest than Catholics; a Romish school is a building with porous walls, a hollow floor, a false ceiling; every room in this house, monsieur, has eyeholes and ear-holes, and what the house is, the inhabitants are, very treacherous; they all think it lawful to tell lies; they all call it politeness to profess friendship where they feel hatred.”

“All?” said I; “you mean the pupils — the mere children — inexperienced, giddy things, who have not learnt to distinguish the difference between right and wrong?”

“On the contrary, monsieur — the children are the most sincere; they have not yet had time to become accomplished in duplicity; they will tell lies, but they do it inartificially, and you know they are lying; but the grown-up people are very false; they deceive strangers, they deceive each other — “

A servant here entered: —

“Mdlle. Henri — Mdlle. Reuter vous prie de vouloir bien conduire la petite de Dorlodot chez elle, elle vous attend dans le cabinet de Rosalie la portiere — c’est que sa bonne n’est pas venue la chercher — voyez-vous.”

“Eh bien! est-ce que je suis sa bonne — moi?” demanded Mdlle. Henri; then smiling, with that same bitter, derisive smile I had seen on her lips once before, she hastily rose and made her exit.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE young Anglo-Swiss evidently derived both pleasure and profit from the study of her mother-tongue. In teaching her I did not, of course, confine myself to the ordinary school routine; I made instruction in English a channel for instruction in literature. I prescribed to her a course of reading; she had a little selection of English classics, a few of which had been left her by her mother, and the others she had purchased with her own penny-fee. I lent her some more modern works; all these she read with avidity, giving me, in writing, a clear summary of each work when she had perused it. Composition, too, she delighted in. Such occupation seemed the very breath of her nostrils, and soon her improved productions wrung from me the avowal that those qualities in her I had termed taste and fancy ought rather to have been denominated judgment and imagination. When I intimated so much, which I did as usual in dry and stinted phrase, I looked for the radiant and exulting smile my one word of eulogy had elicited before; but Frances coloured. If she did smile, it was very softly and shyly; and instead of looking up to me with a conquering glance, her eyes rested on my hand, which, stretched over her shoulder, was writing some directions with a pencil on the margin of her book.

"Well, are you pleased that I am satisfied with your progress?" I asked.

"Yes," said she slowly, gently, the blush that had half subsided returning.

"But I do not say enough, I suppose?" I continued. "My praises are too cool?"

She made no answer, and, I thought, looked a little sad. I divined her thoughts, and should much have liked to have responded to them, had it been expedient so to do. She was not now very ambitious of my admiration — not eagerly desirous of dazzling me; a little affection — ever so little — pleased her better than all the panegyrics in the world. Feeling this, I stood a good while behind her, writing on the margin of her book. I could hardly quit my station or relinquish my occupation; something retained me bending there, my head very near hers, and my hand near hers too; but the margin of a copy-book is not an illimitable space — so, doubtless, the directress thought; and she took occasion to walk past in order to ascertain by what art I prolonged so disproportionately the period necessary for filling it. I was obliged to go. Distasteful effort — to leave what we most prefer!

Frances did not become pale or feeble in consequence of her sedentary employment; perhaps the stimulus it communicated to her mind counterbalanced the inaction it imposed on her body. She changed, indeed, changed obviously and rapidly; but it was for the better. When I first saw her, her countenance was sunless, her complexion colourless; she looked like one who had no source of enjoyment, no store of bliss anywhere in the world; now the cloud had passed from her mien, leaving space for the dawn of hope and interest, and those feelings rose like a clear morning, animating what had been depressed, tinting what had been pale. Her eyes, whose colour I had not at first known, so dim were they with repressed tears, so shadowed with ceaseless dejection, now, lit by a ray of the sunshine that cheered her heart, revealed irids of bright hazel — irids large and full, screened with long lashes; and pupils instinct with fire. That look of wan emaciation which anxiety or low spirits often communicates to a thoughtful, thin face, rather long than round, having vanished from hers; a clearness of skin almost bloom, and a plumpness almost embonpoint, softened the decided lines of her features. Her figure shared in this beneficial change; it became rounder, and as the harmony of her form was complete and her stature of the graceful middle height, one did not regret (or at least I did not regret) the absence of confirmed fulness, in contours, still slight, though compact, elegant, flexible — the exquisite turning of waist, wrist, hand, foot, and ankle satisfied completely my notions of symmetry, and allowed a lightness and freedom of movement which corresponded with my ideas of grace.

Thus improved, thus wakened to life, Mdlle. Henri began to take a new footing in the school; her mental power, manifested gradually but steadily, ere long extorted recognition even from the envious; and when the young and healthy saw that she could smile brightly, converse gaily, move with vivacity and alertness, they acknowledged in her a sisterhood of youth and health, and tolerated her as of their kind accordingly.

To speak truth, I watched this change much as a gardener watches the growth of a precious plant, and I contributed to it too, even as the said gardener contributes to the development of his favourite. To me it was not difficult to discover how I could best foster my pupil, cherish her starved feelings, and induce the outward manifestation of that inward vigour which sunless drought and blighting blast had hitherto forbidden to expand. Constancy of attention — a kindness as mute as watchful, always standing by her, cloaked in the rough garb of austerity, and making its real nature known only by a rare glance of interest, or a cordial and gentle word; real respect masked with seeming imperiousness, directing, urging her actions, yet helping her too, and that with devoted care: these were the means I used, for these means best suited Frances' feelings, as susceptible as deep vibrating — her nature at once proud and shy.

The benefits of my system became apparent also in her altered demeanour as a teacher; she now took her place amongst her pupils with an air of spirit and firmness which assured them at once that she meant to be obeyed — and obeyed she was. They felt they had lost their power over her. If any girl had rebelled, she would no longer have taken her rebellion to heart; she possessed a source of comfort they could not drain, a pillar of support they could not overthrow: formerly, when insulted, she wept; now, she smiled.

The public reading of one of her devoirs achieved the revelation of her talents to all and sundry; I remember the subject — it was an emigrant's letter to his friends at home. It opened with simplicity; some natural and graphic touches disclosed to the reader the scene of virgin forest and great, New-World river — barren of sail and flag — amidst which the epistle was supposed to be indited. The difficulties and dangers that attend a settler's life, were hinted at; and in the few words said on that subject, Mdlle. Henri failed not to render audible the voice of resolve, patience, endeavour. The disasters which had driven him from his native country were alluded to; stainless honour, inflexible independence, indestructible self-respect there took the word. Past days were spoken of; the grief of parting, the regrets of absence, were touched upon; feeling, forcible and fine, breathed eloquent in every period. At the close, consolation was suggested; religious faith became there the speaker, and she spoke well.

The devoir was powerfully written in language at once chaste and choice, in a style nerved with vigour and graced with harmony.

Mdlle. Reuter was quite sufficiently acquainted with English to understand it when read or spoken in her presence, though she could neither speak nor write it herself. During the perusal of this devoir, she sat placidly busy, her eyes and fingers occupied with the formation of a "riviere" or open-work hem round a cambric handkerchief; she said nothing, and her face and forehead, clothed with a mask of purely negative expression, were as blank of comment as her lips. As neither surprise, pleasure, approbation, nor interest were evinced in her countenance, so no more were disdain, envy, annoyance, weariness; if that inscrutable mien said anything, it was simply this —

"The matter is too trite to excite an emotion, or call forth an opinion."

As soon as I had done, a hum rose; several of the pupils, pressing round Mdlle. Henri, began to beset her with compliments; the composed voice of the directress was now heard: —

"Young ladies, such of you as have cloaks and umbrellas will hasten to return home before the shower becomes heavier" (it was raining a little), "the remainder will wait till their respective servants arrive to fetch them." And the school dispersed, for it was four o'clock.

"Monsieur, a word," said Mdlle. Reuter, stepping on to the estrade, and signifying, by a movement of the hand, that she wished me to relinquish, for an instant, the castor I had clutched.

"Mademoiselle, I am at your service."

"Monsieur, it is of course an excellent plan to encourage effort in young people by making conspicuous the progress of any particularly industrious pupil; but do you not think that in the present instance, Mdlle. Henri can hardly be considered as a concurrent with the other pupils? She is older than most of them, and has had advantages of an exclusive nature for acquiring a knowledge of English; on the other hand, her sphere of life is somewhat beneath theirs; under these circumstances, a public distinction, conferred upon

Mdlle. Henri, may be the means of suggesting comparisons, and exciting feelings such as would be far from advantageous to the individual forming their object. The interest I take in Mdlle. Henri's real welfare makes me desirous of screening her from annoyances of this sort; besides, monsieur, as I have before hinted to you, the sentiment of AMOUR-PROPRE has a somewhat marked preponderance in her character; celebrity has a tendency to foster this sentiment, and in her it should be rather repressed — she rather needs keeping down than bringing forward; and then I think, monsieur — it appears to me that ambition, LITERARY ambition especially, is not a feeling to be cherished in the mind of a woman: would not Mdlle. Henri be much safer and happier if taught to believe that in the quiet discharge of social duties consists her real vocation, than if stimulated to aspire after applause and publicity? She may never marry; scanty as are her resources, obscure as are her connections, uncertain as is her health (for I think her consumptive, her mother died of that complaint), it is more than probable she never will. I do not see how she can rise to a position, whence such a step would be possible; but even in celibacy it would be better for her to retain the character and habits of a respectable decorous female."

"Indisputably, mademoiselle," was my answer. "Your opinion admits of no doubt;" and, fearful of the harangue being renewed, I retreated under cover of that cordial sentence of assent.

At the date of a fortnight after the little incident noted above, I find it recorded in my diary that a hiatus occurred in Mdlle. Henri's usually regular attendance in class. The first day or two I wondered at her absence, but did not like to ask an explanation of it; I thought indeed some chance word might be dropped which would afford me the information I wished to obtain, without my running the risk of exciting silly smiles and gossiping whispers by demanding it. But when a week passed and the seat at the desk near the door still remained vacant, and when no allusion was made to the circumstance by any individual of the class — when, on the contrary, I found that all observed a marked silence on the point — I determined, COUTE QUI COUTE, to break the ice of this silly reserve. I selected Sylvie as my informant, because from her I knew that I should at least get a sensible answer, unaccompanied by wriggle, titter, or other flourish of folly.

"Ou donc est Mdlle. Henri?" I said one day as I returned an exercise-book I had been examining.

"Elle est partie, monsieur."

"Partie? et pour combien de temps? Quand reviendra-t-elle?"

"Elle est partie pour toujours, monsieur; elle ne reviendra plus."

"Ah!" was my involuntary exclamation; then after a pause: —

"En etes-vous bien sure, Sylvie?"

"Oui, oui, monsieur, mademoiselle la directrice nous l'a dit elle-meme il y a deux ou trois jours."

And I could pursue my inquiries no further; time, place, and circumstances forbade my adding another word. I could neither comment on what had been said, nor demand further particulars. A question as to the reason of the teacher’s departure, as to whether it had been voluntary or otherwise, was indeed on my lips, but I suppressed it — there were listeners all round. An hour after, in passing Sylvie in the corridor as she was putting on her bonnet, I stopped short and asked: —

“Sylvie, do you know Mdlle. Henri’s address? I have some books of hers,” I added carelessly, “and I should wish to send them to her.”

“No, monsieur,” replied Sylvie; “but perhaps Rosalie, the portress, will be able to give it you.”

Rosalie’s cabinet was just at hand; I stepped in and repeated the inquiry. Rosalie — a smart French grisette — looked up from her work with a knowing smile, precisely the sort of smile I had been so desirous to avoid exciting. Her answer was prepared; she knew nothing whatever of Mdlle. Henri’s address — had never known it. Turning from her with impatience — for I believed she lied and was hired to lie — I almost knocked down some one who had been standing at my back; it was the directress. My abrupt movement made her recoil two or three steps. I was obliged to apologize, which I did more concisely than politely. No man likes to be dogged, and in the very irritable mood in which I then was the sight of Mdlle. Reuter thoroughly incensed me. At the moment I turned her countenance looked hard, dark, and inquisitive; her eyes were bent upon me with an expression of almost hungry curiosity. I had scarcely caught this phase of physiognomy ere it had vanished; a bland smile played on her features; my harsh apology was received with good-humoured facility.

“Oh, don’t mention it, monsieur; you only touched my hair with your elbow; it is no worse, only a little dishevelled.” She shook it back, and passing her fingers through her curls, loosened them into more numerous and flowing ringlets. Then she went on with vivacity:

“Rosalie, I was coming to tell you to go instantly and close the windows of the salon; the wind is rising, and the muslin curtains will be covered with dust.”

Rosalie departed. “Now,” thought I, “this will not do; Mdlle. Reuter thinks her meanness in eaves-dropping is screened by her art in devising a pretext, whereas the muslin curtains she speaks of are not more transparent than this same pretext.” An impulse came over me to thrust the flimsy screen aside, and confront her craft boldly with a word or two of plain truth. “The rough-shod foot treads most firmly on slippery ground,” thought I; so I began:

“Mademoiselle Henri has left your establishment — been dismissed, I presume?”

“Ah, I wished to have a little conversation with you, monsieur,” replied the directress with the most natural and affable air in the world; “but we cannot talk quietly here; will Monsieur step into the garden a minute?” And she preceded me, stepping out through the glass-door I have before mentioned.

"There," said she, when we had reached the centre of the middle alley, and when the foliage of shrubs and trees, now in their summer pride, closing behind end around us, shut out the view of the house, and thus imparted a sense of seclusion even to this little plot of ground in the very core of a capital.

"There, one feels quiet and free when there are only pear-trees and rose-bushes about one; I dare say you, like me, monsieur, are sometimes tired of being eternally in the midst of life; of having human faces always round you, human eyes always upon you, human voices always in your ear. I am sure I often wish intensely for liberty to spend a whole month in the country at some little farm-house, bien gentille, bien propre, tout entouree de champs et de bois; quelle vie charmante que la vie champetre! N'est-ce pas, monsieur?"

"Cela depend, mademoiselle."

"Que le vent est bon et frais!" continued the directress; and she was right there, for it was a south wind, soft and sweet. I carried my hat in my hand, and this gentle breeze, passing through my hair, soothed my temples like balm. Its refreshing effect, however, penetrated no deeper than the mere surface of the frame; for as I walked by the side of Mdlle. Reuter, my heart was still hot within me, and while I was musing the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue: —

"I understand Mdlle. Henri is gone from hence, and will not return?"

"Ah, true! I meant to have named the subject to you some days ago, but my time is so completely taken up, I cannot do half the things I wish: have you never experienced what it is, monsieur, to find the day too short by twelve hours for your numerous duties?"

"Not often. Mdlle. Henri's departure was not voluntary, I presume? If it had been, she would certainly have given me some intimation of it, being my pupil."

"Oh, did she not tell you? that was strange; for my part, I never thought of adverting to the subject; when one has so many things to attend to, one is apt to forget little incidents that are not of primary importance."

"You consider Mdlle. Henri's dismission, then, as a very insignificant event?"

"Dismission? Ah! she was not dismissed; I can say with truth, monsieur, that since I became the head of this establishment no master or teacher has ever been dismissed from it."

"Yet some have left it, mademoiselle?"

"Many; I have found it necessary to change frequently — a change of instructors is often beneficial to the interests of a school; it gives life and variety to the proceedings; it amuses the pupils, and suggests to the parents the idea of exertion and progress."

"Yet when you are tired of a professor or maitresse, you scruple to dismiss them?"

“No need to have recourse to such extreme measures, I assure you. Allons, monsieur le professeur — asseyons-nous; je vais vous donner une petite lecon dans votre etat d’instituteur.” (I wish I might write all she said to me in French — it loses sadly by being translated into English.) We had now reached THE garden-chair; the directress sat down, and signed to me to sit by her, but I only rested my knee on the seat, and stood leaning my head and arm against the embowering branch of a huge laburnum, whose golden flowers, blent with the dusky green leaves of a lilac-bush, formed a mixed arch of shade and sunshine over the retreat. Mdlle. Reuter sat silent a moment; some novel movements were evidently working in her mind, and they showed their nature on her astute brow; she was meditating some CHEF D’OEUVRE of policy. Convinced by several months’ experience that the affectation of virtues she did not possess was unavailing to ensnare me — aware that I had read her real nature, and would believe nothing of the character she gave out as being hers — she had determined, at last, to try a new key, and see if the lock of my heart would yield to that; a little audacity, a word of truth, a glimpse of the real. “Yes, I will try,” was her inward resolve; and then her blue eye glittered upon me — it did not flash — nothing of flame ever kindled in its temperate gleam.

“Monsieur fears to sit by me?” she inquired playfully.

“I have no wish to usurp Pelet’s place,” I answered, for I had got the habit of speaking to her bluntly — a habit begun in anger, but continued because I saw that, instead of offending, it fascinated her. She cast down her eyes, and drooped her eyelids; she sighed uneasily; she turned with an anxious gesture, as if she would give me the idea of a bird that flutters in its cage, and would fain fly from its jail and jailer, and seek its natural mate and pleasant nest.

“Well — and your lesson?” I demanded briefly.

“Ah!” she exclaimed, recovering herself, “you are so young, so frank and fearless, so talented, so impatient of imbecility, so disdainful of vulgarity, you need a lesson; here it is then: far more is to be done in this world by dexterity than by strength; but, perhaps, you knew that before, for there is delicacy as well as power in your character — policy, as well as pride?”

“Go on,” said I; and I could hardly help smiling, the flattery was so piquant, so finely seasoned. She caught the prohibited smile, though I passed my hand over my month to conceal it; and again she made room for me to sit beside her. I shook my head, though temptation penetrated to my senses at the moment, and once more I told her to go on.

“Well, then, if ever you are at the head of a large establishment, dismiss nobody. To speak truth, monsieur (and to you I will speak truth), I despise people who are always making rows, blustering, sending off one to the right, and another to the left, urging and hurrying circumstances. I’ll tell you what I like best to do, monsieur, shall I?” She looked up again; she had compounded her glance well this time — much archness, more deference, a spicy dash of coquetry, an unveiled consciousness of capacity. I nodded; she treated me like the great Mogul; so I became the great Mogul as far as she was concerned.

"I like, monsieur, to take my knitting in my hands, and to sit quietly down in my chair; circumstances defile past me; I watch their march; so long as they follow the course I wish, I say nothing, and do nothing; I don't clap my hands, and cry out 'Bravo! How lucky I am!' to attract the attention and envy of my neighbours — I am merely passive; but when events fall out ill — when circumstances become adverse — I watch very vigilantly; I knit on still, and still I hold my tongue; but every now and then, monsieur, I just put my toe out — so — and give the rebellious circumstance a little secret push, without noise, which sends it the way I wish, and I am successful after all, and nobody has seen my expedient. So, when teachers or masters become troublesome and inefficient — when, in short, the interests of the school would suffer from their retaining their places — I mind my knitting, events progress, circumstances glide past; I see one which, if pushed ever so little awry, will render untenable the post I wish to have vacated — the deed is done — the stumbling-block removed — and no one saw me: I have not made an enemy, I am rid of an incumbrance."

A moment since, and I thought her alluring; this speech concluded, I looked on her with distaste. "Just like you," was my cold answer. "And in this way you have ousted Mdlle. Henri? You wanted her office, therefore you rendered it intolerable to her?"

"Not at all, monsieur, I was merely anxious about Mdlle. Henri's health; no, your moral sight is clear and piercing, but there you have failed to discover the truth. I took — I have always taken a real interest in Mdlle. Henri's welfare; I did not like her going out in all weathers; I thought it would be more advantageous for her to obtain a permanent situation; besides, I considered her now qualified to do something more than teach sewing. I reasoned with her; left the decision to herself; she saw the correctness of my views, and adopted them."

"Excellent! and now, mademoiselle, you will have the goodness to give me her address."

"Her address!" and a sombre and stony change came over the mien of the directress. "Her address? Ah? — well — I wish I could oblige you, monsieur, but I cannot, and I will tell you why; whenever I myself asked her for her address, she always evaded the inquiry. I thought — I may be wrong — but I THOUGHT her motive for doing so, was a natural, though mistaken reluctance to introduce me to some, probably, very poor abode; her means were narrow, her origin obscure; she lives somewhere, doubtless, in the 'basse ville.'"

"I'll not lose sight of my best pupil yet," said I, "though she were born of beggars and lodged in a cellar; for the rest, it is absurd to make a bugbear of her origin to me — I happen to know that she was a Swiss pastor's daughter, neither more nor less; and, as to her narrow means, I care nothing for the poverty of her purse so long as her heart overflows with affluence."

"Your sentiments are perfectly noble, monsieur," said the directress, affecting to suppress a yawn; her sprightliness was now extinct, her temporary candour shut up; the little, red-coloured, piratical-looking pennon of audacity she had allowed to float a minute in the air, was furled, and the broad, sober-hued flag of dissimulation again hung low over the citadel. I did not like her thus, so I cut short the TETE-A-TETE and departed.

CHAPTER XIX.

NOVELISTS should never allow themselves to weary of the study of real life. If they observed this duty conscientiously, they would give us fewer pictures chequered with vivid contrasts of light and shade; they would seldom elevate their heroes and heroines to the heights of rapture — still seldomer sink them to the depths of despair; for if we rarely taste the fulness of joy in this life, we yet more rarely savour the acrid bitterness of hopeless anguish; unless, indeed, we have plunged like beasts into sensual indulgence, abused, strained, stimulated, again overstrained, and, at last, destroyed our faculties for enjoyment; then, truly, we may find ourselves without support, robbed of hope. Our agony is great, and how can it end? We have broken the spring of our powers; life must be all suffering — too feeble to conceive faith — death must be darkness — God, spirits, religion can have no place in our collapsed minds, where linger only hideous and polluting recollections of vice; and time brings us on to the brink of the grave, and dissolution flings us in — a rag eaten through and through with disease, wrung together with pain, stamped into the churchyard sod by the inexorable heel of despair.

But the man of regular life and rational mind never despairs. He loses his property — it is a blow — he staggers a moment; then, his energies, roused by the smart, are at work to seek a remedy; activity soon mitigates regret. Sickness affects him; he takes patience — endures what he cannot cure. Acute pain racks him; his writhing limbs know not where to find rest; he leans on Hope's anchors. Death takes from him what he loves; roots up, and tears violently away the stem round which his affections were twined — a dark, dismal time, a frightful wrench — but some morning Religion looks into his desolate house with sunrise, and says, that in another world, another life, he shall meet his kindred again. She speaks of that world as a place unsullied by sin — of that life, as an era unembittered by suffering; she mightily strengthens her consolation by connecting with it two ideas — which mortals cannot comprehend, but on which they love to repose — Eternity, Immortality; and the mind of the mourner, being filled with an image, faint yet glorious, of heavenly hills all light and peace — of a spirit resting there in bliss — of a day when his spirit shall also alight there, free and disembodied — of a reunion perfected by love, purified from fear — he takes courage — goes out to encounter the necessities and discharge the duties of life; and, though sadness may never lift her burden from his mind, Hope will enable him to support it.

Well — and what suggested all this? and what is the inference to be drawn therefrom? What suggested it, is the circumstance of my best pupil — my treasure — being snatched from my hands, and put away out of my reach;

the inference to be drawn from it is — that, being a steady, reasonable man, I did not allow the resentment, disappointment, and grief, engendered in my mind by this evil chance, to grow there to any monstrous size; nor did I allow them to monopolize the whole space of my heart; I pent them, on the contrary, in one strait and secret nook. In the daytime, too, when I was about my duties, I put them on the silent system; and it was only after I had closed the door of my chamber at night that I somewhat relaxed my severity towards these morose nurslings, and allowed vent to their language of murmurs; then, in revenge, they sat on my pillow, haunted my bed, and kept me awake with their long, midnight cry.

A week passed. I had said nothing more to Mdlle. Reuter. I had been calm in my demeanour to her, though stony cold and hard. When I looked at her, it was with the glance fitting to be bestowed on one who I knew had consulted jealousy as an adviser, and employed treachery as an instrument — the glance of quiet disdain and rooted distrust. On Saturday evening, ere I left the house, I stept into the SALLE-A-MANGER, where she was sitting alone, and, placing myself before her, I asked, with the same tranquil tone and manner that I should have used had I put the question for the first time —

"Mademoiselle, will you have the goodness to give me the address of Frances Evans Henri?"

A little surprised, but not disconcerted, she smilingly disclaimed any knowledge of that address, adding, "Monsieur has perhaps forgotten that I explained all about that circumstance before — a week ago?"

"Mademoiselle," I continued, "you would greatly oblige me by directing me to that young person's abode."

She seemed somewhat puzzled; and, at last, looking up with an admirably counterfeited air of naivete, she demanded, "Does Monsieur think I am telling an untruth?"

Still avoiding to give her a direct answer, I said, "It is not then your intention, mademoiselle, to oblige me in this particular?"

"But, monsieur, how can I tell you what I do not know?"

"Very well; I understand you perfectly, mademoiselle, and now I have only two or three words to say. This is the last week in July; in another month the vacation will commence, have the goodness to avail yourself of the leisure it will afford you to look out for another English master — at the close of August, I shall be under the necessity of resigning my post in your establishment."

I did not wait for her comments on this announcement, but bowed and immediately withdrew.

That same evening, soon after dinner, a servant brought me a small packet; it was directed in a hand I knew, but had not hoped so soon to see again; being in my own apartment and alone, there was nothing to prevent my immediately opening it; it contained four five-franc pieces, and a note in English.

“MONSIEUR,

“I came to Mdlle. Reuter’s house yesterday, at the time when I knew you would be just about finishing your lesson, and I asked if I might go into the schoolroom and speak to you. Mdlle. Reuter came out and said you were already gone; it had not yet struck four, so I thought she must be mistaken, but concluded it would be vain to call another day on the same errand. In one sense a note will do as well — it will wrap up the 20 francs, the price of the lessons I have received from you; and if it will not fully express the thanks I owe you in addition — if it will not bid you good-bye as I could wish to have done — if it will not tell you, as I long to do, how sorry I am that I shall probably never see you more — why, spoken words would hardly be more adequate to the task. Had I seen you, I should probably have stammered out something feeble and unsatisfactory — something belying my feelings rather than explaining them; so it is perhaps as well that I was denied admission to your presence. You often remarked, monsieur, that my devoirs dwelt a great deal on fortitude in bearing grief — you said I introduced that theme too often: I find indeed that it is much easier to write about a severe duty than to perform it, for I am oppressed when I see and feel to what a reverse fate has condemned me; you were kind to me, monsieur — very kind; I am afflicted — I am heart-broken to be quite separated from you; soon I shall have no friend on earth. But it is useless troubling you with my distresses. What claim have I on your sympathy? None; I will then say no more.

“Farewell, Monsieur.

“F. E. HENRI.”

I put up the note in my pocket-book. I slipped the five-franc pieces into my purse — then I took a turn through my narrow chamber.

“Mdlle. Reuter talked about her poverty,” said I, “and she is poor; yet she pays her debts and more. I have not yet given her a quarter’s lessons, and she has sent me a quarter’s due. I wonder of what she deprived herself to scrape together the twenty francs — I wonder what sort of a place she has to live in, and what sort of a woman her aunt is, and whether she is likely to get employment to supply the place she has lost. No doubt she will have to trudge about long enough from school to school, to inquire here, and apply there — be rejected in this place, disappointed in that. Many an evening she’ll go to her bed tired and unsuccessful. And the directress would not let her in to bid me good-bye? I might not have the chance of standing with her for a few minutes at a window in the schoolroom and exchanging some half-dozen of sentences — getting to know where she lived — putting matters in train for having all things arranged to my mind? No address on the note” — I continued, drawing it again from the pocket-book and examining it on each side of the two leaves: “women are women, that is certain, and always do business like women; men mechanically put a date and address to their communications. And these five-franc pieces?” — (I hauled them forth from my purse) — “if she had offered me them herself instead of tying them up with a thread of green silk in a kind of Lilliputian packet, I could have thrust them back into her little hand, and shut up the small, taper fingers over them — so — and compelled her shame, her pride, her shyness, all to yield to a little bit of determined Will — now where is she? How can I get at her?"

Opening my chamber door I walked down into the kitchen.

"Who brought the packet?" I asked of the servant who had delivered it to me.

"Un petit commissionaire, monsieur."

"Did he say anything?"

"Rien."

And I wended my way up the back-stairs, wondrously the wiser for my inquiries.

"No matter," said I to myself, as I again closed the door. "No matter — I'll seek her through Brussels."

And I did. I sought her day by day whenever I had a moment's leisure, for four weeks; I sought her on Sundays all day long; I sought her on the Boulevards, in the Allee Verte, in the Park; I sought her in Ste. Gudule and St. Jacques; I sought her in the two Protestant chapels; I attended these latter at the German, French, and English services, not doubting that I should meet her at one of them. All my researches were absolutely fruitless; my security on the last point was proved by the event to be equally groundless with my other calculations. I stood at the door of each chapel after the service, and waited till every individual had come out, scrutinizing every gown draping a slender form, peering under every bonnet covering a young head. In vain; I saw girlish figures pass me, drawing their black scarfs over their sloping shoulders, but none of them had the exact turn and air of Mdlle. Henri's; I saw pale and thoughtful faces "encadrees" in bands of brown hair, but I never found her forehead, her eyes, her eyebrows. All the features of all the faces I met seemed frittered away, because my eye failed to recognize the peculiarities it was bent upon; an ample space of brow and a large, dark, and serious eye, with a fine but decided line of eyebrow traced above.

"She has probably left Brussels — perhaps is gone to England, as she said she would," muttered I inwardly, as on the afternoon of the fourth Sunday, I turned from the door of the chapel-royal which the door-keeper had just closed and locked, and followed in the wake of the last of the congregation, now dispersed and dispersing over the square. I had soon outwalked the couples of English gentlemen and ladies. (Gracious goodness! why don't they dress better? My eye is yet filled with visions of the high-flounced, slovenly, and tumbled dresses in costly silk and satin, of the large unbecoming collars in expensive lace; of the ill-cut coats and strangely fashioned pantaloons which every Sunday, at the English service, filled the choirs of the chapel-royal, and after it, issuing forth into the square, came into disadvantageous contrast with freshly and trimly attired foreign figures, hastening to attend salut at the church of Coburg.) I had passed these pairs of Britons, and the groups of pretty British children, and the British footmen and waiting-maids; I had crossed the Place Royale, and got into the Rue Royale, thence I had diverged into the Rue de Louvain — an old and quiet street. I remember that, feeling a little hungry, and not desiring to go back and take my share of the "gouter," now on the refectory-table at Pelet's — to wit, pistolets and water — I stepped into a baker's and refreshed myself on a COUC(?) — it is a Flemish word, I don't know how to spell it — A CORINTHE-ANGLICE, a currant bun — and a cup of coffee; and then I strolled on towards the Porte de Louvain. Very soon I was out of the city, and slowly mounting the hill, which ascends from the gate, I took my time; for the afternoon, though cloudy, was very sultry, and not a breeze stirred to refresh the atmosphere. No inhabitant of Brussels need wander far to search for solitude; let him but move half a league from his own city and he will find her brooding still and blank over the wide fields, so drear though so fertile, spread out treeless and trackless round the capital of Brabant. Having gained the summit of the hill, and having stood and looked long over the cultured but lifeless campaign, I felt a wish to quit the high road, which I had hitherto followed, and get in among those tilled grounds — fertile as the beds of a Brobdignagian kitchen-garden — spreading far and wide even to the boundaries of the horizon, where, from a dusk green, distance changed them to a sullen blue, and confused their tints with those of the livid and thunderous-looking sky. Accordingly I turned up a by-path to the right; I had not followed it far ere it brought me, as I expected, into the fields, amidst which, just before me, stretched a long and lofty white wall enclosing, as it seemed from the foliage showing above, some thickly planted nursery of yew and cypress, for of that species were the branches resting on the pale parapets, and crowding gloomily about a massive cross, planted doubtless on a central eminence and extending its arms, which seemed of black marble, over the summits of those sinister trees. I approached, wondering to what house this well-protected garden appertained; I turned the angle of the wall, thinking to see some stately residence; I was close upon great iron gates; there was a hut serving for a lodge near, but I had no occasion to apply for the key — the gates were open; I pushed one leaf back — rain had rusted its hinges, for it groaned dolefully as they revolved. Thick planting embowered the entrance. Passing up the avenue, I saw objects on each hand which, in their own mute language of inscription and sign, explained clearly to what abode I had made my way. This was the house appointed for all living; crosses, monuments, and garlands of everlastings announced, "The Protestant Cemetery, outside the gate of Louvain."

The place was large enough to afford half an hour's strolling without the monotony of treading continually the same path; and, for those who love to peruse the annals of graveyards, here was variety of inscription enough to occupy the attention for double or treble that space of time. Hither people of many kindreds, tongues, and nations, had brought their dead for interment; and here, on pages of stone, of marble, and of brass, were written names, dates, last tributes of pomp or love, in English, in French, in German, and Latin. Here the Englishman had erected a marble monument over the remains of his Mary Smith or Jane Brown, and inscribed it only with her name. There the French widower had shaded the grave: of his Elmire or Celestine with a brilliant thicket of roses, amidst which a little tablet rising, bore an equally bright testimony to her countless virtues. Every nation, tribe, and kindred, mourned after its own fashion; and how soundless was the mourning of all! My own tread, though slow and upon smooth-rolled paths, seemed to startle, because it formed the sole break to a silence otherwise total. Not only the winds, but the very fitful, wandering airs, were that afternoon, as by common consent, all fallen asleep in their various quarters; the north was hushed, the south silent, the east sobbed not, nor did the west whisper. The clouds in heaven were condensed and dull, but apparently quite motionless. Under the trees of this cemetery nestled a warm breathless gloom, out of which the cypresses stood up straight and mute, above which the willows hung low and still; where the flowers, as languid as fair, waited listless for night dew or thunder-shower; where the tombs, and those they hid, lay impassible to sun or shadow, to rain or drought.

Importuned by the sound of my own footsteps, I turned off upon the turf, and slowly advanced to a grove of yews; I saw something stir among the stems; I thought it might be a broken branch swinging, my short-sighted vision had caught no form, only a sense of motion; but the dusky shade passed on, appearing and disappearing at the openings in the avenue. I soon discerned it was a living thing, and a human thing; and, drawing nearer, I perceived it was a woman, pacing slowly to and fro, and evidently deeming herself alone as I had deemed myself alone, and meditating as I had been meditating. Ere long she returned to a seat which I fancy she had but just quitted, or I should have caught sight of her before. It was in a nook, screened by a clump of trees; there was the white wall before her, and a little stone set up against the wall, and, at the foot of the stone, was an allotment of turf freshly turned up, a new-made grave. I put on my spectacles, and passed softly close behind her; glancing at the inscription on the stone, I read," Julienne Henri, died at Brussels, aged sixty. August 10th, 18 — ." Having perused the inscription, I looked down at the form sitting bent and thoughtful just under my eyes, unconscious of the vicinity of any living thing; it was a slim, youthful figure in mourning apparel of the plainest black stuff, with a little simple, black crape bonnet; I felt, as well as saw, who it was; and, moving neither hand nor foot, I stood some moments enjoying the security of conviction. I had sought her for a month, and had never discovered one of her traces — never met a hope, or seized a chance of encountering her anywhere. I had been forced to loosen my grasp on expectation; and, but an hour ago, had sunk slackly under the discouraging thought that the current of life, and the impulse of destiny, had swept her for ever from my reach; and, behold, while bending suddenly earthward beneath the pressure of despondency — while following with my eyes the track of sorrow on the turf of a graveyard — here was my lost jewel dropped on the tear-fed herbage, nestling in the messy and mouldy roots of yew-trees.

Frances sat very quiet, her elbow on her knee, and her head on her hand. I knew she could retain a thinking attitude a long time without change; at last, a tear fell; she had been looking at the name on the stone before her, and her heart had no doubt endured one of those constrictions with which the desolate living, regretting the dead, are, at times, so sorely oppressed. Many tears rolled down, which she wiped away, again and again, with her handkerchief; some distressed sobs escaped her, and then, the paroxysm over, she sat quiet as before. I put my hand gently on her shoulder; no need further to prepare her, for she was neither hysterical nor liable to fainting-fits; a sudden push, indeed, might have startled her, but the contact of my quiet touch merely woke attention as I wished; and, though she turned quickly, yet so lightning-swift is thought — in some minds especially — I believe the wonder of what — the consciousness of who it was that thus stole unawares on her solitude, had passed through her brain, and flashed into her heart, even before she had effected that hasty movement; at least, Amazement had hardly opened her eyes and raised them to mine, ere Recognition informed their irids with most speaking brightness. Nervous surprise had hardly discomposed her features ere a sentiment of most vivid joy shone clear and warm on her whole countenance. I had hardly time to observe that she was wasted and pale, ere called to feel a responsive inward pleasure by the sense of most full and exquisite pleasure glowing in the animated flush, and shining in the expansive light, now diffused over my pupil's face. It was the summer sun flashing out after the heavy summer shower; and what fertilizes more rapidly than that beam, burning almost like fire in its ardour?

I hate boldness — that boldness which is of the brassy brow and insensate nerves; but I love the courage of the strong heart, the fervour of the generous blood; I loved with passion the light of Frances Evans' clear hazel eye when it did not fear to look straight into mine; I loved the tones with which she uttered the words —

"Mon maitre! mon maitre!"

I loved the movement with which she confided her hand to my hand; I loved her as she stood there, penniless and parentless; for a sensualist charmless, for me a treasure — my best object of sympathy on earth, thinking such thoughts as I thought, feeling such feelings as I felt; my ideal of the shrine in which to seal my stores of love; personification of discretion and forethought, of diligence and perseverance, of self-denial and self-control — those guardians, those trusty keepers of the gift I longed to confer on her — the gift of all my affections; model of truth and honour, of independence and conscientiousness — those refiners and sustainers of an honest life; silent possessor of a well of tenderness, of a flame, as genial as still, as pure as quenchless, of natural feeling, natural passion — those sources of refreshment and comfort to the sanctuary of home. I knew how quietly and how deeply the well bubbled in her heart; I knew how the more dangerous flame burned safely under the eye of reason; I had seen when the fire shot up a moment high and vivid, when the accelerated heat troubled life's current in its channels; I had seen reason reduce the rebel, and humble its blaze to embers. I had confidence in Frances Evans; I had respect for her, and as I drew her arm through mine, and led her out of the cemetery, I felt I had another sentiment, as strong as confidence, as firm as respect, more fervid than either — that of love.

"Well, my pupil," said I, as the ominous sounding gate swung to behind us — "Well, I have found you again: a month's search has seemed long, and I little thought to have discovered my lost sheep straying amongst graves."

Never had I addressed her but as "Mademoiselle" before, and to speak thus was to take up a tone new to both her and me. Her answer suprised me that this language ruffled none of her feelings, woke no discord in her heart:

"Mon maitre," she said, "have you troubled yourself to seek me? I little imagined you would think much of my absence, but I grieved bitterly to be taken away from you. I was sorry for that circumstance when heavier troubles ought to have made me forget it."

"Your aunt is dead?"

"Yes, a fortnight since, and she died full of regret, which I could not chase from her mind; she kept repeating, even during the last night of her existence, 'Frances, you will be so lonely when I am gone, so friendless:' she wished too that she could have been buried in Switzerland, and it was I who persuaded her in her old age to leave the banks of Lake Leman, and to come, only as it seems to die, in this flat region of Flanders. Willingly would I have observed her last wish, and taken her remains back to our own country, but that was impossible; I was forced to lay her here."

"She was ill but a short time, I presume?"

"But three weeks. When she began to sink I asked Mdlle. Reuter's leave to stay with her and wait on her; I readily got leave."

"Do you return to the pensionnat!" I demanded hastily.

"Monsieur, when I had been at home a week Mdlle. Reuter called one evening, just after I had got my aunt to bed; she went into her room to speak to her, and was extremely civil and affable, as she always is; afterwards she came and sat with me a long time, and just as she rose to go away, she said: "Mademoiselle, I shall not soon cease to regret your departure from my establishment, though indeed it is true that you have taught your class of pupils so well that they are all quite accomplished in the little works you manage so skilfully, and have not the slightest need of further instruction; my second teacher must in future supply your place, with regard to the younger pupils, as well as she can, though she is indeed an inferior artiste to you, and doubtless it will be your part now to assume a higher position in your calling; I am sure you will everywhere find schools and families willing to profit by your talents.' And then she paid me my last quarter's salary. I asked, as mademoiselle would no doubt think, very bluntly, if she designed to discharge me from the establishment. She smiled at my inelegance of speech, and answered that 'our connection as employer and employed was certainly dissolved, but that she hoped still to retain the pleasure of my acquaintance; she should always be happy to see me as a friend;' and then she said something about the excellent condition of the streets, and the long continuance of fine weather, and went away quite cheerful."

I laughed inwardly; all this was so like the directress — so like what I had expected and guessed of her conduct; and then the exposure and proof of her lie, unconsciously afforded by Frances: — "She had frequently applied for Mdlle. Henri's address," forsooth; "Mdlle. Henri had always evaded giving it," &c., &c., and here I found her a visitor at the very house of whose locality she had professed absolute ignorance!

Any comments I might have intended to make on my pupil's communication, were checked by the plashing of large rain-drops on our faces and on the path, and by the muttering of a distant but coming storm. The warning obvious in stagnant air and leaden sky had already induced me to take the road leading back to Brussels, and now I hastened my own steps and those of my companion, and, as our way lay downhill, we got on rapidly. There was an interval after the fall of the first broad drops before heavy rain came on; in the meantime we had passed through the Porte de Louvain, and were again in the city.

"Where do you live?" I asked; "I will see you safe home."

"Rue Notre Dame aux Neiges," answered Frances.

It was not far from the Rue de Louvain, and we stood on the doorsteps of the house we sought ere the clouds, severing with loud peal and shattered cataract of lightning, emptied their livid folds in a torrent, heavy, prone, and broad.

"Come in! come in!" said Frances, as, after putting her into the house, I paused ere I followed: the word decided me; I stepped across the threshold, shut the door on the rushing, flashing, whitening storm, and followed her upstairs to her apartments. Neither she nor I were wet; a projection over the door had warded off the straight-descending flood; none but the first, large drops had touched our garments; one minute more and we should not have had a dry thread on us.

Stepping over a little mat of green wool, I found myself in a small room with a painted floor and a square of green carpet in the middle; the articles of furniture were few, but all bright and exquisitely clean; order reigned through its narrow limits — such order as it soothed my punctilious soul to behold. And I had hesitated to enter the abode, because I apprehended after all that Mdlle. Reuter's hint about its extreme poverty might be too well-founded, and I feared to embarrass the lace-mender by entering her lodgings unawares! Poor the place might be; poor truly it was; but its neatness was better than elegance, and had but a bright little fire shone on that clean hearth, I should have deemed it more attractive than a palace. No fire was there, however, and no fuel laid ready to light; the lace-mender was unable to allow herself that indulgence, especially now when, deprived by death of her sole relative, she had only her own unaided exertions to rely on. Frances went into an inner room to take off her bonnet, and she came out a model of frugal neatness, with her well-fitting black stuff dress, so accurately defining her elegant bust and taper waist, with her spotless white collar turned back from a fair and shapely neck, with her plenteous brown hair arranged in smooth bands on her temples, and in a large Grecian plait behind: ornaments she had none — neither brooch, ring, nor ribbon; she did well enough without them — perfection of fit, proportion of form, grace of carriage, agreeably supplied their place. Her eye, as she re-entered the small sitting-room, instantly sought mine, which was just then lingering on the hearth; I knew she read at once the sort of inward ruth and pitying pain which the chill vacancy of that hearth stirred in my soul: quick to penetrate, quick to determine, and quicker to put in practice, she had in a moment tied a holland apron round her waist; then she disappeared, and reappeared with a basket; it had a cover; she opened it, and produced wood and coal; deftly and compactly she arranged them in the grate.

"It is her whole stock, and she will exhaust it out of hospitality," thought I.

"What are you going to do?" I asked: "not surely to light a fire this hot evening? I shall be smothered."

"Indeed, monsieur, I feel it very chilly since the rain began; besides, I must boil the water for my tea, for I take tea on Sundays; you will be obliged to try and bear the heat."

She had struck a light; the wood was already in a blaze; and truly, when contrasted with the darkness, the wild tumult of the tempest without, that peaceful glow which began to beam on the now animated hearth, seemed very cheering. A low, purring sound, from some quarter, announced that another being, besides myself, was pleased with the change; a black cat, roused by the light from its sleep on a little cushioned foot-stool, came and rubbed its head against Frances' gown as she knelt; she caressed it, saying it had been a favourite with her "pauvre tante Julienne."

The fire being lit, the hearth swept, and a small kettle of a very antique pattern, such as I thought I remembered to have seen in old farmhouses in England, placed over the now ruddy flame, Frances' hands were washed, and her apron removed in an instant then she opened a cupboard, and took out a tea-tray, on which she had soon arranged a china tea-equipage, whose pattern, shape, and size, denoted a remote antiquity; a little, old-fashioned silver spoon was deposited in each saucer; and a pair of silver tongs, equally old-fashioned, were laid on the sugar-basin; from the cupboard, too, was produced a tidy silver cream-ewer, not larger then an egg-shell. While making these preparations, she chanced to look up, and, reading curiosity in my eyes, she smiled and asked —

“Is this like England, monsieur?”

“Like the England of a hundred years ago,” I replied.

“Is it truly? Well, everything on this tray is at least a hundred years old: these cups, these spoons, this ewer, are all heirlooms; my great-grandmother left them to my grandmother, she to my mother, and my mother brought them with her from England to Switzerland, and left them to me; and, ever since I was a little girl, I have thought I should like to carry them back to England, whence they came.”

She put some pistolets on the table; she made the tea, as foreigners do make tea — i.e., at the rate of a teaspoonful to half-a-dozen cups; she placed me a chair, and, as I took it, she asked, with a sort of exaltation —

“Will it make you think yourself at home for a moment?”

“If I had a home in England, I believe it would recall it,” I answered; and, in truth, there was a sort of illusion in seeing the fair-complexioned English-looking girl presiding at the English meal, and speaking in the English language.

“You have then no home?” was her remark.

“None, nor ever have had. If ever I possess a home, it must be of my own making, and the task is yet to begin.” And, as I spoke, a pang, new to me, shot across my heart: it was a pang of mortification at the humility of my position, and the inadequacy of my means; while with that pang was born a strong desire to do more, earn more, be more, possess more; and in the increased possessions, my roused and eager spirit panted to include the home I had never had, the wife I inwardly vowed to win.

Frances’ tea was little better than hot water, sugar, and milk; and her pistolets, with which she could not offer me butter, were sweet to my palate as manna.

The repast over, and the treasured plate and porcelain being washed and put by, the bright table rubbed still brighter, “le chat de ma tante Julienne” also being fed with provisions brought forth on a plate for its special use, a few stray cinders, and a scattering of ashes too, being swept from the hearth, Frances at last sat down; and then, as she took a chair opposite to me, she betrayed, for the first time, a little embarrassment; and no wonder, for indeed I had unconsciously watched her rather too closely, followed all her steps and all her movements a little too perseveringly with my eyes, for she mesmerized me by the grace and alertness of her action — by the deft, cleanly, and even decorative effect resulting from each touch of her slight and fine fingers; and when, at last, she subsided to stillness, the intelligence of her face seemed beauty to me, and I dwelt on it accordingly. Her colour, however, rising, rather than settling with repose, and her eyes remaining downcast, though I kept waiting for the lids to be raised that I might drink a ray of the light I loved — a light where fire dissolved in softness, where affection tempered penetration, where, just now at least, pleasure played with thought — this expectation not being gratified, I began at last to suspect that I had probably myself to blame for the disappointment; I must cease gazing, and begin talking, if I wished to break the spell under which she now sat motionless; so recollecting the composing effect which an authoritative tone and manner had ever been wont to produce on her, I said —

"Get one of your English books, mademoiselle, for the rain yet falls heavily, and will probably detain me half an hour longer."

Released, and set at ease, up she rose, got her book, and accepted at once the chair I placed for her at my side. She had selected "Paradise Lost" from her shelf of classics, thinking, I suppose, the religious character of the book best adapted it to Sunday; I told her to begin at the beginning, and while she read Milton's invocation to that heavenly muse, who on the "secret top of Oreb or Sinai" had taught the Hebrew shepherd how in the womb of chaos, the conception of a world had originated and ripened, I enjoyed, undisturbed, the treble pleasure of having her near me, hearing the sound of her voice — a sound sweet and satisfying in my ear — and looking, by intervals, at her face: of this last privilege, I chiefly availed myself when I found fault with an intonation, a pause, or an emphasis; as long as I dogmatized, I might also gaze, without exciting too warm a flush.

"Enough," said I, when she had gone through some half dozen pages (a work of time with her, for she read slowly and paused often to ask and receive information) — "enough; and now the rain is ceasing, and I must soon go." For indeed, at that moment, looking towards the window, I saw it all blue; the thunder-clouds were broken and scattered, and the setting August sun sent a gleam like the reflection of rubies through the lattice. I got up; I drew on my gloves.

"You have not yet found another situation to supply the place of that from which you were dismissed by Mdlle. Reuter?"

"No, monsieur; I have made inquiries everywhere, but they all ask me for references; and to speak truth, I do not like to apply to the directress, because I consider she acted neither justly nor honourably towards me; she used underhand means to set my pupils against me, and thereby render me unhappy while I held my place in her establishment, and she eventually deprived me of it by a masked and hypocritical manoeuvre, pretending that she was acting for my good, but really snatching from me my chief means of subsistence, at a crisis when not only my own life, but that of another, depended on my exertions: of her I will never more ask a favour."

"How, then, do you propose to get on? How do you live now?"

"I have still my lace-mending trade; with care it will keep me from starvation, and I doubt not by dint of exertion to get better employment yet; it is only a fortnight since I began to try; my courage or hopes are by no means worn out yet."

"And if you get what you wish, what then? what are your ultimate views?"

"To save enough to cross the Channel: I always look to England as my Canaan."

"Well, well — ere long I shall pay you another visit; good evening now," and I left her rather abruptly; I had much ado to resist a strong inward impulse, urging me to take a warmer, more expressive leave: what so natural as to fold her for a moment in a close embrace, to imprint one kiss on her cheek or forehead? I was not unreasonable — that was all I wanted; satisfied in that point, I could go away content; and Reason denied me even this; she ordered me to turn my eyes from her face, and my steps from her apartment — to quit her as dryly and coldly as I would have quitted old Madame Pelet. I obeyed, but I swore rancorously to be avenged one day. "I'll earn a right to do as I please in this matter, or I'll die in the contest. I have one object before me now — to get that Genevese girl for my wife; and my wife she shall be — that is, provided she has as much, or half as much regard for her master as he has for her. And would she be so docile, so smiling, so happy under my instructions if she had not? would she sit at my side when I dictate or correct, with such a still, contented, halcyon mien?" for I had ever remarked, that however sad or harassed her countenance might be when I entered a room, yet after I had been near her, spoken to her a few words, given her some directions, uttered perhaps some reproofs, she would, all at once, nestle into a nook of happiness, and look up serene and revived. The reproofs suited her best of all: while I scolded she would chip away with her pen-knife at a pencil or a pen; fidgetting a little, pouting a little, defending herself by monosyllables, and when I deprived her of the pen or pencil, fearing it would be all cut away, and when I interdicted even the monosyllabic defence, for the purpose of working up the subdued excitement a little higher, she would at last raise her eyes and give me a certain glance, sweetened with gaiety, and pointed with defiance, which, to speak truth, thrilled me as nothing had ever done, and made me, in a fashion (though happily she did not know it), her subject, if not her slave. After such little scenes her spirits would maintain their flow, often for some hours, and, as I remarked before, her health therefrom took a sustenance and vigour which, previously to the event of her aunt's death and her dismissal, had almost recreated her whole frame.

It has taken me several minutes to write these last sentences; but I had thought all their purport during the brief interval of descending the stairs from Frances' room. Just as I was opening the outer door, I remembered the twenty francs which I had not restored; I paused: impossible to carry them away with me; difficult to force them back on their original owner; I had now seen her in her own humble abode, witnessed the dignity of her poverty, the pride of order, the fastidious care of conservatism, obvious in the arrangement and economy of her little home; I was sure she would not suffer herself to be excused paying her debts; I was certain the favour of indemnity would be accepted from no hand, perhaps least of all from mine: yet these four five-franc pieces were a burden to my self-respect, and I must get rid of them. An expedient — a clumsy one no doubt, but the best I could devise-suggested itself to me. I darted up the stairs, knocked, re-entered the room as if in haste: —

“Mademoiselle, I have forgotten one of my gloves; I must have left it here.”

She instantly rose to seek it; as she turned her back, I — being now at the hearth — noiselessly lifted a little vase, one of a set of china ornaments, as old-fashioned as the tea-cups — slipped the money under it, then saying — “Oh here is my glove! I had dropped it within the fender; good evening, mademoiselle,” I made my second exit.

Brief as my impromptu return had been, it had afforded me time to pick up a heart-ache; I remarked that Frances had already removed the red embers of her cheerful little fire from the grate: forced to calculate every item, to save in every detail, she had instantly on my departure retrenched a luxury too expensive to be enjoyed alone.

“I am glad it is not yet winter,” thought I; “but in two months more come the winds and rains of November; would to God that before then I could earn the right, and the power, to shovel coals into that grate AD LIBITUM!”

Already the pavement was drying; a balmy and fresh breeze stirred the air, purified by lightning; I felt the West behind me, where spread a sky like opal; azure immingled with crimson: the enlarged sun, glorious in Tyrian tints, dipped his brim already; stepping, as I was, eastward, I faced a vast bank of clouds, but also I had before me the arch of an evening rainbow; a perfect rainbow — high, wide, vivid. I looked long; my eye drank in the scene, and I suppose my brain must have absorbed it; for that night, after lying awake in pleasant fever a long time, watching the silent sheet-lightning, which still played among the retreating clouds, and flashed silvery over the stars, I at last fell asleep; and then in a dream were reproduced the setting sun, the bank of clouds, the mighty rainbow. I stood, methought, on a terrace; I leaned over a parapeted wall; there was space below me, depth I could not fathom, but hearing an endless dash of waves, I believed it to be the sea; sea spread to the horizon; sea of changeful green and intense blue: all was soft in the distance; all vapour-veiled. A spark of gold glistened on the line between water and air, floated up, approached, enlarged, changed; the object hung midway between heaven and earth, under the arch of the rainbow; the soft but dusk clouds diffused behind. It hovered as on wings; pearly, fleecy, gleaming air streamed like raiment round it; light, tinted with carnation, coloured what seemed face and limbs; A large star shone with still lustre on an angel’s forehead; an upraised arm and hand, glancing like a ray, pointed to the bow overhead, and a voice in my heart whispered —

“Hope smiles on Effort!”

CHAPTER XX.

A COMPETENCY was what I wanted; a competency it was now my aim and resolve to secure; but never had I been farther from the mark. With August the school-year (l'annee scolaire) closed, the examinations concluded, the prizes were adjudged, the schools dispersed, the gates of all colleges, the doors of all pensionnats shut, not to be reopened till the beginning or middle of October. The last day of August was at hand, and what was my position? Had I advanced a step since the commencement of the past quarter? On the contrary, I had receded one. By renouncing my engagement as English master in Mdlle. Reuter's establishment, I had voluntarily cut off 20l. from my yearly income; I had diminished my 60l. per annum to 40l., and even that sum I now held by a very precarious tenure.

It is some time since I made any reference to M. Pelet. The moonlight walk is, I think, the last incident recorded in this narrative where that gentleman cuts any conspicuous figure: the fact is, since that event, a change had come over the spirit of our intercourse. He, indeed, ignorant that the still hour, a cloudless moon, and an open lattice, had revealed to me the secret of his selfish love and false friendship, would have continued smooth and complaisant as ever; but I grew spiny as a porcupine, and inflexible as a blackthorn cudgel; I never had a smile for his raillery, never a moment for his society; his invitations to take coffee with him in his parlour were invariably rejected, and very stiffly and sternly rejected too; his jesting allusions to the directress (which he still continued) were heard with a grim calm very different from the petulant pleasure they were formerly wont to excite. For a long time Pelet bore with my frigid demeanour very patiently; he even increased his attentions; but finding that even a cringing politeness failed to thaw or move me, he at last altered too; in his turn he cooled; his invitations ceased; his countenance became suspicious and overcast, and I read in the perplexed yet brooding aspect of his brow, a constant examination and comparison of premises, and an anxious endeavour to draw thence some explanatory inference. Ere long, I fancy, he succeeded, for he was not without penetration; perhaps, too, Mdlle. Zoraide might have aided him in the solution of the enigma; at any rate I soon found that the uncertainty of doubt had vanished from his manner; renouncing all pretence of friendship and cordiality, he adopted a reserved, formal, but still scrupulously polite deportment. This was the point to which I had wished to bring him, and I was now again comparatively at my ease. I did not, it is true, like my position in his house; but being freed from the annoyance of false professions and double-dealing I could endure it, especially as no heroic sentiment of hatred or jealousy of the director distracted my philosophical soul; he had not, I found, wounded me in a very tender point, the wound was so soon and so radically healed, leaving only a sense of contempt for the treacherous fashion in which it had been inflicted, and a lasting mistrust of the hand which I had detected attempting to stab in the dark.

This state of things continued till about the middle of July, and then there was a little change; Pelet came home one night, an hour after his usual time, in a state of unequivocal intoxication, a thing anomalous with him; for if he had some of the worst faults of his countrymen, he had also one at least of their virtues, i.e. sobriety. So drunk, however, was he upon this occasion, that after having roused the whole establishment (except the pupils, whose dormitory being over the classes in a building apart from the dwelling-house, was consequently out of the reach of disturbance) by violently ringing the hall-bell and ordering lunch to be brought in immediately, for he imagined it was noon, whereas the city bells had just tolled midnight; after having furiously rated the servants for their want of punctuality, and gone near to chastise his poor old mother, who advised him to go to bed, he began raving dreadfully about "le maudit Anglais, Creemsvort." I had not yet retired; some German books I had got hold of had kept me up late; I heard the uproar below, and could distinguish the director's voice exalted in a manner as appalling as it was unusual. Opening my door a little, I became aware of a demand on his part for "Creemsvort" to be brought down to him that he might cut his throat on the hall-table and wash his honour, which he affirmed to be in a dirty condition, in infernal British blood. "He is either mad or drunk," thought I, "and in either case the old woman and the servants will be the better of a man's assistance," so I descended straight to the hall. I found him staggering about, his eyes in a fine frenzy rolling — a pretty sight he was, a just medium between the fool and the lunatic.

"Come, M. Pelet," said I, "you had better go to bed," and I took hold of his arm. His excitement, of course, increased greatly at sight and touch of the individual for whose blood he had been making application: he struggled and struck with fury — but a drunken man is no match for a sober one; and, even in his normal state, Pelet's worn out frame could not have stood against my sound one. I got him up-stairs, and, in process of time, to bed. During the operation he did not fail to utter comminations which, though broken, had a sense in them; while stigmatizing me as the treacherous spawn of a perfidious country, he, in the same breath, anathematized Zoraide Reuter; he termed her "femme sotte et vicieuse," who, in a fit of lewd caprice, had thrown herself away on an unprincipled adventurer; directing the point of the last appellation by a furious blow, obliquely aimed at me. I left him in the act of bounding elastically out of the bed into which I had tucked him; but, as I took the precaution of turning the key in the door behind me, I retired to my own room, assured of his safe custody till the morning, and free to draw undisturbed conclusions from the scene I had just witnessed.

Now, it was precisely about this time that the directress, stung by my coldness, bewitched by my scorn, and excited by the preference she suspected me of cherishing for another, had fallen into a snare of her own laying — was herself caught in the meshes of the very passion with which she wished to entangle me. Conscious of the state of things in that quarter, I gathered, from the condition in which I saw my employer, that his lady-love had betrayed the alienation of her affections — inclinations, rather, I would say; affection is a word at once too warm and too pure for the subject — had let him see that the cavity of her hollow heart, emptied of his image, was now occupied by that of his usher. It was not without some surprise that I found myself obliged to entertain this view of the case; Pelet, with his old-established school, was so convenient, so profitable a match — Zoraide was so calculating, so interested a woman — I wondered mere personal preference could, in her mind, have prevailed for a moment over worldly advantage: yet, it was evident, from what Pelet said, that, not only had she repulsed him, but had even let slip expressions of partiality for me. One of his drunken exclamations was, "And the jade doats on your youth, you raw blockhead! and talks of your noble deportment, as she calls your accursed English formality — and your pure morals, forsooth! des moeurs de Caton a-t-elle dit — sotte!" Hers, I thought, must be a curious soul, where in spite of a strong, natural tendency to estimate unduly advantages of wealth and station, the sardonic disdain of a fortuneless subordinate had wrought a deeper impression than could be imprinted by the most flattering assiduities of a prosperous CHEF D'INSTITUTION. I smiled inwardly; and strange to say, though my AMOUR PROPRE was excited not disagreeably by the conquest, my better feelings remained untouched. Next day, when I saw the directress, and when she made an excuse to meet me in the corridor, and besought my notice by a demeanour and look subdued to Helot humility, I could not love, I could scarcely pity her. To answer briefly and dryly some interesting inquiry about my health — to pass her by with a stern bow — was all I could; her presence and manner had then, and for some time previously and consequently, a singular effect upon me: they sealed up all that was good elicited all that was noxious in my nature; sometimes they enervated my senses, but they always hardened my heart. I was aware of the detriment done, and quarrelled with myself for the change. I had ever hated a tyrant; and, behold, the possession of a slave, self-given, went near to transform me into what I abhorred! There was at once a sort of low gratification in receiving this luscious incense from an attractive and still young worshipper; and an irritating sense of degradation in the very experience of the pleasure. When she stole about me with the soft step of a slave, I felt at once barbarous and sensual as a pasha. I endured her homage sometimes; sometimes I rebuked it. My indifference or harshness served equally to increase the evil I desired to check.

"Que le dedain lui sied bien!" I once overheard her say to her mother: "il est beau comme Apollon quand il sourit de son air hautain."

And the jolly old dame laughed, and said she thought her daughter was bewitched, for I had no point of a handsome man about me, except being straight and without deformity. “Pour moi,” she continued, “il me fait tout l’effet d’un chat-huant, avec ses besicles.”

Worthy old girl! I could have gone and kissed her had she not been a little too old, too fat, and too red-faced; her sensible, truthful words seemed so wholesome, contrasted with the morbid illusions of her daughter.

When Pelet awoke on the morning after his frenzy fit, he retained no recollection of what had happened the previous night, and his mother fortunately had the discretion to refrain from informing him that I had been a witness of his degradation. He did not again have recourse to wine for curing his griefs, but even in his sober mood he soon showed that the iron of jealousy had entered into his soul. A thorough Frenchman, the national characteristic of ferocity had not been omitted by nature in compounding the ingredients of his character; it had appeared first in his access of drunken wrath, when some of his demonstrations of hatred to my person were of a truly fiendish character, and now it was more covertly betrayed by momentary contractions of the features, and flashes of fierceness in his light blue eyes, when their glance chanced to encounter mine. He absolutely avoided speaking to me; I was now spared even the falsehood of his politeness. In this state of our mutual relations, my soul rebelled sometimes almost ungovernably, against living in the house and discharging the service of such a man; but who is free from the constraint of circumstances? At that time, I was not: I used to rise each morning eager to shake off his yoke, and go out with my portmanteau under my arm, if a beggar, at least a freeman; and in the evening, when I came back from the pensionnat de demoiselles, a certain pleasant voice in my ear; a certain face, so intelligent, yet so docile, so reflective, yet so soft, in my eyes; a certain cast of character, at once proud and pliant, sensitive and sagacious, serious and ardent, in my head; a certain tone of feeling, fervid and modest, refined and practical, pure and powerful, delighting and troubling my memory — visions of new ties I longed to contract, of new duties I longed to undertake, had taken the rover and the rebel out of me, and had shown endurance of my hated lot in the light of a Spartan virtue.

But Pelet’s fury subsided; a fortnight sufficed for its rise, progress, and extinction: in that space of time the dismissal of the obnoxious teacher had been effected in the neighbouring house, and in the same interval I had declared my resolution to follow and find out my pupil, and upon my application for her address being refused, I had summarily resigned my own post. This last act seemed at once to restore Mdlle. Reuter to her senses; her sagacity, her judgment, so long misled by a fascinating delusion, struck again into the right track the moment that delusion vanished. By the right track, I do not mean the steep and difficult path of principle — in that path she never trod; but the plain highway of common sense, from which she had of late widely diverged. When there she carefully sought, and having found, industriously pursued the trail of her old suitor, M. Pelet. She soon overtook him. What arts she employed to soothe and blind him I know not, but she succeeded both in allaying his wrath, and hoodwinking his discernment, as was soon proved by the alteration in his mien and manner; she must have managed to convince him that I neither was, nor ever had been, a rival of his, for the fortnight of fury against me terminated in a fit of exceeding graciousness and amenity, not unmixed with a dash of exulting self-complacency, more ludicrous than irritating. Pelet's bachelor's life had been passed in proper French style with due disregard to moral restraint, and I thought his married life promised to be very French also. He often boasted to me what a terror he had been to certain husbands of his acquaintance; I perceived it would not now be difficult to pay him back in his own coin.

The crisis drew on. No sooner had the holidays commenced than note of preparation for some momentous event sounded all through the premises of Pelet: painters, polishers, and upholsterers were immediately set to work, and there was talk of "la chambre de Madame," "le salon de Madame." Not deeming it probable that the old duenna at present graced with that title in our house, had inspired her son with such enthusiasm of filial piety, as to induce him to fit up apartments expressly for her use, I concluded, in common with the cook, the two housemaids, and the kitchen-scullion, that a new and more juvenile Madame was destined to be the tenant of these gay chambers.

Presently official announcement of the coming event was put forth. In another week's time M. Francois Pelet, directeur, and Mdlle. Zoraide Reuter, directrice, were to be joined together in the bands of matrimony. Monsieur, in person, heralded the fact to me; terminating his communication by an obliging expression of his desire that I should continue, as heretofore, his ablest assistant and most trusted friend; and a proposition to raise my salary by an additional two hundred francs per annum. I thanked him, gave no conclusive answer at the time, and, when he had left me, threw off my blouse, put on my coat, and set out on a long walk outside the Porte de Flandre, in order, as I thought, to cool my blood, calm my nerves, and shake my disarranged ideas into some order. In fact, I had just received what was virtually my dismissal. I could not conceal, I did not desire to conceal from myself the conviction that, being now certain that Mdlle. Reuter was destined to become Madame Pelet it would not do for me to remain a dependent dweller in the house which was soon to be hers. Her present demeanour towards me was deficient neither in dignity nor propriety; but I knew her former feeling was unchanged. Decorum now repressed, and Policy masked it, but Opportunity would be too strong for either of these — Temptation would shiver their restraints.

I was no pope — I could not boast infallibility: in short, if I stayed, the probability was that, in three months' time, a practical modern French novel would be in full process of concoction under the roof of the unsuspecting Pelet. Now, modern French novels are not to my taste, either practically or theoretically. Limited as had yet been my experience of life, I had once had the opportunity of contemplating, near at hand, an example of the results produced by a course of interesting and romantic domestic treachery. No golden halo of fiction was about this example, I saw it bare and real, and it was very loathsome. I saw a mind degraded by the practice of mean subterfuge, by the habit of perfidious deception, and a body depraved by the infectious influence of the vice-polluted soul. I had suffered much from the forced and prolonged view of this spectacle; those sufferings I did not now regret, for their simple recollection acted as a most wholesome antidote to temptation. They had inscribed on my reason the conviction that unlawful pleasure, trenching on another's rights, is delusive and envenomed pleasure — its hollowness disappoints at the time, its poison cruelly tortures afterwards, its effects deprave for ever.

From all this resulted the conclusion that I must leave Pelet's, and that instantly; "but," said Prudence, "you know not where to go, nor how to live;" and then the dream of true love came over me: Frances Henri seemed to stand at my side; her slender waist to invite my arm; her hand to court my hand; I felt it was made to nestle in mine; I could not relinquish my right to it, nor could I withdraw my eyes for ever from hers, where I saw so much happiness, such a correspondence of heart with heart; over whose expression I had such influence; where I could kindle bliss, infuse awe, stir deep delight, rouse sparkling spirit, and sometimes waken pleasurable dread. My hopes to will and possess, my resolutions to merit and rise, rose in array against me; and here I was about to plunge into the gulf of absolute destitution; "and all this," suggested an inward voice, "because you fear an evil which may never happen!" "It will happen; you KNOW it will," answered that stubborn monitor, Conscience. "Do what you feel is right; obey me, and even in the sloughs of want I will plant for you firm footing." And then, as I walked fast along the road, there rose upon me a strange, inly-felt idea of some Great Being, unseen, but all present, who in His beneficence desired only my welfare, and now watched the struggle of good and evil in my heart, and waited to see whether I should obey His voice, heard in the whispers of my conscience, or lend an ear to the sophisms by which His enemy and mine — the Spirit of Evil — sought to lead me astray. Rough and steep was the path indicated by divine suggestion; mossy and declining the green way along which Temptation strewed flowers; but whereas, methought, the Deity of Love, the Friend of all that exists, would smile well-pleased were I to gird up my loins and address myself to the rude ascent; so, on the other hand, each inclination to the velvet declivity seemed to kindle a gleam of triumph on the brow of the man-hating, God-defying demon. Sharp and short I turned round; fast I retraced my steps; in half an hour I was again at M. Pelet's: I sought him in his study; brief parley, concise explanation sufficed; my manner proved that I was resolved; he, perhaps, at heart approved my decision. After twenty minutes' conversation, I re-entered my own room, self-deprived of the means of living, self-sentenced to leave my present home, with the short notice of a week in which to provide another.

CHAPTER XXI.

DIRECTLY as I closed the door, I saw laid on the table two letters; my thought was, that they were notes of invitation from the friends of some of my pupils; I had received such marks of attention occasionally, and with me, who had no friends, correspondence of more interest was out of the question; the postman's arrival had never yet been an event of interest to me since I came to Brussels. I laid my hand carelessly on the documents, and coldly and slowly glancing at them, I prepared to break the seals; my eye was arrested and my hand too; I saw what excited me, as if I had found a vivid picture where I expected only to discover a blank page: on one cover was an English postmark; on the other, a lady's clear, fine autograph; the last I opened first: —

"MONSIEUR,

"I FOUND out what you had done the very morning after your visit to me; you might be sure I should dust the china, every day; and, as no one but you had been in my room for a week, and as fairy-money is not current in Brussels, I could not doubt who left the twenty francs on the chimney-piece. I thought I heard you stir the vase when I was stooping to look for your glove under the table, and I wondered you should imagine it had got into such a little cup. Now, monsieur, the money is not mine, and I shall not keep it; I will not send it in this note because it might be lost — besides, it is heavy; but I will restore it to you the first time I see you, and you must make no difficulties about taking it; because, in the first place, I am sure, monsieur, you can understand that one likes to pay one's debts; that it is satisfactory to owe no man anything; and, in the second place, I can now very well afford to be honest, as I am provided with a situation. This last circumstance is, indeed, the reason of my writing to you, for it is pleasant to communicate good news; and, in these days, I have only my master to whom I can tell anything.

"A week ago, monsieur, I was sent for by a Mrs. Wharton, an English lady; her eldest daughter was going to be married, and some rich relation having made her a present of a veil and dress in costly old lace, as precious, they said, almost as jewels, but a little damaged by time, I was commissioned to put them in repair. I had to do it at the house; they gave me, besides, some embroidery to complete, and nearly a week elapsed before I had finished everything. While I worked, Miss Wharton often came into the room and sat with me, and so did Mrs. Wharton; they made me talk English; asked how I had learned to speak it so well; then they inquired what I knew besides — what books I had read; soon they seemed to make a sort of wonder of me, considering me no doubt as a learned grisette. One afternoon, Mrs. Wharton brought in a Parisian lady to test the accuracy of my knowledge of French; the result of it: was that, owing probably in a great degree to the mother's and daughter's good humour about the marriage, which inclined them to do beneficent deeds, and partly, I think, because they are naturally benevolent people, they decided that the wish I had expressed to do something more than mend lace was a very legitimate one; and the same day they took me in their carriage to Mrs. D.'s, who is the directress of the first English school at Brussels. It seems she happened to be in want of a French lady to give lessons in geography, history, grammar, and composition, in the French language. Mrs. Wharton recommended me very warmly; and, as two of her younger daughters are pupils in the house, her patronage availed to get me the place. It was settled that I am to attend six hours daily (for, happily, it was not required that I should live in the house; I should have been sorry to leave my lodgings), and, for this, Mrs. D. will give me twelve hundred francs per annum.

"You see, therefore, monsieur, that I am now rich; richer almost than I ever hoped to be: I feel thankful for it, especially as my sight was beginning to be injured by constant working at fine lace; and I was getting, too, very weary of sitting up late at nights, and yet not being able to find time for reading or study. I began to fear that I should fall ill, and be unable to pay my way; this fear is now, in a great measure, removed; and, in truth, monsieur, I am very grateful to God for the relief; and I feel it necessary, almost, to speak of my happiness to some one who is kind-hearted enough to derive joy from seeing others joyful. I could not, therefore, resist the temptation of writing to you; I argued with myself it is very pleasant for me to write, and it will not be exactly painful, though it may be tiresome to monsieur to read. Do not be too angry with my circumlocution and inelegancies of expression, and, believe me

"Your attached pupil,

"F. E. HENRI."

Having read this letter, I mused on its contents for a few moments — whether with sentiments pleasurable or otherwise I will hereafter note — and then took up the other. It was directed in a hand to me unknown — small, and rather neat; neither masculine nor exactly feminine; the seal bore a coat of arms, concerning which I could only decipher that it was not that of the Seacombe family, consequently the epistle could be from none of my almost forgotten, and certainly quite forgetting patrician relations. From whom, then, was it? I removed the envelope; the note folded within ran as follows:

"I have no doubt in the world that you are doing well in that greasy Flanders; living probably on the fat of the unctuous land; sitting like a black-haired, tawny-skinned, long-nosed Israelite by the flesh-pots of Egypt; or like a rascally son of Levi near the brass cauldrons of the sanctuary, and every now and then plunging in a consecrated hook, and drawing out of the sea, of broth the fattest of heave-shoulders and the fleshiest of wave-breasts. I know this, because you never write to any one in England. Thankless dog that you are! I, by the sovereign efficacy of my recommendation, got you the place where you are now living in clover, and yet not a word of gratitude, or even acknowledgment, have you ever offered in return; but I am coming to see you, and small conception can you, with your addled aristocratic brains, form of the sort of moral kicking I have, ready packed in my carpet-bag, destined to be presented to you immediately on my arrival.

“Meantime I know all about your affairs, and have just got information, by Brown’s last letter, that you are said to be on the point of forming an advantageous match with a pursy, little Belgian schoolmistress — a Mdlle. Zenobie, or some such name. Won’t I have a look at her when I come over! And this you may rely on: if she pleases my taste, or if I think it worth while in a pecuniary point of view, I’ll pounce on your prize and bear her away triumphant in spite of your teeth. Yet I don’t like dumpies either, and Brown says she is little and stout — the better fitted for a wiry, starved-looking chap like you. “Be on the look-out, for you know neither the day nor hour when your — — “ (I don’t wish to blaspheme, so I’ll leave a blank) — cometh.

“Yours truly,

“HUNSDEN YORKE HUNSDEN.”

“Humph!” said I; and ere I laid the letter down, I again glanced at the small, neat handwriting, not a bit like that of a mercantile man, nor, indeed, of any man except Hunsden himself. They talk of affinities between the autograph and the character: what affinity was there here? I recalled the writer’s peculiar face and certain traits I suspected, rather than knew, to appertain to his nature, and I answered, “A great deal.”

Hunsden, then, was coming to Brussels, and coming I knew not when; coming charged with the expectation of finding me on the summit of prosperity, about to be married, to step into a warm nest, to lie comfortably down by the side of a snug, well-fed little mate.

“I wish him joy of the fidelity of the picture he has painted,” thought I. “What will he say when, instead of a pair of plump turtle doves, billing and cooing in a bower of roses, he finds a single lean cormorant, standing mateless and shelterless on poverty’s bleak cliff? Oh, confound him! Let him come, and let him laugh at the contrast between rumour and fact. Were he the devil himself, instead of being merely very like him, I’d not condescend to get out of his way, or to forge a smile or a cheerful word wherewith to avert his sarcasm.”

Then I recurred to the other letter: that struck a chord whose sound I could not deaden by thrusting my fingers into my ears, for it vibrated within; and though its swell might be exquisite music, its cadence was a groan.

That Frances was relieved from the pressure of want, that the curse of excessive labour was taken off her, filled me with happiness; that her first thought in prosperity should be to augment her joy by sharing it with me, met and satisfied the wish of my heart. Two results of her letter were then pleasant, sweet as two draughts of nectar; but applying my lips for the third time to the cup, and they were excoriated as with vinegar and gall.

Two persons whose desires are moderate may live well enough in

Brussels on an income which would scarcely afford a respectable maintenance for one in London: and that, not because the necessaries of life are so much dearer in the latter capital, or taxes so much higher than in the former, but because the English surpass in folly all the nations on God's earth, and are more abject slaves to custom, to opinion, to the desire to keep up a certain appearance, than the Italians are to priestcraft, the French to vain-glory, the Russians to their Czar, or the Germans to black beer. I have seen a degree of sense in the modest arrangement of one homely Belgian household, that might put to shame the elegance, the superfluities, the luxuries, the strained refinements of a hundred genteel English mansions. In Belgium, provided you can make money, you may save it; this is scarcely possible in England; ostentation there lavishes in a month what industry has earned in a year. More shame to all classes in that most bountiful and beggarly country for their servile following of Fashion; I could write a chapter or two on this subject, but must forbear, at least for the present. Had I retained my 60l. per annum I could, now that Frances was in possession of 50l., have gone straight to her this very evening, and spoken out the words which, repressed, kept fretting my heart with fever; our united income would, as we should have managed it, have sufficed well for our mutual support; since we lived in a country where economy was not confounded with meanness, where frugality in dress, food, and furniture, was not synonymous with vulgarity in these various points. But the placeless usher, bare of resource, and unsupported by connections, must not think of this; such a sentiment as love, such a word as marriage, were misplaced in his heart, and on his lips. Now for the first time did I truly feel what it was to be poor; now did the sacrifice I had made in casting from me the means of living put on a new aspect; instead of a correct, just, honourable act, it seemed a deed at once light and fanatical; I took several turns in my room, under the goading influence of most poignant remorse; I walked a quarter of an hour from the wall to the window; and at the window, self-reproach seemed to face me; at the wall, self-disdain: all at once out spoke Conscience: —

"Down, stupid tormenters!" cried she; "the man has done his duty; you shall not bait him thus by thoughts of what might have been; he relinquished a temporary and contingent good to avoid a permanent and certain evil he did well. Let him reflect now, and when your blinding dust and deafening hum subside, he will discover a path."

I sat down; I propped my forehead on both my hands; I thought and thought an hour-two hours; vainly. I seemed like one sealed in a subterranean vault, who gazes at utter blackness; at blackness ensured by yard-thick stone walls around, and by piles of building above, expecting light to penetrate through granite, and through cement firm as granite. But there are chinks, or there may be chinks, in the best adjusted masonry; there was a chink in my cavernous cell; for, eventually, I saw, or seemed to see, a ray — pallid, indeed, and cold, and doubtful, but still a ray, for it showed that narrow path which conscience had promised after two, three hours' torturing research in brain and memory, I disinterred certain remains of circumstances, and conceived a hope that by putting them together an expedient might be framed, and a resource discovered. The circumstances were briefly these:

Some three months ago M. Pelet had, on the occasion of his fete, given the boys a treat, which treat consisted in a party of pleasure to a certain place of public resort in the outskirts of Brussels, of which I do not at this moment remember the name, but near it were several of those lakelets called etangs; and there was one etang, larger than the rest, where on holidays people were accustomed to amuse themselves by rowing round it in little boats. The boys having eaten an unlimited quantity of "gaufres," and drank several bottles of Louvain beer, amid the shades of a garden made and provided for such crams, petitioned the director for leave to take a row on the etang. Half a dozen of the eldest succeeded in obtaining leave, and I was commissioned to accompany them as surveillant. Among the half dozen happened to be a certain Jean Baptiste Vandenhuten, a most ponderous young Flamand, not tall, but even now, at the early age of sixteen, possessing a breadth and depth of personal development truly national. It chanced that Jean was the first lad to step into the boat; he stumbled, rolled to one side, the boat revolted at his weight and capsized. Vandenhuten sank like lead, rose, sank again. My coat and waistcoat were off in an instant; I had not been brought up at Eton and boated and bathed and swam there ten long years for nothing; it was a natural and easy act for me to leap to the rescue. The lads and the boatmen yelled; they thought there would be two deaths by drowning instead of one; but as Jean rose the third time, I clutched him by one leg and the collar, and in three minutes more both he and I were safe landed. To speak heaven's truth, my merit in the action was small indeed, for I had run no risk, and subsequently did not even catch cold from the wetting; but when M. and Madame Vandenhuten, of whom Jean Baptiste was the sole hope, came to hear of the exploit, they seemed to think I had evinced a bravery and devotion which no thanks could sufficiently repay. Madame, in particular, was "certain I must have dearly loved their sweet son, or I would not thus have hazarded my own life to save his." Monsieur, an honest-looking, though phlegmatic man, said very little, but he would not suffer me to leave the room, till I had promised that in case I ever stood in need of help I would, by applying to him, give him a chance of discharging the obligation under which he affirmed I had laid him. These words, then, were my glimmer of light; it was here I found my sole outlet; and in truth, though the cold light roused, it did not cheer me; nor did the outlet seem such as I should like to pass through. Right I had none to M. Vandenhuten's good offices; it was not on the ground of merit I could apply to him; no, I must stand on that of necessity: I had no work; I wanted work; my best chance of obtaining it lay in securing his recommendation. This I knew could be had by asking for it; not to ask, because the request revolted my pride and contradicted my habits, would, I felt, be an indulgence of false and indolent fastidiousness. I might repent the omission all my life; I would not then be guilty of it.

That evening I went to M. Vandenhuten's; but I had bent the bow and adjusted the shaft in vain; the string broke. I rang the bell at the great door (it was a large, handsome house in an expensive part of the town); a manservant opened; I asked for M. Vandenhuten; M. Vandenhuten and family were all out of town — gone to Ostend — did not know when they would be back. I left my card, and retraced my steps.

CHAPTER XXII

A WEEK is gone; LE JOUR DES NOCES arrived; the marriage was solemnized at St. Jacques; Mdlle. Zoraide became Madame Pelet, NEE Reuter; and, in about an hour after this transformation, “the happy pair,” as newspapers phrase it, were on their way to Paris; where, according to previous arrangement, the honeymoon was to be spent. The next day I quitted the pensionnat. Myself and my chattels (some books and clothes) were soon transferred to a modest lodging I had hired in a street not far off. In half an hour my clothes were arranged in a commode, my books on a shelf, and the “flitting” was effected. I should not have been unhappy that day had not one pang tortured me — a longing to go to the Rue Notre Dame aux Neiges, resisted, yet irritated by an inward resolve to avoid that street till such time as the mist of doubt should clear from my prospects.

It was a sweet September evening — very mild, very still; I had nothing to do; at that hour I knew Frances would be equally released from occupation; I thought she might possibly be wishing for her master, I knew I wished for my pupil. Imagination began with her low whispers, infusing into my soul the soft tale of pleasures that might be.

“You will find her reading or writing,” said she; “you can take your seat at her side; you need not startle her peace by undue excitement; you need not embarrass her manner by unusual action or language. Be as you always are; look over what she has written; listen while she reads; chide her, or quietly approve; you know the effect of either system; you know her smile when pleased, you know the play of her looks when roused; you have the secret of awakening that expression you will, and you can choose amongst that pleasant variety. With you she will sit silent as long as it suits you to talk alone; you can hold her under a potent spell: intelligent as she is, eloquent as she can be, you can seal her lips, and veil her bright countenance with diffidence; yet, you know, she is not all monotonous mildness; you have seen, with a sort of strange pleasure, revolt, scorn, austerity, bitterness, lay energetic claim to a place in her feelings and physiognomy; you know that few could rule her as you do; you know she might break, but never bend under the hand of Tyranny and Injustice, but Reason and Affection can guide her by a sign. Try their influence now. Go — they are not passions; you may handle them safely.”

“I will NOT go was my answer to the sweet temptress. A man is master of himself to a certain point, but not beyond it. Could I seek Frances to-night, could I sit with her alone in a quiet room, and address her only in the language of Reason and Affection?”

“No,” was the brief, fervent reply of that Love which had conquered and now controlled me.

Time seemed to stagnate; the sun would not go down; my watch ticked, but I thought the hands were paralyzed.

"What a hot evening!" I cried, throwing open the lattice; for, indeed, I had seldom felt so feverish. Hearing a step ascending the common stair, I wondered whether the "locataire," now mounting to his apartments, were as unsettled in mind and condition as I was, or whether he lived in the calm of certain resources, and in the freedom of unfettered feelings. What! was he coming in person to solve the problem hardly proposed in inaudible thought? He had actually knocked at the door — at MY door; a smart, prompt rap; and, almost before I could invite him in, he was over the threshold, and had closed the door behind him.

"And how are you?" asked an indifferent, quiet voice, in the English language; while my visitor, without any sort of bustle or introduction, put his hat on the table, and his gloves into his hat, and drawing the only armchair the room afforded a little forward, seated himself tranquilly therein.

"Can't you speak?" he inquired in a few moments, in a tone whose nonchalance seemed to intimate that it was much the same thing whether I answered or not. The fact is, I found it desirable to have recourse to my good friends "les besicles;" not exactly to ascertain the identity of my visitor — for I already knew him, confound his impudence! but to see how he looked — to get a clear notion of his mien and countenance. I wiped the glasses very deliberately, and put them on quite as deliberately; adjusting them so as not to hurt the bridge of my nose or get entangled in my short tufts of dun hair. I was sitting in the window-seat, with my back to the light, and I had him VIS-A-VIS; a position he would much rather have had reversed; for, at any time, he preferred scrutinizing to being scrutinized. Yes, it was HE, and no mistake, with his six feet of length arranged in a sitting attitude; with his dark travelling surtout with its velvet collar, his gray pantaloons, his black stock, and his face, the most original one Nature ever modelled, yet the least obtrusively so; not one feature that could be termed marked or odd, yet the effect of the whole unique. There is no use in attempting to describe what is indescribable. Being in no hurry to address him, I sat and stared at my ease.

"Oh, that's your game — is it?" said he at last. "Well, we'll see which is soonest tired." And he slowly drew out a fine cigar-case, picked one to his taste, lit it, took a book from the shelf convenient to his hand, then leaning back, proceeded to smoke and read as tranquilly as if he had been in his own room, in Grove-street, X — -shire, England. I knew he was capable of continuing in that attitude till midnight, if he conceived the whim, so I rose, and taking the book from his hand, I said, —

"You did not ask for it, and you shall not have it."

"It is silly and dull," he observed, "so I have not lost much;" then the spell being broken, he went on. "I thought you lived at Pelet's; I went there this afternoon expecting to be starved to death by sitting in a boarding-school drawing-room, and they told me you were gone, had departed this morning;

you had left your address behind you though, which I wondered at; it was a more practical and sensible precaution than I should have imagined you capable of. Why did you leave?"

"Because M. Pelet has just married the lady whom you and Mr. Brown assigned to me as my wife."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Hunsden with a short laugh; "so you've lost both your wife and your place?"

"Precisely so."

I saw him give a quick, covert glance all round my room; he marked its narrow limits, its scanty furniture: in an instant he had comprehended the state of matters — had absolved me from the crime of prosperity. A curious effect this discovery wrought in his strange mind; I am morally certain that if he had found me installed in a handsome parlour, lounging on a soft couch, with a pretty, wealthy wife at my side, he would have hated me; a brief, cold, haughty visit, would in such a case have been the extreme limit of his civilities, and never would he have come near me more, so long as the tide of fortune bore me smoothly on its surface; but the painted furniture, the bare walls, the cheerless solitude of my room relaxed his rigid pride, and I know not what softening change had taken place both in his voice and look ere he spoke again.

"You have got another place?"

"No."

"You are in the way of getting one?"

"No."

"That is bad; have you applied to Brown?"

"No, indeed."

"You had better; he often has it in his power to give useful information in such matters."

"He served me once very well; I have no claim on him, and am not in the humour to bother him again."

"Oh, if you're bashful, and dread being intrusive, you need only commission me. I shall see him to-night; I can put in a word."

"I beg you will not, Mr. Hunsden; I am in your debt already; you did me an important service when I was at X— —; got me out of a den where I was dying: that service I have never repaid, and at present I decline positively adding another item to the account."

"If the wind sits that way, I'm satisfied. I thought my unexampled generosity in turning you out of that accursed counting-house would be duly appreciated some day: 'Cast your bread on the waters, and it shall be found after many days,' say the Scriptures. Yes, that's right, lad — make much of me — I'm a nonpareil: there's nothing like me in the common herd. In the meantime, to put all humbug aside and talk sense for a few moments, you would be greatly the better of a situation, and what is more, you are a fool if you refuse to take one from any hand that offers it."

“Very well, Mr. Hunsden; now you have settled that point, talk of something else. What news from X — — ?”

“I have not settled that point, or at least there is another to settle before we get to X — — . Is this Miss Zenobie” (Zoraide, interposed I) — “well, Zoraide — is she really married to Pelet?”

“I tell you yes — and if you don’t believe me, go and ask the cure of St. Jacques.”

“And your heart is broken?”

“I am not aware that it is; it feels all right — beats as usual.”

“Then your feelings are less superfine than I took them to be; you must be a coarse, callous character, to bear such a thwack without staggering under it.”

“Staggering under it? What the deuce is there to stagger under in the circumstance of a Belgian schoolmistress marrying a French schoolmaster? The progeny will doubtless be a strange hybrid race; but that’s their Look out — not mine.”

“He indulges in scurrilous jests, and the bride was his affianced one!”

“Who said so?”

“Brown.”

“I’ll tell you what, Hunsden — Brown is an old gossip.”

“He is; but in the meantime, if his gossip be founded on less than fact — if you took no particular interest in Miss Zoraide — why, O youthful pedagogue! did you leave your place in consequence of her becoming Madame Pelet?”

“Because — “ I felt my face grow a little hot; “because — in short, Mr. Hunsden, I decline answering any more questions,” and I plunged my hands deep in my breeches pocket.

Hunsden triumphed: his eyes — his laugh announced victory.

“What the deuce are you laughing at, Mr. Hunsden?”

“At your exemplary composure. Well, lad, I’ll not bore you; I see how it is: Zoraide has jilted you — married some one richer, as any sensible woman would have done if she had had the chance.”

I made no reply — I let him think so, not feeling inclined to enter into an explanation of the real state of things, and as little to forge a false account; but it was not easy to blind Hunsden; my very silence, instead of convincing him that he had hit the truth, seemed to render him doubtful about it; he went on: —

“I suppose the affair has been conducted as such affairs always are amongst rational people: you offered her your youth and your talents-such as they are — in exchange for her position and money: I don’t suppose you took appearance, or what is called LOVE, into the account — for I understand she is older than you, and Brown says, rather sensible-looking than beautiful. She, having then no chance of making a better bargain, was at first inclined to come to terms with you, but Pelet — the head of a flourishing school — stepped in with a higher bid; she accepted, and he has got her: a correct transaction — perfectly so — business-like and legitimate. And now we'll talk of something else."

"Do," said I, very glad to dismiss the topic, and especially glad to have baffled the sagacity of my cross-questioner — if, indeed, I had baffled it; for though his words now led away from the dangerous point, his eyes, keen and watchful, seemed still preoccupied with the former idea.

"You want to hear news from X — — ? And what interest can you have in X — — ? You left no friends there, for you made none. Nobody ever asks after you — neither man nor woman; and if I mention your name in company, the men look as if I had spoken of Prester John; and the women sneer covertly. Our X — — belles must have disliked you. How did you excite their displeasure?"

"I don't know. I seldom spoke to them — they were nothing to me. I considered them only as something to be glanced at from a distance; their dresses and faces were often pleasing enough to the eye: but I could not understand their conversation, nor even read their countenances. When I caught snatches of what they said, I could never make much of it; and the play of their lips and eyes did not help me at all."

"That was your fault, not theirs. There are sensible, as well as handsome women in X — — ; women it is worth any man's while to talk to, and with whom I can talk with pleasure: but you had and have no pleasant address; there is nothing in you to induce a woman to be affable. I have remarked you sitting near the door in a room full of company, bent on hearing, not on speaking; on observing, not on entertaining; looking frigidly shy at the commencement of a party, confusingly vigilant about the middle, and insultingly weary towards the end. Is that the way, do you think, ever to communicate pleasure or excite interest? No; and if you are generally unpopular, it is because you deserve to be so."

"Content!" I ejaculated.

"No, you are not content; you see beauty always turning its back on you; you are mortified and then you sneer. I verily believe all that is desirable on earth — wealth, reputation, love — will for ever to you be the ripe grapes on the high trellis: you'll look up at them; they will tantalize in you the lust of the eye; but they are out of reach: you have not the address to fetch a ladder, and you'll go away calling them sour."

Cutting as these words might have been under some circumstances, they drew no blood now. My life was changed; my experience had been varied since I left X — — , but Hunsden could not know this; he had seen me only in the character of Mr. Crimsworth's clerk — a dependant amongst wealthy strangers, meeting disdain with a hard front, conscious of an unsocial and unattractive exterior, refusing to sue for notice which I was sure would be withheld, declining to evince an admiration which I knew would be scorned as worthless. He could not be aware that since then youth and loveliness had been to me everyday objects; that I had studied them at leisure and closely, and had seen the plain texture of truth under the embroidery of appearance; nor could he, keen-sighted as he was, penetrate into my heart, search my brain, and read my peculiar sympathies and antipathies; he had not known me long enough, or well enough, to perceive how low my feelings would ebb under some influences, powerful over most minds; how high, how fast they would flow under other influences, that perhaps acted with the more intense force on me, because they acted on me alone. Neither could he suspect for an instant the history of my communications with Mdlle. Reuter; secret to him and to all others was the tale of her strange infatuation; her blandishments, her wiles had been seen but by me, and to me only were they known; but they had changed me, for they had proved that I COULD impress. A sweeter secret nestled deeper in my heart; one full of tenderness and as full of strength: it took the sting out of Hunsden's sarcasm; it kept me unbent by shame, and unstirred by wrath. But of all this I could say nothing — nothing decisive at least; uncertainty sealed my lips, and during the interval of silence by which alone I replied to Mr. Hunsden, I made up my mind to be for the present wholly misjudged by him, and misjudged I was; he thought he had been rather too hard upon me, and that I was crushed by the weight of his upbraidings; so to re-assure me he said, doubtless I should mend some day; I was only at the beginning of life yet; and since happily I was not quite without sense, every false step I made would be a good lesson.

Just then I turned my face a little to the light; the approach of twilight, and my position in the window-seat, had, for the last ten minutes, prevented him from studying my countenance; as I moved, however, he caught an expression which he thus interpreted: —

"Confound it! How doggedly self-approving the lad looks! I thought he was fit to die with shame, and there he sits grinning smiles, as good as to say, 'Let the world wag as it will, I've the philosopher's stone in my waist-coat pocket, and the elixir of life in my cupboard; I'm independent of both Fate and Fortune.'"

"Hunsden — you spoke of grapes; I was thinking of a fruit I like better than your X— — hot-house grapes — an unique fruit, growing wild, which I have marked as my own, and hope one day to gather and taste. It is of no use your offering me the draught of bitterness, or threatening me with death by thirst: I have the anticipation of sweetness on my palate; the hope of freshness on my lips; I can reject the unsavoury, and endure the exhausting."

"For how long?"

"Till the next opportunity for effort; and as the prize of success will be a treasure after my own heart, I'll bring a bull's strength to the struggle."

"Bad luck crushes bulls as easily as bullaces; and, I believe, the fury dogs you: you were born with a wooden spoon in your mouth, depend on it."

"I believe you; sad I mean to make my wooden spoon do the work of some people's silver ladles: grasped firmly, and handled nimbly, even a wooden spoon will shovel up broth."

Hunsden rose: "I see," said he; "I suppose you're one of those who develop best unwatched, and act best unaided-work your own way. Now, I'll go." And, without another word, he was going; at the door he turned: —

"Crimsworth Hall is sold," said he.

"Sold!" was my echo.

"Yes; you know, of course, that your brother failed three months ago?"

"What! Edward Crimsworth?"

"Precisely; and his wife went home to her fathers; when affairs went awry, his temper sympathized with them; he used her ill; I told you he would be a tyrant to her some day; as to him — "

"Ay, as to him — what is become of him?"

"Nothing extraordinary — don't be alarmed; he put himself under the protection of the court, compounded with his creditors — tenpence in the pound; in six weeks set up again, coaxed back his wife, and is flourishing like a green bay-tree."

"And Crimsworth Hall — was the furniture sold too?"

"Everything — from the grand piano down to the rolling-pin."

"And the contents of the oak dining-room — were they sold?"

"Of course; why should the sofas and chairs of that room be held more sacred than those of any other?"

"And the pictures?"

"What pictures? Crimsworth had no special collection that I know of — he did not profess to be an amateur."

"There were two portraits, one on each side the mantelpiece; you cannot have forgotten them, Mr. Hunsden; you once noticed that of the lady — "

"Oh, I know! the thin-faced gentlewoman with a shawl put on like drapery. — Why, as a matter of course, it would be sold among the other things. If you had been rich, you might have bought it, for I remember you said it represented your mother: you see what it is to be without a sou."

I did. "But surely," I thought to myself, "I shall not always be so poverty-stricken; I may one day buy it back yet. — Who purchased it? do you know?" I asked.

"How is it likely? I never inquired who purchased anything; there spoke the unpractical man — to imagine all the world is interested in what interests himself! Now, good night — I'm off for Germany to-morrow morning; I shall be back here in six weeks, and possibly I may call and see you again; I wonder whether you'll be still out of place!" he laughed, as mockingly, as heartlessly as Mephistopheles, and so laughing, vanished.

Some people, however indifferent they may become after a considerable space of absence, always contrive to leave a pleasant impression just at parting; not so Hunsden, a conference with him affected one like a draught of Peruvian bark; it seemed a concentration of the specially harsh, stringent, bitter; whether, like bark, it invigorated, I scarcely knew.

A ruffled mind makes a restless pillow; I slept little on the night after this interview; towards morning I began to doze, but hardly had my slumber become sleep, when I was roused from it by hearing a noise in my sitting room, to which my bed-room adjoined — a step, and a shoving of furniture; the movement lasted barely two minutes; with the closing of the door it ceased. I listened; not a mouse stirred; perhaps I had dreamt it; perhaps a locataire had made a mistake, and entered my apartment instead of his own. It was yet but five o'clock; neither I nor the day were wide awake; I turned, and was soon unconscious. When I did rise, about two hours later, I had forgotten the circumstance; the first thing I saw, however, on quitting my chamber, recalled it; just pushed in at the door of my sitting-room, and still standing on end, was a wooden packing-case — a rough deal affair, wide but shallow; a porter had doubtless shoved it forward, but seeing no occupant of the room, had left it at the entrance.

"That is none of mine," thought I, approaching; "it must be meant for somebody else." I stooped to examine the address: —

"Wm. Crimsworth, Esq., No — , — St., Brussels."

I was puzzled, but concluding that the best way to obtain information was to ask within, I cut the cords and opened the case. Green baize enveloped its contents, sewn carefully at the sides; I ripped the pack-thread with my penknife, and still, as the seam gave way, glimpses of gilding appeared through the widening interstices. Boards and baize being at length removed, I lifted from the case a large picture, in a magnificent frame; leaning it against a chair, in a position where the light from the window fell favourably upon it, I stepped back — already I had mounted my spectacles. A portrait-painter's sky (the most sombre and threatening of welkins), and distant trees of a conventional depth of hue, raised in full relief a pale, pensive-looking female face, shadowed with soft dark hair, almost blending with the equally dark clouds; large, solemn eyes looked reflectively into mine; a thin cheek rested on a delicate little hand; a shawl, artistically draped, half hid, half showed a slight figure. A listener (had there been one) might have heard me, after ten minutes' silent gazing, utter the word "Mother!" I might have said more — but with me, the first word uttered aloud in soliloquy rouses consciousness; it reminds me that only crazy people talk to themselves, and then I think out my monologue, instead of speaking it. I had thought a long while, and a long while had contemplated the intelligence, the sweetness, and — alas! the sadness also of those fine, grey eyes, the mental power of that forehead, and the rare sensibility of that serious mouth, when my glance, travelling downwards, fell on a narrow billet, stuck in the corner of the picture, between the frame and the canvas. Then I first asked, "Who sent this picture? Who thought of me, saved it out of the wreck of Crimsworth Hall, and now commits it to the care of its natural keeper?" I took the note from its niche; thus it spoke: —

"There is a sort of stupid pleasure in giving a child sweets, a fool his bells, a dog a bone. You are repaid by seeing the child besmear his face with sugar; by witnessing how the fool's ecstasy makes a greater fool of him than ever; by watching the dog's nature come out over his bone. In giving William Crimsworth his mother's picture, I give him sweets, bells, and bone all in one; what grieves me is, that I cannot behold the result; I would have added five shillings more to my bid if the auctioneer could only have promised me that pleasure.

"H. Y. H.

"P.S. — You said last night you positively declined adding another item to your account with me; don't you think I've saved you that trouble?"

I muffled the picture in its green baize covering, restored it to the case, and having transported the whole concern to my bed-room, put it out of sight under my bed. My pleasure was now poisoned by pungent pain; I determined to look no more till I could look at my ease. If Hunsden had come in at that moment, I should have said to him, "I owe you nothing, Hunsden — not a fraction of a farthing: you have paid yourself in taunts!"

Too anxious to remain any longer quiescent, I had no sooner breakfasted, than I repaired once more to M. Vandenhuten's, scarcely hoping to find him at home; for a week had barely elapsed since my first call: but fancying I might be able to glean information as to the time when his return was expected. A better result awaited me than I had anticipated, for though the family were yet at Ostend, M. Vandenhuten had come over to Brussels on business for the day. He received me with the quiet kindness of a sincere though not excitable man. I had not sat five minutes alone with him in his bureau, before I became aware of a sense of ease in his presence, such as I rarely experienced with strangers. I was surprised at my own composure, for, after all, I had come on business to me exceedingly painful — that of soliciting a favour. I asked on what basis the calm rested — I feared it might be deceptive. Ere long I caught a glimpse of the ground, and at once I felt assured of its solidity; I knew where it was.

M. Vandenhuten was rich, respected, and influential; I, poor, despised and powerless; so we stood to the world at large as members of the world's society; but to each other, as a pair of human beings, our positions were reversed. The Dutchman (he was not Flamand, but pure Hollandais) was slow, cool, of rather dense intelligence, though sound and accurate judgment; the Englishman far more nervous, active, quicker both to plan and to practise, to conceive and to realize. The Dutchman was benevolent, the Englishman susceptible; in short our characters dovetailed, but my mind having more fire and action than his, instinctively assumed and kept the predominance.

This point settled, and my position well ascertained, I addressed him on the subject of my affairs with that genuine frankness which full confidence can alone inspire. It was a pleasure to him to be so appealed to; he thanked me for giving him this opportunity of using a little exertion in my behalf. I went on to explain to him that my wish was not so much to be helped, as to be put into the way of helping myself; of him I did not want exertion — that was to be my part — but only information and recommendation. Soon after I rose to go. He held out his hand at parting — an action of greater significance with foreigners than with Englishmen. As I exchanged a smile with him, I thought the benevolence of his truthful face was better than the intelligence of my own. Characters of my order experience a balm-like solace in the contact of such souls as animated the honest breast of Victor Vandenhuten.

The next fortnight was a period of many alternations; my existence during its lapse resembled a sky of one of those autumnal nights which are specially haunted by meteors and falling stars. Hopes and fears, expectations and disappointments, descended in glancing showers from zenith to horizon; but all were transient, and darkness followed swift each vanishing apparition. M. Vandenhuten aided me faithfully; he set me on the track of several places, and himself made efforts to secure them for me; but for a long time solicitation and recommendation were vain — the door either shut in my face when I was about to walk in, or another candidate, entering before me, rendered my further advance useless. Feverish and roused, no disappointment arrested me; defeat following fast on defeat served as stimulants to will. I forgot fastidiousness, conquered reserve, thrust pride from me: I asked, I persevered, I remonstrated, I dunned. It is so that openings are forced into the guarded circle where Fortune sits dealing favours round. My perseverance made me known; my importunity made me remarked. I was inquired about; my former pupils' parents, gathering the reports of their children, heard me spoken of as talented, and they echoed the word: the sound, bandied about at random, came at last to ears which, but for its universality, it might never have reached; and at the very crisis when I had tried my last effort and knew not what to do, Fortune looked in at me one morning, as I sat in drear and almost desperate deliberation on my bedstead, nodded with the familiarity of an old acquaintance — though God knows I had never met her before — and threw a prize into my lap.

In the second week of October, 18 — , I got the appointment of English professor to all the classes of — — College, Brussels, with a salary of three thousand francs per annum; and the certainty of being able, by dint of the reputation and publicity accompanying the position, to make as much more by private means. The official notice, which communicated this information, mentioned also that it was the strong recommendation of M. Vandenhuten, negociant, which had turned the scale of choice in my favour.

No sooner had I read the announcement than I hurried to M. Vandenhuten's bureau, pushed the document under his nose, and when he had perused it, took both his hands, and thanked him with unrestrained vivacity. My vivid words and emphatic gesture moved his Dutch calm to unwonted sensation. He said he was happy — glad to have served me; but he had done nothing meriting such thanks. He had not laid out a centime — only scratched a few words on a sheet of paper.

Again I repeated to him —

“You have made me quite happy, and in a way that suits me; I do not feel an obligation irksome, conferred by your kind hand; I do not feel disposed to shun you because you have done me a favour; from this day you must consent to admit me to your intimate acquaintance, for I shall hereafter recur again and again to the pleasure of your society.”

“Ainsi soit-il,” was the reply, accompanied by a smile of benignant content. I went away with its sunshine in my heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was two o'clock when I returned to my lodgings; my dinner, just brought in from a neighbouring hotel, smoked on the table; I sat down thinking to eat — had the plate been heaped with potsherds and broken glass, instead of boiled beef and haricots, I could not have made a more signal failure: appetite had forsaken me. Impatient of seeing food which I could not taste, I put it all aside into a cupboard, and then demanded, "What shall I do till evening?" for before six P.M. it would be vain to seek the Rue Notre Dame aux Neiges; its inhabitant (for me it had but one) was detained by her vocation elsewhere. I walked in the streets of Brussels, and I walked in my own room from two o'clock till six; never once in that space of time did I sit down. I was in my chamber when the last-named hour struck; I had just bathed my face and feverish hands, and was standing near the glass; my cheek was crimson, my eye was flame, still all my features looked quite settled and calm. Descending swiftly the stair and stepping out, I was glad to see Twilight drawing on in clouds; such shade was to me like a grateful screen, and the chill of latter Autumn, breathing in a fitful wind from the north-west, met me as a refreshing coolness. Still I saw it was cold to others, for the women I passed were wrapped in shawls, and the men had their coats buttoned close.

When are we quite happy? Was I so then? No; an urgent and growing dread worried my nerves, and had worried them since the first moment good tidings had reached me. How was Frances? It was ten weeks since I had seen her, six since I had heard from her, or of her. I had answered her letter by a brief note, friendly but calm, in which no mention of continued correspondence or further visits was made. At that hour my bark hung on the topmost curl of a wave of fate, and I knew not on what shoal the onward rush of the billow might hurl it; I would not then attach her destiny to mine by the slightest thread; if doomed to split on the rock, or run a aground on the sand-bank, I was resolved no other vessel should share my disaster: but six weeks was a long time; and could it be that she was still well and doing well? Were not all sages agreed in declaring that happiness finds no climax on earth? Dared I think that but half a street now divided me from the full cup of contentment — the draught drawn from waters said to flow only in heaven?

I was at the door; I entered the quiet house; I mounted the stairs; the lobby was void and still, all the doors closed; I looked for the neat green mat; it lay duly in its place.

"Signal of hope!" I said, and advanced. "But I will be a little calmer; I am not going to rush in, and get up a scene directly." Forcibly staying my eager step, I paused on the mat.

"What an absolute hush! Is she in? Is anybody in?" I demanded to myself.

A little tinkle, as of cinders falling from a grate, replied; a movement — a fire was gently stirred; and the slight rustle of life continuing, a step paced equably backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, in the apartment. Fascinated, I stood, more fixedly fascinated when a voice rewarded the attention of my strained ear — so low, so self-addressed, I never fancied the speaker otherwise than alone; solitude might speak thus in a desert, or in the hall of a forsaken house.

"'And ne'er but once, my son,' he said,
'Was yon dark cavern trod;
In persecution's iron days,
When the land was left by God.
From Bewley's bog, with slaughter red,
A wanderer hither drew;
And oft he stopp'd and turn'd his head,
As by fits the night-winds blew.
For trampling round by Cheviot-edge
Were heard the troopers keen;
And frequent from the Whitelaw ridge
The death-shot flash'd between,'" &c. &c.

The old Scotch ballad was partly recited, then dropt; a pause ensued; then another strain followed, in French, of which the purport, translated, ran as follows: —

I gave, at first, attention close;
Then interest warm ensued;
From interest, as improvement rose,
Succeeded gratitude.

Obedience was no effort soon,
And labour was no pain;
If tired, a word, a glance alone
Would give me strength again.

From others of the studious band,
Ere long he singled me;
But only by more close demand,
And sterner urgency.

The task he from another took,
From me he did reject;
He would no slight omission brook,
And suffer no defect.

If my companions went astray,
He scarce their wanderings blam'd;

If I but falter'd in the way,
His anger fiercely flam'd.

Something stirred in an adjoining chamber; it would not do to be surprised eaves-dropping; I tapped hastily, And as hastily entered. Frances was just before me; she had been walking slowly in her room, and her step was checked by my advent: Twilight only was with her, and tranquil, ruddy Firelight; to these sisters, the Bright and the Dark, she had been speaking, ere I entered, in poetry. Sir Walter Scott's voice, to her a foreign, far-off sound, a mountain echo, had uttered itself in the first stanzas; the second, I thought, from the style and the substance, was the language of her own heart. Her face was grave, its expression concentrated; she bent on me an unsmiling eye — an eye just returning from abstraction, just awaking from dreams: well-arranged was her simple attire, smooth her dark hair, orderly her tranquil room; but what — with her thoughtful look, her serious self-reliance, her bent to meditation and haply inspiration — what had she to do with love? "Nothing," was the answer of her own sad, though gentle countenance; it seemed to say, "I must cultivate fortitude and cling to poetry; one is to be my support and the other my solace through life. Human affections do not bloom, nor do human passions glow for me." Other women have such thoughts. Frances, had she been as desolate as she deemed, would not have been worse off than thousands of her sex. Look at the rigid and formal race of old maids — the race whom all despise; they have fed themselves, from youth upwards, on maxims of resignation and endurance. Many of them get ossified with the dry diet; self-control is so continually their thought, so perpetually their object, that at last it absorbs the softer and more agreeable qualities of their nature; and they die mere models of austerity, fashioned out of a little parchment and much bone. Anatomists will tell you that there is a heart in the withered old maid's carcase — the same as in that of any cherished wife or proud mother in the land. Can this be so? I really don't know; but feel inclined to doubt it.

I came forward, bade Frances "good evening," and took my seat. The chair I had chosen was one she had probably just left; it stood by a little table where were her open desk and papers. I know not whether she had fully recognized me at first, but she did so now; and in a voice, soft but quiet, she returned my greeting. I had shown no eagerness; she took her cue from me, and evinced no surprise. We met as me had always met, as master and pupil — nothing more. I proceeded to handle the papers; Frances, observant and serviceable, stepped into an inner room, brought a candle, lit it, placed it by me; then drew the curtain over the lattice, and having added a little fresh fuel to the already bright fire, she drew a second chair to the table and sat down at my right hand, a little removed. The paper on the top was a translation of some grave French author into English, but underneath lay a sheet with stanzas; on this I laid hands. Frances half rose, made a movement to recover the captured spoil, saying, that was nothing — a mere copy of verses. I put by resistance with the decision I knew she never long opposed; but on this occasion her fingers had fastened on the paper. I had quietly to unloose them; their hold dissolved to my touch; her hand shrunk away; my own would fain have followed it, but for the present I forbade such impulse. The first page of the sheet was occupied with the lines I had overheard; the sequel was not exactly the writer's own experience, but a composition by portions of that experience suggested. Thus while egotism was avoided, the fancy was exercised, and the heart satisfied. I translate as before, and my translation is nearly literal; it continued thus: —

When sickness stay'd awhile my course,
 He seem'd impatient still,
Because his pupil's flagging force
 Could not obey his will.

One day when summoned to the bed
 Where pain and I did strive,
I heard him, as he bent his head,
 Say, "God, she must revive!"

I felt his hand, with gentle stress,
 A moment laid on mine,
And wished to mark my consciousness
 By some responsive sign.

But pow'rless then to speak or move,
 I only felt, within,
The sense of Hope, the strength of Love,
 Their healing work begin.

And as he from the room withdrew,
 My heart his steps pursued;
I long'd to prove, by efforts new;
 My speechless gratitude.

When once again I took my place,
 Long vacant, in the class,
Th' unfrequent smile across his face
 Did for one moment pass.

The lessons done; the signal made
 Of glad release and play,
He, as he passed, an instant stay'd,
 One kindly word to say.

"Jane, till to-morrow you are free

From tedious task and rule;
This afternoon I must not see
That yet pale face in school.

“Seek in the garden-shades a seat,
Far from the play-ground din;
The sun is warm, the air is sweet:
Stay till I call you in.”

A long and pleasant afternoon
I passed in those green bowers;
All silent, tranquil, and alone
With birds, and bees, and flowers.

Yet, when my master’s voice I heard
Call, from the window, “Jane!”
I entered, joyful, at the word,
The busy house again.

He, in the hall, paced up and down;
He paused as I passed by;
His forehead stern relaxed its frown:
He raised his deep-set eye.

“Not quite so pale,” he murmured low.
“Now Jane, go rest awhile.”
And as I smiled, his smoothened brow
Returned as glad a smile.

My perfect health restored, he took
His mien austere again;
And, as before, he would not brook
The slightest fault from Jane.

The longest task, the hardest theme
Fell to my share as erst,
And still I toiled to place my name
In every study first.

He yet begrudged and stinted praise,
But I had learnt to read
The secret meaning of his face,
And that was my best meed.

Even when his hasty temper spoke
 In tones that sorrow stirred,
My grief was lulled as soon as woke
 By some relenting word.

And when he lent some precious book,
 Or gave some fragrant flower,
I did not quail to Envy's look,
 Upheld by Pleasure's power.

At last our school ranks took their ground,
 The hard-fought field I won;
The prize, a laurel-wreath, was bound
 My throbbing forehead on.

Low at my master's knee I bent,
 The offered crown to meet;
Its green leaves through my temples sent
 A thrill as wild as sweet.

The strong pulse of Ambition struck
 In every vein I owned;
At the same instant, bleeding broke
 A secret, inward wound.

The hour of triumph was to me
 The hour of sorrow sore;
A day hence I must cross the sea,
 Ne'er to recross it more.

An hour hence, in my master's room
 I with him sat alone,
And told him what a dreary gloom
 O'er joy had parting thrown.

He little said; the time was brief,
 The ship was soon to sail,
And while I sobbed in bitter grief,
 My master but looked pale.

They called in haste; he bade me go,
 Then snatched me back again;
He held me fast and murmured low,
"Why will they part us, Jane?"

“Were you not happy in my care?
Did I not faithful prove?
Will others to my darling bear
As true, as deep a love?

“O God, watch o’er my foster child!
O guard her gentle head!
When minds are high and tempests wild
Protection round her spread!

“They call again; leave then my breast;
Quit thy true shelter, Jane;
But when deceived, repulsed, opprest,
Come home to me again!”

I read — then dreamily made marks on the margin with my pencil; thinking all the while of other things; thinking that “Jane” was now at my side; no child, but a girl of nineteen; and she might be mine, so my heart affirmed; Poverty’s curse was taken off me; Envy and Jealousy were far away, and unapprized of this our quiet meeting; the frost of the Master’s manner might melt; I felt the thaw coming fast, whether I would or not; no further need for the eye to practise a hard look, for the brow to compress its expense into a stern fold: it was now permitted to suffer the outward revelation of the inward glow — to seek, demand, elicit an answering ardour. While musing thus, I thought that the grass on Hermon never drank the fresh dews of sunset more gratefully than my feelings drank the bliss of this hour.

Frances rose, as if restless; she passed before me to stir the fire, which did not want stirring; she lifted and put down the little ornaments on the mantelpiece; her dress waved within a yard of me; slight, straight, and elegant, she stood erect on the hearth.

There are impulses we can control; but there are others which control us, because they attain us with a tiger-leap, and are our masters ere we have seen them. Perhaps, though, such impulses are seldom altogether bad; perhaps Reason, by a process as brief as quiet, a process that is finished ere felt, has ascertained the sanity of the deed Instinct meditates, and feels justified in remaining passive while it is performed. I know I did not reason, I did not plan or intend, yet, whereas one moment I was sitting solus on the chair near the table, the next, I held Frances on my knee, placed there with sharpness and decision, and retained with exceeding tenacity.

“Monsieur!” cried Frances, and was still: not another word escaped her lips; sorely confounded she seemed during the lapse of the first few moments; but the amazement soon subsided; terror did not succeed, nor fury: after all, she was only a little nearer than she had ever been before, to one she habitually respected and trusted; embarrassment might have impelled her to contend, but self-respect checked resistance where resistance was useless.

"Frances, how much regard have you for me?" was my demand. No answer; the situation was yet too new and surprising to permit speech. On this consideration, I compelled myself for some seconds to tolerate her silence, though impatient of it: presently, I repeated the same question — probably, not in the calmest of tones; she looked at me; my face, doubtless, was no model of composure, my eyes no still wells of tranquillity.

"Do speak," I urged; and a very low, hurried, yet still arch voice said —

"Monsieur, vous me faites mal; de grace lachez un peu ma main droite."

In truth I became aware that I was holding the said "main droite" in a somewhat ruthless grasp: I did as desired; and, for the third time, asked more gently —

"Frances, how much regard have you for me?"

"Mon maitre, j'en ai beaucoup," was the truthful rejoinder.

"Frances, have you enough to give yourself to me as my wife? — to accept me as your husband?"

I felt the agitation of the heart, I saw "the purple light of love" cast its glowing reflection on cheeks, temples, neck; I desired to consult the eye, but sheltering lash and lid forbade.

"Monsieur," said the soft voice at last, — "Monsieur desire savoir si je consens — si — enfin, si je veux me marier avec lui?"

"Justement."

"Monsieur sera-t-il aussi bon mari qu'il a ete bon maitre?"

"I will try, Frances."

A pause; then with a new, yet still subdued inflexion of the voice — an inflexion which provoked while it pleased me — accompanied, too, by a "sourire a la fois fin et timide" in perfect harmony with the tone: —

"C'est a dire, monsieur sera toujours un peu entete exigeant, volontaire —?"

"Have I been so, Frances?"

"Mais oui; vous le savez bien."

"Have I been nothing else?"

"Mais oui; vons avez ete mon meilleur ami."

"And what, Frances, are you to me?"

"Votre devouee eleve, qui vous aime de tout son coeur."

"Will my pupil consent to pass her life with me? Speak English now, Frances."

Some moments were taken for reflection; the answer, pronounced slowly, ran thus: —

"You have always made me happy; I like to hear you speak; I like to see you; I like to be near you; I believe you are very good, and very superior; I know you are stern to those who are careless and idle, but you are kind, very kind to the attentive and industrious, even if they are not clever. Master, I should be GLAD to live with you always;" and she made a sort of movement, as if she would have clung to me, but restraining herself she only added with earnest emphasis — “Master, I consent to pass my life with you.”

“Very well, Frances.”

I drew her a little nearer to my heart; I took a first kiss from her lips, thereby sealing the compact, now framed between us; afterwards she and I were silent, nor was our silence brief. Frances’ thoughts, during this interval, I know not, nor did I attempt to guess them; I was not occupied in searching her countenance, nor in otherwise troubling her composure. The peace I felt, I wished her to feel; my arm, it is true, still detained her; but with a restraint that was gentle enough, so long as no opposition tightened it. My gaze was on the red fire; my heart was measuring its own content; it sounded and sounded, and found the depth fathomless.

“Monsieur,” at last said my quiet companion, as stirless in her happiness as a mouse in its terror. Even now in speaking she scarcely lifted her head.

“Well, Frances?” I like unexaggerated intercourse; it is not my way to overpower with amorous epithets, any more than to worry with selfishly importunate caresses.

“Monsieur est raisonnable, n’eut-ce pas?”

“Yes; especially when I am requested to be so in English: but why do you ask me? You see nothing vehement or obtrusive in my manner; am I not tranquil enough?”

“Ce n’est pas cela — “ began Frances.

“English!” I reminded her.

“Well, monsieur, I wished merely to say, that I should like, of course, to retain my employment of teaching. You will teach still, I suppose, monsieur?”

“Oh, yes! It is all I have to depend on.”

“Bon! — I mean good. Thus we shall have both the same profession. I like that; and my efforts to get on will be as unrestrained as yours — will they not, monsieur?”

“You are laying plans to be independent of me,” said I.

“Yes, monsieur; I must be no incumbrance to you — no burden in any way.”

“But, Frances, I have not yet told you what my prospects are. I have left M. Pelet’s; and after nearly a month’s seeking, I have got another place, with a salary of three thousand francs a year, which I can easily double by a little additional exertion. Thus you see it would be useless for you to fag yourself by going out to give lessons; on six thousand francs you and I can live, and live well.”

Frances seemed to consider. There is something flattering to man’s strength, something consonant to his honourable pride, in the idea of becoming the providence of what he loves — feeding and clothing it, as God does the lilies of the field. So, to decide her resolution, I went on: —

“Life has been painful and laborious enough to you so far, Frances; you require complete rest; your twelve hundred francs would not form a very important addition to our income, and what sacrifice of comfort to earn it! Relinquish your labours: you must be weary, and let me have the happiness of giving you rest."

I am not sure whether Frances had accorded due attention to my harangue; instead of answering me with her usual respectful promptitude, she only sighed and said, —

"How rich you are, monsieur!" and then she stirred uneasy in my arms. "Three thousand francs!" she murmured, "While I get only twelve hundred!" She went on faster. "However, it must be so for the present; and, monsieur, were you not saying something about my giving up my place? Oh no! I shall hold it fast;" and her little fingers emphatically tightened on mine.

"Think of my marrying you to be kept by you, monsieur! I could not do it; and how dull my days would be! You would be away teaching in close, noisy school-rooms, from morning till evening, and I should be lingering at home, unemployed and solitary; I should get depressed and sullen, and you would soon tire of me."

"Frances, you could read and study — two things you like so well."

"Monsieur, I could not; I like a contemplative life, but I like an active life better; I must act in some way, and act with you. I have taken notice, monsieur, that people who are only in each other's company for amusement, never really like each other so well, or esteem each other so highly, as those who work together, and perhaps suffer together."

"You speak God's truth," said I at last, "and you shall have your own way, for it is the best way. Now, as a reward for such ready consent, give me a voluntary kiss."

After some hesitation, natural to a novice in the art of kissing, she brought her lips into very shy and gentle contact with my forehead; I took the small gift as a loan, and repaid it promptly, and with generous interest.

I know not whether Frances was really much altered since the time I first saw her; but, as I looked at her now, I felt that she was singularly changed for me; the sad eye, the pale cheek, the dejected and joyless countenance I remembered as her early attributes, were quite gone, and now I saw a face dressed in graces; smile, dimple, and rosy tint, rounded its contours and brightened its hues. I had been accustomed to nurse a flattering idea that my strong attachment to her proved some particular perspicacity in my nature; she was not handsome, she was not rich, she was not even accomplished, yet was she my life's treasure; I must then be a man of peculiar discernment. To-night my eyes opened on the mistake I had made; I began to suspect that it was only my tastes which were unique, not my power of discovering and appreciating the superiority of moral worth over physical charms. For me Frances had physical charms: in her there was no deformity to get over; none of those prominent defects of eyes, teeth, complexion, shape, which hold at bay the admiration of the boldest male champions of intellect (for women can love a downright ugly man if he be but talented); had she been either "edentee, myope, rugueuse, ou bossue," my feelings towards her might still have been kindly, but they could never have been impassioned; I had affection for the poor little misshapen Sylvie, but for her I could never have had love. It is true Frances' mental points had been the first to interest me, and they still retained the strongest hold on my preference; but I liked the graces of her person too. I derived a pleasure, purely material, from contemplating the clearness of her brown eyes, the fairness of her fine skin, the purity of her well-set teeth, the proportion of her delicate form; and that pleasure I could ill have dispensed with. It appeared, then, that I too was a sensualist, in my temperate and fastidious way.

Now, reader, during the last two pages I have been giving you honey fresh from flowers, but you must not live entirely on food so luscious; taste then a little gall — just a drop, by way of change.

At a somewhat late hour I returned to my lodgings: having temporarily forgotten that man had any such coarse cares as those of eating and drinking, I went to bed fasting. I had been excited and in action all day, and had tasted no food since eight that morning; besides, for a fortnight past, I had known no rest either of body or mind; the last few hours had been a sweet delirium, it would not subside now, and till long after midnight, broke with troubled ecstacy the rest I so much needed. At last I dozed, but not for long; it was yet quite dark when I awoke, and my waking was like that of Job when a spirit passed before his face, and like him, "the hair of my flesh stood up." I might continue the parallel, for in truth, though I saw nothing, yet "a thing was secretly brought unto me, and mine ear received a little thereof; there was silence, and I heard a voice," saying — "In the midst of life we are in death."

That sound, and the sensation of chill anguish accompanying it, many would have regarded as supernatural; but I recognized it at once as the effect of reaction. Man is ever clogged with his mortality, and it was my mortal nature which now faltered and plained; my nerves, which jarred and gave a false sound, because the soul, of late rushing headlong to an aim, had overstrained the body's comparative weakness. A horror of great darkness fell upon me; I felt my chamber invaded by one I had known formerly, but had thought for ever departed. I was temporarily a prey to hypochondria.

She had been my acquaintance, nay, my guest, once before in boyhood; I had entertained her at bed and board for a year; for that space of time I had her to myself in secret; she lay with me, she ate with me, she walked out with me, showing me nooks in woods, hollows in hills, where we could sit together, and where she could drop her drear veil over me, and so hide sky and sun, grass and green tree; taking me entirely to her death-cold bosom, and holding me with arms of bone. What tales she would tell me at such hours! What songs she would recite in my ears! How she would discourse to me of her own country — the grave — and again and again promise to conduct me there ere long; and, drawing me to the very brink of a black, sullen river, show me, on the other side, shores unequal with mound, monument, and tablet, standing up in a glimmer more hoary than moonlight. “Necropolis!” she would whisper, pointing to the pale piles, and add, “It contains a mansion prepared for you.”

But my boyhood was lonely, parentless; uncheered by brother or sister; and there was no marvel that, just as I rose to youth, a sorceress, finding me lost in vague mental wanderings, with many affections and few objects, glowing aspirations and gloomy prospects, strong desires and slender hopes, should lift up her illusive lamp to me in the distance, and lure me to her vaulted home of horrors. No wonder her spells THEN had power; but NOW, when my course was widening, my prospect brightening; when my affections had found a rest; when my desires, folding wings, weary with long flight, had just alighted on the very lap of fruition, and nestled there warm, content, under the caress of a soft hand — why did hypochondria accost me now?

I repulsed her as one would a dreaded and ghastly concubine coming to embitter a husband’s heart toward his young bride; in vain; she kept her sway over me for that night and the next day, and eight succeeding days. Afterwards, my spirits began slowly to recover their tone; my appetite returned, and in a fortnight I was well. I had gone about as usual all the time, and had said nothing to anybody of what I felt; but I was glad when the evil spirit departed from me, and I could again seek Frances, and sit at her side, freed from the dreadful tyranny of my demon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE fine, frosty Sunday in November, Frances and I took a long walk; we made the tour of the city by the Boulevards; and, afterwards, Frances being a little tired, we sat down on one of those wayside seats placed under the trees, at intervals, for the accommodation of the weary. Frances was telling me about Switzerland; the subject animated her; and I was just thinking that her eyes spoke full as eloquently as her tongue, when she stopped and remarked —

"Monsieur, there is a gentleman who knows you."

I looked up; three fashionably dressed men were just then passing — Englishmen, I knew by their air and gait as well as by their features; in the tallest of the trio I at once recognized Mr. Hunsden; he was in the act of lifting his hat to Frances; afterwards, he made a grimace at me, and passed on.

"Who is he?"

"A person I knew in England."

"Why did he bow to me? He does not know me."

"Yes, he does know you, in his way."

"How, monsieur?" (She still called me "monsieur"; I could not persuade her to adopt any more familiar term.)

"Did you not read the expression of his eyes?"

"Of his eyes? No. What did they say?"

"To you they said, 'How do you do, Wilhelmina, Crimsworth?' To me, 'So you have found your counterpart at last; there she sits, the female of your kind!'"

"Monsieur, you could not read all that in his eyes; He was so soon gone."

"I read that and more, Frances; I read that he will probably call on me this evening, or on some future occasion shortly; and I have no doubt he will insist on being introduced to you; shall I bring him to your rooms?"

"If you please, monsieur — I have no objection; I think, indeed, I should rather like to see him nearer; he looks so original."

As I had anticipated, Mr. Hunsden came that evening. The first thing he said was: —

"You need not begin boasting, Monsieur le Professeur; I know about your appointment to — — College, and all that; Brown has told me." Then he intimated that he had returned from Germany but a day or two since; afterwards, he abruptly demanded whether that was Madame Pelet-Reuter with whom he had seen me on the Boulevards. I was going to utter a rather emphatic negative, but on second thoughts I checked myself, and, seeming to assent, asked what he thought of her?

"As to her, I'll come to that directly; but first I've a word for you. I see you are a scoundrel; you've no business to be promenading about with another man's wife. I thought you had sounder sense than to get mixed up in foreign hodge-podge of this sort."

"But the lady?"

"She's too good for you evidently; she is like you, but something better than you — no beauty, though; yet when she rose (for I looked back to see you both walk away) I thought her figure and carriage good. These foreigners understand grace. What the devil has she done with Pelet? She has not been married to him three months — he must be a spoon!"

I would not let the mistake go too far; I did not like it much.

"Pelet? How your head runs on Mons. and Madame Pelet! You are always talking about them. I wish to the gods you had wed Mdlle. Zoraide yourself!"

"Was that young gentlewoman not Mdlle. Zoraide?"

"No; nor Madame Zoraide either."

"Why did you tell a lie, then?"

"I told no lie; but you are is such a hurry. She is a pupil of mine — a Swiss girl."

"And of course you are going to be married to her? Don't deny that."

"Married! I think I shall — if Fate spares us both ten weeks longer. That is my little wild strawberry, Hunsden, whose sweetness made me careless of your hothouse grapes."

"Stop! No boasting — no heroics; I won't hear them. What is she? To what caste does she belong?"

I smiled. Hunsden unconsciously laid stress on the word caste, and, in fact, republican, lordhater as he was, Hunsden was as proud of his old — — shire blood, of his descent and family standing, respectable and respected through long generations back, as any peer in the realm of his Norman race and Conquest-dated title. Hunsden would as little have thought of taking a wife from a caste inferior to his own, as a Stanley would think of mating with a Cobden. I enjoyed the surprise I should give; I enjoyed the triumph of my practice over his theory; and leaning over the table, and uttering the words slowly but with repressed glee, I said concisely —

"She is a lace-mender."

Hunsden examined me. He did not SAY he was surprised, but surprised he was; he had his own notions of good breeding. I saw he suspected I was going to take some very rash step; but repressing declamation or remonstrance, he only answered —

"Well, you are the best; judge of your own affairs. A lace-mender may make a good wife as well as a lady; but of course you have taken care to ascertain thoroughly that since she has not education, fortune or station, she is well furnished with such natural qualities as you think most likely to conduce to your happiness. Has she many relations?"

"None in Brussels."

"That is better. Relations are often the real evil in such cases. I cannot but think that a train of inferior connections would have been a bore to you to your life's end."

After sitting in silence a little while longer, Hunsden rose, and was quietly bidding me good evening; the polite, considerate manner in which he offered me his hand (a thing he had never done before), convinced me that he thought I had made a terrible fool of myself; and that, ruined and thrown away as I was, it was no time for sarcasm or cynicism, or indeed for anything but indulgence and forbearance.

"Good night, William," he said, in a really soft voice, while his face looked benevolently compassionate. "Good night, lad. I wish you and your future wife much prosperity; and I hope she will satisfy your fastidious soul."

I had much ado to refrain from laughing as I beheld the magnanimous pity of his mien; maintaining, however, a grave air, I said: —

"I thought you would have liked to have seen Mdlle. Henri?"

"Oh, that is the name! Yes — if it would be convenient, I should like to see her — but — — ." He hesitated.

"Well?"

"I should on no account wish to intrude."

"Come, then," said I. We set out. Hunsden no doubt regarded me as a rash, imprudent man, thus to show my poor little grisette sweetheart, in her poor little unfurnished grenier; but he prepared to act the real gentleman, having, in fact, the kernel of that character, under the harsh husk it pleased him to wear by way of mental mackintosh. He talked affably, and even gently, as we went along the street; he had never been so civil to me in his life. We reached the house, entered, ascended the stair; on gaining the lobby, Hunsden turned to mount a narrower stair which led to a higher story; I saw his mind was bent on the attics.

"Here, Mr. Hunsden," said I quietly, tapping at Frances' door. He turned; in his genuine politeness he was a little disconcerted at having made the mistake; his eye reverted to the green mat, but he said nothing.

We walked in, and Frances rose from her seat near the table to receive us; her mourning attire gave her a recluse, rather conventual, but withal very distinguished look; its grave simplicity added nothing to beauty, but much to dignity; the finish of the white collar and manchettes sufficed for a relief to the merino gown of solemn black; ornament was forsworn. Frances curtsied with sedate grace, looking, as she always did, when one first accosted her, more a woman to respect than to love; I introduced Mr. Hunsden, and she expressed her happiness at making his acquaintance in French. The pure and polished accent, the low yet sweet and rather full voice, produced their effect immediately; Hunsden spoke French in reply; I had not heard him speak that language before; he managed it very well. I retired to the window-seat; Mr. Hunsden, at his hostess's invitation, occupied a chair near the hearth; from my position I could see them both, and the room too, at a glance. The room was so clean and bright, it looked like a little polished cabinet; a glass filled with flowers in the centre of the table, a fresh rose in each china cup on the mantelpiece gave it an air of FETE, Frances was serious, and Mr. Hunsden subdued, but both mutually polite; they got on at the French swimmingly: ordinary topics were discussed with great state and decorum; I thought I had never seen two such models of propriety, for Hunsden (thanks to the constraint of the foreign tongue) was obliged to shape his phrases, and measure his sentences, with a care that forbade any eccentricity. At last England was mentioned, and Frances proceeded to ask questions. Animated by degrees, she began to change, just as a grave night-sky changes at the approach of sunrise: first it seemed as if her forehead cleared, then her eyes glittered, her features relaxed, and became quite mobile; her subdued complexion grew warm and transparent; to me, she now looked pretty; before, she had only looked ladylike.

She had many things to say to the Englishman just fresh from his island-country, and she urged him with an enthusiasm of curiosity, which ere long thawed Hunsden's reserve as fire thaws a congealed viper. I use this not very flattering comparison because he vividly reminded me of a snake waking from torpor, as he erected his tall form, reared his head, before a little declined, and putting back his hair from his broad Saxon forehead, showed unshaded the gleam of almost savage satire which his interlocutor's tone of eagerness and look of ardour had sufficed at once to kindle in his soul and elicit from his eyes: he was himself; as Frances was herself, and in none but his own language would he now address her.

"You understand English?" was the prefatory question.

"A little."

"Well, then, you shall have plenty of it; and first, I see you've not much more sense than some others of my acquaintance" (indicating me with his thumb), "or else you'd never turn rabid about that dirty little country called England; for rabid, I see you are; I read Anglophobia in your looks, and hear it in your words. Why, mademoiselle, is it possible that anybody with a grain of rationality should feel enthusiasm about a mere name, and that name England? I thought you were a lady-abbess five minutes ago, and respected you accordingly; and now I see you are a sort of Swiss sibyl, with high Tory and high Church principles!"

"England is your country?" asked Frances.

"Yes."

"And you don't like it?"

"I'd be sorry to like it! A little corrupt, venal, lord-and-king-cursed nation, full of mucky pride (as they say in — — shire), and helpless pauperism; rotten with abuses, worm-eaten with prejudices!"

"You might say so of almost every state; there are abuses and prejudices everywhere, and I thought fewer in England than in other countries."

"Come to England and see. Come to Birmingham and Manchester; come to St. Giles' in London, and get a practical notion of how our system works. Examine the footprints of our august aristocracy; see how they walk in blood, crushing hearts as they go. Just put your head in at English cottage doors; get a glimpse of Famine crouched torpid on black hearthstones; of Disease lying bare on beds without coverlets, of Infamy wantoning viciously with Ignorance, though indeed Luxury is her favourite paramour, and princely halls are dearer to her than thatched hovels — — "

"I was not thinking of the wretchedness and vice in England; I was thinking of the good side — of what is elevated in your character as a nation."

"There is no good side — none at least of which you can have any knowledge; for you cannot appreciate the efforts of industry, the achievements of enterprise, or the discoveries of science: narrowness of education and obscurity of position quite incapacitate you from understanding these points; and as to historical and poetical associations, I will not insult you, mademoiselle, by supposing that you alluded to such humbug."

"But I did partly."

Hunsden laughed — his laugh of unmitigated scorn.

"I did, Mr. Hunsden. Are you of the number of those to whom such associations give no pleasure?"

"Mademoiselle, what is an association? I never saw one. What is its length, breadth, weight, value — ay, VALUE? What price will it bring in the market?"

"Your portrait, to any one who loved you, would, for the sake of association, be without price."

That inscrutable Hunsden heard this remark and felt it rather acutely, too, somewhere; for he coloured — a thing not unusual with him, when hit unawares on a tender point. A sort of trouble momentarily darkened his eye, and I believe he filled up the transient pause succeeding his antagonist's home-thrust, by a wish that some one did love him as he would like to be loved — some one whose love he could unreservedly return.

The lady pursued her temporary advantage.

"If your world is a world without associations, Mr. Hunsden, I no longer wonder that you hate England so. I don't clearly know what Paradise is, and what angels are; yet taking it to be the most glorious region I can conceive, and angels the most elevated existences — if one of them — if Abdiel the Faithful himself" (she was thinking of Milton) "were suddenly stripped of the faculty of association, I think he would soon rush forth from 'the ever-during gates,' leave heaven, and seek what he had lost in hell. Yes, in the very hell from which he turned 'with retorted scorn.'"

Frances' tone in saying this was as marked as her language, and it was when the word "hell" twanged off from her lips, with a somewhat startling emphasis, that Hunsden deigned to bestow one slight glance of admiration. He liked something strong, whether in man or woman; he liked whatever dared to clear conventional limits. He had never before heard a lady say "hell" with that uncompromising sort of accent, and the sound pleased him from a lady's lips; he would fain have had Frances to strike the string again, but it was not in her way. The display of eccentric vigour never gave her pleasure, and it only sounded in her voice or flashed in her countenance when extraordinary circumstances — and those generally painful — forced it out of the depths where it burned latent. To me, once or twice, she had in intimate conversation, uttered venturous thoughts in nervous language; but when the hour of such manifestation was past, I could not recall it; it came of itself and of itself departed. Hunsden's excitations she put by soon with a smile, and recurring to the theme of disputation, said —

"Since England is nothing, why do the continental nations respect her so?"

"I should have thought no child would have asked that question," replied Hunsden, who never at any time gave information without reproving for stupidity those who asked it of him. "If you had been my pupil, as I suppose you once had the misfortune to be that of a deplorable character not a hundred miles off, I would have put you in the corner for such a confession of ignorance. Why, mademoiselle, can't you see that it is our GOLD which buys us French politeness, German good-will, and Swiss servility?" And he sneered diabolically.

"Swiss?" said Frances, catching the word "servility." "Do you call my countrymen servile?" and she started up. I could not suppress a low laugh; there was ire in her glance and defiance in her attitude. "Do you abuse Switzerland to me, Mr. Hunsden? Do you think I have no associations? Do you calculate that I am prepared to dwell only on what vice and degradation may be found in Alpine villages, and to leave quite out of my heart the social greatness of my countrymen, and our blood-earned freedom, and the natural glories of our mountains? You're mistaken — you're mistaken."

"Social greatness? Call it what you will, your countrymen are sensible fellows; they make a marketable article of what to you is an abstract idea; they have, ere this, sold their social greatness and also their blood-earned freedom to be the servants of foreign kings."

"You never were in Switzerland?"

"Yes — I have been there twice."

"You know nothing of it."

"I do."

"And you say the Swiss are mercenary, as a parrot says 'Poor Poll,' or as the Belgians here say the English are not brave, or as the French accuse them of being perfidious: there is no justice in your dictums."

"There is truth."

"I tell you, Mr. Hunsden, you are a more unpractical man than I am an unpractical woman, for you don't acknowledge what really exists; you want to annihilate individual patriotism and national greatness as an atheist would annihilate God and his own soul, by denying their existence."

"Where are you flying to? You are off at a tangent — I thought we were talking about the mercenary nature of the Swiss."

"We were — and if you proved to me that the Swiss are mercenary to-morrow (which you cannot do) I should love Switzerland still."

"You would be mad, then — mad as a March hare — to indulge in a passion for millions of shiploads of soil, timber, snow, and ice."

"Not so mad as you who love nothing."

"There's a method in my madness; there's none in yours."

"Your method is to squeeze the sap out of creation and make manure of the refuse, by way of turning it to what you call use."

"You cannot reason at all," said Hunsden; "there is no logic in you."

"Better to be without logic than without feeling," retorted Frances, who was now passing backwards and forwards from her cupboard to the table, intent, if not on hospitable thoughts, at least on hospitable deeds, for she was laying the cloth, and putting plates, knives and forks thereon.

"Is that a hit at me, mademoiselle? Do you suppose I am without feeling?"

"I suppose you are always interfering with your own feelings, and those of other people, and dogmatizing about the irrationality of this, that, and the other sentiment, and then ordering it to be suppressed because you imagine it to be inconsistent with logic."

"I do right."

Frances had stepped out of sight into a sort of little pantry; she soon reappeared.

"You do right? Indeed, no! You are much mistaken if you think so. Just be so good as to let me get to the fire, Mr. Hunsden; I have something to cook." (An interval occupied in settling a casserole on the fire; then, while she stirred its contents:) "Right! as if it were right to crush any pleasurable sentiment that God has given to man, especially any sentiment that, like patriotism, spreads man's selfishness in wider circles" (fire stirred, dish put down before it).

"Were you born in Switzerland?"

"I should think so, or else why should I call it my country?"

"And where did you get your English features and figure?"

"I am English, too; half the blood in my veins is English; thus I have a right to a double power of patriotism, possessing an interest in two noble, free, and fortunate countries."

"You had an English mother?"

"Yes, yes; and you, I suppose, had a mother from the moon or from Utopia, since not a nation in Europe has a claim on your interest?"

"On the contrary, I'm a universal patriot, if you could understand me rightly: my country is the world."

"Sympathies so widely diffused must be very shallow: will you have the goodness to come to table. Monsieur" (to me who appeared to be now absorbed in reading by moonlight) — "Monsieur, supper is served."

This was said in quite a different voice to that in which she had been bandying phrases with Mr. Hunsden — not so short, graver and softer.

"Frances, what do you mean by preparing, supper? we had no intention of staying."

"Ah, monsieur, but you have stayed, and supper is prepared; you have only the alternative of eating it."

The meal was a foreign one, of course; it consisted in two small but tasty dishes of meat prepared with skill and served with nicety; a salad and "fromage francais," completed it. The business of eating interposed a brief truce between the belligerents, but no sooner was supper disposed of than they were at it again. The fresh subject of dispute ran on the spirit of religious intolerance which Mr. Hunsden affirmed to exist strongly in Switzerland, notwithstanding the professed attachment of the Swiss to freedom. Here Frances had greatly the worst of it, not only because she was unskilled to argue, but because her own real opinions on the point in question happened to coincide pretty nearly with Mr. Hunsden's, and she only contradicted him out of opposition. At last she gave in, confessing that she thought as he thought, but bidding him take notice that she did not consider herself beaten.

"No more did the French at Waterloo," said Hunsden.

"There is no comparison between the cases," rejoined Frances; "mine was a sham fight."

"Sham or real, it's up with you."

"No; though I have neither logic nor wealth of words, yet in a case where my opinion really differed from yours, I would adhere to it when I had not another word to say in its defence; you should be baffled by dumb determination. You speak of Waterloo; your Wellington ought to have been conquered there, according to Napoleon; but he persevered in spite of the laws of war, and was victorious in defiance of military tactics. I would do as he did."

"I'll be bound for it you would; probably you have some of the same sort of stubborn stuff in you.

"I should be sorry if I had not; he and Tell were brothers, and I'd scorn the Swiss, man or woman, who had none of the much-enduring nature of our heroic William in his soul."

"If Tell was like Wellington, he was an ass."

"Does not ASS mean BAUDET?" asked Frances, turning to me.

"No, no," replied I, "it means an ESPRIT-FORT; and now," I continued, as I saw that fresh occasion of strife was brewing between these two, "it is high time to go."

Hunsden rose. "Good bye," said he to Frances; "I shall be off for this glorious England to-morrow, and it may be twelve months or more before I come to Brussels again; whenever I do come I'll seek you out, and you shall see if I don't find means to make you fiercer than a dragon. You've done pretty well this evening, but next interview you shall challenge me outright. Meantime you're doomed to become Mrs. William Crimsworth, I suppose; poor young lady? but you have a spark of spirit; cherish it, and give the Professor the full benefit thereof."

"Are you married. Mr. Hunsden?" asked Frances, suddenly.

"No. I should have thought you might have guessed I was a Benedict by my look."

"Well, whenever you marry don't take a wife out of Switzerland; for if you begin blaspheming Helvetia, and cursing the cantons — above all, if you mention the word ASS in the same breath with the name Tell (for ass IS baudet, I know; though Monsieur is pleased to translate it ESPRIT-FORT) your mountain maid will some night smother her Breton-bretonnant, even as your own Shakspeare's Othello smothered Desdemona."

"I am warned," said Hunsden; "and so are you, lad," (nodding to me). "I hope yet to hear of a travesty of the Moor and his gentle lady, in which the parts shall be reversed according to the plan just sketched — you, however, being in my nightcap. Farewell, mademoiselle!" He bowed on her hand, absolutely like Sir Charles Grandison on that of Harriet Byron; adding — "Death from such fingers would not be without charms."

"Mon Dieu!" murmured Frances, opening her large eyes and lifting her distinctly arched brows; "c'est qu'il fait des compliments! je ne m'y suis pas attendu." She smiled, half in ire, half in mirth, curtsied with foreign grace, and so they parted.

No sooner had we got into the street than Hunsden collared me.

"And that is your lace-mender?" said he; "and you reckon you have done a fine, magnanimous thing in offering to marry her? You, a scion of Seacombe, have proved your disdain of social distinctions by taking up with an ouvriere! And I pitied the fellow, thinking his feelings had misled him, and that he had hurt himself by contracting a low match!"

"Just let go my collar, Hunsden."

"On the contrary, he swayed me to and fro; so I grappled him round the waist. It was dark; the street lonely and lampless. We had then a tug for it; and after we had both rolled on the pavement, and with difficulty picked ourselves up, we agreed to walk on more soberly.

"Yes, that's my lace-mender," said I; "and she is to be mine for life — God willing."

"God is not willing — you can't suppose it; what business have you to be suited so well with a partner? And she treats you with a sort of respect, too, and says, 'Monsieur' and modulates her tone in addressing you, actually, as if you were something superior! She could not evince more deference to such a one as I, were she favoured by fortune to the supreme extent of being my choice instead of yours."

"Hunsden, you're a puppy. But you've only seen the title-page of my happiness; you don't know the tale that follows; you cannot conceive the interest and sweet variety and thrilling excitement of the narrative."

Hunsden — speaking low and deep, for we had now entered a busier street — desired me to hold my peace, threatening to do something dreadful if I stimulated his wrath further by boasting. I laughed till my sides ached. We soon reached his hotel; before he entered it, he said —

"Don't be vainglorious. Your lace-mender is too good for you, but not good enough for me; neither physically nor morally does she come up to my ideal of a woman. No; I dream of something far beyond that pale-faced, excitable little Helvetian (by-the-by she has infinitely more of the nervous, mobile Parisienne in her than of the the robust 'jungfrau'). Your Mdlle. Henri is in person "chetive", in mind "sans caractere", compared with the queen of my visions. You, indeed, may put up with that "minois chiffone"; but when I marry I must have straighter and more harmonious features, to say nothing of a nobler and better developed shape than that perverse, ill-thriven child can boast."

"Bribe a seraph to fetch you a coal of fire from heaven, if you will," said I, "and with it kindle life in the tallest, fattest, most boneless, fullest-blooded of Ruben's painted women — leave me only my Alpine peri, and I'll not envy you."

With a simultaneous movement, each turned his back on the other. Neither said "God bless you;" yet on the morrow the sea was to roll between us.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN two months more Frances had fulfilled the time of mourning for her aunt. One January morning — the first of the new year holidays — I went in a fiacre, accompanied only by M. Vandenhuten, to the Rue Notre Dame aux Neiges, and having alighted alone and walked upstairs, I found Frances apparently waiting for me, dressed in a style scarcely appropriate to that cold, bright, frosty day. Never till now had I seen her attired in any other than black or sad-coloured stuff; and there she stood by the window, clad all in white, and white of a most diaphanous texture; her array was very simple, to be sure, but it looked imposing and festal because it was so clear, full, and floating; a veil shadowed her head, and hung below her knee; a little wreath of pink flowers fastened it to her thickly tressed Grecian plait, and thence it fell softly on each side of her face. Singular to state, she was, or had been crying; when I asked her if she were ready, she said "Yes, monsieur," with something very like a checked sob; and when I took a shawl, which lay on the table, and folded it round her, not only did tear after tear course unbidden down her cheek, but she shook to my ministration like a reed. I said I was sorry to see her in such low spirits, and requested to be allowed an insight into the origin thereof. She only said, "It was impossible to help it," and then voluntarily, though hurriedly, putting her hand into mine, accompanied me out of the room, and ran downstairs with a quick, uncertain step, like one who was eager to get some formidable piece of business over. I put her into the fiacre. M. Vandenhuten received her, and seated her beside himself; we drove all together to the Protestant chapel, went through a certain service in the Common Prayer Book, and she and I came out married. M. Vandenhuten had given the bride away.

We took no bridal trip; our modesty, screened by the peaceful obscurity of our station, and the pleasant isolation of our circumstances, did not exact that additional precaution. We repaired at once to a small house I had taken in the faubourg nearest to that part of the city where the scene of our avocations lay.

Three or four hours after the wedding ceremony, Frances, divested of her bridal snow, and attired in a pretty lilac gown of warmer materials, a piquant black silk apron, and a lace collar with some finishing decoration of lilac ribbon, was kneeling on the carpet of a neatly furnished though not spacious parlour, arranging on the shelves of a chiffoniere some books, which I handed to her from the table. It was snowing fast out of doors; the afternoon had turned out wild and cold; the leaden sky seemed full of drifts, and the street was already ankle-deep in the white downfall. Our fire burned bright, our new habitation looked brilliantly clean and fresh, the furniture was all arranged, and there were but some articles of glass, china, books, &c., to put in order. Frances found in this business occupation till tea-time, and then, after I had distinctly instructed her how to make a cup of tea in rational English style, and after she had got over the dismay occasioned by seeing such an extravagant amount of material put into the pot, she administered to me a proper British repast, at which there wanted neither candies nor urn, fire-light nor comfort.

Our week's holiday glided by, and we readdressed ourselves to labour. Both my wife and I began in good earnest with the notion that we were working people, destined to earn our bread by exertion, and that of the most assiduous kind. Our days were thoroughly occupied; we used to part every morning at eight o'clock, and not meet again till five P.M.; but into what sweet rest did the turmoil of each busy day decline! Looking down the vista, of memory, I see the evenings passed in that little parlour like a long string of rubies circling the dusk brow of the past. Unvaried were they as each cut gem, and like each gem brilliant and burning.

A year and a half passed. One morning (it was a FETE, and we had the day to ourselves) Frances said to me, with a suddenness peculiar to her when she had been thinking long on a subject, and at last, having come to a conclusion, wished to test its soundness by the touchstone of my judgment: —

"I don't work enough."

"What now?" demanded I, looking up from my coffee, which I had been deliberately stirring while enjoying, in anticipation, a walk I proposed to take with Frances, that fine summer day (it was June), to a certain farmhouse in the country, where we were to dine. "What now?" and I saw at once, in the serious ardour of her face, a project of vital importance.

"I am not satisfied" returned she: "you are now earning eight thousand francs a year" (it was true; my efforts, punctuality, the fame of my pupils' progress, the publicity of my station, had so far helped me on), "while I am still at my miserable twelve hundred francs. I CAN do better, and I WILL."

"You work as long and as diligently as I do, Frances."

"Yes, monsieur, but I am not working in the right way, and I am convinced of it."

"You wish to change — you have a plan for progress in your mind; go and put on your bonnet; and, while we take our walk, you shall tell me of it."

"Yes, monsieur."

She went — as docile as a well-trained child; she was a curious mixture of tractability and firmness: I sat thinking about her, and wondering what her plan could be, when she re-entered.

"Monsieur, I have given Minnie" (our bonne) "leave to go out too, as it is so very fine; so will you be kind enough to lock the door, and take the key with you?"

"Kiss me, Mrs. Crimsworth," was my not very apposite reply; but she looked so engaging in her light summer dress and little cottage bonnet, and her manner in speaking to me was then, as always, so unaffectedly and suavely respectful, that my heart expanded at the sight of her, and a kiss seemed necessary to content its importunity.

“There, monsieur.”

“Why do you always call me ‘Monsieur?’ Say, ‘William.’”

“I cannot pronounce your W; besides, ‘Monsieur’ belongs to you; I like it best.”

Minnie having departed in clean cap and smart shawl, we, too, set out, leaving the house solitary and silent — silent, at least, but for the ticking of the clock. We were soon clear of Brussels; the fields received us, and then the lanes, remote from carriage-resounding CHAUSSEES. Ere long we came upon a nook, so rural, green, and secluded, it might have been a spot in some pastoral English province; a bank of short and mossy grass, under a hawthorn, offered a seat too tempting to be declined; we took it, and when we had admired and examined some English-looking wild-flowers growing at our feet, I recalled Frances’ attention and my own to the topic touched on at breakfast.

“What was her plan?” A natural one — the next step to be mounted by us, or, at least, by her, if she wanted to rise in her profession. She proposed to begin a school. We already had the means for commencing on a careful scale, having lived greatly within our income. We possessed, too, by this time, an extensive and eligible connection, in the sense advantageous to our business; for, though our circle of visiting acquaintance continued as limited as ever, we were now widely known in schools and families as teachers. When Frances had developed her plan, she intimated, in some closing sentences, her hopes for the future. If we only had good health and tolerable success, me might, she was sure, in time realize an independency; and that, perhaps, before we were too old to enjoy it; then both she and I would rest; and what was to hinder us from going to live in England? England was still her Promised Land.

I put no obstacle in her way; raised no objection; I knew she was not one who could live quiescent and inactive, or even comparatively inactive. Duties she must have to fulfil, and important duties; work to do — and exciting, absorbing, profitable work; strong faculties stirred in her frame, and they demanded full nourishment, free exercise: mine was not the hand ever to starve or cramp them; no, I delighted in offering them sustenance, and in clearing them wider space for action.

“You have conceived a plan, Frances,” said I, “and a good plan; execute it; you have my free consent, and wherever and whenever my assistance is wanted, ask and you shall have.”

Frances’ eyes thanked me almost with tears; just a sparkle or two, soon brushed away; she possessed herself of my hand too, and held it for some time very close clasped in both her own, but she said no more than “Thank you, monsieur.”

We passed a divine day, and came home late, lighted by a full summer moon.

Ten years rushed now upon me with dusty, vibrating, unresting wings; years of bustle, action, unslacked endeavour; years in which I and my wife, having launched ourselves in the full career of progress, as progress whirls on in European capitals, scarcely knew repose, were strangers to amusement, never thought of indulgence, and yet, as our course ran side by side, as we marched hand in hand, we neither murmured, repented, nor faltered. Hope indeed cheered us; health kept us up; harmony of thought and deed smoothed many difficulties, and finally, success bestowed every now and then encouraging reward on diligence. Our school became one of the most popular in Brussels, and as by degrees we raised our terms and elevated our system of education, our choice of pupils grew more select, and at length included the children of the best families in Belgium. We had too an excellent connection in England, first opened by the unsolicited recommendation of Mr. Hunsden, who having been over, and having abused me for my prosperity in set terms, went back, and soon after sent a leash of young — — shire heiresses — his cousins; as he said "to be polished off by Mrs. Crimsworth."

As to this same Mrs. Crimsworth, in one sense she was become another woman, though in another she remained unchanged. So different was she under different circumstances. I seemed to possess two wives. The faculties of her nature, already disclosed when I married her, remained fresh and fair; but other faculties shot up strong, branched out broad, and quite altered the external character of the plant. Firmness, activity, and enterprise, covered with grave foliage, poetic feeling and fervour; but these flowers were still there, preserved pure and dewy under the umbrage of later growth and hardier nature: perhaps I only in the world knew the secret of their existence, but to me they were ever ready to yield an exquisite fragrance and present a beauty as chaste as radiant.

In the daytime my house and establishment were conducted by Madame the directress, a stately and elegant woman, bearing much anxious thought on her large brow; much calculated dignity in her serious mien: immediately after breakfast I used to part with this lady; I went to my college, she to her schoolroom; returning for an hour in the course of the day, I found her always in class, intently occupied; silence, industry, observance, attending on her presence. When not actually teaching, she was overlooking and guiding by eye and gesture; she then appeared vigilant and solicitous. When communicating instruction, her aspect was more animated; she seemed to feel a certain enjoyment in the occupation. The language in which she addressed her pupils, though simple and unpretending, was never trite or dry; she did not speak from routine formulas — she made her own phrases as she went on, and very nervous and impressive phrases they frequently were; often, when elucidating favourite points of history, or geography, she would wax genuinely eloquent in her earnestness. Her pupils, or at least the elder and more intelligent amongst them, recognized well the language of a superior mind; they felt too, and some of them received the impression of elevated sentiments; there was little fondling between mistress and girls, but some of Frances' pupils in time learnt to love her sincerely, all of them beheld her with respect; her general demeanour towards them was serious; sometimes benignant when they pleased her with their progress and attention, always scrupulously refined and considerate. In cases where reproof or punishment was called for she was usually forbearing enough; but if any took advantage of that forbearance, which sometimes happened, a sharp, sudden and lightning-like severity taught the culprit the extent of the mistake committed. Sometimes a gleam of tenderness softened her eyes and manner, but this was rare; only when a pupil was sick, or when it pined after home, or in the case of some little motherless child, or of one much poorer than its companions, whose scanty wardrobe and mean appointments brought on it the contempt of the jewelled young countesses and silk-clad misses. Over such feeble fledglings the directress spread a wing of kindliest protection: it was to their bedside she came at night to tuck them warmly in; it was after them she looked in winter to see that they always had a comfortable seat by the stove; it was they who by turns were summoned to the salon to receive some little dole of cake or fruit — to sit on a footstool at the fireside — to enjoy home comforts, and almost home liberty, for an evening together — to be spoken to gently and softly, comforted, encouraged, cherished — and when bedtime came, dismissed with a kiss of true tenderness. As to Julia and Georgiana G — — , daughters of an English baronet, as to Mdlle. Mathilde de — — , heiress of a Belgian count, and sundry other children of patrician race, the directress was careful of them as of the others, anxious for their progress, as for that of the rest — but it never seemed to enter her head to distinguish them by a mark of preference; one girl of noble blood she loved dearly — a young Irish baroness — lady Catherine — — ; but it was for her enthusiastic heart and clever head, for her generosity and her genius, the title and rank went for nothing.

My afternoons were spent also in college, with the exception of an hour that my wife daily exacted of me for her establishment, and with which she would not dispense. She said that I must spend that time amongst her pupils to learn their characters, to be AU COURANT with everything that was passing in the house, to become interested in what interested her, to be able to give her my opinion on knotty points when she required it, and this she did constantly, never allowing my interest in the pupils to fall asleep, and never making any change of importance without my cognizance and consent. She delighted to sit by me when I gave my lessons (lessons in literature), her hands folded on her knee, the most fixedly attentive of any present. She rarely addressed me in class; when she did it was with an air of marked deference; it was her pleasure, her joy to make me still the master in all things.

At six o'clock P.M. my daily labours ceased. I then came home, for my home was my heaven; ever at that hour, as I entered our private sitting-room, the lady-directress vanished from before my eyes, and Frances Henri, my own little lace-mender, was magically restored to my arms; much disappointed she would have been if her master had not been as constant to the tryste as herself, and if his truthfull kiss had not been prompt to answer her soft, “Bon soir, monsieur.”

Talk French to me she would, and many a punishment she has had for her wilfulness. I fear the choice of chastisement must have been injudicious, for instead of correcting the fault, it seemed to encourage its renewal. Our evenings were our own; that recreation was necessary to refresh our strength for the due discharge of our duties; sometimes we spent them all in conversation, and my young Genevese, now that she was thoroughly accustomed to her English professor, now that she loved him too absolutely to fear him much, reposed in him a confidence so unlimited that topics of conversation could no more be wanting with him than subjects for communion with her own heart. In those moments, happy as a bird with its mate, she would show me what she had of vivacity, of mirth, of originality in her well-dowered nature. She would show, too, some stores of raillery, of “malice,” and would vex, tease, pique me sometimes about what she called my “bizarreries anglaises,” my “caprices insulaires,” with a wild and witty wickedness that made a perfect white demon of her while it lasted. This was rare, however, and the elfish freak was always short: sometimes when driven a little hard in the war of words — for her tongue did ample justice to the pith, the point, the delicacy of her native French, in which language she always attacked me — I used to turn upon her with my old decision, and arrest bodily the sprite that teased me. Vain idea! no sooner had I grasped hand or arm than the elf was gone; the provocative smile quenched in the expressive brown eyes, and a ray of gentle homage shone under the lids in its place. I had seized a mere vexing fairy, and found a submissive and supplicating little mortal woman in my arms. Then I made her get a book, and read English to me for an hour by way of penance. I frequently dosed her with Wordsworth in this way, and Wordsworth steadied her soon; she had a difficulty in comprehending his deep, serene, and sober mind; his language, too, was not facile to her; she had to ask questions, to sue for explanations, to be like a child and a novice, and to acknowledge me as her senior and director. Her instinct instantly penetrated and possessed the meaning of more ardent and imaginative writers. Byron excited her; Scott she loved; Wordsworth only she puzzled at, wondered over, and hesitated to pronounce an opinion upon.

But whether she read to me, or talked with me; whether she teased me in French, or entreated me in English; whether she jested with wit, or inquired with deference; narrated with interest, or listened with attention; whether she smiled at me or on me, always at nine o’clock I was left abandoned. She would extricate herself from my arms, quit my side, take her lamp, and be gone. Her mission was upstairs; I have followed her sometimes and watched her. First she opened the door of the dortoir (the pupils’ chamber), noiselessly she glided up the long room between the two rows of white beds, surveyed all the sleepers; if any were wakeful, especially if any were sad, spoke to them and soothed them; stood some minutes to ascertain that all was safe and tranquil; trimmed the watch-light which burned in the apartment all night, then withdrew, closing the door behind her without sound. Thence she glided to our own chamber; it had a little cabinet within; this she sought; there, too, appeared a bed, but one, and that a very small one; her face (the night I followed and observed her) changed as she approached this tiny couch; from grave it warmed to earnest; she shaded with one hand the lamp she held in the other; she bent above the pillow and hung over a child asleep; its slumber (that evening at least, and usually, I believe) was sound and calm; no tear wet its dark eyelashes; no fever heated its round cheek; no ill dream discomposed its budding features. Frances gazed, she did not smile, and yet the deepest delight filled, flushed her face; feeling pleasurable, powerful, worked in her whole frame, which still was motionless. I saw, indeed, her heart heave, her lips were a little apart, her breathing grew somewhat hurried; the child smiled; then at last the mother smiled too, and said in low soliloquy, "God bless my little son!" She stooped closer over him, breathed the softest of kisses on his brow, covered his minute hand with hers, and at last started up and came away. I regained the parlour before her. Entering it two minutes later she said quietly as she put down her extinguished lamp —

"Victor rests well: he smiled in his sleep; he has your smile, monsieur."

The said Victor was of course her own boy, born in the third year of our marriage: his Christian name had been given him in honour of M. Vandenhuten, who continued always our trusty and well-beloved friend.

Frances was then a good and dear wife to me, because I was to her a good, just, and faithful husband. What she would have been had she married a harsh, envious, careless man — a profligate, a prodigal, a drunkard, or a tyrant — is another question, and one which I once propounded to her. Her answer, given after some reflection, was —

"I should have tried to endure the evil or cure it for awhile; and when I found it intolerable and incurable, I should have left my torturer suddenly and silently."

"And if law or might had forced you back again?"

"What, to a drunkard, a profligate, a selfish spendthrift, an unjust fool?"

"Yes."

"I would have gone back; again assured myself whether or not his vice and my misery were capable of remedy; and if not, have left him again."

"And if again forced to return, and compelled to abide?"

"I don't know," she said, hastily. "Why do you ask me, monsieur?"

I would have an answer, because I saw a strange kind of spirit in her eye, whose voice I determined to waken.

"Monsieur, if a wife's nature loathes that of the man she is wedded to, marriage must be slavery. Against slavery all right thinkers revolt, and though torture be the price of resistance, torture must be dared: though the only road to freedom lie through the gates of death, those gates must be passed; for freedom is indispensable. Then, monsieur, I would resist as far as my strength permitted; when that strength failed I should be sure of a refuge. Death would certainly screen me both from bad laws and their consequences."

"Voluntary death, Frances?"

"No, monsieur. I'd have courage to live out every throe of anguish fate assigned me, and principle to contend for justice and liberty to the last."

"I see you would have made no patient Grizzle. And now, supposing fate had merely assigned you the lot of an old maid, what then? How would you have liked celibacy?"

"Not much, certainly. An old maid's life must doubtless be void and vapid — her heart strained and empty. Had I been an old maid I should have spent existence in efforts to fill the void and ease the aching. I should have probably failed, and died weary and disappointed, despised and of no account, like other single women. But I'm not an old maid," she added quickly. "I should have been, though, but for my master. I should never have suited any man but Professor Crimsworth — no other gentleman, French, English, or Belgian, would have thought me amiable or handsome; and I doubt whether I should have cared for the approbation of many others, if I could have obtained it. Now, I have been Professor Crimsworth's wife eight years, and what is he in my eyes? Is he honourable, beloved — — ?" She stopped, her voice was cut off, her eyes suddenly suffused. She and I were standing side by side; she threw her arms round me, and strained me to her heart with passionate earnestness: the energy of her whole being glowed in her dark and then dilated eye, and crimsoned her animated cheek; her look and movement were like inspiration; in one there was such a flash, in the other such a power. Half an hour afterwards, when she had become calm, I asked where all that wild vigour was gone which had transformed her ere-while and made her glance so thrilling and ardent — her action so rapid and strong. She looked down, smiling softly and passively: —

"I cannot tell where it is gone, monsieur," said she, "but I know that, whenever it is wanted, it will come back again."

Behold us now at the close of the ten years, and we have realized an independency. The rapidity with which we attained this end had its origin in three reasons: — Firstly, we worked so hard for it; secondly, we had no incumbrances to delay success; thirdly, as soon as we had capital to invest, two well-skilled counsellors, one in Belgium, one in England, viz. Vandenhuten and Hunsden, gave us each a word of advice as to the sort of investment to be chosen. The suggestion made was judicious; and, being promptly acted on, the result proved gainful — I need not say how gainful; I communicated details to Messrs. Vandenhuten and Hunsden; nobody else can be interested in hearing them.

Accounts being wound up, and our professional connection disposed of, we both agreed that, as mammon was not our master, nor his service that in which we desired to spend our lives; as our desires were temperate, and our habits unostentatious, we had now abundance to live on — abundance to leave our boy; and should besides always have a balance on hand, which, properly managed by right sympathy and unselfish activity, might help philanthropy in her enterprises, and put solace into the hand of charity.

To England we now resolved to take wing; we arrived there safely; Frances realized the dream of her lifetime. We spent a whole summer and autumn in travelling from end to end of the British islands, and afterwards passed a winter in London. Then we thought it high time to fix our residence. My heart yearned towards my native county of — — shire; and it is in — — shire I now live; it is in the library of my own home I am now writing. That home lies amid a sequestered and rather hilly region, thirty miles removed from X — — ; a region whose verdure the smoke of mills has not yet sullied, whose waters still run pure, whose swells of moorland preserve in some ferny glens that lie between them the very primal wildness of nature, her moss, her bracken, her blue-bells, her scents of reed and heather, her free and fresh breezes. My house is a picturesque and not too spacious dwelling, with low and long windows, a trellised and leaf-veiled porch over the front door, just now, on this summer evening, looking like an arch of roses and ivy. The garden is chiefly laid out in lawn, formed of the sod of the hills, with herbage short and soft as moss, full of its own peculiar flowers, tiny and starlike, imbedded in the minute embroidery of their fine foliage. At the bottom of the sloping garden there is a wicket, which opens upon a lane as green as the lawn, very long, shady, and little frequented; on the turf of this lane generally appear the first daisies of spring — whence its name — Daisy Lane; serving also as a distinction to the house.

It terminates (the lane I mean) in a valley full of wood; which wood — chiefly oak and beech — spreads shadowy about the vicinage of a very old mansion, one of the Elizabethan structures, much larger, as well as more antique than Daisy Lane, the property and residence of an individual familiar both to me and to the reader. Yes, in Hunsden Wood — for so are those glades and that grey building, with many gables and more chimneys, named — abides Yorke Hunsden, still unmarried; never, I suppose, having yet found his ideal, though I know at least a score of young ladies within a circuit of forty miles, who would be willing to assist him in the search.

The estate fell to him by the death of his father, five years since; he has given up trade, after having made by it sufficient to pay off some incumbrances by which the family heritage was burdened. I say he abides here, but I do not think he is resident above five months out of the twelve; he wanders from land to land, and spends some part of each winter in town: he frequently brings visitors with him when he comes to — — shire, and these visitors are often foreigners; sometimes he has a German metaphysician, sometimes a French savant; he had once a dissatisfied and savage-looking

Italian, who neither sang nor played, and of whom Frances affirmed that he had "tout l'air d'un conspirateur."

What English guests Hunsden invites, are all either men of Birmingham or Manchester — hard men, seemingly knit up in one thought, whose talk is of free trade. The foreign visitors, too, are politicians; they take a wider theme — European progress — the spread of liberal sentiments over the Continent; on their mental tablets, the names of Russia, Austria, and the Pope, are inscribed in red ink. I have heard some of them talk vigorous sense — yea, I have been present at polyglot discussions in the old, oak-lined dining-room at Hunsden Wood, where a singular insight was given of the sentiments entertained by resolute minds respecting old northern despotisms, and old southern superstitions: also, I have heard much twaddle, enounced chiefly in French and Deutsch, but let that pass. Hunsden himself tolerated the drivelling theorists; with the practical men he seemed leagued hand and heart.

When Hunsden is staying alone at the Wood (which seldom happens) he generally finds his way two or three times a week to Daisy Lane. He has a philanthropic motive for coming to smoke his cigar in our porch on summer evenings; he says he does it to kill the earwigs amongst the roses, with which insects, but for his benevolent fumigations, he intimates we should certainly be overrun. On wet days, too, we are almost sure to see him; according to him, it gets on time to work me into lunacy by treading on my mental corns, or to force from Mrs. Crimsworth revelations of the dragon within her, by insulting the memory of Hofer and Tell.

We also go frequently to Hunsden Wood, and both I and Frances relish a visit there highly. If there are other guests, their characters are an interesting study; their conversation is exciting and strange; the absence of all local narrowness both in the host and his chosen society gives a metropolitan, almost a cosmopolitan freedom and largeness to the talk. Hunsden himself is a polite man in his own house: he has, when he chooses to employ it, an inexhaustible power of entertaining guests; his very mansion too is interesting, the rooms look storied, the passages legendary, the low-ceiled chambers, with their long rows of diamond-paned lattices, have an old-world, haunted air: in his travels he has collected stores of articles of VERTU, which are well and tastefully disposed in his panelled or tapestried rooms: I have seen there one or two pictures, and one or two pieces of statuary which many an aristocratic connoisseur might have envied.

When I and Frances have dined and spent an evening with Hunsden, he often walks home with us. His wood is large, and some of the timber is old and of huge growth. There are winding ways in it which, pursued through glade and brake, make the walk back to Daisy Lane a somewhat long one. Many a time, when we have had the benefit of a full moon, and when the night has been mild and balmy, when, moreover, a certain nightingale has been singing, and a certain stream, hid in alders, has lent the song a soft accompaniment, the remote church-bell of the one hamlet in a district of ten miles, has tolled midnight ere the lord of the wood left us at our porch. Free-flowing was his talk at such hours, and far more quiet and gentle than in the day-time and before numbers. He would then forget politics and discussion, and would dwell on the past times of his house, on his family history, on himself and his own feelings — subjects each and all invested with a peculiar zest, for they were each and all unique. One glorious night in June, after I had been taunting him about his ideal bride and asking him when she would come and graft her foreign beauty on the old Hunsden oak, he answered suddenly —

"You call her ideal; but see, here is her shadow; and there cannot be a shadow without a substance."

He had led us from the depth of the "winding way" into a glade from whence the beeches withdrew, leaving it open to the sky; an unclouded moon poured her light into this glade, and Hunsden held out under her beam an ivory miniature.

Frances, with eagerness, examined it first; then she gave it to me — still, however, pushing her little face close to mine, and seeking in my eyes what I thought of the portrait. I thought it represented a very handsome and very individual-looking female face, with, as he had once said, "straight and harmonious features." It was dark; the hair, raven-black, swept not only from the brow, but from the temples — seemed thrust away carelessly, as if such beauty dispensed with, nay, despised arrangement. The Italian eye looked straight into you, and an independent, determined eye it was; the mouth was as firm as fine; the chin ditto. On the back of the miniature was gilded "Lucia."

"That is a real head," was my conclusion.

Hunsden smiled.

"I think so," he replied. "All was real in Lucia."

"And she was somebody you would have liked to marry — but could not?"

"I should certainly have liked to marry her, and that I HAVE not done so is a proof that I COULD not."

He repossessed himself of the miniature, now again in Frances' hand, and put it away.

"What do YOU think of it?" he asked of my wife, as he buttoned his coat over it.

"I am sure Lucia once wore chains and broke them," was the strange answer. "I do not mean matrimonial chains," she added, correcting herself, as if she feared mis-interpretation, "but social chains of some sort. The face is that of one who has made an effort, and a successful and triumphant effort, to wrest some vigorous and valued faculty from insupportable constraint; and when Lucia's faculty got free, I am certain it spread wide pinions and carried her higher than — " she hesitated.

"Than what?" demanded Hunsden.

"Than 'les convenances' permitted you to follow."

"I think you grow spiteful — impertinent."

"Lucia has trodden the stage," continued Frances. "You never seriously thought of marrying her; you admired her originality, her fearlessness, her energy of body and mind; you delighted in her talent, whatever that was, whether song, dance, or dramatic representation; you worshipped her beauty, which was of the sort after your own heart: but I am sure she filled a sphere from whence you would never have thought of taking a wife."

"Ingenious," remarked Hunsden; "whether true or not is another question. Meantime, don't you feel your little lamp of a spirit wax very pale, beside such a girandole as Lucia's?"

"Yes."

"Candid, at least; and the Professor will soon be dissatisfied with the dim light you give?"

"Will you, monsieur?"

"My sight was always too weak to endure a blaze, Frances," and we had now reached the wicket.

I said, a few pages back, that this is a sweet summer evening; it is — there has been a series of lovely days, and this is the loveliest; the hay is just carried from my fields, its perfume still lingers in the air. Frances proposed to me, an hour or two since, to take tea out on the lawn; I see the round table, loaded with china, placed under a certain beech; Hunsden is expected — nay, I hear he is come — there is his voice, laying down the law on some point with authority; that of Frances replies; she opposes him of course. They are disputing about Victor, of whom Hunsden affirms that his mother is making a milksop. Mrs. Crimsworth retaliates: —

"Better a thousand times he should be a milksop than what he, Hunsden, calls 'a fine lad;' and moreover she says that if Hunsden were to become a fixture in the neighbourhood, and were not a mere comet, coming and going, no one knows how, when, where, or why, she should be quite uneasy till she had got Victor away to a school at least a hundred miles off; for that with his mutinous maxims and unpractical dogmas, he would ruin a score of children."

I have a word to say of Victor ere I shut this manuscript in my desk — but it must be a brief one, for I hear the tinkle of silver on porcelain.

Victor is as little of a pretty child as I am of a handsome man, or his mother of a fine woman; he is pale and spare, with large eyes, as dark as those of Frances, and as deeply set as mine. His shape is symmetrical enough, but slight; his health is good. I never saw a child smile less than he does, nor one who knits such a formidable brow when sitting over a book that interests him, or while listening to tales of adventure, peril, or wonder, narrated by his mother, Hunsden, or myself. But though still, he is not unhappy — though serious, not morose; he has a susceptibility to pleasurable sensations almost too keen, for it amounts to enthusiasm. He learned to read in the old-fashioned way out of a spelling-book at his mother's knee, and as he got on without driving by that method, she thought it unnecessary to buy him ivory letters, or to try any of the other inducements to learning now deemed indispensable. When he could read, he became a glutton of books, and is so still. His toys have been few, and he has never wanted more. For those he possesses, he seems to have contracted a partiality amounting to affection; this feeling, directed towards one or two living animals of the house, strengthens almost to a passion.

Mr. Hunsden gave him a mastiff cub, which he called Yorke, after the donor; it grew to a superb dog, whose fierceness, however, was much modified by the companionship and caresses of its young master. He would go nowhere, do nothing without Yorke; Yorke lay at his feet while he learned his lessons, played with him in the garden, walked with him in the lane and wood, sat near his chair at meals, was fed always by his own hand, was the first thing he sought in the morning, the last he left at night. Yorke accompanied Mr. Hunsden one day to X — — , and was bitten in the street by a dog in a rabid state. As soon as Hunsden had brought him home, and had informed me of the circumstance, I went into the yard and shot him where he lay licking his wound: he was dead in an instant; he had not seen me level the gun; I stood behind him. I had scarcely been ten minutes in the house, when my ear was struck with sounds of anguish: I repaired to the yard once more, for they proceeded thence. Victor was kneeling beside his dead mastiff, bent over it, embracing its bull-like neck, and lost in a passion of the wildest woe: he saw me.

“Oh, papa, I’ll never forgive you! I’ll never forgive you!” was his exclamation. “You shot Yorke — I saw it from the window. I never believed you could be so cruel — I can love you no more!”

I had much ado to explain to him, with a steady voice, the stern necessity of the deed; he still, with that inconsolable and bitter accent which I cannot render, but which pierced my heart, repeated —

“He might have been cured — you should have tried — you should have burnt the wound with a hot iron, or covered it with caustic. You gave no time; and now it is too late — he is dead!”

He sank fairly down on the senseless carcase; I waited patiently a long while, till his grief had somewhat exhausted him; and then I lifted him in my arms and carried him to his mother, sure that she would comfort him best. She had witnessed the whole scene from a window; she would not come out for fear of increasing my difficulties by her emotion, but she was ready now to receive him. She took him to her kind heart, and on to her gentle lap; consoled him but with her lips, her eyes, her soft embrace, for some time; and then, when his sobs diminished, told him that Yorke had felt no pain in dying, and that if he had been left to expire naturally, his end would have been most horrible; above all, she told him that I was not cruel (for that idea seemed to give exquisite pain to poor Victor), that it was my affection for Yorke and him which had made me act so, and that I was now almost heart-broken to see him weep thus bitterly.

Victor would have been no true son of his father, had these considerations, these reasons, breathed in so low, so sweet a tone — married to caresses so benign, so tender — to looks so inspired with pitying sympathy — produced no effect on him. They did produce an effect: he grew calmer, rested his face on her shoulder, and lay still in her arms. Looking up, shortly, he asked his mother to tell him over again what she had said about Yorke having suffered no pain, and my not being cruel; the balmy words being repeated, he again pillowed his cheek on her breast, and was again tranquil.

Some hours after, he came to me in my library, asked if I forgave him, and desired to be reconciled. I drew the lad to my side, and there I kept him a good while, and had much talk with him, in the course of which he disclosed many points of feeling and thought I approved of in my son. I found, it is true, few elements of the "good fellow" or the "fine fellow" in him; scant sparkles of the spirit which loves to flash over the wine cup, or which kindles the passions to a destroying fire; but I saw in the soil of his heart healthy and swelling germs of compassion, affection, fidelity. I discovered in the garden of his intellect a rich growth of wholesome principles — reason, justice, moral courage, promised, if not blighted, a fertile bearing. So I bestowed on his large forehead, and on his cheek — still pale with tears — a proud and contented kiss, and sent him away comforted. Yet I saw him the next day laid on the mound under which Yorke had been buried, his face covered with his hands; he was melancholy for some weeks, and more than a year elapsed before he would listen to any proposal of having another dog.

Victor learns fast. He must soon go to Eton, where, I suspect, his first year or two will be utter wretchedness: to leave me, his mother, and his home, will give his heart an agonized wrench; then, the fagging will not suit him — but emulation, thirst after knowledge, the glory of success, will stir and reward him in time. Meantime, I feel in myself a strong repugnance to fix the hour which will uproot my sole olive branch, and transplant it far from me; and, when I speak to Frances on the subject, I am heard with a kind of patient pain, as though I alluded to some fearful operation, at which her nature shudders, but from which her fortitude will not permit her to recoil. The step must, however, be taken, and it shall be; for, though Frances will not make a milksop of her son, she will accustom him to a style of treatment, a forbearance, a congenial tenderness, he will meet with from none else. She sees, as I also see, a something in Victor's temper — a kind of electrical ardour and power — which emits, now and then, ominous sparks; Hunsden calls it his spirit, and says it should not be curbed. I call it the leaven of the offending Adam, and consider that it should be, if not WHIPPED out of him, at least soundly disciplined; and that he will be cheap of any amount of either bodily or mental suffering which will ground him radically in the art of self-control. Frances gives this something in her son's marked character no name; but when it appears in the grinding of his teeth, in the glittering of his eye, in the fierce revolt of feeling against disappointment, mischance, sudden sorrow, or supposed injustice, she folds him to her breast, or takes him to walk with her alone in the wood; then she reasons with him like any philosopher, and to reason Victor is ever accessible; then she looks at him with eyes of love, and by love Victor can be infallibly subjugated; but will reason or love be the weapons with which in future the world will meet his violence? Oh, no! for that flash in his black eye — for that cloud on his bony brow — for that compression of his statuesque lips, the lad will some day get blows instead of blandishments — kicks instead of kisses; then for the fit of mute fury which will sicken his body and madden his soul; then for the ordeal of merited and salutary suffering, out of which he will come (I trust) a wiser and a better man.

I see him now; he stands by Hunsden, who is seated on the lawn under the beech; Hunsden's hand rests on the boy's collar, and he is instilling God knows what principles into his ear. Victor looks well just now, for he listens with a sort of smiling interest; he never looks so like his mother as when he smiles — pity the sunshine breaks out so rarely! Victor has a preference for Hunsden, full as strong as I deem desirable, being considerably more potent decided, and indiscriminating, than any I ever entertained for that personage myself. Frances, too, regards it with a sort of unexpressed anxiety; while her son leans on Hunsden's knee, or rests against his shoulder, she roves with restless movement round, like a dove guarding its young from a hovering hawk; she says she wishes Hunsden had children of his own, for then he would better know the danger of inciting their pride end indulging their foibles.

Frances approaches my library window; puts aside the honeysuckle which half covers it, and tells me tea is ready; seeing that I continue busy she enters the room, comes near me quietly, and puts her hand on my shoulder.

"Monsieur est trop applique."

"I shall soon have done."

She draws a chair near, and sits down to wait till I have finished; her presence is as pleasant to my mind as the perfume of the fresh hay and spicy flowers, as the glow of the westering sun, as the repose of the midsummer eve are to my senses.

But Hunsden comes; I hear his step, and there he is, bending through the lattice, from which he has thrust away the woodbine with unsparing hand, disturbing two bees and a butterfly.

"Crimsworth! I say, Crimsworth! take that pen out of his hand, mistress, and make him lift up his head.

"Well, Hunsden? I hear you — "

"I was at X — — yesterday! your brother Ned is getting richer than Croesus by railway speculations; they call him in the Piece Hall a stag of ten; and I have heard from Brown. M. and Madame Vandenhuten and Jean Baptiste talk of coming to see you next month. He mentions the Pelets too; he says their domestic harmony is not the finest in the world, but in business they are doing 'on ne peut mieux,' which circumstance he concludes will be a sufficient consolation to both for any little crosses in the affections. Why don't you invite the Pelets to — — shire, Crimsworth? I should so like to see your first flame, Zoraide. Mistress, don't be jealous, but he loved that lady to distraction; I know it for a fact. Brown says she weighs twelve stones now; you see what you've lost, Mr. Professor. Now, Monsieur and Madame, if you don't come to tea, Victor and I will begin without you."

"Papa, come!"

EMMA

This unfinished novel bears only 20 pages of manuscript and was published posthumously in 1860. In recent years, at least two continuations of the fragment have been published.

Charlotte Brontë, photograph, 1854

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CHAPTER I.

We all seek an ideal in life. A pleasant fancy began to visit me in a certain year, that perhaps the number of human beings is few who do not find their quest at some era of life for some space more or less brief. I had certainly not found mine in youth, though the strong belief I held of its existence sufficed through all of my brightest and freshest time to keep me hopeful. I had not found it in maturity. I was become resigned never to find it. I had lived certain dim years entirely tranquil and unexpectant. And now I was not sure but something was hovering round my hearth which pleased me wonderfully.

Look at it, reader. Come into my parlor and judge for yourself whether I do right to care for this thing. First, you may scan me, if you please. We shall go on better together after a satisfactory introduction and due apprehension of identity. My name is Mrs. Chalfont. I am a widow. My house is good, and my income such as need not check the impulse either of charity or a moderate hospitality. I am not young her yet old. There is no silver yet in my hair, but its yellow lustre is gone. In my face wrinkles are yet to come, but I have almost forgotten the days when it wore any bloom. I married when I was very young. I lived for fifteen years a life which, whatever its trials, could not be called stagnant. Then for five years I was alone and, having no children, desolate. Lately Fortune, by a somewhat curious turn of her wheel, placed in my way an interest and a companion.

The neighbourhood where I live is pleasant enough, its scenery agreeable, and its society civilized, though not numerous. About a mile from my house there is a ladies' school, established but lately — not more than three years since. The conductress of this school were of my acquaintances; and though I cannot say that they occupied the very highest place in my opinion — for they had brought back from some months' residence abroad, for finishing purposes, a good deal that was fantastic, affected, and pretentious — yet I awarded them some portion of that respect which seems the fair due of all women who face life bravely, and try to make their own way by their own efforts.

About a year after the Misses Wilcox opened their school, when the number of their pupils was as yet exceedingly limited, and when, no doubt, they were looking out anxiously enough for augmentation, the entrance-gate to their little drive was one day thrown back to admit a carriage — "a very handsome, fashionable carriage," Miss Mabel Wilcox said, in narrating the circumstance afterwards — and drawn by a pair of really splendid horses. The sweep up the drive, the loud ring at the doorbell, the bustling entrance into the house, the ceremonious admission to the bright drawing-room, roused excitement enough in Fuchsia Lodge. Miss Wilcox repaired to the reception-room in a pair of new gloves, and carrying in her hand a handkerchief of French cambric.

She found a gentleman seated on the sofa, who, as he rose up, appeared a tall, fine-looking personage; at least she thought him so, as he stood with his back to the light. He introduced himself as Mr. Fitzgibbon, inquired if Miss Wilcox had a vacancy, and intimated that he wished to intrust to her care a new pupil in the shape of his daughter. This was welcome news, for there was many a vacancy in Miss Wilcox's school room; indeed, her establishment was as yet limited to the select number of three, and she and her sisters were looking forward with anything but confidence to the balancing of accounts at the close of their first half-year. Few objects could have been more agreeable to her, then, than that to which, by a wave of the hand, Mr. Fitzgibbon now directed her attention — the figure of a child standing near the drawing-room window.

Had Miss Wilcox's establishment boasted fuller ranks — had she indeed entered well on that course of prosperity which in after years an undeviating attention to externals enabled her so triumphantly to realize — an early thought with her would have been to judge whether the acquisition now offered was likely to answer well as a show-pupil. She would have instantly marked her look, dress, &c., and inferred her value from these indicia. In those anxious commencing times, however, Miss Wilcox could scarce afford herself the luxury of such appreciation: a new pupil represented forty pounds a year, independently of master's terms — and forty pounds a year was a sum Miss Wilcox needed and was glad to secure; besides, the fine carriage, the fine gentleman, and the fine name, gave gratifying assurance, enough and to spare, of eligibility in the proffered connection. It was admitted, then, that there were vacancies in Fuschia Lodge; that Miss Fitzgibbon could be received at once; that she was to learn all that the school prospectus proposed to teach; to be liable to every extra: in short, to be as expensive, and consequently as profitable a pupil as any directress's heart could wish. All this was arranged as upon velvet, smoothly and liberally. Mr. Fitzgibbon showed in the transaction none of the hardness of the bargin-making man of business, and as little of the penurious anxiety of the straitened professional man. Miss Wilcox felt him to be "quite the gentleman." Everything disposed her to be partially inclined towards the little girl whom he, on taking leave, formally committed to her guardianship; and as if no circumstance should be wanting to complete her happy impression, the address left written on a card served to fill up the measure of Miss Wilcox's satisfaction — Conway Fitzgibbon, Esq., May Park, Midland County. That very day three decrees were passed in the newcomer's favor: —

1st. That she was to be Miss Wilcox's bed-fellow.

2d. To sit next her at table.

3d. To walk out with her.

In a few days it became evident that a fourth secret clause had been added to these, viz., that Miss Fitzgibbon was to be favored, petted and screened on all possible occasions.

An ill-conditioned pupil, who before coming to Fuschia Lodge had passed a year under the care of certain old-fashioned Misses Sterling, of Hartwood, and from them had picked up unpractical notions of justice, took it upon her to utter an opinion on this system of favoritism.

“The Misses Sterling,” she injudiciously said, “never distinguished any girl because she was richer or better dressed than the rest. They would have scorned to do so. They always rewarded girls according as they behaved well to their school fellows and minded their lessons, not according to the number of their silk dresses, and fine laces, and feathers.”

For it must not be forgotten that Miss Fitzgibbon ‘s trunks, when opened, disclosed a splendid wardrobe; so fine were the carious articles of apparel, indeed, that instead of assigning for their accommodation the painted deal drawers of the school bedroom, Miss Wilcox had them arranged in a mahogany bureau in her own room. With her own hands, too, she would on Sundays array the little favorite in her quilted silk pelisse, her hat and feathers, her ermine boa, and little French boots and gloves. And very self-complacent she felt when she led the young heiress (a letter from Mr. Fitzgibbon, received since his first visit, had communicated the additional particulars that his daughter was his only child, and would be the inheritress of his estates, including May Park, Midland County) — when she led her, I say, into the church, and seated her stately by her side at the top of the gallery-pew. Unbiased observers might, indeed, have wondered what there was to be proud of, and puzzled their heads to detect the special merits of this little woman in silk — for, to speak truth, Miss Fitzgibbon was far from being the beauty of the school: there were two or three blooming faces amongst her companions lovelier than hers. Had she been a poor child, Miss Wilcox herself would not have liked her physiognomy at all: rather, indeed, would it have repelled than attracted her; and, moreover — though Miss Wilcox hardly confessed the circumstance to herself, but, on the contrary, strove hard not to be conscious of it — there were moments when she became sensible of a certain strange weariness in continuing her system of partiality. It hardly came natural to her to show this special distinction in this particular instance. An undefined wonder would smite her sometimes that she did not take more real satisfaction in flattering and caressing this embryo heiress — that she did not like better to have her always at her side, under her special charge. On principle Miss Wilcox continued the plan she had begun. On principle, for she argued with herself: This was the richest and most aristocratic of my pupils; she brings me the most credit and the most profit; therefore, I ought in justice to show her a special indulgence; which she did — but with a gradually increasing peculiarity of feeling.

Certainly, the undue favors showered on little Miss Fitzgibbon brought their object no real benefit. Unfitted for the character of playfellow by her position of favorite, her fellow pupils rejected her company as decidedly as they dared. Active rejection was not long necessary; it was soon seen that passive avoidance would suffice; the pet was not social. No. Even Miss Wilcox never thought her social. When she sent for her to show her fine clothes in the drawing-room when there was company, and especially when she had her into her parlor of an evening to be her own companion, Miss Wilcox used to feel curiously perplexed. She would try to talk affably to the young heiress, to draw her out, to amuse her. To herself the governess could render no reason why her efforts soon flagged; but this was invariably the case. However, Miss Wilcox was a woman of courage; and be the protégé what she might, the patroness did not fail to continue on principle her system of preference.

A favorite has no friends; and the observation of a gentleman, who about this time called at the Lodge and chanced to see Miss Fitzgibbon, was, "That child looks consummately unhappy:" he was watching Miss Fitzgibbon, as she walked, by herself, fine and solitary, while her schoolfellows were merrily playing.

"Who is the miserable little wight?" he asked.

He was told her name and dignity.

"Wretched little soul!" he repeated; and he watched her pace down the walk and back again; marching upright, her hands in her ermine muff, her fine pelisse showing a gay sheen to the winter's sun, her large Leghorn hat shading such a face as fortunately had not its parallel on the premises.

"Wretched little soul!" reiterated this gentleman. He opened the drawing-room window, watched the bearer of the muff till he caught her eye, and then summoned her with his finger. She came; he stooped his head down to her; she lifted her face up to him.

"Don't you play, little girl?"

"No, sir."

"No! Why not? Do you think yourself better than other children?"

No answer.

"Is it because people tell you you are rich, you won't play?"

The young lady was gone. he stretched his hand to arrest her, but she wheeled beyond his reach, and ran quickly out of sight.

"An only child," pleaded Miss Wilcox; "possibly spoiled by her papa, you know; we must excuse a little pettishness."

"Humph! I am afraid there is not a little to excuse."

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Ellin — the gentleman mentioned in the last chapter — was a man who went where he liked, and being a gossiping, leisurely person, he liked to go almost anywhere. He could not be rich, he lived so quietly; and yet he must have had some money, for, without apparent profession, he continued to keep a house and a servant. He always spoke of himself as having once been a worker; but if so, that could not hav been very long since, for he still looked far from old. Sometimes of an evening, under a little social conversational excitement, he would look quite young; but he was changeable in mood, and complexion, and expression, and had chamelion eyes, sometimes blue and merry, sometimes gray and dark, and anon green and gleaming. On the whole he might be called a fair man, of average height, rather thin and rather wiry. He had not resided more than two years in the present neighbourhood; his antecedents were unknown there; but as the Rector, a man of good family and standing, and of undoubted scrupulousness in the choice of acquaintance, had introduced him, he found everywhere a prompt reception, of which nothing in his conduct had yet seemed to prove him unworthy. Some people, indeed, dubbed him "a character," and fancied him "eccentric;" but others could not see the appropriateness of the epithets. He always seemed to them very harmless and quiet, not always perhaps so perfectly unreserved and comprehensible as might be wished. He had a discomposing expression in his eye; and sometimes in conversation an ambiguous diction; but still they believed he meant no harm.

Mr. Ellin often called on the Misses Wilcox; he sometimes took tea with them; he appeared to like tea and muffins, and not to dislike the kind of conversation which usually accompanies that refreshment; he was said to be a good shot, a good angler. He proved himself an excellent gossip — he liked gossip well. On the whole he liked women's society, and did not seem to be particular in requiring difficult accomplishments or rare endowments in his female acquaintance. The Misses Wilcox, for instance, were not much less shallow than the china saucer which held their teacups; yet Mr. Ellin got on perfectly well with them, and had apparently great pleasure in hearing them discuss all the details of their school. He knew the names of all their young ladies too; he knew their examination days and gala days, and more than once accompanied Mr.Cecil, the curate, when he went to examine in ecclesiastical history.

This ceremony took place weekly, on Wednesday afternoons, after which Mr. Cecil sometimes stayed to tea, and usually found two or three lady parishioners invited to meet him. Mr. Ellin was also pretty sure to be there.

Rumor gave one of the Misses Wilcox in anticipated wedlock to the curate, and furnished his friend with a second in the same tender relation; so that it is to be conjectured they made a social, pleasant party under such interesting circumstances. Their evenings rarely passed without Miss Fitzgibbon being introduced — all worked muslin and streaming sash and elaborate ringlets; others of the pupils would also be called in, perhaps to sing, to show off a little at the piano, or sometimes to repeat poetry. Miss Wilcox conscientiously cultivated display in her young ladies, thinking she thus fulfilled a duty to herself and to them, at once spreading her own fame and giving the children self-possessed manners.

It was curious to note how, on these occasions, good, genuine natural qualities still vindicated their superiority to counterfeit, artificial advantages. Wile "dear Miss Fitzgibbon," dressed up and flattered as she was, could only sidle round the circle with the crestfallen air which seemed natural to her, just giving her hand to the guests, then almost snatching it away, and sneaking in unmannerly haste to the place allotted to her at Miss Wilcox's side, which place she filled like a piece of furniture, neither smiling nor speaking the evening through — while such as her deportment, certain of her companions, as Mary Franks, Jessy Newton, &c., handsome, open-countenanced little damsels — fearless because harmless — would enter with a smile of salutation and a blush of pleasure, make their pretty reverence at the drawing-room door, stretch a friendly little hand to such visitors as they knew, and sit down to the piano to play their well-practiced duet with an innocent, obliging readiness which won all hearts.

There was a girl called Diana — the girl alluded to before as having once been Miss Sterling's pupil — a daring, brave girl, much loved and a little feared by her comrades. She had good faculties, both physical and mental — was clever, honest, and dauntless. In the schoolroom she set her young brow like a rock against Miss Fitzgibbon's pretensions; she found also heart and spirit to withstand them in the drawing-room. One evening, when the curate had been summoned away by some piece of duty directly after tea, and there was no stranger present but Mr. Ellin, Diana had been called in to play a long, difficult piece of music, which she could execute like a master. She was still in the midst of her performance, when — Mr. Ellin having for the first time, perhaps, recognized the existence of the heiress by asking if she was cold — Miss Wilcox took the opportunity of launching into a strain of commendation on Miss Fitzgibbon's inanimate behaviour, terming it lady-like, modest, and exemplary. Whether Miss Wilcox's constrained tone betrayed how far she was from really feeling the approbation she expressed, how entirely she spoke from a sense of duty, and not because she felt it possible to be in any degree charmed by the personage she praised — or whether Diana, who was by nature hasty, had a sudden fit of irritability — is not quite certain, but she turned on her music-stool.

"Ma'am," said she to Miss Wilcox, "that girl does not deserve so much praise. Her behaviour is not at all exemplary. In the schoolroom she is insolently distant. For my part I denounce her airs; there is not one of us but is as good or better than she, though we may not be as rich."

And Diana shut up the piano, took her music-book under her arm, curtsied, and vanished.

Strange to relate, Miss Wilcox said not a word at the time; nor was Diana subsequently reprimanded for this outbreak. Miss Fitzgibbon had now been three months in the school, and probably the governess had had leisure to wear out her early raptures of partiality.

Indeed, as time advanced, this evil often seemed likely to right itself; again and again it seemed that Miss Fitzgibbon was about to fall to her proper level, but then, somewhat provokingly to the lovers of reason and justice, some little incident would occur to invest her insignificance with artificial interest. Once it was the arrival of a great basket of hothouse fruit — melons, grapes, and pines — as a present to Miss Wilcox in Miss Fitzgibbon's name. Whether it was that a share of these luscious productions was imparted too freely to the nominal donor, or whether she had had a surfeit of cake on Miss Mabel Wilcox's birthday, it so befell, that in some disturbed state of the digestive organs Miss Fitzgibbon took to sleepwalking. She one night terrified the school into a panic by passing through the bedrooms, all white in her night-dress, moaning and holding out her hands as she went.

Dr. Percy was then sent for; his medicines, probably, did not suit the case; for within a fortnight after the somnambulistic feat, Miss Wilcox going up stairs in the dark, trod on something which she thought was the cat, and on calling for a light, found her darling Matilda Fitzgibbon curled round on the landing, blue, cold, and stiff, without any light in her half-open eyes, or any color in her lips or movement in her limbs. She was not soon roused from this fit; her senses seemed half scattered; and Miss Wilcox had now an undeniable excuse for keeping her all day on the drawing-room sofa, and making more of her than ever.

There comes a day of reckoning both for petted heiresses and partial governesses.

One clear winter morning, as Mr. Ellin was seated at breakfast, enjoying his bachelor's easy-chair and damp, fresh London newspaper, a note was brought to him marked "private," and "in haste." The last injuction was vain, for William Ellin if nothing in hast — he had no haste in him; he wondered anybody should be so foolish as to hurry; life was short enough without it. He looked at the little note — three-cornered, scented, feminine. He knew the handwriting; it came from the very lady Rumor had so often assigned him as his own. The bachelor took out a morocco case, selected from a variety of little instruments a pair of scissors, cut round the seal, and read: — "Miss Wilcox's compliments to Mr. Ellin, and she should be truly glad to see him for a few minutes, if at leisure. Miss W. requires a little advice. She will reserve explanations till she sees Mr. E."

Mr. Ellin very quietly finished his breakfast; then, as it was a very fine December day — hoar and crisp, but serene, and not bitter — he carefully prepared himself for the cold, took his cane, and set out. He liked the walk; the air was still; the sun not wholly ineffectual; the path firm, and but lightly powdered with snow. He made his journey as long as he could by going round through many fields, and through winding, unfrequented lanes. When there was a tree in the way conveniently placed for support, he would sometimes stop, lean his back against the trunk, fold his arms, and muse. If Rumor could have seen him, she would have affirmed that he was thinking about Miss Wilcox; perhaps when he arrives at the Lodge his demeanor will inform us whether such an idea be warranted.

At last he stands at the door and rings the bell; he is admitted, and shown into the parlor — a smaller and more private room than the drawing-room. Miss Wilcox occupies it; she is seated at her writing-table; she rises — not without air and grace — to receive her visitor. This air and grace she learned in France; for she was in a Parisian school for six months, and learned there a little French, and a stock of gestures and courtesies. No: it is certainly not impossible that Mr. Ellin may admire Miss Wilcox. She is not without prettiness, any more than are her sisters; and she and they are one and all smart and showy. Bright stone-blue is a color they like in dress; a crimson bow rarely fails to be pinned on somewhere to give contrast; positive colors generally — grass-greens, red violets, deep yellows — are in favor with them; all harmonies are at a discount. Many people would think Miss Wilcox, standing there in her blue merino dress and pomegranate ribbon, a very agreeable woman. She has regular features; the nose is a little sharp, the lips a little thin, good complexion, light red hair. She is very business-like, very practical; she never in her life knew a refinement of feeling or of thought; she is entirely limited, respectable, and self-satisfied. She has a cool, prominent eye; sharp and shallow pupil, unshrinking and inexpansive; pale irid; light eyelashes, light brow. Miss Wilcox is a very proper and decorous person; but she could not be delicate or modest, because she is naturally destitute of sensitiveness. Her voice, when she speaks, has no vibration; her face no expression; her manner no emotion. Blush or tremor she never knew.

“What can I do for you, Miss Wilcox?” says Mr. Ellin, approaching the writing-table, and taking a chair beside it.

“Perhaps you can advise me,” was the answer; “or perhaps you can give me some information. I feel so thoroughly puzzled, and really fear all is not right.”

“Where? and how?”

“I will have redress if it be possible,” pursued the lady; “but how to set about obtaining it! Draw to the fire, Mr. Ellin; it is a cold day.”

They both drew near to the fire. She continued, “You know the Christmas holidays are near?”

He nodded.

"Well, about a fortnight since, I wrote, as is customary, to the friends of my pupils, notifying the day when we break up and requesting that, if it was desired that any girl should stay the vacation, intimation should be sent accordingly. Satisfactory and prompt answers came to all the notes except one — that addressed to Conway Fitzgibbon, Esquire, May Park, Midland County — Matilda Fitzgibbon's father, you know."

"What? won't he let her go home?"

"Let her go home, my dear sir! you shall hear. two weeks elapsed, during which I daily expected an answer; none came. I felt annoyed at the delay, as I had particularly requested a speedy reply. This very morning I had made up my mind to write again, when — what do you think the post brought me?"

"I should like to know."

"My own letter — actually my own — returned from the post-office with an intimation — such an intimation! — but read her yourself."

She handed to Mr. Ellin an envelope; he took from it the returned note and a paper — the paper bore a hastily-scrawled line or two. It said, in brief terms, that there was no such place in Midland County as May Park, and that no such person had ever been heard of there as Conway Fitzgibbon, Esquire.

On reading this, Mr. Ellin slightly opened his eyes.

"I hardly thought it was so bad as this," said he.

"What? you did think it was bad, then? You suspected that something was wrong?"

"Really! I scarcely know what I thought or suspected. How very odd, no such place as May Park! The grand mansion, the grounds, the oaks, the deer, vanished clean away. And then Fitzgibbon himself! But you saw Fitzgibbon — he came in his carriage?"

"In his carriage!" echoed Miss Wilcox; "a most stylish equipage, and himself a most distinguished person. Do you think, after all, there is some mistake?"

"Certainly, a mistake; but when it is rectified I don't think Fitzgibbon or May Park will be forthcoming. Shall I run down to Midland County and look after these two precious objects?"

"Oh! would you be so good, Mr. Ellin? I knew you would be so kind; personal inquiry, you know — there's nothing like it."

"Nothing at all. Meantime, what shall you do with the child — the pseudo-heiress, if pseudo she be? Shall you correct her — let her know her place?"

"I think," responded Miss Wilcox reflectively — "I think not exactly as yet; my plan is to do nothing in a hurry; we will inquire first. If after all she should turn out to be connected as was at first supposed, one had better not do anything which one might afterwards regret. No; I shall make no difference with her till I hear from you again."

"Very good. As you please," said Mr. Ellin, with that coolness which made him so convenient a counsellor in Miss Wilcox's opinion. In his dry laconism she found the response suited to her outer worldliness. She thought he said enough if he did not oppose her. The comment he stinted so avariciously she did not want.

Mr. Ellin "ran down," as he said, to Midland County. It was an errand that seemed to suit him; for he had curious predilections as well as peculiar methods of his own. Any secret quest was to his taste; perhaps there was something of the amateur detective in him. He could conduct an inquiry and draw no attention. His quiet face never looked inquisitive, nor did his sleepless eye betray vigilance.

He was away about a week. The day after his return he appeared in Miss Wilcox's presence as cool as if he had seen her but yesterday. Confronting her with that fathomless face he liked to show her, he first told her he had done nothing.

Let Mr. Ellin be as enigmatical as he would, he never puzzled Miss Wilcox. She never saw enigma in the man. Some people feared, because they did not understand him; to her it had not yet occurred to begin to spell his nature or analyze his character. If she had an impression about him, it was, that he was an idle but obliging man, not aggressive, of few words, but often convenient. Whether he were clever and deep, or deficient and shallow, close or open, odd or ordinary, she saw no practical end to be answered by inquiry, and therefore did not inquire.

"Why had he done nothing?" she now asked.

"Chiefly because there is nothing to do."

"Then he could give her no information?"

"Not much; only this, indeed — Conway Fitzgibbon was a man of straw; May Park a house of cards. there was no vestige of such man or mansion in Midland County, or in any other shire in England. Tradition herself had nothing to say about either name or the place. The oracle of old deeds and registers, when consulted, had not responded."

"Who can he be, then, that came here, and who is this child?"

"That's just what I can't tell you; — an incapacity which makes me say I have done nothing."

"And how am I to get paid?"

"Can't tell you that either."

"A quarter's board and education owing, and master's terms besides," pursued Miss Wilcox. "How infamous! I can't afford the loss."

"And if we were only in the good old times," said Mr. Ellin, "where we ought to be, you might just send Miss Matilda out to the plantations in Virginia, sell her for what she is worth, and pay yourself."

"Matilda, indeed, and Fitzgibbon! A little impostor. I wonder what her real name is?"

"Betty Hodge? Poll Smith? Hannah Jones?" suggested Mr. Ellin.

"Now," cried Miss Wilcox, "give me credit for sagacity. It's very odd, but try as I would, — and I made every effort, — I never could really like that child. She has had every indulgence in this house; and I am sure I made great sacrifice of feeling to principle in showing her much attention, for I could not make any one believe the degree of antipathy I have all along felt towards her.”

“Yes. I can believe it. I saw it.”

“Did you? Well, it proves that my discernment is rarely at fault. Her game is now up, however; and time it was. I have said nothing to her yet; but now — “

“Have her in whilst I am here,” said Mr. Ellin. “Has she known of this business? Is she in the secret? Is she herself an accomplice, or a mere tool? Have her in.”

Miss Wilcox rang the bell, demanded Matilda Fitzgibbon, and the false heiress soon appeared. She came in her ringlets, her sash, and her furbelowed dress adornments, alas! no longer acceptable.

“Stand there!” said Miss Wilcox sternly, checking her as she approached the hearth. “Stand there on the further side of the table. I have a few questions to put to you, and your business will be to answer them. And mind, let us have the truth. We will not endure lies.”

Ever since Miss Fitzgibbon had been found in the fit, her face had retained a peculiar paleness and her eyes a dark orbit. When thus addressed, she began to shake and blanch like conscious guilt personified.

“Who are you?” demanded Miss Wilcox. “What do you know about yourself?”

A sort of half-interjection escaped the girl’s lips; it was a sound expressing partly fear, and partly the shock which the nerves feel when an evil, very long expected, at last and suddenly arrives.

“Keep yourself still, and reply, if you please,” said Miss Wilcox, whom nobody should blame for lacking pity, because nature had not made her compassionate. “What is your name? We know you have no right to that of Matilda Fitzgibbon.”

She gave no answer.

“I do insist upon a reply. Speak you shall, sooner or later. So you had better do it at once.

This inquisition had evidently a very strong effect upon the subject of it. She stood as if palsied, trying to speak, but apparently not competent to articulate.

Miss Wilcox did not fly into a passion, but she grew very stern and urgent, spoke a little loud, and there was a dry clamor in her raised voice which seemed to beat upon the ear and bewilder the brain. Her interest had been injured — her pocket wounded. She was vindicating her rights, and she had no eye to see, and no nerve to feel, but for the point in hand. Mr. Ellin appeared to consider himself strictly a looker-on; he stood on the hearth very quiet.

At last the culprit spoke. A low voice escaped her lips. “Oh, my head!”

she cried, lifting her hands to her forehead. She staggered, but caught the door and did not fall. Some accusers might have been startled by such a cry — even silenced; not so Miss Wilcox. She was neither cruel nor violent; but she was coarse because insensible. Having just drawn breath, she went on, harsh as ever.

Mr. Ellin, leaving the hearth, deliberately paced up the room, as if he were tired of standing still, and would walk a little for a change. In returning and passing near the door an the criminal, a faint breath seemed to seek his ear, whispering his name, —

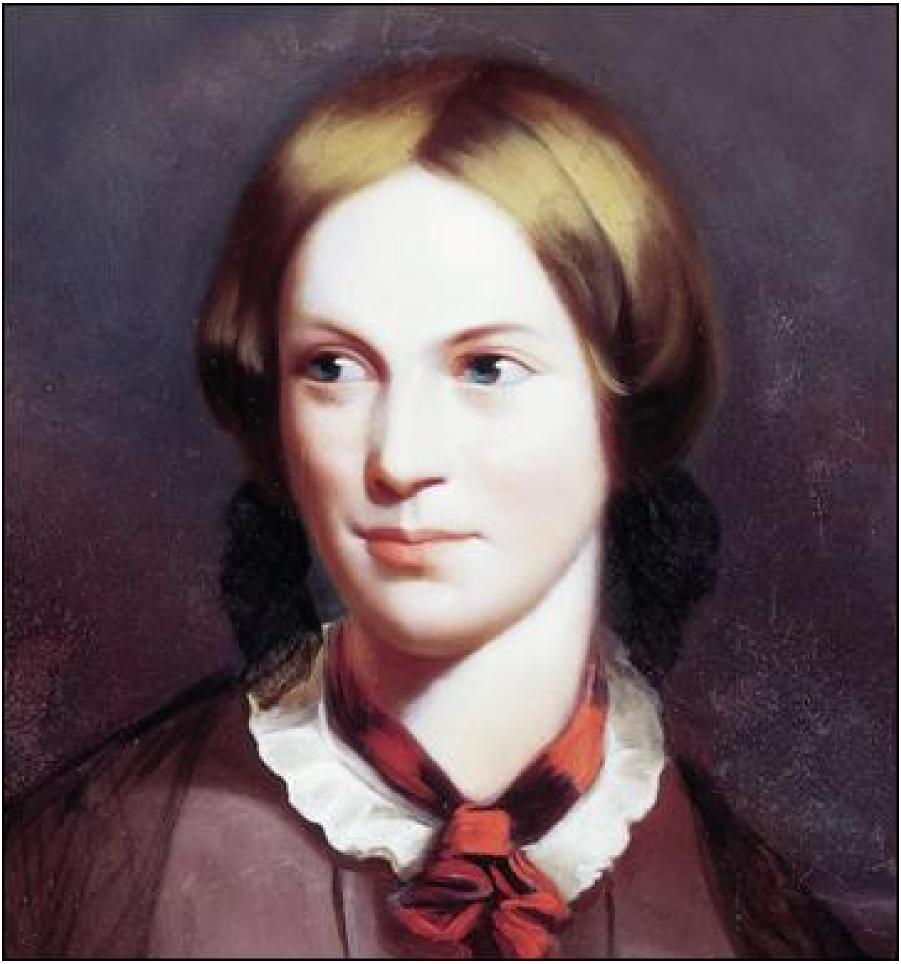
"Oh, Mr. Ellin!"

The child dropped as she spoke. A curious voice — not like Mr. Ellin's though it came from his lips — asked Miss Wilcox to cease speaking, and say no more. He gathered from the floor what had fallen on it. She seemed overcome, but not unconscious. Resting beside Mr. Ellin, in a few minutes she again drew breath. She raised her eyes to him.

"Come, my little one; have no fear," said he.

Reposing her head against him, she gradually became assured. It did not cost him another word to bring her round; even strong trembling was calmed by the mere effects of his protection. He told Miss Wilcox with remarkable tranquillity, but still with a certain decision, that the little girl must be put to bed. He carried her up stairs, and saw her laid there himself. Returning to Miss Wilcox, he said, "Say no more to her. Beware, or you will do more mischief than you think or wish. That kind of nature is very different from yours. It is not possible that you should like it; but let it alone. We will talk more on the subject to-morrow. Let me question her."

Charlotte Brontë's Juvenilia



TALES OF ANGRIA

In 1834 Charlotte and her brother Branwell created an imaginary kingdom called Angria in a series of tiny handmade books. Continuing their saga some years later, the five ‘novelettes’ were written by Charlotte when she was in her early twenties and depict a aristocratic beau monde in witty and ironic style. Together the tales provide a fascinating glimpse into the mind and creative processes of the young writer before she became the great novelist.

MINA LAURY

The Cross of Rivaulx! Is that a name familiar to my readers? I rather think not. Listen then: it is a green, delightful, and quiet place half way between Angria and the foot of the Sydenham Hills; under the frown of Hawkscliffe, on the edge of its royal forest. You see a fair house, whose sash windows are set in ivy grown thick and kept in trim order; over the front door there is a little modern porch of trellis work, all the summer covered with a succession of verdant leaves and pink rose-globes, buds and full-blown blossoms. Within this, in fine weather, the door is constantly open and reveals a noble passage, almost a hall, terminating in a staircase of low white steps, traced up the middle by a brilliant carpet. You look in vain for anything like a wall or gate to shut it in: the only landmark consists in an old obelisk with moss and wild flowers at its base and an half obliterated crucifix sculptured on its side.

Well, this is no very presuming place, but on a June evening not seldom have I seen a figure, whom every eye in Angria might recognise, stride out of the domestic gloom of that little hall and stand in pleasant leisure under the porch whose flowers and leaves were disturbed by the contact of his curls. Though in a sequestered spot, the Cross of Rivaulx is not one of Zamorna's secret houses; he'll let anybody come there that chooses.

The day is breathless, quite still and warm. The sun, far declined for afternoon, is just melting into evening, and sheds a deep amber light. A cheerful air surrounds the mansion whose windows are up, its door as usual hospitably apart, and the broad passage reverberates with a lively conversational hum from the rooms which open into it. The day is of that perfectly mild, sunny kind that by an irresistible influence draws people out into the balmy air; see, there are two gentlemen lounging easily in the porch, sipping coffee from the cups they have brought from the drawing room; a third has stretched himself on the soft moss in the shadow of the obelisk. But for these figures, the landscape could be one of exquisite repose.

Two, [in military dress], are officers from the headquarters of Zamorna's grand army; the other, reclining on the grass, a slight figure in black, wears a civil dress. That is Mr Warner, the home secretary. Another person was standing by him whom I should not have omitted to describe. It was a fine girl, dressed in rich black satin, with ornaments like those of a bandit's wife in which a whole fortune seemed to have been expended; but no wonder, for they had doubtless been the gift of a king. In her ears hung two long clear drops, red as fire, and suffused with a purple tint that showed them to be the true oriental ruby. Bright delicate links of gold circled her neck again and again, and a cross of gems lay on her breast, the centre stone of which was a locket enclosing a ringlet of dark brown hair — with that little soft curl she would not have parted for a kingdom.

Warner's eyes were fixed with interest on Miss Laury as she stood over him, a model of beautiful vigour and glowing health; there was a kind of military erectness in her form, so elegantly built, and in the manner in which her neck, sprung from her exquisite bust, was placed with graceful uprightness on her falling shoulders. Her waits too, falling in behind, and her fine slender foot, supporting her in a regulated position, plainly indicated familiarity from her childhood with the sergeant's drill. All the afternoon she had been entertaining her exalted guests — the two in the porch were no other than Lord Hartford and Enara — and conversing with them, frankly and cheerfully. These were the only friends she had in the world. Female acquaintance she never sought, nor if she had sought, would she have found them. And so sagacious, clever, and earnest was she in all she said and did, that the haughty aristocrats did not hesitate to communicate with her often on matters of first-rate importance.

Mr Warner was now talking to her about herself.

'My dear madam,' he was saying in his usual imperious and still dulcet tone, 'it is unreasonable that you should remain this exposed to danger. I am your friend — yes, madam, your true friend. Why do you not hear me and attend to my representations of the case? Angria is an unsafe place for you. You ought to leave it.' The lady shook her head.

'Never. Till my master compels me, his land is my land.'

'But — but, Miss Laury, you know that our army have no warrant from the Almighty. This invasion may be successful at least for a time; and then what becomes of you? When the duke's nation is wrestling with destruction, his glory sunk in deep waters, and himself striving desperately to recover it, can he waste a thought or a moment on one woman?'

Mina smiled.

'I am resolved,' said she. 'My master himself shall not force me to leave him. You know I am hardened, Warner; shame and reproach have no effect on me. I do not care for being called a camp follower. In peace and pleasure all the ladies of Africa would be at the duke's beck; in war and suffering he shall not lack one poor peasant girl. Why, sir, I've nothing else to exist for. I've no other interest in life. Just to stand by his grace, watch him and anticipate his wishes, or when I cannot do that, to execute them like lightning when they are signified; to wait on him when he is sick or wounded, to hear his groans and bear his heartrending animal patience in enduring pain; to breathe if I can my own inexhaustible health and energy into him, and oh, if it were practicable, to take his fever and agony; to guard his interests, to take on my shoulders power from him that galls me with its weight; to fill a gap in his mighty train of service which nobody else would dare to step into: to do all that, sir, is to fulfil the destiny I was born to. I know I am of no repute amongst society at large because I have devoted myself so wholly to one man. And I know that he even seldom troubles himself to think of what I do, has never and can never appreciate the unusual feelings of subservience, the total self-sacrifice I offer at his shrine. But then he gives me my reward, and that an abundant one.

‘Mr Warner, when I was at Fort Adrian and had all the yoke of governing the garrison and military household, I used to rejoice in my responsibility, and to feel firmer, the heavier the weight assigned me to support. When my master came over, as he often did to take one of his general surveys, or on a hunting expedition with some of his state officers, I had such delight in ordering the banquets and entertainments, and in seeing the fires kindled up and the chandeliers lighted in those dark halls, knowing for whom the feast was made ready. It gave me a feeling of ecstasy to hear my young master’s voice, to see him moving about secure and powerful in his own stronghold, to know what true hearts he had about him. Besides, sir, his greeting to me, and the condescending touch of his hand, were enough to make a queen proud, let alone a sergeant’s daughter.

‘Then, for instance, the last summer evening that he came here, the sun and flowers and quietness brightened his noble features with such happiness, I could tell his heart was at rest; for as he lay in the shade where you are now, I heard him hum the airs he long, long ago played on his guitar. I was rewarded then to feel that the house I kept was pleasant enough to make him forget Angria and recur to home. You must excuse me, Mr Warner, but the west, the sweet west, is both his home and mine.’ Mina paused and looked solemnly at the sun, now softened in its shine and hanging exceedingly low. In a moment her eyes fell again on Warner. They seemed to have absorbed radiance from what they had gazed on: light like an arrow point glanced in them as she said,

‘This is my time to follow Zamorna. I’ll not be robbed of those hours of blissful danger when I may be continually with him. I am not afraid of danger; I have strong nerves; I will die or be with him.’

‘What has fired your eyes so suddenly, Miss Laury?’ asked Lord Hartford, now advancing with Enara from their canopy of roses.

‘The duke, the duke,’ muttered Enara. ‘You won’t leave him, I’ll be sworn.’

‘I can’t, general,’ said Mina.

‘No,’ answered the Italian, ‘and nobody shall force you. You shall have your own way, madam, whether it be right or wrong. I hate to contradict such as you in their will.’

‘Thank you, general, you are always so kind to me.’ Mina hurriedly put her little hand into the gloved grasp of Enara.

‘Kind, madam?’ said he, pressing it warmly, ‘I’m so kind that I would hang the man unshriven who should use your name with other than respect due to a queen.’ The dark, hard-browed Hartford smiled at his enthusiasm.

‘Is that homage paid to Miss Laury’s goodness or to her beauty?’ asked he.

'To neither, my lord,' answered Enara briefly, 'but to her worth, her sterling worth.'

'Hartford, you are not going to despise me? Was that a sneer?' murmured Mina aside.

'No. No, Miss Laury,' replied the noble general seriously. 'I know what you are; I am aware of your value. Do you doubt Edward Hartford's honourable friendship? It is yours on terms such as it was never given to a beautiful woman before.'

Before Miss Laury could answer, a voice from within the mansion spoke her name.

'It is my lord!' she exclaimed, and sped like a roe over the sward, through the porch, along the passage, to a summer parlour, whose walls were painted fine pale red, its mouldings burnished gilding, and its window curtains artistical draperies of dark blue silk, covered with gold waves and flowers.

Here Zamorna sat alone; he had been writing. One or two letters, folded, sealed, and inscribed with western directions lay on the table beside him. He had not uncovered since entering the house three hours since, and either the weight of his dragoon helmet, or the gloom of its impending plumes, or else some inward feeling, had clouded his face with a strange darkness.

Mina closed the door and softly drew near; without speaking or asking leave, she began to busy herself in unclasping the heavy helmet. The duke smiled faintly as her little fingers played about his chin and luxuriant whiskers; and then, the load of brass and sable plumage being removed, as they arranged the compressed masses of glossy brown ringlets, and touched with soft cool contact his feverish brow. Absorbed in this grateful task she hardly felt that his majesty's arm had encircled her waist; yet she did feel it, too, and would have thought herself presumptuous to shrink from his endearment. She took it as a slave ought to take the caress of a sultan, and obeying the gentle effort of his hand, slowly sunk on to the sofa by her master's side.

'My little physician,' said he, meeting her adoring but anxious upward gaze with the full light of his countenance, 'you look at me as if you thought I was not well — feel my pulse.' She folded the proferred hand, white, supple, and soft with youth and delicate nurture, in both her own; whether Zamorna's pulse beat rapidly or not, his handmaid's did as she felt the slender grasping fingers of the monarch laid quietly in hers.

He did not wait for the report, but took his hand away again, and laying it on her raven curls said, 'So, Mina, you won't leave me, though I never did you any good in the world. Warner says you are resolved to continue in the scene of war.'

'To continue by your side, my lord duke.'

'But what shall I do with you, Mina? Where shall I put you? My little girl, what will the army say when they hear of your presence? You have read history; recollect that it was Darius who carried his concubines to the field, not Alexander. The world will say Zamorna has provided himself with a pretty mistress. He attends to his own pleasures and cares not how his men suffer.'

Poor Mina writhed at these words as if the iron had entered into her soul. A vivid burning blush crimsoned her cheek, and tears of shame and bitter self-reproach gushed at once into her bright black eyes. Zamorna was touched acutely.

'Nay, my little girl,' said he, redoubling his haughty caresses and speaking in his most soothing tone, 'never weep about it. It grieves me to hurt your feelings, but you desire an impossibility and I must use strong language to convince you that I cannot grant it — -'

'Oh! don't refuse me again,' sobbed Miss Laury. 'I'll bear all infamy and contempt to be allowed to follow you, my lord. My lord, I've served you for many years most faithfully and I seldom ask a favour of you. Don't reject almost the first request of the kind I ever made.' The duke shook his head, and the meeting of his exquisite lips, too placid for the term compression, told he was not to be moved.

'If you should receive a wound, if you should fall sick,' continued Mina, 'what can surgeons and physicians do for you? They cannot watch you and wait on you and worship you like me; you do not seem well now, the bloom is so faded on your complexion and the flesh is wasted round your eyes. My lord, smile and do not look so calmly resolved. Let me go!'

Zamorna withdrew his arm from her waist. 'I must be displeased before you cease to importune me,' said he. 'Mina, look at that letter, read the direction,' pointing to one he had been writing. She obeyed: it was addressed to Her Royal Highness Mary Henrietta, Duchess of Zamorna, Queen of Angria.

'Must I pay no attention to the feelings of that lady?' pursued the duke, whom the duties of war and the conflict of some internal emotions seemed to render rather peculiarly stern. 'Her public claims must be respected whether I love her or not.' Miss Laury shrunk into herself. Not another word did she venture to breathe. An unconscious wish of wild intensity filled her that she were dead and buried, insensible to the shame that overwhelmed her. She saw Zamorna's finger with the ring on it still pointing to that awful name, a name that raised no impulse of hatred, but only bitter humiliation and self-abasement. She stole from her master's side, feeling that she had no more right to sit there than a fawn has to share the den of a royal lion; and murmuring that she was very sorry for her folly, was about to glide in dismay and despair from the room. But the duke, rising up, arrested her, and bending his lofty stature over as she crouched before him, folded her again in his arms. His countenance relaxed not a moment from its sternness, nor did the gloom leave his magnificent but worn features, as he said,

'I will make no apologies for what I have said because I know, Mina, that, as I hold you now, you feel fully recompensed for my transient severity.

Before I depart, I will speak to you one word of comfort, which you may remember when I am far away, and perhaps dead. My dear girl! I know and appreciate all you have done, all you have resigned, and all you have endured for my sake. I repay you for it with one coin, with what alone will be to you of greater worth than worlds without it. I give you such true and fond love as a master may give to the fairest and loveliest vassal that ever was bound to him in feudal allegiance. You may never feel the touch of Zamorna's lips again. There, Mina.' And fervently, almost fiercely, he pressed them to her forehead. 'Go to your chamber. Tomorrow you must leave for the west.'

'Obedient till death,' was Miss Laury's answer, as she closed the door and disappeared.

> [Meanwhile ... though Zamorna has apparently directed a letter to his wife in this past scene, he persists in his decision to repudiate her and get revenge on her father, Northangerland, by breaking her heart. Weeks pass without a word from Zamorna, and Mary begins to pine away.]

The duchess dropped her head on her hand.

'Is the sun shining hot this evening?' said she. 'I feel very languid and inert.' Alas, it was not the mild sun of April glistening even now on the lingering rain drops of the morning which caused that sickly languor. 'I wish the mail would come in,' continued the duchess. 'How long is it since I've had a letter now, Amelia?'

'Three weeks, my lady.'

'If none comes this evening, what shall I do, Amelia? I shall never get on till tomorrow. Oh, I dread those long, weary, sleepless nights I've had lately, tossing through many hours on a wide, lonely bed, with the lamps decaying round me. Now I think I could sleep if I only had a kind letter for a talisman to press to my heart all night long. Amelia, I'd give anything to get from the east this evening a square of white paper directed in that light, rapid hand. Would he but write two lines to me signed with his name.'

'My lady,' said Miss Clifton, as she placed a little silver vessel of tea and a plate of biscuit before her mistress, 'you will hear from the east this evening, and that before many minutes elapse. Mr Warner is in Verdopolis and will wait upon you immediately.' It was pleasant to see how a sudden beam of joy shot into the settled sadness of Queen Mary's face.

'I am thankful to heaven for it,' exclaimed she. 'Even if he brings bad news it will be a relief from suspense; and if good news, this heart sickness will be removed for a moment.'

As she spoke, a foot was heard in the antechamber, there was a light tap at the door. Mr Warner entered closely muffled, as it was absolutely necessary that he should avoid remark, for the sacrifice of his liberty would have been the result of recognition. With something of chivalric devotedness in his manner he sunk on one knee before the duchess, and respectfully touched with his lips the hand she offered him. A gleam of eager anxiety darted into his eyes as he rose, looked at her, and saw the pining and joyless shadow which had settled on her divine features, her blanched delicacy of complexion.

'Your grace is wasting away,' said he abruptly, the first greeting being past. 'You are going into a decline; you have imagined things to be worse than they really are; you have frightened yourself with fantastic surmises.'

> [Despite his desire to console her, Warner does not bring the longed-for letter. In desperation, Mary resolved to return with him to the front.]

'I cannot try one effort to soften him, separated by one hundred and twenty miles. He would think of me more as a woman, I am sure, and less as a bodiless link between himself and my terrible father if I were near at hand. Warner, this irritation throughout all my nerves is unbearable. I am not accustomed to disappointment and delay in what I wish. When do you return to Angria?'

'Tomorrow, my lady, before daylight, if possible.' 'And you travel incognito, of course?'

'I do.'

'Make room in your carriage then for me. I must go with you. Not a word, I implore you, Mr Warner, of expostulation. I should have died before morning if I had not hit upon this expedient.' Mr Warner heard her in silence and saw it was utterly vain to oppose her, but in his heart he hated the adventure. He saw its rashness and peril; besides he had calculated the result of the duke's determination over and over again. He had weighed advantages against disadvantages, profit against loss, the separation from the father against the happiness of the daughter, and in his serene and ambitious eye, the latter scale seemed far to kick the beam. He bowed to the duchess, said she should be obeyed, and left the room.

> [Upon their arrival at the front Warner immediately meets with Zamorna.]

'I knew you were come, Howard,' said he, 'for I heard you voice below a quarter of an hour since. Well, have you procured the documents?'

'Yes, and I have delivered them to your grace's private secretary.'

'They were at Wellesley house, of course?'

'Yes, in the duchess's own keeping. She said you wished them to be preserved with care.

'Her grace,' continued Warner after a brief pause, 'asked very anxiously after you.'

The stern field-marshal look came over the duke, as he lay giantlike on his couch, and the momentary mildness melted away.

‘I need not ask you how Mary Wellesley looks,’ said he in his deep undertone, ‘because I know better than you can tell me. I say, Howard, did she not ask you for a letter?’

‘She did; she almost entreated me for one.’

‘And you had not one to give her,’ answered his sovereign, while with a low bitter laugh he turned on his couch and was silent.

Warner paced the room with a troubled step. ‘My lord, are you doing right?’ exclaimed he, pausing suddenly. ‘The matter lies between God and your conscience. I know that the kingdom must be saved at any hazard of individual peace or even life; I advocate expediency, my lord, in the government of a state; I allow of equivocal measures to procure a just end; I sanction the shedding of blood and the cutting up of domestic happiness by the roots to stab a traitor to the heart. But nevertheless I am a man, sire, and after what I have seen during the last day or two, I ask your majesty with solemn earnestness: is there no way by which the heart of Northangerland may be reached except through the breast of my queen?’

> [Zamorna remains obdurate, and Warner finally quits him, with the intelligence that there is ‘a lady’ in the next room who wishes an audience with him.]

About ten minutes after Warner’s departure, the lady in question entered the room by an inner door. Zamorna was now risen from his couch and stood in full stature before the fire. He turned to her at first carelessly, but his keen eye was quickly lit up with interest when he saw the elegant figure, whose slight, youthful proportions and graceful carriage, agreeing with her dress, produced an effect of such ladylike harmony. While dropping a profound obeisance, she contrived so to arrange her large veil as to hide her face. As she did this, her hand trembled; then she paused and leaned against a bookcase near the door.

Zamorna now saw that she shook from head to foot. Speaking in his tone of most soothing melody, he told her to draw near, and placed a chair for her close by the hearth. She made an effort to obey but it was evident she would have dropped if she had quitted her support. His grace smiled, a little surprised at her extreme agitation.

‘I hope, madam,’ said he, ‘my presence is not the cause of your alarm,’ and advancing, he kindly gave her his hand and led her to a seat. As she grew a little calmer he addressed her again in tones of the softest encouragement.

‘I think Mr Warner said you are the wife of an officer in my army. What is his name?’

‘Archer,’ replied the lady, dropping one silver word for the first time.

‘And have you any request to make concerning your husband? Speak our freely, madam; if it be reasonable, I will grant it.’ She made some answer, but in a tone too low to be audible.

‘Be so kind as to remove your veil, madam,’ said the duke. ‘It prevents me from hearing what you say distinctly.’ She hesitated a moment, then as if she had formed some sudden resolution, she loosened the satin knot that confined her bonnet, and taking off both it and her veil, let them drop on the carpet. His majesty now caught a glimpse of a beautiful blushing face, but in a moment clusters of curls fell over it, and it was likewise concealed by two delicate little white hands with many rings sparkling on the taper fingers.

The sovereign of the east was nonplussed; he had an acute eye for most of these matters, but he did not quite understand the growing, trembling embarrassment of his lovely suppliant. He repeated the question he had before put to the lady respecting the nature of her petition.

‘Sire,’ said she at length, ‘I want your majesty’s gracious permission to see my dear, dear husband once more in this world before he leaves me forever.’ She looked up, parted from her fair forehead her auburn curls, and raised her wild brown eyes, tearful and earnest and imploring, to a face that grew crimson under their glance.

The king’s heart beat and throbbed till its motion could be seen in the heaving of a splendid chest. He seemed fixed in his attitude, standing before the lady, slightly bent over her, an inexpressible sparkle commencing and spreading to a flash in his eyes, the current of his lifeblood rising to his cheek, and his forehead dark with solemn, awful, desperate thought.

Mary clasped her hands and waited. She did not know whether love or indignation would prevail. She saw that both feelings were at work. Her suspense was at and end: the thundercloud broke asunder in a burst of electric passion! He turned from his duchess and flung open the door. A voice rung along the halls of Angria House summoning Warner — a voice having the spirit of a trumpet, the depth of a drum in its tone — -

[Warner is duly rebuked in true imperial style, and dismissed.]

Warner, whose angelic philosophy had been little shaken by this appalling hurricane, would have stopped to give his grace a brief homily on the wickedness of indulging in violent passions; but a glance of entreaty from the duchess prevailed on him to withdraw in silence.

It was with a sensation of pleasurable terror that Mary found herself again alone with the duke. He had not yet spoken one harsh word to her. It was awful to be Zamorna’s sole companion in this hour of his ire but how much better than to be one hundred and twenty miles away from him. She was soon near enough. The duke, gazing at her pale and sweet loveliness till he felt there was nothing in the world he loved half so well — -conscious that her delicate attenuation was for his sake, appreciating too the idolatry that had brought her through such perils to see him at all hazards — threw himself impetuously beside her and soon made her tremble as much with the ardour of his caresses as she had done with the dread of his wrath.

‘I’ll seize the few hours of happiness you have thrown in my way, Mary,’ said he, as she clung to him and called him her adored glorious Adrian, ‘but these kisses and tears of thine, and this intoxicating beauty, shall not change my resolution. I will rend you, my lovely rose, entirely from me; I’ll plant you in your father’s garden again: I must do it, he compels me.’

‘I don’t care,’ said the duchess, swallowing the delicious draught of the moment, and turning from the dark future to the glorious present shrined in Zamorna. ‘But if you do divorce me, Zamorna, will you never, never take me back to you? Must I die inevitably before I am twenty?’ The duke looked at her in silence; he could not cut off hope.

‘The event has not taken place yet, Mary, and there lingers a possibility that it may be averted. But, love, should I take the crown off that sweet brow, the crown I placed over those silken curls on the day of our coronation, do not live hopeless. You may on some moonlight night hear Adrian’s whistle under your window when you least expect it. Then step out on to the parapet; I’ll lift you in my arms from thence to the terrace. From that time for ever, Mary, though Angria shall have no queen, a Percy shall have no daughter.’

‘Adrian,’ said the duchess, ‘how different you are, how very different when I get close to you. At a distance you appear quite unapproachable. I wish, I wish my father was as near to you now as I am — or at least almost as near; because I am your creeping plant, I twine about you like ivy, and he is a tree to grow side by side with you. If he were in this room I should be satisfied.’

What answer Zamorna made I know not, but he brought down the curtain.

> [An interval ensues; Zamorna is ultimately victorious and the rebellion put down; he is reconciled with Northangerland, against the vigorous objections of his advisors, and Mary is saved from the death which could surely have followed a permanent separation from her ‘Adrian’. However, we next see Zamorna trying to extricate himself once again from his tenacious ‘creeping plant’. He has bid good-bye to his family and is about to set off for Angria.]

The barouche stood at the door, the groom and the valet were waiting, and the duke, with a clouded countenance, was proceeding to join them, when his wife came forwards.

‘You have forgotten me, Adrian — ‘ she said in a very quiet tone, but her eye meantime flashed expressively. He started, for in truth he had forgotten her.

‘Good-bye then, Mary,’ he said, giving her a hurried kiss and embrace. She detained his hand.

‘Pray, how long am I to stay here?’ she asked. ‘Why do you leave me at all? Why am I not to go with you?’ ‘It is such weather,’ he answered. ‘When this storm passes over I will send for you — -'

'When will that be?' pursued the duchess, following his steps as he strode into the hall.

'Soon — soon my love — perhaps in a day or two — there now — don't be unreasonable — of course you cannot go today — -'

'I can and I will,' answered the duchess quickly. 'I have had enough of Alnwick, you shall not leave me behind you.'

'Go into the room, Mary. The door is open and the wind blows on you far too keenly. Don't you see how it drifts the snow in — -'

"I will not go into the room. I'll step into the carriage as I am. If you refuse to wait till I can prepare, perhaps you will be humane enough to let me have a share of your cloak — ' She shivered as she spoke. Her hair and her dress floated in the cold blast that blew in through the open entrance, strewing the hall with snow and dead leaves.

'You might wait till it is milder. I don't think it will do your grace any good to be out today — -'

'But I must go, Mary — The Christmas recess is over and business presses.'

'Then do take me; I am sure I can bear it.'

'Out of the question. You may well clasp those small, silly hands — so thin I can almost see through them; and you may shake your curls over your face — to hide its paleness from me, I suppose. What is the matter? Crying? Good! What the devil am I do to with her? Go to your father, Mary. He has spoilt you.' 'Adrian, I cannot live at Alnwick without you,' said the duchess earnestly, 'It recalls too forcibly the very bitterest days of my life. I'll not be separated from you again except by violence — -'

The task of persuasion was no very easy one, for his own false play, his alienations, and his unnumbered treacheries had filled her mind with hideous phantoms of jealousy, had weakened her nerves and made them a prey to a hundred vague apprehensions; fears that never wholly left her except when she was actually in his arms or at least in his immediate presence.

'I tell you, Mary,' he said, regarding her with a smile half expressive of fondness — half of vexation — 'I tell you I will send for you in two or three days — . Probably I shall be a week in Angria, not more — -'

'A week! and your grace considers that but a short time? To me it will be most wearisome — '

'The horses will be frozen if they stand much longer,' returned the duke, not heeding her last remark. 'Come, wipe your eyes and be a little philosopher for once. There, let me have one smile before I go. A week will be over directly — this is not like setting out for a campaign.'

'Don't forget to send for me in two days,' pleaded the duchess as Zamorna released her from his arms.

'No, no, I'll send for you tomorrow — if the weather is settled enough. And,' half mimicking her voice, 'don't be jealous of me, Mary — unless you're afraid of the superior charms of Enara and Warner. Good-bye — ' He was gone. She hurried to the window; he passed it. In three minutes the barouche swept with muffled sound round the lawn, shot down the carriage road, and was quickly lost in the thickening whirl of the snow storm.

> [Mina, in the meantime, waits patiently for Zamorna at Rivaulx. As it happens, Lord Hartford is desperately in love with Mina; outraged by Zamorna's careless treatment of her, he decides to visit her and propose. He makes several attempts to broach the subject, but Mina pointedly avoids taking his meaning. Finally, however, his ardour becomes unmistakeable.]

Miss Laury agitatedly rose; she approached Hartford.

'My lord, you have been very kind to me, and I feel very grateful for that kindness. Perhaps sometime I may be able to repay it — we know not how the chances of fortune may turn; the weak have aided the strong. I will watch vigilantly for the slightest opportunity to serve you, but do not talk in this way. I scarcely know whither your words tend.' Lord Hartford paused a moment before he replied. Gazing at her with bended brows and folded arms, he said,

'Miss Laury, what do you think of me?'

'That you are one of the noblest hearts in the world,' she replied unhesitatingly. She was standing just before Hartford, looking up at him, her hair falling back from her brow, shading with exquisite curls her temples and her slender neck. Her small sweet features, with that high seriousness deepening their beauty, were lit up by eyes so large, so dark, so swimming, so full of pleading benignity: an expression of alarmed regard, as if she at once feared for, and pitied, the sinful abstraction of a great mind.

Hartford could not stand it. He could have borne female anger or terror, but the look of enthusiastic gratitude, softened by compassion, nearly unmanned him. He turned his head for a moment aside, but then passion prevailed. Her beauty when he looked again struck through him a maddening sensation, whetted to acute power by a feeling like despair.

'You shall love me!' he exclaimed desperately. 'Do I not love you? Would I not die for you? Must I in return receive only the cold regard of friendship? I am no platonist, Miss Laury — I am not your friend. I am, hear me, madam, your declared lover. Nay, you shall not leave me, by heaven! I am stronger than you are — ' She had stepped a pace or two back, appalled by his vehemence. He thought she meant to withdraw; determined not to be so balked, he clasped her at once in both his arms and kissed her furiously rather than fondly. Miss Laury did not struggle.

'Hartford,' said she, steadying her voice, though it faltered in spite of her effort, 'this must be our parting scene. I will never see you again if you do not restrain yourself.' Hartford saw that she turned pale and he felt her tremble violently. His arms relaxed their hold. He allowed her to leave him. She sat down on a chair opposite and hurriedly wiped her brow, which was damp and marble-pale.

‘Now, Miss Laury,’ said his lordship, ‘no man in the world loves you as I do. Will you accept my title and my coronet? I fling them at your feet.’

‘My lord, do you know whose I am?’ she replied in a hollow, very suppressed tone. ‘Do you know with what a sound those proposals fall on my ear, how impious and blasphemous they seem to be? Do you at all conceive how utterly impossible it is that I should ever love you? I thought you a true-hearted faithful man; I find that you are a traitor.’

‘And do you despise me?’ asked Hartford.

‘No, my lord, I do not.’ She paused and looked down. The colour rose rapidly into her pale face; she sobbed, not in tears, but in the overmastering approach of an impulse born of a warm heart. Again she looked up. Her eyes had changed, their aspect burning with a wild bright inspiration.

‘Hartford,’ said she, ‘had I met you long since, before I left home and dishonoured my father, I would have loved you. O, my lord, you know not how truly. I would have married you and made it the glory of my life to cheer and brighten your hearth. But I cannot do so now — never.

‘I saw my present master when he had scarcely attained manhood. Do you think, Hartford, I will tell you what feelings I had for him? No tongue could express them: they were so fervid, so glowing in their colour, that they effaced everything else. I lost the power of properly appreciating the value of the world’s opinion, of discerning the difference between right and wrong. I have never in my life contradicted Zamorna, never delayed obedience to his commands. I could not! He was sometimes more to me than a human being, he superseded all things: all affections, all interests, all fears or hopes or principles. Unconnected with him, my mind would be a blank — cold, dead, susceptible only of a sense of despair. How I should sicken if I were torn from him and thrown to you! Do not ask it — I would die first. No woman that ever loved my master could consent to leave him. There is nothing like him elsewhere. Hartford, if I were to be your wife, if Zamorna only looked at me, I should creep back like a slave to my former service. I should disgrace you as I have long since disgraced all my kindred. Think of that, my lord, and never say you love me again — -‘

> [Hartford, stung to recklessness, finally insults Mina by a sarcastic reference to her as Zamorna’s ‘gentle mistress’ whom he visits when he is tired by ‘the turmoil of business and the teasing of matrimony’. They part abruptly, in bitterness.
>
> More desperate than ever, Hartford challenges Zamorna to a duel; furious that ‘a coarse Angrian squire’ should seek to ‘possess anything that had ever been mine’, the duke inflicts a near-fatal wound on his rival.

Having dismissed Hartford, and unaware of the ensuing duel, Mina returns to her daily tasks, and to waiting for the duke. Mary, less patent than Mina, can wait no longer, and sets out for Zamorna's country house. An accident with her carriage lands her instead at Mina's Cross of Rivaulx, which is on the grounds of the duke's estate.]

Miss Laury was sitting after breakfast in a small library. Her desk lay before her, and two large ruled quartos filled with items and figures which she seemed to be comparing. Behind her chair stood a tall, well-made, soldierly, young man with light hair. His dress was plain and gentlemanly; the epaulette on one shoulder alone indicated an official capacity. He watched with a fixed look of attention the movements of the small fingers, which ascended in rapid calculation of long columns of accounts. It was strange to see the absorption of mind expressed in Miss Laury's face; the gravity of her smooth, white brow, shaded with drooping curls; the scarcely perceptible and unsmiling movement of her lips — though those lips in their rosy sweetness seemed formed only for smiles. An hour or more lapsed in the employment, the room meantime continuing in profound silence broken only by an occasional observation addressed by Miss Laury to the gentleman behind her concerning the legitimacy of some items, or the absence of some stray farthing, wanted to complete the necessary of the sum total. In the balancing of the books she displayed a most businesslike sharpness and strictness. The slightest fault was detected and remarked on in few words, but with a quick searching glance. However, the accountant had evidently been accustomed to her surveillance, for on the whole his books were a specimen of mathematical correctness.

'Very well,' said Miss Laury, as she closed the volumes. 'Your accounts do you credit, Mr O'Neill. You may tell his grace that all is quite right. Your memoranda tally with my own exactly.' Mr O'Neill bowed.

'Thank you, madam.' Taking up his books, he seemed about to leave the room. Before he did so, however, he turned and said,

'The duke wished me to inform you, madam, that he would probably be here about four or five o'clock in the afternoon.'

'Today?' asked Miss Laury in an accent of surprise. 'Yes, madam.' She paused a moment, then said quickly,

'Very well, sir.' Mr O'Neill now took his leave with another bow of low and respectful obeisance. Miss Laury returned it with a slight abstracted bow; her thoughts were all caught up and hurried away by that last communication. For a long time after the door had closed, she sat with her head on her hand, lost in a tumultuous flush of ideas — anticipations awakened by that simple sentence, 'The duke will be here today.'

The striking of the timepiece roused her. She remembered that twenty tasks waited her direction. Always active, always employed, it was not her custom to while away hours in dreaming. She rose, closed her desk, and left the quiet library for busier scenes.

Four o'clock came and Miss Laury's foot was heard on the staircase, descending from her chamber. She crossed the large, light passage, an apparition of feminine elegance and beauty. She had dressed herself splendidly: the robe of black satin became at once her slender form, which it enveloped in full and shining folds, and her bright, blooming complexion, which it set off by the contrast of colour. Glittering through her curls there was a band of fine diamonds, and drops of the same pure gem trembled from her small, delicate ears. These ornaments, so regal in their nature, had been the gift of royalty, and were worn now chiefly for the associations of soft and happy moments which their gleam might be supposed to convey.

She entered her drawing room and stood by the window. From thence appeared one glimpse of the high-road, visible through the thickening shades of Rivaulx; even that was now almost concealed by the frozen mist in which the approach of twilight was wrapt. All was very quiet, both in the house and in the wood. A carriage drew near, she heard the sound. She saw it shoot through the fog. But it was not Zamorna.

She had not gazed a minute before her experienced eye discerned that there was something wrong with the horses — the harness had got entangled, or they were frightened. The coachman had lost command over them, they were plunging violently. She rung the bell; a servant entered; she ordered immediate assistance to be despatched to that carriage on the road. Two grooms presently hurried down the drive to execute her commands, but before they could reach the spot, one of the horses, in its gambols, had slipped on the icy road and fallen. The others grew more unmanageable, and presently the carriage lay overturned on the roadside. One of Miss Laury's messengers came back. She threw up the window.

'Anybody hurt?'

'I hope not much, madam.'

'Who is in the carriage?'

'Only one lady, and she seems to have fainted. She looked very white when I opened the door. What is to be done, madam?' Miss Laury, with Irish frankness, answered directly.

'Bring the lady in directly, and make the servants comfortable.'

'Yes, madam.'

Miss Laury shut her window; it was very cold. Not many minutes elapsed before the lady, in the arms of her own servant, was slowly brought up the lawn and ushered into the drawing-room.

'Lay her on the sofa,' said Miss Laury. The lady's travelling cloak was carefully removed, and a thin figure became apparent in a dark silk dress: the cushions of down scarcely sunk under the pressure, it was so light.

Her swoon was now passing off. The genial warmth of the fire, which shone full on her, revived her. Opening her eyes, she looked up at Miss Laury's face, who was bending close over her, wetting her lips with some cordial. Recognising a stranger, she shyly turned her glance aside. She looked keenly round the room, and seeing the perfect elegance of its arrangement, the cheerful and tranquil glow of a hearthlight, she appeared to grow more composed.

‘To whom am I indebted for this kindness? Where am I?’

‘In a hospitable country, madam. The Angrians never turn their backs on strangers.’

‘I know I am in Angria,’ she said quietly, ‘but where? What is the name of this house, and who are you?’

Miss Laury coloured slightly. It seemed as if there were some undefinable reluctance to give her real name; she knew she was widely celebrated — too widely; most likely the lady would turn from her in contempt if she heard it. Miss Laury felt she could not bear that.

‘I am only the housekeeper,’ she said. ‘This is a shooting lodge belonging to a great Angrian proprietor — -’

‘Who?’ asked the lady, who was not to be put off by indirect answers. Again Miss Laury hesitated; for her life she could not have said ‘His Grace the Duke of Zamorna.’ She replied hastily.

‘A gentleman of western extraction, a distant branch of the great Pakenhams — so at least the family records say, but they have been long naturalised in the east — -’

‘I never heard of them,’ replied the lady. ‘Pakenham? That is not an Angrian name!’

‘Perhaps, madam, you are not particularly acquainted with this part of the country — -’

‘I know Hawkscliffe,’ said the lady, ‘and your house is on the very borders, within the royal liberties, is it not?’

‘Yes, madam. It stood there before the great duke bought up the forest manor, and his majesty allowed my master to retain this lodge and the privilege of sporting in the chase.’

‘Well, and you are Mr Pakenham’s housekeeper?’

‘Yes, madam.’ The lady surveyed Miss Laury with another furtive side-glance of her large, majestic eyes. Those eyes lingered upon the diamond earrings, the bandeau of brilliants that flashed from between the clusters of raven curls; then passed over the sweet face, the exquisite figure of the young housekeeper; and finally were reverted to the wall with an expression that spoke volumes. Miss Laury could have torn the dazzling pendants from her ears; she was bitterly stung. ‘Everybody knows me,’ she said to herself. ‘ “Mistress” I suppose is branded on my brow — -’

> [Realizing that Mina is lying, Mary asks for a room to withdraw to and concocts her own story: she is ‘Mrs Irving’, whose husband is a minister from the north. Mary retires; Mina, below, awaits Zamorna’s arrival.]

Five o'clock now struck. It was nearly dark. A servant with a taper was lighting up the chandeliers in the large dining room where a table, spread for dinner, received the kindling lamplight upon a starry service of silver. It was likewise flashed back from a splendid sideboard, all arranged in readiness to receive the great, the expected, guest.

Tolerably punctual in keeping an appointment when he meant to keep it at all — Zamorna entered the house as the fairylike voice of a musical clock in the passage struck out its symphony to the pendulum. The opening of the front door, a bitter rush of the night wind; then the sudden close and the step advancing were the signals of his arrival.

Miss Laury was in the dining room looking round and giving the last touch to all things. She just met her master as he entered. His cold lip pressed to her forehead, and his colder hand clasping hers, brought the sensation which it was her custom of weeks and months to wait for, and to consider, when attained, as the single recompense of all delay and all toil, all suffering.

'I am frozen, Mina,' said he. 'I came on horseback for the last four miles and the night is like Canada.' Chafing his icy hand to animation between her own warm and supple palms, she answered by the speechless but expressive look of joy, satisfaction, and idolatry which filled and overflowed her eyes.

'What can I do for you, my lord?' were her first words, as he stood by the fire raising his hands cheerily over the blaze. He laughed.

'Put your arms around my neck, Mina, and kiss my cheek as warm and blooming as your own.'

If Mina Laury had been Mina Wellesley, she would have done so; and it gave her a pang to resist the impulse that urged her to take him at his word. But she put it by and only diffidently drew near the arm chair into which he had now thrown himself, and began to smooth and separate the curls on his temples. She noticed, as the first smile of salutation subsided, a gloom succeeded on her master's brow, which, however he spoke or laughed afterwards, remained a settled characteristic of his countenance.

'What visitors are in the house?' he asked. 'I saw the groom rubbing down four black horses before the stables as I came in.'

'A carriage was overturned at the lodge gates about an hour since; as the lady who was in it was taken out insensible, I ordered her to be brought up here and her servants accommodated for the night.'

'And do you know who the lady is?' continued his grace. 'The horses are good — first rate.'

'She says her name is Mrs Irving, and that she is the wife of a Presbyterian minister in the north, but — -'

'You hardly believe her?' interrupted the duke.

'No,' returned Miss Laury. 'I must say I took her for a lady of rank. She has something highly aristocratic about her manners and aspect, and she appeared to know a good deal about Angria.'

'What is she like?' asked Zamorna. 'Young or old, handsome or ugly?'

‘She is young, slender, not so tall as I, and I should say rather elegant than handsome; very pale and cold in her demeanour. She has a small mouth and chin and a very fair neck — -’

‘Perhaps you did not say to whom the house belonged, Mina?’

‘I said,’ replied Mina smiling, ‘the owner of the house was a great Angrian proprietor, a lineal descendant of the western Pakenhams, and that I was his housekeeper.’

‘Very good; she would not believe you. You look like an Angrian country gentleman’s dolly. Give me your hand, my girl. Are you not as old as I am?’

‘Yes, my lord duke. I was born on the same day, an hour after your grace.’

‘So I have heard, but it must be a mistake. You don’t look twenty, and I am twenty-five, my beautiful western. What eyes! Look at me, Mina — straight and don’t blush — ‘ Mina tried to look, but she could not do it without blushing. She coloured to the temples.

‘Pshaw!’ said his grace, putting her away. ‘Pretending to be modest. My acquaintance of ten years cannot meet my eye unshrinkingly. Have you lost that ring I once gave you, Mina?’

‘What ring, my lord? You have given me many.’

‘That which I said had the essence of your whole heart and mind engraven in the stone as a motto.’

‘Fidelity?’ asked Miss Laury, and she held out her hand with a graven emerald on her forefinger.

‘Right,’ was the reply. ‘Is it your motto still?’ And with one of his haughty, jealous glances he seemed trying to read her conscience. Miss Laury at once saw that late transactions were not a secret confined between herself and Lord Hartford. She saw his grace was unhinged and strongly inclined to be savage; she stood and watched him with a sad, fearful gaze.

‘Well,’ she said, turning away after a long pause, ‘If your grace is angry with me, I’ve very little to care about in this world — ‘ The entrance of servants with the dinner prevented Zamorna’s answer . . .

It was not till after the cloth was withdrawn and the servants had retired that the duke, whilst he sipped his single glass of champagne, recommenced the conversation he had before so unpleasantly entered upon.

‘Come here, my girl,’ he said, drawing a seat close to his side. Mina never delayed nor hesitated, through bashfulness or any other feeling, to comply with his orders.

‘Now,’ he continued, leaning his head towards hers, and placing his hand on her shoulder, ‘are you happy, Mina? Do you want anything?’

‘Nothing, my lord.’ She spoke truly. All that was capable of yielding her happiness on this side of eternity was at that moment within her reach. The room was full of calm. The lamps hung as if they were listening; the fire sent up no flickering flame, but diffused a broad, still, glowing light over all the spacious saloon. Zamorna touched her. His form and features filled her eye, his voice her ear, his presence her whole heart. She was soothed to perfect happiness.

‘My Fidelity,’ pursued that musical voice, ‘if thou hast any favour to ask, now is the time. I’m all concession — as sweet as honey, as yielding as a lady’s glove. Come, Esther, what is thy petition and thy request? Even to the half of my kingdom it shall be granted.’

‘Nothing’, again murmured Miss Laury. ‘Oh, my lord, nothing. What can I want?’

‘Nothing?’ he repeated. ‘What, no reward for ten years’ faith and love and devotion? No reward for the companionship in six months’ exile? No recompense to the little hand that has so often smoothed my pillow in sickness, to the sweet lips that have many a time in cool and dewy health been pressed to a brow of fever? None to the dark Milesian eyes that once grew dim with watching through endless nights by my couch of delirium? Need I speak of the sweetness and fortitude that cheered sufferings known only to thee and me, Mina, of the devotion that gave me bread when thou wert dying of hunger, and that scarcely more than a year since? For all this and much more must there be no reward?’

‘I have had it,’ said Miss Laury, ‘I have it now — ‘

‘But,’ continued the duke, ‘what if I have devised something worthy of your acceptance? Look up now and listen to me.’ She did look up, but she speedily looked down again. Her master’s eye was insupportable; it burnt absolutely with infernal fire.

‘What is he going to say?’ murmured Miss Laury to herself. She trembled.

‘I say, love, pursued the individual, drawing her a little closer to him, ‘I will give you as a reward a husband — don’t start now — and that husband shall be a nobleman, and that nobleman is called Lord Hartford! Now, madam, stand up and let me look at you.’ He opened his arms and Miss Laury sprang erect like a loosened bow.

‘Your grace is anticipated!’ she said. ‘That offer has been made me before. Lord Hartford did it himself three days ago.’

‘And what did you say, madam? Speak the truth now. Subterfuge won’t avail you — ‘

‘What did I say? Zamorna, I don’t know — it little signifies. You have rewarded me, my lord duke, but I cannot bear this. I feel sick.’ With a deep short sob, she turned white, and fell, close by the duke, her head against his foot.

This was the first time in her life that Miss Laury had fainted, but strong health availed nothing against the deadly struggle which convulsed every feeling of her nature when she heard her master’s announcement. She believed him to be perfectly sincere; she thought he was tired of her and she could not stand it.

I suppose Zamorna's first feeling when she fell was horror; and his next, I am tolerably certain, was intense gratification. People say I am not in earnest when I abuse him, or else I would here insert half a page of deserved vituperation: deserved and heartfelt. As it is, I will merely relate his conduct, without note or comment. He took a wax taper from the table and held it over Miss Laury. Hers could be no dissimulation: she went white as marble and still as stone. In truth, then, she did intensely love him with a devotion that left no room in her thoughts for one shadow of an alien image. Do not think, reader, that Zamorna meant to be so generous as to bestow Miss Laury on Lord Hartford. No; trust him; he was but testing in his usual way the attachment which a thousand proofs daily given ought long ago to have convinced him was undying.

While he yet gazed, she began to recover. Her eyelids stirred; then slowly dawned from beneath the large black orbs that scarcely met his before they filled to overflowing with sorrow. Not a gleam of anger, not a whisper of reproach; her lips and eyes spoke together no other language than the simple words,

'I cannot leave you.' She rose feebly, and with effort. The duke stretched out his hand to assist her. He held to her lips the scarcely tasted wine glass. 'Mina,' he said, 'are you collected enough to hear me?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'Then listen. I would much sooner give half — aye, the whole of my estates to Lord Hartford than yourself. What I said just now was only to try you.' Miss Laury raised her eyes, sighed like awaking from some hideous dream, but she could not speak..

"Would I,' continued the duke, 'would I resign the possession of my first love to any hands but my own? I would far rather see her in her coffin. I would lay you there as still, as white, and much more lifeless than you were stretched just now at my feet, before I would for threat, for entreaty, for purchase, give to another a glance of your eye, a smile from your lip. I know you adore me now, for you could not feign that agitation; and therefore I will tell you what a proof I gave yesterday of my regard for you. Hartford mentioned your name in my presence, and I revenged the profanation by a shot which sent him to his bed little better than a corpse.'

Miss Laury shuddered, but so dark and profound are the mysteries of human nature, ever allying vice with virtue, that I fear this bloody proof of her master's love brought to her heart more rapture than horror. She said not a word, for now Zamorna's arms were again folded round her; again he was soothing her to tranquillity, by endearments and caresses that far away removed all thought of the world, all past pangs of shame, all cold doubts, all weariness, all heartsickness resulting from hope long-deferred. He had told her that she was his first love, and now she felt tempted to believe that she was likewise his only love. Strong-minded beyond her sex, active, energetic, and accomplished in all other points of view, here she was as weak as a child.

She lost her identity. Her very way of life was swallowed up in that of another.

> [The tête-à-tête is interrupted by Zamorna's valet, who calls him from the room to deliver the embarrassing intelligence that 'Mrs Irving', now wandering about the halls, bears a disconcerting resemblance to his wife, the duchess.]

'I was walking carelessly through the passage about ten minutes since, when I heard a step on the stairs — a light step, as if of a very small foot. I turned, and there was a lady coming down. My lord, she was a lady!'

'Well, sir, did you know her?'

'I think, if my eyes were not bewitched, I did. I stood in the shade screened by a pillar and she passed very near without observing me. I saw her distinctly, and may I be damned this very moment if it was not — '

'Who, sir?'

'The duchess!!' There was a pause, which was closed by a remarkably prolonged whistle from the duke. He put both his hands into his pockets and took a leisurely turn through the room. 'You're sure?' he said. 'I know you dare not tell me a lie in such matters. Aye, it's true enough, I'll be sworn. Mrs Irving, wife of a minister in the north. A satirical hit at my royal self, by God. Pale, fair neck, little mouth and chin. Very good! I wish that same little mouth and chin were about a hundred miles off. What can have brought her? Anxiety about her invaluable husband? Could not bear any longer without him? Obliged to set off to see what he was doing? If she had entered the room unexpectedly about five minutes since — God! I should have had no resource but to tie her hand and foot. It would have killed her. What the devil shall I do? Must not be angry, she can't do with that sort of thing just now. Talk softly, reprove her gently, swear black and white to my having no connection with Mr Pakenham's housekeeper — -' Closing his sililoquy, the duke turned again to his valet.

'What room did her grace go into?'

'The drawing room, my lord. She's there now.'

'Well, say nothing about it, on pain of sudden death. Do you hear sir?' He laid his hand on his heart and Zamorna left the room to commence operations.

Softly unclosing the drawing room door, he perceived a lady by the hearth. Her back was towards him, but there could be no mistake. The whole turn of form, the style of dress, the curled auburn head: all were attributes of but one person, of his own unique, haughty, jealous little duchess. He closed the door as noiselessly as he had opened it, and stole forwards.

The duchess felt a hand press her shoulder, and she looked up. The force of attraction had its usual result, and she clung to what she saw.

'Adrian! Adrian!' was all her lips could utter.

'Mary! Mary!' replied the duke, allowing her to hang about him. 'Pretty doings! What brought you here? Are you running away, eloping in my absence?'

'Adrian, why did you leave me? You said you would come back in a week, and it's eight days since you left me. Do come home — -'

'So, you actually have set off in search of a husband,' said Zamorna, laughing heartily, 'and been overturned and obliged to take shelter in Pakenham's shooting box!'

'Why are you here, Adrian?' enquired the duchess,

who was far too much in earnest to join in his laugh. 'Who is Pakenham and who is that person who calls herself his housekeeper? Why do you let anybody live so near Hawkscliffe without ever telling me?'

'I forgot to tell you,' said his grace. 'I've other things to think about when those bright hazel eyes are looking up at me. As for Pakenham, to tell you the truth — he's a sort of left-hand cousin of your own, being natural son to the old admiral, my uncle, in the south; his housekeeper is his sister. Voila tout. Kiss me now.' The duchess did kiss him, but it was with a heavy sigh. The cloud of jealous anxiety hung on her brow undissipated.

'Adrian, my heart aches still. Why have you been staying so long in Angria? O, you don't care for me! You have never thought how miserably I have been longing for your return. Adrian — ' she stopped and cried.

'Mary, recollect yourself,' said his grace. 'I cannot be always at your feet. You were not so weak when we were first married. You let me leave you often then without any jealous remonstrance.'

'I did not know you so well at that time,' said Mary, 'and if my mind is weakened, all its strength has gone away in tears and terrors for you. I am neither so handsome nor so cheerful as I once was. But you ought to forgive my decay because you have caused it.'

'Mary, never again reproach yourself with loss of beauty till I give the hint first. Believe me now, in that and every other respect, you are just what I wish you to be. You cannot fade any more than marble can — at least not to my eyes. As for your devotion and tenderness, though I chide its excess sometimes because it wastes and bleaches you almost to a shadow, yet it forms the very firmest chain that binds me to you. Now cheer up. Tonight you shall go to Hawkscliffe; it is only five miles off. I cannot accompany you because I have some important business to transact with Pakenham which must not be deferred. Tomorrow I will be at the castle before dawn. The carriage shall be ready, I will put you in, myself beside you. Off we go, straight to Verdopolis, and there for the next three months I will tire you of my company, morning, noon, and night. Now, what can I promise more? If you choose to be jealous, why, I can't help it. I must then take to soda water and despair, or have myself petrified and carved into an Apollo for your dressing room. Lord! I get no credit with my virtue — ' By dint of lies and laughter the individual at last succeeded in getting all things settled to his mind. The duchess went to Hawkscliffe that night. Keeping his promise, for once, he accompanied her to Verdopolis the next morning — -

Lord Hartford still lies between life and death. His passion is neither weakened by pain, piqued by rejection, nor cooled by absence. On the iron nerves of the man are graven an impression which nothing can efface.

For a long space of time, good-bye reader. I have done my best to please you, and though I know that through feebleness, dullness, and iteration my work terminates rather in failure than triumph, yet you are bound to forgive, for I have done my best — -

January, 1838

MINA LAURY PART II

Late one fine still evening in January the moon arose over a blue summit of the Sydenham Hills and looked down on a quiet road winding from the hamlet of Rivaulx. The earth was bound in frost – hard, mute and glittering. The forest of Hawkscliffe was as still as a tomb, and its black leafless wilds stretched away in the distance and cut off with a harsh serrated line the sky from the country. That sky was all silver blue, pierced here and there with a star like a diamond. Only the moon softened it, large, full, and golden. The by-road I have spoken of received her ascending beam on a path of perfect solitude. Spectral pines and vast old beech trees guarded the way like sentinels from Hawkscliffe. Farther on the rude track wound deep into the shades of the forest, but here it was open and the worn causeway, bleached with frost, ran under an old wall grown over with moss and wild ivy.

Over this scene the sun of winter had gone down in cloudless calm, red as fire, and kindling with its last beams the windows of a mansion on the verge of Hawkescliffe. To that mansion the road in question was the shortest cut from Rivaulx. And here a moment let us wait, wrapped, it is to be hoped, in furs, for a keener frost never congealed the Olympia.

Almost before you are aware a figure strays up the causeway at a leisurely pace, musing amid the tranquillity of evening. Doubtless that figure must be an inmate of the before-mentioned mansion, for it is an elegant and pleasing object. Approaching gradually nearer, you can observe most accurately a lady of distinguished carriage, straight and slender, something inceding and princess-like in her walk, but unconsciously so. Her ankles are so perfect, and her feet – if she tried, she could scarcely tread otherwise than she does – lightly, firmly, erectly. The ermine muff, the silk pelisse, the graceful and ample hat of dark beaver, suit and set off her light youthful form. She is deeply veiled; you must guess at her features – but she passes on and a turn of the road conceals her.

Breaking up the silence, dashing in on the solitude, comes a horseman. Fire flashes from under his steed’s hoofs out of the flinty road. He rides desperately. Now and then he rises in his stirrups and eagerly looks along the track as if to catch a sight of some object that has eluded him. He sees it, and the spurs are struck mercilessly into his horse’s flanks. Horse and rider vanish in a whirlwind.

The lady passing through the iron gates had just entered upon the demesne of Hawkscliffe. She paused to gaze at the moon which, now full risen, looked upon her through the boughs of a superb elm. A green lawn lay between her and the house, and there its light slumbered in gold. Thundering behind her, came the sound of hoofs, and, bending low to his saddle to avoid the contact of oversweeping branches, that wild horseman we saw five minutes since rushed upon the scene. Harshly curbing the charger, he brought it almost upon its haunches close to the spot where she stood.

'Miss Laury! Good evening!' he said. The lady threw back her veil, surveyed him with one glance, and replied:

'Lord Hartford! I am glad to see you, my lord. You have ridden fast. Your horse foams. Any bad news?'

'No!'

'Then you are on your way to Adrianopolis. I suppose you will pass the night here?'

'If you ask me, I will.'

'If I ask you! Yes; this is the proper half-way house between the capitals. The night is cold, let us go in'.

They were now at the door. Hartford flung himself from his saddle. A servant came to lead the over-ridden steed to the stables, and he followed Miss Laury in.

It was her own drawing room to which she led him, just such a scene as is most welcome after the contrast of a winter evening's chill; not a large room, simply furnished, with curtains and couches of green silk, a single large mirrow, a Grecian lamp dependent from the centre softly burning now and mingling with the softer illumination of the fire, whose brilliant glow bore testimony to the keenness of the frost.

Hartford glanced round him. He had been in Miss Laury's drawing room before, but never as her sole guest. He had, before the troubles broke out, more than once formed one of a high and important trio whose custom it was to make the lodge of Rivaulx their occasional rendezvous: Warner, Enara, and himself had often stood on that hearth in a ring round Miss Laury's sofa, and he recalled how her face looking up to them with its serious, soft intelligence that blent no woman's frivolity with the heartfelt interest of those subjects on which they conversed. He remembered those first kindlings of the flame that now devoured his life as he watched her beauty and saw the earnest enthusiasm with which she threw her soul into topics of the highest import. She had often done for these great men what they could get no man to do for them. She had kept their secrets and executed their wishes as far as in her lay, for it had never been her part to counse. With humble feminine devotedness she always looked up for her task to be set, and then not Warner himself could have bent his energies more resolutely to the fulfilment of that task than did Miss Laury. Had Mina's lot in life been different, she never would have interfered in such matters. She did not interfere now: she only served. Nothing like intrigue had ever stained her course in politics. She told her directors what she had done, and she asked for more to do, grateful always that they would trust her so far as to employ her, grateful too for the enthusiasm of their loyalty; in short, devoted to them heart and mind because she believed in them to be devoted as unreservedly to the commom master of all.

The consequence of this species of deeply confidential intercourse between the statesmen and their beautiful lieutenant had been intense and chivalric admiration on the part of Mr Warner; strong fond attachment on that of General Enara; and on Lord Hartford's the burning brand of passion. His Lordship had always been a man of strong and ill-regulated feelings, and in his youth (if report may be credited) of somewhat dissolute habits, but he had his own ideas of honour strongly implanted in his breast, and though he would not have scrupled if the wife of one of his equals, or the daughter of one of his tenants had been in the question, yet as it was he stood beset and nonplussed.

Miss Laury belonged to the Duke of Zamorna. She was indisputably his property, as much as the Lodge of Rivaulx or the stately wood of Hawkscliffe, and in that light she considered herself. All his dealings with her had been on matters connected with the Duke, and she had ever shown an habitual, rooted, solemn devotedness to his interest which seemed to leave her hardly a thought for anything else in the world beside. She had but one idea – Zamorna! Zamorna! It had grown up with her, become a part of her nature. Absence, coldness, total neglect for long periods together went for nothing. She could not more feel alienation from him than she could from herself. She did not even repine when he forgot her any more than the religious devotee does when his Deity seems to turn away his face for a time and leave him to the ordeal of temporal afflictions. It seemed as if she could have lived on the remembrance of what he had once been to her without asking for anything more.

All this Hartford knew, and he knew, too, that she valued himself in proportion as she believed him to be royal to his sovereign. Her friendship for him turned on this hinge: 'We have been fellow-labourers and fellow-sufferers together in the same good cause' These were her own words which she had uttered one night as she took leave of her three noble collegues just befre the storm broke over Angria. Hartford had noticed the expression of her countenance as she spoke, and thought what a young and beautiful being thus appealed for sympathy with minds scarcely like her own in mould.

However, let us dwell no longer on these topics. Suffuce it to say that Lord Hartford, against reason and without hope, had finally delivered himself wholly up to the guidance of his vehement passions; and it was with the resolution to make one desperate effort in the attainment of their end that he now stood before the lady of Rivaulx.

Above two hours had elapsed since Lord Hartford had entered the house. Tea was over, and in the perfect quiet of evening he and Miss Laury were left together. He sat on one side of the hearth, and she on the other – her work-table only between them, and on that her little hand rested within his reach. It was embedded in a veil of lace, the embroidering of which she had just relinquished for a moment's thought. Lord Hartford's eye was fascinated by the white soft fingers. His own heart at the moment was in a tumult of bliss. To be so near, to be received so benignly, so kindly – he forgot himself. His own hand closed half involuntarily upon hers. Miss Laury looked at him ….

Shocked for a moment, almost overwhelmed , she yet speedily mastered her emotions, took her hand away, resumed her work, and with head bent down, seemed endeavouring to conceal embarrassment under the appearance of occupation.

The dead silence that followed would not do, so she broke it in a very calm, self-possessed tone.

'That ring, Lord Hartford, which you were admiring just now belonged once to the Duchess of Wellington'

' And was it given you by her son?' asked the General bitterly.

'No, my lord, the Duchess herself gave it me a few days before she died. It has her maiden name ''Catherine Pakenham'', engraved within the stone'.

'But', pursued Hartford, 'I was not admiring the ring when I touched your hand. No; the thought struck me, if ever I marry I should like my wife's hand to be just as white and snowy and taper as that.'

'I am the daughter of a common soldier, my lord, and it is said that ladies of high descent have fairer hands than peasant women.'

Hartford made no reply. He rose restlessly from his seat and stood against the mantelpiece.

'Miss Laury, shall I tell you which was the happiest hour of my life?'

'I will guess, my lord. Perhaps when the bill passed which made Angria an independent kingdom.'

'No. ' replied Hartford with an expressive smile.

'Perhaps, then, when Lord Northangerland resigned the seals - for I know you and the Earl were never on good terms'.

'No. I hated his lordship, but there are moment of deeper felicity even than those which see the triumph of a fallen enemy'.

'I will hope that it was at the Restoration.'

'Wrong again! Why, madam, young as you are your mind is so used to the harness of politics that you can imagine no happiness or misery unconnected with them. You remind me of Warner.'

'I believe I am like him', returned Miss Laury. 'He often tells me so himself, but I live so much with men and statesmen I almost lose the ideas of a woman'.

'Do you?' muttered Hartford with the dark sinister smile peculiar to him'.

Miss Laury passed over this equivocal remark and proceeded with the conversation.

'I cannot guess your riddle, my lord, so I think you must explain it'.

'Then, Miss Laury, prepare to be astonished. You are so patriotic, so loyal that you will scarcely credit me when I say that the happiest hour I have ever known fell on the darkest day in the deadliest crisis of Angria's calamities'.

'How, Lord Hartford?'

'Moreover, miss Laury, it was at no bright period of your own life. It was to you an hour of the most acute agony; to me one of ecstasy'.

Miss Laury turned aside her head with a disturbed air and trembled. She seemed to know to what he alluded.

'You remember the first of July, '36?' continued Hartford.

She bowed.

'You remember that the evening of that day closed in a tremendous storm?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'You recollect how you sat in this very room by this fireside, fearful of retiring for the night lest you should awake in another world in the morning. The country was not then as quiet as it is now. You have not forgotten that deep explosion which roared up at midnight and told you that your life and liberty hung on a thread, that the enemy had come suddenly upon Rivaulx, and that we who lay thre to defend the forlon hope were surprised and routed by a night attack. Then madam, perhaps you recollect the warning which I brought you at one o'clock in the morning, to fly instantly, unless you chose the alternative of infamous captivity in the hands of Jordan. I found you here, sitting by a black hearth without fire, and Ernest Fitz-Arthur lay on your knee asleep. You told me you had heard the firing, and that you were waiting for some communication from me, determined not to stir without orders lest a precipitate step on your part should embarass me. I had a carriage already in waiting for you. I put you in, and with the remains of my defeated followers escorted you as far as Zamorna. What followed after that, Miss Laury?'

Miss Laury covered her eyes with her hand. She seemed as if she could not answer.

'Well', continued Hartford. 'In the midst of darkness and tempest, and while the whole city of Zamorna seemed changed into a hell peopled with fiends and inspired with madness, my lads were hewed down about you, and your carriage was stopped. I very well remember what you did – how frantically you struggled to save Fitz-Arthur, and how you looked at me when he was snatched from you. As to your own preservation – that, I need not repeat – only my arm did it. You acknowledge that, Miss Laury?'

'Hartford, I do, but why do you dwell on that terrible scene?'

'Because I am now approaching the happiest hour of my life. I took you to the house of one of my tenants whom I could depend upon, and just as morning dawned you and I sat together and alone in the little chamber of a farm-house, and you were in my arms, your head upon my shoulder, and weeping out all your anguish on a breast that longed to bleed for you'.

Miss Laury agitatedly rose. She approached Hartford.

'My lord, you have been very kind to me and I feel very grateful for that kindness. Perhaps sometime I may be able to repay it. We know not how the chances of fortune may turn. The weak have aided the strong, and I will watch vigilantly for the slightest opportunity to serve you, but d not talk in this way. I scarcely know whither your words tend'.

Lord Hartford paused a moment before he replied. Gazing at her with bended brows and folded arms he said:

'Miss Laury, what do you think of me?'

'That you are one of the noblest hearts in the world!' she replied unhesitatingly. She was standing just before Hartford, looking up at him, her hair in that attitude falling back from her brow, shading with exquisite curls her temples and slender neck; her small, sweet features, with that high seriousness deepening their beauty, lit up by her eyes so large, so dark, so swimming, so full of pleading benignity, of an expression of alarmed regard, as if she at once feared for and pitied the sinful abstraction of a great mind. Hartford couldn't stand it. He could have borne female anger or terror, but the look of enthusiastic gratitude softened by compassion nearly unmanned him. He turned his head for a moment aside but then passion prevailed. Her beauty when he looked again struck through him – maddening sensation whetted to acuter power by a feeling like despair.

'You shall love me!' he exclaimed desperately; 'Do I not adore you? Would I not die for you? And must I in return receive only the cold regard of friendship? I am not a Platonist, Miss Laury – I am not your friend. I am, hear me, madam, your declasred lover! Nay, you shall not leave me; by heaven -–I am stronger than you are'.

She had stepped a pace or two back, appalled by his vehemence. He thought she meant to withdraw, and, determined not to be so baulked, he clasped her at once in both his arms and kissed her furiously rather than fondly. Miss Laury did not struggle.

'Hartford', said she steadying her voice, though it faletered in spite of her effort, ' this must be our parting scene. I will never see you again if you do not restrain yourself.'

Hartford saw that she turned pale, and he felt her tremble violently. His arms relaxed their hold. He allowed her to leave him.

She sat down on a chair opposite and hurriedly wiped her brow which was damp and marble-pale.

'Now, Miss Laury', said his lordship, 'no man in the world loves you as I do. Will you accept my title and my coronet? I fling them at your feet'.

'My lord, do you know whose I am?' she replied in a hollow and very suppressed tone. 'Do you know with what a sound those proposals fall on my ear – how impious and blasphemous they seem to be? Do you at all conceive how utterly impossible it is that I should ever love you? The scene I have just witnessed has given a strange wrench to all my accustomed habits of thought. I thought you a true-hearted, faithful man: I find that you are a traitor'.

'And do you despise me?' asked Hartford.

'No, my lord, I do not'.

She paused and looked down. The colour rose rapidly into her pale face. She sobbed, not in tears, but in the overmastering approach of an impulse born of a warm and Western heart. Again she looked up. Her eyes had changed, their aspect beaming with a wild, bright inspiration, truly, divinely Irish.

‘Hartford’, said she, ‘had I met you long since, before I left Ellibank and forgot St. Cyprian and dishonoured my father, I would have loved you. O my lord, you know not how truly! I would have married you and made it the glory of my life to cheer and brighten your hearth, but I cannot do so now – never. I saw my present master when he had scarcely attained manhood. Do you think, Hartford, I will tell you what feelings I had for him? No tongue could express them; they were so fervid, so glowing in their colour that they effaced everything else. I lost the power of properly appreciating the value of the world’s opinion, of discerning the difference between right and wrong. I have never in my life contradicted Zamorna, never delayed obedience to his commands. I could not. He was something more to me than a human being. He superseded all things - all affections, all interests, all fears or hopes or principles. Unconnected with him my mind would be a blank, cold, dead, susceptible only of a sense of despair. How should I sicken if were torn from him and thrown to you! Ado not ask it; I would die first. No woman that ever loved my master could consent to leave him. There is nothing like him elsewhere. Hartford, if I were to be your wife, if Zamorna only looked at me, I should creep back like a slave to my former service. I should disgrace you as I have long since disgraced all my kindred. Think of that, my lord, and never say you love me again’.

‘You do not frighten me’, replied Lord Hartford hardily; ‘I would stand that chance, aye, and every other, if I only might see at the head of my table in that old dining room at Hartford Hall yourself as my wife and lady. I am called proud as it is, but then I would show Angria to what pitch of pride a man might attain, if I could, coming home at night, find Mina Laury waiting to receive me; if I could sit down and look at you with the consciousness that your exquisite beauty was all my own, that cheek, those lips, that lovely hand, might be claimed arbitrarily, and you dare not refuse me, I should then feel happy’.

‘Hartford, you would be more likely when you came home to find your house vacant and your hearth deserted. I know the extent of my own infatuation. I should go back to Zamorna and entreat him on my knees to let me be his slave again!’

‘Madam’, said Hartford frowning, ‘you dared not if you were my wife; I would guard you!’

‘Then I should die under your guardianshp. But the experiment will never be tried!’

Hartford came near, sat down by her side, and leaned over her. She did not shirk away.

‘Oh!’ he said, ‘I am happy. There was a time when I dared not have come so near you. One summer evening two years ago I was walking in the twilight amongst those trees on the lawn, and at a turn I saw you sitting at the root of one of them by yourself’.

‘You were looking up at a starwhich was twinkling above the Sydenhams. You were in white; your hands were folded on your knee, and your hair was resting in still, shining curls on your neck. I stood and watched. The thought struck me: if that image sat now in my own woods, if she were something in which I had an interest, if I could go and press my lips to her brow and expect a smile in answer to the caress, if I could take her in my arms and turn her thought from that sky with its single star, and from the distant country to which it points (for it hung in the west and I know you were thinking about Senegambia), if I could attract those thoughts and centre them all in myself, how like heaven would the world become to me. I heard a window open, and Zamorna’s voice called through the silence, ‘’Mina!’’ The next moment I had the pleasure of seeing you standing on the lawn, close under the very casement where the Duke sat leaning out, and you were allowing his hand to stray through your hair, and his lips -’

‘Lord Hartford!’ exclaimed Miss Laury, colouring to the eyes, ‘this is more than I can bear, I have not been angry yet. I thought it folly to rage at you, because you said you loved me, but what you have just said is like touching a nerve; it overpowers all reason; it is like a stinging taunt which I am under no obligation to endure from you. Every one knows what I am, but where is the woman in Africa who would have acted more wisely than I did if under the same circumstances she had been subject to the same temptations?’

‘That is’, returned Hartford, whose eye was now glittering with a desperate, reckless expression, ‘where is the woman in Africa who would have said no to young douro when amongst the romantic hills of Ellibank he has pressed his suit on some fine moonlight summer night, and the girl and boy have found themselves alone in a green dell, with here and there a tree to be their shade, far above the stars for their sentinels, and around, the night for their wide curtain’.

The wild bounding throb of Miss Laury’s heart was visible through her satin bodice – it was even audible as for a moment Hartford ceased his scoffing to note its effect. He was still close by her, and she did not move from him. She did not speak. The pallid lamp-light shewed her lips white, her cheek bloodless.

He continued unrelentingly and bitterly: ‘In after times, doubtless, the woods of Hawkscliffe have witnessed many a tender scene, with the king of Angria has retired from the turmoil of business and the teasing of matrimony to love and leisure with his gentle mistress’.

‘Now, Hartford, we must part’, interrupted Miss Laury, ‘I see what opinion of me is, and it is very just, but not one which I willingly hear expressed. You have cut me to the heart. Good bye. I shall try to avoid seeing you for the future.’

She rose. Hartford did not attempt to detain her. She went out. As she closed the door, he heard the bursting convulsive gush of feelings which his taunts had brought up to agony.

Her absence left a blank. Suddenly a wish to recall, to soothe, to propitiate her rose in his mind. He strode to the door and opened it. There was a little hall or rather a wide passage without in which one large lamp was quietly burning. Nothing appeared here, nor on the staircase of low broad steps in which it terminated. She seemed to have vanished.

Lord Hartford's hat and horseman's cloak lay on the side slab. There remained no further attraction for him at the Lodge of Rivaulx. The delirious dream of rapture which had intoxicated his sense broke up and disappeared. His passionate, stern nature maddened under disappointment. He strode out into the black and frozen night burning in flames no ice could quench. He ordered and mounted his steed, and, dashing his spurs with harsh cruelty up to the rowels into the flanks of the noble war-horse which had borne him victoriously through the carnage of Westwood and Leyden, he dashed in furious gallop down the road to Rivaulx.

Miss Laury was sitting after breakfast in a small library. Her desk lay before her and two large ruled quartos filled with items and figures which she seemed to be comparing. Behind her chair stood a tall, well-made, soldierly young man with light hair. His dress was plain and gentlemanly; the epaulette on one shoulder alone indicated an official capacity. He watched with fixed look of attention the movements of the small finger which ascended in rapid calculation the long columns of accounts. It was strange to see the absorption of mind expressed in Miss Laury's face, the gravity of her smooth white brw shaded with drooping curls, the scarcely perceptible and unsmiling movement of her lips, though those lips in their rosy sweetness seemed formed only for smiles. Edward Percy at his ledger could not have appeared more completely wrapt in the mysteries of practice and fractions. An hour or more elapsed in this employement, the room, meantime, continuing in profound silence broken only by an occasional observation addressed by Miss Laury to the gentlemen behind her cncerning the legitimacy of some item or the absence of some stray farthing wanted to complete the accuracy of the sum total. In this balancing of the books she displayed a most business-like sharpness and strictness. The slightest fault was detected and remarked on in few words but with a quick searching glance. However, the accountant had evidently been accustomed to her surveillance, for on the whole his books were a specimen of arithmetical correctness.

'Very well', said Miss Laury, as she closd the volumes. 'Your accounts do you credit, Mr. O'Neill. You may tell his Grace that all is quite right. Your memoranda tally with my own exactly.'

Mr. O'Neill bowed. 'Thank you, madam. This will bear me out against Lord Hartford. His lordship lectured me severely last time he came to inspect Fort Adrian'.

'What about?' asked Miss Laury turning aside her face to hide the deepening of colour which overspread it at the mention of Lord Hartford's name.

'I can hardly tell you, madam, but his lordship was in a savage temper. Nothing would please him. He found fault with everything and everybody. I thought he scarcely appeared himself, and that has been the opinion of many lately'.

Miss Laury gently shook her head. 'You should not say so, Ryan', she replied in a soft tone of reproof. 'Lord Hartford has a great many things to think about, and he is naturally rather stern. You ought to bear with his tempers'.

'Necessity has no law, madam', replied Mr. O'Neill with a smile, 'and I must bear with them, but his lordship is not a popular man in the army. He orders the lash so unsparingly. We like the Earl of Arundel ten times better'.

'Ah', said Miss Laury smiling, 'you and I are Westerns, Mr. O'Neill – Irish – and we favour our countrymen. But Hartford is a gallant commander. His men can always trust him. Do not let us be partial'.

Mr O'Neill bowed in deference to her opinion, but smiled at the same time, as if he doubted its justice. Taking up his books, he seemed about to leave the room. Before he did so, however, he turned and said: 'The Duke wished me to inform you, madam, that he would probably be here about four or five o'clock in the afternoon'.

'Today?' asked Miss Laury in an accent of surprise.

'Yes, madam'.

She mused a moment, then said quickly, 'Very well, sir.'

Mr. O'Neill now took his leave with another low and respectful obeisance. Miss Laury returned it with a slight abstracted bow. Her thoughts were all caught up and hurried away by that last communication. For a long time after the door had closed she sat with her head on her hand, lost in a tumultuous flush of ideas - anticipations awakened by that simple sentence, 'The Duke will be here today'.

The striking of a timepiece roused her. She remembered that twenty tasks awaited her direction. Always active, always employed, it was not her custom to waste many hours in dreaming. She rose, closed her desk, and left the quiet library for busier scenes.

Four o'clock came, and Miss Laury's foot was heard on the stair case descending from her chamber. She crossed the large light passagew – such an apparition of feminine elegance and beauty! She had dressed herself splendidly. The robe of black satin became at once her slender form, which it enveloped in full and shining folds, and her bright blooming complexion, which it set off by the contrast of colour. Glittering through her curls, there was a band of fine diamonds, and drops of the same pure gems trembled from her small, delicate ears. These ornaments, so regal in their nature, had been the gift of royalty, and were worn now chiefly for the associations of soft and happy moments which their gleam might be supposed to convey.

She entered her drawing room and stood by the window. From thence appeared one glimpse of the high-road visible through the thickening shades of Rivaulx. Even that was now almost concealed by the frozen mist in which the approach of twilight was wrapped. All was very quiet both in the house and in the woods. A carriage drew near. She heard the sound. She saw it shoot through the fog; but it was not Zamorna. No; the driving was neither the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, nor that of Jehu's postillions. She had not gazed a minute before her experienced eye discerned that there was something wrong with the horses. The harness had got entangled or they were frightened. The coachman had lost command over them: they were plunging violently.

She rang the bell. A servant entered. She ordered immediate assistance to be despatched to that carriage on the road. Two grooms presently hurried down the drive to execute her command, but before they could reach the spot, one of the horses , in its gambols, had slipped on the icy road and fallen. The others grew more unmanageable, and presently the carriage lay overturned on the radside. One of Miss Laury's messengers came back. She threw up the window that she might communicate with him more readily.

'Any accident?' she asked. 'Anybody hurt?'

'I hope not much, madam'.

'Who is in the carriage?'

'Only one lady, and she seems to have fainted. She looked very white when I opened the door. What is to be done, madam?'

Miss Laury, with Irish frankness, answered directly, 'Bring them all into the house. Let the horses be taken into the stables. And the servants – how many are there?'

'Three, Madam. Postillions grey and white; footman in plain clothes. Horses frightened at a drove of Sydenham oxen, they say: very spirited nags.'

'Well, you have my orders: bring the lady in directly, and make the others comfortable.'

'Yes, madam'.

The groom touched his hat and departed. Miss Laury shut her window. It was very cold. Not many minutes elapsed before the lady in the arms of her own servants was slowly brought up the lawn and ushered into the drawing room.

'Lay her on the sofa', said Miss Laury.

She was obeyed. The lady's travelling cloak was carefully removed, and a thin figure became apparent in a dark silk dress. The cushions of down scarcely sank under the pressure, it was so light.

Her swoon was now passing off. The genial warmth of the fire which shone full on her revived her. Opening her eyes, she looked up at Miss Laury'' face who was bending close over her and wetting her lips with some cordial. Recognising a stranger, she shyly turned her glance aside and asked for her servants.

'They are in the house, madam, and perfectly safe.But you cannot pursue your journey at present; the carriage is much broken.'

The lady lay silent. She looked keenly round the room and seeing the perfect elegance of its arrangement, the cheerful and tranquil glow of its hearth-light, she appeared to grow more composed. Turning a little on the cushions which supported her, and by no means looking at Miss Laury, but straight the other way, she said, 'To whom am I indebted for this kindness? Where am I?'

'In a hospitable country, madam. The Angrians never turn their backs on strangers.'

'I know I am in Angria' she said quickly, 'but where? What is the name of the house? Who are you?'

'Miss Laury coloured slightly. Iat seemed as if there was some undefined reluctance to give her real name that she knew was widely celebrated - too widely. Most likely the lady would turn from her in contempt if she heard it, and Miss Laury felt she could not bear that.

'I am only the housekeeper', she said. 'This is a shooting-lodge belonging to a great Angrian proprietor'.

'Who?'asked the lady, who was not to be put off by indirect answers.

Again Miss Laury hesitated. For her life she could not have said 'His Grace the Duke of Zamorna'. She replied hastily, 'A gentleman of Western extraction, a distant branch of the freat Pakenhams, so at least the family records say, but they have been long naturalised in the East'.

'I never heard of them', replied the lady. 'Pakenham!that is not an Angrian name?'

'Perhaps, madam, you are not particularly acquainted with this part of the country?'

'I know Hawkscliffe', said the lady, 'and your house is on the very borders, within the royal liberties, is it not?'

'Yes, madam, it stood there before the Great Duke bought up the forest-manor, and his Majesty allowed my master to retain this lodge and the privilege of sporting in the chase''

'Well, and you are Mr. Pakenham's housekeeper?'

'Yes, madam.'

The lady surveyed Miss Laury with another furtive side-glance of her large majestic eyes. Those eyes lingered upon diamond ear-rings, the bandeau of brilliants that flashed from between the clusters of raven curls, then passed over the sweet face, the exquisite figure of the young housekeeper, and finally were reverted to the wall with an expression that spoke volumes.

Miss Laury could have torn the dazzling pendants from her ears. She was bitterly stung. 'Everybody knows me', she said to herself. ' ''Mistress'', I suppose, is branded on my brow'.

In her turn she gazed on her guest. The lady was but a young creature, though so high and commanding in her demeanour. She had very small and feminine features, handsome eyes, a neck of delicate curve, and fair, graceful little snowy aristocratic hands, and sandalled feet to match. It would have been difficoult to tell her rank by her dress. None of those dazzling witnesses appeared which had betrayed Miss Laury. Any gentleman's wife might have worn the grown of dark-blue silk, the tinted gloves of Parisian kid, and the fairy sandals of black satin in which she was attired.

'May I have a room to myself?' she asked, again turning her eyes with something like a smile toward Miss Laury.

'Certainly, madam, I wish to make you comfortable. Can you walk upstairs?'

'Oh, yes!'

She rose from the couch, and, leaning on Miss Laury's offered arm in a way that showed she had been used to that sort of support, they both glided from the room. Having seen her fair but somewhat haughty guest carefully laid on a stately crimson bed in a quiet and spacious chamber, having seen her head sink (with all her curls) onto the pillow of down, her larfe shy eyes close under their smooth eyelids, and her little slender hands fold on her breast in an attitude of perfect repose, Miss Laury prepared to leave her.

'Come back a moment', she said. She was obeyed – there was something in the tone of her voice which exacted obedience. 'I don't know who you are', she said, 'but I am very much obliged to you for your kindness. If my manners are displeasing, forgive me. I mean no incivility. I suppose you will wish to know my name: it is Mrs. Irving. My husband is a minister in the northern kirk; I come from Sneachiesland. Now you may go!'

Miss Laury did go. Mrs Irving had testified incredulity respecting her story, and now she reciprocated that incredulity. Both ladies were lost in their own mystification.

Five o'clock now struck. It was nearly dark. A servant with a taper was lighting up the chandeliers in the large dining room, where a table spread for dinner received the kindling lamplight upon a starry from a splendid sideboard, all arranged in readiness to receive the great, the expected guest.

Tolerably punctual in keeping an appointment when he means to keep it at all, Zamorna entered the house as the fairy-like voice of a musical clock in the passage struck out its symphony to the pendulum. The opening of the front door, a bitter rush of the night-wind, and then the sudden close and the step advancing forwards were the signals of his arrival.

Miss Laury was in the dining room looking round and giving the last touch to all things. She just met her master as she entered. His cold lip pressed to her forehead and his colder hand clasping hers brought the sensation which it was her custom of weeks and months to wait for, and to consider, when attained, as the ample recompense for all delay, all toil, all suffering.

'I am frozen, Mina', said he. 'I came on horseback for the last four miles, and the night is like Canada'.

Chafing his icy hand to animation between her own own warm, supple palms, she answered by the speechless but expressive look of joy, satisfaction, idolatry, which filled and overflowed her eyes.

'What can I do for you, my lord?' were her first words as he stood by the fire rubbing his hands cheerily over the blaze. He laughed.

'Put your arms round my neck, Mina, and kiss my cheek as warm and blooming as your own.'

If Mina Laury had been Mina Wellesley she would have done so, and it gave her a pang to resist the impulse that urged her to take him at his word, but she put it by and only diffidently drew near the armchair into which he had now thrown himself and began to smooth and separate the curls which matted on his temples. She noticed as the first smile of salutation subsided a gloom succeded on her master's brow, which, however he spoke or laughed, afterwards, remained a settled characteristic of his countenance.

'What visitors are in the house?' he asked; 'I saw the groom rubbing down four black horses before the stables as I came in. They are not of the Hawkscliffe stud, I think?'

'No, my lord. A carriage was overturned at the lawn gates about an hour since, and, as the lady who was in it was taken out insensible, I ordered her to be brought up here and her servants accomodated for the night'.

'And do you know who the lady is?' continued his Grace, 'The horses are good – first rate'.

'She says her name is Mrs Irving, and that she is the wife of a Presbyterian minister in the north, but –'

'You hardly believe her?' interrupted the Duke.

'No', returned Miss Laury, 'I must say I took her for a lady of rank. She has something highly aristocratic about her manners and aspect, and she appeared to know a good deal about Angria'.

'What is she like?' asked Zamorna. 'Young or old, handsome or ugly?'

'She is young, slender, not so tall as I am, and, I should say, rather elegant than handsome, very pale, cold in her demeanour. She has a small mouth and chin, and a fair neck.'

'Humph! A trifle like Lady Stuatville', replied his Majesty. 'I should not wonder if it is the Countess, but I'll know. Perhaps you did not say to whom the house belonged, Mina?'

'I said', replied Mina, smiling, 'that the owner of the house was a great Angrian proprietor, a lineal descendant of the Western Pakenhams, and that I was his housekeeper'.

'Very good! She would not believe you. You look like an Angrian country gentleman's Dolly! Give me your hand, my girl. You are not as old as I am.'

'Yes, my lord Duke, I was born on the same day, an hour after your Grace'.

'So I have heard, but it must be a mistake. You don't look twenty, and I am twenty-five. My beautiful Western – what eyes! Look at me, Mina, straight, and don't blush'.

Mina tried to look but she could not do it without blushing. She coloured to the temples.

'Pshaw' said his Grace, pushing her away. 'Pretending to be modest! My acquaintance of ten years cannot meet my eyes unshrinkingly. Have you lost that ring I once gave you, Mina?'

'Whar ring, my lord? You have given me many'

'That which I said had the essence of your whole heart and mind engraven in the stone as a motto'.

'Fidelity?' asked Miss Laury, and she held out her hand with a graven emerald on the forefinger.

'Right' was the reply; 'It is your motto still?' And with one of his hungry jealous glances, he seemed trying to read conscience. Miss Laury at once saw the late transactions were not a secret confined between herself and Lord Hartford. She saw His Grace was unhinged and strongly inclined to be savage. She stood and watched him with a sad fearful gaze.

'Well', she said, turning away after a long pause, 'if your Grace is angry with me I've very little to care about in this world.'

The entrance of the servants with the dinner prevented Zamorna's answer. As he took his place at the head of the table, he said to the man who stood behind him: 'Give Mr Pakenham's compliments to Mrs Irving and say that he will be happy to see her at his table if she will honour him so far as to be present there'.

The footman vanished. He returned in five minutes.

'Mrs Irving is too much tired to avail herself of Mr Pakenham's kind invitation at present, but she will be happy to join him at tea'.

'Very well', said Zamorna, then looking round, 'where is Miss Laury?'

Mina was in the act of gliding from the room, but she stopped mechanically at his call.

'Am i to dine alone?' he asked.

'Does your Grace wish me to attend you?'

He answered by rising and leading her to her seat. He then resumed his own and dinner commenced. It was not till after the cloth was withdrawn and the servants had retired that the Duke, whilst he sipped his single glass of champagne, recommenced the conversation he had before so unpleasantly entered upon.

'Come here, my girl', he said, drawing a chair close to his side.

Mina never delayed, never hesitated, through bashfulness or any other feeling, to comply with his orders.

'Now', he continued, leaning his head towards her and placing his hand on her shoulder, 'are you happy, Mina? Do you want anything?'

'Nothing, my lord'.

She spoke truly; all that was capable of yielding her happiness on this side of Eternity was at that moment within her reach. The room was full of calm. The lamps burnt as if they were listening. The fire sent up no flickering flame, but diffused a broad, still, glowing light over all the spacious saloon. Zamorna touched her. His form and features filled her eye, his voice her ear, his presence her whole heart. She was soothed to perfect happiness.

'My Fidelity!' pursued that musical voice. 'If thou hast any favour to ask, now is the time. I'm all concession, as sweet as honey, as yielding as a lady's glove. Come, Esther, what is thy petition? And thy request, even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be granted!'

'Nothing', again murmured Miss Laury. 'oh, my lord, nothing. What can I want?'

'Nothing', he repeated. 'What? No reward for ten years of faith and love and devotion; no reward for the companionship in six months' exile; no recompense to the little hand that has so often smoothed my pillow in sickness, to the sweet lips that have many a time in cool and dewy health been pressed to a brow of fever, none to the dark Milesian eyes that once grew dim with watching through endless nights by my couch of delirium? Need I speak of the sweetness and fortitude that cheered sufferings known only to thee and me, Mina? Of the devotion that gave me bread when you wert dying with hunger – and scarcely more than a year since? For all this, and much more, must there be no reward?'

'I have had it', said Miss Laury. 'I have it now'.

'But', continued the Duke, 'what if I have devised something worthy of your acceptance? Look up now and listen to me'.

She did look up, but she speedily looked down again, Her master's eye was insupportable. It burnt absolutely with infernal fire. 'What is he going to say?' murmured Miss Laury to herself. She trembled.

'I say, love', pursued the individual, drawing her a little closer to him, 'I will give you as a reward a husband, don't start now! – and that husband shall be a nobleman, and that nobleman is called Lord Hartford! Now, madam, stand up and let me look at you!'

He opened his arms, and Miss Laury sprang erect like a loosened bow.

'Your Grace is anticipated', she said. 'That offer has been made me before. Lord Hartford did it himself three days ago'.

'And what did you say, madam?' Speak the truth now; subterfuge won't avail you'.

'What did I say, Zamorna? I don't know; it little signifies; you have rewarded me, my lord Duke! But I cannt bear this - I feel sick'.

With a deep, short sob, she turned white and fell close by the Duke, her head against his foot.

This was the first time in her life that Mina Laury had fainted, but strong health availed nothing against the deadly struggle which convulsed every feeling of her nature when she heard her master's announcement. She believed him to be perfectly sincere. She thought he was tired of her and she could not stand it.

I suppose Zamorna's first feeling when she fell was horror, and his next, I am tolerably certain, was intense gratification. People say I am not in earnest when I abuse him, or else I would here insert half a page of deserved vituperation, deserved and heartfelt. As it is I will merely relate his conduct without note or comment.

He took a wax taper from the table and held it over Miss Laury. Here could be no dissimulation. She was white as marble and still as stone. In truth, then, she did intensely love him with a devotion that left no room in her thoughts for one shadow of an alien image. Do not think, reader, that Zamorna meant to be so generous as to bestow Miss Laury on Lord Hartford. No; trust him! He was but testing in his usual way the attachment which a thousand proofs daily given ought long ago to have convinced him was undying.

While he yet gazed she began to recover. Her eyelids stirred, and then slowly dawned from beneath, the large dark orbs that scarcely met his before they filled to overflowing with sorrow. Not a gleam of anger! Not a whisper of reproach! Her lips and eyes spoke together no other language than the simple words,

'I cannot leave you!'

She rose feebly and with effort. The Duke streched out his hand to assist her. He held to her lips the scarcely tasted wineglass.

'Mina', he said. 'are you collected enough to hear me?'

'Yes, my lord'.

'Then listen. I would much sooner give half – aye, the whole of my estate to Lord Hartfield, than yourself! What I said just now was only to try you'.

Miss Laury raised her eyes, sighed like one awaking from some hideous dream, but she could not speak.

'Would I', continued the Duke, 'would I resign the possession of my first love to any hands but my own? I would far rather see her in her coffin; and I would lay you there as still, as white, and much more lifeless than you were stretched just now at my feet before I would, for threat, for entreaty, for purchase, give to another a glance of your eye or a smile from your lip. I know you adore me now, Mina, for you could not feign that agitation, and therefore I will tell you what proof I gave yesterday of my regard for you: Hartford mentioned your name in my presence, and I revenged the profanation by a shot which sent him to his bed little better than a corpse'.

Miss Laury shuddered, but so dark and profound are the mysteries of human nature ever allying vice with virtue, that I fear this bloody proof of her master's love brought to her heart more rapture than horror. She said not a word, for now Zamorna's arms were again folded around her, and again he was soothing her to tranquillity by endearments and caresses that far away removed all thought of the world, all past pangs of shame, all cold doubts , all weariness, all heart-sickness resulting from hope long deferred. He had told her that she was his first love, and now she felt tempted to believe that she was likewise his only love. Strong-minded beyond her sex, active, energetic, and accomplished in all other points of view, here she was as weak as a child. She lost her identity; her life was swallowed up in that of another.

There came a knock at the door. Zamorna rose and opened it. His valet stood without.

'Might I speak with your Grace in the ante-room?' asked Monsieur Rosier in somewhat of a hurried tone. The Duke followed him out.

'What do you want with me, sir? Anything the matter?'

'Ahem!' began Eugene, whose countenance expressed much more embarassment than is the usual characteristic of his dark, sharp physiognomy. 'Ahem! My lord Duke, rather a curious spot of work, a complete conjuror's trick if your Grace will allow me to say so'.

'What do you mean, sir?'

'Sacré! I hardly know. I must confess I felt a trifle stupefied when I saw it.'

'Saw what? Speak plainly, Rosier!'

'How your Grace is to act I can't imagine', replied the valet, 'though indeed I have seen your Majesty double wonderfully well when the case appeared to me extremely embarassing, but this I really thought extra – I could not have dreamt!'

'Speak to the point, Rosier, or – ' Zamorna lifted his hand.

'Mort de ma vie' exclaimed Eugene, 'I will tell your Grace all I know. I was walking carelessly through the passage about ten minutes since when I heard a step on the stairs, a light step as if of a very small foot. I turned, and there was a lady coming down. My lord, she was a lady!'

'Well, sir, did you know her?'

'I think if my eyes were not bewitched I did. I stood in the shade screened by a pillar and she passed very near without observing me. I saw her distinctly, and may I be d — d this very moment if it was not – '

'Who, sir?'

'The Duchess!'

There was a pause which was closed by a clear and remarkable prolonged whistle from the Duke. He put both his hands into his pockets and took a leisurely turn through the rom.

'You are sure, Eugene?' he asked. 'I know you dare not tell me a lie in such a matter because you have a laudable and natural regard to your proper carcass! Aye, it's true enough, I'll be sworn. Mrs Irving, the wife of a minister of the North! A satirical hit at my royal self! By G — d ! pale fair neck, little mouth and chin! Very good! I wish that same little mouth and chin were about a hundred miles off. What can have brought her? Anxiety about her invaluable husband – could not bear any longer without him – obliged to set off to see what he was doing. It's as well that turnspit Rosier told me, however. If she had entered the room unexpectedly above five minutes since – God! I should have had no resource but to tie her hand and foot. It would have killed her! What the d — l shall I do?Must not be angry; she can't do with that sort of thing just now. Talk softly, reprove her gently, swear black and white to my having no connection with MR Pakenham's housekeeper'.

Ceasing his soliloquy, the duke turned again to his valet.

'What room did Her aGrace go into?'

'The drawing room, my lord, she is in there now'.

'Well, say nothing about it, Rosier – on pain of sudden death! Do you hear me, sir?'

Rosier laid his hand on his heart, and Zamorna left the room to commence the operations.

Softly unclosing the drawing room door, he perceived a lady by the hearth. Her back was towards him, but there could be no mistake. The whole turn of form, the style of dress, the curled auburn head: all were attributes but of one person – of his own unique, haughty, jealous little Duchess. He closed the door as noiselessly as he had opened it and stole forwards. Her attention was absorbed in something, a book she had picked up. As he stood unobserved behind her he could see that her eye rested on the fly-leaf, where was written in his own hand:

Holy St. Cyprian! Thy waters stray
With still and solemn tone:
And fast my bright hours pass away
And somewhat throws a shadow grey,
Even as twilight closes day,
Upon thy waters lone.

Farewell! If I might come again,
Young as I was and free,
And feel once more in every vein
The fire of that first passion reign
Which sorrow could not quench or pain,
I'd soon return to thee;
But while thy billows seek the main
That never more may be!

This was dated 'Mornington, 1829'.

The Duchess felt a hand press her shoulder and she looked up. The force of attraction had its usual results and sh clung to what she saw.

'Adrian! Adrian!' was all her lips could utter.

'Mary! Mary!' replied the Duke, allowing her to hang about him: 'Pretty doings! What brought you here? Are you running away, eloping in my absence?'

'Adrian, why did you leave me? You said you would come back in a week, and it's eight days since. I could not bear any longer. I have never slept nor rested since you left me. Do come home!'

‘So you actually have set off in search of a husband!’’said Zamorna, laughing heartily, ‘‘nd been overturned and obliged to take shelter in Pakenham’’ shooting-box!’

‘Why are you here, Adrian?’ inquired the Duchess who was far too much in earnest to join in his laugh. ‘Who is Pakenham?And who is that person who calls herself his housekeeper? And why do you let anybody live so near Hawskliffe without ever telling me?’

‘I forgot to tell you’ said his Grace. ‘I’ve other things to think about when those bright hazel eyes are looking up at me! As to Pakenham, to tell you the truth he’s a sort of left-hand cousin of your own, being natural son to the old Admiral, my uncle, in the South, and his housekeeper is his sister. Voilà tout. Kiss me now’.

The Duchess did kiss him, but it was with a heavy sigh; the cloud of jealous anxiety hung on her brow undissipated.

‘Adrian, my heart aches still. Why have you been staying so long in Angria? O, you don’t care for me! You have never thought how miserable I have been longing for your return, Adrian!’ She stopped and cried.

‘Mary, recollect yourself!’ said His Grace. ‘I cannot be always at your feet. You were not so weak when we were first married. You let me leave you often then without any jealous remonstrance’’

‘I did not know you as well at that time’, said Mary, ‘and if my mind is weakened, all its strength has gone away in tears and terrors for you. I am neither so handsome nor so chherful as I once was, but you ought to forgive my decay because you have caused it.’

‘Low spirits’, returned Zamorna,’looking on the dark side of matters! God bless me, the wicked is caught in his own net. I wish I could add ‘yet shall I withal escape’. Mary, never again reproach yourself with loss of beauty till I give the hint first. Believe me now; in that and every other respect you are just what I wish you to be. You cannot fade any more than marble can – at least not in my eyes. And as for your devotion and tenderness, though I chide its excess sometimes, because it wastes and bleaches you almost to a shadow, yet it formsthe very finest chain that binds me to you. Now cheer up! Tonight you shall go to Hawkscliffe; it is only five miles off. I cannot accompany you because I have some important business to transact with Pakenham which must not be deferred. Tomorrow, I will be at the castle before dawn. The carriage will be ready. I will put you in, myself beside you; off we go straight to Verdopolis, and there for the next three months I will tire you of my company, morning, noon, and night! Now what can I promise more? If you choose to be jealous of Henri Fernando, Baron of Etrei; or John, Duke of Fidena; or the fair Earl of Richton, who, as God is my witness, has been the only companion of my present peregrinations, why, I can’t help it. I must then take to soda-water and despair, or have myself petrified and carved into an Apollo for your dressing room. Lord! I get no credit with my virtue!’

By dint of lies and laughter the individual at last succeded in getting all things settled to his mind.

The Duchess went to Hawkscliffe that night; and, keeping his promise for once, he accompanied her to Verdopolis next morning.

Lord Hartford still lies between life and death. His passion is neither weakened by pain, piqued by rejection, nor cooled by absence. On the iron nerves of the man are graved an impression which nothing can efface. Warner curses him; Richton deplores.

For a long space of time, good bye, reader! I have done my best to please you; and though I know that through feebleness, dullness, and iteration my work terminates rather in failure than triumph, yet you are sure to forgive, for I have done my best.

C. Brontë

Haworth, January 17th, 1838

STANCLIFFE'S HOTEL

CHAPTER 1

Charles Townshend pays a visit to Louisa Dance's house, and finds Macara Lofty under the influence of opium

"AMEN!" Such was the sound, given in a short shout, which closed the evening service at Ebenezer Chapel. Mr Bromley rose from his knees. He had wrestled hard, and the sweat of his pious labours shone like oil upon his forehead. Fetching a deep breath and passing his handkerchief over his damp brow, the apostle sank back in his seat. Then, extending both brawny arms and resting them on the sides of the pulpit, with the yellow-spotted handkerchief dependent from one hand, he sat and watched the evacuation of the crowded galleries.

"How oppressively hot the chapel has been to-night," said a soft voice to me, and a bonnet, bending forward, waved its ribbons against my face.

"Aye, in two senses," was my answer. "Literally, as to atmosphere, and figuratively, as to zeal. Our brother has exercised [conducted ther service; expounded scripture (obsolete)] with freedom, madam."

"Nonsense, Charles! I never can get into this slang! But come, the crowd is lessening at the gallery-door. I think we shall be able to make our way through it now, and I do long to get a breath of fresh air. Give me my shawl, Charles."

The lady rose, and, while I carefully enveloped her in the shawl and boa ["a snake-like coil of fur or feathers worn by women about the neck" (*OED*). The earliest usage in this sense cited in the *OED* is 1936; CB was clearly familiar with the latest fashions] which were to protect her from the night-air, she said, smiling persuasively, "You will escort me to my villa and sup with me on a radish and an egg." I answered by pressing the white hand over which she was just drawing a glove of French kid. She passed that hand through my arm and we left the gallery together.

A perfectly still and starlight night welcomed us as we quitted the steam and torches of the chapel. Threading our way quickly through the dispersing crowd at the door, we entered a well-known and oft-trod way, which in half an hour brought us from among the lighted shops and busy streets of our quartier to the deep shade and — at this hour — the unbroken retirement of the vale.

"Charles," said my fair companion in her usual voice, half a whisper, half a murmur. "Charles, what a sweet night — a premature summer night! It only wants the moon to make it perfect — then I could see my villa. Those stars are not close enough to bring out the white front fully from its laurels. And yet I do see a light glittering there. Is it not from my drawing-room window?"

"Probably," was my answer, and I said no more. Her ladyship's softness is at times too surfeiting, more especially when she approaches the brink of the sentimental.

"Charles," she pursued, in no wise abashed by my coolness. "How many fond recollections come on us at such a time as this! Where do you think my thoughts always stray on a summer night? What image do you think 'a cloudless clime and starry skies' always suggests?"

"Perhaps," said I, "that of the most noble Richard, Marquis of Wellesley, as you last saw him, reposing in gouty chair and stool, with eyelids gently closed by the influence of the pious libations in claret with which he has concluded the dinner of rice-currie, devilled turkey and guava."

Louisa, instead of being offended, laughed with silver sound. "You are partly right," said she. "The figure you have described does indeed form a portion of my recollections. Now, will you finish the picture, or shall I do it in your stead?"

"I resign the pencil into hands better qualified for its management," rejoined I.

"Well, then, listen," continued the Marchioness. "Removed from the easy chair and cushioned foot-stool and from the slumbering occupant thereof, imagine a harp - that very harp which stands now in my boudoir. Imagine a woman, seated by it. I need not describe her: it is myself. She is not playing. She is listening to one who leans on her instrument and whispers as softly as the wind now whispers in my acacias."

"Hem!" said I. "Is the figure that of a bald elderly gentleman?"

Louisa sighed her affirmative.

"By the bye," continued I. "It is constantly reported that he has taken to — "

"What?" interrupted the Marchioness. "Not proof spirits, I hope! Watered Hollands I know scarcely satisfied him."

"No, madam, repress your fears. I was alluding merely to his dress. The pantaloons are gone: he sports white tights and silks."

Low as the whisper was in which I communicated these stunning tidings, it thrilled along Louisa's nerves to her heart. During the pause which followed, I waited in breathless expectation for the effect. It came at last. Tittering faintly, she exclaimed, "You don't say so! Lord! how odd! But after all, I think it's judicious, you know. Nothing can exhibit more perfect symmetry than his leg, and then he does get older of course, and a change of costume was becoming advisable. Yet I should almost fear there would be too much deep shade and — at this hour — the unbroken retirement of the vale.

"Charles," said my fair companion in her usual voice, half a whisper, half a murmur. “Charles, what a sweet night — a premature summer night! It only wants the moon to make it perfect — then I could see my villa. Those stars are not close enough to bring out the white front fully from its laurels. And yet I do see a light glittering there. Is it not from my drawing-room window?”

“Probably,” was my answer, and I said no more. Her ladyship’s softness is at times too surfeiting, more especially when she approaches the brink of the sentimental.

“Charles,” she pursued, in no wise abashed by my coolness. “How many fond recollections come on us at such a time as this! Where do you think my thoughts always stray on a summer night? What image do you think ‘a cloudless clime and starry skies’ always suggests?”

“Perhaps,” said I, “that of the most noble Richard, Marquis of Wellesley, as you last saw him, reposing in gouty chair and stool, with eyelids gently closed by the influence of the pious libations in claret with which he has concluded the dinner of rice-currie, devilled turkey and guava.”

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“Have you heard from his lordship lately?” I asked.

“Oh no! About six months ago I had indeed one little note, but I gave it to Macara by mistake, and really I don’t know what became of it afterwards.”

“Did Macara express hot sentiment of incipient jealousy on thus accidentally learning that you had not entirely dropped all correspondence with the noble Earl?”

“Yes. He said he thought the note was very civilly expressed, and wished me to answer it in terms equally polite.”

“Good! And you did so?”

“Of course. I penned an elegant billet on a sheet of rose-tinted note-paper, and sealed it with a pretty green seal bearing the device of twin hearts consumed by the same flame. Some misunderstanding must have occurred, though, for in two or three days afterwards I received it back unopened and carefully enclosed in a cover. The direction was not in his lordship’s handwriting: Macara told me he thought it was the Countess’s.”

“Do you know Selden House, where his lordship now resides?” I asked.

“Ah yes! Soon after I was married I remember passing it while on a bridal excursion to Rossland [Ross’s Land, the kingdom founded by Captain John Ross, Anne Bronte’s principal character in the *Young Men’s Play*] with the old Marquis. We took lunch there, indeed, for Colonel Selden (at that time the owner of it) was a friend of my venerable bridegroom’s. Talking of those times reminds me of a mistake everybody was sure to make at the hotels and private houses etc. where we stopped. I was universally taken for Lord Wellesley’s daughter. Colonel Selden in particular persisted in calling me Lady Julia.

“He was a fine-looking man, not so old as my illustrious spouse by at least twenty years. I asked Dance, who accompanied us on that tour, why he had not chosen for me such a partner as the gallant Colonel. He answered me by the sourest look I ever saw.”

“Well,” said I, interrupting her ladyship’s reminiscences. “Here we are at your villa. Goodnight. I cannot sup with you this evening: I am engaged.”

“Nay, Charles,” returned she, retaining the hand I would have withdrawn from hers. “Do come in! It is so long since I have had the pleasure of a quiet tète à tète with you.”

I persisted for some time in my refusal; but at length yielding to the smile and the soft tone of entreaty I gave up the point, and followed the Marchioness in.

On entering her ladyship’s parlour, we found the candles lighted and a supper-tray placed ready for us on the table. By the hearth, alone, Lord Macara Lofty was seated. His hand, drooping over the arm-chair, held two open letters: his eyes were fixed on the fire — as seemed, in thought. Louisa roused him. I could not help being struck by the languid gaze with which he turned his eyes upon her as she bent over him. There was vacancy in his aspect, and dreamy stupor.

"Are we late from chapel?" said she. "Bromley's last prayer seemed interminably long."

"Rather, I should think," was the Viscount's answer. "Rather, a trifle or so — late, you said? O ah! to be sure. I have been sitting with you two hours, have I not Louisa? — just dusk when I walked up the valley — late! certainly — "

This not particularly intelligible reply was given in the tone and with the manner of a man just startled from a heavy slumber, and yet the noble viscount had evidently been wide awake when we entered the room. Having delivered the speech above mentioned, he ceased to notice the Marchioness, and relapsed as if involuntarily into his former position and look.

"Won't you take some supper?" she inquired.

No answer. She repeated the question.

"G-d, no," he said hastily, as if annoyed at interruption, his countenance at the same time wearing a rapt expression, as if every faculty were spell-bound in some absorbing train of thought. The Marchioness turned from him with a grimace. She nodded at me and whispered, "Learned men now and then have very strange vagaries."

Not at all discomposed by his strange conduct, she proceeded quietly to remove her bonnet, shawl and boa; and having thrown them over the back of a sofa, she passed her fingers through her hair, and shaking aside the loose ringlets into which it was thus parted, turned towards the mirror a face by no means youthful, by no means blooming, by no means regularly beautiful — but which yet had been able, by the aid of that long chiselled nose, those soft and sleepy eyes, and that bland smile always hovering round the deceitful lips, to captivate the greatest man of his age.

"Come," she said, gliding towards the table. "Take a sandwich, Charles, and give me a wing of that chicken. We can amuse each other till Macara thinks proper to come round and behave like a sensible Christian."

I did not, reader, ask what was the matter with Macara, for I had a very good guess myself as to the cause and origin of that profound fit of meditation in which his lordship now sat entranced. I fell forthwith to the discussion of the sandwiches and chicken, which the Marchioness dispensed to me with liberal hand. She also sat, and, as we sipped wine together, her soft eyes looking over the brim of the glass expressed far more easy enjoyment of the good things given her for her use than perplexing concern for the singular quandary in which her *cher ami* sat speechless and motionless by the hearth. Meantime, the ecstatic smiles which had, every now and then, kindled Macara's eye and passed like sunshine over his countenance began to recur with fainter effect and at longer intervals. The almost sensual look of intense gratification and absorption gave place to an air of fatigue. Our voices seemed recalling him to recollection. He stirred in his seat, then rose, and with an uncertain step began to pace the room. His eye — heavy still, and filmy — caught mine.

"Ho! is that you?" he said in a peculiar voice, which scarcely seemed under the speaker's command. "Hardly knew you were in the room — and Louisa too I declare! Well, I must have been adipose [fat. Apparently this is a comic substitution for "comatose": Macara si not yet in command of language]. And what has Bromley said tonight? You were at chapel, somebody told me a while since — at least I think so, but it may be all fancy! I daresay you'll think me in an extraordinary mood to-night, but I'll explain directly — as soon as I get sufficiently collected."

With an unsteady hand he poured out a goblet of water, drank part, and, dipping his fingers in, cooled with the remainder his forehead and temples. "My head throbs," said he. "I must not try this experiment often." As he spoke, his hand shook so convulsively that he could hardly replace the glass on the table. Smiling grimly at this evidence of abused nerves, he continued, "Really, Townshend! Only mark that! And what do you think it is occasioned by?"

"Intoxication," I said concisely. "And that of a very heathen kind. You were far better take to dry spirits at once, Macara, than do as you do."

"Upon my conscience," replied the Viscount, sitting down and striking the table with that same shaking hand. "I do believe, Townshend, you are in the right. I begin to find that this system of mine, rational as I thought it, is fraught with the most irresistible temptation."

Really, reader, it is difficult to deal with a man like Macara, who has candour at will to screen even his weakest points from attack. However infamous may be the position in which he is surprised, he turns round without a blush, and instead of defending himself, by denying that matters are as appearances would warrant you to suppose, usually admits all the disgrace of his situation, and begins with metaphysical profundity to detail all the motives and secret springs of action which brought matters to the state in which you found them. According to this system of tactics the Viscount proceeded with his self-accusation.

"It was a fine evening, as you know," said he, "and I thought I would take a stroll up the valley, just to alleviate those low spirits which had been oppressing me all day. Townshend, I dare say you do not know what it is to look at an unclouded sun, at pleasant fields and young woods crowding green and bright to the edge of a river, and from these fair objects to be unable to derive any feeling but such as is tinged with sadness. However, I am familiar with this state of mind — and as I passed through the wicket that shuts in Louisa's lawn, and turning round paused in the green alley, and saw between the laurels the glittering red sky, clear as fire, which the sun had left far over the hills, I, Townshend, felt that, still and bright as the day was closing, fair as it promised to rise on the morrow, this summer loveliness was nothing to me — no.

"So I walked up to the house; I entered this room, wishing to find Louisa. She was not there, and when I inquired for her I was told she would not return for some hours. I sat down to wait. The dusk approached, and in that mood of mind I watched it slowly veiling every object, clothing every tree of the shrubbery, with such disguises as a haunted, a disturbed, a blackened imagination could suggest. Memory whispered to me that in former years I could have sat at such an hour, in such a scene; and from the rising moon, the darkening landscape on which I looked, the quiet little chamber where I sat, have gathered images all replete with bliss for the present, with softened happiness for the future. Was it so now? No, Mr Townshend; I was in a state of mind which I will not mock you by endeavouring to describe. But the gloom, the despair, became unendurable; dread forebodings rushed upon me, whose power I could not withstand. I felt myself on the brink of some hideous disaster and a vague influence ever and anon pushed me over, till clinging wildly to life and reason, I almost lost consciousness in the faintness of mortal terror.

"Now, Townshend, so suffering, how far did I err when I had resource to the sovereign specific which a simple narcotic drug offered me? I opened this little box, and, sir, I did not hesitate. No, I tasted. The change was wrought quickly. In five minutes I, who had been the most miserable wretch under that heaven, sat a rational, happy man, soothed to peace of mind, to rest of body, capable of creating sweet thoughts, of tasting bliss, of dropping those fetters of anguish which had restrained me, and floating away with light brain and soaring soul into the fairest regions imagination can disclose. Now, Townshend, I injured no fellow-creature by this: I did not even brutalize myself. Probably my life may be shortened by indulgence of this kind [the young Brontes would have been familiar with such descriptions of drug experiences. Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* had appeared in 1822, and was much discussed and referred to thereafter in *Blackwood's Magazine*] — but what of that? The eternal sleep will come sometime, and as well sooner as later."

"I've no objection," returned I, coolly. "Louisa, have you?"

"I can't understand the pleasure of that opium," said the Marchioness. "And as to low spirits, I often tell Macara that I think there must be a great deal of fancy in them."

The Viscount gently sighed, and, dropping his hand on hers, said, as he softly pressed it with his wan fingers, "May you long think so, Louisa!"

Finding that his lordship was in much too sentimental a mood to serve my turn, I shortly after rose and took my leave. The Marchioness attended me to the hall-door.

"Is he not frénétique, Charles?" said she. "What nonsense to make such a piece of work about low spirits! I declare he reminds me of Ashworth. He, poor man, after a few days of hard preaching and harder drinking used to say that he had a muttering devil at his side. He told Bromley so once, and Bromley believed him. Would you have done, Charles?"

"Implicitly, madam. Goodnight."

CHAPTER 2

Charles Townshend decides to pay a visit to the country

I like the city. So long as winter lasts, it would be no easy task to entice me from its warm and crowded precincts. So long even as spring, with lingering chill, scatters her longer showers and fitful blinks of sunshine, I would cling to the theatre at night and the news-room [in the 1830s, a reading room set aside for the reading of newspapers] in the morning. But at last, I do confess, as June advances, and ushers in a long series of warm days, of soft sunsets and mellow moonlight evenings, I do begin to feel certain intuitive longings for an excursion, a jaunt out into the country, a sojourn somewhere far off, where there are woods, pastoral hills and bright pebbled becks.

This feeling came strong over me the other day, when, sitting in Grant's Coffee-House, I took up a fashionable paper whose columns teemed with such announcements as the following: Preparations are making at Roslyn castle, the seat of Lord St Clair in the North, for the reception of his Lordship's family and a party of illustrious visitors, who are invited to spend the summer quarter amidst the beautiful forest scenery with which that part of the St Clair estate abounds.

Prince Augustus of Fidena set out yesterday, accompanied by his tutor, for Northwood-Zara, whither the Duke and Duchess of Fidena are to follow in a few days.

Lord and Lady Stuartville leave town to-morrow. Their destination is Stuartville Park in Angria.

The Earl of Northangerland is still at Selden House. It is understood that his lordship expresses little interest in politics.

General Thornton and his lady took their departure for Girnington Hall last week. The General intends adding to the plantations on his already finely wooded property in Angria.

The Earl and Countess of Arundel are at their seat of Summerfield House, in the province of Arundel.

General and Mrs Grenville propose to spend the summer at Warner Hall, the residence of W.H.Warner Esqre, premier of Angria.

John Bellingham Esqre, banker, is rusticating at Goldthorpe Mowbray. The physicians have advised sea bathing for the perfect restoration of Mr Bellingham's health, which has suffered considerably from a severe attack of influenza.

The Marquis of Harlaw, with a party of friends, J.Billinger Esqre, Mr Macqueen etc., is enjoying a brief relaxation from state cares at Colonel Luckyman's country house, Catton Lodge.

Lord Charles and the young ladies Flower have joined their noble mother at Mowbray. Sigston's Hotel is engaged entirely for the use of Lady Richton and her household. Lord Charles Flower, who, as well as his sisters, is just recovering from the measles, continues under the care of Dr Morrison, the family physician. The noble ambassador himself is in the south.

From these paragraphs it was evident that the season was now completely over. No more assemblies at Flower House, no more select dinner-parties at the Fidena Palace. Closed were the saloons of Thornton Hotel, forsaken were the squares round Ellrington Hall and Wellesley House, void were the habitations of Castlereagh, darkened the tabernacles of Arundel! Whereas now, in remote woods, the chimneys of Girnington Hall sent out their blue smoke to give token that the old spot was peopled again; in remoter meads, the broad sashes of Summerfield House were thrown up, to admit the gale sweeping over those wide prairies into rooms with mirrors cleared and carpets spread and couches unswathed in holland. Every blind was withdrawn at Stuartville Park, every shutter opened, and the windows through crimson curtains looked boldly towards the green ascent [eminence (obsolete)] where Edwardston smiles upon its young plantations. The rooks were cawing at Warner Hall with cheerier sound than ever as, early on a summer morning, the Prime Minister of Angria, standing on his front-door steps, looked at the sun rising over his still grounds and deep woods and over the long, dark moors of Howard.

I could have grown poetical. I could have recalled more distant and softer scenes touched with the light of other years, hallowed by higher — because older — associations than the campaign of -33, the rebellion of -36. I might have asked how sunrise yet became the elms and the turret of Wood Church. But I restrained myself, and merely put the question, shall I have me out or not? And whither shall I direct my steps? To my old quarters at the Greyhound opposite Mowbray Vicarage? To my friend Tom Ingham’s farm at the foot of Boulshill? To some acquaintances I have North awa’ in the vicinity of Fidena? Or to a snug country lodging I know of in the south not far from my friend Billinger’s paternal home? Time and chance shall decide me. I’ve cash sufficient for the excursion; I’ve just rounded off my nineteenth year and entered on my twentieth; I’m a neat figure, a competent scholar, a popular author, a gentleman and a man of the world. Who then shall restrain me? Shall I not wander at my own sweet will? *Allons*, reader, come, and we will pack the carpet-bag. Make out an inventory: Item - 4 shirts, 6 fronts, 4 pair cotton, 2 pair silk stockings, 1 pair morocco pumps, 1 dress satin waistcoat, 1 dress coat, 2 pair dress pantaloons, 1 pair nankeens [trousers made of a kind of cotton cloth], 1 brush and comb, 1 bottle macassar oil, 1 tooth-brush, box vegetable tooth-powder, 1 pot cream of roses, 1 case of razors (N.B. for show not use), two cakes of almond soap, 1 bottle eau de cologne, 1 bottle eau de mille fleurs, 1 pair curling-irons. C’est tout! I’m my own valet now! Reader, if you’re ready, so am I. The coach is coming, hillo! Off at full speed to meet it!

CHAPTER 3

At Stancliffe's Hotel, amongst the commercial travelers

"Well, I think I shall have to stay at Zamorna all night. It's a delightful June evening."

So I soliloquized to myself, as, standing in the traveller's room at Stancliffe's Hotel, I from the window watched the umbrellas, cloaks, and mackintoshes which ever and anon traversed Thornton Street in Zamorna. It had been market-day, and the gigs of the clothiers, now homeward-bound, were bowling along the pavement in the teeth of the driving showers and fitful blasts in which the before-mentioned delightful June evening had thought proper to veil its close. Now and then a cavalcade of some half-dozen mounted manufacturers passed the window at full trot. These gentlemen had doubtless dined en comité at the Woolpack or the Stuart Arms, and the speed and lightness of their progress, the pleasing gaiety of their aspects, and the frequency of the laugh and jest in their ranks indicated pretty plainly that they were, one and all — to speak technically — market-fresh [slang for drunk, referring to "that dubious degree of sobriety with which farmers too commonly return home from market" (1841; *OED*)] Many of the gigs, too, shot past with a vengeable rapidity which warranted that occupants had duly laid in the stock of brandy and water. Wild and boisterous as the wind swept up the street and drove before it a heavy constant rain, these heroes, safe in the external shield of waterproof capes and the internal specific of no less waterproof cognac, dashed away towards the open Edwardston or Adrianopolitan roads, as if in defiance of the storm which was to meet them in fuller force when removed from the partial shelter of the city.

The traveller's room at Stancliffe's Hotel by no means exhibited the silence and solitude of a hermit's cell. Gentlemen in the soft and hard line [commercial travellers in different kinds of commodities] strode in and out incessantly from the trampled inn-passage, whose wet and miry floor plainly told the condition of the streets outside. Then there were loud calls for the waiters, incessant ringings of the weary bell, orders about sundry carpet-bags and portmanteaus, deliveries of divers wet great-coats and drenched pea-surtouts [stout overcoats made of course cloth] to be dried instantly at the kitchen-fire, expostulations about mysterious subjects unintelligible except to the affrighted waiter and the aggrieved complainant. One furious individual, whose gig drove up to the Hotel amidst the pelting of a wilder torrent of rain than had fallen in the course of the whole afternoon, entered the room with a dark and ominous aspect. As he was drawing off his three-caped great-coat, from which the water dripped in streams, something in the condition of the fire-place seemed to strike him with conscientious horror. He rushed to the door.

"Waiter! Waiter!! Waiter!!!" he exclaimed with the voice of a lion.

The waiter came. The person who had summoned him was a portly man and an apoplectic; his rage seemed at first to impede his utterance, but not for long. He opened forth:

"Look at that grate, sir! Do you call that comfort — tawdry rags of blue and yellow paper instead of a good fire?"

"It's June, sir," replied the waiter. "18th inst. We never put on fire in the low-rooms after May goes out."

"Damn you," said the bagman. "Light a fire directly, or I'll send for your master and give him a jobation [talking-to] to his face about it. Let me tell you, your people here at Stancliffe's get abominably careless. Such a blackguard dinner as I had here last circuit! But I promise you if you set me down to such another I'll put up at the Stuart Arms in future. Light a fire, sir, and take my coat. If you leave a wet thread on it I'll subtract it from the reckoning. Bring me some hot punch and oysters for supper, and mind the chambermaid airs my bed well. I'd damp sheets last time I slept here, I'll be d-ed if I had not."

Your Angrian commercial traveller is one of the greatest scamps in existence, much on a par with your Angrian newspaper editor. Anything more systematically unprincipled, more recklessly profligate than these men, taking them as a body, is not easy to conceive. Characters indicative of these vices were legibly written in the faces of the half-dozen gentlemen gathered on this stormy evening in the apartment to which I have introduced my readers. Conversation did not flag amongst them. Amidst the ringing of crushers and tumblers, such sentences were heard as the following:

"Brown, I say, you're lucky to have no further to go to-night!"

"Well, and so are you, an't you?"

"Me! I must push on ten miles further if it rain cats and dogs: I must be in Edwardston by nine to-night to meet one of our partners."

"Which of them: Culpeper or Hoskins?"

"Culpeper, ac-d cross-grained dog."

"Pretty weather, this, for June ain't it?" interpolated a young dandy with red curls and velvet waistcoat.

"Aye, as pretty as your phiz [face]," replied the furious man who had ordered the fire to be lit, and who was now sitting with both his feet on the fender, full in front of the few smoky coals which in obedience to his mandates had been piled together.

"I say, can you change me a bank-note?" asked one man with his chin shrouded in a white shawl.

"Bank of Angria or private bank?" said the person whom he had addressed.

"Private bank — of our own Amos Kirkwall and sons."

"I can change it with our pound notes — Edward Percy's and Steaton's: I got them at their warehouse this afternoon."

"I'd prefer these any day to sovereigns — less chance of their being counterfeit.”

“Well, and how go politics to-day?” asked a smart traveller in a gold chain, slapping on the shoulder a studious individual deeply absorbed in the perusal of a newspaper.

“God knows!” was the answer. “I should not be much astonished to hear of the Prime Minister resigning.”

“And he will if he does his duty,” exclaimed a third person. “Have you seen the War Despatch for this morning? My word, their people do go it!”

“Manly, independent print, the War Despatch,” answered the first speaker. “Delivers the sentiments of the nation at large. Curse it — who’s to hinder us from asserting our rights? Aren’t we all free-born Angrians?”

“The Rising Sun swears that Percy has tendered his resignation, and been solicited to withdraw it. What do you think of that?”

“That he had a capital opportunity of discharging with interest many a long bill of insults he has been storing up against the Czar [the Duke of Zamorna] for these three years at least.”

“But I think it would hardly be like him to let such an opportunity pass, if it be so. Brandy and Water! He’ll serve them out next sessions, in style.”

“By G-d, that he will, and before next sessions too. A propos of that, they say some of the leaders in the War Despatch are penned by him.”

“Very likely; he’s a real trump-card. Do you deal with him?”

“No, our house is in the cutlery-line.”

“We do, or rather, we did a while since; but he screwed so hard in that last bargain about some casks of madder, and came down so prompt for payment at a time when ready money was rather scarce with us, that our senior partner swore upon the Gospels he’d burn his fingers in that oven no more.”

The furious man, who had hitherto sat silent, here turned from the fire which he had by this time coaxed into something like a blaze and growled sotto-voce: “Shall be happy to supply you, Mr Drake, with madder, indigo, logwood and barilla of all qualities on the most reasonable terms. Shall feel obliged if you will favour me with an order. May I put you down?” He drew out a pocket-book and unsheathed a pencil.

“Of what house?” asked Mr Drake.

“I do for Milnes, Duff & Stephenson, Dyers, Anvale,” answered the fire-eater [one fond of quarrelling].

“Humph!” rejoined Drake with a kind of sneer. “I’ve seen that firm mentioned somewhere.” He affected to ponder for a moment, then, snapping his fingers: “I have it! It was in the Gazette. Paid a second dividend, I think, a month ago — half-a-crown in the pound.”

The man of choler said nothing: he was flabbergasted. But he leaned back in his chair, and, lifting both feet from the fender, he deposited one on each hob. His favourite element, now burning clear and red, seemed to console him for every contre-temps.

"Drat it, the weather's clearing!" suddenly ejaculated that gentleman who had declared his obligation to be at Edwardston by nine o'clock. He rushed out of the room and, having peremptorily ordered his gig, rushed back again; and having swallowed the contents of a capacious tumbler besought Dawson to help him on with his d-d mackintosh. Then, as he settled the collar about his neck, he bade an affectionate adieu to the said Dawson in the words:

"Go it old cock! Good bye! Judging by thy nose next circuit will use thee up."

I saw him from the window mount his gig and flash down the still wet street like a comet.

In truth, the clouds for the first time that day were now beginning to separate. The rain had ceased; the wind likewise had subsided; and I think, if I could have seen the west, the sun, within a few minutes of its setting, was just shedding one parting smile over the Olympian [houses of the Angrian gentry are in the valley of the Olympian]. Several of the travellers now rose. There was a general ordering out of gigs and assuming of coats and cloaks. In a few minutes the room was cleared, with the exception of two or three whose intention it was to take up their quarters at Stancliffe's for the night. While these discussed professional subjects, I maintained my station at the window, watching the passengers whom the gleam of sunshine had called out at the close of a rainy day.

In particular, I marked the movements of a pretty woman who seemed waiting for someone at the door of a splendid mercer's shop opposite. Drawing aside the green blind, I tried to catch her eye, displaying a gold snuff-box under pretence of taking a pinch, and by the same action exhibiting two or three flashy rings with which my white aristocratic hand was adorned. Her eye was caught by the glitter. She looked at me from amongst a profusion of curls, glossy and silky though of the genuine Angrian hue [red]. From me her glance reverted to her own green silk frock and pretty sandalled feet. I fancied she smiled. Whether she did or not, I certainly returned the compliment by a most seductive grin. She blushed. Encouraged by this sign of sympathy, I kissed my hand to her. She giggled, and retreated into the shop. While I was vainly endeavouring to trace her figure, of which no more than the dim outline was visible through the gloom of the interior, increased by waving streamers of silk and print pendant to the shop door, someone touched my arm. I turned. It was a waiter.

"Sir, you are wanted, if you please."

"Who wants me?"

"A gentleman upstairs. Came this afternoon. Dined here. I've just carried in the wine, and he desired me to tell the young gentleman in the traveller's room who wore a dark frock-coat and white jeans [trousers of coarse cotton cloth] that he would be happy to have the pleasure of his company for the evening."

"Do you know who he is?" I asked.

“I’ve not heard his name, sir, but he came in his own carriage — a genteel barouche. A military looking person. I should fancy he may be an officer in the army.”

“Well,” said I, “show me up to his apartment”, and as the slippered waiter glided before me I followed with some little curiosity to see who the owner of the genteel barouche might be. Not that there was anything at all strange in the circumstance, for Stancliffe’s, being the head hotel in Zamorna, every day received aristocratic visitants within its walls. The Czar himself usually changed horses here in his journeys to and from his capital.

CHAPTER 4

Charles Townshend remembers the trial of Zamorna, after his defeat at Edwardston, and meets an old friend

Traversing the inn-passage — wetter and dirtier than ever, and all in tumult for the evening Verdopolitan-coach had just come in and the passengers were calling for supper and beds and rooms and at the same time rushing wildly after their luggage — traversing, I say, this rich melée, in the course of which transit I nearly ran over a lady and a little girl and was in requital called a rude scoundrel by their companion, a big fellow in mustachios — traversing, I once more repeat, this area wherein a woman with a child in her arms — dripping wet, for she had ridden on the outside of the coach — came against me full drive, I at length, after turning the angle of second long passage and passing through a pair of large folding doors, found myself in another region.

It was a hall with rooms about it, green mats at every door, a lamp in the centre, a broad staircase ascending to a gallery above, which ran round three sides of the hall, leaving space in the fourth for a great arched window. All here was clean, quiet, stately. This was the new part of the hotel, which had been erected since the year of independence. Before that time, Stancliffe's was but a black-looking old public, whose best apartment was not more handsomely furnished than its present travellers' room. As I ascended the staircase, chancing to look through the window I got a full and noble view of that new court-house which, rising upon its solid basement, so majestically fronts the first inn in Zamorna. There it was that, after the disastrous day of Edwardston, Jeremiah Simpson opened his court martial; there, on such an evening as this. At this very hour, when twilight was sealing sunset, a turbaned figure, with furred robes like a sultan and shawl streaming from his waist, had mounted those steps, and, while all the wide and long street beneath him was a sea of heads and a hell of strange cries, had shouted: "Soldiers, bring on the prisoner!"

Then, breaking through the crowd, trampling down young and old, Julian Gordon's troopers burst on amidst the boom of Quashia's gongs and the yell of Medina's kettle-drums. A gun mounted on the court-house was discharged down on the heads of the mob, as was afterwards sworn before the House of Peers. Through the smoke the prisoner could hardly be seen, but his head was bare, his hands bound; that court-house received him, and the door was barred on the mob.

"This is the room, sir," said the waiter, throwing open a door in the middle of the gallery, and admitting me to a large apartment whose style of decoration, had I been a novice in such matters, would have burst upon me with dazzling force. It was as elegant in finish, as splendid in effect, as a saloon in any nobleman's house. The windows were large, lofty and clear; the curtains were of silk that draperied them, of crimson silk, imparting to everything a rosy hue. The carpet was soft and rich, exhibiting groups of brilliant flowers. The mantelpiece was crowned with classical ornaments — small but exquisite figures in marble, vases as white as snow, protected from soil by glass bells inverted over them, silver lamps, and, in the centre, a foreign time-piece.

Above all these sloped a picture, the only one in the room: an Angrian peer in his robes, really a fine fellow. At first I did not recognize the face, as the costume was so unusual; but by degrees I acknowledged a dashing likeness to the most noble Frederick Stuart, Earl of Stuartville and Viscount Castlereagh, Lord Lieutenant of the Province of Zamorna. “Really,” thought I, as I took in the tout ensemble of the room, “These Angrians do lavish the blunt [slang for ready money] — hotels like palaces, palaces like Genii dreams [in Glass Town, the creators of Angria were the four Chief Genii]. It’s to be hoped there’s cash to answer the paper-money, that’s all.” At a table covered with decanters and silver fruit-baskets sat my unknown friend, the owner of the genteel conveyance. The waiter having retired, closing the door after him, I advanced.

CHAPTER 5

William Percy tells Charles Townshend of his exploits

It being somewhat dusk, and the gentleman's face being turned away from the glow of a ruddy fire, I did not at first glance hit his identity. However, I said, "How do you do, sir? Glad to see you."

"Pretty well, thank you," returned he, and slowly rising, he tenderly took his coat-tails under the protection of his arms, and standing on the rug presented his back to the before-mentioned ruddy fire.

"O it's you, is it!" I ejaculated; for his face was now obvious enough. "How the devil did you know that I was here?"

"What the devil brought you here?" he asked.

"Why the devil do you wish to know?" I rejoined.

"How the devil can I tell?" he replied.

Here, our wits being mutually exhausted by these brilliant sallies, I took a momentary reprieve in laughter. Then my friend began again.

"In God's name, take a chair."

"In Christ's name, I will."

"For the love of Heaven, let me fill you a bumper."

"For the fear of Hell, leave no heel-tap [the liquor left at the bottom of teh glass after drinking]."

"I adjure you by the gospels, tell me if it's good wine."

"I swear upon the Koran, I've tasted better."

"By the miracle of Cana, you lie."

"By the miracle of Moses, I do not."

"According to your oaths, sir, I should take you to be circumcised."

"According to yours, I should scarce think you were baptized."

"The Christian ordinance came not upon me."

"The Mahometan rite I have eschewed."

"Thou then art an unchristened Heathen."

"And thou an infidel Giaour [Islamic term of abuse for Christians, adn title of a poem by Lord Byron, 1813]."

"Pass the bottle, lad," said my friend, resuming his seat and grasping the decanter with emphasis. He and I filled our glasses, and then we looked at each other. A third person, I think, would have observed something similar about us. We were both young, both thin, both sallow and light-haired and blue-eyed, both carefully and somewhat foppishly dressed, with small feet set off by a slender chaussure and white hands garnished with massive rings.

My friend, however, was considerably taller than I, and had besides more of the air military. His head was differently set upon his shoulders. He had incipient light brown mustaches and some growth of whisker; he threw out his chest too and sported a length of limb terminating in boot and spur. His complexion, originally fair almost to delicacy, appeared to have seen service, for it was like my own much tanned, freckled and yellowed to a bilious hue with the sun. He wore a blue dress-coat with velvet collar, velvet waistcoat and charming white tights: I endued [put on as a garment (OED); the word also has the sense of "invest or endow with a spiritual gift", and carries a mock-heroic resonance here; frock; frock-coat] a well-made green frock and light summer jeans. Now, reader, have you got us before you?

The young officer, resting his temples on his hand and pensively filling a tall champagne glass, renewed the conversation.

"You'll be surprised to see me here, I daresay, aren't you?"

"Why yes; I thought you were at Gazemba or Dongola, or Bonowen or Socatoo, or some such barbarian station, setting slot-hounds [sleuth-hounds] on negro-tracks, and sleeping like Moses among the flags on some river-side."

"Well, Townshend," said he. "Your description exactly answers to the sort of life I have led for the last six months."

"And are you stalled of it?" I asked.

"Stalled, man! think of the honour! Have you not seen in every newspaper: 'The exertions of the 10th Hussars in the east under their Colonel Sir William Percy continue unabated. The efforts made by that Gallant Officer to extirpate the savages are beyond all praise. Scarce a day passes but five or six are hung under the walls of Dongola'? Then again: 'A signal instance of vengeance was exhibited at Katagoom last week, by order of Sir William Percy.

A soldier had been missing some days from his regiment stationed at that place. His remains were at length found in a neighbouring jungle, hideously mangled, and displaying all the frightful mutilation of Negro slaughter. Sir William instantly ordered out two of the fiercest and keenest hounds in his leashes. They tracked up the murderers in a few hours. When seized, the blood-stained wretches were sunk up to the neck in the deep mire of a carr-brake26. Sir William had them shot through the head where they stood, and their bodies merged in the filth which afforded them such a suitable sepulchre.' Eh, Townshend? is not that the strain?"

"Exactly so. But now Colonel, since you were so honourably occupied, why do I now find you so far from the seat of your glorious toil?"

"Really, Townshend, how can you be so unreasonable? The tenth Hussars — all Gods as they are, or God-like men, which is better — can't stand the sun of those deserts and the malaria of those marshes for ever. It has therefore pleased our gracious monarch to command a recall; that is, not by his own sacred mouth, but through the medium of W.H.Warner Esqre, our trusty and well-beloved councillor, who delivered his instructions to our General-in-Chief and Commander of the Forts, Henri Fernando di Enara, by whom they were transmitted to your humble servant."

"And with alacrity you jumped at the reprieve."

"Jumped at it? No; I perused the despatch with, I believe, my wonted coolness - awed, of course, by the sublime appellation of our Lord the King, in whose name it was penned — but otherwise I sweat not, neither did I swoon. It is not for us poor subalterns to feel either joy or grief, satisfaction or disappointment.”

“Well, Colonel, where are you going now?”

“Lord, Mr Townshend, don’t be in such a hurry! Let one have a minute’s time for reflection! I’ve hardly yet got over the anguish of soul that came upon me at Gazemba.”

“How? On what account?”

“All a sense of my own insignificance — a humbling to the dust, as it were. That organ of veneration is so predominant in my cranium, it will be the death of me some day. You know, being to go to Adrianopolis, it was needful to pass through Gazemba, and being at Gazemba, it was onerous to wait upon our Commander of the Forts at his pretty little villa there. So, having donned the regimentals over a check shirt for the more grace (it would have been presumptuous to appear in cambric while his Highness sported huckaback), I made my way to the domicile. Signor Fernando must be a man of some nerves to endure about his person such fellows as form the household of that garrison. The dirtiest dregs of a convict hulk would scarce turn out such another muster. Parricides, matricides, fratricides, sororicides, stabbers in the dark, blackguard bullies of hells, scoundrel suborners of false testimony: of these materials has he formed the domestic establishment of his country-seat. A forger in the disguise of a porter opened the door for me; a cut-purse wearing a footman’s epaulettes shewed me to an ante-room; there I was received by one bearing a steward’s wand who had been thrice convicted of arson; he gave my name to a Mr Secretary Gordon, who had visibly been hanged for murder but unfortunately cut down before the law had done its perfect work.

“Of course I sweat profusely by the time I had passed through this ordeal, and when at length Mr Gordon introduced me to a dismal little dungeon called a cabinet where sat Enara, my knees shook under me like aspen leaves. There was the great man in his usual attire of a gingham jacket and canvas trousers of more than Dutch capacity. Stock he disdained, and waistcoat: the most fastidious lady might have beheld with admiration that muscular chest and neck bristled with heroic hair. Between the commander’s lips breathed a cigar, and in one hand he held a smart box of the commodity, fresh as imported from the spicy islands where springs the fragrant weed. With head a little declined, and brow contracted in solicitude respecting the important choice, the illustrious General seemed, at the moment I entered, to be engaged in picking out another of the same. Mark the noble simplicity of a great mind stooping to the commonest employment of an ordinary shop-boy! Having made his election, he handed the Havannah to a person who stood beside him, and whom till now I had not perceived, ejaculating as he did so, ‘Damn it! I think that’ll be a good ‘un!’

"'G-d, so it is!' was his companion's answer when, after a moment's pause, he had tried the sweet Virginian. I looked now at this second speaker. Townshend, it was too much! At Enara's chair back there stood a man in a shabby brown surtout, with his hands stuck in the hind pockets thereof, wearing a stiff stock, out of which projected a long and dark dried vinegar physiognomy shaded with grizzly whiskers and overshaded with still more grizzly hair. The fellow was so ugly, at first sight I thought it must be a stranger. A second glance assured me that it was General Lord Hartford. What could I do? The blaze of patrician dignity quite overpowered me. However, I made shift to advance.

" 'How d'ye do, Sir William?' said Enara. 'Recalled, you find? I regret the necessity, which doubtless will be a great disappointment to you.' I ventured to ask in what respect? He looked at me as if I had put the question in Greek. 'As a man of honour, sir, I should suppose — but most probably you are consoling yourself under the disappointment by the prospect of a speedy return. We shall see, sir; I will speak to the Duke in your behalf. Your services have given me much satisfaction.'

"I bowed, of course, and then stood to hear what more was coming, but the General seemed to have said his say. Lord Hartford now grunted something unintelligible, though with the most dignified air possible, his under lip being scornfully protruded to support the cigar and his branded brow corrugated over his eyes with the sour malignant look of a fiend. He seemed to breathe asthmatically, I suppose in consequence of that wound he received last winter. Finding that there was no more talk to be had for love or money, I rose to go. In reply to my farewell genuflection Enara nodded sharply, and muttered a word or two about hoping to see me again soon and having a spot of special work cut out purposely for me. Hartford bent his stiff back with a stern haughty bow that made me feel strongly inclined to walk round behind him and trip up his heels."

I laughed as Sir William closed his narration.

"Well, you do give it them properly, Colonel!" said I. "A set of pompous prigs! I like to hear them dished now and then. And how did you get on at Adrianopolis? I suppose you saw the premier?"

"Yes, I went to the Treasury; and I'd scarcely got within the door of his parlour there before he began in his woman's voice, 'Sir William, Sir William, let me hear what you have been doing. Give a clear account, sir, of your proceedings. General Enara's despatches are not sufficiently detailed, sir; they are too brief, too laconic. The government of the country is kept in the dark, sir — comparatively speaking that is — at a time, too, when every facility for obtaining information ought to be afforded it. I wish to know every particular concerning that late affair at Cuttal-Curafee.' He stopped a minute, and looked at me. I looked at him, and sat down, after settling the cushion on my chair. The pause being a rather lengthened one, I remarked that it was a fine morning. 'What?' said he, pricking up his ears. 'The morning is charmingly cool and dry,' was my answer. 'Is it possible?' exclaimed Warner. 'Sir, I say, is it possible that the trite remarks of the most indolent and vacant time-killer should be the first and only words on the lips of a man just returned from the active service of his king, in a country reeking with rapine and carnage and teeming with the hideous pollutions of pagan savages?'

"'What do you wish me to say?' I asked, taking up a pamphlet that lay on the table and glancing at the title-page. 'Sir,' said the premier, very lofty and impressive. 'Sir, my time is valuable. If your business with me is not of so important a nature as to require immediate attention we will defer it for the present.' Endeavouring to suppress a yawn, and slightly stretching my limbs — not inelegant, are they Townshend? — I replied: 'Business, sir? Your honour, I hardly know what I called upon you for. It was merely, I think, to pass away an idle hour. Can you tell me what the newest fashions are? I'm quite out just now in dress, for really one sees little in that line at Cuttal-Curafee.' 'Sir,' replied Warner, 'I wish you a very good morning. Mr Jones will show you the door.' 'Good morning, sir,' said I, and I left the Treasury as good as kicked out."

"Well, and where did you go next?"

"I went to a perfumers, and bought a few trifles in the way of gloves and combs. On returning, whom do you think I met?"

"Can't guess."

"Why, none other than the President to the Board of Trade."

"What! Edward Percy?"

"Yes; he stopt in the street and began: 'William! I say, William, who sent for you back? I know it for a fact, sir, that you sent up a puling memorial soliciting a recall. You did, sir, don't begin to deny it.'

"'Not,' I answered. 'Good morning, Edward! Charming seasonable weather! Take care of your lungs, lad — always pthisically inclined. I would recommend balsam of horehound — excellent remedy for pulmonary complaints! Good morning, lad!' And gracefully waving my hand, I passed on."

Here a waiter came in with wax-lights and a supper-tray. Sir William invited me to partake of his roast chicken and oyster-sauce, but I declined, as I had ordered supper on my own account in a room below. We separated therefore for the night, after shaking hands in the Colonel's peculiar way — that is, a cool presentation of each individual's fore-finger.

CHAPTER 6

Charles Townshend and Sir William Percy engage in a flirtation

The next morning rose as lovely and calm a day as ever ushered in the steps of summer. Wakened by the sunshine — I saw it streaming in through the stately windows of my chamber between the interstices of the carefully drawn curtains - my heart was rejoiced at the sight, and still more so when, on rising and withdrawing that veil, I beheld, in the lofty and dappled arch of a few marbled clouds, in the serenity and freshness of the air, a soft promise of settled summer. The storms, the fitful showers and chilly gusts, to which for the last month we had been subject were all gone. They had swept the sky and left it placid behind them.

It took me a full half hour to dress, and another half hour to view myself over from head to foot in the splendid full-length mirror with which my chamber was furnished. Really, when I saw the neat figure therein reflected, genteelly attired in a fashionable morning suit, with light soft hair parted on one side and brushed into glossy curls, I thought, "there are worse men in the world than Charles Townshend." Having descended from my chamber, I made my way once again into the bustling, dirty inn-passage before described. It was bustling still, but not so dirty as it had been the night before, for a scullion wench was on her knees with a huge pail, scouring away for the bare life. A gentleman's carriage was at the door. Two or three servants were lifting into it some luggage, and a family party stood waiting to enter — a lady, a gentleman, and some children. The children, indeed, were already mounted behind, and a stout rosy Angrian brood they looked. Their mother was receiving the parting civilities of a fine, tall, showy woman, most superbly dressed, who had come sailing out of a side room to see them off. It was Mrs Stancliffe, the hostess of this great house. I went up to her when the carriage had at length driven away, and paid my respects, for I had some little significance with her. She received and answered my attentions much in the tone and with the air of the Countess of Northangerland, only more civilly. Let not the Countess hear me, but it is a fact that she and the landlady bear a strong resemblance to each other, being nearly equal in point of longitude, latitude and circumference. Big women both! awful women! In temper, too, they are somewhat like, as the following anecdote will shew.

A public dinner being given a few months since by the Corporation of Zamorna to their Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Stuartville, and to Sir Wilson Thornton, in honour of the eminent services rendered by those officers to their country in the war campaign, the whole conduct of culinary matters was of course consigned to the superintendence of Mrs Stancliffe. It so happened that, by some oversight or other, the individual with whom she had contracted for a supply of game failed in his duty. On the great day of the feast, the tables were spread in the court-house. Stancliffe's plate, conveyed over the way in iron chests, shone in tasteful arrangement and more than princely splendour on the ample boards. The gentlemen of the province were collected from far and near. The hour of six struck; the soup and fish were on the table.

The Lord Lieutenant walked in amidst deafening cheers, looking as much the fine gentleman as ever, and smiling and bowing his thanks to his townsmen. General Sir William Thornton followed and Edward Percy Esqre, M.P.Last, though not least, the proud, bitter owner of Hartford Hall entered, with a face like an unbleached holland sheet (it was after his wound), supported between Sir John Kirkwall and Wm Moore Esqre, an eminent barrister. A blessing being solemnly pronounced by the Right Reverend Dr Kirkwall, primate of Zamorna, and Amen responded by Dr Cook, vicar of Edwardston, all fell to. Fish and soup being despatched, game ought to have entered. But instead of it, in walked Mrs Stancliffe, grandly dressed, with a turban and a plume and a diamond aigrette like any countess in the gallery. She went to the back of Lord Stuartville's chair.

"My lord," said she, with great dignity of manner and in a voice sufficiently audible to be heard by everyone present. "I ought to apologize to your lordship for the delay of the second course, but my servants have failed in their duty and it is not forthcoming. However I have punished the insult thus offered to your lordship and the gentlemen of Zamorna. I have revolutionized my household. Before to-morrow night, not an ostler or a chamber-maid of the present set shall remain in my employment."

The bland earl, passing his hand over his face to conceal a smile, said something gallant and polite by way of consolation to the indignant lady, and General Thornton assured her that such was the luxurious profusion and exquisite quality of her other provisions, two or three hares and partridges would never be missed. Mrs Stancliffe, however, refused to be comforted. Without at all relaxing the solemn concern of her countenance, she dropped a stately curtsey to the company and sailed away. She did revolutionize her household, and a pretty revolution it was, never such a helter-skelter turn out of waiters, barmaids, ostlers, boots and coachmen seen in this world before. Ever since this imperial move she has been popularly termed the Duchess of Zamorna! So Lord Stuartville delights to call her, even to her face. This is a liberty, however, taken by none but his gallant lordship. If any other man were to venture so far she'd soon spurt out in his face.

I had scarcely finished my breakfast when a waiter brought me a billet to the following effect: "Dear Townshend, will you take a walk with me this morning? yours etc. W.Percy." I scribbled for answer: "Dear Baronet, with all the xcing. Yours etc. C. Townshend."

We met each other in the passage; and arm in arm, each with a light cane in his hand, started on our jaunt.

Zamorna was all astir. Half her population seemed poured out into the wide new streets. Not a trace remained of last night's storm. Summer was reigning with ardour in the perfectly still air and unclouded sunshine. Ladies in white dresses flitted along the streets and crowded the magnificent and busy shops. Before us rose the new minster, lifting its beautiful front and rich fretted pinnacles almost as radiant as marble against a sky of southern purity. Its bells, sweet-toned as Bochea's harp, rang out the morning chimes high in air, and young Zamorna seemed wakened to quicker life by the voice of that lofty music. How had the city so soon sprung to perfect vigour and beauty from the iron crush of Simpson's hoof? Here was no mark of recent tyranny, no trace of grinding exaction, no symptom of a lately repulsed invasion, of a now existing heavy national debt, nothing of squalor or want or suffering. Lovely women, stately mansions, busy mills and gorgeous shops appeared on all sides.

When we first came out the atmosphere was quite clear. As we left the west end and approached the bridge and river, whose banks were piled with enormous manufactories and bristled with mill-chimneys, tall, stately, and steep as slender towers, we breathed a denser air. Columns of smoke as black as soot rose thick and solid from the chimneys of two vast erections - Edward Percy's, I believe, and Mr Sydenham's — and, slowly spreading, darkened the sky above all Zamorna.

"That's Edward's tobacco pipe," said Sir William, looking up, as we passed close under his brother's mill-chimney, whose cylindrical pillar rose three hundred feet into the air. Having crossed the bridge, we turned into the noble road which leads down to Hartford, and now the full splendour of the June morning began to disclose itself round us.

Immediately before us, the valley of the Olympian opened broad and free; the road with gentle descent wound white as milk down among the rich pastures and waving woods of the vale. My heart expanded as I looked at the path we were to tread, edging the feet of the gentle hills whose long sweep subsided to level on the banks of the river — the glorious river! brightly flowing, in broad quiet waves and with a sound of remote seas, through scenery as green as Eden. We were almost at the gates of Hartford Park. The house was visible far away among its sunny grounds, and its beech-woods, extending to the road, lifted high above the causeway a silver shade. This was not a scene of solitude. Carriages smoothly rolled past us every five minutes, and stately cavaliers galloped by on their noble chargers.

We had walked on for a quarter of an hour, almost in silence, when Sir William suddenly exclaimed,

"Townshend, what a pretty girl!"

"Where?" I asked.

He pointed to a figure a little in advance of us: a young lady, mounted on a spirited little pony, and followed by a servant, also mounted. I quickened my pace to get a nearer view. She wore a purple habit, long and sweeping; it disclosed a fine, erect and rounded form, set off to advantage by the grace of her attitude and the ease of all her movements. When I first looked, her face was turned away, and concealed partly by the long curls of her hair and partly by her streaming veil, but she presently changed her position, and then I saw a fine decided profile, a bright eye, and a complexion of exquisite bloom. From the first moment I knew she was not a stranger.

"I've seen that face before," said I to Sir William. Then, as my recollection cleared, I added, "It was last night in the mercer's shop opposite Stancliffe's." For in fact this was the very girl whom I had watched from the window.

"I, too, have seen her before," returned the baronet. "I know her name. It is Miss Moore, the daughter of the noted barrister."

"What!" I exclaimed. "Jane — the beautiful Angrian?" Perhaps my readers may recollect a description of this young lady which appeared some time since, in a sort of comparison between Eastern and Western women.

Sir William proceeded. "I saw her last autumn at the musical festival which was held in September in the minster at Zamorna. You remember the anecdote concerning her which was told in the papers at that time?"

"Can't say I do."

"Why, people said that she had particularly attracted the attention of His Majesty, who attended the Festival, and that he has bestowed on her the title of the Rose of Zamorna."

"Was it true?"

"No further than this: she sat full in his sight and he stared at her as everybody else did, for she really was a very imposing figure in her white satin dress and stately plume of snowy ostrich feathers. He asked her name, too, and when somebody told him, he said 'By God, she's the Rose of Zamorna! I don't see another woman to come near her.' That was all. I daresay he never thought of her afterwards. She's not one of his sort."

"Well, but," continued I, "I should like to see a little more of her. Heigho! I believe I'm in love!"

"So am I," said Percy, echoing the sigh. "Head over ears! Look now, did you ever see a better horse-woman? What grace and spirit! But there's that cursed angle in the road, it will hide her. There, she's turned it. I declare, my sun is eclipsed. Is not yours, Townshend?"

"Yes, totally; but can't we follow her, Colonel? Where does she live?"

"Not far off. I really think we might manage it, though I never was introduced to her in my life, nor you either, I dare say."

"To my sorrow, never."

"Well then, have you any superfluous modesty? Because if you have, put it into your waistcoat pocket and button your coat over it. Now, man, are you eased of the commodity?"

"Perfectly."

"Come along, then. Her father is a barrister and attending the assizes at Angria. Consequently, he is not at home. What so natural as for two elegant young men like you and I to be wanting him on business, respecting a mortgage — on a friend's estate, possibly, or probably on our own — or a lawsuit concerning our rich old uncle's contested will? The servants having answered that Mr Moore is not at home, can't we inquire for his daughter (she has no mother by the bye), to give her some particular charge which we won't entrust to menials? Now, man, have you got your cue?"

I put my thumb to the side of my nose, and we mutually strode on.

Mr Moore's house is a lease-hold on Lord Hartford's property, and he has the character in Zamorna of being a toady of that nobleman's. The barrister, though an able man, is certainly, according to report, but lightly burdened with principle, and it is possible that with his large fortune he may have hopes of one day contesting the election of the city with its present representative — in which case Lord Hartford's influence would be no feather in the scale of success.

"We enter here," said Percy, pausing at a green gate which opened sweetly beneath an arch of laburnums upon a lawn like velvet. A white-walled villa stood before us, bosomed in a blooming shrubbery, with green walks between the rose-trees and a broad carriage-road winding through all to the door. In that bright hour (it was now nearly noon) nothing could be more soothing than its aspect of shade and retirement. One almost preferred it to the wide demesne and princely mansion which it fronted with such modest dignity. Arrived at the door, Sir William knocked. A footman opened it.

"Is Mr Moore within?"

"No, sir; master left home last week for the assizes."

Sir William affected disappointment. He turned, and made a show of consulting me in a whisper. Then again, addressing the servant: "Miss Moore is at home, perhaps?" "Yes, sir."

"Then be kind enough to give in our names to her — Messrs Clarke and Gardiner — and say we wish to see her for an instant on a matter of some importance"

The servant bowed, and politely requesting us to walk forward, threw open the door of a small sitting-room. The apartment was prettily furnished. Its single large window, flung wide open, admitted the faint gale which now and then breathed over the languor of the burning noon. This window looked specially pleasant, for it had a deep recess and a seat pillowed with a white cushion, over which waved the festoons of a muslin curtain. Seating ourselves within this embayment, we leaned over the sill, and scented the jessamine whose tendrils were playing in the breeze around the casement.

"This is Miss Moore's own parlour," said Sir William pointing to a little work-table with scissors, thimble and lace upon it, and then, reverting his eye to a cabinet piano with an open music book above its key-board. "I always appropriate when I'm left alone in a lady's boudoir," he continued; and getting up softly, he was on the point of prigging something from the work-table, when a voice slightly hummed in the passage, and without any other sound, either of footstep or rustling dress, Miss Moore like an apparition dawned upon us. The Colonel turned, and she was there. He looked at her, or rather through her, before he spoke. Really, she seemed to be haloed — there was something so radiant in her whole appearance. Not the large dark eyes of the west, nor the large even arch of the eye-brow; not the enthusiastic and poetic look, nor the braided or waving locks of solemn shade; but just a girl in white, plump and very tall. Her riding-habit was gone, and her beaver; and golden locks (the word golden I use in courtesy, mind, reader) drooped on the whitest neck in Angria. Her complexion seemed to glow: it was so fair, so blooming. She had very rosy lips and a row of small even teeth sparkling like pearls; her nose was prominent and straight and her eyes very spirited. Regularity of feature by no means formed her chief charm: it was the perfection of a lively complexion and handsome figure.

The lady looked very grave; her curtsey was dignified and distant.

“Permit me, madam,” said the Colonel, “to introduce myself and my friend. I am Mr Clarke, this gentleman, Mr Gardiner. We are both clients of your father. You will have heard him mention the lawsuit now pending between Clarke and Gardiner versus Jowett.”

“I daresay,” returned Miss Moore, “though I don’t recollect just now. Will you be seated, gentlemen?”

She took her own seat on a little couch near the work-table and, resting her elbow on the arm, looked very graceful and majestic.

“A warm morning,” observed Sir William, by way of keeping up the conversation.

“Very,” she replied demurely.

“A pretty place Mr Moore has here,” said I.

“Rather,” was Miss Moore’s answer; then, carelessly taking up her work, she continued. “How can I serve you, gentlemen?”

Sir William rubbed his hand. He was obliged to recur to business.

“Why, madam, will you be so good as to say to Mr Moore when he returns that James Cartwright, the witness who was so reluctant to come up, has at length consented to appear, and that consequently the trial may proceed, if he thinks proper, next month.”

“Very well,” said she. Then, still bending her eyes upon the lace, she continued. “How far have you come to tell my father this? Do you reside in the neighbourhood?”

“No, madam, but we are both on a visit there at present. We came to look after some little mill-property we possess in Zamorna.”

You must have had a hot walk,” pursued Miss Moore. “Will you take some refreshment?”

We both declined, but she took no notice of our refusal, and, touching a bell, ordered the servant who answered it to bring wine etc. She then quietly returned to her lace-work. We might have been lap-dogs or children for all the discomposure our presence seemed to occasion her. Sir William was a match for her, however. He sat, one leg crossed over the other, regarding her with a hard stare. I believe she knew his eyes were fixed upon her, but she kept her countenance admirably. At last he said, “I have had the pleasure of seeing you before, madam.”

“Probably, sir; I don’t always stay at home.”

“It was in Zamorna Minster last September.”

She did colour a little, and laughed, for she recollected, doubtless, the admiration with which her name had been mentioned at that time in the journals, and the thousand eyes which had been fixed upon her as the centre of attraction as she sat in her white satin robe high placed in the lofty gallery of the minster.

“A great many people saw me at that time,” she answered, “and talked about me too, for my size gave me wonderful distinction.”

“Nothing but size?” asked Sir William, and his look expressed the rest.

“Will you take some salmagundi, Mr Clarke?” said she, rising and approaching the tray which the servant had just placed on the table. Mr Clarke expressed his willingness; so did Mr Gardiner. She helped both, plentifully, and they fell to.

A knock came to the door. She stept to the window and looked out. I saw her nod and smile, and her smile was by no means a simper: it showed her front teeth, and made her eyes shine very pleasantly. She walked into the passage, and opened the door herself.

“Now, Jane, how are you?” said a masculine voice. Percy winked at me.

“How are you?” she answered. “And why are you come here this hot day?”

“What! you’re not glad to see me, I guess,” returned the visitor.

“Yes I am, because you look so cool! I’m sorry we’ve no fire to warm you, but you can step into the kitchen.”

“Come, be steady! Moore’s at Angria, varry like?”

“Varry like he is — but you may walk forwards notwithstanding.” Then, in a lower voice, “I’ve two chits in my parlour — very like counting-house clerks or young surgeons or something of that kind. Just come and look at them.”

Percy and I arrested the victual on the way to our mouths. We were wroth.

“The jade!” said Percy.

I said nothing. However, a more urgent cause of disturbance was at hand. That voice which had been speaking sounded but too familiar, both to Sir William and myself, and now the speaker was approaching with measured step and the clank of a spur. He continued talking as he came: “I’ve come to dine with you, Jane, and then I’ve to step over to Hartford Hall about some business. I’ll call again at six o’clock, and Julia says you’ve to come back with me to Girnington.”

“Whether I will or not, I suppose, General?”

“Whether you will or not.”

And here Sir Wilson Thornton paused, for he was in the room, and his glance had encountered us, seated at the table and tucking in to the wines with which Miss Moore had provided us. I don't think either Sir William or I changed countenance. General Thornton's eye always assumes a cold annoyed expression when it sees me. I met him freely: "Ho! General! how d'ye do? My word, you do look warm with walking! Is your face swelled?"

"Not 'at I know on, Mr Townshend," he answered coldly, and, bowing to Sir William, he took his seat.

"My dear General," I continued. "Don't on any account drink water in your present state. You seem to me to be running thin! I wish you may not catch your death of cold! Dear, dear - what a pity you should appear such a figure before a beautiful young lady like Miss Moore!"

"If I'm any vex to Miss Moore she'll be good enough to tell me of it without yer interference," said the General, much disturbed.

"Had you ever the scarlet fever?" I inquired anxiously.

"I cannot see how my health concerns you," he answered.

"Or the sweating sickness?" I continued.

The General brushed the dust from his coat-sleeve and, turning briskly to Miss Moore, asked her if these were the lads she had taken for two young surgeons.

"Yes," said she, "but I begin to think I was in the wrong."

"I would like to know what nonsense brought 'em here," said Thornton. "They're no more surgeons nor I am. Percy, I wonder ye'll go looking abâat t' country wi' such a nout as Townshend."

"Percy!" exclaimed Miss Moore. "O, it is Sir William Percy! I thought I had seen that gentleman before. It was at a review: he was one of the royal staff."

The Colonel bowed. "The greatest compliment I ever had paid me," said he, "that Miss Moore should single me out from among thousands and recollect my face."

"Just because it struck me for its likeness to Lord Northangerland's," replied she.

"From whatever cause, madam, the honour is mine, and I am proud of it."

He searched her countenance with one of those sentimental and sinister glances which, when they flicker in his eyes, do indeed make him strongly resemble his father. I don't think he was pleased with the result of his scrutiny. Miss Moore's aspect remained laughing and open as ever. Had she blushed or shrunk away, Sir William would have triumphed. But hers was no heart to be smitten with sudden, secret and cankering love — the sort of love he often aims to inspire.

"Come, Townshend," said he, drawing on his gloves. "We will go."

"I think you'd better, lad," observed Thornton. "Neither you nor Townshend have done yourselves any credit by this spree."

We both were bold enough to approach Miss Moore; and she was good-natured or thoughtless enough to shake hands with us freely, and say that when her father came home she should be happy to see his clients Messrs Clarke and Gardiner again, either about the lawsuit or to take a friendly cup of tea with them. The girl, to do her justice, seemed to have some tact. I don't think I shall soon forget her very handsome face, or the sound of her voice and the pleasant expression of her eyes.

As we two passed again through the embowered gate and stept out into the now burning road, I asked Sir William if he was smitten.

"Not I," said he. "There's no mind there, and very little heart. If ever I marry, rest satisfied my choice will not fall upon the Rose of Zamorna."

Yet something had evidently gone wrong with the young Colonel. His vanity was wounded, or he was vexed at the interference of General Thornton. Whatever the cause was, certain it he grew mightily disagreeable, snapping on all sides and snarling sourly at everything. We had not walked above a quarter of a mile, when he said he had business which called him elsewhere, and he must now bid me good-day. The baronet turned into a retired lane branching from the main road, and I continued my course straight on.

Jane Moore, staying at Girnington with General and Lady Thornton, sings stirring songs of the charge of the men of Ardsley and of the siege of Evesham in the recent Angrian war. Castlereagh, Earl of Stuartville brings news that Zamorna is expected in Zamorna City next day, and that the populace, who are furious that he has been visiting Northangerland, are threatening to riot.

"The rumour of invaders through all Zamorna ran.
Then Turner Grey his watch-word gave:
Ho! Ardsley to the van!
Lord Hartford called his yeomen, and Warner raised his clan,
But first in fiercest gallop rushed Ardsley to the van!
On came Medina's turbans, Sir John hurled his ban:
'Mid the thousand hearts who scorned it still Ardsley kept the van!
The freshening gales of battle a hundred standards fan,
And doubt not Ardsley's pennon floats foremost in the van!
Cold on the field of carnage they have fallen man for man,
And no more in march or onslaught will Ardsley lead the van!
Loud wail lamenting trumpets for all that gallant clan,
And Angrians shout their signal:
Ho! Ardsley to the van!

Give them the grave of honour where their native river ran,
Let them rest! They died like heroes
In the battle's fiery van!

And when their names are uttered, this hope may cheer each man:
That land shall never perish
Where such true hearts led the van!"

The aged halls of Girnington echoed to this heroic song, and a few notes even strayed through the open windows of the drawing-room into the twilight park. It was still evening. A heaven unclouded smiled to the ascent of a moon undimmed. That summer day was gone, and while the burning west closed its gates upon her departure, softer paths opened in the east for the steps of a mild summer night.

Is that horseman thinking of the glory which smiles above those trees through which his form glances so fast? Pressing up the avenue, he never turns to look from what source stream those silver rays which fall upon him at every opening of the giant boughs. Yet no heavy care absorbs his thoughts, for he lifts his head to listen when that music comes across his way, and he smiles when at its close a laugh is heard from the mansion at whose door he now dismounts.

General and Lady Thornton sat vis à vis in two opposite arm-chairs by a window of their saloon. The softening light stole upon Julia, and in Sir Wilson's eyes made her look like an angel. In the background, and almost lost in the dusk, a third person sat at the piano, playing and talking at the same time. The voice sufficiently indicated her identity. It was Miss Moore, of Kirkham Lodge, Hartford, who had accompanied Colonel Thornton according to his invitation.

"General," she was saying, in answer to some bantering speech of the worthy baronet's, "I am afraid I shall die an old maid."

"It'll be your own fault if you do, I think, Jane."

"Well, but nobody ever made me an offer yet, positively."

"Because you're so proud and saucy," said Julia. "You frighten them away."

"Indeed, you're mistaken! There's one man, at least, whom I've done my very best to win."

"Who is that?"

"Lord Hartford. Now, I've long been in love with that man. Seriously, there's nobody I should like half so well to be married to — and I've danced with him and smiled at him and sung him all my most triumphant songs in my finest style, without as yet gaining even an outwork of the fortress. Once I thought I had made some little impression. It was after singing that Ardsley song you've heard just now. He came and stood behind me, and asked for it again. The same night, he offered to let me have his carriage to go home, for our own was engaged with my father in one of his circuits; and the next morning he actually walked down to the Lodge to breakfast with me. How I did exert myself to please! I'm sure I was most fascinating! He went home, and I fully expected to receive a proposal in form before night; but no. I'm afraid I had overshot the mark. At any rate, nothing came of it."

"The Earl of Stuartville," said a servant, opening the door, and the Earl of Stuartville walked in.

"Good evening, Thornton," said his lordship. "All in shadow, I see — no candles. Perfectly romantic! Is that Lady Julia, covered with moonlight? Good heavens! My heart's gone! Who ever saw anything so perfectly transcendent? Thornton, you'd better challenge me forthwith!"

The Earl threw himself into a chair next to Lady Julia, and, stretching out one elegant leg, leaned towards her like an enamoured Frenchman.

"What on earth has brought you here, Castlereagh?" said her ladyship. "Excuse me for forgetting the new title — but you know, Castle, that former name must be endeared to me, for with it are connected all our earliest associations."

"Of the days when your ladyship's pet-cognomen for me was man-monkey."

"Happy days, those, Castlereagh!" sighed Julia. "You'd nothing then to do but to dress and dance and dine. No Secretary of State, no General of Division business, no county politics to control or court intrigues to counteract."

"True, Lady Julia; I used to turn out of bed at two o'clock in the afternoon, dress till four, lounge till seven, dine till nine, and dance till six next morning."

"You did, my dear lord; that was just a chart of your life. Alas! did I ever think the owner of the prettiest fancy waistcoat and the best perfumed pair of mustaches in Verdopolis would ever expose his elegance to the rigours of a winter campaign, his eye-glass to the danger of being broken in a field of battle!"

Here the chat was hushed, lost in a solemn burst of music from the piano and the reveille of a thrilling voice.

"Deep the Cirhala flows,
And Evesham o'er it swells,
The last night she shall smile upon
In silence round her dwells!
All lean upon their spears,
All rest within, around,
But some shall know to-morrow night
A slumber far more sound!
The summer dew unseen
On fort and turret shines:
What dew shall fall when battle's voice
Is heard along the lines?
Trump and triumphant drum
The conflict won shall spread:
Who then will turn aside and say
We mourn the noble dead?
Strong hands, heroic hearts

Shall homeward throng again,
Returned from battle's bloody grasp:
Where will they leave the slain?
Beneath a foreign sod,
Beside an alien wave,
Watched by the martyr's holy God,
Who guards the martyr's grave!"

Miss Moore rose and came forward as she concluded the song.

"Now, my lord," said she, addressing the Earl of Stuartville. "You see, I have forced you to hear, if you will not see me. Don't apologize! I am offended, of course. It will avail you nothing to say you did not observe me, it was dark, etc. You should have perceived my presence by instinct."

"What!" returned his lordship. "I suppose the Rose of Zamorna ought to be known by its fragrance. Miss Jane, sit down. I have something to tell you; something which — I can answer for it — will make your heart beat high with indignation."

"Does it relate to the reason which has brought you here?" she asked, taking her seat on an ottoman near him.

"Exactly so; and you must needs think it an important circumstance which should bring me ten miles at this time of night."

"Why then, let's hear it, without any more ado," interposed Thornton. "Did aught go wrong at the magistrates' meeting after I left them?"

"No," returned the earl, "except that Edward Percy and I had some sparring about a case of illegitimacy. However, that was all settled; we'd cleared scores, and Edward was just turning down his final glass of brandy and water, when Sydenham, who was standing by the court-house window, remarked that there seemed to be a crowd collecting at the lower end of the street — and as he spoke we heard a yell just for all the world like one of their election cries. I desired Mackay to go immediately and see what there was to do, but before he could get out five or six gentlemen of Zamorna rushed in a body up the steps of the magistrates' room, and the foremost announced, with more glee than grief, he believed there was going to be a riot. 'What about?' I asked. Nobody answered, and some of us turned pale, for all at once a great rush thundered up the street, and in two minutes the whole front of Stancliffe's and the court-house was blocked up by a mass of howling ragamuffins."

"Did they break t' windows?" asked Thornton.

"Not they; there was not a stone thrown, and indeed, they were not thinking of us. Their faces were all turned the other way, lifted up to the front windows of the hotel. They were yelling terribly, but for my life I could not tell what they said. However, you may be sure we set sharply about the business of swearing in special constables, and a message was despatched to the barracks to have the soldiers ready. Meantime I and Percy went out onto the steps and shouted to the crowd to disperse, but they answered us with a loud roar of ‘Down with Northangerland! No French! No Ardrahians!’ ‘Well, my lads,’ I said, ‘Do you call us French? Do you say we’re for Northangerland and Ardrah? If that be all, I’ll join you in a hearty groan against all three — and then disperse, and go home quietly.’ And so the groan was given, and a tremendous rumble it was; and Edward, stepping forward and sticking his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, shouted out, ‘Now, lads, let’s have a yell — the highest you can raise — set apart entirely in honour of the old harlot-ridden buck Northangerland! Lift it up, lads! I’ll set the time!’ He did so, and the very steps he stood on quaked to the hellish sound they raised in unison. ‘Fellow-countrymen!’ said Edward. ‘I’m proud to see such a spirit amongst you! Now go home. You’ve done enough for one day.’ But they did not stir. They only answered by a confused and horrible jabber which it was impossible to comprehend, and still they looked up at the hotel, as if there was something there they could have liked to have gotten out. ‘Do you think Northangerland is at Stancliffe’s?’ I asked. ‘No, no,’ was the answer. ‘We’d have had blood if he were!’ and a single voice added, ‘But that dog, his son-in-law, is.’”

Castlereagh paused. This announcement included much. Thornton started from his chair, and strode once or twice through the room; Julia looked troubled, and uttered some faint exclamation; as for Miss Moore, she said nothing, but even in the pale moonlight it might be seen that she coloured. The Earl went on. “When we heard this, Edward Percy just walked back into the court-house, sat down, and said he wished he might die if he lifted a hand to prevent any thing that might happen. I stood over him and swore in good earnest, ‘If what we had heard was true, and if the crowd did not disperse immediately, I’d have three hundred cavalry from the barracks and ride them down like vermin.’ ‘By God you shall not,’ said Edward. ‘The soldiers have no right to control the people, d-d d-d red tyrants!’ I said my measures should be vigorous and that I would not be restrained by his cursed malignity. I got on horseback and dashed through the crowd over the way to Stancliffe’s. I went in. They were all in some panic, as you may suppose, but I sent for the mistress and asked her if the Duke was really here. She said no, but that the Earl of Richton’s carriage had arrived an hour ago, and that had given rise to the rumour. I asked her if the ambassador were in it, but she said, only his family physician, Dr Morrison, who had brought word that his grace had left Selden House and would be in Zamorna to-morrow at twelve o’clock. Richton was travelling with him, and Morrison preceded them by a day’s journey to prepare the way. Furnished with this information, I went out again, told the people to go now and be sure to come to the same spot at noon to-morrow, when Zamorna would be there to meet them in the body. ‘And then,’ I said, ‘let us see what you’ll do. At present he’s two hundred miles off.’ They took the word, and in a few hours the street was clear. Now, Thornton, what think you of the prospect? You and I must be at Stancliffe’s betimes in the morning.

As for Edward Percy, he says he'll lie in bed all the day to-morrow."

"Let him lie there and be d-d!" muttered Thornton. "I care naught about him, and t' Duke deserves what he's like to get. He sudn't vex folk so. What need had he to go three or four-hundred mile to see an ow'd worn out rake? Edward's raight enow abâat that. He's allus brewing bitter drink for hisseln, and now he mun sup it for aught I know. I wish he'd his raight wit. Where's Hartford?"

"Just returned to the Hall from Gazemba. But he'll be of no use. He'll go to bed too."

"I niver knew sich bother," continued the worthy General. "I hate t' thoughts o' folk being ridden down wi' troopers. It's not natural like. But if they mess wi' them they sudn't do, I care n't if t' cannon be pointed at 'em. Hasaiver ya mun flay 'em first Castlereagh — flay 'em first and let's hear what he says hisseln when he comes. Happen if he once gets among 'em they'll think better on't."

"I hope they will," echoed Julia, wringing her hands. "I hope they will. Do you think, Thornton, they'll try to do him harm?"

"Who cares?" answered Sir William gruffly.

"I am sure you do," said she, "for all you're so cross about it."

"Julia, be quiet!" returned he.

Julia was quiet; and Miss Moore looked at her from under the dark shadow of her eyelashes with an expression almost of scorn — a momentary expression which vanished instantly.

"The Duke will pass Girnington gates on his way to the city," she observed in an indifferent tone.

"Yes," said Castlereagh. "But you will hardly distinguish the carriage if you watch for it. It is quite a plain one, like any private gentleman's with six horses and three postillions."

"Perhaps one might distinguish the Duke himself," she replied, regarding Castlereagh with the same side-glance out of the corner of her eye.

"Jane, talk sense!" said Thornton testily, and she raised her head and fixed on him a look kindling with sudden astonishment and anger. But she did not speak, and by biting in her under-lip seemed to control the emotion which was darkening her face with crimson. Thornton now asked Lord Stuartville to step with him into his study, and the party broke up.

CHAPTER 7

Charles Townshend watches Zamorna's return to Zamorna City

All business seemed suspended on the morning of the 26th of June. A spirit of excitement pervaded the population of Zamorna, as though at the time of a general election. Few ladies were to be seen in the streets, but groups of gentlemen or mechanics loitered by every lamp-post. Most of the mills were idle, for the men would not come to their work. At ten o'clock the court-house doors were thrown open, and, contrary to Lord Stuartville's prediction, Lord Hartford's carriage was the first that drew up at the steps below. Special constables began to appear, leaving the magistrate's room and crossing the street to Stancliffe's. As noon approached, the crowd thickened. A dense mass began to form in front of the hotel.

It was now that from a window in the second story I saw the whole. It was a fine day — the sun burning high, the sky of its deepest summer azure — but nobody seemed to feel the scorching heat. Harried expectation appeared in every face. This would have been a capital position for a stranger, for the greatest men of the province crossed the street at every instant. General Thornton, I saw, had arrived, for he was standing on the inner steps, and pointing out to Mr Walker, a principal mill owner, a heavy red flag which hung stirless from a tall banner-staff held by two grimy operatives just opposite. As the flag occasionally deployed its sullen folds, rather to the swaying of its pole than to any breeze felt in the sultry air, it revealed these words: 'Angria scorns Traitors — Northangerland to the block'; on the reverse: 'No Percy influence'. Lord Stuartville walked up, and I heard him say distinctly, "We'll not put down that banner! It has a good motto." Indeed, it was evident that the nobility and gentry of the town were by no means at war with the lower orders. On the contrary, they were pleased with this demonstration of feeling against the arch-enemy, whose stinging insults were fresh in the memory and keen in the hearts of each. They only wished to keep this feeling within bounds to prevent any unseemly and impolitic ebullition.

Well, time passed on. The tumult swelled and the crowd thickened. The whole air seemed hoarse with sound. Impatient expectation was at its height. People looked up to the town-clock, which shewed, in vivid sunlight, its hand on the stroke of twelve: another second, and every ear heard the deep, strong stroke of iron reverberate on the air. From Trinity Church and the minster it pealed more musically. Their chime was hardly hushed, when a few flags on the farthest outskirts of the crowd were seen to wave agitatedly. They crowded forward, and then were hurried back. A wild, deepening sound arose. One felt a sensation of panic, as it rushed on through the swaying, agitated ranks, gathering strength in its rapid approach. At last, close under the Hotel windows, "He is coming - he is coming!" was shouted from a hundred voices. Within the house the announcement rose, and footsteps stamped up the staircase. My chamber door burst open, and twenty persons were at my back, pressing one behind another to get a glimpse from the window; I saw, as I leaned far out, every sash along the wide front similarly occupied.

The magistrates were all now out on the court-house steps. I looked for Edward Percy, but doubtless he was in bed; at any rate he was not there. Meantime, a dark furrow opened in the crowded distance — I know not how, for the street had seemed too densely packed to admit another man. Slowly wading through, I perceived the heads of horses and the mounted figures of postillions. At this moment, the groan began — the scornful, abhorrent, malignant groan of the populace. It filled one with dread — the sound grew so loud and furious, the people thronged and swayed with such frantic motion, while above them the two gigantic standard bearers wildly waved their vast and gory ensign. All, meantime, stretched to gaze at the approaching carriage. It delved its way through the solid mass with difficulty, but still on it came. The horses tossed their heads high as they backed to the hard curb of the postillions. They were now near. My strained eyes viewed the whole distinctly. The carriage was open and large: it contained three figures. There was a deep interest in watching these three, and trying to discover how their present situation affected them.

One, in a white hat and blue frogged dress coat, was bending forwards and directing the postillions earnestly. He seemed anxious, I thought, for the carriage to be drawn up close by the court-house; he looked towards the gentlemen there, and glances of intelligence seemed to pass between them and him. These — I mean the magistrates — had all uncovered. Lord Stuartville appeared in front; his curls were shining in the sun; he held his hat in one hand and with the other was motioning to the people to part their ranks. General Thornton, likewise hat in hand, was hastily giving orders to a man whom I knew to be his own attendant; I saw him point to the barracks. As to Lord Hartford, he stood back silent and upright: his deep eye wandered over the people and fixed fiercely on the carriage. Lord Richton (of course the owner of the blue frogged coat and white hat could be no other) is said not to have the nerves of a lion, yet he can exhibit much self-possession in cases of considerable apparent danger. I was amused by watching the calmness of his face, divested either of smile or frown and expressing in its light eyes, always quick in their motions, a sort of concern wholly unmixed with either fear or anger. He seemed to take upon himself the office of dictator and manager, and very busy he appeared, now telegraphing with the group on the court-house steps, and now checking or urging the postillions as prudence seemed to demand. The other male occupant of the carriage was very still. He leaned back in what seemed a very careless posture; a hat with a broad brim and slouched much forwards shaded his face; he said nothing; he looked at nobody. The only token of life I saw him give was taking a gold snuff-box from his waistcoat pocket, tapping it thrice, extracting a pinch of snuff with his finger and thumb, then replacing the box and buttoning his coat well over it.

A more interesting object was presented by the third figure of this group — a lady, and, of course, the Duchess of Zamorna. She was dressed with that sort of stylish simplicity peculiar to herself — a light summer pelisse, gracefully fitted to her figure; a pretty simple bonnet, tyed with a broad ribbon; no veil, no flower, no plume. Her very hair was smoothed out of its native luxuriance of curl, and plainly parted on her forehead: this mode, which suits so few, suited her. It seemed to impart additional serenity to her forehead, additional straightness and delicacy to her nose; it relieved by more striking contrast her fair, transparent complexion, and gave her eyes a touch of something saintly. I cannot tell whether she was afraid, or grieved or mortified; your great people will not reveal their emotions to the eyes of common men; however, she was wholly colourless except a faint tinge in the lips.

"No Percy influence!" shouted and howled the frantic mob. "Down with Northangerland — roll his bloody head in the dirt!" and they shook the insulting banner high over his daughter, involving her figure for a moment in the sullen fiery shade reflected from its folds. Meantime, the person in the broad brim sat like any wet Quaker whom the spirit had not yet moved. His carriage, however, having by dint of Richton's skilful pilotage at length reached the court-house, now cast anchor at the steps, the cessation of motion seemed to remind him that he was in rather a peculiar situation. He gave a look straight before him, then to the right hand, the left, and finally over his shoulder. After a moment's meditation he lifted his forefinger and beckoned to the Earl of Stuartville. I was surprised to see him do anything half so intelligent. A conference of three minutes ensued, in which Stuartville's part seemed to consist in answering a string of running questions delivered as fast as the lips of the inquirer could move. Broad-brim then drew himself up, lifted his beaver a little, rose all at once to his feet in the carriage, and in so doing uncovered his head. A breeze passing through his hair waved it from temples and brow. He stood confessed.

A sudden movement, unexpected, generally checks affairs, for a moment at least, in whatever channel they may chance to be running. On the present occasion, this rising of the Duke of Zamorna lulled the yell which had given him such hoarse welcome to his kingdom. The hush first dropped on those immediately round him; others caught the feeling that there was something to be seen, something to be heard, and they too were silent. The calm spread, and ere long nothing was to be heard but the dull ocean-murmur of a mighty and expectant multitude. He, meantime, remained erect, the breast of his coat open, one hand resting on his side. The other at first held his hat, till Richton relieved him of it without his apparently being conscious it was gone. He seemed to wait and watch till the living vortex round him sunk into tranquillity. Comparative silence stole over it: every eye sought his. So mute was the pause of expectation, one's heart quaked at the thought of its being broken.

“I wish,” said the Duke of Zamorna, “I wish, lads, you’d all something to do at home.”

His voice was familiar, and so were his features. The people seemed disposed to hear more, and, after pushing his long fingers through his hair, he spoke again.

“Is there a man among you wise enough to render a reason for the bonny display you’re making just now?”

(”Yes! Yes!” exclaimed several voices.)

“I say no! Is it because I have been to see an old acquaintance and distant relative of mine who is a feeble invalid?”

(”Your Grace has been taking on wi’ Northangerland again and we hate him,” replied a single voice in the crowd.)

“What do you say, my lad?” said the Duke, who, it seems, had not distinctly heard the observation. The man repeated it.

“Taking on with Northangerland!” continued his Grace. “That’s a vague sort of expression. I’ve been to the south, looking after my own and my kinsfolk’s concerns, and concerning myself no more about politics than most of you do about religion.”

“Have you leagued with Northangerland?” asked one of the bannermen sternly.

The Duke turned upon him with a dark and changed aspect. He eyed his rebellious standard and said coldly, “Take down that flag.”

“No!” shouted the bannerman. “This is the flag of the people.”

“Take it down,” replied his Grace in a deepened tone, and he savagely glared at the magistrates. They instantly despatched six special constables to execute the Duke’s mandate. Loud uproar ensued; the huge flag was tossed up and down as its bearers struggled to retain what the constables were resolved to seize; the yelling of the mob redoubled; and all at once, with hideous roar, a rush was made on the royal carriage. A frightful scene ensued. The gentlemen who had crowded the court-house steps and windows sprang into the crowd. A dismal shriek was heard as the startled horses — no longer obedient to the postillions — plunged in terror amongst the densely wedged crowd. Their wild eyes and streaming manes were seen tossed over the sea of human heads, as their iron hoofs, prancing madly, crushed all around them. I looked in agony at the Duchess; she was bending back, and had hid her face in the cushions of the carriage. As for Zamorna, with teeth fast set and the curls of his bare head shadowing his fierce eyes, he looked hellish; he gave not a word either to his wife or Lord Richton; his glance was fixed in one direction. At last, as a thundering beating sound and a dense cloud of dust rose in the quarter where he looked, he got up, and speaking with a very loud distinct voice said, ”Men of Zamorna, three hundred horsemen are upon you. I see them; they are here; you will be ridden down in five minutes if you do not bear back instantly from the carriage.” There was no time: with horse-hair waving and broad sabres glancing, with loud huzza and dint of thunder, the cavalry charged on the mob. Lord Stuartville led the van, waving his hat and mounted on a horse like a devil. Nothing could stand this, not even the mad mechanics and desperate operatives of Zamorna. They flew like chaff; it was the whirlwind chasing the sand of the desert. Causeway and carriage were cleared; the wide street lay bare in the fierce sun behind them. A few wounded men alone were left with shattered limbs, lying on the pavement. These were soon taken off to the infirmary, their blood was washed from the stones, and no sign remained of what had happened. When I looked for the royal carriage, it stood in front of Stancliffe's, empty; a cloak was flung over the seat and two grooms were taking out the horses. Sic transit etc.

CHAPTER 8

Sir William Percy describes Zamorna's anger at the city leaders

It was afternoon, and the hotel was somewhat quieter. I had gone out to get a little cool air in the garden, whose bushy shrubs in some measure screened the sun. Two or three gentlemen were walking there, and in an arbour I found Sir William Percy.

"Well, Colonel, where did you put yourself this morning while that dust was kicking up?"

"O, I got the snuggest possible corner in the court-house. I witnessed the whole spectacle quite at my ease. Very good sport for winter; rather too active for these dog-days. How the canaille did run! What will your brother say when he hears of their rout?"

"Bah — swear himself to the bottomless pit and then call for a drop of brandy to cool his tongue! But Townshend, don't I look very languid? quite stived up [deprived of fresh air], to use a classical phrase?"

"Can't say but you do. The heat seems to have overpowered you."

"Well it may. Ever since noon, I've been in the presence of the Great Mogul."

"What, of Zamorna?"

"No other. He sent for a whole lot of us into the great dining room; and then, when I and Stuartville and Thornton and Sydenham and Walker and a dozen more went in, he was striding up and down from the fire-place to the window with a face ten times blacker than the smoke from Edward's tobacco-pipe. He just stood and put his hand on the long table when we came in, each man doffing his castor and bowing at the door. He never asked us to sit down, but let us stand at the lower end, like four and twenty honey-pots all of a row. He began by asking Lord Stuartville if the troops were gone back to their quarters. Stuartville stept forward a pace and made answer that they were, with the exception of a small detatchment which had been left to keep order in a part of the town which as yet seemed scarcely settled. 'Then,' his grace continued, as coldly as you please, 'I must say, my lord, I have been a good deal surprised at the state of dissatisfaction in which I have found the province under your lieutenancy.' And without softening this pretty sentence by another word he stopped for an answer.

"Stuartville said very plainly, 'he believed there was a strong feeling in the minds of the people against the Earl of Northangerland.' 'Allow me to put your meaning in other words,' said his grace. 'There seems to me to be a strong feeling in the minds of the people that they have a right to dictate how, when, where, to whom and on what subject they will. Let it be your business, and that of the gentlemen behind you, to subdue this feeling; to shew those who entertain it the fallacy and danger of acting upon it.' General Thornton remarked that they had done their best, he thought, that morning. The answer he received proved to him that this idea was all a delusion. ‘I have not seen your conduct in that light,’ said the Mogul. ‘Ordinary vigilance on the part of the city authorities would have prevented the assemblage of such a mass of scum. Ordinary decison would have broken into firewood the staff of that banner which in your town was this day insolently hoisted over my head.’ He made another of his frozen pauses, and then asked if the Mayor of Zamorna was present. Mr Maude bowed and came forward. ‘Your police is lax,’ began his grace without a word of civility. ‘Your Corporation is indolent, and ought to be overhauled. Every thing indicates disorder, negligence and misrule. If I do not find a speedy change for the better, I shall consider it my duty to set on foot measures for depriving your city of its corporate privileges.’

“There fell another pause, in the course of which Mr Sydenham said ‘he believed his grace judged the town too hardly. It was his opinion that the feeling manifested that day was no proof of disloyalty, but the contrary.’ At this speech the Duke scowled like a Saracen. Fixing his eyes on Sydenham he said, ‘Favour me by keeping that opinion to yourself while you remain in this room. I never yet admitted the value of the loyalty which would dictate the choice of my private friends, or control the course of my private actions. It was not on that condition I accepted the crown of Angria — and how long will it take you to learn that when I became a monarch I did not cease to be a man? Your country put into my hands the splendour and power of royalty, but I did not offer in exchange the freedom and independence of private life.’ Nobody answered him and, after another of his pauses, he began dictating again. ‘Lord Stuartville, Zamorna has not done well under your Lieutenancy. In this capacity you have disappointed my expectations. I must supersede you if you do not act with greater vigour.’ Stuartville coloured high and said, much moved, ‘Your Grace shall be anticipated. From this moment I resign my office. Had I been aware before — .’ And, would you believe it, Townshend, here he broke off with a gulp as if he had been choked. Thornton went red too and said he thought all this was far too bad. Our Czar went on: ‘Your magistracy have disgraced themselves; one was absent; another was perfectly inactive; and the remaining four shewed neither foresight, resolution, nor energy. Gentlemen, you may go.’ And so he turned his back on us, walked up to the window, and we made our exit. Thornton’s gone back to Girnington as surly as a bull; Stuartville flung himself on his break-neck horse and set off at a gallop, which must have brought him to the D-l long since; Sydenham and Walker both mounted the Edwardston stage and are doubtless now drinking d-tion to the sovereign in a bumper of Edward’s best; as for me, I came here to take the air and get an appetite for some fricandeau [“a slice of veal or other meat ... served with sauce” *OED*] I’ve just ordered.”

“Well,” said I. “There’s a pretty go! And pray, what has become of the Duchess? Do you know whether she’s frightened to death?”

“Almost, I daresay. She did look white when the rush began; I heard she turned sick as soon as they got her into Stancliffe’s.”

“Then you’ve not seen her?”

“Yes, for a minute; going up the staircase leaning on Richton’s arm.”

“Did you speak?”

“No. Indeed, she was all but dead then, and neither noticed me nor anybody else. The man is coming to say my fricandeau is ready. Townshend, will you walk in and take a snack?”

CHAPTER 9

Zamorna and his wife Mary at Stancliffe's Hotel

Evening drew on at length. Oh, how cool, how balmy its first breeze came sighing, to call away the beams of day-light. Sunset was over; the streets were still and dim; an early moon gazed from heaven on the towers of Zamorna's minster, which fairly lifted its white front and shafted oriel to meet that gaze. The breeze which ushers in evening fluttered the blinds of a large upper saloon at Stancliffe's. Every window was shaded, as if to shut out light and noise and all that could chase repose from that couch in the recess. Sunk among a pile of cushions, a lady lies asleep — pale, with her hair loose, and her figure shewing in its attitude the relaxation of extreme fatigue.

Is that person about to awake her, who is leaning over the couch? Pity there is not another living soul in the room to bid him stand away, and let her sleep! What is the individual smiling at? He seems to find matter for amusement in the exhaustion of that slender form and marble face, and the saintly folding of those little fairy hands. Villain, don't touch her! But with his long fore-finger he is parting the loose hair farther from her forehead, and then he smiles again at what any other person would worship — the open brow, gleaming fair and serene like that of a sculptured Virgin Mary. He takes his unhallowed hands from her for a moment, and puts them in his pocket. Man, you look no fit guardian for that shrine! You break the harmony of the scene. Why don't you go away? All round is so still and dim, and she is so fair, one might think her a saint and this room a consecrated chapel. But while you stand there I defy anybody to soothe their mind with so pious a delusion: a fellow with whiskers and something like moustaches, and so much hair — almost black it looks in this light — that you hardly know whether he has any forehead or not, until all at once he pushes the pile away and then there's an expanse underneath, whose smoothness tells you he's not old enough to be a priest.

Fresh from the stern interview with his Lord Lieutenant and the Corporation, from scenes of an equally iron nature which had followed and occupied him all the afternoon, Zamorna had now sought, in the cool of evening, the apartment to which his Duchess had retired. It was an undefined mixture of feelings that brought him there. Half, he wished to know how she had borne the scene of the morning — a scene so unfitted to her nature. Half, he felt an inclination to repose on her softness faculties worried with the bitter and angry contest of the day. Then, in metaphysical indistinctness, existed, scarce known to himself, the consciousness that it was her connection with him which had thus embroiled him with his people; and he was come now partly to please himself with her beauty, partly to dream away an hour in amiable meditations on the sorcery of female charms and the peril of doting on them too fondly, being guided by them too implicitly.

He drew aside the crimson curtain and let the evening sun shine upon her. He walked softly to and fro in the saloon, and every time he passed her couch turned on her his ardent gaze. That man has now loved Mary Percy longer than he ever loved any woman before, and I daresay her face has by this time become to him a familiar and household face. It may be told, by the way in which his eye seeks the delicate and pallid features and rests on their lines, that he finds settled pleasure in the contemplation. In all moods, at all times, he likes them. Her temper is changeful; she is not continual sunshine; she weeps sometimes, and frets and teazes him not unfrequently with womanish jealousies. I don't think another woman lives on earth in whom he would bear these changes for a moment. From her, they almost please him. He finds an amusement in playing with her fears — piquing or soothing them as caprice directs.

She slept still, but now he stoops to wake her. He separated her clasped hands and took one in his own. Disturbed by the movement, she drew that hand hastily and petulantly away, and turned on her couch with a murmur. He laughed, and the laugh woke her. Rising, she looked at him and smiled. Still she seemed weary, and when he placed himself beside her she dropped her head on his shoulder and would have slept again. But the Duke would not permit this: he was come for his evening's amusement, and his evening's amusement he would have, whether she was fit to yield it or not. In answer to his prohibitory and disturbing movements she said, "Adrian, I am tired."

"Too tired to talk to me?" he asked.

"No, Adrian, but let me lean against you."

Still he held her off.

"Come," said he. "Open your eyes and fasten your hair up; it is hanging on your neck like a mermaid's." The Duchess raised her hand to her hair; it was indeed all loose and dishevelled over her shoulders. She got up to arrange it, and the occupation roused her. Having smoothed the auburn braids before a mirror, and touched and retouched her loosened dress till it resumed its usual aspect of fastidious neatness, she walked to the window.

"The sun is gone," said she. "I am too late to see it set." And she pensively smiled as her eye lingered on the soft glory which the sun, just departed, had left in its track. "That is the West!" she exclaimed; and, turning to Zamorna, added quickly, "What if you had been born a great imaginative Angrian?"

"Well, I should have played the fool as I have done by marrying a little imaginative Senegambian."

"And," she continued, talking half to herself and half to him, "I should have had a very different feeling towards you then to what I have now. I should have fancied you cared nothing about my country so far off, with its wide wild woodlands. I should have thought all your heart was wrapt in this land, so fair and rich, teeming with energy and life, but still, Adrian, not with the romance of the West."

"And what do you think now, my Sappho?"

"That you are not a grand awful foreigner absorbed in your kingdom as the grandest land of the earth, looking at me as an exotic, listening to my patriotic rhapsodies as sentimental dreams, but a son of Senegambia as I am a daughter — a thousand times more glorious to me, because you are the most glorious thing my own land ever flung from her fire-fertilized soil! I looked at you when those Angrians were howling round you today, and remembered that you were my countryman, not theirs — and all at once their alien senses, their foreign hearts, seemed to have discerned something uncongenial in you, the great stranger, and they rose under your control, yelling rebelliously."

"Mary!" exclaimed the Duke, laughingly approaching her. "Mary, what ails you this evening? Let me look — is it the same quiet little winsome face I am accustomed to see?" He raised her face and gazed but she turned with a quick movement away.

"Don't, Adrian. I have been dreaming about Percy Hall. When will you let me go there?"

"Any time. Set off to-night if you please."

"That is nonsense, and I am serious. I must go sometime — but you never let do anything I wish."

"Indeed! You dared not say so, if you were not far too much indulged."

"Let me go, and come with me in about a month when you have settled matters at Adrianapolis — promise, Adrian."

"I'll let you go willingly enough," returned Zamorna, sitting down and beginning to look vexatious. "But as for asking me to leave Angria again for at least a year and a day — none but an over-fondled wife would think of preferring an unreasonable request."

"It is not unreasonable, and I suppose you want me to leave you? I'd never allow you to go fifteen hundred miles if I could help it."

"No," returned his grace. "Nor fifteen hundred yards either. You'd keep me like a china ornament in your drawing-room. Come, dismiss that pet39! What is it all about?"

"Adrian, you look so scornful."

He took up a book which lay in the window-seat, and began to read. The Duchess stood a while looking at him, and knitting her arched and even brows. He turned over page after page, and by the composure of his brow expressed interest in what he was reading and an intention to proceed. Her Grace is by no means the victim of caprice, though now and then she seems daringly to play with weapons few besides would venture to handle. On this occasion her tact, so nice as to be infallible, informed her that the pet was carried far enough. She sat down, then, by Zamorna's side; leant over and looked at the book; it was poetry — a volume of Byron. Her attention, likewise, was arrested; and she continued to read, turning the page with her slender, after looking into the Duke's face at the conclusion of each leaf to see if he was ready to proceed. She was so quiet, her hair so softly fanned his cheek as she leaned her head towards him, the contact of her gentle hand now and then touching his, of her smooth and silken dress, was so endearing, that it quickly appeased the incipient ire her whim of perverseness had raised; and when, in about half an hour, she ventured to close the obnoxious volume and take it from his hand, the action met with no resistance — nothing but a shake of the head, half-reproving, half-indulgent.

Little more was said by either Duke or Duchess, or at least their further conversation was audible to no mortal ear. The shades of dusk were gathering in the room; the very latest beam of sunset was passing from its gilded walls. They sat in the deep recess of the window side by side, a cloudless moon looking down from the sky upon them and lighting their faces with her smile. Mary leant her happy head on a breast she thought she might trust — happy in that belief, even though it were a delusion. Zamorna had been kind, even fond, and, for aught she knew, faithful, ever since their last blissful meeting at Adrianapolis, and she had learnt how to rest in his arms with a feeling of security, not trembling lest when she most needed the support it might all at once be torn away. During their late visit to Northangerland he had shewn her marked attention, conscious that tenderness bestowed on her was the surest method of soothing her father's heart, and words could not express half the rapture of her feelings when, more than once, seated between the Earl and Duke on such an evening as this, she had perceived that both regarded her as the light and hope of their lives. Language had not revealed this to her. Her father is a man of few words on sentimental matters; her husband, of none at all, though very vigorous in his actions; but Northangerland cheered in her presence, and Zamorna watched her from morning till night, following all her movements with a keen and searching glance.

Is that Hannah Rowley tapping at the door? She says tea is, and Mr Surena impatient to get into the shop again.

THE STORY OF WILLIE ELLIN

PART I

[dated May 1853]
I will not deny that I took a pleasure in studying the character of Mrs Widdup, nor that to me she seemed to possess a good deal of worth of a particular kind. Thirty years ago (our acquaintance dated its commencement thus far back) I had believed very heartily in her worth without studying her character. She then ruled me as one of a flock of four – her nurslings. Of this flock I was not her favourite; indeed my place was lowest in her grace. Even through boyhood and adolescence she held me for a riddle rather than a model. After two decades of separation and more than half a generations's change beheld us again under the same roof, still the housekeeper of Ellin Hall, while respecting its master, revolved him day and night as an unsolved conundrum.

It was and must be so: habit and circumstances attached us, but nothing could combine, nothing quite unfold.

In a certain sense Mrs Widdup was spotlessly honest; she had the fidelity of a consistent and steady nature; she was a partisan in friendship, an unflinching foe; she was usually humane and cheerful. She was narrow-minded, loved money, and by natural instinct still leant to the guidance of interest. Fidelity, partisanship, interest, all counselled her to attachment to the Ellin family, and accordingly she was attached to me, that family's surviving representative.

Ellin Hall had for five ages been the home of the Ellins. In my youth it passed out of their hands. My eldest half-brother sold it. He died suddenly, leaving neither will nor direct heir; his fortune fell to me, and I purchased back the ancient homestead. That eldest half-brother of mine was a stronger man in body and a tyrant in heart. I would advert to his deeds, but they are such as we suffer Death to cancel from memory.

PART II

[dated 22 June 1853]

In other countries, and in distant times, it is possible that more of my kind might have been attracted to human dwellings – hut or mansion – and secretly taken them in lease, than for these hundred years past have been known to make their home in such abodes. Yet we were always few, our presence rare, its signs faint, and its proofs difficult to seize.

My house was not picturesque: it had no turrets, no battlements, no mullioned or lozenged windows. From the first, however, I believe its stones were grey, dug from a grey quarry on a grey waste. They who planned it had loved fresh air, and had chosen a raised site, building it where the green ground swelled highest. Its outlook was free and four-fold: it commanded both sunrise and sunset, and viewed an equal and a wide expanse north and south. These builders, too, preferred solitude to convenience: the village was distant – near enough, perhaps, in summer weather, but remote for a winter's day walk. As to a sentimental peculiarity of the vicinage, I believe the first owners had not known nor reckoned it in their choice of ground. The short, green, flower-bearing turf around covered an ancient burying-ground – so ancient that all the sleepers under the flowers had long ago ceased to be either clay or bone, and were become fine mould, throwing out violets in May, and a carpet of close silken grass all spring, summer, and autumn. These violets were white, and in their season they gathered thickly in a bleached wreath about what seemed a deep-sunk and iron-grey rock – the sole left foundation stone of a forgotten chapel, or the basement of a cross broken away. A quiet gable of the house looked upon this mossy bit of mead. In the lower story of the gable was no aperture, in the upper a single window, having before it a balcony of stone, a peculiarity rare in that neighbourhood, forming indeed the distinctive feature of the house and originating its name – Ellin Balcony.

Who am I? Was I owner of the house? No. Was I its resident tenant, taking it perhaps on lease, and paying the rent? No. Was I a child of the family? No. A servant? No. Ask me no more questions for they are difficult to meet. I was there, and it was my house.

I recollect the first hour that I knew it. I came to consciousness at a moment within the rim of twilight. I came upward out of earth – not downward from heaven, and what first welcomed and seemed to aid me to life was a large disk high over me, a globule, clear, cragged, and desolate. I saw the moon before I could see the sky; but that too, night-veiled and star-inspired, soon opened for me. A sweet silence watched my birth-hour. I took affection for this mossy spot, I stole all through building and nook of land. In the mild beam and pure humidity of a midsummer night I found my seal and sign printed here in dew and there in moonbeam on roof and lawn of Ellin Balcony.

I do not know that ever I was knit with humanity, or was mixed with the mystery of existence as men or women know it. Yet had no mortal relic slumbered near the Balcony, should I have risen? Would Night, my mother, have borne me, unwedded to a certain vital, mortal essence?

Tears had watered this ground; great sorrows and strong feelings had gathered here. Could a colder soil, drenched only with rain and visited only by airs and shadows, have yielded me as its produce?

I even think that some one sleeper threw me out of a great labouring heart which had toiled terribly through his thirty, or sixty, or fourscore years of work, had lived and throbbed strongly, stood still while yet in vigour, and buried, yet warm and scarce arrested, had thrown forth its unslackened glow and ill-checked action in an essence bodiless and incomplete, yet penetrative and subtle.

I believe this because my relations to men were so limited. To millions I felt no tie, found no approach; to tens I might draw gently. Whether units existed that could more actively attract it, yet lay with time and chance to show.

Whoever in my early days were the inmates of Ellin Balcony, on me they made no impression. I knew every stone in the walls. I knew the neighbourhood – the knolls, the lanes, the turfed wastes, all vegetable growth, field flowers, hedge plants, yellow gorse and broom, foxglove springing bright out of stony soil, ivy on ground or wall. I distinguished and now remember these things very well. I knew the seasons, the faces of summer and winter. Spring and autumn were familiar in their skies; night, day, and the hours were all acquaintances. Storm and fair weather complete my reminiscences. I cannot recall anything human, and yet humanity was in the house. Experience now tells me that it must have been busy, bustling humanity, an alert current of life flowing out after to towns and thickly peopled scenes, returning thence with accessions – life circulating in a free, ordinary channel, never stealing slow under the banks of thought, never winding in deeps, but coursing parallel with populous highways. At last, I suppose, this practical daily life forsook retirement and went permanently away to the towns which were its natural sphere. This departure made no difference to me, except that I remember looking at the sun and listening to the wind with a new holiday feeling of unconstraint.

About this time I first added a cognisance of the individual human being to a vague impression of a human race existing. A solitary old woman became housekeeper of Ellin Balcony. She used to feed a great dog chained in the now empty yard, to close and open shutters, to knit a great deal, and read and think a little. I believe it was because she *did* think, however little, that I had the power to perceive her presence. Those who had lived here before her never thought, and into an existence all material I could not enter.

PART III

I

Old Mrs Hill, the solitary housekeeper of Ellin Balcony, was sitting one day in her kitchen reading a pamphlet-sermon as old as herself, when, just as her kettle began to simmer for tea, she thought she heard a noise like the jar of the iron gate opening from a bridle road which approached the lone house. She held her hand, checked her clicking needles and listened. Was it an arrival? It was no more than the wind, which, when it blew as it now did from the south, could rattle that gate like a hand. Sedately superstitious, Mrs Hill, every day and every night, heard noises about this deserted place which scared her, but, firm-nerved, her fears never passed her lips or affected her movements. She passed the jar over and resumed her stocking.

True, there blew a south wind, but in a low key. It shook nothing; it sighed only along the natural avenue which darkened above a path conducting upward from the gate. At this moment the shadow fell not on the path only, but on a small wayfarer – a child's figure – perhaps a little rustic venturing through this gate and up this tree-dark way as a short cut to the bourn of some errand. Is his garb coloured like the path? Does it make a concord with gravel, moss, tree, stem? Are his cheeks and hands berry-brown and red?

Not at all; the shape is less picturesque. It is civilised and slender, a contrast with adjuncts, not a harmony. The dress was made in a town; the hair is long and waved, the face is fair, the countenance is informed. This seems to be a gentleman schoolboy, perhaps ten years old. He must have walked far to-day; he is footsore, pale, and with a few more miles of pilgrimage would become exhausted. He carries a knapsack, a light burden, but his weary shoulder aches under it. Emerging from the avenue, he halts on the little lawn, and looks at Ellin Balcony.

He has measured the house, surveyed the enclosed ground, glanced down into the wooded valley and up at the barer and greyer hills towards which the Balcony fronts. He approaches the door.

The old lonely knitter was winding the worsted round her ball, and folding her knitting, preparatory to taking off the fire the kettle, which now boiled, when the house thrilled to a knock, a loud though brief knock at the front door. She started – and might well start, for it was the first time she had been thus summoned since she kept the Balcony. She ran amazed, she opened, and saw on the step a boy, well clad but dusty, viewing her from under light-complexioned brows with direct clear blue eyes.

'They call you Mrs Hill?' said he.

He was answered affirmatively.

'And this place is "Ellin Balcony"?'

'Yes.'

'If you please, then, let me pass. I should like to come in; I should like well to come in. I'm tired.'

'But, master — ' Mrs Hill paused astonished, as if a sudden light broke on her. She quickly pursued – 'Surely you are not an Ellin of Golpit, surely not the little one – the baby?'

'I'm Willie, that is William Ellin, and I came this very day from Golpit – fifteen miles, a long way. I'm tired.'

Mrs Hill let him pass. She took him to the kitchen, and he sat down in a chair that stood on the hearth.

'You *are* the baby, then?' cried the housekeeper.

'Perhaps I was a baby when you saw me. I hope I'm a boy now.'

'How old. Master Ellin?'

'Ten and a half, but I'm a thin boy.'

'You are thin and white. Have you good health?'

'Capital – when they let me.'

'You are like your mother.'

'Am I like mamma? I'm glad of it!'

'You have her mouth, you speak like her. But what, Master William, brought a child like you alone from Golpit?'

'Several things, Mrs Hill. I can't tell you all in a minute – only here I am, and very hungry and tired.'

'Hungry!' echoed Mrs Hill: 'I'm afraid he is hungry,' and she hastened to get a tray and cups.

Before the boy took his tea he asked his hostess to fasten both outer doors of the house. When this was done he said, 'Now I'm safe,' and proceeded to eat with appetite. The meal over, he lay down on a kind of settle. He folded both hands under his head, but did not close his eyes; he was pale but had no look of langour.

'Mrs Hill,' he resumed, 'you knew my mother?'

'I stayed with her in her last sickness. Master Willie.'

'Had she much pain when she was ill?'

'Sometimes she suffered greatly.'

'Was she patient, or not?'

'She was silent when she suffered, and bore wonderfully.'

'She cared for me, didn't she, Mrs Hill?'

'Beyond words,' said the housekeeper. 'And we all used to think you took greatly to your mamma.'

'Well, I suppose it was so. I was not much more than three years old when she died, but I remember her. I have wanted her always, and I shall be glad when I grow out of the habit of thinking about her, as she can never come back.'

'You must have something of her nature in you,' was the reply, 'and I see you have. But I am afraid you have not found many friends, or your mind would not dwell in this way on a dead person.'

'No more it would, I daresay,' replied the lad.

'Do they treat you well at Golpit, Master Willie?'

'I have run away, Mrs Hill.'

'Child, where do you mean to go to, and what will you do?'

'I shall think about it. You must hide me here for a day or two.'

'What has happened wrong? Do they starve you?'

'Oh no, I get enough to eat, but Edward's hand and stick are so heavy.'

'Ah! Mr Ellin never liked either you or your mother.'

'I believe he was a cruel stepson, Mrs Hill – he still speaks so savagely about mamma at times.'

'And does he strike you, child?'

'If he thinks me slow in the business, which I find dry and hard enough to learn, he knocks my head about till it aches. It is very seldom that I cry, but if I look dull after punishment, he calls me a disaffected rebel, and strikes again. Last night he had been making bargains, and had taken some brandy and water. He knocked me down with a stool, for no particular reason that I know of, unless it is that in some moods he hates the sight of me. My temple was cut with the sharp comer of the stool. I wish, Mrs Hill, you would give me a little warm water to wash it. It is sore and burning now, after my long walk.'

The housekeeper soon brought him a basin of water. She wished to aid him, but he took the sponge himself, and pushing aside his fair brown hair, discovered in the blue-veined temple a rough laceration and dark bruise – it was now darkened with blood – but he soon washed it clean, and then Mrs Hill bound it up carefully.

'My lamb,' said she, compassionately, 'this is wicked work.'

'Old lady, I am not a lamb,' replied the boy, while his eyes laughed. 'And after all it is not so much the knock I think about. I did not run away on that account.'

'What could it be for?'

'Because Edward threatened me with something I really should dread. It seems I am quite in his power, as my parents left me no money.'

'I know, child. Your stepbrother's property came to him in his mother's, your father's first wife's, right. You are dependent on him, as they say.'

'Yes, and he tells me he will bring me up as becomes a beggar – he will make me a shop apprentice. I can't bear it, Mrs Hill.'

The old lady shook her head, and looked somewhat at a loss for a response.

'I can't bear it. I don't want to live with shop boys, and stand behind a counter. My mother was a lady – I ought to be a gentleman.'

'But you've no money; you can't choose. You must learn a trade.'

'We have never had traders in our family for I don't know how long till Edward out of greediness went into business. My father and grandfather and great-grandfather lived here at Ellin Balcony and farmed their own land, and were squires.'

'Yes, and lessened their income little by little. Ellin Balcony would have had to be sold if your brother had not removed into premises at Golpit, and gone, as you say, into business.'

'Would it?'

'Aye; and mind me, you can't do better than follow his example. Would he take you into his own counting house?'

'I should be so miserable.'

The poor lad groaned.

'But, remember,' said Mrs Hill, with much sympathy, but also with deep warning in her tone, 'you are without friends, Master Willie. Edward is your only chance: displease him as little and obey him as much as you can.'

'Can't I go to sea, or be a soldier?'

'You can't – indeed you can't.'

'But Edward is cruel, Mrs Hill; he persecutes me, I think. I don't complain much, I don't tell you all, but indeed I hardly know how to go on living as I have lived for some years.'

'You must look to God – you must, my poor child. It is all that sufferers, whether grown up or little ones, can do in this weary world.'

'I wonder if mamma knows about me, Mrs Hill? I sometimes hope not, lest she should be unhappy in Heaven.'

'Do you say your prayers at night? Have they ever taught you to pray?'

'Yes,' said he briefly. '*They* never taught me – that is, Edward and his wife never taught me my prayers, but I learnt them of mamma, and remember them yet.'

'Don't forget them. Will you go to bed now?'

'Yes, if you please. I'm tired.'

After Mrs Hill had taken the child upstairs and shown him his room, containing a spare bed she always kept dry and aired, he came to the staircase head, and called out anxiously, yet quietly:

'Lock the doors fast, Mrs Hill. Let nobody in, and tell nobody there is a strange boy in the house.

She promised accordingly.

Worn out with fatigue, he slept till late the next morning. He had not yet risen when the iron gate clashed back and a gig drove furiously up the avenue. In an instant a man athletic and red-whiskered bounded to the yard pavement, entered the kitchen door, and seemed to take house and housekeeper by storm.

'Where is the cub? I tracked him here by sure marks, so let us have no lies. Where is he?'

'Mr Ellin, what can you mean?'

Mr Ellin held up a clenched fist in the old woman's face, shook it between her two eyes, pronounced an oath, and dashed upstairs.

There were seven bedrooms. He tried the doors of six – they yielded. He entered, and found empty rooms. Testing the seventh door, he found that it resisted his hand – a drawn bolt opposed him.

'Run down!' said he. 'I have him now. William Ellin!'

‘Yes, Edward,’ said a child’s voice.

‘Open this door!’ (Oath accompanying).

‘I would open it directly if you would promise not to strike – at least, not hard.’

For answer the great athlete vigorously shook the slight door.

‘*I* promise!’ he yelled. ‘I’ll see you,’ etc.

Silence within. Again the door was made to quiver.

‘If you will not promise,’ recommenced the treble organ, uttered in an awe-pierced yet not timid key, ‘I must defend.’

‘Defend? What do you mean? Open if you value your life.’

‘I do value my life, so I shall make a barricade,’ was answered, and a dragging sound followed as of furniture moved. The child seemed quietly planning to resist this terrible besieger. Hereupon Goliath foamed at the mouth. Strong hand and heavy shoulder were both made to bear upon the door. It heaved, creaked, swayed. Below knelt Mrs Hill on the landing praying for pardon and forbearance. She might as well have implored stone. Ere long hinge, lock, panels yielded, the whole door crashed in, and thrusting aside an interposed chest of drawers, Edward Ellin sprang upon his young brother. Down went the child before the onslaught, but he got up soon on one knee, and his blue eye did not fall – it rose. Over him flourished the gig whip. He looked at the lash.

‘Not too hard this time,’ said he in a low voice, inexplicably quiet and steady. ‘I have considered, and mean to do my best at a trade.’

The wicked man’s arm stiffened its muscles; the cruel lash vibrated, but it did not fall. There was a Providence watching over that poor little Samuel kneeling on the floor in his scant night-shirt.

A voice spoke behind.

‘Ellin – not so. I’ll not see that done,’ declared accents manlier and mellower than those of the husky ruffian. ‘Whatever the lad may be, he is not strong enough for the discipline of a gig whip. Let him go.’

The speaker was the second occupant of the gig. Mrs Hill’s cries and the breakage of the door had called him upon the scene of action. He looked at this moment a capable protector. He was a handsome man, as powerful as Ellin; and his face, his eye, his voice, attested that by him power would never be abused to cruelty. There might be a certain command about him, but it was unmixed with any propensity to oppress. Many a murderer has owned the light savage eye, the sensual traits, the strong jaw, massive neck, and full red whisker of Edward Ellin. No criminal ever displayed in a dock the countenance, bearing, feature and glance of Mr Bosas.

‘Come, Ellin, be calm,’ said this last. ‘Give me that whip; I’ll take care of it.’

The person addressed looked ready to pour out oaths, and indeed forth they rushed, but not on his dark-eyed pleasant opponent. Little Willie bore the brunt of the storm, or would have borne it had not Bosas stepped between.

‘Dress yourself,’ said he to the boy, speaking sharply but not unkindly. He was obeyed in haste. William meantime still eyed with dread, but no poltroonery, the bull kept at bay by the man. He washed his face and hands too, and as he wiped them on a towel, he looked up at his friend, and said, with a curious kind of resigned endurance, ’After all, sir, do not give yourself too much trouble. I’ve had that whip before, and shall have it again when you’re gone.’

‘I hope not,’ said the gentleman gravely. ‘Come, Ellin, promise me you’ll let him off this time.’

Ellin made no promise and gave no answer for some minutes; then, as if his mood had changed suddenly, he burst out laughing, and said –

‘Pooh, pooh! I’m only in joke; I’ll not touch him. Willie knows me well enough. I’m a passionate fellow, but good-natured.’

‘You forgive him, then?’ said the mediator.

‘Oh, to be sure. I owed the little booby no grudge. Let him play truant no more, and come home quietly now – that is all.’

’Very well. You agree, don’t you, my little fellow?’ said the dark-faced but kind man.

He spoke without turning to the child. If he had seen him at that moment perhaps the current of his own thoughts might have changed, perhaps an intention might have entered his mind which for the present did not occur to him. But Fate sat in the air invisible at her cloudy wheel. She span on impassive, unravelling no knot in her wool. It was in vain that Willie turned sheet-white, and, for an instant, heart-sick. No man regarded, or could read what a lot the child foresaw. He put neither his thoughts nor his forebodings into words. Prescient but long-suffering, he went back to Golpit that morning.

II

Mr Bosas was no resident at Golpit. He lived, indeed, a great way off in a capital city. Notwithstanding his foreign-sounding name, he was English born, but report ascribed to him a Hebrew origin. There was nothing, indeed, of the Jew in his countenance or eye, yet in his features some of the handsomer lines of Israel’s race were perhaps traceable, and might he have worn a beard, curls, rich, dark, and Eastern would have graced his chin.

Between Bosas and Ellin existed mercantile relations, for the former was in business too; and as he was the merchant who bought Ellin’s manufactured goods for export, and possessed besides, in his superior wealth and commercial standing, the power of either obliging or injuring to an important extent, Ellin held him in respect, and treated him almost with subservience. Hence the ready concession to his will in the matter of Willie; and for this reason, too, during the two days Mr Bosas continued a guest at Golpit, his protégé remained unmolested.

Perhaps Willie expected this respite would last no longer than the kind merchant's stay; perhaps he wished to express as much; but if so he never found his opportunity to put in a quiet word, nor had he the chance of renewing or conforming an awakened interest at parting. Shortly before Mr Bosas' departure Willie had been sent out on an errand, and when he returned his advocate was gone.

The lad had a small room he called his own. It was only a kind of garret, and contained but a crib and a stool. Yet, such as it was, he preferred it before the smart drawing-room, two floors below. If his poor tossed life numbered any peaceful associations, they were all connected with this cold, narrow nest under the slates. Hither he retired early, on the night after Bosas' departure – rather wondering to himself that nothing had yet befallen him, even dimly conceiving a hope that perhaps his brother for once had sincerely pardoned. It was half-past eight of a summer evening, not yet dusk, consequently Willie had brought a book with him, and sitting near the little window he could read. A year ago some love of reading had dawned in his mind. The taste had not been much cultivated, but it throve on scant diet full as much as was healthful. At present he liked *Robinson Crusoe* as well as any book in the world. *Robinson Crusoe* was his present study.

His thoughts were all in the desolate island, when he heard a step mounting the ladder staircase to his room. It pressed almost the last round ere any more disturbing idea struck him than that it must be wearing late, as the maids – who also lodged in the attics – were coming to bed. Suddenly he felt a weight in the tread which forbade the supposition of a female foot. The wooden steps shook, his door shook too; it opened, and a shape six feet high, broad and rather corpulent, entered.

Willie had never, till now, seen his brother enter his chamber alone by night. In all his trials he had never been visited thus in darkness, and in secret. I should not, perhaps, say in darkness, for the hour was shared between two gleams – twilight and moonlight. It was a very pleasant night, quite calm and warm, and only a few faint clouds, gilded and lightly electric, curled mellow round the moon. The door was shut, the thin child sat on his stool, the giant man stood over him.

'I have you safe at last, and I'll very nearly finish you now,' were the first words, spoken in rough adult tones. None must expect qualified language or measured action from Mr Edward Ellin. He stood there strong, brutal, and ungovernable, and as an ungoverned brute he meant to behave.

The boy pleaded only once.

'Wait till to-morrow,' said he. 'Don't flog me here, and in the night-time. Do it to-morrow in the counting house.'

But his step-brother answered by turning up the cuff of his coat, showing a thick wrist not soon to be wearied. He had brought with him the gig whip. He lifted and flourished it on high. This was the rejoinder.

PART IV

[undated, c. June 1853]

'Stop,' said the expectant victim earnestly – so very earnestly that the executioner did stop, demanding, however,

'What am I to stop for? It's no use whining – sooner or later you shall have your deserts – you've run away and you shall pay for it.'

'But mind how you make me pay, Edward. A grown-up man like you should be reasonable. That whip is heavy, and I am only moderately strong. If you strike me in great anger you may cut deeper than you think.'

'What then? Who cares?'

'If I were to be more hurt than you think of? If you had to be taken before a magistrate and pay a fine or be transported?' suggested Willie.

The idea was an unlucky one. The whole bearing of the boy was antipathetic because incomprehensible to the gross nature under influence. Mr Ellin growled fury in his throat.

'Insolent beggar!' said he; 'so you threaten me with fines and magistrates? Take that! and that! – &c.'

He had fallen to work. It seemed he liked his business, for he continued at its exercise what seemed a long, a very long time. The worst of it was, Willie would not scream, he would not cry. A few loud shrieks, a combative struggle, a lusty roar, might probably have done wonders in abridging Mr Ellin's pleasure; but nothing in the present case interrupted or checked him, and he indulged freely. At last there came a gasp – the child sunk quite down – the man stopped. Through the silence breathed some utterance of pain – a moan or two – the slightest sound to which suffering Nature could be restricted; but in its repression only too significant. It induced Mr Ellin to say,

'I hope you have had enough now.'

He was not answered.

'Let me see you play truant again, or wheedle Bosas, and I'll double the dose.'

No reply – and no sob – perhaps no tear.

'Will you speak?'

The flogger seemed half-frightened, for Willie's exhausted attitude proved that he had indeed received enough; possibly he might have swooned, which would be troublesome.

But this was not the case. He spoke as soon as the severe pain of that last cut permitted him.

'I cannot bear any more to-night,' said he.

Ellin believed him – told him to go either to bed now or to – another place, whistled and walked off.

By and by, after Willie was left alone, he gathered himself up. It would have been sad to watch him undress and creep painfully to his crib, and sadder to read his thoughts. Scarce an interjection and not a word passed his lips; for some time scarce a tear wet his eyelashes. He had lain sleepless and suffering for over an hour ere there came any gush that could relieve; but at last the water sprung, the sobs thickened, his little handkerchief was drawn from under his pillow – he wept into it freely – then he murmured something about his life being very, very hard and difficult to bear. At last, and after a long pause, he slowly got on his knees – he seemed to be praying – though there were neither lifted eyes nor clasped hands nor audible words to denote supplication – nothing indeed but the attitude and a concentrated, abstracted expression of countenance, denoting a mind withdrawn into an unseen sphere, preoccupied with viewless intercourse. As he returned to earth, his eyes, hitherto dosed, slowly opened. He lay down; probably he believed his petition heard; composure breathed rest upon him; he slumbered.

Willie cannot take rank as a saint – his patience was constitutional, as his religion was instinctive. Temperance in his expression of suffering was with him an idiosyncrasy. Prayer was a need of his almost hopeless circumstances. Oppressed by man, Nature whispered him, ‘Appeal to God,’ and he obeyed. Some think prayers are rarely answered; and yet there have been penetrating prayers that have seemed to pass unchallenged all gates and hosts and pierced at once within the veil.

PART V

The man of bad propensities withdrew. William was left kneeling at his cribside, his face and hands pressed against the mattress. He had been severely flogged, and for a time felt sick, but he was not maimed or dangerously hurt – not corporeally maimed. How his heart fared is another question.

It might seem that the watchful care of God had temporarily been withdrawn from this orphan, as he shrank powerless to resist under a tyrannic hand – as he afterwards moaned alone, pale, faint, miserably though not passionately weeping, compelling himself, according to the bent of his idiosyncrasy, to a sort of heroic temperance of expression, even in extremity of grief. In man’s judgment it might be deemed that this child was forgotten where even the fledgling dropped from the nest is remembered. William himself feared as much. There was great darkness over his eyes, and a terrible ice chilled his hopes – his very hearing was suspended. He did not now catch an ascending step on the ladder, nor notice the door once more opening. It required the near glare of candle-light to snatch him even transiently from himself and his anguish.

The hand which brought the candle placed it on the narrow window-sill. Some one then approached Willie, sat down beside him on the edge of the crib; an arm passed round him, another arm drew him towards a warm shoulder, lips kissed his forehead, and eyes wept on his neck.

‘Poor boy! Poor wronged child!’

The voice uttering these words belonged to an age not many years beyond Willie’s own: the speaker seemed a girl of seventeen, blooming, and with features which, if they borrowed at this moment interest of pity, gave back in return beauty distinct, undoubted, undenied. Fine indeed were the eyes which dropped tears on Willie, and all lovely the arms, the hands, the lips by which he was protected and soothed.

‘I heard what has happened – heard it from my room below. I fear you are terribly hurt?’ said she.

‘I don’t care for the pain – my mind suffers the most,’ the boy declared with a groan. This sudden transfer from terror to tenderness relaxed for one instant the power of self-control.

‘Hush, my love, my child! Hush, Willie, forget him: he shall never hurt you more,’ said the young comforter, rocking the sufferer in her arms and cradling him on her breast.

Softened even while relieved, Willie wept fast and free and was soon easier. By gentle hands he was helped to bed, he was lovingly watched till he slept, he was kissed in his slumbers; and then the guardian withdrew, only to think of him through the night, to listen against molestation, and to be prepared at one menacing symptom to come out resolved to defend.

ALBION AND MARINA

A tale by Lord Wellesley

PREFACE

I have written this tale out of malignity for the injuries that have lately been offered to me. Many parts, especially the former, were composed under a mysterious influence that I cannot account for.

My reader will easily recognise the characters through the thin veil which I have thrown over them. I have considerably flattered Lady Zenobia Zelzia Ellrington. She is not nearly so handsome as I have represented her, and she strove far more vigorously to oust some one from another person's good graces than I say. But her endeavours failed. Albion has hitherto stood firm. What he will do I cannot pretend to even guess; but I think that Marina's incomparable superiority will prevail over her Frenchified rival, who, as all the world knows, is a miller, jockey, talker, bluestocking, charioteer, and beldam united in one….

The conclusion is wholly destitute of any foundation in truth, and I did it out of revenge. Albion and Marina are both alive and well for aught I know.

One thing, however, will certainly break my heart, and that is the admission of any scandal against Tree (the publisher); but I hope my readers will pardon me for it, as I promise to make amends with usury next time I write a book.

C. Wellesley

October 12th, 1830

I wrote this in four hours. C.B.

CHAPTER I
Albion

There is a certain sweet little pastoral village in the south of England with which I am better acquainted than most men. The scenery around it possesses no distinguished characteristic of romantic grandeur or wildness that might figure to advantage in a novel, to which high title this brief narrative sets up no pretentions.

Neither rugged lofty rocks, nor mountains dimly huge, mark with frowns the undisturbed face of nature; but little peaceful valleys, low hills crowned with wood, murmuring cascades and streamlets, richly cultivated fields, farmhouses, cottages, and a wide river, form all the scenic features. And every hamlet has one or more great men.

This had one and he was ‘na-sheep-shanks’. Every ear in the world had heard of his fame, and every tongue could bear testimony to it. I shall name him the Duke of Strathelleraye, and by that name the village was likewise denominated.

For more than thirty miles around every inch of ground belonged to him and every man was his retainer.

The magnificent villa, or rather palace, of this noble, stood on an eminence, surrounded by a vast park and the embowering shade of an ancient wood, proudly seeming to claim the allegiance of all the countryside.

The mind, achievements, and character of its great possessor, must not, can not, be depicted by a pen so feeble as mine; for though I could call filial love and devoted admiration to my aid, yet both would be utterly ineffective.

Though the duke seldom himself came among his attached vassals, being detained elsewhere by important avocations, yet his lady the duchess resided in the castle constantly. Of her I can only say that she was like an earthly angel. Her mind was composed of charity, beneficence, gentleness, and sweetness. All, both old and young, loved her; and the blessings of those that were ready to perish came upon her evermore.

His Grace had also two sons, who often visited Strathelleraye.

Of the youngest, Lord Cornelius, everything is said when I inform the reader that he was seventeen years of age, grave, sententious, stoical, rather haughty and sarcastic, of a fine countenance though somewhat swarthy; that he had long thick hair black as the hoody’s wing; and liked nothing so well as to sit in moody silence musing over the vanity of human affairs, or improving and expanding his mind by the abstruse study of the higher branches of mathematics, and that sublime science astronomy.

The eldest son, Albion, Marquis of Tagus, is the hero of my present tale. He had entered his nineteenth year; his stature was lofty; his form equal in the magnificence of its proportions to that of Apollo Belvedere. The bright wealth of curls of his rich brown hair waved over a forehead of the purest marble in the placidity of its unveined whiteness. His nose and mouth were cast in the most perfect mould. But saw I never anything to equal his eye! Oh! I could have stood riveted with the chains of admiration gazing for hours upon it! What clearness, depth, and lucid transparency in those large orbs of radiant brown! And the fascination of his smile was irresistible, though seldom did that sunshine of the mind break through the thoughtful and almost melancholy expression of his noble features. He was a soldier, captain in the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards, and all his attitudes and actions were full of martial grace. His mental faculties were in exact keeping with such an exterior, being of the highest order; and though not like his younger brother, wholly given up to study, yet he was well versed in the ancient languages, and deeply read in the Greek and Roman classics, in addition to the best works in the British, German, and Italian tongues.

Such was my hero. The only blot I was ever able to discover in his character was that of a slight fierceness or impetuosity of temper which sometimes carried him beyond bounds, though at the slightest look or word of command from his father he instantly bridled his passion and became perfectly calm.

No wonder the duke should be, as he was, proud of such a son.

CHAPTER II
Marina

About two miles from the castle there stood a pretty house, entirely hid from view by a thick forest, in a glade of which it was situated.

Behind it was a smooth lawn fringed with odoriferous shrubs, and before it a tasteful flower garden.

This was the abode of Sir Alured Angus, a Scotchman, who was physician to His Grace, and though of gentlemanly manners and demeanour, yet harsh, stern, and somewhat querulous in countenance and disposition.

He was a widower, and had but one child, a daughter, whom I shall call Marina, which nearly resembles her true name.

No wild rose blooming in solitude, or bluebell peering from an old wall, ever equalled in loveliness this flower of the forest. The hue of her cheek would excel the most delicate tint of the former, even when its bud is just opening to the breath of summer, and the clear azure of her eyes would cause the latter to appear dull as a dusky hyacinth. Also, the silken tresses of her hazel hair straying in light ringlets down a neck and forehead of snow seemed more elegant than the young tendrils of a vine. Her dress was almost Quaker-like in its simplicity. Pure white or vernal green were the colours she constantly wore, without any jewels save one row of pearls round her neck. She never stirred beyond the precincts of the wooded and pleasant green lane which skirted a long cornfield near the house. There on warm summer evenings she would ramble and linger listening to the woodlark's song, and occasionally join her own more harmonious voice to its delightful warblings.

When the gloomy days and nights of autumn and winter did not permit these walks she amused herself with drawings (for which she had an exact taste), playing on the harp, reading the best English, French, and Italian works (all of which languages she understood) in her father's extensive library, and sometimes a little light needlework.

Thus in a state of almost perfect seclusion (for seldom had she even Sir Alured's company, as he generally resided in London) she was quite happy, and reflected with innocent wonder on those who could find pleasure in the noisy delights of what is called 'fashionable society'….

One day, as Lady Strathellerraye was walking in the wood she met Marina, and on learning who she was, being charmed with her beauty and sweet manners, invited her to go on the morrow to the castle. She did so, and there met the Marquis of Tagus. He was even more surprised and pleased with her than the duchess, and when she was gone he asked his mother many questions about her, all of which she answered to his satisfaction.

For some time afterwards he appeared listless and abstracted. The reader will readily perceive that he had, to use a cant phrase, 'fallen in love'.

Lord Cornelius, his brother, warned him of the folly of doing so, but instead of listening to his sage admonitions he first strove to laugh, and then frowning at him commanded silence.

In a few days he paid a visit to Oakwood House (Sir Alured's mansion), and after that became more gloomy than before.

His father observed this, and one day as they were sitting alone remarked it to Albion, adding that he was fully acquainted with the reason.

Albion reddened but made no answer.

'I am not, my son', continued the duke, 'opposed to your wishes, though certainly there is a considerable difference of rank between yourself and Marina Angus, but that difference is compensated by the many admirable qualities she possesses'.

On hearing these words, Arthur – Albion I mean – started up, and throwing himself at his father's feet, poured fourth his thanks in terms of glowing gratitude, while his fine features, flushed with excitation, spoke even more eloquently. tHan his eloquent words.

'Rise, Albion!', said the duke, 'you are worthy of her and she of you; but both are yet too young. Some years must elapse before your union takes place; therefore exert your patience, my son'.

Albion's joy was slightly damped by this news, but his thankfulness and filial obedience as well as love forced him to acquiesce, and immediately after he quitted the room and took his way to Oakwood House.

There he related the circumstances to Marina, who, though she blushed incredulously, yet in truth felt as much gladness and as great a relief from doubt almost amounting to despair as himself.

CHAPTER III
GLASSTOWN

A few months afterwards the Duke of Strathelleraye determined to visit that wonder of the world, the great city of Africa: the Glass Town, of whose spendour, magnificence, and extent, strength and riches, occasional tidings came from afar, wafted by breezes of the ocean to Merry England.

But to most of the inhabitants of that little isle it bore the character of a dream or gorgeous fiction. They were unable to comprehend how mere human beings could construct fabrics of such a marvellous size and grandeur as many of the public buildings were represented to be; and as to the 'Tower of all the Nations', few believed in its existence. It seemed as the cities of old: Nineveh or Babylon with the temples of their gods, Ninus or Jupiter Belus, and their halls of Astarté and Semalt. These most people believe to be magnified by the dim haze of intervening ages, and the exaggerating page of history through which medium we behold them.

The duke, as he had received many invitations from the Glass Townians, who were impatient to behold one whose renown had spread so far, and who likewise possessed vast dominions near the African coast, informed his lady, the Marquis of Tagus, and Lord Cornelius, that in a month's timehe should take his departure with them, and that he should expect them all to be prepared at that period, adding that when they returned Marina Angus should be created Marchioness of Tagus.

Though it was a bitter trial to Albion to part with one to whom he was now so entirely devoted, yet, comforted by the last part of his father's speech, he obeyed without murmuring.

On the last evening of his stay in Strathelleraye he took a sad farewell of Marina, who wept as if hopeless; but suddenly restraining her griefs she looked up, with her beautiful eyes irradiated by a smile that like a ray of light illuminated the crystal tears, and whispered:

'I shall be happy when you return'.

Then they parted; and Albion during his voyage over the wide ocean often thought for comfort on her last words.

It is a common superstition that the words uttered by a friend on separating are prophetic, and these certainly portended nothing but peace.

CHAPTER IV
LITERARY AMBITIONS

In due course of time they arrived at the Glass Town, and were welcomed with enthusiastic cordiality.

After the duke had visited his kingdom he returned to the chief metropolis and established his residence there at Salamanca Palace.

The Marquis of Tagus from the noble beauty of his person attracted considerable attention wherever he went, and in a short period he had won and attached many faithful friends of the highest rank and abilities.

From his love of elegant literature and the fine arts in general, painters and poets were soon among his warmest admirers. He himself possessed a most sublime genius, but as yet its full extent was unknown to him.

One day as he was meditating alone on the world of waters that rolled between him and the fair Marina, he determined to put his feelings on paper in a tangible shape that he might hereafter show them to her when anticipation had given place to fruition. He took his pen, and in about a quarter of an hour had completed a brief poem of exquisite beauty. The attempt pleased him and soothed the anguish that lingered in his heart. It likewise gave him an insight into the astonishing faculties of his own mind; and a longing for immortality, an ambition of glory, seized him.

He was a devoted worshipper of the divine works that the Grecian tragedians have left for all succeding ages to marvel at, particularly those of Sophocles the Majestic; and his mind was deeply embued with the spirit of their eagle-flights into higher regions than that of earth or even Parnassus.

Being now sensible in a degree of his lofty powers, he determined, like Milton, to write somewhat that the traditionary muses would not willingly let die, and accordingly commenced a tragedy entitled: ‘Necropolis, or the City of the Dead’. Here was set forth in a strain of the grandest mind the mysteries of ancient Egyptian worship, and he has acknowledged to me that he felt his being absorbed while he wrote it, even by the words himself had made.

Sublime is this surprising production! It is indeed, in the words of an eminent writer (Captain Tree), ‘a noble instance of the almost perfectibility of human intellect’; but there hovers over it a feeling of tender melancholy, for the image of Marina haunted his thoughts, and Amalthea, his heroine, is but an impersonation of her.

This tragedy wreathed the laurels of fame round his brow, and his after-productions, each of which seemed to excel the other, added new wreaths to those which already beautified his temples.

I cannot follow him in the splendour of his literary career, nor even mention so much as the titles of his various works. Suffice it to say he became one of the greatest poets of the age; and one of the chief motives that influenced him in his exertions for renown was to render himself worthy to possess such a treasure as Marina. She in whatever he was employed was never out of his thoughts, and none had he as yet beheld among all the ladies of his Glass Town – though rich, titled, and handsome strove by innumerable arts to gain his favour – whom he could ever compare with her.

CHAPTER V
LADY ZELZIA ELLRINGTON

One evening Albion was invited to the house of Earl Cruchan, where was a large party assembled. Among the guests was one lady apparently about twenty –five or twenty –six years of age. In figure she was very tall, and both it and her face were of a perfectly Roman cast. Her features were regularly and finely formed, her full and brilliant eyes jetty black, as were the luxuriant tresses of her richly –curled hair. Her dark glowing complexion was set off by a robe of crimson velvet trimmed with ermine, and a nodding plume of black ostrich feathers added to the imposing dignity of her appearance.

Albion, notwithstanding her unusual comeliness, hardly noticed her till Earl Cruachan rose and introduced her to him as the Lady Zelzia Ellrington.

She was the most learned and noted woman in Glass Town, and he was pleased with this opportunity of seeing her.

For some time she entertained him with a discourse of the most lively eloquence, and indeed madame de Staël herself could not have gone beyond Lady Zelzia in the conversational talent; and on this occasion she exerted herself to the utmost, as she was in the presence of so distinguished a man, and one whom she seemed ambitious to please.

At length one of the guests asked her to favour the company with a song and tune on the grand piano. At first she refused, but on Albion seconding the request rose, and taking from the drawing-room table a small volume of poems opened it at one by the Marquis of Tagus. She then set it to a fine air and sang as follows, while she skilfully accompanied her voice upon the instrument:

I think of thee when the moonbeams play
On the placid water’s face;
For thus thy blue eys’ lustrous ray
Shone with resembling grace.

I think of thee when the snowy swan
Glides calmly down the stream;
Its plumes the breezes scarcely fan,
Awed by their radiant gleam.

For thus I’ve seen the loud winds hush
To pass thy beauty by,
With soft caress and playful rush
‘Mid thy bright tresses fly.

And I have seen the wild birds sail
In rings thy head above,
While thou hast stood like lily pale
Unknowing of their love.

Oh! For the day when once again
Mine eyes will gaze on thee;
But an ocean vast, a sounding main,
And ever howling sea,
Roll on between
With their billows green,
High tost tempestuously.

This song had been composed by Albion soon after his arrival at the Glass Town. The person addressed was Marina. The full rich tones of Lady Zelzia's voice did ample justice to the subject, and expressed his sense of the honor she had done him in appropriate terms.

When she had finished the company departed, for it was then rather late.

CHAPTER VI
THE SPIRIT OF MARINA

As Albion pursued his way homewards alone he began insensibly to meditate on the majestic charms of Lady Zelzia Ellrington, and to compare them with the gentler ones of Marina Angus. At first he could hardly tell which to give the preference to, for though he still almost idolised Marina, yet an absebce of four years had considerably deadened his remembrance of her person.

While he was thus employed he heard a soft but mournful voice whisper 'Albion!'

He turned hastily round, and saw the form of the identical Marina at a little distance distinctly visible by the moonlight.

'Marina! My dearest Marina!' he exclaimed , springing towards her, while joy unutterable filled his heart; 'how did you come here? Have the angels in Heaven brought you?'

So saying he stretched out his hand, but she eluded his grasp, and slowly gliding away, said: 'Do not forget me; I shall be happy when you return'.

Then the apparition vanished. It seemed to have appeared merely to assert her superiority over her rival, and indeed the moment Albion beheld her beauty he felt that it was peerless.

But now wonder and perplexity took possession of his mind. He could not account for this vision except by the common solution of supernatural agency, and that ancient creed his enlightened understanding had hitherto rejected until it was forced upon him by this extraordinary incident.

One thing there was, however, the interpretation of which he thought he could not mistake, and that was the repetition of her last words. 'I shall be happy when you return'. It showed that she was still alive, and that which he had seen could not be her wraith. However, he made a memorandum of the day and hour, namely, the 18th of June 815, twelve o'clock at night.

From this time the natural melancholy turn of his disposition increased, for the dread of her death before he should return was constantly before him, and the ardency of his adoration and desire to see her again redoubled.

At length, not being able any longer to bear his misery, he revealed it to his father; and the duke, touched with his grief and the fidelity of his attachment, gave him full of permission to visit England and bring back Marina with him to Africa.

CHAPTER VII
ALBION'S RETURN

I need not trouble the reader with a minute detail of the circumstances of Albion's voyage, but shall pass on to what happened after he arrived in England.

It was a fair evening in September 185 when he reached Strathelleraye.

Without waiting to enter the halls of his fathers he proceeded immediately to Oakwood House. As he approached it he almost sickened when for an instant the thought that she might be no more passed his mind, but summoning hope to his aid and resting on her golden anchor he passed up the lawn and gained the glass doors of the drawing room.

As he drew near a sweet symphony of harp music swelled on his ear. His heart bounded within him at the sound. He knew that no fingers but hers could create those melodious tones with which now blended the harmony of a sweet and sad but well-known voice. He lifted the vine branch that shaded the door and beheld Marina, more beautiful he thought than ever, seated at her harp sweeping with her slender fingers the quivering chords.

Without being observed by her, as she had her face turned frm him, he entered, and sitting down leaned his head on his hand and, closing his eyes, listened with feelings of overwhelming transport to the following words:

Long my anxious ear hath listened
For the step that ne'er returned;
And my tearful eye hath glistened,
And my heart hath daily burned,
But now I rest.

Nature's self seemed clothed in mourning;
Even the star-like woodland flower,
With its leaflets fair, adorning
The pathway to the forest-bower,
Drooped its head.

From the cavern of the mountain,
From the groves that crown the hill,
From the stream, and from the fountain,
Sounds prophetic murmured still,
Betokening grief.

Boding winds came fitful, sighing,
Through the tall and leafy trees;
Birds of omen, wildly crying,

Sent their calls upon the breeze
Wailing round me.

At each sound I paled and trembled,
At each step I raised my head,
Hearkening if it his resembled,
Or if news that he was dead
Were come from far.

All my days were days of weeping;
Thoughts of grim despair were stirred;
Time on leaden feet seemed creeping;
Long heart-sickness, hope deferred
Cankered my heart.

Here the music and singing suddenly ceased.

Albion raised his head. All was darkness except where the silver moonbeams showed a desolate and ruined apartment instead of the elegant parlour that a few minutes before had gladdened his sight.

No trace of Marina was visible, no harp or other instrument of harmony, and the cold lunar light streamed through a void space instead of the glass door. He sprang up and called aloud: ‘Marina!Marina!’ But only an echo as of empty rooms answered. Almost distracted he rushed into the open air. A child was standing alone at the garden gates, who advanced towards him and said: ‘I will lead you to Marina Angus; she has removed from that house to another’.

Albion followed the child till they came to a long row of tall dark trees leading to a churchyard, which they entered, and the child vanished, leaving Albion beside a white marble tombstone on which was chiselled :

MARINA ANGUS
She died
18th of June 1815
at 12 o’clock midnight

When Albion had read this he felt a pang of horrible anguish wring his heart and convulse his whole frame. With a loud groan he fell across the tomb and lay there senseless a long time, till at length he was waked from the death-like trance to behold the spirit of Marina, which stood beside him for a moment, and then murmuring, ‘Albion, I am happy, for I am at peace’, disappeared!

For a few days he lingered round her tomb, and then quitted

Srathelleraye, where he was never again heard of.

…………………………

The reason of Marina's death I shall briefly relate. Four years after Albion's departure tidings came to the village that he was dead. The news broke Marina's faithful heart. The day after, she was no more.

C.B.

October 12th, 1830

ANGRIA AND THE ANGRIANS

Among all the descriptions I have read I do not recollect one to me more beautiful that that in the commencement of the Tales of my Landlord which describes the Burial place of the Covenanters at the Valley Head among the lonely Lowland Hills and I like it so much because there is not about it that selection of the sublime or beautiful in Nature wherewith to seize the mind independantly of power in the writer or of sentiment in his subject For excepting in the Grave stones themselves half buried it is only the picture of one among many "lone vales of green Bracken" with a rude ill cultivated country below and a brown fern Hidden brook within and dull stony swells around and a marshy monotonous Moor beyond But I born and bred upon the Hills side want no more of the great or striking to make me adore that discription for I feel enough of the Associations called up at sight of those Linnet peopled Hills and well indeed the quiet nook of Grave stones tells me of times when the perils of Life and the sternness of man fitly accorded with the Moors and Mosses of their Mountain Land I will never beleive that our minds can be so well awakened by the poetry of distant and unknown Images as by that of the things we have long been used to know I would doubt the genius of that writer who loved more to dwell upon Indian Palm Groves or Genii palaces than on the wooded manors and cloudy skies of England So when I see upon that page the reflection of objects which I have always been surrounded with I must the more delight in the description itself and in the Noble Head that framed it for it shows me both its own sacred graveyard and what I have only to lift my eyes from the pages to look on. That Mountain Ash among the stone fenced feilds that skirt the Heather and the peewits wheeling above the quiet pools that reflect only their whistling rushes and grey clouded sky. I am carried away to the lonly farm Houses on the confines of the heath whose roomy Interior shews old Tale inspiring Oaken furniture and funnel chimnies and Bibles blacken with the smoke of a century while the form of Eld cowering in its high back chair beside the fire rigid and callous with years but living dotedly on as if years had forgotten it casts by its discomfortless look as much almost of solemn awe over my scene as the Hoar Old Mortality busied above the dead does over that of the Scottish Novelist

Such a country as that I nave alluded too lay round the Parish of Airdmore in Carnac, whose bleak hills sides flanked the Ash bordered brook coming down from the Gorside Dean which might be seen like a desolate chasm in the gloomy frontier bordered by fern clad slopes and lost in a wilderness of moor and nearly the farthest House toward its confines was one which stood on the highest level of the sour pale pasture Land with large black walls and mossy mistal and a plantation of gloomy firs one clump of which the oldest and the highest stretched their horizontal arms above one Gable like the Genii of that desolate scene. Beyond this House its long feild walls made a line with the November sky and the path across them led on to an interminable moor whose tracks might furnish a long days sport after Snipe or Heathcock, but no birds flew near the House except the Linnets twittering by hundreds on some wet old wall. and yet despite its loneliness this House was one of no common note in the Extensive parish and half the fireside tales of times gone by were sure to take "Darkwall" for their scene and its owners for their subject they had been Lords of the Manor of Longmoor Edge and their immemorial Grave stones had every Sunday occupied the gaze of the Congregation of Airdmore Church but more than anything contributed to their fame the apparations of the "Darkwall Gytrash" though in the awe which its appearance had spread through that parish my Readers from ignorance of its nature will in very few instances participate. A Gytrash is a Spectre neither at all similar to the Ghosts of those who once were alive nor to fairys and silvan Creatures nor to Demons and the powers of the air it does not confine its forms to the Human and indeed most seldom appears in such a form a Black Dog dragging a chain a dusky calf nay even a rolling stone or a self impelled cart wheel are more commonly the mortal coil of the Sullen Spectre But the Darkwall Gytrash was known by the form of of an Old Dwarfish and hideous Man as often seen without a head as with one and moving at dark along the naked feilds which spread round the Aged House its visits were connected in all mens minds with the fortunes of the family he hovered round and evil omens were always drawn on such occasions and if tradition spoke true fullfilled upon them

Next to their Gytrash the Thurstons themselves were the object of awe and tale telling to the parish for uncertainty creates wonder and the knowledge possessed of the Thurstons was often indistinct They had alwalys[sic] held lands and Houses far down in the fertile and populous country their family ties were all there and only at uncertain periods they were used to live upon their oldest family land William Thurston Esq^{r}. to whom all the property had fallen was more addicted to vice than virtue (a leaning which distinguished the Thurstons as it has done many a House besides) and from the vast distance of his usual Residence (Thurston House near Edwardston beyond Verdopolis) he was quite as little know as any of his forefathers besides he had married a Lady of good family from nobody knew where and a sight of Mrs Thurston was much more frequently wished for than obtained. Those who visited them were always from a distance and their House was not more severed from all Neighbourhood than themselves

At the Time in which my forthcoming Narrative begins Mr Thurston had for some time been absent at the metropolis but his return was expected that day which was the one before a great cattle fair annually held in Airdmore as the centre of a vast pastoral and Grazing district and which this year was expected to be larger and more numerously attended than ever for through the whole season it had been rumoured that Mr PERCY. the celebrated cattle dealer would attend and a day before the fair the van of his Horned Legions came in under the care of his co partners Mess^{rs} O' Connor Cary and Gordon who with Mr H M M Montmorency the well known Barrister rode up in the Evening to Darkwall to meet Mr Percy their principal who with Mr Thurston was expected to arrive there that night from the Capital The Worthies were gathered round the Drawing Room fire and through closed doors and passages their Oaths and laughter might be heard in the Large Old Kitchen where Mrs Maria Thurston was superintending the preparations for a kingly supper.

That Kitchen in the decline of November Daylight seemed Ruddied all over by the glow of the Roaring fire that flashed all its radiance upon the mighty Dresser of Ancient and Burnished pewter In so much that far opposite from the else darkened end of the Room that front of polished metal reflected in every plate and dish a bright and bickering blaze The Dark Oak Settles them selves glistened and the faces of the Neat Aproned Servant Maids shone brighter than either while they bent to their duties over the Hissing Roast and fragrant steaming Ovens Hardly at any bidding would the great Spaniels quit such a Elysian Hearth and when they were forced to leave it for the darkening passage the change so pressed upon their hearts that pricking both ears at the social roar from the Drawing Room they barked till all the House rung Hollow with the Echoe. But in the great kitchen what most cheifly struck the Eye was the Tall and Ladylike Woman with black silk Apron and Round white Arms bared to the Elbow whose pink and Taper fingers were busied in arranging and superintending what her Active maids did their part to create. Her white stockinged and black sandalped] feet moved the very picture of quiet Elegance and now and then her white Eylids drooped over the table would lift their dark lashes to the window with an expectant look though to see the shadening prospect she had often to put back the raven curls that would when downward bending escape from their Lacy confinement After such a parade of description my Readers may wonder to find Mrs Thurston engaged in occupations so little allied to those of a Lady but she was though polished and educated enough accustomed to a retired and rural Country where mistresses are really Ladies of the House Thousands a year in among the Carnac Mountains did not in those days deter a wife from seeing the thousands well expended Nor had French Cooks found their way to Airdmore so the task of pleasing visitors fell naturally to the person whose interest it was to please

The grand hour of projection was passed the safty of the viands was assured and releived from her Anxiety Mrs Thurston looked at the clock which spoke a hour long after that affixed for Mr Thurstons arrival. It was rather inconvenient she thought to leave the Gentlemen so long without their host but it was time at any rate for her to dress so she called her waiting maid and left the kitchen leaving the Girls gathering round the fire as neat as trim Ribbons and white Aprons could make them the exitement of expectation awoke in their faces and multitudinous guess arose on their tongues all about the famous Cattle Dealer whose exploits in the feilds of Mars and Venus had long been the fireside talk of Africa He and his partners known though they were "Wide as the world" were novelties in the body to Airdmore and the distant villiage was as mad awaiting to see them as was the fireside knot of the Darkwall kitchen

"What Horses they have" said one "Johns been a cleaning on 'em and he says he never saw such tits sin he was born

"Yes and" said a second "What a man that young'st on 'em is — " "What the great Lawyer — "? — "Nay him with the Red Head lass — if he didnt take me round the waist as I was coming through the passage — the impudence — "

"Eh lass! I wadnt ha' said it nother but how foul that Black whiskered one looks — whisht thats the bell — who'll go? The call about 'em like any Alehouse — "

Straight rose a fuss each one wanting to go and to seem as if she would not go but the footman just entering saved them the trouble and they began to discourse about "How the Red haired Gentleman was O' Connor the Brother of the Lady that Percy had run away with and How Mr Montmorency was her Husband and all about the story and the News that John had brought from Girnington far away in the East about Miss Hartford and Mr Percy and — but in the high tide of story telling a clatter of Horses Hoofs came down the yard and a Gentlemans voice was heard giving an order outside the door which the footman opened directly thinking it was His Master but Mr Thurston was not there And the visitor a much taller person was in the act of throwing the reins of his Noble Grey to a servant mounted upon a "Great White Horse" who taking both his beasts toward the stable left Mr Percy bowing his lofty head to enter beneath the kitchen porch to the utter confusion of the servants when instead of their Master they saw enter a man of such uncommon height attired in short Green frock white cord Breeks and Top boots with a white broad brim on his head and immense Orange whiskers on his face

"Now my Girls" he said "let me see your Lady as soon as you can" and therewith he strode to the fire standing with his back toward it on the Hearth and placing his hat on a table The servants crowded together gigglingly to note the celebrated man and he looked a noble fellow enough with his superb white forehead and head of Auburn curls and cheeks so richly haloed though their marked lines of dissipation and the athwart glance of his eyes took somewhat from the gazers admiration and left a sensation akin to fear. She who had done his bidding returned to usher him into a parlour but he swore he was not so loath to leave them and began a verbal salute that made them hardly know where to look for smiling till the door opening hushed Him and Mrs Thurston Entered who now dressed with wreathing curls and snowwhite neck and shoulders looked as handsome as she before had looked Ladylike Each warmly advancing shook hands

And “By God” he said “I could not have thought to see my little Maria so much improved by time. It spoils all that I know but it has mended thee —

“It is long since we met Sir” she answered “I was only a Girl then — but where is my Husband? Have you not brought him with you?”

While speaking Mrs Thurston led Mr Percy to a sitting room and he swore her Husband did not need his assistance he was fending for himself and he guessed the D — l had him in some plot or another They parted at Denard and she must expect him home in a day or two. But he would not talk on the subject and declared that when he knew it was years since they two had met the thought bewildered almost past talking He durst say she had long forgotten him but through all the rough work it been his lot to encounter He had found a minute now and then to think upon her “Ah” she replied “I was fourteen then which was an age old enough to observe and the happiness I saw you enjoying when I was at Percy Hall has recurred to my mind ever since when I have heard of the sorrows and dangers which after years have connected with your name — but you look greived that I should mention it will you join your freinds Sir or — ”

“Freinds Maria! D — n them how many are there? Mont I should judge from that laugh and the crack brained O’ Connor? first let me dress and then have at them — the drunken Blackguards!” So Mrs Thurston ringing the footman appeared whom she bidd call Mr Percys servant and as the man came in she went out leaving a striking contrast in appearance to fill up her place in the room He was an aged and stunted fellow with a forehead moulded in to every demon feeling and his grey hairs and black Old fashioned cloaths mocked in every motion the alert twinkle of his deep grey eye Such was the celebrated Robert King or as all the world called him *Mr S death* an old villain whose crimes would fill the Newgate Calendar and whilolm the mentor of his almost equally accomplished Master whom now he served both as personal servant and as the cheif Agent in his extensive Horse trade an office which the old Theifs Yorkshire birth and Horse Jockey education perfectly qualified him to fill. He ushered Mr Percy up stairs candle in hand and when in a while they came down conducted him into the drawing Room where round a blazing fire sat the circle of partnership waiting for the advent of their stady head All jumped up as he appeared and being told that Mrs Thurston waited supper for them followed their Guide to the Dining Room O Connor swearing internal oaths of enjoyment at the long display of shining plate and snowhite[sic] table and Montmorency giving Percy a fiendly squint as he saw the beautiful woman who stood to welcome their enterance

She, when all were seated, with her somewhat pale though smiling face and large dark eyes and elegant womanly form to a painters eye made a beautiful companion to the lofty stature and August forehead of the Handsome though Dissipated looking man at her right hand and as good a contrast to the Black and sullen ferocity of the malignant Gordon on her left. The wild disjasked profligate O' Connor rattled and the facetious though far deeper dyied scoundrel Montmorency joked away opposite, but in such wise that as soon as possible Mrs Thurston quitted the table and left them to the paradise of Bottles and glasses that O Connors heart had all day been panting for

"Now" he cried drawing in to the fire "lets unite Theory and practice they've been a cursed while seperate with me fill round to our Hostess and may our own homes never want as fair an Ornament I mean when we have a Home G — d D — n!"

"Now my Hearts" said the Barrister "whats the use bothering ourselves with care and we have only a grain of sense in our heads here's we four here been sitting all the Evening doing nothing but cracking a lot over the old foolishness and theres you Percy have only entered a quarter since and your Bread's baked already D — n the jade fortune — pass the Bottle Arthur"

Arthur did so with another oath that yet more releived him and his wild Red head commenced its customary whirl of thoughtless oddity which Hector Matthias Montmorency took a delight in bothering to a truly Irish confusion of ideas all the while as he did it keeping a keen grey twinkle upon the motions of his Leader Alexander Percy "Come now my chuck" cried Hector coaxingly to O Connor "I want to have thy opinion at full on the subject we left before supper — "

"Shiver my breeches if I aut forgotten it Mont — "

"The identy of moral right and wrong my chuck you had just set about prosing — "

"Oh by G — d I recollect — well and you see when a man says if I commit this crime I'm sure of getting a fairing for it either here or hereafter what's that? Why its cowardice real D — d infernal poltroonery he's afraid and he makes fear the mainspring of his refusal Dammn when I was aboard the Rover if I haddnt whipped my whittle into Grayson it would have been through fear of a licking. I did strike in and whats the issue — why I'de a thousand pounds that made half a years paradise after it! God — why theres Percy now. Whats his theory? — Ive had cause for handling him many a day — and so have you Mont By G — d — well what would have been the issue if I had?.

When I was aboard the Rover — (excuse me madam Mr Percy knows what I mean) — I used at first to be for ever asking myself — Is this right? if not what'll be the issue? — Well Day came on after Day — never an hour but I had to do something wrong and never a night but I turned in as drunk as paradise — well I thought whats the theory of this? I see its practice and thats a regular elysium I looked we should all strike and founder some fine morning but it was useless nought happened and our purses became like the Widow's cruise. we had always our hand in them and they weighed never an ounce the lighter — Excuse me madam what could we do? Temptations came and goodly merchant men crossed on all sides of us What was the issue, why what was theirs became Ours — There was the fight of — well well we'll not mention names but however it was the first time I shed blood, you'll forgive me?. well I never slept a wink the night after for counting over the good that I got by it where was the punishment there?. Oh the

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That strange union which formed Percy's character of Debauched profligacy and impassioned feeling and restless Ambition and which then was but begginning to be over clouded by his after embittered melancholy but always excited the interest in Mrs Thurstons mind which it had done in the minds of many thousands besides and the story of his life its ceasless wanderings and rumoured crimes only added to that interest and kept awake the Romance which his present employment might have tended to destroy She had expected with much excitement the visit of so celebrated a man and when arrived each word and action seemed to fill up her fancys sketch or open features in the prospect unknown before

Mr Percy though she had not seen him had been a comrade of her Husbands in the Metropolis and Mr Thurston had now invited him to stay at his Residence whither he should follow him so soon as his buisiness at Fidena should be despatched and it was left till such time for his Lady to entertain him which at first she fancied herself quite unable to do but she little knew him — While his Gang was present He had appeared sour and Impetuous but they were now gone And while his Hostess occupied a Sopha by the fire He arose on a sudden and commenced a progress backward and forward through the room His Majestic figure now lightened now shadowed as he advanced to or receded from the fire and his blue wayward eyes enkindled and his expression each moment changing while he poured forth on many a subject his words so warmly and flowingly eloquent. If Mrs Thurston talked to him he would stop and listen with a keenness which almost fluttered and damped her but in turn when he talked she felt roused beyond the pitch of every day conversation She had no need to tempt him forwards for something had excited him with evident pleasure and it was far more the pretty swan like neck and Raven Ringlets of his Hostess that encouraged him than any regard for subject or any desire to shine

"I wonder" she said for she had heard of the morbid bitterness of his feelings "I wonder Sir after what I know to find you now so cheerful. It was much my fear that this wild moorland and ancient House would oppress you with lassitude and ennuye

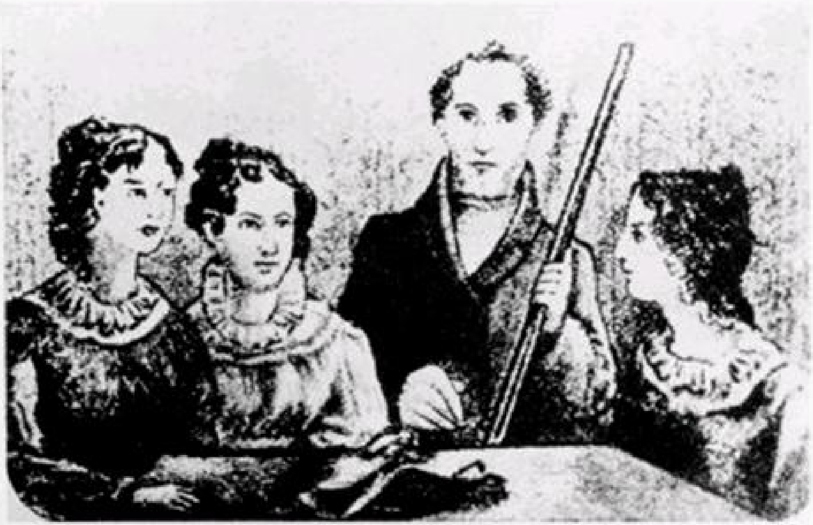
"And there are times" he replied "when it might if I were left in it alone but not with you here and indeed I have too often held communion with loneliness to find it either strange or disagreeable when I think of long nights at sea and days of the winters in Norway I am minded that but for the burial which they gave to other greifs I should have been withered into my grave before now. But I can always think best when I am far away at sea and I can feel best when I am even as I am now. you must forgive my intrusion on your time Mrs Thurston because it is seldom I can obtain such an opportunity of pleasure and if you knew how I shall feel when I leave you you would hold me very excusable in keeping you so long

Have not you been used to think of me as a debauched profligate — and one to whom God had denied every spark of kindly nature? — and I own that vice and I have held a long companionship.

TALES OF THE ISLANDERS

When Charlotte’s brother Branwell was given a set of twelve toy soldiers, an entire new imaginary world opened before them. The Twelves, or Young Men, became a constant source of inspiration for the Bronte children, spawning tales of swashbuckling adventures, darkest intrigue, doomed romance and spiteful spirits. The tales collected here make delightful reading, offering a unique insight into Bronte family life and Charlotte’s development as a writer.

This collection is exceptional in that it is the only surviving example of a complete set of stories written by one of the Brontë children. The four volumes of *Tales of the Islanders*, written in tiny hand-made books by Charlotte over a period of a year, comprise the entire output. They are therefore of particular interest because they form an entity. The four volumes reveal a significant development in Charlotte’s storytelling powers. The first volume is not even divided into chapters, though there are two distinct stories, introduced by a fascinating account of how the young Brontes first devised the idea for the Islanders. The play origin of the stories, with each child taking an active and inter-active dramatic role in their progression, is especially obvious in the first and crudest volume. Charlotte herself, Emily and Branwell all appear as themselves, as well as in a variety of fictitious incarnations with their youngest sister, Anne.



A FAMILY GROUP BY BRANWELL BRONTË

TALES OF THE ISLANDERS

31 JULY 1829-30 JULY 1830

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FIRST VOLUME OF TALES OF THE ISLANDERS JUNE 31 1829

Tales of Islanders

The play of the Islanders was formed in December 1827 in the following manner. One night about the time when the cold sleet and dreary fogs of November are succeeded by the snow storms & high peircing nightwinds of confirmed winter we where all sitting round the warm blazing kitchen fire having just concluded a quarrel with Taby concerning the propriety of lighting a candle from which she came of victorious no candle having been produced . a long pause suceeded which was at last broken by Branwell saying in a lazy maner " I don't know what to do." this was reechoed by Emily and Anne T wha ya may go t'bed'

B I'd rather do anything than that & C your so glum tonight C well supose we had each an Island B if we had I would choose the Island of Man C & I would choose Isle of Wight E the Isle of Arran for me'

A & mine should be Guernsey C the D of Wellington should be my cheif man B Herries should be mine E Walter Scott should be mine A I should have Bentinck here our conversation was interrupted by the to us dismal sound of the clock striking 7 & we where sumoned of to bed. the next day we added several others to our list of names till we had got allmost all the cheif men in the kingdom.

after this for a long time nothing worth noticing ocured. In June 1828 we erected a school on a fictitous Island which was to contain 1000 children. the maner of the building was as followsf: the Island was 50 miles in circumference & certainly it apeared more like the region of enchantment or a beautiful fiction than sober reality. in some parts made terribly sublime by mighty rocks rushing streams and roaring cataracts with here and there an oak either scathed by lightning or withered by time & as if to remind the lonely passenger of what it once was a green young scion twisting round its old grey trunk. in other parts of the Island there were greensward's glittering fountains springing in the flowery meadows or among the pleasant woods where fairys were said to dwell its borders embroidered by the purple violet & the yellow primrose and the air perfumed by the sweet wild flowers and ringing with the sound of the cuckoo & turtle dove or the merry music of the blackbird & thrush formed the beautiful scenery.

One specialty? around the palace school was a fine large park in which the beautiful undulations of hill & plain variegated the sceen- ery which might otherwise have been monotonous shady Groves crowened the hills pure streams wandered through the plains watering? the banks with a lovelier verdure as4 clear lakes whose borders are overhung by the drooping willow the elegant larch the venerable oak & the evergreen laurel seemed the crystal emerald framed mirrors of some huge Giant. often at times it is said of one of the most beautiful of these lakes that when all is quiet the music of fairyland may be heard and a tiny barge of red sandalwood its mast of amber its sails & cordage of silk and its oars of fine ivory may be seen skimming across the lake & when its small crew have gathered the water lily plant back again & landing on the flowery bank spread their transparent wings & melt away at the sound of mortal footsteps like the mists of the morning before the splendour of the sun.

from a beautiful grove of winter roses & twining woodbine towers a magnificent palace of pure white marble whose elegant & finely wrought pillars & majestic turrets seem the work of mighty Geni & not of feeble men. ascending a flight of marble steps you come to a grand entrance which leads into a Hall surrounded by Corinthian pillars of white marblef. in the midst of the hall is a colossal statue holding in each hand a vase of crystal from which rushes a stream of clear water and breaking into a thousand diamonds & pearls falls into a basin of pure Gold & disapearing through an opening rises again in different parts of the park in the form of brilliant fountains these falling part into numerous rills which winding through the ground throw themselves into a river which runs into the sea.

at the uper end of the hall was a grove of orange trees bearing the golden fruit & fragrant blossoms often upon the same branch, from this hall you pass into another splendid & spacious apartment all hung with rich deep crimson velvet & from the grand dome is suspended a magnificent lustre of fine gold the drops of which are pure crystal, the whole length of the room run long sofa's covered also with Crimson velvet, at each end are chimney peices of dove coulour Italian marble the pillars of which are of the Corinthian order fluted and wreathed with goldf. from this we pass into a smaller but very elegant room the sofas of which are covered with light blue velvet flowerd with silver and surrounded with small white marble columns.

& now from fine halls splendid drawing rooms I must begin to describe scenes of a very different nature, in the Hall of the fountain behind a statue is a small door over which is drawn a curtain of white silk. this door when opened discover's a small apartment at the father end of which is a very large iron door which leads to a long dark passage at the the end of which is a flight of steps leading to a subterranean dungeon which I shall now endeavour to describe.

it has the appearance of a wide vault dimly lighted by a lamp asphaltas which casts a strange death like lustre over part of the dungeon & leaves the rest in the gloom & darkness of midnight. in the middle is a slab of black marble supported by 4 pillars of the same. at the head of it stands a throne of iron. in several parts of the vault are instrument's of torture for this place is the dreadful hall where wicked cockneys are judged by that most unjust of Judges, CN and his gang S. TOD & the rest.? at the end of this dungeon is the entrance to the cell's which are apropriated to the private & particular use of Hal B. Stunt the Cockney's & the naughty school childrenf. these cells are dark, vaulted arched and so far down in the earth that the loudest shreik could not be heard by any inhabitant of the upper world & in these as well as the dungeon the most unjust torturing might go on without any fear of detection if it was not that I keep the key of the dungeon & Emily keeps the key of the cell's6 & the huge strong iron entrances will brave any assault except with the lawful instrument's.

the children which inhabit this magnificent palace are composed only of the young nobles of the land except such asJohnny Lock- hart. the cheif Governor under us is the Duke of Wellington. this however is only a honorary distinction as when applied to his Grace returned the following answer.

"Little King and Queens Qthese are our titles)7 I am sorry to say my avocation's of Soldier & Statesman will not allow me to comply with your requests that I would be Governer of some ioodreds, not to say any looods of Children unless the title be merely honorary & I am to have a few scores of subordinates under me. with the request that it may be I remain your obedient subject, W." the request was complied with.

the Guards for keeping the children in order & taking them out to walk are the Marquis of Douro & Lord Charles Wfellesley for which they are peculiarly fitted as they lead them into the wildest & most dangerous parts of the country leaping rocks precepeces chasms &c & little caring whether the children go before or stop behind & finally coming home with about a dozen wanting who are found a few days after in hedges or ditches with legs or head broken & affording a fine field for Sir A Hume Sir A Cooper & Sir H Halford to display their different modes of setting and trepanning."

The Gfuards for threshing the Children when they do wrong and sometimes they exercicise the priveledge when they do not need it are Colonel O'Shaugnesy and his Nephew Foghartyf. these are often eminently useful. I forgot to mention that Branwell has a large black club with which he thump's the children upon ocasion and that most unmercifully. I have now done my notices of the school children for the present.

among our Islanders there are Baines's 3 sons T E & T who go by the seperate name's of toltol, Nedned or sometimes rr Raten & Tomtomf. these 3 are the most mischevous trio in existencef: t is about 2 foot long n is half the length of his brother & t is 3 quaters as long as ned. tol is dressed in a lawyers gown & a huge wig which reaches to his feet & wraps round him; rat is atired in a coarse peice of sackcloth tied round the neck and feet with rope & having the appearance of a tail & ears & Tom is dressed in the dress of a reporter.

about a year ago as we where wandering in one of the woods which belong to the great Domain of Strathfeildsay we heard a low voice behind us saying "there has been a storm today & the now blue & radiant arch of the mighty firmament has been overcast with dark cloud's the gloom of which was only broken by feirce gleams of lightning which shot across the black vapours like the word of revenge through the clouds hatred which obscured the bright dawn of Whigish intellect! & I was appointed to be their avenger! yes this arm (here we saw an arm of little more than an inch long dart through the foliage) this arm shall wreak their spite upon the head of that stern Duke in whose domains I am. but soon I shall bring his pride down to the dust & make him bow to the soveriegn people " then with a rush through the tangled grass (for the spiteful creature did not reach higher than the grass) it reached the park gate but here a great obstacle presented itself for the keeper of the gate is an old veteran who has followed the Duke through all his wars & attended him in all his Battle's & if he had seen the animal he would certainly have taken it for a rat & would have treated it accordingly, ned turned round & seeing us he said "Little Queens will you open that gate?" as we wished to see the end of this adventure we took raten up and threw him over the High wall & then knocked at the gate. we presently heard a rustling among the tree's and the soldier stood before us. LQjf you please orderly man will you open that gate for us OM I must first know who you are LQJ We're Lfittle Queens OM 0 you are are you? come then so saying he opened the gate & we entredf. Rfaten ran swiftly up the park & narowly escaped been trod to Death by a deer which bounded close past him. there was however one thing which threatened to stop his progress & that was a river that gently & silently was winding it's way through the park. for a while he stood still on its banks & looked around & behind him was the large wood he had just quitted. it was situated on a high hill & covered to the top with dark green foliage interspersed here & there with the lightly waveing Branches of the purple Beach or the pale green of the white poplar. on each side of him lay the extensive & beautiful park bounded by the wide domains of the Great Duke before him was the splendid mansion of Strathfieldsay & close to his feet was the river on the opposite banks of which stood a deer stooping it's head & branching antlers to drink of the pure waters which flowed before it. on the branches of a young oak which grew close by the stream sat a nightingale which was begin- ing it's early song to the silver moon that now appeared like a pale crescent in the clear sky of the east, over all the setting sun shed a golden radiance which invested every thing with a splendour that made it appear like burning gold - for a while raten seemed moved by the beauty of the scene but sudenly exclaiming "rr no weaknessf he leaped into the river & swiming across he gained the opposite Bank then runing with inconceivable swiftness up the rest of the park he reached the house ran through the hall the gallery the stairs & at last reached the Duke's library . nobody was there & upon the table stood a tumbler of water; into this Raton put something which however did not change it's coulour then leaping from the table he hid himself behind a large Book which lay on the carpet.

just then the sound of footsteps was heard in the gallery the door opened

& a tall man with the air & carriage of a soldier entred followed by another who was likewise tall but very stout. the first was his grace the Duke of Wellington & the 2 was Sir Alexander Hume, as soon as they entred the duke took from a shelf a volume & sitting down the following conversation ensued .

D Hume what do you think of Wfalter Scott's history of Nfapoleon?'

H do you mean me to take the fact of it being written by a pekin'0 into consideration my lord? D yes H then I think it is written as well as a pekin is capable of writing D do you think it has any truth in it?

H a great deal my Lord D you have given it a high meed of praise H do you think I have praised it too highly?

D Oh no H I would never wish to praise a pekin too much after this a silence of about half an hour ensued & still the Duke did not touch the water. raten began to be impatient & to fear for the success of his enterprize. at last his Grace took up the glass & drained it's contents. Rfaten was on the point of giving a shriek through joy but restrained himself . just then Hume said UI never thought much good came of drinking cold waterf & a few minutes after he exclaimed "my Lord are you well? how pale how very pale you are I never saw anybody more so"

here raten shouted out "And pale he will always be." the Duke fixed his stern eye on him & the creature shrank shuddering back to his corner "my Lord are you dyingf? ring the bell Lfittle QJueens "

his Grace's features collapsed with agony the volume fell from his hand and he sank back in his chair. just then a loud yell rang in our ears a rushing noise was heard & a Giant of Cloud's stood before us. he touched the Duke & new life seemed to be given him. he stood up & in a firm tone demandefd the name of the Giant. it answered with a voice of thunder "mystery" & then slowly vanished."

his Grace then ordered every one out of his prescence & a few days after raten was found in his father's house at Lfeeds pale with horor trembling & half dead but how he got there is uncertainf. nor could he ever be induced to give any explanation & truly a mystry doth the whole affair remain to this day.

Prince Lfeopold & Sir George Hill have always entertained a great dislike to the Marquis of Douro & Lord Charles Wfellesley . Prince Lfeopold it is well known is a very mean sort of personage with an appearance of cunning about him that is very disagreeable. Sir George Hill is frank and brave somewhat given to gambling & an undue dislike of pekins. it has been lately surmised that he only pretends to dislike Afrthur & Cfharles Wellesley for a little amusement & this is most likely true.

A little while ago as Emily & me one stormy night were going through the wood which leads to school we saw by the light of the moon which just then broke through a cloud the flashing of some bright substance, the moon then became obscured & we could discern nothing more but see very black cloud. we heard a well known voice saying “0 Arthur I wish we had never come! what will my father say if he ever gets to know of it? & I am begining to get very cold for it rains fast and the wind is highf “wrap your fur cloak closer round you Charles & let us lean against this old tree for I shall not be able to stand much longer without some suportf. the sky is quite covered with dark clouds & how dismaly the wind is moaning among the trees.” “Athur what was that noise I heard? listenf “it is a raven Charles I am not much given to superstition but I remember hearing my grandmother say it is a sign that something bad is comeing to pass.f “if we were to die here tonight & remember Athur we came here by apointment of two of our worst enemies what would my mother do & my father - “ here they both sobbed aloud & we likewise heard a strange & horrible noise sweep through the wood. “what is the matter with our dogs Arthurf? are they dying?”

“no Charles but that likewise is said to be a sound of death “ “a sound of death Arthur! but listen again to the raven O! this is a dreadful place.f’

“Hush Charles! they are coming.”

the glimmering of a lantern appeared through the trees and two men burst upon the path. one of them was tall & bony but he had an expression of pity in his face as he said “poor fellows! Though I dont particularly like you yet I’m sorry you’ve had to wait so long in the rain this cold night - “ the other was a mean despicable wretch & he squinted . “prince Leopold & Sir gfeorge I — I ill we are quite ready to follow you but go slowly for we cannot possibly walk fastf’ “come along then.f so saying they set off & we followed closfe behind . by the light of the lantern we could see that the Marquis of Douro & Lord Charles Wellesley had 2 bloodhound’s with them & as soon as they imerged from the forest these 2 dogs gave a dreadful yell . Prince Lfeopold shook with terror & Charles patted them at which they moaned piteously. after this they were silent for awhile & the march proceededf. after climbing a great many high steep rocks & leaping many ditches we entred on the confines of the great moor. just then the bloodhound’s stopped again & gave another horrible cry which rang all over the wide heath & seemed to be answered from a great distance with a deeper & more dreadful yell.

“do make your nasty dogs hold their tongues or else I will” said Sir Gfeorge “if you touch them Hill you must take the consequences” answered Arthur “they might bite you”

Leopold was panting with fear.

“come on boy’s “ shouted Sir George with a peal of hollow laughter which was answered by the echoing rocks with tenfold vehemence. just at that moment a dull flapping of wings & an ominous croak was heard .

“what in the name of wonder is that?”

“jit’s a ravenlf replied Leopold almost fainting with cowardice. f’0! do make haste that we may reach some shelter for the darkness of the night is increasing the rain is falling faster & the wind sweeps with more fearful blast over this wild bleak moorf they all moved on & after a while a light became visible on the verge of the horizon which as they approached it vanished but by the help of the lantern we could discern a small & seemingly deserted cottagef. they entred it & we followed by a door which was decayed by time & shattered by violence in many places.

"& is this where you intend to take us?" exclaimed the Marquis of Dfouro.

f"Oh no but as you seem unable to go any father I thought you had better stop here & very likely we shall find some of our freind's below said Sfir Gfeorge as he opened a door which discovered a narrow flight of steps down which they went & then came to another door & now likewise they heard a sound of many voices & much mirth . Sir G eorge opened the door & imediatly a blaze of light & genial warmth burst forth which almost overpowered them after being so long exposed to the dark wet night. the cellar into which they came was vaulted & the lime dropping of the wall in many parts, there was a large peat fire blazing on the hearth & on benches round sat a great many officers among whom was the Marquis of A Lords CAW & G P.u some where drinking some playing at card's singing & yet. as soon as the marquis of Douro & Lord Charles Wfellesley saw these things they exclaimed "we will go no father & though we die for it we had rather stop all night on the open moor than in this wicked place & if you prevent us from going hence it will be at your peril."

"will it?" said Leopold with a shrill scornful laughf.

they called their dog's which however did not make their appear- ancef. Leopold then rushed toward's them threw them down & gaged them & tied their hand's & feet then returning to the party round the fire he began to play sing and be as loud & talkative as any among them, but in the midst of all this mirth & cheerfulness the sound of footsteps was heard descending the stairs the door was burst open & 2 men followd by 3 large dogs burst into the apartmentf. one of the men was instantly known by his stern countenance & flashing eye as he exclaimed with feirce energy "you wretches where are my son's.?" it was the. DUKE OF WELLINGTON, they where too much astounded to reply till he repeated the question more feircely than before & commanded them to give him an answer. Leopold replied tremblingly "they are there."

"they are! you vile beggarf said his Grace & kicked him to the opposite end of the cellar then going to the corner which Lfeopold had pointed to he unbound & ungaged his sons & raised them up. they were however unable to stand & fell back againf. his Grace then turned to the rest & said in a tone of voice which showed he meant to be obeyed, "I command you all to quit this place & if ever you return here again I shall make you suffer for it & that dreadfully."

imediatly they flung open the door rushed up the stair & scampered of as fast as they could. In the meantime the other man who was Doctor Hume had given Afrthur & Charles something which strengthened them so much that they could stand & even walk. the Duke then inquired how they came to that house, just at this moment we issued from our hiding place & related all the circumstances after which we asked how his Grace got to know of Charles & Arthur being theref. His Grace told us that as he was on his way to sfchool accompanied by Hume & his great Bloodhound he thought he heard at a distance the yelling of his sons dogs which was imediatly answered by his own and that after he had gone about a mile father he met a countryman who told him that he had seen his sons on the Great moor in the company of George Hill & Prince Leopold that then though it was night he rode towards the moor but was met on his way by his sons dogs who led them to the cottage.

as soon as his Grace had finished he rose to depart & Afrthur &

Charles followed. when they had got up the dark narrow stairs and to the door of the cottage they were surprised to find the rising sun beaming through the chinks of the door & when they reached the open air the scenes which greeted their eyes were truly refreshing. instead of dark watery clouds there was the blue radiant dome like sky in which the pale moon was yet visible. the glorious sun was rising in the east & making the rain which had fallen the preceding night and which still remained on the balmy heath to sparkle like fine diamond's. a few little wild mountain sheep were to be seen & as they drew near they scurried? away & sprang up the rocks till they could view us safely at a distance^ the lark sprang from his mossy bed at our approach and began to warble its matin song & the higher it mounted up in the blue heavens the sweeter did its song become till it could no longer be heard, in a short time they came to the edge of the moor & reached School about 9 oclock all sound in life & limb. thus ended the Duke's Marquis's & Lord's adventure of the cottage

Charlotte Bronte June the 31 - 1829

SECOND VOLUME OF TALES OF THE ISLANDERS

CHAPTER ONE

I have before put forth a volume of these tales in which the subject of the school was mentioned, in that volume I laid down the rule's by which the school was governed & like wise the names of the gov- erner's with their several character's &c. I shall now proceed with this subject.

for some time after it was established the institution went on very well. all the rules were observed with scrupolous exactness, the gov- erner's attended admirably to their duty the children where absolutely becoming something like civilized being's, to all outward appearance at least, gambling was less frequent among them, their quarrels with each other were less savage & some little attention was paid by them- selve's to order & cleanliness, at this time we constantly resided in the magnificent palace of the school as did all the governers so that nothing was left entirely to the care of servants & underlings. The great room had become the resort of all the great ministers in their hours of leisure (that is in the evenings) and they seeing how well were conducted resolved to uphold the institution with all their might.

this prosperous state of affairs continued for about six months & then Parliament was opened & the Great Catholic question' was brought forward & the Dukes measures were disclosed and all was slander violence party spirit & confusion. O those 3 months from the time of the kings speech to the end! nobody could think speak or write on anything but the catholic question and the Duke of Wellington or Mr Peel. I remember the day when the Intelligence Extraordinary came with Mr Peels speech in it containing the terms on which the catholics were to be let in; with what eagerness papa tore off the cover & how we all gathered round him & with what breathless anxiety we listend as one by one they were disclosed & explained & argued upon so ably & so well & then when it was all out how aunt said she thought it was excellent & that the catholics could do no harm with such good security. I remember also the doubts as to wether it would pass into the house of Lords & the prophecys that it would not. when the paper came which was to decide the question the anxiety was almost dreadful with which we listened to the whole affair - the opening of the doors the hush the Royal Dukes in there robes & the Great Duke in green sash & waistcoat the rising of all the peeresses when he rose the reading of his speech papa saying that his words were like precious gold &

lastly the majority one to 4 in favour of the bill, but this is a digression & I must beg my reader's to excuse it — to proceed with my subject then.

in consequence of this catholic question the Duke & Mr Peel where of course obliged to be constantly in London & we soon took ourselves off to the same place. OShaugnesy & his nephew were away shooting somewhere & the whole management of the school was left to the Marquis of Dfouro and lord Charles Wfellesley. The upshot will be seen in the next chapter

CHAPTER TWO

For some time we heard not a word about the school & never took the trouble to inquire until at length one morning as we were sitting at breakfast in came a letter the which when we had opened we perceived was from my lord Wfellesley. the purport was as follows June 8. Vision Island Little King & queen's I write this letter to inform you of a rebellion which, has broken out in the school the particulars of which I have not time to relate: all I can say is that I am at present in a little hut built in the open air - and - but they are coming & I can say no more —

I remain yours &c - Charles W

PS since I wrote the above we have had a battle in which our bloodhounds fought bravely & we have conquered — we are however reduced to a great extremity for want of food & if you dont make haste & come to our help we must surrenderf. bring my father's great blood-hound with you & doctor Hume & the gamekeeper likewise

as soon as we had read this letter we ordered a balloon'4 the which when it was brought we got into & then steered our way through the air towards Strathfieldsayf. when we had there arrived we took up blood & hounds & the gamekeeper & then went quick-way to the Island. we alighted in the grounds about the School and on casting our eyes toward's the myrtle grove we saw the stately palace rising in it's magnificence from the green trees which grew thickly around & towering in silent grandeur over that Isle which was rightly named a dream for never but in the visions of the night has the eye of man beheld such gorgeous beauty such wild magnificence as is in this fairy land and never but in the imaginings of his heart has his ear heard such musick as that which proceeds from the giant's harp hid from sight amid those treesf. listen there is a faint sound like the voice of a dying swan but now a stronger breeze sweeps through the strings & the music is rising. hark how it swellsf! what grandeur was in that wild note but the wind roars louder. I heard the muttering of distant thunder it is drawing nearer & nearer & the tunes of the harp & swelling till all at once amidst the roaring of thunder & the howling of the wind it peals out with such awful wildness such unearthly grandeur that you are tempted to believe it is the voice of spirits speaking. This is the storm.

but to proceed with my subject: after we had been in the Island about half an hour we saw lord Wellesley approaching at a distance^ when he came near he acosted us with "well little Queen's I am glad you are come make haste & follow me for there is not a moment to be lost." as we went along he at our request gave us the following narrative as to the origin of the school rebellion.

"for about 3 day's after you were gone things went on very well but, at the end of that time symptom's of insubordination began to manifest themselvesf. these we strove to check but in vain & instead of growing better they grew worse . the school now was divided into 4 parties each of whom was headed by a cheiftein namely Pfrince Polignac Prince George & Johny Lockhart & the Princess Vittoria.'5 these 4 were constantly quarreling & fighting with each other in a most outrageous maner & after struggleing a few weeks with them to no purpose they all ran off & are now encamped in a very wild part of the Island which we shall presently come to. they are well provided with 2 cannons each party & a quantity of powder & shot. sometime's they all unite against us & then we have a bad chance I assure you but now you are come to our assistance we shall soon do for them.f as soon as he had ended we emerged from the forest in which we had till then been travelling & entred a deep glen through which rushed an impetuous brawling river roaring & foaming amongst the large stone's which impeded its course & then as it's chanel deepened & widened it became calm & smooth flowing silently through the wide green plain on the right hand fertilizing & refreshing it as it went. on our left arose rocks frowning darkly over the glen & blackning it with their mighty shadowf. in some parts they were covered with tall pine tree's through which the wind moaned sadly as it swept among their scathed branchesf. in other parts imense fragments of rock looked out from their shaggy covring & hung their grey summits awfully over the vale. no sound but the echo of a distant cannon which was discharge d as we entred the glen & the scream of the eagle startled from her aerie disturbed the death like silence.

in a short time we came to the place where the children were encampedf. the tents of the Vitorans were pitched on the sumit of a rock those of the Polignacs in a deep ravine & the Georgians had taken up their abode in an open spot of ground & the Lockhartians had entrenched them selves among some trees. the hut of the Marquis of Douro & Lord Wellesley was built beneath the shade of a spreading oak. a tremendous rock rose above it. on one side was a gently swelling hill on the other a grove of tall trees & before it ran a clear rippling streamf.

when we had entred the humble abode we beheld the Marquis of Dfouro lying on a bed of leaves. his face was very pale; his fine feature's seemed as fixed as a marble statuef. his eyes were closed & his glossy curling hair was in some parts stiffned with blood, as soon as we beheld this sight Charles rushed forward & falling on the bed beside his brother he fainted away, the usual remidies were then applied to him by doctor Hume & after a long time he recovered. all this while Arthur had neither spoke nor stirred & we thought he was dead. the game-keeper was raving & even the hardihearted Hume shed some tears & Charles seemed like one demented. in this emergency we thought it advisable to send quick-way for the Duke of Wellington. this we accordingly did & as soon as we saw him coming one of us went out to meet him. when we had informed him of what had happened he became as pale as death; his lip's quivered & his whole frame shook with agitation . in a short time he arrived at the hut & then going up to the bedside he took hold of one lifeless hand & said in a tremulous & scarcely audible voice “Arthur my son speak to me”. just then at the sound of his father’s words Arthur slowly opened his eye’s & looked up. when he saw the Duke he tried to speak but could not. we then in the plenitude of our goodness & kindness of heart, cured him instantaneously by the application of some fairy remedie’s & as soon as we had done so the Duke drew from his finger a diamond ring & presented it to us. this we accepted & thanked him for it.

after these transactions we informed his Grace of the school rebellion . he imediately went out without speaking a word & we followed him. he proceeded up to the place were they were encamped & called out in a loud tone of voice that if they did not surrender they were all dead men as he had brought several thousand blood hound’s with him who would tear them to peice’s in a moment. this they dreaded more than anything & therefore agreed to surrender which they did imediately & for a short time thereafter the school prospered as before but we becoming tired of it sent the children of to their own home’s & now onlv fairy’s dwell in the Island of a dream

C. Bronte October 6 1829

CHAPTER THREE

About a year after the school rebellion the following wonderful thing happened in the family of the Duke of Wellington, one pleasant morning in the month of September 1828 the Marquis of Douro & Lord Charles Wellesley went out to follow the sport of shooting. they had promised to return before 8 o'clock but however 10 o'clock came & they had not returnedf: 12 & still no signs of them. Old man Cockney then ordered the servant's to-bed & when they had retired & all was quietness he went into the great hall & sat down by the fire determined not to go to bed till they came back. he had sat about half an hour listening anxiously for their arrival when the inner door gently opened, and lady Wfellesley appeared. Old Man could see by the light of the fire for he had put out the candle that she was very pale & much agitated .

"What is the matter madamf?" said he lady wfellesley "I was sitting down working when suddenly I saw the light cast on my work by the taper turn blue & death like burning phosphorous or asphaltasf. I looked up & saw the figure's of my sons all bloody & distorted. I gazed on them till they vanished unable to speak or stir & then I came down here".

she had scarcely finished the recital of this strange vision when the great door was heard to open with a loud, creaking noise & the Duke of. Wellington, entredf. he stood still for a moment earnestly looking at 1 ady Wellesley & the Old man & then said in a distinctly audible but hollow tone of voice "Catherine where are my son's, for I heard while sitting in my study their voices moaning and wailing around me & supplicating me to deliver them from the death they were about to die, even now I feel a dreadful foreboding concerning them which I cannot shake off. Catherine were are they?"

Before lady Wellesley could answer the door again opened & we appearedf. he imediately addressed us & begged of us to tell him what had become of them. we replied that we "did not know but that if he liked we would go in search of them". he thanked us gratefuly adding that he would go with us & then after he had taken leave of lady Wfellesley we imediately set off.

we had gone as near as we could about? 4 miles when we entred a very wild barren plain which none of us had ever seen beforef. we continued on this plain till we lost sight of every thing else & then suddenly perceived the whole aspect of the sky to be changed . it assumed the appearance of large rolling waves crested with white foam also we could hear a thundering sound like the roaring of the sea at a distance & the moon seemed a great globe of many miles in diameter, we were gazing in silent astonishment at this glorious sight which every minute was growing grander & grander & the noise of thunder was increasing when suddenly the huge waves parted asunder & a giant clothed in the sun with a crown of 12 stars on his head descended on the plainf.'6 for a moment our sight was destroyed bv the glory of his apparel & when it was restored to us we found ourselves in a world the beauty of which exceeds beyond my powers of description, there were trees & bowers of light, waters of liquid crystal flowing over sands of gold with a sound the melody of which far exceeds music of the finesft toned harps or the song of the sweet voiced nightingales . the re were palaces of emerald & of ruby of diamond of amethyst and pearl arches like the rainbow of jaspar agate & saphire spaning wide seas whose mighty voices where now hushed into a gentle murmur & sang in sweet unison with the silver streams which flowed through this radiant land while their glorious song was echoed & reechoed by high mountains which rose in the distance & which shone in the glowing light like fine opals set in gold.

we had been here for a short time when the sky blackned the winds rose the waves of the ocean began to roar. all beautiful things vanished & were suceeded by tall dark cypress & fir trees which swayed to & fro in the wind with a mournful sound like the moans of dying mortalsf. a huge black rock appeared before us & a wide & dark cavern opened in it in which we saw Afrthur & Charles Wfellesley. the Giant then came again & taking them & us in his arms flew swiftly through the air & landed us all in the great hall of Strathfeildsay.

CHAPTER FOUR

It was a beautiful evening in the month of August when the Duke of Wellington & his sons were seated in a small private parlour at the top of the great round tower at Strathfieldsay. the sun was just setting & its beams shone through the gothic window half veiled by a green velvet curtain which had fallen from the golden supports & hung in rich festoons with a glowing brilliance equal to the crimson light which streams from the oriental ruby but unlike to that beautiful gem it was every moment decreasing in splendour till at length only a faint rose tint remained on the marble pedestal which stood opposite bearing the statue of William Pitt & which but a little while ago had shone with a brightness resembling the lustre of burnished gold. Just as the last ray disappeared lord Charles Wellesley exclaimed, “Father I wish you would relate to us some of your adventures either in India or Spain.”

“Very well I will Charles now listen attentively” replied his Grace, “would you like to hear too Arthur?”

“I should very much” answered the Marquis with a gravity & calmness which formed a striking contrast to the giddy gaiety that marred the deportment of his younger brother, his Grace began as follows:

“In the year & the day of the battle of Salamanca’7 just as the sun set & the twilight was approaching I finished my despatches & walked forth from the convent gates of the Rector of Salamanca in order to enjoy the coolness of a Spanish evening, to this purpose I proceeded through the city till I came to the outside of its walls & then strolled heedlessly along by the clear stream of the Tormes following as it led until I found my self far away from the city & on the borders of a great wood which stretched over many high hills to the verge of the horizon: there was a small pathway cut through this forest, which I entred striding over the river which had now dwindled into a diminutive rill, strictly speaking this was not a prudent step nor one which I should advise you my sons if ever you should be in the like circumstances to take, for the evening was far advanced & the bright light of the beautiful horizon cast an uncertain glowing glare on everything which made travelling through a dark wood which I knew nothing of exceeding dangerous, the country was likewise much infested with daring robbers & organized banditti who dwelt in such lonely situations, but there was a sort of charm upon me which led me on in spite of myself. After I had proceeded about a quater of a mile I heard a sound like music at a distance which in a short time dyed away, but when I had got very deep into the forest it rose again & then it sounded nearer, I sat down under a large spreading maple tree whose massive limbs & foliage where now begining to be irradiated by the moonlight wich peirced into the depths of the forest & highlly illumined with its beams the thick darkness. I had not sat here long when suddenly the music which had till then sounded soft & low like the preluding of a fine musician on a sweet instrument, broke out into a loud deep strain which resembled the pealing of a full toned organ when its rich floods of sound are rolling & swelling in the sublime Te Deum & echoing amid the lofty aisles &? high Dome of some grand Cathedral with a deep solemn noise like the loud awful rumbling & terrible thunder Or the sudden burst of that most sublime of all music martial music when the ringing trumpet & the rolling drum are sounding together with the feirce onset of a brave & noble army, then you feel the grandeur of the battle amid the lightning and roar of the canon the glancing of sword's & lances & the thunder of the living cataract of men & horses rushing terribly to victory who stands arrayed in bloody garments with a crown of glory upon her head, but to proceed with my story, no sooner had this loud concert sounded than the dark forest vanished like mists of the morning before the suns brightness & slowly there rose up on my sight a huge mirror, in which were dimly shadowed the forms of clouds & vapours all dense & black, rolling one over the other in dark & stormy grandeur & among them in letters of lightning I saw the "Futurity", by degrees these clouds cleared away & a fair & beautiful Island appeared in their stead rising out of the midst of a calm & peaceful Ocean & linked to it by a golden chain was another equal in beauty but smaller.' in the middle of the largest of these 2 Islands was a tall & majestic female seated on a throne of ruby crowned with roses bearing in one hand a wreath of Oak-leaves & in the other a sword, while over her the tree of liberty flourished spreading its branches far & wide & casting the perfume of its flowers to the uttermost parts of the earth. In the midst of the other Island there was likewise a female who sat on an emerald throne, her crown was formed of shamrocks, in her right hand she held an harp & her robes were of a crimson hue as if they had been dyed in blood, she was as majestic as the other but in her countenance was some thing very sad & sorrowful, as if a terrible evil hung upon her — over her head where the boughs of a dark cypress instead of the pleasant tree which shaded the other Island, & sometimes she swept the chords of the harp causing a wild & mournful sound to issue therefrom like a death wail or dirge, while I was wond'ring at her greif, I perceived a tremendous monster rise out of the sea and land on her Island . as soon as it touched the shores a lamentable cry burst forth which shook both Islands to their centre & the Ocean all round boiled furiously as if some terrible earthquake had happened, the monster was black & hideous & the sound of his roaring was like thunderf. he was clothed in the skin of wild beasts & in his forehead was branded as with a hot iron the word bigotry, in one hand he held a scythe & as soon as he entred the land the work of desolation began : all pleasantness & beauty disapearefd from the face of the country & pestilential morasses came in their stead, he seemed to pursue with inveterate fury a horrible old man who a voice wispered in my ear was called the Romish Religion, at first he seemed weak & impotent but as he ran he gathered strength & the more he was persecuted the stronger he became till at length he began with a terrible voice to defy his persecutor & at the same time strove to break the golden chain which united the two Islandsf. & now I saw the form of a warrior approaching whose likeness I could by no means discern but over whom a mighty sheild was extended from the sky. he came near to the monster whose name was bigotry & taking a dart on which the word justice was written in golden characters he flung it at him with all his mightf. the dart had struck in the heart & he fell with a loud groan to the earth, as soon as he had fallen the warrior whose brow had already many wreaths on it was crowned by a hand which proceeded from a golden cloud with a fresh one of amaranths interwoven with laurel. at the same time the two spirits arose from their thrones & coming towards him they cast garlands & crowns of victory at his feet while they sung his praises in loud & glorious notes. meantime the desolated land was again overspread with pleasant pastures & green woods & sunny plains watered by clear rivers flowing with a gentle sound over green rocks?, while the wild harp pealed in sweetly swelling tones among the branches of the tree of liberty . the sound ceased & lo I was beneath the maple tree & a nightingale was serenading me with its beautiful song which caused me to dream of sweet music C B November 21st Ano Domini 1829

Adieu Adios?

CHAPTER FIVE

In the year 1722 In the pleasant month of June, four'9 Inhabitants of fairy-land took it into their heads for a treat to pay a visit to the inhabitants of the earth. In order to accomplish this end they took the form of mortals, but first it was necessary to obtain leave of Oberon & Titania, their King & Queen. accordingly they demanded an audience of their majesties & where admitted. They stated their wish & petition which was imediately granted & they prepared to depart.

Having descended to the earth in a cloud they alighted in a part of England which was very mountainous & quite uninhabited. they proceeded along for some time till they came to the verge of a rock that looked down into a beautiful vale below, through it ran a clear & pleasant stream which followed the vale in all its narrow windings among the high dark mountains which bordered it & the massive branching trees which grew in thick clumps casting a cool & agreeable shade over all the valley, through these it meandred with a rippling sound until when the glen broke from its confinement among them & spread into a wide green plain all dotted with great white poplars & stately oaks & spangle d with pearly daisies & golden buttercups among which likewise ocasionally peeped out the pale primrose or the purple violet, it also expanded into a broader & deeper current rolling or rather gliding on with a still murmur that resembled the voice of some water spirit heard from the depths of its coral palaces when it sings in lonely silence after the sea has ceased to heave & toss in terrible black beauty & night walks in awful majesty on the face of the earth all clothed in stars while Luna sheds pale light from her silver lamp to illumine the pathway of the dark & stately queen. In the midst of this valley there was a small thatched cottage which had once been the pleasant abode of a flourishing husbandman who was now dead & his children had one by one forsaken it & the sweet spot where it stood each to pursue his own fortune till it was now entirely deserted & had fallen into a state of ruin & decay. The fairies proceeded down the vale towards the cottage & when they arrived there began to examine it. the walls where all grey & moss grown; vine tendrils where still visible among the wreaths of ivy which clasped around the door-way & one silver star of a jesamine peeped out from among the dark leaves, the little garden was all grown over with nettles & rank weed & no trace remained of its former beauty except a single rose bush on which still bloomed a few half wild roses & beside it grew a small strawberry plant with two or three scarlet strawberrys upon it forming a fine contrast to the desolation which surrounded them.

In this place the fairies determined to take up their abode, which they accordingly did & they had not been long their when the following occurence happened, they where sitting one evening round the fire of their hut (for being now in the form of mortals they acted like them) listening to the wind which moaned in hollow cadences as it swept along the valley & its voice was sometimefs mingled with strange sounds which they well knew were the voices of spirits rising in the air invisible to the dull eyes of mortals. They were sitting as I said before around the fire of their hut when suddenly they heard a low knocking at the door, one of them imediately rose to open it & a man appeared clothed in a travellers cloak. they enquired what he wanted, he replied that he had lost his way in the glen & that seeing the light stream across his path from their cottage he had stopped there & now requested shelter till the morning when he might be able to pursue his journey with the advantage of daylight, his request was imediately granted & as soon as he was seated they asked what the cause of his travelling was? he replied that if they chose he would relate to them his whole history as he could perceive that they where persons of no ordinary description & might perhaps be able to assist him in his distressf. they consented & he began as follows.

“I am the son of a gentleman of great fortune & estate who resided in one of the southermost counties of Ireland. My father & mother were both Roman catholics & I was brought up in that faith & continued in it until I became convinced of the error of the creed I professed. My father’s confessor was a man of strange and unsociable habits and was thought by those among whom he dwelt to have converse with the inhabitants of another worldf. he had received his education in Spain & it was suposed that in the country he had learnt the science of necromancy.” the manner in which I became converted to the protestant religion was as follows, There lived in our family an old servant who unknown to my father was a seceder from the Roman catholic church & a member of the church of England. One day I unexpectedly entred the room & surprised him reading his bible. I imediately remonstrated with him on the impropriety of what he was about & desired him to leave of telling him that it was against the laws of the true church and contrary to the admonitions of our preist.2’ he replied mildly but firmly quoting many passages of scripture in defence of what he did & arguing in such a manner as to convince me that I was in the wrong. Next day I paid him a visit at the same hour & found him simmiliarly employedf. I had a long conversation with him, the effect of which was to induce me to search the bible for myself : I did so and there discovered that the doctrines of the church of England where those which most closely assimilated with the word of God, those doctrines I accordingly determined to embrace. As soon as my conversion became known my father strove to dissuade me from it, but I remained steadfast & resolute? In a short time he ceased to trouble me. But Not so with the confessor: he was constantly advancing arguments to induce me to recant but failing he made use of the following expedient, As a last resource. I was standing one evening in the court of my fathers house, when suddenly I heard a voice whisper in my ear “come this night to the great moor at 12 o’clock”. I turned round but could see no body. I then debated with myself what it could be & wether I should go or not. I at length determined to go & when the clock struck eleven I set off. the moor alluded to lay about four miles off, It was a wide barren heath stretching 3 leagues to the northward. In a short time I reached it. The night was very dark no moon was visible & the stars where only dimly seen through the thin cloudy vapours that sailed over the sky veiling the dark azure with a sombre robe & casting a melancholy gloom on the path beneath . all around me was silent except a little stream flowing unseen among the heather with a sound resembling the hoarse incessant murmur which the sea shell retains of its native caverns where the green billows of the deep are roaring & rageing with an eternal thun- der. I had not waited long when slowly I saw rising around me the dim form of a sacred abbey, the stately pillars, the long drawn sweeping aisles, the echoing dome, & the holy altar all arose in gradual & mysterious order while a solemn & supernatural light stole through the high arched windows & beamed full upon a tomb which stood in the centre & which I knew to be my grandfathers. I was gazing at these things in wrapt & silent astonishment when suddenly I saw a tall white robed figure standing upon the monumenjt. it beckoned to me with its hand: I approached & It then addressed me in the following words “Son why have you deserted the Ancient & holy Religion of your ancestors to embrace a strange one which you know not of” I was going to reply when at that moment I perceived the confessor standing near. I instantly comprehended the whole scheme & exclaimed in a loud voice “your wiles are discovered. the faith I profess is true and I well know that this is all necromancy” when the preist heard this he flew into a terrible rage & stamping with his foot a fire sprung out of the groundf. he then threw some perfumes on it & said in a voice made tremulous by ungovernable fury “depart hence Vile heretic” & imediately I found myself in this valley. You know the rest.”

here the traveller stopped & little more is known of the story except that the fairies restored him to his family who became devout members of the Church of England . the preist afterwards disappeared in a very unacountable way & the fairies no longer dwell in that little hut of which only a mossy remnant now remains but the tradition still lives in many a peasants fireside tale when gloomy winter has apparelled the earth in frost & radiant snow.

This Tale was related to little king & queens Seringapatan old man cockney Gamekeeper Jack of all trades & orderly man by the Marquis of Duro & lord C. Wellesley as they sat by the fire at the Great hall of Strathfeildsay C. Bronte December 2 1829

THIRD VOLUME OF TALES OF THE ISLANDERS

CHAPTER ONE

One evening"the duke of Wellington was writing in his room at Downing Street. Eldon reposed at his ease in an ample easy chair smoking a homely tobacco pipe (for he disdained all the modern frippery of cigars &c &c) beside a blazing fire whose flames Left had just been feeding by a fresh supply of Londonderry's black diamonds. One armed Hardinge stood at his desk awarkdly scrawling an army estimate on a gilt-eged sheet of Bath post, coxcomical Roslyn lounged against the polished green marble mantlepeice eyeing with ineffable contempt the quizzical old pekin who sat opposite & occasionly casting a sidelong glance at his own dandy figure reflected in a magnificent mirror suspended against the wall which was hung with purple figured velvet; Castlereagh seated on a turkish Ottoman whined & yawned incessantly while Mr Secretary Peel perched upon a treasury tripod close beside his Grace kept whispering & wheedling in the Dukes ear until at length happening to interupt him in the midst of an abstruse calculation he saw his masters eye suddenly flash on him & without further warning was at the other end of the room in a twinkling. At this tragical catastrophe, Roslyn slank back to his desk which he had quitted without leave from head quaters. Hardinge just gave a keck over his shoulder at the prostrate civillian. Eldon ceased puffing holding up his withered hands half in fear & half in wonder Castlereagh crawled of the cushion under the table where he lay quietly down & the Duke of Wellington without noticing the general consternation relapsed into his former occupation of unraveling a confused mass of exchequer-like figures left by poor Vesey in a sad state of disorder when he was seized with the sickness which superanuated him.

while they were thus employed a heavy footstep was heard without, the door opened & a little shrunk old woman wrapped up & wholly concealed except her face entered, her appearance excited no surprise for this was one of the famous little queens, she advanced up to the duke & presented him a letter writen with blood & sealed with a seal on which was the motto "le message d'un revenant". he took it respectfully & read it, while he was doing this he changed colour several times evincing an uncontrolable emotion. when he had finished he rose & walked about as if trying to calm his mind. suddenly he stopped & commanded all present to depart they imediately obeyed, then after a pause he demanded of the fairy if that letter was true or a forgery. She made a sign with her hand & imediately the king & the 2 other queens appearedf. they all knelt down. each drew out a wand wreathed with ivory ; they kissed them & said " it is by virtue of these wands we rule the hearts of mortals, we will forfeit them & our spiritual power if what we say is false, that letter is true," when they had uttered these words they vanished.

his Grace imediately rang a bell & ordered the attendant who answered the sumons to get ready the swiftest horse in his stables, his mandates were presently obeyed & the Duke clad in a Georgian mantle with a broad milliatry belt, brass helmet & high black plumes, mounted the spirited animal spurred him to full gallop & in a short time left London & its subburbs far behind, he rode with such speed that when the sun rose he beheld the towers of Strathfeildsay rearing their proud heads ruddy with the first beams of morning from the ancient oak forests which surrounded them, all his wide domains were stretched before his eyes, the peaceful village nestling among venerable woods, the wide fruitful feilds extending to the verge of the horizon, the stately trees darkning the scene with their shadow the white cottages looking out from the bowery retreat of their orchards & the great river refreshing everything as it passed, all were his own won by his invincible sword, the monuments of England's gratitude to her glorious preserver.

he passed quickly on & in a short time arrived aft the dark gate, the old soldiers cottages removed a little way from the narrow path could hardly be distinguished by reason of the large trees on each side whose thick drooping branches now in full verdure had shot out & increased to such a degree as wholly to surround them with a fresh verdant barrier & their situation was only marked by the tall round grey chimnies one of which Qthat on the right hand) belonging to Seringapatan was just breathing a light dun smoke on the stainless ether. The other stood in motionless silence for the inhabitants thereof to wit Jack of all trades, Orderly-man & Gamekeeper where for the present tarrying at the more noisy and to their dispositions (unlike that of their bookish neighbour) more congenial Horse- gaurds.

his grace was just in the act of raising a huge bough which guarded the righthand doorway for the purpose of entring, when he heard a light buyoant step & a sweet voice at a distance carrolling the following words:

O Where has Arthur been this night Why did he not come home For long the suns fair orb of light hath shone in heavens dome Beneath the greenwood tree he's slept his tester was the sky O'er him the midnight stars have wept bright dewdrops from on high And when the first faint streak of day did in the east appear His eyes touched by the mornings ray Shone out with lustre clear He rose & from his dark brown hair He shook the glit'ring gems Which natures hand had scattered there as on the forest stems The flowers sent up an odour sweet as forth he stately stept The stag sprang past more light & fleet the hare through brushwood crept here the voice suddenly stoptf. all the trees which bordered the path rustled & Lord Charles Wellesley bounded by with so much buoyancy merriment & elasticity that he hardly seemed to touch the ground, his rosy face was radiant with smiles his large bright sparkling blue eyes seemed the transparent palaces of cheerfulness - his parted ruby lips mantling with mirth displayed a row of teeth whiter than the finest oriental pearl . his forehead fair as ivory was shaded by ringlets of gold which hung in beautiful clusters over his temples & his form was the very emblem of aerial symetry. He passed the Duke without observing him as he was hid by a tall black cypressf. His Grace stepped forward & called him by his name; imediately the light gay being arrested his swift course or rather flight as soon as he heard his father's voice & turned round.

uGood morning my son where are you going?" Said the Duke "O Dear Dear father" exclaimed he "I'm so glad to see you I'm going to seek Arthur who has never been home since last evening."

"never been home since last eveningf! it is true then they have not deceived me" replied his Grace & the dark sorrowful cloud which for a moment had been dissipated by the prescence of his cheerful son shadowed his noble brow more gloomily than before. "Charles your brother is in danger of death"2' he said solemnly.

"In danger of Death!" repeated Charles & imediately all gladness forsook his face & dim tears veiled his lustrous eyes. his face turned pale as ashes & sinking on the ground he exclaimed as well as agonizing greif would permit him "0 Arthur must not die! Little queens can & shall save him. I will find Mystery24 wherever he lives. Where is Arthur father Where is he? Ill die if he dies, for I cannot live without him."

"Hush Charles hush" said his Grace raising him from the earth "come with me into Seringapatans cottage. I will try to save Arthur. "

by this time Seringapatan hearing the moans & sobs of Lord Welles- ley had come out of his house. When he saw the Duke supporting his son who was weeping incessantly he was somewhat alarmed & exclaimed "poor thing he seems faintish whats the matter my Lord? has a pekin been hurting him? where is the Wretchf? let me scald him in boiling lead but stop Id better fetch a drink of something for hes rather white in the face."

"No no Seringapatan take him into your house a little while, I whish to speak to you."

"0 Pray come in My lord" replied the old veteran rearing him

self proudly at the thought of a secret & flinging the door wider open. " there's nought new to listen at peoples keyholes for them at lived over the way's at London. "

When they had entred he put two chairs by the fire wiping them with a dishcloth & spreading a peice of carpet over the hearth . he then pulled a pillow from the bedhead & placed it in one chair saying that if lord Charles felt weakly he might lean on it. When they were in he closed the door bolted

& locked it & then sat down on a threelegged stool at his masters feet.

"Seringapatan" said his Grace "I beleive you to be an honourable & upright man, faithful to my interests & grateful for the favours I have done you. therefore I will now trust you with a secret of great importance, last night I received a mysterious letter purporting to be from the spirit of my dead father, it stated that Arthur the eldest of my children and your future Lord having in the course of his melancholy wanderings, been drawn by the power of a secret fascination into the abode of supernatural beings, is at this moment suffering all the torments which they can devise & that if you did not go with me to a particular place which I am acquainted with certain death will befall him & I now require you by your allegiance to me and mine to obey my comands in everything.f here the Duke stopped & Seringapatan, falling on his knees solemnly promised to follow all his orders not only at the present time, but until he should draw his last breath, the Duke then turned to Charles & asked him if he would go also, UI would willingly die to save Arthurs life" replied the young Lord ardently while a beam of hope lighted his glistening eyes." his father patted his curly head & smiled on him approveinly.

In a few moments they were ready & when Seringapatan had locked his cottage door they set out at a quick pace on their journey, in a little while they had emerged from the forest & after crossing several hay & cornfeilds together with a large belt of meadow land & orchards that surrounded the village they entred a very wide plain on which only a few scattered sheep where visible & even these in a short time ceased to present themselves to the eye. as they went on the towers and woods of Strathfeildsay gradually sank beneath the horizon the high church steeple lessend & receded till it became invisible the enclosed feilds & orchards vanished in the distance & aft length only the flat plain beneath & the arched sky above remained for their sight to rest upon.

On this plain they continued till evening when they arrived at a place where were huge rocks rising perpendicularly to an imense heightf; a vast cataract rolling thunderously down the precipices hollowed for itself a bason in the solid stone beneath & the waters rushing over dashed furiously onwards for some time until aft length smoothning & widening they glided peaceffully along a lovely valley which opened by degrees to the right hand, it was shaded with sycamore trees & young oaks through which the rays of the setting sun now beamed with a rich lustre on the subsiding wavelets of the river imparting to it the beautiful appearance of liquid gold, they proceeded to mount a narrow rugged sheep-path winding up one of the rocks till they came to a kind of plateau covered with herbage above which the rocks rising to a dizzy height appeared wholly inacessable.

here the Duke suddenly stopped & commanded Seringapatan & lord Wellesley to halt as it was not nesessary for them to proceed further, this he said in a tone which both his son & servant understood; it was not angry nor hardly stern, but it had a decisive sound in it which showed that no entreaties would prevail with him to let them go on. they accordingly sat down on the grass without speaking & watched him with earnest eyes for they saw it was impossible for any mortal man unassisted by supernatural power to scale the perpendicular wall of even stone which they beheld, about y yards distant from the plateau was a projecting fragment that hung over the valley beneath. it was however exceedingly narrow and such a tremendous height from the ground that this together with its distance from the little plain where they were made it perfectly improbable that any living being should dare the horrible leap which must be made before they could reach it.

The Duke stood for a moment gazing eagerly around as if searching for some means to atain his end: at length fixing his eyes on the fragment he quickly threw of his dark mantle which till now he had kept closely wrapped about him & advancing to the border of the plateau sprang from it to the ledge in an instant as if the spirit of an Izard or chamois26 had been suddenly granted to him. When lord Wellesley saw his father perform his daring action to which he was prompted & encouraged by the desire to save his eldest son a smothered scream burst from his lips, the Duke looked round not withstanding his perilous situation & looking on him with compassion he said “my dear Charles do not fear for me; in a short time I shall return with Arthur perfectly safe & well.” then turning a corner of the rock he disapeard from their sight.

Continuing on his course which became more dangerous at every step he at length arrived at a vast Cavern the entrance of which was closed with Iron doors: these rolled back as he advanced & admitted him into an imense hall of stone. he entred the doors closed after him & he found himself alone in this strange apartment dimly lighted by a blue flame in the middle, huge massive pillars rose to the vaulted roof: their capitals were ornamented with human skulls & crossbones their shafts were in the form of grisly skeletons & their bases were Shaped like tombstones, the hall was so long that he was unable to see the end & as he walked to & fro he heard the echoing of his footsteps at a distance as if the sound was reflected by vaults or cells, after a considerable time the noise of an opening door was heard - light well known footsteps fell on his ear & in another moment he embraced his beloved son. almost at the same instant they found themselves on the plateau were Seringapatan & lord Wellesley anxiously waited for them.

the meeting between the two brothers was joyful in the extreme & after a short time spent in tears of gladness & affectionate congratulating the whole party returned in saftety to Strathfeildsay. to all the questions put to the marquis respecting his sufferings while in that cave his invariable answer has been that they were indiscribable.

CB May 5 1830

CHAPTER TWO

MAY6 1830

It was a bright afternoon in August 1829 when the Duke of Wellington rose from the dry wearisome ocupation of composing & copying state documents (better fitted for the mind of a Jhon Herries or a P. Courtnay than his lofty & energetic spirit) which employment he had constantly followed for above 3 months without any relaxation whatsoever. after locking his writing desk and placing all the papers in order, he determined forthwith to proceed to the Horsegaurds. for tired of the tedious dull society of gentlemen in office & creeping crawling clerks; ready & even ambitious to lick the dust beneath his feet, he longed once more to breathe the fresh free millatry air of that priveliged retreat of all the great Feild marshals Generals staff officers & colonels now alive. Just as he had formed his resolution the door of his apartment opened & little king & queens entred in their usual form, they accosted him with, "Duke of Wellington come to the Horsegaurds: we are going there & we wish you to accompany us in order that you may point out all that is worth seeing. "

"I was just about to proceed thitherf replied his Grace "& shall be much honoured by your society."

In a few moments they set out & after a quater of an hours walk reached the place of their destination, the gate was closed but a soldier who stood by, imediately hastened to open it as soon as he saw his Grace approach presenting arms & making a low bow. they entred & it was shut after them, the yard of the Horse guards was covered with rough stones & gravel 2 or 3 sentinels were pacing about ocasionally turning their eyes towards a lofty triangle & fixed at one end on which a poor soldier was undergoing the lash of the cat-o- nine-tails17 inflicted by the merciless hand of orderly-man who stood with his shirt sleeves rolled up exerting every sinew in the cause of cruelty.

"What crime has that fellow been guilty of to bring on his head or rather his back such a bloody punishment?" exclaimed the Duke as he walked towards the instrument of torture.

uhes been making faces at lord Hill when he told him to lick the dust of his shoes.f replied Orderly-man halting for a moment.

"lord Hills a scoundrel" replied his Grace uin the first place for flogging a man because he refused to comit a crime (which that he commanded him to do would have been) & in the second place for ordring you to triangle him which none but I have a right to. Take that wretch down instantly orderly-man. Bring Lord Hill & set him in his place."

For the first time in his life Orderly-man hesitated to obey his masters mandates, casting the whip on the ground he sighed deeply tears came into his glittering gray eyes & marks of evident greif & disappointment appeared on his rugged countenance;

"What is the matter?" said the Duke in the utmost surprise. "I should think the fellow was absolutely under the influence of witchcraft: why don't you fly like lightning to execute my command?"

for a few moments he was unable to reply. at length a flood of tears came to his releif & then the following words intermixed with sobs & moans made their way.

"Well my lord its baking day today & I was just begining to make a good? currant cake when lord Hill called me off to triangle this beast & now when I've done that I'm forced to triangle him too & my cake will be eaten by Seringapatan or some other horrid glutton in the Baking-room while I shall have none at all though I bought the stuff it's made of," here as if touched by the recital of his own misfortune he wept anew, the Duke of Wellington laughed aloud & placing his hand on his shoulder told him not to break his heart as he would give him something better than a peice of Bread - Orderly-man consoled by this assurance hastened to obey his lord & in a few minutes Hill suspended from the triangle suffered the penalty of his crime.

Little King & queens understanding from the previous conversation that it was baking day in the Horsegaurds expressed a wish to go into the room where the bread was prepared & made ready.

"Your majesties are perfectly at liberty to do so if you please" said his Grace " provided my attendance can be dispensed with, as I never frequent the apartments were the soldiers cook their food.f uvery well Duke of Wellington we can do without you" replied the fairies angrily & imediately quitting him in an abrupt manner they entred the Horsegaurds & proceeded to the Bakehouse. It was a large room built of brick without any ceiling so that all the great beams & rafter that formed the roof were exposed to the eye & paved after the fashion of streets & thoroughfares, a fire of a suficient size & feirceness to roast an ox was blazing at one end. a long table ran down the centre at which 2 or 3 hundred soldiers were standing busily employed in the manufacture of coarse loaves & cakes; at the head on a high rustic tripod sat a very old man apparently more than six feet in height with muscles as strong & supple as those of Hercules & bones as big as a mammothsf. his grizzled grey hairs were drawn all together tied with a peice of a rope and plaited into a long queu behind, his nose was like an eagles beak when by reason of its age the upper mandible has peirced through the under & the venerable posessor unable either to eat or drink lies in its inacessible eirie made like a charnel house by the blanched bones of those which in its vigorous youth it has slain now - I was going on but I find that the metaphor is too diffuse allreadyf. Seringapatan's nose then (for the old man was no other) was exceedingly aquiline & his mouth a scarlet thread stretching from ear to ear & together with his fine large dark expressive eye betokened him of true Milesian origin.

He sat on his exalted throne in an atitude of extreme dignity & imperial majestyf. his head gently inclined to one side leaned on a hand whose coulour the snow might have envied, it being of a dark tawny red. One foot lay on the far side of the table & the other on the head of a horrible wretch who had ventured to rebel against his high power but who at lenght having sucumbed from a gentle intimation that tomorrow at drilltime he should suffer for his impudence, was now doing penance for his black crime. When Seringapatan spoke he invaribly streched out his right arm intuwards? imitating the elegant action of all the great Grecian Roman British & Hibernian orators.

After little king & queen's had viewed this scene for some time they left the room & proceeded to find out the Duke of Wellington, they found him in the public apartment for the officers, it was an ample rotunda carpeted with green cloth, a large brass lustre suspended from the roof was covered with the accumalated dust of several years, a billiard table stood in the middle about which a number of officers sat playing or talking. The Duke was standing at one end of the room surrounded by Lords Rosslyn Berresford, Sommerset & Arthur Hill together with Generals Murray Hardinge Londonderry Fitzroy &c &c. Rosslyn was just delivering an enconium upon his Grace in the following words.

"My Lord when you appear a mist seems withdrawn from my eyes. You are as the clear splendor of the sun shining after rain. the dark clouds hasten at your approach to mingle with the swelling waves of the deep from whence they came & to whence they will return, a hundred flowers Whose beautiful heads drooped beneath the fury of the storm & whose radiant colours waned as it beat upon them, raise again their slender stems unfurl their emerald leaflets & hold up their golden crowns towards the first beam of light which heralds your appearance that they may be filled with loveliness & joy for lo you have allready glorified the last drops of the departing shower into a faint but fast brightning rainbowf. as I gaze on that mighty apparition spanning the whole earth & heaven, a solemn sign that the victorious waters shall never again roar triumphantly over the worlds highest mountain which clave the clouds with their summits or roll in her pleasant valleys the palaces of beauty & silence. I think by a mysterious conection of the humble snowdrop both the arch of the sky & the first blossom of spring are alike in their origin, though one be a child of heaven & the other of earth, for each is "rocked by the storm & cradled by the blast" Eh? my lord is not that very pretty?" said he & at that moment he certainly bore a much greater resemblance to a monkey than a man.

"Rosslyn" replied the Duke smiling sarcastically "you have certainly out done yourself to day though I am afraid if a jackal? or a mandrill a pinch or a pigmy could be brought to speak it would still surpass you in giving utterance to all that is conceited & devoid of sense in the compass of Apish phraseology. But sir & I am now serious if you bother me again with such language more resembling the watry scum of a weak whining poetaster's[28] brains than the conversation of an officer of sense & spirit or even of a civillian whose capacities are but mediocre in every respect I shall certainly allow you the privelige of showing off some elegant French atitudes scrapes & bows wether of the head or the back will I presume be perfectly imaterial on a triangle formed of deserters halberts exposed to the view & derision of the whole regiment of the gaurds. You will likewise Sir be expected to attend drill every day to officiate as caller of the muster roll to clean your own arms & accoutrements without the aid of any menial attendant, to associate with the common shoe blacks valets & soultlers? of the army in order that you may teach them the polite art of elocution besides improving their general maners by your elegant example & finally you will be cashiered for a few months to the end that you may enjoy your favourite solitued which will perhaps enable you to produce more masterly specimens of ryhming than you have hitherto favoured us with.f here his Grace stopped. all the generals around stood staring contemptuously at Roslyn & when he happened to come near any of them they shrank from his touch as if he was infectious not deigning to speak to him for a moment. Seeing their strange conduct & hearing the words of his master the poor wretch burst into a flood of tears sobbed aloud & then as if unable to contain himself he ran out of the room as fast as he was able & a few minutes after he was heard at a distance singing the following verses

To the forest to the wilderness Ah let me hasten now Wher'ere I go I still shall see My master's lowering brow The Woods black shade won't hide my greif No influence now I have But 'th stream will give more quick releif I'll seek a watry grave Unto the shore I'll swiftly fly I'll plunge into the sea The foam bells will ascend on high When drowning sets me free

Drown all the ills which life doth give O mis'ry in me dwells when no longer shall I live The tide of sorrow swells

Suspended from an elm tree tall I'll end my mournful life My soul more bitter is than gall My heart is full of strife

I'll cut my neck with some sharp blade I'll swallow poison dire No now my resolution's made I'll set myself on fire

Just then a loud noise was heard in an adjoining appartment & Game keeper came rushing into the room exclaiming that Lord Rosslyn had thrown himself into the fire but that he had been pulled out before he was hurt.

"take him" replied the Duke of Wellington "to the lowest dungeon keep him there & feed him on nothing but bread & water for a month." His Grace then quitted the room & little King & queens followed him.

"Where are you going?" said they.

"to Arthur's appartmentf he replied "will your majesties honour me by your company?"

"yes" they answered shortly & in a few minutes after mounting a flight of stone steps they arrived at the end of a long gallery terminated by a door which when opened discovered a small antichamber, where was an arched entrance veiled by a curtain of thick green baize, the Duke undrew the curtain

& a most elegant but rather small saloon presented itself, the floor was spread with a rich persian carpet, low sofas surrounded the room covered with green satin elegantly embroidered in needle work. A Dome tastefully painted in the arabesque style formed the roof, several stands of beautiful white marble supported alabaster vases of the finest & most fragrant flowers. On the Parian mantle peice stood a number of images clasically designed & well executed in Japan china & on a hearth slab of costly Tabruz? marble were ranged magnificent porphory, lapis lazuli and agate vessels filled with the most exquisite perfumes the East can supply, all the windows were shaded with orange & myrtle trees which grew in large pots of Seville china, at one of these were seated the Marquis of Douro & Lord Wellesly. the former was habited in the uniform of his regiment, imperial blue & gold, the latter in white silk lightly bordered with green & a purple mantle fastened on one shoulder by an ornament of saphire & emerald.

As soon as his Grace entred they both started up joyfully welcoming him to their peaceful retreat from the noisy & turbulent Rotunda. In a few minutes he sat down & then after a short silence he observed “What a luxurious place this is Arthur quite unfited I assure you my son to prepare a man for those hardships which every one has to encounter during some part of his life.”

“0 fatherf” exclaimed lord Charles “Arthur will always make hardships if he has not them ready at hand. ever since he has been here (that is 3 hours) I have not observed a single smile on his countenance & after tiring myself to no purpose with trying to make him speak I was forced to open the window & amuse myself by talking to every person who passed in the court below . at last that resource failed me for no living creature showed its head & therefore shutting the sash I sat down again remained silent for half an hour & then finding that hypochondriasm was fast approaching upon me I got up smelt at every flower & perfume in the appartment danced shook the orange branches sung merry songs, stamped, raged, wept, mimicked Arthur, screamed smiled became hysterical fainted & at last finding all my efforts fruitless to provoke him to utter the smallest monosyllable I flung myself exhausted on a seat & remained staring franticly at Arthur till you entred when to my inexpressible joy I saw him rise & open his lips to welcome you.f The Duke of Wellington remained for about an hour at the Horse- gaurds & then returned to Downing Street where he found a bundle of official documents awaiting his arrival, these he imediately sat down to decipher & at this employment I shall for the present leave him.

C Bronte May the 8th 1830

THIRD VOLUME OF THE TALES of the ISLANDERS

I began this volume on Monday May the third 1830 & finished it on Saturday May the 8 1830

C Bronte 1830

May the 8.

FOURTH VOLUME OF TALES OF THE ISLANDERS

CHAPTER ONE

One fine atumnal evening the duke of Wellington was on his way from LONDON to Strathfeildsay. he had just passed through the village & had entred a narrow bridle-path leading to the park gate, here he dismounted from his horse & leading old Blanco-White by the reins proceeded at a leisurely pace onwards. It was as I have said a fine evening in autumn: the air was warm & breezeless, the sky covered with high light clouds except where here & there a few pale soft blue streaks apeared on the hazy horizon, the sun had just set. the snails where crawling forth from the hedge side to enjoy that refreshing dampness which imediately preceedes dusk at this period of the year, scarcely a leaf fell from the oaks & hawthorns bordring the path, for the dark hue of their foliage had hardly begun to mellow with the waning seasonf. The only sounds audible were the noise of an occasional Lady-clock*9 humming by & the trickle of a rill as it flowed invisibly down an ancient Cart rut (now unused) hid by dock leaves wild vetch grass & other hedge plants with witch the road was completely overgrown. A hill rising on one hand concealed from view the Hall with its extensive parks pleasure grounds gardens woods &c situated in a broad & delightful valley sloping far down on the other side.

As the Duke walked quietly forward he suddenly heard a murmuring sound like the voices of several people conversing in an under tone, a little in advance of him. He stopped & listened but was unable to understand what they said, at a few paces farther on a turn in the path brought in sight the figures of 3 old women seated on a green bank under a holly knitting with the utmost rapidity & keeping their tongues in constant motion all the while, stretched in a lounging posture beside them lay little king languidly gathring the violets & cuckoo-meat which grew around, at the Dukes approach he started up as likewise did the old women, they courtesied & he bowed much after the fashion of a Dip-Tail'0 on a stone. He then after a sharp peal of laughter from his companions addressed the Duke thus.

"Well Duke of Wellington here are three freinds of mine whom I wish to introduce to you." "they lived for some time as washerwomen in the family of the late Sir Robert Peel Bart'1 who respected them so much that in his will he remembered them each for twenty guineas. After his death however the present Bart, turnened them away together with several other antiquated but faithful servants of his deceased parent, to make room for the modern trash of fopish varlets that now constitute every gentlemans establishment, thus they are now cast on the wide world without shelter or home & if you would consent to take them into your service it would be conferring a great obligation on me as well as them."

"I am not much accustomed to engage servants" replied his Grace, "but you may take them to my house-keeper & if their characters will bear the old lady's scrutiny I have no objection."

"Very well that's right Duke of Wellington" replied little King, much pleased.

the Duke then remounted his horse & proceeded at a smart trot onward wishing to escape from the company of his new acquaintance, they however stuck close to him & continued by his side talking & laughing & trying to draw him into conversation incessantly, in a short time they turned the hill & going rapidly down a long inclined lane, entered the vast wood which forms a boundary to one side of Strath- feildsay Park - after threading the puzzling mazes of the labyrinth which leads to Seringapatans 0rderly-Man's Jack Off A11 Trades' & Game Keeper's cottages they stop at the door of Seringapatans and the Duke stooping his head to avoid the huge thick branches waving around, lifted the latchet. Seringapatan instantly sprang out & bowing low without waiting for his masters orders flung open the park gate. His grace then bent aside & whispered something in the old-mans ear, commanding him to detain little king & his comrades until he reached the hall. Seringapatan bowed again lower than before & the Duke, tickling Blanco's flanks galloped swiftly off.

"If you please will you step into my Kitchin a minute & rest you?" said Seringapatan.

they thanked him & without further ceremony walked in. it was a small apartment neatly white-washed. an oaken dresser furnished with the brightest pewter & deIf-ware covered one end; above it was suspended a highly polished musket & sword . several ancient books were carefully piled on a black oak kist. two substantial armchairs stood at each end of a hot, blazing fire & opposite the window seat, a number of stout 3 legged stools were ranged in a row. the floor & hearth were as clean & white as scouring could make them. Mrs Left Seringapatan sat mending her husband stockings by a round deal table. She was clad in a dark green stuff gown with snow- white cap & apron & looked as sedate as if she had be en 60 instead of 25.

When little King & the old women entred she rose & begged them to be seated : they complied . after chatting awhile she got up again & went out but in a short time returned with a plateful of rich current cake & a bottle of perry." these dainties she invited her guest's to partake of which they did of course & then prepared to depart. Seringapatan knowing that by this time his Master had arived at his seat opened the door & permitted them to go. they pursued their way up the park without stopping for night was fast coming on & the moon pouring her light on the long groves & alleys which in dark obscure lines stretched far over the undulating prospect was climbing the mild atumnal heaven's amid freckled downy clouds & dimly visible stars.

It happened that Lord Charles Wellesley had that day been taking one of his wild rambles over his fathers domains & he was now returning homewards, at a distance he saw the three old women with their conductor, being fond of company he made haste to overtake them but as he approached his volatile mind changed & he determined to walk close behind & remain a concealed listener to their conversation promising himself much amusement from the scheme, in this however he was deceived for voluble as they had been while in Seringapatan's Cottage they now became perfectly silent.

in about a quater of an hour they reached the deep rapid stream which runs through the grounds. its banks are shaded by willows & larches & the long rays of moonlight trembling through the high boughs fell with sweet serenity on the turbulent waves prouducing a soothing contrast to their impetuous & dark ridges following each other in quick succesion down the waters, a grassy mole extending to the opposite bank formed a kind of natural bridge & over this lord Charles supposed they would go so he halted a while to observe them, they however to his astonishment glided noiselessly to the midst of the river & there turning three times round amidst the shivered fragments of brilliant light in which the moon was reflected were swallowed up in a whirlpool of raging surges & foam, he stood a moment powerless with horror, then springing over the mound dashed through the trees on the other side & gaining the open path beheld little King & the three old women walking whole & sound a few yards before him. more surprised than before he viewed them in silence for an instant & then concluded that they were other fairies whom little King had broughft with him to this earth, he strove to satisfy himself with this conjecture but notwithstanding his endeavours he still felt an uneasy vague & by no means pleasant sensation when he looked at their little sharp faces & heard the shrill disagreeable tones of their voicefs (for they were now chatting away as merrily as before) for which he was unable to account.

at length they arrived at the mansion, little King knocked at the Great Gate the folding-doors rolled back and a blaze of red light burst forth illuminating the grand flight of broad sculptured steps & the dark avenue for a great distance off. a huge fire was burning in the wide hall chimney & every branch of the brass lustre bore a flame . The servants were gathered together at superf: GameKeeper sat at the head of the table, Jack 0f All Tfrades officated as waiter & 0rderly-Man as vice president. Peels of laughter rose every instant to the lofty roof & the oaken rafters trembled, little King & his companions entered. the doors were shut again & lord Charles was left to the darkness & solitude of night which formed a wide difference to the revels he had just caught a glimpse of. after a moments thought he cleared the steps with a bound & springing along the path came to a door in the wall which he opened with a key he took from his pocket & then entred a small green plain delightfully planted with many beautiful shrubs & trees & watred by a fountain in the midst, this he presently crossed & ascending a high flight of balustraded marble steps reached a terrace that led to an arched glass door, he opened this also & a small elegantly furnished room became apparent which was his own & his brothers private appartment.

Arthur was sitting by the fire with his head resting on his hand lost in deep abstraction, the moment lord Wellesley entred he started up exclaiming “0 Charles I have been listening & wishing for you a long time & now I am rejoiced at your arrival - come sit down & let us have our usual pleasant converzazione before retiring to rest.f Charles met his brothers welcome with equal cordiality &, flinging himself on the warm persian rug began to relate his adventures of that day, in which employment I must for the present leave him & return to little King and the 3 old women.

After Supper was over he requested leave to speak with the housekeeper & was informed by one of the maids that she had withdrawn for the night & they dared not now disturb her but that to-morrow he might procure an interview for himself & freinds. this answer by no means pleased the Dames who were begining in a loud shrill cadence to express their dissatisfaction, when Old-Man-Cockney coming in they together with the servants were driven off to-bed.

The next morning they rose with the sun & were only prevented from breaking in upon Mrs Daura Dovelike’s rest by a chamber-maid who met them at the door & warned them of the consequence of their intrusion namely instant dismission without an audience. It was with difficulty they were persuaded to wait till nine-o.clock so great was their anxiety to have the affair of engagement settled, at that time Mrs Daura sent word that she was ready to receive them. On proceeding to her apartment they found her seated at breakfast in an arm chair with her feet on a cushonied foot-stool, her stiff figure was invested in an old fashioned bustling black silk gown with cap & ruff starched to the consistence of buck-ram.” as kind Fortune would have it she happened this morning to be in good temper so after bidding them sit down & asking a few questions she agreed to take them before her lady the Duchess of Wellington .

When they had passed through a long corridor gallery & anti- chamber they came to her private sitting-room, it was ornamented after a most splendid but nevertheless simple & unostentatious stylef. The Duchess was engaged at her usual charitable employment of working for the poor.’4 She was attired in a rich robe of dark crimson velvet almost entirely unadorned except one bright diamond which fastend the belt, the redundant tresses of her fine brown hair were confined in a silken net over which gracefully waved a single white ostrich feather, her face & figure were extremely beautiful & her large hazel eyes beamed with expression, but the principal charm about her was the gentleness & sweetness ever visible in her countenance, it seemed and it was impossible for her to storm & frown or even be angry for if any thing wrong was comitted by her servants or dependants she only looked greived & sad & not dark or lowering.

When they entred the Duke was also in the room conversing with his lady & the housekeeper on seeing him courtesied respectfully & was going away when he called her back & quitting the appartment left them to transact business without being under the embarrasment of his awe-inspiring-minister-general-& clerk-confusing prescence. after a short conversation it was settled that the 3 old Dames should act for one month on trial as washer-women & laundry-maids & that if during the prescribed time they behaved well they should then be taken into permanent service at wages of 10 guineas per-anumn each, when this was fixed they left her ladyships equally delighted with the mild condescension of her manner the enchanting benignity of her smiles & the unexpected success of their application.

The next day they commenced the performnance of the duties of their office which they continued for some weeks to execute with equal punctuality dilligence & sobriety but not without many qarrels among themselves often ending in ferocious fights where tooth nail feet & hands were employed with equal fury, in these fracas little King (who always continued with them) was observed to be exceedingly active inciting them by every means in his power to maul & mangle each other in the most horrible way. this circumstance however was not much wondered at as his constant disposition to all kinds of mischeif was well knowfn & he was considered by every member of the house of Strathfeildsay not excepting the Duke himself more as an evil brownie than a legitamate fairy.’

Lord Charles had not revealed to any-one the strange incident, of which he was witness that happened on the first night of their arrival, his curiosity of which he naturally possesed a considerable share strengthened. he watched them narrowly but nothing occurred furthur to warrant the suspicion of their being supernatural crea- turesf. One afternoon he went alone to that part of the rivers banks whence he saw them walking on the waves, after wandering some time among the trees gathering wild roses blue-bells & other feild flowers he lay down on the green turf & fixed his eyes on the blue sky peering at intervals through the thick masses of overhanging foliage, the sounds that saluted his ear were all of a lulling soothing character only the soft murmuring of the water flowing, the distant cooing of turtle doves from the groves or the wispering of wind in the trees, by degree^ his eyes closed a pleasing sensation of secluded rest glided through him & he was gradually passing away into a profound balmy slumber when suddenly an articulate voice came up on the breeze which said “meet us at midnight in the corridor.f he started up & listened, the sound had dyed off & no trace or tone of it remained in the wild woodland music breathing around.

“I am bewitched” he exclaimed aloud “those beings have certainly cast a spell over me but I will keep the asignation notwith standing for I can do so without any one being accquainted with it as Arthur is at London."

he then rose & walked home, during the remainder of the day a most unusual expression of thought appeared in his countenance & at night he retired early to his chamber, he sat pensively alone reading by a table till every noise ceased & not a voice or footstep was heard to break the dead hush reigning throughout the whole house, then the dull heavy toll of the great hall clock fell on his ear, twelve times the hammer resounded. he got up & extinguished his taper & quitted the room by a secret outlet opening to the corridor. his eyes glanced with an involuntary shudder down the long vista, all was veild in impenetrable darkness, at length a bright light appeared moving among the pillars. he advanced onwards, it receded slowly from him but he still followed, after awhile he saw it ascending a stair which wound up the great round tower. there he bent his course till he gained a huge door where the light vanished & left him alone, the door with a harsh jawing din opened & a vast lofty chamber became visible faintly illumined by long glimmering rows of torches which cast on all sides a bloody & terrific light. It had no roof but the sky above seemed as if a star-lit & cloudy dome, a huge black canopy in the midst swayed to-& fro in the wind that rushed through the open top & underneath were set 3 Coffins each of which held a shrouded corpse. Lord Charles advanced towards them & turning aside the winding sheets perceived that they were the 3 old washerwomen, he trembled with dread & at that instant a loud laugh rang in his ears. he looked up & beheld little King and queens standing beside him, one of them gave him a hearty slap on the shoulder saying "Charley dont' be frightened they were only our enchantments.f"

he opened his eyes at this salute stared around wondered & became bewildered. For Lo! he was lying in the pale moonlight on the rivers bank & no living creature near. he imediately ran with all haste to the house & when he had arrived there repeated his tale with eagerness to his father mother & brother whom he found together in the private parlour, they laughed at it of course but on inquiry it was found that the old women had been absent from Sftrathfeildsay since the morning, investigation was set on foot but no clue by which they could be traced was discovered. One Country-man said that he had observed them about noon on the moor with little king, but that he had occasion to turn away his eyes for an instant & when he looked again he saw little King & queens standing in the same place but not the smallest mark of them. this was all that could after the strictest search be gatherd & they have never been seen or heard of from that time to this. Charlotte Bronte July 14 1830

CHAPTER TWO

VOLUME 4TH

It was a sweet July evening When the Marquis of Douro & lord Charles Wellesley lay stretched on the verge of a lofty precipice silently beholding the prospect around. Majestic forest trees waving above their heads formed with woven intermingled boughs a sylvan roof to the natural carpet of grass & flowers spread beneath. Far down hundreds of green oaks & sycamores clothed the rocky and almost perpendicular shelving abyss in the dark sumer verdure with which their branches were now arrayed & from the profound depth below arose the voice of a concealed torrent hid by the gathering obscurity of dusk which was there heightened because of the gulph into which the sides of the precipice sloped that lay beyond the reach of the unceratain light lingering on the horizon after sunset. No sound save that dissipated the twilight sensation of stillness with which every passing breath of wind was charged until the Marquis taking a guitar that lay by his side swept its chords till every string vibrated in unison & then played an old mournful air which sweeping over the broad landscape was answered from a great distance by the same tune.

"There listen to Marian's reply" exclaimed lord Charles.

Arthur listend attentively but the music & its echos in a little while dyed softly away. They both remained silent for some time again, their eyes were fixed on the east where a pale light spreading over the sky began to herald the moons advent, at length like a silver sheild she heaved slowly up among stars and clouds & sat like Empress of the night on a throne of blue hills which bounded the orient expanse of scenery .

"It is surely impossible for that orb of light to be a world like ours," said Arthur as the splendour of its beams shone around him.

"Not at all my dear brother" replied lord Charles laughing "if you like I'll tell you a tale concerning it while we sit idly here."

"do Charles you know I always enjoy your stories particularly when I'm melancholy as I happen to be just now. Begin love I am ready. "

"Well I will directly but first where's my ape Tringiaf? Tringiaf! Oh here he comes now Tringia sit down under that branch of underwood. there are some nuts & blackberries to amuse yourself with & you must be more quiet than a dove while I divert Arthurs attention from the inhabitant of that pretty house which you may see yonder Tringia surrounded by a garden & plantation & lo! what do I see stooping amid the flowery parterres of that garden? an object clothed all in white! it cannot be, yes it is Marion Hume! & now that I look better through this small opera-glass, she is watering the very rose- tree that Arthur gave her from the green house & planted there with his own hands kind youth that he was. yes & there is her harp standing by the bower from which a few minutes ago she played that enchanting air."

"Charles are you going to tell me this story or not" said Arthur apparently whishing to draw of his attention.

"yes I am brother" replied lord Wellesley and he began as follows.

Once upon a time there lived in Georgia upon the banks of silver Aragua which washes the feet of the mighty Elborus; an old man named Mirza Abduliemah. he abode all alone in a solitary hut far from the habitations of men the nearest hamlet being twelve miles distant, his occupation was that of a woodcutter an easy business for one who lived in the heart of Georgias forests & he likewise gathered & sold the fruit of chestnut trees, accustomed from his youth to the vast solitudes of Caucasus Giant Mountains he needed not the society of human beings but loved rather to walk in the vales of young vines & lindens which smile round the borders of Aragua to gaze at the wonderous ravines rent in the stupendous sides of icy Kasibeck or to view in mute astonishment the awful form of good Gara towering aloft & raising its snow-crowned head afar into the deep azure of his native skies.'15

One evening as he returned homewards weighed down under the burden of sticks which he had gathered in a wood 3 miles distant from his hut he sat him down in a little green glen between two rocks. The sky over-head was bright cloudless & beautiful. The horizon round about was clear as liquid amber & the light which streamed from it was of the purest golden hue enriching the sumits of the coniform hills with a faint glow of orange that divested the snow of that cold deadly aspect which would ill have harmonized with the transparency of warmth that tinted every other object. The aged Mirza felt himself touched with the beauteous prospect & kneeling he turned towards Mecca said his sunset prayers to Mahomet & then thanked the one Almighty God for his goodness in creating such a profusion of fair & lovely scenes merely for ungrateful man's pleasure & reacreation.

when he had finished he rose resumed his bundle of faggots & casting a last look at the glorious horizon he prepared to quit the glen, but what was his surprise on beholding a black even line drawn around the pellucid heavens like a zone." it rose slowly up coiled itself in rings & unfurled with a noise like the concentrated winds of heaven two dark dragon pinions which shadowed the west as if the obscurity of thunder clouds hung over it. For a few moments it wavered between the vault of heaven & the globe of earth, then gradually descended. Mirza shook like one palsy stricken, but how was his fear heightened when he felt himself drawn powerless towards it. he prayed, he shreiked, he called on the name of Mahomet in vain, still like iron before the magnet he continued his charmed course upward, swifter than light he fled to the sky on on for days & nights till the moon grew larger than the earth to his eyes, at length overwhelmed with dread he fell into a long swoon & when his orbs of vision were released from the bondage by which they were held fast closed & sealed he was in a land the like of which no man ever before saw. Nothing was to be seen but black mountains higher than the highest on earth vomiting forth floods of fire & clouds of smoke - nothing to be heard but the roaring of internal flames, the ground quaked constantly under him & was continually rending in every direction & from the ravines fresh streams of red burning liquid burst boiling forth & overwhelmed every thing near.

"I must die I cannot live" he exclaimed aloud while the cold sweat of terror fell in large drops from his writhing visage. "0! Mahomet O! Allah save thy servantf! what horrid crime has he committed thus to die the death of an infidel?"

"Squilish squilli keriwes Nevilah" exclaimed a sharp shrill voice above him. he looked up & beheld a creature standing on the point of a rock surrounded by several others of a similar form. But how shall I describe its shapef? to what shall I liken it? it was seven feet in height stood on legs that resembled branches of trees, its eyes were two holes in a square block that formed its head, its mouth was invisible except by a pucker in the rugged skin when shut, but when open it was an oblong hole displaying 3 rows of brown teeth as sharp and slender as pins, its arms were so long that from the elbows downward they rested on the ground, it with the others cleared the rock at one leap & alighted near Mirza. they seized & bound him with long scarfs that hung on their heads & afterwards remained for about half a hour examining him closely & showing every sign of extreme astonishment. at the end of that time Mirza heard a great hissing bubbling noisef. he looked up & beheld a vast volume of lava rolling impetuously towards him, they saw it likewise & catching him up in their arms fled with incredible swiftness in an opposite direction, it however followed & would presently have overtaken them if a steep rock had not come to their releif. in a moment they sprang from it to one which stood opposite and the lava when it reached the brink was percipitated with a noise like the tremendous crash & rattle of approximate thunder down the declivity where in a short time it assumed the appearance of a black mass undistinguishable from the dense gloom of the ravine where it lay.

when this was over they hastened on without halting till day began to wane. at that time they reached a narrow vale irrigated by a branch from a neighbouring river & planted by several high trees of a kind unknown on earth, one which far outdid the rest in loftiness & beauty spreading its huge branches for a vast extent around, bore among thickly clustered leaves & blossoms hundreds of strange appearances like the nests of great birds, to this the beings who still carried Mirza with them directed their steps & quickly ascending the trunk & boughs took possesion of the topmost of these nests & snugly ensconced themselves there behind an intrenchment of rich purple & golden streaked fruit growing luxuriantly on one side of their circular habitation, when they had plucked & eaten themselves they offred some to Mirza. he tasted it at first warily but finding that it proved gratefully refreshing to his palate though the flavour was different from any he had ever before known he eat freely & without restraint. When the repast was concluded they all sat perfectly silent having their eyes fixed on a certain point of the sky which was azure like that which canopies our world. Mirza looked in that direction also & began mentally to repeat his evening prayers.

scarcely had he commenced when a light appeared over the hills. it slowly rose & when all was revealed Mirza saw his earth in the form of a great luminary 5 times larger than the moon seems to us. He bowed his head and thanked God in silent ejaculations, then all his companions turned away, as the earth rose & coiling themselves round in the nest presently gave Mirza notice by loud snores that sleep had closed their eyelids. Somnous also soon asserted his empire over him & in the oblivion of a deep sleep he buried his woes for the space of one lunar night which is I beleive Arthur much about the length of a terrene.

How long he continued with these strange creatures I cannot say for I never heard but his deliverance from them happened thus. One day when they were all gone down from the tree in search of fruits & had left him alone, he knelt & ernestly implored for liberty at the hands of Mahomet who it seems heard & accepted his petitions, for before he had finished he was startled by the sound of wings & ere he could look up an immense feathered & pinioned animal of marvellous form & dimensions had him safely secured in its great brazen claws, he calmly resigned himself to his fate without one shreik or struggle imagining that these judgements coming so thick & fast upon him one at anothers back were for some dreadful crime that his fathers had committed, the moon eagle for it was nothing else, quivered for a while over the valley & then rose perpendicularly to an imense altitude. Mirza feared that it was mounting to the sun & in that case he knew that the eternal torment of fire was certain to be his portion, again his fervid though inward prayers were sent up to the Great Prophet, the eagle waved its wing loosened the strong grasp of its talons & Mirza found himself whirling at rather an uncomfortable rate downward.

of the particulars of his descent I am ignorant as long before he arrived at a landing place sense had fled his skull. When however it returned he was reposing on the ground & two gigantic forms were bending over him. their countenances & figures were majestically beautiful shaped like those of human beings, instead of ears they had long flaps of flesh hanging gracefully down on their shoulders, their hair was soft & glossy as unspun silk in coulour a pale blue arranged in artful wreaths & curls upon their heads, from their foreheads projected a long taper horn white and polished as the finest ivory & a string of gold beads was wound spirally about it. their attire was a long robe of white down, bound at the waist with a richly embroidered belt and falling thence in the softest & most elegant folds, their arms & ankles were adorned with bracelets of gold & their feet with sandals of down ornamented by silver bands & fastend with jewels, from their necks also hung several strings of precious stones & gold or silver, they were gazing at Mirza in smiling astonishment turning him over & examining him with the utmost gentleness & care & conversing to each other meantime in a strange but harmonious language.

after some time spent thus they rose & wrapping him in the leaf of a huge plant that grew near, they conveyed him towards a great plain where was a very large & magnificent tent surrounded by several meaner ones, this they entred passing through formidable ranks of armed giants between thirty & forty feet in height all of whom showed them the greatest respect, in the midst of the tent sat one who appeared to be the cheif in a thoughtful attitude his right hand supported his monstrous head & his left a dagger, they advanced & unfolding the leaf placed poor little unfortunate Mirza before him. he gave an exclamation apparently of delight, snatched him up & rising hastily quitted the tent making a sign that none should follow.

For about the space of an hour he walked or rather strode on over hills plains and rivers till there appeared a valley full of tents that encompassed a palace like edifice constructed of a species of variegated marble not in the best architectural taste but from its enormous bulk inspiring an idea of sublimity & grandeur. This was the metropolis of the country where Mirza was & that building was its Kings residence, the Giant directed his course thither.

it would be needless for me to give an account of the odd ceremonies that took place on his introduction to the King which besides being tedious would make my tale even dryer than it now is Arthur. But when they were over, he showed Mirza with a joyful counten- ance to his majesty who leapt from his throne in a transport & on resuming his seat poured forth an energetic speech expressive of his joy. then Mirza was consigned to a golden box enriched with gems where he lay a miserable captive till next day. at that time he was taken out & food was offered to him. being extremely hungry he eat though with great loathing & disgust as he knew what animal it was the flesh of & the taste was coarse and disagreeable .

just when he had concluded his repast he heard a tremendous sound of shouting instruments & music &c. he was then placed in his box & hurried off. after many hours of marching he was again let out & found himself in the midst of a vast army of giants who were ranged at a respectful distance from an altar where he stood in the hands of a venerable old preist clothed in wide flowing garments with a snowhite beard hanging lower than his girdle & long grey hair disheveled in the wind, a great fire burnt on the altar & as he sprinkled perfumes thereon & anointed Mirza with fragrant oils & essences he uttered these words “here is the sacrifice which thou didst demand O Mountain! here are our warriors assembled to do thee homage, accept our offering & spare us!” By these words Mirza knew his doom for though spoken in a strange tongue they were supernaturally understood by him. he trembled & quaked with horror as the idea of being burnt alive flashed through his mind but no shreik or supplication burst from his whitened lips and after some inward strife he resigned himself to his inevitable fate hoping that the joys of

Paradise would be his subsequent reward. The Preist now poured the last libation over his devoted head and bathefd him in the blood of a newly slain beast & more fuel was added to the fire whose flames were already ascending with intense feirceness & heat. Mirza was on the point of being dropped headlong in when a cry of horror broke from those around, the Preist withheld his arm & looked up. a huge black mountain appeared in the sky wavering over their heads & slowly descending on them, suddenly a flood of fire burst from the summit & a terrible voice was heard to say "Have ye O wretches, provided the offeringf?" "We have" they all exclaimed in an agony of dread, with a dull rumbling sound it went up again while they watched it in breathless silence while every trace vanished from the heavens.

The Preist then turned to Mirza and said "Creature whoever thou may'st be thou art doomed to die for our saftey. we for a length of time have been tormented by that vision which thou sawst. it threatened to destroy us if a being like thee was not procured to appease it by death, At length some Good Spirit has placed thee in our power, thou wert found by the daughters of our cheif warrior asleep & defenceless in a feild. they brought thee to their father & by him thou wast delivered to our King, hitherto thou hast behaved with becoming resignation, let not thy heart fail thee in the hour of death -"

with these words Mirza was commited to the flames & the tortures he endured were hard and indescribable, for as the fire seized his feet & legs he felt all the sinews crack the calcined bones started through his blackned cindery flesh; by degrees his extremites crumbled to ashes & he fell prostrate amid their ruins, a short time now sufficed to extinguish his insupportable agony. the rising smoke presently suffocated him & he died amid shouts & cries of gladness from his sacrificers.

the remnant of my parched tale is clad in a veil of mystery. This same Mirza who suffered the extreme rigour of the law among those Giants was I know not how long subsequent to that event, wakend from his sleep of death by a shake on the shoulder which brought life again into him. he looked about & discovered that he was standing upright against the door cheek of his hut with a bundle of faggots lying before him. his surprise & joy I will not attempt to depict but on examining his hands and feet he found that they were all marked with long seams & scars of burning, this staggered him a little but after some consideration he concluded that it was all the machinations of those evil spirist who haunt the Caucasian range, for my part I do not agree with him but think that these circumstances I have related really occured. Mirza never knew wether the Giants were inhabitants of the sun moon stars or earth. I beleive the latter.

"Well my sons what witch or wizard-craft is going on between you that you have need to do it under the midnight (or thereabouts) moon & sky? come home my young scape-graces," exclaimed a voice close behind them, they started to their feet & saw their father standing near.

"I'll come directly" replied lord Wellesley. "Tringia Tringia where are you?”

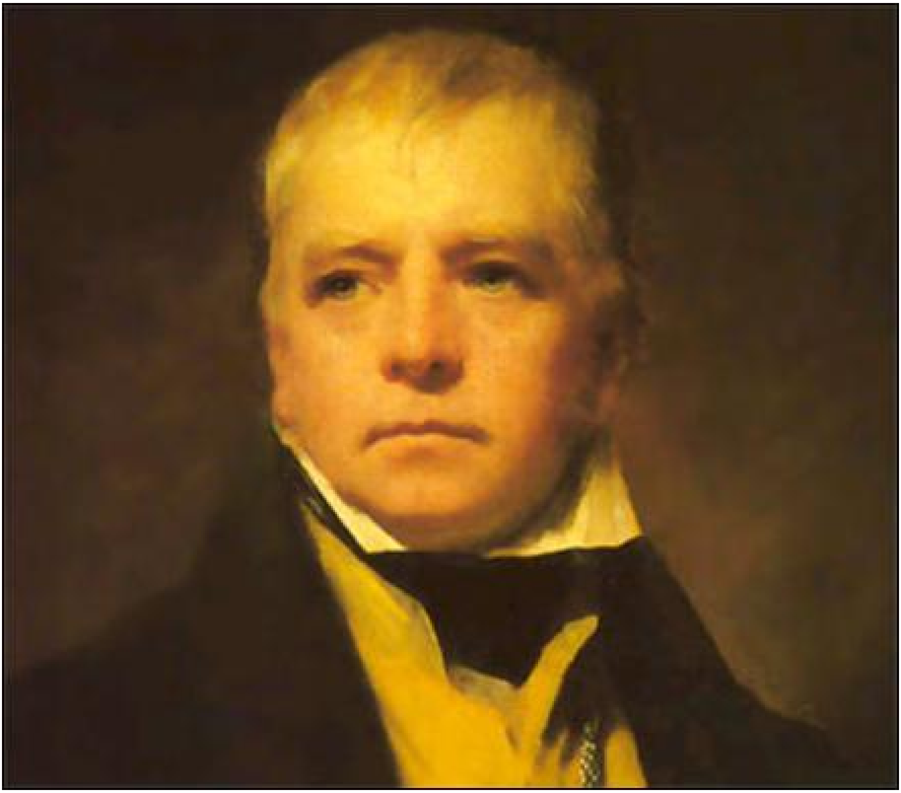
Tringia sprang from under his branch of brushwood & in a short time was seated in softer & warmer quaters with Trill Philomel & Pol on the rug of the private parlour before a warm blazing fire.

C Bronte

THE GREEN DWARF

The Green Dwarf is Charlotte's romantic love-story, written before she had turned eighteen, featuring star-crossed lovers, concealed identities and magical revelations, heavily influenced by the works of Sir Walter Scott. The narrative is much more sustained and sophisticated than anything she had produced in her early juvenilia works. The use of flashbacks to unfold the story is a rudimentary, though not unsuccessful, attempt to maintain the tension and deepen the mystery. At the age of seventeen, Charlotte was already an experienced writer and *The Green Dwarf* proves her early ability as a novelist.

Please note: This novel was never published in Charlotte's lifetime and survives from an unpolished manuscript, thus there are frequent errors in punctuation and spelling, due to the original state of the text.



Sir Walter Scott, the Father of Historical Fiction, whose Waverley novels influenced Charlotte to write 'The Green Dwarf'

THE GREEN DWARF

A TALE OF THE PERFECT TENSE

BY LORD CHARLES ALBERT FLORIAN WELLESLEY

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PREFACE

I am informed that the world is beginning to express in low, discontented grumblings its surprise at my long, profound, & (I must say) very ominous silence. What says the reading publick as she stands in the market place with gray cap & ragged petticoat the exact image of a modern blue "What is the matter with lord Charles?" "is he expifli- cated by the literary captains lash? have his good genius & his scribbling mania forsaken him both at once?" "Rides he now on Man-back through the mountains of the moon or mournful thought lies he helpless on a sick-bed of pain?"

the last conjecture I am sorry to say is or rather was true. I have been sick, most sick, I have suffered dreadful indescribable tortures arising chiefly from the terrible remedies which were made use of to effect my restoration.' One of these was boiling alive in what was called a hot-bath, another roasting before a slow fire, & a third a most rigid system of starvation, for proof of these assertions apply to Mrs Cook, back of Waterloo Palace situated in the suburbs of Verdopolis. How I managed to survive such a mode of treatment, or what the strength of my victorious constitution must be wiser men than I am would fail in explaining.

Certain it is however that I did at length get better or to speak more elegantly become convalescent but long after my cadaverous cheek had begun to reassume a little of its wonted freshness I was kept penned up in a corner of the House-keepers parlour, forbid the use of pen, ink & paper, prohibited setting foot into the open air & dieted on rice-gruel, sago, snail soup panado, stewed cock-chaffers, milk-broth & roasted mice. I will not say what was my delight when first Mrs Cook deigned to inform me about two o'clock on a fine summer afternoon that as it was a mild warm day I might take a short walk out if I pleased, ten minutes sufficed for arraying my person in a new suit of very handsome clothes & washing the accumulated dirt of seven diurnal revolutions of the earth from my face & hands.

as soon as these necessary operations were performed I sallied out in plumed hat & cavalier mantle. Never before had I been fully sensible of the delights of liberty, the suffocating atmosphere which filled the hot, flinty street was to me as delicious as the dew-cooled & balm- breathing air of the freshest twilight in the wildest solitude, there was not a single tree to throw its sheltering branches between me & that fiery sun but I felt no want of such a screen as with slow but not faltering step I crept along in the shadow of shops and houses. At a sudden turn the flowing ever-cool sea burst unexpectedly on me. I felt like those poor wretches do who are victims to the disease called a calenture. the green waves looked like wide-spread plains covered with foam -white flowers & tender spring grass & the thickly clustered masts of vessels my excited fancy transformed into groves of tall, graceful trees, while the smaller craft took the form of cattle reposing in their shade. I passed on with something of that springing step which is natural to me, but soon my feeble knees began to totter under the frame which they should have supported, unable to go further without rest I looked round for some place where I might sit down till my strength should be un peu retabli. I was in that ancient & dilapidated court, called (pompously enough) Quaxmina Square, where Bud, Gifford, Love-dust, & about twenty other cracked old antiquarians reside. I determined to take refuge in the house of the first mentioned as well because he is my most intimate friend as because it is in the best condition.

Buds' mansion is indeed far from being either incommodious or unseemly, the outside is venerable & has been very judiciously repaired by modern masons (a step by the bye which brought down the censure of almost all his neighbours) & the inside is well & comfortably furnished. I knocked at the door, it was opened by an old footman with a reverend grey head. on asking if his master were at home he showed me upstairs into a small but handsome room. Here I found Bud seated at a table surrounded by torn parchments & rubbish & descanting copiously on some rusty knee-buckles which he held in his hand to the Marquis of Douro & another puppy who very politely were standing before him with their backs to the fire.

"What's been to do with my darling?" said the kind old gentleman as I entered "what's made it look so pale & sickly, I hope not chagrin at Trees superannuated drivel"

"Bless us" said Arthur before I could speak a word "What a little chalky spoon he looks! the whipping I bestowed on him has stuck to his small body right well.[f] hey Charley any soreness yet?"

"Fratricide" said I "how dare you speak thus lightly to your half murdered brother, how dare you demand whether the tortures you have inflicted continue yet to writhe his agonized frame?"

he answered this appeal with a laugh intended I have no doubt to display his white teeth & a sneer designed to set of his keen wit & at the same instant he gently touched his riding-wand.

"Nay my lord" said Bud who noticed this significant manoeuvre, "let us have no more of such rough play - you'll kill the lad in earnest if you don't mind"

"I'm not going to meddle with him yet" said he "he's not at present in a condition to show game but let him offend me again as he has done & I'll hardly leave a strip of skin on his carcase"

What brutal threats he would have uttered besides I know not but at this moment he was interrupted by the entrance of dinner.

"My lord & Colonel Morton" said Bud "I hope you'll stay & take a bit of dinner with me, if you don't think my plain fare too coarse for your dainty palates"

"On my honour Captain" replied Arthur "your bachelor's meal looks very nice & I should really feel tempted to partake of it had it been more than two hours since I breakfasted, last night or rather this morning I went to bed at six & so it was twelve before I rose, therefore dining you know is out of the question till seven or eight o'clock in the evening"

Morton excused himself on some similar pretext & shortly after both the gentlemen much to my satisfaction took their leave.

"Now Charley" said my friend when they were gone "you'll give me your company I know, so sit down on that easy chair opposite to me & let's have a regular two-handed crack."

I gladly accepted his kind invitation because I knew that if I returned home Mrs Cook would allow me nothing for dinner but a basin-full of some filthy vermined slop. During our meal few words were spoken for Bud hates chatter at feeding time & I was too busily engaged in discussing the most savoury plateful of food I had eaten for the last month & more to bestow a thought on anything of less importance, however when the table was cleared & the dessert brought in, Bud wheeled the round table nearer the open window poured out a glass of sack seated himself in his cushioned arm-chair & then said in that quiet satisfactory tone which men use when they are perfectly comfortable :

"What shall we talk about Charley."

"anything you like" I replied .

"Anything?" said he "why that means just nothing, but what would you like?"

"Dear Bud" was my answer "since you have been kind enough to leave the choice of a topic to me there is nothing I should enjoy so much as one of your delightful tales if you would but favour me this once I shall consider myself eternally obliged to you."

Of course Bud according to the universal fashion of all story-tellers refused at first but after a world of flattery, coaxing & intreating he at length complied with my request & related the following incidents which I now present to the reader not exactly in the original form of words in which I heard it but strictly preserving the sense & facts.

July 10th -33. C. Wellesley

CHAPTER THE FIRST

Twenty years since or thereabouts there stood in what is now the middle of Verdopolis but which was then the extremity a huge irregular building called the Genii's Inn. it contained more than five hundred appartments all comfortably & some splendidly fitted up for the accommodation of travellers who were entertained in this vast hostelry free of expense, it became in consequence of this generous regulation the almost exclusive resort of way-farers of every nation who in spite of the equivocal character of the host & hostesses being the four chief Genii, Talli, Brani, Emi, & Anni & the despicable villany of the waiters & other attendants which noble offices were filled by subordinate spirits of the same species continually flocked thither in prodigious multitudes; the sound of their hurrying footsteps, the voice of rude revel, & the hum of business has ceased now among the ruined arches, the damp mouldy vaults, the dark halls & the desolate chambers of this once mighty edifice which was destroyed in the great rebellion, & now stands silent, & lonely in the heart of Great Verdopolis. But our business is with the past, not the present day, therefore let us leave moping to the owls & look on the bright side of matters; On the evening of the fourth of June 1814 it offered rather a different appearance, there had been during that day a greater influx of guests than usual - which circumstance was owing to a Grand fete to be held on the morrow, the great hall looked like a motley masquerade in one part was seated cross legged on the pavement a group of Turkish merchants who in those days used to trade largely with the shopkeepers & citizens of Verdopolis in spices, shawls, silks, muslins, jewellry, perfumes, & other articles of oriental luxury, these sat composedly smoking their long pipes & drinking choice sherbet & reclining against the cushions which had been provided for their accommodation. Near them a few dark sunburnt Spaniards strutted with the gravely proud air of a peacock, which bird according to the received opinion dares not look downwards lest his feet should break the self complacent spell which enchants him. Not far from these lords of creation sat a company of round, rosy-faced, curly-pated, straight- legged one-shoed beings, from Stumps'es Island, where that now nearly obsolete race of existences then flourished like the green bay tree, more than a dozen Genii were employed in furnishing them with melons & rice pudding for which they roared out incessantly.

at the opposite extremity of the hall five or six sallow, bilious Englishmen were conversing over a cup of green-tea. behind them a band of withered monsieurs sat presenting each other with fine white bread peculiarly rich elegant prussian butter," perfumed snutf brown sugar & calico. at no great distance from these half withered apes, within the great carved screen that surrounded a huge blazing fire two gentlemen had established themselves before a table on which smoked a tempting dish of beefsteaks with the due accompaniments of onions ketchup & cayenne flanked by a large silver vessel of prime old Canary & a corresponding tankard of spiced ale.

One of the personages whose good fortune it was to be the devourer of such choice cheer was a middle-aged man who might perhaps have numbered his fifty-fif|th year, his rusty black habiliments, powdered wig & furrowed brow spoke at once the scholar & the despiser of external decorations; the other presented a remarkable contrast to his companion, he was in the prime of life being apparently not more than six or seven & twenty years of age. a head of light brown hair arranged in careless yet tasteful curls well became the pleasing though not strictly regular features of his very handsome countenance to which a bright & bold blue eye added all the charms of expression. His form evincing both strength & symmetry was set of to the best advantage by a military costume while his erect bearing & graceful address gave additional testimony to the nature of his profession.

"this young soldier" said Bud with a kindling eye " was myself, you may laugh Charlev;" for I could not forbear a smile on contrasting the dignified corporation of my now somewhat elderly fat friend with the description he had just given of his former appearance "you may laugh but I was once as gallant a youth as ever wore a soldiers sword. alack a day time troubles Good Liquour & good-living change a man sorely"

But the reader will ask who was the other gentleman mentioned above, he was John Gilford then the bosom friend of Ensign Bud as he is now of Captain Bud. There was a profound silence so long as their savoury meal continued but when the last mouthful of beef, the last shred of onion the last grain of cayenne & the last drop of ketchup had disappeared, Gilford laid down his knife & fork, uttered a deep sigh & opening his oracular jaws said "Well Bud I suppose the fools whom we see here gathered together from all the winds of heaven are come to our Babylonian City for the unworthy purpose of beholding the gauds & vanities of tomorrow."

"Doubtless" replied the other "And I sincerely hope that you Sir also will not disdain to honnour their exhibition with your presence."

"I!" almost yelled the senior gentleman, "I go & see the running of chariots, the racing & prancing of horses, the goring of wild beasts, the silly craft of archery & the brutal sport of the wrestlers! art thou mad or are thy brains troubled with the good wine & nutmeg ale" here the speaker filled his glass with the latter generous liquid.

"I am neither one nor t'other Gilford" answered Bud, "but I'll venture to say that forasmuch as you despise those gauds & vanities as you call them, many a better man than you is longing for to-morrow on their account"

"Ah! & I suppose thou art among the number of those arrant fools"

"Aye truly said! I see no shame in the avowal"

“Don’t you indeed, Oh Bud, Bud I sometimes hope that you are beginning to be sensible of the folly of these pursuits. I sometimes dare to imagine that you will one day be found a member of that chosen band who despising the weak frivolities of this our degenerate age, turn studiously to the contemplation of the past who value as some men do gold & jewels every remnant however small however apparently trivial which offers a memento of vanished generations.”

“Goodness Gifford! how you talk! I like well enough to see Melchizedecs cup for the sacramental wine, the tethers by which Abraham’s camels were fastened in their pasture-grounds or even the thigh bone & shoulder-blade of one of our own worthy old Giants even when these latter articles turn out to be the remains of a dead elephant. (Ah Giff touched ye there I see) but as to making such matters the serious business of my life, why hang me if I think I shall turn to that trade before a round dozen of years have trotted merrily over my head.”

“you speak like one of the foolish people” replied Giff solemnly “but still I glean a handful of comfort from your last words. at some future period you will give serious attention to the grand purpose for which we were all brought into the world?”

“May be aye & may be nay but whether I do or not my cherub there, Stingo, seems as if he would have no objection to turn both antiquarian & lawyer already.”

“Ha! what is it that same sweet boy whom I saw yesterday at your house whose young features express a promising solemnity far beyond his tender years?”

“the same and a sour squalling ill-tempered brat it is” “My dear friend,” said GifFord with great earnestness “take care that you do not check the unfolding of that hopeful flower, mind my words, he will be an honnour to his country & here give him these toys (taking a number of roundish stones from his pocket) & tell him I have no doubt they were used as marbles by the children of the ancient Britons, doubtless he will know how to value them accordingly.”

“to be sure he will, but my dear friend, the next time you make Stingo a present let it be some slight treatise on the law. he is continually hunting in my library for books of that nature & complains that he can scarcely find one of the sort he wants.”

“The angel! “ exclaimed Gifford in ecstasy “the moment I get home I will send him a compleat edition of my compendium of the laws, he shall not long pine in the agonies of inanition.”

“You are very kind” said Bud “but now let us change the subject. I understand that Bravey is to occupy the president’s throne tomorrow. I wonder who will be the rewarder of the victors.”

“it is not often that I remember the idle chat which passes in my presence but I heard this morning that Lady Emily Charlesworth is to be honoured with that dignity."

"Is she? that's well! they could not possibly have made a better choice - why her beauty alone will give eclat to the whole routine of tomorrows proceedings^ now tell me honestly Giff do you not think Lady Emily the most beautiful of earthly creaturesf?"

"She's well enough favoured" replied Gifford "that is her garments ever become her person but for her mind I fear it is a waste, uncultivated field which where it is not wholly barren presents a rank crop of the weeds of frivolity"

"Prejudiced old prig!" said I angrily " would you have a spiritual essence of Divinity like that to wither her roses by studying rotten scrolls & bending over grub-devoured law-books?"

"Not precisely so but I would have her to cultivate the faculties with which Nature hath endowed her by a diligent perusal of abridged treatises on the subjects you mention carefully digested by some able & judicious man. I myself when her uncle appointed me her tutor in the more solid & useful branches of a polite education composed a small work of ten quarto volumes on the antiquities of England, interspersed with explanatory notes & having an appendix of one thick volume quarto, if I could have got her to read this little work carefully & attentively through it might have given her some insight into the noble science of which I am an unworthy eulogist but while by a strange perversion of intellect she listened to openly & followed obediently the instructions of those trivial beings who taught her the empty accomplishments of music, dancing, drawing, modern languages, &c. &c., while she even gave some occasional odd moments to the formation of flowers & other cunning devices on the borders of silken or fine linen raiment I alone vainly attempted to lure her on in the honourable paths of Wisdom sometimes by honeyed words of enticement sometimes by thorny threats of correctionf. at one time she laughed at another wept & occasionally (to my shame be it spoken) bribed me by delusive blandishments to criminal acquiescence in her shameful neglect of all that is profitable to be understood by either man or womankind"

"Bravo Giff" said Bud laughing "I wish she had boxed your ears whenever you bothered her on such subjects! by the by have you heard that your fair quondam pupil is about to be married to Colonel Percy? "

"I have not but I do not doubt the rumour: that's the way of all women. they think of nothing but being married while Learning is as dust in the balance."

"Who & what is Colonel Percy?" said a voice close behind. Bud turned hastily round to see who the strange interragator might be. he started as his eyes met the apparition of a tall slender form dimly seen by the decaying embers which now shone fitfully on the hearth.

"friend" said he stirring up the fire to obtain a more perfect view of the stranger, "tell me first who & what you are who ask such abrupt questions about other people."

"I" replied he "am a volunteer in the cause of good government & suppressor of rebels & ere long I hope to be able to call myself a brother in arms with you it being my intention shortly to enlist under the Duke's standard"

as the unknown gave this explanation a bundle of brushwood which had been thrown on the half extinguished fire kindling to a bright blaze revealed his person more clearly than the darkning twilight had hitherto permitted it to be seen, he appeared to be full six feet high. his figure naturally formed on a model of the most perfect elegance derived aditional grace from the picturesque though rather singular costume in which he was attired consisting of a green vest & tunic reaching a little below the knee laced buskins, a large dark robe or mantle which hung over one shoulder in ample folds & was partially confined by the broad belt which encircled his waist & a green bonnet surmounted by a high plume of black feathers, a bow & quiver hung on his back, two knives whose hafts sparkled with jewellry were stuck in his girdle & a tall spear of glittering steel which he held in one hand served him for a kind of support as he stood, the martial majesty of this imposing stranger's form & dress harmonized well with the manly though youthful beauty of his countenance whose finely chiselled features & full bright eyes shaded by clusters of short brown curls shone with an expression of mingled pride & frankness which awed the spectator while it won his unqualified admiration."

"Upon my word friend" said I struck with the young soldier's handsome exterior "if I were the Duke I should be well pleased with such a recruit as you promise to be. pray may I inquire of what country you are a native for both your garb & accent are somewhat foreign?"

"you forget" replied the stranger smiling "that you are my debtor for a reply : my first question remains yet unanswered"

"Ah true" said Bud "you asked me I think who Colonel Percy might be?»

"I did, & it would gratify me much to receive some information respecting him."

"He is the nephew & apparent heir of the rich old Duke of Beaufortf"

"Indeed! how long has he paid his addresses to lady Emily Charlesworthf?"

"For nearly a year."

"When are they to be married?"

"Shortly I believe"

"Is he handsome?"

"Yes nearly as much so as you & into the bargain his manners are those of an accomplished soldier & gentleman but in spite of all this he is a finished scoundrel, a haughty gambling drinking unconscionable blackguard"

"Why do you speak so warmly against him?"

"Because I know him well. I am his inferior officer & have daily opportunities of observing his vices."

“Is lady Emily acquainted with his real character?”

“Perhaps not altogether but if she were I do not think she would love him less, ladies look more to external than internal qualifications in their husbands elect.”

“Do they often appear in public together?”

“I believe not, lady Emily confines herself very much to private life. she is said not to like display”

“Do you know anything of her disposition or temper? is it good or bad, close or candidf?”

“I’m sure I can’t tell you but there is a gentleman here who will satisfy your curiosity on that pointf. he was her tutor & should know all about it. Pray Gifford favour us with your opinion.”

Gifford hearing himself thus appealed to emerged from the dark corner which had hitherto nearly concealed him from view, the stranger started on seeing him & attempted to muffle his face with one end of the large mantle in which he was envelopped as if for the purpose of avoiding a recognition. But the worthy antiquary at no time sharp- sighted & whose brains at this particular juncture happened to be somewhat muddled by the draughts of spiced ale which he had just been administring to himself with no sparing hand, regarded him with a vacant stare of wonder as he drawled out “What’s your business with me Bud?”

“I merely wished to know if you could inform this gentleman what sort of temper lady Charlesworth had”

“What sort of a temper! why I don’t know, much the same as other girls of her age have & that’s a very bad one.f the stranger smiled gave a significant shrug of the shoulder which seemed to say there’s not much to be had from this quater & bowing politely to the corner walked away to a distant part of the hall. When he was gone the two friends sat silent for some time but Bud’s attention was soon attracted by the sound of a voice apparently employed in reading or recitation proceeding from the group of Frenchmen who were seated at no great distance, he walked towards them, the speaker was a little dapper man dressed in brown coat & waistcoat & cream? coulour continuations.” he was uttering the following words’’ with abundance of action & grimace as Bud came up.

“Well as I was saying the Emperor got into bed. “Cheveleure” says he to his valet “let down those window curtains & shut that casement before you leave the room.” Cheveleure did as he was told & then taking up his candlestick departed. In a few minutes the Emperor felt his pillow becoming rather hard & he got up to shake it. as he did so, a slight rustling noise was heard near the bed-head, his majesty listened but all was silent so he lay down again, scarcely had he settled into a peaceful attitude of repose when he was disturbed by a sensation of thirst, lifting himself on his elbow he took a glass of lemonade from the small stand which was placed beside him. he refreshed himself by a deep draught, as he returned the goblet to its station a deep groan burst from a kind of closet in one corner of the appartment. “Who’s there?” cried the Emperor seizing his pistols “Speak or I’ll blow your brains out.” this threat produced no other effect than a short sharp laugh & a dead silence followed, the Emperor started from his couch & hastily throwing on a robe de chambre which hung over the back of a chair stepped courageously to the haunted closet, as he opened the door something rustled, he sprang forward sword in hand, no soul or even substance appeared & the rustling it was evident had proceeded from the falling of a cloak which had been suspended by a peg from the door, half ashamed of himself he returned to bed. just as he was about once more to close his eyes the light of the three wax tapers which burnt in a silver branch over the mantle peice was suddenly darkened, he looked up. a black opaque shadow obscured it. sweating with terror the Emperor put out his hand to seize the bell-rope but some invisible being snatched it rudely from his grasp & at the same instant the ominous shade vanished. “Pooh” exclaimed Napoleon “it was but an ocular delusion.”

“Was it?” whispered a hollow voice in deep mysterious tones, close to his ear “Was it a delusion Emperor of France, no all thou hast heard & seen is sad forwarning reality. Rise lifter of the Eagle Standard, Awake swayer of the lily sceptre, follow me Napoleon & thou shalt see more.” as the voice ceased, a form dawned on his astonished sight, it was that of a tall thin man dressed in a blue surtout edged with gold lace, it wore a black cravat very tightly twisted round its neck & confined by two little sticks placed behind each ear. the countenance was livid, the tongue protruded from between the teeth & the eyes all glazed & bloodshot starting with frightful prominence from their sockets. “Mon Dieu”, exclaimed the Emperor “what do I see? dreadful? spectre whence comest thou?” the apparition spoke not but gliding forward beckoned Napoleon with uplifted finger to follow, controlled by a mysterious influence which entirely deprived him of the capability of either thinking or acting for himself he obeyed in silence, the solid wall of the appartment fell open as they approached & when both had passed through, it closed behind them with a noise like thunder, they would now have been in total darkness had it not been for a dim blue light which lit the air round? the ghost & revealed the damp walls of a long vaulted passage, down this they proceeded with mute rapidity, ere long a cool refreshing breeze which rushed wailing up the vault & caused the Emperor to wrap his loose night dress closer round announced their approach to the open air. this they soon reached & Napoleon found himself in one of the principal streets of Paris. “Worthy Spirit” said he shivering in the chill air “permit me to return & put on some additional clothing I will be with you again presently” “Forward” replied his companion sternly, he felt compelled in spite of the rising indignation which almost choked him to obey, on they went through the deserted streets till they arrived at a lofty house built on the banks of the Seine, here the Spectre stopped, the gates rolled back to receive them & they entered a large marble hall which was partly concealed by a curtain drawn across through the half transparent folds of which a bright light might be seen burning with dazzling lustre. A row of fine female figures richly attired stood before this screenf; each wore on their heads garlands of the most beautiful flowers but their faces were concealed by ghastly masks representing Death's heads. "What is all this mummery," cried the Emperor making an effort to shake off the mental shackles by which he was unwillingly restrained "where am I & why have I been brought here." "Silence" said the guide lolling out still further his black & bloody tongue "Silence if thou wouldst escape instant death." the Emperor would have replied his natural courage overcoming the temporary awe to which he had at first been subjected, but just then a strain of wild supernatural music swelled behind the huge curtain which waved to & fro & bellyed slowly out as if agitated by some internal commotion or battle of warring winds, at the same moment an overpowering mixture of the scents of mortal corruption blent with the richest eastern odours stole through the haunted hall. A murmur of many voices was now heard at a distance. something grasped his arm roughly from behind, he turned hastily round, his eyes met the well-known countenance of Maria Louisa. "What are you in this infernal place too?" says he "What has brought you here?" "Will your majesty permit me to ask the same question of yourself?" returned the Empress smiling, he made no reply — astonishment prevented him. no curtain now intervened between him & the lightf. it had been removed as if by magic & a splendid chandelier appeared suspended over his head, throngs of ladies richly dressed but without deaths head masks stood round & a due proportion of gay cavaliers was mingled with them, music was still sounding but it was now seen to proceed from a band of mortal musicians stationed in an orchestra near at hand, the air was yet redolent of incence but it was incense unblended with stench. "Bon Dieu" cried the Emperor "how is all this come about, where in the world is Piche?" "Piche?" replied the Empress "what does your majesty meanp had you not better leave the appartment & retire to rest?" "leave the appartment! why, where am I?" "in my private drawing-room surrounded by a few particular persons of the court whom I had invited this evening to a ball . you entred a few minutes since in your night dress with your eyes fixed & wide open. I suppose from the astonishment you now testify that you were walking in your sleep." the Emperor immediately fell into a fit of the catalepsy in which he continued during the whole of that night & the greater part of next day."

As the little man finished his story a person dressed in blue & gold uniform bustled through the surrounding crowd of listners & touching the narrator with a sort of official staff which he carried in his hand said "He arrests him in the name of the Emperor."

"what for?" asked the little man.

"what for!" reiterated a voice at the other end of the hall "he'll let him know what for. What's the meaning of that scandalous anecdote he should like to know, to the Bastile with him instantly incessantly," all eyes were turned towards the deliverer of this peremptory mandate, & lo! the identical Emperor himself in his accustomed green surtout and violet couloured pantaloons stood surrounded by about twenty gens d'armes engaged in continued and uninterrupted snuff- takingf: every one's attention was now attracted towards le grand Napoleon and le pauvre petit conteur de sirnettes?' was hurried off to the Bastile without further notice or compassion, as it was now getting very late & the Inn was all bustle & confusion in consequence of the excitement occasioned among the guests by the arrival of the illustrious visitor. Bud & Gifford to whom the Emperor was no novelty, thought proper to take their departure. They walked down the first street together & then as their roads lay in opposite directions separated for the night.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

A bright & balmy summer's morning ushered in the first celebration of the African Olympic Games.'* At an early hour (as the newspapers say) the amphitheatre was crowded almost to suffocation in every part except the open area a square mile in magnitude allotted to the combatants & those Private seats which were reserved for the accommodation of the nobility & other persons of distinction.

the scene of the Games was not exactly then what it is now. the houses which surround it on three sides were at that time but newly built; some indeed were but half finished & a few had only the foundations dug. the lofty hill called Fredericks Crag which completes the circle on the fourth side & whose summit above the seats is at the present day covered with Gardens & splendid private dwellings was then a sombre forest whose ancient echos were as yet unviolated by the sound of the woodcutter's axe. the stumps of a few recently felled trees likewise appeared in the midst of the newly cleared arena but it is a question in my opinion whether by the vast improvements which have since taken place in the neighbourhood of the amphitheatre the scene has not lost in picturesque variety what it has gained in grandeur & perfect finish. On that memorable morning the tall magnificent trees waving their still dewy arms now towards the blue sky which seemed not far above them & now over the heads of as many peoples, nations,

tongues & kindreds as Nebuchadzezzar's decree called together on the plains of Dura" Hung into the prospect a woodland wildness & sylvan sublimity which in my opinion would be a more potent & higher charm than any of the artificial forms of beauty our great city has created in their stead are capable of infusing.

After an hour of anxious expectation the distant sound of musical instruments announced the approach of the principal personages. Bravey advanced slowly & majestically followed by a brilliant train of noblesf. his tall & imposing person was set of to the best advantage by an ample robe of purple splendidly wrought with gold, he took his seat on the president's throne amidst bursts of universal applause, after him came Lady Emily Charlesworth his neice. the flutes & softer instruments of the musicians breathed a dulcet welcome as the fair Re- warder of victors with a graceful rather than stately tread moved towards her decorated seat, her form was exquisitely elegant though not above the middle size & as she lifted her long white veil to acknowledge the thunderous applause of the multitude a countenance was revealed such as painters & poets love to immagine but which is seldom seen in actual life, the features were soft and delicate the general complexion transparently fair but tinged on the cheeks & lips with a clear healthy crimson hue which gave an idea of vigour & healthy freshness, her eyes dark, bright & full of animation flashed from under their long lashes & finely pencilled brows an arch, laughing, playful light, which though it might not perhaps have suited well in a heroine of romance yet added to her countenance a most fascinating though indescribable charm. At first as she removed her veil & met the gaze of more than a million admiring eyes a blush mantled on her beautiful cheeks. She bowed timidly though gracefully & her white hand trembled with agitation as she waved it in reply to their greeting, but she soon regained her composure, the scene before her awoke feelings of a highjer nature in her susceptible mind.

the blue & silent sky, the wild dark forest & the broad glimpse of mountainous country opening far beyond, tinged by the violet hues of distance contrasted with the mighty assemblage of living & moving beings, the Great city & the boundless sea beyondf. these circumstances together with the sound of the music which now in subdued &

solemn but most inspiring tones accompanied the heralds as they summoned the charioteers who were to contest the first prize to approach, could not but kindle in every bosom admiration for the simple sublimity of Nature & the commanding magnificence of Art.

Three chariots now drew up round the Starting Post. In the first sat a little man with a head of fiery red hair & a pair of keen malicious black eyes which kept squinting round the arena & regarding every one on whom their distorted glances chanced to fall with a kind of low blackguard expression which accorded well with the rest of his appearance & equipments.' His chariot was rather out of character when compared with the gorgeousness of all surrounding objects being in fact neither more nor less than a common spring cart drawn by four of those long eared & proverbially obstinate animals called asses whom he alternately held in check by means of a rough straw rope bridle or goaded forward with the assistance of a black thorn staff pointed at one end. the occupier of the second chariot was a fashionable dandified gentleman in pink silk jacket & white pantaloons whose whole attention seemed absorbed by the management of his four handsome bay chargers, his name was Major Hawkins at that time a celebrated Hero of the Turf & ring, but it was the third & last charioteer who excited the most general attention. He was a tall & very handsome young man whose symmetrical form appeared to the utmost advantage as he stood upright on his small light car gallantly reining in the proud prancing steeds that seemed by their loud snorting & the haughty elevation of their stately arched necks to be conscious of their master's superiority over the other combatants, the countenance of this gentleman was as I have said handsome, his features were regularly formed & his forehead was lofty, though not very open, but there was in the expression of his blue & sparkling but sinister eyes & of the smile that ever played round his deceitful looking mouth a spirit of deep restless villainy which warned the penetrating observer that all was not as fair within as without, while his pallid cheek & somewhat haggard air bespoke at once the profligate the gambler & perhaps the Drunkard. Such is the description as well as my poor pen can express it of Colonel the Honourable Alexander Augustus Percy.

All being now ready the signal for starting broke from a silver trumpet stationed near the President's throne, the three chariots shot off bravely with the swiftness of arrows running nearly abreast of each other till near the middle of the course, When to the surprise of all the little red-headed gentleman with the asses got ahead of the other two & by dint of a most vigorous system of pricking reached the Gaol two minutes before them. No pen or pencil can give an adequate picture of the deep subdued rage which glowed in Colonel Percy's eye & covered his pale cheek & forehead with a dark red flush of anger, he threw one glance of concentrated malignity on the fortunate winner & then throwing the reins to a groom who stood near in attendance leapt from his chariot & mingled with the crowd.

it is not my intention to give a full & detailed account of all that took place on this memorable day. I shall merely glance at the transactions which followed & then proceed to topics more nearly connected with my tale.

the sports of Horse-racing, wrestling, & bull-fighting followed in all of which Colonel Percy was engaged, in the first his favourite horse Tornado carried away the gold chaplet from ten of the most renowned steeds in Verdopolis; in the second he himself sucessively overcame five powerful antagonists, & in the third when every one else turned in dismay from a mighty red bull of the Byson breed after it had ripped up ten horses & gored their riders to death he mounted Tornado & with a red crest waving from his Hussars cap & a scarlet cloak depending from his shoulders rode courageously into the middle of the amphitheatre, the Combat for a long time was dubious but at length by a well aimed stroke his lance drank the huge monster's heart's blood & it fell bellowing to the earth which was crimsoned with its gore.

The last prize now remained to be tried for, it was that of Archery, here too Colonel Percy presented himself as a competitor, the mark was a tall white wand set at the distance of sixty feet, twenty noble members of the Archer's Association all accounted Marksmen of the first order contended for this prize, but the arrows of all fell either more or less wide of the mark. It now became Colonel Percy's turn, he advanced & discharged a carefully directed arrow which though it came much nearer than any of the rest failed also in hitting the appointed mark. The Heralds now according to an established form demanded if there were any one amongst the spectators who would undertake to shame the unsuccessful archers. A dead silence followed this demand for none thought themselves qualified to attempt an enterprise apparently so impracticable & the President proceeded to adjudge the prize to him whose arrow had come nearest in default of a better.

he had scarcely uttered the words when a young man of a form as noble & majestic as that which the ancients attributed to Appollo advanced from the crowd, his dress & appearance I have described before for it was that identical stranger who on the previous night had arrived at the Genii's Inn but now instead of the green bonnet & plume which he then wore a steel helmet covered his head & the visor being closed entirely concealed his features.'

"My Lord" said he approaching the President's throne, "will you permit me the honour of discharging a single arrow before you & the fair rewarder of Victors? I delayed my request till now that I might not deprive Colonel Percy of the prize which justly falls to his lot."

Bravey readily gave his consent & the stranger stationing himself twenty feet further off than the appointed distance, unslung the bow & quiver which hung at his shoulder chose an arrow tightened his string & ere another second had elapsed the splintering of the white wand proclaimed his triumph and skill. A loud thundering cheer rose from the thousands gazing round & when it had subsided Bravey rising from his seat declared that he rescinded his former decision regarding the prize & awarded it to the successful stranger. All eyes now turned to Colonel Percy, but no symptom of mortification or anger appeared either in his countenance or behaviour, on the contrary he turned imediately to the Unknown & with the most friendly cordiality of manner congratulated him on his good fortune. His civilities were received however with a cold & haughty courtesy which told that they were unwelcome as effectually as the most prompt & decided rejection of them could have done. Still the Colonel did not seem piqued but continued to converse with his unsocial conqueror in the free & unembarrassed strain which was natural to him as a man of the world.

"Upon my word" observed Ensign Bud who with his friend Gifford (for he had persuaded the old Gentleman to accompany him to see the Games) was seated in the front row of seats "Upon my word I believe the Colonel has some fiendish scheme of Revenge in his mind or he would never put on that smooth quiet face"

"Doubtless " returned Gifford "but who is that fantastically arrayed foreignerf? methinks I have heard a voice like his before though where or when I cannot for my life call to mind".

Bud was about to reply but he was prevented by the loud summons of the heralds & the sudden rich swell of music which burst grandly forth as the victors advanced to the foot of the throne & one by one knelt before lady Emily Charlesworth from whose hands they were to receive their recompense, first came the carroty-locked hero of the cart & asses.

"Sir" said the lady as she strove vainly to suppress the smile which his odd appearance excited "you have this day gained a miraculous victory over one of the most gallant & high-born gentlemen of Ver- dopolis & are well worthy of the golden wreath which I thus twine round your illustrious temples."

"Thank you madam" replied he bowing low "the Colonel's certainly a rum'un but I've matched him well to day & if you knew all you'd say so too"

"I do not doubt your ability to match any man" she replied laughing "& the Colonel in my opinion has no reason to be ashamed of his defeat since it was effected by such a consummate master in the art of over-reaching as you appear to be."

he thanked her again & with another low bow gave place to Colonel Percy.

As he the claimer of three crowns knelt gracefully at her feet & whispered some flattering compliment in an undertone lady Emily seemed visibly embarrassed. She did not blush but her forehead before so open & smiling grew dark & sad. For a moment she sat silent as if scarcely knowing how to address him but almost immediately regaining her self possession said in a soft yet firm voice while with her slender & jewelled fingers she bound the garland among his thickly clustered light brown curls.

"It gives me pleasure to be the instrument of rewarding one who has found his equal in three ardent contests. I trust our City will have s able a champion in every succeeding anniversary of the African Olympic Games"

"Fair lady" replied the Colonel "your approbation would be worth more to me than the transitory applause of ten thousand times the number that have shouted at my trivial exploits to day"

"Strive to deserve it" said she in a low quick voice. "& it shall not be witheld!"

The herald now summoned the nameless stranger to draw near, slowly & half reluctantly he advanced.

"Shall I bid the attendants to remove your helmet," asked lady Emily smiling, the unknown shook his head but made no reply.

"Well" returned she playfully "you are an uncourteous though a gallant archer, but not with standing your refusal to comply with my request I will acknowledge that I think you worthy of the bright garland which I thus twine amongst the Eagles feathers which form your crest. "

he rose & with a stately inclination of the head withdrew. All was now concluded. the first celebration of the African Olympic Games was past & amidst a loud & triumphant peal of warlike music the mighty assembly of a million souls broke up & with a crush & tumult that might have annihilated worlds left the amphitheatre. This dispersion I need not describe, no lives that I am aware of were lost, but hundreds of bags, pockets, fobs, & reticules yielded up their contents in the melee while thousands of sides were bruised almost to sinuweres? by an equal proportion of elbows.

Amongst the principal sufferers I am sorry to inform the reader our worthy friend Mr Gifford must be reckoned. At the first crush in spite of Ensign Bud's supporting arm which was tenderly passed round the excellent antiquary's waist he fell prone to the ground & in attempting to rise got entangled among the extented legs of half a score French messieurs who greatly to their own edification were pursuing their way through the huge press not on their heels like sensible people but on their heads. When these gentlemen felt the not very slight pressure of Mr Gifford's falling carcase, they testified their sense of its inconvenience by that disagreeable agitation of the limbs called kicking.

with the utmost difficulty & with the loss of his best hat & wig the Lawyer was at length rescued, but he had hardly gone twelve paces when his shoes were trodden from his feet & five minutes after his Sunday coat a rich black plush was torn violently from his back & borne off by some audacious thief. Groaning & sighing he still with the assistance of Bud continued gradually & painfully to push his way & had almost cleared the thickest part of the crowd when a hand was unceremoniously introduced into his breeches pockets & all the contents most dexterously extracted. But I need not trouble the reader with more of the unhappy mans misfortunes, suffice it to say that he did at length get home & was put to bed with unbroken bones, hot gruel & brandy administered in large doses induced a comfortable night's rest & next morning when he awoke he was able to curse all Games whether Greek Roman or African in unmeasured terms & to denounce instant vengeance on all who should hereafter propose attendance on their vanities to him.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

The Sun which had risen so brightly & cheerfully sank to repose with a magnificence worthy of its glorious advent, a short twilight followed^ the sea-billows for a time rolled in a dimly lustrous light to the fading shore, then came the moon. the evening stars began to look out singly from the soft pure sky, the night wind rose & before it a few pearly clouds which had been resting motionless on the horizon glided away beyond the skirting hills, at this tranquil hour the unknown archer emerging from a grove on the Niger's shady banks where he had been walking since he left the arena, turned his back to Verdopolis & striking into a bye-path which led up the at that period wild valley in which our City lies (for there were then no gardens or palaces & but few cultivated fields to varigate its natural beauties) soon forgot in the calm evening hush which surrounded him all remembrance of the scene he had quitted an hour before.

Slowly he entred a little sequestered glen formed by the junction of two lofty hills whose summits were covered with wood but whose bases excepting here & there a tall spreading tree, exhibited a green slope of unincumbered pasture land. He stopped & leaning on the tall spear which as I have before mentioned he carried in one hand stood a few minutes gazing at the lovely moonlight landscape which surrounded him on every side, then drawing a bugle from his belt he blew a clear but not loud blast which awoke many faint echos in the wooded hills above, after a brief interval of expectation steps were heard approaching & a figure wrapped in a mantle entered from the opposite end of the valley.

"Andrew." said the Archer "is that you my lad."

"Yes" replied a voice whose shrill childish tones & the speaker's diminutive size announced the tender age of the new comer.

"Come hither then & show me where you have hid the baggage. I am half dead with hunger, for it is full twelve hours since I have either eaten or drunk."

Andrew immediately scampered off & in a few minutes returned with a large portmanteau on his shoulders, he now threw aside his mask & the bright moonshine revealed the person of a boy who might be about thirteen years of age though from his countenance he seemed upwards of twenty the sharp keen features lighted by a pair of little quick cunning eyes retaining no traces of that juvenile rotundity which is considered the principal characteristic of a child, his dress was as singular as that of his master, being a short plaided petticoat or kilt & a round cap of the same stuff & laced leather buskins. He speedily unlocked the trunk & took from it a kind of basket the contents of which when spread on the smooth sward under the shadow of a magnificent elm tree formed a supper which no hungry man would have passed by with contempt, there was a couple of cold fowls a loaf of white bread some cheese a bottle of palm wine a vessel of the purest water which Andrew had procured from a small rivulet which half hidden by wild flowers washed the roots of the ancient elm-tree as it wandered slowly through the valley. While the archer satisfied the cravings of his own appetite he did not forget his follower who sat at a little distance ravenously devouring one of the fowl & a large portion of bread & cheese, when their meal was concluded & the fragments were cleared away, Andrew produced from the trunk a large plaided cloak in which his master wrapped himself & lying down on the green dewy grass with a moss-grown stone for his pillow he as well as the boy who lay at his feet were soon lulled by the low wind rustling in their leafy canopy & drowsy murmurs of the monotonous stream to a deep & dreamless slumber.

An hour elapsed & they still continued in a state of the most profound repose.J the moon now high in heaven shone with a silvery clearness that almost transformed night into a fairer noon, in Arthur's words or something like them "all felt the heavenly influence of moonlight's milder day" when a human step suddenly broke the delicious calm reigning around & (unromantic incident) the apparition not of, "A lady fair and bright With a crown of flowers and a robe of light"'

but of a smart footman in a blue coat with silver epaulettes appeared stealing down from the brow of one of the nearest hills, softly almost noiselessly he advanced to the unsuspecting Andrew & clapping a gag into his mouth which happened to be wide open bore him off kicking & struggling in his arms. Andrew's abduction however did not last long. an hour had scarcely passed before he returned alone & without awakening his master to inform him of what had occurred he lay down in his former place & in a few minutes was as fast asleep as ever.

The bursting sunlight & singing birds aroused the Archer just as the first beams broke forth in summer splendour. Springing lightly from his hard couch he stirred with his foot the still slumbering page.

"Get up Andrew" said he & roll out the contents of that trunk on to the grass. I must change this outlandish gear before I venture again in to the city, so stir yourself boy & here help me first to unbuckle this belt, why" continued he as the lad rose up reluctantly rubbing his eyes & yawning like one overcome with sleep "what ails you child have you been disturbed by fairies to night that you are so sluggish & drowsy in the morning?"

"No not I" said Andrew laughing rather hollowly & fixing his keen eyes on his master's face as if he would have penetrated to his inmost thoughts "No but I've been troubled with some ugly dreams."

"Ugly dreams? you little idiot what were they about?"

"About selling my soul to the old gentleman"

"Well did you complete the bargainf?"

"yes & sealed it with a written oath"

"Come that was managing the affair in a business like way but now a truce to your nonsense sir & help me on with this strait waistcoat."

In a few minutes the archer had stripped off his becoming though peculiar dress & assumed in its stead a fashionable suit of clothes consisting of a blue frock coat which had something of a military air & white waistcoat & pantaloons.

"Now" said he when he had completed his toilet "Do you stay here Andrew. I am going to the city & shall most probably be back before evening. Keep close in the wood till I return & speak to no mortal creature."

Andrew loudly promised implicit obedience & his master took his departure, the Archer in his new costume displayed none of that awkwardness which people usually feel when attired in a novel garment for the first time.

on the contrary it was evident from the perfect ease & grace of his movements which all partook of a lofty & martial character that he was not unaccustomed to such a mode of dress. With a slow, melancholy step he retraced the winding, bye-path by which he had ascended the valley on the previous evening, the passengers he met were few & far between for in those days it was a road but little frequented, two or three milk maids singing on their way and a few illegal rare lads who were returning from poaching overnight among the hills, together with five or six straightish legged gentlemen "Wahking out befahr braukfast to get an auppetite to de Melons & brahd & bautter"' were the only persons with whom he exchanged a morning's salutation & these did not make their appearance till the latter end of his walk.

At about eight o'clock he reached Verdopolis, entering at the north gate he proceeded through a series of streets, squares, Rows & alleys along which even at this early hour the living stream of population had begun to flow rapidly till he reached a quiet street leading from Monmouth Square formed by two rows of respectable looking houses whose white window curtains & green Venetian blinds, proclaimed the comfortable circumstances of those who inhabited them. Halting at the twelfth mansion he gave a rousing alarm by means of the well-scoured bright brass knocker. In about two minutes the door was opened by a clean looking elderly Dame who the moment she caught a glimpse of our hero's person uttered a loud exclamation of surprise.

"Bless us Mr Leslie!" cried she "is that you? lord my poor eyes never thought to see your handsome face again"

"It is me indeed Alice, but how is your Master, is he at home?" "At home? yes indeed where else should he be I wonder, when you're standing at his door? but come in & I'll run to tell him the good news this minute."

Here the good woman led the way forward & showing Mr Leslie into an appartment ran off to do her errand, the room into which she had ushered him was a middle-sized parlour comfortably & even elegantly furnished, a bright fire was burning in the polished steel bars of a handsome grate & all the paraphernalia of a good breakfast appeared spread on a snow-white damask cloth which covered a round table in the centre of the room, but what principally attracted the eye was a number of very beautiful oil-paintings principally portraits arranged with judgement on the walls; all betrayed the hand of a genuine master in the art & some were executed with surprising grace & delicacy, the visitor's countenance expressed something like astonishment as he looked carefully round but his attention was soon attracted by the unclosing of the door, he started up & stepped eagerly forward as a young man rather above the middle size with a pale but interesting countenance & large intelligent black eyes entered.

"Well my dear Frederick" said he "I need not inquire how you are. your appearance & that of the house tells me & I suppose I have now only to congratulate you on Fortune's altered disposition."

"my Noble Benefactor" began Frederick De Lisle while a flush of joy suffused his colourless cheek. "How I rejoice to see you once againf! are you still Mr Leslie the Artist or may I now be permitted to address you as -"

"No, No" interrupted his guest, "let Leslie be my name for the present, but Frederick you must have made a good use of the small sum I gave you if it has entitled you to reside in such a comfortable house as this."

"Yes" replied the young man "I think I may fairly claim the praise of having employed it to the best advantage yet it was not that alone which has obtained me the affluence I now enjoy. Your lordship must know that about three years since I fell in love (to use the common phrase) with a young & very lovely girl who soon appreciated the sincerity of my affection & returned it. Obstacles however apparently insurmountable opposed our union, her parents were rich & they disdained to unite their daughter to a man whose whole wealth lay in a brush & palett. for a long time Matilda wept & intreated in vain but at length her altered looks her pallid cheek & her attenuated form so far moved their compassion that they promised to sanction our marriage on condition that I should previously free myself from the pecuniary embarrassment in which I was then entangled, this however was impossible. I had scarcely sufficient employment to procure bread & as to laying by anything that was not to be thought of. At this wretched period your lordship condescended to become my pupil. the liberal salary which you paid me enabled me to discharge my debts in part & by the aid of your further munificent gift when you left Verdopolis I ultimately cleared the whole. My dear Matilda's parents kept their word & about six months since I was made the happiest of men. Employment has since poured in rapidly upon me & I trust that Fame the meed for which I have striven so long & perseveringly under distresses & difficulties which might have daunted the spirit of a saint will at length reward my unwearied endeavours."

here the door again opened and Mrs De Lisle entered, she was a young & elegant woman with a pretty face & very genteel manners. Her husband introduced our Hero to her as "Mr Leslie the Gentleman of whom you have often heard me speak". She curtsied & replied with a significant smile "I have indeed & the pleasure of seeing him in my house is as great as it was unexpected."

All three now sat down to a substantial breakfast of coffee eggs ham & bread & butter, the conversation during this meal was animated & interesting Mrs De Lisle joining in it with a propriety & good taste which did honour to Frederick's choice of a wife. When it was over she left the room pleading as an excuse for her absence the necessity of attending to household concerns, the two gentlemen being thus left alone recommenced the conversation in which they had been engaged before breakfast. Presently however they were again interrupted by the arrival of a carriage & the entrance of Alice who announced Colonel Percy & lady Emily Charlesworth.

"Ah" said De Lisle, "this is fortunate, your lordship I think will recollect lady Emily. she used to come often when you painted at my house & would sit for hours conversing with you about the fine arts, but my lord what is the matter are you ill?"

"No Frederick" replied Leslie though the deadly paleness which overspread his countenance seemed to contradict the truth of what he said, "merely a sudden pain in the head to which I am subject, it will soon pass off but in the meantime I should not like to be seen by these strangersf. will they come into this appartment?"

"No I have ordered them to be shown into my studio. Lady Emily is come to sit for her portrait which I am painting for Colonel Percy to whom it is said she is shortly about to be united. they will make a find couple, pity the Colonel is not as good as he is handsome."

"De Lisle" said Leslie quickly "I think it would amuse me if I could watch you paint this morning but at the same time I should like to remain concealed myself, can you not contrive some means of effecting this?"

"Easily my lord. the library window looks into my studio, you may sit there & entertain yourself as you like."

"Come then" returned Leslie & both left the room together, the library into which Delisle conducted his guest was a small appartment furnished with a few well chosen books principally of the Belle Lettre class." one window looked into a little garden at the back of the house & the other partially shaded by a green curtain formed a post of observation by which the studio might be easily reconnoitred, here Leslie placed himself, the blood returned in full force to his pale cheek as he beheld Lady Emily more beautiful than he had seen her at the Games reclining gracefully on a sofa. a large velvet carriage mantle trimmed with costly fur fell in rich folds from her shoulders, her hat which was ornamented with a splendid plume of ostrich feathers she had laid aside & her hair turned up behind & fastened with a gold comb fell down on each side of her face in a luxurious profusion of glossy brown ringletsf. she was quietly arranging the collar of a small silken-haired spaniel which lay on her lap & appeared to take little notice of the passionate protestations of the Colonel who was kneeling devotedly beside her. This circumstance however was unnoticed by Leslie: he marked only the attitude of both & an indignant frown darkened his lofty brow, their Love Conference however (if such it was) was soon interrupted by the entrance of Delisle. “Good morning” said he bowing low.

“Good morning” replied Colonel Percy “Now Sir call up all your skill summon inspiration to your aid for the beauty you have to depict is not earthly but heavenly”

“I hope” replied the artist as he seated himself at his easel & began to touch the lovely though still unfinished resemblance which was placed there “I hope you do not consider the attempt I have already made quite a failure”

“No not quite, but Mr Painter surely you have not the vanity to imagine that an imitation in oil and earths however skillfully managed can equal the bright reality of such a form & face as that you have now before you”

“Do you mean yourself Colonel or me?” inquired the fair sitter slily.

“You to be sure. why do you ask the question?” “Because you gave so many furtive glances into that mirror that I thought your glowing panegyric must have been designed for the figure therein reflected.”

“Hum I was merely admiring the countenance of a tolerably good-looking monkey which I saw peering through that window at you & which by the bye I have seen before in your company Delisle”

Lady Emily turned to the point indicated but nothing was now visible. She continued to sit for about two hours then becoming weary of a compulsory state of inactivity she ordered the carriage to be called & together with her escort Colonel Percy departed.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

Clydesdale Castle the Seat of the Marquis of Charlesworth was one of the few mansions which at that period adorned the Glass Town Valley: it was a large and magnificent Structure erected during the time of the Second Twelvs. the architecture was not of the light Grecian cast in which our modern Villas are built but grand & substantial, tall arched windows lighted the lofty turrets & pillared Norman Gateways gave entrance to the numerous vast halls which were contained under its embattled roof.

The Noble Proprietor of this feudal residence was Uncle & Guardian to the beautiful lady Emily Charlesworth whose parents dying when she was yet a child committed her with their last breath to the protection of her only surviving relative.’ This trust the Marquis discharged faithfully as the reader may perceive from the circumstance of his having appointed John Gilford Esquire Tutor to his niece & she in return regarded him with that affection which an amiable mind will always cherish towards those from whom it has received any benefit.

About a week after the time mentioned in my last Chapter Lady Emily was sitting one afternoon in her solitary chamber in the west turret. She was alone . her elbow rested on the little work table beside her & her full dark eyes were fixed with an expression of deep melancholy on the blue & far-distant mountain boundary which appeared through the open lattice. I cannot tell what she was thinking of for I never heard, but soon a few tears trickling down her soft cheek betrayed that her meditations belonged rather to Il Penserosa than L’Allegra; these mute monitors seemed to rouse her from her sad reverie, with a deep sigh she turned away from the window & drawing a harp towards her which stood near began to sing in a sweet low voice the following Petit chanson The night fell down all calm and still The moon shone out o’er vale & hill Stars trembled in the sky Then forth into that pale, sad light There came a gentle lady bright With veil & cymar!! spotless white Fair brow & dark blue eye Her lover sailed on the mighty deep The Ocean wild and stern And now she walks to pray & weep For his swift & safe return Full oft she pauses as the breeze Moans wildly through those Giant trees As startled at the tone The sounds it waked were like the sigh Of spirits voice through midnight sky So soft, so sad so drearily That wandering wind swept on And ever as she listened Unbidden thoughts would rise Till the pearly tear-drop glistened All in her star-like eyes She saw her love’s proud battle ship tossed wildly on the storm-dark deep By the roused wind’s destroying sweep A wrecked & shattered hull And as the red bolt burst its shroud And glanced in fires o’er sea & cloud She heard a peal break deep & loud Then sink to echos dull And as that thunder died away She saw amid the rushing spray Her Edwards Eagle plume While thus that deathly scene she wrought And viewed in the dim realms of thought His soul appalling doom A voice through all the forest rang Up like a deer the lady sprang "Tis he 'tis he" she cried And ere another moments space In time's unresting course found place By heaven! & by our lady's grace Lord Edward clasped his bride The Song was ended but her lingers yet lingered among the harp strings from which they drew long wailing notes whose plaintive sound seemed all unsuited to the happy termination of the romance she had just been warbling, the tears she had before checked were now suffered to flow freely & faint sobs were beginning to reveal the secret grief which oppressed her when suddenly the door opened & a servant entered with the intelligence that a gentleman had arrived who wished to see her ladyship.

"A Gentleman!" exclaimed Lady Emily wiping her eyes and trying to assume some degree of composure "What is he like? have you never seen him before?"

"Never my lady, he is a personable young man with a very piercing look"

"Did he not tell you his name?"

"No I asked him what it was but he gave me no answer"

"that is strange. Is he alone or accompanied by servants?"

"He has one little page with him but that is all"

"Well, show him into my drawing room & say I will be down directly."

the Servant bowed & withdrew. Lady Emily now hastened to remove the traces of recent tears, she bathed her face in water, carefully arranged her dress & smoothed her dishevelled ringlets. Having thus discharged the duties of the toilette she proceeded to attend the unknown visitor. with a light tread she glided from her appartment down the staircase & through a portion of the corridor till she reached the drawing room, its rose-wood folding doors rolled back noiselessly at her touch on their well polished hinges & she entered unobserved by the stranger whose tall & kingly form stood before her opposite the great arched window through which he was gazing with folded arms, for an instant she paused to admire the statue-like dignity of his attitude. her heart she could not tell why beat wildly as she looked at him. But fearing that he might turn suddenly & take her unawares she proclaimed her presence by a gentle cough, he started & turned round. Their eyes met. the pensive expression which had dwelt in lady Emily's vanished like magic & a brilliant ray of animation sparked in its stead.

"Leslie, dear Leslie" cried she springing joyfully toward him. "Is it you? How long have you been in Verdopolis? Why did you not return long since? Oh, how often I have thought & cried about you since you went away"

She was going on, but observing that a cold & haughty bow was the only return her cordial welcome met with stopped in embarrasment. A mutual silence of some moments followed which was at length broken by Leslie who stood with his arms still folded gazing earnestly at her.

"Beautiful Hypocrite" said he & paused again while his finely cut lip quivered with the strongest emotion.

"What is the matter" asked lady Emily faintly "have I been too forward, too ardent in my expressions of pleasure at seeing you again after so long an absence?"

"Cease this unworthy acting" said her lover sternly "& do not think so meanly of me as to immagine I can be deceived by pretensions so flimsy, you have been too well employed during my absence to think much of me, another & doubtless in your opinion a higher prize has been ensnared by your false though incomparable loveliness & now I am come to cast you from me as a perjured woman though my heart-strings should burst in agony with the effort. But" he continued m a voice of thunder, while all the lightnings of jealousy gleamed in his fierce dark eyes "I will not tamely give you up to the scoundrel who has dared to supplant me. No he shall have an even struggle, he shall wade through blood to obtain his stolen reward"

Leslie, Leslie" replied Lady Emily in a soft soothing tone "You have indeed been deceived, but not by me. sit down now calmly & tell me all you have heard to my disadvantage, you see I am not angry notwithstanding this is a far different reception to what I had ever expected to meet with from you"

"Syren" said Her yet unappeased lover "Who would imagine that so sweet a voice could be employed in the utterance of falsehoods or that such a lovely countenance should be a mere mask to conceal the hollow insincerity of a coquette's heart"

Lady Emily whose fortitude was unequal to sustain this continued severity now burst into tears. Leslie deeply moved by her distress whether real or apparent, began to reflect what right he had to upbraid her in such haughty terms & to ask himself whether the reports which had awakened his suspicions might not be in themselves destitute of foundation. Under the influence of these thoughts he approached the Sofa on which she had thrown herself when unable to stand from excess of agitation & sitting down beside her took her hand, but she withdrew it with becoming pride.

"Mr Leslie" said she starting up "your words show the regard you once pretended to entertain for me is no more, you desire that we should part & be assured that whatever pain I may experience in renouncing one whom I have hitherto looked upon as my dearest friend, yet I shall not hesitate a moment to take this necessary though painful step. Farewell then, I trust that the bitterness of remorse for wrongs inflicted upon others will never be added to your portion of this world's evils."

As she spoke the blood rushed back to her terror blanched cheek her tearful eye shone like a meteor & her slender form seemed dilated with the swell of justly aroused pride. Leslie sat silent till she turned to depart then springing from his seat he hastily placed himself between her & the door.

"You shall not go" said he, "I am convinced that I was mistaken, the man who could hear your words & look on your countenance would be more or less than human if he could still doubt that you were innocent" Lady Emily continued to advance with an irresolute step but a smile now began to dimple her fair cheek.

"Well Leslie" she said "you are like a true artist one of the most capricious of men, but this moment you were so angry with me that I was almost afraid to remain in the room & now you will not let me leave me but" she continued while the arch smile more fully lit up her face, "Perhaps I shall not choose to remain now. I really am very angry & feel a great mind to tell Colonel Percy next time he comes (for I suppose he is the person you are jealous of) that I have cut his rival & shall marry him forthwith."

"Hush Emily" replied Leslie leaving his post near the door "I cannot bear to hear you speak thus even in jest but Come let us sit down & tell me seriously who & what is the wretch whose name has just passed your lips."

"He is a very handsome & accomplished man" she replied provok- ingly "and my uncle says one of the bravest soldiers in the army"

Leslie's eye flashed & his brow darkened again "Am I still to think" he asked "that you entertain a partiality for the infamous villain?"

"Goodness" exclaimed the lady "jcan't I like two people at once? how monopolizing you are" the convulsive grasp with which her lover seized her hand & the flush which rose suddenly to his cheek warned her that she had trifled long enough, she proceeded in an altered tone "but though the Colonel is all I have described him yet I assure you, you have nothing to fear for I detest him most thoroughly & nothing on earth should either tempt or compel me to change my name from Emily Charlesworth to Emily Percy"

"Bless you" Exclaimed the enthusiastic Leslie "for that assurancef! it has relieved me of a mighty load but tell me dearest how these vile reports by which I have been misled arose, Colonel Percy I presume visited you?"

"He did & made proposals to me but I remembered the absent & peremptorily rejected him. he then applied to my uncle who as ill- luck would have it behaved like all guardians & commanded me forthwith to receive him as my husband elect. I demurred, my Uncle insisted, the Colonel implored, hints of compulsion were thrown out. this only served to render me more restive, the chaplain was sent for. I then had recourse to tears, the Colonel seeing me so far softened became a little insolent, he said that instead of crying & pouting I might think myself very highly honoured by the preference of one whom all the ladies in Verdopolis would be glad of. this effectually awoke my spirit. I got up for I had been kneeling to both the oppressors & told him that he was the object of my scorn & hatred & that he never need hope to obtain any interest in a heart that was entirely devoted to another. When he heard this he stormed & frowned just as you did just now. my Uncle asked who the favoured suitor was. I said instantly that he was neither lord nor knight but a young & gifted artist, if you had seen the fit of astonishment that seized them both. they stood with mouths gaping & eyes staring like two images of surprisef. the effect was perfectly ludicrous & despite of the fears which filled me I laughed outright, this only irritated them still more, the Colonel swore that he would compel me to marry him or die & my Uncle took oath on belt & brand that no man from king to beggar from Duke to Artist should be my husband except Colonel Percy. I smiled but said nothing. Well for a while after this I was confined to my room & not suffered to cross the threshold lest I might run away, this rigour injured my health: I grew pale & thin. My Uncle (who I know loves me notwithstanding his harshnessf) perceived the change & commanded that I should be set at liberty on condition of my consenting to accompany the Colonel for the purpose of having my portrait taken, the first time I went to De Lisle's in order to sit Colonel Percy told me that he had discovered who my lover was & had even seen him several times, this frightened me a little but I consoled myself with the knowledge that you were at present absent from Verdopolis & therefore out of his reach but now you are returned I fear greatly that he will never rest till he has accomplished your destruction by some means"

"Emily" said Leslie as she concluded her brief narrative "You have acted generously & truly, you have been faithful to a poor & friendless artist or one whom you thought such & have rejected a man whose birth expectations & personal accomplishments render him an object of the highest admiration to every other individual of your own sex. I now know with a degree of certainty which admits no shadow of doubt that you love me for myself & that nothing of a selfish nature mingles with your regard. I owe it therefore to your disinterested affection to reveal my real rank & station in life. I am not what I seem a servile minion of fortune a low born son of Drudgery. No the Head of Clan Albyn, the Earl of St Clair, the Cheiftain of the wild children of the mist' Descends from a line of ancestors as illustrious as any whose brows were ever encircled by the coronet of nobility. Alliance with me will not bring you to want & beggary but pure blood will be mingled, broad lands joined & loving hearts united in bonds dissoluble only by death. Come with me then Emily shake of at once the shackles which restrain you. free yourself from the importunities of a villain I will take you to my mountainous lands in the north & you shall be at once Countess of Saint Clair & Lady of seven thousand of the bravest warriors that ever gathered round a chieftain's banner, my castle on Elimbos is larger than your uncle's here & my brave clan will pay their lovely & gentle mistress the adoration due to a divinity"

As Leslie or as we must now call him Ronald Lord St Clair revealed his rank & power, the proud blood mounted to his forehead his eye flashed like that of one of his own wild eagles & the majesty of his step & bearing as he slowly paced the appartment proclaimed the descendant of a hundred Earls. Lady Emily caught the lofty enthusiasm which infused a higher beauty into his noble countenance & rising from her seat she frankly extended her hand towards him & said "Accept the pledge of my inviolable faith though the whole earth should unite against me I will never love another. "True till death " shall be my chosen motto. I cannot love you more than I did but I rejoice for your own sake that you can vie in rank with the proudest nobles of Africa.' "Do you consent to go with me?" asked he "I do. at what time must I depart"

"this night at twelve o'clock meet me in the chestnut avenue" "I will be punctual" said the lady. "And now my lord tell me what your reason was for playing the incognito in Verdopolis."

"Why Emily you must know that I was educated in England. After leaving Oxford I resided some time in London, there I was of course admitted into the highest circles of society; being young & rich great attention was paid me. the ladies in particular treated me very graciously but I suspected that much of this especial favour was owing rather to my rank & fortune than to my personal qualities, this idea having once entered my head I could not by any means drive it out. So I determined to take a voyage to Africa & try what luck would befall an unknown & apparently friendless stranger. In Verdopolis I met with De Lisle, his manners & address pleased me while his merits & poverty excited my warmest sympathy. Enjoining the strictest secrecy I told him who I was & my motives for wishing to remain unknown. Having some knowledge of painting I determined to assume the character of an artist & accordingly placed my self under De lisle's tuition. At his house I met with you for you used to come there ocasionally under the protection of your worthy tutor Mr Gif- ford to purchase copies & drawing materials, the consequence of these interviews I need not relate, in a short time we became firmly attached to each other & when I was about to declare my rank & formally to solicit your hand of Lord Charlesworth I was suddenly called away to my northern estates among the Branni mountains. Legal affairs & business connected with the clan unavoidably detained me for nearly twelve months & now I have returned to Verdopolis for the double purpose of claiming you as my bride & when that is accomplished joining the Duke of Wellingtons standard against the rebellious Ashantees"

"I have but one more question to ask" said lady Emily "How did the Colonel become acquainted with your person?"

"I know not except it be by having seen me at Delisle's house. I remember a gentleman strongly resembling him entering the studio one day while you were conversing with me & regarding us with an eye of the strictest scrutiny but the circumstance had slipped my memory until your question recalled it."

"there still remains a single point on which I wish to be satisfied" said Lady Emily smiling as if a sudden thought had struck her. "were you present at the Olympic Games in disguise?" "I was"

"what dress did you wear?" "the costume of my clan."

"then you were the gallant archer whose arrow shivered the white wand when every other failed."

"you have guessed cleverly Emily it is as you say." "Then Depend upon it my lord" said she seriously "Colonel Percy recognized you. His eye is keener than a hawk's & I saw him glance sharply at you when you half lifted your vizor to speak, could I have heard your voice I should have remembered it I am certain & doubtless he did so. Oh I fear his revengeful spirit will never rest till it has accomplished your destruction."

"Fear nothing for me Emily my sword is as good as his & my arm also, if he causes a tear to spring in that bright eye, his heart's blood shall pay for it. & now my dearest fare well, we must part for the present but before another sun rises the conjoined powers of earth & hell will be insufficient to divide us. Only remember the appointed time, be punctual & trust to me for the rest."

Lady Emily repeated the promise she had before given & the lovers separated each to make the necessary preparations. As Lord St Clair left the drawing room he saw a shadowy form hastily gliding down the dark corridor, fearful of their conversation having been overheard he pursued the retreating figuref. at first he appeared to be gaining some advantage but suddenly it turned down a side passage & he lost sight of it. Chagrined at this failure & somewhat apprehensive of what this nimble-footed personage's design might be in lurking so suspiciously about, he thought of returning back & acquainting lady Emily with what he had seen, but just then the marquis of Charlesworth's gruff, stern voice was heard in the hall, so our hero thought it best to take his departure instantly lest his presence might be discovered by that dignitary & the whole plan of elopement blown up. he proceeded therefore to the stables where he found both page & horse in readiness, mounting his beautiful Arabian charger with one glance at the western turret & one sigh for his lady-love he dashed out of the yard & in a few minutes was half way on the road to Verdopolis.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

For the present I must leave Lord St Clair & lady Charlesworth to see what Colonel Percy was about while they were preparing to cheat him so cleverly. The Colonel occupied a large & splendid mansion in Dim- dim Square then a fashionable quater of the city though now the favourite abode of briefless lawyers, non-commissioned officers unpat- ronized authors with others of the tag-rag & bobtail species, this residence together with the expensive establishment of servants, carriages &c. appertaining to it was kept up partly by the owners pay, partly by his gains at the billiard & card-table & partly by liberal borrowings from usurers on the strength of his great expectations, there in a magnificent saloon furnished with all the elegance that luxury or taste could devise Colonel Percy sat alone on the afternoon spoken of in my last chapter, his fine form was stretched in very unmilitary ease on a silken sofa. his languid eye & pale cheek revealed the dissipation of the previous night while the empty decanter & glass which stood on a table near him showed that the stimulus of wine had been employed to remove his lassitude though without effect, while he was lying thus with his hands pressed to his lofty & aristocratic forehead a window of the saloon was suddenly opened and a man with a red head & ragged inexpressibles sprang in from without.

“Beast” said Percy starting up with a loud oath “how dare you enter my house in such a brazenly impudent manner. How dare you come near me in fact after the manner in which you have lately treated me?”

this reception did not in the least seem to daunt the unabashed entree whom no doubt our readers will have already recognized as the hero of the ass drawn chariot, on the contrary he advanced with a smiling countenance & seizing the colonel’s hand with his horny paw replied “How is all with you my sweet rogue, I’m afraid you’re not quite as your best friends could wish, that pale face & this feverish hand tell tales”

“Curse you for the hardiest scoundrel that ever deserved a hempen neckcloth”‘ replied the Colonel at the same time dashing the other hand into his face with a violence that would have felled any other man but which only drew a horse-laugh from the sturdy charioteer. “Curse you ten thousand times I say how in the name of body & soul dare you face me alone & without arms after our last transaction?”

“Why what I have I done to thee my Emperor of Roguesf?”

“What have you done to me brute? Did I not bribe you with two hundred guineas to cut out Captain Wheeler from running his chariot at the games by becoming a competitor yourself with your vile cart & asses? did I not give you fifty guineas more in advance to let me win & after swearing a hundred oaths of fidelity did you not break them all & by so doing swindle me out of twenty thousand pounds for I had laid a wager to that amount on my success?"

"Well & if I did all this" replied the carroty haired gentleman "was it not just what you would have done in my situationf? I had your two hundred & fifty pounds safe in my breeches pocket when by ill or good luck which you please as soon as it was publickly known that I was to run upwards of forty bets were laid against me. I accepted them all & so in self defence was obliged to do my best, but comef he continued "this is not what I intended to talk about, my purpose for coming here was to beg the loan of a few pounds; I've spent every farthing of what I got last week in drink & other matters"

this demand was made in a quiet self-complacent tone as if the request had been one of the most reasonable in the world. Colonel Percy could bear it no longer, quivering all over & deadly pale with rage he snatched a loaded pistol from his pocket & discharged it full at him. this attack like the former produced no other effect than a fiendish laugh, the shot flew from his head and in the rebound one of them struck the Colonel so smartly as to produce blood. Baffled in this manner a second time he threw down the weapon & began to pace the apartment with furious strides.

"Fool that I am" cried he "Why do I waste my strength in vain? the Demon as I might have known before now is impervious to fire or shot, my fruitless attempts only expose me to his derision"

"Ha, Ha, Ha" shouted his tormentor "that's true Rogue, so now sit down & let's have a little sensible conversation"

Percy exhausted with the efforts he had made threw himself mechanically into a chair: "S'death" said he in a calmer tone "You're not a man as sure as I live you're an evil spirit in the flesh a true fiend mcarnate. no human being could have lived after a shower of such hailstones as those"

S death (for such was the unblushing swindler's name) made no answer but rising from his seat went to a sort of beaufet or side-board ⁿ ʷhich stood several bottles of wine &c. and taking a case of liquers first helped himself to a brimming bumper & then pouring out another advanced with it to Rogue, Percy I mean.

"here charmer" said he lifting it to his lips "here taste this cordial you look faintish I think & should have something to comfort your poor heart. "

the Colonel who at that time was no drunkard whatever he may have become since just sipped of the offered beverage & returned it to Mr S'death by whom it was annihilated at a draught, the Conversation was now carried on in a more animated & less violent strain than before. Percy's anger seemed to have been in some measure appeased when he found that it was useless to exert it against one whom he could not possibly injure. Still however half at least of every sentence they addressed to each other was composed of oaths & execrations, S'death continued to demand a loan of twenty pounds which Percy for some time refused declaring that he had not that sum in the world. S'death then tried to intimidate him & threatened to inform against him for certain highly criminal transactions in which he had been concerned, this had the desired effectf: the Colonel immediately unfastened a diamond clasp from his stock & throwing it on the floor commanded him with an oath "to take that & be off". the hardened villain picked it up with a chuckle &, going again to the side-board helped himself to another tumbler of liqueurf. he then made his exit through the open window saying as he went away "Good bye Rogue at this moment I have bank-bills for two thousand pounds in each waistcoat pocket" with these words he scampered off followed by the discharge of a second pistol.

"Infernal scoundrel" said the colonel as he closed the sash with violence. "I wish the earth would yawn & swallow him up or the skies rend & strike him dead with a flash of his native element"

As he uttered this pious aspiration, he flung himself again on the sofa from which he had been roused by his unwelcome visitor. Two hours elapsed before he was again disturbed but at the end of that time a low tap was heard at the door.

"Come in beast whoever you are" shouted he in a loud voice, the door softly unclosed & a footman in livery enteredf. "what do you want now scoundrel?" asked his master furiously.

"merely to tell your honour that the green Dwarf has just arrived quite out of breath & says he has important information to communicate."

"the green Dwarf! show him into my library & say I'll come directly"

The servant bowed & left the room. Colonel Percy followed him almost immediately & proceeded to the library . there we shall now leave him to revisit Clydesdale Castle.

Lord St Clair had hardly left Lady Emily's private drawing-room before her uncle the Marquis of Charlesworth entered it. he was a tall & stately old gentleman between sixty & seventy years of age. his grey locks curled & powdered with the most scrupulous nicety surrounded a countenance whose fresh weather-beaten skin, stern aquiline features & peculiar expression would have at once marked him out to the attentive observer as a veteran soldier even if his military jack boots & enormous sword had not done so more decidedly.

"Well Emily" said he saluting his niece who had run forward to meet him. "How are you this evening love? I'm afraid you've had a dull day of it sitting here alone"

"O no uncle" said she "I never in the least feel the want of company . my books & music & drawing give me sufficient employment without it"

"That's well, but I think you have not been quite alone this evening, has not the Colonel been with you?"

"No" replied Lady Emily "why do you ask me uncle"

"because I saw a very handsome horse standing in the yard which I concluded to be his, but since it was not pray what other visitor have you had?"

this was an unexpected question . lady Emily however was not thrown off her guard by it. she instantly did what perhaps will not be thought very becoming in the heroine of a novel viz coined a little lie.

"Oh" said she carelessly "I suppose the horse must have belonged to Mr Lustring the linen-draper's apprentice, he has been here this afternoon with some articles which I bought at his master's shop the other day & now uncle" she continued willing to change the conversation to some less ticklish subject "tell me what you have been doing in the city to day"

"Why" said he "in the first place I went to Waterloo Palace for the purpose of soliciting an audience of the Duke. our interview lasted two hours & when it was over his Grace requested my company to dinner, there I saw the Duchess who was as affable & agreeable as ever. she asked kindly after you & desired me to say that she should be happy to have the pleasure of your society for a few weeks at Verdopolis"

"Sweet creature" exclaimed lady Emily "I love her more than any body else in the world except you uncle & perhaps one or two besides but did you see the little baby?"' "Yes"

"Is it a pretty child?"

"remarkably so but I fear it will be spoiled: the Duke seems disposed to indulge it in everything & the Duchesses whole existence is evidently wrapped up in it"

"And no wonder, pray what's it called?"

"Arthur I believe"

"Does it seem well-dispositioned?"

"I really dont know. it will be tolerably headstrong I think, there was a regular battle between it & the nurse when she attempted to convey it out of the room after dinner, now have you any more questions to ask concerning the little imp?"

"Not at present. what did you do when you left the palace?" "I stepped into the Genii's Inn & had a bottle of wine with Major Sterling, after that I proceeded to our barracks where I had some business to transact with the officers of my regiment, when this was finished I went to Mr Trefoil's & purchased something for my neice to wear on her wedding-day which I intend shall soon arrive"

here the Marquis took from his pocket a small casket in which when it was opened appeared a superb diamond necklace with ear-rings, finger-rings & brooches to correspond, he threw them into lady Emily's lap. a tear started into her eye as she thanked him for this costly present & at the same time thought what an act of disobedience to her kind Uncle's will she was about to commit. He observed it & said "now my love let us have no piping. the Colonel is an admirable fellow, a little wild perhaps but marriage will soon cure him of that"

A long silence followed, both Uncle & neice judging by their pensive countenances seemed to be engaged in sorrowful reflections. At length the former resumed the conversation by saying “In a few days Emily we shall have to be separated for some time” “How?” exclaimed lady Emily starting & turning pale for her thoughts instantly reverted to Colonel Percy.

“Why my love” replied the Marquis “News has lately arrived that the Ashantees are mustering strong. the Duke therefore considers an addition to the army requisite . several regiments have been ordered out as reinforcements among which number is the ninety-sixth & I being Commander must of course accompany it. it is on this account that the Duchess of Wellington has invited you to pay her a visit for she very kindly considers that you will feel Clydesdale Castle a very dull & lonely residence in my absence. I hope you will accept the invitation my love”

“Certainly” replied lady Emily in a faint voice for her heart misgave her when she thought of the deceitful part she was acting towards the careful & affectionate guardian from whom she was about to be separated perhaps for ever.

Supper was now announced & when this meal was concluded Lady Emily pleading a slight head-ache as an excuse for retiring early bade her uncle good night & with a heavy heart proceeded to her little chamber in the western Turret. When she reached it & had secured the door she sat down to consider a little of the decisive step she was about to take. after long & deep meditation she arrived at the conclusion that there were but two practicable modes of acting namely either to obey her uncle prove false to her lover & sacrifice her own happiness for life or to disobey the marquis, be faithful to st Clair & run away with him according to her promise. Driven to such a dilemma who can blame her if she made a choice of the latter course & determined to run the hazard of an elopement rather than to await the evils which delay might produce. Just as her resolution was fixed the Castle- bell began in deep and solemn tones to announce the eventful hour of midnightf. each stroke of the resounding hammer seemed in her excited imagination a warning voice enjoining her instant departure. As the last hollow echo died away to the profoundest silence she started from the chair where she had hitherto sat motionless as a statue & proceeded to wrap herself in a large hooded mantle such as was then frequently worn by the ladies of Verdopolis & which served the treble purpose of a veil, hat, & cloak.

Thus attired she stole noiselessly from her chamber & instead of proceeding toward the grand staircase directed her steps to the winding turret stair which led to an unoccupied hall in which was an arched gate opening directly into the park. As she softly entered this hall she perceived by the moonlight which was streaming brilliantly through the tall latticed windows a dark figure standing near the gate through which she was to pass. Lady Emily was not much of a philosopher & this appearance startled her not a little for she instantly remembered a traditionary story of a wicked fairy who was said to haunt this appartment. her fears on this head however were soon relieved by hearing the rattling of a bunch of Keys accompanied by the gruff murmuring tones of a man’s voice.

“I wonder” said the supposed apparition in soliloquy “I wonder what that beast of a light chose to go out for, it’s a rare thing to be sure for me to be in this dog-hole at midnight without a candle, that last pint made my hand rather unsteady & I can’t see to find the Key-hole.”

Lady Emily now recognized in the speaker a man-servant whose office it was to secure all the castle-gates before retiring to rest, the urgency of her situation immediately suggested an expedient which considering the muddled state of the man’s brain could hardly fail of success. She wrapped herself closely in the mantle & advancing into the middle of the hall said in a voice as commanding as she could muster, “Mortal I command thee to depart from the Great fairy Asherah’s abodef.” the effect of this ruse was instantaneousf. he flung down the keys with a shout of terror & scampered of as fast as his heels could carry him. Lady Emily had now no difficulty in unbarring the portal & making her premeditated escape, with the lightness & swiftness of a liberated Deer she bounded across the moonlit lawn towards the appointed place of rendezvous.

A chill & dreary wind was sweeping among the lofty chestnut trees as she wandered under their huge boughs impatiently awaiting her lover’s arrival. The uncertain light now streaming through a wide opening as the swelling breeze suddenly bowed all the branches in one direction & now when it dyed away & they sprang back to their former station flinging a thousand silvery checquers on the leaf-strewn pathway produced shadows equally uncertain, sometimes it seemed as if a hundred ghosts were gliding among the mighty trunks, beckoning with their dim hands & vanishing as she approached them. Occasionally too a cloud would suddenly obscure the moon, & then in the dense darkness which followed the creaking of branches, the rustling of leaves & the wild howling of wind formed a combination of doleful sounds which might have impressed the stoutest heart with terror.

For half an hour she continued to walk slowly about shivering in the cold night air & at intervals pausing to listen for some advancing step. at length she heard a rumbling noise like the wheels of some vehicle: it drew near: the tramp of horses feet became distinctly audible when suddenly it ceased altogether, five anxious minutes passed, nothing was heard. lady Emily listened & listenedf. she began to doubt whether her ears had not deceived her but now the rustling of the dead leaves foretold an approaching footstep. she knew the tread, none but st Clair had such a stately & martial stride. forward she darted like an arrow from a bow & in another instant was clasped to lord Ronald’s bosom. After the first mute greetings were over he said in a low smothered tone, “Come dearest let us not lose a moment, silence & despatch are necessary for our safety.” they accord- ingly proceeded down the avenue at the end of which a carriage was awaiting their approach, into it lady Emily was handed by her lover who as he warmly pressed the hand which had been put into his as she entered the chaise whispered in the same suppressed voice as before that he would follow her on horse-back. “very well my lord” said Emily, gently returning his grasp. He closed the door mounted a horse which stood near, gave the word of departure & soon by the aid of four wheels & six steeds the fair runaway left her guardian’s castle far behind.

In less than an hour they had rolled over the four miles of road which intervened between them and Verdopolis, passed through the wide streets of that city now all still & desolate & entered a great road which ran northward through an extensive forest, after two hours travelling through the dense gloom of woodland shade the carriage turned aside from the mainpath into a bye-way. they now struck still deeper into the brownish obscurity of oak & palm, elm & cedar, darkly & dimly branch rose above branch each uplifting a thicker canopy of night like foliage till not a single ray of light could find an opening by which to direct the belated traveller’s passing underneath. At last to lady Emily’s great satisfaction the trees began to grow thinner; gradually they assumed a scattered appearance & e’re long the carriage entered an open glade where standing in the full brilliancy of moonlight there appeared a lofty, & ruinous tower. Wall-flowers were waving from its mouldring battlements & ivy-tendrils twined gracefully round the stone mullions of windows from which the glass had long disappeared. Lady Emily shuddered as the carriage stopped before the iron gate of this dreary edifice.

“this will be a dismal hole to sleep in” said she to herself “But why should I be afraid? St Clair is certainly the best judge of the places we ought to halt at”

The door was now unfastened by a foot-man who as the Earl had not yet come up offered to assist her in getting out of the carriage. When she had descended the man proceeded to demand entrance, the loud clamourous din which was produced by the agitation of the rusty knocker strangely interrupted that profound & solemn silence which reigned through the primeval forest While it awoke a hollow echo within the grey desolate ruin. After a long pause the withdrawal of bolts & bars was heard. the portals slowly unfolded & revealed a figure whose appearance was in the most perfect keeping with every thing around, it was that of an old woman bent double with the weight of years: her countenance all wrinkled & shrivelled wore a settled expression of discontent while her small, red eyes gleamed with fiendlike malignity, in one shaking hand she held a huge bunch of rusty keys & in the other a dimly glimmering torch.

“Well Bertha” said the footman “I have brought you a visitor, you must show her up to the highest chamber for I suppose there’s no other in a habitable condition.”

uNo how should their I wonder” replied the hag in an angry mumbling tone “When no body’s slept in them for more than sixty long years, but what have you brought such a painted toy as this here for? there’s no good in the wind I think”

“Silence you old witch” said the man “or I’ll cut your tongue out.” then addressing lady Emily he continued "I hope madam you'll excuse such an attendant as she is for the present: had there been time to procure a better my master would not have failed to do so"

Lady Emily replied "that she could make every allowance for old age " & was proceeding to speak a few kind words to the miserable being when she turned abruptly away & muttering "follow me my fine madam an you want to see your sleeping-place" hobbled out of the appartment. Our heroine immediately complied with her request or rather command, & leaving the roofless hall in which she then stood, followed the hideous crone through a suite of damp empty rooms through which the wind was sighing in tones too wildly mournful not to communicate a feeling of sympathetic melancholy to the heart of every listener, at length they reached a room smaller than the others to which a canopy-couch with faded velvet curtains a few chairs, a table & an old-fashioned carved ward-robe gave a habitable if not a comfortable appearance, here the old woman stopped & placing the candle on the table said "Now here you may lie till tomorrow if spirits don't run away with you"

"Oh I have no fear of that" replied lady Emily forcing a laugh "but my good Bertha can you not light a fire in that grate for it's very cold?"

"No not I" replied the hag "I've something else to do indeed" & with these ungracious words she walked or rather crept out of the room.

When she was gone lady Emily very naturally fell into a fit of rather sorrowful musing. The clandestine & secret nature of the past the dreariness of the present & the uncertainty of the future all contributed to impress her mind with the deepest gloom. Ere long however the image of St Clair rising like the sun above a threatening horizon dispelled the sadness which hung over her mind.

"Soon" thought she "he will be here & then this decayed tower will to me wear the aspect of a kings palace"

Scarcely had this consoling reflection been uttered in a half whispered soliloquy When a stately stride & jingling spurs sounded from the antichamber. the door which stood ajar was gently pushed open & the Earls tall form wrapped in a travelling cloak & with a plumed bonnet darkly shading his noble features appeared at the entrance.

"You are come at last" said lady Emily. "How long you have been, I was almost beginning to fear that you had lost your way in that dismal wood"

"Beautiful Creature" replied he in a tone which thrilled through her like an electrical shock "I would give every thing I possess on earth to be in reality an object of such tender interest in your eyes, but alas I fear that your sweet sympathy is directed to one who while I live shall never more hear it expressed by that silvery voice. Behold me fair lady & know into whose power you have fallen"

So saying he flung off" at once the enshrouding cloak & hat & there stood before the horror stricken lady not the form of her lover St Clair but that of his rival Colonel Percy. The ghastly paleness which instantly overspread her face & the sudden clasping of her hands alone proclaimed what feelings passed through her mind as she beheld this unexpected apparition.

“Come cheer up” continued the Colonel with a scornful smile. “It’s as well to settle your mind now for I swear by every-thing earthly or heavenly, sacred or profane that this painter-lover of yours, - this romancing arrow-shooting artist has seen your face for the last time” “Wretch” exclaimed lady Emily her eyes sparkling with scorn & hatred “Know that he whom you call my painter lover has higher & purer blood in his veins than you. he is Earl St Clair of Clan Albyn & you are but the dependent hanger on of a noble relative”

“So he has told you” returned Percy “but damsel be he lord or limner I have fairly outwitted him this time, his chariot wheels tarried somewhat too long methinks. mine were better oiled - they ran smoother. I won the race & have borne off the prize triumphantly, he may now cry St Clair to the rescue but none of his plaided minions can reach the length of this dark & unknown retreat,”

“Unprincipled villain” said lady Emily whose high spirit was now fully roused “you have acted treacherously, you have adopted means totally unbecoming the honour of a gentleman or never should I have been thus ensnared by your toils”

“Humph” replied the colonel “I am not one of those punctilious fools who consider honour as the God of their Idolatry. Eavesdroppers, spys, or false-witnesses are all equally acceptable to me when there is a great end in View which can be more easily obtained by their assistance.”

“Colonel Percy” said lady Emily “for I can call you by no name so detestable as your own do you intend to keep me in this tower or to send me back to Clydesdale Castle?”

“I shall keep you here most assuredly till you promise to become my wife & then you shall re-appear in Verdopolis with a magnificence suitable to the future Duchess of Beaufort”

“Then here I remain till death or some happier chance relieves me, for not all the tortures that man’s ingenuity could devise should ever induce me to marry one whose vices have sunk him so low in the ranks of humanity as yours have one who openly renounces the dominion of honnour & declares that he has given himself up to the blind guidance of his own depraved inclinations”

“Excellently well preached” remarked the Colonel with a sneer “but fair worshipper of honnour this resolution will not prevent the proposed incarceration which shall be inflicted on you as a sort of punishment for having flagrantly violated the decrees of that Deity whose cause you so eloquently advocate, pray my lady was it quite consistent with the dictates of honnour to deceive your old doting uncle and elope at midnight with an unknown adventurer?”

this taunt was too much for lady Emily, the remembrance of her Uncle & of what his sufferings would be when her disappearance should be known instantly destroyed that semblance of dignity which pnde had taught her to assume in order to overawe her suitor's fam- jhar insolence. She leant her head on her hand & burst into a flood of bitter tears.

Those crystal drops" said the Colonel totally unmoved by her ress Tell me that it would be no very difficult matter to soften your apparently stubborn heart. could I but remain here one day longer I am certain that the powers of persuasion I possess would succeed in bringing my Queen of Beauty to reason but unfortunately dire necessity commands my immediate departure. Before Sunrise I ought to be in Verdopolis & day is already breaking over those eastern Hills. Farewell" he continued in a more serious tone, "Farewell lady Emily, I am going where their is likely to be hot work & perhaps some black rebel's sabre may before long rid you of a sincere though rejected lover & the world of what most men call a villain."

"Farewell Colonel" replied his weeping captive "And remember that if such should be your fate the recollection of what you have this night done will not tend to alleviate the agonies of death"

"Pshaw" said he with a reckless laugh "do you think I have any fears on that score? no my conscience if I ever had any has been long seared. Immortality finds no place in my creed & death is with me but an abbreviated term for lasting sleep.' Once more farewell"

with these words he snatched her hand kissed it fervently & departed. The twilight glimmer of dawn was now stealing through the narrow casements of lady Emily's prison & falling on her face & person as she lay stretched on the tattered velvet couch where overcome with fatigue she had now thrown herself revealed a touching picture of Beauty in Distress.' her hair hung in loose & neglected curls on her snowy neck & shoulder her eyes were closed her long dark lashes wet with tears rested motionless on her cheek except when a fresh drop trembled on their silken fringes, her face usually blooming was now pale as alabaster from the misery of the sleepless night she had passed. one white hand & arm supported her head on the pillow & the other confined the folds of the dark mantle in which she was still partially enveloped.

After some time in spite of the wretchedness of her situation, separated it might be for ever from all she held dear on earth, & confined in a solitary ruin with no other attendant than the withered hag Bertha, she fell into a deep slumber & while she enjoys this temporary respite from affliction we will revert to other matters.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

It is well known that the Great War between the Ashantee's & Twelves ended, after many bloody & obstinate battles in the complete subjugation of the former, their prince being slain their nation nearly annihilated, their metropolis destroyed & the circumjacent country reduced to a condition of the wildest & most appalling desolation which the imagination of man can conceive. Quashie the Kings only son, then at the tender age of four or five years was taken prisoner. At the General Partition of booty he with other captives fell to the share of his Grace the Duke of Wellington from whom he experienced as much care & tenderness as if he had been that Monarch's son instead of his slave. In these gilded fetters the young prince grew up, his literary education was duly cared for but he declined to profit by the instructions bestowed on him further than as it regarded the acquisition of the English & Ashantee languages & the capability of expressing himself in both by pen as well as tongue. In bodily exercises & military affairs however the case was different, everything relating to these he learnt with an avidity which showed how fully he inherited his father's warlike spirit. At the age of seventeen, he was a tall handsome youth, black as jet & with an eye full of expression & fire, his disposition was bold, irritable, active, daring & at the same time deeply treacherous.

It now began to appear that notwithstanding the care with which he had been treated by his conquerors he retained against them as if by instinct the most deeply rooted and inveterate hatred. Since his fifteenth year he had been accustomed to take long excursions by himself among the mountains & forests of Ashantee for the purpose as he said of hunting the wild animals that abound there, but subsequent events showed that his real employment during these expeditions was discovering & prompting to Rebellion the hidden tribes of Africans who after the Destruction of Coomassie & the slaughter of King Quamina had concealed themselves in fastnesses inaccessible to any but a native of the country. When he had sufficiently kindled in these ^{Wl}'d savages a spirit of slumbering discontent, & roused them to make an effort for regaining that independence as a nation which they had lost, he in conjunction with the celebrated brothers Budi & Benini formerly his father's favourite counsellors unfurled the Royal standard of Ashantee & summoned the scattered remnant of that once mighty empire to join him without delay at the foot of Mount Pindus.

It seemed as if this invocation had called from their graves a portion at least of the vast army which fourteen years since had reddened with their blood the lofty heights of Rosendale-Hill. Multitudes flocked to his banner from the mountain glens & caverns of Jibbel Kumri from the unexplored regions of Inner Africa & from the almost boundless Desert of Sahara, so that in a few weeks no less than fifteen thousand armed natives of a kingdom which was supposed to have been extirpated declared themselves ready to shed the last drop of their blood in vindication of Quashie the second's claim to his ancestral throne. With this determination they marched toward Verdopolis & had arrived within four hundred miles of that City before intelligence of what had taken place reached the twelves. When the fact of this rebellion was known however the Duke of Wellington immediately desired that the punishment of the rebels might be left to him as the young viper who commanded them had been nourished on his own hearth & brought up by him with almost parental tenderness, his request was immediately granted & the duke despatched ten thousand troops under the command of General Leaf a descendant by the way of the famous Captain Leaf to stop the progress of the insurgents.

When Quashie heard of the formidable force which was advancing against him he sent an ambassador to Gondar requesting assistance from the Abysinnian King & in the mean time commenced a very orderly retreat. Ras Michael who detested the British readily permitted an army of eight thousand soldiers to assist Quashie in his bold enterprise against them. With this reinforcement that young warrior ventured to give the enemy battle. An engagement accordingly ensued near Fateconda on the Senegal Which after a very obstinate contest ended rather in favour of the Verdopolitans though the victory they gained was of that nature that another similar one would have been total destruction. A fresh addition now arrived from Abyssinia so that the army of the rebels was very little the worse for their defeat, while Leafs force amounted barely to six thousand men. The Duke being informed of this state of things immediately ordered out sixteen regiments & placing himself at their head marched without delay to the scene of the action. On his arrival he found that the enemy had been joined by a large body of Moors from the North so that he was still far inferior in numbers but trusting to the superior discipline of his troops he determined to stand his ground without further reinforcement. Having given the reader this necessary information I will now proceed with my narrative in a more detailed & less historical style.

It was a glorious evening in the end of summer when the hostile armies lay encamped on opposite banks of the river Senegal. The sun was slowly approaching the horizon of a speckless sky & threw his parting rays with softened brilliancy over a scene of unsurpassed loveliness. between the two hosts lay a beautiful valley where groves of delicate-leaved tamarind trees & tall palmyras sweetly shadowed the blue bright waters of the wandering stream. A cluster of deserted huts whose inhabitants had fled at the approach of soldiers crowned the gently-sloped aclivity which embosomed the glen. on one side in the largest of these the Duke of Wellington had taken up his quaters & here he now sat surrounded by four of his principal officers. Two of these are already known to our readers being the Marquis of Charlesworth &

Colonel Percy, of the remaining two the first was a middle- sized man with broad shoulders & spindle shanksf: his forehead was rather high his nose large & projecting, his mouth wide & his chin remarkably long, he was dressed in uniform with a star on his breast & large cambric ruffles at each wrist, the other was a little personage with jointless limbs, a chubby face & a pale pink wig of frizzled silk surmounted by a tall black hat on which was an ornament of carved wood, these officers were conversing with each other in undertones not to disturb the duke's meditations who sat with his eyes fixed on the wide prospect which opened before him & which was bounded by a dim sweeping milk-white line indicating the commencement of the great sandy desert.

Bobadil" said he suddenly addressing himself to the former of the two gentlemen I have just described "do you not perceive something moving in the direction of the enemies camp? it is under the shadow of that lofty hill to the north & appears like a dark & compact body of men, surely it is not some new ally?"

Bobadil came forward & began to poke out his neck strain & wink his eyes, look through his fingers &c. but finally declared he could perceive nothing, the Marquis of Charlesworth & General Leaf the owner of the pink wig were equally unsuccessful.

"You are a set of moles" said the Duke "I see them most distinctly they have rounded the hill & their arms are glittering brightly in the sunshine . come hither Percy can't you see that flashing hedge of spears with a banner displayed in the rear?", "Certainly my lord" replied Percy whose younger eyes could easily discern what was quite lost to the dimmed optics of the old Generals "they are now turned from the rebels & seem advancing towards us." A silence of a quater of an hour here ensued during which the Duke continued to gaze intently at the approaching army, for such it was now distinctly seen to be. they slowly wound away from the Ashantee camp & entering a deep valley were for the present lost to sight. But ere long a burst of wild music heralded their reappearance, gradually they emerged from the sinuous winding of the Glen which had concealed them & in martial array advanced to the sound of shrill pipes & deep-toned kettle drums along the right bank of the Senegal.

"These are not foes but friends" exclaimed the Duke starting up. "Upon my word St Clair has kept his promise well, I did not think his northern hills could send forth such a fine body of troops.f"

"Who are they my lord?" exclaimed all the officers at once, with the exception of Percy, whose brow had suddenly grown dark at the mention of St Clair.

"The men of Elimbos, the lads of the mist" replied his Grace. "Here Percy order my horse & your own & attend me whilst I go to meet them."

Percy left the hut & in a few minutes the Duke & himself were galloping down towards the valley. As they drew near that Highland host my father frequently expressed his admiration at the perfect order in which the ranks moved, the athletic appearance & uncommon stature of the men who formed them & the clean well burnished appearance of their arms & equipments, just as they reached the ad

vanced guard a general halt was called, both rode through the unfolding columns till on gaining the centre of the little army, they perceived the Earl surrounded by his choicest vassals all dressed in the green tartan of their clan & bearing spears, bows quivers & small triangular shields. Near him stood a gigantic warrior whose snow white hair & beard proclaimed advanced age while from his erect bearing herculean frame & sinewy limbs it was easy to perceive that he retained unimpaired all the vigourous powers of youth, he bore in one hand a huge spear proportionate to his own Titanic size from which floated the broad folds of a green banner bearing as a device a golden Eagle with expanded wings & the motto “I dwell on the rock”. This person was the celebrated Donald of the Standard called in common parlance the ape of the Hills. he is now one hundred & ten years of age & consequently was at that period ninety.” After a cordial greeting on each side the Duke proceeded to direct St Clair how to encamp his men & to give him other instructions which it is unnecessary here to recapitulate, their conference being ended he took leave for the night & returned with Colonel Percy to his own quaters.

It may now be as well to connect the broken thread of my rambling narrative before I proceed further.

When St Clair reached Verdopolis after his interview with lady Emily Charlesworth at Clydesdale Castle he ordered his page to go to the nearest place where carriages were let out to hire & order one to be in readiness by eleven o’clock that night, from some unexplained cause of delay it was not prepared till past twelve & consequently the bird was flown before he arrived at the appointed place of rendezvous. In a state of impatience amounting almost to madness he continued to pace the chestnut avenue watching the setting of the moon, the slow vanishing of the stars & the gradual approach of day-light, listening to every breath of wind & transforming the rustle of each falling leaf in ^{t} the step of his expected fair one. Morning broke however, the sun $^{r\circ}$se, the Deer awoke from their light slumbers & still lady Emily came not. Stung to the heart with her apparent infidelity, he determined to learn the cause of it from her own mouth & if a satisfactory excuse were not assigned to bid her an eternal farewell, with this resolution ^{he} hastened to the castle .

on his arrival he found it all in confusion, the servants hurrying to & fro with countenances of doubt & dismay. on inquiring the reason of this unusual movement, he was informed that lady Emily had disappeared that night & that no one knew where she was gone. Terror struck at this intelligence he immediately returned to Verdopolis where he remained for some days during which time the most diligent research was made after the unfortunate lady by her atflicted Uncle but all to no purpose. Finding this to be the case St Clair who had now- lost all motive for desiring a continuance of life & whose bitter & heart-gnawing anguish rendered a quiescent state of existence the most terrible of all others determined immediately to offer his own services & those of the clan whose cheiftain he was to the Duke of Wellington in his intended expedition against the Ashantees. this proposal of course was gratefully accepted & St Clair soon after departed to gather his warriors & lead them from their native mountains. With his opportune arrival the reader is already acquainted & now having cleared scores I may trot on unincumbered.

On the evening of the day which followed that event as The Earl sat in his tent with no other companion than the little Page Andrew who squatting like a Turk in one corner was employed in burnishing his master's spear & silver quiver. Colonel Percy rode up on his gallant war- horse & informed St Clair that the Duke was about to hold a council of war in which his presence would be required. It was with difficulty that our hero managed to return a civil answer to the unwelcome envoy, with a haughtiness of gesture & a sterness of tone that ill-suited the courteous nature of the words he replyed "that he felt highly flattered by the Duke's request & would attend him without delay" Whether Percy experienced any reciprocation of animosity I know not but his countenance expressed none as with a bland smile & low inclination of the head he touched his horse's sides & caracoled' gaily away.

The council was held in a large tent covered with scarlet cloth richly ornamented with gold embroidery & from the summit waved a crimson flag bearing the arms of England. When St Clair entered this superb pavillion, he found the Duke surrounded by about twenty officersf. at his left hand sat the Marquis of Charlesworth whose pale countenance & abstracted air told a melancholy tale of recent afflic

tion. the Earl was invited by his Grace to take the seat at his right hand which was vacant. at this flattering mark of distinction Colonel Percy who sat near the entrance of the tent amongst the junior officers was observed to smile with a peculiar expression.

"Now Gentlemen" said the Duke when all were assembled "I do not intend to detain you long, my motive for assembling you together was merely to obtain your approbation of a proposal for settling our black friends on the other side of the river in a few hours without I trust incurring much risk to our own army"

His Grace then proceeded to unfold a scheme for attacking the enemy's camp at night when they would be wholly unable to make any adequate defence it having been ascertained by means of spies that their watch was not one of the most vigilant in the world, the advantages of this plan being obvious the council gave a unanimous opinion in its favour & the next night was assigned as the period for putting it into execution. Business being thus summarily disposed of the Duke proceeded to say "Since Gentlemen I have called you to-gether for an affair of such brevity some reparation is due. I hope therefore you will not refuse to partake with me of a soldier's supper, it is prepared & now only waits your approach"

As he spoke the curtain at the upper end of the tent was withdrawn &

revealed an inner pavillion brilliantly lighted in which was a long table covered with the material for an excellent & substantial though not perhaps a luxurious supper. All willingly accepted the invitation except the Marquis of Charlesworth who pleaded an inability to enjoy festivity as an excuse for declining it.

“I will not press you my lord” said the Duke kindly taking his hand but remember that solitude nourishes grief” the old man’s only reply was a mournful shake of the head. “That poor fellow has had a heavy stroke in his old age” observed Colonel Percy who happened to be seated next to St Clair at supper he has lost a very pretty & accomplished neice in a most unaccountable manner”

Has he?” said the Earl eyeing his neighbour with a glance that m’ght have struck terror to the heart of a lion.

“Yes” pursued the Colonel in a tone of the most provoking calmness “Ah she was a sweet girl rather capricious though as most women are, one of her fancies was particularly absurd” “What might that be?” asked St Clair.

“Why you’ll hardly believe it when I tell you, she took it into her head to fall in love with a poor, silly, sneaking puppy of a painter & for some time declared she would marry him in preference to the nephew & heir of a duke but at length the latter lover prevailed & then the little witch confessed she had only been playing the coquette to try her suitors fidelity & that in reality she despised the man of canvass as much as she did the meanest of his sign-post daubs”

The flush which crimsoned St Clair’s cheek & brow & the light which sparkled in his fierce eyes would have quelled the insolence of any ordinary man but they only increased that of the demi fiend who sat by rejoicing in his agony.

“You are not subject to apoplectic fits are you sir?” said he gazing on him with affected wonder.

“No replied the Earl suppressing his wrath by a strong effort “but Sir how will the successful lover bear the loss of his intended bride?”

“Oh, they say he displays a laudable degree of resignation under the affliction”

“Then his affection for her was a pretence?” “No I don’t say that but you know my lord he is perhaps better acquainted with her whereabouts than other people. Hum, don’t you understand me?” “Indeed I do not”

“Why then to speak more plainly, some folks don’t hesitate to say that she has eloped”

“Sir” said the Earl in a low deep voice “Let me tell you I am in some degree acquainted with the parties we have been conversing about & let me tell you further that if I were her uncle & entertained the least suspicion of the kind you hint at I would cause the infernal scoundrel her lover to be torn limb from limb by wild horses or force him to tell me where the unhappy creature is concealed”‘

"Ha! Would you" said the colonel while a cloud at once fell on his brow & he instinctively grasped the weapon at his side but almost directly after he muttered "the hour is not yet arrived" & his countenance resumed its former state of deceitful composure.

The dishes were now removed & wine was introduced. after the first few rounds the Duke of Wellington rising from his seat at the head of the table "begged to be excused from a longer stay at the festive boardf". he then drank to the health of all his guests & bidding them good night withdrew. St Clair who was in no mood for joining in the riotous mirth that now became the principal characteristic of the military mess took the first opportunity of following his example.

the night was still & calm, its dewy coolness & the mild moonlight which was poured down upon him at intervals as he wandered among the silent tents & through the dark groves which waved with scarce visible motion along the river's shelving banks served in a great measure to soothe his roused & exaggerated passions. But not all the deep tranquility which fell like balm from the blue starry sky Not all the images of rest & serenity which a sweet summer's night ever creates could bring corresponding peace to his love tortured heart, or expel the worm of jealousy that now gnawed his very vitals. To be despised by her for whom he could have given his life's blood, to be the object of her derision & scorn, to have all his suspicions of her good faith so fearfully verified, was worse than death to his proud haughty spirit. As he stood on the river's brink & looked down on the deep clear waters which flowed so gently & wooingly at his feet he longed to cool the delirium of his brain by a spring into their liquid freshness, putting aside however this suggestion of the tempter & half- despising himself for being so moved by the false-heartedness of a fickle woman he turned from the stream & proceeded towards his own tent. just as he was about to enter it a voice whispered in his ear, Beware of Percy, it is a friend who warns you." The Earl looked hastily round ; he saw a dark figure gliding away which was soon lost >n the shadow of a lofty cluster of palm trees.

For a long time after he had laid himself on his deer skin couch that $^{\text{ni}}$ght, Slumber refused to visit his aching eyelids, the warning of his unknown friend, joined to the other subjects of deep & intense thought which filled his distracted mind for some hours effectually nished sleep from his pillow. But at last wearied nature being quite worn out was compelled to seek refuge in temporary repose. Scarcely had kindly oblivion fallen over the sorrows which oppressed him when a long & peculiarly shrill whistle sounded without the tent. Andrew who till this moment had been apparently fast asleep in a corner now softly & cautiously left his couch & taking up a small lamp stept on tip-toe to his master's bed-side, having ascertained that he was really slumbering by holding the light to his closed eyes &c. the page wrapped himself in a green plaid & without noise left the tent, at the outside a man was standing whose blue coat & livried hat showed him to be the same person that had abducted Andrew about a month since. Without a word spoken both walked or rather stole away towards a neighbouring grove the footman leading the way & beckoning Andrew to follow, here they were joined by another figure in a cloak. All three then proceeded down the river & in a few minutes the intervening trees entirely concealed them from view.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

"Well my lord the day is ours at last, but we've had a hard tug for the victory - upon my word those black rascals fought like devils"

"They did indeed & I think their overthrow considering all the circumstances of the case may be accounted almost a miracle."

"Truly it may. by the bye St Clair I shall hold a second council of war this Evening, those circumstances you allude to require explanation, they must be carefully looked into, you will attend of course?"

"Certainly my lord"

such was the brief dialogue between St Clair & the Duke of Wellington as the latter rode by with his staff. A bloody but decisive victory had just been gained over the Ashantee though in a manner different from what had been at first intended. At eleven o'clock of the night appointed for the secret attack, the Duke of Wellington crossed the Senegal at the head of his whole army. As they drew near the hostile camp not a voice whispered, not a light glimmered among the long silent rows of snow white tents, unopposed they held on their course to Quashie's own pavillion. they entered, it was empty, a short

space of time sufficed to ascertain that not a living thing save themselves remained in all the deserted camp. Those who were near the Duke when this discovery was made said that for a few moments his countenance expressed a depth of disappointment akin to despair, he recovered himself however almost directly & ordered scouts to disperse instantly in every direction & find out which way the enemy was gone. Ere long some of them returned with the information that they had marched northward & were now halting about ten miles off. The army immediately received orders to take the route indicated which led up the valley.

About day break they arrived at a wild mountain pass, through which might be seen a vast plain where the allied forces of the Moors Ashantees & Abyssinians, were all drawn up in battle array. It was a gorgeous but terrific spectacle as the first sunbeams flashed on that dusky host & lighted up to fiercer radiance their bright weapons & all the barbarous magnificence of gold & gems in which most of the warriors were attired, as the Duke's Army with himself at their head filed slowly forward through the narrow gorge, a young horseman sped suddenly to the front of the African array & waving his long lance in the air exclaimed "Freedom would this night have received her death stab from the hand of the White Tyrant had not a traitor arisen in the Camp of Oppression" with these words he plunged again into the ranks & disappeared but not before the golden diadem glittering on his forehead had revealed the arch-rebel Quashie.

The contest which then ensued & which dyed the plains of Camalia with blood I need not describef: it is a matter of History. Suffice it to say that of the twenty-five thousand gallant rebels whom the sun's nsing rays had that morning lighted to the contest high in hope & strong in valour the bodies of seventeen thousand eight hundred ere evening lay cold & still on a lost field of battle waiting till the vultures of Gibbel Kumri should scent the banquet from afar & grant them a living sepulchre in their devouring maws.

Our hero St Clair had played one of the mostconspicuous parts in the days tragedy. Reckless of Life which was now hateful to him he ought glory at the head of his brave Highlanders wherever the fight raged thickest & almost wished that the renown his dauntless courage was certain to earn might ring through the world whilst he himself lay in the voiceless tomb shrouded in his last garments & hushed to repose in the slumber from which none can awake. Fate however had decreed otherwise, the scymitar of the turbaned moor, the war spear of the savage Ashantee & even the renowned arrow of the quivered Abyssinian seemed all to have lost their powers of destruction when turned against him & when the battle was past & he with his little army slowly retraced their steps over the gory plain, it was with feelings approaching to envy that he viewed the ghastly corpses which pale & mangled lay scattered around.

On arriving at his own tent he called Andrew to assist him in changing his soiled & bloody dress, the page however did not obey this summons & after waiting sometime in expectation of his appearance he was obliged to manage as well as he could without any aid. having completed his toilette & partaken of some refreshment, he hastened as it was now late to attend the council. A profound silence pervaded the pavillion as he entered broken only by an occasional whisper. The Duke was sitting at the head of the table in an unusually pensive & meditative posture, his head resting on his hand, his brows contracted & an expression of deep solemnity diffused over his whole countenance. When St Clair was seated he looked up & glanced quickly round as if to ascertain that all the members were assembled then rising he proceed to address them briefly thus.

"Gentlemen the cause for which you are convened this night is of the last' importance, it is to make an enquiry which will involve the life and honnour of some individual or individuals amongst you. Two days ago a plan was broached in this place for attacking our enemies by night: they obtained intelligence of it & it was frustrated. Our business is now to discover how that intelligence reached them. I grieve to say that the words which you all heard the rebel-leader utter this day in the face of both armies have raised the horrible suspicion in my mind that it was by treachery. The traitor must be in this appartment & if he will now confess his guilt I solemnly promise to spare his life, but if he leaves it to be found out by another, then a death the most painful & dishonourable shall be his."

The Duke ceased. his stern & keen eye scrutinized the countenances of all who surrounded him one by one as if he would by that means have read the thoughts passing in every heart. For some minutes not a word was spoken ; each regarded his neighbour with a visage in which awe, curiosity & aimless suspicion were strangely mingled. The dim torchlight of the pavillion however showed one person whose calm & noble features displayed none of these emotions but on the contrary something like a lurking smile played round the corners of his mouth, it was Colonel Percy, in a short time he rose & advancing to the table where the duke sat said in a low voice " Will your grace permit me to speak?" "Certainly" was the reply.

"Then" continued the Colonel drawing his tall form up to the fullness of its majestic height, & cooly folding his arms "I have it in my power to reveal the wretch who betrayed his general & his comrades but before I mention the craven's name he shall have one more opportunity of saving his worthless life. Conscience stricken Traitor step forward & avail yourself of that mercy which is even now passing away never to return "

a breathless pause followed this awful appeal, not a whisper sounded, not a foot or hand moved .

"You will not accept the offered boon?" said Percy in deep thrilling tones "then your blood be upon your own head, My lord," he went on turning to the Duke while a supernatural light rose in his triumphant glance, "know that the base traitor sits at your right hand, yes the most Noble Ronald, Lord of St Clair, & cheiftain of Clan Albyn, has been bribed by the negro's wealth to blot with treachery a scutcheon owned by a hundred Earls"

One universal exclamation of "impossible" broke forth at this strange accusation. Each member of the council started from his seat & an expression of astonishment amounting almost to horror appeared in every countenance. The Duke & St Clair alone sat unmoved.

"Sir" said the former calmly but somewhat sternly "The most ample proof of this bold charge must be furnished, or that punishment intended for the accused shall recoil upon the accuser"

"I accept your grace's alternative" replied the Colonel bowing low "testimony is not wanting but first let me ask his lordship if he denies the charge"

"No" replied the Earl in a tone of startling vehemence, while he sprung from his seat as if actuated by some overmastering impulse, "No I scorn to deny the hellish falsehood, but I will prove its baseness on that tool of Satan with my sword"

as he spoke he snatched the weapon from its scabbard. "Gentlemen" said Percy wholly undisturbed by this action "that sword condemns him. mark it well & then tell me if such a one ought to be in the hands of a British Soldier."

All eyes turned on the glittering blade, it was a curved Moorish scymitar the handle richly decorated with gems of the highest value.

"that certainly has not been purchased in Verdopolis my lord" said the Duke after examining it. "how did you obtain it?"

“I know not” replied St Clair regarding the weapon with evident surprise “it is not my own - I never saw it till this moment”

“Recollect yourself” continued his friendly Judge. “Did you take it up by mistake on the field of battle?” The Earl shook his head.

“Perhaps” observed Colonel Percy with a sneer “I could inform his lordship how it came into his possession, if your Grace will allow me to produce my witness.”

The Duke signified his assent & Percy advancing towards the tent door called out “Travers bring in the prisoner”. this summons was answered by the appearance of a footman leading a boy whose keen eye & shrivelled, ill-favoured features instantly proclaimed him to be no other than our friend Andrew.

“How is this?” exclaimed St Clair stepping back in amazement, “Why is that boy in your custodyf? I claim him as my vassal & as his liege lord have a right to know of what he is accused”

“he shall inform you himself my lord” said the Colonel significantlyf.

“No” interposed the Duke. “I should like to hear it from you Sir m the first place.”

“I found him my lord” returned Percy “beyond the proscribed boundaries of the camp early yesterday morning when I was going m>

rounds as officer of the watchf. on questioning him where he had been, he appeared much agitated & returned no answers but such as were inconsistent & evidently false. I then threatened to punish him severely if he did not speak the truth, this had the desired effect, he immediately confessed that he had been to the African Tents, further questions extorted from him the information on which I have grounded my charge against his master & which he is now ready to communicate to your Grace”

“Andrew “ said the Duke “come here, will you promise to answer me truly such questions as I shall now ask?”

“I will” said the boy laying his hand on his heart with great apparent sincerity.

“By whom then were you sent to the Ashantee Camp?” “By my lord the Chief.” “What forP”

“To deliver a paper which was sealed & directed to Quashie the second King of the liberated Africans” “Had you ever been there before?” “yes once.” “When?” “That same night” “& why did you go then?”

f”I was sent to ask for a certain reward which Quashie had promised my master some time before in case he would tell him of all that passed in such councils as he should attend” “Did you hear that promise made?” “Yes”

“at What time?”

the first night after we arrived here a black man came to my lord’s tent & offered him twelve ackies? (I think he called it) of rock gold if he would do as he wanted him,” “And your master consented?”

“Did you see Quashie When you went to his Camp?” Yes”

"What was he likef?"

"He was a young man & very tall, his nose & lips were not flat & thick like the other blacks & he spoke English."

"The description you have given is very correctf. now tell me what the reward was you carried to your master."

"There was a black box filled with something very heavy, a large mantle made of different couloured silk & a sword which Quashie took from his own belt" "Describe the sword"

"It was crooked, almost like a sickle & had a great many precious stones about the handle"

here a general murmur of surprise broke from the bystanders. the Duke however sternly rebuked them & went on.

"Do you know where the black box & silk mantle were put?" "Yes my master commanded me to dig a hole in the centre of the tent & bury them there."

"Bobadil" said his Grace, "take one or two men with you to the Earl's tent & see if you can find these articles,"

Bobadil made a deep & silent reverence & departed to execute his commission. General Leaf now advanced to the table.

"May I ausk" said he addressing the page in a tone which retained something of the ancient long-drawn twang, "Whather you were by yourself when you went to the Raubels?"

"No My master went part of the way with me the first time" replied Andrew.

"I thought so for the night before last whan I was returning from de counshel saupper, I saw a tall man & a little boy going towards the camp boundaries & the man was dressed in a green plaid such as laurd St Clair wears"

"That is conclusive evidence" observed Colonel Percy, "it's corroborative" said the Duke "but I do not allow it to be quite conclusive".

Steps were now heard approaching the door of the pavillion. & in another moment General Bobadil entered bearing a black box in one hand & a folded silk garment in the other. he silently deposited both on the table, the Duke first examined the latter article, it was one of those splendid Ashantee cloths which exhibit in their ever-varying hues all the vivid coulours of the rainbow, he then opened the casket & took out its contents which consisted of five double gold chains each two yards long, a collar & a pair of bracelets of the same costly metal, several ornaments in aggry beads & an amulet in a gold case blazing with the finest diamonds.

"Good God" said he when he had completed the survey "I could not have thought that these paltry trinkets would have purchased a British Soldiers faith. St Clair rise - let me hear your defence. I wish with my whole heart that you may be able to disprove all we have heard this night"

"My lord" said the Earl who had hitherto been sitting motionless with his head muffled in his plaid “I have no defence to make. Heaven knows my innocence, but how can I prove to man that all the seemingly fair & consistent evidence which has just been delivered is in reality a most Satanic compound of the deepest & blackest falsehoods, my destiny is at present dark & gloomy I will wait with patience till a better prospect rises”

So saying he folded his arms & resumed his former attitude, the Duke then proceeded to say that he should not yet pronounce sentence but should give the accused six weeks to collect witnesses & prepare for a formal trial, he informed him likewise that he should be instantly conveyed to Verdopolis & intimated his intention of repairing thither himself as soon as the rebellion should be finally quelled. The council now broke up & St Clair was removed by a band of soldiers to the tent usually appropriated to prisoners.

I must beg the reader to immagine that a space of six weeks has elapsed before he again beholds my hero, during which time he has been removed to Verdopolis & placed in one of those state dungeons that lie under the Tower of All nations. It was a gloomy place, a thousand feet below the upper world, the thick walls & the low roof elevated on short broad arches as massive as the rock whence they were hewn, admitted no sound however faint transient & far away by which the tenant of this living tomb might be reminded that near three millions of his fellow men were living & moving in the free light of heaven above him. The dead the dreary silence which hung in the grave-like atmostphere was however broken at intervals by a noise which low indeed & seemingly as distant as the earth’s central abyss yet shook the dungeon’s walls & as it reverberated among the other subterranean caverns which were excavated above below & around rung on the ear with a deep hollow boom that chilled the heart & brought the sweat-drops of terror to the brow. This was the clam-clam sounding through underground passages a thousand miles in length from the haunted hills ofjibbel Kumri.

Here on the evening of that day preceding the one appointed for his final trial, St Clair lay stretched on a bed of straw, a glimmering lamp was placed on the damp ground beside him, its feeble rays inadequate to dissipate the almost palpable darkness which shrouded the remote recesses of this fearful prison yet shed a faint dying light on the unfortunate nobleman’s wasted person & features. Not a trace remained of that bright bloom which health & youthful vigour had once communicated to his now wan & sunken cheek, the light of his eye however yet remained unquenchedf; the princely beauty of his countenance though faded was not destroyed.

Suddenly as a harsh, grating sound like a key turning in a rusty lock proclaimed the jailor’s approach he started from his recumbent posture & sat upright. It was full ten minutes before all the fastenings which secured the dungeon door were removed, but at length the last bolt was withdrawn & the heavy iron portals being unfolded gave admittance not to the jailor but to a tall man whose form & face were wholly concealed by the foldings of his ample mantle. With a slow & cautious step he advanced toward the Earl’s straw couch, & placing himself on that side which was most dimly illuminated by the lamp addressed him thus.

"Earl of St Clair if I mistake not you lie here on the charge of Treachery"

"And if I do" replied the prisoner whose spirit confinement had not in the least subdued "does that circumstance give strangers a right to insult me by the mention of it?"

"Certainly not" returned the unknown visitor unmoved by the indirect reproach which his words conveyed "Nor did I intend to insult you by the question I have just asked, my firm conviction is that you are innocent of the crime laid to your charge - do I err in that belief?"

"Do you err in a belief of your own existencef?" "I should think not"

"Be as certain then of the one fact as you are of the other & you will be right. "

"That is decisive" replied the stranger in a tone which revealed that a smile was curling his lip & then after a pause he added "My lord does not your trial for this false offence come on tomorrow?" "it does"

"& are you provided with evidence to disprove it?" "No & I doubt not that before forty eight hours go by I shall have fallen a victim to the hate of a malignant enemy. Yes the last son of the lords of Roslyn will go to his grave branded with the name of traitor" "Not if I can help it!" said the unknown "and I will do my utmost" "Stranger you are kind but what alas is it in your power to effect? the evidence against me is strong, the web of deceit has been woven with impenetrable art."

"Oh but fear nothing. Truth shall prevail at last. tell me only who your concealed enemy is" "Colonel Percy, my accuser"

"I thought as much, & now I come to the object of my visit to you in this loathsome dungeon; why does he hate you?"

"Before I answer that question I must know who it is that asks me" "That cannot be" replied the Stranger drawing his ample cloak more firmly round him. "Thus far however I may say. I am the person who sometime since warned you to beware of Colonel Percy. I was present when the charge was brought against you & as I know something of the accuser's character & disposition I was led to suspect the truth of what he said knowing that nothing but a motive of the most powerful kind could induce him to be so active in an affair of that nature. I ask you to inform me what that motive is if you will be candid with me the young vulture shall miss his prey this time."

"Sir" replied the Earl "there is something in your voice which tells me I ought to trust you. Know then that I loved a woman who as I thought was the most beautiful & excellent of her sex. the Colonel was my rival and -"

"You have said enough" interrupted the stranger "I need no more to convince me fully of your perfect innocence. In such a case I know Colonel Percy would never rest till he had wreaked on his rival the deepest & deadliest revenge were that rival his own brother, the whole black conspiracy is now revealed: he is the traitor & heaven willing he shall die the traitor's death.

Tomorrow when you are called upon to produce evidence of your innocence do not hesitate to say that there is one in the court who if he will can prove you guiltless of the crime, leave the rest to me & now farewell I hope tomorrow night you will lay your head on a different pillowf "Farewell" said St Clair warmly grasping the stranger's hand "& doubt not my unknown friend that a Roslyn will know how to recompense those who have saved his honour"

with these words the Earl fell back on his lowly pallet, while the stranger hastened to regain the upper Earth which he had quitted to fulfil his benevolent erand.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

The old Hall of Military Justice (it has lately been pulled down and a new one erected in its stead) was a vast & gloomy building, surrounded by Galleries & surmounted by a huge dark dome upheld by massive columns the shadow of whose ponderous shafts united with the louring roof diffused around an air of profound & appropriate solemnity, here on the 25th of September 1814, upward of ten thousand people were assembled to view the trial of the Earl of St Clair for high Treason. The Duke of Wellington occupied the principal seat among thejudges who were twelve in number. A degree of intense interest contracted every brow as the noble prisoner loaded with irons & attired in the striking costume of his clan was led by a guard of soldiers into the centre of the hall. None could behold his lofty bearing his majestic form, his youthful & handsome features, & the stately gait with wich he moved in spite of his heavy fetters, without experiencing an involuntary conviction that he who stood before them was no traitor.

The first step taken by the court was to demand a recapitulation of the evidence which had already been adduced, this was accordingly gone into: the jewels, the amulet, the cloth, & the sword were all sedulously displayed & it appeared that nothing was wanting to prove the prisoner's guilt in the most satisfactory manner. "He is lost beyond redemption" was the general feeling which prevaded the bosom of every spectator. The Earl was now called upon for his defence, slowly he rose & with a calm dignity of manner proceeded to assert his innocence & deprecate the clemency of his Judges .

"My Lords" said he rising in energy as he went on "I do not implore an acquittal . that would be the part of a man who conscious of guilt seeks mercy as a boon. no I claim it, it is my right, I am innocent & I demand to be treated as such, I conjure you to do your duty, believe the word of a nobleman whose honnour till now was never doubted & reject that of a - what shall I call him - of a man who to speak in mild terms is well known utterly to disregard both truth & honour when injuries either real or supposed awake in his bosom the blood-thirsty passion of revenge. And my lords for the other witness" (here he turned his full dark eyes on the perjured page who shrunk as if blighted by his glance) "I know not what demon has possessed my vassal's breast what hell-born eloquence has persuaded the orphan who since his birth has existed only on my bounty, to aid in the destruction of his lord & benefactor, but this I know they who shall condemn me for such cursed testimony will sin both in the eyes of men & angels. My lords avoid the sin for the sake of that Justice whose servants you profess to be & whose image stands there the Guardian of your hall." (every eye turned as he spoke to the colossal statue of Justice which stood conspicuous in the light of the lofty window. meantime the Earl continued) "My lords avoid it for your own sake for I warn you the last St Clair will not die unavenged. There are on the heights of my own Elimbos ten thousand unconquered warriors, seven times that number fierce as lions & free as the Eagles that furnish their crests dwell in the bosoms of those hundred glens that ruled by no sovereign controled by no laws lie among the wild Branni Hills. And when the news that I am dead that the house of their chief is fallen, that his name & fame are blasted shall reach these wild sons of the mist, let my rers who cut me off with the sword & under the mask of Justice tremble in their high places. My lords I will say no more, do as you list & gather the fruit of your deed."

The question was now put whether he had any witnesses to call. For a moment he was silent & seemed lost in deep thought but almost immediately raising his head he said in a firm tone "I believe there is one in this hall who if he will can do me great service." there was a pause, the Judges (except the Duke who throughout the trial had preserved his usual imperturbable calmness of demeanour) regarded each other with looks of astonishment. The exulting smile which had begun to dawn on Colonel Percy's cheek vanished, the page turned pale, & St Clair's own countenance assumed an expression of anxious expectation, at length a slight bustle was heard in one part of the hall, a movement became perceivable among the dense & hitherto almost motionless mass of spectators, their close ranks slowly opened & a young man of handsome & genteel appearance attired in an officer's undress uniform, advanced to the Judges' seats.

"Are you come to bear testimony in favour of the prisoner?" asked the Duke of Wellingtonf.

"I am" replied the young officer bowing respectfully to his interrogator.

"what is your name & profession?"

"My name is John Bud & I hold the rank of Ensign in the Sixty-fifth regiment of horse commanded by Colonel Percy"

"Repeat what you know concerning this affair but first let the oath be administered to him."

this formula being complied with Ensign Bud proceeded to give evidence to the following effect. That on the night preceding that on which the army received orders to attack the enemies camp, he was returning to his own tent after passing the evening with a friend, when just as he passed the outskirts of a thick grove of trees, beside the river, the words "thou shalt obey me this instant Dwarf or I'll stab thee to the heart" caught his ear, that on looking through the branches he beheld Colonel Percy & a man dressed in livery holding between them a little boy whom he believed to be the same now present in their lordships' court, that the child fell on his knees & promised to obey them in every-thing, That the Colonel then told him to go to the African Camp & claim a reward in the name of his master the Earl of St Clair for intelligence of an important nature concerning certain plans which had just been resolved on in a council of war, that on the boy's declaring he did not know the way the Colonel said he would go with him as far as the boundaries, that then after wrapping himself in a green plaid which he took from the child, all three left the place & were soon out of sight. As the witness concluded this singular piece of evidence, Colonel Percy started from his seat & sprung rather than stepped to the bar.

"My lords" he exclaimed in a loud but agitated voice which while his flushed cheek, fierce eye & the veins swelled almost to bursting on his forehead proclaimed the violence of the emotions that were contending within him "my lords I implore you not to believe a word which has been uttered by that forsworn that perjured minion, mean revenge has dictated -" he was going on with increasing vehemence when the Duke of Wellington commanded silence.

A short conference carried on in such low tones as scarcely to be audible then suceeded among the judges the result of which was that they declared that Ensign Bud's testimony was not sufficiently clear & decisive to warrant an immediate acquittal but that they should remand the prisoner for the present in order that he might have an opportunity of procuring additional evidence. The court was now about to dissolve when a movement became again visible among the crowd, it opened a second time & our friend Mr Sdeath appeared' followed by six men bearing a litter on which lay a man dressed in the blue silver laced coat of a foot man. His countenance was ghastly pale & his clothes were covered with recent stains of blood. "Set him down here at the foot of his master as in duty bound" said Mr Sdeath, coming forward with an air of bustling assiduity, & carefully assisting the men to deposit their doleful burden just beside Colonel Percy.

"What do you mean by this you villain?" asked he turning as pale as the dying man before him. Sdeath answered this question by a quiet inward chuckle & a significant nod of intelligence, then turning to the Duke he said "You see my lord I was daunering' out this morning up the valley to get a breath of country air when just as I got to a very lonely & quiet spot I heard a long rattling groan like as it might be of a man that's either drunk or discontented, so I turned to the place it seemed to come from & what should I see but this here carrion lying writhing on the ground like a trodden snake. "What's to do with you?" says I "& who's brought you to that smart pass my beauty?" "Colonel Percy" he squeeled out "Oh carry me to Verdopolis carry me to the hall of Justice ; let me be revenged on the wretch before I die" There was no resisting this pathetic appeal, besides I have a great affection for the Colonel & knowing him to be a wildish young man (youth alas! has its follies as well as old age) I thought the sight of his poor servant in the dead thraws might do him good, so I ran hired a litter & brought him here according to his wish"

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked the Duke "Who is the wounded man?"

“I am a miserable & deluded being” replied Travers in a hollow tremulous tone “but if it please heaven to grant me strength & time for confession I will ease my conscience of a part at least of that fiery burden which presses on it. Let it be known to all in this place that the Earl of St Clair is totally innocent of the crime laid to his charge. My master is the traitor, yes - but - but I cannot get on,” here he paused from exhaustion his eyes closed his breath came thick & to all present it appeared as if he were dying. on a glass of wine being administered to him however he revived in some degree, raising himself in his litter he requested to speak with St Clair in Private. Orders were immediately given for the crowd to be cleared out, the subordinate Judges likewise removed to a distant part of the hall & none remained within hearing of his confession except the Duke of Wellington, Ensign Bud & the Earl himself, this being done the poor wretch proceeded thus.

“My lord Colonel Percy hates you for what reasons you yourself best know, he recognized you for an old enemy at the Olympic Games & ordered me after the Prizes were distributed to watch your motions & inform him where you should take up quarters for the night. I dogged you as far as the Zephyr Valley & then returned to tell my master. When we returned you were fast asleep, & that boy whom from his dress short stature & withered unnatural features my master always called the Green Dwarf was laid at your feet, the Colonel then bade me go & fetch the boy to him. I did so & when he was brought, Percy drew his sword & threatened to kill him on the spot if he would not instantly swear to obey him in every thing he should command, the lad called out that if he did obey him it should be for the promise of a reward rather than for a threat of punishment, my master told him to name his own reward; he said he would do so when he knew what his business was to be. Colonel Percy told him in the first place it was to tell him who his master was. he said he would do that for five pounds & then confessed directly that you were the Earl of St Clair, afterwards the Colonel told him that he was to be a spy on all your actions, to note particularly whether you went to Charlesworth Castle” to follow you thither, if possible to listen at the door of the appartment to which you might be shown & to report everything that was said to him. The little mercenary wretch swore to do all this for a hundred pounds. He was then informed in what part of the city his employer resided, & dismissed to commence his villainous system of espial. About a week afterwards he arrived at our house panting & quite out of breath & desired to see the Colonel instantly, he had brought information that you & lady Emily Charlesworth had concerted a plan of elopement together which was to be put in practice at twelve o’clock that night, my master commanded him to delay you as much beyond the time as he could & then dismissed him. At eleven o’clock he & myself set of in a carriage & six for the castle, we reached the place of rendezvous a chestnut avenue shortly after twelve, at the entrance my master got out & went a little way up the walk, he soon returned with the lady &

handed her into the carriage"

"Did she go with him willinglyp" asked St Clair in a tone of the deepest agitationf.

"yes but it was because he had passed himself for you, & as he had on a travelling cloak & the trees threw a very dark shade it was impossible for her to discover the cheat."

"But she might have recognized his voice, he spoke to her did he not?"

"Very seldom & when he did it was scarcely above his breath"

"Well proceed : where did you carry her?"

"That I cannot, dare not tell. I am bound by a solemn oath never to reveal it & surely you would not have me add fresh agonies to my dying hour by committing the crime of perjury?"

In this determination the man seemed fixed. St Clair tried in vain arguments, entreaties & commands & seeing it was impossible to prevail with him & that the sands of life were running very low, he at length permitted him to continue his confession.

"When she was secured" said he "We returned to Verdopolis & the next day accompanied the rest of the army on their march against the rebels, you arrived at the camp shortly after us. as soon as he saw you my master resolved to rid himself of an abhorred rival in your person & was confirmed in this resolution by seeing the distinction with which his Grace the Duke of Wellington treated you. accordingly one night he ordered me to fetch him the Green Dwarf. I proceeded to your tent for this purpose & by means of a peculiar signal with which he was acquainted called him out. Subsequently by means of threats & promises the Dwarf was induced to lend his aid in executing the scheme which my master had devised for your disgrace & death, he went to the camp, betrayed the secrets of the council in your name & brought back as a recompense the articles which are now lying on that table, these he afterwards buried in your tent, he removed the sword which was fastened to your belt & put that scymitar in its place, & finally he completed his treachery by delivering that false evidence which has so nearly been the means of causing you to incur an undeserved & shameful death"

here Travers paused again to wipe off the death-sweats which were starting in large drops from his pallid forehead.

"you have nobly cleared St Clair's character" said the Duke of Wellington "now inform us by whom & how the wound of which you are dying has been inflicted"

"By my master," replied the unhappy man "I informed him this morning as we were returning from his Uncle's country seat in the valley that I intended to reform & lead a better life, for that the sins I had already committed lay like a leaden weight at my heart. At first he laughed at me & pretended to think I was in jest, but on my assuring him that I never was more serious in my life, he grew gloomy, we walked together for some time in silence, but at length just as we came to a very lonely part of the road he drew his sword & stabbed me suddenly in the side saying as I fell, with a loud laugh “now go & reform in Hell” I can speak no longer & you know the rest”

The last part of Traver’s communication was uttered in a very faint & broken voice, when the excitement of talking was past he fell into a sort of lethargy which continued about ten minutes & then with a single gasping groan & convulsive shudder of the whole frame his soul & body parted for ever asunder.

The Crowd were now again admitted into the hall, the judges returned to their station & the Duke of Wellington after publicly declaring that St Clair’s honour was unblemished & that the charge brought against him had risen entirely from the machinations of a malignant enemy, ordered his fetters to be taken off & commanded them to be fastened on the limbs of Colonel Percy & the Green Dwarf instead, subsequently he condemned the former of these worthy personages to Death & the latter to ten years labour at the galleys.

Matters being thus settled the Duke rose from his seat & taking St Clair by the hand he said “my lord I claim you as my guest whilst you remain in Verdopolis, you must comply with my request were it only to show that you bear no malice against me for the six weeks imprisonment to which you have been subjected.”

Of course St Clair could not resist an invitation thus courteously urged & accordingly he accompanied the Duke to Waterloo Palace. On his way thither he informed his noble conductor of the mysterious incognito who had visited him in his dungeon & expressed a strong desire to discover who he was that he might recompense him accord- lng to the signal service he had received at his hands. “Was it Ensign Bud do you think?” said the Dukef. “no” replied St Clair “he was taller & the tones of his voice were Very different. indeed if I may be permitted to form so presumptuous a conjecture on such slight grounds, I should say that I am at this moment conversing with my unknown friend” he Duke smiled but returned no answer.

“I am not mistaken then” continued St Clair eagerly “& it is to your Grace that I owe a continuance both of life & honour”

as he spoke the silent gratitude which beamed forth from his fine eyes expressed his thanks more clearly than any words could have done. “Well” said the Duke “I will confess that you have made a true guess, & now I suppose you would like to know the reasons which led me in the first place to give you that warning on the banks of the Senegal. It was simply this . I had witnessed the sort of quarrel which took place between you & Colonel Percy during supper in my pavil- lion. I saw him lay his hand on his sword & then relinquish it with a look & a muttered exclamation which told me plainly that the gratification of present revenge was postponed only for some more delicious future prospect & as the life of the chieftain of Clan-Albyn was of some value in my estimation I determined at least to set him on his guard against the attempts of an insidious enemy. Then for my visit in the prison that was prompted by the information Ensign Bud had communicated to me &

I thought that that method of summoning him to give evidence which I pointed out would make a deeper impression on the minds of the other judges than if the ordinary way of calling a witness were followed."

As the Duke concluded this explanation they reached Waterloo Palace. They immediately proceeded to the dining-room where dinner was already prepared. During this meal St Clair spoke very little & eat less, his spirits which had been in some degree excited by the unexpected events of the morning now began to flag. The thought of lady Emily & of the forlorn & wretched condition to which she was probably reduced communicated a mournful gloom to his mind. The Duke perceived this & after a few vain attempts to dispel it he said, "I see what you are thinking of my lord so come I'll carry you to my wife. perhaps her sympathy will be some consolation to your distress" St Clair followed almost mechanically as his noble host led the way to the drawing room. On entering they found the Duchess seated on the sofa & engaged in some ornamental labour of the needle, beside her was a little Indian stand supporting her work-box & a few books, near this & with her back turned to the door was seated another elegant female form over whose rich brown tresses was thrown a transparent veil of white gauze according to the graceful fashion of the times, her head was resting on her hand in a pensive posture & when the Duke & his guest were announced she did not rise nor give any other symptom of being conscious of their presence except a sudden & convulsive start, the Duchess however left her seat & advanced to meet St Clair with a benignant smile.

"I was sure" said she "that Justice would be done & that your fame would come out of the fiery ordeal seven times purified, now my lord will you permit me to introduce you to a friend of mine, here lovef (addressing the silent lady) ttis one whom Fortune has severely tried & who now expects from her & you a recompense for all he has suffered."

the lady rose, threw back her veil, there was a momentary pause, a joyful exclamation & St Clair clasped to his bosom his dear & long- lost Emily, it now only remains for me to explain how this happy catastrophe was brought about which duty I shall discharge as briefly as possible.

During a period of four weeks lady Emily had pined in her lonely prison under the surveillance of the wretched Bertha who regularly visited her three times a day to supply her with food but at all other times remained in a distant part of the castle. at the usual hour on the first day of the fith week she did not make her appearance, lady Emily whose appetite was much impaired by grief & confinement at first was rather pleased than otherwise with the ommission. but when night came she began to feel some symptoms of hunger. the next day likewise elapsed & neither food nor drink passed her now parched & quivering lips. On the morning of the third day she was reduced to such a state of weakness from inanition that she felt totally unable to leave her bed, while she lay there expecting death & almost wishing for it The tramp of a heavy step in the antichamber & the sound of a gruff voice calling out "Is there any living body besides owls & bats in this here old ancient heap of a ruin?", roused her from the lethargic stupor into which she had fallen. Collecting her remaining strength with a strong effort she answered that there was an unhappy woman ^{lr}nprisoned here who would give much for deliverance & a restoration to her friends .

apparently the querist heard her voice faint as it was for he immediately broke open the door of her chamber & appeared in the shape of a tall & athletic man dressed in the usual garb of rare lads & armed with a long fowling peice. "What's to do with you poor heart that you look so pale & thin?" said he advancing towards her. she shortly informed him that she had eaten nothing for three days & begged a little food for the love of heaven, he directly took from a pouch which was slung over his shoulders a little bread & cheese. While she was eating these coarse though acceptable viands he told her that his name was Dick Crack- Skull & that while poaching a bit in the forest he had lit upon this old Tower which from motives of idle curiosity he had entered through one of the unglazed windows, that in his perambulations through the desolate halls he had to his horror stumbled on the corpse of an old & hideous woman who to his mind looked for all the world like a witch; that he then supposed that there must be some other inhabitants & so had gone on bawling as he went till he reached the antichamber of lady Emily's appartment whose life he had thus been the providential means of saving.

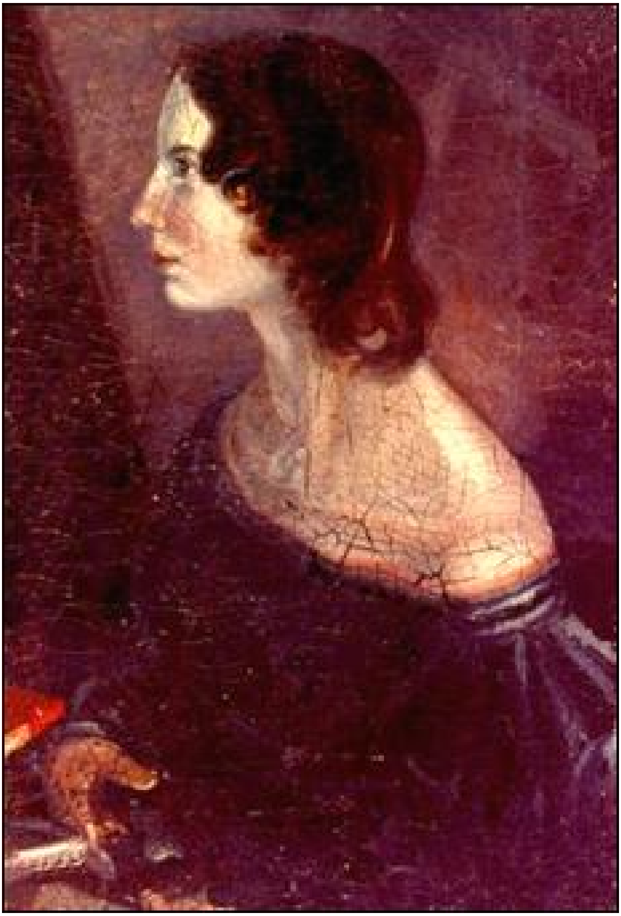
The next day after covering Bertha's dead body with a heap of stones Dick set out with his charge for Verdopolis. on arriving there he accompanied the lady at her own desire to Waterloo Palace. here she put herself under the Duchess's protection who after bestowing on Dick a reward that made his heart leap for joy dismissed him with all honour, from my mother the unfortunate damsel received the most tender & assiduous Kindness insomuch that she won her entire confidence & all the tale of Lady Emily's mournful loves was poured into her beloved patronesse's sympathizing ear. When the news of lord St Clair's incarceration for high treason arrived her grief may be better imagined than described, But now the pleasure of this happy meeting when she received her lover with life untouched & honour unsullied more than counterbalanced all her past tears & agony. The good old Marquis of Charlesworth was now easily brought to consent to their union & according to all accounts never was felicity so lasting & unbroken as that which crowned the future lives of the noble Earl of St Clair & the beautiful Lady Emily Charlesworth.

Having thus wound up the denoument of my brief & jejeune narrative I will conclude by a glance at the future fortunes of Colonel Percy & his accomplice. The Sentence of Death which had been passed on the former was afterwards commuted to exile for sixteen years, during this period he wandered through the world sometimes a Pirate, sometimes a leader of Banditti & ever the companion of the most dissolute & profligate of mankind. At the expiration of the term of banishment, he returned to Verdopolis, broken both in health & fortune to claim the inheritance of his uncle the Duke of Beaufort who had been for some time dead, on enquiry however he found that that Nobleman had married shortly after his disgrace became known & had become the father of two sons on whom consequently his estates & title devolved, thus baffled the Colonel turned his attention to political affairs &, finding himself disowned by all his relations discarded his real name & assumed a feigned one. Few now can recognize in that seditious demagogue that worn out & faded debauchee Alexander Rogue Viscount Ellrington, the once brilliant & handsome young soldier Colonel Augustus Percy.’ as for Andrew when he was released from his service on the galleys he became a printer’s devil, from thence he rose to the office of compositor & being of a saving & pilfering disposition he at length by some means acquired money enough to purchase a commission in the army, he then took to the trade of author published drivelling rhymes which he called Poetry & snivelling tales which went under the denomination of novels. I need say no more, many are yet living who can discover a passage in the early life of Captain Tree in this my Tale of the Green Dwarf.

Charlotte Bronte September 2nd 1833

Finis

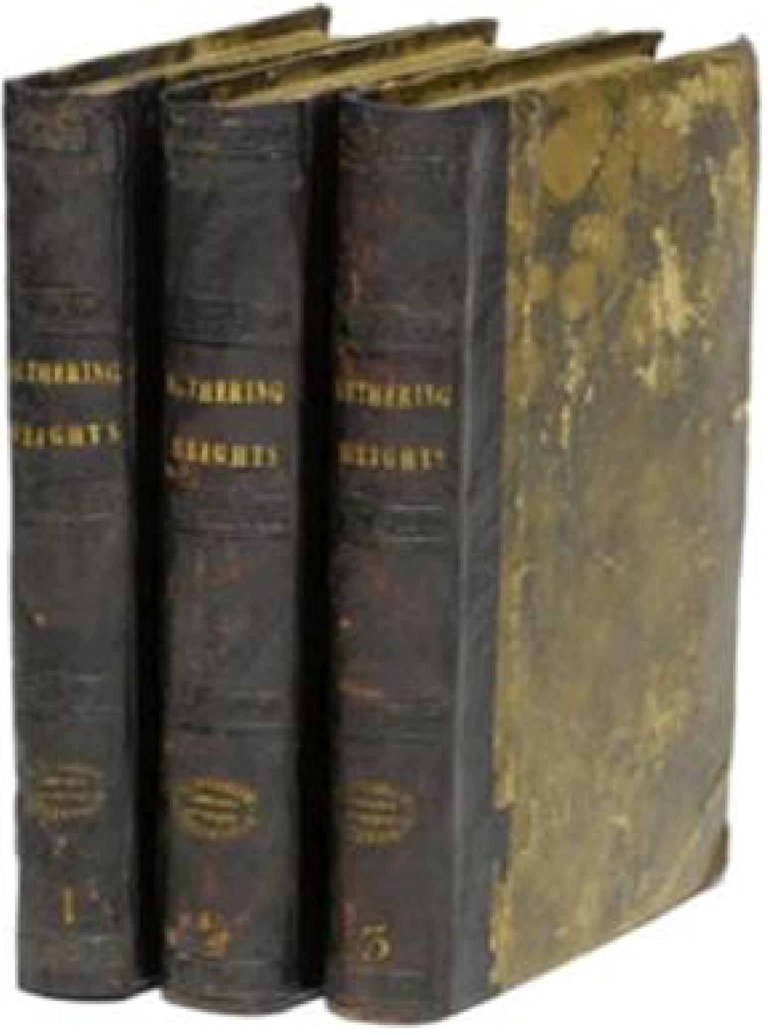
Emily Brontë's Novel



A portrait of Emily made by her brother

WUTHERING HEIGHTS

This is the only novel by Emily Brontë, which was first published in 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell. A second edition was edited by her sister Charlotte after Emily's early death. The name of the novel comes from the Yorkshire manor on the moors on which the story is set, yet 'wuthering' is a Yorkshire word for turbulent weather. The novel tells the tale of the consuming and passionate, yet thwarted love between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. Now considered a classic of English literature, *Wuthering Heights* received mixed critical reviews when first published, mainly due to its stark depiction of mental and physical cruelty.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WUTHERING HEIGHTS

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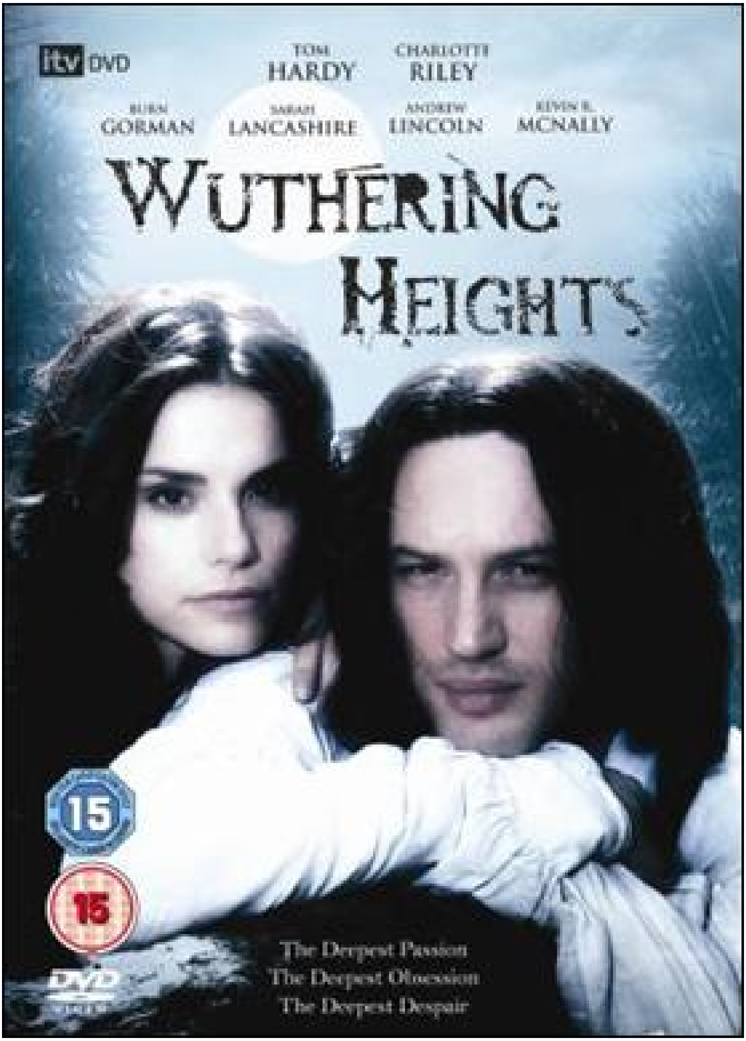
Top Withens, a ruined farmhouse overlooking the moors, south of Emily's hometown, Haworth – believed by many to be the inspiration of the novel

Lawrence Olivier in the famous 1939 film adaptation of 'Wuthering Heights'

A passion.
An obsession.
A love that destroyed
everyone it touched.
Juliette Binoche
Ralph Fiennes
Emily Brontë's
Wuthering Heights
FOR THE FIRST TIME EMILY BRONTË'S FULL STORY IS TOLD

The 1992 film version of the novel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The Deepest Passion
The Deepest Obsession
The Deepest Despair
DVD

The 2006 British TV series adaptation

CHAPTER I

1801. — I have just returned from a visit to my landlord — the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with. This is certainly a beautiful country! In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthropist's heaven: and Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name.

'Mr. Heathcliff?' I said.

A nod was the answer.

'Mr. Lockwood, your new tenant, sir. I do myself the honour of calling as soon as possible after my arrival, to express the hope that I have not inconvenienced you by my perseverance in soliciting the occupation of Thrushcross Grange: I heard yesterday you had had some thoughts — '

'Thrushcross Grange is my own, sir,' he interrupted, wincing. 'I should not allow any one to inconvenience me, if I could hinder it — walk in!'

The 'walk in' was uttered with closed teeth, and expressed the sentiment, 'Go to the Deuce:' even the gate over which he leant manifested no sympathising movement to the words; and I think that circumstance determined me to accept the invitation: I felt interested in a man who seemed more exaggeratedly reserved than myself.

When he saw my horse's breast fairly pushing the barrier, he did put out his hand to unchain it, and then sullenly preceded me up the causeway, calling, as we entered the court, — 'Joseph, take Mr. Lockwood's horse; and bring up some wine.'

'Here we have the whole establishment of domestics, I suppose,' was the reflection suggested by this compound order. 'No wonder the grass grows up between the flags, and cattle are the only hedge-cutters.'

Joseph was an elderly, nay, an old man: very old, perhaps, though hale and sinewy. 'The Lord help us!' he soliloquised in an undertone of peevish displeasure, while relieving me of my horse: looking, meantime, in my face so sourly that I charitably conjectured he must have need of divine aid to digest his dinner, and his pious ejaculation had no reference to my unexpected advent.

Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling. 'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.

Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door; above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys, I detected the date '1500,' and the name 'Hareton Earnshaw.' I would have made a few comments, and requested a short history of the place from the surly owner; but his attitude at the door appeared to demand my speedy entrance, or complete departure, and I had no desire to aggravate his impatience previous to inspecting the penetralium.

One stop brought us into the family sitting-room, without any introductory lobby or passage: they call it here 'the house' pre-eminently. It includes kitchen and parlour, generally; but I believe at Wuthering Heights the kitchen is forced to retreat altogether into another quarter: at least I distinguished a chatter of tongues, and a clatter of culinary utensils, deep within; and I observed no signs of roasting, boiling, or baking, about the huge fireplace; nor any glitter of copper saucepans and tin cullenders on the walls. One end, indeed, reflected splendidly both light and heat from ranks of immense pewter dishes, interspersed with silver jugs and tankards, towering row after row, on a vast oak dresser, to the very roof. The latter had never been under-drawn: its entire anatomy lay bare to an inquiring eye, except where a frame of wood laden with oatcakes and clusters of legs of beef, mutton, and ham, concealed it. Above the chimney were sundry villainous old guns, and a couple of horse-pistols: and, by way of ornament, three gaudily-painted canisters disposed along its ledge. The floor was of smooth, white stone; the chairs, high-backed, primitive structures, painted green: one or two heavy black ones lurking in the shade. In an arch under the dresser reposed a huge, liver-coloured bitch pointer, surrounded by a swarm of squealing puppies; and other dogs haunted other recesses.

The apartment and furniture would have been nothing extraordinary as belonging to a homely, northern farmer, with a stubborn countenance, and stalwart limbs set out to advantage in knee-breeches and gaiters. Such an individual seated in his arm-chair, his mug of ale frothing on the round table before him, is to be seen in any circuit of five or six miles among these hills, if you go at the right time after dinner. But Mr. Heathcliff forms a singular contrast to his abode and style of living. He is a dark-skinned gipsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman: that is, as much a gentleman as many a country squire: rather slovenly, perhaps, yet not looking amiss with his negligence, because he has an erect and handsome figure; and rather morose. Possibly, some people might suspect him of a degree of under-bred pride; I have a sympathetic chord within that tells me it is nothing of the sort: I know, by instinct, his reserve springs from an aversion to showy displays of feeling — to manifestations of mutual kindliness. He'll love and hate equally under cover, and esteem it a species of impertinence to be loved or hated again. No, I'm running on too fast: I bestow my own attributes over-liberally on him. Mr. Heathcliff may have entirely dissimilar reasons for keeping his hand out of the way when he meets a would-be acquaintance, to those which actuate me. Let me hope my constitution is almost peculiar: my dear mother used to say I should never have a comfortable home; and only last summer I proved myself perfectly unworthy of one.

While enjoying a month of fine weather at the sea-coast, I was thrown into the company of a most fascinating creature: a real goddess in my eyes, as long as she took no notice of me. I 'never told my love' vocally; still, if looks have language, the merest idiot might have guessed I was over head and ears: she understood me at last, and looked a return — the sweetest of all imaginable looks. And what did I do? I confess it with shame — shrunk icily into myself, like a snail; at every glance retired colder and farther; till finally the poor innocent was led to doubt her own senses, and, overwhelmed with confusion at her supposed mistake, persuaded her mamma to decamp. By this curious turn of disposition I have gained the reputation of deliberate heartlessness; how undeserved, I alone can appreciate.

I took a seat at the end of the hearthstone opposite that towards which my landlord advanced, and filled up an interval of silence by attempting to caress the canine mother, who had left her nursery, and was sneaking wolfishly to the back of my legs, her lip curled up, and her white teeth watering for a snatch. My caress provoked a long, guttural gnarl.

'You'd better let the dog alone,' growled Mr. Heathcliff in unison, checking fiercer demonstrations with a punch of his foot. 'She's not accustomed to be spoiled — not kept for a pet.' Then, striding to a side door, he shouted again, 'Joseph!'

Joseph mumbled indistinctly in the depths of the cellar, but gave no intimation of ascending; so his master dived down to him, leaving me *vis-à-vis* the ruffianly bitch and a pair of grim shaggy sheep-dogs, who shared with her a jealous guardianship over all my movements. Not anxious to come in contact with their fangs, I sat still; but, imagining they would scarcely understand tacit insults, I unfortunately indulged in winking and making faces at the trio, and some turn of my physiognomy so irritated madam, that she suddenly broke into a fury and leapt on my knees. I flung her back, and hastened to interpose the table between us. This proceeding aroused the whole hive: half-a-dozen four-footed fiends, of various sizes and ages, issued from hidden dens to the common centre. I felt my heels and coat-laps peculiar subjects of assault; and parrying off the larger combatants as effectually as I could with the poker, I was constrained to demand, aloud, assistance from some of the household in re-establishing peace.

Mr. Heathcliff and his man climbed the cellar steps with vexatious phlegm: I don't think they moved one second faster than usual, though the hearth was an absolute tempest of worrying and yelping. Happily, an inhabitant of the kitchen made more despatch: a lusty dame, with tucked-up gown, bare arms, and fire-flushed cheeks, rushed into the midst of us flourishing a frying-pan: and used that weapon, and her tongue, to such purpose, that the storm subsided magically, and she only remained, heaving like a sea after a high wind, when her master entered on the scene.

'What the devil is the matter?' he asked, eyeing me in a manner that I could ill endure, after this inhospitable treatment.

'What the devil, indeed!' I muttered. 'The herd of possessed swine could have had no worse spirits in them than those animals of yours, sir. You might as well leave a stranger with a brood of tigers!'

'They won't meddle with persons who touch nothing,' he remarked, putting the bottle before me, and restoring the displaced table. 'The dogs do right to be vigilant. Take a glass of wine?'

'No, thank you.'

'Not bitten, are you?'

'If I had been, I would have set my signet on the biter.' Heathcliff's countenance relaxed into a grin.

'Come, come,' he said, 'you are flurried, Mr. Lockwood. Here, take a little wine. Guests are so exceedingly rare in this house that I and my dogs, I am willing to own, hardly know how to receive them. Your health, sir?'

I bowed and returned the pledge; beginning to perceive that it would be foolish to sit sulking for the misbehaviour of a pack of curs; besides, I felt loth to yield the fellow further amusement at my expense; since his humour took that turn. He — probably swayed by prudential consideration of the folly of offending a good tenant — relaxed a little in the laconic style of chipping off his pronouns and auxiliary verbs, and introduced what he supposed would be a subject of interest to me, — a discourse on the advantages and disadvantages of my present place of retirement. I found him very intelligent on the topics we touched; and before I went home, I was encouraged so far as to volunteer another visit to-morrow. He evidently wished no repetition of my intrusion. I shall go, notwithstanding. It is astonishing how sociable I feel myself compared with him.

CHAPTER II

Yesterday afternoon set in misty and cold. I had half a mind to spend it by my study fire, instead of wading through heath and mud to Wuthering Heights. On coming up from dinner, however, (N.B. — I dine between twelve and one o'clock; the housekeeper, a matronly lady, taken as a fixture along with the house, could not, or would not, comprehend my request that I might be served at five) — on mounting the stairs with this lazy intention, and stepping into the room, I saw a servant-girl on her knees surrounded by brushes and coal-scuttles, and raising an infernal dust as she extinguished the flames with heaps of cinders. This spectacle drove me back immediately; I took my hat, and, after a four-miles' walk, arrived at Heathcliff's garden-gate just in time to escape the first feathery flakes of a snow-shower.

On that bleak hill-top the earth was hard with a black frost, and the air made me shiver through every limb. Being unable to remove the chain, I jumped over, and, running up the flagged causeway bordered with straggling gooseberry-bushes, knocked vainly for admittance, till my knuckles tingled and the dogs howled.

'Wretched inmates!' I ejaculated, mentally, 'you deserve perpetual isolation from your species for your churlish inhospitality. At least, I would not keep my doors barred in the day-time. I don't care — I will get in!' So resolved, I grasped the latch and shook it vehemently. Vinegar-faced Joseph projected his head from a round window of the barn.

'What are ye for?' he shouted. 'T' maister's down i' t' fowld. Go round by th' end o' t' laith, if ye went to spake to him.'

'Is there nobody inside to open the door?' I hallooed, responsively.

'There's nobbut t' missis; and shoo'll not oppen 't an ye mak' yer flaysome dins till neeght.'

'Why? Cannot you tell her whom I am, eh, Joseph?'

'Nor-ne me! I'll hae no hend wi't,' muttered the head, vanishing.

The snow began to drive thickly. I seized the handle to essay another trial; when a young man without coat, and shouldering a pitchfork, appeared in the yard behind. He hailed me to follow him, and, after marching through a wash-house, and a paved area containing a coal-shed, pump, and pigeon-cot, we at length arrived in the huge, warm, cheerful apartment where I was formerly received. It glowed delightfully in the radiance of an immense fire, compounded of coal, peat, and wood; and near the table, laid for a plentiful evening meal, I was pleased to observe the 'missis,' an individual whose existence I had never previously suspected. I bowed and waited, thinking she would bid me take a seat. She looked at me, leaning back in her chair, and remained motionless and mute.

'Rough weather!' I remarked. 'I'm afraid, Mrs. Heathcliff, the door must bear the consequence of your servants' leisure attendance: I had hard work to make them hear me.'

She never opened her mouth. I stared — she stared also: at any rate, she kept her eyes on me in a cool, regardless manner, exceedingly embarrassing and disagreeable.

'Sit down,' said the young man, gruffly. 'He'll be in soon.'

I obeyed; and hemmed, and called the villain Juno, who deigned, at this second interview, to move the extreme tip of her tail, in token of owning my acquaintance.

'A beautiful animal!' I commenced again. 'Do you intend parting with the little ones, madam?'

'They are not mine,' said the amiable hostess, more repellingly than Heathcliff himself could have replied.

'Ah, your favourites are among these?' I continued, turning to an obscure cushion full of something like cats.

'A strange choice of favourites!' she observed scornfully.

Unluckily, it was a heap of dead rabbits. I hemmed once more, and drew closer to the hearth, repeating my comment on the wildness of the evening.

'You should not have come out,' she said, rising and reaching from the chimney-piece two of the painted canisters.

Her position before was sheltered from the light; now, I had a distinct view of her whole figure and countenance. She was slender, and apparently scarcely past girlhood: an admirable form, and the most exquisite little face that I have ever had the pleasure of beholding; small features, very fair; flaxen ringlets, or rather golden, hanging loose on her delicate neck; and eyes, had they been agreeable in expression, that would have been irresistible: fortunately for my susceptible heart, the only sentiment they evinced hovered between scorn and a kind of desperation, singularly unnatural to be detected there. The canisters were almost out of her reach; I made a motion to aid her; she turned upon me as a miser might turn if any one attempted to assist him in counting his gold.

'I don't want your help,' she snapped; 'I can get them for myself.'

'I beg your pardon!' I hastened to reply.

'Were you asked to tea?' she demanded, tying an apron over her neat black frock, and standing with a spoonful of the leaf poised over the pot.

'I shall be glad to have a cup,' I answered.

'Were you asked?' she repeated.

'No,' I said, half smiling. 'You are the proper person to ask me.'

She flung the tea back, spoon and all, and resumed her chair in a pet; her forehead corrugated, and her red under-lip pushed out, like a child's ready to cry.

Meanwhile, the young man had slung on to his person a decidedly shabby upper garment, and, erecting himself before the blaze, looked down on me from the corner of his eyes, for all the world as if there were some mortal feud unavenged between us. I began to doubt whether he were a servant or not: his dress and speech were both rude, entirely devoid of the superiority observable in Mr. and Mrs. Heathcliff; his thick brown curls were rough and uncultivated, his whiskers encroached bearishly over his cheeks, and his hands were embrowned like those of a common labourer: still his bearing was free, almost haughty, and he showed none of a domestic's assiduity in attending on the lady of the house. In the absence of clear proofs of his condition, I deemed it best to abstain from noticing his curious conduct; and, five minutes afterwards, the entrance of Heathcliff relieved me, in some measure, from my uncomfortable state.

'You see, sir, I am come, according to promise!' I exclaimed, assuming the cheerful; 'and I fear I shall be weather-bound for half an hour, if you can afford me shelter during that space.'

'Half an hour?' he said, shaking the white flakes from his clothes; 'I wonder you should select the thick of a snow-storm to ramble about in. Do you know that you run a risk of being lost in the marshes? People familiar with these moors often miss their road on such evenings; and I can tell you there is no chance of a change at present.'

'Perhaps I can get a guide among your lads, and he might stay at the Grange till morning — could you spare me one?'

'No, I could not.'

'Oh, indeed! Well, then, I must trust to my own sagacity.'

'Umph!'

'Are you going to mak' the tea?' demanded he of the shabby coat, shifting his ferocious gaze from me to the young lady.

'Is *he* to have any?' she asked, appealing to Heathcliff.

'Get it ready, will you?' was the answer, uttered so savagely that I started. The tone in which the words were said revealed a genuine bad nature. I no longer felt inclined to call Heathcliff a capital fellow. When the preparations were finished, he invited me with — 'Now, sir, bring forward your chair.' And we all, including the rustic youth, drew round the table: an austere silence prevailing while we discussed our meal.

I thought, if I had caused the cloud, it was my duty to make an effort to dispel it. They could not every day sit so grim and taciturn; and it was impossible, however ill-tempered they might be, that the universal scowl they wore was their every-day countenance.

'It is strange,' I began, in the interval of swallowing one cup of tea and receiving another — 'it is strange how custom can mould our tastes and ideas: many could not imagine the existence of happiness in a life of such complete exile from the world as you spend, Mr. Heathcliff; yet, I'll venture to say, that, surrounded by your family, and with your amiable lady as the presiding genius over your home and heart — '

'My amiable lady!' he interrupted, with an almost diabolical sneer on his face. ‘Where is she — my amiable lady?’

‘Mrs. Heathcliff, your wife, I mean.’

‘Well, yes — oh, you would intimate that her spirit has taken the post of ministering angel, and guards the fortunes of Wuthering Heights, even when her body is gone. Is that it?’

Perceiving myself in a blunder, I attempted to correct it. I might have seen there was too great a disparity between the ages of the parties to make it likely that they were man and wife. One was about forty: a period of mental vigour at which men seldom cherish the delusion of being married for love by girls: that dream is reserved for the solace of our declining years. The other did not look seventeen.

Then it flashed on me — ‘The clown at my elbow, who is drinking his tea out of a basin and eating his broad with unwashed hands, may be her husband: Heathcliff junior, of course. Here is the consequence of being buried alive: she has thrown herself away upon that boor from sheer ignorance that better individuals existed! A sad pity — I must beware how I cause her to regret her choice.’ The last reflection may seem conceited; it was not. My neighbour struck me as bordering on repulsive; I knew, through experience, that I was tolerably attractive.

‘Mrs. Heathcliff is my daughter-in-law,’ said Heathcliff, corroborating my surmise. He turned, as he spoke, a peculiar look in her direction: a look of hatred; unless he has a most perverse set of facial muscles that will not, like those of other people, interpret the language of his soul.

‘Ah, certainly — I see now: you are the favoured possessor of the beneficent fairy,’ I remarked, turning to my neighbour.

This was worse than before: the youth grew crimson, and clenched his fist, with every appearance of a meditated assault. But he seemed to recollect himself presently, and smothered the storm in a brutal curse, muttered on my behalf: which, however, I took care not to notice.

‘Unhappy in your conjectures, sir,’ observed my host; ‘we neither of us have the privilege of owning your good fairy; her mate is dead. I said she was my daughter-in-law: therefore, she must have married my son.’

‘And this young man is — ’

‘Not my son, assuredly.’

Heathcliff smiled again, as if it were rather too bold a jest to attribute the paternity of that bear to him.

‘My name is Hareton Earnshaw,’ growled the other; ‘and I’d counsel you to respect it!’

‘I’ve shown no disrespect,’ was my reply, laughing internally at the dignity with which he announced himself.

He fixed his eye on me longer than I cared to return the stare, for fear I might be tempted either to box his ears or render my hilarity audible. I began to feel unmistakably out of place in that pleasant family circle. The dismal spiritual atmosphere overcame, and more than neutralised, the glowing physical comforts round me; and I resolved to be cautious how I ventured under those rafters a third time.

The business of eating being concluded, and no one uttering a word of sociable conversation, I approached a window to examine the weather. A sorrowful sight I saw: dark night coming down prematurely, and sky and hills mingled in one bitter whirl of wind and suffocating snow.

‘I don’t think it possible for me to get home now without a guide,’ I could not help exclaiming. ‘The roads will be buried already; and, if they were bare, I could scarcely distinguish a foot in advance.’

‘Hareton, drive those dozen sheep into the barn porch. They’ll be covered if left in the fold all night: and put a plank before them,’ said Heathcliff.

‘How must I do?’ I continued, with rising irritation.

There was no reply to my question; and on looking round I saw only Joseph bringing in a pail of porridge for the dogs, and Mrs. Heathcliff leaning over the fire, diverting herself with burning a bundle of matches which had fallen from the chimney-piece as she restored the tea-canister to its place. The former, when he had deposited his burden, took a critical survey of the room, and in cracked tones grated out — ‘Aw wonder how yah can faishion to stand thear i’ idleness un war, when all on ’ems goan out! Bud yah’re a nowt, and it’s no use talking — yah’ll niver mend o’yer ill ways, but goa raight to t’ divil, like yer mother afore ye!’

I imagined, for a moment, that this piece of eloquence was addressed to me; and, sufficiently enraged, stepped towards the aged rascal with an intention of kicking him out of the door. Mrs. Heathcliff, however, checked me by her answer.

‘You scandalous old hypocrite!’ she replied. ‘Are you not afraid of being carried away bodily, whenever you mention the devil’s name? I warn you to refrain from provoking me, or I’ll ask your abduction as a special favour! Stop! look here, Joseph,’ she continued, taking a long, dark book from a shelf; ‘I’ll show you how far I’ve progressed in the Black Art: I shall soon be competent to make a clear house of it. The red cow didn’t die by chance; and your rheumatism can hardly be reckoned among providential visitations!’

‘Oh, wicked, wicked!’ gasped the elder; ‘may the Lord deliver us from evil!’

‘No, reprobate! you are a castaway — be off, or I’ll hurt you seriously! I’ll have you all modelled in wax and clay! and the first who passes the limits I fix shall — I’ll not say what he shall be done to — but, you’ll see! Go, I’m looking at you!’

The little witch put a mock malignity into her beautiful eyes, and Joseph, trembling with sincere horror, hurried out, praying, and ejaculating ‘wicked’ as he went. I thought her conduct must be prompted by a species of dreary fun; and, now that we were alone, I endeavoured to interest her in my distress.

‘Mrs. Heathcliff,’ I said earnestly, ‘you must excuse me for troubling you. I presume, because, with that face, I'm sure you cannot help being good-hearted. Do point out some landmarks by which I may know my way home: I have no more idea how to get there than you would have how to get to London!'

'Take the road you came,' she answered, ensconcing herself in a chair, with a candle, and the long book open before her. 'It is brief advice, but as sound as I can give.'

'Then, if you hear of me being discovered dead in a bog or a pit full of snow, your conscience won't whisper that it is partly your fault?'

'How so? I cannot escort you. They wouldn't let me go to the end of the garden wall.'

'*You*! I should be sorry to ask you to cross the threshold, for my convenience, on such a night,' I cried. 'I want you to tell me my way, not to *show* it: or else to persuade Mr. Heathcliff to give me a guide.'

'Who? There is himself, Earnshaw, Zillah, Joseph and I. Which would you have?'

'Are there no boys at the farm?'

'No; those are all.'

'Then, it follows that I am compelled to stay.'

'That you may settle with your host. I have nothing to do with it.'

'I hope it will be a lesson to you to make no more rash journeys on these hills,' cried Heathcliff's stern voice from the kitchen entrance. 'As to staying here, I don't keep accommodations for visitors: you must share a bed with Hareton or Joseph, if you do.'

'I can sleep on a chair in this room,' I replied.

'No, no! A stranger is a stranger, be he rich or poor: it will not suit me to permit any one the range of the place while I am off guard!' said the unmannerly wretch.

With this insult my patience was at an end. I uttered an expression of disgust, and pushed past him into the yard, running against Earnshaw in my haste. It was so dark that I could not see the means of exit; and, as I wandered round, I heard another specimen of their civil behaviour amongst each other. At first the young man appeared about to befriend me.

'I'll go with him as far as the park,' he said.

'You'll go with him to hell!' exclaimed his master, or whatever relation he bore. 'And who is to look after the horses, eh?'

'A man's life is of more consequence than one evening's neglect of the horses: somebody must go,' murmured Mrs. Heathcliff, more kindly than I expected.

'Not at your command!' retorted Hareton. 'If you set store on him, you'd better be quiet.'

'Then I hope his ghost will haunt you; and I hope Mr. Heathcliff will never get another tenant till the Grange is a ruin,' she answered, sharply.

'Hearken, hearken, shoo's cursing on 'em!' muttered Joseph, towards whom I had been steering.

He sat within earshot, milking the cows by the light of a lantern, which I seized unceremoniously, and, calling out that I would send it back on the morrow, rushed to the nearest postern.

‘Maister, maister, he’s staling t’ lanthern!’ shouted the ancient, pursuing my retreat. ‘Hey, Gnasher! Hey, dog! Hey Wolf, holld him, holld him!’

On opening the little door, two hairy monsters flew at my throat, bearing me down, and extinguishing the light; while a mingled guffaw from Heathcliff and Hareton put the copestone on my rage and humiliation. Fortunately, the beasts seemed more bent on stretching their paws, and yawning, and flourishing their tails, than devouring me alive; but they would suffer no resurrection, and I was forced to lie till their malignant masters pleased to deliver me: then, hatless and trembling with wrath, I ordered the miscreants to let me out — on their peril to keep me one minute longer — with several incoherent threats of retaliation that, in their indefinite depth of virulency, smacked of King Lear.

The vehemence of my agitation brought on a copious bleeding at the nose, and still Heathcliff laughed, and still I scolded. I don’t know what would have concluded the scene, had there not been one person at hand rather more rational than myself, and more benevolent than my entertainer. This was Zillah, the stout housewife; who at length issued forth to inquire into the nature of the uproar. She thought that some of them had been laying violent hands on me; and, not daring to attack her master, she turned her vocal artillery against the younger scoundrel.

‘Well, Mr. Earnshaw,’ she cried, ‘I wonder what you’ll have agait next? Are we going to murder folk on our very door-stones? I see this house will never do for me — look at t’ poor lad, he’s fair choking! Wisht, wisht; you mun’n’t go on so. Come in, and I’ll cure that: there now, hold ye still.’

With these words she suddenly splashed a pint of icy water down my neck, and pulled me into the kitchen. Mr. Heathcliff followed, his accidental merriment expiring quickly in his habitual moroseness.

I was sick exceedingly, and dizzy, and faint; and thus compelled perforce to accept lodgings under his roof. He told Zillah to give me a glass of brandy, and then passed on to the inner room; while she condoled with me on my sorry predicament, and having obeyed his orders, whereby I was somewhat revived, ushered me to bed.

CHAPTER III

While leading the way upstairs, she recommended that I should hide the candle, and not make a noise; for her master had an odd notion about the chamber she would put me in, and never let anybody lodge there willingly. I asked the reason. She did not know, she answered: she had only lived there a year or two; and they had so many queer goings on, she could not begin to be curious.

Too stupefied to be curious myself, I fastened my door and glanced round for the bed. The whole furniture consisted of a chair, a clothes-press, and a large oak case, with squares cut out near the top resembling coach windows. Having approached this structure, I looked inside, and perceived it to be a singular sort of old-fashioned couch, very conveniently designed to obviate the necessity for every member of the family having a room to himself. In fact, it formed a little closet, and the ledge of a window, which it enclosed, served as a table. I slid back the panelled sides, got in with my light, pulled them together again, and felt secure against the vigilance of Heathcliff, and every one else.

The ledge, where I placed my candle, had a few mildewed books piled up in one corner; and it was covered with writing scratched on the paint. This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small — *Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*.

In vapid listlessness I leant my head against the window, and continued spelling over Catherine Earnshaw — Heathcliff — Linton, till my eyes closed; but they had not rested five minutes when a glare of white letters started from the dark, as vivid as spectres — the air swarmed with Catherines; and rousing myself to dispel the obtrusive name, I discovered my candle-wick reclining on one of the antique volumes, and perfuming the place with an odour of roasted calf-skin. I snuffed it off, and, very ill at ease under the influence of cold and lingering nausea, sat up and spread open the injured tome on my knee. It was a Testament, in lean type, and smelling dreadfully musty: a fly-leaf bore the inscription — 'Catherine Earnshaw, her book,' and a date some quarter of a century back. I shut it, and took up another and another, till I had examined all. Catherine's library was select, and its state of dilapidation proved it to have been well used, though not altogether for a legitimate purpose: scarcely one chapter had escaped, a pen-and-ink commentary — at least the appearance of one — covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left. Some were detached sentences; other parts took the form of a regular diary, scrawled in an unformed, childish hand. At the top of an extra page (quite a treasure, probably, when first lighted on) I was greatly amused to behold an excellent caricature of my friend Joseph, — rudely, yet powerfully sketched. An immediate interest kindled within me for the unknown Catherine, and I began forthwith to decipher her faded hieroglyphics.

'An awful Sunday,' commenced the paragraph beneath. 'I wish my father were back again. Hindley is a detestable substitute — his conduct to Heathcliff is atrocious — H. and I are going to rebel — we took our initiatory step this evening.

'All day had been flooding with rain; we could not go to church, so Joseph must needs get up a congregation in the garret; and, while Hindley and his wife basked downstairs before a comfortable fire — doing anything but reading their Bibles, I'll answer for it — Heathcliff, myself, and the unhappy ploughboy were commanded to take our prayer-books, and mount: we were ranged in a row, on a sack of corn, groaning and shivering, and hoping that Joseph would shiver too, so that he might give us a short homily for his own sake. A vain idea! The service lasted precisely three hours; and yet my brother had the face to exclaim, when he saw us descending, "What, done already?" On Sunday evenings we used to be permitted to play, if we did not make much noise; now a mere titter is sufficient to send us into corners.

'"You forget you have a master here," says the tyrant. "I'll demolish the first who puts me out of temper! I insist on perfect sobriety and silence. Oh, boy! was that you? Frances darling, pull his hair as you go by: I heard him snap his fingers." Frances pulled his hair heartily, and then went and seated herself on her husband's knee, and there they were, like two babies, kissing and talking nonsense by the hour — foolish palaver that we should be ashamed of. We made ourselves as snug as our means allowed in the arch of the dresser. I had just fastened our pinafores together, and hung them up for a curtain, when in comes Joseph, on an errand from the stables. He tears down my handiwork, boxes my ears, and croaks:

'"T' maister nobbut just buried, and Sabbath not o'ered, und t' sound o' t' gospel still i' yer lugs, and ye darr be laiking! Shame on ye! sit ye down, ill childer! there's good books eneugh if ye'll read 'em: sit ye down, and think o' yer sowls!"

'Saying this, he compelled us so to square our positions that we might receive from the far-off fire a dull ray to show us the text of the lumber he thrust upon us. I could not bear the employment. I took my dingy volume by the scroop, and hurled it into the dog-kennel, vowing I hated a good book. Heathcliff kicked his to the same place. Then there was a hubbub!

'"Maister Hindley!" shouted our chaplain. "Maister, coom hither! Miss Cathy's riven th' back off 'Th' Helmet o' Salvation,' un' Heathcliff's pawsed his fit into t' first part o' 'T' Brooad Way to Destruction!' It's fair flaysome that ye let 'em go on this gait. Ech! th' owd man wad ha' laced 'em properly — but he's goan!"

'Hindley hurried up from his paradise on the hearth, and seizing one of us by the collar, and the other by the arm, hurled both into the back-kitchen;

where, Joseph asseverated, “owd Nick” would fetch us as sure as we were living: and, so comforted, we each sought a separate nook to await his advent. I reached this book, and a pot of ink from a shelf, and pushed the house-door ajar to give me light, and I have got the time on with writing for twenty minutes; but my companion is impatient, and proposes that we should appropriate the dairywoman’s cloak, and have a scamper on the moors, under its shelter. A pleasant suggestion — and then, if the surly old man come in, he may believe his prophecy verified — we cannot be damper, or colder, in the rain than we are here.’

* * * * * *

I suppose Catherine fulfilled her project, for the next sentence took up another subject: she waxed lachrymose.

‘How little did I dream that Hindley would ever make me cry so!’ she wrote. ‘My head aches, till I cannot keep it on the pillow; and still I can’t give over. Poor Heathcliff! Hindley calls him a vagabond, and won’t let him sit with us, nor eat with us any more; and, he says, he and I must not play together, and threatens to turn him out of the house if we break his orders. He has been blaming our father (how dared he?) for treating H. too liberally; and swears he will reduce him to his right place — ’

* * * * * *

I began to nod drowsily over the dim page: my eye wandered from manuscript to print. I saw a red ornamented title — ‘Seventy Times Seven, and the First of the Seventy-First.’ A Pious Discourse delivered by the Reverend Jabez Branderham, in the Chapel of Gimmerden Sough.’ And while I was, half-consciously, worrying my brain to guess what Jabez Branderham would make of his subject, I sank back in bed, and fell asleep. Alas, for the effects of bad tea and bad temper! What else could it be that made me pass such a terrible night? I don’t remember another that I can at all compare with it since I was capable of suffering.

I began to dream, almost before I ceased to be sensible of my locality. I thought it was morning; and I had set out on my way home, with Joseph for a guide. The snow lay yards deep in our road; and, as we floundered on, my companion wearied me with constant reproaches that I had not brought a pilgrim’s staff: telling me that I could never get into the house without one, and boastfully flourishing a heavy-headed cudgel, which I understood to be so denominated. For a moment I considered it absurd that I should need such a weapon to gain admittance into my own residence. Then a new idea flashed across me. I was not going there: we were journeying to hear the famous Jabez Branderham preach, from the text — ‘Seventy Times Seven;’ and either Joseph, the preacher, or I had committed the ‘First of the Seventy-First,’ and were to be publicly exposed and excommunicated.

We came to the chapel. I have passed it really in my walks, twice or thrice; it lies in a hollow, between two hills: an elevated hollow, near a swamp, whose peaty moisture is said to answer all the purposes of embalming on the few corpses deposited there. The roof has been kept whole hitherto; but as the clergyman's stipend is only twenty pounds per annum, and a house with two rooms, threatening speedily to determine into one, no clergyman will undertake the duties of pastor: especially as it is currently reported that his flock would rather let him starve than increase the living by one penny from their own pockets. However, in my dream, Jabez had a full and attentive congregation; and he preached — good God! what a sermon; divided into *four hundred and ninety* parts, each fully equal to an ordinary address from the pulpit, and each discussing a separate sin! Where he searched for them, I cannot tell. He had his private manner of interpreting the phrase, and it seemed necessary the brother should sin different sins on every occasion. They were of the most curious character: odd transgressions that I never imagined previously.

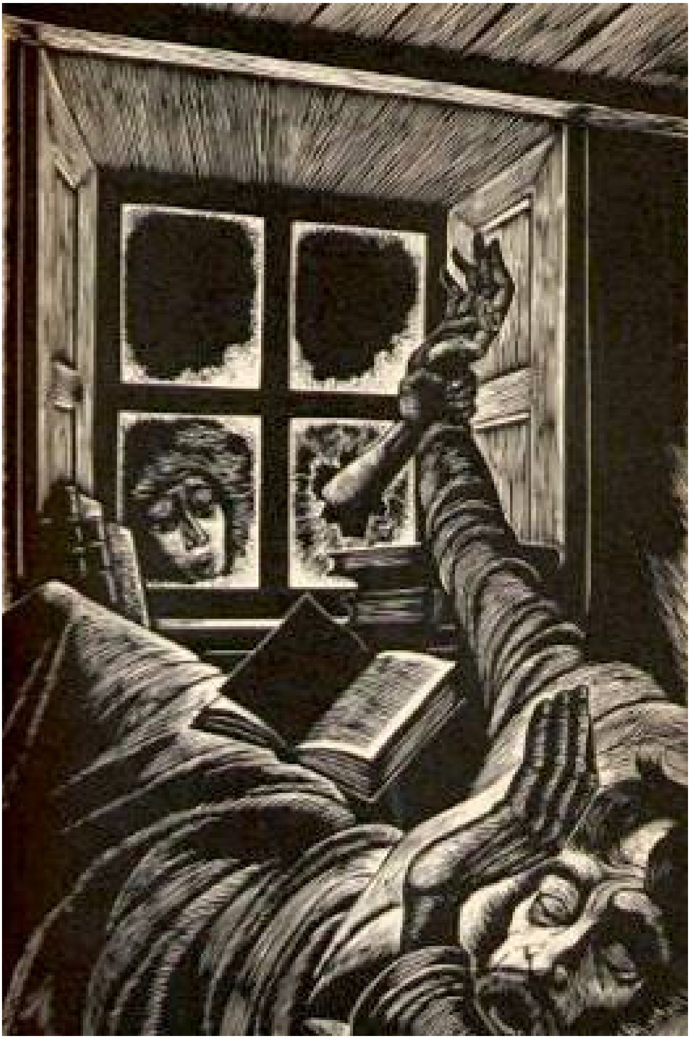
Oh, how weary I grow. How I writhed, and yawned, and nodded, and revived! How I pinched and pricked myself, and rubbed my eyes, and stood up, and sat down again, and nudged Joseph to inform me if he would *ever* have done. I was condemned to hear all out: finally, he reached the '*First of the Seventy-First.*' At that crisis, a sudden inspiration descended on me; I was moved to rise and denounce Jabez Branderham as the sinner of the sin that no Christian need pardon.

'Sir,' I exclaimed, 'sitting here within these four walls, at one stretch, I have endured and forgiven the four hundred and ninety heads of your discourse. Seventy times seven times have I plucked up my hat and been about to depart — Seventy times seven times have you preposterously forced me to resume my seat. The four hundred and ninety-first is too much. Fellow-martyrs, have at him! Drag him down, and crush him to atoms, that the place which knows him may know him no more!'

'*Thou art the Man*!' cried Jabez, after a solemn pause, leaning over his cushion. 'Seventy times seven times didst thou gapingly contort thy visage — seventy times seven did I take counsel with my soul — Lo, this is human weakness: this also may be absolved! The First of the Seventy-First is come. Brethren, execute upon him the judgment written. Such honour have all His saints!'

With that concluding word, the whole assembly, exalting their pilgrim's staves, rushed round me in a body; and I, having no weapon to raise in self-defence, commenced grappling with Joseph, my nearest and most ferocious assailant, for his. In the confluence of the multitude, several clubs crossed; blows, aimed at me, fell on other sconces. Presently the whole chapel resounded with rappings and counter rappings: every man's hand was against his neighbour; and Branderham, unwilling to remain idle, poured forth his zeal in a shower of loud taps on the boards of the pulpit, which responded so smartly that, at last, to my unspeakable relief, they woke me. And what was it that had suggested the tremendous tumult? What had played Jabez's part in the row? Merely the branch of a fir-tree that touched my lattice as the blast wailed by, and rattled its dry cones against the panes! I listened doubtingly an instant; detected the disturber, then turned and dozed, and dreamt again: if possible, still more disagreeably than before.

This time, I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause: but it annoyed me so much, that I resolved to silence it, if possible; and, I thought, I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple: a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten. 'I must stop it, nevertheless!' I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch; instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in — let me in!' 'Who are you?' I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. 'Catherine Linton,' it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton) — 'I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!' As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious gripe, almost maddening me with fear. 'How can I!' I said at length. 'Let *me* go, if you want me to let you in!' The fingers relaxed, I snatched mine through the hole, hurriedly piled the books up in a pyramid against it, and stopped my ears to exclude the lamentable prayer. I seemed to keep them closed above a quarter of an hour; yet, the instant I listened again, there was the doleful cry moaning on! 'Begone!' I shouted. 'I'll never let you in, not if you beg for twenty years.' 'It is twenty years,' mourned the voice: 'twenty years. I've been a waif for twenty years!' Thereat began a feeble scratching outside, and the pile of books moved as if thrust forward. I tried to jump up; but could not stir a limb; and so yelled aloud, in a frenzy of fright. To my confusion, I discovered the yell was not ideal: hasty footsteps approached my chamber door; somebody pushed it open, with a vigorous hand, and a light glimmered through the squares at the top of the bed. I sat shuddering yet, and wiping the perspiration from my forehead: the intruder appeared to hesitate, and muttered to himself. At last, he said, in a half-whisper, plainly not expecting an answer, 'Is any one here?' I considered it best to confess my presence; for I knew Heathcliff's accents, and feared he might search further, if I kept quiet. With this intention, I turned and opened the panels. I shall not soon forget the effect my action produced.



Heathcliff stood near the entrance, in his shirt and trousers; with a candle dripping over his fingers, and his face as white as the wall behind him. The first creak of the oak startled him like an electric shock: the light leaped from his hold to a distance of some feet, and his agitation was so extreme, that he could hardly pick it up.

'It is only your guest, sir,' I called out, desirous to spare him the humiliation of exposing his cowardice further. 'I had the misfortune to scream in my sleep, owing to a frightful nightmare. I'm sorry I disturbed you.'

'Oh, God confound you, Mr. Lockwood! I wish you were at the — ' commenced my host, setting the candle on a chair, because he found it impossible to hold it steady. 'And who showed you up into this room?' he continued, crushing his nails into his palms, and grinding his teeth to subdue the maxillary convulsions. 'Who was it? I've a good mind to turn them out of the house this moment?'

'It was your servant Zillah,' I replied, flinging myself on to the floor, and rapidly resuming my garments. 'I should not care if you did, Mr. Heathcliff; she richly deserves it. I suppose that she wanted to get another proof that the place was haunted, at my expense. Well, it is — swarming with ghosts and goblins! You have reason in shutting it up, I assure you. No one will thank you for a doze in such a den!'

'What do you mean?' asked Heathcliff, 'and what are you doing? Lie down and finish out the night, since you *are* here; but, for heaven's sake! don't repeat that horrid noise: nothing could excuse it, unless you were having your throat cut!'

'If the little fiend had got in at the window, she probably would have strangled me!' I returned. 'I'm not going to endure the persecutions of your hospitable ancestors again. Was not the Reverend Jabez Branderham akin to you on the mother's side? And that minx, Catherine Linton, or Earnshaw, or however she was called — she must have been a changeling — wicked little soul! She told me she had been walking the earth these twenty years: a just punishment for her mortal transgressions, I've no doubt!'

Scarcely were these words uttered when I recollected the association of Heathcliff's with Catherine's name in the book, which had completely slipped from my memory, till thus awakened. I blushed at my inconsideration: but, without showing further consciousness of the offence, I hastened to add — 'The truth is, sir, I passed the first part of the night in — ' Here I stopped afresh — I was about to say 'perusing those old volumes,' then it would have revealed my knowledge of their written, as well as their printed, contents; so, correcting myself, I went on — 'in spelling over the name scratched on that window-ledge. A monotonous occupation, calculated to set me asleep, like counting, or — '

'What *can* you mean by talking in this way to *me*!' thundered Heathcliff with savage vehemence. 'How — how *dare* you, under my roof? — God! he's mad to speak so!' And he struck his forehead with rage.

I did not know whether to resent this language or pursue my explanation; but he seemed so powerfully affected that I took pity and proceeded with my dreams; affirming I had never heard the appellation of 'Catherine Linton' before, but reading it often over produced an impression which personified itself when I had no longer my imagination under control. Heathcliff gradually fell back into the shelter of the bed, as I spoke; finally sitting down almost concealed behind it. I guessed, however, by his irregular and intercepted breathing, that he struggled to vanquish an excess of violent emotion. Not liking to show him that I had heard the conflict, I continued my toilette rather noisily, looked at my watch, and soliloquised on the length of the night: 'Not three o'clock yet! I could have taken oath it had been six. Time stagnates here: we must surely have retired to rest at eight!'

‘Always at nine in winter, and rise at four,’ said my host, suppressing a groan: and, as I fancied, by the motion of his arm’s shadow, dashing a tear from his eyes. ‘Mr. Lockwood,’ he added, ‘you may go into my room: you’ll only be in the way, coming down-stairs so early: and your childish outcry has sent sleep to the devil for me.’

‘And for me, too,’ I replied. ‘I’ll walk in the yard till daylight, and then I’ll be off; and you need not dread a repetition of my intrusion. I’m now quite cured of seeking pleasure in society, be it country or town. A sensible man ought to find sufficient company in himself.’

‘Delightful company!’ muttered Heathcliff. ‘Take the candle, and go where you please. I shall join you directly. Keep out of the yard, though, the dogs are unchained; and the house — Juno mounts sentinel there, and — nay, you can only ramble about the steps and passages. But, away with you! I’ll come in two minutes!’

I obeyed, so far as to quit the chamber; when, ignorant where the narrow lobbies led, I stood still, and was witness, involuntarily, to a piece of superstition on the part of my landlord which belied, oddly, his apparent sense. He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. ‘Come in! come in!’ he sobbed. ‘Cathy, do come. Oh, do — *once* more! Oh! my heart’s darling! hear me *this* time, Catherine, at last!’ The spectre showed a spectre’s ordinary caprice: it gave no sign of being; but the snow and wind whirled wildly through, even reaching my station, and blowing out the light.

There was such anguish in the gush of grief that accompanied this raving, that my compassion made me overlook its folly, and I drew off, half angry to have listened at all, and vexed at having related my ridiculous nightmare, since it produced that agony; though *why* was beyond my comprehension. I descended cautiously to the lower regions, and landed in the back-kitchen, where a gleam of fire, raked compactly together, enabled me to rekindle my candle. Nothing was stirring except a brindled, grey cat, which crept from the ashes, and saluted me with a querulous mew.

Two benches, shaped in sections of a circle, nearly enclosed the hearth; on one of these I stretched myself, and Grimalkin mounted the other. We were both of us nodding ere any one invaded our retreat, and then it was Joseph, shuffling down a wooden ladder that vanished in the roof, through a trap: the ascent to his garret, I suppose. He cast a sinister look at the little flame which I had enticed to play between the ribs, swept the cat from its elevation, and bestowing himself in the vacancy, commenced the operation of stuffing a three-inch pipe with tobacco. My presence in his sanctum was evidently esteemed a piece of impudence too shameful for remark: he silently applied the tube to his lips, folded his arms, and puffed away. I let him enjoy the luxury unannoyed; and after sucking out his last wreath, and heaving a profound sigh, he got up, and departed as solemnly as he came.

A more elastic footstep entered next; and now I opened my mouth for a ‘good-morning,’ but closed it again, the salutation unachieved; for Hareton Earnshaw was performing his orison *sotto voce*, in a series of curses directed against every object he touched, while he rummaged a corner for a spade or shovel to dig through the drifts. He glanced over the back of the bench, dilating his nostrils, and thought as little of exchanging civilities with me as with my companion the cat. I guessed, by his preparations, that egress was allowed, and, leaving my hard couch, made a movement to follow him. He noticed this, and thrust at an inner door with the end of his spade, intimating by an inarticulate sound that there was the place where I must go, if I changed my locality.

It opened into the house, where the females were already astir; Zillah urging flakes of flame up the chimney with a colossal bellows; and Mrs. Heathcliff, kneeling on the hearth, reading a book by the aid of the blaze. She held her hand interposed between the furnace-heat and her eyes, and seemed absorbed in her occupation; desisting from it only to chide the servant for covering her with sparks, or to push away a dog, now and then, that snoozled its nose overforwardly into her face. I was surprised to see Heathcliff there also. He stood by the fire, his back towards me, just finishing a stormy scene with poor Zillah; who ever and anon interrupted her labour to pluck up the corner of her apron, and heave an indignant groan.

‘And you, you worthless — ’ he broke out as I entered, turning to his daughter-in-law, and employing an epithet as harmless as duck, or sheep, but generally represented by a dash — . ‘There you are, at your idle tricks again! The rest of them do earn their bread — you live on my charity! Put your trash away, and find something to do. You shall pay me for the plague of having you eternally in my sight — do you hear, damnable jade?’

‘I’ll put my trash away, because you can make me if I refuse,’ answered the young lady, closing her book, and throwing it on a chair. ‘But I’ll not do anything, though you should swear your tongue out, except what I please!’

Heathcliff lifted his hand, and the speaker sprang to a safer distance, obviously acquainted with its weight. Having no desire to be entertained by a cat-and-dog combat, I stepped forward briskly, as if eager to partake the warmth of the hearth, and innocent of any knowledge of the interrupted dispute. Each had enough decorum to suspend further hostilities: Heathcliff placed his fists, out of temptation, in his pockets; Mrs. Heathcliff curled her lip, and walked to a seat far off, where she kept her word by playing the part of a statue during the remainder of my stay. That was not long. I declined joining their breakfast, and, at the first gleam of dawn, took an opportunity of escaping into the free air, now clear, and still, and cold as impalpable ice.

My landlord halloed for me to stop ere I reached the bottom of the garden, and offered to accompany me across the moor. It was well he did, for the whole hill-back was one billowy, white ocean; the swells and falls not indicating corresponding rises and depressions in the ground: many pits, at least, were filled to a level; and entire ranges of mounds, the refuse of the quarries, blotted from the chart which my yesterday's walk left pictured in my mind. I had remarked on one side of the road, at intervals of six or seven yards, a line of upright stones, continued through the whole length of the barren: these were erected and daubed with lime on purpose to serve as guides in the dark, and also when a fall, like the present, confounded the deep swamps on either hand with the firmer path: but, excepting a dirty dot pointing up here and there, all traces of their existence had vanished: and my companion found it necessary to warn me frequently to steer to the right or left, when I imagined I was following, correctly, the windings of the road.

We exchanged little conversation, and he halted at the entrance of Thrushcross Park, saying, I could make no error there. Our adieux were limited to a hasty bow, and then I pushed forward, trusting to my own resources; for the porter's lodge is untenanted as yet. The distance from the gate to the grange is two miles; I believe I managed to make it four, what with losing myself among the trees, and sinking up to the neck in snow: a predicament which only those who have experienced it can appreciate. At any rate, whatever were my wanderings, the clock chimed twelve as I entered the house; and that gave exactly an hour for every mile of the usual way from Wuthering Heights.

My human fixture and her satellites rushed to welcome me; exclaiming, tumultuously, they had completely given me up: everybody conjectured that I perished last night; and they were wondering how they must set about the search for my remains. I bid them be quiet, now that they saw me returned, and, benumbed to my very heart, I dragged up-stairs; whence, after putting on dry clothes, and pacing to and fro thirty or forty minutes, to restore the animal heat, I adjourned to my study, feeble as a kitten: almost too much so to enjoy the cheerful fire and smoking coffee which the servant had prepared for my refreshment.

CHAPTER IV

What vain weathercocks we are! I, who had determined to hold myself independent of all social intercourse, and thanked my stars that, at length, I had lighted on a spot where it was next to impracticable — I, weak wretch, after maintaining till dusk a struggle with low spirits and solitude, was finally compelled to strike my colours; and under pretence of gaining information concerning the necessities of my establishment, I desired Mrs. Dean, when she brought in supper, to sit down while I ate it; hoping sincerely she would prove a regular gossip, and either rouse me to animation or lull me to sleep by her talk.

'You have lived here a considerable time,' I commenced; 'did you not say sixteen years?'

'Eighteen, sir: I came when the mistress was married, to wait on her; after she died, the master retained me for his housekeeper.'

'Indeed.'

There ensued a pause. She was not a gossip, I feared; unless about her own affairs, and those could hardly interest me. However, having studied for an interval, with a fist on either knee, and a cloud of meditation over her ruddy countenance, she ejaculated — 'Ah, times are greatly changed since then!'

'Yes,' I remarked, 'you've seen a good many alterations, I suppose?'

'I have: and troubles too,' she said.

'Oh, I'll turn the talk on my landlord's family!' I thought to myself. 'A good subject to start! And that pretty girl-widow, I should like to know her history: whether she be a native of the country, or, as is more probable, an exotic that the surly *indigenae* will not recognise for kin.' With this intention I asked Mrs. Dean why Heathcliff let Thrushcross Grange, and preferred living in a situation and residence so much inferior. 'Is he not rich enough to keep the estate in good order?' I inquired.

'Rich, sir!' she returned. 'He has nobody knows what money, and every year it increases. Yes, yes, he's rich enough to live in a finer house than this: but he's very near — close-handed; and, if he had meant to flit to Thrushcross Grange, as soon as he heard of a good tenant he could not have borne to miss the chance of getting a few hundreds more. It is strange people should be so greedy, when they are alone in the world!'

'He had a son, it seems?'

'Yes, he had one — he is dead.'

'And that young lady, Mrs. Heathcliff, is his widow?'

'Yes.'

'Where did she come from originally?'

‘Why, sir, she is my late master’s daughter: Catherine Linton was her maiden name. I nursed her, poor thing! I did wish Mr. Heathcliff would remove here, and then we might have been together again.’

‘What! Catherine Linton?’ I exclaimed, astonished. But a minute’s reflection convinced me it was not my ghostly Catherine. Then,’ I continued, ‘my predecessor’s name was Linton?’

‘It was.’

‘And who is that Earnshaw: Hareton Earnshaw, who lives with Mr. Heathcliff? Are they relations?’

‘No; he is the late Mrs. Linton’s nephew.’

‘The young lady’s cousin, then?’

‘Yes; and her husband was her cousin also: one on the mother’s, the other on the father’s side: Heathcliff married Mr. Linton’s sister.’

‘I see the house at Wuthering Heights has “Earnshaw” carved over the front door. Are they an old family?’

‘Very old, sir; and Hareton is the last of them, as our Miss Cathy is of us — I mean, of the Lintons. Have you been to Wuthering Heights? I beg pardon for asking; but I should like to hear how she is!’

‘Mrs. Heathcliff? she looked very well, and very handsome; yet, I think, not very happy.’

‘Oh dear, I don’t wonder! And how did you like the master?’

‘A rough fellow, rather, Mrs. Dean. Is not that his character?

‘Rough as a saw-edge, and hard as whinstone! The less you meddle with him the better.’

‘He must have had some ups and downs in life to make him such a churl. Do you know anything of his history?’

‘It’s a cuckoo’s, sir — I know all about it: except where he was born, and who were his parents, and how he got his money at first. And Hareton has been cast out like an unfledged dunnock! The unfortunate lad is the only one in all this parish that does not guess how he has been cheated.’

‘Well, Mrs. Dean, it will be a charitable deed to tell me something of my neighbours: I feel I shall not rest if I go to bed; so be good enough to sit and chat an hour.’

‘Oh, certainly, sir! I’ll just fetch a little sewing, and then I’ll sit as long as you please. But you’ve caught cold: I saw you shivering, and you must have some gruel to drive it out.’

The worthy woman bustled off, and I crouched nearer the fire; my head felt hot, and the rest of me chill: moreover, I was excited, almost to a pitch of foolishness, through my nerves and brain. This caused me to feel, not uncomfortable, but rather fearful (as I am still) of serious effects from the incidents of to-day and yesterday. She returned presently, bringing a smoking basin and a basket of work; and, having placed the former on the hob, drew in her seat, evidently pleased to find me so companionable.

Before I came to live here, she commenced — waiting no farther invitation to her story — I was almost always at Wuthering Heights; because my mother had nursed Mr. Hindley Earnshaw, that was Hareton's father, and I got used to playing with the children: I ran errands too, and helped to make hay, and hung about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set me to. One fine summer morning — it was the beginning of harvest, I remember — Mr. Earnshaw, the old master, came down-stairs, dressed for a journey; and, after he had told Joseph what was to be done during the day, he turned to Hindley, and Cathy, and me — for I sat eating my porridge with them — and he said, speaking to his son, 'Now, my bonny man, I'm going to Liverpool to-day, what shall I bring you? You may choose what you like: only let it be little, for I shall walk there and back: sixty miles each way, that is a long spell!' Hindley named a fiddle, and then he asked Miss Cathy; she was hardly six years old, but she could ride any horse in the stable, and she chose a whip. He did not forget me; for he had a kind heart, though he was rather severe sometimes. He promised to bring me a pocketful of apples and pears, and then he kissed his children, said good-bye, and set off.

It seemed a long while to us all — the three days of his absence — and often did little Cathy ask when he would be home. Mrs. Earnshaw expected him by supper-time on the third evening, and she put the meal off hour after hour; there were no signs of his coming, however, and at last the children got tired of running down to the gate to look. Then it grew dark; she would have had them to bed, but they begged sadly to be allowed to stay up; and, just about eleven o'clock, the door-latch was raised quietly, and in stepped the master. He threw himself into a chair, laughing and groaning, and bid them all stand off, for he was nearly killed — he would not have such another walk for the three kingdoms.

'And at the end of it to be flighted to death!' he said, opening his great-coat, which he held bundled up in his arms. 'See here, wife! I was never so beaten with anything in my life: but you must e'en take it as a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil.'

We crowded round, and over Miss Cathy's head I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk: indeed, its face looked older than Catherine's; yet when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand. I was frightened, and Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors: she did fly up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for? What he meant to do with it, and whether he were mad? The master tried to explain the matter; but he was really half dead with fatigue, and all that I could make out, amongst her scolding, was a tale of his seeing it starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb, in the streets of Liverpool, where he picked it up and inquired for its owner. Not a soul knew to whom it belonged, he said; and his money and time being both limited, he thought it better to take it home with him at once, than run into vain expenses there: because he was determined he would not leave it as he found it. Well, the conclusion was, that my mistress grumbled herself calm; and Mr. Earnshaw told me to wash it, and give it clean things, and let it sleep with the children.

Hindley and Cathy contented themselves with looking and listening till peace was restored: then, both began searching their father's pockets for the presents he had promised them. The former was a boy of fourteen, but when he drew out what had been a fiddle, crushed to morsels in the great-coat, he blubbered aloud; and Cathy, when she learned the master had lost her whip in attending on the stranger, showed her humour by grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing; earning for her pains a sound blow from her father, to teach her cleaner manners. They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room; and I had no more sense, so I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow. By chance, or else attracted by hearing his voice, it crept to Mr. Earnshaw's door, and there he found it on quitting his chamber. Inquiries were made as to how it got there; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house.

This was Heathcliff's first introduction to the family. On coming back a few days afterwards (for I did not consider my banishment perpetual), I found they had christened him 'Heathcliff': it was the name of a son who died in childhood, and it has served him ever since, both for Christian and surname. Miss Cathy and he were now very thick; but Hindley hated him: and to say the truth I did the same; and we plagued and went on with him shamefully: for I wasn't reasonable enough to feel my injustice, and the mistress never put in a word on his behalf when she saw him wronged.

He seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: he would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident, and nobody was to blame. This endurance made old Earnshaw furious, when he discovered his son persecuting the poor fatherless child, as he called him. He took to Heathcliff strangely, believing all he said (for that matter, he said precious little, and generally the truth), and petting him up far above Cathy, who was too mischievous and wayward for a favourite.

So, from the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house; and at Mrs. Earnshaw's death, which happened in less than two years after, the young master had learned to regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections and his privileges; and he grew bitter with brooding over these injuries. I sympathised a while; but when the children fell ill of the measles, and I had to tend them, and take on me the cares of a woman at once, I changed my idea. Heathcliff was dangerously sick; and while he lay at the worst he would have me constantly by his pillow: I suppose he felt I did a good deal for him, and he hadn't wit to guess that I was compelled to do it. However, I will say this, he was the quietest child that ever nurse watched over. The difference between him and the others forced me to be less partial. Cathy and her brother harassed me terribly: he was as uncomplaining as a lamb; though hardness, not gentleness, made him give little trouble.

He got through, and the doctor affirmed it was in a great measure owing to me, and praised me for my care. I was vain of his commendations, and softened towards the being by whose means I earned them, and thus Hindley lost his last ally: still I couldn't dote on Heathcliff, and I wondered often what my master saw to admire so much in the sullen boy; who never, to my recollection, repaid his indulgence by any sign of gratitude. He was not insolent to his benefactor, he was simply insensible; though knowing perfectly the hold he had on his heart, and conscious he had only to speak and all the house would be obliged to bend to his wishes. As an instance, I remember Mr. Earnshaw once bought a couple of colts at the parish fair, and gave the lads each one. Heathcliff took the handsomest, but it soon fell lame, and when he discovered it, he said to Hindley —

'You must exchange horses with me: I don't like mine; and if you won't I shall tell your father of the three thrashings you've given me this week, and show him my arm, which is black to the shoulder.' Hindley put out his tongue, and cuffed him over the ears. 'You'd better do it at once,' he persisted, escaping to the porch (they were in the stable): 'you will have to: and if I speak of these blows, you'll get them again with interest.' 'Off, dog!' cried Hindley, threatening him with an iron weight used for weighing potatoes and hay. 'Throw it,' he replied, standing still, 'and then I'll tell how you boasted that you would turn me out of doors as soon as he died, and see whether he will not turn you out directly.' Hindley threw it, hitting him on the breast, and down he fell, but staggered up immediately, breathless and white; and, had not I prevented it, he would have gone just so to the master, and got full revenge by letting his condition plead for him, intimating who had caused it. 'Take my colt, Gipsy, then!' said young Earnshaw. 'And I pray that he may break your neck: take him, and be damned, you beggarly interloper! and wheedle my father out of all he has: only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan. — And take that, I hope he'll kick out your brains!'

Heathcliff had gone to loose the beast, and shift it to his own stall; he was passing behind it, when Hindley finished his speech by knocking him under its feet, and without stopping to examine whether his hopes were fulfilled, ran away as fast as he could. I was surprised to witness how coolly the child gathered himself up, and went on with his intention; exchanging saddles and all, and then sitting down on a bundle of hay to overcome the qualm which the violent blow occasioned, before he entered the house. I persuaded him easily to let me lay the blame of his bruises on the horse: he minded little what tale was told since he had what he wanted. He complained so seldom, indeed, of such stirs as these, that I really thought him not vindictive: I was deceived completely, as you will hear.

CHAPTER V

In the course of time Mr. Earnshaw began to fail. He had been active and healthy, yet his strength left him suddenly; and when he was confined to the chimney-corner he grew grievously irritable. A nothing vexed him; and suspected slights of his authority nearly threw him into fits. This was especially to be remarked if any one attempted to impose upon, or domineer over, his favourite: he was painfully jealous lest a word should be spoken amiss to him; seeming to have got into his head the notion that, because he liked Heathcliff, all hated, and longed to do him an ill-turn. It was a disadvantage to the lad; for the kinder among us did not wish to fret the master, so we humoured his partiality; and that humouring was rich nourishment to the child's pride and black tempers. Still it became in a manner necessary; twice, or thrice, Hindley's manifestation of scorn, while his father was near, roused the old man to a fury: he seized his stick to strike him, and shook with rage that he could not do it.

At last, our curate (we had a curate then who made the living answer by teaching the little Lintons and Earnshaws, and farming his bit of land himself) advised that the young man should be sent to college; and Mr. Earnshaw agreed, though with a heavy spirit, for he said — 'Hindley was nought, and would never thrive as where he wandered.'

I hoped heartily we should have peace now. It hurt me to think the master should be made uncomfortable by his own good deed. I fancied the discontent of age and disease arose from his family disagreements; as he would have it that it did: really, you know, sir, it was in his sinking frame. We might have got on tolerably, notwithstanding, but for two people — Miss Cathy, and Joseph, the servant: you saw him, I daresay, up yonder. He was, and is yet most likely, the wearisomest self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises to himself and fling the curses to his neighbours. By his knack of sermonising and pious discoursing, he contrived to make a great impression on Mr. Earnshaw; and the more feeble the master became, the more influence he gained. He was relentless in worrying him about his soul's concerns, and about ruling his children rigidly. He encouraged him to regard Hindley as a reprobate; and, night after night, he regularly grumbled out a long string of tales against Heathcliff and Catherine: always minding to flatter Earnshaw's weakness by heaping the heaviest blame on the latter.

Certainly she had ways with her such as I never saw a child take up before; and she put all of us past our patience fifty times and oftener in a day: from the hour she came down-stairs till the hour she went to bed, we had not a minute's security that she wouldn't be in mischief. Her spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going — singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same. A wild, wicked slip she was — but she had the bonniest eye, the sweetest smile, and lightest foot in the parish: and, after all, I believe she meant no harm; for when once she made you cry in good earnest, it seldom happened that she would not keep you company, and oblige you to be quiet that you might comfort her. She was much too fond of Heathcliff. The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him: yet she got chided more than any of us on his account. In play, she liked exceedingly to act the little mistress; using her hands freely, and commanding her companions: she did so to me, but I would not bear slapping and ordering; and so I let her know.

Now, Mr. Earnshaw did not understand jokes from his children: he had always been strict and grave with them; and Catherine, on her part, had no idea why her father should be crosser and less patient in his ailing condition than he was in his prime. His peevish reproofs wakened in her a naughty delight to provoke him: she was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once, and she defying us with her bold, saucy look, and her ready words; turning Joseph's religious curses into ridicule, baiting me, and doing just what her father hated most — showing how her pretended insolence, which he thought real, had more power over Heathcliff than his kindness: how the boy would do *her* bidding in anything, and *his* only when it suited his own inclination. After behaving as badly as possible all day, she sometimes came fondling to make it up at night. 'Nay, Cathy,' the old man would say, 'I cannot love thee, thou'rt worse than thy brother. Go, say thy prayers, child, and ask God's pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee!' That made her cry, at first; and then being repulsed continually hardened her, and she laughed if I told her to say she was sorry for her faults, and beg to be forgiven.

But the hour came, at last, that ended Mr. Earnshaw's troubles on earth. He died quietly in his chair one October evening, seated by the fire-side. A high wind blustered round the house, and roared in the chimney: it sounded wild and stormy, yet it was not cold, and we were all together — I, a little removed from the hearth, busy at my knitting, and Joseph reading his Bible near the table (for the servants generally sat in the house then, after their work was done). Miss Cathy had been sick, and that made her still; she leant against her father's knee, and Heathcliff was lying on the floor with his head in her lap. I remember the master, before he fell into a doze, stroking her bonny hair — it pleased him rarely to see her gentle — and saying, 'Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?' And she turned her face up to his, and laughed, and answered, 'Why cannot you always be a good man, father?' But as soon as she saw him vexed again, she kissed his hand, and said she would sing him to sleep. She began singing very low, till his fingers dropped from hers, and his head sank on his breast. Then I told her to hush, and not stir, for fear she should wake him. We all kept as mute as mice a full half-hour, and should have done so longer, only Joseph, having finished his chapter, got up and said that he must rouse the master for prayers and bed. He stepped forward, and called him by name, and touched his shoulder; but he would not move: so he took the candle and looked at him. I thought there was something wrong as he set down the light; and seizing the children each by an arm, whispered them to 'frame up-stairs, and make little din — they might pray alone that evening — he had summut to do.'

'I shall bid father good-night first,' said Catherine, putting her arms round his neck, before we could hinder her. The poor thing discovered her loss directly — she screamed out — 'Oh, he's dead, Heathcliff! he's dead!' And they both set up a heart-breaking cry.

I joined my wail to theirs, loud and bitter; but Joseph asked what we could be thinking of to roar in that way over a saint in heaven. He told me to put on my cloak and run to Gimmerton for the doctor and the parson. I could not guess the use that either would be of, then. However, I went, through wind and rain, and brought one, the doctor, back with me; the other said he would come in the morning. Leaving Joseph to explain matters, I ran to the children's room: their door was ajar, I saw they had never lain down, though it was past midnight; but they were calmer, and did not need me to console them. The little souls were comforting each other with better thoughts than I could have hit on: no parson in the world ever pictured heaven so beautifully as they did, in their innocent talk; and, while I sobbed and listened, I could not help wishing we were all there safe together.

CHAPTER VI

Mr. Hindley came home to the funeral; and — a thing that amazed us, and set the neighbours gossiping right and left — he brought a wife with him. What she was, and where she was born, he never informed us: probably, she had neither money nor name to recommend her, or he would scarcely have kept the union from his father.

She was not one that would have disturbed the house much on her own account. Every object she saw, the moment she crossed the threshold, appeared to delight her; and every circumstance that took place about her: except the preparing for the burial, and the presence of the mourners. I thought she was half silly, from her behaviour while that went on: she ran into her chamber, and made me come with her, though I should have been dressing the children: and there she sat shivering and clasping her hands, and asking repeatedly — 'Are they gone yet?' Then she began describing with hysterical emotion the effect it produced on her to see black; and started, and trembled, and, at last, fell a-weeping — and when I asked what was the matter, answered, she didn't know; but she felt so afraid of dying! I imagined her as little likely to die as myself. She was rather thin, but young, and fresh-complexioned, and her eyes sparkled as bright as diamonds. I did remark, to be sure, that mounting the stairs made her breathe very quick; that the least sudden noise set her all in a quiver, and that she coughed troublesomely sometimes: but I knew nothing of what these symptoms portended, and had no impulse to sympathise with her. We don't in general take to foreigners here, Mr. Lockwood, unless they take to us first.

Young Earnshaw was altered considerably in the three years of his absence. He had grown sparer, and lost his colour, and spoke and dressed quite differently; and, on the very day of his return, he told Joseph and me we must thenceforth quarter ourselves in the back-kitchen, and leave the house for him. Indeed, he would have carpeted and papered a small spare room for a parlour; but his wife expressed such pleasure at the white floor and huge glowing fireplace, at the pewter dishes and delf-case, and dog-kennel, and the wide space there was to move about in where they usually sat, that he thought it unnecessary to her comfort, and so dropped the intention.

She expressed pleasure, too, at finding a sister among her new acquaintance; and she prattled to Catherine, and kissed her, and ran about with her, and gave her quantities of presents, at the beginning. Her affection tired very soon, however, and when she grew peevish, Hindley became tyrannical. A few words from her, evincing a dislike to Heathcliff, were enough to rouse in him all his old hatred of the boy. He drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labour out of doors instead; compelling him to do so as hard as any other lad on the farm.

Heathcliff bore his degradation pretty well at first, because Cathy taught him what she learnt, and worked or played with him in the fields. They both promised fair to grow up as rude as savages; the young master being entirely negligent how they behaved, and what they did, so they kept clear of him. He would not even have seen after their going to church on Sundays, only Joseph and the curate reprimanded his carelessness when they absented themselves; and that reminded him to order Heathcliff a flogging, and Catherine a fast from dinner or supper. But it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at. The curate might set as many chapters as he pleased for Catherine to get by heart, and Joseph might thrash Heathcliff till his arm ached; they forgot everything the minute they were together again: at least the minute they had contrived some naughty plan of revenge; and many a time I've cried to myself to watch them growing more reckless daily, and I not daring to speak a syllable, for fear of losing the small power I still retained over the unfriended creatures. One Sunday evening, it chanced that they were banished from the sitting-room, for making a noise, or a light offence of the kind; and when I went to call them to supper, I could discover them nowhere. We searched the house, above and below, and the yard and stables; they were invisible: and, at last, Hindley in a passion told us to bolt the doors, and swore nobody should let them in that night. The household went to bed; and I, too, anxious to lie down, opened my lattice and put my head out to hearken, though it rained: determined to admit them in spite of the prohibition, should they return. In a while, I distinguished steps coming up the road, and the light of a lantern glimmered through the gate. I threw a shawl over my head and ran to prevent them from waking Mr. Earnshaw by knocking. There was Heathcliff, by himself: it gave me a start to see him alone.

'Where is Miss Catherine?' I cried hurriedly. 'No accident, I hope?' 'At Thrushcross Grange,' he answered; 'and I would have been there too, but they had not the manners to ask me to stay.' 'Well, you will catch it!' I said: 'you'll never be content till you're sent about your business. What in the world led you wandering to Thrushcross Grange?' 'Let me get off my wet clothes, and I'll tell you all about it, Nelly,' he replied. I bid him beware of rousing the master, and while he undressed and I waited to put out the candle, he continued — 'Cathy and I escaped from the wash-house to have a ramble at liberty, and getting a glimpse of the Grange lights, we thought we would just go and see whether the Lintons passed their Sunday evenings standing shivering in corners, while their father and mother sat eating and drinking, and singing and laughing, and burning their eyes out before the fire. Do you think they do? Or reading sermons, and being catechised by their manservant, and set to learn a column of Scripture names, if they don't answer properly?'

‘Probably not,’ I responded. ‘They are good children, no doubt, and don’t deserve the treatment you receive, for your bad conduct.’ ‘Don’t cant, Nelly,’ he said: ‘nonsense! We ran from the top of the Heights to the park, without stopping — Catherine completely beaten in the race, because she was barefoot. You’ll have to seek for her shoes in the bog to-morrow. We crept through a broken hedge, groped our way up the path, and planted ourselves on a flower-plot under the drawing-room window. The light came from thence; they had not put up the shutters, and the curtains were only half closed. Both of us were able to look in by standing on the basement, and clinging to the ledge, and we saw — ah! it was beautiful — a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers. Old Mr. and Mrs. Linton were not there; Edgar and his sisters had it entirely to themselves. Shouldn’t they have been happy? We should have thought ourselves in heaven! And now, guess what your good children were doing? Isabella — I believe she is eleven, a year younger than Cathy — lay screaming at the farther end of the room, shrieking as if witches were running red-hot needles into her. Edgar stood on the hearth weeping silently, and in the middle of the table sat a little dog, shaking its paw and yelping; which, from their mutual accusations, we understood they had nearly pulled in two between them. The idiots! That was their pleasure! to quarrel who should hold a heap of warm hair, and each begin to cry because both, after struggling to get it, refused to take it. We laughed outright at the petted things; we did despise them! When would you catch me wishing to have what Catherine wanted? or find us by ourselves, seeking entertainment in yelling, and sobbing, and rolling on the ground, divided by the whole room? I’d not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here, for Edgar Linton’s at Thrushcross Grange — not if I might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley’s blood!’

‘Hush, hush!’ I interrupted. ‘Still you have not told me, Heathcliff, how Catherine is left behind?’

‘I told you we laughed,’ he answered. ‘The Lintons heard us, and with one accord they shot like arrows to the door; there was silence, and then a cry, “Oh, mamma, mamma! Oh, papa! Oh, mamma, come here. Oh, papa, oh!” They really did howl out something in that way. We made frightful noises to terrify them still more, and then we dropped off the ledge, because somebody was drawing the bars, and we felt we had better flee. I had Cathy by the hand, and was urging her on, when all at once she fell down. “Run, Heathcliff, run!” she whispered. “They have let the bull-dog loose, and he holds me!” The devil had seized her ankle, Nelly: I heard his abominable snorting. She did not yell out — no! she would have scorned to do it, if she had been spitted on the horns of a mad cow. I did, though: I vociferated curses enough to annihilate any fiend in Christendom; and I got a stone and thrust it between his jaws, and tried with all my might to cram it down his throat. A beast of a servant came up with a lantern, at last, shouting — “Keep fast, Skulker, keep fast!” He changed his note, however, when he saw Skulker’s game. The dog was throttled off; his huge, purple tongue hanging half a foot out of his mouth, and his pendent lips streaming with bloody slaver. The man took Cathy up; she was sick: not from fear, I’m certain, but from pain. He carried her in; I followed, grumbling execrations and vengeance. “What prey, Robert?” hallooed Linton from the entrance. “Skulker has caught a little girl, sir,” he replied; “and there’s a lad here,” he added, making a clutch at me, “who looks an out-and-outer! Very like the robbers were for putting them through the window to open the doors to the gang after all were asleep, that they might murder us at their ease. Hold your tongue, you foul-mouthed thief, you! you shall go to the gallows for this. Mr. Linton, sir, don’t lay by your gun.” “No, no, Robert,” said the old fool. “The rascals knew that yesterday was my rent-day: they thought to have me cleverly. Come in; I’ll furnish them a reception. There, John, fasten the chain. Give Skulker some water, Jenny. To beard a magistrate in his stronghold, and on the Sabbath, too! Where will their insolence stop? Oh, my dear Mary, look here! Don’t be afraid, it is but a boy — yet the villain scowls so plainly in his face; would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his nature in acts as well as features?” He pulled me under the chandelier, and Mrs. Linton placed her spectacles on her nose and raised her hands in horror. The cowardly children crept nearer also, Isabella lisping — “Frightful thing! Put him in the cellar, papa. He’s exactly like the son of the fortune-teller that stole my tame pheasant. Isn’t he, Edgar?”

‘While they examined me, Cathy came round; she heard the last speech, and laughed. Edgar Linton, after an inquisitive stare, collected sufficient wit to recognise her. They see us at church, you know, though we seldom meet them elsewhere. “That’s Miss Earnshaw?” he whispered to his mother, “and look how Skulker has bitten her — how her foot bleeds!”

‘“Miss Earnshaw? Nonsense!” cried the dame; “Miss Earnshaw scouring the country with a gipsy! And yet, my dear, the child is in mourning — surely it is — and she may be lamed for life!”

‘“What culpable carelessness in her brother!” exclaimed Mr. Linton, turning from me to Catherine. “I’ve understood from Shielders”’ (that was the curate, sir) ‘“that he lets her grow up in absolute heathenism. But who is this? Where did she pick up this companion? Oho! I declare he is that strange acquisition my late neighbour made, in his journey to Liverpool — a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway.”

‘“A wicked boy, at all events,” remarked the old lady, “and quite unfit for a decent house! Did you notice his language, Linton? I’m shocked that my children should have heard it.”

‘I recommenced cursing — don’t be angry, Nelly — and so Robert was ordered to take me off. I refused to go without Cathy; he dragged me into the garden, pushed the lantern into my hand, assured me that Mr. Earnshaw should be informed of my behaviour, and, bidding me march directly, secured the door again. The curtains were still looped up at one corner, and I resumed my station as spy; because, if Catherine had wished to return, I intended shattering their great glass panes to a million of fragments, unless they let her out. She sat on the sofa quietly. Mrs. Linton took off the grey cloak of the dairy-maid which we had borrowed for our excursion, shaking her head and expostulating with her, I suppose: she was a young lady, and they made a distinction between her treatment and mine. Then the woman-servant brought a basin of warm water, and washed her feet; and Mr. Linton mixed a tumbler of negus, and Isabella emptied a plateful of cakes into her lap, and Edgar stood gaping at a distance. Afterwards, they dried and combed her beautiful hair, and gave her a pair of enormous slippers, and wheeled her to the fire; and I left her, as merry as she could be, dividing her food between the little dog and Skulker, whose nose she pinched as he ate; and kindling a spark of spirit in the vacant blue eyes of the Lintons — a dim reflection from her own enchanting face. I saw they were full of stupid admiration; she is so immeasurably superior to them — to everybody on earth, is she not, Nelly?'

'There will more come of this business than you reckon on,' I answered, covering him up and extinguishing the light. 'You are incurable, Heathcliff; and Mr. Hindley will have to proceed to extremities, see if he won't.' My words came truer than I desired. The luckless adventure made Earnshaw furious. And then Mr. Linton, to mend matters, paid us a visit himself on the morrow, and read the young master such a lecture on the road he guided his family, that he was stirred to look about him, in earnest. Heathcliff received no flogging, but he was told that the first word he spoke to Miss Catherine should ensure a dismissal; and Mrs. Earnshaw undertook to keep her sister-in-law in due restraint when she returned home; employing art, not force: with force she would have found it impossible.

CHAPTER VII

Cathy stayed at Thrushcross Grange five weeks: till Christmas. By that time her ankle was thoroughly cured, and her manners much improved. The mistress visited her often in the interval, and commenced her plan of reform by trying to raise her self-respect with fine clothes and flattery, which she took readily; so that, instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze us all breathless, there 'lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver, and a long cloth habit, which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in. Hindley lifted her from her horse, exclaiming delightedly, 'Why, Cathy, you are quite a beauty! I should scarcely have known you: you look like a lady now. Isabella Linton is not to be compared with her, is she, Frances?' 'Isabella has not her natural advantages,' replied his wife: 'but she must mind and not grow wild again here. Ellen, help Miss Catherine off with her things — Stay, dear, you will disarrange your curls — let me untie your hat.'

I removed the habit, and there shone forth beneath a grand plaid silk frock, white trousers, and burnished shoes; and, while her eyes sparkled joyfully when the dogs came bounding up to welcome her, she dared hardly touch them lest they should fawn upon her splendid garments. She kissed me gently: I was all flour making the Christmas cake, and it would not have done to give me a hug; and then she looked round for Heathcliff. Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw watched anxiously their meeting; thinking it would enable them to judge, in some measure, what grounds they had for hoping to succeed in separating the two friends.

Heathcliff was hard to discover, at first. If he were careless, and uncared for, before Catherine's absence, he had been ten times more so since. Nobody but I even did him the kindness to call him a dirty boy, and bid him wash himself, once a week; and children of his age seldom have a natural pleasure in soap and water. Therefore, not to mention his clothes, which had seen three months' service in mire and dust, and his thick uncombed hair, the surface of his face and hands was dismally beclouded. He might well skulk behind the settle, on beholding such a bright, graceful damsel enter the house, instead of a rough-headed counterpart of himself, as he expected. 'Is Heathcliff not here?' she demanded, pulling off her gloves, and displaying fingers wonderfully whitened with doing nothing and staying indoors.

'Heathcliff, you may come forward,' cried Mr. Hindley, enjoying his discomfiture, and gratified to see what a forbidding young blackguard he would be compelled to present himself. 'You may come and wish Miss Catherine welcome, like the other servants.'

Cathy, catching a glimpse of her friend in his concealment, flew to embrace him; she bestowed seven or eight kisses on his cheek within the second, and then stopped, and drawing back, burst into a laugh, exclaiming, ‘Why, how very black and cross you look! and how — how funny and grim! But that’s because I’m used to Edgar and Isabella Linton. Well, Heathcliff, have you forgotten me?’

She had some reason to put the question, for shame and pride threw double gloom over his countenance, and kept him immovable.

‘Shake hands, Heathcliff,’ said Mr. Earnshaw, condescendingly; ‘once in a way that is permitted.’

‘I shall not,’ replied the boy, finding his tongue at last; ‘I shall not stand to be laughed at. I shall not bear it!’ And he would have broken from the circle, but Miss Cathy seized him again.

‘I did not mean to laugh at you,’ she said; ‘I could not hinder myself: Heathcliff, shake hands at least! What are you sulky for? It was only that you looked odd. If you wash your face and brush your hair, it will be all right: but you are so dirty!’

She gazed concernedly at the dusky fingers she held in her own, and also at her dress; which she feared had gained no embellishment from its contact with his.

‘You needn’t have touched me!’ he answered, following her eye and snatching away his hand. ‘I shall be as dirty as I please: and I like to be dirty, and I will be dirty.’

With that he dashed headforemost out of the room, amid the merriment of the master and mistress, and to the serious disturbance of Catherine; who could not comprehend how her remarks should have produced such an exhibition of bad temper.

After playing lady’s-maid to the new-comer, and putting my cakes in the oven, and making the house and kitchen cheerful with great fires, befitting Christmas-eve, I prepared to sit down and amuse myself by singing carols, all alone; regardless of Joseph’s affirmations that he considered the merry tunes I chose as next door to songs. He had retired to private prayer in his chamber, and Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw were engaging Missy’s attention by sundry gay trifles bought for her to present to the little Lintons, as an acknowledgment of their kindness. They had invited them to spend the morrow at Wuthering Heights, and the invitation had been accepted, on one condition: Mrs. Linton begged that her darlings might be kept carefully apart from that ‘naughty swearing boy.’

Under these circumstances I remained solitary. I smelt the rich scent of the heating spices; and admired the shining kitchen utensils, the polished clock, decked in holly, the silver mugs ranged on a tray ready to be filled with mulled ale for supper; and above all, the speckless purity of my particular care — the scoured and well-swept floor. I gave due inward applause to every object, and then I remembered how old Earnshaw used to come in when all was tidied, and call me a cant lass, and slip a shilling into my hand as a Christmas-box; and from that I went on to think of his fondness for Heathcliff, and his dread lest he should suffer neglect after death had removed him: and that naturally led me to consider the poor lad's situation now, and from singing I changed my mind to crying. It struck me soon, however, there would be more sense in endeavouring to repair some of his wrongs than shedding tears over them: I got up and walked into the court to seek him. He was not far; I found him smoothing the glossy coat of the new pony in the stable, and feeding the other beasts, according to custom.

'Make haste, Heathcliff!' I said, 'the kitchen is so comfortable; and Joseph is up-stairs: make haste, and let me dress you smart before Miss Cathy comes out, and then you can sit together, with the whole hearth to yourselves, and have a long chatter till bedtime.'

He proceeded with his task, and never turned his head towards me.

'Come — are you coming?' I continued. 'There's a little cake for each of you, nearly enough; and you'll need half-an-hour's donning.'

I waited five minutes, but getting no answer left him. Catherine supped with her brother and sister-in-law: Joseph and I joined at an unsociable meal, seasoned with reproofs on one side and sauciness on the other. His cake and cheese remained on the table all night for the fairies. He managed to continue work till nine o'clock, and then marched dumb and dour to his chamber. Cathy sat up late, having a world of things to order for the reception of her new friends: she came into the kitchen once to speak to her old one; but he was gone, and she only stayed to ask what was the matter with him, and then went back. In the morning he rose early; and, as it was a holiday, carried his ill-humour on to the moors; not re-appearing till the family were departed for church. Fasting and reflection seemed to have brought him to a better spirit. He hung about me for a while, and having screwed up his courage, exclaimed abruptly — 'Nelly, make me decent, I'm going to be good.'

'High time, Heathcliff,' I said; 'you *have* grieved Catherine: she's sorry she ever came home, I daresay! It looks as if you envied her, because she is more thought of than you.'

The notion of *envying* Catherine was incomprehensible to him, but the notion of grieving her he understood clearly enough.

'Did she say she was grieved?' he inquired, looking very serious.

'She cried when I told her you were off again this morning.'

'Well, *I* cried last night,' he returned, 'and I had more reason to cry than she.'

'Yes: you had the reason of going to bed with a proud heart and an empty stomach,' said I. 'Proud people breed sad sorrows for themselves. But, if you be ashamed of your touchiness, you must ask pardon, mind, when she comes in. You must go up and offer to kiss her, and say — you know best what to say; only do it heartily, and not as if you thought her converted into a stranger by her grand dress. And now, though I have dinner to get ready, I'll steal time to arrange you so that Edgar Linton shall look quite a doll beside you: and that he does. You are younger, and yet, I'll be bound, you are taller and twice as broad across the shoulders; you could knock him down in a twinkling; don't you feel that you could?'

Heathcliff's face brightened a moment; then it was overcast afresh, and he sighed.

'But, Nelly, if I knocked him down twenty times, that wouldn't make him less handsome or me more so. I wish I had light hair and a fair skin, and was dressed and behaved as well, and had a chance of being as rich as he will be!'

'And cried for mamma at every turn,' I added, 'and trembled if a country lad heaved his fist against you, and sat at home all day for a shower of rain. Oh, Heathcliff, you are showing a poor spirit! Come to the glass, and I'll let you see what you should wish. Do you mark those two lines between your eyes; and those thick brows, that, instead of rising arched, sink in the middle; and that couple of black fiends, so deeply buried, who never open their windows boldly, but lurk glinting under them, like devil's spies? Wish and learn to smooth away the surly wrinkles, to raise your lids frankly, and change the fiends to confident, innocent angels, suspecting and doubting nothing, and always seeing friends where they are not sure of foes. Don't get the expression of a vicious cur that appears to know the kicks it gets are its desert, and yet hates all the world, as well as the kicker, for what it suffers.'

'In other words, I must wish for Edgar Linton's great blue eyes and even forehead,' he replied. 'I do — and that won't help me to them.'

'A good heart will help you to a bonny face, my lad,' I continued, 'if you were a regular black; and a bad one will turn the bonniest into something worse than ugly. And now that we've done washing, and combing, and sulking — tell me whether you don't think yourself rather handsome? I'll tell you, I do. You're fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England. Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!'

So I chattered on; and Heathcliff gradually lost his frown and began to look quite pleasant, when all at once our conversation was interrupted by a rumbling sound moving up the road and entering the court. He ran to the window and I to the door, just in time to behold the two Lintons descend from the family carriage, smothered in cloaks and furs, and the Earnshaws dismount from their horses: they often rode to church in winter. Catherine took a hand of each of the children, and brought them into the house and set them before the fire, which quickly put colour into their white faces.

I urged my companion to hasten now and show his amiable humour, and he willingly obeyed; but ill luck would have it that, as he opened the door leading from the kitchen on one side, Hindley opened it on the other. They met, and the master, irritated at seeing him clean and cheerful, or, perhaps, eager to keep his promise to Mrs. Linton, shoved him back with a sudden thrust, and angrily bade Joseph 'keep the fellow out of the room — send him into the garret till dinner is over. He'll be cramming his fingers in the tarts and stealing the fruit, if left alone with them a minute.'

'Nay, sir,' I could not avoid answering, 'he'll touch nothing, not he: and I suppose he must have his share of the dainties as well as we.'

'He shall have his share of my hand, if I catch him downstairs till dark,' cried Hindley. 'Begone, you vagabond! What! you are attempting the coxcomb, are you? Wait till I get hold of those elegant locks — see if I won't pull them a bit longer!'

'They are long enough already,' observed Master Linton, peeping from the doorway; 'I wonder they don't make his head ache. It's like a colt's mane over his eyes!'

He ventured this remark without any intention to insult; but Heathcliff's violent nature was not prepared to endure the appearance of impertinence from one whom he seemed to hate, even then, as a rival. He seized a tureen of hot apple sauce (the first thing that came under his gripe) and dashed it full against the speaker's face and neck; who instantly commenced a lament that brought Isabella and Catherine hurrying to the place. Mr. Earnshaw snatched up the culprit directly and conveyed him to his chamber; where, doubtless, he administered a rough remedy to cool the fit of passion, for he appeared red and breathless. I got the dishcloth, and rather spitefully scrubbed Edgar's nose and mouth, affirming it served him right for meddling. His sister began weeping to go home, and Cathy stood by confounded, blushing for all.

'You should not have spoken to him!' she expostulated with Master Linton. 'He was in a bad temper, and now you've spoilt your visit; and he'll be flogged: I hate him to be flogged! I can't eat my dinner. Why did you speak to him, Edgar?'

'I didn't,' sobbed the youth, escaping from my hands, and finishing the remainder of the purification with his cambric pocket-handkerchief. 'I promised mamma that I wouldn't say one word to him, and I didn't.'

'Well, don't cry,' replied Catherine, contemptuously; 'you're not killed. Don't make more mischief; my brother is coming: be quiet! Hush, Isabella! Has anybody hurt you?'

'There, there, children — to your seats!' cried Hindley, bustling in. 'That brute of a lad has warmed me nicely. Next time, Master Edgar, take the law into your own fists — it will give you an appetite!'

The little party recovered its equanimity at sight of the fragrant feast. They were hungry after their ride, and easily consoled, since no real harm had befallen them. Mr. Earnshaw carved bountiful platefuls, and the mistress made them merry with lively talk. I waited behind her chair, and was pained to behold Catherine, with dry eyes and an indifferent air, commence cutting up the wing of a goose before her. ‘An unfeeling child,’ I thought to myself; ‘how lightly she dismisses her old playmate’s troubles. I could not have imagined her to be so selfish.’ She lifted a mouthful to her lips: then she set it down again: her cheeks flushed, and the tears gushed over them. She slipped her fork to the floor, and hastily dived under the cloth to conceal her emotion. I did not call her unfeeling long; for I perceived she was in purgatory throughout the day, and wearying to find an opportunity of getting by herself, or paying a visit to Heathcliff, who had been locked up by the master: as I discovered, on endeavouring to introduce to him a private mess of victuals.

In the evening we had a dance. Cathy begged that he might be liberated then, as Isabella Linton had no partner: her entreaties were vain, and I was appointed to supply the deficiency. We got rid of all gloom in the excitement of the exercise, and our pleasure was increased by the arrival of the Gimmerton band, mustering fifteen strong: a trumpet, a trombone, clarionets, bassoons, French horns, and a bass viol, besides singers. They go the rounds of all the respectable houses, and receive contributions every Christmas, and we esteemed it a first-rate treat to hear them. After the usual carols had been sung, we set them to songs and glees. Mrs. Earnshaw loved the music, and so they gave us plenty.

Catherine loved it too: but she said it sounded sweetest at the top of the steps, and she went up in the dark: I followed. They shut the house door below, never noting our absence, it was so full of people. She made no stay at the stairs’-head, but mounted farther, to the garret where Heathcliff was confined, and called him. He stubbornly declined answering for a while: she persevered, and finally persuaded him to hold communion with her through the boards. I let the poor things converse unmolested, till I supposed the songs were going to cease, and the singers to get some refreshment: then I clambered up the ladder to warn her. Instead of finding her outside, I heard her voice within. The little monkey had crept by the skylight of one garret, along the roof, into the skylight of the other, and it was with the utmost difficulty I could coax her out again. When she did come, Heathcliff came with her, and she insisted that I should take him into the kitchen, as my fellow-servant had gone to a neighbour’s, to be removed from the sound of our ‘devil’s psalmody,’ as it pleased him to call it. I told them I intended by no means to encourage their tricks: but as the prisoner had never broken his fast since yesterday’s dinner, I would wink at his cheating Mr. Hindley that once. He went down: I set him a stool by the fire, and offered him a quantity of good things: but he was sick and could eat little, and my attempts to entertain him were thrown away. He leant his two elbows on his knees, and his chin on his hands and remained rapt in dumb meditation. On my inquiring the subject of his thoughts, he answered gravely — ‘I’m trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don’t care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do!’

‘For shame, Heathcliff!’ said I. ‘It is for God to punish wicked people;

we should learn to forgive.'

'No, God won't have the satisfaction that I shall,' he returned. 'I only wish I knew the best way! Let me alone, and I'll plan it out: while I'm thinking of that I don't feel pain.'

'But, Mr. Lockwood, I forget these tales cannot divert you. I'm annoyed how I should dream of chattering on at such a rate; and your gruel cold, and you nodding for bed! I could have told Heathcliff's history, all that you need hear, in half a dozen words.'

* * * * *

Thus interrupting herself, the housekeeper rose, and proceeded to lay aside her sewing; but I felt incapable of moving from the hearth, and I was very far from nodding. 'Sit still, Mrs. Dean,' I cried; 'do sit still another half-hour. You've done just right to tell the story leisurely. That is the method I like; and you must finish it in the same style. I am interested in every character you have mentioned, more or less.'

'The clock is on the stroke of eleven, sir.'

'No matter — I'm not accustomed to go to bed in the long hours. One or two is early enough for a person who lies till ten.'

'You shouldn't lie till ten. There's the very prime of the morning gone long before that time. A person who has not done one-half his day's work by ten o'clock, runs a chance of leaving the other half undone.'

'Nevertheless, Mrs. Dean, resume your chair; because to-morrow I intend lengthening the night till afternoon. I prognosticate for myself an obstinate cold, at least.'

'I hope not, sir. Well, you must allow me to leap over some three years; during that space Mrs. Earnshaw — '

'No, no, I'll allow nothing of the sort! Are you acquainted with the mood of mind in which, if you were seated alone, and the cat licking its kitten on the rug before you, you would watch the operation so intently that puss's neglect of one ear would put you seriously out of temper?'

'A terribly lazy mood, I should say.'

'On the contrary, a tiresomely active one. It is mine, at present; and, therefore, continue minutely. I perceive that people in these regions acquire over people in towns the value that a spider in a dungeon does over a spider in a cottage, to their various occupants; and yet the deepened attraction is not entirely owing to the situation of the looker-on. They *do* live more in earnest, more in themselves, and less in surface, change, and frivolous external things. I could fancy a love for life here almost possible; and I was a fixed unbeliever in any love of a year's standing. One state resembles setting a hungry man down to a single dish, on which he may concentrate his entire appetite and do it justice; the other, introducing him to a table laid out by French cooks: he can perhaps extract as much enjoyment from the whole; but each part is a mere atom in his regard and remembrance.'

'Oh! here we are the same as anywhere else, when you get to know us,' observed Mrs. Dean, somewhat puzzled at my speech.

'Excuse me,' I responded; 'you, my good friend, are a striking evidence against that assertion. Excepting a few provincialisms of slight consequence, you have no marks of the manners which I am habituated to consider as peculiar to your class. I am sure you have thought a great deal more than the generality of servants think. You have been compelled to cultivate your reflective faculties for want of occasions for frittering your life away in silly trifles.'

Mrs. Dean laughed.

'I certainly esteem myself a steady, reasonable kind of body,' she said; 'not exactly from living among the hills and seeing one set of faces, and one series of actions, from year's end to year's end; but I have undergone sharp discipline, which has taught me wisdom; and then, I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood. You could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into, and got something out of also: unless it be that range of Greek and Latin, and that of French; and those I know one from another: it is as much as you can expect of a poor man's daughter. However, if I am to follow my story in true gossip's fashion, I had better go on; and instead of leaping three years, I will be content to pass to the next summer — the summer of 1778, that is nearly twenty-three years ago.'

CHAPTER VIII

On the morning of a fine June day my first bonny little nursling, and the last of the ancient Earnshaw stock, was born. We were busy with the hay in a far-away field, when the girl that usually brought our breakfasts came running an hour too soon across the meadow and up the lane, calling me as she ran.

‘Oh, such a grand bairn!’ she panted out. ‘The finest lad that ever breathed! But the doctor says missis must go: he says she’s been in a consumption these many months. I heard him tell Mr. Hindley: and now she has nothing to keep her, and she’ll be dead before winter. You must come home directly. You’re to nurse it, Nelly: to feed it with sugar and milk, and take care of it day and night. I wish I were you, because it will be all yours when there is no missis!’

‘But is she very ill?’ I asked, flinging down my rake and tying my bonnet.

‘I guess she is; yet she looks bravely,’ replied the girl, ‘and she talks as if she thought of living to see it grow a man. She’s out of her head for joy, it’s such a beauty! If I were her I’m certain I should not die: I should get better at the bare sight of it, in spite of Kenneth. I was fairly mad at him. Dame Archer brought the cherub down to master, in the house, and his face just began to light up, when the old croaker steps forward, and says he — “Earnshaw, it’s a blessing your wife has been spared to leave you this son. When she came, I felt convinced we shouldn’t keep her long; and now, I must tell you, the winter will probably finish her. Don’t take on, and fret about it too much: it can’t be helped. And besides, you should have known better than to choose such a rush of a lass!”’

‘And what did the master answer?’ I inquired.

‘I think he swore: but I didn’t mind him, I was straining to see the bairn,’ and she began again to describe it rapturously. I, as zealous as herself, hurried eagerly home to admire, on my part; though I was very sad for Hindley’s sake. He had room in his heart only for two idols — his wife and himself: he doted on both, and adored one, and I couldn’t conceive how he would bear the loss.

When we got to Wuthering Heights, there he stood at the front door; and, as I passed in, I asked, ‘how was the baby?’

‘Nearly ready to run about, Nell!’ he replied, putting on a cheerful smile.

‘And the mistress?’ I ventured to inquire; ‘the doctor says she’s — ’

‘Damn the doctor!’ he interrupted, reddening. ‘Frances is quite right: she’ll be perfectly well by this time next week. Are you going up-stairs? will you tell her that I’ll come, if she’ll promise not to talk. I left her because she would not hold her tongue; and she must — tell her Mr. Kenneth says she must be quiet.’

I delivered this message to Mrs. Earnshaw; she seemed in flighty spirits, and replied merrily, ‘I hardly spoke a word, Ellen, and there he has gone out twice, crying. Well, say I promise I won’t speak: but that does not bind me not to laugh at him!’

Poor soul! Till within a week of her death that gay heart never failed her; and her husband persisted doggedly, nay, furiously, in affirming her health improved every day. When Kenneth warned him that his medicines were useless at that stage of the malady, and he needn’t put him to further expense by attending her, he retorted, ‘I know you need not — she’s well — she does not want any more attendance from you! She never was in a consumption. It was a fever; and it is gone: her pulse is as slow as mine now, and her cheek as cool.’

He told his wife the same story, and she seemed to believe him; but one night, while leaning on his shoulder, in the act of saying she thought she should be able to get up to-morrow, a fit of coughing took her — a very slight one — he raised her in his arms; she put her two hands about his neck, her face changed, and she was dead.

As the girl had anticipated, the child Hareton fell wholly into my hands. Mr. Earnshaw, provided he saw him healthy and never heard him cry, was contented, as far as regarded him. For himself, he grew desperate: his sorrow was of that kind that will not lament. He neither wept nor prayed; he cursed and defied: execrated God and man, and gave himself up to reckless dissipation. The servants could not bear his tyrannical and evil conduct long: Joseph and I were the only two that would stay. I had not the heart to leave my charge; and besides, you know, I had been his foster-sister, and excused his behaviour more readily than a stranger would. Joseph remained to hector over tenants and labourers; and because it was his vocation to be where he had plenty of wickedness to reprove.

The master’s bad ways and bad companions formed a pretty example for Catherine and Heathcliff. His treatment of the latter was enough to make a fiend of a saint. And, truly, it appeared as if the lad *were* possessed of something diabolical at that period. He delighted to witness Hindley degrading himself past redemption; and became daily more notable for savage sullenness and ferocity. I could not half tell what an infernal house we had. The curate dropped calling, and nobody decent came near us, at last; unless Edgar Linton’s visits to Miss Cathy might be an exception. At fifteen she was the queen of the country-side; she had no peer; and she did turn out a haughty, headstrong creature! I own I did not like her, after infancy was past; and I vexed her frequently by trying to bring down her arrogance: she never took an aversion to me, though. She had a wondrous constancy to old attachments: even Heathcliff kept his hold on her affections unalterably; and young Linton, with all his superiority, found it difficult to make an equally deep impression. He was my late master: that is his portrait over the fireplace. It used to hang on one side, and his wife’s on the other; but hers has been removed, or else you might see something of what she was. Can you make that out?

Mrs. Dean raised the candle, and I discerned a soft-featured face, exceedingly resembling the young lady at the Heights, but more pensive and amiable in expression. It formed a sweet picture. The long light hair curled slightly on the temples; the eyes were large and serious; the figure almost too graceful. I did not marvel how Catherine Earnshaw could forget her first friend for such an individual. I marvelled much how he, with a mind to correspond with his person, could fancy my idea of Catherine Earnshaw.

'A very agreeable portrait,' I observed to the house-keeper. 'Is it like?'

'Yes,' she answered; 'but he looked better when he was animated; that is his everyday countenance: he wanted spirit in general.'

Catherine had kept up her acquaintance with the Lintons since her five-weeks' residence among them; and as she had no temptation to show her rough side in their company, and had the sense to be ashamed of being rude where she experienced such invariable courtesy, she imposed unwittingly on the old lady and gentleman by her ingenious cordiality; gained the admiration of Isabella, and the heart and soul of her brother: acquisitions that flattered her from the first — for she was full of ambition — and led her to adopt a double character without exactly intending to deceive any one. In the place where she heard Heathcliff termed a 'vulgar young ruffian,' and 'worse than a brute,' she took care not to act like him; but at home she had small inclination to practise politeness that would only be laughed at, and restrain an unruly nature when it would bring her neither credit nor praise.

Mr. Edgar seldom mustered courage to visit Wuthering Heights openly. He had a terror of Earnshaw's reputation, and shrunk from encountering him; and yet he was always received with our best attempts at civility: the master himself avoided offending him, knowing why he came; and if he could not be gracious, kept out of the way. I rather think his appearance there was distasteful to Catherine; she was not artful, never played the coquette, and had evidently an objection to her two friends meeting at all; for when Heathcliff expressed contempt of Linton in his presence, she could not half coincide, as she did in his absence; and when Linton evinced disgust and antipathy to Heathcliff, she dared not treat his sentiments with indifference, as if depreciation of her playmate were of scarcely any consequence to her. I've had many a laugh at her perplexities and untold troubles, which she vainly strove to hide from my mockery. That sounds ill-natured: but she was so proud it became really impossible to pity her distresses, till she should be chastened into more humility. She did bring herself, finally, to confess, and to confide in me: there was not a soul else that she might fashion into an adviser.

Mr. Hindley had gone from home one afternoon, and Heathcliff presumed to give himself a holiday on the strength of it. He had reached the age of sixteen then, I think, and without having bad features, or being deficient in intellect, he contrived to convey an impression of inward and outward repulsiveness that his present aspect retains no traces of. In the first place, he had by that time lost the benefit of his early education: continual hard work, begun soon and concluded late, had extinguished any curiosity he once possessed in pursuit of knowledge, and any love for books or learning. His childhood's sense of superiority, instilled into him by the favours of old Mr. Earnshaw, was faded away. He struggled long to keep up an equality with Catherine in her studies, and yielded with poignant though silent regret: but he yielded completely; and there was no prevailing on him to take a step in the way of moving upward, when he found he must, necessarily, sink beneath his former level. Then personal appearance sympathised with mental deterioration: he acquired a slouching gait and ignoble look; his naturally reserved disposition was exaggerated into an almost idiotic excess of unsociable moroseness; and he took a grim pleasure, apparently, in exciting the aversion rather than the esteem of his few acquaintance.

Catherine and he were constant companions still at his seasons of respite from labour; but he had ceased to express his fondness for her in words, and recoiled with angry suspicion from her girlish caresses, as if conscious there could be no gratification in lavishing such marks of affection on him. On the before-named occasion he came into the house to announce his intention of doing nothing, while I was assisting Miss Cathy to arrange her dress: she had not reckoned on his taking it into his head to be idle; and imagining she would have the whole place to herself, she managed, by some means, to inform Mr. Edgar of her brother's absence, and was then preparing to receive him.

'Cathy, are you busy this afternoon?' asked Heathcliff. 'Are you going anywhere?'

'No, it is raining,' she answered.

'Why have you that silk frock on, then?' he said. 'Nobody coming here, I hope?'

'Not that I know of,' stammered Miss: 'but you should be in the field now, Heathcliff. It is an hour past dinnertime: I thought you were gone.'

'Hindley does not often free us from his accursed presence,' observed the boy. 'I'll not work any more to-day: I'll stay with you.'

'Oh, but Joseph will tell,' she suggested; 'you'd better go!'

'Joseph is loading lime on the further side of Penistone Crags; it will take him till dark, and he'll never know.'

So, saying, he lounged to the fire, and sat down. Catherine reflected an instant, with knitted brows — she found it needful to smooth the way for an intrusion. 'Isabella and Edgar Linton talked of calling this afternoon,' she said, at the conclusion of a minute's silence. 'As it rains, I hardly expect them; but they may come, and if they do, you run the risk of being scolded for no good.'

'Order Ellen to say you are engaged, Cathy,' he persisted; 'don't turn me out for those pitiful, silly friends of yours! I'm on the point, sometimes, of complaining that they — but I'll not — '

'That they what?' cried Catherine, gazing at him with a troubled countenance. ‘Oh, Nelly!’ she added petulantly, jerking her head away from my hands, ‘you’ve combed my hair quite out of curl! That’s enough; let me alone. What are you on the point of complaining about, Heathcliff?’

‘Nothing — only look at the almanack on that wall;’ he pointed to a framed sheet hanging near the window, and continued, ‘The crosses are for the evenings you have spent with the Lintons, the dots for those spent with me. Do you see? I’ve marked every day.’

‘Yes — very foolish: as if I took notice!’ replied Catherine, in a peevish tone. ‘And where is the sense of that?’

‘To show that I *do* take notice,’ said Heathcliff.

‘And should I always be sitting with you?’ she demanded, growing more irritated. ‘What good do I get? What do you talk about? You might be dumb, or a baby, for anything you say to amuse me, or for anything you do, either!’

‘You never told me before that I talked too little, or that you disliked my company, Cathy!’ exclaimed Heathcliff, in much agitation.

‘It’s no company at all, when people know nothing and say nothing,’ she muttered.

Her companion rose up, but he hadn’t time to express his feelings further, for a horse’s feet were heard on the flags, and having knocked gently, young Linton entered, his face brilliant with delight at the unexpected summon she had received. Doubtless Catherine marked the difference between her friends, as one came in and the other went out. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley; and his voice and greeting were as opposite as his aspect. He had a sweet, low manner of speaking, and pronounced his words as you do: that’s less gruff than we talk here, and softer.

‘I’m not come too soon, am I?’ he said, casting a look at me: I had begun to wipe the plate, and tidy some drawers at the far end in the dresser.

‘No,’ answered Catherine. ‘What are you doing there, Nelly?’

‘My work, Miss,’ I replied. (Mr. Hindley had given me directions to make a third party in any private visits Linton chose to pay.)

She stepped behind me and whispered crossly, ‘Take yourself and your dusters off; when company are in the house, servants don’t commence scouring and cleaning in the room where they are!’

‘It’s a good opportunity, now that master is away,’ I answered aloud: ‘he hates me to be fidgeting over these things in his presence. I’m sure Mr. Edgar will excuse me.’

‘I hate you to be fidgeting in *my* presence,’ exclaimed the young lady imperiously, not allowing her guest time to speak: she had failed to recover her equanimity since the little dispute with Heathcliff.

‘I’m sorry for it, Miss Catherine,’ was my response; and I proceeded assiduously with my occupation.

She, supposing Edgar could not see her, snatched the cloth from my hand,

and pinched me, with a prolonged wrench, very spitefully on the arm. I've said I did not love her, and rather relished mortifying her vanity now and then: besides, she hurt me extremely; so I started up from my knees, and screamed out, 'Oh, Miss, that's a nasty trick! You have no right to nip me, and I'm not going to bear it.'

'I didn't touch you, you lying creature!' cried she, her fingers tingling to repeat the act, and her ears red with rage. She never had power to conceal her passion, it always set her whole complexion in a blaze.

'What's that, then?' I retorted, showing a decided purple witness to refute her.

She stamped her foot, wavered a moment, and then, irresistibly impelled by the naughty spirit within her, slapped me on the cheek: a stinging blow that filled both eyes with water.

'Catherine, love! Catherine!' interposed Linton, greatly shocked at the double fault of falsehood and violence which his idol had committed.

'Leave the room, Ellen!' she repeated, trembling all over.

Little Hareton, who followed me everywhere, and was sitting near me on the floor, at seeing my tears commenced crying himself, and sobbed out complaints against 'wicked aunt Cathy,' which drew her fury on to his unlucky head: she seized his shoulders, and shook him till the poor child waxed livid, and Edgar thoughtlessly laid hold of her hands to deliver him. In an instant one was wrung free, and the astonished young man felt it applied over his own ear in a way that could not be mistaken for jest. He drew back in consternation. I lifted Hareton in my arms, and walked off to the kitchen with him, leaving the door of communication open, for I was curious to watch how they would settle their disagreement. The insulted visitor moved to the spot where he had laid his hat, pale and with a quivering lip.

'That's right!' I said to myself. 'Take warning and begone! It's a kindness to let you have a glimpse of her genuine disposition.'

'Where are you going?' demanded Catherine, advancing to the door.

He swerved aside, and attempted to pass.

'You must not go!' she exclaimed, energetically.

'I must and shall!' he replied in a subdued voice.

'No,' she persisted, grasping the handle; 'not yet, Edgar Linton: sit down; you shall not leave me in that temper. I should be miserable all night, and I won't be miserable for you!'

'Can I stay after you have struck me?' asked Linton.

Catherine was mute.

'You've made me afraid and ashamed of you,' he continued; 'I'll not come here again!'

Her eyes began to glisten and her lids to twinkle.

'And you told a deliberate untruth!' he said.

'I didn't!' she cried, recovering her speech; 'I did nothing deliberately. Well, go, if you please — get away! And now I'll cry — I'll cry myself sick!'

She dropped down on her knees by a chair, and set to weeping in serious earnest. Edgar persevered in his resolution as far as the court; there he lingered. I resolved to encourage him.

'Miss is dreadfully wayward, sir,' I called out. 'As bad as any marred child: you'd better be riding home, or else she will be sick, only to grieve us.'

The soft thing looked askance through the window: he possessed the power to depart as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half killed, or a bird half eaten. Ah, I thought, there will be no saving him: he's doomed, and flies to his fate! And so it was: he turned abruptly, hastened into the house again, shut the door behind him; and when I went in a while after to inform them that Earnshaw had come home rabid drunk, ready to pull the whole place about our ears (his ordinary frame of mind in that condition), I saw the quarrel had merely effected a closer intimacy — had broken the outworks of youthful timidity, and enabled them to forsake the disguise of friendship, and confess themselves lovers.

Intelligence of Mr. Hindley's arrival drove Linton speedily to his horse, and Catherine to her chamber. I went to hide little Hareton, and to take the shot out of the master's fowling-piece, which he was fond of playing with in his insane excitement, to the hazard of the lives of any who provoked, or even attracted his notice too much; and I had hit upon the plan of removing it, that he might do less mischief if he did go the length of firing the gun.

CHAPTER IX

He entered, vociferating oaths dreadful to hear; and caught me in the act of stowing his son sway in the kitchen cupboard. Hareton was impressed with a wholesome terror of encountering either his wild beast's fondness or his madman's rage; for in one he ran a chance of being squeezed and kissed to death, and in the other of being flung into the fire, or dashed against the wall; and the poor thing remained perfectly quiet wherever I chose to put him.

'There, I've found it out at last!' cried Hindley, pulling me back by the skin of my neck, like a dog. 'By heaven and hell, you've sworn between you to murder that child! I know how it is, now, that he is always out of my way. But, with the help of Satan, I shall make you swallow the carving-knife, Nelly! You needn't laugh; for I've just crammed Kenneth, head-downmost, in the Black-horse marsh; and two is the same as one — and I want to kill some of you: I shall have no rest till I do!'

'But I don't like the carving-knife, Mr. Hindley,' I answered; 'it has been cutting red herrings. I'd rather be shot, if you please.'

'You'd rather be damned!' he said; 'and so you shall. No law in England can hinder a man from keeping his house decent, and mine's abominable! Open your mouth.' He held the knife in his hand, and pushed its point between my teeth: but, for my part, I was never much afraid of his vagaries. I spat out, and affirmed it tasted detestably — I would not take it on any account.

'Oh!' said he, releasing me, 'I see that hideous little villain is not Hareton: I beg your pardon, Nell. If it be, he deserves flaying alive for not running to welcome me, and for screaming as if I were a goblin. Unnatural cub, come hither! I'll teach thee to impose on a good-hearted, deluded father. Now, don't you think the lad would be handsomer cropped? It makes a dog fiercer, and I love something fierce — get me a scissors — something fierce and trim! Besides, it's infernal affectation — devilish conceit it is, to cherish our ears — we're asses enough without them. Hush, child, hush! Well then, it is my darling! wisht, dry thy eyes — there's a joy; kiss me. What! it won't? Kiss me, Hareton! Damn thee, kiss me! By God, as if I would rear such a monster! As sure as I'm living, I'll break the brat's neck.'

Poor Hareton was squalling and kicking in his father's arms with all his might, and redoubled his yells when he carried him up-stairs and lifted him over the banister. I cried out that he would frighten the child into fits, and ran to rescue him. As I reached them, Hindley leant forward on the rails to listen to a noise below; almost forgetting what he had in his hands. 'Who is that?' he asked, hearing some one approaching the stairs'-foot. I leant forward also, for the purpose of signing to Heathcliff, whose step I recognised, not to come further; and, at the instant when my eye quitted Hareton, he gave a sudden spring, delivered himself from the careless grasp that held him, and fell.

There was scarcely time to experience a thrill of horror before we saw that the little wretch was safe. Heathcliff arrived underneath just at the critical moment; by a natural impulse he arrested his descent, and setting him on his feet, looked up to discover the author of the accident. A miser who has parted with a lucky lottery ticket for five shillings, and finds next day he has lost in the bargain five thousand pounds, could not show a blanker countenance than he did on beholding the figure of Mr. Earnshaw above. It expressed, plainer than words could do, the intensest anguish at having made himself the instrument of thwarting his own revenge. Had it been dark, I daresay he would have tried to remedy the mistake by smashing Hareton's skull on the steps; but, we witnessed his salvation; and I was presently below with my precious charge pressed to my heart. Hindley descended more leisurely, sobered and abashed.

'It is your fault, Ellen,' he said; 'you should have kept him out of sight: you should have taken him from me! Is he injured anywhere?'

'Injured!' I cried angrily; 'if he is not killed, he'll be an idiot! Oh! I wonder his mother does not rise from her grave to see how you use him. You're worse than a heathen — treating your own flesh and blood in that manner!' He attempted to touch the child, who, on finding himself with me, sobbed off his terror directly. At the first finger his father laid on him, however, he shrieked again louder than before, and struggled as if he would go into convulsions.

'You shall not meddle with him!' I continued. 'He hates you — they all hate you — that's the truth! A happy family you have; and a pretty state you're come to!'

'I shall come to a prettier, yet, Nelly,' laughed the misguided man, recovering his hardness. 'At present, convey yourself and him away. And hark you, Heathcliff! clear you too quite from my reach and hearing. I wouldn't murder you to-night; unless, perhaps, I set the house on fire: but that's as my fancy goes.'

While saying this he took a pint bottle of brandy from the dresser, and poured some into a tumbler.

'Nay, don't!' I entreated. 'Mr. Hindley, do take warning. Have mercy on this unfortunate boy, if you care nothing for yourself!'

'Any one will do better for him than I shall,' he answered.

'Have mercy on your own soul!' I said, endeavouring to snatch the glass from his hand.

'Not I! On the contrary, I shall have great pleasure in sending it to perdition to punish its Maker,' exclaimed the blasphemer. 'Here's to its hearty damnation!'

He drank the spirits and impatiently bade us go; terminating his command with a sequel of horrid imprecations too bad to repeat or remember.

‘It’s a pity he cannot kill himself with drink,’ observed Heathcliff, muttering an echo of curses back when the door was shut. ‘He’s doing his very utmost; but his constitution defies him. Mr. Kenneth says he would wager his mare that he’ll outlive any man on this side Gimmerton, and go to the grave a hoary sinner; unless some happy chance out of the common course befall him.’

I went into the kitchen, and sat down to lull my little lamb to sleep. Heathcliff, as I thought, walked through to the barn. It turned out afterwards that he only got as far as the other side the settle, when he flung himself on a bench by the wall, removed from the fire and remained silent.

I was rocking Hareton on my knee, and humming a song that began, —

It was far in the night, and the bairnies grat,
The mither beneath the mools heard that,

when Miss Cathy, who had listened to the hubbub from her room, put her head in, and whispered, — ‘Are you alone, Nelly?’

‘Yes, Miss,’ I replied.

She entered and approached the hearth. I, supposing she was going to say something, looked up. The expression of her face seemed disturbed and anxious. Her lips were half asunder, as if she meant to speak, and she drew a breath; but it escaped in a sigh instead of a sentence. I resumed my song; not having forgotten her recent behaviour.

‘Where’s Heathcliff?’ she said, interrupting me.

‘About his work in the stable,’ was my answer.

He did not contradict me; perhaps he had fallen into a doze. There followed another long pause, during which I perceived a drop or two trickle from Catherine’s cheek to the flags. Is she sorry for her shameful conduct? — I asked myself. That will be a novelty: but she may come to the point — as she will — I sha’n’t help her! No, she felt small trouble regarding any subject, save her own concerns.

‘Oh, dear!’ she cried at last. ‘I’m very unhappy!’

‘A pity,’ observed I. ‘You’re hard to please; so many friends and so few cares, and can’t make yourself content!’

‘Nelly, will you keep a secret for me?’ she pursued, kneeling down by me, and lifting her winsome eyes to my face with that sort of look which turns off bad temper, even when one has all the right in the world to indulge it.

‘Is it worth keeping?’ I inquired, less sulkily.

‘Yes, and it worries me, and I must let it out! I want to know what I should do. To-day, Edgar Linton has asked me to marry him, and I’ve given him an answer. Now, before I tell you whether it was a consent or denial, you tell me which it ought to have been.’

‘Really, Miss Catherine, how can I know?’ I replied. ‘To be sure, considering the exhibition you performed in his presence this afternoon, I might say it would be wise to refuse him: since he asked you after that, he must either be hopelessly stupid or a venturesome fool.’

'If you talk so, I won't tell you any more,' she returned, peevishly rising to her feet. 'I accepted him, Nelly. Be quick, and say whether I was wrong!'

'You accepted him! Then what good is it discussing the matter? You have pledged your word, and cannot retract.'

'But say whether I should have done so — do!' she exclaimed in an irritated tone; chafing her hands together, and frowning.

'There are many things to be considered before that question can be answered properly,' I said, sententiously. 'First and foremost, do you love Mr. Edgar?'

'Who can help it? Of course I do,' she answered.

Then I put her through the following catechism: for a girl of twenty-two it was not injudicious.

'Why do you love him, Miss Cathy?'

'Nonsense, I do — that's sufficient.'

'By no means; you must say why?'

'Well, because he is handsome, and pleasant to be with.'

'Bad!' was my commentary.

'And because he is young and cheerful.'

'Bad, still.'

'And because he loves me.'

'Indifferent, coming there.'

'And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband.'

'Worst of all. And now, say how you love him?'

'As everybody loves — You're silly, Nelly.'

'Not at all — Answer.'

'I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says. I love all his looks, and all his actions, and him entirely and altogether. There now!'

'And why?'

'Nay; you are making a jest of it: it is exceedingly ill-natured! It's no jest to me!' said the young lady, scowling, and turning her face to the fire.

'I'm very far from jesting, Miss Catherine,' I replied. 'You love Mr. Edgar because he is handsome, and young, and cheerful, and rich, and loves you. The last, however, goes for nothing: you would love him without that, probably; and with it you wouldn't, unless he possessed the four former attractions.'

'No, to be sure not: I should only pity him — hate him, perhaps, if he were ugly, and a clown.'

'But there are several other handsome, rich young men in the world: handsomer, possibly, and richer than he is. What should hinder you from loving them?'

'If there be any, they are out of my way: I've seen none like Edgar.'

'You may see some; and he won't always be handsome, and young, and may not always be rich.'

'He is now; and I have only to do with the present. I wish you would speak rationally.'

'Well, that settles it: if you have only to do with the present, marry Mr. Linton.'

'I don't want your permission for that — I *shall* marry him: and yet you have not told me whether I'm right.'

'Perfectly right; if people be right to marry only for the present. And now, let us hear what you are unhappy about. Your brother will be pleased; the old lady and gentleman will not object, I think; you will escape from a disorderly, comfortless home into a wealthy, respectable one; and you love Edgar, and Edgar loves you. All seems smooth and easy: where is the obstacle?'

'*Here*! and *here*!' replied Catherine, striking one hand on her forehead, and the other on her breast: 'in whichever place the soul lives. In my soul and in my heart, I'm convinced I'm wrong!'

'That's very strange! I cannot make it out.'

'It's my secret. But if you will not mock at me, I'll explain it: I can't do it distinctly; but I'll give you a feeling of how I feel.'

She seated herself by me again: her countenance grew sadder and graver, and her clasped hands trembled.

'Nelly, do you never dream queer dreams?' she said, suddenly, after some minutes' reflection.

'Yes, now and then,' I answered.

'And so do I. I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind. And this is one: I'm going to tell it — but take care not to smile at any part of it.'

'Oh! don't, Miss Catherine!' I cried. 'We're dismal enough without conjuring up ghosts and visions to perplex us. Come, come, be merry and like yourself! Look at little Hareton! *he's* dreaming nothing dreary. How sweetly he smiles in his sleep!'

'Yes; and how sweetly his father curses in his solitude! You remember him, I daresay, when he was just such another as that chubby thing: nearly as young and innocent. However, Nelly, I shall oblige you to listen: it's not long; and I've no power to be merry to-night.'

'I won't hear it, I won't hear it!' I repeated, hastily.

I was superstitious about dreams then, and am still; and Catherine had an unusual gloom in her aspect, that made me dread something from which I might shape a prophecy, and foresee a fearful catastrophe. She was vexed, but she did not proceed. Apparently taking up another subject, she recommenced in a short time.

'If I were in heaven, Nelly, I should be extremely miserable.'

'Because you are not fit to go there,' I answered. 'All sinners would be miserable in heaven.'

'But it is not for that. I dreamt once that I was there.'

'I tell you I won't hearken to your dreams, Miss Catherine! I'll go to bed,' I interrupted again.

She laughed, and held me down; for I made a motion to leave my chair.

'This is nothing,' cried she: 'I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy. That will do to explain my secret, as well as the other. I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.'

Ere this speech ended I became sensible of Heathcliff's presence. Having noticed a slight movement, I turned my head, and saw him rise from the bench, and steal out noiselessly. He had listened till he heard Catherine say it would degrade her to marry him, and then he stayed to hear no further. My companion, sitting on the ground, was prevented by the back of the settle from remarking his presence or departure; but I started, and bade her hush!

'Why?' she asked, gazing nervously round.

'Joseph is here,' I answered, catching opportunely the roll of his cartwheels up the road; 'and Heathcliff will come in with him. I'm not sure whether he were not at the door this moment.'

'Oh, he couldn't overhear me at the door!' said she. 'Give me Hareton, while you get the supper, and when it is ready ask me to sup with you. I want to cheat my uncomfortable conscience, and be convinced that Heathcliff has no notion of these things. He has not, has he? He does not know what being in love is!'

'I see no reason that he should not know, as well as you,' I returned; 'and if you are his choice, he'll be the most unfortunate creature that ever was born! As soon as you become Mrs. Linton, he loses friend, and love, and all! Have you considered how you'll bear the separation, and how he'll bear to be quite deserted in the world? Because, Miss Catherine — '

'He quite deserted! we separated!' she exclaimed, with an accent of indignation. 'Who is to separate us, pray? They'll meet the fate of Milo! Not as long as I live, Ellen: for no mortal creature. Every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing before I could consent to forsake Heathcliff. Oh, that's not what I intend — that's not what I mean! I shouldn't be Mrs. Linton were such a price demanded! He'll be as much to me as he has been all his lifetime. Edgar must shake off his antipathy, and tolerate him, at least. He will, when he learns my true feelings towards him. Nelly, I see now you think me a selfish wretch; but did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? whereas, if I marry Linton I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power.'

'With your husband's money, Miss Catherine?' I asked. 'You'll find him not so pliable as you calculate upon: and, though I'm hardly a judge, I think that's the worst motive you've given yet for being the wife of young Linton.'

'It is not,' retorted she; 'it is the best! The others were the satisfaction of my whims: and for Edgar's sake, too, to satisfy him. This is for the sake of one who comprehends in his person my feelings to Edgar and myself. I cannot express it; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, *I* should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it. — My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. So don't talk of our separation again: it is impracticable; and — '

She paused, and hid her face in the folds of my gown; but I jerked it forcibly away. I was out of patience with her folly!

'If I can make any sense of your nonsense, Miss,' I said, 'it only goes to convince me that you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying; or else that you are a wicked, unprincipled girl. But trouble me with no more secrets: I'll not promise to keep them.'

'You'll keep that?' she asked, eagerly.

'No, I'll not promise,' I repeated.

She was about to insist, when the entrance of Joseph finished our conversation; and Catherine removed her seat to a corner, and nursed Hareton, while I made the supper. After it was cooked, my fellow-servant and I began to quarrel who should carry some to Mr. Hindley; and we didn't settle it till all was nearly cold. Then we came to the agreement that we would let him ask, if he wanted any; for we feared particularly to go into his presence when he had been some time alone.

'And how isn't that nowt comed in fro' th' field, be this time? What is he about? girt idle seeght!' demanded the old man, looking round for Heathcliff.

'I'll call him,' I replied. 'He's in the barn, I've no doubt.'

I went and called, but got no answer. On returning, I whispered to Catherine that he had heard a good part of what she said, I was sure; and told how I saw him quit the kitchen just as she complained of her brother's conduct regarding him. She jumped up in a fine fright, flung Hareton on to the settle, and ran to seek for her friend herself; not taking leisure to consider why she was so flurried, or how her talk would have affected him. She was absent such a while that Joseph proposed we should wait no longer. He cunningly conjectured they were staying away in order to avoid hearing his protracted blessing. They were 'ill eneugh for ony fahl manners,' he affirmed. And on their behalf he added that night a special prayer to the usual quarter-of-an-hour's supplication before meat, and would have tacked another to the end of the grace, had not his young mistress broken in upon him with a hurried command that he must run down the road, and, wherever Heathcliff had rambled, find and make him re-enter directly!

'I want to speak to him, and I *must*, before I go upstairs,' she said. 'And the gate is open: he is somewhere out of hearing; for he would not reply, though I shouted at the top of the fold as loud as I could.'

Joseph objected at first; she was too much in earnest, however, to suffer contradiction; and at last he placed his hat on his head, and walked grumbling forth. Meantime, Catherine paced up and down the floor, exclaiming — 'I wonder where he is — I wonder where he can be! What did I say, Nelly? I've forgotten. Was he vexed at my bad humour this afternoon? Dear! tell me what I've said to grieve him? I do wish he'd come. I do wish he would!'

'What a noise for nothing!' I cried, though rather uneasy myself. 'What a trifle scares you! It's surely no great cause of alarm that Heathcliff should take a moonlight saunter on the moors, or even lie too sulky to speak to us in the hay-loft. I'll engage he's lurking there. See if I don't ferret him out!'

I departed to renew my search; its result was disappointment, and Joseph's quest ended in the same.

'Yon lad gets war und war!' observed he on re-entering. 'He's left th' gate at t' full swing, and Miss's pony has trodden dahn two rigs o' corn, and plottered through, raight o'er into t' meadow! Hahsomdiver, t' maister 'ull play t' devil to-morn, and he'll do weel. He's patience itsseln wi' sich careless, offald craters — patience itsseln he is! Bud he'll not be soa allus — yah's see, all on ye! Yah mun'n't drive him out of his heead for nowt!'

'Have you found Heathcliff, you ass?' interrupted Catherine. 'Have you been looking for him, as I ordered?'

'I sud more likker look for th' horse,' he replied. 'It 'ud be to more sense. Bud I can look for norther horse nur man of a neeght loike this — as black as t' chimbley! und Heathcliff's noan t' chap to coom at *my* whistle — happen he'll be less hard o' hearing wi' *ye*!'

It *was* a very dark evening for summer: the clouds appeared inclined to thunder, and I said we had better all sit down; the approaching rain would be certain to bring him home without further trouble. However, Catherine would not be persuaded into tranquillity. She kept wandering to and fro, from the gate to the door, in a state of agitation which permitted no repose; and at length took up a permanent situation on one side of the wall, near the road: where, heedless of my expostulations and the growling thunder, and the great drops that began to plash around her, she remained, calling at intervals, and then listening, and then crying outright. She beat Hareton, or any child, at a good passionate fit of crying.

About midnight, while we still sat up, the storm came rattling over the Heights in full fury. There was a violent wind, as well as thunder, and either one or the other split a tree off at the corner of the building: a huge bough fell across the roof, and knocked down a portion of the east chimney-stack, sending a clatter of stones and soot into the kitchen-fire. We thought a bolt had fallen in the middle of us; and Joseph swung on to his knees, beseeching the Lord to remember the patriarchs Noah and Lot, and, as in former times, spare the righteous, though he smote the ungodly. I felt some sentiment that it must be a judgment on us also. The Jonah, in my mind, was Mr. Earnshaw; and I shook the handle of his den that I might ascertain if he were yet living. He replied audibly enough, in a fashion which made my companion vociferate, more clamorously than before, that a wide distinction might be drawn between saints like himself and sinners like his master. But the uproar passed away in twenty minutes, leaving us all unharmed; excepting Cathy, who got thoroughly drenched for her obstinacy in refusing to take shelter, and standing bonnetless and shawl-less to catch as much water as she could with her hair and clothes. She came in and lay down on the settle, all soaked as she was, turning her face to the back, and putting her hands before it.

'Well, Miss!' I exclaimed, touching her shoulder; 'you are not bent on getting your death, are you? Do you know what o'clock it is? Half-past twelve. Come, come to bed! there's no use waiting any longer on that foolish boy: he'll be gone to Gimmerton, and he'll stay there now. He guesses we shouldn't wait for him till this late hour: at least, he guesses that only Mr. Hindley would be up; and he'd rather avoid having the door opened by the master.'

'Nay, nay, he's noan at Gimmerton,' said Joseph. 'I's niver wonder but he's at t' bothom of a bog-hoile. This visitation worn't for nowt, and I wod hev' ye to look out, Miss — yah muh be t' next. Thank Hivin for all! All warks togither for gooid to them as is chozzen, and piked out fro' th' rubbidge! Yah knaw whet t' Scripture ses.' And he began quoting several texts, referring us to chapters and verses where we might find them.

I, having vainly begged the wilful girl to rise and remove her wet things, left him preaching and her shivering, and betook myself to bed with little Hareton, who slept as fast as if everyone had been sleeping round him. I heard Joseph read on a while afterwards; then I distinguished his slow step on the ladder, and then I dropped asleep.

Coming down somewhat later than usual, I saw, by the sunbeams piercing the chinks of the shutters, Miss Catherine still seated near the fireplace. The house-door was ajar, too; light entered from its unclosed windows; Hindley had come out, and stood on the kitchen hearth, haggard and drowsy.

'What ails you, Cathy?' he was saying when I entered: 'you look as dismal as a drowned whelp. Why are you so damp and pale, child?'

'I've been wet,' she answered reluctantly, 'and I'm cold, that's all.'

'Oh, she is naughty!' I cried, perceiving the master to be tolerably sober. 'She got steeped in the shower of yesterday evening, and there she has sat the night through, and I couldn't prevail on her to stir.'

Mr. Earnshaw stared at us in surprise. 'The night through,' he repeated. 'What kept her up? not fear of the thunder, surely? That was over hours since.'

Neither of us wished to mention Heathcliff's absence, as long as we could conceal it; so I replied, I didn't know how she took it into her head to sit up; and she said nothing. The morning was fresh and cool; I threw back the lattice, and presently the room filled with sweet scents from the garden; but Catherine called peevishly to me, 'Ellen, shut the window. I'm starving!' And her teeth chattered as she shrank closer to the almost extinguished embers.

'She's ill,' said Hindley, taking her wrist; 'I suppose that's the reason she would not go to bed. Damn it! I don't want to be troubled with more sickness here. What took you into the rain?'

'Running after t' lads, as usuald!' croaked Joseph, catching an opportunity from our hesitation to thrust in his evil tongue. 'If I war yah, maister, I'd just slam t' boards i' their faces all on 'em, gentle and simple! Never a day ut yah're off, but yon cat o' Linton comes sneaking hither; and Miss Nelly, shoo's a fine lass! shoo sits watching for ye i' t' kitchen; and as yah're in at one door, he's out at t'other; and, then, wer grand lady goes a-courting of her side! It's bonny behaviour, lurking amang t' fields, after twelve o' t' night, wi' that fahl, flaysome divil of a gipsy, Heathcliff! They think *I'm* blind; but I'm noan: nowt ut t' soart! — I seed young Linton boath coming and going, and I seed *yah*' (directing his discourse to me), 'yah gooid fur nowt, slattenly witch! nip up and bolt into th' house, t' minute yah heard t' maister's horse-fit clatter up t' road.'

'Silence, eavesdropper!' cried Catherine; 'none of your insolence before me! Edgar Linton came yesterday by chance, Hindley; and it was *I* who told him to be off: because I knew you would not like to have met him as you were.'

'You lie, Cathy, no doubt,' answered her brother, 'and you are a confounded simpleton! But never mind Linton at present: tell me, were you not with Heathcliff last night? Speak the truth, now. You need not be afraid of harming him: though I hate him as much as ever, he did me a good turn a short time since that will make my conscience tender of breaking his neck. To prevent it, I shall send him about his business this very morning; and after he's gone, I'd advise you all to look sharp: I shall only have the more humour for you.'

'I never saw Heathcliff last night,' answered Catherine, beginning to sob bitterly: 'and if you do turn him out of doors, I'll go with him. But, perhaps, you'll never have an opportunity: perhaps, he's gone.' Here she burst into uncontrollable grief, and the remainder of her words were inarticulate.

Hindley lavished on her a torrent of scornful abuse, and bade her get to her room immediately, or she shouldn't cry for nothing! I obliged her to obey; and I shall never forget what a scene she acted when we reached her chamber: it terrified me. I thought she was going mad, and I begged Joseph to run for the doctor. It proved the commencement of delirium: Mr. Kenneth, as soon as he saw her, pronounced her dangerously ill; she had a fever. He bled her, and he told me to let her live on whey and water-gruel, and take care she did not throw herself downstairs or out of the window; and then he left: for he had enough to do in the parish, where two or three miles was the ordinary distance between cottage and cottage.

Though I cannot say I made a gentle nurse, and Joseph and the master were no better, and though our patient was as wearisome and headstrong as a patient could be, she weathered it through. Old Mrs. Linton paid us several visits, to be sure, and set things to rights, and scolded and ordered us all; and when Catherine was convalescent, she insisted on conveying her to Thrushcross Grange: for which deliverance we were very grateful. But the poor dame had reason to repent of her kindness: she and her husband both took the fever, and died within a few days of each other.

Our young lady returned to us saucier and more passionate, and haughtier than ever. Heathcliff had never been heard of since the evening of the thunder-storm; and, one day, I had the misfortune, when she had provoked me exceedingly, to lay the blame of his disappearance on her: where indeed it belonged, as she well knew. From that period, for several months, she ceased to hold any communication with me, save in the relation of a mere servant. Joseph fell under a ban also: he would speak his mind, and lecture her all the same as if she were a little girl; and she esteemed herself a woman, and our mistress, and thought that her recent illness gave her a claim to be treated with consideration. Then the doctor had said that she would not bear crossing much; she ought to have her own way; and it was nothing less than murder in her eyes for any one to presume to stand up and contradict her. From Mr. Earnshaw and his companions she kept aloof; and tutored by Kenneth, and serious threats of a fit that often attended her rages, her brother allowed her whatever she pleased to demand, and generally avoided aggravating her fiery temper. He was rather too indulgent in humouring her caprices; not from affection, but from pride: he wished earnestly to see her bring honour to the family by an alliance with the Lintons, and as long as she let him alone she might trample on us like slaves, for aught he cared! Edgar Linton, as multitudes have been before and will be after him, was infatuated: and believed himself the happiest man alive on the day he led her to Gimmerton Chapel, three years subsequent to his father's death.

Much against my inclination, I was persuaded to leave Wuthering Heights and accompany her here. Little Hareton was nearly five years old, and I had just begun to teach him his letters. We made a sad parting; but Catherine's tears were more powerful than ours. When I refused to go, and when she found her entreaties did not move me, she went lamenting to her husband and brother. The former offered me munificent wages; the latter ordered me to pack up: he wanted no women in the house, he said, now that there was no mistress; and as to Hareton, the curate should take him in hand, by-and-by. And so I had but one choice left: to do as I was ordered. I told the master he got rid of all decent people only to run to ruin a little faster; I kissed Hareton, said good-by; and since then he has been a stranger: and it's very queer to think it, but I've no doubt he has completely forgotten all about Ellen Dean, and that he was ever more than all the world to her and she to him!

* * * * *

At this point of the housekeeper's story she chanced to glance towards the time-piece over the chimney; and was in amazement on seeing the minute-hand measure half-past one. She would not hear of staying a second longer: in truth, I felt rather disposed to defer the sequel of her narrative myself. And now that she is vanished to her rest, and I have meditated for another hour or two, I shall summon courage to go also, in spite of aching laziness of head and limbs.

CHAPTER X

A charming introduction to a hermit's life! Four weeks' torture, tossing, and sickness! Oh, these bleak winds and bitter northern skies, and impassable roads, and dilatory country surgeons! And oh, this dearth of the human physiognomy! and, worse than all, the terrible intimation of Kenneth that I need not expect to be out of doors till spring!

Mr. Heathcliff has just honoured me with a call. About seven days ago he sent me a brace of grouse — the last of the season. Scoundrel! He is not altogether guiltless in this illness of mine; and that I had a great mind to tell him. But, alas! how could I offend a man who was charitable enough to sit at my bedside a good hour, and talk on some other subject than pills and draughts, blisters and leeches? This is quite an easy interval. I am too weak to read; yet I feel as if I could enjoy something interesting. Why not have up Mrs. Dean to finish her tale? I can recollect its chief incidents, as far as she had gone. Yes: I remember her hero had run off, and never been heard of for three years; and the heroine was married. I'll ring: she'll be delighted to find me capable of talking cheerfully. Mrs. Dean came.

'It wants twenty minutes, sir, to taking the medicine,' she commenced.

'Away, away with it!' I replied; 'I desire to have — '

'The doctor says you must drop the powders.'

'With all my heart! Don't interrupt me. Come and take your seat here. Keep your fingers from that bitter phalanx of vials. Draw your knitting out of your pocket — that will do — now continue the history of Mr. Heathcliff, from where you left off, to the present day. Did he finish his education on the Continent, and come back a gentleman? or did he get a sizar's place at college, or escape to America, and earn honours by drawing blood from his foster-country? or make a fortune more promptly on the English highways?'

'He may have done a little in all these vocations, Mr. Lockwood; but I couldn't give my word for any. I stated before that I didn't know how he gained his money; neither am I aware of the means he took to raise his mind from the savage ignorance into which it was sunk: but, with your leave, I'll proceed in my own fashion, if you think it will amuse and not weary you. Are you feeling better this morning?'

'Much.'

'That's good news.'

* * * * *

I got Miss Catherine and myself to Thrushcross Grange; and, to my agreeable disappointment, she behaved infinitely better than I dared to expect. She seemed almost over-fond of Mr. Linton; and even to his sister she showed plenty of affection. They were both very attentive to her comfort, certainly. It was not the thorn bending to the honeysuckles, but the honeysuckles embracing the thorn. There were no mutual concessions: one stood erect, and the others yielded: and who can be ill-natured and bad-tempered when they encounter neither opposition nor indifference? I observed that Mr. Edgar had a deep-rooted fear of ruffling her humour. He concealed it from her; but if ever he heard me answer sharply, or saw any other servant grow cloudy at some imperious order of hers, he would show his trouble by a frown of displeasure that never darkened on his own account. He many a time spoke sternly to me about my pertness; and averred that the stab of a knife could not inflict a worse pang than he suffered at seeing his lady vexed. Not to grieve a kind master, I learned to be less touchy; and, for the space of half a year, the gunpowder lay as harmless as sand, because no fire came near to explode it. Catherine had seasons of gloom and silence now and then: they were respected with sympathising silence by her husband, who ascribed them to an alteration in her constitution, produced by her perilous illness; as she was never subject to depression of spirits before. The return of sunshine was welcomed by answering sunshine from him. I believe I may assert that they were really in possession of deep and growing happiness.

It ended. Well, we *must* be for ourselves in the long run; the mild and generous are only more justly selfish than the domineering; and it ended when circumstances caused each to feel that the one's interest was not the chief consideration in the other's thoughts. On a mellow evening in September, I was coming from the garden with a heavy basket of apples which I had been gathering. It had got dusk, and the moon looked over the high wall of the court, causing undefined shadows to lurk in the corners of the numerous projecting portions of the building. I set my burden on the house-steps by the kitchen-door, and lingered to rest, and drew in a few more breaths of the soft, sweet air; my eyes were on the moon, and my back to the entrance, when I heard a voice behind me say, — 'Nelly, is that you?'

It was a deep voice, and foreign in tone; yet there was something in the manner of pronouncing my name which made it sound familiar. I turned about to discover who spoke, fearfully; for the doors were shut, and I had seen nobody on approaching the steps. Something stirred in the porch; and, moving nearer, I distinguished a tall man dressed in dark clothes, with dark face and hair. He leant against the side, and held his fingers on the latch as if intending to open for himself. 'Who can it be?' I thought. 'Mr. Earnshaw? Oh, no! The voice has no resemblance to his.'

'I have waited here an hour,' he resumed, while I continued staring; 'and the whole of that time all round has been as still as death. I dared not enter. You do not know me? Look, I'm not a stranger!'

A ray fell on his features; the cheeks were sallow, and half covered with black whiskers; the brows lowering, the eyes deep-set and singular. I remembered the eyes.

‘What!’ I cried, uncertain whether to regard him as a worldly visitor, and I raised my hands in amazement. ‘What! you come back? Is it really you? Is it?’

‘Yes, Heathcliff,’ he replied, glancing from me up to the windows, which reflected a score of glittering moons, but showed no lights from within. ‘Are they at home? where is she? Nelly, you are not glad! you needn’t be so disturbed. Is she here? Speak! I want to have one word with her — your mistress. Go, and say some person from Gimmerton desires to see her.’

‘How will she take it?’ I exclaimed. ‘What will she do? The surprise bewilders me — it will put her out of her head! And you *are* Heathcliff! But altered! Nay, there’s no comprehending it. Have you been for a soldier?’

‘Go and carry my message,’ he interrupted, impatiently. ‘I’m in hell till you do!’

He lifted the latch, and I entered; but when I got to the parlour where Mr. and Mrs. Linton were, I could not persuade myself to proceed. At length I resolved on making an excuse to ask if they would have the candles lighted, and I opened the door.

They sat together in a window whose lattice lay back against the wall, and displayed, beyond the garden trees, and the wild green park, the valley of Gimmerton, with a long line of mist winding nearly to its top (for very soon after you pass the chapel, as you may have noticed, the sough that runs from the marshes joins a beck which follows the bend of the glen). Wuthering Heights rose above this silvery vapour; but our old house was invisible; it rather dips down on the other side. Both the room and its occupants, and the scene they gazed on, looked wondrously peaceful. I shrank reluctantly from performing my errand; and was actually going away leaving it unsaid, after having put my question about the candles, when a sense of my folly compelled me to return, and mutter, ‘A person from Gimmerton wishes to see you ma’am.’

‘What does he want?’ asked Mrs. Linton.

‘I did not question him,’ I answered.

‘Well, close the curtains, Nelly,’ she said; ‘and bring up tea. I’ll be back again directly.’

She quitted the apartment; Mr. Edgar inquired, carelessly, who it was.

‘Some one mistress does not expect,’ I replied. ‘That Heathcliff — you recollect him, sir — who used to live at Mr. Earnshaw’s.’

‘What! the gipsy — the ploughboy?’ he cried. ‘Why did you not say so to Catherine?’

‘Hush! you must not call him by those names, master,’ I said. ‘She’d be sadly grieved to hear you. She was nearly heartbroken when he ran off. I guess his return will make a jubilee to her.’

Mr. Linton walked to a window on the other side of the room that overlooked the court. He unfastened it, and leant out. I suppose they were below, for he exclaimed quickly: ‘Don’t stand there, love! Bring the person in, if it be anyone particular.’ Ere long, I heard the click of the latch, and Catherine flew up-stairs, breathless and wild; too excited to show gladness: indeed, by her face, you would rather have surmised an awful calamity.

‘Oh, Edgar, Edgar!’ she panted, flinging her arms round his neck. ‘Oh, Edgar darling! Heathcliff’s come back — he is!’ And she tightened her embrace to a squeeze.

‘Well, well,’ cried her husband, crossly, ‘don’t strangle me for that! He never struck me as such a marvellous treasure. There is no need to be frantic!’

‘I know you didn’t like him,’ she answered, repressing a little the intensity of her delight. ‘Yet, for my sake, you must be friends now. Shall I tell him to come up?’

‘Here,’ he said, ‘into the parlour?’

‘Where else?’ she asked.

He looked vexed, and suggested the kitchen as a more suitable place for him. Mrs. Linton eyed him with a droll expression — half angry, half laughing at his fastidiousness.

‘No,’ she added, after a while; ‘I cannot sit in the kitchen. Set two tables here, Ellen: one for your master and Miss Isabella, being gentry; the other for Heathcliff and myself, being of the lower orders. Will that please you, dear? Or must I have a fire lighted elsewhere? If so, give directions. I’ll run down and secure my guest. I’m afraid the joy is too great to be real!’

She was about to dart off again; but Edgar arrested her.

‘*You* bid him step up,’ he said, addressing me; ‘and, Catherine, try to be glad, without being absurd. The whole household need not witness the sight of your welcoming a runaway servant as a brother.’

I descended, and found Heathcliff waiting under the porch, evidently anticipating an invitation to enter. He followed my guidance without waste of words, and I ushered him into the presence of the master and mistress, whose flushed cheeks betrayed signs of warm talking. But the lady’s glowed with another feeling when her friend appeared at the door: she sprang forward, took both his hands, and led him to Linton; and then she seized Linton’s reluctant fingers and crushed them into his. Now, fully revealed by the fire and candlelight, I was amazed, more than ever, to behold the transformation of Heathcliff. He had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man; beside whom my master seemed quite slender and youth-like. His upright carriage suggested the idea of his having been in the army. His countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr. Linton’s; it looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. A half-civilised ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified: quite divested of roughness, though stern for grace. My master’s surprise equalled or exceeded mine: he remained for a minute at a loss how to address the ploughboy, as he had called him. Heathcliff dropped his slight hand, and stood looking at him coolly till he chose to speak.

‘Sit down, sir,’ he said, at length. ‘Mrs. Linton, recalling old times, would have me give you a cordial reception; and, of course, I am gratified when anything occurs to please her.’

‘And I also,’ answered Heathcliff, ‘especially if it be anything in which I have a part. I shall stay an hour or two willingly.’

He took a seat opposite Catherine, who kept her gaze fixed on him as if she feared he would vanish were she to remove it. He did not raise his to her often: a quick glance now and then sufficed; but it flashed back, each time more confidently, the undisguised delight he drank from hers. They were too much absorbed in their mutual joy to suffer embarrassment. Not so Mr. Edgar: he grew pale with pure annoyance: a feeling that reached its climax when his lady rose, and stepping across the rug, seized Heathcliff’s hands again, and laughed like one beside herself.

‘I shall think it a dream to-morrow!’ she cried. ‘I shall not be able to believe that I have seen, and touched, and spoken to you once more. And yet, cruel Heathcliff! you don’t deserve this welcome. To be absent and silent for three years, and never to think of me!’

‘A little more than you have thought of me,’ he murmured. ‘I heard of your marriage, Cathy, not long since; and, while waiting in the yard below, I meditated this plan — just to have one glimpse of your face, a stare of surprise, perhaps, and pretended pleasure; afterwards settle my score with Hindley; and then prevent the law by doing execution on myself. Your welcome has put these ideas out of my mind; but beware of meeting me with another aspect next time! Nay, you’ll not drive me off again. You were really sorry for me, were you? Well, there was cause. I’ve fought through a bitter life since I last heard your voice; and you must forgive me, for I struggled only for you!’

‘Catherine, unless we are to have cold tea, please to come to the table,’ interrupted Linton, striving to preserve his ordinary tone, and a due measure of politeness. ‘Mr. Heathcliff will have a long walk, wherever he may lodge to-night; and I’m thirsty.’

She took her post before the urn; and Miss Isabella came, summoned by the bell; then, having handed their chairs forward, I left the room. The meal hardly endured ten minutes. Catherine’s cup was never filled: she could neither eat nor drink. Edgar had made a slop in his saucer, and scarcely swallowed a mouthful. Their guest did not protract his stay that evening above an hour longer. I asked, as he departed, if he went to Gimmerton?

‘No, to Wuthering Heights,’ he answered: ‘Mr. Earnshaw invited me, when I called this morning.’

Mr. Earnshaw invited *him*! and *he* called on Mr. Earnshaw! I pondered this sentence painfully, after he was gone. Is he turning out a bit of a hypocrite, and coming into the country to work mischief under a cloak? I mused: I had a presentiment in the bottom of my heart that he had better have remained away.

About the middle of the night, I was wakened from my first nap by Mrs. Linton gliding into my chamber, taking a seat on my bedside, and pulling me by the hair to rouse me.

'I cannot rest, Ellen,' she said, by way of apology. 'And I want some living creature to keep me company in my happiness! Edgar is sulky, because I'm glad of a thing that does not interest him: he refuses to open his mouth, except to utter pettish, silly speeches; and he affirmed I was cruel and selfish for wishing to talk when he was so sick and sleepy. He always contrives to be sick at the least cross! I gave a few sentences of commendation to Heathcliff, and he, either for a headache or a pang of envy, began to cry: so I got up and left him.'

'What use is it praising Heathcliff to him?' I answered. 'As lads they had an aversion to each other, and Heathcliff would hate just as much to hear him praised: it's human nature. Let Mr. Linton alone about him, unless you would like an open quarrel between them.'

'But does it not show great weakness?' pursued she. 'I'm not envious: I never feel hurt at the brightness of Isabella's yellow hair and the whiteness of her skin, at her dainty elegance, and the fondness all the family exhibit for her. Even you, Nelly, if we have a dispute sometimes, you back Isabella at once; and I yield like a foolish mother: I call her a darling, and flatter her into a good temper. It pleases her brother to see us cordial, and that pleases me. But they are very much alike: they are spoiled children, and fancy the world was made for their accommodation; and though I humour both, I think a smart chastisement might improve them all the same.'

'You're mistaken, Mrs. Linton,' said I. 'They humour you: I know what there would be to do if they did not. You can well afford to indulge their passing whims as long as their business is to anticipate all your desires. You may, however, fall out, at last, over something of equal consequence to both sides; and then those you term weak are very capable of being as obstinate as you.'

'And then we shall fight to the death, sha'n't we, Nelly?' she returned, laughing. 'No! I tell you, I have such faith in Linton's love, that I believe I might kill him, and he wouldn't wish to retaliate.'

I advised her to value him the more for his affection.

'I do,' she answered, 'but he needn't resort to whining for trifles. It is childish and, instead of melting into tears because I said that Heathcliff was now worthy of anyone's regard, and it would honour the first gentleman in the country to be his friend, he ought to have said it for me, and been delighted from sympathy. He must get accustomed to him, and he may as well like him: considering how Heathcliff has reason to object to him, I'm sure he behaved excellently!'

'What do you think of his going to Wuthering Heights?' I inquired. 'He is reformed in every respect, apparently: quite a Christian: offering the right hand of fellowship to his enemies all around!'

'He explained it,' she replied. 'I wonder as much as you. He said he called to gather information concerning me from you, supposing you resided there still; and Joseph told Hindley, who came out and fell to questioning him of what he had been doing, and how he had been living; and finally, desired him to walk in. There were some persons sitting at cards; Heathcliff joined them; my brother lost some money to him, and, finding him plentifully supplied, he requested that he would come again in the evening: to which he consented. Hindley is too reckless to select his acquaintance prudently: he doesn't trouble himself to reflect on the causes he might have for mistrusting one whom he has basely injured. But Heathcliff affirms his principal reason for resuming a connection with his ancient persecutor is a wish to install himself in quarters at walking distance from the Grange, and an attachment to the house where we lived together; and likewise a hope that I shall have more opportunities of seeing him there than I could have if he settled in Gimmerton. He means to offer liberal payment for permission to lodge at the Heights; and doubtless my brother's covetousness will prompt him to accept the terms: he was always greedy; though what he grasps with one hand he flings away with the other.'

'It's a nice place for a young man to fix his dwelling in!' said I. 'Have you no fear of the consequences, Mrs. Linton?'

'None for my friend,' she replied: 'his strong head will keep him from danger; a little for Hindley: but he can't be made morally worse than he is; and I stand between him and bodily harm. The event of this evening has reconciled me to God and humanity! I had risen in angry rebellion against Providence. Oh, I've endured very, very bitter misery, Nelly! If that creature knew how bitter, he'd be ashamed to cloud its removal with idle petulance. It was kindness for him which induced me to bear it alone: had I expressed the agony I frequently felt, he would have been taught to long for its alleviation as ardently as I. However, it's over, and I'll take no revenge on his folly; I can afford to suffer anything hereafter! Should the meanest thing alive slap me on the cheek, I'd not only turn the other, but I'd ask pardon for provoking it; and, as a proof, I'll go make my peace with Edgar instantly. Good-night! I'm an angel!'

In this self-complacent conviction she departed; and the success of her fulfilled resolution was obvious on the morrow: Mr. Linton had not only abjured his peevishness (though his spirits seemed still subdued by Catherine's exuberance of vivacity), but he ventured no objection to her taking Isabella with her to Wuthering Heights in the afternoon; and she rewarded him with such a summer of sweetness and affection in return as made the house a paradise for several days; both master and servants profiting from the perpetual sunshine.

Heathcliff — Mr. Heathcliff I should say in future — used the liberty of visiting at Thrushcross Grange cautiously, at first: he seemed estimating how far its owner would bear his intrusion. Catherine, also, deemed it judicious to moderate her expressions of pleasure in receiving him; and he gradually established his right to be expected. He retained a great deal of the reserve for which his boyhood was remarkable; and that served to repress all startling demonstrations of feeling. My master's uneasiness experienced a lull, and further circumstances diverted it into another channel for a space.

His new source of trouble sprang from the not anticipated misfortune of Isabella Linton evincing a sudden and irresistible attraction towards the tolerated guest. She was at that time a charming young lady of eighteen; infantile in manners, though possessed of keen wit, keen feelings, and a keen temper, too, if irritated. Her brother, who loved her tenderly, was appalled at this fantastic preference. Leaving aside the degradation of an alliance with a nameless man, and the possible fact that his property, in default of heirs male, might pass into such a one's power, he had sense to comprehend Heathcliff's disposition: to know that, though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable and unchanged. And he dreaded that mind: it revolted him: he shrank forebodingly from the idea of committing Isabella to its keeping. He would have recoiled still more had he been aware that her attachment rose unsolicited, and was bestowed where it awakened no reciprocation of sentiment; for the minute he discovered its existence he laid the blame on Heathcliff's deliberate designing.

We had all remarked, during some time, that Miss Linton fretted and pined over something. She grew cross and wearisome; snapping at and teasing Catherine continually, at the imminent risk of exhausting her limited patience. We excused her, to a certain extent, on the plea of ill-health: she was dwindling and fading before our eyes. But one day, when she had been peculiarly wayward, rejecting her breakfast, complaining that the servants did not do what she told them; that the mistress would allow her to be nothing in the house, and Edgar neglected her; that she had caught a cold with the doors being left open, and we let the parlour fire go out on purpose to vex her, with a hundred yet more frivolous accusations, Mrs. Linton peremptorily insisted that she should get to bed; and, having scolded her heartily, threatened to send for the doctor. Mention of Kenneth caused her to exclaim, instantly, that her health was perfect, and it was only Catherine's harshness which made her unhappy.

'How can you say I am harsh, you naughty fondling?' cried the mistress, amazed at the unreasonable assertion. 'You are surely losing your reason. When have I been hash, tell me?'

'Yesterday,' sobbed Isabella, 'and now!'

'Yesterday!' said her sister-in-law. 'On what occasion?'

'In our walk along the moor: you told me to ramble where I pleased, while you sauntered on with Mr. Heathcliff!'

'And that's your notion of harshness?' said Catherine, laughing. 'It was no hint that your company was superfluous? We didn't care whether you kept with us or not; I merely thought Heathcliff's talk would have nothing entertaining for your ears.'

'Oh, no,' wept the young lady; 'you wished me away, because you knew I liked to be there!'

'Is she sane?' asked Mrs. Linton, appealing to me. 'I'll repeat our conversation, word for word, Isabella; and you point out any charm it could have had for you.'

'I don't mind the conversation,' she answered: 'I wanted to be with — '

'Well?' said Catherine, perceiving her hesitate to complete the sentence.

'With him: and I won't be always sent off!' she continued, kindling up. 'You are a dog in the manger, Cathy, and desire no one to be loved but yourself!'

'You are an impertinent little monkey!' exclaimed Mrs. Linton, in surprise. 'But I'll not believe this idiotcy! It is impossible that you can covet the admiration of Heathcliff — that you consider him an agreeable person! I hope I have misunderstood you, Isabella?'

'No, you have not,' said the infatuated girl. 'I love him more than ever you loved Edgar, and he might love me, if you would let him!'

'I wouldn't be you for a kingdom, then!' Catherine declared, emphatically: and she seemed to speak sincerely. 'Nelly, help me to convince her of her madness. Tell her what Heathcliff is: an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone. I'd as soon put that little canary into the park on a winter's day, as recommend you to bestow your heart on him! It is deplorable ignorance of his character, child, and nothing else, which makes that dream enter your head. Pray, don't imagine that he conceals depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior! He's not a rough diamond — a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic: he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man. I never say to him, "Let this or that enemy alone, because it would be ungenerous or cruel to harm them;" I say, "Let them alone, because *I* should hate them to be wronged:" and he'd crush you like a sparrow's egg, Isabella, if he found you a troublesome charge. I know he couldn't love a Linton; and yet he'd be quite capable of marrying your fortune and expectations: avarice is growing with him a besetting sin. There's my picture: and I'm his friend — so much so, that had he thought seriously to catch you, I should, perhaps, have held my tongue, and let you fall into his trap.'

Miss Linton regarded her sister-in-law with indignation.

'For shame! for shame!' she repeated, angrily. 'You are worse than twenty foes, you poisonous friend!'

'Ah! you won't believe me, then?' said Catherine. 'You think I speak from wicked selfishness?'

'I'm certain you do,' retorted Isabella; 'and I shudder at you!'

'Good!' cried the other. 'Try for yourself, if that be your spirit: I have done, and yield the argument to your saucy insolence.' —

'And I must suffer for her egotism!' she sobbed, as Mrs. Linton left the room. 'All, all is against me: she has blighted my single consolation. But she uttered falsehoods, didn't she? Mr. Heathcliff is not a fiend: he has an honourable soul, and a true one, or how could he remember her?'

'Banish him from your thoughts, Miss,' I said. 'He's a bird of bad omen: no mate for you. Mrs. Linton spoke strongly, and yet I can't contradict her. She is better acquainted with his heart than I, or any one besides; and she never would represent him as worse than he is. Honest people don't hide their deeds. How has he been living? how has he got rich? why is he staying at Wuthering Heights, the house of a man whom he abhors? They say Mr. Earnshaw is worse and worse since he came. They sit up all night together continually, and Hindley has been borrowing money on his land, and does nothing but play and drink: I heard only a week ago — it was Joseph who told me — I met him at Gimmerton: "Nelly," he said, "we's hae a crowner's 'quest enow, at ahr folks'. One on 'em 's a'most getten his finger cut off wi' hauding t' other fro' stickin' hisseln loike a cawlf. That's maister, yeah knaw, 'at 's soa up o' going tuh t' grand 'sizes. He's noan feared o' t' bench o' judges, norther Paul, nur Peter, nur John, nur Matthew, nor noan on 'em, not he! He fair likes — he langs to set his brazened face agean 'em! And yon bonny lad Heathcliff, yah mind, he's a rare 'un. He can girn a laugh as well 's onybody at a raight divil's jest. Does he niver say nowt of his fine living amang us, when he goes to t' Grange? This is t' way on 't: — up at sundown: dice, brandy, cloised shutters, und can'le-light till next day at noon: then, t'fooil gangs banning und raving to his cham'er, makking dacent fowks dig thur fingers i' thur lugs fur varry shame; un' the knave, why he can caint his brass, un' ate, un' sleep, un' off to his neighbour's to gossip wi' t' wife. I' course, he tells Dame Catherine how her fathur's goold runs into his pocket, and her fathur's son gallops down t' broad road, while he flees afore to oppen t' pikes!" Now, Miss Linton, Joseph is an old rascal, but no liar; and, if his account of Heathcliff's conduct be true, you would never think of desiring such a husband, would you?'

'You are leagued with the rest, Ellen!' she replied. 'I'll not listen to your slanders. What malevolence you must have to wish to convince me that there is no happiness in the world!'

Whether she would have got over this fancy if left to herself, or persevered in nursing it perpetually, I cannot say: she had little time to reflect. The day after, there was a justice-meeting at the next town; my master was obliged to attend; and Mr. Heathcliff, aware of his absence, called rather earlier than usual. Catherine and Isabella were sitting in the library, on hostile terms, but silent: the latter alarmed at her recent indiscretion, and the disclosure she had made of her secret feelings in a transient fit of passion; the former, on mature consideration, really offended with her companion; and, if she laughed again at her pertness, inclined to make it no laughing matter to her. She did laugh as she saw Heathcliff pass the window. I was sweeping the hearth, and I noticed a mischievous smile on her lips. Isabella, absorbed in her meditations, or a book, remained till the door opened; and it was too late to attempt an escape, which she would gladly have done had it been practicable.

'Come in, that's right!' exclaimed the mistress, gaily, pulling a chair to the fire. 'Here are two people sadly in need of a third to thaw the ice between them; and you are the very one we should both of us choose. Heathcliff, I'm proud to show you, at last, somebody that dotes on you more than myself. I expect you to feel flattered. Nay, it's not Nelly; don't look at her! My poor little sister-in-law is breaking her heart by mere contemplation of your physical and moral beauty. It lies in your own power to be Edgar's brother! No, no, Isabella, you sha'n't run off,' she continued, arresting, with feigned playfulness, the confounded girl, who had risen indignantly. 'We were quarrelling like cats about you, Heathcliff; and I was fairly beaten in protestations of devotion and admiration: and, moreover, I was informed that if I would but have the manners to stand aside, my rival, as she will have herself to be, would shoot a shaft into your soul that would fix you for ever, and send my image into eternal oblivion!'

'Catherine!' said Isabella, calling up her dignity, and disdaining to struggle from the tight grasp that held her, 'I'd thank you to adhere to the truth and not slander me, even in joke! Mr. Heathcliff, be kind enough to bid this friend of yours release me: she forgets that you and I are not intimate acquaintances; and what amuses her is painful to me beyond expression.'

As the guest answered nothing, but took his seat, and looked thoroughly indifferent what sentiments she cherished concerning him, she turned and whispered an earnest appeal for liberty to her tormentor.

'By no means!' cried Mrs. Linton in answer. 'I won't be named a dog in the manger again. You *shall* stay: now then! Heathcliff, why don't you evince satisfaction at my pleasant news? Isabella swears that the love Edgar has for me is nothing to that she entertains for you. I'm sure she made some speech of the kind; did she not, Ellen? And she has fasted ever since the day before yesterday's walk, from sorrow and rage that I despatched her out of your society under the idea of its being unacceptable.'

'I think you belie her,' said Heathcliff, twisting his chair to face them. 'She wishes to be out of my society now, at any rate!'

And he stared hard at the object of discourse, as one might do at a strange repulsive animal: a centipede from the Indies, for instance, which curiosity leads one to examine in spite of the aversion it raises. The poor thing couldn't bear that; she grew white and red in rapid succession, and, while tears beaded her lashes, bent the strength of her small fingers to loosen the firm clutch of Catherine; and perceiving that as fast as she raised one finger off her arm another closed down, and she could not remove the whole together, she began to make use of her nails; and their sharpness presently ornamented the detainer's with crescents of red.

'There's a tigress!' exclaimed Mrs. Linton, setting her free, and shaking her hand with pain. 'Begone, for God's sake, and hide your vixen face! How foolish to reveal those talons to him. Can't you fancy the conclusions he'll draw? Look, Heathcliff! they are instruments that will do execution — you must beware of your eyes.'

'I'd wrench them off her fingers, if they ever menaced me,' he answered, brutally, when the door had closed after her. 'But what did you mean by teasing the creature in that manner, Cathy? You were not speaking the truth, were you?'

'I assure you I was,' she returned. 'She has been dying for your sake several weeks, and raving about you this morning, and pouring forth a deluge of abuse, because I represented your failings in a plain light, for the purpose of mitigating her adoration. But don't notice it further: I wished to punish her sauciness, that's all. I like her too well, my dear Heathcliff, to let you absolutely seize and devour her up.'

'And I like her too ill to attempt it,' said he, 'except in a very ghoulish fashion. You'd hear of odd things if I lived alone with that mawkish, waxen face: the most ordinary would be painting on its white the colours of the rainbow, and turning the blue eyes black, every day or two: they detestably resemble Linton's.'

'Delectably!' observed Catherine. 'They are dove's eyes — angel's!'

'She's her brother's heir, is she not?' he asked, after a brief silence.

'I should be sorry to think so,' returned his companion. 'Half a dozen nephews shall erase her title, please heaven! Abstract your mind from the subject at present: you are too prone to covet your neighbour's goods; remember *this* neighbour's goods are mine.'

'If they were *mine*, they would be none the less that,' said Heathcliff; 'but though Isabella Linton may be silly, she is scarcely mad; and, in short, we'll dismiss the matter, as you advise.'

From their tongues they did dismiss it; and Catherine, probably, from her thoughts. The other, I felt certain, recalled it often in the course of the evening. I saw him smile to himself — grin rather — and lapse into ominous musing whenever Mrs. Linton had occasion to be absent from the apartment.

I determined to watch his movements. My heart invariably cleaved to the master's, in preference to Catherine's side: with reason I imagined, for he was kind, and trustful, and honourable; and she — she could not be called *opposite*, yet she seemed to allow herself such wide latitude, that I had little faith in her principles, and still less sympathy for her feelings. I wanted something to happen which might have the effect of freeing both Wuthering Heights and the Grange of Mr. Heathcliff quietly; leaving us as we had been prior to his advent. His visits were a continual nightmare to me; and, I suspected, to my master also. His abode at the Heights was an oppression past explaining. I felt that God had forsaken the stray sheep there to its own wicked wanderings, and an evil beast prowled between it and the fold, waiting his time to spring and destroy.

CHAPTER XI

Sometimes, while meditating on these things in solitude, I've got up in a sudden terror, and put on my bonnet to go see how all was at the farm. I've persuaded my conscience that it was a duty to warn him how people talked regarding his ways; and then I've recollected his confirmed bad habits, and, hopeless of benefiting him, have flinched from re-entering the dismal house, doubting if I could bear to be taken at my word.

One time I passed the old gate, going out of my way, on a journey to Gimmerton. It was about the period that my narrative has reached: a bright frosty afternoon; the ground bare, and the road hard and dry. I came to a stone where the highway branches off on to the moor at your left hand; a rough sand-pillar, with the letters W. H. cut on its north side, on the east, G., and on the south-west, T. G. It serves as a guide-post to the Grange, the Heights, and village. The sun shone yellow on its grey head, reminding me of summer; and I cannot say why, but all at once a gush of child's sensations flowed into my heart. Hindley and I held it a favourite spot twenty years before. I gazed long at the weather-worn block; and, stooping down, perceived a hole near the bottom still full of snail-shells and pebbles, which we were fond of storing there with more perishable things; and, as fresh as reality, it appeared that I beheld my early playmate seated on the withered turf: his dark, square head bent forward, and his little hand scooping out the earth with a piece of slate. 'Poor Hindley!' I exclaimed, involuntarily. I started: my bodily eye was cheated into a momentary belief that the child lifted its face and stared straight into mine! It vanished in a twinkling; but immediately I felt an irresistible yearning to be at the Heights. Superstition urged me to comply with this impulse: supposing he should be dead! I thought — or should die soon! — supposing it were a sign of death! The nearer I got to the house the more agitated I grew; and on catching sight of it I trembled in every limb. The apparition had outstripped me: it stood looking through the gate. That was my first idea on observing an elf-locked, brown-eyed boy setting his ruddy countenance against the bars. Further reflection suggested this must be Hareton, *my* Hareton, not altered greatly since I left him, ten months since.

'God bless thee, darling!' I cried, forgetting instantaneously my foolish fears. 'Hareton, it's Nelly! Nelly, thy nurse.'

He retreated out of arm's length, and picked up a large flint.

'I am come to see thy father, Hareton,' I added, guessing from the action that Nelly, if she lived in his memory at all, was not recognised as one with me.

He raised his missile to hurl it; I commenced a soothing speech, but could not stay his hand: the stone struck my bonnet; and then ensued, from the stammering lips of the little fellow, a string of curses, which, whether he comprehended them or not, were delivered with practised emphasis, and distorted his baby features into a shocking expression of malignity. You may be certain this grieved more than angered me. Fit to cry, I took an orange from my pocket, and offered it to propitiate him. He hesitated, and then snatched it from my hold; as if he fancied I only intended to tempt and disappoint him. I showed another, keeping it out of his reach.

'Who has taught you those fine words, my bairn?' I inquired. 'The curate?'

'Damn the curate, and thee! Gie me that,' he replied.

'Tell us where you got your lessons, and you shall have it,' said I. 'Who's your master?'

'Devil daddy,' was his answer.

'And what do you learn from daddy?' I continued.

He jumped at the fruit; I raised it higher. 'What does he teach you?' I asked.

'Naught,' said he, 'but to keep out of his gait. Daddy cannot bide me, because I swear at him.'

'Ah! and the devil teaches you to swear at daddy?' I observed.

'Ay — nay,' he drawled.

'Who, then?'

'Heathcliff.'

'I asked if he liked Mr. Heathcliff.'

'Ay!' he answered again.

Desiring to have his reasons for liking him, I could only gather the sentences — 'I known't: he pays dad back what he gies to me — he curses daddy for cursing me. He says I mun do as I will.'

'And the curate does not teach you to read and write, then?' I pursued.

'No, I was told the curate should have his — teeth dashed down his — throat, if he stepped over the threshold — Heathcliff had promised that!'

I put the orange in his hand, and bade him tell his father that a woman called Nelly Dean was waiting to speak with him, by the garden gate. He went up the walk, and entered the house; but, instead of Hindley, Heathcliff appeared on the door-stones; and I turned directly and ran down the road as hard as ever I could race, making no halt till I gained the guide-post, and feeling as scared as if I had raised a goblin. This is not much connected with Miss Isabella's affair: except that it urged me to resolve further on mounting vigilant guard, and doing my utmost to cheek the spread of such bad influence at the Grange: even though I should wake a domestic storm, by thwarting Mrs. Linton's pleasure.

The next time Heathcliff came my young lady chanced to be feeding some pigeons in the court. She had never spoken a word to her sister-in-law for three days; but she had likewise dropped her fretful complaining, and we found it a great comfort. Heathcliff had not the habit of bestowing a single unnecessary civility on Miss Linton, I knew. Now, as soon as he beheld her, his first precaution was to take a sweeping survey of the house-front. I was standing by the kitchen-window, but I drew out of sight. He then stepped across the pavement to her, and said something: she seemed embarrassed, and desirous of getting away; to prevent it, he laid his hand on her arm. She averted her face: he apparently put some question which she had no mind to answer. There was another rapid glance at the house, and supposing himself unseen, the scoundrel had the impudence to embrace her.

‘Judas! Traitor!’ I ejaculated. ‘You are a hypocrite, too, are you? A deliberate deceiver.’

‘Who is, Nelly?’ said Catherine’s voice at my elbow: I had been over-intent on watching the pair outside to mark her entrance.

‘Your worthless friend!’ I answered, warmly: ‘the sneaking rascal yonder. Ah, he has caught a glimpse of us — he is coming in! I wonder will he have the heart to find a plausible excuse for making love to Miss, when he told you he hated her?’

Mrs. Linton saw Isabella tear herself free, and run into the garden; and a minute after, Heathcliff opened the door. I couldn’t withhold giving some loose to my indignation; but Catherine angrily insisted on silence, and threatened to order me out of the kitchen, if I dared to be so presumptuous as to put in my insolent tongue.

‘To hear you, people might think you were the mistress!’ she cried. ‘You want setting down in your right place! Heathcliff, what are you about, raising this stir? I said you must let Isabella alone! — I beg you will, unless you are tired of being received here, and wish Linton to draw the bolts against you!’

‘God forbid that he should try!’ answered the black villain. I detested him just then. ‘God keep him meek and patient! Every day I grow madder after sending him to heaven!’

‘Hush!’ said Catherine, shutting the inner door! ‘Don’t vex me. Why have you disregarded my request? Did she come across you on purpose?’

‘What is it to you?’ he growled. ‘I have a right to kiss her, if she chooses; and you have no right to object. I am not *your* husband: *you* needn’t be jealous of me!’

‘I’m not jealous of you,’ replied the mistress; ‘I’m jealous for you. Clear your face: you sha’n’t scowl at me! If you like Isabella, you shall marry her. But do you like her? Tell the truth, Heathcliff! There, you won’t answer. I’m certain you don’t.’

‘And would Mr. Linton approve of his sister marrying that man?’ I inquired.

‘Mr. Linton should approve,’ returned my lady, decisively.

‘He might spare himself the trouble,’ said Heathcliff: ‘I could do as well without his approbation. And as to you, Catherine, I have a mind to speak a few words now, while we are at it. I want you to be aware that I *know* you have treated me infernally — infernally! Do you hear? And if you flatter yourself that I don't perceive it, you are a fool; and if you think I can be consoled by sweet words, you are an idiot: and if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged, I'll convince you of the contrary, in a very little while! Meantime, thank you for telling me your sister-in-law's secret: I swear I'll make the most of it. And stand you aside!'

'What new phase of his character is this?' exclaimed Mrs. Linton, in amazement. 'I've treated you infernally — and you'll take your revenge! How will you take it, ungrateful brute? How have I treated you infernally?'

'I seek no revenge on you,' replied Heathcliff, less vehemently. 'That's not the plan. The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath them. You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement, only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style, and refrain from insult as much as you are able. Having levelled my palace, don't erect a hovel and complacently admire your own charity in giving me that for a home. If I imagined you really wished me to marry Isabel, I'd cut my throat!'

'Oh, the evil is that I am *not* jealous, is it?' cried Catherine. 'Well, I won't repeat my offer of a wife: it is as bad as offering Satan a lost soul. Your bliss lies, like his, in inflicting misery. You prove it. Edgar is restored from the ill-temper he gave way to at your coming; I begin to be secure and tranquil; and you, restless to know us at peace, appear resolved on exciting a quarrel. Quarrel with Edgar, if you please, Heathcliff, and deceive his sister: you'll hit on exactly the most efficient method of revenging yourself on me.'

The conversation ceased. Mrs. Linton sat down by the fire, flushed and gloomy. The spirit which served her was growing intractable: she could neither lay nor control it. He stood on the hearth with folded arms, brooding on his evil thoughts; and in this position I left them to seek the master, who was wondering what kept Catherine below so long.

'Ellen,' said he, when I entered, 'have you seen your mistress?'

'Yes; she's in the kitchen, sir,' I answered. 'She's sadly put out by Mr. Heathcliff's behaviour: and, indeed, I do think it's time to arrange his visits on another footing. There's harm in being too soft, and now it's come to this — .' And I related the scene in the court, and, as near as I dared, the whole subsequent dispute. I fancied it could not be very prejudicial to Mrs. Linton; unless she made it so afterwards, by assuming the defensive for her guest. Edgar Linton had difficulty in hearing me to the close. His first words revealed that he did not clear his wife of blame.

'This is insufferable!' he exclaimed. 'It is disgraceful that she should own him for a friend, and force his company on me! Call me two men out of the hall, Ellen. Catherine shall linger no longer to argue with the low ruffian — I have humoured her enough.'

He descended, and bidding the servants wait in the passage, went, followed by me, to the kitchen. Its occupants had recommenced their angry discussion: Mrs. Linton, at least, was scolding with renewed vigour; Heathcliff had moved to the window, and hung his head, somewhat cowed by her violent rating apparently. He saw the master first, and made a hasty motion that she should be silent; which she obeyed, abruptly, on discovering the reason of his intimation.

‘How is this?’ said Linton, addressing her; ‘what notion of propriety must you have to remain here, after the language which has been held to you by that blackguard? I suppose, because it is his ordinary talk you think nothing of it: you are habituated to his baseness, and, perhaps, imagine I can get used to it too!’

‘Have you been listening at the door, Edgar?’ asked the mistress, in a tone particularly calculated to provoke her husband, implying both carelessness and contempt of his irritation. Heathcliff, who had raised his eyes at the former speech, gave a sneering laugh at the latter; on purpose, it seemed, to draw Mr. Linton’s attention to him. He succeeded; but Edgar did not mean to entertain him with any high flights of passion.

‘I’ve been so far forbearing with you, sir,’ he said quietly; ‘not that I was ignorant of your miserable, degraded character, but I felt you were only partly responsible for that; and Catherine wishing to keep up your acquaintance, I acquiesced — foolishly. Your presence is a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous: for that cause, and to prevent worse consequences, I shall deny you hereafter admission into this house, and give notice now that I require your instant departure. Three minutes’ delay will render it involuntary and ignominious.

Heathcliff measured the height and breadth of the speaker with an eye full of derision.

‘Cathy, this lamb of yours threatens like a bull!’ he said. ‘It is in danger of splitting its skull against my knuckles. By God! Mr. Linton, I’m mortally sorry that you are not worth knocking down!’

My master glanced towards the passage, and signed me to fetch the men: he had no intention of hazarding a personal encounter. I obeyed the hint; but Mrs. Linton, suspecting something, followed; and when I attempted to call them, she pulled me back, slammed the door to, and locked it.

‘Fair means!’ she said, in answer to her husband’s look of angry surprise. ‘If you have not courage to attack him, make an apology, or allow yourself to be beaten. It will correct you of feigning more valour than you possess. No, I’ll swallow the key before you shall get it! I’m delightfully rewarded for my kindness to each! After constant indulgence of one’s weak nature, and the other’s bad one, I earn for thanks two samples of blind ingratitude, stupid to absurdity! Edgar, I was defending you and yours; and I wish Heathcliff may flog you sick, for daring to think an evil thought of me!’

It did not need the medium of a flogging to produce that effect on the master. He tried to wrest the key from Catherine’s grasp, and for safety she flung it into the hottest part of the fire; whereupon Mr. Edgar was taken with a nervous trembling, and his countenance grew deadly pale. For his life he could not avert that excess of emotion: mingled anguish and humiliation overcame him completely. He leant on the back of a chair, and covered his face.

‘Oh, heavens! In old days this would win you knighthood!’ exclaimed Mrs. Linton. ‘We are vanquished! we are vanquished! Heathcliff would as soon lift a finger at you as the king would march his army against a colony of mice. Cheer up! you sha’n’t be hurt! Your type is not a lamb, it’s a sucking leveret.’

‘I wish you joy of the milk-blooded coward, Cathy!’ said her friend. ‘I compliment you on your taste. And that is the slavering, shivering thing you preferred to me! I would not strike him with my fist, but I’d kick him with my foot, and experience considerable satisfaction. Is he weeping, or is he going to faint for fear?’

The fellow approached and gave the chair on which Linton rested a push. He’d better have kept his distance: my master quickly sprang erect, and struck him full on the throat a blow that would have levelled a slighter man. It took his breath for a minute; and while he choked, Mr. Linton walked out by the back door into the yard, and from thence to the front entrance.

‘There! you’ve done with coming here,’ cried Catherine. ‘Get away, now; he’ll return with a brace of pistols and half-a-dozen assistants. If he did overhear us, of course he’d never forgive you. You’ve played me an ill turn, Heathcliff! But go — make haste! I’d rather see Edgar at bay than you.’

‘Do you suppose I’m going with that blow burning in my gullet?’ he thundered. ‘By hell, no! I’ll crush his ribs in like a rotten hazel-nut before I cross the threshold! If I don’t floor him now, I shall murder him some time; so, as you value his existence, let me get at him!’

‘He is not coming,’ I interposed, framing a bit of a lie. ‘There’s the coachman and the two gardeners; you’ll surely not wait to be thrust into the road by them! Each has a bludgeon; and master will, very likely, be watching from the parlour-windows to see that they fulfil his orders.’

The gardeners and coachman were there: but Linton was with them. They had already entered the court. Heathcliff, on the second thoughts, resolved to avoid a struggle against three underlings: he seized the poker, smashed the lock from the inner door, and made his escape as they tramped in.

Mrs. Linton, who was very much excited, bade me accompany her upstairs. She did not know my share in contributing to the disturbance, and I was anxious to keep her in ignorance.

‘I’m nearly distracted, Nelly!’ she exclaimed, throwing herself on the sofa. ‘A thousand smiths’ hammers are beating in my head! Tell Isabella to shun me; this uproar is owing to her; and should she or any one else aggravate my anger at present, I shall get wild. And, Nelly, say to Edgar, if you see him again to-night, that I’m in danger of being seriously ill. I wish it may prove true. He has startled and distressed me shockingly! I want to frighten him. Besides, he might come and begin a string of abuse or complainings; I'm certain I should recriminate, and God knows where we should end! Will you do so, my good Nelly? You are aware that I am no way blamable in this matter. What possessed him to turn listener? Heathcliff's talk was outrageous, after you left us; but I could soon have diverted him from Isabella, and the rest meant nothing. Now all is dashed wrong; by the fool's craving to hear evil of self, that haunts some people like a demon! Had Edgar never gathered our conversation, he would never have been the worse for it. Really, when he opened on me in that unreasonable tone of displeasure after I had scolded Heathcliff till I was hoarse for him, I did not care hardly what they did to each other; especially as I felt that, however the scene closed, we should all be driven asunder for nobody knows how long! Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend — if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own. That will be a prompt way of finishing all, when I am pushed to extremity! But it's a deed to be reserved for a forlorn hope; I'd not take Linton by surprise with it. To this point he has been discreet in dreading to provoke me; you must represent the peril of quitting that policy, and remind him of my passionate temper, verging, when kindled, on frenzy. I wish you could dismiss that apathy out of that countenance, and look rather more anxious about me.'

The stolidity with which I received these instructions was, no doubt, rather exasperating: for they were delivered in perfect sincerity; but I believed a person who could plan the turning of her fits of passion to account, beforehand, might, by exerting her will, manage to control herself tolerably, even while under their influence; and I did not wish to 'frighten' her husband, as she said, and multiply his annoyances for the purpose of serving her selfishness. Therefore I said nothing when I met the master coming towards the parlour; but I took the liberty of turning back to listen whether they would resume their quarrel together. He began to speak first.

'Remain where you are, Catherine,' he said; without any anger in his voice, but with much sorrowful despondency. 'I shall not stay. I am neither come to wrangle nor be reconciled; but I wish just to learn whether, after this evening's events, you intend to continue your intimacy with — '

'Oh, for mercy's sake,' interrupted the mistress, stamping her foot, 'for mercy's sake, let us hear no more of it now! Your cold blood cannot be worked into a fever: your veins are full of ice-water; but mine are boiling, and the sight of such chillness makes them dance.'

'To get rid of me, answer my question,' persevered Mr. Linton. 'You must answer it; and that violence does not alarm me. I have found that you can be as stoical as anyone, when you please. Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be *my* friend and *his* at the same time; and I absolutely *require* to know which you choose.'

'I require to be let alone!' exclaimed Catherine, furiously. 'I demand it!

Don’t you see I can scarcely stand? Edgar, you — you leave me!’

She rang the bell till it broke with a twang; I entered leisurely. It was enough to try the temper of a saint, such senseless, wicked rages! There she lay dashing her head against the arm of the sofa, and grinding her teeth, so that you might fancy she would crash them to splinters! Mr. Linton stood looking at her in sudden compunction and fear. He told me to fetch some water. She had no breath for speaking. I brought a glass full; and as she would not drink, I sprinkled it on her face. In a few seconds she stretched herself out stiff, and turned up her eyes, while her cheeks, at once blanched and livid, assumed the aspect of death. Linton looked terrified.

‘There is nothing in the world the matter,’ I whispered. I did not want him to yield, though I could not help being afraid in my heart.

‘She has blood on her lips!’ he said, shuddering.

‘Never mind!’ I answered, tartly. And I told him how she had resolved, previous to his coming, on exhibiting a fit of frenzy. I incautiously gave the account aloud, and she heard me; for she started up — her hair flying over her shoulders, her eyes flashing, the muscles of her neck and arms standing out preternaturally. I made up my mind for broken bones, at least; but she only glared about her for an instant, and then rushed from the room. The master directed me to follow; I did, to her chamber-door: she hindered me from going further by securing it against me.

As she never offered to descend to breakfast next morning, I went to ask whether she would have some carried up. ‘No!’ she replied, peremptorily. The same question was repeated at dinner and tea; and again on the morrow after, and received the same answer. Mr. Linton, on his part, spent his time in the library, and did not inquire concerning his wife’s occupations. Isabella and he had had an hour’s interview, during which he tried to elicit from her some sentiment of proper horror for Heathcliff’s advances: but he could make nothing of her evasive replies, and was obliged to close the examination unsatisfactorily; adding, however, a solemn warning, that if she were so insane as to encourage that worthless suitor, it would dissolve all bonds of relationship between herself and him.

CHAPTER XII

While Miss Linton moped about the park and garden, always silent, and almost always in tears; and her brother shut himself up among books that he never opened — wearying, I guessed, with a continual vague expectation that Catherine, repenting her conduct, would come of her own accord to ask pardon, and seek a reconciliation — and *she* fasted pertinaciously, under the idea, probably, that at every meal Edgar was ready to choke for her absence, and pride alone held him from running to cast himself at her feet; I went about my household duties, convinced that the Grange had but one sensible soul in its walls, and that lodged in my body. I wasted no condolences on Miss, nor any expostulations on my mistress; nor did I pay much attention to the sighs of my master, who yearned to hear his lady's name, since he might not hear her voice. I determined they should come about as they pleased for me; and though it was a tiresomely slow process, I began to rejoice at length in a faint dawn of its progress: as I thought at first.

Mrs. Linton, on the third day, unbarred her door, and having finished the water in her pitcher and decanter, desired a renewed supply, and a basin of gruel, for she believed she was dying. That I set down as a speech meant for Edgar's ears; I believed no such thing, so I kept it to myself and brought her some tea and dry toast. She ate and drank eagerly, and sank back on her pillow again, clenching her hands and groaning. 'Oh, I will die,' she exclaimed, 'since no one cares anything about me. I wish I had not taken that.' Then a good while after I heard her murmur, 'No, I'll not die — he'd be glad — he does not love me at all — he would never miss me!'

'Did you want anything, ma'am?' I inquired, still preserving my external composure, in spite of her ghastly countenance and strange, exaggerated manner.

'What is that apathetic being doing?' she demanded, pushing the thick entangled locks from her wasted face. 'Has he fallen into a lethargy, or is he dead?'

'Neither,' replied I; 'if you mean Mr. Linton. He's tolerably well, I think, though his studies occupy him rather more than they ought: he is continually among his books, since he has no other society.'

I should not have spoken so if I had known her true condition, but I could not get rid of the notion that she acted a part of her disorder.

'Among his books!' she cried, confounded. 'And I dying! I on the brink of the grave! My God! does he know how I'm altered?' continued she, staring at her reflection in a mirror hanging against the opposite wall. 'Is that Catherine Linton? He imagines me in a pet — in play, perhaps. Cannot you inform him that it is frightful earnest? Nelly, if it be not too late, as soon as I learn how he feels, I'll choose between these two: either to starve at once — that would be no punishment unless he had a heart — or to recover, and leave the country. Are you speaking the truth about him now? Take care. Is he actually so utterly indifferent for my life?'

'Why, ma'am,' I answered, 'the master has no idea of your being deranged; and of course he does not fear that you will let yourself die of hunger.'

'You think not? Cannot you tell him I will?' she returned. 'Persuade him! speak of your own mind: say you are certain I will!'

'No, you forget, Mrs. Linton,' I suggested, 'that you have eaten some food with a relish this evening, and to-morrow you will perceive its good effects.'

'If I were only sure it would kill him,' she interrupted, 'I'd kill myself directly! These three awful nights I've never closed my lids — and oh, I've been tormented! I've been haunted, Nelly! But I begin to fancy you don't like me. How strange! I thought, though everybody hated and despised each other, they could not avoid loving me. And they have all turned to enemies in a few hours: they have, I'm positive; the people here. How dreary to meet death, surrounded by their cold faces! Isabella, terrified and repelled, afraid to enter the room, it would be so dreadful to watch Catherine go. And Edgar standing solemnly by to see it over; then offering prayers of thanks to God for restoring peace to his house, and going back to his *books*! What in the name of all that feels has he to do with *books*, when I am dying?'

She could not bear the notion which I had put into her head of Mr. Linton's philosophical resignation. Tossing about, she increased her feverish bewilderment to madness, and tore the pillow with her teeth; then raising herself up all burning, desired that I would open the window. We were in the middle of winter, the wind blew strong from the north-east, and I objected. Both the expressions flitting over her face, and the changes of her moods, began to alarm me terribly; and brought to my recollection her former illness, and the doctor's injunction that she should not be crossed. A minute previously she was violent; now, supported on one arm, and not noticing my refusal to obey her, she seemed to find childish diversion in pulling the feathers from the rents she had just made, and ranging them on the sheet according to their different species: her mind had strayed to other associations.

'That's a turkey's,' she murmured to herself; 'and this is a wild duck's; and this is a pigeon's. Ah, they put pigeons' feathers in the pillows — no wonder I couldn't die! Let me take care to throw it on the floor when I lie down. And here is a moor-cock's; and this — I should know it among a thousand — it's a lapwing's. Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds had touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot: we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dared not come. I made him promise he'd never shoot a lapwing after that, and he didn't. Yes, here are more! Did he shoot my lapwings, Nelly? Are they red, any of them? Let me look.'

'Give over with that baby-work!' I interrupted, dragging the pillow away, and turning the holes towards the mattress, for she was removing its contents by handfuls. 'Lie down and shut your eyes: you're wandering. There's a mess! The down is flying about like snow.'

I went here and there collecting it.

'I see in you, Nelly,' she continued dreamily, 'an aged woman: you have grey hair and bent shoulders. This bed is the fairy cave under Penistone crags, and you are gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers; pretending, while I am near, that they are only locks of wool. That's what you'll come to fifty years hence: I know you are not so now. I'm not wandering: you're mistaken, or else I should believe you really *were* that withered hag, and I should think I *was* under Penistone Crags; and I'm conscious it's night, and there are two candles on the table making the black press shine like jet.'

'The black press? where is that?' I asked. 'You are talking in your sleep!'

'It's against the wall, as it always is,' she replied. 'It *does* appear odd — I see a face in it!'

'There's no press in the room, and never was,' said I, resuming my seat, and looping up the curtain that I might watch her.

'Don't *you* see that face?' she inquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror.

And say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own; so I rose and covered it with a shawl.

'It's behind there still!' she pursued, anxiously. 'And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!'

I took her hand in mine, and bid her be composed; for a succession of shudders convulsed her frame, and she would keep straining her gaze towards the glass.

'There's nobody here!' I insisted. 'It was *yourself*, Mrs. Linton: you knew it a while since.'

'Myself!' she gasped, 'and the clock is striking twelve! It's true, then! that's dreadful!'

Her fingers clutched the clothes, and gathered them over her eyes. I attempted to steal to the door with an intention of calling her husband; but I was summoned back by a piercing shriek — the shawl had dropped from the frame.

'Why, what is the matter?' cried I. 'Who is coward now? Wake up! That is the glass — the mirror, Mrs. Linton; and you see yourself in it, and there am I too by your side.'

Trembling and bewildered, she held me fast, but the horror gradually passed from her countenance; its paleness gave place to a glow of shame.

'Oh, dear! I thought I was at home,' she sighed. 'I thought I was lying in my chamber at Wuthering Heights. Because I'm weak, my brain got confused, and I screamed unconsciously. Don't say anything; but stay with me. I dread sleeping: my dreams appal me.'

'A sound sleep would do you good, ma'am,' I answered: 'and I hope this suffering will prevent your trying starving again.'

'Oh, if I were but in my own bed in the old house!' she went on bitterly, wringing her hands. 'And that wind sounding in the firs by the lattice. Do let me feel it — it comes straight down the moor — do let me have one breath!' To pacify her I held the casement ajar a few seconds. A cold blast rushed through; I closed it, and returned to my post. She lay still now, her face bathed in tears. Exhaustion of body had entirely subdued her spirit: our fiery Catherine was no better than a wailing child.

'How long is it since I shut myself in here?' she asked, suddenly reviving.

'It was Monday evening,' I replied, 'and this is Thursday night, or rather Friday morning, at present.'

'What! of the same week?' she exclaimed. 'Only that brief time?'

'Long enough to live on nothing but cold water and ill-temper,' observed I.

'Well, it seems a weary number of hours,' she muttered doubtfully: 'it must be more. I remember being in the parlour after they had quarrelled, and Edgar being cruelly provoking, and me running into this room desperate. As soon as ever I had barred the door, utter blackness overwhelmed me, and I fell on the floor. I couldn't explain to Edgar how certain I felt of having a fit, or going raging mad, if he persisted in teasing me! I had no command of tongue, or brain, and he did not guess my agony, perhaps: it barely left me sense to try to escape from him and his voice. Before I recovered sufficiently to see and hear, it began to be dawn, and, Nelly, I'll tell you what I thought, and what has kept recurring and recurring till I feared for my reason. I thought as I lay there, with my head against that table leg, and my eyes dimly discerning the grey square of the window, that I was enclosed in the oak-panelled bed at home; and my heart ached with some great grief which, just waking, I could not recollect. I pondered, and worried myself to discover what it could be, and, most strangely, the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank! I did not recall that they had been at all. I was a child; my father was just buried, and my misery arose from the separation that Hindley had ordered between me and Heathcliff. I was laid alone, for the first time; and, rousing from a dismal doze after a night of weeping, I lifted my hand to push the panels aside: it struck the table-top! I swept it along the carpet, and then memory burst in: my late anguish was swallowed in a paroxysm of despair. I cannot say why I felt so wildly wretched: it must have been temporary derangement; for there is scarcely cause. But, supposing at twelve years old I had been wrenched from the Heights, and every early association, and my all in all, as Heathcliff was at that time, and been converted at a stroke into Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange, and the wife of a stranger: an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world. You may fancy a glimpse of the abyss where I grovelled! Shake your head as you will, Nelly, you have helped to unsettle me! You should have spoken to Edgar, indeed you should, and compelled him to leave me quiet! Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills. Open the window again wide: fasten it open! Quick, why don't you move?'

'Because I won't give you your death of cold,' I answered.

'You won't give me a chance of life, you mean,' she said, sullenly. 'However, I'm not helpless yet; I'll open it myself.'

And sliding from the bed before I could hinder her, she crossed the room, walking very uncertainly, threw it back, and bent out, careless of the frosty air that cut about her shoulders as keen as a knife. I entreated, and finally attempted to force her to retire. But I soon found her delirious strength much surpassed mine (she was delirious, I became convinced by her subsequent actions and ravings). There was no moon, and everything beneath lay in misty darkness: not a light gleamed from any house, far or near all had been extinguished long ago: and those at Wuthering Heights were never visible — still she asserted she caught their shining.

'Look!' she cried eagerly, 'that's my room with the candle in it, and the trees swaying before it; and the other candle is in Joseph's garret. Joseph sits up late, doesn't he? He's waiting till I come home that he may lock the gate. Well, he'll wait a while yet. It's a rough journey, and a sad heart to travel it; and we must pass by Gimmerton Kirk to go that journey! We've braved its ghosts often together, and dared each other to stand among the graves and ask them to come. But, Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself: they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me. I never will!'

She paused, and resumed with a strange smile. 'He's considering — he'd rather I'd come to him! Find a way, then! not through that kirkyard. You are slow! Be content, you always followed me!'

Perceiving it vain to argue against her insanity, I was planning how I could reach something to wrap about her, without quitting my hold of herself (for I could not trust her alone by the gaping lattice), when, to my consternation, I heard the rattle of the door-handle, and Mr. Linton entered. He had only then come from the library; and, in passing through the lobby, had noticed our talking and been attracted by curiosity, or fear, to examine what it signified, at that late hour.

'Oh, sir!' I cried, checking the exclamation risen to his lips at the sight which met him, and the bleak atmosphere of the chamber. 'My poor mistress is ill, and she quite masters me: I cannot manage her at all; pray, come and persuade her to go to bed. Forget your anger, for she's hard to guide any way but her own.'

'Catherine ill?' he said, hastening to us. 'Shut the window, Ellen! Catherine! why — '

He was silent. The haggardness of Mrs. Linton's appearance smote him speechless, and he could only glance from her to me in horrified astonishment.

'She's been fretting here,' I continued, 'and eating scarcely anything, and never complaining: she would admit none of us till this evening, and so we couldn't inform you of her state, as we were not aware of it ourselves; but it is nothing.'

I felt I uttered my explanations awkwardly; the master frowned. 'It is nothing, is it, Ellen Dean?' he said sternly. 'You shall account more clearly for keeping me ignorant of this!' And he took his wife in his arms, and looked at her with anguish.

At first she gave him no glance of recognition: he was invisible to her abstracted gaze. The delirium was not fixed, however; having weaned her eyes from contemplating the outer darkness, by degrees she centred her attention on him, and discovered who it was that held her.

'Ah! you are come, are you, Edgar Linton?' she said, with angry animation. 'You are one of those things that are ever found when least wanted, and when you are wanted, never! I suppose we shall have plenty of lamentations now — I see we shall — but they can't keep me from my narrow home out yonder: my resting-place, where I'm bound before spring is over! There it is: not among the Lintons, mind, under the chapel-roof, but in the open air, with a head-stone; and you may please yourself whether you go to them or come to me!'

'Catherine, what have you done?' commenced the master. 'Am I nothing to you any more? Do you love that wretch Heath — '

'Hush!' cried Mrs. Linton. 'Hush, this moment! You mention that name and I end the matter instantly by a spring from the window! What you touch at present you may have; but my soul will be on that hill-top before you lay hands on me again. I don't want you, Edgar: I'm past wanting you. Return to your books. I'm glad you possess a consolation, for all you had in me is gone.'

'Her mind wanders, sir,' I interposed. 'She has been talking nonsense the whole evening; but let her have quiet, and proper attendance, and she'll rally. Hereafter, we must be cautious how we vex her.'

'I desire no further advice from you,' answered Mr. Linton. 'You knew your mistress's nature, and you encouraged me to harass her. And not to give me one hint of how she has been these three days! It was heartless! Months of sickness could not cause such a change!'

I began to defend myself, thinking it too bad to be blamed for another's wicked waywardness. 'I knew Mrs. Linton's nature to be headstrong and domineering,' cried I: 'but I didn't know that you wished to foster her fierce temper! I didn't know that, to humour her, I should wink at Mr. Heathcliff. I performed the duty of a faithful servant in telling you, and I have got a faithful servant's wages! Well, it will teach me to be careful next time. Next time you may gather intelligence for yourself!'

'The next time you bring a tale to me you shall quit my service, Ellen Dean,' he replied.

'You'd rather hear nothing about it, I suppose, then, Mr. Linton?' said I. 'Heathcliff has your permission to come a-courting to Miss, and to drop in at every opportunity your absence offers, on purpose to poison the mistress against you?'

Confused as Catherine was, her wits were alert at applying our conversation.

'Ah! Nelly has played traitor,' she exclaimed, passionately. 'Nelly is my hidden enemy. You witch! So you do seek elf-bolts to hurt us! Let me go, and I'll make her rue! I'll make her howl a recantation!'

A maniac's fury kindled under her brows; she struggled desperately to disengage herself from Linton's arms. I felt no inclination to tarry the event; and, resolving to seek medical aid on my own responsibility, I quitted the chamber.

In passing the garden to reach the road, at a place where a bridle hook is driven into the wall, I saw something white moved irregularly, evidently by another agent than the wind. Notwithstanding my hurry, I stayed to examine it, lest ever after I should have the conviction impressed on my imagination that it was a creature of the other world. My surprise and perplexity were great on discovering, by touch more than vision, Miss Isabella's springer, Fanny, suspended by a handkerchief, and nearly at its last gasp. I quickly released the animal, and lifted it into the garden. I had seen it follow its mistress up-stairs when she went to bed; and wondered much how it could have got out there, and what mischievous person had treated it so. While untying the knot round the hook, it seemed to me that I repeatedly caught the beat of horses' feet galloping at some distance; but there were such a number of things to occupy my reflections that I hardly gave the circumstance a thought: though it was a strange sound, in that place, at two o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Kenneth was fortunately just issuing from his house to see a patient in the village as I came up the street; and my account of Catherine Linton's malady induced him to accompany me back immediately. He was a plain rough man; and he made no scruple to speak his doubts of her surviving this second attack; unless she were more submissive to his directions than she had shown herself before.

'Nelly Dean,' said he, 'I can't help fancying there's an extra cause for this. What has there been to do at the Grange? We've odd reports up here. A stout, hearty lass like Catherine does not fall ill for a trifle; and that sort of people should not either. It's hard work bringing them through fevers, and such things. How did it begin?'

'The master will inform you,' I answered; 'but you are acquainted with the Earnshaws' violent dispositions, and Mrs. Linton caps them all. I may say this; it commenced in a quarrel. She was struck during a tempest of passion with a kind of fit. That's her account, at least: for she flew off in the height of it, and locked herself up. Afterwards, she refused to eat, and now she alternately raves and remains in a half dream; knowing those about her, but having her mind filled with all sorts of strange ideas and illusions.'

'Mr. Linton will be sorry?' observed Kenneth, interrogatively.

'Sorry? he'll break his heart should anything happen!' I replied. 'Don't alarm him more than necessary.'

'Well, I told him to beware,' said my companion; 'and he must bide the consequences of neglecting my warning! Hasn't he been intimate with Mr. Heathcliff lately?'

'Heathcliff frequently visits at the Grange,' answered I, 'though more on the strength of the mistress having known him when a boy, than because the master likes his company. At present he's discharged from the trouble of calling; owing to some presumptuous aspirations after Miss Linton which he manifested. I hardly think he'll be taken in again.'

'And does Miss Linton turn a cold shoulder on him?' was the doctor's next question.

'I'm not in her confidence,' returned I, reluctant to continue the subject.

'No, she's a sly one,' he remarked, shaking his head. 'She keeps her own counsel! But she's a real little fool. I have it from good authority that last night (and a pretty night it was!) she and Heathcliff were walking in the plantation at the back of your house above two hours; and he pressed her not to go in again, but just mount his horse and away with him! My informant said she could only put him off by pledging her word of honour to be prepared on their first meeting after that: when it was to be he didn't hear; but you urge Mr. Linton to look sharp!'

This news filled me with fresh fears; I outstripped Kenneth, and ran most of the way back. The little dog was yelping in the garden yet. I spared a minute to open the gate for it, but instead of going to the house door, it coursed up and down snuffing the grass, and would have escaped to the road, had I not seized it and conveyed it in with me. On ascending to Isabella's room, my suspicions were confirmed: it was empty. Had I been a few hours sooner Mrs. Linton's illness might have arrested her rash step. But what could be done now? There was a bare possibility of overtaking them if pursued instantly. *I* could not pursue them, however; and I dared not rouse the family, and fill the place with confusion; still less unfold the business to my master, absorbed as he was in his present calamity, and having no heart to spare for a second grief! I saw nothing for it but to hold my tongue, and suffer matters to take their course; and Kenneth being arrived, I went with a badly composed countenance to announce him. Catherine lay in a troubled sleep:

her husband had succeeded in soothing the excess of frenzy; he now hung over her pillow, watching every shade and every change of her painfully expressive features.

The doctor, on examining the case for himself, spoke hopefully to him of its having a favourable termination, if we could only preserve around her perfect and constant tranquillity. To me, he signified the threatening danger was not so much death, as permanent alienation of intellect.

I did not close my eyes that night, nor did Mr. Linton: indeed, we never went to bed; and the servants were all up long before the usual hour, moving through the house with stealthy tread, and exchanging whispers as they encountered each other in their vocations. Every one was active but Miss Isabella; and they began to remark how sound she slept: her brother, too, asked if she had risen, and seemed impatient for her presence, and hurt that she showed so little anxiety for her sister-in-law. I trembled lest he should send me to call her; but I was spared the pain of being the first proclaimant of her flight. One of the maids, a thoughtless girl, who had been on an early errand to Gimmerton, came panting up-stairs, open-mouthed, and dashed into the chamber, crying: 'Oh, dear, dear! What mun we have next? Master, master, our young lady — '

'Hold your noise!' cried, I hastily, enraged at her clamorous manner.

'Speak lower, Mary — What is the matter?' said Mr. Linton. 'What ails your young lady?'

'She's gone, she's gone! Yon' Heathcliff's run off wi' her!' gasped the girl.

'That is not true!' exclaimed Linton, rising in agitation. 'It cannot be: how has the idea entered your head? Ellen Dean, go and seek her. It is incredible: it cannot be.'

As he spoke he took the servant to the door, and then repeated his demand to know her reasons for such an assertion.

'Why, I met on the road a lad that fetches milk here,' she stammered, 'and he asked whether we weren't in trouble at the Grange. I thought he meant for missis's sickness, so I answered, yes. Then says he, "There's somebody gone after 'em, I guess?" I stared. He saw I knew nought about it, and he told how a gentleman and lady had stopped to have a horse's shoe fastened at a blacksmith's shop, two miles out of Gimmerton, not very long after midnight! and how the blacksmith's lass had got up to spy who they were: she knew them both directly. And she noticed the man — Heathcliff it was, she felt certain: nob'dy could mistake him, besides — put a sovereign in her father's hand for payment. The lady had a cloak about her face; but having desired a sup of water, while she drank it fell back, and she saw her very plain. Heathcliff held both bridles as they rode on, and they set their faces from the village, and went as fast as the rough roads would let them. The lass said nothing to her father, but she told it all over Gimmerton this morning.'

I ran and peeped, for form's sake, into Isabella's room; confirming, when I returned, the servant's statement. Mr. Linton had resumed his seat by the bed; on my re-entrance, he raised his eyes, read the meaning of my blank aspect, and dropped them without giving an order, or uttering a word.

'Are we to try any measures for overtaking and bringing her back,' I inquired. 'How should we do?'

'She went of her own accord,' answered the master; 'she had a right to go if she pleased. Trouble me no more about her. Hereafter she is only my sister in name: not because I disown her, but because she has disowned me.'

And that was all he said on the subject: he did not make single inquiry further, or mention her in any way, except directing me to send what property she had in the house to her fresh home, wherever it was, when I knew it.

CHAPTER XIII

For two months the fugitives remained absent; in those two months, Mrs. Linton encountered and conquered the worst shock of what was denominated a brain fever. No mother could have nursed an only child more devotedly than Edgar tended her. Day and night he was watching, and patiently enduring all the annoyances that irritable nerves and a shaken reason could inflict; and, though Kenneth remarked that what he saved from the grave would only recompense his care by forming the source of constant future anxiety — in fact, that his health and strength were being sacrificed to preserve a mere ruin of humanity — he knew no limits in gratitude and joy when Catherine's life was declared out of danger; and hour after hour he would sit beside her, tracing the gradual return to bodily health, and flattering his too sanguine hopes with the illusion that her mind would settle back to its right balance also, and she would soon be entirely her former self.

The first time she left her chamber was at the commencement of the following March. Mr. Linton had put on her pillow, in the morning, a handful of golden crocuses; her eye, long stranger to any gleam of pleasure, caught them in waking, and shone delighted as she gathered them eagerly together.

'These are the earliest flowers at the Heights,' she exclaimed. 'They remind me of soft thaw winds, and warm sunshine, and nearly melted snow. Edgar, is there not a south wind, and is not the snow almost gone?'

'The snow is quite gone down here, darling,' replied her husband; 'and I only see two white spots on the whole range of moors: the sky is blue, and the larks are singing, and the becks and brooks are all brim full. Catherine, last spring at this time, I was longing to have you under this roof; now, I wish you were a mile or two up those hills: the air blows so sweetly, I feel that it would cure you.'

'I shall never be there but once more,' said the invalid; 'and then you'll leave me, and I shall remain for ever. Next spring you'll long again to have me under this roof, and you'll look back and think you were happy to-day.'

Linton lavished on her the kindest caresses, and tried to cheer her by the fondest words; but, vaguely regarding the flowers, she let the tears collect on her lashes and stream down her cheeks unheeding. We knew she was really better, and, therefore, decided that long confinement to a single place produced much of this despondency, and it might be partially removed by a change of scene. The master told me to light a fire in the many-weeks' deserted parlour, and to set an easy-chair in the sunshine by the window; and then he brought her down, and she sat a long while enjoying the genial heat, and, as we expected, revived by the objects round her: which, though familiar, were free from the dreary associations investing her hated sick chamber. By evening she seemed greatly exhausted; yet no arguments could persuade her to return to that apartment, and I had to arrange the parlour sofa for her bed, till another room could be prepared. To obviate the fatigue of mounting and descending the stairs, we fitted up this, where you lie at present — on the same floor with the parlour; and she was soon strong enough to move from one to the other, leaning on Edgar's arm. Ah, I thought myself, she might recover, so waited on as she was. And there was double cause to desire it, for on her existence depended that of another: we cherished the hope that in a little while Mr. Linton's heart would be gladdened, and his lands secured from a stranger's gripe, by the birth of an heir.

I should mention that Isabella sent to her brother, some six weeks from her departure, a short note, announcing her marriage with Heathcliff. It appeared dry and cold; but at the bottom was dotted in with pencil an obscure apology, and an entreaty for kind remembrance and reconciliation, if her proceeding had offended him: asserting that she could not help it then, and being done, she had now no power to repeal it. Linton did not reply to this, I believe; and, in a fortnight more, I got a long letter, which I considered odd, coming from the pen of a bride just out of the honeymoon. I'll read it: for I keep it yet. Any relic of the dead is precious, if they were valued living.

* * * * *

Dear Ellen, it begins, — I came last night to Wuthering Heights, and heard, for the first time, that Catherine has been, and is yet, very ill. I must not write to her, I suppose, and my brother is either too angry or too distressed to answer what I sent him. Still, I must write to somebody, and the only choice left me is you.

Inform Edgar that I'd give the world to see his face again — that my heart returned to Thrushcross Grange in twenty-four hours after I left it, and is there at this moment, full of warm feelings for him, and Catherine! *I can't follow it though* — (these words are underlined) — they need not expect me, and they may draw what conclusions they please; taking care, however, to lay nothing at the door of my weak will or deficient affection.

The remainder of the letter is for yourself alone. I want to ask you two questions: the first is, — How did you contrive to preserve the common sympathies of human nature when you resided here? I cannot recognise any sentiment which those around share with me.

The second question I have great interest in; it is this — Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? I sha'n't tell my reasons for making this inquiry; but I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married: that is, when you call to see me; and you must call, Ellen, very soon. Don't write, but come, and bring me something from Edgar.

Now, you shall hear how I have been received in my new home, as I am led to imagine the Heights will be. It is to amuse myself that I dwell on such subjects as the lack of external comforts: they never occupy my thoughts, except at the moment when I miss them. I should laugh and dance for joy, if I found their absence was the total of my miseries, and the rest was an unnatural dream!

The sun set behind the Grange as we turned on to the moors; by that, I judged it to be six o'clock; and my companion halted half an hour, to inspect the park, and the gardens, and, probably, the place itself, as well as he could; so it was dark when we dismounted in the paved yard of the farm-house, and your old fellow-servant, Joseph, issued out to receive us by the light of a dip candle. He did it with a courtesy that redounded to his credit. His first act was to elevate his torch to a level with my face, squint malignantly, project his under-lip, and turn away. Then he took the two horses, and led them into the stables; reappearing for the purpose of locking the outer gate, as if we lived in an ancient castle.

Heathcliff stayed to speak to him, and I entered the kitchen — a dingy, untidy hole; I daresay you would not know it, it is so changed since it was in your charge. By the fire stood a ruffianly child, strong in limb and dirty in garb, with a look of Catherine in his eyes and about his mouth.

'This is Edgar's legal nephew,' I reflected — 'mine in a manner; I must shake hands, and — yes — I must kiss him. It is right to establish a good understanding at the beginning.'

I approached, and, attempting to take his chubby fist, said — 'How do you do, my dear?'

He replied in a jargon I did not comprehend.

'Shall you and I be friends, Hareton?' was my next essay at conversation.

An oath, and a threat to set Throttler on me if I did not 'frame off' rewarded my perseverance.

'Hey, Throttler, lad!' whispered the little wretch, rousing a half-bred bull-dog from its lair in a corner. 'Now, wilt thou be ganging?' he asked authoritatively.

Love for my life urged a compliance; I stepped over the threshold to wait till the others should enter. Mr. Heathcliff was nowhere visible; and Joseph, whom I followed to the stables, and requested to accompany me in, after staring and muttering to himself, screwed up his nose and replied — 'Mim! mim! mim! Did iver Christian body hear aught like it? Mincing un' munching! How can I tell whet ye say?'

'I say, I wish you to come with me into the house!' I cried, thinking him deaf, yet highly disgusted at his rudeness.

'None o' me! I getten summut else to do,' he answered, and continued his work; moving his lantern jaws meanwhile, and surveying my dress and countenance (the former a great deal too fine, but the latter, I'm sure, as sad as he could desire) with sovereign contempt.

I walked round the yard, and through a wicket, to another door, at which I took the liberty of knocking, in hopes some more civil servant might show himself. After a short suspense, it was opened by a tall, gaunt man, without neckerchief, and otherwise extremely slovenly; his features were lost in masses of shaggy hair that hung on his shoulders; and *his* eyes, too, were like a ghostly Catherine's with all their beauty annihilated.

'What's your business here?' he demanded, grimly. 'Who are you?'

'My name was Isabella Linton,' I replied. 'You've seen me before, sir. I'm lately married to Mr. Heathcliff, and he has brought me here — I suppose, by your permission.'

'Is he come back, then?' asked the hermit, glaring like a hungry wolf.

'Yes — we came just now,' I said; 'but he left me by the kitchen door; and when I would have gone in, your little boy played sentinel over the place, and frightened me off by the help of a bull-dog.'

'It's well the hellish villain has kept his word!' growled my future host, searching the darkness beyond me in expectation of discovering Heathcliff; and then he indulged in a soliloquy of execrations, and threats of what he would have done had the 'fiend' deceived him.

I repented having tried this second entrance, and was almost inclined to slip away before he finished cursing, but ere I could execute that intention, he ordered me in, and shut and re-fastened the door. There was a great fire, and that was all the light in the huge apartment, whose floor had grown a uniform grey; and the once brilliant pewter-dishes, which used to attract my gaze when I was a girl, partook of a similar obscurity, created by tarnish and dust. I inquired whether I might call the maid, and be conducted to a bedroom! Mr. Earnshaw vouchsafed no answer. He walked up and down, with his hands in his pockets, apparently quite forgetting my presence; and his abstraction was evidently so deep, and his whole aspect so misanthropical, that I shrank from disturbing him again.

You'll not be surprised, Ellen, at my feeling particularly cheerless, seated in worse than solitude on that inhospitable hearth, and remembering that four miles distant lay my delightful home, containing the only people I loved on earth; and there might as well be the Atlantic to part us, instead of those four miles: I could not overpass them! I questioned with myself — where must I turn for comfort? and — mind you don't tell Edgar, or Catherine — above every sorrow beside, this rose pre-eminent: despair at finding nobody who could or would be my ally against Heathcliff! I had sought shelter at Wuthering Heights, almost gladly, because I was secured by that arrangement from living alone with him; but he knew the people we were coming amongst, and he did not fear their intermeddling.

I sat and thought a doleful time: the clock struck eight, and nine, and still my companion paced to and fro, his head bent on his breast, and perfectly silent, unless a groan or a bitter ejaculation forced itself out at intervals. I listened to detect a woman's voice in the house, and filled the interim with wild regrets and dismal anticipations, which, at last, spoke audibly in irrepressible sighing and weeping. I was not aware how openly I grieved, till

Earnshaw halted opposite, in his measured walk, and gave me a stare of newly-awakened surprise. Taking advantage of his recovered attention, I exclaimed — 'I'm tired with my journey, and I want to go to bed! Where is the maid-servant? Direct me to her, as she won't come to me!'

'We have none,' he answered; 'you must wait on yourself!'

'Where must I sleep, then?' I sobbed; I was beyond regarding self-respect, weighed down by fatigue and wretchedness.

'Joseph will show you Heathcliff's chamber,' said he; 'open that door — he's in there.'

I was going to obey, but he suddenly arrested me, and added in the strangest tone — 'Be so good as to turn your lock, and draw your bolt — don't omit it!'

'Well!' I said. 'But why, Mr. Earnshaw?' I did not relish the notion of deliberately fastening myself in with Heathcliff.

'Look here!' he replied, pulling from his waistcoat a curiously-constructed pistol, having a double-edged spring knife attached to the barrel. 'That's a great tempter to a desperate man, is it not? I cannot resist going up with this every night, and trying his door. If once I find it open he's done for; I do it invariably, even though the minute before I have been recalling a hundred reasons that should make me refrain: it is some devil that urges me to thwart my own schemes by killing him. You fight against that devil for love as long as you may; when the time comes, not all the angels in heaven shall save him!'

I surveyed the weapon inquisitively. A hideous notion struck me: how powerful I should be possessing such an instrument! I took it from his hand, and touched the blade. He looked astonished at the expression my face assumed during a brief second: it was not horror, it was covetousness. He snatched the pistol back, jealously; shut the knife, and returned it to its concealment.

'I don't care if you tell him,' said he. 'Put him on his guard, and watch for him. You know the terms we are on, I see: his danger does not shock you.'

'What has Heathcliff done to you?' I asked. 'In what has he wronged you, to warrant this appalling hatred? Wouldn't it be wiser to bid him quit the house?'

'No!' thundered Earnshaw; 'should he offer to leave me, he's a dead man: persuade him to attempt it, and you are a murderess! Am I to lose *all*, without a chance of retrieval? Is Hareton to be a beggar? Oh, damnation! I *will* have it back; and I'll have *his* gold too; and then his blood; and hell shall have his soul! It will be ten times blacker with that guest than ever it was before!'

You've acquainted me, Ellen, with your old master's habits. He is clearly on the verge of madness: he was so last night at least. I shuddered to be near him, and thought on the servant's ill-bred moroseness as comparatively agreeable. He now recommenced his moody walk, and I raised the latch, and escaped into the kitchen. Joseph was bending over the fire, peering into a large pan that swung above it; and a wooden bowl of oatmeal stood on the settle close by. The contents of the pan began to boil, and he turned to plunge his hand into the bowl; I conjectured that this preparation was probably for our supper, and, being hungry, I resolved it should be eatable; so, crying out sharply, '*I'll* make the porridge!' I removed the vessel out of his reach, and proceeded to take off my hat and riding-habit. 'Mr. Earnshaw,' I continued, 'directs me to wait on myself: I will. I'm not going to act the lady among you, for fear I should starve.'

'Gooid Lord!' he muttered, sitting down, and stroking his ribbed stockings from the knee to the ankle. 'If there's to be fresh ortherings — just when I getten used to two maisters, if I mun hev' a *mistress* set o'er my heead, it's like time to be flitting. I niver *did* think to see t' day that I mud lave th' owld place — but I doubt it's nigh at hand!'

This lamentation drew no notice from me: I went briskly to work, sighing to remember a period when it would have been all merry fun; but compelled speedily to drive off the remembrance. It racked me to recall past happiness and the greater peril there was of conjuring up its apparition, the quicker the thible ran round, and the faster the handfuls of meal fell into the water. Joseph beheld my style of cookery with growing indignation.

'Thear!' he ejaculated. 'Hareton, thou willn't sup thy porridge to-neeght; they'll be naught but lumps as big as my neive. Thear, agean! I'd fling in bowl un' all, if I wer ye! There, pale t' guilp off, un' then ye'll hae done wi' 't. Bang, bang. It's a mercy t' bothom isn't deaved out!'

It *was* rather a rough mess, I own, when poured into the basins; four had been provided, and a gallon pitcher of new milk was brought from the dairy, which Hareton seized and commenced drinking and spilling from the expansive lip. I expostulated, and desired that he should have his in a mug; affirming that I could not taste the liquid treated so dirtily. The old cynic chose to be vastly offended at this nicety; assuring me, repeatedly, that 'the barn was every bit as good' as I, 'and every bit as wollsome,' and wondering how I could fashion to be so conceited. Meanwhile, the infant ruffian continued sucking; and glowered up at me defyingly, as he slavered into the jug.

'I shall have my supper in another room,' I said. 'Have you no place you call a parlour?'

'*Parlour*!' he echoed, sneeringly, '*parlour*! Nay, we've noa *parlours*. If yah dunnut loike wer company, there's maister's; un' if yah dunnut loike maister, there's us.'

'Then I shall go up-stairs,' I answered; 'show me a chamber.'

I put my basin on a tray, and went myself to fetch some more milk. With great grumblings, the fellow rose, and preceded me in my ascent: we mounted to the garrets; he opened a door, now and then, to look into the apartments we passed.

‘Here’s a rahm,’ he said, at last, flinging back a cranky board on hinges. ‘It’s weel eneugh to ate a few porridge in. There’s a pack o’ corn i’ t’ corner, thear, meeterly clane; if ye’re feared o’ muckying yer grand silk cloes, spread yer hankerchir o’ t’ top on’t.’

The ‘rahm’ was a kind of lumber-hole smelling strong of malt and grain; various sacks of which articles were piled around, leaving a wide, bare space in the middle.

‘Why, man,’ I exclaimed, facing him angrily, ‘this is not a place to sleep in. I wish to see my bed-room.’

‘*Bed-rume*!’ he repeated, in a tone of mockery. ‘Yah’s see all t’ *bed-rumes* thear is — yon’s mine.’

He pointed into the second garret, only differing from the first in being more naked about the walls, and having a large, low, curtainless bed, with an indigo-coloured quilt, at one end.

‘What do I want with yours?’ I retorted. ‘I suppose Mr. Heathcliff does not lodge at the top of the house, does he?’

‘Oh! it’s Maister *Hathecliff’s* ye’re wanting?’ cried he, as if making a new discovery. ‘Couldn’t ye ha’ said soa, at onst? un’ then, I mud ha’ telled ye, baht all this wark, that that’s just one ye cannut see — he allas keeps it locked, un’ nob’dy iver mells on’t but hisseln.’

‘You’ve a nice house, Joseph,’ I could not refrain from observing, ‘and pleasant inmates; and I think the concentrated essence of all the madness in the world took up its abode in my brain the day I linked my fate with theirs! However, that is not to the present purpose — there are other rooms. For heaven’s sake be quick, and let me settle somewhere!’

He made no reply to this adjuration; only plodding doggedly down the wooden steps, and halting, before an apartment which, from that halt and the superior quality of its furniture, I conjectured to be the best one. There was a carpet — a good one, but the pattern was obliterated by dust; a fireplace hung with cut-paper, dropping to pieces; a handsome oak-bedstead with ample crimson curtains of rather expensive material and modern make; but they had evidently experienced rough usage: the vallances hung in festoons, wrenched from their rings, and the iron rod supporting them was bent in an arc on one side, causing the drapery to trail upon the floor. The chairs were also damaged, many of them severely; and deep indentations deformed the panels of the walls. I was endeavouring to gather resolution for entering and taking possession, when my fool of a guide announced, — ‘This here is t’ maister’s.’ My supper by this time was cold, my appetite gone, and my patience exhausted. I insisted on being provided instantly with a place of refuge, and means of repose.

‘Whear the divil?’ began the religious elder. ‘The Lord bless us! The Lord forgie us! Whear the *hell* wold ye gang? ye marred, wearisome nowt! Ye’ve seen all but Hareton’s bit of a cham’er. There’s not another hoile to lig down in i’ th’ hahse!’

I was so vexed, I flung my tray and its contents on the ground; and then seated myself at the stairs'-head, hid my face in my hands, and cried.

'Ech! ech!' exclaimed Joseph. 'Weel done, Miss Cathy! weel done, Miss Cathy! Howsiver, t' maister sall just tum'le o'er them brooken pots; un' then we's hear summut; we's hear how it's to be. Gooid-for-naught madling! ye desarve pining fro' this to Churstmas, flinging t' precious gifts o'God under fooit i' yer flaysome rages! But I'm mista'en if ye shew yer sperrit lang. Will Hathecliff bide sich bonny ways, think ye? I nobbut wish he may catch ye i' that plisky. I nobbut wish he may.'

And so he went on scolding to his den beneath, taking the candle with him; and I remained in the dark. The period of reflection succeeding this silly action compelled me to admit the necessity of smothering my pride and choking my wrath, and bestirring myself to remove its effects. An unexpected aid presently appeared in the shape of Throttler, whom I now recognised as a son of our old Skulker: it had spent its whelphood at the Grange, and was given by my father to Mr. Hindley. I fancy it knew me: it pushed its nose against mine by way of salute, and then hastened to devour the porridge; while I groped from step to step, collecting the shattered earthenware, and drying the spatters of milk from the banister with my pocket-handkerchief. Our labours were scarcely over when I heard Earnshaw's tread in the passage; my assistant tucked in his tail, and pressed to the wall; I stole into the nearest doorway. The dog's endeavour to avoid him was unsuccessful; as I guessed by a scutter down-stairs, and a prolonged, piteous yelping. I had better luck: he passed on, entered his chamber, and shut the door. Directly after Joseph came up with Hareton, to put him to bed. I had found shelter in Hareton's room, and the old man, on seeing me, said, — 'They's rahm for boath ye un' yer pride, now, I sud think i' the hahse. It's empty; ye may hev' it all to yerseln, un' Him as allus maks a third, i' sich ill company!'

Gladly did I take advantage of this intimation; and the minute I flung myself into a chair, by the fire, I nodded, and slept. My slumber was deep and sweet, though over far too soon. Mr. Heathcliff awoke me; he had just come in, and demanded, in his loving manner, what I was doing there? I told him the cause of my staying up so late — that he had the key of our room in his pocket. The adjective *our* gave mortal offence. He swore it was not, nor ever should be, mine; and he'd — but I'll not repeat his language, nor describe his habitual conduct: he is ingenious and unresting in seeking to gain my abhorrence! I sometimes wonder at him with an intensity that deadens my fear: yet, I assure you, a tiger or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens. He told me of Catherine's illness, and accused my brother of causing it promising that I should be Edgar's proxy in suffering, till he could get hold of him.

I do hate him — I am wretched — I have been a fool! Beware of uttering one breath of this to any one at the Grange. I shall expect you every day — don't disappoint me! — Isabella.

CHAPTER XIV

As soon as I had perused this epistle I went to the master, and informed him that his sister had arrived at the Heights, and sent me a letter expressing her sorrow for Mrs. Linton's situation, and her ardent desire to see him; with a wish that he would transmit to her, as early as possible, some token of forgiveness by me.

'Forgiveness!' said Linton. 'I have nothing to forgive her, Ellen. You may call at Wuthering Heights this afternoon, if you like, and say that I am not angry, but I'm sorry to have lost her; especially as I can never think she'll be happy. It is out of the question my going to see her, however: we are eternally divided; and should she really wish to oblige me, let her persuade the villain she has married to leave the country.'

'And you won't write her a little note, sir?' I asked, imploringly.

'No,' he answered. 'It is needless. My communication with Heathcliff's family shall be as sparing as his with mine. It shall not exist!'

Mr. Edgar's coldness depressed me exceedingly; and all the way from the Grange I puzzled my brains how to put more heart into what he said, when I repeated it; and how to soften his refusal of even a few lines to console Isabella. I daresay she had been on the watch for me since morning: I saw her looking through the lattice as I came up the garden causeway, and I nodded to her; but she drew back, as if afraid of being observed. I entered without knocking. There never was such a dreary, dismal scene as the formerly cheerful house presented! I must confess, that if I had been in the young lady's place, I would, at least, have swept the hearth, and wiped the tables with a duster. But she already partook of the pervading spirit of neglect which encompassed her. Her pretty face was wan and listless; her hair uncurled: some locks hanging lankly down, and some carelessly twisted round her head. Probably she had not touched her dress since yester evening. Hindley was not there. Mr. Heathcliff sat at a table, turning over some papers in his pocket-book; but he rose when I appeared, asked me how I did, quite friendly, and offered me a chair. He was the only thing there that seemed decent; and I thought he never looked better. So much had circumstances altered their positions, that he would certainly have struck a stranger as a born and bred gentleman; and his wife as a thorough little slattern! She came forward eagerly to greet me, and held out one hand to take the expected letter. I shook my head. She wouldn't understand the hint, but followed me to a sideboard, where I went to lay my bonnet, and importuned me in a whisper to give her directly what I had brought. Heathcliff guessed the meaning of her manoeuvres, and said — 'If you have got anything for Isabella (as no doubt you have, Nelly), give it to her. You needn't make a secret of it:

we have no secrets between us.'

'Oh, I have nothing,' I replied, thinking it best to speak the truth at once. 'My master bid me tell his sister that she must not expect either a letter or a visit from him at present. He sends his love, ma'am, and his wishes for your happiness, and his pardon for the grief you have occasioned; but he thinks that after this time his household and the household here should drop intercommunication, as nothing could come of keeping it up.'

Mrs. Heathcliff's lip quivered slightly, and she returned to her seat in the window. Her husband took his stand on the hearthstone, near me, and began to put questions concerning Catherine. I told him as much as I thought proper of her illness, and he extorted from me, by cross-examination, most of the facts connected with its origin. I blamed her, as she deserved, for bringing it all on herself; and ended by hoping that he would follow Mr. Linton's example and avoid future interference with his family, for good or evil.

'Mrs. Linton is now just recovering,' I said; 'she'll never be like she was, but her life is spared; and if you really have a regard for her, you'll shun crossing her way again: nay, you'll move out of this country entirely; and that you may not regret it, I'll inform you Catherine Linton is as different now from your old friend Catherine Earnshaw, as that young lady is different from me. Her appearance is changed greatly, her character much more so; and the person who is compelled, of necessity, to be her companion, will only sustain his affection hereafter by the remembrance of what she once was, by common humanity, and a sense of duty!'

'That is quite possible,' remarked Heathcliff, forcing himself to seem calm: 'quite possible that your master should have nothing but common humanity and a sense of duty to fall back upon. But do you imagine that I shall leave Catherine to his *duty* and *humanity*? and can you compare my feelings respecting Catherine to his? Before you leave this house, I must exact a promise from you that you'll get me an interview with her: consent, or refuse, I *will* see her! What do you say?'

'I say, Mr. Heathcliff,' I replied, 'you must not: you never shall, through my means. Another encounter between you and the master would kill her altogether.'

'With your aid that may be avoided,' he continued; 'and should there be danger of such an event — should he be the cause of adding a single trouble more to her existence — why, I think I shall be justified in going to extremes! I wish you had sincerity enough to tell me whether Catherine would suffer greatly from his loss: the fear that she would restrains me. And there you see the distinction between our feelings: had he been in my place, and I in his, though I hated him with a hatred that turned my life to gall, I never would have raised a hand against him. You may look incredulous, if you please! I never would have banished him from her society as long as she desired his. The moment her regard ceased, I would have torn his heart out, and drunk his blood! But, till then — if you don't believe me, you don't know me — till then, I would have died by inches before I touched a single hair of his head!'

'And yet,' I interrupted, 'you have no scruples in completely ruining all hopes of her perfect restoration, by thrusting yourself into her remembrance now, when she has nearly forgotten you, and involving her in a new tumult of discord and distress.'

'You suppose she has nearly forgotten me?' he said. 'Oh, Nelly! you know she has not! You know as well as I do, that for every thought she spends on Linton she spends a thousand on me! At a most miserable period of my life, I had a notion of the kind: it haunted me on my return to the neighbourhood last summer; but only her own assurance could make me admit the horrible idea again. And then, Linton would be nothing, nor Hindley, nor all the dreams that ever I dreamt. Two words would comprehend my future — *death* and *hell*: existence, after losing her, would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton's attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day. And Catherine has a heart as deep as I have: the sea could be as readily contained in that horse-trough as her whole affection be monopolised by him. Tush! He is scarcely a degree dearer to her than her dog, or her horse. It is not in him to be loved like me: how can she love in him what he has not?'

'Catherine and Edgar are as fond of each other as any two people can be,' cried Isabella, with sudden vivacity. 'No one has a right to talk in that manner, and I won't hear my brother depreciated in silence!'

'Your brother is wondrous fond of you too, isn't he?' observed Heathcliff, scornfully. 'He turns you adrift on the world with surprising alacrity.'

'He is not aware of what I suffer,' she replied. 'I didn't tell him that.'

'You have been telling him something, then: you have written, have you?'

'To say that I was married, I did write — you saw the note.'

'And nothing since?'

'No.'

'My young lady is looking sadly the worse for her change of condition,' I remarked. 'Somebody's love comes short in her case, obviously; whose, I may guess; but, perhaps, I shouldn't say.'

'I should guess it was her own,' said Heathcliff. 'She degenerates into a mere slut! She is tired of trying to please me uncommonly early. You'd hardly credit it, but the very morrow of our wedding she was weeping to go home. However, she'll suit this house so much the better for not being over nice, and I'll take care she does not disgrace me by rambling abroad.'

'Well, sir,' returned I, 'I hope you'll consider that Mrs. Heathcliff is accustomed to be looked after and waited on; and that she has been brought up like an only daughter, whom every one was ready to serve. You must let her have a maid to keep things tidy about her, and you must treat her kindly. Whatever be your notion of Mr. Edgar, you cannot doubt that she has a capacity for strong attachments, or she wouldn’t have abandoned the elegancies, and comforts, and friends of her former home, to fix contentedly, in such a wilderness as this, with you.’

‘She abandoned them under a delusion,’ he answered; ‘picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion. I can hardly regard her in the light of a rational creature, so obstinately has she persisted in forming a fabulous notion of my character and acting on the false impressions she cherished. But, at last, I think she begins to know me: I don’t perceive the silly smiles and grimaces that provoked me at first; and the senseless incapability of discerning that I was in earnest when I gave her my opinion of her infatuation and herself. It was a marvellous effort of perspicacity to discover that I did not love her. I believed, at one time, no lessons could teach her that! And yet it is poorly learnt; for this morning she announced, as a piece of appalling intelligence, that I had actually succeeded in making her hate me! A positive labour of Hercules, I assure you! If it be achieved, I have cause to return thanks. Can I trust your assertion, Isabella? Are you sure you hate me? If I let you alone for half a day, won’t you come sighing and wheedling to me again? I daresay she would rather I had seemed all tenderness before you: it wounds her vanity to have the truth exposed. But I don’t care who knows that the passion was wholly on one side: and I never told her a lie about it. She cannot accuse me of showing one bit of deceitful softness. The first thing she saw me do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog; and when she pleaded for it, the first words I uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her, except one: possibly she took that exception for herself. But no brutality disgusted her: I suppose she has an innate admiration of it, if only her precious person were secure from injury! Now, was it not the depth of absurdity — of genuine idiotcy, for that pitiful, slavish, mean-minded brach to dream that I could love her? Tell your master, Nelly, that I never, in all my life, met with such an abject thing as she is. She even disgraces the name of Linton; and I’ve sometimes relented, from pure lack of invention, in my experiments on what she could endure, and still creep shamefully cringing back! But tell him, also, to set his fraternal and magisterial heart at ease: that I keep strictly within the limits of the law. I have avoided, up to this period, giving her the slightest right to claim a separation; and, what’s more, she’d thank nobody for dividing us. If she desired to go, she might: the nuisance of her presence outweighs the gratification to be derived from tormenting her!’

‘Mr. Heathcliff,’ said I, ‘this is the talk of a madman; your wife, most likely, is convinced you are mad; and, for that reason, she has borne with you hitherto: but now that you say she may go, she’ll doubtless avail herself of the permission. You are not so bewitched, ma’am, are you, as to remain with him of your own accord?’

‘Take care, Ellen!’ answered Isabella, her eyes sparkling irefully; there was no misdoubting by their expression the full success of her partner’s endeavours to make himself detested. ‘Don’t put faith in a single word he speaks. He’s a lying fiend! a monster, and not a human being! I’ve been told I might leave him before; and I’ve made the attempt, but I dare not repeat it! Only, Ellen, promise you’ll not mention a syllable of his infamous conversation to my brother or Catherine. Whatever he may pretend, he wishes to provoke Edgar to desperation: he says he has married me on purpose to obtain power over him; and he sha’n’t obtain it — I’ll die first! I just hope, I pray, that he may forget his diabolical prudence and kill me! The single pleasure I can imagine is to die, or to see him dead!’

‘There — that will do for the present!’ said Heathcliff. ‘If you are called upon in a court of law, you’ll remember her language, Nelly! And take a good look at that countenance: she’s near the point which would suit me. No; you’re not fit to be your own guardian, Isabella, now; and I, being your legal protector, must retain you in my custody, however distasteful the obligation may be. Go up-stairs; I have something to say to Ellen Dean in private. That’s not the way: up-stairs, I tell you! Why, this is the road upstairs, child!’

He seized, and thrust her from the room; and returned muttering — ‘I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain.’

‘Do you understand what the word pity means?’ I said, hastening to resume my bonnet. ‘Did you ever feel a touch of it in your life?’

‘Put that down!’ he interrupted, perceiving my intention to depart. ‘You are not going yet. Come here now, Nelly: I must either persuade or compel you to aid me in fulfilling my determination to see Catherine, and that without delay. I swear that I meditate no harm: I don’t desire to cause any disturbance, or to exasperate or insult Mr. Linton; I only wish to hear from herself how she is, and why she has been ill; and to ask if anything that I could do would be of use to her. Last night I was in the Grange garden six hours, and I’ll return there to-night; and every night I’ll haunt the place, and every day, till I find an opportunity of entering. If Edgar Linton meets me, I shall not hesitate to knock him down, and give him enough to insure his quiescence while I stay. If his servants oppose me, I shall threaten them off with these pistols. But wouldn’t it be better to prevent my coming in contact with them, or their master? And you could do it so easily. I’d warn you when I came, and then you might let me in unobserved, as soon as she was alone, and watch till I departed, your conscience quite calm: you would be hindering mischief.’

I protested against playing that treacherous part in my employer’s house: and, besides, I urged the cruelty and selfishness of his destroying Mrs. Linton’s tranquillity for his satisfaction. ‘The commonest occurrence startles her painfully,’ I said. ‘She’s all nerves, and she couldn’t bear the surprise, I’m positive. Don’t persist, sir! or else I shall be obliged to inform my master of your designs; and he’ll take measures to secure his house and its inmates from any such unwarrantable intrusions!'

'In that case I'll take measures to secure you, woman!' exclaimed Heathcliff; 'you shall not leave Wuthering Heights till to-morrow morning. It is a foolish story to assert that Catherine could not bear to see me; and as to surprising her, I don't desire it: you must prepare her — ask her if I may come. You say she never mentions my name, and that I am never mentioned to her. To whom should she mention me if I am a forbidden topic in the house? She thinks you are all spies for her husband. Oh, I've no doubt she's in hell among you! I guess by her silence, as much as anything, what she feels. You say she is often restless, and anxious-looking: is that a proof of tranquillity? You talk of her mind being unsettled. How the devil could it be otherwise in her frightful isolation? And that insipid, paltry creature attending her from *duty* and *humanity*! From *pity* and *charity*! He might as well plant an oak in a flower-pot, and expect it to thrive, as imagine he can restore her to vigour in the soil of his shallow cares? Let us settle it at once: will you stay here, and am I to fight my way to Catherine over Linton and his footman? Or will you be my friend, as you have been hitherto, and do what I request? Decide! because there is no reason for my lingering another minute, if you persist in your stubborn ill-nature!'

Well, Mr. Lockwood, I argued and complained, and flatly refused him fifty times; but in the long run he forced me to an agreement. I engaged to carry a letter from him to my mistress; and should she consent, I promised to let him have intelligence of Linton's next absence from home, when he might come, and get in as he was able: I wouldn't be there, and my fellow-servants should be equally out of the way. Was it right or wrong? I fear it was wrong, though expedient. I thought I prevented another explosion by my compliance; and I thought, too, it might create a favourable crisis in Catherine's mental illness: and then I remembered Mr. Edgar's stern rebuke of my carrying tales; and I tried to smooth away all disquietude on the subject, by affirming, with frequent iteration, that that betrayal of trust, if it merited so harsh an appellation, should be the last. Notwithstanding, my journey homeward was sadder than my journey thither; and many misgivings I had, ere I could prevail on myself to put the missive into Mrs. Linton's hand.

But here is Kenneth; I'll go down, and tell him how much better you are. My history is *dree*, as we say, and will serve to while away another morning.

Dree, and dreary! I reflected as the good woman descended to receive the doctor: and not exactly of the kind which I should have chosen to amuse me. But never mind! I'll extract wholesome medicines from Mrs. Dean's bitter herbs; and firstly, let me beware of the fascination that lurks in Catherine Heathcliff's brilliant eyes. I should be in a curious taking if I surrendered my heart to that young person, and the daughter turned out a second edition of the mother.

CHAPTER XV

Another week over — and I am so many days nearer health, and spring! I have now heard all my neighbour's history, at different sittings, as the housekeeper could spare time from more important occupations. I'll continue it in her own words, only a little condensed. She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator, and I don't think I could improve her style.

In the evening, she said, the evening of my visit to the Heights, I knew, as well as if I saw him, that Mr. Heathcliff was about the place; and I shunned going out, because I still carried his letter in my pocket, and didn't want to be threatened or teased any more. I had made up my mind not to give it till my master went somewhere, as I could not guess how its receipt would affect Catherine. The consequence was, that it did not reach her before the lapse of three days. The fourth was Sunday, and I brought it into her room after the family were gone to church. There was a manservant left to keep the house with me, and we generally made a practice of locking the doors during the hours of service; but on that occasion the weather was so warm and pleasant that I set them wide open, and, to fulfil my engagement, as I knew who would be coming, I told my companion that the mistress wished very much for some oranges, and he must run over to the village and get a few, to be paid for on the morrow. He departed, and I went up-stairs.

Mrs. Linton sat in a loose white dress, with a light shawl over her shoulders, in the recess of the open window, as usual. Her thick, long hair had been partly removed at the beginning of her illness, and now she wore it simply combed in its natural tresses over her temples and neck. Her appearance was altered, as I had told Heathcliff; but when she was calm, there seemed unearthly beauty in the change. The flash of her eyes had been succeeded by a dreamy and melancholy softness; they no longer gave the impression of looking at the objects around her: they appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond — you would have said out of this world. Then, the paleness of her face — its haggard aspect having vanished as she recovered flesh — and the peculiar expression arising from her mental state, though painfully suggestive of their causes, added to the touching interest which she awakened; and — invariably to me, I know, and to any person who saw her, I should think — refuted more tangible proofs of convalescence, and stamped her as one doomed to decay.

A book lay spread on the sill before her, and the scarcely perceptible wind fluttered its leaves at intervals. I believe Linton had laid it there: for she never endeavoured to divert herself with reading, or occupation of any kind, and he would spend many an hour in trying to entice her attention to some subject which had formerly been her amusement. She was conscious of his aim, and in her better moods endured his efforts placidly, only showing their uselessness by now and then suppressing a wearied sigh, and checking him at last with the saddest of smiles and kisses. At other times, she would turn petulantly away, and hide her face in her hands, or even push him off angrily; and then he took care to let her alone, for he was certain of doing no good.

Gimmerton chapel bells were still ringing; and the full, mellow flow of the beck in the valley came soothingly on the ear. It was a sweet substitute for the yet absent murmur of the summer foliage, which drowned that music about the Grange when the trees were in leaf. At Wuthering Heights it always sounded on quiet days following a great thaw or a season of steady rain. And of Wuthering Heights Catherine was thinking as she listened: that is, if she thought or listened at all; but she had the vague, distant look I mentioned before, which expressed no recognition of material things either by ear or eye.

'There's a letter for you, Mrs. Linton,' I said, gently inserting it in one hand that rested on her knee. 'You must read it immediately, because it wants an answer. Shall I break the seal?' 'Yes,' she answered, without altering the direction of her eyes. I opened it — it was very short. 'Now,' I continued, 'read it.' She drew away her hand, and let it fall. I replaced it in her lap, and stood waiting till it should please her to glance down; but that movement was so long delayed that at last I resumed — 'Must I read it, ma'am? It is from Mr. Heathcliff.'

There was a start and a troubled gleam of recollection, and a struggle to arrange her ideas. She lifted the letter, and seemed to peruse it; and when she came to the signature she sighed: yet still I found she had not gathered its import, for, upon my desiring to hear her reply, she merely pointed to the name, and gazed at me with mournful and questioning eagerness.

'Well, he wishes to see you,' said I, guessing her need of an interpreter. 'He's in the garden by this time, and impatient to know what answer I shall bring.'

As I spoke, I observed a large dog lying on the sunny grass beneath raise its ears as if about to bark, and then smoothing them back, announce, by a wag of the tail, that some one approached whom it did not consider a stranger. Mrs. Linton bent forward, and listened breathlessly. The minute after a step traversed the hall; the open house was too tempting for Heathcliff to resist walking in: most likely he supposed that I was inclined to shirk my promise, and so resolved to trust to his own audacity. With straining eagerness Catherine gazed towards the entrance of her chamber. He did not hit the right room directly: she motioned me to admit him, but he found it out ere I could reach the door, and in a stride or two was at her side, and had her grasped in his arms.

He neither spoke nor loosed his hold for some five minutes, during which period he bestowed more kisses than ever he gave in his life before, I daresay: but then my mistress had kissed him first, and I plainly saw that he could hardly bear, for downright agony, to look into her face! The same conviction had stricken him as me, from the instant he beheld her, that there was no prospect of ultimate recovery there — she was fated, sure to die.

‘Oh, Cathy! Oh, my life! how can I bear it?’ was the first sentence he uttered, in a tone that did not seek to disguise his despair. And now he stared at her so earnestly that I thought the very intensity of his gaze would bring tears into his eyes; but they burned with anguish: they did not melt.

‘What now?’ said Catherine, leaning back, and returning his look with a suddenly clouded brow: her humour was a mere vane for constantly varying caprices. ‘You and Edgar have broken my heart, Heathcliff! And you both come to bewail the deed to me, as if you were the people to be pitied! I shall not pity you, not I. You have killed me — and thriven on it, I think. How strong you are! How many years do you mean to live after I am gone?’

Heathcliff had knelt on one knee to embrace her; he attempted to rise, but she seized his hair, and kept him down.

‘I wish I could hold you,’ she continued, bitterly, ‘till we were both dead! I shouldn’t care what you suffered. I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn’t you suffer? I do! Will you forget me? Will you be happy when I am in the earth? Will you say twenty years hence, “That’s the grave of Catherine Earnshaw? I loved her long ago, and was wretched to lose her; but it is past. I’ve loved many others since: my children are dearer to me than she was; and, at death, I shall not rejoice that I am going to her: I shall be sorry that I must leave them!” Will you say so, Heathcliff?’

‘Don’t torture me till I’m as mad as yourself,’ cried he, wrenching his head free, and grinding his teeth.

The two, to a cool spectator, made a strange and fearful picture. Well might Catherine deem that heaven would be a land of exile to her, unless with her mortal body she cast away her moral character also. Her present countenance had a wild vindictiveness in its white cheek, and a bloodless lip and scintillating eye; and she retained in her closed fingers a portion of the locks she had been grasping. As to her companion, while raising himself with one hand, he had taken her arm with the other; and so inadequate was his stock of gentleness to the requirements of her condition, that on his letting go I saw four distinct impressions left blue in the colourless skin.

‘Are you possessed with a devil,’ he pursued, savagely, ‘to talk in that manner to me when you are dying? Do you reflect that all those words will be branded in my memory, and eating deeper eternally after you have left me? You know you lie to say I have killed you: and, Catherine, you know that I could as soon forget you as my existence! Is it not sufficient for your infernal selfishness, that while you are at peace I shall writhe in the torments of hell?’

‘I shall not be at peace,’ moaned Catherine, recalled to a sense of physical weakness by the violent, unequal throbbing of her heart, which beat visibly and audibly under this excess of agitation. She said nothing further till the paroxysm was over; then she continued, more kindly —

‘I’m not wishing you greater torment than I have, Heathcliff. I only wish us never to be parted: and should a word of mine distress you hereafter, think I feel the same distress underground, and for my own sake, forgive me! Come here and kneel down again! You never harmed me in your life. Nay, if you nurse anger, that will be worse to remember than my harsh words! Won't you come here again? Do!'

Heathcliff went to the back of her chair, and leant over, but not so far as to let her see his face, which was livid with emotion. She bent round to look at him; he would not permit it: turning abruptly, he walked to the fireplace, where he stood, silent, with his back towards us. Mrs. Linton's glance followed him suspiciously: every movement woke a new sentiment in her. After a pause and a prolonged gaze, she resumed; addressing me in accents of indignant disappointment: —

'Oh, you see, Nelly, he would not relent a moment to keep me out of the grave. *That* is how I'm loved! Well, never mind. That is not *my* Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me: he's in my soul. And,' added she musingly, 'the thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I'm tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there: not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart: but really with it, and in it. Nelly, you think you are better and more fortunate than I; in full health and strength: you are sorry for me — very soon that will be altered. I shall be sorry for *you*. I shall be incomparably beyond and above you all. I *wonder* he won't be near me!' She went on to herself. 'I thought he wished it. Heathcliff, dear! you should not be sullen now. Do come to me, Heathcliff.'

In her eagerness she rose and supported herself on the arm of the chair. At that earnest appeal he turned to her, looking absolutely desperate. His eyes, wide and wet, at last flashed fiercely on her; his breast heaved convulsively. An instant they held asunder, and then how they met I hardly saw, but Catherine made a spring, and he caught her, and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive: in fact, to my eyes, she seemed directly insensible. He flung himself into the nearest seat, and on my approaching hurriedly to ascertain if she had fainted, he gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy. I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species: it appeared that he would not understand, though I spoke to him; so I stood off, and held my tongue, in great perplexity.

A movement of Catherine's relieved me a little presently: she put up her hand to clasp his neck, and bring her cheek to his as he held her; while he, in return, covering her with frantic caresses, said wildly —

'You teach me now how cruel you've been — cruel and false. *Why* did you despise me? *Why* did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry; and wring out my kisses and tears: they'll blight you — they'll damn you. You loved me — then what *right* had you to leave me?

What right — answer me — for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, *you*, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart — *you* have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine. So much the worse for me that I am strong. Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you — oh, God! would *you* like to live with your soul in the grave?'

'Let me alone. Let me alone,' sobbed Catherine. 'If I've done wrong, I'm dying for it. It is enough! You left me too: but I won't upbraid you! I forgive you. Forgive me!'

'It is hard to forgive, and to look at those eyes, and feel those wasted hands,' he answered. 'Kiss me again; and don't let me see your eyes! I forgive what you have done to me. I love *my* murderer — but *yours*! How can I?'

They were silent — their faces hid against each other, and washed by each other's tears. At least, I suppose the weeping was on both sides; as it seemed Heathcliff could weep on a great occasion like this.

I grew very uncomfortable, meanwhile; for the afternoon wore fast away, the man whom I had sent off returned from his errand, and I could distinguish, by the shine of the western sun up the valley, a concourse thickening outside Gimmerton chapel porch.

'Service is over,' I announced. 'My master will be here in half an hour.'

Heathcliff groaned a curse, and strained Catherine closer: she never moved.

Ere long I perceived a group of the servants passing up the road towards the kitchen wing. Mr. Linton was not far behind; he opened the gate himself and sauntered slowly up, probably enjoying the lovely afternoon that breathed as soft as summer.

'Now he is here,' I exclaimed. 'For heaven's sake, hurry down! You'll not meet any one on the front stairs. Do be quick; and stay among the trees till he is fairly in.'

'I must go, Cathy,' said Heathcliff, seeking to extricate himself from his companion's arms. 'But if I live, I'll see you again before you are asleep. I won't stray five yards from your window.'

'You must not go!' she answered, holding him as firmly as her strength allowed. 'You *shall* not, I tell you.'

'For one hour,' he pleaded earnestly.

'Not for one minute,' she replied.

'I *must* — Linton will be up immediately,' persisted the alarmed intruder.

He would have risen, and unfixed her fingers by the act — she clung fast, gasping: there was mad resolution in her face.

'No!' she shrieked. 'Oh, don't, don't go. It is the last time! Edgar will not hurt us. Heathcliff, I shall die! I shall die!'

'Damn the fool! There he is,' cried Heathcliff, sinking back into his seat.

‘Hush, my darling! Hush, hush, Catherine! I’ll stay. If he shot me so, I’d expire with a blessing on my lips.’

And there they were fast again. I heard my master mounting the stairs — the cold sweat ran from my forehead: I was horrified.

‘Are you going to listen to her ravings?’ I said, passionately. ‘She does not know what she says. Will you ruin her, because she has not wit to help herself? Get up! You could be free instantly. That is the most diabolical deed that ever you did. We are all done for — master, mistress, and servant.’

I wrung my hands, and cried out; and Mr. Linton hastened his step at the noise. In the midst of my agitation, I was sincerely glad to observe that Catherine’s arms had fallen relaxed, and her head hung down.

‘She’s fainted, or dead,’ I thought: ‘so much the better. Far better that she should be dead, than lingering a burden and a misery-maker to all about her.’

Edgar sprang to his unbidden guest, blanched with astonishment and rage. What he meant to do I cannot tell; however, the other stopped all demonstrations, at once, by placing the lifeless-looking form in his arms.

‘Look there!’ he said. ‘Unless you be a fiend, help her first — then you shall speak to me!’

He walked into the parlour, and sat down. Mr. Linton summoned me, and with great difficulty, and after resorting to many means, we managed to restore her to sensation; but she was all bewildered; she sighed, and moaned, and knew nobody. Edgar, in his anxiety for her, forgot her hated friend. I did not. I went, at the earliest opportunity, and besought him to depart; affirming that Catherine was better, and he should hear from me in the morning how she passed the night.

‘I shall not refuse to go out of doors,’ he answered; ‘but I shall stay in the garden: and, Nelly, mind you keep your word to-morrow. I shall be under those larch-trees. Mind! or I pay another visit, whether Linton be in or not.’

He sent a rapid glance through the half-open door of the chamber, and, ascertaining that what I stated was apparently true, delivered the house of his luckless presence.

CHAPTER XVI

About twelve o'clock that night was born the Catherine you saw at Wuthering Heights: a puny, seven-months' child; and two hours after the mother died, having never recovered sufficient consciousness to miss Heathcliff, or know Edgar. The latter's distraction at his bereavement is a subject too painful to be dwelt on; its after-effects showed how deep the sorrow sunk. A great addition, in my eyes, was his being left without an heir. I bemoaned that, as I gazed on the feeble orphan; and I mentally abused old Linton for (what was only natural partiality) the securing his estate to his own daughter, instead of his son's. An unwelcomed infant it was, poor thing! It might have wailed out of life, and nobody cared a morsel, during those first hours of existence. We redeemed the neglect afterwards; but its beginning was as friendless as its end is likely to be.

Next morning — bright and cheerful out of doors — stole softened in through the blinds of the silent room, and suffused the couch and its occupant with a mellow, tender glow. Edgar Linton had his head laid on the pillow, and his eyes shut. His young and fair features were almost as deathlike as those of the form beside him, and almost as fixed: but *his* was the hush of exhausted anguish, and *hers* of perfect peace. Her brow smooth, her lids closed, her lips wearing the expression of a smile; no angel in heaven could be more beautiful than she appeared. And I partook of the infinite calm in which she lay: my mind was never in a holier frame than while I gazed on that untroubled image of Divine rest. I instinctively echoed the words she had uttered a few hours before: 'Incomparably beyond and above us all! Whether still on earth or now in heaven, her spirit is at home with God!'

I don't know if it be a peculiarity in me, but I am seldom otherwise than happy while watching in the chamber of death, should no frenzied or despairing mourner share the duty with me. I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break, and I feel an assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter — the Eternity they have entered — where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy, and joy in its fulness. I noticed on that occasion how much selfishness there is even in a love like Mr. Linton's, when he so regretted Catherine's blessed release! To be sure, one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. One might doubt in seasons of cold reflection; but not then, in the presence of her corpse. It asserted its own tranquillity, which seemed a pledge of equal quiet to its former inhabitant.

Do you believe such people are happy in the other world, sir? I'd give a great deal to know.

I declined answering Mrs. Dean's question, which struck me as something heterodox. She proceeded:

Retracing the course of Catherine Linton, I fear we have no right to think she is; but we'll leave her with her Maker.

The master looked asleep, and I ventured soon after sunrise to quit the room and steal out to the pure refreshing air. The servants thought me gone to shake off the drowsiness of my protracted watch; in reality, my chief motive was seeing Mr. Heathcliff. If he had remained among the larches all night, he would have heard nothing of the stir at the Grange; unless, perhaps, he might catch the gallop of the messenger going to Gimmerton. If he had come nearer, he would probably be aware, from the lights flitting to and fro, and the opening and shutting of the outer doors, that all was not right within. I wished, yet feared, to find him. I felt the terrible news must be told, and I longed to get it over; but how to do it I did not know. He was there — at least, a few yards further in the park; leant against an old ash-tree, his hat off, and his hair soaked with the dew that had gathered on the budded branches, and fell pattering round him. He had been standing a long time in that position, for I saw a pair of ousels passing and repassing scarcely three feet from him, busy in building their nest, and regarding his proximity no more than that of a piece of timber. They flew off at my approach, and he raised his eyes and spoke: — 'She's dead!' he said; 'I've not waited for you to learn that. Put your handkerchief away — don't snivel before me. Damn you all! she wants none of your tears!'

I was weeping as much for him as her: we do sometimes pity creatures that have none of the feeling either for themselves or others. When I first looked into his face, I perceived that he had got intelligence of the catastrophe; and a foolish notion struck me that his heart was quelled and he prayed, because his lips moved and his gaze was bent on the ground.

'Yes, she's dead!' I answered, checking my sobs and drying my cheeks. 'Gone to heaven, I hope; where we may, every one, join her, if we take due warning and leave our evil ways to follow good!'

'Did *she* take due warning, then?' asked Heathcliff, attempting a sneer. 'Did she die like a saint? Come, give me a true history of the event. How did — ?'

He endeavoured to pronounce the name, but could not manage it; and compressing his mouth he held a silent combat with his inward agony, defying, meanwhile, my sympathy with an unflinching, ferocious stare. 'How did she die?' he resumed, at last — fain, notwithstanding his hardihood, to have a support behind him; for, after the struggle, he trembled, in spite of himself, to his very finger-ends.

'Poor wretch!' I thought; 'you have a heart and nerves the same as your brother men! Why should you be anxious to conceal them? Your pride cannot blind God! You tempt him to wring them, till he forces a cry of humiliation.'

'Quietly as a lamb!' I answered, aloud. 'She drew a sigh, and stretched herself, like a child reviving, and sinking again to sleep; and five minutes after I felt one little pulse at her heart, and nothing more!'

'And — did she ever mention me?' he asked, hesitating, as if he dreaded the answer to his question would introduce details that he could not bear to hear.

'Her senses never returned: she recognised nobody from the time you left her,' I said. 'She lies with a sweet smile on her face; and her latest ideas wandered back to pleasant early days. Her life closed in a gentle dream — may she wake as kindly in the other world!'

'May she wake in torment!' he cried, with frightful vehemence, stamping his foot, and groaning in a sudden paroxysm of ungovernable passion. 'Why, she's a liar to the end! Where is she? Not *there* — not in heaven — not perished — where? Oh! you said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I pray one prayer — I repeat it till my tongue stiffens — Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you — haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always — take any form — drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!'

He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death with knives and spears. I observed several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree, and his hand and forehead were both stained; probably the scene I witnessed was a repetition of others acted during the night. It hardly moved my compassion — it appalled me: still, I felt reluctant to quit him so. But the moment he recollected himself enough to notice me watching, he thundered a command for me to go, and I obeyed. He was beyond my skill to quiet or console!

Mrs. Linton's funeral was appointed to take place on the Friday following her decease; and till then her coffin remained uncovered, and strewn with flowers and scented leaves, in the great drawing-room. Linton spent his days and nights there, a sleepless guardian; and — a circumstance concealed from all but me — Heathcliff spent his nights, at least, outside, equally a stranger to repose. I held no communication with him: still, I was conscious of his design to enter, if he could; and on the Tuesday, a little after dark, when my master, from sheer fatigue, had been compelled to retire a couple of hours, I went and opened one of the windows; moved by his perseverance to give him a chance of bestowing on the faded image of his idol one final adieu. He did not omit to avail himself of the opportunity, cautiously and briefly; too cautiously to betray his presence by the slightest noise. Indeed, I shouldn't have discovered that he had been there, except for the disarrangement of the drapery about the corpse's face, and for observing on the floor a curl of light hair, fastened with a silver thread; which, on examination, I ascertained to have been taken from a locket hung round Catherine's neck. Heathcliff had opened the trinket and cast out its contents, replacing them by a black lock of his own. I twisted the two, and enclosed them together.

Mr. Earnshaw was, of course, invited to attend the remains of his sister to the grave; he sent no excuse, but he never came; so that, besides her husband, the mourners were wholly composed of tenants and servants. Isabella was not asked.

The place of Catherine's interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It was dug on a green slope in a corner of the kirk-yard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry-plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat-mould almost buries it. Her husband lies in the same spot now; and they have each a simple headstone above, and a plain grey block at their feet, to mark the graves.

CHAPTER XVII

That Friday made the last of our fine days for a month. In the evening the weather broke: the wind shifted from south to north-east, and brought rain first, and then sleet and snow. On the morrow one could hardly imagine that there had been three weeks of summer: the primroses and crocuses were hidden under wintry drifts; the larks were silent, the young leaves of the early trees smitten and blackened. And dreary, and chill, and dismal, that morrow did creep over! My master kept his room; I took possession of the lonely parlour, converting it into a nursery: and there I was, sitting with the moaning doll of a child laid on my knee; rocking it to and fro, and watching, meanwhile, the still driving flakes build up the uncurtained window, when the door opened, and some person entered, out of breath and laughing! My anger was greater than my astonishment for a minute. I supposed it one of the maids, and I cried — 'Have done! How dare you show your giddiness here; What would Mr. Linton say if he heard you?'

'Excuse me!' answered a familiar voice; 'but I know Edgar is in bed, and I cannot stop myself.'

With that the speaker came forward to the fire, panting and holding her hand to her side.

'I have run the whole way from Wuthering Heights!' she continued, after a pause; 'except where I've flown. I couldn't count the number of falls I've had. Oh, I'm aching all over! Don't be alarmed! There shall be an explanation as soon as I can give it; only just have the goodness to step out and order the carriage to take me on to Gimmerton, and tell a servant to seek up a few clothes in my wardrobe.'

The intruder was Mrs. Heathcliff. She certainly seemed in no laughing predicament: her hair streamed on her shoulders, dripping with snow and water; she was dressed in the girlish dress she commonly wore, befitting her age more than her position: a low frock with short sleeves, and nothing on either head or neck. The frock was of light silk, and clung to her with wet, and her feet were protected merely by thin slippers; add to this a deep cut under one ear, which only the cold prevented from bleeding profusely, a white face scratched and bruised, and a frame hardly able to support itself through fatigue; and you may fancy my first fright was not much allayed when I had had leisure to examine her.

'My dear young lady,' I exclaimed, 'I'll stir nowhere, and hear nothing, till you have removed every article of your clothes, and put on dry things; and certainly you shall not go to Gimmerton to-night, so it is needless to order the carriage.'

'Certainly I shall,' she said; 'walking or riding: yet I've no objection to dress myself decently. And — ah, see how it flows down my neck now! The fire does make it smart.'

She insisted on my fulfilling her directions, before she would let me touch her; and not till after the coachman had been instructed to get ready, and a maid set to pack up some necessary attire, did I obtain her consent for binding the wound and helping to change her garments.

'Now, Ellen,' she said, when my task was finished and she was seated in an easy-chair on the hearth, with a cup of tea before her, 'you sit down opposite me, and put poor Catherine's baby away: I don't like to see it! You mustn't think I care little for Catherine, because I behaved so foolishly on entering: I've cried, too, bitterly — yes, more than any one else has reason to cry. We parted unreconciled, you remember, and I sha'n't forgive myself. But, for all that, I was not going to sympathise with him — the brute beast! Oh, give me the poker! This is the last thing of his I have about me:' she slipped the gold ring from her third finger, and threw it on the floor. 'I'll smash it!' she continued, striking it with childish spite, 'and then I'll burn it!' and she took and dropped the misused article among the coals. 'There! he shall buy another, if he gets me back again. He'd be capable of coming to seek me, to tease Edgar. I dare not stay, lest that notion should possess his wicked head! And besides, Edgar has not been kind, has he? And I won't come suing for his assistance; nor will I bring him into more trouble. Necessity compelled me to seek shelter here; though, if I had not learned he was out of the way, I'd have halted at the kitchen, washed my face, warmed myself, got you to bring what I wanted, and departed again to anywhere out of the reach of my accursed — of that incarnate goblin! Ah, he was in such a fury! If he had caught me! It's a pity Earnshaw is not his match in strength: I wouldn't have run till I'd seen him all but demolished, had Hindley been able to do it!'

'Well, don't talk so fast, Miss!' I interrupted; 'you'll disorder the handkerchief I have tied round your face, and make the cut bleed again. Drink your tea, and take breath, and give over laughing: laughter is sadly out of place under this roof, and in your condition!'

'An undeniable truth,' she replied. 'Listen to that child! It maintains a constant wail — send it out of my hearing for an hour; I sha'n't stay any longer.'

I rang the bell, and committed it to a servant's care; and then I inquired what had urged her to escape from Wuthering Heights in such an unlikely plight, and where she meant to go, as she refused remaining with us.

'I ought, and I wished to remain,' answered she, 'to cheer Edgar and take care of the baby, for two things, and because the Grange is my right home. But I tell you he wouldn't let me! Do you think he could bear to see me grow fat and merry — could bear to think that we were tranquil, and not resolve on poisoning our comfort? Now, I have the satisfaction of being sure that he detests me, to the point of its annoying him seriously to have me within earshot or eyesight: I notice, when I enter his presence, the muscles of his countenance are involuntarily distorted into an expression of hatred; partly arising from his knowledge of the good causes I have to feel that sentiment for him, and partly from original aversion. It is strong enough to make me feel pretty certain that he would not chase me over England, supposing I contrived a clear escape; and therefore I must get quite away. I've recovered from my first desire to be killed by him: I'd rather he'd kill himself! He has extinguished my love effectually, and so I'm at my ease. I can recollect yet how I loved him; and can dimly imagine that I could still be loving him, if — no, no! Even if he had doted on me, the devilish nature would have revealed its existence somehow. Catherine had an awfully perverted taste to esteem him so dearly, knowing him so well. Monster! would that he could be blotted out of creation, and out of my memory!'

'Hush, hush! He's a human being,' I said. 'Be more charitable: there are worse men than he is yet!'

'He's not a human being,' she retorted; 'and he has no claim on my charity. I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death, and flung it back to me. People feel with their hearts, Ellen: and since he has destroyed mine, I have not power to feel for him: and I would not, though he groaned from this to his dying day, and wept tears of blood for Catherine! No, indeed, indeed, I wouldn't!' And here Isabella began to cry; but, immediately dashing the water from her lashes, she recommenced. 'You asked, what has driven me to flight at last? I was compelled to attempt it, because I had succeeded in rousing his rage a pitch above his malignity. Pulling out the nerves with red hot pincers requires more coolness than knocking on the head. He was worked up to forget the fiendish prudence he boasted of, and proceeded to murderous violence. I experienced pleasure in being able to exasperate him: the sense of pleasure woke my instinct of self-preservation, so I fairly broke free; and if ever I come into his hands again he is welcome to a signal revenge.

'Yesterday, you know, Mr. Earnshaw should have been at the funeral. He kept himself sober for the purpose — tolerably sober: not going to bed mad at six o'clock and getting up drunk at twelve. Consequently, he rose, in suicidal low spirits, as fit for the church as for a dance; and instead, he sat down by the fire and swallowed gin or brandy by tumblerfuls.

'Heathcliff — I shudder to name him! has been a stranger in the house from last Sunday till to-day. Whether the angels have fed him, or his kin beneath, I cannot tell; but he has not eaten a meal with us for nearly a week. He has just come home at dawn, and gone up-stairs to his chamber; locking himself in — as if anybody dreamt of coveting his company! There he has continued, praying like a Methodist: only the deity he implored is senseless dust and ashes; and God, when addressed, was curiously confounded with his own black father! After concluding these precious orisons — and they lasted generally till he grew hoarse and his voice was strangled in his throat — he would be off again; always straight down to the Grange! I wonder Edgar did not send for a constable, and give him into custody! For me, grieved as I was about Catherine, it was impossible to avoid regarding this season of deliverance from degrading oppression as a holiday.

'I recovered spirits sufficient to bear Joseph's eternal lectures without weeping, and to move up and down the house less with the foot of a frightened thief than formerly. You wouldn't think that I should cry at anything Joseph could say; but he and Hareton are detestable companions. I'd rather sit with Hindley, and hear his awful talk, than with "t' little maister" and his staunch supporter, that odious old man! When Heathcliff is in, I'm often obliged to seek the kitchen and their society, or starve among the damp uninhabited chambers; when he is not, as was the case this week, I establish a table and chair at one corner of the house fire, and never mind how Mr. Earnshaw may occupy himself; and he does not interfere with my arrangements. He is quieter now than he used to be, if no one provokes him: more sullen and depressed, and less furious. Joseph affirms he's sure he's an altered man: that the Lord has touched his heart, and he is saved "so as by fire." I'm puzzled to detect signs of the favourable change: but it is not my business.

'Yester-evening I sat in my nook reading some old books till late on towards twelve. It seemed so dismal to go up-stairs, with the wild snow blowing outside, and my thoughts continually reverting to the kirk-yard and the new-made grave! I dared hardly lift my eyes from the page before me, that melancholy scene so instantly usurped its place. Hindley sat opposite, his head leant on his hand; perhaps meditating on the same subject. He had ceased drinking at a point below irrationality, and had neither stirred nor spoken during two or three hours. There was no sound through the house but the moaning wind, which shook the windows every now and then, the faint crackling of the coals, and the click of my snuffers as I removed at intervals the long wick of the candle. Hareton and Joseph were probably fast asleep in bed. It was very, very sad: and while I read I sighed, for it seemed as if all joy had vanished from the world, never to be restored.

'The doleful silence was broken at length by the sound of the kitchen latch: Heathcliff had returned from his watch earlier than usual; owing, I suppose, to the sudden storm. That entrance was fastened, and we heard him coming round to get in by the other. I rose with an irrepressible expression of what I felt on my lips, which induced my companion, who had been staring towards the door, to turn and look at me.

'"I'll keep him out five minutes," he exclaimed. "You won't object?"

'"No, you may keep him out the whole night for me," I answered. "Do! put the key in the look, and draw the bolts."

'Earnshaw accomplished this ere his guest reached the front; he then came and brought his chair to the other side of my table, leaning over it, and searching in my eyes for a sympathy with the burning hate that gleamed from his: as he both looked and felt like an assassin, he couldn't exactly find that; but he discovered enough to encourage him to speak.

'"You, and I," he said, "have each a great debt to settle with the man out yonder! If we were neither of us cowards, we might combine to discharge it. Are you as soft as your brother? Are you willing to endure to the last, and not once attempt a repayment?"

'"I'm weary of enduring now," I replied; "and I'd be glad of a retaliation that wouldn't recoil on myself; but treachery and violence are spears pointed at both ends; they wound those who resort to them worse than their enemies."

'"Treachery and violence are a just return for treachery and violence!" cried Hindley. "Mrs. Heathcliff, I'll ask you to do nothing; but sit still and be dumb. Tell me now, can you? I'm sure you would have as much pleasure as I in witnessing the conclusion of the fiend's existence; he'll be *your* death unless you overreach him; and he'll be *my* ruin. Damn the hellish villain! He knocks at the door as if he were master here already! Promise to hold your tongue, and before that clock strikes — it wants three minutes of one — you're a free woman!"

'He took the implements which I described to you in my letter from his breast, and would have turned down the candle. I snatched it away, however, and seized his arm.

'"I'll not hold my tongue!" I said; "you mustn't touch him. Let the door remain shut, and be quiet!"

'"No! I've formed my resolution, and by God I'll execute it!" cried the desperate being. "I'll do you a kindness in spite of yourself, and Hareton justice! And you needn't trouble your head to screen me; Catherine is gone. Nobody alive would regret me, or be ashamed, though I cut my throat this minute — and it's time to make an end!"

'I might as well have struggled with a bear, or reasoned with a lunatic. The only resource left me was to run to a lattice and warn his intended victim of the fate which awaited him.

'"You'd better seek shelter somewhere else to-night!" I exclaimed, in rather a triumphant tone. "Mr. Earnshaw has a mind to shoot you, if you persist in endeavouring to enter."

'"You'd better open the door, you — " he answered, addressing me by some elegant term that I don't care to repeat.

'"I shall not meddle in the matter," I retorted again. "Come in and get shot, if you please. I've done my duty."

'With that I shut the window and returned to my place by the fire; having too small a stock of hypocrisy at my command to pretend any anxiety for the danger that menaced him. Earnshaw swore passionately at me: affirming that I loved the villain yet; and calling me all sorts of names for the base spirit I evinced. And I, in my secret heart (and conscience never reproached me), thought what a blessing it would be for *him* should Heathcliff put him out of misery; and what a blessing for *me* should he send Heathcliff to his right abode! As I sat nursing these reflections, the casement behind me was banged on to the floor by a blow from the latter individual, and his black countenance looked blightingly through. The stanchions stood too close to suffer his shoulders to follow, and I smiled, exulting in my fancied security. His hair and clothes were whitened with snow, and his sharp cannibal teeth, revealed by cold and wrath, gleamed through the dark.

'"Isabella, let me in, or I'll make you repent!" he "girned," as Joseph calls it.

'"I cannot commit murder," I replied. "Mr. Hindley stands sentinel with a knife and loaded pistol."

'"Let me in by the kitchen door," he said.

'"Hindley will be there before me," I answered: "and that's a poor love of yours that cannot bear a shower of snow! We were left at peace in our beds as long as the summer moon shone, but the moment a blast of winter returns, you must run for shelter! Heathcliff, if I were you, I'd go stretch myself over her grave and die like a faithful dog. The world is surely not worth living in now, is it? You had distinctly impressed on me the idea that Catherine was the whole joy of your life: I can't imagine how you think of surviving her loss."

'"He's there, is he?" exclaimed my companion, rushing to the gap. "If I can get my arm out I can hit him!"

'I'm afraid, Ellen, you'll set me down as really wicked; but you don't know all, so don't judge. I wouldn't have aided or abetted an attempt on even *his* life for anything. Wish that he were dead, I must; and therefore I was fearfully disappointed, and unnerved by terror for the consequences of my taunting speech, when he flung himself on Earnshaw's weapon and wrenched it from his grasp.

'The charge exploded, and the knife, in springing back, closed into its owner's wrist. Heathcliff pulled it away by main force, slitting up the flesh as it passed on, and thrust it dripping into his pocket. He then took a stone, struck down the division between two windows, and sprang in. His adversary had fallen senseless with excessive pain and the flow of blood, that gushed from an artery or a large vein. The ruffian kicked and trampled on him, and dashed his head repeatedly against the flags, holding me with one hand, meantime, to prevent me summoning Joseph. He exerted preterhuman self-denial in abstaining from finishing him completely; but getting out of breath, he finally desisted, and dragged the apparently inanimate body on to the settle. There he tore off the sleeve of Earnshaw's coat, and bound up the wound with brutal roughness; spitting and cursing during the operation as energetically as he had kicked before. Being at liberty, I lost no time in seeking the old servant; who, having gathered by degrees the purport of my hasty tale, hurried below, gasping, as he descended the steps two at once.

'"What is ther to do, now? what is ther to do, now?"

'"There's this to do," thundered Heathcliff, "that your master's mad; and should he last another month, I'll have him to an asylum. And how the devil did you come to fasten me out, you toothless hound? Don't stand muttering and mumbling there. Come, I'm not going to nurse him. Wash that stuff away; and mind the sparks of your candle — it is more than half brandy!"

'"And so ye've been murthering on him?" exclaimed Joseph, lifting his hands and eyes in horror. "If iver I seed a seeght loike this! May the Lord — "

'Heathcliff gave him a push on to his knees in the middle of the blood, and flung a towel to him; but instead of proceeding to dry it up, he joined his hands and began a prayer, which excited my laughter from its odd phraseology. I was in the condition of mind to be shocked at nothing: in fact, I was as reckless as some malefactors show themselves at the foot of the gallows.

'"Oh, I forgot you," said the tyrant. "You shall do that. Down with you. And you conspire with him against me, do you, viper? There, that is work fit for you!"

'He shook me till my teeth rattled, and pitched me beside Joseph, who steadily concluded his supplications, and then rose, vowing he would set off for the Grange directly. Mr. Linton was a magistrate, and though he had fifty wives dead, he should inquire into this. He was so obstinate in his resolution, that Heathcliff deemed it expedient to compel from my lips a recapitulation of what had taken place; standing over me, heaving with malevolence, as I reluctantly delivered the account in answer to his questions. It required a great deal of labour to satisfy the old man that Heathcliff was not the aggressor; especially with my hardly-wrung replies. However, Mr. Earnshaw soon convinced him that he was alive still; Joseph hastened to administer a dose of spirits, and by their succour his master presently regained motion and consciousness. Heathcliff, aware that his opponent was ignorant of the treatment received while insensible, called him deliriously intoxicated; and said he should not notice his atrocious conduct further, but advised him to get to bed. To my joy, he left us, after giving this judicious counsel, and Hindley stretched himself on the hearthstone. I departed to my own room, marvelling that I had escaped so easily.

'This morning, when I came down, about half an hour before noon, Mr. Earnshaw was sitting by the fire, deadly sick; his evil genius, almost as gaunt and ghastly, leant against the chimney. Neither appeared inclined to dine, and, having waited till all was cold on the table, I commenced alone. Nothing hindered me from eating heartily, and I experienced a certain sense of satisfaction and superiority, as, at intervals, I cast a look towards my silent companions, and felt the comfort of a quiet conscience within me. After I had done, I ventured on the unusual liberty of drawing near the fire, going round Earnshaw's seat, and kneeling in the corner beside him.

'Heathcliff did not glance my way, and I gazed up, and contemplated his features almost as confidently as if they had been turned to stone. His forehead, that I once thought so manly, and that I now think so diabolical, was shaded with a heavy cloud; his basilisk eyes were nearly quenched by sleeplessness, and weeping, perhaps, for the lashes were wet then: his lips devoid of their ferocious sneer, and sealed in an expression of unspeakable sadness. Had it been another, I would have covered my face in the presence of such grief. In *his* case, I was gratified; and, ignoble as it seems to insult a fallen enemy, I couldn't miss this chance of sticking in a dart: his weakness was the only time when I could taste the delight of paying wrong for wrong.'

'Fie, fie, Miss!' I interrupted. 'One might suppose you had never opened a Bible in your life. If God afflict your enemies, surely that ought to suffice you. It is both mean and presumptuous to add your torture to his!'

'In general I'll allow that it would be, Ellen,' she continued; 'but what misery laid on Heathcliff could content me, unless I have a hand in it? I'd rather he suffered less, if I might cause his sufferings and he might *know* that I was the cause. Oh, I owe him so much. On only one condition can I hope to forgive him. It is, if I may take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; for every wrench of agony return a wrench: reduce him to my level. As he was the first to injure, make him the first to implore pardon; and then — why then, Ellen, I might show you some generosity. But it is utterly impossible I can ever be revenged, and therefore I cannot forgive him. Hindley wanted some water, and I handed him a glass, and asked him how he was.

'"Not as ill as I wish," he replied. "But leaving out my arm, every inch of me is as sore as if I had been fighting with a legion of imps!"

'"Yes, no wonder," was my next remark. "Catherine used to boast that she stood between you and bodily harm: she meant that certain persons would not hurt you for fear of offending her. It's well people don't *really* rise from their grave, or, last night, she might have witnessed a repulsive scene! Are not you bruised, and cut over your chest and shoulders?"

'"I can't say," he answered, "but what do you mean? Did he dare to strike me when I was down?"

'"He trampled on and kicked you, and dashed you on the ground," I whispered. "And his mouth watered to tear you with his teeth; because he's only half man: not so much, and the rest fiend."

'Mr. Earnshaw looked up, like me, to the countenance of our mutual foe; who, absorbed in his anguish, seemed insensible to anything around him: the longer he stood, the plainer his reflections revealed their blackness through his features.

'"Oh, if God would but give me strength to strangle him in my last agony, I'd go to hell with joy," groaned the impatient man, writhing to rise, and sinking back in despair, convinced of his inadequacy for the struggle.

'"Nay, it's enough that he has murdered one of you," I observed aloud. "At the Grange, every one knows your sister would have been living now had it not been for Mr. Heathcliff. After all, it is preferable to be hated than loved by him. When I recollect how happy we were — how happy Catherine was before he came — I'm fit to curse the day."

‘Most likely, Heathcliff noticed more the truth of what was said, than the spirit of the person who said it. His attention was roused, I saw, for his eyes rained down tears among the ashes, and he drew his breath in suffocating sighs. I stared full at him, and laughed scornfully. The clouded windows of hell flashed a moment towards me; the fiend which usually looked out, however, was so dimmed and drowned that I did not fear to hazard another sound of derision.

‘“Get up, and begone out of my sight,” said the mourner.

‘I guessed he uttered those words, at least, though his voice was hardly intelligible.

‘“I beg your pardon,” I replied. “But I loved Catherine too; and her brother requires attendance, which, for her sake, I shall supply. Now, that she’s dead, I see her in Hindley: Hindley has exactly her eyes, if you had not tried to gouge them out, and made them black and red; and her — ”

‘“Get up, wretched idiot, before I stamp you to death!” he cried, making a movement that caused me to make one also.

‘“But then,” I continued, holding myself ready to flee, “if poor Catherine had trusted you, and assumed the ridiculous, contemptible, degrading title of Mrs. Heathcliff, she would soon have presented a similar picture! *She* wouldn’t have borne your abominable behaviour quietly: her detestation and disgust must have found voice.”

‘The back of the settle and Earnshaw’s person interposed between me and him; so instead of endeavouring to reach me, he snatched a dinner-knife from the table and flung it at my head. It struck beneath my ear, and stopped the sentence I was uttering; but, pulling it out, I sprang to the door and delivered another; which I hope went a little deeper than his missile. The last glimpse I caught of him was a furious rush on his part, checked by the embrace of his host; and both fell locked together on the hearth. In my flight through the kitchen I bid Joseph speed to his master; I knocked over Hareton, who was hanging a litter of puppies from a chair-back in the doorway; and, blessed as a soul escaped from purgatory, I bounded, leaped, and flew down the steep road; then, quitting its windings, shot direct across the moor, rolling over banks, and wading through marshes: precipitating myself, in fact, towards the beacon-light of the Grange. And far rather would I be condemned to a perpetual dwelling in the infernal regions than, even for one night, abide beneath the roof of Wuthering Heights again.’

Isabella ceased speaking, and took a drink of tea; then she rose, and bidding me put on her bonnet, and a great shawl I had brought, and turning a deaf ear to my entreaties for her to remain another hour, she stepped on to a chair, kissed Edgar’s and Catherine’s portraits, bestowed a similar salute on me, and descended to the carriage, accompanied by Fanny, who yelped wild with joy at recovering her mistress. She was driven away, never to revisit this neighbourhood: but a regular correspondence was established between her and my master when things were more settled. I believe her new abode was in the south, near London; there she had a son born a few months subsequent to her escape. He was christened Linton, and, from the first, she reported him to be an ailing, peevish creature.

Mr. Heathcliff, meeting me one day in the village, inquired where she lived. I refused to tell. He remarked that it was not of any moment, only she must beware of coming to her brother: she should not be with him, if he had to keep her himself. Though I would give no information, he discovered, through some of the other servants, both her place of residence and the existence of the child. Still, he didn't molest her: for which forbearance she might thank his aversion, I suppose. He often asked about the infant, when he saw me; and on hearing its name, smiled grimly, and observed: 'They wish me to hate it too, do they?'

'I don't think they wish you to know anything about it,' I answered.

'But I'll have it,' he said, 'when I want it. They may reckon on that!'

Fortunately its mother died before the time arrived; some thirteen years after the decease of Catherine, when Linton was twelve, or a little more.

On the day succeeding Isabella's unexpected visit I had no opportunity of speaking to my master: he shunned conversation, and was fit for discussing nothing. When I could get him to listen, I saw it pleased him that his sister had left her husband; whom he abhorred with an intensity which the mildness of his nature would scarcely seem to allow. So deep and sensitive was his aversion, that he refrained from going anywhere where he was likely to see or hear of Heathcliff. Grief, and that together, transformed him into a complete hermit: he threw up his office of magistrate, ceased even to attend church, avoided the village on all occasions, and spent a life of entire seclusion within the limits of his park and grounds; only varied by solitary rambles on the moors, and visits to the grave of his wife, mostly at evening, or early morning before other wanderers were abroad. But he was too good to be thoroughly unhappy long. *He* didn't pray for Catherine's soul to haunt him. Time brought resignation, and a melancholy sweeter than common joy. He recalled her memory with ardent, tender love, and hopeful aspiring to the better world; where he doubted not she was gone.

And he had earthly consolation and affections also. For a few days, I said, he seemed regardless of the puny successor to the departed: that coldness melted as fast as snow in April, and ere the tiny thing could stammer a word or totter a step it wielded a despot's sceptre in his heart. It was named Catherine; but he never called it the name in full, as he had never called the first Catherine short: probably because Heathcliff had a habit of doing so. The little one was always Cathy: it formed to him a distinction from the mother, and yet a connection with her; and his attachment sprang from its relation to her, far more than from its being his own.

I used to draw a comparison between him and Hindley Earnshaw, and perplex myself to explain satisfactorily why their conduct was so opposite in similar circumstances. They had both been fond husbands, and were both attached to their children; and I could not see how they shouldn't both have taken the same road, for good or evil. But, I thought in my mind, Hindley, with apparently the stronger head, has shown himself sadly the worse and the weaker man. When his ship struck, the captain abandoned his post; and the crew, instead of trying to save her, rushed into riot and confusion, leaving no hope for their luckless vessel. Linton, on the contrary, displayed the true courage of a loyal and faithful soul: he trusted God; and God comforted him. One hoped, and the other despaired: they chose their own lots, and were righteously doomed to endure them. But you'll not want to hear my moralising, Mr. Lockwood; you'll judge, as well as I can, all these things: at least, you'll think you will, and that's the same. The end of Earnshaw was what might have been expected; it followed fast on his sister's: there were scarcely six months between them. We, at the Grange, never got a very succinct account of his state preceding it; all that I did learn was on occasion of going to aid in the preparations for the funeral. Mr. Kenneth came to announce the event to my master.

'Well, Nelly,' said he, riding into the yard one morning, too early not to alarm me with an instant presentiment of bad news, 'it's yours and my turn to go into mourning at present. Who's given us the slip now, do you think?'

'Who?' I asked in a flurry.

'Why, guess!' he returned, dismounting, and slinging his bridle on a hook by the door. 'And nip up the corner of your apron: I'm certain you'll need it.'

'Not Mr. Heathcliff, surely?' I exclaimed.

'What! would you have tears for him?' said the doctor. 'No, Heathcliff's a tough young fellow: he looks blooming to-day. I've just seen him. He's rapidly regaining flesh since he lost his better half.'

'Who is it, then, Mr. Kenneth?' I repeated impatiently.

'Hindley Earnshaw! Your old friend Hindley,' he replied, 'and my wicked gossip: though he's been too wild for me this long while. There! I said we should draw water. But cheer up! He died true to his character: drunk as a lord. Poor lad! I'm sorry, too. One can't help missing an old companion: though he had the worst tricks with him that ever man imagined, and has done me many a rascally turn. He's barely twenty-seven, it seems; that's your own age: who would have thought you were born in one year?'

I confess this blow was greater to me than the shock of Mrs. Linton's death: ancient associations lingered round my heart; I sat down in the porch and wept as for a blood relation, desiring Mr. Kenneth to get another servant to introduce him to the master. I could not hinder myself from pondering on the question — 'Had he had fair play?' Whatever I did, that idea would bother me: it was so tiresomely pertinacious that I resolved on requesting leave to go to Wuthering Heights, and assist in the last duties to the dead. Mr. Linton was extremely reluctant to consent, but I pleaded eloquently for the friendless condition in which he lay; and I said my old master and foster-brother had a claim on my services as strong as his own. Besides, I reminded him that the child Hareton was his wife's nephew, and, in the absence of nearer kin, he ought to act as its guardian; and he ought to and must inquire how the property was left, and look over the concerns of his brother-in-law. He was unfit for attending to such matters then, but he bid me speak to his lawyer; and at length permitted me to go. His lawyer had been Earnshaw's also: I called at the village, and asked him to accompany me. He shook his head, and advised that Heathcliff should be let alone; affirming, if the truth were known, Hareton would be found little else than a beggar.

'His father died in debt,' he said; 'the whole property is mortgaged, and the sole chance for the natural heir is to allow him an opportunity of creating some interest in the creditor's heart, that he may be inclined to deal leniently towards him.'

When I reached the Heights, I explained that I had come to see everything carried on decently; and Joseph, who appeared in sufficient distress, expressed satisfaction at my presence. Mr. Heathcliff said he did not perceive that I was wanted; but I might stay and order the arrangements for the funeral, if I chose.

'Correctly,' he remarked, 'that fool's body should be buried at the cross-roads, without ceremony of any kind. I happened to leave him ten minutes yesterday afternoon, and in that interval he fastened the two doors of the house against me, and he has spent the night in drinking himself to death deliberately! We broke in this morning, for we heard him sporting like a horse; and there he was, laid over the settle: flaying and scalping would not have wakened him. I sent for Kenneth, and he came; but not till the beast had changed into carrion: he was both dead and cold, and stark; and so you'll allow it was useless making more stir about him!'

The old servant confirmed this statement, but muttered:

'I'd rayther he'd goan hisseln for t' doctor! I sud ha,' taen tent o' t' maister better nor him — and he warn't deead when I left, naught o' t' soart!'

I insisted on the funeral being respectable. Mr. Heathcliff said I might have my own way there too: only, he desired me to remember that the money for the whole affair came out of his pocket. He maintained a hard, careless deportment, indicative of neither joy nor sorrow: if anything, it expressed a flinty gratification at a piece of difficult work successfully executed. I observed once, indeed, something like exultation in his aspect: it was just when the people were bearing the coffin from the house. He had the hypocrisy to represent a mourner: and previous to following with Hareton, he lifted the unfortunate child on to the table and muttered, with peculiar gusto, 'Now, my bonny lad, you are *mine*! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!' The unsuspecting thing was pleased at this speech: he played with Heathcliff's whiskers, and stroked his cheek; but I divined its meaning, and observed tartly, 'That boy must go back with me to Thrushcross Grange, sir. There is nothing in the world less yours than he is!'

'Does Linton say so?' he demanded.

‘Of course — he has ordered me to take him,’ I replied.

‘Well,’ said the scoundrel, ‘we’ll not argue the subject now: but I have a fancy to try my hand at rearing a young one; so intimate to your master that I must supply the place of this with my own, if he attempt to remove it. I don’t engage to let Hareton go undisputed; but I’ll be pretty sure to make the other come! Remember to tell him.’

This hint was enough to bind our hands. I repeated its substance on my return; and Edgar Linton, little interested at the commencement, spoke no more of interfering. I’m not aware that he could have done it to any purpose, had he been ever so willing.

The guest was now the master of Wuthering Heights: he held firm possession, and proved to the attorney — who, in his turn, proved it to Mr. Linton — that Earnshaw had mortgaged every yard of land he owned for cash to supply his mania for gaming; and he, Heathcliff, was the mortgagee. In that manner Hareton, who should now be the first gentleman in the neighbourhood, was reduced to a state of complete dependence on his father’s inveterate enemy; and lives in his own house as a servant, deprived of the advantage of wages: quite unable to right himself, because of his friendlessness, and his ignorance that he has been wronged.

CHAPTER XVIII

The twelve years, continued Mrs. Dean, following that dismal period were the happiest of my life: my greatest troubles in their passage rose from our little lady's trifling illnesses, which she had to experience in common with all children, rich and poor. For the rest, after the first six months, she grew like a larch, and could walk and talk too, in her own way, before the heath blossomed a second time over Mrs. Linton's dust. She was the most winning thing that ever brought sunshine into a desolate house: a real beauty in face, with the Earnshaws' handsome dark eyes, but the Lintons' fair skin and small features, and yellow curling hair. Her spirit was high, though not rough, and qualified by a heart sensitive and lively to excess in its affections. That capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother: still she did not resemble her: for she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce: it was deep and tender. However, it must be acknowledged, she had faults to foil her gifts. A propensity to be saucy was one; and a perverse will, that indulged children invariably acquire, whether they be good tempered or cross. If a servant chanced to vex her, it was always — 'I shall tell papa!' And if he reproved her, even by a look, you would have thought it a heart-breaking business: I don't believe he ever did speak a harsh word to her. He took her education entirely on himself, and made it an amusement. Fortunately, curiosity and a quick intellect made her an apt scholar: she learned rapidly and eagerly, and did honour to his teaching.

Till she reached the age of thirteen she had not once been beyond the range of the park by herself. Mr. Linton would take her with him a mile or so outside, on rare occasions; but he trusted her to no one else. Gimmerton was an unsubstantial name in her ears; the chapel, the only building she had approached or entered, except her own home. Wuthering Heights and Mr. Heathcliff did not exist for her: she was a perfect recluse; and, apparently, perfectly contented. Sometimes, indeed, while surveying the country from her nursery window, she would observe —

'Ellen, how long will it be before I can walk to the top of those hills? I wonder what lies on the other side — is it the sea?'

'No, Miss Cathy,' I would answer; 'it is hills again, just like these.'

'And what are those golden rocks like when you stand under them?' she once asked.

The abrupt descent of Penistone Crags particularly attracted her notice; especially when the setting sun shone on it and the topmost heights, and the whole extent of landscape besides lay in shadow. I explained that they were bare masses of stone, with hardly enough earth in their clefts to nourish a stunted tree.

‘And why are they bright so long after it is evening here?’ she pursued.

‘Because they are a great deal higher up than we are,’ replied I; ‘you could not climb them, they are too high and steep. In winter the frost is always there before it comes to us; and deep into summer I have found snow under that black hollow on the north-east side!’

‘Oh, you have been on them!’ she cried gleefully. ‘Then I can go, too, when I am a woman. Has papa been, Ellen?’

‘Papa would tell you, Miss,’ I answered, hastily, ‘that they are not worth the trouble of visiting. The moors, where you ramble with him, are much nicer; and Thrushcross Park is the finest place in the world.’

‘But I know the park, and I don’t know those,’ she murmured to herself. ‘And I should delight to look round me from the brow of that tallest point: my little pony Minny shall take me some time.’

One of the maids mentioning the Fairy Cave, quite turned her head with a desire to fulfil this project: she teased Mr. Linton about it; and he promised she should have the journey when she got older. But Miss Catherine measured her age by months, and, ‘Now, am I old enough to go to Penistone Crags?’ was the constant question in her mouth. The road thither wound close by Wuthering Heights. Edgar had not the heart to pass it; so she received as constantly the answer, ‘Not yet, love: not yet.’

I said Mrs. Heathcliff lived above a dozen years after quitting her husband. Her family were of a delicate constitution: she and Edgar both lacked the ruddy health that you will generally meet in these parts. What her last illness was, I am not certain: I conjecture, they died of the same thing, a kind of fever, slow at its commencement, but incurable, and rapidly consuming life towards the close. She wrote to inform her brother of the probable conclusion of a four-months’ indisposition under which she had suffered, and entreated him to come to her, if possible; for she had much to settle, and she wished to bid him adieu, and deliver Linton safely into his hands. Her hope was that Linton might be left with him, as he had been with her: his father, she would fain convince herself, had no desire to assume the burden of his maintenance or education. My master hesitated not a moment in complying with her request: reluctant as he was to leave home at ordinary calls, he flew to answer this; commanding Catherine to my peculiar vigilance, in his absence, with reiterated orders that she must not wander out of the park, even under my escort he did not calculate on her going unaccompanied.

He was away three weeks. The first day or two my charge sat in a corner of the library, too sad for either reading or playing: in that quiet state she caused me little trouble; but it was succeeded by an interval of impatient, fretful weariness; and being too busy, and too old then, to run up and down amusing her, I hit on a method by which she might entertain herself. I used to send her on her travels round the grounds — now on foot, and now on a pony; indulging her with a patient audience of all her real and imaginary adventures when she returned.

The summer shone in full prime; and she took such a taste for this solitary rambling that she often contrived to remain out from breakfast till tea; and then the evenings were spent in recounting her fanciful tales. I did not fear her breaking bounds; because the gates were generally locked, and I thought she would scarcely venture forth alone, if they had stood wide open. Unluckily, my confidence proved misplaced. Catherine came to me, one morning, at eight o'clock, and said she was that day an Arabian merchant, going to cross the Desert with his caravan; and I must give her plenty of provision for herself and beasts: a horse, and three camels, personated by a large hound and a couple of pointers. I got together good store of dainties, and slung them in a basket on one side of the saddle; and she sprang up as gay as a fairy, sheltered by her wide-brimmed hat and gauze veil from the July sun, and trotted off with a merry laugh, mocking my cautious counsel to avoid galloping, and come back early. The naughty thing never made her appearance at tea. One traveller, the hound, being an old dog and fond of its ease, returned; but neither Cathy, nor the pony, nor the two pointers were visible in any direction: I despatched emissaries down this path, and that path, and at last went wandering in search of her myself. There was a labourer working at a fence round a plantation, on the borders of the grounds. I inquired of him if he had seen our young lady.

'I saw her at morn,' he replied: 'she would have me to cut her a hazel switch, and then she leapt her Galloway over the hedge yonder, where it is lowest, and galloped out of sight.'

You may guess how I felt at hearing this news. It struck me directly she must have started for Penistone Crags. 'What will become of her?' I ejaculated, pushing through a gap which the man was repairing, and making straight to the high-road. I walked as if for a wager, mile after mile, till a turn brought me in view of the Heights; but no Catherine could I detect, far or near. The Crags lie about a mile and a half beyond Mr. Heathcliff's place, and that is four from the Grange, so I began to fear night would fall ere I could reach them. 'And what if she should have slipped in clambering among them,' I reflected, 'and been killed, or broken some of her bones?' My suspense was truly painful; and, at first, it gave me delightful relief to observe, in hurrying by the farmhouse, Charlie, the fiercest of the pointers, lying under a window, with swelled head and bleeding ear. I opened the wicket and ran to the door, knocking vehemently for admittance. A woman whom I knew, and who formerly lived at Gimmerton, answered: she had been servant there since the death of Mr. Earnshaw.

'Ah,' said she, 'you are come a-seeking your little mistress! Don't be frightened. She's here safe: but I'm glad it isn't the master.'

'He is not at home then, is he?' I panted, quite breathless with quick walking and alarm.

'No, no,' she replied: 'both he and Joseph are off, and I think they won't return this hour or more. Step in and rest you a bit.'

I entered, and beheld my stray lamb seated on the hearth, rocking herself in a little chair that had been her mother's when a child. Her hat was hung against the wall, and she seemed perfectly at home, laughing and chattering, in the best spirits imaginable, to Hareton — now a great, strong lad of eighteen — who stared at her with considerable curiosity and astonishment: comprehending precious little of the fluent succession of remarks and questions which her tongue never ceased pouring forth.

'Very well, Miss!' I exclaimed, concealing my joy under an angry countenance. 'This is your last ride, till papa comes back. I'll not trust you over the threshold again, you naughty, naughty girl!'

'Aha, Ellen!' she cried, gaily, jumping up and running to my side. 'I shall have a pretty story to tell to-night; and so you've found me out. Have you ever been here in your life before?'

'Put that hat on, and home at once,' said I. 'I'm dreadfully grieved at you, Miss Cathy: you've done extremely wrong! It's no use pouting and crying: that won't repay the trouble I've had, scouring the country after you. To think how Mr. Linton charged me to keep you in; and you stealing off so! It shows you are a cunning little fox, and nobody will put faith in you any more.'

'What have I done?' sobbed she, instantly checked. 'Papa charged me nothing: he'll not scold me, Ellen — he's never cross, like you!'

'Come, come!' I repeated. 'I'll tie the riband. Now, let us have no petulance. Oh, for shame! You thirteen years old, and such a baby!'

This exclamation was caused by her pushing the hat from her head, and retreating to the chimney out of my reach.

'Nay,' said the servant, 'don't be hard on the bonny lass, Mrs. Dean. We made her stop: she'd fain have ridden forwards, afeard you should be uneasy. Hareton offered to go with her, and I thought he should: it's a wild road over the hills.'

Hareton, during the discussion, stood with his hands in his pockets, too awkward to speak; though he looked as if he did not relish my intrusion.

'How long am I to wait?' I continued, disregarding the woman's interference. 'It will be dark in ten minutes. Where is the pony, Miss Cathy? And where is Phoenix? I shall leave you, unless you be quick; so please yourself.'

'The pony is in the yard,' she replied, 'and Phoenix is shut in there. He's bitten — and so is Charlie. I was going to tell you all about it; but you are in a bad temper, and don't deserve to hear.'

I picked up her hat, and approached to reinstate it; but perceiving that the people of the house took her part, she commenced capering round the room; and on my giving chase, ran like a mouse over and under and behind the furniture, rendering it ridiculous for me to pursue. Hareton and the woman laughed, and she joined them, and waxed more impertinent still; till I cried, in great irritation, — 'Well, Miss Cathy, if you were aware whose house this is you'd be glad enough to get out.'

'It's *your* father's, isn't it?' said she, turning to Hareton.

'Nay,' he replied, looking down, and blushing bashfully.

He could not stand a steady gaze from her eyes, though they were just his own.

'Whose then — your master's?' she asked.

He coloured deeper, with a different feeling, muttered an oath, and turned away.

'Who is his master?' continued the tiresome girl, appealing to me. 'He talked about "our house," and "our folk." I thought he had been the owner's son. And he never said Miss: he should have done, shouldn't he, if he's a servant?'

Hareton grew black as a thunder-cloud at this childish speech. I silently shook my questioner, and at last succeeded in equipping her for departure.

'Now, get my horse,' she said, addressing her unknown kinsman as she would one of the stable-boys at the Grange. 'And you may come with me. I want to see where the goblin-hunter rises in the marsh, and to hear about the *fairishes*, as you call them: but make haste! What's the matter? Get my horse, I say.'

'I'll see thee damned before I be *thy* servant!' growled the lad.

'You'll see me *what*!' asked Catherine in surprise.

'Damned — thou saucy witch!' he replied.

'There, Miss Cathy! you see you have got into pretty company,' I interposed. 'Nice words to be used to a young lady! Pray don't begin to dispute with him. Come, let us seek for Minny ourselves, and begone.'

'But, Ellen,' cried she, staring fixed in astonishment, 'how dare he speak so to me? Mustn't he be made to do as I ask him? You wicked creature, I shall tell papa what you said. — Now, then!'

Hareton did not appear to feel this threat; so the tears sprang into her eyes with indignation. 'You bring the pony,' she exclaimed, turning to the woman, 'and let my dog free this moment!'

'Softly, Miss,' answered she addressed; 'you'll lose nothing by being civil. Though Mr. Hareton, there, be not the master's son, he's your cousin: and I was never hired to serve you.'

'*He* my cousin!' cried Cathy, with a scornful laugh.

'Yes, indeed,' responded her reprover.

'Oh, Ellen! don't let them say such things,' she pursued in great trouble. 'Papa is gone to fetch my cousin from London: my cousin is a gentleman's son. That my — ' she stopped, and wept outright; upset at the bare notion of relationship with such a clown.

'Hush, hush!' I whispered; 'people can have many cousins and of all sorts, Miss Cathy, without being any the worse for it; only they needn't keep their company, if they be disagreeable and bad.'

'He's not — he's not my cousin, Ellen!' she went on, gathering fresh grief from reflection, and flinging herself into my arms for refuge from the idea.

I was much vexed at her and the servant for their mutual revelations; having no doubt of Linton's approaching arrival, communicated by the former, being reported to Mr. Heathcliff; and feeling as confident that Catherine's first thought on her father's return would be to seek an explanation of the latter's assertion concerning her rude-bred kindred. Hareton, recovering from his disgust at being taken for a servant, seemed moved by her distress; and, having fetched the pony round to the door, he took, to propitiate her, a fine crooked-legged terrier whelp from the kennel, and putting it into her hand, bid her whist! for he meant nought. Pausing in her lamentations, she surveyed him with a glance of awe and horror, then burst forth anew.

I could scarcely refrain from smiling at this antipathy to the poor fellow; who was a well-made, athletic youth, good-looking in features, and stout and healthy, but attired in garments befitting his daily occupations of working on the farm and lounging among the moors after rabbits and game. Still, I thought I could detect in his physiognomy a mind owning better qualities than his father ever possessed. Good things lost amid a wilderness of weeds, to be sure, whose rankness far over-topped their neglected growth; yet, notwithstanding, evidence of a wealthy soil, that might yield luxuriant crops under other and favourable circumstances. Mr. Heathcliff, I believe, had not treated him physically ill; thanks to his fearless nature, which offered no temptation to that course of oppression: he had none of the timid susceptibility that would have given zest to ill-treatment, in Heathcliff's judgment. He appeared to have bent his malevolence on making him a brute: he was never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit which did not annoy his keeper; never led a single step towards virtue, or guarded by a single precept against vice. And from what I heard, Joseph contributed much to his deterioration, by a narrow-minded partiality which prompted him to flatter and pet him, as a boy, because he was the head of the old family. And as he had been in the habit of accusing Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, when children, of putting the master past his patience, and compelling him to seek solace in drink by what he termed their 'offald ways,' so at present he laid the whole burden of Hareton's faults on the shoulders of the usurper of his property. If the lad swore, he wouldn't correct him: nor however culpably he behaved. It gave Joseph satisfaction, apparently, to watch him go the worst lengths: he allowed that the lad was ruined: that his soul was abandoned to perdition; but then he reflected that Heathcliff must answer for it. Hareton's blood would be required at his hands; and there lay immense consolation in that thought. Joseph had instilled into him a pride of name, and of his lineage; he would, had he dared, have fostered hate between him and the present owner of the Heights: but his dread of that owner amounted to superstition;

and he confined his feelings regarding him to muttered innuendoes and private comminations. I don't pretend to be intimately acquainted with the mode of living customary in those days at Wuthering Heights: I only speak from hearsay; for I saw little. The villagers affirmed Mr. Heathcliff was *near*, and a cruel hard landlord to his tenants; but the house, inside, had regained its ancient aspect of comfort under female management, and the scenes of riot common in Hindley's time were not now enacted within its walls. The master was too gloomy to seek companionship with any people, good or bad; and he is yet.

This, however, is not making progress with my story. Miss Cathy rejected the peace-offering of the terrier, and demanded her own dogs, Charlie and Phoenix. They came limping and hanging their heads; and we set out for home, sadly out of sorts, every one of us. I could not wring from my little lady how she had spent the day; except that, as I supposed, the goal of her pilgrimage was Penistone Crags; and she arrived without adventure to the gate of the farm-house, when Hareton happened to issue forth, attended by some canine followers, who attacked her train. They had a smart battle, before their owners could separate them: that formed an introduction. Catherine told Hareton who she was, and where she was going; and asked him to show her the way: finally, beguiling him to accompany her. He opened the mysteries of the Fairy Cave, and twenty other queer places. But, being in disgrace, I was not favoured with a description of the interesting objects she saw. I could gather, however, that her guide had been a favourite till she hurt his feelings by addressing him as a servant; and Heathcliff's housekeeper hurt hers by calling him her cousin. Then the language he had held to her rankled in her heart; she who was always 'love,' and 'darling,' and 'queen,' and 'angel,' with everybody at the Grange, to be insulted so shockingly by a stranger! She did not comprehend it; and hard work I had to obtain a promise that she would not lay the grievance before her father. I explained how he objected to the whole household at the Heights, and how sorry he would be to find she had been there; but I insisted most on the fact, that if she revealed my negligence of his orders, he would perhaps be so angry that I should have to leave; and Cathy couldn't bear that prospect: she pledged her word, and kept it for my sake. After all, she was a sweet little girl.

CHAPTER XIX

A letter, edged with black, announced the day of my master's return. Isabella was dead; and he wrote to bid me get mourning for his daughter, and arrange a room, and other accommodations, for his youthful nephew. Catherine ran wild with joy at the idea of welcoming her father back; and indulged most sanguine anticipations of the innumerable excellencies of her 'real' cousin. The evening of their expected arrival came. Since early morning she had been busy ordering her own small affairs; and now attired in her new black frock — poor thing! her aunt's death impressed her with no definite sorrow — she obliged me, by constant worrying, to walk with her down through the grounds to meet them.

'Linton is just six months younger than I am,' she chattered, as we strolled leisurely over the swells and hollows of mossy turf, under shadow of the trees. 'How delightful it will be to have him for a playfellow! Aunt Isabella sent papa a beautiful lock of his hair; it was lighter than mine — more flaxen, and quite as fine. I have it carefully preserved in a little glass box; and I've often thought what a pleasure it would be to see its owner. Oh! I am happy — and papa, dear, dear papa! Come, Ellen, let us run! come, run.'

She ran, and returned and ran again, many times before my sober footsteps reached the gate, and then she seated herself on the grassy bank beside the path, and tried to wait patiently; but that was impossible: she couldn't be still a minute.

'How long they are!' she exclaimed. 'Ah, I see, some dust on the road — they are coming! No! When will they be here? May we not go a little way — half a mile, Ellen, only just half a mile? Do say Yes: to that clump of birches at the turn!'

I refused staunchly. At length her suspense was ended: the travelling carriage rolled in sight. Miss Cathy shrieked and stretched out her arms as soon as she caught her father's face looking from the window. He descended, nearly as eager as herself; and a considerable interval elapsed ere they had a thought to spare for any but themselves. While they exchanged caresses I took a peep in to see after Linton. He was asleep in a corner, wrapped in a warm, fur-lined cloak, as if it had been winter. A pale, delicate, effeminate boy, who might have been taken for my master's younger brother, so strong was the resemblance: but there was a sickly peevishness in his aspect that Edgar Linton never had. The latter saw me looking; and having shaken hands, advised me to close the door, and leave him undisturbed; for the journey had fatigued him. Cathy would fain have taken one glance, but her father told her to come, and they walked together up the park, while I hastened before to prepare the servants.

‘Now, darling,’ said Mr. Linton, addressing his daughter, as they halted at the bottom of the front steps: ‘your cousin is not so strong or so merry as you are, and he has lost his mother, remember, a very short time since; therefore, don’t expect him to play and run about with you directly. And don’t harass him much by talking: let him be quiet this evening, at least, will you?’

‘Yes, yes, papa,’ answered Catherine: ‘but I do want to see him; and he hasn’t once looked out.’

The carriage stopped; and the sleeper being roused, was lifted to the ground by his uncle.

‘This is your cousin Cathy, Linton,’ he said, putting their little hands together. ‘She’s fond of you already; and mind you don’t grieve her by crying to-night. Try to be cheerful now; the travelling is at an end, and you have nothing to do but rest and amuse yourself as you please.’

‘Let me go to bed, then,’ answered the boy, shrinking from Catherine’s salute; and he put his fingers to remove incipient tears.

‘Come, come, there’s a good child,’ I whispered, leading him in. ‘You’ll make her weep too — see how sorry she is for you!’

I do not know whether it was sorrow for him, but his cousin put on as sad a countenance as himself, and returned to her father. All three entered, and mounted to the library, where tea was laid ready. I proceeded to remove Linton’s cap and mantle, and placed him on a chair by the table; but he was no sooner seated than he began to cry afresh. My master inquired what was the matter.

‘I can’t sit on a chair,’ sobbed the boy.

‘Go to the sofa, then, and Ellen shall bring you some tea,’ answered his uncle patiently.

He had been greatly tried, during the journey, I felt convinced, by his fretful ailing charge. Linton slowly trailed himself off, and lay down. Cathy carried a footstool and her cup to his side. At first she sat silent; but that could not last: she had resolved to make a pet of her little cousin, as she would have him to be; and she commenced stroking his curls, and kissing his cheek, and offering him tea in her saucer, like a baby. This pleased him, for he was not much better: he dried his eyes, and lightened into a faint smile.

‘Oh, he’ll do very well,’ said the master to me, after watching them a minute. ‘Very well, if we can keep him, Ellen. The company of a child of his own age will instil new spirit into him soon, and by wishing for strength he’ll gain it.’

‘Ay, if we can keep him!’ I mused to myself; and sore misgivings came over me that there was slight hope of that. And then, I thought, how ever will that weakling live at Wuthering Heights? Between his father and Hareton, what playmates and instructors they’ll be. Our doubts were presently decided — even earlier than I expected. I had just taken the children up-stairs, after tea was finished, and seen Linton asleep — he would not suffer me to leave him till that was the case — I had come down, and was standing by the table in the hall, lighting a bedroom candle for Mr. Edgar, when a maid stepped out of the kitchen and informed me that Mr. Heathcliff's servant Joseph was at the door, and wished to speak with the master.

'I shall ask him what he wants first,' I said, in considerable trepidation. 'A very unlikely hour to be troubling people, and the instant they have returned from a long journey. I don't think the master can see him.'

Joseph had advanced through the kitchen as I uttered these words, and now presented himself in the hall. He was donned in his Sunday garments, with his most sanctimonious and sourest face, and, holding his hat in one hand, and his stick in the other, he proceeded to clean his shoes on the mat.

'Good-evening, Joseph,' I said, coldly. 'What business brings you here to-night?'

'It's Maister Linton I mun spake to,' he answered, waving me disdainfully aside.

'Mr. Linton is going to bed; unless you have something particular to say, I'm sure he won't hear it now,' I continued. 'You had better sit down in there, and entrust your message to me.'

'Which is his rahm?' pursued the fellow, surveying the range of closed doors.

I perceived he was bent on refusing my mediation, so very reluctantly I went up to the library, and announced the unseasonable visitor, advising that he should be dismissed till next day. Mr. Linton had no time to empower me to do so, for Joseph mounted close at my heels, and, pushing into the apartment, planted himself at the far side of the table, with his two fists clapped on the head of his stick, and began in an elevated tone, as if anticipating opposition —

'Hathecliff has sent me for his lad, and I munn't goa back 'bout him.'

Edgar Linton was silent a minute; an expression of exceeding sorrow overcast his features: he would have pitied the child on his own account; but, recalling Isabella's hopes and fears, and anxious wishes for her son, and her commendations of him to his care, he grieved bitterly at the prospect of yielding him up, and searched in his heart how it might be avoided. No plan offered itself: the very exhibition of any desire to keep him would have rendered the claimant more peremptory: there was nothing left but to resign him. However, he was not going to rouse him from his sleep.

'Tell Mr. Heathcliff,' he answered calmly, 'that his son shall come to Wuthering Heights to-morrow. He is in bed, and too tired to go the distance now. You may also tell him that the mother of Linton desired him to remain under my guardianship; and, at present, his health is very precarious.'

'Noa!' said Joseph, giving a thud with his prop on the floor, and assuming an authoritative air. 'Noa! that means naught. Hathecliff maks noa 'count o' t' mother, nor ye norther; but he'll heu' his lad; und I mun tak' him — soa now ye knaw!'

'You shall not to-night!' answered Linton decisively. 'Walk down stairs at once, and repeat to your master what I have said. Ellen, show him down. Go — '

And, aiding the indignant elder with a lift by the arm, he rid the room of him and closed the door.

'Varrah weell!' shouted Joseph, as he slowly drew off. 'To-morn, he's come hisseln, and thrust *him* out, if ye darr!'

CHAPTER XX

To obviate the danger of this threat being fulfilled, Mr. Linton commissioned me to take the boy home early, on Catherine's pony; and, said he — 'As we shall now have no influence over his destiny, good or bad, you must say nothing of where he is gone to my daughter: she cannot associate with him hereafter, and it is better for her to remain in ignorance of his proximity; lest she should be restless, and anxious to visit the Heights. Merely tell her his father sent for him suddenly, and he has been obliged to leave us.'

Linton was very reluctant to be roused from his bed at five o'clock, and astonished to be informed that he must prepare for further travelling; but I softened off the matter by stating that he was going to spend some time with his father, Mr. Heathcliff, who wished to see him so much, he did not like to defer the pleasure till he should recover from his late journey.

'My father!' he cried, in strange perplexity. 'Mamma never told me I had a father. Where does he live? I'd rather stay with uncle.'

'He lives a little distance from the Grange,' I replied; 'just beyond those hills: not so far, but you may walk over here when you get hearty. And you should be glad to go home, and to see him. You must try to love him, as you did your mother, and then he will love you.'

'But why have I not heard of him before?' asked Linton. 'Why didn't mamma and he live together, as other people do?'

'He had business to keep him in the north,' I answered, 'and your mother's health required her to reside in the south.'

'And why didn't mamma speak to me about him?' persevered the child. 'She often talked of uncle, and I learnt to love him long ago. How am I to love papa? I don't know him.'

'Oh, all children love their parents,' I said. 'Your mother, perhaps, thought you would want to be with him if she mentioned him often to you. Let us make haste. An early ride on such a beautiful morning is much preferable to an hour's more sleep.'

'Is *she* to go with us,' he demanded, 'the little girl I saw yesterday?'

'Not now,' replied I.

'Is uncle?' he continued.

'No, I shall be your companion there,' I said.

Linton sank back on his pillow and fell into a brown study.

'I won't go without uncle,' he cried at length: 'I can't tell where you mean to take me.'

I attempted to persuade him of the naughtiness of showing reluctance to meet his father; still he obstinately resisted any progress towards dressing, and I had to call for my master's assistance in coaxing him out of bed. The poor thing was finally got off, with several delusive assurances that his absence should be short: that Mr. Edgar and Cathy would visit him, and other promises, equally ill-founded, which I invented and reiterated at intervals throughout the way. The pure heather-scented air, the bright sunshine, and the gentle canter of Minny, relieved his despondency after a while. He began to put questions concerning his new home, and its inhabitants, with greater interest and liveliness.

'Is Wuthering Heights as pleasant a place as Thrushcross Grange?' he inquired, turning to take a last glance into the valley, whence a light mist mounted and formed a fleecy cloud on the skirts of the blue.

'It is not so buried in trees,' I replied, 'and it is not quite so large, but you can see the country beautifully all round; and the air is healthier for you — fresher and drier. You will, perhaps, think the building old and dark at first; though it is a respectable house: the next best in the neighbourhood. And you will have such nice rambles on the moors. Hareton Earnshaw — that is, Miss Cathy's other cousin, and so yours in a manner — will show you all the sweetest spots; and you can bring a book in fine weather, and make a green hollow your study; and, now and then, your uncle may join you in a walk: he does, frequently, walk out on the hills.'

'And what is my father like?' he asked. 'Is he as young and handsome as uncle?'

'He's as young,' said I; 'but he has black hair and eyes, and looks sterner; and he is taller and bigger altogether. He'll not seem to you so gentle and kind at first, perhaps, because it is not his way: still, mind you, be frank and cordial with him; and naturally he'll be fonder of you than any uncle, for you are his own.'

'Black hair and eyes!' mused Linton. 'I can't fancy him. Then I am not like him, am I?'

'Not much,' I answered: not a morsel, I thought, surveying with regret the white complexion and slim frame of my companion, and his large languid eyes — his mother's eyes, save that, unless a morbid touchiness kindled them a moment, they had not a vestige of her sparkling spirit.

'How strange that he should never come to see mamma and me!' he murmured. 'Has he ever seen me? If he has, I must have been a baby. I remember not a single thing about him!'

'Why, Master Linton,' said I, 'three hundred miles is a great distance; and ten years seem very different in length to a grown-up person compared with what they do to you. It is probable Mr. Heathcliff proposed going from summer to summer, but never found a convenient opportunity; and now it is too late. Don't trouble him with questions on the subject: it will disturb him, for no good.'

The boy was fully occupied with his own cogitations for the remainder of the ride, till we halted before the farmhouse garden-gate. I watched to catch his impressions in his countenance. He surveyed the carved front and lowbrowed lattices, the straggling gooseberry-bushes and crooked firs, with solemn intentness, and then shook his head: his private feelings entirely disapproved of the exterior of his new abode. But he had sense to postpone complaining: there might be compensation within. Before he dismounted, I went and opened the door. It was half-past six; the family had just finished breakfast: the servant was clearing and wiping down the table. Joseph stood by his master's chair telling some tale concerning a lame horse; and Hareton was preparing for the hayfield.

'Hallo, Nelly!' said Mr. Heathcliff, when he saw me. 'I feared I should have to come down and fetch my property myself. You've brought it, have you? Let us see what we can make of it.'

He got up and strode to the door: Hareton and Joseph followed in gaping curiosity. Poor Linton ran a frightened eye over the faces of the three.

'Sure-ly,' said Joseph after a grave inspection, 'he's swopped wi' ye, Maister, an' yon's his lass!'

Heathcliff, having stared his son into an ague of confusion, uttered a scornful laugh.

'God! what a beauty! what a lovely, charming thing!' he exclaimed. 'Hav'n't they reared it on snails and sour milk, Nelly? Oh, damn my soul! but that's worse than I expected — and the devil knows I was not sanguine!'

I bid the trembling and bewildered child get down, and enter. He did not thoroughly comprehend the meaning of his father's speech, or whether it were intended for him: indeed, he was not yet certain that the grim, sneering stranger was his father. But he clung to me with growing trepidation; and on Mr. Heathcliff's taking a seat and bidding him 'come hither' he hid his face on my shoulder and wept.

'Tut, tut!' said Heathcliff, stretching out a hand and dragging him roughly between his knees, and then holding up his head by the chin. 'None of that nonsense! We're not going to hurt thee, Linton — isn't that thy name? Thou art thy mother's child, entirely! Where is my share in thee, puling chicken?'

He took off the boy's cap and pushed back his thick flaxen curls, felt his slender arms and his small fingers; during which examination Linton ceased crying, and lifted his great blue eyes to inspect the inspector.

'Do you know me?' asked Heathcliff, having satisfied himself that the limbs were all equally frail and feeble.

'No,' said Linton, with a gaze of vacant fear.

'You've heard of me, I daresay?'

'No,' he replied again.

'No! What a shame of your mother, never to waken your filial regard for me! You are my son, then, I'll tell you; and your mother was a wicked slut to leave you in ignorance of the sort of father you possessed. Now, don't wince, and colour up! Though it is something to see you have not white blood. Be a good lad; and I'll do for you. Nelly, if you be tired you may sit down; if not, get home again. I guess you'll report what you hear and see to the cipher at the Grange; and this thing won't be settled while you linger about it.'

'Well,' replied I, 'I hope you'll be kind to the boy, Mr. Heathcliff, or you'll not keep him long; and he's all you have akin in the wide world, that you will ever know — remember.'

'I'll be very kind to him, you needn't fear,' he said, laughing. 'Only nobody else must be kind to him: I'm jealous of monopolising his affection. And, to begin my kindness, Joseph, bring the lad some breakfast. Hareton, you infernal calf, begone to your work. Yes, Nell,' he added, when they had departed, 'my son is prospective owner of your place, and I should not wish him to die till I was certain of being his successor. Besides, he's *mine*, and I want the triumph of seeing *my* descendant fairly lord of their estates; my child hiring their children to till their fathers' lands for wages. That is the sole consideration which can make me endure the whelp: I despise him for himself, and hate him for the memories he revives! But that consideration is sufficient: he's as safe with me, and shall be tended as carefully as your master tends his own. I have a room up-stairs, furnished for him in handsome style; I've engaged a tutor, also, to come three times a week, from twenty miles' distance, to teach him what he pleases to learn. I've ordered Hareton to obey him: and in fact I've arranged everything with a view to preserve the superior and the gentleman in him, above his associates. I do regret, however, that he so little deserves the trouble: if I wished any blessing in the world, it was to find him a worthy object of pride; and I'm bitterly disappointed with the whey-faced, whining wretch!'

While he was speaking, Joseph returned bearing a basin of milk-porridge, and placed it before Linton: who stirred round the homely mess with a look of aversion, and affirmed he could not eat it. I saw the old man-servant shared largely in his master's scorn of the child; though he was compelled to retain the sentiment in his heart, because Heathcliff plainly meant his underlings to hold him in honour.

'Cannot ate it?' repeated he, peering in Linton's face, and subduing his voice to a whisper, for fear of being overheard. 'But Maister Hareton nivir ate naught else, when he wer a little 'un; and what wer gooid enough for him's gooid enough for ye, I's rayther think!'

'I *sha'n't* eat it!' answered Linton, snappishly. 'Take it away.'

Joseph snatched up the food indignantly, and brought it to us.

'Is there aught ails th' victuals?' he asked, thrusting the tray under Heathcliff's nose.

'What should ail them?' he said.

'Wah!' answered Joseph, 'yon dainty chap says he cannut ate 'em. But I guess it's raight! His mother wer just soa — we wer a'most too mucky to sow t' corn for makking her breead.'

'Don't mention his mother to me,' said the master, angrily. 'Get him something that he can eat, that's all. What is his usual food, Nelly?'

I suggested boiled milk or tea; and the housekeeper received instructions to prepare some. Come, I reflected, his father's selfishness may contribute to his comfort. He perceives his delicate constitution, and the necessity of treating him tolerably. I'll console Mr. Edgar by acquainting him with the turn Heathcliff's humour has taken. Having no excuse for lingering longer, I slipped out, while Linton was engaged in timidly rebuffing the advances of a friendly sheep-dog. But he was too much on the alert to be cheated: as I closed the door, I heard a cry, and a frantic repetition of the words —

'Don't leave me! I'll not stay here! I'll not stay here!'

Then the latch was raised and fell: they did not suffer him to come forth. I mounted Minny, and urged her to a trot; and so my brief guardianship ended.

CHAPTER XXI

We had sad work with little Cathy that day: she rose in high glee, eager to join her cousin, and such passionate tears and lamentations followed the news of his departure that Edgar himself was obliged to soothe her, by affirming he should come back soon: he added, however, ‘if I can get him’; and there were no hopes of that. This promise poorly pacified her; but time was more potent; and though still at intervals she inquired of her father when Linton would return, before she did see him again his features had waxed so dim in her memory that she did not recognise him.

When I chanced to encounter the housekeeper of Wuthering Heights, in paying business visits to Gimmerton, I used to ask how the young master got on; for he lived almost as secluded as Catherine herself, and was never to be seen. I could gather from her that he continued in weak health, and was a tiresome inmate. She said Mr. Heathcliff seemed to dislike him ever longer and worse, though he took some trouble to conceal it: he had an antipathy to the sound of his voice, and could not do at all with his sitting in the same room with him many minutes together. There seldom passed much talk between them: Linton learnt his lessons and spent his evenings in a small apartment they called the parlour: or else lay in bed all day: for he was constantly getting coughs, and colds, and aches, and pains of some sort.

‘And I never know such a fainthearted creature,’ added the woman; ‘nor one so careful of hisseln. He *will* go on, if I leave the window open a bit late in the evening. Oh! it’s killing, a breath of night air! And he must have a fire in the middle of summer; and Joseph’s bacca-pipe is poison; and he must always have sweets and dainties, and always milk, milk for ever — heeding naught how the rest of us are pinched in winter; and there he’ll sit, wrapped in his furred cloak in his chair by the fire, with some toast and water or other slop on the hob to sip at; and if Hareton, for pity, comes to amuse him — Hareton is not bad-natured, though he’s rough — they’re sure to part, one swearing and the other crying. I believe the master would relish Earnshaw’s thrashing him to a mummy, if he were not his son; and I’m certain he would be fit to turn him out of doors, if he knew half the nursing he gives hisseln. But then he won’t go into danger of temptation: he never enters the parlour, and should Linton show those ways in the house where he is, he sends him up-stairs directly.’

I divined, from this account, that utter lack of sympathy had rendered young Heathcliff selfish and disagreeable, if he were not so originally; and my interest in him, consequently, decayed: though still I was moved with a sense of grief at his lot, and a wish that he had been left with us. Mr. Edgar encouraged me to gain information: he thought a great deal about him, I fancy, and would have run some risk to see him; and he told me once to ask the housekeeper whether he ever came into the village? She said he had only been twice, on horseback, accompanying his father; and both times he pretended to be quite knocked up for three or four days afterwards. That housekeeper left, if I recollect rightly, two years after he came; and another, whom I did not know, was her successor; she lives there still.

Time wore on at the Grange in its former pleasant way till Miss Cathy reached sixteen. On the anniversary of her birth we never manifested any signs of rejoicing, because it was also the anniversary of my late mistress's death. Her father invariably spent that day alone in the library; and walked, at dusk, as far as Gimmerton kirkyard, where he would frequently prolong his stay beyond midnight. Therefore Catherine was thrown on her own resources for amusement. This twentieth of March was a beautiful spring day, and when her father had retired, my young lady came down dressed for going out, and said she asked to have a ramble on the edge of the moor with me: Mr. Linton had given her leave, if we went only a short distance and were back within the hour.

'So make haste, Ellen!' she cried. 'I know where I wish to go; where a colony of moor-game are settled: I want to see whether they have made their nests yet.'

'That must be a good distance up,' I answered; 'they don't breed on the edge of the moor.'

'No, it's not,' she said. 'I've gone very near with papa.'

I put on my bonnet and sallied out, thinking nothing more of the matter. She bounded before me, and returned to my side, and was off again like a young greyhound; and, at first, I found plenty of entertainment in listening to the larks singing far and near, and enjoying the sweet, warm sunshine; and watching her, my pet and my delight, with her golden ringlets flying loose behind, and her bright cheek, as soft and pure in its bloom as a wild rose, and her eyes radiant with cloudless pleasure. She was a happy creature, and an angel, in those days. It's a pity she could not be content.

'Well,' said I, 'where are your moor-game, Miss Cathy? We should be at them: the Grange park-fence is a great way off now.'

'Oh, a little further — only a little further, Ellen,' was her answer, continually. 'Climb to that hillock, pass that bank, and by the time you reach the other side I shall have raised the birds.'

But there were so many hillocks and banks to climb and pass, that, at length, I began to be weary, and told her we must halt, and retrace our steps. I shouted to her, as she had outstripped me a long way; she either did not hear or did not regard, for she still sprang on, and I was compelled to follow. Finally, she dived into a hollow; and before I came in sight of her again, she was two miles nearer Wuthering Heights than her own home; and I beheld a couple of persons arrest her, one of whom I felt convinced was Mr. Heathcliff himself.

Cathy had been caught in the fact of plundering, or, at least, hunting out the nests of the grouse. The Heights were Heathcliff's land, and he was reproving the poacher.

'I've neither taken any nor found any,' she said, as I toiled to them, expanding her hands in corroboration of the statement. 'I didn't mean to take them; but papa told me there were quantities up here, and I wished to see the eggs.'

Heathcliff glanced at me with an ill-meaning smile, expressing his acquaintance with the party, and, consequently, his malevolence towards it, and demanded who 'papa' was?

'Mr. Linton of Thrushcross Grange,' she replied. 'I thought you did not know me, or you wouldn't have spoken in that way.'

'You suppose papa is highly esteemed and respected, then?' he said, sarcastically.

'And what are you?' inquired Catherine, gazing curiously on the speaker. 'That man I've seen before. Is he your son?'

She pointed to Hareton, the other individual, who had gained nothing but increased bulk and strength by the addition of two years to his age: he seemed as awkward and rough as ever.

'Miss Cathy,' I interrupted, 'it will be three hours instead of one that we are out, presently. We really must go back.'

'No, that man is not my son,' answered Heathcliff, pushing me aside. 'But I have one, and you have seen him before too; and, though your nurse is in a hurry, I think both you and she would be the better for a little rest. Will you just turn this nab of heath, and walk into my house? You'll get home earlier for the ease; and you shall receive a kind welcome.'

I whispered Catherine that she mustn't, on any account, accede to the proposal: it was entirely out of the question.

'Why?' she asked, aloud. 'I'm tired of running, and the ground is dewy: I can't sit here. Let us go, Ellen. Besides, he says I have seen his son. He's mistaken, I think; but I guess where he lives: at the farmhouse I visited in coming from Penistone' Crags. Don't you?'

'I do. Come, Nelly, hold your tongue — it will be a treat for her to look in on us. Hareton, get forwards with the lass. You shall walk with me, Nelly.'

'No, she's not going to any such place,' I cried, struggling to release my arm, which he had seized: but she was almost at the door-stones already, scampering round the brow at full speed. Her appointed companion did not pretend to escort her: he shied off by the road-side, and vanished.

'Mr. Heathcliff, it's very wrong,' I continued: 'you know you mean no good. And there she'll see Linton, and all will be told as soon as ever we return; and I shall have the blame.'

'I want her to see Linton,' he answered; 'he's looking better these few days; it's not often he's fit to be seen. And we'll soon persuade her to keep the visit secret: where is the harm of it?'

'The harm of it is, that her father would hate me if he found I suffered her to enter your house; and I am convinced you have a bad design in encouraging her to do so,' I replied.

'My design is as honest as possible. I'll inform you of its whole scope,' he said. 'That the two cousins may fall in love, and get married. I'm acting generously to your master: his young chit has no expectations, and should she second my wishes she'll be provided for at once as joint successor with Linton.'

'If Linton died,' I answered, 'and his life is quite uncertain, Catherine would be the heir.'

'No, she would not,' he said. 'There is no clause in the will to secure it so: his property would go to me; but, to prevent disputes, I desire their union, and am resolved to bring it about.'

'And I'm resolved she shall never approach your house with me again,' I returned, as we reached the gate, where Miss Cathy waited our coming.

Heathcliff bade me be quiet; and, preceding us up the path, hastened to open the door. My young lady gave him several looks, as if she could not exactly make up her mind what to think of him; but now he smiled when he met her eye, and softened his voice in addressing her; and I was foolish enough to imagine the memory of her mother might disarm him from desiring her injury. Linton stood on the hearth. He had been out walking in the fields, for his cap was on, and he was calling to Joseph to bring him dry shoes. He had grown tall of his age, still wanting some months of sixteen. His features were pretty yet, and his eye and complexion brighter than I remembered them, though with merely temporary lustre borrowed from the salubrious air and genial sun.

'Now, who is that?' asked Mr. Heathcliff, turning to Cathy. 'Can you tell?'

'Your son?' she said, having doubtfully surveyed, first one and then the other.

'Yes, yes,' answered he: 'but is this the only time you have beheld him? Think! Ah! you have a short memory. Linton, don't you recall your cousin, that you used to tease us so with wishing to see?'

'What, Linton!' cried Cathy, kindling into joyful surprise at the name. 'Is that little Linton? He's taller than I am! Are you Linton?'

The youth stepped forward, and acknowledged himself: she kissed him fervently, and they gazed with wonder at the change time had wrought in the appearance of each. Catherine had reached her full height; her figure was both plump and slender, elastic as steel, and her whole aspect sparkling with health and spirits. Linton's looks and movements were very languid, and his form extremely slight; but there was a grace in his manner that mitigated these defects, and rendered him not unpleasing. After exchanging numerous marks of fondness with him, his cousin went to Mr. Heathcliff, who lingered by the door, dividing his attention between the objects inside and those that lay without: pretending, that is, to observe the latter, and really noting the former alone.

‘And you are my uncle, then!’ she cried, reaching up to salute him. ‘I thought I liked you, though you were cross at first. Why don’t you visit at the Grange with Linton? To live all these years such close neighbours, and never see us, is odd: what have you done so for?’

‘I visited it once or twice too often before you were born,’ he answered. ‘There — damn it! If you have any kisses to spare, give them to Linton: they are thrown away on me.’

‘Naughty Ellen!’ exclaimed Catherine, flying to attack me next with her lavish caresses. ‘Wicked Ellen! to try to hinder me from entering. But I’ll take this walk every morning in future: may I, uncle? and sometimes bring papa. Won’t you be glad to see us?’

‘Of course,’ replied the uncle, with a hardly suppressed grimace, resulting from his deep aversion to both the proposed visitors. ‘But stay,’ he continued, turning towards the young lady. ‘Now I think of it, I’d better tell you. Mr. Linton has a prejudice against me: we quarrelled at one time of our lives, with unchristian ferocity; and, if you mention coming here to him, he’ll put a veto on your visits altogether. Therefore, you must not mention it, unless you be careless of seeing your cousin hereafter: you may come, if you will, but you must not mention it.’

‘Why did you quarrel?’ asked Catherine, considerably crestfallen.

‘He thought me too poor to wed his sister,’ answered Heathcliff, ‘and was grieved that I got her: his pride was hurt, and he’ll never forgive it.’

‘That’s wrong!’ said the young lady: ‘some time I’ll tell him so. But Linton and I have no share in your quarrel. I’ll not come here, then; he shall come to the Grange.’

‘It will be too far for me,’ murmured her cousin: ‘to walk four miles would kill me. No, come here, Miss Catherine, now and then: not every morning, but once or twice a week.’

The father launched towards his son a glance of bitter contempt.

‘I am afraid, Nelly, I shall lose my labour,’ he muttered to me. ‘Miss Catherine, as the ninny calls her, will discover his value, and send him to the devil. Now, if it had been Hareton! — Do you know that, twenty times a day, I covet Hareton, with all his degradation? I’d have loved the lad had he been some one else. But I think he’s safe from *her* love. I’ll pit him against that paltry creature, unless it bestir itself briskly. We calculate it will scarcely last till it is eighteen. Oh, confound the vapid thing! He’s absorbed in drying his feet, and never looks at her. — Linton!’

‘Yes, father,’ answered the boy.

‘Have you nothing to show your cousin anywhere about, not even a rabbit or a weasel’s nest? Take her into the garden, before you change your shoes; and into the stable to see your horse.’

‘Wouldn’t you rather sit here?’ asked Linton, addressing Cathy in a tone which expressed reluctance to move again.

‘I don’t know,’ she replied, casting a longing look to the door, and evidently eager to be active.

He kept his seat, and shrank closer to the fire. Heathcliff rose, and went into the kitchen, and from thence to the yard, calling out for Hareton. Hareton responded, and presently the two re-entered. The young man had been washing himself, as was visible by the glow on his cheeks and his wetted hair.

‘Oh, I’ll ask *you*, uncle,’ cried Miss Cathy, recollecting the housekeeper’s assertion. ‘That is not my cousin, is he?’

‘Yes,’ he, replied, ‘your mother’s nephew. Don’t you like him!’

Catherine looked queer.

‘Is he not a handsome lad?’ he continued.

The uncivil little thing stood on tiptoe, and whispered a sentence in Heathcliff’s ear. He laughed; Hareton darkened: I perceived he was very sensitive to suspected slights, and had obviously a dim notion of his inferiority. But his master or guardian chased the frown by exclaiming —

‘You’ll be the favourite among us, Hareton! She says you are a — What was it? Well, something very flattering. Here! you go with her round the farm. And behave like a gentleman, mind! Don’t use any bad words; and don’t stare when the young lady is not looking at you, and be ready to hide your face when she is; and, when you speak, say your words slowly, and keep your hands out of your pockets. Be off, and entertain her as nicely as you can.’

He watched the couple walking past the window. Earnshaw had his countenance completely averted from his companion. He seemed studying the familiar landscape with a stranger’s and an artist’s interest. Catherine took a sly look at him, expressing small admiration. She then turned her attention to seeking out objects of amusement for herself, and tripped merrily on, lilting a tune to supply the lack of conversation.

‘I’ve tied his tongue,’ observed Heathcliff. ‘He’ll not venture a single syllable all the time! Nelly, you recollect me at his age — nay, some years younger. Did I ever look so stupid: so “gaumless,” as Joseph calls it?’

‘Worse,’ I replied, ‘because more sullen with it.’

‘I’ve a pleasure in him,’ he continued, reflecting aloud. ‘He has satisfied my expectations. If he were a born fool I should not enjoy it half so much. But he’s no fool; and I can sympathise with all his feelings, having felt them myself. I know what he suffers now, for instance, exactly: it is merely a beginning of what he shall suffer, though. And he’ll never be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance. I’ve got him faster than his scoundrel of a father secured me, and lower; for he takes a pride in his brutishness. I’ve taught him to scorn everything extra-animal as silly and weak. Don’t you think Hindley would be proud of his son, if he could see him? almost as proud as I am of mine. But there’s this difference; one is gold put to the use of paving-stones, and the other is tin polished to ape a service of silver. *Mine* has nothing valuable about it; yet I shall have the merit of making it go as far as such poor stuff can go. *His* had first-rate qualities, and they are lost: rendered worse than unavailing. I have nothing to regret; he would have more than any but I are aware of. And the best of it is, Hareton is damnably fond of me! You'll own that I've outmatched Hindley there. If the dead villain could rise from his grave to abuse me for his offspring's wrongs, I should have the fun of seeing the said offspring fight him back again, indignant that he should dare to rail at the one friend he has in the world!'

Heathcliff chuckled a fiendish laugh at the idea. I made no reply, because I saw that he expected none. Meantime, our young companion, who sat too removed from us to hear what was said, began to evince symptoms of uneasiness, probably repenting that he had denied himself the treat of Catherine's society for fear of a little fatigue. His father remarked the restless glances wandering to the window, and the hand irresolutely extended towards his cap.

'Get up, you idle boy!' he exclaimed, with assumed heartiness.

'Away after them! they are just at the corner, by the stand of hives.'

Linton gathered his energies, and left the hearth. The lattice was open, and, as he stepped out, I heard Cathy inquiring of her unsociable attendant what was that inscription over the door? Hareton stared up, and scratched his head like a true clown.

'It's some damnable writing,' he answered. 'I cannot read it.'

'Can't read it?' cried Catherine; 'I can read it: it's English. But I want to know why it is there.'

Linton giggled: the first appearance of mirth he had exhibited.

'He does not know his letters,' he said to his cousin. 'Could you believe in the existence of such a colossal dunce?'

'Is he all as he should be?' asked Miss Cathy, seriously; 'or is he simple: not right? I've questioned him twice now, and each time he looked so stupid I think he does not understand me. I can hardly understand him, I'm sure!'

Linton repeated his laugh, and glanced at Hareton tauntingly; who certainly did not seem quite clear of comprehension at that moment.

'There's nothing the matter but laziness; is there, Earnshaw?' he said. 'My cousin fancies you are an idiot. There you experience the consequence of scorning "book-larning," as you would say. Have you noticed, Catherine, his frightful Yorkshire pronunciation?'

'Why, where the devil is the use on't?' growled Hareton, more ready in answering his daily companion. He was about to enlarge further, but the two youngsters broke into a noisy fit of merriment: my giddy miss being delighted to discover that she might turn his strange talk to matter of amusement.

'Where is the use of the devil in that sentence?' tittered Linton. 'Papa told you not to say any bad words, and you can't open your mouth without one. Do try to behave like a gentleman, now do!'

‘If thou weren’t more a lass than a lad, I’d fell thee this minute, I would; pitiful lath of a crater!’ retorted the angry boor, retreating, while his face burnt with mingled rage and mortification! for he was conscious of being insulted, and embarrassed how to resent it.

Mr. Heathcliff having overheard the conversation, as well as I, smiled when he saw him go; but immediately afterwards cast a look of singular aversion on the flippant pair, who remained chattering in the door-way: the boy finding animation enough while discussing Hareton’s faults and deficiencies, and relating anecdotes of his goings on; and the girl relishing his pert and spiteful sayings, without considering the ill-nature they evinced. I began to dislike, more than to compassionate Linton, and to excuse his father in some measure for holding him cheap.

We stayed till afternoon: I could not tear Miss Cathy away sooner; but happily my master had not quitted his apartment, and remained ignorant of our prolonged absence. As we walked home, I would fain have enlightened my charge on the characters of the people we had quitted: but she got it into her head that I was prejudiced against them.

‘Aha!’ she cried, ‘you take papa’s side, Ellen: you are partial I know; or else you wouldn’t have cheated me so many years into the notion that Linton lived a long way from here. I’m really extremely angry; only I’m so pleased I can’t show it! But you must hold your tongue about *my* uncle; he’s my uncle, remember; and I’ll scold papa for quarrelling with him.’

And so she ran on, till I relinquished the endeavour to convince her of her mistake. She did not mention the visit that night, because she did not see Mr. Linton. Next day it all came out, sadly to my chagrin; and still I was not altogether sorry: I thought the burden of directing and warning would be more efficiently borne by him than me. But he was too timid in giving satisfactory reasons for his wish that she should shun connection with the household of the Heights, and Catherine liked good reasons for every restraint that harassed her petted will.

‘Papa!’ she exclaimed, after the morning’s salutations, ‘guess whom I saw yesterday, in my walk on the moors. Ah, papa, you started! you’ve not done right, have you, now? I saw — but listen, and you shall hear how I found you out; and Ellen, who is in league with you, and yet pretended to pity me so, when I kept hoping, and was always disappointed about Linton’s coming back!’

She gave a faithful account of her excursion and its consequences; and my master, though he cast more than one reproachful look at me, said nothing till she had concluded. Then he drew her to him, and asked if she knew why he had concealed Linton’s near neighbourhood from her? Could she think it was to deny her a pleasure that she might harmlessly enjoy?

‘It was because you disliked Mr. Heathcliff,’ she answered.

‘Then you believe I care more for my own feelings than yours, Cathy?’ he said. ‘No, it was not because I disliked Mr. Heathcliff, but because Mr.

Heathcliff dislikes me; and is a most diabolical man, delighting to wrong and ruin those he hates, if they give him the slightest opportunity. I knew that you could not keep up an acquaintance with your cousin without being brought into contact with him; and I knew he would detest you on my account; so for your own good, and nothing else, I took precautions that you should not see Linton again. I meant to explain this some time as you grew older, and I'm sorry I delayed it.'

'But Mr. Heathcliff was quite cordial, papa,' observed Catherine, not at all convinced; 'and he didn't object to our seeing each other: he said I might come to his house when I pleased; only I must not tell you, because you had quarrelled with him, and would not forgive him for marrying aunt Isabella. And you won't. *You* are the one to be blamed: he is willing to let us be friends, at least; Linton and I; and you are not.'

My master, perceiving that she would not take his word for her uncle-in-law's evil disposition, gave a hasty sketch of his conduct to Isabella, and the manner in which Wuthering Heights became his property. He could not bear to discourse long upon the topic; for though he spoke little of it, he still felt the same horror and detestation of his ancient enemy that had occupied his heart ever since Mrs. Linton's death. 'She might have been living yet, if it had not been for him!' was his constant bitter reflection; and, in his eyes, Heathcliff seemed a murderer. Miss Cathy — conversant with no bad deeds except her own slight acts of disobedience, injustice, and passion, arising from hot temper and thoughtlessness, and repented of on the day they were committed — was amazed at the blackness of spirit that could brood on and cover revenge for years, and deliberately prosecute its plans without a visitation of remorse. She appeared so deeply impressed and shocked at this new view of human nature — excluded from all her studies and all her ideas till now — that Mr. Edgar deemed it unnecessary to pursue the subject. He merely added: 'You will know hereafter, darling, why I wish you to avoid his house and family; now return to your old employments and amusements, and think no more about them.'

Catherine kissed her father, and sat down quietly to her lessons for a couple of hours, according to custom; then she accompanied him into the grounds, and the whole day passed as usual: but in the evening, when she had retired to her room, and I went to help her to undress, I found her crying, on her knees by the bedside.

'Oh, fie, silly child!' I exclaimed. 'If you had any real griefs you'd be ashamed to waste a tear on this little contrariety. You never had one shadow of substantial sorrow, Miss Catherine. Suppose, for a minute, that master and I were dead, and you were by yourself in the world: how would you feel, then? Compare the present occasion with such an affliction as that, and be thankful for the friends you have, instead of coveting more.'

'I'm not crying for myself, Ellen,' she answered, 'it's for him. He expected to see me again to-morrow, and there he'll be so disappointed: and he'll wait for me, and I sha'n't come!'

'Nonsense!' said I, 'do you imagine he has thought as much of you as you have of him? Hasn't he Hareton for a companion? Not one in a hundred would weep at losing a relation they had just seen twice, for two afternoons. Linton will conjecture how it is, and trouble himself no further about you.'

'But may I not write a note to tell him why I cannot come?' she asked, rising to her feet. 'And just send those books I promised to lend him? His books are not as nice as mine, and he wanted to have them extremely, when I told him how interesting they were. May I not, Ellen?'

'No, indeed! no, indeed!' replied I with decision. 'Then he would write to you, and there'd never be an end of it. No, Miss Catherine, the acquaintance must be dropped entirely: so papa expects, and I shall see that it is done.'

'But how can one little note — ?' she recommenced, putting on an imploring countenance.

'Silence!' I interrupted. 'We'll not begin with your little notes. Get into bed.'

She threw at me a very naughty look, so naughty that I would not kiss her good-night at first: I covered her up, and shut her door, in great displeasure; but, repenting half-way, I returned softly, and lo! there was Miss standing at the table with a bit of blank paper before her and a pencil in her hand, which she guiltily slipped out of sight on my entrance.

'You'll get nobody to take that, Catherine,' I said, 'if you write it; and at present I shall put out your candle.'

I set the extinguisher on the flame, receiving as I did so a slap on my hand and a petulant 'cross thing!' I then quitted her again, and she drew the bolt in one of her worst, most peevish humours. The letter was finished and forwarded to its destination by a milk-fetcher who came from the village; but that I didn't learn till some time afterwards. Weeks passed on, and Cathy recovered her temper; though she grew wondrous fond of stealing off to corners by herself and often, if I came near her suddenly while reading, she would start and bend over the book, evidently desirous to hide it; and I detected edges of loose paper sticking out beyond the leaves. She also got a trick of coming down early in the morning and lingering about the kitchen, as if she were expecting the arrival of something; and she had a small drawer in a cabinet in the library, which she would trifle over for hours, and whose key she took special care to remove when she left it.

One day, as she inspected this drawer, I observed that the playthings and trinkets which recently formed its contents were transmuted into bits of folded paper. My curiosity and suspicions were roused; I determined to take a peep at her mysterious treasures; so, at night, as soon as she and my master were safe upstairs, I searched, and readily found among my house keys one that would fit the lock. Having opened, I emptied the whole contents into my apron, and took them with me to examine at leisure in my own chamber.

Though I could not but suspect, I was still surprised to discover that they were a mass of correspondence — daily almost, it must have been — from Linton Heathcliff: answers to documents forwarded by her. The earlier dated were embarrassed and short; gradually, however, they expanded into copious love-letters, foolish, as the age of the writer rendered natural, yet with touches here and there which I thought were borrowed from a more experienced source. Some of them struck me as singularly odd compounds of ardour and flatness; commencing in strong feeling, and concluding in the affected, wordy style that a schoolboy might use to a fancied, incorporeal sweetheart. Whether they satisfied Cathy I don't know; but they appeared very worthless trash to me. After turning over as many as I thought proper, I tied them in a handkerchief and set them aside, relocking the vacant drawer.

Following her habit, my young lady descended early, and visited the kitchen: I watched her go to the door, on the arrival of a certain little boy; and, while the dairymaid filled his can, she tucked something into his jacket pocket, and plucked something out. I went round by the garden, and laid wait for the messenger; who fought valorously to defend his trust, and we spilt the milk between us; but I succeeded in abstracting the epistle; and, threatening serious consequences if he did not look sharp home, I remained under the wall and perused Miss Cathy's affectionate composition. It was more simple and more eloquent than her cousin's: very pretty and very silly. I shook my head, and went meditating into the house. The day being wet, she could not divert herself with rambling about the park; so, at the conclusion of her morning studies, she resorted to the solace of the drawer. Her father sat reading at the table; and I, on purpose, had sought a bit of work in some unripped fringes of the window-curtain, keeping my eye steadily fixed on her proceedings. Never did any bird flying back to a plundered nest, which it had left brimful of chirping young ones, express more complete despair, in its anguished cries and flutterings, than she by her single 'Oh!' and the change that transfigured her late happy countenance. Mr. Linton looked up.

'What is the matter, love? Have you hurt yourself?' he said.

His tone and look assured her *he* had not been the discoverer of the hoard.

'No, papa!' she gasped. 'Ellen! Ellen! come up-stairs — I'm sick!'

I obeyed her summons, and accompanied her out.

'Oh, Ellen! you have got them,' she commenced immediately, dropping on her knees, when we were enclosed alone. 'Oh, give them to me, and I'll never, never do so again! Don't tell papa. You have not told papa, Ellen? say you have not? I've been exceedingly naughty, but I won't do it any more!'

With a grave severity in my manner I bade her stand up.

'So,' I exclaimed, 'Miss Catherine, you are tolerably far on, it seems: you may well be ashamed of them! A fine bundle of trash you study in your leisure hours, to be sure: why, it's good enough to be printed! And what do you suppose the master will think when I display it before him? I hav'n't shown it yet, but you needn't imagine I shall keep your ridiculous secrets. For shame! and you must have led the way in writing such absurdities: he would not have thought of beginning, I'm certain.'

'I didn't! I didn't!' sobbed Cathy, fit to break her heart. 'I didn't once think of loving him till — '

'*Loving*!' cried I, as scornfully as I could utter the word. '*Loving*! Did anybody ever hear the like! I might just as well talk of loving the miller who comes once a year to buy our corn. Pretty loving, indeed! and both times together you have seen Linton hardly four hours in your life! Now here is the babyish trash. I'm going with it to the library; and we'll see what your father says to such *loving*.'

She sprang at her precious epistles, but I hold them above my head; and then she poured out further frantic entreaties that I would burn them — do anything rather than show them. And being really fully as much inclined to laugh as scold — for I esteemed it all girlish vanity — I at length relented in a measure, and asked, — 'If I consent to burn them, will you promise faithfully neither to send nor receive a letter again, nor a book (for I perceive you have sent him books), nor locks of hair, nor rings, nor playthings?'

'We don't send playthings,' cried Catherine, her pride overcoming her shame.

'Nor anything at all, then, my lady?' I said. 'Unless you will, here I go.'

'I promise, Ellen!' she cried, catching my dress. 'Oh, put them in the fire, do, do!'

But when I proceeded to open a place with the poker the sacrifice was too painful to be borne. She earnestly supplicated that I would spare her one or two.

'One or two, Ellen, to keep for Linton's sake!'

I unknotted the handkerchief, and commenced dropping them in from an angle, and the flame curled up the chimney.

'I will have one, you cruel wretch!' she screamed, darting her hand into the fire, and drawing forth some half-consumed fragments, at the expense of her fingers.

'Very well — and I will have some to exhibit to papa!' I answered, shaking back the rest into the bundle, and turning anew to the door.

She emptied her blackened pieces into the flames, and motioned me to finish the immolation. It was done; I stirred up the ashes, and interred them under a shovelful of coals; and she mutely, and with a sense of intense injury, retired to her private apartment. I descended to tell my master that the young lady's qualm of sickness was almost gone, but I judged it best for her to lie down a while. She wouldn't dine; but she reappeared at tea, pale, and red about the eyes, and marvellously subdued in outward aspect. Next morning I answered the letter by a slip of paper, inscribed, 'Master Heathcliff is requested to send no more notes to Miss Linton, as she will not receive them.' And, henceforth, the little boy came with vacant pockets.

CHAPTER XXII

Summer drew to an end, and early autumn: it was past Michaelmas, but the harvest was late that year, and a few of our fields were still uncleared. Mr. Linton and his daughter would frequently walk out among the reapers; at the carrying of the last sheaves they stayed till dusk, and the evening happening to be chill and damp, my master caught a bad cold, that settled obstinately on his lungs, and confined him indoors throughout the whole of the winter, nearly without intermission.

Poor Cathy, frightened from her little romance, had been considerably sadder and duller since its abandonment; and her father insisted on her reading less, and taking more exercise. She had his companionship no longer; I esteemed it a duty to supply its lack, as much as possible, with mine: an inefficient substitute; for I could only spare two or three hours, from my numerous diurnal occupations, to follow her footsteps, and then my society was obviously less desirable than his.

On an afternoon in October, or the beginning of November — a fresh watery afternoon, when the turf and paths were rustling with moist, withered leaves, and the cold blue sky was half hidden by clouds — dark grey streamers, rapidly mounting from the west, and boding abundant rain — I requested my young lady to forego her ramble, because I was certain of showers. She refused; and I unwillingly donned a cloak, and took my umbrella to accompany her on a stroll to the bottom of the park: a formal walk which she generally affected if low-spirited — and that she invariably was when Mr. Edgar had been worse than ordinary, a thing never known from his confession, but guessed both by her and me from his increased silence and the melancholy of his countenance. She went sadly on: there was no running or bounding now, though the chill wind might well have tempted her to race. And often, from the side of my eye, I could detect her raising a hand, and brushing something off her cheek. I gazed round for a means of diverting her thoughts. On one side of the road rose a high, rough bank, where hazels and stunted oaks, with their roots half exposed, held uncertain tenure: the soil was too loose for the latter; and strong winds had blown some nearly horizontal. In summer Miss Catherine delighted to climb along these trunks, and sit in the branches, swinging twenty feet above the ground; and I, pleased with her agility and her light, childish heart, still considered it proper to scold every time I caught her at such an elevation, but so that she knew there was no necessity for descending. From dinner to tea she would lie in her breeze-rocked cradle, doing nothing except singing old songs — my nursery lore — to herself, or watching the birds, joint tenants, feed and entice their young ones to fly: or nestling with closed lids, half thinking, half dreaming, happier than words can express.

‘Look, Miss!’ I exclaimed, pointing to a nook under the roots of one twisted tree. ‘Winter is not here yet. There’s a little flower up yonder, the last bud from the multitude of bluebells that clouded those turf steps in July with a lilac mist. Will you clamber up, and pluck it to show to papa?’ Cathy stared a long time at the lonely blossom trembling in its earthy shelter, and replied, at length — ‘No, I’ll not touch it: but it looks melancholy, does it not, Ellen?’

‘Yes,’ I observed, ‘about as starved and suckless as you: your cheeks are bloodless; let us take hold of hands and run. You’re so low, I daresay I shall keep up with you.’

‘No,’ she repeated, and continued sauntering on, pausing at intervals to muse over a bit of moss, or a tuft of blanched grass, or a fungus spreading its bright orange among the heaps of brown foliage; and, ever and anon, her hand was lifted to her averted face.

‘Catherine, why are you crying, love?’ I asked, approaching and putting my arm over her shoulder. ‘You mustn’t cry because papa has a cold; be thankful it is nothing worse.’

She now put no further restraint on her tears; her breath was stifled by sobs.

‘Oh, it will be something worse,’ she said. ‘And what shall I do when papa and you leave me, and I am by myself? I can’t forget your words, Ellen; they are always in my ear. How life will be changed, how dreary the world will be, when papa and you are dead.’

‘None can tell whether you won’t die before us,’ I replied. ‘It’s wrong to anticipate evil. We’ll hope there are years and years to come before any of us go: master is young, and I am strong, and hardly forty-five. My mother lived till eighty, a canty dame to the last. And suppose Mr. Linton were spared till he saw sixty, that would be more years than you have counted, Miss. And would it not be foolish to mourn a calamity above twenty years beforehand?’

‘But Aunt Isabella was younger than papa,’ she remarked, gazing up with timid hope to seek further consolation.

‘Aunt Isabella had not you and me to nurse her,’ I replied. ‘She wasn’t as happy as Master: she hadn’t as much to live for. All you need do, is to wait well on your father, and cheer him by letting him see you cheerful; and avoid giving him anxiety on any subject: mind that, Cathy! I’ll not disguise but you might kill him if you were wild and reckless, and cherished a foolish, fanciful affection for the son of a person who would be glad to have him in his grave; and allowed him to discover that you fretted over the separation he has judged it expedient to make.’

‘I fret about nothing on earth except papa’s illness,’ answered my companion. ‘I care for nothing in comparison with papa. And I’ll never — never — oh, never, while I have my senses, do an act or say a word to vex him. I love him better than myself, Ellen; and I know it by this: I pray every night that I may live after him; because I would rather be miserable than that he should be: that proves I love him better than myself.'

'Good words,' I replied. 'But deeds must prove it also; and after he is well, remember you don't forget resolutions formed in the hour of fear.'

As we talked, we neared a door that opened on the road; and my young lady, lightening into sunshine again, climbed up and seated herself on the top of the wall, reaching over to gather some hips that bloomed scarlet on the summit branches of the wild-rose trees shadowing the highway side: the lower fruit had disappeared, but only birds could touch the upper, except from Cathy's present station. In stretching to pull them, her hat fell off; and as the door was locked, she proposed scrambling down to recover it. I bid her be cautious lest she got a fall, and she nimbly disappeared. But the return was no such easy matter: the stones were smooth and neatly cemented, and the rose-bushes and black-berry stragglers could yield no assistance in re-ascending. I, like a fool, didn't recollect that, till I heard her laughing and exclaiming — 'Ellen! you'll have to fetch the key, or else I must run round to the porter's lodge. I can't scale the ramparts on this side!'

'Stay where you are,' I answered; 'I have my bundle of keys in my pocket: perhaps I may manage to open it; if not, I'll go.'

Catherine amused herself with dancing to and fro before the door, while I tried all the large keys in succession. I had applied the last, and found that none would do; so, repeating my desire that she would remain there, I was about to hurry home as fast as I could, when an approaching sound arrested me. It was the trot of a horse; Cathy's dance stopped also.

'Who is that?' I whispered.

'Ellen, I wish you could open the door,' whispered back my companion, anxiously.

'Ho, Miss Linton!' cried a deep voice (the rider's), 'I'm glad to meet you. Don't be in haste to enter, for I have an explanation to ask and obtain.'

'I sha'n't speak to you, Mr. Heathcliff,' answered Catherine. 'Papa says you are a wicked man, and you hate both him and me; and Ellen says the same.'

'That is nothing to the purpose,' said Heathcliff. (He it was.) 'I don't hate my son, I suppose; and it is concerning him that I demand your attention. Yes; you have cause to blush. Two or three months since, were you not in the habit of writing to Linton? making love in play, eh? You deserved, both of you, flogging for that! You especially, the elder; and less sensitive, as it turns out. I've got your letters, and if you give me any pertness I'll send them to your father. I presume you grew weary of the amusement and dropped it, didn't you? Well, you dropped Linton with it into a Slough of Despond. He was in earnest: in love, really. As true as I live, he's dying for you; breaking his heart at your fickleness: not figuratively, but actually. Though Hareton has made him a standing jest for six weeks, and I have used more serious measures, and attempted to frighten him out of his idiotcy, he gets worse daily; and he'll be under the sod before summer, unless you restore him!'

‘How can you lie so glaringly to the poor child?’ I called from the inside. ‘Pray ride on! How can you deliberately get up such paltry falsehoods? Miss Cathy, I’ll knock the lock off with a stone: you won’t believe that vile nonsense. You can feel in yourself it is impossible that a person should die for love of a stranger.’

‘I was not aware there were eavesdroppers,’ muttered the detected villain. ‘Worthy Mrs. Dean, I like you, but I don’t like your double-dealing,’ he added aloud. ‘How could *you* lie so glaringly as to affirm I hated the “poor child”? and invent bugbear stories to terrify her from my door-stones? Catherine Linton (the very name warms me), my bonny lass, I shall be from home all this week; go and see if have not spoken truth: do, there’s a darling! Just imagine your father in my place, and Linton in yours; then think how you would value your careless lover if he refused to stir a step to comfort you, when your father himself entreated him; and don’t, from pure stupidity, fall into the same error. I swear, on my salvation, he’s going to his grave, and none but you can save him!’

The lock gave way and I issued out.

‘I swear Linton is dying,’ repeated Heathcliff, looking hard at me. ‘And grief and disappointment are hastening his death. Nelly, if you won’t let her go, you can walk over yourself. But I shall not return till this time next week; and I think your master himself would scarcely object to her visiting her cousin.’

‘Come in,’ said I, taking Cathy by the arm and half forcing her to re-enter; for she lingered, viewing with troubled eyes the features of the speaker, too stern to express his inward deceit.

He pushed his horse close, and, bending down, observed — ‘Miss Catherine, I’ll own to you that I have little patience with Linton; and Hareton and Joseph have less. I’ll own that he’s with a harsh set. He pines for kindness, as well as love; and a kind word from you would be his best medicine. Don’t mind Mrs. Dean’s cruel cautions; but be generous, and contrive to see him. He dreams of you day and night, and cannot be persuaded that you don’t hate him, since you neither write nor call.’

I closed the door, and rolled a stone to assist the loosened lock in holding it; and spreading my umbrella, I drew my charge underneath: for the rain began to drive through the moaning branches of the trees, and warned us to avoid delay. Our hurry prevented any comment on the encounter with Heathcliff, as we stretched towards home; but I divined instinctively that Catherine’s heart was clouded now in double darkness. Her features were so sad, they did not seem hers: she evidently regarded what she had heard as every syllable true.

The master had retired to rest before we came in. Cathy stole to his room to inquire how he was; he had fallen asleep. She returned, and asked me to sit with her in the library. We took our tea together; and afterwards she lay down on the rug, and told me not to talk, for she was weary. I got a book, and pretended to read. As soon as she supposed me absorbed in my occupation, she recommenced her silent weeping: it appeared, at present, her favourite diversion. I suffered her to enjoy it a while; then I expostulated: deriding and ridiculing all Mr. Heathcliff's assertions about his son, as if I were certain she would coincide. Alas! I hadn't skill to counteract the effect his account had produced: it was just what he intended.

'You may be right, Ellen,' she answered; 'but I shall never feel at ease till I know. And I must tell Linton it is not my fault that I don't write, and convince him that I shall not change.'

What use were anger and protestations against her silly credulity? We parted that night — hostile; but next day beheld me on the road to Wuthering Heights, by the side of my wilful young mistress's pony. I couldn't bear to witness her sorrow: to see her pale, dejected countenance, and heavy eyes: and I yielded, in the faint hope that Linton himself might prove, by his reception of us, how little of the tale was founded on fact.

CHAPTER XXIII

The rainy night had ushered in a misty morning — half frost, half drizzle — and temporary brooks crossed our path — gurgling from the uplands. My feet were thoroughly wetted; I was cross and low; exactly the humour suited for making the most of these disagreeable things. We entered the farm-house by the kitchen way, to ascertain whether Mr. Heathcliff were really absent: because I put slight faith in his own affirmation.

Joseph seemed sitting in a sort of elysium alone, beside a roaring fire; a quart of ale on the table near him, bristling with large pieces of toasted oat-cake; and his black, short pipe in his mouth. Catherine ran to the hearth to warm herself. I asked if the master was in? My question remained so long unanswered, that I thought the old man had grown deaf, and repeated it louder.

‘Na — ay!’ he snarled, or rather screamed through his nose. ‘Na — ay! yah muh goa back whear yah coom frough.’

‘Joseph!’ cried a peevish voice, simultaneously with me, from the inner room. ‘How often am I to call you? There are only a few red ashes now. Joseph! come this moment.’

Vigorous puffs, and a resolute stare into the grate, declared he had no ear for this appeal. The housekeeper and Hareton were invisible; one gone on an errand, and the other at his work, probably. We knew Linton’s tones, and entered.

‘Oh, I hope you’ll die in a garret, starved to death!’ said the boy, mistaking our approach for that of his negligent attendant.

He stopped on observing his error: his cousin flew to him.

‘Is that you, Miss Linton?’ he said, raising his head from the arm of the great chair, in which he reclined. ‘No — don’t kiss me: it takes my breath. Dear me! Papa said you would call,’ continued he, after recovering a little from Catherine’s embrace; while she stood by looking very contrite. ‘Will you shut the door, if you please? you left it open; and those — those *detestable* creatures won’t bring coals to the fire. It’s so cold!’

I stirred up the cinders, and fetched a scuttleful myself. The invalid complained of being covered with ashes; but he had a tiresome cough, and looked feverish and ill, so I did not rebuke his temper.

‘Well, Linton,’ murmured Catherine, when his corrugated brow relaxed, ‘are you glad to see me? Can I do you any good?’

‘Why didn’t you come before?’ he asked. ‘You should have come, instead of writing. It tired me dreadfully writing those long letters. I’d far rather have talked to you. Now, I can neither bear to talk, nor anything else. I wonder where Zillah is! Will you’ (looking at me) ‘step into the kitchen and see?'

I had received no thanks for my other service; and being unwilling to run to and fro at his behest, I replied — 'Nobody is out there but Joseph.'

'I want to drink,' he exclaimed fretfully, turning away. 'Zillah is constantly gadding off to Gimmerton since papa went: it's miserable! And I'm obliged to come down here — they resolved never to hear me up-stairs.'

'Is your father attentive to you, Master Heathcliff?' I asked, perceiving Catherine to be checked in her friendly advances.

'Attentive? He makes them a little more attentive at least,' he cried. 'The wretches! Do you know, Miss Linton, that brute Hareton laughs at me! I hate him! indeed, I hate them all: they are odious beings.'

Cathy began searching for some water; she lighted on a pitcher in the dresser, filled a tumbler, and brought it. He bid her add a spoonful of wine from a bottle on the table; and having swallowed a small portion, appeared more tranquil, and said she was very kind.

'And are you glad to see me?' asked she, reiterating her former question and pleased to detect the faint dawn of a smile.

'Yes, I am. It's something new to hear a voice like yours!' he replied. 'But I have been vexed, because you wouldn't come. And papa swore it was owing to me: he called me a pitiful, shuffling, worthless thing; and said you despised me; and if he had been in my place, he would be more the master of the Grange than your father by this time. But you don't despise me, do you, Miss — ?'

'I wish you would say Catherine, or Cathy,' interrupted my young lady. 'Despise you? No! Next to papa and Ellen, I love you better than anybody living. I don't love Mr. Heathcliff, though; and I dare not come when he returns: will he stay away many days?'

'Not many,' answered Linton; 'but he goes on to the moors frequently, since the shooting season commenced; and you might spend an hour or two with me in his absence. Do say you will. I think I should not be peevish with you: you'd not provoke me, and you'd always be ready to help me, wouldn't you?'

'Yes,' said Catherine, stroking his long soft hair: 'if I could only get papa's consent, I'd spend half my time with you. Pretty Linton! I wish you were my brother.'

'And then you would like me as well as your father?' observed he, more cheerfully. 'But papa says you would love me better than him and all the world, if you were my wife; so I'd rather you were that.'

'No, I should never love anybody better than papa,' she returned gravely. 'And people hate their wives, sometimes; but not their sisters and brothers: and if you were the latter, you would live with us, and papa would be as fond of you as he is of me.'

Linton denied that people ever hated their wives; but Cathy affirmed they did, and, in her wisdom, instanced his own father's aversion to her aunt. I endeavoured to stop her thoughtless tongue. I couldn't succeed till everything she knew was out. Master Heathcliff, much irritated, asserted her relation was false.

'Papa told me; and papa does not tell falsehoods,' she answered pertly.

'*My* papa scorns yours!' cried Linton. 'He calls him a sneaking fool.'

'Yours is a wicked man,' retorted Catherine; 'and you are very naughty to dare to repeat what he says. He must be wicked to have made Aunt Isabella leave him as she did.'

'She didn't leave him,' said the boy; 'you sha'n't contradict me.'

'She did,' cried my young lady.

'Well, I'll tell you something!' said Linton. 'Your mother hated your father: now then.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Catherine, too enraged to continue.

'And she loved mine,' added he.

'You little liar! I hate you now!' she panted, and her face grew red with passion.

'She did! she did!' sang Linton, sinking into the recess of his chair, and leaning back his head to enjoy the agitation of the other disputant, who stood behind.

'Hush, Master Heathcliff!' I said; 'that's your father's tale, too, I suppose.'

'It isn't: you hold your tongue!' he answered. 'She did, she did, Catherine! she did, she did!'

Cathy, beside herself, gave the chair a violent push, and caused him to fall against one arm. He was immediately seized by a suffocating cough that soon ended his triumph. It lasted so long that it frightened even me. As to his cousin, she wept with all her might, aghast at the mischief she had done: though she said nothing. I held him till the fit exhausted itself. Then he thrust me away, and leant his head down silently. Catherine quelled her lamentations also, took a seat opposite, and looked solemnly into the fire.

'How do you feel now, Master Heathcliff?' I inquired, after waiting ten minutes.

'I wish *she* felt as I do,' he replied: 'spiteful, cruel thing! Hareton never touches me: he never struck me in his life. And I was better to-day: and there — ' his voice died in a whimper.

'*I* didn't strike you!' muttered Cathy, chewing her lip to prevent another burst of emotion.

He sighed and moaned like one under great suffering, and kept it up for a quarter of an hour; on purpose to distress his cousin apparently, for whenever he caught a stifled sob from her he put renewed pain and pathos into the inflexions of his voice.

'I'm sorry I hurt you, Linton,' she said at length, racked beyond endurance. 'But I couldn't have been hurt by that little push, and I had no idea that you could, either: you're not much, are you, Linton? Don't let me go home thinking I've done you harm. Answer! speak to me.'

'I can't speak to you,' he murmured; 'you've hurt me so that I shall lie awake all night choking with this cough. If you had it you'd know what it was; but *you'll* be comfortably asleep while I'm in agony, and nobody near me. I wonder how you would like to pass those fearful nights!' And he began to wail aloud, for very pity of himself.

'Since you are in the habit of passing dreadful nights,' I said, 'it won't be Miss who spoils your ease: you'd be the same had she never come. However, she shall not disturb you again; and perhaps you'll get quieter when we leave you.'

'Must I go?' asked Catherine dolefully, bending over him. 'Do you want me to go, Linton?'

'You can't alter what you've done,' he replied pettishly, shrinking from her, 'unless you alter it for the worse by teasing me into a fever.'

'Well, then, I must go?' she repeated.

'Let me alone, at least,' said he; 'I can't bear your talking.'

She lingered, and resisted my persuasions to departure a tiresome while; but as he neither looked up nor spoke, she finally made a movement to the door, and I followed. We were recalled by a scream. Linton had slid from his seat on to the hearthstone, and lay writhing in the mere perverseness of an indulged plague of a child, determined to be as grievous and harassing as it can. I thoroughly gauged his disposition from his behaviour, and saw at once it would be folly to attempt humouring him. Not so my companion: she ran back in terror, knelt down, and cried, and soothed, and entreated, till he grew quiet from lack of breath: by no means from compunction at distressing her.

'I shall lift him on to the settle,' I said, 'and he may roll about as he pleases: we can't stop to watch him. I hope you are satisfied, Miss Cathy, that you are not the person to benefit him; and that his condition of health is not occasioned by attachment to you. Now, then, there he is! Come away: as soon as he knows there is nobody by to care for his nonsense, he'll be glad to lie still.'

She placed a cushion under his head, and offered him some water; he rejected the latter, and tossed uneasily on the former, as if it were a stone or a block of wood. She tried to put it more comfortably.

'I can't do with that,' he said; 'it's not high enough.'

Catherine brought another to lay above it.

'That's too high,' murmured the provoking thing.

'How must I arrange it, then?' she asked despairingly.

He twined himself up to her, as she half knelt by the settle, and converted her shoulder into a support.

'No, that won't do,' I said. 'You'll be content with the cushion, Master Heathcliff. Miss has wasted too much time on you already: we cannot remain five minutes longer.'

'Yes, yes, we can!' replied Cathy. 'He's good and patient now. He's beginning to think I shall have far greater misery than he will to-night, if I believe he is the worse for my visit: and then I dare not come again. Tell the truth about it, Linton; for I musn't come, if I have hurt you.'

'You must come, to cure me,' he answered. 'You ought to come, because you have hurt me: you know you have extremely! I was not as ill when you entered as I am at present — was I?'

'But you've made yourself ill by crying and being in a passion. — I didn't do it all,' said his cousin. 'However, we'll be friends now. And you want me: you would wish to see me sometimes, really?'

'I told you I did,' he replied impatiently. 'Sit on the settle and let me lean on your knee. That's as mamma used to do, whole afternoons together. Sit quite still and don't talk: but you may sing a song, if you can sing; or you may say a nice long interesting ballad — one of those you promised to teach me; or a story. I'd rather have a ballad, though: begin.'

Catherine repeated the longest she could remember. The employment pleased both mightily. Linton would have another, and after that another, notwithstanding my strenuous objections; and so they went on until the clock struck twelve, and we heard Hareton in the court, returning for his dinner.

'And to-morrow, Catherine, will you be here to-morrow?' asked young Heathcliff, holding her frock as she rose reluctantly.

'No,' I answered, 'nor next day neither.' She, however, gave a different response evidently, for his forehead cleared as she stooped and whispered in his ear.

'You won't go to-morrow, recollect, Miss!' I commenced, when we were out of the house. 'You are not dreaming of it, are you?'

She smiled.

'Oh, I'll take good care,' I continued: 'I'll have that lock mended, and you can escape by no way else.'

'I can get over the wall,' she said laughing. 'The Grange is not a prison, Ellen, and you are not my gaoler. And besides, I'm almost seventeen: I'm a woman. And I'm certain Linton would recover quickly if he had me to look after him. I'm older than he is, you know, and wiser: less childish, am I not? And he'll soon do as I direct him, with some slight coaxing. He's a pretty little darling when he's good. I'd make such a pet of him, if he were mine. We should never quarrel, should we after we were used to each other? Don't you like him, Ellen?'

'Like him!' I exclaimed. 'The worst-tempered bit of a sickly slip that ever struggled into its teens. Happily, as Mr. Heathcliff conjectured, he'll not win twenty. I doubt whether he'll see spring, indeed. And small loss to his family whenever he drops off. And lucky it is for us that his father took him: the kinder he was treated, the more tedious and selfish he'd be. I'm glad you have no chance of having him for a husband, Miss Catherine.'

My companion waxed serious at hearing this speech. To speak of his death so regardlessly wounded her feelings.

‘He’s younger than I,’ she answered, after a protracted pause of meditation, ‘and he ought to live the longest: he will — he must live as long as I do. He’s as strong now as when he first came into the north; I’m positive of that. It’s only a cold that ails him, the same as papa has. You say papa will get better, and why shouldn’t he?’

‘Well, well,’ I cried, ‘after all, we needn’t trouble ourselves; for listen, Miss, — and mind, I’ll keep my word, — if you attempt going to Wuthering Heights again, with or without me, I shall inform Mr. Linton, and, unless he allow it, the intimacy with your cousin must not be revived.’

‘It has been revived,’ muttered Cathy, sulkily.

‘Must not be continued, then,’ I said.

‘We’ll see,’ was her reply, and she set off at a gallop, leaving me to toil in the rear.

We both reached home before our dinner-time; my master supposed we had been wandering through the park, and therefore he demanded no explanation of our absence. As soon as I entered I hastened to change my soaked shoes and stockings; but sitting such awhile at the Heights had done the mischief. On the succeeding morning I was laid up, and during three weeks I remained incapacitated for attending to my duties: a calamity never experienced prior to that period, and never, I am thankful to say, since.

My little mistress behaved like an angel in coming to wait on me, and cheer my solitude; the confinement brought me exceedingly low. It is wearisome, to a stirring active body: but few have slighter reasons for complaint than I had. The moment Catherine left Mr. Linton’s room she appeared at my bedside. Her day was divided between us; no amusement usurped a minute: she neglected her meals, her studies, and her play; and she was the fondest nurse that ever watched. She must have had a warm heart, when she loved her father so, to give so much to me. I said her days were divided between us; but the master retired early, and I generally needed nothing after six o’clock, thus the evening was her own. Poor thing! I never considered what she did with herself after tea. And though frequently, when she looked in to bid me good-night, I remarked a fresh colour in her cheeks and a pinkness over her slender fingers, instead of fancying the line borrowed from a cold ride across the moors, I laid it to the charge of a hot fire in the library.

CHAPTER XXIV

At the close of three weeks I was able to quit my chamber and move about the house. And on the first occasion of my sitting up in the evening I asked Catherine to read to me, because my eyes were weak. We were in the library, the master having gone to bed: she consented, rather unwillingly, I fancied; and imagining my sort of books did not suit her, I bid her please herself in the choice of what she perused. She selected one of her own favourites, and got forward steadily about an hour; then came frequent questions.

'Ellen, are not you tired? Hadn't you better lie down now? You'll be sick, keeping up so long, Ellen.'

'No, no, dear, I'm not tired,' I returned, continually.

Perceiving me immovable, she essayed another method of showing her disrelish for her occupation. It changed to yawning, and stretching, and —

'Ellen, I'm tired.'

'Give over then and talk,' I answered.

That was worse: she fretted and sighed, and looked at her watch till eight, and finally went to her room, completely overdone with sleep; judging by her peevish, heavy look, and the constant rubbing she inflicted on her eyes. The following night she seemed more impatient still; and on the third from recovering my company she complained of a headache, and left me. I thought her conduct odd; and having remained alone a long while, I resolved on going and inquiring whether she were better, and asking her to come and lie on the sofa, instead of up-stairs in the dark. No Catherine could I discover up-stairs, and none below. The servants affirmed they had not seen her. I listened at Mr. Edgar's door; all was silence. I returned to her apartment, extinguished my candle, and seated myself in the window.

The moon shone bright; a sprinkling of snow covered the ground, and I reflected that she might, possibly, have taken it into her head to walk about the garden, for refreshment. I did detect a figure creeping along the inner fence of the park; but it was not my young mistress: on its emerging into the light, I recognised one of the grooms. He stood a considerable period, viewing the carriage-road through the grounds; then started off at a brisk pace, as if he had detected something, and reappeared presently, leading Miss's pony; and there she was, just dismounted, and walking by its side. The man took his charge stealthily across the grass towards the stable. Cathy entered by the casement-window of the drawing-room, and glided noiselessly up to where I awaited her. She put the door gently too, slipped off her snowy shoes, untied her hat, and was proceeding, unconscious of my espionage, to lay aside her mantle, when I suddenly rose and revealed myself. The surprise petrified her an instant: she uttered an inarticulate exclamation, and stood fixed.

‘My dear Miss Catherine,’ I began, too vividly impressed by her recent kindness to break into a scold, ‘where have you been riding out at this hour? And why should you try to deceive me by telling a tale? Where have you been? Speak!’

‘To the bottom of the park,’ she stammered. ‘I didn’t tell a tale.’

‘And nowhere else?’ I demanded.

‘No,’ was the muttered reply.

‘Oh, Catherine!’ I cried, sorrowfully. ‘You know you have been doing wrong, or you wouldn’t be driven to uttering an untruth to me. That does grieve me. I’d rather be three months ill, than hear you frame a deliberate lie.’

She sprang forward, and bursting into tears, threw her arms round my neck.

‘Well, Ellen, I’m so afraid of you being angry,’ she said. ‘Promise not to be angry, and you shall know the very truth: I hate to hide it.’

We sat down in the window-seat; I assured her I would not scold, whatever her secret might be, and I guessed it, of course; so she commenced —

‘I’ve been to Wuthering Heights, Ellen, and I’ve never missed going a day since you fell ill; except thrice before, and twice after you left your room. I gave Michael books and pictures to prepare Minny every evening, and to put her back in the stable: you mustn’t scold him either, mind. I was at the Heights by half-past six, and generally stayed till half-past eight, and then galloped home. It was not to amuse myself that I went: I was often wretched all the time. Now and then I was happy: once in a week perhaps. At first, I expected there would be sad work persuading you to let me keep my word to Linton: for I had engaged to call again next day, when we quitted him; but, as you stayed up-stairs on the morrow, I escaped that trouble. While Michael was refastening the lock of the park door in the afternoon, I got possession of the key, and told him how my cousin wished me to visit him, because he was sick, and couldn’t come to the Grange; and how papa would object to my going: and then I negotiated with him about the pony. He is fond of reading, and he thinks of leaving soon to get married; so he offered, if I would lend him books out of the library, to do what I wished: but I preferred giving him my own, and that satisfied him better.

‘On my second visit Linton seemed in lively spirits; and Zillah (that is their housekeeper) made us a clean room and a good fire, and told us that, as Joseph was out at a prayer-meeting and Hareton Earnshaw was off with his dogs — robbing our woods of pheasants, as I heard afterwards — we might do what we liked. She brought me some warm wine and gingerbread, and appeared exceedingly good-natured, and Linton sat in the arm-chair, and I in the little rocking chair on the hearth-stone, and we laughed and talked so merrily, and found so much to say: we planned where we would go, and what we would do in summer. I needn’t repeat that, because you would call it silly.

‘One time, however, we were near quarrelling. He said the pleasantest manner of spending a hot July day was lying from morning till evening on a bank of heath in the middle of the moors, with the bees humming dreamily about among the bloom, and the larks singing high up overhead, and the blue sky and bright sun shining steadily and cloudlessly. That was his most perfect idea of heaven's happiness: mine was rocking in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing, and bright white clouds flitting rapidly above; and not only larks, but throstles, and blackbirds, and linnets, and cuckoos pouring out music on every side, and the moors seen at a distance, broken into cool dusky dells; but close by great swells of long grass undulating in waves to the breeze; and woods and sounding water, and the whole world awake and wild with joy. He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee. I said his heaven would be only half alive; and he said mine would be drunk: I said I should fall asleep in his; and he said he could not breathe in mine, and began to grow very snappish. At last, we agreed to try both, as soon as the right weather came; and then we kissed each other and were friends.

'After sitting still an hour, I looked at the great room with its smooth uncarpeted floor, and thought how nice it would be to play in, if we removed the table; and I asked Linton to call Zillah in to help us, and we'd have a game at blindman's-buff; she should try to catch us: you used to, you know, Ellen. He wouldn't: there was no pleasure in it, he said; but he consented to play at ball with me. We found two in a cupboard, among a heap of old toys, tops, and hoops, and battledores and shuttlecocks. One was marked C., and the other H.; I wished to have the C., because that stood for Catherine, and the H. might be for Heathcliff, his name; but the bran came out of H., and Linton didn't like it. I beat him constantly: and he got cross again, and coughed, and returned to his chair. That night, though, he easily recovered his good humour: he was charmed with two or three pretty songs — *your* songs, Ellen; and when I was obliged to go, he begged and entreated me to come the following evening; and I promised. Minny and I went flying home as light as air; and I dreamt of Wuthering Heights and my sweet, darling cousin, till morning.

'On the morrow I was sad; partly because you were poorly, and partly that I wished my father knew, and approved of my excursions: but it was beautiful moonlight after tea; and, as I rode on, the gloom cleared. I shall have another happy evening, I thought to myself; and what delights me more, my pretty Linton will. I trotted up their garden, and was turning round to the back, when that fellow Earnshaw met me, took my bridle, and bid me go in by the front entrance. He patted Minny's neck, and said she was a bonny beast, and appeared as if he wanted me to speak to him. I only told him to leave my horse alone, or else it would kick him. He answered in his vulgar accent, "It wouldn't do mitch hurt if it did;" and surveyed its legs with a smile. I was half inclined to make it try; however, he moved off to open the door, and, as he raised the latch, he looked up to the inscription above, and said, with a stupid mixture of awkwardness and elation: “Miss Catherine! I can read yon, now.”

‘“Wonderful,” I exclaimed. “Pray let us hear you — you *are* grown clever!”

‘He spelt, and drawled over by syllables, the name — “Hareton Earnshaw.”

‘“And the figures?” I cried, encouragingly, perceiving that he came to a dead halt.

‘“I cannot tell them yet,” he answered.

‘“Oh, you dunce!” I said, laughing heartily at his failure.

‘The fool stared, with a grin hovering about his lips, and a scowl gathering over his eyes, as if uncertain whether he might not join in my mirth: whether it were not pleasant familiarity, or what it really was, contempt. I settled his doubts, by suddenly retrieving my gravity and desiring him to walk away, for I came to see Linton, not him. He reddened — I saw that by the moonlight — dropped his hand from the latch, and skulked off, a picture of mortified vanity. He imagined himself to be as accomplished as Linton, I suppose, because he could spell his own name; and was marvellously discomfited that I didn’t think the same.’

‘Stop, Miss Catherine, dear!’ — I interrupted. ‘I shall not scold, but I don’t like your conduct there. If you had remembered that Hareton was your cousin as much as Master Heathcliff, you would have felt how improper it was to behave in that way. At least, it was praiseworthy ambition for him to desire to be as accomplished as Linton; and probably he did not learn merely to show off: you had made him ashamed of his ignorance before, I have no doubt; and he wished to remedy it and please you. To sneer at his imperfect attempt was very bad breeding. Had you been brought up in his circumstances, would you be less rude? He was as quick and as intelligent a child as ever you were; and I’m hurt that he should be despised now, because that base Heathcliff has treated him so unjustly.’

‘Well, Ellen, you won’t cry about it, will you?’ she exclaimed, surprised at my earnestness. ‘But wait, and you shall hear if he conned his A B C to please me; and if it were worth while being civil to the brute. I entered; Linton was lying on the settle, and half got up to welcome me.

‘“I’m ill to-night, Catherine, love,” he said; “and you must have all the talk, and let me listen. Come, and sit by me. I was sure you wouldn’t break your word, and I’ll make you promise again, before you go.”

‘I knew now that I mustn’t tease him, as he was ill; and I spoke softly and put no questions, and avoided irritating him in any way. I had brought some of my nicest books for him: he asked me to read a little of one, and I was about to comply, when Earnshaw burst the door open: having gathered venom with reflection. He advanced direct to us, seized Linton by the arm, and swung him off the seat.

‘“Get to thy own room!” he said, in a voice almost inarticulate with passion; and his face looked swelled and furious. "Take her there if she comes to see thee: thou shalln't keep me out of this. Begone wi' ye both!"

'He swore at us, and left Linton no time to answer, nearly throwing him into the kitchen; and he clenched his fist as I followed, seemingly longing to knock me down. I was afraid for a moment, and I let one volume fall; he kicked it after me, and shut us out. I heard a malignant, crackly laugh by the fire, and turning, beheld that odious Joseph standing rubbing his bony hands, and quivering.

'"I wer sure he'd sarve ye out! He's a grand lad! He's getten t' raight sperrit in him! *He* knaws — ay, he knaws, as weel as I do, who sud be t' maister yonder — Ech, ech, ech! He made ye skift properly! Ech, ech, ech!"

'"Where must we go?" I asked of my cousin, disregarding the old wretch's mockery.

'Linton was white and trembling. He was not pretty then, Ellen: oh, no! he looked frightful; for his thin face and large eyes were wrought into an expression of frantic, powerless fury. He grasped the handle of the door, and shook it: it was fastened inside.

'"If you don't let me in, I'll kill you! — If you don't let me in, I'll kill you!" he rather shrieked than said. "Devil! devil! — I'll kill you — I'll kill you!"

Joseph uttered his croaking laugh again.

'"Thear, that's t' father!" he cried. "That's father! We've allas summut o' either side in us. Niver heed, Hareton, lad — dunnut be 'feard — he cannot get at thee!"

'I took hold of Linton's hands, and tried to pull him away; but he shrieked so shockingly that I dared not proceed. At last his cries were choked by a dreadful fit of coughing; blood gushed from his mouth, and he fell on the ground. I ran into the yard, sick with terror; and called for Zillah, as loud as I could. She soon heard me: she was milking the cows in a shed behind the barn, and hurrying from her work, she inquired what there was to do? I hadn't breath to explain; dragging her in, I looked about for Linton. Earnshaw had come out to examine the mischief he had caused, and he was then conveying the poor thing up-stairs. Zillah and I ascended after him; but he stopped me at the top of the steps, and said I shouldn't go in: I must go home. I exclaimed that he had killed Linton, and I *would* enter. Joseph locked the door, and declared I should do "no sich stuff," and asked me whether I were "bahn to be as mad as him." I stood crying till the housekeeper reappeared. She affirmed he would be better in a bit, but he couldn't do with that shrieking and din; and she took me, and nearly carried me into the house.

'Ellen, I was ready to tear my hair off my head! I sobbed and wept so that my eyes were almost blind; and the ruffian you have such sympathy with stood opposite: presuming every now and then to bid me "wisht," and denying that it was his fault; and, finally, frightened by my assertions that I would tell papa, and that he should be put in prison and hanged, he commenced blubbering himself, and hurried out to hide his cowardly agitation. Still, I was not rid of him: when at length they compelled me to depart, and I had got some hundred yards off the premises, he suddenly issued from the shadow of the road-side, and checked Minny and took hold of me.

'"Miss Catherine, I'm ill grieved," he began, "but it's rayther too bad — "

'I gave him a cut with my whip, thinking perhaps he would murder me. He let go, thundering one of his horrid curses, and I galloped home more than half out of my senses.

'I didn't bid you good-night that evening, and I didn't go to Wuthering Heights the next: I wished to go exceedingly; but I was strangely excited, and dreaded to hear that Linton was dead, sometimes; and sometimes shuddered at the thought of encountering Hareton. On the third day I took courage: at least, I couldn't bear longer suspense, and stole off once more. I went at five o'clock, and walked; fancying I might manage to creep into the house, and up to Linton's room, unobserved. However, the dogs gave notice of my approach. Zillah received me, and saying "the lad was mending nicely," showed me into a small, tidy, carpeted apartment, where, to my inexpressible joy, I beheld Linton laid on a little sofa, reading one of my books. But he would neither speak to me nor look at me, through a whole hour, Ellen: he has such an unhappy temper. And what quite confounded me, when he did open his mouth, it was to utter the falsehood that I had occasioned the uproar, and Hareton was not to blame! Unable to reply, except passionately, I got up and walked from the room. He sent after me a faint "Catherine!" He did not reckon on being answered so: but I wouldn't turn back; and the morrow was the second day on which I stayed at home, nearly determined to visit him no more. But it was so miserable going to bed and getting up, and never hearing anything about him, that my resolution melted into air before it was properly formed. It had appeared wrong to take the journey once; now it seemed wrong to refrain. Michael came to ask if he must saddle Minny; I said "Yes," and considered myself doing a duty as she bore me over the hills. I was forced to pass the front windows to get to the court: it was no use trying to conceal my presence.

'"Young master is in the house," said Zillah, as she saw me making for the parlour. I went in; Earnshaw was there also, but he quitted the room directly. Linton sat in the great arm-chair half asleep; walking up to the fire, I began in a serious tone, partly meaning it to be true —

'"As you don't like me, Linton, and as you think I come on purpose to hurt you, and pretend that I do so every time, this is our last meeting: let us say good-bye; and tell Mr. Heathcliff that you have no wish to see me, and that he mustn't invent any more falsehoods on the subject."

'"Sit down and take your hat off, Catherine," he answered. "You are so much happier than I am, you ought to be better. Papa talks enough of my defects, and shows enough scorn of me, to make it natural I should doubt myself. I doubt whether I am not altogether as worthless as he calls me, frequently; and then I feel so cross and bitter, I hate everybody! I am worthless, and bad in temper, and bad in spirit, almost always; and, if you choose, you may say good-bye: you'll get rid of an annoyance. Only, Catherine, do me this justice: believe that if I might be as sweet, and as kind, and as good as you are, I would be; as willingly, and more so, than as happy and as healthy. And believe that your kindness has made me love you deeper than if I deserved your love: and though I couldn't, and cannot help showing my nature to you, I regret it and repent it; and shall regret and repent it till I die!"

'I felt he spoke the truth; and I felt I must forgive him: and, though we should quarrel the next moment, I must forgive him again. We were reconciled; but we cried, both of us, the whole time I stayed: not entirely for sorrow; yet I *was* sorry Linton had that distorted nature. He'll never let his friends be at ease, and he'll never be at ease himself! I have always gone to his little parlour, since that night; because his father returned the day after.

'About three times, I think, we have been merry and hopeful, as we were the first evening; the rest of my visits were dreary and troubled: now with his selfishness and spite, and now with his sufferings: but I've learned to endure the former with nearly as little resentment as the latter. Mr. Heathcliff purposely avoids me: I have hardly seen him at all. Last Sunday, indeed, coming earlier than usual, I heard him abusing poor Linton cruelly for his conduct of the night before. I can't tell how he knew of it, unless he listened. Linton had certainly behaved provokingly: however, it was the business of nobody but me, and I interrupted Mr. Heathcliff's lecture by entering and telling him so. He burst into a laugh, and went away, saying he was glad I took that view of the matter. Since then, I've told Linton he must whisper his bitter things. Now, Ellen, you have heard all. I can't be prevented from going to Wuthering Heights, except by inflicting misery on two people; whereas, if you'll only not tell papa, my going need disturb the tranquillity of none. You'll not tell, will you? It will be very heartless, if you do.'

'I'll make up my mind on that point by to-morrow, Miss Catherine,' I replied. 'It requires some study; and so I'll leave you to your rest, and go think it over.'

I thought it over aloud, in my master's presence; walking straight from her room to his, and relating the whole story: with the exception of her conversations with her cousin, and any mention of Hareton. Mr. Linton was alarmed and distressed, more than he would acknowledge to me. In the morning, Catherine learnt my betrayal of her confidence, and she learnt also that her secret visits were to end. In vain she wept and writhed against the interdict, and implored her father to have pity on Linton: all she got to comfort her was a promise that he would write and give him leave to come to the Grange when he pleased; but explaining that he must no longer expect to see Catherine at Wuthering Heights. Perhaps, had he been aware of his nephew’s disposition and state of health, he would have seen fit to withhold even that slight consolation.

CHAPTER XXV

‘These things happened last winter, sir,’ said Mrs. Dean; ‘hardly more than a year ago. Last winter, I did not think, at another twelve months’ end, I should be amusing a stranger to the family with relating them! Yet, who knows how long you’ll be a stranger? You’re too young to rest always contented, living by yourself; and I some way fancy no one could see Catherine Linton and not love her. You smile; but why do you look so lively and interested when I talk about her? and why have you asked me to hang her picture over your fireplace? and why — ?’

‘Stop, my good friend!’ I cried. ‘It may be very possible that *I* should love her; but would she love me? I doubt it too much to venture my tranquillity by running into temptation: and then my home is not here. I’m of the busy world, and to its arms I must return. Go on. Was Catherine obedient to her father’s commands?’

‘She was,’ continued the housekeeper. ‘Her affection for him was still the chief sentiment in her heart; and he spoke without anger: he spoke in the deep tenderness of one about to leave his treasure amid perils and foes, where his remembered words would be the only aid that he could bequeath to guide her. He said to me, a few days afterwards, “I wish my nephew would write, Ellen, or call. Tell me, sincerely, what you think of him: is he changed for the better, or is there a prospect of improvement, as he grows a man?”

‘“He’s very delicate, sir,” I replied; “and scarcely likely to reach manhood: but this I can say, he does not resemble his father; and if Miss Catherine had the misfortune to marry him, he would not be beyond her control: unless she were extremely and foolishly indulgent. However, master, you’ll have plenty of time to get acquainted with him and see whether he would suit her: it wants four years and more to his being of age.”’

Edgar sighed; and, walking to the window, looked out towards Gimmerton Kirk. It was a misty afternoon, but the February sun shone dimly, and we could just distinguish the two fir-trees in the yard, and the sparely-scattered gravestones.

‘I’ve prayed often,’ he half soliloquised, ‘for the approach of what is coming; and now I begin to shrink, and fear it. I thought the memory of the hour I came down that glen a bridegroom would be less sweet than the anticipation that I was soon, in a few months, or, possibly, weeks, to be carried up, and laid in its lonely hollow! Ellen, I’ve been very happy with my little Cathy: through winter nights and summer days she was a living hope at my side. But I’ve been as happy musing by myself among those stones, under that old church: lying, through the long June evenings, on the green mound of her mother’s grave, and wishing — yearning for the time when I might lie beneath it. What can I do for Cathy? How must I quit her? I'd not care one moment for Linton being Heathcliff's son; nor for his taking her from me, if he could console her for my loss. I'd not care that Heathcliff gained his ends, and triumphed in robbing me of my last blessing! But should Linton be unworthy — only a feeble tool to his father — I cannot abandon her to him! And, hard though it be to crush her buoyant spirit, I must persevere in making her sad while I live, and leaving her solitary when I die. Darling! I'd rather resign her to God, and lay her in the earth before me.'

'Resign her to God as it is, sir,' I answered, 'and if we should lose you — which may He forbid — under His providence, I'll stand her friend and counsellor to the last. Miss Catherine is a good girl: I don't fear that she will go wilfully wrong; and people who do their duty are always finally rewarded.'

Spring advanced; yet my master gathered no real strength, though he resumed his walks in the grounds with his daughter. To her inexperienced notions, this itself was a sign of convalescence; and then his cheek was often flushed, and his eyes were bright; she felt sure of his recovering. On her seventeenth birthday, he did not visit the churchyard: it was raining, and I observed — 'You'll surely not go out to-night, sir?'

He answered, — 'No, I'll defer it this year a little longer.' He wrote again to Linton, expressing his great desire to see him; and, had the invalid been presentable, I've no doubt his father would have permitted him to come. As it was, being instructed, he returned an answer, intimating that Mr. Heathcliff objected to his calling at the Grange; but his uncle's kind remembrance delighted him, and he hoped to meet him sometimes in his rambles, and personally to petition that his cousin and he might not remain long so utterly divided.

That part of his letter was simple, and probably his own. Heathcliff knew he could plead eloquently for Catherine's company, then.

'I do not ask,' he said, 'that she may visit here; but am I never to see her, because my father forbids me to go to her home, and you forbid her to come to mine? Do, now and then, ride with her towards the Heights; and let us exchange a few words, in your presence! We have done nothing to deserve this separation; and you are not angry with me: you have no reason to dislike me, you allow, yourself. Dear uncle! send me a kind note to-morrow, and leave to join you anywhere you please, except at Thrushcross Grange. I believe an interview would convince you that my father's character is not mine: he affirms I am more your nephew than his son; and though I have faults which render me unworthy of Catherine, she has excused them, and for her sake, you should also. You inquire after my health — it is better; but while I remain cut off from all hope, and doomed to solitude, or the society of those who never did and never will like me, how can I be cheerful and well?'

Edgar, though he felt for the boy, could not consent to grant his request; because he could not accompany Catherine. He said, in summer, perhaps, they might meet: meantime, he wished him to continue writing at intervals, and engaged to give him what advice and comfort he was able by letter; being well aware of his hard position in his family. Linton complied; and had he been unrestrained, would probably have spoiled all by filling his epistles with complaints and lamentations: but his father kept a sharp watch over him; and, of course, insisted on every line that my master sent being shown; so, instead of penning his peculiar personal sufferings and distresses, the themes constantly uppermost in his thoughts, he harped on the cruel obligation of being held asunder from his friend and love; and gently intimated that Mr. Linton must allow an interview soon, or he should fear he was purposely deceiving him with empty promises.

Cathy was a powerful ally at home; and between them they at length persuaded my master to acquiesce in their having a ride or a walk together about once a week, under my guardianship, and on the moors nearest the Grange: for June found him still declining. Though he had set aside yearly a portion of his income for my young lady’s fortune, he had a natural desire that she might retain — or at least return in a short time to — the house of her ancestors; and he considered her only prospect of doing that was by a union with his heir; he had no idea that the latter was failing almost as fast as himself; nor had any one, I believe: no doctor visited the Heights, and no one saw Master Heathcliff to make report of his condition among us. I, for my part, began to fancy my forebodings were false, and that he must be actually rallying, when he mentioned riding and walking on the moors, and seemed so earnest in pursuing his object. I could not picture a father treating a dying child as tyrannically and wickedly as I afterwards learned Heathcliff had treated him, to compel this apparent eagerness: his efforts redoubling the more imminently his avaricious and unfeeling plans were threatened with defeat by death.

CHAPTER XXVI

Summer was already past its prime, when Edgar reluctantly yielded his assent to their entreaties, and Catherine and I set out on our first ride to join her cousin. It was a close, sultry day: devoid of sunshine, but with a sky too dappled and hazy to threaten rain: and our place of meeting had been fixed at the guide-stone, by the cross-roads. On arriving there, however, a little herd-boy, despatched as a messenger, told us that, — 'Maister Linton wer just o' this side th' Heights: and he'd be mitch obleeged to us to gang on a bit further.'

'Then Master Linton has forgot the first injunction of his uncle,' I observed: 'he bid us keep on the Grange land, and here we are off at once.'

'Well, we'll turn our horses' heads round when we reach him,' answered my companion; 'our excursion shall lie towards home.'

But when we reached him, and that was scarcely a quarter of a mile from his own door, we found he had no horse; and we were forced to dismount, and leave ours to graze. He lay on the heath, awaiting our approach, and did not rise till we came within a few yards. Then he walked so feebly, and looked so pale, that I immediately exclaimed, — 'Why, Master Heathcliff, you are not fit for enjoying a ramble this morning. How ill you do look!'

Catherine surveyed him with grief and astonishment: she changed the ejaculation of joy on her lips to one of alarm; and the congratulation on their long-postponed meeting to an anxious inquiry, whether he were worse than usual?

'No — better — better!' he panted, trembling, and retaining her hand as if he needed its support, while his large blue eyes wandered timidly over her; the hollowness round them transforming to haggard wildness the languid expression they once possessed.

'But you have been worse,' persisted his cousin; 'worse than when I saw you last; you are thinner, and — '

'I'm tired,' he interrupted, hurriedly. 'It is too hot for walking, let us rest here. And, in the morning, I often feel sick — papa says I grow so fast.'

Badly satisfied, Cathy sat down, and he reclined beside her.

'This is something like your paradise,' said she, making an effort at cheerfulness. 'You recollect the two days we agreed to spend in the place and way each thought pleasantest? This is nearly yours, only there are clouds; but then they are so soft and mellow: it is nicer than sunshine. Next week, if you can, we'll ride down to the Grange Park, and try mine.'

Linton did not appear to remember what she talked of and he had evidently great difficulty in sustaining any kind of conversation. His lack of interest in the subjects she started, and his equal incapacity to contribute to her entertainment, were so obvious that she could not conceal her disappointment. An indefinite alteration had come over his whole person and manner. The pettishness that might be caressed into fondness, had yielded to a listless apathy; there was less of the peevish temper of a child which frets and teases on purpose to be soothed, and more of the self-absorbed moroseness of a confirmed invalid, repelling consolation, and ready to regard the good-humoured mirth of others as an insult. Catherine perceived, as well as I did, that he held it rather a punishment, than a gratification, to endure our company; and she made no scruple of proposing, presently, to depart. That proposal, unexpectedly, roused Linton from his lethargy, and threw him into a strange state of agitation. He glanced fearfully towards the Heights, begging she would remain another half-hour, at least.

'But I think,' said Cathy, 'you'd be more comfortable at home than sitting here; and I cannot amuse you to-day, I see, by my tales, and songs, and chatter: you have grown wiser than I, in these six months; you have little taste for my diversions now: or else, if I could amuse you, I'd willingly stay.'

'Stay to rest yourself,' he replied. 'And, Catherine, don't think or say that I'm *very* unwell: it is the heavy weather and heat that make me dull; and I walked about, before you came, a great deal for me. Tell uncle I'm in tolerable health, will you?'

'I'll tell him that *you* say so, Linton. I couldn't affirm that you are,' observed my young lady, wondering at his pertinacious assertion of what was evidently an untruth.

'And be here again next Thursday,' continued he, shunning her puzzled gaze. 'And give him my thanks for permitting you to come — my best thanks, Catherine. And — and, if you *did* meet my father, and he asked you about me, don't lead him to suppose that I've been extremely silent and stupid: don't look sad and downcast, as you are doing — he'll be angry.'

'I care nothing for his anger,' exclaimed Cathy, imagining she would be its object.

'But I do,' said her cousin, shuddering. '*Don't* provoke him against me, Catherine, for he is very hard.'

'Is he severe to you, Master Heathcliff?' I inquired. 'Has he grown weary of indulgence, and passed from passive to active hatred?'

Linton looked at me, but did not answer; and, after keeping her seat by his side another ten minutes, during which his head fell drowsily on his breast, and he uttered nothing except suppressed moans of exhaustion or pain, Cathy began to seek solace in looking for bilberries, and sharing the produce of her researches with me: she did not offer them to him, for she saw further notice would only weary and annoy.

'Is it half-an-hour now, Ellen?' she whispered in my ear, at last. 'I can't tell why we should stay. He's asleep, and papa will be wanting us back.'

'Well, we must not leave him asleep,' I answered; 'wait till he wakes, and be patient. You were mighty eager to set off, but your longing to see poor

Linton has soon evaporated!'

'Why did *he* wish to see me?' returned Catherine. 'In his crossest humours, formerly, I liked him better than I do in his present curious mood. It's just as if it were a task he was compelled to perform — this interview — for fear his father should scold him. But I'm hardly going to come to give Mr. Heathcliff pleasure; whatever reason he may have for ordering Linton to undergo this penance. And, though I'm glad he's better in health, I'm sorry he's so much less pleasant, and so much less affectionate to me.'

'You think *he is* better in health, then?' I said.

'Yes,' she answered; 'because he always made such a great deal of his sufferings, you know. He is not tolerably well, as he told me to tell papa; but he's better, very likely.'

'There you differ with me, Miss Cathy,' I remarked; 'I should conjecture him to be far worse.'

Linton here started from his slumber in bewildered terror, and asked if any one had called his name.

'No,' said Catherine; 'unless in dreams. I cannot conceive how you manage to doze out of doors, in the morning.'

'I thought I heard my father,' he gasped, glancing up to the frowning nab above us. 'You are sure nobody spoke?'

'Quite sure,' replied his cousin. 'Only Ellen and I were disputing concerning your health. Are you truly stronger, Linton, than when we separated in winter? If you be, I'm certain one thing is not stronger — your regard for me: speak, — are you?'

The tears gushed from Linton's eyes as he answered, 'Yes, yes, I am!' And, still under the spell of the imaginary voice, his gaze wandered up and down to detect its owner.

Cathy rose. 'For to-day we must part,' she said. 'And I won't conceal that I have been sadly disappointed with our meeting; though I'll mention it to nobody but you: not that I stand in awe of Mr. Heathcliff.'

'Hush,' murmured Linton; 'for God's sake, hush! He's coming.' And he clung to Catherine's arm, striving to detain her; but at that announcement she hastily disengaged herself, and whistled to Minny, who obeyed her like a dog.

'I'll be here next Thursday,' she cried, springing to the saddle. 'Good-bye. Quick, Ellen!'

And so we left him, scarcely conscious of our departure, so absorbed was he in anticipating his father's approach.

Before we reached home, Catherine's displeasure softened into a perplexed sensation of pity and regret, largely blended with vague, uneasy doubts about Linton's actual circumstances, physical and social: in which I partook, though I counselled her not to say much; for a second journey would make us better judges. My master requested an account of our ongoings. His nephew's offering of thanks was duly delivered, Miss Cathy gently touching on the rest: I also threw little light on his inquiries, for I hardly knew what to hide and what to reveal.

CHAPTER XXVII

Seven days glided away, every one marking its course by the henceforth rapid alteration of Edgar Linton's state. The havoc that months had previously wrought was now emulated by the inroads of hours. Catherine we would fain have deluded yet; but her own quick spirit refused to delude her: it divined in secret, and brooded on the dreadful probability, gradually ripening into certainty. She had not the heart to mention her ride, when Thursday came round; I mentioned it for her, and obtained permission to order her out of doors: for the library, where her father stopped a short time daily — the brief period he could bear to sit up — and his chamber, had become her whole world. She grudged each moment that did not find her bending over his pillow, or seated by his side. Her countenance grew wan with watching and sorrow, and my master gladly dismissed her to what he flattered himself would be a happy change of scene and society; drawing comfort from the hope that she would not now be left entirely alone after his death.

He had a fixed idea, I guessed by several observations he let fall, that, as his nephew resembled him in person, he would resemble him in mind; for Linton's letters bore few or no indications of his defective character. And I, through pardonable weakness, refrained from correcting the error; asking myself what good there would be in disturbing his last moments with information that he had neither power nor opportunity to turn to account.

We deferred our excursion till the afternoon; a golden afternoon of August: every breath from the hills so full of life, that it seemed whoever respired it, though dying, might revive. Catherine's face was just like the landscape — shadows and sunshine flitting over it in rapid succession; but the shadows rested longer, and the sunshine was more transient; and her poor little heart reproached itself for even that passing forgetfulness of its cares.

We discerned Linton watching at the same spot he had selected before. My young mistress alighted, and told me that, as she was resolved to stay a very little while, I had better hold the pony and remain on horseback; but I dissented: I wouldn't risk losing sight of the charge committed to me a minute; so we climbed the slope of heath together. Master Heathcliff received us with greater animation on this occasion: not the animation of high spirits though, nor yet of joy; it looked more like fear.

'It is late!' he said, speaking short and with difficulty. 'Is not your father very ill? I thought you wouldn't come.'

'*Why* won't you be candid?' cried Catherine, swallowing her greeting. 'Why cannot you say at once you don't want me? It is strange, Linton, that for the second time you have brought me here on purpose, apparently to distress us both, and for no reason besides!'

Linton shivered, and glanced at her, half supplicating, half ashamed; but his cousin's patience was not sufficient to endure this enigmatical behaviour.

'My father *is* very ill,' she said; 'and why am I called from his bedside? Why didn't you send to absolve me from my promise, when you wished I wouldn't keep it? Come! I desire an explanation: playing and trifling are completely banished out of my mind; and I can't dance attendance on your affectations now!'

'My affectations!' he murmured; 'what are they? For heaven's sake, Catherine, don't look so angry! Despise me as much as you please; I am a worthless, cowardly wretch: I can't be scorned enough; but I'm too mean for your anger. Hate my father, and spare me for contempt.'

'Nonsense!' cried Catherine in a passion. 'Foolish, silly boy! And there! he trembles: as if I were really going to touch him! You needn't bespeak contempt, Linton: anybody will have it spontaneously at your service. Get off! I shall return home: it is folly dragging you from the hearth-stone, and pretending — what do we pretend? Let go my frock! If I pitied you for crying and looking so very frightened, you should spurn such pity. Ellen, tell him how disgraceful this conduct is. Rise, and don't degrade yourself into an abject reptile — *don't*!'

With streaming face and an expression of agony, Linton had thrown his nerveless frame along the ground: he seemed convulsed with exquisite terror.

'Oh!' he sobbed, 'I cannot bear it! Catherine, Catherine, I'm a traitor, too, and I dare not tell you! But leave me, and I shall be killed! *Dear* Catherine, my life is in your hands: and you have said you loved me, and if you did, it wouldn't harm you. You'll not go, then? kind, sweet, good Catherine! And perhaps you *will* consent — and he'll let me die with you!'

My young lady, on witnessing his intense anguish, stooped to raise him. The old feeling of indulgent tenderness overcame her vexation, and she grew thoroughly moved and alarmed.

'Consent to what?' she asked. 'To stay! tell me the meaning of this strange talk, and I will. You contradict your own words, and distract me! Be calm and frank, and confess at once all that weighs on your heart. You wouldn't injure me, Linton, would you? You wouldn't let any enemy hurt me, if you could prevent it? I'll believe you are a coward, for yourself, but not a cowardly betrayer of your best friend.'

'But my father threatened me,' gasped the boy, clasping his attenuated fingers, 'and I dread him — I dread him! I *dare* not tell!'

'Oh, well!' said Catherine, with scornful compassion, 'keep your secret: *I'm* no coward. Save yourself: I'm not afraid!'

Her magnanimity provoked his tears: he wept wildly, kissing her supporting hands, and yet could not summon courage to speak out. I was cogitating what the mystery might be, and determined Catherine should never suffer to benefit him or any one else, by my good will; when, hearing a rustle among the ling, I looked up and saw Mr. Heathcliff almost close upon us, descending the Heights. He didn't cast a glance towards my companions, though they were sufficiently near for Linton's sobs to be audible; but hailing me in the almost hearty tone he assumed to none besides, and the sincerity of which I couldn't avoid doubting, he said —

'It is something to see you so near to my house, Nelly. How are you at the Grange? Let us hear. The rumour goes,' he added, in a lower tone, 'that Edgar Linton is on his death-bed: perhaps they exaggerate his illness?'

'No; my master is dying,' I replied: 'it is true enough. A sad thing it will be for us all, but a blessing for him!'

'How long will he last, do you think?' he asked.

'I don't know,' I said.

'Because,' he continued, looking at the two young people, who were fixed under his eye — Linton appeared as if he could not venture to stir or raise his head, and Catherine could not move, on his account — 'because that lad yonder seems determined to beat me; and I'd thank his uncle to be quick, and go before him! Hallo! has the whelp been playing that game long? I *did* give him some lessons about snivelling. Is he pretty lively with Miss Linton generally?'

'Lively? no — he has shown the greatest distress,' I answered. 'To see him, I should say, that instead of rambling with his sweetheart on the hills, he ought to be in bed, under the hands of a doctor.'

'He shall be, in a day or two,' muttered Heathcliff. 'But first — get up, Linton! Get up!' he shouted. 'Don't grovel on the ground there up, this moment!'

Linton had sunk prostrate again in another paroxysm of helpless fear, caused by his father's glance towards him, I suppose: there was nothing else to produce such humiliation. He made several efforts to obey, but his little strength was annihilated for the time, and he fell back again with a moan. Mr. Heathcliff advanced, and lifted him to lean against a ridge of turf.

'Now,' said he, with curbed ferocity, 'I'm getting angry and if you don't command that paltry spirit of yours — *damn* you! get up directly!'

'I will, father,' he panted. 'Only, let me alone, or I shall faint. I've done as you wished, I'm sure. Catherine will tell you that I — that I — have been cheerful. Ah! keep by me, Catherine; give me your hand.'

'Take mine,' said his father; 'stand on your feet. There now — she'll lend you her arm: that's right, look at her. You would imagine I was the devil himself, Miss Linton, to excite such horror. Be so kind as to walk home with him, will you? He shudders if I touch him.'

'Linton dear!' whispered Catherine, 'I can't go to Wuthering Heights: papa has forbidden me. He'll not harm you: why are you so afraid?'

'I can never re-enter that house,' he answered. 'I'm *not* to re-enter it without you!'

'Stop!' cried his father. 'We'll respect Catherine's filial scruples. Nelly, take him in, and I'll follow your advice concerning the doctor, without delay.'

'You'll do well,' replied I. 'But I must remain with my mistress: to mind your son is not my business.'

'You are very stiff,' said Heathcliff, 'I know that: but you'll force me to pinch the baby and make it scream before it moves your charity. Come, then, my hero. Are you willing to return, escorted by me?'

He approached once more, and made as if he would seize the fragile being; but, shrinking back, Linton clung to his cousin, and implored her to accompany him, with a frantic importunity that admitted no denial. However I disapproved, I couldn't hinder her: indeed, how could she have refused him herself? What was filling him with dread we had no means of discerning; but there he was, powerless under its gripe, and any addition seemed capable of shocking him into idiotcy. We reached the threshold; Catherine walked in, and I stood waiting till she had conducted the invalid to a chair, expecting her out immediately; when Mr. Heathcliff, pushing me forward, exclaimed — 'My house is not stricken with the plague, Nelly; and I have a mind to be hospitable to-day: sit down, and allow me to shut the door.'

He shut and locked it also. I started.

'You shall have tea before you go home,' he added. 'I am by myself. Hareton is gone with some cattle to the Lees, and Zillah and Joseph are off on a journey of pleasure; and, though I'm used to being alone, I'd rather have some interesting company, if I can get it. Miss Linton, take your seat by *him*. I give you what I have: the present is hardly worth accepting; but I have nothing else to offer. It is Linton, I mean. How she does stare! It's odd what a savage feeling I have to anything that seems afraid of me! Had I been born where laws are less strict and tastes less dainty, I should treat myself to a slow vivisection of those two, as an evening's amusement.'

He drew in his breath, struck the table, and swore to himself, 'By hell! I hate them.'

'I am not afraid of you!' exclaimed Catherine, who could not hear the latter part of his speech. She stepped close up; her black eyes flashing with passion and resolution. 'Give me that key: I will have it!' she said. 'I wouldn't eat or drink here, if I were starving.'

Heathcliff had the key in his hand that remained on the table. He looked up, seized with a sort of surprise at her boldness; or, possibly, reminded, by her voice and glance, of the person from whom she inherited it. She snatched at the instrument, and half succeeded in getting it out of his loosened fingers: but her action recalled him to the present; he recovered it speedily.

'Now, Catherine Linton,' he said, 'stand off, or I shall knock you down; and, that will make Mrs. Dean mad.'

Regardless of this warning, she captured his closed hand and its contents again. 'We *will* go!' she repeated, exerting her utmost efforts to cause the iron muscles to relax; and finding that her nails made no impression, she applied her teeth pretty sharply. Heathcliff glanced at me a glance that kept me from interfering a moment. Catherine was too intent on his fingers to notice his face. He opened them suddenly, and resigned the object of dispute; but, ere she had well secured it, he seized her with the liberated hand, and, pulling her on his knee, administered with the other a shower of terrific slaps on both sides of the head, each sufficient to have fulfilled his threat, had she been able to fall.

At this diabolical violence I rushed on him furiously. 'You villain!' I began to cry, 'you villain!' A touch on the chest silenced me: I am stout, and soon put out of breath; and, what with that and the rage, I staggered dizzily back and felt ready to suffocate, or to burst a blood-vessel. The scene was over in two minutes; Catherine, released, put her two hands to her temples, and looked just as if she were not sure whether her ears were off or on. She trembled like a reed, poor thing, and leant against the table perfectly bewildered.

'I know how to chastise children, you see,' said the scoundrel, grimly, as he stooped to repossess himself of the key, which had dropped to the floor. 'Go to Linton now, as I told you; and cry at your ease! I shall be your father, to-morrow — all the father you'll have in a few days — and you shall have plenty of that. You can bear plenty; you're no weakling: you shall have a daily taste, if I catch such a devil of a temper in your eyes again!'

Cathy ran to me instead of Linton, and knelt down and put her burning cheek on my lap, weeping aloud. Her cousin had shrunk into a corner of the settle, as quiet as a mouse, congratulating himself, I dare say, that the correction had alighted on another than him. Mr. Heathcliff, perceiving us all confounded, rose, and expeditiously made the tea himself. The cups and saucers were laid ready. He poured it out, and handed me a cup.

'Wash away your spleen,' he said. 'And help your own naughty pet and mine. It is not poisoned, though I prepared it. I'm going out to seek your horses.'

Our first thought, on his departure, was to force an exit somewhere. We tried the kitchen door, but that was fastened outside: we looked at the windows — they were too narrow for even Cathy's little figure.

'Master Linton,' I cried, seeing we were regularly imprisoned, 'you know what your diabolical father is after, and you shall tell us, or I'll box your ears, as he has done your cousin's.'

'Yes, Linton, you must tell,' said Catherine. 'It was for your sake I came; and it will be wickedly ungrateful if you refuse.'

'Give me some tea, I'm thirsty, and then I'll tell you,' he answered. 'Mrs. Dean, go away. I don't like you standing over me. Now, Catherine, you are letting your tears fall into my cup. I won't drink that. Give me another.' Catherine pushed another to him, and wiped her face. I felt disgusted at the little wretch's composure, since he was no longer in terror for himself. The anguish he had exhibited on the moor subsided as soon as ever he entered Wuthering Heights; so I guessed he had been menaced with an awful visitation of wrath if he failed in decoying us there; and, that accomplished, he had no further immediate fears.

'Papa wants us to be married,' he continued, after sipping some of the liquid. 'And he knows your papa wouldn't let us marry now; and he's afraid of my dying if we wait; so we are to be married in the morning, and you are to stay here all night; and, if you do as he wishes, you shall return home next day, and take me with you.'

'Take you with her, pitiful changeling!' I exclaimed. '*You* marry? Why, the man is mad! or he thinks us fools, every one. And do you imagine that beautiful young lady, that healthy, hearty girl, will tie herself to a little perishing monkey like you? Are you cherishing the notion that anybody, let alone Miss Catherine Linton, would have you for a husband? You want whipping for bringing us in here at all, with your dastardly puling tricks: and — don't look so silly, now! I've a very good mind to shake you severely, for your contemptible treachery, and your imbecile conceit.'

I did give him a slight shaking; but it brought on the cough, and he took to his ordinary resource of moaning and weeping, and Catherine rebuked me.

'Stay all night? No,' she said, looking slowly round. 'Ellen, I'll burn that door down but I'll get out.'

And she would have commenced the execution of her threat directly, but Linton was up in alarm for his dear self again. He clasped her in his two feeble arms sobbing: — 'Won't you have me, and save me? not let me come to the Grange? Oh, darling Catherine! you mustn't go and leave, after all. You *must* obey my father — you *must*!'

'I must obey my own,' she replied, 'and relieve him from this cruel suspense. The whole night! What would he think? He'll be distressed already. I'll either break or burn a way out of the house. Be quiet! You're in no danger; but if you hinder me — Linton, I love papa better than you!' The mortal terror he felt of Mr. Heathcliff's anger restored to the boy his coward's eloquence. Catherine was near distraught: still, she persisted that she must go home, and tried entreaty in her turn, persuading him to subdue his selfish agony. While they were thus occupied, our jailor re-entered.

'Your beasts have trotted off,' he said, 'and — now Linton! snivelling again? What has she been doing to you? Come, come — have done, and get to bed. In a month or two, my lad, you'll be able to pay her back her present tyrannies with a vigorous hand. You're pining for pure love, are you not? nothing else in the world: and she shall have you! There, to bed! Zillah won't be here to-night; you must undress yourself. Hush! hold your noise! Once in your own room, I'll not come near you: you needn't fear. By chance, you've managed tolerably. I'll look to the rest.'

He spoke these words, holding the door open for his son to pass, and the latter achieved his exit exactly as a spaniel might which suspected the person who attended on it of designing a spiteful squeeze. The lock was re-secured. Heathcliff approached the fire, where my mistress and I stood silent. Catherine looked up, and instinctively raised her hand to her cheek: his neighbourhood revived a painful sensation. Anybody else would have been incapable of regarding the childish act with sternness, but he scowled on her and muttered — ‘Oh! you are not afraid of me? Your courage is well disguised: you seem damnably afraid!’

‘I *am* afraid now,’ she replied, ‘because, if I stay, papa will be miserable: and how can I endure making him miserable — when he — when he — Mr. Heathcliff, let *me* go home! I promise to marry Linton: papa would like me to: and I love him. Why should you wish to force me to do what I’ll willingly do of myself?’

‘Let him dare to force you,’ I cried. ‘There’s law in the land, thank God! there is; though we be in an out-of-the-way place. I’d inform if he were my own son: and it’s felony without benefit of clergy!’

‘Silence!’ said the ruffian. ‘To the devil with your clamour! I don’t want *you* to speak. Miss Linton, I shall enjoy myself remarkably in thinking your father will be miserable: I shall not sleep for satisfaction. You could have hit on no surer way of fixing your residence under my roof for the next twenty-four hours than informing me that such an event would follow. As to your promise to marry Linton, I’ll take care you shall keep it; for you shall not quit this place till it is fulfilled.’

‘Send Ellen, then, to let papa know I’m safe!’ exclaimed Catherine, weeping bitterly. ‘Or marry me now. Poor papa! Ellen, he’ll think we’re lost. What shall we do?’

‘Not he! He’ll think you are tired of waiting on him, and run off for a little amusement,’ answered Heathcliff. ‘You cannot deny that you entered my house of your own accord, in contempt of his injunctions to the contrary. And it is quite natural that you should desire amusement at your age; and that you would weary of nursing a sick man, and that man *only* your father. Catherine, his happiest days were over when your days began. He cursed you, I dare say, for coming into the world (I did, at least); and it would just do if he cursed you as *he* went out of it. I’d join him. I don’t love you! How should I? Weep away. As far as I can see, it will be your chief diversion hereafter; unless Linton make amends for other losses: and your provident parent appears to fancy he may. His letters of advice and consolation entertained me vastly. In his last he recommended my jewel to be careful of his; and kind to her when he got her. Careful and kind — that’s paternal. But Linton requires his whole stock of care and kindness for himself. Linton can play the little tyrant well. He’ll undertake to torture any number of cats, if their teeth be drawn and their claws pared. You’ll be able to tell his uncle fine tales of his *kindness*, when you get home again, I assure you.’

‘You’re right there!’ I said; ‘explain your son’s character. Show his resemblance to yourself: and then, I hope, Miss Cathy will think twice before she takes the cockatrice!’

‘I don’t much mind speaking of his amiable qualities now,’ he answered; ‘because she must either accept him or remain a prisoner, and you along with her, till your master dies. I can detain you both, quite concealed, here. If you doubt, encourage her to retract her word, and you'll have an opportunity of judging!'

'I'll not retract my word,' said Catherine. 'I'll marry him within this hour, if I may go to Thrushcross Grange afterwards. Mr. Heathcliff, you're a cruel man, but you're not a fiend; and you won't, from *mere* malice, destroy irrevocably all my happiness. If papa thought I had left him on purpose, and if he died before I returned, could I bear to live? I've given over crying: but I'm going to kneel here, at your knee; and I'll not get up, and I'll not take my eyes from your face till you look back at me! No, don't turn away! *do look*! you'll see nothing to provoke you. I don't hate you. I'm not angry that you struck me. Have you never loved *anybody* in all your life, uncle? *never*? Ah! you must look once. I'm so wretched, you can't help being sorry and pitying me.'

'Keep your eft's fingers off; and move, or I'll kick you!' cried Heathcliff, brutally repulsing her. 'I'd rather be hugged by a snake. How the devil can you dream of fawning on me? I *detest* you!'

He shrugged his shoulders: shook himself, indeed, as if his flesh crept with aversion; and thrust back his chair; while I got up, and opened my mouth, to commence a downright torrent of abuse. But I was rendered dumb in the middle of the first sentence, by a threat that I should be shown into a room by myself the very next syllable I uttered. It was growing dark — we heard a sound of voices at the garden-gate. Our host hurried out instantly: *he* had his wits about him; *we* had not. There was a talk of two or three minutes, and he returned alone.

'I thought it had been your cousin Hareton,' I observed to Catherine. 'I wish he would arrive! Who knows but he might take our part?'

'It was three servants sent to seek you from the Grange,' said Heathcliff, overhearing me. 'You should have opened a lattice and called out: but I could swear that chit is glad you didn't. She's glad to be obliged to stay, I'm certain.'

At learning the chance we had missed, we both gave vent to our grief without control; and he allowed us to wail on till nine o'clock. Then he bid us go upstairs, through the kitchen, to Zillah's chamber; and I whispered my companion to obey: perhaps we might contrive to get through the window there, or into a garret, and out by its skylight. The window, however, was narrow, like those below, and the garret trap was safe from our attempts; for we were fastened in as before. We neither of us lay down: Catherine took her station by the lattice, and watched anxiously for morning; a deep sigh being the only answer I could obtain to my frequent entreaties that she would try to rest. I seated myself in a chair, and rocked to and fro, passing harsh judgment on my many derelictions of duty; from which, it struck me then, all the misfortunes of my employers sprang. It was not the case, in reality, I am aware; but it was, in my imagination, that dismal night; and I thought

Heathcliff himself less guilty than I.

At seven o'clock he came, and inquired if Miss Linton had risen. She ran to the door immediately, and answered, 'Yes.' 'Here, then,' he said, opening it, and pulling her out. I rose to follow, but he turned the lock again. I demanded my release.

'Be patient,' he replied; 'I'll send up your breakfast in a while.'

I thumped on the panels, and rattled the latch angrily and Catherine asked why I was still shut up? He answered, I must try to endure it another hour, and they went away. I endured it two or three hours; at length, I heard a footstep: not Heathcliff's.

'I've brought you something to eat,' said a voice; 'oppen t' door!'

Complying eagerly, I beheld Hareton, laden with food enough to last me all day.

'Tak' it,' he added, thrusting the tray into my hand.

'Stay one minute,' I began.

'Nay,' cried he, and retired, regardless of any prayers I could pour forth to detain him.

And there I remained enclosed the whole day, and the whole of the next night; and another, and another. Five nights and four days I remained, altogether, seeing nobody but Hareton once every morning; and he was a model of a jailor: surly, and dumb, and deaf to every attempt at moving his sense of justice or compassion.

CHAPTER XXVIII

On the fifth morning, or rather afternoon, a different step approached — lighter and shorter; and, this time, the person entered the room. It was Zillah; donned in her scarlet shawl, with a black silk bonnet on her head, and a willow-basket swung to her arm.

‘Eh, dear! Mrs. Dean!’ she exclaimed. ‘Well! there is a talk about you at Gimmerton. I never thought but you were sunk in the Blackhorse marsh, and missy with you, till master told me you’d been found, and he’d lodged you here! What! and you must have got on an island, sure? And how long were you in the hole? Did master save you, Mrs. Dean? But you’re not so thin — you’ve not been so poorly, have you?’

‘Your master is a true scoundrel!’ I replied. ‘But he shall answer for it. He needn’t have raised that tale: it shall all be laid bare!’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Zillah. ‘It’s not his tale: they tell that in the village — about your being lost in the marsh; and I calls to Earnshaw, when I come in — “Eh, they’s queer things, Mr. Hareton, happened since I went off. It’s a sad pity of that likely young lass, and cant Nelly Dean.” He stared. I thought he had not heard aught, so I told him the rumour. The master listened, and he just smiled to himself, and said, “If they have been in the marsh, they are out now, Zillah. Nelly Dean is lodged, at this minute, in your room. You can tell her to flit, when you go up; here is the key. The bog-water got into her head, and she would have run home quite flighty; but I fixed her till she came round to her senses. You can bid her go to the Grange at once, if she be able, and carry a message from me, that her young lady will follow in time to attend the squire’s funeral.”’

‘Mr. Edgar is not dead?’ I gasped. ‘Oh! Zillah, Zillah!’

‘No, no; sit you down, my good mistress,’ she replied; ‘you’re right sickly yet. He’s not dead; Doctor Kenneth thinks he may last another day. I met him on the road and asked.’

Instead of sitting down, I snatched my outdoor things, and hastened below, for the way was free. On entering the house, I looked about for some one to give information of Catherine. The place was filled with sunshine, and the door stood wide open; but nobody seemed at hand. As I hesitated whether to go off at once, or return and seek my mistress, a slight cough drew my attention to the hearth. Linton lay on the settle, sole tenant, sucking a stick of sugar-candy, and pursuing my movements with apathetic eyes. ‘Where is Miss Catherine?’ I demanded sternly, supposing I could frighten him into giving intelligence, by catching him thus, alone. He sucked on like an innocent.

‘Is she gone?’ I said.

'No,' he replied; 'she's upstairs: she's not to go; we won't let her.'

'You won't let her, little idiot!' I exclaimed. 'Direct me to her room immediately, or I'll make you sing out sharply.'

'Papa would make you sing out, if you attempted to get there,' he answered. 'He says I'm not to be soft with Catherine: she's my wife, and it's shameful that she should wish to leave me. He says she hates me and wants me to die, that she may have my money; but she shan't have it: and she shan't go home! She never shall! — she may cry, and be sick as much as she pleases!'

He resumed his former occupation, closing his lids, as if he meant to drop asleep.

'Master Heathcliff,' I resumed, 'have you forgotten all Catherine's kindness to you last winter, when you affirmed you loved her, and when she brought you books and sung you songs, and came many a time through wind and snow to see you? She wept to miss one evening, because you would be disappointed; and you felt then that she was a hundred times too good to you: and now you believe the lies your father tells, though you know he detests you both. And you join him against her. That's fine gratitude, is it not?'

The corner of Linton's mouth fell, and he took the sugar-candy from his lips.

'Did she come to Wuthering Heights because she hated you?' I continued. 'Think for yourself! As to your money, she does not even know that you will have any. And you say she's sick; and yet you leave her alone, up there in a strange house! You who have felt what it is to be so neglected! You could pity your own sufferings; and she pitied them, too; but you won't pity hers! I shed tears, Master Heathcliff, you see — an elderly woman, and a servant merely — and you, after pretending such affection, and having reason to worship her almost, store every tear you have for yourself, and lie there quite at ease. Ah! you're a heartless, selfish boy!'

'I can't stay with her,' he answered crossly. 'I'll not stay by myself. She cries so I can't bear it. And she won't give over, though I say I'll call my father. I did call him once, and he threatened to strangle her if she was not quiet; but she began again the instant he left the room, moaning and grieving all night long, though I screamed for vexation that I couldn't sleep.'

'Is Mr. Heathcliff out?' I inquired, perceiving that the wretched creature had no power to sympathize with his cousin's mental tortures.

'He's in the court,' he replied, 'talking to Doctor Kenneth; who says uncle is dying, truly, at last. I'm glad, for I shall be master of the Grange after him. Catherine always spoke of it as her house. It isn't hers! It's mine: papa says everything she has is mine. All her nice books are mine; she offered to give me them, and her pretty birds, and her pony Minny, if I would get the key of our room, and let her out; but I told her she had nothing to give, they ware all, all mine. And then she cried, and took a little picture from her neck, and said I should have that; two pictures in a gold case, on one side her mother, and on the other uncle, when they were young. That was yesterday — I said they were mine, too; and tried to get them from her. The spiteful thing wouldn't let me: she pushed me off, and hurt me. I shrieked out — that frightens her — she heard papa coming, and she broke the hinges and divided the case, and gave me her mother's portrait; the other she attempted to hide: but papa asked what was the matter, and I explained it. He took the one I had away, and ordered her to resign hers to me; she refused, and he — he struck her down, and wrenched it off the chain, and crushed it with his foot.'

'And were you pleased to see her struck?' I asked: having my designs in encouraging his talk.

'I winked,' he answered: 'I wink to see my father strike a dog or a horse, he does it so hard. Yet I was glad at first — she deserved punishing for pushing me: but when papa was gone, she made me come to the window and showed me her cheek cut on the inside, against her teeth, and her mouth filling with blood; and then she gathered up the bits of the picture, and went and sat down with her face to the wall, and she has never spoken to me since: and I sometimes think she can't speak for pain. I don't like to think so; but she's a naughty thing for crying continually; and she looks so pale and wild, I'm afraid of her.'

'And you can get the key if you choose?' I said.

'Yes, when I am up-stairs,' he answered; 'but I can't walk up-stairs now.'

'In what apartment is it?' I asked.

'Oh,' he cried, 'I shan't tell *you* where it is. It is our secret. Nobody, neither Hareton nor Zillah, is to know. There! you've tired me — go away, go away!' And he turned his face on to his arm, and shut his eyes again.

I considered it best to depart without seeing Mr. Heathcliff, and bring a rescue for my young lady from the Grange. On reaching it, the astonishment of my fellow-servants to see me, and their joy also, was intense; and when they heard that their little mistress was safe, two or three were about to hurry up and shout the news at Mr. Edgar's door: but I bespoke the announcement of it myself. How changed I found him, even in those few days! He lay an image of sadness and resignation awaiting his death. Very young he looked: though his actual age was thirty-nine, one would have called him ten years younger, at least. He thought of Catherine; for he murmured her name. I touched his hand, and spoke.

'Catherine is coming, dear master!' I whispered; 'she is alive and well; and will be here, I hope, to-night.'

I trembled at the first effects of this intelligence: he half rose up, looked eagerly round the apartment, and then sank back in a swoon. As soon as he recovered, I related our compulsory visit, and detention at the Heights. I said Heathcliff forced me to go in: which was not quite true. I uttered as little as possible against Linton; nor did I describe all his father's brutal conduct — my intentions being to add no bitterness, if I could help it, to his already overflowing cup.

He divined that one of his enemy’s purposes was to secure the personal property, as well as the estate, to his son: or rather himself; yet why he did not wait till his decease was a puzzle to my master, because ignorant how nearly he and his nephew would quit the world together. However, he felt that his will had better be altered: instead of leaving Catherine’s fortune at her own disposal, he determined to put it in the hands of trustees for her use during life, and for her children, if she had any, after her. By that means, it could not fall to Mr. Heathcliff should Linton die.

Having received his orders, I despatched a man to fetch the attorney, and four more, provided with serviceable weapons, to demand my young lady of her jailor. Both parties were delayed very late. The single servant returned first. He said Mr. Green, the lawyer, was out when he arrived at his house, and he had to wait two hours for his re-entrance; and then Mr. Green told him he had a little business in the village that must be done; but he would be at Thrushcross Grange before morning. The four men came back unaccompanied also. They brought word that Catherine was ill: too ill to quit her room; and Heathcliff would not suffer them to see her. I scolded the stupid fellows well for listening to that tale, which I would not carry to my master; resolving to take a whole bevy up to the Heights, at day-light, and storm it literally, unless the prisoner were quietly surrendered to us. Her father *shall* see her, I vowed, and vowed again, if that devil be killed on his own doorstones in trying to prevent it!

Happily, I was spared the journey and the trouble. I had gone down-stairs at three o’clock to fetch a jug of water; and was passing through the hall with it in my hand, when a sharp knock at the front door made me jump. ‘Oh! it is Green,’ I said, recollecting myself — ‘only Green,’ and I went on, intending to send somebody else to open it; but the knock was repeated: not loud, and still importunately. I put the jug on the banister and hastened to admit him myself. The harvest moon shone clear outside. It was not the attorney. My own sweet little mistress sprang on my neck sobbing, ‘Ellen, Ellen! Is papa alive?’

‘Yes,’ I cried: ‘yes, my angel, he is, God be thanked, you are safe with us again!’

She wanted to run, breathless as she was, up-stairs to Mr. Linton’s room; but I compelled her to sit down on a chair, and made her drink, and washed her pale face, chafing it into a faint colour with my apron. Then I said I must go first, and tell of her arrival; imploring her to say, she should be happy with young Heathcliff. She stared, but soon comprehending why I counselled her to utter the falsehood, she assured me she would not complain.

I couldn’t abide to be present at their meeting. I stood outside the chamber-door a quarter of an hour, and hardly ventured near the bed, then. All was composed, however: Catherine’s despair was as silent as her father’s joy. She supported him calmly, in appearance; and he fixed on her features his raised eyes that seemed dilating with ecstasy.

He died blissfully, Mr. Lockwood: he died so. Kissing her cheek, he murmured, — 'I am going to her; and you, darling child, shall come to us!' and never stirred or spoke again; but continued that rapt, radiant gaze, till his pulse imperceptibly stopped and his soul departed. None could have noticed the exact minute of his death, it was so entirely without a struggle.

Whether Catherine had spent her tears, or whether the grief were too weighty to let them flow, she sat there dry-eyed till the sun rose: she sat till noon, and would still have remained brooding over that deathbed, but I insisted on her coming away and taking some repose. It was well I succeeded in removing her, for at dinner-time appeared the lawyer, having called at Wuthering Heights to get his instructions how to behave. He had sold himself to Mr. Heathcliff: that was the cause of his delay in obeying my master's summons. Fortunately, no thought of worldly affairs crossed the latter's mind, to disturb him, after his daughter's arrival.

Mr. Green took upon himself to order everything and everybody about the place. He gave all the servants but me, notice to quit. He would have carried his delegated authority to the point of insisting that Edgar Linton should not be buried beside his wife, but in the chapel, with his family. There was the will, however, to hinder that, and my loud protestations against any infringement of its directions. The funeral was hurried over; Catherine, Mrs. Linton Heathcliff now, was suffered to stay at the Grange till her father's corpse had quitted it.

She told me that her anguish had at last spurred Linton to incur the risk of liberating her. She heard the men I sent disputing at the door, and she gathered the sense of Heathcliff's answer. It drove her desperate. Linton who had been conveyed up to the little parlour soon after I left, was terrified into fetching the key before his father re-ascended. He had the cunning to unlock and re-lock the door, without shutting it; and when he should have gone to bed, he begged to sleep with Hareton, and his petition was granted for once. Catherine stole out before break of day. She dared not try the doors lest the dogs should raise an alarm; she visited the empty chambers and examined their windows; and, luckily, lighting on her mother's, she got easily out of its lattice, and on to the ground, by means of the fir-tree close by. Her accomplice suffered for his share in the escape, notwithstanding his timid contrivances.

CHAPTER XXIX

The evening after the funeral, my young lady and I were seated in the library; now musing mournfully — one of us despairingly — on our loss, now venturing conjectures as to the gloomy future.

We had just agreed the best destiny which could await Catherine would be a permission to continue resident at the Grange; at least during Linton's life: he being allowed to join her there, and I to remain as housekeeper. That seemed rather too favourable an arrangement to be hoped for; and yet I did hope, and began to cheer up under the prospect of retaining my home and my employment, and, above all, my beloved young mistress; when a servant — one of the discarded ones, not yet departed — rushed hastily in, and said 'that devil Heathcliff' was coming through the court: should he fasten the door in his face?

If we had been mad enough to order that proceeding, we had not time. He made no ceremony of knocking or announcing his name: he was master, and availed himself of the master's privilege to walk straight in, without saying a word. The sound of our informant's voice directed him to the library; he entered and motioning him out, shut the door.

It was the same room into which he had been ushered, as a guest, eighteen years before: the same moon shone through the window; and the same autumn landscape lay outside. We had not yet lighted a candle, but all the apartment was visible, even to the portraits on the wall: the splendid head of Mrs. Linton, and the graceful one of her husband. Heathcliff advanced to the hearth. Time had little altered his person either. There was the same man: his dark face rather sallower and more composed, his frame a stone or two heavier, perhaps, and no other difference. Catherine had risen with an impulse to dash out, when she saw him.

'Stop!' he said, arresting her by the arm. 'No more runnings away! Where would you go? I'm come to fetch you home; and I hope you'll be a dutiful daughter and not encourage my son to further disobedience. I was embarrassed how to punish him when I discovered his part in the business: he's such a cobweb, a pinch would annihilate him; but you'll see by his look that he has received his due! I brought him down one evening, the day before yesterday, and just set him in a chair, and never touched him afterwards. I sent Hareton out, and we had the room to ourselves. In two hours, I called Joseph to carry him up again; and since then my presence is as potent on his nerves as a ghost; and I fancy he sees me often, though I am not near. Hareton says he wakes and shrieks in the night by the hour together, and calls you to protect him from me; and, whether you like your precious mate, or not, you must come: he's your concern now; I yield all my interest in him to you.'

‘Why not let Catherine continue here,’ I pleaded, ‘and send Master Linton to her? As you hate them both, you’d not miss them: they can only be a daily plague to your unnatural heart.’

‘I’m seeking a tenant for the Grange,’ he answered; ‘and I want my children about me, to be sure. Besides, that lass owes me her services for her bread. I’m not going to nurture her in luxury and idleness after Linton is gone. Make haste and get ready, now; and don’t oblige me to compel you.’

‘I shall,’ said Catherine. ‘Linton is all I have to love in the world, and though you have done what you could to make him hateful to me, and me to him, you cannot make us hate each other. And I defy you to hurt him when I am by, and I defy you to frighten me!’

‘You are a boastful champion,’ replied Heathcliff; ‘but I don’t like you well enough to hurt him: you shall get the full benefit of the torment, as long as it lasts. It is not I who will make him hateful to you — it is his own sweet spirit. He’s as bitter as gall at your desertion and its consequences: don’t expect thanks for this noble devotion. I heard him draw a pleasant picture to Zillah of what he would do if he were as strong as I: the inclination is there, and his very weakness will sharpen his wits to find a substitute for strength.’

‘I know he has a bad nature,’ said Catherine: ‘he’s your son. But I’m glad I’ve a better, to forgive it; and I know he loves me, and for that reason I love him. Mr. Heathcliff *you* have *nobody* to love you; and, however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery. You *are* miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him? *Nobody* loves you — *nobody* will cry for you when you die! I wouldn’t be you!’

Catherine spoke with a kind of dreary triumph: she seemed to have made up her mind to enter into the spirit of her future family, and draw pleasure from the griefs of her enemies.

‘You shall be sorry to be yourself presently,’ said her father-in-law, ‘if you stand there another minute. Begone, witch, and get your things!’

She scornfully withdrew. In her absence I began to beg for Zillah’s place at the Heights, offering to resign mine to her; but he would suffer it on no account. He bid me be silent; and then, for the first time, allowed himself a glance round the room and a look at the pictures. Having studied Mrs. Linton’s, he said — ‘I shall have that home. Not because I need it, but — ’ He turned abruptly to the fire, and continued, with what, for lack of a better word, I must call a smile — ‘I’ll tell you what I did yesterday! I got the sexton, who was digging Linton’s grave, to remove the earth off her coffin lid, and I opened it. I thought, once, I would have stayed there: when I saw her face again — it is hers yet! — he had hard work to stir me; but he said it would change if the air blew on it, and so I struck one side of the coffin loose, and covered it up: not Linton’s side, damn him! I wish he’d been soldered in lead. And I bribed the sexton to pull it away when I’m laid there, and slide mine out too; I’ll have it made so: and then by the time Linton gets to us he’ll not know which is which!'

'You were very wicked, Mr. Heathcliff!' I exclaimed; 'were you not ashamed to disturb the dead?'

'I disturbed nobody, Nelly,' he replied; 'and I gave some ease to myself. I shall be a great deal more comfortable now; and you'll have a better chance of keeping me underground, when I get there. Disturbed her? No! she has disturbed me, night and day, through eighteen years — incessantly — remorselessly — till yesternight; and yesternight I was tranquil. I dreamt I was sleeping the last sleep by that sleeper, with my heart stopped and my cheek frozen against hers.'

'And if she had been dissolved into earth, or worse, what would you have dreamt of then?' I said.

'Of dissolving with her, and being more happy still!' he answered. 'Do you suppose I dread any change of that sort? I expected such a transformation on raising the lid — but I'm better pleased that it should not commence till I share it. Besides, unless I had received a distinct impression of her passionless features, that strange feeling would hardly have been removed. It began oddly. You know I was wild after she died; and eternally, from dawn to dawn, praying her to return to me her spirit! I have a strong faith in ghosts: I have a conviction that they can, and do, exist among us! The day she was buried, there came a fall of snow. In the evening I went to the churchyard. It blew bleak as winter — all round was solitary. I didn't fear that her fool of a husband would wander up the glen so late; and no one else had business to bring them there. Being alone, and conscious two yards of loose earth was the sole barrier between us, I said to myself — "I'll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills *me*; and if she be motionless, it is sleep." I got a spade from the tool-house, and began to delve with all my might — it scraped the coffin; I fell to work with my hands; the wood commenced cracking about the screws; I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from some one above, close at the edge of the grave, and bending down. "If I can only get this off," I muttered, "I wish they may shovel in the earth over us both!" and I wrenched at it more desperately still. There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by; but, as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there: not under me, but on the earth. A sudden sense of relief flowed from my heart through every limb. I relinquished my labour of agony, and turned consoled at once: unspeakably consoled. Her presence was with me: it remained while I re-filled the grave, and led me home. You may laugh, if you will; but I was sure I should see her there. I was sure she was with me, and I could not help talking to her. Having reached the Heights, I rushed eagerly to the door. It was fastened; and, I remember, that accursed Earnshaw and my wife opposed my entrance.

I remember stopping to kick the breath out of him, and then hurrying upstairs, to my room and hers. I looked round impatiently — I felt her by me — I could *almost* see her, and yet I *could not*! I ought to have sweat blood then, from the anguish of my yearning — from the fervour of my supplications to have but one glimpse! I had not one. She showed herself, as she often was in life, a devil to me! And, since then, sometimes more and sometimes less, I've been the sport of that intolerable torture! Infernal! keeping my nerves at such a stretch that, if they had not resembled catgut, they would long ago have relaxed to the feebleness of Linton's. When I sat in the house with Hareton, it seemed that on going out I should meet her; when I walked on the moors I should meet her coming in. When I went from home I hastened to return; she *must* be somewhere at the Heights, I was certain! And when I slept in her chamber — I was beaten out of that. I couldn't lie there; for the moment I closed my eyes, she was either outside the window, or sliding back the panels, or entering the room, or even resting her darling head on the same pillow as she did when a child; and I must open my lids to see. And so I opened and closed them a hundred times a night — to be always disappointed! It racked me! I've often groaned aloud, till that old rascal Joseph no doubt believed that my conscience was playing the fiend inside of me. Now, since I've seen her, I'm pacified — a little. It was a strange way of killing: not by inches, but by fractions of hairbreadths, to beguile me with the spectre of a hope through eighteen years!'

Mr. Heathcliff paused and wiped his forehead; his hair clung to it, wet with perspiration; his eyes were fixed on the red embers of the fire, the brows not contracted, but raised next the temples; diminishing the grim aspect of his countenance, but imparting a peculiar look of trouble, and a painful appearance of mental tension towards one absorbing subject. He only half addressed me, and I maintained silence. I didn't like to hear him talk! After a short period he resumed his meditation on the picture, took it down and leant it against the sofa to contemplate it at better advantage; and while so occupied Catherine entered, announcing that she was ready, when her pony should be saddled.

'Send that over to-morrow,' said Heathcliff to me; then turning to her, he added: 'You may do without your pony: it is a fine evening, and you'll need no ponies at Wuthering Heights; for what journeys you take, your own feet will serve you. Come along.'

'Good-bye, Ellen!' whispered my dear little mistress.

As she kissed me, her lips felt like ice. 'Come and see me, Ellen; don't forget.'

'Take care you do no such thing, Mrs. Dean!' said her new father. 'When I wish to speak to you I'll come here. I want none of your prying at my house!'

He signed her to precede him; and casting back a look that cut my heart, she obeyed. I watched them, from the window, walk down the garden.

Heathcliff fixed Catherine’s arm under his: though she disputed the act at first evidently; and with rapid strides he hurried her into the alley, whose trees concealed them.

CHAPTER XXX

I have paid a visit to the Heights, but I have not seen her since she left: Joseph held the door in his hand when I called to ask after her, and wouldn't let me pass. He said Mrs. Linton was 'thrang,' and the master was not in. Zillah has told me something of the way they go on, otherwise I should hardly know who was dead and who living. She thinks Catherine haughty, and does not like her, I can guess by her talk. My young lady asked some aid of her when she first came; but Mr. Heathcliff told her to follow her own business, and let his daughter-in-law look after herself; and Zillah willingly acquiesced, being a narrow-minded, selfish woman. Catherine evinced a child's annoyance at this neglect; repaid it with contempt, and thus enlisted my informant among her enemies, as securely as if she had done her some great wrong. I had a long talk with Zillah about six weeks ago, a little before you came, one day when we foregathered on the moor; and this is what she told me.

'The first thing Mrs. Linton did,' she said, 'on her arrival at the Heights, was to run up-stairs, without even wishing good-evening to me and Joseph; she shut herself into Linton's room, and remained till morning. Then, while the master and Earnshaw were at breakfast, she entered the house, and asked all in a quiver if the doctor might be sent for? her cousin was very ill.

'"We know that!" answered Heathcliff; "but his life is not worth a farthing, and I won't spend a farthing on him."

'"But I cannot tell how to do," she said; "and if nobody will help me, he'll die!"

'"Walk out of the room," cried the master, "and let me never hear a word more about him! None here care what becomes of him; if you do, act the nurse; if you do not, lock him up and leave him."

'Then she began to bother me, and I said I'd had enough plague with the tiresome thing; we each had our tasks, and hers was to wait on Linton: Mr. Heathcliff bid me leave that labour to her.

'How they managed together, I can't tell. I fancy he fretted a great deal, and moaned hisseln night and day; and she had precious little rest: one could guess by her white face and heavy eyes. She sometimes came into the kitchen all wildered like, and looked as if she would fain beg assistance; but I was not going to disobey the master: I never dare disobey him, Mrs. Dean; and, though I thought it wrong that Kenneth should not be sent for, it was no concern of mine either to advise or complain, and I always refused to meddle. Once or twice, after we had gone to bed, I've happened to open my door again and seen her sitting crying on the stairs'-top; and then I've shut myself in quick, for fear of being moved to interfere. I did pity her then, I'm sure: still I didn't wish to lose my place, you know.

‘At last, one night she came boldly into my chamber, and frightened me out of my wits, by saying, “Tell Mr. Heathcliff that his son is dying — I’m sure he is, this time. Get up, instantly, and tell him.”

‘Having uttered this speech, she vanished again. I lay a quarter of an hour listening and trembling. Nothing stirred — the house was quiet.

‘She’s mistaken, I said to myself. He’s got over it. I needn’t disturb them; and I began to doze. But my sleep was marred a second time by a sharp ringing of the bell — the only bell we have, put up on purpose for Linton; and the master called to me to see what was the matter, and inform them that he wouldn’t have that noise repeated.

‘I delivered Catherine’s message. He cursed to himself, and in a few minutes came out with a lighted candle, and proceeded to their room. I followed. Mrs. Heathcliff was seated by the bedside, with her hands folded on her knees. Her father-in-law went up, held the light to Linton’s face, looked at him, and touched him; afterwards he turned to her.

‘“Now — Catherine,” he said, “how do you feel?”

‘She was dumb.

‘“How do you feel, Catherine?” he repeated.

‘“He’s safe, and I’m free,” she answered: “I should feel well — but,” she continued, with a bitterness she couldn’t conceal, “you have left me so long to struggle against death alone, that I feel and see only death! I feel like death!”

‘And she looked like it, too! I gave her a little wine. Hareton and Joseph, who had been wakened by the ringing and the sound of feet, and heard our talk from outside, now entered. Joseph was fain, I believe, of the lad’s removal; Hareton seemed a thought bothered: though he was more taken up with staring at Catherine than thinking of Linton. But the master bid him get off to bed again: we didn’t want his help. He afterwards made Joseph remove the body to his chamber, and told me to return to mine, and Mrs. Heathcliff remained by herself.

‘In the morning, he sent me to tell her she must come down to breakfast: she had undressed, and appeared going to sleep, and said she was ill; at which I hardly wondered. I informed Mr. Heathcliff, and he replied, — “Well, let her be till after the funeral; and go up now and then to get her what is needful; and, as soon as she seems better, tell me.”’

Cathy stayed upstairs a fortnight, according to Zillah; who visited her twice a day, and would have been rather more friendly, but her attempts at increasing kindness were proudly and promptly repelled.

Heathcliff went up once, to show her Linton’s will. He had bequeathed the whole of his, and what had been her, moveable property, to his father: the poor creature was threatened, or coaxed, into that act during her week’s absence, when his uncle died. The lands, being a minor, he could not meddle with. However, Mr. Heathcliff has claimed and kept them in his wife’s right and his also: I suppose legally; at any rate, Catherine, destitute of cash and friends, cannot disturb his possession.

'Nobody,' said Zillah, 'ever approached her door, except that once, but I; and nobody asked anything about her. The first occasion of her coming down into the house was on a Sunday afternoon. She had cried out, when I carried up her dinner, that she couldn't bear any longer being in the cold; and I told her the master was going to Thrushcross Grange, and Earnshaw and I needn't hinder her from descending; so, as soon as she heard Heathcliff's horse trot off, she made her appearance, donned in black, and her yellow curls combed back behind her ears as plain as a Quaker: she couldn't comb them out.

'Joseph and I generally go to chapel on Sundays:' the kirk, you know, has no minister now, explained Mrs. Dean; and they call the Methodists' or Baptists' place (I can't say which it is) at Gimmerton, a chapel. 'Joseph had gone,' she continued, 'but I thought proper to bide at home. Young folks are always the better for an elder's over-looking; and Hareton, with all his bashfulness, isn't a model of nice behaviour. I let him know that his cousin would very likely sit with us, and she had been always used to see the Sabbath respected; so he had as good leave his guns and bits of indoor work alone, while she stayed. He coloured up at the news, and cast his eyes over his hands and clothes. The train-oil and gunpowder were shoved out of sight in a minute. I saw he meant to give her his company; and I guessed, by his way, he wanted to be presentable; so, laughing, as I durst not laugh when the master is by, I offered to help him, if he would, and joked at his confusion. He grew sullen, and began to swear.

'Now, Mrs. Dean,' Zillah went on, seeing me not pleased by her manner, 'you happen think your young lady too fine for Mr. Hareton; and happen you're right: but I own I should love well to bring her pride a peg lower. And what will all her learning and her daintiness do for her, now? She's as poor as you or I: poorer, I'll be bound: you're saying, and I'm doing my little all that road.'

Hareton allowed Zillah to give him her aid; and she flattered him into a good humour; so, when Catherine came, half forgetting her former insults, he tried to make himself agreeable, by the housekeeper's account.

'Missis walked in,' she said, 'as chill as an icicle, and as high as a princess. I got up and offered her my seat in the arm-chair. No, she turned up her nose at my civility. Earnshaw rose, too, and bid her come to the settle, and sit close by the fire: he was sure she was starved.

'"I've been starved a month and more," she answered, resting on the word as scornful as she could.

'And she got a chair for herself, and placed it at a distance from both of us. Having sat till she was warm, she began to look round, and discovered a number of books on the dresser; she was instantly upon her feet again, stretching to reach them: but they were too high up. Her cousin, after watching her endeavours a while, at last summoned courage to help her; she held her frock, and he filled it with the first that came to hand.

'That was a great advance for the lad. She didn't thank him; still, he felt gratified that she had accepted his assistance, and ventured to stand behind as she examined them, and even to stoop and point out what struck his fancy in certain old pictures which they contained; nor was he daunted by the saucy style in which she jerked the page from his finger: he contented himself with going a bit farther back and looking at her instead of the book. She continued reading, or seeking for something to read. His attention became, by degrees, quite centred in the study of her thick silky curls: her face he couldn't see, and she couldn't see him. And, perhaps, not quite awake to what he did, but attracted like a child to a candle, at last he proceeded from staring to touching; he put out his hand and stroked one curl, as gently as if it were a bird. He might have stuck a knife into her neck, she started round in such a taking.

'"Get away this moment! How dare you touch me? Why are you stopping there?" she cried, in a tone of disgust. "I can't endure you! I'll go upstairs again, if you come near me."

'Mr. Hareton recoiled, looking as foolish as he could do: he sat down in the settle very quiet, and she continued turning over her volumes another half hour; finally, Earnshaw crossed over, and whispered to me.

'"Will you ask her to read to us, Zillah? I'm stalled of doing naught; and I do like — I could like to hear her! Dunnot say I wanted it, but ask of yourseln."

'"Mr. Hareton wishes you would read to us, ma'am," I said, immediately. "He'd take it very kind — he'd be much obliged."

'She frowned; and looking up, answered —

'"Mr. Hareton, and the whole set of you, will be good enough to understand that I reject any pretence at kindness you have the hypocrisy to offer! I despise you, and will have nothing to say to any of you! When I would have given my life for one kind word, even to see one of your faces, you all kept off. But I won't complain to you! I'm driven down here by the cold; not either to amuse you or enjoy your society."

'"What could I ha' done?" began Earnshaw. "How was I to blame?"

'"Oh! you are an exception," answered Mrs. Heathcliff. "I never missed such a concern as you."

'"But I offered more than once, and asked," he said, kindling up at her pertness, "I asked Mr. Heathcliff to let me wake for you — "

'"Be silent! I'll go out of doors, or anywhere, rather than have your disagreeable voice in my ear!" said my lady.

'Hareton muttered she might go to hell, for him! and unslinging his gun, restrained himself from his Sunday occupations no longer. He talked now, freely enough; and she presently saw fit to retreat to her solitude: but the frost had set in, and, in spite of her pride, she was forced to condescend to our company, more and more. However, I took care there should be no further scorning at my good nature: ever since, I've been as stiff as herself; and she has no lover or liker among us: and she does not deserve one; for, let them say the least word to her, and she'll curl back without respect of any one. She'll snap at the master himself, and as good as dares him to thrash her; and the more hurt she gets, the more venomous she grows.'

At first, on hearing this account from Zillah, I determined to leave my situation, take a cottage, and get Catherine to come and live with me: but Mr. Heathcliff would as soon permit that as he would set up Hareton in an independent house; and I can see no remedy, at present, unless she could marry again; and that scheme it does not come within my province to arrange.

* * * * *

Thus ended Mrs. Dean's story. Notwithstanding the doctor's prophecy, I am rapidly recovering strength; and though it be only the second week in January, I propose getting out on horseback in a day or two, and riding over to Wuthering Heights, to inform my landlord that I shall spend the next six months in London; and, if he likes, he may look out for another tenant to take the place after October. I would not pass another winter here for much.

CHAPTER XXXI

Yesterday was bright, calm, and frosty. I went to the Heights as I proposed: my housekeeper entreated me to bear a little note from her to her young lady, and I did not refuse, for the worthy woman was not conscious of anything odd in her request. The front door stood open, but the jealous gate was fastened, as at my last visit; I knocked and invoked Earnshaw from among the garden-beds; he unchained it, and I entered. The fellow is as handsome a rustic as need be seen. I took particular notice of him this time; but then he does his best apparently to make the least of his advantages.

I asked if Mr. Heathcliff were at home? He answered, No; but he would be in at dinner-time. It was eleven o'clock, and I announced my intention of going in and waiting for him; at which he immediately flung down his tools and accompanied me, in the office of watchdog, not as a substitute for the host.

We entered together; Catherine was there, making herself useful in preparing some vegetables for the approaching meal; she looked more sulky and less spirited than when I had seen her first. She hardly raised her eyes to notice me, and continued her employment with the same disregard to common forms of politeness as before; never returning my bow and good-morning by the slightest acknowledgment.

'She does not seem so amiable,' I thought, 'as Mrs. Dean would persuade me to believe. She's a beauty, it is true; but not an angel.'

Earnshaw surlily bid her remove her things to the kitchen. 'Remove them yourself,' she said, pushing them from her as soon as she had done; and retiring to a stool by the window, where she began to carve figures of birds and beasts out of the turnip-parings in her lap. I approached her, pretending to desire a view of the garden; and, as I fancied, adroitly dropped Mrs. Dean's note on to her knee, unnoticed by Hareton — but she asked aloud, 'What is that?' And chucked it off.

'A letter from your old acquaintance, the housekeeper at the Grange,' I answered; annoyed at her exposing my kind deed, and fearful lest it should be imagined a missive of my own. She would gladly have gathered it up at this information, but Hareton beat her; he seized and put it in his waistcoat, saying Mr. Heathcliff should look at it first. Thereat, Catherine silently turned her face from us, and, very stealthily, drew out her pocket-handkerchief and applied it to her eyes; and her cousin, after struggling awhile to keep down his softer feelings, pulled out the letter and flung it on the floor beside her, as ungraciously as he could. Catherine caught and perused it eagerly; then she put a few questions to me concerning the inmates, rational and irrational, of her former home; and gazing towards the hills, murmured in soliloquy:

'I should like to be riding Minny down there! I should like to be climbing up there! Oh! I'm tired — I'm *stalled*, Hareton!' And she leant her pretty head back against the sill, with half a yawn and half a sigh, and lapsed into an aspect of abstracted sadness: neither caring nor knowing whether we remarked her.

'Mrs. Heathcliff,' I said, after sitting some time mute, 'you are not aware that I am an acquaintance of yours? so intimate that I think it strange you won't come and speak to me. My housekeeper never wearies of talking about and praising you; and she'll be greatly disappointed if I return with no news of or from you, except that you received her letter and said nothing!'

She appeared to wonder at this speech, and asked, —

'Does Ellen like you?'

'Yes, very well,' I replied, hesitatingly.

'You must tell her,' she continued, 'that I would answer her letter, but I have no materials for writing: not even a book from which I might tear a leaf.'

'No books!' I exclaimed. 'How do you contrive to live here without them? if I may take the liberty to inquire. Though provided with a large library, I'm frequently very dull at the Grange; take my books away, and I should be desperate!'

'I was always reading, when I had them,' said Catherine; 'and Mr. Heathcliff never reads; so he took it into his head to destroy my books. I have not had a glimpse of one for weeks. Only once, I searched through Joseph's store of theology, to his great irritation; and once, Hareton, I came upon a secret stock in your room — some Latin and Greek, and some tales and poetry: all old friends. I brought the last here — and you gathered them, as a magpie gathers silver spoons, for the mere love of stealing! They are of no use to you; or else you concealed them in the bad spirit that, as you cannot enjoy them, nobody else shall. Perhaps *your* envy counselled Mr. Heathcliff to rob me of my treasures? But I've most of them written on my brain and printed in my heart, and you cannot deprive me of those!'

Earnshaw blushed crimson when his cousin made this revelation of his private literary accumulations, and stammered an indignant denial of her accusations.

'Mr. Hareton is desirous of increasing his amount of knowledge,' I said, coming to his rescue. 'He is not *envious*, but *emulous* of your attainments. He'll be a clever scholar in a few years.'

'And he wants me to sink into a dunce, meantime,' answered Catherine. 'Yes, I hear him trying to spell and read to himself, and pretty blunders he makes! I wish you would repeat Chevy Chase as you did yesterday: it was extremely funny. I heard you; and I heard you turning over the dictionary to seek out the hard words, and then cursing because you couldn't read their explanations!'

The young man evidently thought it too bad that he should be laughed at for his ignorance, and then laughed at for trying to remove it. I had a similar notion; and, remembering Mrs. Dean's anecdote of his first attempt at enlightening the darkness in which he had been reared, I observed, — 'But, Mrs. Heathcliff, we have each had a commencement, and each stumbled and tottered on the threshold; had our teachers scorned instead of aiding us, we should stumble and totter yet.'

'Oh!' she replied, 'I don't wish to limit his acquirements: still, he has no right to appropriate what is mine, and make it ridiculous to me with his vile mistakes and mispronunciations! Those books, both prose and verse, are consecrated to me by other associations; and I hate to have them debased and profaned in his mouth! Besides, of all, he has selected my favourite pieces that I love the most to repeat, as if out of deliberate malice.'

Hareton's chest heaved in silence a minute: he laboured under a severe sense of mortification and wrath, which it was no easy task to suppress. I rose, and, from a gentlemanly idea of relieving his embarrassment, took up my station in the doorway, surveying the external prospect as I stood. He followed my example, and left the room; but presently reappeared, bearing half a dozen volumes in his hands, which he threw into Catherine's lap, exclaiming, — 'Take them! I never want to hear, or read, or think of them again!'

'I won't have them now,' she answered. 'I shall connect them with you, and hate them.'

She opened one that had obviously been often turned over, and read a portion in the drawling tone of a beginner; then laughed, and threw it from her. 'And listen,' she continued, provokingly, commencing a verse of an old ballad in the same fashion.

But his self-love would endure no further torment: I heard, and not altogether disapprovingly, a manual check given to her saucy tongue. The little wretch had done her utmost to hurt her cousin's sensitive though uncultivated feelings, and a physical argument was the only mode he had of balancing the account, and repaying its effects on the inflictor. He afterwards gathered the books and hurled them on the fire. I read in his countenance what anguish it was to offer that sacrifice to spleen. I fancied that as they consumed, he recalled the pleasure they had already imparted, and the triumph and ever-increasing pleasure he had anticipated from them; and I fancied I guessed the incitement to his secret studies also. He had been content with daily labour and rough animal enjoyments, till Catherine crossed his path. Shame at her scorn, and hope of her approval, were his first prompters to higher pursuits; and instead of guarding him from one and winning him to the other, his endeavours to raise himself had produced just the contrary result.

'Yes that's all the good that such a brute as you can get from them!' cried Catherine, sucking her damaged lip, and watching the conflagration with indignant eyes.

'You'd *better* hold your tongue, now,' he answered fiercely.

And his agitation precluded further speech; he advanced hastily to the entrance, where I made way for him to pass. But ere he had crossed the door-stones, Mr. Heathcliff, coming up the causeway, encountered him, and laying hold of his shoulder asked, — 'What's to do now, my lad?'

'Naught, naught,' he said, and broke away to enjoy his grief and anger in solitude.

Heathcliff gazed after him, and sighed.

'It will be odd if I thwart myself,' he muttered, unconscious that I was behind him. 'But when I look for his father in his face, I find *her* every day more! How the devil is he so like? I can hardly bear to see him.'

He bent his eyes to the ground, and walked moodily in. There was a restless, anxious expression in his countenance. I had never remarked there before; and he looked sparer in person. His daughter-in-law, on perceiving him through the window, immediately escaped to the kitchen, so that I remained alone.

'I'm glad to see you out of doors again, Mr. Lockwood,' he said, in reply to my greeting; 'from selfish motives partly: I don't think I could readily supply your loss in this desolation. I've wondered more than once what brought you here.'

'An idle whim, I fear, sir,' was my answer; 'or else an idle whim is going to spirit me away. I shall set out for London next week; and I must give you warning that I feel no disposition to retain Thrushcross Grange beyond the twelve months I agreed to rent it. I believe I shall not live there any more.'

'Oh, indeed; you're tired of being banished from the world, are you?' he said. 'But if you be coming to plead off paying for a place you won't occupy, your journey is useless: I never relent in exacting my due from any one.'

'I'm coming to plead off nothing about it,' I exclaimed, considerably irritated. 'Should you wish it, I'll settle with you now,' and I drew my note-book from my pocket.

'No, no,' he replied, coolly; 'you'll leave sufficient behind to cover your debts, if you fail to return: I'm not in such a hurry. Sit down and take your dinner with us; a guest that is safe from repeating his visit can generally be made welcome. Catherine! bring the things in: where are you?'

Catherine reappeared, bearing a tray of knives and forks.

'You may get your dinner with Joseph,' muttered Heathcliff, aside, 'and remain in the kitchen till he is gone.'

She obeyed his directions very punctually: perhaps she had no temptation to transgress. Living among clowns and misanthropists, she probably cannot appreciate a better class of people when she meets them.

With Mr. Heathcliff, grim and saturnine, on the one hand, and Hareton, absolutely dumb, on the other, I made a somewhat cheerless meal, and bade adieu early. I would have departed by the back way, to get a last glimpse of Catherine and annoy old Joseph; but Hareton received orders to lead up my horse, and my host himself escorted me to the door, so I could not fulfil my wish.

‘How dreary life gets over in that house!’ I reflected, while riding down the road. ‘What a realisation of something more romantic than a fairy tale it would have been for Mrs. Linton Heathcliff, had she and I struck up an attachment, as her good nurse desired, and migrated together into the stirring atmosphere of the town!’

CHAPTER XXXII

1802. — This September I was invited to devastate the moors of a friend in the north, and on my journey to his abode, I unexpectedly came within fifteen miles of Gimmerton. The ostler at a roadside public-house was holding a pail of water to refresh my horses, when a cart of very green oats, newly reaped, passed by, and he remarked, — 'Yon's frough Gimmerton, nah! They're allas three wick' after other folk wi' ther harvest.'

'Gimmerton?' I repeated — my residence in that locality had already grown dim and dreamy. 'Ah! I know. How far is it from this?'

'Happen fourteen mile o'er th' hills; and a rough road,' he answered.

A sudden impulse seized me to visit Thrushcross Grange. It was scarcely noon, and I conceived that I might as well pass the night under my own roof as in an inn. Besides, I could spare a day easily to arrange matters with my landlord, and thus save myself the trouble of invading the neighbourhood again. Having rested awhile, I directed my servant to inquire the way to the village; and, with great fatigue to our beasts, we managed the distance in some three hours.

I left him there, and proceeded down the valley alone. The grey church looked greyer, and the lonely churchyard lonelier. I distinguished a moor-sheep cropping the short turf on the graves. It was sweet, warm weather — too warm for travelling; but the heat did not hinder me from enjoying the delightful scenery above and below: had I seen it nearer August, I'm sure it would have tempted me to waste a month among its solitudes. In winter nothing more dreary, in summer nothing more divine, than those glens shut in by hills, and those bluff, bold swells of heath.

I reached the Grange before sunset, and knocked for admittance; but the family had retreated into the back premises, I judged, by one thin, blue wreath, curling from the kitchen chimney, and they did not hear. I rode into the court. Under the porch, a girl of nine or ten sat knitting, and an old woman reclined on the housesteps, smoking a meditative pipe.

'Is Mrs. Dean within?' I demanded of the dame.

'Mistress Dean? Nay!' she answered, 'she doesn't bide here: shoo's up at th' Heights.'

'Are you the housekeeper, then?' I continued.

'Eea, aw keep th' hause,' she replied.

'Well, I'm Mr. Lockwood, the master. Are there any rooms to lodge me in, I wonder? I wish to stay all night.'

'T' maister!' she cried in astonishment. 'Whet, whoiver knew yah wur coming? Yah sud ha' send word. They's nowt norther dry nor mensful abaht t' place: nowt there isn't!'

She threw down her pipe and bustled in, the girl followed, and I entered too; soon perceiving that her report was true, and, moreover, that I had almost upset her wits by my unwelcome apparition, I bade her be composed. I would go out for a walk; and, meantime she must try to prepare a corner of a sitting-room for me to sup in, and a bedroom to sleep in. No sweeping and dusting, only good fire and dry sheets were necessary. She seemed willing to do her best; though she thrust the hearth-brush into the grates in mistake for the poker, and malappropriated several other articles of her craft: but I retired, confiding in her energy for a resting-place against my return. Wuthering Heights was the goal of my proposed excursion. An afterthought brought me back, when I had quitted the court.

'All well at the Heights?' I inquired of the woman.

'Eea, f'r owt ee knaw!' she answered, skurrying away with a pan of hot cinders.

I would have asked why Mrs. Dean had deserted the Grange, but it was impossible to delay her at such a crisis, so I turned away and made my exit, rambling leisurely along, with the glow of a sinking sun behind, and the mild glory of a rising moon in front — one fading, and the other brightening — as I quitted the park, and climbed the stony by-road branching off to Mr. Heathcliff's dwelling. Before I arrived in sight of it, all that remained of day was a beamless amber light along the west: but I could see every pebble on the path, and every blade of grass, by that splendid moon. I had neither to climb the gate nor to knock — it yielded to my hand. That is an improvement, I thought. And I noticed another, by the aid of my nostrils; a fragrance of stocks and wallflowers wafted on the air from amongst the homely fruit-trees.

Both doors and lattices were open; and yet, as is usually the case in a coal-district, a fine red fire illumined the chimney: the comfort which the eye derives from it renders the extra heat endurable. But the house of Wuthering Heights is so large that the inmates have plenty of space for withdrawing out of its influence; and accordingly what inmates there were had stationed themselves not far from one of the windows. I could both see them and hear them talk before I entered, and looked and listened in consequence; being moved thereto by a mingled sense of curiosity and envy, that grew as I lingered.

'Con-*trary*!' said a voice as sweet as a silver bell. 'That for the third time, you dunce! I'm not going to tell you again. Recollect, or I'll pull your hair!'

'Contrary, then,' answered another, in deep but softened tones. 'And now, kiss me, for minding so well.'

'No, read it over first correctly, without a single mistake.'

The male speaker began to read: he was a young man, respectably dressed and seated at a table, having a book before him. His handsome features glowed with pleasure, and his eyes kept impatiently wandering from the page to a small white hand over his shoulder, which recalled him by a smart slap on the cheek, whenever its owner detected such signs of inattention. Its owner stood behind; her light, shining ringlets blending, at intervals, with his brown looks, as she bent to superintend his studies; and her face — it was lucky he could not see her face, or he would never have been so steady. I could; and I bit my lip in spite, at having thrown away the chance I might have had of doing something besides staring at its smiting beauty.

The task was done, not free from further blunders; but the pupil claimed a reward, and received at least five kisses; which, however, he generously returned. Then they came to the door, and from their conversation I judged they were about to issue out and have a walk on the moors. I supposed I should be condemned in Hareton Earnshaw's heart, if not by his mouth, to the lowest pit in the infernal regions if I showed my unfortunate person in his neighbourhood then; and feeling very mean and malignant, I skulked round to seek refuge in the kitchen. There was unobstructed admittance on that side also; and at the door sat my old friend Nelly Dean, sewing and singing a song; which was often interrupted from within by harsh words of scorn and intolerance, uttered in far from musical accents.

'I'd rayther, by th' haulf, hev' 'em swearing i' my lugs fro'h morn to neeght, nor hearken ye hahsiver!' said the tenant of the kitchen, in answer to an unheard speech of Nelly's. 'It's a blazing shame, that I cannot oppen t' blessed Book, but yah set up them glories to sattan, and all t' flaysome wickednesses that iver were born into th' warld! Oh! ye're a raight nowt; and shoo's another; and that poor lad 'll be lost atween ye. Poor lad!' he added, with a groan; 'he's witched: I'm sartin on't. Oh, Lord, judge 'em, for there's norther law nor justice among wer rullers!'

'No! or we should be sitting in flaming fagots, I suppose,' retorted the singer. 'But wisht, old man, and read your Bible like a Christian, and never mind me. This is "Fairy Annie's Wedding" — a bonny tune — it goes to a dance.'

Mrs. Dean was about to recommence, when I advanced; and recognising me directly, she jumped to her feet, crying — 'Why, bless you, Mr. Lockwood! How could you think of returning in this way? All's shut up at Thrushcross Grange. You should have given us notice!'

'I've arranged to be accommodated there, for as long as I shall stay,' I answered. 'I depart again to-morrow. And how are you transplanted here, Mrs. Dean? tell me that.'

'Zillah left, and Mr. Heathcliff wished me to come, soon after you went to London, and stay till you returned. But, step in, pray! Have you walked from Gimmerton this evening?'

'From the Grange,' I replied; 'and while they make me lodging room there, I want to finish my business with your master; because I don't think of having another opportunity in a hurry.'

'What business, sir?' said Nelly, conducting me into the house. 'He's gone out at present, and won't return soon.'

'About the rent,' I answered.

'Oh! then it is with Mrs. Heathcliff you must settle,' she observed; 'or rather with me. She has not learnt to manage her affairs yet, and I act for her: there's nobody else.'

I looked surprised.

'Ah! you have not heard of Heathcliff's death, I see,' she continued.

'Heathcliff dead!' I exclaimed, astonished. 'How long ago?'

'Three months since: but sit down, and let me take your hat, and I'll tell you all about it. Stop, you have had nothing to eat, have you?'

'I want nothing: I have ordered supper at home. You sit down too. I never dreamt of his dying! Let me hear how it came to pass. You say you don't expect them back for some time — the young people?'

'No — I have to scold them every evening for their late rambles: but they don't care for me. At least, have a drink of our old ale; it will do you good: you seem weary.'

She hastened to fetch it before I could refuse, and I heard Joseph asking whether 'it warn't a crying scandal that she should have followers at her time of life? And then, to get them jocks out o' t' maister's cellar! He fair shaamed to 'bide still and see it.'

She did not stay to retaliate, but re-entered in a minute, bearing a reaming silver pint, whose contents I lauded with becoming earnestness. And afterwards she furnished me with the sequel of Heathcliff's history. He had a 'queer' end, as she expressed it.

I was summoned to Wuthering Heights, within a fortnight of your leaving us, she said; and I obeyed joyfully, for Catherine's sake. My first interview with her grieved and shocked me: she had altered so much since our separation. Mr. Heathcliff did not explain his reasons for taking a new mind about my coming here; he only told me he wanted me, and he was tired of seeing Catherine: I must make the little parlour my sitting-room, and keep her with me. It was enough if he were obliged to see her once or twice a day. She seemed pleased at this arrangement; and, by degrees, I smuggled over a great number of books, and other articles, that had formed her amusement at the Grange; and flattered myself we should get on in tolerable comfort. The delusion did not last long. Catherine, contented at first, in a brief space grew irritable and restless. For one thing, she was forbidden to move out of the garden, and it fretted her sadly to be confined to its narrow bounds as spring drew on; for another, in following the house, I was forced to quit her frequently, and she complained of loneliness: she preferred quarrelling with Joseph in the kitchen to sitting at peace in her solitude. I did not mind their skirmishes: but Hareton was often obliged to seek the kitchen also, when the master wanted to have the house to himself! and though in the beginning she either left it at his approach, or quietly joined in my occupations, and shunned remarking or addressing him — and though he was always as sullen and silent as possible — after a while, she changed her behaviour, and became incapable of letting him alone: talking at him; commenting on his stupidity and idleness; expressing her wonder how he could endure the life he lived — how he could sit a whole evening staring into the fire, and dozing.

‘He’s just like a dog, is he not, Ellen?’ she once observed, ‘or a cart-horse? He does his work, eats his food, and sleeps eternally! What a blank, dreary mind he must have! Do you ever dream, Hareton? And, if you do, what is it about? But you can’t speak to me!’

Then she looked at him; but he would neither open his mouth nor look again.

‘He’s, perhaps, dreaming now,’ she continued. ‘He twitched his shoulder as Juno twitches hers. Ask him, Ellen.’

‘Mr. Hareton will ask the master to send you up-stairs, if you don’t behave!’ I said. He had not only twitched his shoulder but clenched his fist, as if tempted to use it.

‘I know why Hareton never speaks, when I am in the kitchen,’ she exclaimed, on another occasion. ‘He is afraid I shall laugh at him. Ellen, what do you think? He began to teach himself to read once; and, because I laughed, he burned his books, and dropped it: was he not a fool?’

‘Were not you naughty?’ I said; ‘answer me that.’

‘Perhaps I was,’ she went on; ‘but I did not expect him to be so silly. Hareton, if I gave you a book, would you take it now? I’ll try!’

She placed one she had been perusing on his hand; he flung it off, and muttered, if she did not give over, he would break her neck.

‘Well, I shall put it here,’ she said, ‘in the table-drawer; and I’m going to bed.’

Then she whispered me to watch whether he touched it, and departed. But he would not come near it; and so I informed her in the morning, to her great disappointment. I saw she was sorry for his persevering sulkiness and indolence: her conscience reproved her for frightening him off improving himself: she had done it effectually. But her ingenuity was at work to remedy the injury: while I ironed, or pursued other such stationary employments as I could not well do in the parlour, she would bring some pleasant volume and read it aloud to me. When Hareton was there, she generally paused in an interesting part, and left the book lying about: that she did repeatedly; but he was as obstinate as a mule, and, instead of snatching at her bait, in wet weather he took to smoking with Joseph; and they sat like automatons, one on each side of the fire, the elder happily too deaf to understand her wicked nonsense, as he would have called it, the younger doing his best to seem to disregard it. On fine evenings the latter followed his shooting expeditions, and Catherine yawned and sighed, and teased me to talk to her, and ran off into the court or garden the moment I began; and, as a last resource, cried, and said she was tired of living: her life was useless.

Mr. Heathcliff, who grew more and more disinclined to society, had almost banished Earnshaw from his apartment. Owing to an accident at the commencement of March, he became for some days a fixture in the kitchen. His gun burst while out on the hills by himself; a splinter cut his arm, and he lost a good deal of blood before he could reach home. The consequence was that, perforce, he was condemned to the fireside and tranquillity, till he made it up again. It suited Catherine to have him there: at any rate, it made her hate her room up-stairs more than ever: and she would compel me to find out business below, that she might accompany me.

On Easter Monday, Joseph went to Gimmerton fair with some cattle; and, in the afternoon, I was busy getting up linen in the kitchen. Earnshaw sat, morose as usual, at the chimney corner, and my little mistress was beguiling an idle hour with drawing pictures on the window-panes, varying her amusement by smothered bursts of songs, and whispered ejaculations, and quick glances of annoyance and impatience in the direction of her cousin, who steadfastly smoked, and looked into the grate. At a notice that I could do with her no longer intercepting my light, she removed to the hearthstone. I bestowed little attention on her proceedings, but, presently, I heard her begin — 'I've found out, Hareton, that I want — that I'm glad — that I should like you to be my cousin now, if you had not grown so cross to me, and so rough.'

Hareton returned no answer.

'Hareton, Hareton, Hareton! do you hear?' she continued.

'Get off wi' ye!' he growled, with uncompromising gruffness.

'Let me take that pipe,' she said, cautiously advancing her hand and abstracting it from his mouth.

Before he could attempt to recover it, it was broken, and behind the fire. He swore at her and seized another.

'Stop,' she cried, 'you must listen to me first; and I can't speak while those clouds are floating in my face.'

'Will you go to the devil!' he exclaimed, ferociously, 'and let me be!'

'No,' she persisted, 'I won't: I can't tell what to do to make you talk to me; and you are determined not to understand. When I call you stupid, I don't mean anything: I don't mean that I despise you. Come, you shall take notice of me, Hareton: you are my cousin, and you shall own me.'

'I shall have naught to do wi' you and your mucky pride, and your damned mocking tricks!' he answered. 'I'll go to hell, body and soul, before I look sideways after you again. Side out o' t' gate, now, this minute!'

Catherine frowned, and retreated to the window-seat chewing her lip, and endeavouring, by humming an eccentric tune, to conceal a growing tendency to sob.

'You should be friends with your cousin, Mr. Hareton,' I interrupted, 'since she repents of her sauciness. It would do you a great deal of good: it would make you another man to have her for a companion.'

'A companion!' he cried; 'when she hates me, and does not think me fit to wipe her shoon! Nay, if it made me a king, I'd not be scorned for seeking her good-will any more.'

'It is not I who hate you, it is you who hate me!' wept Cathy, no longer disguising her trouble. 'You hate me as much as Mr. Heathcliff does, and more.'

'You're a damned liar,' began Earnshaw: 'why have I made him angry, by taking your part, then, a hundred times? and that when you sneered at and despised me, and — Go on plaguing me, and I'll step in yonder, and say you worried me out of the kitchen!'

'I didn't know you took my part,' she answered, drying her eyes; 'and I was miserable and bitter at everybody; but now I thank you, and beg you to forgive me: what can I do besides?'

She returned to the hearth, and frankly extended her hand. He blackened and scowled like a thunder-cloud, and kept his fists resolutely clenched, and his gaze fixed on the ground. Catherine, by instinct, must have divined it was obdurate perversity, and not dislike, that prompted this dogged conduct; for, after remaining an instant undecided, she stooped and impressed on his cheek a gentle kiss. The little rogue thought I had not seen her, and, drawing back, she took her former station by the window, quite demurely. I shook my head reprovingly, and then she blushed and whispered — 'Well! what should I have done, Ellen? He wouldn't shake hands, and he wouldn't look: I must show him some way that I like him — that I want to be friends.'

Whether the kiss convinced Hareton, I cannot tell: he was very careful, for some minutes, that his face should not be seen, and when he did raise it, he was sadly puzzled where to turn his eyes.

Catherine employed herself in wrapping a handsome book neatly in white paper, and having tied it with a bit of ribbon, and addressed it to 'Mr. Hareton Earnshaw,' she desired me to be her ambassadress, and convey the present to its destined recipient.

'And tell him, if he'll take it, I'll come and teach him to read it right,' she said; 'and, if he refuse it, I'll go upstairs, and never tease him again.'

I carried it, and repeated the message; anxiously watched by my employer. Hareton would not open his fingers, so I laid it on his knee. He did not strike it off, either. I returned to my work. Catherine leaned her head and arms on the table, till she heard the slight rustle of the covering being removed; then she stole away, and quietly seated herself beside her cousin. He trembled, and his face glowed: all his rudeness and all his surly harshness had deserted him: he could not summon courage, at first, to utter a syllable in reply to her questioning look, and her murmured petition.

'Say you forgive me, Hareton, do. You can make me so happy by speaking that little word.'

He muttered something inaudible.

'And you'll be my friend?' added Catherine, interrogatively.

'Nay, you'll be ashamed of me every day of your life,' he answered; 'and the more ashamed, the more you know me; and I cannot bide it.'

‘So you won’t be my friend?’ she said, smiling as sweet as honey, and creeping close up.

I overheard no further distinguishable talk, but, on looking round again, I perceived two such radiant countenances bent over the page of the accepted book, that I did not doubt the treaty had been ratified on both sides; and the enemies were, thenceforth, sworn allies.

The work they studied was full of costly pictures; and those and their position had charm enough to keep them unmoved till Joseph came home. He, poor man, was perfectly aghast at the spectacle of Catherine seated on the same bench with Hareton Earnshaw, leaning her hand on his shoulder; and confounded at his favourite’s endurance of her proximity: it affected him too deeply to allow an observation on the subject that night. His emotion was only revealed by the immense sighs he drew, as he solemnly spread his large Bible on the table, and overlaid it with dirty bank-notes from his pocket-book, the produce of the day’s transactions. At length he summoned Hareton from his seat.

‘Tak’ these in to t’ maister, lad,’ he said, ‘and bide there. I’s gang up to my own rahm. This hoile’s neither mensful nor seemly for us: we mun side out and seearch another.’

‘Come, Catherine,’ I said, ‘we must “side out” too: I’ve done my ironing. Are you ready to go?’

‘It is not eight o’clock!’ she answered, rising unwillingly.

‘Hareton, I’ll leave this book upon the chimney-piece, and I’ll bring some more to-morrow.’

‘Ony books that yah leave, I shall tak’ into th’ hahse,’ said Joseph, ‘and it’ll be mitch if yah find ’em agean; soa, yah may plase yerseln!’

Cathy threatened that his library should pay for hers; and, smiling as she passed Hareton, went singing up-stairs: lighter of heart, I venture to say, than ever she had been under that roof before; except, perhaps, during her earliest visits to Linton.

The intimacy thus commenced grew rapidly; though it encountered temporary interruptions. Earnshaw was not to be civilized with a wish, and my young lady was no philosopher, and no paragon of patience; but both their minds tending to the same point — one loving and desiring to esteem, and the other loving and desiring to be esteemed — they contrived in the end to reach it.

You see, Mr. Lockwood, it was easy enough to win Mrs. Heathcliff’s heart. But now, I’m glad you did not try. The crown of all my wishes will be the union of those two. I shall envy no one on their wedding day: there won’t be a happier woman than myself in England!

CHAPTER XXXIII

On the morrow of that Monday, Earnshaw being still unable to follow his ordinary employments, and therefore remaining about the house, I speedily found it would be impracticable to retain my charge beside me, as heretofore. She got downstairs before me, and out into the garden, where she had seen her cousin performing some easy work; and when I went to bid them come to breakfast, I saw she had persuaded him to clear a large space of ground from currant and gooseberry bushes, and they were busy planning together an importation of plants from the Grange.

I was terrified at the devastation which had been accomplished in a brief half-hour; the black-currant trees were the apple of Joseph's eye, and she had just fixed her choice of a flower-bed in the midst of them.

'There! That will be all shown to the master,' I exclaimed, 'the minute it is discovered. And what excuse have you to offer for taking such liberties with the garden? We shall have a fine explosion on the head of it: see if we don't! Mr. Hareton, I wonder you should have no more wit than to go and make that mess at her bidding!'

'I'd forgotten they were Joseph's,' answered Earnshaw, rather puzzled; 'but I'll tell him I did it.'

We always ate our meals with Mr. Heathcliff. I held the mistress's post in making tea and carving; so I was indispensable at table. Catherine usually sat by me, but to-day she stole nearer to Hareton; and I presently saw she would have no more discretion in her friendship than she had in her hostility.

'Now, mind you don't talk with and notice your cousin too much,' were my whispered instructions as we entered the room. 'It will certainly annoy Mr. Heathcliff, and he'll be mad at you both.'

'I'm not going to,' she answered.

The minute after, she had sidled to him, and was sticking primroses in his plate of porridge.

He dared not speak to her there: he dared hardly look; and yet she went on teasing, till he was twice on the point of being provoked to laugh. I frowned, and then she glanced towards the master: whose mind was occupied on other subjects than his company, as his countenance evinced; and she grew serious for an instant, scrutinizing him with deep gravity. Afterwards she turned, and recommenced her nonsense; at last, Hareton uttered a smothered laugh. Mr. Heathcliff started; his eye rapidly surveyed our faces, Catherine met it with her accustomed look of nervousness and yet defiance, which he abhorred.

'It is well you are out of my reach,' he exclaimed. 'What fiend possesses you to stare back at me, continually, with those infernal eyes? Down with them! and don't remind me of your existence again. I thought I had cured you of laughing.'

'It was me,' muttered Hareton.

'What do you say?' demanded the master.

Hareton looked at his plate, and did not repeat the confession. Mr. Heathcliff looked at him a bit, and then silently resumed his breakfast and his interrupted musing. We had nearly finished, and the two young people prudently shifted wider asunder, so I anticipated no further disturbance during that sitting: when Joseph appeared at the door, revealing by his quivering lip and furious eyes that the outrage committed on his precious shrubs was detected. He must have seen Cathy and her cousin about the spot before he examined it, for while his jaws worked like those of a cow chewing its cud, and rendered his speech difficult to understand, he began: —

'I mun hev' my wage, and I mun goa! I *hed* aimed to dee wheare I'd sarved fur sixty year; and I thowt I'd lug my books up into t' garret, and all my bits o' stuff, and they sud hev' t' kitchen to theirseln; for t' sake o' quietness. It wur hard to gie up my awn hearthstun, but I thowt I *could* do that! But nah, shoo's taan my garden fro' me, and by th' heart, maister, I cannot stand it! Yah may bend to th' yoak an ye will — I noan used to 't, and an old man doesn't sooin get used to new barthens. I'd rayther arn my bite an' my sup wi' a hammer in th' road!'

'Now, now, idiot!' interrupted Heathcliff, 'cut it short! What's your grievance? I'll interfere in no quarrels between you and Nelly. She may thrust you into the coal-hole for anything I care.'

'It's noan Nelly!' answered Joseph. 'I sudn't shift for Nelly — nasty ill nowt as shoo is. Thank God! *shoo* cannot stale t' sowl o' nob'dy! Shoo wer niver soa handsome, but what a body mud look at her 'bout winking. It's yon flaysome, graceless quean, that's witched our lad, wi' her bold een and her forrard ways — till — Nay! it fair brusts my heart! He's forgotten all I've done for him, and made on him, and goan and riven up a whole row o' t' grandest currant-trees i' t' garden!' and here he lamented outright; unmanned by a sense of his bitter injuries, and Earnshaw's ingratitude and dangerous condition.

'Is the fool drunk?' asked Mr. Heathcliff. 'Hareton, is it you he's finding fault with?'

'I've pulled up two or three bushes,' replied the young man; 'but I'm going to set 'em again.'

'And why have you pulled them up?' said the master.

Catherine wisely put in her tongue.

'We wanted to plant some flowers there,' she cried. 'I'm the only person to blame, for I wished him to do it.'

'And who the devil gave *you* leave to touch a stick about the place?' demanded her father-in-law, much surprised. 'And who ordered *you* to obey her?' he added, turning to Hareton.

The latter was speechless; his cousin replied — 'You shouldn't grudge a few yards of earth for me to ornament, when you have taken all my land!'

'Your land, insolent slut! You never had any,' said Heathcliff.

'And my money,' she continued; returning his angry glare, and meantime biting a piece of crust, the remnant of her breakfast.

'Silence!' he exclaimed. 'Get done, and begone!'

'And Hareton's land, and his money,' pursued the reckless thing. 'Hareton and I are friends now; and I shall tell him all about you!'

The master seemed confounded a moment: he grew pale, and rose up, eyeing her all the while, with an expression of mortal hate.

'If you strike me, Hareton will strike you,' she said; 'so you may as well sit down.'

'If Hareton does not turn you out of the room, I'll strike him to hell,' thundered Heathcliff. 'Damnable witch! dare you pretend to rouse him against me? Off with her! Do you hear? Fling her into the kitchen! I'll kill her, Ellen Dean, if you let her come into my sight again!'

Hareton tried, under his breath, to persuade her to go.

'Drag her away!' he cried, savagely. 'Are you staying to talk?' And he approached to execute his own command.

'He'll not obey you, wicked man, any more,' said Catherine; 'and he'll soon detest you as much as I do.'

'Wisht! wisht!' muttered the young man, reproachfully; 'I will not hear you speak so to him. Have done.'

'But you won't let him strike me?' she cried.

'Come, then,' he whispered earnestly.

It was too late: Heathcliff had caught hold of her.

'Now, *you* go!' he said to Earnshaw. 'Accursed witch! this time she has provoked me when I could not bear it; and I'll make her repent it for ever!'

He had his hand in her hair; Hareton attempted to release her locks, entreating him not to hurt her that once. Heathcliff's black eyes flashed; he seemed ready to tear Catherine in pieces, and I was just worked up to risk coming to the rescue, when of a sudden his fingers relaxed; he shifted his grasp from her head to her arm, and gazed intently in her face. Then he drew his hand over his eyes, stood a moment to collect himself apparently, and turning anew to Catherine, said, with assumed calmness — 'You must learn to avoid putting me in a passion, or I shall really murder you some time! Go with Mrs. Dean, and keep with her; and confine your insolence to her ears. As to Hareton Earnshaw, if I see him listen to you, I'll send him seeking his bread where he can get it! Your love will make him an outcast and a beggar. Nelly, take her; and leave me, all of you! Leave me!'

I led my young lady out: she was too glad of her escape to resist; the other followed, and Mr. Heathcliff had the room to himself till dinner. I had counselled Catherine to dine up-stairs; but, as soon as he perceived her vacant seat, he sent me to call her. He spoke to none of us, ate very little, and went out directly afterwards, intimating that he should not return before evening.

The two new friends established themselves in the house during his absence; where I heard Hareton sternly check his cousin, on her offering a revelation of her father-in-law's conduct to his father. He said he wouldn't suffer a word to be uttered in his disparagement: if he were the devil, it didn't signify; he would stand by him; and he'd rather she would abuse himself, as she used to, than begin on Mr. Heathcliff. Catherine was waxing cross at this; but he found means to make her hold her tongue, by asking how she would like *him* to speak ill of her father? Then she comprehended that Earnshaw took the master's reputation home to himself; and was attached by ties stronger than reason could break — chains, forged by habit, which it would be cruel to attempt to loosen. She showed a good heart, thenceforth, in avoiding both complaints and expressions of antipathy concerning Heathcliff; and confessed to me her sorrow that she had endeavoured to raise a bad spirit between him and Hareton: indeed, I don't believe she has ever breathed a syllable, in the latter's hearing, against her oppressor since.

When this slight disagreement was over, they were friends again, and as busy as possible in their several occupations of pupil and teacher. I came in to sit with them, after I had done my work; and I felt so soothed and comforted to watch them, that I did not notice how time got on. You know, they both appeared in a measure my children: I had long been proud of one; and now, I was sure, the other would be a source of equal satisfaction. His honest, warm, and intelligent nature shook off rapidly the clouds of ignorance and degradation in which it had been bred; and Catherine's sincere commendations acted as a spur to his industry. His brightening mind brightened his features, and added spirit and nobility to their aspect: I could hardly fancy it the same individual I had beheld on the day I discovered my little lady at Wuthering Heights, after her expedition to the Crags. While I admired and they laboured, dusk drew on, and with it returned the master. He came upon us quite unexpectedly, entering by the front way, and had a full view of the whole three, ere we could raise our heads to glance at him. Well, I reflected, there was never a pleasanter, or more harmless sight; and it will be a burning shame to scold them. The red fire-light glowed on their two bonny heads, and revealed their faces animated with the eager interest of children; for, though he was twenty-three and she eighteen, each had so much of novelty to feel and learn, that neither experienced nor evinced the sentiments of sober disenchanted maturity.

They lifted their eyes together, to encounter Mr. Heathcliff: perhaps you have never remarked that their eyes are precisely similar, and they are those of Catherine Earnshaw. The present Catherine has no other likeness to her, except a breadth of forehead, and a certain arch of the nostril that makes her appear rather haughty, whether she will or not. With Hareton the resemblance is carried farther: it is singular at all times, *then* it was particularly striking; because his senses were alert, and his mental faculties wakened to unwonted activity. I suppose this resemblance disarmed Mr. Heathcliff: he walked to the hearth in evident agitation; but it quickly subsided as he looked at the young man: or, I should say, altered its character; for it was there yet. He took the book from his hand, and glanced at the open page, then returned it without any observation; merely signing Catherine away: her companion lingered very little behind her, and I was about to depart also, but he bid me sit still.

'It is a poor conclusion, is it not?' he observed, having brooded awhile on the scene he had just witnessed: 'an absurd termination to my violent exertions? I get levers and mattocks to demolish the two houses, and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules, and when everything is ready and in my power, I find the will to lift a slate off either roof has vanished! My old enemies have not beaten me; now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives: I could do it; and none could hinder me. But where is the use? I don't care for striking: I can't take the trouble to raise my hand! That sounds as if I had been labouring the whole time only to exhibit a fine trait of magnanimity. It is far from being the case: I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing.

'Nelly, there is a strange change approaching; I'm in its shadow at present. I take so little interest in my daily life that I hardly remember to eat and drink. Those two who have left the room are the only objects which retain a distinct material appearance to me; and that appearance causes me pain, amounting to agony. About *her* I won't speak; and I don't desire to think; but I earnestly wish she were invisible: her presence invokes only maddening sensations. *He* moves me differently: and yet if I could do it without seeming insane, I'd never see him again! You'll perhaps think me rather inclined to become so,' he added, making an effort to smile, 'if I try to describe the thousand forms of past associations and ideas he awakens or embodies. But you'll not talk of what I tell you; and my mind is so eternally secluded in itself, it is tempting at last to turn it out to another.

'Five minutes ago Hareton seemed a personification of my youth, not a human being; I felt to him in such a variety of ways, that it would have been impossible to have accosted him rationally. In the first place, his startling likeness to Catherine connected him fearfully with her. That, however, which you may suppose the most potent to arrest my imagination, is actually the least: for what is not connected with her to me? and what does not recall her? I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped in the flags! In every cloud, in every tree — filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day — I am surrounded with her image! The most ordinary faces of men and women — my own features — mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her! Well, Hareton's aspect was the ghost of my immortal love; of my wild endeavours to hold my right; my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish —

‘But it is frenzy to repeat these thoughts to you: only it will let you know why, with a reluctance to be always alone, his society is no benefit; rather an aggravation of the constant torment I suffer: and it partly contributes to render me regardless how he and his cousin go on together. I can give them no attention any more.’

‘But what do you mean by a *change*, Mr. Heathcliff?’ I said, alarmed at his manner: though he was neither in danger of losing his senses, nor dying, according to my judgment: he was quite strong and healthy; and, as to his reason, from childhood he had a delight in dwelling on dark things, and entertaining odd fancies. He might have had a monomania on the subject of his departed idol; but on every other point his wits were as sound as mine.

‘I shall not know that till it comes,’ he said; ‘I’m only half conscious of it now.’

‘You have no feeling of illness, have you?’ I asked.

‘No, Nelly, I have not,’ he answered.

‘Then you are not afraid of death?’ I pursued.

‘Afraid? No!’ he replied. ‘I have neither a fear, nor a presentiment, nor a hope of death. Why should I? With my hard constitution and temperate mode of living, and unperilous occupations, I ought to, and probably *shall*, remain above ground till there is scarcely a black hair on my head. And yet I cannot continue in this condition! I have to remind myself to breathe — almost to remind my heart to beat! And it is like bending back a stiff spring: it is by compulsion that I do the slightest act not prompted by one thought; and by compulsion that I notice anything alive or dead, which is not associated with one universal idea. I have a single wish, and my whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it. They have yearned towards it so long, and so unwaveringly, that I’m convinced it will be reached — and soon — because it has devoured my existence: I am swallowed up in the anticipation of its fulfilment. My confessions have not relieved me; but they may account for some otherwise unaccountable phases of humour which I show. O God! It is a long fight; I wish it were over!’

He began to pace the room, muttering terrible things to himself, till I was inclined to believe, as he said Joseph did, that conscience had turned his heart to an earthly hell. I wondered greatly how it would end. Though he seldom before had revealed this state of mind, even by looks, it was his habitual mood, I had no doubt: he asserted it himself; but not a soul, from his general bearing, would have conjectured the fact. You did not when you saw him, Mr. Lockwood: and at the period of which I speak, he was just the same as then; only fonder of continued solitude, and perhaps still more laconic in company.

CHAPTER XXXIV

For some days after that evening Mr. Heathcliff shunned meeting us at meals; yet he would not consent formally to exclude Hareton and Cathy. He had an aversion to yielding so completely to his feelings, choosing rather to absent himself; and eating once in twenty-four hours seemed sufficient sustenance for him.

One night, after the family were in bed, I heard him go downstairs, and out at the front door. I did not hear him re-enter, and in the morning I found he was still away. We were in April then: the weather was sweet and warm, the grass as green as showers and sun could make it, and the two dwarf apple-trees near the southern wall in full bloom. After breakfast, Catherine insisted on my bringing a chair and sitting with my work under the fir-trees at the end of the house; and she beguiled Hareton, who had perfectly recovered from his accident, to dig and arrange her little garden, which was shifted to that corner by the influence of Joseph's complaints. I was comfortably revelling in the spring fragrance around, and the beautiful soft blue overhead, when my young lady, who had run down near the gate to procure some primrose roots for a border, returned only half laden, and informed us that Mr. Heathcliff was coming in. 'And he spoke to me,' she added, with a perplexed countenance.

'What did he say?' asked Hareton.

'He told me to begone as fast as I could,' she answered. 'But he looked so different from his usual look that I stopped a moment to stare at him.'

'How?' he inquired.

'Why, almost bright and cheerful. No, *almost* nothing — *very much* excited, and wild, and glad!' she replied.

'Night-walking amuses him, then,' I remarked, affecting a careless manner: in reality as surprised as she was, and anxious to ascertain the truth of her statement; for to see the master looking glad would not be an every-day spectacle. I framed an excuse to go in. Heathcliff stood at the open door; he was pale, and he trembled: yet, certainly, he had a strange joyful glitter in his eyes, that altered the aspect of his whole face.

'Will you have some breakfast?' I said. 'You must be hungry, rambling about all night!' I wanted to discover where he had been, but I did not like to ask directly.

'No, I'm not hungry,' he answered, averting his head, and speaking rather contemptuously, as if he guessed I was trying to divine the occasion of his good humour.

I felt perplexed: I didn't know whether it were not a proper opportunity to offer a bit of admonition.

'I don't think it right to wander out of doors,' I observed, 'instead of being in bed: it is not wise, at any rate this moist season. I daresay you'll catch a bad cold or a fever: you have something the matter with you now!'

'Nothing but what I can bear,' he replied; 'and with the greatest pleasure, provided you'll leave me alone: get in, and don't annoy me.'

I obeyed: and, in passing, I noticed he breathed as fast as a cat.

'Yes!' I reflected to myself, 'we shall have a fit of illness. I cannot conceive what he has been doing.'

That noon he sat down to dinner with us, and received a heaped-up plate from my hands, as if he intended to make amends for previous fasting.

'I've neither cold nor fever, Nelly,' he remarked, in allusion to my morning's speech; 'and I'm ready to do justice to the food you give me.'

He took his knife and fork, and was going to commence eating, when the inclination appeared to become suddenly extinct. He laid them on the table, looked eagerly towards the window, then rose and went out. We saw him walking to and fro in the garden while we concluded our meal, and Earnshaw said he'd go and ask why he would not dine: he thought we had grieved him some way.

'Well, is he coming?' cried Catherine, when her cousin returned.

'Nay,' he answered; 'but he's not angry: he seemed rarely pleased indeed; only I made him impatient by speaking to him twice; and then he bid me be off to you: he wondered how I could want the company of anybody else.'

I set his plate to keep warm on the fender; and after an hour or two he re-entered, when the room was clear, in no degree calmer: the same unnatural — it was unnatural — appearance of joy under his black brows; the same bloodless hue, and his teeth visible, now and then, in a kind of smile; his frame shivering, not as one shivers with chill or weakness, but as a tight-stretched cord vibrates — a strong thrilling, rather than trembling.

I will ask what is the matter, I thought; or who should? And I exclaimed — 'Have you heard any good news, Mr. Heathcliff? You look uncommonly animated.'

'Where should good news come from to me?' he said. 'I'm animated with hunger; and, seemingly, I must not eat.'

'Your dinner is here,' I returned; 'why won't you get it?'

'I don't want it now,' he muttered, hastily: 'I'll wait till supper. And, Nelly, once for all, let me beg you to warn Hareton and the other away from me. I wish to be troubled by nobody: I wish to have this place to myself.'

'Is there some new reason for this banishment?' I inquired. 'Tell me why you are so queer, Mr. Heathcliff? Where were you last night? I'm not putting the question through idle curiosity, but — '

'You are putting the question through very idle curiosity,' he interrupted, with a laugh. 'Yet I'll answer it. Last night I was on the threshold of hell. To-day, I am within sight of my heaven. I have my eyes on it: hardly three feet to sever me! And now you'd better go! You'll neither see nor hear anything to frighten you, if you refrain from prying.'

Having swept the hearth and wiped the table, I departed; more perplexed than ever.

He did not quit the house again that afternoon, and no one intruded on his solitude; till, at eight o'clock, I deemed it proper, though unsummoned, to carry a candle and his supper to him. He was leaning against the ledge of an open lattice, but not looking out: his face was turned to the interior gloom. The fire had smouldered to ashes; the room was filled with the damp, mild air of the cloudy evening; and so still, that not only the murmur of the beck down Gimmerton was distinguishable, but its ripples and its gurgling over the pebbles, or through the large stones which it could not cover. I uttered an ejaculation of discontent at seeing the dismal grate, and commenced shutting the casements, one after another, till I came to his.

'Must I close this?' I asked, in order to rouse him; for he would not stir.

The light flashed on his features as I spoke. Oh, Mr. Lockwood, I cannot express what a terrible start I got by the momentary view! Those deep black eyes! That smile, and ghastly paleness! It appeared to me, not Mr. Heathcliff, but a goblin; and, in my terror, I let the candle bend towards the wall, and it left me in darkness.

'Yes, close it,' he replied, in his familiar voice. 'There, that is pure awkwardness! Why did you hold the candle horizontally? Be quick, and bring another.'

I hurried out in a foolish state of dread, and said to Joseph — 'The master wishes you to take him a light and rekindle the fire.' For I dared not go in myself again just then.

Joseph rattled some fire into the shovel, and went: but he brought it back immediately, with the supper-tray in his other hand, explaining that Mr. Heathcliff was going to bed, and he wanted nothing to eat till morning. We heard him mount the stairs directly; he did not proceed to his ordinary chamber, but turned into that with the panelled bed: its window, as I mentioned before, is wide enough for anybody to get through; and it struck me that he plotted another midnight excursion, of which he had rather we had no suspicion.

'Is he a ghoul or a vampire?' I mused. I had read of such hideous incarnate demons. And then I set myself to reflect how I had tended him in infancy, and watched him grow to youth, and followed him almost through his whole course; and what absurd nonsense it was to yield to that sense of horror. 'But where did he come from, the little dark thing, harboured by a good man to his bane?' muttered Superstition, as I dozed into unconsciousness. And I began, half dreaming, to weary myself with imagining some fit parentage for him; and, repeating my waking meditations, I tracked his existence over again, with grim variations; at last, picturing his death and funeral: of which, all I can remember is, being exceedingly vexed at having the task of dictating an inscription for his monument, and consulting the sexton about it; and, as he had no surname, and we could not tell his age, we were obliged to content ourselves with the single word, ‘Heathcliff.’ That came true: we were. If you enter the kirkyard, you’ll read, on his headstone, only that, and the date of his death.

Dawn restored me to common sense. I rose, and went into the garden, as soon as I could see, to ascertain if there were any footmarks under his window. There were none. ‘He has stayed at home,’ I thought, ‘and he’ll be all right to-day.’ I prepared breakfast for the household, as was my usual custom, but told Hareton and Catherine to get theirs ere the master came down, for he lay late. They preferred taking it out of doors, under the trees, and I set a little table to accommodate them.

On my re-entrance, I found Mr. Heathcliff below. He and Joseph were conversing about some farming business; he gave clear, minute directions concerning the matter discussed, but he spoke rapidly, and turned his head continually aside, and had the same excited expression, even more exaggerated. When Joseph quitted the room he took his seat in the place he generally chose, and I put a basin of coffee before him. He drew it nearer, and then rested his arms on the table, and looked at the opposite wall, as I supposed, surveying one particular portion, up and down, with glittering, restless eyes, and with such eager interest that he stopped breathing during half a minute together.

‘Come now,’ I exclaimed, pushing some bread against his hand, ‘eat and drink that, while it is hot: it has been waiting near an hour.’

He didn’t notice me, and yet he smiled. I’d rather have seen him gnash his teeth than smile so.

‘Mr. Heathcliff! master!’ I cried, ‘don’t, for God’s sake, stare as if you saw an unearthly vision.’

‘Don’t, for God’s sake, shout so loud,’ he replied. ‘Turn round, and tell me, are we by ourselves?’

‘Of course,’ was my answer; ‘of course we are.’

Still, I involuntarily obeyed him, as if I was not quite sure. With a sweep of his hand he cleared a vacant space in front among the breakfast things, and leant forward to gaze more at his ease.

Now, I perceived he was not looking at the wall; for when I regarded him alone, it seemed exactly that he gazed at something within two yards’ distance. And whatever it was, it communicated, apparently, both pleasure and pain in exquisite extremes: at least the anguished, yet raptured, expression of his countenance suggested that idea. The fancied object was not fixed, either: his eyes pursued it with unwearied diligence, and, even in speaking to me, were never weaned away. I vainly reminded him of his protracted abstinence from food: if he stirred to touch anything in compliance with my entreaties, if he stretched his hand out to get a piece of bread, his fingers clenched before they reached it, and remained on the table, forgetful of their aim.

I sat, a model of patience, trying to attract his absorbed attention from its engrossing speculation; till he grew irritable, and got up, asking why I would not allow him to have his own time in taking his meals? and saying that on the next occasion I needn't wait: I might set the things down and go. Having uttered these words he left the house, slowly sauntered down the garden path, and disappeared through the gate.

The hours crept anxiously by: another evening came. I did not retire to rest till late, and when I did, I could not sleep. He returned after midnight, and, instead of going to bed, shut himself into the room beneath. I listened, and tossed about, and, finally, dressed and descended. It was too irksome to lie there, harassing my brain with a hundred idle misgivings.

I distinguished Mr. Heathcliff's step, restlessly measuring the floor, and he frequently broke the silence by a deep inspiration, resembling a groan. He muttered detached words also; the only one I could catch was the name of Catherine, coupled with some wild term of endearment or suffering; and spoken as one would speak to a person present; low and earnest, and wrung from the depth of his soul. I had not courage to walk straight into the apartment; but I desired to divert him from his reverie, and therefore fell foul of the kitchen fire, stirred it, and began to scrape the cinders. It drew him forth sooner than I expected. He opened the door immediately, and said — 'Nelly, come here — is it morning? Come in with your light.'

'It is striking four,' I answered. 'You want a candle to take up-stairs: you might have lit one at this fire.'

'No, I don't wish to go up-stairs,' he said. 'Come in, and kindle *me* a fire, and do anything there is to do about the room.'

'I must blow the coals red first, before I can carry any,' I replied, getting a chair and the bellows.

He roamed to and fro, meantime, in a state approaching distraction; his heavy sighs succeeding each other so thick as to leave no space for common breathing between.

'When day breaks I'll send for Green,' he said; 'I wish to make some legal inquiries of him while I can bestow a thought on those matters, and while I can act calmly. I have not written my will yet; and how to leave my property I cannot determine. I wish I could annihilate it from the face of the earth.'

'I would not talk so, Mr. Heathcliff,' I interposed. 'Let your will be a while: you'll be spared to repent of your many injustices yet! I never expected that your nerves would be disordered: they are, at present, marvellously so, however; and almost entirely through your own fault. The way you've passed these three last days might knock up a Titan. Do take some food, and some repose. You need only look at yourself in a glass to see how you require both. Your cheeks are hollow, and your eyes blood-shot, like a person starving with hunger and going blind with loss of sleep.'

'It is not my fault that I cannot eat or rest,' he replied. 'I assure you it is through no settled designs. I'll do both, as soon as I possibly can. But you might as well bid a man struggling in the water rest within arms' length of the shore! I must reach it first, and then I'll rest. Well, never mind Mr. Green: as to repenting of my injustices, I've done no injustice, and I repent of nothing. I'm too happy; and yet I'm not happy enough. My soul's bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself.'

'Happy, master?' I cried. 'Strange happiness! If you would hear me without being angry, I might offer some advice that would make you happier.'

'What is that?' he asked. 'Give it.'

'You are aware, Mr. Heathcliff,' I said, 'that from the time you were thirteen years old you have lived a selfish, unchristian life; and probably hardly had a Bible in your hands during all that period. You must have forgotten the contents of the book, and you may not have space to search it now. Could it be hurtful to send for some one — some minister of any denomination, it does not matter which — to explain it, and show you how very far you have erred from its precepts; and how unfit you will be for its heaven, unless a change takes place before you die?'

'I'm rather obliged than angry, Nelly,' he said, 'for you remind me of the manner in which I desire to be buried. It is to be carried to the churchyard in the evening. You and Hareton may, if you please, accompany me: and mind, particularly, to notice that the sexton obeys my directions concerning the two coffins! No minister need come; nor need anything be said over me. — I tell you I have nearly attained *my* heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me.'

'And supposing you persevered in your obstinate fast, and died by that means, and they refused to bury you in the precincts of the kirk?' I said, shocked at his godless indifference. 'How would you like it?'

'They won't do that,' he replied: 'if they did, you must have me removed secretly; and if you neglect it you shall prove, practically, that the dead are not annihilated!'

As soon as he heard the other members of the family stirring he retired to his den, and I breathed freer. But in the afternoon, while Joseph and Hareton were at their work, he came into the kitchen again, and, with a wild look, bid me come and sit in the house: he wanted somebody with him. I declined; telling him plainly that his strange talk and manner frightened me, and I had neither the nerve nor the will to be his companion alone.

'I believe you think me a fiend,' he said, with his dismal laugh: 'something too horrible to live under a decent roof.' Then turning to Catherine, who was there, and who drew behind me at his approach, he added, half sneeringly, — 'Will *you* come, chuck? I'll not hurt you. No! to you I've made myself worse than the devil. Well, there is *one* who won't shrink from my company! By God! she's relentless. Oh, damn it! It's unutterably too much for flesh and blood to bear — even mine.'

He solicited the society of no one more. At dusk he went into his chamber. Through the whole night, and far into the morning, we heard him groaning and murmuring to himself. Hareton was anxious to enter; but I bid him fetch Mr. Kenneth, and he should go in and see him. When he came, and I requested admittance and tried to open the door, I found it locked; and Heathcliff bid us be damned. He was better, and would be left alone; so the doctor went away.

The following evening was very wet: indeed, it poured down till day-dawn; and, as I took my morning walk round the house, I observed the master's window swinging open, and the rain driving straight in. He cannot be in bed, I thought: those showers would drench him through. He must either be up or out. But I'll make no more ado, I'll go boldly and look.'

Having succeeded in obtaining entrance with another key, I ran to unclose the panels, for the chamber was vacant; quickly pushing them aside, I peeped in. Mr. Heathcliff was there — laid on his back. His eyes met mine so keen and fierce, I started; and then he seemed to smile. I could not think him dead: but his face and throat were washed with rain; the bed-clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still. The lattice, flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill; no blood trickled from the broken skin, and when I put my fingers to it, I could doubt no more: he was dead and stark!

I hasped the window; I combed his black long hair from his forehead; I tried to close his eyes: to extinguish, if possible, that frightful, life-like gaze of exultation before any one else beheld it. They would not shut: they seemed to sneer at my attempts; and his parted lips and sharp white teeth sneered too! Taken with another fit of cowardice, I cried out for Joseph. Joseph shuffled up and made a noise, but resolutely refused to meddle with him.

'Th' divil's harried off his soul,' he cried, 'and he may hev' his carcass into t' bargin, for aught I care! Ech! what a wicked 'un he looks, girning at death!' and the old sinner grinned in mockery. I thought he intended to cut a caper round the bed; but suddenly composing himself, he fell on his knees, and raised his hands, and returned thanks that the lawful master and the ancient stock were restored to their rights.

I felt stunned by the awful event; and my memory unavoidably recurred to former times with a sort of oppressive sadness. But poor Hareton, the most wronged, was the only one who really suffered much. He sat by the corpse all night, weeping in bitter earnest. He pressed its hand, and kissed the sarcastic, savage face that every one else shrank from contemplating; and bemoaned him with that strong grief which springs naturally from a generous heart, though it be tough as tempered steel.

Mr. Kenneth was perplexed to pronounce of what disorder the master died. I concealed the fact of his having swallowed nothing for four days, fearing it might lead to trouble, and then, I am persuaded, he did not abstain on purpose: it was the consequence of his strange illness, not the cause.

We buried him, to the scandal of the whole neighbourhood, as he wished. Earnshaw and I, the sexton, and six men to carry the coffin, comprehended the whole attendance. The six men departed when they had let it down into the grave: we stayed to see it covered. Hareton, with a streaming face, dug green sods, and laid them over the brown mould himself: at present it is as smooth and verdant as its companion mounds — and I hope its tenant sleeps as soundly. But the country folks, if you ask them, would swear on the Bible that he *walks*: there are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house. Idle tales, you'll say, and so say I. Yet that old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on 'em looking out of his chamber window on every rainy night since his death: — and an odd thing happened to me about a month ago. I was going to the Grange one evening — a dark evening, threatening thunder — and, just at the turn of the Heights, I encountered a little boy with a sheep and two lambs before him; he was crying terribly; and I supposed the lambs were skittish, and would not be guided.

'What is the matter, my little man?' I asked.

'There's Heathcliff and a woman yonder, under t' nab,' he blubbered, 'un' I darnut pass 'em.'

I saw nothing; but neither the sheep nor he would go on so I bid him take the road lower down. He probably raised the phantoms from thinking, as he traversed the moors alone, on the nonsense he had heard his parents and companions repeat. Yet, still, I don't like being out in the dark now; and I don't like being left by myself in this grim house: I cannot help it; I shall be glad when they leave it, and shift to the Grange.

'They are going to the Grange, then?' I said.

'Yes,' answered Mrs. Dean, 'as soon as they are married, and that will be on New Year's Day.'

'And who will live here then?'

'Why, Joseph will take care of the house, and, perhaps, a lad to keep him company. They will live in the kitchen, and the rest will be shut up.'

'For the use of such ghosts as choose to inhabit it?' I observed.

'No, Mr. Lockwood,' said Nelly, shaking her head. 'I believe the dead are at peace: but it is not right to speak of them with levity.'

At that moment the garden gate swung to; the ramblers were returning.

'*They* are afraid of nothing,' I grumbled, watching their approach through the window. 'Together, they would brave Satan and all his legions.'

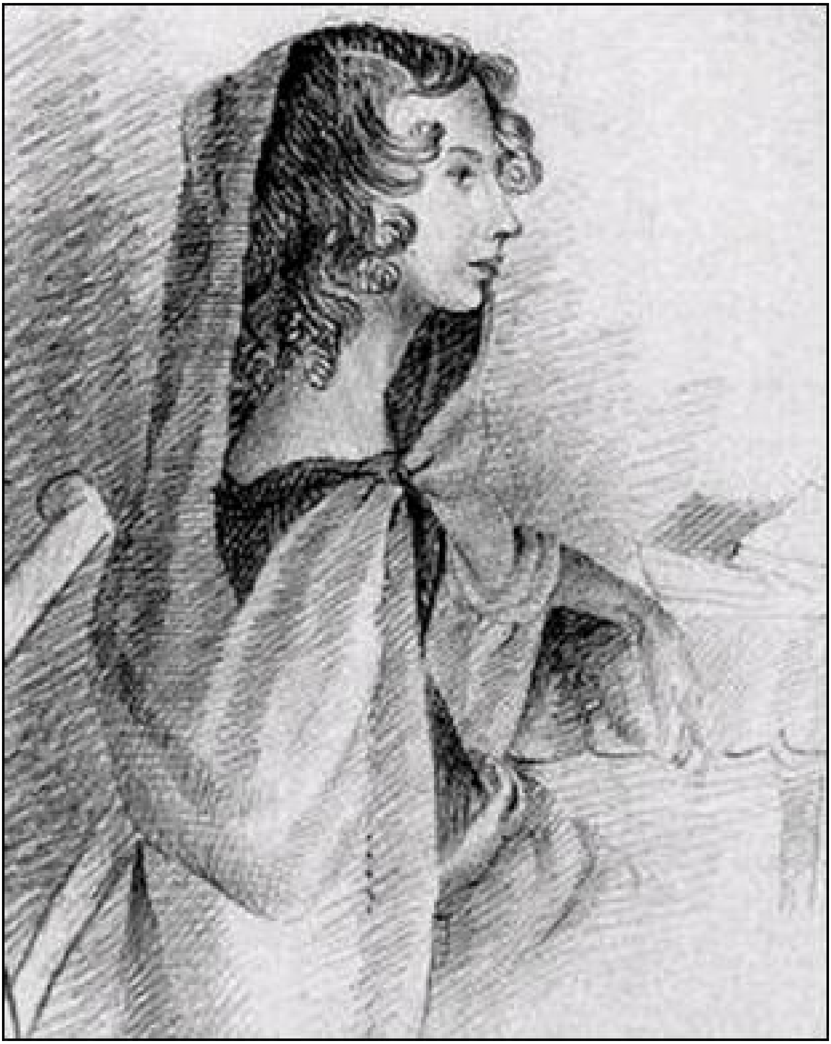
As they stepped on to the door-stones, and halted to take a last look at the moon — or, more correctly, at each other by her light — I felt irresistibly impelled to escape them again; and, pressing a remembrance into the hand of Mrs. Dean, and disregarding her expostulations at my rudeness, I vanished through the kitchen as they opened the house-door; and so should have confirmed Joseph in his opinion of his fellow-servant's gay indiscretions, had he not fortunately recognised me for a respectable character by the sweet ring of a sovereign at his feet.

My walk home was lengthened by a diversion in the direction of the kirk. When beneath its walls, I perceived decay had made progress, even in seven months: many a window showed black gaps deprived of glass; and slates jutted off here and there, beyond the right line of the roof, to be gradually worked off in coming autumn storms.

I sought, and soon discovered, the three headstones on the slope next the moor: the middle one grey, and half buried in the heath; Edgar Linton's only harmonized by the turf and moss creeping up its foot; Heathcliff's still bare.

I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.

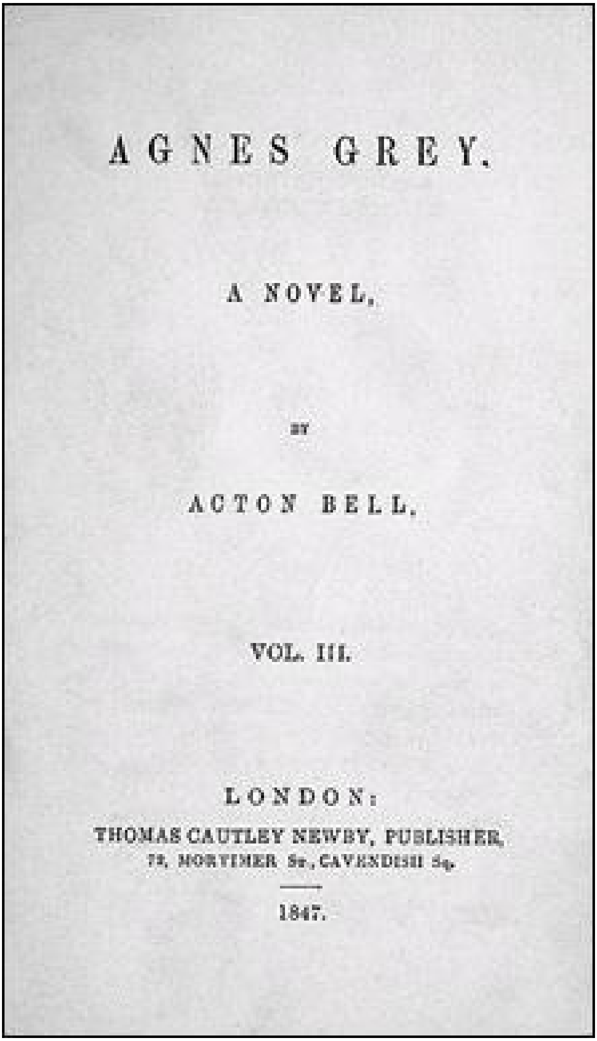
Anne Brontë's Novels



A portrait of Anne made by Charlotte Brontë, 1845

AGNES GREY

This is Anne's debut novel, first published in 1847, and republished in a second edition in 1850. The novel follows the eponymous governess, as she works in several bourgeois families. Scholarship and comments by Anne's sister Charlotte Brontë suggest the novel is largely based on Anne Brontë's own experiences as a governess for five years. Like her sister Charlotte's novel *Jane Eyre,* it addresses what the precarious position of governess entailed and how it affected a young woman. The choice of central character allows Anne to deal with issues of oppression and abuse of women and governesses, isolation and ideas of empathy. *Agnes Grey* also mimics some of the stylistic approaches of bildungsromans, employing ideas of personal growth and coming to age, but representing a character who in fact does not gain in virtue.



AGNES GREY.

A NOVEL,

BY

ACTON BELL.

VOL. III.

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CHAPTER I — THE PARSONAGE

All true histories contain instruction; though, in some, the treasure may be hard to find, and when found, so trivial in quantity, that the dry, shrivelled kernel scarcely compensates for the trouble of cracking the nut. Whether this be the case with my history or not, I am hardly competent to judge. I sometimes think it might prove useful to some, and entertaining to others; but the world may judge for itself. Shielded by my own obscurity, and by the lapse of years, and a few fictitious names, I do not fear to venture; and will candidly lay before the public what I would not disclose to the most intimate friend.

My father was a clergyman of the north of England, who was deservedly respected by all who knew him; and, in his younger days, lived pretty comfortably on the joint income of a small incumbency and a snug little property of his own. My mother, who married him against the wishes of her friends, was a squire's daughter, and a woman of spirit. In vain it was represented to her, that if she became the poor parson's wife, she must relinquish her carriage and her lady's-maid, and all the luxuries and elegancies of affluence; which to her were little less than the necessaries of life. A carriage and a lady's-maid were great conveniences; but, thank heaven, she had feet to carry her, and hands to minister to her own necessities. An elegant house and spacious grounds were not to be despised; but she would rather live in a cottage with Richard Grey than in a palace with any other man in the world.

Finding arguments of no avail, her father, at length, told the lovers they might marry if they pleased; but, in so doing, his daughter would forfeit every fraction of her fortune. He expected this would cool the ardour of both; but he was mistaken. My father knew too well my mother's superior worth not to be sensible that she was a valuable fortune in herself: and if she would but consent to embellish his humble hearth he should be happy to take her on any terms; while she, on her part, would rather labour with her own hands than be divided from the man she loved, whose happiness it would be her joy to make, and who was already one with her in heart and soul. So her fortune went to swell the purse of a wiser sister, who had married a rich nabob; and she, to the wonder and compassionate regret of all who knew her, went to bury herself in the homely village parsonage among the hills of — -. And yet, in spite of all this, and in spite of my mother's high spirit and my father's whims, I believe you might search all England through, and fail to find a happier couple.

Of six children, my sister Mary and myself were the only two that survived the perils of infancy and early childhood. I, being the younger by five or six years, was always regarded as *the* child, and the pet of the family:

father, mother, and sister, all combined to spoil me — not by foolish indulgence, to render me fractious and ungovernable, but by ceaseless kindness, to make me too helpless and dependent — too unfit for buffeting with the cares and turmoils of life.

Mary and I were brought up in the strictest seclusion. My mother, being at once highly accomplished, well informed, and fond of employment, took the whole charge of our education on herself, with the exception of Latin — which my father undertook to teach us — so that we never even went to school; and, as there was no society in the neighbourhood, our only intercourse with the world consisted in a stately tea-party, now and then, with the principal farmers and tradespeople of the vicinity (just to avoid being stigmatized as too proud to consort with our neighbours), and an annual visit to our paternal grandfather's; where himself, our kind grandmamma, a maiden aunt, and two or three elderly ladies and gentlemen, were the only persons we ever saw. Sometimes our mother would amuse us with stories and anecdotes of her younger days, which, while they entertained us amazingly, frequently awoke — in *me*, at least — a secret wish to see a little more of the world.

I thought she must have been very happy: but she never seemed to regret past times. My father, however, whose temper was neither tranquil nor cheerful by nature, often unduly vexed himself with thinking of the sacrifices his dear wife had made for him; and troubled his head with revolving endless schemes for the augmentation of his little fortune, for her sake and ours. In vain my mother assured him she was quite satisfied; and if he would but lay by a little for the children, we should all have plenty, both for time present and to come: but saving was not my father's forte. He would not run in debt (at least, my mother took good care he should not), but while he had money he must spend it: he liked to see his house comfortable, and his wife and daughters well clothed, and well attended; and besides, he was charitably disposed, and liked to give to the poor, according to his means: or, as some might think, beyond them.

At length, however, a kind friend suggested to him a means of doubling his private property at one stroke; and further increasing it, hereafter, to an untold amount. This friend was a merchant, a man of enterprising spirit and undoubted talent, who was somewhat straitened in his mercantile pursuits for want of capital; but generously proposed to give my father a fair share of his profits, if he would only entrust him with what he could spare; and he thought he might safely promise that whatever sum the latter chose to put into his hands, it should bring him in cent. per cent. The small patrimony was speedily sold, and the whole of its price was deposited in the hands of the friendly merchant; who as promptly proceeded to ship his cargo, and prepare for his voyage.

My father was delighted, so were we all, with our brightening prospects. For the present, it is true, we were reduced to the narrow income of the curacy; but my father seemed to think there was no necessity for scrupulously restricting our expenditure to that; so, with a standing bill at Mr. Jackson's, another at Smith's, and a third at Hobson's, we got along even more comfortably than before: though my mother affirmed we had better keep within bounds, for our prospects of wealth were but precarious, after all; and if my father would only trust everything to her management, he should never feel himself stinted: but he, for once, was incorrigible.

What happy hours Mary and I have passed while sitting at our work by the fire, or wandering on the heath-clad hills, or idling under the weeping birch (the only considerable tree in the garden), talking of future happiness to ourselves and our parents, of what we would do, and see, and possess; with no firmer foundation for our goodly superstructure than the riches that were expected to flow in upon us from the success of the worthy merchant's speculations. Our father was nearly as bad as ourselves; only that he affected not to be so much in earnest: expressing his bright hopes and sanguine expectations in jests and playful sallies, that always struck me as being exceedingly witty and pleasant. Our mother laughed with delight to see him so hopeful and happy: but still she feared he was setting his heart too much upon the matter; and once I heard her whisper as she left the room, 'God grant he be not disappointed! I know not how he would bear it.'

Disappointed he was; and bitterly, too. It came like a thunder-clap on us all, that the vessel which contained our fortune had been wrecked, and gone to the bottom with all its stores, together with several of the crew, and the unfortunate merchant himself. I was grieved for him; I was grieved for the overthrow of all our air-built castles: but, with the elasticity of youth, I soon recovered the shook.

Though riches had charms, poverty had no terrors for an inexperienced girl like me. Indeed, to say the truth, there was something exhilarating in the idea of being driven to straits, and thrown upon our own resources. I only wished papa, mamma, and Mary were all of the same mind as myself; and then, instead of lamenting past calamities we might all cheerfully set to work to remedy them; and the greater the difficulties, the harder our present privations, the greater should be our cheerfulness to endure the latter, and our vigour to contend against the former.

Mary did not lament, but she brooded continually over the misfortune, and sank into a state of dejection from which no effort of mine could rouse her. I could not possibly bring her to regard the matter on its bright side as I did: and indeed I was so fearful of being charged with childish frivolity, or stupid insensibility, that I carefully kept most of my bright ideas and cheering notions to myself; well knowing they could not be appreciated.

My mother thought only of consoling my father, and paying our debts and retrenching our expenditure by every available means; but my father was completely overwhelmed by the calamity: health, strength, and spirits sank beneath the blow, and he never wholly recovered them. In vain my mother strove to cheer him, by appealing to his piety, to his courage, to his affection for herself and us. That very affection was his greatest torment: it was for our sakes he had so ardently longed to increase his fortune — it was our interest that had lent such brightness to his hopes, and that imparted such bitterness to his present distress. He now tormented himself with remorse at having neglected my mother's advice; which would at least have saved him from the additional burden of debt — he vainly reproached himself for having brought her from the dignity, the ease, the luxury of her former station to toil with him through the cares and toils of poverty. It was gall and wormwood to his soul to see that splendid, highly-accomplished woman, once so courted and admired, transformed into an active managing housewife, with hands and head continually occupied with household labours and household economy. The very willingness with which she performed these duties, the cheerfulness with which she bore her reverses, and the kindness which withheld her from imputing the smallest blame to him, were all perverted by this ingenious self-tormentor into further aggravations of his sufferings. And thus the mind preyed upon the body, and disordered the system of the nerves, and they in turn increased the troubles of the mind, till by action and reaction his health was seriously impaired; and not one of us could convince him that the aspect of our affairs was not half so gloomy, so utterly hopeless, as his morbid imagination represented it to be.

The useful pony phaeton was sold, together with the stout, well-fed pony — the old favourite that we had fully determined should end its days in peace, and never pass from our hands; the little coach-house and stable were let; the servant boy, and the more efficient (being the more expensive) of the two maid-servants, were dismissed. Our clothes were mended, turned, and darned to the utmost verge of decency; our food, always plain, was now simplified to an unprecedented degree — except my father's favourite dishes; our coals and candles were painfully economized — the pair of candles reduced to one, and that most sparingly used; the coals carefully husbanded in the half-empty grate: especially when my father was out on his parish duties, or confined to bed through illness — then we sat with our feet on the fender, scraping the perishing embers together from time to time, and occasionally adding a slight scattering of the dust and fragments of coal, just to keep them alive. As for our carpets, they in time were worn threadbare, and patched and darned even to a greater extent than our garments. To save the expense of a gardener, Mary and I undertook to keep the garden in order; and all the cooking and household work that could not easily be managed by one servant-girl, was done by my mother and sister, with a little occasional help from me: only a little, because, though a woman in my own estimation, I was still a child in theirs; and my mother, like most active, managing women, was not gifted with very active daughters: for this reason — that being so clever and diligent herself, she was never tempted to trust her affairs to a deputy, but, on the contrary, was willing to act and think for others as well as for number one; and whatever was the business in hand, she was apt to think that no one could do it so well as herself: so that whenever I offered to assist her, I received such an answer as — 'No, love, you cannot indeed — there's nothing here you can do. Go and help your sister, or get her to take a walk with you — tell her she must not sit so much, and stay so constantly in the house as she does — she may well look thin and dejected.'

'Mary, mamma says I'm to help you; or get you to take a walk with me; she says you may well look thin and dejected, if you sit so constantly in the house.'

'Help me you cannot, Agnes; and I cannot go out with *you* — I have far too much to do.'

'Then let me help you.'

'You cannot, indeed, dear child. Go and practise your music, or play with the kitten.'

There was always plenty of sewing on hand; but I had not been taught to cut out a single garment, and except plain hemming and seaming, there was little I could do, even in that line; for they both asserted that it was far easier to do the work themselves than to prepare it for me: and besides, they liked better to see me prosecuting my studies, or amusing myself — it was time enough for me to sit bending over my work, like a grave matron, when my favourite little pussy was become a steady old cat. Under such circumstances, although I was not many degrees more useful than the kitten, my idleness was not entirely without excuse.

Through all our troubles, I never but once heard my mother complain of our want of money. As summer was coming on she observed to Mary and me, 'What a desirable thing it would be for your papa to spend a few weeks at a watering-place. I am convinced the sea-air and the change of scene would be of incalculable service to him. But then, you see, there's no money,' she added, with a sigh. We both wished exceedingly that the thing might be done, and lamented greatly that it could not. 'Well, well!' said she, 'it's no use complaining. Possibly something might be done to further the project after all. Mary, you are a beautiful drawer. What do you say to doing a few more pictures in your best style, and getting them framed, with the water-coloured drawings you have already done, and trying to dispose of them to some liberal picture-dealer, who has the sense to discern their merits?'

'Mamma, I should be delighted if you think they *could* be sold; and for anything worth while.'

'It's worth while trying, however, my dear: do you procure the drawings, and I'll endeavour to find a purchaser.'

'I wish *I* could do something,' said I.

'You, Agnes! well, who knows? You draw pretty well, too: if you choose some simple piece for your subject, I daresay you will be able to produce something we shall all be proud to exhibit.'

'But I have another scheme in my head, mamma, and have had long, only I did not like to mention it.'

‘Indeed! pray tell us what it is.’

‘I should like to be a governess.’

My mother uttered an exclamation of surprise, and laughed. My sister dropped her work in astonishment, exclaiming, ‘*You* a governess, Agnes! What can you be dreaming of?’

‘Well! I don’t see anything so *very* extraordinary in it. I do not pretend to be able to instruct great girls; but surely I could teach little ones: and I should like it so much: I am so fond of children. Do let me, mamma!’

‘But, my love, you have not learned to take care of *yourself* yet: and young children require more judgment and experience to manage than elder ones.’

‘But, mamma, I am above eighteen, and quite able to take care of myself, and others too. You do not know half the wisdom and prudence I possess, because I have never been tried.’

‘Only think,’ said Mary, ‘what would you do in a house full of strangers, without me or mamma to speak and act for you — with a parcel of children, besides yourself, to attend to; and no one to look to for advice? You would not even know what clothes to put on.’

‘You think, because I always do as you bid me, I have no judgment of my own: but only try me — that is all I ask — and you shall see what I can do.’

At that moment my father entered and the subject of our discussion was explained to him.

‘What, my little Agnes a governess!’ cried he, and, in spite of his dejection, he laughed at the idea.

‘Yes, papa, don’t *you* say anything against it: I should like it so much; and I am sure I could manage delightfully.’

‘But, my darling, we could not spare you.’ And a tear glistened in his eye as he added — ‘No, no! afflicted as we are, surely we are not brought to that pass yet.’

‘Oh, no!’ said my mother. ‘There is no necessity whatever for such a step; it is merely a whim of her own. So you must hold your tongue, you naughty girl; for, though you are so ready to leave us, you know very well we cannot part with *you*.’

I was silenced for that day, and for many succeeding ones; but still I did not wholly relinquish my darling scheme. Mary got her drawing materials, and steadily set to work. I got mine too; but while I drew, I thought of other things. How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance, and something to comfort and help my father, mother, and sister, besides exonerating them from the provision of my food and clothing; to show papa what his little Agnes could do; to convince mamma and Mary that I was not quite the helpless, thoughtless being they supposed. And then, how charming to be entrusted with the care and education of children! Whatever others said, I felt I was fully competent to the task: the clear remembrance of my own thoughts in early childhood would be a surer guide than the instructions of the most mature adviser. I had but to turn from my little pupils to myself at their age, and I should know, at once, how to win their confidence and affections: how to waken the contrition of the erring; how to embolden the timid and console the afflicted; how to make Virtue practicable, Instruction desirable, and Religion lovely and comprehensible.

— Delightful task!
To teach the young idea how to shoot!

To train the tender plants, and watch their buds unfolding day by day!

Influenced by so many inducements, I determined still to persevere; though the fear of displeasing my mother, or distressing my father's feelings, prevented me from resuming the subject for several days. At length, again, I mentioned it to my mother in private; and, with some difficulty, got her to promise to assist me with her endeavours. My father's reluctant consent was next obtained, and then, though Mary still sighed her disapproval, my dear, kind mother began to look out for a situation for me. She wrote to my father's relations, and consulted the newspaper advertisements — her own relations she had long dropped all communication with: a formal interchange of occasional letters was all she had ever had since her marriage, and she would not at any time have applied to them in a case of this nature. But so long and so entire had been my parents' seclusion from the world, that many weeks elapsed before a suitable situation could be procured. At last, to my great joy, it was decreed that I should take charge of the young family of a certain Mrs. Bloomfield; whom my kind, prim aunt Grey had known in her youth, and asserted to be a very nice woman. Her husband was a retired tradesman, who had realized a very comfortable fortune; but could not be prevailed upon to give a greater salary than twenty-five pounds to the instructress of his children. I, however, was glad to accept this, rather than refuse the situation — which my parents were inclined to think the better plan.

But some weeks more were yet to be devoted to preparation. How long, how tedious those weeks appeared to me! Yet they were happy ones in the main — full of bright hopes and ardent expectations. With what peculiar pleasure I assisted at the making of my new clothes, and, subsequently, the packing of my trunks! But there was a feeling of bitterness mingling with the latter occupation too; and when it was done — when all was ready for my departure on the morrow, and the last night at home approached — a sudden anguish seemed to swell my heart. My dear friends looked so sad, and spoke so very kindly, that I could scarcely keep my eyes from overflowing: but I still affected to be gay. I had taken my last ramble with Mary on the moors, my last walk in the garden, and round the house; I had fed, with her, our pet pigeons for the last time — the pretty creatures that we had tamed to peck their food from our hands: I had given a farewell stroke to all their silky backs as they crowded in my lap. I had tenderly kissed my own peculiar favourites, the pair of snow-white fantails; I had played my last tune on the old familiar piano, and sung my last song to papa: not the last, I hoped, but the last for what appeared to me a very long time. And, perhaps, when I did these things again it would be with different feelings: circumstances might be changed, and this house might never be my settled home again. My dear little friend, the kitten, would certainly be changed: she was already growing a fine cat; and when I returned, even for a hasty visit at Christmas, would, most likely, have forgotten both her playmate and her merry pranks. I had romped with her for the last time; and when I stroked her soft bright fur, while she lay purring herself to sleep in my lap, it was with a feeling of sadness I could not easily disguise. Then at bed-time, when I retired with Mary to our quiet little chamber, where already my drawers were cleared out and my share of the bookcase was empty — and where, hereafter, she would have to sleep alone, in dreary solitude, as she expressed it — my heart sank more than ever: I felt as if I had been selfish and wrong to persist in leaving her; and when I knelt once more beside our little bed, I prayed for a blessing on her and on my parents more fervently than ever I had done before. To conceal my emotion, I buried my face in my hands, and they were presently bathed in tears. I perceived, on rising, that she had been crying too: but neither of us spoke; and in silence we betook ourselves to our repose, creeping more closely together from the consciousness that we were to part so soon.

But the morning brought a renewal of hope and spirits. I was to depart early; that the conveyance which took me (a gig, hired from Mr. Smith, the draper, grocer, and tea-dealer of the village) might return the same day. I rose, washed, dressed, swallowed a hasty breakfast, received the fond embraces of my father, mother, and sister, kissed the cat — to the great scandal of Sally, the maid — shook hands with her, mounted the gig, drew my veil over my face, and then, but not till then, burst into a flood of tears. The gig rolled on; I looked back; my dear mother and sister were still standing at the door, looking after me, and waving their adieux. I returned their salute, and prayed God to bless them from my heart: we descended the hill, and I could see them no more.

‘It’s a coldish mornin’ for you, Miss Agnes,’ observed Smith; ‘and a darksome ’un too; but we’s happen get to yon spot afore there come much rain to signify.’

‘Yes, I hope so,’ replied I, as calmly as I could.

‘It’s comed a good sup last night too.’

‘Yes.’

‘But this cold wind will happen keep it off.’

‘Perhaps it will.’

Here ended our colloquy. We crossed the valley, and began to ascend the opposite hill. As we were toiling up, I looked back again; there was the village spire, and the old grey parsonage beyond it, basking in a slanting beam of sunshine — it was but a sickly ray, but the village and surrounding hills were all in sombre shade, and I hailed the wandering beam as a propitious omen to my home. With clasped hands I fervently implored a blessing on its inhabitants, and hastily turned away; for I saw the sunshine was departing; and I carefully avoided another glance, lest I should see it in gloomy shadow, like the rest of the landscape.

CHAPTER II — FIRST LESSONS IN THE ART OF INSTRUCTION

As we drove along, my spirits revived again, and I turned, with pleasure, to the contemplation of the new life upon which I was entering. But though it was not far past the middle of September, the heavy clouds and strong north-easterly wind combined to render the day extremely cold and dreary; and the journey seemed a very long one, for, as Smith observed, the roads were 'very heavy'; and certainly, his horse was very heavy too: it crawled up the hills, and crept down them, and only condescended to shake its sides in a trot where the road was at a dead level or a very gentle slope, which was rarely the case in those rugged regions; so that it was nearly one o'clock before we reached the place of our destination. Yet, after all, when we entered the lofty iron gateway, when we drove softly up the smooth, well-rolled carriage-road, with the green lawn on each side, studded with young trees, and approached the new but stately mansion of Wellwood, rising above its mushroom poplar-groves, my heart failed me, and I wished it were a mile or two farther off. For the first time in my life I must stand alone: there was no retreating now. I must enter that house, and introduce myself among its strange inhabitants. But how was it to be done? True, I was near nineteen; but, thanks to my retired life and the protecting care of my mother and sister, I well knew that many a girl of fifteen, or under, was gifted with a more womanly address, and greater ease and self-possession, than I was. Yet, if Mrs. Bloomfield were a kind, motherly woman, I might do very well, after all; and the children, of course, I should soon be at ease with them — and Mr. Bloomfield, I hoped, I should have but little to do with.

'Be calm, be calm, whatever happens,' I said within myself; and truly I kept this resolution so well, and was so fully occupied in steadying my nerves and stifling the rebellious flutter of my heart, that when I was admitted into the hall and ushered into the presence of Mrs. Bloomfield, I almost forgot to answer her polite salutation; and it afterwards struck me, that the little I did say was spoken in the tone of one half-dead or half-asleep. The lady, too, was somewhat chilly in her manner, as I discovered when I had time to reflect. She was a tall, spare, stately woman, with thick black hair, cold grey eyes, and extremely sallow complexion.

With due politeness, however, she showed me my bedroom, and left me there to take a little refreshment. I was somewhat dismayed at my appearance on looking in the glass: the cold wind had swelled and reddened my hands, uncurled and entangled my hair, and dyed my face of a pale purple; add to this my collar was horridly crumpled, my frock splashed with mud, my feet clad in stout new boots, and as the trunks were not brought up, there was no remedy; so having smoothed my hair as well as I could, and repeatedly twitched my obdurate collar, I proceeded to clomp down the two flights of stairs, philosophizing as I went; and with some difficulty found my way into the room where Mrs. Bloomfield awaited me.

She led me into the dining-room, where the family luncheon had been laid out. Some beefsteaks and half-cold potatoes were set before me; and while I dined upon these, she sat opposite, watching me (as I thought) and endeavouring to sustain something like a conversation — consisting chiefly of a succession of commonplace remarks, expressed with frigid formality: but this might be more my fault than hers, for I really could *not* converse. In fact, my attention was almost wholly absorbed in my dinner: not from ravenous appetite, but from distress at the toughness of the beefsteaks, and the numbness of my hands, almost palsied by their five-hours' exposure to the bitter wind. I would gladly have eaten the potatoes and let the meat alone, but having got a large piece of the latter on to my plate, I could not be so impolite as to leave it; so, after many awkward and unsuccessful attempts to cut it with the knife, or tear it with the fork, or pull it asunder between them, sensible that the awful lady was a spectator to the whole transaction, I at last desperately grasped the knife and fork in my fists, like a child of two years old, and fell to work with all the little strength I possessed. But this needed some apology — with a feeble attempt at a laugh, I said, 'My hands are so benumbed with the cold that I can scarcely handle my knife and fork.'

'I daresay you would find it cold,' replied she with a cool, immutable gravity that did not serve to reassure me.

When the ceremony was concluded, she led me into the sitting-room again, where she rang and sent for the children.

'You will find them not very far advanced in their attainments,' said she, 'for I have had so little time to attend to their education myself, and we have thought them too young for a governess till now; but I think they are clever children, and very apt to learn, especially the little boy; he is, I think, the flower of the flock — a generous, noble-spirited boy, one to be led, but not driven, and remarkable for always speaking the truth. He seems to scorn deception' (this was good news). 'His sister Mary Ann will require watching,' continued she, 'but she is a very good girl upon the whole; though I wish her to be kept out of the nursery as much as possible, as she is now almost six years old, and might acquire bad habits from the nurses. I have ordered her crib to be placed in your room, and if you will be so kind as to overlook her washing and dressing, and take charge of her clothes, she need have nothing further to do with the nursery maid.'

I replied I was quite willing to do so; and at that moment my young pupils entered the apartment, with their two younger sisters. Master Tom Bloomfield was a well-grown boy of seven, with a somewhat wiry frame, flaxen hair, blue eyes, small turned-up nose, and fair complexion. Mary Ann was a tall girl too, somewhat dark like her mother, but with a round full face and a high colour in her cheeks. The second sister was Fanny, a very pretty little girl; Mrs. Bloomfield assured me she was a remarkably gentle child, and required encouragement: she had not learned anything yet; but in a few days, she would be four years old, and then she might take her first lesson in the alphabet, and be promoted to the schoolroom. The remaining one was Harriet, a little broad, fat, merry, playful thing of scarcely two, that I coveted more than all the rest — but with her I had nothing to do.

I talked to my little pupils as well as I could, and tried to render myself agreeable; but with little success I fear, for their mother's presence kept me under an unpleasant restraint. They, however, were remarkably free from shyness. They seemed bold, lively children, and I hoped I should soon be on friendly terms with them — the little boy especially, of whom I had heard such a favourable character from his mamma. In Mary Ann there was a certain affected simper, and a craving for notice, that I was sorry to observe. But her brother claimed all my attention to himself; he stood bolt upright between me and the fire, with his hands behind his back, talking away like an orator, occasionally interrupting his discourse with a sharp reproof to his sisters when they made too much noise.

'Oh, Tom, what a darling you are!' exclaimed his mother. 'Come and kiss dear mamma; and then won't you show Miss Grey your schoolroom, and your nice new books?'

'I won't kiss *you*, mamma; but I *will* show Miss Grey my schoolroom, and my new books.'

'And *my* schoolroom, and *my* new books, Tom,' said Mary Ann. 'They're mine too.'

'They're *mine*,' replied he decisively. 'Come along, Miss Grey — I'll escort you.'

When the room and books had been shown, with some bickerings between the brother and sister that I did my utmost to appease or mitigate, Mary Ann brought me her doll, and began to be very loquacious on the subject of its fine clothes, its bed, its chest of drawers, and other appurtenances; but Tom told her to hold her clamour, that Miss Grey might see his rocking-horse, which, with a most important bustle, he dragged forth from its corner into the middle of the room, loudly calling on me to attend to it. Then, ordering his sister to hold the reins, he mounted, and made me stand for ten minutes, watching how manfully he used his whip and spurs. Meantime, however, I admired Mary Ann's pretty doll, and all its possessions; and then told Master Tom he was a capital rider, but I hoped he would not use his whip and spurs so much when he rode a real pony.

'Oh, yes, I will!' said he, laying on with redoubled ardour. 'I'll cut into him like smoke! Eeh! my word! but he shall sweat for it.'

This was very shocking; but I hoped in time to be able to work a reformation.

'Now you must put on your bonnet and shawl,' said the little hero, 'and

I'll show you my garden.'

'And *mine*,' said Mary Ann.

Tom lifted his fist with a menacing gesture; she uttered a loud, shrill scream, ran to the other side of me, and made a face at him.

'Surely, Tom, you would not strike your sister! I hope I shall *never* see you do that.'

'You will sometimes: I'm obliged to do it now and then to keep her in order.'

'But it is not your business to keep her in order, you know — that is for — '

'Well, now go and put on your bonnet.'

'I don't know — it is so very cloudy and cold, it seems likely to rain; — and you know I have had a long drive.'

'No matter — you *must* come; I shall allow of no excuses,' replied the consequential little gentleman. And, as it was the first day of our acquaintance, I thought I might as well indulge him. It was too cold for Mary Ann to venture, so she stayed with her mamma, to the great relief of her brother, who liked to have me all to himself.

The garden was a large one, and tastefully laid out; besides several splendid dahlias, there were some other fine flowers still in bloom: but my companion would not give me time to examine them: I must go with him, across the wet grass, to a remote sequestered corner, the most important place in the grounds, because it contained *his* garden. There were two round beds, stocked with a variety of plants. In one there was a pretty little rose-tree. I paused to admire its lovely blossoms.

'Oh, never mind that!' said he, contemptuously. 'That's only *Mary Ann's* garden; look, this is mine.'

After I had observed every flower, and listened to a disquisition on every plant, I was permitted to depart; but first, with great pomp, he plucked a polyanthus and presented it to me, as one conferring a prodigious favour. I observed, on the grass about his garden, certain apparatus of sticks and corn, and asked what they were.

'Traps for birds.'

'Why do you catch them?'

'Papa says they do harm.'

'And what do you do with them when you catch them?'

'Different things. Sometimes I give them to the cat; sometimes I cut them in pieces with my penknife; but the next, I mean to roast alive.'

'And why do you mean to do such a horrible thing?'

'For two reasons: first, to see how long it will live — and then, to see what it will taste like.'

'But don't you know it is extremely wicked to do such things? Remember, the birds can feel as well as you; and think, how would you like it yourself?'

‘Oh, that’s nothing! I’m not a bird, and I can’t feel what I do to them.’

‘But you will have to feel it some time, Tom: you have heard where wicked people go to when they die; and if you don’t leave off torturing innocent birds, remember, you will have to go there, and suffer just what you have made them suffer.’

‘Oh, pooh! I shan’t. Papa knows how I treat them, and he never blames me for it: he says it is just what *he* used to do when *he* was a boy. Last summer, he gave me a nest full of young sparrows, and he saw me pulling off their legs and wings, and heads, and never said anything; except that they were nasty things, and I must not let them soil my trousers: end Uncle Robson was there too, and he laughed, and said I was a fine boy.’

‘But what would your mamma say?’

‘Oh, she doesn’t care! she says it’s a pity to kill the pretty singing birds, but the naughty sparrows, and mice, and rats, I may do what I like with. So now, Miss Grey, you see it is *not* wicked.’

‘I still think it is, Tom; and perhaps your papa and mamma would think so too, if they thought much about it. However,’ I internally added, ‘they may say what they please, but I am determined you shall do nothing of the kind, as long as I have power to prevent it.’

He next took me across the lawn to see his mole-traps, and then into the stack-yard to see his weasel-traps: one of which, to his great joy, contained a dead weasel; and then into the stable to see, not the fine carriage-horses, but a little rough colt, which he informed me had been bred on purpose for him, and he was to ride it as soon as it was properly trained. I tried to amuse the little fellow, and listened to all his chatter as complacently as I could; for I thought if he had any affections at all, I would endeavour to win them; and then, in time, I might be able to show him the error of his ways: but I looked in vain for that generous, noble spirit his mother talked of; though I could see he was not without a certain degree of quickness and penetration, when he chose to exert it.

When we re-entered the house it was nearly tea-time. Master Tom told me that, as papa was from home, he and I and Mary Ann were to have tea with mamma, for a treat; for, on such occasions, she always dined at luncheon-time with them, instead of at six o’clock. Soon after tea, Mary Ann went to bed, but Tom favoured us with his company and conversation till eight. After he was gone, Mrs. Bloomfield further enlightened me on the subject of her children’s dispositions and acquirements, and on what they were to learn, and how they were to be managed, and cautioned me to mention their defects to no one but herself. My mother had warned me before to mention them as little as possible to *her*, for people did not like to be told of their children’s faults, and so I concluded I was to keep silence on them altogether. About half-past nine, Mrs. Bloomfield invited me to partake of a frugal supper of cold meat and bread. I was glad when that was over, and she took her bedroom candlestick and retired to rest; for though I wished to be pleased with her, her company was extremely irksome to me; and I could not help feeling that she was cold, grave, and forbidding — the very opposite of the kind, warm-hearted matron my hopes had depicted her to be.

CHAPTER III — A FEW MORE LESSONS

I rose next morning with a feeling of hopeful exhilaration, in spite of the disappointments already experienced; but I found the dressing of Mary Ann was no light matter, as her abundant hair was to be smeared with pomade, plaited in three long tails, and tied with bows of ribbon: a task my unaccustomed fingers found great difficulty in performing. She told me her nurse could do it in half the time, and, by keeping up a constant fidget of impatience, contrived to render me still longer. When all was done, we went into the schoolroom, where I met my other pupil, and chatted with the two till it was time to go down to breakfast. That meal being concluded, and a few civil words having been exchanged with Mrs. Bloomfield, we repaired to the schoolroom again, and commenced the business of the day. I found my pupils very backward, indeed; but Tom, though averse to every species of mental exertion, was not without abilities. Mary Ann could scarcely read a word, and was so careless and inattentive that I could hardly get on with her at all. However, by dint of great labour and patience, I managed to get something done in the course of the morning, and then accompanied my young charge out into the garden and adjacent grounds, for a little recreation before dinner. There we got along tolerably together, except that I found they had no notion of going with me: I must go with them, wherever they chose to lead me. I must run, walk, or stand, exactly as it suited their fancy. This, I thought, was reversing the order of things; and I found it doubly disagreeable, as on this as well as subsequent occasions, they seemed to prefer the dirtiest places and the most dismal occupations. But there was no remedy; either I must follow them, or keep entirely apart from them, and thus appear neglectful of my charge. To-day, they manifested a particular attachment to a well at the bottom of the lawn, where they persisted in dabbling with sticks and pebbles for above half an hour. I was in constant fear that their mother would see them from the window, and blame me for allowing them thus to draggle their clothes and wet their feet and hands, instead of taking exercise; but no arguments, commands, or entreaties could draw them away. If *she* did not see them, some one else did — a gentleman on horseback had entered the gate and was proceeding up the road; at the distance of a few paces from us he paused, and calling to the children in a waspish penetrating tone, bade them 'keep out of that water.' 'Miss Grey,' said he, '(I suppose it *is* Miss Grey), I am surprised that you should allow them to dirty their clothes in that manner! Don't you see how Miss Bloomfield has soiled her frock? and that Master Bloomfield's socks are quite wet? and both of them without gloves? Dear, dear! Let me *request* that in future you will keep them *decent* at least!' so saying, he turned away, and continued his ride up to the house. This was Mr.

Bloomfield. I was surprised that he should nominate his children Master and Miss Bloomfield; and still more so, that he should speak so uncivilly to me, their governess, and a perfect stranger to himself. Presently the bell rang to summon us in. I dined with the children at one, while he and his lady took their luncheon at the same table. His conduct there did not greatly raise him in my estimation. He was a man of ordinary stature — rather below than above — and rather thin than stout, apparently between thirty and forty years of age: he had a large mouth, pale, dingy complexion, milky blue eyes, and hair the colour of a hempen cord. There was a roast leg of mutton before him: he helped Mrs. Bloomfield, the children, and me, desiring me to cut up the children's meat; then, after twisting about the mutton in various directions, and eyeing it from different points, he pronounced it not fit to be eaten, and called for the cold beef.

'What is the matter with the mutton, my dear?' asked his mate.

'It is quite overdone. Don't you taste, Mrs. Bloomfield, that all the goodness is roasted out of it? And can't you see that all that nice, red gravy is completely dried away?'

'Well, I think the *beef* will suit you.'

The beef was set before him, and he began to carve, but with the most rueful expressions of discontent.

'What is the matter with the *beef*, Mr. Bloomfield? I'm sure I thought it was very nice.'

'And so it *was* very nice. A nicer joint could not be; but it is *quite* spoiled,' replied he, dolefully.

'How so?'

'How so! Why, don't you see how it is cut? Dear — dear! it is quite shocking!'

'They must have cut it wrong in the kitchen, then, for I'm sure I carved it quite properly here, yesterday.'

'No *doubt* they cut it wrong in the kitchen — the savages! Dear — dear! Did ever any one see such a fine piece of beef so completely ruined? But remember that, in future, when a decent dish leaves this table, they shall not *touch* it in the kitchen. Remember *that*, Mrs. Bloomfield!'

Notwithstanding the ruinous state of the beef, the gentleman managed to out himself some delicate slices, part of which he ate in silence. When he next spoke, it was, in a less querulous tone, to ask what there was for dinner.

'Turkey and grouse,' was the concise reply.

'And what besides?'

'Fish.'

'What kind of fish?'

'I don't know.'

'*You don't know*?' cried he, looking solemnly up from his plate, and suspending his knife and fork in astonishment.

'No. I told the cook to get some fish — I did not particularize what.'

‘Well, that beats everything! A lady professes to keep house, and doesn’t even know what fish is for dinner! professes to order fish, and doesn’t specify what!’

‘Perhaps, Mr. Bloomfield, you will order dinner yourself in future.’

Nothing more was said; and I was very glad to get out of the room with my pupils; for I never felt so ashamed and uncomfortable in my life for anything that was not my own fault.

In the afternoon we applied to lessons again: then went out again; then had tea in the schoolroom; then I dressed Mary Ann for dessert; and when she and her brother had gone down to the dining-room, I took the opportunity of beginning a letter to my dear friends at home: but the children came up before I had half completed it. At seven I had to put Mary Ann to bed; then I played with Tom till eight, when he, too, went; and I finished my letter and unpacked my clothes, which I had hitherto found no opportunity for doing, and, finally, went to bed myself.

But this is a very favourable specimen of a day’s proceedings.

My task of instruction and surveillance, instead of becoming easier as my charges and I got better accustomed to each other, became more arduous as their characters unfolded. The name of governess, I soon found, was a mere mockery as applied to me: my pupils had no more notion of obedience than a wild, unbroken colt. The habitual fear of their father’s peevish temper, and the dread of the punishments he was wont to inflict when irritated, kept them generally within bounds in his immediate presence. The girls, too, had some fear of their mother’s anger; and the boy might occasionally be bribed to do as she bid him by the hope of reward; but I had no rewards to offer; and as for punishments, I was given to understand, the parents reserved that privilege to themselves; and yet they expected me to keep my pupils in order. Other children might be guided by the fear of anger and the desire of approbation; but neither the one nor the other had any effect upon these.

Master Tom, not content with refusing to be ruled, must needs set up as a ruler, and manifested a determination to keep, not only his sisters, but his governess in order, by violent manual and pedal applications; and, as he was a tall, strong boy of his years, this occasioned no trifling inconvenience. A few sound boxes on the ear, on such occasions, might have settled the matter easily enough: but as, in that case, he might make up some story to his mother which she would be sure to believe, as she had such unshaken faith in his veracity — though I had already discovered it to be by no means unimpeachable — I determined to refrain from striking him, even in self-defence; and, in his most violent moods, my only resource was to throw him on his back and hold his hands and feet till the frenzy was somewhat abated. To the difficulty of preventing him from doing what he ought not, was added that of forcing him to do what he ought. Often he would positively refuse to learn, or to repeat his lessons, or even to look at his book. Here, again, a good birch rod might have been serviceable; but, as my powers were so limited, I must make the best use of what I had.

As there were no settled hours for study and play, I resolved to give my pupils a certain task, which, with moderate attention, they could perform in a short time; and till this was done, however weary I was, or however perverse they might be, nothing short of parental interference should induce me to suffer them to leave the schoolroom, even if I should sit with my chair against the door to keep them in. Patience, Firmness, and Perseverance were my only weapons; and these I resolved to use to the utmost. I determined always strictly to fulfil the threats and promises I made; and, to that end, I must be cautious to threaten and promise nothing that I could not perform. Then, I would carefully refrain from all useless irritability and indulgence of my own ill-temper: when they behaved tolerably, I would be as kind and obliging as it was in my power to be, in order to make the widest possible distinction between good and bad conduct; I would reason with them, too, in the simplest and most effective manner. When I reproved them, or refused to gratify their wishes, after a glaring fault, it should be more in sorrow than in anger: their little hymns and prayers I would make plain and clear to their understanding; when they said their prayers at night and asked pardon for their offences, I would remind them of the sins of the past day, solemnly, but in perfect kindness, to avoid raising a spirit of opposition; penitential hymns should be said by the naughty, cheerful ones by the comparatively good; and every kind of instruction I would convey to them, as much as possible, by entertaining discourse — apparently with no other object than their present amusement in view.

By these means I hoped in time both to benefit the children and to gain the approbation of their parents; and also to convince my friends at home that I was not so wanting in skill and prudence as they supposed. I knew the difficulties I had to contend with were great; but I knew (at least I believed) unremitting patience and perseverance could overcome them; and night and morning I implored Divine assistance to this end. But either the children were so incorrigible, the parents so unreasonable, or myself so mistaken in my views, or so unable to carry them out, that my best intentions and most strenuous efforts seemed productive of no better result than sport to the children, dissatisfaction to their parents, and torment to myself.

The task of instruction was as arduous for the body as the mind. I had to run after my pupils to catch them, to carry or drag them to the table, and often forcibly to hold them there till the lesson was done. Tom I frequently put into a corner, seating myself before him in a chair, with a book which contained the little task that must be said or read, before he was released, in my hand. He was not strong enough to push both me and the chair away, so he would stand twisting his body and face into the most grotesque and singular contortions — laughable, no doubt, to an unconcerned spectator, but not to me — and uttering loud yells and doleful outcries, intended to represent weeping but wholly without the accompaniment of tears. I knew this was done solely for the purpose of annoying me; and, therefore, however I might inwardly tremble with impatience and irritation, I manfully strove to suppress all visible signs of molestation, and affected to sit with calm indifference, waiting till it should please him to cease this pastime, and prepare for a run in the garden, by casting his eye on the book and reading or repeating the few words he was required to say. Sometimes he was determined to do his writing badly; and I had to hold his hand to prevent him from purposely blotting or disfiguring the paper. Frequently I threatened that, if he did not do better, he should have another line: then he would stubbornly refuse to write this line; and I, to save my word, had finally to resort to the expedient of holding his fingers upon the pen, and forcibly drawing his hand up and down, till, in spite of his resistance, the line was in some sort completed.

Yet Tom was by no means the most unmanageable of my pupils: sometimes, to my great joy, he would have the sense to see that his wisest policy was to finish his tasks, and go out and amuse himself till I and his sisters came to join him; which frequently was not at all, for Mary Ann seldom followed his example in this particular: she apparently preferred rolling on the floor to any other amusement: down she would drop like a leaden weight; and when I, with great difficulty, had succeeded in rooting her thence, I had still to hold her up with one arm, while with the other I held the book from which she was to read or spell her lesson. As the dead weight of the big girl of six became too heavy for one arm to bear, I transferred it to the other; or, if both were weary of the burden, I carried her into a corner, and told her she might come out when she should find the use of her feet, and stand up: but she generally preferred lying there like a log till dinner or tea-time, when, as I could not deprive her of her meals, she must be liberated, and would come crawling out with a grin of triumph on her round, red face. Often she would stubbornly refuse to pronounce some particular word in her lesson; and now I regret the lost labour I have had in striving to conquer her obstinacy. If I had passed it over as a matter of no consequence, it would have been better for both parties, than vainly striving to overcome it as I did; but I thought it my absolute duty to crush this vicious tendency in the bud: and so it was, if I could have done it; and had my powers been less limited, I might have enforced obedience; but, as it was, it was a trial of strength between her and me, in which she generally came off victorious; and every victory served to encourage and strengthen her for a future contest. In vain I argued, coaxed, entreated, threatened, scolded; in vain I kept her in from play, or, if obliged to take her out, refused to play with her, or to speak kindly or have anything to do with her; in vain I tried to set before her the advantages of doing as she was bid, and being loved, and kindly treated in consequence, and the disadvantages of persisting in her absurd perversity. Sometimes, when she would ask me to do something for her, I would answer, — ‘Yes, I will, Mary Ann, if you will only say that word. Come! you’d better say it at once, and have no more trouble about it.’

‘No.’

‘Then, of course, I can do nothing for you.’

With me, at her age, or under, neglect and disgrace were the most dreadful of punishments; but on her they made no impression. Sometimes, exasperated to the utmost pitch, I would shake her violently by the shoulder, or pull her long hair, or put her in the corner; for which she punished me with loud, shrill, piercing screams, that went through my head like a knife. She knew I hated this, and when she had shrieked her utmost, would look into my face with an air of vindictive satisfaction, exclaiming, — ‘*Now*, then! *that’s* for you!’ and then shriek again and again, till I was forced to stop my ears. Often these dreadful cries would bring Mrs. Bloomfield up to inquire what was the matter?

‘Mary Ann is a naughty girl, ma’am.’

‘But what are these shocking screams?’

‘She is screaming in a passion.’

‘I never heard such a dreadful noise! You might be killing her. Why is she not out with her brother?’

‘I cannot get her to finish her lessons.’

‘But Mary Ann must be a *good* girl, and finish her lessons.’ This was blandly spoken to the child. ‘And I hope I shall *never* hear such terrible cries again!’

And fixing her cold, stony eyes upon me with a look that could not be mistaken, she would shut the door, and walk away. Sometimes I would try to take the little obstinate creature by surprise, and casually ask her the word while she was thinking of something else; frequently she would begin to say it, and then suddenly cheek herself, with a provoking look that seemed to say, ‘Ah! I’m too sharp for you; you shan’t trick it out of me, either.’

On another occasion, I pretended to forget the whole affair; and talked and played with her as usual, till night, when I put her to bed; then bending over her, while she lay all smiles and good humour, just before departing, I said, as cheerfully and kindly as before — ‘Now, Mary Ann, just tell me that word before I kiss you good-night. You are a good girl now, and, of course, you will say it.’

‘No, I won’t.’

‘Then I can’t kiss you.’

‘Well, I don’t care.’

In vain I expressed my sorrow; in vain I lingered for some symptom of contrition; she really ‘didn’t care,’ and I left her alone, and in darkness, wondering most of all at this last proof of insensate stubbornness. In *my* childhood I could not imagine a more afflictive punishment than for my mother to refuse to kiss me at night: the very idea was terrible. More than the idea I never felt, for, happily, I never committed a fault that was deemed worthy of such penalty; but once I remember, for some transgression of my sister’s, our mother thought proper to inflict it upon her: what *she* felt, I cannot tell; but my sympathetic tears and suffering for her sake I shall not soon forget.

Another troublesome trait in Mary Ann was her incorrigible propensity to keep running into the nursery, to play with her little sisters and the nurse. This was natural enough, but, as it was against her mother's express desire, I, of course, forbade her to do so, and did my utmost to keep her with me; but that only increased her relish for the nursery, and the more I strove to keep her out of it, the oftener she went, and the longer she stayed, to the great dissatisfaction of Mrs. Bloomfield, who, I well knew, would impute all the blame of the matter to me. Another of my trials was the dressing in the morning: at one time she would not be washed; at another she would not be dressed, unless she might wear some particular frock, that I knew her mother would not like her to have; at another she would scream and run away if I attempted to touch her hair. So that, frequently, when, after much trouble and toil, I had, at length, succeeded in bringing her down, the breakfast was nearly half over; and black looks from 'mamma,' and testy observations from 'papa,' spoken at me, if not to me, were sure to be my meed: for few things irritated the latter so much as want of punctuality at meal times. Then, among the minor annoyances, was my inability to satisfy Mrs. Bloomfield with her daughter's dress; and the child's hair 'was never fit to be seen.' Sometimes, as a powerful reproach to me, she would perform the office of tire woman herself, and then complain bitterly of the trouble it gave her.

When little Fanny came into the schoolroom, I hoped she would be mild and inoffensive, at least; but a few days, if not a few hours, sufficed to destroy the illusion: I found her a mischievous, intractable little creature, given up to falsehood and deception, young as she was, and alarmingly fond of exercising her two favourite weapons of offence and defence: that of spitting in the faces of those who incurred her displeasure, and bellowing like a bull when her unreasonable desires were not gratified. As she, generally, was pretty quiet in her parents' presence, and they were impressed with the notion of her being a remarkably gentle child, her falsehoods were readily believed, and her loud uproars led them to suspect harsh and injudicious treatment on my part; and when, at length, her bad disposition became manifest even to their prejudiced eyes, I felt that the whole was attributed to me.

'What a naughty girl Fanny is getting!' Mrs. Bloomfield would say to her spouse. 'Don't you observe, my dear, how she is altered since she entered the schoolroom? She will soon be as bad as the other two; and, I am sorry to say, they have quite deteriorated of late.'

'You may say that,' was the answer. 'I've been thinking that same myself. I thought when we got them a governess they'd improve; but, instead of that, they get worse and worse: I don't know how it is with their learning, but their habits, I know, make no sort of improvement; they get rougher, and dirtier, and more unseemly every day.'

I knew this was all pointed at me; and these, and all similar innuendoes, affected me far more deeply than any open accusations would have done; for against the latter I should have been roused to speak in my own defence: now I judged it my wisest plan to subdue every resentful impulse, suppress every sensitive shrinking, and go on perseveringly, doing my best; for, irksome as my situation was, I earnestly wished to retain it. I thought, if I could struggle on with unremitting firmness and integrity, the children would in time become more humanized: every month would contribute to make them some little wiser, and, consequently, more manageable; for a child of nine or ten as frantic and ungovernable as these at six and seven would be a maniac.

I flattered myself I was benefiting my parents and sister by my continuance here; for small as the salary was, I still was earning something, and with strict economy I could easily manage to have something to spare for them, if they would favour me by taking it. Then it was by my own will that I had got the place: I had brought all this tribulation on myself, and I was determined to bear it; nay, more than that, I did not even regret the step I had taken. I longed to show my friends that, even now, I was competent to undertake the charge, and able to acquit myself honourably to the end; and if ever I felt it degrading to submit so quietly, or intolerable to toil so constantly, I would turn towards my home, and say within myself —

They may crush, but they shall not subdue me!
’Tis of thee that I think, not of them.

About Christmas I was allowed to visit home; but my holiday was only of a fortnight’s duration: ‘For,’ said Mrs. Bloomfield, ‘I thought, as you had seen your friends so lately, you would not care for a longer stay.’ I left her to think so still: but she little knew how long, how wearisome those fourteen weeks of absence had been to me; how intensely I had longed for my holidays, how greatly I was disappointed at their curtailment. Yet she was not to blame in this. I had never told her my feelings, and she could not be expected to divine them; I had not been with her a full term, and she was justified in not allowing me a full vacation.

CHAPTER IV — THE GRANDMAMMA

I spare my readers the account of my delight on coming home, my happiness while there — enjoying a brief space of rest and liberty in that dear, familiar place, among the loving and the loved — and my sorrow on being obliged to bid them, once more, a long adieu.

I returned, however, with unabated vigour to my work — a more arduous task than anyone can imagine, who has not felt something like the misery of being charged with the care and direction of a set of mischievous, turbulent rebels, whom his utmost exertions cannot bind to their duty; while, at the same time, he is responsible for their conduct to a higher power, who exacts from him what cannot be achieved without the aid of the superior's more potent authority; which, either from indolence, or the fear of becoming unpopular with the said rebellious gang, the latter refuses to give. I can conceive few situations more harassing than that wherein, however you may long for success, however you may labour to fulfil your duty, your efforts are baffled and set at nought by those beneath you, and unjustly censured and misjudged by those above.

I have not enumerated half the vexatious propensities of my pupils, or half the troubles resulting from my heavy responsibilities, for fear of trespassing too much upon the reader's patience; as, perhaps, I have already done; but my design in writing the few last pages was not to amuse, but to benefit those whom it might concern; he that has no interest in such matters will doubtless have skipped them over with a cursory glance, and, perhaps, a malediction against the prolixity of the writer; but if a parent has, therefrom, gathered any useful hint, or an unfortunate governess received thereby the slightest benefit, I am well rewarded for my pains.

To avoid trouble and confusion, I have taken my pupils one by one, and discussed their various qualities; but this can give no adequate idea of being worried by the whole three together; when, as was often the case, all were determined to 'be naughty, and to tease Miss Grey, and put her in a passion.'

Sometimes, on such occasions, the thought has suddenly occurred to me — 'If they could see me now!' meaning, of course, my friends at home; and the idea of how they would pity me has made me pity myself — so greatly that I have had the utmost difficulty to restrain my tears: but I have restrained them, till my little tormentors were gone to dessert, or cleared off to bed (my only prospects of deliverance), and then, in all the bliss of solitude, I have given myself up to the luxury of an unrestricted burst of weeping. But this was a weakness I did not often indulge: my employments were too numerous, my leisure moments too precious, to admit of much time being given to fruitless lamentations.

I particularly remember one wild, snowy afternoon, soon after my return in January: the children had all come up from dinner, loudly declaring that they meant ‘to be naughty;’ and they had well kept their resolution, though I had talked myself hoarse, and wearied every muscle in my throat, in the vain attempt to reason them out of it. I had got Tom pinned up in a corner, whence, I told him, he should not escape till he had done his appointed task. Meantime, Fanny had possessed herself of my work-bag, and was rifling its contents — and spitting into it besides. I told her to let it alone, but to no purpose, of course. ‘Burn it, Fanny!’ cried Tom: and *this* command she hastened to obey. I sprang to snatch it from the fire, and Tom darted to the door. ‘Mary Ann, throw her desk out of the window!’ cried he: and my precious desk, containing my letters and papers, my small amount of cash, and all my valuables, was about to be precipitated from the three-storey window. I flew to rescue it. Meanwhile Tom had left the room, and was rushing down the stairs, followed by Fanny. Having secured my desk, I ran to catch them, and Mary Ann came scampering after. All three escaped me, and ran out of the house into the garden, where they plunged about in the snow, shouting and screaming in exultant glee.

What must I do? If I followed them, I should probably be unable to capture one, and only drive them farther away; if I did not, how was I to get them in? And what would their parents think of me, if they saw or heard the children rioting, hatless, bonnetless, gloveless, and bootless, in the deep soft snow? While I stood in this perplexity, just without the door, trying, by grim looks and angry words, to awe them into subjection, I heard a voice behind me, in harshly piercing tones, exclaiming, —

‘Miss Grey! Is it possible? What, in the devil’s name, can you be thinking about?’

‘I can’t get them in, sir,’ said I, turning round, and beholding Mr. Bloomfield, with his hair on end, and his pale blue eyes bolting from their sockets.

‘But I insist upon their being got in!’ cried he, approaching nearer, and looking perfectly ferocious.

‘Then, sir, you must call them yourself, if you please, for they won’t listen to me,’ I replied, stepping back.

‘Come in with you, you filthy brats; or I’ll horsewhip you every one!’ roared he; and the children instantly obeyed. ‘There, you see! — they come at the first word!’

‘Yes, when *you* speak.’

‘And it’s very strange, that when you’ve the care of ’em you’ve no better control over ’em than that! — Now, there they are — gone upstairs with their nasty snowy feet! Do go after ’em and see them made decent, for heaven’s sake!’

That gentleman’s mother was then staying in the house; and, as I ascended the stairs and passed the drawing-room door, I had the satisfaction of hearing the old lady declaiming aloud to her daughter-in-law to this effect (for I could only distinguish the most emphatic words) —

‘Gracious heavens! — never in all my life — ! — get their death as sure as — ! Do you think, my dear, she’s a *proper person*? Take my word for it — ’

I heard no more; but that sufficed.

The senior Mrs. Bloomfield had been very attentive and civil to me; and till now I had thought her a nice, kind-hearted, chatty old body. She would often come to me and talk in a confidential strain; nodding and shaking her head, and gesticulating with hands and eyes, as a certain class of old ladies are won’t to do; though I never knew one that carried the peculiarity to so great an extent. She would even sympathise with me for the trouble I had with the children, and express at times, by half sentences, interspersed with nods and knowing winks, her sense of the injudicious conduct of their mamma in so restricting my power, and neglecting to support me with her authority. Such a mode of testifying disapprobation was not much to my taste; and I generally refused to take it in, or understand anything more than was openly spoken; at least, I never went farther than an implied acknowledgment that, if matters were otherwise ordered my task would be a less difficult one, and I should be better able to guide and instruct my charge; but now I must be doubly cautious. Hitherto, though I saw the old lady had her defects (of which one was a proneness to proclaim her perfections), I had always been wishful to excuse them, and to give her credit for all the virtues she professed, and even imagine others yet untold. Kindness, which had been the food of my life through so many years, had lately been so entirely denied me, that I welcomed with grateful joy the slightest semblance of it. No wonder, then, that my heart warmed to the old lady, and always gladdened at her approach and regretted her departure.

But now, the few words luckily or unluckily heard in passing had wholly revolutionized my ideas respecting her: now I looked upon her as hypocritical and insincere, a flatterer, and a spy upon my words and deeds. Doubtless it would have been my interest still to meet her with the same cheerful smile and tone of respectful cordiality as before; but I could not, if I would: my manner altered with my feelings, and became so cold and shy that she could not fail to notice it. She soon did notice it, and *her* manner altered too: the familiar nod was changed to a stiff bow, the gracious smile gave place to a glare of Gorgon ferocity; her vivacious loquacity was entirely transferred from me to ‘the darling boy and girls,’ whom she flattered and indulged more absurdly than ever their mother had done.

I confess I was somewhat troubled at this change: I feared the consequences of her displeasure, and even made some efforts to recover the ground I had lost — and with better apparent success than I could have anticipated. At one time, I, merely in common civility, asked after her cough; immediately her long visage relaxed into a smile, and she favoured me with a particular history of that and her other infirmities, followed by an account of her pious resignation, delivered in the usual emphatic, declamatory style, which no writing can portray.

‘But there’s one remedy for all, my dear, and that’s resignation’ (a toss of the head), ‘resignation to the will of heaven!’ (an uplifting of the hands and eyes). ‘It has always supported me through all my trials, and always will do’ (a succession of nods). ‘But then, it isn’t everybody that can say that’ (a shake of the head); ‘but I’m one of the pious ones, Miss Grey!’ (a very significant nod and toss). ‘And, thank heaven, I always was’ (another nod), ‘and I glory in it!’ (an emphatic clasping of the hands and shaking of the head). And with several texts of Scripture, misquoted or misapplied, and religious exclamations so redolent of the ludicrous in the style of delivery and manner of bringing in, if not in the expressions themselves, that I decline repeating them, she withdrew; tossing her large head in high good-humour — with herself at least — and left me hoping that, after all, she was rather weak than wicked.

At her next visit to Wellwood House, I went so far as to say I was glad to see her looking so well. The effect of this was magical: the words, intended as a mark of civility, were received as a flattering compliment; her countenance brightened up, and from that moment she became as gracious and benign as heart could wish — in outward semblance at least. From what I now saw of her, and what I heard from the children, I know that, in order to gain her cordial friendship, I had but to utter a word of flattery at each convenient opportunity: but this was against my principles; and for lack of this, the capricious old dame soon deprived me of her favour again, and I believe did me much secret injury.

She could not greatly influence her daughter-in-law against me, because, between that lady and herself there was a mutual dislike — chiefly shown by her in secret detractions and calumniations; by the other, in an excess of frigid formality in her demeanour; and no fawning flattery of the elder could thaw away the wall of ice which the younger interposed between them. But with her son, the old lady had better success: he would listen to all she had to say, provided she could soothe his fretful temper, and refrain from irritating him by her own asperities; and I have reason to believe that she considerably strengthened his prejudice against me. She would tell him that I shamefully neglected the children, and even his wife did not attend to them as she ought; and that he must look after them himself, or they would all go to ruin.

Thus urged, he would frequently give himself the trouble of watching them from the windows during their play; at times, he would follow them through the grounds, and too often came suddenly upon them while they were dabbling in the forbidden well, talking to the coachman in the stables, or revelling in the filth of the farm-yard — and I, meanwhile, wearily standing, by, having previously exhausted my energy in vain attempts to get them away. Often, too, he would unexpectedly pop his head into the schoolroom while the young people were at meals, and find them spilling their milk over the table and themselves, plunging their fingers into their own or each other's mugs, or quarrelling over their victuals like a set of tiger's cubs. If I were quiet at the moment, I was conniving at their disorderly conduct; if (as was frequently the case) I happened to be exalting my voice to enforce order, I was using undue violence, and setting the girls a bad example by such ungentleness of tone and language.

I remember one afternoon in spring, when, owing to the rain, they could not go out; but, by some amazing good fortune, they had all finished their lessons, and yet abstained from running down to tease their parents — a trick that annoyed me greatly, but which, on rainy days, I seldom could prevent their doing; because, below, they found novelty and amusement — especially when visitors were in the house; and their mother, though she bid me keep them in the schoolroom, would never chide them for leaving it, or trouble herself to send them back. But this day they appeared satisfied with, their present abode, and what is more wonderful still, seemed disposed to play together without depending on me for amusement, and without quarrelling with each other. Their occupation was a somewhat puzzling one: they were all squatted together on the floor by the window, over a heap of broken toys and a quantity of birds' eggs — or rather egg-shells, for the contents had luckily been abstracted. These shells they had broken up and were pounding into small fragments, to what end I could not imagine; but so long as they were quiet and not in positive mischief, I did not care; and, with a feeling of unusual repose, I sat by the fire, putting the finishing stitches to a frock for Mary Ann's doll; intending, when that was done, to begin a letter to my mother. Suddenly the door opened, and the dingy head of Mr. Bloomfield looked in.

'All very quiet here! What are you doing?' said he. 'No harm *to-day*, at least,' thought I. But he was of a different opinion. Advancing to the window, and seeing the children's occupations, he testily exclaimed — 'What in the world are you about?'

'We're grinding egg-shells, papa!' cried Tom.

'How *dare* you make such a mess, you little devils? Don't you see what confounded work you're making of the carpet?' (the carpet was a plain brown drugget). 'Miss Grey, did you know what they were doing?'

'Yes, sir.'

'You knew it?'

'Yes.'

'You knew it! and you actually sat there and permitted them to go on without a word of reproof!'

'I didn't think they were doing any harm.'

'Any harm! Why, look there! Just look at that carpet, and see — was there ever anything like it in a Christian house before? No wonder your room is not fit for a pigsty — no wonder your pupils are worse than a litter of pigs!

— no wonder — oh! I declare, it puts me quite past my patience' and he departed, shutting the door after him with a bang that made the children laugh.

'It puts me quite past my patience too!' muttered I, getting up; and, seizing the poker, I dashed it repeatedly into the cinders, and stirred them up with unwonted energy; thus easing my irritation under pretence of mending the fire.

After this, Mr. Bloomfield was continually looking in to see if the schoolroom was in order; and, as the children were continually littering the floor with fragments of toys, sticks, stones, stubble, leaves, and other rubbish, which I could not prevent their bringing, or oblige them to gather up, and which the servants refused to 'clean after them,' I had to spend a considerable portion of my valuable leisure moments on my knees upon the floor, in painsfully reducing things to order. Once I told them that they should not taste their supper till they had picked up everything from the carpet; Fanny might have hers when she had taken up a certain quantity, Mary Ann when she had gathered twice as many, and Tom was to clear away the rest. Wonderful to state, the girls did their part; but Tom was in such a fury that he flew upon the table, scattered the bread and milk about the floor, struck his sisters, kicked the coals out of the coal-pan, attempted to overthrow the table and chairs, and seemed inclined to make a Douglas-larder of the whole contents of the room: but I seized upon him, and, sending Mary Ann to call her mamma, held him, in spite of kicks, blows, yells, and execrations, till Mrs. Bloomfield made her appearance.

'What is the matter with my boy?' said she.

And when the matter was explained to her, all she did was to send for the nursery-maid to put the room in order, and bring Master Bloomfield his supper.

'There now,' cried Tom, triumphantly, looking up from his viands with his mouth almost too full for speech. 'There now, Miss Grey! you see I've got my supper in spite of you: and I haven't picked up a single thing!'

The only person in the house who had any real sympathy for me was the nurse; for she had suffered like afflictions, though in a smaller degree; as she had not the task of teaching, nor was she so responsible for the conduct of her charge.

'Oh, Miss Grey!' she would say, 'you have some trouble with them childer!'

'I have, indeed, Betty; and I daresay you know what it is.'

'Ay, I do so! But I don't vex myself o'er 'em as you do. And then, you see, I hit 'em a slap sometimes: and them little 'uns — I gives 'em a good whipping now and then: there's nothing else will do for 'em, as what they say. Howsoever, I've lost my place for it.'

'Have you, Betty? I heard you were going to leave.'

'Eh, bless you, yes! Missis gave me warning a three wik sin'. She told me afore Christmas how it mud be, if I hit 'em again; but I couldn't hold my hand off ’em at nothing. I know not how *you* do, for Miss Mary Ann’s worse by the half nor her sisters!’

CHAPTER V — THE UNCLE

Besides the old lady, there was another relative of the family, whose visits were a great annoyance to me — this was 'Uncle Robson,' Mrs. Bloomfield's brother; a tall, self-sufficient fellow, with dark hair and sallow complexion like his sister, a nose that seemed to disdain the earth, and little grey eyes, frequently half-closed, with a mixture of real stupidity and affected contempt of all surrounding objects. He was a thick-set, strongly-built man, but he had found some means of compressing his waist into a remarkably small compass; and that, together with the unnatural stillness of his form, showed that the lofty-minded, manly Mr. Robson, the scorner of the female sex, was not above the foppery of stays. He seldom deigned to notice me; and, when he did, it was with a certain supercilious insolence of tone and manner that convinced me he was no gentleman: though it was intended to have a contrary effect. But it was not for that I disliked his coming, so much as for the harm he did the children — encouraging all their evil propensities, and undoing in a few minutes the little good it had taken me months of labour to achieve.

Fanny and little Harriet he seldom condescended to notice; but Mary Ann was something of a favourite. He was continually encouraging her tendency to affectation (which I had done my utmost to crush), talking about her pretty face, and filling her head with all manner of conceited notions concerning her personal appearance (which I had instructed her to regard as dust in the balance compared with the cultivation of her mind and manners); and I never saw a child so susceptible of flattery as she was. Whatever was wrong, in either her or her brother, he would encourage by laughing at, if not by actually praising: people little know the injury they do to children by laughing at their faults, and making a pleasant jest of what their true friends have endeavoured to teach them to hold in grave abhorrence.

Though not a positive drunkard, Mr. Robson habitually swallowed great quantities of wine, and took with relish an occasional glass of brandy and water. He taught his nephew to imitate him in this to the utmost of his ability, and to believe that the more wine and spirits he could take, and the better he liked them, the more he manifested his bold, and manly spirit, and rose superior to his sisters. Mr. Bloomfield had not much to say against it, for his favourite beverage was gin and water; of which he took a considerable portion every day, by dint of constant sipping — and to that I chiefly attributed his dingy complexion and waspish temper.

Mr. Robson likewise encouraged Tom's propensity to persecute the lower creation, both by precept and example. As he frequently came to course or shoot over his brother-in-law's grounds, he would bring his favourite dogs with him; and he treated them so brutally that, poor as I was, I would have given a sovereign any day to see one of them bite him, provided the animal could have done it with impunity. Sometimes, when in a very complacent mood, he would go a-birds'-nesting with the children, a thing that irritated and annoyed me exceedingly; as, by frequent and persevering attempts, I flattered myself I had partly shown them the evil of this pastime, and hoped, in time, to bring them to some general sense of justice and humanity; but ten minutes' birds'-nesting with uncle Robson, or even a laugh from him at some relation of their former barbarities, was sufficient at once to destroy the effect of my whole elaborate course of reasoning and persuasion. Happily, however, during that spring, they never, but once, got anything but empty nests, or eggs — being too impatient to leave them till the birds were hatched; that once, Tom, who had been with his uncle into the neighbouring plantation, came running in high glee into the garden, with a brood of little callow nestlings in his hands. Mary Ann and Fanny, whom I was just bringing out, ran to admire his spoils, and to beg each a bird for themselves. 'No, not one!' cried Tom. 'They're all mine; uncle Robson gave them to me — one, two, three, four, five — you shan't touch one of them! no, not one, for your lives!' continued he, exultingly; laying the nest on the ground, and standing over it with his legs wide apart, his hands thrust into his breeches-pockets, his body bent forward, and his face twisted into all manner of contortions in the ecstasy of his delight.

'But you shall see me fettle 'em off. My word, but I *will* wallop 'em? See if I don't now. By gum! but there's rare sport for me in that nest.'

'But, Tom,' said I, 'I shall not allow you to torture those birds. They must either be killed at once or carried back to the place you took them from, that the old birds may continue to feed them.'

'But you don't know where that is, Madam: it's only me and uncle Robson that knows that.'

'But if you don't tell me, I shall kill them myself — much as I hate it.'

'You daren't. You daren't touch them for your life! because you know papa and mamma, and uncle Robson, would be angry. Ha, ha! I've caught you there, Miss!'

'I shall do what I think right in a case of this sort without consulting any one. If your papa and mamma don't happen to approve of it, I shall be sorry to offend them; but your uncle Robson's opinions, of course, are nothing to me.'

So saying — urged by a sense of duty — at the risk of both making myself sick and incurring the wrath of my employers — I got a large flat stone, that had been reared up for a mouse-trap by the gardener; then, having once more vainly endeavoured to persuade the little tyrant to let the birds be carried back, I asked what he intended to do with them. With fiendish glee he commenced a list of torments; and while he was busied in the relation, I dropped the stone upon his intended victims and crushed them flat beneath it. Loud were the outcries, terrible the execrations, consequent upon this daring outrage; uncle Robson had been coming up the walk with his gun, and was just then pausing to kick his dog. Tom flew towards him, vowing he would make him kick me instead of Juno. Mr. Robson leant upon his gun, and laughed excessively at the violence of his nephew's passion, and the bitter maledictions and opprobrious epithets he heaped upon me. 'Well, you *are* a good 'un!' exclaimed he, at length, taking up his weapon and proceeding towards the house. 'Damme, but the lad has some spunk in him, too. Curse me, if ever I saw a nobler little scoundrel than that. He's beyond petticoat government already: by God! he defies mother, granny, governess, and all! Ha, ha, ha! Never mind, Tom, I'll get you another brood to-morrow.'

'If you do, Mr. Robson, I shall kill them too,' said I.

'Humph!' replied he, and having honoured me with a broad stare — which, contrary to his expectations, I sustained without flinching — he turned away with an air of supreme contempt, and stalked into the house. Tom next went to tell his mamma. It was not her way to say much on any subject; but, when she next saw me, her aspect and demeanour were doubly dark and chilled. After some casual remark about the weather, she observed — 'I am sorry, Miss Grey, you should think it necessary to interfere with Master Bloomfield's amusements; he was very much distressed about your destroying the birds.'

'When Master Bloomfield's amusements consist in injuring sentient creatures,' I answered, 'I think it my duty to interfere.'

'You seemed to have forgotten,' said she, calmly, 'that the creatures were all created for our convenience.'

I thought that doctrine admitted some doubt, but merely replied — 'If they were, we have no right to torment them for our amusement.'

'I think,' said she, 'a child's amusement is scarcely to be weighed against the welfare of a soulless brute.'

'But, for the child's own sake, it ought not to be encouraged to have such amusements,' answered I, as meekly as I could, to make up for such unusual pertinacity. '"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."'

'Oh! of course; but that refers to our conduct towards each other.'

'"The merciful man shows mercy to his beast,"' I ventured to add.

'I think *you* have not shown much mercy,' replied she, with a short, bitter laugh; 'killing the poor birds by wholesale in that shocking manner, and putting the dear boy to such misery for a mere whim.'

I judged it prudent to say no more. This was the nearest approach to a quarrel I ever had with Mrs. Bloomfield; as well as the greatest number of words I ever exchanged with her at one time, since the day of my first arrival.

But Mr. Robson and old Mrs. Bloomfield were not the only guests whose coming to Wellwood House annoyed me; every visitor disturbed me more or less; not so much because they neglected me (though I did feel their conduct strange and disagreeable in that respect), as because I found it impossible to keep my pupils away from them, as I was repeatedly desired to do: Tom must talk to them, and Mary Ann must be noticed by them. Neither the one nor the other knew what it was to feel any degree of shamefacedness, or even common modesty. They would indecently and clamorously interrupt the conversation of their elders, tease them with the most impertinent questions, roughly collar the gentlemen, climb their knees uninvited, hang about their shoulders or rifle their pockets, pull the ladies' gowns, disorder their hair, tumble their collars, and importunately beg for their trinkets.

Mrs. Bloomfield had the sense to be shocked and annoyed at all this, but she had not sense to prevent it: she expected me to prevent it. But how could I — when the guests, with their fine clothes and new faces, continually flattered and indulged them, out of complaisance to their parents — how could I, with my homely garments, every-day face, and honest words, draw them away? I strained every nerve to do so: by striving to amuse them, I endeavoured to attract them to my side; by the exertion of such authority as I possessed, and by such severity as I dared to use, I tried to deter them from tormenting the guests; and by reproaching their unmannerly conduct, to make them ashamed to repeat it. But they knew no shame; they scorned authority which had no terrors to back it; and as for kindness and affection, either they had no hearts, or such as they had were so strongly guarded, and so well concealed, that I, with all my efforts, had not yet discovered how to reach them.

But soon my trials in this quarter came to a close — sooner than I either expected or desired; for one sweet evening towards the close of May, as I was rejoicing in the near approach of the holidays, and congratulating myself upon having made some progress with my pupils (as far as their learning went, at least, for I *had* instilled *something* into their heads, and I had, at length, brought them to be a little — a very little — more rational about getting their lessons done in time to leave some space for recreation, instead of tormenting themselves and me all day long to no purpose), Mrs. Bloomfield sent for me, and calmly told me that after Midsummer my services would be no longer required. She assured me that my character and general conduct were unexceptionable; but the children had made so little improvement since my arrival that Mr. Bloomfield and she felt it their duty to seek some other mode of instruction. Though superior to most children of their years in abilities, they were decidedly behind them in attainments; their manners were uncultivated, and their tempers unruly. And this she attributed to a want of sufficient firmness, and diligent, persevering care on my part.

Unshaken firmness, devoted diligence, unwearied perseverance, unceasing care, were the very qualifications on which I had secretly prided myself; and by which I had hoped in time to overcome all difficulties, and obtain success at last. I wished to say something in my own justification; but in attempting to speak, I felt my voice falter; and rather than testify any emotion, or suffer the tears to overflow that were already gathering in my eyes, I chose to keep silence, and bear all like a self-convicted culprit.

Thus was I dismissed, and thus I sought my home. Alas! what would they think of me? unable, after all my boasting, to keep my place, even for a single year, as governess to three small children, whose mother was asserted by my own aunt to be a ‘very nice woman.’ Having been thus weighed in the balance and found wanting, I need not hope they would be willing to try me again. And this was an unwelcome thought; for vexed, harassed, disappointed as I had been, and greatly as I had learned to love and value my home, I was not yet weary of adventure, nor willing to relax my efforts. I knew that all parents were not like Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield, and I was certain all children were not like theirs. The next family must be different, and any change must be for the better. I had been seasoned by adversity, and tutored by experience, and I longed to redeem my lost honour in the eyes of those whose opinion was more than that of all the world to me.

CHAPTER VI — THE PARSONAGE AGAIN

For a few months I remained peaceably at home, in the quiet enjoyment of liberty and rest, and genuine friendship, from all of which I had fasted so long; and in the earnest prosecution of my studies, to recover what I had lost during my stay at Wellwood House, and to lay in new stores for future use. My father's health was still very infirm, but not materially worse than when I last saw him; and I was glad I had it in my power to cheer him by my return, and to amuse him with singing his favourite songs.

No one triumphed over my failure, or said I had better have taken his or her advice, and quietly stayed at home. All were glad to have me back again, and lavished more kindness than ever upon me, to make up for the sufferings I had undergone; but not one would touch a shilling of what I had so cheerfully earned and so carefully saved, in the hope of sharing it with them. By dint of pinching here, and scraping there, our debts were already nearly paid. Mary had had good success with her drawings; but our father had insisted upon *her* likewise keeping all the produce of her industry to herself. All we could spare from the supply of our humble wardrobe and our little casual expenses, he directed us to put into the savings'-bank; saying, we knew not how soon we might be dependent on that alone for support: for he felt he had not long to be with us, and what would become of our mother and us when he was gone, God only knew!

Dear papa! if he had troubled himself less about the afflictions that threatened us in case of his death, I am convinced that dreaded event would not have taken place so soon. My mother would never suffer him to ponder on the subject if she could help it.

'Oh, Richard!' exclaimed she, on one occasion, 'if you would but dismiss such gloomy subjects from your mind, you would live as long as any of us; at least you would live to see the girls married, and yourself a happy grandfather, with a canty old dame for your companion.'

My mother laughed, and so did my father: but his laugh soon perished in a dreary sigh.

'*They* married — poor penniless things!' said he; 'who will take them I wonder!'

'Why, nobody shall that isn't thankful for them. Wasn't I penniless when you took me? and you *pretended*, at least, to be vastly pleased with your acquisition. But it's no matter whether they get married or not: we can devise a thousand honest ways of making a livelihood. And I wonder, Richard, you can think of bothering your head about our *poverty* in case of your death; as if *that* would be anything compared with the calamity of losing you — an affliction that you well know would swallow up all others, and which you ought to do your utmost to preserve us from: and there is nothing like a cheerful mind for keeping the body in health.'

'I know, Alice, it is wrong to keep repining as I do, but I cannot help it: you must bear with me.'

'I *won't* bear with you, if I can alter you,' replied my mother: but the harshness of her words was undone by the earnest affection of her tone and pleasant smile, that made my father smile again, less sadly and less transiently than was his wont.

'Mamma,' said I, as soon as I could find an opportunity of speaking with her alone, 'my money is but little, and cannot last long; if I could increase it, it would lessen papa's anxiety, on one subject at least. I cannot draw like Mary, and so the best thing I could do would be to look out for another situation.'

'And so you would actually try again, Agnes?'

'Decidedly, I would.'

'Why, my dear, I should have thought you had had enough of it.'

'I know,' said I, 'everybody is not like Mr. and Mrs. Bloomfield — '

'Some are worse,' interrupted my mother.

'But not many, I think,' replied I, 'and I'm sure all children are not like theirs; for I and Mary were not: we always did as you bid us, didn't we?'

'Generally: but then, I did not spoil you; and you were not perfect angels after all: Mary had a fund of quiet obstinacy, and you were somewhat faulty in regard to temper; but you were very good children on the whole.'

'I know I was sulky sometimes, and I should have been glad to see these children sulky sometimes too; for then I could have understood them: but they never were, for they *could* not be offended, nor hurt, nor ashamed: they could not be unhappy in any way, except when they were in a passion.'

'Well, if they *could* not, it was not their fault: you cannot expect stone to be as pliable as clay.'

'No, but still it is very unpleasant to live with such unimpressible, incomprehensible creatures. You cannot love them; and if you could, your love would be utterly thrown away: they could neither return it, nor value, nor understand it. But, however, even if I should stumble on such a family again, which is quite unlikely, I have all this experience to begin with, and I should manage better another time; and the end and aim of this preamble is, let me try again.'

'Well, my girl, you are not easily discouraged, I see: I am glad of that. But, let me tell you, you are a good deal paler and thinner than when you first left home; and we cannot have you undermining your health to hoard up money either for yourself or others.'

'Mary tells me I am changed too; and I don't much wonder at it, for I was in a constant state of agitation and anxiety all day long: but next time I am determined to take things coolly.'

After some further discussion, my mother promised once more to assist me, provided I would wait and be patient; and I left her to broach the matter to my father, when and how she deemed it most advisable: never doubting her ability to obtain his consent. Meantime, I searched, with great interest, the advertising columns of the newspapers, and wrote answers to every 'Wanted a Governess' that appeared at all eligible; but all my letters, as well as the replies, when I got any, were dutifully shown to my mother; and she, to my chagrin, made me reject the situations one after another: these were low people, these were too exacting in their demands, and these too niggardly in their remuneration.

'Your talents are not such as every poor clergyman's daughter possesses, Agnes,' she would say, 'and you must not throw them away. Remember, you promised to be patient: there is no need of hurry: you have plenty of time before you, and may have many chances yet.'

At length, she advised me to put an advertisement, myself, in the paper, stating my qualifications, &c.

'Music, singing, drawing, French, Latin, and German,' said she, 'are no mean assemblage: many will be glad to have so much in one instructor; and this time, you shall try your fortune in a somewhat higher family in that of some genuine, thoroughbred gentleman; for such are far more likely to treat you with proper respect and consideration than those purse-proud tradespeople and arrogant upstarts. I have known several among the higher ranks who treated their governesses quite as one of the family; though some, I allow, are as insolent and exacting as any one else can be: for there are bad and good in all classes.'

The advertisement was quickly written and despatched. Of the two parties who answered it, but one would consent to give me fifty pounds, the sum my mother bade me name as the salary I should require; and here, I hesitated about engaging myself, as I feared the children would be too old, and their parents would require some one more showy, or more experienced, if not more accomplished than I. But my mother dissuaded me from declining it on that account: I should do vastly well, she said, if I would only throw aside my diffidence, and acquire a little more confidence in myself. I was just to give a plain, true statement of my acquirements and qualifications, and name what stipulations I chose to make, and then await the result. The only stipulation I ventured to propose, was that I might be allowed two months' holidays during the year to visit my friends, at Midsummer and Christmas. The unknown lady, in her reply, made no objection to this, and stated that, as to my acquirements, she had no doubt I should be able to give satisfaction; but in the engagement of governesses she considered those things as but subordinate points; as being situated in the neighbourhood of O — -, she could get masters to supply any deficiencies in that respect: but, in her opinion, next to unimpeachable morality, a mild and cheerful temper and obliging disposition were the most essential requisities.

My mother did not relish this at all, and now made many objections to my accepting the situation; in which my sister warmly supported her: but, unwilling to be balked again, I overruled them all; and, having first obtained the consent of my father (who had, a short time previously, been apprised of these transactions), I wrote a most obliging epistle to my unknown correspondent, and, finally, the bargain was concluded.

It was decreed that on the last day of January I was to enter upon my new office as governess in the family of Mr. Murray, of Horton Lodge, near O —-, about seventy miles from our village: a formidable distance to me, as I had never been above twenty miles from home in all the course of my twenty years' sojourn on earth; and as, moreover, every individual in that family and in the neighbourhood was utterly unknown to myself and all my acquaintances. But this rendered it only the more piquant to me. I had now, in some measure, got rid of the *mauvaise honte* that had formerly oppressed me so much; there was a pleasing excitement in the idea of entering these unknown regions, and making my way alone among its strange inhabitants. I now flattered myself I was going to see something in the world: Mr. Murray's residence was near a large town, and not in a manufacturing district, where the people had nothing to do but to make money; his rank from what I could gather, appeared to be higher than that of Mr. Bloomfield; and, doubtless, he was one of those genuine thoroughbred gentry my mother spoke of, who would treat his governess with due consideration as a respectable well-educated lady, the instructor and guide of his children, and not a mere upper servant. Then, my pupils being older, would be more rational, more teachable, and less troublesome than the last; they would be less confined to the schoolroom, and not require that constant labour and incessant watching; and, finally, bright visions mingled with my hopes, with which the care of children and the mere duties of a governess had little or nothing to do. Thus, the reader will see that I had no claim to be regarded as a martyr to filial piety, going forth to sacrifice peace and liberty for the sole purpose of laying up stores for the comfort and support of my parents: though certainly the comfort of my father, and the future support of my mother, had a large share in my calculations; and fifty pounds appeared to me no ordinary sum. I must have decent clothes becoming my station; I must, it seemed, put out my washing, and also pay for my four annual journeys between Horton Lodge and home; but with strict attention to economy, surely twenty pounds, or little more, would cover those expenses, and then there would be thirty for the bank, or little less: what a valuable addition to our stock! Oh, I must struggle to keep this situation, whatever it might be! both for my own honour among my friends and for the solid services I might render them by my continuance there.

CHAPTER VII — HORTON LODGE

The 31st of January was a wild, tempestuous day: there was a strong north wind, with a continual storm of snow drifting on the ground and whirling through the air. My friends would have had me delay my departure, but fearful of prejudicing my employers against me by such want of punctuality at the commencement of my undertaking, I persisted in keeping the appointment.

I will not inflict upon my readers an account of my leaving home on that dark winter morning: the fond farewells, the long, long journey to O — -, the solitary waitings in inns for coaches or trains — for there were some railways then — and, finally, the meeting at O — - with Mr. Murray's servant, who had been sent with the phaeton to drive me from thence to Horton Lodge. I will just state that the heavy snow had thrown such impediments in the way of both horses and steam-engines, that it was dark some hours before I reached my journey's end, and that a most bewildering storm came on at last, which made the few miles' space between O — - and Horton Lodge a long and formidable passage. I sat resigned, with the cold, sharp snow drifting through my veil and filling my lap, seeing nothing, and wondering how the unfortunate horse and driver could make their way even as well as they did; and indeed it was but a toilsome, creeping style of progression, to say the best of it. At length we paused; and, at the call of the driver, someone unlatched and rolled back upon their creaking hinges what appeared to be the park gates. Then we proceeded along a smoother road, whence, occasionally, I perceived some huge, hoary mass gleaming through the darkness, which I took to be a portion of a snow-clad tree. After a considerable time we paused again, before the stately portico of a large house with long windows descending to the ground.

I rose with some difficulty from under the superincumbent snowdrift, and alighted from the carriage, expecting that a kind and hospitable reception would indemnify me for the toils and hardships of the day. A gentleman person in black opened the door, and admitted me into a spacious hall, lighted by an amber-coloured lamp suspended from the ceiling; he led me through this, along a passage, and opening the door of a back room, told me that was the schoolroom. I entered, and found two young ladies and two young gentlemen — my future pupils, I supposed. After a formal greeting, the elder girl, who was trifling over a piece of canvas and a basket of German wools, asked if I should like to go upstairs. I replied in the affirmative, of course.

'Matilda, take a candle, and show her her room,' said she.

Miss Matilda, a strapping hoyden of about fourteen, with a short frock and trousers, shrugged her shoulders and made a slight grimace, but took a candle and proceeded before me up the back stairs (a long, steep, double flight), and through a long, narrow passage, to a small but tolerably comfortable room. She then asked me if I would take some tea or coffee. I was about to answer No; but remembering that I had taken nothing since seven o'clock that morning, and feeling faint in consequence, I said I would take a cup of tea. Saying she would tell 'Brown,' the young lady departed; and by the time I had divested myself of my heavy, wet cloak, shawl, bonnet, &c., a mincing damsel came to say the young ladies desired to know whether I would take my tea up there or in the schoolroom. Under the plea of fatigue I chose to take it there. She withdrew; and, after a while, returned again with a small tea-tray, and placed it on the chest of drawers, which served as a dressing-table. Having civilly thanked her, I asked at what time I should be expected to rise in the morning.

'The young ladies and gentlemen breakfast at half-past eight, ma'am,' said she; 'they rise early; but, as they seldom do any lessons before breakfast, I should think it will do if you rise soon after seven.'

I desired her to be so kind as to call me at seven, and, promising to do so, she withdrew. Then, having broken my long fast on a cup of tea and a little thin bread and butter, I sat down beside the small, smouldering fire, and amused myself with a hearty fit of crying; after which, I said my prayers, and then, feeling considerably relieved, began to prepare for bed. Finding that none of my luggage was brought up, I instituted a search for the bell; and failing to discover any signs of such a convenience in any corner of the room, I took my candle and ventured through the long passage, and down the steep stairs, on a voyage of discovery. Meeting a well-dressed female on the way, I told her what I wanted; but not without considerable hesitation, as I was not quite sure whether it was one of the upper servants, or Mrs. Murray herself: it happened, however, to be the lady's-maid. With the air of one conferring an unusual favour, she vouchsafed to undertake the sending up of my things; and when I had re-entered my room, and waited and wondered a long time (greatly fearing that she had forgotten or neglected to perform her promise, and doubting whether to keep waiting or go to bed, or go down again), my hopes, at length, were revived by the sound of voices and laughter, accompanied by the tramp of feet along the passage; and presently the luggage was brought in by a rough-looking maid and a man, neither of them very respectful in their demeanour to me. Having shut the door upon their retiring footsteps, and unpacked a few of my things, I betook myself to rest; gladly enough, for I was weary in body and mind.

It was with a strange feeling of desolation, mingled with a strong sense of the novelty of my situation, and a joyless kind of curiosity concerning what was yet unknown, that I awoke the next morning; feeling like one whirled away by enchantment, and suddenly dropped from the clouds into a remote and unknown land, widely and completely isolated from all he had ever seen or known before; or like a thistle-seed borne on the wind to some strange nook of uncongenial soil, where it must lie long enough before it can take root and germinate, extracting nourishment from what appears so alien to its nature: if, indeed, it ever can. But this gives no proper idea of my feelings at all; and no one that has not lived such a retired, stationary life as mine, can possibly imagine what they were: hardly even if he has known what it is to awake some morning, and find himself in Port Nelson, in New Zealand, with a world of waters between himself and all that knew him.

I shall not soon forget the peculiar feeling with which I raised my blind and looked out upon the unknown world: a wide, white wilderness was all that met my gaze; a waste of

Deserts tossed in snow,
And heavy laden groves.

I descended to the schoolroom with no remarkable eagerness to join my pupils, though not without some feeling of curiosity respecting what a further acquaintance would reveal. One thing, among others of more obvious importance, I determined with myself — I must begin with calling them Miss and Master. It seemed to me a chilling and unnatural piece of punctilio between the children of a family and their instructor and daily companion; especially where the former were in their early childhood, as at Wellwood House; but even there, my calling the little Bloomfields by their simple names had been regarded as an offensive liberty: as their parents had taken care to show me, by carefully designating them *Master* and *Miss* Bloomfield, &c., in speaking to me. I had been very slow to take the hint, because the whole affair struck me as so very absurd; but now I determined to be wiser, and begin at once with as much form and ceremony as any member of the family would be likely to require: and, indeed, the children being so much older, there would be less difficulty; though the little words Miss and Master seemed to have a surprising effect in repressing all familiar, open-hearted kindness, and extinguishing every gleam of cordiality that might arise between us.

As I cannot, like Dogberry, find it in my heart to bestow all my tediousness upon the reader, I will not go on to bore him with a minute detail of all the discoveries and proceedings of this and the following day. No doubt he will be amply satisfied with a slight sketch of the different members of the family, and a general view of the first year or two of my sojourn among them.

To begin with the head: Mr. Murray was, by all accounts, a blustering, roystering, country squire: a devoted fox-hunter, a skilful horse-jockey and farrier, an active, practical farmer, and a hearty *bon vivant*. By all accounts, I say; for, except on Sundays, when he went to church, I never saw him from month to month: unless, in crossing the hall or walking in the grounds, the figure of a tall, stout gentleman, with scarlet cheeks and crimson nose, happened to come across me; on which occasions, if he passed near enough to speak, an unceremonious nod, accompanied by a ‘Morning, Miss Grey,’ or some such brief salutation, was usually vouchsafed. Frequently, indeed, his loud laugh reached me from afar; and oftener still I heard him swearing and blaspheming against the footmen, groom, coachman, or some other hapless dependant.

Mrs. Murray was a handsome, dashing lady of forty, who certainly required neither rouge nor padding to add to her charms; and whose chief enjoyments were, or seemed to be, in giving or frequenting parties, and in dressing at the very top of the fashion. I did not see her till eleven o'clock on the morning after my arrival; when she honoured me with a visit, just as my mother might step into the kitchen to see a new servant-girl: yet not so, either, for my mother would have seen her immediately after her arrival, and not waited till the next day; and, moreover, she would have addressed her in a more kind and friendly manner, and given her some words of comfort as well as a plain exposition of her duties; but Mrs. Murray did neither the one nor the other. She just stepped into the schoolroom on her return from ordering dinner in the housekeeper's room, bade me good-morning, stood for two minutes by the fire, said a few words about the weather and the 'rather rough' journey I must have had yesterday; petted her youngest child — a boy of ten — who had just been wiping his mouth and hands on her gown, after indulging in some savoury morsel from the housekeeper's store; told me what a sweet, good boy he was; and then sailed out, with a self-complacent smile upon her face: thinking, no doubt, that she had done quite enough for the present, and had been delightfully condescending into the bargain. Her children evidently held the same opinion, and I alone thought otherwise.

After this she looked in upon me once or twice, during the absence of my pupils, to enlighten me concerning my duties towards them. For the girls she seemed anxious only to render them as superficially attractive and showily accomplished as they could possibly be made, without present trouble or discomfort to themselves; and I was to act accordingly — to study and strive to amuse and oblige, instruct, refine, and polish, with the least possible exertion on their part, and no exercise of authority on mine. With regard to the two boys, it was much the same; only instead of accomplishments, I was to get the greatest possible quantity of Latin grammar and Valpy's Delectus into their heads, in order to fit them for school — the greatest possible quantity at least *without* trouble to themselves. John might be a 'little high-spirited,' and Charles might be a little 'nervous and tedious — '

'But at all events, Miss Grey,' said she, 'I hope *you* will keep your temper, and be mild and patient throughout; especially with the dear little Charles; he is so extremely nervous and susceptible, and so utterly unaccustomed to anything but the tenderest treatment. You will excuse my naming these things to you; for the fact is, I have hitherto found all the governesses, even the very best of them, faulty in this particular. They wanted that meek and quiet spirit, which St. Matthew, or some of them, says is better than the putting on of apparel — you will know the passage to which I allude, for you are a clergyman's daughter. But I have no doubt you will give satisfaction in this respect as well as the rest. And remember, on all occasions, when any of the young people do anything improper, if persuasion and gentle remonstrance will not do, let one of the others come and tell me; for I can speak to them more plainly than it would be proper for you to do. And make them as happy as you can, Miss Grey, and I dare say you will do very well.'

I observed that while Mrs. Murray was so extremely solicitous for the comfort and happiness of her children, and continually talking about it, she never once mentioned mine; though they were at home, surrounded by friends, and I an alien among strangers; and I did not yet know enough of the world, not to be considerably surprised at this anomaly.

Miss Murray, otherwise Rosalie, was about sixteen when I came, and decidedly a very pretty girl; and in two years longer, as time more completely developed her form and added grace to her carriage and deportment, she became positively beautiful; and that in no common degree. She was tall and slender, yet not thin; perfectly formed, exquisitely fair, though not without a brilliant, healthy bloom; her hair, which she wore in a profusion of long ringlets, was of a very light brown inclining to yellow; her eyes were pale blue, but so clear and bright that few would wish them darker; the rest of her features were small, not quite regular, and not remarkably otherwise: but altogether you could not hesitate to pronounce her a very lovely girl. I wish I could say as much for mind and disposition as I can for her form and face.

Yet think not I have any dreadful disclosures to make: she was lively, light-hearted, and could be very agreeable, with those who did not cross her will. Towards me, when I first came, she was cold and haughty, then insolent and overbearing; but, on a further acquaintance, she gradually laid aside her airs, and in time became as deeply attached to me as it was possible for *her* to be to one of my character and position: for she seldom lost sight, for above half an hour at a time, of the fact of my being a hireling and a poor curate's daughter. And yet, upon the whole, I believe she respected me more than she herself was aware of; because I was the only person in the house who steadily professed good principles, habitually spoke the truth, and generally endeavoured to make inclination bow to duty; and this I say, not, of course, in commendation of myself, but to show the unfortunate state of the family to which my services were, for the present, devoted. There was no member of it in whom I regretted this sad want of principle so much as Miss Murray herself; not only because she had taken a fancy to me, but because there was so much of what was pleasant and prepossessing in herself, that, in spite of her failings, I really liked her — when she did not rouse my indignation, or ruffle my temper by *too* great a display of her faults. These, however, I would fain persuade myself were rather the effect of her education than her disposition: she had never been perfectly taught the distinction between right and wrong; she had, like her brothers and sisters, been suffered, from infancy, to tyrannize over nurses, governesses, and servants; she had not been taught to moderate her desires, to control her temper or bridle her will, or to sacrifice her own pleasure for the good of others. Her temper being naturally good, she was never violent or morose, but from constant indulgence, and habitual scorn of reason, she was often testy and capricious; her mind had never been cultivated: her intellect, at best, was somewhat shallow; she possessed considerable vivacity, some quickness of perception, and some talent for music and the acquisition of languages, but till fifteen she had troubled herself to acquire nothing; — then the love of display had roused her faculties, and induced her to apply herself, but only to the more showy accomplishments. And when I came it was the same: everything was neglected but French, German, music, singing, dancing, fancy-work, and a little drawing — such drawing as might produce the greatest show with the smallest labour, and the principal parts of which were generally done by me. For music and singing, besides my occasional instructions, she had the attendance of the best master the country afforded; and in these accomplishments, as well as in dancing, she certainly attained great proficiency. To music, indeed, she devoted too much of her time, as, governess though I was, I frequently told her; but her mother thought that if *she* liked it, she *could* not give too much time to the acquisition of so attractive an art. Of fancy-work I knew nothing but what I gathered from my pupil and my own observation; but no sooner was I initiated, than she made me useful in twenty different ways: all the tedious parts of her work were shifted on to my shoulders; such as stretching the frames, stitching in the canvas, sorting the wools and silks, putting in the grounds, counting the stitches, rectifying mistakes, and finishing the pieces she was tired of.

At sixteen, Miss Murray was something of a romp, yet not more so than is natural and allowable for a girl of that age, but at seventeen, that propensity, like all other things, began to give way to the ruling passion, and soon was swallowed up in the all-absorbing ambition to attract and dazzle the other sex. But enough of her: now let us turn to her sister.

Miss Matilda Murray was a veritable hoyden, of whom little need be said. She was about two years and a half younger than her sister; her features were larger, her complexion much darker. She might possibly make a handsome woman; but she was far too big-boned and awkward ever to be called a pretty girl, and at present she cared little about it. Rosalie knew all her charms, and thought them even greater than they were, and valued them more highly than she ought to have done, had they been three times as great; Matilda thought she was well enough, but cared little about the matter; still less did she care about the cultivation of her mind, and the acquisition of ornamental accomplishments. The manner in which she learnt her lessons and practised her music was calculated to drive any governess to despair. Short and easy as her tasks were, if done at all, they were slurred over, at any time and in any way; but generally at the least convenient times, and in the way least beneficial to herself, and least satisfactory to me: the short half-hour of practising was horribly strummed through; she, meantime, unsparingly abusing me, either for interrupting her with corrections, or for not rectifying her mistakes before they were made, or something equally unreasonable. Once or twice, I ventured to remonstrate with her seriously for such irrational conduct; but on each of those occasions, I received such reprehensive expostulations from her mother, as convinced me that, if I wished to keep the situation, I must even let Miss Matilda go on in her own way.

When her lessons were over, however, her ill-humour was generally over too: while riding her spirited pony, or romping with the dogs or her brothers and sister, but especially with her dear brother John, she was as happy as a lark. As an animal, Matilda was all right, full of life, vigour, and activity; as an intelligent being, she was barbarously ignorant, indocile, careless and irrational; and, consequently, very distressing to one who had the task of cultivating her understanding, reforming her manners, and aiding her to acquire those ornamental attainments which, unlike her sister, she despised as much as the rest. Her mother was partly aware of her deficiencies, and gave me many a lecture as to how I should try to form her tastes, and endeavour to rouse and cherish her dormant vanity; and, by insinuating, skilful flattery, to win her attention to the desired objects — which I would not do; and how I should prepare and smooth the path of learning till she could glide along it without the least exertion to herself: which I could not, for nothing can be taught to any purpose without some little exertion on the part of the learner.

As a moral agent, Matilda was reckless, headstrong, violent, and unamenable to reason. One proof of the deplorable state of her mind was, that from her father's example she had learned to swear like a trooper. Her mother was greatly shocked at the 'unlady-like trick,' and wondered 'how she had picked it up.' 'But you can soon break her of it, Miss Grey,' said she: 'it is only a habit; and if you will just gently remind her every time she does so, I am sure she will soon lay it aside.' I not only 'gently reminded' her, I tried to impress upon her how wrong it was, and how distressing to the ears of decent people: but all in vain: I was only answered by a careless laugh, and, 'Oh, Miss Grey, how shocked you are! I'm so glad!' or, 'Well! I can't help it; papa shouldn't have taught me: I learned it all from him; and maybe a bit from the coachman.'

Her brother John, *alias* Master Murray, was about eleven when I came: a fine, stout, healthy boy, frank and good-natured in the main, and might have been a decent lad had he been properly educated; but now he was as rough as a young bear, boisterous, unruly, unprincipled, untaught, unteachable — at least, for a governess under his mother's eye. His masters at school might be able to manage him better — for to school he was sent, greatly to my relief, in the course of a year; in a state, it is true, of scandalous ignorance as to Latin, as well as the more useful though more neglected things: and this, doubtless, would all be laid to the account of his education having been entrusted to an ignorant female teacher, who had presumed to take in hand what she was wholly incompetent to perform. I was not delivered from his brother till full twelve months after, when he also was despatched in the same state of disgraceful ignorance as the former.

Master Charles was his mother's peculiar darling. He was little more than a year younger than John, but much smaller, paler, and less active and robust; a pettish, cowardly, capricious, selfish little fellow, only active in doing mischief, and only clever in inventing falsehoods: not simply to hide his faults, but, in mere malicious wantonness, to bring odium upon others. In fact, Master Charles was a very great nuisance to me: it was a trial of patience to live with him peaceably; to watch over him was worse; and to teach him, or pretend to teach him, was inconceivable. At ten years old, he could not read correctly the easiest line in the simplest book; and as, according to his mother's principle, he was to be told every word, before he had time to hesitate or examine its orthography, and never even to be informed, as a stimulant to exertion, that other boys were more forward than he, it is not surprising that he made but little progress during the two years I had charge of his education. His minute portions of Latin grammar, &c., were to be repeated over to him, till he chose to say he knew them, and then he was to be helped to say them; if he made mistakes in his little easy sums in arithmetic, they were to be shown him at once, and the sum done for him, instead of his being left to exercise his faculties in finding them out himself; so that, of course, he took no pains to avoid mistakes, but frequently set down his figures at random, without any calculation at all.

I did not invariably confine myself to these rules: it was against my conscience to do so; but I seldom could venture to deviate from them in the slightest degree, without incurring the wrath of my little pupil, and subsequently of his mamma; to whom he would relate my transgressions maliciously exaggerated, or adorned with embellishments of his own; and often, in consequence, was I on the point of losing or resigning my situation. But, for their sakes at home, I smothered my pride and suppressed my indignation, and managed to struggle on till my little tormentor was despatched to school; his father declaring that home education was 'no go; for him, it was plain; his mother spoiled him outrageously, and his governess could make no hand of him at all.'

A few more observations about Horton Lodge and its ongoings, and I have done with dry description for the present. The house was a very respectable one; superior to Mr. Bloomfield's, both in age, size, and magnificence: the garden was not so tastefully laid out; but instead of the smooth-shaven lawn, the young trees guarded by palings, the grove of upstart poplars, and the plantation of firs, there was a wide park, stocked with deer, and beautified by fine old trees. The surrounding country itself was pleasant, as far as fertile fields, flourishing trees, quiet green lanes, and smiling hedges with wild-flowers scattered along their banks, could make it; but it was depressingly flat to one born and nurtured among the rugged hills of — -.

We were situated nearly two miles from the village church, and, consequently, the family carriage was put in requisition every Sunday morning, and sometimes oftener. Mr. and Mrs. Murray generally thought it sufficient to show themselves at church once in the course of the day; but frequently the children preferred going a second time to wandering about the grounds all the day with nothing to do. If some of my pupils chose to walk and take me with them, it was well for me; for otherwise my position in the carriage was to be crushed into the corner farthest from the open window, and with my back to the horses: a position which invariably made me sick; and if I were not actually obliged to leave the church in the middle of the service, my devotions were disturbed with a feeling of languor and sickliness, and the tormenting fear of its becoming worse: and a depressing headache was generally my companion throughout the day, which would otherwise have been one of welcome rest, and holy, calm enjoyment.

'It's very odd, Miss Grey, that the carriage should always make you sick: it never makes *me*,' remarked Miss Matilda,

'Nor me either,' said her sister; 'but I dare say it would, if I sat where she does — such a nasty, horrid place, Miss Grey; I wonder how you can bear it!'

'I am obliged to bear it, since no choice is left me,' — I might have answered; but in tenderness for their feelings I only replied, — 'Oh! it is but a short way, and if I am not sick in church, I don't mind it.'

If I were called upon to give a description of the usual divisions and arrangements of the day, I should find it a very difficult matter. I had all my meals in the schoolroom with my pupils, at such times as suited their fancy: sometimes they would ring for dinner before it was half cooked; sometimes they would keep it waiting on the table for above an hour, and then be out of humour because the potatoes were cold, and the gravy covered with cakes of solid fat; sometimes they would have tea at four; frequently, they would storm at the servants because it was not in precisely at five; and when these orders were obeyed, by way of encouragement to punctuality, they would keep it on the table till seven or eight.

Their hours of study were managed in much the same way; my judgment or convenience was never once consulted. Sometimes Matilda and John would determine 'to get all the plaguy business over before breakfast,' and send the maid to call me up at half-past five, without any scruple or apology; sometimes, I was told to be ready precisely at six, and, having dressed in a hurry, came down to an empty room, and after waiting a long time in suspense, discovered that they had changed their minds, and were still in bed; or, perhaps, if it were a fine summer morning, Brown would come to tell me that the young ladies and gentlemen had taken a holiday, and were gone out; and then I was kept waiting for breakfast till I was almost ready to faint: they having fortified themselves with something before they went.

Often they would do their lessons in the open air; which I had nothing to say against: except that I frequently caught cold by sitting on the damp grass, or from exposure to the evening dew, or some insidious draught, which seemed to have no injurious effect on them. It was quite right that they should be hardy; yet, surely, they might have been taught some consideration for others who were less so. But I must not blame them for what was, perhaps, my own fault; for I never made any particular objections to sitting where they pleased; foolishly choosing to risk the consequences, rather than trouble them for my convenience. Their indecorous manner of doing their lessons was quite as remarkable as the caprice displayed in their choice of time and place. While receiving my instructions, or repeating what they had learned, they would lounge upon the sofa, lie on the rug, stretch, yawn, talk to each other, or look out of the window; whereas, I could not so much as stir the fire, or pick up the handkerchief I had dropped, without being rebuked for inattention by one of my pupils, or told that 'mamma would not like me to be so careless.'

The servants, seeing in what little estimation the governess was held by both parents and children, regulated their behaviour by the same standard. I have frequently stood up for them, at the risk of some injury to myself, against the tyranny and injustice of their young masters and mistresses; and I always endeavoured to give them as little trouble as possible: but they entirely neglected my comfort, despised my requests, and slighted my directions. All servants, I am convinced, would not have done so; but domestics in general, being ignorant and little accustomed to reason and reflection, are too easily corrupted by the carelessness and bad example of those above them; and these, I think, were not of the best order to begin with.

I sometimes felt myself degraded by the life I led, and ashamed of submitting to so many indignities; and sometimes I thought myself a fool for caring so much about them, and feared I must be sadly wanting in Christian humility, or that charity which 'suffereth long and is kind, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, beareth all things, endureth all things.'

But, with time and patience, matters began to be slightly ameliorated: slowly, it is true, and almost imperceptibly; but I got rid of my male pupils (that was no trifling advantage), and the girls, as I intimated before concerning one of them, became a little less insolent, and began to show some symptoms of esteem. 'Miss Grey was a queer creature: she never flattered, and did not praise them half enough; but whenever she did speak favourably of them, or anything belonging to them, they could be quite sure her approbation was sincere. She was very obliging, quiet, and peaceable in the main, but there were some things that put her out of temper: they did not much care for that, to be sure, but still it was better to keep her in tune; as when she was in a good humour she would talk to them, and be very agreeable and amusing sometimes, in her way; which was quite different to mamma's, but still very well for a change. She had her own opinions on every subject, and kept steadily to them — very tiresome opinions they often were; as she was always thinking of what was right and what was wrong, and had a strange reverence for matters connected with religion, and an unaccountable liking to good people.'

CHAPTER VIII — THE ‘COMING OUT’

At eighteen, Miss Murray was to emerge from the quiet obscurity of the schoolroom into the full blaze of the fashionable world — as much of it, at least, as could be had out of London; for her papa could not be persuaded to leave his rural pleasures and pursuits, even for a few weeks’ residence in town. She was to make her débût on the third of January, at a magnificent ball, which her mamma proposed to give to all the nobility and choice gentry of O — - and its neighbourhood for twenty miles round. Of course, she looked forward to it with the wildest impatience, and the most extravagant anticipations of delight.

‘Miss Grey,’ said she, one evening, a month before the all-important day, as I was perusing a long and extremely interesting letter of my sister’s — which I had just glanced at in the morning to see that it contained no very bad news, and kept till now, unable before to find a quiet moment for reading it, — ‘Miss Grey, do put away that dull, stupid letter, and listen to me! I’m sure my talk must be far more amusing than that.’

She seated herself on the low stool at my feet; and I, suppressing a sigh of vexation, began to fold up the epistle.

‘You should tell the good people at home not to bore you with such long letters,’ said she; ‘and, above all, do bid them write on proper note-paper, and not on those great vulgar sheets. You should see the charming little lady-like notes mamma writes to her friends.’

‘The good people at home,’ replied I, ‘know very well that the longer their letters are, the better I like them. I should be very sorry to receive a charming little lady-like note from any of them; and I thought you were too much of a lady yourself, Miss Murray, to talk about the “vulgarity” of writing on a large sheet of paper.’

‘Well, I only said it to tease you. But now I want to talk about the ball; and to tell you that you positively must put off your holidays till it is over.’

‘Why so? — I shall not be present at the ball.’

‘No, but you will see the rooms decked out before it begins, and hear the music, and, above all, see me in my splendid new dress. I shall be so charming, you’ll be ready to worship me — you really must stay.’

‘I should like to see you very much; but I shall have many opportunities of seeing you equally charming, on the occasion of some of the numberless balls and parties that are to be, and I cannot disappoint my friends by postponing my return so long.’

‘Oh, never mind your friends! Tell them we won’t let you go.’

‘But, to say the truth, it would be a disappointment to myself: I long to see them as much as they to see me — perhaps more.’

‘Well, but it is such a short time.’

‘Nearly a fortnight by my computation; and, besides, I cannot bear the thoughts of a Christmas spent from home: and, moreover, my sister is going to be married.’

‘Is she — when?’

‘Not till next month; but I want to be there to assist her in making preparations, and to make the best of her company while we have her.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me before?’

‘I’ve only got the news in this letter, which you stigmatize as dull and stupid, and won’t let me read.’

‘To whom is she to be married?’

‘To Mr. Richardson, the vicar of a neighbouring parish.’

‘Is he rich?’

‘No; only comfortable.’

‘Is he handsome?’

‘No; only decent.’

‘Young?’

‘No; only middling.’

‘Oh, mercy! what a wretch! What sort of a house is it?’

‘A quiet little vicarage, with an ivy-clad porch, an old-fashioned garden, and — ’

‘Oh, stop! — you’ll make me sick. How *can* she bear it?’

‘I expect she’ll not only be able to bear it, but to be very happy. You did not ask me if Mr. Richardson were a good, wise, or amiable man; I could have answered Yes, to all these questions — at least so Mary thinks, and I hope she will not find herself mistaken.’

‘But — miserable creature! how can she think of spending her life there, cooped up with that nasty old man; and no hope of change?’

‘He is not old: he’s only six or seven and thirty; and she herself is twenty-eight, and as sober as if she were fifty.’

‘Oh! that’s better then — they’re well matched; but do they call him the “worthy vicar”?’

‘I don’t know; but if they do, I believe he merits the epithet.’

‘Mercy, how shocking! and will she wear a white apron and make pies and puddings?’

‘I don’t know about the white apron, but I dare say she will make pies and puddings now and then; but that will be no great hardship, as she has done it before.’

‘And will she go about in a plain shawl, and a large straw bonnet, carrying tracts and bone soup to her husband’s poor parishioners?’

‘I’m not clear about that; but I dare say she will do her best to make them comfortable in body and mind, in accordance with our mother’s example.’

CHAPTER IX — THE BALL

'Now, Miss Grey,' exclaimed Miss Murray, immediately I entered the schoolroom, after having taken off my outdoor garments, upon returning from my four weeks' recreation, 'Now — shut the door, and sit down, and I'll tell you all about the ball.'

'No — damn it, no!' shouted Miss Matilda. 'Hold your tongue, can't ye? and let me tell her about my new mare — *such* a splendour, Miss Grey! a fine blood mare — '

'Do be quiet, Matilda; and let me tell my news first.'

'No, no, Rosalie; you'll be such a damned long time over it — she shall hear me first — I'll be hanged if she doesn't!'

'I'm sorry to hear, Miss Matilda, that you've not got rid of that shocking habit yet.'

'Well, I can't help it: but I'll never say a wicked word again, if you'll only listen to me, and tell Rosalie to hold her confounded tongue.'

Rosalie remonstrated, and I thought I should have been torn in pieces between them; but Miss Matilda having the loudest voice, her sister at length gave in, and suffered her to tell her story first: so I was doomed to hear a long account of her splendid mare, its breeding and pedigree, its paces, its action, its spirit, &c., and of her own amazing skill and courage in riding it; concluding with an assertion that she could clear a five-barred gate 'like winking,' that papa said she might hunt the next time the hounds met, and mamma had ordered a bright scarlet hunting-habit for her.

'Oh, Matilda! what stories you are telling!' exclaimed her sister.

'Well,' answered she, no whit abashed, 'I know I *could* clear a five-barred gate, if I tried, and papa *will* say I may hunt, and mamma *will* order the habit when I ask it.'

'Well, now get along,' replied Miss Murray; 'and do, dear Matilda, try to be a little more lady-like. Miss Grey, I wish you would tell her not to use such shocking words; she will call her horse a mare: it is so inconceivably shocking! and then she uses such dreadful expressions in describing it: she must have learned it from the grooms. It nearly puts me into fits when she begins.'

'I learned it from papa, you ass! and his jolly friends,' said the young lady, vigorously cracking a hunting-whip, which she habitually carried in her hand. 'I'm as good judge of horseflesh as the best of 'm.'

'Well, now get along, you shocking girl! I really shall take a fit if you go on in such a way. And now, Miss Grey, attend to me; I'm going to tell you about the ball. You must be dying to hear about it, I know. Oh, *such* a ball! You never saw or heard, or read, or dreamt of anything like it in all your life.

The decorations, the entertainment, the supper, the music were indescribable! and then the guests! There were two noblemen, three baronets, and five titled ladies, and other ladies and gentlemen innumerable. The ladies, of course, were of no consequence to me, except to put me in a good humour with myself, by showing how ugly and awkward most of them were; and the best, mamma told me, — the most transcendent beauties among them, were nothing to me. As for me, Miss Grey — I'm so *sorry* you didn't see me! I was *charming* — wasn't I, Matilda?'

'Middling.'

'No, but I really was — at least so mamma said — and Brown and Williamson. Brown said she was sure no gentleman could set eyes on me without falling in love that minute; and so I may be allowed to be a little vain. I know you think me a shocking, conceited, frivolous girl; but then, you know, I don't attribute it *all* to my personal attractions: I give some praise to the hairdresser, and some to my exquisitely lovely dress — you must see it to-morrow — white gauze over pink satin — and so *sweetly* made! and a necklace and bracelet of beautiful, large pearls!'

'I have no doubt you looked very charming: but should that delight you so very much?'

'Oh, no! — not that alone: but, then, I was so much admired; and I made so *many* conquests in that one night — you'd be astonished to hear — '

'But what good will they do you?'

'What good! Think of any woman asking that!'

'Well, I should think one conquest would be enough; and too much, unless the subjugation were mutual.'

'Oh, but you know I never agree with you on those points. Now, wait a bit, and I'll tell you my principal admirers — those who made themselves very conspicuous that night and after: for I've been to two parties since. Unfortunately the two noblemen, Lord G — - and Lord F — -, were married, or I might have condescended to be particularly gracious to *them*; as it was, I did not: though Lord F — -, who hates his wife, was evidently much struck with me. He asked me to dance with him twice — he is a charming dancer, by-the-by, and so am I: you can't think how well I did — I was astonished at myself. My lord was very complimentary too — rather too much so in fact — and I thought proper to be a little haughty and repellent; but I had the pleasure of seeing his nasty, cross wife ready to perish with spite and vexation — '

'Oh, Miss Murray! you don't mean to say that such a thing could really give you pleasure? However cross or — '

'Well, I know it's very wrong; — but never mind! I mean to be good some time — only don't preach now, there's a good creature. I haven't told you half yet. Let me see. Oh! I was going to tell you how many unmistakeable admirers I had: — Sir Thomas Ashby was one, — Sir Hugh Meltham and Sir Broadley Wilson are old codgers, only fit companions for papa and mamma. Sir Thomas is young, rich, and gay; but an ugly beast, nevertheless: however, mamma says I should not mind that after a few months' acquaintance. Then, there was Henry Meltham, Sir Hugh's younger son; rather good-looking, and a pleasant fellow to flirt with: but *being* a younger son, that is all he is good for; then there was young Mr. Green, rich enough, but of no family, and a great stupid fellow, a mere country booby! and then, our good rector, Mr. Hatfield: an *humble* admirer he ought to consider himself; but I fear he has forgotten to number humility among his stock of Christian virtues.'

'Was Mr. Hatfield at the ball?'

'Yes, to be sure. Did you think he was too good to go?'

'I thought be might consider it unclerical.'

'By no means. He did not profane his cloth by dancing; but it was with difficulty he could refrain, poor man: he looked as if he were dying to ask my hand just for *one* set; and — oh! by-the-by — he's got a new curate: that seedy old fellow Mr. Bligh has got his long-wished-for living at last, and is gone.'

'And what is the new one like?'

'Oh, *such* a beast! Weston his name is. I can give you his description in three words — an insensate, ugly, stupid blockhead. That's four, but no matter — enough of *him* now.'

Then she returned to the ball, and gave me a further account of her deportment there, and at the several parties she had since attended; and further particulars respecting Sir Thomas Ashby and Messrs. Meltham, Green, and Hatfield, and the ineffaceable impression she had wrought upon each of them.

'Well, which of the four do you like best?' said I, suppressing my third or fourth yawn.

'I detest them all!' replied she, shaking her bright ringlets in vivacious scorn.

'That means, I suppose, "I like them all" — but which most?'

'No, I really detest them all; but Harry Meltham is the handsomest and most amusing, and Mr. Hatfield the cleverest, Sir Thomas the wickedest, and Mr. Green the most stupid. But the one I'm to have, I suppose, if I'm doomed to have any of them, is Sir Thomas Ashby.'

'Surely not, if he's so wicked, and if you dislike him?'

'Oh, I don't mind his being wicked: he's all the better for that; and as for disliking him — I shouldn't greatly object to being Lady Ashby of Ashby Park, if I must marry. But if I could be always young, I would be always single. I should like to enjoy myself thoroughly, and coquet with all the world, till I am on the verge of being called an old maid; and then, to escape the infamy of that, after having made ten thousand conquests, to break all their hearts save one, by marrying some high-born, rich, indulgent husband, whom, on the other hand, fifty ladies were dying to have.'

'Well, as long as you entertain these views, keep single by all means, and never marry at all: not even to escape the infamy of old-maidenhood.'

CHAPTER X — THE CHURCH

'Well, Miss Grey, what do you think of the new curate?' asked Miss Murray, on our return from church the Sunday after the recommencement of our duties.

'I can scarcely tell,' was my reply: 'I have not even heard him preach.'

'Well, but you saw him, didn't you?'

'Yes, but I cannot pretend to judge of a man's character by a single cursory glance at his face.'

'But isn't he ugly?'

'He did not strike me as being particularly so; I don't dislike that cast of countenance: but the only thing I particularly noticed about him was his style of reading; which appeared to me good — infinitely better, at least, than Mr. Hatfield's. He read the Lessons as if he were bent on giving full effect to every passage; it seemed as if the most careless person could not have helped attending, nor the most ignorant have failed to understand; and the prayers he read as if he were not reading at all, but praying earnestly and sincerely from his own heart.'

'Oh, yes, that's all he is good for: he can plod through the service well enough; but he has not a single idea beyond it.'

'How do you know?'

'Oh! I know perfectly well; I am an excellent judge in such matters. Did you see how he went out of church? stumping along — as if there were nobody there but himself — never looking to the right hand or the left, and evidently thinking of nothing but just getting out of the church, and, perhaps, home to his dinner: his great stupid head could contain no other idea.'

'I suppose you would have had him cast a glance into the squire's pew,' said I, laughing at the vehemence of her hostility.

'Indeed! I should have been highly indignant if he had dared to do such a thing!' replied she, haughtily tossing her head; then, after a moment's reflection, she added — 'Well, well! I suppose he's good enough for his place: but I'm glad I'm not dependent on *him* for amusement — that's all. Did you see how Mr. Hatfield hurried out to get a bow from me, and be in time to put us into the carriage?'

'Yes,' answered I; internally adding, 'and I thought it somewhat derogatory to his dignity as a clergyman to come flying from the pulpit in such eager haste to shake hands with the squire, and hand his wife and daughters into their carriage: and, moreover, I owe him a grudge for nearly shutting me out of it'; for, in fact, though I was standing before his face, close beside the carriage steps, waiting to get in, he would persist in putting them up and closing the door, till one of the family stopped him by calling out that the governess was not in yet; then, without a word of apology, he departed, wishing them good-morning, and leaving the footman to finish the business.

Nota bene. — Mr. Hatfield never spoke to me, neither did Sir Hugh or Lady Meltham, nor Mr. Harry or Miss Meltham, nor Mr. Green or his sisters, nor any other lady or gentleman who frequented that church: nor, in fact, any one that visited at Horton Lodge.

Miss Murray ordered the carriage again, in the afternoon, for herself and her sister: she said it was too cold for them to enjoy themselves in the garden; and besides, she believed Harry Meltham would be at church. 'For,' said she, smiling slyly at her own fair image in the glass, 'he has been a most exemplary attendant at church these last few Sundays: you would think he was quite a good Christian. And you may go with us, Miss Grey: I want you to see him; he is so greatly improved since he returned from abroad — you can't think! And besides, then you will have an opportunity of seeing the beautiful Mr. Weston again, and of hearing him preach.'

I did hear him preach, and was decidedly pleased with the evangelical truth of his doctrine, as well as the earnest simplicity of his manner, and the clearness and force of his style. It was truly refreshing to hear such a sermon, after being so long accustomed to the dry, prosy discourses of the former curate, and the still less edifying harangues of the rector. Mr. Hatfield would come sailing up the aisle, or rather sweeping along like a whirlwind, with his rich silk gown flying behind him and rustling against the pew doors, mount the pulpit like a conqueror ascending his triumphal car; then, sinking on the velvet cushion in an attitude of studied grace, remain in silent prostration for a certain time; then mutter over a Collect, and gabble through the Lord's Prayer, rise, draw off one bright lavender glove, to give the congregation the benefit of his sparkling rings, lightly pass his fingers through his well-curled hair, flourish a cambric handkerchief, recite a very short passage, or, perhaps, a mere phrase of Scripture, as a head-piece to his discourse, and, finally, deliver a composition which, as a composition, might be considered good, though far too studied and too artificial to be pleasing to me: the propositions were well laid down, the arguments logically conducted; and yet, it was sometimes hard to listen quietly throughout, without some slight demonstrations of disapproval or impatience.

His favourite subjects were church discipline, rites and ceremonies, apostolical succession, the duty of reverence and obedience to the clergy, the atrocious criminality of dissent, the absolute necessity of observing all the forms of godliness, the reprehensible presumption of individuals who attempted to think for themselves in matters connected with religion, or to be guided by their own interpretations of Scripture, and, occasionally (to please his wealthy parishioners) the necessity of deferential obedience from the poor to the rich — supporting his maxims and exhortations throughout with quotations from the Fathers: with whom he appeared to be far better acquainted than with the Apostles and Evangelists, and whose importance he seemed to consider at least equal to theirs. But now and then he gave us a sermon of a different order — what some would call a very good one; but sunless and severe: representing the Deity as a terrible taskmaster rather than a benevolent father. Yet, as I listened, I felt inclined to think the man was sincere in all he said: he must have changed his views, and become decidedly religious, gloomy and austere, yet still devout. But such illusions were usually dissipated, on coming out of church, by hearing his voice in jocund colloquy with some of the Melthams or Greens, or, perhaps, the Murrays themselves; probably laughing at his own sermon, and hoping that he had given the rascally people something to think about; perchance, exulting in the thought that old Betty Holmes would now lay aside the sinful indulgence of her pipe, which had been her daily solace for upwards of thirty years: that George Higgins would be frightened out of his Sabbath evening walks, and Thomas Jackson would be sorely troubled in his conscience, and shaken in his sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection at the last day.

Thus, I could not but conclude that Mr. Hatfield was one of those who 'bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them upon men's shoulders, while they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers'; and who 'make the word of God of none effect by their traditions, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.' I was well pleased to observe that the new curate resembled him, as far as I could see, in none of these particulars.

'Well, Miss Grey, what do you think of him now?' said Miss Murray, as we took our places in the carriage after service.

'No harm still,' replied I.

'No harm!' repeated she in amazement. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean, I think no worse of him than I did before.'

'No worse! I should think not indeed — quite the contrary! Is he not greatly improved?'

'Oh, yes; very much indeed,' replied I; for I had now discovered that it was Harry Meltham she meant, not Mr. Weston. That gentleman had eagerly come forward to speak to the young ladies: a thing he would hardly have ventured to do had their mother been present; he had likewise politely handed them into the carriage. He had not attempted to shut me out, like Mr. Hatfield; neither, of course, had he offered me his assistance (I should not have accepted it, if he had), but as long as the door remained open he had stood smirking and chatting with them, and then lifted his hat and departed to his own abode: but I had scarcely noticed him all the time. My companions, however, had been more observant; and, as we rolled along, they discussed between them not only his looks, words, and actions, but every feature of his face, and every article of his apparel.

'You shan't have him all to yourself, Rosalie,' said Miss Matilda at the close of this discussion; 'I like him: I know he'd make a nice, jolly companion for me.'

‘Well, you’re quite welcome to him, Matilda,’ replied her sister, in a tone of affected indifference.

‘And I’m sure,’ continued the other, ‘he admires me quite as much as he does you; doesn’t he, Miss Grey?’

‘I don’t know; I’m not acquainted with his sentiments.’

‘Well, but he *does* though.’

‘My *dear* Matilda! nobody will ever admire you till you get rid of your rough, awkward manners.’

‘Oh, stuff! Harry Meltham likes such manners; and so do papa’s friends.’

‘Well, you *may* captivate old men, and younger sons; but nobody else, I am sure, will ever take a fancy to you.’

‘I don’t care: I’m not always grabbing after money, like you and mamma. If my husband is able to keep a few good horses and dogs, I shall be quite satisfied; and all the rest may go to the devil!’

‘Well, if you use such shocking expressions, I’m sure no real gentleman will ever venture to come near you. Really, Miss Grey, you should not let her do so.’

‘I can’t possibly prevent it, Miss Murray.’

‘And you’re quite mistaken, Matilda, in supposing that Harry Meltham admires you: I assure you he does nothing of the kind.’

Matilda was beginning an angry reply; but, happily, our journey was now at an end; and the contention was cut short by the footman opening the carriage-door, and letting down the steps for our descent.

CHAPTER XI — THE COTTAGERS

As I had now only one regular pupil — though she contrived to give me as much trouble as three or four ordinary ones, and though her sister still took lessons in German and drawing — I had considerably more time at my own disposal than I had ever been blessed with before, since I had taken upon me the governess's yoke; which time I devoted partly to correspondence with my friends, partly to reading, study, and the practice of music, singing, &c., partly to wandering in the grounds or adjacent fields, with my pupils if they wanted me, alone if they did not.

Often, when they had no more agreeable occupation at hand, the Misses Murray would amuse themselves with visiting the poor cottagers on their father's estate, to receive their flattering homage, or to hear the old stories or gossiping news of the garrulous old women; or, perhaps, to enjoy the purer pleasure of making the poor people happy with their cheering presence and their occasional gifts, so easily bestowed, so thankfully received. Sometimes, I was called upon to accompany one or both of the sisters in these visits; and sometimes I was desired to go alone, to fulfil some promise which they had been more ready to make than to perform; to carry some small donation, or read to one who was sick or seriously disposed: and thus I made a few acquaintances among the cottagers; and, occasionally, I went to see them on my own account.

I generally had more satisfaction in going alone than with either of the young ladies; for they, chiefly owing to their defective education, comported themselves towards their inferiors in a manner that was highly disagreeable for me to witness. They never, in thought, exchanged places with them; and, consequently, had no consideration for their feelings, regarding them as an order of beings entirely different from themselves. They would watch the poor creatures at their meals, making uncivil remarks about their food, and their manner of eating; they would laugh at their simple notions and provincial expressions, till some of them scarcely durst venture to speak; they would call the grave elderly men and women old fools and silly old blockheads to their faces: and all this without meaning to offend. I could see that the people were often hurt and annoyed by such conduct, though their fear of the 'grand ladies' prevented them from testifying any resentment; but *they* never perceived it. They thought that, as these cottagers were poor and untaught, they must be stupid and brutish; and as long as they, their superiors, condescended to talk to them, and to give them shillings and half-crowns, or articles of clothing, they had a right to amuse themselves, even at their expense; and the people must adore them as angels of light, condescending to minister to their necessities, and enlighten their humble dwellings.

I made many and various attempts to deliver my pupils from these delusive notions without alarming their pride — which was easily offended, and not soon appeased — but with little apparent result; and I know not which was the more reprehensible of the two: Matilda was more rude and boisterous; but from Rosalie's womanly age and lady-like exterior better things were expected: yet she was as provokingly careless and inconsiderate as a giddy child of twelve.

One bright day in the last week of February, I was walking in the park, enjoying the threefold luxury of solitude, a book, and pleasant weather; for Miss Matilda had set out on her daily ride, and Miss Murray was gone in the carriage with her mamma to pay some morning calls. But it struck me that I ought to leave these selfish pleasures, and the park with its glorious canopy of bright blue sky, the west wind sounding through its yet leafless branches, the snow-wreaths still lingering in its hollows, but melting fast beneath the sun, and the graceful deer browsing on its moist herbage already assuming the freshness and verdure of spring — and go to the cottage of one Nancy Brown, a widow, whose son was at work all day in the fields, and who was afflicted with an inflammation in the eyes; which had for some time incapacitated her from reading: to her own great grief, for she was a woman of a serious, thoughtful turn of mind. I accordingly went, and found her alone, as usual, in her little, close, dark cottage, redolent of smoke and confined air, but as tidy and clean as she could make it. She was seated beside her little fire (consisting of a few red cinders and a bit of stick), busily knitting, with a small sackcloth cushion at her feet, placed for the accommodation of her gentle friend the cat, who was seated thereon, with her long tail half encircling her velvet paws, and her half-closed eyes dreamily gazing on the low, crooked fender.

'Well, Nancy, how are you to-day?'

'Why, middling, Miss, i' myseln — my eyes is no better, but I'm a deal easier i' my mind nor I have been,' replied she, rising to welcome me with a contented smile; which I was glad to see, for Nancy had been somewhat afflicted with religious melancholy. I congratulated her upon the change. She agreed that it was a great blessing, and expressed herself 'right down thankful for it'; adding, 'If it please God to spare my sight, and make me so as I can read my Bible again, I think I shall be as happy as a queen.'

'I hope He will, Nancy,' replied I; 'and, meantime, I'll come and read to you now and then, when I have a little time to spare.'

With expressions of grateful pleasure, the poor woman moved to get me a chair; but, as I saved her the trouble, she busied herself with stirring the fire, and adding a few more sticks to the decaying embers; and then, taking her well-used Bible from the shelf, dusted it carefully, and gave it me. On my asking if there was any particular part she should like me to read, she answered —

'Well, Miss Grey, if it's all the same to you, I should like to hear that chapter in the First Epistle of St. John, that says, "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."'

With a little searching, I found these words in the fourth chapter. When I came to the seventh verse she interrupted me, and, with needless apologies for such a liberty, desired me to read it very slowly, that she might take it all in, and dwell on every word; hoping I would excuse her, as she was but a 'simple body.'

'The wisest person,' I replied, 'might think over each of these verses for an hour, and be all the better for it; and I would rather read them slowly than not.'

Accordingly, I finished the chapter as slowly as need be, and at the same time as impressively as I could; my auditor listened most attentively all the while, and sincerely thanked me when I had done. I sat still about half a minute to give her time to reflect upon it; when, somewhat to my surprise, she broke the pause by asking me how I liked Mr. Weston?

'I don't know,' I replied, a little startled by the suddenness of the question; 'I think he preaches very well.'

'Ay, he does so; and talks well too.'

'Does he?'

'He does. Maybe, you haven't seen him — not to talk to him much, yet?'

'No, I never see any one to talk to — except the young ladies of the Hall.'

'Ah; they're nice, kind young ladies; but they can't talk as he does.'

'Then he comes to see you, Nancy?'

'He does, Miss; and I'se thankful for it. He comes to see all us poor bodies a deal ofter nor Maister Bligh, or th' Rector ever did; an' it's well he does, for he's always welcome: we can't say as much for th' Rector — there is 'at says they're fair feared on him. When he comes into a house, they say he's sure to find summut wrong, and begin a-calling 'em as soon as he crosses th' doorstuns: but maybe he thinks it his duty like to tell 'em what's wrong. And very oft he comes o' purpose to reprove folk for not coming to church, or not kneeling an' standing when other folk does, or going to the Methody chapel, or summut o' that sort: but I can't say 'at he ever fund much fault wi' me. He came to see me once or twice, afore Maister Weston come, when I was so ill troubled in my mind; and as I had only very poor health besides, I made bold to send for him — and he came right enough. I was sore distressed, Miss Grey — thank God, it's owered now — but when I took my Bible, I could get no comfort of it at all. That very chapter 'at you've just been reading troubled me as much as aught — "He that loveth not, knoweth not God." It seemed fearsome to me; for I felt that I loved neither God nor man as I should do, and could not, if I tried ever so. And th' chapter afore, where it says, — "He that is born of God cannot commit sin." And another place where it says, — "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." And many, many others, Miss: I should fair weary you out, if I was to tell them all. But all seemed to condemn me, and to show me 'at I was not in the right way; and as

I knew not how to get into it, I sent our Bill to beg Maister Hatfield to be as kind as look in on me some day and when he came, I telled him all my troubles.'

'And what did he say, Nancy?'

'Why, Miss, he seemed to scorn me. I might be mista'en — but he like gave a sort of a whistle, and I saw a bit of a smile on his face; and he said, "Oh, it's all stuff! You've been among the Methodists, my good woman." But I telled him I'd never been near the Methodies. And then he said, — "Well," says he, "you must come to church, where you'll hear the Scriptures properly explained, instead of sitting poring over your Bible at home."

'But I telled him I always used coming to church when I had my health; but this very cold winter weather I hardly durst venture so far — and me so bad wi' th' rheumatic and all.

'But he says, "It'll do your rheumatiz good to hobble to church: there's nothing like exercise for the rheumatiz. You can walk about the house well enough; why can't you walk to church? The fact is," says he, "you're getting too fond of your ease. It's always easy to find excuses for shirking one's duty."

'But then, you know, Miss Grey, it wasn't so. However, I telled him I'd try. "But please, sir," says I, "if I do go to church, what the better shall I be? I want to have my sins blotted out, and to feel that they are remembered no more against me, and that the love of God is shed abroad in my heart; and if I can get no good by reading my Bible an' saying my prayers at home, what good shall I get by going to church?"'

'"The church," says he, "is the place appointed by God for His worship. It's your duty to go there as often as you can. If you want comfort, you must seek it in the path of duty," — an' a deal more he said, but I cannot remember all his fine words. However, it all came to this, that I was to come to church as oft as ever I could, and bring my prayer-book with me, an' read up all the sponsers after the clerk, an' stand, an' kneel, an' sit, an' do all as I should, and take the Lord's Supper at every opportunity, an' hearken his sermons, and Maister Bligh's, an' it 'ud be all right: if I went on doing my duty, I should get a blessing at last.

'"But if you get no comfort that way," says he, "it's all up."

'"Then, sir," says I, "should you think I'm a reprobate?"

'"Why," says he — he says, "if you do your best to get to heaven and can't manage it, you must be one of those that seek to enter in at the strait gate and shall not be able."

'An' then he asked me if I'd seen any of the ladies o' th' Hall about that mornin'; so I telled him where I had seen the young misses go on th' Moss Lane; — an' he kicked my poor cat right across th' floor, an' went after 'em as gay as a lark: but I was very sad. That last word o' his fair sunk into my heart, an' lay there like a lump o' lead, till I was weary to bear it.

'Howsever, I follered his advice: I thought he meant it all for th' best, though he *had* a queer way with him. But you know, Miss, he's rich an' young, and such like cannot right understand the thoughts of a poor old woman such as me. But, howsever, I did my best to do all as he bade me — but maybe I'm plaguing you, Miss, wi' my chatter.'

'Oh, no, Nancy! Go on, and tell me all.'

'Well, my rheumatiz got better — I know not whether wi' going to church or not, but one frosty Sunday I got this cold i' my eyes. Th' inflammation didn't come on all at once like, but bit by bit — but I wasn't going to tell you about my eyes, I was talking about my trouble o' mind; — and to tell the truth, Miss Grey, I don't think it was anyways eased by coming to church — nought to speak on, at least: I like got my health better; but that didn't mend my soul. I hearkened and hearkened the ministers, and read an' read at my prayer-book; but it was all like sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal: the sermons I couldn't understand, an' th' prayer-book only served to show me how wicked I was, that I could read such good words an' never be no better for it, and oftens feel it a sore labour an' a heavy task beside, instead of a blessing and a privilege as all good Christians does. It seemed like as all were barren an' dark to me. And then, them dreadful words, "Many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." They like as they fair dried up my sperrit.

'But one Sunday, when Maister Hatfield gave out about the sacrament, I noticed where he said, "If there be any of you that cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or some other discreet and learned minister of God's word, and open his grief!" So next Sunday morning, afore service, I just looked into the vestry, an' began a-talking to th' Rector again. I hardly could fashion to take such a liberty, but I thought when my soul was at stake I shouldn't stick at a trifle. But he said he hadn't time to attend to me then.

'"And, indeed," says he, "I've nothing to say to you but what I've said before. Take the sacrament, of course, and go on doing your duty; and if that won't serve you, nothing will. So don't bother me any more."

'So then, I went away. But I heard Maister Weston — Maister Weston was there, Miss — this was his first Sunday at Horton, you know, an' he was i' th' vestry in his surplice, helping th' Rector on with his gown — '

'Yes, Nancy.'

'And I heard him ask Maister Hatfield who I was, an' he says, "Oh, she's a canting old fool."

'And I was very ill grieved, Miss Grey; but I went to my seat, and I tried to do my duty as aforetime: but I like got no peace. An' I even took the sacrament; but I felt as though I were eating and drinking to my own damnation all th' time. So I went home, sorely troubled.

'But next day, afore I'd gotten fettled up — for indeed, Miss, I'd no heart to sweeping an' fettling, an' washing pots; so I sat me down i' th' muck — who should come in but Maister Weston! I started siding stuff then, an' sweeping an' doing; and I expected he'd begin a-calling me for my idle ways, as Maister Hatfield would a' done; but I was mista'en: he only bid me good-mornin' like, in a quiet dacent way. So I dusted him a chair, an' fettled up th' fireplace a bit; but I hadn't forgotten th' Rector's words, so says I, "I wonder, sir, you should give yourself that trouble, to come so far to see a 'canting old fool,' such as me."

'He seemed taken aback at that; but he would fain persuade me 'at the Rector was only in jest; and when that wouldn't do, he says, "Well, Nancy, you shouldn't think so much about it: Mr. Hatfield was a little out of humour just then: you know we're none of us perfect — even Moses spoke unadvisedly with his lips. But now sit down a minute, if you can spare the time, and tell me all your doubts and fears; and I'll try to remove them."

'So I sat me down anent him. He was quite a stranger, you know, Miss Grey, and even *younger* nor Maister Hatfield, I believe; and I had thought him not so pleasant-looking as him, and rather a bit crossish, at first, to look at; but he spake so civil like — and when th' cat, poor thing, jumped on to his knee, he only stroked her, and gave a bit of a smile: so I thought that was a good sign; for once, when she did so to th' Rector, he knocked her off, like as it might be in scorn and anger, poor thing. But you can't expect a cat to know manners like a Christian, you know, Miss Grey.'

'No; of course not, Nancy. But what did Mr. Weston say then?'

'He said nought; but he listened to me as steady an' patient as could be, an' never a bit o' scorn about him; so I went on, an' telled him all, just as I've telled you — an' more too.

'"Well," says he, "Mr. Hatfield was quite right in telling you to persevere in doing your duty; but in advising you to go to church and attend to the service, and so on, he didn't mean that was the whole of a Christian's duty: he only thought you might there learn what more was to be done, and be led to take delight in those exercises, instead of finding them a task and a burden. And if you had asked him to explain those words that trouble you so much, I think he would have told you, that if many shall seek to enter in at the strait gate and shall not be able, it is their own sins that hinder them; just as a man with a large sack on his back might wish to pass through a narrow doorway, and find it impossible to do so unless he would leave his sack behind him. But you, Nancy, I dare say, have no sins that you would not gladly throw aside, if you knew how?"

'"Indeed, sir, you speak truth," said I.

'"Well," says he, "you know the first and great commandment — and the second, which is like unto it — on which two commandments hang all the law and the prophets? You say you cannot love God; but it strikes me that if you rightly consider who and what He is, you cannot help it. He is your father, your best friend: every blessing, everything good, pleasant, or useful, comes from Him; and everything evil, everything you have reason to hate, to shun, or to fear, comes from Satan — *His* enemy as well as ours. And for *this* cause was God manifest in the flesh, that He might destroy the works of the Devil: in one word, God is love; and the more of love we have within us, the nearer we are to Him and the more of His spirit we possess.”

‘“Well, sir,” I said, “if I can always think on these things, I think I might well love God: but how can I love my neighbours, when they vex me, and be so contrary and sinful as some on ’em is?”

‘“It may seem a hard matter,” says he, “to love our neighbours, who have so much of what is evil about them, and whose faults so often awaken the evil that lingers within ourselves; but remember that *He* made them, and *He* loves them; and whosoever loveth him that begat, loveth him that is begotten also. And if God so loveth us, that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us, we ought also to love one another. But if you cannot feel positive affection for those who do not care for you, you can at least try to do to them as you would they should do unto you: you can endeavour to pity their failings and excuse their offences, and to do all the good you can to those about you. And if you accustom yourself to this, Nancy, the very effort itself will make you love them in some degree — to say nothing of the goodwill your kindness would beget in them, though they might have little else that is good about them. If we love God and wish to serve Him, let us try to be like Him, to do His work, to labour for His glory — which is the good of man — to hasten the coming of His kingdom, which is the peace and happiness of all the world: however powerless we may seem to be, in doing all the good we can through life, the humblest of us may do much towards it: and let us dwell in love, that He may dwell in us and we in Him. The more happiness we bestow, the more we shall receive, even here; and the greater will be our reward in heaven when we rest from our labours.” I believe, Miss, them is his very words, for I’ve thought ’em ower many a time. An’ then he took that Bible, an’ read bits here and there, an’ explained ’em as clear as the day: and it seemed like as a new light broke in on my soul; an’ I felt fair aglow about my heart, an’ only wished poor Bill an’ all the world could ha’ been there, an’ heard it all, and rejoiced wi’ me.

‘After he was gone, Hannah Rogers, one o’ th’ neighbours, came in and wanted me to help her to wash. I telled her I couldn’t just then, for I hadn’t set on th’ potaties for th’ dinner, nor washed up th’ breakfast stuff yet. So then she began a-calling me for my nasty idle ways. I was a little bit vexed at first, but I never said nothing wrong to her: I only telled her like all in a quiet way, ’at I’d had th’ new parson to see me; but I’d get done as quick as ever I could, an’ then come an’ help her. So then she softened down; and my heart like as it warmed towards her, an’ in a bit we was very good friends. An’ so it is, Miss Grey, “a soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger.” It isn’t only in them you speak to, but in yourself.’

‘Very true, Nancy, if we could always remember it.’

‘Ay, if we could!’

‘And did Mr. Weston ever come to see you again?’

‘Yes, many a time; and since my eyes has been so bad, he’s sat an’ read to me by the half-hour together: but you know, Miss, he has other folks to see, and other things to do — God bless him! An’ that next Sunday he preached *such* a sermon! His text was, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” and them two blessed verses that follows. You wasn’t there, Miss, you was with your friends then — but it made me *so* happy! And I *am* happy now, thank God! an’ I take a pleasure, now, in doing little bits o’ jobs for my neighbours — such as a poor old body ’at’s half blind can do; and they take it kindly of me, just as he said. You see, Miss, I’m knitting a pair o’ stockings now; — they’re for Thomas Jackson: he’s a queerish old body, an’ we’ve had many a bout at threaping, one anent t’other; an’ at times we’ve differed sorely. So I thought I couldn’t do better nor knit him a pair o’ warm stockings; an’ I’ve felt to like him a deal better, poor old man, sin’ I began. It’s turned out just as Maister Weston said.’

‘Well, I’m very glad to see you so happy, Nancy, and so wise: but I must go now; I shall be wanted at the Hall,’ said I; and bidding her good-bye, I departed, promising to come again when I had time, and feeling nearly as happy as herself.

At another time I went to read to a poor labourer who was in the last stage of consumption. The young ladies had been to see him, and somehow a promise of reading had been extracted from them; but it was too much trouble, so they begged me to do it instead. I went, willingly enough; and there too I was gratified with the praises of Mr. Weston, both from the sick man and his wife. The former told me that he derived great comfort and benefit from the visits of the new parson, who frequently came to see him, and was ‘another guess sort of man’ to Mr. Hatfield; who, before the other’s arrival at Horton, had now and then paid him a visit; on which occasions he would always insist upon having the cottage-door kept open, to admit the fresh air for his own convenience, without considering how it might injure the sufferer; and having opened his prayer-book and hastily read over a part of the Service for the Sick, would hurry away again: if he did not stay to administer some harsh rebuke to the afflicted wife, or to make some thoughtless, not to say heartless, observation, rather calculated to increase than diminish the troubles of the suffering pair.

‘Whereas,’ said the man, ‘Maister Weston ’ull pray with me quite in a different fashion, an’ talk to me as kind as owt; an’ oft read to me too, an’ sit beside me just like a brother.’

‘Just for all the world!’ exclaimed his wife; ‘an’ about a three wik sin’, when he seed how poor Jem shivered wi’ cold, an’ what pitiful fires we kept, he axed if wer stock of coals was nearly done. I telled him it was, an’ we was ill set to get more: but you know, mum, I didn’t think o’ him helping us; but, howsever, he sent us a sack o’ coals next day; an’ we’ve had good fires ever sin’: and a great blessing it is, this winter time. But that’s his way, Miss Grey: when he comes into a poor body’s house a-seein’ sick folk, he like notices what they most stand i' need on; an' if he thinks they can't readily get it therseln, he never says nowt about it, but just gets it for 'em. An' it isn't everybody 'at 'ud do that, 'at has as little as he has: for you know, mum, he's nowt at all to live on but what he gets fra' th' Rector, an' that's little enough they say.'

I remembered then, with a species of exultation, that he had frequently been styled a vulgar brute by the amiable Miss Murray, because he wore a silver watch, and clothes not quite so bright and fresh as Mr. Hatfield's.

In returning to the Lodge I felt very happy, and thanked God that I had now something to think about; something to dwell on as a relief from the weary monotony, the lonely drudgery, of my present life: for I *was* lonely. Never, from month to month, from year to year, except during my brief intervals of rest at home, did I see one creature to whom I could open my heart, or freely speak my thoughts with any hope of sympathy, or even comprehension: never one, unless it were poor Nancy Brown, with whom I could enjoy a single moment of real social intercourse, or whose conversation was calculated to render me better, wiser, or happier than before; or who, as far as I could see, could be greatly benefited by mine. My only companions had been unamiable children, and ignorant, wrong-headed girls; from whose fatiguing folly, unbroken solitude was often a relief most earnestly desired and dearly prized. But to be restricted to such associates was a serious evil, both in its immediate effects and the consequences that were likely to ensue. Never a new idea or stirring thought came to me from without; and such as rose within me were, for the most part, miserably crushed at once, or doomed to sicken or fade away, because they could not see the light.

Habitual associates are known to exercise a great influence over each other's minds and manners. Those whose actions are for ever before our eyes, whose words are ever in our ears, will naturally lead us, albeit against our will, slowly, gradually, imperceptibly, perhaps, to act and speak as they do. I will not presume to say how far this irresistible power of assimilation extends; but if one civilised man were doomed to pass a dozen years amid a race of intractable savages, unless he had power to improve them, I greatly question whether, at the close of that period, he would not have become, at least, a barbarian himself. And I, as I could not make my young companions better, feared exceedingly that they would make me worse — would gradually bring my feelings, habits, capacities, to the level of their own; without, however, imparting to me their lightheartedness and cheerful vivacity.

Already, I seemed to feel my intellect deteriorating, my heart petrifying, my soul contracting; and I trembled lest my very moral perceptions should become deadened, my distinctions of right and wrong confounded, and all my better faculties be sunk, at last, beneath the baneful influence of such a mode of life. The gross vapours of earth were gathering around me, and closing in upon my inward heaven; and thus it was that Mr. Weston rose at length upon me, appearing like the morning star in my horizon, to save me from the fear of utter darkness; and I rejoiced that I had now a subject for contemplation that was above me, not beneath. I was glad to see that all the world was not made up of Bloomfields, Murrays, Hatfields, Ashbys, &c.; and that human excellence was not a mere dream of the imagination. When we hear a little good and no harm of a person, it is easy and pleasant to imagine more: in short, it is needless to analyse all my thoughts; but Sunday was now become a day of peculiar delight to me (I was now almost broken-in to the back corner in the carriage), for I liked to hear him — and I liked to see him, too; though I knew he was not handsome, or even what is called agreeable, in outward aspect; but, certainly, he was not ugly.

In stature he was a little, a very little, above the middle size; the outline of his face would be pronounced too square for beauty, but to me it announced decision of character; his dark brown hair was not carefully curled, like Mr. Hatfield's, but simply brushed aside over a broad white forehead; the eyebrows, I suppose, were too projecting, but from under those dark brows there gleamed an eye of singular power, brown in colour, not large, and somewhat deep-set, but strikingly brilliant, and full of expression; there was character, too, in the mouth, something that bespoke a man of firm purpose and an habitual thinker; and when he smiled — but I will not speak of that yet, for, at the time I mention, I had never seen him smile: and, indeed, his general appearance did not impress me with the idea of a man given to such a relaxation, nor of such an individual as the cottagers described him. I had early formed my opinion of him; and, in spite of Miss Murray's objurgations: was fully convinced that he was a man of strong sense, firm faith, and ardent piety, but thoughtful and stern: and when I found that, to his other good qualities, was added that of true benevolence and gentle, considerate kindness, the discovery, perhaps, delighted me the more, as I had not been prepared to expect it.

CHAPTER XII — THE SHOWER

The next visit I paid to Nancy Brown was in the second week in March: for, though I had many spare minutes during the day, I seldom could look upon an hour as entirely my own; since, where everything was left to the caprices of Miss Matilda and her sister, there could be no order or regularity. Whatever occupation I chose, when not actually busied about them or their concerns, I had, as it were, to keep my loins girded, my shoes on my feet, and my staff in my hand; for not to be immediately forthcoming when called for, was regarded as a grave and inexcusable offence: not only by my pupils and their mother, but by the very servant, who came in breathless haste to call me, exclaiming, 'You're to go to the schoolroom *directly*, mum, the young ladies is waiting!!' Climax of horror! actually waiting for their governess!!!

But this time I was pretty sure of an hour or two to myself; for Matilda was preparing for a long ride, and Rosalie was dressing for a dinner-party at Lady Ashby's: so I took the opportunity of repairing to the widow's cottage, where I found her in some anxiety about her cat, which had been absent all day. I comforted her with as many anecdotes of that animal's roving propensities as I could recollect. 'I'm feared o' th' gamekeepers,' said she: 'that's all 'at I think on. If th' young gentlemen had been at home, I should a' thought they'd been setting their dogs at her, an' worried her, poor thing, as they did *many* a poor thing's cat; but I haven't that to be feared on now.' Nancy's eyes were better, but still far from well: she had been trying to make a Sunday shirt for her son, but told me she could only bear to do a little bit at it now and then, so that it progressed but slowly, though the poor lad wanted it sadly. So I proposed to help her a little, after I had read to her, for I had plenty of time that evening, and need not return till dusk. She thankfully accepted the offer. 'An' you'll be a bit o' company for me too, Miss,' said she; 'I like as I feel lonesome without my cat.' But when I had finished reading, and done the half of a seam, with Nancy's capacious brass thimble fitted on to my finger by means of a roll of paper, I was disturbed by the entrance of Mr. Weston, with the identical cat in his arms. I now saw that he could smile, and very pleasantly too.

'I've done you a piece of good service, Nancy,' he began: then seeing me, he acknowledged my presence by a slight bow. I should have been invisible to Hatfield, or any other gentleman of those parts. 'I've delivered your cat,' he continued, 'from the hands, or rather the gun, of Mr. Murray's gamekeeper.'

'God bless you, sir!' cried the grateful old woman, ready to weep for joy as she received her favourite from his arms.

'Take care of it,' said he, 'and don't let it go near the rabbit-warren, for the gamekeeper swears he'll shoot it if he sees it there again: he would have done so to-day, if I had not been in time to stop him. I believe it is raining, Miss Grey,' added he, more quietly, observing that I had put aside my work, and was preparing to depart. 'Don't let me disturb you — I shan't stay two minutes.'

'You'll *both* stay while this shower gets owered,' said Nancy, as she stirred the fire, and placed another chair beside it; 'what! there's room for all.'

'I can see better here, thank you, Nancy,' replied I, taking my work to the window, where she had the goodness to suffer me to remain unmolested, while she got a brush to remove the cat's hairs from Mr. Weston's coat, carefully wiped the rain from his hat, and gave the cat its supper, busily talking all the time: now thanking her clerical friend for what he had done; now wondering how the cat had found out the warren; and now lamenting the probable consequences of such a discovery. He listened with a quiet, good-natured smile, and at length took a seat in compliance with her pressing invitations, but repeated that he did not mean to stay.

'I have another place to go to,' said he, 'and I see' (glancing at the book on the table) 'someone else has been reading to you.'

'Yes, sir; Miss Grey has been as kind as read me a chapter; an' now she's helping me with a shirt for our Bill — but I'm feared she'll be cold there. Won't you come to th' fire, Miss?'

'No, thank you, Nancy, I'm quite warm. I must go as soon as this shower is over.'

'Oh, Miss! You said you could stop while dusk!' cried the provoking old woman, and Mr. Weston seized his hat.

'Nay, sir,' exclaimed she, 'pray don't go now, while it rains so fast.'

'But it strikes me I'm keeping your visitor away from the fire.'

'No, you're not, Mr. Weston,' replied I, hoping there was no harm in a falsehood of that description.

'No, sure!' cried Nancy. 'What, there's lots o' room!'

'Miss Grey,' said he, half-jestingly, as if he felt it necessary to change the present subject, whether he had anything particular to say or not, 'I wish you would make my peace with the squire, when you see him. He was by when I rescued Nancy's cat, and did not quite approve of the deed. I told him I thought he might better spare all his rabbits than she her cat, for which audacious assertion he treated me to some rather ungentlemanly language; and I fear I retorted a trifle too warmly.'

'Oh, lawful sir! I hope you didn't fall out wi' th' maister for sake o' my cat! he cannot bide answering again — can th' maister.'

'Oh! it's no matter, Nancy: I don't care about it, really; I said nothing *very* uncivil; and I suppose Mr. Murray is accustomed to use rather strong language when he's heated.'

'Ay, sir: it's a pity.'

'And now, I really must go. I have to visit a place a mile beyond this; and you would not have me to return in the dark: besides, it has nearly done raining now — so good-evening, Nancy. Good-evening, Miss Grey.'

'Good-evening, Mr. Weston; but don't depend upon me for making your peace with Mr. Murray, for I never see him — to speak to.'

'Don't you; it can't be helped then,' replied he, in dolorous resignation: then, with a peculiar half-smile, he added, 'But never mind; I imagine the squire has more to apologise for than I;' and left the cottage.

I went on with my sewing as long as I could see, and then bade Nancy good-evening; checking her too lively gratitude by the undeniable assurance that I had only done for her what she would have done for me, if she had been in my place and I in hers. I hastened back to Horton Lodge, where, having entered the schoolroom, I found the tea-table all in confusion, the tray flooded with slops, and Miss Matilda in a most ferocious humour.

'Miss Grey, whatever have you been about? I've had tea half an hour ago, and had to make it myself, and drink it all alone! I wish you would come in sooner!'

'I've been to see Nancy Brown. I thought you would not be back from your ride.'

'How could I ride in the rain, I should like to know. That damned pelting shower was vexatious enough — coming on when I was just in full swing: and then to come and find nobody in to tea! and you know I can't make the tea as I like it.'

'I didn't think of the shower,' replied I (and, indeed, the thought of its driving her home had never entered my head).

'No, of course; you were under shelter yourself, and you never thought of other people.'

I bore her coarse reproaches with astonishing equanimity, even with cheerfulness; for I was sensible that I had done more good to Nancy Brown than harm to her: and perhaps some other thoughts assisted to keep up my spirits, and impart a relish to the cup of cold, overdrawn tea, and a charm to the otherwise unsightly table; and — I had almost said — to Miss Matilda's unamiable face. But she soon betook herself to the stables, and left me to the quiet enjoyment of my solitary meal.

CHAPTER XIII — THE PRIMROSES

Miss Murray now always went twice to church, for she so loved admiration that she could not bear to lose a single opportunity of obtaining it; and she was so sure of it wherever she showed herself, that, whether Harry Meltham and Mr. Green were there or not, there was certain to be somebody present who would not be insensible to her charms, besides the Rector, whose official capacity generally obliged him to attend. Usually, also, if the weather permitted, both she and her sister would walk home; Matilda, because she hated the confinement of the carriage; she, because she disliked the privacy of it, and enjoyed the company that generally enlivened the first mile of the journey in walking from the church to Mr. Green's park-gates: near which commenced the private road to Horton Lodge, which lay in the opposite direction, while the highway conducted in a straightforward course to the still more distant mansion of Sir Hugh Meltham. Thus there was always a chance of being accompanied, so far, either by Harry Meltham, with or without Miss Meltham, or Mr. Green, with perhaps one or both of his sisters, and any gentlemen visitors they might have.

Whether I walked with the young ladies or rode with their parents, depended upon their own capricious will: if they chose to 'take' me, I went; if, for reasons best known to themselves, they chose to go alone, I took my seat in the carriage. I liked walking better, but a sense of reluctance to obtrude my presence on anyone who did not desire it, always kept me passive on these and similar occasions; and I never inquired into the causes of their varying whims. Indeed, this was the best policy — for to submit and oblige was the governess's part, to consult their own pleasure was that of the pupils. But when I did walk, the first half of journey was generally a great nuisance to me. As none of the before-mentioned ladies and gentlemen ever noticed me, it was disagreeable to walk beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to be thought one of them, while they talked over me, or across; and if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy — as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear so. It was disagreeable, too, to walk behind, and thus appear to acknowledge my own inferiority; for, in truth, I considered myself pretty nearly as good as the best of them, and wished them to know that I did so, and not to imagine that I looked upon myself as a mere domestic, who knew her own place too well to walk beside such fine ladies and gentlemen as they were — though her young ladies might choose to have her with them, and even condescend to converse with her when no better company were at hand. Thus — I am almost ashamed to confess it — but indeed I gave myself no little trouble in my endeavours (if I did keep up with them) to appear perfectly unconscious or regardless of their presence, as if I were wholly absorbed in my own reflections, or the contemplation of surrounding objects; or, if I lingered behind, it was some bird or insect, some tree or flower, that attracted my attention, and having duly examined that, I would pursue my walk alone, at a leisurely pace, until my pupils had bidden adieu to their companions and turned off into the quiet private road.

One such occasion I particularly well remember; it was a lovely afternoon about the close of March; Mr. Green and his sisters had sent their carriage back empty, in order to enjoy the bright sunshine and balmy air in a sociable walk home along with their visitors, Captain Somebody and Lieutenant Somebody-else (a couple of military fops), and the Misses Murray, who, of course, contrived to join them. Such a party was highly agreeable to Rosalie; but not finding it equally suitable to my taste, I presently fell back, and began to botanise and entomologise along the green banks and budding hedges, till the company was considerably in advance of me, and I could hear the sweet song of the happy lark; then my spirit of misanthropy began to melt away beneath the soft, pure air and genial sunshine; but sad thoughts of early childhood, and yearnings for departed joys, or for a brighter future lot, arose instead. As my eyes wandered over the steep banks covered with young grass and green-leaved plants, and surmounted by budding hedges, I longed intensely for some familiar flower that might recall the woody dales or green hill-sides of home: the brown moorlands, of course, were out of the question. Such a discovery would make my eyes gush out with water, no doubt; but that was one of my greatest enjoyments now. At length I descried, high up between the twisted roots of an oak, three lovely primroses, peeping so sweetly from their hiding-place that the tears already started at the sight; but they grew so high above me, that I tried in vain to gather one or two, to dream over and to carry with me: I could not reach them unless I climbed the bank, which I was deterred from doing by hearing a footstep at that moment behind me, and was, therefore, about to turn away, when I was startled by the words, ‘Allow me to gather them for you, Miss Grey,’ spoken in the grave, low tones of a well-known voice. Immediately the flowers were gathered, and in my hand. It was Mr. Weston, of course — who else would trouble himself to do so much for *me*?

‘I thanked him; whether warmly or coldly, I cannot tell: but certain I am that I did not express half the gratitude I felt. It was foolish, perhaps, to feel any gratitude at all; but it seemed to me, at that moment, as if this were a remarkable instance of his good-nature: an act of kindness, which I could not repay, but never should forget: so utterly unaccustomed was I to receive such civilities, so little prepared to expect them from anyone within fifty miles of Horton Lodge. Yet this did not prevent me from feeling a little uncomfortable in his presence; and I proceeded to follow my pupils at a much quicker pace than before; though, perhaps, if Mr. Weston had taken the hint, and let me pass without another word, I might have repeated it an hour after: but he did not. A somewhat rapid walk for me was but an ordinary pace for him.

‘Your young ladies have left you alone,’ said he.

‘Yes, they are occupied with more agreeable company.’

‘Then don’t trouble yourself to overtake them.’ I slackened my pace; but next moment regretted having done so: my companion did not speak; and I had nothing in the world to say, and feared he might be in the same predicament. At length, however, he broke the pause by asking, with a certain quiet abruptness peculiar to himself, if I liked flowers.

‘Yes; very much,’ I answered, ‘wild-flowers especially.’

‘*I* like wild-flowers,’ said he; ‘others I don’t care about, because I have no particular associations connected with them — except one or two. What are your favourite flowers?’

‘Primroses, bluebells, and heath-blossoms.’

‘Not violets?’

‘No; because, as you say, I have no particular associations connected with them; for there are no sweet violets among the hills and valleys round my home.’

‘It must be a great consolation to you to have a home, Miss Grey,’ observed my companion after a short pause: ‘however remote, or however seldom visited, still it is something to look to.’

‘It is so much that I think I could not live without it,’ replied I, with an enthusiasm of which I immediately repented; for I thought it must have sounded essentially silly.

‘Oh, yes, you could,’ said he, with a thoughtful smile. ‘The ties that bind us to life are tougher than you imagine, or than anyone can who has not felt how roughly they may be pulled without breaking. You might be miserable without a home, but even *you* could live; and not so miserably as you suppose. The human heart is like india-rubber; a little swells it, but a great deal will not burst it. If “little more than nothing will disturb it, little less than all things will suffice” to break it. As in the outer members of our frame, there is a vital power inherent in itself that strengthens it against external violence. Every blow that shakes it will serve to harden it against a future stroke; as constant labour thickens the skin of the hand, and strengthens its muscles instead of wasting them away: so that a day of arduous toil, that might excoriate a lady’s palm, would make no sensible impression on that of a hardy ploughman.

‘I speak from experience — partly my own. There was a time when I thought as you do — at least, I was fully persuaded that home and its affections were the only things that made life tolerable: that, if deprived of these, existence would become a burden hard to be endured; but now I have no home — unless you would dignify my two hired rooms at Horton by such a name; — and not twelve months ago I lost the last and dearest of my early friends; and yet, not only I live, but I am not wholly destitute of hope and comfort, even for this life: though I must acknowledge that I can seldom enter even an humble cottage at the close of day, and see its inhabitants peaceably gathered around their cheerful hearth, without a feeling *almost* of envy at their domestic enjoyment.'

'You don't know what happiness lies before you yet,' said I: 'you are now only in the commencement of your journey.'

'The best of happiness,' replied he, 'is mine already — the power and the will to be useful.'

We now approached a stile communicating with a footpath that conducted to a farm-house, where, I suppose, Mr. Weston purposed to make himself 'useful;' for he presently took leave of me, crossed the stile, and traversed the path with his usual firm, elastic tread, leaving me to ponder his words as I continued my course alone. I had heard before that he had lost his mother not many months before he came. She then was the last and dearest of his early friends; and he had *no home*. I pitied him from my heart: I almost wept for sympathy. And this, I thought, accounted for the shade of premature thoughtfulness that so frequently clouded his brow, and obtained for him the reputation of a morose and sullen disposition with the charitable Miss Murray and all her kin. 'But,' thought I, 'he is not so miserable as I should be under such a deprivation: he leads an active life; and a wide field for useful exertion lies before him. He can *make* friends; and he can make a home too, if he pleases; and, doubtless, he will please some time. God grant the partner of that home may be worthy of his choice, and make it a happy one — such a home as he deserves to have! And how delightful it would be to — ' But no matter what I thought.

I began this book with the intention of concealing nothing; that those who liked might have the benefit of perusing a fellow-creature's heart: but we have some thoughts that all the angels in heaven are welcome to behold, but not our brother-men — not even the best and kindest amongst them.

By this time the Greens had taken themselves to their own abode, and the Murrays had turned down the private road, whither I hastened to follow them. I found the two girls warm in an animated discussion on the respective merits of the two young officers; but on seeing me Rosalie broke off in the middle of a sentence to exclaim, with malicious glee —

'Oh-ho, Miss Grey! you're come at last, are you? No *wonder* you lingered so long behind; and no *wonder* you always stand up so vigorously for Mr. Weston when I abuse him. Ah-ha! I see it all now!'

'Now, come, Miss Murray, don't be foolish,' said I, attempting a good-natured laugh; 'you know such nonsense can make no impression on me.'

But she still went on talking such intolerable stuff — her sister helping her with appropriate fiction coined for the occasion — that I thought it necessary to say something in my own justification.

'What folly all this is!' I exclaimed. 'If Mr. Weston's road happened to be the same as mine for a few yards, and if he chose to exchange a word or two in passing, what is there so remarkable in that? I assure you, I never spoke to him before: except once.'

'Where? where? and when?' cried they eagerly.

'In Nancy's cottage.'

'Ah-ha! you've met him there, have you?' exclaimed Rosalie, with exultant laughter. 'Ah! now, Matilda, I've found out why she's so fond of going to Nancy Brown's! She goes there to flirt with Mr. Weston.'

'Really, that is not worth contradicting — I only saw him there once, I tell you — and how could I know he was coming?'

Irritated as I was at their foolish mirth and vexatious imputations, the uneasiness did not continue long: when they had had their laugh out, they returned again to the captain and lieutenant; and, while they disputed and commented upon them, my indignation rapidly cooled; the cause of it was quickly forgotten, and I turned my thoughts into a pleasanter channel. Thus we proceeded up the park, and entered the hall; and as I ascended the stairs to my own chamber, I had but one thought within me: my heart was filled to overflowing with one single earnest wish. Having entered the room, and shut the door, I fell upon my knees and offered up a fervent but not impetuous prayer: 'Thy will be done,' I strove to say throughout; but, 'Father, all things are possible with Thee, and may it be Thy will,' was sure to follow. That wish — that prayer — both men and women would have scorned me for — 'But, Father, *Thou* wilt *not* despise!' I said, and felt that it was true. It seemed to me that another's welfare was at least as ardently implored for as my own; nay, even *that* was the principal object of my heart's desire. I might have been deceiving myself; but that idea gave me confidence to ask, and power to hope I did not ask in vain. As for the primroses, I kept two of them in a glass in my room until they were completely withered, and the housemaid threw them out; and the petals of the other I pressed between the leaves of my Bible — I have them still, and mean to keep them always.

CHAPTER XIV — THE RECTOR

The following day was as fine as the preceding one. Soon after breakfast Miss Matilda, having galloped and blundered through a few unprofitable lessons, and vengeably thumped the piano for an hour, in a terrible humour with both me and it, because her mamma would not give her a holiday, had betaken herself to her favourite places of resort, the yards, the stables, and the dog-kennels; and Miss Murray was gone forth to enjoy a quiet ramble with a new fashionable novel for her companion, leaving me in the schoolroom hard at work upon a water-colour drawing which I had promised to do for her, and which she insisted upon my finishing that day.

At my feet lay a little rough terrier. It was the property of Miss Matilda; but she hated the animal, and intended to sell it, alleging that it was quite spoiled. It was really an excellent dog of its kind; but she affirmed it was fit for nothing, and had not even the sense to know its own mistress.

The fact was she had purchased it when but a small puppy, insisting at first that no one should touch it but herself; but soon becoming tired of so helpless and troublesome a nursling, she had gladly yielded to my entreaties to be allowed to take charge of it; and I, by carefully nursing the little creature from infancy to adolescence, of course, had obtained its affections: a reward I should have greatly valued, and looked upon as far outweighing all the trouble I had had with it, had not poor Snap's grateful feelings exposed him to many a harsh word and many a spiteful kick and pinch from his owner, and were he not now in danger of being 'put away' in consequence, or transferred to some rough, stony-hearted master. But how could I help it? I could not make the dog hate me by cruel treatment, and she would not propitiate him by kindness.

However, while I thus sat, working away with my pencil, Mrs. Murray came, half-sailing, half-bustling, into the room.

'Miss Grey,' she began, — 'dear! how can you sit at your drawing such a day as this?' (She thought I was doing it for my own pleasure.) 'I *wonder* you don't put on your bonnet and go out with the young ladies.'

'I think, ma'am, Miss Murray is reading; and Miss Matilda is amusing herself with her dogs.'

'If you would try to amuse Miss Matilda yourself a little more, I think she would not be driven to seek amusement in the companionship of dogs and horses and grooms, so much as she is; and if you would be a little more cheerful and conversable with Miss Murray, she would not so often go wandering in the fields with a book in her hand. However, I don't want to vex you,' added she, seeing, I suppose, that my cheeks burned and my hand trembled with some unamiable emotion. 'Do, pray, try not to be so touchy — there's no speaking to you else. And tell me if you know where Rosalie is gone: and why she likes to be so much alone?'

'She says she likes to be alone when she has a new book to read.'

'But why can't she read it in the park or the garden? — why should she go into the fields and lanes? And how is it that that Mr. Hatfield so often finds her out? She told me last week he'd walked his horse by her side all up Moss Lane; and now I'm sure it was he I saw, from my dressing-room window, walking so briskly past the park-gates, and on towards the field where she so frequently goes. I wish you would go and see if she is there; and just gently remind her that it is not proper for a young lady of her rank and prospects to be wandering about by herself in that manner, exposed to the attentions of anyone that presumes to address her; like some poor neglected girl that has no park to walk in, and no friends to take care of her: and tell her that her papa would be extremely angry if he knew of her treating Mr. Hatfield in the familiar manner that I fear she does; and — oh! if you — if *any* governess had but half a mother's watchfulness — half a mother's anxious care, I should be saved this trouble; and you would see at once the necessity of keeping your eye upon her, and making your company agreeable to — Well, go — go; there's no time to be lost,' cried she, seeing that I had put away my drawing materials, and was waiting in the doorway for the conclusion of her address.

According to her prognostications, I found Miss Murray in her favourite field just without the park; and, unfortunately, not alone; for the tall, stately figure of Mr. Hatfield was slowly sauntering by her side.

Here was a poser for me. It was my duty to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*: but how was it to be done? Mr. Hatfield could not to be driven away by so insignificant person as I; and to go and place myself on the other side of Miss Murray, and intrude my unwelcome presence upon her without noticing her companion, was a piece of rudeness I could not be guilty of: neither had I the courage to cry aloud from the top of the field that she was wanted elsewhere. So I took the intermediate course of walking slowly but steadily towards them; resolving, if my approach failed to scare away the beau, to pass by and tell Miss Murray her mamma wanted her.

She certainly looked very charming as she strolled, lingering along under the budding horse-chestnut trees that stretched their long arms over the park-palings; with her closed book in one hand, and in the other a graceful sprig of myrtle, which served her as a very pretty plaything; her bright ringlets escaping profusely from her little bonnet, and gently stirred by the breeze, her fair cheek flushed with gratified vanity, her smiling blue eyes, now slyly glancing towards her admirer, now gazing downward at her myrtle sprig. But Snap, running before me, interrupted her in the midst of some half-pert, half-playful repartee, by catching hold of her dress and vehemently tugging thereat; till Mr. Hatfield, with his cane, administered a resounding thwack upon the animal's skull, and sent it yelping back to me with a clamorous outcry that afforded the reverend gentleman great amusement: but seeing me so near, he thought, I suppose, he might as well be taking his departure; and, as I stooped to caress the dog, with ostentatious pity to show my disapproval of his severity, I heard him say: ‘When shall I see you again, Miss Murray?’

‘At church, I suppose,’ replied she, ‘unless your business chances to bring you here again at the precise moment when I happen to be walking by.’

‘I could always manage to have business here, if I knew precisely when and where to find you.’

‘But if I would, I could not inform you, for I am so immethodical, I never can tell to-day what I shall do to-morrow.’

‘Then give me that, meantime, to comfort me,’ said he, half jestingly and half in earnest, extending his hand for the sprig of myrtle.

‘No, indeed, I shan’t.’

‘Do! *pray* do! I shall be the most miserable of men if you don’t. You cannot be so cruel as to deny me a favour so easily granted and yet so highly prized!’ pleaded he as ardently as if his life depended on it.

By this time I stood within a very few yards of them, impatiently waiting his departure.

‘There then! take it and go,’ said Rosalie.

He joyfully received the gift, murmured something that made her blush and toss her head, but with a little laugh that showed her displeasure was entirely affected; and then with a courteous salutation withdrew.

‘Did you ever see such a man, Miss Grey?’ said she, turning to me; ‘I’m so *glad* you came! I thought I never *should*, get rid of him; and I was so terribly afraid of papa seeing him.’

‘Has he been with you long?’

‘No, not long, but he’s so extremely impertinent: and he’s always hanging about, pretending his business or his clerical duties require his attendance in these parts, and really watching for poor me, and pouncing upon me wherever he sees me.’

‘Well, your mamma thinks you ought not to go beyond the park or garden without some discreet, matronly person like me to accompany you, and keep off all intruders. She descried Mr. Hatfield hurrying past the park-gates, and forthwith despatched me with instructions to seek you up and to take care of you, and likewise to warn — ’

‘Oh, mamma’s so tiresome! As if I couldn’t take care of myself. She bothered me before about Mr. Hatfield; and I told her she might trust me: I never should forget my rank and station for the most delightful man that ever breathed. I wish he would go down on his knees to-morrow, and implore me to be his wife, that I might just show her how mistaken she is in supposing that I could ever — Oh, it provokes me so! To think that I could be such a fool as to fall in *love*! It is quite beneath the dignity of a woman to do such a thing. Love! I detest the word! As applied to one of our sex, I think it a perfect insult. A preference I *might* acknowledge; but never for one like poor Mr. Hatfield, who has not seven hundred a year to bless himself with. I like to talk to him, because he’s so clever and amusing — I wish Sir Thomas Ashby were half as nice; besides, I must have *somebody* to flirt with, and no one else has the sense to come here; and when we go out, mamma won't let me flirt with anybody but Sir Thomas — if he's there; and if he's *not* there, I'm bound hand and foot, for fear somebody should go and make up some exaggerated story, and put it into his head that I'm engaged, or likely to be engaged, to somebody else; or, what is more probable, for fear his nasty old mother should see or hear of my ongoings, and conclude that I'm not a fit wife for her excellent son: as if the said son were not the greatest scamp in Christendom; and as if any woman of common decency were not a world too good for him.'

'Is it really so, Miss Murray? and does your mamma know it, and yet wish you to marry him?'

'To be sure, she does! She knows more against him than I do, I believe: she keeps it from me lest I should be discouraged; not knowing how little I care about such things. For it's no great matter, really: he'll be all right when he's married, as mamma says; and reformed rakes make the best husbands, *everybody* knows. I only wish he were not so ugly — *that's* all *I* think about: but then there's no choice here in the country; and papa *will not* let us go to London — '

'But I should think Mr. Hatfield would be far better.'

'And so he would, if he were lord of Ashby Park — there's not a doubt of it: but the fact is, I *must* have Ashby Park, whoever shares it with me.'

'But Mr. Hatfield thinks you like him all this time; you don't consider how bitterly he will be disappointed when he finds himself mistaken.'

'*No*, indeed! It will be a proper punishment for his presumption — for ever *daring* to think I could like him. I should enjoy nothing so much as lifting the veil from his eyes.'

'The sooner you do it the better then.'

'No; I tell you, I like to amuse myself with him. Besides, he doesn't really think I like him. I take good care of that: you don't know how cleverly I manage. He may presume to think he can induce me to like him; for which I shall punish him as he deserves.'

'Well, mind you don't give too much reason for such presumption — that's all,' replied I.

But all my exhortations were in vain: they only made her somewhat more solicitous to disguise her wishes and her thoughts from me. She talked no more to me about the Rector; but I could see that her mind, if not her heart, was fixed upon him still, and that she was intent upon obtaining another interview: for though, in compliance with her mother's request, I was now constituted the companion of her rambles for a time, she still persisted in wandering in the fields and lanes that lay in the nearest proximity to the road; and, whether she talked to me or read the book she carried in her hand, she kept continually pausing to look round her, or gaze up the road to see if anyone was coming; and if a horseman trotted by, I could tell by her unqualified abuse of the poor equestrian, whoever he might be, that she hated him *because* he was not Mr. Hatfield.

'Surely,' thought I, 'she is not so indifferent to him as she believes herself to be, or would have others to believe her; and her mother's anxiety is not so wholly causeless as she affirms.'

Three days passed away, and he did not make his appearance. On the afternoon of the fourth, as we were walking beside the park-palings in the memorable field, each furnished with a book (for I always took care to provide myself with something to be doing when she did not require me to talk), she suddenly interrupted my studies by exclaiming —

'Oh, Miss Grey! do be so kind as to go and see Mark Wood, and take his wife half-a-crown from me — I should have given or sent it a week ago, but quite forgot. There!' said she, throwing me her purse, and speaking very fast — 'Never mind getting it out now, but take the purse and give them what you like; I would go with you, but I want to finish this volume. I'll come and meet you when I've done it. Be quick, will you — and — oh, wait; hadn't you better read to him a bit? Run to the house and get some sort of a good book. Anything will do.'

I did as I was desired; but, suspecting something from her hurried manner and the suddenness of the request, I just glanced back before I quitted the field, and there was Mr. Hatfield about to enter at the gate below. By sending me to the house for a book, she had just prevented my meeting him on the road.

'Never mind!' thought I, 'there'll be no great harm done. Poor Mark will be glad of the half-crown, and perhaps of the good book too; and if the Rector does steal Miss Rosalie's heart, it will only humble her pride a little; and if they do get married at last, it will only save her from a worse fate; and she will be quite a good enough partner for him, and he for her.'

Mark Wood was the consumptive labourer whom I mentioned before. He was now rapidly wearing away. Miss Murray, by her liberality, obtained literally the blessing of him that was ready to perish; for though the half-crown could be of very little service to him, he was glad of it for the sake of his wife and children, so soon to be widowed and fatherless. After I had sat a few minutes, and read a little for the comfort and edification of himself and his afflicted wife, I left them; but I had not proceeded fifty yards before I encountered Mr. Weston, apparently on his way to the same abode. He greeted me in his usual quiet, unaffected way, stopped to inquire about the condition of the sick man and his family, and with a sort of unconscious, brotherly disregard to ceremony took from my hand the book out of which I had been reading, turned over its pages, made a few brief but very sensible remarks, and restored it; then told me about some poor sufferer he had just been visiting, talked a little about Nancy Brown, made a few observations upon my little rough friend the terrier, that was frisking at his feet, and finally upon the beauty of the weather, and departed.

I have omitted to give a detail of his words, from a notion that they would not interest the reader as they did me, and not because I have forgotten them. No; I remember them well; for I thought them over and over again in the course of that day and many succeeding ones, I know not how often; and recalled every intonation of his deep, clear voice, every flash of his quick, brown eye, and every gleam of his pleasant, but too transient smile. Such a confession will look very absurd, I fear: but no matter: I have written it: and they that read it will not know the writer.

While I was walking along, happy within, and pleased with all around, Miss Murray came hastening to meet me; her buoyant step, flushed cheek, and radiant smiles showing that she, too, was happy, in her own way. Running up to me, she put her arm through mine, and without waiting to recover breath, began — 'Now, Miss Grey, think yourself highly honoured, for I'm come to tell you my news before I've breathed a word of it to anyone else.'

'Well, what is it?'

'Oh, *such* news! In the first place, you must know that Mr. Hatfield came upon me just after you were gone. I was in such a way for fear papa or mamma should see him; but you know I couldn't call you back again, and so! — oh, dear! I can't tell you all about it now, for there's Matilda, I see, in the park, and I must go and open my budget to her. But, however, Hatfield was most uncommonly audacious, unspeakably complimentary, and unprecedentedly tender — tried to be so, at least — he didn't succeed very well in *that*, because it's not his vein. I'll tell you all he said another time.'

'But what did *you* say — I'm more interested in that?'

'I'll tell you that, too, at some future period. I happened to be in a very good humour just then; but, though I was complaisant and gracious enough, I took care not to compromise myself in any possible way. But, however, the conceited wretch chose to interpret my amiability of temper his own way, and at length presumed upon my indulgence so far — what do you think? — he actually made me an offer!'

'And you — '

'I proudly drew myself up, and with the greatest coolness expressed my astonishment at such an occurrence, and hoped he had seen nothing in my conduct to justify his expectations. You should have *seen* how his countenance fell! He went perfectly white in the face. I assured him that I esteemed him and all that, but could not possibly accede to his proposals; and if I did, papa and mamma could never be brought to give their consent.'

'"But if they could," said he, "would yours be wanting?"

'"Certainly, Mr. Hatfield," I replied, with a cool decision which quelled all hope at once. Oh, if you had seen how dreadfully mortified he was — how crushed to the earth by his disappointment! really, I almost pitied him myself.

'One more desperate attempt, however, he made. After a silence of considerable duration, during which he struggled to be calm, and I to be grave — for I felt a strong propensity to laugh — which would have ruined all — he said, with the ghost of a smile — "But tell me plainly, Miss Murray, if I had the wealth of Sir Hugh Meltham, or the prospects of his eldest son, would you still refuse me? Answer me truly, upon your honour."

'"Certainly," said I. "That would make no difference whatever."

'It was a great lie, but he looked so confident in his own attractions still, that I determined not to leave him one stone upon another. He looked me full in the face; but I kept my countenance so well that he could not imagine I was saying anything more than the actual truth.

'"Then it's all over, I suppose," he said, looking as if he could have died on the spot with vexation and the intensity of his despair. But he was angry as well as disappointed. There was he, suffering so unspeakably, and there was I, the pitiless cause of it all, so utterly impenetrable to all the artillery of his looks and words, so calmly cold and proud, he could not but feel some resentment; and with singular bitterness he began — "I certainly did not expect this, Miss Murray. I might say something about your past conduct, and the hopes you have led me to foster, but I forbear, on condition — "

'"No conditions, Mr. Hatfield!" said I, now truly indignant at his insolence.

'"Then let me beg it as a favour," he replied, lowering his voice at once, and taking a humbler tone: "let me entreat that you will not mention this affair to anyone whatever. If you will keep silence about it, there need be no unpleasantness on either side — nothing, I mean, beyond what is quite unavoidable: for my own feelings I will endeavour to keep to myself, if I cannot annihilate them — I will try to forgive, if I cannot forget the cause of my sufferings. I will not suppose, Miss Murray, that you know how deeply you have injured me. I would not have you aware of it; but if, in addition to the injury you have already done me — pardon me, but, whether innocently or not, you *have* done it — and if you add to it by giving publicity to this unfortunate affair, or naming it *at all*, you will find that I too can speak, and though you scorned my love, you will hardly scorn my — "

'He stopped, but he bit his bloodless lip, and looked so terribly fierce that I was quite frightened. However, my pride upheld me still, and I answered disdainfully; "I do not know what motive you suppose I could have for naming it to anyone, Mr. Hatfield; but if I were disposed to do so, you would not deter me by threats; and it is scarcely the part of a gentleman to attempt it."

'"Pardon me, Miss Murray," said he, "I have loved you so intensely — I do still adore you so deeply, that I would not willingly offend you; but though I never have loved, and never *can* love any woman as I have loved you, it is equally certain that I never was so ill-treated by any. On the contrary, I have always found your sex the kindest and most tender and obliging of God's creation, till now." (Think of the conceited fellow saying that!) "And the novelty and harshness of the lesson you have taught me to-day, and the bitterness of being disappointed in the only quarter on which the happiness of my life depended, must excuse any appearance of asperity. If my presence is disagreeable to you, Miss Murray," he said (for I was looking about me to show how little I cared for him, so he thought I was tired of him, I suppose) — "if my presence is disagreeable to you, Miss Murray, you have only to promise me the favour I named, and I will relieve you at once. There are many ladies — some even in this parish — who would be delighted to accept what you have so scornfully trampled under your feet. They would be naturally inclined to hate one whose surpassing loveliness has so completely estranged my heart from them and blinded me to their attractions; and a single hint of the truth from me to one of these would be sufficient to raise such a talk against you as would seriously injure your prospects, and diminish your chance of success with any other gentleman you or your mamma might design to entangle."

'"What do your mean, sir?" said I, ready to stamp with passion.

'"I mean that this affair from beginning to end appears to me like a case of arrant flirtation, to say the least of it — such a case as you would find it rather inconvenient to have blazoned through the world: especially with the additions and exaggerations of your female rivals, who would be too glad to publish the matter, if I only gave them a handle to it. But I promise you, on the faith of a gentleman, that no word or syllable that could tend to your prejudice shall ever escape my lips, provided you will — "

'"Well, well, I won't mention it," said I. "You may rely upon my silence, if that can afford you any consolation."

'"You promise it?"

'"Yes," I answered; for I wanted to get rid of him now.

'"Farewell, then!" said he, in a most doleful, heart-sick tone; and with a look where pride vainly struggled against despair, he turned and went away: longing, no doubt, to get home, that he might shut himself up in his study and cry — if he doesn't burst into tears before he gets there.'

'But you have broken your promise already,' said I, truly horrified at her perfidy.

'Oh! it's only to you; I know you won't repeat it.'

'Certainly, I shall not: but you say you are going to tell your sister; and she will tell your brothers when they come home, and Brown immediately, if you do not tell her yourself; and Brown will blazon it, or be the means of blazoning it, throughout the country.'

'No, indeed, she won't. We shall not tell her at all, unless it be under the promise of the strictest secrecy.'

'But how can you expect her to keep her promises better than her more enlightened mistress?'

'Well, well, she shan't hear it then,' said Miss Murray, somewhat snappishly.

'But you will tell your mamma, of course,' pursued I; 'and she will tell your papa.'

'Of course I shall tell mamma — that is the very thing that pleases me so much. I shall now be able to convince her how mistaken she was in her fears about me.'

'Oh, *that's* it, is it? I was wondering what it was that delighted you so much.'

'Yes; and another thing is, that I've humbled Mr. Hatfield so charmingly; and another — why, you must allow me some share of female vanity: I don't pretend to be without that most essential attribute of our sex — and if you had seen poor Hatfield's intense eagerness in making his ardent declaration and his flattering proposal, and his agony of mind, that no effort of pride could conceal, on being refused, you would have allowed I had some cause to be gratified.'

'The greater his agony, I should think, the less your cause for gratification.'

'Oh, nonsense!' cried the young lady, shaking herself with vexation. 'You either can't understand me, or you won't. If I had not confidence in your magnanimity, I should think you envied me. But you will, perhaps, comprehend this cause of pleasure — which is as great as any — namely, that I am delighted with myself for my prudence, my self-command, my heartlessness, if you please. I was not a bit taken by surprise, not a bit confused, or awkward, or foolish; I just acted and spoke as I ought to have done, and was completely my own mistress throughout. And here was a man, decidedly good-looking — Jane and Susan Green call him bewitchingly handsome I suppose they're two of the ladies he pretends would be so glad to have him; but, however, he was certainly a very clever, witty, agreeable companion — not what you call clever, but just enough to make him entertaining; and a man one needn't be ashamed of anywhere, and would not soon grow tired of; and to confess the truth, I rather liked him — better even, of late, than Harry Meltham — and he evidently idolised me; and yet, though he came upon me all alone and unprepared, I had the wisdom, and the pride, and the strength to refuse him — and so scornfully and coolly as I did: I have good reason to be proud of that.'

'And are you equally proud of having told him that his having the wealth of Sir Hugh Meltham would make no difference to you, when that was not the case; and of having promised to tell no one of his misadventure, apparently without the slightest intention of keeping your promise?'

'Of course! what else could I do? You would not have had me — but I see, Miss Grey, you're not in a good temper. Here's Matilda; I'll see what she and mamma have to say about it.'

She left me, offended at my want of sympathy, and thinking, no doubt, that I envied her. I did not — at least, I firmly believed I did not. I was sorry for her; I was amazed, disgusted at her heartless vanity; I wondered why so much beauty should be given to those who made so bad a use of it, and denied to some who would make it a benefit to both themselves and others.

But, God knows best, I concluded. There are, I suppose, some men as vain, as selfish, and as heartless as she is, and, perhaps, such women may be useful to punish them.

CHAPTER XV — THE WALK

‘Oh, dear! I wish Hatfield had not been so precipitate!’ said Rosalie next day at four P.M., as, with a portentous yawn, she laid down her worsted-work and looked listlessly towards the window. ‘There’s no inducement to go out now; and nothing to look forward to. The days will be so long and dull when there are no parties to enliven them; and there are none this week, or next either, that I know of.’

‘Pity you were so cross to him,’ observed Matilda, to whom this lamentation was addressed. ‘He’ll never come again: and I suspect you liked him after all. I hoped you would have taken him for your beau, and left dear Harry to me.’

‘Humph! my beau must be an Adonis indeed, Matilda, the admired of all beholders, if I am to be contented with him alone. I’m sorry to lose Hatfield, I confess; but the first decent man, or number of men, that come to supply his place, will be more than welcome. It’s Sunday to-morrow — I do wonder how he’ll look, and whether he’ll be able to go through the service. Most likely he’ll pretend he’s got a cold, and make Mr. Weston do it all.’

‘Not he!’ exclaimed Matilda, somewhat contemptuously. ‘Fool as he is, he’s not so soft as that comes to.’

Her sister was slightly offended; but the event proved Matilda was right: the disappointed lover performed his pastoral duties as usual. Rosalie, indeed, affirmed he looked very pale and dejected: he might be a little paler; but the difference, if any, was scarcely perceptible. As for his dejection, I certainly did not hear his laugh ringing from the vestry as usual, nor his voice loud in hilarious discourse; though I did hear it uplifted in rating the sexton in a manner that made the congregation stare; and, in his transits to and from the pulpit and the communion-table, there was more of solemn pomp, and less of that irreverent, self-confident, or rather self-delighted imperiousness with which he usually swept along — that air that seemed to say, ‘You all reverence and adore me, I know; but if anyone does not, I defy him to the teeth!’ But the most remarkable change was, that he never once suffered his eyes to wander in the direction of Mr. Murray’s pew, and did not leave the church till we were gone.

Mr. Hatfield had doubtless received a very severe blow; but his pride impelled him to use every effort to conceal the effects of it. He had been disappointed in his certain hope of obtaining not only a beautiful, and, to him, highly attractive wife, but one whose rank and fortune might give brilliance to far inferior charms: he was likewise, no doubt, intensely mortified by his repulse, and deeply offended at the conduct of Miss Murray throughout. It would have given him no little consolation to have known how disappointed she was to find him apparently so little moved, and to see that he was able to refrain from casting a single glance at her throughout both services; though, she declared, it showed he was thinking of her all the time, or his eyes would have fallen upon her, if it were only by chance: but if they had so chanced to fall, she would have affirmed it was because they could not resist the attraction. It might have pleased him, too, in some degree, to have seen how dull and dissatisfied she was throughout that week (the greater part of it, at least), for lack of her usual source of excitement; and how often she regretted having 'used him up so soon,' like a child that, having devoured its plumcake too hastily, sits sucking its fingers, and vainly lamenting its greediness.

At length I was called upon, one fine morning, to accompany her in a walk to the village. Ostensibly she went to get some shades of Berlin wool, at a tolerably respectable shop that was chiefly supported by the ladies of the vicinity: really — I trust there is no breach of charity in supposing that she went with the idea of meeting either with the Rector himself, or some other admirer by the way; for as we went along, she kept wondering 'what Hatfield would do or say, if we met him,' &c. &c.; as we passed Mr. Green's park-gates, she 'wondered whether he was at home — great stupid blockhead'; as Lady Meltham's carriage passed us, she 'wondered what Mr. Harry was doing this fine day'; and then began to abuse his elder brother for being 'such a fool as to get married and go and live in London.'

'Why,' said I, 'I thought you wanted to live in London yourself.'

'Yes, because it's so dull here: but then he makes it still duller by taking himself off: and if he were not married I might have him instead of that odious Sir Thomas.'

Then, observing the prints of a horse's feet on the somewhat miry road, she 'wondered whether it was a gentleman's horse,' and finally concluded it was, for the impressions were too small to have been made by a 'great clumsy cart-horse'; and then she 'wondered who the rider could be,' and whether we should meet him coming back, for she was sure he had only passed that morning; and lastly, when we entered the village and saw only a few of its humble inhabitants moving about, she 'wondered why the stupid people couldn't keep in their houses; she was sure she didn't want to see their ugly faces, and dirty, vulgar clothes — it wasn't for that she came to Horton!'

Amid all this, I confess, I wondered, too, in secret, whether we should meet, or catch a glimpse of somebody else; and as we passed his lodgings, I even went so far as to wonder whether he was at the window. On entering the shop, Miss Murray desired me to stand in the doorway while she transacted her business, and tell her if anyone passed. But alas! there was no one visible besides the villagers, except Jane and Susan Green coming down the single street, apparently returning from a walk.

'Stupid things!' muttered she, as she came out after having concluded her bargain. 'Why couldn't they have their dolt of a brother with them? even he would be better than nothing.'

She greeted them, however, with a cheerful smile, and protestations of pleasure at the happy meeting equal to their own. They placed themselves one on each side of her, and all three walked away chatting and laughing as young ladies do when they get together, if they be but on tolerably intimate terms. But I, feeling myself to be one too many, left them to their merriment and lagged behind, as usual on such occasions: I had no relish for walking beside Miss Green or Miss Susan like one deaf and dumb, who could neither speak nor be spoken to.

But this time I was not long alone. It struck me, first, as very odd, that just as I was thinking about Mr. Weston he should come up and accost me; but afterwards, on due reflection, I thought there was nothing odd about it, unless it were the fact of his speaking to me; for on such a morning and so near his own abode, it was natural enough that he should be about; and as for my thinking of him, I had been doing that, with little intermission, ever since we set out on our journey; so there was nothing remarkable in that.

'You are alone again, Miss Grey,' said he.

'Yes.'

'What kind of people are those ladies — the Misses Green?'

'I really don't know.'

'That's strange — when you live so near and see them so often!'

'Well, I suppose they are lively, good-tempered girls; but I imagine you must know them better than I do, yourself, for I never exchanged a word with either of them.'

'Indeed? They don't strike me as being particularly reserved.'

'Very likely they are not so to people of their own class; but they consider themselves as moving in quite a different sphere from me!'

He made no reply to this: but after a short pause, he said, — 'I suppose it's these things, Miss Grey, that make you think you could not live without a home?'

'Not exactly. The fact is I am too socially disposed to be able to live contentedly without a friend; and as the only friends I have, or am likely to have, are at home, if it — or rather, if they were gone — I will not say I could not live — but I would rather not live in such a desolate world.'

'But why do you say the only friends you are likely to have? Are you so unsociable that you cannot make friends?'

'No, but I never made one yet; and in my present position there is no possibility of doing so, or even of forming a common acquaintance. The fault may be partly in myself, but I hope not altogether.'

'The fault is partly in society, and partly, I should think, in your immediate neighbours: and partly, too, in yourself; for many ladies, in your position, would make themselves be noticed and accounted of. But your pupils should be companions for you in some degree; they cannot be many years younger than yourself.'

'Oh, yes, they are good company sometimes; but I cannot call them friends, nor would they think of bestowing such a name on me — they have other companions better suited to their tastes.'

'Perhaps you are too wise for them. How do you amuse yourself when alone — do you read much?'

'Reading is my favourite occupation, when I have leisure for it and books to read.'

From speaking of books in general, he passed to different books in particular, and proceeded by rapid transitions from topic to topic, till several matters, both of taste and opinion, had been discussed considerably within the space of half an hour, but without the embellishment of many observations from himself; he being evidently less bent upon communicating his own thoughts and predilections, than on discovering mine. He had not the tact, or the art, to effect such a purpose by skilfully drawing out my sentiments or ideas through the real or apparent statement of his own, or leading the conversation by imperceptible gradations to such topics as he wished to advert to: but such gentle abruptness, and such single-minded straightforwardness, could not possibly offend me.

'And why should he interest himself at all in my moral and intellectual capacities: what is it to him what I think or feel?' I asked myself. And my heart throbbed in answer to the question.

But Jane and Susan Green soon reached their home. As they stood parleying at the park-gates, attempting to persuade Miss Murray to come in, I wished Mr. Weston would go, that she might not see him with me when she turned round; but, unfortunately, his business, which was to pay one more visit to poor Mark Wood, led him to pursue the same path as we did, till nearly the close of our journey. When, however, he saw that Rosalie had taken leave of her friends and I was about to join her, he would have left me and passed on at a quicker pace; but, as he civilly lifted his hat in passing her, to my surprise, instead of returning the salute with a stiff, ungracious bow, she accosted him with one of her sweetest smiles, and, walking by his side, began to talk to him with all imaginable cheerfulness and affability; and so we proceeded all three together.

After a short pause in the conversation, Mr. Weston made some remark addressed particularly to me, as referring to something we had been talking of before; but before I could answer, Miss Murray replied to the observation and enlarged upon it: he rejoined; and, from thence to the close of the interview, she engrossed him entirely to herself. It might be partly owing to my own stupidity, my want of tact and assurance: but I felt myself wronged: I trembled with apprehension; and I listened with envy to her easy, rapid flow of utterance, and saw with anxiety the bright smile with which she looked into his face from time to time: for she was walking a little in advance, for the purpose (as I judged) of being seen as well as heard. If her conversation was light and trivial, it was amusing, and she was never at a loss for something to say, or for suitable words to express it in. There was nothing pert or flippant in her manner now, as when she walked with Mr. Hatfield, there was only a gentle, playful kind of vivacity, which I thought must be peculiarly pleasing to a man of Mr. Weston's disposition and temperament.

When he was gone she began to laugh, and muttered to herself, 'I thought I could do it!'

'Do what?' I asked.

'Fix that man.'

'What in the world do you mean?'

'I mean that he will go home and dream of me. I have shot him through the heart!'

'How do you know?'

'By many infallible proofs: more especially the look he gave me when he went away. It was not an impudent look — I exonerate him from that — it was a look of reverential, tender adoration. Ha, ha! he's not quite such a stupid blockhead as I thought him!'

I made no answer, for my heart was in my throat, or something like it, and I could not trust myself to speak. 'O God, avert it!' I cried, internally — 'for his sake, not for mine!'

Miss Murray made several trivial observations as we passed up the park, to which (in spite of my reluctance to let one glimpse of my feelings appear) I could only answer by monosyllables. Whether she intended to torment me, or merely to amuse herself, I could not tell — and did not much care; but I thought of the poor man and his one lamb, and the rich man with his thousand flocks; and I dreaded I knew not what for Mr. Weston, independently of my own blighted hopes.

Right glad was I to get into the house, and find myself alone once more in my own room. My first impulse was to sink into the chair beside the bed; and laying my head on the pillow, to seek relief in a passionate burst of tears: there was an imperative craving for such an indulgence; but, alas! I must restrain and swallow back my feelings still: there was the bell — the odious bell for the schoolroom dinner; and I must go down with a calm face, and smile, and laugh, and talk nonsense — yes, and eat, too, if possible, as if all was right, and I was just returned from a pleasant walk.

CHAPTER XVI — THE SUBSTITUTION

Next Sunday was one of the gloomiest of April days — a day of thick, dark clouds, and heavy showers. None of the Murrays were disposed to attend church in the afternoon, excepting Rosalie: she was bent upon going as usual; so she ordered the carriage, and I went with her: nothing loth, of course, for at church I might look without fear of scorn or censure upon a form and face more pleasing to me than the most beautiful of God's creations; I might listen without disturbance to a voice more charming than the sweetest music to my ears; I might seem to hold communion with that soul in which I felt so deeply interested, and imbibe its purest thoughts and holiest aspirations, with no alloy to such felicity except the secret reproaches of my conscience, which would too often whisper that I was deceiving my own self, and mocking God with the service of a heart more bent upon the creature than the Creator.

Sometimes, such thoughts would give me trouble enough; but sometimes I could quiet them with thinking — it is not the man, it is his goodness that I love. 'Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are honest and of good report, think on these things.' We do well to worship God in His works; and I know none of them in which so many of His attributes — so much of His own spirit shines, as in this His faithful servant; whom to know and not to appreciate, were obtuse insensibility in me, who have so little else to occupy my heart.

Almost immediately after the conclusion of the service, Miss Murray left the church. We had to stand in the porch, for it was raining, and the carriage was not yet come. I wondered at her coming forth so hastily, for neither young Meltham nor Squire Green was there; but I soon found it was to secure an interview with Mr. Weston as he came out, which he presently did. Having saluted us both, he would have passed on, but she detained him; first with observations upon the disagreeable weather, and then with asking if he would be so kind as to come some time to-morrow to see the granddaughter of the old woman who kept the porter's lodge, for the girl was ill of a fever, and wished to see him. He promised to do so.

'And at what time will you be most likely to come, Mr. Weston? The old woman will like to know when to expect you — you know such people think more about having their cottages in order when decent people come to see them than we are apt to suppose.'

Here was a wonderful instance of consideration from the thoughtless Miss Murray. Mr. Weston named an hour in the morning at which he would endeavour, to be there. By this time the carriage was ready, and the footman was waiting, with an open umbrella, to escort Miss Murray through the churchyard. I was about to follow; but Mr. Weston had an umbrella too, and offered me the benefit of its shelter, for it was raining heavily.

'No, thank you, I don't mind the rain,' I said. I always lacked common sense when taken by surprise.

'But you don't *like* it, I suppose? — an umbrella will do you no harm at any rate,' he replied, with a smile that showed he was not offended; as a man of worse temper or less penetration would have been at such a refusal of his aid. I could not deny the truth of his assertion, and so went with him to the carriage; he even offered me his hand on getting in: an unnecessary piece of civility, but I accepted that too, for fear of giving offence. One glance he gave, one little smile at parting — it was but for a moment; but therein I read, or thought I read, a meaning that kindled in my heart a brighter flame of hope than had ever yet arisen.

'I would have sent the footman back for you, Miss Grey, if you'd waited a moment — you needn't have taken Mr. Weston's umbrella,' observed Rosalie, with a very unamiable cloud upon her pretty face.

'I would have come without an umbrella, but Mr. Weston offered me the benefit of his, and I could not have refused it more than I did without offending him,' replied I, smiling placidly; for my inward happiness made that amusing, which would have wounded me at another time.

The carriage was now in motion. Miss Murray bent forwards, and looked out of the window as we were passing Mr. Weston. He was pacing homewards along the causeway, and did not turn his head.

'Stupid ass!' cried she, throwing herself back again in the seat. 'You don't know what you've lost by not looking this way!'

'What has he lost?'

'A bow from me, that would have raised him to the seventh heaven!'

I made no answer. I saw she was out of humour, and I derived a secret gratification from the fact, not that she was vexed, but that she thought she had reason to be so. It made me think my hopes were not entirely the offspring of my wishes and imagination.

'I mean to take up Mr. Weston instead of Mr. Hatfield,' said my companion, after a short pause, resuming something of her usual cheerfulness. 'The ball at Ashby Park takes place on Tuesday, you know; and mamma thinks it very likely that Sir Thomas will propose to me then: such things are often done in the privacy of the ball-room, when gentlemen are most easily ensnared, and ladies most enchanting. But if I am to be married so soon, I must make the best of the present time: I am determined Hatfield shall not be the only man who shall lay his heart at my feet, and implore me to accept the worthless gift in vain.'

'If you mean Mr. Weston to be one of your victims,' said I, with affected indifference, 'you will have to make such overtures yourself that you will find it difficult to draw back when he asks you to fulfil the expectations you have raised.'

'I don't suppose he will ask me to marry him, nor should I desire it: that would be rather too much presumption! but I intend him to feel my power. He has felt it already, indeed: but he shall *acknowledge* it too; and what visionary hopes he may have, he must keep to himself, and only amuse me with the result of them — for a time.'

'Oh! that some kind spirit would whisper those words in his ear,' I inwardly exclaimed. I was far too indignant to hazard a reply to her observation aloud; and nothing more was said about Mr. Weston that day, by me or in my hearing. But next morning, soon after breakfast, Miss Murray came into the schoolroom, where her sister was employed at her studies, or rather her lessons, for studies they were not, and said, 'Matilda, I want you to take a walk with me about eleven o'clock.'

'Oh, I can't, Rosalie! I have to give orders about my new bridle and saddle-cloth, and speak to the rat-catcher about his dogs: Miss Grey must go with you.'

'No, I want you,' said Rosalie; and calling her sister to the window, she whispered an explanation in her ear; upon which the latter consented to go.

I remembered that eleven was the hour at which Mr. Weston proposed to come to the porter's lodge; and remembering that, I beheld the whole contrivance. Accordingly, at dinner, I was entertained with a long account of how Mr. Weston had overtaken them as they were walking along the road; and how they had had a long walk and talk with him, and really found him quite an agreeable companion; and how he must have been, and evidently was, delighted with them and their amazing condescension, &c. &c.

CHAPTER XVII — CONFESSIONS

As I am in the way of confessions I may as well acknowledge that, about this time, I paid more attention to dress than ever I had done before. This is not saying much — for hitherto I had been a little neglectful in that particular; but now, also, it was no uncommon thing to spend as much as two minutes in the contemplation of my own image in the glass; though I never could derive any consolation from such a study. I could discover no beauty in those marked features, that pale hollow cheek, and ordinary dark brown hair; there might be intellect in the forehead, there might be expression in the dark grey eyes, but what of that? — a low Grecian brow, and large black eyes devoid of sentiment would be esteemed far preferable. It is foolish to wish for beauty. Sensible people never either desire it for themselves or care about it in others. If the mind be but well cultivated, and the heart well disposed, no one ever cares for the exterior. So said the teachers of our childhood; and so say we to the children of the present day. All very judicious and proper, no doubt; but are such assertions supported by actual experience?

We are naturally disposed to love what gives us pleasure, and what more pleasing than a beautiful face — when we know no harm of the possessor at least? A little girl loves her bird — Why? Because it lives and feels; because it is helpless and harmless? A toad, likewise, lives and feels, and is equally helpless and harmless; but though she would not hurt a toad, she cannot love it like the bird, with its graceful form, soft feathers, and bright, speaking eyes. If a woman is fair and amiable, she is praised for both qualities, but especially the former, by the bulk of mankind: if, on the other hand, she is disagreeable in person and character, her plainness is commonly inveighed against as her greatest crime, because, to common observers, it gives the greatest offence; while, if she is plain and good, provided she is a person of retired manners and secluded life, no one ever knows of her goodness, except her immediate connections. Others, on the contrary, are disposed to form unfavourable opinions of her mind, and disposition, if it be but to excuse themselves for their instinctive dislike of one so unfavoured by nature; and *visa versâ* with her whose angel form conceals a vicious heart, or sheds a false, deceitful charm over defects and foibles that would not be tolerated in another. They that have beauty, let them be thankful for it, and make a good use of it, like any other talent; they that have it not, let them console themselves, and do the best they can without it: certainly, though liable to be over-estimated, it is a gift of God, and not to be despised. Many will feel this who have felt that they could love, and whose hearts tell them that they are worthy to be loved again; while yet they are debarred, by the lack of this or some such seeming trifle, from giving and receiving that happiness they seem almost made to feel and to impart. As well might the humble glowworm despise that power of giving light without which the roving fly might pass her and repass her a thousand times, and never rest beside her: she might hear her winged darling buzzing over and around her; he vainly seeking her, she longing to be found, but with no power to make her presence known, no voice to call him, no wings to follow his flight; — the fly must seek another mate, the worm must live and die alone.

Such were some of my reflections about this period. I might go on prosing more and more, I might dive much deeper, and disclose other thoughts, propose questions the reader might be puzzled to answer, and deduce arguments that might startle his prejudices, or, perhaps, provoke his ridicule, because he could not comprehend them; but I forbear.

Now, therefore, let us return to Miss Murray. She accompanied her mamma to the ball on Tuesday; of course splendidly attired, and delighted with her prospects and her charms. As Ashby Park was nearly ten miles distant from Horton Lodge, they had to set out pretty early, and I intended to have spent the evening with Nancy Brown, whom I had not seen for a long time; but my kind pupil took care I should spend it neither there nor anywhere else beyond the limits of the schoolroom, by giving me a piece of music to copy, which kept me closely occupied till bed-time. About eleven next morning, as soon as she had left her room, she came to tell me her news. Sir Thomas had indeed proposed to her at the ball; an event which reflected great credit on her mamma's sagacity, if not upon her skill in contrivance. I rather incline to the belief that she had first laid her plans, and then predicted their success. The offer had been accepted, of course, and the bridegroom elect was coming that day to settle matters with Mr. Murray.

Rosalie was pleased with the thoughts of becoming mistress of Ashby Park; she was elated with the prospect of the bridal ceremony and its attendant splendour and éclat, the honeymoon spent abroad, and the subsequent gaieties she expected to enjoy in London and elsewhere; she appeared pretty well pleased too, for the time being, with Sir Thomas himself, because she had so lately seen him, danced with him, and been flattered by him; but, after all, she seemed to shrink from the idea of being so soon united: she wished the ceremony to be delayed some months, at least; and I wished it too. It seemed a horrible thing to hurry on the inauspicious match, and not to give the poor creature time to think and reason on the irrevocable step she was about to take. I made no pretension to 'a mother's watchful, anxious care,' but I was amazed and horrified at Mrs. Murray's heartlessness, or want of thought for the real good of her child; and by my unheeded warnings and exhortations, I vainly strove to remedy the evil. Miss Murray only laughed at what I said; and I soon found that her reluctance to an immediate union arose chiefly from a desire to do what execution she could among the young gentlemen of her acquaintance, before she was incapacitated from further mischief of the kind. It was for this cause that, before confiding to me the secret of her engagement, she had extracted a promise that I would not mention a word on the subject to any one. And when I saw this, and when I beheld her plunge more recklessly than ever into the depths of heartless coquetry, I had no more pity for her. 'Come what will,' I thought, 'she deserves it. Sir Thomas cannot be too bad for her; and the sooner she is incapacitated from deceiving and injuring others the better.'

The wedding was fixed for the first of June. Between that and the critical ball was little more than six weeks; but, with Rosalie's accomplished skill and resolute exertion, much might be done, even within that period; especially as Sir Thomas spent most of the interim in London; whither he went up, it was said, to settle affairs with his lawyer, and make other preparations for the approaching nuptials. He endeavoured to supply the want of his presence by a pretty constant fire of billets-doux; but these did not attract the neighbours' attention, and open their eyes, as personal visits would have done; and old Lady Ashby's haughty, sour spirit of reserve withheld her from spreading the news, while her indifferent health prevented her coming to visit her future daughter-in-law; so that, altogether, this affair was kept far closer than such things usually are.

Rosalie would sometimes show her lover's epistles to me, to convince me what a kind, devoted husband he would make. She showed me the letters of another individual, too, the unfortunate Mr. Green, who had not the courage, or, as she expressed it, the 'spunk,' to plead his cause in person, but whom one denial would not satisfy: he must write again and again. He would not have done so if he could have seen the grimaces his fair idol made over his moving appeals to her feelings, and heard her scornful laughter, and the opprobrious epithets she heaped upon him for his perseverance.

'Why don't you tell him, at once, that you are engaged?' I asked.

'Oh, I don't want him to know that,' replied she. 'If he knew it, his sisters and everybody would know it, and then there would be an end of my — ahem! And, besides, if I told him that, he would think my engagement was the only obstacle, and that I would have him if I were free; which I could not bear that any man should think, and he, of all others, at least. Besides, I don't care for his letters,' she added, contemptuously; 'he may write as often as he pleases, and look as great a calf as he likes when I meet him; it only amuses me.'

Meantime, young Meltham was pretty frequent in his visits to the house or transits past it; and, judging by Matilda's execrations and reproaches, her sister paid more attention to him than civility required; in other words, she carried on as animated a flirtation as the presence of her parents would admit. She made some attempts to bring Mr. Hatfield once more to her feet; but finding them unsuccessful, she repaid his haughty indifference with still loftier scorn, and spoke of him with as much disdain and detestation as she had formerly done of his curate. But, amid all this, she never for a moment lost sight of Mr. Weston. She embraced every opportunity of meeting him, tried every art to fascinate him, and pursued him with as much perseverance as if she really loved him and no other, and the happiness of her life depended upon eliciting a return of affection. Such conduct was completely beyond my comprehension. Had I seen it depicted in a novel, I should have thought it unnatural; had I heard it described by others, I should have deemed it a mistake or an exaggeration; but when I saw it with my own eyes, and suffered from it too, I could only conclude that excessive vanity, like drunkenness, hardens the heart, enslaves the faculties, and perverts the feelings; and that dogs are not the only creatures which, when gorged to the throat, will yet gloat over what they cannot devour, and grudge the smallest morsel to a starving brother.

She now became extremely beneficent to the poor cottagers. Her acquaintance among them was more widely extended, her visits to their humble dwellings were more frequent and excursive than they had ever been before. Hereby, she earned among them the reputation of a condescending and very charitable young lady; and their encomiums were sure to be repeated to Mr. Weston: whom also she had thus a daily chance of meeting in one or other of their abodes, or in her transits to and fro; and often, likewise, she could gather, through their gossip, to what places he was likely to go at such and such a time, whether to baptize a child, or to visit the aged, the sick, the sad, or the dying; and most skilfully she laid her plans accordingly. In these excursions she would sometimes go with her sister — whom, by some means, she had persuaded or bribed to enter into her schemes — sometimes alone, never, now, with me; so that I was debarred the pleasure of seeing Mr. Weston, or hearing his voice even in conversation with another: which would certainly have been a very great pleasure, however hurtful or however fraught with pain. I could not even see him at church: for Miss Murray, under some trivial pretext, chose to take possession of that corner in the family pew which had been mine ever since I came; and, unless I had the presumption to station myself between Mr. and Mrs. Murray, I must sit with my back to the pulpit, which I accordingly did.

Now, also, I never walked home with my pupils: they said their mamma thought it did not look well to see three people out of the family walking, and only two going in the carriage; and, as they greatly preferred walking in fine weather, I should be honoured by going with the seniors. ‘And besides,’ said they, ‘you can’t walk as fast as we do; you know you’re always lagging behind.’ I knew these were false excuses, but I made no objections, and never contradicted such assertions, well knowing the motives which dictated them. And in the afternoons, during those six memorable weeks, I never went to church at all. If I had a cold, or any slight indisposition, they took advantage of that to make me stay at home; and often they would tell me they were not going again that day, themselves, and then pretend to change their minds, and set off without telling me: so managing their departure that I never discovered the change of purpose till too late. Upon their return home, on one of these occasions, they entertained me with an animated account of a conversation they had had with Mr. Weston as they came along. ‘And he asked if you were ill, Miss Grey,’ said Matilda; ‘but we told him you were quite well, only you didn’t want to come to church — so he’ll think you’re turned wicked.’

All chance meetings on week-days were likewise carefully prevented; for, lest I should go to see poor Nancy Brown or any other person, Miss Murray took good care to provide sufficient employment for all my leisure hours. There was always some drawing to finish, some music to copy, or some work to do, sufficient to incapacitate me from indulging in anything beyond a short walk about the grounds, however she or her sister might be occupied.

One morning, having sought and waylaid Mr. Weston, they returned in high glee to give me an account of their interview. ‘And he asked after you again,’ said Matilda, in spite of her sister’s silent but imperative intimation that she should hold her tongue. ‘He wondered why you were never with us, and thought you must have delicate health, as you came out so seldom.’

‘He didn’t Matilda — what nonsense you’re talking!’

‘Oh, Rosalie, what a lie! He did, you know; and you said — Don’t, Rosalie — hang it! — I won’t be pinched so! And, Miss Grey, Rosalie told him you were quite well, but you were always so buried in your books that you had no pleasure in anything else.’

‘What an idea he must have of me!’ I thought.

‘And,’ I asked, ‘does old Nancy ever inquire about me?’

‘Yes; and we tell her you are so fond of reading and drawing that you can do nothing else.’

‘That is not the case though; if you had told her I was so busy I could not come to see her, it would have been nearer the truth.’

‘I don’t think it would,’ replied Miss Murray, suddenly kindling up; ‘I’m sure you have plenty of time to yourself now, when you have so little teaching to do.’

It was no use beginning to dispute with such indulged, unreasoning creatures: so I held my peace. I was accustomed, now, to keeping silence when things distasteful to my ear were uttered; and now, too, I was used to wearing a placid smiling countenance when my heart was bitter within me. Only those who have felt the like can imagine my feelings, as I sat with an assumption of smiling indifference, listening to the accounts of those meetings and interviews with Mr. Weston, which they seemed to find such pleasure in describing to me; and hearing things asserted of him which, from the character of the man, I knew to be exaggerations and perversions of the truth, if not entirely false — things derogatory to him, and flattering to them — especially to Miss Murray — which I burned to contradict, or, at least, to show my doubts about, but dared not; lest, in expressing my disbelief, I should display my interest too. Other things I heard, which I felt or feared were indeed too true: but I must still conceal my anxiety respecting him, my indignation against them, beneath a careless aspect; others, again, mere hints of something said or done, which I longed to hear more of, but could not venture to inquire. So passed the weary time. I could not even comfort myself with saying, ‘She will soon be married; and then there may be hope.’

Soon after her marriage the holidays would come; and when I returned from home, most likely, Mr. Weston would be gone, for I was told that he and the Rector could not agree (the Rector’s fault, of course), and he was about to remove to another place.

No — besides my hope in God, my only consolation was in thinking that, though he know it not, I was more worthy of his love than Rosalie Murray, charming and engaging as she was; for I could appreciate his excellence, which she could not: I would devote my life to the promotion of his happiness; she would destroy his happiness for the momentary gratification of her own vanity. ‘Oh, if he could but know the difference!’ I would earnestly exclaim. ‘But no! I would not have him see my heart: yet, if he could but know her hollowness, her worthless, heartless frivolity, he would then be safe, and I should be — *almost* happy, though I might never see him more!’

I fear, by this time, the reader is well nigh disgusted with the folly and weakness I have so freely laid before him. I never disclosed it then, and would not have done so had my own sister or my mother been with me in the house. I was a close and resolute dissembler — in this one case at least. My prayers, my tears, my wishes, fears, and lamentations, were witnessed by myself and heaven alone.

When we are harassed by sorrows or anxieties, or long oppressed by any powerful feelings which we must keep to ourselves, for which we can obtain and seek no sympathy from any living creature, and which yet we cannot, or will not wholly crush, we often naturally seek relief in poetry — and often find it, too — whether in the effusions of others, which seem to harmonize with our existing case, or in our own attempts to give utterance to those thoughts and feelings in strains less musical, perchance, but more appropriate, and therefore more penetrating and sympathetic, and, for the time, more soothing, or more powerful to rouse and to unburden the oppressed and swollen heart. Before this time, at Wellwood House and here, when suffering from home-sick melancholy, I had sought relief twice or thrice at this secret source of consolation; and now I flew to it again, with greater avidity than ever, because I seemed to need it more. I still preserve those relics of past sufferings and experience, like pillars of witness set up in travelling through the vale of life, to mark particular occurrences. The footsteps are obliterated now; the face of the country may be changed; but the pillar is still there, to remind me how all things were when it was reared. Lest the reader should be curious to see any of these effusions, I will favour him with one short specimen: cold and languid as the lines may seem, it was almost a passion of grief to which they owed their being: —

Oh, they have robbed me of the hope
My spirit held so dear;

They will not let me hear that voice
  My soul delights to hear.
    They will not let me see that face
  I so delight to see;
And they have taken all thy smiles,
  And all thy love from me.
    Well, let them seize on all they can; —
  One treasure still is mine, —
A heart that loves to think on thee,
  And feels the worth of thine.

Yes, at least, they could not deprive me of that: I could think of him day and night; and I could feel that he was worthy to be thought of. Nobody knew him as I did; nobody could appreciate him as I did; nobody could love him as I — could, if I might: but there was the evil. What business had I to think so much of one that never thought of me? Was it not foolish? was it not wrong? Yet, if I found such deep delight in thinking of him, and if I kept those thoughts to myself, and troubled no one else with them, where was the harm of it? I would ask myself. And such reasoning prevented me from making any sufficient effort to shake off my fetters.

But, if those thoughts brought delight, it was a painful, troubled pleasure, too near akin to anguish; and one that did me more injury than I was aware of. It was an indulgence that a person of more wisdom or more experience would doubtless have denied herself. And yet, how dreary to turn my eyes from the contemplation of that bright object and force them to dwell on the dull, grey, desolate prospect around: the joyless, hopeless, solitary path that lay before me. It was wrong to be so joyless, so desponding; I should have made God my friend, and to do His will the pleasure and the business of my life; but faith was weak, and passion was too strong.

In this time of trouble I had two other causes of affliction. The first may seem a trifle, but it cost me many a tear: Snap, my little dumb, rough-visaged, but bright-eyed, warm-hearted companion, the only thing I had to love me, was taken away, and delivered over to the tender mercies of the village rat-catcher, a man notorious for his brutal treatment of his canine slaves. The other was serious enough; my letters from home gave intimation that my father's health was worse. No boding fears were expressed, but I was grown timid and despondent, and could not help fearing that some dreadful calamity awaited us there. I seemed to see the black clouds gathering round my native hills, and to hear the angry muttering of a storm that was about to burst, and desolate our hearth.

CHAPTER XVIII — MIRTH AND MOURNING

The 1st of June arrived at last: and Rosalie Murray was transmuted into Lady Ashby. Most splendidly beautiful she looked in her bridal costume. Upon her return from church, after the ceremony, she came flying into the schoolroom, flushed with excitement, and laughing, half in mirth, and half in reckless desperation, as it seemed to me.

‘Now, Miss Grey, I’m Lady Ashby!’ she exclaimed. ‘It’s done, my fate is sealed: there’s no drawing back now. I’m come to receive your congratulations and bid you good-by; and then I’m off for Paris, Rome, Naples, Switzerland, London — oh, dear! what a deal I shall see and hear before I come back again. But don’t forget me: I shan’t forget you, though I’ve been a naughty girl. Come, why don’t you congratulate me?’

‘I cannot congratulate you,’ I replied, ‘till I know whether this change is really for the better: but I sincerely hope it is; and I wish you true happiness and the best of blessings.’

‘Well, good-by, the carriage is waiting, and they’re calling me.’

She gave me a hasty kiss, and was hurrying away; but, suddenly returning, embraced me with more affection than I thought her capable of evincing, and departed with tears in her eyes. Poor girl! I really loved her then; and forgave her from my heart all the injury she had done me — and others also: she had not half known it, I was sure; and I prayed God to pardon her too.

During the remainder of that day of festal sadness, I was left to my own devices. Being too much unhinged for any steady occupation, I wandered about with a book in my hand for several hours, more thinking than reading, for I had many things to think about. In the evening, I made use of my liberty to go and see my old friend Nancy once again; to apologize for my long absence (which must have seemed so neglectful and unkind) by telling her how busy I had been; and to talk, or read, or work for her, whichever might be most acceptable, and also, of course, to tell her the news of this important day: and perhaps to obtain a little information from her in return, respecting Mr. Weston’s expected departure. But of this she seemed to know nothing, and I hoped, as she did, that it was all a false report. She was very glad to see me; but, happily, her eyes were now so nearly well that she was almost independent of my services. She was deeply interested in the wedding; but while I amused her with the details of the festive day, the splendours of the bridal party and of the bride herself, she often sighed and shook her head, and wished good might come of it; she seemed, like me, to regard it rather as a theme for sorrow than rejoicing. I sat a long time talking to her about that and other things — but no one came.

Shall I confess that I sometimes looked towards the door with a half-expectant wish to see it open and give entrance to Mr. Weston, as had happened once before? and that, returning through the lanes and fields, I often paused to look round me, and walked more slowly than was at all necessary — for, though a fine evening, it was not a hot one — and, finally, felt a sense of emptiness and disappointment at having reached the house without meeting or even catching a distant glimpse of any one, except a few labourers returning from their work?

Sunday, however, was approaching: I should see him then: for now that Miss Murray was gone, I could have my old corner again. I should see him, and by look, speech, and manner, I might judge whether the circumstance of her marriage had very much afflicted him. Happily I could perceive no shadow of a difference: he wore the same aspect as he had worn two months ago — voice, look, manner, all alike unchanged: there was the same keen-sighted, unclouded truthfulness in his discourse, the same forcible clearness in his style, the same earnest simplicity in all he said and did, that made itself, not marked by the eye and ear, but felt upon the hearts of his audience.

I walked home with Miss Matilda; but *he did not join us*. Matilda was now sadly at a loss for amusement, and wofully in want of a companion: her brothers at school, her sister married and gone, she too young to be admitted into society; for which, from Rosalie's example, she was in some degree beginning to acquire a taste — a taste at least for the company of certain classes of gentlemen; at this dull time of year — no hunting going on, no shooting even — for, though she might not join in that, it was *something* to see her father or the gamekeeper go out with the dogs, and to talk with them on their return, about the different birds they had bagged. Now, also, she was denied the solace which the companionship of the coachman, grooms, horses, greyhounds, and pointers might have afforded; for her mother having, notwithstanding the disadvantages of a country life, so satisfactorily disposed of her elder daughter, the pride of her heart had begun seriously to turn her attention to the younger; and, being truly alarmed at the roughness of her manners, and thinking it high time to work a reform, had been roused at length to exert her authority, and prohibited entirely the yards, stables, kennels, and coach-house. Of course, she was not implicitly obeyed; but, indulgent as she had hitherto been, when once her spirit was roused, her temper was not so gentle as she required that of her governesses to be, and her will was not to be thwarted with impunity. After many a scene of contention between mother and daughter, many a violent outbreak which I was ashamed to witness, in which the father's authority was often called in to confirm with oaths and threats the mother's slighted prohibitions — for even *he* could see that 'Tilly, though she would have made a fine lad, was not quite what a young lady ought to be' — Matilda at length found that her easiest plan was to keep clear of the forbidden regions; unless she could now and then steal a visit without her watchful mother's knowledge.

Amid all this, let it not be imagined that I escaped without many a reprimand, and many an implied reproach, that lost none of its sting from not being openly worded; but rather wounded the more deeply, because, from that very reason, it seemed to preclude self-defence. Frequently, I was told to amuse Miss Matilda with other things, and to remind her of her mother's precepts and prohibitions. I did so to the best of my power: but she would not be amused against her will, and could not against her taste; and though I went beyond mere reminding, such gentle remonstrances as I could use were utterly ineffectual.

'*Dear* Miss Grey! it is the *strangest* thing. I suppose you can't help it, if it's not in your nature — but I *wonder* you can't win the confidence of that girl, and make your society at *least* as agreeable to her as that of Robert or Joseph!'

'They can talk the best about the things in which she is most interested,' I replied.

'Well! that is a strange confession, *however*, to come from her *governess*! Who is to form a young lady's tastes, I wonder, if the governess doesn't do it? I have known governesses who have so completely identified themselves with the reputation of their young ladies for elegance and propriety in mind and manners, that they would blush to speak a word against them; and to hear the slightest blame imputed to their pupils was worse than to be censured in their own persons — and I really think it very natural, for my part.'

'Do you, ma'am?'

'Yes, of course: the young lady's proficiency and elegance is of more consequence to the governess than her own, as well as to the world. If she wishes to prosper in her vocation she must devote all her energies to her business: all her ideas and all her ambition will tend to the accomplishment of that one object. When we wish to decide upon the merits of a governess, we naturally look at the young ladies she professes to have educated, and judge accordingly. The *judicious* governess knows this: she knows that, while she lives in obscurity herself, her pupils' virtues and defects will be open to every eye; and that, unless she loses sight of herself in their cultivation, she need not hope for success. You see, Miss Grey, it is just the same as any other trade or profession: they that wish to prosper must devote themselves body and soul to their calling; and if they begin to yield to indolence or self-indulgence they are speedily distanced by wiser competitors: there is little to choose between a person that ruins her pupils by neglect, and one that corrupts them by her example. You will excuse my dropping these little hints: you know it is all for your own good. Many ladies would speak to you much more strongly; and many would not trouble themselves to speak at all, but quietly look out for a substitute. That, of course, would be the *easiest* plan: but I know the advantages of a place like this to a person in your situation; and I have no desire to part with you, as I am sure you would do very well if you will only think of these things and try to exert yourself a *little* more: then, I am convinced, you would *soon* acquire that delicate tact which alone is wanting to give you a proper influence over the mind of your pupil.'

I was about to give the lady some idea of the fallacy of her expectations; but she sailed away as soon as she had concluded her speech. Having said what she wished, it was no part of her plan to await my answer: it was my business to hear, and not to speak.

However, as I have said, Matilda at length yielded in some degree to her mother's authority (pity it had not been exerted before); and being thus deprived of almost every source of amusement, there was nothing for it but to take long rides with the groom and long walks with the governess, and to visit the cottages and farmhouses on her father's estate, to kill time in chatting with the old men and women that inhabited them. In one of these walks, it was our chance to meet Mr. Weston. This was what I had long desired; but now, for a moment, I wished either he or I were away: I felt my heart throb so violently that I dreaded lest some outward signs of emotion should appear; but I think he hardly glanced at me, and I was soon calm enough. After a brief salutation to both, he asked Matilda if she had lately heard from her sister.

'Yes,' replied she. 'She was at Paris when she wrote, and very well, and very happy.'

She spoke the last word emphatically, and with a glance impertinently sly. He did not seem to notice it, but replied, with equal emphasis, and very seriously —

'I hope she will continue to be so.'

'Do you think it likely?' I ventured to inquire: for Matilda had started off in pursuit of her dog, that was chasing a leveret.

'I cannot tell,' replied he. 'Sir Thomas may be a better man than I suppose; but, from all I have heard and seen, it seems a pity that one so young and gay, and — and interesting, to express many things by one word — whose greatest, if not her only fault, appears to be thoughtlessness — no trifling fault to be sure, since it renders the possessor liable to almost every other, and exposes him to so many temptations — but it seems a pity that she should be thrown away on such a man. It was her mother's wish, I suppose?'

'Yes; and her own too, I think, for she always laughed at my attempts to dissuade her from the step.'

'You did attempt it? Then, at least, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that it is no fault of yours, if any harm should come of it. As for Mrs. Murray, I don't know how she can justify her conduct: if I had sufficient acquaintance with her, I'd ask her.'

'It seems unnatural: but some people think rank and wealth the chief good; and, if they can secure that for their children, they think they have done their duty.'

'True: but is it not strange that persons of experience, who have been married themselves, should judge so falsely?' Matilda now came panting back, with the lacerated body of the young hare in her hand.

'Was it your intention to kill that hare, or to save it, Miss Murray?' asked Mr. Weston, apparently puzzled at her gleeful countenance.

'I pretended to want to save it,' she answered, honestly enough, 'as it was so glaringly out of season; but I was better pleased to see it lolled. However, you can both witness that I couldn't help it: Prince was determined to have her; and he clutched her by the back, and killed her in a minute! Wasn't it a noble chase?'

'Very! for a young lady after a leveret.'

There was a quiet sarcasm in the tone of his reply which was not lost upon her; she shrugged her shoulders, and, turning away with a significant 'Humph!' asked me how I had enjoyed the fun. I replied that I saw no fun in the matter; but admitted that I had not observed the transaction very narrowly.

'Didn't you see how it doubled — just like an old hare? and didn't you hear it scream?'

'I'm happy to say I did not.'

'It cried out just like a child.'

'Poor little thing! What will you do with it?'

'Come along — I shall leave it in the first house we come to. I don't want to take it home, for fear papa should scold me for letting the dog kill it.'

Mr. Weston was now gone, and we too went on our way; but as we returned, after having deposited the hare in a farm-house, and demolished some spice-cake and currant-wine in exchange, we met him returning also from the execution of his mission, whatever it might be. He carried in his hand a cluster of beautiful bluebells, which he offered to me; observing, with a smile, that though he had seen so little of me for the last two months, he had not forgotten that bluebells were numbered among my favourite flowers. It was done as a simple act of goodwill, without compliment or remarkable courtesy, or any look that could be construed into 'reverential, tender adoration' (*vide* Rosalie Murray); but still, it was something to find my unimportant saying so well remembered: it was something that he had noticed so accurately the time I had ceased to be visible.

'I was told,' said he, 'that you were a perfect bookworm, Miss Grey: so completely absorbed in your studies that you were lost to every other pleasure.'

'Yes, and it's quite true!' cried Matilda.

'No, Mr. Weston: don't believe it: it's a scandalous libel. These young ladies are too fond of making random assertions at the expense of their friends; and you ought to be careful how you listen to them.'

'I hope *this* assertion is groundless, at any rate.'

'Why? Do you particularly object to ladies studying?'

'No; but I object to anyone so devoting himself or herself to study, as to lose sight of everything else. Except under peculiar circumstances, I consider very close and constant study as a waste of time, and an injury to the mind as well as the body.'

'Well, I have neither the time nor the inclination for such transgressions.'

We parted again.

Well! what is there remarkable in all this? Why have I recorded it? Because, reader, it was important enough to give me a cheerful evening, a night of pleasing dreams, and a morning of felicitous hopes. Shallow-brained cheerfulness, foolish dreams, unfounded hopes, you would say; and I will not venture to deny it: suspicions to that effect arose too frequently in my own mind. But our wishes are like tinder: the flint and steel of circumstances are continually striking out sparks, which vanish immediately, unless they chance to fall upon the tinder of our wishes; then, they instantly ignite, and the flame of hope is kindled in a moment.

But alas! that very morning, my flickering flame of hope was dismally quenched by a letter from my mother, which spoke so seriously of my father's increasing illness, that I feared there was little or no chance of his recovery; and, close at hand as the holidays were, I almost trembled lest they should come too late for me to meet him in this world. Two days after, a letter from Mary told me his life was despaired of, and his end seemed fast approaching. Then, immediately, I sought permission to anticipate the vacation, and go without delay. Mrs. Murray stared, and wondered at the unwonted energy and boldness with which I urged the request, and thought there was no occasion to hurry; but finally gave me leave: stating, however, that there was 'no need to be in such agitation about the matter — it might prove a false alarm after all; and if not — why, it was only in the common course of nature: we must all die some time; and I was not to suppose myself the only afflicted person in the world;' and concluding with saying I might have the phaeton to take me to O — -. 'And instead of *repining*, Miss Grey, be thankful for the *privileges* you enjoy. There's many a poor clergyman whose family would be plunged into ruin by the event of his death; but you, you see, have influential friends ready to continue their patronage, and to show you every consideration.'

I thanked her for her 'consideration,' and flew to my room to make some hurried preparations for my departure. My bonnet and shawl being on, and a few things hastily crammed into my largest trunk, I descended. But I might have done the work more leisurely, for no one else was in a hurry; and I had still a considerable time to wait for the phaeton. At length it came to the door, and I was off: but, oh, what a dreary journey was that! how utterly different from my former passages homewards! Being too late for the last coach to — -, I had to hire a cab for ten miles, and then a car to take me over the rugged hills.

It was half-past ten before I reached home. They were not in bed.

My mother and sister both met me in the passage — sad — silent — pale! I was so much shocked and terror-stricken that I could not speak, to ask the information I so much longed yet dreaded to obtain.

'Agnes!' said my mother, struggling to repress some strong emotion.

‘Oh, Agnes!’ cried Mary, and burst into tears.

‘How is he?’ I asked, gasping for the answer.

‘Dead!’

It was the reply I had anticipated: but the shock seemed none the less tremendous.

CHAPTER XIX — THE LETTER

My father's mortal remains had been consigned to the tomb; and we, with sad faces and sombre garments, sat lingering over the frugal breakfast-table, revolving plans for our future life. My mother's strong mind had not given way beneath even this affliction: her spirit, though crushed, was not broken. Mary's wish was that I should go back to Horton Lodge, and that our mother should come and live with her and Mr. Richardson at the vicarage: she affirmed that he wished it no less than herself, and that such an arrangement could not fail to benefit all parties; for my mother's society and experience would be of inestimable value to them, and they would do all they could to make her happy. But no arguments or entreaties could prevail: my mother was determined not to go. Not that she questioned, for a moment, the kind wishes and intentions of her daughter; but she affirmed that so long as God spared her health and strength, she would make use of them to earn her own livelihood, and be chargeable to no one; whether her dependence would be felt as a burden or not. If she could afford to reside as a lodger in — vicarage, she would choose that house before all others as the place of her abode; but not being so circumstanced, she would never come under its roof, except as an occasional visitor: unless sickness or calamity should render her assistance really needful, or until age or infirmity made her incapable of maintaining herself.

'No, Mary,' said she, 'if Richardson and you have anything to spare, you must lay it aside for your family; and Agnes and I must gather honey for ourselves. Thanks to my having had daughters to educate, I have not forgotten my accomplishments. God willing, I will check this vain repining,' she said, while the tears coursed one another down her cheeks in spite of her efforts; but she wiped them away, and resolutely shaking back her head, continued, 'I will exert myself, and look out for a small house, commodiously situated in some populous but healthy district, where we will take a few young ladies to board and educate — if we can get them — and as many day pupils as will come, or as we can manage to instruct. Your father's relations and old friends will be able to send us some pupils, or to assist us with their recommendations, no doubt: I shall not apply to my own. What say you to it, Agnes? will you be willing to leave your present situation and try?'

'Quite willing, mamma; and the money I have saved will do to furnish the house. It shall be taken from the bank directly.'

'When it is wanted: we must get the house, and settle on preliminaries first.'

Mary offered to lend the little she possessed; but my mother declined it, saying that we must begin on an economical plan; and she hoped that the whole or part of mine, added to what we could get by the sale of the furniture, and what little our dear papa had contrived to lay aside for her since the debts were paid, would be sufficient to last us till Christmas; when, it was hoped, something would accrue from our united labours. It was finally settled that this should be our plan; and that inquiries and preparations should immediately be set on foot; and while my mother busied herself with these, I should return to Horton Lodge at the close of my four weeks' vacation, and give notice for my final departure when things were in train for the speedy commencement of our school.

We were discussing these affairs on the morning I have mentioned, about a fortnight after my father's death, when a letter was brought in for my mother, on beholding which the colour mounted to her face — lately pale enough with anxious watchings and excessive sorrow. 'From my father!' murmured she, as she hastily tore off the cover. It was many years since she had heard from any of her own relations before. Naturally wondering what the letter might contain, I watched her countenance while she read it, and was somewhat surprised to see her bite her lip and knit her brows as if in anger. When she had done, she somewhat irreverently cast it on the table, saying with a scornful smile, — 'Your grandpapa has been so kind as to write to me. He says he has no doubt I have long repented of my "unfortunate marriage," and if I will only acknowledge this, and confess I was wrong in neglecting his advice, and that I have justly suffered for it, he will make a lady of me once again — if that be possible after my long degradation — and remember my girls in his will. Get my desk, Agnes, and send these things away: I will answer the letter directly. But first, as I may be depriving you both of a legacy, it is just that I should tell you what I mean to say. I shall say that he is mistaken in supposing that I can regret the birth of my daughters (who have been the pride of my life, and are likely to be the comfort of my old age), or the thirty years I have passed in the company of my best and dearest friend; — that, had our misfortunes been three times as great as they were (unless they had been of my bringing on), I should still the more rejoice to have shared them with your father, and administered what consolation I was able; and, had his sufferings in illness been ten times what they wore, I could not regret having watched over and laboured to relieve them; — that, if he had married a richer wife, misfortunes and trials would no doubt have come upon him still; while I am egotist enough to imagine that no other woman could have cheered him through them so well: not that I am superior to the rest, but I was made for him, and he for me; and I can no more repent the hours, days, years of happiness we have spent together, and which neither could have had without the other, than I can the privilege of having been his nurse in sickness, and his comfort in affliction.

'Will this do, children? — or shall I say we are all very sorry for what has happened during the last thirty years, and my daughters wish they had never been born; but since they have had that misfortune, they will be thankful for any trifle their grandpapa will be kind enough to bestow?’

Of course, we both applauded our mother’s resolution; Mary cleared away the breakfast things; I brought the desk; the letter was quickly written and despatched; and, from that day, we heard no more of our grandfather, till we saw his death announced in the newspaper a considerable time after — all his worldly possessions, of course, being left to our wealthy unknown cousins.

CHAPTER XX — THE FAREWELL

A house in A — -, the fashionable watering-place, was hired for our seminary; and a promise of two or three pupils was obtained to commence with. I returned to Horton Lodge about the middle of July, leaving my mother to conclude the bargain for the house, to obtain more pupils, to sell off the furniture of our old abode, and to fit out the new one.

We often pity the poor, because they have no leisure to mourn their departed relatives, and necessity obliges them to labour through their severest afflictions: but is not active employment the best remedy for overwhelming sorrow — the surest antidote for despair? It may be a rough comforter: it may seem hard to be harassed with the cares of life when we have no relish for its enjoyments; to be goaded to labour when the heart is ready to break, and the vexed spirit implores for rest only to weep in silence: but is not labour better than the rest we covet? and are not those petty, tormenting cares less hurtful than a continual brooding over the great affliction that oppresses us? Besides, we cannot have cares, and anxieties, and toil, without hope — if it be but the hope of fulfilling our joyless task, accomplishing some needful project, or escaping some further annoyance. At any rate, I was glad my mother had so much employment for every faculty of her action-loving frame. Our kind neighbours lamented that she, once so exalted in wealth and station, should be reduced to such extremity in her time of sorrow; but I am persuaded that she would have suffered thrice as much had she been left in affluence, with liberty to remain in that house, the scene of her early happiness and late affliction, and no stern necessity to prevent her from incessantly brooding over and lamenting her bereavement.

I will not dilate upon the feelings with which I left the old house, the well-known garden, the little village church — then doubly dear to me, because my father, who, for thirty years, had taught and prayed within its walls, lay slumbering now beneath its flags — and the old bare hills, delightful in their very desolation, with the narrow vales between, smiling in green wood and sparkling water — the house where I was born, the scene of all my early associations, the place where throughout life my earthly affections had been centred; — and left them to return no more! True, I was going back to Horton Lodge, where, amid many evils, one source of pleasure yet remained: but it was pleasure mingled with excessive pain; and my stay, alas! was limited to six weeks. And even of that precious time, day after day slipped by and I did not see him: except at church, I never saw him for a fortnight after my return. It seemed a long time to me: and, as I was often out with my rambling pupil, of course hopes would keep rising, and disappointments would ensue; and then, I would say to my own heart, ‘Here is a convincing proof — if you would but have the sense to see it, or the candour to acknowledge it — that he does not care for you. If he only thought *half* as much about you as you do about him, he would have contrived to meet you many times ere this: you must know that, by consulting your own feelings. Therefore, have done with this nonsense: you have no ground for hope: dismiss, at once, these hurtful thoughts and foolish wishes from your mind, and turn to your own duty, and the dull blank life that lies before you. You might have known such happiness was not for you.'

But I saw him at last. He came suddenly upon me as I was crossing a field in returning from a visit to Nancy Brown, which I had taken the opportunity of paying while Matilda Murray was riding her matchless mare. He must have heard of the heavy loss I had sustained: he expressed no sympathy, offered no condolence: but almost the first words he uttered were, — 'How is your mother?' And this was no matter-of-course question, for I never told him that I had a mother: he must have learned the fact from others, if he knew it at all; and, besides, there was sincere goodwill, and even deep, touching, unobtrusive sympathy in the tone and manner of the inquiry. I thanked him with due civility, and told him she was as well as could be expected. 'What will she do?' was the next question. Many would have deemed it an impertinent one, and given an evasive reply; but such an idea never entered my head, and I gave a brief but plain statement of my mother's plans and prospects.

'Then you will leave this place shortly?' said he.

'Yes, in a month.'

He paused a minute, as if in thought. When he spoke again, I hoped it would be to express his concern at my departure; but it was only to say, — 'I should think you will be willing enough to go?'

'Yes — for some things,' I replied.

'For *some* things only — I wonder what should make you regret it?'

I was annoyed at this in some degree; because it embarrassed me: I had only one reason for regretting it; and that was a profound secret, which he had no business to trouble me about.

'Why,' said I — 'why should you suppose that I dislike the place?'

'You told me so yourself,' was the decisive reply. 'You said, at least, that you could not live contentedly, without a friend; and that you had no friend here, and no possibility of making one — and, besides, I know you *must* dislike it.'

'But if you remember rightly, I said, or meant to say, I could not live contentedly without a friend in the world: I was not so unreasonable as to require one always near me. I think I could be happy in a house full of enemies, if — ' but no; that sentence must not be continued — I paused, and hastily added, — 'And, besides, we cannot well leave a place where we have lived for two or three years, without some feeling of regret.'

'Will you regret to part with Miss Murray, your sole remaining pupil and companion?'

'I dare say I shall in some degree: it was not without sorrow I parted with her sister.'

'I can imagine that.'

'Well, Miss Matilda is quite as good — better in one respect.'

'What is that?'

'She's honest.'

'And the other is not?'

'I should not call her *dis*honest; but it must be confessed she's a little artful.'

'*Artful* is she? — I saw she was giddy and vain — and now,' he added, after a pause, 'I can well believe she was artful too; but so excessively so as to assume an aspect of extreme simplicity and unguarded openness. Yes,' continued he, musingly, 'that accounts for some little things that puzzled me a trifle before.'

After that, he turned the conversation to more general subjects. He did not leave me till we had nearly reached the park-gates: he had certainly stepped a little out of his way to accompany me so far, for he now went back and disappeared down Moss Lane, the entrance of which we had passed some time before. Assuredly I did not regret this circumstance: if sorrow had any place in my heart, it was that he was gone at last — that he was no longer walking by my side, and that that short interval of delightful intercourse was at an end. He had not breathed a word of love, or dropped one hint of tenderness or affection, and yet I had been supremely happy. To be near him, to hear him talk as he did talk, and to feel that he thought me worthy to be so spoken to — capable of understanding and duly appreciating such discourse — was enough.

'Yes, Edward Weston, I could indeed be happy in a house full of enemies, if I had but one friend, who truly, deeply, and faithfully loved me; and if that friend were you — though we might be far apart — seldom to hear from each other, still more seldom to meet — though toil, and trouble, and vexation might surround me, still — it would be too much happiness for me to dream of! Yet who can tell,' said I within myself, as I proceeded up the park, — 'who can tell what this one month may bring forth? I have lived nearly three-and-twenty years, and I have suffered much, and tasted little pleasure yet; is it likely my life all through will be so clouded? Is it not possible that God may hear my prayers, disperse these gloomy shadows, and grant me some beams of heaven's sunshine yet? Will He entirely deny to me those blessings which are so freely given to others, who neither ask them nor acknowledge them when received? May I not still hope and trust? I did hope and trust for a while: but, alas, alas! the time ebbed away: one week followed another, and, excepting one distant glimpse and two transient meetings — during which scarcely anything was said — while I was walking with Miss Matilda, I saw nothing of him: except, of course, at church.

And now, the last Sunday was come, and the last service. I was often on the point of melting into tears during the sermon — the last I was to hear from him: the best I should hear from anyone, I was well assured. It was over — the congregation were departing; and I must follow. I had then seen him, and heard his voice, too, probably for the last time. In the churchyard, Matilda was pounced upon by the two Misses Green. They had many inquiries to make about her sister, and I know not what besides. I only wished they would have done, that we might hasten back to Horton Lodge: I longed to seek the retirement of my own room, or some sequestered nook in the grounds, that I might deliver myself up to my feelings — to weep my last farewell, and lament my false hopes and vain delusions. Only this once, and then adieu to fruitless dreaming — thenceforth, only sober, solid, sad reality should occupy my mind. But while I thus resolved, a low voice close beside me said — 'I suppose you are going this week, Miss Grey?' 'Yes,' I replied. I was very much startled; and had I been at all hysterically inclined, I certainly should have committed myself in some way then. Thank God, I was not.

'Well,' said Mr. Weston, 'I want to bid you good-bye — it is not likely I shall see you again before you go.'

'Good-bye, Mr. Weston,' I said. Oh, how I struggled to say it calmly! I gave him my hand. He retained it a few seconds in his.

'It is possible we may meet again,' said he; 'will it be of any consequence to you whether we do or not?'

'Yes, I should be very glad to see you again.'

I *could* say no less. He kindly pressed my hand, and went. Now, I was happy again — though more inclined to burst into tears than ever. If I had been forced to speak at that moment, a succession of sobs would have inevitably ensued; and as it was, I could not keep the water out of my eyes. I walked along with Miss Murray, turning aside my face, and neglecting to notice several successive remarks, till she bawled out that I was either deaf or stupid; and then (having recovered my self-possession), as one awakened from a fit of abstraction, I suddenly looked up and asked what she had been saying.

CHAPTER XXI — THE SCHOOL

I left Horton Lodge, and went to join my mother in our new abode at A — -. I found her well in health, resigned in spirit, and even cheerful, though subdued and sober, in her general demeanour. We had only three boarders and half a dozen day-pupils to commence with; but by due care and diligence we hoped ere long to increase the number of both.

I set myself with befitting energy to discharge the duties of this new mode of life. I call it *new*, for there was, indeed, a considerable difference between working with my mother in a school of our own, and working as a hireling among strangers, despised and trampled upon by old and young; and for the first few weeks I was by no means unhappy. 'It is possible we may meet again,' and 'will it be of any consequence to you whether we do or not?' — Those words still rang in my ear and rested on my heart: they were my secret solace and support. 'I shall see him again. — He will come; or he will write.' No promise, in fact, was too bright or too extravagant for Hope to whisper in my ear. I did not believe half of what she told me: I pretended to laugh at it all; but I was far more credulous than I myself supposed; otherwise, why did my heart leap up when a knock was heard at the front door, and the maid, who opened it, came to tell my mother a gentleman wished to see her? and why was I out of humour for the rest of the day, because it proved to be a music-master come to offer his services to our school? and what stopped my breath for a moment, when the postman having brought a couple of letters, my mother said, 'Here, Agnes, this is for you,' and threw one of them to me? and what made the hot blood rush into my face when I saw it was directed in a gentleman's hand? and why — oh! why did that cold, sickening sense of disappointment fall upon me, when I had torn open the cover and found it was *only* a letter from Mary, which, for some reason or other, her husband had directed for her?

Was it then come to this — that I should be *disappointed* to receive a letter from my only sister: and because it was not written by a comparative stranger? Dear Mary! and she had written it so kindly — and thinking I should be so pleased to have it! — I was not worthy to read it! And I believe, in my indignation against myself, I should have put it aside till I had schooled myself into a better frame of mind, and was become more deserving of the honour and privilege of its perusal: but there was my mother looking on, and wishful to know what news it contained; so I read it and delivered it to her, and then went into the schoolroom to attend to the pupils: but amidst the cares of copies and sums — in the intervals of correcting errors here, and reproving derelictions of duty there, I was inwardly taking myself to task with far sterner severity. 'What a fool you must be,' said my head to my heart, or my sterner to my softer self; — 'how could you ever dream that he would write to you? What grounds have you for such a hope — or that he will see you, or give himself any trouble about you — or even think of you again?' 'What grounds?' — and then Hope set before me that last, short interview, and repeated the words I had so faithfully treasured in my memory. 'Well, and what was there in that? — Who ever hung his hopes upon so frail a twig? What was there in those words that any common acquaintance might not say to another? Of course, it was possible you might meet again: he might have said so if you had been going to New Zealand; but that did not imply any *intention* of seeing you — and then, as to the question that followed, anyone might ask that: and how did you answer? — Merely with a stupid, commonplace reply, such as you would have given to Master Murray, or anyone else you had been on tolerably civil terms with.' 'But, then,' persisted Hope, 'the tone and manner in which he spoke.' 'Oh, that is nonsense! he always speaks impressively; and at that moment there were the Greens and Miss Matilda Murray just before, and other people passing by, and he was obliged to stand close beside you, and to speak very low, unless he wished everybody to hear what he said, which — though it was nothing at all particular — of course, he would rather not.' But then, above all, that emphatic, yet gentle pressure of the hand, which seemed to say, '*Trust* me;' and many other things besides — too delightful, almost too flattering, to be repeated even to one's self. 'Egregious folly — too absurd to require contradiction — mere inventions of the imagination, which you ought to be ashamed of. If you would but consider your own unattractive exterior, your unamiable reserve, your foolish diffidence — which must make you appear cold, dull, awkward, and perhaps ill-tempered too; — if you had but rightly considered these from the beginning, you would never have harboured such presumptuous thoughts: and now that you have been so foolish, pray repent and amend, and let us have no more of it!'

I cannot say that I implicitly obeyed my own injunctions: but such reasoning as this became more and more effective as time wore on, and nothing was seen or heard of Mr. Weston; until, at last, I gave up hoping, for even my heart acknowledged it was all in vain. But still, I would think of him: I would cherish his image in my mind; and treasure every word, look, and gesture that my memory could retain; and brood over his excellences and his peculiarities, and, in fact, all I had seen, heard, or imagined respecting him.

'Agnes, this sea air and change of scene do you no good, I think: I never saw you look so wretched. It must be that you sit too much, and allow the cares of the schoolroom to worry you. You must learn to take things easy, and to be more active and cheerful; you must take exercise whenever you can get it, and leave the most tiresome duties to me: they will only serve to exercise my patience, and, perhaps, try my temper a little.'

So said my mother, as we sat at work one morning during the Easter holidays. I assured her that my employments were not at all oppressive; that I was well; or, if there was anything amiss, it would be gone as soon as the trying months of spring were over: when summer came I should be as strong and hearty as she could wish to see me: but inwardly her observation startled me. I knew my strength was declining, my appetite had failed, and I was grown listless and desponding; — and if, indeed, he could never care for me, and I could never see him more — if I was forbidden to minister to his happiness — forbidden, for ever, to taste the joys of love, to bless, and to be blessed — then, life must be a burden, and if my heavenly Father would call me away, I should be glad to rest. But it would not do to die and leave my mother. Selfish, unworthy daughter, to forget her for a moment! Was not her happiness committed in a great measure to my charge? — and the welfare of our young pupils too? Should I shrink from the work that God had set before me, because it was not fitted to my taste? Did not He know best what I should do, and where I ought to labour? — and should I long to quit His service before I had finished my task, and expect to enter into His rest without having laboured to earn it? 'No; by His help I will arise and address myself diligently to my appointed duty. If happiness in this world is not for me, I will endeavour to promote the welfare of those around me, and my reward shall be hereafter.' So said I in my heart; and from that hour I only permitted my thoughts to wander to Edward Weston — or at least to dwell upon him now and then — as a treat for rare occasions: and, whether it was really the approach of summer or the effect of these good resolutions, or the lapse of time, or all together, tranquillity of mind was soon restored; and bodily health and vigour began likewise, slowly, but surely, to return.

Early in June, I received a letter from Lady Ashby, late Miss Murray. She had written to me twice or thrice before, from the different stages of her bridal tour, always in good spirits, and professing to be very happy. I wondered every time that she had not forgotten me, in the midst of so much gaiety and variety of scene. At length, however, there was a pause; and it seemed she had forgotten me, for upwards of seven months passed away and no letter. Of course, I did not break my heart about *that*, though I often wondered how she was getting on; and when this last epistle so unexpectedly arrived, I was glad enough to receive it. It was dated from Ashby Park, where she was come to settle down at last, having previously divided her time between the continent and the metropolis. She made many apologies for having neglected me so long, assured me she had not forgotten me, and had often intended to write, &c. &c., but had always been prevented by something. She acknowledged that she had been leading a very dissipated life, and I should think her very wicked and very thoughtless; but, notwithstanding that, she thought a great deal, and, among other things, that she should vastly like to see me. 'We have been several days here already,' wrote she. 'We have not a single friend with us, and are likely to be very dull. You know I never had a fancy for living with my husband like two turtles in a nest, were he the most delightful creature that ever wore a coat; so do take pity upon me and come. I suppose your Midsummer holidays commence in June, the same as other people's; therefore you cannot plead want of time; and you must and shall come — in fact, I shall die if you don't. I want you to visit me as a friend, and stay a long time. There is nobody with me, as I told you before, but Sir Thomas and old Lady Ashby: but you needn't mind them — they'll trouble us but little with their company. And you shall have a room to yourself, whenever you like to retire to it, and plenty of books to read when my company is not sufficiently amusing. I forget whether you like babies; if you do, you may have the pleasure of seeing mine — the most charming child in the world, no doubt; and all the more so, that I am not troubled with nursing it — I was determined I wouldn't be bothered with that. Unfortunately, it is a girl, and Sir Thomas has never forgiven me: but, however, if you will only come, I promise you shall be its governess as soon as it can speak; and you shall bring it up in the way it should go, and make a better woman of it than its mamma. And you shall see my poodle, too: a splendid little charmer imported from Paris: and two fine Italian paintings of great value — I forget the artist. Doubtless you will be able to discover prodigious beauties in them, which you must point out to me, as I only admire by hearsay; and many elegant curiosities besides, which I purchased at Rome and elsewhere; and, finally, you shall see my new home — the splendid house and grounds I used to covet so greatly. Alas! how far the promise of anticipation exceeds the pleasure of possession! There's a fine sentiment! I assure you I am become quite a grave old matron: pray come, if it be only to witness the wonderful change. Write by return of post, and tell me when your vacation commences, and say that you will come the day after, and stay till the day before it closes — in mercy to

'Yours affectionately,
'Rosalie Ashby.'

I showed this strange epistle to my mother, and consulted her on what I ought to do. She advised me to go; and I went — willing enough to see Lady Ashby, and her baby, too, and to do anything I could to benefit her, by consolation or advice; for I imagined she must be unhappy, or she would not have applied to me thus — but feeling, as may readily be conceived, that, in accepting the invitation, I made a great sacrifice for her, and did violence to my feelings in many ways, instead of being delighted with the honourable distinction of being entreated by the baronet's lady to visit her as a friend. However, I determined my visit should be only for a few days at most; and I will not deny that I derived some consolation from the idea that, as Ashby Park was not very far from Horton, I might possibly see Mr. Weston, or, at least, hear something about him.

CHAPTER XXII — THE VISIT

Ashby Park was certainly a very delightful residence. The mansion was stately without, commodious and elegant within; the park was spacious and beautiful, chiefly on account of its magnificent old trees, its stately herds of deer, its broad sheet of water, and the ancient woods that stretched beyond it: for there was no broken ground to give variety to the landscape, and but very little of that undulating swell which adds so greatly to the charm of park scenery. And so, this was the place Rosalie Murray had so longed to call her own, that she must have a share of it, on whatever terms it might be offered — whatever price was to be paid for the title of mistress, and whoever was to be her partner in the honour and bliss of such a possession! Well I am not disposed to censure her now.

She received me very kindly; and, though I was a poor clergyman's daughter, a governess, and a schoolmistress, she welcomed me with unaffected pleasure to her home; and — what surprised me rather — took some pains to make my visit agreeable. I could see, it is true, that she expected me to be greatly struck with the magnificence that surrounded her; and, I confess, I was rather annoyed at her evident efforts to reassure me, and prevent me from being overwhelmed by so much grandeur — too much awed at the idea of encountering her husband and mother-in-law, or too much ashamed of my own humble appearance. I was not ashamed of it at all; for, though plain, I had taken good care not to shabby or mean, and should have been pretty considerably at my ease, if my condescending hostess had not taken such manifest pains to make me so; and, as for the magnificence that surrounded her, nothing that met my eyes struck me or affected me half so much as her own altered appearance. Whether from the influence of fashionable dissipation, or some other evil, a space of little more than twelve months had had the effect that might be expected from as many years, in reducing the plumpness of her form, the freshness of her complexion, the vivacity of her movements, and the exuberance of her spirits.

I wished to know if she was unhappy; but I felt it was not my province to inquire: I might endeavour to win her confidence; but, if she chose to conceal her matrimonial cares from me, I would trouble her with no obtrusive questions. I, therefore, at first, confined myself to a few general inquiries about her health and welfare, and a few commendations on the beauty of the park, and of the little girl that should have been a boy: a small delicate infant of seven or eight weeks old, whom its mother seemed to regard with no remarkable degree of interest or affection, though full as much as I expected her to show.

Shortly after my arrival, she commissioned her maid to conduct me to my room and see that I had everything I wanted; it was a small, unpretending, but sufficiently comfortable apartment. When I descended thence — having divested myself of all travelling encumbrances, and arranged my toilet with due consideration for the feelings of my lady hostess, she conducted me herself to the room I was to occupy when I chose to be alone, or when she was engaged with visitors, or obliged to be with her mother-in-law, or otherwise prevented, as she said, from enjoying the pleasure of my society. It was a quiet, tidy little sitting-room; and I was not sorry to be provided with such a harbour of refuge.

'And some time,' said she, 'I will show you the library: I never examined its shelves, but, I daresay, it is full of wise books; and you may go and burrow among them whenever you please. And now you shall have some tea — it will soon be dinner-time, but I thought, as you were accustomed to dine at one, you would perhaps like better to have a cup of tea about this time, and to dine when we lunch: and then, you know, you can have your tea in this room, and that will save you from having to dine with Lady Ashby and Sir Thomas: which would be rather awkward — at least, not awkward, but rather — a — you know what I mean. I thought you mightn't like it so well — especially as we may have other ladies and gentlemen to dine with us occasionally.'

'Certainly,' said I, 'I would much rather have it as you say, and, if you have no objection, I should prefer having all my meals in this room.'

'Why so?'

'Because, I imagine, it would be more agreeable to Lady Ashby and Sir Thomas.'

'Nothing of the kind.'

'At any rate it would be more agreeable to me.'

She made some faint objections, but soon conceded; and I could see that the proposal was a considerable relief to her.

'Now, come into the drawing-room,' said she. 'There's the dressing bell; but I won't go yet: it's no use dressing when there's no one to see you; and I want to have a little discourse.'

The drawing-room was certainly an imposing apartment, and very elegantly furnished; but I saw its young mistress glance towards me as we entered, as if to notice how I was impressed by the spectacle, and accordingly I determined to preserve an aspect of stony indifference, as if I saw nothing at all remarkable. But this was only for a moment: immediately conscience whispered, 'Why should I disappoint her to save my pride? No — rather let me sacrifice my pride to give her a little innocent gratification.' And I honestly looked round, and told her it was a noble room, and very tastefully furnished. She said little, but I saw she was pleased.

She showed me her fat French poodle, that lay curled up on a silk cushion, and the two fine Italian paintings: which, however, she would not give me time to examine, but, saying I must look at them some other day, insisted upon my admiring the little jewelled watch she had purchased in

Geneva; and then she took me round the room to point out sundry articles of *vertu* she had brought from Italy: an elegant little timepiece, and several busts, small graceful figures, and vases, all beautifully carved in white marble. She spoke of these with animation, and heard my admiring comments with a smile of pleasure: that soon, however, vanished, and was followed by a melancholy sigh; as if in consideration of the insufficiency of all such baubles to the happiness of the human heart, and their woeful inability to supply its insatiate demands.

Then, stretching herself upon a couch, she motioned me to a capacious easy-chair that stood opposite — not before the fire, but before a wide open window; for it was summer, be it remembered; a sweet, warm evening in the latter half of June. I sat for a moment in silence, enjoying the still, pure air, and the delightful prospect of the park that lay before me, rich in verdure and foliage, and basking in yellow sunshine, relieved by the long shadows of declining day. But I must take advantage of this pause: I had inquiries to make, and, like the substance of a lady's postscript, the most important must come last. So I began with asking after Mr. and Mrs. Murray, and Miss Matilda and the young gentlemen.

I was told that papa had the gout, which made him very ferocious; and that he would not give up his choice wines, and his substantial dinners and suppers, and had quarrelled with his physician, because the latter had dared to say that no medicine could cure him while he lived so freely; that mamma and the rest were well. Matilda was still wild and reckless, but she had got a fashionable governess, and was considerably improved in her manners, and soon to be introduced to the world; and John and Charles (now at home for the holidays) were, by all accounts, 'fine, bold, unruly, mischievous boys.'

'And how are the other people getting on?' said I — 'the Greens, for instance?'

'Ah! Mr. Green is heart-broken, you know,' replied she, with a languid smile: 'he hasn't got over his disappointment yet, and never will, I suppose. He's doomed to be an old bachelor; and his sisters are doing their best to get married.'

'And the Melthams?'

'Oh, they're jogging on as usual, I suppose: but I know very little about any of them — except Harry,' said she, blushing slightly, and smiling again. 'I saw a great deal of him while we were in London; for, as soon as he heard we were there, he came up under pretence of visiting his brother, and either followed me, like a shadow, wherever I went, or met me, like a reflection, at every turn. You needn't look so shocked, Miss Grey; I was very discreet, I assure you, but, you know, one can't help being admired. Poor fellow! He was not my only worshipper; though he was certainly the most conspicuous, and, I think, the most devoted among them all. And that detestable — ahem — and Sir Thomas chose to take offence at him — or my profuse expenditure, or something — I don't exactly know what — and hurried me down to the country at a moment's notice; where I'm to play the hermit, I suppose, for life.'

And she bit her lip, and frowned vindictively upon the fair domain she had once so coveted to call her own.

'And Mr. Hatfield,' said I, 'what is become of him?'

Again she brightened up, and answered gaily — 'Oh! he made up to an elderly spinster, and married her, not long since; weighing her heavy purse against her faded charms, and expecting to find that solace in gold which was denied him in love — ha, ha!'

'Well, and I think that's all — except Mr. Weston: what is he doing?'

'I don't know, I'm sure. He's gone from Horton.'

'How long since? and where is he gone to?'

'I know nothing about him,' replied she, yawning — 'except that he went about a month ago — I never asked where' (I would have asked whether it was to a living or merely another curacy, but thought it better not); 'and the people made a great rout about his leaving,' continued she, 'much to Mr. Hatfield's displeasure; for Hatfield didn't like him, because he had too much influence with the common people, and because he was not sufficiently tractable and submissive to him — and for some other unpardonable sins, I don't know what. But now I positively must go and dress: the second bell will ring directly, and if I come to dinner in this guise, I shall never hear the end of it from Lady Ashby. It's a strange thing one can't be mistress in one's own house! Just ring the bell, and I'll send for my maid, and tell them to get you some tea. Only think of that intolerable woman — '

'Who — your maid?'

'No; — my mother-in-law — and my unfortunate mistake! Instead of letting her take herself off to some other house, as she offered to do when I married, I was fool enough to ask her to live here still, and direct the affairs of the house for me; because, in the first place, I hoped we should spend the greater part of the year, in town, and in the second place, being so young and inexperienced, I was frightened at the idea of having a houseful of servants to manage, and dinners to order, and parties to entertain, and all the rest of it, and I thought she might assist me with her experience; never dreaming she would prove a usurper, a tyrant, an incubus, a spy, and everything else that's detestable. I wish she was dead!'

She then turned to give her orders to the footman, who had been standing bolt upright within the door for the last half minute, and had heard the latter part of her animadversions; and, of course, made his own reflections upon them, notwithstanding the inflexible, wooden countenance he thought proper to preserve in the drawing-room. On my remarking afterwards that he must have heard her, she replied — 'Oh, no matter! I never care about the footmen; they're mere automatons: it's nothing to them what their superiors say or do; they won't dare to repeat it; and as to what they think — if they presume to think at all — of course, nobody cares for that. It would be a pretty thing indeed, it we were to be tongue-tied by our servants!'

So saying, she ran off to make her hasty toilet, leaving me to pilot my way back to my sitting-room, where, in due time, I was served with a cup of tea. After that, I sat musing on Lady Ashby's past and present condition; and on what little information I had obtained respecting Mr. Weston, and the small chance there was of ever seeing or hearing anything more of him throughout my quiet, drab-colour life: which, henceforth, seemed to offer no alternative between positive rainy days, and days of dull grey clouds without downfall. At length, however, I began to weary of my thoughts, and to wish I knew where to find the library my hostess had spoken of; and to wonder whether I was to remain there doing nothing till bed-time.

As I was not rich enough to possess a watch, I could not tell how time was passing, except by observing the slowly lengthening shadows from the window; which presented a side view, including a corner of the park, a clump of trees whose topmost branches had been colonized by an innumerable company of noisy rooks, and a high wall with a massive wooden gate: no doubt communicating with the stable-yard, as a broad carriage-road swept up to it from the park. The shadow of this wall soon took possession of the whole of the ground as far as I could see, forcing the golden sunlight to retreat inch by inch, and at last take refuge in the very tops of the trees. Ere long, even they were left in shadow — the shadow of the distant hills, or of the earth itself; and, in sympathy for the busy citizens of the rookery, I regretted to see their habitation, so lately bathed in glorious light, reduced to the sombre, work-a-day hue of the lower world, or of my own world within. For a moment, such birds as soared above the rest might still receive the lustre on their wings, which imparted to their sable plumage the hue and brilliance of deep red gold; at last, that too departed. Twilight came stealing on; the rooks became more quiet; I became more weary, and wished I were going home to-morrow. At length it grew dark; and I was thinking of ringing for a candle, and betaking myself to bed, when my hostess appeared, with many apologies for having neglected me so long, and laying all the blame upon that 'nasty old woman,' as she called her mother-in-law.

'If I didn't sit with her in the drawing-room while Sir Thomas is taking his wine,' said she, 'she would never forgive me; and then, if I leave the room the instant he comes — as I have done once or twice — it is an unpardonable offence against her dear Thomas. *She* never showed such disrespect to *her* husband: and as for affection, wives never think of that now-a-days, she supposes: but things were different in *her* time — as if there was any good to be done by staying in the room, when he does nothing but grumble and scold when he's in a bad humour, talk disgusting nonsense when he's in a good one, and go to sleep on the sofa when he's too stupid for either; which is most frequently the case now, when he has nothing to do but to sot over his wine.'

'But could you not try to occupy his mind with something better; and engage him to give up such habits? I'm sure you have powers of persuasion, and qualifications for amusing a gentleman, which many ladies would be glad to possess.'

'And so you think I would lay myself out for his amusement! No: that's not *my* idea of a wife. It's the husband's part to please the wife, not hers to please him; and if he isn't satisfied with her as she is — and thankful to possess her too — he isn't worthy of her, that's all. And as for persuasion, I assure you I shan't trouble myself with that: I've enough to do to bear with him as he is, without attempting to work a reform. But I'm sorry I left you so long alone, Miss Grey. How have you passed the time?'

'Chiefly in watching the rooks.'

'Mercy, how dull you must have been! I really must show you the library; and you must ring for everything you want, just as you would in an inn, and make yourself comfortable. I have selfish reasons for wishing to make you happy, because I want you to stay with me, and not fulfil your horrid threat of running away in a day or two.'

'Well, don't let me keep you out of the drawing-room any longer to-night, for at present I am tired and wish to go to bed.'

CHAPTER XXIII — THE PARK

I came down a little before eight, next morning, as I knew by the striking of a distant clock. There was no appearance of breakfast. I waited above an hour before it came, still vainly longing for access to the library; and, after that lonely repast was concluded, I waited again about an hour and a half in great suspense and discomfort, uncertain what to do. At length Lady Ashby came to bid me good-morning. She informed me she had only just breakfasted, and now wanted me to take an early walk with her in the park. She asked how long I had been up, and on receiving my answer, expressed the deepest regret, and again promised to show me the library. I suggested she had better do so at once, and then there would be no further trouble either with remembering or forgetting. She complied, on condition that I would not think of reading, or bothering with the books now; for she wanted to show me the gardens, and take a walk in the park with me, before it became too hot for enjoyment; which, indeed, was nearly the case already. Of course I readily assented; and we took our walk accordingly.

As we were strolling in the park, talking of what my companion had seen and heard during her travelling experience, a gentleman on horseback rode up and passed us. As he turned, in passing, and stared me full in the face, I had a good opportunity of seeing what he was like. He was tall, thin, and wasted, with a slight stoop in the shoulders, a pale face, but somewhat blotchy, and disagreeably red about the eyelids, plain features, and a general appearance of languor and flatness, relieved by a sinister expression in the mouth and the dull, soulless eyes.

'I detest that man!' whispered Lady Ashby, with bitter emphasis, as he slowly trotted by.

'Who is it?' I asked, unwilling to suppose that she should so speak of her husband.

'Sir Thomas Ashby,' she replied, with dreary composure.

'And do you *detest* him, Miss Murray?' said I, for I was too much shocked to remember her name at the moment.

'Yes, I do, Miss Grey, and despise him too; and if you knew him you would not blame me.'

'But you knew what he was before you married him.'

'No; I only thought so: I did not half know him really. I know you warned me against it, and I wish I had listened to you: but it's too late to regret that now. And besides, mamma ought to have known better than either of us, and she never said anything against it — quite the contrary. And then I thought he adored me, and would let me have my own way: he did pretend to do so at first, but now he does not care a bit about me. Yet I should not care for that: he might do as he pleased, if I might only be free to amuse myself and to stay in London, or have a few friends down here: but *he will* do as he pleases, and I must be a prisoner and a slave. The moment he saw I could enjoy myself without him, and that others knew my value better than himself, the selfish wretch began to accuse me of coquetry and extravagance; and to abuse Harry Meltham, whose shoes he was not worthy to clean. And then he must needs have me down in the country, to lead the life of a nun, lest I should dishonour him or bring him to ruin; as if he had not been ten times worse every way, with his betting-book, and his gaming-table, and his opera-girls, and his Lady This and Mrs. That — yes, and his bottles of wine, and glasses of brandy-and-water too! Oh, I would give ten thousand worlds to be Mss Murray again! It is *too* bad to feel life, health, and beauty wasting away, unfelt and unenjoyed, for such a brute as that!' exclaimed she, fairly bursting into tears in the bitterness of her vexation.

Of course, I pitied her exceedingly; as well for her false idea of happiness and disregard of duty, as for the wretched partner with whom her fate was linked. I said what I could to comfort her, and offered such counsels as I thought she most required: advising her, first, by gentle reasoning, by kindness, example, and persuasion, to try to ameliorate her husband; and then, when she had done all she could, if she still found him incorrigible, to endeavour to abstract herself from him — to wrap herself up in her own integrity, and trouble herself as little about him as possible. I exhorted her to seek consolation in doing her duty to God and man, to put her trust in Heaven, and solace herself with the care and nurture of her little daughter; assuring her she would be amply rewarded by witnessing its progress in strength and wisdom, and receiving its genuine affection.

'But I can't devote myself entirely to a child,' said she; 'it may die — which is not at all improbable.'

'But, with care, many a delicate infant has become a strong man or woman.'

'But it may grow so intolerably like its father that I shall hate it.'

'That is not likely; it is a little girl, and strongly resembles its mother.'

'No matter; I should like it better if it were a boy — only that its father will leave it no inheritance that he can possibly squander away. What pleasure can I have in seeing a girl grow up to eclipse me, and enjoy those pleasures that I am for ever debarred from? But supposing I could be so generous as to take delight in this, still it is *only* a child; and I can't centre all my hopes in a child: that is only one degree better than devoting oneself to a dog. And as for all the wisdom and goodness you have been trying to instil into me — that is all very right and proper, I daresay, and if I were some twenty years older, I might fructify by it: but people must enjoy themselves when they are young; and if others won't let them — why, they must hate them for it!'

'The best way to enjoy yourself is to do what is right and hate nobody.

The end of Religion is not to teach us how to die, but how to live; and the earlier you become wise and good, the more of happiness you secure. And now, Lady Ashby, I have one more piece of advice to offer you, which is, that you will not make an enemy of your mother-in-law. Don't get into the way of holding her at arms' length, and regarding her with jealous distrust. I never saw her, but I have heard good as well as evil respecting her; and I imagine that, though cold and haughty in her general demeanour, and even exacting in her requirements, she has strong affections for those who can reach them; and, though so blindly attached to her son, she is not without good principles, or incapable of hearing reason. If you would but conciliate her a little, and adopt a friendly, open manner — and even confide your grievances to her — real grievances, such as you have a right to complain of — it is my firm belief that she would, in time, become your faithful friend, and a comfort and support to you, instead of the incubus you describe her.' But I fear my advice had little effect upon the unfortunate young lady; and, finding I could render myself so little serviceable, my residence at Ashby Park became doubly painful. But still, I must stay out that day and the following one, as I had promised to do so: though, resisting all entreaties and inducements to prolong my visit further, I insisted upon departing the next morning; affirming that my mother would be lonely without me, and that she impatiently expected my return. Nevertheless, it was with a heavy heart that I bade adieu to poor Lady Ashby, and left her in her princely home. It was no slight additional proof of her unhappiness, that she should so cling to the consolation of my presence, and earnestly desire the company of one whose general tastes and ideas were so little congenial to her own — whom she had completely forgotten in her hour of prosperity, and whose presence would be rather a nuisance than a pleasure, if she could but have half her heart's desire.

CHAPTER XXIV — THE SANDS

Our school was not situated in the heart of the town: on entering A — - from the north-west there is a row of respectable-looking houses, on each side of the broad, white road, with narrow slips of garden-ground before them, Venetian blinds to the windows, and a flight of steps leading to each trim, brass-handled door. In one of the largest of these habitations dwelt my mother and I, with such young ladies as our friends and the public chose to commit to our charge. Consequently, we were a considerable distance from the sea, and divided from it by a labyrinth of streets and houses. But the sea was my delight; and I would often gladly pierce the town to obtain the pleasure of a walk beside it, whether with the pupils, or alone with my mother during the vacations. It was delightful to me at all times and seasons, but especially in the wild commotion of a rough sea-breeze, and in the brilliant freshness of a summer morning.

I awoke early on the third morning after my return from Ashby Park — the sun was shining through the blind, and I thought how pleasant it would be to pass through the quiet town and take a solitary ramble on the sands while half the world was in bed. I was not long in forming the resolution, nor slow to act upon it. Of course I would not disturb my mother, so I stole noiselessly downstairs, and quietly unfastened the door. I was dressed and out, when the church clock struck a quarter to six. There was a feeling of freshness and vigour in the very streets; and when I got free of the town, when my foot was on the sands and my face towards the broad, bright bay, no language can describe the effect of the deep, clear azure of the sky and ocean, the bright morning sunshine on the semicircular barrier of craggy cliffs surmounted by green swelling hills, and on the smooth, wide sands, and the low rocks out at sea — looking, with their clothing of weeds and moss, like little grass-grown islands — and above all, on the brilliant, sparkling waves. And then, the unspeakable purity — and freshness of the air! There was just enough heat to enhance the value of the breeze, and just enough wind to keep the whole sea in motion, to make the waves come bounding to the shore, foaming and sparkling, as if wild with glee. Nothing else was stirring — no living creature was visible besides myself. My footsteps were the first to press the firm, unbroken sands; — nothing before had trampled them since last night's flowing tide had obliterated the deepest marks of yesterday, and left them fair and even, except where the subsiding water had left behind it the traces of dimpled pools and little running streams.

Refreshed, delighted, invigorated, I walked along, forgetting all my cares, feeling as if I had wings to my feet, and could go at least forty miles without fatigue, and experiencing a sense of exhilaration to which I had been an entire stranger since the days of early youth. About half-past six, however, the grooms began to come down to air their masters' horses — first one, and then another, till there were some dozen horses and five or six riders: but that need not trouble me, for they would not come as far as the low rocks which I was now approaching. When I had reached these, and walked over the moist, slippery sea-weed (at the risk of floundering into one of the numerous pools of clear, salt water that lay between them), to a little mossy promontory with the sea splashing round it, I looked back again to see who next was stirring. Still, there were only the early grooms with their horses, and one gentleman with a little dark speck of a dog running before him, and one water-cart coming out of the town to get water for the baths. In another minute or two, the distant bathing machines would begin to move, and then the elderly gentlemen of regular habits and sober quaker ladies would be coming to take their salutary morning walks. But however interesting such a scene might be, I could not wait to witness it, for the sun and the sea so dazzled my eyes in that direction, that I could but afford one glance; and then I turned again to delight myself with the sight and the sound of the sea, dashing against my promontory — with no prodigious force, for the swell was broken by the tangled sea-weed and the unseen rocks beneath; otherwise I should soon have been deluged with spray. But the tide was coming in; the water was rising; the gulfs and lakes were filling; the straits were widening: it was time to seek some safer footing; so I walked, skipped, and stumbled back to the smooth, wide sands, and resolved to proceed to a certain bold projection in the cliffs, and then return.

Presently, I heard a snuffling sound behind me and then a dog came frisking and wriggling to my feet. It was my own Snap — the little dark, wire-haired terrier! When I spoke his name, he leapt up in my face and yelled for joy. Almost as much delighted as himself, I caught the little creature in my arms, and kissed him repeatedly. But how came he to be there? He could not have dropped from the sky, or come all that way alone: it must be either his master, the rat-catcher, or somebody else that had brought him; so, repressing my extravagant caresses, and endeavouring to repress his likewise, I looked round, and beheld — Mr. Weston!

'Your dog remembers you well, Miss Grey,' said he, warmly grasping the hand I offered him without clearly knowing what I was about. 'You rise early.'

'Not often so early as this,' I replied, with amazing composure, considering all the circumstances of the case.

'How far do you purpose to extend your walk?'

'I was thinking of returning — it must be almost time, I think.'

He consulted his watch — a gold one now — and told me it was only five minutes past seven.

'But, doubtless, you have had a long enough walk,' said he, turning towards the town, to which I now proceeded leisurely to retrace my steps; and he walked beside me.

‘In what part of the town do you live?’ asked he. ‘I never could discover.’

Never could discover? Had he endeavoured to do so then? I told him the place of our abode. He asked how we prospered in our affairs. I told him we were doing very well — that we had had a considerable addition to our pupils after the Christmas vacation, and expected a still further increase at the close of this.

‘You must be an accomplished instructor,’ he observed.

‘No, it is my mother,’ I replied; ‘she manages things so well, and is so active, and clever, and kind.’

‘I should like to know your mother. Will you introduce me to her some time, if I call?’

‘Yes, willingly.’

‘And will you allow me the privilege of an old friend, of looking in upon you now and then?’

‘Yes, if — I suppose so.’

This was a very foolish answer, but the truth was, I considered that I had no right to invite anyone to my mother’s house without her knowledge; and if I had said, ‘Yes, if my mother does not object,’ it would appear as if by his question I understood more than was expected; so, *supposing* she would not, I added, ‘I suppose so:’ but of course I should have said something more sensible and more polite, if I had had my wits about me. We continued our walk for a minute in silence; which, however, was shortly relieved (no small relief to me) by Mr. Weston commenting upon the brightness of the morning and the beauty of the bay, and then upon the advantages A — - possessed over many other fashionable places of resort.

‘You don’t ask what brings me to A — - ’ said he. ‘You can’t suppose I’m rich enough to come for my own pleasure.’

‘I heard you had left Horton.’

‘You didn’t hear, then, that I had got the living of F — -?’

F — - was a village about two miles distant from A — -.

‘No,’ said I; ‘we live so completely out of the world, even here, that news seldom reaches me through any quarter; except through the medium of the — *Gazette*. But I hope you like your new parish; and that I may congratulate you on the acquisition?’

‘I expect to like my parish better a year or two hence, when I have worked certain reforms I have set my heart upon — or, at least, progressed some steps towards such an achievement. But you may congratulate me now; for I find it very agreeable to *have* a parish all to myself, with nobody to interfere with me — to thwart my plans or cripple my exertions: and besides, I have a respectable house in a rather pleasant neighbourhood, and three hundred pounds a year; and, in fact, I have nothing but solitude to complain of, and nothing but a companion to wish for.’

He looked at me as he concluded: and the flash of his dark eyes seemed to set my face on fire; greatly to my own discomfiture, for to evince confusion at such a juncture was intolerable. I made an effort, therefore, to remedy the evil, and disclaim all personal application of the remark by a hasty, ill-expressed reply, to the effect that, if he waited till he was well known in the neighbourhood, he might have numerous opportunities for supplying his want among the residents of F — - and its vicinity, or the visitors of A — -, if he required so ample a choice: not considering the compliment implied by such an assertion, till his answer made me aware of it.

'I am not so presumptuous as to believe that,' said he, 'though you tell it me; but if it were so, I am rather particular in my notions of a companion for life, and perhaps I might not find one to suit me among the ladies you mention.'

'If you require perfection, you never will.'

'I do not — I have no right to require it, as being so far from perfect myself.'

Here the conversation was interrupted by a water-cart lumbering past us, for we were now come to the busy part of the sands; and, for the next eight or ten minutes, between carts and horses, and asses, and men, there was little room for social intercourse, till we had turned our backs upon the sea, and begun to ascend the precipitous road leading into the town. Here my companion offered me his arm, which I accepted, though not with the intention of using it as a support.

'You don't often come on to the sands, I think,' said he, 'for I have walked there many times, both morning and evening, since I came, and never seen you till now; and several times, in passing through the town, too, I have looked about for your school — but I did not think of the — Road; and once or twice I made inquiries, but without obtaining the requisite information.'

When we had surmounted the acclivity, I was about to withdraw my arm from his, but by a slight tightening of the elbow was tacitly informed that such was not his will, and accordingly desisted. Discoursing on different subjects, we entered the town, and passed through several streets. I saw that he was going out of his way to accompany me, notwithstanding the long walk that was yet before him; and, fearing that he might be inconveniencing himself from motives of politeness, I observed — 'I fear I am taking you out of your way, Mr. Weston — I believe the road to F — - lies quite in another direction.'

'I'll leave you at the end of the next street,' said he.

'And when will you come to see mamma?'

'To-morrow — God willing.'

The end of the next street was nearly the conclusion of my journey. He stopped there, however, bid me good-morning, and called Snap, who seemed a little doubtful whether to follow his old mistress or his new master, but trotted away upon being summoned by the latter.

‘I won’t offer to restore him to you, Miss Grey,’ said Mr. Weston, smiling, ‘because I like him.’

‘Oh, I don’t want him,’ replied I, ‘now that he has a good master; I’m quite satisfied.’

‘You take it for granted that I am a good one, then?’

The man and the dog departed, and I returned home, full of gratitude to heaven for so much bliss, and praying that my hopes might not again be crushed.

CHAPTER XXV — CONCLUSION

'Well, Agnes, you must not take such long walks again before breakfast,' said my mother, observing that I drank an extra cup of coffee and ate nothing — pleading the heat of the weather, and the fatigue of my long walk as an excuse. I certainly did feel feverish and tired too.

'You always do things by extremes: now, if you had taken a *short* walk every morning, and would continue to do so, it would do you good.'

'Well, mamma, I will.'

'But this is worse than lying in bed or bending over your books: you have quite put yourself into a fever.'

'I won't do it again,' said I.

I was racking my brains with thinking how to tell her about Mr. Weston, for she must know he was coming to-morrow. However, I waited till the breakfast things were removed, and I was more calm and cool; and then, having sat down to my drawing, I began — 'I met an old friend on the sands to-day, mamma.'

'An old friend! Who could it be?'

'Two old friends, indeed. One was a dog;' and then I reminded her of Snap, whose history I had recounted before, and related the incident of his sudden appearance and remarkable recognition; 'and the other,' continued I, 'was Mr. Weston, the curate of Horton.'

'Mr. Weston! I never heard of him before.'

'Yes, you have: I've mentioned him several times, I believe: but you don't remember.'

'I've heard you speak of Mr. Hatfield.'

'Mr. Hatfield was the rector, and Mr. Weston the curate: I used to mention him sometimes in contradistinction to Mr. Hatfield, as being a more efficient clergyman. However, he was on the sands this morning with the dog — he had bought it, I suppose, from the rat-catcher; and he knew me as well as it did — probably through its means: and I had a little conversation with him, in the course of which, as he asked about our school, I was led to say something about you, and your good management; and he said he should like to know you, and asked if I would introduce him to you, if he should take the liberty of calling to-morrow; so I said I would. Was I right?'

'Of course. What kind of a man is he?'

'A very *respectable* man, I think: but you will see him to-morrow. He is the new vicar of F — -, and as he has only been there a few weeks, I suppose he has made no friends yet, and wants a little society.'

The morrow came. What a fever of anxiety and expectation I was in from breakfast till noon — at which time he made his appearance! Having introduced him to my mother, I took my work to the window, and sat down to await the result of the interview. They got on extremely well together — greatly to my satisfaction, for I had felt very anxious about what my mother would think of him. He did not stay long that time: but when he rose to take leave, she said she should be happy to see him, whenever he might find it convenient to call again; and when he was gone, I was gratified by hearing her say, — 'Well! I think he's a very sensible man. But why did you sit back there, Agnes,' she added, 'and talk so little?'

'Because you talked so well, mamma, I thought you required no assistance from me: and, besides, he was your visitor, not mine.'

After that, he often called upon us — several times in the course of a week. He generally addressed most of his conversation to my mother: and no wonder, for she could converse. I almost envied the unfettered, vigorous fluency of her discourse, and the strong sense evinced by everything she said — and yet, I did not; for, though I occasionally regretted my own deficiencies for his sake, it gave me very great pleasure to sit and hear the two beings I loved and honoured above every one else in the world, discoursing together so amicably, so wisely, and so well. I was not always silent, however; nor was I at all neglected. I was quite as much noticed as I would wish to be: there was no lack of kind words and kinder looks, no end of delicate attentions, too fine and subtle to be grasped by words, and therefore indescribable — but deeply felt at heart.

Ceremony was quickly dropped between us: Mr. Weston came as an expected guest, welcome at all times, and never deranging the economy of our household affairs. He even called me 'Agnes:' the name had been timidly spoken at first, but, finding it gave no offence in any quarter, he seemed greatly to prefer that appellation to 'Miss Grey;' and so did I. How tedious and gloomy were those days in which he did not come! And yet not miserable; for I had still the remembrance of the last visit and the hope of the next to cheer me. But when two or three days passed without my seeing him, I certainly felt very anxious — absurdly, unreasonably so; for, of course, he had his own business and the affairs of his parish to attend to. And I dreaded the close of the holidays, when *my* business also would begin, and I should be sometimes unable to see him, and sometimes — when my mother was in the schoolroom — obliged to be with him alone: a position I did not at all desire, in the house; though to meet him out of doors, and walk beside him, had proved by no means disagreeable.

One evening, however, in the last week of the vacation, he arrived — unexpectedly: for a heavy and protracted thunder-shower during the afternoon had almost destroyed my hopes of seeing him that day; but now the storm was over, and the sun was shining brightly.

'A beautiful evening, Mrs. Grey!' said he, as he entered. 'Agnes, I want you to take a walk with me to — -' (he named a certain part of the coast — a bold hill on the land side, and towards the sea a steep precipice, from the summit of which a glorious view is to be had). 'The rain has laid the dust, and cooled and cleared the air, and the prospect will be magnificent. Will you come?'

'Can I go, mamma?'

'Yes; to be sure.'

I went to get ready, and was down again in a few minutes; though, of course, I took a little more pains with my attire than if I had merely been going out on some shopping expedition alone. The thunder-shower had certainly had a most beneficial effect upon the weather, and the evening was most delightful. Mr. Weston would have me to take his arm; he said little during our passage through the crowded streets, but walked very fast, and appeared grave and abstracted. I wondered what was the matter, and felt an indefinite dread that something unpleasant was on his mind; and vague surmises, concerning what it might be, troubled me not a little, and made me grave and silent enough. But these fantasies vanished upon reaching the quiet outskirts of the town; for as soon as we came within sight of the venerable old church, and the — hill, with the deep blue beyond it, I found my companion was cheerful enough.

'I'm afraid I've been walking too fast for you, Agnes,' said he: 'in my impatience to be rid of the town, I forgot to consult your convenience; but now we'll walk as slowly as you please. I see, by those light clouds in the west, there will be a brilliant sunset, and we shall be in time to witness its effect upon the sea, at the most moderate rate of progression.'

When we had got about half-way up the hill, we fell into silence again; which, as usual, he was the first to break.

'My house is desolate yet, Miss Grey,' he smilingly observed, 'and I am acquainted now with all the ladies in my parish, and several in this town too; and many others I know by sight and by report; but not one of them will suit me for a companion; in fact, there is only one person in the world that will: and that is yourself; and I want to know your decision?'

'Are you in earnest, Mr. Weston?'

'In earnest! How could you think I should jest on such a subject?'

He laid his hand on mine, that rested on his arm: he must have felt it tremble — but it was no great matter now.

'I hope I have not been too precipitate,' he said, in a serious tone. 'You must have known that it was not my way to flatter and talk soft nonsense, or even to speak the admiration that I felt; and that a single word or glance of mine meant more than the honied phrases and fervent protestations of most other men.'

I said something about not liking to leave my mother, and doing nothing without her consent.

'I settled everything with Mrs. Grey, while you were putting on your bonnet,' replied he. 'She said I might have her consent, if I could obtain yours; and I asked her, in case I should be so happy, to come and live with us

— for I was sure you would like it better. But she refused, saying she could now afford to employ an assistant, and would continue the school till she could purchase an annuity sufficient to maintain her in comfortable lodgings; and, meantime, she would spend her vacations alternately with us and your sister, and should be quite contented if you were happy. And so now I have overruled your objections on her account. Have you any other?'

'No — none.'

'You love me then?' said be, fervently pressing my hand.

'Yes.'

Here I pause. My Diary, from which I have compiled these pages, goes but little further. I could go on for years, but I will content myself with adding, that I shall never forget that glorious summer evening, and always remember with delight that steep hill, and the edge of the precipice where we stood together, watching the splendid sunset mirrored in the restless world of waters at our feet — with hearts filled with gratitude to heaven, and happiness, and love — almost too full for speech.

A few weeks after that, when my mother had supplied herself with an assistant, I became the wife of Edward Weston; and never have found cause to repent it, and am certain that I never shall. We have had trials, and we know that we must have them again; but we bear them well together, and endeavour to fortify ourselves and each other against the final separation — that greatest of all afflictions to the survivor. But, if we keep in mind the glorious heaven beyond, where both may meet again, and sin and sorrow are unknown, surely that too may be borne; and, meantime, we endeavour to live to the glory of Him who has scattered so many blessings in our path.

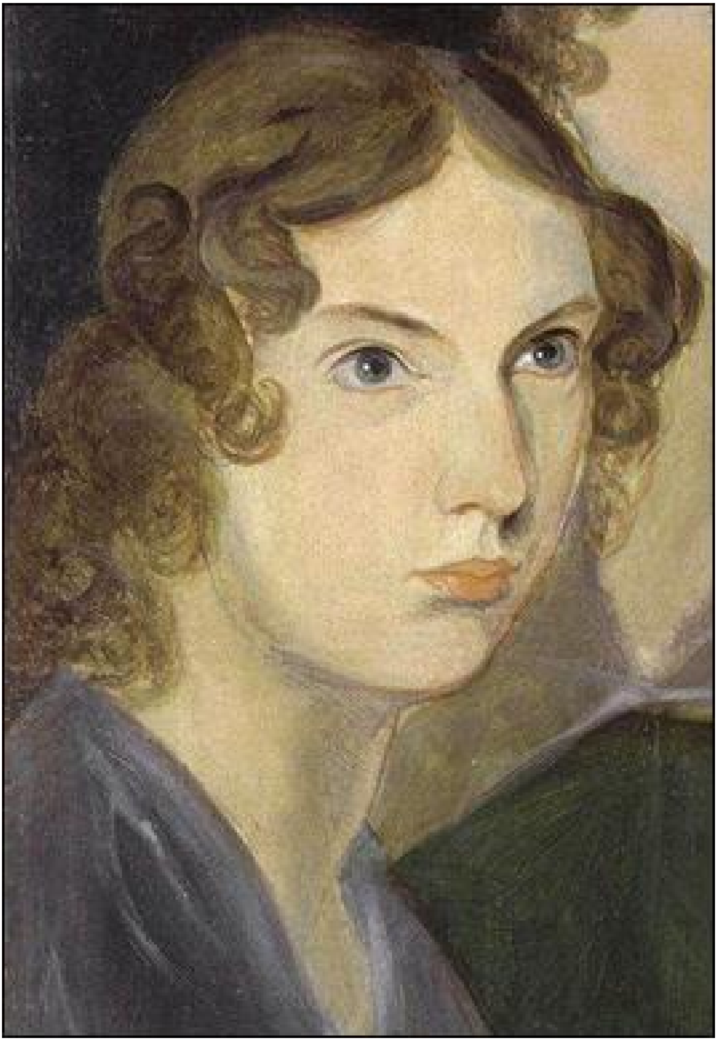
Edward, by his strenuous exertions, has worked surprising reforms in his parish, and is esteemed and loved by its inhabitants — as he deserves; for whatever his faults may be as a man (and no one is entirely without), I defy anybody to blame him as a pastor, a husband, or a father.

Our children, Edward, Agnes, and little Mary, promise well; their education, for the time being, is chiefly committed to me; and they shall want no good thing that a mother's care can give. Our modest income is amply sufficient for our requirements: and by practising the economy we learnt in harder times, and never attempting to imitate our richer neighbours, we manage not only to enjoy comfort and contentment ourselves, but to have every year something to lay by for our children, and something to give to those who need it.

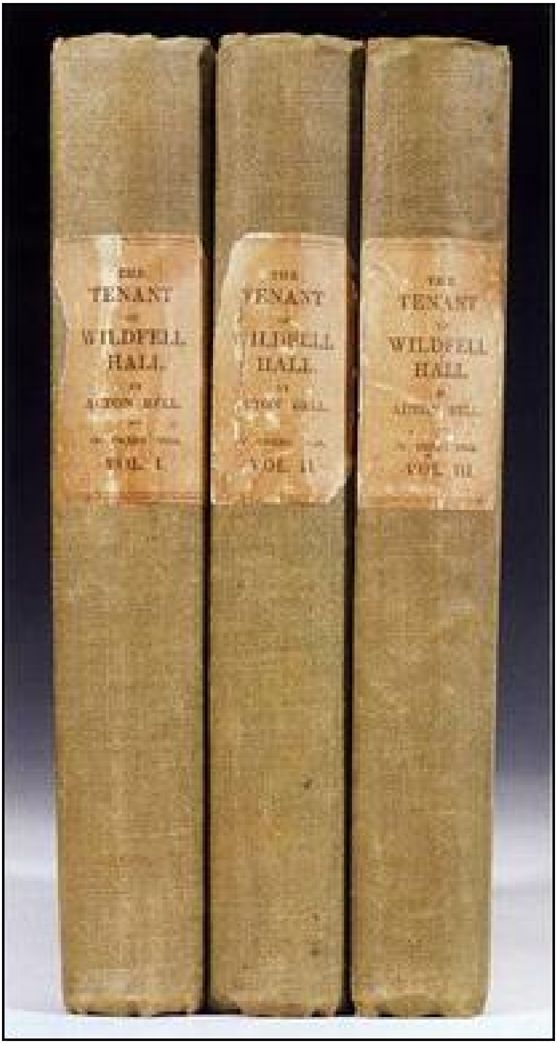
And now I think I have said sufficient.

THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL

Anne’s second and final novel was first published in 1848 under the pseudonym Acton Bell. It is structured as a letter from Gilbert Markham to his friend and brother-in-law about the events leading to his meeting his wife. The Tenant of Wildfell Hall had an instant phenomenal success and rapidly outsold Emily’s Wuthering Heights. Within six weeks, the novel was sold out.



Anne Brontë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The 1996 TV adaptation of the novel

CHAPTER I

You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827.

My father, as you know, was a sort of gentleman farmer in — shire; and I, by his express desire, succeeded him in the same quiet occupation, not very willingly, for ambition urged me to higher aims, and self-conceit assured me that, in disregarding its voice, I was burying my talent in the earth, and hiding my light under a bushel. My mother had done her utmost to persuade me that I was capable of great achievements; but my father, who thought ambition was the surest road to ruin, and change but another word for destruction, would listen to no scheme for bettering either my own condition, or that of my fellow mortals. He assured me it was all rubbish, and exhorted me, with his dying breath, to continue in the good old way, to follow his steps, and those of his father before him, and let my highest ambition be to walk honestly through the world, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, and to transmit the paternal acres to my children in, at least, as flourishing a condition as he left them to me.

'Well! — an honest and industrious farmer is one of the most useful members of society; and if I devote my talents to the cultivation of my farm, and the improvement of agriculture in general, I shall thereby benefit, not only my own immediate connections and dependants, but, in some degree, mankind at large: — hence I shall not have lived in vain.' With such reflections as these I was endeavouring to console myself, as I plodded home from the fields, one cold, damp, cloudy evening towards the close of October. But the gleam of a bright red fire through the parlour window had more effect in cheering my spirits, and rebuking my thankless repinings, than all the sage reflections and good resolutions I had forced my mind to frame; — for I was young then, remember — only four-and-twenty — and had not acquired half the rule over my own spirit that I now possess — trifling as that may be.

However, that haven of bliss must not be entered till I had exchanged my miry boots for a clean pair of shoes, and my rough surtout for a respectable coat, and made myself generally presentable before decent society; for my mother, with all her kindness, was vastly particular on certain points.

In ascending to my room I was met upon the stairs by a smart, pretty girl of nineteen, with a tidy, dumpy figure, a round face, bright, blooming cheeks, glossy, clustering curls, and little merry brown eyes. I need not tell you this was my sister Rose. She is, I know, a comely matron still, and, doubtless, no less lovely — in your eyes — than on the happy day you first beheld her. Nothing told me then that she, a few years hence, would be the wife of one entirely unknown to me as yet, but destined hereafter to become a closer friend than even herself, more intimate than that unmannerly lad of seventeen, by whom I was collared in the passage, on coming down, and well-nigh jerked off my equilibrium, and who, in correction for his impudence, received a resounding whack over the sconce, which, however, sustained no serious injury from the infliction; as, besides being more than commonly thick, it was protected by a redundant shock of short, reddish curls, that my mother called auburn.

On entering the parlour we found that honoured lady seated in her arm-chair at the fireside, working away at her knitting, according to her usual custom, when she had nothing else to do. She had swept the hearth, and made a bright blazing fire for our reception; the servant had just brought in the tea-tray; and Rose was producing the sugar-basin and tea-caddy from the cupboard in the black oak side-board, that shone like polished ebony, in the cheerful parlour twilight.

'Well! here they both are,' cried my mother, looking round upon us without retarding the motion of her nimble fingers and glittering needles. 'Now shut the door, and come to the fire, while Rose gets the tea ready; I'm sure you must be starved; — and tell me what you've been about all day; — I like to know what my children have been about.'

'I've been breaking in the grey colt — no easy business that — directing the ploughing of the last wheat stubble — for the ploughboy has not the sense to direct himself — and carrying out a plan for the extensive and efficient draining of the low meadowlands.'

'That's my brave boy! — and Fergus, what have you been doing?'

'Badger-baiting.'

And here he proceeded to give a particular account of his sport, and the respective traits of prowess evinced by the badger and the dogs; my mother pretending to listen with deep attention, and watching his animated countenance with a degree of maternal admiration I thought highly disproportioned to its object.

'It's time you should be doing something else, Fergus,' said I, as soon as a momentary pause in his narration allowed me to get in a word.

'What can I do?' replied he; 'my mother won't let me go to sea or enter the army; and I'm determined to do nothing else — except make myself such a nuisance to you all, that you will be thankful to get rid of me on any terms.'

Our parent soothingly stroked his stiff, short curls. He growled, and tried to look sulky, and then we all took our seats at the table, in obedience to the thrice-repeated summons of Rose.

'Now take your tea,' said she; 'and I'll tell you what I've been doing. I've been to call on the Wilsons; and it's a thousand pities you didn't go with me, Gilbert, for Eliza Millward was there!'

'Well! what of her?'

'Oh, nothing! — I'm not going to tell you about her; — only that she's a nice, amusing little thing, when she is in a merry humour, and I shouldn't mind calling her — '

'Hush, hush, my dear! your brother has no such idea!' whispered my mother earnestly, holding up her finger.

'Well,' resumed Rose; 'I was going to tell you an important piece of news I heard there — I have been bursting with it ever since. You know it was reported a month ago, that somebody was going to take Wildfell Hall — and — what do you think? It has actually been inhabited above a week! — and we never knew!'

'Impossible!' cried my mother.

'Preposterous!!!' shrieked Fergus.

'It has indeed! — and by a single lady!'

'Good gracious, my dear! The place is in ruins!'

'She has had two or three rooms made habitable; and there she lives, all alone — except an old woman for a servant!'

'Oh, dear! that spoils it — I'd hoped she was a witch,' observed Fergus, while carving his inch-thick slice of bread and butter. 'Nonsense, Fergus! But isn't it strange, mamma?'

'Strange! I can hardly believe it.'

'But you may believe it; for Jane Wilson has seen her. She went with her mother, who, of course, when she heard of a stranger being in the neighbourhood, would be on pins and needles till she had seen her and got all she could out of her. She is called Mrs. Graham, and she is in mourning — not widow's weeds, but slightish mourning — and she is quite young, they say, — not above five or six and twenty, — but so reserved! They tried all they could to find out who she was and where she came from, and, all about her, but neither Mrs. Wilson, with her pertinacious and impertinent home-thrusts, nor Miss Wilson, with her skilful manoeuvring, could manage to elicit a single satisfactory answer, or even a casual remark, or chance expression calculated to allay their curiosity, or throw the faintest ray of light upon her history, circumstances, or connections. Moreover, she was barely civil to them, and evidently better pleased to say 'good-by,' than 'how do you do.' But Eliza Millward says her father intends to call upon her soon, to offer some pastoral advice, which he fears she needs, as, though she is known to have entered the neighbourhood early last week, she did not make her appearance at church on Sunday; and she — Eliza, that is — will beg to accompany him, and is sure she can succeed in wheedling something out of her — you know, Gilbert, she can do anything. And we should call some time, mamma; it's only proper, you know.'

'Of course, my dear. Poor thing! How lonely she must feel!'

'And pray, be quick about it; and mind you bring me word how much sugar she puts in her tea, and what sort of caps and aprons she wears, and all about it; for I don't know how I can live till I know,' said Fergus, very gravely.

But if he intended the speech to be hailed as a master-stroke of wit, he signally failed, for nobody laughed. However, he was not much disconcerted at that; for when he had taken a mouthful of bread and butter and was about to swallow a gulp of tea, the humour of the thing burst upon him with such irresistible force, that he was obliged to jump up from the table, and rush snorting and choking from the room; and a minute after, was heard screaming in fearful agony in the garden.

As for me, I was hungry, and contented myself with silently demolishing the tea, ham, and toast, while my mother and sister went on talking, and continued to discuss the apparent or non-apparent circumstances, and probable or improbable history of the mysterious lady; but I must confess that, after my brother's misadventure, I once or twice raised the cup to my lips, and put it down again without daring to taste the contents, lest I should injure my dignity by a similar explosion.

The next day my mother and Rose hastened to pay their compliments to the fair recluse; and came back but little wiser than they went; though my mother declared she did not regret the journey, for if she had not gained much good, she flattered herself she had imparted some, and that was better: she had given some useful advice, which, she hoped, would not be thrown away; for Mrs. Graham, though she said little to any purpose, and appeared somewhat self-opinionated, seemed not incapable of reflection, — though she did not know where she had been all her life, poor thing, for she betrayed a lamentable ignorance on certain points, and had not even the sense to be ashamed of it.

'On what points, mother?' asked I.

'On household matters, and all the little niceties of cookery, and such things, that every lady ought to be familiar with, whether she be required to make a practical use of her knowledge or not. I gave her some useful pieces of information, however, and several excellent receipts, the value of which she evidently could not appreciate, for she begged I would not trouble myself, as she lived in such a plain, quiet way, that she was sure she should never make use of them. "No matter, my dear," said I; "it is what every respectable female ought to know; — and besides, though you are alone now, you will not be always so; you have been married, and probably — I might say almost certainly — will be again." "You are mistaken there, ma'am," said she, almost haughtily; "I am certain I never shall." — But I told her I knew better.'

'Some romantic young widow, I suppose,' said I, 'come there to end her days in solitude, and mourn in secret for the dear departed — but it won't last long.'

'No, I think not,' observed Rose; 'for she didn't seem very disconsolate after all; and she's excessively pretty — handsome rather — you must see her, Gilbert; you will call her a perfect beauty, though you could hardly pretend to discover a resemblance between her and Eliza Millward.'

'Well, I can imagine many faces more beautiful than Eliza's, though not more charming. I allow she has small claims to perfection; but then, I maintain that, if she were more perfect, she would be less interesting.'

‘And so you prefer her faults to other people’s perfections?’

‘Just so — saving my mother’s presence.’

‘Oh, my dear Gilbert, what nonsense you talk! — I know you don’t mean it; it’s quite out of the question,’ said my mother, getting up, and bustling out of the room, under pretence of household business, in order to escape the contradiction that was trembling on my tongue.

After that Rose favoured me with further particulars respecting Mrs. Graham. Her appearance, manners, and dress, and the very furniture of the room she inhabited, were all set before me, with rather more clearness and precision than I cared to see them; but, as I was not a very attentive listener, I could not repeat the description if I would.

The next day was Saturday; and, on Sunday, everybody wondered whether or not the fair unknown would profit by the vicar’s remonstrance, and come to church. I confess I looked with some interest myself towards the old family pew, appertaining to Wildfell Hall, where the faded crimson cushions and lining had been unpressed and unrenewed so many years, and the grim escutcheons, with their lugubrious borders of rusty black cloth, frowned so sternly from the wall above.

And there I beheld a tall, lady-like figure, clad in black. Her face was towards me, and there was something in it which, once seen, invited me to look again. Her hair was raven black, and disposed in long glossy ringlets, a style of coiffure rather unusual in those days, but always graceful and becoming; her complexion was clear and pale; her eyes I could not see, for, being bent upon her prayer-book, they were concealed by their drooping lids and long black lashes, but the brows above were expressive and well defined; the forehead was lofty and intellectual, the nose, a perfect aquiline and the features, in general, unexceptionable — only there was a slight hollowness about the cheeks and eyes, and the lips, though finely formed, were a little too thin, a little too firmly compressed, and had something about them that betokened, I thought, no very soft or amiable temper; and I said in my heart — ‘I would rather admire you from this distance, fair lady, than be the partner of your home.’

Just then she happened to raise her eyes, and they met mine; I did not choose to withdraw my gaze, and she turned again to her book, but with a momentary, indefinable expression of quiet scorn, that was inexpressibly provoking to me.

‘She thinks me an impudent puppy,’ thought I. ‘Humph! — she shall change her mind before long, if I think it worth while.’

But then it flashed upon me that these were very improper thoughts for a place of worship, and that my behaviour, on the present occasion, was anything but what it ought to be. Previous, however, to directing my mind to the service, I glanced round the church to see if any one had been observing me; — but no, — all, who were not attending to their prayer-books, were attending to the strange lady, — my good mother and sister among the rest, and Mrs. Wilson and her daughter; and even Eliza Millward was slily glancing from the corners of her eyes towards the object of general attraction. Then she glanced at me, simpered a little, and blushed, modestly looked at her prayer-book, and endeavoured to compose her features.

Here I was transgressing again; and this time I was made sensible of it by a sudden dig in the ribs, from the elbow of my pert brother. For the present, I could only resent the insult by pressing my foot upon his toes, deferring further vengeance till we got out of church.

Now, Halford, before I close this letter, I'll tell you who Eliza Millward was: she was the vicar's younger daughter, and a very engaging little creature, for whom I felt no small degree of partiality; — and she knew it, though I had never come to any direct explanation, and had no definite intention of so doing, for my mother, who maintained there was no one good enough for me within twenty miles round, could not bear the thoughts of my marrying that insignificant little thing, who, in addition to her numerous other disqualifications, had not twenty pounds to call her own. Eliza's figure was at once slight and plump, her face small, and nearly as round as my sister's, — complexion, something similar to hers, but more delicate and less decidedly blooming, — nose, retroussé, — features, generally irregular; and, altogether, she was rather charming than pretty. But her eyes — I must not forget those remarkable features, for therein her chief attraction lay — in outward aspect at least; — they were long and narrow in shape, the irids black, or very dark brown, the expression various, and ever changing, but always either preternaturally — I had almost said diabolically — wicked, or irresistibly bewitching — often both. Her voice was gentle and childish, her tread light and soft as that of a cat: — but her manners more frequently resembled those of a pretty playful kitten, that is now pert and roguish, now timid and demure, according to its own sweet will.

Her sister, Mary, was several years older, several inches taller, and of a larger, coarser build — a plain, quiet, sensible girl, who had patiently nursed their mother, through her last long, tedious illness, and been the housekeeper, and family drudge, from thence to the present time. She was trusted and valued by her father, loved and courted by all dogs, cats, children, and poor people, and slighted and neglected by everybody else.

The Reverend Michael Millward himself was a tall, ponderous elderly gentleman, who placed a shovel hat above his large, square, massive-featured face, carried a stout walking-stick in his hand, and incased his still powerful limbs in knee-breeches and gaiters, — or black silk stockings on state occasions. He was a man of fixed principles, strong prejudices, and regular habits, intolerant of dissent in any shape, acting under a firm conviction that his opinions were always right, and whoever differed from them must be either most deplorably ignorant, or wilfully blind.

In childhood, I had always been accustomed to regard him with a feeling of reverential awe — but lately, even now, surmounted, for, though he had a fatherly kindness for the well-behaved, he was a strict disciplinarian, and had often sternly reproved our juvenile failings and peccadilloes; and moreover, in those days, whenever he called upon our parents, we had to stand up before him, and say our catechism, or repeat, ‘How doth the little busy bee,’ or some other hymn, or — worse than all — be questioned about his last text, and the heads of the discourse, which we never could remember. Sometimes, the worthy gentleman would reprove my mother for being over-indulgent to her sons, with a reference to old Eli, or David and Absalom, which was particularly galling to her feelings; and, very highly as she respected him, and all his sayings, I once heard her exclaim, ‘I wish to goodness he had a son himself! He wouldn’t be so ready with his advice to other people then; — he’d see what it is to have a couple of boys to keep in order.’

He had a laudable care for his own bodily health — kept very early hours, regularly took a walk before breakfast, was vastly particular about warm and dry clothing, had never been known to preach a sermon without previously swallowing a raw egg — albeit he was gifted with good lungs and a powerful voice, — and was, generally, extremely particular about what he ate and drank, though by no means abstemious, and having a mode of dietary peculiar to himself, — being a great despiser of tea and such slops, and a patron of malt liquors, bacon and eggs, ham, hung beef, and other strong meats, which agreed well enough with his digestive organs, and therefore were maintained by him to be good and wholesome for everybody, and confidently recommended to the most delicate convalescents or dyspeptics, who, if they failed to derive the promised benefit from his prescriptions, were told it was because they had not persevered, and if they complained of inconvenient results therefrom, were assured it was all fancy.

I will just touch upon two other persons whom I have mentioned, and then bring this long letter to a close. These are Mrs. Wilson and her daughter. The former was the widow of a substantial farmer, a narrow-minded, tattling old gossip, whose character is not worth describing. She had two sons, Robert, a rough countrified farmer, and Richard, a retiring, studious young man, who was studying the classics with the vicar’s assistance, preparing for college, with a view to enter the church.

Their sister Jane was a young lady of some talents, and more ambition. She had, at her own desire, received a regular boarding-school education, superior to what any member of the family had obtained before. She had taken the polish well, acquired considerable elegance of manners, quite lost her provincial accent, and could boast of more accomplishments than the vicar’s daughters. She was considered a beauty besides; but never for a moment could she number me amongst her admirers. She was about six and twenty, rather tall and very slender, her hair was neither chestnut nor auburn, but a most decided bright, light red; her complexion was remarkably fair and brilliant, her head small, neck long, chin well turned, but very short, lips thin and red, eyes clear hazel, quick, and penetrating, but entirely destitute of poetry or feeling. She had, or might have had, many suitors in her own rank of life, but scornfully repulsed or rejected them all; for none but a gentleman could please her refined taste, and none but a rich one could satisfy her soaring ambition. One gentleman there was, from whom she had lately received some rather pointed attentions, and upon whose heart, name, and fortune, it was whispered, she had serious designs. This was Mr. Lawrence, the young squire, whose family had formerly occupied Wildfell Hall, but had deserted it, some fifteen years ago, for a more modern and commodious mansion in the neighbouring parish.

Now, Halford, I bid you adieu for the present. This is the first instalment of my debt. If the coin suits you, tell me so, and I'll send you the rest at my leisure: if you would rather remain my creditor than stuff your purse with such ungainly, heavy pieces, — tell me still, and I'll pardon your bad taste, and willingly keep the treasure to myself.

Yours immutably,
Gilbert Markham.

CHAPTER II

I perceive, with joy, my most valued friend, that the cloud of your displeasure has passed away; the light of your countenance blesses me once more, and you desire the continuation of my story: therefore, without more ado, you shall have it.

I think the day I last mentioned was a certain Sunday, the latest in the October of 1827. On the following Tuesday I was out with my dog and gun, in pursuit of such game as I could find within the territory of Linden-Car; but finding none at all, I turned my arms against the hawks and carrion crows, whose depredations, as I suspected, had deprived me of better prey. To this end I left the more frequented regions, the wooded valleys, the corn-fields, and the meadow-lands, and proceeded to mount the steep acclivity of Wildfell, the wildest and the loftiest eminence in our neighbourhood, where, as you ascend, the hedges, as well as the trees, become scanty and stunted, the former, at length, giving place to rough stone fences, partly greened over with ivy and moss, the latter to larches and Scotch fir-trees, or isolated blackthorns. The fields, being rough and stony, and wholly unfit for the plough, were mostly devoted to the posturing of sheep and cattle; the soil was thin and poor: bits of grey rock here and there peeped out from the grassy hillocks; bilberry-plants and heather — relics of more savage wildness — grew under the walls; and in many of the enclosures, ragweeds and rushes usurped supremacy over the scanty herbage; but these were not my property.

Near the top of this hill, about two miles from Linden-Car, stood Wildfell Hall, a superannuated mansion of the Elizabethan era, built of dark grey stone, venerable and picturesque to look at, but doubtless, cold and gloomy enough to inhabit, with its thick stone mullions and little latticed panes, its time-eaten air-holes, and its too lonely, too unsheltered situation, — only shielded from the war of wind and weather by a group of Scotch firs, themselves half blighted with storms, and looking as stern and gloomy as the Hall itself. Behind it lay a few desolate fields, and then the brown heath-clad summit of the hill; before it (enclosed by stone walls, and entered by an iron gate, with large balls of grey granite — similar to those which decorated the roof and gables — surmounting the gate-posts) was a garden, — once stocked with such hard plants and flowers as could best brook the soil and climate, and such trees and shrubs as could best endure the gardener's torturing shears, and most readily assume the shapes he chose to give them, — now, having been left so many years untilled and untrimmed, abandoned to the weeds and the grass, to the frost and the wind, the rain and the drought, it presented a very singular appearance indeed. The close green walls of privet, that had bordered the principal walk, were two-thirds withered away, and the rest grown beyond all reasonable bounds; the old boxwood swan, that sat beside the scraper, had lost its neck and half its body: the castellated towers of laurel in the middle of the garden, the gigantic warrior that stood on one side of the gateway, and the lion that guarded the other, were sprouted into such fantastic shapes as resembled nothing either in heaven or earth, or in the waters under the earth; but, to my young imagination, they presented all of them a goblinish appearance, that harmonised well with the ghostly legions and dark traditions our old nurse had told us respecting the haunted hall and its departed occupants.

I had succeeded in killing a hawk and two crows when I came within sight of the mansion; and then, relinquishing further depredations, I sauntered on, to have a look at the old place, and see what changes had been wrought in it by its new inhabitant. I did not like to go quite to the front and stare in at the gate; but I paused beside the garden wall, and looked, and saw no change — except in one wing, where the broken windows and dilapidated roof had evidently been repaired, and where a thin wreath of smoke was curling up from the stack of chimneys.

While I thus stood, leaning on my gun, and looking up at the dark gables, sunk in an idle reverie, weaving a tissue of wayward fancies, in which old associations and the fair young hermit, now within those walls, bore a nearly equal part, I heard a slight rustling and scrambling just within the garden; and, glancing in the direction whence the sound proceeded, I beheld a tiny hand elevated above the wall: it clung to the topmost stone, and then another little hand was raised to take a firmer hold, and then appeared a small white forehead, surmounted with wreaths of light brown hair, with a pair of deep blue eyes beneath, and the upper portion of a diminutive ivory nose.

The eyes did not notice me, but sparkled with glee on beholding Sancho, my beautiful black and white setter, that was coursing about the field with its muzzle to the ground. The little creature raised its face and called aloud to the dog. The good-natured animal paused, looked up, and wagged his tail, but made no further advances. The child (a little boy, apparently about five years old) scrambled up to the top of the wall, and called again and again; but finding this of no avail, apparently made up his mind, like Mahomet, to go to the mountain, since the mountain would not come to him, and attempted to get over; but a crabbed old cherry-tree, that grew hard by, caught him by the frock in one of its crooked scraggy arms that stretched over the wall. In attempting to disengage himself his foot slipped, and down he tumbled — but not to the earth; — the tree still kept him suspended. There was a silent struggle, and then a piercing shriek; — but, in an instant, I had dropped my gun on the grass, and caught the little fellow in my arms.

I wiped his eyes with his frock, told him he was all right and called Sancho to pacify him. He was just putting little hand on the dog's neck and beginning to smile through his tears, when I heard behind me a click of the iron gate, and a rustle of female garments, and lo! Mrs. Graham darted upon me — her neck uncovered, her black locks streaming in the wind.

'Give me the child!' she said, in a voice scarce louder than a whisper, but with a tone of startling vehemence, and, seizing the boy, she snatched him from me, as if some dire contamination were in my touch, and then stood with one hand firmly clasping his, the other on his shoulder, fixing upon me her large, luminous dark eyes — pale, breathless, quivering with agitation.

'I was not harming the child, madam,' said I, scarce knowing whether to be most astonished or displeased; 'he was tumbling off the wall there; and I was so fortunate as to catch him, while he hung suspended headlong from that tree, and prevent I know not what catastrophe.'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' stammered she; — suddenly calming down, — the light of reason seeming to break upon her beclouded spirit, and a faint blush mantling on her cheek — 'I did not know you; — and I thought — '

She stooped to kiss the child, and fondly clasped her arm round his neck.

'You thought I was going to kidnap your son, I suppose?'

She stroked his head with a half-embarrassed laugh, and replied, — 'I did not know he had attempted to climb the wall. — I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Markham, I believe?' she added, somewhat abruptly.

I bowed, but ventured to ask how she knew me.

'Your sister called here, a few days ago, with Mrs. Markham.'

'Is the resemblance so strong then?' I asked, in some surprise, and not so greatly flattered at the idea as I ought to have been.

'There is a likeness about the eyes and complexion I think,' replied she, somewhat dubiously surveying my face; — 'and I think I saw you at church on Sunday.'

I smiled. — There was something either in that smile or the recollections it awakened that was particularly displeasing to her, for she suddenly assumed again that proud, chilly look that had so unspeakably roused my aversion at church — a look of repellent scorn, so easily assumed, and so entirely without the least distortion of a single feature, that, while there, it seemed like the natural expression of the face, and was the more provoking to me, because I could not think it affected.

‘Good-morning, Mr. Markham,’ said she; and without another word or glance, she withdrew, with her child, into the garden; and I returned home, angry and dissatisfied — I could scarcely tell you why, and therefore will not attempt it.

I only stayed to put away my gun and powder-horn, and give some requisite directions to one of the farming-men, and then repaired to the vicarage, to solace my spirit and soothe my ruffled temper with the company and conversation of Eliza Millward.

I found her, as usual, busy with some piece of soft embroidery (the mania for Berlin wools had not yet commenced), while her sister was seated at the chimney-corner, with the cat on her knee, mending a heap of stockings.

‘Mary — Mary! put them away!’ Eliza was hastily saying, just as I entered the room.

‘Not I, indeed!’ was the phlegmatic reply; and my appearance prevented further discussion.

‘You’re so unfortunate, Mr. Markham!’ observed the younger sister, with one of her arch, sidelong glances. ‘Papa’s just gone out into the parish, and not likely to be back for an hour!’

‘Never mind; I can manage to spend a few minutes with his daughters, if they’ll allow me,’ said I, bringing a chair to the fire, and seating myself therein, without waiting to be asked.

‘Well, if you’ll be very good and amusing, we shall not object.’

‘Let your permission be unconditional, pray; for I came not to give pleasure, but to seek it,’ I answered.

However, I thought it but reasonable to make some slight exertion to render my company agreeable; and what little effort I made, was apparently pretty successful, for Miss Eliza was never in a better humour. We seemed, indeed, to be mutually pleased with each other, and managed to maintain between us a cheerful and animated though not very profound conversation. It was little better than a *tête-à-tête*, for Miss Millward never opened her lips, except occasionally to correct some random assertion or exaggerated expression of her sister’s, and once to ask her to pick up the ball of cotton that had rolled under the table. I did this myself, however, as in duty bound.

‘Thank you, Mr. Markham,’ said she, as I presented it to her. ‘I would have picked it up myself; only I did not want to disturb the cat.’

‘Mary, dear, that won’t excuse you in Mr. Markham’s eyes,’ said Eliza; ‘he hates cats, I daresay, as cordially as he does old maids — like all other gentlemen. Don’t you, Mr. Markham?’

‘I believe it is natural for our unamiable sex to dislike the creatures,’ replied I; ‘for you ladies lavish so many caresses upon them.’

‘Bless them — little darlings!’ cried she, in a sudden burst of enthusiasm, turning round and overwhelming her sister’s pet with a shower of kisses.

‘Don’t, Eliza!’ said Miss Millward, somewhat gruffly, as she impatiently pushed her away.

But it was time for me to be going: make what haste I would, I should still be too late for tea; and my mother was the soul of order and punctuality.

My fair friend was evidently unwilling to bid me adieu. I tenderly squeezed her little hand at parting; and she repaid me with one of her softest smiles and most bewitching glances. I went home very happy, with a heart brimful of complacency for myself, and overflowing with love for Eliza.

CHAPTER III

Two days after, Mrs. Graham called at Linden-Car, contrary to the expectation of Rose, who entertained an idea that the mysterious occupant of Wildfell Hall would wholly disregard the common observances of civilized life, — in which opinion she was supported by the Wilsons, who testified that neither their call nor the Millwards' had been returned as yet. Now, however, the cause of that omission was explained, though not entirely to the satisfaction of Rose. Mrs. Graham had brought her child with her, and on my mother's expressing surprise that he could walk so far, she replied, — 'It is a long walk for him; but I must have either taken him with me, or relinquished the visit altogether; for I never leave him alone; and I think, Mrs. Markham, I must beg you to make my excuses to the Millwards and Mrs. Wilson, when you see them, as I fear I cannot do myself the pleasure of calling upon them till my little Arthur is able to accompany me.'

'But you have a servant,' said Rose; 'could you not leave him with her?'

'She has her own occupations to attend to; and besides, she is too old to run after a child, and he is too mercurial to be tied to an elderly woman.'

'But you left him to come to church.'

'Yes, once; but I would not have left him for any other purpose; and I think, in future, I must contrive to bring him with me, or stay at home.'

'Is he so mischievous?' asked my mother, considerably shocked.

'No,' replied the lady, sadly smiling, as she stroked the wavy locks of her son, who was seated on a low stool at her feet; 'but he is my only treasure, and I am his only friend: so we don't like to be separated.'

'But, my dear, I call that doting,' said my plain-spoken parent. 'You should try to suppress such foolish fondness, as well to save your son from ruin as yourself from ridicule.'

'Ruin! Mrs. Markham!'

'Yes; it is spoiling the child. Even at his age, he ought not to be always tied to his mother's apron-string; he should learn to be ashamed of it.'

'Mrs. Markham, I beg you will not say such things, in his presence, at least. I trust my son will never be ashamed to love his mother!' said Mrs. Graham, with a serious energy that startled the company.

My mother attempted to appease her by an explanation; but she seemed to think enough had been said on the subject, and abruptly turned the conversation.

'Just as I thought,' said I to myself: 'the lady's temper is none of the mildest, notwithstanding her sweet, pale face and lofty brow, where thought and suffering seem equally to have stamped their impress.'

All this time I was seated at a table on the other side of the room, apparently immersed in the perusal of a volume of the *Farmer's Magazine*, which I happened to have been reading at the moment of our visitor's arrival; and, not choosing to be over civil, I had merely bowed as she entered, and continued my occupation as before.

In a little while, however, I was sensible that some one was approaching me, with a light, but slow and hesitating tread. It was little Arthur, irresistibly attracted by my dog Sancho, that was lying at my feet. On looking up I beheld him standing about two yards off, with his clear blue eyes wistfully gazing on the dog, transfixed to the spot, not by fear of the animal, but by a timid disinclination to approach its master. A little encouragement, however, induced him to come forward. The child, though shy, was not sullen. In a minute he was kneeling on the carpet, with his arms round Sancho's neck, and, in a minute or two more, the little fellow was seated on my knee, surveying with eager interest the various specimens of horses, cattle, pigs, and model farms portrayed in the volume before me. I glanced at his mother now and then to see how she relished the new-sprung intimacy; and I saw, by the unquiet aspect of her eye, that for some reason or other she was uneasy at the child's position.

'Arthur,' said she, at length, 'come here. You are troublesome to Mr. Markham: he wishes to read.'

'By no means, Mrs. Graham; pray let him stay. I am as much amused as he is,' pleaded I. But still, with hand and eye, she silently called him to her side.

'No, mamma,' said the child; 'let me look at these pictures first; and then I'll come, and tell you all about them.'

'We are going to have a small party on Monday, the fifth of November,' said my mother; 'and I hope you will not refuse to make one, Mrs. Graham. You can bring your little boy with you, you know — I daresay we shall be able to amuse him; — and then you can make your own apologies to the Millwards and Wilsons — they will all be here, I expect.'

'Thank you, I never go to parties.'

'Oh! but this will be quite a family concern — early hours, and nobody here but ourselves, and just the Millwards and Wilsons, most of whom you already know, and Mr. Lawrence, your landlord, with whom you ought to make acquaintance.'

'I do know something of him — but you must excuse me this time; for the evenings, now, are dark and damp, and Arthur, I fear, is too delicate to risk exposure to their influence with impunity. We must defer the enjoyment of your hospitality till the return of longer days and warmer nights.'

Rose, now, at a hint from my mother, produced a decanter of wine, with accompaniments of glasses and cake, from the cupboard and the oak sideboard, and the refreshment was duly presented to the guests. They both partook of the cake, but obstinately refused the wine, in spite of their hostess's hospitable attempts to force it upon them. Arthur, especially shrank from the ruby nectar as if in terror and disgust, and was ready to cry when urged to take it.

‘Never mind, Arthur,’ said his mamma; ‘Mrs. Markham thinks it will do you good, as you were tired with your walk; but she will not oblige you to take it! — I daresay you will do very well without. He detests the very sight of wine,’ she added, ‘and the smell of it almost makes him sick. I have been accustomed to make him swallow a little wine or weak spirits-and-water, by way of medicine, when he was sick, and, in fact, I have done what I could to make him hate them.’

Everybody laughed, except the young widow and her son.

‘Well, Mrs. Graham,’ said my mother, wiping the tears of merriment from her bright blue eyes — ‘well, you surprise me! I really gave you credit for having more sense. — The poor child will be the veriest milksop that ever was sopped! Only think what a man you will make of him, if you persist in — ’

‘I think it a very excellent plan,’ interrupted Mrs. Graham, with imperturbable gravity. ‘By that means I hope to save him from one degrading vice at least. I wish I could render the incentives to every other equally innoxious in his case.’

‘But by such means,’ said I, ‘you will never render him virtuous. — What is it that constitutes virtue, Mrs. Graham? Is it the circumstance of being able and willing to resist temptation; or that of having no temptations to resist? — Is he a strong man that overcomes great obstacles and performs surprising achievements, though by dint of great muscular exertion, and at the risk of some subsequent fatigue, or he that sits in his chair all day, with nothing to do more laborious than stirring the fire, and carrying his food to his mouth? If you would have your son to walk honourably through the world, you must not attempt to clear the stones from his path, but teach him to walk firmly over them — not insist upon leading him by the hand, but let him learn to go alone.’

‘I will lead him by the hand, Mr. Markham, till he has strength to go alone; and I will clear as many stones from his path as I can, and teach him to avoid the rest — or walk firmly over them, as you say; — for when I have done my utmost, in the way of clearance, there will still be plenty left to exercise all the agility, steadiness, and circumspection he will ever have. — It is all very well to talk about noble resistance, and trials of virtue; but for fifty — or five hundred men that have yielded to temptation, show me one that has had virtue to resist. And why should I take it for granted that my son will be one in a thousand? — and not rather prepare for the worst, and suppose he will be like his — like the rest of mankind, unless I take care to prevent it?’

‘You are very complimentary to us all,’ I observed.

‘I know nothing about you — I speak of those I do know — and when I see the whole race of mankind (with a few rare exceptions) stumbling and blundering along the path of life, sinking into every pitfall, and breaking their shins over every impediment that lies in their way, shall I not use all the means in my power to insure for him a smoother and a safer passage?'

'Yes, but the surest means will be to endeavour to fortify him against temptation, not to remove it out of his way.'

'I will do both, Mr. Markham. God knows he will have temptations enough to assail him, both from within and without, when I have done all I can to render vice as uninviting to him, as it is abominable in its own nature — I myself have had, indeed, but few incentives to what the world calls vice, but yet I have experienced temptations and trials of another kind, that have required, on many occasions, more watchfulness and firmness to resist than I have hitherto been able to muster against them. And this, I believe, is what most others would acknowledge who are accustomed to reflection, and wishful to strive against their natural corruptions.'

'Yes,' said my mother, but half apprehending her drift; 'but you would not judge of a boy by yourself — and, my dear Mrs. Graham, let me warn you in good time against the error — the fatal error, I may call it — of taking that boy's education upon yourself. Because you are clever in some things and well informed, you may fancy yourself equal to the task; but indeed you are not; and if you persist in the attempt, believe me you will bitterly repent it when the mischief is done.'

'I am to send him to school, I suppose, to learn to despise his mother's authority and affection!' said the lady, with rather a bitter smile.

'Oh, no! — But if you would have a boy to despise his mother, let her keep him at home, and spend her life in petting him up, and slaving to indulge his follies and caprices.'

'I perfectly agree with you, Mrs. Markham; but nothing can be further from my principles and practice than such criminal weakness as that.'

'Well, but you will treat him like a girl — you'll spoil his spirit, and make a mere Miss Nancy of him — you will, indeed, Mrs. Graham, whatever you may think. But I'll get Mr. Millward to talk to you about it: — he'll tell you the consequences; — he'll set it before you as plain as the day; — and tell you what you ought to do, and all about it; — and, I don't doubt, he'll be able to convince you in a minute.'

'No occasion to trouble the vicar,' said Mrs. Graham, glancing at me — I suppose I was smiling at my mother's unbounded confidence in that worthy gentleman — 'Mr. Markham here thinks his powers of conviction at least equal to Mr. Millward's. If I hear not him, neither should I be convinced though one rose from the dead, he would tell you. Well, Mr. Markham, you that maintain that a boy should not be shielded from evil, but sent out to battle against it, alone and unassisted — not taught to avoid the snares of life, but boldly to rush into them, or over them, as he may — to seek danger, rather than shun it, and feed his virtue by temptation, — would you — ?'

'I beg your pardon, Mrs. Graham — but you get on too fast. I have not yet said that a boy should be taught to rush into the snares of life, — or even wilfully to seek temptation for the sake of exercising his virtue by overcoming it; — I only say that it is better to arm and strengthen your hero, than to disarm and enfeeble the foe; — and if you were to rear an oak sapling in a hothouse, tending it carefully night and day, and shielding it from every breath of wind, you could not expect it to become a hardy tree, like that which has grown up on the mountain-side, exposed to all the action of the elements, and not even sheltered from the shock of the tempest.'

'Granted; — but would you use the same argument with regard to a girl?'

'Certainly not.'

'No; you would have her to be tenderly and delicately nurtured, like a hot-house plant — taught to cling to others for direction and support, and guarded, as much as possible, from the very knowledge of evil. But will you be so good as to inform me why you make this distinction? Is it that you think she has no virtue?'

'Assuredly not.'

'Well, but you affirm that virtue is only elicited by temptation; — and you think that a woman cannot be too little exposed to temptation, or too little acquainted with vice, or anything connected therewith. It must be either that you think she is essentially so vicious, or so feeble-minded, that she cannot withstand temptation, — and though she may be pure and innocent as long as she is kept in ignorance and restraint, yet, being destitute of real virtue, to teach her how to sin is at once to make her a sinner, and the greater her knowledge, the wider her liberty, the deeper will be her depravity, — whereas, in the nobler sex, there is a natural tendency to goodness, guarded by a superior fortitude, which, the more it is exercised by trials and dangers, is only the further developed — '

'Heaven forbid that I should think so!' I interrupted her at last.

'Well, then, it must be that you think they are both weak and prone to err, and the slightest error, the merest shadow of pollution, will ruin the one, while the character of the other will be strengthened and embellished — his education properly finished by a little practical acquaintance with forbidden things. Such experience, to him (to use a trite simile), will be like the storm to the oak, which, though it may scatter the leaves, and snap the smaller branches, serves but to rivet the roots, and to harden and condense the fibres of the tree. You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience, while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others. Now I would have both so to benefit by the experience of others, and the precepts of a higher authority, that they should know beforehand to refuse the evil and choose the good, and require no experimental proofs to teach them the evil of transgression. I would not send a poor girl into the world, unarmed against her foes, and ignorant of the snares that beset her path; nor would I watch and guard her, till, deprived of self-respect and self-reliance, she lost the power or the will to watch and guard herself; — and as for my son — if I thought he would grow up to be what you call a man of the world —

one that has "seen life," and glories in his experience, even though he should so far profit by it as to sober down, at length, into a useful and respected member of society — I would rather that he died to-morrow! — rather a thousand times!' she earnestly repeated, pressing her darling to her side and kissing his forehead with intense affection. He had already left his new companion, and been standing for some time beside his mother's knee, looking up into her face, and listening in silent wonder to her incomprehensible discourse.

'Well! you ladies must always have the last word, I suppose,' said I, observing her rise, and begin to take leave of my mother.

'You may have as many words as you please, — only I can't stay to hear them.'

'No; that is the way: you hear just as much of an argument as you please; and the rest may be spoken to the wind.'

'If you are anxious to say anything more on the subject,' replied she, as she shook hands with Rose, 'you must bring your sister to see me some fine day, and I'll listen, as patiently as you could wish, to whatever you please to say. I would rather be lectured by you than the vicar, because I should have less remorse in telling you, at the end of the discourse, that I preserve my own opinion precisely the same as at the beginning — as would be the case, I am persuaded, with regard to either logician.'

'Yes, of course,' replied I, determined to be as provoking as herself; 'for when a lady does consent to listen to an argument against her own opinions, she is always predetermined to withstand it — to listen only with her bodily ears, keeping the mental organs resolutely closed against the strongest reasoning.'

'Good-morning, Mr. Markham,' said my fair antagonist, with a pitying smile; and deigning no further rejoinder, she slightly bowed, and was about to withdraw; but her son, with childish impertinence, arrested her by exclaiming, — 'Mamma, you have not shaken hands with Mr. Markham!'

She laughingly turned round and held out her hand. I gave it a spiteful squeeze, for I was annoyed at the continual injustice she had done me from the very dawn of our acquaintance. Without knowing anything about my real disposition and principles, she was evidently prejudiced against me, and seemed bent upon showing me that her opinions respecting me, on every particular, fell far below those I entertained of myself. I was naturally touchy, or it would not have vexed me so much. Perhaps, too, I was a little bit spoiled by my mother and sister, and some other ladies of my acquaintance; — and yet I was by no means a fop — of that I am fully convinced, whether you are or not.

CHAPTER IV

Our party, on the 5th of November, passed off very well, in spite of Mrs. Graham's refusal to grace it with her presence. Indeed, it is probable that, had she been there, there would have been less cordiality, freedom, and frolic amongst us than there was without her.

My mother, as usual, was cheerful and chatty, full of activity and good-nature, and only faulty in being too anxious to make her guests happy, thereby forcing several of them to do what their soul abhorred in the way of eating or drinking, sitting opposite the blazing fire, or talking when they would be silent. Nevertheless, they bore it very well, being all in their holiday humours.

Mr. Millward was mighty in important dogmas and sententious jokes, pompous anecdotes and oracular discourses, dealt out for the edification of the whole assembly in general, and of the admiring Mrs. Markham, the polite Mr. Lawrence, the sedate Mary Millward, the quiet Richard Wilson, and the matter-of-fact Robert in particular, — as being the most attentive listeners.

Mrs. Wilson was more brilliant than ever, with her budgets of fresh news and old scandal, strung together with trivial questions and remarks, and oft-repeated observations, uttered apparently for the sole purpose of denying a moment's rest to her inexhaustible organs of speech. She had brought her knitting with her, and it seemed as if her tongue had laid a wager with her fingers, to outdo them in swift and ceaseless motion.

Her daughter Jane was, of course, as graceful and elegant, as witty and seductive, as she could possibly manage to be; for here were all the ladies to outshine, and all the gentlemen to charm, — and Mr. Lawrence, especially, to capture and subdue. Her little arts to effect his subjugation were too subtle and impalpable to attract my observation; but I thought there was a certain refined affectation of superiority, and an ungenial self-consciousness about her, that negatived all her advantages; and after she was gone, Rose interpreted to me her various looks, words, and actions with a mingled acuteness and asperity that made me wonder, equally, at the lady's artifice and my sister's penetration, and ask myself if she too had an eye to the squire — but never mind, Halford; she had not.

Richard Wilson, Jane's younger brother, sat in a corner, apparently good-tempered, but silent and shy, desirous to escape observation, but willing enough to listen and observe: and, although somewhat out of his element, he would have been happy enough in his own quiet way, if my mother could only have let him alone; but in her mistaken kindness, she would keep persecuting him with her attentions — pressing upon him all manner of viands, under the notion that he was too bashful to help himself, and obliging him to shout across the room his monosyllabic replies to the numerous questions and observations by which she vainly attempted to draw him into conversation.

Rose informed me that he never would have favoured us with his company but for the importunities of his sister Jane, who was most anxious to show Mr. Lawrence that she had at least one brother more gentlemanly and refined than Robert. That worthy individual she had been equally solicitous to keep away; but he affirmed that he saw no reason why he should not enjoy a crack with Markham and the old lady (my mother was not old, really), and bonny Miss Rose and the parson, as well as the best; — and he was in the right of it too. So he talked common-place with my mother and Rose, and discussed parish affairs with the vicar, farming matters with me, and politics with us both.

Mary Millward was another mute, — not so much tormented with cruel kindness as Dick Wilson, because she had a certain short, decided way of answering and refusing, and was supposed to be rather sullen than diffident. However that might be, she certainly did not give much pleasure to the company; — nor did she appear to derive much from it. Eliza told me she had only come because her father insisted upon it, having taken it into his head that she devoted herself too exclusively to her household duties, to the neglect of such relaxations and innocent enjoyments as were proper to her age and sex. She seemed to me to be good-humoured enough on the whole. Once or twice she was provoked to laughter by the wit or the merriment of some favoured individual amongst us; and then I observed she sought the eye of Richard Wilson, who sat over against her. As he studied with her father, she had some acquaintance with him, in spite of the retiring habits of both, and I suppose there was a kind of fellow-feeling established between them.

My Eliza was charming beyond description, coquettish without affectation, and evidently more desirous to engage my attention than that of all the room besides. Her delight in having me near her, seated or standing by her side, whispering in her ear, or pressing her hand in the dance, was plainly legible in her glowing face and heaving bosom, however belied by saucy words and gestures. But I had better hold my tongue: if I boast of these things now, I shall have to blush hereafter.

To proceed, then, with the various individuals of our party; Rose was simple and natural as usual, and full of mirth and vivacity.

Fergus was impertinent and absurd; but his impertinence and folly served to make others laugh, if they did not raise himself in their estimation.

And finally (for I omit myself), Mr. Lawrence was gentlemanly and inoffensive to all, and polite to the vicar and the ladies, especially his hostess and her daughter, and Miss Wilson — misguided man; he had not the taste to prefer Eliza Millward. Mr. Lawrence and I were on tolerably intimate terms. Essentially of reserved habits, and but seldom quitting the secluded place of his birth, where he had lived in solitary state since the death of his father, he had neither the opportunity nor the inclination for forming many acquaintances; and, of all he had ever known, I (judging by the results) was the companion most agreeable to his taste. I liked the man well enough, but he was too cold, and shy, and self-contained, to obtain my cordial sympathies. A spirit of candour and frankness, when wholly unaccompanied with coarseness, he admired in others, but he could not acquire it himself. His excessive reserve upon all his own concerns was, indeed, provoking and chilly enough; but I forgave it, from a conviction that it originated less in pride and want of confidence in his friends, than in a certain morbid feeling of delicacy, and a peculiar diffidence, that he was sensible of, but wanted energy to overcome. His heart was like a sensitive plant, that opens for a moment in the sunshine, but curls up and shrinks into itself at the slightest touch of the finger, or the lightest breath of wind. And, upon the whole, our intimacy was rather a mutual predilection than a deep and solid friendship, such as has since arisen between myself and you, Halford, whom, in spite of your occasional crustiness, I can liken to nothing so well as an old coat, unimpeachable in texture, but easy and loose — that has conformed itself to the shape of the wearer, and which he may use as he pleases, without being bothered with the fear of spoiling it; — whereas Mr. Lawrence was like a new garment, all very neat and trim to look at, but so tight in the elbows, that you would fear to split the seams by the unrestricted motion of your arms, and so smooth and fine in surface that you scruple to expose it to a single drop of rain.

Soon after the arrival of the guests, my mother mentioned Mrs. Graham, regretted she was not there to meet them, and explained to the Millwards and Wilsons the reasons she had given for neglecting to return their calls, hoping they would excuse her, as she was sure she did not mean to be uncivil, and would be glad to see them at any time. — 'But she is a very singular lady, Mr. Lawrence,' added she; 'we don't know what to make of her — but I daresay you can tell us something about her, for she is your tenant, you know, — and she said she knew you a little.'

All eyes were turned to Mr. Lawrence. I thought he looked unnecessarily confused at being so appealed to.

'I, Mrs. Markham!' said he; 'you are mistaken — I don't — that is — I have seen her, certainly; but I am the last person you should apply to for information respecting Mrs. Graham.'

He then immediately turned to Rose, and asked her to favour the company with a song, or a tune on the piano.

'No,' said she, 'you must ask Miss Wilson: she outshines us all in singing, and music too.'

Miss Wilson demurred.

'She'll sing readily enough,' said Fergus, 'if you'll undertake to stand by her, Mr. Lawrence, and turn over the leaves for her.'

'I shall be most happy to do so, Miss Wilson; will you allow me?'

She bridled her long neck and smiled, and suffered him to lead her to the instrument, where she played and sang, in her very best style, one piece after another; while he stood patiently by, leaning one hand on the back of her chair, and turning over the leaves of her book with the other. Perhaps he was as much charmed with her performance as she was. It was all very fine in its way; but I cannot say that it moved me very deeply. There was plenty of skill and execution, but precious little feeling.

But we had not done with Mrs. Graham yet.

‘I don’t take wine, Mrs. Markham,’ said Mr. Millward, upon the introduction of that beverage; ‘I’ll take a little of your home-brewed ale. I always prefer your home-brewed to anything else.’

Flattered at this compliment, my mother rang the bell, and a china jug of our best ale was presently brought and set before the worthy gentleman who so well knew how to appreciate its excellences.

‘Now this is the thing!’ cried he, pouring out a glass of the same in a long stream, skilfully directed from the jug to the tumbler, so as to produce much foam without spilling a drop; and, having surveyed it for a moment opposite the candle, he took a deep draught, and then smacked his lips, drew a long breath, and refilled his glass, my mother looking on with the greatest satisfaction.

‘There’s nothing like this, Mrs. Markham!’ said he. ‘I always maintain that there’s nothing to compare with your home-brewed ale.’

‘I’m sure I’m glad you like it, sir. I always look after the brewing myself, as well as the cheese and the butter — I like to have things well done, while we’re about it.’

‘Quite right, Mrs. Markham!’

‘But then, Mr. Millward, you don’t think it wrong to take a little wine now and then — or a little spirits either!’ said my mother, as she handed a smoking tumbler of gin-and-water to Mrs. Wilson, who affirmed that wine sat heavy on her stomach, and whose son Robert was at that moment helping himself to a pretty stiff glass of the same.

‘By no means!’ replied the oracle, with a Jove-like nod; ‘these things are all blessings and mercies, if we only knew how to make use of them.’

‘But Mrs. Graham doesn’t think so. You shall just hear now what she told us the other day — I told her I’d tell you.’

And my mother favoured the company with a particular account of that lady’s mistaken ideas and conduct regarding the matter in hand, concluding with, ‘Now, don’t you think it is wrong?’

‘Wrong!’ repeated the vicar, with more than common solemnity — ‘criminal, I should say — criminal! Not only is it making a fool of the boy, but it is despising the gifts of Providence, and teaching him to trample them under his feet.’

He then entered more fully into the question, and explained at large the folly and impiety of such a proceeding. My mother heard him with profoundest reverence; and even Mrs. Wilson vouchsafed to rest her tongue for a moment, and listen in silence, while she complacently sipped her gin-and-water. Mr. Lawrence sat with his elbow on the table, carelessly playing with his half-empty wine-glass, and covertly smiling to himself.

‘But don’t you think, Mr. Millward,’ suggested he, when at length that gentleman paused in his discourse, ‘that when a child may be naturally prone to intemperance — by the fault of its parents or ancestors, for instance — some precautions are advisable?’ (Now it was generally believed that Mr. Lawrence’s father had shortened his days by intemperance.)

‘Some precautions, it may be; but temperance, sir, is one thing, and abstinence another.’

‘But I have heard that, with some persons, temperance — that is, moderation — is almost impossible; and if abstinence be an evil (which some have doubted), no one will deny that excess is a greater. Some parents have entirely prohibited their children from tasting intoxicating liquors; but a parent’s authority cannot last for ever; children are naturally prone to hanker after forbidden things; and a child, in such a case, would be likely to have a strong curiosity to taste, and try the effect of what has been so lauded and enjoyed by others, so strictly forbidden to himself — which curiosity would generally be gratified on the first convenient opportunity; and the restraint once broken, serious consequences might ensue. I don’t pretend to be a judge of such matters, but it seems to me, that this plan of Mrs. Graham’s, as you describe it, Mrs. Markham, extraordinary as it may be, is not without its advantages; for here you see the child is delivered at once from temptation; he has no secret curiosity, no hankering desire; he is as well acquainted with the tempting liquors as he ever wishes to be; and is thoroughly disgusted with them, without having suffered from their effects.’

‘And is that right, sir? Have I not proven to you how wrong it is — how contrary to Scripture and to reason, to teach a child to look with contempt and disgust upon the blessings of Providence, instead of to use them aright?’

‘You may consider laudanum a blessing of Providence, sir,’ replied Mr. Lawrence, smiling; ‘and yet, you will allow that most of us had better abstain from it, even in moderation; but,’ added he, ‘I would not desire you to follow out my simile too closely — in witness whereof I finish my glass.’

‘And take another, I hope, Mr. Lawrence,’ said my mother, pushing the bottle towards him.

He politely declined, and pushing his chair a little away from the table, leant back towards me — I was seated a trifle behind, on the sofa beside Eliza Millward — and carelessly asked me if I knew Mrs. Graham.

‘I have met her once or twice,’ I replied.

‘What do you think of her?’

‘I cannot say that I like her much. She is handsome — or rather I should say distinguished and interesting — in her appearance, but by no means amiable — a woman liable to take strong prejudices, I should fancy, and stick to them through thick and thin, twisting everything into conformity with her own preconceived opinions — too hard, too sharp, too bitter for my taste.'

He made no reply, but looked down and bit his lip, and shortly after rose and sauntered up to Miss Wilson, as much repelled by me, I fancy, as attracted by her. I scarcely noticed it at the time, but afterwards I was led to recall this and other trifling facts, of a similar nature, to my remembrance, when — but I must not anticipate.

We wound up the evening with dancing — our worthy pastor thinking it no scandal to be present on the occasion, though one of the village musicians was engaged to direct our evolutions with his violin. But Mary Millward obstinately refused to join us; and so did Richard Wilson, though my mother earnestly entreated him to do so, and even offered to be his partner.

We managed very well without them, however. With a single set of quadrilles, and several country dances, we carried it on to a pretty late hour; and at length, having called upon our musician to strike up a waltz, I was just about to whirl Eliza round in that delightful dance, accompanied by Lawrence and Jane Wilson, and Fergus and Rose, when Mr. Millward interposed with: — 'No, no; I don't allow that! Come, it's time to be going now.'

'Oh, no, papa!' pleaded Eliza.

'High time, my girl — high time! Moderation in all things, remember! That's the plan — "Let your moderation be known unto all men!"'

But in revenge I followed Eliza into the dimly-lighted passage, where, under pretence of helping her on with her shawl, I fear I must plead guilty to snatching a kiss behind her father's back, while he was enveloping his throat and chin in the folds of a mighty comforter. But alas! in turning round, there was my mother close beside me. The consequence was, that no sooner were the guests departed, than I was doomed to a very serious remonstrance, which unpleasantly checked the galloping course of my spirits, and made a disagreeable close to the evening.

'My dear Gilbert,' said she, 'I wish you wouldn't do so! You know how deeply I have your advantage at heart, how I love you and prize you above everything else in the world, and how much I long to see you well settled in life — and how bitterly it would grieve me to see you married to that girl — or any other in the neighbourhood. What you see in her I don't know. It isn't only the want of money that I think about — nothing of the kind — but there's neither beauty, nor cleverness, nor goodness, nor anything else that's desirable. If you knew your own value, as I do, you wouldn't dream of it. Do wait awhile and see! If you bind yourself to her, you'll repent it all your lifetime when you look round and see how many better there are. Take my word for it, you will.'

'Well, mother, do be quiet! — I hate to be lectured! — I'm not going to marry yet, I tell you; but — dear me! mayn't I enjoy myself at all?'

'Yes, my dear boy, but not in that way. Indeed, you shouldn't do such things. You would be wronging the girl, if she were what she ought to be; but I assure you she is as artful a little hussy as anybody need wish to see; and you’ll got entangled in her snares before you know where you are. And if you marry her, Gilbert, you’ll break my heart — so there’s an end of it.’

‘Well, don’t cry about it, mother,’ said I, for the tears were gushing from her eyes; ‘there, let that kiss efface the one I gave Eliza; don’t abuse her any more, and set your mind at rest; for I’ll promise never — that is, I’ll promise to think twice before I take any important step you seriously disapprove of.’

So saying, I lighted my candle, and went to bed, considerably quenched in spirit.

CHAPTER V

It was about the close of the month, that, yielding at length to the urgent importunities of Rose, I accompanied her in a visit to Wildfell Hall. To our surprise, we were ushered into a room where the first object that met the eye was a painter's easel, with a table beside it covered with rolls of canvas, bottles of oil and varnish, palette, brushes, paints, &c. Leaning against the wall were several sketches in various stages of progression, and a few finished paintings — mostly of landscapes and figures.

'I must make you welcome to my studio,' said Mrs. Graham; 'there is no fire in the sitting-room to-day, and it is rather too cold to show you into a place with an empty grate.'

And disengaging a couple of chairs from the artistical lumber that usurped them, she bid us be seated, and resumed her place beside the easel — not facing it exactly, but now and then glancing at the picture upon it while she conversed, and giving it an occasional touch with her brush, as if she found it impossible to wean her attention entirely from her occupation to fix it upon her guests. It was a view of Wildfell Hall, as seen at early morning from the field below, rising in dark relief against a sky of clear silvery blue, with a few red streaks on the horizon, faithfully drawn and coloured, and very elegantly and artistically handled.

'I see your heart is in your work, Mrs. Graham,' observed I: 'I must beg you to go on with it; for if you suffer our presence to interrupt you, we shall be constrained to regard ourselves as unwelcome intruders.'

'Oh, no!' replied she, throwing her brush on to the table, as if startled into politeness. 'I am not so beset with visitors but that I can readily spare a few minutes to the few that do favour me with their company.'

'You have almost completed your painting,' said I, approaching to observe it more closely, and surveying it with a greater degree of admiration and delight than I cared to express. 'A few more touches in the foreground will finish it, I should think. But why have you called it Fernley Manor, Cumberland, instead of Wildfell Hall, — shire?' I asked, alluding to the name she had traced in small characters at the bottom of the canvas.

But immediately I was sensible of having committed an act of impertinence in so doing; for she coloured and hesitated; but after a moment's pause, with a kind of desperate frankness, she replied: —

'Because I have friends — acquaintances at least — in the world, from whom I desire my present abode to be concealed; and as they might see the picture, and might possibly recognise the style in spite of the false initials I have put in the corner, I take the precaution to give a false name to the place also, in order to put them on a wrong scent, if they should attempt to trace me out by it.'

'Then you don't intend to keep the picture?' said I, anxious to say anything to change the subject.

'No; I cannot afford to paint for my own amusement.'

'Mamma sends all her pictures to London,' said Arthur; 'and somebody sells them for her there, and sends us the money.'

In looking round upon the other pieces, I remarked a pretty sketch of Linden-hope from the top of the hill; another view of the old hall basking in the sunny haze of a quiet summer afternoon; and a simple but striking little picture of a child brooding, with looks of silent but deep and sorrowful regret, over a handful of withered flowers, with glimpses of dark low hills and autumnal fields behind it, and a dull beclouded sky above.

'You see there is a sad dearth of subjects,' observed the fair artist. 'I took the old hall once on a moonlight night, and I suppose I must take it again on a snowy winter's day, and then again on a dark cloudy evening; for I really have nothing else to paint. I have been told that you have a fine view of the sea somewhere in the neighbourhood. Is it true? — and is it within walking distance?'

'Yes, if you don't object to walking four miles — or nearly so — little short of eight miles, there and back — and over a somewhat rough, fatiguing road.'

'In what direction does it lie?'

I described the situation as well as I could, and was entering upon an explanation of the various roads, lanes, and fields to be traversed in order to reach it, the goings straight on, and turnings to the right and the left, when she checked me with, —

'Oh, stop! don't tell me now: I shall forget every word of your directions before I require them. I shall not think about going till next spring; and then, perhaps, I may trouble you. At present we have the winter before us, and — '

She suddenly paused, with a suppressed exclamation, started up from her seat, and saying, 'Excuse me one moment,' hurried from the room, and shut the door behind her.

Curious to see what had startled her so, I looked towards the window — for her eyes had been carelessly fixed upon it the moment before — and just beheld the skirts of a man's coat vanishing behind a large holly-bush that stood between the window and the porch.

'It's mamma's friend,' said Arthur.

Rose and I looked at each other.

'I don't know what to make of her at all,' whispered Rose.

The child looked at her in grave surprise. She straightway began to talk to him on indifferent matters, while I amused myself with looking at the pictures. There was one in an obscure corner that I had not before observed. It was a little child, seated on the grass with its lap full of flowers. The tiny features and large blue eyes, smiling through a shock of light brown curls, shaken over the forehead as it bent above its treasure, bore sufficient resemblance to those of the young gentleman before me to proclaim it a portrait of Arthur Graham in his early infancy.

In taking this up to bring it to the light, I discovered another behind it, with its face to the wall. I ventured to take that up too. It was the portrait of a gentleman in the full prime of youthful manhood — handsome enough, and not badly executed; but if done by the same hand as the others, it was evidently some years before; for there was far more careful minuteness of detail, and less of that freshness of colouring and freedom of handling that delighted and surprised me in them. Nevertheless, I surveyed it with considerable interest. There was a certain individuality in the features and expression that stamped it, at once, a successful likeness. The bright blue eyes regarded the spectator with a kind of lurking drollery — you almost expected to see them wink; the lips — a little too voluptuously full — seemed ready to break into a smile; the warmly-tinted cheeks were embellished with a luxuriant growth of reddish whiskers; while the bright chestnut hair, clustering in abundant, wavy curls, trespassed too much upon the forehead, and seemed to intimate that the owner thereof was prouder of his beauty than his intellect — as, perhaps, he had reason to be; and yet he looked no fool.

I had not had the portrait in my hands two minutes before the fair artist returned.

‘Only some one come about the pictures,’ said she, in apology for her abrupt departure: ‘I told him to wait.’

‘I fear it will be considered an act of impertinence,’ said ‘to presume to look at a picture that the artist has turned to the wall; but may I ask — ’

‘It is an act of very great impertinence, sir; and therefore I beg you will ask nothing about it, for your curiosity will not be gratified,’ replied she, attempting to cover the tartness of her rebuke with a smile; but I could see, by her flushed cheek and kindling eye, that she was seriously annoyed.

‘I was only going to ask if you had painted it yourself,’ said I, sulkily resigning the picture into her hands; for without a grain of ceremony she took it from me; and quickly restoring it to the dark corner, with its face to the wall, placed the other against it as before, and then turned to me and laughed.

But I was in no humour for jesting. I carelessly turned to the window, and stood looking out upon the desolate garden, leaving her to talk to Rose for a minute or two; and then, telling my sister it was time to go, shook hands with the little gentleman, coolly bowed to the lady, and moved towards the door. But, having bid adieu to Rose, Mrs. Graham presented her hand to me, saying, with a soft voice, and by no means a disagreeable smile, — ‘Let not the sun go down upon your wrath, Mr. Markham. I’m sorry I offended you by my abruptness.’

When a lady condescends to apologise, there is no keeping one’s anger, of course; so we parted good friends for once; and this time I squeezed her hand with a cordial, not a spiteful pressure.

CHAPTER VI

During the next four months I did not enter Mrs. Graham's house, nor she mine; but still the ladies continued to talk about her, and still our acquaintance continued, though slowly, to advance. As for their talk, I paid but little attention to that (when it related to the fair hermit, I mean), and the only information I derived from it was, that one fine frosty day she had ventured to take her little boy as far as the vicarage, and that, unfortunately, nobody was at home but Miss Millward; nevertheless, she had sat a long time, and, by all accounts, they had found a good deal to say to each other, and parted with a mutual desire to meet again. But Mary liked children, and fond mammas like those who can duly appreciate their treasures.

But sometimes I saw her myself, not only when she came to church, but when she was out on the hills with her son, whether taking a long, purpose-like walk, or — on special fine days — leisurely rambling over the moor or the bleak pasture-lands, surrounding the old hall, herself with a book in her hand, her son gambolling about her; and, on any of these occasions, when I caught sight of her in my solitary walks or rides, or while following my agricultural pursuits, I generally contrived to meet or overtake her, for I rather liked to see Mrs. Graham, and to talk to her, and I decidedly liked to talk to her little companion, whom, when once the ice of his shyness was fairly broken, I found to be a very amiable, intelligent, and entertaining little fellow; and we soon became excellent friends — how much to the gratification of his mamma I cannot undertake to say. I suspected at first that she was desirous of throwing cold water on this growing intimacy — to quench, as it were, the kindling flame of our friendship — but discovering, at length, in spite of her prejudice against me, that I was perfectly harmless, and even well-intentioned, and that, between myself and my dog, her son derived a great deal of pleasure from the acquaintance that he would not otherwise have known, she ceased to object, and even welcomed my coming with a smile.

As for Arthur, he would shout his welcome from afar, and run to meet me fifty yards from his mother's side. If I happened to be on horseback he was sure to get a canter or a gallop; or, if there was one of the draught horses within an available distance, he was treated to a steady ride upon that, which served his turn almost as well; but his mother would always follow and trudge beside him — not so much, I believe, to ensure his safe conduct, as to see that I instilled no objectionable notions into his infant mind, for she was ever on the watch, and never would allow him to be taken out of her sight. What pleased her best of all was to see him romping and racing with Sancho, while I walked by her side — not, I fear, for love of my company (though I sometimes deluded myself with that idea), so much as for the delight she took in seeing her son thus happily engaged in the enjoyment of those active sports so invigorating to his tender frame, yet so seldom exercised for want of playmates suited to his years: and, perhaps, her pleasure was sweetened not a little by the fact of my being with her instead of with him, and therefore incapable of doing him any injury directly or indirectly, designedly or otherwise, small thanks to her for that same.

But sometimes, I believe, she really had some little gratification in conversing with me; and one bright February morning, during twenty minutes' stroll along the moor, she laid aside her usual asperity and reserve, and fairly entered into conversation with me, discoursing with so much eloquence and depth of thought and feeling on a subject happily coinciding with my own ideas, and looking so beautiful withal, that I went home enchanted; and on the way (morally) started to find myself thinking that, after all, it would, perhaps, be better to spend one's days with such a woman than with Eliza Millward; and then I (figuratively) blushed for my inconstancy.

On entering the parlour I found Eliza there with Rose, and no one else. The surprise was not altogether so agreeable as it ought to have been. We chatted together a long time, but I found her rather frivolous, and even a little insipid, compared with the more mature and earnest Mrs. Graham. Alas, for human constancy!

'However,' thought I, 'I ought not to marry Eliza, since my mother so strongly objects to it, and I ought not to delude the girl with the idea that I intended to do so. Now, if this mood continue, I shall have less difficulty in emancipating my affections from her soft yet unrelenting sway; and, though Mrs. Graham might be equally objectionable, I may be permitted, like the doctors, to cure a greater evil by a less, for I shall not fall seriously in love with the young widow, I think, nor she with me — that's certain — but if I find a little pleasure in her society I may surely be allowed to seek it; and if the star of her divinity be bright enough to dim the lustre of Eliza's, so much the better, but I scarcely can think it.'

And thereafter I seldom suffered a fine day to pass without paying a visit to Wildfell about the time my new acquaintance usually left her hermitage; but so frequently was I baulked in my expectations of another interview, so changeable was she in her times of coming forth and in her places of resort, so transient were the occasional glimpses I was able to obtain, that I felt half inclined to think she took as much pains to avoid my company as I to seek hers; but this was too disagreeable a supposition to be entertained a moment after it could conveniently be dismissed.

One calm, clear afternoon, however, in March, as I was superintending the rolling of the meadow-land, and the repairing of a hedge in the valley, I saw Mrs. Graham down by the brook, with a sketch-book in her hand, absorbed in the exercise of her favourite art, while Arthur was putting on the time with constructing dams and breakwaters in the shallow, stony stream. I was rather in want of amusement, and so rare an opportunity was not to be neglected; so, leaving both meadow and hedge, I quickly repaired to the spot, but not before Sancho, who, immediately upon perceiving his young friend, scoured at full gallop the intervening space, and pounced upon him with an impetuous mirth that precipitated the child almost into the middle of the beck; but, happily, the stones preserved him from any serious wetting, while their smoothness prevented his being too much hurt to laugh at the untoward event.

Mrs. Graham was studying the distinctive characters of the different varieties of trees in their winter nakedness, and copying, with a spirited, though delicate touch, their various ramifications. She did not talk much, but I stood and watched the progress of her pencil: it was a pleasure to behold it so dexterously guided by those fair and graceful fingers. But ere long their dexterity became impaired, they began to hesitate, to tremble slightly, and make false strokes, and then suddenly came to a pause, while their owner laughingly raised her face to mine, and told me that her sketch did not profit by my superintendence.

'Then,' said I, 'I'll talk to Arthur till you've done.'

'I should like to have a ride, Mr. Markham, if mamma will let me,' said the child.

'What on, my boy?'

'I think there's a horse in that field,' replied he, pointing to where the strong black mare was pulling the roller.

'No, no, Arthur; it's too far,' objected his mother.

But I promised to bring him safe back after a turn or two up and down the meadow; and when she looked at his eager face she smiled and let him go. It was the first time she had even allowed me to take him so much as half a field's length from her side.

Enthroned upon his monstrous steed, and solemnly proceeding up and down the wide, steep field, he looked the very incarnation of quiet, gleeful satisfaction and delight. The rolling, however, was soon completed; but when

I dismounted the gallant horseman, and restored him to his mother, she seemed rather displeased at my keeping him so long. She had shut up her sketch-book, and been, probably, for some minutes impatiently waiting his return.

It was now high time to go home, she said, and would have bid me good-evening, but I was not going to leave her yet: I accompanied her half-way up the hill. She became more sociable, and I was beginning to be very happy; but, on coming within sight of the grim old hall, she stood still, and turned towards me while she spoke, as if expecting I should go no further, that the conversation would end here, and I should now take leave and depart — as, indeed, it was time to do, for 'the clear, cold eve' was fast 'declining,' the sun had set, and the gibbous moon was visibly brightening in the pale grey sky; but a feeling almost of compassion riveted me to the spot. It seemed hard to leave her to such a lonely, comfortless home. I looked up at it. Silent and grim it frowned; before us. A faint, red light was gleaming from the lower windows of one wing, but all the other windows were in darkness, and many exhibited their black, cavernous gulfs, entirely destitute of glazing or framework.

'Do you not find it a desolate place to live in?' said I, after a moment of silent contemplation.

'I do, sometimes,' replied she. 'On winter evenings, when Arthur is in bed, and I am sitting there alone, hearing the bleak wind moaning round me and howling through the ruinous old chambers, no books or occupations can repress the dismal thoughts and apprehensions that come crowding in — but it is folly to give way to such weakness, I know. If Rachel is satisfied with such a life, why should not I? — Indeed, I cannot be too thankful for such an asylum, while it is left me.'

The closing sentence was uttered in an under-tone, as if spoken rather to herself than to me. She then bid me good-evening and withdrew.

I had not proceeded many steps on my way homewards when I perceived Mr. Lawrence, on his pretty grey pony, coming up the rugged lane that crossed over the hill-top. I went a little out of my way to speak to him; for we had not met for some time.

'Was that Mrs. Graham you were speaking to just now?' said he, after the first few words of greeting had passed between us.

'Yes.'

'Humph! I thought so.' He looked contemplatively at his horse's mane, as if he had some serious cause of dissatisfaction with it, or something else.

'Well! what then?'

'Oh, nothing!' replied he. 'Only I thought you disliked her,' he quietly added, curling his classic lip with a slightly sarcastic smile.

'Suppose I did; mayn't a man change his mind on further acquaintance?'

'Yes, of course,' returned he, nicely reducing an entanglement in the pony's redundant hoary mane. Then suddenly turning to me, and fixing his shy, hazel eyes upon me with a steady penetrating gaze, he added, ‘Then you have changed your mind?’

‘I can’t say that I have exactly. No; I think I hold the same opinion respecting her as before — but slightly ameliorated.’

‘Oh!’ He looked round for something else to talk about; and glancing up at the moon, made some remark upon the beauty of the evening, which I did not answer, as being irrelevant to the subject.

‘Lawrence,’ said I, calmly looking him in the face, ‘are you in love with Mrs. Graham?’

Instead of his being deeply offended at this, as I more than half expected he would, the first start of surprise, at the audacious question, was followed by a tittering laugh, as if he was highly amused at the idea.

‘I in love with her!’ repeated he. ‘What makes you dream of such a thing?’

‘From the interest you take in the progress of my acquaintance with the lady, and the changes of my opinion concerning her, I thought you might be jealous.’

He laughed again. ‘Jealous! no. But I thought you were going to marry Eliza Millward.’

‘You thought wrong, then; I am not going to marry either one or the other — that I know of — ’

‘Then I think you’d better let them alone.’

‘Are you going to marry Jane Wilson?’

He coloured, and played with the mane again, but answered — ‘No, I think not.’

‘Then you had better let her alone.’

‘She won’t let me alone,’ he might have said; but he only looked silly and said nothing for the space of half a minute, and then made another attempt to turn the conversation; and this time I let it pass; for he had borne enough: another word on the subject would have been like the last atom that breaks the camel’s back.

I was too late for tea; but my mother had kindly kept the teapot and muffin warm upon the hobs, and, though she scolded me a little, readily admitted my excuses; and when I complained of the flavour of the overdrawn tea, she poured the remainder into the slop-basin, and bade Rose put some fresh into the pot, and reboil the kettle, which offices were performed with great commotion, and certain remarkable comments.

‘Well! — if it had been me now, I should have had no tea at all — if it had been Fergus, even, he would have to put up with such as there was, and been told to be thankful, for it was far too good for him; but you — we can’t do too much for you. It’s always so — if there’s anything particularly nice at table, mamma winks and nods at me to abstain from it, and if I don’t attend to that, she whispers, “Don’t eat so much of that, Rose; Gilbert will like it for his supper.” — I’m nothing at all. In the parlour, it’s “Come, Rose, put away your things, and let's have the room nice and tidy against they come in; and keep up a good fire; Gilbert likes a cheerful fire." In the kitchen — "Make that pie a large one, Rose; I daresay the boys'll be hungry; and don't put so much pepper in, they'll not like it, I'm sure" — or, "Rose, don't put so many spices in the pudding, Gilbert likes it plain," — or, "Mind you put plenty of currants in the cake, Fergus liked plenty." If I say, "Well, mamma, I don't," I'm told I ought not to think of myself. "You know, Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what's proper to be done; and, secondly, what's most agreeable to the gentlemen of the house — anything will do for the ladies."'

'And very good doctrine too,' said my mother. 'Gilbert thinks so, I'm sure.'

'Very convenient doctrine, for us, at all events,' said I; 'but if you would really study my pleasure, mother, you must consider your own comfort and convenience a little more than you do — as for Rose, I have no doubt she'll take care of herself; and whenever she does make a sacrifice or perform a remarkable act of devotedness, she'll take good care to let me know the extent of it. But for you I might sink into the grossest condition of self-indulgence and carelessness about the wants of others, from the mere habit of being constantly cared for myself, and having all my wants anticipated or immediately supplied, while left in total ignorance of what is done for me, — if Rose did not enlighten me now and then; and I should receive all your kindness as a matter of course, and never know how much I owe you.'

'Ah! and you never will know, Gilbert, till you're married. Then, when you've got some trifling, self-conceited girl like Eliza Millward, careless of everything but her own immediate pleasure and advantage, or some misguided, obstinate woman, like Mrs. Graham, ignorant of her principal duties, and clever only in what concerns her least to know — then you'll find the difference.'

'It will do me good, mother; I was not sent into the world merely to exercise the good capacities and good feelings of others — was I? — but to exert my own towards them; and when I marry, I shall expect to find more pleasure in making my wife happy and comfortable, than in being made so by her: I would rather give than receive.'

'Oh! that's all nonsense, my dear. It's mere boy's talk that! You'll soon tire of petting and humouring your wife, be she ever so charming, and then comes the trial.'

'Well, then, we must bear one another's burdens.'

'Then you must fall each into your proper place. You'll do your business, and she, if she's worthy of you, will do hers; but it's your business to please yourself, and hers to please you. I'm sure your poor, dear father was as good a husband as ever lived, and after the first six months or so were over, I should as soon have expected him to fly, as to put himself out of his way to pleasure me. He always said I was a good wife, and did my duty; and he always did his — bless him! — he was steady and punctual, seldom found fault without a reason, always did justice to my good dinners, and hardly ever spoiled my cookery by delay — and that's as much as any woman can expect of any man.'

Is it so, Halford? Is that the extent of your domestic virtues; and does your happy wife exact no more?

CHAPTER VII

Not many days after this, on a mild sunny morning — rather soft under foot; for the last fall of snow was only just wasted away, leaving yet a thin ridge, here and there, lingering on the fresh green grass beneath the hedges; but beside them already, the young primroses were peeping from among their moist, dark foliage, and the lark above was singing of summer, and hope, and love, and every heavenly thing — I was out on the hill-side, enjoying these delights, and looking after the well-being of my young lambs and their mothers, when, on glancing round me, I beheld three persons ascending from the vale below. They were Eliza Millward, Fergus, and Rose; so I crossed the field to meet them; and, being told they were going to Wildfell Hall, I declared myself willing to go with them, and offering my arm to Eliza, who readily accepted it in lieu of my brother's, told the latter he might go back, for I would accompany the ladies.

'I beg your pardon!' exclaimed he. 'It's the ladies that are accompanying me, not I them. You had all had a peep at this wonderful stranger but me, and I could endure my wretched ignorance no longer — come what would, I must be satisfied; so I begged Rose to go with me to the Hall, and introduce me to her at once. She swore she would not, unless Miss Eliza would go too; so I ran to the vicarage and fetched her; and we've come hooked all the way, as fond as a pair of lovers — and now you've taken her from me; and you want to deprive me of my walk and my visit besides. Go back to your fields and your cattle, you lubberly fellow; you're not fit to associate with ladies and gentlemen like us, that have nothing to do but to run snooking about to our neighbours' houses, peeping into their private corners, and scenting out their secrets, and picking holes in their coats, when we don't find them ready made to our hands — you don't understand such refined sources of enjoyment.'

'Can't you both go?' suggested Eliza, disregarding the latter half of the speech.

'Yes, both, to be sure!' cried Rose; 'the more the merrier — and I'm sure we shall want all the cheerfulness we can carry with us to that great, dark, gloomy room, with its narrow latticed windows, and its dismal old furniture — unless she shows us into her studio again.'

So we went all in a body; and the meagre old maid-servant, that opened the door, ushered us into an apartment such as Rose had described to me as the scene of her first introduction to Mrs. Graham, a tolerably spacious and lofty room, but obscurely lighted by the old-fashioned windows, the ceiling, panels, and chimney-piece of grim black oak — the latter elaborately but not very tastefully carved, — with tables and chairs to match, an old bookcase on one side of the fire-place, stocked with a motley assemblage of books, and an elderly cabinet piano on the other.

The lady was seated in a stiff, high-backed arm-chair, with a small round table, containing a desk and a work-basket on one side of her, and her little boy on the other, who stood leaning his elbow on her knee, and reading to her, with wonderful fluency, from a small volume that lay in her lap; while she rested her hand on his shoulder, and abstractedly played with the long, wavy curls that fell on his ivory neck. They struck me as forming a pleasing contrast to all the surrounding objects; but of course their position was immediately changed on our entrance. I could only observe the picture during the few brief seconds that Rachel held the door for our admittance.

I do not think Mrs. Graham was particularly delighted to see us: there was something indescribably chilly in her quiet, calm civility; but I did not talk much to her. Seating myself near the window, a little back from the circle, I called Arthur to me, and he and I and Sancho amused ourselves very pleasantly together, while the two young ladies baited his mother with small talk, and Fergus sat opposite with his legs crossed and his hands in his breeches-pockets, leaning back in his chair, and staring now up at the ceiling, now straight forward at his hostess (in a manner that made me strongly inclined to kick him out of the room), now whistling sotto voce to himself a snatch of a favourite air, now interrupting the conversation, or filling up a pause (as the case might be) with some most impertinent question or remark. At one time it was, — ‘It, amazes me, Mrs. Graham, how you could choose such a dilapidated, rickety old place as this to live in. If you couldn’t afford to occupy the whole house, and have it mended up, why couldn’t you take a neat little cottage?’

‘Perhaps I was too proud, Mr. Fergus,’ replied she, smiling; ‘perhaps I took a particular fancy for this romantic, old-fashioned place — but, indeed, it has many advantages over a cottage — in the first place, you see, the rooms are larger and more airy; in the second place, the unoccupied apartments, which I don’t pay for, may serve as lumber-rooms, if I have anything to put in them; and they are very useful for my little boy to run about in on rainy days when he can’t go out; and then there is the garden for him to play in, and for me to work in. You see I have effected some little improvement already,’ continued she, turning to the window. ‘There is a bed of young vegetables in that corner, and here are some snowdrops and primroses already in bloom — and there, too, is a yellow crocus just opening in the sunshine.’

‘But then how can you bear such a situation — your nearest neighbours two miles distant, and nobody looking in or passing by? Rose would go stark mad in such a place. She can’t put on life unless she sees half a dozen fresh gowns and bonnets a day — not to speak of the faces within; but you might sit watching at these windows all day long, and never see so much as an old woman carrying her eggs to market.’

‘I am not sure the loneliness of the place was not one of its chief recommendations. I take no pleasure in watching people pass the windows;

and I like to be quiet.'

'Oh! as good as to say you wish we would all of us mind our own business, and let you alone.'

'No, I dislike an extensive acquaintance; but if I have a few friends, of course I am glad to see them occasionally. No one can be happy in eternal solitude. Therefore, Mr. Fergus, if you choose to enter my house as a friend, I will make you welcome; if not, I must confess, I would rather you kept away.' She then turned and addressed some observation to Rose or Eliza.

'And, Mrs. Graham,' said he again, five minutes after, 'we were disputing, as we came along, a question that you can readily decide for us, as it mainly regarded yourself — and, indeed, we often hold discussions about you; for some of us have nothing better to do than to talk about our neighbours' concerns, and we, the indigenous plants of the soil, have known each other so long, and talked each other over so often, that we are quite sick of that game; so that a stranger coming amongst us makes an invaluable addition to our exhausted sources of amusement. Well, the question, or questions, you are requested to solve — '

'Hold your tongue, Fergus!' cried Rose, in a fever of apprehension and wrath.

'I won't, I tell you. The questions you are requested to solve are these: — First, concerning your birth, extraction, and previous residence. Some will have it that you are a foreigner, and some an Englishwoman; some a native of the north country, and some of the south; some say — '

'Well, Mr. Fergus, I'll tell you. I'm an Englishwoman — and I don't see why any one should doubt it — and I was born in the country, neither in the extreme north nor south of our happy isle; and in the country I have chiefly passed my life, and now I hope you are satisfied; for I am not disposed to answer any more questions at present.'

'Except this — '

'No, not one more!' laughed she, and, instantly quitting her seat, she sought refuge at the window by which I was seated, and, in very desperation, to escape my brother's persecutions, endeavoured to draw me into conversation.

'Mr. Markham,' said she, her rapid utterance and heightened colour too plainly evincing her disquietude, 'have you forgotten the fine sea-view we were speaking of some time ago? I think I must trouble you, now, to tell me the nearest way to it; for if this beautiful weather continue, I shall, perhaps, be able to walk there, and take my sketch; I have exhausted every other subject for painting; and I long to see it.'

I was about to comply with her request, but Rose would not suffer me to proceed.

'Oh, don't tell her, Gilbert!' cried she; 'she shall go with us. It's — Bay you are thinking about, I suppose, Mrs. Graham? It is a very long walk, too far for you, and out of the question for Arthur. But we were thinking about making a picnic to see it some fine day; and, if you will wait till the settled fine weather comes, I'm sure we shall all be delighted to have you amongst us.'

Poor Mrs. Graham looked dismayed, and attempted to make excuses, but Rose, either compassionating her lonely life, or anxious to cultivate her acquaintance, was determined to have her; and every objection was overruled. She was told it would only be a small party, and all friends, and that the best view of all was from — Cliffs, full five miles distant.

'Just a nice walk for the gentlemen,' continued Rose; 'but the ladies will drive and walk by turns; for we shall have our pony-carriage, which will be plenty large enough to contain little Arthur and three ladies, together with your sketching apparatus, and our provisions.'

So the proposal was finally acceded to; and, after some further discussion respecting the time and manner of the projected excursion, we rose, and took our leave.

But this was only March: a cold, wet April, and two weeks of May passed over before we could venture forth on our expedition with the reasonable hope of obtaining that pleasure we sought in pleasant prospects, cheerful society, fresh air, good cheer and exercise, without the alloy of bad roads, cold winds, or threatening clouds. Then, on a glorious morning, we gathered our forces and set forth. The company consisted of Mrs. and Master Graham, Mary and Eliza Millward, Jane and Richard Wilson, and Rose, Fergus, and Gilbert Markham.

Mr. Lawrence had been invited to join us, but, for some reason best known to himself, had refused to give us his company. I had solicited the favour myself. When I did so, he hesitated, and asked who were going. Upon my naming Miss Wilson among the rest, he seemed half inclined to go, but when I mentioned Mrs. Graham, thinking it might be a further inducement, it appeared to have a contrary effect, and he declined it altogether, and, to confess the truth, the decision was not displeasing to me, though I could scarcely tell you why.

It was about midday when we reached the place of our destination. Mrs. Graham walked all the way to the cliffs; and little Arthur walked the greater part of it too; for he was now much more hardy and active than when he first entered the neighbourhood, and he did not like being in the carriage with strangers, while all his four friends, mamma, and Sancho, and Mr. Markham, and Miss Millward, were on foot, journeying far behind, or passing through distant fields and lanes.

I have a very pleasant recollection of that walk, along the hard, white, sunny road, shaded here and there with bright green trees, and adorned with flowery banks and blossoming hedges of delicious fragrance; or through pleasant fields and lanes, all glorious in the sweet flowers and brilliant verdure of delightful May. It was true, Eliza was not beside me; but she was with her friends in the pony-carriage, as happy, I trusted, as I was; and even when we pedestrians, having forsaken the highway for a short cut across the fields, beheld the little carriage far away, disappearing amid the green, embowering trees, I did not hate those trees for snatching the dear little bonnet and shawl from my sight, nor did I feel that all those intervening objects lay between my happiness and me; for, to confess the truth, I was too happy in the company of Mrs. Graham to regret the absence of Eliza Millward.

The former, it is true, was most provokingly unsociable at first — seemingly bent upon talking to no one but Mary Millward and Arthur. She and Mary journeyed along together, generally with the child between them; — but where the road permitted, I always walked on the other side of her, Richard Wilson taking the other side of Miss Millward, and Fergus roving here and there according to his fancy; and, after a while, she became more friendly, and at length I succeeded in securing her attention almost entirely to myself — and then I was happy indeed; for whenever she did condescend to converse, I liked to listen. Where her opinions and sentiments tallied with mine, it was her extreme good sense, her exquisite taste and feeling, that delighted me; where they differed, it was still her uncompromising boldness in the avowal or defence of that difference, her earnestness and keenness, that piqued my fancy: and even when she angered me by her unkind words or looks, and her uncharitable conclusions respecting me, it only made me the more dissatisfied with myself for having so unfavourably impressed her, and the more desirous to vindicate my character and disposition in her eyes, and, if possible, to win her esteem.

At length our walk was ended. The increasing height and boldness of the hills had for some time intercepted the prospect; but, on gaining the summit of a steep acclivity, and looking downward, an opening lay before us — and the blue sea burst upon our sight! — deep violet blue — not deadly calm, but covered with glinting breakers — diminutive white specks twinkling on its bosom, and scarcely to be distinguished, by the keenest vision, from the little seamews that sported above, their white wings glittering in the sunshine: only one or two vessels were visible, and those were far away.

I looked at my companion to see what she thought of this glorious scene. She said nothing: but she stood still, and fixed her eyes upon it with a gaze that assured me she was not disappointed. She had very fine eyes, by-the-by — I don't know whether I have told you before, but they were full of soul, large, clear, and nearly black — not brown, but very dark grey. A cool, reviving breeze blew from the sea — soft, pure, salubrious: it waved her drooping ringlets, and imparted a livelier colour to her usually too pallid lip and cheek. She felt its exhilarating influence, and so did I — I felt it tingling through my frame, but dared not give way to it while she remained so quiet. There was an aspect of subdued exhilaration in her face, that kindled into almost a smile of exalted, glad intelligence as her eye met mine. Never had she looked so lovely: never had my heart so warmly cleaved to her as now. Had we been left two minutes longer standing there alone, I cannot answer for the consequences. Happily for my discretion, perhaps for my enjoyment during the remainder of the day, we were speedily summoned to the repast — a very respectable collation, which Rose, assisted by Miss Wilson and Eliza, who, having shared her seat in the carriage, had arrived with her a little before the rest, had set out upon an elevated platform overlooking the sea, and sheltered from the hot sun by a shelving rock and overhanging trees.

Mrs. Graham seated herself at a distance from me. Eliza was my nearest neighbour. She exerted herself to be agreeable, in her gentle, unobtrusive way, and was, no doubt, as fascinating and charming as ever, if I could only have felt it. But soon my heart began to warm towards her once again; and we were all very merry and happy together — as far as I could see — throughout the protracted social meal.

When that was over, Rose summoned Fergus to help her to gather up the fragments, and the knives, dishes, &c., and restore them to the baskets; and Mrs. Graham took her camp-stool and drawing materials; and having begged Miss Millward to take charge of her precious son, and strictly enjoined him not to wander from his new guardian's side, she left us and proceeded along the steep, stony hill, to a loftier, more precipitous eminence at some distance, whence a still finer prospect was to be had, where she preferred taking her sketch, though some of the ladies told her it was a frightful place, and advised her not to attempt it.

When she was gone, I felt as if there was to be no more fun — though it is difficult to say what she had contributed to the hilarity of the party. No jests, and little laughter, had escaped her lips; but her smile had animated my mirth; a keen observation or a cheerful word from her had insensibly sharpened my wits, and thrown an interest over all that was done and said by the rest. Even my conversation with Eliza had been enlivened by her presence, though I knew it not; and now that she was gone, Eliza's playful nonsense ceased to amuse me — nay, grew wearisome to my soul, and I grew weary of amusing her: I felt myself drawn by an irresistible attraction to that distant point where the fair artist sat and plied her solitary task — and not long did I attempt to resist it: while my little neighbour was exchanging a few words with Miss Wilson, I rose and cannily slipped away. A few rapid strides, and a little active clambering, soon brought me to the place where she was seated — a narrow ledge of rock at the very verge of the cliff, which descended with a steep, precipitous slant, quite down to the rocky shore.

She did not hear me coming: the falling of my shadow across her paper gave her an electric start; and she looked hastily round — any other lady of my acquaintance would have screamed under such a sudden alarm.

'Oh! I didn't know it was you. — Why did you startle me so?' said she, somewhat testily. 'I hate anybody to come upon me so unexpectedly.'

'Why, what did you take me for?' said I: 'if I had known you were so nervous, I would have been more cautious; but — '

'Well, never mind. What did you come for? are they all coming?'

'No; this little ledge could scarcely contain them all.'

'I'm glad, for I'm tired of talking.'

'Well, then, I won't talk. I'll only sit and watch your drawing.'

'Oh, but you know I don't like that.'

'Then I'll content myself with admiring this magnificent prospect.'

She made no objection to this; and, for some time, sketched away in silence. But I could not help stealing a glance, now and then, from the splendid view at our feet to the elegant white hand that held the pencil, and the graceful neck and glossy raven curls that drooped over the paper.

'Now,' thought I, 'if I had but a pencil and a morsel of paper, I could make a lovelier sketch than hers, admitting I had the power to delineate faithfully what is before me.'

But, though this satisfaction was denied me, I was very well content to sit beside her there, and say nothing.

'Are you there still, Mr. Markham?' said she at length, looking round upon me — for I was seated a little behind on a mossy projection of the cliff. — 'Why don't you go and amuse yourself with your friends?'

'Because I am tired of them, like you; and I shall have enough of them to-morrow — or at any time hence; but you I may not have the pleasure of seeing again for I know not how long.'

'What was Arthur doing when you came away?'

'He was with Miss Millward, where you left him — all right, but hoping mamma would not be long away. You didn't intrust him to me, by-the-by,' I grumbled, 'though I had the honour of a much longer acquaintance; but Miss Millward has the art of conciliating and amusing children,' I carelessly added, 'if she is good for nothing else.'

'Miss Millward has many estimable qualities, which such as you cannot be expected to perceive or appreciate. Will you tell Arthur that I shall come in a few minutes?'

'If that be the case, I will wait, with your permission, till those few minutes are past; and then I can assist you to descend this difficult path.'

'Thank you — I always manage best, on such occasions, without assistance.'

'But, at least, I can carry your stool and sketch-book.'

She did not deny me this favour; but I was rather offended at her evident desire to be rid of me, and was beginning to repent of my pertinacity, when she somewhat appeased me by consulting my taste and judgment about some doubtful matter in her drawing. My opinion, happily, met her approbation, and the improvement I suggested was adopted without hesitation.

'I have often wished in vain,' said she, 'for another's judgment to appeal to when I could scarcely trust the direction of my own eye and head, they having been so long occupied with the contemplation of a single object as to become almost incapable of forming a proper idea respecting it.'

'That,' replied I, 'is only one of many evils to which a solitary life exposes us.'

'True,' said she; and again we relapsed into silence.

About two minutes after, however, she declared her sketch completed, and closed the book.

On returning to the scene of our repast we found all the company had deserted it, with the exception of three — Mary Millward, Richard Wilson, and Arthur Graham. The younger gentleman lay fast asleep with his head pillowed on the lady's lap; the other was seated beside her with a pocket edition of some classic author in his hand. He never went anywhere without such a companion wherewith to improve his leisure moments: all time seemed lost that was not devoted to study, or exacted, by his physical nature, for the bare support of life. Even now he could not abandon himself to the enjoyment of that pure air and balmy sunshine — that splendid prospect, and those soothing sounds, the music of the waves and of the soft wind in the sheltering trees above him — not even with a lady by his side (though not a very charming one, I will allow) — he must pull out his book, and make the most of his time while digesting his temperate meal, and reposing his weary limbs, unused to so much exercise.

Perhaps, however, he spared a moment to exchange a word or a glance with his companion now and then — at any rate, she did not appear at all resentful of his conduct; for her homely features wore an expression of unusual cheerfulness and serenity, and she was studying his pale, thoughtful face with great complacency when we arrived.

The journey homeward was by no means so agreeable to me as the former part of the day: for now Mrs. Graham was in the carriage, and Eliza Millward was the companion of my walk. She had observed my preference for the young widow, and evidently felt herself neglected. She did not manifest her chagrin by keen reproaches, bitter sarcasms, or pouting sullen silence — any or all of these I could easily have endured, or lightly laughed away; but she showed it by a kind of gentle melancholy, a mild, reproachful sadness that cut me to the heart. I tried to cheer her up, and apparently succeeded in some degree, before the walk was over; but in the very act my conscience reproved me, knowing, as I did, that, sooner or later, the tie must be broken, and this was only nourishing false hopes and putting off the evil day.

When the pony-carriage had approached as near Wildfell Hall as the road would permit — unless, indeed, it proceeded up the long rough lane, which Mrs. Graham would not allow — the young widow and her son alighted, relinquishing the driver's seat to Rose; and I persuaded Eliza to take the latter's place. Having put her comfortably in, bid her take care of the evening air, and wished her a kind good-night, I felt considerably relieved, and hastened to offer my services to Mrs. Graham to carry her apparatus up the fields, but she had already hung her camp-stool on her arm and taken her sketch-book in her hand, and insisted upon bidding me adieu then and there, with the rest of the company. But this time she declined my proffered aid in so kind and friendly a manner that I almost forgave her.

CHAPTER VIII

Six weeks had passed away. It was a splendid morning about the close of June. Most of the hay was cut, but the last week had been very unfavourable; and now that fine weather was come at last, being determined to make the most of it, I had gathered all hands together into the hay-field, and was working away myself, in the midst of them, in my shirt-sleeves, with a light, shady straw hat on my head, catching up armfuls of moist, reeking grass, and shaking it out to the four winds of heaven, at the head of a goodly file of servants and hirelings — intending so to labour, from morning till night, with as much zeal and assiduity as I could look for from any of them, as well to prosper the work by my own exertion as to animate the workers by my example — when lo! my resolutions were overthrown in a moment, by the simple fact of my brother's running up to me and putting into my hand a small parcel, just arrived from London, which I had been for some time expecting. I tore off the cover, and disclosed an elegant and portable edition of 'Marmion.'

'I guess I know who that's for,' said Fergus, who stood looking on while I complacently examined the volume. 'That's for Miss Eliza, now.'

He pronounced this with a tone and look so prodigiously knowing, that I was glad to contradict him.

'You're wrong, my lad,' said I; and, taking up my coat, I deposited the book in one of its pockets, and then put it on (*i.e.* the coat). 'Now come here, you idle dog, and make yourself useful for once,' I continued. 'Pull off your coat, and take my place in the field till I come back.'

'Till you come back? — and where are you going, pray? 'No matter where — the when is all that concerns you; — and I shall be back by dinner, at least.'

'Oh — oh! and I'm to labour away till then, am I? — and to keep all these fellows hard at it besides? Well, well! I'll submit — for once in a way. — Come, my lads, you must look sharp: I'm come to help you now: — and woe be to that man, or woman either, that pauses for a moment amongst you — whether to stare about him, to scratch his head, or blow his nose — no pretext will serve — nothing but work, work, work in the sweat of your face,' &c., &c.

Leaving him thus haranguing the people, more to their amusement than edification, I returned to the house, and, having made some alteration in my toilet, hastened away to Wildfell Hall, with the book in my pocket; for it was destined for the shelves of Mrs. Graham.

'What! then had she and you got on so well together as to come to the giving and receiving of presents?' — Not precisely, old buck; this was my first experiment in that line; and I was very anxious to see the result of it.

We had met several times since the — Bay excursion, and I had found she was not averse to my company, provided I confined my conversation to the discussion of abstract matters, or topics of common interest; — the moment I touched upon the sentimental or the complimentary, or made the slightest approach to tenderness in word or look, I was not only punished by an immediate change in her manner at the time, but doomed to find her more cold and distant, if not entirely inaccessible, when next I sought her company. This circumstance did not greatly disconcert me, however, because I attributed it, not so much to any dislike of my person, as to some absolute resolution against a second marriage formed prior to the time of our acquaintance, whether from excess of affection for her late husband, or because she had had enough of him and the matrimonial state together. At first, indeed, she had seemed to take a pleasure in mortifying my vanity and crushing my presumption — relentlessly nipping off bud by bud as they ventured to appear; and then, I confess, I was deeply wounded, though, at the same time, stimulated to seek revenge; — but latterly finding, beyond a doubt, that I was not that empty-headed coxcomb she had first supposed me, she had repulsed my modest advances in quite a different spirit. It was a kind of serious, almost sorrowful displeasure, which I soon learnt carefully to avoid awakening.

'Let me first establish my position as a friend,' thought I — 'the patron and playfellow of her son, the sober, solid, plain-dealing friend of herself, and then, when I have made myself fairly necessary to her comfort and enjoyment in life (as I believe I can), we'll see what next may be effected.'

So we talked about painting, poetry, and music, theology, geology, and philosophy: once or twice I lent her a book, and once she lent me one in return: I met her in her walks as often as I could; I came to her house as often as I dared. My first pretext for invading the sanctum was to bring Arthur a little waddling puppy of which Sancho was the father, and which delighted the child beyond expression, and, consequently, could not fail to please his mamma. My second was to bring him a book, which, knowing his mother's particularity, I had carefully selected, and which I submitted for her approbation before presenting it to him. Then, I brought her some plants for her garden, in my sister's name — having previously persuaded Rose to send them. Each of these times I inquired after the picture she was painting from the sketch taken on the cliff, and was admitted into the studio, and asked my opinion or advice respecting its progress.

My last visit had been to return the book she had lent me; and then it was that, in casually discussing the poetry of Sir Walter Scott, she had expressed a wish to see 'Marmion,' and I had conceived the presumptuous idea of making her a present of it, and, on my return home, instantly sent for the smart little volume I had this morning received. But an apology for invading the hermitage was still necessary; so I had furnished myself with a blue morocco collar for Arthur's little dog; and that being given and received, with much more joy and gratitude, on the part of the receiver, than the worth of the gift or the selfish motive of the giver deserved, I ventured to ask Mrs. Graham for one more look at the picture, if it was still there.

‘Oh, yes! come in,’ said she (for I had met them in the garden). ‘It is finished and framed, all ready for sending away; but give me your last opinion, and if you can suggest any further improvement, it shall be — duly considered, at least.’

The picture was strikingly beautiful; it was the very scene itself, transferred as if by magic to the canvas; but I expressed my approbation in guarded terms, and few words, for fear of displeasing her. She, however, attentively watched my looks, and her artist’s pride was gratified, no doubt, to read my heartfelt admiration in my eyes. But, while I gazed, I thought upon the book, and wondered how it was to be presented. My heart failed me; but I determined not to be such a fool as to come away without having made the attempt. It was useless waiting for an opportunity, and useless trying to concoct a speech for the occasion. The more plainly and naturally the thing was done, the better, I thought; so I just looked out of the window to screw up my courage, and then pulled out the book, turned round, and put it into her hand, with this short explanation:

‘You were wishing to see ‘Marmion,’ Mrs. Graham; and here it is, if you will be so kind as to take it.’

A momentary blush suffused her face — perhaps, a blush of sympathetic shame for such an awkward style of presentation: she gravely examined the volume on both sides; then silently turned over the leaves, knitting her brows the while, in serious cogitation; then closed the book, and turning from it to me, quietly asked the price of it — I felt the hot blood rush to my face.

‘I’m sorry to offend you, Mr. Markham,’ said she, ‘but unless I pay for the book, I cannot take it.’ And she laid it on the table.

‘Why cannot you?’

‘Because,’ — she paused, and looked at the carpet.

‘Why cannot you?’ I repeated, with a degree of irascibility that roused her to lift her eyes and look me steadily in the face.

‘Because I don’t like to put myself under obligations that I can never repay — I am obliged to you already for your kindness to my son; but his grateful affection and your own good feelings must reward you for that.’

‘Nonsense!’ ejaculated I.

She turned her eyes on me again, with a look of quiet, grave surprise, that had the effect of a rebuke, whether intended for such or not.

‘Then you won’t take the book?’ I asked, more mildly than I had yet spoken.

‘I will gladly take it, if you will let me pay for it.’ I told her the exact price, and the cost of the carriage besides, in as calm a tone as I could command — for, in fact, I was ready to weep with disappointment and vexation.

She produced her purse, and coolly counted out the money, but hesitated to put it into my hand. Attentively regarding me, in a tone of soothing softness, she observed, — ‘You think yourself insulted, Mr Markham — I wish I could make you understand that — that I — ’

‘I do understand you, perfectly,’ I said. ‘You think that if you were to accept that trifle from me now, I should presume upon it hereafter; but you are mistaken: — if you will only oblige me by taking it, believe me, I shall build no hopes upon it, and consider this no precedent for future favours: — and it is nonsense to talk about putting yourself under obligations to me when you must know that in such a case the obligation is entirely on my side, — the favour on yours.’

‘Well, then, I’ll take you at your word,’ she answered, with a most angelic smile, returning the odious money to her purse — ‘but remember!’

‘I will remember — what I have said; — but do not you punish my presumption by withdrawing your friendship entirely from me, — or expect me to atone for it by being more distant than before,’ said I, extending my hand to take leave, for I was too much excited to remain.

‘Well, then! let us be as we were,’ replied she, frankly placing her hand in mine; and while I held it there, I had much difficulty to refrain from pressing it to my lips; — but that would be suicidal madness: I had been bold enough already, and this premature offering had well-nigh given the death-blow to my hopes.

It was with an agitated, burning heart and brain that I hurried homewards, regardless of that scorching noonday sun — forgetful of everything but her I had just left — regretting nothing but her impenetrability, and my own precipitancy and want of tact — fearing nothing but her hateful resolution, and my inability to overcome it — hoping nothing — but halt, — I will not bore you with my conflicting hopes and fears — my serious cogitations and resolves.

CHAPTER IX

Though my affections might now be said to be fairly weaned from Eliza Millward, I did not yet entirely relinquish my visits to the vicarage, because I wanted, as it were, to let her down easy; without raising much sorrow, or incurring much resentment, — or making myself the talk of the parish; and besides, if I had wholly kept away, the vicar, who looked upon my visits as paid chiefly, if not entirely, to himself, would have felt himself decidedly affronted by the neglect. But when I called there the day after my interview with Mrs. Graham, he happened to be from home — a circumstance by no means so agreeable to me now as it had been on former occasions. Miss Millward was there, it is true, but she, of course, would be little better than a nonentity. However, I resolved to make my visit a short one, and to talk to Eliza in a brotherly, friendly sort of way, such as our long acquaintance might warrant me in assuming, and which, I thought, could neither give offence nor serve to encourage false hopes.

It was never my custom to talk about Mrs. Graham either to her or any one else; but I had not been seated three minutes before she brought that lady on to the carpet herself in a rather remarkable manner.

'Oh, Mr. Markham!' said she, with a shocked expression and voice subdued almost to a whisper, 'what do you think of these shocking reports about Mrs. Graham? — can you encourage us to disbelieve them?'

'What reports?'

'Ah, now! you know!' she slily smiled and shook her head.

'I know nothing about them. What in the world do you mean, Eliza?'

'Oh, don't ask me! *I* can't explain it.' She took up the cambric handkerchief which she had been beautifying with a deep lace border, and began to be very busy.

'What is it, Miss Millward? what does she mean?' said I, appealing to her sister, who seemed to be absorbed in the hemming of a large, coarse sheet.

'I don't know,' replied she. 'Some idle slander somebody has been inventing, I suppose. I never heard it till Eliza told me the other day, — but if all the parish dinned it in my ears, I shouldn't believe a word of it — I know Mrs. Graham too well!'

'Quite right, Miss Millward! — and so do I — whatever it may be.'

'Well,' observed Eliza, with a gentle sigh, 'it's well to have such a comfortable assurance regarding the worth of those we love. I only wish you may not find your confidence misplaced.'

And she raised her face, and gave me such a look of sorrowful tenderness as might have melted my heart, but within those eyes there lurked a something that I did not like; and I wondered how I ever could have admired them — her sister’s honest face and small grey optics appeared far more agreeable. But I was out of temper with Eliza at that moment for her insinuations against Mrs. Graham, which were false, I was certain, whether she knew it or not.

I said nothing more on the subject, however, at the time, and but little on any other; for, finding I could not well recover my equanimity, I presently rose and took leave, excusing myself under the plea of business at the farm; and to the farm I went, not troubling my mind one whit about the possible truth of these mysterious reports, but only wondering what they were, by whom originated, and on what foundations raised, and how they could the most effectually be silenced or disproved.

A few days after this we had another of our quiet little parties, to which the usual company of friends and neighbours had been invited, and Mrs. Graham among the number. She could not now absent herself under the plea of dark evenings or inclement weather, and, greatly to my relief, she came. Without her I should have found the whole affair an intolerable bore; but the moment of her arrival brought new life to the house, and though I might not neglect the other guests for her, or expect to engross much of her attention and conversation to myself alone, I anticipated an evening of no common enjoyment.

Mr. Lawrence came too. He did not arrive till some time after the rest were assembled. I was curious to see how he would comport himself to Mrs. Graham. A slight bow was all that passed between them on his entrance; and having politely greeted the other members of the company, he seated himself quite aloof from the young widow, between my mother and Rose.

‘Did you ever see such art?’ whispered Eliza, who was my nearest neighbour. ‘Would you not say they were perfect strangers?’

‘Almost; but what then?’

‘What then; why, you can’t pretend to be ignorant?’

‘Ignorant of what?’ demanded I, so sharply that she started and replied, —

‘Oh, hush! don’t speak so loud.’

‘Well, tell me then,’ I answered in a lower tone, ‘what is it you mean? I hate enigmas.’

‘Well, you know, I don’t vouch for the truth of it — indeed, far from it — but haven’t you heard — ?’

‘I’ve heard nothing, except from you.’

‘You must be wilfully deaf then, for anyone will tell you that; but I shall only anger you by repeating it, I see, so I had better hold my tongue.’

She closed her lips and folded her hands before her, with an air of injured meekness.

‘If you had wished not to anger me, you should have held your tongue from the beginning, or else spoken out plainly and honestly all you had to say.’

She turned aside her face, pulled out her handkerchief, rose, and went to the window, where she stood for some time, evidently dissolved in tears. I was astounded, provoked, ashamed — not so much of my harshness as for her childish weakness. However, no one seemed to notice her, and shortly after we were summoned to the tea-table: in those parts it was customary to sit to the table at tea-time on all occasions, and make a meal of it, for we dined early. On taking my seat, I had Rose on one side of me and an empty chair on the other.

'May I sit by you?' said a soft voice at my elbow.

'If you like,' was the reply; and Eliza slipped into the vacant chair; then, looking up in my face with a half-sad, half-playful smile, she whispered, — 'You're so stern, Gilbert.'

I handed down her tea with a slightly contemptuous smile, and said nothing, for I had nothing to say.

'What have I done to offend you?' said she, more plaintively. 'I wish I knew.'

'Come, take your tea, Eliza, and don't be foolish,' responded I, handing her the sugar and cream.

Just then there arose a slight commotion on the other side of me, occasioned by Miss Wilson's coming to negotiate an exchange of seats with Rose.

'Will you be so good as to exchange places with me, Miss Markham?' said she; 'for I don't like to sit by Mrs. Graham. If your mamma thinks proper to invite such persons to her house, she cannot object to her daughter's keeping company with them.'

This latter clause was added in a sort of soliloquy when Rose was gone; but I was not polite enough to let it pass.

'Will you be so good as to tell me what you mean, Miss Wilson?' said I.

The question startled her a little, but not much.

'Why, Mr. Markham,' replied she, coolly, having quickly recovered her self-possession, 'it surprises me rather that Mrs. Markham should invite such a person as Mrs. Graham to her house; but, perhaps, she is not aware that the lady's character is considered scarcely respectable.'

'She is not, nor am I; and therefore you would oblige me by explaining your meaning a little further.'

'This is scarcely the time or the place for such explanations; but I think you can hardly be so ignorant as you pretend — you must know her as well as I do.'

'I think I do, perhaps a little better; and therefore, if you will inform me what you have heard or imagined against her, I shall, perhaps, be able to set you right.'

'Can you tell me, then, who was her husband, or if she ever had any?'

Indignation kept me silent. At such a time and place I could not trust myself to answer.

'Have you never observed,' said Eliza, 'what a striking likeness there is between that child of hers and — '

'And whom?' demanded Miss Wilson, with an air of cold, but keen severity.

Eliza was startled; the timidly spoken suggestion had been intended for my ear alone.

'Oh, I beg your pardon!' pleaded she; 'I may be mistaken — perhaps I was mistaken.' But she accompanied the words with a sly glance of derision directed to me from the corner of her disingenuous eye.

'There's no need to ask my pardon,' replied her friend, 'but I see no one here that at all resembles that child, except his mother, and when you hear ill-natured reports, Miss Eliza, I will thank you, that is, I think you will do well, to refrain from repeating them. I presume the person you allude to is Mr. Lawrence; but I think I can assure you that your suspicions, in that respect, are utterly misplaced; and if he has any particular connection with the lady at all (which no one has a right to assert), at least he has (what cannot be said of some others) sufficient sense of propriety to withhold him from acknowledging anything more than a bowing acquaintance in the presence of respectable persons; he was evidently both surprised and annoyed to find her here.'

'Go it!' cried Fergus, who sat on the other side of Eliza, and was the only individual who shared that side of the table with us. 'Go it like bricks! mind you don't leave her one stone upon another.'

Miss Wilson drew herself up with a look of freezing scorn, but said nothing. Eliza would have replied, but I interrupted her by saying as calmly as I could, though in a tone which betrayed, no doubt, some little of what I felt within, — 'We have had enough of this subject; if we can only speak to slander our betters, let us hold our tongues.'

'I think you'd better,' observed Fergus, 'and so does our good parson; he has been addressing the company in his richest vein all the while, and eyeing you, from time to time, with looks of stern distaste, while you sat there, irreverently whispering and muttering together; and once he paused in the middle of a story or a sermon, I don't know which, and fixed his eyes upon you, Gilbert, as much as to say, "When Mr. Markham has done flirting with those two ladies I will proceed."'

What more was said at the tea-table I cannot tell, nor how I found patience to sit till the meal was over. I remember, however, that I swallowed with difficulty the remainder of the tea that was in my cup, and ate nothing; and that the first thing I did was to stare at Arthur Graham, who sat beside his mother on the opposite side of the table, and the second to stare at Mr. Lawrence, who sat below; and, first, it struck me that there was a likeness; but, on further contemplation, I concluded it was only in imagination.

Both, it is true, had more delicate features and smaller bones than commonly fall to the lot of individuals of the rougher sex, and Lawrence's complexion was pale and clear, and Arthur's delicately fair; but Arthur's tiny, somewhat snubby nose could never become so long and straight as Mr. Lawrence's; and the outline of his face, though not full enough to be round, and too finely converging to the small, dimpled chin to be square, could never be drawn out to the long oval of the other's, while the child's hair was evidently of a lighter, warmer tint than the elder gentleman's had ever been, and his large, clear blue eyes, though prematurely serious at times, were utterly dissimilar to the shy hazel eyes of Mr. Lawrence, whence the sensitive soul looked so distrustfully forth, as ever ready to retire within, from the offences of a too rude, too uncongenial world. Wretch that I was to harbour that detestable idea for a moment! Did I not know Mrs. Graham? Had I not seen her, conversed with her time after time? Was I not certain that she, in intellect, in purity and elevation of soul, was immeasurably superior to any of her detractors; that she was, in fact, the noblest, the most adorable, of her sex I had ever beheld, or even imagined to exist? Yes, and I would say with Mary Millward (sensible girl as she was), that if all the parish, ay, or all the world, should din these horrible lies in my ears, I would not believe them, for I knew her better than they.

Meantime, my brain was on fire with indignation, and my heart seemed ready to burst from its prison with conflicting passions. I regarded my two fair neighbours with a feeling of abhorrence and loathing I scarcely endeavoured to conceal. I was rallied from several quarters for my abstraction and ungallant neglect of the ladies; but I cared little for that: all I cared about, besides that one grand subject of my thoughts, was to see the cups travel up to the tea-tray, and not come down again. I thought Mr. Millward never would cease telling us that he was no tea-drinker, and that it was highly injurious to keep loading the stomach with slops to the exclusion of more wholesome sustenance, and so give himself time to finish his fourth cup.

At length it was over; and I rose and left the table and the guests without a word of apology — I could endure their company no longer. I rushed out to cool my brain in the balmy evening air, and to compose my mind or indulge my passionate thoughts in the solitude of the garden.

To avoid being seen from the windows I went down a quiet little avenue that skirted one side of the inclosure, at the bottom of which was a seat embowered in roses and honeysuckles. Here I sat down to think over the virtues and wrongs of the lady of Wildfell Hall; but I had not been so occupied two minutes, before voices and laughter, and glimpses of moving objects through the trees, informed me that the whole company had turned out to take an airing in the garden too. However, I nestled up in a corner of the bower, and hoped to retain possession of it, secure alike from observation and intrusion. But no — confound it — there was some one coming down the avenue! Why couldn't they enjoy the flowers and sunshine of the open garden, and leave that sunless nook to me, and the gnats and midges?

But, peeping through my fragrant screen of the interwoven branches to discover who the intruders were (for a murmur of voices told me it was more than one), my vexation instantly subsided, and far other feelings agitated my still unquiet soul; for there was Mrs. Graham, slowly moving down the walk with Arthur by her side, and no one else. Why were they alone? Had the poison of detracting tongues already spread through all; and had they all turned their backs upon her? I now recollected having seen Mrs. Wilson, in the early part of the evening, edging her chair close up to my mother, and bending forward, evidently in the delivery of some important confidential intelligence; and from the incessant wagging of her head, the frequent distortions of her wrinkled physiognomy, and the winking and malicious twinkle of her little ugly eyes, I judged it was some spicy piece of scandal that engaged her powers; and from the cautious privacy of the communication I supposed some person then present was the luckless object of her calumnies: and from all these tokens, together with my mother's looks and gestures of mingled horror and incredulity, I now concluded that object to have been Mrs. Graham. I did not emerge from my place of concealment till she had nearly reached the bottom of the walk, lest my appearance should drive her away; and when I did step forward she stood still and seemed inclined to turn back as it was.

'Oh, don't let us disturb you, Mr. Markham!' said she. 'We came here to seek retirement ourselves, not to intrude on your seclusion.'

'I am no hermit, Mrs. Graham — though I own it looks rather like it to absent myself in this uncourteous fashion from my guests.'

'I feared you were unwell,' said she, with a look of real concern.

'I was rather, but it's over now. Do sit here a little and rest, and tell me how you like this arbour,' said I, and, lifting Arthur by the shoulders, I planted him in the middle of the seat by way of securing his mamma, who, acknowledging it to be a tempting place of refuge, threw herself back in one corner, while I took possession of the other.

But that word refuge disturbed me. Had their unkindness then really driven her to seek for peace in solitude?

'Why have they left you alone?' I asked.

'It is I who have left them,' was the smiling rejoinder. 'I was wearied to death with small talk — nothing wears me out like that. I cannot imagine how they can go on as they do.'

I could not help smiling at the serious depth of her wonderment.

'Is it that they think it a duty to be continually talking,' pursued she: 'and so never pause to think, but fill up with aimless trifles and vain repetitions when subjects of real interest fail to present themselves, or do they really take a pleasure in such discourse?'

'Very likely they do,' said I; 'their shallow minds can hold no great ideas, and their light heads are carried away by trivialities that would not move a better-furnished skull; and their only alternative to such discourse is to plunge over head and ears into the slough of scandal — which is their chief delight.'

‘Not all of them, surely?’ cried the lady, astonished at the bitterness of my remark.

‘No, certainly; I exonerate my sister from such degraded tastes, and my mother too, if you included her in your animadversions.’

‘I meant no animadversions against any one, and certainly intended no disrespectful allusions to your mother. I have known some sensible persons great adepts in that style of conversation when circumstances impelled them to it; but it is a gift I cannot boast the possession of. I kept up my attention on this occasion as long as I could, but when my powers were exhausted I stole away to seek a few minutes’ repose in this quiet walk. I hate talking where there is no exchange of ideas or sentiments, and no good given or received.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘if ever I trouble you with my loquacity, tell me so at once, and I promise not to be offended; for I possess the faculty of enjoying the company of those I — of my friends as well in silence as in conversation.’

‘I don’t quite believe you; but if it were so you would exactly suit me for a companion.’

‘I am all you wish, then, in other respects?’

‘No, I don’t mean that. How beautiful those little clusters of foliage look, where the sun comes through behind them!’ said she, on purpose to change the subject.

And they did look beautiful, where at intervals the level rays of the sun penetrating the thickness of trees and shrubs on the opposite side of the path before us, relieved their dusky verdure by displaying patches of semi-transparent leaves of resplendent golden green.

‘I almost wish I were not a painter,’ observed my companion.

‘Why so? one would think at such a time you would most exult in your privilege of being able to imitate the various brilliant and delightful touches of nature.’

‘No; for instead of delivering myself up to the full enjoyment of them as others do, I am always troubling my head about how I could produce the same effect upon canvas; and as that can never be done, it is more vanity and vexation of spirit.’

‘Perhaps you cannot do it to satisfy yourself, but you may and do succeed in delighting others with the result of your endeavours.’

‘Well, after all, I should not complain: perhaps few people gain their livelihood with so much pleasure in their toil as I do. Here is some one coming.’

She seemed vexed at the interruption.

‘It is only Mr. Lawrence and Miss Wilson,’ said I, ‘coming to enjoy a quiet stroll. They will not disturb us.’

I could not quite decipher the expression of her face; but I was satisfied there was no jealousy therein. What business had I to look for it?

‘What sort of a person is Miss Wilson?’ she asked.

‘She is elegant and accomplished above the generality of her birth and station; and some say she is ladylike and agreeable.'

'I thought her somewhat frigid and rather supercilious in her manner to-day.'

'Very likely she might be so to you. She has possibly taken a prejudice against you, for I think she regards you in the light of a rival.'

'Me! Impossible, Mr. Markham!' said she, evidently astonished and annoyed.

'Well, I know nothing about it,' returned I, rather doggedly; for I thought her annoyance was chiefly against myself.

The pair had now approached within a few paces of us. Our arbour was set snugly back in a corner, before which the avenue at its termination turned off into the more airy walk along the bottom of the garden. As they approached this, I saw, by the aspect of Jane Wilson, that she was directing her companion's attention to us; and, as well by her cold, sarcastic smile as by the few isolated words of her discourse that reached me, I knew full well that she was impressing him with the idea, that we were strongly attached to each other. I noticed that he coloured up to the temples, gave us one furtive glance in passing, and walked on, looking grave, but seemingly offering no reply to her remarks.

It was true, then, that he had some designs upon Mrs. Graham; and, were they honourable, he would not be so anxious to conceal them. She was blameless, of course, but he was detestable beyond all count.

While these thoughts flashed through my mind, my companion abruptly rose, and calling her son, said they would now go in quest of the company, and departed up the avenue. Doubtless she had heard or guessed something of Miss Wilson's remarks, and therefore it was natural enough she should choose to continue the *tête-à-tête* no longer, especially as at that moment my cheeks were burning with indignation against my former friend, the token of which she might mistake for a blush of stupid embarrassment. For this I owed Miss Wilson yet another grudge; and still the more I thought upon her conduct the more I hated her.

It was late in the evening before I joined the company. I found Mrs. Graham already equipped for departure, and taking leave of the rest, who were now returned to the house. I offered, nay, begged to accompany her home. Mr. Lawrence was standing by at the time conversing with some one else. He did not look at us, but, on hearing my earnest request, he paused in the middle of a sentence to listen for her reply, and went on, with a look of quiet satisfaction, the moment he found it was to be a denial.

A denial it was, decided, though not unkind. She could not be persuaded to think there was danger for herself or her child in traversing those lonely lanes and fields without attendance. It was daylight still, and she should meet no one; or if she did, the people were quiet and harmless she was well assured. In fact, she would not hear of any one's putting himself out of the way to accompany her, though Fergus vouchsafed to offer his services in case they should be more acceptable than mine, and my mother begged she might send one of the farming-men to escort her.

When she was gone the rest was all a blank or worse. Lawrence attempted to draw me into conversation, but I snubbed him and went to another part of the room. Shortly after the party broke up and he himself took leave. When he came to me I was blind to his extended hand, and deaf to his good-night till he repeated it a second time; and then, to get rid of him, I muttered an inarticulate reply, accompanied by a sulky nod.

‘What is the matter, Markham?’ whispered he.

I replied by a wrathful and contemptuous stare.

‘Are you angry because Mrs. Graham would not let you go home with her?’ he asked, with a faint smile that nearly exasperated me beyond control.

But, swallowing down all fiercer answers, I merely demanded, — ‘What business is it of yours?’

‘Why, none,’ replied he with provoking quietness; ‘only,’ — and he raised his eyes to my face, and spoke with unusual solemnity, — ‘only let me tell you, Markham, that if you have any designs in that quarter, they will certainly fail; and it grieves me to see you cherishing false hopes, and wasting your strength in useless efforts, for — ’

‘Hypocrite!’ I exclaimed; and he held his breath, and looked very blank, turned white about the gills, and went away without another word.

I had wounded him to the quick; and I was glad of it.

CHAPTER X

When all were gone, I learnt that the vile slander had indeed been circulated throughout the company, in the very presence of the victim. Rose, however, vowed she did not and would not believe it, and my mother made the same declaration, though not, I fear, with the same amount of real, unwavering incredulity. It seemed to dwell continually on her mind, and she kept irritating me from time to time by such expressions as — 'Dear, dear, who would have thought it! — Well! I always thought there was something odd about her. — You see what it is for women to affect to be different to other people.' And once it was, — 'I misdoubted that appearance of mystery from the very first — I thought there would no good come of it; but this is a sad, sad business, to be sure!'

'Why, mother, you said you didn't believe these tales,' said Fergus.

'No more I do, my dear; but then, you know, there must be some foundation.'

'The foundation is in the wickedness and falsehood of the world,' said I, 'and in the fact that Mr. Lawrence has been seen to go that way once or twice of an evening — and the village gossips say he goes to pay his addresses to the strange lady, and the scandal-mongers have greedily seized the rumour, to make it the basis of their own infernal structure.'

'Well, but, Gilbert, there must be something in her manner to countenance such reports.'

'Did you see anything in her manner?'

'No, certainly; but then, you know, I always said there was something strange about her.'

I believe it was on that very evening that I ventured on another invasion of Wildfell Hall. From the time of our party, which was upwards of a week ago, I had been making daily efforts to meet its mistress in her walks; and always disappointed (she must have managed it so on purpose), had nightly kept revolving in my mind some pretext for another call. At length I concluded that the separation could be endured no longer (by this time, you will see, I was pretty far gone); and, taking from the book-case an old volume that I thought she might be interested in, though, from its unsightly and somewhat dilapidated condition, I had not yet ventured to offer it for perusal, I hastened away, — but not without sundry misgivings as to how she would receive me, or how I could summon courage to present myself with so slight an excuse. But, perhaps, I might see her in the field or the garden, and then there would be no great difficulty: it was the formal knocking at the door, with the prospect of being gravely ushered in by Rachel, to the presence of a surprised, uncordial mistress, that so greatly disturbed me.

My wish, however, was not gratified. Mrs. Graham herself was not to be seen; but there was Arthur playing with his frolicsome little dog in the garden. I looked over the gate and called him to me. He wanted me to come in; but I told him I could not without his mother's leave.

'I'll go and ask her,' said the child.

'No, no, Arthur, you mustn't do that; but if she's not engaged, just ask her to come here a minute. Tell her I want to speak to her.'

He ran to perform my bidding, and quickly returned with his mother. How lovely she looked with her dark ringlets streaming in the light summer breeze, her fair cheek slightly flushed, and her countenance radiant with smiles. Dear Arthur! what did I not owe to you for this and every other happy meeting? Through him I was at once delivered from all formality, and terror, and constraint. In love affairs, there is no mediator like a merry, simple-hearted child — ever ready to cement divided hearts, to span the unfriendly gulf of custom, to melt the ice of cold reserve, and overthrow the separating walls of dread formality and pride.

'Well, Mr. Markham, what is it?' said the young mother, accosting me with a pleasant smile.

'I want you to look at this book, and, if you please, to take it, and peruse it at your leisure. I make no apology for calling you out on such a lovely evening, though it be for a matter of no greater importance.'

'Tell him to come in, mamma,' said Arthur.

'Would you like to come in?' asked the lady.

'Yes; I should like to see your improvements in the garden.'

'And how your sister's roots have prospered in my charge,' added she, as she opened the gate.

And we sauntered through the garden, and talked of the flowers, the trees, and the book, and then of other things. The evening was kind and genial, and so was my companion. By degrees I waxed more warm and tender than, perhaps, I had ever been before; but still I said nothing tangible, and she attempted no repulse, until, in passing a moss rose-tree that I had brought her some weeks since, in my sister's name, she plucked a beautiful half-open bud and bade me give it to Rose.

'May I not keep it myself?' I asked.

'No; but here is another for you.'

Instead of taking it quietly, I likewise took the hand that offered it, and looked into her face. She let me hold it for a moment, and I saw a flash of ecstatic brilliance in her eye, a glow of glad excitement on her face — I thought my hour of victory was come — but instantly a painful recollection seemed to flash upon her; a cloud of anguish darkened her brow, a marble paleness blanched her cheek and lip; there seemed a moment of inward conflict, and, with a sudden effort, she withdrew her hand, and retreated a step or two back.

'Now, Mr. Markham,' said she, with a kind of desperate calmness, 'I must tell you plainly that I cannot do with this. I like your company, because I am alone here, and your conversation pleases me more than that of any other person; but if you cannot be content to regard me as a friend — a plain, cold, motherly, or sisterly friend — I must beg you to leave me now, and let me alone hereafter: in fact, we must be strangers for the future.'

'I will, then — be your friend, or brother, or anything you wish, if you will only let me continue to see you; but tell me why I cannot be anything more?'

There was a perplexed and thoughtful pause.

'Is it in consequence of some rash vow?'

'It is something of the kind,' she answered. 'Some day I may tell you, but at present you had better leave me; and never, Gilbert, put me to the painful necessity of repeating what I have just now said to you,' she earnestly added, giving me her hand in serious kindness. How sweet, how musical my own name sounded in her mouth!

'I will not,' I replied. 'But you pardon this offence?'

'On condition that you never repeat it.'

'And may I come to see you now and then?'

'Perhaps — occasionally; provided you never abuse the privilege.'

'I make no empty promises, but you shall see.'

'The moment you do our intimacy is at an end, that's all.'

'And will you always call me Gilbert? It sounds more sisterly, and it will serve to remind me of our contract.'

She smiled, and once more bid me go; and at length I judged it prudent to obey, and she re-entered the house and I went down the hill. But as I went the tramp of horses' hoofs fell on my ear, and broke the stillness of the dewy evening; and, looking towards the lane, I saw a solitary equestrian coming up. Inclining to dusk as it was, I knew him at a glance: it was Mr. Lawrence on his grey pony. I flew across the field, leaped the stone fence, and then walked down the lane to meet him. On seeing me, he suddenly drew in his little steed, and seemed inclined to turn back, but on second thought apparently judged it better to continue his course as before. He accosted me with a slight bow, and, edging close to the wall, endeavoured to pass on; but I was not so minded. Seizing his horse by the bridle, I exclaimed, — 'Now, Lawrence, I will have this mystery explained! Tell me where you are going, and what you mean to do — at once, and distinctly!'

'Will you take your hand off the bridle?' said he, quietly — 'you're hurting my pony's mouth.'

'You and your pony be — '

'What makes you so coarse and brutal, Markham? I'm quite ashamed of you.'

'You answer my questions — before you leave this spot I will know what you mean by this perfidious duplicity!'

'I shall answer no questions till you let go the bridle, — if you stand till morning.'

'Now then,' said I, unclosing my hand, but still standing before him.

'Ask me some other time, when you can speak like a gentleman,' returned he, and he made an effort to pass me again; but I quickly re-captured the pony, scarce less astonished than its master at such uncivil usage.

'Really, Mr. Markham, this is too much!' said the latter. 'Can I not go to see my tenant on matters of business, without being assaulted in this manner by — ?'

'This is no time for business, sir! — I'll tell you, now, what I think of your conduct.'

'You'd better defer your opinion to a more convenient season,' interrupted he in a low tone — 'here's the vicar.' And, in truth, the vicar was just behind me, plodding homeward from some remote corner of his parish. I immediately released the squire; and he went on his way, saluting Mr. Millward as he passed.

'What! quarrelling, Markham?' cried the latter, addressing himself to me, — 'and about that young widow, I doubt?' he added, reproachfully shaking his head. 'But let me tell you, young man' (here he put his face into mine with an important, confidential air), 'she's not worth it!' and he confirmed the assertion by a solemn nod.

'Mr. Millward,' I exclaimed, in a tone of wrathful menace that made the reverend gentleman look round — aghast — astounded at such unwonted insolence, and stare me in the face, with a look that plainly said, 'What, this to me!' But I was too indignant to apologise, or to speak another word to him: I turned away, and hastened homewards, descending with rapid strides the steep, rough lane, and leaving him to follow as he pleased.

CHAPTER XI

You must suppose about three weeks passed over. Mrs. Graham and I were now established friends — or brother and sister, as we rather chose to consider ourselves. She called me Gilbert, by my express desire, and I called her Helen, for I had seen that name written in her books. I seldom attempted to see her above twice a week; and still I made our meetings appear the result of accident as often as I could — for I found it necessary to be extremely careful — and, altogether, I behaved with such exceeding propriety that she never had occasion to reprove me once. Yet I could not but perceive that she was at times unhappy and dissatisfied with herself or her position, and truly I myself was not quite contented with the latter: this assumption of brotherly nonchalance was very hard to sustain, and I often felt myself a most confounded hypocrite with it all; I saw too, or rather I felt, that, in spite of herself, 'I was not indifferent to her,' as the novel heroes modestly express it, and while I thankfully enjoyed my present good fortune, I could not fail to wish and hope for something better in future; but, of course, I kept such dreams entirely to myself.

'Where are you going, Gilbert?' said Rose, one evening, shortly after tea, when I had been busy with the farm all day.

'To take a walk,' was the reply.

'Do you always brush your hat so carefully, and do your hair so nicely, and put on such smart new gloves when you take a walk?'

'Not always.'

'You're going to Wildfell Hall, aren't you?'

'What makes you think so?'

'Because you look as if you were — but I wish you wouldn't go so often.'

'Nonsense, child! I don't go once in six weeks — what do you mean?'

'Well, but if I were you, I wouldn't have so much to do with Mrs. Graham.'

'Why, Rose, are you, too, giving in to the prevailing opinion?'

'No,' returned she, hesitatingly — 'but I've heard so much about her lately, both at the Wilsons' and the vicarage; — and besides, mamma says, if she were a proper person she would not be living there by herself — and don't you remember last winter, Gilbert, all that about the false name to the picture; and how she explained it — saying she had friends or acquaintances from whom she wished her present residence to be concealed, and that she was afraid of their tracing her out; — and then, how suddenly she started up and left the room when that person came — whom she took good care not to let us catch a glimpse of, and who Arthur, with such an air of mystery, told us was his mamma's friend?'

'Yes, Rose, I remember it all; and I can forgive your uncharitable conclusions; for, perhaps, if I did not know her myself, I should put all these things together, and believe the same as you do; but thank God, I do know her; and I should be unworthy the name of a man, if I could believe anything that was said against her, unless I heard it from her own lips. — I should as soon believe such things of you, Rose.'

'Oh, Gilbert!'

'Well, do you think I could believe anything of the kind, — whatever the Wilsons and Millwards dared to whisper?'

'I should hope not indeed!'

'And why not? — Because I know you — Well, and I know her just as well.'

'Oh, no! you know nothing of her former life; and last year, at this time, you did not know that such a person existed.'

'No matter. There is such a thing as looking through a person's eyes into the heart, and learning more of the height, and breadth, and depth of another's soul in one hour than it might take you a lifetime to discover, if he or she were not disposed to reveal it, or if you had not the sense to understand it.'

'Then you are going to see her this evening?'

'To be sure I am!'

'But what would mamma say, Gilbert!'

'Mamma needn't know.'

'But she must know some time, if you go on.'

'Go on! — there's no going on in the matter. Mrs. Graham and I are two friends — and will be; and no man breathing shall hinder it, — or has a right to interfere between us.'

'But if you knew how they talk you would be more careful, for her sake as well as for your own. Jane Wilson thinks your visits to the old hall but another proof of her depravity — '

'Confound Jane Wilson!'

'And Eliza Millward is quite grieved about you.'

'I hope she is.'

'But I wouldn't, if I were you.'

'Wouldn't what? — How do they know that I go there?'

'There's nothing hid from them: they spy out everything.'

'Oh, I never thought of this! — And so they dare to turn my friendship into food for further scandal against her! — That proves the falsehood of their other lies, at all events, if any proof were wanting. — Mind you contradict them, Rose, whenever you can.'

'But they don't speak openly to me about such things: it is only by hints and innuendoes, and by what I hear others say, that I knew what they think.'

'Well, then, I won't go to-day, as it's getting latish. But oh, deuce take their cursed, envenomed tongues!' I muttered, in the bitterness of my soul.

And just at that moment the vicar entered the room: we had been too much absorbed in our conversation to observe his knock. After his customary cheerful and fatherly greeting of Rose, who was rather a favourite with the old gentleman, he turned somewhat sternly to me: —

'Well, sir!' said he, 'you're quite a stranger. It is — let — me — see,' he continued, slowly, as he deposited his ponderous bulk in the arm-chair that Rose officiously brought towards him; 'it is just — six-weeks — by my reckoning, since you darkened — my — door!' He spoke it with emphasis, and struck his stick on the floor.

'Is it, sir?' said I.

'Ay! It is so!' He added an affirmatory nod, and continued to gaze upon me with a kind of irate solemnity, holding his substantial stick between his knees, with his hands clasped upon its head.

'I have been busy,' I said, for an apology was evidently demanded.

'Busy!' repeated he, derisively.

'Yes, you know I've been getting in my hay; and now the harvest is beginning.'

'Humph!'

Just then my mother came in, and created a diversion in my favour by her loquacious and animated welcome of the reverend guest. She regretted deeply that he had not come a little earlier, in time for tea, but offered to have some immediately prepared, if he would do her the favour to partake of it.

'Not any for me, I thank you,' replied he; 'I shall be at home in a few minutes.'

'Oh, but do stay and take a little! it will be ready in five minutes.'

But he rejected the offer with a majestic wave of the hand.

'I'll tell you what I'll take, Mrs. Markham,' said he: 'I'll take a glass of your excellent ale.'

'With pleasure!' cried my mother, proceeding with alacrity to pull the bell and order the favoured beverage.

'I thought,' continued he, 'I'd just look in upon you as I passed, and taste your home-brewed ale. I've been to call on Mrs. Graham.'

'Have you, indeed?'

He nodded gravely, and added with awful emphasis — 'I thought it incumbent upon me to do so.'

'Really!' ejaculated my mother.

'Why so, Mr. Millward?' asked I.

He looked at me with some severity, and turning again to my mother, repeated, — 'I thought it incumbent upon me!' and struck his stick on the floor again. My mother sat opposite, an awe-struck but admiring auditor.

'"Mrs. Graham," said I,' he continued, shaking his head as he spoke, '"these are terrible reports!" "What, sir?" says she, affecting to be ignorant of my meaning. "It is my — duty — as — your pastor," said I, "to tell you both everything that I myself see reprehensible in your conduct, and all I have reason to suspect, and what others tell me concerning you." — So I told her!'

‘You did, sir?’ cried I, starting from my seat and striking my fist on the table. He merely glanced towards me, and continued — addressing his hostess: —

‘It was a painful duty, Mrs. Markham — but I told her!’

‘And how did she take it?’ asked my mother.

‘Hardened, I fear — hardened!’ he replied, with a despondent shake of the head; ‘and, at the same time, there was a strong display of unchastened, misdirected passions. She turned white in the face, and drew her breath through her teeth in a savage sort of way; — but she offered no extenuation or defence; and with a kind of shameless calmness — shocking indeed to witness in one so young — as good as told me that my remonstrance was unavailing, and my pastoral advice quite thrown away upon her — nay, that my very presence was displeasing while I spoke such things. And I withdrew at length, too plainly seeing that nothing could be done — and sadly grieved to find her case so hopeless. But I am fully determined, Mrs. Markham, that my daughters — shall — not — consort with her. Do you adopt the same resolution with regard to yours! — As for your sons — as for you, young man,’ he continued, sternly turning to me —

‘As for me, sir,’ I began, but checked by some impediment in my utterance, and finding that my whole frame trembled with fury, I said no more, but took the wiser part of snatching up my hat and bolting from the room, slamming the door behind me, with a bang that shook the house to its foundations, and made my mother scream, and gave a momentary relief to my excited feelings.

The next minute saw me hurrying with rapid strides in the direction of Wildfell Hall — to what intent or purpose I could scarcely tell, but I must be moving somewhere, and no other goal would do — I must see her too, and speak to her — that was certain; but what to say, or how to act, I had no definite idea. Such stormy thoughts — so many different resolutions crowded in upon me, that my mind was little better than a chaos of conflicting passions.

CHAPTER XII

In little more than twenty minutes the journey was accomplished. I paused at the gate to wipe my streaming forehead, and recover my breath and some degree of composure. Already the rapid walking had somewhat mitigated my excitement; and with a firm and steady tread I paced the garden-walk. In passing the inhabited wing of the building, I caught a sight of Mrs. Graham, through the open window, slowly pacing up and down her lonely room.

She seemed agitated and even dismayed at my arrival, as if she thought I too was coming to accuse her. I had entered her presence intending to condole with her upon the wickedness of the world, and help her to abuse the vicar and his vile informants, but now I felt positively ashamed to mention the subject, and determined not to refer to it, unless she led the way.

'I am come at an unseasonable hour,' said I, assuming a cheerfulness I did not feel, in order to reassure her; 'but I won't stay many minutes.'

She smiled upon me, faintly it is true, but most kindly — I had almost said thankfully, as her apprehensions were removed.

'How dismal you are, Helen! Why have you no fire?' I said, looking round on the gloomy apartment.

'It is summer yet,' she replied.

'But we always have a fire in the evenings, if we can bear it; and you especially require one in this cold house and dreary room.'

'You should have come a little sooner, and I would have had one lighted for you: but it is not worth while now — you won't stay many minutes, you say, and Arthur is gone to bed.'

'But I have a fancy for a fire, nevertheless. Will you order one, if I ring?'

'Why, Gilbert, you don't look cold!' said she, smilingly regarding my face, which no doubt seemed warm enough.

'No,' replied I, 'but I want to see you comfortable before I go.'

'Me comfortable!' repeated she, with a bitter laugh, as if there were something amusingly absurd in the idea. 'It suits me better as it is,' she added, in a tone of mournful resignation.

But determined to have my own way, I pulled the bell.

'There now, Helen!' I said, as the approaching steps of Rachel were heard in answer to the summons. There was nothing for it but to turn round and desire the maid to light the fire.

I owe Rachel a grudge to this day for the look she cast upon me ere she departed on her mission, the sour, suspicious, inquisitorial look that plainly demanded, 'What are you here for, I wonder?' Her mistress did not fail to notice it, and a shade of uneasiness darkened her brow.

'You must not stay long, Gilbert,' said she, when the door was closed upon us.

‘I’m not going to,’ said I, somewhat testily, though without a grain of anger in my heart against any one but the meddling old woman. ‘But, Helen, I’ve something to say to you before I go.’

‘What is it?’

‘No, not now — I don’t know yet precisely what it is, or how to say it,’ replied I, with more truth than wisdom; and then, fearing lest she should turn me out of the house, I began talking about indifferent matters in order to gain time. Meanwhile Rachel came in to kindle the fire, which was soon effected by thrusting a red-hot poker between the bars of the grate, where the fuel was already disposed for ignition. She honoured me with another of her hard, inhospitable looks in departing, but, little moved thereby, I went on talking; and setting a chair for Mrs. Graham on one side of the hearth, and one for myself on the other, I ventured to sit down, though half suspecting she would rather see me go.

In a little while we both relapsed into silence, and continued for several minutes gazing abstractedly into the fire — she intent upon her own sad thoughts, and I reflecting how delightful it would be to be seated thus beside her with no other presence to restrain our intercourse — not even that of Arthur, our mutual friend, without whom we had never met before — if only I could venture to speak my mind, and disburden my full heart of the feelings that had so long oppressed it, and which it now struggled to retain, with an effort that it seemed impossible to continue much longer, — and revolving the pros and cons for opening my heart to her there and then, and imploring a return of affection, the permission to regard her thenceforth as my own, and the right and the power to defend her from the calumnies of malicious tongues. On the one hand, I felt a new-born confidence in my powers of persuasion — a strong conviction that my own fervour of spirit would grant me eloquence — that my very determination — the absolute necessity for succeeding, that I felt must win me what I sought; while, on the other, I feared to lose the ground I had already gained with so much toil and skill, and destroy all future hope by one rash effort, when time and patience might have won success. It was like setting my life upon the cast of a die; and yet I was ready to resolve upon the attempt. At any rate, I would entreat the explanation she had half promised to give me before; I would demand the reason of this hateful barrier, this mysterious impediment to my happiness, and, as I trusted, to her own.

But while I considered in what manner I could best frame my request, my companion, wakened from her reverie with a scarcely audible sigh, and looking towards the window, where the blood-red harvest moon, just rising over one of the grim, fantastic evergreens, was shining in upon us, said, — ‘Gilbert, it is getting late.’

‘I see,’ said I. ‘You want me to go, I suppose?’

‘I think you ought. If my kind neighbours get to know of this visit — as no doubt they will — they will not turn it much to my advantage.' It was with what the vicar would doubtless have called a savage sort of smile that she said this.

'Let them turn it as they will,' said I. 'What are their thoughts to you or me, so long as we are satisfied with ourselves — and each other. Let them go to the deuce with their vile constructions and their lying inventions!'

This outburst brought a flush of colour to her face.

'You have heard, then, what they say of me?'

'I heard some detestable falsehoods; but none but fools would credit them for a moment, Helen, so don't let them trouble you.'

'I did not think Mr. Millward a fool, and he believes it all; but however little you may value the opinions of those about you — however little you may esteem them as individuals, it is not pleasant to be looked upon as a liar and a hypocrite, to be thought to practise what you abhor, and to encourage the vices you would discountenance, to find your good intentions frustrated, and your hands crippled by your supposed unworthiness, and to bring disgrace on the principles you profess.'

'True; and if I, by my thoughtlessness and selfish disregard to appearances, have at all assisted to expose you to these evils, let me entreat you not only to pardon me, but to enable me to make reparation; authorise me to clear your name from every imputation: give me the right to identify your honour with my own, and to defend your reputation as more precious than my life!'

'Are you hero enough to unite yourself to one whom you know to be suspected and despised by all around you, and identify your interests and your honour with hers? Think! it is a serious thing.'

'I should be proud to do it, Helen! — most happy — delighted beyond expression! — and if that be all the obstacle to our union, it is demolished, and you must — you shall be mine!'

And starting from my seat in a frenzy of ardour, I seized her hand and would have pressed it to my lips, but she as suddenly caught it away, exclaiming in the bitterness of intense affliction, — 'No, no, it is not all!'

'What is it, then? You promised I should know some time, and — '

'You shall know some time — but not now — my head aches terribly,' she said, pressing her hand to her forehead, 'and I must have some repose — and surely I have had misery enough to-day!' she added, almost wildly.

'But it could not harm you to tell it,' I persisted: 'it would ease your mind; and I should then know how to comfort you.'

She shook her head despondingly. 'If you knew all, you, too, would blame me — perhaps even more than I deserve — though I have cruelly wronged you,' she added in a low murmur, as if she mused aloud.

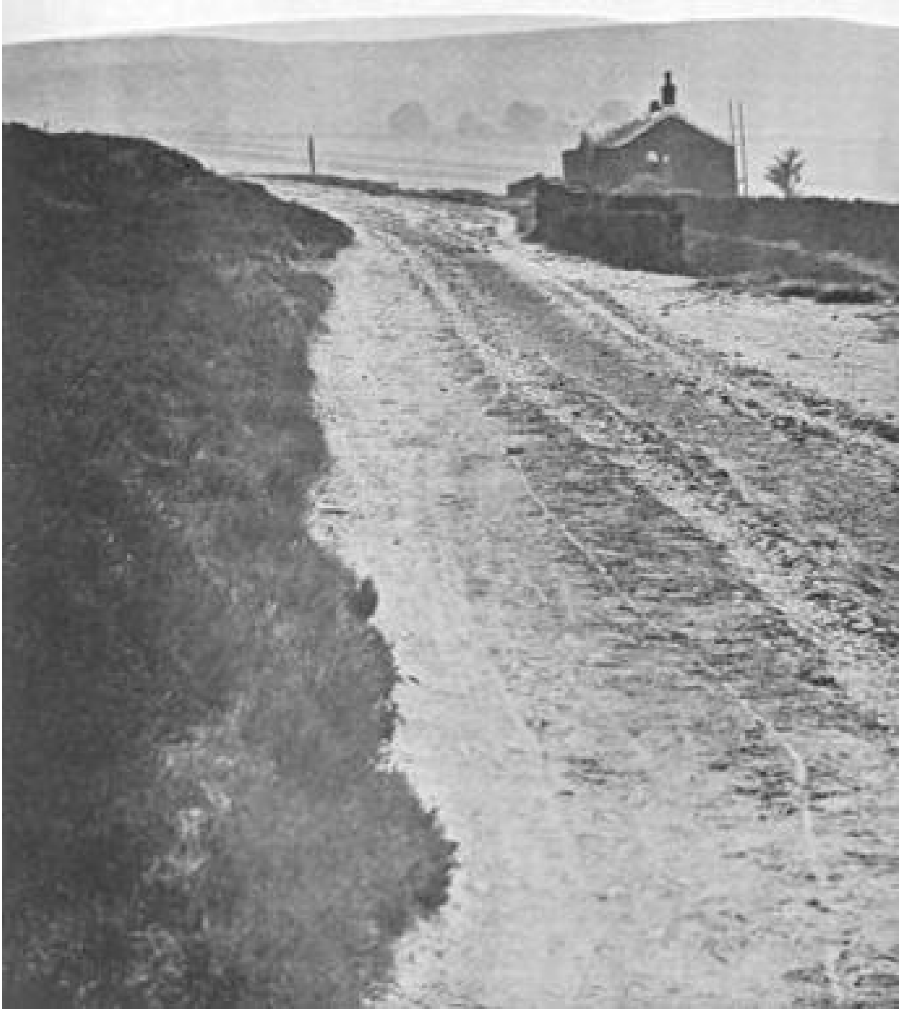
'You, Helen? Impossible?'

'Yes, not willingly; for I did not know the strength and depth of your attachment. I thought — at least I endeavoured to think your regard for me was as cold and fraternal as you professed it to be.'

'Or as yours?'

'Or as mine — ought to have been — of such a light and selfish, superficial nature, that — '

'There, indeed, you wronged me.'



'I know I did; and, sometimes, I suspected it then; but I thought, upon the whole, there could be no great harm in leaving your fancies and your hopes to dream themselves to nothing — or flutter away to some more fitting object, while your friendly sympathies remained with me; but if I had known the depth of your regard, the generous, disinterested affection you seem to feel — '

'Seem, Helen?'

'That you do feel, then, I would have acted differently.'

'How? You could not have given me less encouragement, or treated me with greater severity than you did! And if you think you have wronged me by giving me your friendship, and occasionally admitting me to the enjoyment of your company and conversation, when all hopes of closer intimacy were vain — as indeed you always gave me to understand — if you think you have wronged me by this, you are mistaken; for such favours, in themselves alone, are not only delightful to my heart, but purifying, exalting, ennobling to my soul; and I would rather have your friendship than the love of any other woman in the world!'

Little comforted by this, she clasped her hands upon her knee, and glancing upward, seemed, in silent anguish, to implore divine assistance; then, turning to me, she calmly said, — 'To-morrow, if you meet me on the moor about mid-day, I will tell you all you seek to know; and perhaps you will then see the necessity of discontinuing our intimacy — if, indeed, you do not willingly resign me as one no longer worthy of regard.'

'I can safely answer no to that: you cannot have such grave confessions to make — you must be trying my faith, Helen.'

'No, no, no,' she earnestly repeated — 'I wish it were so! Thank heaven!' she added, 'I have no great crime to confess; but I have more than you will like to hear, or, perhaps, can readily excuse, — and more than I can tell you now; so let me entreat you to leave me!'

'I will; but answer me this one question first; — do you love me?'

'I will not answer it!'

'Then I will conclude you do; and so good-night.'

She turned from me to hide the emotion she could not quite control; but I took her hand and fervently kissed it.

'Gilbert, do leave me!' she cried, in a tone of such thrilling anguish that I felt it would be cruel to disobey.

But I gave one look back before I closed the door, and saw her leaning forward on the table, with her hands pressed against her eyes, sobbing convulsively; yet I withdrew in silence. I felt that to obtrude my consolations on her then would only serve to aggravate her sufferings.

To tell you all the questionings and conjectures — the fears, and hopes, and wild emotions that jostled and chased each other through my mind as I descended the hill, would almost fill a volume in itself. But before I was half-way down, a sentiment of strong sympathy for her I had left behind me had displaced all other feelings, and seemed imperatively to draw me back: I began to think, 'Why am I hurrying so fast in this direction? Can I find comfort or consolation — peace, certainty, contentment, all — or anything that I want at home? and can I leave all perturbation, sorrow, and anxiety behind me there?'

And I turned round to look at the old Hall. There was little besides the chimneys visible above my contracted horizon. I walked back to get a better view of it. When it rose in sight, I stood still a moment to look, and then continued moving towards the gloomy object of attraction. Something called me nearer — nearer still — and why not, pray? Might I not find more benefit in the contemplation of that venerable pile with the full moon in the cloudless heaven shining so calmly above it — with that warm yellow lustre peculiar to an August night — and the mistress of my soul within, than in returning to my home, where all comparatively was light, and life, and cheerfulness, and therefore inimical to me in my present frame of mind, — and the more so that its inmates all were more or less imbued with that detestable belief, the very thought of which made my blood boil in my veins — and how could I endure to hear it openly declared, or cautiously insinuated — which was worse? — I had had trouble enough already, with some babbling fiend that would keep whispering in my ear, 'It may be true,' till I had shouted aloud, 'It is false! I defy you to make me suppose it!'

I could see the red firelight dimly gleaming from her parlour window. I went up to the garden wall, and stood leaning over it, with my eyes fixed upon the lattice, wondering what she was doing, thinking, or suffering now, and wishing I could speak to her but one word, or even catch one glimpse of her, before I went.

I had not thus looked, and wished, and wondered long, before I vaulted over the barrier, unable to resist the temptation of taking one glance through the window, just to see if she were more composed than when we parted; — and if I found her still in deep distress, perhaps I might venture attempt a word of comfort — to utter one of the many things I should have said before, instead of aggravating her sufferings by my stupid impetuosity. I looked. Her chair was vacant: so was the room. But at that moment some one opened the outer door, and a voice — her voice — said, — 'Come out — I want to see the moon, and breathe the evening air: they will do me good — if anything will.'

Here, then, were she and Rachel coming to take a walk in the garden. I wished myself safe back over the wall. I stood, however, in the shadow of the tall holly-bush, which, standing between the window and the porch, at present screened me from observation, but did not prevent me from seeing two figures come forth into the moonlight: Mrs. Graham followed by another — not Rachel, but a young man, slender and rather tall. O heavens, how my temples throbbed! Intense anxiety darkened my sight; but I thought — yes, and the voice confirmed it — it was Mr. Lawrence!

'You should not let it worry you so much, Helen,' said he; 'I will be more cautious in future; and in time — '

I did not hear the rest of the sentence; for he walked close beside her and spoke so gently that I could not catch the words. My heart was splitting with hatred; but I listened intently for her reply. I heard it plainly enough.

'But I must leave this place, Frederick,' she said — 'I never can be happy here, — nor anywhere else, indeed,' she added, with a mirthless laugh, — 'but I cannot rest here.'

'But where could you find a better place?' replied he, 'so secluded — so near me, if you think anything of that.'

'Yes,' interrupted she, 'it is all I could wish, if they could only have left me alone.’

‘But wherever you go, Helen, there will be the same sources of annoyance. I cannot consent to lose you: I must go with you, or come to you; and there are meddling fools elsewhere, as well as here.’

While thus conversing they had sauntered slowly past me, down the walk, and I heard no more of their discourse; but I saw him put his arm round her waist, while she lovingly rested her hand on his shoulder; — and then, a tremulous darkness obscured my sight, my heart sickened and my head burned like fire: I half rushed, half staggered from the spot, where horror had kept me rooted, and leaped or tumbled over the wall — I hardly know which — but I know that, afterwards, like a passionate child, I dashed myself on the ground and lay there in a paroxysm of anger and despair — how long, I cannot undertake to say; but it must have been a considerable time; for when, having partially relieved myself by a torment of tears, and looked up at the moon, shining so calmly and carelessly on, as little influenced by my misery as I was by its peaceful radiance, and earnestly prayed for death or forgetfulness, I had risen and journeyed homewards — little regarding the way, but carried instinctively by my feet to the door, I found it bolted against me, and every one in bed except my mother, who hastened to answer my impatient knocking, and received me with a shower of questions and rebukes.

‘Oh, Gilbert! how could you do so? Where have you been? Do come in and take your supper. I’ve got it all ready, though you don’t deserve it, for keeping me in such a fright, after the strange manner you left the house this evening. Mr. Millward was quite — Bless the boy! how ill he looks. Oh, gracious! what is the matter?’

‘Nothing, nothing — give me a candle.’

‘But won’t you take some supper?’

‘No; I want to go to bed,’ said I, taking a candle and lighting it at the one she held in her hand.

‘Oh, Gilbert, how you tremble!’ exclaimed my anxious parent. ‘How white you look! Do tell me what it is? Has anything happened?’

‘It’s nothing,’ cried I, ready to stamp with vexation because the candle would not light. Then, suppressing my irritation, I added, ‘I’ve been walking too fast, that’s all. Good-night,’ and marched off to bed, regardless of the ‘Walking too fast! where have you been?’ that was called after me from below.

My mother followed me to the very door of my room with her questionings and advice concerning my health and my conduct; but I implored her to let me alone till morning; and she withdrew, and at length I had the satisfaction to hear her close her own door. There was no sleep for me, however, that night as I thought; and instead of attempting to solicit it, I employed myself in rapidly pacing the chamber, having first removed my boots, lest my mother should hear me. But the boards creaked, and she was watchful. I had not walked above a quarter of an hour before she was at the door again.

‘Gilbert, why are you not in bed — you said you wanted to go?’

‘Confound it! I’m going,’ said I.

‘But why are you so long about it? You must have something on your mind — ’

‘For heaven’s sake, let me alone, and get to bed yourself.’

‘Can it be that Mrs. Graham that distresses you so?’

‘No, no, I tell you — it’s nothing.’

‘I wish to goodness it mayn’t,’ murmured she, with a sigh, as she returned to her own apartment, while I threw myself on the bed, feeling most undutifully disaffected towards her for having deprived me of what seemed the only shadow of a consolation that remained, and chained me to that wretched couch of thorns.

Never did I endure so long, so miserable a night as that. And yet it was not wholly sleepless. Towards morning my distracting thoughts began to lose all pretensions to coherency, and shape themselves into confused and feverish dreams, and, at length, there followed an interval of unconscious slumber. But then the dawn of bitter recollection that succeeded — the waking to find life a blank, and worse than a blank, teeming with torment and misery — not a mere barren wilderness, but full of thorns and briers — to find myself deceived, duped, hopeless, my affections trampled upon, my angel not an angel, and my friend a fiend incarnate — it was worse than if I had not slept at all.

It was a dull, gloomy morning; the weather had changed like my prospects, and the rain was pattering against the window. I rose, nevertheless, and went out; not to look after the farm, though that would serve as my excuse, but to cool my brain, and regain, if possible, a sufficient degree of composure to meet the family at the morning meal without exciting inconvenient remarks. If I got a wetting, that, in conjunction with a pretended over-exertion before breakfast, might excuse my sudden loss of appetite; and if a cold ensued, the severer the better — it would help to account for the sullen moods and moping melancholy likely to cloud my brow for long enough.

CHAPTER XIII

‘My dear Gilbert, I wish you would try to be a little more amiable,’ said my mother one morning after some display of unjustifiable ill-humour on my part. ‘You say there is nothing the matter with you, and nothing has happened to grieve you, and yet I never saw anyone so altered as you within these last few days. You haven’t a good word for anybody — friends and strangers, equals and inferiors — it’s all the same. I do wish you’d try to check it.’

‘Check what?’

‘Why, your strange temper. You don’t know how it spoils you. I’m sure a finer disposition than yours by nature could not be, if you’d let it have fair play: so you’ve no excuse that way.’

While she thus remonstrated, I took up a book, and laying it open on the table before me, pretended to be deeply absorbed in its perusal, for I was equally unable to justify myself and unwilling to acknowledge my errors; and I wished to have nothing to say on the matter. But my excellent parent went on lecturing, and then came to coaxing, and began to stroke my hair; and I was getting to feel quite a good boy, but my mischievous brother, who was idling about the room, revived my corruption by suddenly calling out, — ‘Don’t touch him, mother! he’ll bite! He’s a very tiger in human form. I’ve given him up for my part — fairly disowned him — cast him off, root and branch. It’s as much as my life is worth to come within six yards of him. The other day he nearly fractured my skull for singing a pretty, inoffensive love-song, on purpose to amuse him.’

‘Oh, Gilbert! how could you?’ exclaimed my mother.

‘I told you to hold your noise first, you know, Fergus,’ said I.

‘Yes, but when I assured you it was no trouble and went on with the next verse, thinking you might like it better, you clutched me by the shoulder and dashed me away, right against the wall there, with such force that I thought I had bitten my tongue in two, and expected to see the place plastered with my brains; and when I put my hand to my head, and found my skull not broken, I thought it was a miracle, and no mistake. But, poor fellow!’ added he, with a sentimental sigh — ‘his heart’s broken — that’s the truth of it — and his head’s — ’

‘Will you be silent now?’ cried I, starting up, and eyeing the fellow so fiercely that my mother, thinking I meant to inflict some grievous bodily injury, laid her hand on my arm, and besought me to let him alone, and he walked leisurely out, with his hands in his pockets, singing provokingly — ‘Shall I, because a woman’s fair,’ &c.

‘I’m not going to defile my fingers with him,’ said I, in answer to the maternal intercession. ‘I wouldn’t touch him with the tongs.’

I now recollected that I had business with Robert Wilson, concerning the purchase of a certain field adjoining my farm — a business I had been putting off from day to day; for I had no interest in anything now; and besides, I was misanthropically inclined, and, moreover, had a particular objection to meeting Jane Wilson or her mother; for though I had too good reason, now, to credit their reports concerning Mrs. Graham, I did not like them a bit the better for it — or Eliza Millward either — and the thought of meeting them was the more repugnant to me that I could not, now, defy their seeming calumnies and triumph in my own convictions as before. But to-day I determined to make an effort to return to my duty. Though I found no pleasure in it, it would be less irksome than idleness — at all events it would be more profitable. If life promised no enjoyment within my vocation, at least it offered no allurements out of it; and henceforth I would put my shoulder to the wheel and toil away, like any poor drudge of a cart-horse that was fairly broken in to its labour, and plod through life, not wholly useless if not agreeable, and uncomplaining if not contented with my lot.

Thus resolving, with a kind of sullen resignation, if such a term may be allowed, I wended my way to Ryecote Farm, scarcely expecting to find its owner within at this time of day, but hoping to learn in what part of the premises he was most likely to be found.

Absent he was, but expected home in a few minutes; and I was desired to step into the parlour and wait. Mrs. Wilson was busy in the kitchen, but the room was not empty; and I scarcely checked an involuntary recoil as I entered it; for there sat Miss Wilson chattering with Eliza Millward. However, I determined to be cool and civil. Eliza seemed to have made the same resolution on her part. We had not met since the evening of the tea-party; but there was no visible emotion either of pleasure or pain, no attempt at pathos, no display of injured pride: she was cool in temper, civil in demeanour. There was even an ease and cheerfulness about her air and manner that I made no pretension to; but there was a depth of malice in her too expressive eye that plainly told me I was not forgiven; for, though she no longer hoped to win me to herself, she still hated her rival, and evidently delighted to wreak her spite on me. On the other hand, Miss Wilson was as affable and courteous as heart could wish, and though I was in no very conversable humour myself, the two ladies between them managed to keep up a pretty continuous fire of small talk. But Eliza took advantage of the first convenient pause to ask if I had lately seen Mrs. Graham, in a tone of merely casual inquiry, but with a sidelong glance — intended to be playfully mischievous — really, brimful and running over with malice.

‘Not lately,’ I replied, in a careless tone, but sternly repelling her odious glances with my eyes; for I was vexed to feel the colour mounting to my forehead, despite my strenuous efforts to appear unmoved.

‘What! are you beginning to tire already? I thought so noble a creature would have power to attach you for a year at least!’

‘I would rather not speak of her now.’

‘Ah! then you are convinced, at last, of your mistake — you have at length discovered that your divinity is not quite the immaculate — ’

‘I desired you not to speak of her, Miss Eliza.’

‘Oh, I beg your pardon! I perceive Cupid’s arrows have been too sharp for you: the wounds, being more than skin-deep, are not yet healed, and bleed afresh at every mention of the loved one’s name.’

‘Say, rather,’ interposed Miss Wilson, ‘that Mr. Markham feels that name is unworthy to be mentioned in the presence of right-minded females. I wonder, Eliza, you should think of referring to that unfortunate person — you might know the mention of her would be anything but agreeable to any one here present.’

How could this be borne? I rose and was about to clap my hat upon my head and burst away, in wrathful indignation from the house; but recollecting — just in time to save my dignity — the folly of such a proceeding, and how it would only give my fair tormentors a merry laugh at my expense, for the sake of one I acknowledged in my own heart to be unworthy of the slightest sacrifice — though the ghost of my former reverence and love so hung about me still, that I could not bear to hear her name aspersed by others — I merely walked to the window, and having spent a few seconds in vengibly biting my lips and sternly repressing the passionate heavings of my chest, I observed to Miss Wilson, that I could see nothing of her brother, and added that, as my time was precious, it would perhaps be better to call again to-morrow, at some time when I should be sure to find him at home.

‘Oh, no!’ said she; ‘if you wait a minute, he will be sure to come; for he has business at L — ’ (that was our market-town), ‘and will require a little refreshment before he goes.’

I submitted accordingly, with the best grace I could; and, happily, I had not long to wait. Mr. Wilson soon arrived, and, indisposed for business as I was at that moment, and little as I cared for the field or its owner, I forced my attention to the matter in hand, with very creditable determination, and quickly concluded the bargain — perhaps more to the thrifty farmer’s satisfaction than he cared to acknowledge. Then, leaving him to the discussion of his substantial ‘refreshment,’ I gladly quitted the house, and went to look after my reapers.

Leaving them busy at work on the side of the valley, I ascended the hill, intending to visit a corn-field in the more elevated regions, and see when it would be ripe for the sickle. But I did not visit it that day; for, as I approached, I beheld, at no great distance, Mrs. Graham and her son coming down in the opposite direction. They saw me; and Arthur already was running to meet me; but I immediately turned back and walked steadily homeward; for I had fully determined never to encounter his mother again; and regardless of the shrill voice in my ear, calling upon me to ‘wait a moment,’ I pursued the even tenor of my way; and he soon relinquished the pursuit as hopeless, or was called away by his mother. At all events, when I looked back, five minutes after, not a trace of either was to be seen.

This incident agitated and disturbed me most unaccountably — unless you would account for it by saying that Cupid’s arrows not only had been too sharp for me, but they were barbed and deeply rooted, and I had not yet been able to wrench them from my heart. However that be, I was rendered doubly miserable for the remainder of the day.

CHAPTER XIV

Next morning, I bethought me, I, too, had business at L — ; so I mounted my horse, and set forth on the expedition soon after breakfast. It was a dull, drizzly day; but that was no matter: it was all the more suitable to my frame of mind. It was likely to be a lonely journey; for it was no market-day, and the road I traversed was little frequented at any other time; but that suited me all the better too.

As I trotted along, however, chewing the cud of — bitter fancies, I heard another horse at no great distance behind me; but I never conjectured who the rider might be, or troubled my head about him, till, on slackening my pace to ascend a gentle acclivity, or rather, suffering my horse to slacken his pace into a lazy walk — for, rapt in my own reflections, I was letting it jog on as leisurely as it thought proper — I lost ground, and my fellow-traveller overtook me. He accosted me by name, for it was no stranger — it was Mr. Lawrence! Instinctively the fingers of my whip-hand tingled, and grasped their charge with convulsive energy; but I restrained the impulse, and answering his salutation with a nod, attempted to push on; but he pushed on beside me, and began to talk about the weather and the crops. I gave the briefest possible answers to his queries and observations, and fell back. He fell back too, and asked if my horse was lame. I replied with a look, at which he placidly smiled.

I was as much astonished as exasperated at this singular pertinacity and imperturbable assurance on his part. I had thought the circumstances of our last meeting would have left such an impression on his mind as to render him cold and distant ever after: instead of that, he appeared not only to have forgotten all former offences, but to be impenetrable to all present incivilities. Formerly, the slightest hint, or mere fancied coldness in tone or glance, had sufficed to repulse him: now, positive rudeness could not drive him away. Had he heard of my disappointment; and was he come to witness the result, and triumph in my despair? I grasped my whip with more determined energy than before — but still forbore to raise it, and rode on in silence, waiting for some more tangible cause of offence, before I opened the floodgates of my soul and poured out the dammed-up fury that was foaming and swelling within.

‘Markham,’ said he, in his usual quiet tone, ‘why do you quarrel with your friends, because you have been disappointed in one quarter? You have found your hopes defeated; but how am I to blame for it? I warned you beforehand, you know, but you would not — ’

He said no more; for, impelled by some fiend at my elbow, I had seized my whip by the small end, and — swift and sudden as a flash of lightning —

brought the other down upon his head. It was not without a feeling of savage satisfaction that I beheld the instant, deadly pallor that overspread his face, and the few red drops that trickled down his forehead, while he reeled a moment in his saddle, and then fell backward to the ground. The pony, surprised to be so strangely relieved of its burden, started and capered, and kicked a little, and then made use of its freedom to go and crop the grass of the hedge-bank: while its master lay as still and silent as a corpse. Had I killed him? — an icy hand seemed to grasp my heart and check its pulsation, as I bent over him, gazing with breathless intensity upon the ghastly, upturned face. But no; he moved his eyelids and uttered a slight groan. I breathed again — he was only stunned by the fall. It served him right — it would teach him better manners in future. Should I help him to his horse? No. For any other combination of offences I would; but his were too unpardonable. He might mount it himself, if he liked — in a while: already he was beginning to stir and look about him — and there it was for him, quietly browsing on the road-side.

So with a muttered execration I left the fellow to his fate, and clapping spurs to my own horse, galloped away, excited by a combination of feelings it would not be easy to analyse; and perhaps, if I did so, the result would not be very creditable to my disposition; for I am not sure that a species of exultation in what I had done was not one principal concomitant.

Shortly, however, the effervescence began to abate, and not many minutes elapsed before I had turned and gone back to look after the fate of my victim. It was no generous impulse — no kind relentings that led me to this — nor even the fear of what might be the consequences to myself, if I finished my assault upon the squire by leaving him thus neglected, and exposed to further injury; it was, simply, the voice of conscience; and I took great credit to myself for attending so promptly to its dictates — and judging the merit of the deed by the sacrifice it cost, I was not far wrong.

Mr. Lawrence and his pony had both altered their positions in some degree. The pony had wandered eight or ten yards further away; and he had managed, somehow, to remove himself from the middle of the road: I found him seated in a recumbent position on the bank, — looking very white and sickly still, and holding his cambric handkerchief (now more red than white) to his head. It must have been a powerful blow; but half the credit — or the blame of it (which you please) must be attributed to the whip, which was garnished with a massive horse's head of plated metal. The grass, being sodden with rain, afforded the young gentleman a rather inhospitable couch; his clothes were considerably bemired; and his hat was rolling in the mud on the other side of the road. But his thoughts seemed chiefly bent upon his pony, on which he was wistfully gazing — half in helpless anxiety, and half in hopeless abandonment to his fate.

I dismounted, however, and having fastened my own animal to the nearest tree, first picked up his hat, intending to clap it on his head; but either he considered his head unfit for a hat, or the hat, in its present condition, unfit for his head; for shrinking away the one, he took the other from my hand, and scornfully cast it aside.

‘It’s good enough for you,’ I muttered.

My next good office was to catch his pony and bring it to him, which was soon accomplished; for the beast was quiet enough in the main, and only winced and flirted a trifle till I got hold of the bridle — but then, I must see him in the saddle.

‘Here, you fellow — scoundrel — dog — give me your hand, and I’ll help you to mount.’

No; he turned from me in disgust. I attempted to take him by the arm. He shrank away as if there had been contamination in my touch.

‘What, you won’t! Well! you may sit there till doomsday, for what I care. But I suppose you don’t want to lose all the blood in your body — I’ll just condescend to bind that up for you.’

‘Let me alone, if you please.’

‘Humph; with all my heart. You may go to the d — l, if you choose — and say I sent you.’

But before I abandoned him to his fate I flung his pony’s bridle over a stake in the hedge, and threw him my handkerchief, as his own was now saturated with blood. He took it and cast it back to me in abhorrence and contempt, with all the strength he could muster. It wanted but this to fill the measure of his offences. With execrations not loud but deep I left him to live or die as he could, well satisfied that I had done my duty in attempting to save him — but forgetting how I had erred in bringing him into such a condition, and how insultingly my after-services had been offered — and sullenly prepared to meet the consequences if he should choose to say I had attempted to murder him — which I thought not unlikely, as it seemed probable he was actuated by such spiteful motives in so perseveringly refusing my assistance.

Having remounted my horse, I just looked back to see how he was getting on, before I rode away. He had risen from the ground, and grasping his pony’s mane, was attempting to resume his seat in the saddle; but scarcely had he put his foot in the stirrup, when a sickness or dizziness seemed to overpower him: he leant forward a moment, with his head drooped on the animal’s back, and then made one more effort, which proving ineffectual, he sank back on the bank, where I left him, reposing his head on the oozy turf, and to all appearance, as calmly reclining as if he had been taking his rest on his sofa at home.

I ought to have helped him in spite of himself — to have bound up the wound he was unable to staunch, and insisted upon getting him on his horse and seeing him safe home; but, besides my bitter indignation against himself, there was the question what to say to his servants — and what to my own family. Either I should have to acknowledge the deed, which would set me down as a madman, unless I acknowledged the motive too — and that seemed impossible — or I must get up a lie, which seemed equally out of the question — especially as Mr. Lawrence would probably reveal the whole truth, and thereby bring me to tenfold disgrace — unless I were villain enough, presuming on the absence of witnesses, to persist in my own version of the case, and make him out a still greater scoundrel than he was. No; he had only received a cut above the temple, and perhaps a few bruises from the fall, or the hoofs of his own pony: that could not kill him if he lay there half the day; and, if he could not help himself, surely some one would be coming by: it would be impossible that a whole day should pass and no one traverse the road but ourselves. As for what he might choose to say hereafter, I would take my chance about it: if he told lies, I would contradict him; if he told the truth, I would bear it as best I could. I was not obliged to enter into explanations further than I thought proper. Perhaps he might choose to be silent on the subject, for fear of raising inquiries as to the cause of the quarrel, and drawing the public attention to his connection with Mrs. Graham, which, whether for her sake or his own, he seemed so very desirous to conceal.

Thus reasoning, I trotted away to the town, where I duly transacted my business, and performed various little commissions for my mother and Rose, with very laudable exactitude, considering the different circumstances of the case. In returning home, I was troubled with sundry misgivings about the unfortunate Lawrence. The question, What if I should find him lying still on the damp earth, fairly dying of cold and exhaustion — or already stark and chill? thrust itself most unpleasantly upon my mind, and the appalling possibility pictured itself with painful vividness to my imagination as I approached the spot where I had left him. But no, thank heaven, both man and horse were gone, and nothing was left to witness against me but two objects — unpleasant enough in themselves to be sure, and presenting a very ugly, not to say murderous appearance — in one place, the hat saturated with rain and coated with mud, indented and broken above the brim by that villainous whip-handle; in another, the crimson handkerchief, soaking in a deeply tinctured pool of water — for much rain had fallen in the interim.

Bad news flies fast: it was hardly four o'clock when I got home, but my mother gravely accosted me with — 'Oh, Gilbert! — Such an accident! Rose has been shopping in the village, and she's heard that Mr. Lawrence has been thrown from his horse and brought home dying!'

This shocked me a trifle, as you may suppose; but I was comforted to hear that he had frightfully fractured his skull and broken a leg; for, assured of the falsehood of this, I trusted the rest of the story was equally exaggerated; and when I heard my mother and sister so feelingly deploring his condition, I had considerable difficulty in preventing myself from telling them the real extent of the injuries, as far as I knew them.

'You must go and see him to-morrow,' said my mother.

'Or to-day,' suggested Rose: 'there's plenty of time; and you can have the pony, as your horse is tired. Won't you, Gilbert — as soon as you've had something to eat?'

'No, no — how can we tell that it isn't all a false report? It's highly im-'

'Oh, I'm sure it isn't; for the village is all alive about it; and I saw two people that had seen others that had seen the man that found him. That sounds far-fetched; but it isn't so when you think of it.'

'Well, but Lawrence is a good rider; it is not likely he would fall from his horse at all; and if he did, it is highly improbable he would break his bones in that way. It must be a gross exaggeration at least.'

'No; but the horse kicked him — or something.'

'What, his quiet little pony?'

'How do you know it was that?'

'He seldom rides any other.'

'At any rate,' said my mother, 'you will call to-morrow. Whether it be true or false, exaggerated or otherwise, we shall like to know how he is.'

'Fergus may go.'

'Why not you?'

'He has more time. I am busy just now.'

'Oh! but, Gilbert, how can you be so composed about it? You won't mind business for an hour or two in a case of this sort, when your friend is at the point of death.'

'He is not, I tell you.'

'For anything you know, he may be: you can't tell till you have seen him. At all events, he must have met with some terrible accident, and you ought to see him: he'll take it very unkind if you don't.'

'Confound it! I can't. He and I have not been on good terms of late.'

'Oh, my dear boy! Surely, surely you are not so unforgiving as to carry your little differences to such a length as — '

'Little differences, indeed!' I muttered.

'Well, but only remember the occasion. Think how — '

'Well, well, don't bother me now — I'll see about it,' I replied.

And my seeing about it was to send Fergus next morning, with my mother's compliments, to make the requisite inquiries; for, of course, my going was out of the question — or sending a message either. He brought back intelligence that the young squire was laid up with the complicated evils of a broken head and certain contusions (occasioned by a fall — of which he did not trouble himself to relate the particulars — and the subsequent misconduct of his horse), and a severe cold, the consequence of lying on the wet ground in the rain; but there were no broken bones, and no immediate prospects of dissolution.

It was evident, then, that for Mrs. Graham's sake it was not his intention to criminate me.

CHAPTER XV

That day was rainy like its predecessor; but towards evening it began to clear up a little, and the next morning was fair and promising. I was out on the hill with the reapers. A light wind swept over the corn, and all nature laughed in the sunshine. The lark was rejoicing among the silvery floating clouds. The late rain had so sweetly freshened and cleared the air, and washed the sky, and left such glittering gems on branch and blade, that not even the farmers could have the heart to blame it. But no ray of sunshine could reach my heart, no breeze could freshen it; nothing could fill the void my faith, and hope, and joy in Helen Graham had left, or drive away the keen regrets and bitter dregs of lingering love that still oppressed it.

While I stood with folded arms abstractedly gazing on the undulating swell of the corn, not yet disturbed by the reapers, something gently pulled my skirts, and a small voice, no longer welcome to my ears, aroused me with the startling words, — 'Mr. Markham, mamma wants you.'

'Wants me, Arthur?'

'Yes. Why do you look so queer?' said he, half laughing, half frightened at the unexpected aspect of my face in suddenly turning towards him, — 'and why have you kept so long away? Come! Won't you come?'

'I'm busy just now,' I replied, scarce knowing what to answer.

He looked up in childish bewilderment; but before I could speak again the lady herself was at my side.

'Gilbert, I must speak with you!' said she, in a tone of suppressed vehemence.

I looked at her pale cheek and glittering eye, but answered nothing.

'Only for a moment,' pleaded she. 'Just step aside into this other field.' She glanced at the reapers, some of whom were directing looks of impertinent curiosity towards her. 'I won't keep you a minute.'

I accompanied her through the gap.

'Arthur, darling, run and gather those bluebells,' said she, pointing to some that were gleaming at some distance under the hedge along which we walked. The child hesitated, as if unwilling to quit my side. 'Go, love!' repeated she more urgently, and in a tone which, though not unkind, demanded prompt obedience, and obtained it.

'Well, Mrs. Graham?' said I, calmly and coldly; for, though I saw she was miserable, and pitied her, I felt glad to have it in my power to torment her.

She fixed her eyes upon me with a look that pierced me to the heart; and yet it made me smile.

'I don't ask the reason of this change, Gilbert,' said she, with bitter calmness: 'I know it too well; but though I could see myself suspected and condemned by every one else, and bear it with calmness, I cannot endure it from you. — Why did you not come to hear my explanation on the day I appointed to give it?'

'Because I happened, in the interim, to learn all you would have told me — and a trifle more, I imagine.'

'Impossible, for I would have told you all!' cried she, passionately — 'but I won't now, for I see you are not worthy of it!'

And her pale lips quivered with agitation.

'Why not, may I ask?'

She repelled my mocking smile with a glance of scornful indignation.

'Because you never understood me, or you would not soon have listened to my traducers — my confidence would be misplaced in you — you are not the man I thought you. Go! I won't care what you think of me.'

She turned away, and I went; for I thought that would torment her as much as anything; and I believe I was right; for, looking back a minute after, I saw her turn half round, as if hoping or expecting to find me still beside her; and then she stood still, and cast one look behind. It was a look less expressive of anger than of bitter anguish and despair; but I immediately assumed an aspect of indifference, and affected to be gazing carelessly around me, and I suppose she went on; for after lingering awhile to see if she would come back or call, I ventured one more glance, and saw her a good way off, moving rapidly up the field, with little Arthur running by her side and apparently talking as he went; but she kept her face averted from him, as if to hide some uncontrollable emotion. And I returned to my business.

But I soon began to regret my precipitancy in leaving her so soon. It was evident she loved me — probably she was tired of Mr. Lawrence, and wished to exchange him for me; and if I had loved and reverenced her less to begin with, the preference might have gratified and amused me; but now the contrast between her outward seeming and her inward mind, as I supposed, — between my former and my present opinion of her, was so harrowing — so distressing to my feelings, that it swallowed up every lighter consideration.

But still I was curious to know what sort of an explanation she would have given me — or would give now, if I pressed her for it — how much she would confess, and how she would endeavour to excuse herself. I longed to know what to despise, and what to admire in her; how much to pity, and how much to hate; — and, what was more, I would know. I would see her once more, and fairly satisfy myself in what light to regard her, before we parted. Lost to me she was, for ever, of course; but still I could not bear to think that we had parted, for the last time, with so much unkindness and misery on both sides. That last look of hers had sunk into my heart; I could not forget it. But what a fool I was! Had she not deceived me, injured me — blighted my happiness for life? 'Well, I'll see her, however,' was my concluding resolve, 'but not to-day: to-day and to-night she may think upon her sins, and be as miserable as she will: to-morrow I will see her once again, and know something more about her. The interview may be serviceable to her, or it may not. At any rate, it will give a breath of excitement to the life she has doomed to stagnation, and may calm with certainty some agitating thoughts.'

I did go on the morrow, but not till towards evening, after the business of the day was concluded, that is, between six and seven; and the westering sun was gleaming redly on the old Hall, and flaming in the latticed windows, as I reached it, imparting to the place a cheerfulness not its own. I need not dilate upon the feelings with which I approached the shrine of my former divinity — that spot teeming with a thousand delightful recollections and glorious dreams — all darkened now by one disastrous truth

Rachel admitted me into the parlour, and went to call her mistress, for she was not there: but there was her desk left open on the little round table beside the high-backed chair, with a book laid upon it. Her limited but choice collection of books was almost as familiar to me as my own; but this volume I had not seen before. I took it up. It was Sir Humphry Davy's 'Last Days of a Philosopher,' and on the first leaf was written, 'Frederick Lawrence.' I closed the book, but kept it in my hand, and stood facing the door, with my back to the fire-place, calmly waiting her arrival; for I did not doubt she would come. And soon I heard her step in the hall. My heart was beginning to throb, but I checked it with an internal rebuke, and maintained my composure — outwardly at least. She entered, calm, pale, collected.

'To what am I indebted for this favour, Mr. Markham?' said she, with such severe but quiet dignity as almost disconcerted me; but I answered with a smile, and impudently enough, —

'Well, I am come to hear your explanation.'

'I told you I would not give it,' said she. 'I said you were unworthy of my confidence.'

'Oh, very well,' replied I, moving to the door.

'Stay a moment,' said she. 'This is the last time I shall see you: don't go just yet.'

I remained, awaiting her further commands.

'Tell me,' resumed she, 'on what grounds you believe these things against me; who told you; and what did they say?'

I paused a moment. She met my eye as unflinchingly as if her bosom had been steeled with conscious innocence. She was resolved to know the worst, and determined to dare it too. 'I can crush that bold spirit,' thought I. But while I secretly exulted in my power, I felt disposed to dally with my victim like a cat. Showing her the book that I still held, in my hand, and pointing to the name on the fly-leaf, but fixing my eye upon her face, I asked, — 'Do you know that gentleman?'

'Of course I do,' replied she; and a sudden flush suffused her features — whether of shame or anger I could not tell: it rather resembled the latter. 'What next, sir?'

‘How long is it since you saw him?’

‘Who gave you the right to catechize me on this or any other subject?’

‘Oh, no one! — it’s quite at your option whether to answer or not. And now, let me ask — have you heard what has lately befallen this friend of yours? — because, if you have not — ’

‘I will not be insulted, Mr. Markham!’ cried she, almost infuriated at my manner. ‘So you had better leave the house at once, if you came only for that.’

‘I did not come to insult you: I came to hear your explanation.’

‘And I tell you I won’t give it!’ retorted she, pacing the room in a state of strong excitement, with her hands clasped tightly together, breathing short, and flashing fires of indignation from her eyes. ‘I will not condescend to explain myself to one that can make a jest of such horrible suspicions, and be so easily led to entertain them.’

‘I do not make a jest of them, Mrs. Graham,’ returned I, dropping at once my tone of taunting sarcasm. ‘I heartily wish I could find them a jesting matter. And as to being easily led to suspect, God only knows what a blind, incredulous fool I have hitherto been, perseveringly shutting my eyes and stopping my ears against everything that threatened to shake my confidence in you, till proof itself confounded my infatuation!’

‘What proof, sir?’

‘Well, I’ll tell you. You remember that evening when I was here last?’

‘I do.’

‘Even then you dropped some hints that might have opened the eyes of a wiser man; but they had no such effect upon me: I went on trusting and believing, hoping against hope, and adoring where I could not comprehend. It so happened, however, that after I left you I turned back — drawn by pure depth of sympathy and ardour of affection — not daring to intrude my presence openly upon you, but unable to resist the temptation of catching one glimpse through the window, just to see how you were: for I had left you apparently in great affliction, and I partly blamed my own want of forbearance and discretion as the cause of it. If I did wrong, love alone was my incentive, and the punishment was severe enough; for it was just as I had reached that tree, that you came out into the garden with your friend. Not choosing to show myself, under the circumstances, I stood still, in the shadow, till you had both passed by.’

‘And how much of our conversation did you hear?’

‘I heard quite enough, Helen. And it was well for me that I did hear it; for nothing less could have cured my infatuation. I always said and thought, that I would never believe a word against you, unless I heard it from your own lips. All the hints and affirmations of others I treated as malignant, baseless slanders; your own self-accusations I believed to be overstrained; and all that seemed unaccountable in your position I trusted that you could account for if you chose.’

Mrs. Graham had discontinued her walk. She leant against one end of the chimney-piece, opposite that near which I was standing, with her chin resting on her closed hand, her eyes — no longer burning with anger, but gleaming with restless excitement — sometimes glancing at me while I spoke, then coursing the opposite wall, or fixed upon the carpet.

'You should have come to me after all,' said she, 'and heard what I had to say in my own justification. It was ungenerous and wrong to withdraw yourself so secretly and suddenly, immediately after such ardent protestations of attachment, without ever assigning a reason for the change. You should have told me all-no matter how bitterly. It would have been better than this silence.'

'To what end should I have done so? You could not have enlightened me further, on the subject which alone concerned me; nor could you have made me discredit the evidence of my senses. I desired our intimacy to be discontinued at once, as you yourself had acknowledged would probably be the case if I knew all; but I did not wish to upbraid you, — though (as you also acknowledged) you had deeply wronged me. Yes, you have done me an injury you can never repair — or any other either — you have blighted the freshness and promise of youth, and made my life a wilderness! I might live a hundred years, but I could never recover from the effects of this withering blow — and never forget it! Hereafter — You smile, Mrs. Graham,' said I, suddenly stopping short, checked in my passionate declamation by unutterable feelings to behold her actually smiling at the picture of the ruin she had wrought.

'Did I?' replied she, looking seriously up; 'I was not aware of it. If I did, it was not for pleasure at the thoughts of the harm I had done you. Heaven knows I have had torment enough at the bare possibility of that; it was for joy to find that you had some depth of soul and feeling after all, and to hope that I had not been utterly mistaken in your worth. But smiles and tears are so alike with me, they are neither of them confined to any particular feelings: I often cry when I am happy, and smile when I am sad.'

She looked at me again, and seemed to expect a reply; but I continued silent.

'Would you be very glad,' resumed she, 'to find that you were mistaken in your conclusions?'

'How can you ask it, Helen?'

'I don't say I can clear myself altogether,' said she, speaking low and fast, while her heart beat visibly and her bosom heaved with excitement, — 'but would you be glad to discover I was better than you think me?'

'Anything that could in the least degree tend to restore my former opinion of you, to excuse the regard I still feel for you, and alleviate the pangs of unutterable regret that accompany it, would be only too gladly, too eagerly received!' Her cheeks burned, and her whole frame trembled, now, with excess of agitation. She did not speak, but flew to her desk, and snatching thence what seemed a thick album or manuscript volume, hastily tore away a few leaves from the end, and thrust the rest into my hand, saying, ‘You needn’t read it all; but take it home with you,’ and hurried from the room. But when I had left the house, and was proceeding down the walk, she opened the window and called me back. It was only to say, — ‘Bring it back when you have read it; and don’t breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being. I trust to your honour.’

Before I could answer she had closed the casement and turned away. I saw her cast herself back in the old oak chair, and cover her face with her hands. Her feelings had been wrought to a pitch that rendered it necessary to seek relief in tears.

Panting with eagerness, and struggling to suppress my hopes, I hurried home, and rushed up-stairs to my room, having first provided myself with a candle, though it was scarcely twilight yet — then, shut and bolted the door, determined to tolerate no interruption; and sitting down before the table, opened out my prize and delivered myself up to its perusal — first hastily turning over the leaves and snatching a sentence here and there, and then setting myself steadily to read it through.

I have it now before me; and though you could not, of course, peruse it with half the interest that I did, I know you would not be satisfied with an abbreviation of its contents, and you shall have the whole, save, perhaps, a few passages here and there of merely temporary interest to the writer, or such as would serve to encumber the story rather than elucidate it. It begins somewhat abruptly, thus — but we will reserve its commencement for another chapter.

CHAPTER XVI

June 1st, 1821. — We have just returned to Staningley — that is, we returned some days ago, and I am not yet settled, and feel as if I never should be. We left town sooner than was intended, in consequence of my uncle's indisposition; — I wonder what would have been the result if we had stayed the full time. I am quite ashamed of my new-sprung distaste for country life. All my former occupations seem so tedious and dull, my former amusements so insipid and unprofitable. I cannot enjoy my music, because there is no one to hear it. I cannot enjoy my walks, because there is no one to meet. I cannot enjoy my books, because they have not power to arrest my attention: my head is so haunted with the recollections of the last few weeks, that I cannot attend to them. My drawing suits me best, for I can draw and think at the same time; and if my productions cannot now be seen by any one but myself, and those who do not care about them, they, possibly, may be, hereafter. But, then, there is one face I am always trying to paint or to sketch, and always without success; and that vexes me. As for the owner of that face, I cannot get him out of my mind — and, indeed, I never try. I wonder whether he ever thinks of me; and I wonder whether I shall ever see him again. And then might follow a train of other wonderments — questions for time and fate to answer — concluding with — Supposing all the rest be answered in the affirmative, I wonder whether I shall ever repent it? as my aunt would tell me I should, if she knew what I was thinking about.

How distinctly I remember our conversation that evening before our departure for town, when we were sitting together over the fire, my uncle having gone to bed with a slight attack of the gout.

'Helen,' said she, after a thoughtful silence, 'do you ever think about marriage?'

'Yes, aunt, often.'

'And do you ever contemplate the possibility of being married yourself, or engaged, before the season is over?'

'Sometimes; but I don't think it at all likely that I ever shall.'

'Why so?'

'Because, I imagine, there must be only a very, very few men in the world that I should like to marry; and of those few, it is ten to one I may never be acquainted with one; or if I should, it is twenty to one he may not happen to be single, or to take a fancy to me.'

'That is no argument at all. It may be very true — and I hope is true, that there are very few men whom you would choose to marry, of yourself. It is not, indeed, to be supposed that you would wish to marry any one till you were asked: a girl's affections should never be won unsought. But when they are sought — when the citadel of the heart is fairly besieged — it is apt to surrender sooner than the owner is aware of, and often against her better judgment, and in opposition to all her preconceived ideas of what she could have loved, unless she be extremely careful and discreet. Now, I want to warn you, Helen, of these things, and to exhort you to be watchful and circumspect from the very commencement of your career, and not to suffer your heart to be stolen from you by the first foolish or unprincipled person that covets the possession of it. — You know, my dear, you are only just eighteen; there is plenty of time before you, and neither your uncle nor I are in any hurry to get you off our hands, and I may venture to say, there will be no lack of suitors; for you can boast a good family, a pretty considerable fortune and expectations, and, I may as well tell you likewise — for, if I don't, others will — that you have a fair share of beauty besides — and I hope you may never have cause to regret it!'

'I hope not, aunt; but why should you fear it?'

'Because, my dear, beauty is that quality which, next to money, is generally the most attractive to the worst kinds of men; and, therefore, it is likely to entail a great deal of trouble on the possessor.'

'Have you been troubled in that way, aunt?'

'No, Helen,' said she, with reproachful gravity, 'but I know many that have; and some, through carelessness, have been the wretched victims of deceit; and some, through weakness, have fallen into snares and temptations terrible to relate.'

'Well, I shall be neither careless nor weak.'

'Remember Peter, Helen! Don't boast, but watch. Keep a guard over your eyes and ears as the inlets of your heart, and over your lips as the outlet, lest they betray you in a moment of unwariness. Receive, coldly and dispassionately, every attention, till you have ascertained and duly considered the worth of the aspirant; and let your affections be consequent upon approbation alone. First study; then approve; then love. Let your eyes be blind to all external attractions, your ears deaf to all the fascinations of flattery and light discourse. — These are nothing — and worse than nothing — snares and wiles of the tempter, to lure the thoughtless to their own destruction. Principle is the first thing, after all; and next to that, good sense, respectability, and moderate wealth. If you should marry the handsomest, and most accomplished and superficially agreeable man in the world, you little know the misery that would overwhelm you if, after all, you should find him to be a worthless reprobate, or even an impracticable fool.'

'But what are all the poor fools and reprobates to do, aunt? If everybody followed your advice, the world would soon come to an end.'

'Never fear, my dear! the male fools and reprobates will never want for partners, while there are so many of the other sex to match them; but do you follow my advice. And this is no subject for jesting, Helen — I am sorry to see you treat the matter in that light way. Believe me, matrimony is a serious thing.' And she spoke it so seriously, that one might have fancied she had known it to her cost; but I asked no more impertinent questions, and merely answered, — 'I know it is; and I know there is truth and sense in what you say; but you need not fear me, for I not only should think it wrong to marry a man that was deficient in sense or in principle, but I should never be tempted to do it; for I could not like him, if he were ever so handsome, and ever so charming, in other respects; I should hate him — despise him — pity him — anything but love him. My affections not only ought to be founded on approbation, but they will and must be so: for, without approving, I cannot love. It is needless to say, I ought to be able to respect and honour the man I marry, as well as love him, for I cannot love him without. So set your mind at rest.'

'I hope it may be so,' answered she.

'I know it is so,' persisted I.

'You have not been tried yet, Helen — we can but hope,' said she in her cold, cautious way.

'I was vexed at her incredulity; but I am not sure her doubts were entirely without sagacity; I fear I have found it much easier to remember her advice than to profit by it; — indeed, I have sometimes been led to question the soundness of her doctrines on those subjects. Her counsels may be good, as far as they go — in the main points at least; — but there are some things she has overlooked in her calculations. I wonder if she was ever in love.

I commenced my career — or my first campaign, as my uncle calls it — kindling with bright hopes and fancies — chiefly raised by this conversation — and full of confidence in my own discretion. At first, I was delighted with the novelty and excitement of our London life; but soon I began to weary of its mingled turbulence and constraint, and sigh for the freshness and freedom of home. My new acquaintances, both male and female, disappointed my expectations, and vexed and depressed me by turns; for I soon grew tired of studying their peculiarities, and laughing at their foibles — particularly as I was obliged to keep my criticisms to myself, for my aunt would not hear them — and they — the ladies especially — appeared so provokingly mindless, and heartless, and artificial. The gentlemen seemed better, but, perhaps, it was because I knew them less — perhaps, because they flattered me; but I did not fall in love with any of them; and, if their attentions pleased me one moment, they provoked me the next, because they put me out of humour with myself, by revealing my vanity and making me fear I was becoming like some of the ladies I so heartily despised.

There was one elderly gentleman that annoyed me very much; a rich old friend of my uncle's, who, I believe, thought I could not do better than marry him; but, besides being old, he was ugly and disagreeable, — and wicked, I am sure, though my aunt scolded me for saying so; but she allowed he was no saint. And there was another, less hateful, but still more tiresome, because she favoured him, and was always thrusting him upon me, and sounding his praises in my ears — Mr. Boarham by name, Bore'em, as I prefer spelling it, for a terrible bore he was: I shudder still at the remembrance of his voice — drone, drone, drone, in my ear — while he sat beside me, prosing away by the half-hour together, and beguiling himself with the notion that he was improving my mind by useful information, or impressing his dogmas upon me and reforming my errors of judgment, or perhaps that he was talking down to my level, and amusing me with entertaining discourse. Yet he was a decent man enough in the main, I daresay; and if he had kept his distance, I never would have hated him. As it was, it was almost impossible to help it, for he not only bothered me with the infliction of his own presence, but he kept me from the enjoyment of more agreeable society.

One night, however, at a ball, he had been more than usually tormenting, and my patience was quite exhausted. It appeared as if the whole evening was fated to be insupportable: I had just had one dance with an empty-headed coxcomb, and then Mr. Boarham had come upon me and seemed determined to cling to me for the rest of the night. He never danced himself, and there he sat, poking his head in my face, and impressing all beholders with the idea that he was a confirmed, acknowledged lover; my aunt looking complacently on all the time, and wishing him God-speed. In vain I attempted to drive him away by giving a loose to my exasperated feelings, even to positive rudeness: nothing could convince him that his presence was disagreeable. Sullen silence was taken for rapt attention, and gave him greater room to talk; sharp answers were received as smart sallies of girlish vivacity, that only required an indulgent rebuke; and flat contradictions were but as oil to the flames, calling forth new strains of argument to support his dogmas, and bringing down upon me endless floods of reasoning to overwhelm me with conviction.

But there was one present who seemed to have a better appreciation of my frame of mind. A gentleman stood by, who had been watching our conference for some time, evidently much amused at my companion's remorseless pertinacity and my manifest annoyance, and laughing to himself at the asperity and uncompromising spirit of my replies. At length, however, he withdrew, and went to the lady of the house, apparently for the purpose of asking an introduction to me, for, shortly after, they both came up, and she introduced him as Mr. Huntingdon, the son of a late friend of my uncle's. He asked me to dance. I gladly consented, of course; and he was my companion during the remainder of my stay, which was not long, for my aunt, as usual, insisted upon an early departure.

I was sorry to go, for I had found my new acquaintance a very lively and entertaining companion. There was a certain graceful ease and freedom about all he said and did, that gave a sense of repose and expansion to the mind, after so much constraint and formality as I had been doomed to suffer. There might be, it is true, a little too much careless boldness in his manner and address, but I was in so good a humour, and so grateful for my late deliverance from Mr. Boarham, that it did not anger me.

‘Well, Helen, how do you like Mr. Boarham now?’ said my aunt, as we took our seats in the carriage and drove away.

‘Worse than ever,’ I replied.

She looked displeased, but said no more on that subject.

‘Who was the gentleman you danced with last,’ resumed she, after a pause — ‘that was so officious in helping you on with your shawl?’

‘He was not officious at all, aunt: he never attempted to help me till he saw Mr. Boarham coming to do so; and then he stepped laughingly forward and said, “Come, I’ll preserve you from that infliction.”’

‘Who was it, I ask?’ said she, with frigid gravity.

‘It was Mr. Huntingdon, the son of uncle’s old friend.’

‘I have heard your uncle speak of young Mr. Huntingdon. I’ve heard him say, “He’s a fine lad, that young Huntingdon, but a bit wildish, I fancy.” So I’d have you beware.’

‘What does “a bit wildish” mean?’ I inquired.

‘It means destitute of principle, and prone to every vice that is common to youth.’

‘But I’ve heard uncle say he was a sad wild fellow himself, when he was young.’

She sternly shook her head.

‘He was jesting then, I suppose,’ said I, ‘and here he was speaking at random — at least, I cannot believe there is any harm in those laughing blue eyes.’

‘False reasoning, Helen!’ said she, with a sigh.

‘Well, we ought to be charitable, you know, aunt — besides, I don’t think it is false: I am an excellent physiognomist, and I always judge of people’s characters by their looks — not by whether they are handsome or ugly, but by the general cast of the countenance. For instance, I should know by your countenance that you were not of a cheerful, sanguine disposition; and I should know by Mr. Wilmot’s, that he was a worthless old reprobate; and by Mr. Boarham’s, that he was not an agreeable companion; and by Mr. Huntingdon’s, that he was neither a fool nor a knave, though, possibly, neither a sage nor a saint — but that is no matter to me, as I am not likely to meet him again — unless as an occasional partner in the ball-room.’

It was not so, however, for I met him again next morning. He came to call upon my uncle, apologising for not having done so before, by saying he was only lately returned from the Continent, and had not heard, till the previous night, of my uncle’s arrival in town; and after that I often met him; sometimes in public, sometimes at home; for he was very assiduous in paying his respects to his old friend, who did not, however, consider himself greatly obliged by the attention.

‘I wonder what the deuce the lad means by coming so often,’ he would say, — ‘can you tell, Helen? — Hey? He wants none o’ my company, nor I his — that’s certain.’

‘I wish you’d tell him so, then,’ said my aunt.

‘Why, what for? If I don’t want him, somebody does, mayhap’ (winking at me). ‘Besides, he’s a pretty tidy fortune, Peggy, you know — not such a catch as Wilmot; but then Helen won’t hear of that match: for, somehow, these old chaps don’t go down with the girls — with all their money, and their experience to boot. I’ll bet anything she’d rather have this young fellow without a penny, than Wilmot with his house full of gold. Wouldn’t you, Nell?’

‘Yes, uncle; but that’s not saying much for Mr. Huntingdon; for I’d rather be an old maid and a pauper than Mrs. Wilmot.’

‘And Mrs. Huntingdon? What would you rather be than Mrs. Huntingdon — eh?’

‘I’ll tell you when I’ve considered the matter.’

‘Ah! it needs consideration, then? But come, now — would you rather be an old maid — let alone the pauper?’

‘I can’t tell till I’m asked.’

And I left the room immediately, to escape further examination. But five minutes after, in looking from my window, I beheld Mr. Boarham coming up to the door. I waited nearly half-an-hour in uncomfortable suspense, expecting every minute to be called, and vainly longing to hear him go. Then footsteps were heard on the stairs, and my aunt entered the room with a solemn countenance, and closed the door behind her.

‘Here is Mr. Boarham, Helen,’ said she. ‘He wishes to see you.’

‘Oh, aunt! — Can’t you tell him I’m indisposed? — I’m sure I am — to see him.’

‘Nonsense, my dear! this is no trifling matter. He is come on a very important errand — to ask your hand in marriage of your uncle and me.’

‘I hope my uncle and you told him it was not in your power to give it. What right had he to ask any one before me?’

‘Helen!’

‘What did my uncle say?’

‘He said he would not interfere in the matter; if you liked to accept Mr. Boarham’s obliging offer, you — ’

‘Did he say obliging offer?’

‘No; he said if you liked to take him you might; and if not, you might please yourself.’

‘He said right; and what did you say?’

‘It is no matter what I said. What will you say? — that is the question. He is now waiting to ask you himself; but consider well before you go; and if you intend to refuse him, give me your reasons.’

‘I shall refuse him, of course; but you must tell me how, for I want to be civil and yet decided — and when I’ve got rid of him, I’ll give you my reasons afterwards.’

‘But stay, Helen; sit down a little and compose yourself. Mr. Boarham is in no particular hurry, for he has little doubt of your acceptance; and I want to speak with you. Tell me, my dear, what are your objections to him? Do you deny that he is an upright, honourable man?'

'No.'

'Do you deny that he is sensible, sober, respectable?'

'No; he may be all this, but — '

'But, Helen! How many such men do you expect to meet with in the world? Upright, honourable, sensible, sober, respectable! Is this such an every-day character that you should reject the possessor of such noble qualities without a moment's hesitation? Yes, noble I may call them; for think of the full meaning of each, and how many inestimable virtues they include (and I might add many more to the list), and consider that all this is laid at your feet. It is in your power to secure this inestimable blessing for life — a worthy and excellent husband, who loves you tenderly, but not too fondly so as to blind him to your faults, and will be your guide throughout life's pilgrimage, and your partner in eternal bliss. Think how — '

'But I hate him, aunt,' said I, interrupting this unusual flow of eloquence.

'Hate him, Helen! Is this a Christian spirit? — you hate him? and he so good a man!'

'I don't hate him as a man, but as a husband. As a man, I love him so much that I wish him a better wife than I — one as good as himself, or better — if you think that possible — provided she could like him; but I never could, and therefore — '

'But why not? What objection do you find?'

'Firstly, he is at least forty years old — considerably more, I should think — and I am but eighteen; secondly, he is narrow-minded and bigoted in the extreme; thirdly, his tastes and feelings are wholly dissimilar to mine; fourthly, his looks, voice, and manner are particularly displeasing to me; and, finally, I have an aversion to his whole person that I never can surmount.'

'Then you ought to surmount it. And please to compare him for a moment with Mr. Huntingdon, and, good looks apart (which contribute nothing to the merit of the man, or to the happiness of married life, and which you have so often professed to hold in light esteem), tell me which is the better man.'

'I have no doubt Mr. Huntingdon is a much better man than you think him; but we are not talking about him now, but about Mr. Boarham; and as I would rather grow, live, and die in single blessedness — than be his wife, it is but right that I should tell him so at once, and put him out of suspense — so let me go.'

'But don't give him a flat denial; he has no idea of such a thing, and it would offend him greatly: say you have no thoughts of matrimony at present — '

'But I have thoughts of it.'

'Or that you desire a further acquaintance.'

‘But I don’t desire a further acquaintance — quite the contrary.’

And without waiting for further admonitions I left the room and went to seek Mr. Boarham. He was walking up and down the drawing-room, humming snatches of tunes and nibbling the end of his cane.

‘My dear young lady,’ said he, bowing and smirking with great complacency, ‘I have your kind guardian’s permission — ’

‘I know, sir,’ said I, wishing to shorten the scene as much as possible, ‘and I am greatly obliged for your preference, but must beg to decline the honour you wish to confer, for I think we were not made for each other, as you yourself would shortly discover if the experiment were tried.’

My aunt was right. It was quite evident he had had little doubt of my acceptance, and no idea of a positive denial. He was amazed, astounded at such an answer, but too incredulous to be much offended; and after a little humming and hawing, he returned to the attack.

‘I know, my dear, that there exists a considerable disparity between us in years, in temperament, and perhaps some other things; but let me assure you, I shall not be severe to mark the faults and foibles of a young and ardent nature such as yours, and while I acknowledge them to myself, and even rebuke them with all a father’s care, believe me, no youthful lover could be more tenderly indulgent towards the object of his affections than I to you; and, on the other hand, let me hope that my more experienced years and graver habits of reflection will be no disparagement in your eyes, as I shall endeavour to make them all conducive to your happiness. Come, now! What do you say? Let us have no young lady’s affectations and caprices, but speak out at once.’

‘I will, but only to repeat what I said before, that I am certain we were not made for each other.’

‘You really think so?’

‘I do.’

‘But you don’t know me — you wish for a further acquaintance — a longer time to — ’

‘No, I don’t. I know you as well as I ever shall, and better than you know me, or you would never dream of uniting yourself to one so incongruous — so utterly unsuitable to you in every way.’

‘But, my dear young lady, I don’t look for perfection; I can excuse — ’

‘Thank you, Mr. Boarham, but I won’t trespass upon your goodness. You may save your indulgence and consideration for some more worthy object, that won’t tax them so heavily.’

‘But let me beg you to consult your aunt; that excellent lady, I am sure, will — ’

‘I have consulted her; and I know her wishes coincide with yours; but in such important matters, I take the liberty of judging for myself; and no persuasion can alter my inclinations, or induce me to believe that such a step would be conducive to my happiness or yours — and I wonder that a man of your experience and discretion should think of choosing such a wife.’

‘Ah, well!’ said he, ‘I have sometimes wondered at that myself. I have sometimes said to myself, “Now Boarham, what is this you’re after? Take care, man — look before you leap! This is a sweet, bewitching creature, but remember, the brightest attractions to the lover too often prove the husband’s greatest torments!” I assure you my choice has not been made without much reasoning and reflection. The seeming imprudence of the match has cost me many an anxious thought by day, and many a sleepless hour by night; but at length I satisfied myself that it was not, in very deed, imprudent. I saw my sweet girl was not without her faults, but of these her youth, I trusted, was not one, but rather an earnest of virtues yet unblown — a strong ground of presumption that her little defects of temper and errors of judgment, opinion, or manner were not irremediable, but might easily be removed or mitigated by the patient efforts of a watchful and judicious adviser, and where I failed to enlighten and control, I thought I might safely undertake to pardon, for the sake of her many excellences. Therefore, my dearest girl, since I am satisfied, why should you object — on my account, at least?’

‘But to tell you the truth, Mr. Boarham, it is on my own account I principally object; so let us — drop the subject,’ I would have said, ‘for it is worse than useless to pursue it any further,’ but he pertinaciously interrupted me with, — ‘But why so? I would love you, cherish you, protect you,’ &c., &c.

I shall not trouble myself to put down all that passed between us. Suffice it to say, that I found him very troublesome, and very hard to convince that I really meant what I said, and really was so obstinate and blind to my own interests, that there was no shadow of a chance that either he or my aunt would ever be able to overcome my objections. Indeed, I am not sure that I succeeded after all; though wearied with his so pertinaciously returning to the same point and repeating the same arguments over and over again, forcing me to reiterate the same replies, I at length turned short and sharp upon him, and my last words were, — ‘I tell you plainly, that it cannot be. No consideration can induce me to marry against my inclinations. I respect you — at least, I would respect you, if you would behave like a sensible man — but I cannot love you, and never could — and the more you talk the further you repel me; so pray don’t say any more about it.’

Whereupon he wished me a good-morning, and withdrew, disconcerted and offended, no doubt; but surely it was not my fault.

CHAPTER XVII

The next day I accompanied my uncle and aunt to a dinner-party at Mr. Wilmot's. He had two ladies staying with him: his niece Annabella, a fine dashing girl, or rather young woman, — of some five-and-twenty, too great a flirt to be married, according to her own assertion, but greatly admired by the gentlemen, who universally pronounced her a splendid woman; and her gentle cousin, Milicent Hargrave, who had taken a violent fancy to me, mistaking me for something vastly better than I was. And I, in return, was very fond of her. I should entirely exclude poor Milicent in my general animadversions against the ladies of my acquaintance. But it was not on her account, or her cousin's, that I have mentioned the party: it was for the sake of another of Mr. Wilmot's guests, to wit Mr. Huntingdon. I have good reason to remember his presence there, for this was the last time I saw him.

He did not sit near me at dinner; for it was his fate to hand in a capacious old dowager, and mine to be handed in by Mr. Grimsby, a friend of his, but a man I very greatly disliked: there was a sinister cast in his countenance, and a mixture of lurking ferocity and fulsome insincerity in his demeanour, that I could not away with. What a tiresome custom that is, by-the-by — one among the many sources of factitious annoyance of this ultra-civilised life. If the gentlemen must lead the ladies into the dining-room, why cannot they take those they like best?

I am not sure, however, that Mr. Huntingdon would have taken me, if he had been at liberty to make his own selection. It is quite possible he might have chosen Miss Wilmot; for she seemed bent upon engrossing his attention to herself, and he seemed nothing loth to pay the homage she demanded. I thought so, at least, when I saw how they talked and laughed, and glanced across the table, to the neglect and evident umbrage of their respective neighbours — and afterwards, as the gentlemen joined us in the drawing-room, when she, immediately upon his entrance, loudly called upon him to be the arbiter of a dispute between herself and another lady, and he answered the summons with alacrity, and decided the question without a moment's hesitation in her favour — though, to my thinking, she was obviously in the wrong — and then stood chatting familiarly with her and a group of other ladies; while I sat with Milicent Hargrave at the opposite end of the room, looking over the latter's drawings, and aiding her with my critical observations and advice, at her particular desire. But in spite of my efforts to remain composed, my attention wandered from the drawings to the merry group, and against my better judgment my wrath rose, and doubtless my countenance lowered; for Milicent, observing that I must be tired of her daubs and scratches, begged I would join the company now, and defer the examination of the remainder to another opportunity. But while I was assuring her that I had no wish to join them, and was not tired, Mr. Huntingdon himself came up to the little round table at which we sat.

'Are these yours?' said he, carelessly taking up one of the drawings.

'No, they are Miss Hargrave's.'

'Oh! well, let's have a look at them.'

And, regardless of Miss Hargrave's protestations that they were not worth looking at, he drew a chair to my side, and receiving the drawings, one by one from my hand, successively scanned them over, and threw them on the table, but said not a word about them, though he was talking all the time. I don't know what Milicent Hargrave thought of such conduct, but I found his conversation extremely interesting; though, as I afterwards discovered, when I came to analyse it, it was chiefly confined to quizzing the different members of the company present; and albeit he made some clever remarks, and some excessively droll ones, I do not think the whole would appear anything very particular, if written here, without the adventitious aids of look, and tone, and gesture, and that ineffable but indefinite charm, which cast a halo over all he did and said, and which would have made it a delight to look in his face, and hear the music of his voice, if he had been talking positive nonsense — and which, moreover, made me feel so bitter against my aunt when she put a stop to this enjoyment, by coming composedly forward, under pretence of wishing to see the drawings, that she cared and knew nothing about, and while making believe to examine them, addressing herself to Mr. Huntingdon, with one of her coldest and most repellent aspects, and beginning a series of the most common-place and formidably formal questions and observations, on purpose to wrest his attention from me — on purpose to vex me, as I thought: and having now looked through the portfolio, I left them to their *tête-à-tête*, and seated myself on a sofa, quite apart from the company — never thinking how strange such conduct would appear, but merely to indulge, at first, the vexation of the moment, and subsequently to enjoy my private thoughts.

But I was not left long alone, for Mr. Wilmot, of all men the least welcome, took advantage of my isolated position to come and plant himself beside me. I had flattered myself that I had so effectually repulsed his advances on all former occasions, that I had nothing more to apprehend from his unfortunate predilection; but it seems I was mistaken: so great was his confidence, either in his wealth or his remaining powers of attraction, and so firm his conviction of feminine weakness, that he thought himself warranted to return to the siege, which he did with renovated ardour, enkindled by the quantity of wine he had drunk — a circumstance that rendered him infinitely the more disgusting; but greatly as I abhorred him at that moment, I did not like to treat him with rudeness, as I was now his guest, and had just been enjoying his hospitality; and I was no hand at a polite but determined rejection, nor would it have greatly availed me if I had, for he was too coarse-minded to take any repulse that was not as plain and positive as his own effrontery. The consequence was, that he waxed more fulsomely tender, and more repulsively warm, and I was driven to the very verge of desperation, and about to say I know not what, when I felt my hand, that hung over the arm of the sofa, suddenly taken by another and gently but fervently pressed. Instinctively, I guessed who it was, and, on looking up, was less surprised than delighted to see Mr. Huntingdon smiling upon me. It was like turning from some purgatorial fiend to an angel of light, come to announce that the season of torment was past.

‘Helen,’ said he (he frequently called me Helen, and I never resented the freedom), ‘I want you to look at this picture. Mr. Wilmot will excuse you a moment, I’m sure.’

I rose with alacrity. He drew my arm within his, and led me across the room to a splendid painting of Vandyke’s that I had noticed before, but not sufficiently examined. After a moment of silent contemplation, I was beginning to comment on its beauties and peculiarities, when, playfully pressing the hand he still retained within his arm, he interrupted me with, — ‘Never mind the picture: it was not for that I brought you here; it was to get you away from that scoundrelly old profligate yonder, who is looking as if he would like to challenge me for the affront.’

‘I am very much obliged to you,’ said I. ‘This is twice you have delivered me from such unpleasant companionship.’

‘Don’t be too thankful,’ he answered: ‘it is not all kindness to you; it is partly from a feeling of spite to your tormentors that makes me delighted to do the old fellows a bad turn, though I don’t think I have any great reason to dread them as rivals. Have I, Helen?’

‘You know I detest them both.’

‘And me?’

‘I have no reason to detest you.’

‘But what are your sentiments towards me? Helen — Speak! How do you regard me?’

And again he pressed my hand; but I feared there was more of conscious power than tenderness in his demeanour, and I felt he had no right to extort a confession of attachment from me when he had made no correspondent avowal himself, and knew not what to answer. At last I said, — ‘How do you regard me?’

‘Sweet angel, I adore you! I — ’

‘Helen, I want you a moment,’ said the distinct, low voice of my aunt, close beside us. And I left him, muttering maledictions against his evil angel.

‘Well, aunt, what is it? What do you want?’ said I, following her to the embrasure of the window.

‘I want you to join the company, when you are fit to be seen,’ returned she, severely regarding me; ‘but please to stay here a little, till that shocking colour is somewhat abated, and your eyes have recovered something of their natural expression. I should be ashamed for anyone to see you in your present state.'

Of course, such a remark had no effect in reducing the 'shocking colour'; on the contrary, I felt my face glow with redoubled fires kindled by a complication of emotions, of which indignant, swelling anger was the chief. I offered no reply, however, but pushed aside the curtain and looked into the night — or rather into the lamp-lit square.

'Was Mr. Huntingdon proposing to you, Helen?' inquired my too watchful relative.

'No.'

'What was he saying then? I heard something very like it.'

'I don't know what he would have said, if you hadn't interrupted him.'

'And would you have accepted him, Helen, if he had proposed?'

'Of course not — without consulting uncle and you.'

'Oh! I'm glad, my dear, you have so much prudence left. Well, now,' she added, after a moment's pause, 'you have made yourself conspicuous enough for one evening. The ladies are directing inquiring glances towards us at this moment, I see: I shall join them. Do you come too, when you are sufficiently composed to appear as usual.'

'I am so now.'

'Speak gently then, and don't look so malicious,' said my calm, but provoking aunt. 'We shall return home shortly, and then,' she added with solemn significance, 'I have much to say to you.'

So I went home prepared for a formidable lecture. Little was said by either party in the carriage during our short transit homewards; but when I had entered my room and thrown myself into an easy-chair, to reflect on the events of the day, my aunt followed me thither, and having dismissed Rachel, who was carefully stowing away my ornaments, closed the door; and placing a chair beside me, or rather at right angles with mine, sat down. With due deference I offered her my more commodious seat. She declined it, and thus opened the conference: 'Do you remember, Helen, our conversation the night but one before we left Staningley?'

'Yes, aunt.'

'And do you remember how I warned you against letting your heart be stolen from you by those unworthy of its possession, and fixing your affections where approbation did not go before, and where reason and judgment withheld their sanction?'

'Yes; but my reason — '

'Pardon me — and do you remember assuring me that there was no occasion for uneasiness on your account; for you should never be tempted to marry a man who was deficient in sense or principle, however handsome or charming in other respects he might be, for you could not love him; you should hate — despise — pity — anything but love him — were not those your words?'

'Yes; but — '

‘And did you not say that your affection must be founded on approbation; and that, unless you could approve and honour and respect, you could not love?’

‘Yes; but I do approve, and honour, and respect — ’

‘How so, my dear? Is Mr. Huntingdon a good man?’

‘He is a much better man than you think him.’

‘That is nothing to the purpose. Is he a good man?’

‘Yes — in some respects. He has a good disposition.’

‘Is he a man of principle?’

‘Perhaps not, exactly; but it is only for want of thought. If he had some one to advise him, and remind him of what is right — ’

‘He would soon learn, you think — and you yourself would willingly undertake to be his teacher? But, my dear, he is, I believe, full ten years older than you — how is it that you are so beforehand in moral acquirements?’

‘Thanks to you, aunt, I have been well brought up, and had good examples always before me, which he, most likely, has not; and, besides, he is of a sanguine temperament, and a gay, thoughtless temper, and I am naturally inclined to reflection.’

‘Well, now you have made him out to be deficient in both sense and principle, by your own confession — ’

‘Then, my sense and my principle are at his service.’

‘That sounds presumptuous, Helen. Do you think you have enough for both; and do you imagine your merry, thoughtless profligate would allow himself to be guided by a young girl like you?’

‘No; I should not wish to guide him; but I think I might have influence sufficient to save him from some errors, and I should think my life well spent in the effort to preserve so noble a nature from destruction. He always listens attentively now when I speak seriously to him (and I often venture to reprove his random way of talking), and sometimes he says that if he had me always by his side he should never do or say a wicked thing, and that a little daily talk with me would make him quite a saint. It may he partly jest and partly flattery, but still — ’

‘But still you think it may be truth?’

‘If I do think there is any mixture of truth in it, it is not from confidence in my own powers, but in his natural goodness. And you have no right to call him a profligate, aunt; he is nothing of the kind.’

‘Who told you so, my dear? What was that story about his intrigue with a married lady — Lady who was it? — Miss Wilmot herself was telling you the other day?’

‘It was false — false!’ I cried. ‘I don’t believe a word of it.’

‘You think, then, that he is a virtuous, well-conducted young man?’

‘I know nothing positive respecting his character. I only know that I have heard nothing definite against it — nothing that could be proved, at least; and till people can prove their slanderous accusations, I will not believe them.

And I know this, that if he has committed errors, they are only such as are common to youth, and such as nobody thinks anything about; for I see that everybody likes him, and all the mammas smile upon him, and their daughters — and Miss Wilmot herself — are only too glad to attract his attention.'

'Helen, the world may look upon such offences as venial; a few unprincipled mothers may be anxious to catch a young man of fortune without reference to his character; and thoughtless girls may be glad to win the smiles of so handsome a gentleman, without seeking to penetrate beyond the surface; but you, I trusted, were better informed than to see with their eyes, and judge with their perverted judgment. I did not think you would call these venial errors!'

'Nor do I, aunt; but if I hate the sins, I love the sinner, and would do much for his salvation, even supposing your suspicions to be mainly true, which I do not and will not believe.'

'Well, my dear, ask your uncle what sort of company he keeps, and if he is not banded with a set of loose, profligate young men, whom he calls his friends, his jolly companions, and whose chief delight is to wallow in vice, and vie with each other who can run fastest and furthest down the headlong road to the place prepared for the devil and his angels.'

'Then I will save him from them.'

'Oh, Helen, Helen! you little know the misery of uniting your fortunes to such a man!'

'I have such confidence in him, aunt, notwithstanding all you say, that I would willingly risk my happiness for the chance of securing his. I will leave better men to those who only consider their own advantage. If he has done amiss, I shall consider my life well spent in saving him from the consequences of his early errors, and striving to recall him to the path of virtue. God grant me success!'

Here the conversation ended, for at this juncture my uncle's voice was heard from his chamber, loudly calling upon my aunt to come to bed. He was in a bad humour that night; for his gout was worse. It had been gradually increasing upon him ever since we came to town; and my aunt took advantage of the circumstance next morning to persuade him to return to the country immediately, without waiting for the close of the season. His physician supported and enforced her arguments; and contrary to her usual habits, she so hurried the preparations for removal (as much for my sake as my uncle's, I think), that in a very few days we departed; and I saw no more of Mr. Huntingdon. My aunt flatters herself I shall soon forget him — perhaps she thinks I have forgotten him already, for I never mention his name; and she may continue to think so, till we meet again — if ever that should be. I wonder if it will?

CHAPTER XVIII

August 25th. — I am now quite settled down to my usual routine of steady occupations and quiet amusements — tolerably contented and cheerful, but still looking forward to spring with the hope of returning to town, not for its gaieties and dissipations, but for the chance of meeting Mr. Huntingdon once again; for still he is always in my thoughts and in my dreams. In all my employments, whatever I do, or see, or hear, has an ultimate reference to him; whatever skill or knowledge I acquire is some day to be turned to his advantage or amusement; whatever new beauties in nature or art I discover are to be depicted to meet his eye, or stored in my memory to be told him at some future period. This, at least, is the hope that I cherish, the fancy that lights me on my lonely way. It may be only an ignis fatuus, after all, but it can do no harm to follow it with my eyes and rejoice in its lustre, as long as it does not lure me from the path I ought to keep; and I think it will not, for I have thought deeply on my aunt's advice, and I see clearly, now, the folly of throwing myself away on one that is unworthy of all the love I have to give, and incapable of responding to the best and deepest feelings of my inmost heart — so clearly, that even if I should see him again, and if he should remember me and love me still (which, alas! is too little probable, considering how he is situated, and by whom surrounded), and if he should ask me to marry him — I am determined not to consent until I know for certain whether my aunt's opinion of him or mine is nearest the truth; for if mine is altogether wrong, it is not he that I love; it is a creature of my own imagination. But I think it is not wrong — no, no — there is a secret something — an inward instinct that assures me I am right. There is essential goodness in him; — and what delight to unfold it! If he has wandered, what bliss to recall him! If he is now exposed to the baneful influence of corrupting and wicked companions, what glory to deliver him from them! Oh! if I could but believe that Heaven has designed me for this!

* * * * *

To-day is the first of September; but my uncle has ordered the gamekeeper to spare the partridges till the gentlemen come. 'What gentlemen?' I asked when I heard it. A small party he had invited to shoot. His friend Mr. Wilmot was one, and my aunt's friend, Mr. Boarham, another. This struck me as terrible news at the moment; but all regret and apprehension vanished like a dream when I heard that Mr. Huntingdon was actually to be a third! My aunt is greatly against his coming, of course: she earnestly endeavoured to dissuade my uncle from asking him; but he, laughing at her objections, told her it was no use talking, for the mischief was already done: he had invited Huntingdon and his friend Lord Lowborough before we left London, and nothing now remained but to fix the day for their coming. So he is safe, and I am sure of seeing him. I cannot express my joy. I find it very difficult to conceal it from my aunt; but I don't wish to trouble her with my feelings till I know whether I ought to indulge them or not. If I find it my absolute duty to suppress them, they shall trouble no one but myself; and if I can really feel myself justified in indulging this attachment, I can dare anything, even the anger and grief of my best friend, for its object — surely, I shall soon know. But they are not coming till about the middle of the month.

We are to have two lady visitors also: Mr. Wilmot is to bring his niece and her cousin Milicent. I suppose my aunt thinks the latter will benefit me by her society, and the salutary example of her gentle deportment and lowly and tractable spirit; and the former I suspect she intends as a species of counter-attraction to win Mr. Huntingdon's attention from me. I don't thank her for this; but I shall be glad of Milicent's company: she is a sweet, good girl, and I wish I were like her — more like her, at least, than I am.

* * * * *

19th. — They are come. They came the day before yesterday. The gentlemen are all gone out to shoot, and the ladies are with my aunt, at work in the drawing-room. I have retired to the library, for I am very unhappy, and I want to be alone. Books cannot divert me; so having opened my desk, I will try what may be done by detailing the cause of my uneasiness. This paper will serve instead of a confidential friend into whose ear I might pour forth the overflowings of my heart. It will not sympathise with my distresses, but then it will not laugh at them, and, if I keep it close, it cannot tell again; so it is, perhaps, the best friend I could have for the purpose.

First, let me speak of his arrival — how I sat at my window, and watched for nearly two hours, before his carriage entered the park-gates — for they all came before him, — and how deeply I was disappointed at every arrival, because it was not his. First came Mr. Wilmot and the ladies. When Milicent had got into her room, I quitted my post a few minutes to look in upon her and have a little private conversation, for she was now my intimate friend, several long epistles having passed between us since our parting. On returning to my window, I beheld another carriage at the door. Was it his? No; it was Mr. Boarham's plain dark chariot; and there stood he upon the steps, carefully superintending the dislodging of his various boxes and packages. What a collection! One would have thought he projected a visit of six months at least. A considerable time after, came Lord Lowborough in his barouche. Is he one of the profligate friends, I wonder? I should think not; for no one could call him a jolly companion, I'm sure, — and, besides, he appears too sober and gentlemanly in his demeanour to merit such suspicions. He is a tall, thin, gloomy-looking man, apparently between thirty and forty, and of a somewhat sickly, careworn aspect.

At last, Mr. Huntingdon's light phaeton came bowling merrily up the lawn. I had but a transient glimpse of him: for the moment it stopped, he sprang out over the side on to the portico steps, and disappeared into the house.

I now submitted to be dressed for dinner — a duty which Rachel had been urging upon me for the last twenty minutes; and when that important business was completed, I repaired to the drawing-room, where I found Mr. and Miss Wilmot and Milicent Hargrave already assembled. Shortly after, Lord Lowborough entered, and then Mr. Boarham, who seemed quite willing to forget and forgive my former conduct, and to hope that a little conciliation and steady perseverance on his part might yet succeed in bringing me to reason. While I stood at the window, conversing with Milicent, he came up to me, and was beginning to talk in nearly his usual strain, when Mr. Huntingdon entered the room.

'How will he greet me, I wonder?' said my bounding heart; and, instead of advancing to meet him, I turned to the window to hide or subdue my emotion. But having saluted his host and hostess, and the rest of the company, he came to me, ardently squeezed my hand, and murmured he was glad to see me once again. At that moment dinner was announced: my aunt desired him to take Miss Hargrave into the dining-room, and odious Mr. Wilmot, with unspeakable grimaces, offered his arm to me; and I was condemned to sit between himself and Mr. Boarham. But afterwards, when we were all again assembled in the drawing-room, I was indemnified for so much suffering by a few delightful minutes of conversation with Mr. Huntingdon.

In the course of the evening, Miss Wilmot was called upon to sing and play for the amusement of the company, and I to exhibit my drawings, and, though he likes music, and she is an accomplished musician, I think I am right in affirming, that he paid more attention to my drawings than to her music.

So far so good; — but hearing him pronounce, sotto voce, but with peculiar emphasis, concerning one of the pieces, 'This is better than all!' — I looked up, curious to see which it was, and, to my horror, beheld him complacently gazing at the back of the picture: — it was his own face that I had sketched there and forgotten to rub out! To make matters worse, in the agony of the moment, I attempted to snatch it from his hand; but he prevented me, and exclaiming, 'No — by George, I'll keep it!' placed it against his waistcoat and buttoned his coat upon it with a delighted chuckle.

Then, drawing a candle close to his elbow, he gathered all the drawings to himself, as well what he had seen as the others, and muttering, 'I must look at both sides now,' he eagerly commenced an examination, which I watched, at first, with tolerable composure, in the confidence that his vanity would not be gratified by any further discoveries; for, though I must plead guilty to having disfigured the backs of several with abortive attempts to delineate that too fascinating physiognomy, I was sure that, with that one unfortunate exception, I had carefully obliterated all such witnesses of my infatuation. But the pencil frequently leaves an impression upon cardboard that no amount of rubbing can efface. Such, it seems, was the case with most of these; and, I confess, I trembled when I saw him holding them so close to the candle, and poring so intently over the seeming blanks; but still, I trusted, he would not be able to make out these dim traces to his own satisfaction. I was mistaken, however. Having ended his scrutiny, he quietly remarked, — 'I perceive the backs of young ladies' drawings, like the postscripts of their letters, are the most important and interesting part of the concern.'

Then, leaning back in his chair, he reflected a few minutes in silence, complacently smiling to himself, and while I was concocting some cutting speech wherewith to check his gratification, he rose, and passing over to where Annabella Wilmot sat vehemently coquetting with Lord Lowborough, seated himself on the sofa beside her, and attached himself to her for the rest of the evening.

'So then,' thought I, 'he despises me, because he knows I love him.'

And the reflection made me so miserable I knew not what to do. Milicent came and began to admire my drawings, and make remarks upon them; but I could not talk to her — I could talk to no one, and, upon the introduction of tea, I took advantage of the open door and the slight diversion caused by its entrance to slip out — for I was sure I could not take any — and take refuge in the library. My aunt sent Thomas in quest of me, to ask if I were not coming to tea; but I bade him say I should not take any to-night, and, happily, she was too much occupied with her guests to make any further inquiries at the time.

As most of the company had travelled far that day, they retired early to rest; and having heard them all, as I thought, go up-stairs, I ventured out, to get my candlestick from the drawing-room sideboard. But Mr. Huntingdon had lingered behind the rest. He was just at the foot of the stairs when I opened the door, and hearing my step in the hall — though I could hardly hear it myself — he instantly turned back.

'Helen, is that you?' said he. 'Why did you run away from us?'

'Good-night, Mr. Huntingdon,' said I, coldly, not choosing to answer the question. And I turned away to enter the drawing-room.

'But you'll shake hands, won't you?' said he, placing himself in the doorway before me. And he seized my hand and held it, much against my will.

'Let me go, Mr. Huntingdon,' said I. 'I want to get a candle.'

'The candle will keep,' returned he.

I made a desperate effort to free my hand from his grasp.

'Why are you in such a hurry to leave me, Helen?' he said, with a smile of the most provoking self-sufficiency. 'You don't hate me, you know.'

‘Yes, I do — at this moment.’

‘Not you. It is Annabella Wilmot you hate, not me.’

‘I have nothing to do with Annabella Wilmot,’ said I, burning with indignation.

‘But I have, you know,’ returned he, with peculiar emphasis.

‘That is nothing to me, sir,’ I retorted.

‘Is it nothing to you, Helen? Will you swear it? Will you?’

‘No I won’t, Mr. Huntingdon! and I will go,’ cried I, not knowing whether to laugh, or to cry, or to break out into a tempest of fury.

‘Go, then, you vixen!’ he said; but the instant he released my hand he had the audacity to put his arm round my neck, and kiss me.

Trembling with anger and agitation, and I don’t know what besides, I broke away, and got my candle, and rushed up-stairs to my room. He would not have done so but for that hateful picture. And there he had it still in his possession, an eternal monument to his pride and my humiliation.

It was but little sleep I got that night, and in the morning I rose perplexed and troubled with the thoughts of meeting him at breakfast. I knew not how it was to be done. An assumption of dignified, cold indifference would hardly do, after what he knew of my devotion — to his face, at least. Yet something must be done to check his presumption — I would not submit to be tyrannised over by those bright, laughing eyes. And, accordingly, I received his cheerful morning salutation as calmly and coldly as my aunt could have wished, and defeated with brief answers his one or two attempts to draw me into conversation, while I comported myself with unusual cheerfulness and complaisance towards every other member of the party, especially Annabella Wilmot, and even her uncle and Mr. Boarham were treated with an extra amount of civility on the occasion, not from any motives of coquetry, but just to show him that my particular coolness and reserve arose from no general ill-humour or depression of spirits.

He was not, however, to be repelled by such acting as this. He did not talk much to me, but when he did speak it was with a degree of freedom and openness, and kindliness too, that plainly seemed to intimate he knew his words were music to my ears; and when his looks met mine it was with a smile — presumptuous, it might be — but oh! so sweet, so bright, so genial, that I could not possibly retain my anger; every vestige of displeasure soon melted away beneath it like morning clouds before the summer sun.

Soon after breakfast all the gentlemen save one, with boyish eagerness, set out on their expedition against the hapless partridges; my uncle and Mr. Wilmot on their shooting ponies, Mr. Huntingdon and Lord Lowborough on their legs: the one exception being Mr. Boarham, who, in consideration of the rain that had fallen during the night, thought it prudent to remain behind a little and join them in a while when the sun had dried the grass. And he favoured us all with a long and minute disquisition upon the evils and dangers attendant upon damp feet, delivered with the most imperturbable gravity, amid the jeers and laughter of Mr. Huntingdon and my uncle, who, leaving the prudent sportsman to entertain the ladies with his medical discussions, sallied forth with their guns, bending their steps to the stables first, to have a look at the horses and let out the dogs.

Not desirous of sharing Mr. Boarham's company for the whole of the morning, I betook myself to the library, and there brought forth my easel and began to paint. The easel and the painting apparatus would serve as an excuse for abandoning the drawing-room if my aunt should come to complain of the desertion, and besides I wanted to finish the picture. It was one I had taken great pains with, and I intended it to be my masterpiece, though it was somewhat presumptuous in the design. By the bright azure of the sky, and by the warm and brilliant lights and deep long shadows, I had endeavoured to convey the idea of a sunny morning. I had ventured to give more of the bright verdure of spring or early summer to the grass and foliage than is commonly attempted in painting. The scene represented was an open glade in a wood. A group of dark Scotch firs was introduced in the middle distance to relieve the prevailing freshness of the rest; but in the foreground was part of the gnarled trunk and of the spreading boughs of a large forest-tree, whose foliage was of a brilliant golden green — not golden from autumnal mellowness, but from the sunshine and the very immaturity of the scarce expanded leaves. Upon this bough, that stood out in bold relief against the sombre firs, were seated an amorous pair of turtle doves, whose soft sad-coloured plumage afforded a contrast of another nature; and beneath it a young girl was kneeling on the daisy-spangled turf, with head thrown back and masses of fair hair falling on her shoulders, her hands clasped, lips parted, and eyes intently gazing upward in pleased yet earnest contemplation of those feathered lovers — too deeply absorbed in each other to notice her.

I had scarcely settled to my work, which, however, wanted but a few touches to the finishing, when the sportsmen passed the window on their return from the stables. It was partly open, and Mr. Huntingdon must have seen me as he went by, for in half a minute he came back, and setting his gun against the wall, threw up the sash and sprang in, and set himself before my picture.

'Very pretty, i'faith,' said he, after attentively regarding it for a few seconds; 'and a very fitting study for a young lady. Spring just opening into summer — morning just approaching noon — girlhood just ripening into womanhood, and hope just verging on fruition. She's a sweet creature! but why didn't you make her black hair?'

'I thought light hair would suit her better. You see I have made her blue-eyed and plump, and fair and rosy.'

'Upon my word — a very Hebe! I should fall in love with her if I hadn't the artist before me. Sweet innocent! she's thinking there will come a time when she will be wooed and won like that pretty hen-dove by as fond and fervent a lover; and she's thinking how pleasant it will be, and how tender and faithful he will find her.'

'And perhaps,' suggested I, 'how tender and faithful she shall find him.'

'Perhaps, for there is no limit to the wild extravagance of Hope's imaginings at such an age.'

'Do you call that, then, one of her wild, extravagant delusions?'

'No; my heart tells me it is not. I might have thought so once, but now, I say, give me the girl I love, and I will swear eternal constancy to her and her alone, through summer and winter, through youth and age, and life and death! if age and death must come.'

He spoke this in such serious earnest that my heart bounded with delight; but the minute after he changed his tone, and asked, with a significant smile, if I had 'any more portraits.'

'No,' replied I, reddening with confusion and wrath.

But my portfolio was on the table: he took it up, and coolly sat down to examine its contents.

'Mr. Huntingdon, those are my unfinished sketches,' cried I, 'and I never let any one see them.'

And I placed my hand on the portfolio to wrest it from him, but he maintained his hold, assuring me that he 'liked unfinished sketches of all things.'

'But I hate them to be seen,' returned I. 'I can't let you have it, indeed!'

'Let me have its bowels then,' said he; and just as I wrenched the portfolio from his hand, he deftly abstracted the greater part of its contents, and after turning them over a moment he cried out, — 'Bless my stars, here's another;' and slipped a small oval of ivory paper into his waistcoat pocket — a complete miniature portrait that I had sketched with such tolerable success as to be induced to colour it with great pains and care. But I was determined he should not keep it.

'Mr. Huntingdon,' cried I, 'I insist upon having that back! It is mine, and you have no right to take it. Give it me directly — I'll never forgive you if you don't!'

But the more vehemently I insisted, the more he aggravated my distress by his insulting, gleeful laugh. At length, however, he restored it to me, saying, — 'Well, well, since you value it so much, I'll not deprive you of it.'

To show him how I valued it, I tore it in two and threw it into the fire. He was not prepared for this. His merriment suddenly ceasing, he stared in mute amazement at the consuming treasure; and then, with a careless 'Humph! I'll go and shoot now,' he turned on his heel and vacated the apartment by the window as he came, and setting on his hat with an air, took up his gun and walked away, whistling as he went — and leaving me not too much agitated to finish my picture, for I was glad, at the moment, that I had vexed him.

When I returned to the drawing-room, I found Mr. Boarham had ventured to follow his comrades to the field; and shortly after lunch, to which they did not think of returning, I volunteered to accompany the ladies in a walk, and show Annabella and Milicent the beauties of the country. We took a long ramble, and re-entered the park just as the sportsmen were returning from their expedition. Toil-spent and travel-stained, the main body of them crossed over the grass to avoid us, but Mr. Huntingdon, all spattered and splashed as he was, and stained with the blood of his prey — to the no small offence of my aunt's strict sense of propriety — came out of his way to meet us, with cheerful smiles and words for all but me, and placing himself between Annabella Wilmot and myself, walked up the road and began to relate the various exploits and disasters of the day, in a manner that would have convulsed me with laughter if I had been on good terms with him; but he addressed himself entirely to Annabella, and I, of course, left all the laughter and all the badinage to her, and affecting the utmost indifference to whatever passed between them, walked along a few paces apart, and looking every way but theirs, while my aunt and Milicent went before, linked arm in arm and gravely discoursing together. At length Mr. Huntingdon turned to me, and addressing me in a confidential whisper, said, — 'Helen, why did you burn my picture?'

'Because I wished to destroy it,' I answered, with an asperity it is useless now to lament.

'Oh, very good!' was the reply; 'if you don't value me, I must turn to somebody that will.'

I thought it was partly in jest — a half-playful mixture of mock resignation and pretended indifference: but immediately he resumed his place beside Miss Wilmot, and from that hour to this — during all that evening, and all the next day, and the next, and the next, and all this morning (the 22nd), he has never given me one kind word or one pleasant look — never spoken to me, but from pure necessity — never glanced towards me but with a cold, unfriendly look I thought him quite incapable of assuming.

My aunt observes the change, and though she has not inquired the cause or made any remark to me on the subject, I see it gives her pleasure. Miss Wilmot observes it, too, and triumphantly ascribes it to her own superior charms and blandishments; but I am truly miserable — more so than I like to acknowledge to myself. Pride refuses to aid me. It has brought me into the scrape, and will not help me out of it.

He meant no harm — it was only his joyous, playful spirit; and I, by my acrimonious resentment — so serious, so disproportioned to the offence — have so wounded his feelings, so deeply offended him, that I fear he will never forgive me — and all for a mere jest! He thinks I dislike him, and he must continue to think so. I must lose him for ever, and Annabella may win him, and triumph as she will.

But it is not my loss nor her triumph that I deplore so greatly as the wreck of my fond hopes for his advantage, and her unworthiness of his affection, and the injury he will do himself by trusting his happiness to her. She does not love him: she thinks only of herself. She cannot appreciate the good that is in him: she will neither see it, nor value it, nor cherish it. She will neither deplore his faults nor attempt their amendment, but rather aggravate them by her own. And I doubt whether she will not deceive him after all. I see she is playing double between him and Lord Lowborough, and while she amuses herself with the lively Huntingdon, she tries her utmost to enslave his moody friend; and should she succeed in bringing both to her feet, the fascinating commoner will have but little chance against the lordly peer. If he observes her artful by-play, it gives him no uneasiness, but rather adds new zest to his diversion by opposing a stimulating check to his otherwise too easy conquest.

Messrs. Wilmot and Boarham have severally taken occasion by his neglect of me to renew their advances; and if I were like Annabella and some others I should take advantage of their perseverance to endeavour to pique him into a revival of affection; but, justice and honesty apart, I could not bear to do it. I am annoyed enough by their present persecutions without encouraging them further; and even if I did it would have precious little effect upon him. He sees me suffering under the condescending attentions and prosaic discourses of the one, and the repulsive obtrusions of the other, without so much as a shadow of commiseration for me, or resentment against my tormentors. He never could have loved me, or he would not have resigned me so willingly, and he would not go on talking to everybody else so cheerfully as he does — laughing and jesting with Lord Lowborough and my uncle, teasing Milicent Hargrave, and flirting with Annabella Wilmot — as if nothing were on his mind. Oh! why can’t I hate him? I must be infatuated, or I should scorn to regret him as I do. But I must rally all the powers I have remaining, and try to tear him from my heart. There goes the dinner-bell, and here comes my aunt to scold me for sitting here at my desk all day, instead of staying with the company: wish the company were — gone.

CHAPTER XIX

Twenty Second: Night. — What have I done? and what will be the end of it? I cannot calmly reflect upon it; I cannot sleep. I must have recourse to my diary again; I will commit it to paper to-night, and see what I shall think of it to-morrow.

I went down to dinner resolving to be cheerful and well-conducted, and kept my resolution very creditably, considering how my head ached and how internally wretched I felt. I don't know what is come over me of late; my very energies, both mental and physical, must be strangely impaired, or I should not have acted so weakly in many respects as I have done; but I have not been well this last day or two. I suppose it is with sleeping and eating so little, and thinking so much, and being so continually out of humour. But to return. I was exerting myself to sing and play for the amusement, and at the request, of my aunt and Milicent, before the gentlemen came into the drawing-room (Miss Wilmot never likes to waste her musical efforts on ladies' ears alone). Milicent had asked for a little Scotch song, and I was just in the middle of it when they entered. The first thing Mr. Huntingdon did was to walk up to Annabella.

'Now, Miss Wilmot, won't you give us some music to-night?' said he. 'Do now! I know you will, when I tell you that I have been hungering and thirsting all day for the sound of your voice. Come! the piano's vacant.'

It was, for I had quitted it immediately upon hearing his petition. Had I been endowed with a proper degree of self-possession, I should have turned to the lady myself, and cheerfully joined my entreaties to his, whereby I should have disappointed his expectations, if the affront had been purposely given, or made him sensible of the wrong, if it had only arisen from thoughtlessness; but I felt it too deeply to do anything but rise from the music-stool, and throw myself back on the sofa, suppressing with difficulty the audible expression of the bitterness I felt within. I knew Annabella's musical talents were superior to mine, but that was no reason why I should be treated as a perfect nonentity. The time and the manner of his asking her appeared like a gratuitous insult to me; and I could have wept with pure vexation.

Meantime, she exultingly seated herself at the piano, and favoured him with two of his favourite songs, in such superior style that even I soon lost my anger in admiration, and listened with a sort of gloomy pleasure to the skilful modulations of her full-toned and powerful voice, so judiciously aided by her rounded and spirited touch; and while my ears drank in the sound, my eyes rested on the face of her principal auditor, and derived an equal or superior delight from the contemplation of his speaking countenance, as he stood beside her — that eye and brow lighted up with keen enthusiasm, and that sweet smile passing and appearing like gleams of sunshine on an April day. No wonder he should hunger and thirst to hear her sing. I now forgave him from my heart his reckless slight of me, and I felt ashamed at my pettish resentment of such a trifle — ashamed too of those bitter envious pangs that gnawed my inmost heart, in spite of all this admiration and delight.

'There now,' said she, playfully running her fingers over the keys when she had concluded the second song. 'What shall I give you next?'

But in saying this she looked back at Lord Lowborough, who was standing a little behind, leaning against the back of a chair, an attentive listener, too, experiencing, to judge by his countenance, much the same feelings of mingled pleasure and sadness as I did. But the look she gave him plainly said, 'Do you choose for me now: I have done enough for him, and will gladly exert myself to gratify you;' and thus encouraged, his lordship came forward, and turning over the music, presently set before her a little song that I had noticed before, and read more than once, with an interest arising from the circumstance of my connecting it in my mind with the reigning tyrant of my thoughts. And now, with my nerves already excited and half unstrung, I could not hear those words so sweetly warbled forth without some symptoms of emotion I was not able to suppress. Tears rose unbidden to my eyes, and I buried my face in the sofa-pillow that they might flow unseen while I listened. The air was simple, sweet, and sad. It is still running in my head, and so are the words: —

Farewell to thee! but not farewell
To all my fondest thoughts of thee:
Within my heart they still shall dwell;
And they shall cheer and comfort me.
O beautiful, and full of grace!
If thou hadst never met mine eye,
I had not dreamed a living face
Could fancied charms so far outvie.
If I may ne'er behold again
That form and face so dear to me,
Nor hear thy voice, still would I fain
Preserve, for aye, their memory.
That voice, the magic of whose tone
Can wake an echo in my breast,
Creating feelings that, alone,
Can make my tranced spirit blest.
That laughing eye, whose sunny beam
My memory would not cherish less; —
And oh, that smile! I whose joyous gleam
No mortal languish can express.
Adieu! but let me cherish, still,
The hope with which I cannot part.

Contempt may wound, and coldness chill,
But still it lingers in my heart.
And who can tell but Heaven, at last,
May answer all my thousand prayers,
And bid the future pay the past
With joy for anguish, smiles for tears.

When it ceased, I longed for nothing so much as to be out of the room. The sofa was not far from the door, but I did not dare to raise my head, for I knew Mr. Huntingdon was standing near me, and I knew by the sound of his voice, as he spoke in answer to some remark of Lord Lowborough's, that his face was turned towards me. Perhaps a half-suppressed sob had caught his ear, and caused him to look round — heaven forbid! But with a violent effort, I checked all further signs of weakness, dried my tears, and, when I thought he had turned away again, rose, and instantly left the apartment, taking refuge in my favourite resort, the library.

There was no light there but the faint red glow of the neglected fire; — but I did not want a light; I only wanted to indulge my thoughts, unnoticed and undisturbed; and sitting down on a low stool before the easy-chair, I sunk my head upon its cushioned seat, and thought, and thought, until the tears gushed out again, and I wept like any child. Presently, however, the door was gently opened and someone entered the room. I trusted it was only a servant, and did not stir. The door was closed again — but I was not alone; a hand gently touched my shoulder, and a voice said, softly, — 'Helen, what is the matter?'

I could not answer at the moment.

'You must, and shall tell me,' was added, more vehemently, and the speaker threw himself on his knees beside me on the rug, and forcibly possessed himself of my hand; but I hastily caught it away, and replied, — 'It is nothing to you, Mr. Huntingdon.'

'Are you sure it is nothing to me?' he returned; 'can you swear that you were not thinking of me while you wept?' This was unendurable. I made an effort to rise, but he was kneeling on my dress.

'Tell me,' continued he — 'I want to know, — because if you were, I have something to say to you, — and if not, I'll go.'

'Go then!' I cried; but, fearing he would obey too well, and never come again, I hastily added — 'Or say what you have to say, and have done with it!'

'But which?' said he — 'for I shall only say it if you really were thinking of me. So tell me, Helen.'

'You're excessively impertinent, Mr. Huntingdon!'

'Not at all — too pertinent, you mean. So you won't tell me? — Well, I'll spare your woman's pride, and, construing your silence into "Yes," I'll take it for granted that I was the subject of your thoughts, and the cause of your affliction — '

'Indeed, sir — '

'If you deny it, I won't tell you my secret,' threatened he; and I did not interrupt him again, or even attempt to repulse him: though he had taken my hand once more, and half embraced me with his other arm, I was scarcely conscious of it at the time.

'It is this,' resumed he: 'that Annabella Wilmot, in comparison with you, is like a flaunting peony compared with a sweet, wild rosebud gemmed with dew — and I love you to distraction! — Now, tell me if that intelligence gives you any pleasure. Silence again? That means yes. Then let me add, that I cannot live without you, and if you answer No to this last question, you will drive me mad. — Will you bestow yourself upon me? — you will!' he cried, nearly squeezing me to death in his arms.

'No, no!' I exclaimed, struggling to free myself from him — 'you must ask my uncle and aunt.'

'They won't refuse me, if you don't.'

'I'm not so sure of that — my aunt dislikes you.'

'But you don't, Helen — say you love me, and I'll go.'

'I wish you would go!' I replied.

'I will, this instant, — if you'll only say you love me.'

'You know I do,' I answered. And again he caught me in his arms, and smothered me with kisses.

At that moment my aunt opened wide the door, and stood before us, candle in hand, in shocked and horrified amazement, gazing alternately at Mr. Huntingdon and me — for we had both started up, and now stood wide enough asunder. But his confusion was only for a moment. Rallying in an instant, with the most enviable assurance, he began, — 'I beg ten thousand pardons, Mrs. Maxwell! Don't be too severe upon me. I've been asking your sweet niece to take me for better, for worse; and she, like a good girl, informs me she cannot think of it without her uncle's and aunt's consent. So let me implore you not to condemn me to eternal wretchedness: if you favour my cause, I am safe; for Mr. Maxwell, I am certain, can refuse you nothing.'

'We will talk of this to-morrow, sir,' said my aunt, coldly. 'It is a subject that demands mature and serious deliberation. At present, you had better return to the drawing-room.'

'But meantime,' pleaded he, 'let me commend my cause to your most indulgent — '

'No indulgence for you, Mr. Huntingdon, must come between me and the consideration of my niece's happiness.'

'Ah, true! I know she is an angel, and I am a presumptuous dog to dream of possessing such a treasure; but, nevertheless, I would sooner die than relinquish her in favour of the best man that ever went to heaven — and as for her happiness, I would sacrifice my body and soul — '

'Body and soul, Mr. Huntingdon — sacrifice your soul?'

'Well, I would lay down life — '

‘You would not be required to lay it down.’

‘I would spend it, then — devote my life — and all its powers to the promotion and preservation — ’

‘Another time, sir, we will talk of this — and I should have felt disposed to judge more favourably of your pretensions, if you too had chosen another time and place, and let me add — another manner for your declaration.’

‘Why, you see, Mrs. Maxwell,’ he began —

‘Pardon me, sir,’ said she, with dignity — ‘The company are inquiring for you in the other room.’ And she turned to me.

‘Then you must plead for me, Helen,’ said he, and at length withdrew.

‘You had better retire to your room, Helen,’ said my aunt, gravely. ‘I will discuss this matter with you, too, to-morrow.’

‘Don’t be angry, aunt,’ said I.

‘My dear, I am not angry,’ she replied: ‘I am surprised. If it is true that you told him you could not accept his offer without our consent — ’

‘It is true,’ interrupted I.

‘Then how could you permit — ?’

‘I couldn’t help it, aunt,’ I cried, bursting into tears. They were not altogether the tears of sorrow, or of fear for her displeasure, but rather the outbreak of the general tumultuous excitement of my feelings. But my good aunt was touched at my agitation. In a softer tone, she repeated her recommendation to retire, and, gently kissing my forehead, bade me good-night, and put her candle in my hand; and I went; but my brain worked so, I could not think of sleeping. I feel calmer now that I have written all this; and I will go to bed, and try to win tired nature’s sweet restorer.

CHAPTER XX

September 24th. — In the morning I rose, light and cheerful — nay, intensely happy. The hovering cloud cast over me by my aunt's views, and by the fear of not obtaining her consent, was lost in the bright effulgence of my own hopes, and the too delightful consciousness of requited love. It was a splendid morning; and I went out to enjoy it, in a quiet ramble, in company with my own blissful thoughts. The dew was on the grass, and ten thousand gossamers were waving in the breeze; the happy red-breast was pouring out its little soul in song, and my heart overflowed with silent hymns of gratitude and praise to heaven.

But I had not wandered far before my solitude was interrupted by the only person that could have disturbed my musings, at that moment, without being looked upon as an unwelcome intruder: Mr. Huntingdon came suddenly upon me. So unexpected was the apparition, that I might have thought it the creation of an over-excited imagination, had the sense of sight alone borne witness to his presence; but immediately I felt his strong arm round my waist and his warm kiss on my cheek, while his keen and gleeful salutation, 'My own Helen!' was ringing in my ear.

'Not yours yet!' said I, hastily swerving aside from this too presumptuous greeting. 'Remember my guardians. You will not easily obtain my aunt's consent. Don't you see she is prejudiced against you?'

'I do, dearest; and you must tell me why, that I may best know how to combat her objections. I suppose she thinks I am a prodigal,' pursued he, observing that I was unwilling to reply, 'and concludes that I shall have but little worldly goods wherewith to endow my better half? If so, you must tell her that my property is mostly entailed, and I cannot get rid of it. There may be a few mortgages on the rest — a few trifling debts and incumbrances here and there, but nothing to speak of; and though I acknowledge I am not so rich as I might be — or have been — still, I think, we could manage pretty comfortably on what's left. My father, you know, was something of a miser, and in his latter days especially saw no pleasure in life but to amass riches; and so it is no wonder that his son should make it his chief delight to spend them, which was accordingly the case, until my acquaintance with you, dear Helen, taught me other views and nobler aims. And the very idea of having you to care for under my roof would force me to moderate my expenses and live like a Christian — not to speak of all the prudence and virtue you would instil into my mind by your wise counsels and sweet, attractive goodness.'

'But it is not that,' said I; 'it is not money my aunt thinks about. She knows better than to value worldly wealth above its price.'

'What is it, then?'

'She wishes me to — to marry none but a really good man.'

'What, a man of "decided piety"? — ahem! — Well, come, I'll manage that too! It's Sunday to-day, isn't it? I'll go to church morning, afternoon, and evening, and comport myself in such a godly sort that she shall regard me with admiration and sisterly love, as a brand plucked from the burning. I'll come home sighing like a furnace, and full of the savour and unction of dear Mr. Blatant's discourse — '

'Mr. Leighton,' said I, dryly.

'Is Mr. Leighton a "sweet preacher," Helen — a "dear, delightful, heavenly-minded man"?'

'He is a good man, Mr. Huntingdon. I wish I could say half as much for you.'

'Oh, I forgot, you are a saint, too. I crave your pardon, dearest — but don't call me Mr. Huntingdon; my name is Arthur.'

'I'll call you nothing — for I'll have nothing at all to do with you if you talk in that way any more. If you really mean to deceive my aunt as you say, you are very wicked; and if not, you are very wrong to jest on such a subject.'

'I stand corrected,' said he, concluding his laugh with a sorrowful sigh. 'Now,' resumed he, after a momentary pause, 'let us talk about something else. And come nearer to me, Helen, and take my arm; and then I'll let you alone. I can't be quiet while I see you walking there.'

I complied; but said we must soon return to the house.

'No one will be down to breakfast yet, for long enough,' he answered. 'You spoke of your guardians just now, Helen, but is not your father still living?'

'Yes, but I always look upon my uncle and aunt as my guardians, for they are so in deed, though not in name. My father has entirely given me up to their care. I have never seen him since dear mamma died, when I was a very little girl, and my aunt, at her request, offered to take charge of me, and took me away to Staningley, where I have remained ever since; and I don't think he would object to anything for me that she thought proper to sanction.'

'But would he sanction anything to which she thought proper to object?'

'No, I don't think he cares enough about me.'

'He is very much to blame — but he doesn't know what an angel he has for his daughter — which is all the better for me, as, if he did, he would not be willing to part with such a treasure.'

'And Mr. Huntingdon,' said I, 'I suppose you know I am not an heiress?'

He protested he had never given it a thought, and begged I would not disturb his present enjoyment by the mention of such uninteresting subjects. I was glad of this proof of disinterested affection; for Annabella Wilmot is the probable heiress to all her uncle's wealth, in addition to her late father's property, which she has already in possession.

I now insisted upon retracing our steps to the house; but we walked slowly, and went on talking as we proceeded. I need not repeat all we said: let me rather refer to what passed between my aunt and me, after breakfast, when Mr. Huntingdon called my uncle aside, no doubt to make his proposals, and she beckoned me into another room, where she once more commenced a solemn remonstrance, which, however, entirely failed to convince me that her view of the case was preferable to my own.

‘You judge him uncharitably, aunt, I know,’ said I. ‘His very friends are not half so bad as you represent them. There is Walter Hargrave, Milicent’s brother, for one: he is but a little lower than the angels, if half she says of him is true. She is continually talking to me about him, and lauding his many virtues to the skies.’

‘You will form a very inadequate estimate of a man’s character,’ replied she, ‘if you judge by what a fond sister says of him. The worst of them generally know how to hide their misdeeds from their sisters’ eyes, and their mother’s, too.’

‘And there is Lord Lowborough,’ continued I, ‘quite a decent man.’

‘Who told you so? Lord Lowborough is a desperate man. He has dissipated his fortune in gambling and other things, and is now seeking an heiress to retrieve it. I told Miss Wilmot so; but you’re all alike: she haughtily answered she was very much obliged to me, but she believed she knew when a man was seeking her for her fortune, and when for herself; she flattered herself she had had experience enough in those matters to be justified in trusting to her own judgment — and as for his lordship’s lack of fortune, she cared nothing about that, as she hoped her own would suffice for both; and as for his wildness, she supposed he was no worse than others — besides, he was reformed now. Yes, they can all play the hypocrite when they want to take in a fond, misguided woman!’

‘Well, I think he’s about as good as she is,’ said I. ‘But when Mr. Huntingdon is married, he won’t have many opportunities of consorting with his bachelor friends; — and the worse they are, the more I long to deliver him from them.’

‘To be sure, my dear; and the worse he is, I suppose, the more you long to deliver him from himself.’

‘Yes, provided he is not incorrigible — that is, the more I long to deliver him from his faults — to give him an opportunity of shaking off the adventitious evil got from contact with others worse than himself, and shining out in the unclouded light of his own genuine goodness — to do my utmost to help his better self against his worse, and make him what he would have been if he had not, from the beginning, had a bad, selfish, miserly father, who, to gratify his own sordid passions, restricted him in the most innocent enjoyments of childhood and youth, and so disgusted him with every kind of restraint; — and a foolish mother who indulged him to the top of his bent, deceiving her husband for him, and doing her utmost to encourage those germs of folly and vice it was her duty to suppress, — and then, such a set of companions as you represent his friends to be — ’

‘Poor man!’ said she, sarcastically, ‘his kind have greatly wronged him!’

‘They have!’ cried I — ‘and they shall wrong him no more — his wife shall undo what his mother did!’

‘Well,’ said she, after a short pause, ‘I must say, Helen, I thought better of your judgment than this — and your taste too. How you can love such a man I cannot tell, or what pleasure you can find in his company; for “what fellowship hath light with darkness; or he that believeth with an infidel?”’

‘He is not an infidel; — and I am not light, and he is not darkness; his worst and only vice is thoughtlessness.’

‘And thoughtlessness,’ pursued my aunt, ‘may lead to every crime, and will but poorly excuse our errors in the sight of God. Mr. Huntingdon, I suppose, is not without the common faculties of men: he is not so light-headed as to be irresponsible: his Maker has endowed him with reason and conscience as well as the rest of us; the Scriptures are open to him as well as to others; — and “if he hear not them, neither will he hear though one rose from the dead.” And remember, Helen,’ continued she, solemnly, ‘“the wicked shall be turned into hell, and they that forget God!”’ And suppose, even, that he should continue to love you, and you him, and that you should pass through life together with tolerable comfort — how will it be in the end, when you see yourselves parted for ever; you, perhaps, taken into eternal bliss, and he cast into the lake that burneth with unquenchable fire — there for ever to — ’

‘Not for ever,’ I exclaimed, ‘“only till he has paid the uttermost farthing;” for “if any man’s work abide not the fire, he shall suffer loss, yet himself shall be saved, but so as by fire;” and He that “is able to subdue all things to Himself will have all men to be saved,” and “will, in the fulness of time, gather together in one all things in Christ Jesus, who tasted death for every man, and in whom God will reconcile all things to Himself, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.”’

‘Oh, Helen! where did you learn all this?’

‘In the Bible, aunt. I have searched it through, and found nearly thirty passages, all tending to support the same theory.’

‘And is that the use you make of your Bible? And did you find no passages tending to prove the danger and the falsity of such a belief?’

‘No: I found, indeed, some passages that, taken by themselves, might seem to contradict that opinion; but they will all bear a different construction to that which is commonly given, and in most the only difficulty is in the word which we translate “everlasting” or “eternal.” I don’t know the Greek, but I believe it strictly means for ages, and might signify either endless or long-enduring. And as for the danger of the belief, I would not publish it abroad if I thought any poor wretch would be likely to presume upon it to his own destruction, but it is a glorious thought to cherish in one’s own heart, and I would not part with it for all the world can give!’

Here our conference ended, for it was now high time to prepare for church. Every one attended the morning service, except my uncle, who hardly ever goes, and Mr. Wilmot, who stayed at home with him to enjoy a quiet game of cribbage. In the afternoon Miss Wilmot and Lord Lowborough likewise excused themselves from attending; but Mr. Huntingdon vouchsafed to accompany us again. Whether it was to ingratiate himself with my aunt I cannot tell, but, if so, he certainly should have behaved better. I must confess, I did not like his conduct during service at all. Holding his prayer-book upside down, or open at any place but the right, he did nothing but stare about him, unless he happened to catch my aunt's eye or mine, and then he would drop his own on his book, with a puritanical air of mock solemnity that would have been ludicrous, if it had not been too provoking. Once, during the sermon, after attentively regarding Mr. Leighton for a few minutes, he suddenly produced his gold pencil-case and snatched up a Bible. Perceiving that I observed the movement, he whispered that he was going to make a note of the sermon; but instead of that, as I sat next him, I could not help seeing that he was making a caricature of the preacher, giving to the respectable, pious, elderly gentleman, the air and aspect of a most absurd old hypocrite. And yet, upon his return, he talked to my aunt about the sermon with a degree of modest, serious discrimination that tempted me to believe he had really attended to and profited by the discourse.

Just before dinner my uncle called me into the library for the discussion of a very important matter, which was dismissed in few words.

'Now, Nell,' said he, 'this young Huntingdon has been asking for you: what must I say about it? Your aunt would answer "no" — but what say you?'

'I say yes, uncle,' replied I, without a moment's hesitation; for I had thoroughly made up my mind on the subject.

'Very good!' cried he. 'Now that's a good honest answer — wonderful for a girl! — Well, I'll write to your father to-morrow. He's sure to give his consent; so you may look on the matter as settled. You'd have done a deal better if you'd taken Wilmot, I can tell you; but that you won't believe. At your time of life, it's love that rules the roast: at mine, it's solid, serviceable gold. I suppose now, you'd never dream of looking into the state of your husband's finances, or troubling your head about settlements, or anything of that sort?'

'I don't think I should.'

'Well, be thankful, then, that you've wiser heads to think for you. I haven't had time, yet, to examine thoroughly into this young rascal's affairs, but I see that a great part of his father's fine property has been squandered away; — but still, I think, there's a pretty fair share of it left, and a little careful nursing may make a handsome thing of it yet; and then we must persuade your father to give you a decent fortune, as he has only one besides yourself to care for; — and, if you behave well, who knows but what I may be induced to remember you in my will!' continued he, putting his fingers to his nose, with a knowing wink.

‘Thanks, uncle, for that and all your kindness,’ replied I.

‘Well, and I questioned this young spark on the matter of settlements,’ continued he; ‘and he seemed disposed to be generous enough on that point — ’

‘I knew he would!’ said I. ‘But pray don’t trouble your head — or his, or mine about that; for all I have will be his, and all he has will be mine; and what more could either of us require?’ And I was about to make my exit, but he called me back.

‘Stop, stop!’ cried he; ‘we haven’t mentioned the time yet. When must it be? Your aunt would put it off till the Lord knows when, but he is anxious to be bound as soon as may be: he won’t hear of waiting beyond next month; and you, I guess, will be of the same mind, so — ’

‘Not at all, uncle; on the contrary, I should like to wait till after Christmas, at least.’

‘Oh! pooh, pooh! never tell me that tale — I know better,’ cried he; and he persisted in his incredulity. Nevertheless, it is quite true. I am in no hurry at all. How can I be, when I think of the momentous change that awaits me, and of all I have to leave? It is happiness enough to know that we are to be united; and that he really loves me, and I may love him as devotedly, and think of him as often as I please. However, I insisted upon consulting my aunt about the time of the wedding, for I determined her counsels should not be utterly disregarded; and no conclusions on that particular are come to yet.

CHAPTER XXI

October 1st. — All is settled now. My father has given his consent, and the time is fixed for Christmas, by a sort of compromise between the respective advocates for hurry and delay. Milicent Hargrave is to be one bridesmaid and Annabella Wilmot the other — not that I am particularly fond of the latter, but she is an intimate of the family, and I have not another friend.

When I told Milicent of my engagement, she rather provoked me by her manner of taking it. After staring a moment in mute surprise, she said, — 'Well, Helen, I suppose I ought to congratulate you — and I am glad to see you so happy; but I did not think you would take him; and I can't help feeling surprised that you should like him so much.'

'Why so?'

'Because you are so superior to him in every way, and there's something so bold and reckless about him — so, I don't know how — but I always feel a wish to get out of his way when I see him approach.'

'You are timid, Milicent; but that's no fault of his.'

'And then his look,' continued she. 'People say he's handsome, and of course he is; but I don't like that kind of beauty, and I wonder that you should.'

'Why so, pray?'

'Well, you know, I think there's nothing noble or lofty in his appearance.'

'In fact, you wonder that I can like any one so unlike the stilted heroes of romance. Well, give me my flesh and blood lover, and I'll leave all the Sir Herberts and Valentines to you — if you can find them.'

'I don't want them,' said she. 'I'll be satisfied with flesh and blood too — only the spirit must shine through and predominate. But don't you think Mr. Huntingdon's face is too red?'

'No!' cried I, indignantly. 'It is not red at all. There is just a pleasant glow, a healthy freshness in his complexion — the warm, pinky tint of the whole harmonising with the deeper colour of the cheeks, exactly as it ought to do. I hate a man to be red and white, like a painted doll, or all sickly white, or smoky black, or cadaverous yellow.'

'Well, tastes differ — but I like pale or dark,' replied she. 'But, to tell you the truth, Helen, I had been deluding myself with the hope that you would one day be my sister. I expected Walter would be introduced to you next season; and I thought you would like him, and was certain he would like you; and I flattered myself I should thus have the felicity of seeing the two persons I like best in the world — except mamma — united in one. He mayn't be exactly what you would call handsome, but he's far more distinguished-looking, and nicer and better than Mr. Huntingdon; — and I'm sure you would say so, if you knew him.'

'Impossible, Milicent! You think so, because you're his sister; and, on that account, I'll forgive you; but nobody else should so disparage Arthur Huntingdon to me with impunity.'

Miss Wilmot expressed her feelings on the subject almost as openly.

'And so, Helen,' said she, coming up to me with a smile of no amiable import, 'you are to be Mrs. Huntingdon, I suppose?'

'Yes,' replied I. 'Don't you envy me?'

'Oh, dear, no!' she exclaimed. 'I shall probably be Lady Lowborough some day, and then you know, dear, I shall be in a capacity to inquire, "Don't you envy me?"'

'Henceforth I shall envy no one,' returned I.

'Indeed! Are you so happy then?' said she, thoughtfully; and something very like a cloud of disappointment shadowed her face. 'And does he love you — I mean, does he idolise you as much as you do him?' she added, fixing her eyes upon me with ill-disguised anxiety for the reply.

'I don't want to be idolised,' I answered; 'but I am well assured that he loves me more than anybody else in the world — as I do him.'

'Exactly,' said she, with a nod. 'I wish — ' she paused.

'What do you wish?' asked I, annoyed at the vindictive expression of her countenance.

'I wish,' returned, she, with a short laugh, 'that all the attractive points and desirable qualifications of the two gentlemen were united in one — that Lord Lowborough had Huntingdon's handsome face and good temper, and all his wit, and mirth and charm, or else that Huntingdon had Lowborough's pedigree, and title, and delightful old family seat, and I had him; and you might have the other and welcome.'

'Thank you, dear Annabella: I am better satisfied with things as they are, for my own part; and for you, I wish you were as well content with your intended as I am with mine,' said I; and it was true enough; for, though vexed at first at her unamiable spirit, her frankness touched me, and the contrast between our situations was such, that I could well afford to pity her and wish her well.

Mr. Huntingdon's acquaintances appear to be no better pleased with our approaching union than mine. This morning's post brought him letters from several of his friends, during the perusal of which, at the breakfast-table, he excited the attention of the company by the singular variety of his grimaces. But he crushed them all into his pocket, with a private laugh, and said nothing till the meal was concluded. Then, while the company were hanging over the fire or loitering through the room, previous to settling to their various morning avocations, he came and leant over the back of my chair, with his face in contact with my curls, and commencing with a quiet little kiss, poured forth the following complaints into my ear: —

'Helen, you witch, do you know that you've entailed upon me the curses of all my friends? I wrote to them the other day, to tell them of my happy prospects, and now, instead of a bundle of congratulations, I've got a pocketful of bitter execrations and reproaches. There's not one kind wish for me, or one good word for you, among them all. They say there'll be no more fun now, no more merry days and glorious nights — and all my fault — I am the first to break up the jovial band, and others, in pure despair, will follow my example. I was the very life and prop of the community, they do me the honour to say, and I have shamefully betrayed my trust — '

'You may join them again, if you like,' said I, somewhat piqued at the sorrowful tone of his discourse. 'I should be sorry to stand between any man — or body of men, and so much happiness; and perhaps I can manage to do without you, as well as your poor deserted friends.'

'Bless you, no,' murmured he. 'It's "all for love or the world well lost," with me. Let them go to — where they belong, to speak politely. But if you saw how they abuse me, Helen, you would love me all the more for having ventured so much for your sake.'

He pulled out his crumpled letters. I thought he was going to show them to me, and told him I did not wish to see them.

'I'm not going to show them to you, love,' said he. 'They're hardly fit for a lady's eyes — the most part of them. But look here. This is Grimsby's scrawl — only three lines, the sulky dog! He doesn't say much, to be sure, but his very silence implies more than all the others' words, and the less he says, the more he thinks — and this is Hargrave's missive. He is particularly grieved at me, because, forsooth he had fallen in love with you from his sister's reports, and meant to have married you himself, as soon as he had sown his wild oats.'

'I'm vastly obliged to him,' observed I.

'And so am I,' said he. 'And look at this. This is Hattersley's — every page stuffed full of railing accusations, bitter curses, and lamentable complaints, ending up with swearing that he'll get married himself in revenge: he'll throw himself away on the first old maid that chooses to set her cap at him, — as if I cared what he did with himself.'

'Well,' said I, 'if you do give up your intimacy with these men, I don't think you will have much cause to regret the loss of their society; for it's my belief they never did you much good.'

'Maybe not; but we'd a merry time of it, too, though mingled with sorrow and pain, as Lowborough knows to his cost — Ha, ha!' and while he was laughing at the recollection of Lowborough's troubles, my uncle came and slapped him on the shoulder.

'Come, my lad!' said he. 'Are you too busy making love to my niece to make war with the pheasants? — First of October, remember! Sun shines out — rain ceased — even Boarham's not afraid to venture in his waterproof boots; and Wilmot and I are going to beat you all. I declare, we old 'uns are the keenest sportsmen of the lot!'

‘I’ll show you what I can do to-day, however,’ said my companion. ‘I’ll murder your birds by wholesale, just for keeping me away from better company than either you or them.’

And so saying he departed; and I saw no more of him till dinner. It seemed a weary time; I wonder what I shall do without him.

It is very true that the three elder gentlemen have proved themselves much keener sportsmen than the two younger ones; for both Lord Lowborough and Arthur Huntingdon have of late almost daily neglected the shooting excursions to accompany us in our various rides and rambles. But these merry times are fast drawing to a close. In less than a fortnight the party break up, much to my sorrow, for every day I enjoy it more and more — now that Messrs. Boarham and Wilmot have ceased to tease me, and my aunt has ceased to lecture me, and I have ceased to be jealous of Annabella — and even to dislike her — and now that Mr. Huntingdon is become my Arthur, and I may enjoy his society without restraint. What shall I do without him, I repeat?

CHAPTER XXII

October 5th. — My cup of sweets is not unmingled: it is dashed with a bitterness that I cannot hide from myself, disguise it as I will. I may try to persuade myself that the sweetness overpowers it; I may call it a pleasant aromatic flavour; but say what I will, it is still there, and I cannot but taste it. I cannot shut my eyes to Arthur's faults; and the more I love him the more they trouble me. His very heart, that I trusted so, is, I fear, less warm and generous than I thought it. At least, he gave me a specimen of his character to-day that seemed to merit a harder name than thoughtlessness. He and Lord Lowborough were accompanying Annabella and me in a long, delightful ride; he was riding by my side, as usual, and Annabella and Lord Lowborough were a little before us, the latter bending towards his companion as if in tender and confidential discourse.

'Those two will get the start of us, Helen, if we don't look sharp,' observed Huntingdon. 'They'll make a match of it, as sure as can be. That Lowborough's fairly besotted. But he'll find himself in a fix when he's got her, I doubt.'

'And she'll find herself in a fix when she's got him,' said I, 'if what I've heard of him is true.'

'Not a bit of it. She knows what she's about; but he, poor fool, deludes himself with the notion that she'll make him a good wife, and because she has amused him with some rodomontade about despising rank and wealth in matters of love and marriage, he flatters himself that she's devotedly attached to him; that she will not refuse him for his poverty, and does not court him for his rank, but loves him for himself alone.'

'But is not he courting her for her fortune?'

'No, not he. That was the first attraction, certainly; but now he has quite lost sight of it: it never enters his calculations, except merely as an essential without which, for the lady's own sake, he could not think of marrying her. No; he's fairly in love. He thought he never could be again, but he's in for it once more. He was to have been married before, some two or three years ago; but he lost his bride by losing his fortune. He got into a bad way among us in London: he had an unfortunate taste for gambling; and surely the fellow was born under an unlucky star, for he always lost thrice where he gained once. That's a mode of self-torment I never was much addicted to. When I spend my money I like to enjoy the full value of it: I see no fun in wasting it on thieves and blacklegs; and as for gaining money, hitherto I have always had sufficient; it's time enough to be clutching for more, I think, when you begin to see the end of what you have. But I have sometimes frequented the gaming-houses just to watch the on-goings of those mad votaries of chance —

a very interesting study, I assure you, Helen, and sometimes very diverting: I've had many a laugh at the boobies and bedlamites. Lowborough was quite infatuated — not willingly, but of necessity, — he was always resolving to give it up, and always breaking his resolutions. Every venture was the 'just once more:' if he gained a little, he hoped to gain a little more next time, and if he lost, it would not do to leave off at that juncture; he must go on till he had retrieved that last misfortune, at least: bad luck could not last for ever; and every lucky hit was looked upon as the dawn of better times, till experience proved the contrary. At length he grew desperate, and we were daily on the look-out for a case of *felo-de-se* — no great matter, some of us whispered, as his existence had ceased to be an acquisition to our club. At last, however, he came to a check. He made a large stake, which he determined should be the last, whether he lost or won. He had often so determined before, to be sure, and as often broken his determination; and so it was this time. He lost; and while his antagonist smilingly swept away the stakes, he turned chalky white, drew back in silence, and wiped his forehead. I was present at the time; and while he stood with folded arms and eyes fixed on the ground, I knew well enough what was passing in his mind.

'"Is it to be the last, Lowborough?" said I, stepping up to him.

'"The last but one," he answered, with a grim smile; and then, rushing back to the table, he struck his hand upon it, and, raising his voice high above all the confusion of jingling coins and muttered oaths and curses in the room, he swore a deep and solemn oath that, come what would, this trial should be the last, and imprecated unspeakable curses on his head if ever he should shuffle a card or rattle a dice-box again. He then doubled his former stake, and challenged any one present to play against him. Grimsby instantly presented himself. Lowborough glared fiercely at him, for Grimsby was almost as celebrated for his luck as he was for his ill-fortune. However, they fell to work. But Grimsby had much skill and little scruple, and whether he took advantage of the other's trembling, blinded eagerness to deal unfairly by him, I cannot undertake to say; but Lowborough lost again, and fell dead sick.

'"You'd better try once more," said Grimsby, leaning across the table. And then he winked at me.

'"I've nothing to try with," said the poor devil, with a ghastly smile.

'"Oh, Huntingdon will lend you what you want," said the other.

'"No; you heard my oath," answered Lowborough, turning away in quiet despair. And I took him by the arm and led him out.

'"Is it to be the last, Lowborough?" I asked, when I got him into the street.

'"The last," he answered, somewhat against my expectation. And I took him home — that is, to our club — for he was as submissive as a child — and plied him with brandy-and-water till he began to look rather brighter — rather more alive, at least.

'"Huntingdon, I'm ruined!" said he, taking the third glass from my hand

— he had drunk the others in dead silence.

'"Not you," said I. "You'll find a man can live without his money as merrily as a tortoise without its head, or a wasp without its body."

'"But I'm in debt," said he — "deep in debt. And I can never, never get out of it."

'"Well, what of that? Many a better man than you has lived and died in debt; and they can't put you in prison, you know, because you're a peer." And I handed him his fourth tumbler.

'"But I hate to be in debt!" he shouted. "I wasn't born for it, and I cannot bear it."

'"What can't be cured must be endured," said I, beginning to mix the fifth.

'"And then, I've lost my Caroline." And he began to snivel then, for the brandy had softened his heart.

'"No matter," I answered, "there are more Carolines in the world than one."

'"There's only one for me," he replied, with a dolorous sigh. "And if there were fifty more, who's to get them, I wonder, without money?"

'"Oh, somebody will take you for your title; and then you've your family estate yet; that's entailed, you know."

'"I wish to God I could sell it to pay my debts," he muttered.

'"And then," said Grimsby, who had just come in, "you can try again, you know. I would have more than one chance, if I were you. I'd never stop here."

'"I won't, I tell you!" shouted he. And he started up, and left the room — walking rather unsteadily, for the liquor had got into his head. He was not so much used to it then, but after that he took to it kindly to solace his cares.

'He kept his oath about gambling (not a little to the surprise of us all), though Grimsby did his utmost to tempt him to break it, but now he had got hold of another habit that bothered him nearly as much, for he soon discovered that the demon of drink was as black as the demon of play, and nearly as hard to get rid of — especially as his kind friends did all they could to second the promptings of his own insatiable cravings.'

'Then, they were demons themselves,' cried I, unable to contain my indignation. 'And you, Mr. Huntingdon, it seems, were the first to tempt him.'

'Well, what could we do?' replied he, deprecatingly. — 'We meant it in kindness — we couldn't bear to see the poor fellow so miserable: — and besides, he was such a damper upon us, sitting there silent and glum, when he was under the threefold influence — of the loss of his sweetheart, the loss of his fortune, and the reaction of the lost night's debauch; whereas, when he had something in him, if he was not merry himself, he was an unfailing source of merriment to us. Even Grimsby could chuckle over his odd sayings: they delighted him far more than my merry jests, or Hattersley's riotous mirth. But one evening, when we were sitting over our wine, after one of our club dinners, and all had been hearty together, — Lowborough giving us mad toasts, and hearing our wild songs, and bearing a hand in the applause, if he did not help us to sing them himself, — he suddenly relapsed into silence, sinking his head on his hand, and never lifting his glass to his lips; — but this was nothing new; so we let him alone, and went on with our jollification, till, suddenly raising his head, he interrupted us in the middle of a roar of laughter by exclaiming, — 'Gentlemen, where is all this to end? — Will you just tell me that now? — Where is it all to end?' He rose.

'"A speech, a speech!" shouted we. "Hear, hear! Lowborough's going to give us a speech!"

'He waited calmly till the thunders of applause and jingling of glasses had ceased, and then proceeded, — "It's only this, gentlemen, — that I think we'd better go no further. We'd better stop while we can."

'"Just so!" cried Hattersley —

"Stop, poor sinner, stop and think
  Before you further go,
No longer sport upon the brink
  Of everlasting woe."

'"Exactly!" replied his lordship, with the utmost gravity. "And if you choose to visit the bottomless pit, I won't go with you — we must part company, for I swear I'll not move another step towards it! — What's this?" he said, taking up his glass of wine.

'"Taste it," suggested I.

'"This is hell broth!" he exclaimed. "I renounce it for ever!" And he threw it out into the middle of the table.

'"Fill again!" said I, handing him the bottle — "and let us drink to your renunciation."

'"It's rank poison," said he, grasping the bottle by the neck, "and I forswear it! I've given up gambling, and I'll give up this too." He was on the point of deliberately pouring the whole contents of the bottle on to the table, but Hargrave wrested it from him. "On you be the curse, then!" said he. And, backing from the room, he shouted, "Farewell, ye tempters!" and vanished amid shouts of laughter and applause.

'We expected him back among us the next day; but, to our surprise, the place remained vacant: we saw nothing of him for a whole week; and we really began to think he was going to keep his word. At last, one evening, when we were most of us assembled together again, he entered, silent and grim as a ghost, and would have quietly slipped into his usual seat at my elbow, but we all rose to welcome him, and several voices were raised to ask what he would have, and several hands were busy with bottle and glass to serve him; but I knew a smoking tumbler of brandy-and-water would comfort him best, and had nearly prepared it, when he peevishly pushed it away, saying, —

'"Do let me alone, Huntingdon! Do be quiet, all of you! I'm not come to join you: I'm only come to be with you awhile, because I can't bear my own thoughts." And he folded his arms, and leant back in his chair; so we let him be. But I left the glass by him; and, after awhile, Grimsby directed my attention towards it, by a significant wink; and, on turning my head, I saw it was drained to the bottom. He made me a sign to replenish, and quietly pushed up the bottle. I willingly complied; but Lowborough detected the pantomime, and, nettled at the intelligent grins that were passing between us, snatched the glass from my hand, dashed the contents of it in Grimsby's face, threw the empty tumbler at me, and then bolted from the room.'

'I hope he broke your head,' said I.

'No, love,' replied he, laughing immoderately at the recollection of the whole affair; 'he would have done so, — and perhaps, spoilt my face, too, but, providentially, this forest of curls' (taking off his hat, and showing his luxuriant chestnut locks) 'saved my skull, and prevented the glass from breaking, till it reached the table.'

'After that,' he continued, 'Lowborough kept aloof from us a week or two longer. I used to meet him occasionally in the town; and then, as I was too good-natured to resent his unmannerly conduct, and he bore no malice against me, — he was never unwilling to talk to me; on the contrary, he would cling to me, and follow me anywhere but to the club, and the gaming-houses, and such-like dangerous places of resort — he was so weary of his own moping, melancholy mind. At last, I got him to come in with me to the club, on condition that I would not tempt him to drink; and, for some time, he continued to look in upon us pretty regularly of an evening, — still abstaining, with wonderful perseverance, from the "rank poison" he had so bravely forsworn. But some of our members protested against this conduct. They did not like to have him sitting there like a skeleton at a feast, instead of contributing his quota to the general amusement, casting a cloud over all, and watching, with greedy eyes, every drop they carried to their lips — they vowed it was not fair; and some of them maintained that he should either be compelled to do as others did, or expelled from the society; and swore that, next time he showed himself, they would tell him as much, and, if he did not take the warning, proceed to active measures. However, I befriended him on this occasion, and recommended them to let him be for a while, intimating that, with a little patience on our parts, he would soon come round again. But, to be sure, it was rather provoking; for, though he refused to drink like an honest Christian, it was well known to me that he kept a private bottle of laudanum about him, which he was continually soaking at — or rather, holding off and on with, abstaining one day and exceeding the next — just like the spirits.

'One night, however, during one of our orgies — one of our high festivals, I mean — he glided in, like the ghost in "Macbeth," and seated himself, as usual, a little back from the table, in the chair we always placed for "the spectre," whether it chose to fill it or not. I saw by his face that he was suffering from the effects of an overdose of his insidious comforter; but nobody spoke to him, and he spoke to nobody. A few sidelong glances, and a whispered observation, that "the ghost was come," was all the notice he drew by his appearance, and we went on with our merry carousals as before, till he startled us all by suddenly drawing in his chair, and leaning forward with his elbows on the table, and exclaiming with portentous solemnity, — "Well! it puzzles me what you can find to be so merry about. What you see in life I don't know — I see only the blackness of darkness, and a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!"

'All the company simultaneously pushed up their glasses to him, and I set them before him in a semicircle, and, tenderly patting him on the back, bid him drink, and he would soon see as bright a prospect as any of us; but he pushed them back, muttering, —

'"Take them away! I won't taste it, I tell you. I won't — I won't!" So I handed them down again to the owners; but I saw that he followed them with a glare of hungry regret as they departed. Then he clasped his hands before his eyes to shut out the sight, and two minutes after lifted his head again, and said, in a hoarse but vehement whisper, —

'"And yet I must! Huntingdon, get me a glass!"

'"Take the bottle, man!" said I, thrusting the brandy-bottle into his hand — but stop, I'm telling too much,' muttered the narrator, startled at the look I turned upon him. 'But no matter,' he recklessly added, and thus continued his relation: 'In his desperate eagerness, he seized the bottle and sucked away, till he suddenly dropped from his chair, disappearing under the table amid a tempest of applause. The consequence of this imprudence was something like an apoplectic fit, followed by a rather severe brain fever — '

'And what did you think of yourself, sir?' said I, quickly.

'Of course, I was very penitent,' he replied. 'I went to see him once or twice — nay, twice or thrice — or by'r lady, some four times — and when he got better, I tenderly brought him back to the fold.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, I restored him to the bosom of the club, and compassionating the feebleness of his health and extreme lowness of his spirits, I recommended him to "take a little wine for his stomach's sake," and, when he was sufficiently re-established, to embrace the media-via, ni-jamais-ni-toujours plan — not to kill himself like a fool, and not to abstain like a ninny — in a word, to enjoy himself like a rational creature, and do as I did; for, don't think, Helen, that I'm a tippler; I'm nothing at all of the kind, and never was, and never shall be. I value my comfort far too much. I see that a man cannot give himself up to drinking without being miserable one-half his days and mad the other; besides, I like to enjoy my life at all sides and ends, which cannot be done by one that suffers himself to be the slave of a single propensity — and, moreover, drinking spoils one's good looks,' he concluded, with a most conceited smile that ought to have provoked me more than it did.

‘And did Lord Lowborough profit by your advice?’ I asked.

‘Why, yes, in a manner. For a while he managed very well; indeed, he was a model of moderation and prudence — something too much so for the tastes of our wild community; but, somehow, Lowborough had not the gift of moderation: if he stumbled a little to one side, he must go down before he could right himself: if he overshot the mark one night, the effects of it rendered him so miserable the next day that he must repeat the offence to mend it; and so on from day to day, till his clamorous conscience brought him to a stand. And then, in his sober moments, he so bothered his friends with his remorse, and his terrors and woes, that they were obliged, in self-defence, to get him to drown his sorrows in wine, or any more potent beverage that came to hand; and when his first scruples of conscience were overcome, he would need no more persuading, he would often grow desperate, and be as great a blackguard as any of them could desire — but only to lament his own unutterable wickedness and degradation the more when the fit was over.

‘At last, one day when he and I were alone together, after pondering awhile in one of his gloomy, abstracted moods, with his arms folded and his head sunk on his breast, he suddenly woke up, and vehemently grasping my arm, said, —

‘“Huntingdon, this won’t do! I’m resolved to have done with it.”

‘“What, are you going to shoot yourself?” said I.

‘“No; I’m going to reform.”

‘“Oh, that’s nothing new! You’ve been going to reform these twelve months and more.”

‘“Yes, but you wouldn’t let me; and I was such a fool I couldn’t live without you. But now I see what it is that keeps me back, and what’s wanted to save me; and I’d compass sea and land to get it — only I’m afraid there’s no chance.” And he sighed as if his heart would break.

‘“What is it, Lowborough?” said I, thinking he was fairly cracked at last.

‘“A wife,” he answered; “for I can’t live alone, because my own mind distracts me, and I can’t live with you, because you take the devil’s part against me.”

‘“Who — I?”

‘“Yes — all of you do — and you more than any of them, you know. But if I could get a wife, with fortune enough to pay off my debts and set me straight in the world — ”

‘“To be sure,” said I.

‘“And sweetness and goodness enough,” he continued, “to make home tolerable, and to reconcile me to myself, I think I should do yet. I shall never be in love again, that’s certain; but perhaps that would be no great matter, it would enable me to choose with my eyes open — and I should make a good husband in spite of it; but could any one be in love with me? — that’s the question. With your good looks and powers of fascination” (he was pleased to say), "I might hope; but as it is, Huntingdon, do you think anybody would take me — ruined and wretched as I am?"

'"Yes, certainly."

'"Who?"

'"Why, any neglected old maid, fast sinking in despair, would be delighted to — "

'"No, no," said he — "it must be somebody that I can love."

'"Why, you just said you never could be in love again!"

'"Well, love is not the word — but somebody that I can like. I'll search all England through, at all events!" he cried, with a sudden burst of hope, or desperation. "Succeed or fail, it will be better than rushing headlong to destruction at that d-d club: so farewell to it and you. Whenever I meet you on honest ground or under a Christian roof, I shall be glad to see you; but never more shall you entice me to that devil's den!"

'This was shameful language, but I shook hands with him, and we parted. He kept his word; and from that time forward he has been a pattern of propriety, as far as I can tell; but till lately I have not had very much to do with him. He occasionally sought my company, but as frequently shrunk from it, fearing lest I should wile him back to destruction, and I found his not very entertaining, especially as he sometimes attempted to awaken my conscience and draw me from the perdition he considered himself to have escaped; but when I did happen to meet him, I seldom failed to ask after the progress of his matrimonial efforts and researches, and, in general, he could give me but a poor account. The mothers were repelled by his empty coffers and his reputation for gambling, and the daughters by his cloudy brow and melancholy temper — besides, he didn't understand them; he wanted the spirit and assurance to carry his point.

'I left him at it when I went to the continent; and on my return, at the year's end, I found him still a disconsolate bachelor — though, certainly, looking somewhat less like an unblest exile from the tomb than before. The young ladies had ceased to be afraid of him, and were beginning to think him quite interesting; but the mammas were still unrelenting. It was about this time, Helen, that my good angel brought me into conjunction with you; and then I had eyes and ears for nobody else. But, meantime, Lowborough became acquainted with our charming friend, Miss Wilmot — through the intervention of his good angel, no doubt he would tell you, though he did not dare to fix his hopes on one so courted and admired, till after they were brought into closer contact here at Staningley, and she, in the absence of her other admirers, indubitably courted his notice and held out every encouragement to his timid advances. Then, indeed, he began to hope for a dawn of brighter days; and if, for a while, I darkened his prospects by standing between him and his sun — and so nearly plunged him again into the abyss of despair — it only intensified his ardour and strengthened his hopes when I chose to abandon the field in the pursuit of a brighter treasure. In a word, as I told you, he is fairly besotted. At first, he could dimly perceive her faults, and they gave him considerable uneasiness; but now his passion and her art together have blinded him to everything but her perfections and his amazing good fortune. Last night he came to me brimful of his new-found felicity:

'"Huntingdon, I am not a castaway!" said he, seizing my hand and squeezing it like a vice. "There is happiness in store for me yet — even in this life — she loves me!"

'"Indeed!" said I. "Has she told you so?"

'"No, but I can no longer doubt it. Do you not see how pointedly kind and affectionate she is? And she knows the utmost extent of my poverty, and cares nothing about it! She knows all the folly and all the wickedness of my former life, and is not afraid to trust me — and my rank and title are no allurements to her; for them she utterly disregards. She is the most generous, high-minded being that can be conceived of. She will save me, body and soul, from destruction. Already, she has ennobled me in my own estimation, and made me three times better, wiser, greater than I was. Oh! if I had but known her before, how much degradation and misery I should have been spared! But what have I done to deserve so magnificent a creature?"

'And the cream of the jest,' continued Mr. Huntingdon, laughing, 'is, that the artful minx loves nothing about him but his title and pedigree, and "that delightful old family seat."'

'How do you know?' said I.

'She told me so herself; she said, "As for the man himself, I thoroughly despise him; but then, I suppose, it is time to be making my choice, and if I waited for some one capable of eliciting my esteem and affection, I should have to pass my life in single blessedness, for I detest you all!" Ha, ha! I suspect she was wrong there; but, however, it is evident she has no love for him, poor fellow.'

'Then you ought to tell him so.'

'What! and spoil all her plans and prospects, poor girl? No, no: that would be a breach of confidence, wouldn't it, Helen? Ha, ha! Besides, it would break his heart.' And he laughed again.

'Well, Mr. Huntingdon, I don't know what you see so amazingly diverting in the matter; I see nothing to laugh at.'

'I'm laughing at you, just now, love,' said he, redoubling his machinations.

And leaving him to enjoy his merriment alone, I touched Ruby with the whip, and cantered on to rejoin our companions; for we had been walking our horses all this time, and were consequently a long way behind. Arthur was soon at my side again; but not disposed to talk to him, I broke into a gallop. He did the same; and we did not slacken our pace till we came up with Miss Wilmot and Lord Lowborough, which was within half a mile of the park-gates. I avoided all further conversation with him till we came to the end of our ride, when I meant to jump off my horse and vanish into the house, before he could offer his assistance; but while I was disengaging my habit from the crutch, he lifted me off, and held me by both hands, asserting that he would not let me go till I had forgiven him.

‘I have nothing to forgive,’ said I. ‘You have not injured me.’

‘No, darling — God forbid that I should! but you are angry because it was to me that Annabella confessed her lack of esteem for her lover.’

‘No, Arthur, it is not that that displeases me: it is the whole system of your conduct towards your friend, and if you wish me to forget it, go now, and tell him what sort of a woman it is that he adores so madly, and on whom he has hung his hopes of future happiness.’

‘I tell you, Helen, it would break his heart — it would be the death of him — besides being a scandalous trick to poor Annabella. There is no help for him now; he is past praying for. Besides, she may keep up the deception to the end of the chapter; and then he will be just as happy in the illusion as if it were reality; or perhaps he will only discover his mistake when he has ceased to love her; and if not, it is much better that the truth should dawn gradually upon him. So now, my angel, I hope I have made out a clear case, and fully convinced you that I cannot make the atonement you require. What other requisition have you to make? Speak, and I will gladly obey.’

‘I have none but this,’ said I, as gravely as before: ‘that, in future, you will never make a jest of the sufferings of others, and always use your influence with your friends for their own advantage against their evil propensities, instead of seconding their evil propensities against themselves.’

‘I will do my utmost,’ said he, ‘to remember and perform the injunctions of my angel monitress;’ and after kissing both my gloved hands, he let me go.

When I entered my room, I was surprised to see Annabella Wilmot standing before my toilet-table, composedly surveying her features in the glass, with one hand flirting her gold-mounted whip, and the other holding up her long habit.

‘She certainly is a magnificent creature!’ thought I, as I beheld that tall, finely developed figure, and the reflection of the handsome face in the mirror before me, with the glossy dark hair, slightly and not ungracefully disordered by the breezy ride, the rich brown complexion glowing with exercise, and the black eyes sparkling with unwonted brilliance. On perceiving me, she turned round, exclaiming, with a laugh that savoured more of malice than of mirth, — ‘Why, Helen! what have you been doing so long? I came to tell you my good fortune,’ she continued, regardless of Rachel’s presence. ‘Lord Lowborough has proposed, and I have been graciously pleased to accept him. Don’t you envy me, dear?’

‘No, love,’ said I — ‘or him either,’ I mentally added. ‘And do you like him, Annabella?’

‘Like him! yes, to be sure — over head and ears in love!’

‘Well, I hope you’ll make him a good wife.’

'Thank you, my dear! And what besides do you hope?'

'I hope you will both love each other, and both be happy.'

'Thanks; and I hope you will make a very good wife to Mr. Huntingdon!' said she, with a queenly bow, and retired.

'Oh, Miss! how could you say so to her!' cried Rachel.

'Say what?' replied I.

'Why, that you hoped she would make him a good wife. I never heard such a thing!'

'Because I do hope it, or rather, I wish it; she's almost past hope.'

'Well,' said she, 'I'm sure I hope he'll make her a good husband. They tell queer things about him downstairs. They were saying — '

'I know, Rachel. I've heard all about him; but he's reformed now. And they have no business to tell tales about their masters.'

'No, mum — or else, they have said some things about Mr. Huntingdon too.' 'I won't hear them, Rachel; they tell lies.'

'Yes, mum,' said she, quietly, as she went on arranging my hair.

'Do you believe them, Rachel?' I asked, after a short pause.

'No, Miss, not all. You know when a lot of servants gets together they like to talk about their betters; and some, for a bit of swagger, likes to make it appear as though they knew more than they do, and to throw out hints and things just to astonish the others. But I think, if I was you, Miss Helen, I'd look very well before I leaped. I do believe a young lady can't be too careful who she marries.'

'Of course not,' said I; 'but be quick, will you, Rachel? I want to be dressed.'

And, indeed, I was anxious to be rid of the good woman, for I was in such a melancholy frame I could hardly keep the tears out of my eyes while she dressed me. It was not for Lord Lowborough — it was not for Annabella — it was not for myself — it was for Arthur Huntingdon that they rose.

* * * * *

13th. — They are gone, and he is gone. We are to be parted for more than two months, above ten weeks! a long, long time to live and not to see him. But he has promised to write often, and made me promise to write still oftener, because he will be busy settling his affairs, and I shall have nothing better to do. Well, I think I shall always have plenty to say. But oh! for the time when we shall be always together, and can exchange our thoughts without the intervention of these cold go-betweens, pen, ink, and paper!

* * * * *

22nd. — I have had several letters from Arthur already. They are not long, but passing sweet, and just like himself, full of ardent affection, and playful lively humour; but there is always a ‘but’ in this imperfect world, and I do wish he would sometimes be serious. I cannot get him to write or speak in real, solid earnest. I don’t much mind it now, but if it be always so, what shall I do with the serious part of myself?

CHAPTER XXIII

Feb. 18, 1822. — Early this morning Arthur mounted his hunter and set off in high glee to meet the — hounds. He will be away all day, and so I will amuse myself with my neglected diary, if I can give that name to such an irregular composition. It is exactly four months since I opened it last.

I am married now, and settled down as Mrs. Huntingdon of Grassdale Manor. I have had eight weeks' experience of matrimony. And do I regret the step I have taken? No, though I must confess, in my secret heart, that Arthur is not what I thought him at first, and if I had known him in the beginning as thoroughly as I do now, I probably never should have loved him, and if I loved him first, and then made the discovery, I fear I should have thought it my duty not to have married him. To be sure I might have known him, for every one was willing enough to tell me about him, and he himself was no accomplished hypocrite, but I was wilfully blind; and now, instead of regretting that I did not discern his full character before I was indissolubly bound to him, I am glad, for it has saved me a great deal of battling with my conscience, and a great deal of consequent trouble and pain; and, whatever I ought to have done, my duty now is plainly to love him and to cleave to him, and this just tallies with my inclination.

He is very fond of me, almost too fond. I could do with less caressing and more rationality. I should like to be less of a pet and more of a friend, if I might choose; but I won't complain of that: I am only afraid his affection loses in depth where it gains in ardour. I sometimes liken it to a fire of dry twigs and branches compared with one of solid coal, very bright and hot; but if it should burn itself out and leave nothing but ashes behind, what shall I do? But it won't, it sha'n't, I am determined; and surely I have power to keep it alive. So let me dismiss that thought at once. But Arthur is selfish; I am constrained to acknowledge that; and, indeed, the admission gives me less pain than might be expected, for, since I love him so much, I can easily forgive him for loving himself: he likes to be pleased, and it is my delight to please him; and when I regret this tendency of his, it is for his own sake, not for mine.

The first instance he gave was on the occasion of our bridal tour. He wanted to hurry it over, for all the continental scenes were already familiar to him: many had lost their interest in his eyes, and others had never had anything to lose. The consequence was, that after a flying transit through part of France and part of Italy, I came back nearly as ignorant as I went, having made no acquaintance with persons and manners, and very little with things, my head swarming with a motley confusion of objects and scenes; some, it is true, leaving a deeper and more pleasing impression than others, but these embittered by the recollection that my emotions had not been shared by my companion, but that, on the contrary, when I had expressed a particular interest in anything that I saw or desired to see, it had been displeasing to him, inasmuch as it proved that I could take delight in anything disconnected with himself.

As for Paris, we only just touched at that, and he would not give me time to see one-tenth of the beauties and interesting objects of Rome. He wanted to get me home, he said, to have me all to himself, and to see me safely installed as the mistress of Grassdale Manor, just as single-minded, as naïve, and piquante as I was; and as if I had been some frail butterfly, he expressed himself fearful of rubbing the silver off my wings by bringing me into contact with society, especially that of Paris and Rome; and, more-over, he did not scruple to tell me that there were ladies in both places that would tear his eyes out if they happened to meet him with me.

Of course I was vexed at all this; but still it was less the disappointment to myself that annoyed me, than the disappointment in him, and the trouble I was at to frame excuses to my friends for having seen and observed so little, without imputing one particle of blame to my companion. But when we got home — to my new, delightful home — I was so happy and he was so kind that I freely forgave him all; and I was beginning to think my lot too happy, and my husband actually too good for me, if not too good for this world, when, on the second Sunday after our arrival, he shocked and horrified me by another instance of his unreasonable exaction. We were walking home from the morning service, for it was a fine frosty day, and as we are so near the church, I had requested the carriage should not be used.

‘Helen,’ said he, with unusual gravity, ‘I am not quite satisfied with you.’

I desired to know what was wrong.

‘But will you promise to reform if I tell you?’

‘Yes, if I can, and without offending a higher authority.’

‘Ah! there it is, you see: you don’t love me with all your heart.’

‘I don’t understand you, Arthur (at least I hope I don’t): pray tell me what I have done or said amiss.’

‘It is nothing you have done or said; it is something that you are — you are too religious. Now I like a woman to be religious, and I think your piety one of your greatest charms; but then, like all other good things, it may be carried too far. To my thinking, a woman’s religion ought not to lessen her devotion to her earthly lord. She should have enough to purify and etherealise her soul, but not enough to refine away her heart, and raise her above all human sympathies.’

‘And am I above all human sympathies?’ said I.

‘No, darling; but you are making more progress towards that saintly condition than I like; for all these two hours I have been thinking of you and wanting to catch your eye, and you were so absorbed in your devotions that you had not even a glance to spare for me — I declare it is enough to make one jealous of one’s Maker — which is very wrong, you know; so don’t excite such wicked passions again, for my soul’s sake.’

‘I will give my whole heart and soul to my Maker if I can,’ I answered, ‘and not one atom more of it to you than He allows. What are you, sir, that you should set yourself up as a god, and presume to dispute possession of my heart with Him to whom I owe all I have and all I am, every blessing I ever did or ever can enjoy — and yourself among the rest — if you are a blessing, which I am half inclined to doubt.’

‘Don’t be so hard upon me, Helen; and don’t pinch my arm so: you are squeezing your fingers into the bone.’

‘Arthur,’ continued I, relaxing my hold of his arm, ‘you don’t love me half as much as I do you; and yet, if you loved me far less than you do, I would not complain, provided you loved your Maker more. I should rejoice to see you at any time so deeply absorbed in your devotions that you had not a single thought to spare for me. But, indeed, I should lose nothing by the change, for the more you loved your God the more deep and pure and true would be your love to me.'

At this he only laughed and kissed my hand, calling me a sweet enthusiast. Then taking off his hat, he added: 'But look here, Helen — what can a man do with such a head as this?'

The head looked right enough, but when he placed my hand on the top of it, it sunk in a bed of curls, rather alarmingly low, especially in the middle.

'You see I was not made to be a saint,' said he, laughing, 'If God meant me to be religious, why didn't He give me a proper organ of veneration?'

'You are like the servant,' I replied, 'who, instead of employing his one talent in his master's service, restored it to him unimproved, alleging, as an excuse, that he knew him "to be a hard man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strawed." Of him to whom less is given, less will be required, but our utmost exertions are required of us all. You are not without the capacity of veneration, and faith and hope, and conscience and reason, and every other requisite to a Christian's character, if you choose to employ them; but all our talents increase in the using, and every faculty, both good and bad, strengthens by exercise: therefore, if you choose to use the bad, or those which tend to evil, till they become your masters, and neglect the good till they dwindle away, you have only yourself to blame. But you have talents, Arthur — natural endowments both of heart and mind and temper, such as many a better Christian would be glad to possess, if you would only employ them in God's service. I should never expect to see you a devotee, but it is quite possible to be a good Christian without ceasing to be a happy, merry-hearted man.'

'You speak like an oracle, Helen, and all you say is indisputably true; but listen here: I am hungry, and I see before me a good substantial dinner; I am told that if I abstain from this to-day I shall have a sumptuous feast to-morrow, consisting of all manner of dainties and delicacies. Now, in the first place, I should be loth to wait till to-morrow when I have the means of appeasing my hunger already before me: in the second place, the solid viands of to-day are more to my taste than the dainties that are promised me; in the third place, I don't see to-morrow's banquet, and how can I tell that it is not all a fable, got up by the greasy-faced fellow that is advising me to abstain in order that he may have all the good victuals to himself? in the fourth place, this table must be spread for somebody, and, as Solomon says, "Who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto more than I?" and finally, with your leave, I'll sit down and satisfy my cravings of to-day, and leave to-morrow to shift for itself — who knows but what I may secure both this and that?'

'But you are not required to abstain from the substantial dinner of to-day: you are only advised to partake of these coarser viands in such moderation as not to incapacitate you from enjoying the choicer banquet of to-morrow. If, regardless of that counsel, you choose to make a beast of yourself now, and over-eat and over-drink yourself till you turn the good victuals into poison, who is to blame if, hereafter, while you are suffering the torments of yesterday's gluttony and drunkenness, you see more temperate men sitting down to enjoy themselves at that splendid entertainment which you are unable to taste?'

'Most true, my patron saint; but again, our friend Solomon says, "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and to drink, and to be merry."'

'And again,' returned I, 'he says, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."'

'Well, but, Helen, I'm sure I've been very good these last few weeks. What have you seen amiss in me, and what would you have me to do?'

'Nothing more than you do, Arthur: your actions are all right so far; but I would have your thoughts changed; I would have you to fortify yourself against temptation, and not to call evil good, and good evil; I should wish you to think more deeply, to look further, and aim higher than you do.'

CHAPTER XXIV

March 25th. — Arthur is getting tired — not of me, I trust, but of the idle, quiet life he leads — and no wonder, for he has so few sources of amusement: he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines; and when he sees me occupied with a book, he won't let me rest till I close it. In fine weather he generally manages to get through the time pretty well, but on rainy days, of which we have had a good many of late, it is quite painful to witness his ennui. I do all I can to amuse him, but it is impossible to get him to feel interested in what I most like to talk about, while, on the other hand, he likes to talk about things that cannot interest me — or even that annoy me — and these please him — the most of all: for his favourite amusement is to sit or loll beside me on the sofa, and tell me stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation, he lays it all to the charge of jealousy, and laughs till the tears run down his cheeks. I used to fly into passions or melt into tears at first, but seeing that his delight increased in proportion to my anger and agitation, I have since endeavoured to suppress my feelings and receive his revelations in the silence of calm contempt; but still he reads the inward struggle in my face, and misconstrues my bitterness of soul for his unworthiness into the pangs of wounded jealousy; and when he has sufficiently diverted himself with that, or fears my displeasure will become too serious for his comfort, he tries to kiss and soothe me into smiles again — never were his caresses so little welcome as then! This is double selfishness displayed to me and to the victims of his former love. There are times when, with a momentary pang — a flash of wild dismay, I ask myself, 'Helen, what have you done?' But I rebuke the inward questioner, and repel the obtrusive thoughts that crowd upon me; for were he ten times as sensual and impenetrable to good and lofty thoughts, I well know I have no right to complain. And I don't and won't complain. I do and will love him still; and I do not and will not regret that I have linked my fate with his.

April 4th. — We have had a downright quarrel. The particulars are as follows: Arthur had told me, at different intervals, the whole story of his intrigue with Lady F — , which I would not believe before. It was some consolation, however, to find that in this instance the lady had been more to blame than he, for he was very young at the time, and she had decidedly made the first advances, if what he said was true. I hated her for it, for it seemed as if she had chiefly contributed to his corruption; and when he was beginning to talk about her the other day, I begged he would not mention her, for I detested the very sound of her name.

'Not because you loved her, Arthur, mind, but because she injured you and deceived her husband, and was altogether a very abominable woman, whom you ought to be ashamed to mention.'

But he defended her by saying that she had a doting old husband, whom it was impossible to love.

'Then why did she marry him?' said I.

'For his money,' was the reply.

'Then that was another crime, and her solemn promise to love and honour him was another, that only increased the enormity of the last.'

'You are too severe upon the poor lady,' laughed he. 'But never mind, Helen, I don't care for her now; and I never loved any of them half as much as I do you, so you needn't fear to be forsaken like them.'

'If you had told me these things before, Arthur, I never should have given you the chance.'

'Wouldn't you, my darling?'

'Most certainly not!'

He laughed incredulously.

'I wish I could convince you of it now!' cried I, starting up from beside him: and for the first time in my life, and I hope the last, I wished I had not married him.

'Helen,' said he, more gravely, 'do you know that if I believed you now I should be very angry? but thank heaven I don't. Though you stand there with your white face and flashing eyes, looking at me like a very tigress, I know the heart within you perhaps a trifle better than you know it yourself.'

Without another word I left the room and locked myself up in my own chamber. In about half an hour he came to the door, and first he tried the handle, then he knocked.

'Won't you let me in, Helen?' said he. 'No; you have displeased me,' I replied, 'and I don't want to see your face or hear your voice again till the morning.'

He paused a moment as if dumfounded or uncertain how to answer such a speech, and then turned and walked away. This was only an hour after dinner: I knew he would find it very dull to sit alone all the evening; and this considerably softened my resentment, though it did not make me relent. I was determined to show him that my heart was not his slave, and I could live without him if I chose; and I sat down and wrote a long letter to my aunt, of course telling her nothing of all this. Soon after ten o'clock I heard him come up again, but he passed my door and went straight to his own dressing-room, where he shut himself in for the night.

I was rather anxious to see how he would meet me in the morning, and not a little disappointed to behold him enter the breakfast-room with a careless smile.

'Are you cross still, Helen?' said he, approaching as if to salute me. I coldly turned to the table, and began to pour out the coffee, observing that he was rather late.

He uttered a low whistle and sauntered away to the window, where he stood for some minutes looking out upon the pleasing prospect of sullen grey clouds, streaming rain, soaking lawn, and dripping leafless trees, and muttering execrations on the weather, and then sat down to breakfast. While taking his coffee he muttered it was 'd — d cold.'

'You should not have left it so long,' said I.

He made no answer, and the meal was concluded in silence. It was a relief to both when the letter-bag was brought in. It contained upon examination a newspaper and one or two letters for him, and a couple of letters for me, which he tossed across the table without a remark. One was from my brother, the other from Milicent Hargrave, who is now in London with her mother. His, I think, were business letters, and apparently not much to his mind, for he crushed them into his pocket with some muttered expletives that I should have reproved him for at any other time. The paper he set before him, and pretended to be deeply absorbed in its contents during the remainder of breakfast, and a considerable time after.

The reading and answering of my letters, and the direction of household concerns, afforded me ample employment for the morning: after lunch I got my drawing, and from dinner till bed-time I read. Meanwhile, poor Arthur was sadly at a loss for something to amuse him or to occupy his time. He wanted to appear as busy and as unconcerned as I did. Had the weather at all permitted, he would doubtless have ordered his horse and set off to some distant region, no matter where, immediately after breakfast, and not returned till night: had there been a lady anywhere within reach, of any age between fifteen and forty-five, he would have sought revenge and found employment in getting up, or trying to get up, a desperate flirtation with her; but being, to my private satisfaction, entirely cut off from both these sources of diversion, his sufferings were truly deplorable. When he had done yawning over his paper and scribbling short answers to his shorter letters, he spent the remainder of the morning and the whole of the afternoon in fidgeting about from room to room, watching the clouds, cursing the rain, alternately petting and teasing and abusing his dogs, sometimes lounging on the sofa with a book that he could not force himself to read, and very often fixedly gazing at me when he thought I did not perceive it, with the vain hope of detecting some traces of tears, or some tokens of remorseful anguish in my face. But I managed to preserve an undisturbed though grave serenity throughout the day. I was not really angry: I felt for him all the time, and longed to be reconciled; but I determined he should make the first advances, or at least show some signs of an humble and contrite spirit first; for, if I began, it would only minister to his self-conceit, increase his arrogance, and quite destroy the lesson I wanted to give him.

He made a long stay in the dining-room after dinner, and, I fear, took an unusual quantity of wine, but not enough to loosen his tongue: for when he came in and found me quietly occupied with my book, too busy to lift my head on his entrance, he merely murmured an expression of suppressed disapprobation, and, shutting the door with a bang, went and stretched himself at full length on the sofa, and composed himself to sleep. But his favourite cocker, Dash, that had been lying at my feet, took the liberty of jumping upon him and beginning to lick his face. He struck it off with a smart blow, and the poor dog squeaked and ran cowering back to me. When he woke up, about half an hour after, he called it to him again, but Dash only looked sheepish and wagged the tip of his tail. He called again more sharply, but Dash only clung the closer to me, and licked my hand, as if imploring protection. Enraged at this, his master snatched up a heavy book and hurled it at his head. The poor dog set up a piteous outcry, and ran to the door. I let him out, and then quietly took up the book.

'Give that book to me,' said Arthur, in no very courteous tone. I gave it to him.

'Why did you let the dog out?' he asked; 'you knew I wanted him.'

'By what token?' I replied; 'by your throwing the book at him? but perhaps it was intended for me?'

'No; but I see you've got a taste of it,' said he, looking at my hand, that had also been struck, and was rather severely grazed.

I returned to my reading, and he endeavoured to occupy himself in the same manner; but in a little while, after several portentous yawns, he pronounced his book to be 'cursed trash,' and threw it on the table. Then followed eight or ten minutes of silence, during the greater part of which, I believe, he was staring at me. At last his patience was tired out.

'What is that book, Helen?' he exclaimed.

I told him.

'Is it interesting?'

'Yes, very.'

I went on reading, or pretending to read, at least — I cannot say there was much communication between my eyes and my brain; for, while the former ran over the pages, the latter was earnestly wondering when Arthur would speak next, and what he would say, and what I should answer. But he did not speak again till I rose to make the tea, and then it was only to say he should not take any. He continued lounging on the sofa, and alternately closing his eyes and looking at his watch and at me, till bed-time, when I rose, and took my candle and retired.

'Helen!' cried he, the moment I had left the room. I turned back, and stood awaiting his commands.

'What do you want, Arthur?' I said at length.

'Nothing,' replied he. 'Go!'

I went, but hearing him mutter something as I was closing the door, I turned again. It sounded very like 'confounded slut,' but I was quite willing it should be something else.

‘Were you speaking, Arthur?’ I asked.

‘No,’ was the answer, and I shut the door and departed. I saw nothing more of him till the following morning at breakfast, when he came down a full hour after the usual time.

‘You’re very late,’ was my morning’s salutation.

‘You needn’t have waited for me,’ was his; and he walked up to the window again. It was just such weather as yesterday.

‘Oh, this confounded rain!’ he muttered. But, after studiously regarding it for a minute or two, a bright idea, seemed to strike him, for he suddenly exclaimed, ‘But I know what I’ll do!’ and then returned and took his seat at the table. The letter-bag was already there, waiting to be opened. He unlocked it and examined the contents, but said nothing about them.

‘Is there anything for me?’ I asked.

‘No.’

He opened the newspaper and began to read.

‘You’d better take your coffee,’ suggested I; ‘it will be cold again.’

‘You may go,’ said he, ‘if you’ve done; I don’t want you.’

I rose and withdrew to the next room, wondering if we were to have another such miserable day as yesterday, and wishing intensely for an end of these mutually inflicted torments. Shortly after I heard him ring the bell and give some orders about his wardrobe that sounded as if he meditated a long journey. He then sent for the coachman, and I heard something about the carriage and the horses, and London, and seven o’clock to-morrow morning, that startled and disturbed me not a little.

‘I must not let him go to London, whatever comes of it,’ said I to myself; ‘he will run into all kinds of mischief, and I shall be the cause of it. But the question is, How am I to alter his purpose? Well, I will wait awhile, and see if he mentions it.’

I waited most anxiously, from hour to hour; but not a word was spoken, on that or any other subject, to me. He whistled and talked to his dogs, and wandered from room to room, much the same as on the previous day. At last I began to think I must introduce the subject myself, and was pondering how to bring it about, when John unwittingly came to my relief with the following message from the coachman:

‘Please, sir, Richard says one of the horses has got a very bad cold, and he thinks, sir, if you could make it convenient to go the day after to-morrow, instead of to-morrow, he could physic it to-day, so as — ’

‘Confound his impudence!’ interjected the master.

‘Please, sir, he says it would be a deal better if you could,’ persisted John, ‘for he hopes there’ll be a change in the weather shortly, and he says it’s not likely, when a horse is so bad with a cold, and physicked and all — ’

‘Devil take the horse!’ cried the gentleman. ‘Well, tell him I’ll think about it,’ he added, after a moment’s reflection. He cast a searching glance at me, as the servant withdrew, expecting to see some token of deep astonishment and alarm; but, being previously prepared, I preserved an aspect of stoical indifference. His countenance fell as he met my steady gaze, and he turned away in very obvious disappointment, and walked up to the fire-place, where he stood in an attitude of undisguised dejection, leaning against the chimney-piece with his forehead sunk upon his arm.

'Where do you want to go, Arthur?' said I.

'To London,' replied he, gravely.

'What for?' I asked.

'Because I cannot be happy here.'

'Why not?'

'Because my wife doesn't love me.'

'She would love you with all her heart, if you deserved it.'

'What must I do to deserve it?'

This seemed humble and earnest enough; and I was so much affected, between sorrow and joy, that I was obliged to pause a few seconds before I could steady my voice to reply.

'If she gives you her heart,' said I, 'you must take it, thankfully, and use it well, and not pull it in pieces, and laugh in her face, because she cannot snatch it away.'

He now turned round, and stood facing me, with his back to the fire. 'Come, then, Helen, are you going to be a good girl?' said he.

This sounded rather too arrogant, and the smile that accompanied it did not please me. I therefore hesitated to reply. Perhaps my former answer had implied too much: he had heard my voice falter, and might have seen me brush away a tear.

'Are you going to forgive me, Helen?' he resumed, more humbly.

'Are you penitent?' I replied, stepping up to him and smiling in his face.

'Heart-broken!' he answered, with a rueful countenance, yet with a merry smile just lurking within his eyes and about the corners of his mouth; but this could not repulse me, and I flew into his arms. He fervently embraced me, and though I shed a torrent of tears, I think I never was happier in my life than at that moment.

'Then you won't go to London, Arthur?' I said, when the first transport of tears and kisses had subsided.

'No, love, — unless you will go with me.'

'I will, gladly,' I answered, 'if you think the change will amuse you, and if you will put off the journey till next week.'

He readily consented, but said there was no need of much preparation, as he should not be for staying long, for he did not wish me to be Londonized, and to lose my country freshness and originality by too much intercourse with the ladies of the world. I thought this folly; but I did not wish to contradict him now: I merely said that I was of very domestic habits, as he well knew, and had no particular wish to mingle with the world.

So we are to go to London on Monday, the day after to-morrow. It is now four days since the termination of our quarrel, and I am sure it has done us both good: it has made me like Arthur a great deal better, and made him behave a great deal better to me. He has never once attempted to annoy me since, by the most distant allusion to Lady F — , or any of those disagreeable reminiscences of his former life. I wish I could blot them from my memory, or else get him to regard such matters in the same light as I do. Well! it is something, however, to have made him see that they are not fit subjects for a conjugal jest. He may see further some time. I will put no limits to my hopes; and, in spite of my aunt's forebodings and my own unspoken fears, I trust we shall be happy yet.

CHAPTER XXV

On the eighth of April we went to London, on the eighth of May I returned, in obedience to Arthur's wish; very much against my own, because I left him behind. If he had come with me, I should have been very glad to get home again, for he led me such a round of restless dissipation while there, that, in that short space of time, I was quite tired out. He seemed bent upon displaying me to his friends and acquaintances in particular, and the public in general, on every possible occasion, and to the greatest possible advantage. It was something to feel that he considered me a worthy object of pride; but I paid dear for the gratification: for, in the first place, to please him I had to violate my cherished predilections, my almost rooted principles in favour of a plain, dark, sober style of dress — I must sparkle in costly jewels and deck myself out like a painted butterfly, just as I had, long since, determined I would never do — and this was no trifling sacrifice; in the second place, I was continually straining to satisfy his sanguine expectations and do honour to his choice by my general conduct and deportment, and fearing to disappoint him by some awkward misdemeanour, or some trait of inexperienced ignorance about the customs of society, especially when I acted the part of hostess, which I was not unfrequently called upon to do; and, in the third place, as I intimated before, I was wearied of the throng and bustle, the restless hurry and ceaseless change of a life so alien to all my previous habits. At last, he suddenly discovered that the London air did not agree with me, and I was languishing for my country home, and must immediately return to Grassdale.

I laughingly assured him that the case was not so urgent as he appeared to think it, but I was quite willing to go home if he was. He replied that he should be obliged to remain a week or two longer, as he had business that required his presence.

‘Then I will stay with you,’ said I.

‘But I can’t do with you, Helen,’ was his answer: ‘as long as you stay I shall attend to you and neglect my business.’

‘But I won’t let you,’ I returned; ‘now that I know you have business to attend to, I shall insist upon your attending to it, and letting me alone; and, to tell the truth, I shall be glad of a little rest. I can take my rides and walks in the Park as usual; and your business cannot occupy all your time: I shall see you at meal-times, and in the evenings at least, and that will be better than being leagues away and never seeing you at all.’

‘But, my love, I cannot let you stay. How can I settle my affairs when I know that you are here, neglected — ?’

‘I shall not feel myself neglected: while you are doing your duty, Arthur, I shall never complain of neglect. If you had told me before, that you had anything to do, it would have been half done before this; and now you must make up for lost time by redoubled exertions. Tell me what it is; and I will be your taskmaster, instead of being a hindrance.’

‘No, no,’ persisted the impracticable creature; ‘you must go home, Helen; I must have the satisfaction of knowing that you are safe and well, though far away. Your bright eyes are faded, and that tender, delicate bloom has quite deserted your cheek.’

‘That is only with too much gaiety and fatigue.’

‘It is not, I tell you; it is the London air: you are pining for the fresh breezes of your country home, and you shall feel them before you are two days older. And remember your situation, dearest Helen; on your health, you know, depends the health, if not the life, of our future hope.’

‘Then you really wish to get rid of me?’

‘Positively, I do; and I will take you down myself to Grassdale, and then return. I shall not be absent above a week or fortnight at most.’

'But if I must go, I will go alone: if you must stay, it is needless to waste your time in the journey there and back.'

But he did not like the idea of sending me alone.

'Why, what helpless creature do you take me for,' I replied, 'that you cannot trust me to go a hundred miles in our own carriage, with our own footman and a maid to attend me? If you come with me I shall assuredly keep you. But tell me, Arthur, what is this tiresome business; and why did you never mention it before?'

'It is only a little business with my lawyer,' said he; and he told me something about a piece of property he wanted to sell, in order to pay off a part of the incumbrances on his estate; but either the account was a little confused, or I was rather dull of comprehension, for I could not clearly understand how that should keep him in town a fortnight after me. Still less can I now comprehend how it should keep him a month, for it is nearly that time since I left him, and no signs of his return as yet. In every letter he promises to be with me in a few days, and every time deceives me, or deceives himself. His excuses are vague and insufficient. I cannot doubt that he has got among his former companions again. Oh, why did I leave him! I wish — I do intensely wish he would return!

June 29th. — No Arthur yet; and for many days I have been looking and longing in vain for a letter. His letters, when they come, are kind, if fair words and endearing epithets can give them a claim to the title — but very short, and full of trivial excuses and promises that I cannot trust; and yet how anxiously I look forward to them! how eagerly I open and devour one of those little, hastily-scribbled returns for the three or four long letters, hitherto unanswered, he has had from me!

Oh, it is cruel to leave me so long alone! He knows I have no one but Rachel to speak to, for we have no neighbours here, except the Hargraves, whose residence I can dimly descry from these upper windows embosomed among those low, woody hills beyond the Dale. I was glad when I learnt that Milicent was so near us; and her company would be a soothing solace to me now; but she is still in town with her mother; there is no one at the Grove but little Esther and her French governess, for Walter is always away. I saw that paragon of manly perfections in London: he seemed scarcely to merit the eulogiums of his mother and sister, though he certainly appeared more conversable and agreeable than Lord Lowborough, more candid and high-minded than Mr. Grimsby, and more polished and gentlemanly than Mr. Hattersley, Arthur's only other friend whom he judged fit to introduce to me. — Oh, Arthur, why won't you come? why won't you write to me at least? You talked about my health: how can you expect me to gather bloom and vigour here, pining in solitude and restless anxiety from day to day? — It would serve you right to come back and find my good looks entirely wasted away. I would beg my uncle and aunt, or my brother, to come and see me, but I do not like to complain of my loneliness to them, and indeed loneliness is the least of my sufferings. But what is he, doing — what is it that keeps him away? It is this ever-recurring question, and the horrible suggestions it raises, that distract me.

July 3rd. — My last bitter letter has wrung from him an answer at last, and a rather longer one than usual; but still I don't know what to make of it. He playfully abuses me for the gall and vinegar of my latest effusion, tells me I can have no conception of the multitudinous engagements that keep him away, but avers that, in spite of them all, he will assuredly be with me before the close of next week; though it is impossible for a man so circumstanced as he is to fix the precise day of his return: meantime he exhorts me to the exercise of patience, 'that first of woman's virtues,' and desires me to remember the saying, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,' and comfort myself with the assurance that the longer he stays away the better he shall love me when he returns; and till he does return, he begs I will continue to write to him constantly, for, though he is sometimes too idle and often too busy to answer my letters as they come, he likes to receive them daily; and if I fulfil my threat of punishing his seeming neglect by ceasing to write, he shall be so angry that he will do his utmost to forget me. He adds this piece of intelligence respecting poor Milicent Hargrave:

'Your little friend Milicent is likely, before long, to follow your example, and take upon her the yoke of matrimony in conjunction with a friend of mine. Hattersley, you know, has not yet fulfilled his direful threat of throwing his precious person away on the first old maid that chose to evince a tenderness for him; but he still preserves a resolute determination to see himself a married man before the year is out. "Only," said he to me, "I must have somebody that will let me have my own way in everything — not like your wife, Huntingdon: she is a charming creature, but she looks as if she had a will of her own, and could play the vixen upon occasion" (I thought "you're right there, man," but I didn't say so). "I must have some good, quiet soul that will let me just do what I like and go where I like, keep at home or stay away, without a word of reproach or complaint; for I can't do with being bothered." "Well," said I, "I know somebody that will suit you to a tee, if you don't care for money, and that's Hargrave's sister, Milicent." He desired to be introduced to her forthwith, for he said he had plenty of the needful himself, or should have when his old governor chose to quit the stage. So you see, Helen, I have managed pretty well, both for your friend and mine.'

Poor Milicent! But I cannot imagine she will ever be led to accept such a suitor — one so repugnant to all her ideas of a man to be honoured and loved.

5th. — Alas! I was mistaken. I have got a long letter from her this morning, telling me she is already engaged, and expects to be married before the close of the month.

'I hardly know what to say about it,' she writes, 'or what to think. To tell you the truth, Helen, I don't like the thoughts of it at all. If I am to be Mr. Hattersley's wife, I must try to love him; and I do try with all my might; but I have made very little progress yet; and the worst symptom of the case is, that the further he is from me the better I like him: he frightens me with his abrupt manners and strange hectoring ways, and I dread the thoughts of marrying him. “Then why have you accepted him?” you will ask; and I didn’t know I had accepted him; but mamma tells me I have, and he seems to think so too. I certainly didn’t mean to do so; but I did not like to give him a flat refusal, for fear mamma should be grieved and angry (for I knew she wished me to marry him), and I wanted to talk to her first about it: so I gave him what I thought was an evasive, half negative answer; but she says it was as good as an acceptance, and he would think me very capricious if I were to attempt to draw back — and indeed I was so confused and frightened at the moment, I can hardly tell what I said. And next time I saw him, he accosted me in all confidence as his affianced bride, and immediately began to settle matters with mamma. I had not courage to contradict them then, and how can I do it now? I cannot; they would think me mad. Besides, mamma is so delighted with the idea of the match; she thinks she has managed so well for me; and I cannot bear to disappoint her. I do object sometimes, and tell her what I feel, but you don’t know how she talks. Mr. Hattersley, you know, is the son of a rich banker, and as Esther and I have no fortunes, and Walter very little, our dear mamma is very anxious to see us all well married, that is, united to rich partners. It is not my idea of being well married, but she means it all for the best. She says when I am safe off her hands it will be such a relief to her mind; and she assures me it will be a good thing for the family as well as for me. Even Walter is pleased at the prospect, and when I confessed my reluctance to him, he said it was all childish nonsense. Do you think it nonsense, Helen? I should not care if I could see any prospect of being able to love and admire him, but I can’t. There is nothing about him to hang one’s esteem and affection upon; he is so diametrically opposite to what I imagined my husband should be. Do write to me, and say all you can to encourage me. Don’t attempt to dissuade me, for my fate is fixed: preparations for the important event are already going on around me; and don’t say a word against Mr. Hattersley, for I want to think well of him; and though I have spoken against him myself, it is for the last time: hereafter, I shall never permit myself to utter a word in his dispraise, however he may seem to deserve it; and whoever ventures to speak slightingly of the man I have promised to love, to honour, and obey, must expect my serious displeasure. After all, I think he is quite as good as Mr. Huntingdon, if not better; and yet you love him, and seem to be happy and contented; and perhaps I may manage as well. You must tell me, if you can, that Mr. Hattersley is better than he seems — that he is upright, honourable, and open-hearted — in fact, a perfect diamond in the rough. He may be all this, but I don’t know him. I know only the exterior, and what, I trust, is the worst part of him.’

She concludes with ‘Good-by, dear Helen. I am waiting anxiously for your advice — but mind you let it be all on the right side.’

Alas! poor Milicent, what encouragement can I give you? or what advice — except that it is better to make a bold stand now, though at the expense of disappointing and angering both mother and brother and lover, than to devote your whole life, hereafter, to misery and vain regret?

Saturday, 13th. — The week is over, and he is not come. All the sweet summer is passing away without one breath of pleasure to me or benefit to him. And I had all along been looking forward to this season with the fond, delusive hope that we should enjoy it so sweetly together; and that, with God's help and my exertions, it would be the means of elevating his mind, and refining his taste to a due appreciation of the salutary and pure delights of nature, and peace, and holy love. But now — at evening, when I see the round red sun sink quietly down behind those woody hills, leaving them sleeping in a warm, red, golden haze, I only think another lovely day is lost to him and me; and at morning, when roused by the flutter and chirp of the sparrows, and the gleeful twitter of the swallows — all intent upon feeding their young, and full of life and joy in their own little frames — I open the window to inhale the balmy, soul-reviving air, and look out upon the lovely landscape, laughing in dew and sunshine — I too often shame that glorious scene with tears of thankless misery, because he cannot feel its freshening influence; and when I wander in the ancient woods, and meet the little wild flowers smiling in my path, or sit in the shadow of our noble ash-trees by the water-side, with their branches gently swaying in the light summer breeze that murmurs through their feathery foliage — my ears full of that low music mingled with the dreamy hum of insects, my eyes abstractedly gazing on the glassy surface of the little lake before me, with the trees that crowd about its bank, some gracefully bending to kiss its waters, some rearing their stately heads high above, but stretching their wide arms over its margin, all faithfully mirrored far, far down in its glassy depth — though sometimes the images are partially broken by the sport of aquatic insects, and sometimes, for a moment, the whole is shivered into trembling fragments by a transient breeze that sweeps the surface too roughly — still I have no pleasure; for the greater the happiness that nature sets before me, the more I lament that he is not here to taste it: the greater the bliss we might enjoy together, the more I feel our present wretchedness apart (yes, ours; he must be wretched, though he may not know it); and the more my senses are pleased, the more my heart is oppressed; for he keeps it with him confined amid the dust and smoke of London — perhaps shut up within the walls of his own abominable club.

But most of all, at night, when I enter my lonely chamber, and look out upon the summer moon, 'sweet regent of the sky,' floating above me in the 'black blue vault of heaven,' shedding a flood of silver radiance over park, and wood, and water, so pure, so peaceful, so divine — and think, Where is he now? — what is he doing at this moment? wholly unconscious of this heavenly scene — perhaps revelling with his boon companions, perhaps — God help me, it is too — too much!

23rd. — Thank heaven, he is come at last! But how altered! flushed and feverish, listless and languid, his beauty strangely diminished, his vigour and vivacity quite departed. I have not upbraided him by word or look; I have not even asked him what he has been doing. I have not the heart to do it, for I think he is ashamed of himself-he must be so indeed, and such inquiries could not fail to be painful to both. My forbearance pleases him — touches him even, I am inclined to think. He says he is glad to be home again, and God knows how glad I am to get him back, even as he is. He lies on the sofa, nearly all day long; and I play and sing to him for hours together. I write his letters for him, and get him everything he wants; and sometimes I read to him, and sometimes I talk, and sometimes only sit by him and soothe him with silent caresses. I know he does not deserve it; and I fear I am spoiling him; but this once, I will forgive him, freely and entirely. I will shame him into virtue if I can, and I will never let him leave me again.

He is pleased with my attentions — it may be, grateful for them. He likes to have me near him: and though he is peevish and testy with his servants and his dogs, he is gentle and kind to me. What he would be, if I did not so watchfully anticipate his wants, and so carefully avoid, or immediately desist from doing anything that has a tendency to irritate or disturb him, with however little reason, I cannot tell. How intensely I wish he were worthy of all this care! Last night, as I sat beside him, with his head in my lap, passing my fingers through his beautiful curls, this thought made my eyes overflow with sorrowful tears — as it often does; but this time, a tear fell on his face and made him look up. He smiled, but not insultingly.

'Dear Helen!' he said — 'why do you cry? you know that I love you' (and he pressed my hand to his feverish lips), 'and what more could you desire?'

'Only, Arthur, that you would love yourself as truly and as faithfully as you are loved by me.'

'That would be hard, indeed!' he replied, tenderly squeezing my hand.

August 24th. — Arthur is himself again, as lusty and reckless, as light of heart and head as ever, and as restless and hard to amuse as a spoilt child, and almost as full of mischief too, especially when wet weather keeps him within doors. I wish he had something to do, some useful trade, or profession, or employment — anything to occupy his head or his hands for a few hours a day, and give him something besides his own pleasure to think about. If he would play the country gentleman and attend to the farm — but that he knows nothing about, and won't give his mind to consider, — or if he would take up with some literary study, or learn to draw or to play — as he is so fond of music, I often try to persuade him to learn the piano, but he is far too idle for such an undertaking: he has no more idea of exerting himself to overcome obstacles than he has of restraining his natural appetites; and these two things are the ruin of him. I lay them both to the charge of his harsh yet careless father, and his madly indulgent mother. — If ever I am a mother I will zealously strive against this crime of over-indulgence. I can hardly give it a milder name when I think of the evils it brings.

Happily, it will soon be the shooting season, and then, if the weather permit, he will find occupation enough in the pursuit and destruction of the partridges and pheasants: we have no grouse, or he might have been similarly occupied at this moment, instead of lying under the acacia-tree pulling poor Dash's ears. But he says it is dull work shooting alone; he must have a friend or two to help him.

'Let them be tolerably decent then, Arthur,' said I. The word 'friend' in his mouth makes me shudder: I know it was some of his 'friends' that induced him to stay behind me in London, and kept him away so long: indeed, from what he has unguardedly told me, or hinted from time to time, I cannot doubt that he frequently showed them my letters, to let them see how fondly his wife watched over his interests, and how keenly she regretted his absence; and that they induced him to remain week after week, and to plunge into all manner of excesses, to avoid being laughed at for a wife-ridden fool, and, perhaps, to show how far he could venture to go without danger of shaking the fond creature's devoted attachment. It is a hateful idea, but I cannot believe it is a false one.

'Well,' replied he, 'I thought of Lord Lowborough for one; but there is no possibility of getting him without his better half, our mutual friend, Annabella; so we must ask them both. You're not afraid of her, are you, Helen?' he asked, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

'Of course not,' I answered: 'why should I? And who besides?'

'Hargrave for one. He will be glad to come, though his own place is so near, for he has little enough land of his own to shoot over, and we can extend our depredations into it, if we like; and he is thoroughly respectable, you know, Helen — quite a lady's man: and I think, Grimsby for another: he's a decent, quiet fellow enough. You'll not object to Grimsby?'

'I hate him: but, however, if you wish it, I'll try to endure his presence for a while.'

'All a prejudice, Helen, a mere woman's antipathy.'

'No; I have solid grounds for my dislike. And is that all?'

'Why, yes, I think so. Hattersley will be too busy billing and cooing, with his bride to have much time to spare for guns and dogs at present,' he replied. And that reminds me, that I have had several letters from Milicent since her marriage, and that she either is, or pretends to be, quite reconciled to her lot. She professes to have discovered numberless virtues and perfections in her husband, some of which, I fear, less partial eyes would fail to distinguish, though they sought them carefully with tears; and now that she is accustomed to his loud voice, and abrupt, uncourteous manners, she affirms she finds no difficulty in loving him as a wife should do, and begs I will burn that letter wherein she spoke so unadvisedly against him. So that I trust she may yet be happy; but, if she is, it will be entirely the reward of her own goodness of heart; for had she chosen to consider herself the victim of fate, or of her mother's worldly wisdom, she might have been thoroughly miserable; and if, for duty's sake, she had not made every effort to love her husband, she would, doubtless, have hated him to the end of her days.

CHAPTER XXVI

Sept. 23rd. — Our guests arrived about three weeks ago. Lord and Lady Lowborough have now been married above eight months; and I will do the lady the credit to say that her husband is quite an altered man; his looks, his spirits, and his temper, are all perceptibly changed for the better since I last saw him. But there is room for improvement still. He is not always cheerful, nor always contented, and she often complains of his ill-humour, which, however, of all persons, she ought to be the last to accuse him of, as he never displays it against her, except for such conduct as would provoke a saint. He adores her still, and would go to the world's end to please her. She knows her power, and she uses it too; but well knowing that to wheedle and coax is safer than to command, she judiciously tempers her despotism with flattery and blandishments enough to make him deem himself a favoured and a happy man.

But she has a way of tormenting him, in which I am a fellow-sufferer, or might be, if I chose to regard myself as such. This is by openly, but not too glaringly, coquetting with Mr. Huntingdon, who is quite willing to be her partner in the game; but I don't care for it, because, with him, I know there is nothing but personal vanity, and a mischievous desire to excite my jealousy, and, perhaps, to torment his friend; and she, no doubt, is actuated by much the same motives; only, there is more of malice and less of playfulness in her manoeuvres. It is obviously, therefore, my interest to disappoint them both, as far as I am concerned, by preserving a cheerful, undisturbed serenity throughout; and, accordingly, I endeavour to show the fullest confidence in my husband, and the greatest indifference to the arts of my attractive guest. I have never reproached the former but once, and that was for laughing at Lord Lowborough's depressed and anxious countenance one evening, when they had both been particularly provoking; and then, indeed, I said a good deal on the subject, and rebuked him sternly enough; but he only laughed, and said, — 'You can feel for him, Helen, can't you?'

'I can feel for anyone that is unjustly treated,' I replied, 'and I can feel for those that injure them too.'

'Why, Helen, you are as jealous as he is!' cried he, laughing still more; and I found it impossible to convince him of his mistake. So, from that time, I have carefully refrained from any notice of the subject whatever, and left Lord Lowborough to take care of himself. He either has not the sense or the power to follow my example, though he does try to conceal his uneasiness as well as he can; but still, it will appear in his face, and his ill-humour will peep out at intervals, though not in the expression of open resentment — they never go far enough for that. But I confess I do feel jealous at times, most painfully, bitterly so; when she sings and plays to him, and he hangs over the instrument, and dwells upon her voice with no affected interest; for then I know he is really delighted, and I have no power to awaken similar fervour. I can amuse and please him with my simple songs, but not delight him thus.

28th. — Yesterday, we all went to the Grove, Mr. Hargrave's much-neglected home. His mother frequently asks us over, that she may have the pleasure of her dear Walter's company; and this time she had invited us to a dinner-party, and got together as many of the country gentry as were within reach to meet us. The entertainment was very well got up; but I could not help thinking about the cost of it all the time. I don't like Mrs. Hargrave; she is a hard, pretentious, worldly-minded woman. She has money enough to live very comfortably, if she only knew how to use it judiciously, and had taught her son to do the same; but she is ever straining to keep up appearances, with that despicable pride that shuns the semblance of poverty as of a shameful crime. She grinds her dependents, pinches her servants, and deprives even her daughters and herself of the real comforts of life, because she will not consent to yield the palm in outward show to those who have three times her wealth; and, above all, because she is determined her cherished son shall be enabled to 'hold up his head with the highest gentlemen in the land.' This same son, I imagine, is a man of expensive habits, no reckless spendthrift and no abandoned sensualist, but one who likes to have 'everything handsome about him,' and to go to a certain length in youthful indulgences, not so much to gratify his own tastes as to maintain his reputation as a man of fashion in the world, and a respectable fellow among his own lawless companions; while he is too selfish to consider how many comforts might be obtained for his fond mother and sisters with the money he thus wastes upon himself: as long as they can contrive to make a respectable appearance once a year, when they come to town, he gives himself little concern about their private stintings and struggles at home. This is a harsh judgment to form of 'dear, noble-minded, generous-hearted Walter,' but I fear it is too just.

Mrs. Hargrave's anxiety to make good matches for her daughters is partly the cause, and partly the result, of these errors: by making a figure in the world, and showing them off to advantage, she hopes to obtain better chances for them; and by thus living beyond her legitimate means, and lavishing so much on their brother, she renders them portionless, and makes them burdens on her hands. Poor Milicent, I fear, has already fallen a sacrifice to the manoeuvrings of this mistaken mother, who congratulates herself on having so satisfactorily discharged her maternal duty, and hopes to do as well for Esther. But Esther is a child as yet, a little merry romp of fourteen: as honest-hearted, and as guileless and simple as her sister, but with a fearless spirit of her own, that I fancy her mother will find some difficulty in bending to her purposes.

CHAPTER XXVII

October 9th. — It was on the night of the 4th, a little after tea, that Annabella had been singing and playing, with Arthur as usual at her side: she had ended her song, but still she sat at the instrument; and he stood leaning on the back of her chair, conversing in scarcely audible tones, with his face in very close proximity with hers. I looked at Lord Lowborough. He was at the other end of the room, talking with Messrs. Hargrave and Grimsby; but I saw him dart towards his lady and his host a quick, impatient glance, expressive of intense disquietude, at which Grimsby smiled. Determined to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*, I rose, and, selecting a piece of music from the music stand, stepped up to the piano, intending to ask the lady to play it; but I stood transfixed and speechless on seeing her seated there, listening, with what seemed an exultant smile on her flushed face to his soft murmurings, with her hand quietly surrendered to his clasp. The blood rushed first to my heart, and then to my head; for there was more than this: almost at the moment of my approach, he cast a hurried glance over his shoulder towards the other occupants of the room, and then ardently pressed the unresisting hand to his lips. On raising his eyes, he beheld me, and dropped them again, confounded and dismayed. She saw me too, and confronted me with a look of hard defiance. I laid the music on the piano, and retired. I felt ill; but I did not leave the room: happily, it was getting late, and could not be long before the company dispersed.

I went to the fire, and leant my head against the chimney-piece. In a minute or two, some one asked me if I felt unwell. I did not answer; indeed, at the time, I knew not what was said; but I mechanically looked up, and saw Mr. Hargrave standing beside me on the rug.

‘Shall I get you a glass of wine?’ said he.

‘No, thank you,’ I replied; and, turning from him, I looked round. Lady Lowborough was beside her husband, bending over him as he sat, with her hand on his shoulder, softly talking and smiling in his face; and Arthur was at the table, turning over a book of engravings. I seated myself in the nearest chair; and Mr. Hargrave, finding his services were not desired, judiciously withdrew. Shortly after, the company broke up, and, as the guests were retiring to their rooms, Arthur approached me, smiling with the utmost assurance.

‘Are you very angry, Helen?’ murmured he.

‘This is no jest, Arthur,’ said I, seriously, but as calmly as I could — ‘unless you think it a jest to lose my affection for ever.’

‘What! so bitter?’ he exclaimed, laughingly, clasping my hand between both his; but I snatched it away, in indignation — almost in disgust, for he was obviously affected with wine.

'Then I must go down on my knees,' said he; and kneeling before me, with clasped hands, uplifted in mock humiliation, he continued imploringly — 'Forgive me, Helen — dear Helen, forgive me, and I'll never do it again!' and, burying his face in his handkerchief, he affected to sob aloud.

Leaving him thus employed, I took my candle, and, slipping quietly from the room, hastened up-stairs as fast as I could. But he soon discovered that I had left him, and, rushing up after me, caught me in his arms, just as I had entered the chamber, and was about to shut the door in his face.

'No, no, by heaven, you sha'n't escape me so!' he cried. Then, alarmed at my agitation, he begged me not to put myself in such a passion, telling me I was white in the face, and should kill myself if I did so.

'Let me go, then,' I murmured; and immediately he released me — and it was well he did, for I was really in a passion. I sank into the easy-chair and endeavoured to compose myself, for I wanted to speak to him calmly. He stood beside me, but did not venture to touch me or to speak for a few seconds; then, approaching a little nearer, he dropped on one knee — not in mock humility, but to bring himself nearer my level, and leaning his hand on the arm of the chair, he began in a low voice: 'It is all nonsense, Helen — a jest, a mere nothing — not worth a thought. Will you never learn,' he continued more boldly, 'that you have nothing to fear from me? that I love you wholly and entirely? — or if,' he added with a lurking smile, 'I ever give a thought to another, you may well spare it, for those fancies are here and gone like a flash of lightning, while my love for you burns on steadily, and for ever, like the sun. You little exorbitant tyrant, will not that — ?'

'Be quiet a moment, will you, Arthur?' said I, 'and listen to me — and don't think I'm in a jealous fury: I am perfectly calm. Feel my hand.' And I gravely extended it towards him — but closed it upon his with an energy that seemed to disprove the assertion, and made him smile. 'You needn't smile, sir,' said I, still tightening my grasp, and looking steadfastly on him till he almost quailed before me. 'You may think it all very fine, Mr. Huntingdon, to amuse yourself with rousing my jealousy; but take care you don't rouse my hate instead. And when you have once extinguished my love, you will find it no easy matter to kindle it again.'

'Well, Helen, I won't repeat the offence. But I meant nothing by it, I assure you. I had taken too much wine, and I was scarcely myself at the time.'

'You often take too much; and that is another practice I detest.' He looked up astonished at my warmth. 'Yes,' I continued; 'I never mentioned it before, because I was ashamed to do so; but now I'll tell you that it distresses me, and may disgust me, if you go on and suffer the habit to grow upon you, as it will if you don't check it in time. But the whole system of your conduct to Lady Lowborough is not referable to wine; and this night you knew perfectly well what you were doing.'

‘Well, I’m sorry for it,’ replied he, with more of sulkiness than contrition: ‘what more would you have?’

‘You are sorry that I saw you, no doubt,’ I answered coldly.

‘If you had not seen me,’ he muttered, fixing his eyes on the carpet, ‘it would have done no harm.’

My heart felt ready to burst; but I resolutely swallowed back my emotion, and answered calmly,

‘You think not?’

‘No,’ replied he, boldly. ‘After all, what have I done? It’s nothing — except as you choose to make it a subject of accusation and distress.’

‘What would Lord Lowborough, your friend, think, if he knew all? or what would you yourself think, if he or any other had acted the same part to me, throughout, as you have to Annabella?’

‘I would blow his brains out.’

‘Well, then, Arthur, how can you call it nothing — an offence for which you would think yourself justified in blowing another man’s brains out? Is it nothing to trifle with your friend’s feelings and mine — to endeavour to steal a woman’s affections from her husband — what he values more than his gold, and therefore what it is more dishonest to take? Are the marriage vows a jest; and is it nothing to make it your sport to break them, and to tempt another to do the same? Can I love a man that does such things, and coolly maintains it is nothing?’

‘You are breaking your marriage vows yourself,’ said he, indignantly rising and pacing to and fro. ‘You promised to honour and obey me, and now you attempt to hector over me, and threaten and accuse me, and call me worse than a highwayman. If it were not for your situation, Helen, I would not submit to it so tamely. I won’t be dictated to by a woman, though she be my wife.’

‘What will you do then? Will you go on till I hate you, and then accuse me of breaking my vows?’

He was silent a moment, and then replied: ‘You never will hate me.’ Returning and resuming his former position at my feet, he repeated more vehemently — ‘You cannot hate me as long as I love you.’

‘But how can I believe that you love me, if you continue to act in this way? Just imagine yourself in my place: would you think I loved you, if I did so? Would you believe my protestations, and honour and trust me under such circumstances?’

‘The cases are different,’ he replied. ‘It is a woman’s nature to be constant — to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and for ever — bless them, dear creatures! and you above them all; but you must have some commiseration for us, Helen; you must give us a little more licence, for, as Shakespeare has it —

However we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,

More longing, wavering, sooner lost and won
Than women's are.'

'Do you mean by that, that your fancies are lost to me, and won by Lady Lowborough?'

'No! heaven is my witness that I think her mere dust and ashes in comparison with you, and shall continue to think so, unless you drive me from you by too much severity. She is a daughter of earth; you are an angel of heaven; only be not too austere in your divinity, and remember that I am a poor, fallible mortal. Come now, Helen; won't you forgive me?' he said, gently taking my hand, and looking up with an innocent smile.

'If I do, you will repeat the offence.'

'I swear by — '

'Don't swear; I'll believe your word as well as your oath. I wish I could have confidence in either.'

'Try me, then, Helen: only trust and pardon me this once, and you shall see! Come, I am in hell's torments till you speak the word.'

I did not speak it, but I put my hand on his shoulder and kissed his forehead, and then burst into tears. He embraced me tenderly; and we have been good friends ever since. He has been decently temperate at table, and well-conducted towards Lady Lowborough. The first day he held himself aloof from her, as far as he could without any flagrant breach of hospitality: since that he has been friendly and civil, but nothing more — in my presence, at least, nor, I think, at any other time; for she seems haughty and displeased, and Lord Lowborough is manifestly more cheerful, and more cordial towards his host than before. But I shall be glad when they are gone, for I have so little love for Annabella that it is quite a task to be civil to her, and as she is the only woman here besides myself, we are necessarily thrown so much together. Next time Mrs. Hargrave calls I shall hail her advent as quite a relief. I have a good mind to ask Arthur's leave to invite the old lady to stay with us till our guests depart. I think I will. She will take it as a kind attention, and, though I have little relish for her society, she will be truly welcome as a third to stand between Lady Lowborough and me.

The first time the latter and I were alone together, after that unhappy evening, was an hour or two after breakfast on the following day, when the gentlemen were gone out, after the usual time spent in the writing of letters, the reading of newspapers, and desultory conversation. We sat silent for two or three minutes. She was busy with her work, and I was running over the columns of a paper from which I had extracted all the pith some twenty minutes before. It was a moment of painful embarrassment to me, and I thought it must be infinitely more so to her; but it seems I was mistaken. She was the first to speak; and, smiling with the coolest assurance, she began, —

'Your husband was merry last night, Helen: is he often so?'

My blood boiled in my face; but it was better she should seem to attribute his conduct to this than to anything else.

'No,' replied I, 'and never will be so again, I trust.'

'You gave him a curtain lecture, did you?'

'No! but I told him I disliked such conduct, and he promised me not to repeat it.'

'I thought he looked rather subdued this morning,' she continued; 'and you, Helen? you've been weeping, I see — that's our grand resource, you know. But doesn't it make your eyes smart? and do you always find it to answer?'

'I never cry for effect; nor can I conceive how any one can.'

'Well, I don't know: I never had occasion to try it; but I think if Lowborough were to commit such improprieties, I'd make him cry. I don't wonder at your being angry, for I'm sure I'd give my husband a lesson he would not soon forget for a lighter offence than that. But then he never will do anything of the kind; for I keep him in too good order for that.'

'Are you sure you don't arrogate too much of the credit to yourself. Lord Lowborough was quite as remarkable for his abstemiousness for some time before you married him, as he is now, I have heard.'

'Oh, about the wine you mean — yes, he's safe enough for that. And as to looking askance to another woman, he's safe enough for that too, while I live, for he worships the very ground I tread on.'

'Indeed! and are you sure you deserve it?'

'Why, as to that, I can't say: you know we're all fallible creatures, Helen; we none of us deserve to be worshipped. But are you sure your darling Huntingdon deserves all the love you give to him?'

I knew not what to answer to this. I was burning with anger; but I suppressed all outward manifestations of it, and only bit my lip and pretended to arrange my work.

'At any rate,' resumed she, pursuing her advantage, 'you can console yourself with the assurance that you are worthy of all the love he gives to you.'

'You flatter me,' said I; 'but, at least, I can try to be worthy of it.' And then I turned the conversation.

CHAPTER XXVIII

December 25th. — Last Christmas I was a bride, with a heart overflowing with present bliss, and full of ardent hopes for the future, though not unmingled with foreboding fears. Now I am a wife: my bliss is sobered, but not destroyed; my hopes diminished, but not departed; my fears increased, but not yet thoroughly confirmed; and, thank heaven, I am a mother too. God has sent me a soul to educate for heaven, and give me a new and calmer bliss, and stronger hopes to comfort me.

Dec. 25th, 1823. — Another year is gone. My little Arthur lives and thrives. He is healthy, but not robust, full of gentle playfulness and vivacity, already affectionate, and susceptible of passions and emotions it will be long ere he can find words to express. He has won his father's heart at last; and now my constant terror is, lest he should be ruined by that father's thoughtless indulgence. But I must beware of my own weakness too, for I never knew till now how strong are a parent's temptations to spoil an only child.

I have need of consolation in my son, for (to this silent paper I may confess it) I have but little in my husband. I love him still; and he loves me, in his own way — but oh, how different from the love I could have given, and once had hoped to receive! How little real sympathy there exists between us; how many of my thoughts and feelings are gloomily cloistered within my own mind; how much of my higher and better self is indeed unmarried — doomed either to harden and sour in the sunless shade of solitude, or to quite degenerate and fall away for lack of nutriment in this unwholesome soil! But, I repeat, I have no right to complain; only let me state the truth — some of the truth, at least, — and see hereafter if any darker truths will blot these pages. We have now been full two years united; the 'romance' of our attachment must be worn away. Surely I have now got down to the lowest gradation in Arthur's affection, and discovered all the evils of his nature: if there be any further change, it must be for the better, as we become still more accustomed to each other; surely we shall find no lower depth than this. And, if so, I can bear it well — as well, at least, as I have borne it hitherto.

Arthur is not what is commonly called a bad man: he has many good qualities; but he is a man without self-restraint or lofty aspirations, a lover of pleasure, given up to animal enjoyments: he is not a bad husband, but his notions of matrimonial duties and comforts are not my notions. Judging from appearances, his idea of a wife is a thing to love one devotedly, and to stay at home to wait upon her husband, and amuse him and minister to his comfort in every possible way, while he chooses to stay with her; and, when he is absent, to attend to his interests, domestic or otherwise, and patiently wait his return, no matter how he may be occupied in the meantime.

Early in spring he announced his intention of going to London: his affairs there demanded his attendance, he said, and he could refuse it no longer. He expressed his regret at having to leave me, but hoped I would amuse myself with the baby till he returned.

'But why leave me?' I said. 'I can go with you: I can be ready at any time.'

'You would not take that child to town?'

'Yes; why not?'

The thing was absurd: the air of the town would be certain to disagree with him, and with me as a nurse; the late hours and London habits would not suit me under such circumstances; and altogether he assured me that it would be excessively troublesome, injurious, and unsafe. I over-ruled his objections as well as I could, for I trembled at the thoughts of his going alone, and would sacrifice almost anything for myself, much even for my child, to prevent it; but at length he told me, plainly, and somewhat testily, that he could not do with me: he was worn out with the baby's restless nights, and must have some repose. I proposed separate apartments; but it would not do.

'The truth is, Arthur,' I said at last, 'you are weary of my company, and determined not to have me with you. You might as well have said so at once.'

He denied it; but I immediately left the room, and flew to the nursery, to hide my feelings, if I could not soothe them, there.

I was too much hurt to express any further dissatisfaction with his plans, or at all to refer to the subject again, except for the necessary arrangements concerning his departure and the conduct of affairs during his absence, till the day before he went, when I earnestly exhorted him to take care of himself and keep out of the way of temptation. He laughed at my anxiety, but assured me there was no cause for it, and promised to attend to my advice.

'I suppose it is no use asking you to fix a day for your return?' said I.

'Why, no; I hardly can, under the circumstances; but be assured, love, I shall not be long away.'

'I don't wish to keep you a prisoner at home,' I replied; 'I should not grumble at your staying whole months away — if you can be happy so long without me — provided I knew you were safe; but I don't like the idea of your being there among your friends, as you call them.'

'Pooh, pooh, you silly girl! Do you think I can't take care of myself?'

'You didn't last time. But this time, Arthur,' I added, earnestly, 'show me that you can, and teach me that I need not fear to trust you!'

He promised fair, but in such a manner as we seek to soothe a child. And did he keep his promise? No; and henceforth I can never trust his word. Bitter, bitter confession! Tears blind me while I write. It was early in March that he went, and he did not return till July. This time he did not trouble himself to make excuses as before, and his letters were less frequent, and shorter and less affectionate, especially after the first few weeks: they came slower and slower, and more terse and careless every time. But still, when I omitted writing, he complained of my neglect. When I wrote sternly and coldly, as I confess I frequently did at the last, he blamed my harshness, and said it was enough to scare him from his home: when I tried mild persuasion, he was a little more gentle in his replies, and promised to return; but I had learnt, at last, to disregard his promises.

CHAPTER XXIX

Those were four miserable months, alternating between intense anxiety, despair, and indignation, pity for him and pity for myself. And yet, through all, I was not wholly comfortless: I had my darling, sinless, inoffensive little one to console me; but even this consolation was embittered by the constantly-recurring thought, ‘How shall I teach him hereafter to respect his father, and yet to avoid his example?’

But I remembered that I had brought all these afflictions, in a manner wilfully, upon myself; and I determined to bear them without a murmur. At the same time I resolved not to give myself up to misery for the transgressions of another, and endeavoured to divert myself as much as I could; and besides the companionship of my child, and my dear, faithful Rachel, who evidently guessed my sorrows and felt for them, though she was too discreet to allude to them, I had my books and pencil, my domestic affairs, and the welfare and comfort of Arthur’s poor tenants and labourers to attend to: and I sometimes sought and obtained amusement in the company of my young friend Esther Hargrave: occasionally I rode over to see her, and once or twice I had her to spend the day with me at the Manor. Mrs. Hargrave did not visit London that season: having no daughter to marry, she thought it as well to stay at home and economise; and, for a wonder, Walter came down to join her in the beginning of June, and stayed till near the close of August.

The first time I saw him was on a sweet, warm evening, when I was sauntering in the park with little Arthur and Rachel, who is head-nurse and lady’s-maid in one — for, with my secluded life and tolerably active habits, I require but little attendance, and as she had nursed me and coveted to nurse my child, and was moreover so very trustworthy, I preferred committing the important charge to her, with a young nursery-maid under her directions, to engaging any one else: besides, it saves money; and since I have made acquaintance with Arthur’s affairs, I have learnt to regard that as no trifling recommendation; for, by my own desire, nearly the whole of the income of my fortune is devoted, for years to come, to the paying off of his debts, and the money he contrives to squander away in London is incomprehensible. But to return to Mr. Hargrave. I was standing with Rachel beside the water, amusing the laughing baby in her arms with a twig of willow laden with golden catkins, when, greatly to my surprise, he entered the park, mounted on his costly black hunter, and crossed over the grass to meet me. He saluted me with a very fine compliment, delicately worded, and modestly delivered withal, which he had doubtless concocted as he rode along. He told me he had brought a message from his mother, who, as he was riding that way, had desired him to call at the Manor and beg the pleasure of my company to a friendly family dinner to-morrow.

‘There is no one to meet but ourselves,’ said he; ‘but Esther is very anxious to see you; and my mother fears you will feel solitary in this great house so much alone, and wishes she could persuade you to give her the pleasure of your company more frequently, and make yourself at home in our more humble dwelling, till Mr. Huntingdon’s return shall render this a little more conducive to your comfort.’

‘She is very kind,’ I answered, ‘but I am not alone, you see; — and those whose time is fully occupied seldom complain of solitude.’

‘Will you not come to-morrow, then? She will be sadly disappointed if you refuse.’

I did not relish being thus compassionated for my loneliness; but, however, I promised to come.

‘What a sweet evening this is!’ observed he, looking round upon the sunny park, with its imposing swell and slope, its placid water, and majestic clumps of trees. ‘And what a paradise you live in!’

‘It is a lovely evening,’ answered I; and I sighed to think how little I had felt its loveliness, and how little of a paradise sweet Grassdale was to me — how still less to the voluntary exile from its scenes. Whether Mr. Hargrave divined my thoughts, I cannot tell, but, with a half-hesitating, sympathising seriousness of tone and manner, he asked if I had lately heard from Mr. Huntingdon.

‘Not lately,’ I replied.

‘I thought not,’ he muttered, as if to himself, looking thoughtfully on the ground.

‘Are you not lately returned from London?’ I asked.

‘Only yesterday.’

‘And did you see him there?’

‘Yes — I saw him.’

‘Was he well?’

‘Yes — that is,’ said he, with increasing hesitation and an appearance of suppressed indignation, ‘he was as well as — as he deserved to be, but under circumstances I should have deemed incredible for a man so favoured as he is.’ He here looked up and pointed the sentence with a serious bow to me. I suppose my face was crimson.

‘Pardon me, Mrs. Huntingdon,’ he continued, ‘but I cannot suppress my indignation when I behold such infatuated blindness and perversion of taste; — but, perhaps, you are not aware — ‘ He paused.

‘I am aware of nothing, sir — except that he delays his coming longer than I expected; and if, at present, he prefers the society of his friends to that of his wife, and the dissipations of the town to the quiet of country life, I suppose I have those friends to thank for it. Their tastes and occupations are similar to his, and I don’t see why his conduct should awaken either their indignation or surprise.’

'You wrong me cruelly,' answered he. 'I have shared but little of Mr. Huntingdon's society for the last few weeks; and as for his tastes and occupations, they are quite beyond me — lonely wanderer as I am. Where I have but sipped and tasted, he drains the cup to the dregs; and if ever for a moment I have sought to drown the voice of reflection in madness and folly, or if I have wasted too much of my time and talents among reckless and dissipated companions, God knows I would gladly renounce them entirely and for ever, if I had but half the blessings that man so thanklessly casts behind his back — but half the inducements to virtue and domestic, orderly habits that he despises — but such a home, and such a partner to share it! It is infamous!' he muttered, between his teeth. 'And don't think, Mrs. Huntingdon,' he added aloud, 'that I could be guilty of inciting him to persevere in his present pursuits: on the contrary, I have remonstrated with him again and again; I have frequently expressed my surprise at his conduct, and reminded him of his duties and his privileges — but to no purpose; he only — '

'Enough, Mr. Hargrave; you ought to be aware that whatever my husband's faults may be, it can only aggravate the evil for me to hear them from a stranger's lips.'

'Am I then a stranger?' said he in a sorrowful tone. 'I am your nearest neighbour, your son's godfather, and your husband's friend; may I not be yours also?'

'Intimate acquaintance must precede real friendship; I know but little of you, Mr. Hargrave, except from report.'

'Have you then forgotten the six or seven weeks I spent under your roof last autumn? I have not forgotten them. And I know enough of you, Mrs. Huntingdon, to think that your husband is the most enviable man in the world, and I should be the next if you would deem me worthy of your friendship.'

'If you knew more of me, you would not think it, or if you did you would not say it, and expect me to be flattered by the compliment.'

I stepped backward as I spoke. He saw that I wished the conversation to end; and immediately taking the hint, he gravely bowed, wished me good-evening, and turned his horse towards the road. He appeared grieved and hurt at my unkind reception of his sympathising overtures. I was not sure that I had done right in speaking so harshly to him; but, at the time, I had felt irritated — almost insulted by his conduct; it seemed as if he was presuming upon the absence and neglect of my husband, and insinuating even more than the truth against him.

Rachel had moved on, during our conversation, to some yards' distance. He rode up to her, and asked to see the child. He took it carefully into his arms, looked upon it with an almost paternal smile, and I heard him say, as I approached, —

'And this, too, he has forsaken!'

He then tenderly kissed it, and restored it to the gratified nurse.

'Are you fond of children, Mr. Hargrave?' said I, a little softened towards him.

‘Not in general,’ he replied, ‘but that is such a sweet child, and so like its mother,’ he added in a lower tone.

‘You are mistaken there; it is its father it resembles.’

‘Am I not right, nurse?’ said he, appealing to Rachel.

‘I think, sir, there’s a bit of both,’ she replied.

He departed; and Rachel pronounced him a very nice gentleman. I had still my doubts on the subject.

In the course of the following six weeks I met him several times, but always, save once, in company with his mother, or his sister, or both. When I called on them, he always happened to be at home, and, when they called on me, it was always he that drove them over in the phaeton. His mother, evidently, was quite delighted with his dutiful attentions and newly-acquired domestic habits.

The time that I met him alone was on a bright, but not oppressively hot day, in the beginning of July: I had taken little Arthur into the wood that skirts the park, and there seated him on the moss-cushioned roots of an old oak; and, having gathered a handful of bluebells and wild-roses, I was kneeling before him, and presenting them, one by one, to the grasp of his tiny fingers; enjoying the heavenly beauty of the flowers, through the medium of his smiling eyes: forgetting, for the moment, all my cares, laughing at his gleeful laughter, and delighting myself with his delight, — when a shadow suddenly eclipsed the little space of sunshine on the grass before us; and looking up, I beheld Walter Hargrave standing and gazing upon us.

‘Excuse me, Mrs. Huntingdon,’ said he, ‘but I was spell-bound; I had neither the power to come forward and interrupt you, nor to withdraw from the contemplation of such a scene. How vigorous my little godson grows! and how merry he is this morning!’ He approached the child, and stooped to take his hand; but, on seeing that his caresses were likely to produce tears and lamentations, instead of a reciprocation of friendly demonstrations, he prudently drew back.

‘What a pleasure and comfort that little creature must be to you, Mrs. Huntingdon!’ he observed, with a touch of sadness in his intonation, as he admiringly contemplated the infant.

‘It is,’ replied I; and then I asked after his mother and sister.

He politely answered my inquiries, and then returned again to the subject I wished to avoid; though with a degree of timidity that witnessed his fear to offend.

‘You have not heard from Huntingdon lately?’ he said.

‘Not this week,’ I replied. Not these three weeks, I might have said.

‘I had a letter from him this morning. I wish it were such a one as I could show to his lady.’ He half drew from his waistcoat-pocket a letter with Arthur’s still beloved hand on the address, scowled at it, and put it back again, adding — ‘But he tells me he is about to return next week.’

'He tells me so every time he writes.'

'Indeed! well, it is like him. But to me he always avowed it his intention to stay till the present month.'

It struck me like a blow, this proof of premeditated transgression and systematic disregard of truth.

'It is only of a piece with the rest of his conduct,' observed Mr. Hargrave, thoughtfully regarding me, and reading, I suppose, my feelings in my face.

'Then he is really coming next week?' said I, after a pause.

'You may rely upon it, if the assurance can give you any pleasure. And is it possible, Mrs. Huntingdon, that you can rejoice at his return?' he exclaimed, attentively perusing my features again.

'Of course, Mr. Hargrave; is he not my husband?'

'Oh, Huntingdon; you know not what you slight!' he passionately murmured.

I took up my baby, and, wishing him good-morning, departed, to indulge my thoughts unscrutinized, within the sanctum of my home.

And was I glad? Yes, delighted; though I was angered by Arthur's conduct, and though I felt that he had wronged me, and was determined he should feel it too.

CHAPTER XXX

On the following morning I received a few lines from him myself, confirming Hargrave's intimations respecting his approaching return. And he did come next week, but in a condition of body and mind even worse than before. I did not, however, intend to pass over his derelictions this time without a remark; I found it would not do. But the first day he was weary with his journey, and I was glad to get him back: I would not upbraid him then; I would wait till to-morrow. Next morning he was weary still: I would wait a little longer. But at dinner, when, after breakfasting at twelve o'clock on a bottle of soda-water and a cup of strong coffee, and lunching at two on another bottle of soda-water mingled with brandy, he was finding fault with everything on the table, and declaring we must change our cook, I thought the time was come.

'It is the same cook as we had before you went, Arthur,' said I. 'You were generally pretty well satisfied with her then.'

'You must have been letting her get into slovenly habits, then, while I was away. It is enough to poison one, eating such a disgusting mess!' And he pettishly pushed away his plate, and leant back despairingly in his chair.

'I think it is you that are changed, not she,' said I, but with the utmost gentleness, for I did not wish to irritate him.

'It may be so,' he replied carelessly, as he seized a tumbler of wine and water, adding, when he had tossed it off, 'for I have an infernal fire in my veins, that all the waters of the ocean cannot quench!'

'What kindled it?' I was about to ask, but at that moment the butler entered and began to take away the things.

'Be quick, Benson; do have done with that infernal clatter!' cried his master. 'And don't bring the cheese, unless you want to make me sick outright!'

Benson, in some surprise, removed the cheese, and did his best to effect a quiet and speedy clearance of the rest; but, unfortunately, there was a rumple in the carpet, caused by the hasty pushing back of his master's chair, at which he tripped and stumbled, causing a rather alarming concussion with the trayful of crockery in his hands, but no positive damage, save the fall and breaking of a sauce tureen; but, to my unspeakable shame and dismay, Arthur turned furiously around upon him, and swore at him with savage coarseness. The poor man turned pale, and visibly trembled as he stooped to pick up the fragments.

'He couldn't help it, Arthur,' said I; 'the carpet caught his foot, and there's no great harm done. Never mind the pieces now, Benson; you can clear them away afterwards.'

Glad to be released, Benson expeditiously set out the dessert and withdrew.

'What could you mean, Helen, by taking the servant's part against me,' said Arthur, as soon as the door was closed, 'when you knew I was distracted?'

'I did not know you were distracted, Arthur: and the poor man was quite frightened and hurt at your sudden explosion.'

'Poor man, indeed! and do you think I could stop to consider the feelings of an insensate brute like that, when my own nerves were racked and torn to pieces by his confounded blunders?'

'I never heard you complain of your nerves before.'

'And why shouldn't I have nerves as well as you?'

'Oh, I don't dispute your claim to their possession, but I never complain of mine.'

'No, how should you, when you never do anything to try them?'

'Then why do you try yours, Arthur?'

'Do you think I have nothing to do but to stay at home and take care of myself like a woman?'

'Is it impossible, then, to take care of yourself like a man when you go abroad? You told me that you could, and would too; and you promised — '

'Come, come, Helen, don't begin with that nonsense now; I can't bear it.'

'Can't bear what? — to be reminded of the promises you have broken?'

'Helen, you are cruel. If you knew how my heart throbbed, and how every nerve thrilled through me while you spoke, you would spare me. You can pity a dolt of a servant for breaking a dish; but you have no compassion for me when my head is split in two and all on fire with this consuming fever.'

He leant his head on his hand, and sighed. I went to him and put my hand on his forehead. It was burning indeed.

'Then come with me into the drawing-room, Arthur; and don't take any more wine: you have taken several glasses since dinner, and eaten next to nothing all the day. How can that make you better?'

With some coaxing and persuasion, I got him to leave the table. When the baby was brought I tried to amuse him with that; but poor little Arthur was cutting his teeth, and his father could not bear his complaints: sentence of immediate banishment was passed upon him on the first indication of fretfulness; and because, in the course of the evening, I went to share his exile for a little while, I was reproached, on my return, for preferring my child to my husband. I found the latter reclining on the sofa just as I had left him.

'Well!' exclaimed the injured man, in a tone of pseudo-resignation. 'I thought I wouldn't send for you; I thought I'd just see how long it would please you to leave me alone.'

'I have not been very long, have I, Arthur? I have not been an hour, I'm sure.'

'Oh, of course, an hour is nothing to you, so pleasantly employed; but to me — '

'It has not been pleasantly employed,' interrupted I. 'I have been nursing our poor little baby, who is very far from well, and I could not leave him till I got him to sleep.'

'Oh, to be sure, you're overflowing with kindness and pity for everything but me.'

'And why should I pity you? What is the matter with you?'

'Well! that passes everything! After all the wear and tear that I've had, when I come home sick and weary, longing for comfort, and expecting to find attention and kindness, at least from my wife, she calmly asks what is the matter with me!'

'There is nothing the matter with you,' returned I, 'except what you have wilfully brought upon yourself, against my earnest exhortation and entreaty.'

'Now, Helen,' said he emphatically, half rising from his recumbent posture, 'if you bother me with another word, I'll ring the bell and order six bottles of wine, and, by heaven, I'll drink them dry before I stir from this place!'

I said no more, but sat down before the table and drew a book towards me.

'Do let me have quietness at least!' continued he, 'if you deny me every other comfort;' and sinking back into his former position, with an impatient expiration between a sigh and a groan, he languidly closed his eyes, as if to sleep.

What the book was that lay open on the table before me, I cannot tell, for I never looked at it. With an elbow on each side of it, and my hands clasped before my eyes, I delivered myself up to silent weeping. But Arthur was not asleep: at the first slight sob, he raised his head and looked round, impatiently exclaiming, 'What are you crying for, Helen? What the deuce is the matter now?'

'I'm crying for you, Arthur,' I replied, speedily drying my tears; and starting up, I threw myself on my knees before him, and clasping his nerveless hand between my own, continued: 'Don't you know that you are a part of myself? And do you think you can injure and degrade yourself, and I not feel it?'

'Degrade myself, Helen?'

'Yes, degrade! What have you been doing all this time?'

'You'd better not ask,' said he, with a faint smile.

'And you had better not tell; but you cannot deny that you have degraded yourself miserably. You have shamefully wronged yourself, body and soul, and me too; and I can't endure it quietly, and I won't!'

'Well, don't squeeze my hand so frantically, and don't agitate me so, for heaven's sake! Oh, Hattersley! you were right: this woman will be the death of me, with her keen feelings and her interesting force of character. There, there, do spare me a little.'

'Arthur, you must repent!' cried I, in a frenzy of desperation, throwing my arms around him and burying my face in his bosom. ‘You shall say you are sorry for what you have done!’

‘Well, well, I am.’

‘You are not! you’ll do it again.’

‘I shall never live to do it again if you treat me so savagely,’ replied he, pushing me from him. ‘You’ve nearly squeezed the breath out of my body.’ He pressed his hand to his heart, and looked really agitated and ill.

‘Now get me a glass of wine,’ said he, ‘to remedy what you’ve done, you she tiger! I’m almost ready to faint.’

I flew to get the required remedy. It seemed to revive him considerably.

‘What a shame it is,’ said I, as I took the empty glass from his hand, ‘for a strong young man like you to reduce yourself to such a state!’

‘If you knew all, my girl, you’d say rather, “What a wonder it is you can bear it so well as you do!” I’ve lived more in these four months, Helen, than you have in the whole course of your existence, or will to the end of your days, if they numbered a hundred years; so I must expect to pay for it in some shape.’

‘You will have to pay a higher price than you anticipate, if you don’t take care: there will be the total loss of your own health, and of my affection too, if that is of any value to you.’

‘What! you’re at that game of threatening me with the loss of your affection again, are you? I think it couldn’t have been very genuine stuff to begin with, if it’s so easily demolished. If you don’t mind, my pretty tyrant, you’ll make me regret my choice in good earnest, and envy my friend Hattersley his meek little wife: she’s quite a pattern to her sex, Helen. He had her with him in London all the season, and she was no trouble at all. He might amuse himself just as he pleased, in regular bachelor style, and she never complained of neglect; he might come home at any hour of the night or morning, or not come home at all; be sullen, sober, or glorious drunk; and play the fool or the madman to his own heart’s desire, without any fear or botheration. She never gives him a word of reproach or complaint, do what he will. He says there’s not such a jewel in all England, and swears he wouldn’t take a kingdom for her.’

‘But he makes her life a curse to her.’

‘Not he! She has no will but his, and is always contented and happy as long as he is enjoying himself.’

‘In that case she is as great a fool as he is; but it is not so. I have several letters from her, expressing the greatest anxiety about his proceedings, and complaining that you incite him to commit those extravagances — one especially, in which she implores me to use my influence with you to get you away from London, and affirms that her husband never did such things before you came, and would certainly discontinue them as soon as you departed and left him to the guidance of his own good sense.’

‘The detestable little traitor! Give me the letter, and he shall see it as sure as I'm a living man.'

'No, he shall not see it without her consent; but if he did, there is nothing there to anger him, nor in any of the others. She never speaks a word against him: it is only anxiety for him that she expresses. She only alludes to his conduct in the most delicate terms, and makes every excuse for him that she can possibly think of; and as for her own misery, I rather feel it than see it expressed in her letters.'

'But she abuses me; and no doubt you helped her.'

'No; I told her she over-rated my influence with you, that I would gladly draw you away from the temptations of the town if I could, but had little hope of success, and that I thought she was wrong in supposing that you enticed Mr. Hattersley or any one else into error. I had myself held the contrary opinion at one time, but I now believed that you mutually corrupted each other; and, perhaps, if she used a little gentle but serious remonstrance with her husband, it might be of some service; as, though he was more rough-hewn than mine, I believed he was of a less impenetrable material.'

'And so that is the way you go on — heartening each other up to mutiny, and abusing each other's partners, and throwing out implications against your own, to the mutual gratification of both!'

'According to your own account,' said I, 'my evil counsel has had but little effect upon her. And as to abuse and aspersions, we are both of us far too deeply ashamed of the errors and vices of our other halves, to make them the common subject of our correspondence. Friends as we are, we would willingly keep your failings to ourselves — even from ourselves if we could, unless by knowing them we could deliver you from them.'

'Well, well! don't worry me about them: you'll never effect any good by that. Have patience with me, and bear with my languor and crossness a little while, till I get this cursed low fever out of my veins, and then you'll find me cheerful and kind as ever. Why can't you be gentle and good, as you were last time? — I'm sure I was very grateful for it.'

'And what good did your gratitude do? I deluded myself with the idea that you were ashamed of your transgressions, and hoped you would never repeat them again; but now you have left me nothing to hope!'

'My case is quite desperate, is it? A very blessed consideration, if it will only secure me from the pain and worry of my dear anxious wife's efforts to convert me, and her from the toil and trouble of such exertions, and her sweet face and silver accents from the ruinous effects of the same. A burst of passion is a fine rousing thing upon occasion, Helen, and a flood of tears is marvellously affecting, but, when indulged too often, they are both deuced plaguy things for spoiling one's beauty and tiring out one's friends.'

Thenceforth I restrained my tears and passions as much as I could. I spared him my exhortations and fruitless efforts at conversion too, for I saw it was all in vain: God might awaken that heart, supine and stupefied with self-indulgence, and remove the film of sensual darkness from his eyes, but I could not. His injustice and ill-humour towards his inferiors, who could not defend themselves, I still resented and withstood; but when I alone was their object, as was frequently the case, I endured it with calm forbearance, except at times, when my temper, worn out by repeated annoyances, or stung to distraction by some new instance of irrationality, gave way in spite of myself, and exposed me to the imputations of fierceness, cruelty, and impatience. I attended carefully to his wants and amusements, but not, I own, with the same devoted fondness as before, because I could not feel it; besides, I had now another claimant on my time and care — my ailing infant, for whose sake I frequently braved and suffered the reproaches and complaints of his unreasonably exacting father.

But Arthur is not naturally a peevish or irritable man; so far from it, that there was something almost ludicrous in the incongruity of this adventitious fretfulness and nervous irritability, rather calculated to excite laughter than anger, if it were not for the intensely painful considerations attendant upon those symptoms of a disordered frame, and his temper gradually improved as his bodily health was restored, which was much sooner than would have been the case but for my strenuous exertions; for there was still one thing about him that I did not give up in despair, and one effort for his preservation that I would not remit. His appetite for the stimulus of wine had increased upon him, as I had too well foreseen. It was now something more to him than an accessory to social enjoyment: it was an important source of enjoyment in itself. In this time of weakness and depression he would have made it his medicine and support, his comforter, his recreation, and his friend, and thereby sunk deeper and deeper, and bound himself down for ever in the bathos whereinto he had fallen. But I determined this should never be, as long as I had any influence left; and though I could not prevent him from taking more than was good for him, still, by incessant perseverance, by kindness, and firmness, and vigilance, by coaxing, and daring, and determination, I succeeded in preserving him from absolute bondage to that detestable propensity, so insidious in its advances, so inexorable in its tyranny, so disastrous in its effects.

And here I must not forget that I am not a little indebted to his friend Mr. Hargrave. About that time he frequently called at Grassdale, and often dined with us, on which occasions I fear Arthur would willingly have cast prudence and decorum to the winds, and made ‘a night of it,’ as often as his friend would have consented to join him in that exalted pastime; and if the latter had chosen to comply, he might, in a night or two, have ruined the labour of weeks, and overthrown with a touch the frail bulwark it had cost me such trouble and toil to construct. I was so fearful of this at first, that I humbled myself to intimate to him, in private, my apprehensions of Arthur’s proneness to these excesses, and to express a hope that he would not encourage it. He was pleased with this mark of confidence, and certainly did not betray it. On that and every subsequent occasion his presence served rather as a check upon his host, than an incitement to further acts of intemperance; and he always succeeded in bringing him from the dining-room in good time, and in tolerably good condition; for if Arthur disregarded such intimations as ‘Well, I must not detain you from your lady,’ or ‘We must not forget that Mrs. Huntingdon is alone,’ he would insist upon leaving the table himself, to join me, and his host, however unwillingly, was obliged to follow.

Hence I learned to welcome Mr. Hargrave as a real friend to the family, a harmless companion for Arthur, to cheer his spirits and preserve him from the tedium of absolute idleness and a total isolation from all society but mine, and a useful ally to me. I could not but feel grateful to him under such circumstances; and I did not scruple to acknowledge my obligation on the first convenient opportunity; yet, as I did so, my heart whispered all was not right, and brought a glow to my face, which he heightened by his steady, serious gaze, while, by his manner of receiving those acknowledgments, he more than doubled my misgivings. His high delight at being able to serve me was chastened by sympathy for me and commiseration for himself — about, I know not what, for I would not stay to inquire, or suffer him to unburden his sorrows to me. His sighs and intimations of suppressed affliction seemed to come from a full heart; but either he must contrive to retain them within it, or breathe them forth in other ears than mine: there was enough of confidence between us already. It seemed wrong that there should exist a secret understanding between my husband’s friend and me, unknown to him, of which he was the object. But my after-thought was, ‘If it is wrong, surely Arthur’s is the fault, not mine.’

And indeed I know not whether, at the time, it was not for him rather than myself that I blushed; for, since he and I are one, I so identify myself with him, that I feel his degradation, his failings, and transgressions as my own: I blush for him, I fear for him; I repent for him, weep, pray, and feel for him as for myself; but I cannot act for him; and hence I must be, and I am, debased, contaminated by the union, both in my own eyes and in the actual truth. I am so determined to love him, so intensely anxious to excuse his errors, that I am continually dwelling upon them, and labouring to extenuate the loosest of his principles and the worst of his practices, till I am familiarised with vice, and almost a partaker in his sins. Things that formerly shocked and disgusted me, now seem only natural. I know them to be wrong, because reason and God’s word declare them to be so; but I am gradually losing that instinctive horror and repulsion which were given me by nature, or instilled into me by the precepts and example of my aunt. Perhaps then I was too severe in my judgments, for I abhorred the sinner as well as the sin; now I flatter myself I am more charitable and considerate; but am I not becoming more indifferent and insensate too? Fool that I was, to dream that I had strength and purity enough to save myself and him! Such vain presumption would be rightly served, if I should perish with him in the gulf from which I sought to save him! Yet, God preserve me from it, and him too! Yes, poor Arthur, I will still hope and pray for you; and though I write as if you were some abandoned wretch, past hope and past reprieve, it is only my anxious fears, my strong desires that make me do so; one who loved you less would be less bitter, less dissatisfied.

His conduct has, of late, been what the world calls irreproachable; but then I know his heart is still unchanged; and I know that spring is approaching, and deeply dread the consequences.

As he began to recover the tone and vigour of his exhausted frame, and with it something of his former impatience of retirement and repose, I suggested a short residence by the sea-side, for his recreation and further restoration, and for the benefit of our little one as well. But no: watering-places were so intolerably dull; besides, he had been invited by one of his friends to spend a month or two in Scotland for the better recreation of grouse-shooting and deer-stalking, and had promise to go.

'Then you will leave me again, Arthur?' said I.

'Yes, dearest, but only to love you the better when I come back, and make up for all past offences and short-comings; and you needn't fear me this time: there are no temptations on the mountains. And during my absence you may pay a visit to Staningley, if you like: your uncle and aunt have long been wanting us to go there, you know; but somehow there's such a repulsion between the good lady and me, that I never could bring myself up to the scratch.'

About the third week in August, Arthur set out for Scotland, and Mr. Hargrave accompanied him thither, to my private satisfaction. Shortly after, I, with little Arthur and Rachel, went to Staningley, my dear old home, which, as well as my dear old friends its inhabitants, I saw again with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain so intimately blended that I could scarcely distinguish the one from the other, or tell to which to attribute the various tears, and smiles, and sighs awakened by those old familiar scenes, and tones, and faces.

Arthur did not come home till several weeks after my return to Grassdale; but I did not feel so anxious about him now; to think of him engaged in active sports among the wild hills of Scotland, was very different from knowing him to be immersed amid the corruptions and temptations of London. His letters now; though neither long nor loverlike, were more regular than ever they had been before; and when he did return, to my great joy, instead of being worse than when he went, he was more cheerful and vigorous, and better in every respect. Since that time I have had little cause to complain. He still has an unfortunate predilection for the pleasures of the table, against which I have to struggle and watch; but he has begun to notice his boy, and that is an increasing source of amusement to him within-doors, while his fox-hunting and coursing are a sufficient occupation for him without, when the ground is not hardened by frost; so that he is not wholly dependent on me for entertainment. But it is now January; spring is approaching; and, I repeat, I dread the consequences of its arrival. That sweet season, I once so joyously welcomed as the time of hope and gladness, awakens now far other anticipations by its return.

CHAPTER XXXI

March 20th, 1824. The dreaded time is come, and Arthur is gone, as I expected. This time he announced it his intention to make but a short stay in London, and pass over to the Continent, where he should probably stay a few weeks; but I shall not expect him till after the lapse of many weeks: I now know that, with him, days signify weeks, and weeks months.

July 30th. — He returned about three weeks ago, rather better in health, certainly, than before, but still worse in temper. And yet, perhaps, I am wrong: it is I that am less patient and forbearing. I am tired out with his injustice, his selfishness and hopeless depravity. I wish a milder word would do; I am no angel, and my corruption rises against it. My poor father died last week: Arthur was vexed to hear of it, because he saw that I was shocked and grieved, and he feared the circumstance would mar his comfort. When I spoke of ordering my mourning, he exclaimed, — 'Oh, I hate black! But, however, I suppose you must wear it awhile, for form's sake; but I hope, Helen, you won't think it your bounden duty to compose your face and manners into conformity with your funereal garb. Why should you sigh and groan, and I be made uncomfortable, because an old gentleman in — shire, a perfect stranger to us both, has thought proper to drink himself to death? There, now, I declare you're crying! Well, it must be affectation.'

He would not hear of my attending the funeral, or going for a day or two, to cheer poor Frederick's solitude. It was quite unnecessary, he said, and I was unreasonable to wish it. What was my father to me? I had never seen him but once since I was a baby, and I well knew he had never cared a stiver about me; and my brother, too, was little better than a stranger. 'Besides, dear Helen,' said he, embracing me with flattering fondness, 'I cannot spare you for a single day.'

'Then how have you managed without me these many days?' said I.

'Ah! then I was knocking about the world, now I am at home, and home without you, my household deity, would be intolerable.'

'Yes, as long as I am necessary to your comfort; but you did not say so before, when you urged me to leave you, in order that you might get away from your home without me,' retorted I; but before the words were well out of my mouth, I regretted having uttered them. It seemed so heavy a charge: if false, too gross an insult; if true, too humiliating a fact to be thus openly cast in his teeth. But I might have spared myself that momentary pang of self-reproach. The accusation awoke neither shame nor indignation in him: he attempted neither denial nor excuse, but only answered with a long, low, chuckling laugh, as if he viewed the whole transaction as a clever, merry jest from beginning to end. Surely that man will make me dislike him at last!

Sine as ye brew, my maiden fair,
Keep mind that ye maun drink the yill.

Yes; and I will drink it to the very dregs: and none but myself shall know how bitter I find it!

August 20th. — We are shaken down again to about our usual position. Arthur has returned to nearly his former condition and habits; and I have found it my wisest plan to shut my eyes against the past and future, as far as he, at least, is concerned, and live only for the present: to love him when I can; to smile (if possible) when he smiles, be cheerful when he is cheerful, and pleased when he is agreeable; and when he is not, to try to make him so; and if that won't answer, to bear with him, to excuse him, and forgive him as well as I can, and restrain my own evil passions from aggravating his; and yet, while I thus yield and minister to his more harmless propensities to self-indulgence, to do all in my power to save him from the worse.

But we shall not be long alone together. I shall shortly be called upon to entertain the same select body of friends as we had the autumn before last, with the addition of Mr. Hattersley and, at my special request, his wife and child. I long to see Milicent, and her little girl too. The latter is now above a year old; she will be a charming playmate for my little Arthur.

September 30th. — Our guests have been here a week or two; but I have had no leisure to pass any comments upon them till now. I cannot get over my dislike to Lady Lowborough. It is not founded on mere personal pique; it is the woman herself that I dislike, because I so thoroughly disapprove of her. I always avoid her company as much as I can without violating the laws of hospitality; but when we do speak or converse together, it is with the utmost civility, even apparent cordiality on her part; but preserve me from such cordiality! It is like handling brier-roses and may-blossoms, bright enough to the eye, and outwardly soft to the touch, but you know there are thorns beneath, and every now and then you feel them too; and perhaps resent the injury by crushing them in till you have destroyed their power, though somewhat to the detriment of your own fingers.

Of late, however, I have seen nothing in her conduct towards Arthur to anger or alarm me. During the first few days I thought she seemed very solicitous to win his admiration. Her efforts were not unnoticed by him: I frequently saw him smiling to himself at her artful manoeuvres: but, to his praise be it spoken, her shafts fell powerless by his side. Her most bewitching smiles, her haughtiest frowns were ever received with the same immutable, careless good-humour; till, finding he was indeed impenetrable, she suddenly remitted her efforts, and became, to all appearance, as perfectly indifferent as himself. Nor have I since witnessed any symptom of pique on his part, or renewed attempts at conquest upon hers.

This is as it should be; but Arthur never will let me be satisfied with him. I have never, for a single hour since I married him, known what it is to realise that sweet idea, 'In quietness and confidence shall be your rest.' Those two detestable men, Grimsby and Hattersley, have destroyed all my labour against his love of wine. They encourage him daily to overstep the bounds of moderation, and not unfrequently to disgrace himself by positive excess. I shall not soon forget the second night after their arrival. Just as I had retired from the dining-room with the ladies, before the door was closed upon us, Arthur exclaimed, — 'Now then, my lads, what say you to a regular jollification?'

Milicent glanced at me with a half-reproachful look, as if I could hinder it; but her countenance changed when she heard Hattersley's voice, shouting through door and wall, — 'I'm your man! Send for more wine: here isn't half enough!'

We had scarcely entered the drawing-room before we were joined by Lord Lowborough.

'What can induce you to come so soon?' exclaimed his lady, with a most ungracious air of dissatisfaction.

'You know I never drink, Annabella,' replied he seriously.

'Well, but you might stay with them a little: it looks so silly to be always dangling after the women; I wonder you can!'

He reproached her with a look of mingled bitterness and surprise, and, sinking into a chair, suppressed a heavy sigh, bit his pale lips, and fixed his eyes upon the floor.

'You did right to leave them, Lord Lowborough,' said I. 'I trust you will always continue to honour us so early with your company. And if Annabella knew the value of true wisdom, and the misery of folly and — and intemperance, she would not talk such nonsense — even in jest.'

He raised his eyes while I spoke, and gravely turned them upon me, with a half-surprised, half-abstracted look, and then bent them on his wife.

'At least,' said she, 'I know the value of a warm heart and a bold, manly spirit.'

'Well, Annabella,' said he, in a deep and hollow tone, 'since my presence is disagreeable to you, I will relieve you of it.'

'Are you going back to them, then?' said she, carelessly.

'No,' exclaimed he, with harsh and startling emphasis. 'I will not go back to them! And I will never stay with them one moment longer than I think right, for you or any other tempter! But you needn't mind that; I shall never trouble you again by intruding my company upon you so unseasonably.'

He left the room: I heard the hall-door open and shut, and immediately after, on putting aside the curtain, I saw him pacing down the park, in the comfortless gloom of the damp, cloudy twilight.

'It would serve you right, Annabella,' said I, at length, 'if Lord Lowborough were to return to his old habits, which had so nearly effected his ruin, and which it cost him such an effort to break: you would then see cause to repent such conduct as this.'

'Not at all, my dear! I should not mind if his lordship were to see fit to intoxicate himself every day: I should only the sooner be rid of him.'

'Oh, Annabella!' cried Milicent. 'How can you say such wicked things! It would, indeed, be a just punishment, as far as you are concerned, if Providence should take you at your word, and make you feel what others feel, that — ' She paused as a sudden burst of loud talking and laughter reached us from the dining-room, in which the voice of Hattersley was pre-eminently conspicuous, even to my unpractised ear.

'What you feel at this moment, I suppose?' said Lady Lowborough, with a malicious smile, fixing her eyes upon her cousin's distressed countenance.

The latter offered no reply, but averted her face and brushed away a tear. At that moment the door opened and admitted Mr. Hargrave, just a little flushed, his dark eyes sparkling with unwonted vivacity.

'Oh, I'm so glad you're come, Walter?' cried his sister. 'But I wish you could have got Ralph to come too.'

'Utterly impossible, dear Milicent,' replied he, gaily. 'I had much ado to get away myself. Ralph attempted to keep me by violence; Huntingdon threatened me with the eternal loss of his friendship; and Grimsby, worse than all, endeavoured to make me ashamed of my virtue, by such galling sarcasms and innuendoes as he knew would wound me the most. So you see, ladies, you ought to make me welcome when I have braved and suffered so much for the favour of your sweet society.' He smilingly turned to me and bowed as he finished the sentence.

'Isn't he handsome now, Helen!' whispered Milicent, her sisterly pride overcoming, for the moment, all other considerations.

'He would be,' I returned, 'if that brilliance of eye, and lip, and cheek were natural to him; but look again, a few hours hence.'

Here the gentleman took a seat near me at the table, and petitioned for a cup of coffee.

'I consider this an apt illustration of heaven taken by storm,' said he, as I handed one to him. 'I am in paradise, now; but I have fought my way through flood and fire to win it. Ralph Hattersley's last resource was to set his back against the door, and swear I should find no passage but through his body (a pretty substantial one too). Happily, however, that was not the only door, and I effected my escape by the side entrance through the butler's pantry, to the infinite amazement of Benson, who was cleaning the plate.'

Mr. Hargrave laughed, and so did his cousin; but his sister and I remained silent and grave.

'Pardon my levity, Mrs. Huntingdon,' murmured he, more seriously, as he raised his eyes to my face. 'You are not used to these things: you suffer them to affect your delicate mind too sensibly. But I thought of you in the midst of those lawless roysterers; and I endeavoured to persuade Mr. Huntingdon to think of you too; but to no purpose: I fear he is fully determined to enjoy himself this night; and it will be no use keeping the coffee waiting for him or his companions; it will be much if they join us at tea.

Meantime, I earnestly wish I could banish the thoughts of them from your mind — and my own too, for I hate to think of them — yes — even of my dear friend Huntingdon, when I consider the power he possesses over the happiness of one so immeasurably superior to himself, and the use he makes of it — I positively detest the man!'

'You had better not say so to me, then,' said I; 'for, bad as he is, he is part of myself, and you cannot abuse him without offending me.'

'Pardon me, then, for I would sooner die than offend you. But let us say no more of him for the present, if you please.'

At last they came; but not till after ten, when tea, which had been delayed for more than half an hour, was nearly over. Much as I had longed for their coming, my heart failed me at the riotous uproar of their approach; and Milicent turned pale, and almost started from her seat, as Mr. Hattersley burst into the room with a clamorous volley of oaths in his mouth, which Hargrave endeavoured to check by entreating him to remember the ladies.

'Ah! you do well to remind me of the ladies, you dastardly deserter,' cried he, shaking his formidable fist at his brother-in-law. 'If it were not for them, you well know, I'd demolish you in the twinkling of an eye, and give your body to the fowls of heaven and the lilies of the fields!' Then, planting a chair by Lady Lowborough's side, he stationed himself in it, and began to talk to her with a mixture of absurdity and impudence that seemed rather to amuse than to offend her; though she affected to resent his insolence, and to keep him at bay with sallies of smart and spirited repartee.

Meantime Mr. Grimsby seated himself by me, in the chair vacated by Hargrave as they entered, and gravely stated that he would thank me for a cup of tea: and Arthur placed himself beside poor Milicent, confidentially pushing his head into her face, and drawing in closer to her as she shrank away from him. He was not so noisy as Hattersley, but his face was exceedingly flushed: he laughed incessantly, and while I blushed for all I saw and heard of him, I was glad that he chose to talk to his companion in so low a tone that no one could hear what he said but herself.

'What fools they are!' drawled Mr. Grimsby, who had been talking away, at my elbow, with sententious gravity all the time; but I had been too much absorbed in contemplating the deplorable state of the other two — especially Arthur — to attend to him.

'Did you ever hear such nonsense as they talk, Mrs. Huntingdon?' he continued. 'I'm quite ashamed of them for my part: they can't take so much as a bottle between them without its getting into their heads — '

'You are pouring the cream into your saucer, Mr. Grimsby.'

'Ah! yes, I see, but we're almost in darkness here. Hargrave, snuff those candles, will you?'

'They're wax; they don't require snuffing,' said I.

'"The light of the body is the eye,"' observed Hargrave, with a sarcastic smile. '"If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light."'

Grimsby repulsed him with a solemn wave of the hand, and then turning to me, continued, with the same drawling tones and strange uncertainty of utterance and heavy gravity of aspect as before: ‘But as I was saying, Mrs. Huntingdon, they have no head at all: they can’t take half a bottle without being affected some way; whereas I — well, I’ve taken three times as much as they have to-night, and you see I’m perfectly steady. Now that may strike you as very singular, but I think I can explain it: you see their brains — I mention no names, but you’ll understand to whom I allude — their brains are light to begin with, and the fumes of the fermented liquor render them lighter still, and produce an entire light-headedness, or giddiness, resulting in intoxication; whereas my brains, being composed of more solid materials, will absorb a considerable quantity of this alcoholic vapour without the production of any sensible result — ’

‘I think you will find a sensible result produced on that tea,’ interrupted Mr. Hargrave, ‘by the quantity of sugar you have put into it. Instead of your usual complement of one lump, you have put in six.’

‘Have I so?’ replied the philosopher, diving with his spoon into the cup, and bringing up several half-dissolved pieces in confirmation of the assertion. ‘Hum! I perceive. Thus, Madam, you see the evil of absence of mind — of thinking too much while engaged in the common concerns of life. Now, if I had had my wits about me, like ordinary men, instead of within me like a philosopher, I should not have spoiled this cup of tea, and been constrained to trouble you for another.’

‘That is the sugar-basin, Mr. Grimsby. Now you have spoiled the sugar too; and I’ll thank you to ring for some more, for here is Lord Lowborough at last; and I hope his lordship will condescend to sit down with us, such as we are, and allow me to give him some tea.’

His lordship gravely bowed in answer to my appeal, but said nothing. Meantime, Hargrave volunteered to ring for the sugar, while Grimsby lamented his mistake, and attempted to prove that it was owing to the shadow of the urn and the badness of the lights.

Lord Lowborough had entered a minute or two before, unobserved by anyone but me, and had been standing before the door, grimly surveying the company. He now stepped up to Annabella, who sat with her back towards him, with Hattersley still beside her, though not now attending to her, being occupied in vociferously abusing and bullying his host.

‘Well, Annabella,’ said her husband, as he leant over the back of her chair, ‘which of these three “bold, manly spirits” would you have me to resemble?’

‘By heaven and earth, you shall resemble us all!’ cried Hattersley, starting up and rudely seizing him by the arm. ‘Hallo, Huntingdon!’ he shouted — ‘I’ve got him! Come, man, and help me! And d — n me, if I don’t make him drunk before I let him go! He shall make up for all past delinquencies as sure as I’m a living soul!’

There followed a disgraceful contest: Lord Lowborough, in desperate earnest, and pale with anger, silently struggling to release himself from the powerful madman that was striving to drag him from the room. I attempted to urge Arthur to interfere in behalf of his outraged guest, but he could do nothing but laugh.

'Huntingdon, you fool, come and help me, can't you!' cried Hattersley, himself somewhat weakened by his excesses.

'I'm wishing you God-speed, Hattersley,' cried Arthur, 'and aiding you with my prayers: I can't do anything else if my life depended on it! I'm quite used up. Oh — oh!' and leaning back in his seat, he clapped his hands on his sides and groaned aloud.

'Annabella, give me a candle!' said Lowborough, whose antagonist had now got him round the waist and was endeavouring to root him from the door-post, to which he madly clung with all the energy of desperation.

'I shall take no part in your rude sports!' replied the lady coldly drawing back. 'I wonder you can expect it.' But I snatched up a candle and brought it to him. He took it and held the flame to Hattersley's hands, till, roaring like a wild beast, the latter unclasped them and let him go. He vanished, I suppose to his own apartment, for nothing more was seen of him till the morning. Swearing and cursing like a maniac, Hattersley threw himself on to the ottoman beside the window. The door being now free, Milicent attempted to make her escape from the scene of her husband's disgrace; but he called her back, and insisted upon her coming to him.

'What do you want, Ralph?' murmured she, reluctantly approaching him.

'I want to know what's the matter with you,' said he, pulling her on to his knee like a child. 'What are you crying for, Milicent? — Tell me!'

'I'm not crying.'

'You are,' persisted he, rudely pulling her hands from her face. 'How dare you tell such a lie!'

'I'm not crying now,' pleaded she.

'But you have been, and just this minute too; and I will know what for. Come, now, you shall tell me!'

'Do let me alone, Ralph! Remember, we are not at home.'

'No matter: you shall answer my question!' exclaimed her tormentor; and he attempted to extort the confession by shaking her, and remorselessly crushing her slight arms in the gripe of his powerful fingers.

'Don't let him treat your sister in that way,' said I to Mr. Hargrave.

'Come now, Hattersley, I can't allow that,' said that gentleman, stepping up to the ill-assorted couple. 'Let my sister alone, if you please.'

And he made an effort to unclasp the ruffian's fingers from her arm, but was suddenly driven backward, and nearly laid upon the floor by a violent blow on the chest, accompanied with the admonition, 'Take that for your insolence! and learn to interfere between me and mine again.'

'If you were not drunk, I'd have satisfaction for that!' gasped Hargrave, white and breathless as much from passion as from the immediate effects of the blow.

'Go to the devil!' responded his brother-in-law. 'Now, Milicent, tell me what you were crying for.'

'I'll tell you some other time,' murmured she, 'when we are alone.'

'Tell me now!' said he, with another shake and a squeeze that made her draw in her breath and bite her lip to suppress a cry of pain.

'I'll tell you, Mr. Hattersley,' said I. 'She was crying from pure shame and humiliation for you; because she could not bear to see you conduct yourself so disgracefully.'

'Confound you, Madam!' muttered he, with a stare of stupid amazement at my 'impudence.' 'It was not that — was it, Milicent?'

She was silent.

'Come, speak up, child!'

'I can't tell now,' sobbed she.

'But you can say "yes" or "no" as well as "I can't tell." — Come!'

'Yes,' she whispered, hanging her head, and blushing at the awful acknowledgment.

'Curse you for an impertinent hussy, then!' cried he, throwing her from him with such violence that she fell on her side; but she was up again before either I or her brother could come to her assistance, and made the best of her way out of the room, and, I suppose, up-stairs, without loss of time.

The next object of assault was Arthur, who sat opposite, and had, no doubt, richly enjoyed the whole scene.

'Now, Huntingdon,' exclaimed his irascible friend, 'I will not have you sitting there and laughing like an idiot!'

'Oh, Hattersley,' cried he, wiping his swimming eyes — 'you'll be the death of me.'

'Yes, I will, but not as you suppose: I'll have the heart out of your body, man, if you irritate me with any more of that imbecile laughter! — What! are you at it yet? — There! see if that'll settle you!' cried Hattersley, snatching up a footstool and hurting it at the head of his host; but he as well as missed his aim, and the latter still sat collapsed and quaking with feeble laughter, with tears running down his face: a deplorable spectacle indeed.

Hattersley tried cursing and swearing, but it would not do: he then took a number of books from the table beside him, and threw them, one by one, at the object of his wrath; but Arthur only laughed the more; and, finally, Hattersley rushed upon him in a frenzy and seizing him by the shoulders, gave him a violent shaking, under which he laughed and shrieked alarmingly. But I saw no more: I thought I had witnessed enough of my husband's degradation; and leaving Annabella and the rest to follow when they pleased, I withdrew, but not to bed. Dismissing Rachel to her rest, I walked up and down my room, in an agony of misery for what had been done, and suspense, not knowing what might further happen, or how or when that unhappy creature would come up to bed.

At last he came, slowly and stumblingly ascending the stairs, supported by Grimsby and Hattersley, who neither of them walked quite steadily themselves, but were both laughing and joking at him, and making noise enough for all the servants to hear. He himself was no longer laughing now, but sick and stupid. I will write no more about that.

Such disgraceful scenes (or nearly such) have been repeated more than once. I don't say much to Arthur about it, for, if I did, it would do more harm than good; but I let him know that I intensely dislike such exhibitions; and each time he has promised they should never again be repeated. But I fear he is losing the little self-command and self-respect he once possessed: formerly, he would have been ashamed to act thus — at least, before any other witnesses than his boon companions, or such as they. His friend Hargrave, with a prudence and self-government that I envy for him, never disgraces himself by taking more than sufficient to render him a little 'elevated,' and is always the first to leave the table after Lord Lowborough, who, wiser still, perseveres in vacating the dining-room immediately after us: but never once, since Annabella offended him so deeply, has he entered the drawing-room before the rest; always spending the interim in the library, which I take care to have lighted for his accommodation; or, on fine moonlight nights, in roaming about the grounds. But I think she regrets her misconduct, for she has never repeated it since, and of late she has comported herself with wonderful propriety towards him, treating him with more uniform kindness and consideration than ever I have observed her to do before. I date the time of this improvement from the period when she ceased to hope and strive for Arthur's admiration.

CHAPTER XXXII

October 5th. — Esther Hargrave is getting a fine girl. She is not out of the school-room yet, but her mother frequently brings her over to call in the mornings when the gentlemen are out, and sometimes she spends an hour or two in company with her sister and me, and the children; and when we go to the Grove, I always contrive to see her, and talk more to her than to any one else, for I am very much attached to my little friend, and so is she to me. I wonder what she can see to like in me though, for I am no longer the happy, lively girl I used to be; but she has no other society, save that of her uncongenial mother, and her governess (as artificial and conventional a person as that prudent mother could procure to rectify the pupil's natural qualities), and, now and then, her subdued, quiet sister. I often wonder what will be her lot in life, and so does she; but her speculations on the future are full of buoyant hope; so were mine once. I shudder to think of her being awakened, like me, to a sense of their delusive vanity. It seems as if I should feel her disappointment, even more deeply than my own. I feel almost as if I were born for such a fate, but she is so joyous and fresh, so light of heart and free of spirit, and so guileless and unsuspecting too. Oh, it would be cruel to make her feel as I feel now, and know what I have known!

Her sister trembles for her too. Yesterday morning, one of October's brightest, loveliest days, Milicent and I were in the garden enjoying a brief half-hour together with our children, while Annabella was lying on the drawing-room sofa, deep in the last new novel. We had been romping with the little creatures, almost as merry and wild as themselves, and now paused in the shade of the tall copper beech, to recover breath and rectify our hair, disordered by the rough play and the frolicsome breeze, while they toddled together along the broad, sunny walk; my Arthur supporting the feebler steps of her little Helen, and sagaciously pointing out to her the brightest beauties of the border as they passed, with semi-articulate prattle, that did as well for her as any other mode of discourse. From laughing at the pretty sight, we began to talk of the children's future life; and that made us thoughtful. We both relapsed into silent musing as we slowly proceeded up the walk; and I suppose Milicent, by a train of associations, was led to think of her sister.

'Helen,' said she, 'you often see Esther, don't you?'

'Not very often.'

'But you have more frequent opportunities of meeting her than I have; and she loves you, I know, and reverences you too: there is nobody's opinion she thinks so much of; and she says you have more sense than mamma.'

'That is because she is self-willed, and my opinions more generally coincide with her own than your mamma's. But what then, Milicent?'

‘Well, since you have so much influence with her, I wish you would seriously impress it upon her, never, on any account, or for anybody’s persuasion, to marry for the sake of money, or rank, or establishment, or any earthly thing, but true affection and well-grounded esteem.’

‘There is no necessity for that,’ said I, ‘for we have had some discourse on that subject already, and I assure you her ideas of love and matrimony are as romantic as any one could desire.’

‘But romantic notions will not do: I want her to have true notions.’

‘Very right: but in my judgment, what the world stigmatises as romantic, is often more nearly allied to the truth than is commonly supposed; for, if the generous ideas of youth are too often over-clouded by the sordid views of after-life, that scarcely proves them to be false.’

‘Well, but if you think her ideas are what they ought to be, strengthen them, will you? and confirm them, as far as you can; for I had romantic notions once, and — I don’t mean to say that I regret my lot, for I am quite sure I don’t, but — ’

‘I understand you,’ said I; ‘you are contented for yourself, but you would not have your sister to suffer the same as you.’

‘No — or worse. She might have far worse to suffer than I, for I am really contented, Helen, though you mayn’t think it: I speak the solemn truth in saying that I would not exchange my husband for any man on earth, if I might do it by the plucking of this leaf.’

‘Well, I believe you: now that you have him, you would not exchange him for another; but then you would gladly exchange some of his qualities for those of better men.’

‘Yes: just as I would gladly exchange some of my own qualities for those of better women; for neither he nor I are perfect, and I desire his improvement as earnestly as my own. And he will improve, don’t you think so, Helen? he’s only six-and-twenty yet.’

‘He may,’ I answered,

‘He will, he will!’ repeated she.

‘Excuse the faintness of my acquiescence, Milicent, I would not discourage your hopes for the world, but mine have been so often disappointed, that I am become as cold and doubtful in my expectations as the flattest of octogenarians.’

‘And yet you do hope, still, even for Mr. Huntingdon?’

‘I do, I confess, “even” for him; for it seems as if life and hope must cease together. And is he so much worse, Milicent, than Mr. Hattersley?’

‘Well, to give you my candid opinion, I think there is no comparison between them. But you mustn’t be offended, Helen, for you know I always speak my mind, and you may speak yours too. I sha’n’t care.’

‘I am not offended, love; and my opinion is, that if there be a comparison made between the two, the difference, for the most part, is certainly in Hattersley’s favour.’

Milicent's own heart told her how much it cost me to make this acknowledgment; and, with a childlike impulse, she expressed her sympathy by suddenly kissing my cheek, without a word of reply, and then turning quickly away, caught up her baby, and hid her face in its frock. How odd it is that we so often weep for each other's distresses, when we shed not a tear for our own! Her heart had been full enough of her own sorrows, but it overflowed at the idea of mine; and I, too, shed tears at the sight of her sympathetic emotion, though I had not wept for myself for many a week.

It was one rainy day last week; most of the company were killing time in the billiard-room, but Milicent and I were with little Arthur and Helen in the library, and between our books, our children, and each other, we expected to make out a very agreeable morning. We had not been thus secluded above two hours, however, when Mr. Hattersley came in, attracted, I suppose, by the voice of his child, as he was crossing the hall, for he is prodigiously fond of her, and she of him.

He was redolent of the stables, where he had been regaling himself with the company of his fellow-creatures the horses ever since breakfast. But that was no matter to my little namesake; as soon as the colossal person of her father darkened the door, she uttered a shrill scream of delight, and, quitting her mother's side, ran crowing towards him, balancing her course with outstretched arms, and embracing his knee, threw back her head and laughed in his face. He might well look smilingly down upon those small, fair features, radiant with innocent mirth, those clear blue shining eyes, and that soft flaxen hair cast back upon the little ivory neck and shoulders. Did he not think how unworthy he was of such a possession? I fear no such idea crossed his mind. He caught her up, and there followed some minutes of very rough play, during which it is difficult to say whether the father or the daughter laughed and shouted the loudest. At length, however, the boisterous pastime terminated, suddenly, as might be expected: the little one was hurt, and began to cry; and the ungentle play-fellow tossed it into its mother's lap, bidding her 'make all straight.' As happy to return to that gentle comforter as it had been to leave her, the child nestled in her arms, and hushed its cries in a moment; and sinking its little weary head on her bosom, soon dropped asleep.

Meantime Mr. Hattersley strode up to the fire, and interposing his height and breadth between us and it, stood with arms akimbo, expanding his chest, and gazing round him as if the house and all its appurtenances and contents were his own undisputed possessions.

'Deuced bad weather this!' he began. 'There'll be no shooting to-day, I guess.' Then, suddenly lifting up his voice, he regaled us with a few bars of a rollicking song, which abruptly ceasing, he finished the tune with a whistle, and then continued: — 'I say, Mrs. Huntingdon, what a fine stud your husband has! not large, but good. I've been looking at them a bit this morning; and upon my word, Black Boss, and Grey Tom, and that young Nimrod are the finest animals I've seen for many a day!' Then followed a particular discussion of their various merits, succeeded by a sketch of the great things he intended to do in the horse-jockey line, when his old governor thought proper to quit the stage. 'Not that I wish him to close his accounts,' added he: 'the old Trojan is welcome to keep his books open as long as he pleases for me.'

'I hope so, indeed, Mr. Hattersley.'

'Oh, yes! It's only my way of talking. The event must come some time, and so I look to the bright side of it: that's the right plan — isn't it, Mrs. H.? What are you two doing here? By-the-by, where's Lady Lowborough?'

'In the billiard-room.'

'What a splendid creature she is!' continued he, fixing his eyes on his wife, who changed colour, and looked more and more disconcerted as he proceeded. 'What a noble figure she has; and what magnificent black eyes; and what a fine spirit of her own; and what a tongue of her own, too, when she likes to use it. I perfectly adore her! But never mind, Milicent: I wouldn't have her for my wife, not if she'd a kingdom for her dowry! I'm better satisfied with the one I have. Now then! what do you look so sulky for? don't you believe me?'

'Yes, I believe you,' murmured she, in a tone of half sad, half sullen resignation, as she turned away to stroke the hair of her sleeping infant, that she had laid on the sofa beside her.

'Well, then, what makes you so cross? Come here, Milly, and tell me why you can't be satisfied with my assurance.'

She went, and putting her little hand within his arm, looked up in his face, and said softly, —

'What does it amount to, Ralph? Only to this, that though you admire

Annabella so much, and for qualities that I don't possess, you would still rather have me than her for your wife, which merely proves that you don't think it necessary to love your wife; you are satisfied if she can keep your house, and take care of your child. But I'm not cross; I'm only sorry; for,' added she, in a low, tremulous accent, withdrawing her hand from his arm, and bending her looks on the rug, 'if you don't love me, you don't, and it can't be helped.'

'Very true; but who told you I didn't? Did I say I loved Annabella?'

'You said you adored her.'

'True, but adoration isn't love. I adore Annabella, but I don't love her; and I love thee, Milicent, but I don't adore thee.' In proof of his affection, he clutched a handful of her light brown ringlets, and appeared to twist them unmercifully.

'Do you really, Ralph?' murmured she, with a faint smile beaming through her tears, just putting up her hand to his, in token that he pulled rather too hard.

'To be sure I do,' responded he: 'only you bother me rather, sometimes.'

'I bother you!' cried she, in very natural surprise.

'Yes, you — but only by your exceeding goodness. When a boy has been eating raisins and sugar-plums all day, he longs for a squeeze of sour orange by way of a change. And did you never, Milly, observe the sands on the sea-shore; how nice and smooth they look, and how soft and easy they feel to the foot? But if you plod along, for half an hour, over this soft, easy carpet — giving way at every step, yielding the more the harder you press, — you'll find it rather wearisome work, and be glad enough to come to a bit of good, firm rock, that won't budge an inch whether you stand, walk, or stamp upon it; and, though it be hard as the nether millstone, you'll find it the easier footing after all.'

'I know what you mean, Ralph,' said she, nervously playing with her watchguard and tracing the figure on the rug with the point of her tiny foot — 'I know what you mean: but I thought you always liked to be yielded to, and I can't alter now.'

'I do like it,' replied he, bringing her to him by another tug at her hair. 'You mustn't mind my talk, Milly. A man must have something to grumble about; and if he can't complain that his wife harries him to death with her perversity and ill-humour, he must complain that she wears him out with her kindness and gentleness.'

'But why complain at all, unless because you are tired and dissatisfied?'

'To excuse my own failings, to be sure. Do you think I'll bear all the burden of my sins on my own shoulders, as long as there's another ready to help me, with none of her own to carry?'

'There is no such one on earth,' said she seriously; and then, taking his hand from her head, she kissed it with an air of genuine devotion, and tripped away to the door.

‘What now?’ said he. ‘Where are you going?’

‘To tidy my hair,’ she answered, smiling through her disordered locks; ‘you’ve made it all come down.’

‘Off with you then! — An excellent little woman,’ he remarked when she was gone, ‘but a thought too soft — she almost melts in one’s hands. I positively think I ill-use her sometimes, when I’ve taken too much — but I can’t help it, for she never complains, either at the time or after. I suppose she doesn’t mind it.’

‘I can enlighten you on that subject, Mr. Hattersley,’ said I: ‘she does mind it; and some other things she minds still more, which yet you may never hear her complain of.’

‘How do you know? — does she complain to you?’ demanded he, with a sudden spark of fury ready to burst into a flame if I should answer “yes.”

‘No,’ I replied; ‘but I have known her longer and studied her more closely than you have done. — And I can tell you, Mr. Hattersley, that Milicent loves you more than you deserve, and that you have it in your power to make her very happy, instead of which you are her evil genius, and, I will venture to say, there is not a single day passes in which you do not inflict upon her some pang that you might spare her if you would.’

‘Well — it’s not my fault,’ said he, gazing carelessly up at the ceiling and plunging his hands into his pockets: ‘if my ongoings don’t suit her, she should tell me so.’

‘Is she not exactly the wife you wanted? Did you not tell Mr. Huntingdon you must have one that would submit to anything without a murmur, and never blame you, whatever you did?’

‘True, but we shouldn’t always have what we want: it spoils the best of us, doesn’t it? How can I help playing the deuce when I see it’s all one to her whether I behave like a Christian or like a scoundrel, such as nature made me? and how can I help teasing her when she’s so invitingly meek and mim, when she lies down like a spaniel at my feet and never so much as squeaks to tell me that’s enough?’

‘If you are a tyrant by nature, the temptation is strong, I allow; but no generous mind delights to oppress the weak, but rather to cherish and protect.’

‘I don’t oppress her; but it’s so confounded flat to be always cherishing and protecting; and then, how can I tell that I am oppressing her when she “melts away and makes no sign”? I sometimes think she has no feeling at all; and then I go on till she cries, and that satisfies me.’

‘Then you do delight to oppress her?’

‘I don’t, I tell you! only when I’m in a bad humour, or a particularly good one, and want to afflict for the pleasure of comforting; or when she looks flat and wants shaking up a bit. And sometimes she provokes me by crying for nothing, and won’t tell me what it’s for; and then, I allow, it enrages me past bearing, especially when I’m not my own man.’

‘As is no doubt generally the case on such occasions,’ said I. ‘But in future, Mr. Hattersley, when you see her looking flat, or crying for "nothing" (as you call it), ascribe it all to yourself: be assured it is something you have done amiss, or your general misconduct, that distresses her.'

'I don't believe it. If it were, she should tell me so: I don't like that way of moping and fretting in silence, and saying nothing: it's not honest. How can she expect me to mend my ways at that rate?'

'Perhaps she gives you credit for having more sense than you possess, and deludes herself with the hope that you will one day see your own errors and repair them, if left to your own reflection.'

'None of your sneers, Mrs. Huntingdon. I have the sense to see that I'm not always quite correct, but sometimes I think that's no great matter, as long as I injure nobody but myself — '

'It is a great matter,' interrupted I, 'both to yourself (as you will hereafter find to your cost) and to all connected with you, most especially your wife. But, indeed, it is nonsense to talk about injuring no one but yourself: it is impossible to injure yourself, especially by such acts as we allude to, without injuring hundreds, if not thousands, besides, in a greater or less, degree, either by the evil you do or the good you leave undone.' 'And as I was saying,' continued he, 'or would have said if you hadn't taken me up so short, I sometimes think I should do better if I were joined to one that would always remind me when I was wrong, and give me a motive for doing good and eschewing evil, by decidedly showing her approval of the one and disapproval of the other.'

'If you had no higher motive than the approval of your fellow-mortal, it would do you little good.'

'Well, but if I had a mate that would not always be yielding, and always equally kind, but that would have the spirit to stand at bay now and then, and honestly tell me her mind at all times, such a one as yourself for instance. Now, if I went on with you as I do with her when I'm in London, you'd make the house too hot to hold me at times, I'll be sworn.'

'You mistake me: I'm no termagant.'

'Well, all the better for that, for I can't stand contradiction, in a general way, and I'm as fond of my own will as another; only I think too much of it doesn't answer for any man.'

'Well, I would never contradict you without a cause, but certainly I would always let you know what I thought of your conduct; and if you oppressed me, in body, mind, or estate, you should at least have no reason to suppose "I didn't mind it."'

'I know that, my lady; and I think if my little wife were to follow the same plan, it would be better for us both.'

'I'll tell her.'

'No, no, let her be; there's much to be said on both sides, and, now I think upon it, Huntingdon often regrets that you are not more like her, scoundrelly dog that he is, and you see, after all, you can't reform him: he's ten times worse than I. He's afraid of you, to be sure; that is, he's always on his best behaviour in your presence — but — '

'I wonder what his worst behaviour is like, then?' I could not forbear observing.

'Why, to tell you the truth, it's very bad indeed — isn't it, Hargrave?' said he, addressing that gentleman, who had entered the room unperceived by me, for I was now standing near the fire, with my back to the door. 'Isn't Huntingdon,' he continued, 'as great a reprobate as ever was d — d?'

'His lady will not hear him censured with impunity,' replied Mr. Hargrave, coming forward; 'but I must say, I thank God I am not such another.'

'Perhaps it would become you better,' said I, 'to look at what you are, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner."'

'You are severe,' returned he, bowing slightly and drawing himself up with a proud yet injured air. Hattersley laughed, and clapped him on the shoulder. Moving from under his hand with a gesture of insulted dignity, Mr. Hargrave took himself away to the other end of the rug.

'Isn't it a shame, Mrs. Huntingdon?' cried his brother-in-law; 'I struck Walter Hargrave when I was drunk, the second night after we came, and he's turned a cold shoulder on me ever since; though I asked his pardon the very morning after it was done!'

'Your manner of asking it,' returned the other, 'and the clearness with which you remembered the whole transaction, showed you were not too drunk to be fully conscious of what you were about, and quite responsible for the deed.'

'You wanted to interfere between me and my wife,' grumbled Hattersley, 'and that is enough to provoke any man.'

'You justify it, then?' said his opponent, darting upon him a most vindictive glance.

'No, I tell you I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't been under excitement; and if you choose to bear malice for it after all the handsome things I've said, do so and be d — d!'

'I would refrain from such language in a lady's presence, at least,' said Mr. Hargrave, hiding his anger under a mask of disgust.

'What have I said?' returned Hattersley: 'nothing but heaven's truth. He will be damned, won't he, Mrs. Huntingdon, if he doesn't forgive his brother's trespasses?'

'You ought to forgive him, Mr. Hargrave, since he asks you,' said I.

'Do you say so? Then I will!' And, smiling almost frankly, he stepped forward and offered his hand. It was immediately clasped in that of his relative, and the reconciliation was apparently cordial on both sides.

'The affront,' continued Hargrave, turning to me, 'owed half its bitterness to the fact of its being offered in your presence; and since you bid me forgive it, I will, and forget it too.'

‘I guess the best return I can make will be to take myself off,’ muttered Hattersley, with a broad grin. His companion smiled, and he left the room. This put me on my guard. Mr. Hargrave turned seriously to me, and earnestly began, —

‘Dear Mrs. Huntingdon, how I have longed for, yet dreaded, this hour! Do not be alarmed,’ he added, for my face was crimson with anger: ‘I am not about to offend you with any useless entreaties or complaints. I am not going to presume to trouble you with the mention of my own feelings or your perfections, but I have something to reveal to you which you ought to know, and which, yet, it pains me inexpressibly — ’

‘Then don’t trouble yourself to reveal it!’

‘But it is of importance — ’

‘If so I shall hear it soon enough, especially if it is bad news, as you seem to consider it. At present I am going to take the children to the nursery.’

‘But can’t you ring and send them?’

‘No; I want the exercise of a run to the top of the house. Come, Arthur.’

‘But you will return?’

‘Not yet; don’t wait.’

‘Then when may I see you again?’

‘At lunch,’ said I, departing with little Helen in one arm and leading Arthur by the hand.

He turned away, muttering some sentence of impatient censure or complaint, in which ‘heartless’ was the only distinguishable word.

‘What nonsense is this, Mr. Hargrave?’ said I, pausing in the doorway. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Oh, nothing; I did not intend you should hear my soliloquy. But the fact is, Mrs. Huntingdon, I have a disclosure to make, painful for me to offer as for you to hear; and I want you to give me a few minutes of your attention in private at any time and place you like to appoint. It is from no selfish motive that I ask it, and not for any cause that could alarm your superhuman purity: therefore you need not kill me with that look of cold and pitiless disdain. I know too well the feelings with which the bearers of bad tidings are commonly regarded not to — ’

‘What is this wonderful piece of intelligence?’ said I, impatiently interrupting him. ‘If it is anything of real importance, speak it in three words before I go.’

‘In three words I cannot. Send those children away and stay with me.’

‘No; keep your bad tidings to yourself. I know it is something I don’t want to hear, and something you would displease me by telling.’

‘You have divined too truly, I fear; but still, since I know it, I feel it my duty to disclose it to you.’

‘Oh, spare us both the infliction, and I will exonerate you from the duty. You have offered to tell; I have refused to hear: my ignorance will not be charged on you.’

‘Be it so: you shall not hear it from me. But if the blow fall too suddenly upon you when it comes, remember I wished to soften it!’

I left him. I was determined his words should not alarm me. What could he, of all men, have to reveal that was of importance for me to hear? It was no doubt some exaggerated tale about my unfortunate husband that he wished to make the most of to serve his own bad purposes.

6th. — He has not alluded to this momentous mystery since, and I have seen no reason to repent of my unwillingness to hear it. The threatened blow has not been struck yet, and I do not greatly fear it. At present I am pleased with Arthur: he has not positively disgraced himself for upwards of a fortnight, and all this last week has been so very moderate in his indulgence at table that I can perceive a marked difference in his general temper and appearance. Dare I hope this will continue?

CHAPTER XXXIII

Seventh. — Yes, I will hope! To-night I heard Grimsby and Hattersley grumbling together about the inhospitality of their host. They did not know I was near, for I happened to be standing behind the curtain in the bow of the window, watching the moon rising over the clump of tall dark elm-trees below the lawn, and wondering why Arthur was so sentimental as to stand without, leaning against the outer pillar of the portico, apparently watching it too.

‘So, I suppose we’ve seen the last of our merry carousals in this house,’ said Mr. Hattersley; ‘I thought his good-fellowship wouldn’t last long. But,’ added he, laughing, ‘I didn’t expect it would meet its end this way. I rather thought our pretty hostess would be setting up her porcupine quills, and threatening to turn us out of the house if we didn’t mind our manners.’

‘You didn’t foresee this, then?’ answered Grimsby, with a guttural chuckle. ‘But he’ll change again when he’s sick of her. If we come here a year or two hence, we shall have all our own way, you’ll see.’

‘I don’t know,’ replied the other: ‘she’s not the style of woman you soon tire of. But be that as it may, it’s devilish provoking now that we can’t be jolly, because he chooses to be on his good behaviour.’

‘It’s all these cursed women!’ muttered Grimsby: ‘they’re the very bane of the world! They bring trouble and discomfort wherever they come, with their false, fair faces and their deceitful tongues.’

At this juncture I issued from my retreat, and smiling on Mr. Grimsby as I passed, left the room and went out in search of Arthur. Having seen him bend his course towards the shrubbery, I followed him thither, and found him just entering the shadowy walk. I was so light of heart, so overflowing with affection, that I sprang upon him and clasped him in my arms. This startling conduct had a singular effect upon him: first, he murmured, ‘Bless you, darling!’ and returned my close embrace with a fervour like old times, and then he started, and, in a tone of absolute terror, exclaimed, ‘Helen! what the devil is this?’ and I saw, by the faint light gleaming through the overshadowing tree, that he was positively pale with the shock.

How strange that the instinctive impulse of affection should come first, and then the shock of the surprise! It shows, at least, that the affection is genuine: he is not sick of me yet.

‘I startled you, Arthur,’ said I, laughing in my glee. ‘How nervous you are!’

‘What the deuce did you do it for?’ cried he, quite testily, extricating himself from my arms, and wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. ‘Go back, Helen — go back directly! You’ll get your death of cold!’

'I won't, till I've told you what I came for. They are blaming you, Arthur, for your temperance and sobriety, and I'm come to thank you for it. They say it is all "these cursed women," and that we are the bane of the world; but don't let them laugh or grumble you out of your good resolutions, or your affection for me.'

He laughed. I squeezed him in my arms again, and cried in tearful earnest, 'Do, do persevere! and I'll love you better than ever I did before!'

'Well, well, I will!' said he, hastily kissing me. 'There, now, go. You mad creature, how could you come out in your light evening dress this chill autumn night?'

'It is a glorious night,' said I.

'It is a night that will give you your death, in another minute. Run away, do!'

'Do you see my death among those trees, Arthur?' said I, for he was gazing intently at the shrubs, as if he saw it coming, and I was reluctant to leave him, in my new-found happiness and revival of hope and love. But he grew angry at my delay, so I kissed him and ran back to the house.

I was in such a good humour that night: Milicent told me I was the life of the party, and whispered she had never seen me so brilliant. Certainly, I talked enough for twenty, and smiled upon them all. Grimsby, Hattersley, Hargrave, Lady Lowborough, all shared my sisterly kindness. Grimsby stared and wondered; Hattersley laughed and jested (in spite of the little wine he had been suffered to imbibe), but still behaved as well as he knew how. Hargrave and Annabella, from different motives and in different ways, emulated me, and doubtless both surpassed me, the former in his discursive versatility and eloquence, the latter in boldness and animation at least. Milicent, delighted to see her husband, her brother, and her over-estimated friend acquitting themselves so well, was lively and gay too, in her quiet way. Even Lord Lowborough caught the general contagion: his dark greenish eyes were lighted up beneath their moody brows; his sombre countenance was beautified by smiles; all traces of gloom and proud or cold reserve had vanished for the time; and he astonished us all, not only by his general cheerfulness and animation, but by the positive flashes of true force and brilliance he emitted from time to time. Arthur did not talk much, but he laughed, and listened to the rest, and was in perfect good-humour, though not excited by wine. So that, altogether, we made a very merry, innocent, and entertaining party.

9th. — Yesterday, when Rachel came to dress me for dinner, I saw that she had been crying. I wanted to know the cause of it, but she seemed reluctant to tell. Was she unwell? No. Had she heard bad news from her friends? No. Had any of the servants vexed her?

'Oh, no, ma'am!' she answered; 'it's not for myself.'

'What then, Rachel? Have you been reading novels?'

'Bless you, no!' said she, with a sorrowful shake of the head; and then she sighed and continued: 'But to tell you the truth, ma'am, I don't like master's ways of going on.'

'What do you mean, Rachel? He's going on very properly at present.'

'Well, ma'am, if you think so, it's right.'

And she went on dressing my hair, in a hurried way, quite unlike her usual calm, collected manner, murmuring, half to herself, she was sure it was beautiful hair: she 'could like to see 'em match it.' When it was done, she fondly stroked it, and gently patted my head.

'Is that affectionate ebullition intended for my hair, or myself, nurse?' said I, laughingly turning round upon her; but a tear was even now in her eye.

'What do you mean, Rachel?' I exclaimed.

'Well, ma'am, I don't know; but if — '

'If what?'

'Well, if I was you, I wouldn't have that Lady Lowborough in the house another minute — not another minute I wouldn't!

I was thunderstruck; but before I could recover from the shock sufficiently to demand an explanation, Milicent entered my room, as she frequently does when she is dressed before me; and she stayed with me till it was time to go down. She must have found me a very unsociable companion this time, for Rachel's last words rang in my ears. But still I hoped, I trusted they had no foundation but in some idle rumour of the servants from what they had seen in Lady Lowborough's manner last month; or perhaps from something that had passed between their master and her during her former visit. At dinner I narrowly observed both her and Arthur, and saw nothing extraordinary in the conduct of either, nothing calculated to excite suspicion, except in distrustful minds, which mine was not, and therefore I would not suspect.

Almost immediately after dinner Annabella went out with her husband to share his moonlight ramble, for it was a splendid evening like the last. Mr. Hargrave entered the drawing-room a little before the others, and challenged me to a game of chess. He did it without any of that sad but proud humility he usually assumes in addressing me, unless he is excited with wine. I looked at his face to see if that was the case now. His eye met mine keenly, but steadily: there was something about him I did not understand, but he seemed sober enough. Not choosing to engage with him, I referred him to Milicent.

'She plays badly,' said he, 'I want to match my skill with yours. Come now! you can't pretend you are reluctant to lay down your work. I know you never take it up except to pass an idle hour, when there is nothing better you can do.'

'But chess-players are so unsociable,' I objected; 'they are no company for any but themselves.'

'There is no one here but Milicent, and she — '

'Oh, I shall be delighted to watch you!' cried our mutual friend. 'Two such players — it will be quite a treat! I wonder which will conquer.'

I consented.

'Now, Mrs. Huntingdon,' said Hargrave, as he arranged the men on the board, speaking distinctly, and with a peculiar emphasis, as if he had a double meaning to all his words, 'you are a good player, but I am a better: we shall have a long game, and you will give me some trouble; but I can be as patient as you, and in the end I shall certainly win.' He fixed his eyes upon me with a glance I did not like, keen, crafty, bold, and almost impudent; — already half triumphant in his anticipated success.

'I hope not, Mr. Hargrave!' returned I, with vehemence that must have startled Milicent at least; but he only smiled and murmured, 'Time will show.'

We set to work: he sufficiently interested in the game, but calm and fearless in the consciousness of superior skill: I, intensely eager to disappoint his expectations, for I considered this the type of a more serious contest, as I imagined he did, and I felt an almost superstitious dread of being beaten: at all events, I could ill endure that present success should add one tittle to his conscious power (his insolent self-confidence I ought to say), or encourage for a moment his dream of future conquest. His play was cautious and deep, but I struggled hard against him. For some time the combat was doubtful: at length, to my joy, the victory seemed inclining to my side: I had taken several of his best pieces, and manifestly baffled his projects. He put his hand to his brow and paused, in evident perplexity. I rejoiced in my advantage, but dared not glory in it yet. At length, he lifted his head, and quietly making his move, looked at me and said, calmly, 'Now you think you will win, don't you?'

'I hope so,' replied I, taking his pawn that he had pushed into the way of my bishop with so careless an air that I thought it was an oversight, but was not generous enough, under the circumstances, to direct his attention to it, and too heedless, at the moment, to foresee the after-consequences of my move. 'It is those bishops that trouble me,' said he; 'but the bold knight can overleap the reverend gentlemen,' taking my last bishop with his knight; 'and now, those sacred persons once removed, I shall carry all before me.'

'Oh, Walter, how you talk!' cried Milicent; 'she has far more pieces than you still.'

'I intend to give you some trouble yet,' said I; 'and perhaps, sir, you will find yourself checkmated before you are aware. Look to your queen.'

The combat deepened. The game was a long one, and I did give him some trouble: but he was a better player than I.

'What keen gamesters you are!' said Mr. Hattersley, who had now entered, and been watching us for some time. 'Why, Mrs. Huntingdon, your hand trembles as if you had staked your all upon it! and, Walter, you dog, you look as deep and cool as if you were certain of success, and as keen and cruel as if you would drain her heart's blood! But if I were you, I wouldn't beat her, for very fear: she'll hate you if you do — she will, by heaven! I see it in her eye.'

'Hold your tongue, will you?' said I: his talk distracted me, for I was driven to extremities. A few more moves, and I was inextricably entangled in the snare of my antagonist.

‘Check,’ cried he: I sought in agony some means of escape. ‘Mate!’ he added, quietly, but with evident delight. He had suspended the utterance of that last fatal syllable the better to enjoy my dismay. I was foolishly disconcerted by the event. Hattersley laughed; Milicent was troubled to see me so disturbed. Hargrave placed his hand on mine that rested on the table, and squeezing it with a firm but gentle pressure, murmured, ‘Beaten, beaten!’ and gazed into my face with a look where exultation was blended with an expression of ardour and tenderness yet more insulting.

‘No, never, Mr. Hargrave!’ exclaimed I, quickly withdrawing my hand.

‘Do you deny?’ replied he, smilingly pointing to the board. ‘No, no,’ I answered, recollecting how strange my conduct must appear: ‘you have beaten me in that game.’

‘Will you try another, then?’

‘No.’

‘You acknowledge my superiority?’

‘Yes, as a chess-player.’

I rose to resume my work.

‘Where is Annabella?’ said Hargrave, gravely, after glancing round the room.

‘Gone out with Lord Lowborough,’ answered I, for he looked at me for a reply.

‘And not yet returned!’ he said, seriously.

‘I suppose not.’

‘Where is Huntingdon?’ looking round again.

‘Gone out with Grimsby, as you know,’ said Hattersley, suppressing a laugh, which broke forth as he concluded the sentence. Why did he laugh? Why did Hargrave connect them thus together? Was it true, then? And was this the dreadful secret he had wished to reveal to me? I must know, and that quickly. I instantly rose and left the room to go in search of Rachel and demand an explanation of her words; but Mr. Hargrave followed me into the anteroom, and before I could open its outer door, gently laid his hand upon the lock. ‘May I tell you something, Mrs. Huntingdon?’ said he, in a subdued tone, with serious, downcast eyes.

‘If it be anything worth hearing,’ replied I, struggling to be composed, for I trembled in every limb.

He quietly pushed a chair towards me. I merely leant my hand upon it, and bid him go on.

‘Do not be alarmed,’ said he: ‘what I wish to say is nothing in itself; and I will leave you to draw your own inferences from it. You say that Annabella is not yet returned?’

‘Yes, yes — go on!’ said I, impatiently; for I feared my forced calmness would leave me before the end of his disclosure, whatever it might be.

‘And you hear,’ continued he, ‘that Huntingdon is gone out with

Grimsby?'

'Well?'

'I heard the latter say to your husband — or the man who calls himself so — '

'Go on, sir!'

He bowed submissively, and continued: 'I heard him say, — "I shall manage it, you'll see! They're gone down by the water; I shall meet them there, and tell him I want a bit of talk with him about some things that we needn't trouble the lady with; and she'll say she can be walking back to the house; and then I shall apologise, you know, and all that, and tip her a wink to take the way of the shrubbery. I'll keep him talking there, about those matters I mentioned, and anything else I can think of, as long as I can, and then bring him round the other way, stopping to look at the trees, the fields, and anything else I can find to discourse of."' Mr. Hargrave paused, and looked at me.

Without a word of comment or further questioning, I rose, and darted from the room and out of the house. The torment of suspense was not to be endured: I would not suspect my husband falsely, on this man's accusation, and I would not trust him unworthily — I must know the truth at once. I flew to the shrubbery. Scarcely had I reached it, when a sound of voices arrested my breathless speed.

'We have lingered too long; he will be back,' said Lady Lowborough's voice.

'Surely not, dearest!' was his reply; 'but you can run across the lawn, and get in as quietly as you can; I'll follow in a while.'

My knees trembled under me; my brain swam round. I was ready to faint. She must not see me thus. I shrunk among the bushes, and leant against the trunk of a tree to let her pass.

'Ah, Huntingdon!' said she reproachfully, pausing where I had stood with him the night before — 'it was here you kissed that woman!' she looked back into the leafy shade. Advancing thence, he answered, with a careless laugh, —

'Well, dearest, I couldn't help it. You know I must keep straight with her as long as I can. Haven't I seen you kiss your dolt of a husband scores of times? — and do I ever complain?'

'But tell me, don't you love her still — a little?' said she, placing her hand on his arm, looking earnestly in his face — for I could see them, plainly, the moon shining full upon them from between the branches of the tree that sheltered me.

'Not one bit, by all that's sacred!' he replied, kissing her glowing cheek.

'Good heavens, I must be gone!' cried she, suddenly breaking from him, and away she flew.

There he stood before me; but I had not strength to confront him now: my tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth; I was well-nigh sinking to the earth, and I almost wondered he did not hear the beating of my heart above the low sighing of the wind and the fitful rustle of the falling leaves. My senses seemed to fail me, but still I saw his shadowy form pass before me, and through the rushing sound in my ears I distinctly heard him say, as he stood looking up the lawn, — 'There goes the fool! Run, Annabella, run! There — in with you! Ah, — he didn't see! That's right, Grimsby, keep him back!' And even his low laugh reached me as he walked away.

'God help me now!' I murmured, sinking on my knees among the damp weeds and brushwood that surrounded me, and looking up at the moonlit sky, through the scant foliage above. It seemed all dim and quivering now to my darkened sight. My burning, bursting heart strove to pour forth its agony to God, but could not frame its anguish into prayer; until a gust of wind swept over me, which, while it scattered the dead leaves, like blighted hopes, around, cooled my forehead, and seemed a little to revive my sinking frame. Then, while I lifted up my soul in speechless, earnest supplication, some heavenly influence seemed to strengthen me within: I breathed more freely; my vision cleared; I saw distinctly the pure moon shining on, and the light clouds skimming the clear, dark sky; and then I saw the eternal stars twinkling down upon me; I knew their God was mine, and He was strong to save and swift to hear. 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' seemed whispered from above their myriad orbs. No, no; I felt He would not leave me comfortless: in spite of earth and hell I should have strength for all my trials, and win a glorious rest at last!

Refreshed, invigorated, if not composed, I rose and returned to the house. Much of my new-born strength and courage forsook me, I confess, as I entered it, and shut out the fresh wind and the glorious sky: everything I saw and heard seemed to sicken my heart — the hall, the lamp, the staircase, the doors of the different apartments, the social sound of talk and laughter from the drawing-room. How could I bear my future life! In this house, among those people — oh, how could I endure to live! John just then entered the hall, and seeing me, told me he had been sent in search of me, adding that he had taken in the tea, and master wished to know if I were coming.

'Ask Mrs. Hattersley to be so kind as to make the tea, John,' said I. 'Say I am not well to-night, and wish to be excused.'

I retired into the large, empty dining-room, where all was silence and darkness, but for the soft sighing of the wind without, and the faint gleam of moonlight that pierced the blinds and curtains; and there I walked rapidly up and down, thinking of my bitter thoughts alone. How different was this from the evening of yesterday! That, it seems, was the last expiring flash of my life's happiness. Poor, blinded fool that I was to be so happy! I could now see the reason of Arthur's strange reception of me in the shrubbery; the burst of kindness was for his paramour, the start of horror for his wife. Now, too, I could better understand the conversation between Hattersley and Grimsby; it was doubtless of his love for her they spoke, not for me.

I heard the drawing-room door open: a light quick step came out of the ante-room, crossed the hall, and ascended the stairs. It was Milicent, poor Milicent, gone to see how I was — no one else cared for me; but she still was kind. I shed no tears before, but now they came, fast and free. Thus she did me good, without approaching me. Disappointed in her search, I heard her come down, more slowly than she had ascended. Would she come in there, and find me out? No, she turned in the opposite direction and re-entered the drawing-room. I was glad, for I knew not how to meet her, or what to say. I wanted no confidante in my distress. I deserved none, and I wanted none. I had taken the burden upon myself; let me bear it alone.

As the usual hour of retirement approached I dried my eyes, and tried to clear my voice and calm my mind. I must see Arthur to-night, and speak to him; but I would do it calmly: there should be no scene — nothing to complain or to boast of to his companions — nothing to laugh at with his lady-love. When the company were retiring to their chambers I gently opened the door, and just as he passed, beckoned him in.

'What's to do with you, Helen?' said he. 'Why couldn't you come to make tea for us? and what the deuce are you here for, in the dark? What ails you, young woman: you look like a ghost!' he continued, surveying me by the light of his candle.

'No matter,' I answered, 'to you; you have no longer any regard for me it appears; and I have no longer any for you.'

'Hal-lo! what the devil is this?' he muttered. 'I would leave you to-morrow,' continued I, 'and never again come under this roof, but for my child' — I paused a moment to steady, my voice.

'What in the devil's name is this, Helen?' cried he. 'What can you be driving at?'

'You know perfectly well. Let us waste no time in useless explanation, but tell me, will you — ?'

He vehemently swore he knew nothing about it, and insisted upon hearing what poisonous old woman had been blackening his name, and what infamous lies I had been fool enough to believe.

'Spare yourself the trouble of forswearing yourself and racking your brains to stifle truth with falsehood,' I coldly replied. 'I have trusted to the testimony of no third person. I was in the shrubbery this evening, and I saw and heard for myself.'

This was enough. He uttered a suppressed exclamation of consternation and dismay, and muttering, 'I shall catch it now!' set down his candle on the nearest chair, and rearing his back against the wall, stood confronting me with folded arms.

'Well, what then?' said he, with the calm insolence of mingled shamelessness and desperation.

'Only this,' returned I; 'will you let me take our child and what remains of my fortune, and go?'

'Go where?'

‘Anywhere, where he will be safe from your contaminating influence, and I shall be delivered from your presence, and you from mine.’

‘No.’

‘Will you let me have the child then, without the money?’

‘No, nor yourself without the child. Do you think I’m going to be made the talk of the country for your fastidious caprices?’

‘Then I must stay here, to be hated and despised. But henceforth we are husband and wife only in the name.’

‘Very good.’

‘I am your child’s mother, and your housekeeper, nothing more. So you need not trouble yourself any longer to feign the love you cannot feel: I will exact no more heartless caresses from you, nor offer nor endure them either. I will not be mocked with the empty husk of conjugal endearments, when you have given the substance to another!’

‘Very good, if you please. We shall see who will tire first, my lady.’

‘If I tire, it will be of living in the world with you: not of living without your mockery of love. When you tire of your sinful ways, and show yourself truly repentant, I will forgive you, and, perhaps, try to love you again, though that will be hard indeed.’

‘Humph! and meantime you will go and talk me over to Mrs. Hargrave, and write long letters to aunt Maxwell to complain of the wicked wretch you have married?’

‘I shall complain to no one. Hitherto I have struggled hard to hide your vices from every eye, and invest you with virtues you never possessed; but now you must look to yourself.’

I left him muttering bad language to himself, and went up-stairs.

‘You are poorly, ma’am,’ said Rachel, surveying me with deep anxiety.

‘It is too true, Rachel,’ said I, answering her sad looks rather than her words.

‘I knew it, or I wouldn’t have mentioned such a thing.’

‘But don’t you trouble yourself about it,’ said I, kissing her pale, time-wasted cheek. ‘I can bear it better than you imagine.’

‘Yes, you were always for “bearing.” But if I was you I wouldn’t bear it; I’d give way to it, and cry right hard! and I’d talk too, I just would — I’d let him know what it was to — ’

‘I have talked,’ said I; ‘I’ve said enough.’

‘Then I’d cry,’ persisted she. ‘I wouldn’t look so white and so calm, and burst my heart with keeping it in.’

‘I have cried,’ said I, smiling, in spite of my misery; ‘and I am calm now, really: so don’t discompose me again, nurse: let us say no more about it, and don’t mention it to the servants. There, you may go now. Good-night; and don’t disturb your rest for me: I shall sleep well — if I can.’

Notwithstanding this resolution, I found my bed so intolerable that, before two o’clock, I rose, and lighting my candle by the rushlight that was still burning, I got my desk and sat down in my dressing-gown to recount the events of the past evening. It was better to be so occupied than to be lying in bed torturing my brain with recollections of the far past and anticipations of the dreadful future. I have found relief in describing the very circumstances that have destroyed my peace, as well as the little trivial details attendant upon their discovery. No sleep I could have got this night would have done so much towards composing my mind, and preparing me to meet the trials of the day. I fancy so, at least; and yet, when I cease writing, I find my head aches terribly; and when I look into the glass, I am startled at my haggard, worn appearance.

Rachel has been to dress me, and says I have had a sad night of it, she can see. Milicent has just looked in to ask me how I was. I told her I was better, but to excuse my appearance admitted I had had a restless night. I wish this day were over! I shudder at the thoughts of going down to breakfast. How shall I encounter them all? Yet let me remember it is not I that am guilty: I have no cause to fear; and if they scorn me as a victim of their guilt, I can pity their folly and despise their scorn.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Evening. — Breakfast passed well over: I was calm and cool throughout. I answered composedly all inquiries respecting my health; and whatever was unusual in my look or manner was generally attributed to the trifling indisposition that had occasioned my early retirement last night. But how am I to get over the ten or twelve days that must yet elapse before they go? Yet why so long for their departure? When they are gone, how shall I get through the months or years of my future life in company with that man — my greatest enemy? for none could injure me as he has done. Oh! when I think how fondly, how foolishly I have loved him, how madly I have trusted him, how constantly I have laboured, and studied, and prayed, and struggled for his advantage; and how cruelly he has trampled on my love, betrayed my trust, scorned my prayers and tears, and efforts for his preservation, crushed my hopes, destroyed my youth's best feelings, and doomed me to a life of hopeless misery, as far as man can do it, it is not enough to say that I no longer love my husband — I hate him! The word stares me in the face like a guilty confession, but it is true: I hate him — I hate him! But God have mercy on his miserable soul! and make him see and feel his guilt — I ask no other vengeance! If he could but fully know and truly feel my wrongs I should be well avenged, and I could freely pardon all; but he is so lost, so hardened in his heartless depravity, that in this life I believe he never will. But it is useless dwelling on this theme: let me seek once more to dissipate reflection in the minor details of passing events.

Mr. Hargrave has annoyed me all day long with his serious, sympathising, and (as he thinks) unobtrusive politeness. If it were more obtrusive it would trouble me less, for then I could snub him; but, as it is, he contrives to appear so really kind and thoughtful that I cannot do so without rudeness and seeming ingratitude. I sometimes think I ought to give him credit for the good feeling he simulates so well; and then again, I think it is my duty to suspect him under the peculiar circumstances in which I am placed. His kindness may not all be feigned; but still, let not the purest impulse of gratitude to him induce me to forget myself: let me remember the game of chess, the expressions he used on the occasion, and those indescribable looks of his, that so justly roused my indignation, and I think I shall be safe enough. I have done well to record them so minutely.

I think he wishes to find an opportunity of speaking to me alone: he has seemed to be on the watch all day; but I have taken care to disappoint him — not that I fear anything he could say, but I have trouble enough without the addition of his insulting consolations, condolences, or whatever else he might attempt; and, for Milicent's sake, I do not wish to quarrel with him. He excused himself from going out to shoot with the other gentlemen in the morning, under the pretext of having letters to write; and instead of retiring for that purpose into the library, he sent for his desk into the morning-room, where I was seated with Milicent and Lady Lowborough. They had betaken themselves to their work; I, less to divert my mind than to deprecate conversation, had provided myself with a book. Milicent saw that I wished to be quiet, and accordingly let me alone. Annabella, doubtless, saw it too: but that was no reason why she should restrain her tongue, or curb her cheerful spirits: she accordingly chatted away, addressing herself almost exclusively to me, and with the utmost assurance and familiarity, growing the more animated and friendly the colder and briefer my answers became. Mr. Hargrave saw that I could ill endure it, and, looking up from his desk, he answered her questions and observations for me, as far as he could, and attempted to transfer her social attentions from me to himself; but it would not do. Perhaps she thought I had a headache, and could not bear to talk; at any rate, she saw that her loquacious vivacity annoyed me, as I could tell by the malicious pertinacity with which she persisted. But I checked it effectually by putting into her hand the book I had been trying to read, on the fly-leaf of which I had hastily scribbled, —

‘I am too well acquainted with your character and conduct to feel any real friendship for you, and as I am without your talent for dissimulation, I cannot assume the appearance of it. I must, therefore, beg that hereafter all familiar intercourse may cease between us; and if I still continue to treat you with civility, as if you were a woman worthy of consideration and respect, understand that it is out of regard for your cousin Milicent’s feelings, not for yours.’

Upon perusing this she turned scarlet, and bit her lip. Covertly tearing away the leaf, she crumpled it up and put it in the fire, and then employed herself in turning over the pages of the book, and, really or apparently, perusing its contents. In a little while Milicent announced it her intention to repair to the nursery, and asked if I would accompany her.

‘Annabella will excuse us,’ said she; ‘she’s busy reading.’

‘No, I won’t,’ cried Annabella, suddenly looking up, and throwing her book on the table; ‘I want to speak to Helen a minute. You may go, Milicent, and she’ll follow in a while.’ (Milicent went.) ‘Will you oblige me, Helen?’ continued she.

Her impudence astounded me; but I complied, and followed her into the library. She closed the door, and walked up to the fire.

‘Who told you this?’ said she.

‘No one: I am not incapable of seeing for myself.’

‘Ah, you are suspicious!’ cried she, smiling, with a gleam of hope. Hitherto there had been a kind of desperation in her hardihood; now she was evidently relieved.

‘If I were suspicious,’ I replied, ‘I should have discovered your infamy long before. No, Lady Lowborough, I do not found my charge upon suspicion.'

'On what do you found it, then?' said she, throwing herself into an armchair, and stretching out her feet to the fender, with an obvious effort to appear composed.

'I enjoy a moonlight ramble as well as you,' I answered, steadily fixing my eyes upon her; 'and the shrubbery happens to be one of my favourite resorts.'

She coloured again excessively, and remained silent, pressing her finger against her teeth, and gazing into the fire. I watched her a few moments with a feeling of malevolent gratification; then, moving towards the door, I calmly asked if she had anything more to say.

'Yes, yes!' cried she eagerly, starting up from her reclining posture. 'I want to know if you will tell Lord Lowborough?'

'Suppose I do?'

'Well, if you are disposed to publish the matter, I cannot dissuade you, of course — but there will be terrible work if you do — and if you don't, I shall think you the most generous of mortal beings — and if there is anything in the world I can do for you — anything short of — ' she hesitated.

'Short of renouncing your guilty connection with my husband, I suppose you mean?' said I.

She paused, in evident disconcertion and perplexity, mingled with anger she dared not show.

'I cannot renounce what is dearer than life,' she muttered, in a low, hurried tone. Then, suddenly raising her head and fixing her gleaming eyes upon me, she continued earnestly: 'But, Helen — or Mrs. Huntingdon, or whatever you would have me call you — will you tell him? If you are generous, here is a fitting opportunity for the exercise of your magnanimity: if you are proud, here am I — your rival — ready to acknowledge myself your debtor for an act of the most noble forbearance.'

'I shall not tell him.'

'You will not!' cried she, delightedly. 'Accept my sincere thanks, then!'

She sprang up, and offered me her hand. I drew back.

'Give me no thanks; it is not for your sake that I refrain. Neither is it an act of any forbearance: I have no wish to publish your shame. I should be sorry to distress your husband with the knowledge of it.'

'And Milicent? will you tell her?'

'No: on the contrary, I shall do my utmost to conceal it from her. I would not for much that she should know the infamy and disgrace of her relation!'

'You use hard words, Mrs. Huntingdon, but I can pardon you.'

'And now, Lady Lowborough,' continued I, 'let me counsel you to leave this house as soon as possible. You must be aware that your continuance here is excessively disagreeable to me — not for Mr. Huntingdon's sake,' said I, observing the dawn of a malicious smile of triumph on her face — 'you are welcome to him, if you like him, as far as I am concerned — but because it is painful to be always disguising my true sentiments respecting you, and straining to keep up an appearance of civility and respect towards one for whom I have not the most distant shadow of esteem; and because, if you stay, your conduct cannot possibly remain concealed much longer from the only two persons in the house who do not know it already. And, for your husband's sake, Annabella, and even for your own, I wish — I earnestly advise and entreat you to break off this unlawful connection at once, and return to your duty while you may, before the dreadful consequences — '

'Yes, yes, of course,' said she, interrupting me with a gesture of impatience. 'But I cannot go, Helen, before the time appointed for our departure. What possible pretext could I frame for such a thing? Whether I proposed going back alone — which Lowborough would not hear of — or taking him with me, the very circumstance itself would be certain to excite suspicion — and when our visit is so nearly at an end too — little more than a week — surely you can endure my presence so long! I will not annoy you with any more of my friendly impertinences.'

'Well, I have nothing more to say to you.'

'Have you mentioned this affair to Huntingdon?' asked she, as I was leaving the room.

'How dare you mention his name to me!' was the only answer I gave.

No words have passed between us since, but such as outward decency or pure necessity demanded.

CHAPTER XXXV

Nineteenth. — In proportion as Lady Lowborough finds she has nothing to fear from me, and as the time of departure draws nigh, the more audacious and insolent she becomes. She does not scruple to speak to my husband with affectionate familiarity in my presence, when no one else is by, and is particularly fond of displaying her interest in his health and welfare, or in anything that concerns him, as if for the purpose of contrasting her kind solicitude with my cold indifference. And he rewards her by such smiles and glances, such whispered words, or boldly-spoken insinuations, indicative of his sense of her goodness and my neglect, as make the blood rush into my face, in spite of myself — for I would be utterly regardless of it all — deaf and blind to everything that passes between them, since the more I show myself sensible of their wickedness the more she triumphs in her victory, and the more he flatters himself that I love him devotedly still, in spite of my pretended indifference. On such occasions I have sometimes been startled by a subtle, fiendish suggestion inciting me to show him the contrary by a seeming encouragement of Hargrave's advances; but such ideas are banished in a moment with horror and self-abasement; and then I hate him tenfold more than ever for having brought me to this! — God pardon me for it and all my sinful thoughts! Instead of being humbled and purified by my afflictions, I feel that they are turning my nature into gall. This must be my fault as much as theirs that wrong me. No true Christian could cherish such bitter feelings as I do against him and her, especially the latter: him, I still feel that I could pardon — freely, gladly — on the slightest token of repentance; but she — words cannot utter my abhorrence. Reason forbids, but passion urges strongly; and I must pray and struggle long ere I subdue it.

It is well that she is leaving to-morrow, for I could not well endure her presence for another day. This morning she rose earlier than usual. I found her in the room alone, when I went down to breakfast.

'Oh, Helen! is it you?' said she, turning as I entered.

I gave an involuntary start back on seeing her, at which she uttered a short laugh, observing, 'I think we are both disappointed.'

I came forward and busied myself with the breakfast things.

'This is the last day I shall burden your hospitality,' said she, as she seated herself at the table. 'Ah, here comes one that will not rejoice at it!' she murmured, half to herself, as Arthur entered the room.

He shook hands with her and wished her good-morning: then, looking lovingly in her face, and still retaining her hand in his, murmured pathetically, 'The last — last day!'

'Yes,' said she with some asperity; 'and I rose early to make the best of it

— I have been here alone this half-hour, and you — you lazy creature — '

'Well, I thought I was early too,' said he; 'but,' dropping his voice almost to a whisper, 'you see we are not alone.'

'We never are,' returned she. But they were almost as good as alone, for I was now standing at the window, watching the clouds, and struggling to suppress my wrath.

Some more words passed between them, which, happily, I did not overhear; but Annabella had the audacity to come and place herself beside me, and even to put her hand upon my shoulder and say softly, 'You need not grudge him to me, Helen, for I love him more than ever you could do.'

This put me beside myself. I took her hand and violently dashed it from me, with an expression of abhorrence and indignation that could not be suppressed. Startled, almost appalled, by this sudden outbreak, she recoiled in silence. I would have given way to my fury and said more, but Arthur's low laugh recalled me to myself. I checked the half-uttered invective, and scornfully turned away, regretting that I had given him so much amusement. He was still laughing when Mr. Hargrave made his appearance. How much of the scene he had witnessed I do not know, for the door was ajar when he entered. He greeted his host and his cousin both coldly, and me with a glance intended to express the deepest sympathy mingled with high admiration and esteem.

'How much allegiance do you owe to that man?' he asked below his breath, as he stood beside me at the window, affecting to be making observations on the weather.

'None,' I answered. And immediately returning to the table, I employed myself in making the tea. He followed, and would have entered into some kind of conversation with me, but the other guests were now beginning to assemble, and I took no more notice of him, except to give him his coffee.

After breakfast, determined to pass as little of the day as possible in company with Lady Lowborough, I quietly stole away from the company and retired to the library. Mr. Hargrave followed me thither, under pretence of coming for a book; and first, turning to the shelves, he selected a volume, and then quietly, but by no means timidly, approaching me, he stood beside me, resting his hand on the back of my chair, and said softly, 'And so you consider yourself free at last?'

'Yes,' said I, without moving, or raising my eyes from my book, 'free to do anything but offend God and my conscience.'

There was a momentary pause.

'Very right,' said he, 'provided your conscience be not too morbidly tender, and your ideas of God not too erroneously severe; but can you suppose it would offend that benevolent Being to make the happiness of one who would die for yours? — to raise a devoted heart from purgatorial torments to a state of heavenly bliss, when you could do it without the slightest injury to yourself or any other?'

This was spoken in a low, earnest, melting tone, as he bent over me. I now raised my head; and steadily confronting his gaze, I answered calmly, ‘Mr. Hargrave, do you mean to insult me?’

He was not prepared for this. He paused a moment to recover the shock; then, drawing himself up and removing his hand from my chair, he answered, with proud sadness, — ‘That was not my intention.’

I just glanced towards the door, with a slight movement of the head, and then returned to my book. He immediately withdrew. This was better than if I had answered with more words, and in the passionate spirit to which my first impulse would have prompted. What a good thing it is to be able to command one’s temper! I must labour to cultivate this inestimable quality: God only knows how often I shall need it in this rough, dark road that lies before me.

In the course of the morning I drove over to the Grove with the two ladies, to give Milicent an opportunity for bidding farewell to her mother and sister. They persuaded her to stay with them the rest of the day, Mrs. Hargrave promising to bring her back in the evening and remain till the party broke up on the morrow. Consequently, Lady Lowborough and I had the pleasure of returning *tête-à-tête* in the carriage together. For the first mile or two we kept silence, I looking out of my window, and she leaning back in her corner. But I was not going to restrict myself to any particular position for her; when I was tired of leaning forward, with the cold, raw wind in my face, and surveying the russet hedges and the damp, tangled grass of their banks, I gave it up and leant back too. With her usual impudence, my companion then made some attempts to get up a conversation; but the monosyllables ‘yes,’ or ‘no’ or ‘humph,’ were the utmost her several remarks could elicit from me. At last, on her asking my opinion upon some immaterial point of discussion, I answered, — ‘Why do you wish to talk to me, Lady Lowborough? You must know what I think of you.’

‘Well, if you will be so bitter against me,’ replied she, ‘I can’t help it; but I’m not going to sulk for anybody.’ Our short drive was now at an end. As soon as the carriage door was opened, she sprang out, and went down the park to meet the gentlemen, who were just returning from the woods. Of course I did not follow.

But I had not done with her impudence yet: after dinner, I retired to the drawing-room, as usual, and she accompanied me, but I had the two children with me, and I gave them my whole attention, and determined to keep them till the gentlemen came, or till Milicent arrived with her mother. Little Helen, however, was soon tired of playing, and insisted upon going to sleep; and while I sat on the sofa with her on my knee, and Arthur seated beside me, gently playing with her soft, flaxen hair, Lady Lowborough composedly came and placed herself on the other side.

‘To-morrow, Mrs. Huntingdon,’ said she, ‘you will be delivered from my presence, which, no doubt, you will be very glad of — it is natural you should; but do you know I have rendered you a great service? Shall I tell you what it is?'

'I shall be glad to hear of any service you have rendered me,' said I, determined to be calm, for I knew by the tone of her voice she wanted to provoke me.

'Well,' resumed she, 'have you not observed the salutary change in Mr. Huntingdon? Don't you see what a sober, temperate man he is become? You saw with regret the sad habits he was contracting, I know: and I know you did your utmost to deliver him from them, but without success, until I came to your assistance. I told him in few words that I could not bear to see him degrade himself so, and that I should cease to — no matter what I told him, but you see the reformation I have wrought; and you ought to thank me for it.'

I rose and rang for the nurse.

'But I desire no thanks,' she continued; 'all the return I ask is, that you will take care of him when I am gone, and not, by harshness and neglect, drive him back to his old courses.'

I was almost sick with passion, but Rachel was now at the door. I pointed to the children, for I could not trust myself to speak: she took them away, and I followed.

'Will you, Helen?' continued the speaker.

I gave her a look that blighted the malicious smile on her face, or checked it, at least for a moment, and departed. In the ante-room I met Mr. Hargrave. He saw I was in no humour to be spoken to, and suffered me to pass without a word; but when, after a few minutes' seclusion in the library, I had regained my composure, and was returning to join Mrs. Hargrave and Milicent, whom I had just heard come downstairs and go into the drawing-room, I found him there still lingering in the dimly-lighted apartment, and evidently waiting for me.

'Mrs. Huntingdon,' said he as I passed, 'will you allow me one word?'

'What is it then? be quick, if you please.'

'I offended you this morning; and I cannot live under your displeasure.'

'Then go, and sin no more,' replied I, turning away.

'No, no!' said he, hastily, setting himself before me. 'Pardon me, but I must have your forgiveness. I leave you to-morrow, and I may not have an opportunity of speaking to you again. I was wrong to forget myself and you, as I did; but let me implore you to forget and forgive my rash presumption, and think of me as if those words had never been spoken; for, believe me, I regret them deeply, and the loss of your esteem is too severe a penalty: I cannot bear it.'

'Forgetfulness is not to be purchased with a wish; and I cannot bestow my esteem on all who desire it, unless they deserve it too.'

'I shall think my life well spent in labouring to deserve it, if you will but pardon this offence — will you?'

'Yes.'

'Yes! but that is coldly spoken. Give me your hand and I'll believe you.

You won't? Then, Mrs. Huntingdon, you do not forgive me!'

'Yes; here it is, and my forgiveness with it: only, *sin no more*.'

He pressed my cold hand with sentimental fervour, but said nothing, and stood aside to let me pass into the room, where all the company were now assembled. Mr. Grimsby was seated near the door: on seeing me enter, almost immediately followed by Hargrave, he leered at me with a glance of intolerable significance, as I passed. I looked him in the face, till he sullenly turned away, if not ashamed, at least confounded for the moment. Meantime Hattersley had seized Hargrave by the arm, and was whispering something in his ear — some coarse joke, no doubt, for the latter neither laughed nor spoke in answer, but, turning from him with a slight curl of the lip, disengaged himself and went to his mother, who was telling Lord Lowborough how many reasons she had to be proud of her son.

Thank heaven, they are all going to-morrow.

CHAPTER XXXVI

December 20th, 1824. — This is the third anniversary of our felicitous union. It is now two months since our guests left us to the enjoyment of each other's society; and I have had nine weeks' experience of this new phase of conjugal life — two persons living together, as master and mistress of the house, and father and mother of a winsome, merry little child, with the mutual understanding that there is no love, friendship, or sympathy between them. As far as in me lies, I endeavour to live peaceably with him: I treat him with unimpeachable civility, give up my convenience to his, wherever it may reasonably be done, and consult him in a business-like way on household affairs, deferring to his pleasure and judgment, even when I know the latter to be inferior to my own.

As for him, for the first week or two, he was peevish and low, fretting, I suppose, over his dear Annabella's departure, and particularly ill-tempered to me: everything I did was wrong; I was cold-hearted, hard, insensate; my sour, pale face was perfectly repulsive; my voice made him shudder; he knew not how he could live through the winter with me; I should kill him by inches. Again I proposed a separation, but it would not do: he was not going to be the talk of all the old gossips in the neighbourhood: he would not have it said that he was such a brute his wife could not live with him. No; he must contrive to bear with me.

'I must contrive to bear with you, you mean,' said I; 'for so long as I discharge my functions of steward and house-keeper, so conscientiously and well, without pay and without thanks, you cannot afford to part with me. I shall therefore remit these duties when my bondage becomes intolerable.' This threat, I thought, would serve to keep him in check, if anything would.

I believe he was much disappointed that I did not feel his offensive sayings more acutely, for when he had said anything particularly well calculated to hurt my feelings, he would stare me searchingly in the face, and then grumble against my 'marble heart' or my 'brutal insensibility.' If I had bitterly wept and deplored his lost affection, he would, perhaps, have condescended to pity me, and taken me into favour for a while, just to comfort his solitude and console him for the absence of his beloved Annabella, until he could meet her again, or some more fitting substitute. Thank heaven, I am not so weak as that! I was infatuated once with a foolish, besotted affection, that clung to him in spite of his unworthiness, but it is fairly gone now — wholly crushed and withered away; and he has none but himself and his vices to thank for it.

At first (in compliance with his sweet lady's injunctions, I suppose), he abstained wonderfully well from seeking to solace his cares in wine; but at length he began to relax his virtuous efforts, and now and then exceeded a little, and still continues to do so; nay, sometimes, not a little. When he is under the exciting influence of these excesses, he sometimes fires up and attempts to play the brute; and then I take little pains to suppress my scorn and disgust. When he is under the depressing influence of the after-consequences, he bemoans his sufferings and his errors, and charges them both upon me; he knows such indulgence injures his health, and does him more harm than good; but he says I drive him to it by my unnatural, unwomanly conduct; it will be the ruin of him in the end, but it is all my fault; and then I am roused to defend myself, sometimes with bitter recrimination. This is a kind of injustice I cannot patiently endure. Have I not laboured long and hard to save him from this very vice? Would I not labour still to deliver him from it if I could? but could I do so by fawning upon him and caressing him when I know that he scorns me? Is it my fault that I have lost my influence with him, or that he has forfeited every claim to my regard? And should I seek a reconciliation with him, when I feel that I abhor him, and that he despises me? and while he continues still to correspond with Lady Lowborough, as I know he does? No, never, never, never! he may drink himself dead, but it is not my fault!

Yet I do my part to save him still: I give him to understand that drinking makes his eyes dull, and his face red and bloated; and that it tends to render him imbecile in body and mind; and if Annabella were to see him as often as I do, she would speedily be disenchanted; and that she certainly will withdraw her favour from him, if he continues such courses. Such a mode of admonition wins only coarse abuse for me — and, indeed, I almost feel as if I deserved it, for I hate to use such arguments; but they sink into his stupefied heart, and make him pause, and ponder, and abstain, more than anything else I could say.

At present I am enjoying a temporary relief from his presence: he is gone with Hargrave to join a distant hunt, and will probably not be back before to-morrow evening. How differently I used to feel his absence!

Mr. Hargrave is still at the Grove. He and Arthur frequently meet to pursue their rural sports together: he often calls upon us here, and Arthur not unfrequently rides over to him. I do not think either of these soi-disant friends is overflowing with love for the other; but such intercourse serves to get the time on, and I am very willing it should continue, as it saves me some hours of discomfort in Arthur’s society, and gives him some better employment than the sottish indulgence of his sensual appetites. The only objection I have to Mr. Hargrave’s being in the neighbourhood, is that the fear of meeting him at the Grove prevents me from seeing his sister so often as I otherwise should; for, of late, he has conducted himself towards me with such unerring propriety, that I have almost forgotten his former conduct. I suppose he is striving to ‘win my esteem.’ If he continue to act in this way, he may win it; but what then? The moment he attempts to demand anything more, he will lose it again.

February 10th. — It is a hard, embittering thing to have one's kind feelings and good intentions cast back in one's teeth. I was beginning to relent towards my wretched partner; to pity his forlorn, comfortless condition, unalleviated as it is by the consolations of intellectual resources and the answer of a good conscience towards God; and to think I ought to sacrifice my pride, and renew my efforts once again to make his home agreeable and lead him back to the path of virtue; not by false professions of love, and not by pretended remorse, but by mitigating my habitual coldness of manner, and commuting my frigid civility into kindness wherever an opportunity occurred; and not only was I beginning to think so, but I had already begun to act upon the thought — and what was the result? No answering spark of kindness, no awakening penitence, but an unappeasable ill-humour, and a spirit of tyrannous exaction that increased with indulgence, and a lurking gleam of self-complacent triumph at every detection of relenting softness in my manner, that congealed me to marble again as often as it recurred; and this morning he finished the business: — I think the petrifaction is so completely effected at last that nothing can melt me again. Among his letters was one which he perused with symptoms of unusual gratification, and then threw it across the table to me, with the admonition, —

'There! read that, and take a lesson by it!'

It was in the free, dashing hand of Lady Lowborough. I glanced at the first page; it seemed full of extravagant protestations of affection; impetuous longings for a speedy reunion — and impious defiance of God's mandates, and railings against His providence for having cast their lot asunder, and doomed them both to the hateful bondage of alliance with those they could not love. He gave a slight titter on seeing me change colour. I folded up the letter, rose, and returned it to him, with no remark, but —

'Thank you, I will take a lesson by it!'

My little Arthur was standing between his knees, delightedly playing with the bright, ruby ring on his finger. Urged by a sudden, imperative impulse to deliver my son from that contaminating influence, I caught him up in my arms and carried him with me out of the room. Not liking this abrupt removal, the child began to pout and cry. This was a new stab to my already tortured heart. I would not let him go; but, taking him with me into the library, I shut the door, and, kneeling on the floor beside him, I embraced him, kissed him, wept over with him with passionate fondness. Rather frightened than consoled by this, he turned struggling from me, and cried out aloud for his papa. I released him from my arms, and never were more bitter tears than those that now concealed him from my blinded, burning eyes. Hearing his cries, the father came to the room. I instantly turned away, lest he should see and misconstrue my emotion. He swore at me, and took the now pacified child away.

It is hard that my little darling should love him more than me; and that, when the well-being and culture of my son is all I have to live for, I should see my influence destroyed by one whose selfish affection is more injurious than the coldest indifference or the harshest tyranny could be. If I, for his good, deny him some trifling indulgence, he goes to his father, and the latter, in spite of his selfish indolence, will even give himself some trouble to meet the child's desires: if I attempt to curb his will, or look gravely on him for some act of childish disobedience, he knows his other parent will smile and take his part against me. Thus, not only have I the father's spirit in the son to contend against, the germs of his evil tendencies to search out and eradicate, and his corrupting intercourse and example in after-life to counteract, but already he counteracts my arduous labour for the child's advantage, destroys my influence over his tender mind, and robs me of his very love; I had no earthly hope but this, and he seems to take a diabolical delight in tearing it away.

But it is wrong to despair; I will remember the counsel of the inspired writer to him 'that feareth the Lord and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that sitteth in darkness and hath no light; let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God!'

CHAPTER XXXVII

December 20th, 1825. — Another year is past; and I am weary of this life. And yet I cannot wish to leave it: whatever afflictions assail me here, I cannot wish to go and leave my darling in this dark and wicked world alone, without a friend to guide him through its weary mazes, to warn him of its thousand snares, and guard him from the perils that beset him on every hand. I am not well fitted to be his only companion, I know; but there is no other to supply my place. I am too grave to minister to his amusements and enter into his infantile sports as a nurse or a mother ought to do, and often his bursts of gleeful merriment trouble and alarm me; I see in them his father's spirit and temperament, and I tremble for the consequences; and too often damp the innocent mirth I ought to share. That father, on the contrary, has no weight of sadness on his mind; is troubled with no fears, no scruples concerning his son's future welfare; and at evenings especially, the times when the child sees him the most and the oftenest, he is always particularly jocund and open-hearted: ready to laugh and to jest with anything or anybody but me, and I am particularly silent and sad: therefore, of course, the child dotes upon his seemingly joyous amusing, ever-indulgent papa, and will at any time gladly exchange my company for his. This disturbs me greatly; not so much for the sake of my son's affection (though I do prize that highly, and though I feel it is my right, and know I have done much to earn it) as for that influence over him which, for his own advantage, I would strive to purchase and retain, and which for very spite his father delights to rob me of, and, from motives of mere idle egotism, is pleased to win to himself; making no use of it but to torment me and ruin the child. My only consolation is, that he spends comparatively little of his time at home, and, during the months he passes in London or elsewhere, I have a chance of recovering the ground I had lost, and overcoming with good the evil he has wrought by his wilful mismanagement. But then it is a bitter trial to behold him, on his return, doing his utmost to subvert my labours and transform my innocent, affectionate, tractable darling into a selfish, disobedient, and mischievous boy; thereby preparing the soil for those vices he has so successfully cultivated in his own perverted nature.

Happily, there were none of Arthur's 'friends' invited to Grassdale last autumn: he took himself off to visit some of them instead. I wish he would always do so, and I wish his friends were numerous and loving enough to keep him amongst them all the year round. Mr. Hargrave, considerably to my annoyance, did not go with him; but I think I have done with that gentleman at last.

For seven or eight months he behaved so remarkably well, and managed so skilfully too, that I was almost completely off my guard, and was really beginning to look upon him as a friend, and even to treat him as such, with certain prudent restrictions (which I deemed scarcely necessary); when, presuming upon my unsuspecting kindness, he thought he might venture to overstep the bounds of decent moderation and propriety that had so long restrained him. It was on a pleasant evening at the close of May: I was wandering in the park, and he, on seeing me there as he rode past, made bold to enter and approach me, dismounting and leaving his horse at the gate. This was the first time he had ventured to come within its inclosure since I had been left alone, without the sanction of his mother's or sister's company, or at least the excuse of a message from them. But he managed to appear so calm and easy, so respectful and self-possessed in his friendliness, that, though a little surprised, I was neither alarmed nor offended at the unusual liberty, and he walked with me under the ash-trees and by the water-side, and talked, with considerable animation, good taste, and intelligence, on many subjects, before I began to think about getting rid of him. Then, after a pause, during which we both stood gazing on the calm, blue water — I revolving in my mind the best means of politely dismissing my companion, he, no doubt, pondering other matters equally alien to the sweet sights and sounds that alone were present to his senses, — he suddenly electrified me by beginning, in a peculiar tone, low, soft, but perfectly distinct, to pour forth the most unequivocal expressions of earnest and passionate love; pleading his cause with all the bold yet artful eloquence he could summon to his aid. But I cut short his appeal, and repulsed him so determinately, so decidedly, and with such a mixture of scornful indignation, tempered with cool, dispassionate sorrow and pity for his benighted mind, that he withdrew, astonished, mortified, and discomforted; and, a few days after, I heard that he had departed for London. He returned, however, in eight or nine weeks, and did not entirely keep aloof from me, but comported himself in so remarkable a manner that his quick-sighted sister could not fail to notice the change.

'What have you done to Walter, Mrs. Huntingdon?' said she one morning, when I had called at the Grove, and he had just left the room after exchanging a few words of the coldest civility. 'He has been so extremely ceremonious and stately of late, I can't imagine what it is all about, unless you have desperately offended him. Tell me what it is, that I may be your mediator, and make you friends again.'

'I have done nothing willingly to offend him,' said I. 'If he is offended, he can best tell you himself what it is about.'

'I'll ask him,' cried the giddy girl, springing up and putting her head out of the window: 'he's only in the garden — Walter!'

'No, no, Esther! you will seriously displease me if you do; and I shall leave you immediately, and not come again for months — perhaps years.'

'Did you call, Esther?' said her brother, approaching the window from without.

'Yes; I wanted to ask you — '

'Good-morning, Esther,' said I, taking her hand and giving it a severe squeeze.

'To ask you,' continued she, 'to get me a rose for Mrs. Huntingdon.' He departed. 'Mrs. Huntingdon,' she exclaimed, turning to me and still holding me fast by the hand, 'I'm quite shocked at you — you're just as angry, and distant, and cold as he is: and I'm determined you shall be as good friends as ever before you go.'

'Esther, how can you be so rude!' cried Mrs. Hargrave, who was seated gravely knitting in her easy-chair. 'Surely, you never will learn to conduct yourself like a lady!'

'Well, mamma, you said yourself — ' But the young lady was silenced by the uplifted finger of her mamma, accompanied with a very stern shake of the head.

'Isn't she cross?' whispered she to me; but, before I could add my share of reproof, Mr. Hargrave reappeared at the window with a beautiful moss-rose in his hand.

'Here, Esther, I've brought you the rose,' said he, extending it towards her.

'Give it her yourself, you blockhead!' cried she, recoiling with a spring from between us.

'Mrs. Huntingdon would rather receive it from you,' replied he, in a very serious tone, but lowering his voice that his mother might not hear. His sister took the rose and gave it to me.

'My brother's compliments, Mrs. Huntingdon, and he hopes you and he will come to a better understanding by-and-by. Will that do, Walter?' added the saucy girl, turning to him and putting her arm round his neck, as he stood leaning upon the sill of the window — 'or should I have said that you are sorry you were so touchy? or that you hope she will pardon your offence?'

'You silly girl! you don't know what you are talking about,' replied he gravely.

'Indeed I don't: for I'm quite in the dark!'

'Now, Esther,' interposed Mrs. Hargrave, who, if equally benighted on the subject of our estrangement, saw at least that her daughter was behaving very improperly, 'I must insist upon your leaving the room!'

'Pray don't, Mrs. Hargrave, for I'm going to leave it myself,' said I, and immediately made my adieux.

About a week after Mr. Hargrave brought his sister to see me. He conducted himself, at first, with his usual cold, distant, half-stately, half-melancholy, altogether injured air; but Esther made no remark upon it this time: she had evidently been schooled into better manners. She talked to me, and laughed and romped with little Arthur, her loved and loving playmate. He, somewhat to my discomfort, enticed her from the room to have a run in the hall, and thence into the garden. I got up to stir the fire. Mr. Hargrave asked if I felt cold, and shut the door — a very unseasonable piece of officiousness, for I had meditated following the noisy playfellows if they did not speedily return. He then took the liberty of walking up to the fire himself, and asking me if I were aware that Mr. Huntingdon was now at the seat of Lord Lowborough, and likely to continue there some time.

'No; but it's no matter,' I answered carelessly; and if my cheek glowed like fire, it was rather at the question than the information it conveyed.

'You don't object to it?' he said.

'Not at all, if Lord Lowborough likes his company.'

'You have no love left for him, then?'

'Not the least.'

'I knew that — I knew you were too high-minded and pure in your own nature to continue to regard one so utterly false and polluted with any feelings but those of indignation and scornful abhorrence!'

'Is he not your friend?' said I, turning my eyes from the fire to his face, with perhaps a slight touch of those feelings he assigned to another.

'He was,' replied he, with the same calm gravity as before; 'but do not wrong me by supposing that I could continue my friendship and esteem to a man who could so infamously, so impiously forsake and injure one so transcendently — well, I won't speak of it. But tell me, do you never think of revenge?'

'Revenge! No — what good would that do? — it would make him no better, and me no happier.'

'I don't know how to talk to you, Mrs. Huntingdon,' said he, smiling; 'you are only half a woman — your nature must be half human, half angelic. Such goodness overawes me; I don't know what to make of it.'

'Then, sir, I fear you must be very much worse than you should be, if I, a mere ordinary mortal, am, by your own confession, so vastly your superior; and since there exists so little sympathy between us, I think we had better each look out for some more congenial companion.' And forthwith moving to the window, I began to look out for my little son and his gay young friend.

'No, I am the ordinary mortal, I maintain,' replied Mr. Hargrave. 'I will not allow myself to be worse than my fellows; but you, Madam — I equally maintain there is nobody like you. But are you happy?' he asked in a serious tone.

'As happy as some others, I suppose.'

'Are you as happy as you desire to be?'

'No one is so blest as that comes to on this side eternity.'

'One thing I know,' returned he, with a deep sad sigh; 'you are immeasurably happier than I am.'

'I am very sorry for you, then,' I could not help replying.

'Are you, indeed? No, for if you were you would be glad to relieve me.'

'And so I should if I could do so without injuring myself or any other.'

'And can you suppose that I should wish you to injure yourself? No: on the contrary, it is your own happiness I long for more than mine. You are miserable now, Mrs. Huntingdon,' continued he, looking me boldly in the face. 'You do not complain, but I see — and feel — and know that you are miserable — and must remain so as long as you keep those walls of impenetrable ice about your still warm and palpitating heart; and I am miserable, too. Deign to smile on me and I am happy: trust me, and you shall be happy also, for if you are a woman I can make you so — and I will do it in spite of yourself!' he muttered between his teeth; 'and as for others, the question is between ourselves alone: you cannot injure your husband, you know, and no one else has any concern in the matter.'

'I have a son, Mr. Hargrave, and you have a mother,' said I, retiring from the window, whither he had followed me.

'They need not know,' he began; but before anything more could be said on either side, Esther and Arthur re-entered the room. The former glanced at Walter's flushed, excited countenance, and then at mine — a little flushed and excited too, I daresay, though from far different causes. She must have thought we had been quarrelling desperately, and was evidently perplexed and disturbed at the circumstance; but she was too polite or too much afraid of her brother's anger to refer to it. She seated herself on the sofa, and putting back her bright, golden ringlets, that were scattered in wild profusion over her face, she immediately began to talk about the garden and her little playfellow, and continued to chatter away in her usual strain till her brother summoned her to depart.

'If I have spoken too warmly, forgive me,' he murmured on taking his leave, 'or I shall never forgive myself.' Esther smiled and glanced at me: I merely bowed, and her countenance fell. She thought it a poor return for Walter's generous concession, and was disappointed in her friend. Poor child, she little knows the world she lives in!

Mr. Hargrave had not an opportunity of meeting me again in private for several weeks after this; but when he did meet me there was less of pride and more of touching melancholy in his manner than before. Oh, how he annoyed me! I was obliged at last almost entirely to remit my visits to the Grove, at the expense of deeply offending Mrs. Hargrave and seriously afflicting poor Esther, who really values my society for want of better, and who ought not to suffer for the fault of her brother. But that indefatigable foe was not yet vanquished: he seemed to be always on the watch. I frequently saw him riding lingeringly past the premises, looking searchingly round him as he went — or, if I did not, Rachel did. That sharp-sighted woman soon guessed how matters stood between us, and descrying the enemy's movements from her elevation at the nursery-window, she would give me a quiet intimation if she saw me preparing for a walk when she had reason to believe he was about, or to think it likely that he would meet or overtake me in the way I meant to traverse. I would then defer my ramble, or confine myself for that day to the park and gardens, or, if the proposed excursion was a matter of importance, such as a visit to the sick or afflicted, I would take Rachel with me, and then I was never molested.

But one mild, sunshiny day, early in November, I had ventured forth alone to visit the village school and a few of the poor tenants, and on my return I was alarmed at the clatter of a horse's feet behind me, approaching at a rapid, steady trot. There was no stile or gap at hand by which I could escape into the fields, so I walked quietly on, saying to myself, 'It may not be he after all; and if it is, and if he do annoy me, it shall be for the last time, I am determined, if there be power in words and looks against cool impudence and mawkish sentimentality so inexhaustible as his.'

The horse soon overtook me, and was reined up close beside me. It was Mr. Hargrave. He greeted me with a smile intended to be soft and melancholy, but his triumphant satisfaction at having caught me at last so shone through that it was quite a failure. After briefly answering his salutation and inquiring after the ladies at the Grove, I turned away and walked on; but he followed and kept his horse at my side: it was evident he intended to be my companion all the way.

'Well! I don't much care. If you want another rebuff, take it — and welcome,' was my inward remark. 'Now, sir, what next?'

This question, though unspoken, was not long unanswered; after a few passing observations upon indifferent subjects, he began in solemn tones the following appeal to my humanity: —

'It will be four years next April since I first saw you, Mrs. Huntingdon — you may have forgotten the circumstance, but I never can. I admired you then most deeply, but I dared not love you. In the following autumn I saw so much of your perfections that I could not fail to love you, though I dared not show it. For upwards of three years I have endured a perfect martyrdom. From the anguish of suppressed emotions, intense and fruitless longings, silent sorrow, crushed hopes, and trampled affections, I have suffered more than I can tell, or you imagine — and you were the cause of it, and not altogether the innocent cause. My youth is wasting away; my prospects are darkened; my life is a desolate blank; I have no rest day or night: I am become a burden to myself and others, and you might save me by a word — a glance, and will not do it — is this right?'

'In the first place, I don't believe you,' answered I; 'in the second, if you will be such a fool, I can't hinder it.'

'If you affect,' replied he, earnestly, 'to regard as folly the best, the strongest, the most godlike impulses of our nature, I don't believe you. I know you are not the heartless, icy being you pretend to be — you had a heart once, and gave it to your husband. When you found him utterly unworthy of the treasure, you reclaimed it; and you will not pretend that you loved that sensual, earthly-minded profligate so deeply, so devotedly, that you can never love another? I know that there are feelings in your nature that have never yet been called forth; I know, too, that in your present neglected lonely state you are and must be miserable. You have it in your power to raise two human beings from a state of actual suffering to such unspeakable beatitude as only generous, noble, self-forgetting love can give (for you can love me if you will); you may tell me that you scorn and detest me, but, since you have set me the example of plain speaking, I will answer that I do not believe you. But you will not do it! you choose rather to leave us miserable; and you coolly tell me it is the will of God that we should remain so. You may call this religion, but I call it wild fanaticism!'

'There is another life both for you and for me,' said I. 'If it be the will of God that we should sow in tears now, it is only that we may reap in joy hereafter. It is His will that we should not injure others by the gratification of our own earthly passions; and you have a mother, and sisters, and friends who would be seriously injured by your disgrace; and I, too, have friends, whose peace of mind shall never be sacrificed to my enjoyment, or yours either, with my consent; and if I were alone in the world, I have still my God and my religion, and I would sooner die than disgrace my calling and break my faith with heaven to obtain a few brief years of false and fleeting happiness — happiness sure to end in misery even here — for myself or any other!'

'There need be no disgrace, no misery or sacrifice in any quarter,' persisted he. 'I do not ask you to leave your home or defy the world's opinion.' But I need not repeat all his arguments. I refuted them to the best of my power; but that power was provokingly small, at the moment, for I was too much flurried with indignation — and even shame — that he should thus dare to address me, to retain sufficient command of thought and language to enable me adequately to contend against his powerful sophistries. Finding, however, that he could not be silenced by reason, and even covertly exulted in his seeming advantage, and ventured to deride those assertions I had not the coolness to prove, I changed my course and tried another plan.

'Do you really love me?' said I, seriously, pausing and looking him calmly in the face.

'Do I love you!' cried he.

'Truly?' I demanded.

His countenance brightened; he thought his triumph was at hand. He commenced a passionate protestation of the truth and fervour of his attachment, which I cut short by another question: —

'But is it not a selfish love? Have you enough disinterested affection to enable you to sacrifice your own pleasure to mine?'

'I would give my life to serve you.'

'I don't want your life; but have you enough real sympathy for my afflictions to induce you to make an effort to relieve them, at the risk of a little discomfort to yourself?'

'Try me, and see.'

'If you have, never mention this subject again. You cannot recur to it in any way without doubling the weight of those sufferings you so feelingly deplore. I have nothing left me but the solace of a good conscience and a hopeful trust in heaven, and you labour continually to rob me of these. If you persist, I must regard you as my deadliest foe.'

'But hear me a moment — '

'No, sir! You said you would give your life to serve me; I only ask your silence on one particular point. I have spoken plainly; and what I say I mean. If you torment me in this way any more, I must conclude that your protestations are entirely false, and that you hate me in your heart as fervently as you profess to love me!'

He bit his lip, and bent his eyes upon the ground in silence for a while.

'Then I must leave you,' said he at length, looking steadily upon me, as if with the last hope of detecting some token of irrepressible anguish or dismay awakened by those solemn words. 'I must leave you. I cannot live here, and be for ever silent on the all-absorbing subject of my thoughts and wishes.'

'Formerly, I believe, you spent but little of your time at home,' I answered; 'it will do you no harm to absent yourself again, for a while — if that be really necessary.'

'If that be really possible,' he muttered; 'and can you bid me go so coolly? Do you really wish it?'

'Most certainly I do. If you cannot see me without tormenting me as you have lately done, I would gladly say farewell and never see you more.'

He made no answer, but, bending from his horse, held out his hand towards me. I looked up at his face, and saw therein such a look of genuine agony of soul, that, whether bitter disappointment, or wounded pride, or lingering love, or burning wrath were uppermost, I could not hesitate to put my hand in his as frankly as if I bade a friend farewell. He grasped it very hard, and immediately put spurs to his horse and galloped away. Very soon after, I learned that he was gone to Paris, where he still is; and the longer he stays there the better for me.

I thank God for this deliverance!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

December 20th, 1826. — The fifth anniversary of my wedding-day, and, I trust, the last I shall spend under this roof. My resolution is formed, my plan concocted, and already partly put in execution. My conscience does not blame me, but while the purpose ripens let me beguile a few of these long winter evenings in stating the case for my own satisfaction: a dreary amusement enough, but having the air of a useful occupation, and being pursued as a task, it will suit me better than a lighter one.

In September, quiet Grassdale was again alive with a party of ladies and gentlemen (so called), consisting of the same individuals as those invited the year before last, with the addition of two or three others, among whom were Mrs. Hargrave and her younger daughter. The gentlemen and Lady Lowborough were invited for the pleasure and convenience of the host; the other ladies, I suppose, for the sake of appearances, and to keep me in check, and make me discreet and civil in my demeanour. But the ladies stayed only three weeks; the gentlemen, with two exceptions, above two months: for their hospitable entertainer was loth to part with them and be left alone with his bright intellect, his stainless conscience, and his loved and loving wife.

On the day of Lady Lowborough's arrival, I followed her into her chamber, and plainly told her that, if I found reason to believe that she still continued her criminal connection with Mr. Huntingdon, I should think it my absolute duty to inform her husband of the circumstance — or awaken his suspicions at least — however painful it might be, or however dreadful the consequences. She was startled at first by the declaration, so unexpected, and so determinately yet calmly delivered; but rallying in a moment, she coolly replied that, if I saw anything at all reprehensible or suspicious in her conduct, she would freely give me leave to tell his lordship all about it. Willing to be satisfied with this, I left her; and certainly I saw nothing thenceforth particularly reprehensible or suspicious in her demeanour towards her host; but then I had the other guests to attend to, and I did not watch them narrowly — for, to confess the truth, I feared to see anything between them. I no longer regarded it as any concern of mine, and if it was my duty to enlighten Lord Lowborough, it was a painful duty, and I dreaded to be called to perform it.

But my fears were brought to an end in a manner I had not anticipated. One evening, about a fortnight after the visitors' arrival, I had retired into the library to snatch a few minutes' respite from forced cheerfulness and wearisome discourse, for after so long a period of seclusion, dreary indeed as I had often found it, I could not always bear to be doing violence to my feelings, and goading my powers to talk, and smile and listen, and play the attentive hostess, or even the cheerful friend: I had just ensconced myself within the bow of the window, and was looking out upon the west, where the darkening hills rose sharply defined against the clear amber light of evening, that gradually blended and faded away into the pure, pale blue of the upper sky, where one bright star was shining through, as if to promise — 'When that dying light is gone, the world will not be left in darkness, and they who trust in God, whose minds are unbeclouded by the mists of unbelief and sin, are never wholly comfortless,' — when I heard a hurried step approaching, and Lord Lowborough entered. This room was still his favourite resort. He flung the door to with unusual violence, and cast his hat aside regardless where it fell. What could be the matter with him? His face was ghastly pale; his eyes were fixed upon the ground; his teeth clenched: his forehead glistened with the dews of agony. It was plain he knew his wrongs at last!

Unconscious of my presence, he began to pace the room in a state of fearful agitation, violently wringing his hands and uttering low groans or incoherent ejaculations. I made a movement to let him know that he was not alone; but he was too preoccupied to notice it. Perhaps, while his back was towards me, I might cross the room and slip away unobserved. I rose to make the attempt, but then he perceived me. He started and stood still a moment; then wiped his streaming forehead, and, advancing towards me, with a kind of unnatural composure, said in a deep, almost sepulchral tone, — 'Mrs. Huntingdon, I must leave you to-morrow.'

'To-morrow!' I repeated. 'I do not ask the cause.'

'You know it then, and you can be so calm!' said he, surveying me with profound astonishment, not unmingled with a kind of resentful bitterness, as it appeared to me.

'I have so long been aware of — ' I paused in time, and added, 'of my husband's character, that nothing shocks me.'

'But this — how long have you been aware of this?' demanded he, laying his clenched hand on the table beside him, and looking me keenly and fixedly in the face.

I felt like a criminal.

'Not long,' I answered.

'You knew it!' cried he, with bitter vehemence — 'and you did not tell me! You helped to deceive me!'

'My lord, I did not help to deceive you.'

'Then why did you not tell me?'

'Because I knew it would be painful to you. I hoped she would return to her duty, and then there would be no need to harrow your feelings with such — '

'O God! how long has this been going on? How long has it been, Mrs. Huntingdon? — Tell me — I must know!' exclaimed, with intense and fearful eagerness.

'Two years, I believe.'

'Great heaven! and she has duped me all this time!' He turned away with a suppressed groan of agony, and paced the room again in a paroxysm of renewed agitation. My heart smote me; but I would try to console him, though I knew not how to attempt it.

‘She is a wicked woman,’ I said. ‘She has basely deceived and betrayed you. She is as little worthy of your regret as she was of your affection. Let her injure you no further; abstract yourself from her, and stand alone.’

‘And you, Madam,’ said he sternly, arresting himself, and turning round upon me, ‘you have injured me too by this ungenerous concealment!’

There was a sudden revulsion in my feelings. Something rose within me, and urged me to resent this harsh return for my heartfelt sympathy, and defend myself with answering severity. Happily, I did not yield to the impulse. I saw his anguish as, suddenly smiting his forehead, he turned abruptly to the window, and, looking upward at the placid sky, murmured passionately, ‘O God, that I might die!’ — and felt that to add one drop of bitterness to that already overflowing cup would be ungenerous indeed. And yet I fear there was more coldness than gentleness in the quiet tone of my reply: — ‘I might offer many excuses that some would admit to be valid, but I will not attempt to enumerate them — ’

‘I know them,’ said he hastily: ‘you would say that it was no business of yours: that I ought to have taken care of myself; that if my own blindness has led me into this pit of hell, I have no right to blame another for giving me credit for a larger amount of sagacity than I possessed — ’

‘I confess I was wrong,’ continued I, without regarding this bitter interruption; ‘but whether want of courage or mistaken kindness was the cause of my error, I think you blame me too severely. I told Lady Lowborough two weeks ago, the very hour she came, that I should certainly think it my duty to inform you if she continued to deceive you: she gave me full liberty to do so if I should see anything reprehensible or suspicious in her conduct; I have seen nothing; and I trusted she had altered her course.’

He continued gazing from the window while I spoke, and did not answer, but, stung by the recollections my words awakened, stamped his foot upon the floor, ground his teeth, and corrugated his brow, like one under the influence of acute physical pain.

‘It was wrong, it was wrong!’ he muttered at length. ‘Nothing can excuse it; nothing can atone for it, — for nothing can recall those years of cursed credulity; nothing obliterate them! — nothing, nothing!’ he repeated in a whisper, whose despairing bitterness precluded all resentment.

‘When I put the case to myself, I own it was wrong,’ I answered; ‘but I can only now regret that I did not see it in this light before, and that, as you say, nothing can recall the past.’

Something in my voice or in the spirit of this answer seemed to alter his mood. Turning towards me, and attentively surveying my face by the dim light, he said, in a milder tone than he had yet employed, — ‘You, too, have suffered, I suppose.’

'I suffered much, at first.'

'When was that?'

'Two years ago; and two years hence you will be as calm as I am now, and far, far happier, I trust, for you are a man, and free to act as you please.'

Something like a smile, but a very bitter one, crossed his face for a moment.

'You have not been happy, lately?' he said, with a kind of effort to regain composure, and a determination to waive the further discussion of his own calamity.

'Happy?' I repeated, almost provoked at such a question. 'Could I be so, with such a husband?'

'I have noticed a change in your appearance since the first years of your marriage,' pursued he: 'I observed it to — to that infernal demon,' he muttered between his teeth; 'and he said it was your own sour temper that was eating away your bloom: it was making you old and ugly before your time, and had already made his fireside as comfortless as a convent cell. You smile, Mrs. Huntingdon; nothing moves you. I wish my nature were as calm as yours.'

'My nature was not originally calm,' said I. 'I have learned to appear so by dint of hard lessons and many repeated efforts.'

At this juncture Mr. Hattersley burst into the room.

'Hallo, Lowborough!' he began — 'Oh! I beg your pardon,' he exclaimed on seeing me. 'I didn't know it was a *tête-à-tête*. Cheer up, man,' he continued, giving Lord Lowborough a thump on the back, which caused the latter to recoil from him with looks of ineffable disgust and irritation. 'Come, I want to speak with you a bit.'

'Speak, then.'

'But I'm not sure it would be quite agreeable to the lady what I have to say.'

'Then it would not be agreeable to me,' said his lordship, turning to leave the room.

'Yes, it would,' cried the other, following him into the hall. 'If you've the heart of a man, it would be the very ticket for you. It's just this, my lad,' he continued, rather lowering his voice, but not enough to prevent me from hearing every word he said, though the half-closed door stood between us. 'I think you're an ill-used man — nay, now, don't flare up; I don't want to offend you: it's only my rough way of talking. I must speak right out, you know, or else not at all; and I'm come — stop now! let me explain — I'm come to offer you my services, for though Huntingdon is my friend, he's a devilish scamp, as we all know, and I'll be your friend for the nonce. I know what it is you want, to make matters straight: it's just to exchange a shot with him, and then you'll feel yourself all right again; and if an accident happens — why, that'll be all right too, I daresay, to a desperate fellow like you. Come now, give me your hand, and don't look so black upon it. Name time and place, and I'll manage the rest.'

'That,' answered the more low, deliberate voice of Lord Lowborough, 'is just the remedy my own heart, or the devil within it, suggested — to meet him, and not to part without blood. Whether I or he should fall, or both, it would be an inexpressible relief to me, if — '

'Just so! Well then, — '

'No!' exclaimed his lordship, with deep, determined emphasis. 'Though I hate him from my heart, and should rejoice at any calamity that could befall him, I'll leave him to God; and though I abhor my own life, I'll leave that, too, to Him that gave it.'

'But you see, in this case,' pleaded Hattersley —

'I'll not hear you!' exclaimed his companion, hastily turning away. 'Not another word! I've enough to do against the fiend within me.'

'Then you're a white-livered fool, and I wash my hands of you,' grumbled the tempter, as he swung himself round and departed.

'Right, right, Lord Lowborough,' cried I, darting out and clasping his burning hand, as he was moving away to the stairs. 'I begin to think the world is not worthy of you!' Not understanding this sudden ebullition, he turned upon me with a stare of gloomy, bewildered amazement, that made me ashamed of the impulse to which I had yielded; but soon a more humanised expression dawned upon his countenance, and before I could withdraw my hand, he pressed it kindly, while a gleam of genuine feeling flashed from his eyes as he murmured, 'God help us both!'

'Amen!' responded I; and we parted.

I returned to the drawing-room, where, doubtless, my presence would be expected by most, desired by one or two. In the ante-room was Mr. Hattersley, railing against Lord Lowborough's poltroonery before a select audience, viz. Mr. Huntingdon, who was lounging against the table, exulting in his own treacherous villainy, and laughing his victim to scorn, and Mr. Grimsby, standing by, quietly rubbing his hands and chuckling with fiendish satisfaction.

In the drawing-room I found Lady Lowborough, evidently in no very enviable state of mind, and struggling hard to conceal her discomposure by an overstrained affectation of unusual cheerfulness and vivacity, very uncalled-for under the circumstances, for she had herself given the company to understand that her husband had received unpleasant intelligence from home, which necessitated his immediate departure, and that he had suffered it so to bother his mind that it had brought on a bilious headache, owing to which, and the preparations he judged necessary to hasten his departure, she believed they would not have the pleasure of seeing him to-night. However, she asserted, it was only a business concern, and so she did not intend it should trouble her. She was just saying this as I entered, and she darted upon me such a glance of hardihood and defiance as at once astonished and revolted me.

'But I am troubled,' continued she, 'and vexed too, for I think it my duty to accompany his lordship, and of course I am very sorry to part with all my kind friends so unexpectedly and so soon.'

'And yet, Annabella,' said Esther, who was sitting beside her, 'I never saw you in better spirits in my life.'

'Precisely so, my love: because I wish to make the best of your society, since it appears this is to be the last night I am to enjoy it till heaven knows when; and I wish to leave a good impression on you all,' — she glanced round, and seeing her aunt's eye fixed upon her, rather too scrutinizingly, as she probably thought, she started up and continued: 'To which end I'll give you a song — shall I, aunt? shall I, Mrs. Huntingdon? shall I ladies and gentlemen all? Very well. I'll do my best to amuse you.'

She and Lord Lowborough occupied the apartments next to mine. I know not how she passed the night, but I lay awake the greater part of it listening to his heavy step pacing monotonously up and down his dressing-room, which was nearest my chamber. Once I heard him pause and throw something out of the window with a passionate ejaculation; and in the morning, after they were gone, a keen-bladed clasp-knife was found on the grass-plot below; a razor, likewise, was snapped in two and thrust deep into the cinders of the grate, but partially corroded by the decaying embers. So strong had been the temptation to end his miserable life, so determined his resolution to resist it.

My heart bled for him as I lay listening to that ceaseless tread. Hitherto I had thought too much of myself, too little of him: now I forgot my own afflictions, and thought only of his; of the ardent affection so miserably wasted, the fond faith so cruelly betrayed, the — no, I will not attempt to enumerate his wrongs — but I hated his wife and my husband more intensely than ever, and not for my sake, but for his.

They departed early in the morning, before any one else was down, except myself, and just as I was leaving my room Lord Lowborough was descending to take his place in the carriage, where his lady was already ensconced; and Arthur (or Mr. Huntingdon, as I prefer calling him, for the other is my child's name) had the gratuitous insolence to come out in his dressing-gown to bid his 'friend' good-by.

'What, going already, Lowborough!' said he. 'Well, good-morning.' He smilingly offered his hand.

I think the other would have knocked him down, had he not instinctively started back before that bony fist quivering with rage and clenched till the knuckles gleamed white and glistening through the skin. Looking upon him with a countenance livid with furious hate, Lord Lowborough muttered between his closed teeth a deadly execration he would not have uttered had he been calm enough to choose his words, and departed.

'I call that an unchristian spirit now,' said the villain. 'But I'd never give up an old friend for the sake of a wife. You may have mine if you like, and I call that handsome; I can do no more than offer restitution, can I?'

But Lowborough had gained the bottom of the stairs, and was now crossing the hall; and Mr. Huntingdon, leaning over the banisters, called out, ‘Give my love to Annabella! and I wish you both a happy journey,’ and withdrew, laughing, to his chamber.

He subsequently expressed himself rather glad she was gone. ‘She was so deuced imperious and exacting,’ said he. ‘Now I shall be my own man again, and feel rather more at my ease.’

CHAPTER XXXIX

My greatest source of uneasiness, in this time of trial, was my son, whom his father and his father's friends delighted to encourage in all the embryo vices a little child can show, and to instruct in all the evil habits he could acquire — in a word, to 'make a man of him' was one of their staple amusements; and I need say no more to justify my alarm on his account, and my determination to deliver him at any hazard from the hands of such instructors. I first attempted to keep him always with me, or in the nursery, and gave Rachel particular injunctions never to let him come down to dessert as long as these 'gentlemen' stayed; but it was no use: these orders were immediately countermanded and overruled by his father; he was not going to have the little fellow moped to death between an old nurse and a cursed fool of a mother. So the little fellow came down every evening in spite of his cross mamma, and learned to tipple wine like papa, to swear like Mr. Hattersley, and to have his own way like a man, and sent mamma to the devil when she tried to prevent him. To see such things done with the roguish naïveté of that pretty little child, and hear such things spoken by that small infantile voice, was as peculiarly piquant and irresistibly droll to them as it was inexpressibly distressing and painful to me; and when he had set the table in a roar he would look round delightedly upon them all, and add his shrill laugh to theirs. But if that beaming blue eye rested on me, its light would vanish for a moment, and he would say, in some concern, 'Mamma, why don't you laugh? Make her laugh, papa — she never will.'

Hence was I obliged to stay among these human brutes, watching an opportunity to get my child away from them instead of leaving them immediately after the removal of the cloth, as I should always otherwise have done. He was never willing to go, and I frequently had to carry him away by force, for which he thought me very cruel and unjust; and sometimes his father would insist upon my letting him remain; and then I would leave him to his kind friends, and retire to indulge my bitterness and despair alone, or to rack my brains for a remedy to this great evil.

But here again I must do Mr. Hargrave the justice to acknowledge that I never saw him laugh at the child's misdemeanours, nor heard him utter a word of encouragement to his aspirations after manly accomplishments. But when anything very extraordinary was said or done by the infant profligate, I noticed, at times, a peculiar expression in his face that I could neither interpret nor define: a slight twitching about the muscles of the mouth; a sudden flash in the eye, as he darted a sudden glance at the child and then at me: and then I could fancy there arose a gleam of hard, keen, sombre satisfaction in his countenance at the look of impotent wrath and anguish he was too certain to behold in mine. But on one occasion, when Arthur had been behaving particularly ill, and Mr. Huntingdon and his guests had been particularly provoking and insulting to me in their encouragement of him, and I particularly anxious to get him out of the room, and on the very point of demeaning myself by a burst of uncontrollable passion — Mr. Hargrave suddenly rose from his seat with an aspect of stern determination, lifted the child from his father's knee, where he was sitting half-tipsy, cocking his head and laughing at me, and execrating me with words he little knew the meaning of, handed him out of the room, and, setting him down in the hall, held the door open for me, gravely bowed as I withdrew, and closed it after me. I heard high words exchanged between him and his already half-inebriated host as I departed, leading away my bewildered and disconcerted boy.

But this should not continue: my child must not be abandoned to this corruption: better far that he should live in poverty and obscurity, with a fugitive mother, than in luxury and affluence with such a father. These guests might not be with us long, but they would return again: and he, the most injurious of the whole, his child's worst enemy, would still remain. I could endure it for myself, but for my son it must be borne no longer: the world's opinion and the feelings of my friends must be alike unheeded here, at least — alike unable to deter me from my duty. But where should I find an asylum, and how obtain subsistence for us both? Oh, I would take my precious charge at early dawn, take the coach to M — , flee to the port of — , cross the Atlantic, and seek a quiet, humble home in New England, where I would support myself and him by the labour of my hands. The palette and the easel, my darling playmates once, must be my sober toil-fellows now. But was I sufficiently skilful as an artist to obtain my livelihood in a strange land, without friends and without recommendation? No; I must wait a little; I must labour hard to improve my talent, and to produce something worth while as a specimen of my powers, something to speak favourably for me, whether as an actual painter or a teacher. Brilliant success, of course, I did not look for, but some degree of security from positive failure was indispensable: I must not take my son to starve. And then I must have money for the journey, the passage, and some little to support us in our retreat in case I should be unsuccessful at first: and not too little either: for who could tell how long I might have to struggle with the indifference or neglect of others, or my own inexperience or inability to suit their tastes?

What should I do then? Apply to my brother and explain my circumstances and my resolves to him? No, no: even if I told him all my grievances, which I should be very reluctant to do, he would be certain to disapprove of the step: it would seem like madness to him, as it would to my uncle and aunt, or to Milicent. No; I must have patience and gather a hoard of my own. Rachel should be my only confidante — I thought I could persuade her into the scheme; and she should help me, first, to find out a picture-dealer in some distant town; then, through her means, I would privately sell what pictures I had on hand that would do for such a purpose, and some of those I should thereafter paint. Besides this, I would contrive to dispose of my jewels, not the family jewels, but the few I brought with me from home, and those my uncle gave me on my marriage. A few months' arduous toil might well be borne by me with such an end in view; and in the interim my son could not be much more injured than he was already.

Having formed this resolution, I immediately set to work to accomplish it, I might possibly have been induced to wax cool upon it afterwards, or perhaps to keep weighing the pros and cons in my mind till the latter overbalanced the former, and I was driven to relinquish the project altogether, or delay the execution of it to an indefinite period, had not something occurred to confirm me in that determination, to which I still adhere, which I still think I did well to form, and shall do better to execute.

Since Lord Lowborough's departure I had regarded the library as entirely my own, a secure retreat at all hours of the day. None of our gentlemen had the smallest pretensions to a literary taste, except Mr. Hargrave; and he, at present, was quite contented with the newspapers and periodicals of the day. And if, by any chance, he should look in here, I felt assured he would soon depart on seeing me, for, instead of becoming less cool and distant towards me, he had become decidedly more so since the departure of his mother and sisters, which was just what I wished. Here, then, I set up my easel, and here I worked at my canvas from daylight till dusk, with very little intermission, saving when pure necessity, or my duties to little Arthur, called me away: for I still thought proper to devote some portion of every day exclusively to his instruction and amusement. But, contrary to my expectation, on the third morning, while I was thus employed, Mr. Hargrave did look in, and did not immediately withdraw on seeing me. He apologized for his intrusion, and said he was only come for a book; but when he had got it, he condescended to cast a glance over my picture. Being a man of taste, he had something to say on this subject as well as another, and having modestly commented on it, without much encouragement from me, he proceeded to expatiate on the art in general. Receiving no encouragement in that either, he dropped it, but did not depart.

'You don't give us much of your company, Mrs. Huntingdon,' observed he, after a brief pause, during which I went on coolly mixing and tempering my colours; 'and I cannot wonder at it, for you must be heartily sick of us all. I myself am so thoroughly ashamed of my companions, and so weary of their irrational conversation and pursuits — now that there is no one to humanize them and keep them in check, since you have justly abandoned us to our own devices — that I think I shall presently withdraw from amongst them, probably within this week; and I cannot suppose you will regret my departure.'

He paused. I did not answer.

'Probably,' he added, with a smile, 'your only regret on the subject will be that I do not take all my companions along with me. I flatter myself, at times, that though among them I am not of them; but it is natural that you should be glad to get rid of me. I may regret this, but I cannot blame you for it.'

'I shall not rejoice at your departure, for you can conduct yourself like a gentleman,' said I, thinking it but right to make some acknowledgment for his good behaviour; 'but I must confess I shall rejoice to bid adieu to the rest, inhospitable as it may appear.'

'No one can blame you for such an avowal,' replied he gravely: 'not even the gentlemen themselves, I imagine. I'll just tell you,' he continued, as if actuated by a sudden resolution, 'what was said last night in the dining-room, after you left us: perhaps you will not mind it, as you're so very philosophical on certain points,' he added with a slight sneer. 'They were talking about Lord Lowborough and his delectable lady, the cause of whose sudden departure is no secret amongst them; and her character is so well known to them all, that, nearly related to me as she is, I could not attempt to defend it. Curse me!' he muttered, par parenthese, 'if I don't have vengeance for this! If the villain must disgrace the family, must he blazon it abroad to every low-bred knave of his acquaintance? I beg your pardon, Mrs. Huntingdon. Well, they were talking of these things, and some of them remarked that, as she was separated from her husband, he might see her again when he pleased.'

'"Thank you," said he; "I've had enough of her for the present: I'll not trouble to see her, unless she comes to me."

'"Then what do you mean to do, Huntingdon, when we're gone?" said Ralph Hattersley. "Do you mean to turn from the error of your ways, and be a good husband, a good father, and so forth; as I do, when I get shut of you and all these rollicking devils you call your friends? I think it's time; and your wife is fifty times too good for you, you know — "

'And he added some praise of you, which you would not thank me for repeating, nor him for uttering; proclaiming it aloud, as he did, without delicacy or discrimination, in an audience where it seemed profanation to utter your name: himself utterly incapable of understanding or appreciating your real excellences. Huntingdon, meanwhile, sat quietly drinking his wine, — or looking smilingly into his glass and offering no interruption or reply, till Hattersley shouted out, — "Do you hear me, man?"

'"Yes, go on," said he.

'"Nay, I've done," replied the other: "I only want to know if you intend to take my advice."

'"What advice?"

'"To turn over a new leaf, you double-dyed scoundrel," shouted Ralph, "and beg your wife's pardon, and be a good boy for the future."

'"My wife! what wife? I have no wife," replied Huntingdon, looking innocently up from his glass, "or if I have, look you, gentlemen: I value her so highly that any one among you, that can fancy her, may have her and welcome: you may, by Jove, and my blessing into the bargain!"

'I — hem — someone asked if he really meant what he said; upon which he solemnly swore he did, and no mistake. What do you think of that, Mrs. Huntingdon?' asked Mr. Hargrave, after a short pause, during which I had felt he was keenly examining my half-averted face.

'I say,' replied I, calmly, 'that what he prizes so lightly will not be long in his possession.'

'You cannot mean that you will break your heart and die for the detestable conduct of an infamous villain like that!'

'By no means: my heart is too thoroughly dried to be broken in a hurry, and I mean to live as long as I can.'

'Will you leave him then?'

'Yes.'

'When: and how?' asked he, eagerly.

'When I am ready, and how I can manage it most effectually.'

'But your child?'

'My child goes with me.'

'He will not allow it.'

'I shall not ask him.'

'Ah, then, it is a secret flight you meditate! but with whom, Mrs. Huntingdon?'

'With my son: and possibly, his nurse.'

'Alone — and unprotected! But where can you go? what can you do? He will follow you and bring you back.'

'I have laid my plans too well for that. Let me once get clear of Grassdale, and I shall consider myself safe.'

Mr. Hargrave advanced one step towards me, looked me in the face, and drew in his breath to speak; but that look, that heightened colour, that sudden sparkle of the eye, made my blood rise in wrath: I abruptly turned away, and, snatching up my brush, began to dash away at my canvas with rather too much energy for the good of the picture.

'Mrs. Huntingdon,' said he with bitter solemnity, 'you are cruel — cruel to me — cruel to yourself.'

'Mr. Hargrave, remember your promise.'

'I must speak: my heart will burst if I don't! I have been silent long enough, and you must hear me!' cried he, boldly intercepting my retreat to the door. 'You tell me you owe no allegiance to your husband; he openly declares himself weary of you, and calmly gives you up to anybody that will take you; you are about to leave him; no one will believe that you go alone; all the world will say, "She has left him at last, and who can wonder at it? Few can blame her, fewer still can pity him; but who is the companion of her flight?" Thus you will have no credit for your virtue (if you call it such): even your best friends will not believe in it; because it is monstrous, and not to be credited but by those who suffer, from the effects of it, such cruel torments that they know it to be indeed reality. But what can you do in the cold, rough world alone? you, a young and inexperienced woman, delicately nurtured, and utterly — '

'In a word, you would advise me to stay where I am,' interrupted I. 'Well, I'll see about it.'

'By all means, leave him!' cried he earnestly; 'but not alone! Helen! let me protect you!'

'Never! while heaven spares my reason,' replied I, snatching away the hand he had presumed to seize and press between his own. But he was in for it now; he had fairly broken the barrier: he was completely roused, and determined to hazard all for victory.

'I must not be denied!' exclaimed he, vehemently; and seizing both my hands, he held them very tight, but dropped upon his knee, and looked up in my face with a half-imploring, half-imperious gaze. 'You have no reason now: you are flying in the face of heaven's decrees. God has designed me to be your comfort and protector — I feel it, I know it as certainly as if a voice from heaven declared, "Ye twain shall be one flesh" — and you spurn me from you — '

'Let me go, Mr. Hargrave!' said I, sternly. But he only tightened his grasp.

'Let me go!' I repeated, quivering with indignation.

His face was almost opposite the window as he knelt. With a slight start, I saw him glance towards it; and then a gleam of malicious triumph lit up his countenance. Looking over my shoulder, I beheld a shadow just retiring round the corner.

'That is Grimsby,' said he deliberately. 'He will report what he has seen to Huntingdon and all the rest, with such embellishments as he thinks proper. He has no love for you, Mrs. Huntingdon — no reverence for your sex, no belief in virtue, no admiration for its image. He will give such a version of this story as will leave no doubt at all about your character, in the minds of those who hear it. Your fair fame is gone; and nothing that I or you can say can ever retrieve it. But give me the power to protect you, and show me the villain that dares to insult!'

'No one has ever dared to insult me as you are doing now!' said I, at length releasing my hands, and recoiling from him.

'I do not insult you,' cried he: 'I worship you. You are my angel, my divinity! I lay my powers at your feet, and you must and shall accept them!' he exclaimed, impetuously starting to his feet. 'I will be your consoler and defender! and if your conscience upbraid you for it, say I overcame you, and you could not choose but yield!'

I never saw a man go terribly excited. He precipitated himself towards me. I snatched up my palette-knife and held it against him. This startled him: he stood and gazed at me in astonishment; I daresay I looked as fierce and resolute as he. I moved to the bell, and put my hand upon the cord. This tamed him still more. With a half-authoritative, half-deprecating wave of the hand, he sought to deter me from ringing.

'Stand off, then!' said I; he stepped back. 'And listen to me. I don't like you,' I continued, as deliberately and emphatically as I could, to give the greater efficacy to my words; 'and if I were divorced from my husband, or if he were dead, I would not marry you. There now! I hope you're satisfied.'

His face grew blanched with anger.

'I am satisfied,' he replied, with bitter emphasis, 'that you are the most cold-hearted, unnatural, ungrateful woman I ever yet beheld!'

'Ungrateful, sir?'

'Ungrateful.'

'No, Mr. Hargrave, I am not. For all the good you ever did me, or ever wished to do, I most sincerely thank you: for all the evil you have done me, and all you would have done, I pray God to pardon you, and make you of a better mind.' Here the door was thrown open, and Messrs. Huntingdon and Hattersley appeared without. The latter remained in the hall, busy with his ramrod and his gun; the former walked in, and stood with his back to the fire, surveying Mr. Hargrave and me, particularly the former, with a smile of insupportable meaning, accompanied as it was by the impudence of his brazen brow, and the sly, malicious, twinkle of his eye.

'Well, sir?' said Hargrave, interrogatively, and with the air of one prepared to stand on the defensive.

'Well, sir,' returned his host.

'We want to know if you are at liberty to join us in a go at the pheasants, Walter,' interposed Hattersley from without. 'Come! there shall be nothing shot besides, except a puss or two; I'll vouch for that.'

Walter did not answer, but walked to the window to collect his faculties. Arthur uttered a low whistle, and followed him with his eyes. A slight flush of anger rose to Hargrave's cheek; but in a moment he turned calmly round, and said carelessly:

'I came here to bid farewell to Mrs. Huntingdon, and tell her I must go to-morrow.'

'Humph! You're mighty sudden in your resolution. What takes you off so soon, may I ask?'

'Business,' returned he, repelling the other's incredulous sneer with a glance of scornful defiance.

'Very good,' was the reply; and Hargrave walked away. Thereupon Mr. Huntingdon, gathering his coat-laps under his arms, and setting his shoulder against the mantel-piece, turned to me, and, addressing me in a low voice, scarcely above his breath, poured forth a volley of the vilest and grossest abuse it was possible for the imagination to conceive or the tongue to utter. I did not attempt to interrupt him; but my spirit kindled within me, and when he had done, I replied, 'If your accusation were true, Mr. Huntingdon, how dare you blame me?'

'She's hit it, by Jove!' cried Hattersley, rearing his gun against the wall; and, stepping into the room, he took his precious friend by the arm, and attempted to drag him away. 'Come, my lad,' he muttered; 'true or false, you've no right to blame her, you know, nor him either; after what you said last night. So come along.'

There was something implied here that I could not endure.

'Dare you suspect me, Mr. Hattersley?' said I, almost beside myself with fury.

'Nay, nay, I suspect nobody. It's all right, it's all right. So come along, Huntingdon, you blackguard.'

'She can't deny it!' cried the gentleman thus addressed, grinning in mingled rage and triumph. 'She can't deny it if her life depended on it!' and muttering some more abusive language, he walked into the hall, and took up his hat and gun from the table.

'I scorn to justify myself to you!' said I. 'But you,' turning to Hattersley, 'if you presume to have any doubts on the subject, ask Mr. Hargrave.'

At this they simultaneously burst into a rude laugh that made my whole frame tingle to the fingers' ends.

'Where is he? I'll ask him myself!' said I, advancing towards them.

Suppressing a new burst of merriment, Hattersley pointed to the outer door. It was half open. His brother-in-law was standing on the front without.

'Mr. Hargrave, will you please to step this way?' said I.

He turned and looked at me in grave surprise.

'Step this way, if you please!' I repeated, in so determined a manner that he could not, or did not choose to resist its authority. Somewhat reluctantly he ascended the steps and advanced a pace or two into the hall.

'And tell those gentlemen,' I continued — 'these men, whether or not I yielded to your solicitations.'

'I don't understand you, Mrs. Huntingdon.'

'You do understand me, sir; and I charge you, upon your honour as a gentleman (if you have any), to answer truly. Did I, or did I not?'

'No,' muttered he, turning away.

'Speak up, sir; they can't hear you. Did I grant your request?

'You did not.'

'No, I'll be sworn she didn't,' said Hattersley, 'or he'd never look so black.'

'I'm willing to grant you the satisfaction of a gentleman, Huntingdon,' said Mr. Hargrave, calmly addressing his host, but with a bitter sneer upon his countenance.

'Go to the deuce!' replied the latter, with an impatient jerk of the head. Hargrave withdrew with a look of cold disdain, saying, — 'You know where to find me, should you feel disposed to send a friend.'

Muttered oaths and curses were all the answer this intimation obtained.

'Now, Huntingdon, you see!' said Hattersley. 'Clear as the day.'

‘I don’t care what he sees,’ said I, ‘or what he imagines; but you, Mr. Hattersley, when you hear my name belied and slandered, will you defend it?’

‘I will.’

I instantly departed and shut myself into the library. What could possess me to make such a request of such a man I cannot tell; but drowning men catch at straws: they had driven me desperate between them; I hardly knew what I said. There was no other to preserve my name from being blackened and aspersed among this nest of boon companions, and through them, perhaps, into the world; and beside my abandoned wretch of a husband, the base, malignant Grimsby, and the false villain Hargrave, this boorish ruffian, coarse and brutal as he was, shone like a glow-worm in the dark, among its fellow worms.

What a scene was this! Could I ever have imagined that I should be doomed to bear such insults under my own roof — to hear such things spoken in my presence; nay, spoken to me and of me; and by those who arrogated to themselves the name of gentlemen? And could I have imagined that I should have been able to endure it as calmly, and to repel their insults as firmly and as boldly as I had done? A hardness such as this is taught by rough experience and despair alone.

Such thoughts as these chased one another through my mind, as I paced to and fro the room, and longed — oh, how I longed — to take my child and leave them now, without an hour’s delay! But it could not be; there was work before me: hard work, that must be done.

‘Then let me do it,’ said I, ‘and lose not a moment in vain repinings and idle chafings against my fate, and those who influence it.’

And conquering my agitation with a powerful effort, I immediately resumed my task, and laboured hard all day.

Mr. Hargrave did depart on the morrow; and I have never seen him since. The others stayed on for two or three weeks longer; but I kept aloof from them as much as possible, and still continued my labour, and have continued it, with almost unabated ardour, to the present day. I soon acquainted Rachel with my design, confiding all my motives and intentions to her ear, and, much to my agreeable surprise, found little difficulty in persuading her to enter into my views. She is a sober, cautious woman, but she so hates her master, and so loves her mistress and her nursling, that after several ejaculations, a few faint objections, and many tears and lamentations that I should be brought to such a pass, she applauded my resolution and consented to aid me with all her might: on one condition only: that she might share my exile: otherwise, she was utterly inexorable, regarding it as perfect madness for me and Arthur to go alone. With touching generosity, she modestly offered to aid me with her little hoard of savings, hoping I would ‘excuse her for the liberty, but really, if I would do her the favour to accept it as a loan, she would be very happy.’ Of course I could not think of such a thing; but now, thank heaven, I have gathered a little hoard of my own, and my preparations are so far advanced that I am looking forward to a speedy emancipation. Only let the stormy severity of this winter weather be somewhat abated, and then, some morning, Mr. Huntingdon will come down to a solitary breakfast-table, and perhaps be clamouring through the house for his invisible wife and child, when they are some fifty miles on their way to the Western world, or it may be more: for we shall leave him hours before the dawn, and it is not probable he will discover the loss of both until the day is far advanced.

I am fully alive to the evils that may and must result upon the step I am about to take; but I never waver in my resolution, because I never forget my son. It was only this morning, while I pursued my usual employment, he was sitting at my feet, quietly playing with the shreds of canvas I had thrown upon the carpet; but his mind was otherwise occupied, for, in a while, he looked up wistfully in my face, and gravely asked, — 'Mamma, why are you wicked?'

'Who told you I was wicked, love?'

'Rachel.'

'No, Arthur, Rachel never said so, I am certain.'

'Well, then, it was papa,' replied he, thoughtfully. Then, after a reflective pause, he added, 'At least, I'll tell you how it was I got to know: when I'm with papa, if I say mamma wants me, or mamma says I'm not to do something that he tells me to do, he always says, "Mamma be damned," and Rachel says it's only wicked people that are damned. So, mamma, that's why I think you must be wicked: and I wish you wouldn't.'

'My dear child, I am not. Those are bad words, and wicked people often say them of others better than themselves. Those words cannot make people be damned, nor show that they deserve it. God will judge us by our own thoughts and deeds, not by what others say about us. And when you hear such words spoken, Arthur, remember never to repeat them: it is wicked to say such things of others, not to have them said against you.'

'Then it's papa that's wicked,' said he, ruefully.

'Papa is wrong to say such things, and you will be very wrong to imitate him now that you know better.'

'What is imitate?'

'To do as he does.'

'Does he know better?'

'Perhaps he does; but that is nothing to you.'

'If he doesn't, you ought to tell him, mamma.'

'I have told him.'

The little moralist paused and pondered. I tried in vain to divert his mind from the subject.

'I'm sorry papa's wicked,' said he mournfully, at length, 'for I don't want him to go to hell.' And so saying he burst into tears.

I consoled him with the hope that perhaps his papa would alter and become good before he died — ; but is it not time to deliver him from such a parent?

CHAPTER XL

January 10th, 1827. — While writing the above, yesterday evening, I sat in the drawing-room. Mr. Huntingdon was present, but, as I thought, asleep on the sofa behind me. He had risen, however, unknown to me, and, actuated by some base spirit of curiosity, been looking over my shoulder for I know not how long; for when I had laid aside my pen, and was about to close the book, he suddenly placed his hand upon it, and saying, — 'With your leave, my dear, I'll have a look at this,' forcibly wrested it from me, and, drawing a chair to the table, composedly sat down to examine it: turning back leaf after leaf to find an explanation of what he had read. Unluckily for me, he was more sober that night than he usually is at such an hour.

Of course I did not leave him to pursue this occupation in quiet: I made several attempts to snatch the book from his hands, but he held it too firmly for that; I upbraided him in bitterness and scorn for his mean and dishonourable conduct, but that had no effect upon him; and, finally, I extinguished both the candles, but he only wheeled round to the fire, and raising a blaze sufficient for his purposes, calmly continued the investigation. I had serious thoughts of getting a pitcher of water and extinguishing that light too; but it was evident his curiosity was too keenly excited to be quenched by that, and the more I manifested my anxiety to baffle his scrutiny, the greater would be his determination to persist in it besides it was too late.

'It seems very interesting, love,' said he, lifting his head and turning to where I stood, wringing my hands in silent rage and anguish; 'but it's rather long; I'll look at it some other time; and meanwhile I'll trouble you for your keys, my dear.'

'What keys?'

'The keys of your cabinet, desk, drawers, and whatever else you possess,' said he, rising and holding out his hand.

'I've not got them,' I replied. The key of my desk, in fact, was at that moment in the lock, and the others were attached to it.

'Then you must send for them,' said he; 'and if that old devil, Rachel, doesn't immediately deliver them up, she tramps bag and baggage tomorrow.'

'She doesn't know where they are,' I answered, quietly placing my hand upon them, and taking them from the desk, as I thought, unobserved. 'I know, but I shall not give them up without a reason.'

'And I know, too,' said he, suddenly seizing my closed hand and rudely abstracting them from it. He then took up one of the candles and relighted it by thrusting it into the fire.

'Now, then,' sneered he, 'we must have a confiscation of property. But, first, let us take a peep into the studio.'

And putting the keys into his pocket, he walked into the library. I followed, whether with the dim idea of preventing mischief, or only to know the worst, I can hardly tell. My painting materials were laid together on the corner table, ready for to-morrow's use, and only covered with a cloth. He soon spied them out, and putting down the candle, deliberately proceeded to cast them into the fire: palette, paints, bladders, pencils, brushes, varnish: I saw them all consumed: the palette-knives snapped in two, the oil and turpentine sent hissing and roaring up the chimney. He then rang the bell.

'Benson, take those things away,' said he, pointing to the easel, canvas, and stretcher; 'and tell the housemaid she may kindle the fire with them: your mistress won't want them any more.'

Benson paused aghast and looked at me.

'Take them away, Benson,' said I; and his master muttered an oath.

'And this and all, sir?' said the astonished servant, referring to the half-finished picture.

'That and all,' replied the master; and the things were cleared away.

Mr. Huntingdon then went up-stairs. I did not attempt to follow him, but remained seated in the arm-chair, speechless, tearless, and almost motionless, till he returned about half-an-hour after, and walking up to me, held the candle in my face and peered into my eyes with looks and laughter too insulting to be borne. With a sudden stroke of my hand I dashed the candle to the floor.

'Hal-lo!' muttered he, starting back; 'she's the very devil for spite. Did ever any mortal see such eyes? — they shine in the dark like a cat's. Oh, you're a sweet one!' So saying, he gathered up the candle and the candlestick. The former being broken as well as extinguished, he rang for another.

'Benson, your mistress has broken the candle; bring another.'

'You expose yourself finely,' observed I, as the man departed.

'I didn't say I'd broken it, did I?' returned he. He then threw my keys into my lap, saying, — 'There! you'll find nothing gone but your money, and the jewels, and a few little trifles I thought it advisable to take into my own possession, lest your mercantile spirit should be tempted to turn them into gold. I've left you a few sovereigns in your purse, which I expect to last you through the month; at all events, when you want more you will be so good as to give me an account of how that's spent. I shall put you upon a small monthly allowance, in future, for your own private expenses; and you needn't trouble yourself any more about my concerns; I shall look out for a steward, my dear — I won't expose you to the temptation. And as for the household matters, Mrs. Greaves must be very particular in keeping her accounts; we must go upon an entirely new plan — '

'What great discovery have you made now, Mr. Huntingdon? Have I attempted to defraud you?'

'Not in money matters, exactly, it seems; but it's best to keep out of the way of temptation.'

Here Benson entered with the candles, and there followed a brief interval of silence; I sitting still in my chair, and he standing with his back to the fire, silently triumphing in my despair.

‘And so,’ said he at length, ‘you thought to disgrace me, did you, by running away and turning artist, and supporting yourself by the labour of your hands, forsooth? And you thought to rob me of my son, too, and bring him up to be a dirty Yankee tradesman, or a low, beggarly painter?’

‘Yes, to obviate his becoming such a gentleman as his father.’

‘It’s well you couldn’t keep your own secret — ha, ha! It’s well these women must be blabbing. If they haven’t a friend to talk to, they must whisper their secrets to the fishes, or write them on the sand, or something; and it’s well, too, I wasn’t over full to-night, now I think of it, or I might have snoozed away and never dreamt of looking what my sweet lady was about; or I might have lacked the sense or the power to carry my point like a man, as I have done.’

Leaving him to his self-congratulations, I rose to secure my manuscript, for I now remembered it had been left upon the drawing-room table, and I determined, if possible, to save myself the humiliation of seeing it in his hands again. I could not bear the idea of his amusing himself over my secret thoughts and recollections; though, to be sure, he would find little good of himself therein indited, except in the former part; and oh, I would sooner burn it all than he should read what I had written when I was such a fool as to love him!

‘And by-the-by,’ cried he, as I was leaving the room, ‘you’d better tell that d — d old sneak of a nurse to keep out of my way for a day or two; I’d pay her her wages and send her packing to-morrow, but I know she’d do more mischief out of the house than in it.’

And as I departed, he went on cursing and abusing my faithful friend and servant with epithets I will not defile this paper with repeating. I went to her as soon as I had put away my book, and told her how our project was defeated. She was as much distressed and horrified as I was — and more so than I was that night, for I was partly stunned by the blow, and partly excited and supported against it by the bitterness of my wrath. But in the morning, when I woke without that cheering hope that had been my secret comfort and support so long, and all this day, when I have wandered about restless and objectless, shunning my husband, shrinking even from my child, knowing that I am unfit to be his teacher or companion, hoping nothing for his future life, and fervently wishing he had never been born, — I felt the full extent of my calamity, and I feel it now. I know that day after day such feelings will return upon me. I am a slave — a prisoner — but that is nothing; if it were myself alone I would not complain, but I am forbidden to rescue my son from ruin, and what was once my only consolation is become the crowning source of my despair.

Have I no faith in God? I try to look to Him and raise my heart to heaven, but it will cleave to the dust. I can only say, ‘He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: He hath made my chain heavy. He hath filled me with bitterness — He hath made me drunken with wormwood.’ I forget to add, ‘But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.’ I ought to think of this; and if there be nothing but sorrow for me in this world, what is the longest life of misery to a whole eternity of peace? And for my little Arthur — has he no friend but me? Who was it said, ‘It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish?’

CHAPTER XLI

March 20th. — Having now got rid of Mr. Huntingdon for a season, my spirits begin to revive. He left me early in February; and the moment he was gone, I breathed again, and felt my vital energy return; not with the hope of escape — he has taken care to leave me no visible chance of that — but with a determination to make the best of existing circumstances. Here was Arthur left to me at last; and rousing from my despondent apathy, I exerted all my powers to eradicate the weeds that had been fostered in his infant mind, and sow again the good seed they had rendered unproductive. Thank heaven, it is not a barren or a stony soil; if weeds spring fast there, so do better plants. His apprehensions are more quick, his heart more overflowing with affection than ever his father's could have been, and it is no hopeless task to bend him to obedience and win him to love and know his own true friend, as long as there is no one to counteract my efforts.

I had much trouble at first in breaking him of those evil habits his father had taught him to acquire, but already that difficulty is nearly vanquished now: bad language seldom defiles his mouth, and I have succeeded in giving him an absolute disgust for all intoxicating liquors, which I hope not even his father or his father's friends will be able to overcome. He was inordinately fond of them for so young a creature, and, remembering my unfortunate father as well as his, I dreaded the consequences of such a taste. But if I had stinted him, in his usual quantity of wine, or forbidden him to taste it altogether, that would only have increased his partiality for it, and made him regard it as a greater treat than ever. I therefore gave him quite as much as his father was accustomed to allow him; as much, indeed, as he desired to have — but into every glass I surreptitiously introduced a small quantity of tartar-emetic, just enough to produce inevitable nausea and depression without positive sickness. Finding such disagreeable consequences invariably to result from this indulgence, he soon grew weary of it, but the more he shrank from the daily treat the more I pressed it upon him, till his reluctance was strengthened to perfect abhorrence. When he was thoroughly disgusted with every kind of wine, I allowed him, at his own request, to try brandy-and-water, and then gin-and-water, for the little toper was familiar with them all, and I was determined that all should be equally hateful to him. This I have now effected; and since he declares that the taste, the smell, the sight of any one of them is sufficient to make him sick, I have given up teasing him about them, except now and then as objects of terror in cases of misbehaviour. 'Arthur, if you're not a good boy I shall give you a glass of wine,' or 'Now, Arthur, if you say that again you shall have some brandy-and-water,' is as good as any other threat; and once or twice, when he was sick, I have obliged the poor child to swallow a little wine-and-water without the tartar-emetic, by way of medicine; and this practice I intend to continue for some time to come; not that I think it of any real service in a physical sense, but because I am determined to enlist all the powers of association in my service; I wish this aversion to be so deeply grounded in his nature that nothing in after-life may be able to overcome it.

Thus, I flatter myself, I shall secure him from this one vice; and for the rest, if on his father's return I find reason to apprehend that my good lessons will be all destroyed — if Mr. Huntingdon commence again the game of teaching the child to hate and despise his mother, and emulate his father's wickedness — I will yet deliver my son from his hands. I have devised another scheme that might be resorted to in such a case; and if I could but obtain my brother's consent and assistance, I should not doubt of its success. The old hall where he and I were born, and where our mother died, is not now inhabited, nor yet quite sunk into decay, as I believe. Now, if I could persuade him to have one or two rooms made habitable, and to let them to me as a stranger, I might live there, with my child, under an assumed name, and still support myself by my favourite art. He should lend me the money to begin with, and I would pay him back, and live in lowly independence and strict seclusion, for the house stands in a lonely place, and the neighbourhood is thinly inhabited, and he himself should negotiate the sale of my pictures for me. I have arranged the whole plan in my head: and all I want is to persuade Frederick to be of the same mind as myself. He is coming to see me soon, and then I will make the proposal to him, having first enlightened him upon my circumstances sufficiently to excuse the project.

Already, I believe, he knows much more of my situation than I have told him. I can tell this by the air of tender sadness pervading his letters; and by the fact of his so seldom mentioning my husband, and generally evincing a kind of covert bitterness when he does refer to him; as well as by the circumstance of his never coming to see me when Mr. Huntingdon is at home. But he has never openly expressed any disapprobation of him or sympathy for me; he has never asked any questions, or said anything to invite my confidence. Had he done so, I should probably have had but few concealments from him. Perhaps he feels hurt at my reserve. He is a strange being; I wish we knew each other better. He used to spend a month at Staningley every year, before I was married; but, since our father's death, I have only seen him once, when he came for a few days while Mr. Huntingdon was away. He shall stay many days this time, and there shall be more candour and cordiality between us than ever there was before, since our early childhood. My heart clings to him more than ever; and my soul is sick of solitude.

April 16th. — He is come and gone. He would not stay above a fortnight. The time passed quickly, but very, very happily, and it has done me good. I must have a bad disposition, for my misfortunes have soured and embittered me exceedingly: I was beginning insensibly to cherish very unamiable feelings against my fellow-mortals, the male part of them especially; but it is a comfort to see there is at least one among them worthy to be trusted and esteemed; and doubtless there are more, though I have never known them, unless I except poor Lord Lowborough, and he was bad enough in his day. But what would Frederick have been, if he had lived in the world, and mingled from his childhood with such men as these of my acquaintance? and what will Arthur be, with all his natural sweetness of disposition, if I do not save him from that world and those companions? I mentioned my fears to Frederick, and introduced the subject of my plan of rescue on the evening after his arrival, when I presented my little son to his uncle.

‘He is like you, Frederick,’ said I, ‘in some of his moods: I sometimes think he resembles you more than his father; and I am glad of it.’

‘You flatter me, Helen,’ replied he, stroking the child’s soft, wavy locks.

‘No, you will think it no compliment when I tell you I would rather have him to resemble Benson than his father.’ He slightly elevated his eyebrows, but said nothing.

‘Do you know what sort of man Mr. Huntingdon is?’ said I.

‘I think I have an idea.’

‘Have you so clear an idea that you can hear, without surprise or disapproval, that I meditate escaping with that child to some secret asylum, where we can live in peace, and never see him again?’

‘Is it really so?’

‘If you have not,’ continued I, ‘I’ll tell you something more about him’; and I gave a sketch of his general conduct, and a more particular account of his behaviour with regard to his child, and explained my apprehensions on the latter’s account, and my determination to deliver him from his father’s influence.

Frederick was exceedingly indignant against Mr. Huntingdon, and very much grieved for me; but still he looked upon my project as wild and impracticable. He deemed my fears for Arthur disproportioned to the circumstances, and opposed so many objections to my plan, and devised so many milder methods for ameliorating my condition, that I was obliged to enter into further details to convince him that my husband was utterly incorrigible, and that nothing could persuade him to give up his son, whatever became of me, he being as fully determined the child should not leave him, as I was not to leave the child; and that, in fact, nothing would answer but this, unless I fled the country, as I had intended before. To obviate that, he at length consented to have one wing of the old hall put into a habitable condition, as a place of refuge against a time of need; but hoped I would not take advantage of it unless circumstances should render it really necessary, which I was ready enough to promise: for though, for my own sake, such a hermitage appears like paradise itself, compared with my present situation, yet for my friends’ sakes, for Milicent and Esther, my sisters in heart and affection, for the poor tenants of Grassdale, and, above all, for my aunt, I will stay if I possibly can.

July 29th. — Mrs. Hargrave and her daughter are come back from London. Esther is full of her first season in town; but she is still heart-whole and unengaged. Her mother sought out an excellent match for her, and even brought the gentleman to lay his heart and fortune at her feet; but Esther had the audacity to refuse the noble gifts. He was a man of good family and large possessions, but the naughty girl maintained he was old as Adam, ugly as sin, and hateful as — one who shall be nameless.

'But, indeed, I had a hard time of it,' said she: 'mamma was very greatly disappointed at the failure of her darling project, and very, very angry at my obstinate resistance to her will, and is so still; but I can't help it. And Walter, too, is so seriously displeased at my perversity and absurd caprice, as he calls it, that I fear he will never forgive me — I did not think he could be so unkind as he has lately shown himself. But Milicent begged me not to yield, and I'm sure, Mrs. Huntingdon, if you had seen the man they wanted to palm upon me, you would have advised me not to take him too.'

'I should have done so whether I had seen him or not,' said I; 'it is enough that you dislike him.'

'I knew you would say so; though mamma affirmed you would be quite shocked at my undutiful conduct. You can't imagine how she lectures me: I am disobedient and ungrateful; I am thwarting her wishes, wronging my brother, and making myself a burden on her hands. I sometimes fear she'll overcome me after all. I have a strong will, but so has she, and when she says such bitter things, it provokes me to such a pass that I feel inclined to do as she bids me, and then break my heart and say, "There, mamma, it's all your fault!"'

'Pray don't!' said I. 'Obedience from such a motive would be positive wickedness, and certain to bring the punishment it deserves. Stand firm, and your mamma will soon relinquish her persecution; and the gentleman himself will cease to pester you with his addresses if he finds them steadily rejected.'

'Oh, no! mamma will weary all about her before she tires herself with her exertions; and as for Mr. Oldfield, she has given him to understand that I have refused his offer, not from any dislike of his person, but merely because I am giddy and young, and cannot at present reconcile myself to the thoughts of marriage under any circumstances: but by next season, she has no doubt, I shall have more sense, and hopes my girlish fancies will be worn away. So she has brought me home, to school me into a proper sense of my duty, against the time comes round again. Indeed, I believe she will not put herself to the expense of taking me up to London again, unless I surrender: she cannot afford to take me to town for pleasure and nonsense, she says, and it is not every rich gentleman that will consent to take me without a fortune, whatever exalted ideas I may have of my own attractions.'

'Well, Esther, I pity you; but still, I repeat, stand firm. You might as well sell yourself to slavery at once, as marry a man you dislike. If your mother and brother are unkind to you, you may leave them, but remember you are bound to your husband for life.'

'But I cannot leave them unless I get married, and I cannot get married if nobody sees me. I saw one or two gentlemen in London that I might have liked, but they were younger sons, and mamma would not let me get to know them — one especially, who I believe rather liked me — but she threw every possible obstacle in the way of our better acquaintance. Wasn't it provoking?'

'I have no doubt you would feel it so, but it is possible that if you married him, you might have more reason to regret it hereafter than if you married Mr. Oldfield. When I tell you not to marry without love, I do not advise you to marry for love alone: there are many, many other things to be considered. Keep both heart and hand in your own possession, till you see good reason to part with them; and if such an occasion should never present itself, comfort your mind with this reflection, that though in single life your joys may not be very many, your sorrows, at least, will not be more than you can bear. Marriage may change your circumstances for the better, but, in my private opinion, it is far more likely to produce a contrary result.'

'So thinks Milicent; but allow me to say I think otherwise. If I thought myself doomed to old-maidenhood, I should cease to value my life. The thoughts of living on, year after year, at the Grove — a hanger-on upon mamma and Walter, a mere cumberer of the ground (now that I know in what light they would regard it), is perfectly intolerable; I would rather run away with the butler.'

'Your circumstances are peculiar, I allow; but have patience, love; do nothing rashly. Remember you are not yet nineteen, and many years are yet to pass before any one can set you down as an old maid: you cannot tell what Providence may have in store for you. And meantime, remember you have a right to the protection and support of your mother and brother, however they may seem to grudge it.'

'You are so grave, Mrs. Huntingdon,' said Esther, after a pause. 'When Milicent uttered the same discouraging sentiments concerning marriage, I asked if she was happy: she said she was; but I only half believed her; and now I must put the same question to you.'

'It is a very impertinent question,' laughed I, 'from a young girl to a married woman so many years her senior, and I shall not answer it.'

'Pardon me, dear madam,' said she, laughingly throwing herself into my arms, and kissing me with playful affection; but I felt a tear on my neck, as she dropped her head on my bosom and continued, with an odd mixture of sadness and levity, timidity and audacity, — 'I know you are not so happy as I mean to be, for you spend half your life alone at Grassdale, while Mr. Huntingdon goes about enjoying himself where and how he pleases. I shall expect my husband to have no pleasures but what he shares with me; and if his greatest pleasure of all is not the enjoyment of my company, why, it will be the worse for him, that's all.'

'If such are your expectations of matrimony, Esther, you must, indeed, be careful whom you marry — or rather, you must avoid it altogether.'

CHAPTER XLII

September 1st. — No Mr. Huntingdon yet. Perhaps he will stay among his friends till Christmas; and then, next spring, he will be off again. If he continue this plan, I shall be able to stay at Grassdale well enough — that is, I shall be able to stay, and that is enough; even an occasional bevy of friends at the shooting season may be borne, if Arthur get so firmly attached to me, so well established in good sense and principles before they come that I shall be able, by reason and affection, to keep him pure from their contaminations. Vain hope, I fear! but still, till such a time of trial comes I will forbear to think of my quiet asylum in the beloved old hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Hattersley have been staying at the Grove a fortnight: and as Mr. Hargrave is still absent, and the weather was remarkably fine, I never passed a day without seeing my two friends, Milicent and Esther, either there or here. On one occasion, when Mr. Hattersley had driven them over to Grassdale in the phaeton, with little Helen and Ralph, and we were all enjoying ourselves in the garden — I had a few minutes' conversation with that gentleman, while the ladies were amusing themselves with the children.

'Do you want to hear anything of your husband, Mrs. Huntingdon?' said he.

'No, unless you can tell me when to expect him home.'

'I can't. — You don't want him, do you?' said he, with a broad grin.

'No.'

'Well, I think you're better without him, sure enough — for my part, I'm downright weary of him. I told him I'd leave him if he didn't mend his manners, and he wouldn't; so I left him. You see, I'm a better man than you think me; and, what's more, I have serious thoughts of washing my hands of him entirely, and the whole set of 'em, and comporting myself from this day forward with all decency and sobriety, as a Christian and the father of a family should do. What do you think of that?'

'It is a resolution you ought to have formed long ago.'

'Well, I'm not thirty yet; it isn't too late, is it?'

'No; it is never too late to reform, as long as you have the sense to desire it, and the strength to execute your purpose.'

'Well, to tell you the truth, I've thought of it often and often before; but he's such devilish good company, is Huntingdon, after all. You can't imagine what a jovial good fellow he is when he's not fairly drunk, only just primed or half-seas-over. We all have a bit of a liking for him at the bottom of our hearts, though we can't respect him.'

'But should you wish yourself to be like him?'

'No, I'd rather be like myself, bad as I am.'

‘You can’t continue as bad as you are without getting worse and more brutalised every day, and therefore more like him.’

I could not help smiling at the comical, half-angry, half-confounded look he put on at this rather unusual mode of address.

‘Never mind my plain speaking,’ said I; ‘it is from the best of motives. But tell me, should you wish your sons to be like Mr. Huntingdon — or even like yourself?’

‘Hang it! no.’

‘Should you wish your daughter to despise you — or, at least, to feel no vestige of respect for you, and no affection but what is mingled with the bitterest regret?’

‘Oh, no! I couldn’t stand that.’

‘And, finally, should you wish your wife to be ready to sink into the earth when she hears you mentioned; and to loathe the very sound of your voice, and shudder at your approach?’

‘She never will; she likes me all the same, whatever I do.’

‘Impossible, Mr. Hattersley! you mistake her quiet submission for affection.’

‘Fire and fury — ’

‘Now don’t burst into a tempest at that. I don’t mean to say she does not love you — she does, I know, a great deal better than you deserve; but I am quite sure, that if you behave better, she will love you more, and if you behave worse, she will love you less and less, till all is lost in fear, aversion, and bitterness of soul, if not in secret hatred and contempt. But, dropping the subject of affection, should you wish to be the tyrant of her life — to take away all the sunshine from her existence, and make her thoroughly miserable?’

‘Of course not; and I don’t, and I’m not going to.’

‘You have done more towards it than you suppose.’

‘Pooh, pooh! she’s not the susceptible, anxious, worriting creature you imagine: she’s a little meek, peaceable, affectionate body; apt to be rather sulky at times, but quiet and cool in the main, and ready to take things as they come.’

‘Think of what she was five years ago, when you married her, and what she is now.’

‘I know she was a little plump lassie then, with a pretty pink and white face: now she’s a poor little bit of a creature, fading and melting away like a snow-wreath. But hang it! — that’s not my fault.’

‘What is the cause of it then? Not years, for she’s only five-and-twenty.’

‘It’s her own delicate health, and confound it, madam! what would you make of me? — and the children, to be sure, that worry her to death between them.’

‘No, Mr. Hattersley, the children give her more pleasure than pain: they are fine, well-dispositioned children — ’

'I know they are — bless them!'

'Then why lay the blame on them? — I'll tell you what it is: it's silent fretting and constant anxiety on your account, mingled, I suspect, with something of bodily fear on her own. When you behave well, she can only rejoice with trembling; she has no security, no confidence in your judgment or principles; but is continually dreading the close of such short-lived felicity; when you behave ill, her causes of terror and misery are more than any one can tell but herself. In patient endurance of evil, she forgets it is our duty to admonish our neighbours of their transgressions. Since you will mistake her silence for indifference, come with me, and I'll show you one or two of her letters — no breach of confidence, I hope, since you are her other half.'

He followed me into the library. I sought out and put into his hands two of Milicent's letters: one dated from London, and written during one of his wildest seasons of reckless dissipation; the other in the country, during a lucid interval. The former was full of trouble and anguish; not accusing him, but deeply regretting his connection with his profligate companions, abusing Mr. Grimsby and others, insinuating bitter things against Mr. Huntingdon, and most ingeniously throwing the blame of her husband's misconduct on to other men's shoulders. The latter was full of hope and joy, yet with a trembling consciousness that this happiness would not last; praising his goodness to the skies, but with an evident, though but half-expressed wish, that it were based on a surer foundation than the natural impulses of the heart, and a half-prophetic dread of the fall of that house so founded on the sand, — which fall had shortly after taken place, as Hattersley must have been conscious while he read.

Almost at the commencement of the first letter I had the unexpected pleasure of seeing him blush; but he immediately turned his back to me, and finished the perusal at the window. At the second, I saw him, once or twice, raise his hand, and hurriedly pass it across his face. Could it be to dash away a tear? When he had done, there was an interval spent in clearing his throat and staring out of the window, and then, after whistling a few bars of a favourite air, he turned round, gave me back the letters, and silently shook me by the hand.

'I've been a cursed rascal, God knows,' said he, as he gave it a hearty squeeze, 'but you see if I don't make amends for it — d — n me if I don't!'

'Don't curse yourself, Mr. Hattersley; if God had heard half your invocations of that kind, you would have been in hell long before now — and you cannot make amends for the past by doing your duty for the future, inasmuch as your duty is only what you owe to your Maker, and you cannot do more than fulfil it: another must make amends for your past delinquencies. If you intend to reform, invoke God's blessing, His mercy, and His aid; not His curse.'

'God help me, then — for I'm sure I need it. Where's Milicent?'

'She's there, just coming in with her sister.'

He stepped out at the glass door, and went to meet them. I followed at a little distance. Somewhat to his wife's astonishment, he lifted her off from the ground, and saluted her with a hearty kiss and a strong embrace; then placing his two hands on her shoulders, he gave her, I suppose, a sketch of the great things he meant to do, for she suddenly threw her arms round him, and burst into tears, exclaiming, — 'Do, do, Ralph — we shall be so happy! How very, very good you are!'

'Nay, not I,' said he, turning her round, and pushing her towards me. 'Thank her; it's her doing.'

Milicent flew to thank me, overflowing with gratitude. I disclaimed all title to it, telling her her husband was predisposed to amendment before I added my mite of exhortation and encouragement, and that I had only done what she might, and ought to have done herself.

'Oh, no!' cried she; 'I couldn't have influenced him, I'm sure, by anything that I could have said. I should only have bothered him by my clumsy efforts at persuasion, if I had made the attempt.'

'You never tried me, Milly,' said he.

Shortly after they took their leave. They are now gone on a visit to Hattersley's father. After that they will repair to their country home. I hope his good resolutions will not fall through, and poor Milicent will not be again disappointed. Her last letter was full of present bliss, and pleasing anticipations for the future; but no particular temptation has yet occurred to put his virtue to the test. Henceforth, however, she will doubtless be somewhat less timid and reserved, and he more kind and thoughtful. — Surely, then, her hopes are not unfounded; and I have one bright spot, at least, whereon to rest my thoughts.

CHAPTER XLIII

October 10th. — Mr. Huntingdon returned about three weeks ago. His appearance, his demeanour and conversation, and my feelings with regard to him, I shall not trouble myself to describe. The day after his arrival, however, he surprised me by the announcement of an intention to procure a governess for little Arthur: I told him it was quite unnecessary, not to say ridiculous, at the present season: I thought I was fully competent to the task of teaching him myself — for some years to come, at least: the child's education was the only pleasure and business of my life; and since he had deprived me of every other occupation, he might surely leave me that.

He said I was not fit to teach children, or to be with them: I had already reduced the boy to little better than an automaton; I had broken his fine spirit with my rigid severity; and I should freeze all the sunshine out of his heart, and make him as gloomy an ascetic as myself, if I had the handling of him much longer. And poor Rachel, too, came in for her share of abuse, as usual; he cannot endure Rachel, because he knows she has a proper appreciation of him.

I calmly defended our several qualifications as nurse and governess, and still resisted the proposed addition to our family; but he cut me short by saying it was no use bothering about the matter, for he had engaged a governess already, and she was coming next week; so that all I had to do was to get things ready for her reception. This was a rather startling piece of intelligence. I ventured to inquire her name and address, by whom she had been recommended, or how he had been led to make choice of her.

'She is a very estimable, pious young person,' said he; 'you needn't be afraid. Her name is Myers, I believe; and she was recommended to me by a respectable old dowager: a lady of high repute in the religious world. I have not seen her myself, and therefore cannot give you a particular account of her person and conversation, and so forth; but, if the old lady's eulogies are correct, you will find her to possess all desirable qualifications for her position: an inordinate love of children among the rest.'

All this was gravely and quietly spoken, but there was a laughing demon in his half-averted eye that boded no good, I imagined. However, I thought of my asylum in — shire, and made no further objections.

When Miss Myers arrived, I was not prepared to give her a very cordial reception. Her appearance was not particularly calculated to produce a favourable impression at first sight, nor did her manners and subsequent conduct, in any degree, remove the prejudice I had already conceived against her. Her attainments were limited, her intellect noways above mediocrity. She had a fine voice, and could sing like a nightingale, and accompany herself sufficiently well on the piano; but these were her only accomplishments. There was a look of guile and subtlety in her face, a sound of it in her voice. She seemed afraid of me, and would start if I suddenly approached her. In her behaviour she was respectful and complaisant, even to servility: she attempted to flatter and fawn upon me at first, but I soon checked that. Her fondness for her little pupil was overstrained, and I was obliged to remonstrate with her on the subject of over-indulgence and injudicious praise; but she could not gain his heart. Her piety consisted in an occasional heaving of sighs, and uplifting of eyes to the ceiling, and the utterance of a few cant phrases. She told me she was a clergyman's daughter, and had been left an orphan from her childhood, but had had the good fortune to obtain a situation in a very pious family; and then she spoke so gratefully of the kindness she had experienced from its different members, that I reproached myself for my uncharitable thoughts and unfriendly conduct, and relented for a time, but not for long: my causes of dislike were too rational, my suspicions too well founded for that; and I knew it was my duty to watch and scrutinize till those suspicions were either satisfactorily removed or confirmed.

I asked the name and residence of the kind and pious family. She mentioned a common name, and an unknown and distant place of abode, but told me they were now on the Continent, and their present address was unknown to her. I never saw her speak much to Mr. Huntingdon; but he would frequently look into the school-room to see how little Arthur got on with his new companion, when I was not there. In the evening, she sat with us in the drawing-room, and would sing and play to amuse him or us, as she pretended, and was very attentive to his wants, and watchful to anticipate them, though she only talked to me; indeed, he was seldom in a condition to be talked to. Had she been other than she was, I should have felt her presence a great relief to come between us thus, except, indeed, that I should have been thoroughly ashamed for any decent person to see him as he often was.

I did not mention my suspicions to Rachel; but she, having sojourned for half a century in this land of sin and sorrow, has learned to be suspicious herself. She told me from the first she was 'down of that new governess,' and I soon found she watched her quite as narrowly as I did; and I was glad of it, for I longed to know the truth: the atmosphere of Grassdale seemed to stifle me, and I could only live by thinking of Wildfell Hall.

At last, one morning, she entered my chamber with such intelligence that my resolution was taken before she had ceased to speak. While she dressed me I explained to her my intentions and what assistance I should require from her, and told her which of my things she was to pack up, and what she was to leave behind for herself, as I had no other means of recompensing her for this sudden dismissal after her long and faithful service: a circumstance I most deeply regretted, but could not avoid.

'And what will you do, Rachel?' said I; 'will you go home, or seek another place?'

'I have no home, ma'am, but with you,' she replied; 'and if I leave you I'll never go into place again as long as I live.'

'But I can't afford to live like a lady now,' returned I: 'I must be my own maid and my child's nurse.'

'What signifies!' replied she, in some excitement. 'You'll want somebody to clean and wash, and cook, won't you? I can do all that; and never mind the wages: I've my bits o' savings yet, and if you wouldn't take me I should have to find my own board and lodging out of 'em somewhere, or else work among strangers: and it's what I'm not used to: so you can please yourself, ma'am.' Her voice quavered as she spoke, and the tears stood in her eyes.

'I should like it above all things, Rachel, and I'd give you such wages as I could afford: such as I should give to any servant-of-all-work I might employ: but don't you see I should be dragging you down with me when you have done nothing to deserve it?'

'Oh, fiddle!' ejaculated she.

'And, besides, my future way of living will be so widely different to the past: so different to all you have been accustomed to — '

'Do you think, ma'am, I can't bear what my missis can? surely I'm not so proud and so dainty as that comes to; and my little master, too, God bless him!'

'But I'm young, Rachel; I sha'n't mind it; and Arthur is young too: it will be nothing to him.'

'Nor me either: I'm not so old but what I can stand hard fare and hard work, if it's only to help and comfort them as I've loved like my own bairns: for all I'm too old to bide the thoughts o' leaving 'em in trouble and danger, and going amongst strangers myself.'

'Then you sha'n't, Rachel!' cried I, embracing my faithful friend. 'We'll all go together, and you shall see how the new life suits you.'

'Bless you, honey!' cried she, affectionately returning my embrace. 'Only let us get shut of this wicked house, and we'll do right enough, you'll see.'

'So think I,' was my answer; and so that point was settled.

By that morning's post I despatched a few hasty lines to Frederick, beseeching him to prepare my asylum for my immediate reception: for I should probably come to claim it within a day after the receipt of that note: and telling him, in few words, the cause of my sudden resolution. I then wrote three letters of adieu: the first to Esther Hargrave, in which I told her that I found it impossible to stay any longer at Grassdale, or to leave my son under his father's protection; and, as it was of the last importance that our future abode should be unknown to him and his acquaintance, I should disclose it to no one but my brother, through the medium of whom I hoped still to correspond with my friends. I then gave her his address, exhorted her to write frequently, reiterated some of my former admonitions regarding her own concerns, and bade her a fond farewell.

The second was to Milicent; much to the same effect, but a little more confidential, as befitted our longer intimacy, and her greater experience and better acquaintance with my circumstances.

The third was to my aunt: a much more difficult and painful undertaking, and therefore I had left it to the last; but I must give her some explanation of that extraordinary step I had taken: and that quickly, for she and my uncle would no doubt hear of it within a day or two after my disappearance, as it was probable that Mr. Huntingdon would speedily apply to them to know what was become of me. At last, however, I told her I was sensible of my error: I did not complain of its punishment, and I was sorry to trouble my friends with its consequences; but in duty to my son I must submit no longer; it was absolutely necessary that he should be delivered from his father's corrupting influence. I should not disclose my place of refuge even to her, in order that she and my uncle might be able, with truth, to deny all knowledge concerning it; but any communications addressed to me under cover to my brother would be certain to reach me. I hoped she and my uncle would pardon the step I had taken, for if they knew all, I was sure they would not blame me; and I trusted they would not afflict themselves on my account, for if I could only reach my retreat in safety and keep it unmolested, I should be very happy, but for the thoughts of them; and should be quite contented to spend my life in obscurity, devoting myself to the training up of my child, and teaching him to avoid the errors of both his parents.

These things were done yesterday: I have given two whole days to the preparation for our departure, that Frederick may have more time to prepare the rooms, and Rachel to pack up the things: for the latter task must be done with the utmost caution and secrecy, and there is no one but me to assist her. I can help to get the articles together, but I do not understand the art of stowing them into the boxes, so as to take up the smallest possible space; and there are her own things to do, as well as mine and Arthur's. I can ill afford to leave anything behind, since I have no money, except a few guineas in my purse; and besides, as Rachel observed, whatever I left would most likely become the property of Miss Myers, and I should not relish that.

But what trouble I have had throughout these two days, struggling to appear calm and collected, to meet him and her as usual, when I was obliged to meet them, and forcing myself to leave my little Arthur in her hands for hours together! But I trust these trials are over now: I have laid him in my bed for better security, and never more, I trust, shall his innocent lips be defiled by their contaminating kisses, or his young ears polluted by their words. But shall we escape in safety? Oh, that the morning were come, and we were on our way at least! This evening, when I had given Rachel all the assistance I could, and had nothing left me but to wait, and wish and tremble, I became so greatly agitated that I knew not what to do. I went down to dinner, but I could not force myself to eat. Mr. Huntingdon remarked the circumstance.

‘What’s to do with you now?’ said he, when the removal of the second course gave him time to look about him.

‘I am not well,’ I replied: ‘I think I must lie down a little; you won’t miss me much?’

‘Not the least: if you leave your chair, it’ll do just as well — better, a trifle,’ he muttered, as I left the room, ‘for I can fancy somebody else fills it.’

‘Somebody else may fill it to-morrow,’ I thought, but did not say. ‘There! I’ve seen the last of you, I hope,’ I muttered, as I closed the door upon him.

Rachel urged me to seek repose at once, to recruit my strength for to-morrow’s journey, as we must be gone before the dawn; but in my present state of nervous excitement that was entirely out of the question. It was equally out of the question to sit, or wander about my room, counting the hours and the minutes between me and the appointed time of action, straining my ears and trembling at every sound, lest someone should discover and betray us after all. I took up a book and tried to read: my eyes wandered over the pages, but it was impossible to bind my thoughts to their contents. Why not have recourse to the old expedient, and add this last event to my chronicle? I opened its pages once more, and wrote the above account — with difficulty, at first, but gradually my mind became more calm and steady. Thus several hours have passed away: the time is drawing near; and now my eyes feel heavy and my frame exhausted. I will commend my cause to God, and then lie down and gain an hour or two of sleep; and then! —

Little Arthur sleeps soundly. All the house is still: there can be no one watching. The boxes were all corded by Benson, and quietly conveyed down the back stairs after dusk, and sent away in a cart to the M — coach-office. The name upon the cards was Mrs. Graham, which appellation I mean henceforth to adopt. My mother’s maiden name was Graham, and therefore I fancy I have some claim to it, and prefer it to any other, except my own, which I dare not resume.

CHAPTER XLIV

October 24th. — Thank heaven, I am free and safe at last. Early we rose, swiftly and quietly dressed, slowly and stealthily descended to the hall, where Benson stood ready with a light, to open the door and fasten it after us. We were obliged to let one man into our secret on account of the boxes, &c. All the servants were but too well acquainted with their master's conduct, and either Benson or John would have been willing to serve me; but as the former was more staid and elderly, and a crony of Rachel's besides, I of course directed her to make choice of him as her assistant and confidant on the occasion, as far as necessity demanded, I only hope he may not be brought into trouble thereby, and only wish I could reward him for the perilous service he was so ready to undertake. I slipped two guineas into his hand, by way of remembrance, as he stood in the doorway, holding the candle to light our departure, with a tear in his honest grey eye, and a host of good wishes depicted on his solemn countenance. Alas! I could offer no more: I had barely sufficient remaining for the probable expenses of the journey.

What trembling joy it was when the little wicket closed behind us, as we issued from the park! Then, for one moment, I paused, to inhale one draught of that cool, bracing air, and venture one look back upon the house. All was dark and still: no light glimmered in the windows, no wreath of smoke obscured the stars that sparkled above it in the frosty sky. As I bade farewell for ever to that place, the scene of so much guilt and misery, I felt glad that I had not left it before, for now there was no doubt about the propriety of such a step — no shadow of remorse for him I left behind. There was nothing to disturb my joy but the fear of detection; and every step removed us further from the chance of that.

We had left Grassdale many miles behind us before the round red sun arose to welcome our deliverance; and if any inhabitant of its vicinity had chanced to see us then, as we bowled along on the top of the coach, I scarcely think they would have suspected our identity. As I intend to be taken for a widow, I thought it advisable to enter my new abode in mourning: I was, therefore, attired in a plain black silk dress and mantle, a black veil (which I kept carefully over my face for the first twenty or thirty miles of the journey), and a black silk bonnet, which I had been constrained to borrow of Rachel, for want of such an article myself. It was not in the newest fashion, of course; but none the worse for that, under present circumstances. Arthur was clad in his plainest clothes, and wrapped in a coarse woollen shawl; and Rachel was muffled in a grey cloak and hood that had seen better days, and gave her more the appearance of an ordinary though decent old woman, than of a lady's-maid.

Oh, what delight it was to be thus seated aloft, rumbling along the broad, sunshiny road, with the fresh morning breeze in my face, surrounded by an unknown country, all smiling — cheerfully, gloriously smiling in the yellow lustre of those early beams; with my darling child in my arms, almost as happy as myself, and my faithful friend beside me: a prison and despair behind me, receding further, further back at every clatter of the horses' feet; and liberty and hope before! I could hardly refrain from praising God aloud for my deliverance, or astonishing my fellow-passengers by some surprising outburst of hilarity.

But the journey was a very long one, and we were all weary enough before the close of it. It was far into the night when we reached the town of L — , and still we were seven miles from our journey's end; and there was no more coaching, nor any conveyance to be had, except a common cart, and that with the greatest difficulty, for half the town was in bed. And a dreary ride we had of it, that last stage of the journey, cold and weary as we were; sitting on our boxes, with nothing to cling to, nothing to lean against, slowly dragged and cruelly shaken over the rough, hilly roads. But Arthur was asleep in Rachel's lap, and between us we managed pretty well to shield him from the cold night air.

At last we began to ascend a terribly steep and stony lane, which, in spite of the darkness, Rachel said she remembered well: she had often walked there with me in her arms, and little thought to come again so many years after, under such circumstances as the present. Arthur being now awakened by the jolting and the stoppages, we all got out and walked. We had not far to go; but what if Frederick should not have received my letter? or if he should not have had time to prepare the rooms for our reception, and we should find them all dark, damp, and comfortless, destitute of food, fire, and furniture, after all our toil?

At length the grim, dark pile appeared before us. The lane conducted us round by the back way. We entered the desolate court, and in breathless anxiety surveyed the ruinous mass. Was it all blackness and desolation? No; one faint red glimmer cheered us from a window where the lattice was in good repair. The door was fastened, but after due knocking and waiting, and some parleying with a voice from an upper window, we were admitted by an old woman who had been commissioned to air and keep the house till our arrival, into a tolerably snug little apartment, formerly the scullery of the mansion, which Frederick had now fitted up as a kitchen. Here she procured us a light, roused the fire to a cheerful blaze, and soon prepared a simple repast for our refreshment; while we disencumbered ourselves of our travelling-gear, and took a hasty survey of our new abode. Besides the kitchen, there were two bedrooms, a good-sized parlour, and another smaller one, which I destined for my studio, all well aired and seemingly in good repair, but only partly furnished with a few old articles, chiefly of ponderous black oak, the veritable ones that had been there before, and which had been kept as antiquarian relics in my brother's present residence, and now, in all haste, transported back again.

The old woman brought my supper and Arthur's into the parlour, and told me, with all due formality, that 'the master desired his compliments to Mrs. Graham, and he had prepared the rooms as well as he could upon so short a notice; but he would do himself the pleasure of calling upon her to-morrow, to receive her further commands.'

I was glad to ascend the stern-looking stone staircase, and lie down in the gloomy, old-fashioned bed, beside my little Arthur. He was asleep in a minute; but, weary as I was, my excited feelings and restless cogitations kept me awake till dawn began to struggle with the darkness; but sleep was sweet and refreshing when it came, and the waking was delightful beyond expression. It was little Arthur that roused me, with his gentle kisses. He was here, then, safely clasped in my arms, and many leagues away from his unworthy father! Broad daylight illumined the apartment, for the sun was high in heaven, though obscured by rolling masses of autumnal vapour.

The scene, indeed, was not remarkably cheerful in itself, either within or without. The large bare room, with its grim old furniture, the narrow, latticed windows, revealing the dull, grey sky above and the desolate wilderness below, where the dark stone walls and iron gate, the rank growth of grass and weeds, and the hardy evergreens of preternatural forms, alone remained to tell that there had been once a garden, — and the bleak and barren fields beyond might have struck me as gloomy enough at another time; but now, each separate object seemed to echo back my own exhilarating sense of hope and freedom: indefinite dreams of the far past and bright anticipations of the future seemed to greet me at every turn. I should rejoice with more security, to be sure, had the broad sea rolled between my present and my former homes; but surely in this lonely spot I might remain unknown; and then I had my brother here to cheer my solitude with his occasional visits.

He came that morning; and I have had several interviews with him since; but he is obliged to be very cautious when and how he comes; not even his servants or his best friends must know of his visits to Wildfell — except on such occasions as a landlord might be expected to call upon a stranger tenant — lest suspicion should be excited against me, whether of the truth or of some slanderous falsehood.

I have now been here nearly a fortnight, and, but for one disturbing care, the haunting dread of discovery, I am comfortably settled in my new home: Frederick has supplied me with all requisite furniture and painting materials: Rachel has sold most of my clothes for me, in a distant town, and procured me a wardrobe more suitable to my present position: I have a second-hand piano, and a tolerably well-stocked bookcase in my parlour; and my other room has assumed quite a professional, business-like appearance already. I am working hard to repay my brother for all his expenses on my account; not that there is the slightest necessity for anything of the kind, but it pleases me to do so: I shall have so much more pleasure in my labour, my earnings, my frugal fare, and household economy, when I know that I am paying my way honestly, and that what little I possess is legitimately all my own; and that no one suffers for my folly — in a pecuniary way at least. I shall make him take the last penny I owe him, if I can possibly effect it without offending him too deeply. I have a few pictures already done, for I told Rachel to pack up all I had; and she executed her commission but too well — for among the rest, she put up a portrait of Mr. Huntingdon that I had painted in the first year of my marriage. It struck me with dismay, at the moment, when I took it from the box and beheld those eyes fixed upon me in their mocking mirth, as if exulting still in his power to control my fate, and deriding my efforts to escape.

How widely different had been my feelings in painting that portrait to what they now were in looking upon it! How I had studied and toiled to produce something, as I thought, worthy of the original! what mingled pleasure and dissatisfaction I had had in the result of my labours! — pleasure for the likeness I had caught; dissatisfaction, because I had not made it handsome enough. Now, I see no beauty in it — nothing pleasing in any part of its expression; and yet it is far handsomer and far more agreeable — far less repulsive I should rather say — than he is now: for these six years have wrought almost as great a change upon himself as on my feelings regarding him. The frame, however, is handsome enough; it will serve for another painting. The picture itself I have not destroyed, as I had first intended; I have put it aside; not, I think, from any lurking tenderness for the memory of past affection, nor yet to remind me of my former folly, but chiefly that I may compare my son's features and countenance with this, as he grows up, and thus be enabled to judge how much or how little he resembles his father — if I may be allowed to keep him with me still, and never to behold that father's face again — a blessing I hardly dare reckon upon.

It seems Mr. Huntingdon is making every exertion to discover the place of my retreat. He has been in person to Staningley, seeking redress for his grievances — expecting to hear of his victims, if not to find them there — and has told so many lies, and with such unblushing coolness, that my uncle more than half believes him, and strongly advocates my going back to him and being friends again. But my aunt knows better: she is too cool and cautious, and too well acquainted with both my husband's character and my own to be imposed upon by any specious falsehoods the former could invent. But he does not want me back; he wants my child; and gives my friends to understand that if I prefer living apart from him, he will indulge the whim and let me do so unmolested, and even settle a reasonable allowance on me, provided I will immediately deliver up his son. But heaven help me! I am not going to sell my child for gold, though it were to save both him and me from starving: it would be better that he should die with me than that he should live with his father.

Frederick showed me a letter he had received from that gentleman, full of cool impudence such as would astonish any one who did not know him, but such as, I am convinced, none would know better how to answer than my brother. He gave me no account of his reply, except to tell me that he had not acknowledged his acquaintance with my place of refuge, but rather left it to be inferred that it was quite unknown to him, by saying it was useless to apply to him, or any other of my relations, for information on the subject, as it appeared I had been driven to such extremity that I had concealed my retreat even from my best friends; but that if he had known it, or should at any time be made aware of it, most certainly Mr. Huntingdon would be the last person to whom he should communicate the intelligence; and that he need not trouble himself to bargain for the child, for he (Frederick) fancied he knew enough of his sister to enable him to declare, that wherever she might be, or however situated, no consideration would induce her to deliver him up.

30th. — Alas! my kind neighbours will not let me alone. By some means they have ferreted me out, and I have had to sustain visits from three different families, all more or less bent upon discovering who and what I am, whence I came, and why I have chosen such a home as this. Their society is unnecessary to me, to say the least, and their curiosity annoys and alarms me: if I gratify it, it may lead to the ruin of my son, and if I am too mysterious it will only excite their suspicions, invite conjecture, and rouse them to greater exertions — and perhaps be the means of spreading my fame from parish to parish, till it reach the ears of some one who will carry it to the Lord of Grassdale Manor.

I shall be expected to return their calls, but if, upon inquiry, I find that any of them live too far away for Arthur to accompany me, they must expect in vain for a while, for I cannot bear to leave him, unless it be to go to church, and I have not attempted that yet: for — it may be foolish weakness, but I am under such constant dread of his being snatched away, that I am never easy when he is not by my side; and I fear these nervous terrors would so entirely disturb my devotions, that I should obtain no benefit from the attendance. I mean, however, to make the experiment next Sunday, and oblige myself to leave him in charge of Rachel for a few hours. It will be a hard task, but surely no imprudence; and the vicar has been to scold me for my neglect of the ordinances of religion. I had no sufficient excuse to offer, and I promised, if all were well, he should see me in my pew next Sunday; for I do not wish to be set down as an infidel; and, besides, I know I should derive great comfort and benefit from an occasional attendance at public worship, if I could only have faith and fortitude to compose my thoughts in conformity with the solemn occasion, and forbid them to be for ever dwelling on my absent child, and on the dreadful possibility of finding him gone when I return; and surely God in His mercy will preserve me from so severe a trial: for my child's own sake, if not for mine, He will not suffer him to be torn away.

November 3rd. — I have made some further acquaintance with my neighbours. The fine gentleman and beau of the parish and its vicinity (in his own estimation, at least) is a young . . . .

* * * * *

Here it ended. The rest was torn away. How cruel, just when she was going to mention me! for I could not doubt it was your humble servant she was about to mention, though not very favourably, of course. I could tell that, as well by those few words as by the recollection of her whole aspect and demeanour towards me in the commencement of our acquaintance. Well! I could readily forgive her prejudice against me, and her hard thoughts of our sex in general, when I saw to what brilliant specimens her experience had been limited.

Respecting me, however, she had long since seen her error, and perhaps fallen into another in the opposite extreme: for if, at first, her opinion of me had been lower than I deserved, I was convinced that now my deserts were lower than her opinion; and if the former part of this continuation had been torn away to avoid wounding my feelings, perhaps the latter portion had been removed for fear of ministering too much to my self-conceit. At any rate, I would have given much to have seen it all — to have witnessed the gradual change, and watched the progress of her esteem and friendship for me, and whatever warmer feeling she might have; to have seen how much of love there was in her regard, and how it had grown upon her in spite of her virtuous resolutions and strenuous exertions to — but no, I had no right to see it: all this was too sacred for any eyes but her own, and she had done well to keep it from me.

CHAPTER XLV

Well, Halford, what do you think of all this? and while you read it, did you ever picture to yourself what my feelings would probably be during its perusal? Most likely not; but I am not going to descant upon them now: I will only make this acknowledgment, little honourable as it may be to human nature, and especially to myself, — that the former half of the narrative was, to me, more painful than the latter, not that I was at all insensible to Mrs. Huntingdon's wrongs or unmoved by her sufferings, but, I must confess, I felt a kind of selfish gratification in watching her husband's gradual decline in her good graces, and seeing how completely he extinguished all her affection at last. The effect of the whole, however, in spite of all my sympathy for her, and my fury against him, was to relieve my mind of an intolerable burden, and fill my heart with joy, as if some friend had roused me from a dreadful nightmare.

It was now near eight o'clock in the morning, for my candle had expired in the midst of my perusal, leaving me no alternative but to get another, at the expense of alarming the house, or to go to bed, and wait the return of daylight. On my mother's account, I chose the latter; but how willingly I sought my pillow, and how much sleep it brought me, I leave you to imagine.

At the first appearance of dawn, I rose, and brought the manuscript to the window, but it was impossible to read it yet. I devoted half an hour to dressing, and then returned to it again. Now, with a little difficulty, I could manage; and with intense and eager interest, I devoured the remainder of its contents. When it was ended, and my transient regret at its abrupt conclusion was over, I opened the window and put out my head to catch the cooling breeze, and imbibe deep draughts of the pure morning air. A splendid morning it was; the half-frozen dew lay thick on the grass, the swallows were twittering round me, the rooks cawing, and cows lowing in the distance; and early frost and summer sunshine mingled their sweetness in the air. But I did not think of that: a confusion of countless thoughts and varied emotions crowded upon me while I gazed abstractedly on the lovely face of nature. Soon, however, this chaos of thoughts and passions cleared away, giving place to two distinct emotions: joy unspeakable that my adored Helen was all I wished to think her — that through the noisome vapours of the world's aspersions and my own fancied convictions, her character shone bright, and clear, and stainless as that sun I could not bear to look on; and shame and deep remorse for my own conduct.

Immediately after breakfast I hurried over to Wildfell Hall. Rachel had risen many degrees in my estimation since yesterday. I was ready to greet her quite as an old friend; but every kindly impulse was checked by the look of cold distrust she cast upon me on opening the door. The old virgin had constituted herself the guardian of her lady's honour, I suppose, and doubtless she saw in me another Mr. Hargrave, only the more dangerous in being more esteemed and trusted by her mistress.

'Missis can't see any one to-day, sir — she's poorly,' said she, in answer to my inquiry for Mrs. Graham.

'But I must see her, Rachel,' said I, placing my hand on the door to prevent its being shut against me.

'Indeed, sir, you can't,' replied she, settling her countenance in still more iron frigidity than before.

'Be so good as to announce me.'

'It's no manner of use, Mr. Markham; she's poorly, I tell you.'

Just in time to prevent me from committing the impropriety of taking the citadel by storm, and pushing forward unannounced, an inner door opened, and little Arthur appeared with his frolicsome playfellow, the dog. He seized my hand between both his, and smilingly drew me forward.

'Mamma says you're to come in, Mr. Markham,' said he, 'and I am to go out and play with Rover.'

Rachel retired with a sigh, and I stepped into the parlour and shut the door. There, before the fire-place, stood the tall, graceful figure, wasted with many sorrows. I cast the manuscript on the table, and looked in her face. Anxious and pale, it was turned towards me; her clear, dark eyes were fixed on mine with a gaze so intensely earnest that they bound me like a spell.

'Have you looked it over?' she murmured. The spell was broken.

'I've read it through,' said I, advancing into the room, — 'and I want to know if you'll forgive me — if you can forgive me?'

She did not answer, but her eyes glistened, and a faint red mantled on her lip and cheek. As I approached, she abruptly turned away, and went to the window. It was not in anger, I was well assured, but only to conceal or control her emotion. I therefore ventured to follow and stand beside her there, — but not to speak. She gave me her hand, without turning her head, and murmured in a voice she strove in vain to steady, — 'Can you forgive me?'

It might be deemed a breach of trust, I thought, to convey that lily hand to my lips, so I only gently pressed it between my own, and smilingly replied, — 'I hardly can. You should have told me this before. It shows a want of confidence — '

'Oh, no,' cried she, eagerly interrupting me; 'it was not that. It was no want of confidence in you; but if I had told you anything of my history, I must have told you all, in order to excuse my conduct; and I might well shrink from such a disclosure, till necessity obliged me to make it. But you forgive me? — I have done very, very wrong, I know; but, as usual, I have reaped the bitter fruits of my own error, — and must reap them to the end.'

Bitter, indeed, was the tone of anguish, repressed by resolute firmness, in which this was spoken. Now, I raised her hand to my lips, and fervently kissed it again and again; for tears prevented any other reply. She suffered these wild caresses without resistance or resentment; then, suddenly turning from me, she paced twice or thrice through the room. I knew by the contraction of her brow, the tight compression of her lips, and wringing of her hands, that meantime a violent conflict between reason and passion was silently passing within. At length she paused before the empty fire-place, and turning to me, said calmly — if that might be called calmness which was so evidently the result of a violent effort, — 'Now, Gilbert, you must leave me — not this moment, but soon — and you must never come again.'

'Never again, Helen? just when I love you more than ever.'

'For that very reason, if it be so, we should not meet again. I thought this interview was necessary — at least, I persuaded myself it was so — that we might severally ask and receive each other's pardon for the past; but there can be no excuse for another. I shall leave this place, as soon as I have means to seek another asylum; but our intercourse must end here.'

'End here!' echoed I; and approaching the high, carved chimney-piece, I leant my hand against its heavy mouldings, and dropped my forehead upon it in silent, sullen despondency.

'You must not come again,' continued she. There was a slight tremor in her voice, but I thought her whole manner was provokingly composed, considering the dreadful sentence she pronounced. 'You must know why I tell you so,' she resumed; 'and you must see that it is better to part at once: — if it be hard to say adieu for ever, you ought to help me.' She paused. I did not answer. 'Will you promise not to come? — if you won't, and if you do come here again, you will drive me away before I know where to find another place of refuge — or how to seek it.'

'Helen,' said I, turning impatiently towards her, 'I cannot discuss the matter of eternal separation calmly and dispassionately as you can do. It is no question of mere expedience with me; it is a question of life and death!'

She was silent. Her pale lips quivered, and her fingers trembled with agitation, as she nervously entwined them in the hair-chain to which was appended her small gold watch — the only thing of value she had permitted herself to keep. I had said an unjust and cruel thing; but I must needs follow it up with something worse.

'But, Helen!' I began in a soft, low tone, not daring to raise my eyes to her face, 'that man is not your husband: in the sight of heaven he has forfeited all claim to — ' She seized my arm with a grasp of startling energy.

'Gilbert, don't!' she cried, in a tone that would have pierced a heart of adamant. 'For God's sake, don't you attempt these arguments! No fiend could torture me like this!'

'I won't, I won't!' said I, gently laying my hand on hers; almost as much alarmed at her vehemence as ashamed of my own misconduct.

'Instead of acting like a true friend,' continued she, breaking from me, and throwing herself into the old arm-chair, 'and helping me with all your might — or rather taking your own part in the struggle of right against passion — you leave all the burden to me; — and not satisfied with that, you do your utmost to fight against me — when you know that! — ‘ she paused, and hid her face in her handkerchief.

‘Forgive me, Helen!’ pleaded I. ‘I will never utter another word on the subject. But may we not still meet as friends?’

‘It will not do,’ she replied, mournfully shaking her head; and then she raised her eyes to mine, with a mildly reproachful look that seemed to say, ‘You must know that as well as I.’

‘Then what must we do?’ cried I, passionately. But immediately I added in a quieter tone — ‘I’ll do whatever you desire; only don’t say that this meeting is to be our last.’

‘And why not? Don’t you know that every time we meet the thoughts of the final parting will become more painful? Don’t you feel that every interview makes us dearer to each other than the last?’

The utterance of this last question was hurried and low, and the downcast eyes and burning blush too plainly showed that she, at least, had felt it. It was scarcely prudent to make such an admission, or to add — as she presently did — ‘I have power to bid you go, now: another time it might be different,’ — but I was not base enough to attempt to take advantage of her candour.

‘But we may write,’ I timidly suggested. ‘You will not deny me that consolation?’

‘We can hear of each other through my brother.’

‘Your brother!’ A pang of remorse and shame shot through me. She had not heard of the injury he had sustained at my hands; and I had not the courage to tell her. ‘Your brother will not help us,’ I said: ‘he would have all communion between us to be entirely at an end.’

‘And he would be right, I suppose. As a friend of both, he would wish us both well; and every friend would tell us it was our interest, as well as our duty, to forget each other, though we might not see it ourselves. But don’t be afraid, Gilbert,’ she added, smiling sadly at my manifest discomposure; ‘there is little chance of my forgetting you. But I did not mean that Frederick should be the means of transmitting messages between us — only that each might know, through him, of the other’s welfare; — and more than this ought not to be: for you are young, Gilbert, and you ought to marry — and will some time, though you may think it impossible now: and though I hardly can say I wish you to forget me, I know it is right that you should, both for your own happiness, and that of your future wife; — and therefore I must and will wish it,’ she added resolutely.

‘And you are young too, Helen,’ I boldly replied; ‘and when that profligate scoundrel has run through his career, you will give your hand to me — I’ll wait till then.’

But she would not leave me this support. Independently of the moral evil of basing our hopes upon the death of another, who, if unfit for this world, was at least no less so for the next, and whose amelioration would thus become our bane and his greatest transgression our greatest benefit, — she maintained it to be madness: many men of Mr. Huntingdon's habits had lived to a ripe though miserable old age. 'And if I,' said she, 'am young in years, I am old in sorrow; but even if trouble should fail to kill me before vice destroys him, think, if he reached but fifty years or so, would you wait twenty or fifteen — in vague uncertainty and suspense — through all the prime of youth and manhood — and marry at last a woman faded and worn as I shall be — without ever having seen me from this day to that? — You would not,' she continued, interrupting my earnest protestations of unfailing constancy, — 'or if you would, you should not. Trust me, Gilbert; in this matter I know better than you. You think me cold and stony-hearted, and you may, but — '

'I don't, Helen.'

'Well, never mind: you might if you would: but I have not spent my solitude in utter idleness, and I am not speaking now from the impulse of the moment, as you do. I have thought of all these matters again and again; I have argued these questions with myself, and pondered well our past, and present, and future career; and, believe me, I have come to the right conclusion at last. Trust my words rather than your own feelings now, and in a few years you will see that I was right — though at present I hardly can see it myself,' she murmured with a sigh as she rested her head on her hand. 'And don't argue against me any more: all you can say has been already said by my own heart and refuted by my reason. It was hard enough to combat those suggestions as they were whispered within me; in your mouth they are ten times worse, and if you knew how much they pain me you would cease at once, I know. If you knew my present feelings, you would even try to relieve them at the expense of your own.'

'I will go — in a minute, if that can relieve you — and never return!' said I, with bitter emphasis. 'But, if we may never meet, and never hope to meet again, is it a crime to exchange our thoughts by letter? May not kindred spirits meet, and mingle in communion, whatever be the fate and circumstances of their earthly tenements?'

'They may, they may!' cried she, with a momentary burst of glad enthusiasm. 'I thought of that too, Gilbert, but I feared to mention it, because I feared you would not understand my views upon the subject. I fear it even now — I fear any kind friend would tell us we are both deluding ourselves with the idea of keeping up a spiritual intercourse without hope or prospect of anything further — without fostering vain regrets and hurtful aspirations, and feeding thoughts that should be sternly and pitilessly left to perish of inanition.'

'Never mind our kind friends: if they can part our bodies, it is enough; in God's name, let them not sunder our souls!' cried I, in terror lest she should deem it her duty to deny us this last remaining consolation.

'But no letters can pass between us here,' said she, 'without giving fresh food for scandal; and when I departed, I had intended that my new abode should be unknown to you as to the rest of the world; not that I should doubt your word if you promised not to visit me, but I thought you would be more tranquil in your own mind if you knew you could not do it, and likely to find less difficulty in abstracting yourself from me if you could not picture my situation to your mind. But listen,' said she, smilingly putting up her finger to check my impatient reply: 'in six months you shall hear from Frederick precisely where I am; and if you still retain your wish to write to me, and think you can maintain a correspondence all thought, all spirit — such as disembodied souls or unimpassioned friends, at least, might hold, — write, and I will answer you.'

'Six months!'

'Yes, to give your present ardour time to cool, and try the truth and constancy of your soul's love for mine. And now, enough has been said between us. Why can't we part at once?' exclaimed she, almost wildly, after a moment's pause, as she suddenly rose from her chair, with her hands resolutely clasped together. I thought it was my duty to go without delay; and I approached and half extended my hand as if to take leave — she grasped it in silence. But this thought of final separation was too intolerable: it seemed to squeeze the blood out of my heart; and my feet were glued to the floor.

'And must we never meet again?' I murmured, in the anguish of my soul.

'We shall meet in heaven. Let us think of that,' said she in a tone of desperate calmness; but her eyes glittered wildly, and her face was deadly pale.

'But not as we are now,' I could not help replying. 'It gives me little consolation to think I shall next behold you as a disembodied spirit, or an altered being, with a frame perfect and glorious, but not like this! — and a heart, perhaps, entirely estranged from me.'

'No, Gilbert, there is perfect love in heaven!'

'So perfect, I suppose, that it soars above distinctions, and you will have no closer sympathy with me than with any one of the ten thousand thousand angels and the innumerable multitude of happy spirits round us.'

'Whatever I am, you will be the same, and, therefore, cannot possibly regret it; and whatever that change may be we know it must be for the better.'

'But if I am to be so changed that I shall cease to adore you with my whole heart and soul, and love you beyond every other creature, I shall not be myself; and though, if ever I win heaven at all, I must, I know, be infinitely better and happier than I am now, my earthly nature cannot rejoice in the anticipation of such beatitude, from which itself and its chief joy must be excluded.'

'Is your love all earthly, then?'

'No, but I am supposing we shall have no more intimate communion with each other than with the rest.'

'If so, it will be because we love them more, and not each other less.

Increase of love brings increase of happiness, when it is mutual, and pure as that will be.'

'But can you, Helen, contemplate with delight this prospect of losing me in a sea of glory?'

'I own I cannot; but we know not that it will be so; — and I do know that to regret the exchange of earthly pleasures for the joys of heaven, is as if the grovelling caterpillar should lament that it must one day quit the nibbled leaf to soar aloft and flutter through the air, roving at will from flower to flower, sipping sweet honey from their cups, or basking in their sunny petals. If these little creatures knew how great a change awaited them, no doubt they would regret it; but would not all such sorrow be misplaced? And if that illustration will not move you, here is another: — We are children now; we feel as children, and we understand as children; and when we are told that men and women do not play with toys, and that our companions will one day weary of the trivial sports and occupations that interest them and us so deeply now, we cannot help being saddened at the thoughts of such an alteration, because we cannot conceive that as we grow up our own minds will become so enlarged and elevated that we ourselves shall then regard as trifling those objects and pursuits we now so fondly cherish, and that, though our companions will no longer join us in those childish pastimes, they will drink with us at other fountains of delight, and mingle their souls with ours in higher aims and nobler occupations beyond our present comprehension, but not less deeply relished or less truly good for that, while yet both we and they remain essentially the same individuals as before. But, Gilbert, can you really derive no consolation from the thought that we may meet together where there is no more pain and sorrow, no more striving against sin, and struggling of the spirit against the flesh; where both will behold the same glorious truths, and drink exalted and supreme felicity from the same fountain of light and goodness — that Being whom both will worship with the same intensity of holy ardour — and where pure and happy creatures both will love with the same divine affection? If you cannot, never write to me!'

'Helen, I can! if faith would never fail.'

'Now, then,' exclaimed she, 'while this hope is strong within us — '

'We will part,' I cried. 'You shall not have the pain of another effort to dismiss me. I will go at once; but — '

I did not put my request in words: she understood it instinctively, and this time she yielded too — or rather, there was nothing so deliberate as requesting or yielding in the matter: there was a sudden impulse that neither could resist. One moment I stood and looked into her face, the next I held her to my heart, and we seemed to grow together in a close embrace from which no physical or mental force could rend us. A whispered 'God bless you!' and 'Go — go!' was all she said; but while she spoke she held me so fast that, without violence, I could not have obeyed her. At length, however, by some heroic effort, we tore ourselves apart, and I rushed from the house.

I have a confused remembrance of seeing little Arthur running up the garden-walk to meet me, and of bolting over the wall to avoid him — and subsequently running down the steep fields, clearing the stone fences and hedges as they came in my way, till I got completely out of sight of the old hall and down to the bottom of the hill; and then of long hours spent in bitter tears and lamentations, and melancholy musings in the lonely valley, with the eternal music in my ears, of the west wind rushing through the overshadowing trees, and the brook babbling and gurgling along its stony bed; my eyes, for the most part, vacantly fixed on the deep, chequered shades restlessly playing over the bright sunny grass at my feet, where now and then a withered leaf or two would come dancing to share the revelry; but my heart was away up the hill in that dark room where she was weeping desolate and alone — she whom I was not to comfort, not to see again, till years or suffering had overcome us both, and torn our spirits from their perishing abodes of clay.

There was little business done that day, you may be sure. The farm was abandoned to the labourers, and the labourers were left to their own devices. But one duty must be attended to; I had not forgotten my assault upon Frederick Lawrence; and I must see him to apologise for the unhappy deed. I would fain have put it off till the morrow; but what if he should denounce me to his sister in the meantime? No, no! I must ask his pardon to-day, and entreat him to be lenient in his accusation, if the revelation must be made. I deferred it, however, till the evening, when my spirits were more composed, and when — oh, wonderful perversity of human nature! — some faint germs of indefinite hopes were beginning to rise in my mind; not that I intended to cherish them, after all that had been said on the subject, but there they must lie for a while, uncrushed though not encouraged, till I had learnt to live without them.

Arrived at Woodford, the young squire’s abode, I found no little difficulty in obtaining admission to his presence. The servant that opened the door told me his master was very ill, and seemed to think it doubtful whether he would be able to see me. I was not going to be baulked, however. I waited calmly in the hall to be announced, but inwardly determined to take no denial. The message was such as I expected — a polite intimation that Mr. Lawrence could see no one; he was feverish, and must not be disturbed.

‘I shall not disturb him long,’ said I; ‘but I must see him for a moment: it is on business of importance that I wish to speak to him.’

‘I’ll tell him, sir,’ said the man. And I advanced further into the hall and followed him nearly to the door of the apartment where his master was — for it seemed he was not in bed. The answer returned was that Mr. Lawrence hoped I would be so good as to leave a message or a note with the servant, as he could attend to no business at present.

‘He may as well see me as you,’ said I; and, stepping past the astonished footman, I boldly rapped at the door, entered, and closed it behind me. The room was spacious and handsomely furnished — very comfortably, too, for a bachelor. A clear, red fire was burning in the polished grate: a superannuated greyhound, given up to idleness and good living, lay basking before it on the thick, soft rug, on one corner of which, beside the sofa, sat a smart young springer, looking wistfully up in its master's face — perhaps asking permission to share his couch, or, it might be, only soliciting a caress from his hand or a kind word from his lips. The invalid himself looked very interesting as he lay reclining there, in his elegant dressing-gown, with a silk handkerchief bound across his temples. His usually pale face was flushed and feverish; his eyes were half closed, until he became sensible of my presence — and then he opened them wide enough: one hand was thrown listlessly over the back of the sofa, and held a small volume, with which, apparently, he had been vainly attempting to beguile the weary hours. He dropped it, however, in his start of indignant surprise as I advanced into the room and stood before him on the rug. He raised himself on his pillows, and gazed upon me with equal degrees of nervous horror, anger, and amazement depicted on his countenance.

'Mr. Markham, I scarcely expected this!' he said; and the blood left his cheek as he spoke.

'I know you didn't,' answered I; 'but be quiet a minute, and I'll tell you what I came for.' Unthinkingly, I advanced a step or two nearer. He winced at my approach, with an expression of aversion and instinctive physical fear anything but conciliatory to my feelings. I stepped back, however.

'Make your story a short one,' said he, putting his hand on the small silver bell that stood on the table beside him, 'or I shall be obliged to call for assistance. I am in no state to bear your brutalities now, or your presence either.' And in truth the moisture started from his pores and stood on his pale forehead like dew.

Such a reception was hardly calculated to diminish the difficulties of my unenviable task. It must be performed however, in some fashion; and so I plunged into it at once, and floundered through it as I could.

'The truth is, Lawrence,' said I, 'I have not acted quite correctly towards you of late — especially on this last occasion; and I'm come to — in short, to express my regret for what has been done, and to beg your pardon. If you don't choose to grant it,' I added hastily, not liking the aspect of his face, 'it's no matter; only I've done my duty — that's all.'

'It's easily done,' replied he, with a faint smile bordering on a sneer: 'to abuse your friend and knock him on the head without any assignable cause, and then tell him the deed was not quite correct, but it's no matter whether he pardons it or not.'

'I forgot to tell you that it was in consequence of a mistake,' — muttered I. 'I should have made a very handsome apology, but you provoked me so confoundedly with your — . Well, I suppose it's my fault. The fact is, I didn't know that you were Mrs. Graham's brother, and I saw and heard some things respecting your conduct towards her which were calculated to awaken unpleasant suspicions, that, allow me to say, a little candour and confidence on your part might have removed; and, at last, I chanced to overhear a part of a conversation between you and her that made me think I had a right to hate you.'

'And how came you to know that I was her brother?' asked he, in some anxiety.

'She told me herself. She told me all. She knew I might be trusted. But you needn't disturb yourself about that, Mr. Lawrence, for I've seen the last of her!'

'The last! Is she gone, then?'

'No; but she has bid adieu to me, and I have promised never to go near that house again while she inhabits it.' I could have groaned aloud at the bitter thoughts awakened by this turn in the discourse. But I only clenched my hands and stamped my foot upon the rug. My companion, however, was evidently relieved.

'You have done right,' he said, in a tone of unqualified approbation, while his face brightened into almost a sunny expression. 'And as for the mistake, I am sorry for both our sakes that it should have occurred. Perhaps you can forgive my want of candour, and remember, as some partial mitigation of the offence, how little encouragement to friendly confidence you have given me of late.'

'Yes, yes — I remember it all: nobody can blame me more than I blame myself in my own heart; at any rate, nobody can regret more sincerely than I do the result of my brutality, as you rightly term it.'

'Never mind that,' said he, faintly smiling; 'let us forget all unpleasant words on both sides, as well as deeds, and consign to oblivion everything that we have cause to regret. Have you any objection to take my hand, or you'd rather not?' It trembled through weakness as he held it out, and dropped before I had time to catch it and give it a hearty squeeze, which he had not the strength to return.

'How dry and burning your hand is, Lawrence,' said I. 'You are really ill, and I have made you worse by all this talk.'

'Oh, it is nothing; only a cold got by the rain.'

'My doing, too.'

'Never mind that. But tell me, did you mention this affair to my sister?'

'To confess the truth, I had not the courage to do so; but when you tell her, will you just say that I deeply regret it, and — ?'

'Oh, never fear! I shall say nothing against you, as long as you keep your good resolution of remaining aloof from her. She has not heard of my illness, then, that you are aware of?'

'I think not.'

'I'm glad of that, for I have been all this time tormenting myself with the fear that somebody would tell her I was dying, or desperately ill, and she would be either distressing herself on account of her inability to hear from me or do me any good, or perhaps committing the madness of coming to see me. I must contrive to let her know something about it, if I can,' continued he, reflectively, 'or she will be hearing some such story. Many would be glad to tell her such news, just to see how she would take it; and then she might expose herself to fresh scandal.'

'I wish I had told her,' said I. 'If it were not for my promise, I would tell her now.'

'By no means! I am not dreaming of that; — but if I were to write a short note, now, not mentioning you, Markham, but just giving a slight account of my illness, by way of excuse for my not coming to see her, and to put her on her guard against any exaggerated reports she may hear, — and address it in a disguised hand — would you do me the favour to slip it into the post-office as you pass? for I dare not trust any of the servants in such a case.'

Most willingly I consented, and immediately brought him his desk. There was little need to disguise his hand, for the poor fellow seemed to have considerable difficulty in writing at all, so as to be legible. When the note was done, I thought it time to retire, and took leave, after asking if there was anything in the world I could do for him, little or great, in the way of alleviating his sufferings, and repairing the injury I had done.

'No,' said he; 'you have already done much towards it; you have done more for me than the most skilful physician could do: for you have relieved my mind of two great burdens — anxiety on my sister's account, and deep regret upon your own: for I do believe these two sources of torment have had more effect in working me up into a fever than anything else; and I am persuaded I shall soon recover now. There is one more thing you can do for me, and that is, come and see me now and then — for you see I am very lonely here, and I promise your entrance shall not be disputed again.'

I engaged to do so, and departed with a cordial pressure of the hand. I posted the letter on my way home, most manfully resisting the temptation of dropping in a word from myself at the same time.

CHAPTER XLVI

I felt strongly tempted, at times, to enlighten my mother and sister on the real character and circumstances of the persecuted tenant of Wildfell Hall, and at first I greatly regretted having omitted to ask that lady's permission to do so; but, on due reflection, I considered that if it were known to them, it could not long remain a secret to the Millwards and Wilsons, and such was my present appreciation of Eliza Millward's disposition, that, if once she got a clue to the story, I should fear she would soon find means to enlighten Mr. Huntingdon upon the place of his wife's retreat. I would therefore wait patiently till these weary six months were over, and then, when the fugitive had found another home, and I was permitted to write to her, I would beg to be allowed to clear her name from these vile calumnies: at present I must content myself with simply asserting that I knew them to be false, and would prove it some day, to the shame of those who slandered her. I don't think anybody believed me, but everybody soon learned to avoid insinuating a word against her, or even mentioning her name in my presence. They thought I was so madly infatuated by the seductions of that unhappy lady that I was determined to support her in the very face of reason; and meantime I grow insupportably morose and misanthropical from the idea that every one I met was harbouring unworthy thoughts of the supposed Mrs. Graham, and would express them if he dared. My poor mother was quite distressed about me; but I couldn't help it — at least I thought I could not, though sometimes I felt a pang of remorse for my undutiful conduct to her, and made an effort to amend, attended with some partial success; and indeed I was generally more humanised in my demeanour to her than to any one else, Mr. Lawrence excepted. Rose and Fergus usually shunned my presence; and it was well they did, for I was not fit company for them, nor they for me, under the present circumstances.

Mrs. Huntingdon did not leave Wildfell Hall till above two months after our farewell interview. During that time she never appeared at church, and I never went near the house: I only knew she was still there by her brother's brief answers to my many and varied inquiries respecting her. I was a very constant and attentive visitor to him throughout the whole period of his illness and convalescence; not only from the interest I took in his recovery, and my desire to cheer him up and make the utmost possible amends for my former 'brutality,' but from my growing attachment to himself, and the increasing pleasure I found in his society — partly from his increased cordiality to me, but chiefly on account of his close connection, both in blood and in affection, with my adored Helen. I loved him for it better than I liked to express: and I took a secret delight in pressing those slender white fingers, so marvellously like her own, considering he was not a woman, and in watching the passing changes in his fair, pale features, and observing the intonations of his voice, detecting resemblances which I wondered had never struck me before. He provoked me at times, indeed, by his evident reluctance to talk to me about his sister, though I did not question the friendliness of his motives in wishing to discourage my remembrance of her.

His recovery was not quite so rapid as he had expected it to be; he was not able to mount his pony till a fortnight after the date of our reconciliation; and the first use he made of his returning strength was to ride over by night to Wildfell Hall, to see his sister. It was a hazardous enterprise both for him and for her, but he thought it necessary to consult with her on the subject of her projected departure, if not to calm her apprehensions respecting his health, and the worst result was a slight relapse of his illness, for no one knew of the visit but the inmates of the old Hall, except myself; and I believe it had not been his intention to mention it to me, for when I came to see him the next day, and observed he was not so well as he ought to have been, he merely said he had caught cold by being out too late in the evening.

'You'll never be able to see your sister, if you don't take care of yourself,' said I, a little provoked at the circumstance on her account, instead of commiserating him.

'I've seen her already,' said he, quietly.

'You've seen her!' cried I, in astonishment.

'Yes.' And then he told me what considerations had impelled him to make the venture, and with what precautions he had made it.

'And how was she?' I eagerly asked.

'As usual,' was the brief though sad reply.

'As usual — that is, far from happy and far from strong.'

'She is not positively ill,' returned he; 'and she will recover her spirits in a while, I have no doubt — but so many trials have been almost too much for her. How threatening those clouds look,' continued he, turning towards the window. 'We shall have thunder-showers before night, I imagine, and they are just in the midst of stacking my corn. Have you got yours all in yet?'

'No. And, Lawrence, did she — did your sister mention me?'

'She asked if I had seen you lately.'

'And what else did she say?'

'I cannot tell you all she said,' replied he, with a slight smile; 'for we talked a good deal, though my stay was but short; but our conversation was chiefly on the subject of her intended departure, which I begged her to delay till I was better able to assist her in her search after another home.'

'But did she say no more about me?'

'She did not say much about you, Markham. I should not have encouraged her to do so, had she been inclined; but happily she was not: she only asked a few questions concerning you, and seemed satisfied with my brief answers, wherein she showed herself wiser than her friend; and I may tell you, too, that she seemed to be far more anxious lest you should think too much of her, than lest you should forget her.'

'She was right.'

'But I fear your anxiety is quite the other way respecting her.'

'No, it is not: I wish her to be happy; but I don't wish her to forget me altogether. She knows it is impossible that I should forget her; and she is right to wish me not to remember her too well. I should not desire her to regret me too deeply; but I can scarcely imagine she will make herself very unhappy about me, because I know I am not worthy of it, except in my appreciation of her.'

'You are neither of you worthy of a broken heart, — nor of all the sighs, and tears, and sorrowful thoughts that have been, and I fear will be, wasted upon you both; but, at present, each has a more exalted opinion of the other than, I fear, he or she deserves; and my sister's feelings are naturally full as keen as yours, and I believe more constant; but she has the good sense and fortitude to strive against them in this particular; and I trust she will not rest till she has entirely weaned her thoughts — ' he hesitated.

'From me,' said I.

'And I wish you would make the like exertions,' continued he.

'Did she tell you that that was her intention?'

'No; the question was not broached between us: there was no necessity for it, for I had no doubt that such was her determination.'

'To forget me?'

'Yes, Markham! Why not?'

'Oh, well!' was my only audible reply; but I internally answered, — 'No, Lawrence, you're wrong there: she is not determined to forget me. It would be wrong to forget one so deeply and fondly devoted to her, who can so thoroughly appreciate her excellencies, and sympathise with all her thoughts, as I can do, and it would be wrong in me to forget so excellent and divine a piece of God's creation as she, when I have once so truly loved and known her.' But I said no more to him on that subject. I instantly started a new topic of conversation, and soon took leave of my companion, with a feeling of less cordiality towards him than usual. Perhaps I had no right to be annoyed at him, but I was so nevertheless.

In little more than a week after this I met him returning from a visit to the Wilsons'; and I now resolved to do him a good turn, though at the expense of his feelings, and perhaps at the risk of incurring that displeasure which is so commonly the reward of those who give disagreeable information, or tender their advice unasked. In this, believe me, I was actuated by no motives of revenge for the occasional annoyances I had lately sustained from him, — nor yet by any feeling of malevolent enmity towards Miss Wilson, but purely by the fact that I could not endure that such a woman should be Mrs. Huntingdon's sister, and that, as well for his own sake as for hers, I could not bear to think of his being deceived into a union with one so unworthy of him, and so utterly unfitted to be the partner of his quiet home, and the companion of his life. He had had uncomfortable suspicions on that head himself, I imagined; but such was his inexperience, and such were the lady's powers of attraction, and her skill in bringing them to bear upon his young imagination, that they had not disturbed him long; and I believe the only effectual causes of the vacillating indecision that had preserved him hitherto from making an actual declaration of love, was the consideration of her connections, and especially of her mother, whom he could not abide. Had they lived at a distance, he might have surmounted the objection, but within two or three miles of Woodford it was really no light matter.

'You've been to call on the Wilsons, Lawrence,' said I, as I walked beside his pony.

'Yes,' replied he, slightly averting his face: 'I thought it but civil to take the first opportunity of returning their kind attentions, since they have been so very particular and constant in their inquiries throughout the whole course of my illness.'

'It's all Miss Wilson's doing.'

'And if it is,' returned he, with a very perceptible blush, 'is that any reason why I should not make a suitable acknowledgment?'

'It is a reason why you should not make the acknowledgment she looks for.'

'Let us drop that subject if you please,' said he, in evident displeasure.

'No, Lawrence, with your leave we'll continue it a while longer; and I'll tell you something, now we're about it, which you may believe or not as you choose — only please to remember that it is not my custom to speak falsely, and that in this case I can have no motive for misrepresenting the truth — '

'Well, Markham, what now?'

'Miss Wilson hates your sister. It may be natural enough that, in her ignorance of the relationship, she should feel some degree of enmity against her, but no good or amiable woman would be capable of evincing that bitter, cold-blooded, designing malice towards a fancied rival that I have observed in her.'

'Markham!'

'Yes — and it is my belief that Eliza Millward and she, if not the very originators of the slanderous reports that have been propagated, were designedly the encouragers and chief disseminators of them. She was not desirous to mix up your name in the matter, of course, but her delight was, and still is, to blacken your sister's character to the utmost of her power, without risking too greatly the exposure of her own malevolence!'

'I cannot believe it,' interrupted my companion, his face burning with indignation.

'Well, as I cannot prove it, I must content myself with asserting that it is so to the best of my belief; but as you would not willingly marry Miss Wilson if it were so, you will do well to be cautious, till you have proved it to be otherwise.'

'I never told you, Markham, that I intended to marry Miss Wilson,' said he, proudly.

'No, but whether you do or not, she intends to marry you.'

'Did she tell you so?'

'No, but — '

'Then you have no right to make such an assertion respecting her.' He slightly quickened his pony's pace, but I laid my hand on its mane, determined he should not leave me yet.

'Wait a moment, Lawrence, and let me explain myself; and don't be so very — I don't know what to call it — inaccessible as you are. — I know what you think of Jane Wilson; and I believe I know how far you are mistaken in your opinion: you think she is singularly charming, elegant, sensible, and refined: you are not aware that she is selfish, cold-hearted, ambitious, artful, shallow-minded — '

'Enough, Markham — enough!'

'No; let me finish: — you don't know that, if you married her, your home would be rayless and comfortless; and it would break your heart at last to find yourself united to one so wholly incapable of sharing your tastes, feelings, and ideas — so utterly destitute of sensibility, good feeling, and true nobility of soul.'

'Have you done?' asked my companion quietly.

'Yes; — I know you hate me for my impertinence, but I don't care if it only conduces to preserve you from that fatal mistake.'

'Well!' returned he, with a rather wintry smile — 'I'm glad you have overcome or forgotten your own afflictions so far as to be able to study so deeply the affairs of others, and trouble your head so unnecessarily about the fancied or possible calamities of their future life.'

We parted — somewhat coldly again: but still we did not cease to be friends; and my well-meant warning, though it might have been more judiciously delivered, as well as more thankfully received, was not wholly unproductive of the desired effect: his visit to the Wilsons was not repeated, and though, in our subsequent interviews, he never mentioned her name to me, nor I to him, — I have reason to believe he pondered my words in his mind, eagerly though covertly sought information respecting the fair lady from other quarters, secretly compared my character of her with what he had himself observed and what he heard from others, and finally came to the conclusion that, all things considered, she had much better remain Miss Wilson of Ryecote Farm than be transmuted into Mrs. Lawrence of Woodford Hall. I believe, too, that he soon learned to contemplate with secret amazement his former predilection, and to congratulate himself on the lucky escape he had made; but he never confessed it to me, or hinted one word of acknowledgment for the part I had had in his deliverance, but this was not surprising to any one that knew him as I did.

As for Jane Wilson, she, of course, was disappointed and embittered by the sudden cold neglect and ultimate desertion of her former admirer. Had I done wrong to blight her cherished hopes? I think not; and certainly my conscience has never accused me, from that day to this, of any evil design in the matter.

CHAPTER XLVII

One morning, about the beginning of November, while I was inditing some business letters, shortly after breakfast, Eliza Millward came to call upon my sister. Rose had neither the discrimination nor the virulence to regard the little demon as I did, and they still preserved their former intimacy. At the moment of her arrival, however, there was no one in the room but Fergus and myself, my mother and sister being both of them absent, 'on household cares intent'; but I was not going to lay myself out for her amusement, whoever else might so incline: I merely honoured her with a careless salutation and a few words of course, and then went on with my writing, leaving my brother to be more polite if he chose. But she wanted to tease me.

'What a pleasure it is to find you at home, Mr. Markham!' said she, with a disingenuously malicious smile. 'I so seldom see you now, for you never come to the vicarage. Papa, is quite offended, I can tell you,' she added playfully, looking into my face with an impertinent laugh, as she seated herself, half beside and half before my desk, off the corner of the table.

'I have had a good deal to do of late,' said I, without looking up from my letter.

'Have you, indeed! Somebody said you had been strangely neglecting your business these last few months.'

'Somebody said wrong, for, these last two months especially, I have been particularly plodding and diligent.'

'Ah! well, there's nothing like active employment, I suppose, to console the afflicted; — and, excuse me, Mr. Markham, but you look so very far from well, and have been, by all accounts, so moody and thoughtful of late, — I could almost think you have some secret care preying on your spirits. Formerly,' said she timidly, 'I could have ventured to ask you what it was, and what I could do to comfort you: I dare not do it now.'

'You're very kind, Miss Eliza. When I think you can do anything to comfort me, I'll make bold to tell you.'

'Pray do! — I suppose I mayn't guess what it is that troubles you?'

'There's no necessity, for I'll tell you plainly. The thing that troubles me the most at present is a young lady sitting at my elbow, and preventing me from finishing my letter, and, thereafter, repairing to my daily business.'

Before she could reply to this ungallant speech, Rose entered the room; and Miss Eliza rising to greet her, they both seated themselves near the fire, where that idle lad Fergus was standing, leaning his shoulder against the corner of the chimney-piece, with his legs crossed and his hands in his breeches-pockets.

'Now, Rose, I'll tell you a piece of news — I hope you have not heard it before: for good, bad, or indifferent, one always likes to be the first to tell. It's about that sad Mrs. Graham — '

'Hush-sh-sh!' whispered Fergus, in a tone of solemn import. '"We never mention her; her name is never heard."' And glancing up, I caught him with his eye askance on me, and his finger pointed to his forehead; then, winking at the young lady with a doleful shake of the head, be whispered — 'A monomania — but don't mention it — all right but that.'

'I should be sorry to injure any one's feelings,' returned she, speaking below her breath. 'Another time, perhaps.'

'Speak out, Miss Eliza!' said I, not deigning to notice the other's buffooneries: 'you needn't fear to say anything in my presence.'

'Well,' answered she, 'perhaps you know already that Mrs. Graham's husband is not really dead, and that she had run away from him?' I started, and felt my face glow; but I bent it over my letter, and went on folding it up as she proceeded. 'But perhaps you did not know that she is now gone back to him again, and that a perfect reconciliation has taken place between them? Only think,' she continued, turning to the confounded Rose, 'what a fool the man must be!'

'And who gave you this piece of intelligence, Miss Eliza?' said I, interrupting my sister's exclamations.

'I had it from a very authentic source.'

'From whom, may I ask?'

'From one of the servants at Woodford.'

'Oh! I was not aware that you were on such intimate terms with Mr. Lawrence's household.'

'It was not from the man himself that I heard it, but he told it in confidence to our maid Sarah, and Sarah told it to me.'

'In confidence, I suppose? And you tell it in confidence to us? But I can tell you that it is but a lame story after all, and scarcely one-half of it true.'

While I spoke I completed the sealing and direction of my letters, with a somewhat unsteady hand, in spite of all my efforts to retain composure, and in spite of my firm conviction that the story was a lame one — that the supposed Mrs. Graham, most certainly, had not voluntarily gone back to her husband, or dreamt of a reconciliation. Most likely she was gone away, and the tale-bearing servant, not knowing what was become of her, had conjectured that such was the case, and our fair visitor had detailed it as a certainty, delighted with such an opportunity of tormenting me. But it was possible — barely possible — that some one might have betrayed her, and she had been taken away by force. Determined to know the worst, I hastily pocketed my two letters, and muttered something about being too late for the post, left the room, rushed into the yard, and vociferously called for my horse. No one being there, I dragged him out of the stable myself, strapped the saddle on to his back and the bridle on to his head, mounted, and speedily galloped away to Woodford. I found its owner pensively strolling in the grounds.

‘Is your sister gone?’ were my first words as I grasped his hand, instead of the usual inquiry after his health.

‘Yes, she’s gone,’ was his answer, so calmly spoken that my terror was at once removed.

‘I suppose I mayn’t know where she is?’ said I, as I dismounted, and relinquished my horse to the gardener, who, being the only servant within call, had been summoned by his master, from his employment of raking up the dead leaves on the lawn, to take him to the stables.

My companion gravely took my arm, and leading me away to the garden, thus answered my question, — ‘She is at Grassdale Manor, in — shire.’

‘Where?’ cried I, with a convulsive start.

‘At Grassdale Manor.’

‘How was it?’ I gasped. ‘Who betrayed her?’

‘She went of her own accord.’

‘Impossible, Lawrence! She could not be so frantic!’ exclaimed I, vehemently grasping his arm, as if to force him to unsay those hateful words.

‘She did,’ persisted he in the same grave, collected manner as before; ‘and not without reason,’ he continued, gently disengaging himself from my grasp. ‘Mr. Huntingdon is ill.’

‘And so she went to nurse him?’

‘Yes.’

‘Fool!’ I could not help exclaiming, and Lawrence looked up with a rather reproachful glance. ‘Is he dying, then?’

‘I think not, Markham.’

‘And how many more nurses has he? How many ladies are there besides to take care of him?’

‘None; he was alone, or she would not have gone.’

‘Oh, confound it! This is intolerable!’

‘What is? That he should be alone?’

I attempted no reply, for I was not sure that this circumstance did not partly conduce to my distraction. I therefore continued to pace the walk in silent anguish, with my hand pressed to my forehead; then suddenly pausing and turning to my companion, I impatiently exclaimed, ‘Why did she take this infatuated step? What fiend persuaded her to it?’

‘Nothing persuaded her but her own sense of duty.’

‘Humbug!’

‘I was half inclined to say so myself, Markham, at first. I assure you it was not by my advice that she went, for I detest that man as fervently as you can do, — except, indeed, that his reformation would give me much greater pleasure than his death; but all I did was to inform her of the circumstance of his illness (the consequence of a fall from his horse in hunting), and to tell her that that unhappy person, Miss Myers, had left him some time ago.’

‘It was ill done! Now, when he finds the convenience of her presence, he will make all manner of lying speeches and false, fair promises for the future, and she will believe him, and then her condition will be ten times worse and ten times more irremediable than before.'

'There does not appear to be much ground for such apprehensions at present,' said he, producing a letter from his pocket. 'From the account I received this morning, I should say — '

It was her writing! By an irresistible impulse I held out my hand, and the words, 'Let me see it,' involuntarily passed my lips. He was evidently reluctant to grant the request, but while he hesitated I snatched it from his hand. Recollecting myself, however, the minute after, I offered to restore it.

'Here, take it,' said I, 'if you don't want me to read it.'

'No,' replied he, 'you may read it if you like.'

I read it, and so may you.

Grassdale, Nov. 4th.

Dear Frederick, — I know you will be anxious to hear from me, and I will tell you all I can. Mr. Huntingdon is very ill, but not dying, or in any immediate danger; and he is rather better at present than he was when I came. I found the house in sad confusion: Mrs. Greaves, Benson, every decent servant had left, and those that were come to supply their places were a negligent, disorderly set, to say no worse — I must change them again, if I stay. A professional nurse, a grim, hard old woman, had been hired to attend the wretched invalid. He suffers much, and has no fortitude to bear him through. The immediate injuries he sustained from the accident, however, were not very severe, and would, as the doctor says, have been but trifling to a man of temperate habits, but with him it is very different. On the night of my arrival, when I first entered his room, he was lying in a kind of half delirium. He did not notice me till I spoke, and then he mistook me for another.

'Is it you, Alice, come again?' he murmured. 'What did you leave me for?'

'It is I, Arthur — it is Helen, your wife,' I replied.

'My wife!' said he, with a start. 'For heaven's sake, don't mention her — I have none. Devil take her,' he cried, a moment after, 'and you, too! What did you do it for?'

I said no more; but observing that he kept gazing towards the foot of the bed, I went and sat there, placing the light so as to shine full upon me, for I thought he might be dying, and I wanted him to know me. For a long time he lay silently looking upon me, first with a vacant stare, then with a fixed gaze of strange growing intensity. At last he startled me by suddenly raising himself on his elbow and demanding in a horrified whisper, with his eyes still fixed upon me, 'Who is it?'

'It is Helen Huntingdon,' said I, quietly rising at the same time, and removing to a less conspicuous position.

'I must be going mad,' cried he, 'or something — delirious, perhaps; but leave me, whoever you are. I can't bear that white face, and those eyes. For God's sake go, and send me somebody else that doesn't look like that!'

I went at once, and sent the hired nurse; but next morning I ventured to enter his chamber again, and, taking the nurse's place by his bedside, I watched him and waited on him for several hours, showing myself as little as possible, and only speaking when necessary, and then not above my breath. At first he addressed me as the nurse, but, on my crossing the room to draw up the window-blinds, in obedience to his directions, he said, 'No, it isn't nurse; it's Alice. Stay with me, do! That old hag will be the death of me.'

'I mean to stay with you,' said I. And after that he would call me Alice, or some other name almost equally repugnant to my feelings. I forced myself to endure it for a while, fearing a contradiction might disturb him too much; but when, having asked for a glass of water, while I held it to his lips, he murmured, 'Thanks, dearest!' I could not help distinctly observing, 'You would not say so if you knew me,' intending to follow that up with another declaration of my identity; but he merely muttered an incoherent reply, so I dropped it again, till some time after, when, as I was bathing his forehead and temples with vinegar and water to relieve the heat and pain in his head, he observed, after looking earnestly upon me for some minutes, 'I have such strange fancies — I can't get rid of them, and they won't let me rest; and the most singular and pertinacious of them all is your face and voice — they seem just like hers. I could swear at this moment that she was by my side.'

'She is,' said I.

'That seems comfortable,' continued he, without noticing my words; 'and while you do it, the other fancies fade away — but this only strengthens. — Go on — go on, till it vanishes, too. I can't stand such a mania as this; it would kill me!'

'It never will vanish,' said I, distinctly, 'for it is the truth!'

'The truth!' he cried, starting, as if an asp had stung him. 'You don't mean to say that you are really she?'

'I do; but you needn't shrink away from me, as if I were your greatest enemy: I am come to take care of you, and do what none of them would do.'

'For God's sake, don't torment me now!' cried he in pitiable agitation; and then he began to mutter bitter curses against me, or the evil fortune that had brought me there; while I put down the sponge and basin, and resumed my seat at the bed-side.

'Where are they?' said he: 'have they all left me — servants and all?'

'There are servants within call if you want them; but you had better lie down now and be quiet: none of them could or would attend you as carefully as I shall do.'

'I can't understand it at all,' said he, in bewildered perplexity. 'Was it a dream that — ' and he covered his eyes with his hands, as if trying to unravel the mystery.

'No, Arthur, it was not a dream, that your conduct was such as to oblige me to leave you; but I heard that you were ill and alone, and I am come back to nurse you. You need not fear to trust me: tell me all your wants, and I will try to satisfy them. There is no one else to care for you; and I shall not upbraid you now.'

'Oh! I see,' said he, with a bitter smile; 'it's an act of Christian charity, whereby you hope to gain a higher seat in heaven for yourself, and scoop a deeper pit in hell for me.'

'No; I came to offer you that comfort and assistance your situation required; and if I could benefit your soul as well as your body, and awaken some sense of contrition and — '

'Oh, yes; if you could overwhelm me with remorse and confusion of face, now's the time. What have you done with my son?'

'He is well, and you may see him some time, if you will compose yourself, but not now.'

'Where is he?'

'He is safe.'

'Is he here?'

'Wherever he is, you will not see him till you have promised to leave him entirely under my care and protection, and to let me take him away whenever and wherever I please, if I should hereafter judge it necessary to remove him again. But we will talk of that to-morrow: you must be quiet now.'

'No, let me see him now, I promise, if it must be so.'

'No — '

'I swear it, as God is in heaven! Now, then, let me see him.'

'But I cannot trust your oaths and promises: I must have a written agreement, and you must sign it in presence of a witness: but not to-day — to-morrow.'

'No, to-day; now,' persisted he: and he was in such a state of feverish excitement, and so bent upon the immediate gratification of his wish, that I thought it better to grant it at once, as I saw he would not rest till I did. But I was determined my son's interest should not be forgotten; and having clearly written out the promise I wished Mr. Huntingdon to give upon a slip of paper, I deliberately read it over to him, and made him sign it in the presence of Rachel. He begged I would not insist upon this: it was a useless exposure of my want of faith in his word to the servant. I told him I was sorry, but since he had forfeited my confidence, he must take the consequence. He next pleaded inability to hold the pen. 'Then we must wait until you can hold it,' said I. Upon which he said he would try; but then he could not see to write. I placed my finger where the signature was to be, and told him he might write his name in the dark, if he only knew where to put it. But he had not power to form the letters. 'In that case, you must be too ill to see the child,' said I; and finding me inexorable, he at length managed to ratify the agreement; and I bade Rachel send the boy.

All this may strike you as harsh, but I felt I must not lose my present advantage, and my son's future welfare should not be sacrificed to any mistaken tenderness for this man's feelings. Little Arthur had not forgotten his father, but thirteen months of absence, during which he had seldom been permitted to hear a word about him, or hardly to whisper his name, had rendered him somewhat shy; and when he was ushered into the darkened room where the sick man lay, so altered from his former self, with fiercely flushed face and wildly-gleaming eyes — he instinctively clung to me, and stood looking on his father with a countenance expressive of far more awe than pleasure.

‘Come here, Arthur,’ said the latter, extending his hand towards him. The child went, and timidly touched that burning hand, but almost started in alarm, when his father suddenly clutched his arm and drew him nearer to his side.

‘Do you know me?’ asked Mr. Huntingdon, intently perusing his features.

‘Yes.’

‘Who am I?’

‘Papa.’

‘Are you glad to see me?’

‘Yes.’

‘You’re not!’ replied the disappointed parent, relaxing his hold, and darting a vindictive glance at me.

Arthur, thus released, crept back to me and put his hand in mine. His father swore I had made the child hate him, and abused and cursed me bitterly. The instant he began I sent our son out of the room; and when he paused to breathe, I calmly assured him that he was entirely mistaken; I had never once attempted to prejudice his child against him.

‘I did indeed desire him to forget you,’ I said, ‘and especially to forget the lessons you taught him; and for that cause, and to lessen the danger of discovery, I own I have generally discouraged his inclination to talk about you; but no one can blame me for that, I think.’

The invalid only replied by groaning aloud, and rolling his head on a pillow in a paroxysm of impatience.

‘I am in hell, already!’ cried he. ‘This cursed thirst is burning my heart to ashes! Will nobody — ?’

Before he could finish the sentence I had poured out a glass of some acidulated, cooling drink that was on the table, and brought it to him. He drank it greedily, but muttered, as I took away the glass, — ‘I suppose you’re heaping coals of fire on my head, you think?’

Not noticing this speech, I asked if there was anything else I could do for him.

‘Yes; I’ll give you another opportunity of showing your Christian magnanimity,’ sneered he: ‘set my pillow straight, and these confounded bed-clothes.’ I did so. ‘There: now get me another glass of that slop.’ I complied. ‘This is delightful, isn’t it?’ said he with a malicious grin, as I held it to his lips; ‘you never hoped for such a glorious opportunity?’

‘Now, shall I stay with you?’ said I, as I replaced the glass on the table: ‘or will you be more quiet if I go and send the nurse?’

‘Oh, yes, you’re wondrous gentle and obliging! But you’ve driven me mad with it all!’ responded he, with an impatient toss.

‘I’ll leave you, then,’ said I; and I withdrew, and did not trouble him with my presence again that day, except for a minute or two at a time, just to see how he was and what he wanted.

Next morning the doctor ordered him to be bled; and after that he was more subdued and tranquil. I passed half the day in his room at different intervals. My presence did not appear to agitate or irritate him as before, and he accepted my services quietly, without any bitter remarks: indeed, he scarcely spoke at all, except to make known his wants, and hardly then. But on the morrow, that is to say, in proportion as he recovered from the state of exhaustion and stupefaction, his ill-nature appeared to revive.

‘Oh, this sweet revenge!’ cried he, when I had been doing all I could to make him comfortable and to remedy the carelessness of his nurse. ‘And you can enjoy it with such a quiet conscience too, because it’s all in the way of duty.’

‘It is well for me that I am doing my duty,’ said I, with a bitterness I could not repress, ‘for it is the only comfort I have; and the satisfaction of my own conscience, it seems, is the only reward I need look for!’

He looked rather surprised at the earnestness of my manner.

‘What reward did you look for?’ he asked.

‘You will think me a liar if I tell you; but I did hope to benefit you: as well to better your mind as to alleviate your present sufferings; but it appears I am to do neither; your own bad spirit will not let me. As far as you are concerned, I have sacrificed my own feelings, and all the little earthly comfort that was left me, to no purpose; and every little thing I do for you is ascribed to self-righteous malice and refined revenge!’

‘It’s all very fine, I daresay,’ said he, eyeing me with stupid amazement; ‘and of course I ought to be melted to tears of penitence and admiration at the sight of so much generosity and superhuman goodness; but you see I can’t manage it. However, pray do me all the good you can, if you do really find any pleasure in it; for you perceive I am almost as miserable just now as you need wish to see me. Since you came, I confess, I have had better attendance than before, for these wretches neglected me shamefully, and all my old friends seem to have fairly forsaken me. I’ve had a dreadful time of it, I assure you: I sometimes thought I should have died: do you think there’s any chance?’

‘There’s always a chance of death; and it is always well to live with such a chance in view.’

‘Yes, yes! but do you think there’s any likelihood that this illness will have a fatal termination?’

‘I cannot tell; but, supposing it should, how are you prepared to meet the event?’

‘Why, the doctor told me I wasn’t to think about it, for I was sure to get better if I stuck to his regimen and prescriptions.'

'I hope you may, Arthur; but neither the doctor nor I can speak with certainty in such a case; there is internal injury, and it is difficult to know to what extent.'

'There now! you want to scare me to death.'

'No; but I don't want to lull you to false security. If a consciousness of the uncertainty of life can dispose you to serious and useful thoughts, I would not deprive you of the benefit of such reflections, whether you do eventually recover or not. Does the idea of death appal you very much?'

'It's just the only thing I can't bear to think of; so if you've any — '

'But it must come some time,' interrupted I, 'and if it be years hence, it will as certainly overtake you as if it came to-day, — and no doubt be as unwelcome then as now, unless you — '

'Oh, hang it! don't torment me with your preachments now, unless you want to kill me outright. I can't stand it, I tell you. I've sufferings enough without that. If you think there's danger, save me from it; and then, in gratitude, I'll hear whatever you like to say.'

I accordingly dropped the unwelcome topic. And now, Frederick, I think I may bring my letter to a close. From these details you may form your own judgment of the state of my patient, and of my own position and future prospects. Let me hear from you soon, and I will write again to tell you how we get on; but now that my presence is tolerated, and even required, in the sick-room, I shall have but little time to spare between my husband and my son, — for I must not entirely neglect the latter: it would not do to keep him always with Rachel, and I dare not leave him for a moment with any of the other servants, or suffer him to be alone, lest he should meet them. If his father get worse, I shall ask Esther Hargrave to take charge of him for a time, till I have reorganised the household at least; but I greatly prefer keeping him under my own eye.

I find myself in rather a singular position: I am exerting my utmost endeavours to promote the recovery and reformation of my husband, and if I succeed, what shall I do? My duty, of course, — but how? No matter; I can perform the task that is before me now, and God will give me strength to do whatever He requires hereafter. Good-by, dear Frederick.

Helen Huntingdon.

'What do you think of it?' said Lawrence, as I silently refolded the letter.

'It seems to me,' returned I, 'that she is casting her pearls before swine. May they be satisfied with trampling them under their feet, and not turn again and rend her! But I shall say no more against her: I see that she was actuated by the best and noblest motives in what she has done; and if the act is not a wise one, may heaven protect her from its consequences! May I keep this letter, Lawrence? — you see she has never once mentioned me throughout — or made the most distant allusion to me; therefore, there can be no impropriety or harm in it.'

‘And, therefore, why should you wish to keep it?’

‘Were not these characters written by her hand? and were not these words conceived in her mind, and many of them spoken by her lips?’

‘Well,’ said he. And so I kept it; otherwise, Halford, you could never have become so thoroughly acquainted with its contents.

‘And when you write,’ said I, ‘will you have the goodness to ask her if I may be permitted to enlighten my mother and sister on her real history and circumstance, just so far as is necessary to make the neighbourhood sensible of the shameful injustice they have done her? I want no tender messages, but just ask her that, and tell her it is the greatest favour she could do me; and tell her — no, nothing more. You see I know the address, and I might write to her myself, but I am so virtuous as to refrain.’

‘Well, I’ll do this for you, Markham.’

‘And as soon as you receive an answer, you’ll let me know?’

‘If all be well, I’ll come myself and tell you immediately.’

CHAPTER XLVIII

Five or six days after this Mr. Lawrence paid us the honour of a call; and when he and I were alone together — which I contrived as soon as possible by bringing him out to look at my cornstacks — he showed me another letter from his sister. This one he was quite willing to submit to my longing gaze; he thought, I suppose, it would do me good. The only answer it gave to my message was this: —

‘Mr. Markham is at liberty to make such revelations concerning me as he judges necessary. He will know that I should wish but little to be said on the subject. I hope he is well; but tell him he must not think of me.’

I can give you a few extracts from the rest of the letter, for I was permitted to keep this also — perhaps, as an antidote to all pernicious hopes and fancies.

* * * * *

He is decidedly better, but very low from the depressing effects of his severe illness and the strict regimen he is obliged to observe — so opposite to all his previous habits. It is deplorable to see how completely his past life has degenerated his once noble constitution, and vitiated the whole system of his organization. But the doctor says he may now be considered out of danger, if he will only continue to observe the necessary restrictions. Some stimulating cordials he must have, but they should be judiciously diluted and sparingly used; and I find it very difficult to keep him to this. At first, his extreme dread of death rendered the task an easy one; but in proportion as he feels his acute suffering abating, and sees the danger receding, the more intractable he becomes. Now, also, his appetite for food is beginning to return; and here, too, his long habits of self-indulgence are greatly against him. I watch and restrain him as well as I can, and often get bitterly abused for my rigid severity; and sometimes he contrives to elude my vigilance, and sometimes acts in opposition to my will. But he is now so completely reconciled to my attendance in general that he is never satisfied when I am not by his side. I am obliged to be a little stiff with him sometimes, or he would make a complete slave of me; and I know it would be unpardonable weakness to give up all other interests for him. I have the servants to overlook, and my little Arthur to attend to, — and my own health too, all of which would be entirely neglected were I to satisfy his exorbitant demands. I do not generally sit up at night, for I think the nurse who has made it her business is better qualified for such undertakings than I am; — but still, an unbroken night's rest is what I but seldom enjoy, and never can venture to reckon upon; for my patient makes no scruple of calling me up at an hour when his wants or his fancies require my presence. But he is manifestly afraid of my displeasure; and if at one time he tries my patience by his unreasonable exactions, and fretful complaints and reproaches, at another he depresses me by his abject submission and deprecatory self-abasement when he fears he has gone too far. But all this I can readily pardon; I know it is chiefly the result of his enfeebled frame and disordered nerves. What annoys me the most, is his occasional attempts at affectionate fondness that I can neither credit nor return; not that I hate him: his sufferings and my own laborious care have given him some claim to my regard — to my affection even, if he would only be quiet and sincere, and content to let things remain as they are; but the more he tries to conciliate me, the more I shrink from him and from the future.

‘Helen, what do you mean to do when I get well?’ he asked this morning. ‘Will you run away again?’

‘It entirely depends upon your own conduct.’

‘Oh, I’ll be very good.’

‘But if I find it necessary to leave you, Arthur, I shall not “run away”: you know I have your own promise that I may go whenever I please, and take my son with me.’

‘Oh, but you shall have no cause.’ And then followed a variety of professions, which I rather coldly checked.

‘Will you not forgive me, then?’ said he.

‘Yes, — I have forgiven you: but I know you cannot love me as you once did — and I should be very sorry if you were to, for I could not pretend to return it: so let us drop the subject, and never recur to it again. By what I have done for you, you may judge of what I will do — if it be not incompatible with the higher duty I owe to my son (higher, because he never forfeited his claims, and because I hope to do more good to him than I can ever do to you); and if you wish me to feel kindly towards you, it is deeds not words which must purchase my affection and esteem.’

His sole reply to this was a slight grimace, and a scarcely perceptible shrug. Alas, unhappy man! words, with him, are so much cheaper than deeds; it was as if I had said, ‘Pounds, not pence, must buy the article you want.’ And then he sighed a querulous, self-commiserating sigh, as if in pure regret that he, the loved and courted of so many worshippers, should be now abandoned to the mercy of a harsh, exacting, cold-hearted woman like that, and even glad of what kindness she chose to bestow.

‘It’s a pity, isn’t it?’ said I; and whether I rightly divined his musings or not, the observation chimed in with his thoughts, for he answered — ‘It can’t be helped,’ with a rueful smile at my penetration.

* * * * *

I have seen Esther Hargrave twice. She is a charming creature, but her blithe spirit is almost broken, and her sweet temper almost spoiled, by the still unremitting persecutions of her mother in behalf of her rejected suitor — not violent, but wearisome and unremitting like a continual dropping. The unnatural parent seems determined to make her daughter's life a burden, if she will not yield to her desires.

'Mamma does all she can,' said she, 'to make me feel myself a burden and incumbrance to the family, and the most ungrateful, selfish, and undutiful daughter that ever was born; and Walter, too, is as stern and cold and haughty as if he hated me outright. I believe I should have yielded at once if I had known, from the beginning, how much resistance would have cost me; but now, for very obstinacy's sake, I will stand out!'

'A bad motive for a good resolve,' I answered. 'But, however, I know you have better motives, really, for your perseverance: and I counsel you to keep them still in view.'

'Trust me I will. I threaten mamma sometimes that I'll run away, and disgrace the family by earning my own livelihood, if she torments me any more; and then that frightens her a little. But I will do it, in good earnest, if they don't mind.'

'Be quiet and patient a while,' said I, 'and better times will come.'

Poor girl! I wish somebody that was worthy to possess her would come and take her away — don't you, Frederick?

* * * * *

If the perusal of this letter filled me with dismay for Helen's future life and mine, there was one great source of consolation: it was now in my power to clear her name from every foul aspersion. The Millwards and the Wilsons should see with their own eyes the bright sun bursting from the cloud — and they should be scorched and dazzled by its beams; — and my own friends too should see it — they whose suspicions had been such gall and wormwood to my soul. To effect this I had only to drop the seed into the ground, and it would soon become a stately, branching herb: a few words to my mother and sister, I knew, would suffice to spread the news throughout the whole neighbourhood, without any further exertion on my part.

Rose was delighted; and as soon as I had told her all I thought proper — which was all I affected to know — she flew with alacrity to put on her bonnet and shawl, and hasten to carry the glad tidings to the Millwards and Wilsons — glad tidings, I suspect, to none but herself and Mary Millward — that steady, sensible girl, whose sterling worth had been so quickly perceived and duly valued by the supposed Mrs. Graham, in spite of her plain outside; and who, on her part, had been better able to see and appreciate that lady's true character and qualities than the brightest genius among them.

As I may never have occasion to mention her again, I may as well tell you here that she was at this time privately engaged to Richard Wilson — a secret, I believe, to every one but themselves. That worthy student was now at Cambridge, where his most exemplary conduct and his diligent perseverance in the pursuit of learning carried him safely through, and eventually brought him with hard-earned honours, and an untarnished reputation, to the close of his collegiate career. In due time he became Mr. Millward's first and only curate — for that gentleman's declining years forced him at last to acknowledge that the duties of his extensive parish were a little too much for those vaunted energies which he was wont to boast over his younger and less active brethren of the cloth. This was what the patient, faithful lovers had privately planned and quietly waited for years ago; and in due time they were united, to the astonishment of the little world they lived in, that had long since declared them both born to single blessedness; affirming it impossible that the pale, retiring bookworm should ever summon courage to seek a wife, or be able to obtain one if he did, and equally impossible that the plain-looking, plain-dealing, unattractive, unconciliating Miss Millward should ever find a husband.

They still continued to live at the vicarage, the lady dividing her time between her father, her husband, and their poor parishioners, — and subsequently her rising family; and now that the Reverend Michael Millward has been gathered to his fathers, full of years and honours, the Reverend Richard Wilson has succeeded him to the vicarage of Linden-hope, greatly to the satisfaction of its inhabitants, who had so long tried and fully proved his merits, and those of his excellent and well-loved partner.

If you are interested in the after fate of that lady's sister, I can only tell you — what perhaps you have heard from another quarter — that some twelve or thirteen years ago she relieved the happy couple of her presence by marrying a wealthy tradesman of L — ; and I don't envy him his bargain. I fear she leads him a rather uncomfortable life, though, happily, he is too dull to perceive the extent of his misfortune. I have little enough to do with her myself: we have not met for many years; but, I am well assured, she has not yet forgotten or forgiven either her former lover, or the lady whose superior qualities first opened his eyes to the folly of his boyish attachment.

As for Richard Wilson's sister, she, having been wholly unable to recapture Mr. Lawrence, or obtain any partner rich and elegant enough to suit her ideas of what the husband of Jane Wilson ought to be, is yet in single blessedness. Shortly after the death of her mother she withdrew the light of her presence from Ryecote Farm, finding it impossible any longer to endure the rough manners and unsophisticated habits of her honest brother Robert and his worthy wife, or the idea of being identified with such vulgar people in the eyes of the world, and took lodgings in — the county town, where she lived, and still lives, I suppose, in a kind of close-fisted, cold, uncomfortable gentility, doing no good to others, and but little to herself; spending her days in fancy-work and scandal; referring frequently to her 'brother the vicar,' and her 'sister, the vicar's lady,' but never to her brother the farmer and her sister the farmer’s wife; seeing as much company as she can without too much expense, but loving no one and beloved by none — a cold-hearted, supercilious, keenly, insidiously censorious old maid.

CHAPTER XLIX

Though Mr. Lawrence's health was now quite re-established, my visits to Woodford were as unremitting as ever; though often less protracted than before. We seldom talked about Mrs. Huntingdon; but yet we never met without mentioning her, for I never sought his company but with the hope of hearing something about her, and he never sought mine at all, because he saw me often enough without. But I always began to talk of other things, and waited first to see if he would introduce the subject. If he did not, I would casually ask, 'Have you heard from your sister lately?' If he said 'No,' the matter was dropped: if he said 'Yes,' I would venture to inquire, 'How is she?' but never 'How is her husband?' though I might be burning to know; because I had not the hypocrisy to profess any anxiety for his recovery, and I had not the face to express any desire for a contrary result. Had I any such desire? — I fear I must plead guilty; but since you have heard my confession, you must hear my justification as well — a few of the excuses, at least, wherewith I sought to pacify my own accusing conscience.

In the first place, you see, his life did harm to others, and evidently no good to himself; and though I wished it to terminate, I would not have hastened its close if, by the lifting of a finger, I could have done so, or if a spirit had whispered in my ear that a single effort of the will would be enough, — unless, indeed, I had the power to exchange him for some other victim of the grave, whose life might be of service to his race, and whose death would be lamented by his friends. But was there any harm in wishing that, among the many thousands whose souls would certainly be required of them before the year was over, this wretched mortal might be one? I thought not; and therefore I wished with all my heart that it might please heaven to remove him to a better world, or if that might not be, still to take him out of this; for if he were unfit to answer the summons now, after a warning sickness, and with such an angel by his side, it seemed but too certain that he never would be — that, on the contrary, returning health would bring returning lust and villainy, and as he grew more certain of recovery, more accustomed to her generous goodness, his feelings would become more callous, his heart more flinty and impervious to her persuasive arguments — but God knew best. Meantime, however, I could not but be anxious for the result of His decrees; knowing, as I did, that (leaving myself entirely out of the question), however Helen might feel interested in her husband's welfare, however she might deplore his fate, still while he lived she must be miserable.

A fortnight passed away, and my inquiries were always answered in the negative. At length a welcome 'yes' drew from me the second question. Lawrence divined my anxious thoughts, and appreciated my reserve. I feared, at first, he was going to torture me by unsatisfactory replies, and either leave me quite in the dark concerning what I wanted to know, or force me to drag the information out of him, morsel by morsel, by direct inquiries. ‘And serve you right,’ you will say; but he was more merciful; and in a little while he put his sister’s letter into my hand. I silently read it, and restored it to him without comment or remark. This mode of procedure suited him so well, that thereafter he always pursued the plan of showing me her letters at once, when ‘inquired’ after her, if there were any to show — it was so much less trouble than to tell me their contents; and I received such confidences so quietly and discreetly that he was never induced to discontinue them.

But I devoured those precious letters with my eyes, and never let them go till their contents were stamped upon my mind; and when I got home, the most important passages were entered in my diary among the remarkable events of the day.

The first of these communications brought intelligence of a serious relapse in Mr. Huntingdon’s illness, entirely the result of his own infatuation in persisting in the indulgence of his appetite for stimulating drink. In vain had she remonstrated, in vain she had mingled his wine with water: her arguments and entreaties were a nuisance, her interference was an insult so intolerable that, at length, on finding she had covertly diluted the pale port that was brought him, he threw the bottle out of the window, swearing he would not be cheated like a baby, ordered the butler, on pain of instant dismissal, to bring a bottle of the strongest wine in the cellar, and affirming that he should have been well long ago if he had been let to have his own way, but she wanted to keep him weak in order that she might have him under her thumb — but, by the Lord Harry, he would have no more humbug — seized a glass in one hand and the bottle in the other, and never rested till he had drunk it dry. Alarming symptoms were the immediate result of this ‘imprudence,’ as she mildly termed it — symptoms which had rather increased than diminished since; and this was the cause of her delay in writing to her brother. Every former feature of his malady had returned with augmented virulence: the slight external wound, half healed, had broken out afresh; internal inflammation had taken place, which might terminate fatally if not soon removed. Of course, the wretched sufferer’s temper was not improved by this calamity — in fact, I suspect it was well nigh insupportable, though his kind nurse did not complain; but she said she had been obliged at last to give her son in charge to Esther Hargrave, as her presence was so constantly required in the sick-room that she could not possibly attend to him herself; and though the child had begged to be allowed to continue with her there, and to help her to nurse his papa, and though she had no doubt he would have been very good and quiet, she could not think of subjecting his young and tender feelings to the sight of so much suffering, or of allowing him to witness his father’s impatience, or hear the dreadful language he was wont to use in his paroxysms of pain or irritation.

The latter (continued she) most deeply regrets the step that has occasioned his relapse; but, as usual, he throws the blame upon me. If I had reasoned with him like a rational creature, he says, it never would have happened; but to be treated like a baby or a fool was enough to put any man past his patience, and drive him to assert his independence even at the sacrifice of his own interest. He forgets how often I had reasoned him 'past his patience' before. He appears to be sensible of his danger; but nothing can induce him to behold it in the proper light. The other night, while I was waiting on him, and just as I had brought him a draught to assuage his burning thirst, he observed, with a return of his former sarcastic bitterness, 'Yes, you're mighty attentive now! I suppose there's nothing you wouldn't do for me now?'

'You know,' said I, a little surprised at his manner, 'that I am willing to do anything I can to relieve you.'

'Yes, now, my immaculate angel; but when once you have secured your reward, and find yourself safe in heaven, and me howling in hell-fire, catch you lifting a finger to serve me then! No, you'll look complacently on, and not so much as dip the tip of your finger in water to cool my tongue!'

'If so, it will be because of the great gulf over which I cannot pass; and if I could look complacently on in such a case, it would be only from the assurance that you were being purified from your sins, and fitted to enjoy the happiness I felt. — But are you determined, Arthur, that I shall not meet you in heaven?'

'Humph! What should I do there, I should like to know?'

'Indeed, I cannot tell; and I fear it is too certain that your tastes and feelings must be widely altered before you can have any enjoyment there. But do you prefer sinking, without an effort, into the state of torment you picture to yourself?'

'Oh, it's all a fable,' said he, contemptuously.

'Are you sure, Arthur? are you quite sure? Because, if there is any doubt, and if you should find yourself mistaken after all, when it is too late to turn —'

'It would be rather awkward, to be sure,' said he; 'but don't bother me now — I'm not going to die yet. I can't and won't,' he added vehemently, as if suddenly struck with the appalling aspect of that terrible event. 'Helen, you must save me!' And he earnestly seized my hand, and looked into my face with such imploring eagerness that my heart bled for him, and I could not speak for tears.

* * * * *

The next letter brought intelligence that the malady was fast increasing; and the poor sufferer's horror of death was still more distressing than his impatience of bodily pain. All his friends had not forsaken him; for Mr.

Hattersley, hearing of his danger, had come to see him from his distant home in the north. His wife had accompanied him, as much for the pleasure of seeing her dear friend, from whom she had been parted so long, as to visit her mother and sister.

Mrs. Huntingdon expressed herself glad to see Milicent once more, and pleased to behold her so happy and well. She is now at the Grove, continued the letter, but she often calls to see me. Mr. Hattersley spends much of his time at Arthur's bed-side. With more good feeling than I gave him credit for, he evinces considerable sympathy for his unhappy friend, and is far more willing than able to comfort him. Sometimes he tries to joke and laugh with him, but that will not do; sometimes he endeavours to cheer him with talk about old times, and this at one time may serve to divert the sufferer from his own sad thoughts; at another, it will only plunge him into deeper melancholy than before; and then Hattersley is confounded, and knows not what to say, unless it be a timid suggestion that the clergyman might be sent for. But Arthur will never consent to that: he knows he has rejected the clergyman's well-meant admonitions with scoffing levity at other times, and cannot dream of turning to him for consolation now.

Mr. Hattersley sometimes offers his services instead of mine, but Arthur will not let me go: that strange whim still increases, as his strength declines — the fancy to have me always by his side. I hardly ever leave him, except to go into the next room, where I sometimes snatch an hour or so of sleep when he is quiet; but even then the door is left ajar, that he may know me to be within call. I am with him now, while I write, and I fear my occupation annoys him; though I frequently break off to attend to him, and though Mr. Hattersley is also by his side. That gentleman came, as he said, to beg a holiday for me, that I might have a run in the park, this fine frosty morning, with Milicent and Esther and little Arthur, whom he had driven over to see me. Our poor invalid evidently felt it a heartless proposition, and would have felt it still more heartless in me to accede to it. I therefore said I would only go and speak to them a minute, and then come back. I did but exchange a few words with them, just outside the portico, inhaling the fresh, bracing air as I stood, and then, resisting the earnest and eloquent entreaties of all three to stay a little longer, and join them in a walk round the garden, I tore myself away and returned to my patient. I had not been absent five minutes, but he reproached me bitterly for my levity and neglect. His friend espoused my cause.

'Nay, nay, Huntingdon,' said he, 'you're too hard upon her; she must have food and sleep, and a mouthful of fresh air now and then, or she can't stand it, I tell you. Look at her, man! she's worn to a shadow already.'

'What are her sufferings to mine?' said the poor invalid. 'You don't grudge me these attentions, do you, Helen?'

'No, Arthur, if I could really serve you by them. I would give my life to save you, if I might.'

'Would you, indeed? No!'

'Most willingly I would.'

'Ah! that's because you think yourself more fit to die!'

There was a painful pause. He was evidently plunged in gloomy reflections; but while I pondered for something to say that might benefit without alarming him, Hattersley, whose mind had been pursuing almost the same course, broke silence with, 'I say, Huntingdon, I would send for a parson of some sort: if you didn't like the vicar, you know, you could have his curate, or somebody else.'

'No; none of them can benefit me if she can't,' was the answer. And the tears gushed from his eyes as he earnestly exclaimed, 'Oh, Helen, if I had listened to you, it never would have come to this! and if I had heard you long ago — oh, God! how different it would have been!'

'Hear me now, then, Arthur,' said I, gently pressing his hand.

'It's too late now,' said he despondingly. And after that another paroxysm of pain came on; and then his mind began to wander, and we feared his death was approaching: but an opiate was administered: his sufferings began to abate, he gradually became more composed, and at length sank into a kind of slumber. He has been quieter since; and now Hattersley has left him, expressing a hope that he shall find him better when he calls to-morrow.

'Perhaps I may recover,' he replied; 'who knows? This may have been the crisis. What do you think, Helen?' Unwilling to depress him, I gave the most cheering answer I could, but still recommended him to prepare for the possibility of what I inly feared was but too certain. But he was determined to hope. Shortly after he relapsed into a kind of doze, but now he groans again.

There is a change. Suddenly he called me to his side, with such a strange, excited manner, that I feared he was delirious, but he was not. 'That was the crisis, Helen!' said he, delightedly. 'I had an infernal pain here — it is quite gone now. I never was so easy since the fall — quite gone, by heaven!' and he clasped and kissed my hand in the very fulness of his heart; but finding I did not participate in his joy, he quickly flung it from him, and bitterly cursed my coldness and insensibility. How could I reply? Kneeling beside him, I took his hand and fondly pressed it to my lips — for the first time since our separation — and told him, as well as tears would let me speak, that it was not that that kept me silent: it was the fear that this sudden cessation of pain was not so favourable a symptom as he supposed. I immediately sent for the doctor: we are now anxiously awaiting him. I will tell you what he says. There is still the same freedom from pain, the same deadness to all sensation where the suffering was most acute.

My worst fears are realised: mortification has commenced. The doctor has told him there is no hope. No words can describe his anguish. I can write no more.

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The next was still more distressing in the tenor of its contents. The sufferer was fast approaching dissolution — dragged almost to the verge of that awful chasm he trembled to contemplate, from which no agony of prayers or tears could save him. Nothing could comfort him now; Hattersley's rough attempts at consolation were utterly in vain. The world was nothing to him: life and all its interests, its petty cares and transient pleasures, were a cruel mockery. To talk of the past was to torture him with vain remorse; to refer to the future was to increase his anguish; and yet to be silent was to leave him a prey to his own regrets and apprehensions. Often he dwelt with shuddering minuteness on the fate of his perishing clay — the slow, piecemeal dissolution already invading his frame: the shroud, the coffin, the dark, lonely grave, and all the horrors of corruption.

'If I try,' said his afflicted wife, 'to divert him from these things — to raise his thoughts to higher themes, it is no better: — "Worse and worse!" he groans. "If there be really life beyond the tomb, and judgment after death, how can I face it?" — I cannot do him any good; he will neither be enlightened, nor roused, nor comforted by anything I say; and yet he clings to me with unrelenting pertinacity — with a kind of childish desperation, as if I could save him from the fate he dreads. He keeps me night and day beside him. He is holding my left hand now, while I write; he has held it thus for hours: sometimes quietly, with his pale face upturned to mine: sometimes clutching my arm with violence — the big drops starting from his forehead at the thoughts of what he sees, or thinks he sees, before him. If I withdraw my hand for a moment it distresses him.

'"Stay with me, Helen," he says; "let me hold you so: it seems as if harm could not reach me while you are here. But death will come — it is coming now — fast, fast! — and — oh, if I could believe there was nothing after!"

'"Don't try to believe it, Arthur; there is joy and glory after, if you will but try to reach it!"

'"What, for me?" he said, with something like a laugh. "Are we not to be judged according to the deeds done in the body? Where's the use of a probationary existence, if a man may spend it as he pleases, just contrary to God's decrees, and then go to heaven with the best — if the vilest sinner may win the reward of the holiest saint, by merely saying, "I repent!""'

'"But if you sincerely repent — "

'"I can't repent; I only fear."

'"You only regret the past for its consequences to yourself?"

'"Just so — except that I'm sorry to have wronged you, Nell, because you're so good to me."

'"Think of the goodness of God, and you cannot but be grieved to have offended Him."

'"What is God? — I cannot see Him or hear Him. — God is only an idea."

'"God is Infinite Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness — and Love; but if this idea is too vast for your human faculties — if your mind loses itself in its overwhelming infinitude, fix it on Him who condescended to take our nature upon Him, who was raised to heaven even in His glorified human body, in whom the fulness of the Godhead shines."

'But he only shook his head and sighed. Then, in another paroxysm of shuddering horror, he tightened his grasp on my hand and arm, and, groaning and lamenting, still clung to me with that wild, desperate earnestness so harrowing to my soul, because I know I cannot help him. I did my best to soothe and comfort him.

'"Death is so terrible," he cried, "I cannot bear it! You don't know, Helen — you can't imagine what it is, because you haven't it before you! and when I'm buried, you'll return to your old ways and be as happy as ever, and all the world will go on just as busy and merry as if I had never been; while I — " He burst into tears.

'"You needn't let that distress you," I said; "we shall all follow you soon enough."

'"I wish to God I could take you with me now!" he exclaimed: "you should plead for me."

'"No man can deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him," I replied: "it cost more to redeem their souls — it cost the blood of an incarnate God, perfect and sinless in Himself, to redeem us from the bondage of the evil one: — let Him plead for you."

'But I seem to speak in vain. He does not now, as formerly, laugh these blessed truths to scorn: but still he cannot trust, or will not comprehend them. He cannot linger long. He suffers dreadfully, and so do those that wait upon him. But I will not harass you with further details: I have said enough, I think, to convince you that I did well to go to him.'

* * * * *

Poor, poor Helen! dreadful indeed her trials must have been! And I could do nothing to lessen them — nay, it almost seemed as if I had brought them upon her myself by my own secret desires; and whether I looked at her husband's sufferings or her own, it seemed almost like a judgment upon myself for having cherished such a wish.

The next day but one there came another letter. That too was put into my hands without a remark, and these are its contents: —

Dec. 5th.

He is gone at last. I sat beside him all night, with my hand fast looked in his, watching the changes of his features and listening to his failing breath. He had been silent a long time, and I thought he would never speak again, when he murmured, faintly but distinctly, — 'Pray for me, Helen!'

'I do pray for you, every hour and every minute, Arthur; but you must pray for yourself.'

His lips moved, but emitted no sound; — then his looks became unsettled; and, from the incoherent, half-uttered words that escaped him from time to time, supposing him to be now unconscious, I gently disengaged my hand from his, intending to steal away for a breath of air, for I was almost ready to faint; but a convulsive movement of the fingers, and a faintly whispered 'Don't leave me!' immediately recalled me: I took his hand again, and held it till he was no more — and then I fainted. It was not grief; it was exhaustion, that, till then, I had been enabled successfully to combat. Oh, Frederick! none can imagine the miseries, bodily and mental, of that death-bed! How could I endure to think that that poor trembling soul was hurried away to everlasting torment? it would drive me mad. But, thank God, I have hope — not only from a vague dependence on the possibility that penitence and pardon might have reached him at the last, but from the blessed confidence that, through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass — whatever fate awaits it — still it is not lost, and God, who hateth nothing that He hath made, will bless it in the end!

His body will be consigned on Thursday to that dark grave he so much dreaded; but the coffin must be closed as soon as possible. If you will attend the funeral, come quickly, for I need help.

Helen Huntingdon.

CHAPTER L

On reading this I had no reason to disguise my joy and hope from Frederick Lawrence, for I had none to be ashamed of. I felt no joy but that his sister was at length released from her afflictive, overwhelming toil — no hope but that she would in time recover from the effects of it, and be suffered to rest in peace and quietness, at least, for the remainder of her life. I experienced a painful commiseration for her unhappy husband (though fully aware that he had brought every particle of his sufferings upon himself, and but too well deserved them all), and a profound sympathy for her own afflictions, and deep anxiety for the consequences of those harassing cares, those dreadful vigils, that incessant and deleterious confinement beside a living corpse — for I was persuaded she had not hinted half the sufferings she had had to endure.

'You will go to her, Lawrence?' said I, as I put the letter into his hand.

'Yes, immediately.'

'That's right! I'll leave you, then, to prepare for your departure.'

'I've done that already, while you were reading the letter, and before you came; and the carriage is now coming round to the door.'

Inly approving his promptitude, I bade him good-morning, and withdrew. He gave me a searching glance as we pressed each other's hands at parting; but whatever he sought in my countenance, he saw there nothing but the most becoming gravity — it might be mingled with a little sternness in momentary resentment at what I suspected to be passing in his mind.

Had I forgotten my own prospects, my ardent love, my pertinacious hopes? It seemed like sacrilege to revert to them now, but I had not forgotten them. It was, however, with a gloomy sense of the darkness of those prospects, the fallacy of those hopes, and the vanity of that affection, that I reflected on those things as I remounted my horse and slowly journeyed homewards. Mrs. Huntingdon was free now; it was no longer a crime to think of her — but did she ever think of me? Not now — of course it was not to be expected — but would she when this shock was over? In all the course of her correspondence with her brother (our mutual friend, as she herself had called him) she had never mentioned me but once — and that was from necessity. This alone afforded strong presumption that I was already forgotten; yet this was not the worst: it might have been her sense of duty that had kept her silent: she might be only trying to forget; but in addition to this, I had a gloomy conviction that the awful realities she had seen and felt, her reconciliation with the man she had once loved, his dreadful sufferings and death, must eventually efface from her mind all traces of her passing love for me. She might recover from these horrors so far as to be restored to her former health, her tranquillity, her cheerfulness even — but never to those feelings which would appear to her, henceforth, as a fleeting fancy, a vain, illusive dream; especially as there was no one to remind her of my existence — no means of assuring her of my fervent constancy, now that we were so far apart, and delicacy forbade me to see her or to write to her, for months to come at least. And how could I engage her brother in my behalf? how could I break that icy crust of shy reserve? Perhaps he would disapprove of my attachment now as highly as before; perhaps he would think me too poor — too lowly born, to match with his sister. Yes, there was another barrier: doubtless there was a wide distinction between the rank and circumstances of Mrs. Huntingdon, the lady of Grassdale Manor, and those of Mrs. Graham, the artist, the tenant of Wildfell Hall. And it might be deemed presumption in me to offer my hand to the former, by the world, by her friends, if not by herself; a penalty I might brave, if I were certain she loved me; but otherwise, how could I? And, finally, her deceased husband, with his usual selfishness, might have so constructed his will as to place restrictions upon her marrying again. So that you see I had reasons enough for despair if I chose to indulge it.

Nevertheless, it was with no small degree of impatience that I looked forward to Mr. Lawrence's return from Grassdale: impatience that increased in proportion as his absence was prolonged. He stayed away some ten or twelve days. All very right that he should remain to comfort and help his sister, but he might have written to tell me how she was, or at least to tell me when to expect his return; for he might have known I was suffering tortures of anxiety for her, and uncertainty for my own future prospects. And when he did return, all he told me about her was, that she had been greatly exhausted and worn by her unremitting exertions in behalf of that man who had been the scourge of her life, and had dragged her with him nearly to the portals of the grave, and was still much shaken and depressed by his melancholy end and the circumstances attendant upon it; but no word in reference to me; no intimation that my name had ever passed her lips, or even been spoken in her presence. To be sure, I asked no questions on the subject; I could not bring my mind to do so, believing, as I did, that Lawrence was indeed averse to the idea of my union with his sister.

I saw that he expected to be further questioned concerning his visit, and I saw too, with the keen perception of awakened jealousy, or alarmed self-esteem, or by whatever name I ought to call it, that he rather shrank from that impending scrutiny, and was no less pleased than surprised to find it did not come. Of course, I was burning with anger, but pride obliged me to suppress my feelings, and preserve a smooth face, or at least a stoic calmness, throughout the interview. It was well it did, for, reviewing the matter in my sober judgment, I must say it would have been highly absurd and improper to have quarrelled with him on such an occasion. I must confess, too, that I wronged him in my heart: the truth was, he liked me very well, but he was fully aware that a union between Mrs. Huntingdon and me would be what the world calls a mesalliance; and it was not in his nature to set the world at defiance; especially in such a case as this, for its dread laugh, or ill opinion, would be far more terrible to him directed against his sister than himself. Had he believed that a union was necessary to the happiness of both, or of either, or had he known how fervently I loved her, he would have acted differently; but seeing me so calm and cool, he would not for the world disturb my philosophy; and though refraining entirely from any active opposition to the match, he would yet do nothing to bring it about, and would much rather take the part of prudence, in aiding us to overcome our mutual predilections, than that of feeling, to encourage them. 'And he was in the right of it,' you will say. Perhaps he was; at any rate, I had no business to feel so bitterly against him as I did; but I could not then regard the matter in such a moderate light; and, after a brief conversation upon indifferent topics, I went away, suffering all the pangs of wounded pride and injured friendship, in addition to those resulting from the fear that I was indeed forgotten, and the knowledge that she I loved was alone and afflicted, suffering from injured health and dejected spirits, and I was forbidden to console or assist her: forbidden even to assure her of my sympathy, for the transmission of any such message through Mr. Lawrence was now completely out of the question.

But what should I do? I would wait, and see if she would notice me, which of course she would not, unless by some kind message intrusted to her brother, that, in all probability, he would not deliver, and then, dreadful thought! she would think me cooled and changed for not returning it, or, perhaps, he had already given her to understand that I had ceased to think of her. I would wait, however, till the six months after our parting were fairly passed (which would be about the close of February), and then I would send her a letter, modestly reminding her of her former permission to write to her at the close of that period, and hoping I might avail myself of it — at least to express my heartfelt sorrow for her late afflictions, my just appreciation of her generous conduct, and my hope that her health was now completely re-established, and that she would, some time, be permitted to enjoy those blessings of a peaceful, happy life, which had been denied her so long, but which none could more truly be said to merit than herself — adding a few words of kind remembrance to my little friend Arthur, with a hope that he had not forgotten me, and perhaps a few more in reference to bygone times, to the delightful hours I had passed in her society, and my unfading recollection of them, which was the salt and solace of my life, and a hope that her recent troubles had not entirely banished me from her mind. If she did not answer this, of course I should write no more: if she did (as surely she would, in some fashion), my future proceedings should be regulated by her reply.

Ten weeks was long to wait in such a miserable state of uncertainty; but courage! it must be endured! and meantime I would continue to see Lawrence now and then, though not so often as before, and I would still pursue my habitual inquiries after his sister, if he had lately heard from her, and how she was, but nothing more.

I did so, and the answers I received were always provokingly limited to the letter of the inquiry: she was much as usual: she made no complaints, but the tone of her last letter evinced great depression of mind: she said she was better: and, finally, she said she was well, and very busy with her son's education, and with the management of her late husband's property, and the regulation of his affairs. The rascal had never told me how that property was disposed, or whether Mr. Huntingdon had died intestate or not; and I would sooner die than ask him, lest he should misconstrue into covetousness my desire to know. He never offered to show me his sister's letters now, and I never hinted a wish to see them. February, however, was approaching; December was past; January, at length, was almost over — a few more weeks, and then, certain despair or renewal of hope would put an end to this long agony of suspense.

But alas! it was just about that time she was called to sustain another blow in the death of her uncle — a worthless old fellow enough in himself, I daresay, but he had always shown more kindness and affection to her than to any other creature, and she had always been accustomed to regard him as a parent. She was with him when he died, and had assisted her aunt to nurse him during the last stage of his illness. Her brother went to Staningley to attend the funeral, and told me, upon his return, that she was still there, endeavouring to cheer her aunt with her presence, and likely to remain some time. This was bad news for me, for while she continued there I could not write to her, as I did not know the address, and would not ask it of him. But week followed week, and every time I inquired about her she was still at Staningley.

'Where is Staningley?' I asked at last.

'In — shire,' was the brief reply; and there was something so cold and dry in the manner of it, that I was effectually deterred from requesting a more definite account.

'When will she return to Grassdale?' was my next question.

'I don't know.'

'Confound it!' I muttered.

'Why, Markham?' asked my companion, with an air of innocent surprise. But I did not deign to answer him, save by a look of silent, sullen contempt, at which he turned away, and contemplated the carpet with a slight smile, half pensive, half amused; but quickly looking up, he began to talk of other subjects, trying to draw me into a cheerful and friendly conversation, but I was too much irritated to discourse with him, and soon took leave.

You see Lawrence and I somehow could not manage to get on very well together. The fact is, I believe, we were both of us a little too touchy. It is a troublesome thing, Halford, this susceptibility to affronts where none are intended. I am no martyr to it now, as you can bear me witness: I have learned to be merry and wise, to be more easy with myself and more indulgent to my neighbours, and I can afford to laugh at both Lawrence and you.

Partly from accident, partly from wilful negligence on my part (for I was really beginning to dislike him), several weeks elapsed before I saw my friend again. When we did meet, it was he that sought me out. One bright morning, early in June, he came into the field, where I was just commencing my hay harvest.

'It is long since I saw you, Markham,' said he, after the first few words had passed between us. 'Do you never mean to come to Woodford again?'

'I called once, and you were out.'

'I was sorry, but that was long since; I hoped you would call again, and now I have called, and you were out, which you generally are, or I would do myself the pleasure of calling more frequently; but being determined to see you this time, I have left my pony in the lane, and come over hedge and ditch to join you; for I am about to leave Woodford for a while, and may not have the pleasure of seeing you again for a month or two.'

'Where are you going?'

'To Grassdale first,' said he, with a half-smile he would willingly have suppressed if he could.

'To Grassdale! Is she there, then?'

'Yes, but in a day or two she will leave it to accompany Mrs. Maxwell to F — for the benefit of the sea air, and I shall go with them.' (F — was at that time a quiet but respectable watering-place: it is considerably more frequented now.)

Lawrence seemed to expect me to take advantage of this circumstance to entrust him with some sort of a message to his sister; and I believe he would have undertaken to deliver it without any material objections, if I had had the sense to ask him, though of course he would not offer to do so, if I was content to let it alone. But I could not bring myself to make the request, and it was not till after he was gone, that I saw how fair an opportunity I had lost; and then, indeed, I deeply regretted my stupidity and my foolish pride, but it was now too late to remedy the evil.

He did not return till towards the latter end of August. He wrote to me twice or thrice from F — , but his letters were most provokingly unsatisfactory, dealing in generalities or in trifles that I cared nothing about, or replete with fancies and reflections equally unwelcome to me at the time, saying next to nothing about his sister, and little more about himself. I would wait, however, till he came back; perhaps I could get something more out of him then. At all events, I would not write to her now, while she was with him and her aunt, who doubtless would be still more hostile to my presumptuous aspirations than himself. When she was returned to the silence and solitude of her own home, it would be my fittest opportunity.

When Lawrence came, however, he was as reserved as ever on the subject of my keen anxiety. He told me that his sister had derived considerable benefit from her stay at F — that her son was quite well, and — alas! that both of them were gone, with Mrs. Maxwell, back to Staningley, and there they stayed at least three months. But instead of boring you with my chagrin, my expectations and disappointments, my fluctuations of dull despondency and flickering hope, my varying resolutions, now to drop it, and now to persevere — now to make a bold push, and now to let things pass and patiently abide my time, — I will employ myself in settling the business of one or two of the characters introduced in the course of this narrative, whom I may not have occasion to mention again.

Some time before Mr. Huntingdon's death Lady Lowborough eloped with another gallant to the Continent, where, having lived a while in reckless gaiety and dissipation, they quarrelled and parted. She went dashing on for a season, but years came and money went: she sunk, at length, in difficulty and debt, disgrace and misery; and died at last, as I have heard, in penury, neglect, and utter wretchedness. But this might be only a report: she may be living yet for anything I or any of her relatives or former acquaintances can tell; for they have all lost sight of her long years ago, and would as thoroughly forget her if they could. Her husband, however, upon this second misdemeanour, immediately sought and obtained a divorce, and, not long after, married again. It was well he did, for Lord Lowborough, morose and moody as he seemed, was not the man for a bachelor's life. No public interests, no ambitious projects, or active pursuits, — or ties of friendship even (if he had had any friends), could compensate to him for the absence of domestic comforts and endearments. He had a son and a nominal daughter, it is true, but they too painfully reminded him of their mother, and the unfortunate little Annabella was a source of perpetual bitterness to his soul. He had obliged himself to treat her with paternal kindness: he had forced himself not to hate her, and even, perhaps, to feel some degree of kindly regard for her, at last, in return for her artless and unsuspecting attachment to himself; but the bitterness of his self-condemnation for his inward feelings towards that innocent being, his constant struggles to subdue the evil promptings of his nature (for it was not a generous one), though partly guessed at by those who knew him, could be known to God and his own heart alone; — so also was the hardness of his conflicts with the temptation to return to the vice of his youth, and seek oblivion for past calamities, and deadness to the present misery of a blighted heart a joyless, friendless life, and a morbidly disconsolate mind, by yielding again to that insidious foe to health, and sense, and virtue, which had so deplorably enslaved and degraded him before.

The second object of his choice was widely different from the first. Some wondered at his taste; some even ridiculed it — but in this their folly was more apparent than his. The lady was about his own age — *i.e.*, between thirty and forty — remarkable neither for beauty, nor wealth, nor brilliant accomplishments; nor any other thing that I ever heard of, except genuine good sense, unswerving integrity, active piety, warm-hearted benevolence, and a fund of cheerful spirits. These qualities, however, as you way readily imagine, combined to render her an excellent mother to the children, and an invaluable wife to his lordship. He, with his usual self-depreciation, thought her a world too good for him, and while he wondered at the kindness of Providence in conferring such a gift upon him, and even at her taste in preferring him to other men, he did his best to reciprocate the good she did him, and so far succeeded that she was, and I believe still is, one of the happiest and fondest wives in England; and all who question the good taste of either partner may be thankful if their respective selections afford them half the genuine satisfaction in the end, or repay their preference with affection half as lasting and sincere.

If you are at all interested in the fate of that low scoundrel, Grimsby, I can only tell you that he went from bad to worse, sinking from bathos to bathos of vice and villainy, consorting only with the worst members of his club and the lowest dregs of society — happily for the rest of the world — and at last met his end in a drunken brawl, from the hands, it is said, of some brother scoundrel he had cheated at play.

As for Mr. Hattersley, he had never wholly forgotten his resolution to ‘come out from among them,’ and behave like a man and a Christian, and the last illness and death of his once jolly friend Huntingdon so deeply and seriously impressed him with the evil of their former practices, that he never needed another lesson of the kind. Avoiding the temptations of the town, he continued to pass his life in the country, immersed in the usual pursuits of a hearty, active, country gentleman; his occupations being those of farming, and breeding horses and cattle, diversified with a little hunting and shooting, and enlivened by the occasional companionship of his friends (better friends than those of his youth), and the society of his happy little wife (now cheerful and confiding as heart could wish), and his fine family of stalwart sons and blooming daughters. His father, the banker, having died some years ago and left him all his riches, he has now full scope for the exercise of his prevailing tastes, and I need not tell you that Ralph Hattersley, Esq., is celebrated throughout the country for his noble breed of horses.

CHAPTER LI

We will now turn to a certain still, cold, cloudy afternoon about the commencement of December, when the first fall of snow lay thinly scattered over the blighted fields and frozen roads, or stored more thickly in the hollows of the deep cart-ruts and footsteps of men and horses impressed in the now petrified mire of last month's drenching rains. I remember it well, for I was walking home from the vicarage with no less remarkable a personage than Miss Eliza Millward by my side. I had been to call upon her father, — a sacrifice to civility undertaken entirely to please my mother, not myself, for I hated to go near the house; not merely on account of my antipathy to the once so bewitching Eliza, but because I had not half forgiven the old gentleman himself for his ill opinion of Mrs. Huntingdon; for though now constrained to acknowledge himself mistaken in his former judgment, he still maintained that she had done wrong to leave her husband; it was a violation of her sacred duties as a wife, and a tempting of Providence by laying herself open to temptation; and nothing short of bodily ill-usage (and that of no trifling nature) could excuse such a step — nor even that, for in such a case she ought to appeal to the laws for protection. But it was not of him I intended to speak; it was of his daughter Eliza. Just as I was taking leave of the vicar, she entered the room, ready equipped for a walk.

'I was just coming to see, your sister, Mr. Markham,' said she; 'and so, if you have no objection, I'll accompany you home. I like company when I'm walking out — don't you?'

'Yes, when it's agreeable.'

'That of course,' rejoined the young lady, smiling archly.

So we proceeded together.

'Shall I find Rose at home, do you think?' said she, as we closed the garden gate, and set our faces towards Linden-Car.

'I believe so.'

'I trust I shall, for I've a little bit of news for her — if you haven't forestalled me.'

'I?'

'Yes: do you know what Mr. Lawrence is gone for?' She looked up anxiously for my reply.

'Is he gone?' said I; and her face brightened.

'Ah! then he hasn't told you about his sister?'

'What of her?' I demanded in terror, lest some evil should have befallen her.

'Oh, Mr. Markham, how you blush!' cried she, with a tormenting laugh. 'Ha, ha, you have not forgotten her yet. But you had better be quick about it, I can tell you, for — alas, alas! — she's going to be married next Thursday!'

'No, Miss Eliza, that's false.'

'Do you charge me with a falsehood, sir?'

'You are misinformed.'

'Am I? Do you know better, then?'

'I think I do.'

'What makes you look so pale then?' said she, smiling with delight at my emotion. 'Is it anger at poor me for telling such a fib? Well, I only "tell the tale as 'twas told to me:" I don't vouch for the truth of it; but at the same time, I don't see what reason Sarah should have for deceiving me, or her informant for deceiving her; and that was what she told me the footman told her: — that Mrs. Huntingdon was going to be married on Thursday, and Mr. Lawrence was gone to the wedding. She did tell me the name of the gentleman, but I've forgotten that. Perhaps you can assist me to remember it. Is there not some one that lives near — or frequently visits the neighbourhood, that has long been attached to her? — a Mr. — oh, dear! Mr. — '

'Hargrave?' suggested I, with a bitter smile.

'You're right,' cried she; 'that was the very name.'

'Impossible, Miss Eliza!' I exclaimed, in a tone that made her start.

'Well, you know, that's what they told me,' said she, composedly staring me in the face. And then she broke out into a long shrill laugh that put me to my wit's end with fury.

'Really you must excuse me,' cried she. 'I know it's very rude, but ha, ha, ha! — did you think to marry her yourself? Dear, dear, what a pity! — ha, ha, ha! Gracious, Mr. Markham, are you going to faint? Oh, mercy! shall I call this man? Here, Jacob — ' But checking the word on her lips, I seized her arm and gave it, I think, a pretty severe squeeze, for she shrank into herself with a faint cry of pain or terror; but the spirit within her was not subdued: instantly rallying, she continued, with well-feigned concern, 'What can I do for you? Will you have some water — some brandy? I daresay they have some in the public-house down there, if you'll let me run.'

'Have done with this nonsense!' cried I, sternly. She looked confounded — almost frightened again, for a moment. 'You know I hate such jests,' I continued.

'Jests indeed! I wasn't jesting!'

'You were laughing, at all events; and I don't like to be laughed at,' returned I, making violent efforts to speak with proper dignity and composure, and to say nothing but what was coherent and sensible. 'And since you are in such a merry mood, Miss Eliza, you must be good enough company for yourself; and therefore I shall leave you to finish your walk alone — for, now I think of it, I have business elsewhere; so good-evening.'

With that I left her (smothering her malicious laughter) and turned aside into the fields, springing up the bank, and pushing through the nearest gap in the hedge. Determined at once to prove the truth — or rather the falsehood —

of her story, I hastened to Woodford as fast as my legs could carry me; first veering round by a circuitous course, but the moment I was out of sight of my fair tormentor cutting away across the country, just as a bird might fly, over pasture-land, and fallow, and stubble, and lane, clearing hedges and ditches and hurdles, till I came to the young squire's gates. Never till now had I known the full fervour of my love — the full strength of my hopes, not wholly crushed even in my hours of deepest despondency, always tenaciously clinging to the thought that one day she might be mine, or, if not that, at least that something of my memory, some slight remembrance of our friendship and our love, would be for ever cherished in her heart. I marched up to the door, determined, if I saw the master, to question him boldly concerning his sister, to wait and hesitate no longer, but cast false delicacy and stupid pride behind my back, and know my fate at once.

'Is Mr. Lawrence at home?' I eagerly asked of the servant that opened the door.

'No, sir, master went yesterday,' replied he, looking very alert.

'Went where?'

'To Grassdale, sir — wasn't you aware, sir? He's very close, is master,' said the fellow, with a foolish, simpering grin. 'I suppose, sir — '

But I turned and left him, without waiting to hear what he supposed. I was not going to stand there to expose my tortured feelings to the insolent laughter and impertinent curiosity of a fellow like that.

But what was to be done now? Could it be possible that she had left me for that man? I could not believe it. Me she might forsake, but not to give herself to him! Well, I would know the truth; to no concerns of daily life could I attend while this tempest of doubt and dread, of jealousy and rage, distracted me. I would take the morning coach from L — (the evening one would be already gone), and fly to Grassdale — I must be there before the marriage. And why? Because a thought struck me that perhaps I might prevent it — that if I did not, she and I might both lament it to the latest moment of our lives. It struck me that someone might have belied me to her: perhaps her brother; yes, no doubt her brother had persuaded her that I was false and faithless, and taking advantage of her natural indignation, and perhaps her desponding carelessness about her future life, had urged her, artfully, cruelly, on to this other marriage, in order to secure her from me. If this was the case, and if she should only discover her mistake when too late to repair it — to what a life of misery and vain regret might she be doomed as well as me; and what remorse for me to think my foolish scruples had induced it all! Oh, I must see her — she must know my truth even if I told it at the church door! I might pass for a madman or an impertinent fool — even she might be offended at such an interruption, or at least might tell me it was now too late. But if I could save her, if she might be mine! — it was too rapturous a thought!

Winged by this hope, and goaded by these fears, I hurried homewards to prepare for my departure on the morrow. I told my mother that urgent business which admitted no delay, but which I could not then explain, called me away.

My deep anxiety and serious preoccupation could not be concealed from her maternal eyes; and I had much ado to calm her apprehensions of some disastrous mystery.

That night there came a heavy fall of snow, which so retarded the progress of the coaches on the following day that I was almost driven to distraction. I travelled all night, of course, for this was Wednesday: to-morrow morning, doubtless, the marriage would take place. But the night was long and dark: the snow heavily clogged the wheels and balled the horses' feet; the animals were consumedly lazy; the coachman most execrably cautious; the passengers confoundedly apathetic in their supine indifference to the rate of our progression. Instead of assisting me to bully the several coachmen and urge them forward, they merely stared and grinned at my impatience: one fellow even ventured to rally me upon it — but I silenced him with a look that quelled him for the rest of the journey; and when, at the last stage, I would have taken the reins into my own hand, they all with one accord opposed it.

It was broad daylight when we entered M — and drew up at the 'Rose and Crown.' I alighted and called aloud for a post-chaise to Grassdale. There was none to be had: the only one in the town was under repair. 'A gig, then — a fly — car — anything — only be quick!' There was a gig, but not a horse to spare. I sent into the town to seek one: but they were such an intolerable time about it that I could wait no longer — I thought my own feet could carry me sooner; and bidding them send the conveyance after me, if it were ready within an hour, I set off as fast as I could walk. The distance was little more than six miles, but the road was strange, and I had to keep stopping to inquire my way; hallooing to carters and clodhoppers, and frequently invading the cottages, for there were few abroad that winter's morning; sometimes knocking up the lazy people from their beds, for where so little work was to be done, perhaps so little food and fire to be had, they cared not to curtail their slumbers. I had no time to think of them, however; aching with weariness and desperation, I hurried on. The gig did not overtake me: and it was well I had not waited for it; vexatious rather, that I had been fool enough to wait so long.

At length, however, I entered the neighbourhood of Grassdale. I approached the little rural church — but lo! there stood a train of carriages before it; it needed not the white favours bedecking the servants and horses, nor the merry voices of the village idlers assembled to witness the show, to apprise me that there was a wedding within. I ran in among them, demanding, with breathless eagerness, had the ceremony long commenced? They only gaped and stared. In my desperation, I pushed past them, and was about to enter the churchyard gate, when a group of ragged urchins, that had been hanging like bees to the window, suddenly dropped off and made a rush for the porch, vociferating in the uncouth dialect of their country something which signified, 'It's over — they're coming out!'

If Eliza Millward had seen me then she might indeed have been delighted. I grasped the gate-post for support, and stood intently gazing towards the door to take my last look on my soul's delight, my first on that detested mortal who had torn her from my heart, and doomed her, I was certain, to a life of misery and hollow, vain repining — for what happiness could she enjoy with him? I did not wish to shock her with my presence now, but I had not power to move away. Forth came the bride and bridegroom. Him I saw not; I had eyes for none but her. A long veil shrouded half her graceful form, but did not hide it; I could see that while she carried her head erect, her eyes were bent upon the ground, and her face and neck were suffused with a crimson blush; but every feature was radiant with smiles, and gleaming through the misty whiteness of her veil were clusters of golden ringlets! Oh, heavens! it was not my Helen! The first glimpse made me start — but my eyes were darkened with exhaustion and despair. Dare I trust them? 'Yes — it is not she! It was a younger, slighter, rosier beauty — lovely indeed, but with far less dignity and depth of soul — without that indefinable grace, that keenly spiritual yet gentle charm, that ineffable power to attract and subjugate the heart — my heart at least. I looked at the bridegroom — it was Frederick Lawrence! I wiped away the cold drops that were trickling down my forehead, and stepped back as he approached; but, his eyes fell upon me, and he knew me, altered as my appearance must have been.

'Is that you, Markham?' said he, startled and confounded at the apparition — perhaps, too, at the wildness of my looks.

'Yes, Lawrence; is that you?' I mustered the presence of mind to reply.

He smiled and coloured, as if half-proud and half-ashamed of his identity; and if he had reason to be proud of the sweet lady on his arm, he had no less cause to be ashamed of having concealed his good fortune so long.

'Allow me to introduce you to my bride,' said he, endeavouring to hide his embarrassment by an assumption of careless gaiety. 'Esther, this is Mr. Markham; my friend Markham, Mrs. Lawrence, late Miss Hargrave.'

I bowed to the bride, and vehemently wrung the bridegroom's hand.

'Why did you not tell me of this?' I said, reproachfully, pretending a resentment I did not feel (for in truth I was almost wild with joy to find myself so happily mistaken, and overflowing with affection to him for this and for the base injustice I felt that I had done him in my mind — he might have wronged me, but not to that extent; and as I had hated him like a demon for the last forty hours, the reaction from such a feeling was so great that I could pardon all offences for the moment — and love him in spite of them too).

'I did tell you,' said he, with an air of guilty confusion; 'you received my letter?'

'What letter?'

‘The one announcing my intended marriage.’

‘I never received the most distant hint of such an intention.’

‘It must have crossed you on your way then — it should have reached you yesterday morning — it was rather late, I acknowledge. But what brought you here, then, if you received no information?’

It was now my turn to be confounded; but the young lady, who had been busily patting the snow with her foot during our short sotto-voce colloquy, very opportunely came to my assistance by pinching her companion’s arm and whispering a suggestion that his friend should be invited to step into the carriage and go with them; it being scarcely agreeable to stand there among so many gazers, and keeping their friends waiting into the bargain.

‘And so cold as it is too!’ said he, glancing with dismay at her slight drapery, and immediately handing her into the carriage. ‘Markham, will you come? We are going to Paris, but we can drop you anywhere between this and Dover.’

‘No, thank you. Good-by — I needn’t wish you a pleasant journey; but I shall expect a very handsome apology, some time, mind, and scores of letters, before we meet again.’

He shook my hand, and hastened to take his place beside his lady. This was no time or place for explanation or discourse: we had already stood long enough to excite the wonder of the village sight-seers, and perhaps the wrath of the attendant bridal party; though, of course, all this passed in a much shorter time than I have taken to relate, or even than you will take to read it. I stood beside the carriage, and, the window being down, I saw my happy friend fondly encircle his companion’s waist with his arm, while she rested her glowing cheek on his shoulder, looking the very impersonation of loving, trusting bliss. In the interval between the footman’s closing the door and taking his place behind she raised her smiling brown eyes to his face, observing, playfully, — ‘I fear you must think me very insensible, Frederick: I know it is the custom for ladies to cry on these occasions, but I couldn’t squeeze a tear for my life.’

He only answered with a kiss, and pressed her still closer to his bosom.

‘But what is this?’ he murmured. ‘Why, Esther, you’re crying now!’

‘Oh, it’s nothing — it’s only too much happiness — and the wish,’ sobbed she, ‘that our dear Helen were as happy as ourselves.’

‘Bless you for that wish!’ I inwardly responded, as the carriage rolled away — ‘and heaven grant it be not wholly vain!’

I thought a cloud had suddenly darkened her husband’s face as she spoke. What did he think? Could he grudge such happiness to his dear sister and his friend as he now felt himself? At such a moment it was impossible. The contrast between her fate and his must darken his bliss for a time. Perhaps, too, he thought of me: perhaps he regretted the part he had had in preventing our union, by omitting to help us, if not by actually plotting against us. I exonerated him from that charge now, and deeply lamented my former ungenerous suspicions; but he had wronged us, still — I hoped, I trusted that he had. He had not attempted to cheek the course of our love by actually damming up the streams in their passage, but he had passively watched the two currents wandering through life's arid wilderness, declining to clear away the obstructions that divided them, and secretly hoping that both would lose themselves in the sand before they could be joined in one. And meantime he had been quietly proceeding with his own affairs; perhaps, his heart and head had been so full of his fair lady that he had had but little thought to spare for others. Doubtless he had made his first acquaintance with her — his first intimate acquaintance at least — during his three months' sojourn at F — , for I now recollected that he had once casually let fall an intimation that his aunt and sister had a young friend staying with them at the time, and this accounted for at least one-half his silence about all transactions there. Now, too, I saw a reason for many little things that had slightly puzzled me before; among the rest, for sundry departures from Woodford, and absences more or less prolonged, for which he never satisfactorily accounted, and concerning which he hated to be questioned on his return. Well might the servant say his master was 'very close.' But why this strange reserve to me? Partly, from that remarkable idiosyncrasy to which I have before alluded; partly, perhaps, from tenderness to my feelings, or fear to disturb my philosophy by touching upon the infectious theme of love.

CHAPTER LII

The tardy gig had overtaken me at last. I entered it, and bade the man who brought it drive to Grassdale Manor — I was too busy with my own thoughts to care to drive it myself. I would see Mrs. Huntingdon — there could be no impropriety in that now that her husband had been dead above a year — and by her indifference or her joy at my unexpected arrival I could soon tell whether her heart was truly mine. But my companion, a loquacious, forward fellow, was not disposed to leave me to the indulgence of my private cogitations.

'There they go!' said he, as the carriages filed away before us. 'There'll be brave doings on yonder to-day, as what come to-morra. — Know anything of that family, sir? or you're a stranger in these parts?'

'I know them by report.'

'Humph! There's the best of 'em gone, anyhow. And I suppose the old missis is agoing to leave after this stir's gotten overed, and take herself off, somewhere, to live on her bit of a jointure; and the young 'un — at least the new 'un (she's none so very young) — is coming down to live at the Grove.'

'Is Mr. Hargrave married, then?'

'Ay, sir, a few months since. He should a been wed afore, to a widow lady, but they couldn't agree over the money: she'd a rare long purse, and Mr. Hargrave wanted it all to hisself; but she wouldn't let it go, and so then they fell out. This one isn't quite as rich, nor as handsome either, but she hasn't been married before. She's very plain, they say, and getting on to forty or past, and so, you know, if she didn't jump at this hopportunity, she thought she'd never get a better. I guess she thought such a handsome young husband was worth all 'at ever she had, and he might take it and welcome, but I lay she'll rue her bargain afore long. They say she begins already to see 'at he isn't not altogether that nice, generous, perlite, delightful gentleman 'at she thought him afore marriage — he begins a being careless and masterful already. Ay, and she'll find him harder and carelesser nor she thinks on.'

'You seem to be well acquainted with him,' I observed.

'I am, sir; I've known him since he was quite a young gentleman; and a proud 'un he was, and a wilful. I was servant yonder for several years; but I couldn't stand their niggardly ways — she got ever longer and worse, did missis, with her nipping and screwing, and watching and grudging; so I thought I'd find another place.'

'Are we not near the house?' said I, interrupting him.

'Yes, sir; yond's the park.'

My heart sank within me to behold that stately mansion in the midst of its expansive grounds. The park as beautiful now, in its wintry garb, as it could be in its summer glory: the majestic sweep, the undulating swell and fall, displayed to full advantage in that robe of dazzling purity, stainless and printless — save one long, winding track left by the trooping deer — the stately timber-trees with their heavy-laden branches gleaming white against the dull, grey sky; the deep, encircling woods; the broad expanse of water sleeping in frozen quiet; and the weeping ash and willow drooping their snow-clad boughs above it — all presented a picture, striking indeed, and pleasing to an unencumbered mind, but by no means encouraging to me. There was one comfort, however, — all this was entailed upon little Arthur, and could not under any circumstances, strictly speaking, be his mother's. But how was she situated? Overcoming with a sudden effort my repugnance to mention her name to my garrulous companion, I asked him if he knew whether her late husband had left a will, and how the property had been disposed of. Oh, yes, he knew all about it; and I was quickly informed that to her had been left the full control and management of the estate during her son's minority, besides the absolute, unconditional possession of her own fortune (but I knew that her father had not given her much), and the small additional sum that had been settled upon her before marriage.

Before the close of the explanation we drew up at the park-gates. Now for the trial. If I should find her within — but alas! she might be still at Staningley: her brother had given me no intimation to the contrary. I inquired at the porter's lodge if Mrs. Huntingdon were at home. No, she was with her aunt in — shire, but was expected to return before Christmas. She usually spent most of her time at Staningley, only coming to Grassdale occasionally, when the management of affairs, or the interest of her tenants and dependents, required her presence.

'Near what town is Staningley situated?' I asked. The requisite information was soon obtained. 'Now then, my man, give me the reins, and we'll return to M — . I must have some breakfast at the "Rose and Crown," and then away to Staningley by the first coach for — .'

At M — I had time before the coach started to replenish my forces with a hearty breakfast, and to obtain the refreshment of my usual morning's ablutions, and the amelioration of some slight change in my toilet, and also to despatch a short note to my mother (excellent son that I was), to assure her that I was still in existence, and to excuse my non-appearance at the expected time. It was a long journey to Staningley for those slow-travelling days, but I did not deny myself needful refreshment on the road, nor even a night's rest at a wayside inn, choosing rather to brook a little delay than to present myself worn, wild, and weather-beaten before my mistress and her aunt, who would be astonished enough to see me without that. Next morning, therefore, I not only fortified myself with as substantial a breakfast as my excited feelings would allow me to swallow, but I bestowed a little more than usual time and care upon my toilet; and, furnished with a change of linen from my small carpet-bag, well-brushed clothes, well-polished boots, and neat new gloves, I mounted ‘The Lightning,’ and resumed my journey. I had nearly two stages yet before me, but the coach, I was informed, passed through the neighbourhood of Staningley, and having desired to be set down as near the Hall as possible, I had nothing to do but to sit with folded arms and speculate upon the coming hour.

It was a clear, frosty morning. The very fact of sitting exalted aloft, surveying the snowy landscape and sweet sunny sky, inhaling the pure, bracing air, and crunching away over the crisp frozen snow, was exhilarating enough in itself; but add to this the idea of to what goal I was hastening, and whom I expected to meet, and you may have some faint conception of my frame of mind at the time — only a faint one, though: for my heart swelled with unspeakable delight, and my spirits rose almost to madness, in spite of my prudent endeavours to bind them down to a reasonable platitude by thinking of the undeniable difference between Helen’s rank and mine; of all that she had passed through since our parting; of her long, unbroken silence; and, above all, of her cool, cautious aunt, whose counsels she would doubtless be careful not to slight again. These considerations made my heart flutter with anxiety, and my chest heave with impatience to get the crisis over; but they could not dim her image in my mind, or mar the vivid recollection of what had been said and felt between us, or destroy the keen anticipation of what was to be: in fact, I could not realise their terrors now. Towards the close of the journey, however, a couple of my fellow-passengers kindly came to my assistance, and brought me low enough.

‘Fine land this,’ said one of them, pointing with his umbrella to the wide fields on the right, conspicuous for their compact hedgerows, deep, well-cut ditches, and fine timber-trees, growing sometimes on the borders, sometimes in the midst of the enclosure: ‘very fine land, if you saw it in the summer or spring.’

‘Ay,’ responded the other, a gruff elderly man, with a drab greatcoat buttoned up to the chin, and a cotton umbrella between his knees. ‘It’s old Maxwell’s, I suppose.’

‘It was his, sir; but he’s dead now, you’re aware, and has left it all to his niece.’

‘All?’

‘Every rood of it, and the mansion-house and all! every hatom of his worldly goods, except just a trifle, by way of remembrance, to his nephew down in — shire, and an annuity to his wife.’

‘It’s strange, sir!’

‘It is, sir; and she wasn’t his own niece neither. But he had no near relations of his own — none but a nephew he’d quarrelled with; and he always had a partiality for this one. And then his wife advised him to it, they say: she’d brought most of the property, and it was her wish that this lady should have it.’

‘Humph! She’ll be a fine catch for somebody.’

‘She will so. She’s a widow, but quite young yet, and uncommon handsome: a fortune of her own, besides, and only one child, and she’s nursing a fine estate for him in — . There’ll be lots to speak for her! ’fraid there’s no chance for uz’ — (facetiously jogging me with his elbow, as well as his companion) — ‘ha, ha, ha! No offence, sir, I hope?’ — (to me). ‘Ahem! I should think she’ll marry none but a nobleman myself. Look ye, sir,’ resumed he, turning to his other neighbour, and pointing past me with his umbrella, ‘that’s the Hall: grand park, you see, and all them woods — plenty of timber there, and lots of game. Hallo! what now?’

This exclamation was occasioned by the sudden stoppage of the coach at the park-gates.

‘Gen’leman for Staningley Hall?’ cried the coachman and I rose and threw my carpet-bag on to the ground, preparatory to dropping myself down after it.

‘Sickly, sir?’ asked my talkative neighbour, staring me in the face. I daresay it was white enough.

‘No. Here, coachman!’

‘Thank’ee, sir. — All right!’

The coachman pocketed his fee and drove away, leaving me, not walking up the park, but pacing to and fro before its gates, with folded arms, and eyes fixed upon the ground, an overwhelming force of images, thoughts, impressions crowding on my mind, and nothing tangibly distinct but this: My love had been cherished in vain — my hope was gone for ever; I must tear myself away at once, and banish or suppress all thoughts of her, like the remembrance of a wild, mad dream. Gladly would I have lingered round the place for hours, in the hope of catching at least one distant glimpse of her before I went, but it must not be — I must not suffer her to see me; for what could have brought me hither but the hope of reviving her attachment, with a view hereafter to obtain her hand? And could I bear that she should think me capable of such a thing? — of presuming upon the acquaintance — the love, if you will — accidentally contracted, or rather forced upon her against her will, when she was an unknown fugitive, toiling for her own support, apparently without fortune, family, or connections; to come upon her now, when she was reinstated in her proper sphere, and claim a share in her prosperity, which, had it never failed her, would most certainly have kept her unknown to me for ever? And this, too, when we had parted sixteen months ago, and she had expressly forbidden me to hope for a re-union in this world, and never sent me a line or a message from that day to this. No! The very idea was intolerable.

And even if she should have a lingering affection for me still, ought I to disturb her peace by awakening those feelings? to subject her to the struggles of conflicting duty and inclination — to whichsoever side the latter might allure, or the former imperatively call her — whether she should deem it her duty to risk the slights and censures of the world, the sorrow and displeasure of those she loved, for a romantic idea of truth and constancy to me, or to sacrifice her individual wishes to the feelings of her friends and her own sense of prudence and the fitness of things? No — and I would not! I would go at once, and she should never know that I had approached the place of her abode: for though I might disclaim all idea of ever aspiring to her hand, or even of soliciting a place in her friendly regard, her peace should not be broken by my presence, nor her heart afflicted by the sight of my fidelity.

‘Adieu then, dear Helen, forever! Forever adieu!’

So said I — and yet I could not tear myself away. I moved a few paces, and then looked back, for one last view of her stately home, that I might have its outward form, at least, impressed upon my mind as indelibly as her own image, which, alas! I must not see again — then walked a few steps further; and then, lost in melancholy musings, paused again and leant my back against a rough old tree that grew beside the road.

CHAPTER LIII

While standing thus, absorbed in my gloomy reverie, a gentleman's carriage came round the corner of the road. I did not look at it; and had it rolled quietly by me, I should not have remembered the fact of its appearance at all; but a tiny voice from within it roused me by exclaiming, 'Mamma, mamma, here's Mr. Markham!'

I did not hear the reply, but presently the same voice answered, 'It is indeed, mamma — look for yourself.'

I did not raise my eyes, but I suppose mamma looked, for a clear melodious voice, whose tones thrilled through my nerves, exclaimed, 'Oh, aunt! here's Mr. Markham, Arthur's friend! Stop, Richard!'

There was such evidence of joyous though suppressed excitement in the utterance of those few words — especially that tremulous, 'Oh, aunt' — that it threw me almost off my guard. The carriage stopped immediately, and I looked up and met the eye of a pale, grave, elderly lady surveying me from the open window. She bowed, and so did I, and then she withdrew her head, while Arthur screamed to the footman to let him out; but before that functionary could descend from his box a hand was silently put forth from the carriage window. I knew that hand, though a black glove concealed its delicate whiteness and half its fair proportions, and quickly seizing it, I pressed it in my own — ardently for a moment, but instantly recollecting myself, I dropped it, and it was immediately withdrawn.

'Were you coming to see us, or only passing by?' asked the low voice of its owner, who, I felt, was attentively surveying my countenance from behind the thick black veil which, with the shadowing panels, entirely concealed her own from me.

'I — I came to see the place,' faltered I.

'The place,' repeated she, in a tone which betokened more displeasure or disappointment than surprise.

'Will you not enter it, then?'

'If you wish it.'

'Can you doubt?'

'Yes, yes! he must enter,' cried Arthur, running round from the other door; and seizing my hand in both his, he shook it heartily.

'Do you remember me, sir?' said he.

'Yes, full well, my little man, altered though you are,' replied I, surveying the comparatively tall, slim young gentleman, with his mother's image visibly stamped upon his fair, intelligent features, in spite of the blue eyes beaming with gladness, and the bright locks clustering beneath his cap.

'Am I not grown?' said he, stretching himself up to his full height.

'Grown! three inches, upon my word!'

'I was seven last birthday,' was the proud rejoinder. 'In seven years more I shall be as tall as you nearly.'

'Arthur,' said his mother, 'tell him to come in. Go on, Richard.'

There was a touch of sadness as well as coldness in her voice, but I knew not to what to ascribe it. The carriage drove on and entered the gates before us. My little companion led me up the park, discoursing merrily all the way. Arrived at the hall-door, I paused on the steps and looked round me, waiting to recover my composure, if possible — or, at any rate, to remember my new-formed resolutions and the principles on which they were founded; and it was not till Arthur had been for some time gently pulling my coat, and repeating his invitations to enter, that I at length consented to accompany him into the apartment where the ladies awaited us.

Helen eyed me as I entered with a kind of gentle, serious scrutiny, and politely asked after Mrs. Markham and Rose. I respectfully answered her inquiries. Mrs. Maxwell begged me to be seated, observing it was rather cold, but she supposed I had not travelled far that morning.

'Not quite twenty miles,' I answered.

'Not on foot!'

'No, Madam, by coach.'

'Here's Rachel, sir,' said Arthur, the only truly happy one amongst us, directing my attention to that worthy individual, who had just entered to take her mistress's things. She vouchsafed me an almost friendly smile of recognition — a favour that demanded, at least, a civil salutation on my part, which was accordingly given and respectfully returned — she had seen the error of her former estimation of my character.

When Helen was divested of her lugubrious bonnet and veil, her heavy winter cloak, &c., she looked so like herself that I knew not how to bear it. I was particularly glad to see her beautiful black hair, unstinted still, and unconcealed in its glossy luxuriance.

'Mamma has left off her widow's cap in honour of uncle's marriage,' observed Arthur, reading my looks with a child's mingled simplicity and quickness of observation. Mamma looked grave and Mrs. Maxwell shook her head. 'And aunt Maxwell is never going to leave off hers,' persisted the naughty boy; but when he saw that his pertness was seriously displeasing and painful to his aunt, he went and silently put his arm round her neck, kissed her cheek, and withdrew to the recess of one of the great bay-windows, where he quietly amused himself with his dog, while Mrs. Maxwell gravely discussed with me the interesting topics of the weather, the season, and the roads. I considered her presence very useful as a check upon my natural impulses — an antidote to those emotions of tumultuous excitement which would otherwise have carried me away against my reason and my will; but just then I felt the restraint almost intolerable, and I had the greatest difficulty in forcing myself to attend to her remarks and answer them with ordinary politeness; for

I was sensible that Helen was standing within a few feet of me beside the fire. I dared not look at her, but I felt her eye was upon me, and from one hasty, furtive glance, I thought her cheek was slightly flushed, and that her fingers, as she played with her watch-chain, were agitated with that restless, trembling motion which betokens high excitement.

‘Tell me,’ said she, availing herself of the first pause in the attempted conversation between her aunt and me, and speaking fast and low, with her eyes bent on the gold chain — for I now ventured another glance — ‘Tell me how you all are at Linden-hope — has nothing happened since I left you?’

‘I believe not.’

‘Nobody dead? nobody married?’

‘No.’

‘Or — or expecting to marry? — No old ties dissolved or new ones formed? no old friends forgotten or supplanted?’

She dropped her voice so low in the last sentence that no one could have caught the concluding words but myself, and at the same time turned her eyes upon me with a dawning smile, most sweetly melancholy, and a look of timid though keen inquiry that made my cheeks tingle with inexpressible emotions.

‘I believe not,’ I answered. ‘Certainly not, if others are as little changed as I.’ Her face glowed in sympathy with mine.

‘And you really did not mean to call?’ she exclaimed.

‘I feared to intrude.’

‘To intrude!’ cried she, with an impatient gesture. ‘What — ‘ but as if suddenly recollecting her aunt’s presence, she checked herself, and, turning to that lady, continued — ‘Why, aunt, this man is my brother’s close friend, and was my own intimate acquaintance (for a few short months at least), and professed a great attachment to my boy — and when he passes the house, so many scores of miles from his home, he declines to look in for fear of intruding!’

‘Mr. Markham is over-modest,’ observed Mrs. Maxwell.

‘Over-ceremonious rather,’ said her niece — ‘over — well, it’s no matter.’ And turning from me, she seated herself in a chair beside the table, and pulling a book to her by the cover, began to turn over the leaves in an energetic kind of abstraction.

‘If I had known,’ said I, ‘that you would have honoured me by remembering me as an intimate acquaintance, I most likely should not have denied myself the pleasure of calling upon you, but I thought you had forgotten me long ago.’

‘You judged of others by yourself,’ muttered she without raising her eyes from the book, but reddening as she spoke, and hastily turning over a dozen leaves at once.

There was a pause, of which Arthur thought he might venture to avail himself to introduce his handsome young setter, and show me how wonderfully it was grown and improved, and to ask after the welfare of its father Sancho. Mrs. Maxwell then withdrew to take off her things. Helen immediately pushed the book from her, and after silently surveying her son, his friend, and his dog for a few moments, she dismissed the former from the room under pretence of wishing him to fetch his last new book to show me. The child obeyed with alacrity; but I continued caressing the dog. The silence might have lasted till its master's return, had it depended on me to break it; but, in half a minute or less, my hostess impatiently rose, and, taking her former station on the rug between me and the chimney corner, earnestly exclaimed —

'Gilbert, what is the matter with you? — why are you so changed? It is a very indiscreet question, I know,' she hastened to add: 'perhaps a very rude one — don't answer it if you think so — but I hate mysteries and concealments.'

'I am not changed, Helen — unfortunately I am as keen and passionate as ever — it is not I, it is circumstances that are changed.'

'What circumstances? Do tell me!' Her cheek was blanched with the very anguish of anxiety — could it be with the fear that I had rashly pledged my faith to another?

'I'll tell you at once,' said I. 'I will confess that I came here for the purpose of seeing you (not without some monitory misgivings at my own presumption, and fears that I should be as little welcome as expected when I came), but I did not know that this estate was yours until enlightened on the subject of your inheritance by the conversation of two fellow-passengers in the last stage of my journey; and then I saw at once the folly of the hopes I had cherished, and the madness of retaining them a moment longer; and though I alighted at your gates, I determined not to enter within them; I lingered a few minutes to see the place, but was fully resolved to return to M — without seeing its mistress.'

'And if my aunt and I had not been just returning from our morning drive, I should have seen and heard no more of you?'

'I thought it would be better for both that we should not meet,' replied I, as calmly as I could, but not daring to speak above my breath, from conscious inability to steady my voice, and not daring to look in her face lest my firmness should forsake me altogether. 'I thought an interview would only disturb your peace and madden me. But I am glad, now, of this opportunity of seeing you once more and knowing that you have not forgotten me, and of assuring you that I shall never cease to remember you.'

There was a moment's pause. Mrs. Huntingdon moved away, and stood in the recess of the window. Did she regard this as an intimation that modesty alone prevented me from asking her hand? and was she considering how to repulse me with the smallest injury to my feelings? Before I could speak to relieve her from such a perplexity, she broke the silence herself by suddenly turning towards me and observing —

'You might have had such an opportunity before — as far, I mean, as regards assuring me of your kindly recollections, and yourself of mine, if you had written to me.'

'I would have done so, but I did not know your address, and did not like to ask your brother, because I thought he would object to my writing; but this would not have deterred me for a moment, if I could have ventured to believe that you expected to hear from me, or even wasted a thought upon your unhappy friend; but your silence naturally led me to conclude myself forgotten.'

'Did you expect me to write to you, then?'

'No, Helen — Mrs. Huntingdon,' said I, blushing at the implied imputation, 'certainly not; but if you had sent me a message through your brother, or even asked him about me now and then — '

'I did ask about you frequently. I was not going to do more,' continued she, smiling, 'so long as you continued to restrict yourself to a few polite inquiries about my health.'

'Your brother never told me that you had mentioned my name.'

'Did you ever ask him?'

'No; for I saw he did not wish to be questioned about you, or to afford the slightest encouragement or assistance to my too obstinate attachment.' Helen did not reply. 'And he was perfectly right,' added I. But she remained in silence, looking out upon the snowy lawn. 'Oh, I will relieve her of my presence,' thought I; and immediately I rose and advanced to take leave, with a most heroic resolution — but pride was at the bottom of it, or it could not have carried me through.

'Are you going already?' said she, taking the hand I offered, and not immediately letting it go.

'Why should I stay any longer?'

'Wait till Arthur comes, at least.'

Only too glad to obey, I stood and leant against the opposite side of the window.

'You told me you were not changed,' said my companion: 'you are — very much so.'

'No, Mrs. Huntingdon, I only ought to be.'

'Do you mean to maintain that you have the same regard for me that you had when last we met?'

'I have; but it would be wrong to talk of it now.'

'It was wrong to talk of it then, Gilbert; it would not now — unless to do so would be to violate the truth.'

I was too much agitated to speak; but, without waiting for an answer, she turned away her glistening eye and crimson cheek, and threw up the window and looked out, whether to calm her own, excited feelings, or to relieve her embarrassment, or only to pluck that beautiful half-blown Christmas-rose that grew upon the little shrub without, just peeping from the snow that had hitherto, no doubt, defended it from the frost, and was now melting away in the sun. Pluck it, however, she did, and having gently dashed the glittering powder from its leaves, approached it to her lips and said:

‘This rose is not so fragrant as a summer flower, but it has stood through hardships none of them could bear: the cold rain of winter has sufficed to nourish it, and its faint sun to warm it; the bleak winds have not blanched it, or broken its stem, and the keen frost has not blighted it. Look, Gilbert, it is still fresh and blooming as a flower can be, with the cold snow even now on its petals. — Will you have it?’

I held out my hand: I dared not speak lest my emotion should overmaster me. She laid the rose across my palm, but I scarcely closed my fingers upon it, so deeply was I absorbed in thinking what might be the meaning of her words, and what I ought to do or say upon the occasion; whether to give way to my feelings or restrain them still. Misconstruing this hesitation into indifference — or reluctance even — to accept her gift, Helen suddenly snatched it from my hand, threw it out on to the snow, shut down the window with an emphasis, and withdrew to the fire.

‘Helen, what means this?’ I cried, electrified at this startling change in her demeanour.

‘You did not understand my gift,’ said she — ‘or, what is worse, you despised it. I’m sorry I gave it you; but since I did make such a mistake, the only remedy I could think of was to take it away.’

‘You misunderstood me cruelly,’ I replied, and in a minute I had opened the window again, leaped out, picked up the flower, brought it in, and presented it to her, imploring her to give it me again, and I would keep it for ever for her sake, and prize it more highly than anything in the world I possessed.

‘And will this content you?’ said she, as she took it in her hand.

‘It shall,’ I answered.

‘There, then; take it.’

I pressed it earnestly to my lips, and put it in my bosom, Mrs. Huntingdon looking on with a half-sarcastic smile.

‘Now, are you going?’ said she.

‘I will if — if I must.’

‘You are changed,’ persisted she — ‘you are grown either very proud or very indifferent.’

‘I am neither, Helen — Mrs. Huntingdon. If you could see my heart — ’

‘You must be one, — if not both. And why Mrs. Huntingdon? — why not Helen, as before?’

‘Helen, then — dear Helen!’ I murmured. I was in an agony of mingled love, hope, delight, uncertainty, and suspense.

‘The rose I gave you was an emblem of my heart,’ said she; ‘would you take it away and leave me here alone?’

‘Would you give me your hand too, if I asked it?’

‘Have I not said enough?’ she answered, with a most enchanting smile. I snatched her hand, and would have fervently kissed it, but suddenly checked myself, and said, —

‘But have you considered the consequences?’

‘Hardly, I think, or I should not have offered myself to one too proud to take me, or too indifferent to make his affection outweigh my worldly goods.’

Stupid blockhead that I was! — I trembled to clasp her in my arms, but dared not believe in so much joy, and yet restrained myself to say, —

‘But if you should repent!’

‘It would be your fault,’ she replied: ‘I never shall, unless you bitterly disappoint me. If you have not sufficient confidence in my affection to believe this, let me alone.’

‘My darling angel — my own Helen,’ cried I, now passionately kissing the hand I still retained, and throwing my left arm around her, ‘you never shall repent, if it depend on me alone. But have you thought of your aunt?’ I trembled for the answer, and clasped her closer to my heart in the instinctive dread of losing my new-found treasure.

‘My aunt must not know of it yet,’ said she. ‘She would think it a rash, wild step, because she could not imagine how well I know you; but she must know you herself, and learn to like you. You must leave us now, after lunch, and come again in spring, and make a longer stay, and cultivate her acquaintance, and I know you will like each other.’

‘And then you will be mine,’ said I, printing a kiss upon her lips, and another, and another; for I was as daring and impetuous now as I had been backward and constrained before.

‘No — in another year,’ replied she, gently disengaging herself from my embrace, but still fondly clasping my hand.

‘Another year! Oh, Helen, I could not wait so long!’

‘Where is your fidelity?’

‘I mean I could not endure the misery of so long a separation.’

‘It would not be a separation: we will write every day: my spirit shall be always with you, and sometimes you shall see me with your bodily eye. I will not be such a hypocrite as to pretend that I desire to wait so long myself, but as my marriage is to please myself, alone, I ought to consult my friends about the time of it.’

‘Your friends will disapprove.’

‘They will not greatly disapprove, dear Gilbert,’ said she, earnestly kissing my hand; ‘they cannot, when they know you, or, if they could, they would not be true friends — I should not care for their estrangement. Now are you satisfied?’ She looked up in my face with a smile of ineffable tenderness.

‘Can I be otherwise, with your love? And you do love me, Helen?’ said I, not doubting the fact, but wishing to hear it confirmed by her own acknowledgment. ‘If you loved as I do,’ she earnestly replied, ‘you would not have so nearly lost me — these scruples of false delicacy and pride would never thus have troubled you — you would have seen that the greatest worldly distinctions and discrepancies of rank, birth, and fortune are as dust in the balance compared with the unity of accordant thoughts and feelings, and truly loving, sympathising hearts and souls.’

‘But this is too much happiness,’ said I, embracing her again; ‘I have not deserved it, Helen — I dare not believe in such felicity: and the longer I have to wait, the greater will be my dread that something will intervene to snatch you from me — and think, a thousand things may happen in a year! — I shall be in one long fever of restless terror and impatience all the time. And besides, winter is such a dreary season.’

‘I thought so too,’ replied she gravely: ‘I would not be married in winter — in December, at least,’ she added, with a shudder — for in that month had occurred both the ill-starred marriage that had bound her to her former husband, and the terrible death that released her — ‘and therefore I said another year, in spring.’

‘Next spring?’

‘No, no — next autumn, perhaps.’

‘Summer, then?’

‘Well, the close of summer. There now! be satisfied.’

While she was speaking Arthur re-entered the room — good boy for keeping out so long.

‘Mamma, I couldn’t find the book in either of the places you told me to look for it’ (there was a conscious something in mamma’s smile that seemed to say, ‘No, dear, I knew you could not’), ‘but Rachel got it for me at last. Look, Mr. Markham, a natural history, with all kinds of birds and beasts in it, and the reading as nice as the pictures!’

In great good humour I sat down to examine the book, and drew the little fellow between my knees. Had he come a minute before I should have received him less graciously, but now I affectionately stroked his curling looks, and even kissed his ivory forehead: he was my own Helen’s son, and therefore mine; and as such I have ever since regarded him. That pretty child is now a fine young man: he has realised his mother’s brightest expectations, and is at present residing in Grassdale Manor with his young wife — the merry little Helen Hattersley of yore.

I had not looked through half the book before Mrs. Maxwell appeared to invite me into the other room to lunch. That lady’s cool, distant manners rather chilled me at first; but I did my best to propitiate her, and not entirely without success, I think, even in that first short visit; for when I talked cheerfully to her, she gradually became more kind and cordial, and when I departed she bade me a gracious adieu, hoping ere long to have the pleasure of seeing me again.

‘But you must not go till you have seen the conservatory, my aunt’s winter garden,’ said Helen, as I advanced to take leave of her, with as much philosophy and self-command as I could summon to my aid.

I gladly availed myself of such a respite, and followed her into a large and beautiful conservatory, plentifully furnished with flowers, considering the season — but, of course, I had little attention to spare for them. It was not, however, for any tender colloquy that my companion had brought me there: —

‘My aunt is particularly fond of flowers,’ she observed, ‘and she is fond of Staningley too: I brought you here to offer a petition in her behalf, that this may be her home as long as she lives, and — if it be not our home likewise — that I may often see her and be with her; for I fear she will be sorry to lose me; and though she leads a retired and contemplative life, she is apt to get low-spirited if left too much alone.’

‘By all means, dearest Helen! — do what you will with your own. I should not dream of wishing your aunt to leave the place under any circumstances; and we will live either here or elsewhere as you and she may determine, and you shall see her as often as you like. I know she must be pained to part with you, and I am willing to make any reparation in my power. I love her for your sake, and her happiness shall be as dear to me as that of my own mother.’

‘Thank you, darling! you shall have a kiss for that. Good-by. There now — there, Gilbert — let me go — here’s Arthur; don’t astonish his infantile brain with your madness.’

* * * * *

But it is time to bring my narrative to a close. Any one but you would say I had made it too long already. But for your satisfaction I will add a few words more; because I know you will have a fellow-feeling for the old lady, and will wish to know the last of her history. I did come again in spring, and, agreeably to Helen’s injunctions, did my best to cultivate her acquaintance. She received me very kindly, having been, doubtless, already prepared to think highly of my character by her niece’s too favourable report. I turned my best side out, of course, and we got along marvellously well together. When my ambitious intentions were made known to her, she took it more sensibly than I had ventured to hope. Her only remark on the subject, in my hearing, was —

‘And so, Mr. Markham, you are going to rob me of my niece, I understand. Well! I hope God will prosper your union, and make my dear girl happy at last. Could she have been contented to remain single, I own I should have been better satisfied; but if she must marry again, I know of no one, now living and of a suitable age, to whom I would more willingly resign her than yourself, or who would be more likely to appreciate her worth and make, her truly happy, as far as I can tell.’

Of course I was delighted with the compliment, and hoped to show her that she was not mistaken in her favourable judgment.

'I have, however, one request to offer,' continued she. 'It seems I am still to look on Staningley as my home: I wish you to make it yours likewise, for Helen is attached to the place and to me — as I am to her. There are painful associations connected with Grassdale, which she cannot easily overcome; and I shall not molest you with my company or interference here: I am a very quiet person, and shall keep my own apartments, and attend to my own concerns, and only see you now and then.'

Of course I most readily consented to this; and we lived in the greatest harmony with our dear aunt until the day of her death, which melancholy event took place a few years after — melancholy, not to herself (for it came quietly upon her, and she was glad to reach her journey's end), but only to the few loving friends and grateful dependents she left behind.

To return, however, to my own affairs: I was married in summer, on a glorious August morning. It took the whole eight months, and all Helen's kindness and goodness to boot, to overcome my mother's prejudices against my bride-elect, and to reconcile her to the idea of my leaving Linden Grange and living so far away. Yet she was gratified at her son's good fortune after all, and proudly attributed it all to his own superior merits and endowments. I bequeathed the farm to Fergus, with better hopes of its prosperity than I should have had a year ago under similar circumstances; for he had lately fallen in love with the Vicar of L — 's eldest daughter — a lady whose superiority had roused his latent virtues, and stimulated him to the most surprising exertions, not only to gain her affection and esteem, and to obtain a fortune sufficient to aspire to her hand, but to render himself worthy of her, in his own eyes, as well as in those of her parents; and in the end he was successful, as you already know. As for myself, I need not tell you how happily my Helen and I have lived together, and how blessed we still are in each other's society, and in the promising young scions that are growing up about us. We are just now looking forward to the advent of you and Rose, for the time of your annual visit draws nigh, when you must leave your dusty, smoky, noisy, toiling, striving city for a season of invigorating relaxation and social retirement with us.

Till then, farewell,
Gilbert Markham.

Staningley: *June* 10*th*, 1847.

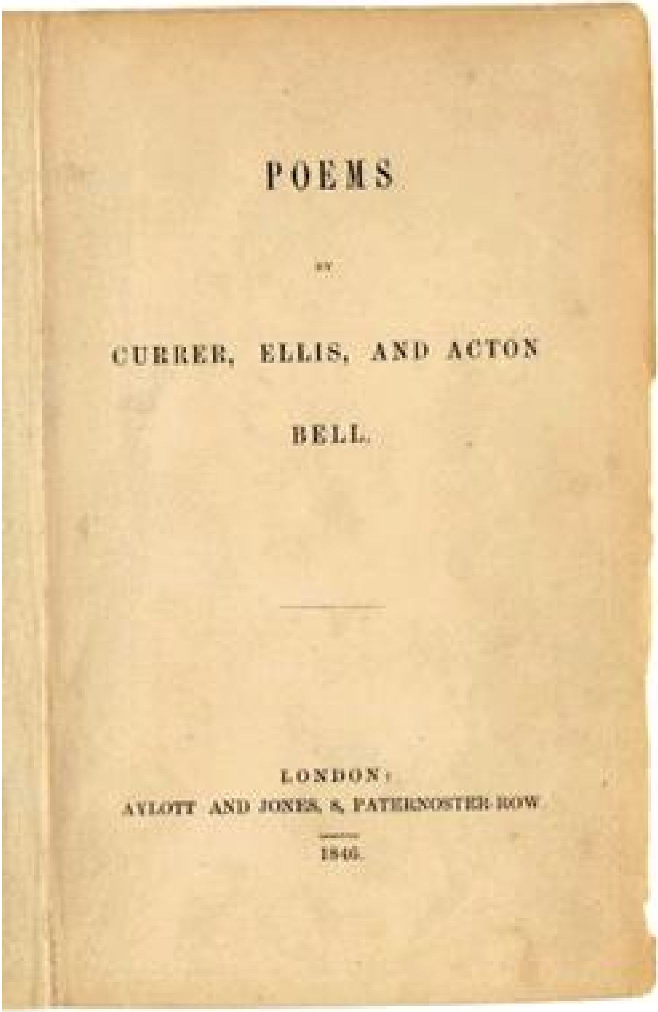
THE END

The Poetry

Brontë Parsonage Museum - their former home in Haworth, West Yorkshire

POEMS BY CURRER, ELLIS, AND ACTON BELL

This volume of poetry was published jointly by the three Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne in 1846, being their first work to go in print. To evade contemporary prejudice against female writers, the Brontë sisters adopted androgynous first names. All three retained the first letter of their first names: Charlotte became Currer Bell, Anne became Acton Bell, and Emily became Ellis Bell. The book was printed by Aylott and Jones, from London. The first edition failed to attract interest, with only two copies being sold. However, the sisters decided to continue writing for publication and began work on their first novels, which became commercial successes. Following the success of Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* in 1848, and after the deaths of Emily and Anne, the second edition of this book fared much better, with Charlotte's additions of previously unpublished poetry by her two late sisters. It is believed that there are fewer than ten copies in existence with the Aylott and Jones title-page.



POEMS

BY

CURRER, ELLIS, AND ACTON

BELL.

LONDON:
AYLOTT AND JONES, 8, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1846.

The title page of the first edition

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POEMS BY CURRER BELL (CHARLOTTE BRONTË)

PILATE'S WIFE'S DREAM.

I've quench'd my lamp, I struck it in that start
Which every limb convulsed, I heard it fall —
The crash blent with my sleep, I saw depart
Its light, even as I woke, on yonder wall;
Over against my bed, there shone a gleam
Strange, faint, and mingling also with my dream.

It sank, and I am wrapt in utter gloom;
How far is night advanced, and when will day
Retinge the dusk and livid air with bloom,
And fill this void with warm, creative ray?
Would I could sleep again till, clear and red,
Morning shall on the mountain-tops be spread!

I'd call my women, but to break their sleep,
Because my own is broken, were unjust;
They've wrought all day, and well-earn'd slumbers steep
Their labours in forgetfulness, I trust;
Let me my feverish watch with patience bear,
Thankful that none with me its sufferings share.

Yet, oh, for light! one ray would tranquillize
My nerves, my pulses, more than effort can;
I'll draw my curtain and consult the skies:
These trembling stars at dead of night look wan,
Wild, restless, strange, yet cannot be more drear
Than this my couch, shared by a nameless fear.

All black — one great cloud, drawn from east to west,
Conceals the heavens, but there are lights below;
Torches burn in Jerusalem, and cast
On yonder stony mount a lurid glow.
I see men station'd there, and gleaming spears;
A sound, too, from afar, invades my ears.

Dull, measured strokes of axe and hammer ring
From street to street, not loud, but through the night
Distinctly heard — and some strange spectral thing
Is now uprear'd — and, fix'd against the light
Of the pale lamps, defined upon that sky,
It stands up like a column, straight and high.

I see it all — I know the dusky sign —

A cross on Calvary, which Jews uprear
While Romans watch; and when the dawn shall shine
Pilate, to judge the victim, will appear —
Pass sentence-yield Him up to crucify;
And on that cross the spotless Christ must die.

Dreams, then, are true — for thus my vision ran;
Surely some oracle has been with me,
The gods have chosen me to reveal their plan,
To warn an unjust judge of destiny:
I, slumbering, heard and saw; awake I know,
Christ's coming death, and Pilate's life of woe.

I do not weep for Pilate — who could prove
Regret for him whose cold and crushing sway
No prayer can soften, no appeal can move:
Who tramples hearts as others trample clay,
Yet with a faltering, an uncertain tread,
That might stir up reprisal in the dead.

Forced to sit by his side and see his deeds;
Forced to behold that visage, hour by hour,
In whose gaunt lines the abhorrent gazer reads
A triple lust of gold, and blood, and power;
A soul whom motives fierce, yet abject, urge —
Rome's servile slave, and Judah's tyrant scourge.

How can I love, or mourn, or pity him?
I, who so long my fetter'd hands have wrung;
I, who for grief have wept my eyesight dim;
Because, while life for me was bright and young,
He robb'd my youth — he quench'd my life's fair ray —
He crush'd my mind, and did my freedom slay.

And at this hour-although I be his wife —
He has no more of tenderness from me
Than any other wretch of guilty life;
Less, for I know his household privacy —
I see him as he is — without a screen;
And, by the gods, my soul abhors his mien!

Has he not sought my presence, dyed in blood —
Innocent, righteous blood, shed shamelessly?
And have I not his red salute withstood?
Ay, when, as erst, he plunged all Galilee
In dark bereavement — in affliction sore,
Mingling their very offerings with their gore.

Then came he — in his eyes a serpent-smile,
Upon his lips some false, endearing word,
And through the streets of Salem clang'd the while
His slaughtering, hacking, sacrilegious sword —
And I, to see a man cause men such woe,
Trembled with ire — I did not fear to show.

And now, the envious Jewish priests have brought
Jesus — whom they in mock'ry call their king —
To have, by this grim power, their vengeance wrought;
By this mean reptile, innocence to sting.

Oh! could I but the purposed doom avert,
And shield the blameless head from cruel hurt!

Accessible is Pilate's heart to fear,
Omens will shake his soul, like autumn leaf;
Could he this night's appalling vision hear,
This just man's bonds were loosed, his life were safe,
Unless that bitter priesthood should prevail,
And make even terror to their malice quail.

Yet if I tell the dream — but let me pause.
What dream? Erewhile the characters were clear,
Graved on my brain — at once some unknown cause
Has dimm'd and razed the thoughts, which now appear,
Like a vague remnant of some by-past scene; —
Not what will be, but what, long since, has been.

I suffer'd many things — I heard foretold
A dreadful doom for Pilate, — lingering woes,
In far, barbarian climes, where mountains cold
Built up a solitude of trackless snows,
There he and grisly wolves prowl'd side by side,
There he lived famish'd — there, methought, he died;

But not of hunger, nor by malady;
I saw the snow around him, stain'd with gore;
I said I had no tears for such as he,
And, lo! my cheek is wet — mine eyes run o'er;
I weep for mortal suffering, mortal guilt,
I weep the impious deed, the blood self-spilt.

More I recall not, yet the vision spread
Into a world remote, an age to come —
And still the illumined name of Jesus shed
A light, a clearness, through the unfolding gloom —
And still I saw that sign, which now I see,
That cross on yonder brow of Calvary.

What is this Hebrew Christ?-to me unknown
His lineage — doctrine — mission; yet how clear
Is God-like goodness in his actions shown,
How straight and stainless is his life's career!
The ray of Deity that rests on him,
In my eyes makes Olympian glory dim.

The world advances; Greek or Roman rite
Suffices not the inquiring mind to stay;
The searching soul demands a purer light
To guide it on its upward, onward way;
Ashamed of sculptured gods, Religion turns
To where the unseen Jehovah's altar burns.

Our faith is rotten, all our rites defiled,
Our temples sullied, and, methinks, this man,
With his new ordinance, so wise and mild,
Is come, even as He says, the chaff to fan
And sever from the wheat; but will his faith
Survive the terrors of to-morrow's death?

* * * * * * *

I feel a firmer trust — a higher hope
Rise in my soul — it dawns with dawning day;
Lo! on the Temple's roof — on Moriah's slope
Appears at length that clear and crimson ray
Which I so wished for when shut in by night;
Oh, opening skies, I hail, I bless pour light!

Part, clouds and shadows! Glorious Sun appear!
Part, mental gloom! Come insight from on high!
Dusk dawn in heaven still strives with daylight clear
The longing soul doth still uncertain sigh.
Oh! to behold the truth — that sun divine,
How doth my bosom pant, my spirit pine!

This day, Time travails with a mighty birth;
This day, Truth stoops from heaven and visits earth;
Ere night descends I shall more surely know
What guide to follow, in what path to go;
I wait in hope — I wait in solemn fear,
The oracle of God — the sole — true God — to hear.

MEMENTOS.

Arranging long-locked drawers and shelves
Of cabinets, shut up for years,
What a strange task we've set ourselves!
How still the lonely room appears!
How strange this mass of ancient treasures,
Mementos of past pains and pleasures;
These volumes, clasped with costly stone,
With print all faded, gilding gone;

These fans of leaves from Indian trees —
These crimson shells, from Indian seas —
These tiny portraits, set in rings —
Once, doubtless, deemed such precious things;
Keepsakes bestowed by Love on Faith,
And worn till the receiver's death,
Now stored with cameos, china, shells,
In this old closet's dusty cells.

I scarcely think, for ten long years,
A hand has touched these relics old;
And, coating each, slow-formed, appears
The growth of green and antique mould.

All in this house is mossing over;

All is unused, and dim, and damp;
Nor light, nor warmth, the rooms discover —
Bereft for years of fire and lamp.

The sun, sometimes in summer, enters
The casements, with reviving ray;
But the long rains of many winters
Moulder the very walls away.

And outside all is ivy, clinging
To chimney, lattice, gable grey;
Scarcely one little red rose springing
Through the green moss can force its way.

Unscared, the daw and starling nestle,
Where the tall turret rises high,
And winds alone come near to rustle
The thick leaves where their cradles lie,

I sometimes think, when late at even
I climb the stair reluctantly,
Some shape that should be well in heaven,
Or ill elsewhere, will pass by me.

I fear to see the very faces,
Familiar thirty years ago,
Even in the old accustomed places
Which look so cold and gloomy now,

I've come, to close the window, hither,
At twilight, when the sun was down,
And Fear my very soul would wither,
Lest something should be dimly shown,

Too much the buried form resembling,
Of her who once was mistress here;
Lest doubtful shade, or moonbeam trembling,
Might take her aspect, once so dear.

Hers was this chamber; in her time
It seemed to me a pleasant room,
For then no cloud of grief or crime
Had cursed it with a settled gloom;

I had not seen death's image laid
In shroud and sheet, on yonder bed.
Before she married, she was blest —
Blest in her youth, blest in her worth;
Her mind was calm, its sunny rest
Shone in her eyes more clear than mirth.

And when attired in rich array,
Light, lustrous hair about her brow,
She yonder sat, a kind of day
Lit up what seems so gloomy now.
These grim oak walls even then were grim;
That old carved chair was then antique;
But what around looked dusk and dim
Served as a foil to her fresh cheek;

Her neck and arms, of hue so fair,
Eyes of unclouded, smiling light;
Her soft, and curled, and floating hair,
Gems and attire, as rainbow bright.

Reclined in yonder deep recess,
Ofttimes she would, at evening, lie
Watching the sun; she seemed to bless
With happy glance the glorious sky.
She loved such scenes, and as she gazed,
Her face evinced her spirit's mood;
Beauty or grandeur ever raised
In her, a deep-felt gratitude.
But of all lovely things, she loved
A cloudless moon, on summer night,
Full oft have I impatience proved
To see how long her still delight
Would find a theme in reverie,
Out on the lawn, or where the trees
Let in the lustre fitfully,
As their boughs parted momently,
To the soft, languid, summer breeze.
Alas! that she should e'er have flung
Those pure, though lonely joys away —
Deceived by false and guileful tongue,
She gave her hand, then suffered wrong;
Oppressed, ill-used, she faded young,
And died of grief by slow decay.

Open that casket-look how bright
Those jewels flash upon the sight;
The brilliants have not lost a ray
Of lustre, since her wedding day.
But see — upon that pearly chain —
How dim lies Time's discolouring stain!
I've seen that by her daughter worn:
For, ere she died, a child was born; —
A child that ne'er its mother knew,
That lone, and almost friendless grew;
For, ever, when its step drew nigh,
Averted was the father's eye;
And then, a life impure and wild
Made him a stranger to his child:
Absorbed in vice, he little cared
On what she did, or how she fared.
The love withheld she never sought,
She grew uncherished — learnt untaught;
To her the inward life of thought
Full soon was open laid.
I know not if her friendlessness
Did sometimes on her spirit press,
But plaint she never made.
The book-shelves were her darling treasure,
She rarely seemed the time to measure
While she could read alone.
And she too loved the twilight wood
And often, in her mother's mood,
Away to yonder hill would hie,
Like her, to watch the setting sun,

Or see the stars born, one by one,
Out of the darkening sky.
Nor would she leave that hill till night
Trembled from pole to pole with light;
Even then, upon her homeward way,
Long — long her wandering steps delayed
To quit the sombre forest shade,
Through which her eerie pathway lay.
You ask if she had beauty's grace?
I know not — but a nobler face
My eyes have seldom seen;
A keen and fine intelligence,
And, better still, the truest sense
Were in her speaking mien.
But bloom or lustre was there none,
Only at moments, fitful shone
An ardour in her eye,
That kindled on her cheek a flush,
Warm as a red sky's passing blush
And quick with energy.
Her speech, too, was not common speech,
No wish to shine, or aim to teach,
Was in her words displayed:
She still began with quiet sense,
But oft the force of eloquence
Came to her lips in aid;
Language and voice unconscious changed,
And thoughts, in other words arranged,
Her fervid soul transfused
Into the hearts of those who heard,
And transient strength and ardour stirred,
In minds to strength unused,
Yet in gay crowd or festal glare,
Grave and retiring was her air;
'Twas seldom, save with me alone,
That fire of feeling freely shone;
She loved not awe's nor wonder's gaze,
Nor even exaggerated praise,
Nor even notice, if too keen
The curious gazer searched her mien.
Nature's own green expanse revealed
The world, the pleasures, she could prize;
On free hill-side, in sunny field,
In quiet spots by woods concealed,
Grew wild and fresh her chosen joys,
Yet Nature's feelings deeply lay
In that endowed and youthful frame;
Shrined in her heart and hid from day,
They burned unseen with silent flame.
In youth's first search for mental light,
She lived but to reflect and learn,
But soon her mind's maturer might
For stronger task did pant and yearn;
And stronger task did fate assign,
Task that a giant's strength might strain;
To suffer long and ne'er repine,
Be calm in frenzy, smile at pain.

Pale with the secret war of feeling,

Sustained with courage, mute, yet high;
The wounds at which she bled, revealing
Only by altered cheek and eye;

She bore in silence — but when passion
Surged in her soul with ceaseless foam,
The storm at last brought desolation,
And drove her exiled from her home.

And silent still, she straight assembled
The wrecks of strength her soul retained;
For though the wasted body trembled,
The unconquered mind, to quail, disdained.

She crossed the sea — now lone she wanders
By Seine's, or Rhine's, or Arno's flow;
Fain would I know if distance renders
Relief or comfort to her woe.

Fain would I know if, henceforth, ever,
These eyes shall read in hers again,
That light of love which faded never,
Though dimmed so long with secret pain.

She will return, but cold and altered,
Like all whose hopes too soon depart;
Like all on whom have beat, unsheltered,
The bitter blasts that blight the heart.

No more shall I behold her lying
Calm on a pillow, smoothed by me;
No more that spirit, worn with sighing,
Will know the rest of infancy.

If still the paths of lore she follow,
'Twill be with tired and goaded will;
She'll only toil, the aching hollow,
The joyless blank of life to fill.

And oh! full oft, quite spent and weary,
Her hand will pause, her head decline;
That labour seems so hard and dreary,
On which no ray of hope may shine.

Thus the pale blight of time and sorrow
Will shade with grey her soft, dark hair;
Then comes the day that knows no morrow,
And death succeeds to long despair.

So speaks experience, sage and hoary;
I see it plainly, know it well,
Like one who, having read a story,
Each incident therein can tell.

Touch not that ring; 'twas his, the sire
Of that forsaken child;
And nought his relics can inspire
Save memories, sin-defiled.

I, who sat by his wife's death-bed,
I, who his daughter loved,
Could almost curse the guilty dead,
For woes the guiltless proved.

And heaven did curse — they found him laid,
When crime for wrath was rife,
Cold — with the suicidal blade
Clutched in his desperate gripe.

'Twas near that long deserted hut,
Which in the wood decays,
Death's axe, self-wielded, struck his root,
And lopped his desperate days.

You know the spot, where three black trees,
Lift up their branches fell,
And moaning, ceaseless as the seas,
Still seem, in every passing breeze,
The deed of blood to tell.

They named him mad, and laid his bones
Where holier ashes lie;
Yet doubt not that his spirit groans
In hell's eternity.

But, lo! night, closing o'er the earth,
Infects our thoughts with gloom;
Come, let us strive to rally mirth
Where glows a clear and tranquil hearth
In some more cheerful room.

THE WIFE'S WILL.

Sit still — a word — a breath may break
(As light airs stir a sleeping lake)
The glassy calm that soothes my woes —
The sweet, the deep, the full repose.
O leave me not! for ever be
Thus, more than life itself to me!

Yes, close beside thee let me kneel —
Give me thy hand, that I may feel
The friend so true — so tried — so dear,
My heart's own chosen — indeed is near;
And check me not — this hour divine
Belongs to me — is fully mine.

'Tis thy own hearth thou sitt'st beside,
After long absence — wandering wide;
'Tis thy own wife reads in thine eyes
A promise clear of stormless skies;

For faith and true love light the rays
Which shine responsive to her gaze.

Ay, — well that single tear may fall;
Ten thousand might mine eyes recall,
Which from their lids ran blinding fast,
In hours of grief, yet scarcely past;
Well mayst thou speak of love to me,
For, oh! most truly — I love thee!

Yet smile — for we are happy now.
Whence, then, that sadness on thy brow?
What sayst thou?" We muse once again,
Ere long, be severed by the main!"
I knew not this — I deemed no more
Thy step would err from Britain's shore.

"Duty commands!" 'Tis true — 'tis just;
Thy slightest word I wholly trust,
Nor by request, nor faintest sigh,
Would I to turn thy purpose try;
But, William, hear my solemn vow —
Hear and confirm! — with thee I go.

"Distance and suffering," didst thou say?
"Danger by night, and toil by day?"
Oh, idle words and vain are these;
Hear me! I cross with thee the seas.
Such risk as thou must meet and dare,
I — thy true wife — will duly share.

Passive, at home, I will not pine;
Thy toils, thy perils shall be mine;
Grant this — and be hereafter paid
By a warm heart's devoted aid:
'Tis granted — with that yielding kiss,
Entered my soul unmingled bliss.

Thanks, William, thanks! thy love has joy,
Pure, undefiled with base alloy;
'Tis not a passion, false and blind,
Inspires, enchains, absorbs my mind;
Worthy, I feel, art thou to be
Loved with my perfect energy.

This evening now shall sweetly flow,
Lit by our clear fire's happy glow;
And parting's peace-embittering fear,
Is warned our hearts to come not near;
For fate admits my soul's decree,
In bliss or bale — to go with thee!

THE WOOD.

But two miles more, and then we rest!
Well, there is still an hour of day,
And long the brightness of the West
Will light us on our devious way;
Sit then, awhile, here in this wood —
So total is the solitude,

We safely may delay.

These massive roots afford a seat,
Which seems for weary travellers made.
There rest. The air is soft and sweet
In this sequestered forest glade,
And there are scents of flowers around,
The evening dew draws from the ground;
How soothingly they spread!

Yes; I was tired, but not at heart;
No — that beats full of sweet content,
For now I have my natural part
Of action with adventure blent;
Cast forth on the wide world with thee,
And all my once waste energy
To weighty purpose bent.

Yet — sayst thou, spies around us roam,
Our aims are termed conspiracy?
Haply, no more our English home
An anchorage for us may be?
That there is risk our mutual blood
May redden in some lonely wood
The knife of treachery?

Sayst thou, that where we lodge each night,
In each lone farm, or lonelier hall
Of Norman Peer — ere morning light
Suspicion must as duly fall,
As day returns — such vigilance
Presides and watches over France,
Such rigour governs all?

I fear not, William; dost thou fear?
So that the knife does not divide,
It may be ever hovering near:
I could not tremble at thy side,
And strenuous love — like mine for thee —
Is buckler strong 'gainst treachery,
And turns its stab aside.

I am resolved that thou shalt learn
To trust my strength as I trust thine;
I am resolved our souls shall burn
With equal, steady, mingling shine;
Part of the field is conquered now,
Our lives in the same channel flow,
Along the self-same line;

And while no groaning storm is heard,
Thou seem'st content it should be so,
But soon as comes a warning word
Of danger — straight thine anxious brow
Bends over me a mournful shade,
As doubting if my powers are made
To ford the floods of woe.

Know, then it is my spirit swells,

And drinks, with eager joy, the air
Of freedom — where at last it dwells,
Chartered, a common task to share
With thee, and then it stirs alert,
And pants to learn what menaced hurt
Demands for thee its care.

Remember, I have crossed the deep,
And stood with thee on deck, to gaze
On waves that rose in threatening heap,
While stagnant lay a heavy haze,
Dimly confusing sea with sky,
And baffling, even, the pilot's eye,
Intent to thread the maze —

Of rocks, on Bretagne's dangerous coast,
And find a way to steer our band
To the one point obscure, which lost,
Flung us, as victims, on the strand; —
All, elsewhere, gleamed the Gallic sword,
And not a wherry could be moored
Along the guarded land.

I feared not then — I fear not now;
The interest of each stirring scene
Wakes a new sense, a welcome glow,
In every nerve and bounding vein;
Alike on turbid Channel sea,
Or in still wood of Normandy,
I feel as born again.

The rain descended that wild morn
When, anchoring in the cove at last,
Our band, all weary and forlorn
Ashore, like wave-worn sailors, cast —
Sought for a sheltering roof in vain,
And scarce could scanty food obtain
To break their morning fast.

Thou didst thy crust with me divide,
Thou didst thy cloak around me fold;
And, sitting silent by thy side,
I ate the bread in peace untold:
Given kindly from thy hand, 'twas sweet
As costly fare or princely treat
On royal plate of gold.

Sharp blew the sleet upon my face,
And, rising wild, the gusty wind
Drove on those thundering waves apace,
Our crew so late had left behind;
But, spite of frozen shower and storm,
So close to thee, my heart beat warm,
And tranquil slept my mind.

So now — nor foot-sore nor opprest
With walking all this August day,
I taste a heaven in this brief rest,
This gipsy-halt beside the way.

England's wild flowers are fair to view,
Like balm is England's summer dew
Like gold her sunset ray.

But the white violets, growing here,
Are sweeter than I yet have seen,
And ne'er did dew so pure and clear
Distil on forest mosses green,
As now, called forth by summer heat,
Perfumes our cool and fresh retreat —
These fragrant limes between.

That sunset! Look beneath the boughs,
Over the copse — beyond the hills;
How soft, yet deep and warm it glows,
And heaven with rich suffusion fills;
With hues where still the opal's tint,
Its gleam of prisoned fire is blent,
Where flame through azure thrills!

Depart we now — for fast will fade
That solemn splendour of decline,
And deep must be the after-shade
As stars alone to-night will shine;
No moon is destined — pale — to gaze
On such a day's vast Phoenix blaze,
A day in fires decayed!

There — hand-in-hand we tread again
The mazes of this varying wood,
And soon, amid a cultured plain,
Girt in with fertile solitude,
We shall our resting-place descry,
Marked by one roof-tree, towering high
Above a farmstead rude.

Refreshed, erelong, with rustic fare,
We'll seek a couch of dreamless ease;
Courage will guard thy heart from fear,
And Love give mine divinest peace:
To-morrow brings more dangerous toil,
And through its conflict and turmoil
We'll pass, as God shall please.

[The preceding composition refers, doubtless, to the scenes acted in France during the last year of the Consulate.]

FRANCES.

She will not sleep, for fear of dreams,
But, rising, quits her restless bed,
And walks where some beclouded beams

Of moonlight through the hall are shed.

Obedient to the goad of grief,
Her steps, now fast, now lingering slow,
In varying motion seek relief
From the Eumenides of woe.

Wringing her hands, at intervals —
 But long as mute as phantom dim —
 She glides along the dusky walls,
Under the black oak rafters grim.

The close air of the grated tower
Stifles a heart that scarce can beat,
And, though so late and lone the hour,
Forth pass her wandering, faltering feet;

And on the pavement spread before
The long front of the mansion grey,
Her steps imprint the night-frost hoar,
Which pale on grass and granite lay.

Not long she stayed where misty moon
And shimmering stars could on her look,
But through the garden archway soon
Her strange and gloomy path she took.

Some firs, coeval with the tower,
Their straight black boughs stretched o'er her head;
Unseen, beneath this sable bower,
Rustled her dress and rapid tread.

There was an alcove in that shade,
Screening a rustic seat and stand;
Weary she sat her down, and laid
Her hot brow on her burning hand.

To solitude and to the night,
Some words she now, in murmurs, said;
And trickling through her fingers white,
Some tears of misery she shed.

"God help me in my grievous need,
God help me in my inward pain;
Which cannot ask for pity's meed,
Which has no licence to complain,

"Which must be borne; yet who can bear,
Hours long, days long, a constant weight —
 The yoke of absolute despair,
A suffering wholly desolate?

"Who can for ever crush the heart,
Restrain its throbbing, curb its life?
Dissemble truth with ceaseless art,
With outward calm mask inward strife?"

She waited — as for some reply;
The still and cloudy night gave none;

Ere long, with deep-drawn, trembling sigh,
Her heavy plaint again begun.

“Unloved — I love; unwept — I weep;
Grief I restrain — hope I repress:
Vain is this anguish — fixed and deep;
Vainer, desires and dreams of bliss.

“My love awakes no love again,
My tears collect, and fall unfelt;
My sorrow touches none with pain,
My humble hopes to nothing melt.

“For me the universe is dumb,
Stone-deaf, and blank, and wholly blind;
Life I must bound, existence sum
In the strait limits of one mind;

“That mind my own. Oh! narrow cell;
Dark — imageless — a living tomb!
There must I sleep, there wake and dwell
Content, with palsy, pain, and gloom.”

Again she paused; a moan of pain,
A stifled sob, alone was heard;
Long silence followed — then again
Her voice the stagnant midnight stirred.

“Must it be so? Is this my fate?
Can I nor struggle, nor contend?
And am I doomed for years to wait,
Watching death’s lingering axe descend?

“And when it falls, and when I die,
What follows? Vacant nothingness?
The blank of lost identity?
Erasure both of pain and bliss?

“I’ve heard of heaven — I would believe;
For if this earth indeed be all,
Who longest lives may deepest grieve;
Most blest, whom sorrows soonest call.

“Oh! leaving disappointment here,
Will man find hope on yonder coast?
Hope, which, on earth, shines never clear,
And oft in clouds is wholly lost.

“Will he hope’s source of light behold,
Fruition’s spring, where doubts expire,
And drink, in waves of living gold,
Contentment, full, for long desire?

“Will he find bliss, which here he dreamed?
Rest, which was weariness on earth?
Knowledge, which, if o’er life it beamed,
Served but to prove it void of worth?

“Will he find love without lust’s leaven,

Love fearless, tearless, perfect, pure,
To all with equal bounty given;
In all, unfeigned, unfailing, sure?

"Will he, from penal sufferings free,
Released from shroud and wormy clod,
All calm and glorious, rise and see
Creation's Sire — Existence' God?

"Then, glancing back on Time's brief woes,
Will he behold them, fading, fly;
Swept from Eternity's repose,
Like sullying cloud from pure blue sky?

"If so, endure, my weary frame;
And when thy anguish strikes too deep,
And when all troubled burns life's flame,
Think of the quiet, final sleep;

"Think of the glorious waking-hour,
Which will not dawn on grief and tears,
But on a ransomed spirit's power,
Certain, and free from mortal fears.

"Seek now thy couch, and lie till morn,
Then from thy chamber, calm, descend,
With mind nor tossed, nor anguish-torn,
But tranquil, fixed, to wait the end.

"And when thy opening eyes shall see
Mementos, on the chamber wall,
Of one who has forgotten thee,
Shed not the tear of acrid gall.

"The tear which, welling from the heart,
Burns where its drop corrosive falls,
And makes each nerve, in torture, start,
At feelings it too well recalls:

"When the sweet hope of being loved
Threw Eden sunshine on life's way:
When every sense and feeling proved
Expectancy of brightest day.

"When the hand trembled to receive
A thrilling clasp, which seemed so near,
And the heart ventured to believe
Another heart esteemed it dear.

"When words, half love, all tenderness,
Were hourly heard, as hourly spoken,
When the long, sunny days of bliss
Only by moonlight nights were broken.

"Till, drop by drop, the cup of joy
Filled full, with purple light was glowing,
And Faith, which watched it, sparkling high
Still never dreamt the overflowing.

"It fell not with a sudden crashing,
It poured not out like open sluice;
No, sparkling still, and redly flashing,
Drained, drop by drop, the generous juice.

"I saw it sink, and strove to taste it,
My eager lips approached the brim;
The movement only seemed to waste it;
It sank to dregs, all harsh and dim.

"These I have drunk, and they for ever
Have poisoned life and love for me;
A draught from Sodom's lake could never
More fiery, salt, and bitter, be.

"Oh! Love was all a thin illusion
Joy, but the desert's flying stream;
And glancing back on long delusion,
My memory grasps a hollow dream.

"Yet whence that wondrous change of feeling,
I never knew, and cannot learn;
Nor why my lover's eye, congealing,
Grew cold and clouded, proud and stern.

"Nor wherefore, friendship's forms forgetting,
He careless left, and cool withdrew;
Nor spoke of grief, nor fond regretting,
Nor ev'n one glance of comfort threw.

"And neither word nor token sending,
Of kindness, since the parting day,
His course, for distant regions bending,
Went, self-contained and calm, away.

"Oh, bitter, blighting, keen sensation,
Which will not weaken, cannot die,
Hasten thy work of desolation,
And let my tortured spirit fly!

"Vain as the passing gale, my crying;
Though lightning-struck, I must live on;
I know, at heart, there is no dying
Of love, and ruined hope, alone.

"Still strong and young, and warm with vigour,
Though scathed, I long shall greenly grow;
And many a storm of wildest rigour
Shall yet break o'er my shivered bough.

"Rebellious now to blank inertion,
My unused strength demands a task;
Travel, and toil, and full exertion,
Are the last, only boon I ask.

"Whence, then, this vain and barren dreaming
Of death, and dubious life to come?
I see a nearer beacon gleaming
Over dejection's sea of gloom.

“The very wildness of my sorrow
Tells me I yet have innate force;
My track of life has been too narrow,
Effort shall trace a broader course.

“The world is not in yonder tower,
Earth is not prisoned in that room,
‘Mid whose dark panels, hour by hour,
I’ve sat, the slave and prey of gloom.

“One feeling — turned to utter anguish,
Is not my being’s only aim;
When, lorn and loveless, life will languish,
But courage can revive the flame.

“He, when he left me, went a roving
To sunny climes, beyond the sea;
And I, the weight of woe removing,
Am free and fetterless as he.

“New scenes, new language, skies less clouded,
May once more wake the wish to live;
Strange, foreign towns, astir, and crowded,
New pictures to the mind may give.

“New forms and faces, passing ever,
May hide the one I still retain,
Defined, and fixed, and fading never,
Stamped deep on vision, heart, and brain.

“And we might meet — time may have changed him;
Chance may reveal the mystery,
The secret influence which estranged him;
Love may restore him yet to me.

“False thought — false hope — in scorn be banished!
I am not loved — nor loved have been;
Recall not, then, the dreams scarce vanished;
Traitors! mislead me not again!

“To words like yours I bid defiance,
‘Tis such my mental wreck have made;
Of God alone, and self-reliance,
I ask for solace — hope for aid.

“Morn comes — and ere meridian glory
O’er these, my natal woods, shall smile,
Both lonely wood and mansion hoary
I’ll leave behind, full many a mile.”

GILBERT.

I. THE GARDEN.

Above the city hung the moon,
Right o’er a plot of ground
Where flowers and orchard-trees were fenced
With lofty walls around:
‘Twas Gilbert’s garden — there to-night
Awhile he walked alone;
And, tired with sedentary toil,
Mused where the moonlight shone.

This garden, in a city-heart,
Lay still as houseless wild,
Though many-windowed mansion fronts
Were round it; closely piled;
But thick their walls, and those within
Lived lives by noise unstirred;
Like wafting of an angel’s wing,
Time’s flight by them was heard.

Some soft piano-notes alone
Were sweet as faintly given,
Where ladies, doubtless, cheered the hearth
With song that winter-even.
The city’s many-mingled sounds
Rose like the hum of ocean;
They rather lulled the heart than roused
Its pulse to faster motion.

Gilbert has paced the single walk
An hour, yet is not weary;
And, though it be a winter night
He feels nor cold nor dreary.
The prime of life is in his veins,
And sends his blood fast flowing,
And Fancy’s fervour warms the thoughts
Now in his bosom glowing.

Those thoughts recur to early love,
Or what he love would name,
Though haply Gilbert’s secret deeds
Might other title claim.
Such theme not oft his mind absorbs,
He to the world clings fast,
And too much for the present lives,
To linger o’er the past.

But now the evening’s deep repose
Has glided to his soul;
That moonlight falls on Memory,
And shows her fading scroll.
One name appears in every line
The gentle rays shine o’er,
And still he smiles and still repeats
That one name — Elinor.

There is no sorrow in his smile,
No kindness in his tone;

The triumph of a selfish heart
Speaks coldly there alone;
He says: “She loved me more than life;
And truly it was sweet
To see so fair a woman kneel,
In bondage, at my feet.

“There was a sort of quiet bliss
To be so deeply loved,
To gaze on trembling eagerness
And sit myself unmoved.
And when it pleased my pride to grant
At last some rare caress,
To feel the fever of that hand
My fingers deigned to press.

“‘Twas sweet to see her strive to hide
What every glance revealed;
Endowed, the while, with despot-might
Her destiny to wield.
I knew myself no perfect man,
Nor, as she deemed, divine;
I knew that I was glorious — but
By her reflected shine;

“Her youth, her native energy,
Her powers new-born and fresh,
‘Twas these with Godhead sanctified
My sensual frame of flesh.
Yet, like a god did I descend
At last, to meet her love;
And, like a god, I then withdrew
To my own heaven above.

“And never more could she invoke
My presence to her sphere;
No prayer, no plaint, no cry of hers
Could win my awful ear.
I knew her blinded constancy
Would ne’er my deeds betray,
And, calm in conscience, whole in heart.
I went my tranquil way.

“Yet, sometimes, I still feel a wish,
The fond and flattering pain
Of passion’s anguish to create
In her young breast again.
Bright was the lustre of her eyes,
When they caught fire from mine;
If I had power — this very hour,
Again I’d light their shine.

“But where she is, or how she lives,
I have no clue to know;
I’ve heard she long my absence pined,
And left her home in woe.
But busied, then, in gathering gold,
As I am busied now,
I could not turn from such pursuit,

To weep a broken vow.

"Nor could I give to fatal risk
The fame I ever prized;
Even now, I fear, that precious fame
Is too much compromised."
An inward trouble dims his eye,
Some riddle he would solve;
Some method to unloose a knot,
His anxious thoughts revolve.

He, pensive, leans against a tree,
A leafy evergreen,
The boughs, the moonlight, intercept,
And hide him like a screen
He starts — the tree shakes with his tremor,
Yet nothing near him pass'd;
He hurries up the garden alley,
In strangely sudden haste.

With shaking hand, he lifts the latchet,
Steps o'er the threshold stone;
The heavy door slips from his fingers —
It shuts, and he is gone.
What touched, transfixed, appalled, his soul? —
A nervous thought, no more;
'Twill sink like stone in placid pool,
And calm close smoothly o'er.

II. THE PARLOUR.

Warm is the parlour atmosphere,
Serene the lamp's soft light;
The vivid embers, red and clear,
Proclaim a frosty night.
Books, varied, on the table lie,
Three children o'er them bend,
And all, with curious, eager eye,
The turning leaf attend.

Picture and tale alternately
Their simple hearts delight,
And interest deep, and tempered glee,
Illume their aspects bright.
The parents, from their fireside place,
Behold that pleasant scene,
And joy is on the mother's face,
Pride in the father's mien.

As Gilbert sees his blooming wife,
Beholds his children fair,
No thought has he of transient strife,
Or past, though piercing fear.
The voice of happy infancy
Lisps sweetly in his ear,
His wife, with pleased and peaceful eye,
Sits, kindly smiling, near.

The fire glows on her silken dress,
And shows its ample grace,

And warmly tints each hazel tress,
Curled soft around her face.
The beauty that in youth he wooed,
Is beauty still, unfaded;
The brow of ever placid mood
No churlish grief has shaded.

Prosperity, in Gilbert's home,
Abides the guest of years;
There Want or Discord never come,
And seldom Toil or Tears.
The carpets bear the peaceful print
Of comfort's velvet tread,
And golden gleams, from plenty sent,
In every nook are shed.

The very silken spaniel seems
Of quiet ease to tell,
As near its mistress' feet it dreams,
Sunk in a cushion's swell
And smiles seem native to the eyes
Of those sweet children, three;
They have but looked on tranquil skies,
And know not misery.

Alas! that Misery should come
In such an hour as this;
Why could she not so calm a home
A little longer miss?
But she is now within the door,
Her steps advancing glide;
Her sullen shade has crossed the floor,
She stands at Gilbert's side.

She lays her hand upon his heart,
It bounds with agony;
His fireside chair shakes with the start
That shook the garden tree.
His wife towards the children looks,
She does not mark his mien;
The children, bending o'er their books,
His terror have not seen.

In his own home, by his own hearth,
He sits in solitude,
And circled round with light and mirth,
Cold horror chills his blood.
His mind would hold with desperate clutch
The scene that round him lies;
No — changed, as by some wizard's touch,
The present prospect flies.

A tumult vague — a viewless strife
His futile struggles crush;
'Twixt him and his an unknown life
And unknown feelings rush.
He sees — but scarce can language paint
The tissue fancy weaves;
For words oft give but echo faint

Of thoughts the mind conceives.

Noise, tumult strange, and darkness dim,
Efface both light and quiet;
No shape is in those shadows grim,
No voice in that wild riot.
Sustain'd and strong, a wondrous blast
Above and round him blows;
A greenish gloom, dense overcast,
Each moment denser grows.

He nothing knows — nor clearly sees,
Resistance checks his breath,
The high, impetuous, ceaseless breeze
Blows on him cold as death.
And still the undulating gloom
Mocks sight with formless motion:
Was such sensation Jonah's doom,
Gulphed in the depths of ocean?

Streaking the air, the nameless vision,
Fast-driven, deep-sounding, flows;
Oh! whence its source, and what its mission?
How will its terrors close?
Long-sweeping, rushing, vast and void,
The universe it swallows;
And still the dark, devouring tide
A typhoon tempest follows.

More slow it rolls; its furious race
Sinks to its solemn gliding;
The stunning roar, the wind's wild chase,
To stillness are subsiding.
And, slowly borne along, a form
The shapeless chaos varies;
Poised in the eddy to the storm,
Before the eye it tarries.

A woman drowned — sunk in the deep,
On a long wave reclining;
The circling waters' crystal sweep,
Like glass, her shape enshrining.
Her pale dead face, to Gilbert turned,
Seems as in sleep reposing;
A feeble light, now first discerned,
The features well disclosing.

No effort from the haunted air
The ghastly scene could banish,
That hovering wave, arrested there,
Rolled — throbbed — but did not vanish.
If Gilbert upward turned his gaze,
He saw the ocean-shadow;
If he looked down, the endless seas
Lay green as summer meadow.

And straight before, the pale corpse lay,
Upborne by air or billow,
So near, he could have touched the spray

That churned around its pillow.
The hollow anguish of the face
Had moved a fiend to sorrow;
Not death's fixed calm could rase the trace
Of suffering's deep-worn furrow.

All moved; a strong returning blast,
The mass of waters raising,
Bore wave and passive carcase past,
While Gilbert yet was gazing.
Deep in her isle-conceiving womb,
It seemed the ocean thundered,
And soon, by realms of rushing gloom,
Were seer and phantom sundered.

Then swept some timbers from a wreck.
On following surges riding;
Then sea-weed, in the turbid rack
Uptorn, went slowly gliding.
The horrid shade, by slow degrees,
A beam of light defeated,
And then the roar of raving seas,
Fast, far, and faint, retreated.

And all was gone — gone like a mist,
Corse, billows, tempest, wreck;
Three children close to Gilbert prest
And clung around his neck.
Good night! good night! the prattlers said,
And kissed their father's cheek;
'Twas now the hour their quiet bed
And placid rest to seek.

The mother with her offspring goes
To hear their evening prayer;
She nought of Gilbert's vision knows,
And nought of his despair.
Yet, pitying God, abridge the time
Of anguish, now his fate!
Though, haply, great has been his crime:
Thy mercy, too, is great.

Gilbert, at length, uplifts his head,
Bent for some moments low,
And there is neither grief nor dread
Upon his subtle brow.
For well can he his feelings task,
And well his looks command;
His features well his heart can mask,
With smiles and smoothness bland.

Gilbert has reasoned with his mind —
He says 'twas all a dream;
He strives his inward sight to blind
Against truth's inward beam.
He pitied not that shadowy thing,
When it was flesh and blood;
Nor now can pity's balmy spring
Refresh his arid mood.

"And if that dream has spoken truth,"
Thus musingly he says;
"If Elinor be dead, in sooth,
Such chance the shock repays:
A net was woven round my feet,
I scarce could further go;
Ere shame had forced a fast retreat,
Dishonour brought me low.

"Conceal her, then, deep, silent sea,
Give her a secret grave!
She sleeps in peace, and I am free,
No longer terror's slave:
And homage still, from all the world,
Shall greet my spotless name,
Since surges break and waves are curled
Above its threatened shame."

III. THE WELCOME HOME.

Above the city hangs the moon,
Some clouds are boding rain;
Gilbert, erewhile on journey gone,
To-night comes home again.
Ten years have passed above his head,
Each year has brought him gain;
His prosperous life has smoothly sped,
Without or tear or stain.

'Tis somewhat late — the city clocks
Twelve deep vibrations toll,
As Gilbert at the portal knocks,
Which is his journey's goal.
The street is still and desolate,
The moon hid by a cloud;
Gilbert, impatient, will not wait, —
His second knock peals loud.

The clocks are hushed — there's not a light
In any window nigh,
And not a single planet bright
Looks from the clouded sky;
The air is raw, the rain descends,
A bitter north-wind blows;
His cloak the traveller scarce defends —
Will not the door unclose?

He knocks the third time, and the last
His summons now they hear,
Within, a footstep, hurrying fast,
Is heard approaching near.
The bolt is drawn, the clanking chain
Falls to the floor of stone;
And Gilbert to his heart will strain
His wife and children soon.

The hand that lifts the latchet, holds
A candle to his sight,
And Gilbert, on the step, beholds

A woman, clad in white.
Lo! water from her dripping dress
Runs on the streaming floor;
From every dark and clinging tress
The drops incessant pour.

There's none but her to welcome him;
She holds the candle high,
And, motionless in form and limb,
Stands cold and silent nigh;
There's sand and sea-weed on her robe,
Her hollow eyes are blind;
No pulse in such a frame can throb,
No life is there defined.

Gilbert turned ashy-white, but still
His lips vouchsafed no cry;
He spurred his strength and master-will
To pass the figure by, —
But, moving slow, it faced him straight,
It would not flinch nor quail:
Then first did Gilbert's strength abate,
His stony firmness quail.

He sank upon his knees and prayed
The shape stood rigid there;
He called aloud for human aid,
No human aid was near.
An accent strange did thus repeat
Heaven's stern but just decree:
"The measure thou to her didst mete,
To thee shall measured be!"

Gilbert sprang from his bended knees,
By the pale spectre pushed,
And, wild as one whom demons seize,
Up the hall-staircase rushed;
Entered his chamber — near the bed
Sheathed steel and fire-arms hung —
Impelled by maniac purpose dread
He chose those stores among.

Across his throat a keen-edged knife
With vigorous hand he drew;
The wound was wide — his outraged life
Rushed rash and redly through.
And thus died, by a shameful death,
A wise and worldly man,
Who never drew but selfish breath
Since first his life began.

LIFE.

Life, believe, is not a dream
So dark as sages say;
Oft a little morning rain
Foretells a pleasant day.
Sometimes there are clouds of gloom,
But these are transient all;
If the shower will make the roses bloom,
O why lament its fall?
Rapidly, merrily,
Life's sunny hours flit by,
Gratefully, cheerily
Enjoy them as they fly!
What though Death at times steps in,
And calls our Best away?
What though sorrow seems to win,
O'er hope, a heavy sway?
Yet Hope again elastic springs,
Unconquered, though she fell;
Still buoyant are her golden wings,
Still strong to bear us well.
Manfully, fearlessly,
The day of trial bear,
For gloriously, victoriously,
Can courage quell despair!

THE LETTER.

What is she writing? Watch her now,
How fast her fingers move!
How eagerly her youthful brow
Is bent in thought above!
Her long curls, drooping, shade the light,
She puts them quick aside,
Nor knows that band of crystals bright,
Her hasty touch untied.
It slips adown her silken dress,
Falls glittering at her feet;
Unmarked it falls, for she no less
Pursues her labour sweet.

The very loveliest hour that shines,
Is in that deep blue sky;
The golden sun of June declines,
It has not caught her eye.
The cheerful lawn, and unclosed gate,
The white road, far away,
In vain for her light footsteps wait,
She comes not forth to-day.
There is an open door of glass
Close by that lady's chair,
From thence, to slopes of messy grass,

Descends a marble stair.

Tall plants of bright and spicy bloom
Around the threshold grow;
Their leaves and blossoms shade the room
From that sun’s deepening glow.
Why does she not a moment glance
Between the clustering flowers,
And mark in heaven the radiant dance
Of evening’s rosy hours?
O look again! Still fixed her eye,
Unsmiling, earnest, still,
And fast her pen and fingers fly,
Urged by her eager will.

Her soul is in th’absorbing task;
To whom, then, doth she write?
Nay, watch her still more closely, ask
Her own eyes’ serious light;
Where do they turn, as now her pen
Hangs o’er th’unfinished line?
Whence fell the tearful gleam that then
Did in their dark spheres shine?
The summer-parlour looks so dark,
When from that sky you turn,
And from th’expanse of that green park,
You scarce may aught discern.

Yet, o’er the piles of porcelain rare,
O’er flower-stand, couch, and vase,
Sloped, as if leaning on the air,
One picture meets the gaze.
‘Tis there she turns; you may not see
Distinct, what form defines
The clouded mass of mystery
Yon broad gold frame confines.
But look again; inured to shade
Your eyes now faintly trace
A stalwart form, a massive head,
A firm, determined face.

Black Spanish locks, a sunburnt cheek
A brow high, broad, and white,
Where every furrow seems to speak
Of mind and moral might.
Is that her god? I cannot tell;
Her eye a moment met
Th’impending picture, then it fell
Darkened and dimmed and wet.
A moment more, her task is done,
And sealed the letter lies;
And now, towards the setting sun
She turns her tearful eyes.

Those tears flow over, wonder not,
For by the inscription see
In what a strange and distant spot
Her heart of hearts must be!
Three seas and many a league of land

That letter must pass o’er,
Ere read by him to whose loved hand
‘Tis sent from England’s shore.
Remote colonial wilds detain
Her husband, loved though stern;
She, ‘mid that smiling English scene,
Weeps for his wished return.

REGRET.

Long ago I wished to leave
“The house where I was born;”
Long ago I used to grieve,
My home seemed so forlorn.
In other years, its silent rooms
Were filled with haunting fears;
Now, their very memory comes
O’ercharged with tender tears.

Life and marriage I have known.
Things once deemed so bright;
Now, how utterly is flown
Every ray of light!
‘Mid the unknown sea, of life
I no blest isle have found;
At last, through all its wild wave’s strife,
My bark is homeward bound.

Farewell, dark and rolling deep!
Farewell, foreign shore!
Open, in unclouded sweep,
Thou glorious realm before!
Yet, though I had safely pass’d
That weary, vexed main,
One loved voice, through surge and blast
Could call me back again.

Though the soul’s bright morning rose
O’er Paradise for me,
William! even from Heaven’s repose
I’d turn, invoked by thee!
Storm nor surge should e’er arrest
My soul, exalting then:
All my heaven was once thy breast,
Would it were mine again!

PRESENTIMENT.

"Sister, you've sat there all the day,
Come to the hearth awhile;
The wind so wildly sweeps away,
The clouds so darkly pile.
That open book has lain, unread,
For hours upon your knee;
You've never smiled nor turned your head;
What can you, sister, see?"

"Come hither, Jane, look down the field;
How dense a mist creeps on!
The path, the hedge, are both concealed,
Ev'n the white gate is gone
No landscape through the fog I trace,
No hill with pastures green;
All featureless is Nature's face.
All masked in clouds her mien.

"Scarce is the rustle of a leaf
Heard in our garden now;
The year grows old, its days wax brief,
The tresses leave its brow.
The rain drives fast before the wind,
The sky is blank and grey;
O Jane, what sadness fills the mind
On such a dreary day!"

"You think too much, my sister dear;
You sit too long alone;
What though November days be drear?
Full soon will they be gone.
I've swept the hearth, and placed your chair.
Come, Emma, sit by me;
Our own fireside is never drear,
Though late and wintry wane the year,
Though rough the night may be."

"The peaceful glow of our fireside
Imparts no peace to me:
My thoughts would rather wander wide
Than rest, dear Jane, with thee.
I'm on a distant journey bound,
And if, about my heart,
Too closely kindred ties were bound,
'Twould break when forced to part.

"'Soon will November days be o'er:'
Well have you spoken, Jane:
My own forebodings tell me more —
For me, I know by presage sure,
They'll ne'er return again.
Ere long, nor sun nor storm to me
Will bring or joy or gloom;
They reach not that Eternity
Which soon will be my home."

Eight months are gone, the summer sun
Sets in a glorious sky;
A quiet field, all green and lone,
Receives its rosy dye.
Jane sits upon a shaded stile,
Alone she sits there now;
Her head rests on her hand the while,
And thought o'ercasts her brow.

She's thinking of one winter's day,
A few short months ago,
Then Emma's bier was borne away
O'er wastes of frozen snow.
She's thinking how that drifted snow
Dissolved in spring's first gleam,
And how her sister's memory now
Fades, even as fades a dream.

The snow will whiten earth again,
But Emma comes no more;
She left, 'mid winter's sleet and rain,
This world for Heaven's far shore.
On Beulah's hills she wanders now,
On Eden's tranquil plain;
To her shall Jane hereafter go,
She ne'er shall come to Jane!

THE TEACHER’S MONOLOGUE.

The room is quiet, thoughts alone
People its mute tranquillity;
The yoke put off, the long task done, —
I am, as it is bliss to be,
Still and untroubled. Now, I see,
For the first time, how soft the day
O’er waveless water, stirless tree,
Silent and sunny, wings its way.
Now, as I watch that distant hill,
So faint, so blue, so far removed,
Sweet dreams of home my heart may fill,
That home where I am known and loved:
It lies beyond; yon azure brow
Parts me from all Earth holds for me;
And, morn and eve, my yearnings flow
Thitherward tending, changelessly.
My happiest hours, aye! all the time,
I love to keep in memory,
Lapsed among moors, ere life’s first prime
Decayed to dark anxiety.

Sometimes, I think a narrow heart
Makes me thus mourn those far away,
And keeps my love so far apart
From friends and friendships of to-day;
Sometimes, I think ‘tis but a dream
I treasure up so jealously,
All the sweet thoughts I live on seem
To vanish into vacancy:
And then, this strange, coarse world around
Seems all that’s palpable and true;
And every sight, and every sound,
Combines my spirit to subdue
To aching grief, so void and lone
Is Life and Earth — so worse than vain,
The hopes that, in my own heart sown,
And cherished by such sun and rain
As Joy and transient Sorrow shed,
Have ripened to a harvest there:
Alas! methinks I hear it said,
“Thy golden sheaves are empty air.”

All fades away; my very home
I think will soon be desolate;
I hear, at times, a warning come
Of bitter partings at its gate;
And, if I should return and see
The hearth-fire quenched, the vacant chair;
And hear it whispered mournfully,

That farewells have been spoken there,
What shall I do, and whither turn?
Where look for peace? When cease to mourn?
‘Tis not the air I wished to play,
The strain I wished to sing;
My wilful spirit slipped away
And struck another string.
I neither wanted smile nor tear,
Bright joy nor bitter woe,
But just a song that sweet and clear,
Though haply sad, might flow.

A quiet song, to solace me
When sleep refused to come;
A strain to chase despondency,
When sorrowful for home.
In vain I try; I cannot sing;
All feels so cold and dead;
No wild distress, no gushing spring
Of tears in anguish shed;

But all the impatient gloom of one
Who waits a distant day,
When, some great task of suffering done,
Repose shall toil repay.
For youth departs, and pleasure flies,
And life consumes away,
And youth’s rejoicing ardour dies
Beneath this drear delay;

And Patience, weary with her yoke,
Is yielding to despair,
And Health’s elastic spring is broke
Beneath the strain of care.
Life will be gone ere I have lived;
Where now is Life’s first prime?
I’ve worked and studied, longed and grieved,
Through all that rosy time.

To toil, to think, to long, to grieve, —
Is such my future fate?
The morn was dreary, must the eve
Be also desolate?
Well, such a life at least makes Death
A welcome, wished-for friend;
Then, aid me, Reason, Patience, Faith,
To suffer to the end!

PASSION.

Some have won a wild delight,
By daring wilder sorrow;

Could I gain thy love to-night,
I'd hazard death to-morrow.

Could the battle-struggle earn
One kind glance from thine eye,
How this withering heart would burn,
The heady fight to try!

Welcome nights of broken sleep,
And days of carnage cold,
Could I deem that thou wouldst weep
To hear my perils told.

Tell me, if with wandering bands
I roam full far away,
Wilt thou to those distant lands
In spirit ever stray?

Wild, long, a trumpet sounds afar;
Bid me — bid me go
Where Seik and Briton meet in war,
On Indian Sutlej's flow.

Blood has dyed the Sutlej's waves
With scarlet stain, I know;
Indus' borders yawn with graves,
Yet, command me go!

Though rank and high the holocaust
Of nations steams to heaven,
Glad I'd join the death-doomed host,
Were but the mandate given.

Passion's strength should nerve my arm,
Its ardour stir my life,
Till human force to that dread charm
Should yield and sink in wild alarm,
Like trees to tempest-strife.

If, hot from war, I seek thy love,
Darest thou turn aside?
Darest thou then my fire reprove,
By scorn, and maddening pride?

No — my will shall yet control
Thy will, so high and free,
And love shall tame that haughty soul —
  Yes — tenderest love for me.

I'll read my triumph in thine eyes,
Behold, and prove the change;
Then leave, perchance, my noble prize,
Once more in arms to range.

I'd die when all the foam is up,
The bright wine sparkling high;
Nor wait till in the exhausted cup
Life's dull dregs only lie.

Then Love thus crowned with sweet reward,
Hope blest with fulness large,
I'd mount the saddle, draw the sword,
And perish in the charge!

PREFERENCE.

Not in scorn do I reprove thee,
Not in pride thy vows I waive,
But, believe, I could not love thee,
Wert thou prince, and I a slave.
These, then, are thine oaths of passion?
This, thy tenderness for me?
Judged, even, by thine own confession,
Thou art steeped in perfidy.
Having vanquished, thou wouldst leave me!
Thus I read thee long ago;
Therefore, dared I not deceive thee,
Even with friendship's gentle show.
Therefore, with impassive coldness
Have I ever met thy gaze;
Though, full oft, with daring boldness,
Thou thine eyes to mine didst raise.
Why that smile? Thou now art deeming
This my coldness all untrue, —
But a mask of frozen seeming,
Hiding secret fires from view.
Touch my hand, thou self-deceiver;
Nay-be calm, for I am so:
Does it burn? Does my lip quiver?
Has mine eye a troubled glow?
Canst thou call a moment's colour
To my forehead — to my cheek?
Canst thou tinge their tranquil pallor
With one flattering, feverish streak?
Am I marble? What! no woman
Could so calm before thee stand?
Nothing living, sentient, human,
Could so coldly take thy hand?
Yes — a sister might, a mother:
My good-will is sisterly:
Dream not, then, I strive to smother
Fires that inly burn for thee.
Rave not, rage not, wrath is fruitless,
Fury cannot change my mind;
I but deem the feeling rootless
Which so whirls in passion's wind.
Can I love? Oh, deeply — truly —
Warmly — fondly — but not thee;
And my love is answered duly,
With an equal energy.
Wouldst thou see thy rival? Hasten,

Draw that curtain soft aside,
Look where yon thick branches chasten
Noon, with shades of eventide.
In that glade, where foliage blending
Forms a green arch overhead,
Sits thy rival, thoughtful bending
O'er a stand with papers spread —
Motionless, his fingers plying
That untired, unresting pen;
Time and tide unnoticed flying,
There he sits — the first of men!
Man of conscience — man of reason;
Stern, perchance, but ever just;
Foe to falsehood, wrong, and treason,
Honour's shield, and virtue's trust!
Worker, thinker, firm defender
Of Heaven's truth — man's liberty;
Soul of iron — proof to slander,
Rock where founders tyranny.
Fame he seeks not — but full surely
She will seek him, in his home;
This I know, and wait securely
For the atoning hour to come.
To that man my faith is given,
Therefore, soldier, cease to sue;
While God reigns in earth and heaven,
I to him will still be true!

EVENING SOLACE.

The human heart has hidden treasures,
In secret kept, in silence sealed; —
The thoughts, the hopes, the dreams, the pleasures,
Whose charms were broken if revealed.
And days may pass in gay confusion,
And nights in rosy riot fly,
While, lost in Fame's or Wealth's illusion,
The memory of the Past may die.

But there are hours of lonely musing,
Such as in evening silence come,
When, soft as birds their pinions closing,
The heart's best feelings gather home.
Then in our souls there seems to languish
A tender grief that is not woe;
And thoughts that once wrung groans of anguish
Now cause but some mild tears to flow.

And feelings, once as strong as passions,
Float softly back — a faded dream;
Our own sharp griefs and wild sensations,
The tale of others' sufferings seem.

Oh! when the heart is freshly bleeding,
How longs it for that time to be,
When, through the mist of years receding,
Its woes but live in reverie!

And it can dwell on moonlight glimmer,
On evening shade and loneliness;
And, while the sky grows dim and dimmer,
Feel no untold and strange distress —
Only a deeper impulse given
By lonely hour and darkened room,
To solemn thoughts that soar to heaven
Seeking a life and world to come.

STANZAS.

If thou be in a lonely place,
If one hour's calm be thine,
As Evening bends her placid face
O'er this sweet day's decline;
If all the earth and all the heaven
Now look serene to thee,
As o'er them shuts the summer even,
One moment — think of me!

Pause, in the lane, returning home;
'Tis dusk, it will be still:
Pause near the elm, a sacred gloom
Its breezeless boughs will fill.
Look at that soft and golden light,
High in the unclouded sky;
Watch the last bird's belated flight,
As it flits silent by.

Hark! for a sound upon the wind,
A step, a voice, a sigh;
If all be still, then yield thy mind,
Unchecked, to memory.
If thy love were like mine, how blest
That twilight hour would seem,
When, back from the regretted Past,
Returned our early dream!

If thy love were like mine, how wild
Thy longings, even to pain,
For sunset soft, and moonlight mild,
To bring that hour again!
But oft, when in thine arms I lay,
I've seen thy dark eyes shine,
And deeply felt their changeful ray
Spoke other love than mine.

My love is almost anguish now,
It beats so strong and true;
‘Twere rapture, could I deem that thou
Such anguish ever knew.
I have been but thy transient flower,
Thou wert my god divine;
Till checked by death’s congealing power,
This heart must throb for thine.

And well my dying hour were blest,
If life’s expiring breath
Should pass, as thy lips gently prest
My forehead cold in death;
And sound my sleep would be, and sweet,
Beneath the churchyard tree,
If sometimes in thy heart should beat
One pulse, still true to me.

PARTING.

There’s no use in weeping,
Though we are condemned to part:
There’s such a thing as keeping
A remembrance in one’s heart:

There’s such a thing as dwelling
On the thought ourselves have nursed,
And with scorn and courage telling
The world to do its worst.

We’ll not let its follies grieve us,
We’ll just take them as they come;
And then every day will leave us
A merry laugh for home.

When we’ve left each friend and brother,
When we’re parted wide and far,
We will think of one another,
As even better than we are.

Every glorious sight above us,
Every pleasant sight beneath,
We’ll connect with those that love us,
Whom we truly love till death!

In the evening, when we’re sitting
By the fire, perchance alone,
Then shall heart with warm heart meeting,
Give responsive tone for tone.

We can burst the bonds which chain us,
Which cold human hands have wrought,

And where none shall dare restrain us
We can meet again, in thought.

So there's no use in weeping,
Bear a cheerful spirit still;
Never doubt that Fate is keeping
Future good for present ill!

APOSTASY.

This last denial of my faith,
Thou, solemn Priest, hast heard;
And, though upon my bed of death,
I call not back a word.
Point not to thy Madonna, Priest, —
Thy sightless saint of stone;
She cannot, from this burning breast,
Wring one repentant moan.

Thou say'st, that when a sinless child,
I duly bent the knee,
And prayed to what in marble smiled
Cold, lifeless, mute, on me.
I did. But listen! Children spring
Full soon to riper youth;
And, for Love's vow and Wedlock's ring,
I sold my early truth.

'Twas not a grey, bare head, like thine,
Bent o'er me, when I said,
"That land and God and Faith are mine,
For which thy fathers bled."
I see thee not, my eyes are dim;
But well I hear thee say,
"O daughter cease to think of him
Who led thy soul astray.

"Between you lies both space and time;
Let leagues and years prevail
To turn thee from the path of crime,
Back to the Church's pale."
And, did I need that, thou shouldst tell
What mighty barriers rise
To part me from that dungeon-cell,
Where my loved Walter lies?

And, did I need that thou shouldst taunt
My dying hour at last,
By bidding this worn spirit pant
No more for what is past?
Priest — MUST I cease to think of him?
How hollow rings that word!

Can time, can tears, can distance dim
The memory of my lord?

I said before, I saw not thee,
Because, an hour agone,
Over my eyeballs, heavily,
The lids fell down like stone.
But still my spirit's inward sight
Beholds his image beam
As fixed, as clear, as burning bright,
As some red planet's gleam.

Talk not of thy Last Sacrament,
Tell not thy beads for me;
Both rite and prayer are vainly spent,
As dews upon the sea.
Speak not one word of Heaven above,
Rave not of Hell's alarms;
Give me but back my Walter's love,
Restore me to his arms!

Then will the bliss of Heaven be won;
Then will Hell shrink away,
As I have seen night's terrors shun
The conquering steps of day.
'Tis my religion thus to love,
My creed thus fixed to be;
Not Death shall shake, nor Priestcraft break
My rock-like constancy!

Now go; for at the door there waits
Another stranger guest;
He calls — I come — my pulse scarce beats,
My heart fails in my breast.
Again that voice — how far away,
How dreary sounds that tone!
And I, methinks, am gone astray
In trackless wastes and lone.

I fain would rest a little while:
Where can I find a stay,
Till dawn upon the hills shall smile,
And show some trodden way?
"I come! I come!" in haste she said,
"'Twas Walter's voice I heard!"
Then up she sprang — but fell back, dead,
His name her latest word.

WINTER STORES.

We take from life one little share,
And say that this shall be

A space, redeemed from toil and care,
From tears and sadness free.

And, haply, Death unstrings his bow,
And Sorrow stands apart,
And, for a little while, we know
The sunshine of the heart.

Existence seems a summer eve,
Warm, soft, and full of peace,
Our free, unfettered feelings give
The soul its full release.

A moment, then, it takes the power
To call up thoughts that throw
Around that charmed and hallowed hour,
This life's divinest glow.

But Time, though viewlessly it flies,
And slowly, will not stay;
Alike, through clear and clouded skies,
It cleaves its silent way.

Alike the bitter cup of grief,
Alike the draught of bliss,
Its progress leaves but moment brief
For baffled lips to kiss

The sparkling draught is dried away,
The hour of rest is gone,
And urgent voices, round us, say,
"Ho, lingerer, hasten on!"

And has the soul, then, only gained,
From this brief time of ease,
A moment's rest, when overstrained,
One hurried glimpse of peace?

No; while the sun shone kindly o'er us,
And flowers bloomed round our feet, —
While many a bud of joy before us
Unclosed its petals sweet, —

An unseen work within was plying;
Like honey-seeking bee,
From flower to flower, unwearied, flying,
Laboured one faculty, —

Thoughtful for Winter's future sorrow,
Its gloom and scarcity;
Prescient to-day, of want to-morrow,
Toiled quiet Memory.

'Tis she that from each transient pleasure
Extracts a lasting good;
'Tis she that finds, in summer, treasure
To serve for winter's food.

And when Youth's summer day is vanished,

And Age brings Winter's stress,
Her stores, with hoarded sweets replenished,
Life's evening hours will bless.

THE MISSIONARY.

Plough, vessel, plough the British main,
Seek the free ocean's wider plain;
Leave English scenes and English skies,
Unbind, dissever English ties;
Bear me to climes remote and strange,
Where altered life, fast-following change,
Hot action, never-ceasing toil,
Shall stir, turn, dig, the spirit's soil;
Fresh roots shall plant, fresh seed shall sow,
Till a new garden there shall grow,
Cleared of the weeds that fill it now, —
Mere human love, mere selfish yearning,
Which, cherished, would arrest me yet.
I grasp the plough, there's no returning,
Let me, then, struggle to forget.

But England's shores are yet in view,
And England's skies of tender blue
Are arched above her guardian sea.
I cannot yet Remembrance flee;
I must again, then, firmly face
That task of anguish, to retrace.
Wedded to home — I home forsake;
Fearful of change — I changes make;
Too fond of ease — I plunge in toil;
Lover of calm — I seek turmoil:
Nature and hostile Destiny
Stir in my heart a conflict wild;
And long and fierce the war will be
Ere duty both has reconciled.

What other tie yet holds me fast
To the divorced, abandoned past?
Smouldering, on my heart's altar lies
The fire of some great sacrifice,
Not yet half quenched. The sacred steel
But lately struck my carnal will,
My life-long hope, first joy and last,
What I loved well, and clung to fast;
What I wished wildly to retain,
What I renounced with soul-felt pain;
What — when I saw it, axe-struck, perish —
Left me no joy on earth to cherish;
A man bereft — yet sternly now
I do confirm that Jephtha vow:
Shall I retract, or fear, or flee?

Did Christ, when rose the fatal tree
Before him, on Mount Calvary?
'Twas a long fight, hard fought, but won,
And what I did was justly done.

Yet, Helen! from thy love I turned,
When my heart most for thy heart burned;
I dared thy tears, I dared thy scorn —
Easier the death-pang had been borne.
Helen, thou mightst not go with me,
I could not — dared not stay for thee!
I heard, afar, in bonds complain
The savage from beyond the main;
And that wild sound rose o'er the cry
Wrung out by passion's agony;
And even when, with the bitterest tear
I ever shed, mine eyes were dim,
Still, with the spirit's vision clear,
I saw Hell's empire, vast and grim,
Spread on each Indian river's shore,
Each realm of Asia covering o'er.
There, the weak, trampled by the strong,
Live but to suffer — hopeless die;
There pagan-priests, whose creed is Wrong,
Extortion, Lust, and Cruelty,
Crush our lost race — and brimming fill
The bitter cup of human ill;
And I — who have the healing creed,
The faith benign of Mary's Son,
Shall I behold my brother's need,
And, selfishly, to aid him shun?
I — who upon my mother's knees,
In childhood, read Christ's written word,
Received his legacy of peace,
His holy rule of action heard;
I — in whose heart the sacred sense
Of Jesus' love was early felt;
Of his pure, full benevolence,
His pitying tenderness for guilt;
His shepherd-care for wandering sheep,
For all weak, sorrowing, trembling things,
His mercy vast, his passion deep
Of anguish for man's sufferings;
I — schooled from childhood in such lore —
Dared I draw back or hesitate,
When called to heal the sickness sore
Of those far off and desolate?
Dark, in the realm and shades of Death,
Nations, and tribes, and empires lie,
But even to them the light of Faith
Is breaking on their sombre sky:
And be it mine to bid them raise
Their drooped heads to the kindling scene,
And know and hail the sunrise blaze
Which heralds Christ the Nazarene.
I know how Hell the veil will spread
Over their brows and filmy eyes,
And earthward crush the lifted head
That would look up and seek the skies;

I know what war the fiend will wage
Against that soldier of the Cross,
Who comes to dare his demon rage,
And work his kingdom shame and loss.
Yes, hard and terrible the toil
Of him who steps on foreign soil,
Resolved to plant the gospel vine,
Where tyrants rule and slaves repine;
Eager to lift Religion's light
Where thickest shades of mental night
Screen the false god and fiendish rite;
Reckless that missionary blood,
Shed in wild wilderness and wood,
Has left, upon the unblest air,
The man's deep moan — the martyr's prayer.
I know my lot — I only ask
Power to fulfil the glorious task;
Willing the spirit, may the flesh
Strength for the day receive afresh.
May burning sun or deadly wind
Prevail not o'er an earnest mind;
May torments strange or direst death
Nor trample truth, nor baffle faith.
Though such blood-drops should fall from me
As fell in old Gethsemane,
Welcome the anguish, so it gave
More strength to work — more skill to save.
And, oh! if brief must be my time,
If hostile hand or fatal clime
Cut short my course — still o'er my grave,
Lord, may thy harvest whitening wave.
So I the culture may begin,
Let others thrust the sickle in;
If but the seed will faster grow,
May my blood water what I sow!

What! have I ever trembling stood,
And feared to give to God that blood?
What! has the coward love of life
Made me shrink from the righteous strife?
Have human passions, human fears
Severed me from those Pioneers
Whose task is to march first, and trace
Paths for the progress of our race?
It has been so; but grant me, Lord,
Now to stand steadfast by Thy word!
Protected by salvation's helm,
Shielded by faith, with truth begirt,
To smile when trials seek to whelm
And stand mid testing fires unhurt!
Hurling hell's strongest bulwarks down,
Even when the last pang thrills my breast,
When death bestows the martyr's crown,
And calls me into Jesus' rest.
Then for my ultimate reward —
 Then for the world-rejoicing word —
 The voice from Father — Spirit — Son:
"Servant of God, well hast thou done!"

POEMS BY ELLIS BELL (EMILY BRONTË)

FAITH AND DESPONDENCY.

"The winter wind is loud and wild,
Come close to me, my darling child;
Forsake thy books, and mateless play;
And, while the night is gathering gray,
We'll talk its pensive hours away; —

"Ierne, round our sheltered hall
November's gusts unheeded call;
Not one faint breath can enter here
Enough to wave my daughter's hair,
And I am glad to watch the blaze
Glance from her eyes, with mimic rays;
To feel her cheek, so softly pressed,
In happy quiet on my breast,

"But, yet, even this tranquillity
Brings bitter, restless thoughts to me;
And, in the red fire's cheerful glow,
I think of deep glens, blocked with snow;
I dream of moor, and misty hill,
Where evening closes dark and chill;
For, lone, among the mountains cold,
Lie those that I have loved of old.
And my heart aches, in hopeless pain,
Exhausted with repinings vain,
That I shall greet them ne'er again!"

"Father, in early infancy,
When you were far beyond the sea,
Such thoughts were tyrants over me!
I often sat, for hours together,
Through the long nights of angry weather,
Raised on my pillow, to descry
The dim moon struggling in the sky;
Or, with strained ear, to catch the shock,
Of rock with wave, and wave with rock;
So would I fearful vigil keep,

And, all for listening, never sleep.
But this world's life has much to dread,
Not so, my Father, with the dead.

"Oh! not for them, should we despair,
The grave is drear, but they are not there;
Their dust is mingled with the sod,
Their happy souls are gone to God!
You told me this, and yet you sigh,
And murmur that your friends must die.
Ah! my dear father, tell me why?
For, if your former words were true,
How useless would such sorrow be;
As wise, to mourn the seed which grew
Unnoticed on its parent tree,
Because it fell in fertile earth,
And sprang up to a glorious birth —
Struck deep its root, and lifted high
Its green boughs in the breezy sky.

"But, I'll not fear, I will not weep
For those whose bodies rest in sleep, —
I know there is a blessed shore,
Opening its ports for me and mine;
And, gazing Time's wide waters o'er,
I weary for that land divine,
Where we were born, where you and I
Shall meet our dearest, when we die;
From suffering and corruption free,
Restored into the Deity."

"Well hast thou spoken, sweet, trustful child!
And wiser than thy sire;
And worldly tempests, raging wild,
Shall strengthen thy desire —
Thy fervent hope, through storm and foam,
Through wind and ocean's roar,
To reach, at last, the eternal home,
The steadfast, changeless shore!"

STARS.

Ah! why, because the dazzling sun
Restored our Earth to joy,
Have you departed, every one,
And left a desert sky?

All through the night, your glorious eyes
Were gazing down in mine,
And, with a full heart's thankful sighs,
I blessed that watch divine.

I was at peace, and drank your beams
As they were life to me;
And revelled in my changeful dreams,
Like petrel on the sea.

Thought followed thought, star followed star,
Through boundless regions, on;
While one sweet influence, near and far,
Thrilled through, and proved us one!

Why did the morning dawn to break
So great, so pure, a spell;
And scorch with fire the tranquil cheek,
Where your cool radiance fell?

Blood-red, he rose, and, arrow-straight,
His fierce beams struck my brow;
The soul of nature sprang, elate,
But mine sank sad and low!

My lids closed down, yet through their veil
I saw him, blazing, still,
And steep in gold the misty dale,
And flash upon the hill.

I turned me to the pillow, then,
To call back night, and see
Your worlds of solemn light, again,
Throb with my heart, and me!

It would not do — the pillow glowed,
And glowed both roof and floor;
And birds sang loudly in the wood,
And fresh winds shook the door;

The curtains waved, the wakened flies
Were murmuring round my room,
Imprisoned there, till I should rise,
And give them leave to roam.

Oh, stars, and dreams, and gentle night;
Oh, night and stars, return!
And hide me from the hostile light
That does not warm, but burn;

That drains the blood of suffering men;
Drinks tears, instead of dew;
Let me sleep through his blinding reign,
And only wake with you!

THE PHILOSOPHER.

Enough of thought, philosopher!
Too long hast thou been dreaming
Unlightened, in this chamber drear,
While summer's sun is beaming!
Space-sweeping soul, what sad refrain
Concludes thy musings once again?

"Oh, for the time when I shall sleep
Without identity.
And never care how rain may steep,
Or snow may cover me!
No promised heaven, these wild desires
Could all, or half fulfil;
No threatened hell, with quenchless fires,
Subdue this quenchless will!"

"So said I, and still say the same;
Still, to my death, will say —
Three gods, within this little frame,
Are warring night; and day;
Heaven could not hold them all, and yet
They all are held in me;
And must be mine till I forget
My present entity!
Oh, for the time, when in my breast
Their struggles will be o'er!
Oh, for the day, when I shall rest,
And never suffer more!"

"I saw a spirit, standing, man,
Where thou dost stand — an hour ago,
And round his feet three rivers ran,
Of equal depth, and equal flow —
A golden stream — and one like blood;
And one like sapphire seemed to be;
But, where they joined their triple flood
It tumbled in an inky sea
The spirit sent his dazzling gaze
Down through that ocean's gloomy night;
Then, kindling all, with sudden blaze,
The glad deep sparkled wide and bright —
White as the sun, far, far more fair
Than its divided sources were!"

"And even for that spirit, seer,
I've watched and sought my life-time long;
Sought him in heaven, hell, earth, and air,
An endless search, and always wrong.
Had I but seen his glorious eye
ONCE light the clouds that wilder me;
I ne'er had raised this coward cry
To cease to think, and cease to be;

I ne'er had called oblivion blest,
Nor stretching eager hands to death,
Implored to change for senseless rest
This sentient soul, this living breath —
Oh, let me die — that power and will
Their cruel strife may close;

And conquered good, and conquering ill
Be lost in one repose!”

REMEMBRANCE.

Cold in the earth — and the deep snow piled above thee,
Far, far, removed, cold in the dreary grave!
Have I forgot, my only Love, to love thee,
Severed at last by Time’s all-severing wave?

Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover
Over the mountains, on that northern shore,
Resting their wings where heath and fern-leaves cover
Thy noble heart for ever, ever more?

Cold in the earth — and fifteen wild Decembers,
From those brown hills, have melted into spring:
Faithful, indeed, is the spirit that remembers
After such years of change and suffering!

Sweet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,
While the world’s tide is bearing me along;
Other desires and other hopes beset me,
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!

No later light has lightened up my heaven,
No second morn has ever shone for me;
All my life’s bliss from thy dear life was given,
All my life’s bliss is in the grave with thee.

But, when the days of golden dreams had perished,
And even Despair was powerless to destroy;
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
Strengthened, and fed without the aid of joy.

Then did I check the tears of useless passion —
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine;
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
Down to that tomb already more than mine.

And, even yet, I dare not let it languish,
Dare not indulge in memory’s rapturous pain;
Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,
How could I seek the empty world again?

A DEATH-SCENE.

“O day! he cannot die
When thou so fair art shining!
O Sun, in such a glorious sky,
So tranquilly declining;

He cannot leave thee now,
While fresh west winds are blowing,
And all around his youthful brow
Thy cheerful light is glowing!

Edward, awake, awake —
The golden evening gleams
Warm and bright on Arden’s lake —
Arouse thee from thy dreams!

Beside thee, on my knee,
My dearest friend, I pray
That thou, to cross the eternal sea,
Wouldst yet one hour delay:

I hear its billows roar —
I see them foaming high;
But no glimpse of a further shore
Has blest my straining eye.

Believe not what they urge
Of Eden isles beyond;
Turn back, from that tempestuous surge,
To thy own native land.

It is not death, but pain
That struggles in thy breast —
Nay, rally, Edward, rouse again;
I cannot let thee rest!”

One long look, that sore reproved me
For the woe I could not bear —
One mute look of suffering moved me
To repent my useless prayer:

And, with sudden check, the heaving
Of distraction passed away;
Not a sign of further grieving
Stirred my soul that awful day.

Paled, at length, the sweet sun setting;
Sunk to peace the twilight breeze:
Summer dews fell softly, wetting
Glen, and glade, and silent trees.

Then his eyes began to weary,
Weighed beneath a mortal sleep;
And their orbs grew strangely dreary,
Clouded, even as they would weep.

But they wept not, but they changed not,

Never moved, and never closed;
Troubled still, and still they ranged not —
Wandered not, nor yet reposed!

So I knew that he was dying —
Stooped, and raised his languid head;
Felt no breath, and heard no sighing,
So I knew that he was dead.

SONG.

The linnet in the rocky dells,
The moor-lark in the air,
The bee among the heather bells
That hide my lady fair:

The wild deer browse above her breast;
The wild birds raise their brood;
And they, her smiles of love caressed,
Have left her solitude!

I ween, that when the grave's dark wall
Did first her form retain,
They thought their hearts could ne'er recall
The light of joy again.

They thought the tide of grief would flow
Unchecked through future years;
But where is all their anguish now,
And where are all their tears?

Well, let them fight for honour's breath,
Or pleasure's shade pursue —
The dweller in the land of death
Is changed and careless too.

And, if their eyes should watch and weep
Till sorrow's source were dry,
She would not, in her tranquil sleep,
Return a single sigh!

Blow, west-wind, by the lonely mound,
And murmur, summer-streams —
There is no need of other sound
To soothe my lady's dreams.

ANTICIPATION.

How beautiful the earth is still,
To thee — how full of happiness?
How little fraught with real ill,
Or unreal phantoms of distress!
How spring can bring thee glory, yet,
And summer win thee to forget
December's sullen time!
Why dost thou hold the treasure fast,
Of youth's delight, when youth is past,
And thou art near thy prime?

When those who were thy own compeers,
Equals in fortune and in years,
Have seen their morning melt in tears,
To clouded, smileless day;
Blest, had they died untried and young,
Before their hearts went wandering wrong, —
Poor slaves, subdued by passions strong,
A weak and helpless prey!

'Because, I hoped while they enjoyed,
And by fulfilment, hope destroyed;
As children hope, with trustful breast,
I waited bliss — and cherished rest.
A thoughtful spirit taught me soon,
That we must long till life be done;
That every phase of earthly joy
Must always fade, and always cloy:

'This I foresaw — and would not chase
The fleeting treacheries;
But, with firm foot and tranquil face,
Held backward from that tempting race,
Gazed o'er the sands the waves efface,
To the enduring seas —
There cast my anchor of desire
Deep in unknown eternity;
Nor ever let my spirit tire,
With looking for WHAT IS TO BE!

"It is hope's spell that glorifies,
Like youth, to my maturer eyes,
All Nature's million mysteries,
The fearful and the fair —
Hope soothes me in the griefs I know;
She lulls my pain for others' woe,
And makes me strong to undergo
What I am born to bear.

Glad comforter! will I not brave,
Unawed, the darkness of the grave?
Nay, smile to hear Death's billows rave —
Sustained, my guide, by thee?
The more unjust seems present fate,
The more my spirit swells elate,
Strong, in thy strength, to anticipate

Rewarding destiny!

THE PRISONER.

A FRAGMENT.

In the dungeon-crypts idly did I stray,
Reckless of the lives wasting there away;
“Draw the ponderous bars! open, Warder stern!”
He dared not say me nay — the hinges harshly turn.

“Our guests are darkly lodged,” I whisper’d, gazing through
The vault, whose grated eye showed heaven more gray than blue;
(This was when glad Spring laughed in awaking pride;)
“Ay, darkly lodged enough!” returned my sullen guide.

Then, God forgive my youth; forgive my careless tongue;
I scoffed, as the chill chains on the damp flagstones rung:
“Confined in triple walls, art thou so much to fear,
That we must bind thee down and clench thy fetters here?”

The captive raised her face; it was as soft and mild
As sculptured marble saint, or slumbering unwean’d child;
It was so soft and mild, it was so sweet and fair,
Pain could not trace a line, nor grief a shadow there!

The captive raised her hand and pressed it to her brow;
“I have been struck,” she said, “and I am suffering now;
Yet these are little worth, your bolts and irons strong;
And, were they forged in steel, they could not hold me long.”

Hoarse laughed the jailor grim: “Shall I be won to hear;
Dost think, fond, dreaming wretch, that I shall grant thy prayer?
Or, better still, wilt melt my master’s heart with groans?
Ah! sooner might the sun thaw down these granite stones.

“My master’s voice is low, his aspect bland and kind,
But hard as hardest flint the soul that lurks behind;
And I am rough and rude, yet not more rough to see
Than is the hidden ghost that has its home in me.”

About her lips there played a smile of almost scorn,
“My friend,” she gently said, “you have not heard me mourn;
When you my kindred’s lives, MY lost life, can restore,
Then may I weep and sue, — but never, friend, before!

“Still, let my tyrants know, I am not doomed to wear
Year after year in gloom, and desolate despair;
A messenger of Hope comes every night to me,
And offers for short life, eternal liberty.

“He comes with western winds, with evening’s wandering airs,

With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars.
Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender fire,
And visions rise, and change, that kill me with desire.

“Desire for nothing known in my maturer years,
When Joy grew mad with awe, at counting future tears.
When, if my spirit’s sky was full of flashes warm,
I knew not whence they came, from sun or thunder-storm.

“But, first, a hush of peace — a soundless calm descends;
The struggle of distress, and fierce impatience ends;
Mute music soothes my breast — unuttered harmony,
That I could never dream, till Earth was lost to me.

“Then dawns the Invisible; the Unseen its truth reveals;
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels:
Its wings are almost free — its home, its harbour found,
Measuring the gulph, it stoops and dares the final bound,

“Oh I dreadful is the check — intense the agony —
When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see;
When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again;
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain.

“Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no torture less;
The more that anguish racks, the earlier it will bless;
And robed in fires of hell, or bright with heavenly shine,
If it but herald death, the vision is divine!”

She ceased to speak, and we, unanswering, turned to go —
We had no further power to work the captive woe:
Her cheek, her gleaming eye, declared that man had given
A sentence, unapproved, and overruled by Heaven.

HOPE.

Hope Was but a timid friend;
She sat without the grated den,
Watching how my fate would tend,
Even as selfish-hearted men.

She was cruel in her fear;
Through the bars one dreary day,
I looked out to see her there,
And she turned her face away!

Like a false guard, false watch keeping,
Still, in strife, she whispered peace;
She would sing while I was weeping;
If I listened, she would cease.

False she was, and unrelenting;

When my last joys strewed the ground,
Even Sorrow saw, repenting,
Those sad relics scattered round;

Hope, whose whisper would have given
Balm to all my frenzied pain,
Stretched her wings, and soared to heaven,
Went, and ne’er returned again!

A DAY DREAM.

On a sunny brae alone I lay
One summer afternoon;
It was the marriage-time of May,
With her young lover, June.

From her mother’s heart seemed loath to part
That queen of bridal charms,
But her father smiled on the fairest child
He ever held in his arms.

The trees did wave their plumy crests,
The glad birds carolled clear;
And I, of all the wedding guests,
Was only sullen there!

There was not one, but wished to shun
My aspect void of cheer;
The very gray rocks, looking on,
Asked, “What do you here?”

And I could utter no reply;
In sooth, I did not know
Why I had brought a clouded eye
To greet the general glow.

So, resting on a heathy bank,
I took my heart to me;
And we together sadly sank
Into a reverie.

We thought, “When winter comes again,
Where will these bright things be?
All vanished, like a vision vain,
An unreal mockery!

“The birds that now so blithely sing,
Through deserts, frozen dry,
Poor spectres of the perished spring,
In famished troops will fly.

“And why should we be glad at all?

The leaf is hardly green,
Before a token of its fall
Is on the surface seen!"

Now, whether it were really so,
I never could be sure;
But as in fit of peevish woe,
I stretched me on the moor,

A thousand thousand gleaming fires
Seemed kindling in the air;
A thousand thousand silvery lyres
Resounded far and near:

Methought, the very breath I breathed
Was full of sparks divine,
And all my heather-couch was wreathed
By that celestial shine!

And, while the wide earth echoing rung
To that strange minstrelsy
The little glittering spirits sung,
Or seemed to sing, to me:

"O mortal! mortal! let them die;
Let time and tears destroy,
That we may overflow the sky
With universal joy!

"Let grief distract the sufferer's breast,
And night obscure his way;
They hasten him to endless rest,
And everlasting day.

"To thee the world is like a tomb,
A desert's naked shore;
To us, in unimagined bloom,
It brightens more and more!

"And, could we lift the veil, and give
One brief glimpse to thine eye,
Thou wouldst rejoice for those that live,
BECAUSE they live to die."

The music ceased; the noonday dream,
Like dream of night, withdrew;
But Fancy, still, will sometimes deem
Her fond creation true.

TO IMAGINATION.

When weary with the long day's care,

And earthly change from pain to pain,
And lost, and ready to despair,
Thy kind voice calls me back again:
Oh, my true friend! I am not lone,
While then canst speak with such a tone!

So hopeless is the world without;
The world within I doubly prize;
Thy world, where guile, and hate, and doubt,
And cold suspicion never rise;
Where thou, and I, and Liberty,
Have undisputed sovereignty.

What matters it, that all around
Danger, and guilt, and darkness lie,
If but within our bosom's bound
We hold a bright, untroubled sky,
Warm with ten thousand mingled rays
Of suns that know no winter days?

Reason, indeed, may oft complain
For Nature's sad reality,
And tell the suffering heart how vain
Its cherished dreams must always be;
And Truth may rudely trample down
The flowers of Fancy, newly-blown:

But thou art ever there, to bring
The hovering vision back, and breathe
New glories o'er the blighted spring,
And call a lovelier Life from Death.
And whisper, with a voice divine,
Of real worlds, as bright as thine.

I trust not to thy phantom bliss,
Yet, still, in evening's quiet hour,
With never-failing thankfulness,
I welcome thee, Benignant Power;
Sure solacer of human cares,
And sweeter hope, when hope despairs!

HOW CLEAR SHE SHINES.

How clear she shines! How quietly
I lie beneath her guardian light;
While heaven and earth are whispering me,
"To morrow, wake, but dream to-night."
Yes, Fancy, come, my Fairy love!
These throbbing temples softly kiss;
And bend my lonely couch above,
And bring me rest, and bring me bliss.

The world is going; dark world, adieu!
Grim world, conceal thee till the day;
The heart thou canst not all subdue
Must still resist, if thou delay!

Thy love I will not, will not share;
Thy hatred only wakes a smile;
Thy griefs may wound — thy wrongs may tear,
But, oh, thy lies shall ne'er beguile!
While gazing on the stars that glow
Above me, in that stormless sea,
I long to hope that all the woe
Creation knows, is held in thee!

And this shall be my dream to-night;
I'll think the heaven of glorious spheres
Is rolling on its course of light
In endless bliss, through endless years;
I'll think, there's not one world above,
Far as these straining eyes can see,
Where Wisdom ever laughed at Love,
Or Virtue crouched to Infamy;

Where, writhing 'neath the strokes of Fate,
The mangled wretch was forced to smile;
To match his patience 'gainst her hate,
His heart rebellious all the while.
Where Pleasure still will lead to wrong,
And helpless Reason warn in vain;
And Truth is weak, and Treachery strong;
And Joy the surest path to Pain;
And Peace, the lethargy of Grief;
And Hope, a phantom of the soul;
And life, a labour, void and brief;
And Death, the despot of the whole!

SYMPATHY.

There should be no despair for you
While nightly stars are burning;
While evening pours its silent dew,
And sunshine gilds the morning.
There should be no despair — though tears
May flow down like a river:
Are not the best beloved of years
Around your heart for ever?

They weep, you weep, it must be so;
Winds sigh as you are sighing,
And winter sheds its grief in snow
Where Autumn's leaves are lying:
Yet, these revive, and from their fate

Your fate cannot be parted:
Then, journey on, if not elate,
Still, NEVER broken-hearted!

PLEAD FOR ME.

Oh, thy bright eyes must answer now,
When Reason, with a scornful brow,
Is mocking at my overthrow!
Oh, thy sweet tongue must plead for me
And tell why I have chosen thee!

Stern Reason is to judgment come,
Arrayed in all her forms of gloom:
Wilt thou, my advocate, be dumb?
No, radiant angel, speak and say,
Why I did cast the world away.

Why I have persevered to shun
The common paths that others run;
And on a strange road journeyed on,
Heedless, alike of wealth and power —
Of glory's wreath and pleasure's flower.

These, once, indeed, seemed Beings Divine;
And they, perchance, heard vows of mine,
And saw my offerings on their shrine;
But careless gifts are seldom prized,
And MINE were worthily despised.

So, with a ready heart, I swore
To seek their altar-stone no more;
And gave my spirit to adore
Thee, ever-present, phantom thing —
My slave, my comrade, and my king.

A slave, because I rule thee still;
Incline thee to my changeful will,
And make thy influence good or ill:
A comrade, for by day and night
Thou art my intimate delight, —

My darling pain that wounds and sears,
And wrings a blessing out from tears
By deadening me to earthly cares;
And yet, a king, though Prudence well
Have taught thy subject to rebel

And am I wrong to worship where
Faith cannot doubt, nor hope despair,
Since my own soul can grant my prayer?
Speak, God of visions, plead for me,

And tell why I have chosen thee!

SELF-INTEROGATION,

“The evening passes fast away.
‘Tis almost time to rest;
What thoughts has left the vanished day,
What feelings in thy breast?

“The vanished day? It leaves a sense
Of labour hardly done;
Of little gained with vast expense —
A sense of grief alone?

“Time stands before the door of Death,
Upbraiding bitterly
And Conscience, with exhaustless breath,
Pours black reproach on me:

“And though I’ve said that Conscience lies
And Time should Fate condemn;
Still, sad Repentance clouds my eyes,
And makes me yield to them!

“Then art thou glad to seek repose?
Art glad to leave the sea,
And anchor all thy weary woes
In calm Eternity?

“Nothing regrets to see thee go —
Not one voice sobs’ farewell;’
And where thy heart has suffered so,
Canst thou desire to dwell?”

“Alas! the countless links are strong
That bind us to our clay;
The loving spirit lingers long,
And would not pass away!

“And rest is sweet, when laurelled fame
Will crown the soldier’s crest;
But a brave heart, with a tarnished name,
Would rather fight than rest.

“Well, thou hast fought for many a year,
Hast fought thy whole life through,
Hast humbled Falsehood, trampled Fear;
What is there left to do?

“‘Tis true, this arm has hotly striven,
Has dared what few would dare;
Much have I done, and freely given,

But little learnt to bear!

"Look on the grave where thou must sleep
Thy last, and strongest foe;
It is endurance not to weep,
If that repose seem woe.

"The long war closing in defeat —
Defeat serenely borne, —
Thy midnight rest may still be sweet,
And break in glorious morn!"

DEATH.

Death! that struck when I was most confiding.
In my certain faith of joy to be —
Strike again, Time's withered branch dividing
From the fresh root of Eternity!

Leaves, upon Time's branch, were growing brightly,
Full of sap, and full of silver dew;
Birds beneath its shelter gathered nightly;
Daily round its flowers the wild bees flew.

Sorrow passed, and plucked the golden blossom;
Guilt stripped off the foliage in its pride
But, within its parent's kindly bosom,
Flowed for ever Life's restoring tide.

Little mourned I for the parted gladness,
For the vacant nest and silent song —
Hope was there, and laughed me out of sadness;
Whispering, "Winter will not linger long!"

And, behold! with tenfold increase blessing,
Spring adorned the beauty-burdened spray;
Wind and rain and fervent heat, caressing,
Lavished glory on that second May!

High it rose — no winged grief could sweep it;
Sin was scared to distance with its shine;
Love, and its own life, had power to keep it
From all wrong — from every blight but thine!

Cruel Death! The young leaves droop and languish;
Evening's gentle air may still restore —
No! the morning sunshine mocks my anguish-
Time, for me, must never blossom more!

Strike it down, that other boughs may flourish
Where that perished sapling used to be;
Thus, at least, its mouldering corpse will nourish

That from which it sprung — Eternity.

STANZAS TO — —

Well, some may hate, and some may scorn,
And some may quite forget thy name;
But my sad heart must ever mourn
Thy ruined hopes, thy blighted fame!
‘Twas thus I thought, an hour ago,
Even weeping o’er that wretch’s woe;
One word turned back my gushing tears,
And lit my altered eye with sneers.
Then “Bless the friendly dust,” I said,
“That hides thy unlamented head!
Vain as thou wert, and weak as vain,
The slave of Falsehood, Pride, and Pain —
My heart has nought akin to thine;
Thy soul is powerless over mine.”
But these were thoughts that vanished too;
Unwise, unholy, and untrue:
Do I despise the timid deer,
Because his limbs are fleet with fear?
Or, would I mock the wolf’s death-howl,
Because his form is gaunt and foul?
Or, hear with joy the leveret’s cry,
Because it cannot bravely die?
No! Then above his memory
Let Pity’s heart as tender be;
Say, “Earth, lie lightly on that breast,
And, kind Heaven, grant that spirit rest!”

HONOUR’S MARTYR.

The moon is full this winter night;
The stars are clear, though few;
And every window glistens bright
With leaves of frozen dew.

The sweet moon through your lattice gleams,
And lights your room like day;
And there you pass, in happy dreams,
The peaceful hours away!

While I, with effort hardly quelling
The anguish in my breast,

Wander about the silent dwelling,
And cannot think of rest.

The old clock in the gloomy hall
Ticks on, from hour to hour;
And every time its measured call
Seems lingering slow and slower:

And, oh, how slow that keen-eyed star
Has tracked the chilly gray!
What, watching yet! how very far
The morning lies away!

Without your chamber door I stand;
Love, are you slumbering still?
My cold heart, underneath my hand,
Has almost ceased to thrill.

Bleak, bleak the east wind sobs and sighs,
And drowns the turret bell,
Whose sad note, undistinguished, dies
Unheard, like my farewell!

To-morrow, Scorn will blight my name,
And Hate will trample me,
Will load me with a coward's shame —
A traitor's perjury.

False friends will launch their covert sneers;
True friends will wish me dead;
And I shall cause the bitterest tears
That you have ever shed.

The dark deeds of my outlawed race
Will then like virtues shine;
And men will pardon their disgrace,
Beside the guilt of mine.

For, who forgives the accursed crime
Of dastard treachery?
Rebellion, in its chosen time,
May Freedom's champion be;

Revenge may stain a righteous sword,
It may be just to slay;
But, traitor, traitor, — from THAT word
All true breasts shrink away!

Oh, I would give my heart to death,
To keep my honour fair;
Yet, I'll not give my inward faith
My honour's NAME to spare!

Not even to keep your priceless love,
Dare I, Beloved, deceive;
This treason should the future prove,
Then, only then, believe!

I know the path I ought to go

I follow fearlessly,
Inquiring not what deeper woe
Stern duty stores for me.

So foes pursue, and cold allies
Mistrust me, every one:
Let me be false in others' eyes,
If faithful in my own.

STANZAS.

I'll not weep that thou art going to leave me,
There's nothing lovely here;
And doubly will the dark world grieve me,
While thy heart suffers there.

I'll not weep, because the summer's glory
Must always end in gloom;
And, follow out the happiest story —
It closes with a tomb!

And I am weary of the anguish
Increasing winters bear;
Weary to watch the spirit languish
Through years of dead despair.

So, if a tear, when thou art dying,
Should haply fall from me,
It is but that my soul is sighing,
To go and rest with thee.

MY COMFORTER.

Well hast thou spoken, and yet not taught
A feeling strange or new;
Thou hast but roused a latent thought,
A cloud-closed beam of sunshine brought
To gleam in open view.

Deep down, concealed within my soul,
That light lies hid from men;
Yet glows unquenched — though shadows roll,
Its gentle ray cannot control —
About the sullen den.

Was I not vexed, in these gloomy ways
To walk alone so long?
Around me, wretches uttering praise,
Or howling o'er their hopeless days,
And each with Frenzy's tongue; —

A brotherhood of misery,
Their smiles as sad as sighs;
Whose madness daily maddened me,
Distorting into agony
The bliss before my eyes!

So stood I, in Heaven's glorious sun,
And in the glare of Hell;
My spirit drank a mingled tone,
Of seraph's song, and demon's moan;
What my soul bore, my soul alone
Within itself may tell!

Like a soft, air above a sea,
Tossed by the tempest's stir;
A thaw-wind, melting quietly
The snow-drift on some wintry lea;
No: what sweet thing resembles thee,
My thoughtful Comforter?

And yet a little longer speak,
Calm this resentful mood;
And while the savage heart grows meek,
For other token do not seek,
But let the tear upon my cheek
Evince my gratitude!

THE OLD STOIC.

Riches I hold in light esteem,
And Love I laugh to scorn;
And lust of fame was but a dream,
That vanished with the morn:

And if I pray, the only prayer
That moves my lips for me
Is, "Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty!"

Yes, as my swift days near their goal:
'Tis all that I implore;
In life and death a chainless soul,
With courage to endure.

POEMS BY ACTON BELL,

A REMINISCENCE.

Yes, thou art gone! and never more
Thy sunny smile shall gladden me;
But I may pass the old church door,
And pace the floor that covers thee,

May stand upon the cold, damp stone,
And think that, frozen, lies below
The lightest heart that I have known,
The kindest I shall ever know.

Yet, though I cannot see thee more,
‘Tis still a comfort to have seen;
And though thy transient life is o’er,
‘Tis sweet to think that thou hast been;

To think a soul so near divine,
Within a form so angel fair,
United to a heart like thine,
Has gladdened once our humble sphere.

THE ARBOUR.

I’ll rest me in this sheltered bower,
And look upon the clear blue sky
That smiles upon me through the trees,
Which stand so thick clustering by;

And view their green and glossy leaves,
All glistening in the sunshine fair;
And list the rustling of their boughs,
So softly whispering through the air.

And while my ear drinks in the sound,
My winged soul shall fly away;
Reviewing lone departed years
As one mild, beaming, autumn day;

And soaring on to future scenes,
Like hills and woods, and valleys green,
All basking in the summer's sun,
But distant still, and dimly seen.

Oh, list! 'tis summer's very breath
That gently shakes the rustling trees —
But look! the snow is on the ground —
How can I think of scenes like these?

'Tis but the FROST that clears the air,
And gives the sky that lovely blue;
They're smiling in a WINTER'S sun,
Those evergreens of sombre hue.

And winter's chill is on my heart —
How can I dream of future bliss?
How can my spirit soar away,
Confined by such a chain as this?

HOME.

How brightly glistening in the sun
The woodland ivy plays!
While yonder beeches from their barks
Reflect his silver rays.

That sun surveys a lovely scene
From softly smiling skies;
And wildly through unnumbered trees
The wind of winter sighs:

Now loud, it thunders o'er my head,
And now in distance dies.
But give me back my barren hills
Where colder breezes rise;

Where scarce the scattered, stunted trees
Can yield an answering swell,
But where a wilderness of heath
Returns the sound as well.

For yonder garden, fair and wide,
With groves of evergreen,
Long winding walks, and borders trim,
And velvet lawns between;

Restore to me that little spot,
With gray walls compassed round,
Where knotted grass neglected lies,
And weeds usurp the ground.

Though all around this mansion high
Invites the foot to roam,
And though its halls are fair within —
Oh, give me back my HOME!

VANITAS VANITATUM, OMNIA VANITAS.

In all we do, and hear, and see,
Is restless Toil and Vanity.
While yet the rolling earth abides,
Men come and go like ocean tides;

And ere one generation dies,
Another in its place shall rise;
THAT, sinking soon into the grave,
Others succeed, like wave on wave;

And as they rise, they pass away.
The sun arises every day,
And hastening onward to the West,
He nightly sinks, but not to rest:

Returning to the eastern skies,
Again to light us, he must rise.
And still the restless wind comes forth,
Now blowing keenly from the North;

Now from the South, the East, the West,
For ever changing, ne'er at rest.
The fountains, gushing from the hills,
Supply the ever-running rills;

The thirsty rivers drink their store,
And bear it rolling to the shore,
But still the ocean craves for more.
'Tis endless labour everywhere!
Sound cannot satisfy the ear,

Light cannot fill the craving eye,
Nor riches half our wants supply,
Pleasure but doubles future pain,
And joy brings sorrow in her train;

Laughter is mad, and reckless mirth —
What does she in this weary earth?
Should Wealth, or Fame, our Life employ,

Death comes, our labour to destroy;

To snatch the untasted cup away,
For which we toiled so many a day.
What, then, remains for wretched man?
To use life’s comforts while he can,

Enjoy the blessings Heaven bestows,
Assist his friends, forgive his foes;
Trust God, and keep His statutes still,
Upright and firm, through good and ill;

Thankful for all that God has given,
Fixing his firmest hopes on Heaven;
Knowing that earthly joys decay,
But hoping through the darkest day.

THE PENITENT.

I mourn with thee, and yet rejoice
That thou shouldst sorrow so;
With angel choirs I join my voice
To bless the sinner’s woe.

Though friends and kindred turn away,
And laugh thy grief to scorn;
I hear the great Redeemer say,
“Blessed are ye that mourn.”

Hold on thy course, nor deem it strange
That earthly cords are riven:
Man may lament the wondrous change,
But “there is joy in heaven!”

MUSIC ON CHRISTMAS MORNING.

Music I love — but never strain
Could kindle raptures so divine,
So grief assuage, so conquer pain,
And rouse this pensive heart of mine —
As that we hear on Christmas morn,
Upon the wintry breezes borne.

Though Darkness still her empire keep,
And hours must pass, ere morning break;

From troubled dreams, or slumbers deep,
That music KINDLY bids us wake:
It calls us, with an angel's voice,
To wake, and worship, and rejoice;

To greet with joy the glorious morn,
Which angels welcomed long ago,
When our redeeming Lord was born,
To bring the light of Heaven below;
The Powers of Darkness to dispel,
And rescue Earth from Death and Hell.

While listening to that sacred strain,
My raptured spirit soars on high;
I seem to hear those songs again
Resounding through the open sky,
That kindled such divine delight,
In those who watched their flocks by night.

With them I celebrate His birth —
Glory to God, in highest Heaven,
Good-will to men, and peace on earth,
To us a Saviour-king is given;
Our God is come to claim His own,
And Satan's power is overthrown!

A sinless God, for sinful men,
Descends to suffer and to bleed;
Hell MUST renounce its empire then;
The price is paid, the world is freed,
And Satan's self must now confess
That Christ has earned a RIGHT to bless:

Now holy Peace may smile from heaven,
And heavenly Truth from earth shall spring:
The captive's galling bonds are riven,
For our Redeemer is our king;
And He that gave his blood for men
Will lead us home to God again.

STANZAS.

Oh, weep not, love! each tear that springs
In those dear eyes of thine,
To me a keener suffering brings
Than if they flowed from mine.

And do not droop! however drear
The fate awaiting thee;
For MY sake combat pain and care,
And cherish life for me!

I do not fear thy love will fail;
Thy faith is true, I know;
But, oh, my love! thy strength is frail
For such a life of woe.

Were ‘t not for this, I well could trace
(Though banished long from thee)
Life’s rugged path, and boldly face
The storms that threaten me.

Fear not for me — I’ve steeled my mind
Sorrow and strife to greet;
Joy with my love I leave behind,
Care with my friends I meet.

A mother’s sad reproachful eye,
A father’s scowling brow —
But he may frown and she may sigh:
I will not break my vow!

I love my mother, I revere
My sire, but fear not me —
Believe that Death alone can tear
This faithful heart from thee.

IF THIS BE ALL.

O God! if this indeed be all
That Life can show to me;
If on my aching brow may fall
No freshening dew from Thee;

If with no brighter light than this
The lamp of hope may glow,
And I may only dream of bliss,
And wake to weary woe;

If friendship’s solace must decay,
When other joys are gone,
And love must keep so far away,
While I go wandering on, —

Wandering and toiling without gain,
The slave of others’ will,
With constant care, and frequent pain,
Despised, forgotten still;

Grieving to look on vice and sin,
Yet powerless to quell
The silent current from within,
The outward torrent’s swell

While all the good I would impart,
The feelings I would share,
Are driven backward to my heart,
And turned to wormwood there;

If clouds must EVER keep from sight
The glories of the Sun,
And I must suffer Winter's blight,
Ere Summer is begun;

If Life must be so full of care,
Then call me soon to thee;
Or give me strength enough to bear
My load of misery.

MEMORY.

Brightly the sun of summer shone
Green fields and waving woods upon,
And soft winds wandered by;
Above, a sky of purest blue,
Around, bright flowers of loveliest hue,
Allured the gazer's eye.

But what were all these charms to me,
When one sweet breath of memory
Came gently wafting by?
I closed my eyes against the day,
And called my willing soul away,
From earth, and air, and sky;

That I might simply fancy there
One little flower — a primrose fair,
Just opening into sight;
As in the days of infancy,
An opening primrose seemed to me
A source of strange delight.

Sweet Memory! ever smile on me;
Nature's chief beauties spring from thee;
Oh, still thy tribute bring
Still make the golden crocus shine
Among the flowers the most divine,
The glory of the spring.

Still in the wallflower's fragrance dwell;
And hover round the slight bluebell,
My childhood's darling flower.
Smile on the little daisy still,
The buttercup's bright goblet fill
With all thy former power.

For ever hang thy dreamy spell
Round mountain star and heather bell,
And do not pass away
From sparkling frost, or wreathed snow,
And whisper when the wild winds blow,
Or rippling waters play.

Is childhood, then, so all divine?
Or Memory, is the glory thine,
That haloes thus the past?
Not ALL divine; its pangs of grief
(Although, perchance, their stay be brief)
Are bitter while they last.

Nor is the glory all thine own,
For on our earliest joys alone
That holy light is cast.
With such a ray, no spell of thine
Can make our later pleasures shine,
Though long ago they passed.

TO COWPER.

Sweet are thy strains, celestial Bard;
And oft, in childhood's years,
I've read them o'er and o'er again,
With floods of silent tears.

The language of my inmost heart
I traced in every line;
MY sins, MY sorrows, hopes, and fears,
Were there-and only mine.

All for myself the sigh would swell,
The tear of anguish start;
I little knew what wilder woe
Had filled the Poet's heart.

I did not know the nights of gloom,
The days of misery;
The long, long years of dark despair,
That crushed and tortured thee.

But they are gone; from earth at length
Thy gentle soul is pass'd,
And in the bosom of its God
Has found its home at last.

It must be so, if God is love,
And answers fervent prayer;
Then surely thou shalt dwell on high,
And I may meet thee there.

Is He the source of every good,
The spring of purity?
Then in thine hours of deepest woe,
Thy God was still with thee.

How else, when every hope was fled,
Couldst thou so fondly cling
To holy things and help men?
And how so sweetly sing,

Of things that God alone could teach?
And whence that purity,
That hatred of all sinful ways —
That gentle charity?

Are THESE the symptoms of a heart
Of heavenly grace bereft —
For ever banished from its God,
To Satan's fury left?

Yet, should thy darkest fears be true,
If Heaven be so severe,
That such a soul as thine is lost, —
Oh! how shall I appear?

THE DOUBTER'S PRAYER.

Eternal Power, of earth and air!
Unseen, yet seen in all around,
Remote, but dwelling everywhere,
Though silent, heard in every sound;

If e'er thine ear in mercy bent,
When wretched mortals cried to Thee,
And if, indeed, Thy Son was sent,
To save lost sinners such as me:

Then hear me now, while kneeling here,
I lift to thee my heart and eye,
And all my soul ascends in prayer,
OH, GIVE ME — GIVE ME FAITH! I cry.

Without some glimmering in my heart,
I could not raise this fervent prayer;
But, oh! a stronger light impart,
And in Thy mercy fix it there.

While Faith is with me, I am blest;
It turns my darkest night to day;
But while I clasp it to my breast,
I often feel it slide away.

Then, cold and dark, my spirit sinks,
To see my light of life depart;
And every fiend of Hell, methinks,
Enjoys the anguish of my heart.

What shall I do, if all my love,
My hopes, my toil, are cast away,
And if there be no God above,
To hear and bless me when I pray?

If this be vain delusion all,
If death be an eternal sleep,
And none can hear my secret call,
Or see the silent tears I weep!

Oh, help me, God! For thou alone
Canst my distracted soul relieve;
Forsake it not: it is thine own,
Though weak, yet longing to believe.

Oh, drive these cruel doubts away;
And make me know, that Thou art God!
A faith, that shines by night and day,
Will lighten every earthly load.

If I believe that Jesus died,
And waking, rose to reign above;
Then surely Sorrow, Sin, and Pride,
Must yield to Peace, and Hope, and Love.

And all the blessed words He said
Will strength and holy joy impart:
A shield of safety o'er my head,
A spring of comfort in my heart.

A WORD TO THE "ELECT."

You may rejoice to think YOURSELVES secure;
You may be grateful for the gift divine —
That grace unsought, which made your black hearts pure,
And fits your earth-born souls in Heaven to shine.

But, is it sweet to look around, and view
Thousands excluded from that happiness
Which they deserved, at least, as much as you. —
Their faults not greater, nor their virtues less?

And wherefore should you love your God the more,
Because to you alone his smiles are given;
Because He chose to pass the MANY o'er,
And only bring the favoured FEW to Heaven?

And, wherefore should your hearts more grateful prove,
Because for ALL the Saviour did not die?
Is yours the God of justice and of love?
And are your bosoms warm with charity?

Say, does your heart expand to all mankind?
And, would you ever to your neighbour do —
The weak, the strong, the enlightened, and the blind —
As you would have your neighbour do to you?

And when you, looking on your fellow-men,
Behold them doomed to endless misery,
How can you talk of joy and rapture then? —
May God withhold such cruel joy from me!

That none deserve eternal bliss I know;
Unmerited the grace in mercy given:
But, none shall sink to everlasting woe,
That have not well deserved the wrath of Heaven.

And, oh! there lives within my heart
A hope, long nursed by me;
(And should its cheering ray depart,
How dark my soul would be!)

That as in Adam all have died,
In Christ shall all men live;
And ever round his throne abide,
Eternal praise to give.

That even the wicked shall at last
Be fitted for the skies;
And when their dreadful doom is past,
To life and light arise.

I ask not, how remote the day,
Nor what the sinners' woe,
Before their dross is purged away;
Enough for me to know —

That when the clip of wrath is drained,
The metal purified,
They'll cling to what they once disdained,
And live by Him that died.

PAST DAYS.

'Tis strange to think there WAS a time
When mirth was not an empty name,
When laughter really cheered the heart,
And frequent smiles unbidden came,

And tears of grief would only flow
In sympathy for others' woe;

When speech expressed the inward thought,
And heart to kindred heart was bare,
And summer days were far too short
For all the pleasures crowded there;
And silence, solitude, and rest,
Now welcome to the weary breast —

Were all unprized, uncourted then —
And all the joy one spirit showed,
The other deeply felt again;
And friendship like a river flowed,
Constant and strong its silent course,
For nought withstood its gentle force:

When night, the holy time of peace,
Was dreaded as the parting hour;
When speech and mirth at once must cease,
And silence must resume her power;
Though ever free from pains and woes,
She only brought us calm repose.

And when the blessed dawn again
Brought daylight to the blushing skies,
We woke, and not RELUCTANT then,
To joyless LABOUR did we rise;
But full of hope, and glad and gay,
We welcomed the returning day.

THE CONSOLATION.

Though bleak these woods, and damp the ground
With fallen leaves so thickly strown,
And cold the wind that wanders round
With wild and melancholy moan;

There IS a friendly roof, I know,
Might shield me from the wintry blast;
There is a fire, whose ruddy glow
Will cheer me for my wanderings past.

And so, though still, where'er I go,
Cold stranger-glances meet my eye;
Though, when my spirit sinks in woe,
Unheeded swells the unbidden sigh;

Though solitude, endured too long,
Bids youthful joys too soon decay,
Makes mirth a stranger to my tongue,
And overclouds my noon of day;

When kindly thoughts that would have way,
Flow back discouraged to my breast;
I know there is, though far away,
A home where heart and soul may rest.

Warm hands are there, that, clasped in mine,
The warmer heart will not belie;
While mirth, and truth, and friendship shine
In smiling lip and earnest eye.

The ice that gathers round my heart
May there be thawed; and sweetly, then,
The joys of youth, that now depart,
Will come to cheer my soul again.

Though far I roam, that thought shall be
My hope, my comfort, everywhere;
While such a home remains to me,
My heart shall never know despair!

LINES COMPOSED IN A WOOD ON A WINDY DAY.

My soul is awakened, my spirit is soaring
And carried aloft on the wings of the breeze;
For above and around me the wild wind is roaring,
Arousing to rapture the earth and the seas.

The long withered grass in the sunshine is glancing,
The bare trees are tossing their branches on high;
The dead leaves beneath them are merrily dancing,
The white clouds are scudding across the blue sky

I wish I could see how the ocean is lashing
The foam of its billows to whirlwinds of spray;
I wish I could see how its proud waves are dashing,
And hear the wild roar of their thunder to-day!

VIEWS OF LIFE.

When sinks my heart in hopeless gloom,
And life can show no joy for me;
And I behold a yawning tomb,

Where bowers and palaces should be;

In vain you talk of morbid dreams;
In vain you gaily smiling say,
That what to me so dreary seems,
The healthy mind deems bright and gay.

I too have smiled, and thought like you,
But madly smiled, and falsely deemed:
TRUTH led me to the present view, —
I'm waking now — 'twas THEN I dreamed.

I lately saw a sunset sky,
And stood enraptured to behold
Its varied hues of glorious dye:
First, fleecy clouds of shining gold;

These blushing took a rosy hue;
Beneath them shone a flood of green;
Nor less divine, the glorious blue
That smiled above them and between.

I cannot name each lovely shade;
I cannot say how bright they shone;
But one by one, I saw them fade;
And what remained when they were gone?

Dull clouds remained, of sombre hue,
And when their borrowed charm was o'er,
The azure sky had faded too,
That smiled so softly bright before.

So, gilded by the glow of youth,
Our varied life looks fair and gay;
And so remains the naked truth,
When that false light is past away.

Why blame ye, then, my keener sight,
That clearly sees a world of woes
Through all the haze of golden light
That flattering Falsehood round it throws?

When the young mother smiles above
The first-born darling of her heart,
Her bosom glows with earnest love,
While tears of silent transport start.

Fond dreamer! little does she know
The anxious toil, the suffering,
The blasted hopes, the burning woe,
The object of her joy will bring.

Her blinded eyes behold not now
What, soon or late, must be his doom;
The anguish that will cloud his brow,
The bed of death, the dreary tomb.

As little know the youthful pair,
In mutual love supremely blest,

What weariness, and cold despair,
Ere long, will seize the aching breast.

And even should Love and Faith remain,
(The greatest blessings life can show,)
Amid adversity and pain,
To shine throughout with cheering glow;

They do not see how cruel Death
Comes on, their loving hearts to part:
One feels not now the gasping breath,
The rending of the earth-bound heart, —

The soul's and body's agony,
Ere she may sink to her repose.
The sad survivor cannot see
The grave above his darling close;

Nor how, despairing and alone,
He then must wear his life away;
And linger, feebly toiling on,
And fainting, sink into decay.

* * * *

Oh, Youth may listen patiently,
While sad Experience tells her tale,
But Doubt sits smiling in his eye,
For ardent Hope will still prevail!

He hears how feeble Pleasure dies,
By guilt destroyed, and pain and woe;
He turns to Hope — and she replies,
"Believe it not-it is not so!"

"Oh, heed her not!" Experience says;
"For thus she whispered once to me;
She told me, in my youthful days,
How glorious manhood's prime would be.

"When, in the time of early Spring,
Too chill the winds that o'er me pass'd,
She said, each coming day would bring
a fairer heaven, a gentler blast.

"And when the sun too seldom beamed,
The sky, o'ercast, too darkly frowned,
The soaking rain too constant streamed,
And mists too dreary gathered round;

"She told me, Summer's glorious ray
Would chase those vapours all away,
And scatter glories round;
With sweetest music fill the trees,
Load with rich scent the gentle breeze,
And strew with flowers the ground

"But when, beneath that scorching ray,
I languished, weary through the day,

While birds refused to sing,
Verdure decayed from field and tree,
And panting Nature mourned with me
The freshness of the Spring.

"'Wait but a little while,' she said,
'Till Summer's burning days are fled;
And Autumn shall restore,
With golden riches of her own,
And Summer's glories mellowed down,
The freshness you deplore.'

And long I waited, but in vain:
That freshness never came again,
Though Summer passed away,
Though Autumn's mists hung cold and chill.
And drooping nature languished still,
And sank into decay.

"Till wintry blasts foreboding blew
Through leafless trees — and then I knew
That Hope was all a dream.
But thus, fond youth, she cheated me;
And she will prove as false to thee,
Though sweet her words may seem.

Stern prophet! Cease thy bodings dire —
 Thou canst not quench the ardent fire
That warms the breast of youth.
Oh, let it cheer him while it may,
And gently, gently die away —
 Chilled by the damps of truth!

Tell him, that earth is not our rest;
Its joys are empty — frail at best;
And point beyond the sky.
But gleams of light may reach us here;
And hope the ROUGHEST path can cheer:
Then do not bid it fly!

Though hope may promise joys, that still
Unkindly time will ne'er fulfil;
Or, if they come at all,
We never find them unalloyed, —
 Hurtful perchance, or soon destroyed,
They vanish or they pall;

Yet hope ITSELF a brightness throws
O'er all our labours and our woes;
While dark foreboding Care
A thousand ills will oft portend,
That Providence may ne'er intend
The trembling heart to bear.

Or if they come, it oft appears,
Our woes are lighter than our fears,
And far more bravely borne.
Then let us not enhance our doom
But e'en in midnight's blackest gloom

Expect the rising morn.

Because the road is rough and long,
Shall we despise the skylark's song,
That cheers the wanderer's way?
Or trample down, with reckless feet,
The smiling flowerets, bright and sweet,
Because they soon decay?

Pass pleasant scenes unnoticed by,
Because the next is bleak and drear;
Or not enjoy a smiling sky,
Because a tempest may be near?

No! while we journey on our way,
We'll smile on every lovely thing;
And ever, as they pass away,
To memory and hope we'll cling.

And though that awful river flows
Before us, when the journey's past,
Perchance of all the pilgrim's woes
Most dreadful — shrink not — 'tis the last!

Though icy cold, and dark, and deep;
Beyond it smiles that blessed shore,
Where none shall suffer, none shall weep,
And bliss shall reign for evermore!

APPEAL.

Oh, I am very weary,
Though tears no longer flow;
My eyes are tired of weeping,
My heart is sick of woe;

My life is very lonely
My days pass heavily,
I'm weary of repining;
Wilt thou not come to me?

Oh, didst thou know my longings
For thee, from day to day,
My hopes, so often blighted,
Thou wouldst not thus delay!

THE STUDENT’S SERENADE.

I have slept upon my couch,
But my spirit did not rest,
For the labours of the day
Yet my weary soul opprest;

And before my dreaming eyes
Still the learned volumes lay,
And I could not close their leaves,
And I could not turn away.

But I oped my eyes at last,
And I heard a muffled sound;
‘Twas the night-breeze, come to say
That the snow was on the ground.

Then I knew that there was rest
On the mountain’s bosom free;
So I left my fevered couch,
And I flew to waken thee!

I have flown to waken thee —
For, if thou wilt not arise,
Then my soul can drink no peace
From these holy moonlight skies.

And this waste of virgin snow
To my sight will not be fair,
Unless thou wilt smiling come,
Love, to wander with me there.

Then, awake! Maria, wake!
For, if thou couldst only know
How the quiet moonlight sleeps
On this wilderness of snow,

And the groves of ancient trees,
In their snowy garb arrayed,
Till they stretch into the gloom
Of the distant valley’s shade;

I know thou wouldst rejoice
To inhale this bracing air;
Thou wouldst break thy sweetest sleep
To behold a scene so fair.

O’er these wintry wilds, ALONE,
Thou wouldst joy to wander free;
And it will not please thee less,
Though that bliss be shared with me.

THE CAPTIVE DOVE.

Poor restless dove, I pity thee;
And when I hear thy plaintive moan,
I mourn for thy captivity,
And in thy woes forget mine own.

To see thee stand prepared to fly,
And flap those useless wings of thine,
And gaze into the distant sky,
Would melt a harder heart than mine.

In vain — in vain! Thou canst not rise:
Thy prison roof confines thee there;
Its slender wires delude thine eyes,
And quench thy longings with despair.

Oh, thou wert made to wander free
In sunny mead and shady grove,
And far beyond the rolling sea,
In distant climes, at will to rove!

Yet, hadst thou but one gentle mate
Thy little drooping heart to cheer,
And share with thee thy captive state,
Thou couldst be happy even there.

Yes, even there, if, listening by,
One faithful dear companion stood,
While gazing on her full bright eye,
Thou mightst forget thy native wood

But thou, poor solitary dove,
Must make, unheard, thy joyless moan;
The heart that Nature formed to love
Must pine, neglected, and alone.

SELF-CONGRATULATION.

Ellen, you were thoughtless once
Of beauty or of grace,
Simple and homely in attire,
Careless of form and face;
Then whence this change? and wherefore now
So often smoothe your hair?
And wherefore deck your youthful form
With such unwearied care?

Tell us, and cease to tire our ears
With that familiar strain;
Why will you play those simple tunes

So often o'er again?
"Indeed, dear friends, I can but say
That childhood's thoughts are gone;
Each year its own new feelings brings,
And years move swiftly on:

"And for these little simple airs —
 I love to play them o'er
So much — I dare not promise, now,
To play them never more."
I answered — and it was enough;
They turned them to depart;
They could not read my secret thoughts,
Nor see my throbbing heart.

I've noticed many a youthful form,
Upon whose changeful face
The inmost workings of the soul
The gazer well might trace;
The speaking eye, the changing lip,
The ready blushing cheek,
The smiling, or beclouded brow,
Their different feelings speak.

But, thank God! you might gaze on mine
For hours, and never know
The secret changes of my soul
From joy to keenest woe.
Last night, as we sat round the fire
Conversing merrily,
We heard, without, approaching steps
Of one well known to me!

There was no trembling in my voice,
No blush upon my cheek,
No lustrous sparkle in my eyes,
Of hope, or joy, to speak;
But, oh! my spirit burned within,
My heart beat full and fast!
He came not nigh — he went away —
 And then my joy was past.

And yet my comrades marked it not:
My voice was still the same;
They saw me smile, and o'er my face
No signs of sadness came.
They little knew my hidden thoughts;
And they will NEVER know
The aching anguish of my heart,
The bitter burning woe!

FLUCTUATIONS,

What though the Sun had left my sky;
To save me from despair
The blessed Moon arose on high,
And shone serenely there.

I watched her, with a tearful gaze,
Rise slowly o’er the hill,
While through the dim horizon’s haze
Her light gleamed faint and chill.

I thought such wan and lifeless beams
Could ne’er my heart repay
For the bright sun’s most transient gleams
That cheered me through the day:

But, as above that mist’s control
She rose, and brighter shone,
I felt her light upon my soul;
But now — that light is gone!

Thick vapours snatched her from my sight,
And I was darkling left,
All in the cold and gloomy night,
Of light and hope bereft:

Until, methought, a little star
Shone forth with trembling ray,
To cheer me with its light afar —
But that, too, passed away.

Anon, an earthly meteor blazed
The gloomy darkness through;
I smiled, yet trembled while I gazed —
But that soon vanished too!

And darker, drearier fell the night
Upon my spirit then; —
But what is that faint struggling light?
Is it the Moon again?

Kind Heaven! increase that silvery gleam
And bid these clouds depart,
And let her soft celestial beam
Restore my fainting heart!

SELECTIONS FROM THE LITERARY REMAINS OF ELLIS AND ACTON BELL. (EMILY AND ANNE BRONTË)

By Currer Bell

SELECTIONS FROM POEMS BY ELLIS BELL.

It would not have been difficult to compile a volume out of the papers left by my sisters, had I, in making the selection, dismissed from my consideration the scruples and the wishes of those whose written thoughts these papers held. But this was impossible: an influence, stronger than could be exercised by any motive of expediency, necessarily regulated the selection. I have, then, culled from the mass only a little poem here and there. The whole makes but a tiny nosegay, and the colour and perfume of the flowers are not such as fit them for festal uses.

It has been already said that my sisters wrote much in childhood and girlhood. Usually, it seems a sort of injustice to expose in print the crude thoughts of the unripe mind, the rude efforts of the unpractised hand; yet I venture to give three little poems of my sister Emily's, written in her sixteenth year, because they illustrate a point in her character.

At that period she was sent to school. Her previous life, with the exception of a single half-year, had been passed in the absolute retirement of a village parsonage, amongst the hills bordering Yorkshire and Lancashire. The scenery of these hills is not grand — it is not romantic it is scarcely striking. Long low moors, dark with heath, shut in little valleys, where a stream waters, here and there, a fringe of stunted copse. Mills and scattered cottages chase romance from these valleys; it is only higher up, deep in amongst the ridges of the moors, that Imagination can find rest for the sole of her foot: and even if she finds it there, she must be a solitude-loving raven — no gentle dove. If she demand beauty to inspire her, she must bring it inborn: these moors are too stern to yield any product so delicate. The eye of the gazer must ITSELF brim with a "purple light," intense enough to perpetuate the brief flower-flush of

August on the heather, or the rare sunset-smile of June; out of his heart must well the freshness, that in latter spring and early summer brightens the bracken, nurtures the moss, and cherishes the starry flowers that spangle for a few weeks the pasture of the moor-sheep. Unless that light and freshness are innate and self-sustained, the drear prospect of a Yorkshire moor will be found as barren of poetic as of agricultural interest: where the love of wild nature is strong, the locality will perhaps be clung to with the more passionate constancy, because from the hill-lover's self comes half its charm.

My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her; out of a sullen hollow in a livid hill-side her mind could make an Eden. She found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best loved was — liberty.

Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it, she perished. The change from her own home to a school, and from her own very noiseless, very secluded, but unrestricted and inartificial mode of life, to one of disciplined routine (though under the kindliest auspices), was what she failed in enduring. Her nature proved here too strong for her fortitude. Every morning when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me — I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength, threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die, if she did not go home, and with this conviction obtained her recall. She had only been three months at school; and it was some years before the experiment of sending her from home was again ventured on. After the age of twenty, having meantime studied alone with diligence and perseverance, she went with me to an establishment on the Continent: the same suffering and conflict ensued, heightened by the strong recoil of her upright, heretic and English spirit from the gentle Jesuitry of the foreign and Romish system. Once more she seemed sinking, but this time she rallied through the mere force of resolution: with inward remorse and shame she looked back on her former failure, and resolved to conquer in this second ordeal. She did conquer: but the victory cost her dear. She was never happy till she carried her hard-won knowledge back to the remote English village, the old parsonage-house, and desolate Yorkshire hills. A very few years more, and she looked her last on those hills, and breathed her last in that house, and under the aisle of that obscure village church found her last lowly resting-place. Merciful was the decree that spared her when she was a stranger in a strange land, and guarded her dying bed with kindred love and congenial constancy.

The following pieces were composed at twilight, in the school-room, when the leisure of the evening play-hour brought back in full tide the thoughts of home.

I.

A LITTLE while, a little while,
The weary task is put away,
And I can sing and I can smile,
Alike, while I have holiday.

Where wilt thou go, my harassed heart —
What thought, what scene invites thee now
What spot, or near or far apart,
Has rest for thee, my weary brow?

There is a spot, ‘mid barren hills,
Where winter howls, and driving rain;
But, if the dreary tempest chills,
There is a light that warms again.

The house is old, the trees are bare,
Moonless above bends twilight’s dome;
But what on earth is half so dear —
So longed for — as the hearth of home?

The mute bird sitting on the stone,
The dank moss dripping from the wall,
The thorn-trees gaunt, the walks o’ergrown,
I love them — how I love them all!

Still, as I mused, the naked room,
The alien firelight died away;
And from the midst of cheerless gloom,
I passed to bright, unclouded day.

A little and a lone green lane
That opened on a common wide;
A distant, dreamy, dim blue chain
Of mountains circling every side.

A heaven so clear, an earth so calm,
So sweet, so soft, so hushed an air;
And, deepening still the dream-like charm,
Wild moor-sheep feeding everywhere.

THAT was the scene, I knew it well;
I knew the turfy pathway’s sweep,
That, winding o’er each billowy swell,
Marked out the tracks of wandering sheep.

Could I have lingered but an hour,
It well had paid a week of toil;
But Truth has banished Fancy’s power:
Restraint and heavy task recoil.

Even as I stood with raptured eye,
Absorbed in bliss so deep and dear,

My hour of rest had fleeted by,
And back came labour, bondage, care.

II. THE BLUEBELL.

The Bluebell is the sweetest flower
That waves in summer air:
Its blossoms have the mightiest power
To soothe my spirit's care.

There is a spell in purple heath
Too wildly, sadly dear;
The violet has a fragrant breath,
But fragrance will not cheer,

The trees are bare, the sun is cold,
And seldom, seldom seen;
The heavens have lost their zone of gold,
And earth her robe of green.

And ice upon the glancing stream
Has cast its sombre shade;
And distant hills and valleys seem
In frozen mist arrayed.

The Bluebell cannot charm me now,
The heath has lost its bloom;
The violets in the glen below,
They yield no sweet perfume.

But, though I mourn the sweet Bluebell,
'Tis better far away;
I know how fast my tears would swell
To see it smile to-day.

For, oh! when chill the sunbeams fall
Adown that dreary sky,
And gild yon dank and darkened wall
With transient brilliancy;

How do I weep, how do I pine
For the time of flowers to come,
And turn me from that fading shine,
To mourn the fields of home!

III.

Loud without the wind was roaring
Through th’autumnal sky;
Drenching wet, the cold rain pouring,
Spoke of winter nigh.
All too like that dreary eve,
Did my exiled spirit grieve.
Grieved at first, but grieved not long,
Sweet — how softly sweet! — it came;
Wild words of an ancient song,
Undefined, without a name.

“It was spring, and the skylark was singing:”
Those words they awakened a spell;
They unlocked a deep fountain, whose springing,
Nor absence, nor distance can quell.

In the gloom of a cloudy November
They uttered the music of May;
They kindled the perishing ember
Into fervour that could not decay.

Awaken, o’er all my dear moorland,
West-wind, in thy glory and pride!
Oh! call me from valley and lowland,
To walk by the hill-torrent’s side!

It is swelled with the first snowy weather;
The rocks they are icy and hoar,
And sullenly waves the long heather,
And the fern leaves are sunny no more.

There are no yellow stars on the mountain
The bluebells have long died away
From the brink of the moss-bedded fountain —
From the side of the wintry brae.

But lovelier than corn-fields all waving
In emerald, and vermeil, and gold,
Are the heights where the north-wind is raving,
And the crags where I wandered of old.

It was morning: the bright sun was beaming;
How sweetly it brought back to me
The time when nor labour nor dreaming
Broke the sleep of the happy and free!

But blithely we rose as the dawn-heaven
Was melting to amber and blue,
And swift were the wings to our feet given,
As we traversed the meadows of dew.

For the moors! For the moors, where the short grass
Like velvet beneath us should lie!
For the moors! For the moors, where each high pass
Rose sunny against the clear sky!

For the moors, where the linnet was trilling
Its song on the old granite stone;
Where the lark, the wild sky-lark, was filling
Every breast with delight like its own!

What language can utter the feeling
Which rose, when in exile afar,
On the brow of a lonely hill kneeling,
I saw the brown heath growing there?

It was scattered and stunted, and told me
That soon even that would be gone:
It whispered, "The grim walls enfold me,
I have bloomed in my last summer's sun."

But not the loved music, whose waking
Makes the soul of the Swiss die away,
Has a spell more adored and heartbreaking
Than, for me, in that blighted heath lay.

The spirit which bent 'neath its power,
How it longed — how it burned to be free!
If I could have wept in that hour,
Those tears had been heaven to me.

Well — well; the sad minutes are moving,
Though loaded with trouble and pain;
And some time the loved and the loving
Shall meet on the mountains again!

The following little piece has no title; but in it the Genius of a solitary region seems to address his wandering and wayward votary, and to recall within his influence the proud mind which rebelled at times even against what it most loved.

Shall earth no more inspire thee,
Thou lonely dreamer now?
Since passion may not fire thee,
Shall nature cease to bow?

Thy mind is ever moving,
In regions dark to thee;
Recall its useless roving,
Come back, and dwell with me.

I know my mountain breezes
Enchant and soothe thee still,
I know my sunshine pleases,
Despite thy wayward will.

When day with evening blending,
Sinks from the summer sky,
I've seen thy spirit bending
In fond idolatry.

I've watched thee every hour;
I know my mighty sway:
I know my magic power
To drive thy griefs away.

Few hearts to mortals given,
On earth so wildly pine;
Yet few would ask a heaven
More like this earth than thine.

Then let my winds caress thee
Thy comrade let me be:
Since nought beside can bless thee,
Return — and dwell with me.

Here again is the same mind in converse with a like abstraction. “The Night-Wind,” breathing through an open window, has visited an ear which discerned language in its whispers.

THE NIGHT-WIND.

In summer’s mellow midnight,
A cloudless moon shone through
Our open parlour window,
And rose-trees wet with dew.

I sat in silent musing;
The soft wind waved my hair;
It told me heaven was glorious,
And sleeping earth was fair.

I needed not its breathing
To bring such thoughts to me;
But still it whispered lowly,
How dark the woods will be!

“The thick leaves in my murmur
Are rustling like a dream,
And all their myriad voices
Instinct with spirit seem.”

I said, “Go, gentle singer,
Thy wooing voice is kind:
But do not think its music
Has power to reach my mind.

“Play with the scented flower,
The young tree’s supple bough,
And leave my human feelings
In their own course to flow.”

The wanderer would not heed me;
Its kiss grew warmer still.
“O come!” it sighed so sweetly;
“I’ll win thee ‘gainst thy will.

“Were we not friends from childhood?

Have I not loved thee long?
As long as thou, the solemn night,
Whose silence wakes my song.

"And when thy heart is resting
Beneath the church-aisle stone,
I shall have time for mourning,
And THOU for being alone."

In these stanzas a louder gale has roused the sleeper on her pillow: the wakened soul struggles to blend with the storm by which it is swayed: —

Ay — there it is! it wakes to-night
Deep feelings I thought dead;
Strong in the blast — quick gathering light —
The heart's flame kindles red.

"Now I can tell by thine altered cheek,
And by thine eyes' full gaze,
And by the words thou scarce dost speak,
How wildly fancy plays.

"Yes — I could swear that glorious wind
Has swept the world aside,
Has dashed its memory from thy mind
Like foam-bells from the tide:

"And thou art now a spirit pouring
Thy presence into all:
The thunder of the tempest's roaring,
The whisper of its fall:

"An universal influence,
From thine own influence free;
A principle of life — intense —
Lost to mortality.

"Thus truly, when that breast is cold,
Thy prisoned soul shall rise;
The dungeon mingle with the mould —
The captive with the skies.
Nature's deep being, thine shall hold,
Her spirit all thy spirit fold,
Her breath absorb thy sighs.
Mortal! though soon life's tale is told;
Who once lives, never dies!"

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP.

Love is like the wild rose-briar;
Friendship like the holly-tree.
The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms,
But which will bloom most constantly?

The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring,
Its summer blossoms scent the air;
Yet wait till winter comes again,
And who will call the wild-briar fair?

Then, scorn the silly rose-wreath now,
And deck thee with the holly's sheen,
That, when December blights thy brow,
He still may leave thy garland green.

THE ELDER'S REBUKE.

"Listen! When your hair, like mine,
Takes a tint of silver gray;
When your eyes, with dimmer shine,
Watch life's bubbles float away:

When you, young man, have borne like me
The weary weight of sixty-three,
Then shall penance sore be paid
For those hours so wildly squandered;
And the words that now fall dead
On your ear, be deeply pondered —
Pondered and approved at last:
But their virtue will be past!

"Glorious is the prize of Duty,
Though she be 'a serious power';
Treacherous all the lures of Beauty,
Thorny bud and poisonous flower!

"Mirth is but a mad beguiling
Of the golden-gifted time;
Love — a demon-meteor, wiling
Heedless feet to gulfs of crime.

"Those who follow earthly pleasure,
Heavenly knowledge will not lead;
Wisdom hides from them her treasure,
Virtue bids them evil-speed!

"Vainly may their hearts repenting.
Seek for aid in future years;
Wisdom, scorned, knows no relenting;
Virtue is not won by fears."

Thus spake the ice-blooded elder gray;
The young man scoffed as he turned away,
Turned to the call of a sweet lute's measure,
Waked by the lightsome touch of pleasure:
Had he ne'er met a gentler teacher,

Woe had been wrought by that pitiless preacher.

THE WANDERER FROM THE FOLD.

How few, of all the hearts that loved,
Are grieving for thee now;
And why should mine to-night be moved
With such a sense of woe?

Too often thus, when left alone,
Where none my thoughts can see,
Comes back a word, a passing tone
From thy strange history.

Sometimes I seem to see thee rise,
A glorious child again;
All virtues beaming from thine eyes
That ever honoured men:

Courage and truth, a generous breast
Where sinless sunshine lay:
A being whose very presence blest
Like gladsome summer-day.

O, fairly spread thy early sail,
And fresh, and pure, and free,
Was the first impulse of the gale
Which urged life’s wave for thee!

Why did the pilot, too confiding,
Dream o’er that ocean’s foam,
And trust in Pleasure’s careless guiding
To bring his vessel home?

For well he knew what dangers frowned,
What mists would gather, dim;
What rocks and shelves, and sands lay round
Between his port and him.

The very brightness of the sun
The splendour of the main,
The wind which bore him wildly on
Should not have warned in vain.

An anxious gazer from the shore —
I marked the whitening wave,
And wept above thy fate the more
Because — I could not save.

It recks not now, when all is over:
But yet my heart will be
A mourner still, though friend and lover

Have both forgotten thee!

WARNING AND REPLY.

In the earth — the earth — thou shalt be laid,
A grey stone standing over thee;
Black mould beneath thee spread,
And black mould to cover thee.

“Well — there is rest there,
So fast come thy prophecy;
The time when my sunny hair
Shall with grass roots entwined be.”

But cold — cold is that resting-place,
Shut out from joy and liberty,
And all who loved thy living face
Will shrink from it shudderingly,

“Not so. HERE the world is chill,
And sworn friends fall from me:
But THERE — they will own me still,
And prize my memory.”

Farewell, then, all that love,
All that deep sympathy:
Sleep on: Heaven laughs above,
Earth never misses thee.

Turf-sod and tombstone drear
Part human company;
One heart breaks only — here,
But that heart was worthy thee!

LAST WORDS.

I knew not ‘twas so dire a crime
To say the word, “Adieu;”
But this shall be the only time
My lips or heart shall sue.

That wild hill-side, the winter morn,
The gnarled and ancient tree,
If in your breast they waken scorn,
Shall wake the same in me.

I can forget black eyes and brows,
And lips of falsest charm,
If you forget the sacred vows
Those faithless lips could form.

If hard commands can tame your love,
Or strongest walls can hold,
I would not wish to grieve above
A thing so false and cold.

And there are bosoms bound to mine
With links both tried and strong:
And there are eyes whose lightning shine
Has warmed and blest me long:

Those eyes shall make my only day,
Shall set my spirit free,
And chase the foolish thoughts away
That mourn your memory.

THE LADY TO HER GUITAR.

For him who struck thy foreign string,
I ween this heart has ceased to care;
Then why dost thou such feelings bring
To my sad spirit — old Guitar?

It is as if the warm sunlight
In some deep glen should lingering stay,
When clouds of storm, or shades of night,
Have wrapt the parent orb away.

It is as if the glassy brook
Should image still its willows fair,
Though years ago the woodman's stroke
Laid low in dust their Dryad-hair.

Even so, Guitar, thy magic tone
Hath moved the tear and waked the sigh:
Hath bid the ancient torrent moan,
Although its very source is dry.

THE TWO CHILDREN.

Heavy hangs the rain-drop
From the burdened spray;
Heavy broods the damp mist
On uplands far away.

Heavy looms the dull sky,
Heavy rolls the sea;
And heavy throbs the young heart
Beneath that lonely tree.

Never has a blue streak
Cleft the clouds since morn;
Never has his grim fate
Smiled since he was born.

Frowning on the infant,
Shadowing childhood's joy
Guardian-angel knows not
That melancholy boy.

Day is passing swiftly
Its sad and sombre prime;
Boyhood sad is merging
In sadder manhood's time:

All the flowers are praying
For sun, before they close,
And he prays too — unconscious —
That sunless human rose.

Blossom — that the west-wind
Has never wooed to blow,
Scentless are thy petals,
Thy dew is cold as snow!

Soul — where kindred kindness,
No early promise woke,
Barren is thy beauty,
As weed upon a rock.

Wither — soul and blossom!
You both were vainly given;
Earth reserves no blessing
For the unblest of heaven!

Child of delight, with sun-bright hair,
And sea-blue, sea-deep eyes!
Spirit of bliss! What brings thee here
Beneath these sullen skies?

Thou shouldst live in eternal spring,
Where endless day is never dim;
Why, Seraph, has thine erring wing
Wafted thee down to weep with him?

"Ah! not from heaven am I descended,
Nor do I come to mingle tears;
But sweet is day, though with shadows blended;
And, though clouded, sweet are youthful years.

"I — the image of light and gladness —
Saw and pitied that mournful boy,
And I vowed — if need were — to share his sadness,
And give to him my sunny joy.

"Heavy and dark the night is closing;
Heavy and dark may its biding be:
Better for all from grief reposing,
And better for all who watch like me —

"Watch in love by a fevered pillow,
Cooling the fever with pity's balm
Safe as the petrel on tossing billow,
Safe in mine own soul's golden calm!

"Guardian-angel he lacks no longer;
Evil fortune he need not fear:
Fate is strong, but love is stronger;
And MY love is truer than angel-care."

THE VISIONARY.

Silent is the house: all are laid asleep:
One alone looks out o'er the snow-wreaths deep,
Watching every cloud, dreading every breeze
That whirls the wildering drift, and bends the groaning trees.

Cheerful is the hearth, soft the matted floor;
Not one shivering gust creeps through pane or door;
The little lamp burns straight, its rays shoot strong and far:
I trim it well, to be the wanderer's guiding-star.

Frown, my haughty sire! chide, my angry dame!
Set your slaves to spy; threaten me with shame:
But neither sire nor dame, nor prying serf shall know,
What angel nightly tracks that waste of frozen snow.

What I love shall come like visitant of air,
Safe in secret power from lurking human snare;
What loves me, no word of mine shall e'er betray,
Though for faith unstained my life must forfeit pay

Burn, then, little lamp; glimmer straight and clear —
Hush! a rustling wing stirs, methinks, the air:
He for whom I wait, thus ever comes to me;
Strange Power! I trust thy might; trust thou my constancy.

ENCOURAGEMENT.

I do not weep; I would not weep;
Our mother needs no tears:
Dry thine eyes, too; ‘tis vain to keep
This causeless grief for years.

What though her brow be changed and cold,
Her sweet eyes closed for ever?
What though the stone — the darksome mould
Our mortal bodies sever?

What though her hand smooth ne’er again
Those silken locks of thine?
Nor, through long hours of future pain,
Her kind face o’er thee shine?

Remember still, she is not dead;
She sees us, sister, now;
Laid, where her angel spirit fled,
‘Mid heath and frozen snow.

And from that world of heavenly light
Will she not always bend
To guide us in our lifetime’s night,
And guard us to the end?

Thou knowest she will; and thou mayst mourn
That WE are left below:
But not that she can ne’er return
To share our earthly woe.

STANZAS.

Often rebuked, yet always back returning
To those first feelings that were born with me,
And leaving busy chase of wealth and learning
For idle dreams of things which cannot be:

To-day, I will seek not the shadowy region;
Its unsustaining vastness waxes drear;
And visions rising, legion after legion,
Bring the unreal world too strangely near.

I’ll walk, but not in old heroic traces,
And not in paths of high morality,
And not among the half-distinguished faces,
The clouded forms of long-past history.

I’ll walk where my own nature would be leading:
It vexes me to choose another guide:

Where the grey flocks in ferny glens are feeding;
Where the wild wind blows on the mountain side.

What have those lonely mountains worth revealing?
More glory and more grief than I can tell:
The earth that wakes one human heart to feeling
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell.

The following are the last lines my sister Emily ever wrote: —

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.

O God within my breast,
Almighty, ever-present Deity!
Life — that in me has rest,
As I — undying Life — have power in thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts: unutterably vain;
Worthless as withered weeds,
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thine infinity;
So surely anchored on
The stedfast rock of immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years,
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and man were gone,
And suns and universes ceased to be,
And Thou were left alone,
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
Nor atom that his might could render void:
Thou — THOU art Being and Breath,
And what THOU art may never be destroyed.

SELECTIONS FROM POEMS BY ACTON BELL. (ANNE BRONTË)

In looking over my sister Anne’s papers, I find mournful evidence that religious feeling had been to her but too much like what it was to Cowper; I mean, of course, in a far milder form. Without rendering her a prey to those horrors that defy concealment, it subdued her mood and bearing to a perpetual pensiveness; the pillar of a cloud glided constantly before her eyes; she ever waited at the foot of a secret Sinai, listening in her heart to the voice of a trumpet sounding long and waxing louder. Some, perhaps, would rejoice over these tokens of sincere though sorrowing piety in a deceased relative: I own, to me they seem sad, as if her whole innocent life had been passed under the martyrdom of an unconfessed physical pain: their effect, indeed, would be too distressing, were it not combated by the certain knowledge that in her last moments this tyranny of a too tender conscience was overcome; this pomp of terrors broke up, and passing away, left her dying hour unclouded. Her belief in God did not then bring to her dread, as of a stern Judge, — but hope, as in a Creator and Saviour: and no faltering hope was it, but a sure and stedfast conviction, on which, in the rude passage from Time to Eternity, she threw the weight of her human weakness, and by which she was enabled to bear what was to be borne, patiently — serenely — victoriously.

DESPONDENCY.

I have gone backward in the work;
The labour has not sped;
Drowsy and dark my spirit lies,
Heavy and dull as lead.

How can I rouse my sinking soul
From such a lethargy?
How can I break these iron chains
And set my spirit free?

There have been times when I have mourned!
In anguish o’er the past,

And raised my suppliant hands on high,
While tears fell thick and fast;

And prayed to have my sins forgiven,
With such a fervent zeal,
An earnest grief, a strong desire
As now I cannot feel.

And I have felt so full of love,
So strong in spirit then,
As if my heart would never cool,
Or wander back again.

And yet, alas! how many times
My feet have gone astray!
How oft have I forgot my God!
How greatly fallen away!

My sins increase — my love grows cold,
And Hope within me dies:
Even Faith itself is wavering now;
Oh, how shall I arise?

I cannot weep, but I can pray,
Then let me not despair:
Lord Jesus, save me, lest I die!
Christ, hear my humble prayer!

A PRAYER.

My God (oh, let me call Thee mine,
Weak, wretched sinner though I be),
My trembling soul would fain be Thine;
My feeble faith still clings to Thee.

Not only for the Past I grieve,
The Future fills me with dismay;
Unless Thou hasten to relieve,
Thy suppliant is a castaway.

I cannot say my faith is strong,
I dare not hope my love is great;
But strength and love to Thee belong;
Oh, do not leave me desolate!

I know I owe my all to Thee;
Oh, TAKE the heart I cannot give!
Do Thou my strength — my Saviour be,
And MAKE me to Thy glory live.

IN MEMORY OF A HAPPY DAY IN FEBRUARY.

Blessed be Thou for all the joy
My soul has felt to-day!
Oh, let its memory stay with me,
And never pass away!

I was alone, for those I loved
Were far away from me;
The sun shone on the withered grass,
The wind blew fresh and free.

Was it the smile of early spring
That made my bosom glow?
'Twas sweet; but neither sun nor wind
Could cheer my spirit so.

Was it some feeling of delight
All vague and undefined?
No; 'twas a rapture deep and strong,
Expanding in the mind.

Was it a sanguine view of life,
And all its transient bliss,
A hope of bright prosperity?
Oh, no! it was not this.

It was a glimpse of truth divine
Unto my spirit given,
Illumined by a ray of light
That shone direct from heaven.

I felt there was a God on high,
By whom all things were made;
I saw His wisdom and His power
In all his works displayed.

But most throughout the moral world,
I saw his glory shine;
I saw His wisdom infinite,
His mercy all divine.

Deep secrets of His providence,
In darkness long concealed,
Unto the vision of my soul
Were graciously revealed.

But while I wondered and adored
His Majesty divine,
I did not tremble at His power:
I felt that God was mine;

I knew that my Redeemer lived;
I did not fear to die;
Full sure that I should rise again
To immortality.

I longed to view that bliss divine,
Which eye hath never seen;
Like Moses, I would see His face
Without the veil between.

CONFIDENCE.

Oppressed with sin and woe,
A burdened heart I bear,
Opposed by many a mighty foe;
But I will not despair.

With this polluted heart,
I dare to come to Thee,
Holy and mighty as Thou art,
For Thou wilt pardon me.

I feel that I am weak,
And prone to every sin;
But Thou who giv'st to those who seek,
Wilt give me strength within.

Far as this earth may be
From yonder starry skies;
Remoter still am I from Thee:
Yet Thou wilt not despise.

I need not fear my foes,
I deed not yield to care;
I need not sink beneath my woes,
For Thou wilt answer prayer.

In my Redeemer's name,
I give myself to Thee;
And, all unworthy as I am,
My God will cherish me.

My sister Anne had to taste the cup of life as it is mixed for the class termed "Governesses."

The following are some of the thoughts that now and then solace a governess:—

LINES WRITTEN FROM HOME.

Though bleak these woods, and damp the ground,
With fallen leaves so thickly strewn,
And cold the wind that wanders round
With wild and melancholy moan;

There is a friendly roof I know,
Might shield me from the wintry blast;
There is a fire whose ruddy glow
Will cheer me for my wanderings past.

And so, though still where'er I go
Cold stranger glances meet my eye;
Though, when my spirit sinks in woe,
Unheeded swells the unbidden sigh;

Though solitude, endured too long,
Bids youthful joys too soon decay,
Makes mirth a stranger to my tongue,
And overclouds my noon of day;

When kindly thoughts that would have way
Flow back, discouraged, to my breast,
I know there is, though far away,
A home where heart and soul may rest.

Warm hands are there, that, clasped in mine,
The warmer heart will not belie;
While mirth and truth, and friendship shine
In smiling lip and earnest eye.

The ice that gathers round my heart
May there be thawed; and sweetly, then,
The joys of youth, that now depart,
Will come to cheer my soul again.

Though far I roam, that thought shall be
My hope, my comfort everywhere;
While such a home remains to me,
My heart shall never know despair.

THE NARROW WAY.

Believe not those who say
The upward path is smooth,
Lest thou shouldst stumble in the way,
And faint before the truth.

It is the only road
Unto the realms of joy;

But he who seeks that blest abode
Must all his powers employ.

Bright hopes and pure delight
Upon his course may beam,
And there, amid the sternest heights,
The sweetest flowerets gleam.

On all her breezes borne,
Earth yields no scents like those;
But he that dares not gasp the thorn
Should never crave the rose.

Arm — arm thee for the fight!
Cast useless loads away;
Watch through the darkest hours of night;
Toil through the hottest day.

Crush pride into the dust,
Or thou must needs be slack;
And trample down rebellious lust,
Or it will hold thee back.

Seek not thy honour here;
Waive pleasure and renown;
The world's dread scoff undaunted bear,
And face its deadliest frown.

To labour and to love,
To pardon and endure,
To lift thy heart to God above,
And keep thy conscience pure;

Be this thy constant aim,
Thy hope, thy chief delight;
What matter who should whisper blame
Or who should scorn or slight?

What matter, if thy God approve,
And if, within thy breast,
Thou feel the comfort of His love,
The earnest of His rest?

DOMESTIC PEACE.

Why should such gloomy silence reign,
And why is all the house so drear,
When neither danger, sickness, pain,
Nor death, nor want, have entered here?

We are as many as we were
That other night, when all were gay

And full of hope, and free from care;
Yet is there something gone away.

The moon without, as pure and calm,
Is shining as that night she shone;
But now, to us, she brings no balm,
For something from our hearts is gone.

Something whose absence leaves a void —
A cheerless want in every heart;
Each feels the bliss of all destroyed,
And mourns the change — but each apart.

The fire is burning in the grate
As redly as it used to burn;
But still the hearth is desolate,
Till mirth, and love, and PEACE return.

'Twas PEACE that flowed from heart to heart,
With looks and smiles that spoke of heaven,
And gave us language to impart
The blissful thoughts itself had given.

Domestic peace! best joy of earth,
When shall we all thy value learn?
White angel, to our sorrowing hearth,
Return — oh, graciously return!

THE THREE GUIDES. [First published in FRASER'S MAGAZINE.]

Spirit of Earth! thy hand is chill:
I've felt its icy clasp;
And, shuddering, I remember still
That stony-hearted grasp.
Thine eye bids love and joy depart:
Oh, turn its gaze from me!
It presses down my shrinking heart;
I will not walk with thee!

"Wisdom is mine," I've heard thee say:
"Beneath my searching eye
All mist and darkness melt away,
Phantoms and fables fly.
Before me truth can stand alone,
The naked, solid truth;
And man matured by worth will own,
If I am shunned by youth.

"Firm is my tread, and sure though slow;
My footsteps never slide;

And he that follows me shall know
I am the surest guide.”
Thy boast is vain; but were it true
That thou couldst safely steer
Life’s rough and devious pathway through,
Such guidance I should fear.

How could I bear to walk for aye,
With eyes to earthward prone,
O’er trampled weeds and miry clay,
And sand and flinty stone;
Never the glorious view to greet
Of hill and dale, and sky;
To see that Nature’s charms are sweet,
Or feel that Heaven is nigh?

If in my heart arose a spring,
A gush of thought divine,
At once stagnation thou wouldst bring
With that cold touch of thine.
If, glancing up, I sought to snatch
But one glimpse of the sky,
My baffled gaze would only catch
Thy heartless, cold grey eye.

If to the breezes wandering near,
I listened eagerly,
And deemed an angel’s tongue to hear
That whispered hope to me,
That heavenly music would be drowned
In thy harsh, droning voice;
Nor inward thought, nor sight, nor sound,
Might my sad soul rejoice.

Dull is thine ear, unheard by thee
The still, small voice of Heaven;
Thine eyes are dim and cannot see
The helps that God has given.
There is a bridge o’er every flood
Which thou canst not perceive;
A path through every tangled wood,
But thou wilt not believe.

Striving to make thy way by force,
Toil-spent and bramble-torn,
Thou’lt fell the tree that checks thy course,
And burst through brier and thorn:
And, pausing by the river’s side,
Poor reasoner! thou wilt deem,
By casting pebbles in its tide,
To cross the swelling stream.

Right through the flinty rock thou’lt try
Thy toilsome way to bore,
Regardless of the pathway nigh
That would conduct thee o’er
Not only art thou, then, unkind,
And freezing cold to me,
But unbelieving, deaf, and blind:

I will not walk with thee!

Spirit of Pride! thy wings are strong,
Thine eyes like lightning shine;
Ecstatic joys to thee belong,
And powers almost divine.
But ‘tis a false, destructive blaze
Within those eyes I see;
Turn hence their fascinating gaze;
I will not follow thee.

“Coward and fool!” thou mayst reply,
Walk on the common sod;
Go, trace with timid foot and eye
The steps by others trod.
‘Tis best the beaten path to keep,
The ancient faith to hold;
To pasture with thy fellow-sheep,
And lie within the fold.

“Cling to the earth, poor grovelling worm;
‘Tis not for thee to soar
Against the fury of the storm,
Amid the thunder’s roar!
There’s glory in that daring strife
Unknown, undreamt by thee;
There’s speechless rapture in the life
Of those who follow me.

Yes, I have seen thy votaries oft,
Upheld by thee their guide,
In strength and courage mount aloft
The steepy mountain-side;
I’ve seen them stand against the sky,
And gazing from below,
Beheld thy lightning in their eye
Thy triumph on their brow.

Oh, I have felt what glory then,
What transport must be theirs!
So far above their fellow-men,
Above their toils and cares;
Inhaling Nature’s purest breath,
Her riches round them spread,
The wide expanse of earth beneath,
Heaven’s glories overhead!

But I have seen them helpless, dash’d
Down to a bloody grave,
And still thy ruthless eye has flash’d,
Thy strong hand did not save;
I’ve seen some o’er the mountain’s brow
Sustain’d awhile by thee,
O’er rocks of ice and hills of snow
Bound fearless, wild, and free.

Bold and exultant was their mien,
While thou didst cheer them on;
But evening fell, — and then, I ween,

Their faithless guide was gone.
Alas! how fared thy favourites then, —
Lone, helpless, weary, cold?
Did ever wanderer find again
The path he left of old?

Where is their glory, where the pride
That swelled their hearts before?
Where now the courage that defied
The mightiest tempest's roar?
What shall they do when night grows black,
When angry storms arise?
Who now will lead them to the track
Thou taught'st them to despise?

Spirit of Pride, it needs not this
To make me shun thy wiles,
Renounce thy triumph and thy bliss,
Thy honours and thy smiles!
Bright as thou art, and bold, and strong,
That fierce glance wins not me,
And I abhor thy scoffing tongue —
I will not follow thee!

Spirit of Faith! be thou my guide,
O clasp my hand in thine,
And let me never quit thy side;
Thy comforts are divine!
Earth calls thee blind, misguided one, —
But who can shew like thee
Forgotten things that have been done,
And things that are to be?

Secrets conceal'd from Nature's ken,
Who like thee can declare?
Or who like thee to erring men
God's holy will can bear?
Pride scorns thee for thy lowly mien, —
But who like thee can rise
Above this toilsome, sordid scene,
Beyond the holy skies?

Meek is thine eye and soft thy voice,
But wondrous is thy might,
To make the wretched soul rejoice,
To give the simple light!
And still to all that seek thy way
This magic power is given, —
E'en while their footsteps press the clay,
Their souls ascend to heaven.

Danger surrounds them, — pain and woe
Their portion here must be,
But only they that trust thee know
What comfort dwells with thee;
Strength to sustain their drooping pow'rs,
And vigour to defend, —
Thou pole-star of my darkest hours
Affliction's firmest friend!

Day does not always mark our way,
Night's shadows oft appal,
But lead me, and I cannot stray, —
Hold me, I shall not fall;
Sustain me, I shall never faint,
How rough soe'er may be
My upward road, — nor moan, nor plaint
Shall mar my trust in thee.

Narrow the path by which we go,
And oft it turns aside
From pleasant meads where roses blow,
And peaceful waters glide;
Where flowery turf lies green and soft,
And gentle gales are sweet,
To where dark mountains frown aloft,
Hard rocks distress the feet, —

Deserts beyond lie bleak and bare,
And keen winds round us blow;
But if thy hand conducts me there,
The way is right, I know.
I have no wish to turn away;
My spirit does not quail, —
How can it while I hear thee say,
"Press forward and prevail!"

Even above the tempest's swell
I hear thy voice of love, —
Of hope and peace, I hear thee tell,
And that blest home above;
Through pain and death I can rejoice.
If but thy strength be mine, —
Earth hath no music like thy voice,
Life owns no joy like thine!

Spirit of Faith, I'll go with thee!
Thou, if I hold thee fast,
Wilt guide, defend, and strengthen me,
And bear me home at last;
By thy help all things I can do,
In thy strength all things bear, —
Teach me, for thou art just and true,
Smile on me, thou art fair!

I have given the last memento of my sister Emily; this is the last of my sister Anne: —

I hoped, that with the brave and strong,
My portioned task might lie;
To toil amid the busy throng,
With purpose pure and high.

But God has fixed another part,
And He has fixed it well;
I said so with my bleeding heart,
When first the anguish fell.

Thou, God, hast taken our delight,

Our treasured hope away:
Thou bid’st us now weep through the night
And sorrow through the day.

These weary hours will not be lost,
These days of misery,
These nights of darkness, anguish-tost,
Can I but turn to Thee.

With secret labour to sustain
In humble patience every blow;
To gather fortitude from pain,
And hope and holiness from woe.

Thus let me serve Thee from my heart,
Whate’er may be my written fate:
Whether thus early to depart,
Or yet a while to wait.

If Thou shouldst bring me back to life,
More humbled I should be;
More wise — more strengthened for the strife —
More apt to lean on Thee.

Should death be standing at the gate,
Thus should I keep my vow:
But, Lord! whatever be my fate,
Oh, let me serve Thee now!

These lines written, the desk was closed, the pen laid aside — for ever.

Patrick Brontë's Works

Patrick Brontë, 1860

COTTAGE POEMS

The Reverend Patrick Brontë was born in Drumballyroney, Rathfriland, County Down, Ireland, 17 March 1777. He was an Irish Anglican curate and writer, who spent most of his adult life in England and was the father of the Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, and of Branwell Brontë, his only son. In 1809 he became assistant curate at Wellington in Shropshire and in 1810 he published his first poem *Winter Evening Thoughts* in a local newspaper, followed in 1811 by a collection of moral verse, *Cottage Poems*. The following year he was appointed school examiner at a Wesleyan academy, Woodhouse Grove School, near Guiseley.

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EPISTLE TO THE REV. J — - B — -, WHILST JOURNEYING FOR THE RECOVERY OF HIS HEALTH.

When warm’d with zeal, my rustic Muse
Feels fluttering fain to tell her news,
And paint her simple, lowly views
    With all her art,
And, though in genius but obtuse,
    May touch the heart.
Of palaces and courts of kings
She thinks but little, never sings,
But wildly strikes her uncouth strings
    In some pool cot,
Spreads o’er the poor hen fostering wings,
    And soothes their lot.
Well pleased is she to see them smile,
And uses every honest wile
To mend then hearts, their cares beguile,
    With rhyming story,
And lend them to then God the while,
    And endless glory.
Perchance, my poor neglected Muse
Unfit to harass or amuse,
Escaping praise and loud abuse,
    Unheard, unknown,
May feed the moths and wasting dews,
    As some have done.
Her aims are good, howe’er they end —
Here comes a foe, and there a friend,
These point the dart and those defend,
    Whilst some deride her;
But God will sweetest comforts blend,
    Whate’er betide her.
Thus heaven-supported, forth she goes
Midst flatterers, critics, friends, and foes;
Secure, since He who all things knows
    Approves her aim,
And kindly fans, or fostering blows
    Her sinking flame.

Hence, when she shows her honest face,
And tells her tale with awkward grace,
Importunate to gain a place
Amongst your friends,
To ruthless critics leave her case,
And hail her ends.
To all my heart is kind and true,
But glows with ardent love for you;
Though absent, still you rise in view,
And talk and smile,
Whilst heavenly themes, for ever new,
Our cares beguile.
The happy seasons oft return,
When love our melting hearts did burn,
As we through heavenly themes were borne
With heavenward eyes,
And Faith this empty globe would spurn,
And sail the skies.
Or, when the rising sun shines bright,
Or, setting, leaves the world in night,
Or, dazzling, sheds his noon-day light,
Or, cloudy, hides,
My fancy, in her airy flight,
With you resides.
Where far you wander down the vale,
When balmy scents perfume the gale,
And purling rills and linnets hail
The King of kings,
To muse with you I never fail,
On heavenly things.
Where dashing cataracts astound,
And foaming shake the neighbouring ground,
And spread a hoary mist around,
With you I gaze! —
And think, amid'st the deaf'ning sound,
On wisdom's ways.
Where rocky mountains prop the skies,
And round the smiling landscape lies,
Whilst you look down with tearful eyes
On grovelling man,
My sympathetic fancy flies,
The scene to scan.
From Pisgah's top we then survey
The blissful realms of endless day,

And all the short but narrow way
    That lies between,
Whilst Faith emits a heavenly ray,
    And cheers the scene.
With you I wander on the shore
To hear the angry surges roar,
Whilst foaming through the sands they pour
    With constant roll,
And meditations heavenward soar,
    And charm the soul.
On life’s rough sea we’re tempest-driven
In crazy barks, our canvas riven!
Such is the lot to mortals given
    Where sins resort:
But he whose anchor’s fixed in heaven
    Shall gain the port.
Though swelling waves oft beat him back,
And tempests make him half a wreck,
And passions strong, with dangerous tack,
    Retard his course,
Yet Christ the pilot all will check,
    And quell their force.
So talk we as we thoughtful stray
Along the coast, where dashing spray
With rising mist o’erhangs the day,
    And wets the shore,
And thick the vivid flashes play
    And thunders roar!
Whilst passing o’er this giddy stage,
A pious and a learned sage
Resolved eternal war to wage
    With passions fell;
How oft you view with holy rage
    These imps of hell!
See! with what madd’ning force they sway
The human breast and lead astray,
Down the steep, broad, destructive way,
    The giddy throng;
Till grisly death sweeps all away
    The fiends among!
As when the mad tornado flies,
And sounding mingles earth and skies,
And wild confusion ’fore the eyes
    In terrors dressed.

So passions fell in whirlwinds rise,
    And rend the breast!
But whilst this direful tempest raves,
And many barks are dashed to staves,
I see you tower above the waves
    Like some tall rock,
Whose base the harmless ocean laves
    Without a shock!
’Tis He who calmed the raging sea,
Who bids the waves be still in thee,
And keeps you from all dangers free
    Amidst the wreck;
All sin, and care, and dangers flee
    E’en at His beck.
And on that great and dreadful day
When heaven and earth shall pass away,
Each soul to bliss He will convey,
    That knows His name;
And give the giddy world a prey
    To quenchless flame.
So oft when Sabbaths bade us rest,
And heavenly zeal inspired your breast,
Obedient to the high behest
    You preached to all,
Whilst God your zealous efforts blessed,
    And owned your call.
The very thought my soul inspires,
And kindles bright her latent fires;
My Muse feels heart-warm fond desires,
    And spreads her wing,
And aims to join th’ angelic choirs,
    And sweetly sing.
May rosy Health with speed return,
And all your wonted ardour burn,
And sickness buried in his urn,
    Sleep many years!
So, countless friends who loudly mourn,
    Shall dry their tears!
Your wailing flock will all rejoice
To hear their much-loved shepherd’s voice,
And long will bless the happy choice
    Their hearts have made,
And tuneful mirth will swell the noise
    Through grove and glade.

Your dearer half will join with me
To celebrate the jubilee,
And praise the Great Eternal Three
　　With throbbing joy,
And taste those pleasures pure and free
　　Which never cloy.

THE HAPPY COTTAGERS.

One sunny morn of May,
When dressed in flowery green
The dewy landscape, charmed
With Nature’s fairest scene,
In thoughtful mood
I slowly strayed
O’er hill and dale,
Through bush and glade.
Throughout the cloudless sky
Of light unsullied blue,
The larks their matins raised,
Whilst on my dizzy view,
Like dusky motes,
They winged their way
Till vanished in
The blaze of day.
The linnets sweetly sang
On every fragrant thorn,
Whilst from the tangled wood
The blackbirds hailed the morn;
And through the dew
Ran here and there,
But half afraid,
The startled hare.
The balmy breeze just kissed
The countless dewy gems
Which decked the yielding blade
Or gilt the sturdy stems,
And gently o’er
The charmed sight
A deluge shed
Of trembling light.
A sympathetic glow
Ran through my melting soul,
And calm and sweet delight
O’er all my senses stole;
And through my heart
A grateful flood
Of joy rolled on

To Nature's God.
Time flew unheeded by,
Till wearied and oppressed,
Upon a flowery bank
I laid me down to rest;
Beneath my feet
A purling stream
Ran glittering in
The noontide beam.
I turned me round to view
The lovely rural scene;
And, just at hand, I spied
A cottage on the green;
The street was clean,
The walls were white,
The thatch was neat,
The window bright.
Bold chanticleer, arrayed
In velvet plumage gay,
With many an amorous dame,
Fierce strutted o'er the way;
And motley ducks
Were waddling seen,
And drake with neck
Of glossy green.
The latch I gently raised,
And oped the humble door;
An oaken stool was placed
On the neat sanded floor;
An aged man
Said with a smile,
"You're welcome, sir:
Come rest a while."
His coarse attire was clean,
His manner rude yet kind:
His air, his words, and looks
Showed a contented mind;
Though mean and poor,
Thrice happy he,
As by our tale
You soon shall see.
But don't expect to hear
Of deeds of martial fame,
Or that our peasant mean

Was born of rank or name,
And soon will strut,
As in romance,
A knight and all
In armour glance.
I sing of real life;
All else is empty show —
To those who read a source
Of much unreal woe:
Pollution, too,
Through novel-veins,
Oft fills the mind
With guilty stains.
Our peasant long was bred
Affliction's meagre child,
Yet gratefully resigned,
Loud hymning praises, smiled,
And like a tower
He stood unmoved,
Supported by
The God he loved.
His loving wife long since
Was numbered with the dead
His son, a martial youth,
Had for his country bled;
And now remained
One daughter fair,
And only she,
To soothe his care.
The aged man with tears
Spoke of the lovely maid;
How earnestly she strove
To lend her father aid,
And as he ran
Her praises o'er,
She gently oped
The cottage-door.
With vegetable store
The table soon she spread,
And pressed me to partake;
Whilst blushes rosy-red
Suffused her face —
The old man smiled,
Well pleased to see

His darling child.
With venerable air
He then looked up to God,
A blessing craved on all,
And on our daily food;
Then kindly begged
I would excuse
Their humble fair,
And not refuse. —
The tablecloth, though coarse,
Was of a snowy white,
The vessels, spoons, and knives
Were clean and dazzling bright;
So down we sat
Devoid of care,
Nor envied kings
Their dainty fare.
When nature was refreshed,
And we familiar grown;
The good old man exclaimed,
“Around Jehovah’s throne,
Come, let us all
Our voices raise,
And sing our great
Redeemer’s praise!”
Their artless notes were sweet,
Grace ran through every line;
Their breasts with rapture swelled,
Their looks were all divine:
Delight o’er all
My senses stole,
And heaven’s pure joy
O’erwhelmed my soul.
When we had praised our God,
And knelt around His throne,
The aged man began
In deep and zealous tone,
With hands upraised
And heavenward eye,
And prayed loud
And fervently:
He prayed that for His sake,
Whose guiltless blood was shed
For guilty ruined man,

We might that day be fed
With that pure bread
Which cheers the soul,
And living stream,
Where pleasures roll.
He prayed long for all,
And for his daughter dear,
That she, preserved from ill,
Might lead for many a year
A spotless life
When he’s no more;
Then follow him
To Canaan’s shore.
His faltering voice then fell,
His tears were dropping fast,
And muttering praise to God
For all His mercies past,
He closed his prayer
Midst heavenly joys,
And tasted bliss
Which never cloys.
In sweet discourse we spent
The fast declining day:
We spoke of Jesus’ love,
And of that narrow way
Which leads, through care
And toil below,
To streams where joys
Eternal flow.
The wondrous plan of Grace,
Adoring, we surveyed,
The birth of heavenly skill —
In Love Eternal laid —
Too deep for clear
Angelic ken,
And far beyond
Dim-sighted men.
To tell you all that passed
Would far exceed my power;
Suffice it, then, to say,
Joy winged the passing hour,
Till, ere we knew,
The setting day
Had clad the world

In silver grey.
I kindly took my leave,
And blessed the happy lot
Of those I left behind
Lodged in their humble cot;
And pitied some
In palace walls,
Where pride torments,
And pleasure palls.
The silver moon now shed
A flood of trembling light
On tower, and tree, and stream;
The twinkling stars shone bright,
Nor misty stain
Nor cloud was seen
O’er all the deep
Celestial green.
Mild was the lovely night,
Nor stirred a whispering breeze.
Smooth was the glassy lake,
And still the leafy trees;
No sound in air
Was heard afloat,
Save Philomel’s
Sweet warbling note.
My thoughts were on the wing,
And back my fancy fled
To where contentment dwelt
In the neat humble shed;
To shining courts
From thence it ran,
Where restless pride
Oppresses man.
In fame some search for bliss,
Some seek content in gain,
In search of happiness
Some give the slackened rein
To passions fierce,
And down the stream
Through giddy life,
Of pleasures dream.
These all mistake the way,
As many more have done:
The narrow path of bliss

Through God's Eternal Son
Directly tends;
And only he
Who treads this path
Can happy be.
Who anchors all above
Has still a happy lot,
Though doomed for life to dwell
E'en in a humble cot,
And when he lays
This covering down
He'll wear a bright
Immortal crown.

THE RAINBOW.

The shower is past, and the sky
  O'erhead is both mild and serene,
Save where a few drops from on high,
  Like gems, twinkle over the green:
And glowing fair, in the black north,
  The rainbow o'erarches the cloud;
The sun in his glory comes forth,
  And larks sweetly warble aloud.
That dismally grim northern sky
  Says God in His vengeance once frowned,
And opened His flood-gates on high,
  Till obstinate sinners were drowned:
The lively bright south, and that bow,
  Say all this dread vengeance is o'er;
These colours that smilingly glow
  Say we shall be deluged no more.
Ever blessed be those innocent days,
  Ever sweet their remembrance to me;
When often, in silent amaze,
  Enraptured, I'd gaze upon thee!
Whilst arching adown the black sky
  Thy colours glowed on the green hill,
To catch thee as lightning I'd fly,
  But aye you eluded my skill.
From hill unto hill your gay scene
  You shifted — whilst crying aloud,
I ran, till at length from the green,
  You shifted, at once to the cloud!
So, vain worldly phantoms betray
  The youths who too eager pursue,
When ruined and far led astray,
  Th' illusion escapes from their view.
Those peaceable days knew no care,
  Except what arose from my play,
My favourite lambkin and hare,
  And cabin I built o'er the way.
No cares did I say? Ah! I'm wrong:
  Even childhood from cares is not free:
Far distant I see a grim throng

Shake horrible lances at me!
One day — I remember it still —
For pranks I had played on the clown
Who lived on the neighbouring hill,
My cabin was trod to the ground.
Who ever felt grief such as I
When crashed by this terrible blow?
Not Priam, the monarch of Troy,
When all his proud towers lay low.
And grief upon grief was my lot:
Soon after, my lambkin was slain;
My hare, having strayed from its cot,
Was chased by the hounds o'er the plain.
What countless calamities teem
From memory's page on my view! —
How trifling soever you seem,
Yet once I have wept over you.
Then cease, foolish heart, to repine;
No stage is exempted from care:
If you would true happiness find,
Come follow! and I'll show you where.
But, first, let us take for our guide
The Word which Jehovah has penned;
By this the true path is descried
Which leads to a glorious end.
How narrow this path to our view!
How steep an ascent lies before!
Whilst, foolish fond heart, laid for you
Are dazzling temptations all o'er.
What bye-ways with easy descent
Invite us through pleasures to stray!
Whilst Satan, with hellish intent,
Suggests that we ought to obey.
But trust not the father of lies,
He tempts you with vanity's dream;
His pleasure, when touched, quickly dies,
Like bubbles that dance on the stream.
Look not on the wine when it glows
All ruddy, in vessels of gold;
At last it will sting your repose,
And death at the bottom unfold.
But lo! an unnatural night
Pours suddenly down on the eye;
The sun has withdrawn all his light,

And rolls a black globe o’er the sky!
And hark! what a cry rent the air!
Immortal the terrible sound! —
The rocks split with honible tear,
And fearfully shakes all the ground!
The dead from their slumbers awake,
And, leaving their mouldy domain,
Make poor guilty mortals to quake
As pallid they glide o’er the plain!
Sure, Nature’s own God is oppressed,
And Nature in agony cries; —
The sun in his mourning is dressed,
To tell the sad news through the skies!
Yet surely some victory’s gained,
Important, and novel, and great,
Since Death has his captives unchained,
And widely thrown open his gate!
Yes, victory great as a God
Could gain over hell, death, and sin,
This moment’s achieved by the blood
Of Jesus, our crucified King.
But all the dread conflict is o’er;
Lo! cloud after cloud rolls away;
And heaven, serene as before,
Breaks forth in the splendour of day!
And all the sweet landscape around,
Emerged from the ocean of night,
With groves, woods, and villages crowned,
Astonish and fill with delight!
But see! where that crowd melts away,
Three crosses sad spectacles show!
Our Guide has not led us astray;
Heart! this is the secret you’d know —
Two thieves, and a crucified God
Hangs awfully mangled between!
Whilst fast from His veins spouting blood
Runs, dyeing with purple the green!
Behold! the red flood rolls along,
And forming a bason below,
Is termed in Emanuel’s song
The fount for uncleanness and woe.
Immerged in that precious tide,
The soul quickly loses its stains,
Though deeper than crimson they’re dyed,

And ’scapes from its sorrows and pains.
This fountain is opened for you:
Go, wash, without money or price;
And instantly formed anew,
You’ll lose all your woes in a trice.
Then cease, foolish heart, to repine,
No stage is exempted from care;
If you would true happiness find,
’Tis on Calvary — seek for it there.

WINTER-NIGHT MEDITATIONS.

Rude winter's come, the sky's o'ercast,
The night is cold and loud the blast,
The mingling snow comes driving down,
Fast whitening o'er the flinty ground.
Severe their lots whose crazy sheds
Hang tottering o'er their trembling heads:
Whilst blows through walls and chinky door
The drifting snow across the floor,
Where blinking embers scarcely glow,
And rushlight only serves to show
What well may move the deepest sigh,
And force a tear from pity's eye.
You there may see a meagre pair,
Worn out with labour, grief, and care:
Whose naked babes, in hungry mood,
Complain of cold and cry for food;
Whilst tears bedew the mother's cheek,
And sighs the father's grief bespeak;
For fire or raiment, bed or board,
Their dreary shed cannot afford.
   Will no kind hand confer relief,
And wipe away the tear of grief?
A little boon it well might spare
Would kindle joy, dispel their care,
Abate the rigour of the night
And warm each heart — achievement bright.
Yea, brighter far than such as grace
The annals of a princely race,
Where kings bestow a large domain
But to receive as much again,
Or e'en corrupt the purest laws,
Or fan the breath of vain applause.
   Peace to the man who stoops his head
To enter the most wretched shed:
Who, with his condescending smiles,
Poor diffidence and awe beguiles:
Till all encouraged, soon disclose
The different causes of their woes —
The moving tale dissolves his heart:

He liberally bestows a part
Of God's donation. From above
Approving Heaven, in smiles of love,
Looks on, and through the shining skies
The great Recording Angel flies
The doors of mercy to unfold,
And write the deed in lines of gold;
There, if a fruit of Faith's fair tree,
To shine throughout eternity,
In honour of that Sovereign dread,
Who had no place to lay His head,
Yet opened wide sweet Mercy's door
To all the desolate and poor,
Who, stung with guilt and hard oppressed,
Groaned to be with Him, and at rest.
   Now, pent within the city wall,
They throng to theatre and hall,
Where gesture, look, and words conspire,
To stain the mind, the passions fire;
Whence sin-polluted streams abound,
That whelm the country all around.
Ah! Modesty, should you be here,
Close up the eye and stop the ear;
Oppose your fan, nor peep beneath,
And blushing shun their tainted breath.
   Here every rake exerts his art
T' ensnare the unsuspecting heart.
The prostitute, with faithless smiles,
Remorseless plays her tricks and wiles.
Her gesture bold and ogling eye,
Obtrusive speech and pert reply,
And brazen front and stubborn tone,
Show all her native virtue's flown.
By her the thoughtless youth is ta'en,
Impoverished, disgraced, or slain:
Through her the marriage vows are broke,
And Hymen proves a galling yoke.
Diseases come, destruction's dealt,
Where'er her poisonous breath is felt;
Whilst she, poor wretch, dies in the flame
That runs through her polluted frame.
   Once she was gentle, fair, and kind,
To no seducing schemes inclined,
Would blush to hear a smutty tale,

Nor ever strolled o’er hill or dale,
But lived a sweet domestic maid,
To lend her aged parents aid —
And oft they gazed and oft they smiled
On this their loved and only child:
They thought they might in her be blest,
And she would see them laid at rest.
  A blithesome youth of courtly mien
Oft called to see this rural queen:
His oily tongue and wily art
Soon gained Maria’s yielding heart.
The aged pair, too, liked the youth,
And thought him naught but love and truth.
The village feast at length is come;
Maria by the youth’s undone:
The youth is gone — so is her fame;
And with it all her sense of shame:
And now she practises the art
Which snared her unsuspecting heart;
And vice, with a progressive sway,
More hardened makes her every day.
Averse to good and prone to ill,
And dexterous in seducing skill;
To look, as if her eyes would melt:
T’ affect a love she never felt;
To half suppress the rising sigh;
Mechanically to weep and cry;
To vow eternal truth, and then
To break her vow, and vow again;
Her ways are darkness, death, and hell:
Remorse and shame and passions fell,
And short-lived joy, with endless pain,
Pursues her in a gloomy train.
  O Britain fair, thou queen of isles!
Nor hostile arms nor hostile wiles
Could ever shake thy solid throne
But for thy sins. Thy sins alone
Can make thee stoop thy royal head,
And lay thee prostrate with the dead.
In vain colossal England mows,
With ponderous strength, the yielding foes;
  In vain fair Scotia, by her side,
With courage flushed and Highland pride,
Whirls her keen blade with horrid whistle

And lops off heads like tops of thistle;
In vain brave Erin, famed afar,
The flaming thunderbolt of war,
Profuse of life, through blood does wade,
To lend her sister kingdom aid:
Our conquering thunders vainly roar
Terrific round the Gallic shore;
Profoundest statesmen vainly scheme —
’Tis all a vain, delusive dream,
If treacherously within our breast
We foster sin, the deadly pest.
   Where Sin abounds Religion dies,
And Virtue seeks her native skies;
Chaste Conscience hides for very shame,
And Honour’s but an empty name.
Then, like a flood, with fearful din,
A gloomy host comes pouring in.
First Bribery, with her golden shield,
Leads smooth Corruption o’er the field;
Dissension wild, with brandished spear,
And Anarchy bring up the rear:
Whilst Care and Sorrow, Grief and Pain
Run howling o’er the bloody plain.
O Thou, whose power resistless fills
The boundless whole, avert those ills
We richly merit: purge away
The sins which on our vitals prey;
Protect, with Thine almighty shield
Our conquering arms by flood and field,
Wheel round the time when Peace shall smile
O’er Britain’s highly-favoured Isle;
When all shall loud hosannas sing
To Thee, the great Eternal King!
   But hark! the bleak, loud whistling wind!
Its crushing blast recalls to mind
The dangers of the troubled deep;
Where, with a fierce and thundering sweep,
The winds in wild distraction rave,
And push along the mountain wave
With dreadful swell and hideous curl!
Whilst hung aloft in giddy whirl,
Or drop beneath the ocean’s bed,
The leaky bark without a shred
Of rigging sweeps through dangers dread.

The flaring beacon points the way,
And fast the pumps loud clanking play:
It ’vails not — hark! with crashing shock
She’s shivered ’gainst the solid rock,
Or by the fierce, incessant waves
Is beaten to a thousand staves;
Or bilging at her crazy side,
Admits the thundering hostile tide,
And down she sinks! — triumphant rave
The winds, and close her wat’ry grave!
   The merchant’s care and toil are vain,
His hopes He buried in the main —
In vain the mother’s tearful eye
Looks for its sole remaining joy —
In vain fair Susan walks the shore,
And sighs for him she’ll see no more —
For deep they lie in ocean’s womb,
And fester in a wat’ry tomb.
   Now, from the frothy, thundering main,
My meditations seek the plain,
Where, with a swift fantastic flight,
They scour the regions of the night,
Free as the winds that wildly blow
O’er hill and dale the blinding snow,
Or, through the woods, their frolics play,
And whirling, sweep the dusty way,
When summer shines with burning glare,
And sportive breezes skim the air,
And Ocean’s glassy breast is fanned
To softest curl by Zephyr bland.
   But Summer’s gone, and Winter’s here —
With iron sceptre rules the year —
Beneath this dark inclement sky
How many wanderers faint and die!
One, flouncing o’er the treacherous snow,
Sinks in the pit that yawns below!
Another numbed, with panting lift
Inhales the suffocating drift!
And creeping cold, with stiffening force,
Extends a third, a pallid corse!
   Thus death, in varied dreadful form,
Triumphant rides along the storm:
With shocking scenes assails the sight,
And makes more sad the dismal night!

How blest the man, whose lot is free
From such distress and misery;
Who, sitting by his blazing fire,
Is closely wrapt in warm attire;
Whose sparkling glasses blush with wine
Of mirthful might and flavour fine;
Whose house, compact and strong, defies
The rigour of the angry skies!
The ruffling winds may blow their last,
And snows come driving on the blast;
And frosts their icy morsels fling,
But all within is mild as spring!
How blest is he! — blest did I say?
E'en sorrow here oft finds its way.
The senses numbed by frequent use,
Of criminal, absurd abuse
Of heaven's blessings, listless grow,
And life is but a dream of woe.
Oft fostered on the lap of ease,
Grow racking pain and foul disease,
And nervous whims, a ghastly train,
Inflicting more than corp'ral pain:
Oft gold and shining pedigree
Prove only splendid misery.
The king who sits upon his throne,
And calls the kneeling world his own,
Has oft of cares a greater load
Than he who feels his iron rod.
No state is free from care and pain
Where fiery passions get the rein,
Or soft indulgence, joined with ease,
Begets a thousand ills to tease:
Where fair Religion, heavenly maid,
Has slighted still her offered aid.
Her matchless power the will subdues,
And gives the judgment clearer views:
Denies no source of real pleasure,
And yields us blessings out of measure;
Our prospect brightens, proves our stay,
December turns to smiling May;
Conveys us to that peaceful shore,
By raging billows lashed no more,
Where endless happiness remains,
And one eternal summer reigns.

VERSES SENT TO A LADY ON HER BIRTHDAY.

The joyous day illumes the sky
That bids each care and sorrow fly
    To shades of endless night:
E'en frozen age, thawed in the fires
Of social mirth, feels young desires,
    And tastes of fresh delight.
In thoughtful mood your parents dear,
Whilst joy smiles through the starting tear,
    Give approbation due.
As each drinks deep in mirthful wine
Your rosy health, and looks benign
    Are sent to heaven for you.
But let me whisper, lovely fair,
This joy may soon give place to care,
    And sorrow cloud this day;
Full soon your eyes of sparkling blue,
And velvet lips of scarlet hue,
    Discoloured, may decay.
As bloody drops on virgin snows,
So vies the lily with the rose
    Full on your dimpled cheek;
But ah! the worm in lazy coil
May soon prey on this putrid spoil,
    Or leap in loathsome freak.
Fond wooers come with flattering tale,
And load with sighs the passing gale,
    And love-distracted rave:
But hark, fair maid! whate'er they say,
You're but a breathing mass of clay,
    Fast ripening for the grave.
Behold how thievish Time has been!
Full eighteen summers you have seen,
    And yet they seem a day?
Whole years, collected in Time's glass,
In silent lapse how soon they pass,
    And steal your life away!
The flying hour none can arrest,
Nor yet recall one moment past,

And what more dread must seem
Is, that to-morrow's not your own —
Then haste! and ere your life has flown
The subtle hours redeem.
Attend with care to what I sing:
Know time is ever on the wing;
None can its flight detain;
Then, like a pilgrim passing by,
Take home this hint, as time does fly,
"All earthly things are vain."
Let nothing here elate your breast,
Nor, for one moment, break your rest,
In heavenly wisdom grow:
Still keep your anchor fixed above,
Where Jesus reigns in boundless love,
And streams of pleasure flow.
So shall your life glide smoothly by
Without a tear, without a sigh,
And purest joys will crown
Each birthday, as the year revolves,
Till this clay tenement dissolves,
And leaves the soul unbound.
Then shall you land on Canaan's shore,
Where time and chance shall be no more,
And joy eternal reigns;
There, mixing with the seraphs bright,
And dressed in robes of heavenly light,
You'll raise angelic strains.

THE IRISH CABIN.

Should poverty, modest and clean,
  E’er please, when presented to view,
Should cabin on brown heath, or green,
  Disclose aught engaging to you,
Should Erin’s wild harp soothe the ear
  When touched by such fingers as mine,
Then kindly attentive draw near,
  And candidly ponder each line.
One day, when December’s keen breath
  Arrested the sweet running rill,
And Nature seemed frozen in death,
  I thoughtfully strolled o’er the hill:
The mustering clouds wore a frown,
  The mountains were covered with snow,
And Winter his mantle of brown
  Had spread o’er the landscape below.
Thick rattling the footsteps were heard
  Of peasants far down in the vale;
From lakes, bogs, and marshes debarred,
  The wild-fowl, aloft on the gale,
Loud gabbling and screaming were borne,
  Whilst thundering guns hailed the day,
And hares sought the thicket forlorn,
  Or, wounded, ran over the way.
No music was heard in the grove,
  The blackbird and linnet and thrush,
And goldfinch and sweet cooing dove,
  Sat pensively mute in the bush:
The leaves that once wove a green shade
  Lay withered in heaps on the ground:
Chill Winter through grove, wood, and glade
  Spread sad desolation around.
But now the keen north wind ’gan whistle,
  And gusty, swept over the sky;
Each hair, frozen, stood like a bristle,
  And night thickened fast on the eye.
In swift-wheeling eddies the snow
  Fell, mingling and drifting amain,
And soon all distinction laid low,

As whitening it covered the plain.
A light its pale ray faintly shot
(The snow-flakes its splendour had shorn),
It came from a neighbouring cot,
Some called it the Cabin of Mourne:
A neat Irish Cabin, snow-proof,
Well thatched, had a good earthen floor,
One chimney in midst of the roof,
One window, and one latched door.
Escaped from the pitiless storm,
I entered the humble retreat;
Compact was the building, and warm,
Its furniture simple and neat.
And now, gentle reader, approve
The ardour that glowed in each breast,
As kindly our cottagers strove
To cherish and welcome their guest.
The dame nimbly rose from her wheel,
And brushed off the powdery snow:
Her daughter, forsaking the reel,
Ran briskly the cinders to blow:
The children, who sat on the hearth,
Leaped up without murmur or frown,
An oaken stool quickly brought forth,
And smilingly bade me sit down.
Whilst grateful sensations of joy
O’er all my fond bosom were poured,
Resumed was each former employ,
And gay thrifty order restored:
The blaze flickered up to the crook,
The reel clicked again by the door,
The dame turned her wheel in the nook,
And frisked the sweet babes round the floor.
Released from the toils of the barn,
His thrifty, blithe wife hailed the sire,
And hanging his flail by her yarn,
He drew up his stool to the fire;
Then smoothing his brow with his hand,
As if he would sweep away sorrow,
He says, “Let us keep God’s command,
And never take thought for the morrow.”
Brisk turning him round with a smile,
And freedom unblended by art,
And affable manners and style,

Though simple, that reached to my heart,
He said (whilst with ardour he glowed),
Kind sir, we are poor, yet we're blest:
We're all in the steep, narrow road
That leads to the city of rest.
"'Tis true, I must toil all the day,
And oft suffer cold through the night,
Though silvered all over with grey,
And dimly declining my sight:
And sometimes our raiment and food
Are scanty — ah! scanty indeed:
But all work together for good,
So in my blest Bible I read.
"I also have seen in that Book
(Perhaps you can tell me the place?)
How God on poor sinners does look
In pity, and gives them His grace —
Yea, gives them His grace in vast store,
Sufficient to help them quite through,
Though troubles should whelm them all o'er;
And sure this sweet promise is true!
"Yes, true as the snow blows without,
And winds whistle keen through the air,
His grace can remove every doubt,
And chase the black gloom of despair:
It often supports my weak mind,
And wipes the salt tear from my eye,
It tells me that Jesus is kind,
And died for such sinners as I.
"I once rolled in wealth, without grace,
But happiness ne'er was my lot,
Till Christ freely pitied my case,
And now I am blest in a cot:
Well knowing things earthly are vain,
Their troubles ne'er puzzle my head;
Convinced that to die will be gain,
I look on the grave as my bed.
"I look on the grave as my bed,
Where I'll sleep the swift hours away,
Till waked from their slumbers, the dead
Shall rise, never more to decay:
Then I, with my children and wife,
Shall get a bright palace above,
And endlessly clothed with life,

Shall dwell in the Eden of love.
“Then know, gentle stranger, though poor,
We’re cheerful, contented, and blest;
Though princes should pass by our door
King Jesus is ever our guest;
We feel, and we taste, and we see
The pleasures which flow from our Lord,
And fearless, and wealthy, and free,
We live on the joys of His word.”
He ceased: and a big tear of joy
Rolled glittering down to the ground;
Whilst all, having dropped their employ,
Were buried in silence profound;
A sweet, solemn pause long ensued —
Each bosom o’erflowed with delight;
Then heavenly converse renewed,
Beguiled the dull season of night.
We talked of the rough narrow way
That leads to the kingdom of rest;
On Pisgah we stood to survey
The King in His holiness dressed —
Even Jesus, the crucified King,
Whose blood in rich crimson does flow,
Clean washing the crimson of sin,
And rinsing it whiter that snow.
But later and later it’s wearing,
And supper they cheerfully bring,
The mealy potato and herring,
And water just fresh from the spring.
They press, and they smile: we sit down;
First praying the Father of Love
Our table with blessings to crown,
And feed us with bread from above.
The wealthy and bloated may sneer,
And sicken o’er luxury’s dishes,
And loathe the poor cottager’s cheer,
And melt in the heat of their wishes:
But luxury’s sons are unblest,
A prey to each giddy desire,
And hence, where they never know rest,
They sink in unquenchable fire.
Not so, the poor cottager’s lot,
Who travels the Zion-ward road,
He’s blest in his neat little cot,

He’s rich in the favour of God;
By faith he surmounts every wave
That rolls on this sea of distress:
Triumphant, he dives in the grave,
To rise on the ocean of bliss.
Now supper is o’er and we raise
Our prayers to the Father of light
And joyfully hymning His praise,
We lovingly bid a good-night. —
The ground’s white, the sky’s cloudless blue,
The breeze flutters keen through the air,
The stars twinkle bright on my view,
As I to my mansion repair.
All peace, my dear cottage, be thine!
Nor think that I’ll treat you with scorn;
Whoever reads verses of mine
Shall hear of the Cabin of Mourne;
And had I but musical strains,
Though humble and mean in your station
You should smile whilst the world remains,
The pride of the fair Irish Nation.
In friendship, fair Erin, you glow;
Offended, you quickly forgive;
Your courage is known to each foe,
Yet foes on your bounty might live.
Some faults you, however, must own;
Dissensions, impetuous zeal,
And wild prodigality, grown
Too big for your income and weal.
Ah! Erin, if you would be great,
And happy, and wealthy, and wise,
And trample your sorrows, elate,
Contend for our cottager’s prize;
So error and vice shall decay,
And concord add bliss to renown,
And you shall gleam brighter than day,
The gem of the fair British Crown.

TO THE REV. J. GILPIN, ON HIS IMPROVED EDITION OF THE “PILGRIM’S PROGRESS.”

When, Reverend Sir, your good design,
To clothe our Pilgrim gravely fine,
And give him gentler mien and gait,
First reached my ear, his doubtful fate
With dread suspense my mind oppressed,
Awoke my fears, and broke my rest.
Yet, still, had England said, “You’re free,
Choose whom you will,” dear sir, to thee,
For dress beseeming modest worth,
I would have led our pilgrim forth.
But when I viewed him o’er and o’er,
And scrutinized the weeds he wore,
And marked his mien and marked his gait,
And saw him trample sin, elate,
And heard him speak, though coarse and plain,
His mighty truths in nervous strain,
I could not gain my own consent
To your acknowledged good intent.
I had my fears, lest honest John,
When he beheld his polished son
(If saints ought earthly care to know),
Would take him for some Bond Street beau,
Or for that thing — it wants a name —
Devoid of truth, of sense and shame,
Which smooths its chin and licks its lip,
And mounts the pulpit with a skip,
Then turning round its pretty face,
To smite each fair one in the place,
Relaxes half to vacant smile,
And aims with trope and polished style,
And lisp affected, to pourtray
Its silly self in colours gay —
Its fusty moral stuff t’ unload,
And preach itself, and not its God.
Thus, wishing, doubting, trembling led,
I oped your book, your Pilgrim read.

As rising Phœbus lights the skies,
And fading night before him flies,
Till darkness to his cave is hurled
And golden day has gilt the world,
Nor vapour, cloud, nor mist is seen
To sully all the pure serene:
So, as I read each modest line,
Increasing light began to shine,
My cloudy fears and doubts gave way,
Till all around shone Heaven’s own day.
And when I closed the book, thought I,
Should Bunyan leave his throne on high;
He’d own the kindness you have done
To Christian, his orphan son:
And smiling as once Eden smiled,
Would thus address his holy child: —
“My son, ere I removed from hence,
I spared nor labour nor expense
To gain for you the heavenly prize,
And teach you to make others wise.
But still, though inward worth was thine,
You lay a diamond in the mine:
You wanted outward polish bright
To show your pure intrinsic light.
Some knew your worth, and seized the prize,
And now are thronèd in the skies:
Whilst others swilled with folly’s wine,
But trod the pearl like the swine,
In ignorance sunk in their grave,
And thence, where burning oceans lave.
Now polished bright, your native flame
And inward worth are still the same;
A flaming diamond still you glow,
In brighter hues: then cheery go —
More suited by a skilful hand
To do your father’s high command:
Fit ornament for sage or clown,
Or beggar’s rags, or kingly crown.

THE COTTAGE MAID.

Aloft on the brow of a mountain,
And hard by a clear running fountain,
In neat little cot,
Content with her lot,
Retired, there lives a sweet maiden.
Her father is dead, and her brother —
And now she alone with her mother
Will spin on her wheel,
And sew, knit, and reel,
And cheerfully work for their living.
To gossip she never will roam,
She loves, and she stays at, her home,
Unless when a neighbour
In sickness does labour,
Then, kindly, she pays her a visit.
With Bible she stands by her bed,
And when some blest passage is read,
In prayer and in praises
Her sweet voice she raises
To Him who for sinners once died.
Well versed in her Bible is she,
Her language is artless and free,
Imparting pure joy,
That never can cloy,
And smoothing the pillow of death.
To novels and plays not inclined,
Nor aught that can sully her mind;
Temptations may shower, —
Unmoved as a tower,
She quenches the fiery arrows.
She dresses as plain as the lily
That modestly glows in the valley,
And never will go
To play, dance or show —
She calls them the engines of Satan.
With tears in her eyes she oft says,
“Away with your dances and plays!
The ills that perplex
The half of our sex

Are owing to you, Satan's engines."
Released from her daily employment,
Intent upon solid enjoyment,
Her time she won't idle,
But reads in her Bible,
And books that divinely enlighten.
Whilst others at wake, dance, and play
Chide life's restless moments away,
And ruin their souls —
In pleasure she rolls,
The foretaste of heavenly joys.
Her soul is refined by her Lord,
She shines in the truths of His Word:
Each Christian grace
Shines full in her face,
And heightens the glow of her charms.
One day as I passed o'er the mountain,
She sung by a clear crystal fountain
(Nor knew I was near);
Her notes charmed my ear,
As thus she melodiously chanted:
"Oh! when shall we see our dear Jesus?
His presence from poverty frees us, —
And bright from His face
The rays of His grace
Beam, purging transgression for ever.
"Oh! when shall we see our dear Jesus?
His presence from sorrow will ease us,
When up to the sky
With angels we fly —
Then farewell all sorrow for ever!
"Come quickly! come quickly, Lord Jesus!
Thy presence alone can appease us;
For aye on Thy breast
Believers shall rest,
Where blest they shall praise Thee for ever."
Oh, had you but seen this sweet maiden!
She smiled like the flowers of Eden,
And raised to the skies
Her fond beaming eyes,
And sighed to be with her Redeemer
While thus she stood heavenly musing,
And sometimes her Bible perusing,
Came over the way,

All silvered with grey,
A crippled and aged poor woman.
Her visage was sallow and thin,
Through her rags peeped her sunburnt skin;
With sorrow oppressed,
She held to her breast
An infant, all pallid with hunger.
Half breathless by climbing the mountain,
She tremblingly stood by the fountain,
And begged that our maid
Would lend her some aid,
And pity both her and her infant.
Our maiden had nought but her earning —
Her heart with soft pity was yearning;
She drooped like a lily
Bedewed in the valley,
Whilst tears fell in pearly showers.
With air unaffected and winning,
To cover them, of her own spinning
Her apron of blue,
Though handsome and new,
She gave, and led them to her cottage.
All peace, my dear maiden, be thine:
Your manners and looks are divine;
On earth you shall rest,
In heaven be blest,
And shine like an angel for ever.
More blest than the king on the throne
Is he who shall call you his own!
The ruby, with you
Compared, fades to blue —
Its price is but dust on the balance.
Religion makes beauty enchanting,
And even where beauty is wanting,
The temper and mind,
Religion-refined,
Will shine through the veil with sweet lustre.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

The sun shines bright, the morning's fair,
The gossamers float on the air,
The dew-gems twinkle in the glare,
    The spider's loom
Is closely plied, with artful care,
    Even in my room.
See how she moves in zigzag line,
And draws along her silken twine,
Too soft for touch, for sight too fine,
    Nicely cementing:
And makes her polished drapery shine,
    The edge indenting.
Her silken ware is gaily spread,
And now she weaves herself a bed,
Where, hiding all but just her head,
    She watching lies
For moths or gnats, entangled spread,
    Or buzzing flies.
You cunning pest! why, forward, dare
So near to lay your bloody snare!
But you to kingly courts repair
    With fell design,
And spread with kindred courtiers there
    Entangling twine.
Ah, silly fly! will you advance?
I see you in the sunbeam dance:
Attracted by the silken glance
    In that dread loom;
Or blindly led, by fatal chance,
    To meet your doom.
Ah! think not, 'tis the velvet flue
Of hare, or rabbit, tempts your view;
Or silken threads of dazzling hue,
    To ease your wing,
The foaming savage, couched for you,
    Is on the spring.
Entangled! freed! — and yet again
You touch! 'tis o'er — that plaintive strain,
That mournful buzz, that struggle vain,

Proclaim your doom:
Up to the murderous den you’re ta’en,
Your bloody tomb!
So thoughtless youths will trifling play
With dangers on their giddy way,
Or madly err in open day
Through passions fell,
And fall, though warned oft, a prey
To death and hell!
But hark! the fluttering leafy trees
Proclaim the gently swelling breeze,
Whilst through my window, by degrees,
Its breathings play:
The spider’s web, all tattered flees,
Like thought, away.
Thus worldlings lean on broken props,
And idly weave their cobweb-hopes,
And hang o’er hell by spider’s ropes,
Whilst sins enthral;
Affliction blows — their joy elopes —
And down they fall!

EPISTLE TO A YOUNG CLERGYMAN.

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” — 2 Timothy ii. 15.

My youthful brother, oft I long
To write to you in prose or song;
With no pretence to judgment strong,
  But warm affection —
May truest friendship rivet long
  Our close connection!
With deference, what I impart
Receive with humble grateful heart,
Nor proudly from my counsel start,
  I only lend it —
A friend ne’er aims a poisoned dart —
  He wounds, to mend it.
A graduate you’ve just been made,
And lately passed the Mitred Head;
I trust, by the Blest Spirit, led,
  And Shepherd’s care:
And not a wolf, in sheepskin clad,
  As numbers are.
The greatest office you sustain
For love of souls, and not of gain:
Through your neglect should one be slain,
  The Scriptures say,
Your careless hands his blood will stain,
  On the Last Day.
But if pure truths, like virgin snows,
You loud proclaim, to friends and foes,
Consoling these, deterring those —
  To heaven you’ll fly;
Though stubborn sinners still oppose,
  And graceless die.
Divide the word of truth aright,
Show Jesus in a saving light,
Proclaim to all they’re dead outright
  Till Grace restore them:
The great Redeemer, full in sight,
  Keep still before them.
Dare not, like some, to mince the matter —

Nor dazzling tropes and figures scatter,
Nor coarsely speak nor basely flatter,
Nor grovelling go:
But let plain truths, as Life's pure water,
Pellucid flow.
The sinner level with the dead,
The Lamb exalt, the Church's Head,
His holiness, adoring spread,
With godly zeal:
Enforce, though sinless, how He bled
For sinners' weal.
Pourtray how God in thunder spoke
His fiery Law, whilst curling smoke,
In terror fierce, from Sinai broke,
Midst raging flame!
Then Jesu's milder blood invoke,
And preach His name.
Remember still to fear the Lord,
To live, as well as preach, His word,
And wield the Gospel's two-edged sword,
Though dangers lower —
Example only can afford
To precept power.
And dress nor slovenly nor gay,
Nor sternly act; nor trifling play;
Still keep the golden middle way
Whate'er betide you;
And ne'er through giddy pleasures stray,
Though fools deride you.
As wily serpent ever prove,
Yet harmless as the turtle-dove,
Still winning souls by guileful love
And deep invention —
So once the great Apostle strove
With good intention.
And inly to thyself take heed,
Oft prove your heart, its pages read, —
Self-knowledge will, in time of need,
Your wants supply;
Who knows himself, from dangers freed,
Where'er he lie.
So God will own the labours done,
Approving see His honoured Son,
And honoured Law; and numbers won

Of souls immortal,
Through grace, will onward conquering run
To heaven’s bright portal.
And on that last and greatest day,
When heaven and earth shall pass away,
A perfect band, in bright array,
Will form your crown,
Your joys triumphant wide display,
And sorrows drown.
And now farewell, my youthful friend —
Excuse these lines, in candour penned;
To me as freely counsel lend,
With zeal as fervent —
For you will pray, till life does end,
Your humble servant.

EPISTLE TO THE LABOURING POOR.

All you who turn the sturdy soil,
Or ply the loom with daily toil,
And lowly on through life turmoil
  For scanty fare,
Attend, and gather richest spoil
  To soothe your care.
I write with tender, feeling heart —
Then kindly read what I impart;
'Tis freely penned, devoid of art,
  In homely style,
'Tis meant to ward off Satan's dart,
  And show his guile.
I write to ope your sin-closed eyes,
And make you great, and rich, and wise,
And give you peace when trials rise,
  And sorrows gloom;
I write to fit you for the skies
  On Day of Doom.
What, though you dwell in lowly cot,
And share through life a humble lot?
Some thousands wealth and fame have got,
  Yet know no rest:
They build, pull down, and scheme and plot,
  And die unblest.
Your mean attire and scanty fare
Are, doubtless, springs of bitter care —
Expose you blushing, trembling, bare,
  To haughty scorn;
Yet murmur not in black despair,
  Nor weep forlorn.
You see that lordling glittering ride
In all the pomp of wealth and pride,
With lady lolling at his side,
  And train attendant:
'Tis all, when felt and fairly tried,
  But care resplendent.
As riches grow his wants increase,
His passions burn and gnaw his peace,
Ambition foams like raging seas

And breaks the rein,
Excess produces pale disease
And racking pain.
Compared with him thrice happy you;
Though small your stock your wants are few —
Each wild desire your toils subdue,
And sweeten rest,
Remove all fancied ills from view,
And calm your breast.
Your labours give the coarsest food
A relish sweet and cleanse the blood,
Make cheerful health in spring-tide flood
Incessant boil,
And seldom restless thoughts obtrude
On daily toil.
Those relish least who proudly own
Rich groves and parks familiar grown;
The gazing stranger passing on
Enjoys them most —
The toy possessed — the pleasure's flown,
For ever lost.
Then grateful let each murmur die,
And joyous wipe the tearful eye:
Erect a palace in the sky —
Be rich in grace:
Loathe this vain world, and longing sigh
For Jesu's face.
Both rich and poor, who serve not God,
But live in sin, averse to good,
Rejecting Christ's atoning blood,
Midst hellish shoals,
Shall welter in that fiery flood,
Which hissing rolls.
But all who worship God aright,
In Christ His Son and image bright,
With minds illumed by Gospel light,
Shall find the way
That leads to bliss, and take their flight
To heavenly day.
There rich and poor, and high and low,
Nor sin, nor pain, nor sorrow know:
There Christ with one eternal glow
Gives life and light —
There streams of pleasure ever flow,

And pure delight.
Christ says to all with sin oppressed,
“Come here, and taste of heavenly rest,
Receive Me as your friendly guest
Into your cots;
In Me you shall be rich and blest,
Though mean your lots.
“Behold My hands, My feet, My side,
All crimsoned with the bloody tide!
For you I wept, and bled, and died,
And rose again:
And thronèd at My Father’s side,
Now plead amain!
“Repent, and enter Mercy’s door,
And though you dwell in cots obscure,
All guilty, ragged, hungry, poor,
I give in love
A crown of gold, and pardon sure,
To each above.”
Then hear the kind, inviting voice —
Believing in the Lord rejoice;
Your souls will hymn the happy choice
To God on high,
Whilst joyful angels swell the noise
Throughout the sky.
A fond farewell! — each cottage friend,
To Jesu’s love I would commend
Your souls and bodies to the end
Of life’s rough way;
Then (death subdued) may you ascend
To endless day!

THE COTTAGER'S HYMN.

I.
My food is but spare,
  And humble my cot,
Yet Jesus dwells there
  And blesses my lot:
Though thinly I'm clad,
  And tempests oft roll,
He's raiment, and bread,
  And drink to my soul.
II.
His presence is wealth,
  His grace is a treasure,
His promise is health
  And joy out of measure.
His word is my rest,
  His spirit my guide:
In Him I am blest
  Whatever betide.
III.
Since Jesus is mine,
  Adieu to all sorrow;
I ne'er shall repine,
  Nor think of to-morrow:
The lily so fair,
  And raven so black,
He nurses with care,
  Then how shall I lack?
IV.
Each promise is sure,
  That shines in His word,
And tells me, though poor,
  I'm rich in my Lord.
Hence! Sorrow and Fear!
  Since Jesus is nigh,
I'll dry up each tear
  And stifle each sigh.
V.
Though prince, duke, or lord,
  Ne'er enter my shed,

King Jesus my board
  With dainties does spread.
Since He is my guest,
  For joy I shall sing,
And ever be blest
  In Jesus my King.

VI.

With horrible din
  Afflictions may swell, —
They cleanse me from sin,
  They save me from hell:
They're all but the rod
  Of Jesus, in love;
They lead me to God
  And blessings above.

VII.

Through sickness and pain
  I flee to my Lord,
Sweet comfort to gain,
  And health from His word;
Bleak scarcities raise
  A keener desire,
To feed on His grace,
  And wear His attire.

VIII.

The trials which frown,
  Applied by His blood,
But plait me a crown,
  And work for my good.
In praise I shall tell,
  When throned in my rest,
The things which befell
  Were always the best.

IX.

Whatever is hid
  Shall burst on my sight
When hence I have fled
  To glorious light.
Should chastisements lower,
  Then let me resign;
Should kindnesses shower,
  Let gratitude shine.

X.

Hence! Sorrow and Fear!

Since Jesus is nigh,
I'll dry up each tear,
And stifle each sigh:
And clothed in His word
Will conquer my foes,
And follow my Lord
Wherever He goes.

XI.

My friends! let us fly
To Jesus our King;
And still as we hie,
Of grace let us sing.
Through pleasure and pain,
If faithful we prove,
For cots we shall gain
A palace above.

Finis.

ADVERTISEMENT TO THE READER.

I wish the Reader to understand, that in preparing this Sermon for publication, I have condensed and shortened it, as much as the nature of circumstances would admit, in order, that as it was principally intended for the poorer classes of the people in Haworth, and the adjoining parishes, it should, both in the perusal and purchase, require as little as might be of their time and money. I am also desirous that the Reader should know, that it appeared to me to be a duty incumbent on some one, to afford them an opportunity of procuring, at an easy rate, a plain and practical statement of an extraordinary occurrence, of a monitory nature, which ought to be remembered and improved.

A SERMON, &c,
PSALM XCVII. 4, 5.

“His lightnings enlightened the world; the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.”

THE Saviour of a lost world usually availed himself of all the advantages offered by incidental circumstances, calculated to convey moral and religious instruction to his hearers. The infinitely wise Redeemer selected this as the best method to awaken the drowsy, interest the indolent, inform the ignorant, and build up believers in their most holy faith.

Endeavouring, though at an immeasurable distance, to follow the example of our Lord, I would avail myself of the advantages now offered for moral and religious improvement, by the late Earthquake and extraordinary Eruption, which lately took place about four miles from this very church in which we are now assembled. You all know, that on the second day of this month of September, and in this present year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty-four, at about six o’clock in the afternoon, two portions of the Moors in the neighbourhood sunk several yards, during a heavy storm of thunder, lightning, and rain, and issued forth a mighty volume of mud and water, that spread alarm, astonishment, and danger, along its course of many miles.

Previously to the issuing forth of this flood, as I learn from some who reside near the place, there was a very considerable tremour of the neighbouring parts, and I was able myself to perceive something of the kind, though at the distance of four miles. This circumstance, which was not noticed by many who live much nearer, requires some explanation, which I shall give you in a few words. As the day was exceedingly fine, I had sent my little children, who were indisposed, accompanied by the servants, to take an airing on the common, and as they stayed rather longer than I expected, I went to an upper chamber to look out for their return. The heavens over the moors were blackening fast. I heard muttering of distant thunder, and saw the frequent flashing of the lightning. Though, ten minutes before, there was scarcely a breath of air stirring; the gale freshened rapidly, and carried along with it clouds of dust and stubble; and, by this time, some large drops of rain, clearly announced an approaching heavy shower. My little family had escaped to a place of shelter, but I did not know it. I consequently watched every movement of the coming tempest with a painful degree of interest. The house was perfectly still. Under these circumstances, I heard a deep, distant explosion, something resembling, yet something differing from thunder, and I perceived a gentle tremour in the chamber in which I was standing, and in the glass of the window just before me, which, at the time, made an extraordinary impression on my mind; and which, I have no manner of doubt now, was the effect of an Earthquake at the place of eruption. This was a solemn visitation of Providence, which, by the help of God, I shall endeavour to improve.

By considering *How and for what reason Earthquakes are produced.*

And then by making some particular observations in reference to that Earthquake which forms the immediate object of our attention.

Previously to my endeavouring to show *how*, and for what reasons Earthquakes are produced, let me tell you, that as my object is, I trust, solely to edify my hearers, and to do them good, I shall labour to be plain, carefully guarding against all unnecessarily hard words and phrases used by chemists, and many of the learned, and which lie beyond the reach of the generality of hearers, in almost every congregation, both in town and country.

When we speak of an earthquake, we mean an extraordinary shaking of the earth to a very considerable extent, which sometimes, though not always, rends the surface of the ground, and pushes it sideways, or upwards, or causes it to sink lower than usual. Thus earthquakes have been in different ages and countries, the most dreadfully effective instruments of vengeance, which God has employed against his guilty creatures. Sometimes by earthquakes God has merely agitated the ground, and filled the inhabitants with terror. Sometimes he has caused wide and awful chasms to be made, but has destroyed no lives. Sometimes he has opened the flood-gates beneath, and produced standing pools of water; or, as in the case before us, overwhelming rivers that have borne down all before them. And sometimes by earthquakes he has let his vengeance fall in all its terror, shaking and sinking whole cities, with thousands of inhabitants, in a moment of time, and covering the ruins of men and houses over with one wide stagnant lake.

God occasionally, without the intervention of second causes, produces earthquakes, as he did at the destruction of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, with their rebellious adherents. But far more frequently he uses the elements as his instruments, which, however, does not make the work less his own, than if he were to effect his purpose by a miracle.

Sometimes earthquakes are produced by certain inflammable substances, such as sulphur kindled underground, and causing an expansion, that struggles till it bursts its usual limits.

This fire underground may be produced in a variety of ways; by the friction or collision of bodies, as when fire is elicited by the rapid whirling of an axis upon wood or iron; or by the quick and forcible contact of flint and steel; or by some chemical process, such as the pouring of water on newly burnt limestone; or fires may be kindled at greater depths than we imagine, by lightning or electrical fluid, under some other modification.

Owing to some one of these causes, no doubt, Etna, Vesuvius, and other burning mountains, for several days before they disgorge liquid fire, shake to their very bases, and not unfrequently cause a tremour far beyond these, exhibiting earthquakes on the grandest and most appalling scale.

The kindling also by some of the aforesaid causes, of what miners usually call fire damps, and which are frequently to be found at the bottom of deep pits and wells, may produce such a convulsion and expansion as will constitute an earthquake. The dreadful effects of these fire-damps when kindled are but too well known in this country, to need an illustration; sometimes in deep and extensive coal-pits, where there is not a free and continual flow of air, explosions take place, that scorch and force all things round them; and, in an instant of time, hurry numbers of souls into eternity.

Water also is another cause of earthquakes, and the last that I shall mention. When a number of streams suddenly rush into one place under ground, which lies considerably below their respective sources, and especially when this water so collected is made to expand by extraordinary heat, arising from electrical fluid, or some other cause, like the too powerful expansion of water in an overcharged and overheated boiler, that trembles and bursts, it will make the earth that surrounds it to shake and rend, till the expanding element, urged on by the incumbent streams, obtains a vent, and either forms itself into a standing lake, or rolls onward in an impetuous torrent. This, in all probability, was the nature of the phenomenon we have under consideration; which, though it may be called by some the bursting of a bog or quagmire, had all the precursors, accompaniments, and results of an earthquake, and justly merits that appellation.

This shaking and opening of the earth, and eruption of mud and water, was preceded by a profound calm, and accompanied by a very high wind, and much lightning and thunder: and both before and after, the air was strongly electrified, as was manifest from the sultry heat, the frequent and vivid lightning and loud thunder, and the apparent mingling of the clouds, and their copper-coloured, and hazy, lowering gloom.

In all probability, as the ground is already sunk to a great extent, and riven and shaken for a considerable distance, there will be a more than usual conflux of water to the place; which may, from time to time, produce other sinkings of the earth, and other eruptions of mud and water, upon a less extensive and less destructive scale.

The operating cause, whatever it was, must have been very powerful; as two cavities were formed, one of which was not less than four or five yards deep, in some places, and six or seven hundred yards in circumference; and a rapid torrent of mud and water issued forth, varying from twenty to thirty yards in width, and from four to five in depth; which, in its course for six or seven miles, entirely threw down or made breaches in several stone and wooden bridges — uprooted trees — laid prostrate walls — and gave many other awful proofs, that, in the hand of Omnipotence, it was an irresistible instrument to execute his judgments.

Having thus stated *how* earthquakes are produced, we shall briefly mention *some of the reasons* which God has for giving birth to, and employing them, in different ages and nations.

God, sometimes, produces earthquakes as manifestations of his power and majesty. In this sense he employed them at the delivery of the Ten Commandments to Moses; when "*Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace; and the whole mount quaked greatly.*"

Sometimes earthquakes are produced as instruments of condign and final punishment; when men have obstinately persevered in rejecting the offered mercies of the Lord, and have proceeded to open rebellion against him. Such was the earthquake that caused that horrid opening which swallowed up the Israelitish rebels in the wilderness, and spread consternation and dismay throughout the remainder of their host.

Sometimes, God produces earthquakes as awful monitors to turn sinners from the error of their ways, and as solemn forerunners of that last and greatest day, when the earth shall be burnt up — and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise — and the universal frame of nature shall tremble, and break, and dissolve. In this sense, earthquakes are viewed in our text; and in this sense our Lord viewed them, when he spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of his coming to judgment; and in this sense we ought to view the earthquake that has lately been produced in our own neighbourhood and parish.

Let us then endeavour, by God's help, to improve this solemn visitation, by making some particular observations in reference to it, as being the immediate object of our attention this day.

On the day after the earthquake, when the fame of it had reached the inhabitants of Haworth and surrounding parishes, motley groups of people from all quarters, hastened in to view the scene; and exhibited, in miniature, a picture of the world — a picture not merely of the inhabitants of Haworth, and Keighley, and Bradford, but of England, and France, and Spain, and the four quarters of the globe.

As I was myself one of the number, I had an opportunity of a near view of the picture, in the most advantageous light; and found it exactly to resemble fallen man, in all ages and climates, since God expelled our first parents from the garden of Paradise.

Whether we examine the Scriptures, or uninspired history, or the inhabitants of the most highly polished and civilised countries, or of the most remote and barbarous islands, where men come nearest to an unsophisticated state of nature, with the exception of a few outward and merely incidental circumstances, we find there is such an exact likeness, that each might be taken for a twin brother to the other; and that it might be truly said, this is but one family, whose whole souls and bodies are polluted by the sins of their common and fallen parents, and who all stand equally in extreme need of the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, and the cleansing efficacy of the crucified Saviour's blood.

As I proceeded up the channel, along which the overwhelming and ruinous flood had lately passed, I heard some, whilst surveying the ruins of overthrown bridges and walls, lament in pathetic terms the great expense that must be incurred by the different townships.

Others, I observed, were absorbed in matters still nearer home; whose sorrows were confined within the narrow limits of their own fields of corn, so lately their hope, but now laid prostrate and ruined. But the greater part, by far, I could perceive, rushed on, impelled by mere idle curiosity.

Here and there, however, I was able to discern one in deep contemplative mood, who saw by faith through nature to nature's God, and could in the appropriate language of our text say — "His lightnings enlightened the world, the earth saw and trembled. The hills melted like wax, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth."

Some, I discovered, who being mere scientific men, could neither penetrate so far, nor rise so high as this; who only looked at second causes, and grovelled here below. In all their observations, however shrewd and appropriate in some respects, I could easily perceive, that they generally left out of their reasoning, *the Grand First Cause*. They wanted the wings of faith, to soar above matter into the region of spirit — and this want cannot be supplied, by the utmost stretch of human invention and power.

When I arrived at the two great cavities, I was strongly reminded of some memorable events recorded in the Scriptures, and of many of the occurrences of daily life.

A few gravely contemplated the sunk and riven earth, and, in pious ejaculations, poured out their hearts unto God. Like pious Noah and his family, whilst surveying the ravages of the Deluge, they thought of the direful effects of sin, of the infinite mercy, as well as justice, of the Lord; and how, in this instance especially, he had graciously remembered mercy in judgment.

Several graceless persons wrangled and disputed with each other, even in the very bottom of the cavities, and on their edges; utterly regardless of the warning voice of Providence, that so lately spoke to them in thunder, and seemed, even yet to give a tongue and utterance to every chasm that yawned around them.

Similar to this, was that bad spirit that actuated the discontented Israelites, when they murmured rebelliously over the very seam of the closed pit, which, but the day before, had swallowed up a part of their host for the sin of rebellion.

Many, I perceived, on their return home, who in all the giddy frivolity of thoughtless youth, talked and acted as if they dreamed not either of heaven or hell, death or judgment. And some, as I afterwards learnt, though they had been thoughtful for a time, lost, in a day or two afterwards, all their serious impressions.

Thus we often find it to be in daily life. When some grievous calamity befals a neighbourhood, or unexpected and sudden death hurries away an individual of consequence, a few are only impressed as they ought to be with the solemn occurrence: the greater part continue to indulge in their bad passions and practices, utterly regardless of every warning, and not considering the awful reckoning they will be brought to for these things on the last day.

Let us pray earnestly for divine grace, that we may be enabled to act differently, and to walk by faith in Christ Jesus. We have just seen something of the mighty power of God: he has unsheathed his sword, and brandished it over our heads, but still the blow is suspended in mercy — it has not yet fallen upon us. As well might he have shaken and sunk all Haworth, as those parts of the uninhabited moors on which the bolts of his vengeance have fallen.

Be thankful that you are spared. — Despise not this. merciful, but monitory voice of Divine Wisdom — Hear, and learn to be spiritually wise, lest the day come suddenly upon you, when God "will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as a desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind;. when distress and anguish cometh upon you." The Lord is long-suffering and of tender mercy; but if sinners continue to despise his mercies, and disregard his judgments, they shall at last be placed for ever beyond the reach of redemption, in eternal torments.

Happy are they, and they only, who attend to the voice of the Holy Spirit; who deny themselves, and take up their daily cross, and follow Christ. They shall have faith, which is the victory that overcometh this world — they shall come off more than conquerors over death — and, in perfect security on the last day, they shall fearlessly and triumphantly survey the wreck of universal nature, when the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood — when the stars shall fall from their orbits, and the heavens and earth shall dissolve in flames, and pass away.

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A FUNERAL SERMON FOR THE LATE REV. WILLIAM WEIGHTMAN, M. A., PREACHED IN THE CHURCH OF HAWORTH, ON SUNDAY, THE 2nd OF OCTOBER, 1842,

BY THE REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A. B., INCUMBENT.

A SERMON.

IN THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS, AND THE FIFTY-SIXTH, FIFTY-SEVENTH, AND FIFTY-EIGHTH VERSES, YOU WILL FIND THE FOLLOWING WORDS: — “THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN, AND THE STRENGTH OF SIN IS THE LAW. BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, WHICH GIVETH US THE VICTORY, THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. THEREFORE MY BELOVED BRETHREN, BE YE STEADFAST, UNMOVEABLE, ALWAYS ABOUNDING IN THE WORK OF THE LORD, FOR AS MUCH AS YE KNOW THAT YOUR LABOUR IS NOT IN VAIN IN THE LORD.”

For more than twenty years, during which time I have ministered amongst you, this will be the first sermon I shall have read to this congregation, and it may be the last. This is owing to a conviction on my mind, that in general, for the ordinary run of hearers, extempore preaching, though accompanied with some peculiar disadvantages, is more likely to be of a colloquial nature, and better adapted, on the whole, to the majority. I might not, even now, have departed from this my usual line, had it not been, that some have requested I would publish what I may say on the present solemn occasion. Seeing that I mean to do this, I deem it proper, with prayer to God and previous meditation, deliberately to write down my thoughts, but yet in such plain terms that, whatever they were, they might be understood without the aid of extraordinary learning. I was also desirous that there should be no discrepancy between the pulpit and the press, but that what may be heard now, may be read again, without any alteration, which could hardly be done if all were to be trusted to memory.

It is the duty of every minister of the gospel, at all times, so to speak that, if possible, he may be understood by all his attentive hearers. Yet, whilst he sets forth the weighty truths in the Scriptures, he ought to do it in the pure and dignified language of Scripture, and not to debase them by a garb foreign to their character, but to clothe them in that attire with which it pleased Him to vest them, who has arrayed the heavens in majesty, and even the lilies of the field in robes eclipsing all Solomon’s glory.

These reflections press upon me with unwonted force, whilst I consider, as on the present occasion I must necessarily do, the shortness and uncertainty of this mortal life, our vast responsibility, the speed of time, and the consequent near approach of eternity; an eternity to every one of us either of unspeakable happiness or unutterable woe.

The text itself is a sermon in reference to what I have already hinted, and in discussing it I shall first give a general explanation; and then apply it more immediately, directly or indirectly, in reference to the present occasion.

Both in biographical sketches and funeral sermons great care should be taken to consider, full as much the interest of the living as the fame of the dead; and everywhere, and at all times, there should be a due regard to truth, whether it may please or displease, disappoint or satisfy. For want of abiding by this rule many productions, such as I refer to, are calculated to mislead rather than edify, and most assuredly to give us a very different idea of men and manners from what we obtain by a careful perusal of the unerring and impartial word of God.

Our text would powerfully urge us to believe the truth, and to speak and practise it. Who that reads it can avoid being almost absorbed and lost in the contemplation of its doctrines. “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.” This it commences with, and solemn words they are, especially when it is considered that it is appointed for man once to die, and after that the judgment. None of us can plead any exemption. Die we must, whether we will or no, and judged we must be, though we should call on the hills and mountains to cover and hide us from the face of Him, who will sit on the great white throne of judgment. And should we on the last day of account be found to have been under the law and not under grace, then we shall discover by sad experience “that the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.” Through sin, and sin alone, death entered into the world; and not only was death introduced by sin, but sin gave death a goad, a poisoned dagger, fatal and tormenting, and capable of destroying both body and soul in hell for ever. The perfect law of God, so far from wiping off this poison, or demolishing this sting, added virulence to the one, and strength and poignancy to the other. The perfect law of God, through man’s imperfection, notwithstanding its divine ordination for life, was found to be unto death — like a just but stern and inexorable judge, this law, in its spotless purity and wide latitude, arraigned the thoughts, desires, words, and actions, and all the commissions and omissions of the criminal, considering a breach of one, as a breach of all its commandments, and finding that there was none righteous, no not one, and not making atonement or opening a way for pardon, it passed the dreadful sentence on the culprit, and would have left him to perish for ever. We may, therefore, say with the Apostle, “thanks be to God which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Yea we must come, after all our windings and subterfuges, and seek out the strait gate and narrow way, which is Christ, the truth and the life. We must enter in at the one, and walk in the other, if we would escape hell, and get into heaven. This may puzzle, or perplex, and disgust fallen proud man; the infidel may sneer, the scorner may laugh, the philosopher may despise, the lukewarm may disregard, and the sophist cavil; and Satan, and the evil deceitful heart may join the unholy alliance; yet the cause of God must stand. What was the result of the operations of the Eternal Mind, what was suggested by infinite mercy, and love, and executed by the hand of the Almighty, has prevailed, and shall for ever prevail, till the wicked shall be consigned to perdition, and heaven shall be peopled with the redeemed. To fulfil the Law, and make it honourable, to make atonement for the sins of the world by dying to conquer death, and take away his sting, by descending into hell to gain more than the victory over hell, was the work of Christ, who alone was capable of executing it, whilst the prerogative of the Spirit is to make Christ to be formed in our souls the hope of glory. Who then, in the fulness of his heart, would not say, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ;" and with St. Paul would not add, "therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord?" In this sinful, perverse world, we may often meet with difficulties and dangers, in our way to heaven, which, where faith is weak, may tend powerfully to shake us from our steadfastness; but knowing what is threatened, and what is promised, who it is that opposes, and who it is that encourages, whom we fight for, and whom we fight against, let us put on the whole armour of God, and courageously dispute every inch of the ground; marching vigorously and boldly on, till the victory is won, and we obtain the prize of immortality. We must abound, and continue to abound in the work of the Lord. Our obedience to Him, must not be niggardly, and dealt out in sparing measure, but must result from the overflowings of a heart changed by the renewing of regeneration — so shall we infallibly obtain the reward of our labour — a reward, indeed, not of debt but of grace — the free unmerited grace of Him who was dead and is alive again, who has the keys of hell, of death, and of the prison of the grave, and the kingdom of heaven. Our frail bodies must soon perish, and return to the dust; but by the power of Him who has said, "Let it be," and the universe was created, they shall be raised in their own proper identity, in a manner far surpassing the comprehension of man, and probably of the highest Archangels, when this mortal shall put on immortality, and shine with unfading splendour for ever and ever.

These were the scriptural doctrines preached, practised, and maintained by him whose loss we deplore.

In his preaching, and practising, he was, as every clergyman ought to be, neither distant nor austere, timid nor obtrusive, nor bigoted, exclusive, nor dogmatical. He was affable, but not familiar; open, but not too confiding. He thought it better, and more scriptural, to make the love of God, rather than the fear of hell, the ruling motive for obedience. He did not see why true believers, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come, should create unto themselves artificial sorrows, and disfigure the garment of gospel peace with the garb of sighing and sadness. Pondering on, and rejoicing in the glad tidings of salvation, he wished others to rejoice from the same principles, and though he preached the necessity of sincere repentance, and heart-felt sorrow for sin, he believed that the convert, in his freedom from its thraldom, should rejoice evermore in the glorious liberty of the gospel; nevertheless, that he should mix fear with his joy, and pray earnestly, and watch continually, lest he should fall into temptation, well knowing that our adversary the devil, goeth about as a roaring lion, or in the assumed form of an angel of light.

After these preliminary remarks, in which I have been rather anticipating what I proposed for the second head, I shall now proceed to apply what has been said, directly, or indirectly, in reference to the present solemn occasion. Since many maybe desirous of retaining this sermon as a memorial of our departed friend, I shall give a few more hints, respecting his history and character, which though not full and perfect, may, nevertheless, in some measure answer the ends for which they are intended. The Rev. William Weightman was a native of Westmorland, and born of respectable parents, who spared no expense within the range of their power in the education of their children; wisely judging this to be the best, the most intrinsic, and abiding fortune they could give them. From school he went to the University of Durham, and at that well-conducted and celebrated seat of learning, for his assiduity, steadiness, and abilities, he obtained both fame and favour, and in due time graduated as a Bachelor and Master of Arts. Whilst he was there, I applied to the justly venerated apostolical Bishop of this Diocese, requesting his Lordship to send me a Curate, adequate to the wants and wishes of the parishioners. This application was not in vain. Our Diocesan, in the scriptural character of the Overlooker and Head of his Clergy, made an admirable choice, which more than answered my expectations, and probably yours. The Church Pastoral Aid Society, in their pious liberality, lent their pecuniary aid, without which all efforts must have failed. For about three years our Reverend Friend in his sacred office has laboured amongst us, faithfully preaching the doctrines expressed and implied in our text. There are many, who for a short time can please, and even astonish — but, who soon retrograde and fall into disrepute. His character wore well; the surest proof of real worth. He had, it is true, some peculiar advantages. Agreeable in person and manners, and constitutionally cheerful, his first introduction was prepossessing. But what he gained at first, he did not lose afterwards. He had those qualities which enabled him rather to gain ground. He had classical attainments of the first order, and above all, his religious principles were sound and orthodox. This was manifest in his sermons, which, with the key of scripture, opened through Christ, the door of salvation to all — and which, though sometimes above the reach of ordinary capacities, always exhibited clearness, truth, and argument, well calculated to edify the generality of attentive hearers. When I stated to him that it would be desirable he should descend to the level of the lowest and most illiterate of his audience, without departing from the pure and dignified simplicity of the scriptures, he would good naturedly promise to do so — and in this respect, there evidently was a gradual, but sure improvement. As it ought to be with every Incumbent, and his clerical coadjutor, we were always like father and son — according to our respective situations — giving and taking mutual advice, from the best motives, and in the most friendly spirit; looking on each other, not as rivals, but as fellow labourers in the same glorious cause, and under the superintendence of our common Lord and Master.

In visiting, and cottage lectures, a most important part of a minister's duty, he who, in reference to this world is now no more, was as active and sedulous as health and cirumstances would permit; and in the Sunday School, especially, he was useful in more than an ordinary degree. He had the rare art of communicating information with diligence and strictness, without austerity, so as to render instruction, even to the youngest and most giddy, a pleasure, and not a task. The Sunday School Committee, and Teachers, as well as learners, have duly appreciated his talents in this way, and will long remember him with esteem and regret. In these familiar remarks I do not, however, mean to represent the subject of them as faultless; I have no such anti-scriptural views of human nature. I would say with the wise Solomon, in his book on the failings and vanities of this world, "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." But wherever there might have been a deficiency, it would, through the grace of God, necessarily have been supplied in due time, by sage experience afforded through the rough but salutary discipline of this unsparing and unceremonious world.

As he was himself a friend to many, and an enemy to none, so by a kind of reaction, he had, I think I might say, no enemies and many friends. He was a conscientious Churchman, and true Protestant — but tolerant to all his differing brethren; where he could not cordially unite, he determined that separation should be no ground of hostility — making due allowance for the natural effects of birth, education and circumstances, and looking to God for causing all things to work together for good to those who love Him. Thus, our reverend friend lived — but, it may be asked, how did he die? During his illness, I generally visited him twice a day, joined with him in prayer, heard his request for the prayers of this congregation, listened to him whilst he expressed his entire dependence on the merits of the Saviour, heard of his pious admonitions to his attendants, and saw him in tranquility close his eyes on this bustling, vain, selfish world; so that I may truly say, his end was peace, and his hope glory. But after all, I do not, and never did consider, the transactions of a dying bed as exclusively a safe criterion to judge of a man's character. If we would know whether a man has died in the Lord, we ought, in the first instance to ask, has he lived in the Lord? Some, I fear, have greatly and dangerously erred on this head, and an error here, would be as fatal as it would be irretrievable. In the dying scenes of Jacob, David, and the martyr

Stephen, we see calm confidence, solemn reverence, and deep and serious reflection, with an evident godly awe of the near approach of eternity and judgment — and above all, we have a perfect criterion, on that occasion, when supernatural darkness covered the world, and the graves were opened, and the veil of the temple rent, when the sun hid his face in night, and the Saviour of the World died. Extraordinary exhilaration may be right, but it may also be wrong; it might exist in a Mussalman, or Jew, and may be, as I fear it often is, the natural result of ignorance, the mere offspring of physical causes, originating in the peculiarity of disease, or the injudicious conduct, or still more injudicious sayings of well-meaning, but unguarded bystanders; whereas, the holy confidence, the calm resignation, the solemn awe of the dying Christian, can only be the effects of divine grace in the regenerated heart, and can alone afford sure proof that the spirit of Infinite Wisdom has been the Teacher.

But these reflections must come to a conclusion. Notwithstanding all that medical skill, the prayers, and good wishes of friends, the tender affection of relations, and the careful attention of nurses could do, our friend is gone the way of all flesh, and the people and places which knew him once, shall know him no more. But let us not grieve, as those without hope. The spotless Saviour wept for his friend Lazarus, and we may, and ought to weep for our departed friends. Want of natural affection is ranked amongst the condemning sins. But our privilege as Christians is to look forward to a joyous resurrection, in the hope of being for ever re-united above, with those who have been taken from us by death, and whom we have loved here below. Let us often think of the words of our text, and pray that we may be enabled to mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

Our late lamented friend ran a bright, but short career. He died in the twenty-sixth year of his age. He had not attained the meridian of man’s life; amidst the joyous, and sanguine anticipations of friends, the good wishes of all, and, as may naturally be supposed, the glad hopes of himself, he was summoned for his removal from this world, to the bar of eternity, by Him whom at the instant, Emperors and Kings, as well as their meanest subjects, angels and mortals, demons, and all created beings must obey. When bad men are removed by death the world rejoices, and considers this as a happy riddance, and a just retribution; when their life is prolonged in prosperity, many, like the Psalmist are puzzled and perplexed, till like him they go into the sanctuary of the Lord, and discover that all this is in the way of mercy, or of judgment. When good men die early, in the full tide of their usefulness, there is bewildering amazement, till we read in the scriptures, that in mercy they are taken away from the evil to come. In all such cases, we want faith, and strong faith too. We are prone to look more than we are generally aware of with the eye of the flesh, and not of faith. Our faith, too frequently, is not the substance of things hoped for, nor the evidence of things not seen; and consequently, this world, with its false lights, eclipses in our morbid imagination, the unimaginable splendour of heaven. Honour and riches, power and fame, with long life to enjoy them, frequently occupy but too much of our attention, whilst we dread the visitation of death, the darkness of the grave, the worm of corruption, the loathsome work of decomposition, eternal separation and oblivion. A joyous resurrection, the glorious immortal transformation, the eternity of unspeakable bliss, the freedom from sin and sinners, and the presence of God and His angels, are seen in dim perspective. Were it not for these things, good men would not dread dissolution. There is more of scepticism in man's creed than he is wont to think of. Else, why does the pious youth fear to die? perhaps, that he may live well, perhaps not — or for what reason does the good old man wish to protract his weary existence, till he becomes a burthen to himself, and an incumbrance to others; till, like a dismantled tower, or a scathed oak, he is divested of his ornaments; and left without friends, without affections, without the capability of receiving or communicating pleasure or profit. Is it that he may enjoy life? This cannot be. We may easily comprehend why the wicked have a desire for life, and a dread of death and judgment; but, that the followers of Christ should tremble at the last step of their journey, which will introduce them into His presence and His glory, can only be accounted for by the weakness of their faith, and the remains of sin, that would chain them down, or keep them back from those unspeakable pleasures which he has in reserve for them in the kingdom of their Heavenly Father.

Brethren, the human heart is weak, wicked, and wrong in its reasoning and conclusions; let us, therefore, not trust in it, but in the strength and wisdom of God, let us walk by faith and not by sight, and be always prepared for death and judgment, looking forward to, and longing for, a glorious resurrection, and eternal salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour; to whom, with the Almighty Father, and Holy Spirit, we would ascribe all glory, praise, power and dominion, both now and for ever. Amen!

“AND THE WEARY ARE AT REST”

The lap against which my temples used to beat was not that of a Mother or daughter but of a *WIFE* and if I appear outwardly forgetful of her now do I not inwardly think of her till sleep snatches away remembrance? I have no longer the half bashful half delighted cheek to blush to my morning salutations no longer the evening solace for the past days cares but of those cares themselves I have plenty who as each fresh one enters my bosom bring tidings of others on the road and if this strong Frame and iron constitution of mine fail me — Good God! What should I do! I dread a single hint at physical decay as the criminal does each tick of the clock which must toll his knell. When this firm foot can no longer tread the heather this warm blood no longer thrill to a womans touch this working brain no longer teem with thick coming fancies this omnivourous stomach no longer bear its three bottles or twenty tumblers — then what the devil is Alexander Percy to do? I am not a woman to bear pain with patience so the life of an invalid would kill me or drive me mad. Fancy *ME* reclining on four pillows — attended by as many nurses — the pill and the draught my only nourishment — the physician and the surgeon my only friends — cares for a decaying body my employment for this life — My Vicar or his curate the gate posts to flank me in an Harlequin jump into the life to come No Mary — No, nor *Thee* Maria — to remind me by their voice and presence that earth has had its ‘Paradise lost’; no Ezekiel or Zechariah or Habbakuk or other hero with a name as rough as his beard to give me a shoulder hitch into ‘Paradise regained.’ Well as honest Nym has it “things must be as they may’ So for this days work I shall begin with some sport — secondly get up a row — thirdly excite a fever in my veins by an hours talk with yonder neglected lady — fourthly excite one in the veins of my companions by rapid communication with Thurstons wine cellar — fifthly go to bed in as bad a temper as a badger after a baiting and sixthly rise from bed with another step advanced toward the bodily ruin I so abhorr. Well as Nym again has it “Conclusions must pass” — Hallo! Bob you rascal did I not swear I would kick you down to your last master if I found you drunk this morning — What are you bullying Thurston for? But you shall have my boots presently.”

So saying and in no very hesitating accent Mr Percy jumped over the gully which divided him from the shooting party gathering round the fire, and collared his little old servant who had been standing opposite to the Lord of the manor with most un — menial assurance, while Mr Thurston looked on the groom with a scowl which was transfered on Percy’s advent to the grooms master.

“What is this old horse stealer about Thurston?” asked Mr Percy giving Bob a shake that discomposed his stomach —

“Oh Sir — ask your servant yourself — for I’m damned if I care.”

“Thurston let me have none of your ill humours shewn or I’ll send you to the Leeds Infirmary to be tapped — Now Robert le Diable — ”

“Aw cannot spake Maister — yaw throttle me so.”

“Lie the first — now go on you old fool — Hector do not you interfere.”

“Weel Maister” said the old man liberated from the gripe of his gigantic young Master — and putting on the mask of one grievously wronged though much forgiving — “Weel Aw will just tell all as straight as t’ Craven Heifer’s back and as fast as the winner o’ th’ Leger — Weel Aw hev been yaw’re sarvent and the sarvent o’ yaw’re father — and knew him that wor th’ owd maister of all — and hev donced you on me knees and gein ye th’ first pack of cairds you handled — and leughed when yaw teuk th’ Jack up and said he wor a sweet un and” — Here the old patriarch wiped one eye with his coat cuff but the clenched and whitened knuckles of his masters fist moved him to restrain his more tender feelings — “Weel — Aw niwer wor so behaved tull sin’ aw wor wick and walking! Aw can stand somemut to sup on, but Aw can *not* stand a lee! — This Gentleman says Aw wor seen wi’ a lady in his plantation this varry morning and Aw can tak my awn owd family Bible to witness that Aw nivver melled wi’ no lasses niwer sin’ aw wor born into this wearisome warld!”

Thurston himself could not help a grim smile at the old scoundrels denial of attempts at flirtation but all smile on his face died as soon as born so he grimly asked Percy

“Are we going to lose our sport for your impudent old groom?”

“Oh no Thurston — time enough yet — now Bob my Vestal virgin — go on!”

“Weel Maister he says he see’d me wi’ his awn cousin — Miss — Aw do not kmow what they call her.”

“Miss Allen Bob — well go on lad — ”

“And he said he saw thee kiss her” roared Mr Montmorency in high apparent glee at the farce enacting —

“Silence Hector as you value that front tooth — ” exclaimed Percy rather seriously.

“Naw Maister Aw tak the blessed book or owd John Wesleys hymns or ought else yaw like to witness that Aw wor there and then filling yawr hampers and feeding yawre dogs — for Me — me thats gotten to age Aw hev getten to — to be called a follower o’ women is *railly* — nay — it’s beyont raison!”

“Now Percy” broke in Mr Thurston “I must stop this humbug — I did see from my dressing room window that fellow of yours pass to and from one of my relations — I mean a yong lady in my house as if on a message or by appointment — and I afterwards saw a Gentleman whom Montmorency saw like wise and affirms was yourself enter into the thicket — Come aside Percy — I want to talk to you.”

“Not a step from this spot will I stir William — I’ll have this cleared up before I walk a stride or fire a shot!”

Mr Percy’s brow darkened into the hue almost of Thurstons as he laid down his fowling piece and turning to Mr Montmorency asked —

“Now Hector — this day shall either prove sport or earnest — Which do you wish it to be — I ask Thurston as well as yourself and can tell you I am ready for either — ”

“For sport — I should have said my dearest” chuckled the Barrister — “But if we stay here much longer we shall have a glut of that sort of thing — We shall need earnest to vary the entertainment. Two Squires quarrelling over a drunken servant about a mornings dream! Pray God they do not shoot each other instead of moor cocks.”

“Hector my old fellow I am not just in the humour to be manufactured into either a cricket bat or ball or wicket I wish neither to strike — be the means of striking or be struck but I am — if as innocent looking as arsenic — just as dangerous, and look at this” — here Mr Percy dashed a charge of powder from his flask into his palm — “There is stuff that can keep quiet for twenty yearrs but if kept carefully mark you — only wants one snap of that trigger to send to Hell King Solomon in all his glory”

“Aye — its pretty powder — Its like thy temper Percy — short and sudden and like friend Thurstons face — black and ugly”

“Come aside Percy — I want to talk to you” said Thurston breaking in on the conversation “And I say Alexander You must come or I’ll take care we do not make a pleasant day of it though I *am* your host — ”

The idea that a quarrel with his ill tempered entertainer would *just now* be very ill timed was cunningly whispered by Montmorency into Percy’s ear and readily recieved by the latter who walked to a short distance with Mr Thurston and then was stopped by the latter who said with a burst of ill temper

“What the devil did you meet Miss Allen for this morning”

“If I did it was as a somnambulist”

“Montmorency says you did”

“Then he lies.”

“Your servant I myself saw meet her.”

“Thats more than I did”

“But he is your servant and so he must have met her on a message from yourself”

“Thats more than I know”

“Is he not your servant?”

“No — He is my groom but the devils servant”

“Percy you play with edge tools and I will not be baulked by you! Mind what I say — *I will not be baulked by you*! You know what I mean and either in one case or in another I repeat I will not be baulked by you! I am a man of few words Percy but if I do not say much I think a deal and on occasion I can act — I do not speak threatningly — I regard you as my guest and aquaintance and friend and in fact all that sort of thing — but — why if the truth will out — I have lost a deal of money and I cannot be bothered — there will be mischeif Sir if I am in the least troubled depend upon it — You know all about Miss Allen — You know whether or not she is my cousin — and Mr Montmorency says you did meet her this morning — It could be to no good Percy for I have a deal of black blood, though I will not as I repeat threaten any one, and I could bear no interference with any arrangements of mine! — Then besides all that — all we have talked about — ”

“Nay Thurston” remarked Percy “I have not talked at all — I have not the most distant idea of the goal which you would gain — I only know that we are delaying our sport incommoding our friends and, if the truth must bespoken, making cursed fools of ourselves.”

Mr Thurston on hearing the calm and rather supercilious voice of Mr Percy seemed to suffer a mental change similar to what a wet blanket might physically produce if wrapped round a fevered body. He leaned on his gun and holding out his hand rather awkwardly replied

“I meant nothing wrong — nothing I assure you — I only wanted to know — that is I do know Mr Montmorency is a — ”

“A Scoundrel” said Percy, finishing the sentence as without accepting Thurstons proffered hand he turned with hasty steps to rejoin his still hastier companions.

Mr Thurston followed with a look so sweet that O’ Connor declared he had swallowed vitriolic acid instead of porter and Quamina swore he never had a blacker bargain from Camaroons or Congo rivers. Montmorency had long been joking with the Keepers who evidently marked him down as a delightful fellow and Mr Robert King had for an equal space of time been venting the indignation of outraged virtue upon the boys and grooms who held charge of the baskets. Now however — the two magnates having returned without black eyes or bloody noses and apparently on terms of friendship, however wide their hearts might be assunder — though one might be conscious of his mastership over and exulting in his powers to torture a being bound by this worlds laws to him in the old Hall far below them — and the other — two days since,

“Vacant hand and heart and eye”

now feeling a lawless abandonment of self to the white cheek and the melancholy eyes which from habitual discharge of a routine of duties hardly ever changed however much the heart might throb or the soul might sicken — Now, the procession felt at liberty to move, and with the wild moors before them the hopes of sport around them — the possession of sound health among them — for even old King was undecayed — why did they not feel truly happy?

Those whose lives lie within the walls of their library little know what has formed the existence of the men who have given them their treasures and those who know no feelings beyond domestic duties cannot divine the thoughts that cross strong but unbridled minds without a home to flee to or long lost to thoughts of home.

Among the gentlemen who formed this army against the ‘Moors’ who had a real home? Mr Montmorency had not — whose wife lay under the huge roof of Cologne Cathedral dead after a few years of sufferance under himself and a few months of the outbreak and indulgence of long felt and late enjoyed love of the man who ‘left her alone to die’ — That Man — Mr Percy had not — who besides such thorns in his flesh — such pinches as the old man Adam gave Christians — knew that cold earth embraced the little lady who never thought but for him — Nor had Mr O’ Connor who felt bitterly that his rents as soon as due must be recieved not by his own itching fingers but by the widely expanding palm of Mr Jeremiah Simpson — Nor had the said Simpson whose nerves were troubled respecting the value of certain American and Spanish mortgages held from Mr Quamina Nor had Quamina whose soul longed by another venture on the now hazardous middle passage to gain enough to clear himself from Jeremiahs talons — Nor had Gordon who felt that his fate and fortune spun round with a teetotum — that Red and Black gave the colours to his chamelion destiny — Nor had probably any one of the fry of Servants Keepers watchers and drivers — for

“Each have their sufferings all are men
Condemned alike to groan
The feeling for anothers pain
The unfeeling for his own.”

However a wide expanse of breezy highland heathers with the sun of the ‘twelfth’ tipping thro purple bloom and where broad breasts face a healthy breeze and Britains peculiar birds surrender their lives at every shot — was no place for remembering by past sorrows or participating in the feelings of the bard of Olney, and when at noontide the diverging groups of sportsman and attendants met at a lonely spring whose diamond water gushed up through deep green mosses in a dell of knee deep heather under a semicircle of whinstone rock they seemed all engrossed in the display of their bags or in excusing a want of display. Thurston from his knowledge of the ground and power over the underlings seemed to produce two or three brace more than any of his guests — O’ Connor and Quamina who had given themselves up to the sport regardless of every other consideration save a pull at the whiskey flask ranked second as victors Montmorency could afford to swagger over Simpson and Gordon but all rode triumphant over the acknowledged best shot in the party — Mr Percy.

“Well” exclaimed Mr O’ Connor turning over Percys single Cockbird which was minus a head from some access of fury on the part of the shooter — “Well Gentlemen — hand me the flask — I have lived through many troubles in my time but this is a regular extinguisher upon all! To think that I have nine brace to shew against half an one from the best gun between Derbyshire and Westmoreland is enough to make me fancy I can pay off my debts — I can tell why Simpson and Gordon have failed for they have had their hands in their purses instead of on their triggers, and as for Montmorency — He's been thinking of his next breif in a 'crius cori' case or an action for assault and battery. Then Thurston can do as he pleases because the fellows about us know that when he wishes a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse — but Percy with half a bird — I say Quamina hand me over the flask — Well may we have more Percy's ere the days out and then thou and I Quashia may do a little business at our old profits of per cent."

Mr Quamina replied — "He is head over ears O' Connor — He is indeed Arthur! I see it in his squint at us two! He has bagged his bird before he donned his jacket and Thurston had better take care of that" —

"Who — I? What are you saying?" exclaimed the Host furiously but Mr Quamina evidently astonished swallowed all reply in another pull at his flask and so Mr Thurston turned to Percy for either an answer or a quarrel but as the latter saw Montmorency watching with an eager eye the cloud no bigger than a mans hand which should presage storms to others and pass unnoticed over himself; and as he was not desirous of being the victim of his friends or his hosts revenge he tossed off his horn of mountain dew — threw his single headless bird to his old servant and bidding him take care to bring the poney and his own skin safe back to Darkwall he lost no time in good mornings or excuses but dashed back across the gulley and down the long cart rut which served as a path from the peat pits to the farm steads of a more civilized land

I cannot be expected to dissect Mr Percy's feelings or emotions during his rapid walk back to Darkwall as I believe he scarce left time to do so himself but with a scorn of his morning employment a distaste toward his mornings companions and a revulsion of thoughts which made the whole twelfth a day of black chalks he sprung over the first style and strode over the first causeways through the twenty acre pastures of green land stolen from heather and made part and parcel of Darkwall farm

Percy did not make any halt in his intrusion so soon and so unexpectedly upon the quietude of a Hall which expected domestic slumber till evening brought in such visitors as might be willing to turn night into day. He made his return known to the Lady of the mansion and was recieved by her in the breakfast room

"I have returned so soon" he said "because I felt my hand was not in for sport and among men over whom I am accustomed to crow I do not like appear second best so you as are aware that fruitless rest is better than fruitless labour I have returned to find in your mansion the ancient works of man which I can look at while seated on a sopha instead of the ancient works of nature which take so many miles of bog trotting to enjoy. How many hours of rest shall I have ere my sad crew return?"

"Thurston did not mention any certain time for the return of your party but I expected no one before six."

While Mrs Thurston spoke and during the first moments of her meeting with the unexpectedly arrived guest no servant about the establishment could have been so dull as not to percieve the embarrasment of their usually calm and sweet tempered Mistress — The eye which usually had a dove like glance for all — the voice which had a gentle tone and the steps which were so quiet now changed into a phase of irritation in manner — trouble in the eyes and hesitation both in voice and step — but a ready Key might have been given to these changes had the observers been aware of the risks she was running from an innocent breach of promises given to her furious husband and meant to be kept as faithfully as made, and the revulsion of all hospitable or lady-like feeling should she keep to the letter of her promise as well as the still small voice scarce daring to whisper amid conflicting winds which told a womans and a ladys heart that a visitor was sheltered under her roof whose mind possessd some mettle more attractive than ebullitions of sour reproach — whose feelings had a wider higher and deeper range than what would be exersised in attempts to ruin others or onse self — whose person likewise gave animated instead of cloudy looks gentle flexibility of tone instead of bilious snappishness — Eyes of mobile imaginativeness instead of bull-like suspicion — lips of winning sweetness instead of acerb ill temper, that she might now in fact have hoped for one happy afternoon after so many blank or blotted ones but for the grim threatning scowl which from neighbouring moors frowned upon her companionship the thunder shadows of resentment and revenge.

Percy took his station at a window which faced the moors and after a long look at moving clouds which from chrysalis like mists had condensed into an emphemeral life of sunny joy and on moors whose clearly defined outlines while they spoke to sportsmen of "the *battle* and the breeze," left his mind 'scaped from scenes of havoc which would make "e'en moorcocks weep" to recurr to former times and like the dove "to flee away and be at rest"

"One would think" he remarked without noticing the embarrasment in the manner of his hostess — "that these melancholy wastes rose above the warm atmosphere of pleasure and beyond the mild influences of sympathy but unless among the dull brick built streets and foggy air and filthy pavement of a town view, one seldom can see a natural prospect of which we can say truthfully "it is stark naught" I once sat not far from Scarboro' under a black wet semicircle of rock with no objects in sight except sand and star fish for a few yards in front and the tidal waves framed in the dark rocks of my cove which ended in a grey background of sea stretching parallel to a milky sky. Now one might ask where lay the charm that could keep me half an hour biting my cane and like the laird on his 'louping on stane' 'looking frae' me when if the prospect did embrace the three great objects of nature Heaven Earth and Ocean they would all have been seen to better advantage on the walls of the National Gallery or in the pages of a young ladies scrap book, and besides did not the ever changing tide of human life on the promenade offer a wider scope for reflection than the monotonous surges of the sea? Would not a railway cutting shew rock work in a more scientific as well as more shapely form than the shapeless and useless piles that girdled me? Would not even the little circular Museum hold forth at an easy distance more interesting specimens of geological and Zoological history than those afforded by the cornelian pebbles or limpet shells or starfish that sprawled among the narrow foreground of sand and sea weed? Very true Mrs Thurston — but neither science and the picturesque combined or any other compound known can produce at ones own will or that of another person the incommunicable emotions of an inward reflective joy."

"Joy is not the appropriate term for it I think Sir."

"How do you know that? I was aware of my mistake but I did not imagine a lady would discover it."

"Perhaps one who has been for years accustomed to see natural beauty only in grey walls and naked fields and barren moors may — although a woman — have attained to some expertness in extracting from them what they have to give of subdued emotion or pleasurable calm. The owner of Chatsworth must not fancy he alone has a delight in Flora because he owns a five hundred feet Conservatory. The heath bloom or the daisy or the foxglove with "its silent peal of bells" may give a thrill of pleasure to the walker through rushy fields and over boggy moors which could not have been exceeded by Schomburgh himself when he first saw the immense Victoria flower gleaming among the reeds of the Essequibo"

"You speak justly — but — I know not how it is — I do not like to hear women speak thus as it appears that they have to fall back on indefinable musings for a refuge from palpable care. Let such rescources be left to a fellow like myself as I should be as cloud capped as ever was Boulshill yonder if I thought that a wife of mine were like a bee sucking comfort from wild flowers on the ridge of his heathy brow! But I suppose we must all get happiness where we can and if it escapes our pursuit we must not repine. Were we born into this world for happiness or is joy the puzzling and contradictory exception to the routine engagements of life and sorrow the Egyptian task work which binds us to our long life-day's work of toil?

"We have guides Sir in even the most intricate journey and of these Duty is one very safe if sometimes unpleasing. Rectitude of conduct points out the straightest road from this to the other world and hope if *healthy* will help one over ordinary obstacles and if feverish it will do us more harm than what might be caused by the common excitement of wine. Resignation I would recommend as a faster friend than either for it neither craves for hope or fears despair."

Mr Percy did not immediately reply to Mrs Thurstons words but he took his seat on the sopha leaned his head on his hand and surveyed the furniture of the room with eyes that might have been mistaken for those of an Auctioneer or Upholsterer had not their matter of fact inquisitiveness been contradicted and relieved by the peculiar smile of his mobile lips. Mrs Thurston was already seated at her little work table and examined her embroidery frame with an attention which might have been as much mistaken as his own — for the patience with which she proceeded in her work partook of the commonplace character of — not perhaps an Upholsterer — but a Power loom weaver — Still the dark eye lashes, bent ever downwards, seemed sometimes moist; and she never once looked at his face whose gaze (though with no difference in expression from that which examined her footstool) was so often bent on *hers*. One of those pauses in which thought seems struggling among the meshes of a net which it has not the power to break and wherein a few minutes of silence send ones mind flying over a score of years occurred to give additional abstraction to both the lady's and the gentlemans countenance, till Mr Percy broke the ice by soliloquizing —

"What a fool they will think me to escape so soon and with half a brace from the sports of so sweet a twelfth of August! Had I brought down a bag crammed with birds flesh and feathers — had I been able to boast of dozens instead of units I had been a hero but now — reclining at noon in Thurstons parlour while my companions are roaming ten thousand acres of heather is really a virtual resignment of my sportsmans crown — Well — when I have nothing else to think of or when I want to drive off all thought I can be as sharp a shot and as stalwart a walker as any one but when I am out o' the vein I will not brag of performances worthy of being registered in any column of Bells Life in London. What have I returned for? My head can not tell me and I wonder if my heart could give me my reason."

"Perhaps your caprice might — for people generally give you credit for the possession of that uncertain quality."

Mr Percy turned his face towards his hostess as he half reclined on the cushions and said rather growlingly

"Do people in general fancy me like an actor or an Opera dancer and do you imagine that my return hither was because I liked whinrocks built into a wall better than whin rocks scattered over a moor? That I preferred my host's servants to my host's guests? That I was attacked by a 'male green sickness' and loved chalk better than cheese? No I believe you to be so far advanced in sense and so well able to appreciate motives or divine intentions as to feel that I returned because a couple of hours spent with yourself would appear one hour and three quarters shorter in the registered revolution of this sun than the same time spent among the pursuits I travelled hither to take part in — because I hoped to find in you the gaslight which in a Theatre or ballroom apologises for the

"gay beams of lightsome day"

You are aware that being a forlorn widower my daylight has winked its wearied eye and dreams or fancies only can restore in the present and future night those alleviations to trouble which fate and fortune have carried far off and far away. Should I very hastily ride back at the risk of a horses knees or walk back at the risk of my own to see Mr O’ Connor or Mr Quamina discuss a couple of bottles before luncheon — to calculate the value of the estates yet to be or just having been mortgaged by them with Simpson and Gordon — to try with Hector which of the two could look most treacherous or with Thurston which could look most sour? No — no — I returned as if to a shadow of my ancient returning during years wherein I could doff my shooting dress and find a face to welcome me milder than that of a man though that man might be a friend — You are looking confused and serious but you need not do so as I must speak what I feel and what I feel is not in want of a cloak” —

“Indeed Sir I was only about to rise to ring the bell as I am sure you must need refreshment and probably Miss Allen, my husband’s cousin, who will soon arrive from her walk will join you — I believe she did *not* expect you here though — any more than myself.”

“Madam — mark me — Do you not think it strange in a person to invite another to dinner and set before him a service of plate but forget all the viands — Then will it not be strange in yourself to welcome me hither and refuse the only pleasure that could make me feel pleased? I see you are about to retire but as my time in this house must be short why try to make that time uncomfortable? Why try to afflict with midnight frost mental leaves that only want for due development an hour or so of morning dew and sunny balm? Do not allow anxiety to spoil your eyes as I see it is doing whenever I notice you to look at the carriage road or listen to the door bell — You have had havoc enough played with your marble cheeks ere now without seeking for any further bleaching and though I heed little who enters here I must if you look so sad much longer be vividly reminded of the different looks with which eyes now closed for ever expected and watched for my own returns. Oh it is true that a soul too lovely for the tempests of this wretched life — too blessed to have a long abidence here may still not die but slumber — and forgetting its own decaying body wake after a few years of repose in the shelter of a corporeal shrine as congenial and as fair. Do not leave the room — I was only permitting a hasty temper to indulge in expectations which can never be fulfilled and I will not be frowned upon if I own that THY womanly gentleness has tamed a heart which sorrow was making sadly too wild.

“I think I see Miss Allen coming up the walk and so you will soon have more cheerful company than any I can give.”

“I do not desire cheerfulness” said Mr Percy rising and pacing rapidly through the apartment — “I want some thing of more value — some thing which will not leave me with a joke or a smile — I want — Why before Miss Allen enters I want Thy hand in proof that I have not angered Thee, or at least in acknowledgement that with thee reproof of an offence may be mingled with pardon for the offender — Come, as my hostess thy hand must be placed in mine — or I have no alternative save to ride off directly or open out a budget of quarrels — God bless the fingers which can by one touch give a whole days life to me — ”

So Mr Percy spoke with some haste and much earnestness as he clasped Mrs Thurstons hand while she was passing — and standing over her with a look of mingled love and sorrow besought by such a glance pardon from her brow and sympathy from her eyes — but well for her equanimity of temper and in full accordance with the gentlemans calculations it happened that ere Mrs Thurston could say a sentence or retire a step the door was opened to admit Miss Louisa Allen on her arrival from her solitary mornings walk.

Miss Allen looked highly flushed and breathed very rapidly but that might have been owing to her hurried return — She did not speak to Mrs Thurston — express her astonishment in a few syllables at Mr Percys desertion of his companions and then threw aside with some impatience the incumbrances of bonnet and mantle.

Mr Percy looked at her with an expression of risibility on his countenance and told her that of the two she seemed more like one who had followed the sports of that morning than himself, for he felt as cool as a cucumber while her cheeks were in a July glow. However only replying that if he felt like a cucumber she felt like a water melon Miss Allen went to the window and Percys laughing eye could mark the entering sunlight glisten on a cheek wet with a few tears not of sensibility to the lovely wilds before her but of that most reckless of all feelings a womans bad temper. He turned from that face to another expressing an equally true picture of a woman but as it was now again bent over the embroidery frame how different seemed the effect of the view & the parks of Windsor and the silver Thames beheld from Richmond hill could not be less like the great Glen beheld from Ben Nevis than was the sweet resignation which compassionated anothers ruffled temper from the rebellious look which nursed and lived on revenge for all causes of disquiet that might thwart its will.

“How pleasant” he remarked seating himself on the sopha and talking at Miss Allen if not to her. “How much milder the feelings produced by a retirement into a primitive district from the false fitful fever of a life in town — Had I been now in the Metropolis and were it now before the prorogation I should have been obliged to dress and paint my soul in all manner of false colours to meet and mix with souls which could no more mingle with mine than oil could with water — To pass compliments with women whose dead corpses would no more affect my real feelings than their living charms — to keep terms of friendship with men who would cause me much more pleasure by a communication with them through my boot toes instead of the tips of my fingers — Here now I find nature in its unsophisticated state — Hills that laugh to scorn the ploughshare a park that absolutely gives a ‘guffaw’ to Sir Henry Stewart of Allanston — a room that exersises[sic] as much decorum in its admission of sunlight from Heaven as did the court under whose auspices it was built in the encouragement of sunlight from eyes — Aye and I suspect more for Queen Bess could see a trim leg among her nobles at a score of yards distance and Mrs Thurston cannot see her needle at an inch from her eye. Miss Allen alone has telescopic power of vision for she looks earnestly for planets or constellations through a heaven wherein I can only see hot autumnal vapours and a single mackarel cloud."

"Perhaps" answered the lady with a rather unsuccessful attempt at cheerfulness — "My cloud may afford a more substantial prospect than words which disguise or don't know their meaning."

"Perhaps a flitch of Bacon — nay a glass of flummery may be more substantial than "Angels ever bright and fair." The first is substance the last sound — but not the less worthy of remembrance when coupled with the alliance of a thrilling voice and jet black eyes."

The reference to Handels song evidently aided in temporarily soothing the little vixen like person at the window who seemed to have a dream of W — — — Cathedral and of an Organist pushed from his seat to make way for the touch of fingers inspired as much by a syrens voice as by the organs roll, and of one who beheld as he touched the Keys not the portly and comely presence of Mr George Frederic Handel but the sylph like figure of one whom she could at any hour behold in the glass with raven locks as Symmons has it

"like midnight loosed at noon"

So she turned more animatedly from her long look at Boulshill and for the first time since her entrance into the room vouchsafed a smile — Perhaps Percy noticed that it was rather one of triumph at momentary success over a fancied rival than at disinterested love of his praise, so he changed his varying features till their powers seemed wreaked on the beads that were gradually forming the roses and tulips of Mrs Thurstons work, and then Miss Allen rousing from silencd irritability saying —

"You may court the sunshine but as the day grows so sultry I will seek shade — I don't think I shall walk — love — before luncheon," She departed leaving behind her the embarrasment produced by the departure of one much displeased from a company wherein no one wished to cause displeasure — and yet I fear the absence of so bright a planet did not give a more midnight hue to the sky which in Mr Percys eyes did sem to contain some scarce explored or erratic star while in those of his hostess it held — if her sad cheek could tell anything — no light whatever — save the ignus fatuus of decay which lights up the enamel remnants of time past or the half despair and half hope which through present frosty skies of winter affords a fitful Aurora borealis to mock the sunshine of Youths summer in the Greenland heavens of time to come. Mrs Thurston looked as if desirous of following her lady guest but a scowling eye pursued her through a meandering search among sideboards for skeins of silk wherein every tack was doorwards till she could feign no longer but placidly returned to her seat and reassumed the hostesses benignness

"Now then" remarked Percy "Summer will have its thunderstorms and noe has just past by with but one peal — I ought to be thankful; for judging from my fair foes eyes a commmon flash of lightning would be nothing to the effect educible from their volcanic fire. Why is it that slender frames enclose such daring spirits while a creature like myself of six feet two can only baa like a new cast lamb?"

The very handsome mouth of Mr Percy as he uttered the last sentence curled into a positively ugly sneer and moved for once a smile on the rather too pallid lips of the lady who listened to him — She replied without looking up from her work

"Fits of temper among theose of our sex seem rational compared with those among yours — If we feel aggrieved past endurance we can at least leave the room whereas you seem disposed to stay and covertly vex persons whom the rules of society forbid you openly to insult"

"And do you apply so severe a censure as your words would imply, to me? Do you think I have returned from an aimless and tiresome journey so soon to spend the time which should have been occupied in killing Moorgame in plaguing women? Two there are of your sex to whom I have spoken this morning and one I am sure I have no wish to irritate or displease — the other now seated opposite to me must retire into her own heart to answer the enquiry does she dislike me more or less than the dozens or scores of country boors that alone have awaked her silver voice since the day she left Euston Square Station? — She knows God has not blighted me with the thunderbolt of personal deformity or the Typhoon of repulsive manners — She must feel that what bad passions and tempers I have are caged up or rioting in a wildernesses far apart from her sylvan shades — That I have no wish to exert my superior bodily strength save to preserve her from harm or my more impetuous temper save to infuse vigour into her mildness — That I forget the black daemons of melancholy partly because her aspect scares them and partly because my anxiety for her comfort subdues them — That indeed I am here just now because God's goodness has given to me for a short time a daily drop of 'elixir vitae' in my cup of restless misery — A sweet remembrance — my girl — of thoughts which must be innocent because they lie wholly in the grave and are only called forth again in this room as among the snows of December you would open the phial which held the essence of Julys rose. You must not rise I — once more repeat — for luncheon is I suppose nearly ready and neither I or yourself — I mean yourself or I would partake of it with more relish from knowing that anger or insult or false modesty or conventional manners had separated our tables or our hearts.Look at this Old Hall Maria Thurston — is it a hypocrite? Look at that mirror — does it tell lies? Look at what that mirror reflects — Is it an image qualified to shine only in a London crowd of fashionables or over the benches of a Methodist conventicle? You KNOW you are a lady and that a man if worthy of the name can neither dislike or even feel indifferent to you. You *know* that you are a neglected lady and that I know you are so. You *know* too that I would lose lifes blood to drive injury from you and sacrifice its comforts to give you pleasure and if you know so much my girl you likewise know that I am not returned hither to change for you this balmy twelfth of August into a weeping twelfth of April, but to indulge a selfish desire for happiness in conversation with you and to exersise a most unselfish feeling in contributing to the ease of the gentle heart which beats within that corset and cheering the hours of a lady who too often I fear has to spend them alone. Cannot I have some stores of knowledge from which to furnish an hours innocent amusement when while her bosom has only brooded dovelike over home scenes my wandering wings have expanded like those of the stormy peteril over lifes ocean through every clime and climate — every grief and joy."

"Yes Sir I know well your mind has among its stores of wealth much that is valuable and that any one might feel happy in your society if that mind chose to let others partake of its stores"

"Let others partake! No not all others But oh thine own dear self should and gladly too! What is that obscurely seen but most overwhelming incubus which forbids me — weighs me down when I dare dream of a pleasure so great as this afternoon spent apart from the world and seated by thy side — yet making what I have known of the world and indeed my whole store of thought, subservient to thy pleasure who while nursed in quiet and comfort might thus explore the ocean of humanity without being buffeted by its storms?"

"You have from indulgence been accustomed Sir to feel too impatient when your days do not pass in unclouded sunshine — many pleasures one might hope for on awaking in the morning but so few are realized during the day that I accustom myself to recieve each visitation of joy as a boon — not as a right or even a thing to be expected and this feeling constantly cultivated allows me to go through my duties and bear any mortifications with such calmness as makes mind and body able to drink the cup of sorrow without a wry face and feel no intoxication from the cup of joy"

"Then is it Gods will and according to a just disposal of events that I should now return to disliked or uncongenial companions and leave you hugging your chain and like an Indian devotee proud to show that you can take your nap on a bed of ten penny nails or like a pugilist that you can smile after a sledge hammer hit on your teeth? Answer me — would it be well — would it accord with your ideas of justice should two persons resolve to do all they could to prevent mutual friendship and produce mutual pain?"

"No Sir — I believe our object ought to be the promotion of friendship and alleviation of pain."

"To both ones own self and to all others?"

"Yes — as I would not reccommend suicide most certainly to ones self — but even before oneself to others because if every one in this world thought first of his neighbour and last of himself we should eventually be sure of happiness. Do not you see that for one grain of pleasure sacrificed every point of the compass would return you a hundred fold?"

"And You — or myself are to don the pasteboard helmet of the Spanish hero and sally forth with the idea of sacrificing our happiness to the good of our fellow creatures, are we? No, no. It is enough that I wish to live for one being beside myself and not for one thousand millions. I wish by word and deed to comfort one whom I love and I only ask as a reward that she should not wholly dislike me."

Mr Percy had now entered upon one of his usual fit of restless walking through an apartment which always attacked him when much excited and while obliged to hide feelings which inborn nature and constant indulgence through life impelled him to display. He would not so much as look at the fair face bending over a mechanical employment lest it should not precisely tally with his notion of the emotions he fancied it ought to feel and lest he should forget what was due to the gentleman under whose roof he was staying and by one wild outbreak of passion throw himself open to three alternatives of misery. The ruin of a Lady whom his very soul did really love just then — the risk of a bullet through his bosom from the pistol of the dark bilious faced person under whose roof he abode, and, worst of all, denial of Love — of sympathy — of sorrow for himself and dearly purchased knowledge of coldness and dislike from an answer to the half dozen sentences which were tingling on his tongue and to which the consciousness of their importance alone prevented him giving utterance. He dreaded every movement made by Mrs Thurston lest it should announce her departure from the room. He felt jealous of every change on her mild thoughtful face lest it should herald some stern avowal of feelings if toward himself, still severed by duty and that last idea so gained upon his mind that he broke the silence of the room by one abrupt question.

"Now Maria Thurston — I must be here for days or weeks and I must not during that time be laid on St Lawrences gridiron — So I ask you once and for all — will you — by preserving your thoroughly womanlike character and by allowing me to rest upon its feminine sweetness my masculine roughness — let my stay here be passable to my mind or will you shun me and make me conscious of the truth of that hideous saying that women care not for any man but live for the gratification of a vanity whose shrine is their looking glass or the hecatomb of real manly hearts that have burst under their whims and which will send up a fragrance when consuming on the altar of that Nova Zembla deity a bloodless woman proud to keep a real man in pain."

"But Sir you have been married yourself and I should not intrude on your feelings perhaps by asking you whether or not your own lady assumed the semblance of a Nova Zembla deity Did she only care for you as the means whereby she could gratify her vanity — did she never feel toward her husband as if pain to him would be double pain to herself?"

"Maria Thurston — You distress me — I have lost the sole charm of a fevered and broken life and I would willingly and innocently fill up the dreadful chasm that lies between the grave of her whom I did possess and the goal whose laurels must sooth the worry of my forthcoming life. What if that goal be *yourself*? Why should you shrink from intercommunion with *myself* whose every sinew would rouse to save your little finger from harm — Who besides me would make his life a secondary consideration to yours? Who besides me would foresake mans idol pleasure to worship what is too often womans idol pain — Who would, though you call him indulged, bear the pains of a prison to see you enjoy the pleasures of a palace.

You know what I mean Maria — You know what I have lost and what I would gain. Tell me — do you think that one who has for years been accustomed to repose a worried and wearied head on a warm and devoted bosom — now that the bosom is given over to corruption and that he is forced to feel jealous of worms — do you think that he no longer wants such a repose and while clouds are gathering and years closing round him he feels no wish for a ressurection of his buried joy? When I leave Darkwall and return to Percy Hall shall I not feel a sad vacancy when my lonely evenings after dinner are spent in studies where a weary head misses sadly the little hand that used to stroke its hair or the soft lap that used to ease its aching — where my little girl alone will give all that childhood can of affection but where I shall leave among northern clouds and heather the polar star of love — Oh do not start Maria Thurston for you too will think of me when I am gone — You will know too well what place you fill now — What place I would have you to fill to feel indifferent to Alexander Percy. Hours which did fate permit it — might be spent in a recalled paradise by my fireside will perforce contrast themselves with hours of neglect present to your heart and senses here. I am sure that ere the winds of winter blow the sleet against these windows you will have dropped some tears over the doom which denies to Maria Thurston the place of Mary Percy!"

"Sir — Sir — you must restrain this speech — I cannot bear it and beg you as a gentleman to spare me."

"Must I not rather Maria — beg you to spare me? She whose heart is resigned to suffering has little to fear but his heart who feels that there is no medium between agony and enjoyment has every thing to dread especially if former time reappears like a ghost in the unattainable yet tantalizing prospects of the present time. Where shall we each be a year hence Maria? Were shall we be to night? Why I — if asleep at all — shall lie dreaming of ideas that

"Remind me of departed times —
Departed — never to return"

and you I am sure will be compelled to fancy that your uncherished cheek might be better nurtured than by comforts which stern crowns and hard usage could give you — Ah — You know not and till you shall have been tried you cannot know the yearnings of a mans heart left alone toward the heart of a woman whom he would wish to be part and parcel with himself.

"Oh Sir" exclaimed Mrs Thurston earnestly and with a face suddenly overmastered by pain — "Do not try to make me miserable — I have my sorrows and I have hitherto born them patiently. It can do no one good to remind me of lifes path mistaken or of pleasure to which it is impossible to attain"

"Then" answered Mr Percy while his expressive features beamed with serpent guile only rendered more dangerous from the intermixture of real anxiety — "Does Maria Thurston mean to enact a Suttee? Does she wish to immolate herself on the pile raised for a husband who never existed must she feel bound for ever to a master whom she scarce knows save by his tyranny and repulse the heartfelt sympathy of a friend?"

"A friend Sir! Do you not mock me by your use of the word?"

"I *do.* Maria, if the drowning man clings to a swimmer or a plank for salvation — if one who has had no peace in this life tries to drive despair from his death bed by his hopes of heaven. But I do *not* if my soul chooses thee as successor to a throne long vacant and a sceptre which no hand save thine can sway — Would that I could make thee believe me! Thou must know that I cannot pass a future existence on the mere memory of love — That one so young as I am will require to support his soul through a probably protracted life some encouragement better than a look backward on a sunny path while clouds and tempests brood over his forward road. But I will not argue — Thou lovest me and thou knowest that thou lovest me — Stop — do not answer or I shall push thee into perjury by asking at once "Dost thou hate me?" and as thy answer would certainly be "Yes" thou wouldest be utterly forsworn. Can I not read thy thoughts on thy pillow to night? and canst thou not read my own? Yes — yes — And if thyself and myself were kneeling together at the parsons altar thou wouldst waste but few moments of hesitation ere saying — however inaudibly with Addison and Haydn

"Lo my Shepherd is divine
How shall I want while he is mine"

The strange character which both adorned and cursed the speaker was exemplified in his last sentence for while absorbed in a subject which engrossed every mental and personal feeling he waywardly sported with a sneering allusion to a few lines of verse and a beautiful snatch of pastoral music. which would have given his eyes the aspect of an angels had he been forced to take his seat at an organ or piano. But here — reclined on a sopha in this quiet ancient apartment and in the company of one who whatever she *suffered* would never *give* pain — He let his looks stray scenting the track of pleasure and his mind run hydrophobically biting at those whom his calmer feelings would lead him to cherish.

The morning sunlight shone through the window of a chamber in the Hotel, upon a head of curly auburn hair, a sad, pale face, and quivering lips laid on a restless pillow and shewing every feature in sickly guise save the wicked blue eyes that — to any one who knew their owner — augered some new ray of mischeivous caprice breaking through the clouds of sickness. Their owner, after a gentle sigh or two rung the bell and the chamber maid appeared.

“Fanny” said Percy “Whether my old groom be dead or alive — drunk or sober — send him to me forthwith.”

“Yes Sir — He has been up all night Sir, with some north country jobbers — They’ve been very noisy Sir.”

“And, Fanny, bring me a tumbler of Hollands with a dash of water in it, and — stop — I have something to say to you — Take a sovereign out of my waistcoat pocket — With ten shillings purchase mob caps, and with the other ten procure yourself a quantity of tracts which you can distribute about the house during the fair and by all means lay one on each tray that the waiters may bring in to company, as well as on every bed in the house.”

“There are some pretty songs Sir in one of the stalls”

“Oh Damn my — I mean Religious tracts my girl! Those printed at the Wesleyan Repository in London.”

Fanny looked at her sovereign as if destining it for another voyage than the one marked in her chart

“And, Fanny, take down those curls, and comb your hair parted in front — come here and I will shew you the way.”

Saying “Oh no Sir I can do it myself” Fanny departed on her errand, rather indignant that her favourite ornaments should be censured, and wholly puzzled to know what that strange wild gentleman meant this morning.

She shortly returned with the morning draught required, and along with her stumbled in the patriarchal form of old Robert, much afflicted with “all overishness” and modelling his face into the expression of a Lord Eldon pronouncing judgement on a chancery suit of a century in duration and a plum in value.

“Well — you doubly hanged dog! Drunk as an owl I see! What have you been doing all night?”

“Searching after me truth Maister.”

“I have heard Truth was to be found at the bottom of a well, but I did not know it was a well of rum and water — But however — Bob, I have turned over a new leaf — I will neither Swear, whore, drink, gamble, rob, or commit manslaughter again — Damn me if I will!”

“Thank Him that Saves! O Maister yaw’re in a fearful gooid way!” and the old Saint clasping his hands together uttered a rapturous groan.

“Are you sober enough Bob to rattle through a healing prayer for me? Anything that has enough grace in it will come in nicely — Stay, Fanny, give me the tumbler — and halt Bob — have you never such an article as a Hymn book about you?”

“Aw’ve getten the varry best” replied Robert, lugging out an old black greasy volume — “Its the Selection used amang the Primitive Methodists — commomly termed Ranters — Owd John Wesla’s nought to it — It warms folk till the divil could’nt tak’ ’em.”

"Damn it! That's the true Nightingale! But Fanny my girl fetch me another glass — and then we'll silence the Angels. Bob — This life will never do — I have a Soul to be saved — "

"Sure — sure Maister"

"And — Damn me if I won't save it'"

"The Lord be praised — Yaw're in a gooid way Maister!"

"Well then — pitch the Key note — thats it — I'll take the tenor —

"Will you go to Glory with me &c &c"

The effect of the ensuing duet was most farcical were it not blasphemous. The beautiful tenor of Mr Percy united in all possible earnestness with a voice that tortured ones ears like that of a mad Jack ass, and, as is usual with the sect from whose book the words were selected, to a tune which might be fitly accompanied by the dance of a 'hen on a het girdle[sic]'.

The poor young chambermaid stood sincerely pitying 'the nice mad gentleman' but utterly unable to repress a feminine titter. But a much deeper and more masculine chuckle could be heard ere the door opened to introduce Hector Matthias Mireabeau Montmorency, Esqre — whose perfect knowledge of his friends character had made him — on hearing from his bedroom the melodious twang — arise, don his garments, and straight proceed to perfect the work of godliness —

"Now then my heroes!" thundered the Barrister "Which is to fly fastest toward Heaven — Master or man? You want a good bass and as I flatter myself I possess such an article, while I am sure, from your chambermaids pretty mouth she has a sweet treble — we'll make up four parts, and walk up faster than Enoch or Elijah — I am a Calvinist and believe Jerry and Quashia and O' Connor and Gordon were predestined to the fire grate so I wont call them in to join us."

"Oh, but Hector, I am not a Calvinist I am as good a Wesleyan as was ever hatched — and I insist that all *shall* be saved — Storming heavens gate is the duty of a Christian soldier — I am a new born child Hector — Fanny just reach me the tumbler — and I'll be — " Here the speakers voice was drowned by a violent fit of coughing in consequence of too strong a draught of the spirits — at last he gained his breath to ask —

"Fanny — have they never a room in the house into which one could put a few forms and a pulpit during the fair time?"

"Yes Sir — Master has a large room up stairs, but the players are using it now"

"The players be damned — stop. damn me if I will swear again — I'll rent it and fit up a pulpit by G — d."

"The loard be praised said Robert, who was steadying himself against the bed post — and "Amen" groaned Hector — who was taking the sweetest pinch of snuff he had ever enjoyed. The groom, by virtue of his superior age and the advanced state of his religious experience thought proper to break in on the conversation of his Master and the Barrister by recommending that they should go to prayer.

“And donnot pray like frightened folk” said Bob “pray wi’ a real thundering roar — pray till ye’re legs kick aat like a stallion’s — There’s nought but muckment in ye’re church prayers — Aw wad not dry my nose wi’ ’em! If Heaven’s grace will not come yaw mun *mak*’ it come!”

I shall not give the report of Mr Robert Patrick King’s prayer as though too true to nature, and to what I have often heard in Yorkshire and Lancashire — it would be very justly pronounced impious by all not intimately aquainted with the lengths to which a brutal character and an impudent hypocrisy like that which the excellent groom possessed, can carry the most notorious scoundrels through all the deliria of ‘revivals’ and ‘experiences’.

Mr Percy lay, ejaculating between the pauses of his spiritual physician — such sentences as “Holy Melchizedec, Nebuchadnezzar and Batholomew look down upon us!” “Belshazzar, Jeroboam and Abihu, save us!” and when Hector remarked mildly “My Lad such invocations are neither Jew or Gentile — Catholic or protestant” He replied “Well I mean all for the best — Sweet Saint Bathsheba — dear Jezebel — divine Herodias have mercy on us!” — There Mr King fairly stopped in horror and amazement —

“Oh Loard! Maister — yaw’re noan calling on them whores are ye? — Nay naw aw mun strip me coil to me wark and link at it in me shirt sleeves!”

“Well Bob it is not a sin to pray to Angels then — so — Merciful Moloch — blessed Belial — beneficent Beelzebub do have — ”

“Stop Maister — They *war* angels once, but they’ve fallen like cracked pots, or a brocken kneed horse — Yaw mun look aboon Maister; same as aw do!”

The morning service had not proceeded much further, and Hector was just preparing to administer pedestrian admonition to the hinder man of the kneeling groom, when in burst Simpson Quamina and O’ Connor —

“By Gom!” thundered Jeremiah in his deepest voice “Are we going to have a case of Delirium tremens here? By Gom — rise you fool”

“This” remarked Arthur “This is just the practical part of what I went through after my famous Fortnight where in I killed young Phillpot — He went off with a red hot poker in his bowels one Friday, after his thirty ninth tumbler — I had three Methodist missionaries at Kingston to pray for me that week — and it was all owing to new rum. It *could* be nothing else, for if it had been real old Jamaica he would have yet been sweet as a daisy.”

“Well” said Quamina “You Christian dogs do pay dearly for your whistle — who ever heard any of the faithful ranting and raving thus? Allah be praised — I am a Moslem skin and bone, and I’d be damned before I’d taste one drop of your infidel wine! Praised be the name of the prophet! I’m glad he knew nothing of Brandy and Whiskey! If He had done I doubt I should have found Houri’s rather scarce hereafter!”

“Quashia Quamina” said Percy sternly “If you do not put off the old man I’ll make you as much a cinder as you seem to be! That Bull baiting stake shall not have been standing so long in the towngate for nothing! Fanny my lass — tell the waiter to order — Coffee, Ham, Eggs — and Brandy for one — and lay a Bible beside the tray open at the Xth chapter of Nehemiah — you may as well also double it down at the Ist chapter of Ist Chronicles — I'll have prayers this morning or else I'll be — "I'll comment on Nehemiah from the Ist to the th verses — I'll let you know the *word*!"

All the bed chamber audience now left the room except the *devout* groom and the *faithful* friend, Hector, who said

"Now — Percy how long is this blasted foolery to continue — for I fancy you have other fish to fry?"

"Hector, if you do not leave this room and let me find you on my descent into the breakfast room, prone on your knees may you get ere night what you will be sure to get ere the Lords last day!"

Mr Montmorency shut the door, saying, ere he left that he hoped there was plenty of Hollands distributed at Love feasts, and Mr Percy with the aid of his devout groom and a snatch now and then from one of the songs of Zion managed to complete his morning toilette — which was not this morning the garb of a grouse shooting Squire — but very unexceptionable and clerical black. He sported a white cravat with a precise tie, and as his groom said on adjusting his masters crock coat — he "at last looked dacent and menseful — "

When the "Rev" Alexander Percy entered the breakfast room in his hotel he was greeted by the irrepressible laughter of his companions, but not all their mirth or raillery could disturb the rapt inspiration of his divine countenance. Addressing himself to the waiter, who, owing to confusion of mind consequent on the metamorphosis of the strange gentleman, was only prevented by Hector from misplacing everything. He said —

"Have you here any resident teachers of the Gospel?"

"No Sir — Yes Sir — Theres Mr Scarlet the Curate — a capital judge of horse flesh Sir — and the Rev Matthew Rasper — poor old Gentleman — he weighs st now and can scarce go to cover — but he loves to see a throw off. Boots will take you there Sir, any time. He has as good a drop of wine in his cellars Sir as we have — and the Dean says ours is not to be beaten at the Bishops — and I am sure the Dean is a judge Sir"

The company pricked up their ears at this intelligence — Quashia swore he loved the cloth for it was his own colour — O' Connor asked had Mr Rasper never a pretty daughter or so, for his soul warmed toward the family — but Mr Percy sternly ordered silence and continued —

"Waiter jest not on things pertaining to Salvation — Are there here any of the Lords labourers in the Wesleyan or Primitive Methodist vineyards"

"The Waiter looked at his napkin — settled his stock and timidly answered

"Lord Reynard has some gardeners Sir, but I believe they are not methodists, for the head gardener broke anothers head last week for selling off peaches — besides his lordship lives eight miles off Sir."

"Unrepentant Sinner — send for your Wesleyan preacher — and tell him to bring a brace of class leaders along with him"

As the waiter left the room scratching his head and sighing deeply Mr Percy took his place at the head of the table and intimated to the company that he should expect every man to off the moor and down at the Hotel by five in the afternoon, for the lord had work for them — For himself he should not touch a trigger as his vocation was to save souls.

"I always thought" said Hector who alone seemed thouroughly to comprehend his dear friends humour — "I always had an idea that the black coat carries it with the lasses over the red or green — Well I'll make one — and now you dogs when your luncheon is ready on the heather see if I don' t treat you to a grace as long as O' Connors face has become at the mention of it"

"Well" Sighed Arthur — turning to Quamina "There is nothing for it but to get drunk to day — trouble is pressing hard on us!"

"I am for a row and a fight in the fair this evening Arthur — nothing else will unburthen my mind."

"Gentlemen" said Percy — "You will do no such thing — The lord hath need of you. Hector I rely on you to follow out the good work."

As the Waiter, on reaching the preacher door had said that the famous "RICH" gentleman staying at their house wished to see him my readers will not wonder that the saintly man knocked over his breakfast table — forgot the ham and eggs that were trembling under his ruthless knife, and in a whirl of calculations about the Chapel debt — quarterly subscriptions — Donations to a dozen different funds — visions of a new school such as should cut the national one to ribbons. The founders name "A. PERCY. ESQr" — on a vast marble tablet with the "Revd Simon Slugg Preacher of the Gospel" and all the Chapel trustees sheltering modestly under the aristocratic wing, beneath — that in such a state of unworldly extasy he broke both shins over the sheep pens and recieved martyrdom from three horse Jobbers whips ere he had roused up his two principal class leaders Messrs Apollos Fleshbotham, and Timothy Bottomley.

Those chosen vessels being rigid Teatotallers and knowing that when recieved gratis creature comforts were never refused by their beloved brother, were at first alarmed lest some hospitable brother or more probably sister, had tempted the lords servant over night — but when wiping his perspiring brow, the Rev Simon gasped out that the "RICH" gentleman at the Thurston Arms wanted them — they too caught a wild infection and each dashing his hat over his brows with the back run in front they burst through gathering the crowd of long and short horns — stopped not to rebuke the glaring lies which were bursting from each dealers lips, and soon made their appearance before the bar of the Thurtson Arms. Once only Bottomley asked Fleshbotham "Whats our Chapel debt?"

“£=s= /”

“Oh nonsense” — said Slugg “Say at once — Its the lords work!”

Messrs Fleshbotham and Bottomley were beauties of the order combining that interesting union of darkness and pallor so assiduously cultivated by those that prefer the straight and narrow path. If their necks were not swanlike they yet stretched several inches above their carelessly tied white neckcloths and so far as stature may become a man, and flexibility be termed a constituent of grace, their lanky figures and loose jointed limbs proclaimed them to be model Apollos. Their Rev brother, though a few inches beneath the heroic standard, made amends by capacity of body for all he might be deficient in as to height and though his face looked like a pale “whangby” cheese, yet it was juicy enough to cause it to shine like the full moon through a fog.

Such as they were, the children of grace were admitted to the breakfast room, and saw first what made their fasting bowels yearn — a large table covered with the reliquae of a sportsmans morning meal — and next five very unevangelical ‘professors’ seated over “Fireballs” each consisting of a wine glass of brandy with the yolk of an egg dropped into it; but the object of their attraction stood before them on the hearth rug — a very tall divine looking saint, with eyes distorted almost to a squint — a mouth that changed its play each moment from wrapt solemnity to malicious drollery, and a pair of orange whiskers horribly out of harmony with the holy sable of his scrupulously neat attire.

As the trio kept each man his mouth open it followed that, physiologically considered, they could not speak — so Mr Percy began with a voice whose sonorous and noble tone gave them delightful anticipations of the effect of ensuing speeches in the Chapel —

“My Christian friends — Welcome in *His* name — come forward — Do your bodies need refreshment?”

“Why Sir, Why, no — That is we have hoped so much from an early exhibition of what *He* can do, that — in short Sir we thought breakfast beneath notice.”

“Refuse not the gifts offered — You will doubtless use that decanter of brandy in your coffee, for your stomachs sake and your many infirmities — Allow me ere you assume your seats, to introduce my respected brother Montmorency — long a fellow labourer in foreign climes — Brother O’ Connor, a saved sinner — now a child of grace — If ever man had the root of the matter in him he has — (’Damn it’ — growled poor O’ Connor — sotto voce — ‘Its never shewn a sprout yet’) Brother Quashia Quamina — I might even say — *dearest* brother (Here the Moor, without being aware, took two fire balls one after the other.) He is indeed a brand snatched from the burning”

O Connor had here nearly spoiled the play by suddenly vociferating “I’ll be blessed — only look at him — if he is not burnt already!” — but a withering scowl from Mr Percy silenced the Slavers Captain —

"Excuse Brother O' Connor, my dear fellow laborours — He has put on the robe of godliness, but the old Adam now and then gives him a grip — Yet he is zealous my dear friends — he is zealous — My friends the native of the benighted land of Africa has been a chosen vessel for the evil one and after unheard of sins, brutalities, torturings — headings — hangings, roastings fleaings alive — burning man woman and child — crushing a thousand slaves into a one hundred ton slaver — in fact after having done all that Satan could do if let suddenly loose from Hell, He has become a burning and a shining light"

Here the three Wesleyans exchanged looks of exstatic delight — The idea of such heavenly converted sinners — of the thrilling experiences, the startling disclosures they would be able to give in the Chapel formed a prospect almost too rich; but poor Quamina so little understood his friends description of his character that nothing save Percys squinting glance prevented him from doffing his coat for a set-to on the spot.

"My beloved brother Mr Simpson" continued Percy "Is a *Banker* (Here the trio involuntarily rose to do homage) "but *He* holds his purse, and my brother only considers himself as a steward" (poor Jeremiah buttoned, at this part of the address, both breaches pockets) "My dear brother Gordon comes last — He has not been the *least* of sinners — Hell has had hard hard hold upon him but he has escaped with the skin of his teeth — I never knew so great a reprobate or have seen so great a change! Indeed my Christian friends all in this room whom I have introduced to you have been the very vilest of sinners — Every crime of which human nature can be guilty, they have committed — every evil thought which could enter mans heart has blackened theirs; They have been eaten up with the filthiest sores of the souls leprosy — (Here O' Connor could hold no longer, but roared out 'I've a skin as fair as yours!') Excuse our brothers sailor like bluntness; it is only a little of the old leaven — there is not one of our dear brethren who ought not to be hung in chains long since — but thanks be to *Him* — they are now like lambs wool washed at the springs of Jordan!"

As 'The viler the sinner, the greater the saint' the three visitors looked up from plates filled a second time with the cold round — each giving a groan of intense satisfaction partly the result of a full heart and partly that of a full stomach. Mr Percy continued

"Brethren Providence hath given me a small endowment of carnal comforts — praised be *His* name — and I propose amid the sins and follies of this vanity fair, to devote my mite to the carrying out of the great work — So I shall request that you will allow me an open and lighted Chapel at o'clock this evening, wherein a short missionary experience may be given you by my dear repentant bretheren, and myself who am lower than the most ignorant sucklings in grace. I beg to place in the hands of my reverend brother in the bonds a small matter of this earthly dross to aid in printing bills and lighting the tabernacle of prayer."

So saying Mr Percy meekly deposited ten sovereigns in the hand of the Rev S. Slugg who trembled with the excess of his gratitude and looked at his benefactors boots as if he thought his tongue would be benefited by becoming their shoe black.

"You will oblige me — brother — a — a — whats your name?"

Slugg — Slugg — my dearest Sir!"

"Well — by drawing up a small bill for this evenings meeting"

Mr Slugg was not long ere his pen was flying fast and furious over a half sheet of paper, and in due time his labours produced — with a little assistance from Mr Momtmorency — the following veracious handbill.

"SANCTIFICATION CHAPEL.
Ardmore.

At o'clock in the Evening of this day there will be held a special extraordinary meeting of the Wesleyan Missionary Society wherein light will be given from lamps fed with the oil of the ten virgins! The horrors of Sin — the iniquities of Heathenism — the cruelties of the slave trade — will be fully exemplified in the experience of several soul saved Sinners sanctified unto Salvation!

Those beloved bretheren, once
lost and now restored — viz.

QUASHIA. QUAMINA.

Formerly a slave in Africa, then a slave driver — next a slave owner, and after wards a pirate captain —

ARTHUR. O' CONNOR.

who declares that he has been nearer to the arm pits in black and white blood than any sinner that ever Gods vengeance neglected to kick to Hell —

GEORGE. GORDON.

who solemnly declares that if he fully gave his experience the roof would fly from the best built Lords House in England —

JEREMIAH SIMPSON ESQr'.

The great Banker who taketh for his motto "Freely thou hast recieved — freely give'.

HECTOR. M. M. MONTMORENCY.

A humble gleaner in the harvest of souls

AND

ALEXANDER. PERCY. ESQR. M.P. PERCY HALL.
ALNWICK HALL. ELRINGTON HOUSE. HANTS. AND
NORTHANGERLAND HOUSE.
LONDON.

Who will lend to the aid of the Society his invalauble religious attainments — his untiring energies, his unequalled eloquence and his unparalleled benevolence.

Silver will most thankfully be recieved in the galleries, and friends who desire front pews will be expected to deposit s — into the hands of the Treasurer,

Simon Slugg.

N. B. The Classes will be called to prayer after the collection, when it is expected that A. PERCY. ESQR. MP. will address them."

"That will do" said Mr Percy as Hector with a ludicrous grin handed him the flattering expose of his companions former life and conversation — "Now my dear freinds in the sacred cause, let this production be distributed extensively throughout the town and; 'ere evening put on the whole armour of righteousness, so that I — even I — David may with a sling and a stone slay the Philistine — even the man of sin — the old man Adam. Good Morning my dear brethren."

Thus, with a stately gesture, Mr Percy bowed his three confounded but triumphing visitors from the room — and then taking one other cup of Coffee dashed with brandy, he beckoned Hector to follow him and both departed either into another apartment, or on some confidential walk.

Those who remained behind, after a torrent of sighs and execrations, resigned themselves to stern fate, and swore that — black as they had been described, they would see the fun out though their usage was scurvy enough to turn a tortoise into a tiger.

"What shall we do — for I can only say 'unaccustomed as I am to public speaking' and I know the Bible as well as you know the Koran" remarked Mr Quamina sorrowfully looking at his Old Companion in arms

"The practical part of the affair is that I fear I shall begin by sending the whole chapel bodily to Hell — and then would'nt Percy storm a trifle!" answered O' Connor — but friendly advice was at hand for at this moment the waiter entered with a note addressed to the lachrymose gentlemen, which being opened proved to be in Hectors handwriting —

"The Vestry — Santification Chapel

Well, my beloved brethren — I always thought you were rogues but, till now I did not know that you were fools — But out of pity to your babyhood I'll just give you one fresh wrinkle in your strait — One fact is clear — that you *must* appear and speak unto improvement to night — But how are you to fructify when I question whether you ever opened the blessed pages since you first robbed your papa's orchard. Now mark me old fellows. Dress yourselves in black, or as our holy friend would say 'put on the whole armour of righteousness', sling round your thrapples a white neckercheif — and, when you are called on, LIE left and right as if according to the holy word you were lying "with a cart rope'. In blackening yourselves from your cradle to your conversion beat the powers of the imp who polishes the boots of Satan. If you can find words to picture earth as worse than Hell do so — but pray do not get *too* drunk ere you enter the sacred portal — I dont care about a dozen tumblers, but *not one* more except to Jeremiah who in consideration of his natural phlegm may be allowed the bakers or the devils dozen.

Remember boys our holy saint is in no joking mood to day — He is just now kneeling at a chair beside me screeching like a half throttled turkey cock for the lord. He roars so about crucifixion in Jesus that I wish from my soul he were nailed hand and foot like a dead magpie, to a barn door.

From your sinful travailer in the throes of labour, and about to bring forth a cubic yard of the blessed one — thus much.

N.B. If you wish to pull our holy friends delicate “petite nez retroussé” you may dash in a few stiffish hints respecting the sinful lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life — but alas you do not know the scriptural phraseology so I suppose I must do that myself!

The Rev H.M.M. Montmorency

Some time a feeble labourer in the vineyards of Damnblastaree — Swiglushaboo, and the torrid African wilds of Splitmytimberara” but now a labourer among the people called methodists.

To HIS servants
gathered over eggs
Ham Brandy and coffee
in the Breakfast room
Thurstons Arms.”

“Grace and peace be with them”

“Well” said O’ Connor with a sigh as if of gratitude for a mountain removed from his breast — “I see through it — The practical part of the evening will be just what I can weild, and if my lies don’t kick down yon chapel Joshua’s trumpets never floored the walls of Jericho!”

“I see no fun in the matter” returned Mr Quamina sulkily “He’s a fool and he want to make fools of us — I dont like to have my tail cut off to please the docked fox — But as you say Arthur I can LIE as far as from here to Guinea as as fast as the rapids of the Congo and as loud as a Gold Coast thunder storm. For not getting drunk to night I’ll not promise, because I am so vexed at him.”

Gordon only growled “I wish he would only think of women for he is never bearable when he deals with men” and Simpson muttered “I wish I may have the collection to count.”

Some of my readers may know little of places of public worship except from such examples as they may find in the lofty roofed, nobly windowed piles which our national religion has dedicated to the service of God. But the decorous worship — the plain yet stately liturgy — the cathedral chaunts and those Anthems that speak to us from the graves of Purcell, Tallis, Gibbons, Bull, Kent or Green, find no parallel in the new raw cubes of brick or stone, pierced with two tiers of semicircular arched windows and possessed of interiors as fine as gaudily painted pews and galleries can make, which are denominated CHAPELS. These gems of classic architecture may possess Organs of much cost and enshrined in mahogany cases but, alas! their music is that of a waltz in ‘delirium tremens’ fancying that it is dancing souls to heaven; Their pulpits are adorned with unexceptionable velvet but the bibles lying upon them are thumped in time to a tattoo of extemporaneous raving: ‘I speak not in anger but in sorrow’ reader for though I could point out many an illustrious exception I have seen enough of what were once called ‘conventicals’ to feel aware that the slight sketch I have just drawn or the more finished picture which I mean to paint give no exaggerated idea of the follies into which man can plunge when he wishes to appear more holy than he is.

On the evening of the first day of Ardmore fair, Sanctification Chapel presented to the crowd assembled about its doors a blaze of gas light from every square paned window — Inside abundance of light threw a yellow glory over the rapidly filling pews and galleries, while a double lustre blessed the green baize-bordered platform erected for the distinguished orators in the forthcoming missionary meeting. Men with slouched shoulders and downcast eyes assiduously trimmed the lamps or scraped discordant preludes on violins and violoncello’s[sic] — and perspiring but regenerated souls buried their faces in their hands under the influence of groaning prayer. The ladies too crowded fast into the scene of action with a very holy fervour though a sadly carnal attention to dress: Their upturned eyes and saddned sighs’ told of heaven but their satin bonnets and white handkercheifs smelt a little ‘of the earth, earthy’.

For a while the bare boards of the platform caused a feeling of impatience in the rapidly filling edifice but ere long those boards were pressed by the boots of five as beautiful specimens of sinners saved as ever trod upon Memel timber. The Rev H.M.M. Montmorency — The Rev J Simpson — the Rev G Gordon — the Rev A, O’ Connor — the Rev Q Quamina — all attired in solemn sable took their seats amid the deepest groans among the male and with the liveliest sympathies from the female portion of the audience — and though the chosen presented countenances as rascally as ever faced the mob round Tyburn tree their erect gentlemanly figures and well whiskered manliness told well especially with the fairer and holier portion of the audience.

Mr Slugg followed these christian warriors and whispered a few words while he familiarily kept hold of the Rev Hectors Coat button but Montmorency audibly responded —

“My beloved fellow soldier wishes to fight the good fight himself — so he will both give out the hymn and probably lead on the Organ. On his knees this morning he vowed that the work should not be done slackly.”

Ere he had ceased speaking the lion of the evening was seen making his way among a reverently parting crowd in the aisle; and, looking neither to the right hand or the left he ascended to his place, faced his audience and shewed to many a tenderly swimming eye a very tall shapely figure in solemn black with an aristocratic forehead shining in the gas light and a face whose angelic aspect was only marred by the accursed chestnut cuds and orange whiskers.

Waiting till an obligate movement of sighs and groans had ceased the Rev Alexander Percy began in a distinct but calm and silvery voice —

"My brethren and Sisters in Christ — I feel so much oppressed with the weight of a duty which a higher power has laid upon me that I request from you a song of prayer and praise ere we open forth the business of this evening — My brother Slugg I shall give out an hymn and accompany it on the Organ myself so it will be quite unnecessary for my Christian friend to make any use of the instruments I see in the music seat."

Slugg and the musicians could not forbear a look of very carnal mortification at the hauteur with which the holy man declined their assistance, but Montmorency covered his face with his handkercheif to hide the uncontrollable risibilty which shook his ribs, as his experienced eyes saw the resolute determination on the part of his beloved friend to carry out the present farce with all the earnestness of his wayward and intractable character. Mr Percy, who if his wrapt and inspired eyes told [the] truth, had really seized the spirit of the hour, advanced to the front of the platform — waved his hand to still the troubled sea of groans and continued —

"Let us miserable worms send up our cry as if from Tophet in the following words and adapted to the tune of "Widdops th."

Before Our mighty Makers throne
Let us submissive kneel in prayer,
And strive for scarlet sins to atone
For we must pray that He may hear.
Deep — Mighty Lord — be our despair —
Distinct our consciousness of sin —
Lest from thine eyes our outside fan —
Should strive to hide our crimes within.
We know that we are formed for crime,
That through our lifetime crimes we form,
Believing, madly, all the time
That mercy sheilds us from the storm;
Or, as long since, in Shinars plain,
Rebellious men their Tower of pride
Raised up, in hopes, by labour vain
That thus thy power might be defied,
So we, by impious moral code
Or ever changing creeds of faith,
Think we may climb the narrow road,
Elude thy arm, and cheat our death.
But, Oh when we have gained Heaven's gate,
The eternal crown intent to win,
Long must we knock and, lingering, wait
Ere watching angels let us in!
"Hast thou repented of thy sin?"
What Soul — my God can answer then?
"Go back — Thy path again begin,
And weep and watch and wait again!"
But if returning be denied
By Deaths grim gateway, closed behind,
Where flies our heaven, our hope, our pride?
They fly like chaff before the wind!
Lord, let us know our treacherous mind

Even though that knowledge bring despair;
For, wandering thus, accursed and blind,
We dare not hope that Thou wilt hear!“

As I have already alluded to Mr Percy’s musical powers I need hardly add now that when after giving out the hymn he took his seat at the Organ he soon sent the solemn harmony rolling through the chapel and ascending as if to heaven. Whatever the discomfited gut scrapers felt they were obliged to stare at [the] powers of the ‘rich converted squire’ and even the Rev S Slugg gave a groan of astonishment when the last deep chord had died away.

Mr Percy again advanced to the front of the platform and continued in what the soul saved declared were heavenly tones,

“My brethren God hath opened out a path through this worlds wilderness, and as to those who ask, much will be given, so to you who seek much will be found. We are nothing ourselves and by ourselves we can do nothing but guided by that Star which shone over Bethlehem more than eighteen hundred years ago and which now, if our dimmed eyes could see it, shines over Ardmore we may pursue a soldiers path and ere morning win a new victory over the hitherto unvanquished Man of Sin. I appear before you now as the advocate — the counsel in fact for a wide world brought before Gods bar for crime, and, and unless I successfully plead their cause condemned to a far worse punishment than any which human ingenuity can inflict — I plead for that wide land whose burning Sun blazes on bodies whose blackened hue is as snow compared with the midnight darkness of their Souls — I plead my brethren for *Africa* — I am counsel also in Gods court of justice for another land still wider — still older — still fuller of all associations which can rouse our hearts to the trumpet sound of human triumphs the funeral wail of human sorrows born — A land wherein our mortal nature found its cradle — wherein a young world met a watery grave — From which a world now called old had its dawning — out of one of whose lonely villages rose the star that has never sunk and whose bright beam from Bethlehem I will trust shines upon our meeting here. I plead for the earth that gave our first father existence and our Saviour a sepulchre — I plead my Christian friends for Asia. Another land also, with which from shorter aquaintance we have less sympathy demands your own and my attention — A land whose mighty rivers roll unknown and incalculable wealth to Ocean but which in itself is — save the United States — a wild and howling waste — nearly Four thousand miles of water draining a surface more than that of all Europe send hourly wasted wealth to the Atlantic and sorrowful sighs to heaven — The Amazons river preaches a sermon in every gush of its stream — The bones that whiten peruvian mountains cry aloud for vengeance — My Brethren I plead for *America*.

Another clime which God has favoured — which he has blessed with small gratitude recieved in return — a clime that has seized the reins and will direct the progress of earthly improvement — That clime too I must plead for — I plead for wealth changed to pride — power changed to tyranny —

Religion changed to hypocrisy — Truth changed to falsehood — population changed to corruption — knowledge obtained only to work the deeds of darkness — I plead for EUROPE. And now my brethren must I not plead for the Island which gave me birth? For the land wherein lies all I have most loved on earth — among whose hills and vales my sorrowing body walks; beneath whose soil my weary head must rest — Must I not plead for our *England* — for our father land?"

Here Percy with eyes glistning and voice faltering under me influence of real though capricious emotions advanced to the very front of the platform and in still more earnest tones continued —

"The flesh that to my carnal mind was once worth all the world to me is now but an atom of thyself O world! The joy of my life is the sport of a worm! The anchor of my mortal back is torn away And now from rocks and quicksands who can save me — O Father! Only *Thou*! "For in thy hands is power and might, and Thou rulest and reignest over all!" Yet England — my country demands a warmer expression of feeling than any I can give to far off lands, for that place which all we love most fills our arms or their graves we must think of oftenest — love the most, and with the most agony deplore — Forgive me, my Christian bretheren — I wander from an important text — "Go ye forth and preach the gospel in my name." Yes let us go from the north and the south, to the uttermost Isles of the sea — Let *His* word mingle with the sound of waters that heralds Lena and Obi and Eniseei to their cold Siberian Sea — Let it return in "iron knell" from the mighty peaks that separate dreary Thibet from fertile India — Let it wake the slumber of America with a voice louder than the thunders of her Andes — Let it tell unhappy Africa that the wide waves of her Nile or her Niger can never fertilize her thirsty sands till their waters unite with the sacred stream of Jordan.

Upon the banks of that river our souls will all in Gods due time have to stand, with the Ægypt of this worlds happiness and the wilderness of this worlds sorrow left like Israels forty years of wandering behind us — With the deep and treacherous flood beneath us — With the unclouded blaze of Heaven before us! —

That,

"When we tread the verge of Jordan"

we may have no need to fear that its waters will hurry us toward the sea of Sodom, but that guardian angels with white wings waving over a sunlit shore will give us a helping hand to place our feet on for ever flowering meadows. Is the earnest soul felt prayer of one who has wandered long in an inward Arabia and who now humbly prays that Yourselves and himself may reach a happy Canaan.

My Brethren excuse further speech from me at present; Brother Montmorency will introduce the speakers and open the real business of the meeting much more ably than myself — I feel I am nothing and have said nothing.

May HE have pity on us all!"

The Rev A Percy with a general bow to the enraptured audience took his seat amid a flourish of five hundred white handkercheifs. The Male portion of the assembly groaned deeply but the female portion felt deeply, and if a keen observer had noticed the odd half smile on Percys mobile lips as he looked round after taking his seat he would have known at once that the Orator had known to whose feelings he ought to address himself and to whom he meant to feel indifference.

When the tempest of groans, sobs, sighs, and screamings had somewhat subsided the Revd Hector. M.M. Montmorency rose and with his blacksmith arms folded across a breast as broad as Ben Caunt's and his wild Irish eyes glinting like black diamonds in a coal mine he burst forth in tones like the bass of La blache

"Well my fellow warriors Brother Percy has just given you a screed of sound doctrine but it's too fine my lads — Its too fine — We poor sinners want a good scouring out ere we are clean — A point lace towel won't do for us — rough horse hair and brooms instead of brushes are the real remedy for our accumulated monstrosities upon case hardened consciences. Now I have here two real horse combs made of cast iron and ready as cheese maggots to jump where Jesus calls them (You perhaps have never yet seen maggots spang off a knife into your mouth but I have) Well these two have been the biggest scamps that ever donned a shirt, and they now are the holiest saints that ever gave orders for a pair of wings — They are sure to have them my brethren — when they leave this misguided world — They are ready for them in heaven's warehouse — full feathered, and every quill tipped with gold. Think of the difference between their hopes and yours if you do not alter — pinions like Archangel Michael's for *them* — Hoofs like Archangel Lucifer's for *you* — Alter then my lads — make no gingerbread matter of it — Never did worse devils live than the two brothers who will now address you, and if they have passed the verge of Jordan why may not you?

Look to the lord my lads — fight the great enemy, though he had as many lives as a cat, and let me introduce to you — Captain Arthur O' Connor — once too worthless to have a coal wasted in roasting him and now galloping toward heaven as fast as Baalam's ass can carry him"

At the conclusion of this eloquent speech the Barrister took a pinch of snuff — hid his face to conceal indecent laugher which was working within him like beer in a barrel, and motioned O' Connor to rise.

With a very reluctant movement and a very irreligious curse the wild eyed, red haired sea officer obeyed the signal — the more quickly from seeing Percy squint — He stood irresolute with perspiring cheeks for a minute and then as if his mind were made up he struck both fists on the front rail of the platform and dashed at once "in medias res" —

Its no use my friends — I am a man unlearned in Godliness, and I have known the old one better than ever I knew my own father or Mother — I have never been worthy of conversion but I have been tumbled into Salvation — Neck and heels you percieve my friends — Glory be to God! Well I suppose I must tell you a bit of my experience — I came from a rich Irish family living at the rate of not more than £ per ann above their income but being an elder son I saddled the estate privately with some few debts to be paid off — interest meanwhile to accumulate — when the old Governor should die. Glory be to God, he lived to see me cut my creditors and take to the high seas — Oh had I but taken to salvation!" (Here tremendous groans for some time interrupted the orator) "Well thats a hit any how! Now then my lads — I mean my Christian brethren — I landed on the Gold Coast with a soul blacker than the body of any devil incarnate that ever bartered mans flesh for a fifteen shilling musket! I did by ("stop stop' said Montmorency sotto voce.) Well, never mind — I'll let you into the secrets of life before that clock strikes eight — I spent all my first capital in buying slaves, and as King Boy of old Calabar — You knew King Boy Quashia?"

"Aye that I did Arthur! The old De — I mean brute would have diddled me out of as fine a lot of real Bambarra niggers as ever were thrust under hatches merely because no more than two out of thirty of my best s Birmingham muskets would go off at the first fire. I told him it was the climate, to which they were not yet seasoned, but the Old boy was not to be done."

A dreadful squint from the Revd. A. Percy placed a padlock on the Moor's tongue, and the Revd. A. O' Connor continued —

"Well — my lads — that is — my dearest bretheren — this King Boy said that if I would "dash him" he would trust me for a ton or so of elephants teeth I consented to visit his majesty — Now, mind you, 'dashing' means oiling the palm — and the best dash is an anker of brandy or a keg of new rum — Well I dashed his majesty with two big calabashes of as fine red raw rum as ever scalded a mans entrails — It was beautiful to see his white eyes rolling, and his black paws patting his pursy paunch (there's alliteration for you Hector!) as he gradually stowed his hold with the leeward-Island stuff till he had got as good a cargo on board as a man need wish to leave port with. "Golly massa" he sputtered "Me no hab done dis while — Me spew, and den see what me do!" Well the old fellow being sick at the stomach essayed to leave the hut — beg pardon — I mean palace — and as his vessel lurched, and tacked as if against a head wind I thought it my duty to take him in tow as a steam tug would a dismasted tub of a collier. Hang me but when I touched him the graceless unrepentant sinner gave me a right handed lunge which would have sent me sharply over the streams of Jordan had not a New Testament which I had in my waistcoat pocket saved me — Yes my blessed Bretheren — My Testament saved me! May it save you too!"

The tumultous groans of joy which broke from the hitherto bewildered congregation made Percy aware that one other word from his eloquent colleague would only spoil the good hit he had made, so hastily stepping forward he said loudly —

“My Christian friends, the hour waxes late, me day is far spent — perhaps to some among us the night may be at hand — My brother O’ Connor is exhausted with previous labour — I introduce to relieve him — my dear brother Quashia Quamina.”

The copper-coloured gentleman advanced to the front of the platform with precisely the same aspect as would have been assumed by him if taking a last look on this weary world from the elevation of Newgate scaffold.

“Blasted bitches and brothers — confound you Hector, don’t kick my shins so — I mean Ladies and Gentlemen — now that’s too bad Hector — well, Christian friends, then — Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, and I’ll be most cruelly explificated if I ever stood on any platform save the deck, before, I will try to enlighten the gentiles and give them some insight into the goings on in our business; I mean — d’ye mind me — what *was* our business *once* — Well — where was I — Percy, you unhanged villain I won’t be trailed by *you* any longer!”

Furiously turning to the Revd A Percy, the irascible Moor muttered an oath and resumed his seat, but the cheif actor in the evening’s farce, without noticing his colleague’s eccentricity, stepped forward and addressed the audience with a forehead like an Indian ocean in a summer calm.

“My dear friends and fellow Christians the zeal of my fellow labourers has eaten them up, and I much fear that the affecting disclosures which their experience would compell them to make would be painful to their tender feelings as well as to your own: I shall therefore adjourn this meeting till a future evening, and may *He* protect you all from the burning hill that was ready to fall upon Christian — from the stones that struck the vital breath out of holy Stephen — from the gridiron that fried St. Lawrence — from the crucifixion, head downwards, that gave apoplexy to St Peter — from the roasting of Polycarp — from the impetuous pride of Tertullian — from the vanity of Athanasius — from the laughing atheism of Lucian — from the humbugs of Plato, the treachery of Judas, the plagiarisms of Virgil, the repetitions of Homer,”

“Halt,” cried Montmorency “What on this earth are you driving at?” But Percy nothing heeding ‘drifted on his path’ and certainly ‘with silence deep as death’ <assured> him —

“Yes, from the fate of Alcibiades’ dog’s tail from the fate of Prynne’s ears, from the fate of Charles the first’s head and of Oliver Cromwell’s nose from the falsehood of Psalmanazer and Jacob, from the impudence of Colonel Blood, and Joab, from the vanity of Absalom and the young Pretender, the go and come virginity of my Ancestress Queen Elizabeth, the death of my pretty Queen Mary, the hard heartedness of Brutus, the clemency of Titus that crucified fifty Jews round the walls of their city, the charity of Inquisitors general — Malay pirates, Slave drivers — I do not allude to my two regenerated fellow labourers present — From the tender mercies of Henry VIIIth and George IVth, of Henry VIIth and old Elwes, of Prince Rupert and the Marquis of Waterford, of Chateaubriand and Robert Montgomery — of Prince Marshal Blucher and Bernard Barton, from all these terrors, Good Lord deliver us!"

As the Revd Alexander Percy concluded with a look of which canvass could give no transcript — Mr Montmorency took his hand gave out a hymn, led the dismayed congregation through the last round of their dance of enthusiasm and all left the chapel impressed with the idea that the Revd. A. Percy was a very odd but very apostolic saint.

Percy departed without another word for his mind did not happen to be under the roof which sheltered his body. O' Connor and Quamina sat stroking their hair from their foreheads, and Mr H.M.M. Montmorency enjoyed the happiness which a warhorse may have while galloping over the dying and the dead.

In a while O' Connor wiping the perspiration from his face sighed forth —

"Well, Quashia, what the deuce are we to do now? That accursed Daguerreotype of Lucifer has got his Barometer up to ° in the shade, and you know how little we liked that pitch when we had scarce a hand left to handle a rope off that pompous peice of Portuguese humbug. Fort Elmina, and that regular mantrap 'Cabo Corso' castle."

"I'de rather hang out the red flag within range of Cape Coast Castle guns than sit where I am doing Arthur."

"Now my lads" broke in the Irish Banister with a glorious chuckle "I move that "plase the pigs' you —

— "Dont go home till morning;
Till daylight doth appear."

for then Alexander the great, seeing your red eyes and pallid cheeks, will deem you repentant, and in his tender mercy forgive you."

"E'gad it's a good suggestion!" exclaimed the culprits in a breath — though Quashia remarked with an oath that if Percy shewed any tender mercies he must have borrowed them at heavy interest from Simpson, for he was sure he had not a farthing' s worth of his own.

"Never you mind where he gets his mercies more than he does where he gets his lasses so long as they are there." said Hector.

"And Echo answers — where?" replied Quashia.

The lamps in the emptied Chapel were flickering amid the smell of their approaching dissolution — the stars seen through the windows were fast outvying them, and shewed that Heaven is seen more distinctly as Earthly light declines.

Montmorency led his legion into the still crowded streets and what they did during the 'sma' hours' of that night — "Is it not written in the books of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?!

The first visitor to the Coffee room of the Hotel, next morning, was the Hero of the previous night, who entered with a look, half quizzical — half serious — and rang the bell which was answered by Fanny.

"Fanny — what do they think of me in these parts?"

Fanny blushed, giggled and replied

"Why Sir, they say you are a very nice looking gentleman."

"Ah, but that is not to the point — It's the *Soul*, Fanny, that I'm thinking of! What do they say about my soul?"

"Well — really — Sir — Why we do not know what to think — We think you are a great gentleman and a clever one — and you pay well — and people say Sir — people say — "

"What — Fanny?"

"Well — do excuse me Sir — They say you have behaved ill to women often."

"Ah! My girl — remember that the tongue though it be a little member can work great mischeif! I'm as innocent as a new born babe — Get me a cup of coffee — four poached eggs, and a 'demi tasse' of Cogniac for breakfast."

"What is that last order Sir?"

"It means as much Brandy as you please my girl — I thought you understood the Chaldaic dialect of the Hebrew — But you perhaps understand that language." said Mr Percy — impressing an unmistakeable kiss on the pink cheek of the young woman, who left the room to execute his orders in a rather flurried and hesitating manner.

As she closed the door his eyes wandered to the window through which beyond the houses could be seen the purple summits of the moorland hills. A long line of fir plantations marked the spot wherein his feelings anchored, and as soon as he had dispatched a hasty breakfast, to that spot he wended his way.

The mild but rather misty air of the uplands for a while diverted his mind from the follies of the previous night. The cattle quietly lying in their mornings rest among the dew spangled grass and half opened daisies, the mountain sheep with shackled limbs still contentedly making their breakfast on the produce of an ungrateful soil, all spoke of calm and contentment — sincere, though perhaps forced, and shewn by objects humble enough in the scale of Creation.

The being of a far mightier mind, and compared with whom, every living thing round his path was little better than would have been the vitality of a polypus, walked forward, sometimes smiling at the little bits of English scenery which no one save Bewick has ever copied on wood or steel, but far oftener casting the mental eye backward upon an object of love long laid in her grave, or forward, upon one whose grave he might be the means of making.

There are hours when our thoughts take in, and fully comprehend years as well as minutes; when the long chain which connects bygone, with present and with forthcoming years blazes like one vivid streak of lightening, and gives mans feelings almost a prophetic power to look into his future doom.

Such a power Mr Percy seemed to have obtained when he leaned on the gate of the avenue leading to Darkwall and thought of the Mary he had lost, and the Maria he was to meet.

After his eye had wandered a while over whitey green pastures and storm beaten moors he entered the Hall, and in its Breakfast room met the beautiful though melancholy looking mistress of the mansion

The old fashioned room with its Elizabethan windows and its roof pointed from the centres to the octagonal diverging supports did not attract his attention, but the Lady who welcomed him did — She entered with a took of studied solemnity, but with a shining in the eyes that said solemnity might sometimes tell lies.

Mrs Maria Thurston had known enough of sorrow, and God had intended her to both know and feel enough of love. She had before her a man capable of exciting every feeling that a woman can know — She had, as the possesor of her own person, a man, if I can write him down as such, who could not gain more than momentarily — her feelings, and who never could fill them at all. She had lost thoughts of him except in her ideas of dread of him, and so many years had elapsed since he had bestowed on her even one moment of, I fear, *selfish* fondness, that the remembrance of her bridal days caused the atonishment which one feels when thinking that ones childhood took for truth the gibberish of a nursery tale.

Now, and for long ago she knew that on rising she must dress to face a day of duties performed unthanked and, so far as her thoughts were concerned, objectless care.

What was it then that caused an expression to cross her face which even the servant who closed the door could notice, as Mr Percy greeted her with a tight rein upon his tongue but a hot spur within his mind? Whatever she felt an unusual visitant — colour — invaded her cheeks as she replied to his greeting of “Well Madam —

There is an unseen power which draws us onwards”

So in accordance with Schiller’s philosophy I am hither thus early from the coarseness of Ardmore cattle fair.”

“I suppose Sir you have yet been so kind as to do your utmost to correct that coarseness for I have understood that Mr Thurstons guest performed — positively for one night only in the Methodist Chapel at — — ”

“Oh do not speak of it! You do not know me — When I am most inwardly serious I am most outwardly absurd — Last nights folly was a borrowed cloak to shelter me from the passing storm and to be returned when the blast should have hurried it by. It has not been the first occasion on which I have dressed myself in motley, but I can doff the fools cap as easily as don it — Why do you look so sad?”

“I did not know that my looks were changed from their usual character —

But I am sure Sir that after the eccentricities of last night you will need refreshment this morning — more especially as I suppose you mean to spend the day on the moors."

"Maria — Madam, I mean — No, Damn it, it shall out — Maria — I do not mean to spend the day on the moors — I am no sentimental milksop, and I like a day spent at the tail of a pointer or a foxhound as well as any fellow that ever donned a green or scarlet Jacket, but I have other likings, and I would rather bring down sorrow from a well loved face than wing the finest Bustard (if there is one left) on the plains of Wiltshire. I know you are unhappy Maria — Yes you may put on the mockery of a smile and look as though you would say you were not — but your lot in life has been among thorny paths and against inclement skies. God made you by nature to be all that a woman could be, so far as her sunshine can enlighten a blighted world — You have been made, by some other power not very nearly akin to God, no better than a weed tossed on the water I can see it and if I wish to strive for a few hours to cheat you out of the bitter consciousness of your fate impute my wish not to a sin on my part, but to tenderness for her who instead of being a weed tossed on the water ought to be a jewel worn in a crown."

"Sir — Sir — Remember who I am — and for *my* sake forbear to — "

"*I* remember *I* know well enough what thou art — I know the earthquake ground on which I tread — But, Maria, through distress and danger to come — through hours of self reproach that I am too stubborn to own to others — through scenes that make me sick of my life — thou *shalt* — thou *must* be now my guiding star. Do not let those tears run down thy cheek unless I am to kiss them off — Do not play with and look at thy eye glass as if it and not Alexander Percy were talking to thee — Remember, my Maria, that we stand on a point of time — sorrow has been behind us both — The balm of mutual love may be before us — for I *know* that thou lovest me, and thy words need not put themselves to the trouble of a denial — and if we must part — Maria — remember a rough villain amid all his mental storms will have one sweet harbour in which that mind may anchor — An ill used lady will find that when she has to retire to a lonely room from the conclusion of thankless toils — she may, ere she lays her head on a (I would hope) peaceful pillow — feel that one man — up to all both of the good and evil of life — and who never prays for himself, is praying most unselfishly for her."

Some of my readers may think that the foregoing report of the breakfast room conversation sounds overstrained, or raphsodical, but as I only

"tell the tale as 'twas told to me"

and can with the mental eye see plainly the noble looking, passionately feeling, well experienced and highly talented scoundrel standing over, and warmly regarding the mild, sweet tempered, but sorrow stricken lady, who (save in this new attraction for her feelings) saw nothing through future life save continual travel over stony roads — I can tell them that the talk was not the kernel, but the shell, and that, after a look of almost vindictive feirceness, one close embrace gave to Mr Percy's arms one whom, at that hour he could not have lived without — and who in the whirl of her own feelings knew not whether she were dead or alive.

With cheek, now white, now red she sat beside Mr Percy, whose light complexioned countenance altered no more than did his orange whiskers but he pressed her dark curls to his bosom and said

"Maria — You must take a walk in the park or plantation — You look sickly, and my arm will be a good support during your walk — Don't be frightened to take the arm that of all the ,,, arms in this world would be the first to protect thy dear little self. Now I shall bring thy bonnet and veil and mantle out of the entrance hall and I insist upon thy putting them on — so wipe thy eyes, my love, and believe that this hand which rather roughly grasps thy neck would be a powerful defender if any other hand dared grasp it"

Mrs Thurston — powerless under the impulse of contending feelings, mechanically walked into the hall and returned ready for a morning walk, but with her sweet confiding eyes looking, now at the powerful past, then at the awful future.

Seeing that she hesitated in entering Percy threw open the window which admitted of immediate access to the lawn, and taking her arm first, and next her waist compelled her by his impetuosity of will to resign herself to his direction during the mornings walk.

The Breakfast Room was left empty now, and the forenoon sunshine beamed as usual upon the customary display of old Furniture and uncouth china. The grim portrait of Mr Thurston frowned over the mantle piece. The fair, but wan looking lady of the mansion smiled sorrowfully from her gilded frame, beside it, but the image of the man who was fated to change the destinies of that house was not there. His lofty forehead, orange whiskers, and sarcastic mouth were not to be found in the gloomy brow, black complexion, and purely malignant aspect of William Thurston.

While the room was empty of living occupants, times gone by, perhaps, looked down from the walls as forty centuries looked down from Cheop's pyramid upon the victory of the "Sultan Kebir" over the chivalrous Mamelukes; But the room was not long empty for, ere long, in burst the brawny, Irish form of Hector. M.M Montmorency — while Mr H.M.M. Montmorency was tenderly enquiring from a servant after the welfare of his dear friend Alexander — Mrs Thurston and her guest entered through the still opened window which invited ones footsteps from the sward without.

Mrs Thurston's raven tressess were rather disordered — and Mr Percy's azure eyes twinkled very suspiciously so Mr Montmorency, with bowels yearning as much as ever Jacob's or David's did for Benjamin or Jonathan — advanced toward his lofty friend and fervently exclaimed —

"Oh, I love thee! I *do* like that squint — It is so very amiable!"

Then turning as if he had not been aware that Mrs Thurston had entered the apartment, Mr Montmorency apologized for his rough outburst of friendship, and earnestly longed to know if Mrs Thurston were well, and able to traverse the moors that day!

Mrs Thurston answered the Irish Barrister as shortly as possible and, as much as possible, without a glance at his dark searching countenance. Mr Percy recklessly keeping beside his fair hostess on the sopha threw a look at Hector, such as would have given one lightning blaze from the Silla de Carracca's to the port of Cumana. A stranger, ignorant of human nature might have been puzzled to explain the meaning of the triumphant brightness of the gentleman's glance or tell the reason for the perpetual check which he seemed forced to keep upon his usually voluble tongue, while addressing Mrs Thurston. Indeed once, when she was taking from the table a very large folio of local Antiquities to shew it to Montmorency he so far forgot himself as to say imperiously and warmly

"Halt, *Darling* — I'll carry it"

and as she coloured violently and could not speak, while he muttered "Damn those slips of the tongue!" Montmorency's snuff box came into requisition and it might have been observed that his scrutiny of the architectural engravings and coats of Arms was as inquisitive as could have been the gaze of Dr Dryasdust or Jonathan Oldbuck but the Irish eyes were noticing, from their corners the changing cheek of the lady, and the cockles of his heart "rejoiced to find that she could not tear herself from that sofa and allowed Percy's hand to fall upon her own without noticing the 'accident'.

Looking at the plan of a Roman Camp alledged to have been discovered on the adjacent moors Montmorency remarked in a mild voice

"I always admire a commander who can kick aside your gradual approaches and take a fortification by storm. Zigzag work will do for the practice of the law, but it does not look natural or prove sucessful in war or in Love. to be sure a Spider would hardly agree with me, for it is very wary in catching its fly — but then when it has *got* it — who so brisk as the spider?"

As Mr Percy only answered by the pantomime of a sneering laugh, and the growling observation that a spider could kill a wasp, Mr Montmorency continued —

"Well, now, to business. You must know, however painful it may be to disclose the secret — and, believe me from the testimony of this bleeding bosom that it is a pain from which only burning tears could relieve me — a pain that no issue to the event, however happy, could wholly remove — for it lies *here*!"

"If you mean the inside coat pocket I judge it to be an unmanageable brief

"Oh no! proffessional business must lie asleep now!"

"Thank Heaven! Now Mar — Madam we may hope for happiness when *Law* sleeps."

"Oh Percy

'Alas, I feel I am no actor here!'

Our beloved fellow labourers, our fellow soldiers under *His* banner, our pilgrim companions, our virgin sisters, those who have fought under the cross by our side and who may with us eventualy win and wear a martyrs crown, are — but how can I declare it in your presence Madam — They are *in quod*!"

Mrs Thurston evidently did not understand the Banisters peroration and her mild eyes asked from Percy's face an explanation of the awful word; but that face, instead of consternation, expressed ecstatic pleasure as its lips whispered

"At last they are at home!"

"Oh but my friend" pleaded the Banister "think of the wives — stop they are not married — well then, of their children, poor little souls, sent adrift on the stormy ocean of this world — "

"Egad! They have been adrift since they were hatched Mat!"

"Well, but their mothers — "

"What? The childrens mothers, or the Saint's Hector?"

"You are not yet out of the shell — I mean the bonds of Satan — Percy. Do you know that Quashia and O' Connor are in the lock up, and will be brought this morning before Thurston and — worst of all — before Sir John Sinclair!"

On hearing that last name Mrs Thurston's pale cheek turned yet paler and she asked

"Then has my uncle arrived from Scotland?"

"He has — because he foresaw the evil to come like a double sighted Highlander as he is!"

Percy frowned on the lady as he noticed her change of countenance and then rose, turning to Montmorency with the remark that he supposed the poor devils wanted bail and he was sure that neither Jerry or Gordon would give it without a consideration so he supposed he must go down to Ardmore — 'but' he concluded, as he left the room with his friend I shall be back with your hus — with Thurston."

Mrs Thurston stood alone in the room, and as she saw the tall athletic gentleman in the dark green Newmarket Coat ride off by the side of his danger boding companion she involuntarily clasped her hands and exclaimed

"Oh God! My life is changed!"

Forethoughts of events to come gathered round her like tide waves round a stone, and like such waves overwhelmed her. Consciousness of what she has done that morning flashed like lightning through her soul, and though one thud of her mind prayed for God's mercy and another third enquired, "had she sinned at all!' the last third compelled he to fall on her knees, bury her face in the sopha cushion, and utter, amid sobs and at intervals, her scarcely coherent prayer.

"Oh God forgive me if thou cans't! I do not know how much I have angered thee — I do not know whether or not I sin in daring to pray to thee — I only know that I cannot help myself, that I am going whither my every feeling leads me, and that, come what may, into thy hands I must fall. The world will now judge ill of me — My sisterhood will shun me — Snares will surround me — my life will be endangered, a long dark future may be preparing for me and Hell itself may rise to meet meat my comings; But how can I shake off what my heart clings to? How can I vow to thee that I will forget him who seems all I have hoped for and never have obtained? How can I return to silent submission under heartless tyranny and keep any promise to hate the name of love?

I loved this world — I longed to see it happy — I did all I could to please whom I could — I gave myself to one who promised what he did not perform — I still kept to my promises and smiled away sorrow when I could, or hid it when misery overmastered the smile — Through all I felt blameless and could each night place my trust in Thee. What, then, can I do now? I *cannot* hate him — I *cannot* forget him — He has made me love him, and yet I must cast his image aside or live, a traitor to my vow, and a sinner in thy sight.

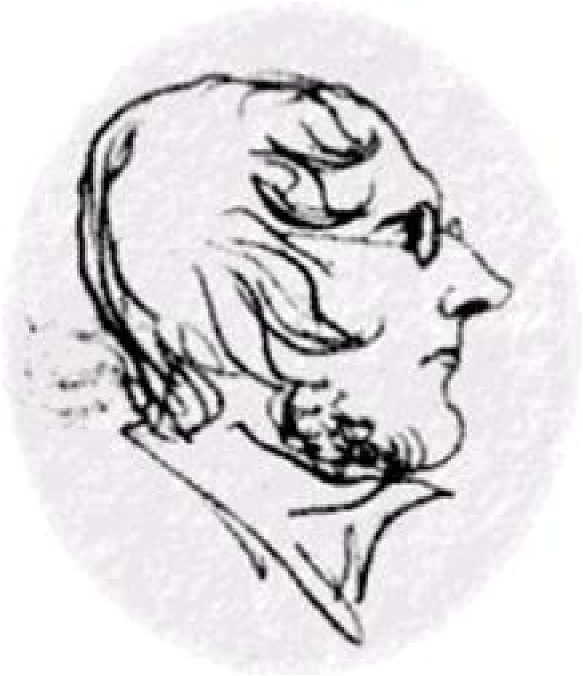
"My God, I *cannot* cast him aside! I should lie if I promised it — I long to be his own,but I have, through my life longed to be *Thine* own. I cannot be both, and now I must try to long to be in my grave.

Where, my God, is thy compassion, and why is it denied to me? Am I doomed to an endless agony; and, if so, wherefore am I doomed? I am as thou hast formed me — I feel as thou hast caused me — I act as thou permittest — I suffer what thou willest — I am thine with whom to do what thou pleasest — *but* — I am another's also!

Forgive me if I pray for him this night when I shall not dare to pray for myself. Forgive me if my eyes turn from the daily repeated scene of sorrow to the seldom coming hour of joy. I ask Thee to *forgive* me but I dare not hope it, so I must entirely trust myself to my darkening fate and to Thine own almighty power!"

Mrs Thurstons white forehead and raven curls were turned toward heaven as she rose with streaming eyes — she dried them with a white handkercheif which she thought her own, but flushed as she noticed the letters "A.P." IN THE CORNER, AND THEN hurriedly left the room to *try* to fulfill her duties.

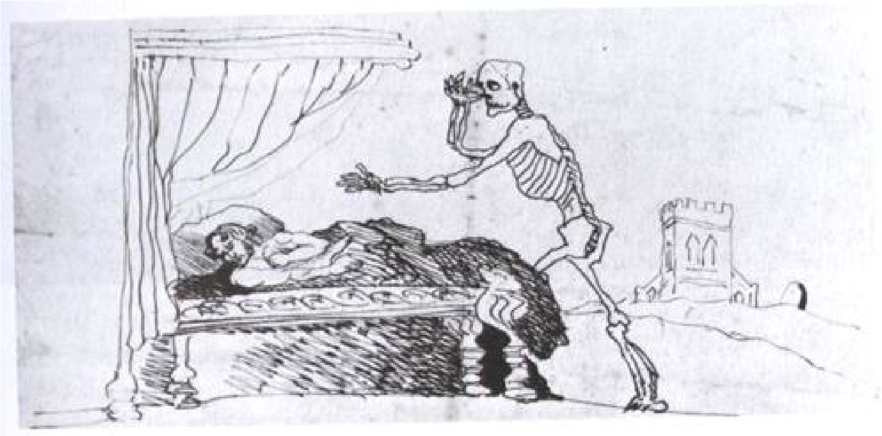
Branwell Brontë



A self-portrait

BRANWELL'S POETRY

Brother to the famous Brontë sisters, Branwell was a painter and poet. He was the only son of the Brontë family, but his literary works never achieved the interest or success of his sisters, and later in life he became addicted to alcohol and laudanum. His severe addictions masked the onset of tuberculosis, and his family did not realise that he was seriously ill until he collapsed outside the house and a local doctor identified him as being in the disease's terminal stages. He died shortly afterwards.



Self caricature of Branwell in bed waiting to die, 1847

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Lydia Gisborne

On Ouse's grassy banks - last Whitsuntide,
I sat, with fears and pleasures, in my soul
Commingled, as 'it roamed without control,'
O'er present hours and through a future wide
Where love, me thought, should keep, my heart beside
Her, whose own prison home I looked upon:
But, as I looked, descended summer's sun,
And did not its descent my hopes deride?
The sky though blue was soon to change to grey -
I, on that day, next year must own no smile -
And as those waves, to Humber far away,
Were gliding - so, though that hour might beguile
My Hopes, they too, to woe's far deeper sea,
Rolled past the shores of Joy's now dim and distant isle.

Penmaenmawr (excerpt)

I knew a flower whose leaves were meant to bloom
Till Death should snatch it to adorn the tomb,
Now, blanching ‘neath the blight of hopeless grief
With never blooming and yet living leaf;
A flower on which my mind would wish to shine,
If but one beam could break from mind like mine:
I had an ear which could on accents dwell
That might as well say ‘perish’ as ‘farewell’ -
An eye which saw, far off, a tender form
Beaten, unsheltered, by affliction’s storm -
An arm - a lip - that trembled to embrace
My Angel’s gentle breast and sorrowing face
A mind that clung to Ouse’s fertile side
While tossing - objectless - on Menai’s tide!

Sir Henry Tunstall (excerpt)

They fancied, when they saw me home returning,
That all my soul to meet with them was yearning,
That every wave I’d bless which bore me hither;
They thought my spring of life could never wither.
That in the dry the green leaf I could keep,
As pliable as youth to laugh or weep;
They did not think how oft my eyesight turned
Toward the skies where Indian Sunshine burned,
That I had perhaps left an associate band,
That I had farewells even for that wild Land;
They did not think my head and heart were older,
My strength more broken and my feelings colder,
That spring was hastening into autumn sere -
And leafless trees make loveliest prospects drear -
That sixteen years the same ground travel o’er
Till each wears out the mark which each has left before.

Thorp Green

I sit, this evening, far away,
From all I used to know,
And nought reminds my soul to-day
Of happy long ago.

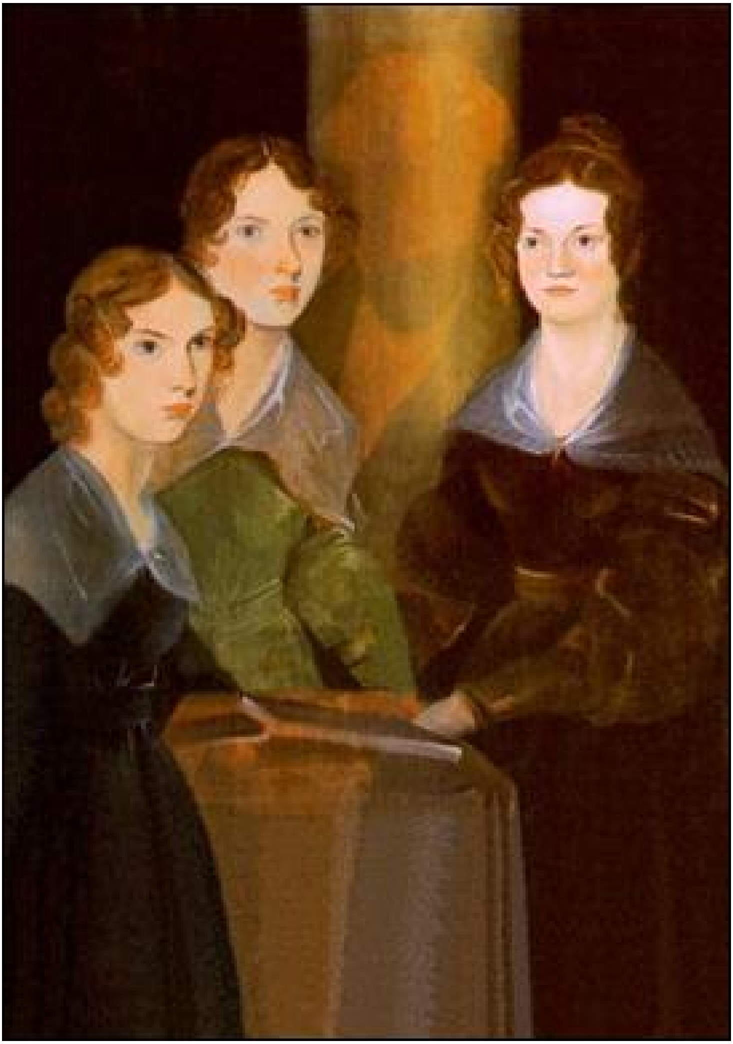
Unwelcome cares, unthought-of fears,
Around my room arise;
I seek for suns of former years
But clouds o'ercast my skies.

Yes-Memory, wherefore does thy voice
Bring old times back to view,
As thou wouldst bid me not rejoice
In thoughts and prospects new?

I'll thank thee, Memory, in the hour
When troubled thoughts are mine-
For thou, like suns in April's shower,
On shadowy scenes wilt shine.

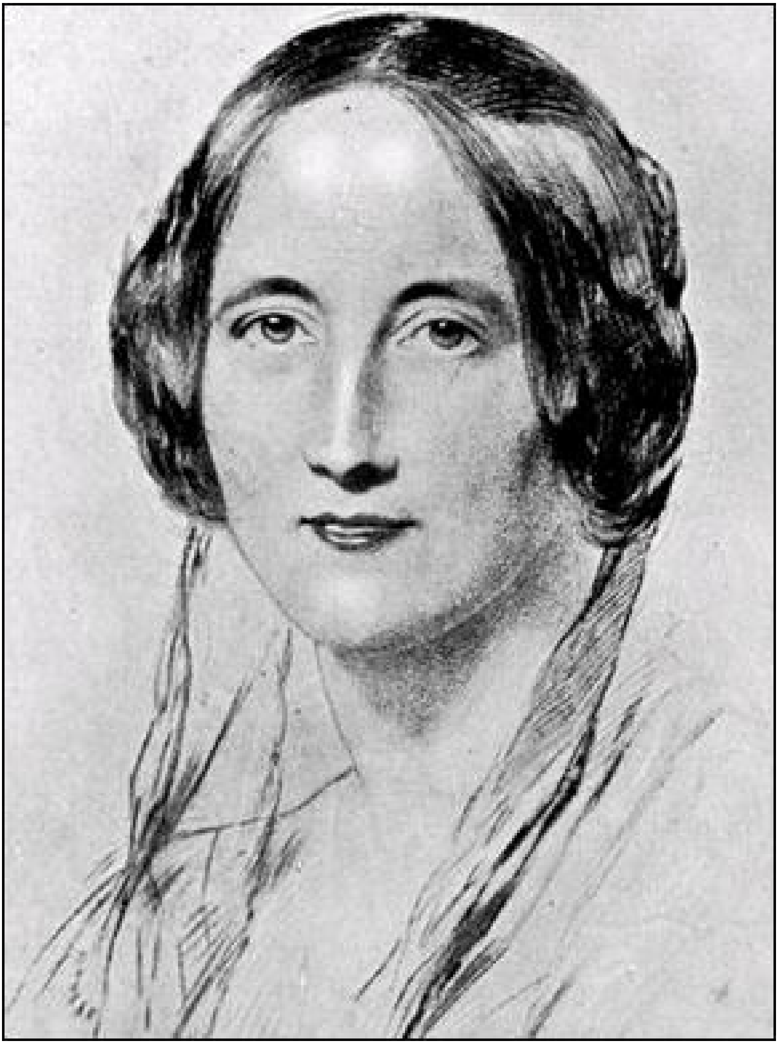
I'll thank thee when approaching death
Would quench life's feeble ember,
For thou wouldst even renew my breath
With thy sweet word 'Remember'!

The Biographies



THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË by Elizabeth Gaskell

This posthumous biography by Elizabeth Gaskell was first published in 1857. One of the major sources was the hundreds of letters sent by Brontë to her lifelong friend Ellen Nussey, which Gaskell spent many months sifting through. The biography is clear and often very telling, yet Gaskell suppressed details of Charlotte's love for Constantin Héger, a married man, due to contemporary morals and in fear of distressing Charlotte's still-living friends, father and husband.



Elizabeth Gaskell, the famous novelist and biographer

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VOLUME I

CHAPTER I

The Leeds and Skipton railway runs along a deep valley of the Aire; a slow and sluggish stream, compared to the neighbouring river of Wharfe. Keighley station is on this line of railway, about a quarter of a mile from the town of the same name. The number of inhabitants and the importance of Keighley have been very greatly increased during the last twenty years, owing to the rapidly extended market for worsted manufactures, a branch of industry that mainly employs the factory population of this part of Yorkshire, which has Bradford for its centre and metropolis.

Keighley is in process of transformation from a populous, old-fashioned village, into a still more populous and flourishing town. It is evident to the stranger, that as the gable-ended houses, which obtrude themselves cornerwise on the widening street, fall vacant, they are pulled down to allow of greater space for traffic, and a more modern style of architecture. The quaint and narrow shop-windows of fifty years ago, are giving way to large panes and plate-glass. Nearly every dwelling seems devoted to some branch of commerce. In passing hastily through the town, one hardly perceives where the necessary lawyer and doctor can live, so little appearance is there of any dwellings of the professional middle-class, such as abound in our old cathedral towns. In fact, nothing can be more opposed than the state of society, the modes of thinking, the standards of reference on all points of morality, manners, and even politics and religion, in such a new manufacturing place as Keighley in the north, and any stately, sleepy, picturesque cathedral town in the south. Yet the aspect of Keighley promises well for future stateliness, if not picturesqueness. Grey stone abounds; and the rows of houses built of it have a kind of solid grandeur connected with their uniform and enduring lines. The frame-work of the doors, and the lintels of the windows, even in the smallest dwellings, are made of blocks of stone. There is no painted wood to require continual beautifying, or else present a shabby aspect; and the stone is kept scrupulously clean by the notable Yorkshire housewives. Such glimpses into the interior as a passer-by obtains, reveal a rough abundance of the means of living, and diligent and active habits in the women. But the voices of the people are hard, and their tones discordant, promising little of the musical taste that distinguishes the district, and which has already furnished a Carrodus to the musical world. The names over the shops (of which the one just given is a sample) seem strange even to an inhabitant of the neighbouring county, and have a peculiar smack and flavour of the place.

The town of Keighley never quite melts into country on the road to Haworth, although the houses become more sparse as the traveller journeys upwards to the grey round hills that seem to bound his journey in a westerly direction. First come some villas; just sufficiently retired from the road to show that they can scarcely belong to any one liable to be summoned in a hurry, at the call of suffering or danger, from his comfortable fireside; the lawyer, the doctor, and the clergyman, live at hand, and hardly in the suburbs, with a screen of shrubs for concealment.

In a town one does not look for vivid colouring; what there may be of this is furnished by the wares in the shops, not by foliage or atmospheric effects; but in the country some brilliancy and vividness seems to be instinctively expected, and there is consequently a slight feeling of disappointment at the grey neutral tint of every object, near or far off, on the way from Keighley to Haworth. The distance is about four miles; and, as I have said, what with villas, great worsted factories, rows of workmen's houses, with here and there an old-fashioned farmhouse and out-buildings, it can hardly be called "country" any part of the way. For two miles the road passes over tolerably level ground, distant hills on the left, a "beck" flowing through meadows on the right, and furnishing water power, at certain points, to the factories built on its banks. The air is dim and lightless with the smoke from all these habitations and places of business. The soil in the valley (or "bottom," to use the local term) is rich; but, as the road begins to ascend, the vegetation becomes poorer; it does not flourish, it merely exists; and, instead of trees, there are only bushes and shrubs about the dwellings. Stone dykes are everywhere used in place of hedges; and what crops there are, on the patches of arable land, consist of pale, hungry-looking, grey green oats. Right before the traveller on this road rises Haworth village; he can see it for two miles before he arrives, for it is situated on the side of a pretty steep hill, with a back-ground of dun and purple moors, rising and sweeping away yet higher than the church, which is built at the very summit of the long narrow street. All round the horizon there is this same line of sinuous wave-like hills; the scoops into which they fall only revealing other hills beyond, of similar colour and shape, crowned with wild, bleak moors — grand, from the ideas of solitude and loneliness which they suggest, or oppressive from the feeling which they give of being pent-up by some monotonous and illimitable barrier, according to the mood of mind in which the spectator may be.

For a short distance the road appears to turn away from Haworth, as it winds round the base of the shoulder of a hill; but then it crosses a bridge over the "beck," and the ascent through the village begins. The flag-stones with which it is paved are placed end-ways, in order to give a better hold to the horses' feet; and, even with this help, they seem to be in constant danger of slipping backwards. The old stone houses are high compared to the width of the street, which makes an abrupt turn before reaching the more level ground at the head of the village, so that the steep aspect of the place, in one part, is almost like that of a wall. But this surmounted, the church lies a little off the main road on the left; a hundred yards, or so, and the driver relaxes his care, and the horse breathes more easily, as they pass into the quite little by-street that leads to Haworth Parsonage. The churchyard is on one side of this lane, the school-house and the sexton's dwelling (where the curates formerly lodged) on the other.

The parsonage stands at right angles to the road, facing down upon the church; so that, in fact, parsonage, church, and belfried school-house, form three sides of an irregular oblong, of which the fourth is open to the fields and moors that lie beyond. The area of this oblong is filled up by a crowded churchyard, and a small garden or court in front of the clergyman's house. As the entrance to this from the road is at the side, the path goes round the corner into the little plot of ground. Underneath the windows is a narrow flower-border, carefully tended in days of yore, although only the most hardy plants could be made to grow there. Within the stone wall, which keeps out the surrounding churchyard, are bushes of elder and lilac; the rest of the ground is occupied by a square grass-plot and a gravel walk. The house is of grey stone, two stories high, heavily roofed with flags, in order to resist the winds that might strip off a lighter covering. It appears to have been built about a hundred years ago, and to consist of four rooms on each story; the two windows on the right (as the visitor stands with his back to the church, ready to enter in at the front door) belonging to Mr. Brontë's study, the two on the left to the family sitting-room. Everything about the place tells of the most dainty order, the most exquisite cleanliness. The door-steps are spotless; the small old-fashioned window-panes glitter like looking-glass. Inside and outside of that house cleanliness goes up into its essence, purity.

The little church lies, as I mentioned, above most of the houses in the village; and the graveyard rises above the church, and is terribly full of upright tombstones. The chapel or church claims greater antiquity than any other in that part of the kingdom; but there is no appearance of this in the external aspect of the present edifice, unless it be in the two eastern windows, which remain unmodernized, and in the lower part of the steeple. Inside, the character of the pillars shows that they were constructed before the reign of Henry VII. It is probable that there existed on this ground, a "field-kirk," or oratory, in the earliest times; and, from the Archbishop's registry at York, it is ascertained that there was a chapel at Haworth in 1317. The inhabitants refer inquirers concerning the date to the following inscription on a stone in the church tower: —

"Hic fecit Cænobium Monachorum Auteste fundator. A. D. sexcentissimo."

That is to say, before the preaching of Christianity in Northumbria. Whitaker says that this mistake originated in the illiterate copying out, by some modern stone-cutter, of an inscription in the character of Henry the

Eighth's time on an adjoining stone: —

"Orate pro bono statu Eutest Tod."

"Now every antiquary knows that the formula of prayer 'bono statu' always refers to the living. I suspect this singular Christian name has been mistaken by the stone-cutter for Austet, a contraction of Eustatius, but the word Tod, which has been mis-read for the Arabic figures 600, is perfectly fair and legible. On the presumption of this foolish claim to antiquity, the people would needs set up for independence, and contest the right of the Vicar of Bradford to nominate a curate at Haworth."

I have given this extract, in order to explain the imaginary groundwork of a commotion which took place in Haworth about five and thirty years ago, to which I shall have occasion to allude again more particularly.

The interior of the church is commonplace; it is neither old enough nor modern enough to compel notice. The pews are of black oak, with high divisions; and the names of those to whom they belong are painted in white letters on the doors. There are neither brasses, nor altar-tombs, nor monuments, but there is a mural tablet on the right-hand side of the communion-table, bearing the following inscription: —

HERE
LIE THE REMAINS OF
MARIA BRONTË, WIFE
OF THE
REV. P. BRONTË, A.B., MINISTER OF HAWORTH.
HER SOUL
DEPARTED TO THE SAVIOUR, SEPT. 15TH, 1821,
IN THE 39TH YEAR OF HER AGE.

"Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." MATTHEW xxiv. 44.

ALSO HERE LIE THE REMAINS OF
MARIA BRONTË, DAUGHTER OF THE AFORESAID;
SHE DIED ON THE
6TH OF MAY, 1825, IN THE 12TH YEAR OF HER AGE;
AND OF
ELIZABETH BRONTË, HER SISTER,
WHO DIED JUNE 15TH, 1825, IN THE 11TH YEAR OF HER AGE.

"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." — MATTHEW xviii. 3.

HERE ALSO LIE THE REMAINS OF
PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË,
WHO DIED SEPT. 24TH, 1848, AGED 30 YEARS;
AND OF
EMILY JANE BRONTË,
WHO DIED DEC. 19TH, 1848, AGED 29 YEARS,

SON AND DAUGHTER OF THE
REV. P. BRONTË, INCUMBENT.
THIS STONE IS ALSO DEDICATED TO THE
MEMORY OF ANNE BRONTË,
YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF THE REV. P. BRONTË, A.B.
SHE DIED, AGED 27 YEARS, MAY 28TH, 1849,
AND WAS BURIED AT THE OLD CHURCH, SCARBORO.'

At the upper part of this tablet ample space is allowed between the lines of the inscription; when the first memorials were written down, the survivors, in their fond affection, thought little of the margin and verge they were leaving for those who were still living. But as one dead member of the household follows another fast to the grave, the lines are pressed together, and the letters become small and cramped. After the record of Anne's death, there is room for no other.

But one more of that generation — the last of that nursery of six little motherless children — was yet to follow, before the survivor, the childless and widowed father, found his rest. On another tablet, below the first, the following record has been added to that mournful list: —

ADJOINING LIE THE REMAINS OF
CHARLOTTE, WIFE
OF THE
REV. ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS, A.B.,
AND DAUGHTER OF THE REV. P. BRONTË, A.B., INCUMBENT
SHE DIED MARCH 31ST, 1855, IN THE 39TH
YEAR OF HER AGE.

This tablet, which corrects the error in the former tablet as to the age of Anne Brontë, bears the following inscription in Roman letters; the initials, however, being in old English.

CHAPTER II

For a right understanding of the life of my dear friend, Charlotte Brontë, it appears to me more necessary in her case than in most others, that the reader should be made acquainted with the peculiar forms of population and society amidst which her earliest years were passed, and from which both her own and her sisters' first impressions of human life must have been received. I shall endeavour, therefore, before proceeding further with my work, to present some idea of the character of the people of Haworth, and the surrounding districts.

Even an inhabitant of the neighbouring county of Lancaster is struck by the peculiar force of character which the Yorkshiremen display. This makes them interesting as a race; while, at the same time, as individuals, the remarkable degree of self-sufficiency they possess gives them an air of independence rather apt to repel a stranger. I use this expression "self-sufficiency" in the largest sense. Conscious of the strong sagacity and the dogged power of will which seem almost the birthright of the natives of the West Riding, each man relies upon himself, and seeks no help at the hands of his neighbour. From rarely requiring the assistance of others, he comes to doubt the power of bestowing it: from the general success of his efforts, he grows to depend upon them, and to over-esteem his own energy and power. He belongs to that keen, yet short-sighted class, who consider suspicion of all whose honesty is not proved as a sign of wisdom. The practical qualities of a man are held in great respect; but the want of faith in strangers and untried modes of action, extends itself even to the manner in which the virtues are regarded; and if they produce no immediate and tangible result, they are rather put aside as unfit for this busy, striving world; especially if they are more of a passive than an active character. The affections are strong and their foundations lie deep: but they are not — such affections seldom are — wide-spreading; nor do they show themselves on the surface. Indeed, there is little display of any of the amenities of life among this wild, rough population. Their accost is curt; their accent and tone of speech blunt and harsh. Something of this may, probably, be attributed to the freedom of mountain air and of isolated hill-side life; something be derived from their rough Norse ancestry. They have a quick perception of character, and a keen sense of humour; the dwellers among them must be prepared for certain uncomplimentary, though most likely true, observations, pithily expressed. Their feelings are not easily roused, but their duration is lasting. Hence there is much close friendship and faithful service; and for a correct exemplification of the form in which the latter frequently appears, I need only refer the reader of "Wuthering Heights" to the character of "Joseph."

From the same cause come also enduring grudges, in some cases amounting to hatred, which occasionally has been bequeathed from generation to generation. I remember Miss Brontë once telling me that it was a saying round about Haworth, "Keep a stone in thy pocket seven year; turn it, and keep it seven year longer, that it may be ever ready to thine hand when thine enemy draws near."

The West Riding men are sleuth-hounds in pursuit of money. Miss Brontë related to my husband a curious instance illustrative of this eager desire for riches. A man that she knew, who was a small manufacturer, had engaged in many local speculations which had always turned out well, and thereby rendered him a person of some wealth. He was rather past middle age, when he bethought him of insuring his life; and he had only just taken out his policy, when he fell ill of an acute disease which was certain to end fatally in a very few days. The doctor, half-hesitatingly, revealed to him his hopeless state. "By jingo!" cried he, rousing up at once into the old energy, "I shall *do* the insurance company! I always was a lucky fellow!"

These men are keen and shrewd; faithful and persevering in following out a good purpose, fell in tracking an evil one. They are not emotional; they are not easily made into either friends or enemies; but once lovers or haters, it is difficult to change their feeling. They are a powerful race both in mind and body, both for good and for evil.

The woollen manufacture was introduced into this district in the days of Edward III. It is traditionally said that a colony of Flemings came over and settled in the West Riding to teach the inhabitants what to do with their wool. The mixture of agricultural with manufacturing labour that ensued and prevailed in the West Riding up to a very recent period, sounds pleasant enough at this distance of time, when the classical impression is left, and the details forgotten, or only brought to light by those who explore the few remote parts of England where the custom still lingers. The idea of the mistress and her maidens spinning at the great wheels while the master was abroad ploughing his fields, or seeing after his flocks on the purple moors, is very poetical to look back upon; but when such life actually touches on our own days, and we can hear particulars from the lips of those now living, there come out details of coarseness — of the uncouthness of the rustic mingled with the sharpness of the tradesman — of irregularity and fierce lawlessness — that rather mar the vision of pastoral innocence and simplicity. Still, as it is the exceptional and exaggerated characteristics of any period that leave the most vivid memory behind them, it would be wrong, and in my opinion faithless, to conclude that such and such forms of society and modes of living were not best for the period when they prevailed, although the abuses they may have led into, and the gradual progress of the world, have made it well that such ways and manners should pass away for ever, and as preposterous to attempt to return to them, as it would be for a man to return to the clothes of his childhood.

The patent granted to Alderman Cockayne, and the further restrictions imposed by James I. on the export of undyed woollen cloths (met by a prohibition on the part of the States of Holland of the import of English-dyed cloths), injured the trade of the West Riding manufacturers considerably. Their independence of character, their dislike of authority, and their strong powers of thought, predisposed them to rebellion against the religious dictation of such men as Laud, and the arbitrary rule of the Stuarts; and the injury done by James and Charles to the trade by which they gained their bread, made the great majority of them Commonwealth men. I shall have occasion afterwards to give one or two instances of the warm feelings and extensive knowledge on subjects of both home and foreign politics existing at the present day in the villages lying west and east of the mountainous ridge that separates Yorkshire and Lancashire; the inhabitants of which are of the same race and possess the same quality of character.

The descendants of many who served under Cromwell at Dunbar, live on the same lands as their ancestors occupied then; and perhaps there is no part of England where the traditional and fond recollections of the Commonwealth have lingered so long as in that inhabited by the woollen manufacturing population of the West Riding, who had the restrictions taken off their trade by the Protector's admirable commercial policy. I have it on good authority that, not thirty years ago, the phrase, "in Oliver's days," was in common use to denote a time of unusual prosperity. The class of Christian names prevalent in a district is one indication of the direction in which its tide of hero-worship sets. Grave enthusiasts in politics or religion perceive not the ludicrous side of those which they give to their children; and some are to be found, still in their infancy, not a dozen miles from Haworth, that will have to go through life as Lamartine, Kossuth, and Dembinsky. And so there is a testimony to what I have said, of the traditional feeling of the district, in the fact that the Old Testament names in general use among the Puritans are yet the prevalent appellations in most Yorkshire families of middle or humble rank, whatever their religious persuasion may be. There are numerous records, too, that show the kindly way in which the ejected ministers were received by the gentry, as well as by the poorer part of the inhabitants, during the persecuting days of Charles II. These little facts all testify to the old hereditary spirit of independence, ready ever to resist authority which was conceived to be unjustly exercised, that distinguishes the people of the West Riding to the present day.

The parish of Halifax touches that of Bradford, in which the chapelry of Haworth is included; and the nature of the ground in the two parishes is much the of the same wild and hilly description. The abundance of coal, and the number of mountain streams in the district, make it highly favourable to manufactures; and accordingly, as I stated, the inhabitants have for centuries been engaged in making cloth, as well as in agricultural pursuits. But the intercourse of trade failed, for a long time, to bring amenity and civilization into these outlying hamlets, or widely scattered dwellings. Mr. Hunter, in his "Life of Oliver Heywood," quotes a sentence out of a memorial of one James Rither, living in the reign of Elizabeth, which is partially true to this day: —

"They have no superior to court, no civilities to practise: a sour and sturdy humour is the consequence, so that a stranger is shocked by a tone of defiance in every voice, and an air of fierceness in every countenance."

Even now, a stranger can hardly ask a question without receiving some crusty reply, if, indeed, he receive any at all. Sometimes the sour rudeness amounts to positive insult. Yet, if the "foreigner" takes all this churlishness good-humouredly, or as a matter of course, and makes good any claim upon their latent kindliness and hospitality, they are faithful and generous, and thoroughly to be relied upon. As a slight illustration of the roughness that pervades all classes in these out-of-the-way villages, I may relate a little adventure which happened to my husband and myself, three years ago, at Addingham —

From Penigent to Pendle Hill,
From Linton to Long-*Addingham*
And all that Craven coasts did tell, &c. —

one of the places that sent forth its fighting men to the famous old battle of Flodden Field, and a village not many miles from Haworth.

We were driving along the street, when one of those ne'er-do-weel lads who seem to have a kind of magnetic power for misfortunes, having jumped into the stream that runs through the place, just where all the broken glass and bottles are thrown, staggered naked and nearly covered with blood into a cottage before us. Besides receiving another bad cut in the arm, he had completely laid open the artery, and was in a fair way of bleeding to death — which, one of his relations comforted him by saying, would be likely to "save a deal o' trouble."

When my husband had checked the effusion of blood with a strap that one of the bystanders unbuckled from his leg, he asked if a surgeon had been sent for.

"Yoi," was the answer; "but we dunna think he'll come."

"Why not?"

"He's owd, yo seen, and asthmatic, and it's up-hill."

My husband taking a boy for his guide, drove as fast as he could to the surgeon's house, which was about three-quarters of a mile off, and met the aunt of the wounded lad leaving it.

"Is he coming?" inquired my husband.

"Well, he didna' say he wouldna' come."

"But, tell him the lad may bleed to death."

"I did."

"And what did he say?"

"Why, only, 'D-n him; what do I care?'"

It ended, however, in his sending one of his sons, who, though not brought up to "the surgering trade," was able to do what was necessary in the way of bandages and plasters. The excuse made for the surgeon was, that "he was near eighty, and getting a bit doited, and had had a matter o' twenty childer."

Among the most unmoved of the lookers-on was the brother of the boy so badly hurt; and while he was lying in a pool of blood on the flag floor, and crying out how much his arm was "warching," his stoical relation stood coolly smoking his bit of black pipe, and uttered not a single word of either sympathy or sorrow.

Forest customs, existing in the fringes of dark wood, which clothed the declivity of the hills on either side, tended to brutalize the population until the middle of the seventeenth century. Execution by beheading was performed in a summary way upon either men or women who were guilty of but very slight crimes; and a dogged, yet in some cases fine, indifference to human life was thus generated. The roads were so notoriously bad, even up to the last thirty years, that there was little communication between one village and another; if the produce of industry could be conveyed at stated times to the cloth market of the district, it was all that could be done; and, in lonely houses on the distant hill-side, or by the small magnates of secluded hamlets, crimes might be committed almost unknown, certainly without any great uprising of popular indignation calculated to bring down the strong arm of the law. It must be remembered that in those days there was no rural constabulary; and the few magistrates left to themselves, and generally related to one another, were most of them inclined to tolerate eccentricity, and to wink at faults too much like their own.

Men hardly past middle life talk of the days of their youth, spent in this part of the country, when, during the winter months, they rode up to the saddle-girths in mud; when absolute business was the only reason for stirring beyond the precincts of home, and when that business was conducted under a pressure of difficulties which they themselves, borne along to Bradford market in a swift first-class carriage, can hardly believe to have been possible. For instance, one woollen manufacturer says that, not five and twenty years ago, he had to rise betimes to set off on a winter's-morning in order to be at Bradford with the great waggon-load of goods manufactured by his father; this load was packed over-night, but in the morning there was a great gathering around it, and flashing of lanterns, and examination of horses' feet, before the ponderous waggon got under way; and then some one had to go groping here and there, on hands and knees, and always sounding with a staff down the long, steep, slippery brow, to find where the horses might tread safely, until they reached the comparative easy-going of the deep-rutted main road. People went on horseback over the upland moors, following the tracks of the pack-horses that carried the parcels, baggage, or goods from one town to another, between which there did not happen to be a highway.

But in winter, all such communication was impossible, by reason of the snow which lay long and late on the bleak high ground. I have known people who, travelling by the mail-coach over Blackstone Edge, had been snowed up for a week or ten days at the little inn near the summit, and obliged to spend both Christmas and New Year's Day there, till the store of provisions laid in for the use of the landlord and his family falling short before the inroads of the unexpected visitors, they had recourse to the turkeys, geese, and Yorkshire pies with which the coach was laden; and even these were beginning to fail, when a fortunate thaw released them from their prison.

Isolated as the hill villages may be, they are in the world, compared with the loneliness of the grey ancestral houses to be seen here and there in the dense hollows of the moors. These dwellings are not large, yet they are solid and roomy enough for the accommodation of those who live in them, and to whom the surrounding estates belong. The land has often been held by one family since the days of the Tudors; the owners are, in fact, the remains of the old yeomanry — small squires — who are rapidly becoming extinct as a class, from one of two causes. Either the possessor falls into idle, drinking habits, and so is obliged eventually to sell his property: or he finds, if more shrewd and adventurous, that the "beck" running down the mountain-side, or the minerals beneath his feet, can be turned into a new source of wealth; and leaving the old plodding life of a landowner with small capital, he turns manufacturer, or digs for coal, or quarries for stone.

Still there are those remaining of this class — dwellers in the lonely houses far away in the upland districts — even at the present day, who sufficiently indicate what strange eccentricity — what wild strength of will — nay, even what unnatural power of crime was fostered by a mode of living in which a man seldom met his fellows, and where public opinion was only a distant and inarticulate echo of some clearer voice sounding behind the sweeping horizon.

A solitary life cherishes mere fancies until they become manias. And the powerful Yorkshire character, which was scarcely tamed into subjection by all the contact it met with in "busy town or crowded mart," has before now broken out into strange wilfulness in the remoter districts. A singular account was recently given me of a landowner (living, it is true, on the Lancashire side of the hills, but of the same blood and nature as the dwellers on the other,) who was supposed to be in the receipt of seven or eight hundred a year, and whose house bore marks of handsome antiquity, as if his forefathers had been for a long time people of consideration. My informant was struck with the appearance of the place, and proposed to the countryman who was accompanying him, to go up to it and take a nearer inspection. The reply was, "Yo'd better not; he'd threap yo' down th' loan. He's let fly at some folk's legs, and let shot lodge in 'em afore now, for going too near to his house." And finding, on closer inquiry, that such was really the inhospitable custom of this moorland squire, the gentleman gave up his purpose. I believe that the savage yeoman is still living.

Another squire, of more distinguished family and larger property — one is thence led to imagine of better education, but that does not always follow — died at his house, not many miles from Haworth, only a few years ago. His great amusement and occupation had been cock-fighting. When he was confined to his chamber with what he knew would be his last illness, he had his cocks brought up there, and watched the bloody battle from his bed. As his mortal disease increased, and it became impossible for him to turn so as to follow the combat, he had looking-glasses arranged in such a manner, around and above him, as he lay, that he could still see the cocks fighting. And in this manner he died.

These are merely instances of eccentricity compared to the tales of positive violence and crime that have occurred in these isolated dwellings, which still linger in the memories of the old people of the district, and some of which were doubtless familiar to the authors of "Wuthering Heights" and "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall."

The amusements of the lower classes could hardly be expected to be more humane than those of the wealthy and better educated. The gentleman, who has kindly furnished me with some of the particulars I have given, remembers the bull-baitings at Rochdale, not thirty years ago. The bull was fastened by a chain or rope to a post in the river. To increase the amount of water, as well as to give their workpeople the opportunity of savage delight, the masters were accustomed to stop their mills on the day when the sport took place. The bull would sometimes wheel suddenly round, so that the rope by which he was fastened swept those who had been careless enough to come within its range down into the water, and the good people of Rochdale had the excitement of seeing one or two of their neighbours drowned, as well as of witnessing the bull baited, and the dogs torn and tossed.

The people of Haworth were not less strong and full of character than their neighbours on either side of the hills. The village lies embedded in the moors, between the two counties, on the old road between Keighley and Colne. About the middle of the last century, it became famous in the religious world as the scene of the ministrations of the Rev. William Grimshaw, curate of Haworth for twenty years. Before this time, it is probable that the curates were of the same order as one Mr. Nicholls, a Yorkshire clergyman, in the days immediately succeeding the Reformation, who was "much addicted to drinking and company-keeping," and used to say to his companions, "You must not heed me but when I am got three feet above the earth," that was, into the pulpit.

Mr. Grimshaw's life was written by Newton, Cowper's friend; and from it may be gathered some curious particulars of the manner in which a rough population were swayed and governed by a man of deep convictions, and strong earnestness of purpose. It seems that he had not been in any way remarkable for religious zeal, though he had led a moral life, and been conscientious in fulfilling his parochial duties, until a certain Sunday in September, 1744, when the servant, rising at five, found her master already engaged in prayer; she stated that, after remaining in his chamber for some time, he went to engage in religious exercises in the house of a parishioner, then home again to pray; thence, still fasting, to the church, where, as he was reading the second lesson, he fell down, and, on his partial recovery, had to be led from the church. As he went out, he spoke to the congregation, and told them not to disperse, as he had something to say to them, and would return presently. He was taken to the clerk's house, and again became insensible. His servant rubbed him, to restore the circulation; and when he was brought to himself "he seemed in a great rapture," and the first words he uttered were, "I have had a glorious vision from the third heaven." He did not say what he had seen, but returned into the church, and began the service again, at two in the afternoon, and went on until seven.

From this time he devoted himself, with the fervour of a Wesley, and something of the fanaticism of a Whitfield, to calling out a religious life among his parishioners. They had been in the habit of playing at foot-ball on Sunday, using stones for this purpose; and giving and receiving challenges from other parishes. There were horse-races held on the moors just above the village, which were periodical sources of drunkenness and profligacy. Scarcely a wedding took place without the rough amusement of foot-races, where the half-naked runners were a scandal to all decent strangers. The old custom of "arvills," or funeral feasts, led to frequent pitched battles between the drunken mourners. Such customs were the outward signs of the kind of people with whom Mr. Grimshaw had to deal. But, by various means, some of the most practical kind, he wrought a great change in his parish. In his preaching he was occasionally assisted by Wesley and Whitfield, and at such times the little church proved much too small to hold the throng that poured in from distant villages, or lonely moorland hamlets; and frequently they were obliged to meet in the open air; indeed, there was not room enough in the church even for the communicants. Mr. Whitfield was once preaching in Haworth, and made use of some such expression, as that he hoped there was no need to say much to this congregation, as they had sat under so pious and godly a minister for so many years; "whereupon Mr. Grimshaw stood up in his place, and said with a loud voice, 'Oh, sir! for God's sake do not speak so. I pray you do not flatter them. I fear the greater part of them are going to hell with their eyes open.'" But if they were so bound, it was not for want of exertion on Mr. Grimshaw's part to prevent them. He used to preach twenty or thirty times a week in private houses. If he perceived any one inattentive to his prayers, he would stop and rebuke the offender, and not go on till he saw every one on their knees. He was very earnest in enforcing the strict observance of Sunday; and would not even allow his parishioners to walk in the fields between services. He sometimes gave out a very long Psalm (tradition says the 119th), and while it was being sung, he left the reading-desk, and taking a horsewhip went into the public-houses, and flogged the loiterers into church. They were swift who could escape the lash of the parson by sneaking out the back way. He had strong health and an active body, and rode far and wide over the hills, "awakening" those who had previously had no sense of religion. To save time, and be no charge to the families at whose houses he held his prayer-meetings, he carried his provisions with him; all the food he took in the day on such occasions consisting simply of a piece of bread and butter, or dry bread and a raw onion.

The horse-races were justly objectionable to Mr. Grimshaw; they attracted numbers of profligate people to Haworth, and brought a match to the combustible materials of the place, only too ready to blaze out into wickedness. The story is, that he tried all means of persuasion, and even intimidation, to have the races discontinued, but in vain. At length, in despair, he prayed with such fervour of earnestness that the rain came down in torrents, and deluged the ground, so that there was no footing for man or beast, even if the multitude had been willing to stand such a flood let down from above. And so Haworth races were stopped, and have never been resumed to this day. Even now the memory of this good man is held in reverence, and his faithful ministrations and real virtues are one of the boasts of the parish.

But after his time, I fear there was a falling back into the wild rough heathen ways, from which he had pulled them up, as it were, by the passionate force of his individual character. He had built a chapel for the Wesleyan Methodists, and not very long after the Baptists established themselves in a place of worship. Indeed, as Dr. Whitaker says, the people of this district are "strong religionists;" only, fifty years ago, their religion did not work down into their lives. Half that length of time back, the code of morals seemed to be formed upon that of their Norse ancestors. Revenge was handed down from father to son as an hereditary duty; and a great capability for drinking without the head being affected was considered as one of the manly virtues. The games of foot-ball on Sundays, with the challenges to the neighbouring parishes, were resumed, bringing in an influx of riotous strangers to fill the public-houses, and make the more sober-minded inhabitants long for good Mr. Grimshaw's stout arm, and ready horsewhip. The old custom of "arvills" was as prevalent as ever. The sexton, standing at the foot of the open grave, announced that the "arvill" would be held at the Black Bull, or whatever public-house might be fixed upon by the friends of the dead; and thither the mourners and their acquaintances repaired. The origin of the custom had been the necessity of furnishing some refreshment for those who came from a distance, to pay the last mark of respect to a friend. In the life of Oliver Heywood there are two quotations, which show what sort of food was provided for "arvills" in quiet Nonconformist connections in the seventeenth century; the first (from Thoresby) tells of "cold possets, stewed prunes, cake, and cheese," as being the arvill after Oliver Heywood's funeral. The second gives, as rather shabby, according to the notion of the times (1673), "nothing but a bit of cake, draught of wine, piece of rosemary, and pair of gloves."

But the arvills at Haworth were often far more jovial doings. Among the poor, the mourners were only expected to provide a kind of spiced roll for each person; and the expense of the liquors — rum, or ale, or a mixture of both called "dog's nose" — was generally defrayed by each guest placing some money on a plate, set in the middle of the table. Richer people would order a dinner for their friends. At the funeral of Mr. Charnock (the next successor but one to Mr. Grimshaw in the incumbency), above eighty people were bid to the arvill, and the price of the feast was 4s. 6d. per head, all of which was defrayed by the friends of the deceased. As few "shirked their liquor," there were very frequently "up-and-down fights" before the close of the day; sometimes with the horrid additions of "pawsing" and "gouging," and biting.

Although I have dwelt on the exceptional traits in the characteristics of these stalwart West-Ridingers, such as they were in the first quarter of this century, if not a few years later, I have little doubt that in the everyday life of the people so independent, wilful, and full of grim humour, there would be much found even at present that would shock those accustomed only to the local manners of the south; and, in return, I suspect the shrewd, sagacious, energetic Yorkshireman would hold such "foreigners" in no small contempt.

I have said, it is most probable that where Haworth Church now stands, there was once an ancient "field-kirk," or oratory. It occupied the third or lowest class of ecclesiastical structures, according to the Saxon law, and had no right of sepulture, or administration of sacraments. It was so called because it was built without enclosure, and open to the adjoining fields or moors. The founder, according to the laws of Edgar, was bound, without subtracting from his tithes, to maintain the ministering priest out of the remaining nine parts of his income. After the Reformation, the right of choosing their clergyman, at any of those chapels of ease which had formerly been field-kirks, was vested in the freeholders and trustees, subject to the approval of the vicar of the parish. But owing to some negligence, this right has been lost to the freeholders and trustees at Haworth, ever since the days of Archbishop Sharp; and the power of choosing a minister has lapsed into the hands of the Vicar of Bradford. So runs the account, according to one authority.

Mr. Brontë says, — "This living has for its patrons the Vicar of Bradford and certain trustees. My predecessor took the living with the consent of the Vicar of Bradford, but in opposition to the trustees; in consequence of which he was so opposed that, after only three weeks' possession, he was compelled to resign." A Yorkshire gentleman, who has kindly sent me some additional information on this subject since the second edition of my work was published, write, thus: —

"The sole right of presentation to the incumbency of Haworth is vested in the Vicar of Bradford. He only can present. The funds, however, from which the clergyman's stipend mainly proceeds, are vested in the hands of trustees, who have the power to withhold them, if a nominee is sent of whom they disapprove. On the decease of Mr. Charnock, the Vicar first tendered the preferment to Mr. Brontë, and he went over to his expected cure. He was told that towards himself they had no personal objection; but as a nominee of the Vicar he would not be received. He therefore retired, with the declaration that if he could not come with the approval of the parish, his ministry could not be useful. Upon this the attempt was made to introduce Mr. Redhead.

"When Mr. Redhead was repelled, a fresh difficulty arose. Some one must first move towards a settlement, but a spirit being evoked which could not be allayed, action became perplexing. The matter had to be referred to some independent arbitrator, and my father was the gentleman to whom each party turned its eye. A meeting was convened, and the business settled by the Vicar's conceding the choice to the trustees, and the acceptance of the Vicar's presentation. That choice forthwith fell on Mr. Brontë, whose promptness and prudence had won their hearts."

In conversing on the character of the inhabitants of the West Riding with Dr. Scoresby, who had been for some time Vicar of Bradford, he alluded to certain riotous transactions which had taken place at Haworth on the presentation of the living to Mr. Redhead, and said that there had been so much in the particulars indicative of the character of the people, that he advised me to inquire into them. I have accordingly done so, and, from the lips of some of the survivors among the actors and spectators, I have learnt the means taken to eject the nominee of the Vicar.

The previous incumbent had been the Mr. Charnock whom I have mentioned as next but one in succession to Mr. Grimshaw. He had a long illness which rendered him unable to discharge his duties without assistance, and Mr. Redhead gave him occasional help, to the great satisfaction of the parishioners, and was highly respected by them during Mr. Charnock's lifetime. But the case was entirely altered when, at Mr. Charnock's death in 1819, they conceived that the trustees had been unjustly deprived of their rights by the Vicar of Bradford, who appointed Mr. Redhead as perpetual curate.

The first Sunday he officiated, Haworth Church was filled even to the aisles; most of the people wearing the wooden clogs of the district. But while Mr. Redhead was reading the second lesson, the whole congregation, as by one impulse, began to leave the church, making all the noise they could with clattering and clumping of clogs, till, at length, Mr. Redhead and the clerk were the only two left to continue the service. This was bad enough, but the next Sunday the proceedings were far worse. Then, as before, the church was well filled, but the aisles were left clear; not a creature, not an obstacle was in the way. The reason for this was made evident about the same time in the reading of the service as the disturbances had begun the previous week. A man rode into the church upon an ass, with his face turned towards the tail, and as many old hats piled on his head as he could possibly carry. He began urging his beast round the aisles, and the screams, and cries, and laughter of the congregation entirely drowned all sound of Mr. Redhead's voice, and, I believe, he was obliged to desist.

Hitherto they had not proceeded to anything like personal violence; but on the third Sunday they must have been greatly irritated at seeing Mr. Redhead, determined to brave their will, ride up the village street, accompanied by several gentlemen from Bradford. They put up their horses at the Black Bull — the little inn close upon the churchyard, for the convenience of arvills as well as for other purposes — and went into church. On this the people followed, with a chimney-sweeper, whom they had employed to clean the chimneys of some out-buildings belonging to the church that very morning, and afterward plied with drink till he was in a state of solemn intoxication. They placed him right before the reading-desk, where his blackened face nodded a drunken, stupid assent to all that Mr. Redhead said. At last, either prompted by some mischief-maker, or from some tipsy impulse, he clambered up the pulpit stairs, and attempted to embrace Mr. Redhead. Then the profane fun grew fast and furious. Some of the more riotous, pushed the soot-covered chimney-sweeper against Mr. Redhead, as he tried to escape. They threw both him and his tormentor down on the ground in the churchyard where the soot-bag had been emptied, and, though, at last, Mr. Redhead escaped into the Black Bull, the doors of which were immediately barred, the people raged without, threatening to stone him and his friends. One of my informants is an old man, who was the landlord of the inn at the time, and he stands to it that such was the temper of the irritated mob, that Mr. Redhead was in real danger of his life. This man, however, planned an escape for his unpopular inmates. The Black Bull is near the top of the long, steep Haworth street, and at the bottom, close by the bridge, on the road to Keighley, is a turnpike. Giving directions to his hunted guests to steal out at the back door (through which, probably, many a ne'er-do-weel has escaped from good Mr. Grimshaw's horsewhip), the landlord and some of the stable-boys rode the horses belonging to the party from Bradford backwards and forwards before his front door, among the fiercely-expectant crowd. Through some opening between the houses, those on the horses saw Mr. Redhead and his friends creeping along behind the street; and then, striking spurs, they dashed quickly down to the turnpike; the obnoxious clergyman and his friends mounted in haste, and had sped some distance before the people found out that their prey had escaped, and came running to the closed turnpike gate.

This was Mr. Redhead's last appearance at Haworth for many years. Long afterwards, he came to preach, and in his sermon to a large and attentive congregation he good-humouredly reminded them of the circumstances which

I have described. They gave him a hearty welcome, for they owed him no grudge; although before they had been ready enough to stone him, in order to maintain what they considered to be their rights.

The foregoing account, which I heard from two of the survivors, in the presence of a friend who can vouch for the accuracy of my repetition, has to a certain degree been confirmed by a letter from the Yorkshire gentleman, whose words I have already quoted.

“I am not surprised at your difficulty in authenticating matter-of-fact. I find this in recalling what I have heard, and the authority on which I have heard anything. As to the donkey tale, I believe you are right. Mr. Redhead and Dr. Ramsbotham, his son-in-law, are no strangers to me. Each of them has a niche in my affections.

“I have asked, this day, two persons who lived in Haworth at the time to which you allude, the son and daughter of an acting trustee, and each of them between sixty and seventy years of age, and they assure me that the donkey was introduced. One of them says it was mounted by a half-witted man, seated with his face towards the tail of the beast, and having several hats piled on his head. Neither of my informants was, however, present at these edifying services. I believe that no movement was made in the church on either Sunday, until the whole of the authorised reading-service was gone through, and I am sure that nothing was more remote from the more respectable party than any personal antagonism toward Mr. Redhead. He was one of the most amiable and worthy of men, a man to myself endeared by many ties and obligations. I never heard before your book that the sweep ascended the pulpit steps. He was present, however, in the clerical habiliments of his order . . . I may also add that among the many who were present at those sad Sunday orgies the majority were non-residents, and came from those moorland fastnesses on the outskirts of the parish locally designated as ‘ovver th’ steyres,’ one stage more remote than Haworth from modern civilization.

“To an instance or two more of the rusticity of the inhabitants of the chapelry of Haworth, I may introduce you.

“A Haworth carrier called at the office of a friend of mine to deliver a parcel on a cold winter’s day, and stood with the door open. ‘Robin! shut the door!’ said the recipient. ‘Have you no doors in your country?’ ‘Yoi,’ responded Robin, ‘we hev, but we nivver steik ‘em.’ I have frequently remarked the number of doors open even in winter.

“When well directed, the indomitable and independent energies of the natives of this part of the country are invaluable; dangerous when perverted. I shall never forget the fierce actions and utterances of one suffering from delirium tremens. Whether in its wrath, disdain, or its dismay, the countenance was infernal. I called once upon a time on a most respectable yeoman, and I was, in language earnest and homely, pressed to accept the hospitality of the house. I consented. The word to me was, ‘Nah, Maister, yah mun stop an hev sum te-ah, yah mun, eah, yah mun.' A bountiful table was soon spread; at all events, time soon went while I scaled the hills to see 't' maire at wor thretty year owd, an't' feil at wor fewer.' On sitting down to the table, a venerable woman officiated, and after filling the cups, she thus addressed me: 'Nah, Maister, yah mun loawze th'taible' (loose the table). The master said, 'Shah meeans yah mun sey t' greyce.' I took the hint, and uttered the blessing.

"I spoke with an aged and tried woman at one time, who, after recording her mercies, stated, among others, her powers of speech, by asserting 'Thank the Lord, ah nivver wor a meilly-meouthed wumman.' I feel particularly at fault in attempting the orthography of the dialect, but must excuse myself by telling you that I once saw a letter in which the word I have just now used (excuse) was written 'ecksqueaize!'

"There are some things, however, which rather tend to soften the idea of the rudeness of Haworth. No rural district has been more markedly the abode of musical taste and acquirement, and this at a period when it was difficult to find them to the same extent apart from towns in advance of their times. I have gone to Haworth and found an orchestra to meet me, filled with local performers, vocal and instrumental, to whom the best works of Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Marcello, &c. &c., were familiar as household words. By knowledge, taste, and voice, they were markedly separate from ordinary village choirs, and have been put in extensive requisition for the solo and chorus of many an imposing festival. One man still survives, who, for fifty years, has had one of the finest tenor voices I ever heard, and with it a refined and cultivated taste. To him and to others many inducements have been offered to migrate; but the loom, the association, the mountain air have had charms enow to secure their continuance at home. I love the recollection of their performance; that recollection extends over more than sixty years. The attachments, the antipathies and the hospitalities of the district are ardent, hearty, and homely. Cordiality in each is the prominent characteristic. As a people, these mountaineers have ever been accessible to gentleness and truth, so far as I have known them; but excite suspicion or resentment, and they give emphatic and not impotent resistance. Compulsion they defy.

"I accompanied Mr. Heap on his first visit to Haworth after his accession to the vicarage of Bradford. It was on Easter day, either 1816 or 1817. His predecessor, the venerable John Crosse, known as the 'blind vicar,' had been inattentive to the vicarial claims. A searching investigation had to be made and enforced, and as it proceeded stout and sturdy utterances were not lacking on the part of the parishioners. To a spectator, though rude, they were amusing, and significant, foretelling what might be expected, and what was afterwards realised, on the advent of a new incumbent, if they deemed him an intruder.

"From their peculiar parochial position and circumstances, the inhabitants of the chapelry have been prompt, earnest, and persevering in their opposition to church-rates. Although ten miles from the mother-church, they were called upon to defray a large proportion of this obnoxious tax, — I believe one fifth.

"Besides this, they had to maintain their own edifice, &c., &c. They resisted, therefore, with energy, that which they deemed to be oppression and injustice. By scores would they wend their way from the hills to attend a vestry meeting at Bradford, and in such service failed not to show less of the *suaviter in modo* than the *fortiter in re*. Happily such occasion for their action has not occurred for many years.

"The use of patronymics has been common in this locality. Inquire for a man by his Christian name and surname, and you may have some difficulty in finding him: ask, however, for 'George o' Ned's,' or 'Dick o' Bob's,' or 'Tom o' Jack's,' as the case may be, and your difficulty is at an end. In many instances the person is designated by his residence. In my early years I had occasion to inquire for Jonathan Whitaker, who owned a considerable farm in the township. I was sent hither and thither, until it occurred to me to ask for 'Jonathan o' th' Gate.' My difficulties were then at an end. Such circumstances arise out of the settled character and isolation of the natives.

"Those who have witnessed a Haworth wedding when the parties were above the rank of labourers, will not easily forget the scene. A levy was made on the horses of the neighbourhood, and a merry cavalcade of mounted men and women, single or double, traversed the way to Bradford church. The inn and church appeared to be in natural connection, and as the labours of the Temperance Society had then to begin, the interests of sobriety were not always consulted. On remounting their steeds they commenced with a race, and not unfrequently an inebriate or unskilful horseman or woman was put *hors de combat*. A race also was frequent at the end. of these wedding expeditions, from the bridge to the toll-bar at Haworth. The race-course you will know to be anything but level."

Into the midst of this lawless, yet not unkindly population, Mr. Brontë brought his wife and six little children, in February, 1820. There are those yet alive who remember seven heavily-laden carts lumbering slowly up the long stone street, bearing the "new parson's" household goods to his future abode.

One wonders how the bleak aspect of her new home — the low, oblong, stone parsonage, high up, yet with a still higher back-ground of sweeping moors — struck on the gentle, delicate wife, whose health even then was failing.

CHAPTER III

The Rev. Patrick Brontë is a native of the County Down in Ireland. His father Hugh Brontë, was left an orphan at an early age. He came from the south to the north of the island, and settled in the parish of Ahaderg, near Loughbrickland. There was some family tradition that, humble as Hugh Brontë's circumstances were, he was the descendant of an ancient family. But about this neither he nor his descendants have cared to inquire. He made an early marriage, and reared and educated ten children on the proceeds of the few acres of land which he farmed. This large family were remarkable for great physical strength, and much personal beauty. Even in his old age, Mr. Brontë is a striking-looking man, above the common height, with a nobly-shaped head, and erect carriage. In his youth he must have been unusually handsome.

He was born on Patrickmas day (March 17), 1777, and early gave tokens of extraordinary quickness and intelligence. He had also his full share of ambition; and of his strong sense and forethought there is a proof in the fact, that, knowing that his father could afford him no pecuniary aid, and that he must depend upon his own exertions, he opened a public school at the early age of sixteen; and this mode of living he continued to follow for five or six years. He then became a tutor in the family of the Rev. Mr. Tighe, rector of Drumgooland parish. Thence he proceeded to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he was entered in July, 1802, being at the time five-and-twenty years of age. After nearly four years' residence, he obtained his B.A. degree, and was ordained to a curacy in Essex, whence he removed into Yorkshire. The course of life of which this is the outline, shows a powerful and remarkable character, originating and pursuing a purpose in a resolute and independent manner. Here is a youth — a boy of sixteen — separating himself from his family, and determining to maintain himself; and that, not in the hereditary manner by agricultural pursuits, but by the labour of his brain.

I suppose, from what I have heard, that Mr. Tighe became strongly interested in his children's tutor, and may have aided him, not only in the direction of his studies, but in the suggestion of an English university education, and in advice as to the mode in which he should obtain entrance there. Mr. Brontë has now no trace of his Irish origin remaining in his speech; he never could have shown his Celtic descent in the straight Greek lines and long oval of his face; but at five-and-twenty, fresh from the only life he had ever known, to present himself at the gates of St. John's proved no little determination of will, and scorn of ridicule.

While at Cambridge, he became one of a corps of volunteers, who were then being called out all over the country to resist the apprehended invasion by the French. I have heard him allude, in late years, to Lord Palmerston as one who had often been associated with him then in the mimic military duties which they had to perform.

We take him up now settled as a curate at Hartshead, in Yorkshire — far removed from his birth-place and all his Irish connections; with whom, indeed, he cared little to keep up any intercourse, and whom he never, I believe, revisited after becoming a student at Cambridge.

Hartshead is a very small village, lying to the east of Huddersfield and Halifax; and, from its high situation — on a mound, as it were, surrounded by a circular basin — commanding a magnificent view. Mr. Brontë resided here for five years; and, while the incumbent of Hartshead, he wooed and married Maria Branwell.

She was the third daughter of Mr. Thomas Branwell, merchant, of Penzance. Her mother's maiden name was Carne: and, both on father's and mother's side, the Branwell family were sufficiently well descended to enable them to mix in the best society that Penzance then afforded. Mr. and Mrs. Branwell would be living — their family of four daughters and one son, still children — during the existence of that primitive state of society which is well described by Dr. Davy in the life of his brother.

"In the same town, when the population was about 2,000 persons, there was only one carpet, the floors of rooms were sprinkled with sea-sand, and there was not a single silver fork.

"At that time, when our colonial possessions were very limited, our army and navy on a small scale, and there was comparatively little demand for intellect, the younger sons of gentlemen were often of necessity brought up to some trade or mechanical art, to which no discredit, or loss of caste, as it were, was attached. The eldest son, if not allowed to remain an idle country squire, was sent to Oxford or Cambridge, preparatory to his engaging in one of the three liberal professions of divinity, law, or physic; the second son was perhaps apprenticed to a surgeon or apothecary, or a solicitor; the third to a pewterer or watchmaker; the fourth to a packer or mercer, and so on, were there more to be provided for.

"After their apprenticeships were finished, the young men almost invariably went to London to perfect themselves in their respective trade or art: and on their return into the country, when settled in business, they were not excluded from what would now be considered genteel society. Visiting then was conducted differently from what it is at present. Dinner-parties were almost unknown, excepting at the annual feast-time. Christmas, too, was then a season of peculiar indulgence and conviviality, and a round of entertainments was given, consisting of tea and supper. Excepting at these two periods, visiting was almost entirely confined to tea-parties, which assembled at three o'clock, broke up at nine, and the amusement of the evening was commonly some round game at cards, as Pope Joan, or Commerce. The lower class was then extremely ignorant, and all classes were very superstitious; even the belief in witches maintained its ground, and there was an almost unbounded credulity respecting the supernatural and monstrous. There was scarcely a parish in the Mount's Bay that was without a haunted house, or a spot to which some story of supernatural horror was not attached. Even when I was a boy, I remember a house in the best street of Penzance which was uninhabited because it was believed to be haunted, and which young people walked by at night at a quickened pace, and with a beating heart. Amongst the middle and higher classes there was little taste for literature, and still less for science, and their pursuits were rarely of a dignified or intellectual kind. Hunting, shooting, wrestling, cock-fighting, generally ending in drunkenness, were what they most delighted in. Smuggling was carried on to a great extent; and drunkenness, and a low state of morals, were naturally associated with it. Whilst smuggling was the means of acquiring wealth to bold and reckless adventurers, drunkenness and dissipation occasioned the ruin of many respectable families."

I have given this extract because I conceive it bears some reference to the life of Miss Brontë, whose strong mind and vivid imagination must have received their first impressions either from the servants (in that simple household, almost friendly companions during the greater part of the day,) retailing the traditions or the news of Haworth village; or from Mr. Brontë, whose intercourse with his children appears to have been considerably restrained, and whose life, both in Ireland and at Cambridge, had been spent under peculiar circumstances; or from her aunt, Miss Branwell, who came to the parsonage, when Charlotte was only six or seven years old, to take charge of her dead sister's family. This aunt was older than Mrs. Brontë, and had lived longer among the Penzance society, which Dr. Davy describes. But in the Branwell family itself, the violence and irregularity of nature did not exist. They were Methodists, and, as far as I can gather, a gentle and sincere piety gave refinement and purity of character. Mr. Branwell, the father, according to his descendants' account, was a man of musical talent. He and his wife lived to see all their children grown up, and died within a year of each other — he in 1808, she in 1809, when their daughter Maria was twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. I have been permitted to look over a series of nine letters, which were addressed by her to Mr. Brontë, during the brief term of their engagement in 1812. They are full of tender grace of expression and feminine modesty; pervaded by the deep piety to which I have alluded as a family characteristic. I shall make one or two extracts from them, to show what sort of a person was the mother of Charlotte Brontë: but first, I must state the circumstances under which this Cornish lady met the scholar from Ahaderg, near Loughbrickland. In the early summer of 1812, when she would be twenty-nine, she came to visit her uncle, the Reverend John Fennel, who was at that time a clergyman of the Church of England, living near Leeds, but who had previously been a Methodist minister. Mr. Brontë was the incumbent of Hartshead; and had the reputation in the neighbourhood of being a very handsome fellow, full of Irish enthusiasm, and with something of an Irishman's capability of falling easily in love. Miss Branwell was extremely small in person; not pretty, but very elegant, and always dressed with a quiet simplicity of taste, which accorded well with her general character, and of which some of the details call to mind the style of dress preferred by her daughter for her favourite heroines. Mr. Brontë was soon captivated by the little, gentle creature, and this time declared that it was for life. In her first letter to him, dated August 26th, she seems almost surprised to find herself engaged, and alludes to the short time which she has known him. In the rest there are touches reminding one of Juliet's —

"But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove more true,
Than those that have more cunning to be strange."

There are plans for happy pic-nic parties to Kirkstall Abbey, in the glowing September days, when "Uncle, Aunt, and Cousin Jane," — the last engaged to a Mr. Morgan, another clergyman — were of the party; all since dead, except Mr. Brontë. There was no opposition on the part of any of her friends to her engagement. Mr. and Mrs. Fennel sanctioned it, and her brother and sisters in far-away Penzance appear fully to have approved of it. In a letter dated September 18th, she says: —

"For some years I have been perfectly my own mistress, subject to no control whatever; so far from it, that my sisters, who are many years older than myself, and even my dear mother, used to consult me on every occasion of importance, and scarcely ever doubted the propriety of my opinions and actions: perhaps you will be ready to accuse me of vanity in mentioning this, but you must consider that I do not boast of it. I have many times felt it a disadvantage, and although, I thank God, it has never led me into error, yet, in circumstances of uncertainty and doubt, I have deeply felt the want of a guide and instructor." In the same letter she tells Mr. Brontë, that she has informed her sisters of her engagement, and that she should not see them again so soon as she had intended. Mr. Fennel, her uncle, also writes to them by the same post in praise of Mr. Brontë.

The journey from Penzance to Leeds in those days was both very long and very expensive; the lovers had not much money to spend in unnecessary travelling, and, as Miss Branwell had neither father nor mother living, it appeared both a discreet and seemly arrangement that the marriage should take place from her uncle's house. There was no reason either why the engagement should be prolonged. They were past their first youth; they had means sufficient for their unambitious wants; the living of Hartshead is rated in the Clergy List at 202*l.* per annum, and she was in the receipt of a small annuity (50*l.* I have been told) by the will of her father. So, at the end of September, the lovers began to talk about taking a house, for I suppose that Mr. Brontë up to that time had been in lodgings; and all went smoothly and successfully with a view to their marriage in the ensuing winter, until November, when a misfortune happened, which she thus patiently and prettily describes: —

“I suppose you never expected to be much the richer for me, but I am sorry to inform you that I am still poorer than I thought myself. I mentioned having sent for my books, clothes, &c. On Saturday evening, about the time when you were writing the description of your imaginary shipwreck, I was reading and feeling the effects of a real one, having then received a letter from my sister giving me an account of the vessel in which she had sent my box being stranded on the coast of Devonshire, in consequence of which the box was dashed to pieces with the violence of the sea, and all my little property, with the exception of a very few articles, being swallowed up in the mighty deep. If this should not prove the prelude to something worse I shall think little of it, as it is the first disastrous circumstance which has occurred since I left my home.”

The last of these letters is dated December the 5th. Miss Branwell and her cousin intended to set about making the wedding-cake in the following week, so the marriage could not be far off. She had been learning by heart a “pretty little hymn” of Mr. Brontë’s composing; and reading Lord Lyttelton’s “Advice to a Lady,” on which she makes some pertinent and just remarks, showing that she thought as well as read. And so Maria Branwell fades out of sight; we have no more direct intercourse with her; we hear of her as Mrs. Brontë, but it is as an invalid, not far from death; still patient, cheerful, and pious. The writing of these letters is elegant and neat; while there are allusions to household occupations — such as making the wedding-cake; there are also allusions to the books she has read, or is reading, showing a well-cultivated mind. Without having anything of her daughter’s rare talents, Mrs. Brontë must have been, I imagine, that unusual character, a well-balanced and consistent woman. The style of the letters is easy and good; as is also that of a paper from the same hand, entitled “The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns,” which was written rather later, with a view to publication in some periodical.

She was married from her uncle’s house in Yorkshire, on the 29th of December, 1812; the same day was also the wedding-day of her younger sister, Charlotte Branwell, in distant Penzance. I do not think that Mrs. Brontë ever revisited Cornwall, but she has left a very pleasant impression on the minds of those relations who yet survive; they speak of her as “their favourite aunt, and one to whom they, as well as all the family, looked up, as a person of talent and great amiability of disposition;” and, again, as “meek and retiring, while possessing more than ordinary talents, which she inherited from her father, and her piety was genuine and unobtrusive.”

Mr. Brontë remained for five years at Hartshead, in the parish of Dewsbury. There he was married, and his two children, Maria and Elizabeth, were born. At the expiration of that period, he had the living of Thornton, in

Bradford Parish. Some of those great West Riding parishes are almost like bishoprics for their amount of population and number of churches. Thornton church is a little episcopal chapel of ease, rich in Nonconformist monuments, as of Accepted Lister and his friend Dr. Hall. The neighbourhood is desolate and wild; great tracts of bleak land, enclosed by stone dykes, sweeping up Clayton heights. The church itself looks ancient and solitary, and as if left behind by the great stone mills of a flourishing Independent firm, and the solid square chapel built by the members of that denomination. Altogether not so pleasant a place as Hartshead, with its ample outlook over cloud-shadowed, sun-flecked plain, and hill rising beyond hill to form the distant horizon.

Here, at Thornton, Charlotte Brontë was born, on the 21st of April, 1816. Fast on her heels followed Patrick Branwell, Emily Jane, and Anne. After the birth of this last daughter, Mrs. Brontë's health began to decline. It is hard work to provide for the little tender wants of many young children where the means are but limited. The necessaries of food and clothing are much more easily supplied than the almost equal necessaries of attendance, care, soothing, amusement, and sympathy. Maria Brontë, the eldest of six, could only have been a few months more than six years old, when Mr. Brontë removed to Haworth, on February the 25th, 1820. Those who knew her then, describe her as grave, thoughtful, and quiet, to a degree far beyond her years. Her childhood was no childhood; the cases are rare in which the possessors of great gifts have known the blessings of that careless happy time; *their* unusual powers stir within them, and, instead of the natural life of perception — the objective, as the Germans call it — they begin the deeper life of reflection — the subjective.

Little Maria Brontë was delicate and small in appearance, which seemed to give greater effect to her wonderful precocity of intellect. She must have been her mother's companion and helpmate in many a household and nursery experience, for Mr. Brontë was, of course, much engaged in his study; and besides, he was not naturally fond of children, and felt their frequent appearance on the scene as a drag both on his wife's strength, and as an interruption to the comfort of the household.

Haworth Parsonage is — as I mentioned in the first chapter — an oblong stone house, facing down the hill on which the village stands, and with the front door right opposite to the western door of the church, distant about a hundred yards. Of this space twenty yards or so in depth are occupied by the grassy garden, which is scarcely wider than the house. The graveyard lies on two sides of the house and garden. The house consists of four rooms on each floor, and is two stories high. When the Brontës took possession, they made the larger parlour, to the left of the entrance, the family sitting-room, while that on the right was appropriated to Mr. Brontë as a study. Behind this was the kitchen; behind the former, a sort of flagged store-room. Upstairs were four bed-chambers of similar size, with the addition of a small apartment over the passage, or "lobby" as we call it in the north. This was to the front, the staircase going up right opposite to the entrance. There is the pleasant old fashion of window seats all through the house; and one can see that the parsonage was built in the days when wood was plentiful, as the massive stair-banisters, and the wainscots, and the heavy window-frames testify.

This little extra upstairs room was appropriated to the children. Small as it was, it was not called a nursery; indeed, it had not the comfort of a fire-place in it; the servants — two affectionate, warm-hearted sisters, who cannot now speak of the family without tears — called the room the "children's study." The age of the eldest student was perhaps by this time seven.

The people in Haworth were none of them very poor. Many of them were employed in the neighbouring worsted mills; a few were mill-owners and manufacturers in a small way; there were also some shopkeepers for the humbler and everyday wants; but for medical advice, for stationery, books, law, dress, or dainties, the inhabitants had to go to Keighley. There were several Sunday-schools; the Baptists had taken the lead in instituting them, the Wesleyans had followed, the Church of England had brought up the rear. Good Mr. Grimshaw, Wesley's friend, had built a humble Methodist chapel, but it stood close to the road leading on to the moor; the Baptists then raised a place of worship, with the distinction of being a few yards back from the highway; and the Methodists have since thought it well to erect another and a larger chapel, still more retired from the road. Mr. Brontë was ever on kind and friendly terms with each denomination as a body; but from individuals in the village the family stood aloof, unless some direct service was required, from the first. "They kept themselves very close," is the account given by those who remember Mr. and Mrs. Brontë's coming amongst them. I believe many of the Yorkshiremen would object to the system of parochial visiting; their surly independence would revolt from the idea of any one having a right, from his office, to inquire into their condition, to counsel, or to admonish them. The old hill-spirit lingers in them, which coined the rhyme, inscribed on the under part of one of the seats in the Sedilia of Whalley Abbey, not many miles from Haworth,

"Who mells wi' what another does
Had best go home and shoe his goose."

I asked an inhabitant of a district close to Haworth what sort of a clergyman they had at the church which he attended.

"A rare good one," said he: "he minds his own business, and ne'er troubles himself with ours."

Mr. Brontë was faithful in visiting the sick and all those who sent for him, and diligent in attendance at the schools; and so was his daughter Charlotte too; but, cherishing and valuing privacy themselves, they were perhaps over-delicate in not intruding upon the privacy of others.

From their first going to Haworth, their walks were directed rather out towards the heathery moors, sloping upwards behind the parsonage, than towards the long descending village street. A good old woman, who came to nurse Mrs. Brontë in the illness — an internal cancer — which grew and gathered upon her, not many months after her arrival at Haworth, tells me that at that time the six little creatures used to walk out, hand in hand, towards the glorious wild moors, which in after days they loved so passionately; the elder ones taking thoughtful care for the toddling wee things.

They were grave and silent beyond their years; subdued, probably, by the presence of serious illness in the house; for, at the time which my informant speaks of, Mrs. Brontë was confined to the bedroom from which she never came forth alive. "You would not have known there was a child in the house, they were such still, noiseless, good little creatures. Maria would shut herself up" (Maria, but seven!) "in the children's study with a newspaper, and be able to tell one everything when she came out; debates in Parliament, and I don't know what all. She was as good as a mother to her sisters and brother. But there never were such good children. I used to think them spiritless, they were so different to any children I had ever seen. They were good little creatures. Emily was the prettiest."

Mrs. Brontë was the same patient, cheerful person as we have seen her formerly; very ill, suffering great pain, but seldom if ever complaining; at her better times begging her nurse to raise her in bed to let her see her clean the grate, "because she did it as it was done in Cornwall;" devotedly fond of her husband, who warmly repaid her affection, and suffered no one else to take the night-nursing; but, according to my informant, the mother was not very anxious to see much of her children, probably because the sight of them, knowing how soon they were to be left motherless, would have agitated her too much. So the little things clung quietly together, for their father was busy in his study and in his parish, or with their mother, and they took their meals alone; sat reading, or whispering low, in the "children's study," or wandered out on the hill-side, hand in hand.

The ideas of Rousseau and Mr. Day on education had filtered down through many classes, and spread themselves widely out. I imagine, Mr. Brontë must have formed some of his opinions on the management of children from these two theorists. His practice was not half so wild or extraordinary as that to which an aunt of mine was subjected by a disciple of Mr. Day's. She had been taken by this gentleman and his wife, to live with them as their adopted child, perhaps about five-and-twenty years before the time of which I am writing. They were wealthy people and kind hearted, but her food and clothing were of the very simplest and rudest description, on Spartan principles. A healthy, merry child, she did not much care for dress or eating; but the treatment which she felt as a real cruelty was this. They had a carriage, in which she and the favourite dog were taken an airing on alternate days; the creature whose turn it was to be left at home being tossed in a blanket — an operation which my aunt especially dreaded. Her affright at the tossing was probably the reason why it was persevered in. Dressed-up ghosts had become common, and she did not care for them, so the blanket exercise was to be the next mode of hardening her nerves. It is well known that Mr. Day broke off his intention of marrying Sabrina, the girl whom he had educated for this purpose, because, within a few weeks of the time fixed for the wedding, she was guilty of the frivolity, while on a visit from home, of wearing thin sleeves. Yet Mr. Day and my aunt's relations were benevolent people, only strongly imbued with the crotchet that by a system of training might be educed the hardihood and simplicity of the ideal savage, forgetting the terrible isolation of feelings and habits which their pupils would experience in the future life which they must pass among the corruptions and refinements of civilization.

Mr. Brontë wished to make his children hardy, and indifferent to the pleasures of eating and dress. In the latter he succeeded, as far as regarded his daughters.

His strong, passionate, Irish nature was, in general, compressed down with resolute stoicism; but it was there notwithstanding all his philosophic calm and dignity of demeanour; though he did not speak when he was annoyed or displeased. Mrs. Brontë, whose sweet nature thought invariably of the bright side, would say, "Ought I not to be thankful that he never gave me an angry word?"

Mr. Brontë was an active walker, stretching away over the moors for many miles, noting in his mind all natural signs of wind and weather, and keenly observing all the wild creatures that came and went in the loneliest sweeps of the hills. He has seen eagles stooping low in search of food for their young; no eagle is ever seen on those mountain slopes now.

He fearlessly took whatever side in local or national politics appeared to him right. In the days of the Luddites, he had been for the peremptory interference of the law, at a time when no magistrate could be found to act, and all the property of the West Riding was in terrible danger. He became unpopular then among the millworkers, and he esteemed his life unsafe if he took his long and lonely walks unarmed; so he began the habit, which has continued to this day, of invariably carrying a loaded pistol about with him. It lay on his dressing-table with his watch; with his watch it was put on in the morning; with his watch it was taken off at night.

Many years later, during his residence at Haworth, there was a strike; the hands in the neighbourhood felt themselves aggrieved by the masters, and refused to work: Mr. Brontë thought that they had been unjustly and unfairly treated, and he assisted them by all the means in his power to "keep the wolf from their doors," and avoid the incubus of debt. Several of the more influential inhabitants of Haworth and the neighbourhood were mill-owners; they remonstrated pretty sharply with him, but he believed that his conduct was right and persevered in it.

His opinions might be often both wild and erroneous, his principles of action eccentric and strange, his views of life partial, and almost misanthropical; but not one opinion that he held could be stirred or modified by any worldly motive: he acted up to his principles of action; and, if any touch of misanthropy mingled with his view of mankind in general, his conduct to the individuals who came in personal contact with him did not agree with such view. It is true that he had strong and vehement prejudices, and was obstinate in maintaining them, and that he was not dramatic enough in his perceptions to see how miserable others might be in a life that to him was all-sufficient. But I do not pretend to be able to harmonize points of character, and account for them, and bring them all into one consistent and intelligible whole. The family with whom I have now to do shot their roots down deeper than I can penetrate. I cannot measure them, much less is it for me to judge them. I have named these instances of eccentricity in the father because I hold the knowledge of them to be necessary for a right understanding of the life of his daughter.

Mrs. Brontë died in September, 1821, and the lives of those quiet children must have become quieter and lonelier still. Charlotte tried hard, in after years, to recall the remembrance of her mother, and could bring back two or three pictures of her. One was when, sometime in the evening light, she had been playing with her little boy, Patrick Branwell, in the parlour of Haworth Parsonage. But the recollections of four or five years old are of a very fragmentary character.

Owing to some illness of the digestive organs, Mr. Brontë was obliged to be very careful about his diet; and, in order to avoid temptation, and possibly to have the quiet necessary for digestion, he had begun, before his wife's death, to take his dinner alone — a habit which he always retained. He did not require companionship, therefore he did not seek it, either in his walks, or in his daily life. The quiet regularity of his domestic hours was only broken in upon by church-wardens, and visitors on parochial business; and sometimes by a neighbouring clergyman, who came down the hills, across the moors, to mount up again to Haworth Parsonage, and spend an evening there. But, owing to Mrs. Brontë's death so soon after her husband had removed into the district, and also to the distances, and the bleak country to be traversed, the wives of these clerical friends did not accompany their husbands; and the daughters grew up out of childhood into girlhood bereft, in a singular manner, of all such society as would have been natural to their age, sex, and station.

But the children did not want society. To small infantine gaieties they were unaccustomed. They were all in all to each other. I do not suppose that there ever was a family more tenderly bound to each other. Maria read the newspapers, and reported intelligence to her younger sisters which it is wonderful they could take an interest in. But I suspect that they had no "children's books," and that their eager minds "browzed undisturbed among the wholesome pasturage of English literature," as Charles Lamb expresses it. The servants of the household appear to have been much impressed with the little Brontës' extraordinary cleverness. In a letter which I had from him on this subject, their father writes: — "The servants often said that they had never seen such a clever little child" (as Charlotte), "and that they were obliged to be on their guard as to what they said and did before her. Yet she and the servants always lived on good terms with each other."

These servants are yet alive; elderly women residing in Bradford. They retain a faithful and fond recollection of Charlotte, and speak of her unvarying kindness from the "time when she was ever such a little child!" when she would not rest till she had got the old disused cradle sent from the parsonage to the house where the parents of one of them lived, to serve for a little infant sister. They tell of one long series of kind and thoughtful actions from this early period to the last weeks of Charlotte Brontë's life; and, though she had left her place many years ago, one of these former servants went over from Bradford to Haworth on purpose to see Mr. Brontë, and offer him her true sympathy, when his last child died. I may add a little anecdote as a testimony to the admirable character of the likeness of Miss Brontë prefixed to this volume. A gentleman who had kindly interested himself in the preparation of this memoir took the first volume, shortly after the publication, to the house of this old servant, in order to show her the portrait. The moment she caught a glimpse of the frontispiece, "There she is," in a minute she exclaimed. "Come, John, look!" (to her husband); and her daughter was equally struck by the resemblance. There might not be many to regard the Brontës with affection, but those who once loved them, loved them long and well.

I return to the father's letter. He says: —

"When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brothers and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own, in which the Duke of Wellington, my daughter Charlotte's hero, was sure to come off conqueror; when a dispute would not unfrequently arise amongst them regarding the comparative merits of him, Buonaparte, Hannibal, and Cæsar. When the argument got warm, and rose to its height, as their mother was then dead, I had sometimes to come in as arbitrator, and settle the dispute according to the best of my judgment. Generally, in the management of these concerns, I frequently thought that I discovered signs of rising talent, which I had seldom or never before seen in any of their age . . . A circumstance now occurs to my mind which I may as well mention. When my children were very young, when, as far as I can remember, the oldest was about ten years of age, and the youngest about four, thinking that they knew more than I had yet discovered, in order to make them speak with less timidity, I deemed that if they were put under a sort of cover I might gain my end; and happening to have a mask in the house, I told them all to stand and speak boldly from under cover of the mask.

"I began with the youngest (Anne, afterwards Acton Bell), and asked what a child like her most wanted; she answered, 'Age and experience.' I asked the next (Emily, afterwards Ellis Bell), what I had best do with her brother Branwell, who was sometimes a naughty boy; she answered, 'Reason with him, and when he won't listen to reason, whip him.' I asked Branwell what was the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of man and woman; he answered, ‘By considering the difference between them as to their bodies.’ I then asked Charlotte what was the best book in the world; she answered, ‘The Bible.’ And what was the next best; she answered, ‘The Book of Nature.’ I then asked the next what was the best mode of education for a woman; she answered, ‘That which would make her rule her house well.’ Lastly, I asked the oldest what was the best mode of spending time; she answered, ‘By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity.’ I may not have given precisely their words, but I have nearly done so, as they made a deep and lasting impression on my memory. The substance, however, was exactly what I have stated.”

The strange and quaint simplicity of the mode taken by the father to ascertain the hidden characters of his children, and the tone and character of these questions and answers, show the curious education which was made by the circumstances surrounding the Brontës. They knew no other children. They knew no other modes of thought than what were suggested to them by the fragments of clerical conversation which they overheard in the parlour, or the subjects of village and local interest which they heard discussed in the kitchen. Each had their own strong characteristic flavour.

They took a vivid interest in the public characters, and the local and the foreign as well as home politics discussed in the newspapers. Long before Maria Brontë died, at the age of eleven, her father used to say he could converse with her on any of the leading topics of the day with as much freedom and pleasure as with any grown-up person.

CHAPTER IV

About a year after Mrs. Brontë's death, an elder sister, as I have before mentioned, came from Penzance to superintend her brother-in-law's household, and look after his children. Miss Branwell was, I believe, a kindly and conscientious woman, with a good deal of character, but with the somewhat narrow ideas natural to one who had spent nearly all her life in the same place. She had strong prejudices, and soon took a distaste to Yorkshire. From Penzance, where plants which we in the north call greenhouse flowers grow in great profusion, and without any shelter even in the winter, and where the soft warm climate allows the inhabitants, if so disposed, to live pretty constantly in the open air, it was a great change for a lady considerably past forty to come and take up her abode in a place where neither flowers nor vegetables would flourish, and where a tree of even moderate dimensions might be hunted for far and wide; where the snow lay long and late on the moors, stretching bleakly and barely far up from the dwelling which was henceforward to be her home; and where often, on autumnal or winter nights, the four winds of heaven seemed to meet and rage together, tearing round the house as if they were wild beasts striving to find an entrance. She missed the small round of cheerful, social visiting perpetually going on in a country town; she missed the friends she had known from her childhood, some of whom had been her parents' friends before they were hers; she disliked many of the customs of the place, and particularly dreaded the cold damp arising from the flag floors in the passages and parlours of Haworth Parsonage. The stairs, too, I believe, are made of stone; and no wonder, when stone quarries are near, and trees are far to seek. I have heard that Miss Branwell always went about the house in pattens, clicking up and down the stairs, from her dread of catching cold. For the same reason, in the latter years of her life, she passed nearly all her time, and took most of her meals, in her bedroom. The children respected her, and had that sort of affection for her which is generated by esteem; but I do not think they ever freely loved her. It was a severe trial for any one at her time of life to change neighbourhood and habitation so entirely as she did; and the greater her merit.

I do not know whether Miss Branwell taught her nieces anything besides sewing, and the household arts in which Charlotte afterwards was such an adept. Their regular lessons were said to their father; and they were always in the habit of picking up an immense amount of miscellaneous information for themselves. But a year or so before this time, a school had been begun in the North of England for the daughters of clergymen. The place was Cowan

Bridge, a small hamlet on the coach-road between Leeds and Kendal, and thus easy of access from Haworth, as the coach ran daily, and one of its stages was at Keighley. The yearly expense for each pupil (according to the entrance-rules given in the Report for 1842, and I believe they had not been increased since the establishment of the schools in 1823) was as follows:

"Rule 11. The terms for clothing, lodging, boarding, and educating, are 14*l.* a year; half to be paid in advance, when the pupils are sent; and also 1*l.* entrance-money, for the use of books, &c. The system of education comprehends history, geography, the use of the globes, grammar, writing and arithmetic, all kinds of needlework, and the nicer kinds of household work — such as getting up fine linen, ironing, &c. If accomplishments are required, an additional charge of 3*l.* a year is made for music or drawing, each."

Rule 3rd requests that the friends will state the line of education desired in the case of every pupil, having a regard to her future prospects.

Rule 4th states the clothing and toilette articles which a girl is expected to bring with her; and thus concludes: "The pupils all appear in the same dress. They wear plain straw cottage bonnets; in summer white frocks on Sundays, and nankeen on other days; in winter, purple stuff frocks, and purple cloth cloaks. For the sake of uniformity, therefore, they are required to bring 3*l.* in lieu of frocks, pelisse, bonnet, tippet, and frills; making the whole sum which each pupil brings with her to the school —

7*l.* half-year in advance.
1*l.* entrance for books.
1*l.* entrance for clothes.

The 8th rule is, — "All letters and parcels are inspected by the superintendent;" but this is a very prevalent regulation in all young ladies' schools, where I think it is generally understood that the schoolmistress may exercise this privilege, although it is certainly unwise in her to insist too frequently upon it.

There is nothing at all remarkable in any of the other regulations, a copy of which was doubtless in Mr. Brontë's hands when he formed the determination to send his daughters to Cowan Bridge School; and he accordingly took Maria and Elizabeth thither in July, 1824.

I now come to a part of my subject which I find great difficulty in treating, because the evidence relating to it on each side is so conflicting that it seems almost impossible to arrive at the truth. Miss Brontë more than once said to me, that she should not have written what she did of Lowood in "Jane Eyre," if she had thought the place would have been so immediately identified with Cowan Bridge, although there was not a word in her account of the institution but what was true at the time when she knew it; she also said that she had not considered it necessary, in a work of fiction, to state every particular with the impartiality that might be required in a court of justice, nor to seek out motives, and make allowances for human failings, as she might have done, if dispassionately analysing the conduct of those who had the superintendence of the institution. I believe she herself would have been glad of an opportunity to correct the over-strong impression which was made upon the public mind by her vivid picture, though even she, suffering her whole life long, both in heart and body, from the consequences of what happened there, might have been apt, to the last, to take her deep belief in facts for the facts themselves — her conception of truth for the absolute truth.

In some of the notices of the previous editions of this work, it is assumed that I derived the greater part of my information with regard to her sojourn at Cowan Bridge from Charlotte Brontë herself. I never heard her speak of the place but once, and that was on the second day of my acquaintance with her. A little child on that occasion expressed some reluctance to finish eating his piece of bread at dinner; and she, stooping down, and addressing him in a low voice, told him how thankful she should have been at his age for a piece of bread; and when we — though I am not sure if I myself spoke — asked her some question as to the occasion she alluded to, she replied with reserve and hesitation, evidently shying away from what she imagined might lead to too much conversation on one of her books. She spoke of the oat-cake at Cowan Bridge (the clap-bread of Westmorland) as being different to the leaven-raised oat-cake of Yorkshire, and of her childish distaste for it. Some one present made an allusion to a similar childish dislike in the true tale of "The terrible knitters o' Dent" given in Southey's "Common-place Book:" and she smiled faintly, but said that the mere difference in food was not all: that the food itself was spoilt by the dirty carelessness of the cook, so that she and her sisters disliked their meals exceedingly; and she named her relief and gladness when the doctor condemned the meat, and spoke of having seen him spit it out. These are all the details I ever heard from her. She so avoided particularizing, that I think Mr. Carus Wilson's name never passed between us.

I do not doubt the general accuracy of my informants, — of those who have given, and solemnly repeated, the details that follow, — but it is only just to Miss Brontë to say that I have stated above pretty nearly all that I ever heard on the subject from her.

A clergyman, living near Kirby Lonsdale, the Reverend William Carus Wilson, was the prime mover in the establishment of this school. He was an energetic man, sparing no labour for the accomplishment of his ends. He saw that it was an extremely difficult task for clergymen with limited incomes to provide for the education of their children; and he devised a scheme, by which a certain sum was raised annually by subscription, to complete the amount required to furnish a solid and sufficient English education, for which the parent's payment of 14*l*. a year would not have been sufficient. Indeed, that made by the parents was considered to be exclusively appropriated to the expenses of lodging and boarding, and the education provided for by the subscriptions. Twelve trustees were appointed; Mr. Wilson being not only a trustee, but the treasurer and secretary; in fact, taking most of the business arrangements upon himself; a responsibility which appropriately fell to him, as he lived nearer the school than any one else who was interested in it. So his character for prudence and judgment was to a certain degree implicated in the success or failure of Cowan Bridge School; and the working of it was for many years the great object and interest of his life. But he was apparently unacquainted with the prime element in good administration — seeking out thoroughly competent persons to fill each department, and then making them responsible for, and judging them by, the result, without perpetual interference with the details.

So great was the amount of good which Mr. Wilson did, by his constant, unwearied superintendence, that I cannot help feeling sorry that, in his old age and declining health, the errors which he was believed to have committed, should have been brought up against him in a form which received such wonderful force from the touch of Miss Brontë's great genius. No doubt whatever can be entertained of the deep interest which he felt in the success of the school. As I write, I have before me his last words on giving up the secretaryship in 1850: he speaks of the "withdrawal, from declining health, of an eye, which, at all events, has loved to watch over the schools with an honest and anxious interest;" — and again he adds, "that he resigns, therefore, with a desire to be thankful for all that God has been pleased to accomplish through his instrumentality (the infirmities and unworthinesses of which he deeply feels and deplores)."

Cowan Bridge is a cluster of some six or seven cottages, gathered together at both ends of a bridge, over which the high road from Leeds to Kendal crosses a little stream, called the Leck. This high road is nearly disused now; but formerly, when the buyers from the West Riding manufacturing districts had frequent occasion to go up into the North to purchase the wool of the Westmorland and Cumberland farmers, it was doubtless much travelled; and perhaps the hamlet of Cowan Bridge had a more prosperous look than it bears at present. It is prettily situated; just where the Leck-fells swoop into the plain; and by the course of the beck alder-trees and willows and hazel bushes grow. The current of the stream is interrupted by broken pieces of grey rock; and the waters flow over a bed of large round white pebbles, which a flood heaves up and moves on either side out of its impetuous way till in some parts they almost form a wall. By the side of the little, shallow, sparkling, vigorous Leck, run long pasture fields, of the fine short grass common in high land; for though Cowan Bridge is situated on a plain, it is a plain from which there is many a fall and long descent before you and the Leck reach the valley of the Lune. I can hardly understand how the school there came to be so unhealthy, the air all round about was so sweet and thyme-scented, when I visited it last summer. But at this day, every one knows that the site of a building intended for numbers should be chosen with far greater care than that of a private dwelling, from the tendency to illness, both infectious and otherwise, produced by the congregation of people in close proximity.

The house is still remaining that formed part of that occupied by the school. It is a long, bow-windowed cottage, now divided into two dwellings. It stands facing the Leck, between which and it intervenes a space, about seventy yards deep, that was once the school garden. This original house was an old dwelling of the Picard family, which they had inhabited for two generations. They sold it for school purposes, and an additional building was erected, running at right angles from the older part. This new part was devoted expressly to schoolrooms, dormitories, &c.; and after the school was removed to Casterton, it was used for a bobbin-mill connected with the stream, where wooden reels were made out of the alders, which grow profusely in such ground as that surrounding Cowan Bridge. This mill is now destroyed. The present cottage was, at the time of which I write, occupied by the teachers' rooms, the dinner-room and kitchens, and some smaller bedrooms. On going into this building, I found one part, that nearest to the high road, converted into a poor kind of public-house, then to let, and having all the squalid appearance of a deserted place, which rendered it difficult to judge what it would look like when neatly kept up, the broken panes replaced in the windows, and the rough-cast (now cracked and discoloured) made white and whole. The other end forms a cottage, with the low ceilings and stone floors of a hundred years ago; the windows do not open freely and widely; and the passage upstairs, leading to the bedrooms, is narrow and tortuous: altogether, smells would linger about the house, and damp cling to it. But sanitary matters were little understood thirty years ago; and it was a great thing to get a roomy building close to the high road, and not too far from the habitation of Mr. Wilson, the originator of the educational scheme. There was much need of such an institution; numbers of ill-paid clergymen hailed the prospect with joy, and eagerly put down the names of their children as pupils when the establishment should be ready to receive them. Mr. Wilson was, no doubt, pleased by the impatience with which the realisation of his idea was anticipated, and opened the school with less than a hundred pounds in hand, and with pupils, the number of whom varies according to different accounts; Mr. W. W. Carus Wilson, the son of the founder, giving it as seventy; while Mr. Shepheard, the son-in-law, states it to have been only sixteen.

Mr. Wilson felt, most probably, that the responsibility of the whole plan rested upon him. The payment made by the parents was barely enough for food and lodging; the subscriptions did not flow very freely into an untried scheme; and great economy was necessary in all the domestic arrangements. He determined to enforce this by frequent personal inspection; carried perhaps to an unnecessary extent, and leading occasionally to a meddling with little matters, which had sometimes the effect of producing irritation of feeling. Yet, although there was economy in providing for the household, there does not appear to have been any parsimony. The meat, flour, milk, &c., were contracted for, but were of very fair quality; and the dietary, which has been shown to me in manuscript, was neither bad nor unwholesome; nor, on the whole, was it wanting in variety. Oatmeal porridge for breakfast; a piece of oat-cake for those who required luncheon; baked and boiled beef, and mutton, potato-pie, and plain homely puddings of different kinds for dinner. At five o'clock, bread and milk for the younger ones; and one piece of bread (this was the only time at which the food was limited) for the elder pupils, who sat up till a later meal of the same description.

Mr. Wilson himself ordered in the food, and was anxious that it should be of good quality. But the cook, who had much of his confidence, and against whom for a long time no one durst utter a complaint, was careless, dirty, and wasteful. To some children oatmeal porridge is distasteful, and consequently unwholesome, even when properly made; at Cowan Bridge School it was too often sent up, not merely burnt, but with offensive fragments of other substances discoverable in it. The beef, that should have been carefully salted before it was dressed, had often become tainted from neglect; and girls, who were school-fellows with the Brontës, during the reign of the cook of whom I am speaking, tell me that the house seemed to be pervaded, morning, noon, and night, by the odour of rancid fat that steamed out of the oven in which much of their food was prepared. There was the same carelessness in making the puddings; one of those ordered was rice boiled in water, and eaten with a sauce of treacle and sugar; but it was often uneatable, because the water had been taken out of the rain tub, and was strongly impregnated with the dust lodging on the roof, whence it had trickled down into the old wooden cask, which also added its own flavour to that of the original rain water. The milk, too, was often "bingy," to use a country expression for a kind of taint that is far worse than sourness, and suggests the idea that it is caused by want of cleanliness about the milk pans, rather than by the heat of the weather. On Saturdays, a kind of pie, or mixture of potatoes and meat, was served up, which was made of all the fragments accumulated during the week. Scraps of meat from a dirty and disorderly larder, could never be very appetizing; and, I believe, that this dinner was more loathed than any in the early days of Cowan Bridge School. One may fancy how repulsive such fare would be to children whose appetites were small, and who had been accustomed to food, far simpler perhaps, but prepared with a delicate cleanliness that made it both tempting and wholesome. At many a meal the little Brontës went without food, although craving with hunger. They were not strong when they came, having only just recovered from a complication of measles and hooping-cough: indeed, I suspect they had scarcely recovered; for there was some consultation on the part of the school authorities whether Maria and Elizabeth should be received or not, in July 1824. Mr. Brontë came again, in the September of that year, bringing with him Charlotte and Emily to be admitted as pupils.

It appears strange that Mr. Wilson should not have been informed by the teachers of the way in which the food was served up; but we must remember that the cook had been known for some time to the Wilson family, while the teachers were brought together for an entirely different work — that of education. They were expressly given to understand that such was their department; the buying in and management of the provisions rested with Mr. Wilson and the cook. The teachers would, of course, be unwilling to lay any complaints on the subject before him.

There was another trial of health common to all the girls. The path from Cowan Bridge to Tunstall Church, where Mr. Wilson preached, and where they all attended on the Sunday, is more than two miles in length, and goes sweeping along the rise and fall of the unsheltered country, in a way to make it a fresh and exhilarating walk in summer, but a bitter cold one in winter, especially to children like the delicate little Brontës, whose thin blood flowed languidly in consequence of their feeble appetites rejecting the food prepared for them, and thus inducing a half-starved condition. The church was not warmed, there being no means for this purpose. It stands in the midst of fields, and the damp mist must have gathered round the walls, and crept in at the windows. The girls took their cold dinner with them, and ate it between the services, in a chamber over the entrance, opening out of the former galleries. The arrangements for this day were peculiarly trying to delicate children, particularly to those who were spiritless and longing for home, as poor Maria Brontë must have been; for her ill health was increasing, and the old cough, the remains of the hooping-cough, lingered about her.

She was far superior in mind to any of her play-fellows and companions, and was lonely amongst them from that very cause; and yet she had faults so annoying that she was in constant disgrace with her teachers, and an object of merciless dislike to one of them, who is depicted as "Miss Scatcherd" in "Jane Eyre," and whose real name I will be merciful enough not to disclose. I need hardly say, that Helen Burns is as exact a transcript of Maria Brontë as Charlotte's wonderful power of reproducing character could give. Her heart, to the latest day on which we met, still beat with unavailing indignation at the worrying and the cruelty to which her gentle, patient, dying sister had been subjected by this woman. Not a word of that part of "Jane Eyre" but is a literal repetition of scenes between the pupil and the teacher. Those who had been pupils at the same time knew who must have written the book from the force with which Helen Burns' sufferings are described. They had, before that, recognised the description of the sweet dignity and benevolence of Miss Temple as only a just tribute to the merits of one whom all that knew her appear to hold in honour; but when Miss Scatcherd was held up to opprobrium they also recognised in the writer of "Jane Eyre" an unconsciously avenging sister of the sufferer.

One of their fellow-pupils, among other statements even worse, gives me the following: — The dormitory in which Maria slept was a long room, holding a row of narrow little beds on each side, occupied by the pupils; and at the end of this dormitory there was a small bed-chamber opening out of it, appropriated to the use of Miss Scatcherd. Maria's bed stood nearest to the door of this room. One morning, after she had become so seriously unwell as to have had a blister applied to her side (the sore from which was not perfectly healed), when the getting-up bell was heard, poor Maria moaned out that she was so ill, so very ill, she wished she might stop in bed; and some of the girls urged her to do so, and said they would explain it all to Miss Temple, the superintendent. But Miss Scatcherd was close at hand, and her anger would have to be faced before Miss Temple's kind thoughtfulness could interfere; so the sick child began to dress, shivering with cold, as, without leaving her bed, she slowly put on her black worsted stockings over her thin white legs (my informant spoke as if she saw it yet, and her whole face flushed out undying indignation). Just then Miss Scatcherd issued from her room, and, without asking for a word of explanation from the sick and frightened girl, she took her by the arm, on the side to which the blister had been applied, and by one vigorous movement whirled her out into the middle of the floor, abusing her all the time for dirty and untidy habits. There she left her. My informant says, Maria hardly spoke, except to beg some of the more indignant girls to be calm; but, in slow, trembling movements, with many a pause, she went downstairs at last, — and was punished for being late.

Any one may fancy how such an event as this would rankle in Charlotte's mind. I only wonder that she did not remonstrate against her father's decision to send her and Emily back to Cowan Bridge, after Maria's and Elizabeth's deaths. But frequently children are unconscious of the effect which some of their simple revelations would have in altering the opinions entertained by their friends of the persons placed around them. Besides, Charlotte's earnest vigorous mind saw, at an unusually early age, the immense importance of education, as furnishing her with tools which she had the strength and the will to wield, and she would be aware that the Cowan Bridge education was, in many points, the best that her father could provide for her.

Before Maria Brontë's death, that low fever broke out, in the spring of 1825, which is spoken of in "Jane Eyre." Mr. Wilson was extremely alarmed at the first symptoms of this. He went to a kind motherly woman, who had had some connection with the school — as laundress, I believe — and asked her to come and tell him what was the matter with them. She made herself ready, and drove with him in his gig. When she entered the schoolroom, she saw from twelve to fifteen girls lying about; some resting their aching heads on the table, others on the ground; all heavy-eyed, flushed, indifferent, and weary, with pains in every limb. Some peculiar odour, she says, made her recognise that they were sickening for "the fever;" and she told Mr. Wilson so, and that she could not stay there for fear of conveying the infection to her own children; but he half commanded, and half entreated her to remain and nurse them; and finally mounted his gig and drove away, while she was still urging that she must return to her own house, and to her domestic duties, for which she had provided no substitute. However, when she was left in this unceremonious manner, she determined to make the best of it; and a most efficient nurse she proved: although, as she says, it was a dreary time.

Mr. Wilson supplied everything ordered by the doctors, of the best quality and in the most liberal manner; the invalids were attended by Dr. Batty, a very clever surgeon in Kirby, who had had the medical superintendence of the establishment from the beginning, and who afterwards became Mr. Wilson's brother-in-law. I have heard from two witnesses besides Charlotte Brontë, that Dr. Batty condemned the preparation of the food by the expressive action of spitting out a portion of it. He himself, it is but fair to say, does not remember this circumstance, nor does he speak of the fever itself as either alarming or dangerous. About forty of the girls suffered from this, but none of them died at Cowan Bridge; though one died at her own home, sinking under the state of health which followed it. None of the Brontës had the fever. But the same causes, which affected the health of the other pupils through typhus, told more slowly, but not less surely, upon their constitutions. The principal of these causes was the food.

The bad management of the cook was chiefly to be blamed for this; she was dismissed, and the woman who had been forced against her will to serve as head nurse, took the place of housekeeper; and henceforward the food was so well prepared that no one could ever reasonably complain of it. Of course it cannot be expected that a new institution, comprising domestic and educational arrangements for nearly a hundred persons, should work quite smoothly at the beginning.

All this occurred during the first two years of the establishment, and in estimating its effect upon the character of Charlotte Brontë, we must remember that she was a sensitive thoughtful child, capable of reflecting deeply, if not of analyzing truly; and peculiarly susceptible, as are all delicate and sickly children, to painful impressions. What the healthy suffer from but momentarily and then forget, those who are ailing brood over involuntarily and remember long, — perhaps with no resentment, but simply as a piece of suffering that has been stamped into their very life. The pictures, ideas, and conceptions of character received into the mind of the child of eight years old, were destined to be reproduced in fiery words a quarter of a century afterwards. She saw but one side of Mr. Wilson's character; and many of those who knew him at that time assure me of the fidelity with which this is represented, while at the same time they regret that the delineation should have obliterated, as it were, nearly all that was noble or conscientious. And that there were grand and fine qualities in Mr. Wilson, I have received abundant evidence. Indeed for several weeks past I have received letters almost daily, bearing on the subject of this chapter; some vague, some definite; many full of love and admiration for Mr. Wilson, some as full of dislike and indignation; few containing positive facts. After giving careful consideration to this mass of conflicting evidence, I have made such alterations and omissions in this chapter as seem to me to be required. It is but just to state that the major part of the testimony with which I have been favoured from old pupils is in high praise of Mr. Wilson. Among the letters that I have read, there is one whose evidence ought to be highly respected. It is from the husband of "Miss Temple." She died in 1856, but he, a clergyman, thus wrote in reply to a letter addressed to him on the subject by one of Mr. Wilson's friends: — "Often have I heard my late dear wife speak of her sojourn at Cowan Bridge; always in terms of admiration of Mr. Carus Wilson, his parental love to his pupils, and their love for him; of the food and general treatment, in terms of approval. I have heard her allude to an unfortunate cook, who used at times to spoil the porridge, but who, she said, was soon dismissed."

The recollections left of the four Brontë sisters at this period of their lives, on the minds of those who associated with them, are not very distinct. Wild, strong hearts, and powerful minds, were hidden under an enforced propriety and regularity of demeanour and expression, just as their faces had been concealed by their father, under his stiff, unchanging mask. Maria was delicate, unusually clever and thoughtful for her age, gentle, and untidy. Of her frequent disgrace from this last fault — of her sufferings, so patiently borne — I have already spoken. The only glimpse we get of Elizabeth, through the few years of her short life, is contained in a letter which I have received from "Miss Temple." "The second, Elizabeth, is the only one of the family of whom I have a vivid recollection, from her meeting with a somewhat alarming accident, in consequence of which I had her for some days and nights in my bedroom, not only for the sake of greater quiet, but that I might watch over her myself. Her head was severely cut, but she bore all the consequent suffering with exemplary patience, and by it won much upon my esteem. Of the two younger ones (if two there were) I have very slight recollections, save that one, a darling child, under five years of age, was quite the pet nursling of the school." This last would be Emily. Charlotte was considered the most talkative of the sisters — a "bright, clever, little child." Her great friend was a certain "Mellany Hane" (so Mr. Brontë spells the name), whose brother paid for her schooling, and who had no remarkable talent except for music, which her brother's circumstances forbade her to cultivate. She was "a hungry, good-natured, ordinary girl;" older than Charlotte, and ever ready to protect her from any petty tyranny or encroachments on the part of the elder girls. Charlotte always remembered her with affection and gratitude.

I have quoted the word "bright" in the account of Charlotte. I suspect that this year of 1825 was the last time it could ever be applied to her. In the spring of it, Maria became so rapidly worse that Mr. Brontë was sent for. He had not previously been aware of her illness, and the condition in which he found her was a terrible shock to him. He took her home by the Leeds coach, the girls crowding out into the road to follow her with their eyes over the bridge, past the cottages, and then out of sight for ever. She died a very few days after her arrival at home. Perhaps the news of her death falling suddenly into the life of which her patient existence had formed a part, only a little week or so before, made those who remained at Cowan Bridge look with more anxiety on Elizabeth's symptoms, which also turned out to be consumptive. She was sent home in charge of a confidential servant of the establishment; and she, too, died in the early summer of that year. Charlotte was thus suddenly called into the responsibilities of eldest sister in a motherless family. She remembered how anxiously her dear sister Maria had striven, in her grave earnest way, to be a tender helper and a counsellor to them all; and the duties that now fell upon her seemed almost like a legacy from the gentle little sufferer so lately dead.

Both Charlotte and Emily returned to school after the Midsummer holidays in this fatal year. But before the next winter it was thought desirable to advise their removal, as it was evident that the damp situation of the house at Cowan Bridge did not suit their health.

CHAPTER V

For the reason just stated, the little girls were sent home in the autumn of 1825, when Charlotte was little more than nine years old.

About this time, an elderly woman of the village came to live as servant at the parsonage. She remained there, as a member of the household, for thirty years; and from the length of her faithful service, and the attachment and respect which she inspired, is deserving of mention. Tabby was a thorough specimen of a Yorkshire woman of her class, in dialect, in appearance, and in character. She abounded in strong practical sense and shrewdness. Her words were far from flattery; but she would spare no deeds in the cause of those whom she kindly regarded. She ruled the children pretty sharply; and yet never grudged a little extra trouble to provide them with such small treats as came within her power. In return, she claimed to be looked upon as a humble friend; and, many years later, Miss Brontë told me that she found it somewhat difficult to manage, as Tabby expected to be informed of all the family concerns, and yet had grown so deaf that what was repeated to her became known to whoever might be in or about the house. To obviate this publication of what it might be desirable to keep secret, Miss Brontë used to take her out for a walk on the solitary moors; where, when both were seated on a tuft of heather, in some high lonely place, she could acquaint the old woman, at leisure, with all that she wanted to hear.

Tabby had lived in Haworth in the days when the pack-horses went through once a week, with their tinkling bells and gay worsted adornment, carrying the produce of the country from Keighley over the hills to Colne and Burnley. What is more, she had known the "bottom," or valley, in those primitive days when the fairies frequented the margin of the "beck" on moonlight nights, and had known folk who had seen them. But that was when there were no mills in the valleys; and when all the wool-spinning was done by hand in the farm-houses round. "It wur the factories as had driven 'em away," she said. No doubt she had many a tale to tell of by-gone days of the country-side; old ways of living, former inhabitants, decayed gentry, who had melted away, and whose places knew them no more; family tragedies, and dark superstitious dooms; and in telling these things, without the least consciousness that there might ever be anything requiring to be softened down, would give at full length the bare and simple details.

Miss Branwell instructed the children at regular hours in all she could teach, making her bed-chamber into their schoolroom. Their father was in the habit of relating to them any public news in which he felt an interest; and from the opinions of his strong and independent mind they would gather much food for thought; but I do not know whether he gave them any direct instruction. Charlotte's deep thoughtful spirit appears to have felt almost painfully the tender responsibility which rested upon her with reference to her remaining sisters. She was only eighteen months older than Emily; but Emily and Anne were simply companions and playmates, while Charlotte was motherly friend and guardian to both; and this loving assumption of duties beyond her years, made her feel considerably older than she really was.

Patrick Branwell, their only brother, was a boy of remarkable promise, and, in some ways, of extraordinary precocity of talent. Mr. Brontë's friends advised him to send his son to school; but, remembering both the strength of will of his own youth and his mode of employing it, he believed that Patrick was better at home, and that he himself could teach him well, as he had taught others before. So Patrick, or as his family called him — Branwell, remained at Haworth, working hard for some hours a day with his father; but, when the time of the latter was taken up with his parochial duties, the boy was thrown into chance companionship with the lads of the village — for youth will to youth, and boys will to boys.

Still, he was associated in many of his sisters' plays and amusements. These were mostly of a sedentary and intellectual nature. I have had a curious packet confided to me, containing an immense amount of manuscript, in an inconceivably small space; tales, dramas, poems, romances, written principally by Charlotte, in a hand which it is almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass. No description will give so good an idea of the extreme minuteness of the writing as the annexed facsimile of a page.

Among these papers there is a list of her works, which I copy, as a curious proof how early the rage for literary composition had seized upon her: —

CATALOGUE OF MY BOOKS, WITH THE PERIOD OF THEIR COMPLETION, UP TO AUGUST 3RD, 1830.

Two romantic tales in one volume; viz., The Twelve Adventurers and the Adventures in Ireland, April 2nd, 1829.

The Search after Happiness, a Tale, Aug. 1st, 1829.

Leisure Hours, a Tale, and two Fragments, July 6th 1829.

The Adventures of Edward de Crack, a Tale, Feb. 2nd, 1830.

The Adventures of Ernest Alembert, a Tale, May 26th, 1830.

An interesting Incident in the Lives of some of the most eminent Persons of the Age, a Tale, June 10th, 1830.

Tales of the Islanders, in four volumes. Contents of the 1st Vol.: — 1. An Account of their Origin; 2. A Description of Vision Island; 3. Ratten's Attempt; 4. Lord Charles Wellesley and the Marquis of Douro's Adventure; completed June 31st, 1829. 2nd Vol.: — 1. The School-rebellion; 2. The strange Incident in the Duke of Wellington's Life; 3. Tale to his Sons; 4. The

Marquis of Douro and Lord Charles Wellesley's Tale to his little King and Queen; completed Dec. 2nd, 1829. 3rd Vol.: — 1. The Duke of Wellington's Adventure in the Cavern; 2. The Duke of Wellington and the little King's and Queen's visit to the Horse-Guards; completed May 8th, 1830. 4th Vol.: — 1. The three old Washer-women of Strathfieldsaye; 2. Lord C. Wellesley's Tale to his Brother; completed July 30th, 1830.

Characters of Great Men of the Present Age, Dec. 17th 1829.

The Young Men's Magazines, in Six Numbers, from August to December, the latter months double number, completed December the 12th, 1829. General index to their contents: — 1. A True Story; 2. Causes of the War; 3. A Song; 4. Conversations; 5. A True Story continued; 6. The Spirit of Cawdor; 7. Interior of a Pothouse, a Poem; 8. The Glass Town, a Song; 9. The Silver Cup, a Tale; 10. The Table and Vase in the Desert, a Song; 11. Conversations; 12. Scene on the Great Bridge; 13. Song of the Ancient Britons; 14. Scene in my Tun, a Tale; 15. An American Tale; 16. Lines written on seeing the Garden of a Genius; 17. The Lay of the Glass Town; 18. The Swiss Artist, a Tale; 19. Lines on the Transfer of this Magazine; 20. On the Same, by a different hand; 21. Chief Genii in Council; 22. Harvest in Spain; 23. The Swiss Artists continued; 24. Conversations.

The Poetaster, a Drama, in 2 volumes, July 12th, 1830.

A Book of Rhymes, finished December 17th, 1829. Contents: — 1. The Beauty of Nature; 2. A Short Poem; 3. Meditations while Journeying in a Canadian Forest; 4. Song of an Exile; 5. On Seeing the Ruins of the Tower of Babel; 6. *A Thing of* 14 *lines*; 7. Lines written on the Bank of a River one fine Summer Evening; 8. Spring, a Song; 9. Autumn, a Song.

Miscellaneous Poems, finished May 30th, 1830. Contents: — 1. The Churchyard; 2. Description of the Duke of Wellington's Palace on the Pleasant Banks of the Lusiva; this article is a small prose tale or incident; 3. Pleasure; 4. Lines written on the Summit of a high Mountain of the North of England; 5. Winter; 6. Two Fragments, namely, 1st, The Vision; 2nd, A Short untitled Poem; the Evening Walk, a Poem, June 23rd, 1830.

Making in the whole twenty-two volumes.

C. BRONTË, *August* 3, 1830

As each volume contains from sixty to a hundred pages, and the size of the page lithographed is rather less than the average, the amount of the whole seems very great, if we remember that it was all written in about fifteen months. So much for the quantity; the quality strikes me as of singular merit for a girl of thirteen or fourteen. Both as a specimen of her prose style at this time, and also as revealing something of the quiet domestic life led by these children, I take an extract from the introduction to "Tales of the Islanders," the title of one of their "Little Magazines:" —

"June the 31st, 1829.

"The play of the 'Islanders' was formed in December, 1827, in the following manner. One night, about the time when the cold sleet and stormy fogs of November are succeeded by the snow-storms, and high piercing night winds of confirmed winter, we were all sitting round the warm blazing kitchen fire, having just concluded a quarrel with Tabby concerning the propriety of lighting a candle, from which she came off victorious, no candle having been produced. A long pause succeeded, which was at last broken by Branwell saying, in a lazy manner, 'I don't know what to do.' This was echoed by Emily and Anne.

"*Tabby*. 'Wha ya may go t' bed.'

"*Branwell*. 'I'd rather do anything than that.'

"*Charlotte*. 'Why are you so glum to-night, Tabby? Oh! suppose we had each an island of our own.'

"*Branwell*. 'If we had I would choose the Island of Man.'

"*Charlotte*. 'And I would choose the Isle of Wight.'

"*Emily*. 'The Isle of Arran for me.'

"*Anne*. 'And mine shall be Guernsey.'

"We then chose who should be chief men in our islands. Branwell chose John Bull, Astley Cooper, and Leigh Hunt; Emily, Walter Scott, Mr. Lockhart, Johnny Lockhart; Anne, Michael Sadler, Lord Bentinck, Sir Henry Halford. I chose the Duke of Wellington and two sons, Christopher North and Co., and Mr. Abernethy. Here our conversation was interrupted by the, to us, dismal sound of the clock striking seven, and we were summoned off to bed. The next day we added many others to our list of men, till we got almost all the chief men of the kingdom. After this, for a long time, nothing worth noticing occurred. In June, 1828, we erected a school on a fictitious island, which was to contain 1,000 children. The manner of the building was as follows. The Island was fifty miles in circumference, and certainly appeared more like the work of enchantment than anything real," &c.

Two or three things strike me much in this fragment; one is the graphic vividness with which the time of the year, the hour of the evening, the feeling of cold and darkness outside, the sound of the night-winds sweeping over the desolate snow-covered moors, coming nearer and nearer, and at last shaking the very door of the room where they were sitting — for it opened out directly on that bleak, wide expanse — is contrasted with the glow, and busy brightness of the cheerful kitchen where these remarkable children are grouped. Tabby moves about in her quaint country-dress, frugal, peremptory, prone to find fault pretty sharply, yet allowing no one else to blame her children, we may feel sure. Another noticeable fact is the intelligent partisanship with which they choose their great men, who are almost all stanch Tories of the time. Moreover, they do not confine themselves to local heroes; their range of choice has been widened by hearing much of what is not usually considered to interest children. Little Anne, aged scarcely eight, picks out the politicians of the day for her chief men.

There is another scrap of paper, in this all but illegible handwriting, written about this time, and which gives some idea of the sources of their opinions.

THE HISTORY OF THE YEAR 1829.

"Once Papa lent my sister Maria a book. It was an old geography-book; she wrote on its blank leaf, 'Papa lent me this book.' This book is a hundred and twenty years old; it is at this moment lying before me. While I write this I am in the kitchen of the Parsonage, Haworth; Tabby, the servant, is washing up the breakfast-things, and Anne, my youngest sister (Maria was my eldest), is kneeling on a chair, looking at some cakes which Tabby has been baking for us. Emily is in the parlour, brushing the carpet. Papa and Branwell are gone to Keighley. Aunt is upstairs in her room, and I am sitting by the table writing this in the kitchen. Keighley is a small town four miles from here. Papa and Branwell are gone for the newspaper, the 'Leeds Intelligencer,' a most excellent Tory newspaper, edited by Mr. Wood, and the proprietor, Mr. Henneman. We take two and see three newspapers a week. We take the 'Leeds Intelligencer,' Tory, and the 'Leeds Mercury,' Whig, edited by Mr. Baines, and his brother, son-in-law, and his two sons, Edward and Talbot. We see the 'John Bull;' it is a high Tory, very violent. Mr. Driver lends us it, as likewise 'Blackwood's Magazine,' the most able periodical there is. The Editor is Mr. Christopher North, an old man seventy-four years of age; the 1st of April is his birth-day; his company are Timothy Tickler, Morgan O'Doherty, Macrabin Mordecai, Mullion, Warnell, and James Hogg, a man of most extraordinary genius, a Scottish shepherd. Our plays were established; 'Young Men,' June, 1826; 'Our Fellows,' July, 1827; 'Islanders,' December, 1827. These are our three great plays, that are not kept secret. Emily's and my best plays were established the 1st of December, 1827; the others March, 1828. Best plays mean secret plays; they are very nice ones. All our plays are very strange ones. Their nature I need not write on paper, for I think I shall always remember them. The 'Young Men's' play took its rise from some wooden soldiers Branwell had: 'Our Fellows' from 'Æsop's Fables;' and the 'Islanders' from several events which happened. I will sketch out the origin of our plays more explicitly if I can. First, 'Young Men.' Papa bought Branwell some wooden soldiers at Leeds; when Papa came home it was night, and we were in bed, so next morning Branwell came to our door with a box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of bed, and I snatched up one and exclaimed, 'This is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the Duke!' When I had said this, Emily likewise took up one and said it should be hers; when Anne came down, she said one should be hers. Mine was the prettiest of the whole, and the tallest, and the most perfect in every part. Emily's was a grave-looking fellow, and we called him 'Gravey.' Anne's was a queer little thing, much like herself, and we called him 'Waiting-Boy.' Branwell chose his, and called him 'Buonaparte.'"

The foregoing extract shows something of the kind of reading in which the little Brontës were interested; but their desire for knowledge must have been excited in many directions, for I find a "list of painters whose works I wish to see," drawn up by Charlotte when she was scarcely thirteen: —

"Guido Reni, Julio Romano, Titian, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Annibal Caracci, Leonardo da Vinci, Fra Bartolomeo, Carlo Cignani, Vandyke, Rubens, Bartolomeo Ramerghi."

Here is this little girl, in a remote Yorkshire parsonage, who has probably never seen anything worthy the name of a painting in her life, studying the names and characteristics of the great old Italian and Flemish masters, whose works she longs to see some time, in the dim future that lies before her! There is a paper remaining which contains minute studies of, and criticisms upon, the engravings in "Friendship's Offering for 1829;" showing how she had early formed those habits of close observation, and patient analysis of cause and effect, which served so well in after-life as handmaids to her genius.

The way in which Mr. Brontë made his children sympathise with him in his great interest in politics, must have done much to lift them above the chances of their minds being limited or tainted by petty local gossip. I take the only other remaining personal fragment out of "Tales of the Islanders;" it is a sort of apology, contained in the introduction to the second volume, for their not having been continued before; the writers had been for a long time too busy, and latterly too much absorbed in politics.

"Parliament was opened, and the great Catholic question was brought forward, and the Duke's measures were disclosed, and all was slander, violence, party-spirit, and confusion. Oh, those six months, from the time of the King's speech to the end! Nobody could write, think, or speak on any subject but the Catholic question, and the Duke of Wellington, and Mr. Peel. I remember the day when the Intelligence Extraordinary came with Mr. Peel's speech in it, containing the terms on which the Catholics were to be let in! With what eagerness Papa tore off the cover, and how we all gathered round him, and with what breathless anxiety we listened, as one by one they were disclosed, and explained, and argued upon so ably, and so well! and then when it was all out, how aunt said that she thought it was excellent, and that the Catholics could do no harm with such good security! I remember also the doubts as to whether it would pass the House of Lords, and the prophecies that it would not; and when the paper came which was to decide the question, the anxiety was almost dreadful with which we listened to the whole affair: the opening of the doors; the hush; the royal dukes in their robes, and the great duke in green sash and waistcoat; the rising of all the peeresses when he rose; the reading of his speech — Papa saying that his words were like precious gold; and lastly, the majority of one to four (sic) in favour of the Bill. But this is a digression," &c., &c.

This must have been written when she was between thirteen and fourteen.

It will be interesting to some of my readers to know what was the character of her purely imaginative writing at this period. While her description of any real occurrence is, as we have seen, homely, graphic, and forcible, when she gives way to her powers of creation, her fancy and her language alike run riot, sometimes to the very borders of apparent delirium. Of this wild weird writing, a single example will suffice. It is a letter to the editor of one of the "Little Magazines."

"Sir, — It is well known that the Genii have declared that unless they perform certain arduous duties every year, of a mysterious nature, all the worlds in the firmament will be burnt up, and gathered together in one mighty globe, which will roll in solitary grandeur through the vast wilderness of space, inhabited only by the four high princes of the Genii, till time shall be succeeded by Eternity; and the impudence of this is only to be paralleled by another of their assertions, namely, that by their magic might they can reduce the world to a desert, the purest waters to streams of livid poison, and the clearest lakes to stagnant waters, the pestilential vapours of which shall slay all living creatures, except the blood-thirsty beast of the forest, and the ravenous bird of the rock. But that in the midst of this desolation the palace of the Chief Genii shall rise sparkling in the wilderness, and the horrible howl of their war-cry shall spread over the land at morning, at noontide and night; but that they shall have their annual feast over the bones of the dead, and shall yearly rejoice with the joy of victors. I think, sir, that the horrible wickedness of this needs no remark, and therefore I haste to subscribe myself, &c.

"July 14, 1829."

It is not unlikely that the foregoing letter may have had some allegorical or political reference, invisible to our eyes, but very clear to the bright little minds for whom it was intended. Politics were evidently their grand interest; the Duke of Wellington their demi-god. All that related to him belonged to the heroic age. Did Charlotte want a knight-errant, or a devoted lover, the Marquis of Douro, or Lord Charles Wellesley, came ready to her hand. There is hardly one of her prose-writings at this time in which they are not the principal personages, and in which their "august father" does not appear as a sort of Jupiter Tonans, or Deus ex Machinâ.

As one evidence how Wellesley haunted her imagination, I copy out a few of the titles to her papers in the various magazines.

"Liffey Castle," a Tale by Lord C. Wellesley.

"Lines to the River Aragua," by the Marquis of Douro.

"An Extraordinary Dream," by Lord C. Wellesley.

"The Green Dwarf, a Tale of the Perfect Tense," by the Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley.

"Strange Events," by Lord C. A. F. Wellesley.

Life in an isolated village, or a lonely country-house, presents many little occurrences which sink into the mind of childhood, there to be brooded over. No other event may have happened, or be likely to happen, for days, to push one of these aside, before it has assumed a vague and mysterious importance. Thus, children leading a secluded life are often thoughtful and dreamy: the impressions made upon them by the world without — the unusual sights of earth and sky — the accidental meetings with strange faces and figures (rare occurrences in those out-of-the-way places) — are sometimes magnified by them into things so deeply significant as to be almost supernatural. This peculiarity I perceive very strongly in Charlotte's writings at this time. Indeed, under the circumstances, it is no peculiarity. It has been common to all, from the Chaldean shepherds — "the lonely herdsman stretched on the soft grass through half a summer's day" — the solitary monk — to all whose impressions from without have had time to grow and vivify in the imagination, till they have been received as actual personifications, or supernatural visions, to doubt which would be blasphemy.

To counterbalance this tendency in Charlotte, was the strong common sense natural to her, and daily called into exercise by the requirements of her practical life. Her duties were not merely to learn her lessons, to read a certain quantity, to gain certain ideas; she had, besides, to brush rooms, to run errands up and down stairs, to help in the simpler forms of cooking, to be by turns play-fellow and monitress to her younger sisters and brother, to make and to mend, and to study economy under her careful aunt. Thus we see that, while her imagination received vivid impressions, her excellent understanding had full power to rectify them before her fancies became realities. On a scrap of paper, she has written down the following relation: —

"June 22, 1830, 6 o'clock p.m.

"Haworth, near Bradford.

"The following strange occurrence happened on the 22nd of June, 1830: — At the time Papa was very ill, confined to his bed, and so weak that he could not rise without assistance. Tabby and I were alone in the kitchen, about half-past nine ante-meridian. Suddenly we heard a knock at the door; Tabby rose and opened it. An old man appeared, standing without, who accosted her thus: —

"*Old Man*. — 'Does the parson live here?'

"*Tabby*. — 'Yes.'

"*Old Man*. — 'I wish to see him.'

"*Tabby*. — 'He is poorly in bed.'

"*Old Man*. — 'I have a message for him.'

"*Tabby*. — 'Who from?'

"*Old Man*. — 'From the Lord.'

"*Tabby*. — 'Who?'

"*Old Man*. — 'The Lord. He desires me to say that the Bridegroom is coming, and that we must prepare to meet him; that the cords are about to be loosed, and the golden bowl broken; the pitcher broken at the fountain.'

"Here he concluded his discourse, and abruptly went his way. As Tabby closed the door, I asked her if she knew him. Her reply was, that she had never seen him before, nor any one like him. Though I am fully persuaded that he was some fanatical enthusiast, well meaning perhaps, but utterly ignorant of true piety; yet I could not forbear weeping at his words, spoken so unexpectedly at that particular period."

Though the date of the following poem is a little uncertain, it may be most convenient to introduce it here. It must have been written before 1833, but how much earlier there are no means of determining. I give it as a specimen of the remarkable poetical talent shown in the various diminutive writings of this time; at least, in all of them which I have been able to read.

THE WOUNDED STAG.

Passing amid the deepest shade
Of the wood's sombre heart,
Last night I saw a wounded deer
Laid lonely and apart.
Such light as pierced the crowded boughs
(Light scattered, scant and dim,)
Passed through the fern that formed his couch
And centred full on him.
Pain trembled in his weary limbs,
Pain filled his patient eye,
Pain-crushed amid the shadowy fern
His branchy crown did lie.
Where were his comrades? where his mate?
All from his death-bed gone!
And he, thus struck and desolate,
Suffered and bled alone.
Did he feel what a man might feel,
Friend-left, and sore distrest?
Did Pain's keen dart, and Grief's sharp sting
Strive in his mangled breast?
Did longing for affection lost
Barb every deadly dart;
Love unrepaid, and Faith betrayed,
Did these torment his heart?
No! leave to man his proper doom!
These are the pangs that rise
Around the bed of state and gloom,
Where Adam's offspring dies!

CHAPTER VI

This is perhaps a fitting time to give some personal description of Miss Brontë. In 1831, she was a quiet, thoughtful girl, of nearly fifteen years of age, very small in figure — "stunted" was the word she applied to herself, — but as her limbs and head were in just proportion to the slight, fragile body, no word in ever so slight a degree suggestive of deformity could properly be applied to her; with soft, thick, brown hair, and peculiar eyes, of which I find it difficult to give a description, as they appeared to me in her later life. They were large and well shaped; their colour a reddish brown; but if the iris was closely examined, it appeared to be composed of a great variety of tints. The usual expression was of quiet, listening intelligence; but now and then, on some just occasion for vivid interest or wholesome indignation, a light would shine out, as if some spiritual lamp had been kindled, which glowed behind those expressive orbs. I never saw the like in any other human creature. As for the rest of her features, they were plain, large, and ill set; but, unless you began to catalogue them, you were hardly aware of the fact, for the eyes and power of the countenance over-balanced every physical defect; the crooked mouth and the large nose were forgotten, and the whole face arrested the attention, and presently attracted all those whom she herself would have cared to attract. Her hands and feet were the smallest I ever saw; when one of the former was placed in mine, it was like the soft touch of a bird in the middle of my palm. The delicate long fingers had a peculiar fineness of sensation, which was one reason why all her handiwork, of whatever kind — writing, sewing, knitting — was so clear in its minuteness. She was remarkably neat in her whole personal attire; but she was dainty as to the fit of her shoes and gloves.

I can well imagine that the grave serious composure, which, when I knew her, gave her face the dignity of an old Venetian portrait, was no acquisition of later years, but dated from that early age when she found herself in the position of an elder sister to motherless children. But in a girl only just entered on her teens, such an expression would be called (to use a country phrase) "old-fashioned;" and in 1831, the period of which I now write, we must think of her as a little, set, antiquated girl, very quiet in manners, and very quaint in dress; for besides the influence exerted by her father's ideas concerning the simplicity of attire befitting the wife and daughters of a country clergyman, her aunt, on whom the duty of dressing her nieces principally devolved, had never been in society since she left Penzance, eight or nine years before, and the Penzance fashions of that day were still dear to her heart.

In January, 1831, Charlotte was sent to school again. This time she went as a pupil to Miss W — -, who lived at Roe Head, a cheerful roomy country house, standing a little apart in a field, on the right of the road from Leeds to Huddersfield. Three tiers of old-fashioned semicircular bow windows run from basement to roof; and look down upon a long green slope of pasture-land, ending in the pleasant woods of Kirklees, Sir George Armitage's park. Although Roe Head and Haworth are not twenty miles apart, the aspect of the country is as totally dissimilar as if they enjoyed a different climate. The soft curving and heaving landscape round the former gives a stranger the idea of cheerful airiness on the heights, and of sunny warmth in the broad green valleys below. It is just such a neighbourhood as the monks loved, and traces of the old Plantagenet times are to be met with everywhere, side by side with the manufacturing interests of the West Riding of to-day. There is the park of Kirklees, full of sunny glades, speckled with black shadows of immemorial yew-trees; the grey pile of building, formerly a "House of professed Ladies;" the mouldering stone in the depth of the wood, under which Robin Hood is said to lie; close outside the park, an old stone-gabled house, now a roadside inn, but which bears the name of the "Three Nuns," and has a pictured sign to correspond. And this quaint old inn is frequented by fustian-dressed mill-hands from the neighbouring worsted factories, which strew the high road from Leeds to Huddersfield, and form the centres round which future villages gather. Such are the contrasts of modes of living, and of times and seasons, brought before the traveller on the great roads that traverse the West Riding. In no other part of England, I fancy, are the centuries brought into such close, strange contact as in the district in which Roe Head is situated. Within six miles of Miss W — -'s house — on the left of the road, coming from Leeds — lie the remains of Howley Hall, now the property of Lord Cardigan, but formerly belonging to a branch of the Saviles. Near to it is Lady Anne's well; "Lady Anne," according to tradition, having been worried and eaten by wolves as she sat at the well, to which the indigo-dyed factory people from Birstall and Batley woollen mills would formerly repair on Palm Sunday, when the waters possess remarkable medicinal efficacy; and it is still believed by some that they assume a strange variety of colours at six o'clock on the morning of that day.

All round the lands held by the farmer who lives in the remains of Howley Hall are stone houses of to-day, occupied by the people who are making their living and their fortunes by the woollen mills that encroach upon and shoulder out the proprietors of the ancient halls. These are to be seen in every direction, picturesque, many-gabled, with heavy stone carvings of coats of arms for heraldic ornament; belonging to decayed families, from whose ancestral lands field after field has been shorn away, by the urgency of rich manufacturers pressing hard upon necessity.

A smoky atmosphere surrounds these old dwellings of former Yorkshire squires, and blights and blackens the ancient trees that overshadow them; cinder-paths lead up to them; the ground round about is sold for building upon; but still the neighbours, though they subsist by a different state of things, remember that their forefathers lived in agricultural dependence upon the owners of these halls; and treasure up the traditions connected with the stately households that existed centuries ago. Take Oakwell Hall, for instance. It stands in a pasture-field, about a quarter of a mile from the high road. It is but that distance from the busy whirr of the steam-engines employed in the woollen mills at Birstall; and if you walk to it from Birstall Station about meal-time, you encounter strings of mill-hands, blue with woollen dye, and cranching in hungry haste over the cinder-paths bordering the high road. Turning off from this to the right, you ascend through an old pasture-field, and enter a short by-road, called the “Bloody Lane” — a walk haunted by the ghost of a certain Captain Batt, the reprobate proprietor of an old hall close by, in the days of the Stuarts. From the “Bloody Lane,” overshadowed by trees, you come into the field in which Oakwell Hall is situated. It is known in the neighbourhood to be the place described as “Field Head,” Shirley’s residence. The enclosure in front, half court, half garden; the panelled hall, with the gallery opening into the bed-chambers running round; the barbarous peach-coloured drawing-room; the bright look-out through the garden-door upon the grassy lawns and terraces behind, where the soft-hued pigeons still love to coo and strut in the sun, — are described in “Shirley.” The scenery of that fiction lies close around; the real events which suggested it took place in the immediate neighbourhood.

They show a bloody footprint in a bed-chamber of Oakwell Hall, and tell a story connected with it, and with the lane by which the house is approached. Captain Batt was believed to be far away; his family was at Oakwell; when in the dusk, one winter evening, he came stalking along the lane, and through the hall, and up the stairs, into his own room, where he vanished. He had been killed in a duel in London that very same afternoon of December 9th, 1684.

The stones of the Hall formed part of the more ancient vicarage, which an ancestor of Captain Batt’s had seized in the troublous times for property which succeeded the Reformation. This Henry Batt possessed himself of houses and money without scruple; and, at last, stole the great bell of Birstall Church, for which sacrilegious theft a fine was imposed on the land, and has to be paid by the owner of the Hall to this day.

But the Oakwell property passed out of the hands of the Batts at the beginning of the last century; collateral descendants succeeded, and left this picturesque trace of their having been. In the great hall hangs a mighty pair of stag’s horns, and dependent from them a printed card, recording the fact that, on the 1st of September, 1763, there was a great hunting-match, when this stag was slain; and that fourteen gentlemen shared in the chase, and dined on the spoil in that hall, along with Fairfax Fearneley, Esq., the owner. The fourteen names are given, doubtless “mighty men of yore;” but, among them all, Sir Fletcher Norton, Attorney-General, and Major-General Birch were the only ones with which I had any association in 1855. Passing on from Oakwell there lie houses right and left, which were well known to Miss Brontë when she lived at Roe Head, as the hospitable homes of some of her school-fellows. Lanes branch off for three or four miles to heaths and commons on the higher ground, which formed pleasant walks on holidays, and then comes the white gate into the field-path leading to Roe Head itself.

One of the bow-windowed rooms on the ground floor with the pleasant look-out I have described was the drawing-room; the other was the schoolroom. The dining-room was on one side of the door, and faced the road.

The number of pupils, during the year and a half Miss Brontë was there, ranged from seven to ten; and as they did not require the whole of the house for their accommodation, the third story was unoccupied, except by the ghostly idea of a lady, whose rustling silk gown was sometimes heard by the listeners at the foot of the second flight of stairs.

The kind motherly nature of Miss W — -, and the small number of the girls, made the establishment more like a private family than a school. Moreover, she was a native of the district immediately surrounding Roe Head, as were the majority of her pupils. Most likely Charlotte Brontë, in coming from Haworth, came the greatest distance of all. “E.’s” home was five miles away; two other dear friends (the Rose and Jessie Yorke of “Shirley”) lived still nearer; two or three came from Huddersfield; one or two from Leeds.

I shall now quote from a valuable letter which I have received from “Mary,” one of these early friends; distinct and graphic in expression, as becomes a cherished associate of Charlotte Brontë’s. The time referred to is her first appearance at Roe Head, on January 19th, 1831.

“I first saw her coming out of a covered cart, in very old-fashioned clothes, and looking very cold and miserable. She was coming to school at Miss W — -’s. When she appeared in the schoolroom, her dress was changed, but just as old. She looked a little old woman, so short-sighted that she always appeared to be seeking something, and moving her head from side to side to catch a sight of it. She was very shy and nervous, and spoke with a strong Irish accent. When a book was given her, she dropped her head over it till her nose nearly touched it, and when she was told to hold her head up, up went the book after it, still close to her nose, so that it was not possible to help laughing.”

This was the first impression she made upon one of those whose dear and valued friend she was to become in after-life. Another of the girls recalls her first sight of Charlotte, on the day she came, standing by the schoolroom window, looking out on the snowy landscape, and crying, while all the rest were at play. “E.” was younger than she, and her tender heart was touched by the apparently desolate condition in which she found the oddly-dressed, odd-looking little girl that winter morning, as "sick for home she stood in tears," in a new strange place, among new strange people. Any over-demonstrative kindness would have scared the wild little maiden from Haworth; but "E." (who is shadowed forth in the Caroline Helstone of "Shirley") managed to win confidence, and was allowed to give sympathy.

To quote again from "Mary's" letter: —

"We thought her very ignorant, for she had never learnt grammar at all, and very little geography."

This account of her partial ignorance is confirmed by her other school-fellows. But Miss W — - was a lady of remarkable intelligence and of delicate tender sympathy. She gave a proof of this in her first treatment of Charlotte. The little girl was well-read, but not well-grounded. Miss W — - took her aside and told her she was afraid that she must place her in the second class for some time till she could overtake the girls of her own age in the knowledge of grammar, &c.; but poor Charlotte received this announcement with so sad a fit of crying, that Miss W — -'s kind heart was softened, and she wisely perceived that, with such a girl, it would be better to place her in the first class, and allow her to make up by private study in those branches where she was deficient.

"She would confound us by knowing things that were out of our range altogether. She was acquainted with most of the short pieces of poetry that we had to learn by heart; would tell us the authors, the poems they were taken from, and sometimes repeat a page or two, and tell us the plot. She had a habit of writing in italics (printing characters), and said she had learnt it by writing in their magazine. They brought out a 'magazine' once a month, and wished it to look as like print as possible. She told us a tale out of it. No one wrote in it, and no one read it, but herself, her brother, and two sisters. She promised to show me some of these magazines, but retracted it afterwards, and would never be persuaded to do so. In our play hours she sate, or stood still, with a book, if possible. Some of us once urged her to be on our side in a game at ball. She said she had never played, and could not play. We made her try, but soon found that she could not see the ball, so we put her out. She took all our proceedings with pliable indifference, and always seemed to need a previous resolution to say 'No' to anything. She used to go and stand under the trees in the play-ground, and say it was pleasanter. She endeavoured to explain this, pointing out the shadows, the peeps of sky, &c. We understood but little of it. She said that at Cowan Bridge she used to stand in the burn, on a stone, to watch the water flow by. I told her she should have gone fishing; she said she never wanted. She always showed physical feebleness in everything. She ate no animal food at school. It was about this time I told her she was very ugly. Some years afterwards, I told her I thought I had been very impertinent. She replied, 'You did me a great deal of good, Polly, so don't repent of it.' She used to draw much better, and more quickly, than anything we had seen before, and knew much about celebrated pictures and painters. Whenever an opportunity offered of examining a picture or cut of any kind, she went over it piecemeal, with her eyes close to the paper, looking so long that we used to ask her 'what she saw in it.' She could always see plenty, and explained it very well. She made poetry and drawing at least exceedingly interesting to me; and then I got the habit, which I have yet, of referring mentally to her opinion on all matters of that kind, along with many more, resolving to describe such and such things to her, until I start at the recollection that I never shall."

To feel the full force of this last sentence — to show how steady and vivid was the impression which Miss Brontë made on those fitted to appreciate her — I must mention that the writer of this letter, dated January 18th, 1856, in which she thus speaks of constantly referring to Charlotte's opinion has never seen her for eleven years, nearly all of which have been passed among strange scenes, in a new continent, at the antipodes.

"We used to be furious politicians, as one could hardly help being in 1832. She knew the names of the two ministries; the one that resigned, and the one that succeeded and passed the Reform Bill. She worshipped the Duke of Wellington, but said that Sir Robert Peel was not to be trusted; he did not act from principle like the rest, but from expediency. I, being of the furious radical party, told her 'how could any of them trust one another; they were all of them rascals!' Then she would launch out into praises of the Duke of Wellington, referring to his actions; which I could not contradict, as I knew nothing about him. She said she had taken interest in politics ever since she was five years old. She did not get her opinions from her father — that is, not directly — but from the papers, &c., he preferred."

In illustration of the truth of this, I may give an extract from a letter to her brother, written from Roe Head, May 17th, 1832: — "Lately I had begun to think that I had lost all the interest which I used formerly to take in politics; but the extreme pleasure I felt at the news of the Reform Bill's being thrown out by the House of Lords, and of the expulsion, or resignation of Earl Grey, &c., convinced me that I have not as yet lost all my penchant for politics. I am extremely glad that aunt has consented to take in 'Fraser's Magazine;' for, though I know from your description of its general contents it will be rather uninteresting when compared with 'Blackwood,' still it will be better than remaining the whole year without being able to obtain a sight of any periodical whatever; and such would assuredly be our case, as, in the little wild moorland village where we reside, there would be no possibility of borrowing a work of that description from a circulating library. I hope with you that the present delightful weather may contribute to the perfect restoration of our dear papa's health; and that it may give aunt pleasant reminiscences of the salubrious climate of her native place," &c.

To return to "Mary's" letter.

"She used to speak of her two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who died at Cowan Bridge. I used to believe them to have been wonders of talent and kindness. She told me, early one morning, that she had just been dreaming; she had been told that she was wanted in the drawing-room, and it was Maria and Elizabeth. I was eager for her to go on, and when she said there was no more, I said, ‘but go on! *Make it out*! I know you can.’ She said she would not; she wished she had not dreamed, for it did not go on nicely, they were changed; they had forgotten what they used to care for. They were very fashionably dressed, and began criticising the room, &c.

“This habit of ‘making out’ interests for themselves that most children get who have none in actual life, was very strong in her. The whole family used to ‘make out’ histories, and invent characters and events. I told her sometimes they were like growing potatoes in a cellar. She said, sadly, ‘Yes! I know we are!’

“Some one at school said she ‘was always talking about clever people; Johnson, Sheridan, &c.’ She said, ‘Now you don’t know the meaning of *clever*, Sheridan might be clever; yes, Sheridan was clever, — scamps often are; but Johnson hadn’t a spark of cleverality in him.’ No one appreciated the opinion; they made some trivial remark about ‘*cleverality*,’ and she said no more.

“This is the epitome of her life. At our house she had just as little chance of a patient hearing, for though not school-girlish, we were more intolerant. We had a rage for practicality, and laughed all poetry to scorn. Neither she nor we had any idea but that our opinions were the opinions of all the *sensible* people in the world, and we used to astonish each other at every sentence . . . Charlotte, at school, had no plan of life beyond what circumstances made for her. She knew that she must provide for herself, and chose her trade; at least chose to begin it once. Her idea of self-improvement ruled her even at school. It was to cultivate her tastes. She always said there was enough of hard practicality and *useful* knowledge forced on us by necessity, and that the thing most needed was to soften and refine our minds. She picked up every scrap of information concerning painting, sculpture, poetry, music, &c., as if it were gold.”

What I have heard of her school days from other sources, confirms the accuracy of the details in this remarkable letter. She was an indefatigable student: constantly reading and learning; with a strong conviction of the necessity and value of education, very unusual in a girl of fifteen. She never lost a moment of time, and seemed almost to grudge the necessary leisure for relaxation and play-hours, which might be partly accounted for by the awkwardness in all games occasioned by her shortness of sight. Yet, in spite of these unsociable habits, she was a great favourite with her school-fellows. She was always ready to try and do what they wished, though not sorry when they called her awkward, and left her out of their sports. Then, at night, she was an invaluable story-teller, frightening them almost out of their wits as they lay in bed. On one occasion the effect was such that she was led to scream out aloud, and Miss W — -, coming up stairs, found that one of the listeners had been seized with violent palpitations, in consequence of the excitement produced by Charlotte’s story.

Her indefatigable craving for knowledge tempted Miss W — - on into setting her longer and longer tasks of reading for examination; and towards the end of the year and a half that she remained as a pupil at Roe Head, she received her first bad mark for an imperfect lesson. She had had a great quantity of Blair’s “Lectures on Belles Lettres” to read; and she could not answer some of the questions upon it; Charlotte Brontë had a bad mark. Miss W — - was sorry, and regretted that she had set Charlotte so long a task. Charlotte cried bitterly. But her school-fellows were more than sorry — they were indignant. They declared that the infliction of ever so slight a punishment on Charlotte Brontë was unjust — for who had tried to do her duty like her? — and testified their feeling in a variety of ways, until Miss W — -, who was in reality only too willing to pass over her good pupil’s first fault, withdrew the bad mark; and the girls all returned to their allegiance except “Mary,” who took her own way during the week or two that remained of the half-year, choosing to consider that Miss W — -, in giving Charlotte Brontë so long a task, had forfeited her claim to obedience of the school regulations.

The number of pupils was so small that the attendance to certain subjects at particular hours, common in larger schools, was not rigidly enforced. When the girls were ready with their lessons, they came to Miss W — - to say them. She had a remarkable knack of making them feel interested in whatever they had to learn. They set to their studies, not as to tasks or duties to be got through, but with a healthy desire and thirst for knowledge, of which she had managed to make them perceive the relishing savour. They did not leave off reading and learning as soon as the compulsory pressure of school was taken away. They had been taught to think, to analyse, to reject, to appreciate. Charlotte Brontë was happy in the choice made for her of the second school to which she was sent. There was a robust freedom in the out-of-doors life of her companions. They played at merry games in the fields round the house: on Saturday half-holidays they went long scrambling walks down mysterious shady lanes, then climbing the uplands, and thus gaining extensive views over the country, about which so much had to be told, both of its past and present history.

Miss W — - must have had in great perfection the French art, “conter,” to judge from her pupil’s recollections of the tales she related during these long walks, of this old house, or that new mill, and of the states of society consequent on the changes involved by the suggestive dates of either building. She remembered the times when watchers or wakeners in the night heard the distant word of command, and the measured tramp of thousands of sad desperate men receiving a surreptitious military training, in preparation for some great day which they saw in their visions, when right should struggle with might and come off victorious: when the people of England, represented by the workers of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Nottinghamshire, should make their voice heard in a terrible slogan, since their true and pitiful complaints could find no hearing in parliament. We forget, now-a-days, so rapid have been the changes for the better, how cruel was the condition of numbers of labourers at the close of the great Peninsular war. The half-ludicrous nature of some of their grievances has lingered on in tradition; the real intensity of their sufferings has become forgotten. They were maddened and desperate; and the country, in the opinion of many, seemed to be on the verge of a precipice, from which it was only saved by the prompt and resolute decision of a few in authority. Miss W — - spoke of those times; of the mysterious nightly drillings; of thousands on lonely moors; of the muttered threats of individuals too closely pressed upon by necessity to be prudent; of the overt acts, in which the burning of Cartwright's mill took a prominent place; and these things sank deep into the mind of one, at least, among her hearers.

Mr. Cartwright was the owner of a factory called Rawfolds, in Liversedge, not beyond the distance of a walk from Roe Head. He had dared to employ machinery for the dressing of woollen cloth, which was an unpopular measure in 1812, when many other circumstances conspired to make the condition of the mill-hands unbearable from the pressure of starvation and misery. Mr. Cartwright was a very remarkable man, having, as I have been told, some foreign blood in him, the traces of which were very apparent in his tall figure, dark eyes and complexion, and singular, though gentlemanly bearing. At any rate he had been much abroad, and spoke French well, of itself a suspicious circumstance to the bigoted nationality of those days. Altogether he was an unpopular man, even before he took the last step of employing shears, instead of hands, to dress his wool. He was quite aware of his unpopularity, and of the probable consequences. He had his mill prepared for an assault. He took up his lodgings in it; and the doors were strongly barricaded at night. On every step of the stairs there was placed a roller, spiked with barbed points all round, so as to impede the ascent of the rioters, if they succeeded in forcing the doors.

On the night of Saturday the 11th of April, 1812, the assault was made. Some hundreds of starving cloth-dressers assembled in the very field near Kirklees that sloped down from the house which Miss W — - afterwards inhabited, and were armed by their leaders with pistols, hatchets, and bludgeons, many of which had been extorted by the nightly bands that prowled about the country, from such inhabitants of lonely houses as had provided themselves with these means of self-defence. The silent sullen multitude marched in the dead of that spring-night to Rawfolds, and giving tongue with a great shout, roused Mr. Cartwright up to the knowledge that the long-expected attack was come. He was within walls, it is true; but against the fury of hundreds he had only four of his own workmen and five soldiers to assist him. These ten men, however, managed to keep up such a vigorous and well-directed fire of musketry that they defeated all the desperate attempts of the multitude outside to break down the doors, and force a way into the mill; and, after a conflict of twenty minutes, during which two of the assailants were killed and several wounded, they withdrew in confusion, leaving Mr. Cartwright master of the field, but so dizzy and exhausted, now the peril was past, that he forgot the nature of his defences, and injured his leg rather seriously by one of the spiked rollers, in attempting to go up his own staircase. His dwelling was near the factory. Some of the rioters vowed that, if he did not give in, they would leave this, and go to his house, and murder his wife and children. This was a terrible threat, for he had been obliged to leave his family with only one or two soldiers to defend them. Mrs. Cartwright knew what they had threatened; and on that dreadful night, hearing, as she thought, steps approaching, she snatched up her two infant children, and put them in a basket up the great chimney, common in old-fashioned Yorkshire houses. One of the two children who had been thus stowed away used to point out with pride, after she had grown up to woman's estate, the marks of musket shot, and the traces of gunpowder on the walls of her father's mill. He was the first that had offered any resistance to the progress of the "Luddites," who had become by this time so numerous as almost to assume the character of an insurrectionary army. Mr. Cartwright's conduct was so much admired by the neighbouring mill-owners that they entered into a subscription for his benefit which amounted in the end to 3,000*l.*

Not much more than a fortnight after this attack on Rawfolds, another manufacturer who employed the obnoxious machinery was shot down in broad daylight, as he was passing over Crossland Moor, which was skirted by a small plantation in which the murderers lay hidden. The readers of "Shirley" will recognise these circumstances, which were related to Miss Brontë years after they occurred, but on the very spots where they took place, and by persons who remembered full well those terrible times of insecurity to life and property on the one hand, and of bitter starvation and blind ignorant despair on the other.

Mr. Brontë himself had been living amongst these very people in 1812, as he was then clergyman at Hartshead, not three miles from Rawfolds; and, as I have mentioned, it was in these perilous times that he began his custom of carrying a loaded pistol continually about with him. For not only his Tory politics, but his love and regard for the authority of the law, made him despise the cowardice of the surrounding magistrates, who, in their dread of the Luddites, refused to interfere so as to prevent the destruction of property. The clergy of the district were the bravest men by far.

There was a Mr. Roberson of Heald's Hall, a friend of Mr. Brontë's who has left a deep impression of himself on the public mind. He lived near Heckmondwike, a large, straggling, dirty village, not two miles from Roe Head. It was principally inhabited by blanket weavers, who worked in their own cottages; and Heald's Hall is the largest house in the village, of which

Mr. Roberson was the vicar. At his own cost, he built a handsome church at Liversedge, on a hill opposite the one on which his house stood, which was the first attempt in the West Riding to meet the wants of the overgrown population, and made many personal sacrifices for his opinions, both religious and political, which were of the true old-fashioned Tory stamp. He hated everything which he fancied had a tendency towards anarchy. He was loyal in every fibre to Church and King; and would have proudly laid down his life, any day, for what he believed to be right and true. But he was a man of an imperial will, and by it he bore down opposition, till tradition represents him as having something grimly demoniac about him. He was intimate with Cartwright, and aware of the attack likely to be made on his mill; accordingly, it is said, he armed himself and his household, and was prepared to come to the rescue, in the event of a signal being given that aid was needed. Thus far is likely enough. Mr. Roberson had plenty of warlike spirit in him, man of peace though he was.

But, in consequence of his having taken the unpopular side, exaggerations of his character linger as truth in the minds of the people; and a fabulous story is told of his forbidding any one to give water to the wounded Luddites, left in the mill-yard, when he rode in the next morning to congratulate his friend Cartwright on his successful defence. Moreover, this stern, fearless clergyman had the soldiers that were sent to defend the neighbourhood billeted at his house; and this deeply displeased the workpeople, who were to be intimidated by the red-coats. Although not a magistrate, he spared no pains to track out the Luddites concerned in the assassination I have mentioned; and was so successful in his acute unflinching energy, that it was believed he had been supernaturally aided; and the country people, stealing into the fields surrounding Heald's Hall on dusky winter evenings, years after this time, declared that through the windows they saw Parson Roberson dancing, in a strange red light, with black demons all whirling and eddying round him. He kept a large boys' school; and made himself both respected and dreaded by his pupils. He added a grim kind of humour to his strength of will; and the former quality suggested to his fancy strange out-of-the-way kinds of punishment for any refractory pupils: for instance, he made them stand on one leg in a corner of the schoolroom, holding a heavy book in each hand; and once, when a boy had run away home, he followed him on horseback, reclaimed him from his parents, and, tying him by a rope to the stirrup of his saddle, made him run alongside of his horse for the many miles they had to traverse before reaching Heald's Hall.

One other illustration of his character may be given. He discovered that his servant Betty had "a follower;" and, watching his time till Richard was found in the kitchen, he ordered him into the dining-room, where the pupils were all assembled. He then questioned Richard whether he had come after Betty; and on his confessing the truth, Mr. Roberson gave the word, "Off with him, lads, to the pump!" The poor lover was dragged to the court-yard, and the pump set to play upon him; and, between every drenching, the question was put to him, "Will you promise not to come after Betty again?" For a long time Richard bravely refused to give in; when "Pump again, lads!" was the order. But, at last, the poor soaked "follower" was forced to yield, and renounce his Betty.

The Yorkshire character of Mr. Roberson would be incomplete if I did not mention his fondness for horses. He lived to be a very old man, dying some time nearer to 1840 than 1830; and even after he was eighty years of age, he took great delight in breaking refractory steeds; if necessary, he would sit motionless on their backs for half-an-hour or more to bring them to. There is a story current that once, in a passion, he shot his wife's favourite horse, and buried it near a quarry, where the ground, some years after, miraculously opened and displayed the skeleton; but the real fact is, that it was an act of humanity to put a poor old horse out of misery; and that, to spare it pain, he shot it with his own hands, and buried it where, the ground sinking afterwards by the working of a coal-pit, the bones came to light. The traditional colouring shows the animus with which his memory is regarded by one set of people. By another, the neighbouring clergy, who remember him riding, in his old age, down the hill on which his house stood, upon his strong white horse — his bearing proud and dignified, his shovel hat bent over and shadowing his keen eagle eyes — going to his Sunday duty like a faithful soldier that dies in harness — who can appreciate his loyalty to conscience, his sacrifices to duty, and his stand by his religion — his memory is venerated. In his extreme old age, a rubric meeting was held, at which his clerical brethren gladly subscribed to present him with a testimonial of their deep respect and regard.

This is a specimen of the strong character not seldom manifested by the Yorkshire clergy of the Established Church. Mr. Roberson was a friend of Charlotte Brontë's father; lived within a couple of miles of Roe Head while she was at school there; and was deeply engaged in transactions, the memory of which was yet recent when she heard of them, and of the part which he had had in them.

I may now say a little on the character of the Dissenting population immediately surrounding Roe Head; for the "Tory and clergyman's daughter," "taking interest in politics ever since she was five years old," and holding frequent discussions with such of the girls as were Dissenters and Radicals, was sure to have made herself as much acquainted as she could with the condition of those to whom she was opposed in opinion.

The bulk of the population were Dissenters, principally Independents. In the village of Heckmondwike, at one end of which Roe Head is situated, there were two large chapels belonging to that denomination, and one to the Methodists, all of which were well filled two or three times on a Sunday, besides having various prayer-meetings, fully attended, on week-days. The inhabitants were a chapel-going people, very critical about the doctrine of their sermons, tyrannical to their ministers, and violent Radicals in politics. A friend, well acquainted with the place when Charlotte Brontë was at school, has described some events which occurred then among them: —

"A scene, which took place at the Lower Chapel at Heckmondwike, will give you some idea of the people at that time. When a newly-married couple made their appearance at chapel, it was the custom to sing the Wedding Anthem, just after the last prayer, and as the congregation was quitting the chapel. The band of singers who performed this ceremony expected to have money given them, and often passed the following night in drinking; at least, so said the minister of the place; and he determined to put an end to this custom. In this he was supported by many members of the chapel and congregation; but so strong was the democratic element, that he met with the most violent opposition, and was often insulted when he went into the street. A bride was expected to make her first appearance, and the minister told the singers not to perform the anthem. On their declaring they would, he had the large pew which they usually occupied locked; they broke it open: from the pulpit he told the congregation that, instead of their singing a hymn, he would read a chapter; hardly had he uttered the first word, before up rose the singers, headed by a tall, fierce-looking weaver, who gave out a hymn, and all sang it at the very top of their voices, aided by those of their friends who were in the chapel. Those who disapproved of the conduct of the singers, and sided with the minister, remained seated till the hymn was finished. Then he gave out the chapter again, read it, and preached. He was just about to conclude with prayer, when up started the singers and screamed forth another hymn. These disgraceful scenes were continued for many weeks, and so violent was the feeling, that the different parties could hardly keep from blows as they came through the chapel-yard. The minister, at last, left the place, and along with him went many of the most temperate and respectable part of the congregation, and the singers remained triumphant.

"I believe that there was such a violent contest respecting the choice of a pastor, about this time, in the Upper Chapel at Heckmondwike, that the Riot Act had to be read at a church-meeting."

Certainly, the *soi-disant* Christians who forcibly ejected Mr. Redhead at Haworth, ten or twelve years before, held a very heathen brotherhood with the *soi-disant* Christians of Heckmondwike; though the one set might be called members of the Church of England and the other Dissenters.

The letter from which I have taken the above extract relates throughout to the immediate neighbourhood of the place where Charlotte Brontë spent her school-days, and describes things as they existed at that very time. The writer says, — "Having been accustomed to the respectful manners of the lower orders in the agricultural districts, I was at first, much disgusted and somewhat alarmed at the great freedom displayed by the working classes of Heckmondwike and Gomersall to those in a station above them. The term 'lass,' was as freely applied to any young lady, as the word 'wench' is in

Lancashire. The extremely untidy appearance of the villagers shocked me not a little, though I must do the housewives the justice to say that the cottages themselves were not dirty, and had an air of rough plenty about them (except when trade was bad), that I had not been accustomed to see in the farming districts. The heap of coals on one side of the house-door, and the brewing tubs on the other, and the frequent perfume of malt and hops as you walked along, proved that fire and 'home-brewed' were to be found at almost every man's hearth. Nor was hospitality, one of the main virtues of Yorkshire, wanting. Oat-cake, cheese, and beer were freely pressed upon the visitor.

"There used to be a yearly festival, half-religious, half social, held at Heckmondwike, called 'The Lecture.' I fancy it had come down from the times of the Nonconformists. A sermon was preached by some stranger at the Lower Chapel, on a week-day evening, and the next day, two sermons in succession were delivered at the Upper Chapel. Of course, the service was a very long one, and as the time was June, and the weather often hot, it used to be regarded by myself and my companions as no pleasurable way of passing the morning. The rest of the day was spent in social enjoyment; great numbers of strangers flocked to the place; booths were erected for the sale of toys and gingerbread (a sort of 'Holy Fair'); and the cottages, having had a little extra paint and white-washing, assumed quite a holiday look.

"The village of Gomersall" (where Charlotte Brontë's friend "Mary" lived with her family), "which was a much prettier place than Heckmondwike, contained a strange-looking cottage, built of rough unhewn stones, many of them projecting considerably, with uncouth heads and grinning faces carved upon them; and upon a stone above the door was cut, in large letters, 'SPITE HALL.' It was erected by a man in the village, opposite to the house of his enemy, who had just finished for himself a good house, commanding a beautiful view down the valley, which this hideous building quite shut out."

Fearless — because this people were quite familiar to all of them — amidst such a population, lived and walked the gentle Miss W — -'s eight or nine pupils. She herself was born and bred among this rough, strong, fierce set, and knew the depth of goodness and loyalty that lay beneath their wild manners and insubordinate ways. And the girls talked of the little world around them, as if it were the only world that was; and had their opinions and their parties, and their fierce discussions like their elders — possibly, their betters. And among them, beloved and respected by all, laughed at occasionally by a few, but always to her face — lived, for a year and a half, the plain, short-sighted, oddly-dressed, studious little girl they called Charlotte Brontë.

CHAPTER VII

Miss Brontë left Roe Head in 1832, having won the affectionate regard both of her teacher and her school-fellows, and having formed there the two fast friendships which lasted her whole life long; the one with "Mary," who has not kept her letters; the other with "E.," who has kindly entrusted me with a large portion of Miss Brontë's correspondence with her. This she has been induced to do by her knowledge of the urgent desire on the part of Mr. Brontë that the life of his daughter should be written, and in compliance with a request from her husband that I should be permitted to have the use of these letters, without which such a task could be but very imperfectly executed. In order to shield this friend, however, from any blame or misconstruction, it is only right to state that, before granting me this privilege, she throughout most carefully and completely effaced the names of the persons and places which occurred in them; and also that such information as I have obtained from her bears reference solely to Miss Brontë and her sisters, and not to any other individuals whom I may find it necessary to allude to in connection with them.

In looking over the earlier portion of this correspondence, I am struck afresh by the absence of hope, which formed such a strong characteristic in Charlotte. At an age when girls, in general, look forward to an eternal duration of such feelings as they or their friends entertain, and can therefore see no hindrance to the fulfilment of any engagements dependent on the future state of the affections, she is surprised that "E." keeps her promise to write. In after-life, I was painfully impressed with the fact, that Miss Brontë never dared to allow herself to look forward with hope; that she had no confidence in the future; and I thought, when I heard of the sorrowful years she had passed through, that it had been this this pressure of grief which had crushed all buoyancy of expectation out of her. But it appears from the letters, that it must have been, so to speak, constitutional; or, perhaps, the deep pang of losing her two elder sisters combined with a permanent state of bodily weakness in producing her hopelessness. If her trust in God had been less strong, she would have given way to unbounded anxiety, at many a period of her life. As it was, we shall see, she made a great and successful effort to leave "her times in His hands."

After her return home, she employed herself in teaching her sisters, over whom she had had superior advantages. She writes thus, July 21st, 1832, of her course of life at the parsonage: —

"An account of one day is an account of all. In the morning, from nine o'clock till half-past twelve, I instruct my sisters, and draw; then we walk till dinner-time. After dinner I sew till tea-time, and after tea I either write, read, or do a little fancy-work, or draw, as I please. Thus, in one delightful, though somewhat monotonous course, my life is passed. I have been only out twice to tea since I came home. We are expecting company this afternoon, and on Tuesday next we shall have all the female teachers of the Sunday-school to tea."

I may here introduce a quotation from a letter which I have received from "Mary" since the publication of the previous editions of this memoir.

"Soon after leaving school she admitted reading something of Cobbett's. 'She did not like him,' she said; 'but all was fish that came to her net.' At this time she wrote to me that reading and drawing were the only amusements she had, and that her supply of books was very small in proportion to her wants. She never spoke of her aunt. When I saw Miss Branwell she was a very precise person, and looked very odd, because her dress, &c., was so utterly out of fashion. She corrected one of us once for using the word 'spit' or 'spitting.' She made a great favourite of Branwell. She made her nieces sew, with purpose or without, and as far as possible discouraged any other culture. She used to keep the girls sewing charity clothing, and maintained to me that it was not for the good of the recipients, but of the sewers. 'It was proper for them to do it,' she said. Charlotte never was 'in wild excitement' that I know of. When in health she used to talk better, and indeed when in low spirits never spoke at all. She needed her best spirits to say what was in her heart, for at other times she had not courage. She never gave decided opinions at such times . . .

"Charlotte said she could get on with any one who had a bump at the top of their heads (meaning conscientiousness). I found that I seldom differed from her, except that she was far too tolerant of stupid people, if they had a grain of kindness in them."

It was about this time that Mr. Brontë provided his children with a teacher in drawing, who turned out to be a man of considerable talent, but very little principle. Although they never attained to anything like proficiency, they took great interest in acquiring this art; evidently, from an instinctive desire to express their powerful imaginations in visible forms. Charlotte told me, that at this period of her life, drawing, and walking out with her sisters, formed the two great pleasures and relaxations of her day.

The three girls used to walk upwards toward the "purple-black" moors, the sweeping surface of which was broken by here and there a stone-quarry; and if they had strength and time to go far enough, they reached a waterfall, where the beck fell over some rocks into the "bottom." They seldom went downwards through the village. They were shy of meeting even familiar faces, and were scrupulous about entering the house of the very poorest uninvited. They were steady teachers at the Sunday-School, a habit which Charlotte kept up very faithfully, even after she was left alone; but they never faced their kind voluntary, and always preferred the solitude and freedom of the moors.

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In the September of this year, Charlotte went to pay her first visit to her friend "E." It took her into the neighbourhood of Roe Head, and brought her into pleasant contact with many of her old school-fellows. After this visit she and her friend seem to have agreed to correspond in French, for the sake of improvement in the language. But this improvement could not be great, when it could only amount to a greater familiarity with dictionary words, and when there was no one to explain to them that a verbal translation of English idioms hardly constituted French composition; but the effort was laudable, and of itself shows how willing they both were to carry on the education which they had begun under Miss W-. I will give an extract which, whatever may be thought of the language, is graphic enough, and presents us with a happy little family picture; the eldest sister returning home to the two younger, after a fortnight's absence.

"J'arrivait à Haworth en parfaite sauveté sans le moindre accident ou malheur. Mes petites sœurs couraient hors de la maison pour me rencontrer aussitôt que la voiture se fit voir, et elles m'embrassaient avec autant d'empressement et de plaisir comme si j'avais été absente pour plus d'an. Mon Papa, ma Tante, et le monsieur dent men frère avoit parlé, furent tous assemblés dans le Salon, et en peu de temps je m'y rendis aussi. C'est souvent l'ordre du Ciel que quand on a perdu un plaisir il y en a un autre prêt à prendre sa place. Ainsi je venois de partir de très-chers amis, mais tout à l'heure je revins à des parens aussi chers et bon dans le moment. Même que vous me perdiez (ose-je croire que mon départ vous était un chagrin?) vous attendites l'arrivée de votre frère, et de votre sœur. J'ai donné à mes sœurs les pommes que vous leur envoyiez avec tant de bonté; elles disent qu'elles sont sûr que Mademoiselle E. est très-aimable et bonne; l'une et l'autre sont extrêmement impatientes de vous voir; j'espère qu'en peu de mois elles auront ce plaisir."

But it was some time yet before the friends could meet, and meanwhile they agreed to correspond once a month. There were no events to chronicle in the Haworth letters. Quiet days, occupied in reaching, and feminine occupations in the house, did not present much to write about; and Charlotte was naturally driven to criticise books.

Of these there were many in different plights, and according to their plight, kept in different places. The well-bound were ranged in the sanctuary of Mr. Brontë's study; but the purchase of books was a necessary luxury to him, but as it was often a choice between binding an old one, or buying a new one, the familiar volume, which had been hungrily read by all the members of the family, was sometimes in such a condition that the bedroom shelf was considered its fitting place. Up and down the house were to be found many standard works of a solid kind. Sir Walter Scott's writings, Wordsworth's and Southey's poems were among the lighter literature; while, as having a character of their own — earnest, wild, and occasionally fanatical — may be named some of the books which came from the Branwell side of the family — from the Cornish followers of the saintly John Wesley — and which are touched on in the account of the works to which Caroline Helstone had access in "Shirley:" — "Some venerable Lady's Magazines, that had once performed a voyage with their owner, and undergone a storm" — (possibly part of the relics of Mrs. Brontë's possessions, contained in the ship wrecked on the coast of Cornwall) — "and whose pages were stained with salt water; some mad Methodist Magazines full of miracles and apparitions, and preternatural warnings, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticisms; and the equally mad letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living."

Mr. Brontë encouraged a taste for reading in his girls; and though Miss Branwell kept it in due bounds, by the variety of household occupations, in which she expected them not merely to take a part, but to become proficients, thereby occupying regularly a good portion of every day, they were allowed to get books from the circulating library at Keighley; and many a happy walk, up those long four miles, must they have had, burdened with some new book, into which they peeped as they hurried home. Not that the books were what would generally be called new; in the beginning of 1833, the two friends seem almost simultaneously to have fallen upon "Kenilworth," and Charlotte writes as follows about it: —

"I am glad you like 'Kenilworth;' it is certainly more resembling a romance than a novel: in my opinion, one of the most interesting works that ever emanated from the great Sir Walter's pen. Varney is certainly the personification of consummate villainy; and in the delineation of his dark and profoundly artful mind, Scott exhibits a wonderful knowledge of human nature, as well as a surprising skill in embodying his perceptions, so as to enable others to become participators in that knowledge."

Commonplace as this extract may seem, it is noteworthy on two or three accounts: in the first place, instead of discussing the plot or story, she analyses the character of Varney; and next, she, knowing nothing of the world, both from her youth and her isolated position, has yet been so accustomed to hear "human nature" distrusted, as to receive the notion of intense and artful villainy without surprise.

What was formal and set in her way of writing to "E." diminished as their personal acquaintance increased, and as each came to know the home of the other; so that small details concerning people and places had their interest and their significance. In the summer of 1833, she wrote to invite her friend to come and pay her a visit. "Aunt thought it would be better" (she says) "to defer it until about the middle of summer, as the winter, and even the spring seasons, are remarkably cold and bleak among our mountains."

The first impression made on the visitor by the sisters of her school-friend was, that Emily was a tall, long-armed girl, more fully grown than her elder sister; extremely reserved in manner. I distinguish reserve from shyness, because I imagine shyness would please, if it knew how; whereas, reserve is indifferent whether it pleases or not. Anne, like her eldest sister, was shy; Emily was reserved.

Branwell was rather a handsome boy, with "tawny" hair, to use Miss Brontë's phrase for a more obnoxious colour. All were very clever, original, and utterly different to any people or family "E." had ever seen before. But, on the whole, it was a happy visit to all parties. Charlotte says, in writing to "E.," just after her return home — "Were I to tell you of the impression you have made on every one here, you would accuse me of flattery. Papa and aunt are continually adducing you as an example for me to shape my actions and behaviour by. Emily and Anne say 'they never saw any one they liked so well as you.' And Tabby, whom you have absolutely fascinated, talks a great deal more nonsense about your ladyship than I care to repeat. It is now so dark that, notwithstanding the singular property of seeing in the night-time, which the young ladies at Roe Head used to attribute to me, I can scribble no longer."

To a visitor at the parsonage, it was a great thing to have Tabby's good word. She had a Yorkshire keenness of perception into character, and it was not everybody she liked.

Haworth is built with an utter disregard of all sanitary conditions: the great old churchyard lies above all the houses, and it is terrible to think how the very water-springs of the pumps below must be poisoned. But this winter of 1833-4 was particularly wet and rainy, and there were an unusual number of deaths in the village. A dreary season it was to the family in the parsonage: their usual walks obstructed by the spongy state of the moors — the passing and funeral bells so frequently tolling, and filling the heavy air with their mournful sound — and, when they were still, the "chip, chip," of the mason, as he cut the grave-stones in a shed close by. In many, living, as it were, in a churchyard, and with all the sights and sounds connected with the last offices to the dead things of everyday occurrence, the very familiarity would have bred indifference. But it was otherwise with Charlotte Brontë. One of her friends says: — "I have seen her turn pale and feel faint when, in Hartshead church, some one accidentally remarked that we were walking over graves. Charlotte was certainly afraid of death. Not only of dead bodies, or dying people. She dreaded it as something horrible. She thought we did not know how long the 'moment of dissolution' might really be, or how terrible. This was just such a terror as only hypochondriacs can provide for themselves. She told me long ago that a misfortune was often preceded by the dream frequently repeated which she gives to 'Jane Eyre,' of carrying a little wailing child, and being unable to still it. She described herself as having the most painful sense of pity for the little thing, lying *inert*, as sick children do, while she walked about in some gloomy place with it, such as the aisle of Haworth

Church. The misfortunes she mentioned were not always to herself. She thought such sensitiveness to omens was like the cholera, present to susceptible people, — some feeling more, some less."

About the beginning of 1834, "E." went to London for the first time. The idea of her friend's visit seems to have stirred Charlotte strangely. She appears to have formed her notions of its probable consequences from some of the papers in the "British Essayists," "The Rambler," "The Mirror," or "The Lounger," which may have been among the English classics on the parsonage bookshelves; for she evidently imagines that an entire change of character for the worse is the usual effect of a visit to "the great metropolis," and is delighted to find that "E." is "E." still. And, as her faith in her friend's stability is restored, her own imagination is deeply moved by the idea of what great wonders are to be seen in that vast and famous city.

"Haworth, February 20th, 1834.

"Your letter gave me real and heartfelt pleasure, mingled with no small share of astonishment. Mary had previously informed me of your departure for London, and I had not ventured to calculate on any communication from you while surrounded by the splendours and novelties of that great city, which has been called the mercantile metropolis of Europe. Judging from human nature, I thought that a little country girl, for the first time in a situation so well calculated to excite curiosity, and to distract attention, would lose all remembrance, for a time at least, of distant and familiar objects, and give herself up entirely to the fascination of those scenes which were then presented to her view. Your kind, interesting, and most welcome epistle showed me, however, that I had been both mistaken and uncharitable in these suppositions. I was greatly amused at the tone of nonchalance which you assumed, while treating of London and its wonders. Did you not feel awed while gazing at St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey? Had you no feeling of intense and ardent interest, when in St. James's you saw the palace where so many of England's kings have held their courts, and beheld the representations of their persons on the walls? You should not be too much afraid of appearing *country-bred*; the magnificence of London has drawn exclamations of astonishment from travelled men, experienced in the world, its wonders and beauties. Have you yet seen anything of the great personages whom the sitting of Parliament now detains in London — the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, Earl Grey, Mr. Stanley, Mr. O'Connell? If I were you, I would not be too anxious to spend my time in reading whilst in town. Make use of your own eyes for the purposes of observation now, and, for a time at least, lay aside the spectacles with which authors would furnish us."

In a postscript she adds: —

"Will you be kind enough to inform me of the number of performers in the King's military band?"

And in something of the same strain she writes on

“June 19th.

“My own Dear E.,

“I may rightfully and truly call you so now. You *have* returned or *are* returning from London — from the great city which is to me as apocryphal as Babylon, or Nineveh, or ancient Rome. You are withdrawing from the world (as it is called), and bringing with you — if your letters enable me to form a correct judgment — a heart as unsophisticated, as natural, as true, as that you carried there. I am slow, *very* slow, to believe the protestations of another; I know my own sentiments, I can read my own mind, but the minds of the rest of man and woman kind are to me sealed volumes, hieroglyphical scrolls, which I cannot easily either unseal or decipher. Yet time, careful study, long acquaintance, overcome most difficulties; and, in your case, I think they have succeeded well in bringing to light and construing that hidden language, whose turnings, windings, inconsistencies, and obscurities, so frequently baffle the researches of the honest observer of human nature . . . I am truly grateful for your mindfulness of so obscure a person as myself, and I hope the pleasure is not altogether selfish; I trust it is partly derived from the consciousness that my friend’s character is of a higher, a more steadfast order than I was once perfectly aware of. Few girls would have done as you have done — would have beheld the glare, and glitter, and dazzling display of London with dispositions so unchanged, heart so uncontaminated. I see no affectation in your letters, no trifling, no frivolous contempt of plain, and weak admiration of showy persons and things.”

In these days of cheap railway trips, we may smile at the idea of a short visit to London having any great effect upon the character, whatever it may have upon the intellect. But her London — her great apocryphal city — was the “town” of a century before, to which giddy daughters dragged unwilling papas, or went with injudicious friends, to the detriment of all their better qualities, and sometimes to the ruin of their fortunes; it was the Vanity Fair of the “Pilgrim’s Progress” to her.

But see the just and admirable sense with which she can treat a subject of which she is able to overlook all the bearings.

“Haworth, July 4th, 1834.

“In your last, you request me to tell you of your faults. Now, really, how can you be so foolish! I *won’t* tell you of your faults, because I don’t know them. What a creature would that be, who, after receiving an affectionate and kind letter from a beloved friend, should sit down and write a catalogue of defects by way of answer! Imagine me doing so, and then consider what epithets you would bestow on me. Conceited, dogmatical, hypocritical, little humbug, I should think, would be the mildest. Why, child! I’ve neither time nor inclination to reflect on your *faults* when you are so far from me, and when, besides, kind letters and presents, and so forth, are continually bringing forth your goodness in the most prominent light. Then, too, there are judicious relations always round you, who can much better discharge that unpleasant office. I have no doubt their advice is completely at your service; why then should I intrude mine? If you will not hear them, it will be vain though one should rise from the dead to instruct you. Let us have no more nonsense, if you love me. Mr. — - is going to be married, is he? Well, his wife elect appeared to me to be a clever and amiable lady, as far as I could judge from the little I saw of her, and from your account. Now to that flattering sentence must I tack on a list of her faults? You say it is in contemplation for you to leave — -. I am sorry for it. — - is a pleasant spot, one of the old family halls of England, surrounded by lawn and woodland, speaking of past times, and suggesting (to me at least) happy feelings. M. thought you grown less, did she? I am not grown a bit, but as short and dumpy as ever. You ask me to recommend you some books for your perusal. I will do so in as few words as I can. If you like poetry, let it be first-rate; Milton, Shakspeare, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope (if you will, though I don't admire him), Scott, Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth, and Southey. Now don't be startled at the names of Shakspeare and Byron. Both these were great men, and their works are like themselves. You will know how to choose the good, and to avoid the evil; the finest passages are always the purest, the bad are invariably revolting; you will never wish to read them over twice. Omit the comedies of Shakspeare, and the Don Juan, perhaps the Cain, of Byron, though the latter is a magnificent poem, and read the rest fearlessly; that must indeed be a depraved mind which can gather evil from Henry VIII., from Richard III., from Macbeth, and Hamlet, and Julius Cæsar. Scott's sweet, wild, romantic poetry can do you no harm. Nor can Wordsworth's, nor Campbell's, nor Southey's — the greatest part at least of his; some is certainly objectionable. For history, read Hume, Rollin, and the Universal History, if you can; I never did. For fiction, read Scott alone; all novels after his are worthless. For biography, read Johnson's Lives of the Poets, Boswell's Life of Johnson, Southey's Life of Nelson, Lockhart's Life of Burns, Moore's Life of Sheridan, Moore's Life of Byron, Wolfe's Remains. For natural history, read Bewick and Audubon, and Goldsmith and White's history of Selborne. For divinity, your brother will advise you there. I can only say, adhere to standard authors, and avoid novelty."

From this list, we see that she must have had a good range of books from which to choose her own reading. It is evident, that the womanly consciences of these two correspondents were anxiously alive to many questions discussed among the stricter religionists. The morality of Shakspeare needed the confirmation of Charlotte's opinion to the sensitive "E.;" and a little later, she inquired whether dancing was objectionable, when indulged in for an hour or two in parties of boys and girls. Charlotte replies, "I should hesitate to express a difference of opinion from Mr. — -, or from your excellent sister, but really the matter seems to me to stand thus. It is allowed on all hands, that the sin of dancing consists not in the mere action of 'shaking the shanks' (as the Scotch say), but in the consequences that usually attend it; namely, frivolity and waste of time; when it is used only, as in the case you state, for the exercise and amusement of an hour among young people (who surely may without any breach of God's commandments be allowed a little light-heartedness), these consequences cannot follow. Ergo (according to my manner of arguing), the amusement is at such times perfectly innocent."

Although the distance between Haworth and B — - was but seventeen miles, it was difficult to go straight from the one to the other without hiring a gig or vehicle of some kind for the journey. Hence a visit from Charlotte required a good deal of pre-arrangement. *The* Haworth gig was not always to be had; and Mr. Brontë was often unwilling to fall into any arrangement for meeting at Bradford or other places, which would occasion trouble to others. The whole family had an ample share of that sensitive pride which led them to dread incurring obligations, and to fear "outstaying their welcome" when on any visit. I am not sure whether Mr. Brontë did not consider distrust of others as a part of that knowledge of human nature on which he piqued himself. His precepts to this effect, combined with Charlotte's lack of hope, made her always fearful of loving too much; of wearying the objects of her affection; and thus she was often trying to restrain her warm feelings, and was ever chary of that presence so invariably welcome to her true friends. According to this mode of acting, when she was invited for a month, she stayed but a fortnight amidst "E.'s" family, to whom every visit only endeared her the more, and by whom she was received with that kind of quiet gladness with which they would have greeted a sister.

She still kept up her childish interest in politics. In March, 1835, she writes: "What do you think of the course politics are taking? I make this enquiry, because I now think you take a wholesome interest in the matter; formerly you did not care greatly about it. B., you see, is triumphant. Wretch! I am a hearty hater, and if there is any one I thoroughly abhor, it is that man. But the Opposition is divided, Red-hots, and Luke-warms; and the Duke (par excellence *the* Duke) and Sir Robert Peel show no signs of insecurity, though they have been twice beat; so 'Courage, mon amie,' as the old chevaliers used to say, before they joined battle."

In the middle of the summer of 1835, a great family plan was mooted at the parsonage. The question was, to what trade or profession should Branwell be brought up? He was now nearly eighteen; it was time to decide. He was very clever, no doubt; perhaps to begin with, the greatest genius in this rare family. The sisters hardly recognised their own, or each others' powers, but they knew *his*. The father, ignorant of many failings in moral conduct, did proud homage to the great gifts of his son; for Branwell's talents were readily and willingly brought out for the entertainment of others. Popular admiration was sweet to him. And this led to his presence being sought at "arvills" and all the great village gatherings, for the Yorkshiremen have a keen relish for intellect; and it likewise procured him the undesirable distinction of having his company recommended by the landlord of the Black Bull to any chance traveller who might happen to feel solitary or dull over his liquor. "Do you want some one to help you with your bottle, sir? If you do, I'll send up for Patrick" (so the villagers called him till the day of his death, though in his own family he was always "Branwell"). And while the messenger went, the landlord entertained his guest with accounts of the wonderful talents of the boy, whose precocious cleverness, and great conversational powers, were the pride of the village. The attacks of ill health to which Mr. Brontë had been subject of late years, rendered it not only necessary that he should take his dinner alone (for the sake of avoiding temptations to unwholesome diet), but made it also desirable that he should pass the time directly succeeding his meals in perfect quiet. And this necessity, combined with due attention to his parochial duties, made him partially ignorant how his son employed himself out of lesson-time. His own youth had been spent among people of the same conventional rank as those into whose companionship Branwell was now thrown; but he had had a strong will, and an earnest and persevering ambition, and a resoluteness of purpose which his weaker son wanted.

It is singular how strong a yearning the whole family had towards the art of drawing. Mr. Brontë had been very solicitous to get them good instruction; the girls themselves loved everything connected with it — all descriptions or engravings of great pictures; and, in default of good ones, they would take and analyse any print or drawing which came in their way, and find out how much thought had gone to its composition, what ideas it was intended to suggest, and what it *did* suggest. In the same spirit, they laboured to design imaginations of their own; they lacked the power of execution, not of conception. At one time, Charlotte had the notion of making her living as an artist, and wearied her eyes in drawing with pre-Raphaelite minuteness, but not with pre-Raphaelite accuracy, for she drew from fancy rather than from nature.

But they all thought there could be no doubt about Branwell's talent for drawing. I have seen an oil painting of his, done I know not when, but probably about this time. It was a group of his sisters, life-size, three-quarters' length; not much better than sign-painting, as to manipulation; but the likenesses were, I should think, admirable. I could only judge of the fidelity with which the other two were depicted, from the striking resemblance which Charlotte, upholding the great frame of canvas, and consequently standing right behind it, bore to her own representation, though it must have been ten years and more since the portraits were taken. The picture was divided, almost in the middle, by a great pillar. On the side of the column which was lighted by the sun, stood Charlotte, in the womanly dress of that day of gigot sleeves and large collars. On the deeply shadowed side, was Emily, with Anne's gentle face resting on her shoulder. Emily's countenance struck me as full of power; Charlotte's of solicitude; Anne's of tenderness. The two younger seemed hardly to have attained their full growth, though Emily was taller than Charlotte; they had cropped hair, and a more girlish dress. I remember looking on those two sad, earnest, shadowed faces, and wondering whether I could trace the mysterious expression which is said to foretell an early death. I had some fond superstitious hope that the column divided their fates from hers, who stood apart in the canvas, as in life she survived. I liked to see that the bright side of the pillar was towards *her* — that the light in the picture fell on *her*: I might more truly have sought in her presentment — nay, in her living face — for the sign of death — in her prime. They were good likenesses, however badly executed. From thence I should guess his family augured truly that, if Branwell had but the opportunity, and, alas! had but the moral qualities, he might turn out a great painter.

The best way of preparing him to become so appeared to be to send him as a pupil to the Royal Academy. I dare say he longed and yearned to follow this path, principally because it would lead him to that mysterious London — that Babylon the great — which seems to have filled the imaginations and haunted the minds of all the younger members of this recluse family. To Branwell it was more than a vivid imagination, it was an impressed reality. By dint of studying maps, he was as well acquainted with it, even down to its by-ways, as if he had lived there. Poor misguided fellow! this craving to see and know London, and that stronger craving after fame, were never to be satisfied. He was to die at the end of a short and blighted life. But in this year of 1835, all his home kindred were thinking how they could best forward his views, and how help him up to the pinnacle where he desired to be. What their plans were, let Charlotte explain. These are not the first sisters who have laid their lives as a sacrifice before their brother's idolized wish. Would to God they might be the last who met with such a miserable return!

"Haworth, July 6th, 1835.

"I had hoped to have had the extreme pleasure of seeing you at Haworth this summer, but human affairs are mutable, and human resolutions must bend to the course of events. We are all about to divide, break up, separate. Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a governess. This last determination I formed myself, knowing that I should have to take the step sometime, 'and better sune as syne,' to use the Scotch proverb; and knowing well that papa would have enough to do with his limited income, should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy, and Emily at Roe Head. Where am I going to reside? you will ask. Within four miles of you, at a place neither of us is unacquainted with, being no other than the identical Roe Head mentioned above. Yes! I am going to teach in the very school where I was myself taught. Miss W — - made me the offer, and I preferred it to one or two proposals of private governess-ship, which I had before received. I am sad — very sad — at the thoughts of leaving home; but duty — necessity — these are stern mistresses, who will not be disobeyed. Did I not once say you ought to be thankful for your independence? I felt what I said at the time, and I repeat it now with double earnestness; if anything would cheer me, it is the idea of being so near you. Surely, you and Polly will come and see me; it would be wrong in me to doubt it; you were never unkind yet. Emily and I leave home on the 27th of this month; the idea of being together consoles us both somewhat, and, truth, since I must enter a situation, ‘My lines have fallen in pleasant places.’ I both love and respect Miss W-.”

CHAPTER VIII

On the 29th of July, 1835, Charlotte, now a little more than nineteen years old, went as teacher to Miss W — -'s. Emily accompanied her as a pupil; but she became literally ill from home-sickness, and could not settle to anything, and after passing only three months at Roe Head, returned to the parsonage and the beloved moors.

Miss Brontë gives the following reasons as those which prevented Emily's remaining at school, and caused the substitution of her younger sister in her place at Miss W — -'s: —

"My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her; — out of a sullen hollow in a livid hill-side, her mind could make an Eden. She found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best-loved was — liberty. Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it she perished. The change from her own home to a school, and from her own very noiseless, very secluded, but unrestricted and unartificial mode of life, to one of disciplined routine (though under the kindest auspices), was what she failed in enduring. Her nature proved here too strong for her fortitude. Every morning, when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me. I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength, threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die, if she did not go home, and with this conviction obtained her recall. She had only been three months at school; and it was some years before the experiment of sending her from home was again ventured on."

This physical suffering on Emily's part when absent from Haworth, after recurring several times under similar circumstances, became at length so much an acknowledged fact, that whichever was obliged to leave home, the sisters decided that Emily must remain there, where alone she could enjoy anything like good health. She left it twice again in her life; once going as teacher to a school in Halifax for six months, and afterwards accompanying Charlotte to Brussels for ten. When at home, she took the principal part of the cooking upon herself, and did all the household ironing; and after Tabby grew old and infirm, it was Emily who made all the bread for the family; and any one passing by the kitchen-door, might have seen her studying German out of an open book, propped up before her, as she kneaded the dough; but no study, however interesting, interfered with the goodness of the bread, which was always light and excellent. Books were, indeed, a very common sight in that kitchen; the girls were taught by their father theoretically, and by their aunt, practically, that to take an active part in all household work was, in their position, woman's simple duty; but in their careful employment of time, they found many an odd five minutes for reading while watching the cakes, and managed the union of two kinds of employment better than King Alfred.

Charlotte's life at Miss W — -'s was a very happy one, until her health failed. She sincerely loved and respected the former schoolmistress, to whom she was now become both companion and friend. The girls were hardly strangers to her, some of them being younger sisters of those who had been her own playmates. Though the duties of the day might be tedious and monotonous, there were always two or three happy hours to look forward to in the evening, when she and Miss W — - sat together — sometimes late into the night — and had quiet pleasant conversations, or pauses of silence as agreeable, because each felt that as soon as a thought or remark occurred which they wished to express, there was an intelligent companion ready to sympathise, and yet they were not compelled to "make talk."

Miss W — - was always anxious to afford Miss Brontë every opportunity of recreation in her power; but the difficulty often was to persuade her to avail herself of the invitations which came, urging her to spend Saturday and Sunday with "E." and "Mary," in their respective homes, that lay within the distance of a walk. She was too apt to consider, that allowing herself a holiday was a dereliction of duty, and to refuse herself the necessary change, from something of an over-ascetic spirit, betokening a loss of healthy balance in either body or mind. Indeed, it is clear that such was the case, from a passage, referring to this time, in the letter of "Mary" from which I have before given extracts.

"Three years after — " (the period when they were at school together) — "I heard that she had gone as teacher to Miss W — -'s. I went to see her, and asked how she could give so much for so little money, when she could live without it. She owned that, after clothing herself and Anne, there was nothing left, though she had hoped to be able to save something. She confessed it was not brilliant, but what could she do? I had nothing to answer. She seemed to have no interest or pleasure beyond the feeling of duty, and, when she could get, used to sit alone, and 'make out.' She told me afterwards, that one evening she had sat in the dressing-room until it was quite dark, and then observing it all at once, had taken sudden fright." No doubt she remembered this well when she described a similar terror getting hold upon Jane Eyre. She says in the story, "I sat looking at the white bed and overshadowed walls — occasionally turning a fascinated eye towards the gleaming mirror — I began to recall what I had heard of dead men troubled in their graves . . . I endeavoured to be firm; shaking my hair from my eyes, I lifted my head and tried to look boldly through the dark room; at this moment, a ray from the moon penetrated some aperture in the blind. No! moon light was still, and this stirred . . . prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears which I deemed the rustling of wings; something seemed near me."

"From that time," Mary adds, "her imaginations became gloomy or frightful; she could not help it, nor help thinking. She could not forget the gloom, could not sleep at night, nor attend in the day.

"She told me that one night, sitting alone, about this time, she heard a voice repeat these lines:

"'Come thou high and holy feeling,
Shine o'er mountain, flit o'er wave,
Gleam like light o'er dome and shielding.'

"There were eight or ten more lines which I forget. She insisted that she had not made them, that she had heard a voice repeat them. It is possible that she had read them, and unconsciously recalled them. They are not in the volume of poems which the sisters published. She repeated a verse of Isaiah, which she said had inspired them, and which I have forgotten. Whether the lines were recollected or invented, the tale proves such habits of sedentary, monotonous solitude of thought as would have shaken a feebler mind."

Of course, the state of health thus described came on gradually, and is not to be taken as a picture of her condition in 1836. Yet even then there is a despondency in some of her expressions, that too sadly reminds one of some of Cowper's letters. And it is remarkable how deeply his poems impressed her. His words, his verses, came more frequently to her memory, I imagine, than those of any other poet.

"Mary" says: "Cowper's poem, 'The Castaway,' was known to them all, and they all at times appreciated, or almost appropriated it. Charlotte told me once that Branwell had done so; and though his depression was the result of his faults, it was in no other respect different from hers. Both were not mental but physical illnesses. She was well aware of this, and would ask how that mended matters, as the feeling was there all the same, and was not removed by knowing the cause. She had a larger religious toleration than a person would have who had never questioned, and the manner of recommending religion was always that of offering comfort, not fiercely enforcing a duty. One time I mentioned that some one had asked me what religion I was of (with the view of getting me for a partizan), and that I had said that that was between God and me; — Emily (who was lying on the hearth-rug) exclaimed, 'That's right.' This was all I ever heard Emily say on religious subjects. Charlotte was free from religious depression when in tolerable health; when that failed, her depression returned. You have probably seen such instances. They don't get over their difficulties; they forget them, when their stomach (or whatever organ it is that inflicts such misery on sedentary people) will let them. I have heard her condemn Socinianism, Calvinism, and many other 'isms' inconsistent with Church of Englandism. I used to wonder at her acquaintance with such subjects."

"May 10th, 1836.

"I was struck with the note you sent me with the umbrella; it showed a degree of interest in my concerns which I have no right to expect from any earthly creature. I won't play the hypocrite; I won't answer your kind, gentle, friendly questions in the way you wish me to. Don't deceive yourself by imagining I have a bit of real goodness about me. My darling, if I were like you, I should have my face Zion-ward, though prejudice and error might occasionally fling a mist over the glorious vision before me — but I *am not like you*. If you knew my thoughts, the dreams that absorb me, and the fiery imagination that at times eats me up, and makes me feel society, as it is, wretchedly insipid, you would pity and I dare say despise me. But I know the treasures of the *Bible*; I love and adore them. I can *see* the Well of Life in all its clearness and brightness; but when I stoop down to drink of the pure waters they fly from my lips as if I were Tantalus.

"You are far too kind and frequent in your invitations. You puzzle me. I hardly know how to refuse, and it is still more embarrassing to accept. At any rate, I cannot come this week, for we are in the very thickest melée of the Repetitions. I was hearing the terrible fifth section when your note arrived. But Miss Wooler says I must go to Mary next Friday, as she promised for me on Whit-Sunday; and on Sunday morning I will join you at church, if it be convenient, and stay till Monday. There's a free and easy proposal! Miss W — - has driven me to it. She says her character is implicated."

Good, kind Miss W — -! however monotonous and trying were the duties Charlotte had to perform under her roof, there was always a genial and thoughtful friend watching over her, and urging her to partake of any little piece of innocent recreation that might come in her way. And in those Midsummer holidays of 1836, her friend E. came to stay with her at Haworth, so there was one happy time secured.

Here follows a series of letters, not dated, but belonging to the latter portion of this year; and again we think of the gentle and melancholy Cowper.

"My dear dear E.,

"I am at this moment trembling all over with excitement, after reading your note; it is what I never received before — it is the unrestrained pouring out of a warm, gentle, generous heart . . . I thank you with energy for this kindness. I will no longer shrink from answering your questions. I *do* wish to be better than I am. I pray fervently sometimes to be made so. I have stings of conscience, visitings of remorse, glimpses of holy, of inexpressible things, which formerly I used to be a stranger to; it may all die away, and I may be in utter midnight, but I implore a merciful Redeemer, that, if this be the dawn of the gospel, it may still brighten to perfect day. Do not mistake me — do not think I am good; I only wish to be so. I only hate my former flippancy and forwardness. Oh! I am no better than ever I was. I am in that state of horrid, gloomy uncertainty that, at this moment, I would submit to be old, grey-haired, to have passed all my youthful days of enjoyment, and to be settling on the verge of the grave, if I could only thereby ensure the prospect of reconciliation to God, and redemption through his Son's merits. I never was exactly careless of these matters, but I have always taken a clouded and repulsive view of them; and now, if possible, the clouds are gathering darker, and a more oppressive despondency weighs on my spirits. You have cheered me, my darling; for one moment, for an atom of time, I thought I might call you my own sister in the spirit; but the excitement is past, and I am now as wretched and hopeless as ever. This very night I will pray as you wish me. May the Almighty hear me compassionately! and I humbly hope he will, for you will strengthen my polluted petitions with your own pure requests. All is bustle and confusion round me, the ladies pressing with their sums and their lessons . . . If you love me, *do, do, do* come on Friday: I shall watch and wait for you, and if you disappoint me I shall weep. I wish you could know the thrill of delight which I experienced, when, as I stood at the dining-room window, I saw — -, as he whirled past, toss your little packet over the wall."

Huddersfield market-day was still the great period for events at Roe Head. Then girls, running round the corner of the house and peeping between tree-stems, and up a shadowy lane, could catch a glimpse of a father or brother driving to market in his gig; might, perhaps, exchange a wave of the hand; or see, as Charlotte Brontë did from the window, a white packet tossed over the avail by come swift strong motion of an arm, the rest of the traveller's body unseen.

"Weary with a day's hard work . . . I am sitting down to write a few lines to my dear E. Excuse me if I say nothing but nonsense, for my mind is exhausted and dispirited. It is a stormy evening, and the wind is uttering a continual moaning sound, that makes me feel very melancholy. At such times — in such moods as these — it is my nature to seek repose in some calm tranquil idea, and I have now summoned up your image to give me rest. There you sit, upright and still in your black dress, and white scarf, and pale marble-like face — just like reality. I wish you would speak to me. If we should be separated — if it should be our lot to live at a great distance, and never to see each other again — in old age, how I should conjure up the memory of my youthful days, and what a melancholy pleasure I should feel in dwelling on the recollection of my early friend! . . . I have some qualities that make me very miserable, some feelings that you can have no participation in — that few, very few, people in the world can at all understand. I don't pride myself on these peculiarities. I strive to conceal and suppress them as much as I can; but they burst out sometimes, and then those who see the explosion despise me, and I hate myself for days afterwards . . . I have just received your epistle and what accompanied it. I can't tell what should induce you and your sisters to waste your kindness on such a one as me. I'm obliged to them, and I hope you'll tell them so. I'm obliged to you also, more for your note than for your present. The first gave me pleasure, the last something like pain."

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The nervous disturbance, which is stated to have troubled her while she was at Miss W — -'s, seems to have begun to distress her about this time; at least, she herself speaks of her irritable condition, which was certainly only a temporary ailment.

"You have been very kind to me of late, and have spared me all those little sallies of ridicule, which, owing to my miserable and wretched touchiness of character, used formerly to make me wince, as if I had been touched with a hot iron; things that nobody else cares for, enter into my mind and rankle there like venom. I know these feelings are absurd, and therefore I try to hide them, but they only sting the deeper for concealment."

Compare this state of mind with the gentle resignation with which she had submitted to be put aside as useless, or told of her ugliness by her school-fellows, only three years before.

"My life since I saw you has passed as monotonously and unbroken as ever; nothing but teach, teach, teach, from morning till night. The greatest variety I ever have is afforded by a letter from you, or by meeting with a pleasant new book. The 'Life of Oberlin,' and 'Leigh Richmond's Domestic Portraiture,' are the last of this description. The latter work strongly attracted and strangely fascinated my attention. Beg, borrow, or steal it without delay; and read the 'Memoir of Wilberforce,' — that short record of a brief uneventful life; I shall never forget it; it is beautiful, not on account of the language in which it is written, not on account of the incidents it details, but because of the simple narrative it gives of a young talented sincere Christian."

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About this time Miss W — - removed her school from the fine, open, breezy situation of Roe Head, to Dewsbury Moor, only two or three miles distant. Her new residence was on a lower site, and the air was less exhilarating to one bred in the wild hill-village of Haworth. Emily had gone as teacher to a school at Halifax, where there were nearly forty pupils.

"I have had one letter from her since her departure," writes Charlotte, on October 2nd, 1836: "it gives an appalling account of her duties; hard labour from six in the morning to eleven at night, with only one half-hour of exercise between. This is slavery. I fear she can never stand it."

* * * * *

When the sisters met at home in the Christmas holidays, they talked over their lives, and the prospect which they afforded of employment and remuneration. They felt that it was a duty to relieve their father of the burden of their support, if not entirely, or that of all three, at least that of one or two; and, naturally, the lot devolved upon the elder ones to find some occupation which would enable them to do this. They knew that they were never likely to inherit much money. Mr. Brontë had but a small stipend, and was both charitable and liberal. Their aunt had an annuity of 50*l*., but it reverted to others at her death, and her nieces had no right, and were the last persons in the world to reckon upon her savings. What could they do? Charlotte and Emily were trying teaching, and, as it seemed, without much success. The former, it is true, had the happiness of having a friend for her employer, and of being surrounded by those who knew her and loved her; but her salary was too small for her to save out of it; and her education did not entitle her to a larger. The sedentary and monotonous nature of the life, too, was preying upon her health and spirits, although, with necessity "as her mistress," she might hardly like to acknowledge this even to herself. But Emily — that free, wild, untameable spirit, never happy nor well but on the sweeping moors that gathered round her home — that hater of strangers, doomed to live amongst them, and not merely to live but to slave in their service — what Charlotte could have borne patiently for herself, she could not bear for her sister. And yet what to do? She had once hoped that she herself might become an artist, and so earn her livelihood; but her eyes had failed her in the minute and useless labour which she had imposed upon herself with a view to this end.

It was the household custom among these girls to sew till nine o'clock at night. At that hour, Miss Branwell generally went to bed, and her nieces' duties for the day were accounted done. They put away their work, and began to pace the room backwards and forwards, up and down, — as often with the candles extinguished, for economy's sake, as not, — their figures glancing into the fire-light, and out into the shadow, perpetually. At this time, they talked over past cares and troubles; they planned for the future, and consulted each other as to their plans. In after years this was the time for discussing together the plots of their novels. And again, still later, this was the time for the last surviving sister to walk alone, from old accustomed habit, round and round the desolate room, thinking sadly upon the "days that were no more." But this Christmas of 1836 was not without its hopes and daring aspirations. They had tried their hands at story-writing, in their miniature magazine, long ago; they all of them "made out" perpetually. They had likewise attempted to write poetry; and had a modest confidence that they had achieved a tolerable success. But they knew that they might deceive themselves, and that sisters' judgments of each other's productions were likely to be too partial to be depended upon. So Charlotte, as the eldest, resolved to write to Southey. I believe (from an expression in a letter to be noticed hereafter), that she also consulted Coleridge; but I have not met with any part of that correspondence.

On December 29th, her letter to Southey was despatched; and from an excitement not unnatural in a girl who has worked herself up to the pitch of writing to a Poet Laureate and asking his opinion of her poems, she used some high-flown expressions which, probably, gave him the idea that she was a romantic young lady, unacquainted with the realities of life.

This, most likely, was the first of those adventurous letters that passed through the little post-office of Haworth. Morning after morning of the holidays slipped away, and there was no answer; the sisters had to leave home, and Emily to return to her distasteful duties, without knowing even whether Charlotte's letter had ever reached its destination.

Not dispirited, however, by the delay, Branwell determined to try a similar venture, and addressed the following letter to Wordsworth. It was given by the poet to Mr. Quillinan in 1850, after the name of Brontë had become known and famous. I have no means of ascertaining what answer was returned by Mr. Wordsworth; but that he considered the letter remarkable may, I think, be inferred both from its preservation, and its recurrence to his memory when the real name of Currer Bell was made known to the public.

"Haworth, near Bradford,
"Yorkshire, January 19, 1837.

"Sir, — I most earnestly entreat you to read and pass your judgment upon what I have sent you, because from the day of my birth to this the nineteenth year of my life, I have lived among secluded hills, where I could neither know what I was, or what I could do. I read for the same reason that I ate or drank; because it was a real craving of nature. I wrote on the same principle as I spoke — out of the impulse and feelings of the mind; nor could I help it, for what came, came out, and there was the end of it. For as to self-conceit, that could not receive food from flattery, since to this hour, not half a dozen people in the world know that I have ever penned a line.

"But a change has taken place now, sir: and I am arrived at an age wherein I must do something for myself: the powers I possess must be exercised to a definite end, and as I don't know them myself I must ask of others what they are worth. Yet there is not one here to tell me; and still, if they are worthless, time will henceforth be too precious to be wasted on them.

"Do pardon me, sir, that I have ventured to come before one whose works I have most loved in our literature, and who most has been with me a divinity of the mind, laying before him one of my writings, and asking of him a judgment of its contents. I must come before some one from whose sentence there is no appeal; and such a one is he who has developed the theory of poetry as well as its practice, and both in such a way as to claim a place in the memory of a thousand years to come.

"My aim, sir, is to push out into the open world, and for this I trust not poetry alone — that might launch the vessel, but could not bear her on; sensible and scientific prose, bold and vigorous efforts in my walk in life, would give a farther title to the notice of the world; and then again poetry ought to brighten and crown that name with glory; but nothing of all this can be ever begun without means, and as I don't possess these, I must in every shape strive to gain them. Surely, in this day, when there is not a *writing* poet worth a sixpence, the field must be open, if a better man can step forward.

"What I send you is the Prefatory Scene of a much longer subject, in which I have striven to develop strong passions and weak principles struggling with a high imagination and acute feelings, till, as youth hardens towards age, evil deeds and short enjoyments end in mental misery and bodily ruin. Now, to send you the whole of this would be a mock upon your patience; what you see, does not even pretend to be more than the description of an imaginative child. But read it, sir; and, as you would hold a light to one in utter darkness — as you value your own kindheartedness — *return* me an *answer*, if but one word, telling me whether I should write on, or write no more. Forgive undue warmth, because my feelings in this matter cannot be cool; and believe me, sir, with deep respect,

"Your really humble servant,
"P. B. Brontë"

The poetry enclosed seems to me by no means equal to parts of the letter; but, as every one likes to judge for himself, I copy the six opening stanzas — about a third of the whole, and certainly not the worst.

So where he reigns in glory bright,
Above those starry skies of night,
Amid his Paradise of light
  Oh, why may I not be?
Oft when awake on Christmas morn,
In sleepless twilight laid forlorn,
Strange thoughts have o'er my mind been borne,
  How he has died for me.
And oft within my chamber lying,
Have I awaked myself with crying
From dreams, where I beheld Him dying
  Upon the accursed Tree.
And often has my mother said,
While on her lap I laid my head,
She feared for time I was not made,
  But for Eternity.
So "I can read my title clear,
To mansions in the skies,
And let me bid farewell to fear,
  And wipe my weeping eyes."
I'll lay me down on this marble stone,
And set the world aside,
To see upon her ebon throne
  The Moon in glory ride.

Soon after Charlotte returned to Dewsbury Moor, she was distressed by hearing that her friend "E." was likely to leave the neighbourhood for a considerable length of time.

"Feb. 20th.

"What shall I do without you? How long are we likely to be separated? Why are we to be denied each other's society? It is an inscrutable fatality. I long to be with you, because it seems as if two or three days, or weeks, spent in your company would beyond measure strengthen me in the enjoyment of those feelings which I have so lately begun to cherish. You first pointed out to me that way in which I am so feebly endeavouring to travel, and now I cannot keep you by my side, I must proceed sorrowfully alone. Why are we to be divided? Surely, it must be because we are in danger of loving each other too well — of losing sight of the *Creator* in idolatry of the *creature*. At first, I could not say 'Thy will be done!' I felt rebellious, but I knew it was wrong to feel so. Being left a moment alone this morning, I prayed fervently to be enabled to resign myself to *every* decree of God's will, though it should be dealt forth by a far severer hand than the present disappointment; since then I have felt calmer and humbler, and consequently happier. Last Sunday I took up my Bible in a gloomy state of mind: I began to read — a feeling stole over me such as I have not known for many long years — a sweet, placid sensation, like those, I remember, which used to visit me when I was a little child, and, on Sunday evenings in summer, stood by the open window reading the life of a certain French nobleman, who attained a purer and higher degree of sanctity than has been known since the days of the early martyrs."

"E.'s" residence was equally within a walk from Dewsbury Moor as it had been from Roe Head; and on Saturday afternoons both "Mary" and she used to call upon Charlotte, and often endeavoured to persuade her to return with them, and be the guest of one of them till Monday morning; but this was comparatively seldom. Mary says: — "She visited us twice or thrice when she was at Miss W — -'s. We used to dispute about politics and religion. She, a Tory and clergyman's daughter, was always in a minority of one in our house of violent Dissent and Radicalism. She used to hear over again, delivered *with authority*, all the lectures I had been used to give her at school on despotic aristocracy, mercenary priesthood, &c. She had not energy to defend herself; sometimes she owned to a *little* truth in it, but generally said nothing. Her feeble health gave her her yielding manner, for she could never oppose any one without gathering up all her strength for the struggle. Thus she would let me advise and patronise most imperiously, sometimes picking out any grain of sense there might be in what I said, but never allowing any one materially to interfere with her independence of thought and action. Though her silence sometimes left one under the impression that she agreed when she did not, she never gave a flattering opinion, and thus her words were golden, whether for praise or blame."

"Mary's" father was a man of remarkable intelligence, but of strong, not to say violent prejudices, all running in favour of Republicanism and Dissent. No other county but Yorkshire could have produced such a man. His brother had been a *détenu* in France, and had afterwards voluntarily taken up his residence there. Mr. T. himself had been much abroad, both on business and to see the great continental galleries of paintings. He spoke French perfectly, I have been told, when need was; but delighted usually in talking the broadest Yorkshire. He bought splendid engravings of the pictures which he particularly admired, and his house was full of works of art and of books; but he rather liked to present his rough side to any stranger or new-comer; he would speak his broadest, bring out his opinions on Church and State in their most startling forms, and, by and by, if he found his hearer could stand the shock, he would involuntarily show his warm kind heart, and his true taste, and real refinement. His family of four sons and two daughters were brought up on Republican principles; independence of thought and action was encouraged; no "shams" tolerated. They are scattered far and wide: Martha, the younger daughter, sleeps in the Protestant cemetery at Brussels; Mary is in New Zealand; Mr. T. is dead. And so life and death have dispersed the circle of "violent Radicals and Dissenters" into which, twenty years ago, the little, quiet, resolute clergyman's daughter was received, and by whom she was truly loved and honoured.

January and February of 1837 had passed away, and still there was no reply from Southey. Probably she had lost expectation and almost hope when at length, in the beginning of March, she received the letter inserted in Mr. C. C. Southey's life of his Father, vol. iv. p. 327.

After accounting for his delay in replying to hers by the fact of a long absence from home, during which his letters had accumulated, whence "it has lain unanswered till the last of a numerous file, not from disrespect or indifference to its contents, but because in truth it is not an easy task to answer it, nor a pleasant one to cast a damp over the high spirits and the generous desires of youth," he goes on to say: "What you are I can only infer from your letter, which appears to be written in sincerity, though I may suspect that you have used a fictitious signature. Be that as it may, the letter and the verses bear the same stamp, and I can well understand the state of mind they indicate.

* * * * *

"It is not my advice that you have asked as to the direction of your talents, but my opinion of them, and yet the opinion may be worth little, and the advice much. You evidently possess, and in no inconsiderable degree, what Wordsworth calls the 'faculty of verse.' I am not depreciating it when I say that in these times it is not rare. Many volumes of poems are now published every year without attracting public attention, any one of which if it had appeared half a century ago, would have obtained a high reputation for its author. Whoever, therefore, is ambitious of distinction in this way ought to be prepared for disappointment.

"But it is not with a view to distinction that you should cultivate this talent, if you consult your own happiness. I, who have made literature my profession, and devoted my life to it, and have never for a moment repented of the deliberate choice, think myself, nevertheless, bound in duty to caution every young man who applies as an aspirant to me for encouragement and advice, against taking so perilous a course. You will say that a woman has no need of such a caution; there can be no peril in it for her. In a certain sense this is true; but there is a danger of which I would, with all kindness and all earnestness, warn you. The day dreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind; and in proportion as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else. Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity. You will not seek in imagination for excitement, of which the vicissitudes of this life, and the anxieties from which you must not hope to be exempted, be your state what it may, will bring with them but too much.

"But do not suppose that I disparage the gift which you possess; nor that I would discourage you from exercising it. I only exhort you so to think of it, and so to use it, as to render it conducive to your own permanent good. Write poetry for its own sake; not in a spirit of emulation, and not with a view to celebrity; the less you aim at that the more likely you will be to deserve and finally to obtain it. So written, it is wholesome both for the heart and soul; it may be made the surest means, next to religion, of soothing the mind and elevating it. You may embody in it your best thoughts and your wisest feelings, and in so doing discipline and strengthen them.

"Farewell, madam. It is not because I have forgotten that I was once young myself, that I write to you in this strain; but because I remember it. You will neither doubt my sincerity nor my good will; and however ill what has here been said may accord with your present views and temper, the longer you live the more reasonable it will appear to you. Though I may be but an ungracious adviser, you will allow me, therefore, to subscribe myself, with the best wishes for your happiness here and hereafter, your true friend,

"ROBERT SOUTHEY."

* * * * *

I was with Miss Brontë when she received Mr. Cuthbert Southey's note, requesting her permission to insert the foregoing letter in his father's life. She said to me, "Mr. Southey's letter was kind and admirable; a little stringent, but it did me good."

It is partly because I think it so admirable, and partly because it tends to bring out her character, as shown in the following reply, that I have taken the liberty of inserting the foregoing extracts from it.

"Sir, March 16th.

"I cannot rest till I have answered your letter, even though by addressing you a second time I should appear a little intrusive; but I must thank you for the kind and wise advice you have condescended to give me. I had not ventured to hope for such a reply; so considerate in its tone, so noble in its spirit. I must suppress what I feel, or you will think me foolishly enthusiastic.

"At the first perusal of your letter, I felt only shame and regret that I had ever ventured to trouble you with my crude rhapsody; I felt a painful heat rise to my face when I thought of the quires of paper I had covered with what once gave me so much delight, but which now was only a source of confusion; but after I had thought a little and read it again and again, the prospect seemed to clear. You do not forbid me to write; you do not say that what I write is utterly destitute of merit. You only warn me against the folly of neglecting real duties for the sake of imaginative pleasures; of writing for the love of fame; for the selfish excitement of emulation. You kindly allow me to write poetry for its own sake, provided I leave undone nothing which I ought to do, in order to pursue that single, absorbing, exquisite gratification. I am afraid, sir, you think me very foolish. I know the first letter I wrote to you was all senseless trash from beginning to end; but I am not altogether the idle dreaming being it would seem to denote. My father is a clergyman of limited, though competent income, and I am the eldest of his children. He expended quite as much in my education as he could afford in justice to the rest. I thought it therefore my duty, when I left school, to become a governess. In that capacity I find enough to occupy my thoughts all day long, and my head and hands too, without having a moment's time for one dream of the imagination. In the evenings, I confess, I do think, but I never trouble any one else with my thoughts. I carefully avoid any appearance of preoccupation and eccentricity, which might lead those I live amongst to suspect the nature of my pursuits. Following my father's advice — who from my childhood has counselled me, just in the wise and friendly tone of your letter — I have endeavoured not only attentively to observe all the duties a woman ought to fulfil, but to feel deeply interested in them. I don't always succeed, for sometimes when I'm teaching or sewing I would rather be reading or writing; but I try to deny myself; and my father's approbation amply rewarded me for the privation. Once more allow me to thank you with sincere gratitude. I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print: if the wish should rise, I'll look at Southey's letter, and suppress it. It is honour enough for me that I have written to him, and received an answer. That letter is consecrated; no one shall ever see it, but papa and my brother and sisters. Again I thank you. This incident, I suppose, will be renewed no more; if I live to be an old woman, I shall remember it thirty years hence as a bright dream. The signature which you suspected of being fictitious is my real name. Again, therefore, I must sign myself,

"C. Brontë.

"P.S. — Pray, sir, excuse me for writing to you a second time; I could not help writing, partly to tell you how thankful I am for your kindness, and partly to let you know that your advice shall not be wasted; however sorrowfully and reluctantly it may be at first followed.

"C. B."

I cannot deny myself the gratification of inserting Southey's reply: —

"Keswick, March 22, 1837.

"Dear Madam,

"Your letter has given me great pleasure, and I should not forgive myself if I did not tell you so. You have received admonition as considerately and as kindly as it was given. Let me now request that, if you ever should come to these Lakes while I am living here, you will let me see you. You would then think of me afterwards with the more good-will, because you would perceive that there is neither severity nor moroseness in the state of mind to which years and observation have brought me.

"It is, by God's mercy, in our power to attain a degree of self-government, which is essential to our own happiness, and contributes greatly to that of those around us. Take care of over-excitement, and endeavour to keep a quiet mind (even for your health it is the best advice that can be given you): your moral and spiritual improvement will then keep pace with the culture of your intellectual powers.

"And now, madam, God bless you!

"Farewell, and believe me to be your sincere friend,

"ROBERT SOUTHEY.

Of this second letter, also, she spoke, and told me that it contained an invitation for her to go and see the poet if ever she visited the Lakes. "But there was no money to spare," said she, "nor any prospect of my ever earning money enough to have the chance of so great a pleasure, so I gave up thinking of it." At the time we conversed together on the subject we were at the Lakes. But Southey was dead.

This "stringent" letter made her put aside, for a time, all idea of literary enterprise. She bent her whole energy towards the fulfilment of the duties in hand; but her occupation was not sufficient food for her great forces of intellect, and they cried out perpetually, "Give, give," while the comparatively less breezy air of Dewsbury Moor told upon her health and spirits more and more. On August 27, 1837, she writes: —

"I am again at Dewsbury, engaged in the old business, — teach, teach, teach . . . *When will you come home*? Make haste! You have been at Bath long enough for all purposes; by this time you have acquired polish enough, I am sure; if the varnish is laid on much thicker, I am afraid the good wood underneath will be quite concealed, and your Yorkshire friends won't stand that. Come, come. I am getting really tired of your absence. Saturday after

Saturday comes round, and I can have no hope of hearing your knock at the door, and then being told that 'Miss E. is come.' Oh, dear! in this monotonous life of mine, that was a pleasant event. I wish it would recur again; but it will take two or three interviews before the stiffness — the estrangement of this long separation — will wear away."

About this time she forgot to return a work-bag she had borrowed, by a messenger, and in repairing her error she says: — "These aberrations of memory warn me pretty intelligibly that I am getting past my prime." AEtat 21! And the same tone of despondency runs through the following letter: —

"I wish exceedingly that I could come to you before Christmas, but it is impossible; another three weeks must elapse before I shall again have my comforter beside me, under the roof of my own dear quiet home. If I could always live with you, and daily read the Bible with you — if your lips and mine could at the same time drink the same draught, from the same pure fountain of mercy — I hope, I trust, I might one day become better, far better than my evil, wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit and warm to the flesh, will now permit me to be. I often plan the pleasant life which we might lead together, strengthening each other in that power of self-denial, that hallowed and glowing devotion, which the first saints of God often attained to. My eyes fill with tears when I contrast the bliss of such a state, brightened by hopes of the future, with the melancholy state I now live in, uncertain that I ever felt true contrition, wandering in thought and deed, longing for holiness, which I shall *never*, *never* obtain, smitten at times to the heart with the conviction that ghastly Calvinistic doctrines are true — darkened, in short, by the very shadows of spiritual death. If Christian perfection be necessary to salvation, I shall never be saved; my heart is a very hotbed for sinful thoughts, and when I decide on an action I scarcely remember to look to my Redeemer for direction. I know not how to pray; I cannot bend my life to the grand end of doing good; I go on constantly seeking my own pleasure, pursuing the gratification of my own desires. I forget God, and will not God forget me? And, meantime, I know the greatness of Jehovah; I acknowledge the perfection of His word; I adore the purity of the Christian faith; my theory is right, my practice horribly wrong."

The Christmas holidays came, and she and Anne returned to the parsonage, and to that happy home circle in which alone their natures expanded; amongst all other people they shrivelled up more or less. Indeed, there were only one or two strangers who could be admitted among the sisters without producing the same result. Emily and Anne were bound up in their lives and interests like twins. The former from reserve, the latter from timidity, avoided all friendships and intimacies beyond their family. Emily was impervious to influence; she never came in contact with public opinion, and her own decision of what was right and fitting was a law for her conduct and appearance, with which she allowed no one to interfere. Her love was poured out on Anne, as Charlotte's was on her. But the affection among all the three was stronger than either death or life.

"E." was eagerly welcomed by Charlotte, freely admitted by Emily, and kindly received by Anne, whenever she could visit them; and this Christmas she had promised to do so, but her coming had to be delayed on account of a little domestic accident detailed in the following letter: —

"Dec. 29, 1837.

"I am sure you will have thought me very remiss in not sending my promised letter long before now; but I have a sufficient and very melancholy excuse in an accident that befell our old faithful Tabby, a few days after my return home. She was gone out into the village on some errand, when, as she was descending the steep street, her foot slipped on the ice, and she fell; it was dark, and no one saw her mischance, till after a time her groans attracted the attention of a passer-by. She was lifted up and carried into the druggist's near; and, after the examination, it was discovered that she had completely shattered and dislocated one leg. Unfortunately, the fracture could not be set till six o'clock the next morning, as no surgeon was to be had before that time, and she now lies at our house in a very doubtful and dangerous state. Of course we are all exceedingly distressed at the circumstance, for she was like one of our own family. Since the event we have been almost without assistance — a person has dropped in now and then to do the drudgery, but we have as yet been able to procure no regular servant; and consequently, the whole work of the house, as well as the additional duty of nursing Tabby, falls on ourselves. Under these circumstances I dare not press your visit here, at least until she is pronounced out of danger; it would be too selfish of me. Aunt wished me to give you this information before, but papa and all the rest were anxious I should delay until we saw whether matters took a more settled aspect, and I myself kept putting it off from day to day, most bitterly reluctant to give up all the pleasure I had anticipated so long. However, remembering what you told me, namely, that you had commended the matter to a higher decision than ours, and that you were resolved to submit with resignation to that decision, whatever it might be, I hold it my duty to yield also, and to be silent; it may be all for the best. I fear, if you had been here during this severe weather, your visit would have been of no advantage to you, for the moors are blockaded with snow, and you would never have been able to get out. After this disappointment, I never dare reckon with certainty on the enjoyment of a pleasure again; it seems as if some fatality stood between you and me. I am not good enough for you, and you must be kept from the contamination of too intimate society. I would urge your visit yet — I would entreat and press it — but the thought comes across me, should Tabby die while you are in the house, I should never forgive myself. No! it must not be, and in a thousand ways the consciousness of that mortifies and disappoints me most keenly, and I am not the only one who is disappointed. All in the house were looking to your visit with eagerness. Papa says he highly approves of my friendship with you, and he wishes me to continue it through life."

A good neighbour of the Brontës — a clever, intelligent Yorkshire woman, who keeps a druggist's shop in Haworth, and from her occupation, her experience, and excellent sense, holds the position of village doctress and nurse, and, as such, has been a friend, in many a time of trial, and sickness, and death, in the households round — told me a characteristic little incident connected with Tabby's fractured leg. Mr. Brontë is truly generous and regardful of all deserving claims. Tabby had lived with them for ten or twelve years, and was, as Charlotte expressed it, "one of the family." But on the other hand, she was past the age for any very active service, being nearer seventy than sixty at the time of the accident; she had a sister living in the village; and the savings she had accumulated, during many years' service, formed a competency for one in her rank of life. Or if, in this time of sickness, she fell short of any comforts which her state rendered necessary, the parsonage could supply them. So reasoned Miss Branwell, the prudent, not to say anxious aunt; looking to the limited contents of Mr. Brontë's purse, and the unprovided-for-future of her nieces; who were, moreover, losing the relaxation of the holidays, in close attendance upon Tabby.

Miss Branwell urged her views upon Mr. Brontë as soon as the immediate danger to the old servant's life was over. He refused at first to listen to the careful advice; it was repugnant to his liberal nature. But Miss Branwell persevered; urged economical motives; pressed on his love for his daughters. He gave way. Tabby was to be removed to her sister's, and there nursed and cared for, Mr. Brontë coming in with his aid when her own resources fell short. This decision was communicated to the girls. There were symptoms of a quiet, but sturdy rebellion, that winter afternoon, in the small precincts of Haworth parsonage. They made one unanimous and stiff remonstrance. Tabby had tended them in their childhood; they, and none other, should tend her in her infirmity and age. At tea-time, they were sad and silent, and the meal went away untouched by any of the three. So it was at breakfast; they did not waste many words on the subject, but each word they did utter was weighty. They "struck" eating till the resolution was rescinded, and Tabby was allowed to remain a helpless invalid entirely dependent upon them. Herein was the strong feeling of Duty being paramount to pleasure, which lay at the foundation of Charlotte's character, made most apparent; for we have seen how she yearned for her friend's company; but it was to be obtained only by shrinking from what she esteemed right, and that she never did, whatever might be the sacrifice.

She had another weight on her mind this Christmas. I have said that the air of Dewsbury Moor did not agree with her, though she herself was hardly aware how much her life there was affecting her health. But Anne had begun to suffer just before the holidays, and Charlotte watched over her younger sisters with the jealous vigilance of some wild creature, that changes her very nature if danger threatens her young. Anne had a slight cough, a pain at her side, a difficulty of breathing. Miss W — - considered it as little more than a common cold; but Charlotte felt every indication of incipient consumption as a stab at her heart, remembering Maria and Elizabeth, whose places once knew them, and should know them no more.

Stung by anxiety for this little sister, she upbraided Miss W — - for her fancied indifference to Anne's state of health. Miss W — - felt these reproaches keenly, and wrote to Mr. Brontë about them. He immediately replied most kindly, expressing his fear that Charlotte's apprehensions and anxieties respecting her sister had led her to give utterance to over-excited expressions of alarm. Through Miss W — -'s kind consideration, Anne was a year longer at school than her friends intended. At the close of the half-year Miss W — - sought for the opportunity of an explanation of each other's words, and the issue proved that "the falling out of faithful friends, renewing is of love." And so ended the first, last, and only difference Charlotte ever had with good, kind Miss W — -.

Still her heart had received a shock in the perception of Anne's delicacy; and all these holidays she watched over her with the longing, fond anxiety, which is so full of sudden pangs of fear.

Emily had given up her situation in the Halifax school, at the expiration of six months of arduous trial, on account of her health, which could only be re-established by the bracing moorland air and free life of home. Tabby's illness had preyed on the family resources. I doubt whether Branwell was maintaining himself at this time. For some unexplained reason, he had given up the idea of becoming a student of painting at the Royal Academy, and his prospects in life were uncertain, and had yet to be settled. So Charlotte had quietly to take up her burden of teaching again, and return to her previous monotonous life.

Brave heart, ready to die in harness! She went back to her work, and made no complaint, hoping to subdue the weakness that was gaining ground upon her. About this time, she would turn sick and trembling at any sudden noise, and could hardly repress her screams when startled. This showed a fearful degree of physical weakness in one who was generally so self-controlled; and the medical man, whom at length, through Miss W — -'s entreaty, she was led to consult, insisted on her return to the parsonage. She had led too sedentary a life, he said; and the soft summer air, blowing round her home, the sweet company of those she loved, the release, the freedom of life in her own family, were needed, to save either reason or life. So, as One higher than she had over-ruled that for a time she might relax her strain, she returned to Haworth; and after a season of utter quiet, her father sought for her the enlivening society of her two friends, Mary and Martha T. At the conclusion of the following letter, written to the then absent E., there is, I think, as pretty a glimpse of a merry group of young people as need be; and like all descriptions of doing, as distinct from thinking or feeling, in letters, it saddens one in proportion to the vivacity of the picture of what was once, and is now utterly swept away.

“Haworth, June 9, 1838.

“I received your packet of despatches on Wednesday; it was brought me by Mary and Martha, who have been staying at Haworth for a few days; they leave us to-day. You will be surprised at the date of this letter. I ought to be at Dewsbury Moor, you know; but I stayed as long as I was able, and at length I neither could nor dared stay any longer. My health and spirits had utterly failed me, and the medical man whom I consulted enjoined me, as I valued my life, to go home. So home I went, and the change has at once roused and soothed me; and I am now, I trust, fairly in the way to be myself again.

“A calm and even mind like yours cannot conceive the feelings of the shattered wretch who is now writing to you, when, after weeks of mental and bodily anguish not to be described, something like peace began to dawn again. Mary is far from well. She breathes short, has a pain in her chest, and frequent flushings of fever. I cannot tell you what agony these symptoms give me; they remind me too strongly of my two sisters, whom no power of medicine could save. Martha is now very well; she has kept in a continual flow of good humour during her stay here, and has consequently been very fascinating . . . ”

“They are making such a noise about me I cannot write any more. Mary is playing on the piano; Martha is chattering as fast as her little tongue can run; and Branwell is standing before her, laughing at her vivacity.”

Charlotte grew much stronger in this quiet, happy period at home. She paid occasional visits to her two great friends, and they in return came to Haworth. At one of their houses, I suspect, she met with the person to whom the following letter refers — some one having a slight resemblance to the character of “St. John,” in the last volume of “Jane Eyre,” and, like him, in holy orders.

“March 12, 1839.

. . . “I had a kindly leaning towards him, because he is an amiable and well-disposed man. Yet I had not, and could not have, that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for him; and if ever I marry, it must be in that light of adoration that I will regard my husband. Ten to one I shall never have the chance again; but *n’importe*. Moreover, I was aware that he knew so little of me he could hardly be conscious to whom he was writing. Why! it would startle him to see me in my natural home character; he would think I was a wild, romantic enthusiast indeed. I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband. I would laugh, and satirize, and say whatever came into my head first. And if he were a clever man, and loved me, the whole world, weighed in the balance against his smallest wish, should be light as air.”

So that — her first proposal of marriage — was quietly declined and put on one side. Matrimony did not enter into the scheme of her life, but good, sound, earnest labour did; the question, however, was as yet undecided in what direction she should employ her forces. She had been discouraged in literature; her eyes failed her in the minute kind of drawing which she practised when she wanted to express an idea; teaching seemed to her at this time, as it does to most women at all times, the only way of earning an independent livelihood. But neither she nor her sisters were naturally fond of children. The hieroglyphics of childhood were an unknown language to them, for they had never been much with those younger than themselves. I am inclined to think, too, that they had not the happy knack of imparting information, which seems to be a separate gift from the faculty of acquiring it; a kind of sympathetic tact, which instinctively perceives the difficulties that impede comprehension in a child's mind, and that yet are too vague and unformed for it, with its half-developed powers of expression, to explain by words. Consequently, teaching very young children was anything but a "delightful task" to the three Brontë sisters. With older girls, verging on womanhood, they might have done better, especially if these had any desire for improvement. But the education which the village clergyman's daughters had received, did not as yet qualify them to undertake the charge of advanced pupils. They knew but little French, and were not proficients in music; I doubt whether Charlotte could play at all. But they were all strong again, and, at any rate, Charlotte and Anne must put their shoulders to the wheel. One daughter was needed at home, to stay with Mr. Brontë and Miss Branwell; to be the young and active member in a household of four, whereof three — the father, the aunt, and faithful Tabby — were past middle age. And Emily, who suffered and drooped more than her sisters when away from Haworth, was the one appointed to remain. Anne was the first to meet with a situation.

"April 15th, 1839.

"I could not write to you in the week you requested, as about that time we were very busy in preparing for Anne's departure. Poor child! she left us last Monday; no one went with her; it was her own wish that she might be allowed to go alone, as she thought she could manage better and summon more courage if thrown entirely upon her own resources. We have had one letter from her since she went. She expresses herself very well satisfied, and says that Mrs. — - is extremely kind; the two eldest children alone are under her care, the rest are confined to the nursery, with which and its occupants she has nothing to do . . . I hope she'll do. You would be astonished what a sensible, clever letter she writes; it is only the talking part that I fear. But I do seriously apprehend that Mrs. — - will sometimes conclude that she has a natural impediment in her speech. For my own part, I am as yet 'wanting a situation,' like a housemaid out of place. By the way, I have lately discovered I have quite a talent for cleaning, sweeping up hearths, dusting rooms, making beds, &c.; so, if everything else fails, I can turn my hand to that, if anybody will give me good wages for little labour. I won't be a cook; I hate soothing. I won't be a nurserymaid, nor a lady's-maid, far less a lady's companion, or a mantua-maker, or a straw-bonnet maker, or a taker-in of plain work. I won't be anything but a housemaid . . . With regard to my visit to G., I have as yet received no invitation; but if I should be asked, though I should feel it a great act of self-denial to refuse, yet I have almost made up my mind to do so, though the society of the T.'s is one of the most rousing pleasures I have ever known. Good-bye, my darling E., &c.

"P. S. — Strike out that word 'darling;' it is humbug. Where's the use of protestations? We've known each other, and liked each other, a good while; that's enough."

Not many weeks after this was written, Charlotte also became engaged as a governess. I intend carefully to abstain from introducing the names of any living people, respecting whom I may have to tell unpleasant truths, or to quote severe remarks from Miss Brontë's letters; but it is necessary that the difficulties she had to encounter in her various phases of life, should be fairly and frankly made known, before the force "of what was resisted" can be at all understood. I was once speaking to her about "Agnes Grey" — the novel in which her sister Anne pretty literally describes her own experience as a governess — and alluding more particularly to the account of the stoning of the little nestlings in the presence of the parent birds. She said that none but those who had been in the position of a governess could ever realise the dark side of "respectable" human nature; under no great temptation to crime, but daily giving way to selfishness and ill-temper, till its conduct towards those dependent on it sometimes amounts to a tyranny of which one would rather be the victim than the inflicter. We can only trust in such cases that the employers err rather from a density of perception and an absence of sympathy, than from any natural cruelty of disposition. Among several things of the same kind, which I well remember, she told me what had once occurred to herself. She had been entrusted with the care of a little boy, three or four years old, during the absence of his parents on a day's excursion, and particularly enjoined to keep him out of the stable-yard. His elder brother, a lad of eight or nine, and not a pupil of Miss Brontë's, tempted the little fellow into the forbidden place. She followed, and tried to induce him to come away; but, instigated by his brother, he began throwing stones at her, and one of them hit her so severe a blow on the temple that the lads were alarmed into obedience. The next day, in full family conclave, the mother asked Miss Brontë what occasioned the mark on her forehead. She simply replied, "An accident, ma'am," and no further inquiry was made; but the children (both brothers and sisters) had been present, and honoured her for not "telling tales." From that time, she began to obtain influence over all, more or less, according to their different characters; and as she insensibly gained their affection, her own interest in them was increasing. But one day, at the children's dinner, the small truant of the stable-yard, in a little demonstrative gush, said, putting his hand in hers, "I love 'ou, Miss Brontë." Whereupon, the mother exclaimed, before all the children, "Love the *governess*, my dear!"

"The family into which she first entered was, I believe, that of a wealthy Yorkshire manufacturer. The following extracts from her correspondence at this time will show how painfully the restraint of her new mode of life pressed upon her. The first is from a letter to Emily, beginning with one of the tender expressions in which, in spite of ‘humbug,’ she indulged herself. ‘Mine dear love,’ ‘Mine-bonnie love,’ are her terms of address to this beloved sister.

“June 8th, 1839.

“I have striven hard to be pleased with my new situation. The country, the house and the grounds are, as I have said, divine; but, alack-a-day! there is such a thing as seeing all beautiful around you — pleasant woods, white paths, green lawns, and blue sunshiny sky — and not having a free moment or a free thought left to enjoy them. The children are constantly with me. As for correcting them, I quickly found that was out of the question; they are to do as they like. A complaint to the mother only brings black looks on myself, and unjust, partial excuses to screen the children. I have tried that plan once, and succeeded so notably, I shall try no more. I said in my last letter that Mrs. —- did not know me. I now begin to find she does not intend to know me; that she cares nothing about me, except to contrive how the greatest possible quantity of labour may be got out of me; and to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needle-work; yards of cambric to hem, muslin nightcaps to make, and, above all things, dolls to dress. I do not think she likes me at all, because I can’t help being shy in such an entirely novel scene, surrounded as I have hitherto been by strange and constantly changing faces . . . I used to think I should like to be in the stir of grand folks’ society; but I have had enough of it — it is dreary work to look on and listen. I see more clearly than I have ever done before, that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living rational being, except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil . . . One of the pleasantest afternoons I have spent here — indeed, the only one at all pleasant — was when Mr. —- walked out with his children, and I had orders to follow a little behind. As he strolled on through his fields, with his magnificent Newfoundland dog at his side, he looked very like what a frank, wealthy, Conservative gentleman ought to be. He spoke freely and unaffectedly to the people he met, and, though he indulged his children and allowed them to tease himself far too much, he would not suffer them grossly to insult others.”

(WRITTEN IN PENCIL TO A FRIEND.)

“July, 1839.

“I cannot procure ink, without going into the drawing-room, where I do not wish to go . . . I should have written to you long since, and told you every detail of the utterly new scene into which I have lately been cast, had I not been daily expecting a letter from yourself, and wondering and lamenting that you did not write; for you will remember it was your turn. I must not bother you too much with my sorrows, of which, I fear, you have heard an exaggerated account. If you were near me, perhaps I might be tempted to tell you all, to grow egotistical, and pour out the long history of a private governess’s trials and crosses in her first situation. As it is, I will only ask you to imagine the miseries of a reserved wretch like me, thrown at once into the midst of a large family, at a time when they were particularly gay — when the house was filled with company — all strangers — people whose faces I had never seen before. In this state I had charge given me of a set of pampered, spoilt, turbulent children, whom I was expected constantly to amuse, as well as to instruct. I soon found that the constant demand on my stock of animal spirits reduced them to the lowest state of exhaustion; at times I felt — and, I suppose, seemed — depressed. To my astonishment, I was taken to task on the subject by Mrs. — - with a sternness of manner and a harshness of language scarcely credible; like a fool, I cried most bitterly. I could not help it; my spirits quite failed me at first. I thought I had done my best — strained every nerve to please her; and to be treated in that way, merely because I was shy and sometimes melancholy, was too bad. At first I was for giving all up and going home. But, after a little reflection, I determined to summon what energy I had, and to weather the storm. I said to myself, 'I have never yet quitted a place without gaining a friend; adversity is a good school; the poor are born to labour, and the dependent to endure.' I resolved to be patient, to command my feelings, and to take what came; the ordeal, I reflected, would not last many weeks, and I trusted it would do me good. I recollected the fable of the willow and the oak; I bent quietly, and now, I trust, the storm is blowing over me. Mrs. — - is generally considered an agreeable woman; so she is, I doubt not, in general society. She behaves somewhat more civilly to me now than she did at first, and the children are a little more manageable; but she does not know my character, and she does not wish to know it. I have never had five minutes' conversation with her since I came, except while she was scolding me. I have no wish to be pitied, except by yourself; if I were talking to you I could tell you much more."

(TO EMILY, ABOUT THIS TIME.)

"Mine bonnie love, I was as glad of your letter as tongue can express: it is a real, genuine pleasure to hear from home; a thing to be saved till bedtime, when one has a moment's quiet and rest to enjoy it thoroughly. Write whenever you can. I could like to be at home. I could like to work in a mill. I could like to feel some mental liberty. I could like this weight of restraint to be taken off. But the holidays will come. Coraggio."

Her temporary engagement in this uncongenial family ended in the July of this year; not before the constant strain upon her spirits and strength had again affected her health; but when this delicacy became apparent in palpitations and shortness of breathing, it was treated as affectation — as a phase of imaginary indisposition, which could be dissipated by a good scolding. She had been brought up rather in a school of Spartan endurance than in one of maudlin self-indulgence, and could bear many a pain and relinquish many a hope in silence.

After she had been at home about a week, her friend proposed that she should accompany her in some little excursion, having pleasure alone for its object. She caught at the idea most eagerly at first; but her hope stood still, waned, and had almost disappeared before, after many delays, it was realised. In its fulfilment at last, it was a favourable specimen of many a similar air-bubble dancing before her eyes in her brief career, in which stern realities, rather than pleasures, formed the leading incidents.

"July 26th, 1839.

"Your proposal has almost driven me 'clean daft' — if you don't understand that ladylike expression, you must ask me what it means when I see you. The fact is, an excursion with you anywhere, — whether to Cleathorpe or Canada, — just by ourselves, would be to me most delightful. I should, indeed, like to go; but I can't get leave of absence for longer than a week, and I'm afraid that would not suit you — must I then give it up entirely? I feel as if I *could not*; I never had such a chance of enjoyment before; I do want to see you and talk to you, and be with you. When do you wish to go? Could I meet you at Leeds? To take a gig from Haworth to B., would be to me a very serious increase of expense, and I happen to be very low in cash. Oh! rich people seem to have many pleasures at their command which we are debarred from! However, no repining.

"Say when you go, and I shall be able in my answer to say decidedly whether I can accompany you or not. I must — I will — I'm set upon it — I'll be obstinate and bear down all opposition.

"P.S. — Since writing the above, I find that aunt and papa have determined to go to Liverpool for a fortnight, and take us all with them. It is stipulated, however, that I should give up the Cleathorpe scheme. I yield reluctantly."

I fancy that, about this time, Mr. Brontë found it necessary, either from failing health or the increased populousness of the parish, to engage the assistance of a curate. At least, it is in a letter written this summer that I find mention of the first of a succession of curates, who henceforward revolved round Haworth Parsonage, and made an impression on the mind of one of its inmates which she has conveyed pretty distinctly to the world. The Haworth curate brought his clerical friends and neighbours about the place, and for a time the incursions of these, near the parsonage tea-time, formed occurrences by which the quietness of the life there was varied, sometimes pleasantly, sometimes disagreeably. The little adventure recorded at the end of the following letter is uncommon in the lot of most women, and is a testimony in this case to the unusual power of attraction — though so plain in feature — which Charlotte possessed, when she let herself go in the happiness and freedom of home.

"August 4th, 1839.

"The Liverpool journey is yet a matter of talk, a sort of castle in the air; but, between you and me, I fancy it is very doubtful whether it will ever assume a more solid shape. Aunt — like many other elderly people — likes to talk of such things; but when it comes to putting them into actual execution, she rather falls off. Such being the case, I think you and I had better adhere to our first plan of going somewhere together independently of other people. I have got leave to accompany you for a week — at the utmost a fortnight — but no more. Where do you wish to go? Burlington, I should think, from what M. says, would be as eligible a place as any. When do you set off? Arrange all these things according to your convenience; I shall start no objections. The idea of seeing the sea — of being near it — watching its changes by sunrise, sunset, moonlight, and noon-day — in calm, perhaps in storm — fills and satisfies my mind. I shall be discontented at nothing. And then I am not to be with a set of people with whom I have nothing in common — who would be nuisances and bores: but with you, whom I like and know, and who knows me.

"I have an odd circumstance to relate to you: prepare for a hearty laugh! The other day, Mr. — -, a vicar, came to spend the day with us, bringing with him his own curate. The latter gentleman, by name Mr. B., is a young Irish clergyman, fresh from Dublin University. It was the first time we had any of us seen him, but, however, after the manner of his countrymen, he soon made himself at home. His character quickly appeared in his conversation; witty, lively, ardent, clever too; but deficient in the dignity and discretion of an Englishman. At home, you know, I talk with ease, and am never shy — never weighed down and oppressed by that miserable *mauvaise honte* which torments and constrains me elsewhere. So I conversed with this Irishman, and laughed at his jests; and, though I saw faults in his character, excused them because of the amusement his originality afforded. I cooled a little, indeed, and drew in towards the latter part of the evening, because he began to season his conversation with something of Hibernian flattery, which I did not quite relish. However, they went away, and no more was thought about them. A few days after, I got a letter, the direction of which puzzled me, it being in a hand I was not accustomed to see. Evidently, it was neither from you nor Mary, my only correspondents. Having opened and read it, it proved to be a declaration of attachment and proposal of matrimony, expressed in the ardent language of the sapient young Irishman! I hope you are laughing heartily. This is not like one of my adventures, is it? It more nearly resembles Martha's. I am certainly doomed to be an old maid. Never mind. I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old.

"Well! thought I, I have heard of love at first sight, but this beats all! I leave you to guess what my answer would be, convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong."

On the 14th of August she still writes from Haworth: —

"I have in vain packed my box, and prepared everything for our anticipated journey. It so happens that I can get no conveyance this week or the next. The only gig let out to hire in Haworth, is at Harrowgate, and likely to remain there, for aught I can hear. Papa decidedly objects to my going by the coach, and walking to B., though I am sure I could manage it. Aunt exclaims against the weather, and the roads, and the four winds of heaven, so I am in a fix, and, what is worse, so are you. On reading over, for the second or third time, your last letter (which, by the by, was written in such hieroglyphics that, at the first hasty perusal, I could hardly make out two consecutive words), I find you intimate that if I leave this journey till Thursday I shall be too late. I grieve that I should have so inconvenienced you; but I need not talk of either Friday or Saturday now, for I rather imagine there is small chance of my ever going at all. The elders of the house have never cordially acquiesced in the measure; and now that impediments seem to start up at every step, opposition grows more open. Papa, indeed, would willingly indulge me, but this very kindness of his makes me doubt whether I ought to draw upon it; so, though I could battle out aunt's discontent, I yield to papa's indulgence. He does not say so, but I know he would rather I stayed at home; and aunt meant well too, I dare say, but I am provoked that she reserved the expression of her decided disapproval till all was settled between you and myself. Reckon on me no more; leave me out in your calculations: perhaps I ought, in the beginning, to have had prudence sufficient to shut my eyes against such a prospect of pleasure, so as to deny myself the hope of it. Be as angry as you please with me for disappointing you. I did not intend it, and have only one thing more to say — if you do not go immediately to the sea, will you come to see us at Haworth? This invitation is not mine only, but papa's and aunt's."

However, a little more patience, a little more delay, and she enjoyed the pleasure she had wished for so much. She and her friend went to Easton for a fortnight in the latter part of September. It was here she received her first impressions of the sea.

"Oct. 24th.

"Have you forgotten the sea by this time, E.? Is it grown dim in your mind? Or can you still see it, dark, blue, and green, and foam-white, and hear it roaring roughly when the wind is high, or rushing softly when it is calm? . . . I am as well as need be, and very fat. I think of Easton very often, and of worthy Mr. H., and his kind-hearted helpmate, and of our pleasant walks to H — - Wood, and to Boynton, our merry evenings, our romps with little Hancheon, &c., &c. If we both live, this period of our lives will long be a theme for pleasant recollection. Did you chance, in your letter to Mr. H., to mention my spectacles? I am sadly inconvenienced by the want of them. I can neither read, write, nor draw with comfort in their absence. I hope Madame won't refuse to give them up . . . Excuse the brevity of this letter, for I have been drawing all day, and my eyes are so tired it is quite a labour to write."

But, as the vivid remembrance of this pleasure died away, an accident occurred to make the actual duties of life press somewhat heavily for a time.

"December 21st, 1839

"We are at present, and have been during the last month, rather busy, as, for that space of time, we have been without a servant, except a little girl to run errands. Poor Tabby became so lame that she was at length obliged to leave us. She is residing with her sister, in a little house of her own, which she bought with her savings a year or two since. She is very comfortable, and wants nothing; as she is near, we see her very often. In the meantime, Emily and I are sufficiently busy, as you may suppose: I manage the ironing, and keep the rooms clean; Emily does the baking, and attends to the kitchen. We are such odd animals, that we prefer this mode of contrivance to having a new face amongst us. Besides, we do not despair of Tabby's return, and she shall not be supplanted by a stranger in her absence. I excited aunt's wrath very much by burning the clothes, the first time I attempted to iron; but I do better now. Human feelings are queer things; I am much happier black-leading the stoves, making the beds, and sweeping the floors at home, than I should be living like a fine lady anywhere else. I must indeed drop my subscription to the Jews, because I have no money to keep it up. I ought to have announced this intention to you before, but I quite forgot I was a subscriber. I intend to force myself to take another situation when I can get one, though I *hate* and *abhor* the very thoughts of governess-ship. But I must do it; and, therefore, I heartily wish I could hear of a family where they need such a commodity as a governess."

CHAPTER IX

The year 1840 found all the Brontës living at home, except Anne. As I have already intimated, for some reason with which I am unacquainted, the plan of sending Branwell to study at the Royal Academy had been relinquished; probably it was found, on inquiry, that the expenses of such a life, were greater than his father's slender finances could afford, even with the help which Charlotte's labours at Miss W — -'s gave, by providing for Anne's board and education. I gather from what I have heard, that Branwell must have been severely disappointed when the plan fell through. His talents were certainly very brilliant, and of this he was fully conscious, and fervently desired, by their use, either in writing or drawing, to make himself a name. At the same time, he would probably have found his strong love of pleasure and irregular habits a great impediment in his path to fame; but these blemishes in his character were only additional reasons why he yearned after a London life, in which he imagined he could obtain every stimulant to his already vigorous intellect, while at the same time he would have a license of action to be found only in crowded cities. Thus his whole nature was attracted towards the metropolis; and many an hour must he have spent poring over the map of London, to judge from an anecdote which has been told me. Some traveller for a London house of business came to Haworth for a night; and according to the unfortunate habit of the place, the brilliant "Patrick" was sent for to the inn, to beguile the evening by his intellectual conversation and his flashes of wit. They began to talk of London; of the habits and ways of life there; of the places of amusement; and Branwell informed the Londoner of one or two short cuts from point to point, up narrow lanes or back streets; and it was only towards the end of the evening that the traveller discovered, from his companion's voluntary confession, that he had never set foot in London at all.

At this time the young man seemed to have his fate in his own hands. He was full of noble impulses, as well as of extraordinary gifts; not accustomed to resist temptation, it is true, from any higher motive than strong family affection, but showing so much power of attachment to all about him that they took pleasure in believing that, after a time, he would "right himself," and that they should have pride and delight in the use he would then make of his splendid talents. His aunt especially made him her great favourite. There are always peculiar trials in the life of an only boy in a family of girls. He is expected to act a part in life; to *do*, while they are only to *be*; and the necessity of their giving way to him in some things, is too often exaggerated into their giving way to him in all, and thus rendering him utterly selfish. In the family about whom I am writing, while the rest were almost ascetic in their habits, Branwell was allowed to grow up self-indulgent; but, in early youth, his power of attracting and attaching people was so great, that few came in contact with him who were not so much dazzled by him as to be desirous of gratifying whatever wishes he expressed. Of course, he was careful enough not to reveal anything before his father and sisters of the pleasures he indulged in; but his tone of thought and conversation became gradually coarser, and, for a time, his sisters tried to persuade themselves that such coarseness was a part of manliness, and to blind themselves by love to the fact that Branwell was worse than other young men. At present, though he had, they were aware, fallen into some errors, the exact nature of which they avoided knowing, still he was their hope and their darling; their pride, who should some time bring great glory to the name of Brontë.

He and his sister Charlotte were both slight and small of stature, while the other two were of taller and larger make. I have seen Branwell's profile; it is what would be generally esteemed very handsome; the forehead is massive, the eye well set, and the expression of it fine and intellectual; the nose too is good; but there are coarse lines about the mouth, and the lips, though of handsome shape, are loose and thick, indicating self-indulgence, while the slightly retreating chin conveys an idea of weakness of will. His hair and complexion were sandy. He had enough of Irish blood in him to make his manners frank and genial, with a kind of natural gallantry about them. In a fragment of one of his manuscripts which I have read, there is a justness and felicity of expression which is very striking. It is the beginning of a tale, and the actors in it are drawn with much of the grace of characteristic portrait-painting, in perfectly pure and simple language which distinguishes so many of Addison's papers in the "Spectator." The fragment is too short to afford the means of judging whether he had much dramatic talent, as the persons of the story are not thrown into conversation. But altogether the elegance and composure of style are such as one would not have expected from this vehement and ill-fated young man. He had a stronger desire for literary fame burning in his heart, than even that which occasionally flashed up in his sisters'. He tried various outlets for his talents. He wrote and sent poems to Wordsworth and Coleridge, who both expressed kind and laudatory opinions, and he frequently contributed verses to the *Leeds Mercury*. In 1840, he was living at home, employing himself in occasional composition of various kinds, and waiting till some occupation, for which he might be fitted without any expensive course of preliminary training, should turn up; waiting, not impatiently; for he saw society of one kind (probably what he called "life") at the Black Bull; and at home he was as yet the cherished favourite.

Miss Branwell was unaware of the fermentation of unoccupied talent going on around her. She was not her nieces' confidante — perhaps no one so much older could have been; but their father, from whom they derived not a little of their adventurous spirit, was silently cognisant of much of which she took no note. Next to her nephew, the docile, pensive Anne was her favourite. Of her she had taken charge from her infancy; she was always patient and tractable, and would submit quietly to occasional oppression, even when she felt it keenly. Not so her two elder sisters; they made their opinions known, when roused by any injustice. At such times, Emily would express herself as strongly as Charlotte, although perhaps less frequently. But, in general, notwithstanding that Miss Branwell might be occasionally unreasonable, she and her nieces went on smoothly enough; and though they might now and then be annoyed by petty tyranny, she still inspired them with sincere respect, and not a little affection. They were, moreover, grateful to her for many habits she had enforced upon them, and which in time had become second nature: order, method, neatness in everything; a perfect knowledge of all kinds of household work; an exact punctuality, and obedience to the laws of time and place, of which no one but themselves, I have heard Charlotte say, could tell the value in after-life; with their impulsive natures, it was positive repose to have learnt implicit obedience to external laws. People in Haworth have assured me that, according to the hour of day — nay, the very minute — could they have told what the inhabitants of the parsonage were about. At certain times the girls would be sewing in their aunt's bedroom — the chamber which, in former days, before they had outstripped her in their learning, had served them as a schoolroom; at certain (early) hours they had their meals; from six to eight, Miss Branwell read aloud to Mr. Brontë; at punctual eight, the household assembled to evening prayers in his study; and by nine he, the aunt, and Tabby, were all in bed, — the girls free to pace up and down (like restless wild animals) in the parlour, talking over plans and projects, and thoughts of what was to be their future life.

At the time of which I write, the favourite idea was that of keeping a school. They thought that, by a little contrivance, and a very little additional building, a small number of pupils, four or six, might be accommodated in the parsonage. As teaching seemed the only profession open to them, and as it appeared that Emily at least could not live away from home, while the others also suffered much from the same cause, this plan of school-keeping presented itself as most desirable. But it involved some outlay; and to this their aunt was averse. Yet there was no one to whom they could apply for a loan of the requisite means, except Miss Branwell, who had made a small store out of her savings, which she intended for her nephew and nieces eventually, but which she did not like to risk. Still, this plan of school-keeping remained uppermost; and in the evenings of this winter of 1839-40, the alterations that would be necessary in the house, and the best way of convincing their aunt of the wisdom of their project, formed the principal subject of their conversation.

This anxiety weighed upon their minds rather heavily, during the months of dark and dreary weather. Nor were external events, among the circle of their friends, of a cheerful character. In January, 1840, Charlotte heard of the death of a young girl who had been a pupil of hers, and a schoolfellow of

Anne's, at the time when the sisters were together at Roe Head; and had attached herself very strongly to the latter, who, in return, bestowed upon her much quiet affection. It was a sad day when the intelligence of this young creature's death arrived. Charlotte wrote thus on January 12th, 1840: —

"Your letter, which I received this morning, was one of painful interest. Anne C., it seems, is *dead*; when I saw her last, she was a young, beautiful, and happy girl; and now 'life's fitful fever' is over with her, and she 'sleeps well.' I shall never see her again. It is a sorrowful thought; for she was a warm-hearted, affectionate being, and I cared for her. Wherever I seek for her now in this world, she cannot be found, no more than a flower or a leaf which withered twenty years ago. A bereavement of this kind gives one a glimpse of the feeling those must have who have seen all drop round them, friend after friend, and are left to end their pilgrimage alone. But tears are fruitless, and I try not to repine."

During this winter, Charlotte employed her leisure hours in writing a story. Some fragments of the manuscript yet remain, but it is in too small a hand to be read without great fatigue to the eyes; and one cares the less to read it, as she herself condemned it, in the preface to the "Professor," by saying that in this story she had got over such taste as she might once have had for the "ornamental and redundant in composition." The beginning, too, as she acknowledges, was on a scale commensurate with one of Richardson's novels, of seven or eight volumes. I gather some of these particulars from a copy of a letter, apparently in reply to one from Wordsworth, to whom she had sent the commencement of the story, sometime in the summer of 1840.

"Authors are generally very tenacious of their productions, but I am not so much attached to this but that I can give it up without much distress. No doubt, if I had gone on, I should have made quite a Richardsonian concern of it . . . I had materials in my head for half-a-dozen volumes . . . Of course, it is with considerable regret I relinquish any scheme so charming as the one I have sketched. It is very edifying and profitable to create a world out of your own brains, and people it with inhabitants, who are so many Melchisedecs, and have no father nor mother but your own imagination . . . I am sorry I did not exist fifty or sixty years ago, when the 'Ladies' Magazine' was flourishing like a green bay-tree. In that case, I make no doubt, my aspirations after literary fame would have met with due encouragement, and I should have had the pleasure of introducing Messrs. Percy and West into the very best society, and recording all their sayings and doings in double-columned close-printed pages . . . I recollect, when I was a child, getting hold of some antiquated volumes, and reading them by stealth with the most exquisite pleasure. You give a correct description of the patient Grisels of those days. My aunt was one of them; and to this day she thinks the tales of the 'Ladies' Magazine' infinitely superior to any trash of modern literature. So do I; for I read them in childhood, and childhood has a very strong faculty of admiration, but a very weak one of criticism . . . I am pleased that you cannot quite decide whether I am an attorney's clerk or a novel-reading dress-maker. I will not help you at all in the discovery; and as to my handwriting, or the ladylike touches in my style and imagery, you must not draw any conclusion from that — I may employ an amanuensis. Seriously, sir, I am very much obliged to you for your kind and candid letter. I almost wonder you took the trouble to read and notice the novelette of an anonymous scribe, who had not even the manners to tell you whether he was a man or a woman, or whether his 'C. T.' meant Charles Timms or Charlotte Tomkins."

There are two or three things noticeable in the letter from which these extracts are taken. The first is the initials with which she had evidently signed the former one to which she alludes. About this time, to her more familiar correspondents, she occasionally calls herself "Charles Thunder," making a kind of pseudonym for herself out of her Christian name, and the meaning of her Greek surname. In the next place, there is a touch of assumed smartness, very different from the simple, womanly, dignified letter which she had written to Southey, under nearly similar circumstances, three years before. I imagine the cause of this difference to be twofold. Southey, in his reply to her first letter, had appealed to the higher parts of her nature, in calling her to consider whether literature was, or was not, the best course for a woman to pursue. But the person to whom she addressed this one had evidently confined himself to purely literary criticisms, besides which, her sense of humour was tickled by the perplexity which her correspondent felt as to whether he was addressing a man or a woman. She rather wished to encourage the former idea; and, in consequence, possibly, assumed something of the flippancy which very probably existed in her brother's style of conversation, from whom she would derive her notions of young manhood, not likely, as far as refinement was concerned, to be improved by the other specimens she had seen, such as the curates whom she afterwards represented in "Shirley."

These curates were full of strong, High-Church feeling. Belligerent by nature, it was well for their professional character that they had, as clergymen, sufficient scope for the exercise of their warlike propensities. Mr. Brontë, with all his warm regard for Church and State, had a great respect for mental freedom; and, though he was the last man in the world to conceal his opinions, he lived in perfect amity with all the respectable part of those who differed from him. Not so the curates. Dissent was schism, and schism was condemned in the Bible. In default of turbaned Saracens, they entered on a crusade against Methodists in broadcloth; and the consequence was that the Methodists and Baptists refused to pay the church-rates. Miss Brontë thus describes the state of things at this time: —

"Little Haworth has been all in a bustle about church-rates, since you were here. We had a stirring meeting in the schoolroom. Papa took the chair, and Mr. C. and Mr. W. acted as his supporters, one on each side. There was violent opposition, which set Mr. C.'s Irish blood in a ferment, and if papa had not kept him quiet, partly by persuasion and partly by compulsion, he would have given the Dissenters their kale through the reek — a Scotch proverb, which I will explain to you another time. He and Mr. W. both bottled up their wrath for that time, but it was only to explode with redoubled force at a future period. We had two sermons on dissent, and its consequences, preached last Sunday — one in the afternoon by Mr. W., and one in the evening by Mr. C. All the Dissenters were invited to come and hear, and they actually shut up their chapels, and came in a body; of course the church was crowded. Mr. W. delivered a noble, eloquent, High-Church, Apostolical-Succession discourse, in which he banged the Dissenters most fearlessly and unflinchingly. I thought they had got enough for one while, but it was nothing to the dose that was thrust down their throats in the evening. A keener, cleverer, bolder, and more heart-stirring harangue than that which Mr. C. delivered from Haworth pulpit, last Sunday evening, I never heard. He did not rant; he did not cant; he did not whine; he did not sniggle; he just got up and spoke with the boldness of a man who was impressed with the truth of what he was saying, who has no fear of his enemies, and no dread of consequences. His sermon lasted an hour, yet I was sorry when it was done. I do not say that I agree either with him, or with Mr. W., either in all or in half their opinions. I consider them bigoted, intolerant, and wholly unjustifiable on the ground of common sense. My conscience will not let me be either a Puseyite or a Hookist; *mais*, if I were a Dissenter, I would have taken the first opportunity of kicking, or of horse-whipping both the gentlemen for their stern, bitter attack on my religion and its teachers. But in spite of all this, I admired the noble integrity which could dictate so fearless an opposition against so strong an antagonist.

“P.S. — Mr. W. has given another lecture at the Keighley Mechanics’ Institution, and papa has also given a lecture; both are spoken of very highly in the newspapers, and it is mentioned as a matter of wonder that such displays of intellect should emanate from the village of Haworth, ‘situated among the bogs and mountains, and, until very lately, supposed to be in a state of semi-barbarism.’ Such are the words of the newspaper.”

To fill up the account of this outwardly eventless year, I may add a few more extracts from the letters entrusted to me.

“May 15th, 1840.

“Do not be over-persuaded to marry a man you can never respect — I do not say *love*; because, I think, if you can respect a person before marriage, moderate love at least will come after; and as to intense *passion*, I am convinced that that is no desirable feeling. In the first place, it seldom or never meets with a requital; and, in the second place, if it did, the feeling would be only temporary: it would last the honeymoon, and then, perhaps, give place to disgust, or indifference, worse, perhaps, than disgust. Certainly this would be the case on the man’s part; and on the woman’s — God help her, if she is left to love passionately and alone.

"I am tolerably well convinced that I shall never marry at all. Reason tells me so, and I am not so utterly the slave of feeling but that I can *occasionally hear* her voice."

"June 2nd, 1840.

"M. is not yet come to Haworth; but she is to come on the condition that I first go and stay a few days there. If all be well, I shall go next Wednesday. I may stay at G — - until Friday or Saturday, and the early part of the following week I shall pass with you, if you will have me — which last sentence indeed is nonsense, for as I shall be glad to see you, so I know you will be glad to see me. This arrangement will not allow much time, but it is the only practicable one which, considering all the circumstances, I can effect. Do not urge me to stay more than two or three days, because I shall be obliged to refuse you. I intend to walk to Keighley, there to take the coach as far as B — -, then to get some one to carry my box, and to walk the rest of the way to G-. If I manage this, I think I shall contrive very well. I shall reach B. by about five o'clock, and then I shall have the cool of the evening for the walk. I have communicated the whole arrangement to M. I desire exceedingly to see both her and you. Good-bye.

C. B.

C. B.

C. B.

C. B.

"If you have any better plan to suggest I am open to conviction, provided your plan is practicable."

"August 20th, 1840.

"Have you seen anything of Miss H. lately? I wish they, or somebody else, would get me a situation. I have answered advertisements without number, but my applications have met with no success.

"I have got another bale of French books from G. containing upwards of forty volumes. I have read about half. They are like the rest, clever, wicked, sophistical, and immoral. The best of it is, they give one a thorough idea of France and Paris, and are the best substitute for French conversation that I have met with.

"I positively have nothing more to say to you, for I am in a stupid humour. You must excuse this letter not being quite as long as your own. I have written to you soon, that you might not look after the postman in vain. Preserve this writing as a curiosity in caligraphy — I think it is exquisite — all brilliant black blots, and utterly illegible letters. 'CALIBAN.'

"'The wind bloweth where it listeth. Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.' That, I believe, is Scripture, though in what chapter or book, or whether it be correctly quoted, I can't possibly say. However, it behoves me to write a letter to a young woman of the name of E., with whom I was once acquainted, 'in life's morning march, when my spirit was young.' This young woman wished me to write to her some time since, though I have nothing to say — I e'en put it off, day by day, till at last, fearing that she will 'curse me by her gods,' I feel constrained to sit down and tack a few lines together, which she may call a letter or not as she pleases. Now if the young woman expects sense in this production, she will find herself miserably disappointed. I shall dress her a dish of salmagundi — I shall cook a hash — compound a stew — toss up an *omelette soufflèe à la Française*, and send it her with my respects. The wind, which is very high up in our hills of Judea, though, I suppose, down in the Philistine flats of B. parish it is nothing to speak of, has produced the same effects on the contents of my knowledge-box that a quaigh of usquebaugh does upon those of most other bipeds. I see everything *couleur de rose*, and am strongly inclined to dance a jig, if I knew how. I think I must partake of the nature of a pig or an ass — both which animals are strongly affected by a high wind. From what quarter the wind blows I cannot tell, for I never could in my life; but I should very much like to know how the great brewing-tub of Bridlington Bay works, and what sort of yeasty froth rises just now on the waves.

"A woman of the name of Mrs. B., it seems, wants a teacher. I wish she would have me; and I have written to Miss W. to tell her so. Verily, it is a delightful thing to live here at home, at full liberty to do just what one pleases. But I recollect some scrubby old fable about grasshoppers and ants, by a scrubby old knave yclept Æsop; the grasshoppers sang all the summer, and starved all the winter.

"A distant relation of mine, one Patrick Branwell, has set off to seek his fortune in the wild, wandering, adventurous, romantic, knight-errant-like capacity of clerk on the Leeds and Manchester Railroad. Leeds and Manchester — where are they? Cities in the wilderness, like Tadmor, alias Palmyra — are they not?

"There is one little trait respecting Mr. W. which lately came to my knowledge, which gives a glimpse of the better side of his character. Last Saturday night he had been sitting an hour in the parlour with Papa; and, as he went away, I heard Papa say to him 'What is the matter with you? You seem in very low spirits to-night.' 'Oh, I don't know. I've been to see a poor young girl, who, I'm afraid, is dying.' 'Indeed; what is her name?' 'Susan Bland, the daughter of John Bland, the superintendent.' Now Susan Bland is my oldest and best scholar in the Sunday-school; and, when I heard that, I thought I would go as soon as I could to see her. I did go on Monday afternoon, and found her on her way to that 'bourn whence no traveller returns.' After sitting with her some time, I happened to ask her mother, if she thought a little port wine would do her good. She replied that the doctor had recommended it, and that when Mr. W. was last there, he had brought them a bottle of wine and jar of preserves. She added, that he was always good-natured to poor folks, and seemed to have a deal of feeling and kindheartedness about him. No doubt, there are defects in his character, but there are also good qualities . . . God bless him! I wonder who, with his advantages, would be without his faults. I know many of his faulty actions, many of his weak points; yet, where I am, he shall always find rather a defender than an accuser. To be sure, my opinion will go but a very little way to decide his character; what of that? People should do right as far as their ability extends. You are not to suppose, from all this, that Mr. W. and I are on very amiable terms; we are not at all. We are distant, cold, and reserved. We seldom speak; and when we do, it is only to exchange the most trivial and common-place remarks."

The Mrs. B. alluded to in this letter, as in want of a governess, entered into a correspondence with Miss Brontë, and expressed herself much pleased with the letters she received from her, with the "style and candour of the application," in which Charlotte had taken care to tell her, that if she wanted a showy, elegant, or fashionable person, her correspondent was not fitted for such a situation. But Mrs. B. required her governess to give instructions in music and singing, for which Charlotte was not qualified: and, accordingly, the negotiation fell through. But Miss Brontë was not one to sit down in despair after disappointment. Much as she disliked the life of a private governess, it was her duty to relieve her father of the burden of her support, and this was the only way open to her. So she set to advertising and inquiring with fresh vigour.

In the meantime, a little occurrence took place, described in one of her letters, which I shall give, as it shows her instinctive aversion to a particular class of men, whose vices some have supposed she looked upon with indulgence. The extract tells all that need be known, for the purpose I have in view, of the miserable pair to whom it relates.

"You remember Mr. and Mrs. — -? Mrs. — - came here the other day, with a most melancholy tale of her wretched husband's drunken, extravagant, profligate habits. She asked Papa's advice; there was nothing she said but ruin before them. They owed debts which they could never pay. She expected Mr. — -'s instant dismissal from his curacy; she knew, from bitter experience, that his vices were utterly hopeless. He treated her and her child savagely; with much more to the same effect. Papa advised her to leave him for ever, and go home, if she had a home to go to. She said, this was what she had long resolved to do; and she would leave him directly, as soon as Mr. B. dismissed him. She expressed great disgust and contempt towards him, and did not affect to have the shadow of regard in any way. I do not wonder at this, but I do wonder she should ever marry a man towards whom her feelings must always have been pretty much the same as they are now. I am morally certain no decent woman could experience anything but aversion towards such a man as Mr. — -. Before I knew, or suspected his character, and when I rather wondered at his versatile talents, I felt it in an uncontrollable degree. I hated to talk with him — hated to look at him; though as I was not certain that there was substantial reason for such a dislike, and thought it absurd to trust to mere instinct, I both concealed and repressed the feeling as much as I could; and, on all occasions, treated him with as much civility as I was mistress of. I was struck with Mary's expression of a similar feeling at first sight; she said, when we left him, 'That is a hideous man, Charlotte!' I thought 'He is indeed.'"

CHAPTER X

Early in March, 1841, Miss Brontë obtained her second and last situation as a governess. This time she esteemed herself fortunate in becoming a member of a kind-hearted and friendly household. The master of it, she especially regarded as a valuable friend, whose advice helped to guide her in one very important step of her life. But as her definite acquirements were few, she had to eke them out by employing her leisure time in needlework; and altogether her position was that of "bonne" or nursery governess, liable to repeated and never-ending calls upon her time. This description of uncertain, yet perpetual employment, subject to the exercise of another person's will at all hours of the day, was peculiarly trying to one whose life at home had been full of abundant leisure. *Idle* she never was in any place, but of the multitude of small talks, plans, duties, pleasures, &c., that make up most people's days, her home life was nearly destitute. This made it possible for her to go through long and deep histories of feeling and imagination, for which others, odd as it sounds, have rarely time. This made it inevitable that — later on, in her too short career — the intensity of her feeling should wear out her physical health. The habit of "making out," which had grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength, had become a part of her nature. Yet all exercise of her strongest and most characteristic faculties was now out of the question. She could not (as while she was at Miss W — -'s) feel, amidst the occupations of the day, that when evening came, she might employ herself in more congenial ways. No doubt, all who enter upon the career of a governess have to relinquish much; no doubt, it must ever be a life of sacrifice; but to Charlotte Brontë it was a perpetual attempt to force all her faculties into a direction for which the whole of her previous life had unfitted them. Moreover, the little Brontës had been brought up motherless; and from knowing nothing of the gaiety and the sportiveness of childhood — from never having experienced caresses or fond attentions themselves — they were ignorant of the very nature of infancy, or how to call out its engaging qualities. Children were to them the troublesome necessities of humanity; they had never been drawn into contact with them in any other way. Years afterwards, when Miss Brontë came to stay with us, she watched our little girls perpetually; and I could not persuade her that they were only average specimens of well brought up children. She was surprised and touched by any sign of thoughtfulness for others, of kindness to animals, or of unselfishness on their part: and constantly maintained that she was in the right, and I in the wrong, when we differed on the point of their unusual excellence. All this must be borne in mind while reading the following letters. And it must likewise be borne in mind — by those who, surviving her, look back upon her life from their mount of observation — how no distaste, no suffering ever made her shrink from any course which she believed it to be her duty to engage in.

“March 3rd, 1841.

“I told some time since, that I meant to get a situation, and when I said so my resolution was quite fixed. I felt that however often I was disappointed, I had no intention of relinquishing my efforts. After being severely baffled two or three times, — after a world of trouble, in the way of correspondence and interviews, — I have at length succeeded, and am fairly established in my new place.

* * * * *

“The house is not very large, but exceedingly comfortable and well regulated; the grounds are fine and extensive. In taking the place, I have made a large sacrifice in the way of salary, in the hope of securing comfort, — by which word I do not mean to express good eating and drinking, or warm fire, or a soft bed, but the society of cheerful faces, and minds and hearts not dug out of a lead-mine, or cut from a marble quarry. My salary is not really more than 16*l.* per annum, though it is nominally 20*l.*, but the expense of washing will be deducted therefrom. My pupils are two in number, a girl of eight, and a boy of six. As to my employers, you will not expect me to say much about their characters when I tell you that I only arrived here yesterday. I have not the faculty of telling an individual’s disposition at first sight. Before I can venture to pronounce on a character, I must see it first under various lights and from various points of view. All I can say therefore is, both Mr. and Mrs. — - seem to me good sort of people. I have as yet had no cause to complain of want of considerateness or civility. My pupils are wild and unbroken, but apparently well-disposed. I wish I may be able to say as much next time I write to you. My earnest wish and endeavour will be to please them. If I can but feel that I am giving satisfaction, and if at the same time I can keep my health, I shall, I hope, be moderately happy. But no one but myself can tell how hard a governess’s work is to me — for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are for the employment. Do not think that I fail to blame myself for this, or that I leave any means unemployed to conquer this feeling. Some of my greatest difficulties lie in things that would appear to you comparatively trivial. I find it so hard to repel the rude familiarity of children. I find it so difficult to ask either servants or mistress for anything I want, however much I want it. It is less pain for me to endure the greatest inconvenience than to go into the kitchen to request its removal. I am a fool. Heaven knows I cannot help it!

“Now can you tell me whether it is considered improper for governesses to ask their friends to come and see them. I do not mean, of course, to stay, but just for a call of an hour or two? If it is not absolute treason, I do fervently request that you will contrive, in some way or other, to let me have a sight of your face. Yet I feel, at the same time, that I am making a very foolish and almost impracticable demand; yet this is only four miles from B — -!"

* * * * *

"March 21st.

"You must excuse a very short answer to your most welcome letter; for my time is entirely occupied. Mrs. — - expected a good deal of sewing from me. I cannot sew much during the day, on account of the children, who require the utmost attention. I am obliged, therefore, to devote the evenings to this business. Write to me often; very long letters. It will do both of us good. This place is far better than — -, but God knows, I have enough to do to keep a good heart in the matter. What you said has cheered me a little. I wish I could always act according to your advice. Home-sickness affects me sorely. I like Mr. — - extremely. The children are over-indulged, and consequently hard at times to manage. *Do, do*, do come and see me; if it be a breach of etiquette, never mind. If you can only stop an hour, come. Talk no more about my forsaking you; my darling, I could not afford to do it. I find it is not in my nature to get on in this weary world without sympathy and attachment in some quarter; and seldom indeed do we find it. It is too great a treasure to be ever wantonly thrown away when once secured."

Miss Brontë had not been many weeks in her new situation before she had a proof of the kind-hearted hospitality of her employers. Mr. — - wrote to her father, and urgently invited him to come and make acquaintance with his daughter's new home, by spending a week with her in it; and Mrs. — - expressed great regret when one of Miss Brontë's friends drove up to the house to leave a letter or parcel, without entering. So she found that all her friends might freely visit her, and that her father would be received with especial gladness. She thankfully acknowledged this kindness in writing to urge her friend afresh to come and see her; which she accordingly did.

"June, 1841.

"You can hardly fancy it possible, I dare say, that I cannot find a quarter of an hour to scribble a note in; but so it is; and when a note is written, it has to be carried a mile to the post, and that consumes nearly an hour, which is a large portion of the day. Mr. and Mrs. — - have been gone a week. I heard from them this morning. No time is fixed for their return, but I hope it will not be delayed long, or I shall miss the chance of seeing Anne this vacation. She came home, I understand, last Wednesday, and is only to be allowed three weeks' vacation, because the family she is with are going to Scarborough. *I should like to see her*, to judge for myself of the state of her health. I dare not trust any other person's report, no one seems minute enough in their observations. I should very much have liked you to have seen her. I have got on very well with the servants and children so far; yet it is dreary, solitary work. You can tell as well as me the lonely feeling of being without a companion."

Soon after this was written, Mr. and Mrs. — - returned, in time to allow Charlotte to go and look after Anne's health, which, as she found to her intense anxiety, was far from strong. What could she do to nurse and cherish up this little sister, the youngest of them all? Apprehension about her brought up once more the idea of keeping a school. If, by this means, they three could live together, and maintain themselves, all might go well. They would have some time of their own, in which to try again and yet again at that literary career, which, in spite of all baffling difficulties, was never quite set aside as an ultimate object; but far the strongest motive with Charlotte was the conviction that Anne's health was so delicate that it required a degree of tending which none but her sister could give. Thus she wrote during those midsummer holidays.

"Haworth, July 18th, 1841.

"We waited long and anxiously for you, on the Thursday that you promised to come. I quite wearied my eyes with watching from the window, eye-glass in hand, and sometimes spectacles on nose. However, you are not to blame . . . and as to disappointment, why, all must suffer disappointment at some period or other of their lives. But a hundred things I had to say to you will now be forgotten, and never said. There is a project hatching in this house, which both Emily and I anxiously wished to discuss with you. The project is yet in its infancy, hardly peeping from its shell; and whether it will ever come out a fine full-fledged chicken, or will turn addle and die before it cheeps, is one of those considerations that are but dimly revealed by the oracles of futurity. Now, don't be nonplussed by all this metaphorical mystery. I talk of a plain and everyday occurrence, though, in Delphic style, I wrap up the information in figures of speech concerning eggs, chickens etceatera, etcaeterorum. To come to the point: Papa and aunt talk, by fits and starts, of our — id est, Emily, Anne, and myself — commencing a school! I have often, you know, said how much I wished such a thing; but I never could conceive where the capital was to come from for making such a speculation. I was well aware, indeed, that aunt had money, but I always considered that she was the last person who would offer a loan for the purpose in question. A loan, however, she *has* offered, or rather intimates that she perhaps *will* offer in case pupils can be secured, an eligible situation obtained, &c. This sounds very fair, but still there are matters to be considered which throw something of a damp upon the scheme. I do not expect that aunt will sink more than 150*l*. in such a venture; and would it be possible to establish a respectable (not by any means a *showy*) school, and to commence housekeeping with a capital of only that amount? Propound the question to your sister, if you think she can answer it; if not, don't say a word on the subject. As to getting into debt, that is a thing we could none of us reconcile our mind to for a moment. We do not care how modest, how humble our commencement be, so it be made on sure grounds, and have a safe foundation. In thinking of all possible and impossible places where we could establish a school, I have thought of Burlington, or rather of the neighbourhood of Burlington. Do you remember whether there was any other school there besides that of Miss — -? This is, of course, a perfectly crude and random idea. There are a hundred reasons why it should be an impracticable one. We have no connections, no acquaintances there; it is far from home, &c. Still, I fancy the ground in the East Riding is less fully occupied than in the West. Much inquiry and consideration will be necessary, of course, before any place is decided on; and I fear much time will elapse before any plan is executed . . . Write as soon as you can. I shall not leave my present situation till my future prospects assume a more fixed and definite aspect."

A fortnight afterwards, we see that the seed has been sown which was to grow up into a plan materially influencing her future life.

"August 7th, 1841.

"This is Saturday evening; I have put the children to bed; now I am going to sit down and answer your letter. I am again by myself — housekeeper and governess — for Mr. and Mrs. — - are staying at — -. To speak truth, though I am solitary while they are away, it is still by far the happiest part of my time. The children are under decent control, the servants are very observant and attentive to me, and the occasional absence of the master and mistress relieves me from the duty of always endeavouring to seem cheerful and conversable. Martha — -, it appears, is in the way of enjoying great advantages; so is Mary, for you will be surprised to hear that she is returning immediately to the Continent with her brother; not, however, to stay there, but to take a month's tour and recreation. I have had a long letter from Mary, and a packet containing a present of a very handsome black silk scarf, and a pair of beautiful kid gloves, bought at Brussels. Of course, I was in one sense pleased with the gift — pleased that they should think of me so far off, amidst the excitements of one of the most splendid capitals of Europe; and yet it felt irksome to accept it. I should think Mary and Martha have not more than sufficient pocket-money to supply themselves. I wish they had testified their regard by a less expensive token. Mary's letters spoke of some of the pictures and cathedrals she had seen — pictures the most exquisite, cathedrals the most venerable. I hardly know what swelled to my throat as I read her letter: such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings — wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute. I was tantalised by the consciousness of faculties unexercised, — then all collapsed, and I despaired. My dear, I would hardly make that confession to any one but yourself; and to you, rather in a letter than *vivâ voce*. These rebellious and absurd emotions were only momentary; I quelled them in five minutes. I hope they will not revive, for they were acutely painful. No further steps have been taken about the project I mentioned to you, nor probably will be for the present; but Emily, and Anne, and I, keep it in view. It is our polar star, and we look to it in all circumstances of despondency. I begin to suspect I am writing in a strain which will make you think I am unhappy. This is far from being the case; on the contrary, I know my place is a favourable one, for a governess. What dismays and haunts me sometimes, is a conviction that I have no natural knack for my vocation. If teaching only were requisite, it would be smooth and easy; but it is the living in other people's houses — the estrangement from one's real character — the adoption of a cold, rigid, apathetic exterior, that is painful . . . You will not mention our school project at present. A project not actually commenced is always uncertain. Write to me often, my dear Nell; you *know* your letters are valued. Your 'loving child' (as you choose to call me so),

C. B.

"P.S. I am well in health; don't fancy I am not, but I have one aching feeling at my heart (I must allude to it, though I had resolved not to). It is about Anne; she has so much to endure: far, far more than I ever had. When my thoughts turn to her, they always see her as a patient, persecuted stranger. I know what concealed susceptibility is in her nature, when her feelings are wounded. I wish I could be with her, to administer a little balm. She is more lonely — less gifted with the power of making friends, even than I am. 'Drop the subject.'"

She could bear much for herself; but she could not patiently bear the sorrows of others, especially of her sisters; and again, of the two sisters, the idea of the little, gentle, youngest suffering in lonely patience, was insupportable to her. Something must be done. No matter if the desired end were far away; all time was lost in which she was not making progress, however slow, towards it. To have a school, was to have some portion of daily leisure, uncontrolled but by her own sense of duty; it was for the three sisters, loving each other with so passionate an affection, to be together under one roof, and yet earning their own subsistence; above all, it was to have the power of watching over these two whose life and happiness were ever to Charlotte far more than her own. But no trembling impatience should lead her to take an unwise step in haste. She inquired in every direction she could, as to the chances which a new school might have of success. In all there seemed more establishments like the one which the sisters wished to set up than could be supported. What was to be done? Superior advantages must be offered. But how? They themselves abounded in thought, power, and information; but these are qualifications scarcely fit to be inserted in a prospectus. Of French they knew something; enough to read it fluently, but hardly enough to teach it in competition with natives or professional masters. Emily and Anne had some knowledge of music; but here again it was doubtful whether, without more instruction, they could engage to give lessons in it.

Just about this time, Miss W — - was thinking of relinquishing her school at Dewsbury Moor; and offered to give it up in favour of her old pupils, the Brontës. A sister of hers had taken the active management since the time when Charlotte was a teacher; but the number of pupils had diminished; and, if the Brontës undertook it, they would have to try and work it up to its former state of prosperity. This, again, would require advantages on their part which they did not at present possess, but which Charlotte caught a glimpse of. She resolved to follow the clue, and never to rest till she had reached a successful issue. With the forced calm of a suppressed eagerness, that sends a glow of desire through every word of the following letter, she wrote to her aunt thus.

“Dear Aunt,

“Sept. 29th, 1841.

“I have heard nothing of Miss W — - yet since I wrote to her, intimating that I would accept her offer. I cannot conjecture the reason of this long silence, unless some unforeseen impediment has occurred in concluding the bargain. Meantime, a plan has been suggested and approved by Mr. and Mrs. — - ” (the father and mother of her pupils) “and others, which I wish now to impart to you. My friends recommend me, if I desire to secure permanent success, to delay commencing the school for six months longer, and by all means to contrive, by hook or by crook, to spend the intervening time in some school on the continent. They say schools in England are so numerous, competition so great, that without some such step towards attaining superiority, we shall probably have a very hard struggle, and may fail in the end. They say, moreover, that the loan of 100*l.*, which you have been so kind as to offer us, will, perhaps, not be all required now, as Miss W — - will lend us the furniture; and that, if the speculation is intended to be a good and successful one, half the sum, at least, ought to be laid out in the manner I have mentioned, thereby insuring a more speedy repayment both of interest and principal.

“I would not go to France or to Paris. I would go to Brussels, in Belgium. The cost of the journey there, at the dearest rate of travelling, would be 5*l.*; living is there little more than half as dear as it is in England, and the facilities for education are equal or superior to any other place in Europe. In half a year, I could acquire a thorough familiarity with French. I could improve greatly in Italian, and even get a dash of German, i.e., providing my health continued as good as it is now. Mary is now staying at Brussels, at a first-rate establishment there. I should not think of going to the Château de Kokleberg, where she is resident, as the terms are much too high; but if I wrote to her, she, with the assistance of Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the British Chaplain, would be able to secure me a cheap, decent residence and respectable protection. I should have the opportunity of seeing her frequently; she would make me acquainted with the city; and, with the assistance of her cousins, I should probably be introduced to connections far more improving, polished, and cultivated, than any I have yet known.

“These are advantages which would turn to real account, when we actually commenced a school; and, if Emily could share them with me, we could take a footing in the world afterwards which we can never do now. I say Emily instead of Anne; for Anne might take her turn at some future period, if our school answered. I feel certain, while I am writing, that you will see the propriety of what I say. You always like to use your money to the best advantage. You are not fond of making shabby purchases; when you do confer a favour, it is often done in style; and depend upon it, 50*l*., or 100*l*., thus laid out, would be well employed. Of course, I know no other friend in the world to whom I could apply on this subject except yourself. I feel an absolute conviction that, if this advantage were allowed us, it would be the making of us for life. Papa will, perhaps, think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but who ever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University, he was as ambitious as I am now. I want us *all* to get on. I know we have talents, and I want them to be turned to account. I look to you, aunt, to help us. I think you will not refuse. I know, if you consent, it shall not be my fault if you ever repent your kindness.”

This letter was written from the house in which she was residing as governess. It was some little time before an answer came. Much had to be talked over between the father and aunt in Haworth Parsonage. At last consent was given. Then, and not till then, she confided her plan to an intimate friend. She was not one to talk over-much about any project, while it remained uncertain — to speak about her labour, in any direction, while its result was doubtful.

“Nov. 2nd, 1841.

“Now let us begin to quarrel. In the first place, I must consider whether I will commence operations on the defensive, or the offensive. The defensive, I think. You say, and I see plainly, that your feelings have been hurt by an apparent want of confidence on my part. You heard from others of Miss W —-’s overtures before I communicated them to you myself. This is true. I was deliberating on plans important to my future prospects. I never exchanged a letter with you on the subject. True again. This appears strange conduct to a friend, near and dear, long-known, and never found wanting. Most true. I cannot give you my *excuses* for this behaviour; this word *excuse* implies confession of a fault, and I do not feel that I have been in fault. The plain fact is, I *was* not, I am not now, certain of my destiny. On the contrary, I have been most uncertain, perplexed with contradictory schemes and proposals. My time, as I have often told you, is fully occupied; yet I had many letters to write, which it was absolutely necessary should be written. I knew it would avail nothing to write to you then to say I was in doubt and uncertainty — hoping this, fearing that, anxious, eagerly desirous to do what seemed impossible to be done. When I thought of you in that busy interval, it was to resolve, that you should know all when my way was clear, and my grand end attained. If I could, I would always work in silence and obscurity, and let my efforts be known by their results. Miss W — - did most kindly propose that I should come to Dewsbury Moor and attempt to revive the school her sister had relinquished. She offered me the use of her furniture. At first, I received the proposal cordially, and prepared to do my utmost to bring about success; but a fire was kindled in my very heart, which I could not quench. I so longed to increase my attainments — to become something better than I am; a glimpse of what I felt, I showed to you in one of my former letters — only a glimpse; Mary cast oil upon the flames — encouraged me, and in her own strong, energetic language, heartened me on. I longed to go to Brussels; but how could I get there? I wished for one, at least, of my sisters to share the advantage with me. I fixed on Emily. She deserved the reward, I knew. How could the point be managed? In extreme excitement, I wrote a letter home, which carried the day. I made an appeal to aunt for assistance, which was answered by consent. Things are not settled; yet it is sufficient to say we have a *chance* of going for half a year. Dewsbury Moor is relinquished. Perhaps, fortunately so. In my secret soul, I believe there is no cause to regret it. My plans for the future are bounded to this intention: if I once get to Brussels, and if my health is spared, I will do my best to make the utmost of every advantage that shall come within my reach. When the half-year is expired, I will do what I can.

* * * * *

"Believe me, though I was born in April, the month of cloud and sunshine, I am not changeful. My spirits are unequal, and sometimes I speak vehemently, and sometimes I say nothing at all; but I have a steady regard for you, and if you will let the cloud and shower pass by, be sure the sun is always behind, obscured, but still existing."

At Christmas she left her situation, after a parting with her employers which seems to have affected and touched her greatly. "They only made too much of me," was her remark, after leaving this family; "I did not deserve it."

* * * * *

All four children hoped to meet together at their father's house this December. Branwell expected to have a short leave of absence from his employment as a clerk on the Leeds and Manchester Railway, in which he had been engaged for five months. Anne arrived before Christmas-day. She had rendered herself so valuable in her difficult situation, that her employers vehemently urged her to return, although she had announced her resolution to leave them; partly on account of the harsh treatment she had received, and partly because her stay at home, during her sisters' absence in Belgium, seemed desirable, when the age of the three remaining inhabitants of the parsonage was taken into consideration.

After some correspondence and much talking over plans at home, it seemed better, in consequence of letters which they received from Brussels giving a discouraging account of the schools there, that Charlotte and Emily should go to an institution at Lille, in the north of France, which was highly recommended by Baptist Noel, and other clergymen. Indeed, at the end of January, it was arranged that they were to set off for this place in three weeks, under the escort of a French lady, then visiting in London. The terms were 50*l.* each pupil, for board and French alone, but a separate room was to be allowed for this sum; without this indulgence, it was lower. Charlotte writes:—

"January 20th, 1842.

"I consider it kind in aunt to consent to an extra sum for a separate room. We shall find it a great privilege in many ways. I regret the change from Brussels to Lille on many accounts, chiefly that I shall not see Martha. Mary has been indefatigably kind in providing me with information. She has grudged no labour, and scarcely any expense, to that end. Mary's price is above rubies. I have, in fact, two friends — you and her — staunch and true, in whose faith and sincerity I have as strong a belief as I have in the Bible. I have bothered you both — you especially; but you always get the tongs and heap coals of fire upon my head. I have had letters to write lately to Brussels, to Lille, and to London. I have lots of chemises, nightgowns, pocket-handkerchiefs, and pockets to make; besides clothes to repair. I have been, every week since I came home, expecting to see Branwell, and he has never been able to get over yet. We fully expect him, however, next Saturday. Under these circumstances how can I go visiting? You tantalize me to death with talking of conversations by the fireside. Depend upon it, we are not to have any such for many a long month to come. I get an interesting impression of old age upon my face; and when you see me next I shall certainly wear caps and spectacles."

CHAPTER XI

I am not aware of all the circumstances which led to the relinquishment of the Lille plan. Brussels had had from the first a strong attraction for Charlotte; and the idea of going there, in preference to any other place, had only been given up in consequence of the information received of the second-rate character of its schools. In one of her letters reference has been made to Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the chaplain of the British Embassy. At the request of his brother — a clergyman, living not many miles from Haworth, and an acquaintance of Mr. Brontë's — she made much inquiry, and at length, after some discouragement in her search, heard of a school which seemed in every respect desirable. There was an English lady who had long lived in the Orleans family, amidst the various fluctuations of their fortunes, and who, when the Princess Louise was married to King Leopold, accompanied her to Brussels, in the capacity of reader. This lady's granddaughter was receiving her education at the pensionnat of Madame Héger; and so satisfied was the grandmother with the kind of instruction given, that she named the establishment, with high encomiums, to Mrs. Jerkins; and, in consequence, it was decided that, if the terms suited, Miss Brontë and Emily should proceed thither. M. Héger informs me that, on receipt of a letter from Charlotte, making very particular inquiries as to the possible amount of what are usually termed "extras," he and his wife were so much struck by the simple earnest tone of the letter, that they said to each other: — "These are the daughters of an English pastor, of moderate means, anxious to learn with an ulterior view of instructing others, and to whom the risk of additional expense is of great consequence. Let us name a specific sum, within which all expenses shall be included."

This was accordingly done; the agreement was concluded, and the Brontës prepared to leave their native county for the first time, if we except the melancholy and memorable residence at Cowan Bridge. Mr. Brontë determined to accompany his daughters. Mary and her brother, who were experienced in foreign travelling, were also of the party. Charlotte first saw London in the day or two they now stopped there; and, from an expression in one of her subsequent letters, they all, I believe, stayed at the Chapter Coffee House, Paternoster Row — a strange, old-fashioned tavern, of which I shall have more to say hereafter.

Mary's account of their journey is thus given.

"In passing through London, she seemed to think our business was and ought to be, to see all the pictures and statues we could. She knew the artists, and know where other productions of theirs were to be found. I don't remember what we saw except St. Paul's. Emily was like her in these habits of mind, but certainly never took her opinion, but always had one to offer . . . I don't know what Charlotte thought of Brussels. We arrived in the dark, and went next morning to our respective schools to see them. We were, of course, much preoccupied, and our prospects gloomy. Charlotte used to like the country round Brussels. 'At the top of every hill you see something.' She took, long solitary walks on the occasional holidays."

Mr. Brontë took his daughters to the Rue d'Isabelle, Brussels; remained one night at Mr. Jenkins'; and straight returned to his wild Yorkshire village.

What a contrast to that must the Belgian capital have presented to those two young women thus left behind! Suffering acutely from every strange and unaccustomed contact — far away from their beloved home, and the dear moors beyond — their indomitable will was their great support. Charlotte's own words, with regard to Emily, are: —

"After the age of twenty, having meantime studied alone with diligence and perseverance, she went with me to an establishment on the continent. The same suffering and conflict ensued, heightened by the strong recoil of her upright heretic and English spirit from the gentle Jesuitry of the foreign and Romish system. Once more she seemed sinking, but this time she rallied through the mere force of resolution: with inward remorse and shame she looked back on her former failure, and resolved to conquer, but the victory cost her dear. She was never happy till she carried her hard-won knowledge back to the remote English village, the old parsonage-house, and desolate Yorkshire hills."

They wanted learning. They came for learning. They would learn. Where they had a distinct purpose to be achieved in intercourse with their fellows, they forgot themselves; at all other times they were miserably shy. Mrs. Jenkins told me that she used to ask them to spend Sundays and holidays with her, until she found that they felt more pain than pleasure from such visits. Emily hardly ever uttered more than a monosyllable. Charlotte was sometimes excited sufficiently to speak eloquently and well — on certain subjects; but before her tongue was thus loosened, she had a habit of gradually wheeling round on her chair, so as almost to conceal her face from the person to whom she was speaking.

And yet there was much in Brussels to strike a responsive chord in her powerful imagination. At length she was seeing somewhat of that grand old world of which she had dreamed. As the gay crowds passed by her, so had gay crowds paced those streets for centuries, in all their varying costumes. Every spot told an historic tale, extending back into the fabulous ages when Jan and Jannika, the aboriginal giant and giantess, looked over the wall, forty feet high, of what is now the Rue Villa Hermosa, and peered down upon the new settlers who were to turn them out of the country in which they had lived since the deluge. The great solemn Cathedral of St. Gudule, the religious paintings, the striking forms and ceremonies of the Romish Church — all made a deep impression on the girls, fresh from the bare walls and simple worship of Haworth Church. And then they were indignant with themselves for having been susceptible of this impression, and their stout Protestant hearts arrayed themselves against the false Duessa that had thus imposed upon them.

The very building they occupied as pupils, in Madame Héger's pensionnat, had its own ghostly train of splendid associations, marching for ever, in shadowy procession, through and through the ancient rooms, and shaded alleys of the gardens. From the splendour of to-day in the Rue Royale, if you turn aside, near the statue of the General Beliard, you look down four flights of broad stone steps upon the Rue d'Isabelle. The chimneys of the houses in it are below your feet. Opposite to the lowest flight of steps, there is a large old mansion facing you, with a spacious walled garden behind — and to the right of it. In front of this garden, on the same side as the mansion, and with great boughs of trees sweeping over their lowly roofs, is a row of small, picturesque, old-fashioned cottages, not unlike, in degree and uniformity, to the almshouses so often seen in an English country town. The Rue d'Isabelle looks as though it had been untouched by the innovations of the builder for the last three centuries; and yet any one might drop a stone into it from the back windows of the grand modern hotels in the Rue Royale, built and furnished in the newest Parisian fashion.

In the thirteenth century, the Rue d'Isabelle was called the Fossé-aux-Chiens; and the kennels for the ducal hounds occupied the place where Madame Héger's pensionnat now stands. A hospital (in the ancient large meaning of the word) succeeded to the kennel. The houseless and the poor, perhaps the leprous, were received, by the brethren of a religious order, in a building on this sheltered site; and what had been a fosse for defence, was filled up with herb-gardens and orchards for upwards of a hundred years. Then came the aristocratic guild of the cross-bow men — that company the members whereof were required to prove their noble descent — untainted for so many generations, before they could be admitted into the guild; and, being admitted, were required to swear a solemn oath, that no other pastime or exercise should take up any part of their leisure, the whole of which was to be devoted to the practice of the noble art of shooting with the cross-bow. Once a year a grand match was held, under the patronage of some saint, to whose church-steeple was affixed the bird, or semblance of a bird, to be hit by the victor. The conqueror in the game was Roi des Arbalétriers for the coming year, and received a jewelled decoration accordingly, which he was entitled to wear for twelve months; after which he restored it to the guild, to be again striven for. The family of him who died during the year that he was king, were bound to present the decoration to the church of the patron saint of the guild, and to furnish a similar prize to be contended for afresh. These noble cross-bow men of the middle ages formed a sort of armed guard to the powers in existence, and almost invariably took the aristocratic, in preference to the democratic side, in the numerous civil dissensions of the Flemish towns. Hence they were protected by the authorities, and easily obtained favourable and sheltered sites for their exercise-ground. And thus they came to occupy the old fosse, and took possession of the great orchard of the hospital, lying tranquil and sunny in the hollow below the rampart.

But, in the sixteenth century, it became necessary to construct a street through the exercise-ground of the "Arbalétriers du Grand Serment," and, after much delay, the company were induced by the beloved Infanta Isabella to give up the requisite plot of ground. In recompense for this, Isabella — who herself was a member of the guild, and had even shot down the bird, and been queen in 1615 — made many presents to the arbalétriers; and, in return, the grateful city, which had long wanted a nearer road to St. Gudule, but been baffled by the noble archers, called the street after her name. She, as a sort of indemnification to the arbalétriers, caused a "great mansion" to be built for their accommodation in the new Rue d'Isabelle. This mansion was placed in front of their exercise-ground, and was of a square shape. On a remote part of the walls, may still be read —

PHILLIPPO IIII. HISPAN. REGE. ISABELLA-CLARA-EUGENIA HISPAN. INFANS. MAGNÆ GULDÆ REGINA GULDÆ FRATRIBUS POSUIT.

In that mansion were held all the splendid feasts of the Grand Serment des Arbalétriers. The master-archer lived there constantly, in order to be ever at hand to render his services to the guild. The great saloon was also used for the court balls and festivals, when the archers were not admitted. The Infanta caused other and smaller houses to be built in her new street, to serve as residences for her "garde noble;" and for her "garde bourgeoise," a small habitation each, some of which still remain, to remind us of English almshouses. The "great mansion," with its quadrangular form; the spacious saloon — once used for the archducal balls, where the dark, grave Spaniards mixed with the blond nobility of Brabant and Flanders — now a schoolroom for Belgian girls; the cross-bow men's archery-ground — all are there — the pensionnat of Madame Héger.

This lady was assisted in the work of instruction by her husband — a kindly, wise, good, and religious man — whose acquaintance I am glad to have made, and who has furnished me with some interesting details, from his wife's recollections and his own, of the two Miss Brontës during their residence in Brussels. He had the better opportunities of watching them, from his giving lessons in the French language and literature in the school. A short extract from a letter, written to me by a French lady resident in Brussels, and well qualified to judge, will help to show the estimation in which he is held.

"Je ne connais pas personnellement M. Héger, mais je sais qu'il est peu de caractères aussi nobles, aussi admirables que le sien. Il est un des membres les plus zélés de cette Société de S. Vincent de Paul dont je t'ai déjà parlé, et ne se contente pas de servir les pauvres et les malades, mais leur consacre encore les soirées. Après des journées absorbées tout entières par les devoirs que sa place lui impose, il réunit les pauvres, les ouvriers, leur donne des cours gratuits, et trouve encore le moyen de les amuser en les instruisant. Ce dévouement te dira assez que M. Héger est profondement et ouvertement religieux. Il a des manières franches et avenantes; il se fait aimer de tous ceux qui l'approchent, et surtout des enfants. Il a la parole facile, et possde à un haut degré l'éloquence du bon sens et du coeur. Il n'est point auteur. Homme de zèle et de conscience, il vient de se démettre des fonctions élevées et lucratives qu'il exerçait à l'Athénée, celles de Préfet des Etudes, parce qu'il ne peut y réaliser le bien qu'il avait espéré, introduire l'enseignement religieux dans le programme des études. J'ai vu une fois Madame Héger, qui a quelque chose de froid et de compassé dans son maintien, et qui prévient peu en sa faveur. Je la crois pourtant aimée et appréciée par ses élèves."

There were from eighty to a hundred pupils in the pensionnat, when Charlotte and Emily Brontë entered in February 1842.

M. Héger's account is that they knew nothing of French. I suspect they knew as much (or as little), for all conversational purposes, as any English girls do, who have never been abroad, and have only learnt the idioms and pronunciation from an Englishwoman. The two sisters clung together, and kept apart from the herd of happy, boisterous, well-befriended Belgian girls, who, in their turn, thought the new English pupils wild and scared-looking, with strange, odd, insular ideas about dress; for Emily had taken a fancy to the fashion, ugly and preposterous even during its reign, of gigot sleves, and persisted in wearing them long after they were "gone out." Her petticoats, too, had not a curve or a wave in them, but hung down straight and long, clinging to her lank figure. The sisters spoke to no one but from necessity. They were too full of earnest thought, and of the exile's sick yearning, to be ready for careless conversation or merry game. M. Héger, who had done little but observe, during the few first weeks of their residence in the Rue d'Isabelle, perceived that with their unusual characters, and extraordinary talents, a different mode must be adopted from that in which he generally taught French to English girls. He seems to have rated Emily's genius as something even higher than Charlotte's; and her estimation of their relative powers was the same. Emily had a head for logic, and a capability of argument, unusual in a man, and rare indeed in a woman, according to M. Héger. Impairing the force of this gift, was a stubborn tenacity of will, which rendered her obtuse to all reasoning where her own wishes, or her own sense of right, was concerned. "She should have been a man — a great navigator," said M. Héger in speaking of her. "Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old; and her strong imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition or difficulty; never have given way but with life." And yet, moreover, her faculty of imagination was such that, if she had written a history, her view of scenes and characters would have been so vivid, and so powerfully expressed, and supported by such a show of argument, that it would have dominated over the reader, whatever might have been his previous opinions, or his cooler perceptions of its truth. But she appeared egotistical and exacting compared to Charlotte, who was always unselfish (this is M. Héger's testimony); and in the anxiety of the elder to make her younger sister contented she allowed her to exercise a kind of unconscious tyranny over her.

After consulting with his wife, M. Héger told them that he meant to dispense with the old method of grounding in grammar, vocabulary, &c., and to proceed on a new plan — something similar to what he had occasionally adopted with the elder among his French and Belgian pupils. He proposed to read to them some of the master-pieces of the most celebrated French authors (such as Casimir de la Vigne's poem on the "Death of Joan of Arc," parts of Bossuet, the admirable translation of the noble letter of St. Ignatius to the Roman Christians in the "Bibliothèque Choisie des Pères de l'Eglise," &c.), and after having thus impressed the complete effect of the whole, to analyse the parts with them, pointing out in what such or such an author excelled, and where were the blemishes. He believed that he had to do with pupils capable, from their ready sympathy with the intellectual, the refined, the polished, or the noble, of catching the echo of a style, and so reproducing their own thoughts in a somewhat similar manner.

After explaining his plan to them, he awaited their reply. Emily spoke first; and said that she saw no good to be derived from it; and that, by adopting it, they should lose all originality of thought and expression. She would have entered into an argument on the subject, but for this, M. Héger had no time. Charlotte then spoke; she also doubted the success of the plan; but she would follow out M. Héger's advice, because she was bound to obey him while she was his pupil. Before speaking of the results, it may be desirable to give an extract from one of her letters, which shows some of her first impressions of her new life.

"Brussels, 1842 (May?).

"I was twenty-six years old a week or two since; and at this ripe time of life I am a school-girl, and, on the whole, very happy in that capacity. It felt very strange at first to submit to authority instead of exercising it — to obey orders instead of giving them; but I like that state of things. I returned to it with the same avidity that a cow, that has long been kept on dry hay, returns to fresh grass. Don't laugh at my simile. It is natural to me to submit, and very unnatural to command.

"This is a large school, in which there are about forty externes, or day pupils, and twelve pensionnaires, or boarders. Madame Héger, the head, is a lady of precisely the same cast of mind, degree of cultivation, and quality of intellect as Miss — -. I think the severe points are a little softened, because she has not been disappointed, and consequently soured. In a word, she is a married instead of a maiden lady. There are three teachers in the school —

Mademoiselle Blanche, Mademoiselle Sophie, and Mademoiselle Marie. The two first have no particular character. One is an old maid, and the other will be one. Mademoiselle Marie is talented and original, but of repulsive and arbitrary manners, which have made the whole school, except myself and Emily, her bitter enemies. No less than seven masters attend, to teach the different branches of education — French, Drawing, Music, Singing, Writing, Arithmetic, and German. All in the house are Catholics except ourselves, one other girl, and the gouvernante of Madame's children, an Englishwoman, in rank something between a lady's maid and a nursery governess. The difference in country and religion makes a broad line of demarcation between us and all the rest. We are completely isolated in the midst of numbers. Yet I think I am never unhappy; my present life is so delightful, so congenial to my own nature, compared to that of a governess. My time, constantly occupied, passes too rapidly. Hitherto both Emily and I have had good health, and therefore we have been able to work well. There is one individual of whom I have not yet spoken — M. Héger, the husband of Madame. He is professor of rhetoric, a man of power as to mind, but very choleric and irritable in temperament. He is very angry with me just at present, because I have written a translation which he chose to stigmatize as '*peu correct*.' He did not tell me so, but wrote the word on the margin of my book, and asked, in brief stern phrase, how it happened that my compositions were always better than my translations? adding that the thing seemed to him inexplicable. The fact is, some weeks ago, in a high-flown humour, he forbade me to use either dictionary or grammar in translating the most difficult English compositions into French. This makes the task rather arduous, and compels me every now and then to introduce an English word, which nearly plucks the eyes out of his head when he sees it. Emily and he don't draw well together at all. Emily works like a horse, and she has had great difficulties to contend with — far greater than I have had. Indeed, those who come to a French school for instruction ought previously to have acquired a considerable knowledge of the French language, otherwise they will lose a great deal of time, for the course of instruction is adapted to natives and not to foreigners; and in these large establishments they will not change their ordinary course for one or two strangers. The few private lessons that M. Héger has vouchsafed to give us, are, I suppose, to be considered a great favour; and I can perceive they have already excited much spite and jealousy in the school.

"You will abuse this letter for being short and dreary, and there are a hundred things which I want to tell you, but I have not time. Brussels is a beautiful city. The Belgians hate the English. Their external morality is more rigid than ours. To lace the stays without a handkerchief on the neck is considered a disgusting piece of indelicacy."

The passage in this letter where M. Héger is represented as prohibiting the use of dictionary or grammar, refers, I imagine, to the time I have mentioned, when he determined to adopt a new method of instruction in the

French language, of which they were to catch the spirit and rhythm rather from the ear and the heart, as its noblest accents fell upon them, than by over-careful and anxious study of its grammatical rules. It seems to me a daring experiment on the part of their teacher; but, doubtless, he knew his ground; and that it answered is evident in the composition of some of Charlotte's *devoirs*, written about this time. I am tempted, in illustration of this season of mental culture, to recur to a conversation which I had with M. Héger on the manner in which he formed his pupils' style, and to give a proof of his success, by copying a *devoir* of Charlotte's with his remarks upon it.

He told me that one day this summer (when the Brontës had been for about four months receiving instruction from him) he read to them Victor Hugo's celebrated portrait of Mirabeau, "mais, dans ma leçon je me bornais à ce qui concerne *Mirabeau orateur*. C'est après l'analyse de ce morceau, considéré surtout du point de vue du fond, de la disposition de ce qu'on pourrait appeler *la charpente* qu'ont été faits les deux portraits que je vous donne." He went on to say that he had pointed out to them the fault in Victor Hugo's style as being exaggeration in conception, and, at the same time, he had made them notice the extreme beauty of his "nuances" of expression. They were then dismissed to choose the subject of a similar kind of portrait. This selection M. Héger always left to them; for "it is necessary," he observed, "before sitting down to write on a subject, to have thoughts and feelings about it. I cannot tell on what subject your heart and mind have been excited. I must leave that to you." The marginal comments, I need hardly say, are M. Héger's; the words in italics are Charlotte's, for which he substitutes a better form of expression, which is placed between brackets.

IMITATION.

"Le 31 Juillet, 1842.

PORTRAIT DE PIERRE L'HERMITE. CHARLOTTE BRONTË

"De temps en temps, il paraît sur la terre des hommes destinés à être les instruments [prédestinés] {Pourquoi cette suppression?} de grands changements moraux ou politiques. Quelquefois c'est un conquérant, un Alexandre ou un Attila, qui passe comme un ouragan, et purifie l'atmosphère moral, comme l'orage purifie l'atmosphère physique; quelquefois, c'est un révolutionnaire, un Cromwell, ou un Robespierre, qui fait expier par un roi {les fautes et} les vices de toute une dynastie; quelquefois c'est un enthousiaste religieux comme Mahomet, ou Pierre l'Hermite, qui, avec le seul levier de la pensée, soulève des nations entières, les déracine et les transplante dans des climats nouveaux, *peuplant l'Asie avec les habitants de l'Europe*. Pierre l'Hermite était gentilhomme de Picardie, en France, {Invtile, quand vous ecrivez er français} pourquoi donc n'a-t-il passé sa vie comma les autres gentilhommes, ses contemporains, ont passé la leur, à table, à la chasse, dans son lit, sans s'inquiéter de Saladin, ou de ses Sarrasins? N'est-ce pas, parce qu'il y a dans certaines natures, *une ardour* [un foyer d'activité] indomptable qui ne leur permet pas de rester inactives, *qui les force à se remuer afin*

d'exercer les facultes puissantes, qui même en dormant sont prêtes, comme Sampson, à briser les noeuds qui les retiennent?

{Vous avez commencé à parler de Pierre: vous êtes entrée dans le sujet: marchez au but.}

"Pierre prit la profession des armes; *si son ardeur avait été de cette espèce* [s'il n'avait eu que cette ardeur vulgaire] qui provient d'une robuste santé, *il aurait* [c'eut] été un brave militaire, et rien de plus; mais son ardeur était celle de l'âme, sa flamme était pure et elle s'élevait vers le ciel.

"*Sans doute* [Il est vrai que] la jeunesse de Pierre *était* [fét] troublée par passions orageuses; les natures puissantes sont extrèmes en tout, elles ne connaissent la tiédeur ni dans le bien, ni dans le mal; Pierre donc chercha d'abord avidement la gloire qui se flétrit et les plaisirs qui trompent, mais *il fit bientôt la découverte* [bientôt il s'aperçut] que ce qu'il poursuivait n'était qe'une illusion à laquelle il ne pourrait jamais atteindre; {Vnutile, quand vous avez dit illusion} il retourna donc sur ses pas, il recommença le voyage de la vie, mais cette fois il évita le chemin spacieux qui mène à la perdition et il prit le chemin étroit qui mène à la vie; *puisque* [comme] le trajet était long et difficile il jeta la casque et les armes du soldat, et se vêtit de l'habit simple du moine. A la vie militaire succéda la vie monastique, car les extrêmes se touchent, et *chez l'homme sincère* la sincérité du repentir amène [nécessairement à la suite] *avec lui* la rigueur de la pénitence. [Voilà donc Pierre devenu moine!]

"Mais *Pierre* avait en lui un principe qui l'empêchait de rester longtemps inactif, ses idées, sur quel sujet *qu'il soit* [que ce fût] ne pouvaient pas être bornées; il ne lui suffisait pas que lui-même fût religieux, que lui-même fût convaincu de la réalité de Christianismé (sic), il fallait que toute l'Europe, que toute l'Asie, partageât sa conviction et professât la croyance de la Croix. La Piété [fervente] élevée par la Génie, nourrie par la Solitude, *fit naître une espèce d'inspiration* [exalta son âme jusqu'à l'inspiration] *dans son ame*, et lorsqu'il quitta sa cellule et reparut dans le monde, il portait comme Moïse l'empreinte de la Divinité sur son front, et *tout* [tous] reconnurent en lui la véritable apôtre de la Croix.

"Mahomet n'avait jamais remué les molles nations de l'Orient comme alors Pierre remua les peuples austères de l'Occident; il fallait que cette éloquence fût d'une force presque miraculeuse *qui pouvait* [presqu'elle] persuad*er* [ait] aux rois de vendre leurs royaumes *afin de procurer* [pour avoir] des armes et des soldats *pour aider* [à offrir] à Pierre dans la guerre sainte qu'il voulait livrer aux infidèles. La puissance de Pierre [l'Hermite] n'était nullement une puissance physique, car la nature, ou pour mieux dire, Dieu est impartial dans la distribution de ses dons; il accorde à l'un de ses enfants la grâce, la beauté, les perfections corporelles, à l'autre l'esprit, la grandeur morale. Pierre donc était un homme petit, d'une physionomie peu agréable; mais il avait ce courage, cette constance, cet enthousiasme, cette énergie de sentiment qui écrase toute opposition, et qui fait que la volonté

d'un seul homme devient la loi de toute une nation. Pour se former une juste idée de l'influence qu'exerça cet homme sur les *caractères* [choses] et les idées de son temps, il faut se le représenter au milieu de l'armée des croisées dans son double rôle de prophète et de guerrier; le pauvre hermite, vêtu *du pauvre* [de l'humble] habit gris est là plus puissant qieun roi; il est entouré *d'une* [de la] multitude [avide] une multitude qui ne voit que lui, tandis qui lui, il ne voit que le ciel; ses yeux levés semblent dire, 'Je vois Dieu et les anges, et j'ai perdu de vue la terre!'

"*Dans ce moment le* [mais ce] pauvre *habit* [froc] gris est pour lui comme le manteau d'Elijah; il l'enveloppe d'inspiration; *il* [Pierre] lit dans l'avenir; il voit Jérusalem délivrée; [il voit] le saint sépulcre libre; il voit le Croissant argent est arraché du Temple, et l'Oriflamme et la Croix rouge sont établi à sa place; non-seulement Pierre voit ces merveilles, mais il les fait voir à tous ceux qui l'entourent; il ravive l'espérance et le courage dans [tous ces corps épuisés de fatigues et de privations]. La bataille ne sera livrée que demain, mais la victoire est décidée ce soir. Pierre a promis; et les Croisés se fient à sa parole, comme les Israëlites se fiaient à celle de Moïse et de Josué."

As a companion portrait to this, Emily chose to depict Harold on the eve of the battle of Hastings. It appears to me that her *devoir* is superior to Charlotte's in power and in imagination, and fully equal to it in language; and that this, in both cases, considering how little practical knowledge of French they had when they arrived at Brussels in February, and that they wrote without the aid of dictionary or grammar, is unusual and remarkable. We shall see the progress Charlotte had made, in ease and grace of style, a year later.

In the choice of subjects left to her selection, she frequently took characters and scenes from the Old Testament, with which all her writings show that she was especially familiar. The picturesqueness and colour (if I may so express it), the grandeur and breadth of its narrations, impressed her deeply. To use M. Héger's expression, "Elle était nourrie de la Bible." After he had read De la Vigne's poem on Joan of Arc, she chose the "Vision and Death of Moses on Mount Nebo" to write about; and, in looking over this *devoir*, I was much struck with one or two of M. Héger's remarks. After describing, in a quiet and simple manner, the circumstances under which Moses took leave of the Israelites, her imagination becomes warmed, and she launches out into a noble strain, depicting the glorious futurity of the Chosen People, as, looking down upon the Promised Land, he sees their prosperity in prophetic vision. But, before reaching the middle of this glowing description, she interrupts herself to discuss for a moment the doubts that have been thrown on the miraculous relations of the Old Testament. M. Héger remarks, "When you are writing, place your argument first in cool, prosaic language; but when you have thrown the reins on the neck of your imagination, do not pull her up to reason." Again, in the vision of Moses, he sees the maidens leading forth their flocks to the wells at eventide, and they are described as wearing flowery garlands. Here the writer is reminded of the necessity of preserving a certain verisimilitude: Moses might from his elevation see mountains and plains, groups of maidens and herds of cattle, but could hardly perceive the details of dress, or the ornaments of the head.

When they had made further progress, M. Héger took up a more advanced plan, that of synthetical teaching. He would read to them various accounts of the same person or event, and make them notice the points of agreement and disagreement. Where they were different, he would make them seek the origin of that difference by causing them to examine well into the character and position of each separate writer, and how they would be likely to affect his conception of truth. For instance, take Cromwell. He would read Bossuet's description of him in the "Oraison Funèbre de la Reine d'Angleterre," and show how in this he was considered entirely from the religious point of view, as an instrument in the hands of God, preordained to His work. Then he would make them read Guizot, and see how, in this view, Cromwell was endowed with the utmost power of free-will, but governed by no higher motive than that of expediency; while Carlyle regarded him as a character regulated by a strong and conscientious desire to do the will of the Lord. Then he would desire them to remember that the Royalist and Commonwealth men had each their different opinions of the great Protector. And from these conflicting characters, he would require them to sift and collect the elements of truth, and try to unite them into a perfect whole.

This kind of exercise delighted Charlotte. It called into play her powers of analysis, which were extraordinary, and she very soon excelled in it.

Wherever the Brontës could be national they were so, with the same tenacity of attachment which made them suffer as they did whenever they left Haworth. They were Protestant to the backbone in other things beside their religion, but pre-eminently so in that. Touched as Charlotte was by the letter of St. Ignatius before alluded to, she claimed equal self-devotion, and from as high a motive, for some of the missionaries of the English Church sent out to toil and to perish on the poisonous African coast, and wrote as an "imitation," "Lettre d'un Missionnaire, Sierra Léone, Afrique."

Something of her feeling, too, appears in the following letter: —

"Brussels, 1842.

"I consider it doubtful whether I shall come home in September or not. Madame Héger has made a proposal for both me and Emily to stay another half-year, offering to dismiss her English master, and take me as English teacher; also to employ Emily some part of each day in teaching music to a certain number of the pupils. For these services we are to be allowed to continue our studies in French and German, and to have board, &c., without paying for it; no salaries, however, are offered. The proposal is kind, and in a great selfish city like Brussels, and a great selfish school, containing nearly ninety pupils (boarders and day pupils included), implies a degree of interest which demands gratitude in return. I am inclined to accept it. What think you? I don't deny I sometimes wish to be in England, or that I have brief attacks of home sickness; but, on the whole, I have borne a very valiant heart so far; and I have been happy in Brussels, because I have always been fully occupied with the employments that I like. Emily is making rapid progress in French, German, music, and drawing. Monsieur and Madame Héger begin to recognise the valuable parts of her character, under her singularities.

"If the national character of the Belgians is to be measured by the character of most of the girls is this school, it in a character singularly cold, selfish, animal, and inferior. They are very mutinous and difficult for the teachers to manage; and their principles are rotten to the core. We avoid them, which it is not difficult to do, as we have the brand of Protestantism and Anglicism upon us. People talk of the danger which Protestants expose themselves to in going to reside in Catholic countries, and thereby running the chance of changing their faith. My advice to all Protestants who are tempted to do anything so besotted as turn Catholics, is, to walk over the sea on to the Continent; to attend mass sedulously for a time; to note well the mummeries thereof; also the idiotic, mercenary aspect of all the priests; and then, if they are still disposed to consider Papistry in any other light than a most feeble, childish piece of humbug, let them turn Papists at once — that's all. I consider Methodism, Quakerism, and the extremes of High and Low Churchism foolish, but Roman Catholicism beats them all. At the same time, allow me to tell you, that there are some Catholics who are as good as any Christians can be to whom the Bible is a sealed book, and much better than many Protestants."

When the Brontës first went to Brussels, it was with the intention of remaining there for six months, or until the *grandes vacances* began in September. The duties of the school were then suspended for six weeks or two months, and it seemed a desirable period for their return. But the proposal mentioned in the foregoing letter altered their plans. Besides, they were happy in the feeling that they were making progress in all the knowledge they had so long been yearning to acquire. They were happy, too, in possessing friends whose society had been for years congenial to them, and in occasional meetings with these, they could have the inexpressible solace to residents in a foreign country — and peculiarly such to the Brontës — of talking over the intelligence received from their respective homes — referring to past, or planning for future days. "Mary" and her sister, the bright, dancing, laughing Martha, were parlour-boarders in an establishment just beyond the barriers of Brussels. Again, the cousins of these friends were resident in the town; and at their house Charlotte and Emily were always welcome, though their overpowering shyness prevented their more valuable qualities from being known, and generally kept them silent. They spent their weekly holiday with this family, for many months; but at the end of the time, Emily was as impenetrable to friendly advances as at the beginning; while Charlotte was too physically weak (as "Mary" has expressed it) to "gather up her forces" sufficiently to express any difference or opposition of opinion, and had consequently an assenting and deferential manner, strangely at variance with what they knew of her remarkable talents and decided character. At this house, the T.'s and the Brontës could look forward to meeting each other pretty frequently. There was another English family where Charlotte soon became a welcome guest, and where, I suspect, she felt herself more at her ease than either at Mrs. Jenkins', or the friends whom I have first mentioned.

An English physician, with a large family of daughters, went to reside at Brussels, for the sake of their education. He placed them at Madame Héger's school in July, 1842, not a month before the beginning of the *grandes vacances* on August 15th. In order to make the most of their time, and become accustomed to the language, these English sisters went daily, through the holidays, to the pensionnat in the Rue d'Isabelle. Six or eight boarders remained, besides the Miss Brontës. They were there during the whole time, never even having the break to their monotonous life, which passing an occasional day with a friend would have afforded them; but devoting themselves with indefatigable diligence to the different studies in which they were engaged. Their position in the school appeared, to these new comers, analogous to what is often called that of a parlour-boarder. They prepared their French, drawing, German, and literature for their various masters; and to these occupations Emily added that of music, in which she was somewhat of a proficient; so much so as to be qualified to give instruction in it to the three younger sisters of my informant.

The school was divided into three classes. In the first were from fifteen to twenty pupils; in the second, sixty was about the average number — all foreigners, excepting the two Brontës and one other; in the third, there were from twenty to thirty pupils. The first and second classes occupied a long room, divided by a wooden partition; in each division were four long ranges of desks; and at the end was the *estrade*, or platform, for the presiding instructor. On the last row, in the quietest corner, sat Charlotte and Emily, side by side, so deeply absorbed in their studies as to be insensible to any noise or movement around them. The school-hours were from nine to twelve (the luncheon hour), when the boarders and half-boarders — perhaps two-and-thirty girls — went to the refectoire (a room with two long tables, having an oil-lamp suspended over each), to partake of bread and fruit; the *externes*, or morning pupils, who had brought their own refreshment with them, adjourning to eat it in the garden. From one to two, there was fancy-work — a pupil reading aloud some light literature in each room; from two to four, lessons again. At four, the externes left; and the remaining girls dined in the refectoire, M. and Madame Héger presiding. From five to six there was recreation, from six to seven, preparation for lessons; and, after that succeeded the *lecture pieuse* — Charlotte's nightmare. On rare occasions, M. Héger himself would come in, and substitute a book of a different and more interesting kind. At eight, there was a slight meal of water and *pistolets* (the delicious little Brussels rolls), which was immediately followed by prayers, and then to bed.

The principal bedroom was over the long classe, or schoolroom. There were six or eight narrow beds on each side of the apartment, every one enveloped in its white draping curtain; a long drawer, beneath each, served for a wardrobe, and between each was a stand for ewer, basin, and looking-glass. The beds of the two Miss Brontës were at the extreme end of the room, almost as private and retired as if they had been in a separate apartment.

During the hours of recreation, which were always spent in the garden, they invariably walked together, and generally kept a profound silence; Emily, though so much the taller, leaning on her sister. Charlotte would always answer when spoken to, taking the lead in replying to any remark addressed to both; Emily rarely spoke to any one. Charlotte's quiet, gentle manner never changed. She was never seen out of temper for a moment; and occasionally, when she herself had assumed the post of English teacher, and the impertinence or inattention of her pupils was most irritating, a slight increase of colour, a momentary sparkling of the eye, and more decided energy of manner, were the only outward tokens she gave of being conscious of the annoyance to which she was subjected. But this dignified endurance of hers subdued her pupils, in the long run, far more than the voluble tirades of the other mistresses. My informant adds: — "The effect of this manner was singular. I can speak from personal experience. I was at that time high-spirited and impetuous, not respecting the French mistresses; yet, to my own astonishment, at one word from her, I was perfectly tractable; so much so, that at length, M. and Madame Héger invariably preferred all their wishes to me through her; the other pupils did not, perhaps, love her as I did, she was so quiet and silent; but all respected her."

With the exception of that part which describes Charlotte's manner as English teacher — an office which she did not assume for some months later — all this description of the school life of the two Brontës refers to the commencement of the new scholastic year in October 1842; and the extracts I have given convey the first impression which the life at a foreign school, and the position of the two Miss Brontës therein, made upon an intelligent English girl of sixteen. I will make a quotation from "Mary's" letter referring to this time.

"The first part of her time at Brussels was not uninteresting. She spoke of new people and characters, and foreign ways of the pupils and teachers. She knew the hopes and prospects of the teachers, and mentioned one who was very anxious to marry, 'she was getting so old.' She used to get her father or brother (I forget which) to be the bearer of letters to different single men, who she thought might be persuaded to do her the favour, saying that her only resource was to become a sister of charity if her present employment failed and that she hated the idea. Charlotte naturally looked with curiosity to people of her own condition. This woman almost frightened her. 'She declares there is nothing she can turn to, and laughs at the idea of delicacy, — and she is only ten years older than I am!' I did not see the connection till she said, 'Well, Polly, I should hate being a sister of charity; I suppose that would shock some people, but I should.' I thought she would have as much feeling as a nurse as most people, and more than some. She said she did not know how people could bear the constant pressure of misery, and never to change except to a new form of it. It would be impossible to keep one's natural feelings. I promised her a better destiny than to go begging any one to marry her, or to lose her natural feelings as a sister of charity. She said, 'My youth is leaving me; I can never do better than I have done, and I have done nothing yet.' At such times she seemed to think that most human beings were destined by the pressure of worldly interests to lose one faculty and feeling after another 'till they went dead altogether. I hope I shall be put in my grave as soon as I'm dead; I don't want to walk about so.' Here we always differed. I thought the degradation of nature she feared was a consequence of poverty, and that she should give her attention to earning money. Sometimes she admitted this, but could find no means of earning money. At others she seemed afraid of letting her thoughts dwell on the subject, saying it brought on the worst palsy of all. Indeed, in her position, nothing less than entire constant absorption in petty money matters could have scraped together a provision.

"Of course artists and authors stood high with Charlotte, and the best thing after their works would have been their company. She used very inconsistently to rail at money and money-getting, and then wish she was able to visit all the large towns in Europe, see all the sights and know all the celebrities. This was her notion of literary fame, — a passport to the society of clever people . . . When she had become acquainted with the people and ways at Brussels her life became monotonous, and she fell into the same hopeless state as at Miss W — -'s, though in a less degree. I wrote to her, urging her to go home or elsewhere; she had got what she wanted (French), and there was at least novelty in a new place, if no improvement. That if she sank into deeper gloom she would soon not have energy to go, and she was too far from home for her friends to hear of her condition and order her home as they had done from Miss W — -'s. She wrote that I had done her a great service, that she should certainly follow my advice, and was much obliged to me. I have often wondered at this letter. Though she patiently tolerated advice, she could always quietly put it aside, and do as she thought fit. More than once afterwards she mentioned the 'service' I had done her. She sent me 10*l.* to New Zealand, on hearing some exaggerated accounts of my circumstances, and told me she hoped it would come in seasonably; it was a debt she owed me 'for the service I had done her.' I should think 10*l.* was a quarter of her income. The 'service' was mentioned as an apology, but kindness was the real motive."

The first break in this life of regular duties and employments came heavily and sadly. Martha — pretty, winning, mischievous, tricksome Martha — was taken ill suddenly at the Château de Koekelberg. Her sister tended her with devoted love; but it was all in vain; in a few days she died. Charlotte's own short account of this event is as follows: —

"Martha T.'s illness was unknown to me till the day before she died. I hastened to Koekelberg the next morning — unconscious that she was in great danger — and was told that it was finished. She had died in the night. Mary was taken away to Bruxelles. I have seen Mary frequently since. She is in no ways crushed by the event; but while Martha was ill, she was to her more than a mother — more than a sister: watching, nursing, cherishing her so tenderly, so unweariedly. She appears calm and serious now; no bursts of violent emotion; no exaggeration of distress. I have seen Martha's grave — the place where her ashes lie in a foreign country."

Who that has read "Shirley" does not remember the few lines — perhaps half a page — of sad recollection?

"He has no idea that little Jessy will die young, she is so gay, and chattering, and arch — original even now; passionate when provoked, but most affectionate if caressed; by turns gentle and rattling; exacting yet generous; fearless . . . yet reliant on any who will help her. Jessy, with her little piquant face, engaging prattle, and winning ways, is made to be a pet.

* * * * *

"Do you know this place? No, you never saw it; but you recognise the nature of these trees, this foliage — the cypress, the willow, the yew. Stone crosses like these are not unfamiliar to you, nor are these dim garlands of everlasting flowers. Here is the place: green sod and a grey marble head-stone — Jessy sleeps below. She lived through an April day; much loved was she, much loving. She often, in her brief life, shed tears — she had frequent sorrows; she smiled between, gladdening whatever saw her. Her death was tranquil and happy in Rose's guardian arms, for Rose had been her stay and defence through many trials; the dying and the watching English girls were at that hour alone in a foreign country, and the soil of that country gave Jessy a grave.

* * * * *

"But, Jessy, I will write about you no more. This is an autumn evening, wet and wild. There is only one cloud in the sky; but it curtains it from pole to pole. The wind cannot rest; it hurries sobbing over hills of sullen outline, colourless with twilight and mist. Rain has beat all day on that church tower" (Haworth): "it rises dark from the stony enclosure of its graveyard: the nettles, the long grass, and the tombs all drip with wet. This evening reminds me too forcibly of another evening some years ago: a howling, rainy autumn evening too — when certain who had that day performed a pilgrimage to a grave new made in a heretic cemetery, sat near a wood fire on the hearth of a foreign dwelling. They were merry and social, but they each knew that a gap, never to be filled, had been made in their circle. They knew they had lost something whose absence could never be quite atoned for, so long as they lived; and they knew that heavy falling rain was soaking into the wet earth which covered their lost darling; and that the sad, sighing gale was mourning above her buried head. The fire warmed them; Life and Friendship yet blessed them: but Jessy lay cold, coffined, solitary — only the sod screening her from the storm."

This was the first death that had occurred in the small circle of Charlotte's immediate and intimate friends since the loss of her two sisters long ago. She was still in the midst of her deep sympathy with "Mary," when word came from home that her aunt, Miss Branwell, was ailing — was very ill. Emily and Charlotte immediately resolved to go home straight, and hastily packed up for England, doubtful whether they should ever return to Brussels or not, leaving all their relations with M. and Madame Héger, and the pensionnat, uprooted, and uncertain of any future existence. Even before their departure, on the morning after they received the first intelligence of illness — when they were on the very point of starting — came a second letter, telling them of their aunt's death. It could not hasten their movements, for every arrangement had been made for speed. They sailed from Antwerp; they travelled night and day, and got home on a Tuesday morning. The funeral and all was over, and Mr. Brontë and Anne were sitting together, in quiet grief for the loss of one who had done her part well in their household for nearly twenty years, and earned the regard and respect of many who never knew how much they should miss her till she was gone. The small property which she had accumulated, by dint of personal frugality and self-denial, was bequeathed to her nieces. Branwell, her darling, was to have had his share; but his reckless expenditure had distressed the good old lady, and his name was omitted in her will.

When the first shock was over, the three sisters began to enjoy the full relish of meeting again, after the longest separation they had had in their lives. They had much to tell of the past, and much to settle for the future. Anne had been for some little time in a situation, to which she was to return at the end of the Christmas holidays. For another year or so they were again to be all three apart; and, after that, the happy vision of being together and opening a school was to be realised. Of course they did not now look forward to settling at Burlington, or any other place which would take them away from their father; but the small sum which they each independently possessed would enable them to effect such alterations in the parsonage-house at Haworth as would adapt it to the reception of pupils. Anne's plans for the interval were fixed. Emily quickly decided to be the daughter to remain at home. About Charlotte there was much deliberation and some discussion.

Even in all the haste of their sudden departure from Brussels, M. Héger had found time to write a letter of sympathy to Mr. Brontë on the loss which he had just sustained; a letter containing such a graceful appreciation of the daughters' characters, under the form of a tribute of respect to their father, that I should have been tempted to copy it, even had there not also been a proposal made in it respecting Charlotte, which deserves a place in the record of her life.

"Au Révérend Monsieur Brontë, Pasteur Évangélique, &c, &c.

"Samedi, 5 Obre.

"MONSIEUR,

"Un évènement bien triste décide mesdemoiselles vas filles à retourner brusquement en Angleterre, ce départ qui nous afflige beaucoup a cependant ma complète approbation; il est bien naturel qu'elles cherchent à vous consoler de ce que le ciel vient de vous ôter, on se serrant autour de vous, poui mieux vous faire apprécier ce que le ciel vous a donné et ce qu'il vous laisse encore. J'espère que vous me pardonnerez, Monsieur, de profiter de cette circonstance pour vous faire parvenir l'expression de mon respect; je n'ai pas l'honneur de vous connaître personnellement, et cependant j'éprouve pour votre personne un sentiment de sincère vénération, car en jugeant un père de famille par ses enfants on ne risque pas de se tromper, et sous ce rapport l'éducation et les sentiments que nous avons trouvés dans mesdemoiselles vos filles n'ont pu que nous donner une très-haute idée de votre mérite et de votre caractère. Vous apprendrez sans doute avec plaisir que vos enfants ont fait du progrès trèsremarquable dans toutes les branches de l'enseignenient, et que ces progrès sont entiérement dû à leur amour pour le travail et à leur persévérance; nous n'avons eu que bien peu à faire avec de pareilles éléves; leur avancement est votre œuvre bien plus que la nôtre; nous n'avons pas eu à leur apprendre le prix du temps et de l'instruction, elles avaient appris tout cela dans la maison paternelle, et nous n'avons eu, pour notre part, que le faible mérite de diriger leurs efforts et de fournir un aliment convenable à la louable activité que vos filles ont puisées dans votre exemple et dans vos leçons. Puissent les éloges méritées que nous donnons à vos enfants vous être de quelque consolation dans le malheur que vous afflige; c'est là notre espoir en vous écrivant, et ce sera, pour Mesdemoiselles Charlotte et Emily, une douce et belle récompense de leurs travaux.

"En perdant nos deux chéres éléves, nous ne devons pas vous cacher que nous éprouvons à la fois et du chagrin et de l'inquiétude; nous sommes affligés parce que cette brusque séparation vient briser l'affection presque paternelle que nous leur avons vouée, et notre peine s'augmente à la vue de tant de travaux interrompues, de tant de choses bien commencées, et qui ne demandent que quelque temps encore pour être menées à bonne fin. Dans un an, chacune de vos demoiselles eût été entièrement prémunie contre les éventualités de l'avenir; chacune d'elles acquérait à la fois et l'instruction et la science d'enseignement; Mlle Emily allait apprendre le piano; recevoir les leçons du meilleur professeur que nous ayons en Belgique, et déjà elle avait elle-même de petites élèves; elle perdait donc à la fois un reste d'ignorance et un reste plus gênant encore de timidité; Mlle Charlotte commençait à donner des leçons en français, et d'acquérir cette assurance, cet aplomb si nécessaire dans l'enseignement; encore un an tout au plus et l'œuvre était achevée et bien achevée. Alors nous aurions pu, si cela vous eût convenu, offrir à mesdemoiselles vos filles ou du moins à l'une des deux une position qui eût été dans ses goûts, et qui lui eût donné cette douce indépendance si difficile à trouver pour une jeune personne. Ce n'est pas, croyez le bien, Monsieur, ce n'est pas ici pour nous une question d'intérêt personnel, c'est une question d'affection; vous me pardonnerez si nous vous parlons de vos enfants, si nous nous occupons de leur avenir, comme si elles faisaient partie de notre famille; leurs qualités personnelles, leur bon vouloir, leur zèle extrême sont les seules causes qui nous poussent à nous hasarder de la sorte. Nous savons, Monsieur, que vous peserez plus mûrement et plus sagement que nous la conséquence qu'aurait pour l'avenir une interruption complète dans les études de vos deux filles; vous déciderez ce qu'il faut faire, et vous nous pardonnerez notre franchise, si vous daignez considérer que le motif qui nous fait agir est une affection bien désintéressée et qui s'affligerait beaucoup de devoir déjà se résigner à n'être plus utile à vos chers enfants.

"Agréez, je vous prie, Monsieur, l'expression respectueuse de mes sentiments de haute considération.

"C. HÉGER."

There was so much truth, as well as so much kindness in this letter — it was so obvious that a second year of instruction would be far more valuable than the first, that there was no long hesitation before it was decided that Charlotte should return to Brussels.

Meanwhile, they enjoyed their Christmas all together inexpressibly. Branwell was with them; that was always a pleasure at this time; whatever might be his faults, or even his vices, his sisters yet held him up as their family hope, as they trusted that he would some day be their family pride. They blinded themselves to the magnitude of the failings of which they were now and then told, by persuading themselves that such failings were common to all men of any strength of character; for, till sad experience taught them better, they fell into the usual error of confounding strong passions with strong character.

Charlotte's friend came over to see her, and she returned the visit. Her Brussels life must have seemed like a dream, so completely, in this short space of time, did she fall back into the old household ways; with more of household independence than she could ever have had during her aunt's lifetime. Winter though it was, the sisters took their accustomed walks on the snow-covered moors; or went often down the long road to Keighley, for such books as had been added to the library there during their absence from England.

CHAPTER XII

Towards the end of January, the time came for Charlotte to return to Brussels. Her journey thither was rather disastrous. She had to make her way alone; and the train from Leeds to London, which should have reached Euston-square early in the afternoon, was so much delayed that it did not get in till ten at night. She had intended to seek out the Chapter Coffee-house, where she had stayed before, and which would have been near the place where the steam-boats lay; but she appears to have been frightened by the idea of arriving at an hour which, to Yorkshire notions, was so late and unseemly; and taking a cab, therefore, at the station, she drove straight to the London Bridge Wharf, and desired a waterman to row her to the Ostend packet, which was to sail the next morning. She described to me, pretty much as she has since described it in "Villette," her sense of loneliness, and yet her strange pleasure in the excitement of the situation, as in the dead of that winter's night she went swiftly over the dark river to the black hull's side, and was at first refused leave to ascend to the deck. "No passengers might sleep on board," they said, with some appearance of disrespect. She looked back to the lights and subdued noises of London — that "Mighty Heart" in which she had no place — and, standing up in the rocking boat, she asked to speak to some one in authority on board the packet. He came, and her quiet simple statement of her wish, and her reason for it, quelled the feeling of sneering distrust in those who had first heard her request; and impressed the authority so favourably that he allowed her to come on board, and take possession of a berth. The next morning she sailed; and at seven on Sunday evening she reached the Rue d'Isabelle once more; having only left Haworth on Friday morning at an early hour.

Her salary was 16*l.* a year; out of which she had to pay for her German lessons, for which she was charged as much (the lessons being probably rated by time) as when Emily learnt with her and divided the expense, viz., ten francs a month. By Miss Brontë's own desire, she gave her English lessons in the *classe*, or schoolroom, without the supervision of Madame or M. Héger. They offered to be present, with a view to maintain order among the unruly Belgian girls; but she declined this, saying that she would rather enforce discipline by her own manner and character than be indebted for obedience to the presence of a *gendarme*. She ruled over a new schoolroom, which had been built on the space in the play-ground adjoining the house. Over that First Class she was *surveillante* at all hours; and henceforward she was called *Mademoiselle* Charlotte by M. Héger's orders. She continued her own studies, principally attending to German, and to Literature; and every Sunday she went alone to the German and English chapels. Her walks too were solitary, and principally taken in the allée défendue, where she was secure from intrusion. This solitude was a perilous luxury to one of her temperament; so liable as she was to morbid and acute mental suffering.

On March 6th, 1843, she writes thus: —

"I am settled by this time, of course. I am not too much overloaded with occupation; and besides teaching English, I have time to improve myself in German. I ought to consider myself well off, and to be thankful for my good fortunes. I hope I am thankful; and if I could always keep up my spirits and never feel lonely, or long for companionship, or friendship, or whatever they call it, I should do very well. As I told you before, M. and Madame Héger are the only two persons in the house for whom I really experience regard and esteem, and of course, I cannot be always with them, nor even very often. They told me, when I first returned, that I was to consider their sitting-room my sitting-room also, and to go there whenever I was not engaged in the schoolroom. This, however, I cannot do. In the daytime it is a public room, where music-masters and mistresses are constantly passing in and out; and in the evening, I will not, and ought not to intrude on M. and Madame Héger and their children. Thus I am a good deal by myself, out of school-hours; but that does not signify. I now regularly give English lessons to M. Héger and his brother-in-law. They get on with wonderful rapidity; especially the first. He already begins to speak English very decently. If you could see and hear the efforts I make to teach them to pronounce like Englishmen, and their unavailing attempts to imitate, you would laugh to all eternity.

"The Carnival is just over, and we have entered upon the gloom and abstinence of Lent. The first day of Lent we had coffee without milk for breakfast; vinegar and vegetables, with a very little salt fish, for dinner; and bread for supper. The Carnival was nothing but masking and mummery. M. Héger took me and one of the pupils into the town to see the masks. It was animating to see the immense crowds, and the general gaiety, but the masks were nothing. I have been twice to the D.'s" (those cousins of "Mary's" of whom I have before made mention). "When she leaves Bruxelles, I shall have nowhere to go to. I have had two letters from Mary. She does not tell me she has been ill, and she does not complain; but her letters are not the letters of a person in the enjoyment of great happiness. She has nobody to be as good to her as M. Héger is to me; to lend her books; to converse with her sometimes, &c.

"Good-bye. When I say so, it seems to me that you will hardly hear me; all the waves of the Channel heaving and roaring between must deaden the sound."

From the tone of this letter, it may easily be perceived that the Brussels of 1843 was a different place from that of 1842. Then she had Emily for a daily and nightly solace and companion. She had the weekly variety of a visit to the family of the D.s; and she had the frequent happiness of seeing "Mary" and Martha. Now Emily was far away in Haworth — where she or any other loved one, might die, before Charlotte, with her utmost speed, could reach them, as experience, in her aunt's case, had taught her. The D.s were leaving Brussels; so, henceforth, her weekly holiday would have to be passed in the Rue d'Isabelle, or so she thought. "Mary" was gone off on her own independent course; Martha alone remained — still and quiet for ever, in the cemetery beyond the Porte de Louvain. The weather, too, for the first few weeks after Charlotte's return, had been piercingly cold; and her feeble constitution was always painfully sensitive to an inclement season. Mere bodily pain, however acute, she could always put aside; but too often ill-health assailed her in a part far more to be dreaded. Her depression of spirits, when she was not well, was pitiful in its extremity. She was aware that it was constitutional, and could reason about it; but no reasoning prevented her suffering mental agony, while the bodily cause remained in force.

The Hégers have discovered, since the publication of "Villette," that at this beginning of her career as English teacher in their school, the conduct of her pupils was often impertinent and mutinous in the highest degree. But of this they were unaware at the time, as she had declined their presence, and never made any complaint. Still it must have been a depressing thought to her at this period, that her joyous, healthy, obtuse pupils were so little answerable to the powers she could bring to bear upon them; and though from their own testimony, her patience, firmness, and resolution, at length obtained their just reward, yet with one so weak in health and spirits, the reaction after such struggles as she frequently had with her pupils, must have been very sad and painful.

She thus writes to her friend E.: —

"April, 1843.

"Is there any talk of your coming to Brussels? During the bitter cold weather we had through February, and the principal part of March, I did not regret that you had not accompanied me. If I had seen you shivering as I shivered myself, if I had seen your hands and feet as red and swelled as mine were, my discomfort would just have been doubled. I can do very well under this sort of thing; it does not fret me; it only makes me numb and silent; but if you were to pass a winter in Belgium, you would be ill. However, more genial weather is coming now, and I wish you were here. Yet I never have pressed you, and never would press you too warmly to come. There are privations and humiliations to submit to; there is monotony and uniformity of life; and, above all, there is a constant sense of solitude in the midst of numbers. The Protestant, the foreigner, is a solitary being, whether as teacher or pupil. I do not say this by way of complaining of my own lot; for though I acknowledge that there are certain disadvantages in my present position, what position on earth is without them? And, whenever I turn back to compare what I am with what I was — my place here with my place at Mrs. — -'s for instance — I am thankful. There was an observation in your last letter which excited, for a moment, my wrath. At first, I thought it would be folly to reply to it, and I would let it die. Afterwards, I determined to give one answer, once for all. 'Three or four people,' it seems, 'have the idea that the future *époux* of Mademoiselle Brontë is on the Continent.' These people are wiser than I am. They could not believe that I crossed the sea merely to return as teacher to Madame Hégers. I must have some more powerful motive than respect for my master and mistress, gratitude for their kindness, &c., to induce me to refuse a salary of 50*l.* in England, and accept one of 16*l.* in Belgium. I must, forsooth, have some remote hope of entrapping a husband somehow, or somewhere. If these charitable people knew the total seclusion of the life I lead, — that I never exchange a word with any other man than Monsieur Héger, and seldom indeed with him, — they would, perhaps, cease to suppose that any such chimerical and groundless notion had influenced my proceedings. Have I said enough to clear myself of so silly an imputation? Not that it is a crime to marry, or a crime to wish to be married; but it is an imbecility, which I reject with contempt, for women, who have neither fortune nor beauty, to make marriage the principal object of their wishes and hopes, and the aim of all their actions; not to be able to convince themselves that they are unattractive, and that they had better be quiet, and think of other things than wedlock."

The following is an extract, from one of the few letters which have been preserved, of her correspondence with her sister Emily: —

"May 29, 1843

"I get on here from day to day in a Robinson-Crusoe-like sort of way, very lonely, but that does not signify. In other respects, I have nothing substantial to complain of, nor is this a cause for complaint. I hope you are well. Walk out often on the moors. My love to Tabby. I hope she keeps well."

And about this time she wrote to her father,

"June 2nd, 1818,

"I was very glad to hear from home. I had begun to get low-spirited at not receiving any news, and to entertain indefinite fears that something was wrong. You do not say anything about your own health, but I hope you are well, and Emily also. I am afraid she will have a good deal of hard work to do now that Hannah" (a servant-girl who had been assisting Tabby) "is gone. I am exceedingly glad to hear that you still keep Tabby" (considerably upwards of seventy). "It is an act of great charity to her, and I do not think it will be unrewarded, for she is very faithful, and will always serve you, when she has occasion, to the best of her abilities; besides, she will be company for Emily, who, without her, would be very lonely."

I gave a *devoir*, written after she had been four months under M. Héger's tuition. I will now copy out another, written nearly a year later, during which the progress made appears to me very great.

“31 Mai, 1843.

“SUR LA MORT DE NAPOLÉON.

“Napoléon naquit en Corse et mourut à Ste. Hélène. Entre ces deux îles rien qu’un vaste et brûlant désert et l’océan immense. Il naquit fils d’un simple gentilhomme, et mourut empereur, mais sans couronne et dans les fers. Entre son berceau et sa tombe qu’y a-t-il? la carrière d’un soldat parvenu, des champs de bataille, une mer de sang, un trône, puis du sang encore, et des fers. Sa vie, c’est l’arc en ciel; les deux points extrêmes touchent la terre, la comble lumi-neuse mesure les cieux. Sur Napoléon au berceau une mère brillait; dans la maison paternelle il avait des frères et des soeurs; plus tard dans son palais il eut une femme qui l’aimait. Mais sur son lit de mort Napoléon est seul; plus de mère, ni de frère, ni de soeur, ni de femme, ni d’enfant!! D’autres ont dit et rediront ses exploits, moi, je m’arrête à contempler l’abandonnement de sa dernière heure!

“Il est là, exilé et captif, enchaîné sur un écueil. Nouveau Prométhée il subit le châtiment de son orgueil! Prométhée avait voulu être Dieu et Créateur; il déroba le feu du Ciel pour animer le corps qu’il avait formé. Et lui, Buonaparte, il a voulu créer, non pas un homme, mais un empire, et pour donner une existence, une âme, à son œuvre gigantesque, il n’a pas hésité à arracher la vie à des nations entières. Jupiter indigné de l’impiété de Prométhée, le riva vivant à la cime du Caucase. Ainsi, pour punir l’ambition rapace de Buonaparte, la Providence l’a enchaîné, jusqu’à ce que la mort s’en suivit, sur un roc isolé de l’Atlantique. Peut-être là aussi a-t-il senti lui fouillant le flanc cet insatiable vautour dont parle la fable, peut-être a-t-il souffert aussi cette soif du coeur, cette faim de l’âme, qui torturent l’exilé, loin de sa famille et de sa patrie. Mais parler ainsi n’est-ce pas attribuer gratuitement à Napoléon une humaine faiblesse qu’il n’éprouva jamais? Quand donc s’est-il laissé enchaîner par un lien d’affection? Sans doute d’autres conquérants ont hésité dans leur carrière de gloire, arrêtés par un obstacle d’amour ou d’amitié, retenus par la main d’une femme, rappéles par la voix d’un ami — lui, jamais! Il n’eut pas besoin, comme Ulysse, de se lier au mât du navire, ni de se boucher les oreilles avec de la cire; il ne redoutait pas le chant des Sirènes — il le dédaignait; il se fit marbre et fer pour exécuter ses grands projets. Napoléon ne se regardait pas comme un homme, mais comme l’incarnation d’un peuple. Il n’aimait pas; il ne considérait ses amis et ses proches que comme des instruments auxquels il tint, tant qu’ils furent utiles, et qu’il jeta de côté quand ils cessèrent de l’être. Qu’on ne se permette donc pas d’approcher du sépulcre du Corse avec sentiments de pitié, ou de souiller de larmes la pierre qui couvre ses restes, son âme répudierait tout cela. On a dit, je le sais, qu’elle fut cruelle la main qui le sépara de sa femme et de son enfant. Non, c’était une main qui, comme la sienne, ne tremblait ni de passion ni de crainte, c’était la main d’un homme froid, convaincu, qui avait su deviner Buonaparte; et voici ce que disait cet homme que la défaite n’a pu humilier, ni la victoire enorgueiller. ‘Marie-Louise n’est pas la femme de Napoléon; c’est la France que Napoléon a épousée; c’est la France qu’il aime, leur union enfante la perte de l’Europe; voilà la divorce que je veux; voilà l’union qu’il faut briser.’

“La voix des timides et des traîtres protesta contre cette sentence. ‘C’est abuser de droit de la victoire! C’est fouler aux pieds le vaincu! Que l’Angleterre se montre clémente, qu’elle ouvre ses bras pour recevoir comme hôte son ennemi désarmé.’ L’Angleterre aurait peut-être écouté ce conseii, car partout et toujours il y a des âmes faibles et timorées bientôt séduites par la flatterie ou effrayées par le reproche. Mais la Providence permit qu’un homme se trouvât qui n’a jamais su ce que c’est que la crainte; qui aima sa patrie mieux que sa renommée; impénétrable devant les menaces, inaccessible aux louanges, il se présenta devant le conseil de la nation, et levant son front tranquille en haut, il osa dire: ‘Que la trahison se taise! car c’est trahir que de conseiller de temporiser avec Buonaparte. Moi je sais ce que sont ces guerres dont l’Europe saigne encore, comme une victime sous le couteau du boucher. Il faut en finir avec Napoléon Buonaparte. Vous vous effrayez à tort d’un mot si dur! Je n’ai pas de magnanimité, dit-on? Soit! que m’importe ce qu’on dit de moi? Je n’ai pas ici à me faire une réputation de héros magnanime, mais à guérir, si la cure est possible, l’Europe qui se meurt, épuisée de ressources et de sang, l’Europe dont vous négligez les vrais intérêts, pré-occupés que vous êtes d’une vaine renommée de clémence. Vous êtes faibles! Eh bien! je viens vous aider. Envoyez Buonaparte à Ste. Hélène! n’hésitez pas, ne cherchez pas un autre endroit; c’ést le seul convenable. Je vous le dis, j’ai réfléchi pour vous; c’est là qu’il doit êtré et non pas ailleurs. Quant à Napoléon, homme, soldat, je n’ai rien contre lui; c’est un lion royal, auprès de qui vous n’êtes que des chacals. Mais Napoléon Empereur, c’est autre chose, je l’extirperai du sol de l’Europe.’ Et celui qui parla ainsi toujours sut garder sa promesse, celle-là comme toutes les autres. Je l’ai dit, et je le répète, cet homme est l’égal de Napoléon par le génie; comme trempe de caractère, comme droiture, comme élévation de pensée et de but, il est d’une tout autre espèce. Napoléon Buonaparte était avide de renommée et de gloire; Arthur Wellesley ne se soucie ni de l’une ni de l’autre; l’opinion publique, la popularité, étaient choses de grand valeur aux yeux de Napoléon; pour Wellington l’opinion publique est une rumeur, un rien que le souffle de son inflexible volonté fait disparaître comme une bulle de savon. Napoléon flattait le peuple; Wellington le brusqne; l’un cherchait les applau-dissements, l’autre ne se soucie que du témoignage de sa conscience; quand elle approuve, c’est assez; toute autre louange l’obsède. Aussi ce peuple, qui adorait Buonaparte s’irritait, s’insurgeait contre la morgue de Wellington: parfois il lui témoigna sa colère et sa haine par des grognements, par des hurlements de bêtes fauves; et alors, avec une impassibilité de sénateur romain, le moderne Coriolan toisait du regard l’émeute furieuse; il croisait ses bras nerveux sur sa large poitrine, et seul, debout sur son seuil, il attendait, il bravait cette tempête populaire dont les flots venaient mourir à quelques pas de lui: et quand la

foule, honteuse de sa rebellion, venait lécher les pieds du maître, le hautain patricien méprisait l'hommage d'aujourd'hui comme la haine d'hier, et dans les rues de Londres, et devant son palais ducal d'Apsley, il repoussait d'un genre plein de froid dédain l'incommode empressement du peuple enthousiaste. Cette fierté néanmoins n'excluait pas en lui une rare modestie; partout il se soustrait à l'éloge; se dérobe au panégyrique; jamais il ne parle de ses exploits, et jamais il ne souffre qu'un autre lui en parle en sa présence. Son caractère égale en grandeur et surpasse en vérité celui de tout autre héros ancien ou moderne. La gloire de Napoléon crût en une nuit, comme la vigne de Jonas, et il suffit d'un jour pour la flétrir; la gloire de Wellington est comme les vieux chênes qui ombragent le château de ses pères sur les rives du Shannon; le chêne croît lentement; il lui faut du temps pour pousser vers le ciel ses branches noueuses, et pour enfoncer dans le sol ces racines profondes qui s'enchevêtrent dans les fondements solides de la terre; mais alors, l'arbre séculaire, inébranlable comme le roc où il a sa base, brave et la faux du temps et l'effort des vents et des tempêtes. Il faudra peut-être un siècle à l'Angleterre pour qu'elle connaise la valeur de son héros. Dans un siècle, l'Europe entière saura combien Wellington a des droits à sa reconnaissance."

How often in writing this paper "in a strange land," must Miss Brontë have thought of the old childish disputes in the kitchen of Haworth parsonage, touching the respective merits of Wellington and Buonaparte! Although the title given to her *devoir* is, "On the Death of Napoleon," she seems yet to have considered it a point of honour rather to sing praises to an English hero than to dwell on the character of a foreigner, placed as she was among those who cared little either for an England or for Wellington. She now felt that she had made great progress towards obtaining proficiency in the French language, which had been her main object in coming to Brussels. But to the zealous learner "Alps on Alps arise." No sooner is one difficulty surmounted than some other desirable attainment appears, and must be laboured after. A knowledge of German now became her object; and she resolved to compel herself to remain in Brussels till that was gained. The strong yearning to go home came upon her; the stronger self-denying will forbade. There was a great internal struggle; every fibre of her heart quivered in the strain to master her will; and, when she conquered herself, she remained, not like a victor calm and supreme on the throne, but like a panting, torn, and suffering victim. Her nerves and her spirits gave way. Her health became much shaken.

"Brussels, August 1st, 1843.

"If I complain in this letter, have mercy and don't blame me, for, I forewarn you, I am in low spirits, and that earth and heaven are dreary and empty to me at this moment. In a few days our vacation will begin; everybody is joyous and animated at the prospect, because everybody is to go home. I know that I am to stay here during the five weeks that the holidays last, and that I shall be much alone during that time, and consequently get downcast, and find both days and nights of a weary length. It is the first time in my life that I have really dreaded the vacation. Alas! I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight at my heart; and I do so wish to go home. Is not this childish? Pardon me, for I cannot help it. However, though I am not strong enough to bear up cheerfully, I can still bear up; and I will continue to stay (D. V.) some months longer, till I have acquired German; and then I hope to see all your faces again. Would that the vacation were well over! it will pass so slowly. Do have the Christian charity to write me a long, long letter; fill it with the minutest details; nothing will be uninteresting. Do not think it is because people are unkind to me that I wish to leave Belgium; nothing of the sort. Everybody is abundantly civil, but home-sickness keeps creeping over me. I cannot shake it off. Believe me, very merrily, vivaciously, gaily, yours,

"C.B."

The *grandes vacances* began soon after the date of this letter, when she was left in the great deserted pensionnat, with only one teacher for a companion. This teacher, a Frenchwoman, had always been uncongenial to her; but, left to each other's sole companionship, Charlotte soon discovered that her associate was more profligate, more steeped in a kind of cold, systematic sensuality, than she had before imagined it possible for a human being to be; and her whole nature revolted from this woman's society. A low nervous fever was gaining upon Miss Brontë. She had never been a good sleeper, but now she could not sleep at all. Whatever had been disagreeable, or obnoxious, to her during the day, was presented when it was over with exaggerated vividness to her disordered fancy. There were causes for distress and anxiety in the news from home, particularly as regarded Branwell. In the dead of the night, lying awake at the end of the long deserted dormitory, in the vast and silent house, every fear respecting those whom she loved, and who were so far off in another country, became a terrible reality, oppressing her and choking up the very life-blood in her heart. Those nights were times of sick, dreary, wakeful misery; precursors of many such in after years.

In the daytime, driven abroad by loathing of her companion and by the weak restlessness of fever, she tried to walk herself into such a state of bodily fatigue as would induce sleep. So she went out, and with weary steps would traverse the Boulevards and the streets, sometimes for hours together; faltering and resting occasionally on some of the many benches placed for the repose of happy groups, or for solitary wanderers like herself. Then up again — anywhere but to the pensionnat — out to the cemetery where Martha lay — out beyond it, to the hills whence there is nothing to be seen but fields as far as the horizon. The shades of evening made her retrace her footsteps — sick for want of food, but not hungry; fatigued with long continued exercise — yet restless still, and doomed to another weary, haunted night of sleeplessness. She would thread the streets in the neighbourhood of the Rue d'Isabelle, and yet avoid it and its occupant, till as late an hour as she dared be out. At last, she was compelled to keep her bed for some days, and this compulsory rest did her good. She was weak, but less depressed in spirits than she had been, when the school re-opened, and her positive practical duties recommenced.

She writes thus: —

“October 13th, 1843

“Mary is getting on well, as she deserves to do. I often hear from her. Her letters and yours are one of my few pleasures. She urges me very much to leave Brussels and go to her; but, at present, however tempted to take such a step, I should not feel justified in doing so. To leave a certainty for a complete uncertainty, would be to the last degree imprudent. Notwithstanding that, Brussels is indeed desolate to me now. Since the D.s left, I have had no friend. I had, indeed, some very kind acquaintances in the family of a Dr. —-, but they, too, are gone now. They left in the latter part of August, and I am completely alone. I cannot count the Belgians anything. It is a curious position to be so utterly solitary in the midst of numbers. Sometimes the solitude oppresses me to an excess. One day, lately, I felt as if I could bear it no longer, and I went to Madame Héger, and gave her notice. If it had depended on her, I should certainly have soon been at liberty; but M. Héger, having heard of what was in agitation, sent for me the day after, and pronounced with vehemence his decision, that I should not leave. I could not, at that time, have persevered in my intention without exciting him to anger; so I promised to stay a little while longer. How long that will be, I do not know. I should not like to return to England to do nothing. I am too old for that now; but if I could hear of a favourable opportunity for commencing a school, I think I should embrace it. We have as yet no fires here, and I suffer much from cold; otherwise, I am well in health. Mr. — - will take this letter to England. He is a pretty-looking and pretty behaved young man, apparently constructed without a backbone; by which I don’t allude to his corporal spine, which is all right enough, but to his character.

“I get on here after a fashion; but now that Mary D. has left Brussels, I have nobody to speak to, for I count the Belgians as nothing. Sometimes I ask myself how long shall I stay here; but as yet I have only asked the question; I have not answered it. However, when I have acquired as much German as I think fit, I think I shall pack up bag and baggage and depart. Twinges of home-sickness cut me to the heart, every now and then. To-day the weather is glaring, and I am stupified with a bad cold and headache. I have nothing to tell you. One day is like another in this place. I know you, living in the country, can hardly believe it is possible life can be monotonous in the centre of a brilliant capital like Brussels; but so it is. I feel it most on holidays, when all the girls and teachers go out to visit, and it sometimes happens that I am left, during several hours, quite alone, with four great desolate schoolrooms at my disposition. I try to read, I try to write; but in vain. I then wander about from room to room, but the silence and loneliness of all the house weighs down one’s spirits like lead. You will hardly believe that Madame Héger (good and kind as I have described her) never comes near me on these occasions. I own, I was astonished the first time I was left alone thus; when everybody else was enjoying the pleasures of a fête day with their friends, and she knew I was quite by myself, and never took the least notice of me. Yet, I understand, she praises me very much to everybody, and says what excellent lessons I give. She is not colder to me than she is to the other teachers; but they are less dependent on her than I am. They have relations and acquaintances in Bruxelles. You remember the letter she wrote me, when I was in England? How kind and affectionate that was? is it not odd? In the meantime, the complaints I make at present are a sort of relief which I permit myself. In all other respects I am well satisfied with my position, and you may say so to people who inquire after me (if any one does). Write to me, dear, whenever you can. You do a good deed when you send me a letter, for you comfort a very desolate heart."

One of the reasons for the silent estrangement between Madame Héger and Miss Brontë, in the second year of her residence at Brussels, is to be found in the fact, that the English Protestant's dislike of Romanism increased with her knowledge of it, and its effects upon those who professed it; and when occasion called for an expression of opinion from Charlotte Brontë, she was uncompromising truth. Madame Héger, on the opposite side, was not merely a Roman Catholic, she was *dévote*. Not of a warm or impulsive temperament, she was naturally governed by her conscience, rather than by her affections; and her conscience was in the hands of her religious guides. She considered any slight thrown upon her Church as blasphemy against the Holy Truth; and, though she was not given to open expression of her thoughts and feelings, yet her increasing coolness of behaviour showed how much her most cherished opinions had been wounded. Thus, although there was never any explanation of Madame Héger's change of manner, this may be given as one great reason why, about this time, Charlotte was made painfully conscious of a silent estrangement between them; an estrangement of which, perhaps, the former was hardly aware. I have before alluded to intelligence from home, calculated to distress Charlotte exceedingly with fears respecting Branwell, which I shall speak of more at large when the realisation of her worst apprehensions came to affect the daily life of herself and her sisters. I allude to the subject again here, in order that the reader may remember the gnawing, private cares, which she had to bury in her own heart; and the pain of which could only be smothered for a time under the diligent fulfilment of present duty. Another dim sorrow was faintly perceived at this time. Her father's eyesight began to fail; it was not unlikely that he might shortly become blind; more of his duty must devolve on a curate, and Mr. Brontë, always liberal, would have to pay at a higher rate than he had heretofore done for this assistance.

She wrote thus to Emily: —

"Dec.1st, 1843.

"This is Sunday morning. They are at their idolatrous 'messe,' and I am here, that is in the Refectoire. I should like uncommonly to be in the dining-room at home, or in the kitchen, or in the back kitchen. I should like even to be cutting up the hash, with the clerk and some register people at the other table, and you standing by, watching that I put enough flour, not too much pepper, and, above all, that I save the best pieces of the leg of mutton for Tiger and Keeper, the first of which personages would be jumping about the dish and carving-knife, and the latter standing like a devouring flame on the kitchen-floor. To complete the picture, Tabby blowing the fire, in order to boil the potatoes to a sort of vegetable glue! How divine are these recollections to me at this moment! Yet I have no thought of coming home just now. I lack a real pretext for doing so; it is true this place is dismal to me, but I cannot go home without a fixed prospect when I get there; and this prospect must not be a situation; that would be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire. *You* call yourself idle! absurd, absurd! . . . Is papa well? Are you well? and Tabby? You ask about Queen Victoria's visit to Brussels. I saw her for an instant flashing through the Rue Royale in a carriage and six, surrounded by soldiers. She was laughing and talking very gaily. She looked a little stout, vivacious lady, very plainly dressed, not much dignity or pretension about her. The Belgians liked her very well on the whole. They said she enlivened the sombre court of King Leopold, which is usually as gloomy as a conventicle. Write to me again soon. Tell me whether papa really wants me very much to come home, and whether you do likewise. I have an idea that I should be of no use there — a sort of aged person upon the parish. I pray, with heart and soul, that all may continue well at Haworth; above all in our grey half-inhabited house. God bless the walls thereof! Safety, health, happiness, and prosperity to you, papa, and Tabby. Amen.

"C. B."

Towards the end of this year (1843) various reasons conspired with the causes of anxiety which have been mentioned, to make her feel that her presence was absolutely and imperatively required at home, while she had acquired all that she proposed to herself in coming to Brussels the second time; and was, moreover, no longer regarded with the former kindliness of feeling by Madame Héger. In consequence of this state of things, working down with sharp edge into a sensitive mind, she suddenly announced to that lady her immediate intention of returning to England. Both M. and Madame Héger agreed that it would be for the best, when they learnt only that part of the case which she could reveal to them — namely, Mr. Brontë's increasing blindness. But as the inevitable moment of separation from people and places, among which she had spent so many happy hours, drew near, her spirits gave way; she had the natural presentiment that she saw them all for the last time, and she received but a dead kind of comfort from being reminded by her friends that Brussels and Haworth were not so very far apart; that access from one place to the other was not so difficult or impracticable as her tears would seem to predicate; nay, there was some talk of one of Madame Héger's daughters being sent to her as a pupil, if she fulfilled her intention of trying to begin a school. To facilitate her success in this plan, should she ever engage in it, M. Héger gave her a kind of diploma, dated from, and sealed with the seal of the Athénée Royal de Bruxelles, certifying that she was perfectly capable of teaching the French language, having well studied the grammar and composition thereof, and, moreover, having prepared herself for teaching by studying and practising the best methods of instruction. This certificate is dated December 29th 1843, and on the 2nd of January, 1844, she arrived at Haworth.

On the 23rd of the month she writes as follows: —

"Every one asks me what I am going to do, now that I am returned home; and every one seems to expect that I should immediately commence a school. In truth, it is what I should wish to do. I desire it above all things. I have sufficient money for the undertaking, and I hope now sufficient qualifications to give me a fair chance of success; yet I cannot yet permit myself to enter upon life — to touch the object which seems now within my reach, and which I have been so long straining to attain. You will ask me why? It is on papa's account; he is now, as you know, getting old, and it grieves me to tell you that he is losing his sight. I have felt for some months that I ought not to be away from him; and I feel now that it would be too selfish to leave him (at least, as long as Branwell and Anne are absent), in order to pursue selfish interests of my own. With the help of God, I will try to deny myself in this matter, and to wait.

"I suffered much before I left Brussels. I think, however long I live, I shall not forget what the parting with M. Héger cost me. It grieved me so much to grieve him who has been so true, kind, and disinterested a friend. At parting he gave me a kind of diploma certifying my abilities as a teacher, sealed with the seal of the Athénée Royal, of which he is professor. I was surprised also at the degree of regret expressed by my Belgian pupils, when they knew I was going to leave. I did not think it had been in their phlegmatic nature . . . I do not know whether you feel as I do, but there are times now when it appears to me as if all my ideas and feelings, except a few friendships and affections, are changed from what they used to be; something in me, which used to be enthusiasm, is tamed down and broken. I have fewer illusions; what I wish for now is active exertion — a stake in life. Haworth seems such a lonely, quiet spot, buried away from the world. I no longer regard myself as young — indeed, I shall soon be twenty-eight; and it seems as if I ought to be working and braving the rough realities of the world, as other people do. It is, however, my duty to restrain this feeling at present, and I will endeavour to do so."

Of course her absent sister and brother obtained a holiday to welcome her return home, and in a few weeks she was spared to pay a visit to her friend at B. But she was far from well or strong, and the short journey of fourteen miles seems to have fatigued her greatly.

Soon after she came back to Haworth, in a letter to one of the household in which she had been staying, there occurs this passage: — "Our poor little cat has been ill two days, and is just dead. It is piteous to see even an animal lying lifeless. Emily is sorry." These few words relate to points in the characters of the two sisters, which I must dwell upon a little. Charlotte was more than commonly tender in her treatment of all dumb creatures, and they, with that fine instinct so often noticed, were invariably attracted towards her. The deep and exaggerated consciousness of her personal defects — the constitutional absence of hope, which made her slow to trust in human affection, and, consequently, slow to respond to any manifestation of it — made her manner shy and constrained to men and women, and even to children. We have seen something of this trembling distrust of her own capability of inspiring affection, in the grateful surprise she expresses at the regret felt by her Belgian pupils at her departure. But not merely were her actions kind, her words and tones were ever gentle and caressing, towards animals: and she quickly noticed the least want of care or tenderness on the part of others towards any poor brute creature. The readers of "Shirley" may remember that it is one of the tests which the heroine applies to her lover.

"Do you know what soothsayers I would consult?" . . . "The little Irish beggar that comes barefoot to my door; the mouse that steals out of the cranny in my wainscot; the bird in frost and snow that pecks at my window for a crumb; the dog that licks my hand and sits beside my knee. I know somebody to whose knee the black cat loves to climb, against whose shoulder and cheek it likes to purr. The old dog always comes out of his kennel and wags his tail, and whines affectionately when somebody passes." [For "somebody" and "he," read "Charlotte Brontë" and "she."] "He quietly strokes the cat, and lets her sit while he conveniently can; and when he must disturb her by rising, he puts her softly down, and never flings her from him roughly: he always whistles to the dog, and gives him a caress."

The feeling, which in Charlotte partook of something of the nature of an affection, was, with Emily, more of a passion. Some one speaking of her to me, in a careless kind of strength of expression, said, "she never showed regard to any human creature; all her love was reserved for animals." The helplessness of an animal was its passport to Charlotte's heart; the fierce, wild, intractability of its nature was what often recommended it to Emily. Speaking of her dead sister, the former told me that from her many traits in Shirley's character were taken; her way of sitting on the rug reading, with her arm round her rough bull-dog's neck; her calling to a strange dog, running past, with hanging head and lolling tongue, to give it a merciful draught of water, its maddened snap at her, her nobly stern presence of mind, going right into the kitchen, and taking up one of Tabby's red-hot Italian irons to sear the bitten place, and telling no one, till the danger was well-nigh over, for fear of the terrors that might beset their weaker minds. All this, looked upon as a well-invented fiction in "Shirley," was written down by Charlotte with streaming eyes; it was the literal true account of what Emily had done. The same tawny bull-dog (with his "strangled whistle"), called "Tartar" in "Shirley," was "Keeper" in Haworth parsonage; a gift to Emily. With the gift came a warning. Keeper was faithful to the depths of his nature as long as he was with friends; but he who struck him with a stick or whip, roused the relentless nature of the brute, who flew at his throat forthwith, and held him there till one or the other was at the point of death. Now Keeper's household fault was this. He loved to steal upstairs, and stretch his square, tawny limbs, on the comfortable beds, covered over with delicate white counterpanes. But the cleanliness of the parsonage arrangements was perfect; and this habit of Keeper's was so objectionable, that Emily, in reply to Tabby's remonstrances, declared that, if he was found again transgressing, she herself, in defiance of warning and his well-known ferocity of nature, would beat him so severely that he would never offend again. In the gathering dusk of an autumn evening, Tabby came, half-triumphantly, half-tremblingly, but in great wrath, to tell Emily that Keeper was lying on the best bed, in drowsy voluptuousness. Charlotte saw Emily's whitening face, and set mouth, but dared not speak to interfere; no one dared when Emily's eyes glowed in that manner out of the paleness of her face, and when her lips were so compressed into stone. She went upstairs, and Tabby and Charlotte stood in the gloomy passage below, full of the dark shadows of coming night. Down-stairs came Emily, dragging after her the unwilling Keeper, his hind legs set in a heavy attitude of resistance, held by the "scuft of his neck," but growling low and savagely all the time. The watchers would fain have spoken, but durst not, for fear of taking off Emily's attention, and causing her to avert her head for a moment from the enraged brute. She let him go, planted in a dark corner at the bottom of the stairs; no time was there to fetch stick or rod, for fear of the strangling clutch at her throat — her bare clenched fist struck against his red fierce eyes, before he had time to make his spring, and, in the language of the turf, she "punished him" till his eyes were swelled up, and the half-blind, stupified beast was led to his accustomed lair, to have his swollen head fomented and cared for by the very Emily herself. The generous dog owed her no grudge; he loved her dearly ever after; he walked first among the mourners to her funeral; he slept moaning for nights at the door of her empty room, and never, so to speak, rejoiced, dog fashion, after her death. He, in his turn, was mourned over by the surviving sister. Let us somehow hope, in half Red Indian creed, that he follows Emily now; and, when he rests, sleeps on some soft white bed of dreams, unpunished when he awakens to the life of the land of shadows.

Now we can understand the force of the words, "Our poor little cat is dead. Emily is sorry."

CHAPTER XIII

The moors were a great resource this spring; Emily and Charlotte walked out on them perpetually, "to the great damage of our shoes, but I hope, to the benefit of our health." The old plan of school-keeping was often discussed in these rambles; but in-doors they set with vigour to shirt-making for the absent Branwell, and pondered in silence over their past and future life. At last they came to a determination.

"I have seriously entered into the enterprise of keeping a school — or rather, taking a limited number of pupils at home. That is, I have begun in good earnest to seek for pupils. I wrote to Mrs. — - " (the lady with whom she had lived as governess, just before going to Brussels), "not asking her for her daughter — I cannot do that — but informing her of my intention. I received an answer from Mr. — - expressive of, I believe, sincere regret that I had not informed them a month sooner, in which case, he said, they would gladly have sent me their own daughter, and also Colonel S.'s, but that now both were promised to Miss C. I was partly disappointed by this answer, and partly gratified; indeed, I derived quite an impulse of encouragement from the warm assurance that if I had but applied a little sooner they would certainly have sent me their daughter. I own I had misgivings that nobody would be willing to send a child for education to Haworth. These misgivings are partly done away with. I have written also to Mrs. B., and have enclosed the diploma which M. Héger gave me before I left Brussels. I have not yet received her answer, but I wait for it with some anxiety. I do not expect that she will send me any of her children, but if she would, I dare say she could recommend me other pupils. Unfortunately, she knows us only very slightly. As soon as I can get an assurance of only *one* pupil, I will have cards of terms printed, and will commence the repairs necessary in the house. I wish all that to be done before winter. I think of fixing the board and English education at 25*l.* per annum."

Again, at a later date, July 24th, in the same year, she writes: —

"I am driving on with my small matter as well as I can. I have written to all the friends on whom I have the slightest claim, and to some on whom I have no claim; Mrs. B., for example. On her, also, I have actually made bold to call. She was exceedingly polite; regretted that her children were already at school at Liverpool; thought the undertaking a most praiseworthy one, but feared I should have some difficulty in making it succeed on account of the *situation*. Such is the answer I receive from almost every one. I tell them the *retired situation* is, in some points of view, an advantage; that were it in the midst of a large town I could not pretend to take pupils on terms so moderate (Mrs. B. remarked that she thought the terms very moderate), but that, as it is, not having house-rent to pay, we can offer the same privileges of education that are to be had in expensive seminaries, at little more than half their price; and as our number must be limited, we can devote a large share of time and pains to each pupil. Thank you for the very pretty little purse you have sent me. I make to you a curious return in the shape of half a dozen cards of terms. Make such use of them as your judgment shall dictate. You will see that I have fixed the sum at 35*l*., which I think is the just medium, considering advantages and disadvantages."

This was written in July; August, September, and October passed away, and no pupils were to be heard of. Day after day, there was a little hope felt by the sisters until the post came in. But Haworth village was wild and lonely, and the Brontës but little known, owing to their want of connections. Charlotte writes on the subject, in the early winter months, to this effect —

"I, Emily, and Anne, are truly obliged to you for the efforts you have made in our behalf; and if you have not been successful, you are only like ourselves. Every one wishes us well; but there are no pupils to be had. We have no present intention, however, of breaking our hearts on the subject, still less of feeling mortified at defeat. The effort must be beneficial, whatever the result may be, because it teaches us experience, and an additional knowledge of this world. I send you two more circulars."

A month later, she says: —

"We have made no alterations yet in our house. It would be folly to do so, while there is so little likelihood of our ever getting pupils. I fear you are giving yourself too much trouble on our account. Depend upon it, if you were to persuade a mamma to bring her child to Haworth, the aspect of the place would frighten her, and she would probably take the dear girl back with her, instanter. We are glad that we have made the attempt, and we will not be cast down because it has not succeeded."

There were, probably, growing up in each sister's heart, secret unacknowledged feelings of relief, that their plan had not succeeded. Yes! a dull sense of relief that their cherished project had been tried and had failed. For that house, which was to be regarded as an occasional home for their brother, could hardly be a fitting residence for the children of strangers. They had, in all likelihood, become silently aware that his habits were such as to render his society at times most undesirable. Possibly, too, they had, by this time, heard distressing rumours concerning the cause of that remorse and agony of mind, which at times made him restless and unnaturally merry, at times rendered him moody and irritable.

In January, 1845, Charlotte says: — "Branwell has been quieter and less irritable, on the whole, this time than he was in summer. Anne is, as usual, always good, mild, and patient." The deep-seated pain which he was to occasion to his relations had now taken a decided form, and pressed heavily on Charlotte's health and spirits. Early in this year, she went to H. to bid good-bye to her dear friend "Mary," who was leaving England for Australia.

Branwell, I have mentioned, had obtained the situation of a private tutor. Anne was also engaged as governess in the same family, and was thus a miserable witness to her brother's deterioration of character at this period. Of the causes of this deterioration I cannot speak; but the consequences were these. He went home for his holidays reluctantly, stayed there as short a time as possible, perplexing and distressing them all by his extraordinary conduct — at one time in the highest spirits, at another, in the deepest depression — accusing himself of blackest guilt and treachery, without specifying what they were; and altogether evincing an irritability of disposition bordering on insanity.

Charlotte and Emily suffered acutely from his mysterious behaviour. He expressed himself more than satisfied with his situation; he was remaining in it for a longer time than he had ever done in any kind of employment before; so that for some time they could not conjecture that anything there made him so wilful, and restless, and full of both levity and misery. But a sense of something wrong connected with him, sickened and oppressed them. They began to lose all hope in his future career. He was no longer the family pride; an indistinct dread, caused partly by his own conduct, partly by expressions of agonising suspicion in Anne's letters home, was creeping over their minds that he might turn out their deep disgrace. But, I believe, they shrank from any attempt to define their fears, and spoke of him to each other as little as possible. They could not help but think, and mourn, and wonder.

"Feb. 20th, 1845.

"I spent a week at H., not very pleasantly; headache, sickliness, and flatness of spirits, made me a poor companion, a sad drag on the vivacious and loquacious gaiety of all the other inmates of the house. I never was fortunate enough to be able to rally, for as much as a single hour, while I was there. I am sure all, with the exception perhaps of Mary, were very glad when I took my departure. I begin to perceive that I have too little life in me, now-a-days, to be fit company for any except very quiet people. Is it age, or what else, that changes me so?"

Alas! she hardly needed to have asked this question. How could she be otherwise than "flat-spirited," "a poor companion," and a "sad drag" on the gaiety of those who were light-hearted and happy! Her honest plan for earning her own livelihood had fallen away, crumbled to ashes; after all her preparations, not a pupil had offered herself; and, instead of being sorry that this wish of many years could not be realised, she had reason to be glad. Her poor father, nearly sightless, depended upon her cares in his blind helplessness; but this was a sacred pious charge, the duties of which she was blessed in fulfilling. The black gloom hung over what had once been the brightest hope of the family — over Branwell, and the mystery in which his wayward conduct was enveloped. Somehow and sometime, he would have to turn to his home as a hiding place for shame; such was the sad foreboding of his sisters. Then how could she be cheerful, when she was losing her dear and noble "Mary," for such a length of time and distance of space that her heart might well prophesy that it was "for ever"? Long before, she had written of Mary T., that she "was full of feelings noble, warm, generous, devoted, and profound. God bless her! I never hope to see in this world a character more truly noble. She would die willingly for one she loved. Her intellect and attainments are of the very highest standard." And this was the friend whom she was to lose! Hear that friend's account of their final interview: —

"When I last saw Charlotte (Jan. 1845), she told me she had quite decided to stay at home. She owned she did not like it. Her health was weak. She said she should like any change at first, as she had liked Brussels at first, and she thought that there must be some possibility for some people of having a life of more variety and more communion with human kind, but she saw none for her. I told her very warmly, that she ought not to stay at home; that to spend the next five years at home, in solitude and weak health, would ruin her; that she would never recover it. Such a dark shadow came over her face when I said, 'Think of what you'll be five years hence!' that I stopped, and said, 'Don't cry, Charlotte!' She did not cry, but went on walking up and down the room, and said in a little while, 'But I intend to stay, Polly.'"

A few weeks after she parted from Mary, she gives this account of her days at Haworth.

"March 24th, 1845.

"I can hardly tell you how time gets on at Haworth. There is no event whatever to mark its progress. One day resembles another; and all have heavy, lifeless physiognomies. Sunday, baking-day, and Saturday, are the only ones that have any distinctive mark. Meantime, life wears away. I shall soon be thirty; and I have done nothing yet. Sometimes I get melancholy at the prospect before and behind me. Yet it is wrong and foolish to repine. Undoubtedly, my duty directs me to stay at home for the present. There was a time when Haworth was a very pleasant place to me; it is not so now. I feel as if we were all buried here. I long to travel; to work; to live a life of action. Excuse me, dear, for troubling you with my fruitless wishes. I will put by the rest, and not trouble you with them. You must write to me. If you knew how welcome your letters are, you would write very often. Your letters, and the French newspapers, are the only messengers that come to me from the outer world beyond our moors; and very welcome messengers they are."

One of her daily employments was to read to her father, and it required a little gentle diplomacy on her part to effect this duty; for there were times when the offer of another to do what he had been so long accustomed to do for himself, only reminded him too painfully of the deprivation under which he was suffering. And, in secret, she, too, dreaded a similar loss for herself. Long-continued ill health, a deranged condition of the liver, her close application to minute drawing and writing in her younger days, her now habitual sleeplessness at nights, the many bitter noiseless tears she had shed over Branwell's mysterious and distressing conduct — all these causes were telling on her poor eyes; and about this time she thus writes to M. Héger: —

"Il n'y a rien que je crains comme le désoeuvrement, l'inertie, la léthargie des facultés. Quand le corps est paresseux l'esprit souffre cruellement; je ne connaîtrais pas cette léthargie, si je pouvais écrire. Autrefois je passais des journées, des semaines, des mois entiers à écrire, et pas tout-à-fait sans fruit, puisque Southey et Coleridge, deux de nos meilleurs auteurs, à qui j'ai envoyé certains manuscrits, en ont bien voulu témoigner leur approbation; mais à présent, j'ai la vue trop faible; si j'écrivais beaueoup je deviendrais aveugle. Cette faiblesse de vue est pour moi une terrible privation; sans cela, savez-vous ce que je ferais, Monsieur? J'écrirais un livre et je le dédierais à mon maître de littérature, au seul maître que j'aie jamais eu — à vous, Monsieur! Je vous ai dit souvent en français combien je vous respecte, combien je suis redevable à votre bonté, à vos conseils. Je voudrais le dire une fois en anglais. Cela ne se peut pas; il ne faut pas y penser. La carrière des lettres m'est fermée . . . N'oubliez pas de me dire comment vous vous portez, comment Madame et les enfants se portent. Je compte bientôt avoir de vos nouvelles; cette idée me souris, car le souvenir de vos bontés ne s'effacera jamais de ma mémoire, et tant que ce souvenir durera, le respect que vous m'avez inspiré durera aussi. Agréez, Monsieur," &c.

It is probable, that even her sisters and most intimate friends did not know of this dread of ultimate blindness which beset her at this period. What eyesight she had to spare she reserved for the use of her father. She did but little plain-sewing; not more writing than could be avoided, and employed herself principally in knitting.

"April 2nd, 1845.

"I see plainly it is proved to us that there is scarcely a draught of unmingled happiness to be had in this world. — -'s illness comes with — -'s marriage. Mary T. finds herself free, and on that path to adventure and exertion to which she has so long been seeking admission. Sickness, hardship, danger are her fellow travellers — her inseparable companions. She may have been out of the reach of these S. W. N. W. gales, before they began to blow, or they may have spent their fury on land, and not ruffled the sea much. If it has been otherwise, she has been sorely tossed, while we have been sleeping in our beds, or lying awake thinking about her. Yet these real, material dangers, when once past, leave in the mind the satisfaction of having struggled with difficulty, and overcome it. Strength, courage, and experience are their invariable results; whereas, I doubt whether suffering purely mental has any good result, unless it be to make us by comparison less sensitive to physical suffering . . . Ten years ago, I should have laughed at your account of the blunder you made in mistaking the bachelor doctor for a married man. I should have certainly thought you scrupulous over-much, and wondered how you could possibly regret being civil to a decent individual, merely because he happened to be single, instead of double. Now, however, I can perceive that your scruples are founded on common sense. I know that if women wish to escape the stigma of husband-seeking, they must act and look like marble or clay — cold, expressionless, bloodless; for every appearance of feeling, of joy, sorrow, friendliness, antipathy, admiration, disgust, are alike construed by the world into the attempt to hook a husband. Never mind! well-meaning women have their own consciences to comfort them after all. Do not, therefore, be too much afraid of showing yourself as you are, affectionate and good-hearted; do not too harshly repress sentiments and feelings excellent in themselves, because you fear that some puppy may fancy that you are letting them come out to fascinate him; do not condemn yourself to live only by halves, because if you showed too much animation some pragmatical thing in breeches might take it into his pate to imagine that you designed to dedicate your life to his inanity. Still, a composed, decent, equable deportment is a capital treasure to a woman, and that you possess. Write again soon, for I feel rather fierce, and want stroking down."

"June 13th, 1845.

"As to the Mrs. — -, who, you say, is like me, I somehow feel no leaning to her at all. I never do to people who are said to be like me, because I have always a notion that they are only like me in the disagreeable, outside, first-acquaintance part of my character; in those points which are obvious to the ordinary run of people, and which I know are not pleasing. You say she is 'clever' — 'a clever person.' How I dislike the term! It means rather a shrewd, very ugly, meddling, talking woman . . . I feel reluctant to leave papa for a single day. His sight diminishes weekly; and can it be wondered at that, as he sees the most precious of his faculties leaving him, his spirits sometimes sink? It is so hard to feel that his few and scanty pleasures must all soon go. He has now the greatest difficulty in either reading or writing; and then he dreads the state of dependence to which blindness will inevitably reduce him. He fears that he will be nothing in his parish. I try to cheer him; sometimes I succeed temporarily, but no consolation can restore his sight, or atone for the want of it. Still he is never peevish; never impatient; only anxious and dejected."

For the reason just given, Charlotte declined an invitation to the only house to which she was now ever asked to come. In answer to her correspondent's reply to this letter, she says: —

"You thought I refused you coldly, did you? It was a queer sort of coldness, when I would have given my ears to say Yes, and was obliged to say No. Matters, however, are now a little changed. Anne is come home, and her presence certainly makes me feel more at liberty. Then, if all be well, I will come and see you. Tell me only when I must come. Mention the week and the day. Have the kindness also to answer the following queries, if you can. How far is it from Leeds to Sheffield? Can you give me a notion of the cost? Of course, when I come, you will let me enjoy your own company in peace, and not drag me out a visiting. I have no desire at all to see your curate. I think he must be like all the other curates I have seen; and they seem to me a self-seeking, vain, empty race. At this blessed moment, we have no less than three of them in Haworth parish — and there is not one to mend another. The other day, they all three, accompanied by Mr. S., dropped, or rather rushed, in unexpectedly to tea. It was Monday (baking day), and I was hot and tired; still, if they had behaved quietly and decently, I would have served them out their tea in peace; but they began glorifying themselves, and abusing Dissenters in such a manner, that my temper lost its balance, and I pronounced a few sentences sharply and rapidly, which struck them all dumb. Papa was greatly horrified also, but I don't regret it."

On her return from this short visit to her friend, she travelled with a gentleman in the railway carriage, whose features and bearing betrayed him, in a moment, to be a Frenchman. She ventured to ask him if such was not the case; and, on his admitting it, she further inquired if he had not passed a considerable time in Germany, and was answered that he had; her quick ear detected something of the thick guttural pronunciation, which, Frenchmen say, they are able to discover even in the grandchildren of their countrymen who have lived any time beyond the Rhine. Charlotte had retained her skill in the language by the habit of which she thus speaks to M. Héger: —

"Je crains beaucoup d'oublier le français — j'apprends tous les jours une demie page de français par coeur, et j'ai grand plaisir à apprendre cette leçon, Veuillez presenter à Madame l'assurance de mon estime; je crains que Maria-Louise et Claire ne m'aient déjà oubliées; mais je vous reverrai un jour; aussitôt que j'aurais gagné assez d'argent pour alter à Bruxelles, j'y irai."

And so her journey back to Haworth, after the rare pleasure of this visit to her friend, was pleasantly beguiled by conversation with the French gentleman; and she arrived at home refreshed and happy. What to find there?

It was ten o'clock when she reached the parsonage. Branwell was there, unexpectedly, very ill. He had come home a day or two before, apparently for a holiday; in reality, I imagine, because some discovery had been made which rendered his absence imperatively desirable. The day of Charlotte's return, he had received a letter from Mr. — -, sternly dismissing him, intimating that his proceedings were discovered, characterising them as bad beyond expression, and charging him, on pain of exposure, to break off immediately, and for ever, all communication with every member of the family.

Whatever may have been the nature and depth of Branwell's sins, — whatever may have been his temptation, whatever his guilt, — there is no doubt of the suffering which his conduct entailed upon his poor father and his innocent sisters. The hopes and plans they had cherished long, and laboured hard to fulfil, were cruelly frustrated; henceforward their days were embittered and the natural rest of their nights destroyed by his paroxysms of remorse. Let us read of the misery caused to his poor sisters in Charlotte's own affecting words: —

"We have had sad work with Branwell. He thought of nothing but stunning or drowning his agony of mind. No one in this house could have rest; and, at last, we have been obliged to send him from home for a week, with some one to look after him. He has written to me this morning, expressing some sense of contrition . . . but as long as he remains at home, I scarce dare hope for peace in the house. We must all, I fear, prepare for a season of distress and disquietude. When I left you, I was strongly impressed with the feeling that I was going back to sorrow."

"August, 1845.

"Things here at home are much as usual; not very bright as it regards Branwell, though his health, and consequently his temper, have been somewhat better this last day or two, because he is now *forced to* abstain."

"August 18th, 1845.

"I have delayed writing, because I have no good news to communicate. My hopes ebb low indeed about Branwell. I sometimes fear he will never be fit for much. The late blow to his prospects and feelings has quite made him reckless. It is only absolute want of means that acts as any check to him. One ought, indeed, to hope to the very last; and I try to do so, but occasionally hope in his case seems so fallacious."

"Nov. 4th, 1845.

"I hoped to be able to ask you to come to Haworth. It almost seemed as if Branwell had a chance of getting employment, and I waited to know the result of his efforts in order to say, dear — -, come and see us. But the place (a secretaryship to a railway committee) is given to another person. Branwell still remains at home; and while *he* is here, *you* shall not come. I am more confirmed in that resolution the more I see of him. I wish I could say one word to you in his favour, but I cannot. I will hold my tongue. We are all obliged to you for your kind suggestion about Leeds; but I think our school schemes are, for the present, at rest."

"Dec. 31st, 1845.

"You say well, in speaking of — -, that no sufferings are so awful as those brought on by dissipation; alas! I see the truth of this observation daily proved. — and — must have as weary and burdensome a life of it in waiting upon their unhappy brother. It seems grievous, indeed, that those who have not sinned should suffer so largely."

In fact, all their latter days blighted with the presence of cruel, shameful suffering, — the premature deaths of two at least of the sisters, — all the great possibilities of their earthly lives snapped short, — may be dated from Midsummer 1845.

For the last three years of Branwell's life, he took opium habitually, by way of stunning conscience; he drank moreover, whenever he could get the opportunity. The reader may say that I have mentioned his tendency to intemperance long before. It is true; but it did not become habitual, as far as I can learn, until after he was dismissed from his tutorship. He took opium, because it made him forget for a time more effectually than drink; and, besides, it was more portable. In procuring it he showed all the cunning of the opium-eater. He would steal out while the family were at church — to which he had professed himself too ill to go — and manage to cajole the village druggist out of a lump; or, it might be, the carrier had unsuspiciously brought him some in a packet from a distance. For some time before his death he had attacks of delirium tremens of the most frightful character; he slept in his father's room, and he would sometimes declare that either he or his father should be dead before the morning. The trembling sisters, sick with fright, would implore their father not to expose himself to this danger; but Mr. Brontë is no timid man, and perhaps he felt that he could possibly influence his son to some self-restraint, more by showing trust in him than by showing fear. The sisters often listened for the report of a pistol in the dead of the night, till watchful eye and hearkening ear grew heavy and dull with the perpetual strain upon their nerves. In the mornings young Brontë would saunter out, saying, with a drunkard's incontinence of speech, "The poor old man and I have had a terrible night of it; he does his best — the poor old man! but it's all over with me."

CHAPTER XIV

In the course of this sad autumn of 1845, a new interest came up; faint, indeed, and often lost sight of in the vivid pain and constant pressure of anxiety respecting their brother. In the biographical notice of her sisters, which Charlotte prefixed to the edition of "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey," published in 1850 — a piece of writing unique, as far as I know, in its pathos and its power — she says: —

"One day in the autumn of 1845, I accidentally lighted on a MS. volume of verse, in my sister Emily's handwriting. Of course, I was not surprised, knowing that she could and did write verse: I looked it over, and something more than surprise seized me — a deep conviction that these were not common effusions, nor at all like the poetry women generally write. I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine. To my ear they had also a peculiar music, wild, melancholy, and elevating. My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one on the recesses of whose mind and feelings even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed: it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication . . . Meantime, my younger sister quietly produced some of her own compositions, intimating that since Emily's had given me pleasure, I might like to look at hers. I could not but be a partial judge, yet I thought that these verses too had a sweet sincere pathos of their own. We had very early cherished the dream of one day being authors. We agreed to arrange a small selection of our poems, and, if possible, get them printed. Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names, positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because — without at the time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine,' we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise. The bringing out of our little book was hard work. As was to be expected, neither we nor our poems were at all wanted; but for this we had been prepared at the outset; though inexperienced ourselves, we had read the experience of others. The great puzzle lay in the difficulty of getting answers of any kind from the publishers to whom we applied. Being greatly harassed by this obstacle, I ventured to apply to the Messrs. Chambers, of Edinburgh, for a word of advice; *they* may have forgotten the circumstance, but *I* have not, for from them I received a brief and business-like, but civil and sensible reply, on which we acted, and at last made way."

I inquired from Mr. Robert Chambers, and found, as Miss Brontë conjectured, that he had entirely forgotten the application which had been made to him and his brother for advice; nor had they any copy or memorandum of the correspondence.

There is an intelligent man living in Haworth, who has given me some interesting particulars relating to the sisters about this period. He says: —

"I have known Miss Brontë, as Miss Brontë, a long time; indeed, ever since they came to Haworth in 1819. But I had not much acquaintance with the family till about 1843, when I began to do a little in the stationery line. Nothing of that kind could be had nearer than Keighley before I began. They used to buy a great deal of writing paper, and I used to wonder whatever they did with so much. I sometimes thought they contributed to the Magazines. When I was out of stock, I was always afraid of their coming; they seemed so distressed about it, if I had none. I have walked to Halifax (a distance of ten miles) many a time, for half a ream of paper, for fear of being without it when they came. I could not buy more at a time for want of capital. I was always short of that. I did so like them to come when I had anything for them; they were so much different to anybody else; so gentle and kind, and so very quiet. They never talked much. Charlotte sometimes would sit and inquire about our circumstances so kindly and feelingly! . . . Though I am a poor working man (which I have never felt to be any degradation), I could talk with her with the greatest freedom. I always felt quite at home with her. Though I never had any school education, I never felt the want of it in her company."

The publishers to whom she finally made a successful application for the production of "Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell's poems," were Messrs. Aylott and Jones, Paternoster Row. Mr. Aylott has kindly placed the letters which she wrote to them on the subject at my disposal. The first is dated January 28th, 1846, and in it she inquires if they will publish one volume octavo of poems; if not at their own risk, on the author's account. It is signed "C. Brontë." They must have replied pretty speedily, for on January 31st she writes again: —

"GENTLEMEN,

"Since you agree to undertake the publication of the work respecting which I applied to you, I should wish now to know, as soon as possible, the cost of paper and printing. I will then send the necessary remittance, together with the manuscript. I should like it to be printed in one octavo volume, of the same quality of paper and size of type as Moxon's last edition of Wordsworth. The poems will occupy, I should think, from 200 to 250 pages. They are not the production of a clergyman, nor are they exclusively of a religious character; but I presume these circumstances will be immaterial. It will, perhaps, be necessary that you should see the manuscript, in order to calculate accurately the expense of publication; in that case I will send it immediately. I should like, however, previously, to have some idea of the probable cost; and if, from what I have said, you can make a rough calculation on the subject, I should be greatly obliged to you."

In her next letter, February 6th, she says: —

"You will perceive that the poems are the work of three persons, relatives — their separate pieces are distinguished by their respective signatures."

She writes again on February 15th; and on the 16th she says: —

"The MS. will certainly form a thinner volume than I had anticipated. I cannot name another model which I should like it precisely to resemble, yet, I think, a duodecimo form, and a somewhat reduced, though still *clear* type, would be preferable. I only stipulate for *clear* type, not too small, and good paper."

On February 21st she selects the "long primer type" for the poems, and will remit 31*l*. 10*s*. in a few days.

Minute as the details conveyed in these notes are, they are not trivial, because they afford such strong indications of character. If the volume was to be published at their own risk, it was necessary that the sister conducting the negotiation should make herself acquainted with the different kinds of type, and the various sizes of books. Accordingly she bought a small volume, from which to learn all she could on the subject of preparation for the press. No half-knowledge — no trusting to other people for decisions which she could make for herself; and yet a generous and full confidence, not misplaced, in the thorough probity of Messrs. Aylott and Jones. The caution in ascertaining the risk before embarking in the enterprise, and the prompt payment of the money required, even before it could be said to have assumed the shape of a debt, were both parts of a self-reliant and independent character. Self-contained also was she. During the whole time that the volume of poems was in the course of preparation and publication, no word was written telling anyone, out of the household circle, what was in progress.

I have had some of the letters placed in my hands, which she addressed to her old schoolmistress, Miss W-. They begin a little before this time. Acting on the conviction, which I have all along entertained, that where Charlotte Brontë's own words could be used, no others ought to take their place, I shall make extracts from this series, according to their dates.

"Jan. 30th, 1846.

"MY DEAR MISS W — -,

"I have not yet paid my visit to — -; it is, indeed, more than a year since I was there, but I frequently hear from E., and she did not fail to tell me that you were gone into Worcestershire; she was unable, however, to give me your exact address. Had I known it, I should have written to you long since. I thought you would wonder how we were getting on, when you heard of the railway panic; and you may be sure that I am very glad to be able to answer your kind inquiries by the assurance that our small capital is as yet undiminished. The York and Midland is, as you say, a very good line, yet, I confess to you, I should wish, for my own part, to be wise in time. I cannot think that even the very best lines will continue for many years at their present premiums; and I have been most anxious for us to sell our shares ere it be too late, and to secure the proceeds in some safer, if, for the present, less profitable investment. I cannot, however, persuade my sisters to regard the affair precisely from my point of view; and I feel as if I would rather run the risk of loss than hurt Emily's feelings by acting in direct opposition to her opinion. She managed in a most handsome and able manner for me, when I was in Brussels, and prevented by distance from looking after my own interests; therefore, I will let her manage still, and take the consequences. Disinterested and energetic she certainly is; and if she be not quite so tractable or open to conviction as I could wish, I must remember perfection is not the lot of humanity; and as long as we can regard those we love, and to whom we are closely allied, with profound and never-shaken esteem, it is a small thing that they should vex us occasionally by what appear to us unreasonable and headstrong notions.

"You, my dear Miss W — -, know, full as well as I do, the value of sisters' affection to each other; there is nothing like it in this world, I believe, when they are nearly equal in age, and similar in education, tastes, and sentiments. You ask about Branwell; he never thinks of seeking employment, and I begin to fear that he has rendered himself incapable of filling any respectable station in life; besides, if money were at his disposal, he would use it only to his own injury; the faculty of self-government is, I fear, almost destroyed in him. You ask me if I do not think that men are strange beings? I do, indeed. I have often thought so; and I think, too, that the mode of bringing them up is strange: they are not sufficiently guarded from temptation. Girls are protected as if they were something very frail or silly indeed, while boys are turned loose on the world, as if they, of all beings in existence, were the wisest and least liable to be led astray. I am glad you like Broomsgrove, though, I dare say, there are few places you would *not* like, with Mrs. M. for a companion. I always feel a peculiar satisfaction when I hear of your enjoying yourself, because it proves that there really is such a thing as retributive justice even in this world. You worked hard; you denied yourself all pleasure, almost all relaxation, in your youth, and in the prime of life; now you are free, and that while you have still, I hope, many years of vigour and health in which you can enjoy freedom. Besides, I have another and very egotistical motive for being pleased; it seems that even 'a lone woman' can be happy, as well as cherished wives and proud mothers. I am glad of that. I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be-married women now-a-days; and I have already got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman, who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly, without support of husband or brother; and who, having attained the age of forty-five or upwards, retains in her possession a well-regulated mind, a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures, and fortitude to support inevitably pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve want as far as her means extend."

During the time that the negotiation with Messrs. Aylott and Co. was going on, Charlotte went to visit her old school-friend, with whom she was in such habits of confidential intimacy; but neither then nor afterwards, did she ever speak to her of the publication of the poems; nevertheless, this young lady suspected that the sisters wrote for Magazines; and in this idea she was confirmed when, on one of her visits to Haworth, she saw Anne with a number of "Chambers's Journal," and a gentle smile of pleasure stealing over her placid face as she read.

"What is the matter?" asked the friend. "Why do you smile?"

"Only because I see they have inserted one of my poems," was the quiet reply; and not a word more was said on the subject.

To this friend Charlotte addressed the following letters: —

"March 3rd, 1846.

"I reached home a little after two o'clock, all safe and right yesterday; I found papa very well; his sight much the same. Emily and Anne were going to Keighley to meet me; unfortunately, I had returned by the old road, while they were gone by the new, and we missed each other. They did not get home till half-past four, and were caught in the heavy shower of rain which fell in the afternoon. I am sorry to say Anne has taken a little cold in consequence, but I hope she will soon be well. Papa was much cheered by my report of Mr. C.'s opinion, and of old Mrs. E.'s experience; but I could perceive he caught gladly at the idea of deferring the operation a few months longer. I went into the room where Branwell was, to speak to him, about an hour after I got home: it was very forced work to address him. I might have spared myself the trouble, as he took no notice, and made no reply; he was stupified. My fears were not in vain. I hear that he got a sovereign while I have been away, under pretence of paying a pressing debt; he went immediately and changed it at a public-house, and has employed it as was to be expected. — - concluded her account by saying he was a 'hopeless being;' it is too true. In his present state it is scarcely possible to stay in the room where he is. What the future has in store I do not know."

"March 31st, 1846.

"Our poor old servant Tabby had a sort of fit, a fortnight since, but is nearly recovered now. Martha" (the girl they had to assist poor old Tabby, and who remains still the faithful servant at the parsonage,) "is ill with a swelling in her knee, and obliged to go home. I fear it will be long before she is in working condition again. I received the number of the 'Record' you sent . . . I read D'Aubigné's letter. It is clever, and in what he says about Catholicism very good. The Evangelical Alliance part is not very practicable, yet certainly it is more in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel to preach unity among Christians than to inculcate mutual intolerance and hatred. I am very glad I went to — when I did, for the changed weather has somewhat changed my health and strength since. How do you get on? I long for mild south and west winds. I am thankful papa continues pretty well, though often made very miserable by Branwell's wretched conduct. *There* — there is no change but for the worse."

Meanwhile the printing of the volume of poems was quietly proceeding. After some consultation and deliberation, the sisters had determined to correct the proofs themselves, Up to March 28th the publishers had addressed their correspondent as C. Brontë, Esq.; but at this time some "little mistake occurred," and she desired Messrs. Aylott and Co. in future to direct to her real address, "*Miss* Brontë," &c. She had, however, evidently left it to be implied that she was not acting on her own behalf, but as agent for the real authors, since in a note dated April 6th, she makes a proposal on behalf of "C., E., and A. Bell," which is to the following effect, that they are preparing for the press a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales, which may be published either together, as a work of three volumes, of the ordinary novel size, or separately, as single volumes, as may be deemed most advisable. She states, in addition, that it is not their intention to publish these tales on their own account; but that the authors direct her to ask Messrs. Aylott and Co. whether they would be disposed to undertake the work, after having, of course, by due inspection of the MS., ascertained that its contents are such as to warrant an expectation of success. To this letter of inquiry the publishers replied speedily, and the tenor of their answer may be gathered from Charlotte's, dated April 11th.

"I beg to thank you, in the name of C., E., and A. Bell, for your obliging offer of advice. I will avail myself of it, to request information on two or three points. It is evident that unknown authors have great difficulties to contend with, before they can succeed in bringing their works before the public. Can you give me any hint as to the way in which these difficulties are best met? For instance, in the present case, where a work of fiction is in question, in what form would a publisher be most likely to accept the MS.? Whether offered as a work of three vols., or as tales which might be published in numbers, or as contributions to a periodical?

"What publishers would be most likely to receive favourably a proposal of this nature?

"Would it suffice to *write* to a publisher on the subject, or would it be necessary to have recourse to a personal interview?

"Your opinion and advice on these three points, or on any other which your experience may suggest as important, would be esteemed by us as a favour."

It is evident from the whole tenor of this correspondence, that the truthfulness and probity of the firm of publishers with whom she had to deal in this her first literary venture, were strongly impressed upon her mind, and was followed by the inevitable consequence of reliance on their suggestions.

And the progress of the poems was not unreasonably lengthy or long drawn out. On April 20th she writes to desire that three copies may be sent to her, and that Messrs. Aylott will advise her as to the reviewers to whom copies ought to be sent.

I give the next letter as illustrating the ideas of these girls as to what periodical reviews or notices led public opinion.

"The poems to be neatly done up in cloth. Have the goodness to send copies and advertisements, *as early as possible*, to each of the undermentioned periodicals.

"'Colburn's New Monthly Magazine.'

"'Bentley's Magazine.'

"'Hood's Magazine.'

"'Jerrold's Shilling Magazine.'

"'Blackwood's Magazine.'

"'The Edinburgh Review.'

"'Tait's Edinburgh Magazine.'

"'The Dublin University Magazine.'

"Also to the 'Daily News' and to the 'Britannia' papers.

"If there are any other periodicals to which you have been in the habit of sending copies of works, let them be supplied also with copies. I think those I have mentioned will suffice for advertising."

In compliance with this latter request, Messrs. Aylott suggest that copies and advertisements of the work should be sent to the "Athenæum," "Literary Gazette," "Critic," and "Times;" but in her reply Miss Brontë says, that she thinks the periodicals she first mentioned will be sufficient for advertising in at present, as the authors do not wish to lay out a larger sum than two pounds in advertising, esteeming the success of a work dependent more on the notice it receives from periodicals than on the quantity of advertisements. In case of any notice of the poems appearing, whether favourable or otherwise, Messrs. Aylott and Co. are requested to send her the name and number of those periodicals in which such notices appear; as otherwise, since she has not the opportunity of seeing periodicals regularly, she may miss reading the critique. "Should the poems be remarked upon favourably, it is my intention to appropriate a further sum for advertisements. If, on the other hand, they should pass unnoticed or be condemned, I consider it would be quite useless to advertise, as there is nothing, either in the title of the work, or the names of the authors, to attract attention from a single individual."

I suppose the little volume of poems was published some time about the end of May, 1846. It stole into life; some weeks passed over, without the mighty murmuring public discovering that three more voices were uttering their speech. And, meanwhile, the course of existence moved drearily along from day to day with the anxious sisters, who must have forgotten their sense of authorship in the vital care gnawing at their hearts. On June 17th, Charlotte writes: —

"Branwell declares that he neither can nor will do anything for himself; good situations have been offered him, for which, by a fortnight's work, he might have qualified himself, but he will do nothing except drink and make us all wretched."

In the "Athenæum" of July 4th, under the head of poetry for the million, came a short review of the poems of C., E., and A. Bell. The reviewer assigns to Ellis the highest rank of the three "brothers," as he supposes them to be; he calls Ellis "a fine, quaint spirit;" and speaks of "an evident power of wing that may reach heights not here attempted." Again, with some degree of penetration, the reviewer says, that the poems of Ellis "convey an impression of originality beyond what his contributions to these volumes embody." Currer is placed midway between Ellis and Acton. But there is little in the review to strain out, at this distance of time, as worth preserving. Still, we can fancy with what interest it was read at Haworth Parsonage, and how the sisters would endeavour to find out reasons for opinions, or hints for the future guidance of their talents.

I call particular attention to the following letter of Charlotte's, dated July 10th, 1846. To whom it was written, matters not; but the wholesome sense of duty in it — the sense of the supremacy of that duty which God, in placing us in families, has laid out for us, seems to deserve especial regard in these days.

"I see you are in a dilemma, and one of a peculiar and difficult nature. Two paths lie before you; you conscientiously wish to choose the right one, even though it be the most steep, strait, and rugged; but you do not know which is the right one; you cannot decide whether duty and religion command you to go out into the cold and friendless world, and there to earn your living by governess drudgery, or whether they enjoin your continued stay with your aged mother, neglecting, *for the present*, every prospect of independency for yourself, and putting up with daily inconvenience, sometimes even with privations. I can well imagine, that it is next to impossible for you to decide for yourself in this matter, so I will decide it for you. At least, I will tell you what is my earnest conviction on the subject; I will show you candidly how the question strikes me. The right path is that which necessitates the greatest sacrifice of self-interest — which implies the greatest good to others; and this path, steadily followed, will lead, I believe, in time, to prosperity and to happiness, though it may seem, at the outset, to tend quite in a contrary direction. Your mother is both old and infirm; old and infirm people have but few sources of happiness — fewer almost than the comparatively young and healthy can conceive; to deprive them of one of these is cruel. If your mother is more composed when you are with her, stay with her. If she would be unhappy in case you left her, stay with her. It will not apparently, as far as short-sighted humanity can see, be for your advantage to remain at — -, nor will you be praised and admired for remaining at home to comfort your mother; yet, probably, your own conscience will approve, and if it does, stay with her. I recommend you to do what I am trying to do myself."

The remainder of this letter is only interesting to the reader as it conveys a peremptory disclaimer of the report that the writer was engaged to be married to her father's curate — the very same gentleman to whom, eight years afterwards, she was united; and who, probably, even now, although she was unconscious of the fact, had begun his service to her, in the same tender and faithful spirit as that in which Jacob served for Rachel. Others may have noticed this, though she did not.

A few more notes remain of her correspondence "on behalf of the Messrs. Bell" with Mr. Aylott. On July 15th she says, "I suppose, as you have not written, no other notices have yet appeared, nor has the demand for the work increased. Will you favour me with a line stating whether *any*, or how many copies have yet been sold?"

But few, I fear; for, three days later, she wrote the following: —

"The Messrs. Bell desire me to thank you for your suggestion respecting the advertisements. They agree with you that, since the season is unfavourable, advertising had better be deferred. They are obliged to you for the information respecting the number of copies sold."

On July 23rd she writes to the Messrs. Aylott: —

"The Messrs. Bell would be obliged to you to post the enclosed note in London. It is an answer to the letter you forwarded, which contained an application for their autographs from a person who professed to have read and admired their poems. I think I before intimated, that the Messrs. Bell are desirous for the present of remaining unknown, for which reason they prefer having the note posted in London to sending it direct, in order to avoid giving any clue to residence, or identity by post-mark, &c."

Once more, in September, she writes, "As the work has received no further notice from any periodical, I presume the demand for it has not greatly increased."

In the biographical notice of her sisters, she thus speaks of the failure of the modest hopes vested in this publication. "The book was printed; it is scarcely known, and all of it that merits to be known are the poems of Ellis Bell.

"The fixed conviction I held, and hold, of the worth of these poems, has not, indeed, received the confirmation of much favourable criticism; but I must retain it notwithstanding."

VOLUME II

CHAPTER I

During this summer of 1846, while her literary hopes were waning, an anxiety of another kind was increasing. Her father's eyesight had become seriously impaired by the progress of the cataract which was forming. He was nearly blind. He could grope his way about, and recognise the figures of those he knew well, when they were placed against a strong light; but he could no longer see to read; and thus his eager appetite for knowledge and information of all kinds was severely balked. He continued to preach. I have heard that he was led up into the pulpit, and that his sermons were never so effective as when he stood there, a grey sightless old man, his blind eyes looking out straight before him, while the words that came from his lips had all the vigour and force of his best days. Another fact has been mentioned to me, curious as showing the accurateness of his sensation of time. His sermons had always lasted exactly half an hour. With the clock right before him, and with his ready flow of words, this had been no difficult matter as long as he could see. But it was the same when he was blind; as the minute-hand came to the point, marking the expiration of the thirty minutes, he concluded his sermon.

Under his great sorrow he was always patient. As in times of far greater affliction, he enforced a quiet endurance of his woe upon himself. But so many interests were quenched by this blindness that he was driven inwards, and must have dwelt much on what was painful and distressing in regard to his only son. No wonder that his spirits gave way, and were depressed. For some time before this autumn, his daughters had been collecting all the information they could respecting the probable success of operations for cataract performed on a person of their father's age. About the end of July, Emily and Charlotte had made a journey to Manchester for the purpose of searching out an operator; and there they heard of the fame of the late Mr. Wilson as an oculist. They went to him at once, but he could not tell, from description, whether the eyes were ready for being operated upon or not. It therefore became necessary for Mr. Bronte to visit him; and towards the end of August, Charlotte brought her father to him. He determined at once to undertake the operation, and recommended them to comfortable lodgings, kept by an old servant of his. These were in one of numerous similar streets of small monotonous-looking houses, in a suburb of the town. From thence the following letter is dated, on August 21st, 1846: —

"I just scribble a line to you to let you know where I am, in order that you may write to me here, for it seems to me that a letter from you would relieve me from the feeling of strangeness I have in this big town. Papa and I came here on Wednesday; we saw Mr. Wilson, the oculist, the same day; he pronounced papa's eyes quite ready for an operation, and has fixed next Monday for the performance of it. Think of us on that day! We got into our lodgings yesterday. I think we shall be comfortable; at least our rooms are very good, but there is no mistress of the house (she is very ill, and gone out into the country), and I am somewhat puzzled in managing about provisions; we board ourselves. I find myself excessively ignorant. I can't tell what to order in the way of meat. For ourselves I could contrive, papa's diet is so very simple; but there will be a nurse coming in a day or two, and I am afraid of not having things good enough for her. Papa requires nothing, you know, but plain beef and mutton, tea and bread and butter; but a nurse will probably expect to live much better; give me some hints if you can. Mr. Wilson says we shall have to stay here for a month at least. I wonder how Emily and Anne will get on at home with Branwell. They, too, will have their troubles. What would I not give to have you here! One is forced, step by step, to get experience in the world; but the learning is so disagreeable. One cheerful feature in the business is, that Mr. Wilson thinks most favourably of the case."

"August 26th, 1846.

"The operation is over; it took place yesterday Mr. Wilson performed it; two other surgeons assisted. Mr. Wilson says, he considers it quite successful; but papa cannot yet see anything. The affair lasted precisely a quarter of an hour; it was not the simple operation of couching Mr. C. described, but the more complicated one of extracting the cataract. Mr. Wilson entirely disapproves of couching. Papa displayed extraordinary patience and firmness; the surgeons seemed surprised. I was in the room all the time; as it was his wish that I should be there; of course, I neither spoke nor moved till the thing was done, and then I felt that the less I said, either to papa or the surgeons, the better. Papa is now confined to his bed in a dark room, and is not to be stirred for four days; he is to speak and be spoken to as little as possible. I am greatly obliged to you for your letter, and your kind advice, which gave me extreme satisfaction, because I found I had arranged most things in accordance with it, and, as your theory coincides with my practice, I feel assured the latter is right. I hope Mr. Wilson will soon allow me to dispense with the nurse; she is well enough, no doubt, but somewhat too obsequious; and not, I should think, to be much trusted; yet I was obliged to trust her in some things. . . .

"Greatly was I amused by your account of — — 's flirtations; and yet something saddened also. I think Nature intended him for something better than to fritter away his time in making a set of poor, unoccupied spinsters unhappy. The girls, unfortunately, are forced to care for him, and such as him, because, while their minds are mostly unemployed, their sensations are all unworn, and, consequently, fresh and green; and he, on the contrary, has had his fill of pleasure, and can with impunity make a mere pastime of other people's torments. This is an unfair state of things; the match is not equal. I only wish I had the power to infuse into the souls of the persecuted a little of the quiet strength of pride — of the supporting consciousness of superiority (for they are superior to him because purer) — of the fortifying resolve of firmness to bear the present, and wait the end. Could all the virgin population of — — receive and retain these sentiments, he would continually have to veil his crest before them. Perhaps, luckily, their feelings are not so acute as one would think, and the gentleman's shafts consequently don't wound so deeply as he might desire. I hope it is so."

A few days later, she writes thus: "Papa is still lying in bed, in a dark room, with his eyes bandaged. No inflammation ensued, but still it appears the greatest care, perfect quiet, and utter privation of light are necessary to ensure a good result from the operation. He is very patient, but, of course, depressed and weary. He was allowed to try his sight for the first time yesterday. He could see dimly. Mr. Wilson seemed perfectly satisfied, and said all was right. I have had bad nights from the toothache since I came to Manchester."

All this time, notwithstanding the domestic anxieties which were harassing them — notwithstanding the ill-success of their poems — the three sisters were trying that other literary venture, to which Charlotte made allusion in one of her letters to the Messrs. Aylott. Each of them had written a prose tale, hoping that the three might be published together. "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey" are before the world. The third — Charlotte's contribution — is yet in manuscript, but will be published shortly after the appearance of this memoir. The plot in itself is of no great interest; but it is a poor kind of interest that depends upon startling incidents rather than upon dramatic development of character; and Charlotte Bronte never excelled one or two sketches of portraits which she had given in "The Professor", nor, in grace of womanhood, ever surpassed one of the female characters there described. By the time she wrote this tale, her taste and judgment had revolted against the exaggerated idealisms of her early girlhood, and she went to the extreme of reality, closely depicting characters as they had shown themselves to her in actual life: if there they were strong even to coarseness, — as was the case with some that she had met with in flesh and blood existence, — she "wrote them down an ass;" if the scenery of such life as she saw was for the most part wild and grotesque, instead of pleasant or picturesque, she described it line for line. The grace of the one or two scenes and characters, which are drawn rather from her own imagination than from absolute fact stand out in exquisite relief from the deep shadows and wayward lines of others, which call to mind some of the portraits of Rembrandt.

The three tales had tried their fate in vain together, at length they were sent forth separately, and for many months with still- continued ill success. I have mentioned this here, because, among the dispiriting circumstances connected with her anxious visit to Manchester, Charlotte told me that her tale came back upon her hands, curtly rejected by some publisher, on the very day when her father was to submit to his operation. But she had the heart of Robert Bruce within her, and failure upon failure daunted her no more than him. Not only did "The Professor" return again to try his chance among the London publishers, but she began, in this time of care and depressing inquietude, in those grey, weary, uniform streets; where all faces, save that of her kind doctor, were strange and untouched with sunlight to her, — there and then, did the brave genius begin "Jane Eyre". Read what she herself says: — "Currer Bell's book found acceptance nowhere, nor any acknowledgment of merit, so that something like the chill of despair began to invade his heart." And, remember it was not the heart of a person who, disappointed in one hope, can turn with redoubled affection to the many certain blessings that remain. Think of her home, and the black shadow of remorse lying over one in it, till his very brain was mazed, and his gifts and his life were lost; — think of her father's sight hanging on a thread; — of her sister's delicate health, and dependence on her care; — and then admire as it deserves to be admired, the steady courage which could work away at "Jane Eyre", all the time "that the one-volume tale was plodding its weary round in London."

I believe I have already mentioned that some of her surviving friends consider that an incident which she heard, when at school at Miss Wooler's, was the germ of the story of Jane Eyre. But of this nothing. can be known, except by conjecture. Those to whom she spoke upon the subject of her writings are dead and silent; and the reader may probably have noticed, that in the correspondence from which I have quoted, there has been no allusion whatever to the publication of her poems, nor is there the least hint of the intention of the sisters to publish any tales. I remember, however, many little particulars which Miss Bronte gave me, in answer to my inquiries respecting her mode of composition, etc. She said, that it was not every day, that she could write. Sometimes weeks or even months elapsed before she felt that she had anything to add to that portion of her story which was already written. Then, some morning, she would waken up, and the progress of her tale lay clear and bright before her, in distinct vision. when this was the case, all her care was to discharge her household and filial duties, so as to obtain leisure to sit down and write out the incidents and consequent thoughts, which were, in fact, more present to her mind at such times than her actual life itself. Yet notwithstanding this "possession" (as it were), those who survive, of her daily and household companions, are clear in their testimony, that never was the claim of any duty, never was the call of another for help, neglected for an instant. It had become necessary to give Tabby — now nearly eighty years of age — the assistance of a girl. Tabby relinquished any of her work with jealous reluctance, and could not bear to be reminded, though ever so delicately, that the acuteness of her senses was dulled by age. The other servant might not interfere with what she chose to consider her exclusive work. Among other things, she reserved to herself the right of peeling the potatoes for dinner; but as she was growing blind, she often left in those black specks, which we in the North call the “eyes” of the potato. Miss Bronte was too dainty a housekeeper to put up with this; yet she could not bear to hurt the faithful old servant, by bidding the younger maiden go over the potatoes again, and so reminding Tabby that her work was less effectual than formerly. Accordingly she would steal into the kitchen, and quietly carry off the bowl of vegetables, without Tabby’s being aware, and breaking off in the full flow of interest and inspiration in her writing, carefully cut out the specks in the potatoes, and noiselessly carry them back to their place. This little proceeding may show how orderly and fully she accomplished her duties, even at those times when the “possession” was upon her.

Any one who has studied her writings, — whether in print or in her letters; any one who has enjoyed the rare privilege of listening to her talk, must have noticed her singular felicity in the choice of words. She herself, in writing her books, was solicitous on this point. One set of words was the truthful mirror of her thoughts; no others, however apparently identical in meaning, would do. She had that strong practical regard for the simple holy truth of expression, which Mr. Trench has enforced, as a duty too often neglected. She would wait patiently searching for the right term, until it presented itself to her. It might be provincial, it might be derived from the Latin; so that it accurately represented her idea, she did not mind whence it came; but this care makes her style present the finish of a piece of mosaic. Each component part, however small, has been dropped into the right place. She never wrote down a sentence until she clearly understood what she wanted to say, had deliberately chosen the words, and arranged them in their right order. Hence it comes that, in the scraps of paper covered with her pencil writing which I have seen, there will occasionally be a sentence scored out, but seldom, if ever, a word or an expression. She wrote on these bits of paper in a minute hand, holding each against a piece of board, such as is used in binding books, for a desk. This plan was necessary for one so short-sighted as she was; and, besides, it enabled her to use pencil and paper, as she sat near the fire in the twilight hours, or if (as was too often the case) she was wakeful for hours in the night. Her finished manuscripts were copied from these pencil scraps, in clear, legible, delicate traced writing, almost as easy to read as print.

The sisters retained the old habit, which was begun in their aunt’s lifetime, of putting away their work at nine o’clock, and beginning their study, pacing up and down the sitting room. At this time, they talked over the stories they were engaged upon, and described their plots. Once or twice a week, each read to the others what she had written, and heard what they had to say about it. Charlotte told me, that the remarks made had seldom any effect in inducing her to alter her work, so possessed was she with the feeling that she had described reality; but the readings were of great and stirring interest to all, taking them out of the gnawing pressure of daily-recurring cares, and setting them in a free place. It was on one of these occasions, that Charlotte determined to make her heroine plain, small, and unattractive, in defiance of the accepted canon.

The writer of the beautiful obituary article on "the death of Currer Bell" most likely learnt from herself what is there stated, and which I will take the liberty of quoting, about Jane Eyre.

"She once told her sisters that they were wrong — even morally wrong — in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, 'I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.' Hence 'Jane Eyre,' said she in telling the anecdote: 'but she is not myself, any further than that.' As the work went on, the interest deepened to the writer. When she came to 'Thornfield' she could not stop. Being short-sighted to excess, she wrote in little square paper-books, held close to her eyes, and (the first copy) in pencil. On she went, writing incessantly for three weeks; by which time she had carried her heroine away from Thornfield, and was herself in a fever which compelled her to pause."

This is all, I believe, which can now be told respecting the conception and composition of this wonderful book, which was, however, only at its commencement when Miss Bronte returned with her father to Haworth, after their anxious expedition to Manchester.

They arrived at home about the end of September. Mr. Bronte was daily gaining strength, but he was still forbidden to exercise his sight much. Things had gone on more comfortably while she was away than Charlotte had dared to hope, and she expresses herself thankful for the good ensured and the evil spared during her absence.

Soon after this some proposal, of which I have not been able to gain a clear account, was again mooted for Miss Bronte's opening a school at some place distant from Haworth. It elicited the following fragment of a characteristic reply: —

"Leave home! — I shall neither be able to find place nor employment, perhaps, too, I shall be quite past the prime of life, my faculties will be rusted, and my few acquirements in a great measure forgotten. These ideas sting me keenly sometimes; but, whenever I consult my conscience, it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home, and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release. I could hardly expect success if I were to err against such warnings. I should like to hear from you again soon. Bring — — to the point, and make him give you a clear, not a vague, account of what pupils he really could promise; people often think they can do great things in that way till they have tried; but getting pupils is unlike getting any other sort of goods."

Whatever might be the nature and extent of this negotiation, the end of it was that Charlotte adhered to the decision of her conscience, which bade her remain at home, as long as her presence could cheer or comfort those who were in distress, or had the slightest influence over him who was the cause of it. The next extract gives us a glimpse into the cares of that home. It is from a letter dated December 15th.

"I hope you are not frozen up; the cold here is dreadful. I do not remember such a series of North-Pole days. England might really have taken a slide up into the Arctic Zone; the sky looks like ice; the earth is frozen; the wind is as keen as a two-edged blade. We have all had severe colds and coughs in consequence of the weather. Poor Anne has suffered greatly from asthma, but is now, we are glad to say, rather better. She had two nights last week when her cough and difficulty of breathing were painful indeed to hear and witness, and must have been most distressing to suffer; she bore it, as she bears all affliction, without one complaint, only sighing now and then when nearly worn out. She has an extraordinary heroism of endurance. I admire, but I certainly could not imitate her." . . . "You say I am to 'tell you plenty.' What would you have me say? Nothing happens at Haworth; nothing, at least, of a pleasant kind. One little incident occurred about a week ago, to sting us to life; but if it gives no more pleasure for you to hear, than it did for us to witness, you will scarcely thank me for adverting to it. It was merely the arrival of a Sheriff's officer on a visit to B., inviting him either to pay his debts or take a trip to York. Of course his debts had to be paid. It is not agreeable to lose money, time after time, in this way; but where is the use of dwelling on such subjects? It will make him no better."

"December 28th.

"I feel as if it was almost a farce to sit down and write to you now, with nothing to say worth listening to; and, indeed, if it were not for two reasons, I should put off the business at least a fortnight hence. The first reason is, I want another letter from you, for your letters are interesting, they have something in them; some results of experience and observation; one receives them with pleasure, and reads them with relish; and these letters I cannot expect to get, unless I reply to them. I wish the correspondence could be managed so as to be all on one side. The second reason is derived from a remark in your last, that you felt lonely, something as I was at Brussels, and that consequently you had a peculiar desire to hear from old acquaintance. I can understand and sympathise with this. I remember the shortest note was a treat to me, when I was at the above-named place; therefore I write. I have also a third reason: it is a haunting terror lest you should imagine I forget you — that my regard cools with absence. It is not in my nature to forget your nature; though, I dare say, I should spit fire and explode sometimes if we lived together continually; and you, too, would get angry, and then we should get reconciled and jog on as before. Do you ever get dissatisfied with your own temper when you are long fixed to one place, in one scene, subject to one monotonous species of annoyance? I do: I am now in that unenviable frame of mind; my humour, I think, is too soon over- thrown, too sore, too demonstrative and vehement. I almost long for some of the uniform serenity you describe in Mrs. — — ‘s disposition; or, at least, I would fain have her power of self- control and concealment; but I would not take her artificial habits and ideas along with her composure. After all I should prefer being as I am. . . You do right not to be annoyed at any maxims of conventionality you meet with. Regard all new ways in the light of fresh experience for you: if you see any honey gather it.” . . . “I don’t, after all, consider that we ought to despise everything we see in the world, merely because it is not what we are accustomed to. I suspect, on the contrary, that there are not unfrequently substantial reasons underneath for customs that appear to us absurd; and if I were ever again to find myself amongst strangers, I should be solicitous to examine before I condemned. Indiscriminating irony and faultfinding are just sumphishness, and that is all. Anne is now much better, but papa has been for near a fortnight far from well with the influenza; he has at times a most distressing cough, and his spirits are much depressed.”

So ended the year 1846.

CHAPTER II

The next year opened with a spell of cold dreary weather, which told severely on a constitution already tried by anxiety and care. Miss Bronte describes herself as having utterly lost her appetite, and as looking “grey, old, worn and sunk,” from her sufferings during the inclement season. The cold brought on severe toothache; toothache was the cause of a succession of restless miserable nights; and long wakefulness told acutely upon her nerves, making them feel with redoubled sensitiveness all the harass of her oppressive life. Yet she would not allow herself to lay her bad health to the charge of an uneasy mind; “for after all,” said she at this time, “I have many, many things to be thankful for.” But the real state of things may be gathered from the following extracts from her letters.

“March 1st.

“Even at the risk of appearing very exacting, I can’t help saying that I should like a letter as long as your last, every time you write. Short notes give one the feeling of a very small piece of a very good thing to eat, — they set the appetite on edge, and don’t satisfy it, — a letter leaves you more contented; and yet, after all, I am very glad to get notes; so don’t think, when you are pinched for time and materials, that it is useless to write a few lines; be assured, a few lines are very acceptable as far as they go; and though I like long letters, I would by no means have you to make a task of writing them. . . . I really should like you to come to Haworth, before I again go to B — — . And it is natural and right that I should have this wish. To keep friendship in proper order, the balance of good offices must be preserved, otherwise a disquieting and anxious feeling creeps in, and destroys mutual comfort. In summer and in fine weather, your visit here might be much better managed than in winter. We could go out more, be more independent of the house and of our room. Branwell has been conducting himself very badly lately. I expect, from the extravagance of his behaviour, and from mysterious hints he drops (for he never will speak out plainly), that we shall be hearing news of fresh debts contracted by him soon. My health is better: I lay the blame of its feebleness on the cold weather, more than on an uneasy mind.”

“March 24th, 1847.

“It is at Haworth, if all be well, that we must next see each other again. I owe you a grudge for giving Miss M — — some very exaggerated account about my not being well, and setting her on to urge my leaving home as quite a duty. I’ll take care not to tell you next time, when I think I am looking specially old and ugly; as if people could not have that privilege, without being supposed to be at the last gasp! I shall be thirty-one next birthday. My youth is gone like a dream; and very little use have I ever made of it. What have I done these last thirty years? Precious little."

The quiet, sad year stole on. The sisters were contemplating near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused in the person of that brother, once their fond darling and dearest pride. They had to cheer the poor old father, into whose heart all trials sank the deeper, because of the silent stoicism of his endurance. They had to watch over his health, of which, whatever was its state, he seldom complained. They had to save, as much as they could, the precious remnants of his sight. They had to order the frugal household with increased care, so as to supply wants and expenditure utterly foreign to their self-denying natures. Though they shrank from overmuch contact with their fellow-beings, for all whom they met they had kind words, if few; and when kind actions were needed, they were not spared, if the sisters at the parsonage could render them. They visited the parish-schools duly; and often were Charlotte's rare and brief holidays of a visit from home shortened by her sense of the necessity of being in her place at the Sunday-school.

In the intervals of such a life as this, "Jane Eyre" was making progress. "The Professor" was passing slowly and heavily from publisher to publisher. "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey" had been accepted by another publisher, "on terms somewhat impoverishing to the two authors;" a bargain to be alluded to more fully hereafter. It was lying in his hands, awaiting his pleasure for its passage through the press, during all the months of early summer.

The piece of external brightness to which the sisters looked during these same summer months, was the hope that the friend to whom so many of Charlotte's letters are addressed, and who was her chosen companion, whenever circumstances permitted them to be together, as well as a favourite with Emily and Anne, would be able to pay them a visit at Haworth. Fine weather had come in May, Charlotte writes, and they hoped to make their visitor decently comfortable. Their brother was tolerably well, having got to the end of a considerable sum of money which he became possessed of in the spring, and therefore under the wholesome restriction of poverty. But Charlotte warns her friend that she must expect to find a change in his appearance, and that he is broken in mind; and ends her note of entreating invitation by saying, "I pray for fine weather, that we may get out while you stay."

At length the day was fixed.

"Friday will suit us very well. I DO trust nothing will now arise to prevent your coming. I shall be anxious about the weather on that day; if it rains, I shall cry. Don't expect me to meet you; where would be the good of it? I neither like to meet, nor to be met. Unless, indeed, you had a box or a basket for me to carry; then there would be some sense in it. Come in black, blue, pink, white, or scarlet, as you like. Come shabby or smart, neither the colour nor the condition signifies; provided only the dress contain E — — , all will be right.”

But there came the first of a series of disappointments to be borne. One feels how sharp it must have been to have wrung out the following words.

“May 20th.

“Your letter of yesterday did indeed give me a cruel chill of disappointment. I cannot blame you, for I know it was not your fault. I do not altogether exempt — — from reproach. . . . This is bitter, but I feel bitter. As to going to B — — , I will not go near the place till you have been to Haworth. My respects to all and sundry, accompanied with a large amount of wormwood and gall, from the effusion of which you and your mother are alone excepted. — C. B.

“You are quite at liberty to tell what I think, if you judge proper. Though it is true I may be somewhat unjust, for I am deeply annoyed. I thought I had arranged your visit tolerably comfortable for you this time. I may find it more difficult on another occasion.”

I must give one sentence from a letter written about this time, as it shows distinctly the clear strong sense of the writer.

“I was amused by what she says respecting her wish that, when she marries, her husband will, at least, have a will of his own, even should he be a tyrant. Tell her, when she forms that aspiration again, she must make it conditional if her husband has a strong will, he must also have strong sense, a kind heart, and a thoroughly correct notion of justice; because a man with a WEAK BRAIN and a STRONG WILL, is merely an intractable brute; you can have no hold of him; you can never lead him right. A TYRANT under any circumstances is a curse.”

Meanwhile, “The Professor” had met with many refusals from different publishers; some, I have reason to believe, not over-courteously worded in writing to an unknown author, and none alleging any distinct reasons for its rejection. Courtesy is always due; but it is, perhaps, hardly to be expected that, in the press of business in a great publishing house, they should find time to explain why they decline particular works. Yet, though one course of action is not to be wondered at, the opposite may fall upon a grieved and disappointed mind with all the graciousness of dew; and I can well sympathise with the published account which “Currer Bell” gives, of the feelings experienced on reading Messrs. Smith and Elder’s letter containing the rejection of “The Professor”.

“As a forlorn hope, we tried one publishing house more. Ere long, in a much shorter space than that on which experience had taught him to calculate, there came a letter, which he opened in the dreary anticipation of finding two hard hopeless lines, intimating that “Messrs. Smith and Elder were not disposed to publish the MS.,” and, instead, he took out of the envelope a letter of two pages. He read it trembling. It declined, indeed, to publish that tale, for business reasons, but it discussed its merits and demerits, so courteously, so considerately, in a spirit so rational, with a discrimination so enlightened, that this very refusal cheered the author better than a vulgarly-expressed acceptance would have done. It was added, that a work in three volumes would meet with careful attention."

Mr. Smith has told me a little circumstance connected with the reception of this manuscript, which seems to me indicative of no ordinary character. It came (accompanied by the note given below) in a brown paper parcel, to 65 Cornhill. Besides the address to Messrs. Smith and Co., there were on it those of other publishers to whom the tale had been sent, not obliterated, but simply scored through, so that Messrs. Smith at once perceived the names of some of the houses in the trade to which the unlucky parcel had gone, without success.

To MESSRS. SMITH AND ELDER.

"July 15th, 1847.

"Gentlemen — I beg to submit to your consideration the accompanying manuscript. I should be glad to learn whether it be such as you approve, and would undertake to publish at as early a period as possible. Address, Mr. Currer Bell, under cover to Miss Bronte, Haworth, Bradford, Yorkshire."

Some time elapsed before an answer was returned.

A little circumstance may be mentioned here, though it belongs to a somewhat earlier period, as showing Miss Bronte's inexperience of the ways of the world, and willing deference to the opinion of others. She had written to a publisher about one of her manuscripts, which she had sent him, and, not receiving any reply, she consulted her brother as to what could be the reason for the prolonged silence. He at once set it down to her not having enclosed a postage-stamp in her letter. She accordingly wrote again, to repair her former omission, and apologise for it.

To MESSRS. SMITH AND ELDER.

"August 2nd, 1847.

"Gentlemen, — About three weeks since, I sent for your consideration a MS. entitled "The Professor", a tale by Currer Bell. I should be glad to know whether it reached your hands safely, and likewise to learn, at your earliest convenience, whether it be such as you can undertake to publish. — I am, gentlemen, yours respectfully,

"CURRER BELL.

"I enclose a directed cover for your reply."

This time her note met with a prompt answer; for, four days later, she writes (in reply to the letter which she afterwards characterised in the Preface to the second edition of "Wuthering Heights", as containing a refusal so delicate, reasonable, and courteous, as to be more cheering than some acceptances):

"Your objection to the want of varied interest in the tale is, I am aware, not without grounds; yet it appears to me that it might be published without serious risk, if its appearance were speedily followed up by another work from the same pen, of a more striking and exciting character. The first work might serve as an introduction, and accustom the public to the author's the success of the second might thereby be rendered more probable. I have a second narrative in three volumes, now in progress, and nearly completed, to which I have endeavoured to impart a more vivid interest than belongs to "The Professor". In about a month I hope to finish it, so that if a publisher were found for "The Professor", the second narrative might follow as soon as was deemed advisable; and thus the interest of the public (if any interest was aroused) might not be suffered to cool. Will you be kind enough to favour me with your judgment on this plan?"

While the minds of the three sisters were in this state of suspense, their long-expected friend came to pay her promised visit. She was with them at the beginning of the glowing August of that year. They were out on the moors for the greater part of the day basking in the golden sunshine, which was bringing on an unusual plenteousness of harvest, for which, somewhat later, Charlotte expressed her earnest desire that there should be a thanksgiving service in all the churches. August was the season of glory for the neighbourhood of Haworth. Even the smoke, lying in the valley between that village and Keighley, took beauty from the radiant colours on the moors above, the rich purple of the heather bloom calling out an harmonious contrast in the tawny golden light that, in the full heat of summer evenings, comes stealing everywhere through the dun atmosphere of the hollows. And up, on the moors, turning away from all habitations of men, the royal ground on which they stood would expand into long swells of amethyst-tinted hills, melting away into aerial tints; and the fresh and fragrant scent of the heather, and the "murmur of innumerable bees," would lend a poignancy to the relish with which they welcomed their friend to their own true home on the wild and open hills.

There, too, they could escape from the Shadow in the house below.

Throughout this time — during all these confidences — not a word was uttered to their friend of the three tales in London; two accepted and in the press — one trembling in the balance of a publisher's judgment; nor did she hear of that other story "nearly completed," lying in manuscript in the grey old parsonage down below. She might have her suspicions that they all wrote with an intention of publication some time; but she knew the bounds which they set to themselves in their communications; nor could she, nor can any one else, wonder at their reticence, when remembering how scheme after scheme had failed, just as it seemed close upon accomplishment.

Mr. Bronte, too, had his suspicions of something going on; but, never being spoken to, he did not speak on the subject, and consequently his ideas were vague and uncertain, only just prophetic enough to keep him from being actually stunned when, later on, he heard of the success of "Jane Eyre"; to the progress of which we must now return.

To MESSRS. SMITH AND ELDER.

"August 24th.

"I now send you per rail a MS. entitled 'Jane Eyre,' a novel in three volumes, by Currer Bell. I find I cannot prepay the carriage of the parcel, as money for that purpose is not received at the small station-house where it is left. If, when you acknowledge the receipt of the MS., you would have the goodness to mention the amount charged on delivery, I will immediately transmit it in postage stamps. It is better in future to address Mr. Currer Bell, under cover to Miss Bronte, Haworth, Bradford, Yorkshire, as there is a risk of letters otherwise directed not reaching me at present. To save trouble, I enclose an envelope."

"Jane Eyre" was accepted, and printed and published by October 16th.

While it was in the press, Miss Bronte went to pay a short visit to her friend at B — — . The proofs were forwarded to her there, and she occasionally sat at the same table with her friend, correcting them; but they did not exchange a word on the subject.

Immediately on her return to the Parsonage, she wrote:

"September.

"I had a very wet, windy walk home from Keighley; but my fatigue quite disappeared when I reached home, and found all well. Thank God for it.

"My boxes came safe this morning. I have distributed the presents. Papa says I am to remember him most kindly to you. The screen will be very useful, and he thanks you for it. Tabby was charmed with her cap. She said, 'she never thought o' naught o' t' sort as Miss sending her aught, and, she is sure, she can never thank her enough for it.' I was infuriated on finding a jar in my trunk. At first, I hoped it was empty, but when I found it heavy and replete, I could have hurled it all the way back to B — — . However, the inscription A. B. softened me much. It was at once kind and villainous in you to send it. You ought first to be tenderly kissed, and then afterwards as tenderly whipped. Emily is just now on the floor of the bed-room where I am writing, looking at her apples. She smiled when I gave the collar to her as your present, with an expression at once well-pleased and slightly surprised. All send their love. — Yours, in a mixture of anger and love."

When the manuscript of "Jane Eyre" had been received by the future publishers of that remarkable novel, it fell to the share of a gentleman connected with the firm to read it first. He was so powerfully struck by the character of the tale, that he reported his impression in very strong terms to Mr. Smith, who appears to have been much amused by the admiration excited. "You seem to have been so enchanted, that I do not know how to believe you," he laughingly said. But when a second reader, in the person of a clear-headed Scotchman, not given to enthusiasm, had taken the MS. home in the evening, and became so deeply interested in it, as to sit up half the night to finish it, Mr. Smith's curiosity was sufficiently excited to prompt him to read it for himself; and great as were the praises which had been bestowed upon it, he found that they had not exceeded the truth.

On its publication, copies were presented to a few private literary friends. Their discernment had been rightly reckoned upon. They were of considerable standing in the world of letters; and one and all returned expressions of high praise along with their thanks for the book. Among them was the great writer of fiction for whom Miss Bronte felt so strong an admiration; he immediately appreciated, and, in a characteristic note to the publishers, acknowledged its extraordinary merits.

The Reviews were more tardy, or more cautious. The Athenaeum and the Spectator gave short notices, containing qualified admissions of the power of the author. The Literary Gazette was uncertain as to whether it was safe to praise an unknown author. The Daily News declined accepting the copy which had been sent, on the score of a rule "never to review novels;" but a little later on, there appeared a notice of the Bachelor of the Albany in that paper; and Messrs. Smith and Elder again forwarded a copy of "Jane Eyre" to the Editor, with a request for a notice. This time the work was accepted; but I am not aware what was the character of the article upon it.

The Examiner came forward to the rescue, as far as the opinions of professional critics were concerned. The literary articles in that paper were always remarkable for their genial and generous appreciation of merit nor was the notice of "Jane Eyre" an exception; it was full of hearty, yet delicate and discriminating praise. Otherwise, the press in general did little to promote the sale of the novel; the demand for it among librarians had begun before the appearance of the review in the Examiner; the power of fascination of the tale itself made its merits known to the public, without the kindly finger-posts of professional criticism; and, early in December, the rush began for copies.

I will insert two or three of Miss Bronte's letters to her publishers, in order to show how timidly the idea of success was received by one so unaccustomed to adopt a sanguine view of any subject in which she was individually concerned. The occasions on which these notes were written, will explain themselves.

"Oct. 19th, 1847.

"Gentlemen, — The six copies of "Jane Eyre" reached me this morning. You have given the work every advantage which good paper, clear type, and a seemly outside can supply; — if it fails, the fault will lie with the author, — you are exempt.

"I now await the judgment of the press and the public. — I am,
Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

C. BELL."

MESSRS. SMITH, ELDER, AND CO.

"Oct. 26th, 1847.

"Gentlemen, — I have received the newspapers. They speak quite as favourably of "Jane Eyre" as I expected them to do. The notice in the Literary Gazette seems certainly to have been indited in rather a flat mood, and the Athenaeum has a style of its own, which I respect, but cannot exactly relish;

still when one considers that journals of that standing have a dignity to maintain which would be deranged by a too cordial recognition of the claims of an obscure author, I suppose there is every reason to be satisfied.

"Meantime a brisk sale would be effectual support under the hauteur of lofty critics. — I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

"C. BELL."

MESSRS. SMITH, ELDER, AND CO.

"Nov. 13th, 1847.

"Gentlemen, — I have to acknowledge the receipt of yours of the 11th inst., and to thank you for the information it communicates. The notice from the People's Journal also duly reached me, and this morning I received the Spectator. The critique in the Spectator gives that view of the book which will naturally be taken by a certain class of minds; I shall expect it to be followed by other notices of a similar nature. The way to detraction has been pointed out, and will probably be pursued. Most future notices will in all likelihood have a reflection of the Spectator in them. I fear this turn of opinion will not improve the demand for the book — but time will show. If "Jane Eyre" has any solid worth in it, it ought to weather a gust of unfavourable wind. — I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

"C. BELL."

MESSRS. SMITH, ELDER, AND CO.

"Nov. 30th, 1847.

"Gentlemen, — I have received the Economist, but not the Examiner; from some cause that paper has missed, as the Spectator did on a former occasion; I am glad, however, to learn through your letter, that its notice of "Jane Eyre" was favourable, and also that the prospects of the work appear to improve.

"I am obliged to you for the information respecting "Wuthering Heights". — I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

"C. BELL."

To MESSRS. SMITH, ELDER, AND CO.

"Dec. 1st, 1847.

"Gentlemen, — The Examiner reached me to-day; it had been missent on account of the direction, which was to Currer Bell, care of Miss Bronte. Allow me to intimate that it would be better in future not to put the name of Currer Bell on the outside of communications; if directed simply to Miss Bronte they will be more likely to reach their destination safely. Currer Bell is not known in the district, and I have no wish that he should become known. The notice in the Examiner gratified me very much; it appears to be from the pen of an able man who has understood what he undertakes to criticise; of course, approbation from such a quarter is encouraging to an author, and I trust it will prove beneficial to the work. — I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

C. BELL.

"I received likewise seven other notices from provincial papers enclosed in an envelope. I thank you very sincerely for so punctually sending me all the various criticisms on “Jane Eyre”.”

TO MESSRS. SMITH, ELDER, AND CO.

“Dec. 10th, 1847.

“Gentlemen, — I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter inclosing a bank post bill, for which I thank you. Having already expressed my sense of your kind and upright conduct, I can now only say that I trust you will always have reason to be as well content with me as I am with you. If the result of any future exertions I may be able to make should prove agreeable and advantageous to you, I shall be well satisfied; and it would be a serious source of regret to me if I thought you ever had reason to repent being my publishers.

“You need not apologise, Gentlemen, for having written to me so seldom; of course I am always glad to hear from you, but I am truly glad to hear from Mr. Williams likewise; he was my first favourable critic; he first gave me encouragement to persevere as an author, consequently I naturally respect him and feel grateful to him.

“Excuse the informality of my letter, and believe me, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

CURRER BELL.”

There is little record remaining of the manner in which the first news of its wonderful success reached and affected the one heart of the three sisters. I once asked Charlotte — we were talking about the description of Lowood school, and she was saying that she was not sure whether she should have written it, if she had been aware how instantaneously it would have been identified with Cowan Bridge — whether the popularity to which the novel attained had taken her by surprise. She hesitated a little, and then said: “I believed that what had impressed me so forcibly when I wrote it, must make a strong impression on any one who read it. I was not surprised at those who read “Jane Eyre” being deeply interested in it; but I hardly expected that a book by an unknown author could find readers.”

The sisters had kept the knowledge of their literary ventures from their father, fearing to increase their own anxieties and disappointment by witnessing his; for he took an acute interest in all that befell his children, and his own tendency had been towards literature in the days when he was young and hopeful. It was true he did not much manifest his feelings in words; he would have thought that he was prepared for disappointment as the lot of man, and that he could have met it with stoicism; but words are poor and tardy interpreters of feelings to those who love one another, and his daughters knew how he would have borne ill-success worse for them than for himself. So they did not tell him what they were undertaking. He says now that he suspected it all along, but his suspicions could take no exact form, as all he was certain of was, that his children were perpetually writing — and not writing letters. We have seen how the communications from their publishers were received “under cover to Miss Bronte.” Once, Charlotte told me, they overheard the postman meeting Mr. Bronte, as the latter was leaving the house, and inquiring from the parson where one Currer Bell could be living, to which Mr. Bronte replied that there was no such person in the parish. This must have been the misadventure to which Miss Bronte alludes in the beginning of her correspondence with Mr. Aylott.

Now, however, when the demand for the work had assured success to "Jane Eyre," her sisters urged Charlotte to tell their father of its publication. She accordingly went into his study one afternoon after his early dinner, carrying with her a copy of the book, and one or two reviews, taking care to include a notice adverse to it.

She informed me that something like the following conversation took place between her and him. (I wrote down her words the day after I heard them; and I am pretty sure they are quite accurate.)

"Papa, I've been writing a book."

"Have you, my dear?"

"Yes, and I want you to read it."

"I am afraid it will try my eyes too much."

"But it is not in manuscript: it is printed."

"My dear! you've never thought of the expense it will be! It will be almost sure to be a loss, for how can you get a book sold? No one knows you or your name."

"But, papa, I don't think it will be a loss; no more will you, if you will just let me read you a review or two, and tell you more about it."

So she sate down and read some of the reviews to her father; and then, giving him the copy of "Jane Eyre" that she intended for him, she left him to read it. When he came in to tea, he said, "Girls, do you know Charlotte has been writing a book, and it is much better than likely?"

But while the existence of Currer Bell, the author, was like a piece of a dream to the quiet inhabitants of Haworth Parsonage, who went on with their uniform household life, — their cares for their brother being its only variety, — the whole reading-world of England was in a ferment to discover the unknown author. Even the publishers of "Jane Eyre" were ignorant whether Currer Bell was a real or an assumed name, — whether it belonged to a man or a woman. In every town people sought out the list of their friends and acquaintances, and turned away in disappointment. No one they knew had genius enough to be the author. Every little incident mentioned in the book was turned this way and that to answer, if possible, the much-vexed question of sex. All in vain. People were content to relax their exertions to satisfy their curiosity, and simply to sit down and greatly admire.

I am not going to write an analysis of a book with which every one who reads this biography is sure to be acquainted; much less a criticism upon a work, which the great flood of public opinion has lifted up from the obscurity in which it first appeared, and laid high and safe on the everlasting hills of fame.

Before me lies a packet of extracts from newspapers and periodicals, which Mr. Bronte has sent me. It is touching to look them over, and see how there is hardly any notice, however short and clumsily-worded, in any obscure provincial paper, but what has been cut out and carefully ticketed with its date by the poor, bereaved father, — so proud when he first read them — so desolate now. For one and all are full of praise of this great, unknown genius, which suddenly appeared amongst us. Conjecture as to the authorship ran about like wild-fire. People in London, smooth and polished as the Athenians of old, and like them "spending their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing," were astonished and delighted to find that a fresh sensation, a new pleasure, was in reserve for them in the uprising of an author, capable of depicting with accurate and Titanic power the strong, self-reliant, racy, and individual characters which were not, after all, extinct species, but lingered still in existence in the North. They thought that there was some exaggeration mixed with the peculiar force of delineation. Those nearer to the spot, where the scene of the story was apparently laid, were sure, from the very truth and accuracy of the writing, that the writer was no Southeron; for though "dark, and cold, and rugged is the North," the old strength of the Scandinavian races yet abides there, and glowed out in every character depicted in "Jane Eyre." Farther than this, curiosity, both honourable and dishonourable, was at fault.

When the second edition appeared, in the January of the following year, with the dedication to Mr. Thackeray, people looked at each other and wondered afresh. But Currer Bell knew no more of William Makepeace Thackeray as an individual man — of his life, age, fortunes, or circumstances — than she did of those of Mr. Michael Angelo Titmarsh. The one had placed his name as author upon the title-page of Vanity Fair, the other had not. She was thankful for the opportunity of expressing her high admiration of a writer, whom, as she says, she regarded "as the social regenerator of his day — as the very master of that working corps who would restore to rectitude the warped state of things. . . . His wit is bright, his humour attractive, but both bear the same relation to his serious genius, that the mere lambent sheet-lightning, playing under the edge of the summer cloud, does to the electric death-spark hid in its womb."

Anne Bronte had been more than usually delicate all the summer, and her sensitive spirit had been deeply affected by the great anxiety of her home. But now that "Jane Eyre" gave such indications of success, Charlotte began to plan schemes of future pleasure, — perhaps relaxation from care, would be the more correct expression, — for their darling younger sister, the "little one" of the household. But, although Anne was cheered for a time by Charlotte's success, the fact was, that neither her spirits nor her bodily strength were such as to incline her to much active exertion, and she led far too sedentary a life, continually stooping either over her book, or work, or at her desk. "It is with difficulty," writes her sister, "that we can prevail upon her to take a walk, or induce her to converse. I look forward to next summer with the confident intention that she shall, if possible, make at least a brief sojourn at the sea-side." In this same letter, is a sentence, telling how dearly home, even with its present terrible drawback, lay at the roots of her heart; but it is too much blended with reference to the affairs of others to bear quotation.

Any author of a successful novel is liable to an inroad of letters from unknown readers, containing commendation — sometimes of so fulsome and indiscriminating a character as to remind the recipient of Dr. Johnson's famous speech to one who offered presumptuous and injudicious praise — sometimes saying merely a few words, which have power to stir the heart "as with the sound of a trumpet," and in the high humility they excite, to call forth strong resolutions to make all future efforts worthy of such praise; and occasionally containing that true appreciation of both merits and demerits, together with the sources of each, which forms the very criticism and help for which an inexperienced writer thirsts. Of each of these kinds of communication Currer Bell received her full share; and her warm heart, and true sense and high standard of what she aimed at, affixed to each its true value. Among other letters of hers, some to Mr. G. H. Lewes have been kindly placed by him at my service; and as I know Miss Bronte highly prized his letters of encouragement and advice, I shall give extracts from her replies, as their dates occur, because they will indicate the kind of criticism she valued, and also because throughout, in anger, as in agreement and harmony, they show her character unblinded by any self-flattery, full of clear-sighted modesty as to what she really did well, and what she failed in, grateful for friendly interest, and only sore and irritable when the question of sex in authorship was, as she thought, roughly or unfairly treated. As to the rest, the letters speak for themselves, to those who know how to listen, far better than I can interpret their meaning into my poorer and weaker words. Mr. Lewes has politely sent me the following explanation of that letter of his, to which the succeeding one of Miss Bronte is a reply.

"When 'Jane Eyre' first appeared, the publishers courteously sent me a copy. The enthusiasm with which I read it, made me go down to Mr. Parker, and propose to write a review of it for Frazer's Magazine. He would not consent to an unknown novel — for the papers had not yet declared themselves — receiving such importance, but thought it might make one on 'Recent Novels: English and French' — which appeared in Frazer, December, 1847. Meanwhile I had written to Miss Bronte to tell her the delight with which her book filled me; and seem to have sermonised her, to judge from her reply."

To G. H. LEWES, ESQ.

"Nov. 6th, 1847.

"Dear Sir, — Your letter reached me yesterday; I beg to assure you, that I appreciate fully the intention with which it was written, and I thank you sincerely both for its cheering commendation and valuable advice.

"You warn me to beware of melodrama, and you exhort me to adhere to the real. When I first began to write, so impressed was I with the truth of the principles you advocate, that I determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides, and to follow in their very footprints; I restrained imagination, eschewed romance, repressed excitement; over-bright colouring, too, I avoided, and sought to produce something which should be soft, grave, and true.

"My work (a tale in one volume) being completed, I offered it to a publisher. He said it was original, faithful to nature, but he did not feel warranted in accepting it; such a work would not sell. I tried six publishers in succession; they all told me it was deficient in 'startling incident' and 'thrilling excitement,' that it would never suit the circulating libraries, and, as it was on those libraries the success of works of fiction mainly depended, they could not undertake to publish what would be overlooked there.

"'Jane Eyre' was rather objected to at first, on the same grounds, but finally found acceptance.

"I mention this to you, not with a view of pleading exemption from censure, but in order to direct your attention to the root of certain literary evils. If, in your forthcoming article in Frazer, you would bestow a few words of enlightenment on the public who support the circulating libraries, you might, with your powers, do some good.

"You advise me, too, not to stray far from the ground of experience, as I become weak when I enter the region of fiction; and you say, 'real experience is perennially interesting, and to all men.'

"I feel that this also is true; but, dear Sir, is not the real experience of each individual very limited? And, if a writer dwells upon that solely or principally, is he not in danger of repeating himself, and also of becoming an egotist? Then, too, imagination is a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised: are we to be quite deaf to her cry, and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them, and try to reproduce them? And when she is eloquent, and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear, are we not to write to her dictation?

"I shall anxiously search the next number of Fraser for your opinions on these points. — Believe me, dear Sir, yours gratefully,

"C. BELL."

But while gratified by appreciation as an author, she was cautious as to the person from whom she received it; for much of the value of the praise depended on the sincerity and capability of the person rendering it. Accordingly, she applied to Mr. Williams (a gentleman connected with her publishers' firm) for information as to who and what Mr. Lewes was. Her reply, after she had learnt something of the character of her future critic, and while awaiting his criticism, must not be omitted. Besides the reference to him, it contains some amusing allusions to the perplexity which began to be excited respecting the "identity of the brothers Bell," and some notice of the conduct of another publisher towards her sister, which I refrain from characterising, because I understand that truth is considered a libel in speaking of such people.

To W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

"Nov. 10th, 1847.

"Dear Sir, — I have received the Britannia and the Sun, but not the Spectator which I rather regret, as censure, though not pleasant, is often wholesome.

"Thank you for your information regarding Mr. Lewes. I am glad to hear that he is a clever and sincere man: such being the case, I can await his critical sentence with fortitude; even if it goes against me, I shall not murmur; ability and honesty have a right to condemn, where they think condemnation is deserved. From what you say, however, I trust rather to obtain at least a modified approval.

"Your account of the various surmises respecting the identity of the brothers Bell, amused me much: were the enigma solved, it would probably be found not worth the trouble of solution; but I will let it alone; it suits ourselves to remain quiet, and certainly injures no one else.

"The reviewer who noticed the little book of poems, in the Dublin Magazine, conjectured that the soi-disant three personages were in reality but one, who, endowed with an unduly prominent organ of self-esteem, and consequently impressed with a somewhat weighty notion of his own merits, thought them too vast to be concentrated in a single individual, and accordingly divided himself into three, out of consideration, I suppose, for the nerves of the much-to-be-astounded public! This was an ingenious thought in the reviewer, — very original and striking, but not accurate. We are three.

"A prose work, by Ellis and Acton, will soon appear: it should have been out, indeed, long since; for the first proof-sheets were already in the press at the commencement of last August, before Currer Bell had placed the MS. of "Jane Eyre" in your hands. Mr. — — , however, does not do business like Messrs. Smith and Elder; a different spirit seems to preside at — — Street, to that which guides the helm at 65, Cornhill. . . . My relations have suffered from exhausting delay and procrastination, while I have to acknowledge the benefits of a management at once business-like and gentleman-like, energetic and considerate.

"I should like to know if Mr. — — often acts as he has done to my relations, or whether this is an exceptional instance of his method. Do you know, and can you tell me anything about him? You must excuse me for going to the point at once, when I want to learn anything: if my questions are importunate, you are, of course, at liberty to decline answering them. — I am, yours respectfully,

C. BELL."

To G. H. LEWES, ESQ.

"Nov. 22nd, 1847.

"Dear Sir, — I have now read 'Ranthorpe.' I could not get it till a day or two ago; but I have got it and read it at last; and in reading 'Ranthorpe,' I have read a new book, — not a reprint — not a reflection of any other book, but a NEW BOOK.

"I did not know such books were written now. It is very different to any of the popular works of fiction: it fills the mind with fresh knowledge. Your experience and your convictions are made the reader's; and to an author, at least, they have a value and an interest quite unusual. I await your criticism on 'Jane Eyre' now with other sentiments than I entertained before the perusal of 'Ranthorpe.'

"You were a stranger to me. I did not particularly respect you. I did not feel that your praise or blame would have any special weight. I knew little of your right to condemn or approve. NOW I am informed on these points.

"You will be severe; your last letter taught me as much. Well! I shall try to extract good out of your severity: and besides, though I am now sure you are a just, discriminating man, yet, being mortal, you must be fallible; and if any part of your censure galls me too keenly to the quick — gives me deadly pain — I shall for the present disbelieve it, and put it quite aside, till such time as I feel able to receive it without torture. — I am, dear Sir, yours very respectfully,

C. BELL."

In December, 1847, "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey" appeared. The first-named of these stories has revolted many readers by the power with which wicked and exceptional characters are depicted. Others, again, have felt the attraction of remarkable genius, even when displayed on grim and terrible criminals. Miss Bronte herself says, with regard to this tale, "Where delineation of human character is concerned, the case is different. I am bound to avow that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst whom she lived, than a nun has of the country-people that pass her convent gates. My sister's disposition was not naturally gregarious: circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion; except to go to church, or take a walk on the hills, she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Though the feeling for the people around her was benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought, nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced and yet she knew them, knew their ways, their language, and their family histories; she could hear of them with interest, and talk of them with detail minute, graphic, and accurate; but WITH them she rarely exchanged a word. Hence it ensued, that what her mind has gathered of the real concerning them, was too exclusively confined to those tragic and terrible traits, of which, in listening to the secret annals of every rude vicinage, the memory is sometimes compelled to receive the impress. Her imagination, which was a spirit more sombre than sunny — more powerful than sportive — found in such traits material whence it wrought creations like Heathcliff, like Earnshaw, like Catherine. Having formed these beings, she did not know what she had done. If the auditor of her work, when read in manuscript, shuddered under the grinding influence of natures so relentless and implacable — of spirits so lost and fallen; if it was complained that the mere hearing of certain vivid and fearful scenes banished sleep by night, and disturbed mental peace by day, Ellis Bell would wonder what was meant, and suspect the complainant of affectation. Had she but lived, her mind would of itself have grown like a strong tree — loftier, straighter, wider-spreading — and its matured fruits would have attained a mellower ripeness and sunnier bloom; but on that mind time and experience alone could work; to the influence of other intellects she was not amenable."

Whether justly or unjustly, the productions of the two younger Miss Brontes were not received with much favour at the time of their publication. "Critics failed to do them justice. The immature, but very real, powers revealed in 'Wuthering Heights,' were scarcely recognised; its import and nature were misunderstood; the identity of its author was misrepresented: it was said that this was an earlier and ruder attempt of the same pen which had produced 'Jane Eyre.'" . . . "Unjust and grievous error! We laughed at it at first, but I deeply lament it now."

Henceforward Charlotte Bronte's existence becomes divided into two parallel currents — her life as Currer Bell, the author; her life as Charlotte Bronte, the woman. There were separate duties belonging to each character — not opposing each other; not impossible, but difficult to be reconciled. When a man becomes an author, it is probably merely a change of employment to him. He takes a portion of that time which has hitherto been devoted to some other study or pursuit; he gives up something of the legal or medical profession, in which he has hitherto endeavoured to serve others, or relinquishes part of the trade or business by which he has been striving to gain a livelihood; and another merchant or lawyer, or doctor, steps into his vacant place, and probably does as well as he. But no other can take up the quiet, regular duties of the daughter, the wife, or the mother, as well as she whom God has appointed to fill that particular place: a woman's principal work in life is hardly left to her own choice; nor can she drop the domestic charges devolving on her as an individual, for the exercise of the most splendid talents that were ever bestowed. And yet she must not shrink from the extra responsibility implied by the very fact of her possessing such talents. She must not hide her gift in a napkin; it was meant for the use and service of others. In an humble and faithful spirit must she labour to do what is not impossible, or God would not have set her to do it.

I put into words what Charlotte Bronte put into actions.

The year 1848 opened with sad domestic distress. It is necessary, however painful, to remind the reader constantly of what was always present to the hearts of father and sisters at this time. It is well that the thoughtless critics, who spoke of the sad and gloomy views of life presented by the Brontes in their tales, should know how such words were wrung out of them by the living recollection of the long agony they suffered. It is well, too, that they who have objected to the representation of coarseness and shrank from it with repugnance, as if such conceptions arose out of the writers, should learn, that, not from the imagination — not from internal conception — but from the hard cruel facts, pressed down, by external life, upon their very senses, for long months and years together, did they write out what they saw, obeying the stern dictates of their consciences. They might be mistaken. They might err in writing at all, when their affections were so great that they could not write otherwise than they did of life. It is possible that it would have been better to have described only good and pleasant people, doing only good and pleasant things (in which case they could hardly have written at any time): all I say is, that never, I believe, did women, possessed of such wonderful gifts, exercise them with a fuller feeling of responsibility for their use. As to mistakes, stand now — as authors as well as women — before the judgment-seat of God.

“Jan. 11th, 1848.

“We have not been very comfortable here at home lately. Branwell has, by some means, contrived to get more money from the old quarter, and has led us a sad life. . . . Papa is harassed day and night; we have little peace, he is always sick; has two or three times fallen down in fits; what will be the ultimate end, God knows. But who is without their drawback, their scourge, their skeleton behind the curtain? It remains only to do one’s best, and endure with patience what God sends.”

I suppose that she had read Mr. Lewes’ review on “Recent Novels,” when it appeared in the December of the last year, but I find no allusion to it till she writes to him on January 12th, 1848.

“Dear Sir, — I thank you then sincerely for your generous review; and it is with the sense of double content I express my gratitude, because I am now sure the tribute is not superfluous or obtrusive. You were not severe on ‘Jane Eyre;’ you were very lenient. I am glad you told me my faults plainly in private, for in your public notice you touch on them so lightly, I should perhaps have passed them over thus indicated, with too little reflection.

“I mean to observe your warning about being careful how I undertake new works; my stock of materials is not abundant, but very slender; and, besides, neither my experience, my acquirements, nor my powers, are sufficiently varied to justify my ever becoming a frequent writer. I tell you this, because your article in Frazer left in me an uneasy impression that you were disposed to think better of the author of ‘Jane Eyre’ than that individual deserved; and I would rather you had a correct than a flattering opinion of me, even though I should never see you.

“If I ever DO write another book, I think I will have nothing of what you call ‘melodrama;’ I think so, but I am not sure. I THINK, too, I will endeavour to follow the counsel which shines out of Miss Austen’s ‘mild eyes,’ ‘to finish more and be more subdued;’ but neither am I sure of that. When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them, which becomes their master — which will have its own way — putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature; new-moulding characters, giving unthought of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully-elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones.

"Is it not so? And should we try to counteract this influence?
Can we indeed counteract it?

"I am glad that another work of yours will soon appear; most curious shall I be to see whether you will write up to your own principles, and work out your own theories. You did not do it altogether in 'Ranthorpe' — at least not in the latter part; but the first portion was, I think, nearly without fault; then it had a pith, truth, significance in it, which gave the book sterling value; but to write so, one must have seen and known a great deal, and I have seen and known very little.

"Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that
point. What induced you to say that you would have rather written
"Pride and Prejudice,' or 'Tom Jones,' than any of the 'Waverley
Novels'?

"I had not seen 'Pride and Prejudice' till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate, daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses. These observations will probably irritate you, but I shall run the risk.

"Now I can understand admiration of George Sand; for though I never saw any of her works which I admired throughout (even 'Consuelo,' which is the best, or the best that I have read, appears to me to couple strange extravagance with wondrous excellence), yet she has a grasp of mind, which, if I cannot fully comprehend, I can very deeply respect; she is sagacious and profound; — Miss Austen is only shrewd and observant.

"Am I wrong — or, were you hasty in what you said? If you have time, I should be glad to hear further on this subject; if not, or if you think the questions frivolous, do not trouble yourself to reply. — I am, yours respectfully,

C. BELL."

To G. H. LEWES, ESQ.

"Jan. 18th, 1848.

"Dear Sir, — I must write one more note, though I had not intended to trouble you again so soon. I have to agree with you, and to differ from you.

"You correct my crude remarks on the subject of the 'influence'; well, I accept your definition of what the effects of that influence should be; I recognise the wisdom of your rules for its regulation. . . .

"What a strange lecture comes next in your letter! You say I must familiarise my mind with the fact, that 'Miss Austen is not a poetess, has no "sentiment" (you scornfully enclose the word in inverted commas), no eloquence, none of the ravishing enthusiasm of poetry,' — and then you add, I MUST 'learn to acknowledge her as ONE OF THE GREATEST ARTISTS, OF THE GREATEST PAINTERS OF HUMAN CHARACTER, and one of the writers with the nicest sense of means to an end that ever lived.'

"The last point only will I ever acknowledge.

"Can there be a great artist without poetry?

"What I call — what I will bend to, as a great artist then — cannot be destitute of the divine gift. But by POETRY, I am sure, you understand something different to what I do, as you do by 'sentiment.' It is POETRY, as I comprehend the word, which elevates that masculine George Sand, and makes out of something coarse, something Godlike. It is 'sentiment,' in my sense of the term — sentiment jealously hidden, but genuine, which extracts the venom from that formidable Thackeray, and converts what might be corrosive poison into purifying elixir.

"If Thackeray did not cherish in his large heart deep feeling for his kind, he would delight to exterminate; as it is, I believe, he wishes only to reform. Miss Austen being, as you say, without 'sentiment,' without Poetry, maybe IS sensible, real (more REAL than TRUE), but she cannot be great.

"I submit to your anger, which I have now excited (for have I not questioned the perfection of your darling?); the storm may pass over me. Nevertheless, I will, when I can (I do not know when that will be, as I have no access to a circulating library), diligently peruse all Miss Austen's works, as you recommend. . . . You must forgive me for not always being able to think as you do, and still believe me, yours gratefully,

C. BELL."

I have hesitated a little, before inserting the following extract from a letter to Mr. Williams, but it is strikingly characteristic; and the criticism contained in it is, from that circumstance, so interesting (whether we agree with it or not), that I have determined to do so, though I thereby displace the chronological order of the letters, in order to complete this portion of a correspondence which is very valuable, as showing the purely intellectual side of her character.

To W. S. WILLIAMS, BSQ.

"April 26th, 1848.

"My dear Sir, — I have now read 'Rose, Blanche, and Violet,' and I will tell you, as well as I can, what I think of it. Whether it is an improvement on 'Ranthorpe' I do not know, for I liked 'Ranthorpe' much; but, at any rate, it contains more of a good thing. I find in it the same power, but more fully developed.

"The author's character is seen in every page, which makes the book interesting — far more interesting than any story could do; but it is what the writer himself says that attracts far more than what he puts into the mouths of his characters. G. H. Lewes is, to my perception, decidedly the most original character in the book. . . . The didactic passages seem to me the best — far the best — in the work; very acute, very profound, are some of the views there given, and very clearly they are offered to the reader. He is a just thinker; he is a sagacious observer; there is wisdom in his theory, and, I doubt not, energy in his practice. But why, then, are you often provoked with him while you read? How does he manage, while teaching, to make his hearer feel as if his business was, not quietly to receive the doctrines propounded, but to combat them? You acknowledge that he offers you gems of pure truth; why do you keep perpetually scrutinising them for flaws?

"Mr. Lewes, I divine, with all his talents and honesty, must have some faults of manner; there must be a touch too much of dogmatism; a dash extra of confidence in him, sometimes. This you think while you are reading the book; but when you have closed it and laid it down, and sat a few minutes collecting your thoughts, and settling your impressions, you find the idea or feeling predominant in your mind to be pleasure at the fuller acquaintance you have made with a fine mind and a true heart, with high abilities and manly principles. I hope he will not be long ere he publishes another book. His emotional scenes are somewhat too uniformly vehement: would not a more subdued style of treatment often have produced a more masterly effect? Now and then Mr. Lewes takes a French pen into his hand, wherein he differs from Mr. Thackeray, who always uses an English quill. However, the French pen does not far mislead Mr. Lewes; he wields it with British muscles. All honour to him for the excellent general tendency of his book!

"He gives no charming picture of London literary society, and especially the female part of it; but all coteries, whether they be literary, scientific, political, or religious, must, it seems to me, have a tendency to change truth into affectation. When people belong to a clique, they must, I suppose, in some measure, write, talk, think, and live for that clique; a harassing and narrowing necessity. I trust, the press and the public show themselves disposed to give the book the reception it merits, and that is a very cordial one, far beyond anything due to a Bulwer or D'Israeli production."

Let us return from Currer Bell to Charlotte Bronte. The winter in Haworth had been a sickly season. Influenza had prevailed amongst the villagers, and where there was a real need for the presence of the clergyman's daughters, they were never found wanting, although they were shy of bestowing mere social visits on the parishioners. They had themselves suffered from the epidemic; Anne severely, as in her case it had been attended with cough and fever enough to make her elder sisters very anxious about her.

There is no doubt that the proximity of the crowded church-yard rendered the Parsonage unhealthy, and occasioned much illness to its inmates. Mr. Bronte represented the unsanitary state at Haworth pretty forcibly to the

Board of Health; and, after the requisite visits from their officers, obtained a recommendation that all future interments in the churchyard should be forbidden, a new graveyard opened on the hill-side, and means set on foot for obtaining a water-supply to each house, instead of the weary, hard-worked housewives having to carry every bucketful, from a distance of several hundred yards, up a steep street. But he was baffled by the rate-payers; as, in many a similar instance, quantity carried it against quality, numbers against intelligence. And thus we find that illness often assumed a low typhoid form in Haworth, and fevers of various kinds visited the place with sad frequency.

In February, 1848, Louis Philippe was dethroned. The quick succession of events at that time called forth the following expression of Miss Bronte's thoughts on the subject, in a letter addressed to Miss Wooler, and dated March 31st.

"I remember well wishing my lot had been cast in the troubled times of the late war, and seeing in its exciting incidents a kind of stimulating charm, which it made my pulses beat fast to think of I remember even, I think; being a little impatient, that you would not fully sympathise with my feelings on those subjects; that you heard my aspirations and speculations very tranquilly, and by no means seemed to think the flaming swords could be any pleasant addition to Paradise. I have now out-lived youth; and, though I dare not say that I have outlived all its illusions — that the romance is quite gone from life — the veil fallen from truth, and that I see both in naked reality — yet, certainly, many things are not what they were ten years ago: and, amongst the rest, the pomp and circumstance of war have quite lost in my eyes their fictitious glitter. I have still no doubt that the shock of moral earthquakes wakens a vivid sense of life, both in nations and individuals; that the fear of dangers on a broad national scale, diverts men's minds momentarily from brooding over small private perils, and for the time gives them something like largeness of views; but, as little doubt have I, that convulsive revolutions put back the world in all that is good, check civilisation, bring the dregs of society to its surface; in short, it appears to me that insurrections and battles are the acute diseases of nations, and that their tendency is to exhaust, by their violence, the vital energies of the countries where they occur. That England may be spared the spasms, cramps, and frenzy-fits now contorting the Continent, and threatening Ireland, I earnestly pray. With the French and Irish I have no sympathy. With the Germans and Italians I think the case is different; as different as the love of freedom is from the lust for license."

Her birthday came round. She wrote to the friend whose birthday was within a week of hers; wrote the accustomed letter; but, reading it with our knowledge of what she had done, we perceive the difference between her thoughts and what they were a year or two ago, when she said "I have done nothing." There must have been a modest consciousness of having "done something" present in her mind, as she wrote this year: —

"I am now thirty-two. Youth is gone — gone, — and will never come back: can't help it. . . . It seems to me, that sorrow must come some time to everybody, and those who scarcely taste it in their youth, often have a more brimming and bitter cup to drain in after life; whereas, those who exhaust the dregs early, who drink the lees before the wine, may reasonably hope for more palatable draughts to succeed."

The authorship of "Jane Eyre" was as yet a close secret in the Bronte family; not even this friend, who was all but a sister knew more about it than the rest of the world. She might conjecture, it is true, both from her knowledge of previous habits, and from the suspicious fact of the proofs having been corrected at B — — , that some literary project was afoot; but she knew nothing, and wisely said nothing, until she heard a report from others, that Charlotte Bronte was an author — had published a novel! Then she wrote to her; and received the two following letters; confirmatory enough, as it seems to me now, in their very vehemence and agitation of intended denial, of the truth of the report.

"April 28th, 1848.

"Write another letter, and explain that last note of yours distinctly. If your allusions are to myself, which I suppose they are, understand this, — I have given no one a right to gossip about me, and am not to be judged by frivolous conjectures, emanating from any quarter whatever. Let me know what you heard, and from whom you heard it."

"May 3rd, 1848.

"All I can say to you about a certain matter is this: the report — if report there be — and if the lady, who seems to have been rather mystified, had not dreamt what she fancied had been told to her — must have had its origin in some absurd misunderstanding. I have given NO ONE a right either to affirm, or to hint, in the most distant manner, that I was 'publishing' — (humbug!) Whoever has said it — if any one has, which I doubt — is no friend of mine. Though twenty books were ascribed to me, I should own none. I scout the idea utterly. Whoever, after I have distinctly rejected the charge, urges it upon me, will do an unkind and an ill-bred thing. The most profound obscurity is infinitely preferable to vulgar notoriety; and that notoriety I neither seek nor will have. If then any B — an, or G — an, should presume to bore you on the subject, — to ask you what 'novel' Miss Bronte has been 'publishing,' you can just say, with the distinct firmness of which you are perfect mistress when you choose, that you are authorised by Miss Bronte to say, that she repels and disowns every accusation of the kind. You may add, if you please, that if any one has her confidence, you believe you have, and she has made no drivelling confessions to you on the subject. I am at a loss to conjecture from what source this rumour has come; and, I fear, it has far from a friendly origin. I am not certain, however, and I should be very glad if I could gain certainty. Should you hear anything more, please let me know. Your offer of 'Simeon's Life' is a very kind one, and I thank you for it. I dare say Papa would like to see the work very much, as he knew Mr. Simeon. Laugh or scold A — — out of the publishing notion; and believe me, through all chances and changes, whether calumniated or let alone, — Yours faithfully,

C. BRONTE.”

The reason why Miss Bronte was so anxious to preserve her secret, was, I am told, that she had pledged her word to her sisters that it should not be revealed through her.

The dilemmas attendant on the publication of the sisters’ novels, under assumed names, were increasing upon them. Many critics insisted on believing, that all the fictions published as by three Bells were the works of one author, but written at different periods of his development and maturity. No doubt, this suspicion affected the reception of the books. Ever since the completion of Anne Bronte’s tale of “Agnes Grey”, she had been labouring at a second, “The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.” It is little known; the subject — the deterioration of a character, whose profligacy and ruin took their rise in habits of intemperance, so slight as to be only considered “good fellowship” — was painfully discordant to one who would fain have sheltered herself from all but peaceful and religious ideas. “She had” (says her sister of that gentle “little one”), “in the course of her life, been called on to contemplate near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was naturally a sensitive, reserved, and dejected nature; what she saw sunk very deeply into her mind; it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (of course, with fictitious characters, incidents, and situations), as a warning to others. She hated her work, but would pursue it. When reasoned with on the subject, she regarded such reasonings as a temptation to self-indulgence. She must be honest; she must not varnish, soften, or conceal. This well-meant resolution brought on her misconstruction, and some abuse, which she bore, as it was her custom to bear whatever was unpleasant with mild steady patience. She was a very sincere and practical Christian, but the tinge of religious melancholy communicated a sad shade to her brief blameless life.”

In the June of this year, ‘The Tenant of Wildfell Hall’ was sufficiently near its completion to be submitted to the person who had previously published for Ellis and Acton Bell.

In consequence of his mode of doing business, considerable annoyance was occasioned both to Miss Bronte and to them. The circumstances, as detailed in a letter of hers to a friend in New Zealand, were these: — One morning, at the beginning of July, a communication was received at the Parsonage from Messrs. Smith and Elder, which disturbed its quiet inmates not a little, as, though the matter brought under their notice was merely referred to as one which affected their literary reputation, they conceived it to have a bearing likewise upon their character. “Jane Eyre” had had a great run in America, and a publisher there had consequently bid high for early sheets of the next work by “Currer Bell.” These Messrs. Smith and Elder had promised to let him have. He was therefore greatly astonished, and not well pleased, to learn that a similar agreement had been entered into with another American house, and that the new tale was very shortly to appear. It turned out, upon inquiry, that the mistake had originated in Acton and Ellis Bell's publisher having assured this American house that, to the best of his belief, "Jane Eyre", "Wuthering Heights", and "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" (which he pronounced superior to either of the other two) were all written by the same author.

Though Messrs. Smith and Elder distinctly stated in their letter that they did not share in such "belief," the sisters were impatient till they had shown its utter groundlessness, and set themselves perfectly straight. With rapid decision, they resolved that Charlotte and Anne should start, for London, that very day, in order to prove their separate identity to Messrs. Smith and Elder, and demand from the credulous publisher his reasons for a "belief" so directly at variance with an assurance which had several times been given to him. Having arrived at this determination, they made their preparations. with resolute promptness. There were many household duties to be performed that day; but they were all got through. The two sisters each packed up a change of dress in a small box, which they sent down to Keighley by an opportune cart; and after early tea they set off to walk thither — no doubt in some excitement; for, independently of the cause of their going to London, it was Anne's first visit there. A great thunderstorm overtook them on their way that summer evening to the station; but they had no time to seek shelter. They only just caught the train at Keighley, arrived at Leeds, and were whirled up by the night train to London.

About eight o'clock on the Saturday morning, they arrived at the Chapter Coffee-house, Paternoster Row — a strange place, but they did not well know where else to go. They refreshed themselves by washing, and had some breakfast. Then they sat still for a few minutes, to consider what next should be done.

When they had been discussing their project in the quiet of Haworth Parsonage the day before, and planning the mode of setting about the business on which they were going to London, they had resolved to take a cab, if they should find it desirable, from their inn to Cornhill; but that, amidst the bustle and "queer state of inward excitement" in which they found themselves, as they sat and considered their position on the Saturday morning, they quite forgot even the possibility of hiring a conveyance; and when they set forth, they became so dismayed by the crowded streets, and the impeded crossings, that they stood still repeatedly, in complete despair of making progress, and were nearly an hour in walking the half-mile they had to go. Neither Mr. Smith nor Mr. Williams knew that they were coming; they were entirely unknown to the publishers of "Jane Eyre", who were not, in fact, aware whether the "Bells" were men or women, but had always written to them as to men.

On reaching Mr. Smith's, Charlotte put his own letter into his hands; the same letter which had excited so much disturbance at Haworth Parsonage only twenty-four hours before. "Where did you get this?" said he, — as if he could not believe that the two young ladies dressed in black, of slight figures and diminutive stature, looking pleased yet agitated, could be the embodied Currer and Acton Bell, for whom curiosity had been hunting so eagerly in vain. An explanation ensued, and Mr. Smith at once began to form plans for their amusement and pleasure during their stay in London. He urged them to meet a few literary friends at his house; and this was a strong temptation to Charlotte, as amongst them were one or two of the writers whom she particularly wished to see; but her resolution to remain unknown induced her firmly to put it aside.

The sisters were equally persevering in declining Mr. Smith's invitations to stay at his house. They refused to leave their quarters, saying they were not prepared for a long stay.

When they returned back to their inn, poor Charlotte paid for the excitement of the interview, which had wound up the agitation and hurry of the last twenty-four hours, by a racking headache and harassing sickness. Towards evening, as she rather expected some of the ladies of Mr. Smith's family to call, she prepared herself for the chance, by taking a strong dose of sal-volatile, which roused her a little, but still, as she says, she was "in grievous bodily case," when their visitors were announced, in full evening costume. The sisters had not understood that it had been settled that they were to go to the Opera, and therefore were not ready. Moreover, they had no fine elegant dresses either with them, or in the world. But Miss Bronte resolved to raise no objections in the acceptance of kindness. So, in spite of headache and weariness, they made haste to dress themselves in their plain high-made country garments.

Charlotte says, in an account which she gives to her friend of this visit to London, describing the entrance of her party into the Opera-house: —

"Fine ladies and gentlemen glanced at us, as we stood by the box- door, which was not yet opened, with a slight, graceful superciliousness, quite warranted by the circumstances. Still I felt pleasurably excited in spite of headache, sickness, and conscious clownishness; and I saw Anne was calm and gentle, which she always is. The performance was Rossini's 'Barber of Seville,' — very brilliant, though I fancy there are things I should like better. We got home after one o'clock. We had never been in bed the night before; had been in constant excitement for twenty-four hours; you may imagine we were tired. The next day, Sunday, Mr. Williams came early to take us to church; and in the afternoon Mr. Smith and his mother fetched us in a carriage, and took us to his house to dine.

"On Monday we went to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, the National Gallery, dined again at Mr. Smith's, and then went home to tea with Mr. Williams at his house.

"On Tuesday morning, we left London, laden with books Mr. Smith had given us, and got safely home. A more jaded wretch than I looked, it would be difficult to conceive. I was thin when I went, but I was meagre indeed when I returned, my face looking grey and very old, with strange deep lines ploughed in it — my eyes stared unnaturally. I was weak and yet restless. In a while, however, these bad effects of excitement went off, and I regained my normal condition."

The impression Miss Bronte made upon those with whom she first became acquainted during this visit to London, was of a person with clear judgment and fine sense; and though reserved, possessing unconsciously the power of drawing out others in conversation. She never expressed an opinion without assigning a reason for it; she never put a question without a definite purpose; and yet people felt at their ease in talking with her. All conversation with her was genuine and stimulating; and when she launched forth in praise or reprobation of books, or deeds, or works of art, her eloquence was indeed burning. She was thorough in all that she said or did; yet so open and fair in dealing with a subject, or contending with an opponent, that instead of rousing resentment, she merely convinced her hearers of her earnest zeal for the truth and right.

Not the least singular part of their proceedings was the place at which the sisters had chosen to stay.

Paternoster Row was for many years sacred to publishers. It is a narrow flagged street, lying under the shadow of St. Paul's; at each end there are posts placed, so as to prevent the passage of carriages, and thus preserve a solemn silence for the deliberations of the "Fathers of the Row." The dull warehouses on each side are mostly occupied at present by wholesale stationers; if they be publishers' shops, they show no attractive front to the dark and narrow street. Half-way up, on the left-hand side, is the Chapter Coffee-house. I visited it last June. It was then unoccupied. It had the appearance of a dwelling-house, two hundred years old or so, such as one sometimes sees in ancient country towns; the ceilings of the small rooms were low, and had heavy beams running across them; the walls were wainscotted breast high; the staircase was shallow, broad, and dark, taking up much space in the centre of the house. This then was the Chapter Coffee-house, which, a century ago, was the resort of all the booksellers and publishers; and where the literary hacks, the critics, and even the wits, used to go in search of ideas or employment. This was the place about which Chatterton wrote, in those delusive letters he sent to his mother at Bristol, while he was starving in London. "I am quite familiar at the Chapter Coffee-house, and know all the geniuses there." Here he heard of chances of employment; here his letters were to be left.

Years later, it became the tavern frequented by university men and country clergymen, who were up in London for a few days, and, having no private friends or access into society, were glad to learn what was going on in the world of letters, from the conversation which they were sure to hear in the Coffee-room. In Mr. Bronte's few and brief visits to town, during his residence at Cambridge, and the period of his curacy in Essex, he had stayed at this house; hither he had brought his daughters, when he was convoying them to Brussels; and here they came now, from very ignorance where else to go. It was a place solely frequented by men; I believe there was but one female servant in the house. Few people slept there; some of the stated meetings of the Trade were held in it, as they had been for more than a century; and, occasionally country booksellers, with now and then a clergyman, resorted to it; but it was a strange desolate place for the Miss Brontes to have gone to, from its purely business and masculine aspect. The old "grey-haired elderly man," who officiated as waiter seems to have been touched from the very first with the quiet simplicity of the two ladies, and he tried to make them feel comfortable and at home in the long, low, dingy room up-stairs, where the meetings of the Trade were held. The high narrow windows looked into the gloomy Row; the sisters, clinging together on the most remote window-seat, (as Mr. Smith tells me he found them, when he came, that Saturday evening, to take them to the Opera,) could see nothing of motion, or of change, in the grim, dark houses opposite, so near and close, although the whole breadth of the Row was between. The mighty roar of London was round them, like the sound of an unseen ocean, yet every footfall on the pavement below might be heard distinctly, in that unfrequented street. Such as it was, they preferred remaining at the Chapter Coffee-house, to accepting the invitation which Mr. Smith and his mother urged upon them, and, in after years, Charlotte says: —

"Since those days, I have seen the West End, the parks, the fine squares; but I love the City far better. The City seems so much more in earnest; its business, its rush, its roar, are such serious things, sights, sounds. The City is getting its living — the West End but enjoying its pleasure. At the West End you may be amused; but in the City you are deeply excited." (Villette, vol. i. p.89.)

Their wish had been to hear Dr. Croly on the Sunday morning, and Mr. Williams escorted them to St. Stephen's, Walbrook; but they were disappointed, as Dr. Croly did not preach. Mr. Williams also took them (as Miss Bronte has mentioned) to drink tea at his house. On the way thither, they had to pass through Kensington Gardens, and Miss Bronte was much "struck with the beauty of the scene, the fresh verdure of the turf, and the soft rich masses of foliage." From remarks on the different character of the landscape in the South to what it was in the North, she was led to speak of the softness and varied intonation of the voices of those with whom she conversed in London, which seem to have made a strong impression on both sisters. All this time those who came in contact with the "Miss Browns" (another pseudonym, also beginning with B), seem only to have regarded them as shy and reserved little country-women, with not much to say. Mr. Williams tells me that on the night when he accompanied the party to the Opera, as Charlotte ascended the flight of stairs leading from the grand entrance up to the lobby of the first tier of boxes, she was so much struck with the architectural effect of the splendid decorations of that vestibule and saloon, that involuntarily she slightly pressed his arm, and whispered, "You know I am not accustomed to this sort of thing." Indeed, it must have formed a vivid contrast to what they were doing and seeing an hour or two earlier the night before, when they were trudging along, with beating hearts and high-strung courage, on the road between Haworth and Keighley, hardly thinking of the thunder-storm that beat about their heads, for the thoughts which filled them of how they would go straight away to London, and prove that they were really two people, and not one imposter. It was no wonder that they returned to Haworth utterly fagged and worn out, after the fatigue and excitement of this visit.

The next notice I find of Charlotte's life at this time is of a different character to anything telling of enjoyment.

"July 28th.

"Branwell is the same in conduct as ever. His constitution seems much shattered. Papa, and sometimes all of us, have sad nights with him. He sleeps most of the day, and consequently will lie awake at night. But has not every house its trial?"

While her most intimate friends were yet in ignorance of the fact of her authorship of "Jane Eyre," she received a letter from one of them, making inquiries about Casterton School. It is but right to give her answer, written on August 28th, 1848.

"Since you wish to hear from me while you are from home, I will write without further delay. It often happens that when we linger at first in answering a friend's letter, obstacles occur to retard us to an inexcusably late period. In my last, I forgot to answer a question which you asked me, and was sorry afterwards for the omission. I will begin, therefore, by replying to it, though I fear what information I can give will come a little late. You said Mrs. — — had some thoughts of sending — — to school, and wished to know whether the Clergy Daughters' School at Casterton was an eligible place. My personal knowledge of that institution is very much out of date, being derived from the experience of twenty years ago. The establishment was at that time in its infancy, and a sad rickety infancy it was. Typhus fever decimated the school periodically; and consumption and scrofula, in every variety of form bad air and water, bad and insufficient diet can generate, preyed on the ill-fated pupils. It would not THEN have been a fit place for any of Mrs. — — 's children; but I understand it is very much altered for the better since those days. The school is removed from Cowan Bridge (a situation as unhealthy as it was picturesque — low, damp, beautiful with wood and water) to Casterton. The accommodations, the diet, the discipline, the system of tuition — all are, I believe, entirely altered and greatly improved. I was told that such pupils as behaved well, and remained at the school till their education was finished, were provided with situations as governesses, if they wished to adopt the vocation and much care was exercised in the selection , it was added, that they were also furnished with an excellent wardrobe on leaving Casterton. . . . The oldest family in Haworth failed lately, and have quitted the neighbourhood where their fathers resided before them for, it is said, thirteen generations. . . . Papa, I am most thankful to say, continues in very good health, considering his age; his sight, too, rather, I think, improves than deteriorates. My sisters likewise are pretty well."

But the dark cloud was hanging over that doomed household, and gathering blackness every hour.

On October the 9th, she thus writes: —

"The past three weeks have been a dark interval in our humble home. Branwell's constitution had been failing fast all the summer; but still, neither the doctors nor himself thought him so near his end as he was. He was entirely confined to his bed but for one single day, and was in the village two days before his death. He died, after twenty minutes' struggle, on Sunday morning, September 24th. He was perfectly conscious till the last agony came on. His mind had undergone the peculiar change which frequently precedes death, two days previously; the calm of better feelings filled it; a return of natural affection marked his last moments. He is in God's hands now; and the All-Powerful is likewise the All-Merciful. A deep conviction that he rests at last — rests well, after his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life — fills and quiets my mind now. The final separation, the spectacle of his pale corpse, gave me more acute bitter pain than I could have imagined. Till the last hour comes, we never how know much we can forgive, pity, regret a near relative. All his vices were and are nothing now. We remember only his woes. Papa was acutely distressed at first, but, on the whole, has borne the event well. Emily and Anne are pretty well, though Anne is always delicate, and Emily has a cold and cough at present. It was my fate to sink at the crisis, when I should have collected my strength. Headache and sickness came on first on the Sunday; I could not regain my appetite. Then internal pain attacked me. I became at once much reduced. It was impossible to touch a morsel. At last, bilious fever declared itself. I was confined to bed a week, — a dreary week. But, thank God! health seems now returning. I can sit up all day, and take moderate nourishment. The doctor said at first, I should be very slow in recovering, but I seem to get on faster than he anticipated. I am truly MUCH BETTER."

I have heard, from one who attended Branwell in his last illness, that he resolved on standing up to die. He had repeatedly said, that as long as there was life there was strength of will to do what it chose; and when the last agony came on, he insisted on assuming the position just mentioned. I have previously stated, that when his fatal attack came on, his pockets were found filled with old letters from the woman to whom he was attached. He died! she lives still, — in May Fair. The Eumenides, I suppose, went out of existence at the time when the wail was heard, "Great Pan is dead." I think we could better have spared him than those awful Sisters who sting dead conscience into life.

I turn from her for ever. Let us look once more into the Parsonage at Haworth.

“Oct. 29th, 1848.

“I think I have now nearly got over the effects of my late illness, and am almost restored to my normal condition of health. I sometimes wish that it was a little higher, but we ought to be content with such blessings as we have, and not pine after those that are out of our reach. I feel much more uneasy about my sister than myself just now. Emily’s cold and cough are very obstinate. I fear she has pain in her chest, and I sometimes catch a shortness in her breathing, when she has moved at all quickly. She looks very thin and pale. Her reserved nature occasions me great uneasiness of mind. It is useless to question her; you get no answers. It is still more useless to recommend remedies; they are never adopted. Nor can I shut my eyes to Anne’s great delicacy of constitution. The late sad event has, I feel, made me more apprehensive than common. I cannot help feeling much depressed sometimes. I try to leave all in God’s hands; to trust in His goodness; but faith and resignation are difficult to practise under some circumstances. The weather has been most unfavourable for invalids of late; sudden changes of temperature, and cold penetrating winds have been frequent here. Should the atmosphere become more settled, perhaps a favourable effect might be produced on the general health, and these harassing colds and coughs be removed. Papa has not quite escaped, but he has so far stood it better than any of us. You must not mention my going to — — this winter. I could not, and would not, leave home on any account. Miss — — has been for some years out of health now. These things make one FEEL, as well as KNOW, that this world is not our abiding-place. We should not knit human ties too close, or clasp human affections too fondly. They must leave us, or we must leave them, one day. God restore health and strength to all who need it!”

I go on now with her own affecting words in the biographical notice of her sisters.

“But a great change approached. Affliction came in that shape which to anticipate is dread; to look back on grief. In the very heat and burden of the day, the labourers failed over their work. My sister Emily first declined. . . . Never in all her life had she lingered over any task that lay before her, and she did not linger now. She sank rapidly. She made haste to leave us. . . . Day by day, when I, saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love: I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed, I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. The awful point was that, while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hands, the unnerved limbs, the fading eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health. To stand by and witness this, and not dare to remonstrate, was a pain no words can render.”

In fact, Emily never went out of doors after the Sunday succeeding

Branwell's death. She made no complaint; she would not endure questioning; she rejected sympathy and help. Many a time did Charlotte and Anne drop their sewing, or cease from their writing, to listen with wrung hearts to the failing step, the laboured breathing, the frequent pauses, with which their sister climbed the short staircase; yet they dared not notice what they observed, with pangs of suffering even deeper than hers. They dared not notice it in words, far less by the caressing assistance of a helping arm or hand. They sat, still and silent.

"Nov. 23rd, 1848.

"I told you Emily was ill, in my last letter. She has not rallied yet. She is VERY ill. I believe, if you were to see her, your impression would be that there is no hope. A more hollow, wasted, pallid aspect I have not beheld. The deep tight cough continues; the breathing after the least exertion is a rapid pant; and these symptoms are accompanied by pains in the chest and side. Her pulse, the only time she allowed it be to felt, was found to beat 115 per minute. In this state she resolutely refuses to see a doctor; she will give no explanation of her feelings, she will scarcely allow her feelings to be alluded to. Our position is, and has been for some weeks, exquisitely painful. God only knows how all this is to terminate. More than once, I have been forced boldly to regard the terrible event of her loss as possible, and even probable. But nature shrinks from such thoughts. I think Emily seems the nearest thing to my heart in the world."

When a doctor had been sent for, and was in the very house, Emily refused to see him. Her sisters could only describe to him what symptoms they had observed; and the medicines which he sent she would not take, denying that she was ill.

"Dec. 10th, 1848.

"I hardly know what to say to you about the subject which now interests me the most keenly of anything in this world, for, in truth, I hardly know what to think myself. Hope and fear fluctuate daily. The pain in her side and chest is better; the cough, the shortness of breath, the extreme emaciation continue. I have endured, however, such tortures of uncertainty on this subject that, at length, I could endure it no longer; and as her repugnance to seeing a medical man continues immutable, — as she declares 'no poisoning doctor' shall come near her, — I have written unknown to her, to an eminent physician in London, giving as minute a statement of her case and symptoms as I could draw up, and requesting an opinion. I expect an answer in a day or two. I am thankful to say, that my own health at present is very tolerable. It is well such is the case; for Anne, with the best will in the world to be useful, is really too delicate to do or bear much. She, too, at present, has frequent pains in the side. Papa is also pretty well, though Emily's state renders him very anxious.

"The — — s (Anne Bronte's former pupils) were here about a week ago. They are attractive and stylish-looking girls. They seemed overjoyed to see Anne: when I went into the room, they were clinging round her like two children — she, meantime, looking perfectly quiet and passive. . . . I. and H. took it into their heads to come here. I think it probable offence was taken on that occasion, — from what cause, I know not; and as, if such be the case, the grudge must rest upon purely imaginary grounds, — and since, besides, I have other things to think about, my mind rarely dwells upon the subject. If Emily were but well, I feel as if I should not care who neglected, misunderstood, or abused me. I would rather you were not of the number either. The crab-cheese arrived safely. Emily has just reminded me to thank you for it: it looks very nice. I wish she were well enough to eat it."

But Emily was growing rapidly worse. I remember Miss Bronte's shiver at recalling the pang she felt when, after having searched in the little hollows and sheltered crevices of the moors for a lingering spray of heather — just one spray, however withered — to take in to Emily, she saw that the flower was not recognised by the dim and indifferent eyes. Yet, to the last, Emily adhered tenaciously to her habits of independence. She would suffer no one to assist her. Any effort to do so roused the old stern spirit. One Tuesday morning, in December, she arose and dressed herself as usual, making many a pause, but doing everything for herself, and even endeavouring to take up her employment of sewing: the servants looked on, and knew what the catching, rattling breath, and the glazing of the eye too surely foretold; but she kept at her work; and Charlotte and Anne, though full of unspeakable dread, had still the faintest spark of hope. On that morning Charlotte wrote thus — probably in the very presence of her dying sister: —

"Tuesday.

"I should have written to you before, if I had had one word of hope to say; but I have not. She grows daily weaker. The physician's opinion was expressed too obscurely to be of use. He sent some medicine, which she would not take. Moments so dark as these I have never known. I pray for God's support to us all. Hitherto He has granted it."

The morning drew on to noon. Emily was worse: she could only
whisper in gasps. Now, when it was too late, she said to
Charlotte, "If you will send for a doctor, I will see him now."
About two o'clock she died.

"Dec. 21st, 1848.

"Emily suffers no more from pain or weakness now. She never will suffer more in this world. She is gone, after a hard short conflict. She died on TUESDAY, the very day I wrote to you. I thought it very possible she might be with us still for weeks; and a few hours afterwards, she was in eternity. Yes; there is no Emily in time or on earth now. Yesterday we put her poor, wasted, mortal frame quietly under the church pavement. We are very calm at present. Why should we be otherwise? The anguish of seeing her suffer is over; the spectacle of the pains of death is gone by; the funeral day is past. We feel she is at peace. No need now to tremble for the hard frost and the keen wind. Emily does not feel them. She died in a time of promise. We saw her taken from life in its prime. But it is God’s will, and the place where she is gone is better than that she has left.

“God has sustained me, in a way that I marvel at, through such agony as I had not conceived. I now look at Anne, and wish she were well and strong; but she is neither; nor is papa. Could you now come to us for a few days? I would not ask you to stay long. Write and tell me if you could come next week, and by what train. I would try to send a gig for you to Keighley. You will, I trust, find us tranquil. Try to come. I never so much needed the consolation of a friend’s presence. Pleasure, of course, there would be none for you in the visit, except what your kind heart would teach you to find in doing good to others.”

As the old, bereaved father and his two surviving children followed the coffin to the grave, they were joined by Keeper, Emily’s fierce, faithful bull-dog. He walked alongside of the mourners, and into the church, and stayed quietly there all the time that the burial service was being read. When he came home, he lay down at Emily’s chamber door, and howled pitifully for many days. Anne Bronte drooped and sickened more rapidly from that time; and so ended the year 1848.

CHAPTER III

An article on “Vanity Fair” and “Jane Eyre” had appeared in the Quarterly Review of December, 1848. Some weeks after, Miss Bronte wrote to her publishers, asking why it had not been sent to her; and conjecturing that it was unfavourable, she repeated her previous request, that whatever was done with the laudatory, all critiques adverse to the novel might be forwarded to her without fail. The Quarterly Review was accordingly sent. I am not aware that Miss Bronte took any greater notice of the article than to place a few sentences out of it in the mouth of a hard and vulgar woman in “Shirley,” where they are so much in character, that few have recognised them as a quotation. The time when the article was read was good for Miss Bronte; she was numbed to all petty annoyances by the grand severity of Death. Otherwise she might have felt more keenly than they deserved the criticisms which, while striving to be severe, failed in logic, owing to the misuse of prepositions; and have smarted under conjectures as to the authorship of “Jane Eyre,” which, intended to be acute, were merely flippant. But flippancy takes a graver name when directed against an author by an anonymous writer. We call it then cowardly insolence.

Every one has a right to form his own conclusion respecting the merits and demerits of a book. I complain not of the judgment which the reviewer passes on “Jane Eyre.” Opinions as to its tendency varied then, as they do now. While I write, I receive a letter from a clergyman in America in which he says: “We have in our sacred of sacreds a special shelf, highly adorned, as a place we delight to honour, of novels which we recognise as having had a good influence on character OUR character. Foremost is ‘Jane Eyre.’”

Nor do I deny the existence of a diametrically opposite judgment. And so (as I trouble not myself about the reviewer’s style of composition) I leave his criticisms regarding the merits of the work on one side. But when — forgetting the chivalrous spirit of the good and noble Southey, who said: “In reviewing anonymous works myself, when I have known the authors I have never mentioned them, taking it for granted they had sufficient reasons for avoiding the publicity” — the Quarterly reviewer goes on into gossiping conjectures as to who Currer Bell really is, and pretends to decide on what the writer may be from the book, I protest with my whole soul against such want of Christian charity. Not even the desire to write a “smart article,” which shall be talked about in London, when the faint mask of the anonymous can be dropped at pleasure if the cleverness of the review be admired — not even this temptation can excuse the stabbing cruelty of the judgment. Who is he that should say of an unknown woman: “She must be one who for some sufficient reason has long forfeited the society of her sex”? Is he one who has led a wild and struggling and isolated life, — seeing few but plain and outspoken Northerns, unskilled in the euphuisms which assist the polite world to skim over the mention of vice? Has he striven through long weeping years to find excuses for the lapse of an only brother; and through daily contact with a poor lost profligate, been compelled into a certain familiarity with the vices that his soul abhors? Has he, through trials, close following in dread march through his household, sweeping the hearthstone bare of life and love, still striven hard for strength to say, “It is the Lord! let Him do what seemeth to Him good” — and sometimes striven in vain, until the kindly Light returned? If through all these dark waters the scornful reviewer have passed clear, refined, free from stain, — with a soul that has never in all its agonies cried “lama sabachthani,” — still, even then let him pray with the Publican rather than judge with the Pharisee.

“Jan. 10th, 1849.

“Anne had a very tolerable day yesterday, and a pretty quiet night last night, though she did not sleep much. Mr. Wheelhouse ordered the blister to be put on again. She bore it without sickness. I have just dressed it, and she is risen and come down-stairs. She looks somewhat pale and sickly. She has had one dose of the cod-liver oil; it smells and tastes like train oil. I am trying to hope, but the day is windy, cloudy, and stormy. My spirits fall at intervals very low; then I look where you counsel me to look, beyond earthly tempests and sorrows. I seem to get strength, if not consolation. It will not do to anticipate. I feel that hourly. In the night, I awake and long for morning; then my heart is wrung. Papa continues much the same; he was very faint when he came down to breakfast. . . . Dear E — — , your friendship is some comfort to me. I am thankful for it. I see few lights through the darkness of the present time, but amongst them the constancy of a kind heart attached to me is one of the most cheering and serene.”

“Jan. 15th, 1849.

“I can scarcely say that Anne is worse, nor can I say she is better. She varies often in the course of a day, yet each day is passed pretty much the same. The morning is usually the best time; the afternoon and the evening the most feverish. Her cough is the most troublesome at night, but it is rarely violent. The pain in her arm still disturbs her. She takes the cod-liver oil and carbonate of iron regularly; she finds them both nauseous, but especially the oil. Her appetite is small indeed. Do not fear that I shall relax in my care of her. She is too precious not to be cherished with all the fostering strength I have. Papa, I am thankful to say, has been a good deal better this last day or two.

“As to your queries about myself, I can only say, that if I continue as I am I shall do very well. I have not yet got rid of the pains in my chest and back. They oddly return with every change of weather; and are still sometimes accompanied with a little soreness and hoarseness, but I combat them steadily with pitch plasters and bran tea. I should think it silly and wrong indeed not to be regardful of my own health at present; it would not do to be ill NOW.

“I avoid looking forward or backward, and try to keep looking upward. This is not the time to regret, dread, or weep. What I have and ought to do is very distinctly laid out for me; what I want, and pray for, is strength to perform it. The days pass in a slow, dark march; the nights are the test; the sudden wakings from restless sleep, the revived knowledge that one lies in her grave, and another not at my side, but in a separate and sick bed. However, God is over all.”

“Jan. 22nd, 1849.

“Anne really did seem to be a little better during some mild days last week, but to-day she looks very pale and languid again. She perseveres with the cod-liver oil, but still finds it very nauseous.

“She is truly obliged to you for the soles for her shoes, and finds them extremely comfortable. I am to commission you to get her just such a respirator as Mrs. — — had. She would not object to give a higher price, if you thought it better. If it is not too much trouble, you may likewise get me a pair of soles; you can send them and the respirator when you send the box. You must put down the price of all, and we will pay you in a Post Office order. “Wuthering Heights” was given to you. I have sent — — neither letter nor parcel. I had nothing but dreary news to write, so preferred that others should tell her. I have not written to — — either. I cannot write, except when I am quite obliged.”

“Feb. 11th, 1849.

“We received the box and its contents quite safely to-day. The penwipers are very pretty, and we are very much obliged to you for them. I hope the respirator will be useful to Anne, in case she should ever be well enough to go out again. She continues very much in the same state — I trust not greatly worse, though she is becoming very thin. I fear it would be only self-delusion to fancy her better. What effect the advancing season may have on her, I know not; perhaps the return of really warm weather may give nature a happy stimulus. I tremble at the thought of any change to cold wind or frost. Would that March were well over! Her mind seems generally serene, and her sufferings hitherto are nothing like Emily’s. The thought of what may be to come grows more familiar to my mind; but it is a sad, dreary guest.”

“March 16th, 1849.

“We have found the past week a somewhat trying one; it has not been cold, but still there have been changes of temperature whose effect Anne has felt unfavourably. She is not, I trust, seriously worse, but her cough is at times very hard and painful, and her strength rather diminished than improved. I wish the month of March was well over. You are right in conjecturing that I am somewhat depressed; at times I certainly am. It was almost easier to bear up when the trial was at its crisis than now. The feeling of Emily’s loss does not diminish as time wears on; it often makes itself most acutely recognised. It brings too an inexpressible sorrow with it; and then the future is dark. Yet I am well aware, it will not do either to complain, or sink, and I strive to do neither. Strength, I hope and trust, will yet be given in proportion to the burden; but the pain of my position is not one likely to lessen with habit. Its solitude and isolation are oppressive circumstances, yet I do not wish for any friends to stay with me; I could not do with any one — not even you — to share the sadness of the house; it would rack me intolerably. Meantime, judgment is still blent with mercy. Anne's sufferings still continue mild. It is my nature, when left alone, to struggle on with a certain perseverance, and I believe God will help me."

Anne had been delicate all her life; a fact which perhaps made them less aware than they would otherwise have been of the true nature of those fatal first symptoms. Yet they seem to have lost but little time before they sent for the first advice that could be procured. She was examined with the stethoscope, and the dreadful fact was announced that her lungs were affected, and that tubercular consumption had already made considerable progress. A system of treatment was prescribed, which was afterwards ratified by the opinion of Dr. Forbes.

For a short time they hoped that the disease was arrested. Charlotte — herself ill with a complaint that severely tried her spirits — was the ever-watchful nurse of this youngest, last sister. One comfort was that Anne was the patientest, gentlest invalid that could be. Still, there were hours, days, weeks of inexpressible anguish to be borne; under the pressure of which Charlotte could only pray and pray she did, right earnestly. Thus she writes on March 24th; —

"Anne's decline is gradual and fluctuating; but its nature is not doubtful. . . . In spirit she is resigned: at heart she is, I believe, a true Christian. . . . May God support her and all of us through the trial of lingering sickness, and aid her in the last hour when the struggle which separates soul from body must be gone through! We saw Emily torn from the midst of us when our hearts clung to her with intense attachment. . . She was scarce buried when Anne's health failed. . . . These things would be too much, if reason, unsupported by religion, were condemned to bear them alone. I have cause to be most thankful for the strength that has hitherto been vouchsafed both to my father and to myself. God, I think, is especially merciful to old age; and for my own part, trials, which in perspective would have seemed to me quite intolerable, when they actually came I endured without prostration. Yet I must confess that, in the time which has elapsed since Emily's death, there have been moments of solitary, deep, inert affliction, far harder to bear than those which immediately followed our loss. The crisis of bereavement has an acute pang which goads to exertion; the desolate after-feeling sometimes paralyses. I have learnt that we are not to find solace in our own strength; we must seek it in God's omnipotence. Fortitude is good; but fortitude itself must be shaken under us to teach us how weak we are!"

All through this illness of Anne's, Charlotte had the comfort of being able to talk to her about her state; a comfort rendered inexpressibly great by the contrast which it presented to the recollection of Emily's rejection of all sympathy. If a proposal for Anne's benefit was made, Charlotte could speak to her about it, and the nursing and dying sister could consult with each other as to its desirability. I have seen but one of Anne's letters; it is the only time we seem to be brought into direct personal contact with this gentle, patient girl. In order to give the requisite preliminary explanation, I must state that the family of friends, to which E — — belonged, proposed that Anne should come to them; in order to try what change of air and diet, and the company of kindly people could do towards restoring her to health. In answer to this proposal, Charlotte writes: —

"March 24th.

"I read your kind note to Anne, and she wishes me to thank you sincerely for your friendly proposal. She feels, of course, that it would not do to take advantage of it, by quartering an invalid upon the inhabitants of — — ; but she intimates there is another way in which you might serve her, perhaps with some benefit to yourself as well as to her. Should it, a month or two hence, be deemed advisable that she should go either to the sea-side, or to some inland watering-place — and should papa be disinclined to move, and I consequently obliged to remain at home — she asks, could you be her companion? Of course I need not add that in the event of such an arrangement being made, you would be put to no expense. This, dear E., is Anne's proposal; I make it to comply with her wish; but for my own part, I must add that I see serious objections to your accepting it — objections I cannot name to her. She continues to vary; is sometimes worse, and sometimes better, as the weather changes; but, on the whole, I fear she loses strength. Papa says her state is most precarious; she may be spared for some time, or a sudden alteration might remove her before we are aware. Were such an alteration to take place while she was far from home, and alone with you, it would be terrible. The idea of it distresses me inexpressibly, and I tremble whenever she alludes to the project of a journey. In short, I wish we could gain time, and see how she gets on. If she leaves home it certainly should not be in the capricious month of May, which is proverbially trying to the weak. June would be a safer month. If we could reach June, I should have good hopes of her getting through the summer. Write such an answer to this note as I can show Anne. You can write any additional remarks to me on a separate piece of paper. Do not consider yourself as confined to discussing only our sad affairs. I am interested in all that interests you."

FROM ANNE BRONTE

"April 5th, 1849.

"My dear Miss — — , — I thank you greatly for your kind letter, and your ready compliance with my proposal, as far as the WILL can go at least. I see, however, that your friends are unwilling that you should undertake the responsibility of accompanying me under present circumstances. But I do not think there would be any great responsibility in the matter. I know, and everybody knows, that you would be as kind and helpful as any one could possibly be, and I hope I should not be very troublesome. It would be as a companion, not as a nurse, that I should wish for your company; otherwise I should not venture to ask it. As for your kind and often-repeated invitation to — —, pray give my sincere thanks to your mother and sisters, but tell them I could not think of inflicting my presence upon them as I now am. It is very kind of them to make so light of the trouble, but still there must be more or less, and certainly no pleasure, from the society of a silent invalid stranger. I hope, however, that Charlotte will by some means make it possible to accompany me after all. She is certainly very delicate, and greatly needs a change of air and scene to renovate her constitution. And then your going with me before the end of May, is apparently out of the question, unless you are disappointed in your visitors; but I should be reluctant to wait till then, if the weather would at all permit an earlier departure. You say May is a trying month, and so say others. The earlier part is often cold enough, I acknowledge, but, according to my experience, we are almost certain of some fine warm days in the latter half, when the laburnums and lilacs are in bloom; whereas June is often cold, and July generally wet. But I have a more serious reason than this for my impatience of delay. The doctors say that change of air or removal to a better climate would hardly ever fail of success in consumptive cases, if the remedy were taken IN TIME; but the reason why there are so many disappointments is, that it is generally deferred till it is too late. Now I would not commit this error; and, to say the truth, though I suffer much less from pain and fever than I did when you were with us, I am decidedly weaker, and very much thinner. My cough still troubles me a good deal, especially in the night, and, what seems worse than all, I am subject to great shortness of breath on going up-stairs or any slight exertion. Under these circumstances, I think there is no time to be lost. I have no horror of death: if I thought it inevitable, I think I could quietly resign myself to the prospect, in the hope that you, dear Miss — —, would give as much of your company as you possibly could to Charlotte, and be a sister to her in my stead. But I wish it would please God to spare me, not only for papa's and Charlotte's sakes, but because I long to do some good in the world before I leave it. I have many schemes in my head for future practice — humble and limited indeed — but still I should not like them all to come to nothing, and myself to have lived to so little purpose. But God's will be done. Remember me respectfully to your mother and sisters, and believe me, dear Miss — —, yours most affectionately,

"ANNE BRONTE."

It must have been about this time that Anne composed her last verses, before "the desk was closed, and the pen laid aside for ever."

I.

“I hoped that with the brave and strong
My portioned task might lie;
To toil amid the busy throng,
With purpose pure and high.

II.

“But God has fixed another part,
And He has fixed it well:
I said so with my bleeding heart,
When first the anguish fell.

III.

“Thou God, hast taken our delight,
Our treasured hope, away;
Thou bid’st us now weep through the night
And sorrow through the day.

IV.

“These weary hours will not be lost,
These days of misery, —
These nights of darkness, anguish-tost, —
Can I but turn to Thee.

IV.

“With secret labour to sustain
In humble patience every blow;
To gather fortitude from pain,
And hope and holiness from woe.

VI.

“Thus let me serve Thee from my heart,
Whate’er may be my written fate;
Whether thus early to depart,
Or yet a while to wait.

VII.

“If Thou should’st bring me back to life,
More humbled I should be;
More wise — more strengthened for the strife,
More apt to lean on Thee.

VIII.

“Should death be standing at the gate,
Thus should I keep my vow;
But, Lord, whatever be my fate,
Oh let me serve Thee now!”

I take Charlotte’s own words as the best record of her thoughts and feelings during all this terrible time.

“April 12th.

“I read Anne’s letter to you; it was touching enough, as you say. If there were no hope beyond this world, — no eternity, no life to come, — Emily's fate, and that which threatens Anne, would be heart-breaking. I cannot forget Emily's death-day; it becomes a more fixed, a darker, a more frequently recurring idea in my mind than ever. It was very terrible. She was torn, conscious, panting, reluctant, though resolute, out of a happy life. But it WILL NOT do to dwell on these things.

"I am glad your friends object to your going with Anne: it would never do. To speak truth, even if your mother and sisters had consented, I never could. It is not that there is any laborious attention to pay her; she requires, and will accept, but little nursing; but there would be hazard, and anxiety of mind, beyond what you ought to be subject to. If, a month or six weeks hence, she continues to wish for a change as much as she does now, I shall (D. V.) go with her myself. It will certainly be my paramount duty; other cares must be made subservient to that. I have consulted Mr. T — — : he does not object, and recommends Scarborough, which was Anne's own choice. I trust affairs may be so ordered, that you may be able to be with us at least part of the time. . . . Whether in lodgings or not, I should wish to be boarded. Providing oneself is, I think, an insupportable nuisance. I don't like keeping provisions in a cupboard, locking up, being pillaged, and all that. It is a petty, wearing annoyance."

The progress of Anne's illness was slower than that of Emily's had been; and she was too unselfish to refuse trying means, from which, if she herself had little hope of benefit, her friends might hereafter derive a mournful satisfaction.

"I began to flatter myself she was getting strength. But the change to frost has told upon her; she suffers more of late. Still her illness has none of the fearful rapid symptoms which appalled in Emily's case. Could she only get over the spring, I hope summer may do much for her, and then early removal to a warmer locality for the winter might, at least, prolong her life. Could we only reckon upon another year, I should be thankful; but can we do this for the healthy? A few days ago I wrote to have Dr. Forbes' opinion. . . . He warned us against entertaining sanguine hopes of recovery. The cod-liver oil he considers a peculiarly efficacious medicine. He, too, disapproved of change of residence for the present. There is some feeble consolation in thinking we are doing the very best that can be done. The agony of forced, total neglect, is not now felt, as during Emily's illness. Never may we be doomed to feel such agony again. It was terrible. I have felt much less of the disagreeable pains in my chest lately, and much less also of the soreness and hoarseness. I tried an application of hot vinegar, which seemed to do good."

"May 1st.

"I was glad to hear that when we go to Scarborough, you will be at liberty to go with us, but the journey and its consequences still continue a source of great anxiety to me , I must try to put it off two or three weeks longer if I can; perhaps by that time the milder season may have given Anne more strength,perhaps it will be otherwise; I cannot tell. The change to fine weather has not proved beneficial to her so far. She has sometimes been so weak, and suffered so much from pain in the side, during the last few days, that I have not known what to think. . . . She may rally again, and be much better, but there must be SOME improvement before I can feel justified in taking her away from home. Yet to delay is painful; for, as is ALWAYS the case, I believe, under her circumstances, she seems herself not half conscious of the necessity for such delay. She wonders, I believe, why I don't talk more about the journey: it grieves me to think she may even be hurt by my seeming tardiness. She is very much emaciated, — far more than when you were with us; her arms are no thicker than a little child's. The least exertion brings a shortness of breath. She goes out a little every day, but we creep rather than walk. . . . Papa continues pretty well; — I hope I shall be enabled to bear up. So far, I have reason for thankfulness to God."

May had come, and brought the milder weather longed for; but Anne was worse for the very change. A little later on it became colder, and she rallied, and poor Charlotte began to hope that, if May were once over, she might last for a long time. Miss Bronte wrote to engage the lodgings at Scarborough, — a place which Anne had formerly visited with the family to whom she was governess. They took a good-sized sitting-room, and an airy double-bedded room (both commanding a sea-view), in one of the best situations of the town. Money was as nothing in comparison with life; besides, Anne had a small legacy left to her by her godmother, and they felt that she could not better employ this than in obtaining what might prolong life, if not restore health. On May 16th, Charlotte writes:

"It is with a heavy heart I prepare; and earnestly do I wish the fatigue of the journey were well over. It may be borne better than I expect; for temporary stimulus often does much; but when I see the daily increasing weakness, I know not what to think. I fear you will be shocked when you see Anne; but be on your guard, dear E — — , not to express your feelings; indeed, I can trust both your self-possession and your kindness. I wish my judgment sanctioned the step of going to Scarborough, more fully than it does. You ask how I have arranged about leaving Papa. I could make no special arrangement. He wishes me to go with Anne, and would not hear of Mr. N — — 's coming, or anything of that kind; so I do what I believe is for the best, and leave the result to Providence."

They planned to rest and spend a night at York; and, at Anne's desire, arranged to make some purchases there. Charlotte ends the letter to her friend, in which she tells her all this, with —

"May 23rd.

"I wish it seemed less like a dreary mockery in us to talk of buying bonnets, etc. Anne was very ill yesterday. She had difficulty of breathing all day, even when sitting perfectly still. To-day she seems better again. I long for the moment to come when the experiment of the sea-air will be tried. Will it do her good? I cannot tell; I can only wish. Oh! if it would please God to strengthen and revive Anne, how happy we might be together: His will, however, be done!"

The two sisters left Haworth on Thursday, May 24th. They were to have done so the day before, and had made an appointment with their friend to meet them at the Leeds Station, in order that they might all proceed together. But on Wednesday morning Anne was so ill, that it was impossible for the sisters to set out; yet they had no means of letting their friend know of this, and she consequently arrived at Leeds station at the time specified. There she sate waiting for several hours. It struck her as strange at the time — and it almost seems ominous to her fancy now — that twice over, from two separate arrivals on the line by which she was expecting her friends, coffins were carried forth, and placed in hearses which were in waiting for their dead, as she was waiting for one in four days to become so.

The next day she could bear suspense no longer, and set out for Haworth, reaching there just in time to carry the feeble, fainting invalid into the chaise which stood at the gate to take them down to Keighley. The servant who stood at the Parsonage gates, saw Death written on her face, and spoke of it. Charlotte saw it and did not speak of it, — it would have been giving the dread too distinct a form; and if this last darling yearned for the change to Scarborough, go she should, however Charlotte's heart might be wrung by impending fear. The lady who accompanied them, Charlotte's beloved friend of more than twenty years, has kindly written out for me the following account of the journey — and of the end.

"She left her home May 24th, 1849 — died May 28th. Her life was calm, quiet, spiritual: SUCH was her end. Through the trials and fatigues of the journey, she evinced the pious courage and fortitude of a martyr. Dependence and helplessness were ever with her a far sorer trial than hard, racking pain.

"The first stage of our journey was to York; and here the dear invalid was so revived, so cheerful, and so happy, we drew consolation, and trusted that at least temporary improvement was to be derived from the change which SHE had so longed for, and her friends had so dreaded for her.

"By her request we went to the Minster, and to her it was an overpowering pleasure; not for its own imposing and impressive grandeur only, but because it brought to her susceptible nature a vital and overwhelming sense of omnipotence. She said, while gazing at the structure, 'If finite power can do this, what is the . . . ?' and here emotion stayed her speech, and she was hastened to a less exciting scene.

"Her weakness of body was great, but her gratitude for every mercy was greater. After such an exertion as walking to her bed-room, she would clasp her hands and raise her eyes in silent thanks, and she did this not to the exclusion of wonted prayer, for that too was performed on bended knee, ere she accepted the rest of her couch.

"On the 25th we arrived at Scarborough; our dear invalid having, during the journey, directed our attention to every prospect worthy of notice.

"On the 26th she drove on the sands for an hour; and lest the poor donkey should be urged by its driver to a greater speed than her tender heart thought right, she took the reins, and drove herself. When joined by her friend, she was charging the boy-master of the donkey to treat the poor animal well. She was ever fond of dumb things, and would give up her own comfort for them.

"On Sunday, the 27th, she wished to go to church, and her eye brightened with the thought of once more worshipping her God amongst her fellow-creatures. We thought it prudent to dissuade her from the attempt, though it was evident her heart was longing to join in the public act of devotion and praise.

"She walked a little in the afternoon, and meeting with a sheltered and comfortable seat near the beach, she begged we would leave her, and enjoy the various scenes near at hand, which were new to us but familiar to her. She loved the place, and wished us to share her preference.

"The evening closed in with the most glorious sunset ever witnessed. The castle on the cliff stood in proud glory gilded by the rays of the declining sun. The distant ships glittered like burnished gold; the little boats near the beach heaved on the ebbing tide, inviting occupants. The view was grand beyond description. Anne was drawn in her easy chair to the window, to enjoy the scene with us. Her face became illumined almost as much as the glorious scene she gazed upon. Little was said, for it was plain that her thoughts were driven by the imposing view before her to penetrate forwards to the regions of unfading glory. She again thought of public worship, and wished us to leave her, and join those who were assembled at the House of God. We declined, gently urging the duty and pleasure of staying with her, who was now so dear and so feeble. On returning to her place near the fire, she conversed with her sister upon the propriety of returning to their home. She did not wish it for her own sake, she said she was fearing others might suffer more if her decease occurred where she was. She probably thought the task of accompanying her lifeless remains on a long journey was more than her sister could bear — more than the bereaved father could bear, were she borne home another, and a third tenant of the family-vault in the short space of nine months.

"The night was passed without any apparent accession of illness. She rose at seven o'clock, and performed most of her toilet herself, by her expressed wish. Her sister always yielded such points, believing it was the truest kindness not to press inability when it was not acknowledged. Nothing occurred to excite alarm till about 11 A. M. She then spoke of feeling a change. She believed she had not long to live. Could she reach home alive, if we prepared immediately for departure? A physician was sent for. Her address to him was made with perfect composure. She begged him to say how long he thought she might live; — not to fear speaking the truth, for she was not afraid to die. The doctor reluctantly admitted that the angel of death was already arrived, and that life was ebbing fast. She thanked him for his truthfulness, and he departed to come again very soon. She still occupied her easy chair, looking so serene, so reliant there was no opening for grief as yet, though all knew the separation was at hand. She clasped her hands, and reverently invoked a blessing from on high; first upon her sister, then upon her friend, to whom she said, ‘Be a sister in my stead. Give Charlotte as much of your company as you can.’ She then thanked each for her kindness and attention.

“Ere long the restlessness of approaching death appeared, and she was borne to the sofa; on being asked if she were easier, she looked gratefully at her questioner, and said, ‘It is not YOU who can give me ease, but soon all will be well, through the merits of our Redeemer.’ Shortly after this, seeing that her sister could hardly restrain her grief, she said, ‘Take courage, Charlotte; take courage.’ Her faith never failed, and her eye never dimmed till about two o’clock, when she calmly and without a sigh passed from the temporal to the eternal. So still, and so hallowed were her last hours and moments. There was no thought of assistance or of dread. The doctor came and went two or three times. The hostess knew that death was near, yet so little was the house disturbed by the presence of the dying, and the sorrow of those so nearly bereaved, that dinner was announced as ready, through the half-opened door, as the living sister was closing the eyes of the dead one. She could now no more stay the welled-up grief of her sister with her emphatic and dying ‘Take courage,’ and it burst forth in brief but agonising strength. Charlotte’s affection, however, had another channel, and there it turned in thought, in care, and in tenderness. There was bereavement, but there was not solitude; — sympathy was at hand, and it was accepted. With calmness, came the consideration of the removal of the dear remains to their home resting-place. This melancholy task, however, was never performed; for the afflicted sister decided to lay the flower in the place where it had fallen. She believed that to do so would accord with the wishes of the departed. She had no preference for place. She thought not of the grave, for that is but the body’s goal, but of all that is beyond it.

“Her remains rest,

‘Where the south sun warms the now dear sod, Where the ocean billows lave and strike the steep and turf-covered rock.’”

Anne died on the Monday. On the Tuesday Charlotte wrote to her father; but, knowing that his presence was required for some annual Church solemnity at Haworth, she informed him that she had made all necessary arrangements for the interment and that the funeral would take place so soon, that he could hardly arrive in time for it. The surgeon who had visited Anne on the day of her death, offered his attendance, but it was respectfully declined.

Mr. Bronte wrote to urge Charlotte’s longer stay at the seaside. Her health and spirits were sorely shaken; and much as he naturally longed to see his only remaining child, he felt it right to persuade her to take, with her friend, a few more weeks’ change of scene, — though even that could not bring change of thought. Late in June the friends returned homewards, — parting rather suddenly (it would seem) from each other, when their paths diverged.

“July, 1849.

“I intended to have written a line to you to-day, if I had not received yours. We did indeed part suddenly; it made my heart ache that we were severed without the time to exchange a word; and yet perhaps it was better. I got here a little before eight o’clock. All was clean and bright waiting for me. Papa and the servants were well; and all received me with an affection which should have consoled. The dogs seemed in strange ecstasy. I am certain they regarded me as the harbinger of others. The dumb creatures thought that as I was returned, those who had been so long absent were not far behind.

“I left Papa soon, and went into the dining-room: I shut the door — I tried to be glad that I was come home. I have always been glad before — except once — even then I was cheered. But this time joy was not to be the sensation. I felt that the house was all silent — the rooms were all empty. I remembered where the three were laid — in what narrow dark dwellings — never more to reappear on earth. So the sense of desolation and bitterness took possession of me. The agony that WAS to be undergone, and WAS NOT to be avoided, came on. I underwent it, and passed a dreary evening and night, and a mournful morrow; to-day I am better.

“I do not know how life will pass, but I certainly do feel confidence in Him who has upheld me hitherto. Solitude may be cheered, and made endurable beyond what I can believe. The great trial is when evening closes and night approaches. At that hour, we used to assemble in the dining-room — we used to talk. Now I sit by myself — necessarily I am silent. I cannot help thinking of their last days, remembering their sufferings, and what they said and did, and how they looked in mortal affliction. Perhaps all this will become less poignant in time.

“Let me thank you once more, dear E — — , for your kindness to me, which I do not mean to forget. How did you think all looking at your home? Papa thought me a little stronger; he said my eyes were not so sunken.”

“July 14th, 1849.

“I do not much like giving an account of myself. I like better to go out of myself, and talk of something more cheerful. My cold, wherever I got it, whether at Easton or elsewhere, is not vanished yet. It began in my head, then I had a sore throat, and then a sore chest, with a cough, but only a trifling cough, which I still have at times. The pain between my shoulders likewise amazed me much. Say nothing about it, for I confess I am too much disposed to be nervous. This nervousness is a horrid phantom. I dare communicate no ailment to Papa; his anxiety harasses me inexpressibly.

“My life is what I expected it to be. Sometimes when I wake in the morning, and know that Solitude, Remembrance, and Longing are to be almost my sole companions all day through — that at night I shall go to bed with them, that they will long keep me sleepless — that next morning I shall wake to them again, — sometimes, Nell, I have a heavy heart of it. But crushed I am not, yet; nor robbed of elasticity, nor of hope, nor quite of endeavour. I have some strength to fight the battle of life. I am aware, and can acknowledge, I have many comforts, many mercies. Still I can GET ON. But I do hope and pray, that never may you, or any one I love, be placed as I am. To sit in a lonely room — the clock ticking loud through a still house — and have open before the mind's eye the record of the last year, with its shocks, sufferings, losses — is a trial.

"I write to you freely, because I believe you will hear me with moderation — that you will not take alarm or think me in any way worse off than I am."

CHAPTER IV

The tale of "Shirley" had been begun soon after the publication of "Jane Eyre." If the reader will refer to the account I have given of Miss Bronte's schooldays at Roe Head, he will there see how every place surrounding that house was connected with the Luddite riots, and will learn how stories and anecdotes of that time were rife among the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages; how Miss Wooler herself, and the elder relations of most of her schoolfellows, must have known the actors in those grim disturbances. What Charlotte had heard there as a girl came up in her mind when, as a woman, she sought a subject for her next work; and she sent to Leeds for a file of the Mercuries of 1812, '13, and '14; in order to understand the spirit of those eventful times. She was anxious to write of things she had known and seen; and among the number was the West Yorkshire character, for which any tale laid among the Luddites would afford full scope. In "Shirley" she took the idea of most of her characters from life, although the incidents and situations were, of course, fictitious. She thought that if these last were purely imaginary, she might draw from the real without detection, but in this she was mistaken; her studies were too closely accurate. This occasionally led her into difficulties. People recognised themselves, or were recognised by others, in her graphic descriptions of their personal appearance, and modes of action and turns of thought; though they were placed in new positions, and figured away in scenes far different to those in which their actual life had been passed. Miss Bronte was struck by the force or peculiarity of the character of some one whom she knew; she studied it, and analysed it with subtle power; and having traced it to its germ, she took that germ as the nucleus of an imaginary character, and worked outwards; — thus reversing the process of analysation, and unconsciously reproducing the same external development. The "three curates" were real living men, haunting Haworth and the neighbouring district; and so obtuse in perception that, after the first burst of anger at having their ways and habits chronicled was over, they rather enjoyed the joke of calling each other by the names she had given them. "Mrs. Pryor" was well known to many who loved the original dearly. The whole family of the Yorkes were, I have been assured, almost daguerreotypes. Indeed Miss Bronte told me that, before publication, she had sent those parts of the novel in which these remarkable persons are introduced, to one of the sons; and his reply, after reading it, was simply that "she had not drawn them strong enough." From those many-sided sons, I suspect, she drew all that there was of truth in the characters of the heroes in her first two works. They, indeed, were almost the only young men she knew intimately, besides her brother. There was much friendship, and still more confidence between the Bronte family and them, — although their intercourse was often broken and irregular. There was never any warmer feeling on either side.

The character of Shirley herself, is Charlotte's representation of Emily. I mention this, because all that I, a stranger, have been able to learn about her has not tended to give either me, or my readers, a pleasant impression of her. But we must remember how little we are acquainted with her, compared to that sister, who, out of her more intimate knowledge, says that she "was genuinely good, and truly great," and who tried to depict her character in Shirley Keeldar, as what Emily Bronte would have been, had she been placed in health and prosperity.

Miss Bronte took extreme pains with "Shirley." She felt that the fame she had acquired imposed upon her a double responsibility. She tried to make her novel like a piece of actual life, — feeling sure that, if she but represented the product of personal experience and observation truly, good would come out of it in the long run. She carefully studied the different reviews and criticisms that had appeared on "Jane Eyre," in hopes of extracting precepts and advice from which to profit.

Down into the very midst of her writing came the bolts of death. She had nearly finished the second volume of her tale when Branwell died, — after him Emily, — after her Anne; — the pen, laid down when there were three sisters living and loving, was taken up when one alone remained. Well might she call the first chapter that she wrote after this, "The Valley of the Shadow of Death."

I knew in part what the unknown author of "Shirley" must have suffered, when I read those pathetic words which occur at the end of this and the beginning of the succeeding chapter: —

"Till break of day, she wrestled with God in earnest prayer.

"Not always do those who dare such divine conflict prevail. Night after night the sweat of agony may burst dark on the forehead; the supplicant may cry for mercy with that soundless voice the soul utters when its appeal is to the Invisible. 'Spare my beloved,' it may implore. 'Heal my life's life. Rend not from me what long affection entwines with my whole nature. God of Heaven — bend — hear — be clement!' And after this cry and strife, the sun may rise and see him worsted. That opening morn, which used to salute him with the whispers of zephyrs, the carol of skylarks, may breathe, as its first accents, from the dear lips which colour and heat have quitted, — 'Oh! I have had a suffering night. This morning I am worse. I have tried to rise. I cannot. Dreams I am unused to have troubled me.'

"Then the watcher approaches the patient's pillow, and sees a new and strange moulding of the familiar features, feels at once that the insufferable moment draws nigh, knows that it is God's will his idol should be broken, and bends his head, and subdues his soul to the sentence he cannot avert, and scarce can bear. . . .

"No piteous, unconscious moaning sound — which so wastes our strength that, even if we have sworn to be firm, a rush of unconquerable tears sweeps away the oath — preceded her waking. No space of deaf apathy followed. The first words spoken were not those of one becoming estranged from this world, and already permitted to stray at times into realms foreign to the living."

She went on with her work steadily. But it was dreary to write without any one to listen to the progress of her tale, — to find fault or to sympathise, — while pacing the length of the parlour in the evenings, as in the days that were no more. Three sisters had done this, — then two, the other sister dropping off from the walk, — and now one was left desolate, to listen for echoing steps that never came, — and to hear the wind sobbing at the windows, with an almost articulate sound.

But she wrote on, struggling against her own feelings of illness; "continually recurring feelings of slight cold; slight soreness in the throat and chest, of which, do what I will," she writes, "I cannot get rid."

In August there arose a new cause for anxiety, happily but temporary.

"Aug. 23rd, 1849.

"Papa has not been well at all lately. He has had another attack of bronchitis. I felt very uneasy about him for some days — more wretched indeed than I care to tell you. After what has happened, one trembles at any appearance of sickness; and when anything ails Papa, I feel too keenly that he is the LAST — the only near and dear relative I have in the world. Yesterday and to-day he has seemed much better, for which I am truly thankful. . . .

"From what you say of Mr. — — , I think I should like him very much. — — wants shaking to be put out about his appearance. What does it matter whether her husband dines in a dress-coat, or a market-coat, provided there be worth, and honesty, and a clean shirt underneath?"

"Sept. 10th, 1849.

"My piece of work is at last finished, and despatched to its destination. You must now tell me when there is a chance of your being able to come here. I fear it will now be difficult to arrange, as it is so near the marriage-day. Note well, it would spoil all my pleasure, if you put yourself or any one else to inconvenience to come to Haworth. But when it is CONVENIENT, I shall be truly glad to see you. . . . Papa, I am thankful to say, is better, though not strong. He is often troubled with a sensation of nausea. My cold is very much less troublesome, I am sometimes quite free from it. A few days since, I had a severe bilious attack, the consequence of sitting too closely to my writing; but it is gone now. It is the first from which I have suffered since my return from the sea-side. I had them every month before."

"Sept. 13th, 1849.

"If duty and the well-being of others require that you should stay at home, I cannot permit myself to complain, still, I am very, VERY sorry that circumstances will not permit us to meet just now. I would without hesitation come to — —, if Papa were stronger; but uncertain as are both his health and spirits, I could not possibly prevail on myself to leave him now. Let us hope that when we do see each other our meeting will be all the more pleasurable for being delayed. Dear E — —, you certain]y have a heavy burden laid on your shoulders, but such burdens, if well borne, benefit the character; only we must take the GREATEST, CLOSEST, MOST WATCHFUL care not to grow proud of our strength, in case we should be enabled to bear up under the trial. That pride, indeed, would be sign of radical weakness. The strength, if strength we have, is certainly never in our own selves; it is given us."

To W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

"Sept. 21st, 1849.

"My dear Sir, — I am obliged to you for preserving my secret, being at least as anxious as ever (MORE anxious I cannot well be) to keep quiet. You asked me in one of your letters lately, whether I thought I should escape identification in Yorkshire. I am so little known, that I think I shall. Besides, the book is far less founded on the Real, than perhaps appears. It would be difficult to explain to you how little actual experience I have had of life, how few persons I have known, and how very few have known me.

"As an instance how the characters have been managed, take that of Mr. Helstone. If this character had an original, it was in the person of a clergyman who died some years since at the advanced age of eighty. I never saw him except once — at the consecration of a church — when I was a child of ten years old. I was then struck with his appearance, and stern, martial air. At a subsequent period, I heard him talked about in the neighbourhood where he had resided: some mention him with enthusiasm — others with detestation. I listened to various anecdotes, balanced evidence against evidence, and drew an inference. The original of Mr. Hall I have seen; he knows me slightly; but he would as soon think I had closely observed him or taken him for a character — he would as soon, indeed, suspect me of writing a hook — a novel — as he would his dog, Prince. Margaret Hall called "Jane Eyre" a 'wicked book,' on the authority of the Quarterly; an expression which, coming from her, I will here confess, struck somewhat deep. It opened my eyes to the harm the Quarterly had done. Margaret would not have called it 'wicked,' if she had not been told so.

"No matter, — whether known or unknown — misjudged, or the contrary, — I am resolved not to write otherwise. I shall bend as my powers tend. The two human beings who understood me, and whom I understood, are gone: I have some that love me yet, and whom I love, without expecting, or having a right to expect, that they shall perfectly understand me. I am satisfied; but I must have my own way in the matter of writing. The loss of what we possess nearest and dearest to us in this world, produces an effect upon the character we search out what we have yet left that can support, and, when found, we cling to it with a hold of new-strung tenacity. The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking, three months ago; its active exercise has kept my head above water since; its results cheer me now, for I feel they have enabled me to give pleasure to others. I am thankful to God, who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift, and to profit by its possession. — Yours sincerely,

“CHARLOTTE BRONTE.”

At the time when this letter was written, both Tabby and the young servant whom they had to assist her were ill in bed; and, with the exception of occasional aid, Miss Bronte had all the household work to perform, as well as to nurse the two invalids.

The serious illness of the younger servant was at its height, when a cry from Tabby called Miss Bronte into the kitchen, and she found the poor old woman of eighty laid on the floor, with her head under the kitchen-grate; she had fallen from her chair in attempting to rise. When I saw her, two years later, she described to me the tender care which Charlotte had taken of her at this time; and wound up her account of “how her own mother could not have had more thought for her nor Miss Bronte had,” by saying, “Eh! she’s a good one — she IS!”

But there was one day when the strung nerves gave way — when, as she says, “I fairly broke down for ten minutes; sat and cried like a fool. Tabby could neither stand nor walk. Papa had just been declaring that Martha was in imminent danger. I was myself depressed with headache and sickness. That day I hardly knew what to do, or where to turn. Thank God! Martha is now convalescent: Tabby, I trust, will be better soon. Papa is pretty well. I have the satisfaction of knowing that my publishers are delighted with what I sent them. This supports me. But life is a battle. May we all be enabled to fight it well!”

The kind friend, to whom she thus wrote, saw how the poor over- taxed system needed bracing, and accordingly sent her a shower- bath — a thing for which she had long been wishing. The receipt of it was acknowledged as follows: —

“Sept. 28th, 1849. “. . . Martha is now almost well, and Tabby much better. A huge monster-package, from ‘Nelson, Leeds,’ came yesterday. You want chastising roundly and soundly. Such are the thanks you get for all your trouble. . . . Whenever you come to Haworth, you shall certainly have a thorough drenching in your own shower-bath. I have not yet unpacked the wretch. — “Yours, as you deserve, C. B.”

There was misfortune of another kind impending over her. There were some railway shares, which, so early as 1846, she had told Miss Wooler she wished to sell, but had kept because she could not persuade her sisters to look upon the affair as she did, and so preferred running the risk of loss, to hurting Emily’s feelings by acting in opposition to her opinion. The depreciation of these same shares was now verifying Charlotte’s soundness of judgment. They were in the York and North-Midland Company, which was one of Mr. Hudson’s pet lines, and had the full benefit of his peculiar system of management. She applied to her friend and publisher, Mr. Smith, for information on the subject; and the following letter is in answer to his reply: —

“Oct. 4th, 1849.

“My dear Sir, — I must not THANK you for, but acknowledge the receipt of your letter. The business is certainly very bad; worse than I thought, and much worse than my father has any idea of. In fact, the little railway property I possessed, according to original prices, formed already a small competency for me, with my views and habits. Now, scarcely any portion of it can, with security, be calculated upon. I must open this view of the case to my father by degrees; and, meanwhile, wait patiently till I see how affairs are likely to turn. . . . However the matter may terminate, I ought perhaps to be rather thankful than dissatisfied. When I look at my own case, and compare it with that of thousands besides, I scarcely see room for a murmur. Many, very many, are by the late strange railway system deprived almost of their daily bread. Such then as have only lost provision laid up for the future, should take care how they complain. The thought that ‘Shirley’ has given pleasure at Cornhill, yields me much quiet comfort. No doubt, however, you are, as I am, prepared for critical severity; but I have good hopes that the vessel is sufficiently sound of construction to weather a gale or two, and to make a prosperous voyage for you in the end.”

Towards the close of October in this year, she went to pay a visit to her friend; but her enjoyment in the holiday, which she had so long promised herself when her work was completed, was deadened by a continual feeling of ill-health; either the change of air or the foggy weather produced constant irritation at the chest. Moreover, she was anxious about the impression which her second work would produce on the public mind. For obvious reasons an author is more susceptible to opinions pronounced on the book which follows a great success, than he has ever been before. Whatever be the value of fame, he has it in his possession, and is not willing to have it dimmed or lost.

“Shirley” was published on October 26th.

When it came out, but before reading it, Mr. Lewes wrote to tell her of his intention of reviewing it in the Edinburgh. Her correspondence with him had ceased for some time: much had occurred since.

To G. H. LEWES, ESQ.

“Nov. 1st, 1849.

“My dear Sir, — It is about a year and a half since you wrote to me; but it seems a longer period, because since then it has been my lot to pass some black milestones in the journey of life. Since then there have been intervals when I have ceased to care about literature and critics and fame; when I have lost sight of whatever was prominent in my thoughts at the first publication of ‘Jane Eyre;’ but now I want these things to come back vividly, if possible: consequently, it was a pleasure to receive your note. I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed ‘Currer Bell’ to be a man; they would be more just to him. You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex; where I am not what you consider graceful, you will condemn me. All mouths will be open against that first chapter; and that first chapter is true as the Bible, nor is it exceptionable. Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand: and if it is only on such terms my writing will be tolerated, I shall pass away from the public and trouble it no more. Out of obscurity I came, to obscurity I can easily return. Standing afar off, I now watch to see what will become of 'Shirley.' My expectations are very low, and my anticipations somewhat sad and bitter; still, I earnestly conjure you to say honestly what you think; flattery would be worse than vain; there is no consolation in flattery. As for condemnation I cannot, on reflection, see why I should much fear it; there is no one but myself to suffer therefrom, and both happiness and suffering in this life soon pass away. Wishing you all success in your Scottish expedition, — I am, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

C. BELL."

Miss Bronte, as we have seen, had been as anxious as ever to preserve her incognito in "Shirley." She even fancied that there were fewer traces of a female pen in it than in "Jane Eyre"; and thus, when the earliest reviews were published, and asserted that the mysterious writer must be a woman, she was much disappointed. She especially disliked the lowering of the standard by which to judge a work of fiction, if it proceeded from a feminine pen; and praise mingled with pseudo-gallant allusions to her sex, mortified her far more than actual blame.

But the secret, so jealously preserved, was oozing out at last. The publication of "Shirley" seemed to fix the conviction that the writer was an inhabitant of the district where the story was laid. And a clever Haworth man, who had somewhat risen in the world, and gone to settle in Liverpool, read the novel, and was struck with some of the names of places mentioned, and knew the dialect in which parts of it were written. He became convinced that it was the production of some one in Haworth. But he could not imagine who in that village could have written such a work except Miss Bronte. Proud of his conjecture, he divulged the suspicion (which was almost certainty) in the columns of a Liverpool paper; thus the heart of the mystery came slowly creeping out; and a visit to London, which Miss Bronte paid towards the end of the year 1849, made it distinctly known. She had been all along on most happy terms with her publishers; and their kindness had beguiled some of those weary, solitary hours which had so often occurred of late, by sending for her perusal boxes of books more suited to her tastes than any she could procure from the circulating library at Keighley. She often writes such sentences as the following, in her letters to Cornhill: —

"I was indeed very much interested in the books you sent 'Eckermann's Conversations with Goethe,' 'Guesses as Truth,' 'Friends in Council,' and the little work on English social life, pleased me particularly, and the last not least. We sometimes take a partiality to books as to characters, not on account of any brilliant intellect or striking peculiarity they boast, but for the sake of something good, delicate, and genuine. I thought that small book the production of a lady, and an amiable, sensible woman, and I liked it. You must not think of selecting any more works for me yet; my stock is still far from exhausted.

"I accept your offer respecting the 'Athenaeum;' it is a paper I should like much to see, providing that you can send it without trouble. It shall be punctually returned."

In a letter to her friend she complains of the feelings of illness from which she was seldom or never free.

"Nov. 16th, 1849.

You are not to suppose any of the characters in 'Shirley' intended as literal portraits. It would not suit the rules of art, nor of my own feelings; to write in that style. We only suffer reality to SUGGEST, never to DICTATE. The heroines are abstractions and the heroes also. Qualities I have seen, loved, and admired, are here and there put in as decorative gems, to be preserved in that sitting. Since you say you could recognise the originals of all except the heroines, pray whom did you suppose the two Moores to represent? I send you a couple of reviews; the one is in the Examiner, written by Albany Fonblanque, who is called the most brilliant political writer of the day, a man whose dictum is much thought of in London. The other, in the Standard of Freedom, is written by William Howitt, a Quaker! . . . I should be pretty well, if it were not for headaches and indigestion. My chest has been better lately."

In consequence of this long-protracted state of languor, headache, and sickness, to which the slightest exposure to cold added sensations of hoarseness and soreness at the chest, she determined to take the evil in time, as much for her father's sake as for her own, and to go up to London and consult some physician there. It was not her first intention to visit anywhere; but the friendly urgency of her publishers prevailed, and it was decided that she was to become the guest of Mr. Smith. Before she went, she wrote two characteristic letters about "Shirley," from which I shall take a few extracts.

"'Shirley' makes her way. The reviews shower in fast. . . . The best critique which has yet appeared is in the Revue des deux Mondes, a sort of European Cosmopolitan periodical, whose head- quarters are at Paris. Comparatively few reviewers, even in their praise, evince a just comprehension of the author's meaning. Eugene Forcarde, the reviewer in question, follows Currer Bell through every winding, discerns every point, discriminates every shade, proves himself master of the subject, and lord of the aim. With that man I would shake hands, if I saw him. I would say, 'You know me, Monsieur; I shall deem it an honour to know you.' I could not say so much of the mass of the London critics. Perhaps I could not say so much to five hundred men and women in all the millions of Great Britain. That matters little. My own conscience I satisfy first; and having done that, if I further content and delight a Forsarde, a Fonblanque, and a Thackeray, my ambition has had its ration, it is fed; it lies down for the present satisfied; my faculties have wrought a day's task, and earned a day's wages. I am no teacher; to look on me in that light is to mistake me. To teach is not my vocation. What I AM, it is useless to say. Those whom it concerns feel and find it out. To all others I wish only to be an obscure, steady-going, private character. To you, dear E — — , I wish to be a sincere friend. Give me your faithful regard; I willingly dispense with admiration."

"Nov. 26th.

"It is like you to pronounce the reviews not good enough, and belongs to that part of your character which will not permit you to bestow unqualified approbation on any dress, decoration, etc., belonging to you. Know that the reviews are superb; and were I dissatisfied with them, I should be a conceited ape. Nothing higher is ever said, FROM PERFECTLY DISINTERESTED MOTIVES, of any living authors. If all be well, I go to London this week; Wednesday, I think. The dress-maker has done my small matters pretty well, but I wish you could have looked them over, and given a dictum. I insisted on the dresses being made quite plainly."

At the end of November she went up to the "big Babylon," and was immediately plunged into what appeared to her a whirl; for changes, and scenes, and stimulus which would have been a trifle to others, were much to her. As was always the case with strangers, she was a little afraid at first of the family into which she was now received, fancying that the ladies looked on her with a mixture of respect and alarm; but in a few days, if this state of feeling ever existed, her simple, shy, quiet manners, her dainty personal and household ways, had quite done away with it, and she says that she thinks they begin to like her, and that she likes them much, for "kindness is a potent heart-winner." She had stipulated that she should not be expected to see many people. The recluse life she had led, was the cause of a nervous shrinking from meeting any fresh face, which lasted all her life long. Still, she longed to have an idea of the personal appearance and manners of some of those whose writings or letters had interested her. Mr. Thackeray was accordingly invited to meet her, but it so happened that she had been out for the greater part of the morning, and, in consequence, missed the luncheon hour at her friend's house. This brought on a severe and depressing headache in one accustomed to the early, regular hours of a Yorkshire Parsonage; besides, the excitement of meeting, hearing, and sitting next a man to whom she looked up with such admiration as she did to the author of "Vanity Fair," was of itself overpowering to her frail nerves. She writes about this dinner as follows: —

"Dec. 10th, 1849.

"As to being happy, I am under scenes and circumstances of excitement; but I suffer acute pain sometimes, — mental pain, I mean. At the moment Mr. Thackeray presented himself, I was thoroughly faint from inanition, having eaten nothing since a very slight breakfast, and it was then seven o'clock in the evening. Excitement and exhaustion made savage work of me that evening. What he thought of me I cannot tell."

She told me how difficult she found it, this first time of meeting Mr. Thackeray, to decide whether he was speaking in jest or in earnest, and that she had (she believed) completely misunderstood an inquiry of his, made on the gentlemen's coming into the drawing-room. He asked her "if she had perceived the secret of their cigars;" to which she replied literally, discovering in a minute afterwards, by the smile on several faces, that he was alluding to a passage in "Jane Eyre". Her hosts took pleasure in showing her the sights of London. On one of the days which had been set apart for some of these pleasant excursions, a severe review of "Shirley" was published in the Times. She had heard that her book would be noticed by it, and guessed that there was some particular reason for the care with which her hosts mislaid it on that particular morning. She told them that she was aware why she might not see the paper. Mrs. Smith at once admitted that her conjecture was right, and said that they had wished her to go to the day's engagement before reading it. But she quietly persisted in her request to be allowed to have the paper. Mrs. Smith took her work, and tried not to observe the countenance, which the other tried to hide between the large sheets; but she could not help becoming aware of tears stealing down the face and dropping on the lap. The first remark Miss Bronte made was to express her fear lest so severe a notice should check the sale of the book, and injuriously affect her publishers. Wounded as she was, her first thought was for others. Later on (I think that very afternoon) Mr. Thackeray called; she suspected (she said) that he came to see how she bore the attack on "Shirley;" but she had recovered her composure, and conversed very quietly with him: he only learnt from the answer to his direct inquiry that she had read the Times' article. She acquiesced in the recognition of herself as the authoress of "Jane Eyre," because she perceived that there were some advantages to be derived from dropping her pseudonym. One result was an acquaintance with Miss Martineau. She had sent her the novel just published, with a curious note, in which Currer Bell offered a copy of "Shirley" to Miss Martineau, as an acknowledgment of the gratification he had received from her works. From "Deerbrook" he had derived a new and keen pleasure, and experienced a genuine benefit. In HIS mind "Deerbrook," etc.

Miss Martineau, in acknowledging this note and the copy of "Shirley," dated her letter from a friend's house in the neighbourhood of Mr. Smith's residence; and when, a week or two afterwards, Miss Bronte found how near she was to her correspondent, she wrote, in the name of Currer Bell, to propose a visit to her. Six o'clock, on a certain Sunday afternoon (Dec. 10th), was the time appointed. Miss Martineau's friends had invited the unknown Currer Bell to their early tea; they were ignorant whether the name was that of a man or a woman; and had had various conjectures as to sex, age, and appearance. Miss Martineau had, indeed, expressed her private opinion pretty distinctly by beginning her reply, to the professedly masculine note referred to above, with “Dear Madam;” but she had addressed it to “Currer Bell, Esq.” At every ring the eyes of the party turned towards the door. Some stranger (a gentleman, I think) came in; for an instant they fancied he was Currer Bell, and indeed an Esq.; he stayed some time — went away. Another ring; “Miss Bronte was announced; and in came a young-looking lady, almost child-like in stature, in a deep mourning dress, neat as a Quaker’s, with her beautiful hair smooth and brown, her fine eyes blazing with meaning and her sensible face indicating a habit of self-control.” She came, — hesitated one moment at finding four or five people assembled, — then went straight to Miss Martineau with intuitive recognition, and, with the free-masonry of good feeling and gentle breeding, she soon became as one of the family seated round the tea-table; and, before she left, she told them, in a simple, touching manner, of her sorrow and isolation, and a foundation was laid for her intimacy with Miss Martineau.

After some discussion on the subject, and a stipulation that she should not be specially introduced to any one, some gentlemen were invited by Mr. Smith to meet her at dinner the evening before she left town. Her natural place would have been at the bottom of the table by her host; and the places of those who were to be her neighbours were arranged accordingly; but, on entering the dining-room, she quickly passed up so as to sit next to the lady of the house, anxious to shelter herself near some one of her own sex. This slight action arose out of the same womanly seeking after protection on every occasion, when there was no moral duty involved in asserting her independence, that made her about this time write as follows: “Mrs. — — watches me very narrowly when surrounded by strangers. She never takes her eye from me. I like the surveillance; it seems to keep guard over me.”

Respecting this particular dinner-party she thus wrote to the Brussels schoolfellow of former days, whose friendship had been renewed during her present visit to London: —

“The evening after I left you passed better than I expected. Thanks to my substantial lunch and cheering cup of coffee, I was able to wait the eight o’clock dinner with complete resignation, and to endure its length quite courageously, nor was I too much exhausted to converse; and of this I was glad, for otherwise I know my kind host and hostess would have been much disappointed. There were only seven gentlemen at dinner besides Mr. Smith, but of these five were critics — men more dreaded in the world of letters than you can conceive. I did not know how much their presence and conversation had excited me till they were gone, and the reaction commenced. When I had retired for the night, I wished to sleep — the effort to do so was vain. I could not close my eyes. Night passed; morning came, and I rose without having known a moment’s slumber. So utterly worn out was I when I got to Derby, that I was again obliged to stay there all night.”

“Dec. 17th.

“Here I am at Haworth once more. I feel as if I had come out of an exciting whirl. Not that the hurry and stimulus would have seemed much to one accustomed to society and change, but to me they were very marked. My strength and spirits too often proved quite insufficient to the demand on their exertions. I used to bear up as long as I possibly could, for, when I flagged, I could see Mr. Smith became disturbed; he always thought that something had been said or done to annoy me — which never once happened, for I met with perfect good breeding even from antagonists — men who had done their best or worst to write me down. I explained to him over and over again, that my occasional silence was only failure of the power to talk, never of the will. . . .

“Thackeray is a Titan of mind. His presence and powers impress one deeply in an intellectual sense; I do not see him or know him as a man. All the others are subordinate. I have esteem for some, and, I trust, courtesy for all. I do not, of course, know what they thought of me, but I believe most of them expected me to come out in a more marked, eccentric, striking light. I believe they desired more to admire and more to blame. I felt sufficiently at my ease with all but Thackeray; with him I was fearfully stupid.”

She returned to her quiet home, and her noiseless daily duties. Her father had quite enough of the spirit of hero-worship in him to make him take a vivid pleasure in the accounts of what she had heard and whom she had seen. It was on the occasion of one of her visits to London that he had desired her to obtain a sight of Prince Albert’s armoury, if possible. I am not aware whether she managed to do this; but she went to one or two of the great national armouries in order that she might describe the stern steel harness and glittering swords to her father, whose imagination was forcibly struck by the idea of such things; and often afterwards, when his spirits flagged and the languor of old age for a time got the better of his indomitable nature, she would again strike on the measure wild, and speak about the armies of strange weapons she had seen in London, till he resumed his interest in the old subject, and was his own keen, warlike, intelligent self again.

CHAPTER V

Her life at Haworth was so unvaried that the postman's call was the event of her day. Yet she dreaded the great temptation of centring all her thoughts upon this one time, and losing her interest in the smaller hopes and employments of the remaining hours. Thus she conscientiously denied herself the pleasure of writing letters too frequently, because the answers (when she received them) took the flavour out of the rest of her life; or the disappointment, when the replies did not arrive, lessened her energy for her home duties.

The winter of this year in the north was hard and cold; it affected Miss Bronte's health less than usual, however, probably because the change and the medical advice she had taken in London had done her good; probably, also, because her friend had come to pay her a visit, and enforced that attention to bodily symptoms which Miss Bronte was too apt to neglect, from a fear of becoming nervous herself about her own state and thus infecting her father. But she could scarcely help feeling much depressed in spirits as the anniversary of her sister Emily's death came round; all the recollections connected with it were painful, yet there were no outward events to call off her attention, and prevent them from pressing hard upon her. At this time, as at many others, I find her alluding in her letters to the solace which she found in the books sent her from Cornhill.

"What, I sometimes ask, could I do without them? I have recourse to them as to friends; they shorten and cheer many an hour that would be too long and too desolate otherwise; even when my tired sight will not permit me to continue reading, it is pleasant to see them on the shelf, or on the table. I am still very rich, for my stock is far from exhausted. Some other friends have sent me books lately. The perusal of Harriet Martineau's 'Eastern Life' has afforded me great pleasure; and I have found a deep and interesting subject of study in Newman's work on the Soul. Have you read this work? It is daring, — it may be mistaken, — but it is pure and elevated. Froude's 'Nemesis of Faith' I did not like; I thought it morbid; yet in its pages, too, are found sprinklings of truth."

By this time, "Airedale, Wharfedale, Calderdale, and Ribblesdale" all knew the place of residence of Currer Bell. She compared herself to the ostrich hiding its head in the sand; and says that she still buries hers in the heath of Haworth moors; but "the concealment is but self-delusion." Indeed it was. Far and wide in the West Riding had spread the intelligence that Currer Bell was no other than a daughter of the venerable clergyman of Haworth; the village itself caught up the excitement.

"Mr. — — , having finished 'Jane Eyre,' is now crying out for the 'other book;' he is to have it next week. . . . Mr. R — — has finished 'Shirley;' he is delighted with it. John — — 's wife seriously thought him gone wrong in the head, as she heard him giving vent to roars of laughter as he sat alone, clapping and stamping on the floor. He would read all the scenes about the curates aloud to papa." . . . "Martha came in yesterday, puffing and blowing, and much excited. 'I've heard sich news!' she began. 'What about?' 'Please, ma'am, you've been and written two books — the grandest books that ever was seen. My father has heard it at Halifax, and Mr. G — — T — — and Mr. G — — and Mr. M — — at Bradford; and they are going to have a meeting at the Mechanics' Institute, and to settle about ordering them.' 'Hold your tongue, Martha, and be off.' I fell into a cold sweat. "Jane Eyre" will be read by J — — B — — , by Mrs. T — — , and B — — . Heaven help, keep, and deliver me!" . . . "The Haworth people have been making great fools of themselves about Shirley; they have taken it in an enthusiastic light. When they got the volumes at the Mechanics' Institute, all the members wanted them. They cast lots for the whole three, and whoever got a volume was only allowed to keep it two days, and was to be fined a shilling per diem for longer detention. It would be mere nonsense and vanity to tell you what they say."

The tone of these extracts is thoroughly consonant with the spirit of Yorkshire and Lancashire people, who try as long as they can to conceal their emotions of pleasure under a bantering exterior, almost as if making fun of themselves. Miss Bronte was extremely touched in the secret places of her warm heart by the way in which those who had known her from her childhood were proud and glad of her success. All round about the news had spread; strangers came "from beyond Burnley" to see her, as she went quietly and unconsciously into church and the sexton "gained many a half-crown" for pointing her out.

But there were drawbacks to this hearty and kindly appreciation which was so much more valuable than fame. The January number of the Edinburgh Review had contained the article on Shirley, of which her correspondent, Mr. Lewes, was the writer. I have said that Miss Bronte was especially anxious to be criticised as a writer, without relation to her sex as a woman. Whether right or wrong, her feeling was strong on this point. Now in this review of Shirley, the heading of the first two pages ran thus: "Mental Equality of the Sexes?" "Female Literature," and through the whole article the fact of the author's sex is never forgotten.

A few days after the review appeared, Mr. Lewes received the following note, — rather in the style of Anne Countess of Pembroke, Dorset, and Montgomery.

To G. H. LEWES, ESQ.

"I can be on my guard against my enemies, but God deliver me from my friends!

CURRER BELL.”

In some explanatory notes on her letters to him, with which Mr. Lewes has favoured me, he says: —

“Seeing that she was unreasonable because angry, I wrote to remonstrate with her on quarrelling with the severity or frankness of a review, which certainly was dictated by real admiration and real friendship; even under its objections the friend’s voice could be heard.”

The following letter is her reply: —

To G. H. LEWES, ESQ.

“Jan. 19th, 1850.

“My dear Sir, — I will tell you why I was so hurt by that review in the Edinburgh; not because its criticism was keen or its blame sometimes severe; not because its praise was stinted (for, indeed, I think you give me quite as much praise as I deserve), but because after I had said earnestly that I wished critics would judge me as an AUTHOR, not as a woman, you so roughly — I even thought so cruelly — handled the question of sex. I dare say you meant no harm, and perhaps you will not now be able to understand why I was so grieved at what you will probably deem such a trifle; but grieved I was, and indignant too.

“There was a passage or two which you did quite wrong to write.

“However, I will not bear malice against you for it; I know what your nature is: it is not a bad or unkind one, though you would often jar terribly on some feelings with whose recoil and quiver you could not possibly sympathise. I imagine you are both enthusiastic and implacable, as you are at once sagacious and careless; you know much and discover much, but you are in such a hurry to tell it all you never give yourself time to think how your reckless eloquence may affect others; and, what is more, if you knew how it did affect them, you would not much care.

“However, I shake hands with you: you have excellent points; you can be generous. I still feel angry, and think I do well to be angry; but it is the anger one experiences for rough play rather than for foul play. — I am yours, with a certain respect, and more chagrin,

CURRER BELL.”

As Mr. Lewes says, “the tone of this letter is cavalier.” But I thank him for having allowed me to publish what is so characteristic of one phase of Miss Bronte’s mind. Her health, too, was suffering at this time. “I don’t know what heaviness of spirit has beset me of late” (she writes, in pathetic words, wrung out of the sadness of her heart), “made my faculties dull, made rest weariness, and occupation burdensome. Now and then, the silence of the house, the solitude of the room, has pressed on me with a weight I found it difficult to bear, and recollection has not failed to be as alert, poignant, obtrusive, as other feelings were languid. I attribute this state of things partly to the weather. Quicksilver invariably falls low in storms and high winds, and

I have ere this been warned of approaching disturbance in the atmosphere by a sense of bodily weakness, and deep, heavy mental sadness, such as some would call PRESENTIMENT, — presentiment indeed it is, but not at all super-natural. . . . I cannot help feeling something of the excitement of expectation till the post hour comes, and when, day after day, it brings nothing, I get low. This is a stupid, disgraceful, unmeaning state of things. I feel bitterly vexed at my own dependence and folly; but it is so bad for the mind to be quite alone, and to have none with whom to talk over little crosses and disappointments, and to laugh them away. If I could write, I dare say I should be better, but I cannot write a line. However (by God's help), I will contend against this folly.

"I had rather a foolish letter the other day from — — . Some things in it nettled me, especially an unnecessarily earnest assurance that, in spite of all I had done in the writing line, I still retained a place in her esteem. My answer took strong and high ground at once. I said I had been troubled by no doubts on the subject; that I neither did her nor myself the injustice to suppose there was anything in what I had written to incur. the just forfeiture of esteem. . . .

"A few days since, a little incident happened which curiously touched me. Papa put into my hands a little packet of letters and papers, — telling me that they were mamma's, and that I might read them. I did read them, in a frame of mind I cannot describe. The papers were yellow with time, all having been written before I was born it was strange now to peruse, for the first time, the records of a mind whence my own sprang; and most strange, and at once sad and sweet, to find that mind of a truly fine, pure, and elevated order. They were written to papa before they were married. There is a rectitude, a refinement a constancy, a modesty, a sense, a gentleness about them indescribable. I wished that she had lived, and that I had known her. . . . All through this month of February, I have had a crushing time of it. I could not escape from or rise above certain most mournful recollections, — the last days, the sufferings, the remembered words — most sorrowful to me, of those who, Faith assures me, are now happy. At evening and bed-time, such thoughts would haunt me, bringing a weary heartache."

The reader may remember the strange prophetic vision, which dictated a few words, written on the occasion of the death of a pupil of hers in January, 1840:

"Wherever I seek for her now in this world, she cannot be found; no more than a flower or a leaf which withered twenty years ago. A bereavement of this kind gives one a glimpse of the feeling those must have, who have seen all drop round them — friend after friend, and are left to end their pilgrimage alone."

Even in persons of naturally robust health, and with no

"Ricordarsi di tempo felice
Nella miseria — "

to wear, with slow dropping but perpetual pain, upon their spirits, the nerves and appetite will give way in solitude. How much more must it have been so with Miss Bronte, delicate and frail in constitution, tried by much anxiety and sorrow in early life, and now left to face her life alone. Owing to Mr. Bronte's great age, and long-formed habits of solitary occupation when in the house, his daughter was left to herself for the greater part of the day. Ever since his serious attacks of illness, he had dined alone; a portion of her dinner, regulated by strict attention to the diet most suitable for him, being taken into his room by herself. After dinner she read to him for an hour or so, as his sight was too weak to allow of his reading long to himself. He was out of doors among his parishioners for a good part of each day; often for a longer time than his strength would permit. Yet he always liked to go alone, and consequently her affectionate care could be no check upon the length of his walks to the more distant hamlets which were in his cure. He would come back occasionally utterly fatigued; and be obliged to go to bed, questioning himself sadly as to where all his former strength of body had gone to. His strength of will was the same as ever. That which he resolved to do he did, at whatever cost of weariness; but his daughter was all the more anxious from seeing him so regardless of himself and his health. The hours of retiring for the night had always been early in the Parsonage; now family prayers were at eight o'clock; directly after which Mr. Bronte and old Tabby went to bed, and Martha was not long in following. But Charlotte could not have slept if she had gone, — could not have rested on her desolate couch. She stopped up, — it was very tempting, — late and later, striving to beguile the lonely night with some employment, till her weak eyes failed to read or to sew, and could only weep in solitude over the dead that were not. No one on earth can even imagine what those hours were to her. All the grim superstitions of the North had been implanted in her during her childhood by the servants, who believed in them. They recurred to her now, — with no shrinking from the spirits of the Dead, but with such an intense longing once more to stand face to face with the souls of her sisters, as no one but she could have felt. It seemed as if the very strength of her yearning should have compelled them to appear. On windy nights, cries, and sobs, and wailings seemed to go round the house, as of the dearly-beloved striving to force their way to her. Some one conversing with her once objected, in my presence, to that part of "Jane Eyre" in which she hears Rochester's voice crying out to her in a great crisis of her life, he being many, many miles distant at the time. I do not know what incident was in Miss Bronte's recollection when she replied, in a low voice, drawing in her breath, "But it is a true thing; it really happened."

The reader, who has even faintly pictured to himself her life at this time, — the solitary days, — the waking, watching nights, — may imagine to what a sensitive pitch her nerves were strung, and how such a state was sure to affect her health.

It was no bad thing for her that about this time various people began to go over to Haworth, curious to see the scenery described in "Shirley," if a sympathy with the writer, of a more generous kind than to be called mere curiosity, did not make them wish to know whether they could not in some way serve or cheer one who had suffered so deeply.

Among this number were Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth. Their house lies over the crest of the moors which rise above Haworth, at about a dozen miles' distance as the crow flies, though much further by the road. But, according to the acceptation of the word in that uninhabited district, they were neighbours, if they so willed it. Accordingly, Sir James and his wife drove over one morning, at the beginning of March, to call upon Miss Bronte and her father. Before taking leave, they pressed her to visit them at Gawthorpe Hall, their residence on the borders of East Lancashire. After some hesitation, and at the urgency of her father, who was extremely anxious to procure for her any change of scene and society that was offered, she consented to go. On the whole, she enjoyed her visit very much, in spite of her shyness, and the difficulty she always experienced in meeting the advances of those strangers whose kindness she did not feel herself in a position to repay.

She took great pleasure in the "quiet drives to old ruins and old halls, situated among older hills and woods; the dialogues by the old fireside in the antique oak-panneled drawing-room, while they suited him, did not too much oppress and exhaust me. The house, too, is much to my taste; near three centuries old, grey, stately, and picturesque. On the whole, now that the visit is over, I do not regret having paid it. The worst of it is, that there is now some menace hanging over my head of an invitation to go to them in London during the season. This, which would be a great enjoyment to some people, is a perfect terror to me. I should highly prize the advantages to be gained in an extended range of observation; but I tremble at the thought of the price I must necessarily pay in mental distress and physical wear and tear."

On the same day on which she wrote the above, she sent the following letter to Mr. Smith.

"March 16th, 1850.

"I return Mr. H — — 's note, after reading it carefully. I tried very hard to understand all he says about art; but, to speak truth, my efforts were crowned with incomplete success. There is a certain jargon in use amongst critics on this point through which it is physically and morally impossible to me to see daylight. One thing however, I see plainly enough, and that is, Mr. Currer Bell needs improvement, and ought to strive after it; and this (D. V.) he honestly intends to do — taking his time, however, and following as his guides Nature and Truth. If these lead to what the critics call art, it is all very well; but if not, that grand desideratum has no chance of being run after or caught. The puzzle is, that while the people of the South object to my delineation of Northern life and manners, the people of Yorkshire and Lancashire approve. They say it is precisely the contrast of rough nature with highly artificial cultivation which forms one of their main characteristics. Such, or something very similar, has been the observation made to me lately, whilst I have been from home, by members of some of the ancient East Lancashire families, whose mansions lie on the hilly border-land between the two counties. The question arises, whether do the London critics, or the old Northern squires, understand the matter best?

"Any promise you require respecting the books shall be willingly given, provided only I am allowed the Jesuit's principle of a mental reservation, giving licence to forget and promise whenever oblivion shall appear expedient. The last two or three numbers of Pendennis will not, I dare say, be generally thought sufficiently exciting, yet I like them. Though the story lingers, (for me) the interest does not flag. Here and there we feel that the pen has been guided by a tired hand, that the mind of the writer has been somewhat chafed and depressed by his recent illness, or by some other cause; but Thackeray still proves himself greater when he is weary than other writers are when they are fresh. The public, of course, will have no compassion for his fatigue, and make no allowance for the ebb of inspiration; but some true-hearted readers here and there, while grieving that such a man should be obliged to write when he is not in the mood, will wonder that, under such circumstances, he should write so well. The parcel of books will come, I doubt not, at such time as it shall suit the good pleasure of the railway officials to send it on, — or rather to yield it up to the repeated and humble solicitations of Haworth carriers; — till when I wait in all reasonable patience and resignation, looking with docility to that model of active self-helpfulness Punch friendly offers the 'Women of England,' in his 'Unprotected Female.'"

The books lent her by her publishers were, as I have before said, a great solace and pleasure to her. There was much interest in opening the Cornhill parcel. But there was pain too; for, as she untied the cords, and took out the volumes one by one, she could scarcely fail to be reminded of those who once, on similar occasions, looked on so eagerly. "I miss familiar voices, commenting mirthfully and pleasantly; the room seems very still — very empty; but yet there is consolation in remembering that Papa will take pleasure in some of the books. Happiness quite unshared can scarcely be called happiness; it has no taste." She goes on to make remarks upon the kind of books sent.

"I wonder how you can choose so well; on no account would I forestall the choice. I am sure any selection I might make for myself would be less satisfactory than the selection others so kindly and judiciously make for me; besides, if I knew all that was coming, it would be comparatively flat. I would much rather not know.

"Amongst the especially welcome works are 'Southey's Life', the 'Women of France,' Hazlitt's 'Essays,' Emerson's 'Representative Men;' but it seems invidious to particularise when all are good. . . . I took up a second small book, Scott's 'Suggestions on Female Education;' that, too, I read, and with unalloyed pleasure. It is very good; justly thought, and clearly and felicitously expressed. The girls of this generation have great advantages; it seems to me that they receive much encouragement in the acquisition of knowledge, and the cultivation of their minds; in these days, women may be thoughtful and well read, without being universally stigmatised as ‘Blues’ and ‘Pedants.’ Men begin to approve and aid, instead of ridiculing or checking them in their efforts to be wise. I must say that, for my own part, whenever I have been so happy as to share the conversation of a really intellectual man, my feeling has been, not that the little I knew was accounted a superfluity and impertinence, but that I did not know enough to satisfy just expectation. I have always to explain, ‘In me you must not look for great attainments: what seems to you the result of reading and study is chiefly spontaneous and intuitive.’ . . . Against the teaching of some (even clever) men, one instinctively revolts. They may possess attainments, they may boast varied knowledge of life and of the world; but if of the finer perceptions, of the more delicate phases of feeling, they be destitute and incapable, of what avail is the rest? Believe me, while hints well worth consideration may come from unpretending sources, from minds not highly cultured, but naturally fine and delicate, from hearts kindly, feeling, and unenvious, learned dictums delivered with pomp and sound may be perfectly empty, stupid, and contemptible. No man ever yet ‘by aid of Greek climbed Parnassus,’ or taught others to climb it. . . . I enclose for your perusal a scrap of paper which came into my hands without the knowledge of the writer. He is a poor working man of this village — a thoughtful, reading, feeling being, whose mind is too keen for his frame, and wears it out. I have not spoken to him above thrice in my life, for he is a Dissenter, and has rarely come in my way. The document is a sort of record of his feelings, after the perusal of “Jane Eyre;” it is artless and earnest; genuine and generous. You must return it to me, for I value it more than testimonies from higher sources. He said, ‘Miss Bronte, if she knew he had written it, would scorn him;’ but, indeed, Miss Bronte does not scorn him; she only grieves that a mind of which this is the emanation, should be kept crushed by the leaden hand of poverty — by the trials of uncertain health, and the claims of a large family.

“As to the Times, as you say, the acrimony of its critique has proved, in some measure, its own antidote; to have been more effective, it should have been juster. I think it has had little weight up here in the North it may be that annoying remarks, if made, are not suffered to reach my ear; but certainly, while I have heard little condemnatory of Shirley, more than once have I been deeply moved by manifestations of even enthusiastic approbation. I deem it unwise to dwell much on these matters; but for once I must permit myself to remark, that the generous pride many of the Yorkshire people have taken in the matter, has been such as to awake and claim my gratitude — especially since it has afforded a source of reviving pleasure to my father in his old age. The very curates, poor fellows! show no resentment each characteristically finds solace for his own wounds in crowing over his brethren. Mr. Donne was at first a little disturbed; for a week or two he was in disquietude, but he is now soothed down; only yesterday I had the pleasure of making him a comfortable cup of tea, and seeing him sip it with revived complacency. It is a curious fact that, since he read 'Shirley,' he has come to the house oftener than ever, and been remarkably meek and assiduous to please. Some people's natures are veritable enigmas I quite expected to have had one good scene at least with him; but as yet nothing of the sort has occurred."

CHAPTER VI

During the earlier months of this spring, Haworth was extremely unhealthy. The weather was damp, low fever was prevalent, and the household at the Parsonage suffered along with its neighbours. Charlotte says, “I have felt it (the fever) in frequent thirst and infrequent appetite; Papa too, and even Martha, have complained.” This depression of health produced depression of spirits, and she grew more and more to dread the proposed journey to London with Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth. “I know what the effect and what the pain will be, how wretched I shall often feel, and how thin and haggard I shall get; but he who shuns suffering will never win victory. If I mean to improve, I must strive and endure. . . . Sir James has been a physician, and looks at me with a physician’s eye: he saw at once that I could not stand much fatigue, nor bear the presence of many strangers. I believe he would partly understand how soon my stock of animal spirits was brought to a low ebb; but none — not the most skilful physician — can get at more than the outside of these things: the heart knows its own bitterness, and the frame its own poverty, and the mind its own struggles. Papa is eager and restless for me to go; the idea of a refusal quite hurts him.”

But the sensations of illness in the family increased; the symptoms were probably aggravated, if not caused, by the immediate vicinity of the churchyard, “paved with rain-blackened tomb-stones.” On April 29th she writes: —

“We have had but a poor week of it at Haworth. Papa continues far from well; he is often very sickly in the morning, a symptom which I have remarked before in his aggravated attacks of bronchitis; unless he should get much better, I shall never think of leaving him to go to London. Martha has suffered from tic-douloureux, with sickness and fever, just like you. I have a bad cold, and a stubborn sore throat; in short, everybody but old Tabby is out of sorts. When — — was here, he complained of a sudden headache, and the night after he was gone I had something similar, very bad, lasting about three hours.”

A fortnight later she writes: —

“I did not think Papa well enough to be left, and accordingly begged Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth to return to London without me. It was arranged that we were to stay at several of their friends’ and relatives’ houses on the way; a week or more would have been taken up on the journey. I cannot say that I regret having missed this ordeal; I would as lief have walked among red-hot plough-shares; but I do regret one great treat, which I shall now miss. Next Wednesday is the anniversary dinner of the Royal Literary

Fund Society, held in Freemasons' Hall. Octavian Blewitt, the secretary, offered me a ticket for the ladies' gallery. I should have seen all the great literati and artists gathered in the hall below, and heard them speak; Thackeray and Dickens are always present among the rest. This cannot now be. I don't think all London can afford another sight to me so interesting."

It became requisite, however, before long, that she should go to London on business; and as Sir James Kay Shuttleworth was detained in the country by indisposition, she accepted Mrs. Smith's invitation to stay quietly at her house, while she transacted her affairs.

In the interval between the relinquishment of the first plan and the adoption of the second, she wrote the following letter to one who was much valued among her literary friends: —

"May 22nd.

"I had thought to bring the Leader and the Athenaeum myself this time, and not to have to send them by post, but it turns out otherwise; my journey to London is again postponed, and this time indefinitely. Sir James Kay Shuttleworth's state of health is the cause-a cause, I fear, not likely to be soon removed. . . . Once more, then, I settle myself down in the quietude of Haworth Parsonage, with books for my household companions, and an occasional letter for a visitor; a mute society, but neither quarrelsome, nor vulgarising, nor unimproving.

"One of the pleasures I had promised myself consisted in asking you several questions about the Leader, which is really, in its way, an interesting paper. I wanted, amongst other things, to ask you the real names of some of the contributors, and also what Lewes writes besides his Apprenticeship of Life. I always think the article headed 'Literature' is his. Some of the communications in the 'Open Council' department are odd productions; but it seems to me very fair and right to admit them. Is not the system of the paper altogether a novel one? I do not remember seeing anything precisely like it before.

"I have just received yours of this morning; thank you for the enclosed note. The longings for liberty and leisure which May sunshine wakens in you, stir my sympathy. I am afraid Cornhill is little better than a prison for its inmates on warm spring or summer days. It is a pity to think of you all toiling at your desks in such genial weather as this. For my part, I am free to walk on the moors; but when I go out there alone, everything reminds me of the times when others were with me, and then the moors seem a wilderness, featureless, solitary, saddening. My sister Emily had a. particular love for them, and there is not a knoll of heather, not a branch of fern, not a young bilberry leaf, not a fluttering lark or linnet, but reminds me of her. The distant prospects were Anne's delight, and when I look round, she is in the blue tints, the pale mists, the waves and shadows of the horizon. In the hill-country silence, their poetry comes by lines and stanzas into my mind: once I loved it; now I dare not read it, and am driven often to wish I could taste one draught of oblivion, and forget much that, while mind remains, I never shall forget. Many people seem to recall their departed relatives with a sort of melancholy complacency, but I think these have not watched them through lingering sickness, nor witnessed their last moments: it is these reminiscences that stand by your bedside at night, and rise at your pillow in the morning. At the end of all, however, exists the Great Hope. Eternal Life is theirs now."

She had to write many letters, about this time, to authors who sent her their books, and strangers who expressed their admiration of her own. The following was in reply to one of the latter class, and was addressed to a young man at Cambridge: —

"May 23rd, 1850.

"Apologies are indeed unnecessary for a 'reality of feeling, for a genuine unaffected impulse of the spirit,' such as prompted you to write the letter which I now briefly acknowledge.

"Certainly it is 'something to me' that what I write should be acceptable to the feeling heart and refined intellect; undoubtedly it is much to me that my creations (such as they are) should find harbourage, appreciation, indulgence, at any friendly hand, or from any generous mind. You are very welcome to take Jane, Caroline, and Shirley for your sisters, and I trust they will often speak to their adopted brother when he is solitary, and soothe him when he is sad. If they cannot make themselves at home in a thoughtful, sympathetic mind, and diffuse through its twilight a cheering, domestic glow, it is their fault; they are not, in that case, so amiable, so benignant, not so real as they ought to be. If they CAN, and can find household altars in human hearts, they will fulfil the best design of their creation, in therein maintaining a genial flame, which shall warm but not scorch, light but not dazzle.

"What does it matter that part of your pleasure in such beings has its source in the poetry of your own youth rather than in any magic of theirs? What, that perhaps, ten years hence, you may smile to remember your present recollections, and view under another light both 'Currer Bell' and his writings? To me this consideration does not detract from the value of what you now feel. Youth has its romance, and maturity its wisdom, as morning and spring have their freshness, noon and summer their power, night and winter their repose. Each attribute is good in its own season. Your letter gave me pleasure, and I thank you for it.

"CURRER BELL."

Miss Bronte went up to town at the beginning of June, and much enjoyed her stay there; seeing very few persons, according to the agreement she made before she went; and limiting her visit to a fortnight, dreading the feverishness and exhaustion which were the inevitable consequences of the slightest excitement upon her susceptible frame.

"June 12th.

"Since I wrote to you last, I have not had many moments to myself, except such as it was absolutely necessary to give to rest. On the whole, however, I have thus far got on very well, suffering much less from exhaustion than I did last time.

"Of course I cannot give you in a letter a regular chronicle of how my time has been spent. I can only — just notify. what I deem three of its chief incidents: a sight of the Duke of Wellington at the Chapel Royal (he is a real grand old man), a visit to the House of Commons (which I hope to describe to you some day when I see you), and last, not least, an interview with Mr. Thackeray. He made a morning call, and sat above two hours. Mr. Smith only was in the room the whole time. He described it afterwards as a 'queer scene,' and — I suppose it was. The giant sate before me; I was moved to speak to him of some of his short-comings (literary of course); one by one the faults came into my head, and one by one I brought them out, and sought some explanation or defence. He did defend himself, like a great Turk and heathen; that is to say, the excuses were often worse than the crime itself. The matter ended in decent amity; if all be well, I am to dine at his house this evening.

"I have seen Lewes too. . . . I could not feel otherwise to him than half-sadly, half-tenderly, — a queer word that last, but I use it because the aspect of Lewes's face almost moves me to tears; it is so wonderfully like Emily, — her eyes, her features, the very nose, the somewhat prominent mouth, the forehead, even, at moments, the expression: whatever Lewes says, I believe I cannot hate him. Another likeness I have seen, too, that touched me sorrowfully. You remember my speaking of a Miss K., a young authoress, who supported her mother by writing? Hearing that she had a longing to see me, I called on her yesterday. . . . She met me half-frankly, half-tremblingly; we sate down together, and when I had talked with her five minutes, her face was no longer strange, but mournfully familiar; — it was Martha in every lineament. I shall try to find a moment to see her again. . . . I do not intend to stay here, at the furthest, more than a week longer; but at the end of that time I cannot go home, for the house at Haworth is just now unroofed; repairs were become necessary."

She soon followed her letter to the friend to whom it was written; but her visit was a very short one, for, in accordance with a plan made before leaving London, she went on to Edinburgh to join the friends with whom she had been staying in town. She remained only a few days in Scotland, and those were principally spent in Edinburgh, with which she was delighted, calling London a "dreary place" in comparison.

"My stay in Scotland" (she wrote some weeks later) "was short, and what I saw was chiefly comprised in Edinburgh and the neighbourhood, in Abbotsford and in Melrose, for I was obliged to relinquish my first intention of going from Glasgow to Oban, and thence through a portion of the Highlands; but though the time was brief, and the view of objects limited, I found such a charm of situation, association, and circumstance, that I think the enjoyment experienced in that little space equalled in degree, and excelled in kind, all which London yielded during a month's sojourn Edinburgh, compared to London, is like a vivid page of history compared to a large dull treatise on political economy; and as to Melrose and Abbotsford, the very names possess music and magic."

And again, in a letter to a different correspondent, she says: —

"I would not write to you immediately on my arrival at home, because each return to this old house brings with it a phase of feeling which it is better to pass through quietly before beginning to indite letters. The six weeks of change and enjoyment are past, but they are not lost; memory took a sketch of each as it went by, and, especially, a distinct daguerreotype of the two days I spent in Scotland. Those were two very pleasant days. I always liked Scotland as an idea, but now, as a reality, I like it far better; it furnished me with some hours as happy almost as any I ever spent. Do not fear, however, that I am going to bore you with description; you will, before now, have received a pithy and pleasant report of all things, to which any addition of mine would be superfluous. My present endeavours are directed towards recalling my thoughts, cropping their wings, drilling them into correct discipline, and forcing them to settle to some useful work: they are idle, and keep taking the train down to London, or making a foray over the Border — especially are they prone to perpetrate that last excursion; and who, indeed, that has once seen Edinburgh, with its couchant crag-lion, but must see it again in dreams, waking or sleeping? My dear sir, do riot think I blaspheme, when I tell you that your great London, as compared to Dun-Edin, 'mine own romantic town,' is as prose compared to poetry, or as a great rumbling, rambling, heavy epic compared to a lyric, brief, bright, clear and vital as a flash of lightning. You have nothing like Scott's monument, or, if you had that, and all the glories of architecture assembled together, you have nothing like Arthur's Seat, and, above all, you have riot the Scotch national character; and it is that grand character after all which gives the land its true charm, its true greatness.

On her return from Scotland, she again spent a few days with her friends, and then made her way to Haworth.

"July 15th.

I got home very well, and full glad was I that no insuperable obstacle had deferred my return one single day longer. Just at the foot of Bridgehouse hill, I met John, staff in hand; he fortunately saw me in the cab, stopped, and informed me he was setting off to B — — , by Mr. Bronte's orders, to see how I was, for that he had been quite miserable ever since he got Miss — — 's letter. I found, on my arrival, that Papa had worked himself up to a sad pitch of nervous excitement and alarm, in which Martha and Tabby were but too obviously joining him. . . . The house looks very clean, and, I think, is not damp; there is, however, still a great deal to do in the way of settling and arranging, — enough to keep me disagreeably busy for some time to come. I was truly thankful to find Papa pretty well, but I fear he is just beginning to show symptoms of a cold: my cold continues better. . . . An article in a newspaper I found awaiting me on my arrival, amused me; it was a paper published while I was in London. I enclose it to give you a laugh; it professes to be written by an Author jealous of Authoresses. I do not know who he is, but he must be one of those I met. . . . The 'ugly men,' giving themselves 'Rochester airs,' is no bad hit; some of those alluded to will not like it."

While Miss Bronte was staying in London, she was induced to sit for her portrait to Richmond. It is a crayon drawing; in my judgment an admirable likeness, though of course there is some difference of opinion on the subject; and, as usual, those best acquainted with the original were least satisfied with the resemblance. Mr. Bronte thought that it looked older than Charlotte did, and that her features had not been flattered; but he acknowledged that the expression was wonderfully good and life-like. She sent the following amusing account of the arrival of the portrait to the donor: —

"Aug. 1st.

"The little box for me came at the same time as the large one for Papa. When you first told me that you had had the Duke's picture framed, and had given it to me, I felt half provoked with you for performing such a work of supererogation, but now, when I see it again, I cannot but acknowledge that, in so doing, you were felicitously inspired. It is his very image, and, as Papa said when he saw it, scarcely in the least like the ordinary portraits; not only the expression, but even the form of the head is different, and of a far nobler character. I esteem it a treasure. The lady who left the parcel for me was, it seems, Mrs. Gore. The parcel contained one of her works, 'The Hamiltons,' and a very civil and friendly note, in which I find myself addressed as 'Dear Jane.' Papa seems much pleased with the portrait, as do the few other persons who have seen it, with one notable exception; viz., our old servant, who tenaciously maintains that it is not like — that it is too old-looking; but as she, with equal tenacity, asserts that the Duke of Wellington's picture is a portrait of 'the Master' (meaning Papa), I am afraid not much weight is to be ascribed to her opinion: doubtless she confuses her recollections of me as I was in childhood with present impressions. Requesting always to be very kindly remembered to your mother and sisters, I am, yours very thanklessly (according to desire),

"C. BRONTE."

It may easily be conceived that two people living together as Mr. Bronte and his daughter did, almost entirely dependent on each other for society, and loving each other deeply (although not demonstratively) — that these two last members of a family would have their moments of keen anxiety respecting each other's health. There is not one letter of hers which I have read, that does not contain some mention of her father's state in this respect. Either she thanks God with simple earnestness that he is well, or some infirmities of age beset him, and she mentions the fact, and then winces away from it, as from a sore that will not bear to be touched. He, in his turn, noted every indisposition of his one remaining child's, exaggerated its nature, and sometimes worked himself up into a miserable state of anxiety, as in the case she refers to, when, her friend having named in a letter to him that his daughter was suffering from a bad cold, he could not rest till he despatched a messenger, to go, “staff in hand” a distance of fourteen miles, and see with his own eyes what was her real state, and return and report.

She evidently felt that this natural anxiety on the part of her father and friend increased the nervous depression of her own spirits, whenever she was ill; and in the following letter she expresses her strong wish that the subject of her health should be as little alluded to as possible.

“Aug. 7th.

“I am truly sorry that I allowed the words to which you refer to escape my lips, since their effect on you has been unpleasant; but try to chase every shadow of anxiety from your mind, and, unless the restraint be very disagreeable to you, permit me to add an earnest request that you will broach the subject to me no more. It is the undisguised and most harassing anxiety of others that has fixed in my mind thoughts and expectations which must canker wherever they take root; against which every effort of religion or philosophy must at times totally fail; and subjugation to which is a cruel terrible fate — the fate, indeed, of him whose life was passed under a sword suspended by a horse-hair. I have had to entreat Papa’s consideration on this point. My nervous system is soon wrought on. I should wish to keep it in rational strength and coolness; but to do so I must determinedly resist the kindly-meant, but too irksome expression of an apprehension, for the realisation or defeat of which I have no possible power to be responsible. At present, I am pretty well. Thank God! Papa, I trust, is no worse, but he complains of weakness.”

CHAPTER VII

Her father was always anxious to procure every change that was possible for her, seeing, as he did, the benefit which she derived from it, however reluctant she might have been to leave her home and him beforehand. This August she was invited to go for a week to the neighbourhood of Bowness, where Sir James Kay Shuttleworth had taken a house; but she says, “I consented to go, with reluctance, chiefly to please Papa, whom a refusal on my part would much have annoyed; but I dislike to leave him. I trust he is not worse, but his complaint is still weakness. It is not right to anticipate evil, and to be always looking forward with an apprehensive spirit; but I think grief is a two-edged sword, it cuts both ways; the memory of one loss is the anticipation of another.”

It was during this visit at the Briery — Lady Kay Shuttleworth having kindly invited me to meet her there — that I first made acquaintance with Miss Bronte. If I copy out part of a letter, which I wrote soon after this to a friend, who was deeply interested in her writings, I shall probably convey my first impressions more truly and freshly than by amplifying what I then said into a longer description.

“Dark when I got to Windermere station; a drive along the level road to Low-wood; then a stoppage at a pretty house, and then a pretty drawing-room, in which were Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth, and a little lady in a black-silk gown, whom I could not see at first for the dazzle in the room; she came up and shook hands with me at once. I went up to unbonnet, etc.; came down to tea; the little lady worked away and hardly spoke but I had time for a good look at her. She is (as she calls herself) UNDEVELOPED, thin, and more than half a head shorter than I am; soft brown hair, not very dark; eyes (very good and expressive, looking straight and open at you) of the same colour as her hair; a large mouth; the forehead square, broad and rather over-hanging. She has a very sweet voice; rather hesitates in choosing her expressions, but when chosen they seem without an effort admirable, and just befitting the occasion; there is nothing overstrained, but perfectly simple. . . . After breakfast, we four went out on the lake, and Miss Bronte agreed with me in liking Mr. Newman’s Soul, and in liking Modern Painters, and the idea of the Seven Lamps; and she told me about Father Newman’s lectures at the Oratory in a very quiet, concise, graphic way. . . . She is more like Miss — — than any one in her ways — if you can fancy Miss — — to have gone through suffering enough to have taken out every spark of merriment, and to be shy and silent from the habit of extreme, intense solitude. Such a life as

Miss Bronte's I never heard of before. — — described her home to me as in a village of grey stone houses, perched up on the north side of a bleak moor, looking over sweeps of bleak moors, etc., etc.

"We were only three days together; the greater part of which was spent in driving about, in order to show Miss Bronte the Westmoreland scenery, as she had never been there before. We were both included in an invitation to drink tea quietly at Fox How; and I then saw how severely her nerves were taxed by the effort of going amongst strangers. We knew beforehand that the number of the party would not exceed twelve; but she suffered the whole day from an acute headache brought on by apprehension of the evening.

"Brierly Close was situated high above Low-wood, and of course commanded an extensive view and wide horizon. I was struck by Miss Bronte's careful examination of the shape of the clouds and the signs of the heavens, in which she read, as from a book, what the coming weather would be. I told her that I saw she must have a view equal in extent at her own home. She said that I was right, but that the character of the prospect from Haworth was very different; that I had no idea what a companion the sky became to any one living in solitude, — more than any inanimate object on earth, — more than the moors themselves."

The following extracts convey some of her own impressions and feelings respecting this visit: —

"You said I should stay longer than a week in Westmoreland; you ought by this time to know me better. Is it my habit to keep dawdling at a place long after the time I first fixed on for departing? I have got home, and I am thankful to say Papa seems, — to say the least, — no worse than when I left him, yet I wish he were stronger. My visit passed off very well; I am glad I went. The scenery is, of course, grand; could I have wandered about amongst those hills ALONE, I could have drank in all their beauty; even in a carriage with company, it was very well. Sir James was all the while as kind and friendly as he could be: he is in much better health. . . . Miss Martineau was from home; she always leaves her house at Ambleside during the Lake season, to avoid the influx of visitors to which she would otherwise be subject.

"If I could only have dropped unseen out of the carriage, and gone away by myself in amongst those grand hills and sweet dales, I should have drank in the full power of this glorious scenery. In company this can hardly be. Sometimes, while — — was warning me against the faults of the artist-class, all the while vagrant artist instincts were busy in the mind of his listener.

"I forget to tell you that, about a week before I went to Westmoreland, there came an invitation to Harden Grange; which, of course, I declined. Two or three days after, a large party made their appearance here, consisting of Mrs. F — — and sundry other ladies and two gentlemen; one tall and stately, black haired and whiskered, who turned out to be Lord John Manners, — the other not so distinguished-looking, shy, and a little queer, who was Mr. Smythe, the son of Lord Strangford. I found Mrs. F. a true lady in manners and appearance, very gentle and unassuming. Lord John Manners brought in his hand a brace of grouse for Papa, which was a well-timed present: a day or two before Papa had been wishing for some."

To these extracts I must add one other from a letter referring to this time. It is addressed to Miss Wooler, the kind friend of both her girlhood and womanhood, who had invited her to spend a fortnight with her at her cottage lodgings.

"Haworth, Sept. 27th, 1850.

"When I tell you that I have already been to the Lakes this season, and that it is scarcely more than a month since I returned, you will understand that it is no longer within my option to accept your kind invitation. I wish I could have gone to you. I have already had my excursion, and there is an end of it. Sir James Kay Shuttleworth is residing near Windermere, at a house called the 'Briery,' and it was there I was staying for a little time this August. He very kindly showed me the neighbourhood, as it can be seen from a carriage, and I discerned that the Lake country is a glorious region, of which I had only seen the similitude in dreams, waking or sleeping. Decidedly I find it does not agree with me to prosecute the search of the picturesque in a carriage. A waggon, a spring-cart, even a post-chaise might do; but the carriage upsets everything. I longed to slip out unseen, and to run away by myself in amongst the hills and dales. Erratic and vagrant instincts tormented me, and these I was obliged to control or rather suppress for fear of growing in any degree enthusiastic, and thus drawing attention to the 'lioness' — the authoress.

"You say that you suspect I have formed a large circle of acquaintance by this time. No: I cannot say that I have. I doubt whether I possess either the wish or the power to do so. A few friends I should like to have, and these few I should like to know well; If such knowledge brought proportionate regard, I could not help concentrating my feelings; dissipation, I think, appears synonymous with dilution. However, I have, as yet, scarcely been tried. During the month I spent in London in the spring, I kept very quiet, having the fear of lionising before my eyes. I only went out once to dinner; and once was present at an evening party; and the only visits I have paid have been to Sir James Kay Shuttleworth's and my publisher's. From this system I should not like to depart; as far as I can see, Indiscriminate visiting tends only to a waste of time and a vulgarising of character. Besides, it would be wrong to leave Papa often; he is now in his seventy-fifth year, the infirmities of age begin to creep upon him; during the summer he has been much harassed by chronic bronchitis, but I am thankful to say that he is now somewhat better. I think my own health has derived benefit from change and exercise.

"Somebody in D — — professes to have authority for saying, that 'when Miss Bronte was in London she neglected to attend Divine service on the Sabbath, and in the week spent her time in going about to balls, theatres, and operas.' On the other hand, the London quidnuncs make my seclusion a matter of wonder, and devise twenty romantic fictions to account for it.

Formerly I used to listen to report with interest, and a certain credulity; but I am now grown deaf and sceptical: experience has taught me how absolutely devoid of foundation her stories may be.”

I must now quote from the first letter I had the privilege of receiving from Miss Bronte. It is dated August the 27th.

“Papa and I have just had tea; he is sitting quietly in his room, and I in mine; ‘storms of rain’ are sweeping over the garden and churchyard: as to the moors, they are hidden in thick fog. Though alone, I am not unhappy; I have a thousand things to be thankful for, and, amongst the rest, that this morning I received a letter from you, and that this evening I have the privilege of answering it.

“I do not know the ‘Life of Sydney Taylor;’ whenever I have the opportunity I will get it. The little French book you mention shall also take its place on the list of books to be procured as soon as possible. It treats a subject interesting to all women — perhaps, more especially to single women; though, indeed, mothers, like you, study it for the sake of their daughters. The Westminster Review is not a periodical I see regularly, but some time since I got hold of a number — for last January, I think — in which there was an article entitled ‘Woman’s Mission’ (the phrase is hackneyed), containing a great deal that seemed to me just and sensible. Men begin to regard the position of woman in another light than they used to do; and a few men, whose sympathies are fine and whose sense of justice is strong, think and speak of it with a candour that commands my admiration. They say, however — and, to an extent, truly — that the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves. Certainly there are evils which our own efforts will best reach; but as certainly there are other evils — deep-rooted in the foundation of the social system — which no efforts of ours can touch: of which we cannot complain; of which it is advisable not too often to think.

“I have read Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam,’ or rather part of it; I closed the book when I had got about half way. It is beautiful; it is mournful; it is monotonous. Many of the feelings expressed bear, in their utterance, the stamp of truth; yet, if Arthur Hallam had been som what nearer Alfred Tennyson, his brother instead of his friend, — I should have distrusted this rhymed, and measured, and printed monument of grief. What change the lapse of years may work I do not know; but it seems to me that bitter sorrow, while recent, does not flow out in verse.

“I promised to send you Wordsworth’s ‘Prelude,’ and, accordingly, despatch it by this post; the other little volume shall follow in a day or two. I shall be glad to hear from you whenever you have time to write to me, but you are never, on any account, to do this except when inclination prompts and leisure permits. I should never thank you for a letter which you had felt it a task to write.”

A short time after we had met at the Briery, she sent me the volume of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell’s poems; and thus alludes to them in the note that accompanied the parcel: —

"The little book of rhymes was sent by way of fulfilling a rashly-made promise; and the promise was made to prevent you from throwing away four shillings in an injudicious purchase. I do not like my own share of the work, nor care that it should be read: Ellis Bell's I think good and vigorous, and Acton's have the merit of truth and simplicity. Mine are chiefly juvenile productions; the restless effervescence of a mind that would not be still. In those days, the sea too often 'wrought and was tempestuous,' and weed, sand, shingle — all turned up in the tumult. This image is much too magniloquent for the subject, but you will pardon it."

Another letter of some interest was addressed, about this time, to a literary friend, on Sept. 5th: —

"The reappearance of the Athenaeum is very acceptable, not merely for its own sake, — though I esteem the opportunity of its perusal a privilege, — but because, as a weekly token of the remembrance of friends, it cheers and gives pleasure. I only fear that its regular transmission may become a task to you; in this case, discontinue it at once.

"I did indeed enjoy my trip to Scotland, and yet I saw little of the face of the country; nothing of its grandeur or finer scenic features; but Edinburgh, Melrose, Abbotsford — these three in themselves sufficed to stir feelings of such deep interest and admiration, that neither at the time did I regret, nor have I since regretted, the want of wider space over which to diffuse the sense of enjoyment. There was room and variety enough to be very happy, and 'enough,' the proverb says, 'is as good as a feast.' The queen, indeed, was right to climb Arthur's Seat with her husband and children. I shall not soon forget how I felt when, having reached its summit, we all sat down and looked over the city — towards the sea and Leith, and the Pentland Hills. No doubt you are proud of being a native of Scotland, — proud of your country, her capital, her children, and her literature. You cannot be blamed.

"The article in the Palladium is one of those notices over which an author rejoices trembling. He rejoices to find his work finely, fully, fervently appreciated, and trembles under the responsibility such appreciation seems to devolve upon him. I am counselled to wait and watch — D. V. I will do so; yet it is harder to wait with the hands bound, and the observant and reflective faculties at their silent and unseen work, than to labour mechanically.

"I need not say how I felt the remarks on 'Wuthering Heights;' they woke the saddest yet most grateful feelings; they are true, they are discriminating, they are full of late justice, but it is very late — alas! in one sense, TOO late. Of this, however, and of the pang of regret for a light prematurely extinguished, it is not wise to speak much. Whoever the author of this article may be, I remain his debtor.

"Yet, you see, even here, Shirley is disparaged in comparison with "Jane Eyre"; and yet I took great pains with Shirley. I did not hurry; I tried to do my best, and my own impression was that it was not inferior to the former work;

indeed, I had bestowed on it more time, thought, and anxiety: but great part of it was written under the shadow of impending calamity; and the last volume, I cannot deny, was composed in the eager, restless endeavour to combat mental sufferings that were scarcely tolerable.

"You sent the tragedy of 'Galileo Galilei,' by Samuel Brown, in one of the Cornhill parcels; it contained, I remember, passages of very great beauty. Whenever you send any more books (but that must not be till I return what I now have) I should be glad if you would include amongst them the 'Life of Dr. Arnold.' Do you know also the 'Life of Sydney Taylor?' I am not familiar even with the name, but it has been recommended to me as a work meriting perusal. Of course, when I name any book, it is always understood that it should be quite convenient to send it."

CHAPTER VIII

It was thought desirable about this time, to republish "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey", the works of the two sisters, and Charlotte undertook the task of editing them.

She wrote to Mr. Williams, September 29th, 1850, "It is my intention to write a few lines of remark on 'Wuthering Heights,' which, however, I propose to place apart as a brief preface before the tale. I am likewise compelling myself to read it over, for the first time of opening the book since my sister's death. Its power fills me with renewed admiration; but yet I am oppressed: the reader is scarcely ever permitted a taste of unalloyed pleasure; every beam of sunshine is poured down through black bars of threatening cloud; every page is surcharged with a sort of moral electricity; and the writer was unconscious of all this — nothing could make her conscious of it.

"And this makes me reflect, — perhaps I am too incapable of perceiving the faults and peculiarities of my own style.

"I should wish to revise the proofs, if it be not too great an inconvenience to send them. It seems to me advisable to modify the orthography of the old servant Joseph's speeches; for though, as it stands, it exactly renders the Yorkshire dialect to a Yorkshire ear, yet, I am sure Southerns must find it unintelligible; and thus one of the most graphic characters in the book is lost on them.

"I grieve to say that I possess no portrait of either of my sisters."

To her own dear friend, as to one who had known and loved her sisters, she writes still more fully respecting the painfulness of her task.

"There is nothing wrong, and I am writing you a line as you desire, merely to say that I AM busy just now. Mr. Smith wishes to reprint some of Emily's and Annie's works, with a few little additions from the papers they have left; and I have been closely engaged in revising, transcribing, preparing a preface, notice, etc. As the time for doing this is limited, I am obliged to be industrious. I found the task at first exquisitely painful and depressing; but regarding it in the light of a SACRED DUTY, I went on, and now can bear it better. It is work, however, that I cannot do in the evening, for if I did, I should have no sleep at night. Papa, I am thankful to say, is in improved health, and so, I think, am I; I trust you are the same.

"I have just received a kind letter from Miss Martineau. She has got back to Ambleside, and had heard of my visit to the Lakes. She expressed her regret, etc., at not being at home.

"I am both angry and surprised at myself for not being in better spirits; for not growing accustomed, or at least resigned, to the solitude and isolation of my lot. But my late occupation left a result for some days, and indeed still, very painful. The reading over of papers, the renewal of remembrances brought back the pang of bereavement, and occasioned a depression of spirits well nigh intolerable. For one or two nights, I scarcely knew how to get on till morning; and when morning came, I was still haunted with a sense of sickening distress. I tell you these things, because it is absolutely necessary to me to have some relief. You will forgive me, and not trouble yourself, or imagine that I am one whit worse than I say. It is quite a mental ailment, and I believe and hope is better now. I think so, because I can speak about it, which I never can when grief is at its worst.

"I thought to find occupation and interest in writing, when alone at home, but hitherto my efforts have been vain; the deficiency of every stimulus is so complete. You will recommend me, I dare say, to go from home; but that does no good, even could I again leave Papa with an easy mind (thank God! he is better). I cannot describe what a time of it I had after my return from London, Scotland, etc. There was a reaction that sunk me to the earth; the deadly silence, solitude, desolation, were awful; the craving for companionship, the hopelessness of relief, were what I should dread to feel again.

"Dear — —, when I think of you, it is with a compassion and tenderness that scarcely cheer me. Mentally, I fear, you also are too lonely and too little occupied. It seems our doom, for the present at least. May God in His mercy help us to bear it!"

During her last visit to London, as mentioned in one of her letters, she had made the acquaintance of her correspondent, Mr. Lewes. That gentleman says: —

"Some months after" (the appearance of the review of "Shirley" in the Edinburgh), "Currer Bell came to London, and I was invited to meet her at your house. You may remember, she asked you not to point me out to her, but allow her to discover me if she could. She DID recognise me almost as soon as I came into the room. You tried me in the same way; I was less sagacious. However, I sat by her side a great part of the evening and was greatly interested by her conversation. On parting we shook hands, and she said, 'We are friends now, are we not?' 'Were we not always, then?' I asked. 'No! not always,' she said, significantly; and that was the only allusion she made to the offending article. I lent her some of Balzac's and George Sand's novels to take with her into the country; and the following letter was written when they were returned:" —

"I am sure you will have thought me very dilatory in returning the books you so kindly lent me. The fact is, having some other books to send, I retained yours to enclose them in the same parcel.

"Accept my thanks for some hours of pleasant reading. Balzac was for me quite a new author; and in making big acquaintance, through the medium of 'Modeste Mignon,' and 'Illusions perdues,' you cannot doubt I have felt some interest. At first, I thought he was going to be painfully minute, and fearfully tedious; one grew impatient of his long parade of detail, his slow revelation of unimportant circumstances, as he assembled his personages on the stage; but by and bye I seemed to enter into the mystery of his craft, and to discover, with delight, where his force lay: is it not in the analysis of motive; and in a subtle perception of the most obscure and secret workings of the mind? Still, admire Balzac as we may, I think we do not like him; we rather feel towards him as towards an ungenial acquaintance who is for ever holding up in strong light our defects, and who rarely draws forth our better qualities.

"Truly, I like George Sand better.

"Fantastic, fanatical, unpractical enthusiast as she often is — far from truthful as are many of her views of life — misled, as she is apt to be, by her feelings — George Sand has a better nature than M. de Balzac; her brain is larger, her heart warmer than his. The 'Lettres d'un Voyageur' are full of the writer's self; and I never felt so strongly, as in the perusal of this work, that most of her very faults spring from the excess of her good qualities: it is this excess which has often hurried her into difficulty, which has prepared for her enduring regret.

"But I believe her mind is of that order which disastrous experience teaches, without weakening or too much disheartening; and, in that case, the longer she lives the better she will grow. A hopeful point in all her writings is the scarcity of false French sentiment; I wish I could say its absence; but the weed flourishes here and there, even in the 'Lettres.'"

I remember the good expression of disgust which Miss Bronte made use of in speaking to me of some of Balzac's novels: "They leave such a bad taste in my mouth."

The reader will notice that most of the letters from which I now quote are devoted to critical and literary subjects. These were, indeed, her principal interests at this time; the revision of her sister's works, and writing a short memoir of them, was the painful employment of every day during the dreary autumn of 1850. Wearied out by the vividness of her sorrowful recollections, she sought relief in long walks on the moors. A friend of hers, who wrote to me on the appearance of the eloquent article in the Daily News upon the "Death of Currer Bell," gives an anecdote which may well come in here.

"They are mistaken in saying she was too weak to roam the hills for the benefit of the air. I do not think any one, certainly not any woman, in this locality, went so much on the moors as she did, when the weather permitted. Indeed, she was so much in the habit of doing so, that people, who live quite away on the edge of the common, knew her perfectly well. I remember on one occasion an old woman saw her at a little distance, and she called out, 'How! Miss Bronte! Hey yah (have you) seen ought o' my cofe (calf)?' Miss Bronte told her she could not say, for she did not know it. 'Well!' she said, 'Yah know, it's getting up like nah (now), between a cah (cow) and a cofe — what we call a stirk, yah know, Miss Bronte; will yah turn it this way if yah happen to see't, as yah're going back, Miss Bronte; nah DO, Miss Bronte.'"

It must have been about this time that a visit was paid to her by some neighbours, who were introduced to her by a mutual friend. This visit has been described in a letter from which I am permitted to give extracts, which will show the impression made upon strangers by the character of the country round her home, and other circumstances. "Though the weather was drizzly, we resolved to make our long-planned excursion to Haworth; so we packed ourselves into the buffalo-skin, and that into the gig, and set off about eleven. The rain ceased, and the day was just suited to the scenery, — wild and chill, — with great masses of cloud glooming over the moors, and here and there a ray of sunshine covertly stealing through, and resting with a dim magical light upon some high bleak village; or darting down into some deep glen, lighting up the tall chimney, or glistening on the windows and wet roof of the mill which lies couching in the bottom. The country got wilder and wilder as we approached Haworth; for the last four miles we were ascending a huge moor, at the very top of which lies the dreary black-looking village of Haworth. The village-street itself is one of the steepest hills I have ever seen, and the stones are so horribly jolting that I should have got out and walked with W — — , if possible, but, having once begun the ascent, to stop was out of the question. At the top was the inn where we put up, close by the church; and the clergyman's house, we were told, was at the top of the churchyard. So through that we went, — a dreary, dreary place, literally PAVED with rain-blackened tombstones, and all on the slope, for at Haworth there is on the highest height a higher still, and Mr. Bronte's house stands considerably above the church. There was the house before us, a small oblong stone house, with not a tree to screen it from the cutting wind; but how were we to get at it from the churchyard we could not see! There was an old man in the churchyard, brooding like a Ghoul over the graves, with a sort of grim hilarity on his face. I thought he looked hardly human; however, he was human enough to tell us the way; and presently we found ourselves in the little bare parlour. Presently the door opened, and in came a superannuated mastiff, followed by an old gentleman very like Miss Bronte, who shook hands with us, and then went to call his daughter. A long interval, during which we coaxed the old dog, and looked at a picture of Miss Bronte, by Richmond, the solitary ornament of the room, looking strangely out of place on the bare walls, and at the books on the little shelves, most of them evidently the gift of the authors since Miss Bronte's celebrity. Presently she came in, and welcomed us very kindly, and took me upstairs to take off my bonnet, and herself brought me water and towels. The uncarpeted stone stairs and floors, the old drawers propped on wood, were all scrupulously clean and neat. When we went into the parlour again, we began talking very comfortably, when the door opened and Mr. Bronte looked in; seeing his daughter there, I suppose he thought it was all right, and he retreated to his study on the opposite side of the passage; presently emerging again to bring W — — a country newspaper. This was his last appearance till we went. Miss Bronte spoke with the greatest warmth of Miss Martineau, and of the good she had gained from her. Well! we talked about various things; the character of the people, — about her solitude, etc., till she left the room to help about dinner, I suppose, for she did not return for an age. The old dog had vanished; a fat curly-haired dog honoured us with his company for some time, but finally manifested a wish to get out, so we were left alone. At last she returned, followed by the maid and dinner, which made us all more comfortable; and we had some very pleasant conversation, in the midst of which time passed quicker than we supposed, for at last W — — found that it was half-past three, and we had fourteen or fifteen miles before us. So we hurried off, having obtained from her a promise to pay us a visit in the spring; and the old gentleman having issued once more from his study to say good-bye, we returned to the inn, and made the best of our way homewards.

"Miss Bronte put me so in mind of her own 'Jane Eyre.' She looked smaller than ever, and moved about so quietly, and noiselessly, just like a little bird, as Rochester called her, barring that all birds are joyous, and that joy can never have entered that house since it was first built; and yet, perhaps, when that old man married, and took home his bride, and children's voices and feet were heard about the house, even that desolate crowded grave-yard and biting blast could not quench cheerfulness and hope. Now there is something touching in the sight of that little creature entombed in such a place, and moving about herself like a spirit, especially when you think that the slight still frame encloses a force of strong fiery life, which nothing has been able to freeze or extinguish."

In one of the preceding letters, Miss Bronte referred to am article in the Palladium, which had rendered what she considered the due meed of merit to "Wuthering Heights", her sister Emily's tale. Her own works were praised, and praised with discrimination, and she was grateful for this. But her warm heart was filled to the brim with kindly feelings towards him who had done justice to the dead. She anxiously sought out the name of the writer; and having discovered that it was Mr. Sydney Dobell he immediately became one of her

"Peculiar people whom Death had made dear."

She looked with interest upon everything he wrote; and before long we shall find that they corresponded.

To W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

"Oct. 25th.

"The box of books came last night, and, as usual, I have only gratefully to admire the selection made: 'Jeffrey's Essays,' 'Dr. Arnold's Life,' 'The Roman,' 'Alton Loche,' these were all wished for and welcome.

"You say I keep no books; pardon me — I am ashamed of my own rapaciousness I have kept 'Macaulay's History,' and Wordsworth's 'Prelude', and Taylor's 'Philip Van Artevelde.' I soothe my conscience by saying that the two last, — being poetry — do not count. This is a convenient doctrine for me I meditate acting upon it with reference to the Roman, so I trust nobody in Cornhill will dispute its validity or affirm that ‘poetry’ has a value, except for trunk-makers.

“I have already had ‘Macaulay’s Essays,’ ‘Sidney Smith’s Lectures on Moral Philosophy,’ and ‘Knox on Race.’ Pickering’s work on the same subject I have not seen; nor all the volumes of Leigh Hunt’s Autobiography. However, I am now abundantly supplied for a long time to come. I liked Hazlitt’s Essays much.

“The autumn, as you say, has been very fine. I and solitude and memory have often profited by its sunshine on the moors.

“I had felt some disappointment at the non-arrival of the proof- sheets of ‘Wuthering Heights;’ a feverish impatience to complete the revision is apt to beset me. The work of looking over papers, etc., could not be gone through with impunity, and with unaltered spirits; associations too tender, regrets too bitter, sprang out of it. Meantime, the Cornhill books now, as heretofore, are my best medicine, — affording a solace which could not be yielded by the very same books procured from a common library.

“Already I have read the greatest part of the ‘Roman;’ passages in it possess a kindling virtue such as true poetry alone can boast; there are images of genuine grandeur; there are lines that at once stamp themselves on the memory. Can it be true that a new planet has risen on the heaven, whence all stars seemed fast fading? I believe it is; for this Sydney or Dobell speaks with a voice of his own, unborrowed, unmimicked. You hear Tennyson, indeed, sometimes, and Byron sometimes, in some passages of the Roman; but then again you have a new note, — nowhere clearer than in a certain brief lyric, sang in a meeting of minstrels, a sort of dirge over a dead brother; — THAT not only charmed the ear and brain, it soothed the heart.”

The following extract will be read with interest as conveying her thoughts after the perusal of Dr. Arnold’s Life: —

“Nov. 6th.

“I have just finished reading the ‘Life of Dr. Arnold;’ but now when I wish, according to your request, to express what I think of it, I do not find the task very easy; proper terms seem wanting. This is not a character to be dismissed with a few laudatory words; it is not a one-sided character; pure panegyric would be inappropriate. Dr. Arnold (it seems to me) was not quite saintly; his greatness was cast in a mortal mould; he was a little severe, almost a little hard; he was vehement and somewhat oppugnant. Himself the most indefatigable of workers, I know not whether he could have understood, or made allowance for, a temperament that required more rest; yet not to one man in twenty thousand is given his giant faculty of labour; by virtue of it he seems to me the greatest of working men. Exacting he might have been, then, on this point; and granting that he were so, and a little hasty, stern, and positive, those were his sole faults (if, indeed, that can be called a fault which in no shape degrades the individual's own character; but is only apt to oppress and overstrain the weaker nature of his neighbours). Afterwards come his good qualities. About these there is nothing dubious. Where can we find justice, firmness, independence, earnestness, sincerity, fuller and purer than in him?

"But this is not all, and I am glad of it. Besides high intellect and stainless rectitude, his letters and his life attest his possession of the most true-hearted affection. WITHOUT this, however one might admire, we could not love him; but WITH it I think we love him much. A hundred such men — fifty — nay, ten or five such righteous men might save any country; might victoriously champion any cause.

"I was struck, too, by the almost unbroken happiness of his life; a happiness resulting chiefly, no doubt, from the right use to which he put that health and strength which God had given him, but also owing partly to a singular exemption from those deep and bitter griefs which most human beings are called on to endure. His wife was what he wished; his children were healthy and promising; his own health was excellent; his undertakings were crowned with success; even death was kind, — for, however sharp the pains of his last hour, they were but brief. God's blessing seems to have accompanied him from the cradle to the grave. One feels thankful to know that it has been permitted to any man to live such a life.

"When I was in Westmoreland last August, I spent an evening at Fox How, where Mrs. Arnold and her daughters still reside. It was twilight as I drove to the place, and almost dark ere I reached it; still I could perceive that the situation was lovely. The house looked like a nest half buried in flowers and creepers: and, dusk as it was, I could FEEL that the valley and the hills round were beautiful as imagination could dream."

If I say again what I have said already before, it is only to impress and re-impress upon my readers the dreary monotony of her life at this time. The dark, bleak season of the year brought back the long evenings, which tried her severely: all the more so, because her weak eyesight rendered her incapable of following any occupation but knitting by candle-light. For her father's sake, as well as for her own, she found it necessary to make some exertion to ward off settled depression of spirits. She accordingly accepted an invitation to spend a week or ten days with Miss Martineau at Ambleside. She also proposed to come to Manchester and see me, on her way to Westmoreland. But, unfortunately, I was from home, and unable to receive her. The friends with whom I was staying in the South of England (hearing me express my regret that I could not accept her friendly proposal, and aware of the sad state of health and spirits which made some change necessary for her) wrote to desire that she would come and spend a week or two with me at their house. She acknowledged this invitation in a letter to me, dated —

"Dec. 13th, 1850.

"My dear Mrs. Gaskell, — Miss — — 's kindness and yours is such that

I am placed in the dilemma of not knowing how adequately to express my sense of it. THIS I know, however, very well-that if I COULD go and be with you for a week or two in such a quiet south-country house, and with such kind people as you describe, I should like it much. I find the proposal marvellously to my taste; it is the pleasantest, gentlest, sweetest, temptation possible; but, delectable as it is, its solicitations are by no means to be yielded to without the sanction of reason, and therefore I desire for the present to be silent, and to stand back till I have been to Miss Martineau's, and returned home, and considered well whether it is a scheme as right as agreeable.

"Meantime, the mere thought does me good."

On the 10th of December, the second edition of "Wuthering Heights" was published. She sent a copy of it to Mr. Dobell, with the following letter: —

To MR. DOBELL.

"Haworth, near Keighley, Yorkshire,

"Dec. 8th, 1850.

"I offer this little book to my critic in the 'Palladium,' and he must believe it accompanied by a tribute of the sincerest gratitude; not so much for anything he has said of myself, as for the noble justice he has rendered to one dear to me as myself — perhaps dearer; and perhaps one kind word spoken for her awakens a deeper, tenderer, sentiment of thankfulness than eulogies heaped on my own head. As you will see when you have read the biographical notice, my sister cannot thank you herself; she is gone out of your sphere and mine, and human blame and praise are nothing to her now. But to me, for her sake, they are something still; it revived me for many a day to find that, dead as she was, the work of her genius had at last met with worthy appreciation.

"Tell me, when you have read the introduction, whether any doubts still linger in your mind respecting the authorship of 'Wuthering Heights,' 'Wildfell Hall,' etc. Your mistrust did me some injustice; it proved a general conception of character such as I should be sorry to call mine; but these false ideas will naturally arise when we only judge an author from his works. In fairness, I must also disclaim the flattering side of the portrait. I am no 'young Penthesilea mediis in millibus,' but a plain country parson's daughter.

"Once more I thank you, and that with a full heart.

"C. BRONTE."

CHAPTER IX.

Immediately after the republication of her sisters' book she went to Miss Martineau's.

"I can write to you now, dear E — — , for I am away from home) and relieved, temporarily, at least, by change of air and scene, from the heavy burden of depression which, I confess, has for nearly three months been sinking me to the earth. I never shall forget last autumn! Some days and nights have been cruel; but now, having once told you this, I need say no more on the subject. My loathing of solitude grew extreme; my recollection of my sisters intolerably poignant. I am better now. I am at Miss Martineau's for a week. Her house is very pleasant, both within and without; arranged at; all points with admirable neatness and comfort. Her visitors enjoy the most perfect liberty; what she claims for herself she allows them. I rise at my own hour, breakfast alone (she is up at five, takes a cold bath, and a walk by starlight, and has finished breakfast and got to her work by seven o'clock). I pass the morning in the drawing-room — she, in her study. At two o'clock we meet — work, talk, and walk together till five, her dinner-hour, spend the evening together, when she converses fluently and abundantly, and with the most complete frankness. I go to my own. room soon after ten, — she sits up writing letters till twelve. She appears exhaustless in strength and spirits, and indefatigable in the faculty of labour. She is a great and a good woman; of course not without peculiarities, but I have seen none as yet that annoy me. She is both hard and warm-hearted, abrupt and affectionate, liberal and despotic. I believe she is not at all conscious of her own absolutism. When I tell her of it, she denies the charge warmly; then I laugh at her. I believe she almost rules Ambleside. Some of the gentry dislike her, but the lower orders have a great regard for her. . . . I thought I should like to spend two or three days with you before going home, so, if it is not inconvenient to you, I will (D. V.) come on Monday and stay till Thursday. . . . I have truly enjoyed my visit here. I have seen a good many people, and all have been so marvellously kind; not the least so, the family of Dr. Arnold. Miss Martineau I relish inexpressibly."

Miss Bronte paid the visit she here proposes to her friend, but only remained two or three days. She then returned home, and immediately began to suffer from her old enemy, sickly and depressing headache. This was all the more trying to bear, as she was obliged to take an active share in the household work, — one servant being ill in bed, and the other, Tabby, aged upwards of eighty.

This visit to Ambleside did Miss Bronte much good, and gave her a stock of pleasant recollections, and fresh interests, to dwell upon in her solitary life. There are many references in her letters to Miss Martineau's character and kindness.

"She is certainly a woman of wonderful endowments, both intellectual and physical; and though I share few of her opinions, and regard her as fallible on certain points of judgment, I must still award her my sincerest esteem. The manner in which she combines the highest mental culture with the nicest discharge of feminine duties filled me with admiration; while her affectionate kindness earned my gratitude." "I think her good and noble qualities far outweigh her defects. It is my habit to consider the individual apart from his (or her) reputation, practice independent of theory, natural disposition isolated from acquired opinions. Harriet Martineau's person, practice, and character, inspire me with the truest affection and respect."You ask me whether Miss Martineau made me a convert to mesmerism? Scarcely; yet I heard miracles of its efficacy, and could hardly discredit the whole of what was told me. I even underwent a personal experiment; and though the result was not absolutely clear, it was inferred that in time I should prove an excellent subject. The question of mesmerism will be discussed with little reserve, I believe, in a forthcoming work of Miss Martineau's; and I have some painful anticipations of the manner in which other subjects, offering less legitimate ground for speculation, will be handled."

"Your last letter evinced such a sincere and discriminating admiration for Dr. Arnold, that perhaps you will not be wholly uninterested in hearing that, during my late visit to Miss Martineau, I saw much more of Fox How and its inmates, and daily admired, in the widow and children of one of the greatest and best men of his time, the possession of qualities the most estimable and endearing. Of my kind hostess herself, I cannot speak in terms too high. Without being able to share all her opinions, philosophical, political, or religious, — without adopting her theories, — I yet find a worth and greatness in herself, and a consistency, benevolence, perseverance in her practice, such as wins the sincerest esteem and affection. She is not a person to be judged by her writings alone, but rather by her own deeds and life, than which nothing can be more exemplary or nobler. She seems to me the benefactress of Ambleside, yet takes no sort of credit to herself for her active and indefatigable philanthropy. The government of her household is admirably administered: all she does is well done, from the writing of a history down to the quietest female occupation. No sort of carelessness or neglect is allowed under her rule, and yet she is not over-strict, nor too rigidly exacting: her servants and her poor neighbours love as well as respect her.

"I must not, however, fall into the error of talking too much about her merely because my own mind is just now deeply impressed with what I have seen of her intellectual power and moral worth. Faults she has; but to me they appear very trivial weighed in the balance against her excellences."

"Your account of Mr. A— — tallies exactly with Miss M— — 's. She, too, said that placidity and mildness (rather than originality and power) were his external characteristics. She described him as a combination of the antique Greek sage with the European modern man of science. Perhaps it was mere perversity in me to get the notion that torpid veins, and a cold, slow-beating heart, lay under his marble outside. But he is a materialist: he serenely denies us our hope of immortality, and quietly blots from man's future Heaven and the Life to come. That is why a savour of bitterness seasoned my feeling towards him.

"All you say of Mr. Thackeray is most graphic and characteristic. He stirs in me both sorrow and anger. Why should he lead so harassing a life? Why should his mocking tongue so perversely deny the better feelings of his better moods?"

For some time, whenever she was well enough in health and spirits, she had been employing herself upon Villette; but she was frequently unable to write, and was both grieved and angry with herself for her inability. In February, she writes as follows to Mr. Smith: —

"Something you say about going to London; but the words are dreamy, and fortunately I am not obliged to hear or answer them. London and summer are many months away: our moors are all white with snow just now, and little redbreasts come every morning to the window for crumbs. One can lay no plans three or four months beforehand. Besides, I don't deserve to go to London; nobody merits a change or a treat less. I secretly think, on the contrary, I ought to be put in prison, and kept on bread and water in solitary confinement — without even a letter from Cornhill — till I had written a book. One of two things would certainly result from such a mode of treatment pursued for twelve months; either I should come out at the end of that time with a three-volume MS. in my hand, or else with a condition of intellect that would exempt me ever after from literary efforts and expectations."

Meanwhile, she was disturbed and distressed by the publication of Miss Martineau's "Letters," etc.; they came down with a peculiar force and heaviness upon a heart that looked, with fond and earnest faith, to a future life as to the meeting-place with those who were "loved and lost awhile."

"Feb. 11th, 1851.

"My dear Sir, — Have you yet read Miss Martineau's and Mr. Atkinson's new work, 'Letters on the Nature and Development of Man'? If you have not, it would be worth your while to do so.

"Of the impression this book has made on me, I will not now say much. It is the first exposition of avowed atheism and materialism I have ever read; the first unequivocal declaration of disbelief in the existence of a God or a future life I have ever seen. In judging of such exposition and declaration, one would wish entirely to put aside the sort of instinctive horror they awaken, and to consider them in an impartial spirit and collected mood. This I find it difficult to do. The strangest thing is, that we are called on to rejoice over this hopeless blank-to receive this bitter bereavement as great gain — to welcome this unutterable desolation as a state of pleasant freedom. Who COULD do this if he would? Who WOULD do it if he could?

"Sincerely, for my own part, do I wish to find and know the Truth; but if this be Truth, well may she guard herself with mysteries, and cover herself with a veil. If this be Truth, man or woman who beholds her can but curse the day he or she was born. I said, however, I would not dwell on what I thought; I wish to hear, rather, what some other person thinks, — some one whose feelings are unapt to bias his judgment. Read the book, then, in an unprejudiced spirit, and candidly say what you think of it. I mean, of course, if you have time — NOT OTHERWISE."

And yet she could not bear the contemptuous tone in which this work was spoken of by many critics; it made her more indignant than almost any other circumstance during my acquaintance with her. Much as she regretted the publication of the book, she could not see that it had given any one a right to sneer at an action, certainly prompted by no worldly motive, and which was but one error — the gravity of which she admitted — in the conduct of a person who had, all her life long, been striving, by deep thought and noble words, to serve her kind.

"Your remarks on Miss Martineau and her book pleased me greatly, from their tone and spirit. I have even taken the liberty of transcribing for her benefit one or two phrases, because I know they will cheer her; she likes sympathy and appreciation (as all people do who deserve them); and most fully do I agree with you in the dislike you express of that hard, contemptuous tone in which her work is spoken of by many critics.

Before I return from the literary opinions of the author to the domestic interests of the woman, I must copy out what she felt and thought about "The Stones of Venice".

"'The Stones of Venice' seem nobly laid and chiselled. How grandly the quarry of vast marbles is disclosed! Mr. Ruskin seems to me one of the few genuine writers, as distinguished from book-makers, of this age. His earnestness even amuses me in certain passages; for I cannot help laughing to think how utilitarians will fume and fret over his deep, serious (and as THEY will think), fanatical reverence for Art. That pure and severe mind you ascribed to him speaks in every line. He writes like a consecrated Priest of the Abstract and Ideal.

"I shall bring with me 'The Stones of Venice'; all the foundations of marble and of granite, together with the mighty quarry out of which they were hewn; and, into the bargain, a small assortment of crotchets and dicta — the private property of one John Ruskin, Esq."

As spring drew on, the depression of spirits to which she was subject began to grasp her again, and "to crush her with a day- and night-mare." She became afraid of sinking as low as she had done in the autumn; and to avoid this, she prevailed on her old friend and schoolfellow to come and stay with her for a few weeks in March. She found great benefit from this companionship, — both from the congenial society in itself, and from the self-restraint of thought imposed by the necessity of entertaining her and looking after her comfort. On this occasion, Miss Bronte said, “It will not do to get into the habit offrom home, and thus temporarily evading an running away oppression instead of facing, wrestling with and conquering it or being conquered by it.”

I shall now make an extract from one of her letters, which is purposely displaced as to time. I quote it because it relates to a third offer of marriage which she had, and because I find that some are apt to imagine, from the extraordinary power with which she represented the passion of love in her novels, that she herself was easily susceptible of it.

“Could I ever feel enough for — — , to accept of him as a husband? Friendship — gratitude — esteem — I have; but each moment he came near me, and that I could see his eyes fastened on me, my veins ran ice. Now that he is away, I feel far more gently towards him, it is only close by that I grow rigid, stiffening with a strange mixture of apprehension and anger, which nothing softens but his retreat, and a perfect subduing of his manner. I did not want to be proud, nor intend to be proud, but I was forced to be so. Most true it is, that we are over-ruled by One above us; that in His hands our very will is as clay in the hands of the potter.”

I have now named all the offers of marriage she ever received, until that was made which she finally accepted. The gentle-man referred to in this letter retained so much regard for her as to be her friend to the end of her life; a circumstance to his credit and to hers.

Before her friend E — — took her departure, Mr. Bronte caught cold, and continued for some weeks much out of health, with an attack of bronchitis. His spirits, too, became much depressed; and all his daughter’s efforts were directed towards cheering him.

When he grew better, and had regained his previous strength, she resolved to avail herself of an invitation which she had received some time before, to pay a visit in London. This year, 1851, was, as e very one remembers, the time of the great Exhibition; but even with that attraction in prospect, she did not intend to stay there long; and, as usual, she made an agreement with her friends, before finally accepting their offered hospitality, that her sojourn at their house was to be as quiet as ever, since any other way of proceeding disagreed with her both mentally and physically. She never looked excited except for a moment, when something in conversation called her out; but she often felt so, even about comparative trifles, and the exhaustion of reaction was sure to follow. Under such circumstances, she always became extremely thin and haggard; yet she averred that the change invariably did her good afterwards.

Her preparations in the way of dress for this visit, in the gay time of that gay season, were singularly in accordance with her feminine taste; quietly anxious to satisfy her love for modest, dainty, neat attire, and not regardless of the becoming, yet remembering consistency, both with her general appearance and with her means, in every selection she made.

"By the bye, I meant to ask you when you went to Leeds, to do a small errand for me, but fear your hands will be too full of business. It was merely this: in case you chanced to be in any shop where the lace cloaks, both black and white, of which I spoke, were sold, to ask their price. I suppose they would hardly like to send a few to Haworth to be looked at; indeed, if they cost very much, it would be useless, but if they are reasonable and they would send them, I should like to see them; and also some chemisettes of small size (the full woman's size don't fit me), both of simple style for every day and good quality for best.". . . ."It appears I could not rest satisfied when I was well off. I told you I had taken one of the black lace mantles, but when I came to try it with the black satin dress, with which I should chiefly want to wear it, I found the effect was far from good; the beauty of the lace was lost, and it looked somewhat brown and rusty; I wrote to Mr. — — , requesting him to change it for a WHITE mantle of the same price; he was extremely courteous, and sent to London for one, which I have got this morning. The price is less, being but 1 pound 14s.; it is pretty, neat and light, looks well on black; and upon reasoning the matter over, I came to the philosophic conclusion, that it would be no shame for a person of my means to wear a cheaper thing; so I think I shall take it, and if you ever see it and call it 'trumpery' so much the worse."

"Do you know that I was in Leeds on the very same day with you — last Wednesday? I had thought of telling you where I was going, and having your help and company in buying a bonnet, etc., but then I reflected this would merely be making a selfish use of you, so I determined to manage or mismanage the matter alone. I went to Hurst and Hall's for the bonnet, and got one which seemed grave and quiet there amongst all the splendours; but now it looks infinitely too gay with its pink lining. I saw some beautiful silks of pale sweet colours, but had not the spirit nor the means to launch out at the rate of five shillings per yard, and went and bought a black silk at three shillings after all. I rather regret this, because papa says he would have lent me a sovereign if he had known. I believe, if you had been there, you would have forced me to get into debt. . . . I really can no more come to B — — before I go to London than I can fly. I have quantities of sewing to do, as well as household matters to arrange, before I leave, as they will clean, etc., in my absence. Besides, I am grievously afflicted with headache, which I trust to change of air for relieving; but meantime, as it proceeds from the stomach, it makes me very thin and grey; neither you nor anybody else would fatten me up or put me into good condition for the visit; it is fated otherwise. No matter. Calm your passion; yet I am glad to see it. Such spirit seems to prove health. Good-bye, in haste.

"Your poor mother is like Tabby, Martha and Papa; all these fancy I am somehow, by some mysterious process, to be married in London, or to engage myself to matrimony. How I smile internally! How groundless and improbable is the idea! Papa seriously told me yesterday, that if I married and left him he should give up housekeeping and go into lodgings!"

I copy the following, for the sake of the few words describing the appearance of the heathery moors in late summer.

TO SYDNEY DOBELL, ESQ.

"May 24th, 1851.

"My dear Sir, — I hasten to send Mrs. Dobell the autograph. It was the word 'Album' that frightened me I thought she wished me to write a sonnet on purpose for it, which I could not do.

"Your proposal respecting a journey to Switzerland is deeply kind; it draws me with the force of a mighty Temptation, but the stern Impossible holds me back. No! I cannot go to Switzerland this summer.

"Why did the editor of the 'Eclectic' erase that most powerful and pictorial passage? He could not be insensible to its beauty; perhaps he thought it profane. Poor man!

"I know nothing of such an orchard-country as you describe. I have never seen such a region. Our hills only confess the coming of summer by growing green with young fern and moss, in secret little hollows. Their bloom is reserved for autumn; then they burn with a kind of dark glow, different, doubtless, from the blush of garden blossoms. About the close of next month, I expect to go to London, to pay a brief and quiet visit. I fear chance will not be so propitious as to bring you to town while I am there; otherwise, how glad I should be if you would call. With kind regards to Mrs. Dobell, — Believe me, sincerely yours,

C. BRONTE."

Her next letter is dated from London.

"June 2nd.

"I came here on Wednesday, being summoned a day sooner than I expected, in order to be in time for Thackeray's second lecture, which was delivered on Thursday afternoon. This, as you may suppose, was a genuine treat to me, and I was glad not to miss it. It was given in Willis' Rooms, where the Almacks balls are held — a great painted and gilded saloon with long sofas for benches. The audience was said to be the cream of London society, and it looked so. I did not at all expect the great lecturer would know me or notice me under these circumstances, with admiring duchesses and countesses seated in rows before him; but he met me as I entered — shook hands — took me to his mother, whom I had not before seen, and introduced me. She is a fine, handsome, young-looking old lady; was very gracious, and called with one of her grand-daughters next day.

"Thackeray called too, separately. I had a long talk with him, and I think he knows me now a little better than he did: but of this I cannot yet be sure; he is a great and strange man. There is quite a furor for his lectures. They are a sort of essays, characterised by his own peculiar originality and power, and delivered with a finished taste and ease, which is felt, but cannot be described. Just before the lecture began, somebody came behind me, leaned over and said, ‘Permit me, as a Yorkshireman, to introduce myself.’ I turned round — saw a strange, not handsome, face, which puzzled me for half a minute, and then I said, ‘You are Lord Carlisle.’ He nodded and smiled; he talked a few minutes very pleasantly and courteously.

“Afterwards came another man with the same plea, that he was a Yorkshireman, and this turned out to be Mr. Monckton Milnes. Then came Dr. Forbes, whom I was sincerely glad to see. On Friday, I went to the Crystal Palace; it is a marvellous, stirring, bewildering sight — a mixture of a genii palace, and a mighty bazaar, but it is not much in my way; I liked the lecture better. On Saturday I saw the Exhibition at Somerset House; about half a dozen of the pictures are good and interesting, the rest of little worth. Sunday — yesterday — was a day to be marked with a white stone; through most of the day I was very happy, without being tired or over-excited. In the afternoon, I went to hear D’Aubigne, the great Protestant French preacher; it was pleasant — half sweet, half sad — and strangely suggestive to hear the French language once more. For health, I have so far got on very fairly, considering that I came here far from well.”

The lady, who accompanied Miss Bronte to the lecture at Thackeray’s alluded to, says that, soon after they had taken their places, she was aware that he was pointing out her companion to several of his friends, but she hoped that Miss Bronte herself would not perceive it. After some time, however, during which many heads had been turned round, and many glasses put up, in order to look at the author of “Jane Eyre”, Miss Bronte said, “I am afraid Mr. Thackeray has been playing me a trick;” but she soon became too much absorbed in the lecture to notice the attention which was being paid to her, except when it was directly offered, as in the case of Lord Carlisle and Mr. Monckton Milnes. When the lecture was ended, Mr. Thackeray came down from the platform, and making his way towards her, asked her for her opinion. This she mentioned to me not many days afterwards, adding remarks almost identical with those which I subsequently read in ‘Villette,’ where a similar action on the part of M. Paul Emanuel is related.

“As our party left the Hall, he stood at the entrance; he saw and knew me, and lifted his hat; he offered his hand in passing, and uttered the words ‘Qu’en dites-vous?’ — question eminently characteristic, and reminding me, even in this his moment of triumph, of that inquisitive restlessness, that absence of what I considered desirable self-control, which were amongst his faults. He should not have cared just then to ask what I thought, or what anybody thought; but he DID care, and he was too natural to conceal, too impulsive to repress his wish. Well! if I blamed his over-eagerness, I liked his naivete. I would have praised him; I had plenty of praise in my heart; but alas I no words on my lips. Who HAS words at the right moment? I stammered some lame expressions; but was truly glad when other people, coming up with profuse congratulations, covered my deficiency by their redundancy."

As they were preparing to leave the room, her companion saw with dismay that many of the audience were forming themselves into two lines, on each side of the aisle down which they had to pass before reaching the door. Aware that any delay would only make the ordeal more trying, her friend took Miss Bronte's arm in hers, and they went along the avenue of eager and admiring faces. During this passage through the "cream of society," Miss Bronte's hand trembled to such a degree, that her companion feared lest she should turn faint and be unable to proceed; and she dared not express her sympathy or try to give her strength by any touch or word, lest it might bring on the crisis she dreaded.

Surely, such thoughtless manifestation of curiosity is a blot on the scutcheon of true politeness! The rest of the account of this, her longest visit to London, shall be told in her own words.

"I sit down to write to you this morning in an inexpressibly flat state; having spent the whole of yesterday and the day before in a gradually increasing headache, which grew at last rampant and violent, ended with excessive sickness, and this morning I am quite weak and washy. I hoped to leave my headaches behind me at Haworth; but it seems I brought them carefully packed in my trunk, and very much have they been in my way since I came. . . . Since I wrote last, I have seen various things worth describing; Rachel, the great French actress, amongst the number. But to-day I really have no pith for the task. I can only wish you good-bye with all my heart."

"I cannot boast that London has agreed with me well this time; the oppression of frequent headache, sickness, and a low tone of spirits, has poisoned many moments which might otherwise have been pleasant. Sometimes I have felt this hard, and been tempted to murmur at Fate, which compels me to comparative silence and solitude for eleven months in the year, and in the twelfth, while offering social enjoyment, takes away the vigour and cheerfulness which should turn it to account. But circumstances are ordered for us, and we must submit."

"Your letter would have been answered yesterday, but I was already gone out before post time, and was out all day. People are very kind, and perhaps I shall be glad of what I have seen afterwards, but it is often a little trying at the time. On Thursday, the Marquis of Westminster asked me to a great party, to which I was to go with Mrs. D — — , a beautiful, and, I think, a kind woman too; but this I resolutely declined. On Friday I dined at the — — 's, and met Mrs. D — — and Mr. Monckton Milnes. On Saturday I went to hear and see Rachel; a wonderful sight — terrible as if the earth had cracked deep at your feet, and revealed a glimpse of hell. I shall never forget it. She made me shudder to the marrow of my bones; in her some fiend has certainly taken up an incarnate home. She is not a woman; she is a snake; she is the — — . On Sunday I went to the Spanish Ambassador's Chapel, where Cardinal

Wiseman, in his archiepiscopal robes and mitre, held a confirmation. The whole scene was impiously theatrical. Yesterday (Monday) I was sent for at ten to breakfast with Mr. Rogers, the patriarch-poet. Mrs. D — — and Lord Glenelg were there; no one else this certainly proved a most calm, refined, and intellectual treat. After breakfast, Sir David Brewster came to take us to the Crystal Palace. I had rather dreaded this, for Sir David is a man of profoundest science, and I feared it would be impossible to understand his explanations of the mechanism, etc.; indeed, I hardly knew how to ask him questions. I was spared all trouble without being questioned, he gave information in the kindest and simplest manner. After two hours spent at the Exhibition, and where, as you may suppose, I was VERY tired, we had to go to Lord Westminster's, and spend two hours more in looking at the collection of pictures in his splendid gallery."

To another friend she writes: —

" — — may have told you that I have spent a month in London this summer. When you come, you shall ask what questions you like on that point, and I will answer to the best of my stammering ability. Do not press me much on the subject of the 'Crystal Palace.' I went there five times, and certainly saw some interesting things, and the 'coup d'oeil' is striking and bewildering enough; but I never was able to get any raptures on the subject, and each renewed visit was made under coercion rather than my own free will. It is an excessively bustling place; and, after all, its wonders appeal too exclusively to the eye, and rarely touch the heart or head. I make an exception to the last assertion, in favour of those who possess a large range of scientific knowledge. Once I went with Sir David Brewster, and perceived that he looked on objects with other eyes than mine."

Miss Bronte returned from London by Manchester, and paid us a visit of a couple of days at the end of June. The weather was so intensely hot, and she herself so much fatigued with her London sight-seeing, that we did little but sit in-doors, with open windows, and talk. The only thing she made a point of exerting herself to procure was a present for Tabby. It was to be a shawl, or rather a large handkerchief, such as she could pin across her neck and shoulders, in the old-fashioned country manner. Miss Bronte took great pains in seeking out one which she thought would please the old woman. On her arrival at home, she addressed the following letter to the friend with whom she had been staying in London: —

"Haworth, July 1st, 1851.

"My dear Mrs. Smith, — Once more I am at home, where, I am thankful to say, I found my father very well. The journey to Manchester was a little hot and dusty, but otherwise pleasant enough. The two stout gentlemen, who filled a portion of the carriage when I got in, quitted it at Rugby, and two other ladies and myself had it to ourselves the rest of the way. The visit to Mrs. Gaskell formed a cheering break in the journey. Haworth Parsonage is rather a contrast, yet even Haworth Parsonage does not look gloomy in this bright summer weather; it is somewhat still, but with the windows open I can hear a bird or two singing on certain thorn-trees in the garden. My father and the servants think me looking better than when I felt home, and I certainly feel better myself for the change. You are too much like your son to render it advisable I should say much about your kindness during my visit. However, one cannot help (like Captain Cuttle) making a note of these matters. Papa says I am to thank you in his name, and offer you his respects, which I do accordingly. — With truest regards to all your circle, believe me very sincerely yours,

C. BRONTE.”

“July 8th, 1851.

“My dear Sir, — Thackeray’s last lecture must, I think, have been his best. What he says about Sterne is true. His observations on literary men, and their social obligations and individual duties, seem to me also true and full of mental and moral vigour. . . . The International Copyright Meeting seems to have had but a barren result, judging from the report in the Literary Gazette. I cannot see that Sir E. Bulwer and the rest DID anything; nor can I well see what it is in their power to do. The argument brought forward about the damage accruing to American national literature from the present piratical system, Is a good and sound argument, but I am afraid the publishers — honest men — are not yet mentally prepared to give such reasoning due weight. I should think, that which refers to the injury inflicted upon themselves, by an oppressive competition in piracy, would influence them more; but, I suppose, all established matters, be they good or evil, are difficult to change. About the ‘Phrenological Character’ I must not say a word. Of your own accord, you have found the safest point from which to view it: I will not say ‘look higher!’ I think you see the matter as it is desirable we should all see what relates to ourselves. If I had a right to whisper a word of counsel, it should be merely this: whatever your present self may be, resolve with all your strength of resolution, never to degenerate thence. Be jealous of a shadow of falling off. Determine rather to look above that standard, and to strive beyond it. Everybody appreciates certain social properties, and likes his neighbour for possessing them; but perhaps few dwell upon a friend’s capacity for the intellectual, or care how this might expand, if there were but facilities allowed for cultivation, and space given for growth. It seems to me that, even should such space and facilities be denied by stringent circumstances and a rigid fate, still it should do you good fully to know, and tenaciously to remember, that you have such a capacity. When other people overwhelm you with acquired knowledge, such as you have not had opportunity, perhaps not application, to gain — derive not pride, but support from the thought. If no new books had ever been written, some of these minds would themselves have remained blank pages: they only take an impression; they were not born with a record of thought on the brain, or an instinct of sensation on the heart. If I had never seen a printed volume, Nature would have offered my perceptions a varying picture of a continuous narrative, which, without any other teacher than herself, would have schooled me to knowledge, unsophisticated, but genuine.

"Before I received your last, I had made up my mind to tell you that I should expect no letter for three months to come (intending afterwards to extend this abstinence to six months, for I am jealous of becoming dependent on this indulgence: you doubtless cannot see why, because you do not live my life). Nor shall I now expect a letter; but since you say that you would like to write now and then, I cannot say 'never write,' without imposing on my real wishes a falsehood which they reject, and doing to them a violence, to which they entirely refuse to submit. I can only observe that when it pleases you to write, whether seriously or for a little amusement, your notes, if they come to me, will come where they are welcome. Tell — — I will try to cultivate good spirits, as assiduously as she cultivates her geraniums."

CHAPTER X.

Soon after she returned home, her friend paid her a visit. While she stayed at Haworth, Miss Bronte wrote the letter from which the following extract is taken. The strong sense and right feeling displayed in it on the subject of friendship, sufficiently account for the constancy of affection which Miss Bronte earned from all those who once became her friends.

To W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

"July 21th, 1851.

". . . I could not help wondering whether Cornhill will ever change for me, as Oxford has changed for you. I have some pleasant associations connected with it now — will these alter their character some day?

"Perhaps they may — though I have faith to the contrary, because, I THINK, I do not exaggerate my partialities; I THINK I take faults along with excellences — blemishes together with beauties. And, besides, in the matter of friendship, I have observed that disappointment here arises chiefly, NOT from liking our friends too well, or thinking of them too highly, but rather from an over-estimate of THEIR liking for and opinion of US; and that if we guard ourselves with sufficient scrupulousness of care from error in this direction, and can be content, and even happy to give more affection than we receive — can make just comparison of circumstances, and be severely accurate in drawing inferences thence, and never let self-love blind our eyes — I think we may manage to get through life with consistency and constancy, unembittered by that misanthropy which springs from revulsions of feeling. All this sounds a little metaphysical, but it is good sense if you consider it. The moral of it is, that if we would build on a sure foundation in friendship, we must love our friends for THEIR sakes rather than for OUR OWN; we must look at their truth to THEMSELVES, full as much as their truth to US. In the latter case, every wound to self-love would be a cause of coldness; in the former, only some painful change in the friend's character and disposition — some fearful breach in his allegiance to his better self — could alienate the heart.

"How interesting your old maiden-cousin's gossip about your parents must have been to you; and how gratifying to find that the reminiscence turned on none but pleasant facts and characteristics! Life must, indeed, be slow in that little decaying hamlet amongst the chalk hills. After all, depend upon it, it is better to be worn out with work in a thronged community, than to perish of inaction in a stagnant solitude take this truth into consideration whenever you get tired of work and bustle."

I received a letter from her a little later than this; and though there is reference throughout to what I must have said in writing to her, all that it called forth in reply is so peculiarly characteristic, that I cannot prevail upon myself to pass it over without a few extracts: —

"Haworth, Aug. 6th, 1851.

"My dear Mrs. Gaskell, — I was too much pleased with your letter, when I got it at last, to feel disposed to murmur now about the delay.

"About a fortnight ago, I received a letter from Miss Martineau; also a long letter, and treating precisely the same subjects on which yours dwelt, viz., the Exhibition and Thackeray's last lecture. It was interesting mentally to place the two documents side by side — to study the two aspects of mind — to view, alternately, the same scene through two mediums. Full striking was the difference; and the more striking because it was not the rough contrast of good and evil, but the more subtle opposition, the more delicate diversity of different kinds of good. The excellences of one nature resembled (I thought) that of some sovereign medicine — harsh, perhaps, to the taste, but potent to invigorate; the good of the other seemed more akin to the nourishing efficacy of our daily bread. It is not bitter; it is not lusciously sweet: it pleases, without flattering the palate; it sustains, without forcing the strength.

"I very much agree with you in all you say. For the sake of variety, I could almost wish that the concord of opinion were less complete.

"To begin with Trafalgar Square. My taste goes with yours and Meta's completely on this point. I have always thought it a fine site (and SIGHT also). The view from the summit of those steps has ever struck me as grand and imposing Nelson Column included the fountains I could dispense with. With respect, also, to the Crystal Palace, my thoughts are precisely yours.

"Then I feel sure you speak justly of Thackeray's lecture. You do well to set aside odious comparisons, and to wax impatient of that trite twaddle about 'nothing newness' — a jargon which simply proves, in those who habitually use it, a coarse and feeble faculty of appreciation; an inability to discern the relative value of ORIGINALITY and NOVELTY; a lack of that refined perception which, dispensing with the stimulus of an ever-new subject, can derive sufficiency of pleasure from freshness of treatment. To such critics, the prime of a summer morning would bring no delight; wholly occupied with railing at their cook for not having provided a novel and piquant breakfast-dish, they would remain insensible to such influences as lie in sunrise, dew, and breeze: therein would be 'nothing new.'

"Is it Mr. — — 's family experience which has influenced your feelings about the Catholics? I own, I cannot be sorry for this commencing change. Good people — VERY good people — I doubt not, there are amongst the Romanists, but the system is not one which would have such sympathy as YOURS. Look at Popery taking off the mask in Naples!

"I have read the 'Saints' Tragedy.' As a 'work of art' it seems to me far superior to either 'Alton Locke' or 'Yeast.' Faulty it may be, crude and unequal, yet there are portions where some of the deep chords of human nature are swept with a hand which is strong even while it falters. We see throughout (I THINK) that Elizabeth has not, and never bad, a mind perfectly sane. From the time that she was what she herself, in the exaggeration of her humility, calls 'an idiot girl,' to the hour when she lay moaning in visions on her dying bed, a slight craze runs through her whole existence. This is good: this is true. A sound mind, a healthy intellect, would have dashed the priest-power to the wall; would have defended her natural affections from his grasp, as a lioness defends her young; would have been as true to husband and children, as your leal-hearted little Maggie was to her Frank. Only a mind weak with some fatal flaw COULD have been influenced as was this poor saint's. But what anguish what struggles! Seldom do I cry over books; but here, my eyes rained as I read. When Elizabeth turns her face to the wall — I stopped- -there needed no more.

"Deep truths are touched on in this tragedy — touched on, not fully elicited; truths that stir a peculiar pity — a compassion hot with wrath, and bitter with pain. This is no poet's dream: we know that such things HAVE been done; that minds HAVE been thus subjugated, and lives thus laid waste.

"Remember me kindly and respectfully to Mr. Gaskell, and though I have not seen Marianne, I must beg to include her in the love I send the others. Could you manage to convey a small kiss to that dear, but dangerous little person, Julia? She surreptitiously possessed herself of a minute fraction of my heart, which has been missing, ever since I saw her. — Believe me, sincerely and affectionately yours,

C. BRONTE."

The reference which she makes at the end of this letter is to my youngest little girl, between whom and her a strong mutual attraction existed. The child would steal her little hand into Miss Bronte's scarcely larger one, and each took pleasure in this apparently unobserved caress. Yet once when I told Julia to take and show her the way to some room in the house, Miss Bronte shrunk back: "Do not BID her do anything for me," she said; "it has been so sweet hitherto to have her rendering her little kindnesses SPONTANEOUSLY."

As illustrating her feelings with regard to children, I may give what she says ill another of her letters to me.

"Whenever I see Florence and Julia again, I shall feel like a fond but bashful suitor, who views at a distance the fair personage to whom, in his clownish awe, he dare not risk a near approach. Such is the clearest idea I can give you of my feeling towards children I like, but to whom I am a stranger; — and to what children am I not a stranger? They seem to me little wonders; their talk, their ways are all matter of half-admiring, half-puzzled speculation."

The following is part of a long letter which I received from her, dated September 20th, 1851: —

". . . Beautiful are those sentences out of James Martineau's sermons;

some of them gems most pure and genuine; ideas deeply conceived, finely expressed. I should like much to see his review of his sister's book. Of all the articles respecting which you question me, I have seen none, except that notable one in the 'Westminster' on the Emancipation of Women. But why are you and I to think (perhaps I should rather say to FEEL) so exactly alike on some points that there can be no discussion between us? Your words on this paper express my thoughts. Well-argued it is, — clear, logical, — but vast is the hiatus of omission; harsh the consequent jar on every finer chord of the soul. What is this hiatus? I think I know; and, knowing, I will venture to say. I think the writer forgets there is such a thing as self-sacrificing love and disinterested devotion. When I first read the paper, I thought it was the work of a powerful-minded, clear-headed woman, who had a hard, jealous heart, muscles of iron, and nerves of bend* leather; of a woman who longed for power, and had never felt affection. To many women affection is sweet, an d power conquered indifferent-though we all like influence won. I believe J. S. Mill would make a hard, dry, dismal world of it; and yet he speaks admirable sense through a great portion of his article — especially when he says, that if there be a natural unfitness in women for men's employment, there is no need to make laws on the subject; leave all careers open; let them try; those who ought to succeed will succeed, or, at least, will have a fair chance — the incapable will fall back into their right place. He likewise disposes of the 'maternity' question very neatly. In short, J. S. Mill's head is, I dare say, very good, but I feel disposed to scorn his heart. You are right when you say that there is a large margin in human nature over which the logicians have no dominion; glad am I that it is so.

* "Bend," in Yorkshire, is strong ox leather.

"I send by this post Ruskin's 'Stones of Venice,' and I hope you and Meta will find passages in it that will please you. Some parts would be dry and technical were it not for the character, the marked individuality which pervades every page. I wish Marianne had come to speak to me at the lecture; it would have given me such pleasure. What you say of that small sprite Julia, amuses me much. I believe you don't know that she has a great deal of her mama's nature (modified) in her; yet I think you will find she has as she grows up.

"Will it not be a great mistake, if Mr. Thackeray should deliver his lectures at Manchester under such circumstances and conditions as will exclude people like you and Mr. Gaskell from the number of his audience? I thought his London-plan too narrow. Charles Dickens would not thus limit his sphere of action.

"You charge me to write about myself. What can I say on that precious topic? My health is pretty good. My spirits are not always alike. Nothing happens to me. I hope and expect little in this world, and am thankful that I do not despond and suffer more. Thank you for inquiring after our old servant; she is pretty well; the little shawl, etc., pleased her much. Papa likewise, I am glad to say, is pretty well; with his and my kindest regards to you and Mr. Gaskell — Believe me sincerely and affectionately yours,

C. BRONTE.”

Before the autumn was far advanced, the usual effects of her solitary life, and of the unhealthy situation of Haworth Parsonage, began to appear in the form of sick headaches, and miserable, starting, wakeful nights. She does not dwell on this in her letters; but there is an absence of all cheerfulness of tone, and an occasional sentence forced out of her, which imply far more than many words could say. There was illness all through the Parsonage household — taking its accustomed forms of lingering influenza and low fever; she herself was outwardly the strongest of the family, and all domestic exertion fell for a time upon her shoulders.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

“Sept. 26th.

“As I laid down your letter, after reading with interest the graphic account it gives of a very striking scene, I could not help feeling with renewed force a truth, trite enough, yet ever impressive; viz., that it is good to be attracted out of ourselves — to be forced to take a near view of the sufferings, the privations, the efforts, the difficulties of others. If we ourselves live in fulness of content, it is well to be reminded that thousands of our fellow-creatures undergo a different lot; it is well to have sleepy sympathies excited, and lethargic selfishness shaken up. If, on the other hand, we be contending with the special grief, — the intimate trial, — the peculiar bitterness with which God has seen fit to mingle our own cup of existence, — it is very good to know that our overcast lot is not singular; it stills the repining word and thought, — it rouses the flagging strength, to have it vividly set before us that there are countless afflictions in the world, each perhaps rivalling — some surpassing — the private pain over which we are too prone exclusively to sorrow.

“All those crowded emigrants had their troubles, — their untoward causes of banishment; you, the looker-on, had ‘your wishes and regrets,’ — your anxieties, alloying your home happiness and domestic bliss; and the parallel might be pursued further, and still it would be true, — still the same; a thorn in the flesh for each; some burden, some conflict for all.

“How far this state of things is susceptible of amelioration from changes in public institutions, — alterations in national habits, — may and ought to be earnestly considered: but this is a problem not easily solved. The evils, as you point them out, are great, real, and most obvious; the remedy is obscure and vague; yet for such difficulties as spring from over-competition, emigration must be good; the new life in a new country must give a new lease of hope; the wider field, less thickly peopled, must open a new path for endeavour. But I always think great physical powers of exertion and endurance ought to accompany such a step. . . . I am truly glad to hear that an ORIGINAL writer has fallen in your way. Originality is the pearl of great price in literature, —

the rarest, the most precious claim by which an author can be recommended. Are not your publishing prospects for the coming season tolerably rich and satisfactory? You inquire after 'Currer Bell.' It seems to me that the absence of his name from your list of announcements will leave no blank, and that he may at least spare himself the disquietude of thinking he is wanted when it is certainly not his lot to appear.

"Perhaps Currer Bell has his secret moan about these matters; but if so, he will keep it to himself. It is an affair about which no words need be wasted, for no words can make a change: it is between him and his position, his faculties and his fate."

My husband and I were anxious that she should pay us a visit before the winter had set completely in; and she thus wrote, declining our invitation: —

"Nov. 6th.

"If anybody would tempt me from home, you would; but, just now, from home I must not, will not go. I feel greatly better at present than I did three weeks ago. For a month or six weeks about the equinox (autumnal or vernal) is a period of the year which, I have noticed, strangely tries me. Sometimes the strain falls on the mental, sometimes on the physical part of me; I am ill with neuralgic headache, or I am ground to the dust with deep dejection of spirits (not, however, such dejection but I can keep it to myself). That weary time has, I think and trust, got over for this year. It was the anniversary of my poor brother's death, and of my sister's failing health: I need say no more.

"As to running away from home every time I have a battle of this sort to fight, it would not do besides, the 'weird' would follow. As to shaking it off, that cannot be. I have declined to go to Mrs. — — , to Miss Martineau, and now I decline to go to you. But listen do not think that I throw your kindness away; or that it fails of doing the good you desire. On the contrary, the feeling expressed in your letter, — proved by your invitation — goes RIGHT HOME where you would have it to go, and heals as you would have it to heal.

"Your description of Frederika Bremer tallies exactly with one I read somewhere, in I know not what book. I laughed out when I got to the mention of Frederika's special accomplishment, given by you with a distinct simplicity that, to my taste, is what the French would call 'impayable.' Where do you find the foreigner who is without some little drawback of this description? It is a pity."

A visit from Miss Wooler at this period did Miss Bronte much good for the time. She speaks of her guest's company as being very pleasant,"like good wine," both to her father and to herself. But Miss Wooler could not remain with her long; and then again the monotony of her life returned upon her in all its force; the only events of her days and weeks consisting in the small changes which occasional letters brought. It must be remembered that her health was often such as to prevent her stirring out of the house in inclement or wintry weather. She was liable to sore throat, and depressing pain at the chest, and difficulty of breathing, on the least exposure to cold.

A letter from her late visitor touched and gratified her much; it was simply expressive of gratitude for attention and kindness shown to her, but it wound up by saying that she had not for many years experienced so much enjoyment as during the ten days passed at Haworth. This little sentence called out a wholesome sensation of modest pleasure in Miss Bronte's mind; and she says, "it did me good."

I find, in a letter to a distant friend, written about this time, a retrospect of her visit to London. It is too ample to be considered as a mere repetition of what she had said before; and, besides, it shows that her first impressions of what she saw and heard were not crude and transitory, but stood the tests of time and after-thought.

"I spent a few weeks in town last summer, as you have heard; and was much interested by many things I heard and saw there. What now chiefly dwells in my memory are Mr. Thackeray's lectures, Mademoiselle Rachel's acting, D'Aubigne's, Melville's, and Maurice's preaching, and the Crystal Palace.

"Mr. Thackeray's lectures you will have seen mentioned and commented on in the papers; they were very interesting. I could not always coincide with the sentiments expressed, or the opinions broached; but I admired the gentlemanlike ease, the quiet humour, the taste, the talent, the simplicity, and the originality of the lecturer.

"Rachel's acting transfixed me with wonder, enchained me with interest, and thrilled me with horror. The tremendous force with which she expresses the very worst passions in their strongest essence forms an exhibition as exciting as the bull fights of Spain, and the gladiatorial combats of old Rome, and (it seemed to me) not one whit more moral than these poisoned stimulants to popular ferocity. It is scarcely human nature that she shows you; it is something wilder and worse; the feelings and fury of a fiend. The great gift of genius she undoubtedly has; but, I fear, she rather abuses it than turns it to good account.

"With all the three preachers I was greatly pleased. Melville seemed to me the most eloquent, Maurice the most in earnest; had I the choice, it is Maurice whose ministry I should frequent.

"On the Crystal Palace I need not comment. You must already have heard too much of it. It struck me at the first with only a vague sort of wonder and admiration; but having one day the privilege of going over it in company with an eminent countryman of yours, Sir David Brewster, and hearing, in his friendly Scotch accent, his lucid explanation of many things that had been to me before a sealed book, I began a little better to comprehend it, or at least a small part of it: whether its final results will equal expectation, I know not."

Her increasing indisposition subdued her at last, in spite of all her efforts of reason and will. She tried to forget oppressive recollections in writing. Her publishers were importunate for a new book from her pen. "Villette" was begun, but she lacked power to continue it.

“It is not at all likely” (she says) “that my book will be ready at the time you mention. If my health is spared, I shall get on with it as fast as is consistent with its being done, if not WELL, yet as well as I can do it. NOT ONE WHIT FASTER. When the mood leaves me (it has left me now, without vouchsafing so much as a word or a message when it will return) I put by the MS. and wait till it comes back again. God knows, I sometimes have to wait long — VERY long it seems to me. Meantime, if I might make a request to you, it would be this. Please to say nothing about my book till it is written, and in your hands. You may not like it. I am not myself elated with it as far as it is gone, and authors, you need not be told, are always tenderly indulgent, even blindly partial to their own. Even if it should turn out reasonably well, still I regard it as ruin to the prosperity of an ephemeral book like a novel, to be much talked of beforehand, as if it were something great. People are apt to conceive, or at least to profess, exaggerated expectation, such as no performance can realise; then ensue disappointment and the due revenge, detraction, and failure. If when I write, I were to think of the critics who, I know, are waiting for Currer Bell, ready ‘to break all his bones or ever he comes to the bottom of the den,’ my hand would fall paralysed on my desk. However, I can but do my best, and then muffle my head in the mantle of Patience, and sit down at her feet and wait.”

The “mood” here spoken of did not go off; it had a physical origin. Indigestion, nausea, headache, sleeplessness, — all combined to produce miserable depression of spirits. A little event which occurred about this time, did not tend to cheer her. It was the death of poor old faithful Keeper, Emily’s dog. He had come to the Parsonage in the fierce strength of his youth. Sullen and ferocious he had met with his master in the indomitable Emily. Like most dogs of his kind, he feared, respected, and deeply loved her who subdued him. He had mourned her with the pathetic fidelity of his nature, falling into old age after her death. And now, her surviving sister wrote: “Poor old Keeper died last Monday morning, after being ill one night; he went gently to sleep; we laid his old faithful head in the garden. Flossy (the ‘fat curly-haired dog’) is dull, and misses him. There was something very sad in losing the old dog; yet I am glad he met a natural fate. People kept hinting he ought to be put away, which neither papa nor I liked to think of.”

When Miss Bronte wrote this, on December 8th, she was suffering from a bad cold, and pain in her side. Her illness increased, and on December 17th, she — so patient, silent, and enduring of suffering — so afraid of any unselfish taxing of others — had to call to her friend for help:

“I cannot at present go to see you, but I would be grateful if you could come and see me, even were it only for a few days. To speak truth, I have put on but a poor time of it during this month past. I kept hoping to be better, but was at last obliged to have recourse to a medical man. Sometimes I have felt very weak and low, and longed much for society, but could not persuade myself to commit the selfish act of asking you merely for my own relief. The doctor speaks encouragingly, but as yet I get no better. As the illness has been coming on for a long time, it cannot, I suppose, be expected to disappear all at once. I am not confined to bed, but I am weak, — have had no appetite for about three weeks — and my nights are very bad. I am well aware myself that extreme and continuous depression of spirits has had much to do with the origin of the illness; and I know a little cheerful society would do me more good than gallons of medicine. If you CAN come, come on Friday. Write to-morrow and say whether this be possible, and what time you will be at Keighley, that I may send the gig. I do not ask you to stay long; a few days is all I request."

Of course, her friend went; and a certain amount of benefit was derived from her society, always so grateful to Miss Bronte. But the evil was now too deep-rooted to be more than palliated for a time by "the little cheerful society" for which she so touchingly besought.

A relapse came on before long. She was very ill, and the remedies employed took an unusual effect on her peculiar sensitiveness of constitution. Mr. Bronte was miserably anxious about the state of his only remaining child, for she was reduced to the last degree of weakness, as she had been unable to swallow food for above a week before. She rallied, and derived her sole sustenance from half-a-tea-cup of liquid, administered by tea-spoonfuls, in the course of the day. Yet she kept out of bed, for her father's sake, and struggled in solitary patience through her worst hours.

When she was recovering, her spirits needed support, and then she yielded to her friend's entreaty that she would visit her. All the time that Miss Bronte's illness had lasted, Miss — — had been desirous of coming to her; but she refused to avail herself of this kindness, saying, that "it was enough to burden herself; that it would be misery to annoy another;" and, even at her worst time, she tells her friend, with humorous glee, how coolly she had managed to capture one of Miss — — 's letters to Mr. Bronte, which she suspected was of a kind to aggravate his alarm about his daughter's state, "and at once conjecturing its tenor, made its contents her own."

Happily for all parties, Mr. Bronte was wonderfully well this winter; good sleep, good spirits, and an excellent steady appetite, all seemed to mark vigour; and in such a state of health, Charlotte could leave him to spend a week with her friend, without any great anxiety.

She benefited greatly by the kind attentions and cheerful society of the family with whom she went to stay. They did not care for her in the least as "Currer Bell," but had known and loved her for years as Charlotte Bronte. To them her invalid weakness was only a fresh claim upon their tender regard, from the solitary woman, whom they had first known as a little, motherless school-girl.

Miss Bronte wrote to me about this time, and told me something of what she had suffered.

"Feb. 6th, 1852.

"Certainly, the past winter has been to me a strange time; had I the prospect before me of living it over again, my prayer must necessarily be, 'Let this cup pass from me.' That depression of spirits, which I thought was gone by when I wrote last, came back again with a heavy recoil; internal congestion ensued, and then inflammation. I had severe pain in my right side, frequent burning and aching in my chest; sleep almost forsook me, or would never come, except accompanied by ghastly dreams; appetite vanished, and slow fever was my continual companion. It was some time before I could bring myself to have recourse to medical advice. I thought my lungs were affected, and could feel no confidence in the power of medicine. When, at last, however, a doctor was consulted, he declared my lungs and chest sound, and ascribed all my sufferings to derangement of the liver, on which organ it seems the inflammation had fallen. This information was a great relief to my dear father, as well as to myself; but I had subsequently rather sharp medical discipline to undergo, and was much reduced. Though not yet well, it is with deep thankfulness that I can say, I am GREATLY BETTER. My sleep, appetite, and strength seem all returning."

It was a great interest to her to be allowed an early reading of Esmond; and she expressed her thoughts on the subject, in a criticising letter to Mr. Smith, who had given her this privilege.

"Feb. 14th, 1852.

"My dear Sir, — It has been a great delight to me to read Mr. Thackeray's work; and I so seldom now express my sense of kindness that, for once, you must permit me, without rebuke, to thank you for a pleasure so rare and special. Yet I am not going to praise either Mr. Thackeray or his book. I have read, enjoyed, been interested, and, after all, feel full as much ire and sorrow as gratitude and admiration. And still one can never lay down a book of his without the last two feelings having their part, be the subject or treatment what it may. In the first half of the book, what chiefly struck me was the wonderful manner in which the writer throws himself into the spirit and letters of the times whereof he treats; the allusions, the illustrations, the style, all seem to me so masterly in their exact keeping, their harmonious consistency, their nice, natural truth, their pure exemption from exaggeration. No second-rate imitator can write in that way; no coarse scene-painter can charm us with an allusion so delicate and perfect. But what bitter satire, what relentless dissection of diseased subjects! Well, and this, too, is right, or would be right, if the savage surgeon did not seem so fiercely pleased with his work. Thackeray likes to dissect an ulcer or an aneurism; he has pleasure in putting his cruel knife or probe into quivering, living flesh. Thackeray would not like all the world to be good; no great satirist would like society to be perfect.

"As usual, he is unjust to women; quite unjust. There is hardly any punishment he does not deserve for making Lady Castlewood peep through a keyhole, listen at a door, and be jealous of a boy and a milkmaid. Many other things I noticed that, for my part, grieved and exasperated me as I read; but then, again, came passages so true, so deeply thought, so tenderly felt, one could not help forgiving and admiring.

. . . .

But I wish he could be told not to care much for dwelling on the political or religious intrigues of the times. Thackeray, in his heart, does not value political or religious intrigues of any age or date. He likes to show us human nature at home, as he himself daily sees it; his wonderful observant faculty likes to be in action. In him this faculty is a sort of captain and leader; and if ever any passage in his writings lacks interest, it is when this master-faculty is for a time thrust into a subordinate position. I think such is the case in the former half of the present volume. Towards the middle, he throws off restraint, becomes himself, and is strong to the close. Everything now depends on the second and third volumes. If, in pith and interest, they fall short of the first, a true success cannot ensue. If the continuation be an improvement upon the commencement, if the stream gather force as it rolls, Thackeray will triumph. Some people have been in the habit of terming him the second writer of the day; it just depends on himself whether or not these critics shall be justified in their award. He need not be the second. God made him second to no man. If I were he, I would show myself as I am, not as critics report me; at any rate, I would do my best. Mr. Thackeray is easy and indolent, and seldom cares to do his best. Thank you once more; and believe me yours sincerely,

C. BRONTE.”

Miss Bronte’s health continued such, that she could not apply herself to writing as she wished, for many weeks after the serious attack from which she had suffered. There was not very much to cheer her in the few events that touched her interests during this time. She heard in March of the death of a friend’s relation in the Colonies; and we see something of what was the corroding dread at her heart.

“The news of E — — ‘s death came to me last week in a letter from M — — ; a long letter, which wrung my heart so, in its simple, strong, truthful emotion, I have only ventured to read it once. It ripped up half-scarred wounds with terrible force. The death-bed was just the same, — breath failing, etc. She fears she shall now, in her dreary solitude, become a ‘stern, harsh, selfish woman.’ This fear struck home; again and again have I felt it for myself, and what is MY position to M — — ‘s? May God help her, as God only can help!”

Again and again, her friend urged her to leave home; nor were various invitations wanting to enable her to do this, when these constitutional accesses of low spirits preyed too much upon her in her solitude. But she would not allow herself any such indulgence, unless it became absolutely necessary from the state of her health. She dreaded the perpetual recourse to such stimulants as change of scene and society, because of the reaction that was sure to follow. As far as she could see, her life was ordained to be lonely, and she must subdue her nature to her life, and, if possible, bring the two into harmony. When she could employ herself in fiction, all was comparatively well. The characters were her companions in the quiet hours, which she spent utterly alone, unable often to stir out of doors for many days together. The interests of the persons in her novels supplied the lack of interest in her own life; and Memory and Imagination found their appropriate work, and ceased to prey upon her vitals. But too frequently she could not write, could not see her people, nor hear them speak; a great mist of head-ache had blotted them out; they were non-existent to her.

This was the case all through the present spring; and anxious as her publishers were for its completion, Villette stood still. Even her letters to her friend are scarce and brief. Here and there I find a sentence in them which can be extracted, and which is worth preserving.

"M — — 's letter is very interesting; it shows a mind one cannot but truly admire. Compare its serene trusting strength, with poor — — 's vacillating dependence. When the latter was in her first burst of happiness, I never remember the feeling finding vent in expressions of gratitude to God. There was always a continued claim upon your sympathy in the mistrust and doubt she felt of her own bliss. M — — believes; her faith is grateful and at peace; yet while happy in herself, how thoughtful she is for others!"

"March 23rd, 1852.

"You say, dear E — — , that you often wish I would chat on paper, as you do. How can I? Where are my materials? Is my life fertile in subjects of chat? What callers do I see? What visits do I pay? No, you must chat, and I must listen, and say 'Yes,' and 'No,' and 'Thank you!' for five minutes' recreation.

. . . .

"I am amused at the interest you take in politics. Don't expect to rouse me; to me, all ministries and all oppositions seem to be pretty much alike. D'Israeli was factious as leader of the Opposition; Lord John Russell is going to be factious, now that he has stepped into D'Israeli's shoes. Lord Derby's 'Christian love and spirit,' is worth three half-pence farthing."

To W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

"March 25th, 1852.

"My dear Sir, — Mr. Smith intimated a short time since, that he had some thoughts of publishing a reprint of Shirley. Having revised the work, I now enclose the errata. I have likewise sent off to-day, per rail, a return-box of Cornhill books.

"I have lately read with great pleasure, 'The Two Families.' This work, it seems, should have reached me in January; but owing to a mistake, it was detained at the Dead Letter Office, and lay there nearly two months. I liked the commencement very much; the close seemed to me scarcely equal to 'Rose Douglas.' I thought the authoress committed a mistake in shifting the main interest from the two personages on whom it first rests — viz., Ben Wilson and Mary — to other characters of quite inferior conception. Had she made

Ben and Mary her hero and heroine, and continued the development of their fortunes and characters in the same truthful natural vein in which she commences it, an excellent, even an original, book might have been the result. As for Lilias and Ronald, they are mere romantic figments, with nothing of the genuine Scottish peasant about them; they do not even speak the Caledonian dialect; they palaver like a fine lady and gentleman.

"I ought long since to have acknowledged the gratification with which I read Miss Kavanagh's 'Women of Christianity.' Her charity and (on the whole) her impartiality are very beautiful. She touches, indeed, with too gentle a hand the theme of Elizabeth of Hungary; and, in her own mind, she evidently misconstrues the fact of Protestant charities SEEMING to be fewer than Catholic. She forgets, or does not know, that Protestantism is a quieter creed than Romanism; as it does not clothe its priesthood in scarlet, so neither does it set up its good women for saints, canonise their names, and proclaim their good works. In the records of man, their almsgiving will not perhaps be found registered, but Heaven has its account as well as earth.

"With kind regards to yourself and family, who, I trust, have all safely weathered the rough winter lately past, as well as the east winds, which are still nipping our spring in Yorkshire, — I am, my dear Sir, yours sincerely,

C. BRONTE."

"April 3rd, 1852.

"My dear Sir, — The box arrived quite safely, and I very much thank you for the contents, which are most kindly selected.

"As you wished me to say what I thought of 'The School for Fathers,' I hastened to read it. The book seems to me clever, interesting, very amusing, and likely to please generally. There is a merit in the choice of ground, which is not yet too hackneyed; the comparative freshness of subject, character, and epoch give the tale a certain attractiveness. There is also, I think, a graphic rendering of situations, and a lively talent for describing whatever is visible and tangible — what the eye meets on the surface of things. The humour appears to me such as would answer well on the stage; most of the scenes seem to demand dramatic accessories to give them their full effect. But I think one cannot with justice bestow higher praise than this. To speak candidly, I felt, in reading the tale, a wondrous hollowness in the moral and sentiment; a strange dilettante shallowness in the purpose and feeling. After all, 'Jack' is not much better than a 'Tony Lumpkin,' and there is no very great breadth of choice between the clown he IS and the fop his father would have made him. The grossly material life of the old English fox-hunter, and the frivolous existence of the fine gentleman present extremes, each in its way so repugnant, that one feels half inclined to smile when called upon to sentimentalise over the lot of a youth forced to pass from one to the other; torn from the stables, to be ushered perhaps into the ball-room. Jack dies mournfully indeed, and you are sorry for the poor fellow's untimely end; but you cannot forget that, if he had not been thrust into the way of Colonel

Penruddock's weapon, he might possibly have broken his neck in a fox-hunt. The character of Sir Thomas Warren is excellent; consistent throughout. That of Mr. Addison not bad, but sketchy, a mere outline — wanting colour and finish. The man's portrait is there, and his costume, and fragmentary anecdotes of his life; but where is the man's nature — soul and self? I say nothing about the female characters — not one word; only that Lydia seems to me like a pretty little actress, prettily dressed gracefully appearing and disappearing, and reappearing in a genteel comedy, assuming the proper sentiments of her part with all due tact and naivete, and — that is all.

"Your description of the model man of business is true enough, I doubt not; but we will not fear that society will ever be brought quite to this standard; human nature (bad as it is) has, after all, elements that forbid it. But the very tendency to such a consummation — the marked tendency, I fear, of the day — produces, no doubt, cruel suffering. Yet, when the evil of competition passes a certain limit, must it not in time work its own cure? I suppose it will, but then through some convulsed crisis, shattering all around it like an earthquake. Meantime, for how many is life made a struggle; enjoyment and rest curtailed; labour terribly enhanced beyond almost what nature can bear I often think that this world would be the most terrible of enigmas, were it not for the firm belief that there is a world to come, where conscientious effort and patient pain will meet their reward. — Believe me, my dear Sir, sincerely yours,

C. BRONTE."

A letter to her old Brussels schoolfellow gives a short retrospect of the dreary winter she had passed through.

"Haworth, April 12th, 1852.

". . . I struggled through the winter, and the early part of the spring, often with great difficulty. My friend stayed with me a few days in the early part of January; she could not be spared longer. I was better during her visit, but had a relapse soon after she left me, which reduced my strength very much. It cannot be denied that the solitude of my position fearfully aggravated its other evils. Some long stormy days and nights there were, when I felt such a craving for support and companionship as I cannot express. Sleepless, I lay awake night after night, weak and unable to occupy myself. I sat in my chair day after day, the saddest memories my only company. It was a time I shall never forget; but God sent it, and it must have been for the best.

"I am better now; and very grateful do I feel for the restoration of tolerable health; but, as if there was always to be some affliction, papa, who enjoyed wonderful health during the whole winter, is ailing with his spring attack of bronchitis. I earnestly trust it may pass over in the comparatively ameliorated form in which it has hitherto shown itself.

"Let me not forget to answer your question about the cataract. Tell your papa that MY father was seventy at the time he underwent an operation; he was most reluctant to try the experiment; could not believe that, at his age, and with his want of robust strength, it would succeed. I was obliged to be very decided in the matter, and to act entirely on my own responsibility. Nearly six years have now elapsed since the cataract was extracted (it was not merely depressed); he has never once during that time regretted the step, and a day seldom passes that he does not express gratitude and pleasure at the restoration of that inestimable privilege of vision whose loss he once knew."

I had given Miss Bronte; in one of my letters, an outline of the story on which I was then engaged, and in reply she says: —

"The sketch you give of your work (respecting which I am, of course, dumb) seems to me very noble; and its purpose may be as useful in practical result as it is high and just in theoretical tendency. Such a book may restore hope and energy to many who thought they had forfeited their right to both; and open a clear course for honourable effort to some who deemed that they and all honour had parted company in this world.

"Yet — hear my protest!

"Why should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?

"My heart fails me already at the thought of the pang it will have to undergo. And yet you must follow the impulse of your own inspiration. If THAT commands the slaying of the victim, no bystander has a right to put out his hand to stay the sacrificial knife: but I hold you a stern priestess in these matters."

As the milder weather came on, her health improved, and her power of writing increased. She set herself with redoubled vigour to the work before her; and denied herself pleasure for the purpose of steady labour. Hence she writes to her friend: —

"May 11th.

"Dear E — — , — I must adhere to my resolution of neither visiting nor being visited at present. Stay you quietly at B., till you go to S., as I shall stay at Haworth; as sincere a farewell can be taken with the heart as with the lips, and perhaps less painful. I am glad the weather is changed; the return of the south-west wind suits me; but I hope you have no cause to regret the departure of your favourite east wind. What you say about — — does not surprise me; I have had many little notes (whereof I answer about one in three) breathing the same spirit, — self and child the sole all-absorbing topics, on which the changes are rung even to weariness. But I suppose one must not heed it, or think the case singular. Nor, I am afraid, must one expect her to improve. I read in a French book lately, a sentence to this effect, that 'marriage might be defined as the state of two-fold selfishness.' Let the single therefore take comfort. Thank you for Mary's letter. She DOES seem most happy; and I cannot tell you how much more real, lasting, and better-warranted her happiness seems than ever — — 's did. I think so much of it is in herself, and her own serene, pure, trusting, religious nature. — — 's always gives me the idea of a vacillating, unsteady rapture, entirely dependent on circumstances with all their fluctuations. If Mary lives to be a mother, you will then see a greater difference.

"I wish you, dear E., all health and enjoyment in your visit; and, as far as one can judge at present, there seems a fair prospect of the wish being realised. — Yours sincerely,

"C. BRONTE."

CHAPTER XI.

The reader will remember that Anne Bronte had been interred in the churchyard of the Old Church at Scarborough. Charlotte had left directions for a tombstone to be placed over her; but many a time during the solitude of the past winter, her sad, anxious thoughts had revisited the scene of that last great sorrow, and she had wondered whether all decent services had been rendered to the memory of the dead, until at last she came to a silent resolution to go and see for herself whether the stone and inscription were in a satisfactory state of preservation.

"Cliffe House, Filey, June 6th, 1852.

"Dear E — — , — I am at Filey utterly alone. Do not be angry, the step is right. I considered it, and resolved on it with due deliberation. Change of air was necessary; there were reasons why I should NOT go to the south, and why I should come here. On Friday I went to Scarborough, visited the churchyard and stone. It must be refaced and relettered; there are five errors. I gave the necessary directions. THAT duty, then, is done; long has it lain heavy on my mind; and that was a pilgrimage I felt I could only make alone.

"I am in our old lodgings at Mrs. Smith's; not, however, in the same rooms, but in less expensive apartments. They seemed glad to see me, remembered you and me very well, and, seemingly, with great good will. The daughter who used to wait on us is just married. Filey seems to me much altered; more lodging-houses — some of them very handsome — have been built; the sea has all its old grandeur. I walk on the sands a good deal, and try NOT to feel desolate and melancholy. How sorely my heart longs for you, I need not say. I have bathed once; it seemed to do me good. I may, perhaps, stay here a fortnight. There are as yet scarcely any visitors. A Lady Wenlock is staying at the large house of which you used so vigilantly to observe the inmates. One day I set out with intent to trudge to Filey Bridge, but was frightened back by two cows. I mean to try again some morning. I left papa well. I have been a good deal troubled with headache, and with some pain in the side since I came here, but I feel that this has been owing to the cold wind, for very cold has it been till lately; at present I feel better. Shall I send the papers to you as usual Write again directly, and tell me this, and anything and everything else that comes into your mind. — Believe me, yours faithfully,

"C. BRONTE."

"Filey, June 16th, 1852.

"Dear E — — , — Be quite easy about me. I really think I am better for my stay at Filey; that I have derived more benefit from it than I dared to anticipate. I believe, could I stay here two months, and enjoy something like social cheerfulness as well as exercise and good air, my health would be quite renewed. This, however, cannot possibly be; but I am most thankful for the good received. I stay here another week.

"I return — — 's letter. I am sorry for her: I believe she suffers; but I do not much like her style of expressing herself. . . . Grief as well as joy manifests itself in most different ways in different people; and I doubt not she is sincere and in earnest when she talks of her 'precious, sainted father;' but I could wish she used simpler language."

Soon after her return from Filey, she was alarmed by a very serious and sharp attack of illness with which Mr. Bronte was seized. There was some fear, for a few days, that his sight was permanently lost, and his spirits sank painfully under this dread.

"This prostration of spirits," writes his daughter, "which accompanies anything like a relapse is almost the most difficult point to manage. Dear E — — , you are tenderly kind in offering your society; but rest very tranquil where you are; be fully assured that it is not now, nor under present circumstances, that I feel the lack either of society or occupation; my time is pretty well filled up, and my thoughts appropriated. . . . I cannot permit myself to comment much on the chief contents of your last; advice is not necessary: as far as I can judge, you seem hitherto enabled to take these trials in a good and wise spirit. I can only pray that such combined strength and resignation may be continued to you. Submission, courage, exertion, when practicable — these seem to be the weapons with which we must fight life's long battle."

I suppose that, during the very time when her thoughts were thus fully occupied with anxiety for her father, she received some letter from her publishers, making inquiry as to the progress of the work which they knew she had in hand, as I find the following letter to Mr. Williams, bearing reference to some of Messrs. Smith and Elder's proposed arrangements.

"To W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

"July 28th, 1852.

"My dear Sir, — Is it in contemplation to publish the new edition of 'Shirley' soon? Would it not be better to defer it for a time? In reference to a part of your letter, permit me to express this wish, — and I trust in doing so, I shall not be regarded as stepping out of my position as an author, and encroaching on the arrangements of business, — viz.: that no announcement of a new work by the author of 'Jane Eyre' shall be made till the MS. of such work is actually in my publisher's hands. Perhaps we are none of us justified in speaking very decidedly where the future is concerned; but for some too much caution in such calculations can scarcely be observed: amongst this number I must class myself. Nor, in doing so, can I assume an apologetic tone. He does right who does his best.

"Last autumn I got on for a time quickly. I ventured to look forward to spring as the period of publication: my health gave way; I passed such a winter as, having been once experienced, will never be forgotten. The spring proved little better than a protraction of trial. The warm weather and a visit to the sea have done me much good physically; but as yet I have recovered neither elasticity of animal spirits, nor flow of the power of composition. And if it were otherwise, the difference would be of no avail; my time and thoughts are at present taken up with close attendance on my father, whose health is just now in a very critical state, the heat of the weather having produced determination of blood to the head. — I am, yours sincerely,

C. BRONTE."

Before the end of August, Mr. Bronte's convalescence became quite established, and he was anxious to resume his duties for some time before his careful daughter would permit him.

On September the 14th the "great duke" died. He had been, as we have seen, her hero from childhood; but I find no further reference to him at this time than what is given in the following extract from a letter to her friend: —

"I do hope and believe the changes you have been having this summer will do you permanent good, notwithstanding the pain with which they have been too often mingled. Yet I feel glad that you are soon coming home; and I really must not trust myself to say how much I wish the time were come when, without let or hindrance, I could once more welcome you to Haworth. But oh I don't get on; I feel fretted — incapable — sometimes very low. However, at present, the subject must not be dwelt upon; it presses me too hardly — nearly — and painfully. Less than ever can I taste or know pleasure till this work is wound up. And yet I often sit up in bed at night, thinking of and wishing for you. Thank you for the Times; what it said on the mighty and mournful subject was well said. All at once the whole nation seems to take a just view of that great character. There was a review too of an American book, which I was glad to see. Read 'Uncle Tom's Cabin': probably, though, you have read it.

"Papa's health continues satisfactory, thank God! As for me, my wretched liver has been disordered again of late, but I hope it is now going to be on better behaviour; it hinders me in working — depresses both power and tone of feeling. I must expect this derangement from time to time."

Haworth was in an unhealthy state, as usual; and both Miss Bronte and Tabby suffered severely from the prevailing epidemics. The former was long in shaking off the effects of this illness. In vain she resolved against allowing herself any society or change of scene until she had accomplished her labour. She was too ill to write; and with illness came on the old heaviness of heart, recollections of the past, and anticipations of the future. At last Mr. Bronte expressed so strong a wish that her friend should be asked to visit her, and she felt some little refreshment so absolutely necessary, that on October the 9th she begged her to come to Haworth, just for a single week.

"I thought I would persist in denying myself till I had done my work, but I find it won't do; the matter refuses to progress, and this excessive solitude presses too heavily; so let me see your dear face, E., just for one reviving week."

But she would only accept of the company of her friend for the exact time specified. She thus writes to Miss Wooler on October the 21st: —

"E — — has only been my companion one little week. I would not have her any longer, for I am disgusted with myself and my delays; and consider it was a weak yielding to temptation in me to send for her at all; but in truth, my spirits were getting low — prostrate sometimes — and she has done me inexpressible good. I wonder when I shall see you at Haworth again; both my father and the servants have again and again insinuated a distinct wish that you should be requested to come in the course of the summer and autumn, but I have always turned rather a deaf ear; 'not yet,' was my thought, 'I want first to be free;' work first, then pleasure."

Miss — — 's visit had done her much good. Pleasant companionship during the day produced, for the time, the unusual blessing of calm repose at night; and after her friend's departure she was well enough to "fall to business," and write away, almost incessantly, at her story of Villette, now drawing to a conclusion. The following letter to Mr. Smith, seems to have accompanied the first part of the MS.

"Oct. 30th, 1852.

"My dear Sir, — You must notify honestly what you think of 'Villette' when you have read it. I can hardly tell you how I hunger to hear some opinion besides my own, and how I have sometimes desponded, and almost despaired, because there was no one to whom to read a line, or of whom to ask a counsel. 'Jane Eyre' was not written under such circumstances, nor were two-thirds of 'Shirley'. I got so miserable about it, I could bear no allusion to the book. It is not finished yet; but now I hope. As to the anonymous publication, I have this to say: If the withholding of the author's name should tend materially to injure the publisher's interest, to interfere with booksellers' orders, etc., I would not press the point; but if no such detriment is contingent, I should be most thankful for the sheltering shadow of an incognito. I seem to dread the advertisements — the large-lettered 'Currer Bell's New Novel,' or 'New Work, by the Author of Jane Eyre.' These, however, I feel well enough, are the transcendentalisms of a retired wretch; so you must speak frankly. . . . I shall be glad to see 'Colonel Esmond.' My objection to the second volume lay here: I thought it contained decidedly too much history — too little story."

In another letter, referring to "Esmond," she uses the following words: —

"The third volume seemed to me to possess the most sparkle, impetus, and interest. Of the first and second my judgment was, that parts of them were admirable; but there was the fault of containing too much History — too little story. I hold that a work of fiction ought to be a work of creation: that the REAL should be sparingly introduced in pages dedicated to the IDEAL. Plain household bread is a far more wholesome and necessary thing than cake; yet who would like to see the brown loaf placed on the table for dessert? In the second volume, the author gives us an ample supply of excellent brown bread; in his third, only such a portion as gives substance, like the crumbs of bread in a well-made, not too rich, plum-pudding."

Her letter to Mr. Smith, containing the allusion to 'Esmond,' which reminded me of the quotation just given continues: —

"You will see that 'Villette' touches on no matter of public interest. I cannot write books handling the topics of the day; it is of no use trying. Nor can I write a book for its moral. Nor can I take up a philanthropic scheme, though I honour philanthropy; and voluntarily and sincerely veil my face before such a mighty subject as that handled in Mrs. Beecher Stowe's work, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' To manage these great matters rightly, they must be long and practically studied — their bearings known intimately, and their evils felt genuinely; they must not be taken up as a business matter, and a trading speculation. I doubt not, Mrs. Stowe had felt the iron of slavery enter into her heart, from childhood upwards, long before she ever thought of writing books. The feeling throughout her work is sincere, and not got up. Remember to be an honest critic of 'Villette,' and tell Mr. Williams to be unsparing: not that I am likely to alter anything, but I want to know his impressions and yours."

To G. SMITH, ESQ.

"Nov. 3rd.

"My dear Sir, — I feel very grateful for your letter; it relieved me much, for I was a good deal harassed by doubts as to how 'Villette' might appear in other eyes than my own. I feel in some degree authorised to rely on your favourable impressions, because you are quite right where you hint disapprobation. You have exactly hit two points at least where I was conscious of defect; — the discrepancy, the want of perfect harmony, between Graham's boyhood and manhood, — the angular abruptness of his change of sentiment towards Miss Fanshawe. You must remember, though, that in secret he had for some time appreciated that young lady at a somewhat depressed standard — held her a LITTLE lower than the angels. But still the reader ought to have been better made to feel this preparation towards a change of mood. As to the publishing arrangement, I leave them to Cornhill. There is, undoubtedly, a certain force in what you say about the inexpediency of affecting a mystery which cannot be sustained; so you must act as you think is for the best. I submit, also, to the advertisements in large letters, but under protest, and with a kind of ostrich-longing for concealment. Most of the third volume is given to the development of the 'crabbed Professor's' character. Lucy must not marry Dr. John; he is far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited, and sweet-tempered; he is a 'curled darling' of Nature and of Fortune, and must draw a prize in life's lottery. His wife must be young, rich, pretty; he must be made very happy indeed. If Lucy marries anybody, it must be the Professor — a man in whom there is much to forgive, much to 'put up with.' But I am not leniently disposed towards Miss FROST from the beginning, I never meant to appoint her lines in pleasant places. The conclusion of this third volume is still a matter of some anxiety: I can but do my best, however. It would speedily be finished, could I ward off certain obnoxious headaches, which, whenever I get into the spirit of my work, are apt to seize and prostrate me. . . . .

"Colonel Henry Esmond is just arrived. He looks very antique and distinguished in his Queen Anne's garb; the periwig, sword, lace, and ruffles are very well represented by the old 'Spectator' type."

In reference to a sentence towards the close of this letter, I may mention what she told me; that Mr. Bronte was anxious that her new tale should end well, as he disliked novels which left a melancholy impression upon the mind; and he requested her to make her hero and heroine (like the heroes and heroines in fairy-tales) "marry, and live very happily ever after." But the idea of M. Paul Emanuel's death at sea was stamped on her imagination till it assumed the distinct force of reality; and she could no more alter her fictitious ending than if they had been facts which she was relating. All she could do in compliance with her father's wish was so to veil the fate in oracular words, as to leave it to the character and discernment of her readers to interpret her meaning.

To W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

"Nov. 6th, 1852.

"My dear Sir, — I must not delay thanking you for your kind letter, with its candid and able commentary on 'Villette.' With many of your strictures I concur. The third volume may, perhaps, do away with some of the objections; others still remain in force. I do not think the interest culminates anywhere to the degree you would wish. What climax there is does not come on till near the conclusion; and even then, I doubt whether the regular novel-reader will consider the 'agony piled sufficiently high' (as the Americans say), or the colours dashed on to the canvas with the proper amount of daring. Still, I fear, they must be satisfied with what is offered: my palette affords no brighter tints; were t to attempt to deepen the reds, or burnish the yellows, I should but botch.

"Unless I am mistaken, the emotion of the book will be found to be kept throughout in tolerable subjection. As to the name of the heroine, I can hardly express what subtlety of thought made me decide upon giving her a cold name; but, at first, I called her 'Lucy Snowe' (spelt with an 'e'); which Snowe I afterwards changed to 'Frost.' Subsequently, I rather regretted the change, and wished it 'Snowe' again. If not too late, I should like the alteration to be made now throughout the MS. A COLD name she must have; partly, perhaps, on the 'lucus a non lucendo' principle — partly on that of the 'fitness of things,' for she has about her an external coldness.

"You say that she may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more fully given. I consider that she is both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid. It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional, for instance; it was the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness. If, however, the book does not express all this, there must be a great fault somewhere. I might explain away a few other points, but it would be too much like drawing a picture and then writing underneath the name of the object intended to be represented. We know what sort of a pencil that is which needs an ally in the pen.

"Thanking you again for the clearness and fulness with which you have responded to my request for a statement of impressions, I am, my dear Sir, yours very sincerely,

"C. BRONTE."

"I trust the work will be seen in MS. by no one except Mr. Smith and yourself."

"Nov. 10th, 1852.

"My dear Sir, — I only wished the publication of 'Shirley' to be delayed till 'Villette' was nearly ready; so that there can now be no objection to its being issued whenever you think fit. About putting the MS. into type, I can only say that, should I be able to proceed with the third volume at my average rate of composition, and with no more than the average amount of interruptions, I should hope to have it ready in about three weeks. I leave it to you to decide whether it would be better to delay the printing that space of time, or to commence it immediately. It would certainly be more satisfactory if you were to see the third volume before printing the first and the second; yet, if delay is likely to prove injurious, I do not think it is indispensable. I have read the third volume of 'Esmond.' I found it both entertaining and exciting to me; it seems to possess an impetus and excitement beyond the other two, — that movement and brilliancy its predecessors sometimes wanted, never fails here. In certain passages, I thought Thackeray used all his powers; their grand, serious force yielded a profound satisfaction. 'At last he puts forth his strength,' I could not help saying to myself. No character in the book strikes me as more masterly than that of Beatrix; its conception is fresh, and its delineation vivid. It is peculiar; it has impressions of a new kind — new, at least, to me. Beatrix is not, in herself, all bad. So much does she sometimes reveal of what is good and great as to suggest this feeling — you would think she was urged by a fate. You would think that some antique doom presses on her house, and that once in so many generations its brightest ornament was to become its greatest disgrace. At times, what is good in her struggles against this terrible destiny, but the Fate conquers. Beatrix cannot be an honest woman and a good man's wife. She 'tries, and she CANNOT.' Proud, beautiful, and sullied, she was born what she becomes, a king's mistress. I know not whether you have seen the notice in the Leader; I read it just after concluding the book. Can I be wrong in deeming it a notice tame, cold, and insufficient? With all its professed friendliness, it produced on me a most disheartening impression. Surely, another sort of justice than this will be rendered to ‘Esmond’ from other quarters. One acute remark of the critic is to the effect that Blanche Amory and Beatrix are identical — sketched from the same original! To me they are about as identical as a weazel and a royal tigress of Bengal; both the latter are quadrupeds, — both the former, women. But I must not take up either your time or my own with further remarks. Believe me yours sincerely,

“C. BRONTE.”

On a Saturday, a little later in this month, Miss Bronte completed ‘Villette,’ and sent it off to her publishers. “I said my prayers when I had done it. Whether it is well or ill done, I don’t know; D. V., I will now try and wait the issue quietly. The book, I think, will not be considered pretentious; nor is it of a character to excite hostility.”

As her labour was ended, she felt at liberty to allow herself a little change. There were several friends anxious to see her and welcome her to their homes Miss Martineau, Mrs. Smith, and her own faithful E — — . With the last, in the same letter as that in which she announced the completion of ‘Villette,’ she offered to spend a week. She began, also, to consider whether it might not be well to avail herself of Mrs. Smith’s kind invitation, with a view to the convenience of being on the spot to correct the proofs.

The following letter is given, not merely on account of her own criticisms on ‘Villette,’ but because it shows how she had learned to magnify the meaning of trifles, as all do who live a self-contained and solitary life. Mr. Smith had been unable to write by the same post as that which brought the money for ‘Villette,’ and she consequently received it without a line. The friend with whom she was staying says, that she immediately fancied there was some disappointment about ‘Villette,’ or that some word or act of hers had given offence; and had not the Sunday intervened, and so allowed time for Mr. Smith’s letter to make its appearance, she would certainly have crossed it on her way to London.

“Dec. 6th, 1852.

“My dear Sir, — The receipts have reached me safely. I received the first on Saturday, enclosed in a cover without a line, and had made up my mind to take the train on Monday, and go up to London to see what was the matter, and what had struck my publisher mute. On Sunday morning your letter came, and you have thus been spared the visitation of the unannounced and unsummoned apparition of Currer Bell in Cornhill. Inexplicable delays should be avoided when possible, for they are apt to urge those subjected to their harassment to sudden and impulsive steps. I must pronounce you right again, in your complaint of the transfer of interest in the third volume, from one set of characters to another. It is not pleasant, and it will probably be found as unwelcome to the reader, as it was, in a sense, compulsory upon the writer. The spirit of romance would have indicated another course, far more flowery and inviting; it would have fashioned a paramount hero, kept faithfully with him, and made him supremely worshipful; he should have been an idol, and not a mute, unresponding idol either; but this would have been unlike real LIFE — inconsistent with truth — at variance with probability. I greatly apprehend, however, that the weakest character in the book is the one I aimed at making the most beautiful; and, if this be the case, the fault lies in its wanting the germ of the real — in its being purely imaginary. I felt that this character lacked substance; I fear that the reader will feel the same. Union with it resembles too much the fate of Ixion, who was mated with a cloud. The childhood of Paulina is, however, I think, pretty well imagined, but her. . .” (the remainder of this interesting sentence is torn off the letter). “A brief visit to London becomes thus more practicable, and if your mother will kindly write, when she has time, and name a day after Christmas which will suit her, I shall have pleasure, papa’s health permitting, in availing myself of her invitation. I wish I could come in time to correct some at least of the proofs; it would save trouble.”

CHAPTER XII.

The difficulty that presented itself most strongly to me, when I first had the honour of being requested to write this biography, was how I could show what a noble, true, and tender woman Charlotte Bronte really was, without mingling up with her life too much of the personal history of her nearest and most intimate friends. After much consideration of this point, I came to the resolution of writing truly, if I wrote at all; of withholding nothing, though some things, from their very nature, could not be spoken of so fully as others.

One of the deepest interests of her life centres naturally round her marriage, and the preceding circumstances; but more than all other events (because of more recent date, and concerning another as intimately as herself), it requires delicate handling on my part, lest I intrude too roughly on what is most sacred to memory. Yet I have two reasons, which seem to me good and valid ones, for giving some particulars of the course of events which led to her few months of wedded life — that short spell of exceeding happiness. The first is my desire to call attention to the fact that Mr. Nicholls was one who had seen her almost daily for years; seen her as a daughter, a sister, a mistress and a friend. He was not a man to be attracted by any kind of literary fame. I imagine that this, by itself, would rather repel him when he saw it in the possession of a woman. He was a grave, reserved, conscientious man, with a deep sense of religion, and of his duties as one of its ministers.

In silence he had watched her, and loved her long. The love of such a man — a daily spectator of her manner of life for years — is a great testimony to her character as a woman.

How deep his affection was I scarcely dare to tell, even if I could in words. She did not know — she had hardly begun to suspect — that she was the object of any peculiar regard on his part, when, in this very December, he came one evening to tea. After tea, she returned from the study to her own sitting-room, as was her custom, leaving her father and his curate together. Presently she heard the study-door open, and expected to hear the succeeding clash of the front door. Instead, came a tap; and, "like lightning, it flashed upon me what was coming. He entered. He stood before me. What his words were you can imagine; his manner you can hardly realise, nor can I forget it. He made me, for the first time, feel what it costs a man to declare affection when he doubts response. . . . The spectacle of one, ordinarily so statue-like, thus trembling, stirred, and overcome, gave me a strange shock. I could only entreat him to leave me then, and promise a reply on the morrow. I asked if he had spoken to Papa. He said he dared not. I think I half led, half put him out of the room."

So deep, so fervent, and so enduring was the affection Miss Bronte had inspired in the heart of this good man! It is an honour to her; and, as such, I have thought it my duty to speak thus much, and quote thus fully from her letter about it. And now I pass to my second reason for dwelling on a subject which may possibly be considered by some, at first sight, of too private a nature for publication. When Mr. Nicholls had left her, Charlotte went immediately to her father and told him all. He always disapproved of marriages, and constantly talked against them. But he more than disapproved at this time; he could not bear the idea of this attachment of Mr. Nicholls to his daughter. Fearing the consequences of agitation to one so recently an invalid, she made haste to give her father a promise that, on the morrow, Mr. Nicholls should have a distinct refusal. Thus quietly and modestly did she, on whom such hard judgments had been passed by ignorant reviewers, receive this vehement, passionate declaration of love, — thus thoughtfully for her father, and unselfishly for herself, put aside all consideration of how she should reply, excepting as he wished!

The immediate result of Mr. Nicholls' declaration of attachment was, that he sent in his resignation of the curacy of Haworth; and that Miss Bronte held herself simply passive, as far as words and actions went, while she suffered acute pain from the strong expressions which her father used in speaking of Mr. Nicholls, and from the too evident distress and failure of health on the part of the latter. Under these circumstances she, more gladly than ever, availed herself of Mrs. Smith's proposal, that she should again visit them in London; and thither she accordingly went in the first week of the year 1853.

From thence I received the following letter. It is with a sad, proud pleasure I copy her words of friendship now.

"January 12th, 1853.

"It is with YOU the ball rests. I have not heard from you since I wrote last; but I thought I knew the reason of your silence, viz. application to work, — and therefore I accept it, not merely with resignation, but with satisfaction.

"I am now in London, as the date above will show; staying very quietly at my publisher's, and correcting proofs, etc. Before receiving yours, I had felt, and expressed to Mr. Smith, reluctance to come in the way of 'Ruth;' not that I think SHE would suffer from contact with 'Villette' — we know not but that the damage might be the other way; but I have ever held comparisons to be odious, and would fain that neither I nor my friends should be made subjects for the same. Mr. Smith proposes, accordingly, to defer the publication of my book till the 24th inst.; he says that will give 'Ruth' the start in the papers daily and weekly, and also will leave free to her all the February magazines. Should this delay appear to you insufficient, speak! and it shall be protracted.

"I dare say, arrange as we may, we shall not be able wholly to prevent comparisons; it is the nature of some critics to be invidious; but we need not care we can set them at defiance; they SHALL not make us foes, they SHALL not mingle with our mutual feelings one taint of jealousy there is my hand on that; I know you will give clasp for clasp.

"'Villette' has indeed no right to push itself before 'Ruth.' There is a goodness, a philanthropic purpose, a social use in the latter to which the former cannot for an instant pretend; nor can it claim precedence on the ground of surpassing power I think it much quieter than 'Jane Eyre.'

. . . .

"I wish to see YOU, probably at least as much as you can wish to see ME, and therefore shall consider your invitation for March as an engagement; about the close of that month, then, I hope to pay you a brief visit. With kindest remembrances to Mr. Gaskell and all your precious circle, I am," etc.

This visit at Mrs. Smith's was passed more quietly than any previous one, and was consequently more in accordance with her own tastes. She saw things rather than persons; and being allowed to have her own choice of sights, she selected the "REAL in preference to the DECORATIVE side of life." She went over two prisons, — one ancient, the other modern, — Newgate and Pentonville; over two hospitals, the Foundling and Bethlehem. She was also taken, at her own request, to see several of the great City sights; the Bank, the Exchange, Rothschild's, etc.

The power of vast yet minute organisation, always called out her respect and admiration. She appreciated it more fully than most women are able to do. All that she saw during this last visit to London impressed her deeply — so much so as to render her incapable of the immediate expression of her feelings, or of reasoning upon her impressions while they were so vivid. If she had lived, her deep heart would sooner or later have spoken out on these things.

What she saw dwelt in her thoughts, and lay heavy on her spirits. She received the utmost kindness from her hosts, and had the old, warm, and grateful regard for them. But looking back, with the knowledge of what was then the future, which Time has given, one cannot but imagine that there was a toning-down in preparation for the final farewell to these kind friends, whom she saw for the last time on a Wednesday morning in February. She met her friend E — — at Keighley, on her return, and the two proceeded to Haworth together.

"Villette" — which, if less interesting as a mere story than "Jane Eyre," displays yet more of the extraordinary genius of the author — was received with one burst of acclamation. Out of so small a circle of characters, dwelling in so dull and monotonous an area as a "pension," this wonderful tale was evolved!

See how she receives the good tidings of her success!

"Feb. 15th, 1853.

"I got a budget of no less than seven papers yesterday and to-day. The import of all the notices is such as to make my heart swell with thankfulness to Him, who takes note both of suffering, and work, and motives. Papa is pleased too. As to friends in general, I believe I can love them still, without expecting them to take any large share in this sort of gratification. The longer I live, the more plainly I see that gentle must be the strain on fragile human nature; it will not bear much."

I suspect that the touch of slight disappointment, perceptible in the last few lines, arose from her great susceptibility to an opinion she valued much, — that of Miss Martineau, who, both in an article on 'Villette' in the Daily News, and in a private letter to Miss Bronte, wounded her to the quick by expressions of censure which she believed to be unjust and unfounded, but which, if correct and true, went deeper than any merely artistic fault. An author may bring himself to believe that he can bear blame with equanimity, from whatever quarter it comes; but its force is derived altogether from the character of this. To the public, one reviewer may be the same impersonal being as another; but an author has frequently a far deeper significance to attach to opinions. They are the verdicts of those whom he respects and admires, or the mere words of those for whose judgment he cares not a jot. It is this knowledge of the individual worth of the reviewer's opinion, which makes the censures of some sink so deep, and prey so heavily upon an author's heart. And thus, in proportion to her true, firm regard for Miss Martineau, did Miss Bronte suffer under what she considered her misjudgment not merely of writing, but of character.

She had long before asked Miss Martineau to tell her whether she considered that any want of womanly delicacy or propriety was betrayed in "Jane Eyre". And on receiving Miss Martineau's assurance that she did not, Miss Bronte entreated her to declare it frankly if she thought there was any failure of this description in any future work of "Currer Bell's." The promise then given of faithful truth-speaking, Miss Martineau fulfilled when "Villette" appeared. Miss Bronte writhed under what she felt to be injustice.

This seems a fitting place to state how utterly unconscious she was of what was, by some, esteemed coarse in her writings. One day, during that visit at the Briery when I first met her, the conversation turned upon the subject of women's writing fiction; and some one remarked on the fact that, in certain instances, authoresses had much outstepped the line which men felt to be proper in works of this kind. Miss Bronte said she wondered how far this was a natural consequence of allowing the imagination to work too constantly; Sir James and Lady Kay Shuttleworth and I expressed our belief that such violations of propriety were altogether unconscious on the part of those to whom reference had been made. I remember her grave, earnest way of saying, "I trust God will take from me whatever power of invention or expression I may have, before He lets me become blind to the sense of what is fitting or unfitting to be said!"

Again, she was invariably shocked and distressed when she heard of any disapproval of "Jane Eyre" on the ground above-mentioned. Some one said to her in London, "You know, you and I, Miss Bronte, have both written naughty books!" She dwelt much on this; and, as if it weighed on her mind, took an opportunity to ask Mrs. Smith, as she would have asked a mother — if she had not been motherless from earliest childhood — whether, indeed, there was anything so wrong in "Jane Eyre."

I do not deny for myself the existence of coarseness here and there in her works, otherwise so entirely noble. I only ask those who read them to consider her life, — which has been openly laid bare before them, — and to say how it could be otherwise. She saw few men; and among these few were one or two with whom she had been acquainted since early girlhood, — who had shown her much friendliness and kindness, — through whose family she had received many pleasures, — for whose intellect she had a great respect, — but who talked before her, if not to her with as little reticence as Rochester talked to Jane Eyre. Take this in connection with her poor brother's sad life, and the out-spoken people among whom she lived, — remember her strong feeling of the duty of representing life as it really is, not as it ought to be, — and then do her justice for all that she was, and all that she would have been (had God spared her), rather than censure her because circumstances forced her to touch pitch, as it were, and by it her hand was for a moment defiled. It was but skin-deep. Every change in her life was purifying her; it hardly could raise her. Again I cry, "If she had but lived!"

The misunderstanding with Miss Martineau on account of "Villette," was the cause of bitter regret to Miss Bronte. Her woman's nature had been touched, as she thought, with insulting misconception; and she had dearly loved the person who had thus unconsciously wounded her. It was but in the January just past that she had written as follows, in reply to a friend, the tenor of whose letter we may guess from this answer: —

"I read attentively all you say about Miss Martineau; the sincerity and constancy of your solicitude touch me very much; I should grieve to neglect or oppose your advice, and yet I do not feel it would be right to give Miss Martineau up entirely. There is in her nature much that is very noble; hundreds have forsaken her, more, I fear, in the apprehension that their fair names may suffer, if seen in connection with hers, than from any pure convictions, such as you suggest, of harm consequent on her fatal tenets. With these fair-weather friends I cannot bear to rank; and for her sin, is it not one of those of which God and not man must judge?

"To speak the truth, my dear Miss — — , I believe, if you were in my place, and knew Miss Martineau as I do, — if you had shared with me the proofs of her genuine kindliness, and had seen how she secretly suffers from abandonment, — you would be the last to give her up; you would separate the sinner from the sin, and feel as if the right lay rather in quietly adhering to her in her strait, while that adherence is unfashionable and unpopular, than in turning on her your back when the world sets the example. I believe she is one of those whom opposition and desertion make obstinate in error; while patience and tolerance touch her deeply and keenly, and incline her to ask of her own heart whether the course she has been pursuing may not possibly be a faulty course."

Kindly and faithful words! which Miss Martineau never knew of; to be repaid in words more grand and tender, when Charlotte lay deaf and cold by her dead sisters. In spite of their short sorrowful misunderstanding, they were a pair of noble women and faithful friends.

I turn to a pleasanter subject. While she was in London, Miss Bronte had seen Lawrence's portrait of Mr. Thackeray, and admired it extremely. Her first words, after she had stood before it some time in silence, were, "And there came up a Lion out of Judah!" The likeness was by this time engraved, and Mr. Smith sent her a copy of it.

To G. SMITH, ESQ.

"Haworth, Feb. 26th, 1853.

"My dear Sir, — At a late hour yesterday evening, I had the honour of receiving, at Haworth Parsonage, a distinguished guest, none other than W. M. Thackeray, Esq. Mindful of the rites of hospitality, I hung him up in state this morning. He looks superb in his beautiful, tasteful gilded gibbet. For companion he has the Duke of Wellington, (do you remember giving me that picture?) and for contrast and foil Richmond's portrait of an unworthy individual, who, in such society, must be name-less. Thackeray looks away from the latter character with a grand scorn, edifying to witness. I wonder if the giver of these gifts will ever see them on the walls where they now hang; it pleases me to fancy that one day he may. My father stood for a quarter of an hour this morning examining the great man's picture. The conclusion of his survey was, that he thought it a puzzling head; if he had known nothing previously of the original's character; he could not have read it in his features. I wonder at this. To me the broad brow seems to express intellect. Certain lines about the nose and cheek, betray the satirist and cynic; the mouth indicates a child-like simplicity — perhaps even a degree of irresoluteness, inconsistency — weakness in short, but a weakness not unamiable. The engraving seems to me very good. A certain not quite Christian expression — 'not to put too fine a point upon it' — an expression of spite, most vividly marked in the original, is here softened, and perhaps a little — a very little — of the power has escaped in this ameliorating process. Did it strike you thus?"

Miss Bronte was in much better health during this winter of 1852-3, than she had been the year before.

"For my part," (she wrote to me in February) "I have thus far borne the cold weather well. I have taken long walks on the crackling snow, and felt the frosty air bracing. This winter has, for me, not been like last winter. December, January, February, '51-2, passed like a long stormy night, conscious of one painful dream) all solitary grief and sickness. The corresponding months. in '52-3 have gone over my head quietly and not uncheerfully. Thank God for the change and the repose! How welcome it has been He only knows! My father too has borne the season well; and my book, and its reception thus far, have pleased and cheered him."

In March the quiet Parsonage had the honour of receiving a visit from the then Bishop of Ripon. He remained one night with Mr. Bronte". In the evening, some of the neighbouring clergy were invited to meet him at tea and supper; and during the latter meal, some of the "curates "began merrily to upbraid Miss Bronte" with "putting them into a book;" and she, shrinking from thus having her character as authoress thrust upon her at her own table, and in the presence of a stranger, pleasantly appealed to the bishop as to whether it was quite fair thus to drive her, into a corner. His Lordship, I have been told, was agreeably impressed with the gentle unassuming manners of his hostess, and with the perfect propriety and consistency of the arrangements in the modest household. So much for the Bishop's recollection of his visit. Now we will turn to hers.

"March 4th.

"The Bishop has been, and is gone. He is certainly a most charming Bishop; the most benignant gentleman that ever put on lawn sleeves; yet stately too, and quite competent to check encroachments. His visit passed capitally well; and at its close, as he was going away, he expressed himself thoroughly gratified with all he had seen. The Inspector has been also in the course of the past week; so that I have had a somewhat busy time of it. If you could have been at Haworth to share the pleasures of the company, without having been inconvenienced by the little bustle of the preparation, I should have been VERY glad. But the house was a good deal put out of its way, as you may suppose; all passed, however, orderly, quietly, and well. Martha waited very nicely, and I had a person to help her in the kitchen. Papa kept up, too, fully as well as I expected, though I doubt whether he could have borne another day of it. My penalty came on in a strong headache as soon as the Bishop was gone: how thankful I was that it had patiently waited his departure. I continue stupid to-day: of course, it is the reaction consequent on several days of extra exertion and excitement. It is very well to talk of receiving a Bishop without trouble, but you MUST prepare for him."

By this time some of the Reviews had began to find fault with
"Villette." Miss Bronte made her old request.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

"My dear Sir, — Were a review to appear, inspired with treble their animus, PRAY do not withhold it from me. I like to see the satisfactory notices, — especially I like to carry them to my father; but I MUST see such as are UNsatisfactory and hostile; these are for my own especial edification; — it is in these I best read public feeling and opinion. To shun examination into the dangerous and disagreeable seems to me cowardly. I long always to know what really IS, and am only unnerved when kept in the dark. . . . . . .

"As to the character of 'Lucy Snowe,' my intention from the first was that she should not occupy the pedestal to which 'Jane Eyre' was raised by some injudicious admirers. She is where I meant her to be, and where no charge of self-laudation can touch her.

"The note you sent this morning from Lady Harriette St. Clair, is precisely to the same purport as Miss Muloch's request, — an application for exact and authentic information respecting the fate of M. Paul Emanuel! You see how much the ladies think of this little man, whom you none of you like. I had a letter the other day; announcing that a lady of some note, who had always determined that whenever, she married, her husband should be the counterpart of 'Mr. Knightly' in Miss Austen's 'Emma,' had now changed her mind, and vowed that she would either find the duplicate of Professor Emanuel, or remain for ever single! I have sent Lady Harriette an answer so worded as to leave the matter pretty much where it was. Since the little puzzle amuses the ladies, it would be a pity to spoil their sport by giving them the key."

When Easter, with its duties arising out of sermons to be preached by strange clergymen who had afterwards to be entertained at the Parsonage, — with Mechanics' Institute Meetings, and school tea-drinkings, was over and gone; she came, at the close of April, to visit us in Manchester. We had a friend, a young lady, staying with us. Miss Bronte had expected to find us alone; and although our friend was gentle and sensible after Miss Bronte's own heart, yet her presence was enough to create a nervous tremour. I was aware that both of our guests were unusually silent; and I saw a little shiver run from time to time over Miss Bronte's frame. I could account for the modest reserve of the young lady; and the next day Miss Bronte told me how the unexpected sight of a strange face had affected her.

It was now two or three years since I had witnessed a similar effect produced on her; in anticipation of a quiet evening at Fox-How; and since then she had seen many and various people in London: but the physical sensations produced by shyness were still the same; and on the following day she laboured under severe headache. I had several opportunities of perceiving how this nervousness was ingrained in her constitution, and how acutely she suffered in striving to overcome it. One evening we had, among other guests, two sisters who sang Scottish ballads exquisitely. Miss Bronte had been sitting quiet and constrained till they began "The Bonnie House of Airlie," but the effect of that and "Carlisle Yetts," which followed, was as irresistible as the playing of the Piper of Hamelin. The beautiful clear light came into her eyes; her lips quivered with emotion; she forgot herself, rose, and crossed the room to the piano, where she asked eagerly for song after song. The sisters begged her to come and see them the next morning, when they would sing as long as ever she liked; and she promised gladly and thankfully. But on reaching the house her courage failed. We walked some time up and down the street; she upbraiding herself all the while for folly, and trying to dwell on the sweet echoes in her memory rather than on the thought of a third sister who would have to be faced if we went in. But it was of no use; and dreading lest this struggle with herself might bring on one of her trying headaches, I entered at last and made the best apology I could for her non-appearance. Much of this nervous dread of encountering strangers I ascribed to the idea of her personal ugliness, which had been strongly impressed upon her imagination early in life, and which she exaggerated to herself in a remarkable manner. “I notice,” said she, “that after a stranger has once looked at my face, he is careful not to let his eyes wander to that part of the room again!” A more untrue idea never entered into any one’s head. Two gentlemen who saw her during this visit, without knowing at the time who she was, were singularly attracted by her appearance; and this feeling of attraction towards a pleasant countenance, sweet voice, and gentle timid manners, was so strong in one as to conquer a dislike he had previously entertained to her works.

There was another circumstance that came to my knowledge at this period which told secrets about the finely-strung frame. One night I was on the point of relating some dismal ghost story, just before bed-time. She shrank from hearing it, and confessed that she was superstitious, and, prone at all times to the involuntary recurrence of any thoughts of ominous gloom which might have been suggested to her. She said that on first coming to us, she had found a letter on her dressing-table from a friend in Yorkshire, containing a story which had impressed her vividly ever since; — that it mingled with her dreams at night, and made her sleep restless and unrefreshing.

One day we asked two gentlemen to meet her at dinner; expecting that she and they would have a mutual pleasure in making each other’s acquaintance. To our disappointment she drew back with timid reserve from all their advances, replying to their questions and remarks in the briefest manner possible; till at last they gave up their efforts to draw her into conversation in despair, and talked to each other and my husband on subjects of recent local interest. Among these Thackeray’s Lectures (which had lately been delivered in Manchester) were spoken of and that on Fielding especially dwelt upon. One gentleman objected to it strongly, as calculated to do moral harm, and regretted that a man having so great an influence over the tone of thought of the day, as Thackeray, should not more carefully weigh his words. The other took the opposite view. He said that Thackeray described men from the inside, as it were; through his strong power of dramatic sympathy, he identified himself with certain characters, felt their temptations, entered into their pleasures, etc. This roused Miss Bronte, who threw herself warmly into the discussion; the ice of her reserve was broken, and from that time she showed her interest in all that was said, and contributed her share to any conversation that was going on in the course of the evening.

What she said, and which part she took, in the dispute about Thackeray’s lecture, may be gathered from the following letter, referring to the same subject: —

“The Lectures arrived safely; I have read them through twice. They must be studied to be appreciated. I thought well of them when I heard them delivered, but now I see their real power; and it is great. The lecture on Swift was new to me; I thought it almost matchless. Not that by any means I always agree with Mr. Thackeray's opinions, but his force, his penetration, his pithy simplicity, his eloquence — his manly sonorous eloquence, — command entire admiration. . . . Against his errors I protest, were it treason to do so. I was present at the Fielding lecture: the hour spent in listening to it was a painful hour. That Thackeray was wrong in his way of treating Fielding's character and vices, my conscience told me. After reading that lecture, I trebly felt that he was wrong — dangerously wrong. Had Thackeray owned a son, grown, or growing up, and a son, brilliant but reckless — would he have spoken in that light way of courses that lead to disgrace and the grave? He speaks of it all as if he theorised; as if he had never been called on, in the course of his life, to witness the actual consequences of such failings; as if he had never stood by and seen the issue, the final result of it all. I believe, if only once the prospect of a promising life blasted on the outset by wild ways had passed close under his eyes, he never COULD have spoken with such levity of what led to its piteous destruction. Had I a brother yet living, I should tremble to let him read Thackeray's lecture on Fielding. I should hide it away from him. If, in spite of precaution, it should fall into his hands, I should earnestly pray him not to be misled by the voice of the charmer, let him charm never so wisely. Not that for a moment I would have had Thackeray to ABUSE Fielding, or even Pharisaically to condemn his life; but I do most deeply grieve that it never entered into his heart sadly and nearly to feel the peril of such a career, that he might have dedicated some of his great strength to a potent warning against its adoption by any young man. I believe temptation often assails the finest manly natures; as the pecking sparrow or destructive wasp attacks the sweetest and mellowest fruit, eschewing what is sour and crude. The true lover of his race ought to devote his vigour to guard and protect; he should sweep away every lure with a kind of rage at its treachery. You will think this far too serious, I dare say; but the subject is serious, and one cannot help feeling upon it earnestly."

CHAPTER XIII.

After her visit to Manchester, she had to return to a re-opening of the painful circumstances of the previous winter, as the time drew near for Mr. Nicholl's departure from Haworth. A testimonial of respect from the parishioners was presented, at a public meeting, to one who had faithfully served them for eight years: and he left the place, and she saw no chance of hearing a word about him in the future, unless it was some second-hand scrap of intelligence, dropped out accidentally by one of the neighbouring clergymen.

I had promised to pay her a visit on my return from London in June; but, after the day was fixed, a letter came from Mr. Bronte, saying that she was suffering from so severe an attack of influenza, accompanied with such excruciating pain in the head, that he must request me to defer my visit until she was better. While sorry for the cause, I did not regret that my going was delayed till the season when the moors would be all glorious with the purple bloom of the heather; and thus present a scene about which she had often spoken to me. So we agreed that I should not come to her before August or September. Meanwhile, I received a letter from which I am tempted to take an extract, as it shows both her conception of what fictitious writing ought to be, and her always kindly interest in what I was doing.

"July 9th, 1853.

"Thank you for your letter; it was as pleasant as a quiet chat, as welcome as spring showers, as reviving as a friend's visit; in short, it was very like a page of 'Cranford.' . . . A thought strikes me. Do you, who have so many friends, — so large a circle of acquaintance, — find it easy, when you sit down to write, to isolate yourself from all those ties, and their sweet associations, so as to be your OWN WOMAN, uninfluenced or swayed by the consciousness of how your work may affect other minds; what blame or what sympathy it may call forth? Does no luminous cloud ever come between you and the severe Truth, as you know it in your own secret and clear-seeing soul? In a word, are you never tempted to make your characters more amiable than the Life, by the inclination to assimilate your thoughts to the thoughts of those who always FEEL kindly, but sometimes fail to SEE justly? Don't answer the question; it is not intended to be answered. . . . Your account of Mrs. Stowe was stimulatingly interesting. I long to see you, to get you to say it, and many other things, all over again. My father continues better. I am better too; but to-day I have a headache again, which will hardly let me write coherently. Give my dear love to M. and M., dear happy girls as they are. You cannot now transmit my message to F. and J. I prized the little wild-flower, — not that I think the sender cares for me; she DOES not, and CANNOT, for she does not know me; — but no matter. In my reminiscences she is a person of a certain distinction. I think hers a fine little nature, frank and of genuine promise. I often see her; as she appeared, stepping supreme from the portico towards the carriage, that evening we went to see 'Twelfth Night.' I believe in J.'s future; I like what speaks in her movements, and what is written upon her face."

Towards the latter end of September I went to Haworth. At the risk of repeating something which I have previously said, I will copy out parts of a letter which I wrote at the time.

"It was a dull, drizzly Indian-inky day, all the way on the railroad to Keighley, which is a rising wool-manufacturing town, lying in a hollow between hills — not a pretty hollow, but more what the Yorkshire people call a 'bottom,' or 'botham.' I left Keighley in a car for Haworth, four miles off — four tough, steep, scrambling miles, the road winding between the wavelike hills that rose and fell on every side of the horizon, with a long illimitable sinuous look, as if they were a part of the line of the Great Serpent, which the Norse legend says girdles the world. The day was lead-coloured; the road had stone factories alongside of it, — grey, dull-coloured rows of stone cottages belonging to these factories, and then we came to poor, hungry-looking fields; — stone fences everywhere, and trees nowhere. Haworth is a long, straggling village one steep narrow street — so steep that the flag-stones with which it is paved are placed end-ways, that the horses' feet may have something to cling to, and not slip down backwards; which if they did, they would soon reach Keighley. But if the horses had cats' feet and claws, they would do all the better. Well, we (the man, horse, car; and I) clambered up this street, and reached the church dedicated to St. Autest (who was he?); then we turned off into a lane on the left, past the curate's lodging at the Sexton's, past the school-house, up to the Parsonage yard-door. I went round the house to the front door, looking to the church; — moors everywhere beyond and above. The crowded grave-yard surrounds the house and small grass enclosure for drying clothes.

"I don't know that I ever saw a spot more exquisitely clean; the most dainty place for that I ever saw. To be sure, the life is like clock-work. No one comes to the house; nothing disturbs the deep repose; hardly a voice is heard; you catch the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, or the buzzing of a fly in the parlour, all over the house. Miss Bronte sits alone in her parlour; breakfasting with her father in his study at nine o'clock. She helps in the housework; for one of their servants, Tabby, is nearly ninety, and the other only a girl. Then I accompanied her in her walks on the sweeping moors the heather-bloom had been blighted by a thunder-storm a day or two before, and was all of a livid brown colour, instead of the blaze of purple glory it ought to have been. Oh those high, wild, desolate moors, up above the whole world, and the very realms of silence I Home to dinner at two. Mr. Bronte has his dinner sent into him. All the small table arrangements had the same dainty simplicity about them. Then we rested, and talked over the clear, bright fire; it is a cold country, and the fires were a pretty warm dancing light all over the house. The parlour had been evidently refurnished within the last few years, since Miss Bronte's success has enabled her to have a little more money to spend. Everything fits into, and is in harmony with, the idea of a country parsonage, possessed by people of very moderate means. The prevailing colour of the room is crimson, to make a warm setting for the cold grey landscape without. There is her likeness by Richmond, and an engraving from Lawrence's picture of Thackeray; and two recesses, on each side of the high, narrow, old-fashioned mantelpiece, filled with books, — books given to her; books she has bought, and which tell of her individual pursuits and tastes; NOT standard books.

"She cannot see well, and does little beside knitting. The way she weakened her eyesight was this: When she was sixteen or seventeen, she wanted much to draw; and she copied niminipimini copper-plate engravings out of annuals, ('stippling,' don't the artists call it?) every little point put in, till at the end of six months she had produced an exquisitely faithful copy of the engraving. She wanted to learn to express her ideas by drawing. After she had tried to DRAW stories, and not succeeded, she took the better mode of writing; but in so small a hand, that it is almost impossible to decipher what she wrote at this time.

"But now to return to our quiet hour of rest after dinner. I soon observed that her habits of order were such that she could not go on with the conversation, if a chair was out of its place; everything was arranged with delicate regularity. We talked over the old times of her childhood; of her elder sister's (Maria's) death, — just like that of Helen Burns in 'Jane Eyre;' of those strange, starved days at school; of the desire (almost amounting to illness) of expressing herself in some way, — writing or drawing; of her weakened eyesight, which prevented her doing anything for two years, from the age of seventeen to nineteen; of her being a governess; of her going to Brussels; whereupon I said I disliked Lucy Snowe, and we discussed M. Paul Emanuel; and I told her of — —'s admiration of 'Shirley,' which pleased her; for the character of Shirley was meant for her sister Emily, about whom she is never tired of talking, nor I of listening. Emily must have been a remnant of the Titans, — great-grand-daughter of the giants who used to inhabit earth. One day, Miss Bronte brought down a rough, common-looking oil-painting, done by her brother, of herself, — a little, rather prim-looking girl of eighteen, — and the two other sisters, girls of sixteen and fourteen, with cropped hair, and sad, dreamy-looking eyes. . . . Emily had a great dog — half mastiff, half bull-dog — so savage, etc. . . . This dog went to her funeral, walking side by side with her father; and then, to the day of its death, it slept at her room door; snuffing under it, and whining every morning.

"We have generally had another walk before tea, which is at six; at half-past eight, prayers; and by nine, all the household are in bed, except ourselves.

We sit up together till ten, or past; and after I go, I hear Miss Bronte comedown and walk up and down the room for an hour or so."

Copying this letter has brought the days of that pleasant visit very clear before me, — very sad in their clearness. We were so happy together; we were so full of interest in each other's subjects. The day seemed only too short for what we had to say and to hear. I understood her life the better for seeing the place where it had been spent — where she had loved and suffered. Mr. Bronte was a most courteous host; and when he was with us, — at breakfast in his study, or at tea in Charlotte's parlour, — he had a sort of grand and stately way of describing past times, which tallied well with his striking appearance. He never seemed quite to have lost the feeling that Charlotte was a child to be guided and ruled, when she was present; and she herself submitted to this with a quiet docility that half amused, half astonished me. But when she had to leave the room, then all his pride in her genius and fame came out. He eagerly listened to everything I could tell him of the high admiration I had at any time heard expressed for her works. He would ask for certain speeches over and over again, as if he desired to impress them on his memory.

I remember two or three subjects of the conversations which she and I held in the evenings, besides those alluded to in my letter.

I asked her whether she had ever taken opium, as the description given of its effects in "Villette" was so exactly like what I had experienced, — vivid and exaggerated presence of objects, of which the outlines were indistinct, or lost in golden mist , etc. She replied, that she had never, to her knowledge, taken a grain of it in any shape, but that she had followed the process she always adopted when she had to describe anything which had not fallen within her own experience; she had thought intently on it for many and many a night before falling to sleep, — wondering what it was like, or how it would be, — till at length, sometimes after the progress of her story had been arrested at this one point for weeks, she wakened up in the morning with all clear before her, as if she had in reality gone through the experience, and then could describe it, word for word, as it had happened. I cannot account for this psychologically; I only am sure that it was so, because she said it.

She made many inquiries as to Mrs. Stowe's personal appearance; and it evidently harmonised well with some theory of hers, to hear that the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin was small and slight. It was another theory of hers, that no mixtures of blood produced such fine characters, mentally and morally, as the Scottish and English.

I recollect, too, her saying how acutely she dreaded a charge of plagiarism, when, after she had written "Jane Eyre;" she read the thrilling effect of the mysterious scream at midnight in Mrs. Marsh's story of the "Deformed." She also said that, when she read the "Neighbours," she thought every one would fancy that she must have taken her conception of Jane Eyre's character from that of "Francesca," the narrator of Miss Bremer's story. For my own part, I cannot see the slightest resemblance between the two characters, and so I told her; but she persisted in saying that Francesca was Jane Eyre married to a good-natured “Bear” of a Swedish surgeon.

We went, not purposely, but accidentally, to see various poor people in our distant walks. From one we had borrowed an umbrella; in the house of another we had taken shelter from a rough September storm. In all these cottages, her quiet presence was known. At three miles from her home, the chair was dusted for her, with a kindly “Sit ye down, Miss Bronte;” and she knew what absent or ailing members of the family to inquire after. Her quiet, gentle words, few though they might be, were evidently grateful to those Yorkshire ears. Their welcome to her, though rough and curt, was sincere and hearty.

We talked about the different courses through which life ran. She said, in her own composed manner, as if she had accepted the theory as a fact, that she believed some were appointed beforehand to sorrow and much disappointment; that it did not fall to the lot of all — as Scripture told us — to have their lines fall in pleasant places; that it was well for those who had rougher paths, to perceive that such was God’s will concerning them, and try to moderate their expectations, leaving hope to those of a different doom, and seeking patience and resignation as the virtues they were to cultivate. I took a different view: I thought that human lots were more equal than she imagined; that to some happiness and sorrow came in strong patches of light and shadow, (so to speak), while in the lives of others they were pretty equally blended throughout. She smiled, and shook her head, and said she was trying to school herself against ever anticipating any pleasure; that it was better to be brave and submit faithfully; there was some good reason, which we should know in time, why sorrow and disappointment were to be the lot of some on earth. It was better to acknowledge this, and face out the truth in a religious faith.

In connection with this conversation, she named a little abortive plan which I had not heard of till then; how, in the previous July, she had been tempted to join some friends (a married couple and their child) in an excursion to Scotland. They set out joyfully; she with especial gladness, for Scotland was a land which had its roots deep down in her imaginative affections, and the glimpse of two days at Edinburgh was all she had as yet seen of it. But, at the first stage after Carlisle, the little yearling child was taken with a slight indisposition; the anxious parents fancied that strange diet disagreed with it, and hurried back to their Yorkshire home as eagerly as, two or three days before, they had set their faces northward, in hopes of a month’s pleasant ramble.

We parted with many intentions, on both sides, of renewing very frequently the pleasure we had had in being together. We agreed that when she wanted bustle, or when I wanted quiet, we were to let each other know, and exchange visits as occasion required.

I was aware that she had a great anxiety on her mind at this time; and being acquainted with its nature, I could not but deeply admire the patient docility which she displayed in her conduct towards her father.

Soon after I left Haworth, she went on a visit to Miss Wooler, who was then staying at Hornsea. The time passed quietly and happily with this friend, whose society was endeared to her by every year.

To Miss WOOLER

"Dec. 12th, 1853.

"I wonder how you are spending these long winter evenings. Alone, probably, like me. The thought often crosses me, as I sit by myself, how pleasant it would be if you lived within a walking distance, and I could go to you sometimes, or have you to come and spend a day and night with me. Yes; I did enjoy that week at Hornsea, and I look forward to spring as the period when you will fulfil your promise of coming to visit me. I fear you must be very solitary at Hornsea. How hard to some people of the world it would seem to live your life! how utterly impossible to live it with a serene spirit and an unsoured disposition! It seems wonderful to me, because you are not, like Mrs. — — , phlegmatic and impenetrable, but received from nature feelings of the very finest edge. Such feelings, when they are locked up, sometimes damage the mind and temper. They don't with you. It must be partly principle, partly self-discipline, which keeps you as you are."

Of course, as I draw nearer to the years so recently closed, it becomes impossible for me to write with the same fulness of detail as I have hitherto not felt it wrong to use. Miss Bronte passed the winter of 1853-4 in a solitary and anxious manner. But the great conqueror Time was slowly achieving his victory over strong prejudice and human resolve. By degrees Mr. Bronte became reconciled to the idea of his daughter's marriage.

There is one other letter, addressed to Mr. Dobell, which developes the intellectual side of her character, before we lose all thought of the authoress in the timid and conscientious woman about to become a wife, and in the too short, almost perfect, happiness of her nine months of wedded life.

"Haworth, near Keighley,

"Feb. 3rd, 1854.

"My dear Sir, — I can hardly tell you how glad I am to have an opportunity of explaining that taciturnity to which you allude. Your letter came at a period of danger and care, when my father was very ill, and I could not leave his bedside. I answered no letters at that time, and yours was one of three or four that, when leisure returned to me, and I came to consider their purport, it seemed to me such that the time was past for answering them, and I laid them finally aside. If you remember, you asked me to go to London; it was too late either to go or to decline. I was sure you had left London. One circumstance you mentioned — your wife's illness — which I have thought of many a time, and wondered whether she is better. In your present note you do not refer to her, but I trust her health has long ere now been quite restored.

"'Balder' arrived safely. I looked at him, before cutting his leaves with singular pleasure. Remembering well his elder brother, the potent ‘Roman,’ it was natural to give a cordial welcome to a fresh scion of the same house and race. I have read him. He impressed me thus he teems with power; I found in him a wild wealth of life, but I thought his favourite and favoured child would bring his sire trouble — would make his heart ache. It seemed to me, that his strength and beauty were not so much those of Joseph, the pillar of Jacob’s age, as of the Prodigal Son, who troubled his father, though he always kept his love.

“How is it that while the first-born of genius often brings honour, the second as almost often proves a source of depression and care? I could almost prophesy that your third will atone for any anxiety inflicted by this his immediate predecessor.

“There is power in that character of ‘Balder,’ and to me a certain horror. Did you mean it to embody, along with force, any of the special defects of the artistic character? It seems to me that those defects were never thrown out in stronger lines. I did not and could not think you meant to offer him as your cherished ideal of the true, great poet; I regarded him as a vividly-coloured picture of inflated self-esteem, almost frantic aspiration; of a nature that has made a Moloch of intellect — offered up; in pagan fires, the natural affections — sacrificed the heart to the brain. Do we not all know that true greatness is simple, self-oblivious, prone to unambitious, unselfish attachments? I am certain you feel this truth in your heart of hearts.

“But if the critics err now (as yet I have seen none of their lucubrations), you shall one day set them right in the second part of ‘Balder.’ You shall show them that you too know — better, perhaps, than they — that the truly great man is too sincere in his affections to grudge a sacrifice; too much absorbed in his work to talk loudly about it; too intent on finding the best way to accomplish what he undertakes to think great things of himself — the instrument. And if God places seeming impediments in his way — if his duties sometimes seem to hamper his powers — he feels keenly, perhaps writhes, under the slow torture of hindrance and delay; but if there be a true man’s heart in his breast, he can bear, submit, wait patiently.

“Whoever speaks to me of ‘Balder’ — though I live too retired a life to come often in the way of comment — shall be answered according to your suggestion and my own impression. Equity demands that you should be your own interpreter. Good-bye for the present, and believe me,

“Faithfully and gratefully,

“CHARLOTTE BRONTE.

“Sydney Dobell, Esq.”

A letter to her Brussels schoolfellow gives an idea of the external course of things during this winter.

“March 8th.

“I was very glad to see your handwriting again. It is, I believe, a year since I heard from you. Again and again you have recurred to my thoughts lately, and I was beginning to have some sad presages as to the cause of your silence. Your letter happily does away with all these; it brings, on the whole, glad tidings both of your papa, mama, your sisters, and, last but not least, your dear respected English self.

"My dear father has borne the severe winter very well, a circumstance for which I feel the more thankful as he had many weeks of very precarious health last summer, following an attack from which he suffered in June, and which for a few hours deprived him totally of sight, though neither his mind, speech, nor even his powers of motion were in the least affected. I can hardly tell you how thankful I was, when, after that dreary and almost despairing interval of utter darkness, some gleam of daylight became visible to him once more. I had feared that paralysis had seized the optic nerve. A sort of mist remained for a long time; and, indeed, his vision is not yet perfectly clear, but he can read, write, and walk about, and he preaches TWICE every Sunday, the curate only reading the prayers. YOU can well understand how earnestly I wish and pray that sight may be spared him to the end; he so dreads the privation of blindness. His mind is just as strong and active as ever, and politics interest him as they do YOUR papa. The Czar, the war, the alliance between France and England — into all these things he throws himself heart and soul; they seem to carry him back to his comparatively young days, and to renew the excitement of the last great European struggle. Of course my father's sympathies (and mine too) are all with Justice and Europe against Tyranny and Russia.

"Circumstanced as I have been, you will comprehend that I have had neither the leisure nor the inclination to go from home much during the past year. I spent a week with Mrs. Gaskell in the spring, and a fortnight with some other friends more recently, and that includes the whole of my visiting since I saw you last. My life is, indeed, very uniform and retired — more so than is quite healthful either for mind or body; yet I find reason for often-renewed feelings of gratitude, in the sort of support which still comes and cheers me on from time to time. My health, though not unbroken, is, I sometimes fancy, rather stronger on the whole than it was three years ago headache and dyspepsia are my worst ailments. Whether I shall come up to town this season for a few days I do not yet know; but if I do, I shall hope to call in P. Place."

In April she communicated the fact of her engagement to Miss Wooler.

"Haworth, April 12th.

"My dear Miss Wooler, — The truly kind interest which you always taken in my affairs makes me feel that it is due to you to transmit an early communication on a subject respecting which I have already consulted you more than once. I must tell you then, that since I wrote last, papa's mind has gradually come round to a view very different to that which he once took; and that after some correspondence, and as the result of a visit Mr. Nicholls paid here about a week ago, it was agreed that he was to resume the curacy of

Haworth, as soon as papa's present assistant is provided with a situation, and in due course of time he is to be received as an inmate into this house.

"It gives me unspeakable content to see that now my father has once admitted this new view of the case, he dwells on it very complacently. In all arrangements, his convenience and seclusion will be scrupulously respected. Mr. Nicholls seems deeply to feel the wish to comfort and sustain his declining years. I think from Mr. Nicholls' character I may depend on this not being a mere transitory impulsive feeling, but rather that it will be accepted steadily as a duty, and discharged tenderly as an office of affection. The destiny which Providence in His goodness and wisdom seems to offer me will not, I am aware, be generally regarded as brilliant, but I trust I see in it some germs of real happiness. I trust the demands of both feeling and duty will be in some measure reconciled by the step in contemplation. It is Mr. Nicholls' wish that the marriage should take place this summer; he urges the month of July, but that seems very soon.

"When you write to me, tell me how you are. . . . I have now decidedly declined the visit to London; the ensuing three months will bring me abundance of occupation; I could not afford to throw away a month. . . . Papa has just got a letter from the good and dear bishop, which has touched and pleased us much; it expresses so cordial an approbation of Mr. Nicholls' return to Haworth (respecting which he was consulted), and such kind gratification at the domestic arrangements which are to ensue. It seems his penetration discovered the state of things when he was here in June 1853."

She expressed herself in other letters, as thankful to One who had guided her through much difficulty and much distress and perplexity of mind; and yet she felt what most thoughtful women do, who marry when the first flush of careless youth is over, that there was a strange half-sad feeling, in making announcements of an engagement — for cares and fears came mingled inextricably with hopes. One great relief to her mind at this time was derived from the conviction that her father took a positive pleasure in all the thoughts about and preparations for her wedding. He was anxious that things should be expedited, and was much interested in every preliminary arrangement for the reception of Mr. Nicholls into the Parsonage as his daughter's husband. This step was rendered necessary by Mr. Bronte's great age, and failing sight, which made it a paramount obligation on so dutiful a daughter as Charlotte, to devote as much time and assistance as ever in attending to his wants. Mr. Nicholls, too, hoped that he might be able to add some comfort and pleasure by his ready presence, on any occasion when the old clergyman might need his services.

At the beginning of May, Miss Bronte left home to pay three visits before her marriage. The first was to us. She only remained three days, as she had to go to the neighbourhood of Leeds, there to make such purchases as were required for her marriage. Her preparations, as she said, could neither be expensive nor extensive; consisting chiefly in a modest replenishing of her wardrobe, some re-papering and re-painting in the Parsonage; and, above all, converting the small flagged passage-room, hitherto used only for stores (which was behind her sitting room), into a study for her husband. On this idea, and plans for his comfort, as well as her father's, her mind dwelt a good deal; and we talked them over with the same unwearying happiness which, I suppose, all women feel in such discussions — especially when money considerations call for that kind of contrivance which Charles Lamb speaks of in his Essay on Old China, as forming so great an addition to the pleasure of obtaining a thing at last.

"Haworth, May 22nd.

"Since I came home I have been very busy stitching; the little new room is got into order, and the green and white curtains are up; they exactly suit the papering, and look neat and clean enough. I had a letter a day or two since, announcing that Mr. Nicholls comes to-morrow. I feel anxious about him; more anxious on one point than I dare quite express to myself. It seems he has again been suffering sharply from his rheumatic affection. I hear this not from himself, but from another quarter. He was ill while I was in Manchester and B — — . He uttered no complaint to me; dropped no hint on the subject. Alas he was hoping he had got the better of it, and I know how this contradiction of his hopes will sadden him. For unselfish reasons he did so earnestly wish this complaint might not become chronic. I fear — I fear; but if he is doomed to suffer, so much the more will he need care and help. Well! come what may, God help and strengthen both him and me! I look forward to to-morrow with a mixture of impatience and anxiety."

Mr. Bronte had a slight illness which alarmed her much. Besides, all the weight of care involved in the household preparations pressed on the bride in this case — not unpleasantly, only to the full occupation of her time. She was too busy to unpack her wedding dresses for several days after they arrived from Halifax; yet not too busy to think of arrangements by which Miss Wooler's journey to be present at the marriage could be facilitated.

"I write to Miss Wooler to-day. Would it not be better, dear, if you and she could arrange to come to Haworth on the same day, arrive at Keighley by the same train; then I could order the cab to meet you at the station, and bring you on with your luggage? In this hot weather walking would be quite out of the question, either for you or for her; and I know she would persist in doing it if left to herself, and arrive half killed. I thought it better to mention this arrangement to you first, and then, if you liked it, you could settle the time, etc., with Miss Wooler, and let me know. Be sure and give me timely information, that I may write to the Devonshire Arms about the cab.

"Mr. Nicholls is a kind, considerate fellow. With all his masculine faults, he enters into my wishes about having the thing done quietly, in a way that makes me grateful; and if nobody interferes and spoils his arrangements, he will manage it so that not a soul in Haworth shall be aware of the day. He is so thoughtful, too, about 'the ladies,' — that is, you and Miss Wooler.

Anticipating, too, the very arrangements I was going to propose to him about providing for your departure, etc. He and Mr. S — — come to — — the evening before; write me a note to let me know they are there; precisely at eight in the morning they will be in the church, and there we are to meet them. Mr. and Mrs. Grant are asked to the breakfast, not to the ceremony.

It was fixed that the marriage was to take place on the 29th of June. Her two friends arrived at Haworth Parsonage the day before; and the long summer afternoon and evening were spent by Charlotte in thoughtful arrangements for the morrow, and for her father's comfort during her absence from home. When all was finished — the trunk packed, the morning's breakfast arranged, the wedding-dress laid out, — just at bedtime, Mr. Bronte announced his intention of stopping at home while the others went to church. What was to be done? Who was to give the bride away? There were only to be the officiating clergyman, the bride and bridegroom, the bridesmaid, and Miss Wooler present. The Prayer-book was referred to; and there it was seen that the Rubric enjoins that the Minister shall receive "the woman from her father's or FRIEND'S hands," and that nothing is specified as to the sex of the "friend." So Miss Wooler, ever kind in emergency, volunteered to give her old pupil away.

The news of the wedding had slipt abroad before the little party came out of church, and many old and humble friends were there, seeing her look "like a snow-drop," as they say. Her dress was white embroidered muslin, with a lace mantle, and white bonnet trimmed with green leaves, which perhaps might suggest the resemblance to the pale wintry flower.

Mr. Nicholls and she went to visit his friends and relations in Ireland; and made a tour by Killarney, Glengariff, Tarbert, Tralee, and Cork, seeing scenery, of which she says, "some parts exceeded all I had ever imagined." . . . "I must say I like my new relations. My dear husband, too, appears in a new light in his own country. More than once I have had deep pleasure in hearing his praises on all sides. Some of the old servants and followers of the family tell me I am a most fortunate person; for that I have got one of the best gentlemen in the country. . . . I trust I feel thankful to God for having enabled me to make what seems a right choice; and I pray to be enabled to repay as I ought the affectionate devotion of a truthful, honourable man."

Henceforward the sacred doors of home are closed upon her married life. We, her loving friends, standing outside, caught occasional glimpses of brightness, and pleasant peaceful murmurs of sound, telling of the gladness within; and we looked at each other, and gently said, "After a hard and long struggle — after many cares and many bitter sorrows — she is tasting happiness now!" We thought of the slight astringencies of her character, and how they would turn to full ripe sweetness in that calm sunshine of domestic peace. We remembered her trials, and were glad in the idea that God had seen fit to wipe away the tears from her eyes. Those who saw her, saw an outward change in her look, telling of inward things. And we thought, and we hoped, and we prophesied, in our great love and reverence.

But God’s ways are not as our ways!

Hear some of the low murmurs of happiness we, who listened, heard: —

“I really seem to have had scarcely a spare moment since that dim quiet June morning, when you, E — — , and myself all walked down to Haworth Church. Not that I have been wearied or oppressed; but the fact is, my time is not my own now; somebody else wants a good portion of it, and says, ‘we must do so and so.’ We DO so and so, accordingly; and it generally seems the right thing. . . . We have had many callers from a distance, and latterly some little occupation in the way of preparing for a small village entertainment. Both Mr. Nicholls and myself wished much to make some response for the hearty welcome and general goodwill shown by the parishioners on his return; accordingly, the Sunday and day scholars and teachers, the church-ringers, singers, etc., to the number of five hundred, were asked to tea and supper in the School-room. They seemed to enjoy it much, and it was very pleasant to see their happiness. One of the villagers, in proposing my husband’s health, described him as a ‘consistent Christian and a kind gentleman.’ I own the words touched me deeply, and I thought (as I know YOU would have thought had you been present) that to merit and win such a character was better than to earn either wealth, or fame, or power. I am disposed to echo that high but simple eulogium. . . . My dear father was not well when we returned from Ireland. I am, however, most thankful to say that he is better now. May God preserve him to us yet for some years! The wish for his continued life, together with a certain solicitude for his happiness and health, seems, I scarcely know why, even stronger in me now than before I was married. Papa has taken no duty since we returned; and each time I see Mr. Nicholls put on gown or surplice, I feel comforted to think that this marriage has secured papa good aid in his old age.”

“September 19th.

“Yes! I am thankful to say my husband is in improved health and spirits. It makes me content and grateful to hear him from time to time avow his happiness in the brief, plain phrase of sincerity. My own life is more occupied than it used to be I have not so much time for thinking I am obliged to be more practical, for my dear Arthur is a very practical, as well as a very punctual and methodical man. Every morning he is in the National School by nine o’clock; he gives the children religious instruction till half-past ten. Almost every afternoon he pays visits amongst the poor parishioners. Of course, he often finds a little work for his wife to do, and I hope she is not sorry to help him. I believe it is not bad for me that his bent should be so wholly towards matters of life and active usefulness; so little inclined to the literary and contemplative. As to his continued affection and kind attentions it does not become me to say much of them; but they neither change nor diminish.”

Her friend and bridesmaid came to pay them a visit in October. I was to have gone also, but I allowed some little obstacle to intervene, to my lasting regret.

"I say nothing about the war; but when I read of its horrors, I cannot help thinking that it is one of the greatest curses that ever fell upon mankind. I trust it may not last long, for it really seems to me that no glory to be gained can compensate for the sufferings which must be endured. This may seem a little ignoble and unpatriotic; but I think that as we advance towards middle age, nobleness and patriotism have a different signification to us to that which we accept while young."

"You kindly inquire after Papa. He is better, and seems to gain strength as the weather gets colder; indeed, of late years health has always been better in winter than in summer. We are all indeed pretty well; and, for my own part, it is long since I have known such comparative immunity from headache, etc., as during the last three months. My life is different from what it used to be. May God make me thankful for it! I have a good, kind, attached husband; and every day my own attachment to him grows stronger."

Late in the autumn, Sir James Kay Shuttleworth crossed the border-hills that separate Lancashire from Yorkshire, and spent two or three days with them.

About this time, Mr. Nicholls was offered a living of much greater value than his curacy at Haworth, and in many ways the proposal was a very advantageous one; but he felt himself bound to Haworth as long as Mr. Bronte lived. Still, this offer gave his wife great and true pleasure, as a proof of the respect in which her husband was held.

"Nov. 29.

"I intended to have written a line yesterday, but just as I was sitting down for the purpose, Arthur called to me to take a walk. We set off, not intending to go far; but, though wild and cloudy, it was fair in the morning; when we had got about half a mile on the moors, Arthur suggested the idea of the waterfall; after the melted snow, he said, it would be fine. I had often wished to see it in its winter power, — so we walked on. It was fine indeed; a perfect torrent racing over the rocks, white and beautiful! It began to rain while we were watching it, and we returned home under a streaming sky. However, I enjoyed the walk inexpressibly, and would not have missed the spectacle on any account"

She did not achieve this walk of seven or eight miles, in such weather, with impunity. She began to shiver soon after her return home, in spite of every precaution, and had a bad lingering sore throat and cold, which hung about her; and made her thin and weak.

"Did I tell you that our poor little Flossy is dead? She drooped for a single day, and died quietly in the night without pain. The loss even of a dog was very saddening; yet, perhaps, no dog ever had a happier life, or an easier death."

On Christmas-day she and her husband walked to the poor old woman (whose calf she had been set to seek in former and less happy days), carrying with them a great spice-cake to make glad her heart. On Christmas-day many a humble meal in Haworth was made more plentiful by her gifts.

Early in the new year (1855), Mr. and Mrs. Nicholls went to visit Sir James Kay Shuttleworth at Gawthorpe. They only remained two or three days, but it so fell out that she increased her lingering cold, by a long walk over damp ground in thin shoes.

Soon after her return, she was attacked by new sensations of perpetual nausea, and ever-recurring faintness. After this state of things had lasted for some time; she yielded to Mr. Nicholls' wish that a doctor should be sent for. He came, and assigned a natural cause for her miserable indisposition; a little patience, and all would go right. She, who was ever patient in illness, tried hard to bear up and bear on. But the dreadful sickness increased and increased, till the very sight of food occasioned nausea. "A wren would have starved on what she ate during those last six weeks," says one. Tabby's health had suddenly and utterly given way, and she died in this time of distress and anxiety respecting the last daughter of the house she had served so long. Martha tenderly waited on her mistress, and from time to time tried to cheer her with the thought of the baby that was coming. "I dare say I shall be glad some time," she would say; "but I am so ill — so weary — " Then she took to her bed, too weak to sit up. From that last couch she wrote two notes — in pencil. The first, which has no date, is addressed to her own "Dear Nell."

"I must write one line out of my weary bed. The news of M — — 's probable recovery came like a ray of joy to me. I am not going to talk of my sufferings — it would be useless and painful. I want to give you an assurance, which I know will comfort you — and that is, that I find in my husband the tenderest nurse, the kindest support, the best earthly comfort that ever woman had. His patience never fails, and it is tried by sad days and broken nights. Write and tell me about Mrs. — — 's case; how long was she ill, and in what way? Papa — thank God! — is better. Our poor old Tabby is DEAD and BURIED. Give my kind love to Miss Wooler. May God comfort and help you.

"C. B. NICHOLLS."

The other — also in faint, faint pencil marks — was to her Brussels schoolfellow.

"Feb. 15th.

"A few lines of acknowledgment your letter SHALL have, whether well or ill. At present I am confined to my bed with illness, and have been so for three weeks. Up to this period, since my marriage, I have had excellent health. My husband and I live at home with my father; of course, I could not leave HIM. He is pretty well, better than last summer. No kinder, better husband than mine, it seems to me, there can be in the world. I do not want now for kind companionship in health and the tenderest nursing in sickness. Deeply I sympathise in all you tell me about Dr. W. and your excellent mother's anxiety. I trust he will not risk another operation. I cannot write more now; for I am much reduced and very weak. God bless you all. — Yours affectionately,

“C. B. NICHOLLS.”

I do not think she ever wrote a line again. Long days and longer nights went by; still the same relentless nausea and faintness, and still borne on in patient trust. About the third week in March there was a change; a low wandering delirium came on; and in it she begged constantly for food and even for stimulants. She swallowed eagerly now; but it was too late. Wakening for an instant from this stupor of intelligence, she saw her husband’s woe-worn face, and caught the sound of some murmured words of prayer that God would spare her. “Oh!” she whispered forth, “I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us, we have been so happy.”

Early on Saturday morning, March 31st, the solemn tolling of Haworth church-bell spoke forth the fact of her death to the villagers who had known her from a child, and whose hearts shivered within them as they thought of the two sitting desolate and alone in the old grey house.

CHAPTER XIV.

I have always been much struck with a passage in Mr. Forster's Life of Goldsmith. Speaking of the scene after his death, the writer says: —

"The staircase of Brick Court is said to have been filled with mourners, the reverse of domestic; women without a home, without domesticity of any kind, with no friend but him they had come to weep for; outcasts of that great, solitary, wicked city, to whom he had never forgotten to be kind and charitable."

This came into my mind when I heard of some of the circumstances attendant on Charlotte's funeral.

Few beyond that circle of hills knew that she, whom the nations praised far off, lay dead that Easter mooring. Of kith and kin she had more in the grave to which she was soon to be borne, than among the living. The two mourners, stunned with their great grief, desired not the sympathy of strangers. One member out of most of the families in the parish was bidden to the funeral; and it became an act of self-denial in many a poor household to give up to another the privilege of paying their last homage to her; and those who were excluded from the formal train of mourners thronged the churchyard and church, to see carried forth, and laid beside her own people, her whom, not many months ago, they had looked at as a pale white bride, entering on a new life with trembling happy hope.

Among those humble friends who passionately grieved over the dead, was a village girl who had been seduced some little time before, but who had found a holy sister in Charlotte. She had sheltered her with her help, her counsel, her strengthening words; had ministered to her needs in her time of trial. Bitter, bitter was the grief of this poor young woman, when she heard that her friend was sick unto death, and deep is her mourning until this day. A blind girl, living some four miles from Haworth, loved Mrs. Nicholls so dearly that, with many cries and entreaties, she implored those about her to lead her along the roads, and over the moor-paths, that she might hear the last solemn words, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Such were the mourners over Charlotte Bronte's grave.

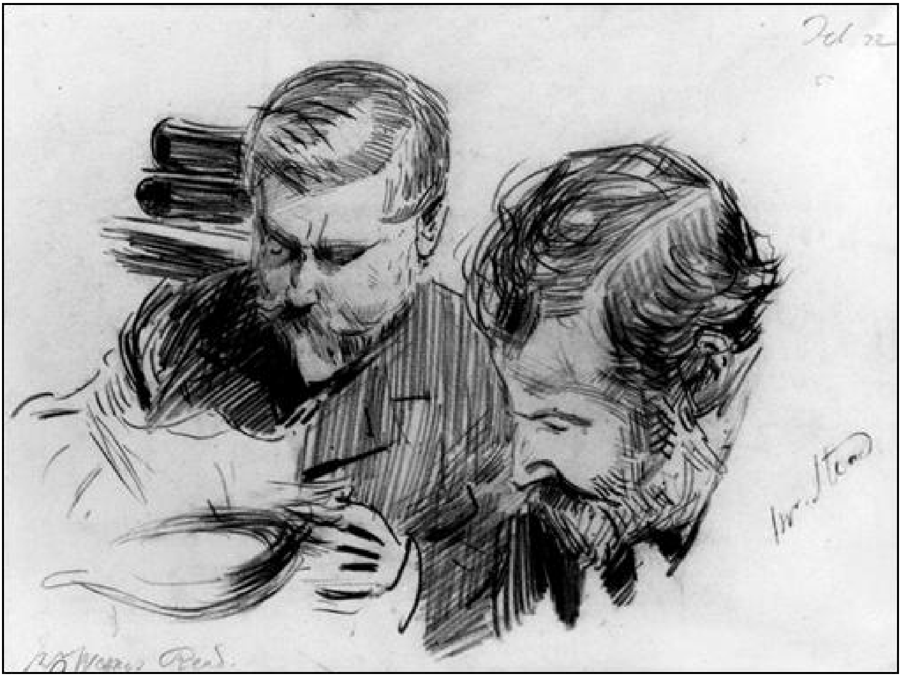
I have little more to say. If my readers find that I have not said enough, I have said too much. I cannot measure or judge of such a character as hers. I cannot map out vices, and virtues, and debatable land. One who knew her long and well, — the "Mary" of this Life — writes thus of her dead friend: —

"She thought much of her duty, and had loftier and clearer notions of it than most people, and held fast to them with more success. It was done, it seems to me, with much more difficulty than people have of stronger nerves, and better fortunes. All her life was but labour and pain; and she never threw down the burden for the sake of present pleasure. I don't know what use you can make of all I have said. I have written it with the strong desire to obtain appreciation for her. Yet, what does it matter? She herself appealed to the world's judgment for her use of some of the faculties she had, — not the best, — but still the only ones she could turn to strangers' benefit. They heartily, greedily enjoyed the fruits of her labours, and then found out she was much to be blamed for possessing such faculties. Why ask for a judgment on her from such a world?"

But I turn from the critical, unsympathetic public — inclined to judge harshly because they have only seen superficially and not thought deeply. I appeal to that larger and more solemn public, who know how to look with tender humility at faults and errors; how to admire generously extraordinary genius, and how to reverence with warm, full hearts all noble virtue. To that Public I commit the memory of Charlotte Bronte.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË by T. Wemyss Reid

Sir Thomas Wemyss Reid (1842–1905) was a British newspaper editor, novelist and biographer. He became chief reporter on the Newcastle Journal aged 19. While working on the Leeds Mercury, he won the right for provincial newspapers to be admitted to the House of Commons press gallery. From 1890–99, he edited his own moderate Liberal magazine *The Speaker* and wrote a number of biographies, including this detailed account of the life of Charlotte Bronte, which was first published in 1877.


Feb 22
Wm. Stead
Wemyss Reid.

Sir Thomas Wemyss Reid with William Thomas Stead, by Sydney Prior Hall, 1889

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CHARLOTTE BRONTË

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

It is just twenty years since one of the most fascinating and artistic biographies in the English language was given to the world. Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Brontë" no sooner appeared than it took firm possession of the public mind; and it has ever since retained its hold upon all who take an interest in the career of one who has been called, in language which is far less extravagant in reality than in appearance, "the foremost woman of her age." Written with admirable skill, in a style at once powerful and picturesque, and with a sympathy such as only one artist could feel for another, it richly merited the popularity which it gained and has kept. Mrs. Gaskell, however, laboured under one serious disadvantage, which no longer exists in anything like the same degree in which it did twenty years ago. Writing but a few months after Charlotte Brontë had been laid in her grave, and whilst the father to whom she was indebted for so much that was characteristic in her life and genius was still living, Mrs. Gaskell had necessarily to deal with many circumstances which affected living persons too closely to be handled in detail. Even as it was she involved herself in serious embarrassment by some of her allusions to incidents connected more or less nearly with the life of Charlotte Brontë; corrections and retractations were forced upon her, the later editions of the book differed considerably from the first, and at last she was compelled to announce that any further correspondence concerning it must be conducted through her solicitors. Thus she was crippled in her attempt to paint a full-length picture of a remarkable life, and her story was what Mr. Thackeray called it, "necessarily incomplete, though most touching and admirable."

There was, moreover, another matter in which Mrs. Gaskell was at fault. She seems to have set out with the determination that her work should be pitched in a particular key. She had formed her own conception of Charlotte Brontë's character, and with the passion of the true artist and the ability of the practised writer she made everything bend to that conception. The result was that whilst she produced a singularly striking and effective portrait of her heroine, it was not one which was absolutely satisfactory to those who were the oldest and closest friends of Charlotte Brontë. If the truth must be told, the life of the author of "Jane Eyre" was by no means so joyless as the world now believes it to have been. That during the later years in which this wonderful woman produced the works by which she has made her name famous, her career was clouded by sorrow and oppressed by anguish both mental and physical, is perfectly true. That she was made what she was in the furnace of affliction cannot be doubted; but it is not true that she was throughout her whole life the victim of that extreme depression of spirits which afflicted her at rare intervals, and which Mrs. Gaskell has presented to us with so much vividness and emphasis. On the contrary, her letters show that at any rate up to the time of her leaving for Brussels, she was a happy and high-spirited girl, and that even to the very last she had the faculty of overcoming her sorrows by means of that steadfast courage which was her most precious possession, and to which she was so much indebted for her successive victories over trials and disappointments of no ordinary character. Those who imagine that Charlotte Brontë's spirit was in any degree a morbid or melancholy one do her a singular injustice. Intensely reserved in her converse with all save the members of her own household, and the solitary friend to whom she clung with such passionate affection throughout her life, she revealed to these

The other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,

which were and have remained hidden from the world, but which must be seen by those who would know what Charlotte Brontë really was as a woman. Alas! those who knew her and her sisters well during their brief lives are few in number now. The Brontës who plucked the flower of fame out of the thorny waste in which their lots were cast survive in their books and in Mrs. Gaskell's biography. But the Brontës, the women who lived and suffered thirty years ago, and whose characters were instinct with so rare and lofty a nobility, so keen a sensitiveness, so pure a nobility, are known no longer.

Yet one mode of making acquaintance with them is still open to some among us. From her school-days down to the hour in which she was stretched prostrate in her last sickness, Charlotte Brontë kept up the closest and most confidential intercourse with her one life-long friend. To that friend she addressed letters which may be counted by hundreds, scarcely one of which fails to contain some characteristic touch worthy of the author of "Villette." No one can read this remarkable correspondence without learning the secret of the writer's character; none, as I believe, can read it without feeling that the woman who "stole like a shadow" into the field of English literature in 1847, and in less than eight years after stole as noiselessly away, was truer and nobler even than her works, truer and nobler even than that masterly picture of her life for which we are indebted to Mrs. Gaskell.

These letters lie before me as I write. Here are the faded sheets of 1832, written in the school-girl's hand, filled with the school-girl's extravagant terms of endearment, yet enriched here and there by sentences which are worthy to live — some of which have already, indeed, taken their place in the literature of England; and here is the faint pencil note written to "my own dear Nell" out of the writer's "dreary sick-bed," which was so soon to be the bed of death! Between the first letter and that last sad note what outpourings of the mind of Charlotte Brontë are embodied in this precious pile of cherished manuscript! Over five-and-twenty years of a blameless life this artless record stretches. So far as Charlotte Brontë's history as a woman, and the history of her family are concerned, it is complete for the whole of that period, the only breaks in the story being those which occurred when she and her friend were together. Of her early literary ventures we find little here, for even to her friend she did not dare in the first instance to betray the novel joys which filled her soul when she at last discovered her true vocation, and spoke to a listening world; but of her later life as an author, of her labours from the day when she owned "Jane Eyre" as the child of her brain, there are constant and abundant traces. Here, too, we read all her secret sorrows, her hopes, her fears, her communings with her own heart. Many things there are in this record too sacred to be given to the world. Even now it is with a tender and a reverent hand that one must touch these "noble letters of the dead;" but those who are allowed to see them, to read them and ponder over them, must feel as I do, that the soul of Charlotte Brontë stands revealed in these unpublished pages, and that only here can we see what manner of woman this really was who in the solitude and obscurity of the Yorkshire hill-parsonage built up for herself an imperishable name, enriched the literature of England with treasures of priceless value, and withal led for nearly forty years a life that was made sacred and noble by the self-repression and patient endurance which were its most marked characteristics.

Mrs. Gaskell has done her work so well that the world would scarcely care to listen to a mere repetition of the Brontë story, even though the story-teller were as gifted as the author of "Ruth" herself. But those who have been permitted to gain a new insight into Charlotte Brontë's character, those who are allowed to command materials of which the biographer of 1857 could make no use, may venture to lay a tribute-wreath of their own upon the altar of this great woman's memory — a tribute-wreath woven of flowers culled from her own letters. And it cannot be that the time is yet come when the name or the fame or the touching story of the unique and splendid genius to whom we owe "Jane Eyre," will fall upon the ears of English readers like "a tale of little meaning" or of doubtful interest.

II.

THE STORY OF "JANE EYRE."

In the late autumn of 1847 the reading public of London suddenly found itself called to admire and wonder at a novel which, without preliminary puff of any kind, had been placed in its hands. "'Jane Eyre,' by Currer Bell," became the theme of every tongue, and society exhausted itself in conjectures as to the identity of the author, and the real meaning of the book. It was no ordinary book, and it produced no ordinary sensation. Disfigured here and there by certain crudities of thought and by a clumsiness of expression which betrayed the hand of a novice, it was nevertheless lit up from the first page to the last by the fire of a genius the depth and power of which none but the dullest could deny. The hand of its author seized upon the public mind whether it would or no, and society was led captive, in the main against its will, by one who had little of the prevailing spirit of the age, and who either knew nothing of conventionalism, or despised it with heart and soul. Fierce was the revolt against the influence of this new-comer in the wide arena of letters, who had stolen in, as it were in the night, and taken the citadel by surprise. But for the moment all opposition was beaten down by sheer force of genius, and "Jane Eyre" made her way, compelling recognition, wherever men and women were capable of seeing and admitting a rare and extraordinary intellectual supremacy. "How well I remember," says Mr. Thackeray, "the delight and wonder and pleasure with which I read 'Jane Eyre,' sent to me by an author whose name and sex were then alike unknown to me; and how with my own work pressing upon me, I could not, having taken the volumes up, lay them down until they were read through." It was the same everywhere. Even those who saw nothing to commend in the story, those who revolted against its free employment of great passions and great griefs, and those who were elaborately critical upon its author's ignorance of the ways of polite society, had to confess themselves bound by the spell of the magician. "Jane Eyre" gathered admirers fast; and for every admirer she had a score of readers.

Those who remember that winter of nine-and-twenty years ago know how something like a "Jane Eyre" fever raged among us. The story which had suddenly discovered a glory in uncomeliness, a grandeur in overmastering passion, moulded the fashion of the hour, and "Rochester airs" and "Jane Eyre graces" became the rage. The book, and its fame and influence, travelled beyond the seas with a speed which in those days was marvellous. In sedate New England homes the history of the English governess was read with an avidity which was not surpassed in London itself, and within a few months of the publication of the novel it was famous throughout two continents. No such triumph has been achieved in our time by any other English author; nor can it be said, upon the whole, that many triumphs have been better merited. It happened that this anonymous story, bearing the unmistakable marks of an unpractised hand, was put before the world at the very moment when another great masterpiece of fiction was just beginning to gain the ear of the English public. But at the moment of publication “Jane Eyre” swept past “Vanity Fair” with a marvellous and impetuous speed which left Thackeray’s work in the distant background; and its unknown author in a few weeks gained a wider reputation than that which one of the master minds of the century had been engaged for long years in building up.

The reaction from this exaggerated fame, of course, set in, and it was sharp and severe. The blots in the book were easily hit; its author’s unfamiliarity with the stage business of the play was evident enough — even to dunces; so it was a simple matter to write smart articles at the expense of a novelist who laid himself open to the whole battery of conventional criticism. In “Jane Eyre” there was much painting of souls in their naked reality; the writer had gauged depths which the plummet of the common story-teller could never have sounded, and conflicting passions were marshalled on the stage with a masterful daring which Shakespeare might have envied; but the costumes, the conventional by-play, the scenery, even the wording of the dialogue, were poor enough in all conscience. The merest playwright or reviewer could have done better in these matters — as the unknown author was soon made to understand. Additional piquancy was given to the attack by the appearance, at the very time when the “Jane Eyre” fever was at its height, of two other novels, written by persons whose sexless names proclaimed them the brothers or the sisters of Currer Bell. Human nature is not so much changed from what it was in 1847 that one need apologise for the readiness with which the reading world in general, and the critical world in particular, adopted the theory that “Wuthering Heights” and “Agnes Grey” were earlier works from the pen which had given them “Jane Eyre.” In “Wuthering Heights” some of the faults of the other book were carried to an extreme, and some of its conspicuous merits were distorted and exaggerated until they became positive blemishes; whilst “Agnes Grey” was a feeble and commonplace tale which it was easy to condemn. So the author of “Jane Eyre” was compelled to bear not only her own burden, but that of the two stories which had followed the successful novel; and the reviewers — ignorant of the fact that they were killing three birds at a single shot — rejoiced in the larger scope which was thus afforded to their critical energy.

Here and there, indeed, a manful fight on behalf of Currer Bell was made by writers who knew nothing but the name and the book. “It is soul speaking to soul,” cried *Fraser’s Magazine* in December, 1847; “it is not a book for prudes,” added *Blackwood*, a few months later; “it is not a book for effeminate and tasteless men; it is for the enjoyment of a feeling heart and critical understanding.” But in the main the verdict of the critics was adverse. It was discovered that the story was improper and immoral; it was said to be filled with descriptions of “courtship after the manner of kangaroos,” and to be impregnated with a “heathenish doctrine of religion;” whilst there went up a perfect chorus of reprobation directed against its “coarseness of language,” “laxity of tone,” “horrid taste,” and “sheer rudeness and vulgarity.” From the book to the author was of course an easy transition. London had been bewildered, and its literary quidnuncs utterly puzzled, when such a story first came forth inscribed with an unknown name. Many had been the rumours eagerly passed from mouth to mouth as to the real identity of Currer Bell. Upon one point there had, indeed, been something like unanimity among the critics, and the story of “Jane Eyre” had been accepted as something more than a romance, as a genuine autobiography in which real and sorrowful experiences were related. Even the most hostile critic of the book had acknowledged that “it contained the story of struggles with such intense suffering and sorrow, as it was sufficient misery to know that any one had conceived, far less passed through.” Where then was this wonderful governess to be found? In what obscure hiding-place could the forlorn soul, whose cry of agony had stirred the hearts of readers everywhere, be discovered? We may smile now, with more of sadness than of bitterness, at the base calumnies of the hour, put forth in mere wantonness and levity by a people ever seeking to know some new thing, and to taste some new sensation. The favourite theory of the day — a theory duly elaborated and discussed in the most orthodox and respectable of the reviews — was that Jane Eyre and Becky Sharp were merely different portraits of the same character; and that their original was to be found in the person of a discarded mistress of Mr. Thackeray, who had furnished the great author with a model for the heroine of “Vanity Fair,” and had revenged herself upon him by painting him as the Rochester of “Jane Eyre!” It was after dwelling upon this marvellous theory of the authorship of the story that the *Quarterly Review*, with Pecksniffian charity, calmly summed up its conclusions in these memorable words: “If we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has for some sufficient reason long forfeited the society of her own sex.”

The world knows the truth now. It knows that these bitter and shameful words were applied to one of the truest and purest of women; to a woman who from her birth had led a life of self-sacrifice and patient endurance; to a woman whose affections dwelt only in the sacred shelter of her home, or with companions as pure and worthy as herself; to one of those few women who can pour out all their hearts in converse with their friends, happy in the assurance that years hence the stranger into whose hands their frank confessions may pass will find nothing there that is not loyal, true, and blameless. There was wonder among the critics, wonder too in the gay world of London, when the secret was revealed, and men were told that the author of “Jane Eyre” was no passionate light-o’-love who had merely transcribed the sad experiences of her own life; but “an austere little Joan of Arc,” pure, gentle, and high-minded, of whom Thackeray himself could say that “a great and holy reverence of right and truth seemed to be with her always.” The quidnuncs had searched far and wide for the author of “Jane Eyre;” but we may well doubt whether, when the truth came out at last, they were not more than ever mystified by the discovery that Currer Bell was Charlotte Brontë, the young daughter of a country parson in a remote moorland parish of Yorkshire.

That such a woman should have written such a book was more than a nine days’ wonder; and for the key to that which is one of the great marvels and mysteries of English literature we must go to Charlotte Brontë’s life itself.

III.

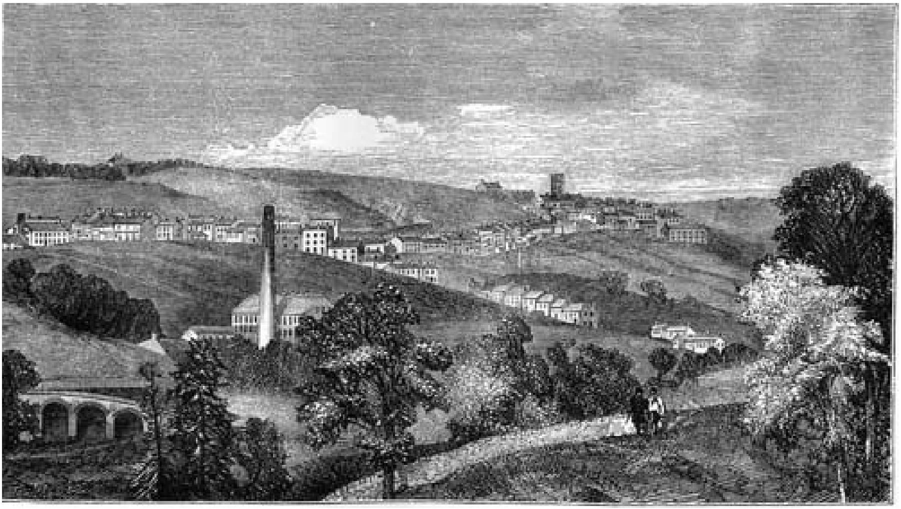
EARLY HISTORY OF THE BRONTËS.

There is a striking passage in Mr. Greg's "Enigmas of Life," in which the influence of external circumstances upon the inner lives of men and women is dwelt upon somewhat minutely, and, by way of example, the connection between religious "conviction" and an imperfect digestion is carefully traced out. That we are the creatures of circumstance can hardly be doubted, nor that our destinies are moulded, just as the coral reefs are built, by the action of innumerable influences, each in itself apparently trivial and insignificant. But the habit which leads men to find a full explanation of the lives of those who have attained exceptional distinction in the circumstances amid which their lot has been cast cannot be said to be a very wholesome or happy one. Few have suffered more cruelly from this trick than the Brontë family. Graphic pictures have been presented to the world of their home among the hills, and of their surroundings in their early years; whilst the public have been asked to believe that some great shadow of gloom rested over their lives from their birth, and that to this fact, and to the influence of the moors, must be attributed, not only the peculiar bent of their genius, but the whole colour and shape of their lives. Those who are thus determined to account for everything that lies out of the range of common experience would do well, before they attempt to analyse the great mystery of genius, to reveal to us the true cause of the superlative excellence of this or that rare *cru*, the secret which gives Johannisberg or Château d'Yquem its glory in the eyes of connoisseurs. Circumstances apparently have little to do with the production of the fragrance and bouquet of these famous wines; for we know that grapes growing close at hand on similar vines and seemingly under precisely similar conditions, warmed by the same sun, refreshed by the same showers, fanned by the same breezes, produce a wine which is comparatively worthless. When the world has expounded this riddle, it will be time enough to deal with that deeper problem of genius on which we are now too apt to lay presumptuous and even violent hands.

The Brontës have suffered grievously from this fashion, inasmuch as their picturesque and striking surroundings have been allowed to obscure our view of the women themselves. We have made a picture of their lives, and have filled in the mere accessories with such pre-Raphaelite minuteness that the distinct individuality of the heroines has been blurred and confused amid the general blaze of vivid colour, the crowd of "telling" points. No individual is to be blamed for this fact. The world, as we have seen, was first introduced to

"Currer Bell" and her sisters under romantic circumstances; the lives of those simple, sternly-honest women were enveloped from the moment when the public made their acquaintance in a certain haze of romantic mystery; and when all had passed away, and the time came for the "many-headed beast" to demand the full satisfaction of its curiosity, it would have nothing but the completion of that romance which from the first it had figured in outline for itself.

Who then does not know the salient points of that strange and touching story which tells us how the author of "Jane Eyre" lived and died? Who is not acquainted with that grim parsonage among the hills, where the sisters dwelt amidst such uncongenial and even weird influences; living like recluses in the house of a Protestant pastor; associated with sorrow and suffering, and terrible pictures of degrading vice, during their blameless maidenhood; constructing an ideal world of their own, and dwelling in it heedless of the real world which was in motion all around them? Who has not been amused and interested by those graphic pictures of Yorkshire life in the last century, in which the local flavour is so intense and piquant, and which are hardly the less interesting because they relate to an order of things which had passed away entirely long before the Brontës appeared upon the stage? And who has not been moved by the dark tragedy of Branwell Brontë's life, hinted at rather than explicitly stated, in Mrs. Gaskell's story, but yet standing out in such prominence that those who know no better may be forgiven if they regard it as having been the powerful and all-pervading influence which made the career of the sisters what it was? The true charm of the history of the Brontës, however, does not lie in these things. It is not to be found in the surroundings of their lives, remarkable and romantic as they were, but in the women themselves, and in those characteristics of their hearts and their intellects which were independent of the accidents of condition. Charlotte herself would have been the first to repudiate the notion that there was anything strikingly exceptional in their outward circumstances. With a horror of being considered eccentric that amounted to a passion, she united an almost morbid dread of the notice of strangers. If she could ever have imagined that readers throughout the world would come to associate her name, and still more the names of her idolised sisters, with the ruder features of the Yorkshire character, or with such a domestic tragedy as that amid which her unhappy brother's life terminated, her spirit would have arisen in indignant revolt against that which she would have regarded almost in the light of a personal outrage.



HAWORTH VILLAGE.

And yet if their surroundings at Haworth had comparatively little to do with the development of the genius of the three sisters, it cannot be doubted that two influences which Mrs. Gaskell has rightly made prominent in her book did affect their characters, one in a minor, and the other in a very marked degree. The influence of the moors is to be traced both in their lives and their works; whilst far more distinctly is to be traced the influence of their father. As to the first there is little to be said in addition to that which all know already. There is a railway station now at Haworth, and all the world therefore can get to the place without difficulty or inconvenience. Yet even to-day, when the engine goes, shrieking past it many times between sunrise and sunset, Haworth is not as other places are. A little manufacturing village, sheltered in a nook among the hills and moors which stretch from the heart of Yorkshire into the heart of Lancashire, it bears the vivid impress of its situation. The moors which lie around it for miles on every side are superb during the summer and autumn months. Then Haworth is in its glory; a gray stone hamlet set in the midst of a vast sea of odorous purple, and swept by breezes which bear into its winding street the hum of the bees and the fragrance of the heather. But it is in the drear, leaden days of winter, when the moors are covered with snow, that we see what Haworth really is. Then we know that this is a place apart from the outer world; even the railway seems to have failed to bring it into the midst of that great West Riding which lies close at hand with its busy mills and multitudes; and the dullest therefore can understand that in the days when the railway was not, and Haworth lay quite by itself, neglected and unseen in its upland valley, its people must have been blessed by some at least of those insular peculiarities which distinguished the villagers of Zermatt and Pontresina before the flood of summer tourists had swept into those comparatively remote crannies of the Alps. Nurtured among these lonely moors, and accustomed, as all dwellers on thinly-peopled hillsides are, to study the skies and the weather, as the inhabitants of towns and plains study the faces of men and women, the Brontës unquestionably drew their love of nature, their affection for tempestuous winds and warring clouds, from their residence at Haworth.

But this influence was trivial compared with the hereditary influences of their father's character. Few more remarkable personalities than that of the Rev. Patrick Brontë have obtruded themselves upon the smooth uniformity of modern society. The readers of Mrs. Gaskell's biography know that the incumbent of Haworth was an eccentric man, but the full measure of his eccentricity and waywardness has never yet been revealed to the world. He was an Irishman by birth, but when still a young man he had gone to Yorkshire as a curate, and in Yorkshire he remained to the end of his days. His real name was not Brontë — regarding the origin of which word there was so much unnecessary mystery when his daughter became famous — but Prunty. Born of humble parentage in the parish of Ahaderg, County Down, he was one of a large family, all of whom were said to be remarkable for their physical strength and personal beauty. Patrick Prunty was the most remarkable member of the family, and his talents were early recognised by Mr. Tighe, the rector of Drumgooland. This gentleman undertook part at least of the cost of his education, which was completed at St. John's College, Cambridge. As to the change of name from Prunty to Brontë, many fantastic stories have been told. Amongst them is one which represents the Brontës as having derived their name from that of the Bronterres, an ancient Irish family with which they were connected. The connection may possibly have existed, but there is no doubt upon one point. The incumbent of Haworth in early life bore the name of Prunty, and it was not until very shortly, before he left Ireland for England that he changed it, at the request of his patron, Mr. Tighe, for the more euphonious appellation of Brontë. He appears to have been a strange compound of good and evil. That he was not without some good is acknowledged by all who knew him. He had kindly feelings towards most people, and he delighted in the stern rectitude which distinguished many of his Yorkshire flock. When his daughter became famous, no one was better pleased at the circumstance than he was. He cut out of every newspaper every scrap which referred to her; he was proud of her achievements, proud of her intellect, and jealous for her reputation. But throughout his whole life there was but one person with whom he had any real sympathy, and that person was himself. Passionate, self-willed, vain, habitually cold and distant in his demeanour towards those of his own household, he exhibited in a marked degree many of the characteristics which Charlotte Brontë afterwards sketched in the portrait of the Mr. Helston of "Shirley." The stranger who encountered him found a scrupulously polite gentleman of the old school, who was garrulous about his past life, and who needed nothing more than the stimulus of a glass of wine to become talkative on the subject of his conquests over the hearts of the ladies of his acquaintance. As you listened to the quaintly-attired old man who chatted on with inexhaustible volubility, you possibly conceived the idea that he was a mere fribble, gay, conceited, harmless; but at odd times a searching glance from the keen, deep-sunk eyes warned you that you also were being weighed in the balance by your companion, and that this assumption of light-hearted vanity was far from revealing the real man to you. Only those who dwelt under the same roof knew him as he really was. Among the many stories told of him by his children, there is one relating to the meek and gentle woman who was his wife, and whose lot it was to submit to persistent coldness and neglect. Somebody had given Mrs. Brontë a very pretty dress, and her husband, who was as proud as he was self-willed, had taken offence at the gift. A word to his wife, who lived in habitual dread of her lordly master, would have secured all he wanted; but in his passionate determination that she should not wear the obnoxious garment, he deliberately cut it to pieces, and presented her with the tattered fragments. Even during his wife's lifetime he formed the habit of taking his meals alone; he constantly carried loaded pistols in his pockets, and when excited he would fire these at the doors of the outhouses, so that the villagers were quite accustomed to the sound of pistol-shots at any hour of the day in their pastor's house. It would be a mistake to suppose that violence was one of the weapons to which Mr. Brontë habitually resorted. However stern and peremptory might be his dealings with his wife (who soon left him to spend the remainder of his life in a dreary widowhood), his general policy was to secure his end by craft rather than by force. A profound belief in his own superior wisdom was conspicuous among his characteristics, and he felt convinced that no one was too clever to be outwitted by his diplomacy. He had also an amazing persistency, which led him to pursue any course on which he had embarked with dogged determination. It happened in later years, when his strength was failing, and when at last he began to see his daughter in her true light, that he quarrelled with her regarding the character of one of their friends. The daughter, always dutiful and respectful, found that any effort to stem the torrent of his bitter and unjust wrath when he spoke of the friend who had offended him, was attended by consequences which were positively dangerous. The veins of his forehead swelled, his eyes glared, his voice shook, and she was fain to submit lest her father's passion should prove fatal to him. But when, wounded beyond endurance by his violence and injustice, she withdrew for a few days from her home, and told her father that she would receive no letters from him in which this friend's name was mentioned, the old man's cunning took the place of passion. He wrote long and affectionate letters to her on general subjects; but accompanying each letter was a little slip of paper, which professed to be a note from Charlotte's dog Flossy to his "much-respected and beloved mistress," in which the dog, declaring that he saw "a good deal of human nature that was hid from those who had the gift of language," was made to repeat the attacks upon the obnoxious person which Mr. Brontë dared no longer make in his own character.

It was to the care of such a father as this, in the midst of the rude and uncongenial society of the lonely manufacturing village, that six motherless children, five daughters and one son, were left in the year 1821. The parson's children were not allowed to associate with their little neighbours in the hamlet; their aunt, who came to the parsonage after their mother's death, had scarcely more sympathy with them than their father himself; their only friend was the rough but kindly servant Tabby, who pitied the bairns without understanding them, and whose acts of graciousness were too often of such a character as to give them more pain than pleasure. So they grew up strange, lonely, old-fashioned children, with absolutely no knowledge of the world outside; so quiet and demure in their habits that, years afterwards, when they invited some of their Sunday scholars up to the parsonage, and wished to amuse them, they found that they had to ask the scholars to teach them how to play — they had never learned. Carefully secluded from the rest of the world, the little Brontë children found out fashions of their own in the way of amusement, and curious fashions they were. Whilst they were still in the nursery, when the oldest of the family, Maria, was barely nine years old, and Charlotte, the third, was just six, they had begun to take a quaint interest in literature and politics. Heaven knows who it was who first told these wonderful pigmies of the great deeds of a Wellington or the crimes of a Bonaparte; but at an age when other children are generally busy with their bricks or their dolls, and when all life's interests are confined for them within the walls of a nursery, these marvellous Brontës were discussing the life of the Great Duke, and maintaining the Tory cause as ardently as the oldest and sturdiest of the village politicians in the neighbouring inn.

There is a touching story of Charlotte at six years old, which gives us some notion of the ideal life led by the forlorn little girl at this time, when, her two elder sisters having been sent to school, she found herself living at home, the eldest of the motherless brood. She had read "The Pilgrim's Progress," and had been fascinated, young as she was, by that wondrous allegory. Everything in it was to her true and real; her little heart had gone forth with Christian on his pilgrimage to the Golden City, her bright young mind had been fired by the Bedford tinker's description of the glories of the Celestial Place; and she made up her mind that she too would escape from the City of Destruction, and gain the haven towards which the weary spirits of every age have turned with eager longing. But where was this glittering city, with its streets of gold, its gates of pearl, its walls of precious stones, its streams of life and throne of light? Poor little girl! The only place which seemed to her to answer Bunyan's description of the celestial town was one which she had heard the servants discussing with enthusiasm in the kitchen, and its name was Bradford! So to Bradford little Charlotte Brontë, escaping from that Haworth Parsonage which she believed to be a doomed spot, set off one day in 1822. Ingenious persons may speculate if they please upon the sore disappointment which awaited her when, like older people, reaching the place which she had imagined to be Heaven, she found that it was only Bradford.

But she never even reached her imaginary Golden City. When her tender feet had carried her a mile along the road, she came to a spot where overhanging trees made the highway dark and gloomy; she imagined that she had come to the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and, fearing to go forward, was presently discovered by her nurse cowering by the roadside.

Of the school-days of the Brontës nothing need be said here. Every reader of "Jane Eyre" knows what Charlotte Brontë herself thought of that charitable institution to which she has given so unenviable a notoriety. There she lost her oldest sister, whose fate is described in the tragic tale of Helen Burns; and it was whilst she was at this place that her second sister, Elizabeth, also died. Only one thing need be added to this dismal record of the stay at Cowan Bridge. During the whole time of their sojourn there, the young Brontës scarcely ever knew what it was to be free from the pangs of hunger.

Charlotte was now the head of the little family; the remaining members of which were her brother Branwell and her sisters Emily and Anne. Mrs. Gaskell has given the world a vivid picture of the life which these four survivors from the hardships of Cowan Bridge led between the years 1825 and 1831. They spent those years at Haworth, almost without care or sympathy. Their father saw little in their lot to interest him, nothing to drag him out of his selfish absorption in his own pursuits; their aunt, a permanent invalid, conceived that her duty was accomplished when she had taught them a few lessons and insisted on their doing a certain amount of needlework every day. For the rest they were left to themselves, and thus early they showed the bent of their genius by spending their time in writing novels.

Mrs. Gaskell has given us some idea of the character of these juvenile performances in a series of extracts which sufficiently indicate their rare merit. She has, however, paid exclusive attention to Charlotte's productions. All readers of the Brontë story will remember the account of the play of "The Islanders," and other remarkable specimens, showing with what real vigour and originality Charlotte could handle her pen whilst she was still in the first year of her teens; but those few persons who have seen the whole of the juvenile library of the family bear testimony to the fact that Branwell and Emily were at least as industrious and successful as Charlotte herself. Indeed, even at this early age, the *bizarre* character of Emily's genius was beginning to manifest itself, and her leaning towards weird and supernatural effects was exhibited whilst she composed her first fairy tales within the walls of her nursery. It may be well to bear in mind the frequency with which the critics have charged Charlotte Brontë with exaggerating the precocity of children. What we know of the early days of the Brontës proves that what would have been exaggeration in any other person was in the case of Charlotte nothing but a truthful reproduction of her own experiences.

Only one specimen of these earliest writings of the Brontës can be quoted here: it is that to which I have already referred, the play of "The Islanders:"

June the 31st, 1829.

The play of “The Islanders” was formed in December, 1827, in the following manner. One night, about the time when the cold sleet and stormy fogs of November are succeeded by the snow-storms and high piercing night-winds of confirmed winter, we were all sitting round the warm blazing kitchen fire, having just concluded a quarrel with Tabby concerning the propriety of lighting a candle, from which she came off victorious, no candles having been produced. A long pause succeeded, which was at length broken by Branwell saying, in a lazy manner, “I don’t know what to do.” This was echoed by Emily and Anne.

Tabby. Wha, ya may go t’ bed.

Branwell. I’d rather do anything than that.

Charlotte. Why are you so glum to-night, Tabby? Oh! suppose we had each an island of our own.

Branwell. If we had, I would choose the Island of Man.

Charlotte. And I would choose the Isle of Wight.

Emily. The Isle of Arran for me.

Anne. And mine shall be Guernsey.

We then chose who should be the chief men in our islands. Branwell chose John Bull, Astley Cooper, and Leigh Hunt; Emily, Walter Scott, Mr. Lockhart, Johnny Lockhart; Anne, Michael Sadler, Lord Bentinck, Sir Henry Halford. I chose the Duke of Wellington and two sons, Christopher North and Co., and Mr. Abernethy. Here our conversation was interrupted by the, to us, dismal sound of the clock striking seven, and we were summoned off to bed.

IV.

THE FAMILY AT HAWORTH.

The years have slipped away, and the Brontës are no longer children. They have passed out of that strange condition of premature activity in which their brains were so busy, their lives so much at variance with the lives of others of their age; they have even "finished" their education, according to the foolish phrase of the world, and, having made some acquaintances and a couple of friends at good Miss Wooler's school at Roehead, Charlotte is again at home, young, hopeful, and in her own way merry, waiting with her brother and her sisters till that mystery of life which seems filled with hidden charms to those who still have it all before them shall be revealed.

One bright June morning in 1833, a handsome carriage and pair is standing opposite the Devonshire Arms at Bolton Bridge, the spot loved by all anglers and artists who know anything of the scenery of the Wharfe. In the carriage with some companions is a young girl, whose face, figure, and manner may be conjured up by all who have read "Shirley," for this pleasant, comely Yorkshire maiden, as we see her on this particular morning, is identical with the Caroline Helston who figures in the pages of that novel. Miss N — — is waiting for her quondam schoolfellow and present bosom friend, Charlotte Brontë, who is coming with her brother and sisters to join in an excursion to the enchanted site of Bolton Abbey hard by. Presently, on the steep road which stretches across the moors to Keighley, the sound of wheels is heard, mingled with the merry speech and merrier laughter of fresh young voices. Shall we go forward unseen, and study the approaching travellers whilst they are still upon the road? Their conveyance is no handsome carriage, but a rickety dogcart, unmistakably betraying its neighbourship to the carts and ploughs of some rural farmyard. The horse, freshly taken from the fields, is driven by a youth who, in spite of his countrified dress, is no mere bumpkin. His shock of red hair hangs down in somewhat ragged locks behind his ears, for Branwell Brontë esteems himself a genius and a poet, and, following the fashion of the times, has that abhorrence of the barber's shears which genius is supposed to affect. But the lad's face is a handsome and a striking one, full of Celtic fire and humour, untouched by the slightest shade of care, giving one the impression of somebody altogether hopeful, promising, even brilliant. How gaily he jokes with his three sisters; with what inexhaustible volubility he pours out quotations from his favourite poets, applying them to the lovely scene around him; and with what a mischievous delight, in his superior nerve and mettle, he attempts feats of charioteering which fill the timid heart of the youngest of the party with sudden terrors! Beside him, in a dress of marvellous plainness and ugliness, stamped with the brand "home-made" in characters which none can mistake, is the eldest of the sisters. Charlotte is talking too; there are bright smiles upon her face; she is enjoying everything around her, the splendid morning, the charms of leafy trees and budding roses, and the ever-musical stream; most of all, perhaps, the charm of her brother's society, and the expectation of that coming meeting with her friend, which is so near at hand. Behind sit a pretty little girl, with fine complexion and delicate regular features, whom the stranger would at once pick out as the beauty of the company, and a tall, rather angular figure, clad in a dress exactly resembling Charlotte's. Emily Brontë does not talk so much as the rest of the party, but her wonderful eyes, brilliant and unfathomable as the pool at the foot of a waterfall, but radiant also with a wealth of tenderness and warmth, show how her soul is expanding under the influences of the scene; how quick she is to note the least prominent of the beauties around her, how intense is her enjoyment of the songs of the birds, the brilliancy of the sunshine, the rich scent of the flower-bespangled hedgerows. If she does not, like Charlotte and Anne, meet her brother's ceaseless flood of sparkling words with opposing currents of speech, she utters at times a strange, deep guttural sound which those who know her best interpret as the language of a joy too deep for articulate expression. Gaze at them as they pass you in the quiet road, and acknowledge that, in spite of their rough and even uncouth exteriors, a happier four could hardly be met with in this favourite haunt of pleasure-seekers during a long summer's day.

Suddenly the dogcart rattles noisily into the open space in front of the Devonshire Arms, and the Brontës see the carriage and its occupants. In an instant there is silence; Branwell contrasts his humble equipage with that which already stands at the inn door, and a flush of mortified pride colours his face; the sisters scarcely note this contrast, but to their dismay they see that their friend is not alone, and each draws a long deep breath, and prepares for that fiercest of all the ordeals they know, a meeting with entire strangers. The laughter is stilled; even Branwell's volubility is at an end; the glad light dies out of their eyes, and when they alight and submit to the process of being introduced to Miss N — — 's companions, their faces are as dull and commonplace as their dresses. It is no imaginary scene we have been watching. Miss N — — still recalls that painful moment when the merry talk and laughter of her friends were quenched at sight of the company awaiting them, and when throughout a day to which all had looked forward with anticipations of delight, the three Brontës clung to each other or to their friend, scarcely venturing to speak above a whisper, and betraying in every look and word the positive agony which filled their hearts when a stranger approached them. It was this excessive shyness in the company of those who were unfamiliar to them which was the most marked characteristic of the sisters. The weakness was as much physical as moral; and those who suppose that it was accompanied by any morbid depression of spirits, or any lack of vigour and liveliness when the incubus of a stranger's presence was removed, entirely mistake their true character. Unhappily, first impressions are always strongest, and running through the whole of Mrs. Gaskell's story, may be seen the impression produced at her first meeting with Charlotte Brontë by her nervous shrinking and awkwardness in the midst of unknown faces.

It was not thus with those who, brought into the closest of all fellowship with her, the fellowship of school society, knew the secrets of her heart far better than did any who became acquainted with her in after life. To such the real Charlotte Brontë, who knew no timidity in their presence, was a bold, clever, outspoken and impulsive girl; ready to laugh with the merriest, and not even indisposed to join in practical jokes with the rest of her schoolfellows. The picture we get in the "Life" is that of a victim to secret terrors and superstitious fancies. The real Charlotte Brontë, when stories were current as to the presence of a ghost in the upper chambers of the old school-house at Roehead, did not hesitate to go up to these rooms alone and in the darkness of a winter's night, leaving her companions shivering in terror round the fire downstairs. When she had left school, and began that correspondence with Miss N — — which is the great source of our knowledge, not merely of the course of her life, but of the secrets of her heart, it must not be supposed that she wrote always in that serious spirit which pervades most of the letters quoted by Mrs. Gaskell. On the contrary, those who have access to the letters will find that even some of the passages given in the "Life" are allied to sentences showing that the frame of mind in which they were written was very different from that which it appears to have been. The following letter, written from Haworth in the beginning of 1835, is an example:

Well, here I am as completely separated from you as if a hundred, instead of seventeen, miles intervened between us. I can neither hear you nor see you nor feel you. You are become a mere thought, an unsubstantial impression on the memory, which, however, is happily incapable of erasure. My journey home was rather melancholy, and would have been very much so but for the presence and conversation of my worthy companion. I found him a very intelligent man. He told me the adventures of his sailor's life, his shipwreck and the hurricane he had witnessed in the West Indies, with a much better flow of language than many of far greater pretensions are masters of. I thought he appeared a little dismayed by the wildness of the country round Haworth, and I imagine he has carried back a pretty report of it.

What do you think of the course politics are taking? I make this inquiry because I now think you have a wholesome interest in the matter; formerly you did not care greatly about it. B — — , you see, is triumphant. Wretch! I am a hearty hater, and if there is any one I thoroughly abhor it is that man. But the Opposition is divided. Red-hots and lukewarms; and the Duke (*par excellence the* Duke) and Sir Robert Peel show no signs of insecurity, although they have been twice beat. So "*courage, mon amie!*" Heaven defend the right! as the old Cavaliers used to say before they joined battle. Now, Ellen, laugh heartily at all that rodomontade. But you have brought it on yourself. Don't you remember telling me to write such letters to you as I wrote to Mary? There's a specimen! Hereafter should follow a long disquisition on books; but I'll spare you that.

Those who turn to Mrs. Gaskell's "Life" will find one of the sentences in this letter quoted, but without the burst of laughter over "all that rodomontade" at the end which shows that Charlotte's interest in politics was not unmingled with the happy levity of youth. Still more striking as an illustration of her true character, with its infinite variety of moods, its sudden transitions from grave to gay, is the letter I now quote:

Last Saturday afternoon, being in one of my sentimental humours, I sat down and wrote to you such a note as I ought to have written to none but M — — , who is nearly as mad as myself; to-day, when I glanced it over, it occurred to me that Ellen's calm eye would look at this with scorn, so I determined to concoct some production more fit for the inspection of common sense. I will not tell you all I think and feel about you, Ellen. I will preserve unbroken that reserve which alone enables me to maintain a decent character for judgment; but for that I should long ago have been set down by all who know me as a Frenchified fool. You have been very kind to me of late, and gentle; and you have spared me those little sallies of ridicule which, owing to my miserable and wretched touchiness of character, used formerly to make me wince as if I had been touched with a hot iron; things that nobody else cares for enter into my mind and rankle there like venom. I know these feelings are absurd, and therefore I try to hide them; but they only sting the deeper for concealment, and I'm an idiot. Ellen, I wish I could live with you always, I begin to cling to you more fondly than ever I did. If we had but a cottage and a competency of our own, I do think we might live and love on till death, without being dependent on any third person for happiness.

Mrs. Gaskell has made a very partial and imperfect use of this letter, by quoting merely from the words "You have been very kind to me of late," down to "they only sting the deeper for concealment." Thus it will be seen that an importance is given to an evanescent mood which it was far from meriting, and that lighter side to Charlotte's character which was prominent enough to her nearest and dearest friends is entirely concealed from the outer world. Again, I say, we must not blame Mrs. Gaskell. Such sentences as those which she omitted from the letter I have just given are not only entirely inconsistent with that ideal portrait of "Currer Bell" which the world had formed for itself out of the bare materials in existence during the author's lifetime, but are also utterly at variance with Mrs. Gaskell's personal conception of Charlotte Brontë's character, founded upon her brief acquaintance with her during her years of loneliness and fame.

The quick transitions which marked her moods in converse with her friends may be traced all through her letters to Miss N — — . The quotations

I have already made show how suddenly on the same page she passes from gaiety to sadness; and so her letters, dealing as they do with an endless variety of topics, reflect only the mood of the writer at the moment that she penned them, and it is only by reading and studying the whole, not by selecting those which reflect a particular phase of her character, that we can complete the portrait we would fain produce.

Here are some extracts from letters which are not to be found in the "Life," and which illustrate what I have said. They were all written between the beginning of 1832 and the end of 1835:

Tell M — — I hope she will derive benefit from the perusal of Cobbett's lucubrations; but I beg she will on no account burden her memory with passages to be repeated for my edification, lest I should not fully appreciate either her kindness or their merit, since that worthy personage and his principles, whether private or political, are no great favourites of mine.

I am really very much obliged to you — she writes in September, 1832 — for your well-filled and *very* interesting letter. It forms a striking contrast to my brief meagre epistles; but I know you will excuse the utter dearth of news visible in them when you consider the situation in which I am placed, quite out of the reach of all intelligence except what I obtain through the medium of the newspapers, and I believe you would not find much to interest you in a political discussion, or a summary of the accidents of the week…. I am sorry, very sorry, that Miss — — has turned out to be so different from what you thought her; but, my dearest Ellen, you must never expect perfection in this world; and I know your naturally confiding and affectionate disposition has led you to imagine that Miss — — was almost faultless…. I think, dearest Ellen, our friendship is destined to form an exception to the general rule regarding school friendships. At least I know that absence has not in the least abated the sisterly affection which I feel towards you.

Your last letter revealed a state of mind which promised much. As I read it, I could not help wishing that my own feelings more nearly resembled yours; but unhappily all the good thoughts that enter *my* mind evaporate almost before I have had time to ascertain their existence. Every right resolution which I form is so transient, so fragile, and so easily broken, that I sometimes fear I shall never be what I ought.

I write a hasty line to assure you we shall be happy to see you on the day you mention. As you are now acquainted with the neighbourhood and its total want of society, and with our plain, monotonous mode of life, I do not fear so much as I used to do, that you will be disappointed with the dulness and sameness of your visit. One thing, however, will make the daily routine more unvaried than ever. Branwell, who used to enliven us, is to leave us in a few days, and enter the situation of a private tutor in the neighbourhood of U — — . How he will like to settle remains yet to be seen. At present he is full of hope and resolution. I, who know his variable nature and his strong turn for active life, dare not be too sanguine. We are as busy as possible in preparing for his departure, and shirt-making and collar-stitching fully occupy our time.

April, 1835.

The election! the election! that cry has rung even among our lonely hills like the blast of a trumpet. How has it been round the populous neighbourhood of B — — ? Under what banner have your brothers ranged themselves? the Blue or the Yellow? Use your influence with them; entreat them, if it be necessary on your knees, to stand by their country and religion in this day of danger!… Stuart Wortley, the son of the most patriotic patrician Yorkshire owns, must be elected the representative of his native province. Lord Morpeth was at Haworth last week, and I saw him. My opinion of his lordship is recorded in a letter I wrote yesterday to Mary. It is not worth writing over again, so I will not trouble you with it here.

Even these brief extracts will show that Charlotte Brontë's life at this time was not a morbid one. These years between 1832 and 1835 must be counted among the happiest of her life — of all the lives of the little household at Haworth, in fact. The young people were accustomed to their father's coldness and eccentricity, and to their aunt's dainty distaste for all Northern customs and Northern people, themselves included. Shy they were and peculiar, alike in their modes of life and their modes of thought; but there was a wholesome, healthy happiness about all of them that gave promise of peaceful lives hereafter. Some literary efforts of a humble kind brightened their hopes at this time. Charlotte had written some juvenile poems (not now worth reprinting), and she sought the opinion of Southey upon them. The poet laureate gave her a kindly and considerate answer, which did not encourage her to persevere in these efforts; nor was an attempt by Branwell to secure the patronage of Wordsworth for some productions of his own more successful. Had anybody ventured into the wilds of Haworth parish at this new year of 1835, and made acquaintance with the parson's family, it is easy to say upon whom the attention of the stranger would have been riveted. Branwell Brontë, of whom casual mention is made in one of the foregoing letters, was the hope and pride of the little household. All who knew him at this time bear testimony to his remarkable talents, his striking graces. Small in stature like Charlotte herself, he was endowed with a rare personal beauty. But it was in his intellectual gifts that his chief charm was found. Even his father's dull parishioners recognised the fire of genius in the lad; and any one who cares to go to Haworth now and inquire into the story of the Brontës, will find that the most vivid reminiscences, the fondest memories of the older people in the village, centre in this hapless youth. Ambitious and clever, he seemed destined to play a considerable part in the world. His conversational powers were remarkable; he gave promise of more than ordinary ability as an artist, and he had even as a boy written verses of no common power. Among other accomplishments, more curious than useful, of which he could boast, was the ability to write two letters simultaneously. It is but a small trait in the history of this remarkable family, yet it deserves to be noticed, that its least successful member excelled Napoleon himself in one respect. The great conqueror could dictate half-a-dozen letters concurrently to his secretaries. Branwell Brontë could do more than this. With a pen in each hand, he could write two different letters at the same moment.

Charlotte was Branwell's senior by one year. In 1835, when in her nineteenth year, she was by no means the unattractive person she has been represented as being. There is a little caricature sketched by herself lying before me as I write. In it all the more awkward of her physical points are ingeniously exaggerated. The prominent forehead bulges out in an aggressive manner, suggestive of hydrocephalus, the nose, "tip-tilted like the petal of a flower," and the mouth are made unnecessarily large; whilst the little figure is clumsy and ungainly. But though she could never pretend to beauty, she had redeeming features, her eyes, hair, and massive forehead all being attractive points. Emily, who was two years her junior, had, like Charlotte, a bad complexion; but she was tall and well-formed, whilst her eyes were of remarkable beauty. All through her life her temperament was more than merely peculiar. She inherited not a little of her father's eccentricity, untempered by her father's *savoir faire*. Her aversion to strangers has been already mentioned. When the curates, who formed the only society of Haworth, found their way to the parsonage, she avoided them as though they had brought the pestilence in their train. On the rare occasions when she went out into the world, she would sit absolutely silent in the company of those who were unfamiliar to her. So intense was this reserve that even in her own family, where alone she was at ease, something like dread was mingled with the affection felt towards her. On one occasion, whilst Charlotte's friend was visiting the parsonage, Charlotte herself was unable through illness to take any walks with her. To the amazement of the household, Emily volunteered to accompany Miss N— — on a ramble over the moors. They set off together, and the girl threw aside her reserve, and talked with a freedom and vigour which gave evidence of the real strength of her character. Her companion was charmed with her intelligence and geniality. But on returning to the parsonage Charlotte was found awaiting them, and, as soon as she had a chance of doing so, she anxiously put to Miss N— — the question, "How did Emily behave herself?" It was the first time she had ever been known to invite the company of any one outside the narrow limits of the family circle. Her chief delight was to roam on the moors, followed by her dogs, to whom she would whistle in masculine fashion. Her heart, indeed, was given to these dumb creatures of the earth. She never forgave those who ill-treated them, nor trusted those whom they disliked. One is reminded of Shelley's "Sensitive Plant" by some traits of Emily Brontë:

If the flowers had been her own infants, she

Could never have nursed them more tenderly;

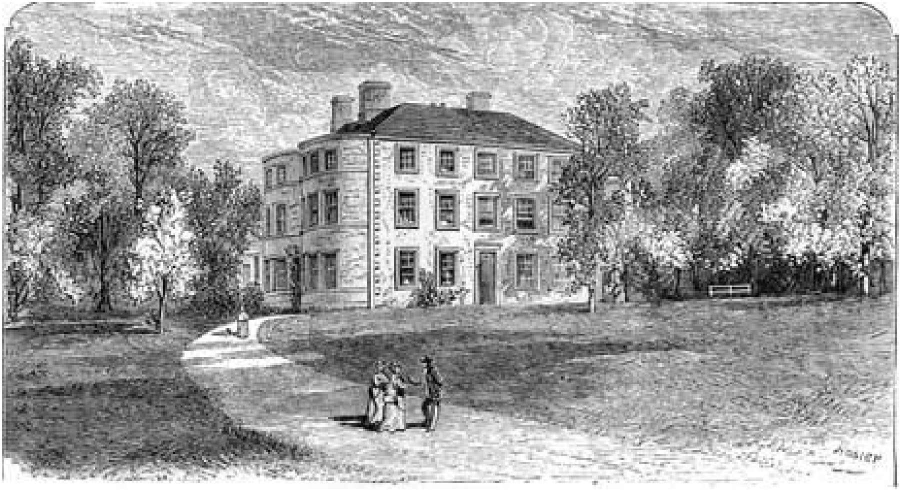
and, like the lady of the poem, her tenderness and charity could reach even

— — the poor banished insects, whose intent,
Although they did ill, was innocent.

One instance of her remarkable personal courage is related in “Shirley,” where she herself is sketched under the character of the heroine. It is her adventure with the mad dog which bit her at the door of the parsonage kitchen whilst she was offering it water. The brave girl took an iron from the fire, where it chanced to be heating, and immediately cauterised the wound on her arm, making a broad, deep scar, which was there until the day of her death. Not until many weeks after did she tell her sisters what had happened. Passionately fond of her home among the hills, and of the rough Yorkshire people among whom she had been reared, she sickened and pined away when absent from Haworth. A strange untamed and untamable character was hers; and none but her two sisters ever seem to have appreciated her remarkable merits, or to have recognised the fine though immature genius which shows itself in every line of the weird story of “Wuthering Heights.”

Anne, the youngest of the family, had beauty in addition to her other gifts. Intellectually she was greatly inferior to her sisters; but her mildness and sweetness of temperament won the affections of many who were repelled by the harsher exteriors of Charlotte and Emily.

This was the family which lived happily and quietly among the hills during those years when life with its vicissitudes still lay in the distance. Gay their existence could not be called; but their letters show that it was unquestionably peaceful, happy, and wholesome.



THE HOUSE THAT CHARLOTTE VISITED.

V.

LIFE AS A GOVERNESS.

Moved by the hope of lightening the family expenses and enabling Branwell to get a thorough artistic training at the Royal Academy, Charlotte resolved to go out as a governess. Her first "place" was at her old school at Roehead, where she was with her friend, Miss Wooler, and where she was also very near the home of her confidante, Miss N — — . Emily went with her for a time, but she soon sickened and pined for the moors, and after a trial of but a few months she returned to Haworth. A great deal of sympathy has been bestowed upon the Brontës in connection with their lives as governesses; nor am I prepared to say that this sympathy is wholly misplaced. Their reserve, their affection for each other, their ignorance of the world, combined to make "the cup of life as it is mixed for the class termed governesses" — to use Charlotte's own phrase — particularly distasteful to them. But it is a mistake to suppose that they were treated with harshness during their governess life, or that Charlotte, at least, felt her trials to be at all unbearable. It was decidedly unpleasant to sacrifice the independence and the family companionship of Haworth for drudgery and loneliness in the household of a stranger; but it was a duty, and as such it was accepted without repining by two, at least, of the sisters. Emily's peculiar temperament made her quite unfitted for life among strangers; she made many attempts to overcome her reserve, but all were unavailing; and after a brief experience in one or two families in different parts of Yorkshire, she returned to Haworth to reside there permanently as her father's housekeeper. There is no need to dwell upon this episode in the lives of the Brontës. They were living among unfamiliar faces, and had little temptation to display themselves in their true characters, but extracts from a few of Charlotte's letters to her friends will show something of the course of her thought at this time. With the exception of a detached sentence or two these letters will be quite new to the readers of Mrs. Gaskell's "Life:"

I have been waiting for an opportunity of sending a letter to you as you wished; but as no such opportunity offers itself, I have at length determined to write to you by post, fearing that if I delayed any longer you would attribute my tardiness to indifference. I can scarcely realise the distance that lies between us, or the length of time which may elapse before we meet again. Now, Ellen, I have no news to tell you, no changes to communicate. My life since I saw you last has passed away as monotonously and unvaryingly as ever — nothing but teach, teach, teach, from morning till night. The greatest variety I ever have is afforded by a letter from you, a call from the T — — s, or by meeting with a pleasant new book. The "Life of Oberlin," and Legh Richmond's "Domestic Portraiture," are the last of this description I have perused. The latter work strongly attracted and strangely fascinated my attention. Beg, borrow, or steal it without delay, and read the "Memoir of Richmond." That short record of a brief and uneventful life I shall never forget. It is beautiful, not on account of the language in which it is written, not on account of the incidents it details, but because of the simple narration it gives of the life and death of a young, talented, sincere Christian. Get the book, Ellen (I wish I had it to give you), read it, and tell me what you think of it. Yesterday I heard that you had been ill since you were in London. I hope you are better now. Are you any happier than you were? Try to reconcile your mind to circumstances, and exert the quiet fortitude of which I know you are not destitute. Your absence leaves a sort of vacancy in my feelings which nothing has as yet offered of sufficient interest to supply. I do not forget ten o'clock. I remember it every night, and if a sincere petition for your welfare will do you any good you will be benefited. I know the Bible says: "The prayer of the *righteous* availeth much," and I am *not righteous*. Nevertheless I believe God despises no application that is uttered in sincerity. My own dear E — — , good-bye. I can write no more, for I am called to a less pleasant avocation.

Dewsbury Moor, Oct. 2, 1836.

I should have written to you a week ago, but my time has of late been so wholly taken up that till now I have really not had an opportunity of answering your last letter. I assure you I feel the kindness of so early a reply to my tardy correspondence. It gave me a sting of self-reproach…. My sister Emily is gone into a situation as teacher in a large school of near forty pupils, near Halifax. I have had one letter from her since her departure. It gives an appalling account of her duties. Hard labour from six in the morning till near eleven at night, with only one half-hour of exercise between. This is slavery. I fear she will never stand it. It gives me sincere pleasure, my dear Ellen, to learn that you have at last found a few associates of congenial minds. I cannot conceive a life more dreary than that passed amidst sights, sounds, and companions all alien to the nature within us. From the tenor of your letters it seems that your mind remains fixed as it ever was, in no wise dazzled by novelty or warped by evil example. I am thankful for it. I could not help smiling at the paragraphs which related to — — . There was in them a touch of the genuine unworldly simplicity which forms part of your character. Ellen, depend upon it, all people have their dark side. Though some possess the power of throwing a fair veil over the defects, close acquaintance slowly removes the screen, and one by one the blots appear; till at last we see the pattern of perfection all slurred over with stains which even affection cannot efface.

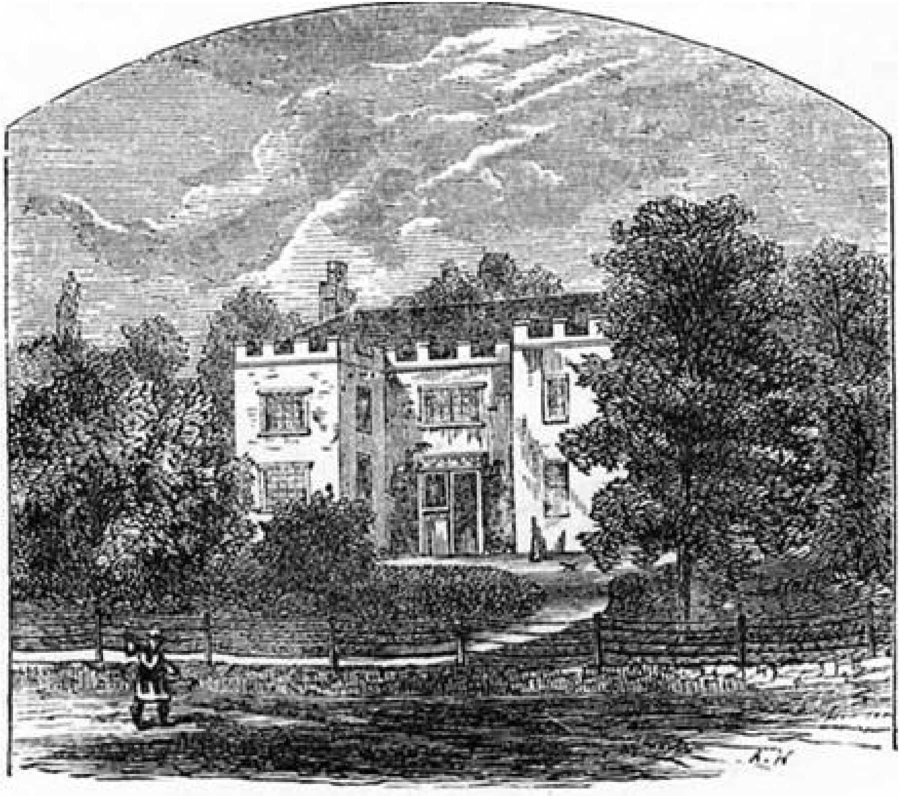
The affectionate commendations of her friend are constantly accompanied by references of a very different character to herself.

If I like people — she says in one of her letters — it is my nature to tell them so, and I am not afraid of offering incense to your vanity. It is from religion that you derive your chief charm, and may its influence always preserve you as pure, as unassuming, and as benevolent in thought and deed as you are now. What am I compared to you? I feel my own utter worthlessness when I make the comparison. I'm a very coarse, commonplace wretch! I have some qualities that make me very miserable, some feelings that you can have no participation in — that few, very few people in the world can at all understand. I don't pride myself on these peculiarities. I strive to conceal and suppress them as much as I can, but they burst out sometimes, and then those who see the explosion despise me, and I hate myself for days afterwards.

All my notes to you, Ellen, are written in a hurry. I am now snatching an opportunity. Mr. J — — is here; by his means it will be transmitted to Miss E — — , by her means to X — — , by his means to you. I do not blame you for not coming to see me. I am sure you have been prevented by sufficient reasons; but I do long to see you, and I hope I shall be gratified momentarily, at least, ere long. Next Friday, if all be well, I shall go to G — — . On Sunday I hope I shall at least catch a glimpse of you. Week after week I have lived on the expectation of your coming. Week after week I have been disappointed. I have not regretted what I said in my last note to you. The confession was wrung from me by sympathy and kindness, such as I can never be sufficiently thankful for. I feel in a strange state of mind; still gloomy, but not despairing. I keep trying to do right, checking wrong feelings; repressing wrong thoughts — but still, every instant I find myself going astray. I have a constant tendency to scorn people who are far better than I am. A horror at the idea of becoming one of a certain set — a dread lest if I made the slightest profession I should sink at once into Phariseeism, merge wholly in the ranks of the self-righteous. In writing at this moment I feel an irksome disgust at the idea of using a single phrase that sounds like religious cant. I abhor myself; I despise myself. If the doctrine of Calvin be true, I am already an outcast. You cannot imagine how hard, rebellious, and intractable all my feelings are. When I begin to study on the subject I almost grow blasphemous, atheistical in my sentiments. Don't desert me — don't be horrified at me. You know what I am. I wish I could see you, my darling. I have lavished the warmest affections of a very hot, tenacious heart upon you. If you grow cold it is over.

You will excuse a very brief and meagre answer to your kind note when I tell you that at the moment it reached me, and that just now whilst I am scribbling a reply, the whole house is in the bustle of packing and preparation, for on this day we all *go home*. Your palliation of my defects is kind and charitable, but I dare not trust its truth. Few would regard them with so lenient an eye as you do. Your consolatory admonitions are kind, Ellen; and when I can read them over in quietness and alone, I trust I shall derive comfort from them. But just now, in the unsettled, excited state of mind which I now feel, I cannot enter into the pure scriptural spirit which they breathe. It would be wrong of me to continue the subject. My thoughts are distracted and absorbed by other ideas. You do not mention your visit to Haworth. Have you spoken of it to the family? Have they agreed to let you come? But I will write when I get home. Ever since last Friday I have been as busy as I could be in finishing up the half-year's lessons, which concluded with a terrible fog in geographical problems (think of explaining that to Misses — — and — — !), and subsequently in mending Miss — — 's clothes. Miss — — is calling me: something about my *protégée's* nightcap. Good-bye. We shall meet again ere many days, I trust.

Here it will be seen that the religious struggle was renewed. The woman who was afterwards to be accused of "heathenism" was going through tortures such as Cowper knew in his darkest hours, and, like him, was acquiring faith, humility, and resignation in the midst of the conflict. But such letters as this are only episodical; in general she writes cheerfully, sometimes even merrily.



THE ROE HEAD SCHOOL.

What would the *Quarterly* reviewer and the other charitable people, who openly declared their conviction that the author of "Jane Eyre" was an improper person, who had written an improper book, have said had they been told that she had written the following letter on the subject of her first offer of marriage — written it, too, at the time when she was a governess, and in spite of the fact that the offer opened up to her a way of escape from all anxiety as to her future life?

You ask me whether I have received a letter from T — — . I have about a week since. The contents I confess did a little surprise me; but I kept them to myself, and unless you had questioned me on the subject I would never have adverted to it. T — — says he is comfortably settled at — — , and that his health is much improved. He then intimates that in due time he will want a wife, and frankly asks me to be that wife. Altogether the letter is written without cant or flattery, and in common-sense style which does credit to his judgment. Now there were in this proposal some things that might have proved a strong temptation. I thought if I were to marry so — — could live with me, and how happy I should be. But again I asked myself two questions: Do I love T — — as much as a woman ought to love her husband? Am I the person best qualified to make him happy? Alas! my conscience answered "No" to both these questions. I felt that though I esteemed T — — , though I had a kindly leaning towards him, because he is an amiable, well-disposed man, yet I had not and never could have that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for him — and if ever I marry it must be in that light of adoration that I will regard my husband. Ten to one I shall never have the chance again; but *n'importe*. Moreover, I was aware he knew so little of me he could hardly be conscious to whom he was writing. Why, it would startle him to see me in my natural home character. He would think I was a wild, romantic enthusiast indeed. I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband. I would laugh and satirise, and say whatever came into my head first; and if he were a clever man and loved me, the whole world weighed in the balance against his smallest wish would be light as air. Could I, knowing my mind to be such as that, conscientiously say that I would take a grave, quiet young man like T — — ? No; it would have been deceiving him, and deception of that sort is beneath me. So I wrote a long letter back in which I expressed my refusal as gently as I could, and also candidly avowed my reasons for that refusal. I described to him, too, the sort of character I thought would suit him for a wife.

The girl who could thus calmly decline a more than merely "eligible" offer, and thus honestly state her reasons for doing so to the friend she trusted, was strangely different from the author of "Jane Eyre" pictured by the critics and the public. Perhaps the full cost of the refusal related in the foregoing letter is only made clear when it is brought into contrast with such a confession as the following, made very soon afterwards:

I am miserable when I allow myself to dwell on the necessity of spending my life as a governess. The chief requisite for that station seems to me to be the power of taking things easily when they come, and of making oneself comfortable and at home wherever one may chance to be — qualities in which all our family are singularly deficient. I know I cannot live with a person like Mrs. — — ; but I hope all women are not like her, and my motto is "Try again."

How thoroughly at all times she could sympathise alike with the joys and sorrows of others, is proved by many letters extending over the whole period of her life. The following is neither the earliest nor the most characteristic of those utterances of a tender and heartfelt sympathy with her special friend, which are to be found in her correspondence, but as Mrs. Gaskell has not made use of it, I may quote it here:

1838.

We were at breakfast when your note reached me, and I consequently write in great hurry. Your trials seem to thicken. I trust God will either remove them or give you strength to bear them. If I could but come to you and offer you all the little assistance either my head or hands could afford! But that is impossible. I scarcely dare offer to comfort you about — — lest my consolation should seem like mockery. I know that in cases of sickness strangers cannot measure what relations feel. One thing, however, I need not remind *you* of. You will have repeated it over and over to yourself before now: God does all for the best; and even should the worst happen, and Death seem finally to destroy hope, remember that this will be but a practical test of the strong faith and calm devotion which have marked you a Christian so long. I would hope, however, that the time for this test is not yet come, that your brother may recover, and all be well. It grieves me to hear that your own health is so indifferent. Once more I wish I were with you to lighten at least by sympathy the burden that seems so unsparingly laid upon you. Let me thank you for remembering me in the midst of such hurry and affliction. We are all apt to grow selfish in distress. This, so far as I have found, is not your case. *When* shall I see you again? The uncertainty in which the answer to that question must be involved gives me a bitter feeling. Through all changes, through all chances, I trust I shall love you as I do now. We can pray for each other and think of each other. Distance is no bar to recollection. You have promised to write to me, and I do not doubt that you will keep your word. Give my love to M — — and your mother. Take with you my blessing and affection, and all the warmest wishes of a warm heart for your welfare.

From one of her situations as governess in a private family (she had long since left the kind shelter of Miss Wooler's house) she writes in 1841 a series of letters showing how little she relished the "cup of life as it is mixed for the class termed governesses."

It is twelve o'clock at night; but I must just write you a word before I go to bed. If you think I'm going to refuse your invitation, or if you sent it me with that idea, you're mistaken. As soon as I had read your shabby little note, I gathered up my spirits directly, walked on the impulse of the moment into Mrs. — — 's presence, popped the question, and for two minutes received no answer. "Will she refuse me when I work so hard for her?" thought I. "Ye — e — es," drawled madam in a reluctant, cold tone. "Thank you, madam!" said

I with extreme cordiality, and was marching from the room when she recalled me with “You’d better go on Saturday afternoon, then, when the children have holiday, and if you return in time for them to have all their lessons on Monday morning, I don’t see that much will be lost.” You *are* a genuine Turk, thought I; but again I assented, and so the bargain was struck. Saturday after next, then, is the day appointed. I’ll come, God knows, with a thankful and joyful heart, glad of a day’s reprieve from labour. If you don’t send the gig I’ll walk. I am coming to taste the pleasure of liberty; a bit of pleasant congenial talk, and a sight of two or three faces I like. God bless you! I want to see you again. Huzza for Saturday afternoon after next! Good-night, my lass!

During the last three weeks that hideous operation called “a thorough clean” has been going on in the house. It is now nearly completed, for which I thank my stars, as during its progress I have fulfilled the double character of nurse and governess, while the nurse has been transmuted into cook and housemaid. That nurse, by-the-bye, is the prettiest lass you ever saw…. I was beginning to think Mrs. — — a good sort of body in spite of her bouncing and toasting, her bad grammar and worse orthography; but I have had experience of one little trait in her character which condemns her a long way with me. After treating a person on the most familiar terms of equality for a long time, if any little thing goes wrong, she does not scruple to give way to anger in a very coarse, unladylike manner, though in justice no blame could be attached where she ascribed it all. I think passion is the true test of vulgarity or refinement. This place looks exquisitely beautiful just now. The grounds are certainly lovely, and all as green as an emerald. I wish you would just come and look at it.

VI.

THE TURNING-POINT.

The “storm and stress” period of Charlotte Brontë’s life was not what the world believes it to have been. Like the rest of our race, she had to fight her own battle in the wilderness, not with one devil, but with many; and it was this sharp contest with the temptations which crowd the threshold of an opening life which made her what she was. The world believes that it was under the parsonage roof that the author of “Jane Eyre” gathered up the precious experiences which were afterwards turned to such good account. Mrs. Gaskell, who was carried away by her honest womanly horror of hardened vice, gives us to understand that the tragic turning-point in the history of the sisters was connected with the disgrace and ruin of their brother. We are even asked to believe that but for the folly of a single woman, whom it is probable that Charlotte never saw, “Currer Bell” would never have taken up her pen, and no halo of glory would have settled on the scarred and rugged brows of prosaic Haworth.

It is not so. There may be disappointment among those who have been nurtured on the traditions of the Brontë romance when they find that the reality is different from what they supposed it to be; some shallow judges may even assume that Charlotte herself loses in moral stature when it is shown that it was not her horror at her brother’s fall which drove her to find relief in literary speech. But the truth must be told; and for my part I see nothing in that truth which affects, even in an infinitesimal degree, the fame and the honour of the woman of whom I write.

It was Charlotte’s visit to Brussels, then, first as pupil and afterwards as teacher in the school of Madame Héger, which was the turning-point in her life, which changed its currents, and gave to it a new purpose and a new meaning. Up to the moment of that visit she had been the simple, kindly, truthful Yorkshire girl, endowed with strange faculties, carried away at times by burning impulses, moved often by emotions the nature of which she could not fathom, but always hemmed in by her narrow experiences, her limited knowledge of life and the world. Until she went to Belgium, her sorest troubles had been associated with her dislike to the society of strangers, her heaviest burden had been the necessity under which she lay of tasting that “cup of life as it is mixed for governesses” which she detested so heartily. Under the belief that they could qualify themselves to keep a school of their own if they had once mastered the delicacies of the French and German languages, she and Emily set off for this sojourn in Brussels.

One may be forgiven for speculating as to her future lot had she accepted the offer of marriage she received in her early governess days, and settled down as the faithful wife of a sober English gentleman. In that case "Shirley" perhaps might have been written, but "Jane Eyre" and "Villette" never. She learnt much during her two years' sojourn in the Belgian capital; but the greatest of all the lessons she mastered whilst there was that self-knowledge the taste of which is so bitter to the mouth, though so wholesome to the life. Mrs. Gaskell has made such ample use of the letters she penned during the long months which she spent as an exile from England, that there is comparatively little left to cull from them. Everybody knows the outward circumstances of her story at this time. For a brief period she had the company of Emily; and the two sisters, working together with the unremitting zeal of those who have learned that time is money, were happy and hopeful, enjoying the novel sights of the gay foreign capital, gathering fresh experiences every day, and looking forward to the moment when they would return to familiar Haworth, and realise the dream of their lives by opening a school of their own within the walls of the parsonage. But then Emily left, and Charlotte, after a brief holiday at home, returned alone. Years after, writing to her friend, she speaks of her return in these words: "I returned to Brussels after aunt's death against my conscience, prompted by what then seemed an irresistible impulse. I was punished for my selfish folly by a total withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind." Why did she thus go back "against her conscience?" Her friends declared that her future husband dwelt somewhere within sound of the chimes of St. Gudule, and that she insisted upon returning to Brussels because she was about to be married there. We know now how different was the reality. The husband who awaited her was even then about to begin his long apprenticeship of love at Haworth. Yet none the less had her spirit, if not her heart, been captured and held captive in the Belgian city. It is not in her letters that we find the truth regarding her life at this time. The truth indeed is there, but not all the truth. "In catalepsy and dread trance," says Lucy Snowe, "I studiously held the quick of my nature.… It is on the surface only the common gaze will fall." The secrets of her inner life could not be trusted to paper, even though the lines were intended for no eyes but those of her friend and confidante. There are some things, as we know well, that the heart hides as by instinct, and which even frank and open natures only reveal under compulsion. Writing to her friend from Brussels in October, 1843, she says: "I have much to say, Ellen; many little odd things, queer and puzzling enough, which I do not like to trust to a letter, but which one day, perhaps, or rather one evening, if ever we should find ourselves again by the fireside at Haworth, or at B — — , with our feet on the fender, curling our hair, I may communicate to you." One of the hardest features of the last year she spent at Brussels was the necessity she was under of locking all the deepest emotions of her life within her own breast, of preserving the calm and even cold exterior, which should tell nothing to the common gaze, above the troubled, fevered heart that beat within.

When do you think I shall see you? — she cries to her friend within a few days of her final return to Haworth — I have, of course, much to tell you, and I dare say you have much also to tell me — things which we should neither of us wish to commit to paper…. I do not know whether you feel as I do, but there are times now when it appears to me as if all my ideas and feelings, except a few friendships and affections, are changed from what they used to be. Something in me which used to be enthusiasm is tamed down and broken. I have fewer illusions. What I wish for now is active exertion — a stake in life. Haworth seems such a lonely, quiet spot, buried away from the world. I no longer regard myself as young; indeed, I shall soon be twenty-eight, and it seems as if I ought to be working and braving the rough realities of the world, as other people do. It is, however, my duty to restrain this feeling at present, and I will endeavour to do so.

Yes; she was "disillusioned" now, and she had brought back from Brussels a heart which could never be quite so light, a spirit which could never again soar so buoyantly, as in those earlier years when the tree of knowledge was still untasted, and the mystery of life still unrevealed. This stay in Belgium was, as I have said, the turning-point in Charlotte Brontë's career, and its true history and meaning is to be found, not in her "Life" and letters, but in "Villette," the master-work of her mind, and the revelation of the most vivid passages in her own heart's history. "I said I disliked Lucy Snowe," is a remark which Mrs. Gaskell innocently repeats in her memoir of Charlotte Brontë. One need not be surprised at it. Lucy Snowe was never meant to be liked — by everybody; but none the less is Lucy Snowe the truest picture we possess of the real Charlotte Brontë; whilst not a few of the fortunes which befell this strange heroine are literal transcripts from the life of her creator. One little incident in "Villette" — Lucy's impulsive visit to a Roman Catholic confessor — is taken direct from Charlotte's own experience. During one of the long lonely holidays in the foreign school, when her mind was restless and disturbed, her heart heavy, her nerves jarred and jangled, she fled from the great empty schoolrooms to seek peace in the street; and she found, not peace perhaps, but sympathy at least, in the counsels of a priest, seated at the Confessional in a church into which she wandered, who took pity on the little heretic, and soothed her troubled spirit without attempting to enmesh it in the folds of Romanism. It was from experiences such as these, with a chastened heart and a nature tamed down, though by no means broken, that she returned to familiar Haworth, to face "the rough realities of the world."

Rough, indeed, those realities were in her case. Her brother, once the hope of the family, had now become its burden and its curse; and from that moment he was to be the prodigal for whom no fatted calf would ever be killed. Her father was fast losing his eyesight; she and her sisters were getting on in life, and "something must be done." Charlotte had returned home, but her heart was still in Brussels, and the wings of her spirit began to beat impatiently against the cage in which she found herself imprisoned. It was only the old story. She had gone out into the world, had tasted strange joys, and drunk deep of waters the very bitterness of which seemed to endear them to her. Returning to Haworth she went back a new woman, with tastes and hopes which it was hard to reconcile with the monotony of life in the parsonage which had once satisfied her completely.

"If I *could* leave home I should not be at Haworth," she says soon after her return. "I know life is passing away, and I am doing nothing, earning nothing; a very bitter knowledge it is at moments, but I see no way out of the mist." And then, almost for the first time in her life, something like a cry of despair goes up from her lips: "Probably, when I am free to leave home, I shall neither be able to find place nor employment. Perhaps, too, I shall be quite past the prime of life, my faculties will be wasted, and my few acquirements in a great measure forgotten. These ideas sting me keenly sometimes; but whenever I consult my conscience, it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home, and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release."

But this outburst of personal feeling was exceptional, and was uttered in one ear only. Within the walls of her home Charlotte again became the house-mother, busying herself with homely cares, and ever watching for some opportunity of carrying her plan of school-keeping into execution. Nor did she allow either the troubles at home, or that weight at her own heart which she bore in secrecy, to render her spirit morbid and melancholy. Not a few who have read Mrs. Gaskell's work labour under the belief that this was the effect that Charlotte Brontë's trials had upon her. As a matter of fact, however, she was far too strong, brave, cheerful — one had almost said manly — to give way to any such selfish repinings. She never was one of those sickly souls who go about "glooming over the woes of existence, and how unworthy God's universe is to have so distinguished a resident." Even when her own sorrows were deepest, and her lot seemed hardest, she found a lively pleasure in discussing the characters and lots of others, and expended as much pains and time in analysing the inner lives of her friends as our sham Byrons are wont to expend upon the study of their own feelings and emotions. Indeed, of that self-pity which is so common a characteristic of the young, no trace is to be found in her correspondence. Let the following letter, hitherto unpublished, written at the very time when the household clouds were blackest, speak for her freedom from morbid self-consciousness, as well as for her hearty interest in the well-being of those around her:

You are a very good girl indeed to send me such a long and interesting letter. In all that account of the young lady and gentleman in the railway carriage I recognise your faculty for observation, which is a rarer gift than you imagine. You ought to be thankful for it. I never yet met with an individual devoid of observation whose conversation was interesting, nor with one possessed of that power in whose society I could not manage to pass a pleasant hour. I was amused with your allusions to individuals at — — . I have little doubt of the truth of the report you mention about Mr. Z — — paying assiduous attention to — — . Whether it will ever come to a match is another thing. *Money* would decide that point, as it does most others of a similar nature. You are perfectly right in saying that Mr. Z — — is more influenced by opinion than he himself suspects. I saw his lordship in a new light last time I was at — — . Sometimes I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard the stress he laid on wealth, appearance, family, and all those advantages which are the idols of the world. His conversation on marriage (and he talked much about it) differed in no degree from that of any hackneyed fortune-hunter, except that with his own peculiar and native audacity he avowed views and principles which more timid individuals conceal. Of course I raised no argument against anything he said. I listened, and laughed inwardly to think how indignant I should have been eight years since if anyone had accused Z — — of being a worshipper of Mammon and of Interest. Indeed, I still believe that the Z — — of ten years ago is not the Z — — of to-day. The world, with its hardness and selfishness, has utterly changed him. He thinks himself grown wiser than the wisest. In a worldly sense he is wise. His feelings have gone through a process of petrifaction which will prevent them from ever warring against his interest; but Ichabod! all glory of principle, and much elevation of character are gone! I learnt another thing. Fear the smooth side of Z — — ‘s tongue more than the rough side. He has the art of paying peppery little compliments, which he seems to bring out with a sort of difficulty, as if he were not used to that kind of thing, and did it rather against his will than otherwise. These compliments you feel disposed to value on account of their seeming rarity. Fudge! They are at any one’s disposal, and are confessedly hollow blarney.

Still more significant, however, is the following letter, showing so kindly and careful an interest in the welfare of the friend to whom it is addressed, even whilst it bears the bitter tidings of a great household sorrow:

July 31, 1845.

I was glad to get your little packet. It was quite a treasure of interest to me. I think the intelligence about G — — is cheering. I have read the lines to Miss — — . They are expressive of the affectionate feelings of his nature, and are poetical, insomuch as they are true. Faults in expression, rhythm, metre, were of course to be expected. All you say about Mr. — — amused me much. Still, I cannot put out of my mind one fear, viz. that you should think too much about him. Faulty as he is, and as you know him to be, he has still certain qualities which might create an interest in your mind before you were aware. He has the art of impressing ladies by something involuntary in his look and manner, exciting in them the notion that he cares for them, while his words and actions are all careless, inattentive, and quite uncompromising for himself. It is only men who have seen much of life and of the world, and who are become in a measure indifferent to female attractions, that possess this art. So be on your guard. These are not pleasant or flattering words, but they are the words of one who has known you long enough to be indifferent about being temporarily disagreeable, provided she can be permanently useful.

I got home very well. There was a gentleman in the railroad carriage whom I recognised by his features immediately as a foreigner and a Frenchman. So sure was I of it that I ventured to say to him, "*Monsieur est français, n'est-ce pas*?" He gave a start of surprise, and answered immediately in his own tongue. He appeared still more astonished and even puzzled when, after a few minutes' further conversation, I inquired if he had not passed the greater part of his life in Germany. He said the surmise was correct. I guessed it from his speaking French with the German accent.

It was ten o'clock at night when I got home. I found Branwell ill. He is so very often, owing to his own fault. I was not therefore shocked at first. But when Anne informed me of the immediate cause of his present illness I was very greatly shocked. He had last Thursday received a note from Mr. — — sternly dismissing him…. We have had sad work with him since. He thought of nothing but stunning or drowning his distressed mind. No one in the house could have rest, and at last we have been obliged to send him from home for a week with someone to look after him. He has written to me this morning, and expresses some sense of contrition for his frantic folly. He promises amendment on his return, but so long as he remains at home I scarce dare hope for peace in the house. We must all, I fear, prepare for a season of distress and disquietude. I cannot now ask Miss — — or anyone else.

The gloom in the household deepened; but Charlotte was still strong enough and brave enough to meet the world, to retain her accustomed interest in her friends, and to discuss as of yore the characters and lives of those around her. Curious are the glimpses one gets of her circle of acquaintances at this time. Little did many of those with whom she was brought in contact think of the keen eyes which were gazing out at them from under the prominent forehead of the parson's daughter. Yet not the least interesting feature of her correspondence is the evidence it affords that she was gradually gaining that knowledge of character which was afterwards to be lavished upon her books. A string of extracts from letters hitherto unpublished will suffice to show how the current of her life and thoughts ran in those days of domestic darkness, whilst the dawn of her fame was still hidden in the blackest hour of the night:

I have just read M — — 's letters. They are very interesting, and show the original and vigorous cast of her mind. There is but one thing I could wish otherwise in them, and that is a certain tendency to flightiness. It is not safe, it is not wise; and will often cause her to be misconstrued. Perhaps *flightiness* is not the right word; but it is a devil-may-care tone, which I do not like when it proceeds from under a hat, and still less from under a bonnet.

I return you Miss — — 's notes with thanks. I always like to read them. They appear to me so true an index of an amiable mind, and one not too conscious of its own worth. Beware of awakening in her this consciousness by undue praise. It is a privilege of simple-hearted, sensible, but not brilliant people that they can *be* and *do* good without comparing their own thoughts and actions too closely with those of other people, and thence drawing strong food for self-appreciation. Talented people almost always know full well the excellence that is in them.… You ask me if we are more comfortable. I wish I could say anything favourable; but how can we be more comfortable so long as Branwell stays at home and degenerates instead of improving? It has been lately intimated to him that he would be received again on the same railroad where he was formerly stationed if he would behave more steadily, but he refuses to make an effort. He will not work, and at home he is a drain on every resource, an impediment to all happiness. But there's no use in complaining.

I thank you again for your last letter, which I found as full or fuller of interest than either of the preceding ones — it is just written as I wish you to write to me — not a detail too much. A correspondence of that sort is the next best thing to actual conversation, though it must be allowed that between the two there is a wide gulf still. I imagine your face, voice, presence very plainly when I read your letters. Still imagination is not reality, and when I return them to their envelope and put them by in my desk I feel the difference sensibly enough. My curiosity is a little piqued about that countess you mention. What is her name? you have not yet given it. I cannot decide from what you say whether she is really clever or only eccentric. The two sometimes go together, but are often seen apart. I generally feel inclined to fight very shy of eccentricity, and have no small horror of being thought eccentric myself, by which observation I don't mean to insinuate that I class myself under the head clever. God knows a more consummate ass in sundry important points has seldom browsed the green herb of His bounties than I. O Lord, Nell, I'm in danger sometimes of falling into self-weariness. I used to say and to think in former times that X — — would certainly be married. I am not so sanguine on that point now. It will never suit her to accept a husband she cannot love, or at least respect, and it appears there are many chances against her meeting with such a one under favourable circumstances; besides, from all I can hear and see, money seems to be regarded as almost the Alpha and Omega of requisites in a wife. Well, if she is destined to be an old maid I don't think she will be a repining one. I think she will find resources in her own mind and disposition which will help her to get on. As to society, I don't understand much about it, but from the few glimpses I have had of its machinery it seems to me to be a very strange, complicated affair indeed, wherein nature is turned upside down. Your well-bred people appear to me, figuratively speaking, to walk on their heads, to see everything the wrong way up — a lie is with them truth, truth a lie, eternal and tedious botheration is their notion of happiness, sensible pursuits their *ennui*. But this may be only the view ignorance takes of what it cannot understand. I refrain from judging them, therefore, but if I were called upon to *swop* — you know the word, I suppose — to swop tastes and ideas and feelings with — — , for instance, I should prefer walking into a good Yorkshire kitchen fire and concluding the bargain at once by an act of voluntary combustion.

I shall scribble you a short note about nothing, just to have a pretext for screwing a letter out of you in return. I was sorry you did not go to W — — , firstly, because you lost the pleasure of observation and enjoyment; and secondly, because I lost the second-hand indulgence of hearing your account of what you had seen. I laughed at the candour with which you give your reason for wishing to be there. Thou hast an honest soul as ever animated human carcase, and a clean one, for it is not ashamed of showing its inmost recesses: only be careful with whom you are frank. Some would not rightly appreciate the value of your frankness, and never cast pearls before swine. You are quite right in wishing to look well in the eyes of those whom you desire to please. It is natural to desire to appear to advantage (*honest* not *false* advantage of course) before people we respect. Long may the power and the inclination to do so be spared you; long may you look young and handsome enough to dress in white; and long may you have a right to feel the consciousness that you look agreeable. I know you have too much judgment to let an over-dose of vanity spoil the blessing and turn it into a misfortune. After all though, age will come on, and it is well you have something better than a nice face for friends to turn to when that is changed. I hope this excessively cold weather has not harmed you or *yours* much. It has nipped me severely — taken away my appetite for a while, and given me toothache; in short put me in the ailing condition in which I have more than once had the honour of making myself such a nuisance both at B — — and — — . The consequence is that at this present speaking I look almost old enough to be your mother — gray, sunk, and withered. To-day, however, it is milder, and I hope soon to feel better; indeed, I am not *ill* now, and my toothache is quite subsided; but I experience a loss of strength and a deficiency of spirit which would make me a sorry companion to you or anyone else. I would not be on a visit now for a large sum of money.

June, 1846.

I hope all the mournful contingencies of death are by this time removed from — — , and that some little sense of relief is beginning to be experienced by its wearied inmates. — — suffered greatly, I make no doubt; and I trust, and even believe, that his long sufferings on earth will be taken as sufficient expiation for his errors. One shudders for him, but it is his relations — his mother and sisters — whom I truly and permanently pity.

July 10th, 1846.

Dear Ellen, — Who gravely asked you whether Miss Brontë was not going to be married to — — ? I scarcely need say that there never was rumour more unfounded. It puzzles me to think how it could possibly have originated. A cold, far-away sort of civility, are the only terms on which I have ever been with Mr. — — . I could by no means think of mentioning such a rumour to him, even as a joke. It would make me the laughing-stock of himself and his fellow-curates, for half a year to come. They regard me as an old maid; and I regard them, one and all, as highly uninteresting, narrow, and unattractive specimens of the "coarser sex."

VII.

AUTHORSHIP AND BEREAVEMENT.

The reader has seen that it was not the degradation of Branwell Brontë which formed the turning-point in Charlotte's life. Mrs. Gaskell, anxious to support her own conception of what *should have been* Charlotte's feelings with regard to her brother's ruin, has scarcely done justice either to herself or to her heroine. Thus she makes use of a passage in one of the letters quoted in the foregoing chapter, but in doing so omits what are perhaps the most characteristic words in it. "He" (Branwell) "has written this morning expressing some sense of contrition; … but as long as he remains at home I scarce dare hope for peace in the house." This is the form in which the passage appears in the "Biography," whereas Charlotte had written of her brother's having expressed "contrition for his frantic folly," and of his having "promised amendment on his return." Mrs. Gaskell could not bring herself to speak of such flagrant sins as those of which young Brontë had been guilty under the name of "folly," nor could she conceive that there was any possibility of amendment on the part of one who had fallen so low in vice. Moreover, one of her objects was to punish those who had shared the lad's misconduct, and to whom she openly attributed not only his ruin but the premature deaths of his sisters. Thus she felt compelled to take throughout her book a far deeper and more tragic view of this miserable episode in the Brontë story than Charlotte herself took. Having read all her letters written at this period of her life to her two most confidential friends, I am justified in saying that the impression produced on Charlotte by Branwell's degrading fall was not so deep as that which was produced on Mrs. Gaskell, who never saw young Brontë, by the mere recital of the story. Yet Charlotte, though too brave, healthy, and reasonable in all things to be utterly weighed down by the fact that her brother had fallen a victim to loathsome vice, was far from being insensible to the sadness and shamefulness of his condition. What she thought of it she has herself told the world in the story of "The Professor" (p. 198):

Limited as had yet been my experience of life, I had once had the opportunity of contemplating near at hand an example of the results produced by a course of interesting and romantic domestic treachery. No golden halo of fiction was about this example; I saw it bare and real, and it was very loathsome. I saw a mind degraded by the practice of mean subterfuge, by the habit of perfidious deception, and a body depraved by the infectious influence of the vice-polluted soul. I had suffered much from the forced and prolonged view of this spectacle; those sufferings I did not now regret, for their simple recollection acted as a most wholesome antidote to temptation. They had inscribed on my reason the conviction that unlawful pleasure, trenching on another's rights, is delusive and envenomed pleasure — its hollowness disappoints at the time, its poison cruelly tortures afterwards, its effects deprave for ever.

Upon the gentle and sensitive mind of Anne Brontë the effect of Branwell's fall was such as Mrs. Gaskell depicts. She was literally broken down by the grief she suffered in seeing her brother's ruin; but Charlotte and Emily were of stronger fibre than their sister, and their predominant feeling, as expressed in their letters, is one of sheer disgust at their brother's weakness, and of indignation against all who had in any way assisted in his downfall. This may not be consistent with the popular conception of Charlotte's character, but it is strictly true.

We must then dismiss from our minds the notion that the brother's fate exercised that paramount influence over the sisters' lives which seems to be believed. Yet, as we have seen, there was a very strong though hidden influence working in Charlotte during those years in which their home was darkened by Branwell's presence. Her yearning for Brussels and the life that now seemed like a vanished dream, continued almost as strong as ever. At Haworth everything was dull, commonplace, monotonous. The school-keeping scheme had failed; poverty and obscurity seemed henceforth to be the appointed lot of all the sisters. Even the source of intercourse with friends was almost entirely cut off; for Charlotte could not bear the shame of exposing the prodigal of the family to the gaze of strangers. It was at this time, and in the mood described in the letters quoted in the preceding chapter, that she took up her pen, and sought to escape from the narrow and sordid cares which environed her by a flight into the region of poetry. She had been accustomed from childhood to write verses, few of which as yet had passed the limits of mediocrity. Now, with all that heart-history through which she had passed at Brussels weighing upon her, she began to write again, moved by a stronger impulse, stirred by deeper thoughts than any she had known before. In this secret exercise of her faculties she found relief and enjoyment; her letters to her friend showed that her mind was regaining its tone, and the dreary out-look from "the hills of Judæa" at Haworth began to brighten. It was a great day in the lives of all the sisters when Charlotte accidentally discovered that Emily also had dared to "commit her soul to paper." The younger sister was keenly troubled when Charlotte made the discovery, for her poems had been written in absolute secrecy. But mutual confessions hastened her reconcilement. Charlotte produced her own poems, and then Anne also, blushing as was her wont, poured some hidden treasures of the same kind into the eldest sister's lap. So it came to pass that in 1846, unknown to their nearest friends, they presented to the world — at their own cost and risk, poor souls! — that thin volume of poetry "by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell," now almost forgotten, the merits of which few readers have recognised and few critics proclaimed.

Strong, calm, sincere, most of these poems are; not the spasmodic or frothy outpourings of Byron-stricken girls; not even mere echoes, however skilful, of the grand music of the masters. When we dip into the pages of the book, we see that these women write because they feel. They write because they have something to say; they write not for the world, but for themselves, each sister wrapping her own secret within her own soul. Strangely enough, it is not Charlotte who carries off the palm in these poems. Verse seems to have been too narrow for the limits of her genius; she could not soar as she desired to do within the self-imposed restraints of rhythm, rhyme, and metre. Here and there, it is true, we come upon lines which flash upon us with the brilliant light of genius; but, upon the whole, we need not wonder that Currer Bell achieved no reputation as a poet. Nor is Anne to be counted among great singers. Sweet, indeed her verses are, radiant with the tenderness, resignation, and gentle humility which were the prominent features of her character. One or two of her little poems are now included in popular collections of hymns used in Yorkshire churches; but, as a rule, her compositions lack the vigorous life which belongs to those of her sisters. It is Emily who takes the first place in this volume. Some of her poems have a lyrical beauty which haunts the mind ever after it has become acquainted with them; others have a passionate emphasis, a depth of meaning, an intensity and gravity which are startling when we know who the singer is, and which furnish a key to many passages in “Wuthering Heights” which the world shudders at and hastily passes by. Such lines as these ought to make the name of Emily Brontë far more familiar than it is to the students of our modern English literature:

Death! that struck when I was most confiding
In my certain faith of joy to be —
Strike again, Time’s withered branch dividing
From the fresh root of Eternity!
Leaves upon Time’s branch were growing brightly,
Full of sap and full of silver dew;
Birds beneath its shelter gathered nightly;
Daily round its flowers the wild bees flew.
Sorrow passed, and plucked the golden blossom;
Guilt stripped off the foliage in its pride;
But within its parent’s kindly bosom
Flowed for ever Life’s restoring tide.
Little mourned I for the parted gladness,
For the vacant nest and silent song —
Hope was there, and laughed me out of sadness,
Whispering, “Winter will not linger long!”
And behold! with tenfold increase blessing,
Spring adorned the beauty-burdened spray;
Wind and rain and fervent heat, caressing,

Lavished glory on that second May!
High it rose — no winged grief could sweep it;
Sin was scared to distance by its shine;
Love, and its own life, had power to keep it
From all wrong — from every blight but thine,
Cruel Death! The young leaves droop and languish;
Evening's gentle air may still restore —
No! the morning sunshine mocks my anguish —
Time, for me, must never blossom more!
Strike it down, that other boughs may flourish
Where that perished sapling used to be;
Thus at least its mouldering corpse will nourish
That from which it sprung — Eternity.

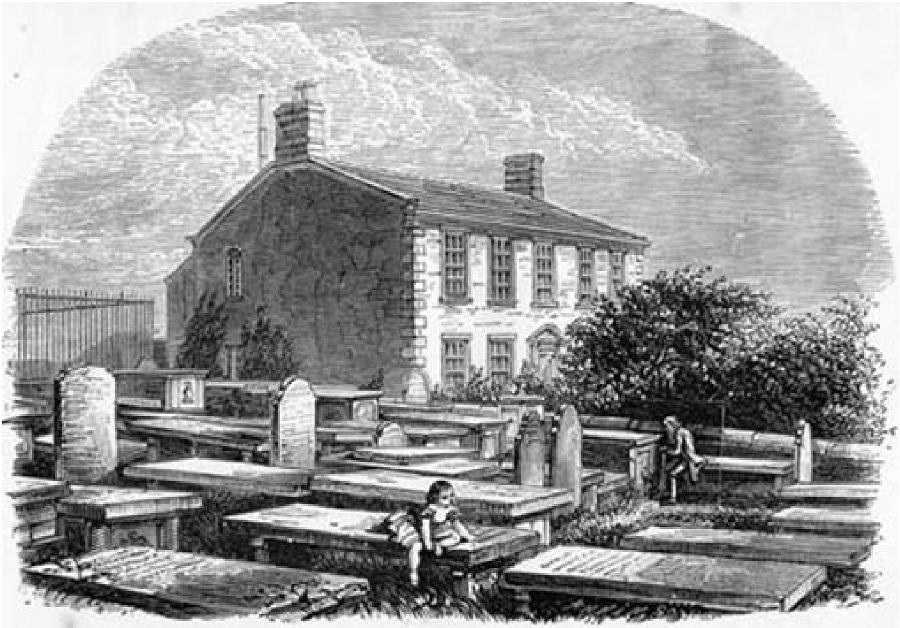
The little book was a failure. This first flight ended only in discomfiture; and Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell were once more left to face the realities of life in Haworth parsonage, uncheered by literary success. This was in the summer and autumn of 1846; about which time they were compelled to think of cares which came even nearer home than the failure of their volume of poems. Their father's eyesight was now almost gone, and all their thoughts were centred upon the operation which was to restore it. It was to Manchester that Mr. Brontë was taken by his daughters to undergo this operation. Many of the letters which were written by Charlotte at this period have already been published; but the two which I now quote are new, and they serve to show what were the narrow cares and anxieties which nipped the sisters at this eventful crisis in their lives:

September 22nd, 1846.

Dear Ellen, — I have nothing new to tell you, except that papa continues to do well, though the process of recovery appears to me very tedious. I daresay it will yet be many weeks before his sight is completely restored; yet every time Mr. Wilson comes, he expresses his satisfaction at the perfect success of the operation, and assures me papa will, ere long, be able both to read and write. He is still a prisoner in his darkened room, into which, however, a little more light is admitted than formerly. The nurse goes to-day — her departure will certainly be a relief, though she is, I daresay, not the worst of her class.

September 29th, 1846.

Dear Ellen, — When I wrote to you last, our return was uncertain indeed, but Mr. Wilson was called away to Scotland; his absence set us at liberty. I hastened our departure, and now we are at home. Papa is daily gaining strength. He cannot yet exercise his sight much, but it improves, and I have no doubt will continue to do so. I feel truly thankful for the good insured and the evil exempted during our absence. What you say about — — grieves me much, and surprises me too. I know well the malaria of — — , it is an abominable smell of gas. I was sick from it ten times a day while I stayed there. That they should hesitate to leave from scruples about furnishing new houses, provokes and amazes me. Is not the furniture they have very decent? The inconsistency of human beings passes belief. I wonder what their sister would say to them, if they told her that tale? She sits on a wooden stool without a back, in a log-house without a carpet, and neither is degraded nor thinks herself degraded by such poor accommodation.



HAWORTH PARSONAGE AND GRAVEYARD.

It was about the time when this journey to Manchester was first projected, and very shortly after they had become convinced that their poems were a failure, that the sisters embarked upon another and more important literary venture. The pen once taken up could not be laid down. By poetry they had only lost money; but the idea had occurred to them that by prose-writing money was to be made. At any rate, in telling the stories of imaginary people, in opening their hearts freely upon all those subjects on which they had thought deeply in their secluded lives, they would find relief from the solitude of Haworth. Each of the three accordingly began to write a novel. The stories were commenced simultaneously, after a long consultation, in which the outlines of the plots, and even the names of the different characters, were settled. How one must wish that some record of that strange literary council had been preserved! Charlotte, in after life, spoke always tenderly, lovingly, almost reverentially, of the days in which she and her well-beloved sisters were engaged in settling the plan and style of their respective romances. That time seemed sacred to her, and though she learnt to smile at the illusions under which the work was begun, and could see clearly enough the errors and crudities of thought and method which all three displayed, she never allowed any one in her presence to question the genius of Emily and Anne, or to ridicule the prosaic and business-like fashion in which the novel-writing was undertaken by the three sisters. Returning to the old customs of their childhood, they sat round the table of their sitting-room in the parsonage, each busy with her pen. No trace of their occupation at this time is to be found in their letters; and on the rare occasions on which the father or the brother came into their room, nothing was said as to the work that was going on. The novel-writing, like the writing and publishing of the poems, was still kept profoundly secret. "There is no gentleman of the name in this parish," said Mr. Brontë to the village postman, when the latter ventured to ask who the Mr. Currer Bell could be for whom letters came so frequently from London. But every night the three sisters, as they paced the barely-furnished room, or strained their eyes across the tombstones, to the spot where the weather-stained church-tower rose from a bank of nettles, told each other what the work of the day had been, and criticised each other's labours with the freedom of that perfect love which casts out all fear of misconception. And here I may interpolate two letters written whilst the novel-writing was in progress, which are in some respects not altogether insignificant:

Dear Nell, — Your last letter both amused and edified me exceedingly. I could not but laugh at your account of the fall in B — —, yet I should by no means have liked to have made a third party in that exhibition. I have endured one fall in your company, and undergone one of your ill-timed laughs, and don't wish to repeat my experience. Allow me to compliment you on the skill with which you can seem to give an explanation, without enlightening one one whit on the question asked. I know no more about Miss R.'s superstition now, than I did before. What is the superstition? — about a dead body? And what is the inference drawn? Do you remember my telling you — or did I ever tell you — about that wretched and most criminal Mr. J. S.? After running an infamous career of vice, both in England and France, abandoning his wife to disease and total destitution in Manchester, with two children and without a farthing, in a strange lodging-house? Yesterday evening Martha came upstairs to say that a woman — "rather lady-like," as she said — wished to speak to me in the kitchen. I went down. There stood Mrs. S., pale and worn, but still interesting-looking, and cleanly and neatly dressed, as was her little girl who was with her. I kissed her heartily. I could almost have cried to see her, for I had pitied her with my whole soul when I heard of her undeserved sufferings, agonies, and physical degradation. She took tea with us, stayed about two hours, and frankly entered into the narrative of her appalling distresses. Her constitution has triumphed over her illness; and her excellent sense, her activity, and perseverance have enabled her to regain a decent position in society, and to procure a respectable maintenance for herself and her children. She keeps a lodging-house in a very eligible part of the suburbs of — — (which I know), and is doing very well. She does not know where Mr. S. is, and of course can never more endure to see him. She is now staying a few days at E — — , with the — — s, who I believe have been all along very kind to her, and the circumstance is greatly to their credit.

I wish to know whether about Whitsuntide would suit you for coming to Haworth. We often have fine weather just then. At least I remember last year it was very beautiful at that season. Winter seems to have returned with severity on us at present, consequently we are all in the full enjoyment of a cold. Much blowing of noses is heard, and much making of gruel goes on in the house. How are you all?

May 12th, 1847.

Dear Ellen, — We shall all be glad to see you on the Thursday or Friday of next week, whichever day will suit you best. About what time will you be likely to get here, and how will you come — by coach to Keighley, or by a gig all the way to Haworth? There must be no impediments now. I could not do with them; I want very much to see you. I hope you will be decently comfortable while you stay. Branwell is quieter now, and for a good reason. He has got to the end of a considerable sum of money, of which he became possessed in the spring, and consequently is obliged to restrict himself in some degree. You must expect to find him weaker in mind, and the complete rake in appearance. I have no apprehension of his being at all uncivil to you, on the contrary he will be as smooth as oil.

I pray for fine weather, that we may be able to get out while you stay. Good-bye for the present. Prepare for much dulness and monotony. Give my love to all at B — — .

Is it needful to tell how the three stories — “The Professor,” “Wuthering Heights,” and “Agnes Grey” — are sent forth at last from the little station at Keighley, to fare as best they may in that unknown London which is still an ideal city to the sisters, peopled not with ordinary human beings, but with creatures of some strangely-different order? Can any one be ignorant of the weary months which passed whilst “The Professor” was going from hand to hand, and the stories written by Emily and Anne were waiting in a publisher’s desk until they could be given to the world on the publisher’s own terms? Charlotte had failed, but the brave heart was not to be baffled. No sooner had the last page of “The Professor” been finished than the first page of “Jane Eyre” was begun. The whole of that wondrous story passed through the author’s busy brain whilst the life around her was clad in these sombre hues, and disappointment, affliction, and gloomy forebodings were her daily companions. The decisive rejection of her first tale by Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co. had been accompanied by some kindly words of advice; so it is to that firm that she now entrusts the completed manuscript of “Jane Eyre.” The result has already been told. On August 24, 1847, the story is sent from Leeds to London; and before the year is out, all England is ringing with the praises of the novel and its author.

Need I defend the sisters from the charge sometimes brought against them that they were unfaithful to their friends in not taking them into their confidence? Surely not. They had pledged themselves to each other that the secret should be sternly guarded as something sacred, kept even from those of their own household. They were not working for fame; for again and again they give proof that personal fame is the last thing to which they aspire. But they had found their true vocation; the call to work was irresistible; they had obeyed it, and all that they sought now was to leave their work to speak for itself, dissevered absolutely from the humble personality of the authors.

In a letter from Anne Brontë, written in January, 1848, at which time the literary quidnuncs both of England and America were eagerly discussing contradictory theories as to the authorship of "Jane Eyre," and of the two other stories which had appeared from the pens of Ellis and Acton Bell, I find the following passage: "I have no news to tell you, for we have been nowhere, seen no one, and done nothing (to *speak* of) since you were here, and yet we contrive to be busy from morning till night." The gentle and scrupulously conscientious girl, whilst hiding the secret from her friend, cannot violate the truth even by a hairbreadth. The italics are her own. Nothing *that can be spoken of* has been done. The friend had her own suspicions. Staying in a southern house for the winter, the new novel about which everybody was talking was produced, fresh from town. One of the guests was deputed to read it aloud, and before she had proceeded far Charlotte Brontë's schoolfellow had pierced the secret of the authorship. Three months before, Charlotte had been spending a few days at Miss N — — 's house, and had openly corrected the proof-sheets of the story in the presence of her hostess; but she had given the latter no encouragement to speak to her on the subject, and nothing had been said. Now, however, in the surprise of the moment, Miss N — — told the company that this must have been written by Miss Brontë; and astute friends at once advised her not to mention the fact that she knew the author of "Jane Eyre" to any one, as her acquaintance with such a person would be regarded as a reflection on her own character! When Charlotte was challenged by her friend, she uttered stormy denials in general terms, which carried a complete confirmation of the truth; and when, in the spring of 1848, Miss N — — visited Haworth, full confession was made, and the poems brought forth and shown to her, in addition to the stories.

Those who read Charlotte Brontë's letters will see that even before this avowal of her flight in authorship there is a distinct change in their tone. Not that she is less affectionate towards her early friend, or that she shows the smallest abatement of her interest in the fortunes of her old companions. On the contrary, it would almost seem as though the great event, which had altered the current of her life, had only served to bind her more closely than before to those whom she had known and loved in her obscurity. But there is a perceptible growth of power and independence in her mode of handling the topics, often trivial enough in themselves, which arise in any prolonged correspondence, which shows how much her mind had grown, how greatly her views had been enlarged, by the intellectual labours through which she had passed. The following was the last letter written by her to her schoolfellow whilst the authorship of "Jane Eyre" was still a secret, and it will, I think, bear out what I have said:

April 25th, 1848.

I was not at all surprised at the contents of your note. Indeed, what part of it was new to us? V — — has his good and bad side, like most others. There is his own original nature, and there are the alterations the world has made in him. Meantime, why do B — — and G — — trouble themselves with matching him? Let him, in God's name, court half the country-side and marry the other half, if such procedure seem good in his eyes, and let him do it all in quietness. He has his own botherations, no doubt; it does not seem to be such very easy work getting married, even for a man, since it is necessary to make up to so many ladies. More tranquil are those who have settled their bargain with celibacy. I like Q — — 's letters more and more. Her goodness is indeed better than mere talent. I fancy she will never be married, but the amiability of her character will give her comfort. To be sure, one has only her letters to judge from, and letters often deceive; but hers seem so artless and unaffected. Still, were I in your place I should feel uneasy in the midst of this correspondence. Does a doubt of mutual satisfaction in case you should one day meet never torment you?… Anne says it pleases her to think that you have kept her little drawing. She would rather have done it for you than for a stranger.

Very quietly and sedately did "Currer Bell" take her sudden change of fortune. She corresponded freely with her publishers, and with the critics who had written to her concerning her book; she told her father the secret of her authorship, and exhibited to him the draft which was the substantial recompense of her labours; but in her letters to her friend no difference of tone is to be detected. Success was very sweet to her, as we know; but she bore her honours meekly, betraying nothing of the gratified ambition which must have filled her soul. She had not even revealed her identity to the publisher till, by an accident, she became aware of the rumour that the writer had satirised Mr. Thackeray under the character of Rochester, and had even obtruded on the sorrows of his private life. Shocked at this supposition, she went to London by the night train, accompanied by Anne, and having breakfasted at the station, walked to the establishment in Cornhill, where she had much difficulty in penetrating to the head of the house, having stated that he would not know her by her name. At last he came into the shop, saying, with some annoyance: "Young woman, what can you want with me?" "Sir, we have come up from Yorkshire. I wish to speak to you privately. I wrote 'Jane Eyre.'" "*You* wrote 'Jane Eyre!'" cried the delighted publisher; and taking them into his office, insisted on their coming to the house of his mother, who would take every care of them. Charlotte related afterwards the strange contrast between the desolate waiting at the station in the early morning, and their loneliness in the crowd of the great city, and finding themselves in the evening seated among the brilliant company at the Opera House, listening to the performance of Jenny Lind.

But her thoughts were soon turned from her literary triumphs. Branwell, who had been so long the dark shadow in their "humble home," was taken from them without any lengthened preliminary warning. Sharing to the full the eccentricity of the family, he resolved to die as nobody else had ever died before; and when the last agony came on he rose to his feet, as though proudly defying death itself to do its worst, and expired standing. In the following letter, hitherto unpublished, to one of her friends — not to her old schoolfellow — Charlotte thus speaks of the last act in the tragedy of her brother's life:

Haworth, October 14th, 1848.

The event to which you allude came upon us indeed with startling suddenness, and was a severe shock to us all. My poor brother has long had a shaken constitution, and during the summer his appetite had been diminished and he had seemed weaker; but neither we, nor himself, nor any medical man who was consulted on his case, thought it one of immediate danger: he was out of doors two days before his death, and was only confined to bed one single day. I thank you for your kind sympathy. Many, under the circumstances, would think our loss rather a relief than otherwise; in truth, we must acknowledge, in all humility and gratitude, that God has greatly tempered judgment with mercy; but yet, as you doubtless know from experience, the last earthly separation cannot take place between near relations without the keenest pangs on the part of the survivors. Every wrong and sin is forgotten then; pity and grief share the heart and the memory between them. Yet we are not without comfort in our affliction. A most propitious change marked the few last days of poor Branwell's life; his demeanour, his language, his sentiments, were all singularly altered and softened, and this change could not be owing to the fear of death, for within half an hour of his decease he seemed unconscious of danger. In God's hands we leave him! He sees not as man sees. Papa, I am thankful to say, has borne the event pretty well. His distress was great at first. To lose an only son is no ordinary trial. But his physical strength has not hitherto failed him, and he has now in a great measure recovered his mental composure; my dear sisters are pretty well also. Unfortunately illness attacked me at the crisis, when strength was most needed; I bore up for a day or two, hoping to be better, but got worse; fever, sickness, total loss of appetite and internal pain were the symptoms. The doctor pronounced it to be bilious fever — but I think it must have been in a mitigated form; it yielded to medicine and care in a few days; I was only confined to my bed a week, and am, I trust, nearly well now. I felt it a grievous thing to be incapacitated from action and effort at a time when action and effort were most called for. The past month seems an overclouded period in my life.

Alas! the brave woman who felt it to be “a grievous thing” that she could not bear her full share of the family burden, little knew how terribly that burden was to be increased, how much heavier and blacker were the clouds which awaited her than any through which she had yet passed. The storm which even then was gathering upon her path was one which no sunshine of fame or prosperity could dissipate. The one to whom Charlotte’s heart had always clung most fondly, the sister who had been nearest to her in age and nearest to her in affection, Emily, the brilliant but ill-fated child of genius, began to fade. “She had never,” says Charlotte, speaking in the solitude of her fame, “lingered over any task in her life, and she did not linger now.” Yet the quick decline of Emily Brontë is one of the saddest of all the sad features of the story. I have spoken of her reserve. So intense was it that when dying she refused to admit even to her own sisters that she was ill. They saw her fading before their eyes; they knew that the grave was yawning at her feet; and yet they dared not offer her any attention such as an invalid needed, and such as they were longing to bestow upon her. It was the cruellest torture of Charlotte’s life. During the brief period of Emily’s illness, her sister writes as follows to her friend:

I mentioned your coming to Emily as a mere suggestion, with the faint hope that the prospect might cheer her, as she really esteems you perhaps more than any other person out of this house. I found, however, it would not do; any, the slightest excitement or putting out of the way, is not to be thought of, and indeed I do not think the journey in this unsettled weather, with the walk from Keighley and back, at all advisable for yourself. Yet I should have liked to see you, and so would Anne. Emily continues much the same: yesterday I thought her a little better, but to-day she is not so well. I hope still, for I *must* hope; she is as dear to me as life. If I let the faintness of despair reach my heart I shall become worthless. The attack was, I believe, in the first place, inflammation of the lungs; it ought to have been met promptly in time; but she would take no care, use no means, she is too intractable. I *do* wish I knew her state and feelings more clearly. The fever is not so high as it was, but the pain in the side, the cough, the emaciation are there still.

The days went by in the parsonage, slowly, solemnly, each bringing some fresh burden of sorrow to the broken hearts of Charlotte and Anne. Emily’s resolute spirit was unbending to the last. Day after day she refused to own that she was ill, refused to take rest or medicine or stimulants; compelled her trembling hands to labour as of old. And so came the bitter morning in December, the story of which has been told by Mrs. Gaskell with simple pathos, when she “arose and dressed herself as usual, making many a pause, but doing everything for herself,” even going on with her sewing as at any time during the years past; until suddenly she laid the unfinished work aside, whispered faintly to her sister: “If you send for a doctor I will see him now,” and in two hours passed quietly away.

The broken father, supported on either side by his surviving daughters, followed Emily to her grave in the old church. There was one other mourner — the fierce old dog whom she had loved better almost than any human being.

Yes — says Charlotte, writing to her friend — there is no Emily in time or on earth now. Yesterday we put her poor wasted mortal frame quietly under the church pavement. We are very calm at present. Why should we be otherwise? The anguish of seeing her suffer is over. We feel she is at peace. No need now to tremble for the hard frost and the keen wind. Emily does not feel them. She died in a time of promise. We saw her taken from life in its prime. But it is God's will, and the place where she is gone is better than that she has left.

It was in the very month of December, 1848, when Charlotte passed through this fierce ordeal, and wrote these tender words of love and resignation, that the *Quarterly Review* denounced her as an improper woman, who "for some sufficient reason" had forfeited the society of her sex!

Terrible was the storm of death which in three short months swept off two of the little household at Haworth; but it had not even yet exhausted all its fury. Scarcely had Emily been laid in the grave than Anne, the youngest and gentlest of the three sisters, began to fade. Very slowly did she droop. The winter passed away, and the spring came with a glimmer of hope; but the following unpublished letter, written on the 16th of May, shows with what fears Charlotte set forth on that visit to Scarborough which her sister insisted upon undertaking as a last resource:

Next Wednesday is the day fixed for our departure; Ellen accompanies us at her own kind and friendly wish. I would not refuse her society, but dared not urge her to go, for I have little hope that the excursion will be one of pleasure or benefit to those engaged in it. Anne is extremely weak. She herself has a fixed impression that the sea-air will give her a chance of regaining strength. That chance therefore she must have. Having resolved to try the experiment, misgivings are useless, and yet when I look at her misgivings will rise. She is more emaciated than Emily was at the very last, her breath scarcely serves her to mount the stairs, however slowly. She sleeps very little at night, and often passes most of the forenoon in a semi-lethargic state. Still she is up all day, and even goes out a little when it is fine. Fresh air usually acts as a temporary stimulus, but its reviving power diminishes.

I am indebted to the faithful friend and companion to whom allusion is made above, for the following account of the sad journey to Scarborough, and of its tragic end:

On our way to Scarborough we stopped at York, and after a rest at the George Hotel, and partaking of dinner, which she enjoyed, Anne went out in a bath-chair, and made purchases, along with Charlotte, of bonnets and dresses, besides visiting the minister. The morning after her arrival at Scarborough, she insisted on going to the baths, and would be left there with only the attendant in charge. She walked back alone to her lodgings, but fell exhausted as she reached the garden-gate. She never named this, but it was discovered afterwards. The same day she had a drive in a donkey carriage, and talked with the boy-driver on kindness to animals. On Sunday she wanted again to be left alone, and for us to go to church. Finding we would not leave her, she begged that she might go out, and we walked down towards the saloon, she resting half way, and sending us on with the excuse that she wanted us to see the place, this being *our* first visit, though not hers. In the evening, after again asking us to go to church, she sat by the sitting-room window, enjoying a very glorious sunset. Next morning (the day she died) she rose by seven o'clock and dressed herself, refusing all assistance. She was the first of the little party to be ready to go downstairs; but when she reached the head of the stairs, she felt fearful of descending. Charlotte went to her and discovered this. I fancying there was some difficulty, left my room to see what it was, when Anne smilingly told me she felt afraid of the steps downward. I immediately said: "Let me try to carry you;" she looked pleased, but feared for me. Charlotte was angry at the idea, and greatly distressed, I could see, at this new evidence of Anne's weakness. Charlotte was at last persuaded to go to her room and leave us. I then went a step or two below Anne, and begged her to put her arms round my neck, and I said: "I will carry you like a baby." She still feared, but on my promising to put her down if I could not do it, she consented to trust herself to me. Strength seemed to be given for the effort, but on reaching the foot of the stairs, poor Anne's head fell like a leaden weight upon the top of mine. The shock was terrible, for I felt it could only be death that was coming. I just managed to bear her to the front of her easy-chair and drop her into it, falling myself on my knees before her, very miserable at the fact, and letting her fall at last, though it was into her chair. She was shaken, but she put out her arms to comfort me, and said: "You know it could not be helped, you did your best." After this she sat at the breakfast-table and partook of a basin of boiled milk prepared for her. As 11 A.M. approached, she wondered if she could be conveyed home in time to die there. At 2 P.M. death had come, and left only her beautiful form in the sweetest peace.

She rendered up her soul with that sweetness and resignation of spirit which had adorned her throughout her brief life, even in the last hour crying: "Take courage, Charlotte, take courage!" as she bade farewell to the sister who was left.

Before me lie the few letters which remain of Emily and Anne. There is little in them worth preserving. Both make reference to the fact that Charlotte is the great correspondent of the family, and that their brief and uninteresting epistles can have no charm for one who is constantly receiving letters from her. Yet that modest reserve which distinguished the greatest of the three is plainly visible in what little remains of the correspondence of the others. They had discovered before their death the real power that lay within them; they had just experienced the joy which comes from the exercise of this power; they had looked forward to a future which should be sunny and prosperous, as no other part of their lives of toil and patient endurance had been. Suddenly death had confronted them, and they recognised the fact that they must leave their work undone. Each faced the dread enemy in her own way, but neither shrank even from that blow. Emily's proud spirit refused to be conquered, and, as we have seen, up to the last agony she carried herself as one sternly indifferent to the weaknesses of the flesh, including that final weakness which must conquer all of us in the end. Anne found consolation, pure and deep, in her religious faith, and she died cheerfully in the firm belief that she was but entering upon that fuller life which lay beyond the grave. The one was defiant, the other resigned; but courage and fortitude were shown by each in accordance with her own special idiosyncrasy.

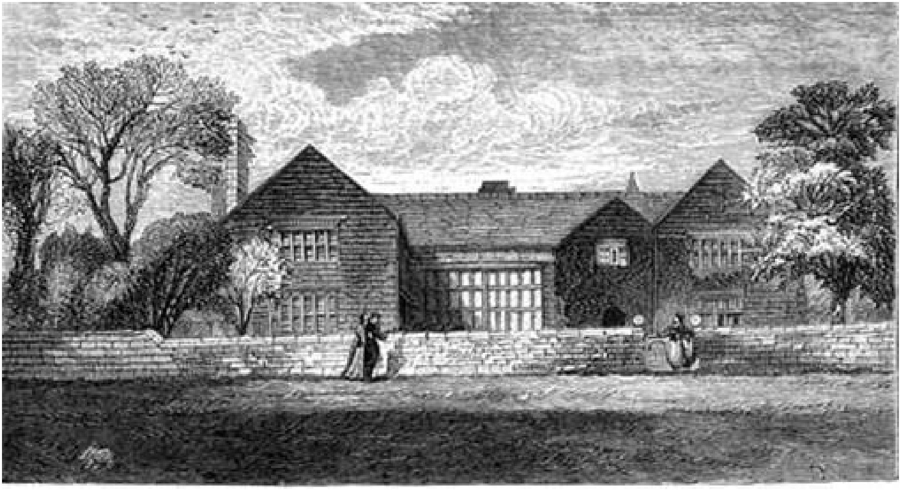
VIII.

"SHIRLEY."

Charlotte went back from Scarborough to Haworth alone. Her father met her with unwonted demonstrations of affection, and she "tried to be glad" that she was once more under the familiar roof. "But this time joy was not to be the sensation." Yet the courage which had held her sisters to the end supported her amid the pangs of loneliness and bereavement. Even now there was no bitterness, no morbid gloom in the heart which had suffered so keenly. Quietly but resolutely setting aside her own sorrow, refusing all the invitations of her friend to seek temporary relief in change of scene, she sat down to complete the story which was intended to tell the world what the lost Emily had seemed to be in the eyes of her fond sister. By herself, in the room in which a short year ago three happy sisters had worked together, within the walls which could never again echo with the old voices, or walking on the moors, which would never more be trodden by the firm, elastic step of Emily, she composed the brilliant story of "Shirley" — the brightest and healthiest of her works. As she writes she sometimes sends forth messages to those who love her, which tell us of the spirit of the hero or the martyr burning within the frail frame of the solitary woman. "Submission, courage, exertion when practicable — these seem to be the weapons with which we must fight life's long battle;" and that these are no mere words she proves with all her accustomed honesty and sincerity, by acting up to them to the very letter. But at times the burden presses upon her till it is almost past endurance. Strangely enough, it is a comparative trifle, as the world counts it, the illness of a servant, that occasions her fiercest outburst of open grief:

You have to fight your way through labour and difficulty at home, it appears, but I am truly glad now you did not come to Haworth. As matters have turned out you would have found only discomfort and gloom. Both Tabby and Martha are at this moment ill in bed. Martha's illness has been most serious. She was seized with internal inflammation ten days ago; Tabby's lame leg has broken out, she cannot stand or walk. I have one of Martha's sisters to help me, and her mother comes up sometimes. There was one day last week when I fairly broke down for ten minutes, and sat down and cried like a fool. Martha's illness was at its height; a cry from Tabby had called me into the kitchen, and I had found her laid on the floor, her head under the kitchen-grate. She had fallen from her chair in attempting to rise. Papa had just been declaring that Martha was in imminent danger; I was myself depressed with headache and sickness that day; I hardly knew what to do or where to turn. Thank God, Martha is now convalescent; Tabby, I trust, will be better soon. Papa is pretty well. I have the satisfaction of knowing that my publishers are delighted with what I sent them — this supports me, but life is a battle. May we *all* be enabled to fight it well.

This letter is dated September 24, 1849, at which time "Shirley" is written, and in the hands of her publishers. She has painted the character of Emily in that of Shirley herself; and her friend Ellen is shadowed forth to the world in the person of Caroline Helston. When the book, with its vivid pictures of Yorkshire life at the beginning of the century, and its masterly sketches of characters as real as those which Shakespeare brings upon the stage, is published, there is but one outcry of praise, even from the critics who were so eager to condemn "Jane Eyre." Up to this point she had preserved her anonymity, but now she is discovered, and her admirers in London persuade her at last to visit them, and make acquaintance with her peers in the Republic of Letters, the men and women whose names were household words in Haworth Parsonage long before "Currer Bell" had made her first modest appeal to the world.



THE "FIELD HEAD" OF SHIRLEY.

A passage from one of the following letters, written during this first sojourn in London, has already been published; but it will well bear reprinting:

December, 1849.

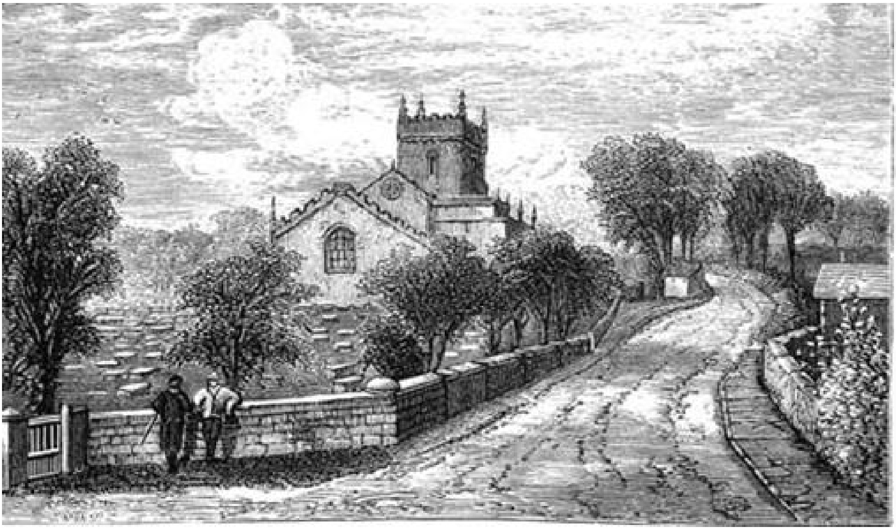
I have just remembered that as you do not know my address you cannot write to me till you get it. I came to this big Babylon last Thursday, and have been in what seems to me a sort of whirl ever since; for changes, scenes, and stimulus, which would be a trifle to others, are much to me. I found when I mentioned to Mr. — — my plan of going to Dr. — — 's it would not do at all. He would have been seriously hurt: he made his mother write to me, and thus I was persuaded to make my principal stay at his house. So far I have found no reason to regret this decision. Mrs. — — received me at first like one who has had the strictest orders to be scrupulously attentive. I had fire in my bedroom evening and morning, two wax candles, &c., and Mrs. — — and her daughters seemed to look on me with a mixture of respect and alarm. But all this is changed; that is to say, the attention and politeness continue as great as ever, but the alarm and estrangement are quite gone; she treats me as if she liked me, and I begin to like her much. Kindness is a potent heart-winner. I had not judged too favourably of — — on a first impression — he pleases me much: I like him better as a son and brother than as a man of business. Mr. W — — too is really most gentlemanly and well-informed; his weak points he certainly has, but these are not seen in society. Mr. X — — (the little man) has again shown his parts. Of him I have not yet come to a clear decision. Abilities he has, for he rules his firm and keeps forty young men under strict control by his iron will. His young superior likes him, which, to speak the truth, is more than I do at present. In fact, I suspect that he is of the Helston order of men — rigid, despotic, and self-willed. He tries to be very kind, and even to express sympathy sometimes, and he does not manage it. He has a determined, dreadful nose in the middle of his face, which, when poked into my countenance, cuts into my soul like iron. Still he is horribly intelligent, quick, searching, sagacious, and with a memory of relentless tenacity: to turn to — after him is to turn from granite to easy down or warm fur. I have seen Thackeray.

As to being happy, I am under scenes and circumstances of excitement, but I suffer acute pain sometimes — mental pain, I mean. At the moment Mr. Thackeray presented himself I was thoroughly faint from inanition, having eaten nothing since a very slight breakfast, and it was then seven o'clock in the evening. Excitement and exhaustion together made savage work of me that evening. What he thought of me I cannot tell. This evening I am going to meet Miss Martineau; she has written to me most kindly; she knows me only as Currer Bell; I am going alone; how I shall get on I do not know. If Mrs. — — were not kind, I should sometimes be miserable; but she treats me almost affectionately, her attentions never flag. I have seen many things; I hope some day to tell you what. Yesterday I went over the new Houses of Parliament with Mr. — — . An attack of rheumatic fever has kept poor Mr. X — — out of the way since I wrote last. I am sorry for *his* sake. It grows quite dark. I must stop. I shall not stay in London a day longer than I first intended. On those points I form my resolutions, and will not be shaken. The thundering *Times* has attacked me savagely.

The following letters (with one exception not previously published) belong to the spring of 1850, when Charlotte was at home again, engaged in attending to her father and to the household cares which shared her attention with literary work and anxieties. The first, which refers exclusively to her visit to London, was addressed to one of her old friends in Yorkshire:

Ellen it seems told you that I spent a fortnight in London last December. They wished me very much to stay a month, alleging that I should in that time be able to secure a complete circle of acquaintance, but I found a fortnight of such excitement quite enough. The whole day was usually devoted to sight-seeing, and often the evening was spent in society; it was more than I could bear for any length of time. On one occasion I met a party of my critics — seven of them. Some of them had been my bitter foes in print, but they were prodigiously civil face to face. These gentlemen seemed infinitely grander, more pompous, dashing, showy, than the few authors I saw. Mr. Thackeray, for example, is a man of very quiet, simple demeanour; he is, however, looked upon with some awe and even distrust. His conversation is very peculiar, too perverse to be pleasant. It was proposed to me to see Charles Dickens, Lady Morgan, Mesdames Trollope, Gore, and some others; but I was aware these introductions would bring a degree of notoriety I was not disposed to encounter; I declined therefore with thanks. Nothing charmed me more during my stay in town than the pictures I saw; one or two private collections of Turner's best water-colours were indeed a treat. His later oil paintings are strange things — things that baffle description. I have twice seen Macready act; once in "Macbeth," and once in "Othello." I astounded a dinner-party by honestly saying I did not like him. It is the fashion to rave about his splendid acting; anything more false and artificial, less genuinely impressive than his whole style, I could scarcely have imagined. The fact is, the stage system altogether is hollow nonsense. They act farces well enough; the actors comprehend their parts and do them justice. They comprehend nothing about tragedy or Shakespeare, and it is a failure. I said so, and by so saying produced a blank silence, a mute consternation. I was indeed obliged to dissent on many occasions, and to offend by dissenting. It seems now very much the custom to admire a certain wordy, intricate, obscure style of poetry, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes. Some pieces were referred to, about which Currer Bell was expected to be very rapturous, and failing in this he disappointed. London people strike a provincial as being very much taken up with little matters, about which no one out of particular town circles cares much. They talk too of persons, literary men and women, whose names are scarcely heard in the country, and in whom you cannot get up an interest. I think I should scarcely like to live in London, and were I obliged to live there I should certainly go little into company — especially I should eschew the literary critics.

I have, since you went, had a remarkable epistle from Thackeray, long, interesting, characteristic; but it unfortunately concludes with the strict injunction, *Show this letter to no one*; adding that if he thought his letters were seen by others, he would either cease to write, or write only what was conventional. But for this circumstance I should have sent it with the others. I answered it at length. Whether my reply will give satisfaction or displeasure remains yet to be ascertained. Thackeray's feelings are not such as can be gauged by ordinary calculation: variable weather is what I should ever expect from that quarter. Yet in correspondence, as in verbal intercourse, this would torment me.



THE “BRIARFIELD” CHURCH OF SHIRLEY.

I believe I should have written to you before, but I don’t know what heaviness of spirit has beset me of late, made my faculties dull, made rest weariness, and occupation burdensome. Now and then the silence of the house, the solitude of the room has pressed on me with a weight I found it difficult to bear, and recollection has not failed to be as alert, poignant, obtrusive, as other feelings were languid. I attribute this state of things partly to the weather. Quicksilver invariably falls low in storms and high winds, and I have ere this been warned of approaching disturbance in the atmosphere by a sense of bodily weakness, and deep, heavy mental sadness, which some would call *presentiment*. Presentiment indeed it is, but not at all supernatural. The Haworth people have been making great fools of themselves about “Shirley;” they take it in the enthusiastic light. When they got the volumes at the Mechanics’ Institution, all the members wanted them; they cast lots for the whole three, and whoever got a volume was only allowed to keep it two days, and to be fined a shilling *per diem* for longer detention. It would be mere nonsense and vanity to tell you what they say. I have had no letters from London for a long time, and am very much ashamed of myself to find, now that that stimulus is withdrawn, how dependent upon it I had become. I cannot help feeling something of the excitement of expectation till post-hour comes, and when day after day it brings nothing I get low. This is a stupid, disgraceful, unmeaning state of things. I feel bitterly enraged at my own dependence and folly. It is so bad for the mind to be quite alone, to have none with whom to talk over little crosses and disappointments, and laugh them away. If I could write I daresay I should be better, but I cannot write a line. However (D. V.), I shall contend against the idiocy. I had rather a foolish letter from Miss — — the other day. Some things in it nettled me, especially an unnecessarily earnest assurance that in spite of all I had gone and done in the writing line I still retained a place in her esteem. My answer took strong and high ground at once. I said I had been troubled by no doubts on the subject, that I neither did myself nor her the injustice to suppose there was anything in what I had written to incur the just forfeiture of esteem. I was aware, I intimated, that some persons thought proper to take exceptions at “Jane Eyre,” and that for their own sakes I was sorry, as I invariably found them individuals in whom the animal largely predominated over the intellectual, persons by nature coarse, by inclination sensual, whatever they might be by education and principle.

I enclose a slip of newspaper for your amusement. Me it both amused and touched, for it alludes to some who are in this world no longer. It is an extract from an American paper, and is written by an emigrant from Haworth. You will find it a curious mixture of truth and inaccuracy. Return it when you write again. I also send you for perusal an opinion of “Jane Eyre,” written by a *working man* in this village; rather, I should say, a record of the feelings the book excited in the poor fellow’s mind; it was not written for my inspection, nor does the writer now know that his little document has by intricate ways come into my possession, and I have forced those who gave it to promise that they will never inform him of this circumstance. He is a modest, thoughtful, feeling, reading being, to whom I have spoken perhaps about three times in the course of my life; his delicate health renders him incapable of hard or close labour; he and his family are often under the pressure of want. He feared that if Miss Brontë saw what he had written she would laugh it to scorn. But Miss Brontë considers it one of the highest, because one of the most truthful and artless tributes her work has yet received. You must return this likewise. I do you great honour in showing it to you.

Once more we can see that the healthy, happy interest she takes in the welfare of others is beginning to assert itself. For a time, under the keen smart of the wounds death had inflicted on her, she had found little heart to discuss the affairs of her circle of friends in her correspondence; but now the outer world vindicates its claim to her renewed attention, and she again begins to discuss and analyse the characters of her acquaintances with a skill and minuteness which make them as interesting even to strangers as any of the most closely-studied characters of fiction can be.

I return Q — — ‘s letter. The business is a most unpleasant one to be concerned in. It seems to me *now* altogether unworthy in its beginning, progress, and ending. Q — — is the only pure thing about it; she stands between her coarse father and cold, unloving suitor, like innocence between a pair of world-hardened knaves. The comparison seems rather hard to be applied to V — — , but as I see him now he merits it. If V — — has no means of keeping a wife, if he does not possess a sixpence he is sure of, how can he think of marrying a woman from whom he cannot expect she should work to keep herself? V — — ‘s want of candour, the twice-falsified account he gave of the matter, tells painfully and deeply against him. It shows a glimpse of his hidden motives such as I refrain from describing in words. After all he is perhaps only like the majority of men. Certainly those men who lead a gay life in their youth, and arrive at middle life with feelings blunted and passions exhausted, can have but one aim in marriage — the selfish advancement of their interest. And to think that such men take as wives — as second selves — women young, modest, sincere, pure in heart and life, with feelings all fresh and emotions all unworn, and bind such virtue and vitality to their own withered existence, such sincerity to their own hollowness, such disinterestedness to their own haggard avarice! to think this, troubles the soul to its inmost depths. Nature and justice forbid the banns of such wedlock. This note is written under excitement. Q — — ‘s letter seems to have lifted so fraudulent a veil, and to show both father and suitor lurking behind in shadow so dark, acting from motives so poor and low, so conscious of each other’s littleness, and consequently so destitute of mutual respect! These things incense me, but I shall cool down.

I cannot find your last letter to refer to, and therefore this will be no answer to it. You must write again by return of post if possible, and let me know how you are progressing. What you said in your last confirmed my opinion that your late attack had been coming on for a long time. Your wish for a cold-water bath, &c, is, I should think, the result of fever. Almost everyone has complained lately of some tendency to slow fever. I have felt it in frequent thirst and in frequent appetite. Papa too, and even Martha, have complained. I fear this damp weather will scarcely suit you; but write and say all. Of late I have had many letters to answer; and some very bothering ones from people who want opinions about their books, who seek acquaintance, and who flatter to get it; people who utterly mistake all about me. They are most difficult to answer, put off, and appease, without offending; for such characters are excessively touchy, and when affronted turn malignant. Their books are too often deplorable.

In June, 1850, she is induced to pay another visit to London, going upon this occasion whilst the season is at its height, though she has stipulated before going that she is “not to be lionised.”

I came to London last Thursday. I am staying at — — . Here I feel very comfortable. Mrs. — — treats me with a serene, equable kindness which just suits me. Her son is as before — genial and friendly. I have seen very few persons, and am not likely to see many, as the agreement was that I was to be very quiet. We have been to the exhibition of the Royal Academy, to the opera, and the Zoological Gardens. The weather is splendid. I shall not stay longer than a fortnight in London; the feverishness and exhaustion beset me somewhat, but I think not quite so badly as before — as indeed I have not yet been so much tired.

I am leaving London if all be well on Tuesday, and shall be very glad to come to you for a few days if that arrangement still remains convenient to you. My London visit has much surpassed my expectations this time. I have suffered less, and enjoyed more than before; rather a trying termination yet remains to me. Mrs. — — ‘s youngest son is at school in Scotland, and her eldest is going to fetch him home for the vacation. The other evening he announced his intention of taking one of his sisters with him, and the evening after he further proposed that Miss Brontë should go down to Edinburgh and join them there, and see that city and its suburbs. I concluded he was joking, laughed and declined. However, it seems he was in earnest, and being always accustomed to have his will, he brooks opposition ill. The thing appearing to me perfectly out of the question, I still refused. Mrs. — — did not at all favour it, but her worthy son only waxed more determined. This morning she came and entreated me to go; G — — wished it so much, he had begged her to use her influence, &c. &c. Now, I believe that he and I understand each other very well, and respect each other very sincerely. We both know the wide breach time has made between us. We do not embarrass each other, or very rarely. My six or eight years of seniority, to say nothing of lack of all pretensions to beauty, &c, are a perfect safeguard. I should not in the least fear to go with him to China. I like to see him pleased. I greatly *dis*like to ruffle and disappoint him; so he shall have his mind, and if all be well I mean to join him in Edinburgh, after I have spent a few days with you. With his buoyant animal spirits and youthful vigour he will make severe demands on my muscles and nerves; but I daresay I shall get through somehow.

IX.

LONELINESS AND FAME.

Charlotte Brontë's letters during 1850 and 1851 are among the most valuable illustrations of the true character of the woman which we possess. Stricken as she had been by successive bereavements, which had robbed her of her dearest friends and companions, and left her the sole prop of the dull house on the moors and of its aged head, she had yet recovered much of her peace of mind and even of her vitality and cheerfulness. She had now, also, begun to see something of life as it is presented, not to despised governesses, but to successful authoresses. Her visits to London had brought her into contact with some of the leaders of the literary world. Who can have forgotten her interview with Thackeray, when she was "moved to speak to the giant of some of his shortcomings?" Haworth itself had become a point of attraction to curious persons, and not a few visitors found their way under one pretence or another to the old parsonage, to be received with effusive courtesy by Mr. Brontë, and with shy indifference by his daughter. Her correspondence, too, became widely-spread among men and women of distinction in the world and in Society. Altogether it was a different life upon which she now looked out from her remote eyrie among the hills — a life with many new interests in it, with much that was calculated to awaken chords in her heart hitherto untouched, and to bring to light new characteristics of her temper and genius. One would fain speculate upon what might have been, but for the desolation wrought in her home and heart by that tempest of death which raged during the autumn of 1848 and the spring of 1849. As it was, no novelty could make her forget what had been; no new faces, however welcome, could dim the tender visions of the faces that were seen no more, or could weaken in any degree the affection with which she still clung to the friend of her school-days. Simplicity and sincerity are the prevailing features of her letters, during this critical time in her life, as during all the years which had preceded it. They reflect her mind in many moods; they show her in many different situations; but they never fail to give the impression of one whose allegiance to her own conscience and whose reverence for truth and purity remain now what they had been in her days of happy and unworldly obscurity. The letters I now quote are quite new to the public.

July 18th, 1850.

You must cheer up, for your letter proves to me that you are low-spirited. As for me, what I said is to be taken in this sense: that, under the circumstances, it would be presumptuous in me to calculate on a long life — a truth obvious enough. For the rest, we are all in the hands of Him who apportions His gifts, health or sickness, length or brevity of days, as is best for the receiver: to him who has work to do time will be given in which to do it; for him to whom no task is assigned the season of rest will come earlier. As to the suffering preceding our last sleep, the sickness, decay, the struggle of flesh and spirit, it *must* come sooner or later to all. If, in one point of view, it is sad to have few ties in the world, in another point of view it is soothing; women who have husbands and children must look forward to death with more pain, more fear, than those who have none. To dismiss the subject, I wish (without cant, and not in any hackneyed sense) that both you and I could always say in this matter, the will of God be done. I am beginning to get settled at home, but the solitude seems heavy as yet. It is a great change, but in looking forward I try to hope for the best. So little faith have I in the power of any temporary excitement to do real good that I put off day by day writing to London to tell them I have come home; and till then it was agreed I should not hear from them. It is painful to be dependent on the small stimulus letters give. I sometimes think I will renounce it altogether, close all correspondence on some quiet pretext, and cease to look forward at post-time for any letters but yours.

August 1st, 1850.

My dear E., — I have certainly felt the late wet weather a good deal, and been somewhat bothered with frequently-returning colds, and so has Papa. About him I have been far from happy: every cold seems to make and leave him so weak. It is easy to say this world is only a scene of probation, but it is a hard thing to feel. Your friends the — — s seem to be happy just now, and long may they continue to be so! Give C. Brontë's sincere love to R — — and tell her she hopes Mr. — — will make her a good husband. If he does not, woe be to him! I wish a similar wish for Q — — ; and then I do really think there will be a kind of happiness. That proposition about remaining at H — — sounds like beginning life sensibly, with no showy dash — I like it. Are you comfortable amongst all these turtle-doves? I could not maintain your present position for a day; I should feel *de trop*, as the French say; that is in the way. But you are different to me. My portrait is come from London, and the Duke of Wellington's, and kind letters enough. Papa thinks the portrait looks older than I do. He says the features are far from flattered, but acknowledges that the expression is wonderfully good and life-like. I left the book called "Social Aspects" at B — — ; accept it from me. I may well give it you, for the author has kindly sent me another copy…. You ask for some promise: who that does not know the future can make promises? Not I.

September 2nd, 1850.

Poor Mrs. A — — it seems is gone; I saw her death in the papers. It is another lesson on the nature of life, on its strange brevity, and in many instances apparent futility…. V — — came here on Saturday last; T — — , who was to have accompanied him, was prevented from executing his intention. I regretted his absence, for I by no means coveted the long *tête-à-tête* with V — — . However, it passed off pretty well. He is satisfied now with his own prospects, and this makes him — on the surface — satisfied with other things. He spoke of Q — — with content and approbation. He looks forward to marriage as a sort of harbour where he is to lay up his now somewhat battered vessel in quiet moorings. He has seen all he wants to see of life; now he is prepared to settle. I listened to all with equanimity and cheerfulness — not assumed but real — for Papa is now somewhat better; his appetite and spirits are improved, and that eases my mind of cankering anxiety. My own health, too, is, I think, really benefited by the late changes of air and scene; I fancy, at any rate, that I feel stronger. Still I mused in my own way on V — — 's character — its depth and scope, I believe, are ascertained.

I saw the governess at — — ; she looked a little better and more cheerful. She was almost as pleased to see me as if we had been related; and when I bid her good-bye expressed an earnest hope that I would soon come again. The children seem fond of her, and on the whole obedient — two great alleviations of the inevitable evils of her position.

Cheer up, dear Nell, and try not to stagnate; or, when you cannot help it, and when your heart is constricted and oppressed, remember what life is and must be to all: some moments of sunshine alternating with many of overclouded and often tempestuous darkness. Humanity cannot escape its fate, which is to drink a mixed cup. Let us believe that the gall and the vinegar are salutary.

Sept. 14th, 1850.

I wish, dear Ellen, you would tell me what is the “twaddle” about my marrying, which you hear. If I knew the details I should have a better chance of guessing the quarter from which such gossip comes. As it is I am quite at a loss. Whom am I to marry? I think I have scarcely seen a single man with whom such a union would be possible since I left London. Doubtless there are men whom, if I chose to encourage, I might marry. But no matrimonial lot is even remotely offered me which seems to me truly desirable. And even if that were the case there would be many obstacles. The least allusion to such a thing is most offensive to Papa. An article entitled “Currer Bell” has lately appeared in *The Palladium*, a new periodical published in Edinburgh. It is an eloquent production, and one of such warm sympathy and high appreciation as I had never expected to see. It makes mistakes about authorship, &c, but those I hope one day to set right. Mr. X — — (the little man) first informed me of this article. I was somewhat surprised to receive his letter, having concluded nine months ago that there would be no more correspondence from that quarter. I enclose a note from him received subsequently, in answer to my acknowledgment. Read it, and tell me exactly how it impresses you regarding the writer’s character, &c. He is deficient neither in spirit nor sense.

October 14th, 1850.

I return Q — — ‘s letter. She seems quite happy and fully satisfied of her husband’s affection. Is this the usual way of spending the honeymoon? To me it seems as if they overdo it. That travelling, and tugging, and fagging about, and getting drenched and muddled, by no means harmonises with my notions of happiness. Besides, the two meals a day, &c, would do one up. It all reminds me too sharply of the few days I spent with V — — in London nearly ten years since, when I was many a time fit to drop with the fever and the faintness resulting from long fasting and excessive fatigue. However, no doubt a bride can bear such things better than others. I smiled to myself at some passages. She has wondrous faith in her husband’s intellectual powers and acquirements. V — — ‘s illusions will soon be over, but Q — — ‘s will not — and therein she is happier than he…. I suppose — — will probably discover that he, too, wants a wife. But I will say no more. You know I disapprove of jesting and teasing on these matters. Idle words sometimes do unintentional harm.

December, 1850.

I got home all right yesterday soon after two o’clock, and found Papa, thank God, well and free from cold. To-day some amount of sickliness and headache is bothering me, but nothing to signify…. The Christmas books waiting for me were, as I expected, from Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, and Mr. Ruskin. No letter from Mr. W — — . It is six weeks since I heard from him. I feel uneasy, but do not like to write. *The Examiner* is very sore about my Preface, because I did not make it a special exception in speaking of the mass of critics. The soreness is unfortunate and gratuitous, for in my mind I certainly excepted it. Another paper shows painful sensitiveness on the same account; but it does not matter, these things are all transitory.

The “Preface” to which she alludes in the foregoing letter, was that to her collected edition of Emily and Anne Brontë’s works, in which she makes allusion to the fact that the “critics failed to do justice” to “Wuthering Heights” and “Agnes Grey” when they were published.

Jan. 20th, 1851.

Thank you heartily for the two letters I owe you. You seem very gay at present, and provided you only take care not to catch cold with coming home at night, I am not sorry to hear it; a little movement, cheerfulness, stimulus, is not only beneficial, but necessary. Your last letter but one made me smile. I think you draw great conclusions from small inferences. I think those “fixed intentions” you fancy are imaginary. I think the “under-current” amounts simply to this, a kind of natural liking and sense of something congenial. Were there no vast barrier of age, fortune, &c, there is perhaps enough personal regard to make things possible which now are impossible. If men and women married because they like each other's temper, look, conversation, nature, and so on — and if, besides, years were more nearly equal — the chance you allude to might be admitted as a chance; but other reasons regulate matrimony — reasons of convenience, of connection, of money. Meantime I am content to know him as a friend, and pray God to continue to me the common sense to look on one so young, so rising, and so hopeful in no other light. The hint about the Rhine disturbs me; I am not made of stone and what is mere excitement to others is fever to me. However it is a matter for the future, and long to look forward to. As I see it now, the journey is out of the question — for many reasons — I rather wonder he should think of it. Good-bye. Heaven grant us both some quiet wisdom and strength, not merely to bear the trial of pain, but to resist the lure of pleasure when it comes in such a shape as our better judgment disapproves.

Feb. 26th, 1851.

You ought always to conclude that when I don't write it is simply because I have nothing particular to say. Be sure that ill news will travel fast enough, and good news too when such commodity comes. If I could often *be* or *seem* in brisk spirits, I might write oftener, knowing that my letters would amuse. But as times go, a glimpse of sunshine now and then is as much as one has a right to expect. However, I get on very decently. I am now and then tempted to break through my resolution of not having you to come before summer, and to ask you to come to this Patmos in a week or two. But it would be dull — very dull — for you…. What would you say to coming here the week after next to stay only just so long as you could comfortably bear the monotony? If the weather were dry, and the moors fine, I should not mind it so much — we could walk for change.

About this time it is clear that Miss Brontë was suffering from one of her periodical attacks of nervous exhaustion. She makes repeated references in her letters to her ailments, attributing them generally to her liver, and she also mentions frequently an occurrence which had given her not a little anxiety and concern. This was an offer of marriage from a business man in a good position, whom she had already met in London. The following letters, which are inserted here without regard to the precise date, and of which Mrs. Gaskell has merely used half-a-dozen lines, relate to this subject:

You are to say no more about "Jupiter" and "Venus." What do you mean by such heathen trash? The fact is no fallacy can be wilder, and I won't have it hinted at, even in jest because my common sense laughs it to scorn. The idea of X— — shocks me less; it would be a more likely match, if "matches" were at all in question, *which they are not*. He still sends his little newspaper, and the other day there came a letter of a bulk, volume, pith, judgment, and knowledge, worthy to have been the product of a giant.

X— — has been, and is gone; things are just as they were. I only know, in addition to the slight information I possessed before, that this Australian undertaking is necessary to the continued prosperity of his firm, that he alone was pronounced to possess the power and means to carry it out successfully, that mercantile honour, combined with his own sense of duty, obliged him to accept the post of honour and of danger to which he has been appointed, that he goes with great personal reluctance, and that he contemplates an absence of five years. He looked much thinner and older. I saw him very near, and once through my glass. The resemblance to Branwell struck me forcibly; it is marked. He is not ugly, but very peculiar. The lines in his face show an inflexibility, and, I must add, a hardness of character, which does not attract. As he stood near me, as he looked at me in his keen way, it was all I could do to stand my ground tranquilly and steadily, and not to recoil as before. It is no use saying anything if I am not candid. I avow then that on this occasion, predisposed as I was to regard him very favourably, his manners and his personal appearance scarcely pleased me more than at the first interview. He gave me a book at parting, requesting in his brief way that I would keep it for his sake, and adding hastily: “I shall hope to hear from you in Australia; your letters *have* been and *will* be a greater refreshment than you can think or I can tell.” And so he is gone, and stern and abrupt little man as he is, too often jarring as are his manners, his absence and the exclusion of his idea from my mind, leave me certainly with less support and in deeper solitude than before. You see, dear Nell, we are still precisely on the same level. *You* are not isolated. I feel that there is a certain mystery about this transaction yet, and whether it will ever be cleared up to me, I do not know. However, my plain duty is to wean my mind from the subject, and if possible to avoid pondering over it…. I feel that in his way he has a regard for me; a regard which I cannot bring myself entirely to reciprocate in kind, and yet its withdrawal leaves a painful blank. I have just got your note. Above, you have all the account of my visitor. I dare not aver that your kind wish that the visit would yield me more pleasure than pain has been fulfilled. Something at my heart aches and gnaws drearily. But I must cultivate fortitude.

Thank you for your kind note. It was kind of you to write it, though it *was* your school-day. I never knew you to let a slight impediment stand in your way when doing a friendly action. Certainly I shall not soon forget last Friday, and never, I think, the evening and night succeeding that morning and afternoon. Evils seldom come singly, and soon after X — — was gone Papa grew much worse. He went to bed early. Was sick and ill for an hour, and when at last he began to doze and I left him, I came down to the dining-room with a sense of weight, fear, and desolation hard to express and harder to endure. A wish that you were with me did cross my mind; but I repelled it as a most selfish wish. Indeed it was only short-lived; my natural tendency in moments of this sort is to get through the struggle alone; to think that one is burdening others makes all worse. You speak to me in soft, consolatory accents; but I hold far sterner language to myself, dear Nell. An absence of five years; a dividing expanse of three oceans; the wide difference between a man's active career and a woman's passive existence. These things are almost equivalent to a life-long separation. But there is another thing which forms a barrier more difficult to pass than any of these. Would X — — and I ever suit? Could I ever feel for him enough love to accept of him as a husband? Friendship, gratitude, esteem, I have; but each moment that he came near me, and that I could see his eyes fastened upon me, my veins ran ice. Now that he is away I feel far more gently towards him; it is only close by that I grow rigid. I did not want to be proud nor intend to be proud, but I was forced to be so. Most true is it that we are overruled by One above us, that in His hands our very will is as clay in the hands of the potter.

I trust Papa is not worse; but he varies. He has never been down to breakfast but once since you left. The circumstance of having him to think about just now is good for me in one way; it keeps my thoughts off other matters which have been complete bitterness and ashes; for I do assure you a more entire crumbling away of a seeming foundation of support and prospect of hope than that which I allude to can scarcely be realised.

I have heard from X — — to-day, a quiet little note. He returned to London a week since on Saturday. He leaves England next month. His note concludes with asking whether he has any chance of seeing me in London before that time. I must tell him that I have already fixed June for my visit, and, therefore, in all human probability we shall see each other no more. There is still a want of plain mutual understanding in this business, and there is sadness and pain in more ways than one. My conscience, I can truly say, does not *now* accuse me of having treated X — — with injustice or unkindness. What I once did wrong in this way I have endeavoured to remedy both to himself and in speaking of him to others. I am sure he has estimable and sterling qualities; but with every disposition — with every wish — with every intention even to look on him in the most favourable point of view at his last visit, it was impossible for me in my inmost heart to think of him as one that might one day be acceptable as a husband…. No, if X — — be the only husband fate offers to me, single I must always remain. But yet at times I grieve for him; and perhaps it is superfluous, for I cannot think he will suffer much — a hard nature, occupation, change of scene will befriend him.

I have had a long, kind letter from Miss Martineau lately. She says she is well and happy. Also I have had a very long letter from Mr. — — , the first for many weeks. He speaks of X — — with much respect and regret, and says he will be greatly missed by many friends. I discover with some surprise that Papa has taken a decided liking to X — — . The marked kindness of his manner to him when he bade him good-bye, exhorting him to be "true to himself, his country, and his God," and wishing him all good wishes, struck me with some astonishment at the time; and whenever he has alluded to him since, it has been with significant eulogy…. You say Papa has penetration. On this subject I believe he has indeed. I have told him nothing, yet he seems to be *au fait* to the whole business. I could think at some moments his guesses go further than mine. I believe he thinks a prospective union, deferred for five years, with such a decorous, reliable personage, would be a very proper and advisable affair. However I ask no questions, and he asks me none; and if he did I should have nothing to tell him.

The summer following this affair of the heart witnessed another visit to London, where she heard Mr. Thackeray's lectures on the humourists. How she enjoyed listening to her idol, in one of his best moods, need not be told. Some there are still living who remember that first lecture, when all London had assembled to listen to the author of "Vanity Fair," and the rumour suddenly ran round the room that the author of "Jane Eyre" was among the audience. Men and women were at fault at first, in their efforts to distinguish "Currer Bell" in that brilliant company of literary and social notabilities; but at last she was discovered hiding under the motherly wing of a chaperon, timid, blushing, but excited and pleased — *not* at the attention she herself attracted, but at the treat she had in prospect. One or two gentlemen sought and obtained introductions to her — amongst them Lord Carlisle and Mr. Monckton Milnes. They were not particularly impressed by the appearance or the speech of the parson's daughter. Her person was insignificant, her dress somewhat rustic, her language quaintly precise and formal, her manner odd and constrained. Altogether this was a woman whom even London could not lionise; somebody outwardly altogether too plain, simple, unpretending, to admit of hero-worship. Within there was, as we know, something entirely exceptional and extraordinary; but, like Lucy Snowe, she still kept her real self hidden under a veil which no casual friend or chance acquaintance was allowed to lift. It was but a brief visit to the "Big Babylon," and then back to Haworth, to loneliness and duty! In July, 1851, she writes from the parsonage to one of her friends as follows:

My first feeling on receiving your note was one of disappointment, but a little consideration sufficed to show me that "all was for the best." In truth it was a great piece of extravagance on my part to ask you and Ellen together; it is much better to divide such good things. To have your visit in prospect will console me when hers is in retrospect. Not that I mean to yield to the weakness of clinging dependently to the society of friends, however dear; but still as an occasional treat I must value and even seek such society as a necessary of life. Let me know then whenever it suits your convenience to come to Haworth, and, unless some change I cannot now foresee occurs, a ready and warm welcome will await you. Should there be any cause rendering it desirable to defer the visit, I will tell you frankly. The pleasures of society I cannot offer you; nor those of fine scenery. But I place very much at your command — the moors, some books, a series of quiet "curling-hair-times," and an old pupil into the bargain. Ellen may have told you that I spent a month in London this summer. When you come you shall ask what questions you like on that point, and I will answer to the best of my stammering ability. Do not press me much on the subject of the Crystal Palace. I went there five times, and certainly saw some interesting things, and the *coup d'œil* is striking and bewildering enough. But I never was able to get up any raptures on the subject, and each renewed visit was made under coercion rather than my own free will. It is an excessively bustling place; and after all, its wonders appeal too exclusively to the eye, and rarely touch the heart or head. I make an exception to the last assertion in favour of those who possess a large range of scientific knowledge. Once I went with Sir David Brewster, and perceived that he looked on objects with other eyes than mine.

X.

"VILLETTE."

With the autumn of 1851 another epoch in the life of Charlotte Brontë was ushered in. She began to write "Villette." Something has already been said of the true character of that marvellous book, in which her own deepest experiences and ripest wisdom are given to the world. Of the manner in which it was written her readers know nothing. Yet this, the best-beloved child of her genius, was brought forth with a travail so bitter that more than once she was tempted to lay aside her pen and hush her voice for ever. Every sentence was wrung from her as though it had been a drop of blood, and the book was built up bit by bit, amid paroxysms of positive anguish, occasioned in part by her own physical weakness and suffering, but still more by the torture through which her mind passed as she depicted scene after scene from the darkest chapter in her own life, for the benefit of those for whom she wrote. It is from her letters that at this time also we get the best indications of what she was passing through. Few, perhaps, reading these letters would suppose that their writer was at that very time engaged in the production of a great masterpiece, destined to hold its own among the ripest and finest fruits of English genius. But no one can read them without seeing how true the woman's soul was, how deep her sympathy with those she loved, how keen her criticisms of even the dull and commonplace characters around her, how vivid and sincere her interest in everything which was passing either in the great world which lay afar off, or in the little world the drama of which was being enacted under her own eyes. Even the ordinary incidents mentioned in her letters, the chance expressions which drop from her pen, have an interest when we remember who it is that speaks, and at what hour in her life this speech falls from her.

September, 1851.

I have mislaid your last letter, and so cannot look it over to see what there is in it to answer; but it is time it was answered in some fashion, whether I have anything to say or not. Miss — — 's note is very like her. All that talk about "friendship," "mutual friends," "auld lang syne," &c., sounds very like palaver. Mrs. — — wrote to me a week or a fortnight since — a well-meaning, amiable note, dwelling a good deal, excusably perhaps, on the good time that is coming. I mean, to speak plain English, on her expectation of soon becoming a mother. No doubt it is very natural in her to feel as if no woman had ever been a mother before; but I could not help inditing an answer calculated to shake her up a bit. A day or two since I had another note from her, quite as good as usual, but I think a trifle nonplussed by the rather unceremonious fashion in which her terrors and the expected personage were handled…. It is useless to tell you how I live. I endure life; but whether I enjoy it or not is another question. However, I get on. The weather, I think, has not been very good lately; or else the beneficial effects of change of air and scene are evaporating. In spite of regular exercise the old headaches and starting, wakeful nights are coming upon me again. But I *do* get on, and have neither wish nor right to complain.

October, 1851.

I am not at all intending to go from home at present. I have just refused successively, Miss Martineau, Mrs. Gaskell, and Mrs. Forster. I could not go if I would. One person after another in the house has been ailing for the last month and more. First Tabby had the influenza, then Martha took it and is ill in bed now, and I grieve to say Papa too has taken cold. So far I keep pretty well, and am thankful for it, for who else would nurse them all? Some painful mental worry I have gone through this autumn; but there is no use in dwelling on all that. At present I seem to have some respite. I feel more disinclined than ever for letter-writing…. Life is a struggle.

November, 1851.

Papa, Tabby, and Martha are at present all better, but yet none of them well. Martha especially looks feeble. I wish she had a better constitution. As it is, one is always afraid of giving her too much to do; and yet there are many things I cannot undertake myself; and we do not like to change when we have had her so long. The other day I received the enclosed letter from Australia. I had had one before from the same quarter, which is still unanswered. I told you I did not expect to hear thence — nor did I. The letter is long, but it will be worth your while to read it. In its way it has merit — that cannot be denied — abundance of information, talent of a certain kind, alloyed (I think) here and there with errors of taste. This little man with all his long letters remains as much a conundrum to me as ever. Your account of the H — — "domestic joys" amused me much. The good folks seem very happy; long may they continue so! It somewhat cheers me to know that such happiness *does* exist on earth.

November, 1851.

All here is pretty much as usual…. The only events of my life consist in that little change occasional letters bring. I have had two from Miss W — — since she left Haworth, which touched me much. She seems to think so much of a little congenial company, a little attention and kindness. She says she has not for many days known such enjoyment as she experienced during the ten days she stayed here. Yet you know what Haworth is — dull enough. Before answering X — — 's letter from Australia I got up my courage to write to — — and beg him to give me an impartial account of X — — 's character and disposition, owning that I was very much in the dark on these points and did not like to continue correspondence without further information. I got the answer which I enclose. Since receiving it I have replied to X — — in a calm, civil manner. At the earliest I cannot hear from him again before the spring.

December, 1851.

I hope you have got on this last week well. It has been very trying here. Papa so far has borne it unhurt; but these winds and changes have given me a bad cold; however, I am better now than I was. Poor old Keeper (Emily's dog) died last Monday morning, after being ill one night. He went gently to sleep; we laid his old faithful head in the garden. Flossy is dull, and misses him. There was something very sad in losing the old dog; yet I am glad he met a natural fate. People kept hinting that he ought to be put away, which neither Papa nor I liked to think of. If I were near a town, and could get cod-liver oil fresh and sweet, I really would most gladly take your advice and try it; but how I could possibly procure it at Haworth I do not see…. You ask about "The Lily and the Bee." If you have read it, you have effected an exploit beyond me. I glanced at a few pages, and laid it down hopeless, nor can I now find courage to resume it. But then, I never liked Warren's writings. "Margaret Maitland" is a good book, I doubt not.

At this point the illness of which she makes light in these letters increased to such an extent as to alarm her father, and at last she consented to lay aside her work and allow herself the pleasure and comfort of a visit from her friend. The visit was a source of happiness whilst it lasted; but when it was over the depression returned, and there was a serious relapse. Something of her sufferings at this time — whilst "Villette" was still upon the stocks — will be gathered from the following letter, dated January 1852:

I wish you could have seen the coolness with which I captured your letter on its way to Papa, and at once conjecturing its tenor, made the contents my own. Be quiet. Be tranquil. It is, dear Nell, my decided intention to come to B — — for a few days when I *can* come; but of this last I must positively judge for myself, and I must take my time. I am better to-day — much better; but you can have little idea of the sort of condition into which mercury throws people to ask me to go from home anywhere in close or open carriage. And as to talking — four days ago I could not well have articulated three sentences. Yet I did not need nursing, and I kept out of bed. It was enough to burden myself; it would have been misery to me to have annoyed another.

March, 1852.

The news of E. T.'s death came to me last week in a letter from M — — , a long letter, which wrung my heart so in its simple, strong, truthful emotion, I have only ventured to read it once. It ripped up half-scarred wounds with terrible force — the death-bed was just the same — breath failing, &c. She fears she will now in her dreary solitude become “a stern, harsh, selfish woman.” This fear struck home. Again and again I have felt it for myself; and what is *my* position to M — — ‘s? I should break out in energetic wishes that she would return to England, if reason would permit me to believe that prosperity and happiness would there await her. But I see no such prospect. May God help her as God only can help!

To another friend she writes as follows, in reply to an invitation to leave Haworth for a short visit:

March 12th, 1852.

Your kind note holds out a strong temptation, but one that *must be resisted*. From home I must not go unless health or some cause equally imperative render a change necessary. For nearly four months now (*i.e.* since I first became ill) I have not put pen to paper; my work has been lying untouched, and my faculties have been rusting for want of exercise; further relaxation is out of the question, and *I will not permit myself to think of it*. My publisher groans over my long delays; I am sometimes provoked to check the expression of his impatience with short and crusty answers. Yet the pleasure I now deny myself I would fain regard as only deferred. I heard something about your purposing to visit Scarborough in the course of the summer; and could I by the close of July or August bring my task to a certain point, how glad should I be to join you there for a while!… However, I dare not lay plans at this distance of time; for me so much must depend, first, on Papa’s health (which throughout the winter has been, I am thankful to say, really excellent), and, second, on the progress of work — a matter not wholly contingent on wish or will, but lying in a great measure beyond the reach of effort, or out of the pale of calculation.

As the summer advanced her sufferings were scarcely abated, and at last, in search of some relief, she made a sudden visit by herself to Filey, inspired in part by her desire to see the memorial-stone erected above her sister’s grave at Scarborough.

Filey Bay, June, 1852.

My dear Miss — —, — Your kind and welcome note reached me at this place, where I have been staying three weeks *quite alone*. Change and sea-air had become necessary. Distance and other considerations forbade my accompanying Ellen to the South, much as I should have liked it had I felt quite free and unfettered. Ellen told me some time ago that you were not likely to visit Scarborough till the autumn, so I forthwith packed my trunk and betook myself here. The first week or ten days I greatly feared the seaside would not suit me, for I suffered almost incessantly from headache and other harassing ailments; the weather, too, was dark, stormy, and excessively — *bitterly* — cold. My solitude under such circumstances partook of the character of desolation; I had some dreary evening hours and night vigils. However, that passed. I think I am now better and stronger for the change, and in a day or two hope to return home. Ellen told me that Mr. W — — said people with my tendency to congestion of the liver should walk three or four hours every day; accordingly, I have walked as much as I could since I came here, and look almost as sunburnt and weather-beaten as a fisherman or a bathing-woman, with being out in the open air. As to my work, it has stood obstinately still for a long while; certainly a torpid liver makes a torpid brain. No spirit moves me. If this state of things does not entirely change, my chance of a holiday in the autumn is not worth much; yet I should be very sorry not to meet you for a little while at Scarborough. The duty to be discharged at Scarborough was the chief motive that drew me to the east coast. I have been there, visited the churchyard, and seen the stone. There were five errors; consequently I had to give directions for its being re-faced and re-lettered.

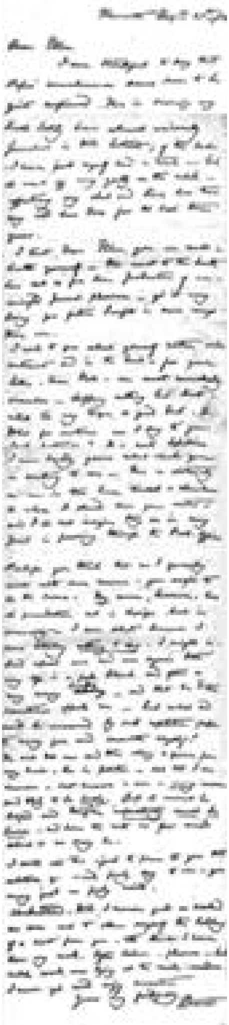
The sea-air did her good; but she was still unable to carry her great work forward, in spite of the urgent pressure put upon her by those who in this respect merely expressed the impatience of the public.

Haworth, July, 1852.

I am again at home, where (thank God) I found all well. I certainly feel much better than I did, and would fain trust that the improvement may prove permanent…. The first fortnight I was at Filey I had constantly recurring pain in the right side, and sick headache into the bargain. My spirits at the same time were cruelly depressed — prostrated sometimes. I feared the miseries and the suffering of last winter were all returning; consequently I am now indeed thankful to find myself so much better…. You ask about Australia. Let us dismiss the subject in a few words, and not recur to it. All is silent as the grave. Cornhill is silent too; there has been bitter disappointment there at my having no work ready for this season. Ellen, we must not rely upon our fellow-creatures — only on ourselves, and on Him who is above both us and them. My *labours*, as you call them, stand in abeyance, and I cannot hurry them. I must take my own time, however long that time may be.

August, 1852.

I am thankful to say that Papa’s convalescence seems now to be quite confirmed. There is scarcely any remainder of the inflammation in his eyes, and his general health progresses satisfactorily. He begins even to look forward to resuming his duty ere long, but caution must be observed on that head. Martha has been very willing and helpful during Papa’s illness. Poor Tabby is ill herself at present with English cholera, which complaint, together with influenza, has lately been almost universally prevalent in this district. Of the last I have myself had a touch; but it went off very gently on the whole, affecting my chest and liver less than any cold has done for the last three years…. I write to you about yourself rather under constraint and in the dark; for your letters, dear Nell, are most remarkably oracular, dropping nothing but hints which tie my tongue a good deal. What, for instance, can I say to your last postscript? It is quite sibylline. I can hardly guess what checks you in writing to me. Perhaps you think that as *I* generally write with some reserve, you ought to do the same. *My* reserve, however, has its origin not in design, but in necessity. I am silent because I have literally *nothing to say*. I might, indeed, repeat over and over again that my life is a pale blank, and often a very weary burden, and that the future sometimes appals me; but what end could be answered by such repetition, except to weary you and enervate myself? The evils that now and then wring a groan from my heart lie in my position — not that I am a *single* woman and likely to remain a *single* woman, but because I am a lonely woman and likely to be *lonely*. But it cannot be helped, and therefore *imperatively must be borne*, and borne, too, with as few words about it as may be. I write this just to prove to you that whatever you would freely *say* to me you may just as freely write. Understand that I remain just as resolved as ever not to allow myself the holiday of a visit from you till *I* have done my work. After labour, pleasure; but while work was lying at the wall undone, I never yet could enjoy recreation.



SIMILE LETTER OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË.

Slowly page after page of "Villette" was now being written. The reader sees from these letters that the book was composed in no happy mood. Writing to her publisher a few weeks after the date of the last letter printed above, she says: "I can hardly tell you how I hunger to hear some opinions beside my own, and how I have sometimes desponded and almost despaired, because there was no one to whom to read a line, or of whom to ask a counsel. 'Jane Eyre' was not written under such circumstances, nor were two-thirds of 'Shirley.' I got so miserable about it that I could bear no allusion to the book. It is not finished yet; but now I hope." But though her work pressed so incessantly upon her, and her feverish anxiety to have it done weighed so heavily upon her health and spirits, she could still find time to answer her friend's letters in a way which showed that her interest in the outer world was as keen as ever:

September, 1852.

Thank you for A — — 's notes. I like to read them, they are so full of news, but they are illegible. A great many words I really cannot make out. It is pleasing to hear that M — — is doing so well, and the tidings about — — seem also good. I get a note from — — every now and then, but I fear my last reply has not given much satisfaction. It contained a taste of that unpalatable commodity called *advice* — such advice, too, as might be, and I dare say was, construed into faint reproof. I can scarcely tell what there is about — — that, in spite of one's conviction of her amiability, in spite of one's sincere wish for her welfare, palls upon one, satiates, stirs impatience. She *will* complacently put forth opinions and tastes as her own which are *not* her own, nor in any sense natural to her. My patience can really hardly sustain the test of such a jay in borrowed plumes. She prated so much about the fine wilful spirit of her child, whom she describes as a hard, brown little thing, who will do nothing but what pleases himself, that I hit out at last — not very hard, but enough to make her think herself ill-used, I doubt not. Can't help it. She often says she is not "absorbed in self," but the fact is, I have seldom seen anyone more unconsciously, thoroughly, and often weakly egotistic. Then, too, she is inconsistent. In the same breath she boasts her matrimonial happiness and whines for sympathy. Don't understand it. With a paragon of a husband and child, why that whining, craving note? Either her lot is not all she professes it to be, or she is hard to content.

In October the resolute determination to allow herself no relaxation until "Villette" was finished broke down. She was compelled to call for help, and to acknowledge herself beaten in her attempt to crush out the yearning for company:

October, 1852.

Papa expresses so strong a wish that I should ask you to come, and I feel some little refreshment so absolutely necessary myself, that I really must beg you to come to Haworth for one single week. I thought I would persist in denying myself till I had done my work, but I find it won't do. The matter refuses to progress, and this excessive solitude presses too heavily. So let me see your dear face, Nell, just for one reviving week. Could you come on Wednesday? Write to-morrow, and let me know by what train you would reach Keighley, that I may send for you.

The visit was a pleasant one in spite of the weariness of body and mind which troubled Charlotte. She laid aside her task for that "one little week," went out upon the moors with her friend, talked as of old, and at last, when she was left alone once more, declared that the change had done her "inexpressible good." Writing to her friend immediately after the latter had left her, she says:

Your note came only this morning. I had expected it yesterday, and was beginning actually to feel weary — like you. This won't do. I am afraid of caring for you too much. You must have come upon — — at an unfavourable moment, seen it under a cloud. Surely they are not always or often thus, or else married life is indeed but a slipshod paradise. I only send *The Examiner*, not having yet read *The Leader*. I was spared the remorse I feared. On Saturday I fell to business, and as the welcome mood is still decently existent, and my eyes consequently excessively tired with scribbling, you must excuse a mere scrawl. Papa was glad to hear you had got home well — as well as we…. I do miss my dear bed-fellow; no more of that calm sleep.

Her pen now began to move more quickly, and the closing chapters of "Villette" were written with comparative ease, so that at last she writes thus, on November 22nd:

Monday morning.

Truly thankful am I to be able to tell you that I finished my long task on Saturday, packed and sent off the parcel to Cornhill. I said my prayers when I had done it. Whether it is well or ill done I don't know. *D. V.*, I will now try to wait the issue quietly. The book, I think, will not be considered pretentious, nor is it of a character to excite hostility. As Papa is pretty well, I may, I trust, dear Nell, do as you wish me, and come for a few days to B — — . Miss Martineau has also urgently asked me to go and see her. I promised, if all were well, to do so at the close of November or the commencement of December, so that I could go on from B — — to Westmoreland. Would Wednesday suit you? "Esmond" shall come with me — *i.e.* Thackeray's novel.

Every reader knows in what fashion "Villette" ends, and most persons also know from Mrs. Gaskell that the reason why the actual issue is left in some uncertainty was the author's filial desire to gratify her father. Charlotte herself was firmly resolved that she would *not* make Lucy Snowe the happy wife of Paul Emanuel. She never meant to "appoint her lot in pleasant places." Lucy was to bear the storm and stress of life in the same manner as that in which her creator had been compelled to bear it; and she was to be left in the end alone, robbed for ever of the hope of spending the happy afternoon of her existence in the sunshine of love and congenial society. But Mr. Brontë, altogether unconscious of that tragedy of heart-sickness and soul-weariness which was being enacted under his own roof, and which furnished so striking a parallel to the story which ran through “Villette,” would not brook a gloomy ending to the tale, and by protestations and entreaties induced his daughter at least so far to alter her plan as to leave the issue in doubt.

So “Villette” went its way, as “Jane Eyre” and “Shirley “ had done before it, from the secluded parsonage at Haworth up to the busy publishing-house in Cornhill, and thence out into the world. There was some fear on Charlotte’s part when the MS. had been despatched. She herself was gradually forming that which remained the fixed conviction of her life — the conviction that in “Villette” she had done her best, and that, for good or for ill, by it her reputation must stand or fall. But she was intensely anxious, as we have seen, to have the opinions of others upon the story. Nor was it only a general verdict on its merits for which she called. She was uneasy upon some minor points. According to her wont, she had taken most of her characters from life, and it was not during her stay at Brussels alone that she had studied the models which she employed when writing the book. Naturally, she was curious to know whether she had painted her portraits too literally. So “Villette” was allowed to pass, whilst still in MS., into the hands of the original of “Dr. John.” When that gentleman had read the story, and criticised all the characters with the freedom of unconsciousness, her mind was set at rest, and she knew that she had not transgressed the bounds which divide the story-teller from the biographer.

In the meantime, her work done, she hurried away from Haworth to spend a well-earned holiday at B — — with her friend. “Esmond” accompanied her, and the quiet afternoons were spent in reading it aloud. On December 9th she writes from Haworth, announcing her safe return to her own home:

I got home safely at five o’clock yesterday afternoon, and, I am most thankful to say, found Papa and all the rest quite well. I did my business satisfactorily in Leeds, getting the head-dress rearranged as I wished. It is now a very different matter to the bushy, tasteless thing it was before. On my arrival I found no proof-sheets, but a letter from Mr. S — — , which I would have enclosed, but so many words are scarce legible you would have no pleasure in reading it. He continues to make a mystery of his “reason”; something in the third volume sticks confoundedly in his throat; and as to the “female character” about which I asked, he responds that “she is an odd, fascinating little puss,” but affirms that “he is not in love with her.” He tells me also that he will answer no more questions about “Villette.” This morning I have a brief note from Mr. Williams, intimating that he has not yet been permitted to read the third volume. Also there is a note from Mrs. — — , very kind. I almost wish I could still look on that kindness just as I used to do: it was very pleasant to me once. Write *immediately*, dear Nell, and tell me how your mother is. Give my kindest regards to her and all others at B — — . Everybody seemed very good to me this last visit. I remember it with corresponding pleasure.

The private reception of “Villette” was not altogether that for which its author had hoped. Her publisher had objections to urge against certain features of the story, and those who saw the book in manuscript were not slow to express their own disapproval. It was evident that there was disappointment at Cornhill; and the proud spirit of Miss Brontë was keenly troubled. The letters in which she dwells on what was passing at that time need not be reproduced here, for their purport is sufficiently indicated by that which has just been given. But it is worth while to notice the scrupulous modesty with which she listened to all that was said by those who found fault, her careful anxiety to understand their objections, such as they were, and her perfect readiness to discuss every point raised with them. Of irritability under this criticism there is no trace, only a certain sadness and sorrow at the discovery that she had not succeeded in impressing others as she had hoped to do. Yet she is scarcely surprised that it is so. Had she not written years before, when “Shirley” was first produced, these words? —

> No matter, whether known or unknown, misjudged or the contrary, I am resolved not to write otherwise. I shall bend as my powers tend. The two human beings who understood me, and whom I understood, are gone. I have some that love me yet, and whom I love without expecting, or having a right to expect, that they shall perfectly understand me. I am satisfied, but I must have my own way in the matter of writing…. I am thankful to God who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift and to profit by its possession.

So now she is not astonished at finding herself misunderstood. Nor is she angry. She is perfectly ready to explain her real meaning to those who have misjudged her, but she is resolute in abiding by what she has written. The work wrung from her during those two years of pain and sorrow is not work which can be altered at will to please another. Even to meet the entreaties of her father she had refused to do more than draw a veil over the catastrophe in which the plot ends; and she cannot introduce new incidents, or lay on new colours, because the little circle of critics sitting in judgment on her manuscript have pronounced it to be imperfect. “I fear they” (the readers) “must be satisfied with what is offered. My palette affords no brighter tints; were I to attempt to deepen the reds or burnish the yellows, I should but blotch.” Yet she admits that those who judge the book only from the outside have some reason to complain that it is not as other novels are:

> You say that Lucy Snowe may be thought morbid and weak, unless the history of her life be more freely given. I consider that she *is* both morbid and weak at times; her character sets up no pretensions to unmixed strength, and anybody living her life would necessarily become morbid. It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional, for instance; it was the semi-delirium of solitary grief and sickness. If, however, the book does not express all this, there must be a great fault somewhere. I might explain away a

few other points, but it would be too much like drawing a picture and then writing underneath the name of the object intended to be represented.

Happily, the heart of the great reading world is bigger and truer as a whole than any part of it is. What those who read the manuscript of “Villette” failed to see at the first glance was seen instantly by the public when the book was placed in its hands. From critics of every school and degree there came up a cry of wonder and admiration, as men saw out of what simple characters and commonplace incidents genius had evoked this striking work of literary art. Popular, perhaps, the book could scarcely hope to be, in the vulgar acceptation of the word. The author had carefully avoided the “flowery and inviting” course of romance, and had written in silent obedience to the stern dictates of an inspiration which, as we have seen, only came at intervals, leaving her between its visits cruelly depressed and pained, but which when it came held her spell-bound and docile. Yet out of the dull record of humble woes, marked by no startling episodes, adorned by few of the flowers of poetry, she had created such a heart-history as remains to this day without a rival in the school of English fiction to which it belongs.

I bring together a batch of notes, not all addressed to the same person, which give her account of the reception and success of the book:

February 11th, 1853.

Excuse a very brief note, for I have time only to thank you for your last kind and welcome letter, and to say that, in obedience to your wishes, I send you by this day’s post two reviews — *The Examiner* and *The Morning Advertiser* — which, perhaps, you will kindly return at your leisure. Ellen has a third — *The Literary Gazette* — which she will likewise send. The reception of the book has been favourable thus far — for which I am thankful — less, I trust, on my own account than for the sake of those few real friends who take so sincere an interest in my welfare as to be happy in my happiness.

February 15th.

I am very glad to hear that you got home all right, and that you managed to execute your commissions in Leeds so satisfactorily. You do not say whether you remembered to order the Bishop’s dessert; I shall know, however, by to-morrow morning. I got a budget of no less than seven papers yesterday and to-day. The import of all the notices is such as to make my heart swell with thankfulness to Him who takes note both of suffering and work and motives. Papa is pleased too. As to friends in general, I believe I can love them still without expecting them to take any large share in this sort of gratification. The longer I live, the more plainly I see that gentle must be the strain on fragile human nature. It will not bear much.

I have heard from Mrs. Gaskell. Very kind, panegyrical, and so on. Mr. S — — tells me he has ascertained that Miss Martineau *did* write the notice in *The Daily News*. J. T. offers to give me a regular blowing-up and setting down for £5, but I tell him *The Times* will probably let me have the same gratis.

March 10th, 1853.

I only got *The Guardian* newspaper yesterday morning, and have not yet seen either *The Critic* or *Sharpe's Magazine*. *The Guardian* does not wound me much. I see the motive, which, indeed, there is no attempt to disguise. Still I think it a choice little morsel for foes (Mr. — — was the first to bring the news of the review to Papa), and a still choicer morsel for "friends" who — bless them! — while they would not perhaps positively do one an injury, still take a dear delight in dashing with bitterness the too sweet cup of success. Is *Sharpe's* small article like a bit of sugar-candy, too, Ellen? or has it the proper wholesome wormwood flavour? Of course I guess it will be like *The Guardian*. My "dear friends" will weary of waiting for *The Times*. "O Sisera! why tarry the wheels of thy chariot so long?"

March 22nd.

Thank you for sending — — 's notes. Though I have not attended to them lately, they always amuse me. I like to read them; one gets from them a clear enough idea of her sort of life. — — 's attempts to improve his good partner's mind make me smile. I think it all right enough, and doubt not they are happy in their way; only the direction he gives his efforts seems of rather problematic wisdom. Algebra and optics! Why not enlarge her views by a little well-chosen general reading? However, they do right to amuse themselves in their own way. The rather dark view you seem to take of the general opinion about "Villette" surprises me the less, as only the more unfavourable reviews seem to have come in your way. Some reports reach me of a different tendency; but no matter; time will show. As to the character of Lucy Snowe, my intention from the first was that she should not occupy the pedestal to which "Jane Eyre" was raised by some injudicious admirers. She is where I meant her to be, and where no charge of self-laudation can touch her.

XI.

MARRIAGE AND DEATH.

Every book, as we know, has its secret history, hidden from the world which reads only the printed pages, but legible enough to the author, who sees something more than the words he has set down for the public to read. Thackeray tells us how, reading again one of his smaller stories, written at a sad period of his own life, he brought back all the scene amid which the little tale was composed, and woke again to a consciousness of the pangs which tore his heart when his pen was busy with the imaginary fortunes of the puppets he had placed upon the mimic stage. Between the lines he read quite a different story from that which was laid before the reader. I have tried to show how largely this was the case with Charlotte Brontë's novels. Each was a double romance, having one meaning for the world, and another for the author. Yet she herself, when she wrote "Shirley" and "Villette," had no conception of the strange blending of the secret currents of the two books which was in store for her, or of the unexpected fate which was to befall the real heroine of her last work — to wit, herself.

I have told how fixed was her belief that "Lucy Snowe's" fate was to be a tragic one — a life the closing years of which were to be spent in loneliness and anguish, and amid the bitterness of withered hopes. Very few readers can have forgotten the closing passage of "Villette," in which the catastrophe, though veiled, can be readily discovered:

The sun passes the equinox; the days shorten, the leaves grow sere; but — he is coming.

Frosts appear at night; November has sent his fogs in advance; the wind takes its autumn moan; but — he is coming.

The skies hang full and dark — a rack sails from the west; the clouds cast themselves into strange forms — arches and broad radiations; there rise resplendent mornings — glorious, royal, purple as a monarch in his state; the heavens are one flame; so wild are they, they rival battle at its thickest — so bloody, they shame Victory in her pride. I know some signs of the sky; I have noted them ever since childhood. God, watch that sail! Oh! guard it!

The wind shifts to the west. Peace, peace, Banshee — "keening" at every window! It will rise — it will swell — it shrieks out long: wander as I may through the house this night, I cannot lull the blast. The advancing hours make it strong: by midnight, all sleepless watchers hear and fear a wild south-west storm….

Peace, be still! Oh! a thousand weepers, praying in agony on waiting shores, listened for that voice, but it was not uttered — not uttered till, when the hush came, some could not feel it; till, when the sun returned, his light was night to some!

In darkness such as here is shadowed forth, Charlotte Brontë believed that her own life would close; all sunshine gone, all joys swept clean away by the bitter blast of death, all hopes withered or uprooted. But the end which she pictured was not to be. God was more merciful than her own imaginings; and at eventide there was light and peace upon her troubled path.

Those who turn to the closing passage of "Shirley" will find there reference to "a true Christian gentleman," who had taken the place of the hypocrite Malone, one of the famous three curates of the story. This gentleman, a Mr. McCarthy, was, like the rest, no fictitious personage. His original was to be found in the person of Mr. Nicholls, who for several years had lived a simple, unobtrusive life at Haworth, as curate to Mr. Brontë, and whose name often occurs in Charlotte's letters to her friend. In none of these references to him is there the slightest indication that he was more than an honoured friend. Nor was it so. Whilst Mr. Nicholls, dwelling near Miss Brontë, and observing her far more closely than any other person could do, had formed a deep and abiding attachment for her, she herself was wholly unconscious of the fact. Its first revelation came upon her as something like a shock; as something also like a reproach. Whilst she had thought herself alone, doomed to a life of solitude and pain, a tender yet a manly love had all the while been growing round her.

It is obvious that the letters which she addressed at this time (December, 1852) to her friend cannot be printed here. Yet no letters more honourable to the woman, the daughter, and the lover have ever been penned. There is no restraint now in the outpourings of her heart. Her friend is taken into her full confidence, and every hope and fear and joy is spoken out as only women who are pure and truthful and entirely noble can venture to speak out. Mrs. Gaskell has briefly but distinctly stated the broad features of this strange love story, giving such promise at the time, so happy and beautiful in its brief fruition, so soon to be quenched in the great darkness. Mr. Brontë resented the attentions of Mr. Nicholls to his daughter in a manner which brought to light all the sternness and bitterness of his character. There had been of late years a certain mellowing of his disposition, which Charlotte had dwelt upon with hopeful joy, as her one comfort in her lonely life at Haworth. How much he owed to her none knew but himself. When he was sinking under the burden of his son's death, she had rescued him; when, for one dark and bitter interval, he had sought refuge from grief and remorse in the coward's solace, her brave heart, her gentleness, her unyielding courage, had brought him back again from evil ways, and sustained and kept him in the path of honour; and now his own ambitions were more than satisfied by her success; he found himself shining in the reflected glory of his daughter's fame, and sunned himself, poor man, in the light and warmth. But all the old jealousy, the intense acerbity of his character, broke out when he saw another person step between himself and her, and that other no idol of the great world of London, but simply the honest man who had dwelt almost under his own roof-tree for years.

When, having heard with surprise and emotion, the story of Mr. Nicholls's attachment, Charlotte communicated his offer to her father, "agitation and anger disproportionate to the occasion ensued. My blood boiled with a sense of injustice. But Papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with. The veins on his forehead started up like whipcord, and his eyes became suddenly bloodshot. I made haste to promise that on the morrow Mr. Nicholls should have a distinct refusal." It so happened that very soon after this, that is to say when "Villette" was published, Miss Martineau caused deep pain to its writer by condemning the manner in which "all the female characters in all their thoughts and lives" were represented as "being full of one thing — love." The critic not unjustly pointed out that love was not the be-all and the end-all of a woman's life. Perhaps her pen would not have been so sharp in touching on this subject, had she known with what quiet self-sacrifice the author of "Villette" had but a few weeks before set aside her own preferences and inclinations, and submitted her lot to her father's angry will. This truly must be reckoned as another illustration of the extent to which the *Quarterly* reviewer of 1848 had formed an accurate conception of the character of "Currer Bell."

Not only was the struggle which followed sharp and painful, it was also stubborn and prolonged. Mr. Nicholls resigned the curacy he had held so many years, and prepared to leave Haworth. Mr. Brontë not only showed no signs of relenting, but openly exulted in his departure, and lost no opportunity of expressing in bitterly sarcastic language his opinion of his colleague's conduct. How deeply Charlotte suffered at this time is proved by the letters before me. Firmly convinced that her first duty was to the parent whose only remaining stay she was, she never wavered in her determination to sacrifice every wish of her own to his comfort. But her heart was racked with pity for the man who was suffering through his love for her, and her indignation was roused to fever-heat by the gross injustice of her father's conduct.

Compassion or relenting is no more to be looked for from Papa than sap from firewood. I never saw a battle more sternly fought with the feelings than Mr. N. fights with his, and when he yields momentarily, you are almost sickened by the sense of the strain upon him. However, he is to go, and I cannot speak to him or look at him or comfort him a whit — and I must submit. Providence is over all; that is the only consolation.

In all this — she says, after speaking again of the severity of the struggle — it is not *I* who am to be pitied at all, and of course nobody pities me. They all think in Haworth that I have disdainfully refused him. If pity would do him any good he ought to have, and I believe has, it. They may abuse me if they will. Whether they do or not I can't tell.

I thought of you on New Year's Day, and hope you got well over your formidable tea-making. I am busy, too, in my little way, preparing to go to London this week — a matter which necessitates some little application to the needle. I find it quite necessary I should go to superintend the press, as Mr. S — — seems quite determined not to let the printing get on till I come. I have actually only received three proof-sheets since I was at Brookroyd. Papa wants me to go too, to be out of the way, I suppose; but I am sorry for one other person whom nobody pities but me…. They don't understand the nature of his feelings, but I see now what they are. Mr. N — — is one of those who attach themselves to very few, whose sensations are close and deep, like an underground stream, running strong but in a narrow channel. He continues restless and ill. He carefully performs the occasional duty, but does not come near the church, procuring a substitute every Sunday. A few days since he wrote to Papa requesting permission to withdraw his resignation. Papa answered that he should only do so on condition of giving his written promise never again to broach the obnoxious subject either to him or to me. This he has evaded doing, so the matter remains unsettled. I feel persuaded the termination will be, his departure for Australia. Dear Nell, without loving him, I don't like to think of him suffering in solitude, and wish him anywhere so that he were happier. He and Papa have never met or spoken yet.

During this crisis in her life, when suffering had come to her in a new and sharp form, but when happily the black cloud was lit up on the other side by the rays of the sun, she went up to London to spend a few weeks. From the letters written during her visit I make these extracts:

January 11th, 1853.

I came here last Wednesday. I had a delightful day for my journey, and was kindly received at the close. My time has passed pleasantly enough since I came, yet I have not much to tell you; nor is it likely I shall have. I do not mean to go out much or see many people. Sir J. S — — wrote to me two or three times before I left home, and made me promise to let him know when I should be in town, but I reserve to myself the right of deferring the communication till the latter part of my stay. All in this house appear to be pretty much as usual, and yet I see some changes. Mrs. — — and her daughter look well enough; but on Mr. — — hard work is telling early. Both his complexion, his countenance, and the very lines of his features are altered. It is rather the remembrance of what he was than the fact of what he is which can warrant the picture I have been accustomed to give of him. One feels pained to see a physical alteration of this kind; yet I feel glad and thankful that it is *merely* physical. As far as I can judge, mind and manners have undergone no deterioration — rather, I think, the contrary.

January 19th, 1853.

I still continue to get on very comfortably and quietly in London, in the way I like, seeing rather things than persons. Being allowed to have my own choice of sights this time I selected the *real* rather than the *decorative* side of life. I have been over two prisons, ancient and modern, Newgate and Pentonville; also the Bank, the Exchange, the Foundling Hospital; and to-day, if all be well, I go with Dr. Forbes to see Bethlehem Hospital. Mrs. — — and her daughters are, I believe, a little amazed at my gloomy tastes; but I take no notice. Papa, I am glad to say, continues well. I enclose portions of two notes of his which will show you better than anything I can say how he treats a certain subject. My book is to appear at the close of this month. Mrs. Gaskell wrote to beg that it should not clash with "Ruth," and it was impossible to refuse to defer the publication a week or two.

The visit to London did good; but it could not remove the pain which she suffered during this period of conflict.

Haworth, May 19th, 1853.

It is almost a relief to hear that you only think of staying at G — — a month; though of course one must not be selfish in wishing you to come home soon…. I cannot help feeling satisfaction in finding that the people here are getting up a subscription to offer a testimonial of respect to Mr. N — — on his leaving the place. Many are expressing both their commiseration and esteem for him. The churchwardens recently put the question to him plainly: Why was he going? Was it Mr. Brontë's fault or his own? His own, he answered. Did he blame Mr. Brontë? No, he did not: if anybody was wrong, it was himself. Was he willing to go? No; it gave him great pain. Yet he is not always right. I must be just. Papa addressed him at the school tea-drinking with *constrained* civility, but still with *civility*. He did not reply civilly; he cut short further words. This sort of treatment is what Papa never will forget or forgive. It inspires him with a silent bitterness not to be expressed…. It is a dismal state of things. The weather is fine now, dear Nell. We will take these sunny days as a good omen for your visit.

May 27th, 1853.

You will want to know about the leave-taking. The whole matter is but a painful subject, but I must treat it briefly. The testimonial was presented in a public meeting. Mr. F — — and Mr. G — — were there. Papa was not very well, and I advised him to stay away, which he did. As to the last Sunday, it was a cruel struggle. Mr. N — — ought not to have had to take any duty. He left Haworth this morning at six o'clock. Yesterday evening he called to render into Papa's hands the deeds of the National School, and to say good-bye. They were busy cleaning, washing the paint, &c., so he did not find me there. I would not go into the parlour to speak to him in Papa's presence. He went out, thinking he was not to see me; and indeed till the very last moment I thought it best not. But perceiving that he stayed long before going out at the gate, and remembering his long grief, I took courage, and went out, trembling and miserable. I found him leaning against the garden door…. Of course I went straight to him. Very few words were interchanged; those few barely articulate: several things I should have liked to ask him were swept entirely from my memory. Poor fellow! but he wanted such hope and such encouragement as I *could* not give him. Still I trust he must know now that I am not cruelly blind and indifferent to his constancy and grief. For a few weeks he goes to the South of England — afterwards he takes a curacy somewhere in Yorkshire, but I don't know where. Papa has been far from strong lately. I dare not mention Mr. N — — 's name to him. He speaks of him quietly and without opprobrium to others; but to me he is implacable on the matter. However, he is gone — gone — and there's an end of it! I see no chance of hearing a word about him in future, unless some stray shred of intelligence comes through Mr. G — — or some other second-hand source.

The remainder of the year 1853 was a chequered one. Mr. Nicholls left Haworth; Charlotte remained with her father. Those who saw her at this time bear testimony to the unfailing, never-flagging devotion she displayed towards one who was wounding her cruelly. But she bore this sorrow, like those which had preceded it, bravely and cheerfully. To her friend she opened her heart at times, revealing something of what she was suffering; but to all others she was silent.

Haworth, April 13th, 1853.

My dear Miss — — , — Your last kind letter ought to have been answered long since, and would have been, did I find it practicable to proportion the promptitude of the response to the value I place upon my correspondents and their communications. You will easily understand, however, that the contrary rule often holds good, and that the epistle which importunes often takes precedence of that which interests. My publishers express entire satisfaction with the reception which has been accorded to "Villette." And, indeed, the majority of the reviews has been favourable enough. You will be aware, however, that there is a minority, small in character, which views the work with no favourable eye. "Currer Bell's" remarks on Romanism have drawn down on him the condign displeasure of the High Church party, which displeasure has been unequivocally expressed through their principal organs, *The Guardian*, *The English Churchman*, and *The Christian Remembrancer*. I can well understand that some of the charges launched against me by these publications will tell heavily to my prejudice in the minds of most readers. But this must be borne; and for my part, I can suffer no accusation to oppress me much which is not supported by the inward evidence of Conscience and Reason. "Extremes meet," says the proverb; in proof whereof I would mention that Miss Martineau finds with "Villette" nearly the same fault as the Puseyites. She accuses me of attacking Popery "with virulence," of going out of my way to assault it "passionately." In other respects she has shown, with reference to the work, a spirit so strangely and unexpectedly acrimonious, that I have gathered courage to tell her that the gulf of mutual difference between her and me is so wide and deep, the bridge of union so slight and uncertain, I have come to the conclusion that frequent intercourse would be most perilous and unadvisable, and have begged to adjourn *sine die* my long-projected visit to her. Of course she is now very angry, but it cannot be helped. Two or three weeks since I received a long and kind letter from Mr. — — , which I answered a short time ago. I believe he thinks me a much better advocate for *change*, and what is called “political progress,” than I am. However, in my reply I did not touch on these subjects. He intimated a wish to publish some of his own MSS. I fear he would hardly like the somewhat dissuasive tendency of my answer; but really, in these days of headlong competition, it is a great risk to publish.

April 18th, 1853.

If all be well, I think of going to Manchester about the close of this week. I only intend staying a few days; but I can say nothing about coming back by B — — . Do not expect me; I would rather see you at Haworth by-and-by. Two or three weeks since, Miss Martineau wrote to ask why she did not hear from me, and to press me to go to Ambleside. Explanations ensued; the notes on each side were quite civil; but, having deliberately formed my resolution on substantial grounds, I adhered to it. I have declined being her visitor, and bid her good-bye. It is best so; the antagonism of our natures and principles was too serious to be trifled with.

This difference with Miss Martineau is not a thing to dwell on now. The pity is that two women so truthful, so sincere, so bold in their utterances should ever have differed. Charlotte Brontë had known how to stand bravely by Miss Martineau when she believed that the latter was suffering because of her honestly-formed opinions; she had known how to speak on her behalf with timely generosity and force. But her sensitive nature was wounded to the quick by criticisms which she believed to be unjust; and so these two great women parted, and met again no more.

To the mental pain which she was now suffering from her father’s conduct there was added keen physical torture. During this summer of 1853 many of her letters contain sentences like this: “I have been suffering most severely for ten days with continued pain in the head — on the nerves it is said to be. Blistering at last seems to have done it some good; but I am yet weak and bewildered.” A visit from Mrs. Gaskell, who came to see how Haworth looked in its autumn robe of splendour, did her some good; but still more was gained by a journey to the seaside in the company of her old friend and schoolmistress, Miss Wooler, before which she had addressed to her the following letter:

Haworth, August 30th, 1853.

My dear Miss W., — I was from home when your kind letter came, and, as it was not forwarded, I did not get it till my return. All the summer I have felt the wish and cherished the intention to join you for a brief period at the seaside; nor do I yet entirely relinquish the purpose, though its fulfilment must depend on my father’s health. At present he complains so much of weakness and depressed spirits, that no thoughts of leaving him can be entertained. Should he improve, however, I would fain come to you before autumn is quite gone.

My late absence was but for a week, when I accompanied Mr. and Mrs. — — and baby on a trip to Scotland. They went with the intention of taking up their quarters at Kirkcudbright, or some watering-place on the Solway Firth. We hardly reached that locality, and had stayed but one night, when the baby (that rather despotic member of modern households) exhibited some symptoms of indisposition. To my unskilled perception its ailments appeared very slight, nowise interfering with its appetite or spirits; but parental eyes saw the matter in a different light. The air of Scotland was pronounced unpropitious to the child, and consequently we had to retrace our steps. I own I felt some little reluctance to leave "bonnie Scotland" so soon and so abruptly, but of course I could not say a word, since, however strong on my own mind the impression that the ailment in question was very trivial and temporary (an impression confirmed by the issue), I could not be absolutely certain that such was the case; and had any evil consequences followed a prolonged stay, I should never have forgiven myself.

Ilkley was the next place thought of. We went there, but I only remained three days, for, in the hurry of changing trains at one of the stations, my box was lost, and without clothes I could not stay. I have heard of it twice, but have not yet regained it. In all probability it is now lying at Kirkcudbright, where it was directed.

Notwithstanding some minor trials, I greatly enjoyed this little excursion. The scenery through which we travelled from Dumfries to Kirkcudbright (a distance of thirty miles, performed outside a stage-coach) was beautiful, though not at all of a peculiarly Scottish character, being richly cultivated and well wooded. I liked Ilkley, too, exceedingly, and shall long to revisit the place. On the whole, I thought it for the best that circumstances obliged me to return home so soon, for I found Papa far from well. He is something better now, yet I shall not feel it right to leave him again till I see a more thorough re-establishment of health and strength.

With some things to regret and smile at, I saw things to admire in the small family party with which I travelled. Mr. — — makes a most devoted father and husband. I admired his great kindness to his wife; but I rather groaned (inwardly) over the unbounded indulgence of both parents towards their only child. The world does not revolve round the sun; that is a mistake. Certain babies, I plainly perceive, are the important centre of all things. The papa and mamma could only take their meals, rest, and exercise at such times and in such manner as the despotic infant permitted. While Mrs. — — eat her dinner, Mr. — — relieved guard as nurse. A nominal nurse, indeed, accompanied the party, but her place was a sort of anxious waiting sinecure, as the child did not fancy her attendance. Tenderness to offspring is a virtue, yet I think I have seen mothers who were most tender and thoughtful, yet in very love for their children would not permit them to become tyrants either over themselves or others.

I shall be glad and grateful, my dear Miss W., to hear from you again whenever you have time or inclination to write — though, as I told you before, there is no fear of my misunderstanding silence. Should you leave Hornsea before winter sets in, I trust you will just come straight to Haworth, and pay your long-anticipated visit there before you go elsewhere. Papa and the servants send their respects. I always duly deliver your kind messages of remembrance, because they give pleasure.

December came, and she writes to this friend expressing her wonder as to how she is spending the long winter evenings — “alone, probably, like me.” It was a dreary winter for her; but the spring was at hand. Mr. Brontë, studying his daughter with keen eyes, could not hide from himself the fact that her health and spirits were drooping now as they had never drooped before. All work with the pen was laid aside; and household cares, attendance upon her father or on the old servant, who now also needed to be waited upon, occupied her time; but her heart was heavy with a burden such as she had never previously known. At last the stern nature of the man was broken down by his genuine affection for his daughter. His opposition to her marriage was suddenly laid aside; he asked her to recall Mr. Nicholls to Haworth, and with characteristic waywardness he now became as anxious that the wedding should take place as he had ever been that it should be prevented.

There was a curious misadventure regarding the letter inviting Mr. Nicholls to Haworth, which is explained in the first of the letters I now quote.

Haworth, March 28th, 1854.

The enclosure in yours of yesterday puzzled me at first, for I did not immediately recognise my own handwriting. When I did, the sensation was one of consternation and vexation, as the letter ought by all means to have gone on Friday. It was intended to relieve him from great anxiety. However, I trust he will get it to-day; and, on the whole, when I think it over, I can only be thankful that the mistake was no worse, and did not throw the letter into the hands of some indifferent and unscrupulous person. I wrote it after some days of indisposition and uneasiness, and when I felt weak and unfit to write. While writing to *him* I was at the same time intending to answer *your* note; which I suppose accounts for the confusion of ideas shown in the mixed and blundering address.

I wish you could come about Easter rather than at another time, for this reason. Mr. Nicholls, if not prevented, proposes coming over then. I suppose he will be staying at Mr. — — ‘s, as he has done two or three times before; but he will be frequently coming here, which would enliven your visits a little. Perhaps, too, he might take a walk with us occasionally. Altogether, it would be a little change for you, such as you know I could not always offer. If all be well, he will come under different circumstances to any that have attended his visits before. Were it otherwise, I should not ask you to meet him, for when aspects are gloomy and unpropitious, the fewer there are to suffer from the cloud, the better. He was here in January, and was then received…. I trust it will be a little different now. Papa has breakfasted in bed to-day, and has not yet risen. His bronchitis is still troublesome. I had a bad week last week, but am greatly better now, for my mind is a little relieved, though very sedate, and rising only to expectations the most moderate. Some time, perhaps in May, I may be in your neighbourhood, and shall then hope to come to B.; but, as you will understand from what I have now stated, I could not come before. Think it over, dear E., and come to Haworth if you can.

April 11th, 1854.

The result of Mr. Nicholls's visit is that Papa's consent is gained and his respect won, for Mr. Nicholls has in all things proved himself disinterested and forbearing. He has shown, too, that, while his feelings are exquisitely keen, he can freely forgive…. In fact, dear Ellen, I am engaged. Mr. Nicholls in the course of a few months will return to the curacy of Haworth. I stipulated that I would not leave Papa, and to Papa himself I proposed a plan of residence which should maintain his seclusion and convenience uninvaded, and in a pecuniary sense bring him gain instead of loss. What seemed at one time impossible is now arranged, and Papa begins really to take a pleasure in the prospect. For myself, dear E — — , while thankful to One who seems to have guided me through much difficulty, much and deep distress and perplexity of mind, I am still very calm…. What I taste of happiness is of the soberest order. Providence offers me this destiny. Doubtless, then, it is the best for me; nor do I shrink from wishing those dear to me one not less happy. It is possible that our marriage may take place in the course of the summer. Mr. Nicholls wishes it to be in July. He spoke of you with great kindness, and said he hoped you would be at our wedding. I said I thought of having no other bridesmaid. Did I say right? I mean the marriage to be literally *as quiet as possible*. Do not mention these things as yet. Good-bye. There is a strange, half-sad feeling in making these announcements. The whole thing is something other than the imagination paints it beforehand — cares, fears, come mixed inextricably with hopes. I trust yet to talk the matter over with you.

So at length the day had dawned, and every letter now is filled with the hopes and cares of the expectant bride.

April 15th.

I hope to see you somewhere about the second week in May. The Manchester visit is still hanging over my head; I have deferred it and deferred it, but have finally promised to go about the beginning of next month. I shall only stay about three days; then I spend two or three days at H., then come to B. The three visits must be compressed into the space of a fortnight, if possible. I suppose I shall have to go to Leeds. My purchases cannot be either expensive or extensive. You must just resolve in your head the bonnets and dresses: something that can be turned to decent use and worn after the wedding-day will be best, I think. I wrote immediately to Miss W— —, and received a truly kind letter from her this morning. Papa's mind seems wholly changed about this matter; and he has said, both to me and when I was not there, how much happier he feels since he allowed all to be settled. It is a wonderful relief for me to hear him treat the thing rationally, and quietly and amicably to talk over with him themes on which once I dared not touch. He is rather anxious that things should get forward now, and takes quite an interest in the arrangement of preliminaries. His health improves daily, though this east wind still keeps up a slight irritation in the throat and chest. The feeling which has been disappointed in Papa was *ambition* — paternal pride — ever a restless feeling, as we all know. Now that this unquiet spirit is exorcised, justice, which was once quite forgotten, is once more listened to, and affection, I hope, resumes some power. My hope is that in the end this arrangement will turn out more truly to Papa's advantage than any other it was in my power to achieve. Mr. N. only in his last letter refers touchingly to his earnest desire to prove his gratitude to Papa by offering support and consolation to his declining age. This will not be mere *talk* with him. He is no talker, no dealer in mere professions.

April 28th.

Papa, thank God! continues to improve much. He preached twice on Sunday, and again on Wednesday, and was not tired. His mind and mood are different to what they were; so much more cheerful and quiet. I trust the illusions of ambition are quite dissipated, and that he really sees it is better to relieve a suffering and faithful heart, to secure in its fidelity a solid good, than unfeelingly to abandon one who is truly attached to *his* interests as well as mine, and pursue some vain empty shadow.

Hemsworth, May 6th.

I came here on Thursday afternoon. I shall stay over Saturday and Sunday, and, if all be well, I hope to come to B. on Monday, after dinner, and just in time for tea. I leave you to judge by your own feelings whether I long to see you or not. — — tells me you are looking better. She tells me also that I am not — rather ugly, as usual. But never mind that, dear Nell — as, indeed, you never did. On the whole, I *feel* very decently at present, and within the last fortnight have had much respite from headache. You are kind in being so much in earnest in wishing for Mr. N. to come to B., and I am sorry that circumstances do not favour such a step. But, knowing how matters stood, I did not repeat the proposal to him, for I thought it would be like tempting him to forget duty.

In the following letters, in addition to the pleasing side-lights which they throw upon her life in its new aspect, there is another feature which deserves to be noticed — that is, the exceeding tenderness with which the writer watches over her friend. The new love entering into her heart has but made the old love stronger, and she lavishes upon the sole remaining companion of her youth the care and affection which can no longer be bestowed upon sisters of her own blood.

Haworth, May 14th.

I took the time of the Leeds, Keighley, Skipton trains from the February time-table, and when I got to Leeds found myself all wrong. The trains on that line were changed. One had that moment left the station — indeed, it was just steaming away; there was not another till a quarter after five o'clock; so I had just four hours to sit and twirl my thumbs. I got over the time somehow, but I was vexed to think how much more pleasantly I might have spent it at B. It was just seven o'clock when I reached home. I found Papa well. It seems he has been particularly well during my absence, but to-day he is a little sickly, and only preached once. However, he is better again this evening. I could not leave you, dear Ellen, with a very quiet mind, or take away a satisfied feeling about you. Not that I think that bad cough lodged in a dangerous quarter; but it shakes your system, wears you out, and makes you look ill. *Take care of it, do, dear Ellen. Avoid the evening air for a time*; keep in the house when the weather is cold. Observe these precautions till the cough is quite gone, and you regain strength, and feel better able to bear chill and change. Believe me, it does not suit you at present to be much exposed to variations of temperature. I send the mantle with this, but have made up my mind not to let you have the cushion now, lest you should sit stitching over it too closely. It will do any time, and whenever it comes will be your present all the same.

May 22nd.

I wonder how you are, and whether that harassing cough is better; but I am afraid the variable weather of last week will not have been favourable to improvement. I *will* not and *do* not believe the cough lies on any vital organ. Still it is a mark of weakness, and a warning to be scrupulously careful about undue exposure. Just now, dear Ellen, an hour's inadvertence might derange your whole constitution for years to come — might throw you into a state of chronic ill-health which would waste, fade, and wither you up prematurely. So, once and again, TAKE CARE. If you go to — — , or any other evening party, pack yourself in blankets and a feather-bed to come home, also fold your boa twice over your mouth, to serve as a respirator. Since I came home I have been very busy sketching. The little new room is got into order now, and the green and white curtains are up. They exactly suit the papering, and look neat and clean enough. I had a letter a day or two since, announcing that Mr. N. comes to-morrow. I feel anxious about him, more anxious on one point than I dare quite express to myself. It seems he has again been suffering sharply from his rheumatic affection. I hear this not from himself, but from another quarter. He was ill whilst I was at Manchester and B. He uttered no complaint to me, dropped no hint on the subject. Alas! he was hoping he had got the better of it; and I know how this contradiction of his hopes will sadden him. For unselfish reasons he did so earnestly wish this complaint might not become chronic. I fear — I fear — but, however, I mean to stand by him now, whether in weal or woe. This liability to rheumatic pain was one of the strong arguments used against the marriage. It did not weigh, somehow. If he is doomed to suffer, it seems that so much the more will he need care and help. And yet the ultimate possibilities of such a case are appalling. Well, come what may, God help and strengthen both him and me. I look forward to to-morrow with a mixture of impatience and anxiety. Poor fellow! I want to see with my own eyes how he is.

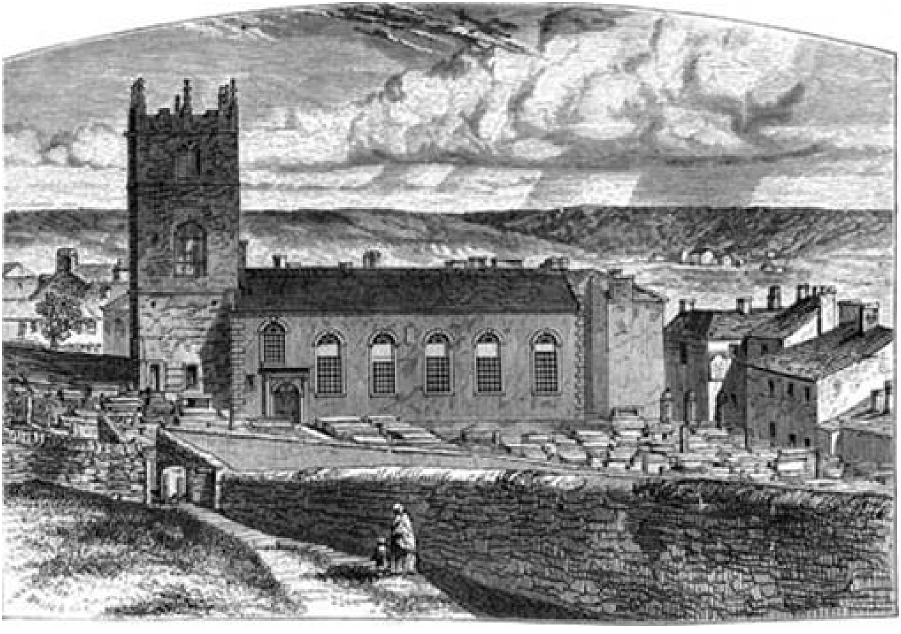
Haworth, June 7th.

I am very glad and thankful to hear that you continue better, though I am afraid your cough will have returned a little during the late chilly change in the weather. Are you taking proper care of yourself, and either staying in the house or going out warmly clad, and with a boa doing duty as a respirator? On this last point I incline particularly to insist, for you seemed careless about it, and unconscious how much atmospheric harm the fine thick hairs of the fur might ward off. I was very miserable about Papa again some days ago. While the weather was so sultry and electric, about a week since, he was suddenly attacked with deafness, and complained of other symptoms which showed the old tendency to the head. His spirits, too, became excessively depressed. It was all I could do to keep him up, and I own I was sad and depressed myself. However he took some medicine, which did him good. The change to cooler weather, too, has suited him. The temporary deafness has quite disappeared for the present, and his head is again clear and cool. I can only earnestly trust he will continue better. That unlucky — — continues his efforts to give what trouble he can, and I am obliged to conceal things from Papa's knowledge as well as I can, to spare him that anxiety which hurts him so much…. I feel compelled to throw the burden of the contest upon Mr. Nicholls, who is younger and can bear it better. The worst of it is, Mr. N. has not Papa's right to speak and act, or he would do it to purpose. I should then have to mediate, not rouse; to play the part of

Feather-bed 'twixt castle-wall
And heavy brunt of cannon-ball.

June 16th.

My dear Miss W — — , — Owing to certain untoward proceedings, matters have hitherto been kept in such a state of uncertainty that I could not make any approach towards fixing the day; and now, if I would avoid inconveniencing Papa, I must hurry. I believe the commencement of July is the furthest date upon which I can calculate; possibly I may be obliged to accept one still nearer — the close of June. I cannot quite decide till next week. Meantime, will you, my dear Miss W — — , come as soon as you possibly can, and let me know at your earliest convenience the day of your arrival. I have written to Ellen, begging her to communicate with you…. Your absence would be a real and grievous disappointment. Papa also seems much to wish your presence. Mr. Nicholls enters with true kindness into my wish to have all done quietly; and he has made such arrangements as will, I trust, secure literal privacy. Yourself, Ellen, and Mr. S. will be the only persons present at the ceremony. Mr. and Mrs. G. are asked to the breakfast afterwards. I know you will kindly excuse this brief note, for I am and have been *very* busy, and must still be busy up to the very day. Give my sincere love to all Mr. C — — 's family. I hope Mr. C. and Mr. Nicholls may meet some day. I believe mutual acquaintance would in time bring mutual respect; but one of them, at least, requires *knowing* to be *appreciated.* And I must say that I have not yet found him to lose with closer knowledge. I make no grand discoveries, but I occasionally come upon a quiet little nook of character which excites esteem. He is always reliable, truthful, faithful, affectionate; a little unbending, perhaps, but still persuadable and open to kind influence — a man never, indeed, to be driven, but who may be led.



HAWORTH CHURCH.

The marriage took place on June 29th, 1854. A neighbouring clergyman read the service; Charlotte's "dear Nell" was the solitary bridesmaid; her old schoolmistress, whose friendship had ever been dear to her, Miss Wooler, gave her away; and visitors to Haworth who are shown the marriage register will see that these two faithful and trusted friends were the only witnesses. Immediately after the marriage the bride and bridegroom started for Ireland, to visit some of the relatives of Mr. Nicholls. "I trust I feel thankful to God for having enabled me to make a right choice; and I pray to be enabled to repay as

I ought the affectionate devotion of a truthful, honourable, unboastful man,” are words which appear in the first letter written from Ireland. A month later the bride writes as follows to her friend:

Dublin, July 28th, 1854.

I really cannot rest any longer without writing you a line, which I have literally not had time to do during the last fortnight. We have been travelling about, with only just such cessation as enabled me to answer a few of the many notes of congratulation forwarded, and which I dared not suffer to accumulate till my return, when I know I shall be busy enough. We have been to Killarney, Glen Gariffe, Tarbert, Tralee, Cork, and are now once more in Dublin again on our way home, where we hope to arrive next week. I shall make no effort to describe the scenery through which we have passed. Some parts have exceeded all I ever imagined. Of course, much pleasure has sprung from all this, and more, perhaps, from the kind and ceaseless protection which has ever surrounded me, and made travelling a different matter to me from what it has heretofore been. Dear Nell, it is written that there shall be no unmixed happiness in this world. Papa has not been well, and I have been longing, *longing intensely* sometimes, to be at home. Indeed, I could enjoy and rest no more, and so home we are going.

It was a new life to which she was returning. Wedded to one who had proved by years of faithfulness and patience how strong and real was his love for her, it seemed as though peace and sunshine, the brightness of affection and the pleasures of home, were at length about to settle upon her and around her. The bare sitting-room in the parsonage, which for six years of loneliness and anguish had been peopled only by the heart-sick woman and the memories of those who had left her, once more resounded with the voices of the living. The husband’s strong and upright nature furnished something for the wife to lean against; the painful sense of isolation which had so long oppressed her vanished utterly, and in its place came that “sweet sense of depending” which is the most blessed fruit of a trustful love. A great calm seemed to be breathed over the spirit of her life after the fitful fever which had raged so long; and her friends saw new shoots of tenderness, new blossoms of gentleness and affection, peeping forth in nooks of her character which had hitherto been barren. Of her letters during these happy months of peace and expectation I cannot quote much; they are too closely intertwined with the life of those who survive to permit of this being done; but all of them breathe the same spirit. They show that the courage, the patience, the cheerfulness with which the rude buffetings of fate had been borne in that stormy middle-passage of her history, had brought their own reward; and that joy had come at last, not perhaps in the shape she had imagined in her early youth, but as a substantial reality, and no longer a mocking illusion.

August 9th, 1854.

— — will probably end by accepting — — ; and judging from what you say, it seems to me that it would be rational to do so. If, indeed, some one else whom she preferred *wished* to have her, and had duly and sincerely come forward, matters would be different. But this it appears is not the case; and to cherish any *unguarded* and unsustained preference is neither right nor wise. Since I came home I have not had one unemployed moment. My life is changed indeed; to be wanted continually, to be constantly called for and occupied, seems so strange; yet it is a marvellously good thing. As yet I don't quite understand how some wives grow so selfish. As far as my experience of matrimony goes, I think it tends to draw you out and away from yourself…. Dear Nell, during the last six weeks the colour of my thoughts is a good deal changed. I know more of the realities of life than I once did. I think many false ideas are propagated, perhaps unintentionally. I think those married women who indiscriminately urge their acquaintance to marry, much to blame. For my part I can only say with deeper sincerity and fuller significance, what I always said in theory: Wait God's will. Indeed, indeed, Nell, it is a solemn and strange and perilous thing for a woman to become a wife. Man's lot is far, far different…. Have I told you how much better Mr. Nicholls is? He looks quite strong and hale. To see this improvement in him has been a great source of happiness to me; and, to speak truth, a source of wonder too.

Haworth, September 7th, 1854.

I send a French paper to-day. You would almost think I had given them up, it is so long since one was despatched. The fact is they had accumulated to quite a pile during my absence. I wished to look them over before sending them off, and as yet I have scarcely found time. That same *time* is an article of which I once had a large stock always on hand; where it is all gone to now it would be difficult to say, but my moments are very fully occupied. Take warning, Ellen. The married woman can call but a very small portion of each day her own. Not that I complain of this sort of monopoly as yet, and I hope I never shall incline to regard it as a misfortune, but it certainly exists. We were both disappointed that you could not come on the day I mentioned. I have grudged this splendid weather very much. The moors are in their glory; I never saw them fuller of purple bloom; I wanted you to see them at their best. They are fast turning now, and in another week, I fear, will be faded and sere. As soon as ever you can leave home, be sure to write and let me know…. Papa continues greatly better. My husband flourishes; he begins indeed to express some slight alarm at the growing improvement in his condition. I think I am decent — better certainly than I was two months ago; but people don't compliment me as they do Arthur — excuse the name; it has grown natural to use it now.

Haworth, September 16th, 1854.

My dear Miss — — , — You kindly tell me not to write while Ellen is with me; I am expecting her this week; and as I think it would be wrong long to defer answering a letter like yours, I will reduce to practice the maxim: “There is no time like the present,” and do it at once. It grieves me that you should have had any anxiety about my health; the cough left me before I quitted Ireland, and since my return home I have scarcely had an ailment, except occasional headaches. My dear father, too, continues much better. Dr. B — — was here on Sunday, preaching a sermon for the Jews, and he gratified me much by saying that he thought Papa not at all altered since he saw him last — nearly a year ago. I am afraid this opinion is rather flattering; but still it gave me pleasure, for I had feared that he looked undeniably thinner and older. You ask what visitors we have had. A good many amongst the clergy, &c., in the neighbourhood, but none of note from a distance. Haworth is, as you say, a very quiet place; it is also difficult of access, and unless under the stimulus of necessity, or that of strong curiosity, or finally, that of true and tried friendship, few take courage to penetrate to so remote a nook. Besides, now that I am married, I do not expect to be an object of much general interest. Ladies who have won some prominence (call it either *notoriety* or celebrity) in their single life, often fall quite into the background when they change their names. But if true domestic happiness replace fame, the change is indeed for the better. Yes, I am thankful to say that my husband is in improved health and spirits. It makes me content and grateful to hear him, from time to time, avow his happiness in the brief but plain phrase of sincerity. My own life is more occupied than it used to be; I have not so much time for thinking: I am obliged to be more practical, for my dear Arthur is a very practical as well as a very punctual, methodical man. Every morning he is in the national school by nine o’clock; he gives the children religious instruction till half-past ten. Almost every afternoon he pays visits amongst the poor parishioners. Of course he often finds a little work for his wife to do, and I hope she is not sorry to help him. I believe it is not bad for me that his bent should be so wholly towards matters of real life and active usefulness — so little inclined to the literary and contemplative. As to his continued affection and kind attentions, it does not become me to say much of them; but as yet they neither change nor diminish. I wish, my dear Miss — — , *you* had some kind, faithful companion to enliven your solitude at R — — , some friend to whom to communicate your pleasure in the scenery, the fine weather, the pleasant walks. You never complain, never murmur, never seem otherwise than thankful; but I know you must miss a privilege none could more keenly appreciate than yourself.

There are other letters like the foregoing, all speaking of the constant occupation of time, which once hung heavily, all giving evidence that peace and love had made their home in her heart, all free from that strain of sadness which was so common in other years. One only of these letters, that written on the morrow of her last Christmas Day, need be quoted, however.

Haworth, December 26th.

I return Mrs. — — ‘s letter: it is as you say, very genuine, truthful, affectionate, *maternal*, without a taint of sham or exaggeration. She will love her child without spoiling it, I think. She does not make an uproar about her happiness either. The longer I live the more I suspect exaggerations. I fancy it is sometimes a sort of fashion for each to vie with the other in protestations about their wondrous felicity — and sometimes they *fib*! I am truly glad to hear you are all better at B — — . In the course of three or four weeks now I expect to get leave to come to you. I certainly long to see you again. One circumstance reconciles me to this delay — the weather. I do not know whether it has been as bad with you as with us; but here for three weeks we have had little else than a succession of hurricanes…. You inquire after Mrs. Gaskell. She has not been here, and I think I should not like her to come now till summer. She is very busy now with her story of "North and South." I must make this note very short. Arthur joins me in sincere good wishes for a happy Christmas and many of them to you and yours. He is well, thank God, and so am I; and he *is* "my dear boy" certainly — dearer now than he was six months ago. In three days we shall actually have been married that length of time.

There was not much time for literary labours during these happy months of married life. The wife, new to her duties, was engaged in mastering them with all the patience, self-suppression, and industry which had characterised her throughout her life. Her husband was now her first thought; and he took the time which had formerly been devoted to reading, study, thought, and writing. But occasionally the pressure she was forced to put upon herself was very severe. Mr. Nicholls had never been attracted towards her by her literary fame; with literary effort, indeed, he had no sympathy, and upon the whole he would rather that his wife should lay aside her pen entirely than that she should gain any fresh triumphs in the world of letters. So she submitted, and with cheerful courage repressed that "gift" which had been her solace in sorrows deep and many. Yet once "the spell" was too strong to be resisted, and she hastily wrote a few pages of a new story called "Emma," in which once more she proposed to deal with her favourite theme — the history of a friendless girl. One would fain have seen how she would have treated her subject, now that "the colour of her thoughts" had been changed, and that a happy marriage had introduced her to a new phase of that life which she had studied so closely and so constantly. But it was not to be. On January 19, when she had returned to Haworth, after a visit to Sir J. K. Shuttleworth's, she wrote to her friend as follows. This letter was the last written in ink to her schoolfellow:

Haworth, January 19th, 1855.

Since our return from Gawthorpe we have had Mr. B — — , one of Arthur's cousins, staying with us. It was a great pleasure. I wish you could have seen him and made his acquaintance: a true gentleman by nature and cultivation is not, after all, an everyday thing…. I very much wish to come to B — — , and I hoped to be able to write with certainty and fix Wednesday, the 31st January, as the day; but the fact is I am not sure whether I shall be well enough to leave home. At present I should be a most tedious visitor. My health has really been very good ever since my return from Ireland, till about ten days ago. Indigestion and continual faint sickness have been my portion ever since. I never before felt as I have done lately. I am rather mortified to lose my good looks and grow thin as I am doing, just when I thought of going to B — — . Poor J — — ! I still hope he will get better, but A — — writes grievous though not always clear or consistent accounts. Dear Ellen, I want to see you, and I hope I shall see you well.

Those around her were not alarmed at first. They hoped that before long all would be well with her again; they could not believe that the joys of which she had just begun to taste were about to be snatched away. But her weakness grew apace; the sickness knew no abatement; and a deadly fear began to creep into the hearts of husband and father. She was soon so weak that she was compelled to remain in bed, and from that "dreary bed" she wrote two or three faint pencil notes which still exist — the last pathetic chapters in that life-long correspondence from which we have gathered so many extracts. In one of them, which Mrs. Gaskell has published, she says: "I want to give you an assurance which I know will comfort you — and that is that I find in my husband the tenderest nurse, the kindest support, the best earthly comfort that ever woman had. His patience never fails, and it is tried by sad days and broken nights." In another, the last, she says: "I cannot talk — even to my dear, patient, constant Arthur I can say but few words at once." One dreary March morning, when frost still bound the earth and no spring sun had come to gladden the hearts of those who watched for summer, her friend received another letter, written, not in the neat, minute hand of Charlotte Brontë, but in her father's tremulous characters:

Haworth, near Keighley,
March 30th, 1855.

My dear Madam, — We are all in great trouble, and Mr. Nicholls so much so that he is not sufficiently strong and composed as to be able to write. I therefore devote a few lines to tell you that my dear daughter is very ill, and apparently on the verge of the grave. If she could speak she would no doubt dictate to us whilst answering your kind letter. But we are left to ourselves to give what answer we can. The doctors have no hope of her case, and fondly as we a long time cherished hope, that hope is now gone; and we have only to look forward to the solemn event with prayer to God that He will give us grace and strength sufficient unto our day.

Ever truly and respectfully yours,
P. Brontë.

The following day, March 31st, 1855, the blinds were drawn once again at Haworth Parsonage; the last and greatest of the children of the house had passed away; and the brilliant name of Charlotte Brontë had become a name and nothing more! "We are left to ourselves," said Mr. Brontë in the letter I have just quoted — and so it was. Not the glory only, but the light, had fled from the parsonage where the childless father and the widowed husband sat together beside their dead. Of all the drear and desolate spots upon that wild Yorkshire moorland there was none now so dreary and so desolate as the house which had once been the home of Charlotte Brontë.

XII.

POSTHUMOUS HONOURS.

There is a deeper truth in the maxim which bids us judge no man happy till his death than most of us are apt to perceive. For sometimes the happiness of a life is crowned by death itself; and that which to the superficial gaze seems but the dreary and tragic close of the play, is really the welcome release from the burden which had become too heavy to be borne longer. But where life and breath fail suddenly in the moment of fullest hope, apparently in the moment also of greatest bliss, the strain upon our faith is almost too severe, and blinded and bewildered, we see nothing and feel nothing but the awful stroke of fate which has laid the loved one low, and the great gap which remains at the table and the hearth. It was with such a feeling as this that the outer world heard of that Easter-day tragedy which had been enacted to the bitter end among the Yorkshire hills. Those who knew the little household at Haworth had been watching, as has already been told, for that fulness of joy which seemed close at hand. They had seen the lonely authoress developing into the trustful happy wife, and they looked forward to no distant day when children should be gathered at her knee, and a new generation, born amid happier circumstances, freed from the strain and stress which had been laid upon her, should perpetuate a great name, and perhaps something of a great genius.

The announcement that all these hopes had been brought to nothing fell upon the world as a blow not easily to be borne. When it was made known that the author of “Jane Eyre” was dead, there rose up even from those who had been her bitter critics during her lifetime, a cry of pain and regret which would have astonished nobody more than herself had she been able to hear it. The genuine unaffected modesty which had enabled her to preserve the simplicity of her character amid all the temptations which thronged round her at the height of her fame, had prevented her from ever feeling herself to be a person of consequence in the world. What she did in the way of writing she did because she could not escape the commanding authority of her own genius; but the idea that by doing this she had made herself conspicuously great never once occurred to her. There is not a letter extant from her which shows that she thought anything of the fame or the fortune she had acquired. On the contrary everything that remains of her inner life proves that to the very last she esteemed herself as humbly as ever she did during the days of her “governessing” in Yorkshire or at Brussels. She knew of course that she attracted attention wherever she went; but her own unfeigned belief seems to have been that this attention was due solely to curiosity, and to curiosity of a not very pleasant or flattering kind. Brought up as she had been among those who regarded any literary pursuit, and above all the writing of a book, as something beyond the proper limits of the rights and duties of her sex, she had never quite escaped from the notion that in putting pen to paper she was in some vague way offending against the proprieties of society. It has been shown by an extract from one of her letters, how keenly and indignantly she repudiated the notion that she had ever written anything of which she needed to be ashamed. Her pure heart vindicated her absolutely upon that point. But, from first to last, she seemed during her literary career to feel that in writing novels she had sinned against the conventional canons, and that she was in consequence looked upon not as a great woman who had taken a lofty place in the republic of letters, but as a social curiosity who had done something which made her for the time-being notorious. How ready she was to forget her success as a writer is shown by a thousand passages in her correspondence, many of these passages being too tender or sacred for quotation. It is impossible to read her letters without seeing that, with the exception of a solitary friend, the companions of her daily life in Yorkshire did not feel at all drawn towards her by her literary fame. With her accustomed humility she accepted herself at their valuation, and whilst the nations afar off were praising her, she herself was perfectly ready to take a humble place in the circle of her friends at home. The tastes of her husband had unquestionably something to do in maintaining this simple and sincere modesty up to the end of her life. He was resolute in putting aside all thought of her literary achievements; his whole anxiety — an anxiety arising almost entirely from his desire for her happiness — was that she should cease entirely to be the author, and should become the busy, useful, contented wife of the village clergyman. It would be wrong to hide the fact that she was compelled to place a severe strain upon herself in order to comply with her husband’s wishes; and once, as we have seen, her strength of self-repression gave way, and she indulged in the forbidden luxury of work with the pen. But it is not surprising that, surrounded by those who, loving her very dearly, yet withheld from her all recognition of her position as one of the great writers of the day, she should have accepted their estimate of her place with characteristic humility, and believed herself to be of little or no account outside the walls of her own home.

In this belief she lived and died. Among the letters before me, but from which I must forbear to quote, are not a few written during that last sad illness when the end began to loom before her vision. In these, whilst there are many anxious inquiries after the friends of early days, and many remarks upon their varying fortunes, many allusions, too, to her husband and father, and to parish work at Haworth, there is not a line which speaks of her own feelings as an author, or of the work which she had accomplished during the brief closing years of her life. The novelist has passed entirely out of sight, and only the wife, the friend, the expectant mother, remains. I know nothing which more touchingly shows one how small a thing is great fame, how little even the most marked and marvellous successes can affect the realities of life, than the last chapters of Charlotte Brontë's correspondence do. Her death, all unknown to the great world outside; her quiet funeral, treated only as the funeral of the clergyman's daughter, the curate's wife; the modest announcement of her end sent to the local papers — all these are in keeping with her own low estimate of herself.

But death, the great touchstone of humanity, revealed her true position to the world, and to her surviving relatives and friends. Copies of the newspapers of that sad March week in 1855 lie before me, carefully treasured up by loving hands. They speak with an eloquence which is not always that of mere words, of a nation's mourning for a great soul gone prematurely to its account. Of all these tributes of loving admiration, there are two which must be singled out for special mention. One is Miss Martineau's generous though not wholly satisfactory notice of "Currer Bell" in *The Daily News*, and the other the far more sympathetic article by "Shirley," which appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* a few months later.

Her father, her husband, her life-long friend, were wonderfully touched and moved when they found how closely the simple, modest woman, who had been so long a sweet and familiar presence to them, had wound herself round the great heart of the reading public. But they were slow to grasp all the truth. When it was proposed that some record of this noble life should be preserved, and when Mrs. Gaskell was named as the fittest among all Charlotte's literary acquaintances to undertake the office, there was strong and keen opposition on the part of those who had been nearest and dearest to her. With a natural feeling, to which no word of blame can be attached, but which again throws light upon the character of her surroundings in life, they objected to any revelation to the world of the real character and career of the lost member of their household. Happily, their scruples were overcome, and the world was permitted to read the story of the Brontës as told by one who was herself a woman of genius and of the highest moral worth. The reader of this monograph will not, it is to be hoped, imagine that the writer has presumed to set himself up as a rival to Mrs. Gaskell. He can no more pretend to equal her in the treatment of his subject than in the freshness of the interest attaching to it. And if he has found himself obliged to differ from her on some points not wholly unimportant, it must be borne in mind that the writer of to-day is free from not a few of the difficulties and restraints which weighed upon the writer of twenty years ago. Mrs. Gaskell had, indeed, to labour under serious disadvantages in her task. Not only was she unable to obtain full and ready access to all the materials which she needed to employ, but she was also compelled to introduce much irrelevant and even hurtful matter into a delightful and beautiful story. When, after gathering up the bare outline of the life she proposed to write, she complained to Mr. Brontë that there were not incidents enough in the history of his daughter to make an interesting narrative of the ordinary length, his reply was a characteristic one: “If there are not facts enough in Charlotte’s life to make a book, madam, you must invent some.” There is no need to say that Mrs. Gaskell declined to follow this advice; but none the less was she hampered all through her work by the necessity of introducing topics which had but little to do with her main theme; and we see the result in the fact that the plain unadorned tale of Charlotte Brontë and her sisters has been interwoven with dismal episodes with which properly it had no concern.

The publication of Mrs. Gaskell’s biography came, however, as a revelation upon the world. Readers everywhere had learned to admire the writings of “Currer Bell,” and to mourn over the premature extinction of her genius, but few of them had imagined that the life and personal character of the author of “Jane Eyre” had been what it was.

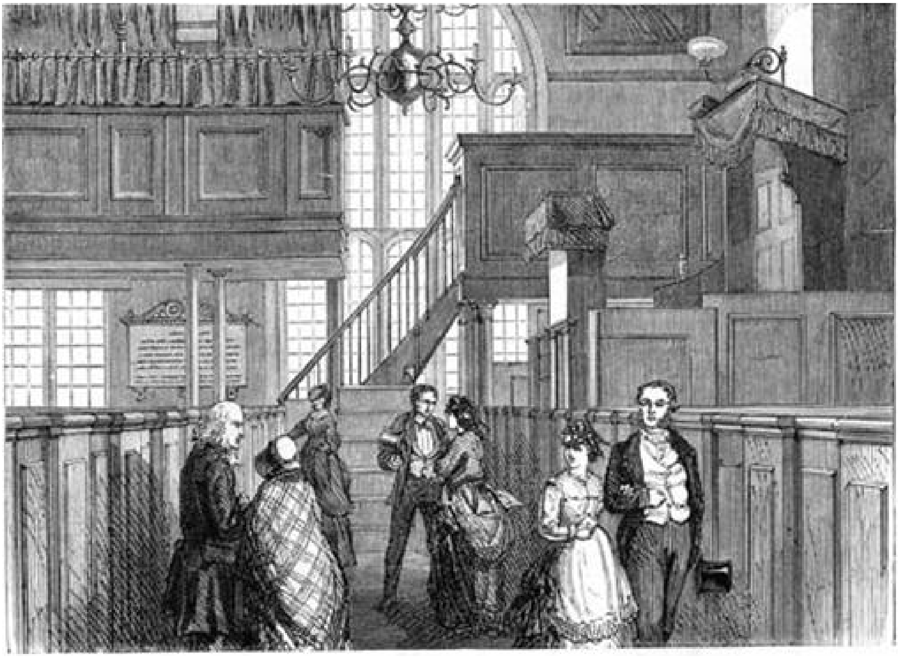
The following letter from Charles Kingsley to Mrs. Gaskell sufficiently indicates the revulsion of feeling wrought in many minds by the publication of the “Memoir:”

St. Leonards, May 14, 1857.

Let me renew our long-interrupted acquaintance by complimenting you on poor Miss Brontë’s “Life.” You have had a delicate and a great work to do, and you have done it admirably. Be sure that the book will do good. It will shame literary people into some stronger belief that a simple, virtuous, practical home life, is consistent with high imaginative genius; and it will shame, too, the prudery of a not over cleanly though carefully white-washed age, into believing that purity is now (as in all ages till now) quite compatible with the knowledge of evil. I confess that the book has made me ashamed of myself. “Jane Eyre” I hardly looked into, very seldom reading a work of fiction — yours, indeed, and Thackeray’s, are the only ones I care to open. “Shirley” disgusted me at the opening, and I gave up the writer and her books with a notion that she was a person who liked coarseness. How I misjudged her! and how thankful I am that I never put a word of my misconceptions into print, or recorded my misjudgments of one who is a whole heaven above me.

Well have you done your work, and given us the picture of a valiant woman made perfect by sufferings. I shall now read carefully and lovingly every word she has written, especially those poems, which ought not to have fallen dead as they did, and which seem to be (from a review in the current *Fraser*) of remarkable, strength and purity.

The effect of the portrait was heightened by the admirable skill with which the background was drawn; and the story of the life gained a popularity which hardly any other recent English biography has attained. Yet, from the first, people were found here and there who, whilst acknowledging the skill, the sympathy, and the entire sincerity displayed by Mrs. Gaskell, yet whispered that the Charlotte Brontë of the story was not in all particulars the Charlotte Brontë they had known.



INTERIOR OF HAWORTH CHURCH.

One great change resulted immediately from the publication of Mrs. Gaskell's work. Haworth and its parsonage became the shrine to which hundreds of literary pilgrims from all parts of the globe began to find their way. To see the house in which the three sisters had spent their lives and done their work, to stand at the altar at which Charlotte was married, and beneath which her ashes now rest, and to hear her aged father preach one of his pithy, sensible, but dogmatic sermons, was what all literary lion-hunters aspired to do. In Yorkshire, indeed, the stolid people of the West Riding were not greatly moved by this enthusiasm. Just as Charlotte herself had seemed an ordinary and rather obscure person to her Yorkshire friends, so Haworth was still regarded as being a very dull and dreary village by those who lived near it. But the empire of genius knows no geographical boundaries, and if at her own doors Charlotte Brontë's sway was unrecognised, from far-distant quarters of the world there came the free and full acknowledgment of her power. No other land, however, furnished so many eager and enthusiastic visitors to the Brontë shrine as the United States, and the number of Americans who found their way to Haworth during the ten years immediately following the death of the author of "Jane Eyre" would, if properly recorded, astonish the world. The bleak and lonely house by the side of the moors, with its dismal little garden stretching down to the churchyard, where the village dead of many a generation rest, and its dreary out-look upon the old tower rising from its bank of nettles, the squalid houses of the hamlet, and the bare moorlands beyond, received almost as many visitors from the other side of the Atlantic during those years as Abbotsford or Stratford-upon-Avon. Mr. Brontë and Mr. Nicholls, though they were anxious to avoid the pertinacious intrusion of these curious but enthusiastic guests, could not entirely escape from meeting them. It followed that many an American lady and gentleman wandered through the rooms where the three sisters had dwelt together in love and unity, and where Charlotte had laboured alone after the light of her life had fled from her, and many an American magazine and newspaper contained the record of the impressions which these visits left upon the minds of those who made them.

In only one case does it seem necessary to recall those impressions. The late Mr. Raymond, for many years editor of *The New York Times*, visited Haworth, and wrote an account of his visit, some passages of which may well be reproduced here. He tells us how on his railway journey to Keighley, at that time the nearest railway station to Haworth, he "astonished an intelligent, sociable, and very agreeable English lady, his sole companion in the railway carriage, by telling her the errand which had brought him to Yorkshire. She lived in the neighbourhood, had read the 'Jane Eyre' novels, and 'supposed the girls were clever;' but 'she would not go ten steps to see where they lived, nor could she understand how a stranger from America should feel any interest in their affairs.'" Arrived at Haworth, and having satisfied himself as to the appearance of the parsonage and the character of the surrounding neighbourhood, Mr. Raymond went to the Black Bull Inn to dine and sleep. "As I took my candle to go to my chamber, I stepped for a moment into the kitchen, where the landlord and landlady were having a comfortable chat over pipes and ale, with a companionable rustic of the place, who proved to be a nephew of the old servant Tabby, who lived so long, and at last died in the service of the Brontë family. I joined the circle, and sat there till long after midnight. Branwell was clearly the hero of the village worship. A little red-headed fellow, the landlord said, quick, bright, abounding in stories, in jokes, and in pleasant talk of every kind; he was a general favourite in town, and the special wonder of the Black Bull circles. Small as he was, it was impossible to frighten him. They had seen him volunteer during a mill-riot to go in and thrash a dozen fellows, any one of whom could have put him in his pocket and carried him off at a minute's notice. Indeed a characteristic of the whole family seems to have been an entire insensibility to danger and to fear. Emily and Charlotte, these people told me, were one day walking through the street, when their great dog, Keeper, engaged in a fight with another dog of equal size. Whilst everybody else stood aloof and shouted, these girls went in, caught Keeper by the neck, and by dint of tugging, and beating him over the head, succeeded in dragging him away." I extract this passage because of the confirmation which it gives, on the authority of one who made his inquiries very soon after the death of Charlotte Brontë, of the account of some of the family characteristics which appear in these pages; nor will the story of Mr. Raymond's interview with Mr. Brontë, told as it is with American directness, be without its interest and its value.

The next morning I prepared to call at the parsonage. I was told that Mr.

Brontë and Mr. Nicholls declined to receive strangers, having a great aversion to visits of curiosity, and being exceedingly retiring and reserved in their habits. I sent in my card, however, and was shown into the little library at the right of the entrance, where I was asked to await Mr. Nicholls's appearance. The room was small, very plainly furnished, with small bookcases round the walls, the one between the windows containing copies of the Brontë novels. Mr. Nicholls soon came in and made me welcome. To my apologies for my intrusion he assured me that while they were under the necessity of declining many visits, both he and his father were always happy to see their friends, and that the words "New York" upon my card were quite sufficient to insure me a welcome. Mr. Brontë, he said, was not up when I called, but had desired him to detain me until he could dress and come down, as he did soon after. I had an exceedingly pleasant conversation of half an hour with them both…. Mr. Brontë's personal appearance is striking and peculiar. He is tall, thin, and rather muscular, has a quick energetic manner, a reflective and by no means unpleasant countenance, and a resolute promptness of movement which indicated marked decision and firmness of character. The extraordinary stories told by Mrs. Gaskell of his inflammable temper, of his burning silk dresses belonging to his wife which he did not approve of her wearing, of his sawing chairs and tables, and firing off pistols in the back-yard by way of relieving his superfluous anger, find no warrant certainly in his present appearance, and are generally considered exaggerations. I remarked to him that I had been agreeably disappointed in the face of the country and the general aspect of the town, that they were less sombre and repulsive than Mrs. Gaskell's descriptions led me to expect. Mr. Nicholls and Mr. Brontë smiled at each other, and the latter remarked: "Well, I think Mrs. Gaskell tried to make us all appear as bad as she could." Mr. Brontë wears a very wide white neckcloth, and usually sinks his chin so that his mouth is barely visible over it. This gives him rather a singular expression, which is rendered still more so by spectacles with large round glasses enclosed in broad metallic rims. Though over eighty years old and somewhat infirm, he preaches once every Sunday in his church…. As I rose to take my leave Mr. Nicholls asked me to step into the parlour and look at Charlotte's portrait. It is the one from which the engraving in the "Life" is made; but the latter does no justice to the picture, which Mr. Nicholls said was a perfect likeness of the original. I remarked that the engraving gives to the face, and especially to the eyes, a weird, sinister, and unpleasant expression which did not appear in the portrait. He said he had observed it, and that nothing could be more unjust, for Charlotte's eyes were as soft and affectionate in their expression as could possibly be conceived.

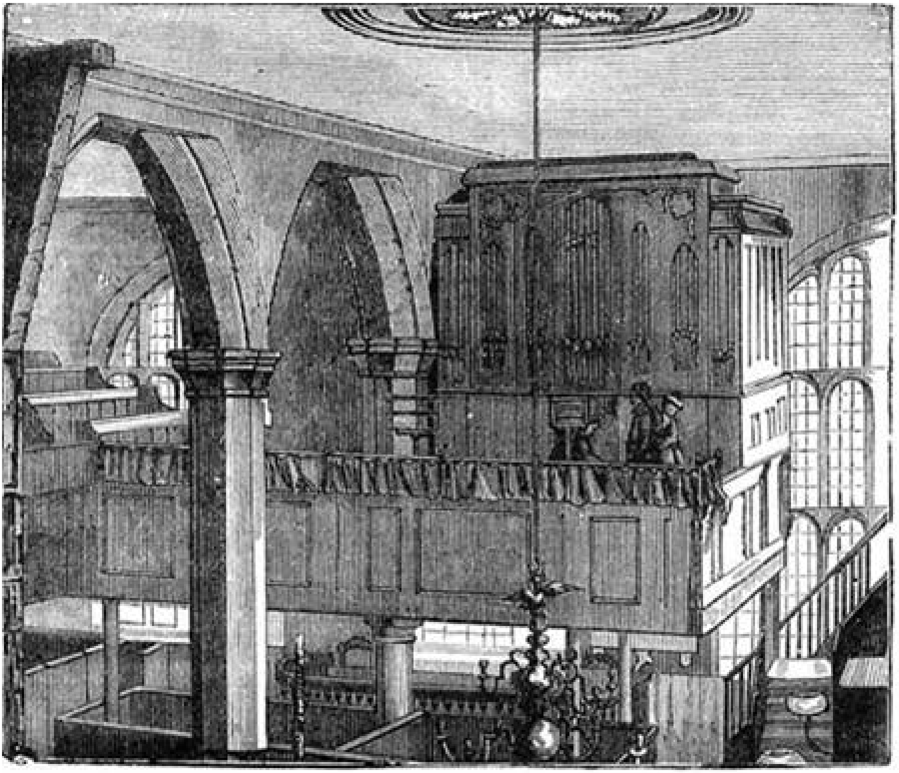
Slight as these scraps from the pen of an American "interviewer" may seem, they have their value as contemporary records of scenes and incidents the memory of which is fast fading away. Yet even to-day old men and women are to be found in Haworth who can regale the curious stranger with many a reminiscence, more or less original, of the family which has given so great a glory to the place.

Mr. Brontë lived six years after the death of Charlotte. In spite of his great age he preached regularly in the church till within a few months of his death; and when at last he took to his bed, he retained his active interest in the affairs of the world. The newspapers which Charlotte mentions in one of her juvenile lucubrations as being regularly "taken in" at the patronage — *The Leeds Mercury* and *The Intelligencer* — were still brought to him, and read aloud. Every scrap of political information which he could gather up he cherished as a precious morsel; and any visitor who could tell him how the currents of public life were moving in the great West Riding towns around him, was certain to be welcome. But the chief enjoyment of his later years was connected with the public respect shown for his daughter's memory. The tributes to her virtues and her genius which were poured from the press after the publication of Mrs. Gaskell's work were valued by him to the latest moment of his life; and in the end he at last understood something of the character and the inner life of the child who had dwelt so long a stranger under her father's roof.

One point I must notice ere I quit the subject of Charlotte Brontë's father. Some of those who knew him in his later years, including one who is above all others entitled to an opinion on the subject, have objected to the portrait of him presented in these pages, as being over-coloured. So far as his early life and manhood are concerned, I cannot admit the force of the objection; for what has been told of Mr. Brontë in these pages has been gathered from the best of all sources — from the letters of his children and the recollections of those who saw much of him during that period. But it is perfectly true that in old age, after the marriage, and still more after the death of Charlotte, he was wonderfully softened in character. The fierce outburst of opposition to the engagement between his daughter and Mr. Nicholls was almost the last trace of that vehement passion which consumed him during his earlier years; and those visitors who, like Mr. Raymond, first became acquainted with him in the closing days of his life, found it difficult to believe that the stories told of his propensities in youth and middle-age could possibly be true. Time did its work at last, even on his adamantine character, softening the asperities, and wearing away the corners of a disposition, the angular eccentricities of which had long been so noticeable. Nor ought mention of the closing scenes of Mr. Brontë's life to be made without some reference to the part which Mr. Nicholls played at Haworth during those last sad years. The faithful husband remained under the parsonage roof in the character of a faithful son. The two men, bound together by so tender and sacred a tie, were not lightly to be separated, now that the living and visible link had been taken away. To some it may seem strange that Charlotte Brontë should have given her heart to one who was little disposed to sympathise with the overmastering passion inspired by her genius. But if in her husband she had found one who was not likely to have helped her in her literary work, she had also found in him a friend whose steadfastness even to the death was nobly proved. During all these sad and lonely years, whilst the father of the Brontës waited for the summons which should call him once more into their company, Charlotte's husband lived with him, the patient companion of his hours of pain and weariness, the faithful guardian of that living legacy which had been bequeathed to him by the woman whom he loved. And by this self-sacrificing life he did greater honour to the memory of Charlotte Brontë than by the most tender and vivid appreciation of her intellectual greatness.

There is a strange sad harmony between the closing chapter of the Brontë story and the earlier ones. The brightness had fled for ever from the parson's house; the gaiety which it had once witnessed was gone; even its fame as the home of one who was a living force in English literature had departed; but there still remained one to bear witness in his own person to the nobleness of that entire devotion to duty of the necessity of which Charlotte was so fully convinced. The friendship by which Mr. Nicholls soothed the last days of Mr. Brontë is a touching episode in the Haworth story, and it is one which cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed.

When Mr. Brontë died there was a general wish, not only among those who were impressed by the claims of all connected with his family upon Haworth, but by the parishioners themselves, that his son-in-law should succeed him, and that the relationship of the Brontës to the place where their lives had been spent and their work accomplished, should thus not be absolutely severed. But the bestowal of church patronage is not always influenced by considerations of this kind. The incumbency of Haworth was given to a stranger; Mr. Nicholls returned to Ireland; and new faces and a new life filled the parsonage-house in which "Jane Eyre" and "Wuthering Heights" were written.



THE ORGAN LOFT, OVER THE BRONTË TABLET AND PEW.

XIII.

THE BRONTË NOVELS.

The Brontë novels continued to sell largely for some time after Charlotte's death. The publication of Mrs. Gaskell's "Life" added not a little to the sale, and both at home and abroad the fame of the three sisters was greatly increased. But in recent years the disposition has been almost to ignore these books; and though fresh editions have recently been issued they have had no circulation worthy of being compared with that which they maintained between 1850 and 1860. Yet though there has not been the same interest in these remarkable performances as that which formerly prevailed, they continue from time to time to attract the attention of literary critics both in this and other countries, the works of "Currer Bell" naturally holding the foremost place in the critiques upon the writings of the sisters.

"Wuthering Heights," the solitary prose work of Emily Brontë, is now practically unread. Even those who admire the genius of the family, those who have the highest opinion of the qualities displayed in "Jane Eyre" or "Villette," turn away with something like a shudder from "that dreadful book," as one who knew the Brontës intimately always calls it. But I venture to invite the attention of my readers to this story, as being in its way as marvellous a *tour de force* as "Jane Eyre" itself. It is true that as a novel it is repulsive and almost ghastly. As one reads chapter after chapter of the horrible chronicles of Heathcliff's crimes, the only literary work that can be recalled for comparison with it is the gory tragedy of "Titus Andronicus." From the first page to the last there is hardly a redeeming passage in the book. The atmosphere is lurid and storm-laden throughout, only lighted up occasionally by the blaze of passion and madness. The hero himself is the most unmitigated villain in fiction; and there is hardly a personage in the story who is not in some shape or another the victim of mental or moral deformities. Nobody can pretend that such a story as this ever ought to have been written; nobody can read it without feeling that its author must herself have had a morbid if not a diseased mind. Much, however, may be said in defence of Emily Brontë's conduct in writing "Wuthering Heights." She was in her twenty-eighth year when it was written, and the reader has seen something of the circumstances of her life, and the motives which led her to take up her pen. The life had been, so far as the outer world could judge, singularly barren and unproductive. Its one eventful episode was the short visit to Brussels. But Brussels had made no such impression upon Emily as it made upon Charlotte. She went back to Haworth quite unchanged; her love for the moors stronger than ever; her self-reserve only strengthened by the assaults to which it had been exposed during her residence among strangers; her whole nature still crying out for the solitary life of home, and the sustenance which she drew from the congenial society of the animals she loved and the servants she understood. When, partly in the forlorn hope of making money by the use of her pen, but still more to give some relief to her pent-up feelings, she began to write "Wuthering Heights," she knew nothing of the world. "I am bound to avow," says Charlotte, "that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasants amongst whom she lived than a nun has of the country people who sometimes pass her convent gates." Love, except the love for nature and for her own nearest relatives, was a passion absolutely unknown to her — as any one who cares to study the pictures of it in "Wuthering Heights" may easily perceive. Of harsh and brutal, or deliberate crime, she had no personal knowledge. She had before her, it is true, a sad instance of the results of vicious self-indulgence, and from that she drew materials for some portions of her story. But so far as the great movements of human nature were concerned — of those movements which are not to be mastered by book learning, but which must come as the tardy fruits of personal experience — she was in absolute ignorance. Little as Charlotte herself knew at this time of the world, and of men and women, she was an accomplished mistress of the secrets of life, in comparison with Emily.

When a woman has lived such a life as that of "Ellis Bell," her first literary effort must be regarded as the attempt of an innocent and ignorant child. It may be full of faults; all the conditions which should govern a work of art may have been neglected; the book itself, so far as story, tone, and execution are concerned, may be an entire mistake; but it will nevertheless give us far more insight into the real character of the author than any more elaborate and successful work, constructed after experience has taught her what to do and what to avoid in order to secure the ear of the public.

"Wuthering Heights," then, is the work of one who, in everything but years, was a mere child, and its great and glaring faults are to be forgiven as one forgives the mistakes of childhood. But how vast was the intellectual greatness displayed in this juvenile work! The author seizes the reader at the first moment at which they meet, holds him thrilled, entranced, terrified perhaps, in a grasp which never relaxes, and leaves him at last, after a perusal of the story, shaken and exhausted as by some great effort of the mind. Surely nowhere in modern English fiction can more striking proof be found of the possession of "the creative gift" in an extraordinary degree than is to be obtained in "Wuthering Heights." From what unfathomed recesses of her intellect did this shy, nervous, untrained girl produce such characters as those which hold the foremost place in her story? Mrs. Dean, the faithful domestic, we can understand; for her model was at Emily's elbow in the kitchen at Haworth. Joseph, the quaint High Calvinist, whose fidelity to his creed is unredeemed by a single touch of fellow-feeling with the human creatures around him, was drawn from life; and vigorous and powerful though his portrait is, one can understand it also. But Heathcliff, and the two Catherines, and Hareton Earnshaw — none of these ever came within the ken of Emily Brontë. No persons approaching them in originality or force of character were to be found in her circle of friends. Here and there some psychologist, learned in the secrets of morbid human nature, may have conceived the existence of such persons — evolved them from an inner consciousness which had been enlightened by years of studious labour. But no such slow and painful process guided the pen of Emily Brontë in painting these weird and wonderful portraits. They come forth with all the vigour and freshness, the living reality and impressiveness, which can belong only to the spontaneous creations of genius. They are no copies, indeed, but living originals, owing their lives to her own travail and suffering.

Regarded in this light they must, I think, be counted among the greatest curiosities of literature. Their very repulsiveness adds to their force. I have said that Heathcliff is the greatest villain in fiction. The reader of the story is disposed to echo the agonised cry of his wife when she asks: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" It is not pleasant to see such a character obtruded upon us in a novel; but I repeat, it is far more difficult to paint a consummate villain of the Heathcliff type than to draw any of the more ordinary types of humanity. The concentration of power required in performing the task is enormous. At every moment the writer is tempted to turn aside and relieve the darkness by some touch of light; and the risk which the artist must encounter if he gives way to this temptation is that of destroying the whole effect of the picture. Light and shade there must be, or the portrait becomes a mere daub of blackness; and the man whom the author has desired to create stands forth as a monster, unrecognisable as a creature belonging to the same race as ourselves. But unless these lighter shades are introduced with a tact and a self-command which belong rather to genius than to art, there must, as I have said, be complete failure. Now, Emily Brontë has not failed in her portrait of Heathcliff. He stands, indeed, absolutely alone in that great human portrait-gallery which forms one of the chambers in the noble edifice of English literature. We can compare him to nobody else among the creatures of fiction. We cannot even trace his literary pedigree. He is a distinct being, not less original than he is hateful. But this circumstance does not alter the fact that we accept him at once as a real being, not a merely grotesque monster. He stands as much alone as Frankenstein's creature did; but we recognise within him that subtle combination of elements which gives him kinship with the human race. Here, then, Emily Brontë has succeeded; and girl as she was when she wrote, she has succeeded where some of the most practised writers have failed entirely. Compare "Wuthering Heights," for example, with the fantastic horrors of Lord Lytton's "Strange Story," and you feel at once how much more powerful and masterly is the touch of the woman. Lord Lytton's villain, though he has been drawn with so much care and skill, is often absurd and at last entirely wearisome. Emily Brontë's is consistent, terrible, fascinating, from beginning to end. Then, again, the writer never tries to frighten her reader with a bogey. She never hints at the possibility of supernatural agencies being at work behind the scene. Even when she is showing us that Heathcliff is for ever haunted by the dead Catherine, she makes it clear by the words she puts into his own mouth that his belief on the subject is nothing more than the delusion of a disordered brain, worried by a guilty conscience. "I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by," says Heathcliff, describing how he dug down into Catherine's grave on the night after she had been buried; "but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there: not under me, but on the earth. A sudden sense of relief flowed from my heart through every limb. I relinquished my labour of agony, and turned consoled at once — unspeakably consoled. Her presence was with me; it remained while I refilled the grave and led me home. You may laugh if you will; but I was sure I should see her there. I was sure she was with me, and I could not help talking to her. Having reached the Heights I rushed eagerly to the door. It was fastened; and I remember that accursed Earnshaw and my wife opposed my entrance. I remember stopping to kick the breath out of him, and then hurrying upstairs to my room and hers. I looked round impatiently — I felt her by me — I could *almost* see her, and yet I *could not*! I ought to have sweat blood then, from the anguish of my yearning — from the fervour of my supplications to have but one glimpse! I had not one. She showed herself, as she often was in life, a devil to me. And, since then, sometimes more and sometimes less, I've been the sport of that intolerable torture.... When I sat in the house with Hareton, it seemed that on going out I should meet her; when I walked on the moors I should meet her coming in. When I went from home I hastened to return. She *must* be somewhere at the Heights, I was certain! And when I slept in her chamber — I was beaten out of that. I couldn't lie there; for the moment I closed my eyes, she was either outside the window, or sliding back the panels, or entering the room, or even resting her darling head on the same pillow as she did when a child; and I must open my lids to see. And so I opened and closed them a hundred times a night — to be always disappointed!" Here is a picture of a man who is really haunted. No supernatural agency is invoked; no strain is put upon the reader's credulity. We are asked to believe in the suspension of no law of nature. In one word, we can all understand how a wicked man, whose brain has, as it were, been made drunk with the fumes of his own wickedness, can be persecuted throughout his whole life by terrors of this kind; and just because we are able to conceive and understand it, this haunting of Heathcliff by the ghost of his dead mistress is infinitely more terrible than if it had been accompanied either by the paraphernalia of rococo horrors which Mrs. Radcliffe habitually invoked, or by those refined and subtle supernatural phenomena which Lord Lytton employs in his famous ghost story.

This strict honesty which refused to allow the writer of the weirdest story in the English language to avail herself of the easiest of all the modes of stimulating a reader’s terrors, is shown all through the novel. The workmanship is good from beginning to end, though the art is crude and clumsy. She never allows a date to escape her memory, nor are there any of those broken threads which usually abound in the works of inexperienced writers. All is neatly, clearly, carefully finished off. Every date fits into its place, and so does every incident. The reader is never allowed to wander into a blind alley. Though at the outset he finds himself in a bewildering maze, far too complicated in construction to comply with the canons of literary art, he has only to go straight on, and in the end he will find everything made plain. Emily permits no fact however minute to drop from her grasp. Irrelevant though it may seem at the moment when the reader meets with it, a place has been prepared for it in the edifice which the patient hands are rearing, and in the end it will be fitted into that place. Thus there is no scamped work in the story; nor any sacrifice of details in order to obtain those broad effects in which the tale abounds.

Let the reader turn to “Wuthering Heights,” and he will find many a simple innocent revelation of the character of the author peeping out from its pages in unexpected places. We know how the story was written, and how day by day it was submitted to the revision of Charlotte and Anne. We may be sure under these circumstances that Emily did not allow too much of her true inner nature to appear in what she wrote. Even from her sisters she habitually concealed some of the strongest and deepest emotions of her heart. But such passages as the following, when read in the light of her history, as we know it now, are of strange and abiding interest:

He said the pleasantest manner of spending a hot July day was lying from morning till evening on a bank of heath in the middle of the moors, with the bees humming dreamily about among the bloom, and the larks singing high up over head, and the blue sky and bright sun shining steadily and cloudlessly. That was his most perfect idea of heaven’s happiness. Mine was rocking in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing, and bright white clouds flitting rapidly above; and not only larks, but throstles and blackbirds and linnets and cuckoos, pouring out music on every side, and the moors seen at a distance broken into cool dusky dells; but close by great swells of long grass undulating in waves to the breeze; and woods and sounding water, and the whole world awake and wild with joy. He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace. I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee. I said his heaven would be only half alive; and he said mine would be drunk. I said I should fall asleep in his; and he said he could not breathe in mine.

For “he,” read “Anne,” and accept Emily as speaking for herself, and we have in this passage a vivid description of the opposing tastes of the two sisters.

The abhorrence which Charlotte felt for the High Calvinism, which was the favourite creed around her, was felt even more strongly by Emily. Her poems throw not a little light upon this feature of her character; but we also gain some from her solitary novel. Joseph, the old man-servant, was a study from life, and he represented one of a class whom the author thoroughly disliked, but for whom at the same time she entertained a certain respect. Again and again she breaks forth with all the force of sarcasm she can command against “the wearisomest, self-righteous pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises to himself and fling the curses to his neighbours.” Yet there is no character in the story over whom she lingers more lovingly than Joseph, and it is only in painting his portrait that she allows herself to be betrayed into the display of any of that humour which, according to her sisters, always lurked very near the surface of her character, ever ready to show itself when no stranger was at hand. Few who have read “Wuthering Heights” can have forgotten Joseph’s quaint remark when the boy Heathcliff has disappeared, and the others are speculating on his fate.

Nay, nay, he’s noan at Gimmerton. I’s never wonder but he’s at t’ bottom of a bog-boile. This visitation worn’t for nowt, and I wod hev ye to look out, miss. Yah muh be t’ next. Thank Hivin for all! All works togither for gooid to them as is chozzen, and piked out fro’ th’ rubbidge. Yah knaw whet t’ Scripture ses.

There is one passage in the story which furnishes so strange a foreshadowing of Emily’s own death, that it is difficult to believe that she did not bear it in her mind during those last hours when she faced the dread enemy with such unwavering resolution. She is writing of the death of Mrs. Earnshaw.

Poor soul! till within a week of her death that gay heart never failed her; and her husband persisted doggedly, nay furiously, in affirming her health improved every day. When Kenneth warned him that his medicines were useless at that stage of the malady, and he needn’t put him to further expense by attending her, he retorted:

“I know you need not. She’s well; she does not want any more attendance from you! She never was in a consumption. It was a fever, and it is gone: her pulse is as slow as mine now, and her cheek as cool!”

He told his wife the same story, and she seemed to believe him. But one night while leaning on his shoulder, in the act of saying she thought she should be able to get up to-morrow, a fit of coughing took her — a very slight one — he raised her in his arms; she put her two hands about his neck, her face changed, and she was dead.

Strange and inscrutable, indeed, are the mysteries of the human heart! Let the reader turn from the passage I have quoted to that letter in which Charlotte laments that “Emily is too intractable,” and let him read how she refused to believe that she was ill until death caught her as suddenly as it did the wife of Earnshaw. The blindness to the approach of danger, which she describes so clearly in her story, was but a few months afterwards displayed even more fully by herself. In this last quotation, which I venture to make from a book now seldom opened, we see the author speaking evidently out of the fulness of her heart on a subject on which in conversation she was specially reserved.

I don’t know if it be a peculiarity in me, but I am seldom otherwise than happy when watching in the chamber of death, should no frenzied or despairing mourner share the duty with me. I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break, and I feel an assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter — the Eternity they have entered — where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy, and joy in its fulness. I noticed on that occasion how much selfishness there is even in a love like Mr. Linton’s, when he so regretted Catherine’s blessed release! To be sure, one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. One might doubt in seasons of cold reflection; but not then in the presence of her corpse. It asserted its own tranquillity, which seemed a pledge of equal quiet to its former inhabitant.

Even these fragments, culled from the pages of “Wuthering Heights,” are sufficient to show how little the story has in common with the ordinary novel. Differing widely in every respect from “Jane Eyre,” dealing with characters and circumstances which belong to the romance rather than the reality of life, it is yet stamped by the same originality, the same daring, the same thoughtfulness, and the same intense individuality. It is a marvel to all who know anything of the secrets of literary work, that Haworth Parsonage should have produced “Jane Eyre;” but how is the marvel increased, when we know that at the same time it produced, from the brain of another inmate, the wonderful story of “Wuthering Heights.” Brimful of faults as it may be, that book is alone sufficient to prove that a rare and splendid genius was lost to the world when Emily Brontë died.

All interested in the story of the Brontës must be curious to know whence Emily derived the materials for this romance. I have said that Heathcliff and the other prominent characters of the story are creations of her own; and indeed the book in its originality is almost unique. But this does not affect the fact that somewhere, and at some period during her life, the seed which brought forth this strange fruit must have been sown. It has been suggested by some — strangely ignorant, surely, of the conditions of West Riding life during the present century — that Emily obtained the skeleton of her plot from her own observation of people around her. But the life round Haworth was really tame and commonplace. Josephs and Mrs. Deans could be found in and about the village in abundance; but there were no people round whose lives hung anything of the mystery which attaches to Heathcliff. It was, so far as I can learn, during her early girlhood that Emily’s mind was filled with those grim traditions which she afterwards employed in writing “Wuthering Heights.” Mr. Brontë, in addition to his other gifts, had the faculty of storytelling highly developed, and his delight was to use this faculty in order to awaken superstitious terrors in the hearts of his children.

Though he habitually took his meals alone, he would often appear at the table where his daughters, with possibly their one female friend, were breakfasting, and, without joining in the repast, would entertain the little company of schoolgirls with wild legends not only relating to life in Yorkshire during the last century, but to that still wilder life which he had left behind him in Ireland. A cold smile would play round his mouth as he added horror to horror in his attempts to move his children; and his keen eyes sparkled with triumph when he found he had succeeded in filling them with alarm. Emily listened to these stories with bated breath, drinking them, in eagerly. She could repeat them afterwards by the hour together to her sisters; and no better proof of the deep root they took in her sensitive nature can be desired, than the fact that they led her to write "Wuthering Heights." Thus the paternal influence, strong as it was in the case of all the daughters, was peculiarly strong as regarded Emily; and we can gauge the nature of that influence in the weird and ghastly story which was brought forth under its shadow.

It is with a feeling of curious disappointment that one rises from the perusal of the writings of Anne Brontë. She wrote two novels, "Agnes Grey" and "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," neither of which will really repay perusal. In the first she sought to set forth some of the experiences which had befallen her in that patient placid life which she led as a governess. They were not ordinary experiences, the reader should know. I have resolutely avoided, in writing this sketch of Charlotte Brontë and her sisters, all unnecessary reference to the tragedy of Branwell Brontë's life. But it is a strange sad feature of that story, that the pious and gentle youngest sister was compelled to be a closer and more constant witness of his sins and his sufferings than either Charlotte or Emily. She was living under the same roof with him when he went astray and was thrust out in deep disgrace. I have said already that the effect of his career upon her own was as strong and deep as Mrs. Gaskell represents it to have been. Branwell's fall formed the dark turning-point in Anne Brontë's life. So it was not unnatural that it should colour her literary labours. Accordingly, whilst "Agnes Grey" gives us some of the scenes of her governess life, dressed up in the fashion of the ordinary romances of thirty years ago, "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall" presents us with a dreary and repulsive picture of Branwell Brontë's condition after his fall. Charlotte, in her brief memoir of her sisters, does bare justice to Anne when she speaks in these words upon the subject:

"The Tenant of Wildfell Hall," by "Acton Bell," had likewise an unfavourable reception. At this I cannot wonder. The choice of subject was an entire mistake. Nothing less congruous with the writer's nature could be conceived. The motives which dictated this choice were pure, but, I think, slightly morbid. She had in the course of her life been called on to contemplate, near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was naturally a sensitive, reserved, and dejected nature; what she saw sank very deeply into her mind; it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (of course with fictitious characters, incidents, and situations) as a warning to others. She hated her work, but would pursue it. When reasoned with on the subject, she regarded such reasonings as a temptation to self-indulgence. She must be honest; she must not varnish, soften, or conceal. This well-meant resolution brought on her misconception and some abuse, which she bore, as it was her custom to bear whatever was unpleasant, with mild steady patience. She was a very sincere and practical Christian, but the tinge of religious melancholy communicated a sad hue to her brief blameless life.

What a picture one gets of this third and least considered of the Brontë sisters in the passage which I have quoted! A lovable, fair-featured girl, leading a blameless life, lighted up by few hopes of any brighter future — for the one little romance of her own heart had been destroyed ere this by the unrelenting hand of death — and not inspired as her sisters were by the passion of the artist or the creator; a girl whose simple faith was still unmoved from its first foundations; whose delight was in visiting the poor and helping the sick, who had no sustaining conviction of her own strength such as maintained Charlotte and Emily in their darkest hours, and whose very piety was "tinged with melancholy." This is the girl who, not from any of the irresistible impulses which attend the exercise of the creative faculty, but from a simple sense of duty, set herself the hard task of depicting in the pages of a novel the consequences of a shocking vice with which her brother's degradation had brought her into close and abiding contact. Of course she failed. It is not by hands so weak as those of Anne Brontë that effective blows are struck at such sins as she assailed. But whilst we acknowledge her failure, let us do justice both to the self-sacrificing courage and the fervent piety which led her to undertake this painful work.

Of Charlotte Brontë's novels, as a whole, I shall say nothing at this point; but something may very properly be said here of the story which she wrote at the time when her sisters were engaged in writing "Wuthering Heights" and "Agnes Grey." It was not published until after her death, and after the world had learned from Mrs. Gaskell's pages something of the truth about her life. Its interest to the ordinary reader was to a considerable extent discounted by the fact that the author had so largely used the materials in her last great work, "Villette." But even as a mere novel "The Professor" has striking merits, and would well repay perusal from that point of view alone; whilst as a means of gaining fresh light with regard to the character of the writer, it is not less valuable than "Wuthering Heights" itself. True, "The Professor" is not really a first attempt. "A first attempt it certainly was not," says Charlotte in reference to it, "as the pen which wrote it had previously been worn a good deal in a practice of some years." But the previous writings, of which hardly a trace now remains — those early MSS. having been carefully destroyed, with the exception of the few which Mrs. Gaskell was permitted to see — were in no respect finished productions, nor had they been written with a view to publication. The first occasion on which Charlotte Brontë really began a prose work which she proposed to commit to the press was on that day when, seated by her two sisters, she joined them in penning the first page of a new novel.

To all practical intents, therefore, "The Professor" is entitled to be regarded as a first work; and certainly nothing can show Charlotte's peculiar views on the subject of novel-writing more clearly or strikingly than this book does. The world knows how resolutely in all her writings she strove to be true to life as she saw it. In "Jane Eyre" there are, indeed, romantic incidents and situations, but even in that work there is no trespassing beyond the limits always allowed to the writer of fiction; whilst it must not be forgotten that "Jane Eyre" was in part a response to the direct appeal from the publishers for something different in character from "The Professor." In that first story she determined that she would write a man's life as men's lives usually are. Her hero was "never to get a shilling he had not earned;" no sudden turns of fortune were "to lift him in a moment to wealth and high station;" and he was not even to marry "a beautiful girl or a lady of rank." "As Adam's son he should share Adam's doom, and drain throughout life a mixed and moderate cup of enjoyment."

Very few novel-readers will share this conception of what a novel ought to be. The writer of fiction is an artist whose accepted duty it is to lift men and women out of the cares of ordinary life, out of the sordid surroundings which belong to every lot in this world, and to show us life under different, perhaps under fantastic, conditions: a life which by its contrast to that we ourselves are leading shall furnish some relief to our mental vision, wearied and jaded by its constant contemplation of the fevers and disappointments, the crosses and long years of weary monotony, which belong to life as it is. We know how a great living writer has ventured to protest against this theory, and how in her finest works of fiction she has shown us life as it is, under the sad and bitter conditions of pain, sorrow, and hopelessness. But Charlotte Brontë wrote "The Professor" long before "George Eliot" took up her pen; and she must at least receive credit for having been in the field as a reformer of fiction before her fellow-labourer was heard of.

She was true to the conditions she had laid down for herself in writing "The Professor." Nothing more sober and matter-of-fact than that story is to be found in English literature. And yet, though the landscape one is invited to view is but a vast plain, without even a hillock to give variety to the prospect, it has beauties of its own which commend it to our admiration. The story, as everybody knows, deals with Brussels, from which she had just returned when she began to write it. But it is sad to note the difference between the spirit of "The Professor" and that which is exhibited in "Villette." Dealing with the same circumstances, and substantially with the same story, the author has nevertheless cast each in a mould of its own. Nor is the cause of this any secret to those who know Charlotte Brontë. When she wrote "The Professor," disillusioned though she was, she was still young, and still blessed with that fervent belief in a better future which the youthful heart can never quite cast out, even under the heaviest blows of fate. She had come home restless and miserable, feeling Haworth to be far too small and quiet a place for her; and her mind could not take in the reality that under that modest roof the remainder of her life was destined to be spent. Suffering and unhappy as she was, she could not shut out the hope that brighter days lay before her. The fever of life racked her; but in the very fact that it burnt so high there was proof that love and hope, the capacity for a large enjoyment of existence, still lived within her. So "The Professor," though a sad, monotonous book, has life and hope, and a fair faith in the ultimate blessedness of all sorrowful ones, shining through all its pages; and it closes in a scene of rest and peace.

Very different is the case with "Villette." It was written years after the period when "The Professor" was composed, when the hard realities of life had ceased to be veiled under tender mists of sentiment or imagination, and when the lonely present, the future, "which often appals me," made the writer too painfully aware that she had drunk the cup of existence almost to the dregs. As a piece of workmanship there is no comparison between it and the earlier story. On every page we see traces of the artist's hand. Genius flashes forth from both works it is true, but in "Villette" it is genius chastened and restrained by a cultivated taste, or working under that high pressure which only the trained writer can bring to bear upon it. Yet, whilst we must admit the immense superiority of the later over the earlier work, we cannot turn from the one to the other without being painfully touched by the sad, strange difference in the spirit which animates them. The stories, as I have said, are nearly the same. With some curious transformations, in fact, they are practically identical. But they are only the same in the sense in which the portrait of the fair and hopeful girl, with life's romance shining before her eyes, is the same as the portrait of the worn and solitary woman for whom the romance is at an end. A whole world of suffering, of sorrow, of patient endurance, lies between the two. I have spoken of the mood in which "The Professor" was written — Hope still lingered at that time in the heart, breathing its merciful though illusory suggestions of something brighter and better in the future. All who have passed through the ordeal of a life's sorrow will be able to understand the distinction between the temperament of the author at that period in her life, and her temperament when she composed "Villette." For such suffering ones know, how, in the first and bitterest moment of sorrow, the heart cannot shut out the blessed belief that a time of release from the pain will come — a time far off, perhaps, but in which a day bright as that which has suddenly been eclipsed will shine again. It is only as the years go by, and as the first ache of intolerable anguish has been lulled into a dreary rest by habit, that the faith which gave them strength to bear the keenest smart, takes flight, and leaves them to the pale monotony of a twilight which can know no dawn. It was in this later and saddest stage of endurance that “Villette” was written. The sharpest pangs of the heart-experiences at Brussels had vanished. The author, no longer full of the self-consciousness of the girl, could even treat her own story, her own sorrows of that period, with a lighter hand, a more artistic touch, than when she first wrote of them; but through all her work there ran the dreary conviction that in those days of mingled joy and suffering she had tasted life at its best, and that in the future which lay before her there could be nothing which should renew either the strong delights or keen anguish of that time. So the book is pitched, as we know, in a key of almost absolute hopelessness. Nothing but the genius of Charlotte Brontë could have saved such a work from sinking under its own burden of gloom. That this intense and tragic study of a soul should have had power to fascinate, not the psychologist alone, but the vast masses of the reading world, is a triumph which can hardly be paralleled in recent literary efforts. In “The Professor” we move among the same scenes, almost among the same characters and incidents, but the whole atmosphere is a different one. It is a dull, cold atmosphere, if you will, but one feels that behind the clouds the sun is shining, and that sooner or later the hero and heroine will be allowed to bask in his reviving rays. Set the two stories together, and read them in the light of all that passed between the years in which they were written — the death of Branwell, of Emily, and of Anne, the utter shattering of some fair illusions which buoyed up Charlotte’s heart in the first years of her literary triumph, the apparent extinction of all hope as to future happiness — and you will get from them a truer knowledge of the author’s soul than any critic or biographer could convey to you.

Ere I part from “The Professor,” which, naturally enough, never gained much attention from the public, I must extract from it one passage, a parallel to which may be found in many of Charlotte Brontë’s letters. It describes, as none but one who had suffered could do, one of those seasons of mental depression, arising from bodily illness, by which she was visited at intervals, and under the influence of which not a little of her work was done. Reading it, we get some idea of the true origin of much in her character that was supposed to be morbid and unnatural:

Man is ever clogged with his mortality, and it was my mortal nature which now faltered and plained; my nerves which jarred and gave a false sound, because the soul, of late rushing headlong to an aim, had overstrained the body’s comparative weakness. A horror of great darkness fell upon me; I felt my chamber invaded by one I had known formerly but had thought for ever departed. I was temporarily a prey to hypochondria. She had been my acquaintance, nay, my guest, once before in boyhood; I had entertained her at bed and board for a year; for that space of time I had her to myself in secret; she lay with me, she ate with me, she walked out with me, showing me nooks in woods, hollows in hills, where we could sit together, and where she could drop her drear veil over me, and so hide sky and sun, grass and green tree; taking me entirely to her death-cold bosom and holding me with arms of bone.

What tales she would tell me at such hours! What songs she would recite in my ears! How she would discourse to me of her own country — the grave — and again and again promise to conduct me there ere long; and drawing me to the very brink of a black sullen river, show me on the other side shores unequal with mound, monument, and tablet, standing up in a glimmer more hoary than moonlight. “Necropolis!” she would whisper, pointing to the pale piles, and add, “it contains a mansion prepared for you.” But my boyhood was lonely, parentless; uncheered by brother or sister; and there was no marvel that, just as I rose to youth, a sorceress, finding me lost in vague mental wanderings, with many affections and few objects, glowing aspirations and gloomy prospects, strong desires and tender hopes, should lift up her illusive lamp to me in the distance, and lure me to her vaulted home of horrors.

It was when, under the influence of occasional spells of physical suffering such as she here describes, that Miss Brontë gave those who saw her the impresion that her mind was naturally a morbid one; and, as I have said before, the same influence is at times perceptible in her writings. One of the purposes with which this little book has been written is to show the world how much of the gloom and depression which are now associated with her story, must be attributed to purely physical or accidental causes.

XIV.

CONCLUSION.

No apology need be offered for any single feature of Charlotte Brontë's life or character. She was what God made her in the furnace of sore afflictions and yet more sore temptations; her life, instinct with its extraordinary individuality, was, notwithstanding, always subject to exterior influences for the existence of which she was not responsible, and which more than once threatened to change the whole nature and purpose of her being; her genius, which brought forth its first-fruits under the cold shade of obscurity and adversity, was developed far more largely by sorrow, loneliness, and pain, than by the success which she gained in so abundant a degree. There are features of her character which we can scarcely comprehend, for the existence of which we are unable to account; and there are features of her genius which jar upon our sympathies and ruffle our conventional ideas; but for neither will one word of apology or excuse be offered by any who really know and love this great woman.

The fashion which exalted her to such a pinnacle of fame, like many another fashion, has lost its vogue; and the present generation, wrapped in admiration of another school of fiction, has consigned the works of "Currer Bell" to a premature sepulchre. But her friends need not despair; for from that dreary tomb of neglect an hour of resurrection must come, and the woman who has given us three of the most masterful books of the century, will again assert her true position in the literature of her country. We hear nothing now of the "immorality" of her writings. Younger people, if they turn from the sparkling or didactic pages of the most popular of recent stories to "Jane Eyre" or "Villette," in the hope of finding there some stimulant which may have power to tickle their jaded palates, will search in vain for anything that even borders upon impropriety — as we understand the word in these enlightened days — and they will form a strange conception of the generation of critics which denounced "Currer Bell" as the writer of immoral works of fiction. But it is said that there is coarseness in her stories, "otherwise so entirely noble." Even Mrs. Gaskell has assented to the charge; and it is generally believed that Charlotte Brontë, as a writer, though not immoral in tone, was rude in language and coarse in thought. The truth, I maintain, is, that this so-called coarseness is nothing more than the simplicity and purity, the straightforwardness and unconsciousness which an unspotted heart naturally displays in dealing with those great problems of life which, alas! none who have drunk deep of the waters of good and evil can ever handle with entire freedom from embarrassment. An American writer has spoken of Charlotte Brontë as "the great pre-Raphaelite among women, who was not ashamed or afraid to utter what God had shown her, and was too single-hearted of aim to swerve one hairbreadth in duplicating nature's outlines." She was more than this however; she was bold enough to set up a standard of right of her own; and when still the unknown daughter of the humble Yorkshire parson, she could stir the hearts of readers throughout the world with the trumpet-note of such a declaration as this: "Conventionality is not morality; self-righteousness is not religion; to pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns." Let it be remembered that these words were written nearly thirty years ago, when conventionalism was still a potent influence in checking the free utterance of our inmost opinions; and let us be thankful that in that heroic band to whom we owe the emancipation of English thought, a woman holds an honourable place.

Writing of her life just after it had closed, her friend Miss Martineau said of her: "In her vocation she had, in addition to the deep intuitions of a gifted woman, the strength of a man, the patience of a hero, and the conscientiousness of a saint." Those who know her best will apply to her personal character the epithets which Miss Martineau reserved for her career as an author. It has been my object in these pages to supplement the picture painted in Mrs. Gaskell's admirable biography by the addition of one or two features, slight in themselves perhaps, and yet not unimportant when the effect of the whole as a faithful portrait is considered. Charlotte Brontë was not naturally a morbid person; in youth she was happy and high-spirited; and up to the last moment of her life she had a serene strength and cheerfulness which seldom deserted her, except when acute physical suffering was added to her mental pangs. If her mind could have been freed from the depressing influences exerted on it by her frail and suffering body, it would have been one of the healthiest and most equable minds of our age. As it was, it showed itself able to meet the rude buffetings of fate without shrinking and without bravado; and the woman who is to this day regarded by the world at large as a marvel of self-conscious genius and of unchecked morbidness, was able to her dying hour to take the keenest, liveliest interest in the welfare of her friends, to pour out all her sympathy wherever she believed it was needed and deserved, and to lighten the grim parsonage of Haworth by a presence which, in the sacred recesses of her home, was bright and cheerful, as well as steadfast and calm.

"Do not underrate her oddity," said a gifted friend who knew her during her heyday of fame, while these pages were being written. Her oddity, it must be owned, was extreme — so far as the world could judge. But I have striven to show how much this eccentricity was outward and superficial only, due in part to the peculiar conditions of her early life, but chiefly to the excessive shyness in the presence of strangers which she shared with her sisters. At heart, as some of these letters will show, she was one of the truest women who ever breathed; and her own heart-history was by no means so exceptional, so far removed from the heart-history of most women, as the public believes.

The key to her character was simple and unflinching devotion to duty. Once she failed, or rather, once she allowed inclination to blind her as to the true direction of the path of duty, and that single failure coloured the whole of her subsequent life. But her own condemnation of herself was more sharp and bitter than any which could have been passed upon her by the world, and from that one venial error she drew lessons which enabled her henceforward to live with a steady, constant power of self-sacrifice at her command such as distinguishes saints and heroes rather than ordinary men and women. Hot, impulsive, and tenacious in her affections, she suffered those whom she loved the most dearly to be torn from her without losing faith in herself or in God; tenderly sensitive as to the treatment which her friends received, she repaid the cruelty and injustice of her father towards the man whose heart she had won, by a depth of devotion and self-sacrifice which can only be fully estimated by those who know under what bitter conditions it was lavished upon an unworthy parent; bound, as all the children of genius are, by the spell of her own imagination, she was yet able during the closing months of her life to lay aside her pen, and give herself up wholly, at the desire of her husband, to those parish duties which had such slight attractions for her. Those who, knowing these facts, still venture to assert that the virtues which distinguished "Currer Bell" the author were lacking in Charlotte Brontë the woman, must have minds warped by deep-rooted and unworthy prejudices.

I have expressed my conviction that the comparative neglect from which "Jane Eyre" and its sister-works now suffer is only temporary. It is true that in some respects these books are not attractive. Though they are written with a terse vigour which must make them grateful to all whose palates are cloyed by the pretty writing of the present generation, they undoubtedly err on the side of a lack of literary polish. And though the portraits presented to us in their pages are wonderful as works of art, unsurpassed as studies of character, the range of the artist is a limited one, and, as a rule, the subjects chosen are not the most pleasing that could have been conceived. Yet one great and striking merit belongs to this masterly painter of men and women, which is lacking in some who, treading to a certain extent in her footsteps, have achieved even a wider and more brilliant reputation. There is no taint of the dissecting-room about her books; we are never invited to admire the supreme cleverness of the operator who, with unsparing knife, lays bare before us the whole cunning mechanism of the soul which is stretched under the scalpel; nor are we bidden to pause and listen to those didactic moralisings which belong rather to the preacher or the lecturer than the novelist. It is the artist, not the anatomist who is instructing us; and after all, we may derive a more accurate knowledge of men and women as they are from the cartoons of a Raphael than from the most elaborate diagrams or sections of the most eminent of physiologists.

Perhaps no merit is more conspicuous in Charlotte Brontë's writings than their unswerving honesty. Writing always "under the spell," at the dictation, as it were, of an invisible and superior spirit, she would never write save when "the fit was upon her" and she had something to say. "I have been silent lately because I have accumulated nothing since I wrote last," is a phrase which fell from her on one occasion. Save when she believed that she had accumulated something, some truth which she was bound to convey to the world, she would not touch her pen. She had every temptation to write fast and freely. Money was needed at home, and money was to be had by the mere production of novels which, whether good, bad, or indifferent, were certain to sell. But she withstood the temptation bravely, withstood it even when it came strengthened by the supplications of her friends; and from first to last she gave the world nothing but her best. This honesty — rare enough unfortunately among those whose painful lot it is to coin their brains into money — was carried far beyond these limits. When in writing she found that any character had escaped from her hands — and every writer of fiction knows how easily this may happen — she made no attempt to finish the portrait according to the canons of literary art. She waited patiently for fresh light; studying deeply in her waking hours, dreaming constantly of her task during her uneasy slumbers, until perchance the light she needed came and she could go on. But if it came not she never pretended to supply the place of this inspiration of genius by any clever trick of literary workmanship. The picture was left unfinished — perfect so far as it went, but broken off at the point at which the author's keen intuitions had failed or fled from her. Nor when her work was done would she consent to alter or amend at the bidding of others; for the sake of no applause, of no success, would she change the fate of any of her characters as they had been fixed in the crucible of her genius. Even when her father exerted all his authority to secure another ending to the tale of "Villette," he could only, as we have seen, persuade his daughter to veil the catastrophe. The hero was doomed; and Charlotte, whatever might be her own inclination, could not save him from his fate. Books so true, so honest, so simple, so thorough as these, depend for their ultimate fate upon no transitions of fashion, no caprices of the public taste. They will hold their own as the slow-born fruits of a great genius, long after the productions of a score of facile pens now able to secure the world's attention have been utterly forgotten. The daring and passion of "Jane Eyre," the broad human sympathies, sparkling humour, and graphic portraiture of "Shirley," and the steady, patient, unsurpassed concentration of power which distinguishes "Villette," can hardly cease to command admiration whilst the literature of this century is remembered and studied.

But when we turn from the author to the woman, from the written pages to the writer, and when, forgetting the features and fortunes of those who appear in the romances of "Currer Bell," we recall that touching story which will for ever be associated with Haworth Parsonage and with the great family of the Brontës, we see that the artist is greater than her works, that the woman is nobler and purer than the writer, and that by her life, even more than by her labours, the author of "Jane Eyre" must always teach us those lessons of courage, self-sacrifice, and patient endurance of which our poor humanity stands in such pressing and constant need.

THE END.

THE BRONTË FAMILY by Francis A. Leyland

Francis Leyland was a former bookseller and friend of Branwell Brontë's, having been introduced to him by his brother, the Halifax sculptor J.B. Leyland, who was Branwell's best friend. After his brother's death in 1851, Francis inherited his considerable collection of letters, sketches and poems by Branwell which he was keen on publishing. In 1886 he published this biographical work, which gives particular attention to the life of the troubled Branwell, rather than his sisters. In the biography, he advocates the idea that Emily had been particularly close to her brother and that *Wuthering Heights* was a work of joint authorship. Without Charlotte's knowledge, Branwell had, Leyland claimed, handed over the unfinished manuscript for his favourite sister, the sympathetic Emily, to complete.

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PREFACE.

It has long seemed to me that the history of the Brontë family is incomplete, and, in some senses, not well understood. Those who have written upon it — as I shall have occasion to point out in these pages — have had certain objects in view, which have, perhaps necessarily, led them to give undue weight to special points and to overlook others. Thus it happens that, though there are in the hands of the public several able works on the Brontës, there are many circumstances relating to them that are yet in comparative obscurity. Especially has injustice been done to one member of the family — Patrick Branwell Brontë — whose life has several times been treated by those who have had some other object in view; and, through a misunderstanding of the character of the brother, the sisters, Anne in particular, have been put, in some respects, in a false light also. This circumstance, coupled with the fact that I am in possession of much new information, and am able to print here a considerable quantity of unknown poetry from Branwell's hand, has induced me to write this work. Those of his poems which are included in these volumes are placed in dealing with the periods of his life in which they were written, for I felt that, however great might be the advantages of putting them together in a complete form, much more would be lost both to the interest of the poems and the life of their author in doing so. Branwell's poems, more, perhaps, than those of any other writer, are so clearly expressive of his feelings at the time of their writing, that a correct view of his character is only to be obtained by looking upon them as parts of his life-history, which indeed they are. And, moreover, when we consider the circumstances under which any of these were written, our understanding and appreciation of the subject must necessarily be much fuller and truer. It has not escaped the attention of writers on the Brontë story that Branwell had an important influence on his sisters; and, though I maintain it to have been essentially different from what others allege, it would not be possible to do justice either to him or to them without saying a good deal about his character.

I have felt it right, in these pages, to some extent also, to re-consider the character of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, which has, along with that of his son, suffered unfair treatment in the biographies of his daughters. I have likewise entered upon some account of the local circumstances of art and literature which surrounded the Brontës, an element in their history which has hitherto been unknown, but is especially necessary to a right understanding of the life and work of Branwell Brontë and his sisters. These circumstances, and the altered view I have taken of the tone of the lives of Mr. Brontë and his son, have obliged me to deal more fully than would otherwise have been necessary with the early years of the Brontës, but I venture to hope that this may be atoned for by the new light I have thus been enabled to throw on some important points. There are published here, for the first time, a series of letters which Branwell Brontë addressed to an intimate friend, J. B. Leyland, sculptor, who died in 1851, and it is with these that a fresh insight is obtained into an interesting period of Branwell's life.

I am largely indebted in some parts of my work, especially those which deal with the lives of the sisters, to Mrs. Gaskell's fascinating 'Life of Charlotte Brontë'; and it is a source of sincere regret to me that I am compelled to differ from that writer on many points. I am likewise indebted in parts to Mr. T. Wemyss Reid's admirable 'Charlotte Brontë: a Monograph,' a work which has corrected several errors and misconceptions into which Mrs. Gaskell had fallen. The reader will perceive that I am obliged in several places to combat the theories and question the statements of Miss A. Mary F. Robinson in her 'Emily Brontë,' a book which, nevertheless, so far as its special subject is concerned, is a worthy contribution to the history of the Brontës.

I have also found of much use, in writing this work, an article entitled 'Branwell Brontë,' which Mr. George Searle Phillips — 'January Searle' — published in the 'Mirror' in 1872. The chapter in Mr. Francis H. Grundy's 'Pictures of the Past' on Branwell Brontë, has likewise been of the greatest service to me. Both these gentlemen were Branwell's personal friends, and to them I gladly acknowledge my indebtedness.

Among many other sources of information respecting the Brontës, of which I have availed myself in writing these pages, I may mention *Hours at Home*, 'Unpublished Letters of Charlotte Brontë'; *Scribner*, 'Reminiscences of Charlotte Brontë'; the *Athenæum*, 'Notices and Letters,' by Mr. A. C. Swinburne, and 'One of the Survivors of the Brontë-Branwell Family.' To this lady I must also express my obligation for her very kind letter to me.

In the preparation of my work I have been greatly assisted by the information, and encouraged by the sympathy, of several who had personal knowledge of Patrick Branwell Brontë, and who have supported the view I have taken of his life and character, and also who had like knowledge of the other members of the Brontë family. Among these, I have to express my sincere thanks to Mr. H. Merrall and to Mr. William Wood, who were early acquaintances of Branwell; also to Mr. William Dearden. To Mr. J. H. Thompson and Mrs. Thornton I am greatly indebted for information respecting Branwell's sojourn in Bradford. I have likewise derived much information from the family of the Browns, now all deceased, except Mrs. Brown, to whom I have to express my obligation. I have also gained much reliable information from Nancy Garrs, now Mrs. Wainwright, the nurse of the Brontës, and to her I must especially express my thanks. To these, I must not omit to add my deep and sincere thanks to those who will not permit me to mention them by name, for the unwearied assistance, counsel, and literary judgment which they have as cheerfully, as they have ably, rendered.

F. A. L.
Oakwood, Skircoat, Halifax,
October, 1885.

VOLUME I

CHAPTER I.

EARLY CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE BRONTËS.

Brontë Genius — Patrick Brontë — His Birthplace — His early Endeavours — Ordained — Presented to Hartshead — High Town — His Courtship and Marriage — Removes to Thornton — His House — Thornton Chapel — Mrs. Brontë's failing Health — Mr. Brontë Accepts the Living of Haworth — Rudeness of the Inhabitants — Local Fights between Haworth and Heptonstall — Description of Haworth — Mrs. Brontë dies.

Not many stories of literary success have attracted so much interest, and are in themselves so curious and enthralling, as that of the Brontë sisters. The question has often been asked how it came about that these children, who were brought up in distant solitude, and cut off, in a manner, from intellectual life, who had but a partial opportunity of studying mankind, and scarcely any knowledge of the ways of the outside world, were enabled, with searching hands, to dissect the finest meshes of the passions, to hold up in the clearest light the springs of human action, and to depict, with nervous power, the most masculine and forcible aspects of character. The solution has been sought in the initiatory strength and inherent mental disposition of the sisters, framed and moulded by the weird and rugged surroundings of their youth, and tinged with lurid light and vivid feeling by the misfortunes and sins of their unhappy brother. To illustrate these several points, the biographers of Charlotte and Emily Brontë have explained, as the matter admitted of explanation, the intellectual beginnings and capability of the sisters, have painted in sombre colours the story of their friendless childhood, and lastly, with no lack of honest condemnation, have told us as much as they knew of the sad history of Patrick Branwell Brontë, their brother. It is a curious fact that this brother, who was looked upon by his family as its brightest ornament and hope, should be named in these days only in connection with his sisters, and then but with apology, condemnation, or reproach. In the course of this work, in which Branwell Brontë will be traced from his parentage to his death, we shall find the explanation of this circumstance; but we shall find, also, that, despite his failings and his sins, his intellectual gifts, as they are testified by his literary promise and his remains, entitle him to a high place as a worthy member of that extraordinary family. It will be seen, moreover, that his influence upon Charlotte, Emily, and Anne was not what has been generally supposed, and that other circumstances, besides their own domestic troubles, inspired them to write their masterpieces.

The father of these gifted authors, Patrick Brontë, whose life and personal characteristics well deserve study, was a native of the county Down. He was born on St. Patrick's Day, 1777; and, after an infancy passed at the house of his father, Hugh Brontë, or Brunty, at Ahaderg — one of the ten children who made a noisy throng in the home of his parents — he opened, at the age of sixteen, a village school at Drumgooland, in the same county. In this occupation he continued after he had attained his majority, and was never a tutor, as Mrs. Gaskell supposes; but, being ambitious of a clerical life, through the assistance of his patron, Mr. Tighe, incumbent of Drumgooland and Drumballyroony, in the county of Down, he was admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge, on the 1st of October in the year 1802, when he had attained his twenty-fifth year. At Cambridge we may infer that he led an active life. It is known that he joined a volunteer corps raised to be in readiness for the French invasion, threatened at the time. After a four years' sojourn at his college, having graduated as a bachelor of arts, in the year 1806, he was ordained, and appointed to a curacy in Essex, where he is said not to have stayed long.

The perpetual curacy of Hartshead, in the West-Riding of Yorkshire, having become vacant, Mr. Brontë received the appointment, on the presentation of the vicar of Dewsbury.

The church of St. Peter, at Hartshead — which has extensive remains of Norman work, and has recently been restored — is situated on an eminence about a mile from the actual hamlet of that name; and, with its broad, low, and massive tower, and its grim old yew-tree, forms a conspicuous object for miles around, commanding on all sides extensive and magnificent views of the valleys of Calder and Colne, with their wooded slopes, and pleasant farms, and the busy villages nestling in the hollows. At the foot of the hill, the deep and sombre woods of Kirklees hide the almost indistinguishable remains of the convent, founded by Raynerus Flandrensis, in the reign of Henry II., for nuns of the order of Citeaux.

There are interesting circumstances and evidences concerning Kirklees, its Roman entrenchments being very distinct within the park which overlooks the Calder at this point. The priory, too, has its curious history of the events which attended the cloistered life of Elizabeth de Stainton, one of the prioresses, whose monumental memorial alone remains of all that marked the graves of the religious of that house; and there are stories relating to Robin Hood. Here still exists the chamber in which tradition says the 'noble outlaw' died, and also the grave, at a cross-bow shot from it, where long generations of men have averred his dust reposes. The district of Kirklees had an interest for Charlotte Brontë, and she has celebrated it in 'Shirley,' under the name of Nunnely, with its old church, its forest, its monastic ruins, and 'its man of title — its baronet.' It was to the house of the latter — kind gentleman though he was — that Louis Moore could not go, where he 'would much sooner have made an appointment with the ghost of the Earl of Huntingdon to meet him, and a shadowy ring of his merry men, under the canopy of the thickest, blackest, oldest oak in Nunnely Forest … would rather have appointed tryst with a phantom abbess, or mist-pale nun, among the wet and weedy relics of that ruined sanctuary of theirs, mouldering in the core of the wood.'

Mr. Brontë entered upon his ministrations at Hartshead in the year 1811; and there are entries in the churchwarden's book of Easter-dues paid to him up to 1815. It is curious to note that, in this early mention of Mr. Brontë, the name is spelled 'Brunty' and 'Bronty.'

Hartshead being destitute of a glebe house, and no suitable residence existing either at this place or at the neighbouring village of Clifton at the time, Mr. Brontë took up his residence at High Town, in a roomy and pleasant house at the top of Clough Lane, near Liversedge in the parish of Birstall, and about a mile from the place of his cure. The house, which commands beautiful views, is entered by a passage of the ordinary width, on the left of which is the drawing-room, having cross-beams ornamented with plaster mouldings, as when first finished. On the right of the passage is the dining-room. The breakfast-room and kitchen are behind them. The house is three stories in height, and stands back about two yards from the road, which points direct to the now populous towns of Liversedge and Cleckheaton, both places of considerable antiquity, whose inhabitants, employed in various manufactories, were increasing in Mr. Brontë's time.

Finding himself now in possession of a competent income and a goodly residence, he felt relieved from those anxieties which, in all probability, had attended his early struggles; and, resting awhile in his ambition, he turned in peace and contentment to poetical meditation. His first book was called 'Cottage Poems,' on the title-page of which he describes himself as the 'Reverend Patrick Brontë, B.A., minister of Hartshead-cum-Clifton.' This book was published at Halifax in the year 1811. The following are a few of its subjects: 'The Happy Cottagers,' 'The Rainbow,' 'Winter Nights' Meditations,' 'Verses sent to a Lady on her Birthday,' 'The Cottage Maid,' and 'The Spider and the Fly.' Mr. Brontë thus speaks of himself and his work: 'When relieved from clerical avocations he was occupied in writing the "Cottage Poems;" from morning till noon, and from noon till night, his employment was full of indescribable pleasure, such as he could wish to taste as long as life lasts. His hours glided pleasantly and almost imperceptibly by, and when night drew on, and he retired to rest, ere his eyes closed in sleep with sweet calmness and serenity of mind, he often reflected that, though the delicate palate of criticism might be disgusted, the business of the day in the prosecution of his humble task was well-pleasing in the sight of God, and by His blessing might be rendered useful to some poor soul who cared little about critical niceties.' Throughout he professes to be indifferent to hostile criticism.

It is pleasant to find that Mr. Brontë, although settled in competence in a picturesque part of England, was not forgetful of his parents or of the land of his birth. So long as his mother lived he sent her twenty pounds a year; and, though we have no record of the occasion, we may safely infer that he found opportunity to visit Ireland again. He maintained his connection with the district of his early life; and, in after-years, he appointed a relative of Mr. Tighe to be his own curate. One of his 'Cottage Poems' is entitled 'The Irish Cabin,' a verse or two from which may here be given: —

'Should poverty, modest and clean,
E'er please when presented to view,
Should cabin on brown heath or green,
Disclose aught engaging to you;
Should Erin's wild harp soothe the ear,
When touched by such fingers as mine,
Then kindly attentive draw near,
And candidly ponder each line.'

He describes a winter-scene on the mountains of Morne — a high range of hills in the north of Ireland — and thus alludes to his hospitable reception in the clean and industrious cabin of his verses: —

'Escaped from the pitiless storm,
I entered the humble retreat;
Compact was the building, and warm,
In furniture simple and neat.
And now, gentle reader, approve
The ardour that glowed in each breast,
As kindly our cottagers strove
To cherish and welcome their guest.'

It is unnecessary to give in this place further extracts from this book; suffice it to say that, in all probability, Mr. Brontë lived to see the day when he was pained and surprised that he had ever committed it to the press.

Although the poems of Mr. Brontë are inspired by the love of a peaceful and contented life, free from excitement and care, yet in times of trouble and emergency, such as those of the Luddite riots which occurred during the period of his ministration at Hartshead, he showed again the active and resolute spirit which had prompted and sustained the efforts of his early ambition; and his ardour in helping to suppress the turbulent spirit of the neighbourhood would have made him very unpopular with the disaffected people, had they not learned to respect the upright and unfailing rectitude of his conduct. In the energetic character of Mr. Brontë's life in these early times, in his persistent ambition, and in the literary pursuits which clearly were dear to him, we may trace those factors of working power and literary aspiration and taste which made up the characteristic intellectual force of his children.

Mrs. Gaskell, in her 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' has given some of the particulars of the Reverend Mr. Brontë's courtship and marriage, in which she appears to have taken a lively interest.

Mr. Brontë met his future wife, (Miss Maria Branwell — of whose character I shall speak in the next chapter — the third daughter of Mr. T. Branwell of Penzance, deceased) for the first time about the summer of 1812, when she was on a visit to her uncle, the Rev. John Fennel, a Methodist minister and head-master of the Wesleyan Academy at Woodhouse Grove, near Bradford, but who became later a clergyman of the Establishment, and was made incumbent of Cross-stone, in the parish of Halifax. This meeting was soon followed by an engagement, and, says Mrs. Gaskell, there were plans for happy picnic-parties to Kirkstall Abbey in the glowing September days, when 'Uncle, Aunt, and Cousin Jane' — the last engaged to a Mr. Morgan, another clergyman — were of the party.

In the account which Mr. Brontë gives of the aim and scope of the work from which I have made an extract, and the state of his mind while engaged upon it, we have a retrospect of the inner life of the father of the Brontës, during his sojourn at Hartshead as perpetual curate, prior to his marriage with Miss Branwell. In this period of his life, he seems to have been perfectly happy, no cloud or anticipation of future sorrow having obscured or diminished the fulness of his peace. The marriage was celebrated on the 29th of December, 1812, at Guiseley, near Bradford, by the Rev. W. Morgan, minister of Bierley, the gentleman engaged to 'Cousin Jane.' It is a very curious circumstance that on the same day, and at the same place, Mr. Brontë performed the marriage ceremony between his wife's cousin, Miss Jane Fennel, only daughter of the Mr. Fennel alluded to above, and the Rev. W. Morgan, who had just been, as described, the officiating clergyman at his own wedding.

Mr. Fennel would naturally have performed the ceremony for his niece and Mr. Brontë, had it not fallen to his lot to give the lady away.

When Mr. Brontë found himself settled in married life at Hartshead, and with the probability of a young family rising around him, he felt pleasure in the contemplation of the future. Mrs. Brontë, ever gentle and affectionate in her household ways, comforted and encouraged him in his literary pursuits, and, by her acute observation and accurate judgment, directed and aided his own. It was at this time that Mr. Brontë wrote a book, entitled 'The Rural Ministry,' which was published at Halifax, in 1813. The work consisted of a miscellany of descriptive poems, with the following titles: 'The Sabbath Bells,' 'Kirkstall Abbey,' 'Extempore Verses,' 'Lines to a Lady on her Birthday,' 'An Elegy,' 'Reflections by Moonlight,' 'Winter,' 'Rural Happiness,' 'The Distress and Relief,' 'The Christian's Farewell,' 'The Harper of Erin.' It cannot be doubted that, in consequence of his two publications while he was at Hartshead, Mr. Brontë became known in the surrounding districts as an aspiring man, and one of literary culture and ability.

Mr. Brontë had taken his bride to his house at High Town, and it was there that his daughters Maria and Elizabeth were born. Maria was baptized on April the 23rd, 1814, and is entered in the register as the 'daughter of

Patrick Brontë and Maria his wife.' The Rev. Mr. Morgan was the officiating minister. There is no such entry there relating to Elizabeth, for she was baptized at Thornton with the other children.

Mr. Brontë, after having been nearly five years minister of Hartshead-cum-Clifton, resigned the benefice, and accepted, from the vicar of Bradford, the incumbency of Thornton, a perpetual curacy in that parish. This, probably, on the suggestion of Mr. Morgan, who was then incumbent of Christ's Church at Bradford.

Thornton is beautifully situated on the northern slope of a valley. Green and fertile pastures spread over the adjacent hills, and wooded dells with shady walks beautify and enrich the district. 'The neighbourhood,' says Mrs. Gaskell, 'is desolate and wild; great tracts of bleak land, enclosed by stone dykes, sweeping up Clayton Heights.' This disagreeable picture of the place, painted by the biographer of Charlotte, is scarcely justified by the actual appearance of the district. The soil is naturally fertile, and the inhabitants are notable for industry and enterprise. Hence no barren land, within the wide range of hill and vale, is now seen obtruding on the cultivated sweep.

The town is somewhat regularly built. In the main street is situated the house where Mr. Brontë took up his abode during his stay at Thornton. The hall door was reached by several steps. There was a dining-room on one side of the hall, and a drawing-room on the other. Over the passage to the front was a dressing-room, at the window of which the neighbours often saw Mr. Brontë at his toilet. Above the door of the house, on a stone slab, there are still visible the letters:

A.
J. S.
1802

These are the initials of John and Sarah Ashworth, former inhabitants of Thornton; and this residence remained as the parsonage until another was built below, nearer to the chapel, by the successor of Mr. Brontë.

The chapel of Thornton is a narrow, contracted, and unsightly building. The north side is lighted by two rows of square cottage windows — on the south side, five late perpendicular pointed windows permit the sun to relieve the gloom of the interior.

The diminutive communion-table is lighted by a four-mullioned window, above which, externally, in the wall, appears the date 1620. The interior is blocked, on the ground floor, with high-backed, unpainted deal pews. Two galleries hide the windows almost from view, and cast a gloom over the interior of the edifice. The area under the pews, and in the aisles, is paved with gravestones, and a fetid, musty smell floats through the damp and mouldering interior. In this chapel, Mr. Brontë preached and ministered, and from the pulpit, placed high above the curate and clerk, whence he delivered his sermons, he could see his wife and children in a pew just below him.

The new incumbent of Thornton seems to have taken active interest in his chapel; for in the western screen, which divides a kind of lobby from the nave, is painted, on a wooden tablet, an inscription recording that in the year 1818 this chapel was 'Repaired and Beautified,' the Rev. Patrick Brontë, B.A., being then minister.

While at Thornton Mr. Brontë steadily pursued his literary avocations, one of his books being a small volume entitled, 'The Cottage in the Wood, or the Art of becoming Rich and Happy.' This is an account of a pious family, consisting of an aged couple and a virtuous child, whose appearance and education qualify her for a higher position in the world than that of a cottager's daughter. Accident brings to their door a young man in a state of almost helpless drunkenness, whose habits are the most profligate and dissolute, as the sequel discloses; and the object of the book is to show the dire consequences of continued intemperance. The story is told in prose, but Mr. Brontë gives a poetical version of one event in the narrative. It is entitled, 'The Nightly Revel,' and possesses a dignity of its own. The following extract shows considerable improvement, in diction and verse, upon the style of his small volume published at Halifax, in 1811. For this reason it is well worth reproducing.

'Around the table polish'd goblets shine,
Fill'd with brown ale, or crown'd with ruddy wine;
Each quaffs his glass, and, thirsty, calls for more,
Till maddening mirth, and song, and wild uproar,
And idly fierce dispute, and brutal fight
Break the soft slumbers of the peaceful night.
'Without, within, above, beneath, around,
Ungodly jests and deep-mouthed oaths resound;
Pale Reason, trembling, leaves her reeling throne,
Truth, Honour, Virtue, Justice, all are flown;
The sly, dark-glancing harlot's fatal breath
Allures to sin and sorrow, shame and death.
The gaming-table, too, that fatal snare,
Beset with fiercest passions fell is there;
Remorse, despair, revenge, and deadly hate,
With dark design, in bitter durance wait,
Till Scarlet Murder waves his bloody hand,
Gives in sepulchral tone the dread command;
Then forth they rush, and from the secret sheath
Draw the keen blade and do the work of death.'

Mr. Brontë also, in 1818, before his appointment to Haworth, published his 'Maid of Killarney.' He had not been long at Thornton, where he went about the year 1815, when a considerable increase in his family added to his parental responsibilities.

On his acceptance of the living, he probably enjoyed a larger stipend than at Hartshead, but the demands of a young family, perhaps, on the whole, made him a poorer man. There Charlotte Brontë was born in April, 1816; Patrick Branwell Brontë in 1817; Emily Jane Brontë in 1818; and Anne Brontë probably just before Mr. Brontë's removal to Haworth, which was on February 25th, 1820, as we are told by Mrs. Gaskell.

Of the life of the Brontës at Thornton we know little. But there were causes of anxiety pressing on Mr. Brontë at the time. The state of his wife's health was a real sorrow, and although he derived solace from his literary pursuits and the society of his clerical friends, his spirits were damped by the contemplation of the season of bereavement and affliction that assuredly threatened him at no distant date.

With six young children, who might soon become motherless, Mr. Brontë's future was dark and discouraging, and he entertained the idea of resigning, at no distant day, the then place of his cure. Here, living within a reasonable distance of Bradford, he had an opportunity of moving in a larger circle of friends than at Hartshead, and it was here that his children received their earliest impressions of local life and character. Old inhabitants of Thornton remembered them playing in the space opposite their father's residence, in the village street, and had often seen them carried, or their parents lead them by the hand, in the lanes of the neighbourhood. They were children only when they left Thornton; yet, on many grounds, the inhabitants of that village may feel privileged that it was the birthplace of the authors of 'Jane Eyre,' 'Wuthering Heights,' and 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.'

Shortly an opportunity presented itself to Mr. Brontë for leaving Thornton, a vacancy having taken place at Haworth through the death of the curate, Mr. Charnock. The situation of this chapelry was blessed with a more bracing air, and the curate had a somewhat better stipend than Thornton allowed, and so Mr. Brontë accepted the presentation from the patron. We are informed, however, that, on visiting the place of his intended ministrations, he was told that while to him personally the parishioners had no objection, yet, as the nominee of the vicar of Bradford, he would not be received. He had no idea that the inhabitants had a veto in the appointment.

On Mr. Brontë declaring that, if he had not the good-will of the inhabitants, his ministrations would be useless, the place was presented to Mr. Redhead by the patron, and the village seems to have become the scene of extraordinary proceedings. It appears that, after the Reformation, the presentation to the curacy of Haworth, which had been from time immemorial vested in the vicar of Bradford, had become subject to the control of the freeholders, and of certain trustees who held possession of the principal funds from which the stipend of the curate proceeded, which they could withhold, by virtue of an authority they appear to have been empowered with. In effect, they could at any time disallow or render void an appointment, if disagreeable to themselves, by keeping back the stipend. Mr. Brontë, writing later of Mr. Redhead, says of this: 'My predecessor took the living with the consent of the vicar of Bradford and certain trustees, in consequence of which he was so opposed that, after only three weeks' possession, he was compelled to resign.' What this opposition and its immediate effects were, we learn from the pages of Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' and they may be mentioned here as illustrative of the pre-eminent resolution and force of character which ever distinguish the inhabitants of the West-Riding and the dwellers on these rough-hewn and storm-beaten elevations.

During the long illness which preceded the death of Mr. Charnock, incumbent of Haworth, his assistant curate, Mr. Redhead, had supplied his place; who, on Mr. Brontë's withdrawal, was presented, as is stated above, to the vacant living by the patron, and he seems to have been determined to hold the chapelry, *vi et armis*, in defiance of the inhabitants. But the freeholders, conceiving they had been deprived of their long established prerogative, or an attempt was being made to interfere with it, protested against Mr. Redhead's appointment. On the first occasion of this gentleman's preaching in the church, it was crowded not by worshippers, but by a multitude of people bent on mischief. These resolved the service should not proceed, or that it should be rendered inaudible. To secure this object they had put on the heavy wooden clogs they daily wore, except on Sundays, and, while the surpliced minister was reading the opening service, the stamping and clattering of the clogs drowned his voice, and the people left the church, making all the noise and uproar that was in their power, which was by no means feeble. The following Sunday witnessed proceedings still more disgraceful. We are told that at the commencement of the service, a man rode up the nave of the church on an ass, with his face to the tail, and with a number of old hats piled on his head. On urging his beast forward, the screams of delight, the roars of laughter, and the shouts of the approving conspirators completely drowned the clergyman's voice; and he left the chapel, but not yet discomfited.

Mr. Redhead, on the third Sunday, resolved to make a strenuous and final effort to keep the ecclesiastical citadel of which he had been formally put in possession. For this purpose he brought with him a body of cavalry, composed of a number of sympathising gentlemen, with their horses; and the curate, thus accompanied by his supporters, ascended the village street and put up at the 'Bull.' But the enemy had been on the alert: the people were exasperated, and followed the new-comers to the church, accompanied by a chimney-sweep who had, not long before, finished his labours at some adjacent chimneys, and whom they had made half drunk. Him they placed right before the reading-desk, which Mr. Redhead had already reached, and the drunken, black-faced sweep nodded assent to the measured utterances of the minister. 'At last,' it is said, 'either prompted by some mischief-maker, or from some tipsy impulse, he clambered up the pulpit stairs, and attempted to embrace Mr. Redhead. Then the fun grew fast and furious. Some of the more riotous pushed the soot-covered chimney-sweeper against Mr. Redhead, as he tried to escape. They threw both him and his tormentor down on the ground in the churchyard where the soot-bag had been emptied, and though, at last, Mr. Redhead escaped into the "Black Bull," the doors of which were immediately barred, the people raged without, threatening to stone him and his friends.' They escaped from the place, and Mr. Redhead, completely vanquished, retired from the curacy of Haworth.

Mr. Brontë, who had made a favourable impression on the inhabitants, was now accepted by them, and the natural kindness of his disposition and the urbanity of his manners, secured peace and contentment in the village.

His responsibilities as a pastor were not light, though the new scene of his labours, in moral condition, was, perhaps, no worse than the generality of similar villages in the north of England. The special chroniclers of Haworth speak of the population of the barren mountains west of York as 'rude and arrogant, after the manner of their wild country.' This is the testimony of James Rither, a Yorkshire esquire. The celebrated Oliver Haywood, preaching at the house of Jonas Foster, at Haworth, on June 13th, 1672, broke out into lamentations about the immorality, corruption, and profanity of the place. Mr. Grimshaw, in the last century, while curate there, had a conviction that the majority of the people were going to hell with their eyes open! Mrs. Gaskell informs us that at Haworth, 'drinking without the head being affected was considered a manly accomplishment.' A remarkable instance of the loss of reverence and the increase of profanity, in those days, is found in the observance of Palm Sunday at Heptonstall, a neighbouring village, and at Haworth itself this feast was pre-eminently distinguished in ancient times by the out-door processions of people going from the church and returning to it, bearing palm branches and singing the psalms and hymns appointed for the special festival.

It is known, indeed, that this feast was attended by the inhabitants of the surrounding hills and valleys in those times; and, at the period of which I speak, the attendance of the people was not diminished, but increased, though they came for another object. It is a singular fact that local feuds, if we may call them such, were kept up between the villages of the West Riding. And thus challenges were given alternately by Haworth to Heptonstall, and by Heptonstall to Haworth, for struggles between the champions of the respective villages, to be fought out on Palm Sunday. The inhabitants of these places, therefore, met to pound and pummel each other without any civil or religious cause to give bitterness to the fray: greed of triumph and brutal indifference to injuries inflicted characterized these hostile meetings. On such occasions, at Heptonstall, amidst great drunkenness and rioting, there were 'stand-up' fights from the church-gates to the 'Buttress,' a steep part of the road, near the bridge which crosses the river at the foot of Heptonstall Bank — nearly a mile in extent. On one of these feasts, a Haworth belligerent, unwilling to return home, although night was drawing on, and looking extremely dissatisfied, when asked by his wife what ailed him, answered, 'Aw 'annot fawhten wi' onny body yet, an' aw'll nut gooa whom till aw dun summat.' His affectionate spouse replied, 'Then gooa, an' get fawhten' an' ha' done wi' it, for we mun gooa.' The West-Riding police, on their institution, put an end to these disagraceful proceedings.

Haworth, the new place of Mr. Brontë's incumbency, which has been well and very fully described by many writers, is situated on the western confines of the parish of Bradford, and stands on a somewhat lofty eminence. It is, however, protected in great measure from the western storms by still higher ground, which consists of irreclaimable moors and morasses.

The church in which he, for the remainder of his life, performed his religious services, and in which his more gifted children repose, after their brief but memorable lives, was of ancient date. A chantry was founded there at the beginning of the reign of Edward III., where a priest celebrated daily for the repose of the soul of Adam de Battley, and for the souls of his ancestors, and for all the faithful departed. The church, which is dedicated to the glory of God, in honour of St. Michael the archangel, has been recently, to a great extent, re-edified. The old structure retained traces of one still older, of the early English style. Invested as it was with the evidences of the periods of taste good and bad through which it had passed, and with the associations which attach to old and familiar internal arrangements, it was endeared to the inhabitants. Of such associations the present church — though an architectural gain upon its predecessor — is necessarily destitute, and the world-wide interest with which the former structure was invested through the genius of the Brontës has been almost destroyed by the substitution of an edifice in which they never prayed, and which they never saw; though their remains repose, it is true, under its pavement, as is indicated by memorial tablets.

During the existence of the old church, Haworth was visited by continuous streams of people; but, on its removal, little was left to attract pilgrims from afar, and there was a manifest diminution of visitors to the village.

In the recent alterations, the parsonage also, in which the children of the Rev. Patrick Brontë lived and won for themselves enduring fame in the path of literature, has undergone considerable changes. It has been found necessary to add a new wing to the house, in order to obtain larger accommodation, and, to beautify the parsonage still further, the old cottage panes, through which light fell on precious and invaluable pages of elaborate manuscript, as they passed through delicate and gifted hands, have given way to plate-glass squares. Altogether the house, both inside and out, presents a very different appearance from that which it did in the time of the Brontës.

The chapelry at Haworth, when Mr. Brontë accepted the perpetual curacy, was much more populous and important than that of Thornton. The stipend of £170 per annum, with a fair residence attached, and a sum of £27 13s. for maintenance, made the change a desirable one on pecuniary grounds; and, with Mrs. Brontë's annuity of £50 a year, anxiety on this head was no doubt allayed.

The population of the district was about four thousand seven hundred, and, in the first ten years of Mr. Brontë's incumbency, increased by nearly twelve hundred souls. The chapelry included within its bounds the townships or hamlets of Stanbury and Near and Far Oxenhope, with the extensive moors and scattered houses stretching to the borders of Lancashire. The curacy of Stanbury, a place one mile west of Haworth, with £100 per annum, was in the gift of Mr. Brontë; and there was also the interest on £600, with a house, for the maintenance of a free school at that place, and a sum of £90 per annum for a like purpose at Haworth. In the year 1849, while Mr. Brontë was still incumbent, the chapelry of Haworth was divided, a church having been erected at Oxenhope at a cost of £1,500, the curacy there being valued at £150 per annum.

Among the considerations which had weight with Mr. Brontë in his determination to accept the curacy of Haworth was, in all probability, the delicate state of his wife's health, and the not over-robust constitutions of his children. He knew, that though from the smoke-laden atmosphere of the busy centres of West-Riding industry, Keighley and Haworth were not wholly exempt, yet the winds which prevailed from the west and the south-west for a great part of the year, and swept over the moorlands from whose heights the Irish Channel itself was visible, would, by their purity, give that invigoration of which his family stood in need. It is quite possible, indeed, that by Mr. Brontë's removal to Haworth, which gave an almost illimitable range of wild, heathery hills for his children to wander over, an extension of their short lives may have been attained. Mrs. Brontë, however, derived little or no benefit from the change. She had suffered for some time under a fatal malady — an internal cancer — of which, about eighteen months after her arrival at Haworth, she died.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. BRONTË.

The Mother of the Brontës — Her Character and Personal Appearance — Her Literary Taste — Penzance, her Native Place — Description of Penzance — The Branwell Family — Personal Traits of Maria Branwell — Her Virtues — Her Letters to Mr. Brontë — Her Domestic Experiences.

The mother of the Brontës — whose death, in September, 1821, deprived her children of the affectionate and tender care which, for the short period of her married life, she had bestowed upon them — would, had she been spared, have moulded their characters by her own meek, gentle, and maternal virtues. Mrs. Brontë is said to have been small in person, but of graceful and kindly manners; not beautiful, yet comely and lady-like, and gifted with great discrimination, judgment, and modesty. Mrs. Gaskell says she 'was very elegant, and always dressed with a quiet simplicity of taste which accorded well with her general character, and of which some details call to mind the style of dress preferred by her daughter for her favourite heroines.' Mrs. Brontë was also gifted with literary ability and taste. She had written an essay entitled, 'The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns,' with a view to publication in some periodical; and her letters were characterized by elegance and ease. Her relations in Penzance spoke of her as 'their favourite aunt, and one to whom they, as well as the family, looked up as a person of talent and great amiability of disposition;' and again, as 'possessing more than ordinary talents, which she inherited from her father.'

Mrs. Brontë, as has been said, was a native of Penzance, a corporate town in the county of Cornwall, and also a sea-port. Penzance is situated in the hundred of Penwith, and is the most westerly town in England. The climate is distinguished by great mildness and salubrity, and the land is remarkable for its fertility, and the beauty of its meads and pastures. Its maritime situation, however, had, in former times, exposed it to the descents of foreign invaders, the last of which appears to have been that of the Spaniards in the year 1595. The account given of this event is that the invaders, being masters of Bretagne, sent four vessels manned with a force sufficient to occupy the Cornish coast. They landed near Mousehole — a well-known place on the western side of Mount's Bay — and entered the town, which they set on fire, the inhabitants fleeing before them. At a later date the town became very pleasant, and many of the houses were large and respectable, while the streets were well paved. Generally the people enjoyed long lives, and some attained the patriarchal age: one of these — Dolly Pentreath, who died in her one hundred and second year, and who had made the 'Mousehole' her residence — was known as the last who spoke Cornish. On account of the gentleness of the climate, many suffering from pulmonary complaints took up their residence there.

Penzance was a town surrounded by places of great interest to the historian and the antiquary, which are fully described by Borlase and others. The trades carried on at the place were of considerable extent in tin and the pilchard fishery, as well as in copper, earthenware, clay, and in other objects of manufacture and merchandise. In one of the local industries, Mr. Thomas Branwell was engaged. He had married a lady named Carne, and they had four daughters and one son. Maria was their third daughter. The families of Mr. and Mrs. Branwell were well connected, and moved in the best society in Penzance. They were Wesleyan Methodist in religion, and the children were brought up in that persuasion. Mr. Branwell relieved the cares of business by the delights and consolations of music, in the performance of which he is said to have had considerable ability. He and his wife lived to see their children grown up; and died, Mr. Branwell in 1808, and his wife in 1809.

Maria Branwell visited her uncle, Mr. Fennel, at the beginning of the summer of 1812, as is stated above, and, for the first time, saw Mr. Brontë. A feeling of mutual admiration sprang up between them, and something like the beginning of an engagement took place. When she returned home, a correspondence opened between the two, and Mr. Brontë preserved the letters. These have been referred to by the biographer of his daughter, and we learn that the communications of Miss Branwell were characterized by singular modesty, thoughtfulness, and piety. She was surprised to find herself so suddenly engaged, but she accepted with modest candour the proffer of Mr. Brontë's affection. The future was determined by mutual acquiescence. On Miss Branwell, nature had bestowed no great personal attractions, yet, as has been said, she was comely, and lady-like in her manners; and her innate grace drew irresistibly to her the esteem of all her acquaintances. Little is known respecting her beyond the personal traits already mentioned; and as to the circumstances and events of her life, unmarried or married, which was one of an extremely even and uneventful kind, little or nothing can be recorded beyond the ordinary routine of domestic duties well and affectionately performed, and of obligations in her sphere religiously observed. Blameless in her conduct, loving in her charge, and patient in the sufferings she was called upon to endure, she was a pattern of those excellencies which are the adornments of domestic life, and make the hearth happy and contented. It cannot be doubted that she ordered her household with judgment, and expended her husband's income with frugality and to the best advantage.

Mrs. Gaskell was enabled to give an extract from one of her letters written to Mr. Brontë before her marriage, which displays in an excellent manner her calm sensibility and understanding. She says: 'For some years I have been perfectly my own mistress, subject to no control whatever; so far from it that my sisters, who are many years older than myself, and even my dear mother, used to consult me on every occasion of importance, and scarcely ever doubted the propriety of my opinions and actions; perhaps you will be ready to accuse me of vanity in mentioning this, but you must consider that I do not boast of it. I have many times felt it a disadvantage, and although, I thank God, it has never led me into error, yet, in circumstances of uncertainty and doubt, I have deeply felt the want of a guide and instructor.'

The usual preparations, which Mrs. Gaskell has particularized, were made for the wedding; but during the arrangements a disaster happened, to which the following letter to Mr. Brontë refers: —

'I suppose you never expected to be much richer for me, but I am sorry to inform you that I am still poorer than I thought myself. I mentioned having sent for my books, clothes, &c. On Saturday evening, about the time when you were writing the description of your imaginary shipwreck, I was reading and feeling the effects of a real one, having then received a letter from my sister, giving me an account of the vessel in which she had sent my box being stranded on the coast of Devonshire, in consequence of which the box was dashed to pieces with the violence of the sea, and all my little property, with the exception of a few articles, being swallowed up in the mighty deep. If this should not prove the prelude to something worse, I shall think little of it, as it is the first disastrous circumstance which has occurred since I left home.'

The wedding took place at Guiseley, on December 29th, 1812, as is stated in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE REV. PATRICK BRONTË.

Character of the Rev. P. Brontë — Charges against Him — Serious Allegations of Biographers — Injustice of the Charges — Mr. Brontë's indignant Denial of the Imputations — Testimony of Nancy Garrs — Mrs. Brontë and the Silk-Dress Episode — Mr. Brontë, the Supposed Prototype of Mr. Helstone — The Pistol-shots Theory — Mr. Brontë on Science Knowledge — Miss Branwell.

The character of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, who was responsible, after the death of his wife, for the education of his children, if we may believe the accounts given of it by those who have admired their genius, had many deplorable peculiarities. It would be difficult, indeed, to find anywhere the record of such passionate outbreaks, such unreasoning prejudices, and such unbending will as are revealed in the stories which are told of him. But we shall see presently that most of these charges have no foundation in fact, while others are, probably, the result of total misconception.

Mrs. Gaskell gives an account of these peculiarities. On one occasion, she tells us, after the children had been out on the wet moors, the nurse had rummaged out certain coloured boots given to them by the Rev. Mr. Morgan, who had been sponsor for Maria at Hartshead, and had arranged them before the fire. Mr. Brontë observing this, and thinking the bright colours might foster pride, heaped the boots upon the coals, and filled the house with a very strong odour of burnt leather. 'Long before this,' she says, 'some one had given Mrs. Brontë a silk gown …. she kept it treasured up in her drawers. One day, however, while in the kitchen, she remembered that she had left the key in the drawer, and, hearing Mr. Brontë upstairs, she augured some ill to her dress, and, running up in haste, she found it cut into shreds…. He did not speak when he was annoyed or displeased, but worked off his volcanic wrath by firing pistols out of the back-door in rapid succession…. Now and then his anger took a different form, but still was speechless. Once he got the hearth-rug, and, stuffing it up the grate, deliberately set it on fire, and remained in the room in spite of the stench until it had smouldered and shrivelled away into uselessness. Another time he took some chairs, and sawed away at the backs till they were reduced to the condition of stools.'

Mr. Wemyss Reid, who implicitly adopts the 'pistol shots' and 'pretty dress' stories, while paying a high tribute to Mr. Brontë's rectitude, and to his just pride in the celebrity of his daughters, says of him, 'He appears to have been a strange compound of good and evil. That he was not without some good is acknowledged by all who knew him. He had kindly feelings towards most people…. But throughout his whole life there was but one person with whom he had any real sympathy, and that person was himself.' He was 'passionate, self-willed, vain, habitually cold and distant in his demeanour towards those of his own household.' His wife 'lived in habitual dread of her lordly master…. It would be a mistake to suppose that violence was one of the weapons to which Mr. Brontë habitually resorted … his general policy was to secure his end by craft rather than by force.'

Miss Robinson, without hesitation, repeats the censures on Mr. Brontë published by Mrs. Gaskell and Mr. Reid, asking, 'Who dare say if that marriage was happy? Mrs. Gaskell, writing in the life and for the eyes of Mr. Brontë, speaks of his unwearied care, his devotion in the night-nursing. But, before that fatal illness was declared, she lets fall many a hint of the young wife's loneliness … of her patient suffering, of his violent temper.'

It will thus be seen that the disposition of Mr. Brontë must have been a sad one indeed, if all these statements are true; and marvellous that, with 'such a father,' the young and sterling faculties of the 'six small children' should have been so admirably directed and trained that, of the four who lived to later years, three at least occupy an exalted and prominent position among women of letters in the present century. And it would be still more strange that these children were especially distinguished for the gentleness of their dispositions, and the refinement of their ideas. It may be hoped that the readers of this volume, with their additional knowledge of the affectionate, but often wayward, Branwell, will sympathize with the sentiment which Monsieur Héger expressed in his letter to Mr. Brontë, that, *en jugeant un père de famille par ses enfants on ne risque pas de se tromper*. For we can scarcely doubt that the characteristics of the children, which I have named, were due, in fact, in great measure, to Mr. Brontë's affectionate supervision and education of them. He had graduated at St. John's College, Cambridge, as we have seen; and the culture and tone of the university were brought under the roof of his house, where his children — more especially Branwell — were subjected to its influence. Moreover, whatever may be thought of Mr. Brontë's intellectual gifts, or of the talent he displayed in his poems and prose writings, we may be sure that he possessed, in a marked degree, a deep sympathy with a higher mental training, and with the truth and simplicity of a pastoral life.

After the allegations against Mr. Brontë had appeared in the first edition of the life of his daughter Charlotte, he never ceased to deny the scandalous reflections upon his character in that work. 'They were,' he said to me, 'wholly untrue.' He stated that he had 'fulfilled every duty of a husband and a father with all the kindness, solicitude, and affection which could be required of him.' And Mrs. Brontë herself had said, as quoted by Mrs. Gaskell, 'Ought I not to be thankful that he never gave me an angry word?' thus openly declaring that, whatever might have been the peculiarities of Mr. Brontë's temper, his wife, at least, never suffered the consequences. The children also ever looked up to their father with reverence, gratitude, and devotion.

In a conversation I had with Mr. Brontë on the 8th of July, 1857, he spoke of the unjustifiable reflections upon himself which had been made public, and he said, 'I did not know that I had an enemy in the world, much less one who would traduce me before my death, till Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte" appeared. Every thing in that book which relates to my conduct to my family is either false or distorted. I never did commit such acts as are there ascribed to me.' At a later interview Mr. Brontë explained that by the word 'enemies,' he implied, 'false informants and hostile critics.' He believed that Mrs. Gaskell had listened to village scandal, and had sought information from some discarded servant.

Let us then examine the source of these allegations. Mrs. Gaskell tells us that her informant was 'a good old woman,' who had been Mrs. Brontë's nurse in her illness. Now it is known that, whatever good qualities this person may be supposed to have had, her conscientiousness and rectitude, at least, were not of the first order, and she was detected in proceedings which caused Mr. Brontë to dismiss her at once. With the double effect of explaining her dismissal and injuring Mr. Brontë, this person gave an account of his temper and conduct, embellished with the stories which I have quoted from the first edition of the 'Life of Charlotte,' to a minister of the place; and it was in this way that Mrs. Gaskell became acquainted with her and them. Nancy Garrs, a faithful young woman who had been in Mr. Brontë's service at Thornton, who continued with the family after the removal to Haworth, and who still survives — a widow, Mrs. Wainwright — at an advanced age, a well-known inhabitant of Bradford, informs me that the 'silk dress' which Mr. Brontë is said to have torn to shreds was a print dress, not new, and that Mr. Brontë, disliking its enormous sleeves, one day, finding the opportunity, cut them off. The whole thing was a joke, which Mrs. Brontë at once guessed at, and, going upstairs, she brought the dress down, saying to Nancy, 'Look what he has done; that falls to your share.' Nancy declares the other stories to be wholly unfounded. She speaks of Mr. Brontë as a 'most affectionate husband; there never was a more affectionate father, never a kinder master;' and 'he was not of a violent temper at all; quite the reverse.'

This view of these slanderous stories is fortunately also confirmed out of the mouth of Charlotte Brontë. In the fourth chapter of 'Shirley,' speaking of Mr. Helstone — whose character, though not absolutely founded on that of her father, is yet unquestionably influenced by her knowledge of his disposition, and of some incidents in which he had been concerned, — she says that on the death of his wife, 'his dry-eyed and sober mourning scandalized an old housekeeper, and likewise a female attendant who had waited upon Mrs. Helstone in her sickness … they gossiped together over the corpse, related anecdotes with embellishments of her lingering decline, and its real or supposed cause; in short, they worked each other up to some indignation against the austere little man, who sat examining papers in an adjoining room, unconscious of what opprobrium he was the object. Mrs. Helstone was hardly under the sod when rumours began to be rife in the neighbourhood that she had died of a broken heart; these magnified quickly into reports of hard usage, and, finally, details of harsh treatment on the part of her husband: reports grossly untrue, but not less eagerly received on that account.' It will thus be seen that the character of Mr. Helstone becomes in part a defence of Mr. Brontë. On the occasion above referred to, Mr. Brontë went on to say that, 'while duly acknowledging the obligations he felt himself under to Mrs. Gaskell for her admirable memoir of his daughter, he could not but regard her uncalled-for allusions to himself, and the failings of his son Branwell, as the excrescences of a work otherwise ably carried out.' He appeared, on this occasion, to be consoled by the thought that, owing to the remonstrances he had made, the objectionable passages would be expunged from the subsequent editions of the work, and that he would ultimately be set right with the public. He concluded with these words: — 'I have long been an abstraction to the world, and it is not consoling now to be thus dragged before the public; to be represented as an unkind husband, and charged with acts which I never committed.'

The story of the pistol-shots admits of ready explanation. It is known that Mr. Brontë, like Helstone, had a strange fascination in military affairs, and he seems to have had almost the spirit of Uncle Toby. He lived, too, in the troublous times of the Luddites, and had kept pistols, for defence as Mr. Helstone did. That gentleman, it will be remembered, had two pairs suspended over the mantel-piece of his study, in cloth cases, kept loaded. As I have reason to know, Mr. Brontë, having been accustomed to the use of fire-arms, retained the possession of them for safety in the night; but, fearing they might become dangerous, occasionally discharged them in the day-time.

Mr. Brontë's remonstrances and denials, and his refutation of the scandals attributed to him, had their effect; and the charges complained of were entirely omitted in the edition of the 'Life of Charlotte,' published in the year 1860. Mr. Brontë was in his eighty-fourth year when this tardy act of bare justice was done to him. It may be added that the people of Haworth, when they saw in print Mrs. Gaskell's exaggerated and erroneous statements, loudly expressed their disapprobation. Mr. Wood, late churchwarden of Haworth, also denied the stories of the cutting up of Mrs. Brontë's dress, and the other charges just referred to.

The truth about Mr. Brontë appears to be this: that though, like Mr. Helstone — many of the *traits* of whose character were derived from that of the incumbent of Haworth — he might have missed his vocation, like him he was 'not diabolical at all,' and that, like him, also, 'he was a conscientious, hard-headed, hard-handed, brave, stern, implacable, faithful little man: a man almost without sympathy, ungentle, prejudiced, and rigid: but a man true to principle — honourable, sagacious, and sincere.' Possibly we should not be wholly mistaken in saying that, like the parson in 'Shirley,' Nature never intended him 'to make a very good husband, especially to a quiet wife.' He lacked the fine sympathy and delicate perception that would have enabled him to make his family entirely happy; and when brooding over his politics, his pamphlets, and his sermons, like Mr. Helstone, he probably locked 'his liveliness in his book-case and study-desk.' Yet Mr. Helstone is neither brutal nor insane, 'neither tyrannical nor hypocritical,' but 'simply a man who is rather liberal than good-natured, rather brilliant than genial, rather scrupulously equitable than truly just — if you can understand such superfine distinctions?'

It would not have been necessary, in this work, to defend at such length the character of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, had it not happened, unfortunately, that recent works, which have treated admirably of the writings of his daughters, have also acquiesced in, and to a great extent reiterated, the serious charges made against him. Moreover, it can never be a useless thing to retrieve a character which has been thoughtlessly taken away. This defence has now been made, and it may be hoped that the 'six motherless children' had a more amiable and affectionate father than is generally supposed, and that he paid careful and anxious attention to their bringing-up and to their education. Indeed, of this there need be no doubt. The death of his wife had placed them in his hands, he being their only support on earth, and it surely is not too much to say that he knew his duty, and did it well, as the lives of his children prove, on the ground of natural affection, and, perhaps, of higher motives also.

The following extract from a letter written by Mr. Brontë a few years later, in reference to scientific knowledge, is sufficiently characteristic. He says: 'In this age of innovation and scepticism, it is the incumbent duty of every man of an enlarged and pious mind to promote, to the utmost extent of his abilities, every movement in the variegated, complex system of human affairs, which may have either a direct, indirect, or collateral tendency to purify and expand the naturally polluted and circumscribed mind of fallen nature, and to raise it to that elevation which the Scriptures require, as well as the best interests of humanity.'

Upon the death of his wife, Mr. Brontë felt the need of some one to superintend the affairs of his household, and assist him in this important charge of the bringing-up of his children; and so, towards the end of the year 1822, an elder sister of the deceased lady, Miss Elizabeth Branwell of Penzance, came to reside with him. She is represented to have been, in personal appearance, of low and slight proportions; prim and starched in her attire, which was, when prepared for the reception of visitors, invariably of silk; and she wore, according to the fashion of the time, a frontal of auburn curls, gracefully overshadowing her forehead. She took occasionally, through habit, a pinch from her gold snuff-box, which she had always at hand. When she had taken up her residence at bleak, wild, and barren Haworth, she is said to have sighed for the flower-decked meads of sunny Penzance, her native place. Miss Branwell's affectionate regard for her dead sister's children caused her to take deep interest in everything relating to them, their health, the comfort and cleanliness of their home, and the sedulous culture of their minds. In the management of Mr. Brontë's household she was materially assisted by the faithful and trustworthy Tabby, who, in 1825, was added to the family as a domestic servant. By a long and faithful service of some thirty years in the Brontë family, Tabby gained the respect and confidence of the household. She had been born and nurtured in the chapelry of Haworth, at a time when mills and machinery were not, when railways had not made the inhabitants of the hills and valleys familiar with the cities and towns of England; and, moreover, before the ancient dialect, so interesting philologically to the readers of King Alfred's translations of Orosius and Bede, and the like, came to be considered rude, vulgar, and barbarous. Tabby used the dialect rightly, without any attempt to improve on the language of her childhood and of her fathers; and she was original and truthful in this, as in all her ways. It was from Tabby, principally, that the youthful Brontës gained the familiarity with the Yorkshire Doric, which they afterwards reproduced with such accuracy in 'Shirley,' 'Wuthering Heights,' and others of their writings.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRLHOOD OF THE BRONTË SISTERS.

Girlhood — Gravity of Character — Charlotte's Description of the Elf-land of Childhood — The Still and Solemn Moors of Haworth influence their Writings — The Present of Toys — The Plays which they Acted — Mr. Brontë on a Supposed Earthquake — The Evidence of his Care for his Children — Grammar School at Haworth — His Children under the Tuition of the Master — The Character of the School — Cowan Bridge School — Charlotte's View of Mr. Carus Wilson's Management — Deaths of Maria and Elizabeth.

The childhood of the Brontës in the parsonage of Haworth has been pictured to us as a very strange one indeed. We have seen them deprived in their early youth of that maternal care which they required so much, and left in the hands of a father unfamiliar with such a charge, who was filled with Spartan ideas of discipline, and with theories of education above and beyond the capacity of childhood. There was probably little room in the house of Mr. Brontë for gaiety and amusement, very little tolerance for pretty dress, or home beauty, and small comprehension of childish needs. Rigid formality, silent chambers, staid attire, frugal fare, and secluded lives fell to the lot of these thoughtful and gifted children. It was no wonder that they grew up 'grave and silent beyond their years;' that, when infantine relaxation failed them, they betook themselves to reading newspapers, and debating the merits of Hannibal and Cæsar, of Buonaparte and Wellington; or that, when they were deprived of the company of the village children by the '*Quis ego et quis tu?*' which was forced too early upon them, they fled for silent companionship with the moors. Yet this childhood, stern and grim though it was, where we look in vain for the beautiful simplicity and sunny gladness which should ever distinguish the features of youth, had a beauty and a joy of its own; and it had a merit also. Charlotte Brontë herself has left us one of the most beautiful pictures which can be found in English literature of the pleasures of childhood, that elf-land which is passed before the shores of Reality have arisen in front; when they stand afar off, so blue, soft, and gentle that we long to reach them; when we 'catch glimpses of silver lines, and imagine the roll of living waters,' heedless of 'many a wilderness, and often of the flood of Death, or some stream of sorrow as cold and almost as black as Death' that must be crossed ere true bliss can be tasted. So the Brontës, trooping abroad on the moors, revelling in the freedom of Nature, while their faculties expanded to the noblest ends, lived also in the heroic world of childhood, 'its inhabitants half-divine or semi-demon; its scenes dream-scenes; darker woods and stranger hills; brighter skies, more dangerous waters; sweeter flowers, more tempting fruits; wider plains; drearier deserts; sunnier fields than are found in Nature.' Can we doubt that the Brontë children, endowed, as the world was afterwards to know, with keener perceptions, more exalted sympathies, and nobler gifts than other children, enjoyed these things more than others could? And the merit of their childhood was this: that it impressed them in the strongest form with the influence of locality, with the boundless expanse of the moors, and with the weird and rugged character of the people amongst whom they lived, and whom they afterwards drew so well. Such influences as these are a quality more or less traceable in the works of every author, but they are very apparent in the productions of the Brontës. These writers could not have produced 'Jane Eyre,' 'Shirley,' and 'Wuthering Heights' without them, any more than Goldsmith could have written his 'Vicar of Wakefield' if his early years had not been passed in the pleasant village of Lissey. The moors, clothed with purple heather and golden gorse in billowy waves, were certainly all in all to Emily Brontë; and she and her sisters, and the youthful Branwell with his ready admiration and brilliant fancy, escorted by Tabby, enjoyed to the full the free atmosphere of the heights around Haworth. The rushing sound of their own waterfall, and the shrill cries of the grouse, which flew up as they came along, were to them friendly voices of the opening life of Nature whose potent influence inspired them so well.

Of other companionship in their early years they had hardly any; and being unable to associate much with children of their own age and condition, or to play with their young and immediate neighbours in childish games, Mr. Brontë's son and daughters grew up amongst their elders with heads older than their years, and spoke with a knowledge that might have sprung from actual experience of men and manners. They were, in fact, 'old-fashioned children.' Their extraordinary cleverness was soon observed, and the servants were always on their guard lest any of their remarks might be repeated by the children. Notwithstanding this, the little Brontës were children still, and took pleasure in the things of childhood. Up-grown men will not whip a top on the causeways, nor trundle a hoop through the streets, nor play at 'hide-and-seek' at dusk as of yore; but the Brontë children in their youthful days did all these things, and they entered at times with ardour, despite their precocious gravity, into the simple joys and amusements of childhood, as is testified by the eager delight with which they regarded the presents of the toys they received.

The earliest notice we have of Branwell Brontë is that Charlotte remembered having seen her mother playing with him during one golden sunset in the parlour of the parsonage at Haworth. Later, we are informed that Mr. Brontë brought from Leeds on one occasion a box of wooden soldiers for him. The children were in bed, but the 'next morning,' says Charlotte, in one of her juvenile manuscripts, 'Branwell came to our door with a box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of bed, and I snatched up one and exclaimed, “This is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the duke!” When I had said this, Emily likewise took up one and said it should be hers; when Anne came down she said one should be hers. Mine was the prettiest of the whole, and the tallest, and the most perfect in every part. Emily’s was a grave-looking fellow, and we called him “Gravey.” Anne’s was a queer little thing much like herself, and we called him “Waiting-boy.” Branwell chose his, and called him “Buonaparte.”‘ So Charlotte relates these glad incidents of their childhood with pleasure, and places on record the joy they inspired.

Mr. Brontë says, ‘When mere children, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own, in which the Duke of Wellington, my daughter Charlotte’s hero, was sure to come off conqueror; when a dispute would not infrequently arise amongst them regarding the comparative merits of Buonaparte, Hannibal, and Cæsar.’

In acting their early plays, they performed them with childish glee, and did not fail at times to ‘tear a passion to tatters.’ They observed that Tabby did not approve of such extraordinary proceedings; but on one occasion, with increased energy of action and voice, they so wrought on her fears that she retreated to her nephew’s house, and, as soon as she could regain her breath, she exclaimed, ‘William! yah mun gooa up to Mr. Brontë’s, for aw’m sure yon childer’s all gooin mad, and aw darn’t stop ‘ith hause ony longer wi’ ‘em; an’ aw’ll stay here woll yah come back!’ When the nephew reached the parsonage, ‘the childer set up a great crack o’ laughin’,’ at the wonderful joke they had perpetrated on faithful Tabby.

Mr. Brontë — like other parents and friends of precocious and gifted children, who, in after-life have become celebrated in religion, art, poetry, literature, politics, or war, and who have given out in childhood tokens of brilliant and sterling gifts which have been recorded in their biographies — saw in his own children evidences of that mental power, fervid imagination, and superior faculty of language and expression, which were developed in them in after-years. He often fancied that great powers lay in his children, and it cannot be doubted that he sometimes looked forward to and hoped for a brilliant future for his offspring. It was this hope that cheered him, and he gave to Mrs. Gaskell, for publication, all the evidences of genius in his son and daughters, as children, which he could remember. But, from the information he imparted to that writer, we can scarcely gather, I fear, sufficient to justify the inference he drew, or appears to have drawn, for the particulars given border too much on the trivial and unimportant. Perhaps Mr. Brontë failed to remember the special evidences he had observed of what he intended to convey at the actual moment of communication. Be this as it may, no doubt remained on his mind that genius was apparent in his children above and apart from their eager reading of magazines and newspapers, nor that other schemes and objects occupied their thoughts than the interests and contentions of the political parties of the hour.

‘When my children were very young,’ says Mr. Brontë, — ‘when, as far as I can remember, the oldest was about ten years of age, and the youngest about four, — thinking that they knew more than I had yet discovered, in order to make them speak with less timidity, I deemed that, if they were put under a sort of cover, I might gain my end; and, happening to have a mask in the house, I told them all to stand and speak boldly from under cover of the mask. I began with the youngest (Anne, afterwards Acton Bell), and asked what a child like her most wanted; she answered, “Age and experience.” I asked the next (Emily, afterwards Ellis Bell) what I had best do with her brother Branwell, who was sometimes a naughty boy; she answered, “Reason with him, and, when he won’t listen to reason, whip him.” I asked Branwell what was the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of man and woman; he answered, “By considering the difference between them as to their bodies.”‘ In answer to a question as to which were the two best books, Charlotte said that ‘the Bible,’ and after it the ‘Book of Nature,’ were the best. Mr. Brontë then asked the next daughter, ‘What is the best mode of education for a woman;’ she answered, ‘That which would make her rule her house well.’ He then asked the eldest, Maria, ‘What is the best mode of spending time;’ she answered, ‘By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity.’ He says he may not have given the exact words, but they were nearly so, and they had made a lasting impression on his memory.

But the intellectual pabulum of Mr. Brontë’s children, for some time, consisted, for the most part, as we are told, of magazines and newspapers. As these took the place of toy-books and fairy tales, their young minds were attracted by such moral subjects and entertaining stories as were treated of in the serials of the day; and their attention was also largely engaged in the political questions which were then debated in the Houses of Parliament. Imbibing from their father their religious and political views and opinions, they became strong partizans and supporters of the leading Conservatives in the House of Lords and the House of Commons. They had often heard conversations between their father and aunt on these subjects; they listened with interested attention, and obtained information as to the outer world and its pursuits. By their surroundings their minds were soon raised above the thoughts, desires, and interests of childhood in general; and, under the circumstances, though it may seem odd, it is not extraordinary that wooden soldiers should thus be made, by these talented children, to represent the two great opposing warriors of the present age.

In addition to the general bringing-up of his children at home, and the formal tasks which Mr. Brontë set them, magazines and other publications were thrown about, and Maria, being the eldest, was wont to read the newspapers when she was less than nine years old, and reported matters of home and foreign interest, as well as those relating to the public characters and current affairs of the day, to her young brother and sisters. Indeed, so earnest was her relevancy on such occasions in these unchildish and grave questions, that she could talk upon them with discriminating intelligence to her father, whose interest in his children thus grew, as their faculties expanded. The young Brontës, though still in childhood's years, were soon no longer children in intellect: they touched, in fact, the 'Shores of Reality' at an earlier age than most children; and, though interested sometimes, perhaps momentarily, in trivial matters, they seem to have turned almost everything to literary account. Even Branwell's toys, which they all received so gleefully, gave rise to the 'Young Men's Play.'

Mr. Brontë, though interested deeply in the gradual development of the mental gifts of his children, did not fail, after his wife's death, to promote and protect their health, and he availed himself of the means which the chapelry of Haworth afforded. For this object he encouraged recreation on the moors at suitable times, and subjected the young members of his family to the pure and exhilarating breeze that, redolent of heather, breathed over them from the sea, during the summer and autumnal months.

On Tuesday, September the 2nd, 1824, a severe thunderstorm, and an almost unprecedented downfall of rain which resembled, in volume, a waterspout, caused the irruption of an immense bog, at Crow Hill, an elevation, between Keighley and Colne, and about one thousand feet above the sea-level. The mud, mingled with stones, many of large size, rolled down a precipitous and rugged clough that descended from it. Reaching the hamlet of Pondens, the torrent expanded and overspread the corn-fields adjoining to the depth of several feet, with many other devastating consequences.

Mr. Brontë regarded this as the effect of an earthquake, and he sent a communication to the 'Leeds Mercury,' in which he says: 'At the time of the irruption, the clouds were copper-coloured, gloomy, and lowering, the atmosphere was strongly electrified, and unusually close.' In the same month — on Sunday, September 12th, 1824 — he preached a sermon on the subject, in Haworth Church, in which he informed his hearers that, the day of disaster being exceedingly fine, he had sent his little children, who were indisposed, accompanied by the servants, to take an airing on the common, and, as they stayed rather longer than he expected, he went to an upper chamber to look out for their return. The heavens over the moors were blackening fast; he heard the muttering of distant thunder, and saw the frequent flashes of lightning. Though, ten minutes before, there was scarcely a breath of air stirring, the gale freshened rapidly and carried along with it clouds of dust and stubble. 'My little family,' he continued, 'had escaped to a place of shelter, but I did not know it.' These were Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Anne. Their sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, were then at Cowan Bridge.

When Mr. Brontë accepted the living of Haworth, he had found existing there a Grammar School, and he took in it a special and personal interest, for it was an old institution, was endowed, and had recently been renovated. It was his policy to show that he took an interest in it; so that, by adding his support to that of the trustees, he might possibly confirm their favourable opinion of him, and secure their continued good feeling. This was essential at the time, as any appearance of coldness on his part towards their cherished foundation would have perhaps evoked a spirit akin to that which caused the compulsory resignation of Mr. Redhead, or have induced an estrangement between himself and the trustees. It is stated, with regard to this Grammar School, that one Christopher Scott by will, dated the 4th of October, 13th of Charles I., gave a school-house which he had built adjoining the church-way; and ordained that there should be a school-master who should be a graduate at least, a bachelor, if not a master of arts, and who should teach Greek and Latin. The school had been enlarged in 1818, when the Brontë family were still at Thornton, and a new house was then erected for the master by the trustees.

As this foundation was designed to provide a classical education for its students, it was one to which the better classes in the neighbourhood need not have hesitated to entrust their children for superior instruction than could possibly be had in the ordinary schools of the district. The school was situated close to the parsonage, a lane only intervening, and it was commodious and lightsome. But Mr. Brontë, on his arrival, found that it had not for some time been maintained as a regular Grammar School: that there was little or no demand for the advantages of a classical education for their children among the inhabitants of the chapelry. Yet the master who received the appointment from the trustees at the Midsummer of 1826, although not even a graduate of either of the universities, was stated to be competent to teach Latin, and was a man of considerable attainments, instructing both boys and girls in every essential branch of knowledge. In this the tutor differed nothing from some of his immediate predecessors. But, though education of this sort was thus immediately at hand, Mr. Brontë does not appear to have availed himself of it for his daughters, or his son Branwell, for any great length of time. Mrs. Gaskell says, indeed, that their regular tasks were given by himself. Mr. Brontë, however, probably heard his children repeat early lessons set by the master in order to ascertain with what facility they had learned them. At a later date, Branwell and his sisters took a larger interest in the Grammar School, and they became active and willing teachers in the Sunday-school, which was connected with it. They were, indeed, often seen, as is yet remembered, in the processions of the scholars.

Although Mr. Brontë had taken vigilant and affectionate care to promote the health of his children, he was well aware that though he could strengthen their constitutions in some sort, delicate by nature as they were, he could not ward off with certainty the diseases and sufferings incident to childhood, from which his children were, indeed, unfortunately destined to suffer. Solicitude therefore came upon the parsonage when Maria and Elizabeth were attacked by measles and whooping-cough. Recovering partially from these attacks, it was thought desirable to send them — perhaps partly for change of air — to a school which had somewhat recently been established at Cowan Bridge, a hamlet on the coach-road between Leeds and Kendal, which was easily reached from Haworth, as the coach passed daily. This school was especially established for the board and education of the daughters of such clegymen of the Establishment as required it. It was begun, as we know from Mrs. Gaskell's 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' by the Rev. William Carus Wilson; and we are aware also that severe and unqualified censures were passed upon its situation and management by the author of 'Jane Eyre,' in after-years, under the description of Lowood, and that the Ellen Burns of the story was no other than Maria Brontë. Readers of 'Jane Eyre' became indignant, and the Cowan Bridge School was execrated, denounced, and condemned by the public, to the utter distress and pain of its founder and patron.

In reference to this affair, Charlotte indeed said to her future biographer that 'she should not have written what she did of Lowood in "Jane Eyre" if she had thought the place would have been so immediately identified with Cowan Bridge, although there was not a word in her account of the institution but what was true at the time when she knew it. She also said that she had not considered it necessary in a work of fiction to state every particular with the impartiality that might be required in a court of justice, nor to seek out motives, and make allowances for human failings, as she might have done, if dispassionately analyzing the conduct of those who had the superintendence of the institution.' Mrs. Gaskell believes Charlotte 'herself would have been glad of an opportunity to correct the over strong impression which was made upon the public mind by her vivid picture, though even she, suffering her whole life long both in heart and body from the consequences of what happened there, might have been apt, to the last, to take her deep belief in facts for the facts themselves — her conception of truth for the absolute truth.'

But it is only just to Mr. Wilson to say that the low situation of the premises fixed upon, the arrangement of the school-buildings, and the inefficient management of the domestic department, do not appear to have been so fatal to the boarders, even if we admit all the alleged severities of the regimen. For, when a low fever, or influenza cold, which was not regarded by Dr. Batty as 'either alarming or dangerous,' broke out at the school, and some forty of the pupils fell more or less under its influence, none died of it at Cowan Bridge, and only one, Mrs. Gaskell informs us, from after consequences at home; and, though delicate, the Brontë children entirely escaped the attack. Mrs. Gaskell has, however, entered at considerable length into a detailed account of the alleged mismanagement of the school, the severities exercised over the pupils — especially by one of the responsible tutors, 'Miss Scatcherd,' — the cooking and insufficiency of food, the general neglect of sanitary regulations in the domestic department, and the utter unfitness of the place itself for the continued health and comfort of the inmates. But the biographer of Charlotte Brontë in after-years considerably modified the severe strictures which her heroine had thought fit to describe in 'Jane Eyre,' — an admirable work of fiction, though not necessarily one of fact — and she says, speaking of Charlotte's account of the Cowan Bridge School: 'The pictures, ideas, and conceptions of character received into the mind of the child of eight years old were destined to be reproduced in fiery words a quarter of a century afterwards. She saw but one side of Mr. Wilson's character; and many of those who knew him at the time assure me of the fidelity with which this is represented, while at the same time they regret that the delineation should have obliterated, as it were, nearly all that was noble and conscientious.' It appears also that Mr. Wilson had 'grand and fine qualities' — which were left unnoticed by Charlotte — of which the biographer had received 'abundant evidence.' Of these Mr. Brontë seems to have been aware, as Charlotte and Emily were sent back to Cowan Bridge after the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth. Mrs. Gaskell wonders Charlotte did not remonstrate against her father's decision to send her and Emily back to the place, knowing, as we may suppose she did, of the alleged infliction which her dead sisters had endured at the very school to which she and Emily were returning. Surely such a very miserable state of things as is described in 'Jane Eyre' could not have existed at the time to impress on Charlotte's mind such a dread as we are asked to believe she had, and Mr. Brontë could not be aware that any serious objections to the school existed. Indeed, the true condition of the institution at the period is apparent from the testimony of the noble and benevolent Miss Temple of 'Jane Eyre,' whose husband thus writes: 'Often have I heard my late dear wife speak of her sojourn at Cowan Bridge; always in terms of admiration of Mr. Carus Wilson, his parental love to his pupils, and their love for him; of the food and general treatment, in terms of approval. I have heard her allude to an unfortunate cook who used at times to spoil the porridge, but who, she said, was soon dismissed.'

While at Cowan Bridge, Maria's health had suddenly given way, and alarming symptoms declared themselves. Mr. Brontë was sent for. He had known nothing of her illness, and was terribly shocked when he saw her. He ascended the Leeds coach with his dying child. Mrs. Gaskell says, 'the girls crowded out into the road to follow her with their eyes, over the bridge, past the cottages, and then out of sight for ever.'

The poignancy of Mr. Brontë's grief on this occasion was profound, and all but insupportable. Here was his first-born, the early joy of his home at Hartshead, the intelligent and brilliantly gifted companion of the first few years of his widowed life — dying before him! She, whose innocent and thoughtful converse had cheered his solitary moments, and whose merry laugh had often made the hearth glad, whose affectionate care of her little brother and sisters, disinterested as it was incessant, supplied for them the offices of their deceased mother — was fading from his sight! Arriving at Haworth, they were received with sincere and tearful sympathy by Miss Branwell, and with childish alarm and dread by Branwell and Anne. Every care which affection could provide was bestowed on the sinking child, but she died, a few days after her arrival, on May 6, 1825.

Elizabeth, too, struck down with the same fatal disease, came home to die of consumption on June 15 in the same year, but a month and a few days after her sister. These sorrowful events were never forgotten by Branwell, and the impressions made upon his mind by the deaths and funeral rites he had witnessed became the theme of some of his later and more mournful effusions.

The early recollection of Maria at Cowan Bridge was that she was delicate, and unusually clever and thoughtful for her age. Of Elizabeth Miss Temple writes: ‘The second, Elizabeth, is the only one of the family of whom I have a vivid recollection, from her meeting with a somewhat alarming accident; in consequence of which I had her for some days and nights in my bedroom, not only for the sake of greater quiet, but that I might watch over her myself…. Of the two younger ones (if two there were) I have very slight recollections, save that one, a darling child under five years of age, was quite the pet nursling of the school.’

‘This last,’ says Mrs. Gaskell, ‘would be Emily. Charlotte was considered the most talkative of the sisters — a “bright, clever little child.”‘

CHAPTER V.

BRANWELL'S BOYHOOD.

Reunion of the Brontë Family — Branwell is the supposed Prototype of Victor Crimsworth — That Character not a complete Portrait of Branwell — His Friendships — His Visit to the Keighley Feast — Its Effect on Branwell's Nerves — The Wrestle — The Lost Spectacles — Fear of his Father's Displeasure — Mrs. Gaskell's Story of the 'Black Bull' Incident Questioned — Miss Branwell and her Nephew.

Upon the return of Charlotte and Emily from Cowan Bridge, the youthful Brontës, whom death had spared, were united again; and, for some years more, followed their pursuits together, until Charlotte went to school at Roe Head in 1831. Branwell was the constant companion of his sisters during these childish years, and they all looked upon him with pride and affection. Charlotte, in those days, was a sympathetic friend to him; and, in his later years, he felt it a source of deep regret that she was somewhat estranged. But the gentle Emily — after the death of Maria — was his chief companion, and a warm affection never lost its ardour between them. The sisters were quick to perceive the Promethean spark that burned in their brother, and they looked upon Branwell, as indeed did all who knew him, as their own superior in mental gifts. In his childhood even, Branwell Brontë showed great aptitude for acquiring knowledge, and his perceptive powers were very marked. He was, too, gifted with a sprightly disposition, tinged at times with great melancholy, but he acquired early a lively and fascinating address. There was a fiery ardour and eagerness in his manner which told of his abundant animal spirits, and he entered with avidity into the enjoyments of the life that lay before him. Charlotte, who knew well the treasures of her brother's opening faculties, his ability, his learning, and his affection, saw also many things that alarmed her in his disposition. She saw the abnormal and unhealthy flashing of his intellect, and marked that weakness and want of self-control which left Branwell, when subjected to temptation, a prey to many destructive influences, whose effect shall hereafter be traced. There is reason to believe that Charlotte pictures this period of Branwell's life in 'The Professor,' where she describes the childhood of Victor Crimsworth; and, though the extract is rather long, it is given here as valuable, because it furnishes a full record of the early powers of Branwell, and of the manner in which his sister — by the light of subsequent events — looked upon them and upon his failings, and it will be seen that towards the latter she is somewhat inflexible.

'Victor,' she makes William Crimsworth say, 'is as little of a pretty child as I am of a handsome man … he is pale and spare, with large eyes…. His shape is symmetrical enough, but slight…. I never saw a child smile less than he does, nor one who knits such a formidable brow when sitting over a book that interests him, or while listening to tales of adventure, peril, or wonder…. But, though still, he is not unhappy — though serious, not morose; he has a susceptibility to pleasurable sensations almost too keen, for it amounts to enthusiasm…. When he could read, he became a glutton of books, and is so still. His toys have been few, and he has never wanted more. For those he possesses he seems to have contracted a partiality amounting to affection; this feeling, directed towards one or two living animals of the house, strengthens almost to a passion…. I saw in the soil of his heart healthy and swelling germs of compassion, affection, fidelity. I discovered in the garden of his intellect a rich growth of wholesome principles — reason, justice, moral courage, promised, if not blighted, a fertile bearing…. She (his mother) sees, as I also see, a something in Victor's temper — a kind of electrical ardour and power — which emits, now and then, ominous sparks; Hunsden calls it his spirit, and says it should not be curbed. I call it the leaven of the offending Adam, and consider that it should be, if not *whipped* out of him, at least soundly disciplined; and that he will be cheap of any amount of either bodily or mental suffering which will ground him radically in the art of self-control. Frances (his mother) gives this *something* in her son's marked character no name; but when it appears in the grinding of his teeth, in the glittering of his eye, in the fierce revolt of feeling against disappointment, mischance, sudden sorrow, or supposed injustice, she folds him to her breast, or takes him to walk with her alone in the wood; then she reasons with him like any philosopher, and to reason Victor is ever accessible; then she looks at him with eyes of love, and by love Victor can be infallibly subjugated. But will reason or love be the weapons with which in future the world will meet his violence? Oh, no! for that flash in his black eye — for that cloud on his bony brow — for that compression of his statuesque lips, the lad will some day get blows instead of blandishments, kicks instead of kisses; then for the fit of mute fury which will sicken the body and madden his soul; then for the ordeal of merited and salutary suffering out of which he will come (I trust) a wiser and a better man.'

The natural adornments and defects of Branwell's mind in boyhood, which may to some extent be traced in Charlotte's picture of Victor Crimsworth, in 'The Professor,' must not be regarded otherwise than as possessing a general resemblance to those which are found in that character. Physically, Branwell and Crimsworth were dissimilar, though mentally there is a portraiture; but even here, Charlotte, having him in her mind when she sketched the character of Victor, exaggerated therein, as she had done in other instances, the actual defects of her brother. It is true, nevertheless, that those who knew Branwell Brontë in early life could see in him the original of Victor Crimsworth.

In the following pages the greatness of Branwell's genius may be observed, — great, though marred by the errors and misfortunes of his life, — as well as by the sorrows which his impulsive, kindly, and affectionate nature brought upon himself, sorrows thus sadly set forth by his sister as the outcome of his passions, and described by her as the penalty of his future years.

In Branwell Brontë, the 'leaven of the offending Adam' might now and then certainly be observed, but it was largely modified by the ameliorating influences of his home; and, although, from the failings common to humanity, the children of Mr. Brontë could not be free, his early waywardness and petulance were, by the influence of sex, more forcibly expressed than such failings could be in his sisters. Between the children of Mr. Brontë, however, there existed even more than the ordinary affections of childhood. At this period of their lives, they were ignorant of the wiles of corrupt human nature, and Branwell, with all the lightsome exuberance of his boyhood, returned without stint the ardent and deep affection of his sisters. But, when a few years had rolled on, he awoke to the sunny morning of youth; and, in the absence of a brother, sought companionship with certain youths of Haworth, and made them playmates. Amongst them was one, the brother of some friends of his sisters, who became to him a personal associate, and it was with this companion that he was wont to sport on the moors, across the meadows, and, with joyous laugh, along the streets of the village.

The survivor of these two friends gives me an incident that occurred at the time of the annual Feast at Keighley, which the youths visited. The town was, as is usual on such occasions, crowded with booths and shows, and various places of entertainment. Players and riders, — men and women, — clothed in gay raiments, rendered brilliant with spangles, paced backwards and forwards along their platforms to the sound of drums, organs, and Pandean pipes, cymbals, tambourines, and castanets. There were stalls, too, weighted with nuts and various confectionaries, and there were also rocking-boats and merry-go-rounds, with other amusements.

As the evening advanced, and the shows were lighted up, Branwell's excitement, hilarity, and extravagance knew no bounds: he would see everything and try everything. Into a rocking-boat he and his friend gaily stepped. The rise of the boat, when it reached its full height, gave Branwell a pleasant view of the fair beneath; but, when it descended, he screamed out at the top of his voice, 'Oh! my nerves! my nerves! Oh! my nerves!' On each descent, every nerve thrilled, tingled, and vibrated with overwhelming effect through the overwrought and delicate frame of the boy. Leaving the fair, the two proceeded homeward; and, reaching a country spot, near a cottage standing among a thicket of trees, Branwell, still full of exuberant life, proposed a wrestle with his companion. They engaged in a struggle, when Branwell was overthrown. It was not until reaching the village, and seeing the lights in the windows, with considerably enlarged rays, that he became aware he had lost his spectacles, — for Branwell was, like his sister Charlotte, very near-sighted. This was, indeed, no little trouble to him, as he was in great fear lest his father should notice his being without them, and institute unpleasant inquiries as to what had become of them. He told his fears to his companion; but, after a sleepless night for both, Branwell's friend was early on the spot in search of the missing spectacles, when the woman living in the cottage close by, seeing a youth looking about, came to him, and, learning for what he sought, brought out the glasses which she had picked up from the ground just before he came. M — — , glad of the discovery, hastened to the parsonage, which he reached to find Branwell astir, who was overjoyed on receiving the missing spectacles, as the danger of his father's displeasure was avoided.

Mrs. Gaskell has written an account of the brother of the Brontë sisters, but from what source I am unable to ascertain. After giving him credit for those abilities in his boyhood of which evidence is given in these pages, she says that: 'Popular admiration was sweet to him, and this led to his presence being sought at Arvills, and all the great village gatherings, for the Yorkshiremen have a keen relish for intellect; and it likewise procured him the undesirable distinction of having his company recommended by the landlord of the "Black Bull" to any chance traveller who might happen to feel solitary or dull over his liquor. "Do you want some one to help you with your bottle, sir? If you do, I'll send up for Patrick" (so the villagers called him to the day of his death, though, in his own family, he was always Branwell). And, while the messenger went, the landlord entertained his guest with accounts of the wonderful talents of the boy, whose precocious cleverness and great conversational powers were the pride of the village.' This account of the landlord being accustomed to send to the parsonage for Branwell to come down to the 'Bull' at Haworth on these occasions is denied by those who knew Branwell at the time, as well as by the landlord. The latter always said that he never ventured to do anything of the kind. It would have been a vulgar liberty, and an unpardonable offence to the inmates of the parsonage had he done so. Besides, the message would, in all probability, have been delivered to a servant, or perhaps to Mr. Brontë himself, or to one of his daughters, and Branwell would have been forbidden, for the credit of the family, to lend himself for such a purpose at the public-house below.

Branwell in these early days was not only the beloved of the household, but the special favourite of his aunt. This good lady was proud of her family and name, a name which her nephew bore to her infinite satisfaction, so that his sometimes rough and noisy merriment made his aunt glad, rather than grieved, because it was the true indication of health of mind and body. She easily pardoned his boyish defects: and at times, as she parted his auburn hair, she looked in his face with fondness and affection, giving him moral advice, consistent with his age, and showing him how, by sedulously cultivating the abilities with which God had blessed him, he would attain an excellent position in the world. It was this gentle and disinterested guide that Providence had placed in the stead of his mother, to impart to her son the good maxims she would herself have given him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LITERARY TASTES OF THE CHILDREN.

The youthful Compositions of the Brontës — Their Character — Branwell's Share in them — 'The Secret,' a Fragment — The Reading of the Brontë Children — Branwell's Character at this Period.

Mr. Brontë, perhaps, made use of a slight hyperbole when he said that, as soon as they could read and write, Charlotte and her brother and sisters used to invent and act little plays of their own; but it is certain that, at an early period of their lives, they took pleasure and pride in seeing their thoughts put down in the manifest form of written words. Charlotte, indeed, gives a list of the juvenile works she had composed. They filled twenty-two volumes, and consisted of Tales, Adventures, Lives, Meditations, Stories, Poems, Songs, &c. Without repeating all the titles which Mrs. Gaskell and others have published, it may be said that the productions manifested extraordinary ability and industry. Branwell, Emily, and Anne partook of the same spirit, and displayed similar energy according to the leisure they could command.

Before Charlotte went to Roe Head, in January, 1831, Branwell worked with his sisters in producing their monthly magazine, with its youthful stories. Mrs. Gaskell has quoted Charlotte's introduction to the 'Tales of the Islanders,' one of these 'Little Magazines,' dated June, 1829, from which it appears that a remark of Branwell's led to the composition of the play of that name, and that he chose the Isle of Man as his territory, and named John Bull, Astley Cooper, and Leigh Hunt as the chief men in it. Charlotte gives the dates of most of their productions. She says: 'Our plays were established, "Young Men," June, 1826; "Our Fellows," July, 1827; "Islanders," December, 1827. These are our three great plays that are not kept secret. Emily's and my best plays were established the 1st of December, 1827; the others March, 1828. Best plays mean secret plays; they are very nice ones. All our plays are very strange ones. Their nature I need not write on paper, for I think I shall always remember them. The "Young Men's" play took its rise from some wooden soldiers Branwell had; "Our Fellows" from "Æsop's Fables;" and the "Islanders" from several events which happened.'

It would be difficult to arrive at a correct understanding of the literary value of these productions of the youthful Brontës, but it would be interesting to know what kind of assistance Branwell was able to give in the work, as well as what was the general merit of these early compositions. Mrs. Gaskell makes some mention of Branwell's literary abilities in his youth. It is certain, from all we know, that his mind was as much occupied in these matters as his sisters', and that his ambition corresponded with theirs. It has, indeed, been placed on record by Mrs. Gaskell that he was associated with his sisters in the compilation of their youthful writings. This author says, also, that their youthful occupations were 'mostly of a sedentary and intellectual nature.'

Among the youthful stories of which Charlotte, as has been already mentioned, wrote a catalogue or list, there was one, of which Mrs. Gaskell has published a fragment in fac-simile, written in a small, elaborate, and cramped hand — so small, indeed, as to be of little use to the general reader. In the 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' this was inserted as a specimen of the handwriting. It shows truly the literary ability, dramatic skill, and force of imagination of the children at the period of their lives of which I speak, and affords an interesting specimen of the character of these early works. A few extracts from it may be given here: —

THE SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

A dead silence had reigned in the Home Office of Verdopolis for three hours in the morning of a fine summer's day, interrupted only by such sounds as the scraping of a pen-knife, the dropping of a ruler, or an occasional cough; or whispered now and then some brief mandate, uttered by the noble first secretary, in his commanding tones. At length that sublime personage, after completing some score or so of despatches, addressing a small slightly-built young gentleman who occupied the chief situation among the clerks, said:

'Mr. Rymer, will you be good enough to tell me what o'clock it is?'

'Certainly, my lord!' was the prompt reply as, springing from his seat, the ready underling, instead of consulting his watch like other people, hastened to the window in order to mark the sun's situation; having made his observation, he answered: ''Tis twelve precisely, my lord.'

'Very well,' said the marquis. 'You may all give up then, and see that all your desks are locked, so that not a scrap of paper is left to litter the office. Mr. Rymer, I shall expect you to take care that my directions are fulfilled.' So saying, he assumed his hat and gloves, and with a stately tread was approaching the vestibule, when a slight bustle and whispering among the clerks arrested his steps.

'What is the matter?' asked he, turning round. 'I hope these are not sounds of contention I hear!'

'I — and — ' said a broad, carrotty-locked young man of a most pugnacious aspect, 'but — but — your lordship has forgotten that — that — — '

'That what?' asked the marquis, rather impatiently.

'Oh! — merely that this afternoon is a half-holiday — and — and — — '

'I understand,' replied his superior, smiling, 'you need not tax your modesty with further explanation, Flanagan; the truth is, I suppose, you want your usual largess, and I'm obliged to you for reminding me — will that do?'

he continued, as, opening his pocket-book, he took out a twenty-pound bank bill and laid it on the nearest desk.

‘My lord, you are too generous,’ Flanagan answered; but the chief secretary laughingly laid his gloved hand on his lips, and, with a condescending nod to the other clerks, sprang down the steps of the portico and strode hastily away, in order to escape the noisy expressions of gratitude which now hailed his liberality.

On the opposite side of the busy and wide street to that on which the splendid Home Office stands, rises the no less splendid Colonial Office; and, just as Arthur, Marquis of Douro, left the former structure, Edward Stanley Sydney departed from the latter: they met in the centre of the street.

‘Well, Ned,’ said my brother, as they shook hands, ‘how are you to-day? I should think this bright sun and sky ought to enliven you if anything can.’

‘Why, my dear Douro,’ replied Mr. Sydney, with a faint smile, ‘such lovely, genial weather may, and I have no doubt does, elevate the spirits of the free and healthy; but for me, whose mind and body are a continual prey to all the heaviest cares of public and private life, it signifies little whether sun cheer or rain damp the atmosphere.’

‘Edward,’ replied Arthur, his features at the same time assuming that disagreeable expression which my landlord denominates by the term ‘scorney;’ ‘now don’t begin to bore me, Ned, with trash of that description, I’m tired of it quite: pray have you recollected that to-day is a half-holiday in all departments of the Treasury?’

‘Yes; and the circumstance has cost me some money; these silly old customs ought to be abolished in my opinion — they are ruinous.’

‘Why, what have you given the poor fellows?’

‘Two sovereigns;’ an emphatic hem formed Arthur’s reply to the communication.

They had now entered Nokel Street, and were proceeding in silence past the line of magnificent shops which it contains, when the sound of wheels was heard behind them, and a smooth-rolling chariot dashed up and stopped just where they stood. One of the window-glasses now fell, a white hand was put out and beckoned them to draw near, while a silvery voice said,

‘Mr. Sydney, Marquis of Douro, come hither a moment.’

Both the gentlemen obeyed the summons, Arthur with alacrity, Sydney with reluctance.

‘What are your commands, fair ladies?’ said the former, bowing respectfully to the inmates of the carriage, who were Lady Julia Sydney and Lady Maria Sneaky.

‘Our commands are principally for your companion, my lord, not for you,’ replied the daughter of Alexander the First; ‘now, Mr. Sydney,’ she continued, smiling on the senator, ‘you must promise not to be disobedient.’

‘Let me first know what I am required to perform,’ was the cautious answer, accompanied by a fearful glance at the shops around.

‘Nothing of much consequence, Edward,’ said his wife, ‘but I hope you’ll not refuse to oblige me this once, love. I only want a few guineas to make out the price of a pair of earrings I have just seen in Mr. Lapis’s shop.’

‘Not a bit of it,’ answered he. ‘Not a farthing will I give you: it is scarce three weeks since you received your quarter’s allowance, and if that is done already you may suffer for it.’

With this decisive reply, he instinctively thrust his hands into his breeches’ pockets, and marched off with a hurried step.

‘Stingy little monkey!’ exclaimed Lady Julia, sinking back on the carriage-seat, while the bright flush of anger and disappointment crimsoned her fair cheek. ‘This is the way he always treats me, but I’ll make him suffer for it!’

‘Do not discompose yourself so much, my dear,’ said her companion, ‘my purse is at your service, if you will accept it.’

‘I am sensible of your goodness, Maria, but of course I shall not take advantage of it; no, no, I can do without the earrings — it is only a fancy, though to be sure I would rather have them.’

‘My pretty cousin,’ observed the marquis, who, till now, had remained a quiet though much-amused spectator of the whole scene, ‘you are certainly one of the most extravagant young ladies I know: why, what on earth can you possibly want with these trinkets? To my knowledge you have at least a dozen different sorts of ear-ornaments.’

‘That is true; but then these are quite of another kind; they are so pretty and unique that I could not help wishing for them.’

‘Well, since your heart is so much set upon the baubles, I will see whether my purse can compass their price, if you will allow me to accompany you to Mr. Lapis’s.’

‘Oh! thank you, Arthur, you are very kind,’ said Lady Julia, and both the ladies quickly made room for him as he sprang in and seated himself between them.

In a few minutes they reached the jeweller’s shop. Mr. Lapis received them with an obsequious bow, and proceeded to display his glittering stores. The pendants which had so fascinated Lady Julia were in the form of two brilliant little humming-birds, whose jewelled plumage equalled if not surpassed the bright hues of nature….

This gay and pleasant fragment of a story, in which the characters and scenes are so freshly drawn, may well be imagined as one of the best, if not the best, of these productions of the Brontë children. We may, indeed, regard the spirit and style of these early stories as the outcome of their eager and observant reading of the magazine and newspaper articles within their reach — when their plastic minds would receive indelible impressions, from which they, perhaps without knowing it, acquired the knowledge and practice of accurate literary composition, and of how to clothe their thoughts in fitting words. Their retentive memories, and their intuitive faculty of putting things, brought them thus early to the threshold of the republic of letters. Mrs. Gaskell states that these works were principally written by Charlotte in a hand so small as to be ‘almost impossible to decipher without the aid of a magnifying glass.’ The specimen she gives is written in an upright hand, and was an attempt to represent the stories in a kind of print, as near as might be to type. If, however, Charlotte and Emily ever accustomed themselves in these early works to this diminutive type-like writing, they threw it off completely in after-years. This, Branwell never did, and Mrs. Gaskell’s fac-simile page is not without some resemblance to one of his ordinary pages of manuscript reduced in size.

Mr. T. Wemyss Reid observes that Mrs. Gaskell, in speaking of the juvenile performances of the Brontë children, ‘paid exclusive attention to Charlotte’s productions.’ ‘All readers of the Brontë story,’ he says, ‘will remember the account of the play of “The Islanders,” and other remarkable specimens, showing with what real vigour and originality Charlotte could handle her pen while she was still in the first years of her teens.’ And he adds that ‘those few persons who have seen the whole of the juvenile library of the family bear testimony to the fact that Branwell and Emily were at least as industrious and successful as Charlotte herself.’

Even at this early period the youthful Brontës had read industriously. ‘Blackwood’s Magazine’ had, as early as the year 1829, asserted itself to Charlotte’s childish taste as ‘the most able periodical there is,’ and ever afterwards the whole family looked with the greatest pleasure for the brilliant essays of Christopher North and his coterie. Of other papers they saw ‘John Bull’ and the ‘Leeds Intelligencer,’ both uncompromising Conservatives, and the ‘Leeds Mercury,’ of the opposite party. The youthful Brontës were also readers of the ‘British Essayists,’ ‘The Rambler,’ ‘The Mirror,’ and ‘The Lounger,’ and they were great admirers of Scott.

But the advice which Charlotte afterwards gave to her friend ‘E,’ with regard to books for perusal, shows that their reading had been much wider: Shakespeare, Milton, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope, Byron, Campbell, and Wordsworth; Hume, Rollin, and the ‘Universal History;’ Johnson’s ‘Poets,’ Boswell’s ‘Johnson,’ Southey’s ‘Nelson,’ Lockhart’s ‘Burns,’ Moore’s ‘Sheridan,’ Moore’s ‘Byron,’ and Wolfe’s ‘Remains;’ and for natural history, she recommends Bewick, Audubon, White, and, strangely enough, Goldsmith. Branwell’s favourite poets were Wordsworth and the melancholy Cowper, whose ‘Castaway’ he was always fond of quoting. The Brontës, in their young years, obtained much of their intellectual food from the circulating library at Keighley.

The extraordinary literary activity which prompted these children never afterwards left them; and Branwell, along with his sisters, was, as we have seen, the author of many effusions of remarkable character. But, as time passed on, and experience was gained, his literary productions began to acquire more vigour and polish. Yet the tone of his mind, however joyous it might be at times, recurred, when the immediate occasion had passed, to that pensive melancholy which, throughout his life, was his most marked characteristic.

Mr. Brontë looked with supreme pleasure on the growing talents of his children; but his principal hope was centred in his son, who, as he fondly trusted, should add lustre to and perpetuate his name. The boy, in these years, was precocious and lively, overflowing with humour and jollity, ready to crack a joke with the rustics he met, and all the time gathering in, with the quickest perception, impressions, both for good and ill, of human nature. Mr. Brontë sedulously, to the utmost of his power, attending to the education of Branwell, did not see the instability of his son's character, or did not apprehend any mischief from the acquaintances he had formed.

The incumbent of Haworth had distinct literary leanings, and it delighted him to find that his son had manifested literary capacity. It has been urged as somewhat of a reproach against Mr. Brontë that he did not send Branwell to a public school, but relied solely upon his own tutorship for his son's education. Situated as Mr. Brontë was, such a step as that said to have been recommended to him was unnecessary. The Grammar School adjoining was under the superintendance of a master who was well qualified to give a higher education to his pupils, if required; and Mr. Brontë himself was equally well able to do the same, but his daily duties within his chapelry left him little or no time to take upon himself the entire education of his son: all he could do was to watch and ascertain occasionally how he was progressing. Mr. Brontë, indeed, might have given the finishing touches to his son's instruction. Those, however, who knew the brilliant youth in the ripeness of his early manhood, recognized the extent of the knowledge he had acquired, and felt, too, that he had been sufficiently well-trained to know how to put it to good use.

CHAPTER VII.

YOUTH.

Charlotte goes to Roe Head — Return Home — Branwell at the Time — The Companion of his Sisters — Escorts Charlotte on a Visit — He becomes Interested in Pugilism — His Education — His Love for Music — His Retentive Memory — His Personal Appearance — His Spirit.

Little more of interest seems to be known concerning the Brontës prior to the year 1831, but it is very apparent that Mr. Brontë exercised a large influence in the formation of his children's habits and characters. He, for instance, had a study in which he spent a considerable portion of his time. The children had their study also. Mr. Brontë had written poems and tales, and was wont to tell strange stories at the breakfast-table. The children imitated him in these things. Mr. Brontë took an enthusiastic interest in all political matters; and here the children followed him also. In short, they copied him in almost everything. Afterwards, he was accustomed to hold himself up as an example for their guidance, and to tell them how he had struggled and worked his way to the position he held; and there is no doubt that his children had a great admiration for his career.

Miss Branwell's influence was altogether distinct from that of Mr. Brontë. While taking pride in the mental ability of her nephew, she aimed at making his sisters into good housewives and patterns of domestic and unobtrusive virtue. With this object, turning her bed-chamber into a school-room, she taught them to sew and to embroider; and they occupied their time in making charity clothing, a work which she maintained 'was not for the good of the recipients, but of the sewers; it was proper for them to do it.' Under Miss Branwell they likewise learned to clean, to wash, to bake, to cook, to make jams and jellies, with many other domestic mysteries; and here, as in everything else, they were apt pupils.

But, towards the end of the year 1830, it was decided that Charlotte should seek a wider training elsewhere; and a school, kept by Miss Wooler, at Roe Head, between Leeds and Huddersfield, was fixed upon. It was a quaint, old-fashioned house, standing in a pleasant country, which had an interest for Charlotte, for it lay not far from Hartshead, where her father's first Yorkshire curacy had been. This circumstance, together with the proximity of the remains of Kirklees priory — which had their traditions of Robin Hood — and the strange local stories she heard from Miss Wooler, led her afterwards to make this district the scene of her novel of 'Shirley.' Miss Wooler was a kind, motherly lady who took an interest in each one of her pupils. She had long been a keen observer, and knew well how to put her knowledge to use in tuition. In this school, Charlotte, a girl of sixteen, was an indefatigable student, scarcely resting in her pursuit of knowledge. She was not exactly sociable, and sat often alone with her book in play-hours — a thin fragile girl, whose brown hair overshadowed the page on which her eyes, ‘those expressive orbs,’ were so intently fixed. Her companions remarked at that time that she had a great store of out-of-the-way knowledge, while on some points of general information she was comparatively ignorant. But when Charlotte left Roe Head, in June, 1832, she returned to the parsonage at Haworth with more expanded ideas, and with wider knowledge, and possessing, perhaps, a keener relish for the delights of the literary world. At Roe Head Charlotte made the acquaintance of her life-long friend ‘E,’ and also of Mary and Martha ‘T.’

The family of Brontë appears, about this time, to have been in perfect peace. Charlotte had corresponded with Branwell when she was at Roe Head, as a pupil of Miss Wooler; and Mrs. Gaskell has published portions of a letter sent from that place to him on May 17th, 1832, when he was in his fifteenth year, in which she showed her old political leanings wherein Branwell shared. It runs: ‘Lately I had begun to think that I had lost all interest which I used formerly to take in politics; but the extreme pleasure I felt at the news of the Reform Bill’s being thrown out by the House of Lords, and of the expulsion, or resignation, of Earl Grey, &c., convinced me that I have not as yet lost all my penchant for politics. I am extremely glad that aunt has consented to take in “Fraser’s Magazine;” for though I know from your description of its general contents it will be rather uninteresting when compared with “Blackwood,” still it will be better than remaining the whole year without being able to obtain a sight of any periodical whatever; and such would assuredly be the case, as, in the little wild moorland village where we reside, there would be no possibility of borrowing a work of this description from a circulating library. I hope with you that the present delightful weather may contribute to the perfect restoration of our dear papa’s health; and that it may give aunt pleasant reminiscences of the salubrious climate of her native place.’

Charlotte’s political principles were strongly Conservative, as were those of her father, brother, and sisters, and these principles were intensified in them all by their religious opinions. They held, consistently enough, the cherished political convictions of their party, and they looked upon every concession made to liberal clamour as an inroad on the very vitals of the Constitution. Hence the jubilation of Charlotte when the Reform Bill was rejected by the House of Lords on October 7th, 1831. But the march of events, in after-years, modified their political opinions considerably.

Branwell at this period, while still under tuition at home, was the constant companion of his sisters, and frequently accompanied them on their visits to the moors and picturesque places in the neighbourhood. ‘E,’ writing in

‘Scribner,’ says: ‘Charlotte’s first visit from Haworth was made about three months after she left school. She travelled in a two-wheeled gig, the only conveyance to be had in Haworth except the covered-cart which brought her to school. Mr. Brontë sent Branwell as an escort; he was *then* a very dear brother, as dear to Charlotte as her own soul; they were in perfect accord of taste and feeling, and it was a mutual delight to be together. Branwell had probably never been from home before; he was in wild ecstacy with everything. He walked about in unrestrained boyish enjoyment, taking views in every direction of the turret-roofed house, the fine chestnut-trees on the lawn (one tree especially interested him because it was iron-girthed, having been split by storms, but still flourishing in great majesty), and a large rookery, which gave to the house a good background — all these he noted and commented upon with perfect enthusiasm. He told his sister he was leaving her in Paradise, and if she were not intensely happy she never would be! Happy, indeed, she then was *in himself*, for she, with her own enthusiasm, looked forward to what her brother’s great promise and talent might effect. He would be, at this time, between fifteen and sixteen years of age.

In the June of 1833, when Branwell was about this age, we learn that he drove his sisters with great delight in a trap, or dog-cart, to Bolton Bridge, to meet their friend ‘E,’ who waited for the young Brontës in a carriage at the ‘Devonshire Arms.’ This was a visit to the ancient abbey and immemorial woods and vales of Bolton. We may well imagine from the time of the year — the ‘leafy month of June,’ when all nature would be glad, and the deep woods gay with varied leaves, while the Wharfe, of amber hue, foamed and rushed impetuously down its rocky channel, from the moorland hills above historic Barden, to the peaceful meads of the ruined abbey — that the hearts of the Brontës rejoiced, enchanted and impressed by these glorious and stately solitudes.

It cannot but be regretted that, while his sisters could confer in confidence and familiarity together, and enjoy a community of interests in secrecy and affection, Branwell had no brother whose sympathetic counsel he could embrace; but, thrown back upon himself, was led to seek the society of appreciative friends, who made him acquainted with the manners and customs of the world, and the vices of society, before his time had yet come to know much concerning them. It was, indeed, unfortunately, no infrequent circumstance to see the plastic, light-hearted, unsuspecting Branwell listening to the coarse jokes of the sexton of Haworth — the noted John Brown — while that functionary was employed in digging the graves so often opened in the churchyard, under the shadow of the parsonage.

It was the kind of society in which he sought relaxation at Haworth that led him to take an interest, which he long retained, in the pugilistic ring. The interest in pugilism and the ‘noble art,’ it must, however, be remembered, had been made fashionable by wealthy, influential, and titled people, amongst whom was Lord Byron, and by the fops and dandies of an earlier period.

Jackson, the noted professor, was a great friend of the poet, and, on several occasions, visited him at Newstead. Early in this century, too, many men about town were accustomed to assemble for practice at the academy of Angelo and Jackson. Branwell, also, read with eagerness the columns of 'Bell's Life in London,' and other sporting papers of the day. The names and personal appearance of the celebrated pugilists who, at that time, to the delight of the *élite* of society, pounded each other till they were unlike anything human — for the applause of the multitude, and the honour of wearing the 'Champion's Belt,' — were familiar to him. 'Bell's Life' was taken in by an innkeeper at Haworth; and the members of the village boxing-club, one of whom was Branwell, were posted up in all public matters relating to the 'noble art of self-defence.' They had sundry boxing-gloves, and, at intervals, amused themselves with sparring in an upper room of a building at Haworth. These practices, at the time of which we speak, were but boyish amusements, and were no doubt congenial to the animal spirits and energetic temperaments of those who entered into them, and they were so more especially to Branwell, who had abundance of both. But it may be that here he became acquainted with young men whose habits and conduct had a deleterious influence upon him at the very opening of his career. If, however, Branwell's high spirit allowed him sometimes to be led away by his companions, his natural goodness of heart brought a ready and vehement repentance. The respect he felt for his father's calling, magnified, in his eyes, any fault of his own — who ought to have been more than ordinarily good — and, exaggerating his failings, he would lament his 'dreadful conduct' in deep distress. Such unmistakable evidences of sincerity and truthfulness procured him a ready pardon. He was necessarily his aunt's favourite; but he attached himself to all about him with so much readiness of affection that it is quite evident, whatever his youthful faults, they were of a superficial character only.

The studies which Branwell pursued in his youth were noticed by his literary friends, in after-years, to bear a considerable fruit of classical knowledge. He possessed then a familiar and extensive acquaintance with the Greek and Latin authors. He knew well the history and condition of Europe, and of this country, in past and present times; and his conversational powers on these, and the current literature of the day, were of the highest order. Mr. Brontë had obtained musical tuition for his son and daughters, and Branwell was enthusiastically fond of sacred music, and could play the organ. He was acquainted with the works of the great composers of recent and former times; and, although he could not perform their elaborate compositions well, he was always so excited when they were played for him by his friends that he would walk about the room with measured footsteps, his eyes raised to the ceiling, accompanying the music with his voice in an impassioned manner, and beating time with his hand on the chairs as he passed to and fro. He was an enthusiastic admirer of the oratorio of 'Samson,' which Handel deemed equal to the 'Messiah,' and of the Mass-music of Haydn, Mozart, and others.

Religion had, indeed, been deeply implanted in Branwell’s breast; but, whenever he heard sacred music like this, his devotional impressions were deepened, and even in times of temptation, indulgence, and folly the influence of early piety was never effaced. Among his minor accomplishments, he had acquired the practice of writing short-hand with facility, and also of writing with both hands at the same time with perfect ease, so that he possessed the extraordinary power of writing two letters at once. His hand-writing was of an upright character. Branwell, too, had a wonderful power of observation, and a most retentive memory. It is on record that, before he visited London, he so mastered its labyrinths, by a diligent study of maps and books, that he spoke with a perfect knowledge of it, and astonished inhabitants of the metropolis by his intimate acquaintance with by-ways and places of which they even had never heard. In person he was rather below the middle height, but of refined and gentleman-like appearance, and of graceful manners. His complexion was fair and his features handsome; his mouth and chin were well-shaped; his nose was prominent and of the Roman type; his eyes sparkled and danced with delight, and his fine forehead made up a face of oval form which gave an irresistible charm to its possessor, and attracted the admiration of those who knew him. Added to this, his address was simple and unadorned, yet polished; but, being familiar with the English language in its highest form of expression, and with the Yorkshire and Hibernian *patois* also, he could easily make use of the quaintest and broadest terms when occasion called for them. It was, indeed, amazing how suddenly he could pass from the discussion of a grave and lofty subject, or from a deep disquisition, or some exalted poetical theme, to one of his light-hearted and amusing Irish or Yorkshire sallies. He could be sad and joyful almost at the same time, like the sunshine and gloom of April weather; exhibiting, by anticipation, the future lights and shadows of his own sad, short, and chequered existence. In a word, he seemed at times even to be jocular and merry with gravity itself.

It is known also that Branwell, at that period of his young life — when manhood with its hopes and joys, its enterprises and aspirations, its affections and its responsibilities, stretched before him — was also busily laying, to the best of his ability, the foundations, as he trusted, of a brilliant literary or artistic future.

CHAPTER VIII.

ART-AIMS OF THE BRONTËS.

Love of Art in the Youthful Brontës — Their elaborate Drawings — J. B. Leyland, Sculptor — Spartacus — Mr. George Hogarth's Opinion — Art Exhibition at Leeds — Mr. William Robinson, their Drawing-Master — Branwell aims at Portrait-Painting — J. B. Leyland in London — Branwell and the Royal Academy — He visits London.

The biographers of the Brontë sisters have pointed out especially the artistic instinct of Charlotte and Emily; and the originality and fidelity of their written descriptions, and the beauty of the composition and 'colour' of their word-paintings, have formed an inexhaustible theme for the various writers on the excellencies of Brontë genius. The appreciation of art possessed by the members of this family, whether in drawing, painting, or sculpture, was manifested early; but, though highly gifted in felicity and aptness of verbal expression in describing natural scenery, and in the delineation of personal character, they were not endowed, in like degree, with the faculty of placing their ideas — weird and wild, or beautiful and joyous as they might be — in that tangible and fixed shape in which artists have perpetuated the emanations of their genius. The devotion of Charlotte and Branwell to art was, nevertheless, so intense, and their belief was so profound, at one time, that the art-faculty consisted of little more than mechanical dexterity, and could be obtained by long study and practice in manipulation, that the sister toiled incessantly in copying, almost line for line, the grand old engravings of Woollett, Brown, Fittler, and others till her eyesight was dimmed and blurred by the sedulous application; and Branwell, with the same belief, eagerly followed her example. Great talent and perseverance they undoubtedly had; and, although we are not possessed of any original drawings by Charlotte of striking character, we know that Branwell drew in pen-and-ink with much facility, humour, and originality. His productions, in this manner, will be more particularly noticed in the course of this work. Charlotte's drawings were said to be pre-Raphaelite in detail, but they had no approach to the spirit of that school; and Branwell's pictures, however meritorious they might be as likenesses of the individuals they represented, lacked, in every instance, that artistic touch which the hand of genius always gives, and cannot help giving. While at school at Roe Head, Charlotte had been noticed by her fellow-pupils to draw better and more quickly than they had before seen anyone do, and we have been told by one of them that 'she picked up every scrap of information concerning painting, sculpture, poetry, music, &c., as if it were gold.' The list she drew up a year or two earlier of the great artists whose works she wished to see, shows us that her interest in art, even in her thirteenth year, led her to read of them and their productions.

On her return home in 1832, Charlotte wrote on the 21st July respecting her course of life at the parsonage: ‘In the morning, from nine o’clock till half-past twelve, I instruct my sisters, and draw; then we walk till dinner-time. After dinner I sew till tea-time, and after tea I either write, read, or do a little fancy-work, or draw as I please.’ Charlotte also told Mrs. Gaskell ‘that, at this period of her life, drawing, and walking with her sisters, formed the two great pleasures and relaxations of her day.’

Mr. Brontë, observing that his son and daughters took pleasure in the art of drawing, and believing this to be one of their natural gifts that ought to be cultivated, perhaps as an accomplishment which they might some time find useful in tuition, obtained for them a drawing-master. But he also observed that Branwell excelled his sisters in the art, while he likewise painted in oils, and he may at times have had some hope that his son would become a distinguished artist.

It is apparent, indeed, that drawing not only engaged much of Charlotte’s leisure, but that it formed a part of home-education. Her sisters as well as herself underwent great labour in acquiring the art in these early years, and Branwell also was not behind them in industrious pursuit of the same object. Charlotte even thought of art as a profession for herself; and so strong was this intention, that she could scarcely be convinced that it was not her true vocation. In short, her appreciative spirit always dwelt with indescribable pleasure on works of real art, and she derived, from their contemplation, one of the chief enjoyments of her life. ‘To paint them, in short,’ says Jane Eyre, speaking of the pictures she is showing to Mr. Rochester, ‘was to enjoy one of the keenest pleasures I have ever known.’ The love the Brontës thus cherished for art became, as time passed on, a passion, and its cultivation a pressing and sensible duty. They were not aware that their industry in, and devotion to it, as they understood it, were a misdirection of their genius. How far this love of it, and this eagerness to acquire a knowledge of the mysteries of composition and analysis, and to be possessed of art-practice and art-learning, may have been excited and encouraged by the success that had been achieved by others with whom they were familiar, in the same direction, may be surmised.

In the year of Mr. Brontë’s appointment to Hartshead, there was born, at Halifax, an artist, Joseph Bentley Leyland, who was destined to become the personal friend and inspirer of Mr. Brontë’s son, Branwell. Leyland, in his early boyhood, showed, by the ease and faithfulness with which he modelled in clay, or sketched with pencil, the objects that attracted his attention, the direction of his genius. The sculptor, as he grew in years, treated, with artistic power, classical subjects which had not hitherto been embodied in sculpture. At the age of twenty-one he modelled a statue of Spartacus, the Thracian, a general who, after defeating several Roman armies in succession, was overthrown with his forces by Crassus the prætor, and slain. The dead leader was represented at that moment after death before the muscles have acquired extreme rigidity. The statue, which was of colossal size, was modelled from living subjects, and was, in all respects, a production far beyond the sculptor's years. It was the most striking work of art at the Manchester Exhibition in the year 1832, and was favourably noticed in the 'Manchester Courier,' on November the 3rd of that year. Such notices were productive of increased exertion, which soon became manifest in the creation of other more lofty and successful works. Among these was a colossal bust of Satan, some six feet in height, which was pronounced to be 'truly that of Milton's "Arch-angel ruined."' Mr. George Hogarth, the father-in-law of Charles Dickens — a gentleman of literary power and knowledge — was the editor of the 'Halifax Guardian' at the time, and visited the artist's small studio, where he saw, in one corner, under its lean-to roof, for the first time, the bust of Satan. He was astonished at its merit, and published his criticism of the work in the paper on May the 24th, 1834. Leyland was then strongly urged to forward the bust to London, which he did, with some others he had modelled; and the critics were invited to visit his studio. The favourable opinion which Mr. Hogarth published, in the paper of which he was editor, was endorsed, but in more flattering terms, in the 'Morning Chronicle' of December 2nd, 1834. But there was held at Leeds, in these years, the Annual Exhibition of the Northern Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts; and Leyland, before he sent his work to London, included it in his contributions to the exhibition at Leeds.

The oil-paintings and water-colour drawings that were hung there, in the summer of 1834, appear to have formed a fine and varied collection. There were beautiful landscapes in water-colour by Copley Fielding, and in oil by Alexander Nasmyth, John Linnel, Robert Macreth; and others were well represented, while historical paintings by H. Fradelle, sea-pieces by Carmichael, and animal paintings by Schwanfelder, always good, were highly creditable to these well-known names. A number of fine portraits by William Bewick and William Robinson added interest and beauty to the galleries. The reader may conceive, if he will, the Brontës — Charlotte and Branwell, and, it may be, Mr. Brontë and Emily — enjoying to the full the paintings and sculptures which were before them. He may fancy the suddenly expressed, 'Look, Charlotte!' as some newly discovered picture flashed as a keen delight on the eager fancy of Branwell's appreciative spirit. He may imagine the ready criticism of Charlotte, and the attempts which she and her brother made to divine how much thought had gone to make up the composition of a work. The young Brontë critics, as they looked on the colossal head of Satan — on the stern and inflexible firmness of the features 'whose superhuman beauty is yet covered with a cloud of the deepest melancholy;' on the representation 'of the great and glorious being sunk in utter despair,' — might ponder, perhaps, whether an ideal has dawned upon the imagination of the artist, and so been wrought from no model, but from the vision of his meditations, or whether success is, after all, but the evidence of painful elaboration. At any rate, it was just on such an exhibition of paintings and works of art that Charlotte and Branwell delighted to dwell in intelligent and educated observation.

That a new impetus and a new meaning were given to their art-practice about this time is certain, and it was probably not long after this date that Mr. Brontë engaged, for the instruction of his son and daughters, an artist of Leeds, the Mr. William Robinson I have mentioned as having contributed a number of portraits to the exhibition. The object of the Brontës was now to practise painting, and this able instructor was consequently engaged.

Mr. Robinson was a native of Leeds, who had, by natural talent and steady perseverance, acquired something more than a local reputation. His early love of art had been such that the wishes of his friends failed to divert him from its pursuit, and he received lessons from Mr. Rhodes, sen., of Leeds, an admirable painter in water-colours. But Mr. Robinson had a strong predilection for portrait-painting, to which he had devoted his powers, at the same time availing himself of every opportunity for improving in its practice. In the year 1820, he visited the metropolis, taking with him an introduction to Sir Thomas Lawrence, who received him with great kindness, and he became a pupil of this eminent artist. Sir Thomas, however, with noble generosity, declined any remuneration whatever, and Robinson assisted his master in his work. He was introduced to Fuseli, and gained the privilege of studying at the Royal Academy, his work being characterized by the requisite merit. He was stimulated to renewed exertion by this much desired success. In 1824, he had returned to his native town, where he procured numerous commissions. He was subsequently introduced to Earl de Grey, of whom he painted portraits, as also of his family. Mr. Robinson, in addition, painted four portraits for the United Service Club, one of which was of the Duke of Wellington, who honoured him with several sittings. Besides these, amongst his other works, was a portrait of the Princess Sophia, and a copy of one of the Duke of York for the Duchess of Gloucester. It was from this gentleman that Branwell Brontë and his sister received a few lessons in portrait-painting at the time of which I speak, and a knowledge of the master's career did not a little to fire the mind of the enthusiastic Branwell with ardour to aim in the same direction, while the contemporary efforts of others added fuel to the fire.

At this time there were certain artists of the neighbourhood who were trying their fortunes in London, and who were known to Branwell Brontë by reputation: C. H. Schwanfelder, the animal painter, and John W. Rhodes, the son of the artist under whom Mr. Robinson had studied. The father of the latter had endeavoured to dissuade him from making art his profession, but all to no purpose: the bent of his genius could not be curbed. He painted in water-colour and oil with great beauty and fidelity; the green lane, the wild flower hanging from an old wall, were his subjects. His works met with well-deserved encomiums in the London press, and with praise wherever they were exhibited; but, when full of aspiring hopes, he was attacked, like Girtin, Liversedge, and Bonnington, by inflammation in the eyes, and ill health. He died at the early age of thirty-three, and a memoir of him appeared in ‘The Art Journal’ of March, 1843. The determination of Charlotte and Branwell to take, as it were, the Temple of Art by forcible possession, was, it may be conceived, due also, in some measure, to the growing celebrity of Leyland; for, in literature and art, Halifax was nearer to the Brontës than any of the surrounding towns. The praise of Leyland’s works, moreover, had been re-published from the London press in all the papers of his native county, and poetic eulogies appeared in the ‘Leeds Intelligencer’ and in the ‘Leeds Mercury;’ and, therefore, that they were eager to emulate his works and to equal his success seems very probable.

I have felt it necessary to mention these influences, as they alone serve to explain how it was that Branwell and his sister were led to think of, and — as regards the brother — to persist for a time in making a profession of painting for which they had no special aptitude. Branwell, in fact, designed to become himself a portrait-painter, and he conceived that a course of instruction at the Royal Academy afforded the best means of preparation for that profession.

Being gifted with a keen and distinct observation, combined with the faculty of retaining impressions once formed, and being an excellent draughtsman, he could with ease produce admirable representations of the persons he portrayed on canvas. But it is quite clear that he never had been instructed either in the right mode of mixing his pigments, or how to use them when properly prepared, or, perhaps, he had not been an apt scholar. He was, therefore, unable to obtain the necessary flesh tints, which require so much delicacy in handling, or the gradations of light and shade so requisite in the painting of a good portrait or picture. Had Branwell possessed this knowledge, the portraits he painted would have been valuable works from his hand; but the colours he used have all but vanished, and scarcely any tint, beyond that of the boiled oil with which they appear to have been mixed, remains. Yet, even if Branwell had been fortunate in his work, he would only have attained the position, probably, of a moderate portrait-painter. His ambition, however, took a higher range, and he prepared himself for the venture, hoping that the desiderata which Haworth could not supply would be amply provided for him in London, when the long-desired opportunity arrived.

At Haworth he had been industrious, for he had painted some portraits of the members of his family, and of several friends. One of these is well described by Mrs. Gaskell, and her account is worth giving here: — ‘It was a group of his sisters, life-size, three-quarters length … the likenesses were, I should think, admirable. I only judge of the fidelity with which the other two were depicted, from the striking resemblance which Charlotte, upholding the great frame of canvas, and consequently standing right behind it, bore to her own representation, though it must have been ten years and more since the portraits were taken. The picture was divided, almost in the middle, by a great pillar. On the side of the column which was lighted by the sun stood Charlotte, in the womanly dress of that day of gigot sleeves and large collars. On the deeply shadowed side was Emily, with Anne's gentle face resting on her shoulder. Emily's countenance struck me as full of power; Charlotte's of solicitude; Anne's of tenderness. The two younger seemed hardly to have attained their full growth, though Emily was taller than Charlotte; they had cropped hair and a more girlish dress. I remember looking on these two sad, earnest, shadowed faces, and wondering whether I could trace the mysterious expression which is said to foretell an early death. I had some fond superstitious hope that the column divided their fate from hers who stood apart in the canvas, as in life she survived. I liked to see that the bright side of the pillar was towards *her* — that the light in the picture fell on *her*. I might more truly have sought in her presentment — nay, in her living face — for the sign of death in her prime.'

From Mrs. Gaskell's description of this one picture, it is apparent that Branwell possessed, not only the faculty, as we have seen, of obtaining excellent portraits, but that he had the ability to impress the faces of his sisters with thought, intelligence, and sensibility; and to invest them with the habitual expressions they wore, of power, solicitude, and tenderness. The deep reflection which Branwell bestowed on this picture, and the care he lavished on its mysterious composition, show unquestionably the aptitude and capacity of his own mind, which enabled him to obtain these essential expressions; and it is evident that his peculiarity of thought invested his picture with that sadness and gloom which, in after times, tinctured the poems he wrote under the solemn-sounding pseudonym of 'Northangerland.' This picture is only one among many others he painted in preparing himself for his intended studies at the Royal Academy; and the old nurse, Nancy Garrs, tells me that he often wanted to paint her portrait, but she told him that she did not think herself 'good-looking enough.'

At a later date Branwell related to Mr. George Searle Phillips the story of his artistic hopes. He spoke of the great fondness for drawing manifested by the whole family; and declared that Charlotte, especially, was well read in art-learning, and knew the lives of the old masters, whose works she criticized with discrimination and judgment. But he said that she had ruined her eyesight by making minute copies of line-engravings, on one of which she was occupied six months. He also spoke of his own passionate love of art, and of the bright and confident anticipations with which he had looked forward to his projected studies at the Royal Academy, which had been the cherished hope of his family and himself.

Leyland had visited London in the December of 1833, when he obtained from Stothard a letter of introduction to Ottley, the curator of the Elgin Marbles, to allow him to study the marbles in the British Museum. Permission was readily granted, and the sculptor availed himself of it. A year later

Leyland took up his residence in the metropolis. He was received in a friendly manner by Chantrey and Westmacott, the latter inviting him to dinner, and afterwards showing him his foundry at Pimlico, and his works in progress, among which was the statue of the Duke of York. He was also introduced to, and enjoyed the friendship of Nasmyth — the father of the eminent engineer whose story has recently been given to the world — and of Warley: one a landscape-painter of celebrity, and the other famed as an artist in water-colour. The latter, who had considerable faith in astrology, persisted in drawing the younger sculptor's horoscope. Among others, he became known to Haydon, under whom he subsequently studied anatomy. This lamented artist was a genuine friend, and it was under his instructions that Leyland perfected his natural perception of the grand and beautiful in art. While here he modelled, in life-size, a figure of 'Kilmeny,' in illustration of the passage in Hogg's 'Queen's Wake,' where the sinless maiden is awakened by Elfin music in fairy-land. It was a successful work, and was favourably noticed by the critics. It was subsequently purchased for the Literary and Philosophical Society of his native town.

It was while Leyland was in the metropolis that Charlotte wrote, on the 6th July, 1835:

'We are all about to divide, break up, separate. Emily is going to school, Branwell is going to London, and I am going to be a governess. This last determination I formed myself, knowing that I should have to take the step sometime, "and better sune as syne," to use the Scotch proverb; and knowing well that papa would have enough to do with his limited income, should Branwell be placed at the Royal Academy, and Emily at Roe Head.'

While this project was warmly engaging the attention of the Brontë family, Leyland was living in London, at the house of Mr. Geller, a mezzotinto-engraver, who was a native of Bradford; and, at the time, the sculptor modelled a group of three figures illustrative of a passage in Maturin's tragedy of 'Bertram,' which represented the warrior listening to the prior reading. The work was engraved by Geller. This group was said to be conceived in the 'true spirit of Maturin,' and met with the favourable notice of the London periodicals of the year 1835, the year of Branwell's visit to the metropolis. The reviews were also reproduced in most of the Yorkshire papers.

The design of putting Branwell forward as an artist, and of giving him the opportunity and the means of beginning and continuing his studies, where he might be imbued with the spirit of the great sculptors and painters who have left imperishable names, and whose works are stored in the public art-galleries of London, had at last been determined upon. The sacrifices the Brontë family were prepared to make in order to secure this object require but a passing notice here. Branwell was a treasured brother; and they would feel, no doubt, a sincere happiness in promoting his interests, in furthering his views, and in bringing his artistic abilities before the world. It would, however, seem scarcely possible that the difficulties attending Branwell's admission as a student at the Royal Academy had been duly considered. He could not be admitted without a preliminary examination of his drawings from the antique and the skeleton, to ascertain if his ability as a draughtsman was of such an order as would qualify him for studentship; and, if successful in this, he would be required to undergo a regular course of education, and to pass through the various schools where professors and academicians attended to give instruction. No doubt it was wished that Branwell should have a regular and prolonged preparation for his professional artistic career; but it would have lasted for years, and the pecuniary strain consequent upon it would, perhaps, have been severely felt, even if Branwell's genius had justified the outlay. But there is no evidence that he ever subjected himself to the preliminary test, or made an application even to be admitted as a probationer.

It would seem that, so far as Mr. Brontë was concerned, his promotion of the wishes of his children arose rather from a desire to gratify them. It does not appear that he had any over-sanguine expectation that Branwell could carry out his ardent intention of becoming an artist. Mr. Brontë's own wish was, indeed, that his son should adopt his profession, but the mercurial youth was probably little attracted by the functions of the clergyman's office.

To London Branwell, however, went, where, without doubt, his object was to draw from the Elgin Marbles, and to study the pictures at the Royal Academy and other galleries, with a perfectly honest intention. Whatever impression he may have received of his own powers as an artist, when he saw those of the great painters of the time, we have no certain knowledge; but it does not exceed belief that he was discouraged when he looked upon the brilliant chef d'oeuvres of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Gainsborough, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and others; and that, when he reflected on the immeasurable distance between his own works and theirs, his hopes of a brilliant artistic career were partially dissipated. Whether it was due to these circumstances, or that he had become more fully aware of the early struggles that meet all who attempt art as a profession, or that his courage failed him at the contemplation of the unhappy lot which falls to those who, either from lack of talent or through misfortune, fail to make their mark in the artistic world; or whether it was because his father was unable to support him in London during the years of preparation and study for the professional career, — the requirements of which had not been sufficiently considered, — is not now accurately known. Branwell, during his short stay in London, visited most of the public institutions; and, among other places, Westminster Abbey, the western façade of which he some time afterwards sketched from memory with an accuracy that astonished his acquaintance, Mr. Grundy.

Before he left the metropolis, Branwell could not resist a visit to the Castle Tavern, Holborn, then kept by the veteran prize-fighter, Tom Spring, a place frequented by the principal sporting characters of the time. A gentleman named Woolven, who was present through the same curiosity which led

Branwell there, noticed the young man, whose unusual flow of language and strength of memory had so attracted the attention of the spectators that they had made him umpire in some dispute arising about the dates of certain celebrated battles. Branwell and he became personal friends in after-years.

Branwell returned to the parsonage a wiser man. His disappointment that he was not to do as others were doing, whom he wished to emulate, was very great, but he was not yet finally discouraged. We shall see subsequently to what purpose Branwell put his artistic knowledge. The failure of the hopes regarding his academical career in art was keenly felt by his family. It was grievous as it was humiliating, but it was borne with exemplary patience and resignation. When these painful experiences had impressed the Brontë sisters with the hopelessness of high artistic study for Branwell, and when their eyes were opened to the consciousness that their large gifts did not include art, Charlotte wrote, in her novel of 'Villette,' under the character of Lucy Snowe: 'I sat bent over my desk, drawing — that is, copying an elaborate line-engraving, tediously working up my copy to the finish of the original, for that was my practical notion of art; and, strange to say, I took extreme pleasure in the labour, and could even produce curiously finished fac-similes of steel or mezzotinto plates — things about as valuable as so many achievements in worsted work, but I thought pretty well of them in those days.'

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLOTTE AT ROE HEAD.

Charlotte returns as a Teacher, with Emily as a Pupil, to Roe Head — Their Determination to Maintain themselves — Charlotte's Fears respecting Emily — Charlotte's religious Melancholy — Accuses herself of Flippancy — She is on the Borders of Despair — Anxiety to Know More of the World — Emily at Law Hill, Halifax, as a Teacher — Charlotte's Excitability — She returns Home out of Health.

'We are all about to divide, break up, separate,' Charlotte said, when conveying to her friend the news of the Academy project, and of her determination to enter upon life as a governess. If Branwell's ambition had encouraged her own, its failure made no change in her plans. She was 'sad,' she says, 'very sad,' at the thoughts of leaving home; yet she was going back to the school of Miss Wooler, whom she both loved and respected, to live at Roe Head, this time to teach, it is true, instead of to be taught. But her sister Emily was to accompany her, as a pupil of the school, and that they would be together was a consolation to both sisters; and Charlotte, too, would be near the homes of the friends she had made when she was herself a pupil there. It was a pleasure to think she would be able to see them sometimes.

At the end of July, then, the two proceeded to Roe Head. This was the first of those adventurous moves which the sisters, from time to time, made. One of the strongest features, indeed, in their lives is the persistency with which they essayed to maintain themselves, even when no apparently pressing necessity impelled them. Yet we may not doubt that one sad reflection sometimes moved them, and it was that their father's stipend ceased with his life; that they had no other resource beyond their own endeavours; and that, such was the uncertainty of all human concerns, they might at any moment be deprived of home, support, and shelter. It behoved them then to secure by their personal energies, while they were able, the very means of subsistence.

When Mr. Brontë saw his young family around him, and when he enjoyed the comfort of his hearth, the contingency of his death, and the consequent helplessness of his children, often struck him with apprehension and sadness. But he had the alleviation that they inherited, in a marked degree, his own adventurous and energetic disposition, whose successful career was always before them as an example and incentive to honourable endeavour.

Mr. Brontë looked back with just satisfaction on the early sacrifices he had made to advance himself in the world. His children were familiar with the story of his exertions. They, however, with far higher talents, were not possessed of the physical strength and powers of endurance which had aided his progress; and Charlotte and Emily, when any unusual strain was cast upon them, soon felt their strength exhausted, and they suffered depression of spirits as the consequence. Home-sickness was the great trouble of the younger sister, and, before she had been long at school, Emily grew pale and ill. Charlotte felt in her heart that, if she remained, she would die; and, at the end of three months, she returned to Haworth, where, alone among the moors, with all the wild things of nature, which had inspired so deep an interest in her feelings, she could be contented. But the youngest sister, Anne, came to Roe Head in her place, and she and Charlotte seem to have been very happy there for some time; but a tendency to religious melancholy had been developing in the elder sister's mind, imperceptibly, out of her deep religious feeling, and it increased upon her.

So early as the letter to 'E,' July 6th, 1835, she had spoken of 'duty, necessity, these are stern mistresses,' as controlling her action in seeking a situation. Her friend Mary went to see her, and in her letter to Mrs. Gaskell she says: 'I asked her how she could give so much for so little money, when she could live without it. She owned that, after clothing herself and Anne, there was nothing left, though she had hoped to be able to save something. She confessed it was not brilliant, but what could she do? I had nothing to answer. She seemed to have no interest or pleasure beyond the feeling of duty, and, when she could get, used to sit alone and "make out." She told me afterwards, that one evening she had sat in the dressing-room until it was quite dark, and then, observing it all at once, had taken sudden fright.' Some relaxation was gained by the Midsummer holidays of the year 1836. All the family were at home, and their friend 'E' visited them, so that a pleasant period of mental diversion was secured. But, after her return to her school, despondency came upon her again, and crowded her thoughts; and she wrote respecting her feelings in religious concerns: 'I do wish to be better than I am. I pray fervently sometimes to be made so. I have stings of conscience, visitings of remorse, glimpses of holy, of inexpressible things, which formerly I used to be a stranger to; it may all die away, and I may be in utter midnight, but I implore a merciful Redeemer, that, if this be the dawn of the Gospel, it may still brighten to perfect day. Do not mistake me — do not think I am good; I only wish to be so. I only hate my former flippancy and forwardness. Oh! I am no better than ever I was. I am in that state of horrid, gloomy uncertainty that, at this moment, I would submit to be old, grey-haired, to have passed all my youthful days of enjoyment, and to be settling on the verge of the grave, if I could only thereby insure the prospect of reconciliation to God, and a redemption through His Son's merits. I never was exactly careless of these matters, but I have always taken a clouded and repulsive view of them; and now, if possible, the clouds are gathering darker, and a more oppressive despondency weighs on my spirits. You have cheered me, my darling; for one moment, for an atom of time, I thought I might call you my own sister in the spirit; but the excitement is past, and I am now as wretched and hopeless as ever.'

Let us not under-estimate the mental suffering which could dictate this confession. Happily, this was not constantly present, nor her feelings always so acutely wrought upon. Even in the same letter from which the above is taken, she wishes her friends should know the thrill of delight which she experienced when she saw the packet of her friend thrown over the wall by the bearer, passing in his gig to Huddersfield Market. She persevered in her place, the whole tendency of her exaggerated reasoning forbidding her to seek that ease and relaxation which she needed so much; but she was not incapacitated for her duties, and probably her family were quite unaware of her troubles: so she remained.

Branwell and Emily were resolved not to be behind their sister in their endeavours, and they were full of anxiety to know more of the world than they could meet with at Haworth. Emily obtained a similar situation to Charlotte's, in a large school at Law Hill, near Halifax, where she found her duties far from light. Her extreme reserve with strangers is remembered by one who knew her there, but she was not at all of an unkindly nature; on the contrary, her disposition was generous and considerate to those with whom she was on familiar terms: her stay at Law Hill terminated at the end of six months. The place of her sojourn is a lofty elevation, overlooking Halifax. Emily would find the situation of the school agreeable to her taste, and to her delight in the weird and grand as presented by the solemn heath-grown heights of the West-Riding: besides, the air was as pure as that of Haworth, and Law Hill commanded finer views, among which the range of Oxenhope moors, in her father's chapelry, was visible. In the other direction, she could overlook the more cultivated district of Hartshead and Kirklees, and could see Roe Head, where her sisters Charlotte and Anne resided. Branwell also, emulating his sisters, obtained the situation of usher in the locality, which he retained for a few months.

Some adventures with their literary productions interested them at the close of this year, of which I shall have further to speak. Miss Wooler's removal of her school to Dewsbury Moor was, in some respects, unfortunate for the sisters, as the situation was less healthy than the former one, and, when Charlotte and Anne returned home at Christmas, in the year 1837, neither was well. Charlotte's nerves were over-strung, and Anne was suffering from chest affections, which conjured up anew their recollection of the deaths of Maria and Elizabeth from consumption. To add to their troubles, Tabby fell on the ice in the lane, and fractured her leg. The consequence of this was, that they had to forego the expected pleasure of a visit from their friend 'E,' through their attendance on the old servant, whom they were unwilling should be removed to her friends, however desirable this might be on many grounds. They even went so far as to refuse to eat at all, till their aunt, who had arranged the matter to the satisfaction of all concerned, except her nieces, should give up her intention of removing Tabby. They succeeded, and Tabby remained at the parsonage, where in time she became convalescent, and Charlotte was enabled to visit her friends before she resumed her occupation.

Charlotte again returned to her accustomed duties, her nervousness increasing, not the less; and Mrs. Gaskell says: ‘About this time she would turn sick and trembling at any sudden noise, and could hardly repress her screams when startled.’ Through Miss Wooler’s urgency, she was induced to consult a medical man, who advised her immediate return to Haworth, where quiet and rest had become for her imperatively necessary. Then her father sought for her the companionship of her two friends, Mary and Martha T — — , than whose society Charlotte had never known a more rousing pleasure. They came to stay at the parsonage, and their cheerful converse and agreeable manners greatly improved Charlotte’s health and spirits. We obtain an interesting picture of the young party in the following letter that Charlotte addressed to her friend ‘E,’ which Mrs. Gaskell has published:

‘Haworth,
‘June 9th, 1838.

‘I received your packet of despatches on Wednesday; it was brought me by Mary and Martha, who have been staying at Haworth for a few days; they leave us to-day. You will be surprised at the date of this letter. I ought to be at Dewsbury Moor, you know; but I stayed as long as I was able, and at length I neither could nor dared stay any longer. My health and spirits had utterly failed me, and the medical man whom I consulted enjoined me, as I valued my life, to go home. So home I went, and the change has at once roused and soothed me. I am now, I trust, fairly in the way to be myself again.

‘A calm and even mind like yours cannot conceive the feelings of the shattered wretch who is now writing to you, when, after weeks of mental and bodily anguish not to be described, something like peace began to dawn again. Mary is far from well. She breathes short, has a pain in her chest, and frequent flushings of fever. I cannot tell you what agony these symptoms give me; they remind me so strongly of my two sisters, whom no power of medicine could save. Martha is now very well; she has kept in a continual flow of good humour during her stay here, and has consequently been very fascinating….

‘They are making such a noise about me, I cannot write any more. Mary is playing on the piano; Martha is chattering as fast as her little tongue can run; and Branwell is standing before her, laughing at her vivacity.’

Branwell, in these days, was well enough, and could be lively enough, when occasion served. He had his hopes, his enthusiasm yet: but, in after-years, he was to fall into a yet deeper and more serious depression than that through which Charlotte had passed.

CHAPTER X.

BRANWELL BRONTË AND HIS SISTERS' BIOGRAPHERS.

The Light in which Biographers have regarded Branwell — Bibliography — Mrs. Gaskell — The Causes which led her into Error — Resentment of Branwell's Friends — Mr. George Searle Phillips — Branwell as Depicted by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid — Mr. F. H. Grundy's Notice of Branwell — Miss A. Mary F. Robinson's Portrait of Branwell.

It will be well here — before we reach the periods of Branwell's life that have been misunderstood — to pause, in our sketch of the Brontë family, in order to consider certain circumstances regarding him, which it will be impossible for any future writer on the Brontës to disregard. It is especially necessary to consider them in a book which — while dealing with the Brontë sisters, their lives and their works — proposes, as a special aim, to make Branwell's position clear. When Derwent Coleridge wrote the short biography of his father, which is prefixed to the poet's works, he approached the subject in a somewhat regretful way, asking if the public has a right to inquire as to that part of a poet's life which does not influence his fellow-men after death, and declaring that the privacy of the dead is sacred. He felt too keenly that the sanctity of Coleridge's life had been broken in upon by those who lacked both accurate knowledge and just discretion. It is a source of sincere regret to the writer of this volume that he, too, is compelled by circumstances to treat a part of his work almost in a deprecatory spirit, and sometimes to assume the position of defence. For, if the failings of Coleridge have been discovered and fed upon by those whose curiosity leads them to delight in such things, what shall we say of Patrick Branwell Brontë, whose misdeeds have not only been sought out with a persistency worthy of a better cause, but have also been exaggerated and misrepresented to a great degree, and whose whole life, moreover, has been contorted by writers who have endeavoured to find in it some evidence for their own hypotheses? It has been the misfortune of Branwell that his life has, to some extent, been already several times written by those who have had some other object in view, and who, consequently, have not been studious to acquire a correct view of the circumstances of it. These writers, it will be seen, have therefore, perhaps unavoidably, fallen into many grievous errors regarding him, so that his name, at this day, has come to be held up as a reproach and even as a token of ignominy. If it be remembered that Mrs. Gaskell, in her 'Life of Charlotte Brontë,' describes him as a drunkard and an opium-eater, as one who rendered miserable the lives of his sisters, and might very well have shot his father; that Mr. T. Wemyss Reid, in his ‘Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,’ has spoken of him as ‘this lost and degraded man;’ that Miss Robinson, in her ‘Emily Brontë,’ has called him a ‘poor, half-demented lonely creature,’ and has moralized upon his ‘vulgar weakness,’ his ‘corrupt and loathsome sentimentality,’ and his ‘maudlin Micawber penitence;’ and lastly that Mr. Swinburne, in a notice of the last-named work in the ‘Athenæum,’ has said, ‘of that lamentable and contemptible caitiff — contemptible not so much for his common-place debauchery as for his abject selfishness, his lying pretension, and his nerveless cowardice — there is far too much in this memoir;’ it may well appear that we have here a strange subject for a biography.

But, since the publication of Miss Robinson’s ‘Emily Brontë,’ — in which Branwell is specially degraded, — it has been felt by many admirers of the Brontës that it was desirable his life should be treated independently of the theories and necessities of his sisters’ biographers, and in a spirit not unfriendly to him; for there are many people who believe that Branwell’s genius has never been sufficiently recognized, and there are a few who know that, notwithstanding his many failings and misdeeds, the charges made against him are, not a few of them, wholly untrue, while many more are grossly exaggerated, and that his disposition and character have been wholly misrepresented. Having in my possession many of his letters and poems, and having been personally acquainted with him, I have undertaken the task of telling the story of his life in connection with the lives of his sisters, for I think that there is much in his strange and sad history that ought to be known, while sufficient evidence exists of his mental power to prove that he was a worthy member of the intellectual family to which he belonged. It may not be amiss here, in order to illustrate circumstances that will be alluded to in parts of this work, to touch slightly upon the bibliography of Branwell’s life, and endeavour to discover the causes which have contributed to the ill-repute in which he is generally held.

Mrs. Gaskell, who became acquainted with Charlotte Brontë after the deaths of her brother and sisters, when all that was most sorrowful in her life had been enacted, saw, or thought she saw, in her the evidences of a deep dejection, the result of a life passed under circumstances of misery and depression. In her ‘Life of Charlotte Brontë,’ this writer’s endeavour to trace the successive influences of the trials of Charlotte’s life upon her, and to find in them the explanation of what was, perhaps, in some measure, an idiosyncrasy of character, has led her, in the strength of her own preconception, to interpret many circumstances to the attestation of her theory. Such, at all events, is the explanation which Mr. T. Wemyss Reid has offered, in his ‘Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,’ of the partial manner in which Mrs. Gaskell has dealt with certain of Miss Brontë’s letters. If we conceive Mrs. Gaskell writing with this preconception, tending to give undue weight to all that was unhappy in the history of her heroine, we need feel little surprise that her account of the lives of the Brontës is too often a gloomy one, that their isolation at Haworth, their poverty, and their struggles have been exaggerated, or that, in order to throw in a sombre background to her picture, she was unduly credulous in listening to those unfounded stories with which she made Mr. Brontë to appear, in act, at least, diabolical, and which have helped to depict the career of Patrick Branwell Brontë in such dark and tragic colours. She had heard at Haworth the story of his disgrace, his subsequent intemperance, and his death. Herein she believed was the great sorrow of the sisters' minds, the care which had induced a morbid peculiarity in their writings, and cast a shadow upon their lives. Mrs. Gaskell seems to have thought it devolved upon her, not merely to picture beginnings of evil in the brother, and trace them to his ruin; but, also, to punish the lady whom she held responsible for what has been termed 'Branwell's fall.' To this end she thought it right to lay at the lady's door, in part, the premature deaths of the sisters; and, in sustaining the idea that the effect on them of the brother's disgrace was what she believed it to be, she was led to employ partial versions of the letters, and exaggerate the whole course of Branwell's conduct. Her book was read with astonishment by those whose characters were made to suffer by it, and she was obliged, in later editions, to omit the charges against the lady; and also those against Mr. Brontë. But Mrs. Gaskell still maintained that, whatever the cause, the effect was the same.

It was not believed at the time, by some, that, because Mrs. Gaskell had been obliged to withdraw the statements complained of, in the later editions of her work, they were necessarily untrue. Mr. Thackeray had said that the life was 'necessarily incomplete, though most touching and admirable,' and the original edition was still in circulation, and was pirated abroad.

The friends of Branwell Brontë, those who from actual acquaintance knew his mental power and real disposition, resented greatly the wrong that had been done to his memory; and several representations were made in his favour. One of these was in an article entitled: 'A Winter's Day at Haworth,' published in 'Chambers's Journal,' 1869. Mr. George Searle Phillips, in the 'Mirror,' of 1872, also published some valuable reminiscences which tended to show Branwell's true elevation of character and gentleness of disposition.

The publication of Mr. Wemyss Reid's 'Charlotte Brontë, a Monograph,' in the year 1877, while it called attention to the original view of Branwell's life and character, did not aim to remove it. Mr. Reid repudiated, with success, the idea that the effect of Branwell's career upon Charlotte and Emily was what Mrs. Gaskell represented it to have been, without expressing any dissent from the story itself. This writer does not, indeed, appear to have suspected that the explanation was to be found in the fact that Branwell was not so bad as he had been made to appear, or that Mrs. Gaskell had fallen into other errors besides those of the letters which he corrected. But, though Mr. Reid carefully avoided the reproduction of the details of Mrs. Gaskell's account of

Branwell's life, what reference is made to him in the 'Monograph,' after the period of his youth, is always in terms of reprobation, which have done nothing to discourage belief in the suppressed scandal. Moreover, Mr. Reid revived some of the charges against Mr. Brontë, and painted a sinister portrait of him.

It was under these circumstances that Mr. F. H. Grundy, C.E., another friend of Branwell's, in his 'Pictures of the Past' (1879), endeavoured to do some justice to his memory, and declared, notwithstanding his great failings, that his abilities were of a very high order, and his disposition one that should be admired. I have found Mr. Grundy's materials of use in this work. But, unfortunately, this friend of Branwell's wrote from recollection, and made such great mistakes in the chronology of his life that his account did not give a true interpretation of actual circumstances. Mr. Grundy, too, had evidently refreshed his memory with a perusal of Mrs. Gaskell's volume, and so his information was considerably tinctured with that writer's misconceptions. This notice had the very opposite effect to that which was intended, and has since been largely used by writers whose purpose has led them to rank Branwell with the fallen.

In Miss Robinson's recently published 'Emily Brontë,' the scandal of Branwell's life, which Mrs. Gaskell laid before the reading world, has been reproduced, and her evil report of his character greatly increased. 'Why,' it might well be asked, 'should it be necessary to publish the records of a brother's misdeeds as a conspicuous feature in a sister's memoir? Why revive a scandal that has been so long suppressed?' Miss Robinson has, indeed, given her reason, in that Branwell's sins had so large a share in determining the bent of his sister's genius, that 'to have passed them by would have been to ignore the shock which turned the fantasy of the "poems" into the tragedy of "Wuthering Heights,"' and here, probably, is the only adequate purpose that could have been found in doing so; but it is scarcely sufficient to explain why Miss Robinson has, almost from her first mention of Branwell Brontë to her remarks on his death, treated every act of his life with contumely, censure, and contempt, or that she has, in opposition to every previous opinion, represented his abilities as almost void. While Mr. Reid suggested that Emily Brontë, in writing her novel, must have obtained some of her impressions from her brother's conduct, Mr. Grundy had made a statement tending to show that Branwell had written a portion of the story himself. If Branwell's abilities were no better than Miss Robinson says they were, she has disposed of Mr. Grundy's assertion at once; but not the less does she employ other reasons for that end, and the degradation she has thought it necessary to show in Branwell, answers quite as much to prove the impossibility of his having written the work, as to picture the cause of brooding in Emily, under which she produced the tragedy of 'Wuthering Heights.'

With views similar to those with which Mrs. Gaskell wrote, Miss Robinson, in following the biographer of Charlotte, has fallen into the same errors. In order to make it clear that the part Branwell had in the production of ‘Wuthering Heights,’ by his sister, was subjective, this writer has found it necessary to show in his life much of what is worst in the characters of the story. So completely has Miss Robinson carried out this portion of her work, that Mr. Swinburne was led to say, in his notice of it, that ‘Emily Brontë’s tenderness for the lower animals … was so vast as to include even her own miserable brother.’ But Miss Robinson has not succeeded so far without much unfairness to the victim of her theory, in omissions and errors of fact. I shall have occasion to treat at some length, later, Branwell’s relationship both to ‘Wuthering Heights’ and ‘The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.’

I hope, indeed, to be able to prove that Branwell was (as all who personally knew him aver him to have been) a man of great and powerful intellectual gifts, to relieve his memory of much of the obloquy that has been heaped upon it, and to clearly show the remarkable individuality of his character. I shall find it necessary, in doing so, to take exception to the portions of Mrs. Gaskell’s ‘Life of Charlotte Brontë’ which deal with her brother, as to some extent I had to do to those which refer to Mr. Brontë. More especially, however, will it be necessary to deal with the fuller statements in the first edition of the work, and with their repetition and amplification in the more recent volumes of Mr. Reid and Miss Robinson.

I have thought it necessary to introduce these remarks in this place, in order that the reader, when he comes to the consideration of certain statements made by previous writers concerning Branwell, and his relationship with his sisters, may have a clear understanding of the views with which the works containing these statements have been written.

CHAPTER XI.

BRANWELL AT BRADFORD.

Branwell becomes a Freemason — His love of Art undiminished — Has Instruction in Oil-Painting — Commences Portrait-Painting at Bradford — His Commissions — His Letter to Mr. Thompson, the Artist — Miss Robinson's Charges of Misconduct — Her Erroneous Statements — Branwell's true Character and Conduct at Bradford — Remarks on his alleged Opium-eating there.

When Branwell returned from London it was not without sincere satisfaction that his acquaintances welcomed their gifted and versatile friend back to Haworth, certain of whom induced him to become a freemason. Thus Branwell was brought into closer connection with the convivial circles of the village.

There was held at Haworth, at the time, 'The Lodge of the Three Graces.' In this lodge Branwell was proposed as a brother, and accepted on the 1st of February, 1836, initiated February the 29th, passed March the 28th, and raised April the 25th of that year, John Brown being the 'Worshipful Master.' Branwell was present at eleven meetings in 1836, the minutes of one of these — September the 18th — being fully entered by him. On December the 20th of the same year, he fulfilled the duties of 'Junior Warden;' and, at seven meetings of the lodge, from January the 16th to December the 11th, 1837, he was secretary, and entered the minutes. He also, on Christmas Day of the same year, officiated as organist. In addition to his duties in connection with the Masonic Lodge, he likewise undertook the secretaryship of the local Temperance Society, of which he was a member.

Branwell's love of art had been too strong, and his interest in its practice too intense, to allow even such a check as that which his aspirations had received in the failure of the Academy project to finally discourage him. Hence it was, I suppose, when he had relinquished his place of usher that his passionate desire of becoming an artist, still cherished under disappointment, revived. He conceived, as the project of studying at the Royal Academy had not proved feasible, that, if he had a full course of instruction from Mr. Robinson, he could, in that way, qualify himself, perhaps as well, to adopt the profession of a portrait-painter, more valuable in those days, when photographers were not, than now; and Mr. Brontë, leaning to his son's wish, was induced to sanction the proposal, as it might provide Branwell with an alternative occupation to that of tutor, the only other that seemed open to him.

Mr. Robinson's charge, on the few occasions of his lessons at Haworth parsonage, had been two guineas for each visit. But it was now arranged that Branwell should receive instruction from the artist at his studio in Leeds. In this way he would not only have better opportunities of acquiring the art, but the cost would be much less. For this purpose, he stayed at an inn in Briggate, but occasionally took his master's pictures to Haworth to copy. Under this kind of tuition he continued for some months, when, having completed his studies, he resolved upon turning the instruction he had received, probably through the kindness of his aunt, to profitable account. With this professional intention, he engaged private apartments in Bradford, and took up his residence as a portrait-painter, under the interest of his mother's relative, the Rev. William Morgan, of Christ Church. Among others, he painted portraits of this gentleman, and of the Rev. Henry Heap, the vicar. For some months Branwell was successful in maintaining himself by these praiseworthy efforts; but it was scarcely to be expected that he could succeed sufficiently well in competition with the older and more experienced artists of the neighbourhood.

Among his other pictures, were portraits of Mrs. Kirby, his landlady, and her two children. One of these, a beautiful little girl, was his special favourite. At his frequent request, she dined with him in his private sitting-room, her pleasant smiles and cheerful prattling always charming him.

It may be mentioned here that, when Branwell had entered upon his studies under Mr. Robinson, he formed an acquaintance with a fellow-student, Mr. J. H. Thompson, who was a portrait-painter at Bradford. A close friendship grew up between them; and this artist, being more experienced than Branwell, gave, now and then, finishing touches to the productions of his young friend.

Soon after Branwell gave up his profession as an artist at Bradford, he wrote to Mr. Thompson, in reference to some misunderstanding which had arisen between himself and his landlady. The letter is dated from 'Haworth, May the 17th, 1839.'

'Dear Sir,

'Your last has made me resolve on a visit to you at Bradford, for certainly this train of misconceptions and delays must at last be put a stop to.

'I shall (Deo volente) be at the "Bull's Head" at two o'clock this afternoon (Friday), and *do* be there, or in Bradford, to give me your aid when I arrive!

'I am astonished at Mrs. Kirby. I have no pictures of hers to finish. But I said that, if I returned there, I would varnish three for her; and also I do not understand people who look on a kindness as a duty.

'Once more my heartfelt thanks to you for your consideration for one who has none for himself.

'Yours faithfully,

'P. B. Brontë.'

Mrs. Kirby had not been quite satisfied with the pictures before mentioned; but, on hearing Mr. Thompson's favourable opinion, she at once gave way. Although Branwell ceased his residence at Bradford for the reasons assigned, he afterwards painted portraits occasionally at Haworth; but also frequently visited his friends at the former place, having become acquainted with the poets and artists of the neighbourhood, as we shall presently see.

Miss Robinson has undertaken to draw Branwell's portrait at this juncture of his affairs, when she says he had attained the age of twenty years, though in fact he was twenty-two; and the following is the labour of her hands: 'He went to Bradford as a portrait-painter, and — so impressive is audacity — actually succeeded for some months in gaining a living there.… His tawny mane, his pose of untaught genius, his verses in the poet's corner of the paper could not for ever keep afloat this untaught and thriftless portrait-painter of twenty. Soon there came an end to his painting there. He disappeared from Bradford suddenly, heavily in debt, and was lost to sight until, unnerved, a drunkard, and an opium-eater, he came back to home and Emily at Haworth.'

These statements are simply untrue. I have the positive information of one who knew Branwell in Leeds, and who resided in Bradford at the time when he was there, that he did not leave that town in debt; that he certainly was not a drunkard; and that, if he took anything at all, it was but occasionally, and then no more than the commonest custom would permit. I would rather believe — if all other evidence were wanting — the account of Branwell given by the friends who knew him personally, and who, at the moment in which I write, are still living on the spot where he exerted himself to gain a living by the labour of his own hands, than the unfair, unjust, and exaggerated charges quoted above. But Branwell's letter to his friend disposes at once of the assertion that he 'disappeared from Bradford suddenly, heavily in debt, and was lost to sight.' And, as to the statement that he was unnerved and a drunkard, one should surely rather accept the evidence of those who knew him, that he was, on the contrary, as they unhesitatingly say, 'a quiet, unassuming young man, retiring, and diffident, seeming rather of a passive nature, and delicate constitution, than otherwise.' And, moreover, his visits to Bradford, after he had given up his profession there, were frequent, for his literary tastes, his artistic pursuits, and his musical abilities had secured him many friends in that town. Assuredly the biographer of Emily has been very unfortunate, to say the least, in her account of Branwell's honest, upright, and honourable endeavour to make his living by the profession of art at Bradford.

Miss Robinson asserts that Branwell was an opium-eater 'of twenty,' in addition to the other baneful habits she ascribes to him. There is, however, no reliable evidence that, at this period of his life, he was any such thing; and, considering the fact that the biographer of Emily has assigned Branwell's art-practice at Bradford to a period subsequent to his tutorship at Broughton-in-Furness, one may, perhaps, be permitted to suspect that she is equally in error in her assertions as to his opium-eating so young. Branwell did, indeed, later, fall into the baneful habit, and suffered at times in consequence; but there is no reason to believe that he became wholly subject to it, or was greatly injured by the practice, either in mind or body. We can only surmise as to the original cause of his use of opium; but, when we consider the extraordinary fascination which De Quincey's wonderful book had for the younger generation of literary men of his day, we shall recognize that Branwell, who read the book, in all probability fell under its influence. Let us remember, moreover, that the young man's two sisters had died of consumption, and that De Quincey declares the use of the drug had saved him from the fate of his father who had fallen a victim to the same scourge. Lastly, it should not be forgotten that, in the first half of this century, the use of opium became, in some sort, fashionable amongst literary men, and that many admirers of De Quincey and Coleridge deemed that the practice had received a sufficient sanction. But the former of these writers had used the drug intermittently, and we have reason to believe that Branwell, who followed him, did likewise. Let us, then, imagine the young Brontë, revelling in the realm of the dreamy and impassioned, and hoping fondly that consumption might be driven away, resolving to try the effect of the 'dread agent of unimaginable pleasure and pain,' a proceeding from which many less brave would have shrunk. Branwell had doubtless read, in the 'Confessions of an English Opium-eater,' that the drug does not disorder the system; but gives tone, a sort of health, that might be natural if it were not for the means by which it is procured. He would believe that — in one under this magic spell, that is — 'the diviner part of his nature is paramount, the moral affections are in a state of cloudless serenity; and high over all the great light of the majestic intellect.' Mrs. Gaskell describes the operation of opium upon herself. She says: 'I asked her' (Charlotte) 'whether she had ever taken opium, as the description of its effects, given in "Villette," was so exactly like what I had experienced — vivid and exaggerated presence of objects of which the outlines were indistinct, or lost in golden mist, etc.' Branwell could not have tasted these stronger effects of the drug when he first made use of it; but it should be remembered that he several times recurred to the practice, and suffered the consequent pains and penalties.

After his portrait-painting at Bradford, he never again resided there, and it was about the period of his leaving that place that he began to see the artistic career he had chosen was a mistake, and he determined to give it up as a profession. Moreover, other influences, as we shall see, had been, and were still, at work upon him which caused him to turn once more to literature. From the period of his acquaintance with the drawing-masters, he had become associated with the literary as well as the artistic circles of the neighbourhood; and he anticipated the literary future of his sisters.

CHAPTER XII.

LITERARY INFLUENCES AND ASPIRATIONS.

New Inspiration of Poetry — Wordsworth — Southey, Scott, and Byron — Southey to Charlotte Brontë — Hartley Coleridge — His Worthies of Yorkshire — Poets of the West-Riding — Alaric A. Watts — Branwell's Literary Abilities.

In the early part of the present century, the spirit of poetry began to make itself felt in quarters where previously it had never been known. The pedantic affectation of the Della Cruscan school gave place, in the works of a passionate lover of Nature like Wordsworth, to a fresher and purer inspiration, that delighted in familiar themes of domestic and rural beauty, which were often both humble and obscure. It was Wordsworth, indeed, who 'developed the theory of poetry,' — as Branwell Brontë well knew — that has worked a greater change in literature than has, perhaps, been known since the period of the Renaissance. In his endeavour to solve the difficulty of 'fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation,' Wordsworth had prepared the way for a natural outburst of poetic feeling, occupied with familiar and simple topics. The writers of the so-called 'Lake School' of poets, and especially Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, were, in fact, the leaders of the new movement; and, speedily, responsive to the free note of genius uncurbed, there arose from many an unknown place in England the sweet sound of poetic voices not heard before. At the same time, the touch of romanticism, which was imparted by Scott and Byron, had a great influence on many of the younger poets of the new school. It is evident, to anyone who has studied the local literature of that time, that the works produced under such inspiration were often of great and permanent merit. Southey, writing to Charlotte Brontë in 1837, indeed says, 'Many volumes of poems are now published every year without attracting public attention, any one of which, if it had appeared half-a-century ago, would have obtained a high reputation for its author.'

Nowhere, probably, in England was the influence of the poets of Westmoreland felt more deeply than in the valleys of the West-Riding of Yorkshire. Indeed, a young publisher of that district, Mr. F. E. Bingley, had sufficient appreciation of genius, and enterprise enough, to bring him to Leeds for the purpose of publishing works from Hartley Coleridge's hand. The younger Coleridge — besides the prestige of his fathers name — had already become known as an occasional contributor to 'Blackwood's Magazine,' wherein first appeared his poem of 'Leonard and Susan,' so much admired.

Mr. Bingley entered into an engagement to enable him to publish two volumes of poems, and a series of 'Biographical notices of the Worthies of Yorkshire and Lancashire,' which Hartley Coleridge was to write. One of the volumes of poems was issued from the press in 1833, and was well received. 'The Worthies' proceeded to the third number, forming an octavo volume of six hundred and thirty-two pages, when circumstances compelled Mr. Bingley to sell the remainders to another publisher, who issued a second edition of this well-known work, with a new title, in the year 1836. From the same press there came, in 1834, 'Cyril, a Poem in Four Cantos; and Minor Poems,' by George Wilson. C. F. Edgar, who was editor of the 'Yorkshire Literary Annual,' the first volume of which appeared in 1831, was also the author of a volume of poems, published by Mr. Bingley in the succeeding year; and other poetical works followed from the Leeds press.

But, in those days, there was scarcely a locality in the populous West-Riding of Yorkshire without its poet, and that poet, too, a man of no mean powers. Nicholson, the Airedale poet, had, previously to the time of which I speak, published his 'Airedale, and other Poems,' and his 'Lyre of Ebor.' His poetical talents were really excellent, and his versatility, and the happy character of his effusions, made Nicholson very popular in the West-Riding. He died in 1843. The gifted poet of Gargrave, Robert Story, had published, in earlier years, many songs and poems in the local papers; and he issued, in 1836, a volume, entitled, 'The Magic Fountain.' This was followed, in 1838, by 'The Outlaw,' and by 'Love and Literature,' in the year 1842. This poet was an ardent partizan of the Conservatives, and his lyrical abilities were devoted with unflagging energy to their cause. His 'Songs and Poems,' and his 'Lyrical, and other Minor Poems,' were subsequently published. His political songs were vigorous, and his pastoral ones were redolent of pastures, meadows, and moors, breathing all the freshness of nature in its happiest time. Thomas Crossley, the 'Bard of Ovenden,' like Story, possessed of lyrical talents of the highest order, was a frequent contributor to the county papers; and he published, in 1837, an admirable and delightful volume, entitled, 'The Flowers of Ebor.' In the same year, William Dearden, the 'Bard of Caldene,' the possessor of high gifts, published his 'Star-Seer; a Poem in Five Cantos,' which was distinguished by great power, originality, and loftiness of conception. It was largely influenced by the spirit of romanticism, and flowed with the sweetest diction.

This also was the age of 'Souvenirs,' 'Keepsakes,' 'Forget-me-nots,' and 'Annuals,' which sold very largely, and contained much that was really good. Heath, the proprietor of the 'Keepsake,' as we are told by Southey, sold fifteen thousand copies in one year, and used four thousand yards of watered-silk for the next issue; for these volumes were always resplendent in silk and gold. Alaric A. Watts, who published, in 1822, his 'Poetical Sketches' (a fourth edition of which, enlarged and exquisitely illustrated with designs by Stothard and Nesfield, was required), became, in the same year, editor of the

‘Leeds Intelligencer,’ which he conducted with much spirit and ability. He afterwards established the ‘Manchester Courier,’ which he for some time edited, and was well-known in the northern shires. In 1828 and 1829 appeared his ‘Poetical Album,’ ‘Scenes of Life, and Shades of Character,’ in 1831; and from 1825 to 1834 he produced his ‘Literary Souvenir; a Cabinet of Poetry and Romance,’ with great and deserved success. It is more than likely that the great popularity of his venture led to the publication of ‘The White Rose of York,’ a similar volume, which was brought out at Halifax in the year 1834. This work was edited by George Hogarth, and, in addition to the authors already mentioned — who were, with the exception of Nicholson, the Airedale poet, and the Leeds authors, contributors to it — were F. C. Spencer, author of ‘The Vale of Bolton,’ a volume of poems; Henry Ingram, author of a volume entitled, ‘Matilda’; Henry Martin, editor of the ‘Halifax Express’; John Roby, author of ‘The Traditions of Lancashire;’ and others. There was also in the work a contribution, entitled ‘Morley Hall,’ — treating of a legend of the last-named county — by C. Peters, the subject of which also exercised the abilities of the author of ‘The Flowers of Ebor’; and subsequently interested Branwell Brontë in a similar manner — his friend Leyland having modelled a scene from the story, in clay.

It is beyond question that these literary influences, which stirred the depths of feeling in Yorkshire, had a profound effect on the earlier writings of the Brontës, and probably were their original inspiration. All the local papers were filled with the news of the literary movement; and the busy brains in the parsonage of Haworth could not but be raised to emulation by the tidings. Branwell, especially, who knew personally many of the workers in the new field whom I have named, and was never so happy as when he could enjoy their company, was soon moved, in the midst of his art-aspirations, to partake in their literary labours. At this time, the tastes of the Brontës in this direction, and their progress in poetical and prose composition, began to inspire them with hopes and anticipations of the brightest character. From childhood their attempts at literary composition had formed, according to Charlotte herself, the highest stimulus, and one of the liveliest pleasures they had known. They began to find out that their genius was not artistic, but literary, and to pursue its bent with increasing ardour and the warmest interest.

It cannot be doubted that Branwell, greatly influenced, perhaps, by his sisters, or they, more probably, by him — for they ever regarded his genius as greater than their own — was soon employing his pen as often, and more successfully, than his pencil. Mr. Brontë’s daughters were possessed largely of discriminating and critical powers, sufficient to enable them to judge accurately of the abilities of their brother; and Mrs. Gaskell allows that, to begin with, he was perhaps the greatest genius of this rare family, and this more even in a literary than in an artistic sense. Their favourable judgment was based on evidence they had before them. They were not ignorant of his poetical and prose compositions; and that these showed great beauty of thought and much felicity of expression, as well as considerable power, originality, and freshness of treatment, the evidences will appear in the subsequent pages.

CHAPTER XIII.

EARLY POEMS.

Branwell's Letter to Wordsworth, with Stanzas — Remarks upon it — No Reply — He Tries Again — His Interest in the Manchester and Leeds Railway — Branwell's Literary and Artistic Friends at Bradford and Halifax — Leyland's Works there — Branwell's great Interest in them — Early Verses — Mrs. Gaskell's Judgment on his Literary Abilities.

Branwell, even while working at art with great energy, was not, as I have said, oblivious of his literary power. While, however, the work of his sisters was to be conducted with great earnestness of purpose, it was unfortunate that the scintillations of Branwell's genius were too often fitful, erratic, and uncertain: his mind, indeed, even at this time, was unstable.

It may be noted, as characteristic of all Mr. Brontë's children, that, united with sterling gifts of intellectual power and literary acumen, there was always some mistrust as to the merit of their *own* productions, especially of poetical ones. They seem to have felt themselves like travellers wandering in mist, or struggling through a thicket, or toiling on devious paths with no reliable information at hand, until they arrived at a point where progress looked impossible, until they had obtained a guide in whom they had confidence. It appeared, indeed, to the Brontës that, without an opinion on their work, time might be altogether wasted on what was unprofitable. Charlotte, therefore, in the December of 1836, determined to submit some of her poems to the judgment of Southey; and it would seem that she also consulted Hartley Coleridge.

Before, however, Southey had answered his sister's letter, Branwell ventured, in a similar spirit, to address Wordsworth, for whose writings he had a great admiration. The following is his letter; and, although it has been previously published, it must not be omitted here.

'Haworth, near Bradford,
'Yorkshire, January 19th, 1837.

'Sir,

'I most earnestly entreat you to read and pass your judgment upon what I have sent you, because from the day of my birth, to this the nineteenth year of my life, I have lived among secluded hills, where I could neither know what I was, or what I could do. I read for the same reason that I ate or drank — because it was a real craving of nature. I wrote on the same principle as I spoke — out of the impulse and feelings of the mind; nor could I help it, for what came, came out, and there was the end of it. For as to self-conceit, that could not receive food from flattery, since to this hour not half-a-dozen people in the world know that I have ever penned a line.

'But a change has taken place now, sir; and I am arrived at an age wherein I must do something for myself: the powers I possess must be exercised to a definite end, and as I don't know them myself I must ask of others what they are worth. Yet there is not one here to tell me; and still, if they are worthless, time will henceforth be too precious to be wasted on them.

'Do pardon me, sir, that I have ventured to come before one whose works I have most loved in our literature, and who most has been with me a divinity of the mind, laying before him one of my writings, and asking of him a judgment of its contents. I must come before some one from whose sentence there is no appeal; and such a one is he who has developed the theory of poetry as well as its practice, and both in such a way as to claim a place in the memory of a thousand years to come.

'My aim, sir, is to push out into the open world, and for this I trust not poetry alone — that might launch the vessel, but could not bear her on; sensible and scientific prose, bold and vigorous efforts in my walk in life, would give a further title to the notice of the world; and then, again, poetry ought to brighten and crown that name with glory; but nothing of all this can be ever begun without means, and as I don't possess these, I must in every shape strive to gain them. Surely, in this day, when there is not a *writing* poet worth a sixpence, the field must be open, if a better man can step forward.

'What I send you is the Prefatory Scene of a much longer subject, in which I have striven to develop strong passions and weak principles struggling with a high imagination and acute feelings, till, as youth hardens towards old age, evil deeds and short enjoyments end in mental misery and bodily ruin. Now, to send you the whole of this would be a mock upon your patience; what you see, does not even pretend to be more than the description of an imaginative child. But read it, sir; and, as you would hold a light to one in utter darkness — as you value your own kind-heartedness — *return* me an *answer*, if but one word, telling me whether I should write on, or write no more. Forgive undue warmth, because my feelings in this matter cannot be cool; and believe me, sir, with deep respect,

'Your really humble servant,

'P. B. Brontë.'

Mrs. Gaskell gives the following six stanzas, which are about a third of the whole, and declares them not to be the worst part of the composition: —

'So where He reigns in glory bright,
Above those starry skies of night,
Amid His Paradise of light,
Oh, why may I not be?
'Oft when awake on Christmas morn,
In sleepless twilight laid forlorn,
Strange thoughts have o'er my mind been borne

How He has died for me.
‘And oft, within my chamber lying,
Have I awaked myself with crying,
From dreams, where I beheld Him dying
Upon the accursed tree.
‘And often has my mother said,
While on her lap I laid my head,
She feared for time I was not made,
But for Eternity.
‘So “I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
And let me bid farewell to fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.”
‘I’ll lay me down on this marble stone,
And set the world aside,
To see upon her ebon throne
The Moon in glory ride.’

Branwell’s letter to Wordsworth is, for the most part, well written, and breathes an eager spirit, which shows the anxiety he was under to know the opinion of a high and competent judge as to how he stood with the Nine. It tells us the ardour with which he read and wrote, the ambitious turn of his mind, and the special aims which he then had in the literary world. But the verses, although imbued with a fervent spirit of early piety, were such as Wordsworth could not justly review without giving discouragement, and it seems probable he preferred to keep silence rather than, by an open avowal, to give pain — if pain must be given — as the lesser evil of the two. Or, perhaps, he took amiss the ready frankness and apparent self-esteem which, notwithstanding the disavowal, would probably seem present to him in the letter of the young stranger who addressed him, without sending any evidence of the powers of which he expressed himself so confidently. But, at any rate, Mrs. Gaskell informs us that the letter and verses were preserved by the poet till the Brontës became celebrated, and that he gave the communication to his friend, Mr. Quillinan, in 1850, when the real name of ‘Currer Bell’ became known.

It must not be overlooked that, in the verses which Mrs. Gaskell has printed, we have no opportunity of studying Branwell’s dramatic powers, which apparently found scope in the poem he had written. In them is no development of the effect of the passionate feelings which Branwell describes: ‘struggling with a high imagination and acute feelings,’ and ending ‘in mental misery and bodily ruin.’

However, discouraged by long waiting, or assisted by friendly advice and criticism, he toiled on in silence at his literary work, as he did at art. The year 1837 turned out an important one for Charlotte. In March, she at last received the answer from Southey, which she considered a ‘little stringent,’ and from which she declared she had derived good. She says, in her reply to the Laureate, ‘I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print…. That letter is consecrated; no one shall ever see it, but papa, and my brother and my sisters.’

It would seem that Branwell, notwithstanding the failure of his first venture with Wordsworth, tried again, at a later date, with some other, and more matured, compositions, which he submitted to that poet and to Hartley Coleridge, ‘who both,’ says Mrs. Gaskell, ‘expressed kind and laudatory opinions.’ But, perhaps, the fact that, to the letter quoted above, Wordsworth sent no answer, and did not tell him whether he should ‘write on, or write no more,’ discouraged Branwell for a time; and he may have been led to suspect that his productions were worthless, and that time might ‘henceforth be too precious to be wasted upon them.’ In this way, perhaps, he was induced to turn with greater energy to his profession of art, as a means of getting on, of which I spoke in a former chapter, though we shall see that he did not abandon his literary work.

Branwell also now found opportunities of making himself acquainted with the grand and wild scenery of the mountainous borders of the counties of York and Lancaster, a wider district than his sisters could well survey.

The Manchester and Leeds Railway was, at the time, in course of construction below Littleborough, passing through the picturesque and romantic vale of Todmorden. Branwell became greatly interested in the work; and as stores, and other things for the completion of the line to Hebden Bridge, were forwarded from Littleborough by canal, having been previously sent to that place from Manchester by train, he soon ingratiated himself with the boatmen, and was frequently seen in their boats. It was on one of these occasions that Mr. Woolven, previously mentioned, who was officially employed on the works, recognized at once the clever young man who had surprised the company at the ‘Castle Tavern,’ Holborn, and entered into conversation with him. These incidents led to a friendly intercourse between them, which continued for some years.

Among his Bradford acquaintances, Branwell numbered, in addition to Geller, the mezzotinto-engraver, previously mentioned, Wilson Anderson, an admirable landscape-painter, whose productions are valued as truthful pictures of the places they represent, and on account of the skilfulness of their manipulation and colouring; and also Richard Waller, a well-known and excellent portrait-painter. To these may be added Edward Collinson, a local poet; Robert Story; and John James, the future historian of Bradford. All these were personal acquaintances of Branwell, as well as of Leyland, and the intercourse between them was frequent. For more than twenty years a party of these friends was accustomed to meet, from time to time, at the ‘George Hotel,’ Bradford, under the auspices of Miss Rennie, who greatly prided herself on seeing at her house, in their hours of leisure, the artistic and literary celebrities of the neighbourhood. Leyland was at Halifax, being there to erect certain monuments, which he had executed in London for various patrons in his native town. While there, he modelled, in the upper room of an ancient house, his colossal group of ‘African Bloodhounds,’ his model being a living specimen of the breed; and the group, which was exhibited in London, was favourably noticed. Landseer regarded it as the ‘noblest modern work of its kind.’ It is now in the Salford Museum. The progress of this group intensely interested Branwell and his Bradford friends; and they frequently visited Leyland’s temporary studio. It also formed the subject of a poem by Dearden.

Finding this studio of insufficient height for a great work he contemplated — a colossal group of ‘Thracian Falconers’ — Leyland afterwards took a suitable place in another part of the town, which, likewise, became a meeting-place of the local *literati*. The new work was to consist of three figures, the centre one being seated, and having upon his right fore-finger a hawk; while his left hand rested on the shoulder of a youth just roused, as if by some sudden sound; and, on his right, was a similar youth, half-recumbent, and also in a listening attitude. The centre figure was alone completed, and is now in the Salford Museum.

Branwell, on his visits to the artist’s studio, often lamented the dissipation of his high artistic hopes, and confessed that he saw with pain how misplaced his confidence in his own powers had been. But the sculptor was a poet also, and thus Branwell and he worked in the same field. Many of Leyland’s poems were published in the Yorkshire papers, and also in the ‘Morning Chronicle,’ and were always considered to be of true poetic excellence. Branwell relied much on the artist’s judgment in literary matters, and often submitted his productions to him.

Although Brontë had, as we have seen, abandoned the hope of a high artistic career, he still clung to the practice of portrait-painting, and this gave him leisure to court the muse. The following are the earliest of his poems, of which the MSS. are in my possession; and these are fragments only. The first is a verse of eleven lines, dated January 23rd, 1838, which originally concluded a poem of sixty; —

‘There’s many a grief to shade the scene,
And hide the starry skies;
But all such clouds that intervene
From mortal life arise.
And — may I smile — O God! to see
Their storms of sorrow beat on me,
When I so surely know
That Thou, the while, art shining on;
That I, at last, when they are gone,
Shall see the glories of Thy throne,
So far more bright than now.’

This fragment, written by Branwell at the age of twenty-one, is characteristic of the early tone of his mind. His naturally amiable and susceptible disposition had soon become imbued with the spirit of Christian piety which surrounded his life. He was, too, at the time, full of noble impulses and high aspirations; but the shade of melancholy implanted in his constitution had begun to influence his writings. The following, which is the beginning of another poem, must have been written in some such thoughtful mood, though the title is not borne out in the portion I am able to give.

DEATH TRIUMPHANT.

May, 1838.

‘Oh! on this first bright Mayday morn,
That seems to change our earth to Heaven,
May my own bitter thoughts be borne,
With the wild winter it has driven!
Like this earth, may my mind be made
To feel the freshness round me spreading,
No other aid to rouse it needing
Than thy glad light, so long delayed.
Sweet woodland sunshine! — none but thee
Can wake the joys of memory,
Which seemed decaying, as all decayed.
‘O! may they bud, as thou dost now,
With promise of a summer near!
Nay — let me feel my weary brow —
Where are the ringlets wreathing there?
Why does the hand that shades it tremble?
Why do these limbs, so languid, shun
Their walk beneath the morning sun?
Ah, mortal Self! couldst thou dissemble
Like Sister-Soul! But forms refuse
The real and unreal to confuse.
But, with caprice of fancy, She
Joins things long past with things to be,
Till even I doubt if I have told
My tale of woes and wonders o’er,
Or think Her magic can unfold
A phantom path of joys before —
Or, laid beneath this Mayday blaze —
Ask, “Live I o’er departed days?”
Am I the child by Gambia’s side,
Beneath its woodlands waving wide?
Have I the footsteps bounding free,
The happy laugh of infancy?’

In this beautiful fragment we have the first passionate out-pouring of the self-imposed woes, which, proceeding from within, were thereafter to overspread and tincture with darkest colours every thought of Branwell's mind. We see him here for a moment, standing in incipient melancholia, in what appears to him to be a desert of mental despondency; but, turning back with a fond affection for the past, and recalling, in plaintive words, the joys of 'departed days.' He seems here, indeed, to seek in the mysteries of the soul those pleasures and hopes which his mortal self cannot afford him. Branwell never appears to have forgotten, as I have previously suggested, the sad circumstances of the death of his sisters; and his solitary broodings over these visitations gave a morbid tone to his writings. It was in 1838 that he adopted the pseudonym of 'Northangerland.' His earlier poems, although occasionally showing some power, were not sufficiently gifted to add to the lustre of Brontë literature.

Mrs. Gaskell, alluding to Branwell's literary abilities about this time, says: 'In a fragment of one of his manuscripts which I have read, there is a justness and felicity of expression which is very striking. It is the beginning of a tale, and the actors in it are drawn with much of the grace of characteristic portrait-painting, in perfectly pure and simple language, which distinguishes so many of Addison's papers in the "Spectator." The fragment is too short to afford the means of judging whether he had much dramatic talent, as the persons of the story are not thrown into conversation. But, altogether, the elegance and composure of style are such as one would not have expected from this vehement and ill-fated young man. 'He had,' continues Mrs. Gaskell, 'a stronger desire for literary fame burning in his heart than even that which occasionally flashed up in his sisters'.' She says also that, 'He tried various outlets for his talents … and he frequently contributed verses to the "Leeds Mercury."' The latter statement, however, is incorrect, for nothing of Branwell's appears in that journal.

CHAPTER XIV.

POEMS ON ‘CAROLINE.’

The Poetical bent of Branwell’s Genius — ’Caroline’s Prayer’ — ’On Caroline’ — ’Caroline’ — Spirit of these Early Effusions.

While Branwell was occupying his leisure as stated in the last chapter, and otherwise employing himself in a desultory way, he pursued the poetic bent of his genius, and sought the improvement of his diction and verse. Among the earliest of his poetical productions, the following are, perhaps, the best. They are distinguished by a similar train of thought and reflection, and by similar sentiments of piety and devotion, as also by the same gloom and sadness of mood, which pervade the poems of his sisters. Indeed, without knowing they were actually Branwell’s, we might easily believe them to be from the pen of Charlotte, Emily, or Anne.

The three following poetical essays are on ‘Caroline,’ under which name Branwell indicates his sister Maria; and, in two of them, he records his reminiscences of her death and funeral obsequies. The first of the three, which he has framed in the sentiments and words of a child, is entitled:

CAROLINE’S PRAYER,
OR THE CHANGE FROM CHILDHOOD TO WOMANHOOD.
‘My Father, and my childhood’s guide!
If oft I’ve wandered far from Thee;
E’en though Thine only Son has died
To save from death a child like me;
‘O! still — to Thee when turns my heart
In hours of sadness, frequent now —
Be Thou the God that once Thou wert,
And calm my breast, and clear my brow.
‘I’m now no more a little child
O’ershadowed by Thy mighty wing;
My very dreams seem now more wild
Than those my slumbers used to bring.
‘I further see — I deeper feel —
With hope more warm, but heart less mild;
And former things new shapes reveal,
All strangely brightened or despoiled.
‘I’m entering on Life’s open tide;
So — farewell childhood’s shores divine!

And, oh, my Father, deign to guide,
Through these wide waters, Caroline!'
The second is:

ON CAROLINE.
'The light of thy ancestral hall,
Thy Caroline, no longer smiles:
She has changed her palace for a pall,
Her garden walks for minster aisles:
Eternal sleep has stilled her breast
Where peace and pleasure made their shrine;
Her golden head has sunk to rest —
Oh, would that rest made calmer mine!
'To thee, while watching o'er the bed
Where, mute and motionless, she lay,
How slow the midnight moments sped!
How void of sunlight woke the day!
Nor ope'd her eyes to morning's beam,
Though all around thee woke to her;
Nor broke thy raven-pinioned dream
Of coffin, shroud, and sepulchre.
'Why beats thy breast when hers is still?
Why linger'st thou when she is gone?
Hop'st thou to light on good or ill?
To find companionship alone?
Perhaps thou think'st the churchyard stone
Can hide past smiles and bury sighs:
That Memory, with her soul, has flown;
That thou canst leave her where she lies.
'No! joy *itself* is but a shade,
So well may its remembrance die;
But cares, life's conquerors, never fade,
So strong is their reality!
Thou may'st forget the day which gave
That child of beauty to thy side,
But not the moment when the grave
Took back again thy borrowed bride.'

Here Branwell, though he has changed the form of expression and the circumstance of the loss, is still occupied with the same theme of family bereavement, with which Charlotte herself was so much impressed.

The following was intended as the first canto of a long poem. It also is entitled, 'Caroline;' and is the soliloquy of one 'Harriet,' who mourns for her sister, the subject of the poem, calling to mind her early recollection of the death and funeral of the departed one. It is extremely probable that Branwell made ‘Harriet’ a vehicle of expression for Charlotte or Emily, as he had adopted the name of ‘Caroline’ for Maria.

CAROLINE.
‘Calm and clear the day declining,
Lends its brightness to the air,
With a slanted sunlight shining,
Mixed with shadows stretching far:
Slow the river pales its glancing,
Soft its waters cease their dancing,
As the hush of eve advancing
Tells our toils that rest is near.
‘Why is such a silence given
To this summer day’s decay?
Does our earth feel aught of Heaven?
Can the voice of Nature pray?
And when daylight’s toils are done,
Beneath its mighty Maker’s throne.
Can it, for noontide sunshine gone,
Its debt with smiles repay?
‘Quiet airs of sacred gladness
Breathing through these woodlands wild,
O’er the whirl of mortal madness
Spread the slumbers of a child:
These surrounding sweeps of trees
Swaying to the evening breeze,
With a voice like distant seas,
Making music mild.
‘Woodchurch Hall above them lowering
Dark against the pearly sky,
With its clustered chimneys towering,
Wakes the wind while passing by:
And in old ancestral glory,
Round that scene of ancient story,
All its oak-trees, huge and hoary,
Wave their boughs on high.
‘‘Mid those gables there is one —
The soonest dark when day is gone —
Which, when autumn winds are strongest,
Moans the most and echoes longest.
There — with her curls like sunset air,
Like it all balmy, bright, and fair —
Sits Harriet, with her cheek reclined
On arm as white as mountain snow;

While, with a bursting swell, her mind
Fills with thoughts of “Long Ago.”
‘As from yon spire a funeral bell,
Wafting through heaven its mourning knell,
Warns man that life’s uncertain day
Like lifeless Nature’s must decay;
And tells her that the warning deep
Speaks where her own forefathers sleep,
And where destruction makes a prey
Of what was once this world to her,
But which — like other gods of clay —
Has cheated its blind worshipper:
With swelling breast and shining eyes
That seem to chide the thoughtless skies,
She strives in words to find relief
For long-pent thoughts of mellowed grief.
‘“Time’s clouds roll back, and memory’s light
Bursts suddenly upon my sight;
For thoughts, which words could never tell,
Find utterance in that funeral bell.
My heart, this eve, seemed full of feeling,
Yet nothing clear to me revealing;
Sounding in breathings undefined
Æolian music to my mind:
Then strikes that bell, and all subsides
Into a harmony, which glides
As sweet and solemn as the dream
Of a remembered funeral hymn.
This scene seemed like the magic glass,
Which bore upon its clouded face
Strange shadows that deceived the eye
With forms defined uncertainly;
That Bell is old Agrippa’s wand,
Which parts the clouds on either hand,
And shows the pictured forms of doom
Momently brightening through the gloom:
Yes — shows a scene of bygone years —
Opens a fount of sealed-up tears —
And wakens memory’s pensive thought
To visions sleeping — not forgot.
It brings me back a summer’s day,
Shedding like this its parting ray,
With skies as shining and serene,
And hills as blue, and groves as green.

'"Ah, well I recollect that hour,
When I sat, gazing, just as now,
Toward that ivy-mantled tower
Among these flowers which wave below!
No — not these flowers — they're long since dead,
And flowers have budded, bloomed, and gone,
Since those were plucked which gird the head
Laid underneath yon churchyard stone!
I stooped to pluck a rose that grew
Beside this window, waving then;
But back my little hand withdrew,
From some reproof of inward pain;
For *she who loved it* was not there
To check me with her dove-like eye,
And something bid my heart forbear
Her favourite rosebud to destroy.
Was it that bell — that funeral bell,
Sullenly sounding on the wind?
Was it that melancholy knell
Which first to sorrow woke my mind?
I looked upon my mourning dress
Till my heart beat with childish fear,
And — frightened at my loneliness —
I watched, some well-known sound to hear.
But all without lay silent in
The sunny hush of afternoon,
And only muffled steps within
Passed slowly and sedately on.
I well can recollect the awe
With which I hastened to depart;
And, as I ran, the instinctive start
With which my mother's form I saw,
Arrayed in black, with pallid face,
And cheeks and 'kerchief wet with tears,
As down she stooped to kiss my face
And quiet my uncertain fears.
'"She led me, in her mourning hood,
Through voiceless galleries, to a room,
'Neath whose black hangings crowded stood,
With downcast eyes and brows of gloom,
My known relations; while — with head
Declining o'er my sister's bed —
My father's stern eye dropt a tear
Upon the coffin resting there.

My mother lifted me to see
What might within that coffin be;
And, to this moment, I can feel
The voiceless gasp — the sickening chill —
With which I hid my whitened face
In the dear folds of her embrace;
For hardly dared I turn my head
Lest its wet eyes should view that bed.
‘But, Harriet,’ said my mother mild,
‘Look at *your* sister and my child
One moment, ere her form be hid
For ever ‘neath its coffin lid!’
I heard the appeal, and answered too;
For down I bent to bid adieu.
But, as I looked, forgot affright
In mild and magical delight.
‘“There lay she then, as now she lies —
For not a limb has moved since then —
In dreamless slumber closed, those eyes
That never more might wake again.
She lay, as I had seen her lie
On many a happy night before,
When I was humbly kneeling by —
Whom she was teaching to adore:
Oh, just as when by her I prayed,
And she to heaven sent up my prayer,
She lay with flowers about her head —
Though formal grave-clothes hid her hair!
Still did her lips the smile retain
Which parted them when hope was high,
Still seemed her brow as smoothed from pain
As when all thought she could not die.
And, though her bed looked cramped and strange,
Her *too* bright cheek all faded now,
My young eyes scarcely saw a change
From hours when moonlight paled her brow.
And yet I felt — and scarce could speak —
A chilly face, a faltering breath,
When my hand touched the marble cheek
Which lay so passively beneath.
In fright I gasped, ‘Speak, Caroline!’
And bade my sister to arise;
But answered not her voice to mine,
Nor ope’d her sleeping eyes.

I turned toward my mother then
And prayed on her to call;
But, though she strove to hide her pain,
It forced her tears to fall.
She pressed me to her aching breast
As if her heart would break,
And bent in silence o'er the rest
Of one she could not wake:
The rest of one, whose vanished years
Her soul had watched in vain;
The end of mother's hopes and fears,
And happiness and pain.
'"They came — they pressed the coffin lid
Above my Caroline,
And then, I felt, for ever hid
My sister's face from mine!
There was one moment's wildered start —
One pang remembered well —
When first from my unhardened heart
The tears of anguish fell:
That swell of thought which seemed to fill
The bursting heart, the gushing eye,
While fades all *present* good or ill
Before the shades of things gone by.
All else seems blank — the mourning march,
The proud parade of woe,
The passage 'neath the churchyard arch,
The crowd that met the show.
My place or thoughts amid the train
I strive to recollect, in vain —
I could not think or see:
I cared not whither I was borne:
And only felt that death had torn
My Caroline from me.
'"Slowly and sadly, o'er her grave,
The organ peals its passing stave,
And, to its last dark dwelling-place,
The corpse attending mourners bear,
While, o'er it bending, many a face
'Mongst young companions shows a tear.
I think I glanced toward the crowd
That stood in musing silence by,
And even now I hear the sound
Of some one's voice amongst them cry —

‘I am the Resurrection and the Life —
He who believes in me shall never die!’
‘“Long years have never worn away
The unnatural strangeness of that day,
When I beheld — upon the plate
Of grim death’s mockery of state —
That well-known word, that long-loved name,
Now but remembered like the dream
Of half-forgotten hymns divine,
My sister’s name — my Caroline!
Down, down, they lowered her, sad and slow,
Into her narrow house below:
And deep, indeed, appeared to be
That one glimpse of eternity,
Where, cut from life, corruption lay,
Where beauty soon should turn to clay!
Though scarcely conscious, hotly fell
The drops that spoke my last farewell;
And wild my sob, when hollow rung
The first cold clod above her flung,
When glitter was to turn to rust,
‘Ashes to ashes, dust to dust!’
‘“How bitter seemed that moment when,
Earth’s ceremonies o’er,
We from the filled grave turned again
To leave her evermore;
And, when emerging from the cold
Of damp, sepulchral air,
As I turned, listless to behold
The evening fresh and fair,
How sadly seemed to smile the face
Of the descending sun!
How seemed as if his latest race
Were with that evening run!
There sank his orb behind the grove
Of my ancestral home,
With heaven’s unbounded vault above
To canopy his tomb.
Yet lingering sadly and serene,
As for his last farewell,
To shine upon those wild woods green
O’er which he’d loved to dwell.
‘“I lost him, and the silent room,
Where soon at rest I lay,

Began to darken, ‘neath the gloom
Of twilight’s dull decay;
So, sobbing as my heart would break,
And blind with gushing eyes,
Hours seemed whole nights to me awake,
And day as ‘twould not rise.
I almost prayed that I might die —
But then the thought would come
That, if I did, my corpse must lie
In yonder dismal tomb;
Until, methought, I saw its stone,
By moonshine glistening clear,
While Caroline’s bright form alone
Kept silent watching there:
All white with angel’s wings she seemed,
And indistinct to see;
But when the unclouded moonlight beamed
I saw her beckon me,
And fade, thus beckoning, while the wind
Around that midnight wall,
To me — now lingering years behind —
Seemed then my sister’s call!
‘“And thus it brought me back the hours
When we, at rest together,
Used to lie listening to the showers
Of wild December weather;
Which, when, as oft, they woke in her
The chords of inward thought,
Would fill with pictures that wild air,
From far off memories brought;
So, while I lay, I heard again
Her silver-sounding tongue,
Rehearsing some remembered strain
Of old times long agone!
And, flashed across my spirit’s sight,
What she had often told me —
When, laid awake on Christmas night,
Her sheltering arms would fold me —
About that midnight-seeming day,
Whose gloom o’er Calvary thrown,
Showed trembling Nature’s deep dismay
At what her sons had done:
When sacred Salem’s murky air
Was riven with the cry,

Which told the world how mortals dare
The Immortal crucify;
When those who, sorrowing, sat afar,
With aching heart and eye,
Beheld their great Redeemer there,
‘Mid sneers and scoffings die;
When all His earthly vigour fled,
When thirsty faintness bowed His head,
When His pale limbs were moistened o’er
With deathly dews and dripping gore,
When quivered all His worn-out frame,
As Death, triumphant, quenched life’s flame,
When upward gazed His glazing eyes
To those tremendous-seeming skies,
When burst His cry of agony —
‘My God! — my God! — hast Thou forsaken me!’
My youthful feelings startled then,
As if the temple, rent in twain,
Horribly pealing on my ear
With its deep thunder note of fear,
Wrapping the world in general gloom,
As if her God’s were Nature’s tomb;
While sheeted ghosts before my gaze
Passed, flitting ‘mid the dreary maze,
As if rejoicing at the day
When death — their king — o’er Heaven had sway.
In glistening charnel damps arrayed,
They seemed to gibber round my head,
Through night’s drear void directing me
Toward still and solemn Calvary,
Where gleamed that cross with steady shine
Around the thorn-crowned head divine —
A flaming cross — a beacon light
To this world’s universal night!
It seemed to shine with such a glow,
And through my spirit piercing so,
That, pantingly, I strove to cry
For her, whom I thought slumbered by,
And hide me from that awful shine
In the embrace of Caroline!
I wakened in the attempt — ‘twas day;
The troubled dream had fled away;
‘Twas day — and I, alone, was laid
In that great room and stately bed;

No Caroline beside me! Wide
And unrelenting swept the tide
Of death ‘twixt her and me!”
There paused
Sweet Harriet’s voice, for such thoughts caused — ‘

This poem springs from the deepest feelings, and from sorrows the most poignant. The respective images, tinctured with grief and despondency, pass before us with weird and vivid reality; and many of the passages are imbued with great tenderness, beauty, and pathos. The painful, and, perhaps, too morbid intensity of some of the pictures, whether of dreams or realities, is painted here with the skill of no common artist, whatever youthful defects may be observed in the composition. The poem is one more notable for tender sweetness than any other that remains from Branwell; but it lacks in places the vigour and power of his later compositions, and is, in several parts, of unequal merit. In the earlier portion of it, where he assumes the iambic measure, it is not difficult to perceive the influence of Byron on his diction. In this work Branwell again recurs to the time when tears of anguish flowed from his yet ‘unhardened heart,’ whose present woes are forgotten in the swelling thoughts of ‘things gone by.’ We recognize with what pathetic feeling he paints in Caroline all the qualities of instructress, guardian, and friend, which had characterized his sister Maria. Long afterwards Charlotte Brontë, inspired by similar feelings, devoted the first chapters of ‘Jane Eyre’ to a delineation, in the character of Helen Burns, of the disposition of her dead sister, whose death, a few days after her return from Cowan Bridge, she could scarcely ever either forget or forgive.

CHAPTER XV.

EVENTS AT THE PARSONAGE.

Charlotte's first Offer of Marriage — Her Remarks concerning it — A second Offer Declined — Anne a Governess — She Moralizes upon it — Charlotte obtains a Situation — Unsuited to Her — She Leaves it — Branwell takes Pleasure in Scenery — He Visits Liverpool with his Friends — Charlotte goes to Easton — Curates at Haworth — Their Visits to the Parsonage — Public Meetings on Church Rates — Charlotte's Attempt at a Richardsonian Novel — She sends the Commencement of it to Wordsworth for his Opinion — Branwell receives an Appointment as Private Tutor.

After the return of Charlotte and Anne from Dewsbury Moor, whither Miss Wooler had removed her school, the three sisters were at home together for some months, and, in this happy, unrestrained intercourse, with their literary relaxations and their plans for the future, Charlotte's mind expanded, and her strength returned. There was Branwell, too, to think about; his venture at Bradford and his progress with his portraits. Then they would have to go and see the likeness of Mr. Morgan; and, on such occasions, Branwell would have much to say of art and literature, and, acquaintances. But Branwell was usually at Haworth on Sundays, and then he would hear of Charlotte's visits to her friends, and her adventures on these occasions. It was shortly before the date of Branwell's return from Bradford, in the spring of 1839, that Charlotte received her first offer of marriage. A young clergyman, who had, as Mrs. Gaskell thought, some resemblance to the St. John in the last volume of 'Jane Eyre,' had evidently been attracted by Charlotte Brontë; but matrimony does not seem, at the time, to have seriously entered into her thoughts. In some respects the proposal might have had strong temptations for her, and she thought how happy her married life might be. However, it was not the way with Charlotte Brontë to take the path of smoothness and comfort, and leave the thorny one untrod; and she asked herself if she loved the clergyman in question as much as a woman should love her husband, and whether she was the one best qualified to make him happy. 'Alas!' she says, 'my conscience answered "No" to both these questions.' She knew very well that she had a 'kindly leaning' towards him, but this was not enough for her, for it was impossible that she could ever feel for him such an intense attachment as would make her sacrifice her life for him. Short of such a devotion awakened in herself, she would never marry anyone. Her comment is characteristic: 'Ten to one I shall never have the chance again; but *n'importe*.'

Charlotte Brontë felt that there was a want of sympathy between the young clergyman and herself, for he was a ‘grave, quiet young man;’ and she knew that he would be startled, and would think her a wild, romantic enthusiast, when she showed her character, and laughed, and satirized, and said whatever came into her head. Nor was her next offer any more to her taste; for, within a few months, a neighbouring curate, a young Irishman, fresh from the Dublin University, made her a proposal. The circumstance amused Charlotte, for it was, on his part, a case of love at first sight. He came with his vicar to be introduced to the family, and was speedily struck with Mr. Brontë’s daughter. Charlotte was never troubled at home with the *mauvaise honte* that troubled her abroad; and so she talked and jested with the clergyman, and was much amused at the originality of his character. A pleasant afternoon was spent, for he made himself at home, after the fashion of his countrymen, and was witty, lively, ardent, and clever; but, withal, wanting in the dignity and discretion of an Englishman. As the evening drew on, Charlotte was not much pleased with the spice of Hibernian flattery with which he began to season his discourse, and, as she expresses it, she ‘cooled a little.’ The vicar and his curate went away; but what was Charlotte’s astonishment to receive a letter next morning from the latter containing a proposal of marriage, and filled with ardent expressions of devotion! ‘I hope you are laughing heartily,’ she says to her friend. ‘This is not like one of my adventures, is it? It more nearly resembles Martha’s. I am certainly doomed to be an old maid. Never mind. I have made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old. Well! thought I, I have heard of love at first sight, but this beats all! I leave you to guess what my answer would be, convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong.’

Although the married state does not appear, from Charlotte’s letters at this time, to have had many attractions for her, we know, from those she wrote later, and, perhaps, more than all from the concluding chapters of ‘Jane Eyre,’ that she could enter into the joys and sacrifices of domestic life, that she had a correct view of the affections, and knew how to appreciate conjugal love at its true value. But, in the present instances — although, at a later period of her life, when she was on the Continent, she is believed to have felt the full force of that ‘passion of the heart’ which those about whom she wrote had failed to evoke — she declined to sever herself from the contented circumstances that surrounded her, and in which she was mistress, for a condition of doubtful peace and certain obedience. Charlotte’s decision was not discordant with the feelings of her family; for, as she had determined to continue at home, their plans for the future would not be disconcerted.

Anne was now resolved on making a trial of the life of a governess for herself, she having completed her education, and being wishful to exert herself as her sisters had done. Inquiries were made, and at length a situation was obtained. Anne continued in this kind of employment during the next six years, and it was her experience that suggested to her the subject of her first novel, ‘Agnes Grey.’ If we may suppose that she has recounted her own experience at this time, where her heroine describes the circumstances of her preparation and departure for her first situation, it would appear that she had some difficulty in convincing her friends of the wisdom of her purpose. Agnes Grey says, after she has made the suggestion to her family:

‘I was silenced for that day, and for many succeeding ones; but still I did not wholly relinquish my darling scheme. Mary got her drawing materials, and steadily set to work. I got mine too; but, while I drew, I thought of other things. How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance, and something to comfort and help my father, mother, and sister, besides exonerating them from the provision of my food and clothing; to show papa what his little Agnes could do; to convince mamma and Mary that I was not quite the helpless, thoughtless being they supposed. And then, how charming to be entrusted with the care and education of children! Whatever others said, I felt I was fully competent to the task: the clear remembrance of my own thoughts in early childhood would be a surer guide than the instructions of the most mature adviser. I had but to turn from my little pupils to myself at their age, and I should know at once how to win their confidence and affections; how to waken the contrition of the erring; how to embolden the timid and console the afflicted; how to make virtue practicable, instruction desirable, and religion lively and comprehensible.’

Anne Brontë was of a milder and more cheerful temperament than her sisters; she had not the fire, the morbid feeling, or the mental force that characterized Charlotte, yet she had more of the initiatory faculty than she had hitherto received credit for. But her gentle nature, her confiding piety, her more equable temper, enabled her to succeed better in the circumstances she had chosen. She had her troubles, her timidity, and her diffidence to contend with, but she made life supportable and even happy. ‘Agnes Grey’ thus speaks of her departure, which we cannot doubt is the experience of Anne Brontë:

‘Some weeks more were yet to be devoted to preparation. How long, how tedious those weeks appeared to me! Yet they were happy ones in the main, full of bright hopes and ardent expectations. With what peculiar pleasure I assisted at the making of my new clothes, and, subsequently, the packing of my trunks! But there was a feeling of bitterness mingling with the latter occupation too; and when it was done — when all was ready for my departure on the morrow, and the last night at home approached — a sudden anguish seemed to swell my heart. My dear friends looked sad, and spoke so very kindly, that I could scarcely keep my heart from overflowing; but I still affected to be gay. I had taken my last ramble with Mary on the moors, my last walk in the garden and round the house … I had played my last tune on the old piano, and sung my last song to papa, not the last, I hoped, but the last for what appeared to me a very long time.’

Charlotte and Emily made themselves busy in assisting Anne with her preparations for departure, and they were very sad and apprehensive when she left them on Monday, April 15th, 1839. She went alone, at her own wish, thinking she could manage better if left to her own resources, and when her failings were unwitnessed by those whose hopes she wished to sustain. However, she wrote, expressing satisfaction with the place she had secured, for the lady of the house was very kind. She had two of the eldest girls under her charge, the children being confined to the nursery, with which she had no concern.

Charlotte, although remarking in a letter to her friend on the cleverness and sensibility with which Anne could express herself in epistolary correspondence, had some fear that, such was the natural diffidence of her manner, her mistress would sometimes believe her to have an impediment in her speech.

Charlotte's eagerness to obtain a situation was now so great that she does not seem to have considered well the step she was about to take, and she obtained one that was not satisfactory to her. It was in the family of a wealthy Yorkshire manufacturer; and we may well believe that the stylish surroundings of her employers differed materially from those of the family at Haworth. Here a large quantity of miscellaneous work was thrown on Charlotte, which displeased her and destroyed her comfort. In a letter to Emily, she says she is 'overwhelmed with oceans of needlework; yards of cambric to hem, muslin night-caps to make, etc.' She found the outside attractions of the house beautiful in 'pleasant woods, white paths, green lawns, and blue, sunshiny sky;' but these surroundings did not compensate for the humiliations which her situation imposed upon her, and her mistress and she did not like each other; so Charlotte did not return to the place after the July holidays of 1839.

Branwell was as yet unemployed, and he sought, and took much pleasure in the scenery, the events and circumstances of the hills and valleys of the West-Riding of Yorkshire, and was frequently from home. He went about the country, associating with the people, and revelling in their ready wit, which enabled him afterwards, by such observations and experience, to give vivid pictures of life and character. At the time of the Haworth 'Rushbearing,' of July, 1839, he visited Liverpool with one or two friends, and, while there, in compliance with an injunction of his father, made a stenographic report, at St. Jude's church, of a sermon by the Rev. H. McNeile, the well-known evangelical preacher. Here, a sudden attack of Tic compelled him to resort to opium, in some form, as an anodyne, whose soothing effect in pain he had previously known. Subsequently, passing a music shop, in one of their rambles through the town, Branwell's attention was arrested by a copy of the oratorio of 'Samson,' by Handel, displayed in the window, the performance of which had always excited him to the highest degree, and he eagerly besought his friend to purchase it, as well as some Mass, and various oratorio music, which was done.

On their return from Liverpool, Branwell, being under some obligation to his friend, proffered to paint his portrait, to which Mr. M — — agreed. A sitting once a week was decided upon, to be in the room at the parsonage where Branwell studied and painted. On his visits, Mr. M — — invariably noticed a row of potatoes, placed on the uppermost rib of the range to roast, Branwell being very fond of them done in this way, even as Jane Eyre was in the novel. 'That night,' she says, 'on going to bed, I forgot to prepare, in imagination, the Barmecide supper of hot roast potatoes … with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings.' When Mr. M — — paid his weekly visits to the parsonage he always heard some one speaking aloud in the room adjoining Branwell's studio; and, at last, his curiosity being excited, he inquired whom it was. Branwell answered that it was his father committing his Sunday's sermon to memory. When the portrait was ready for the finishing touches, Mr. M — — discovered that Branwell had painted the names of Johann Sebastian Bach, Mozart, Haydn, and Handel at each corner of the canvas respectively. He remonstrated, but Branwell was firm, maintaining that, as his friend was an accomplished musician, and could perform the most elaborate and difficult compositions of these immortal men, with expression and ease, he was, in every way, worthy of being associated with them in the manner he designed. Mr. M — — complied. When the portrait was finished, Branwell pressed his friend to take a glass of wine; and, while the two were chatting over the affair, Mr. Brontë and his daughters entered the room to view Branwell's work on its completion. They were pleased with it, and praised it as a truthful likeness and an excellent picture.

We may well imagine the enthusiasm with which Branwell would recount his experience of Liverpool. How much he would have to tell of the wonders of the Mersey, the great ships that rode upon its surface, and its commerce with the new world, out across the ocean! His visit seems to have originated a proposal that the family should spend a week or a fortnight at that sea-port, but, almost at the same moment, Charlotte's friend suggested to her that they should visit Cleethorpes together, a suggestion that pleased her very much.

'The idea of seeing the sea,' she says, 'of being near it — watching its changes by sunrise, sunset, moonlight, and noon-day — in calm, perhaps in storm — fills and satisfies my mind. I shall be discontented at nothing. And then I am not to be with a set of people with whom I have nothing in common — who would be nuisances and bores.'

The visit of Charlotte to the sea-side seems to have been put off again and again, by often-recurring obstacles. The irresolution of her family in regard to the Liverpool project, and the manifest unwillingness that she should leave home on a visit anywhere else, put off, from time to time, the pleasure she had anticipated for herself; but at last she decided to go. Her box was packed and everything prepared, but no conveyance could be procured. Mr. Brontë objected to her going by coach, and walking part of the way to meet her friend, and her aunt exclaimed against 'the weather, and the roads, and the four winds of heaven,’ so Charlotte almost gave up hope. She told her friend that the elders of the house had never cordially acquiesced in the measure, and that opposition was growing more open, though her father would willingly have indulged her. Even he, however, wished her to remain at home. Charlotte was ‘provoked’ that her aunt had deferred opposition until arrangements had been made. In the end ‘E’ was asked to pay a visit to the parsonage.

Owing to the circumstances indicated, Charlotte’s visit to the sea-coast was put off until the following September, when an opportunity occurred favourable to the project, which does not seem to have been entirely abandoned; and she and her friend visited Easton where they spent a fortnight. Here for the first time Charlotte beheld the sea.

Afterwards she wrote, ‘Have you forgotten the sea by this time, E.? Is it grown dim in your mind? Or can you still see it, dark, blue and green and foam-white, and hear it roaring roughly when the wind is high, or rushing softly when it is calm?’ The Liverpool journey appears to have been finally abandoned.

It was in a letter, written about this time that Mrs. Gaskell found the first mention of a succession of curates who henceforth revolved round Haworth Parsonage. Three years earlier Mr. Brontë had sought aid from the ‘Additional Curates’ Society,’ or some similar institution, and was provided at once with assistance. The increasing duties of his chapelry had rendered this step necessary. It would seem also that a curate was appointed to Stanbury, while another became master of the National or Grammar School. These gentlemen were not infrequent in their visits to the parsonage, and they varied the life of its inmates, sometimes one way and sometimes another. This circumstance, at the same time, provided Charlotte Brontë with those living studies which she did not fail afterwards to remember in her delineation of the three curates in ‘Shirley.’ Emily, on the other hand, invariably avoided these gentlemen.

The arrival of the curates at Haworth was the occasion of increased activity in the affairs of the chapelry; and, the church-rate question being uppermost at this juncture, the new-comers entered into a crusade against the Dissenters who had refused to pay church-rates. Charlotte wrote a long letter in which she spoke of a violent public meeting held at Haworth about the affair, and of two sermons against dissent — one by Mr. W. a ‘noble, eloquent, high-church, apostolical-succession discourse, in which he banged the Dissenters most fearlessly and unflinchingly;’ the other by Mr. C., a ‘keener, cleverer, bolder, and more heart-stirring harangue,’ than Charlotte, perhaps, had ever heard from the Haworth pulpit. She, however, did not entirely agree with either of these gentlemen, and thought, if she had been a Dissenter, she would have ‘taken the first opportunity of kicking or of horse-whipping both.’

In the winter of 1839-40, Charlotte employed her leisure in the composition of a story which she had commenced on a scale commensurate with one of Richardson’s novels of seven or eight volumes. Mrs. Gaskell saw some fragments of the manuscript, written in a very small hand: but she was less solicitous to decipher it, as Charlotte had herself condemned it in the preface to ‘The Professor.’ Branwell, to whom she submitted it, seems to have understood, at the time, that in its florid style of composition she was working in opposition to her genius, and he told her she was making a mistake. It appears not unlikely that Branwell was himself similarly engaged on prose writing when he gave her this opinion. A few months later, however, Charlotte resolved to send the commencement of her tale to Wordsworth, and that an unfavourable judgment was the result, for which she was not altogether unprepared, may be gathered from the following letter she addressed to the poet: —

‘Authors are generally very tenacious of their productions, but I am not so much attached to this but that I can give it up without much distress. No doubt if I had gone on I should have made quite a Richardsonian concern of it…. I had materials in my head for half-a-dozen volumes…. Of course it is with considerable regret I relinquish any scheme so charming as the one I have sketched. It is very edifying and profitable to create a world out of your own brains, and people it with inhabitants who are so many Melchisedecs, and have no father or mother but your own imagination…. I am sorry I did not exist fifty or sixty years ago, when the “Ladies’ Magazine” was flourishing like a green bay-tree. In that case, I make no doubt, my aspirations after literary fame would have met with due encouragement, and I should have had the pleasure of introducing Messrs. Percy and West into the best society, and recording all their sayings and doings in double-columned, close-printed pages…. I recollect, when I was a child, getting hold of some antiquated volumes, reading them by stealth with the most exquisite pleasure. You give a correct description of the patient Grisels of these days. My aunt was one of them, and to this day she thinks the tales of the “Ladies’ Magazine” infinitely superior to any trash of modern literature. So do I; for I read them in childhood, and childhood has a very strong faculty of admiration, but a very weak one of criticism…. I am pleased that you cannot quite decide whether I am an attorney’s clerk or a novel-reading dressmaker. I will not help you at all in the discovery….’

In the midst of their literary endeavours, their efforts were not relaxed to obtain new places. Charlotte was obliged by circumstances to give up her subscriptions to the Jews, and she determined to force herself to take a situation, if one could be found, though she says, ‘I hate and abhor the very thoughts of governess-ship.’ An alternative which the sisters talked over in these holidays was the opening of a school at Haworth, for which an enlargement of the parsonage would be required.

Branwell was more successful in his pursuit of employment than Charlotte, having procured the place of a tutor; and he was to commence his duties with the new year. Charlotte says of this event, ‘One thing, however, will make the daily routine more unvaried than ever. Branwell, who used to enliven us, is to leave us in a few days, and enter the situation of a private tutor in the neighbourhood of Ulverston. How he will like to settle remains yet to be seen. At present he is full of hope and resolution. I, who know his variable nature, and his strong turn for active life, dare not be too sanguine.'

Branwell seems to have paid a farewell visit to the 'Lodge of the Three Graces' on the Christmas Day of this year, when he acted as organist. This is the only occasion on which he is recorded as having attended at the meetings of the Lodge in 1839, and it is the last on which his name appears in the minute book of the Haworth masonic body.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRANWELL AT BROUGHTON-IN-FURNESS.

The District of Black Comb — Branwell's Sonnet — Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge — Branwell's Letter to the 'Old Knave of Trumps' — Its Publication by Miss Robinson in her 'Emily Brontë' — Branwell's familiar Acquaintance with the People of Haworth — He could Paint their Characters with Accuracy — His Knowledge of the Human Passions — Emily's Isolation.

Branwell, being as desirous of employment as his sisters, had sought for, and obtained, a situation as tutor in the family of Mr. Postlethwaite, of Broughton-in-Furness. He entered upon his new duties on the 1st of January, 1840.

Now that he found himself resident near the English lake district, consecrated as it is by so many poetic memories, and dear to him as the home of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey he naturally felt an intense interest in all that surrounded him; and, when he was not engaged in teaching the sons of his employer, he took occasion to visit such places as had any attraction for him. On one of his pedestrian excursions, he had stepped into a wayside inn, and was seated musing before the parlour fire, when a young gentleman entered the room. Branwell turned round, and recognized at once a friend of the name of Ayrton, whose acquaintance he had formed in Leeds. The surprise and delight at this unexpected meeting was mutual; and Branwell's friend, who was driving about the country, requested his company for some distance on the journey, for the purpose of prolonging the interview, and of continuing the conversation that had been begun. The young tutor drove some ten miles with his friend, utterly regardless of the long return walk to Ulverston.

Branwell delighted in the writings of the 'Lake Poets,' and was much influenced by Southey's prose works. He read the 'Life of Nelson,' and was himself moved to write a poem illustrative of the life of that great naval hero. He also read the 'Colloquies on Society,' and others of Southey's works. But it was Wordsworth who at this moment, was the object of Branwell's chief admiration. He revelled in that poet's fine description of the view from the top of Black Comb, and, perhaps, knew the lines written by his 'deity of the mind' on a stone on the side of the mountain, and probably had himself looked from its summit. But Branwell certainly knew Black Comb from afar. Five miles away he could see it; and he celebrated it in the following sonnet:

BLACK COMB.

'Far off, and half revealed, 'mid shade and light,
Black Comb half smiles, half frowns; his mighty form
Scarce bending into peace — more formed to fight
A thousand years of struggles with a storm
Than bask one hour, subdued by sunshine warm,
To bright and breezeless rest; yet even his height
Towers not o'er this world's sympathies, he smiles —
While many a human heart to pleasures' wiles
Can bear to bend, and still forget to rise —
As though he, huge and heath-clad, on our sight,
Again rejoices in his stormy skies.
Man loses vigour in unstable joys.
Thus tempests find Black Comb invincible,
While we are lost, who should know life so well!'

It was doubtless while Branwell was living at Ulverston that he obtained the favourable opinion of Wordsworth on some poems which he submitted for criticism. Probably he found opportunity to visit the writer whose works he 'loved most in our literature,' and it would be on some similar excursion that he obtained an encouraging expression of opinion from Hartley Coleridge. The author of 'The Northern Worthies' was not unknown to the circle at 'The George,' at Bradford, and was acquainted with Branwell Brontë and Leyland.

The master of the 'Lodge of the Three Graces,' at Haworth, did not, however, long permit Branwell to forget his old acquaintance there; for this worthy soon addressed to him a communication which provoked a reply that Branwell dated from Broughton-in-Furness on the 13th of the March following his arrival. This unfortunate response, in which Branwell addressed the masonic sexton of Haworth, with sarcastic humour, as 'Old Knave of Trumps,' is the one which Miss Robinson has been so ill advised as to publish in her 'Emily Brontë;' and which has done not a little to draw down on the head of Branwell the full and unmitigated volume of Mr. Swinburne's vocabulary of abuse. And, in fact, if this letter could be taken as the proper and natural expression of an abject profligate, altogether shameless and unredeemed, he could find a defender neither here nor elsewhere. But there are good reasons for hoping that it was otherwise. We have seen that Branwell had been led to join the rude village society of Haworth, where, on account of his brilliance, and of his position as the incumbent's son, he was not a little looked up to. It was natural, then, that he should be led, foolishly enough, to endeavour to stand well with the friends he had selected, and his knowledge of character was sufficiently good to enable him to know what kind of letter would best suit the tastes and inclinations of many of his companions of the 'Lodge of the Three Graces.' He assumed in fact, that bravado of vice, that air of *diablerie*, which was thought by many people, in those days, and is so yet by not a few, to be the best proof of manhood, because it betokened a knowledge of the world. Yet, at the end of the letter, — the passage is not given by Miss Robinson — Branwell appears to take it as a matter of course that the sexton will not show it, and he begs him, for 'Heaven's sake,' to blot out the lines scored in red. Branwell knew the 'Old Knave of Trumps' well, and he was certain that his letter would cause no little amusement among his immediate friends to whom the sexton was sure to read it. He was ashamed of certain passages in it, which is evidence enough that it was not the outcome of a depraved and shameless nature, but rather the expression of the *acted* character of a vicious and *blasé* worldling. And it is, moreover, inconceivable that a young man, who was of the sensitive nature betokened by the contemporary poems we have published, could, at the same time, have been a hardened and cynical profligate. Indeed, it is evident that the objectionable allusions were not of his origination, but were called forth by the remarks of others, for whom Branwell does not fail to show his contempt.

It has, however, been the misfortune of Branwell Brontë, that a letter which he wrote in folly, for the eyes of personal friends alone, has been published to the world as the token and evidence of his infamy. One use, at any rate, flows from the publication of it, for it shows us the quick and vivid grasp of character, and the incisive mode of composition which now began, in his more vigorous moods, to distinguish its author. The letter is as follows: —

'Broughton-in-Furness,

'March 13, 1840.

'Old Knave of Trumps,

'Don't think I have forgotten you, though I have delayed so long in writing to you. It was my purpose to send you a yarn as soon as I could find materials to spin one with, and it is only just now that I have had time to turn myself round and know where I am. If you saw me now, you would not know me, and you would laugh to hear the character the people give me. Oh, the falsehood and hypocrisy of this world! I am fixed in a little retired town by the sea-shore, among wild woody hills that rise round me — huge, rocky, and capped with clouds. My employer is a retired county magistrate, a large landowner, and of a right hearty and generous disposition. His wife is a quiet, silent, and amiable woman, and his sons are two fine, spirited lads. My landlord is a respectable surgeon, and six days out of seven is as drunk as a lord! His wife is a bustling, chattering, kind-hearted soul; and his daughter! — oh! death and damnation! Well, what am I? That is, what do they think I am? A most calm, sedate, sober, abstemious, patient, mild-hearted, virtuous, gentlemanly philosopher, — the picture of good works, and the treasure-house of righteous thoughts. Cards are shuffled under the table-cloth, glasses are thrust into the cupboard, if I enter the room. I take neither spirits, wine, nor malt liquors. I dress in black, and smile like a saint or martyr. Everybody says, "What a good young gentleman is Mr. Postlethwaite's tutor!" This is fact, as I am a living soul, and right comfortably do I laugh at them. I mean to continue in their good opinion. I took a half year's farewell of old friend whisky at Kendal on the night after I left. There was a party of gentlemen at the Royal

Hotel, and I joined them. We ordered in supper and whisky-toddy as “hot as hell!” They thought I was a physician, and put me in the chair. I gave sundry toasts, that were washed down at the same time, till the room spun round and the candles danced in our eyes. One of the guests was a respectable old gentleman with powdered head, rosy cheeks, fat paunch, and ringed fingers. He gave “The Ladies,” … after which he brayed off with a speech; and in two minutes, in the middle of a grand sentence, he stopped, wiped his head, looked wildly round, stammered, coughed, stopped again, and called for his slippers. The waiter helped him to bed. Next a tall Irish squire and a native of the land of Israel began to quarrel about their countries; and, in the warmth of argument, discharged their glasses, each at his neighbour’s throat instead of his own. I recommended bleeding, purging, and blistering; but they administered each other a real “Jem Warder,” so I flung my tumbler on the floor, too, and swore I’d join “Old Ireland!” A regular rumpus ensued, but we were tamed at last. I found myself in bed next morning, with a bottle of porter, a glass, and a corkscrew beside me. Since then I have not tasted anything stronger than milk-and-water, nor, I hope, shall, till I return at Midsummer; when we will see about it. I am getting as fat as Prince William at Springhead, and as godly as his friend, Parson Winterbotham. My hand shakes no longer. I ride to the banker’s at Ulverston with Mr. Postlethwaite, and sit drinking tea and talking scandal with old ladies. As to the young ones! I have one sitting by me just now — fair-faced, blue-eyed, dark-haired, sweet eighteen — she little thinks the devil is so near her!

‘I was delighted to see thy note, old squire, but I do not understand one sentence — you will perhaps know what I mean…. How are all about you? I long to hear and see them again. How is the “Devil’s Thumb,” whom men call — — — —, and the “Devil in Mourning,” whom they call — — — — ? How are — — — —, and — — — —, and the Doctor; and him who will be used as the tongs of hell — he whose eyes Satan looks out of, as from windows — I mean — — — —, esquire? How are little — — — —, — — “Longshanks,” — — — — , and the rest of them? Are they married, buried, devilled, and damned? When I come I’ll give them a good squeeze of the hand; till then I am too godly for them to think of. That bow-legged devil used to ask me impertinent questions which I answered him in kind. Beelzebub will make of him a walking-stick! Keep to thy teetotalism, old squire, till I return; it will mend thy old body…. Does “Little Nosey” think I have forgotten him? No, by Jupiter! nor his clock either. I’ll send him a remembrancer some of these days! But I must talk to some one prettier than thee; so good-night, old boy, and

‘Believe me thine,

‘The Philosopher.

‘Write directly. Of course you won’t show this letter; and, for Heaven’s sake, blot out all the lines scored with red ink.’

This letter, as I have intimated, was never intended for more than a moment's amusement, at most, to a small circle of acquaintances at Haworth, and was not to exist after having been read. But John Brown kept the letter, which I saw and copied. It is a curious circumstance, illustrating the hold which it obtained over the Haworth circle, that, though the original was lost so long since as 1874, the brother of the sexton knew it by heart, and could repeat it with considerable accuracy. In this way it has been several times written down. No allusion would have been made to the letter in the present work, if Miss Robinson — strange to say — had not thought it a fitting embellishment for her 'Emily Brontë.' If Branwell had known its fate at the moment he wrote it, it would never have reached the 'Worshipful Master of the Lodge of the Three Graces,' but would have been committed to the flames by his own hand; for, as we have seen, he was ashamed of some expressions scored in red, which he begged might be obliterated.

This letter, however, is valuable; inasmuch as it shows what Branwell, at this young period of his life, knew about human nature, and the depths to which it can descend. He had penetrated into the passions, feelings, and dispositions of his acquaintances by frequent intercourse, by keen perception, and by familiar conversation. He had heard them, noticed them, and could paint their characters with unerring precision and vivid colouring. He was acquainted with the ways of society, and the customs of domestic life. The world was to him a picture-gallery, and all living things in it were studies of the deepest interest. His knowledge of men and manners, of the hard, implacable, and selfish, and also of the soft, tender, and gentle natures of men and women, enabled him to cast their stories of sorrow and gladness faithfully and well.

At the time when he had attained manhood, when his intellects were reaching their full development, he had already been drawn into society, and indoctrinated into the mysteries of Haworth life; and had become acquainted with the excesses of men older and harder than himself. It cannot be wondered at that, if he had learned more than is usual in youth, he did not escape the temptations attendant on the peculiar knowledge he had acquired. But, while *he* was thus passing through the crooked ways and reckless deviations of the world, obtaining a large crop of experiences, good and bad, his *sisters* were, for the most part, at home, living like recluses, and, when away, were still in similar seclusion. Of Emily, Charlotte says, 'I am bound to avow that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst whom she lived, than a nun has of the country people who sometimes pass her convent gates. My sister's disposition was not naturally gregarious; circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion; except to go to church or take a walk on the hills, she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Though her feeling for the people round her was benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought, nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced. And yet she knew them, knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest, and talk of them *with* detail, minute, graphic, and accurate; but with them she rarely exchanged a word.' But Branwell walked and held personal intercourse, as we have seen, with the people whom Emily shunned; and his personal knowledge, and his unquestionable genius combined, enabled him to grasp and appreciate, to dissect with penetrating skill, and to estimate and define the tendency of the strong and marked character of the people around him. It is, therefore, doubly unfortunate that, from Branwell, we have little remaining in the way of graphic description, and that the rich treasures of observation which he outpoured have, for the most part, left their impressions only in the memories of those who were privileged to hear him discourse.

CHAPTER XVII.

BRANWELL AT SOWERBY BRIDGE. — CHARLOTTE’S EXERTIONS.

Branwell’s Appointment at Ulverston ends — He gets a Situation on the Railroad at Sowerby Bridge — Branwell at Luddenden Foot — His Friends’ Reminiscences of him — Charlotte and Emily reading French Novels — Charlotte obtains a Situation — Anxious about Anne — School Project of the Sisters — Charlotte’s keen Desire to visit Brussels — Her Letter to her Aunt Branwell.

If the performance of the responsible duties of his appointment at Mr. Postlethwaite’s, which ended, at his father’s wish, in the June of 1840, had been felt by Branwell as a banishment from the cheerful company of his Haworth acquaintances, it had been still greater from his artistic and literary friends in the neighbourhood of Bradford and Halifax. Hence he sought, with a perseverance amounting to anxiety, to obtain a post on the Leeds and Manchester Railway, — to the opening of which he had looked forward with concern — at some place in the valley of the Calder, near Halifax; and he received the appointment of clerk in charge, at the station at Sowerby Bridge. Charlotte says of Branwell’s determination: ‘a distant relation of mine, one Patrick Branwell, has set off to seek his fortune in the wild, wandering, adventurous, romantic, knight-errant-like capacity of clerk on the Leeds and Manchester Railroad.’ Branwell commenced his new occupation at Sowerby Bridge on the 1st of October, 1840, just before the opening of the line from Hebden Bridge to Normanton.

As has been already seen, an acquaintance had existed between Branwell and Leyland; but now that the former had become a resident in the immediate neighbourhood, after his visits to the artist’s studio had been interrupted for six months, or more, by his stay at Broughton-in-Furness, a more frequent intercourse followed between the two. It was on a bright Sunday afternoon in the autumn of 1840, at the desire of my brother, the sculptor, that I accompanied him to the station at Sowerby Bridge to see Branwell. The young railway clerk was of gentleman-like appearance, and seemed to be qualified for a much better position than the one he had chosen. In stature he was a little below the middle height; not ‘almost insignificantly small,’ as Mr. Grundy states, nor had he ‘a downcast look;’ neither was he ‘a plain specimen of humanity.’ He was slim and agile in figure, yet of well-formed outline. His complexion was clear and ruddy, and the expression of his face, at the time, lightsome and cheerful. His voice had a ringing sweetness, and the utterance and use of his English were perfect. Branwell appeared to be in excellent spirits, and showed none of those traces of intemperance with which some writers have unjustly credited him about this period of his life.

My brother had often spoken to me of Branwell's poetical abilities, his conversational powers, and the polish of his education; and, on a personal acquaintance, I found nothing to question in this estimate of his mental gifts, and of his literary attainments.

Branwell stayed at Sowerby Bridge some months, whence he was transferred, in 1841, to Luddenden Foot, a place about a mile further up the valley, where a station had been recently fixed. Mr. Grundy, who was an assistant-engineer on the line, became acquainted with Branwell at the latter place; and says of it, 'there was no village near at hand,' and that, 'had a position been chosen for this strange creature, for the express purpose of driving him several steps to the bad, this must have been it.'

Mr. Grundy must have spoken from memory only. The ancient village of Luddenden Foot, within two minutes' walk of the station, with its population employed in the mills and manufactories of the neighbourhood, together with its two old hostelries of the 'Red Lion,' and the 'Shuttle and Anchor,' was surely sufficient to banish all solitude and wildness from the neighbourhood of Branwell's sojourn. Yet the change was scarcely a desirable one, and doubtless helped to disgust Branwell with his employment. It is to be regretted that the respective occupations of Branwell and Mr. Grundy were of such a nature as to prevent a regular and continual intercourse, and that distance of time and place have so far dimmed Mr. Grundy's reminiscences of his friend, that, valuable though the letters he has wisely preserved are, many inaccuracies have entered into his recollections of him, and Mrs. Gaskell's exaggerated account has had undue weight in the picture he has drawn.

Mr. William Heaton, author of a minor volume of poems entitled the 'Flowers of Caldervale,' knew Branwell Brontë well when he was at Luddenden Foot. He wrote to me a letter in which occurred the following description of his mind and character, and also of his conversation when at one of the village inns, where they sometimes met: —

'He was,' says Heaton, 'blithe and gay, but at times appeared downcast and sad; yet, if the subject were some topic that he was acquainted with, or some author he loved, he would rise from his seat, and, in beautiful language, describe the author's character, with a zeal and fluency I had never heard equalled. His talents were of a very exalted kind. I have heard him quote pieces from the bard of Avon, from Shelley, Wordsworth, and Byron, as well as from Butler's "Hudibras," in such a manner as often made me wish I had been a scholar, as he was. At that time I was just beginning to write verses. It is true I had written many pieces, but they had never seen the light; and, on a certain occasion, I showed him one, which he pronounced very good. He lent me books which I had never seen before, and was ever ready to give me information. His temper was always mild towards me. I shall never forget his love for the sublime and beautiful works of Nature, nor how he would tell of the lovely flowers and rare plants he had observed by the mountain stream and woodland rill. All these had excellencies for him; and I have often heard him dilate on the sweet strains of the nightingale, and on the thoughts that bewitched him the first time he heard one.'

During Branwell's twelvemonths' stay at Luddenden Foot, he formed new acquaintances, but the avocations, tastes, and pursuits of the well-to-do inhabitants did not accord with his; and he, perhaps, more frequently than was compatible with his duties, visited Halifax to seek the intellectual enjoyment which his own narrow occupation and the society of Luddenden Foot did not afford.

While he was occupied in the service of the railway company at this place, we hear nothing relating to him, of moment, in Charlotte's correspondence. Happy that he was employed, his sisters engaged eagerly and earnestly in devising schemes for obtaining a livelihood that might enable them to work together for their mutual assistance in literary labour.

Charlotte was still at home with Emily, reading French novels, of which, we learn, she had got another bale, 'containing upwards of forty volumes.' 'I have read about half,' she says. 'They are like the rest, clever, wicked, sophistical, and immoral. The best of it is, they give one a thorough idea of France and Paris, and are the best substitute for French conversation.' We scarcely recognize, in this employment, the Charlotte Brontë of three years before, whose religious mania was driving her to despair, unless, indeed, it be in the force with which she pursues the new bent of her inclination. She has read twenty volumes of this, the second, batch, and was proposing to read twenty more. It was her expectation that, by this process, she would become sufficiently familiar with the language to enable her to teach it to others.

In the letter in which she announced that Branwell had gone to his post on the railway — written in good spirits, when she saw everything *couleur-de-rose*, which, however, she attributes to the high wind blowing over the 'hills of Judea' at Haworth — she says: 'A woman of the name of Mrs. B — — , it seems, wants a teacher. I wish she would have me; and I have written to Miss Wooler to tell her so. Verily, it is a delightful thing to live at home, at full liberty to do just what one pleases. But I recollect some scrubby old fable about grasshoppers and ants, by a scrubby old knave, yclept Æsop; the grasshoppers sang all the summer, and starved all the winter.'

Branwell was proving himself no grasshopper, for, if he sang, he was anxious to exert himself in a practical way at the same time; and, so far, he was doing well at Luddenden Foot. Charlotte, too, was resolved to be employed, but the negotiation with Mrs. B — — failed. The lady expressed herself pleased with the frankness with which Charlotte stated her qualifications, but she required some one who could undertake to give instruction in music and singing. This Miss Brontë could not do. She does not appear to have had the musical taste which her brother and sisters had inherited from the Branwell family. She resembled her father, perhaps, more closely than did any of the other children. At last, however, in March, 1841, she entered her second situation as a private governess. ‘I told you, some time since,’ she writes to her friend, ‘that I meant to get a situation, and, when I said so, my resolution was quite fixed. I felt that, however often I was disappointed, I had no intention of relinquishing my efforts. After being severely baffled two or three times — after a world of trouble, in the way of correspondence and interviews — I have at length succeeded, and am fairly established in my new place.’

Charlotte found her residence not very large, but the grounds were fine and extensive. She had made some sacrifice to secure comfort, as she says, not good living, but cheerful faces and warm hearts. Her pupils were two in number, one a girl of eight, and the other a boy of six. Though always more or less afflicted with home-sickness, whenever she was at a distance from her father’s house, with its familiar and affectionate ways, she enjoyed, in her new place, considerable relief from it, owing to the spontaneous generosity and kindliness of her employers. She says, indeed, ‘My earnest wish and endeavour will be to please them. If I can but feel that I am giving satisfaction, and if, at the same time, I can keep my health, I shall, I hope, be moderately happy. But no one but myself can tell how hard a governess’s work is to me — for no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are for the employment. Do not think that I fail to blame myself for this, or that I leave any means unemployed to conquer this feeling. Some of my greatest difficulties lie in things that would appear to you comparatively trivial. I find it so hard to repel the rude familiarity of children. I find it so difficult to ask either servants or mistress for anything I want, however much I want it. It is less pain for me to endure the greatest inconvenience than to go into the kitchen to request its removal. I am a fool. Heaven knows I cannot help it.’

Charlotte found matters a little easier after the first month of her stay, and her home-sickness became less oppressive. Though her time was much occupied, great kindness was shown towards her, and her father and her friend were invited to come to see her.

In June she wrote, in the absence of her employer, ‘You can hardly fancy it possible, I dare say, that I cannot find a quarter-of-an-hour to scribble a note in; but so it is; and when a note is written, it has to be carried a mile to the post, and that consumes nearly an hour, which is a large portion of the day. Mr. and Mrs. — — have been gone a week. I heard from them this morning. No time is fixed for their return, but I hope it will not be delayed long, or I shall miss the chance of seeing Anne this vacation. She came home, I understand, last Wednesday, and is only to be allowed three weeks’ vacation, because the family she is with are going to Scarborough. *I should like to see her*, to judge for myself of the state of her health. I dare not trust any other person's report, no one seems minute enough in their observations. I should very much have liked you to have seen her. I have got on very well with the servants and children so far; yet it is dreary, solitary work. You can tell as well as me the lonely feeling of being without a companion.'

The delicate Anne, struggling with all the troubles, the indignities, of the life of a governess, was a picture that was naturally distressing enough to Charlotte, ever anxious, ever watchful over the welfare of her youngest sister, and she would, perhaps, be apt, in her imagination, to exaggerate her sister's difficulties in the light of her own. In truth the sisters had qualities of mind and heart which did much to unfit them for the enjoyment of content or happiness amongst strangers. Charlotte, in particular, with a nature, sensitive, observant, and tenacious; an imagination highly wrought, active, and fertile, but too often morbid; with a will, powerful, yet constrained by the nervous weakness of an excitable constitution, could with difficulty conform inclination to the necessities of such a career; she longed for freedom. It was not surprising, then, that when Charlotte reached Haworth — which she did before Anne's return — there was a revival of the project I have before mentioned of the opening of a school, wherein they could enjoy the liberty of home.

Mr. Brontë and Miss Branwell were not unfavourably disposed towards the project, and they conversed now and then, at the breakfast-table or in the evenings, as to how they could best help the girls into the position they so much coveted. The sisters must always have had a friend in their father in these matters; he could not but be pleased and interested in struggles and expectations which reproduced so closely the hopeful days of his own early life, and we learn, as the result of the deliberations of the elders, that the aunt offered a loan, or intimated that she would, perhaps, offer one, in case her nieces could give some assurance of the solidity of their plans in the shape of a situation decided upon and of pupils promised. The East-Riding was thought to be not so well provided with schools as the West, and the favourite idea of the sisters was to open their projected academy in the neighbourhood of Burlington, where the health, both of themselves and of their pupils, might be hoped for. But there was a question how much their aunt would be disposed to advance them. Charlotte did not think she would sink more than £150 in such a venture, and she doubted if this would be a sufficient sum with which to establish a school and commence house-keeping, on however modest a scale. These were reflections which damped a little the excitement of hopeful expectation in which the sisters, especially Charlotte, revolved these plans. She anxiously awaited the coming of her friend, on the day she was expected to visit them during their holidays at the parsonage, wearying her eyes with watching from the window, eye-glass in hand, and, sometimes, spectacles on nose, eager to talk over her schemes with some one else than her sisters and to hear a new opinion. But her friend could not come, and she says, 'a hundred things I had to say to you will now be forgotten, and never said.' Charlotte began to fear some time must elapse before her plans could be executed, and she resolved not to relinquish her situation till something was assured. But this expectation of keeping a school, cherished through long years, was never realized by the sisters; ever and anon the shifting sands of circumstance, the changing currents of life, moved them away, even while they believed themselves approaching the goal of their hopes.

Charlotte returned to her situation, and she tells her friend, in a letter dated August the 7th, 1841, that she 'felt herself' again. Mr. and Mrs. — — were from home, and she takes the opportunity of saying that to be solitary there was to her the happiest part of her time. She enters into particulars of the household: the children were under decent control, and the servants were observant and attentive to her; she says of herself, moreover, that the absence of the master and mistress relieved her from the duty of always putting on the appearance of being cheerful and conversable.

Her friends, Martha and Mary T — — , were enjoying great advantages on the Continent, where they had gone to stay a month with their brother. Charlotte had had a long letter from Mary, and a packet enclosing a handsome black silk scarf, and a pair of beautiful kid gloves bought in Brussels as a present. She was pleased with them, and that she had been remembered so far off, amidst the excitement of 'one of the most splendid capitals of Europe.' Mary's letters spoke of 'some of the pictures and cathedrals she had seen — pictures the most exquisite, cathedrals the most venerable.' Something swelled to the throat of Charlotte as she read this account. She was seized with a 'vehement impatience of restraint and steady work; such a strong wish for wings — wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute.' She was tantalized for a time by the consciousness of faculties unexercised; then all collapsed. She considered these emotions, momentary as they were, rebellious and absurd, and they were speedily quelled by the resolute spirit they had disturbed. She hoped they would not revive, as they had been acutely painful. The school project, instead of at all fading, was gaining strength, and the three sisters kept it in view as the pole-star round which all their other schemes, as of lesser importance, revolved. To this they looked in their despondency. Charlotte was haunted, sometimes, and dismayed, at the conviction that she had no natural knack for her occupation. She says that, if teaching only were requisite, all would be smooth and easy; and she adds, 'but it is the living in other people's houses — the estrangement from one's real character — the adoption of a cold, rigid, apathetic exterior, that is painful.'

It appears that Miss Wooler was about this time intending to give up her school at Dewsbury Moor, and had offered it to the Misses Brontë. One or two disadvantages had to be set against the favourable terms on which they might have the school. The situation could not commend itself to Charlotte, anxious as she was concerning Anne's health; the number of pupils had also diminished, and it would be necessary to offer special advantages in the way of education before they could hope to have a prosperous establishment — so their friends argued. But Charlotte had resolved to take the school. The sisters, however, could not feel confident that their qualifications were such as would render success certain. Hence, a suggestion that was made to Charlotte which would provide her with the necessary powers, was at once taken up with all the energy of her nature; she thus writes to her aunt, on whom all must depend:

‘September 29th, 1841.

‘Dear Aunt,

‘I have heard nothing of Miss Wooler yet since I wrote to her, intimating that I would accept her offer. I cannot conjecture the reason of this long silence, unless some unforeseen impediment has occurred in concluding the bargain. Meantime a plan has been suggested and approved by Mr. and Mrs. — — ‘ (the father and mother of her pupils) ‘and others, which I wish now to impart to you. My friends recommend me, if I desire to secure permanent success, to delay commencing the school for six months longer, and by all means to contrive, by hook or by crook, to spend the intervening time in some school on the continent. They say schools in England are so numerous, competition so great, that without some such step towards attaining superiority, we shall probably have a very hard struggle, and may fail in the end. They say, moreover, that the loan of £100, which you have been so kind as to offer us, will, perhaps, not be all required now, as Miss Wooler will lend us the furniture; and that, if the speculation is intended to be a good and successful one, half the sum, at least, ought to be laid out in the manner I have mentioned, thereby insuring a more speedy repayment both of interest and principal.

‘I would not go to France or to Paris. I would go to Brussels in Belgium. The cost of the journey there, at the dearest rate of travelling, would be £5; living there is little more than half as dear as it is in England, and the facilities for education are equal or superior to any other place in Europe. In half a year, I could acquire a thorough familiarity with French. I could improve greatly in Italian, and even get a dash of German; *i.e.*, provided my health continued as good as it is now. Mary is now staying at Brussels, at a first-rate establishment there. I should not think of going to the Château de Kokleberg, where she is resident, as the terms are much too high; but if I wrote to her, she, with the assistance of Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the British Chaplain, would be able to secure me a cheap, decent residence and respectable protection. I should have the opportunity of seeing her frequently; she would make me acquainted with the city; and, with the assistance of her cousins, I should probably be introduced to connections far more improving, polished, and cultivated, than any I have yet known.

‘These are advantages which would turn to real account, when we actually commenced a school; and, if Emily could share them with me, we could take a footing in the world afterwards which we can never do now. I say

Emily instead of Anne; for Anne might take her turn at some future period, if our school answered. I feel certain, while I am writing, that you will see the propriety of what I say. You always like to use your money to the best advantage. You are not fond of making shabby purchases; when you do confer a favour, it is often done in style; and depend upon it, £50 or £100, thus laid out, would be well employed. Of course I know no other friend in the world to whom I could apply on this subject except yourself. I feel an absolute conviction that, if this advantage were allowed us, it would be the making of us for life. Papa will, perhaps, think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but whoever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University, he was as ambitious as I am now. I want us all to get on. I know we have talents, and I want them to be turned to account. I look to you, aunt, to help us. I think you will not refuse. I know, if you consent, it shall not be my fault if you ever repent your kindness.'

Charlotte had some time to wait for an answer, but it came at last; her enthusiasm had carried the day. The answer was favourable: she and Emily were to go to Brussels.

At times, during his stay with the railway company, Branwell would drive over from Luddenden Foot to visit his family at the Haworth parsonage, having hired a gig for the purpose. Mr. Grundy sometimes accompanied him, and they would escape to the moors together, or pay curious visits to the old fortune-teller, with the curates. Then, says his friend, he was 'at his best, and would be eloquent and amusing, though, on returning sometimes, he would burst into tears, and swear he meant to mend.' This last statement is favourable to Branwell's calm judgment upon himself. Few — and Branwell was one of the last — drift deliberately into wrong-doing. He was, like most other men, often placed under influences which a habit of attention and self-control would have enabled him to resist. He knew, perhaps, in a desultory way, what he ought to do, and what he ought not; but, owing to his inattention to consequences, he might, now and then, go wrong, sometimes yielding to whatever illusion was paramount within, acting in concert with whatever was most alluring without; yet he could draw his mental forces together, and review his past actions with keen and painful accuracy. Hence he was not destitute of the faculty of analyzing his acts in the light of their moral quality, and, when his sober judgment enabled him to see them in their true bearing, he exhibited a due contrition.

On Branwell's visits home, he learned much of the exertions, the projects, and the resolves of his sisters. He was aware of their aims, and how important were the steps being taken to qualify them the better for teaching others, more especially in perfecting their knowledge of the French language and of music. He also knew of the ultimate hope of his sisters — that, were the future secure, they would have leisure to realize their early dream of one day becoming authors, never relinquished, even when distance divided, and when absorbing tasks occupied them. He had the highest appreciation of their genius; and, although he had his times of hilarity, indulgence, and enjoyment, he was certainly never forgetful of his own hopes and aspirations in the same direction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRANWELL'S POETRY, 1842.

Situation of Luddenden Foot — Branwell visits Manchester — The Sultry Summer — He visits the Picturesque Places adjacent — His impromptu Verses to Mr. Grundy — He leaves the Railway Company — Miss Robinson's unjust Comments — His three Sonnets — His poem 'The Afghan War' — Branwell's letter to Mr. Grundy — His Self-depreciation.

Luddenden Foot — the second place of Branwell Brontë's appointment as clerk in charge on the Leeds and Manchester Railway — was a village about equi-distant between Sowerby Bridge and Mytholmroyd, situated in a fertile and moderately-wooded valley, on the left bank of the Calder as it descends from its source in Cliviger Dean. The cultivated hills rise to a considerable height on both sides of the river, and are very romantic in character. Among the manufacturers and gentry of the neighbourhood, Branwell found few to welcome him, and from these he turned to the artists and literary men he had previously known at Halifax.

But Branwell, in addition, made excursions up the valley (Mr. W — — , his fellow-assistant, acting for him in his absence) in the direction of Hebden Bridge, Heptonstall, the Ridge, Todmorden, and the heights of Wadsworth. There were, indeed, many places of marvellous beauty and interest near, that have long been the theme of artists and poets, with which he did not fail to make himself acquainted.

The huge, rounded hills, which border this valley, are intersected in places by lovely cloughs and glens, whose peat-stained streams rush over their rocky beds, from the elevated grouse-moors around, to pour their waters into the Calder. From Luddenden Dean, between the townships of Warley and Midgley, a brook makes its way to Luddenden Foot, through a glen on whose verdant slopes stand several ancient houses of architectural and historic interest. Among these are Ewood Hall, where Bishop Farrer was born, and Kershaw House, a beautiful Jacobean mansion. Crag Valley, which descends to the Calder on the opposite bank, a mile or more from Luddenden Foot, is deeper and more thickly wooded. On one hand lies Sowerby — with Haugh End, the birthplace of Archbishop Tillotson — and, on the other, Erringden, which was a royal deer-park in the days of the Plantagenets. But the loveliest of the valleys through which the confluent streams of the Calder run, is that of Hebden, a romantic glen, winding between the wooded and precipitous slopes of Heptonstall — crowned with the ancient and now ruined church of St. Thomas à Becket — and of Wadsworth, with its narrow dell of Crimsworth, which gave Charlotte Brontë a name for the hero of the earliest of her novels. Between these solemn heights the stream flows beneath the huge crags of Hardcastle, and roars over many a rocky obstruction in its channel before it reaches the Calder at Hebden Bridge. This was a district to which picnic-parties from Haworth often came, there being a direct road over the hills.

Branwell also visited Manchester on one occasion; and, on his return, he gave an account to a young clergyman, then living in the neighbourhood of Mytholmroyd, who sometimes went to his wooden shanty at Luddenden Foot to hear his conversation, of how he had been impressed with the architecture of the parish church at Manchester, as he stood under the arched portal, and beheld the long lines of pillars and arches, and the fretted roof, the lightsome details of which had charmed him. He went forward on that occasion to the choir of the church, and saw the Lady Chapel — which still retained its beautiful screen, with its Perpendicular tracery and shafts of that period — occupied by the gravedigger's implements, which reminded him of the 'Worshipful Master of the Lodge of the Three Graces,' consisting of crowbar, mattock, spade, barrow, planks and ropes; for the Lady Chapel had been made a convenient receptacle for these dismal chattels.

The summer of 1841 was a somewhat monotonous time for Branwell and his friend at the quiet station. Here, in the intervals of the trains, scarcely anything was heard except the occasional hum of a bee or a wasp, or the drone of a blue-bottle, while the almost vertical rays of a summer sun darted down on the roof of the wooden hut, and made the place unendurable. It was in moments of weary lassitude, or in hours of drowsy leisure, that Branwell whiled away the time by sketching carelessly on the margins of the books — for the amusement of himself and his friend — free-hand portraits of characters of the neighbourhood, and of the celebrated pugilists of the day.

But about Hebden Bridge there were people known to Branwell, and he did not fail to visit them. His sister, Charlotte, in after-years, sometimes came to Hanging Royd, Hebden Bridge, the house of my late friend, the Rev. Sutcliffe Sowden, then incumbent of Mytholm — the gentleman who afterwards performed the marriage ceremony between the gifted lady and Mr. Nicholls. The friendship of the latter and Mr. Sowden dated from earlier years, and to them Branwell was known when he was at Luddenden Foot. He had, indeed, sometimes clerical visitors at his 'wooden shanty' to hear his conversation. Mr. Sowden was an enthusiastic lover of scenery, and the sphere of his duties abounded in moors, wilds, crags, rivers, brooks, and dells, which he often visited. Branwell's tastes accorded with his, but these attractions clearly drew Branwell's attention, too often and too far, from the imperative duties of his situation, comparatively light though they were. As might be expected, therefore, the work of this talented but changeful young man was found unsatisfactory, and explanations were demanded. About the time of the close of his twelve months' official duties at Luddenden Foot, an examination of his books was made, and they were found to be confused and incomplete. The irregularity and the defects of his returns had also been remarked, and an inquiry was set on foot respecting them. The officials, in looking over the books, discovered the pen-and-ink sketches on the margins of the pages, which I have already mentioned; and these were taken as conclusive evidence of carelessness and indifference on the part of the unfortunate Branwell in the performance of his duties and the keeping of his accounts.

He had been made aware, by unwelcome inquiries and remonstrances, that his position with the railway company was precarious, and he was filled with apprehension as to the ultimate consequences. He was requested finally to appear at the audit of the company, and his friend W— — accompanied him.

It was at the Christmas of 1841, that the Brontës expected to meet at home together, in anticipation of Charlotte and Emily's journey to Brussels; but Charlotte had not found her brother there in the January of 1842, for she writes on the 20th of that month and year: 'I have been every week, since I came home, expecting to see Branwell, and he has never been able to get over yet. We fully expect him, however, next Saturday.' Branwell certainly returned home, but only when it had been intimated to him that his services were no longer required by the railway company. How far he had felt the duties of his post irksome, and the power of perseverance required inconsistent with his tastes and pursuits, does not appear, though the inference that they were so will scarcely be doubted. But the humiliation and sorrow he felt on the loss of his employment plunged him, for a time, into despair; and the natural gloom of his disposition, caused him to magnify the common pleasures and enjoyments of his leisure hours into crimes and omissions of duty of no ordinary magnitude. But the erroneous recollections of Mr. Grundy, respecting the situation of the station at Luddenden Foot, and its supposed deleterious influence on Branwell's manners and obligations, may justify a doubt as to the particular accuracy of many of his reminiscences of his friend.

The following incident of Branwell's stay at that place, which Mr. Grundy gives, may be regarded as affording a valuable contribution to his writings; for, although impromptu, the verses show that he could, even on unexpected occasions, bring into play his innate faculty of verse with no mean grasp of his subject, and a certain harmony of rhythmical expression.

Mr. Grundy says, 'On one occasion he (Branwell) thought I was disposed to treat him distantly at a party, and he retired in great dudgeon. When I arrived at my lodgings the same evening, I found the following, necessarily an impromptu: —

'"The man who will not know another,
Whose heart can never sympathize,
Who loves not comrade, friend, or brother,
Unhonoured lives — unnoticed dies:

His frozen eye, his bloodless heart,
Nature, repugnant, bids depart.
'"O, Grundy! born for nobler aim,
Be thine the task to shun such shame;
And henceforth never think that he
Who gives his hand in courtesy
To one who kindly feels to him,
His gentle birth or name can dim.
'"However mean a man may be,
Know man *is* man as well as thee;
However high thy gentle line,
Know he who writes can rank with thine;
And though his frame be worn and dead,
Some light still glitters round his head.
'"Yes! though his tottering limbs seem old,
His heart and blood are not yet cold.
Ah, Grundy! shun his evil ways,
His restless nights, his troubled days;
But never slight his mind, which flies,
Instinct with noble sympathies,
Afar from spleen and treachery,
To thought, to kindness, and to thee.
'"P. B. Brontë."'

Branwell's extreme sensibility caused him, indeed, to exaggerate both the lights and the shadows of his existence. He was gleeful, as I found, full of fun, jest, and anecdote, in social circles, or where literature and art were the theme; and then, almost involuntarily, would rise to his feet, and, with a beaming countenance, treat the subject with a vivid flow of imagination, displaying the rich stores of his information with wondrous and enthralling eloquence. But, under disappointment or misfortune, he fell a prey to gloomy thoughts, and reached a state often near akin to despair. It was at such moments that he usually took up his pen to express, in poetry, the fulness of his feelings and the depth of his sorrow; and it is to this fact that the pathetic sadness of most of his writings is due. I have had occasion already to speak of the melancholy tone which characterized also the minds of his sisters.

The worth of Branwell's poetic genius about this time, — the year of 1842, — has been unfairly commented upon. Miss Robinson, questioning the judgment of the Brontë sisters, undertakes to doubt if Branwell's mental gifts were any better than his moral qualities, and says: 'It is doubtful, judging from Branwell's letters and his verses, whether anything much better than his father's "Cottage in the Wood" would have resulted from his following the advice of James Montgomery. Fluent ease, often on the verge of twaddle, with here and there a bright felicitous touch, with here and there a smack of the conventional hymn-book and pulpit twang — such weak and characterless effusions are all that is left of the passion-ridden pseudo-genius of Haworth.'

Miss Robinson's ignorance of Branwell's more matured poems and writings has caused her, in company with others, to fall into very grave errors regarding him; and she, — with extreme bitterness, it must be said, — has embellished her biography of Emily with elaborate censures of his misdeeds, and with accounts of his imputed glaring inferiority to his sisters in intellectual power. It is pitiable, indeed, that Miss Robinson, — and not she alone, — in the want of Branwell's true life and remains, with nothing to set against the primary errors of Mrs. Gaskell, — should have joined the hue and cry against him, and have essayed, almost as of set purpose, to write down the gifted brother of the author whose life she was giving to the world.

In 1842 Branwell began to feel more perceptibly the development of his intellectual powers, and to discern more clearly his natural ability to define, in poetic and felicitous language, his thoughts, feelings, and emotions. While under the depression and gloom consequent upon his disgrace, and the recent loss of his employment, he wrote the three following sonnets. The profound depth of feeling, expressed with mournful voice, which pervades them, the full consciousness of woe by which they are informed, leave nothing wanting in their expression of pathetic beauty; and they are distinguished by much sweetness of diction. These sonnets favourably show the poetical genius of Branwell. His soul is carried beyond his frail mortality; but sadness and sorrow, enshrouding his imagination, bind it to the precincts of the tomb. Here, with pessimistic and gloomy philosophy, he bids us, impressed with the slender sum of human happiness, to recognize the constant recurrence of the misery to which we are born, and to discern how little there is beneficent in nature or mankind.

SONNET I.

On Landseer's Painting.

'The Shepherd's Chief Mourner' — A Dog Keeping Watch at Twilight over its Master's Grave.

The beams of Fame dry up affection's tears;
And those who rise forget from whom they spring;
Wealth's golden glories — pleasure's glittering wing —
All that we follow through our chase of years —
All that our hope seeks — all our caution fears,
Dim or destroy those holy thoughts which cling
Round where the forms we loved lie slumbering;
But, not with *thee* — our slave — whose joys and cares
We deem so grovelling — power nor pride are thine,
Nor our pursuits, nor ties; yet, o'er this grave,
Where lately crowds the form of mourning gave,
I only hear *thy* low heart-broken whine —

I only see *thee* left long hours to pine
For *him* whom thou — if love had power — would'st save!

SONNET II.

On the Callousness produced by Care.

Why hold young eyes the fullest fount of tears?
And why do youthful hearts the oftenest sigh,
When fancied friends forsake, or lovers fly,
Or fancied woes and dangers wake their fears?
Ah! he who asks has known but spring-tide years,
Or Time's rough voice had long since told him why!
Increase of days increases misery;
And misery brings selfishness, which sears
The heart's first feelings: 'mid the battle's roar,
In Death's dread grasp, the soldier's eyes are blind
To comrades dying, and he whose hopes are o'er
Turns coldest from the sufferings of mankind;
A bleeding spirit oft delights in gore:
A tortured heart oft makes a tyrant mind.

SONNET III.

On Peaceful Death and Painful Life.

Why dost thou sorrow for the happy dead?
For, if their life be lost, their toils are o'er,
And woe and want can trouble them no more;
Nor ever slept they in an earthly bed
So sound as now they sleep, while dreamless laid
In the dark chambers of the unknown shore,
Where Night and Silence guard each sealed door.
So, turn from such as these thy drooping head,
And mourn the *Dead Alive* — whose spirit flies —
Whose life departs, before his death has come;
Who knows no Heaven beneath Life's gloomy skies,
Who sees no Hope to brighten up that gloom, —
'Tis *He* who feels the worm that never dies, —
The *real* death and darkness of the tomb.

It is painful to find the writer of these sad and beautiful sonnets spoken of in terms of reprobation, as being, at the time he wrote them, and when asking Mr. Grundy's aid while seeking a situation, 'sunk and contemptible.'

'Alas,' says Miss Robinson, 'no helping hand rescued the sinking wretch from the quicksands of idle sensuality which slowly engulfed him!' Let us look further.

The Afghan War, which commenced in 1838, and had secured for the English arms what seemed at the time a complete conquest, was followed by the conspiracy of Akbar Khan, the son of Dost Mohammed, which occurred at the beginning of winter, when help from India was hopeless. There was an uprising at Cabul, and several officers and men were slain, which compelled Major Pottinger to submit to humiliating conditions. The British left Cabul; and the disastrous retreat to India, through the Khyber Pass, which commenced on January 6th, 1842, will long be sadly remembered. Of sixteen thousand troops — accompanied by women and children to the number of ten thousand more — who were continually harassed by hostile tribes on the way, and benumbed by the severity of the winter, only one man, Doctor Brydon, survived to tell the tidings. Branwell, overwhelmed by these horrors, published the following powerful and impressive poem in the 'Leeds Intelligencer,' on May the 7th of the same year.

THE AFGHAN WAR.
'Winds within our chimney thunder,
Rain-showers shake each window-pane,
Still — if nought our household sunder —
We can smile at wind or rain.
Sickness shades a loved one's chamber,
Steps glide gently to and fro,
Still — 'mid woe — our hearts remember
We are there to soothe that woe.
'Comes at last the hour of mourning,
Solemn tolls the funeral bell;
And we feel that no returning
Fate allows to such farewell:
Still a holy hope shines o'er us;
We wept by the One who died;
And 'neath earth shall death restore us;
As round hearthstone — side by side.
'But — when all at eve, together,
Circle round the flickering light,
While December's howling weather
Ushers in a stormy night:
When each ear, scarce conscious, listens
To the outside Winter's war,
When each trembling eyelash glistens
As each thinks of *one* afar —
Man to chilly silence dying,
Ceases story, song, and smile;
Thought asks — "Is the loved one lying
Cold upon some storm-beat isle?"
And with death — when doubtings vanish,
When despair still hopes and fears —

Though our anguish toil may banish,
Rest brings unavailing tears.
‘So, Old England — when the warning
Of thy funeral bells I hear —
Though thy dead a host is mourning,
Friends and kindred watch each bier.
But alas! Atlantic waters
Bear another sound from far!
Unknown woes, uncounted slaughters,
Cruel deaths, inglorious war!
‘Breasts and banners, crushed and gory,
That seemed once invincible;
England’s children — England’s glory,
Moslem sabres smite and quell!
Far away their bones are wasting,
But I hear their spirits call —
“Is our Mighty Mother hasting
To avenge her children’s fall?”
‘England rise! Thine ancient thunder
Humbled mightier foes than these;
Broke a whole world’s bonds asunder,
Gave thee empire o’er the seas:
And while yet one rose may blossom,
Emblem of thy former bloom,
Let not age invade thy bosom —
Brightest shine in darkest gloom!
‘While one oak thy homes shall shadow,
Stand like it as thou hast stood;
While a Spring greets grove and meadow,
Let not Winter freeze thy blood.
Till this hour St. George’s standard
Led the advancing march of time;
England! keep it streaming vanward,
Conqueror over age and clime!’

In this poem Branwell prefaces his subject with a picture of domestic suffering — one with which he is familiar — and compares the consolation which accompanies the affectionate attentions of those present, with the hopeless fate and untended deaths of such as perish in the storms and wars of distant places, far away from their homes and friends. In the true, loyal, and national spirit which animates him, his manly appeal to England, comprised principally in the last two verses, is perhaps one of the noblest and most vigorous ever written.

In the May of 1842, Leyland was commissioned to execute certain monuments for Haworth and its neighbourhood; and, on the 15th of that month, Branwell wrote to him, in reference to a design for a monument which he had sent for submission to a committee of which the Rev. P. Brontë was chairman, and invited him to the parsonage on the 20th of the month, being sure his father would be pleased to see him. Leyland visited Haworth and partook of Mr. Brontë's hospitality; and in the evening, accompanied by the incumbent and his son, appeared before the monument committee.

Branwell also wrote an interesting letter to Mr. Grundy on May 22nd, 1842, which that gentleman erroneously assigns to 1845. In it he says that he cannot avoid the temptation, while sitting alone, all the household being at church, and he being the sole occupant of the parsonage, to scribble a few lines to cheer his spirits. He alludes to the extreme pain, illness, and mental depression he has endured since his dismissal. He describes himself, while at Luddenden Foot, as a 'miserable wreck,' as requiring six glasses of whisky to stimulate him, as almost insane! And he feels his recovery from this last stage of his condition to be retarded by 'having nothing to listen to except the wind moaning among old chimneys and older ash trees, — nothing to look at except heathery hills, walked over when life had all to hope for, and nothing to regret.' He reproaches himself, in bitter terms, with seeking indulgence, while at Luddenden Foot, in failings which formed, he declares, the black spot on his character. His sister Charlotte's mind appears to have been cast in the same gloomy mould; for, when suffering under bodily ailment, or the despondency and hopelessness which overshadowed her soul, she was impelled, as we have seen, to make confessions to her friend 'E' of her 'stings of conscience,' her 'visitings of remorse.' She hates her 'former flippancy and forwardness.' She is in a state of 'horrid, gloomy uncertainty,' and clouds are 'gathering darker,' and a more depressing despondency weighs upon her spirits.

In another letter to her friend, Charlotte says she is 'in a strange state of mind — still gloomy, but not despairing. I keep trying to do right…. I abhor myself, I despise myself.' And again, later, she wonders if the new year will be 'stained as darkly as the last with all our sins, follies, secret vanities, and uncontrolled passions and propensities,' saying 'I trust not; but I feel in nothing better, neither humbler nor purer.'

Branwell, however, while making, in a like tone, his unnecessarily exaggerated confession to his friend, sets forth his renovation of soul and body. He has, at length, acquired health, strength, and soundness of mind far superior to anything he had known at Luddenden Foot. He can speak cheerfully, and enjoy the company of another, without his former stimulus. He can write, think, and act, with some apparent approach to resolution, and he only wants a motive for exertion to be happier than he has been for years. He has still something left in him which might do him service. He thinks he ought not to live too long in solitude, as the world soon forgets those who wish it 'Goodbye.' Then, although ashamed of it, he asks for answers to some inquiries he had made about obtaining a new situation, evidently thinking Mr.

Grundy's influence of importance in the matter.

This letter must receive a passing notice. It shows Branwell's mind vigorous and healthy, although it had been disordered by physical illness accompanied by brooding melancholy. His picture of the lonely parsonage and the solitude of the surrounding country, combined with the expression of his own sad emotions, is graphic enough. His sisters wrote with the same power and the same artistic feeling. The occasion of his writing this letter to Mr. Grundy was his wish to obtain some employment in connection with the railway, and he made this overdrawn confession of his habits and indulgences when at Luddenden Foot, and contrasted them with the great mental, moral, and bodily improvement he had acquired since he left. It was his hope that by this contrast he might make a favourable impression, and that Mr. Grundy's position with the Messrs. Stephenson might be a means of helping him to some employment suited to his tastes and abilities. But Mr. Grundy could not aid him in this object, which he pursued with all the feverish eagerness of his urgent and impetuous nature. With great vigour of expression he declares, 'I would rather give my hand than undergo again the grovelling carelessness, the malignant yet cold debauchery, the determination to find how far mind could carry body without both being chucked into hell.'

But Branwell, at the time of which I speak, was full of energy and industry; indeed, he could not be idle. He wrote another letter in reply to one he had received from Mr. Grundy, dated June the 9th, 1842. From this we learn that his friend had either not entertained his applications, or was unable to further his interests in the quarter from which employment could come, for he had given discouraging answers. Branwell felt the disappointment keenly, but says that it was allayed by Mr. Grundy's kind and considerate tone. His friend had asked why he did not turn his attention elsewhere. To this Branwell replies that most of his relations are clergymen, and others of them, by a private life, removed from the busy world. As for the church, he declares he has not one mental qualification, 'save, perhaps, hypocrisy,' which might make him 'cut a figure in its pulpits.' He informs Mr. Grundy that Mr. James Montgomery and another literary gentleman, who had lately seen something of his work, wished him to turn his attention to literature. He declares that he has little conceit of himself, but that he has a great desire for activity. He is somewhat changed, yet, although not possessed of the buoyant spirits of his friend, he might, in dress and appearance, emulate something like ordinary decency.

In Leyland's art commissions at Haworth, Branwell took great interest, and in his correspondence considerable activity and industry appear. He wrote, on June the 29th, 1842, to the sculptor, a letter, in which he alludes to the conduct of some gentlemen of the committee at Haworth, who had acted in an unfair way to his friend on a professional matter. He says: —

'I have not often felt more heartily ashamed than when you left the committee at Haworth; but I did not like to speak on the subject then, and I trusted that you would make that allowance, which you have perhaps often ere now had to do, for gothic ignorance and ill breeding; and one or two of the persons present afterwards felt that they had left by no means an enviable impression on your mind.

'Though it is but a poor compliment, — I long much to see you again at Haworth, and forget for half-a-day the amiable society in which I am placed, where I never hear a word more musical than an ass's bray. When you come over, bring with you Mr. Constable, but leave behind Father Matthew, as his conversation is too cold and freezing for comfort among the moors of Yorkshire.'

At the bottom of the sheet on which this letter is written, Branwell has drawn a pen-and-ink sketch of rare merit. The weird waste, which stretches to the horizon, may represent well the lonely wilds of Haworth, overshadowed by the clouds of approaching night, and interspersed with streaks of fading day, among which the crescent moon appears. In the foreground is a group of monuments, one a tomb sunk on its side; and, of the head-stones, one is inscribed with the word 'Resurgam.' Branwell was no mean draughtsman, and that his hand did not shake with the excesses he is represented to have gone through at this period of his life, the delicacy of this elaborate drawing is sufficient proof.

Mr. Constable, mentioned in the letter, was an acquaintance of the sculptor, a gentleman of considerable ability in art and poetry. The conviviality, which Branwell did not consider altogether a dereliction of moral duty, led him to make his quiet and humorous allusion to Father Matthew.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

VOLUME II

CHAPTER I.

CHARLOTTE AND EMILY IN BRUSSELS.

The Sojourn in Brussels Resolved upon — Why Charlotte fixed on Brussels for Higher Education — Charlotte and Emily take up their Residence with Madame Héger — A Picture of the Prospect in 'Villette' — At the Pensionnat — Madame Héger — Monsieur Héger — Charlotte likes Brussels — Her Contrast between the Belgians and the English — Death of Miss Branwell — Return to Haworth.

It was more than a month before Charlotte received the reply from her Aunt Branwell. Meanwhile she had waited patiently, pending the anxious discussions at the parsonage, and she breathed not a single word of the great project to her friend. It was her way to work in obscurity, and to let her efforts 'be known by their results.' But at last, as I have said, consent was given to her plan; the necessary money was forthcoming; and it only remained for her to make the arrangements for her journey, and Emily had arrangements to make also. There was much of letter-writing to do, letters to Brussels — whither Charlotte would of all cities prefer to go, — and to many other places; and there were clothes to make, and farewells to be said.

It was a great disappointment to Charlotte, — when, having left her situation at Christmas, 1841, she came to Haworth to join the family circle, — that Branwell could not be there, and it troubled him very much too. But the plans were talked over, the letters were written, and Charlotte did not repent her boldness, — nay, she looked forward confidently to the venture. It seems a strange ambitious plan to us, and one showing little knowledge of the world, this of spending six months in Brussels, in that short time to become thoroughly acquainted with French, to be improved in Italian, and get a dash of German; and, so provided with accomplishments, to set up a successful school at Burlington, — for the Dewsbury Moor project had already been relinquished.

Brussels was fixed upon by Charlotte for several reasons: because it was a cheap journey, because education could be had there at any rate as good as at any other place in Europe, and perhaps better; and then, Mary and Martha T — — , her friends, were staying at Brussels at the Château de Kokleberg, and Mary, with Mrs. Jenkins, the wife of the English chaplain, would find the desired *pensionnat*. But there was a temporary disappointment: it was reported that the schools in Brussels were not good; and Charlotte immediately set to work to discover another establishment, which was found at Lille — one that Baptist Noel recommended, where the terms were £50 for each pupil. It had been at last arranged that Charlotte and Emily should journey to this place, about the middle of February, 1842, under the escort of Madame Marzials, a lady then in London, when again the plans were changed. Mrs. Jenkins, the chaplain's wife, had discovered, to Charlotte's great delight, the establishment of Madame Héger in the Rue d'Isabelle, at Brussels, which was greatly eulogized, and thither it was finally decided that the two sisters could go.

Charlotte went to Brussels with a stout heart and in perfect confidence, and she left no regrets behind her; but it was not so with Emily. The elder sister was cast in a different mould from the younger; there was a spice of adventure in her composition, and the pleasure, too, of seeing new places was keen. It had been said to her by some inward voice, as to Lucy Snowe, who is the truest portrait of Charlotte, 'Leave this wilderness, and go out hence;' and she answered the query, 'Where?' with a sharp determination; and went out to enter into the spirit of the things she met, wherever her mental constitution would enable her to do so. 'For background,' she says of her journey in 'Villette,' 'spread a sky, solemn and dark blue, and — grand with imperial promise, with tints of enchantment — strode from north to south a God-bent bow, an arch of hope:' but that was to be struck out. 'Cancel that, reader — or rather let it stand, and draw thence a moral — an alliterative, text-hand copy:

'"Day-dreams are delusions of the demon."'

So was Charlotte to be disillusioned. But what a fairyland had she fashioned to herself of that gay Belgian capital, and what painful memories she brought thence! For, according to Mr. Wemyss Reid, — and doubtless he is right — her stay in Brussels with Emily, and afterwards alone, was the turning-point in Charlotte's career, and the record of it in 'Villette' was wrung from her as her heart's blood, amid paroxysms of positive anguish. But of these things she knew nothing in the January of 1842; then the future slept in sunny calm, so sunny, indeed, that to part from Haworth, and those she knew there, her father and her brother and sister, gave her scarcely a pang; and afterwards, so far as one can trace, from her letters, and from 'Villette,' which expresses even more, the troubles of the parsonage were never acute troubles to her. Her joys and troubles abroad were in fact her own, and they were borne and suffered alone.

But, with Emily, Haworth was no wilderness, a paradise rather, and with bitter pain she left the moors that the coming summer should cover with purple billows. For Emily Brontë was inspired far more than her sister with the influences of locality and of her home. Amidst the distant Yorkshire hills dwelt, too, her father, with Branwell and Anne, whom she loved more than all else in the world; and many an hour, sitting in the bare rooms of the *pensionnat*, she pondered on their hopes and their sorrows. We cannot say that Emily's sojourn in Brussels changed her in any way whatever, nor that she was made by it of any nearer kinship with the outside world.

Mr. Brontë accompanied his daughters, and Mary and her brother, who travelled with them to Brussels. They stayed a day or two in London, at the Chapter coffee-house in Paternoster Row, and a good deal of sight-seeing was done before they left for the Belgian capital. In 'Villette' Charlotte has told us of her first visit to London, and of the travelling to Labassecour, but the actual details refer more probably to her second journey thither. Yet we may feel sure that it was with the same spirit that she saw the metropolis, that she revelled in its busy life and in the earnestness that moved it. We may imagine her on the dome of St. Paul's looking over the river with its bridges, and, alongside it, the Temple Gardens, and Westminster beyond; and we may see her in the classic ground of Paternoster Row. Emily has left no record of her feelings on this journey, but we may be sure they differed very much from Charlotte's. We have an account in 'The Professor' of William Crimsworth's feelings when he entered Belgium, and they were doubtless Charlotte's also. 'This is Belgium, reader. Look! don't call the picture flat or a dull one — it was neither flat nor dull to me when I first beheld it. When I left Ostend on a fine February morning, and found myself on the road to Brussels, nothing could look vapid to me. My sense of enjoyment possessed an edge whetted to the finest; untouched, keen, exquisite.… Liberty I clasped in my arms for the first time, and the influence of her smile and embrace revived my life like the sun and the west wind.'

It was proposed at the time that the two sisters should remain in the *pensionnat* until the *grandes vacances* in September, when they were to return home. They were in Brussels then to work, and the boisterous schoolgirls found no companions in them, for they remained together for a long time, and read and studied apart. These two sisters did not easily make friends; they were shy, and their companions thought them peculiar — Charlotte, clad in her plain, home-made dress, and Emily, with her gigot sleeves and long, straight skirts, walking in the garden together. Mrs. Jenkins told Mrs. Gaskell that she asked them to spend Sundays and holidays with her, but at last she found that even these visits gave them more pain than pleasure, and thenceforth they remained away. This reserve never passed from Emily entirely, but Charlotte afterwards gained confidence and made friends.

There were memories, as Mrs. Gaskell records, connected with Madame Héger's house in the Rue d'Isabelle, of mediæval chivalry and romance, which are doubtless reflected in the visits of the nun to the *grenier* and the old garden where Lucy Snowe is. From the gay, bright Rue Royale four flights of steps lead down to the Rue d'Isabelle, and the chimneys of its houses are level with one's feet as one stands at the top of them. The quiet street was called the Fossé aux Chiens in the thirteenth century, because the ducal kennels were there, on the site of Madame Héger's house; but these gave place later to a hospital for the homeless and the poor. Afterwards the Arbalétriers du Grand Serment had their place there, and noble company visited them, and great ceremonials and feasts they gave. Later again the street was called the Rue d'Isabelle, because the Infanta Isabella induced the Arbalétriers to allow a road to be made through their grounds, and built them in return a noble mansion close by, which was afterwards Madame Héger's.

William Crimsworth saw the establishment. 'I remember, before entering the park, I stood awhile to contemplate the statue of General Belliard, and then I advanced to the top of the great staircase just beyond, and I looked down into a narrow back street, which I afterwards learnt was called the Rue d'Isabelle. I well recollect that my eye rested on the green door of a rather large house opposite, where, on a brass plate, was inscribed, "Pensionnat de Demoiselles."'

Madame Héger, the mistress of this *pensionnat*, was a woman of capacity, and understood the duties of her position, but apparently Charlotte did not get on very well with her, and in the second year of the residence in Brussels they were estranged. It was said that the *directrice* had 'quelque chose de froid et de compassé dans son maintien,' which did not prepossess people in her favour; and Charlotte, it appears, had little tolerance of her beliefs or her prejudices. Monsieur Héger, unlike his wife, was of a quick and energetic nature, choleric and irritable in temperament, but withal gentle and benevolent also. It was said that there were few characters so noble and admirable as his, that he was a zealous member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and that, after days occupied in arduous educational work, he was wont to gather the poor together in order that he might amuse and instruct them at the same time. He gave up his lucrative position, too, as prefect of the studies at the Athenée because he could not succeed in introducing religious instruction into the curriculum there. Very many traits of Monsieur Héger's character are reproduced in that of Paul Emanuel.

The school was a large and prosperous one, conducted as continental schools usually are, and Charlotte, in a short time, was happy in the busy life she led there. She has left an admirable picture, a veritable photograph, of the establishment in the pages of 'Villette,' which indeed contains her mental history during her sojourn there. The training through which she and Emily were put was different from that of the other pupils. Monsieur Héger was quick to perceive that they were capable of greater things than most people, so he took the bold step of putting them to the higher walks of French literature, omitting the general work of grammar and vocabulary; and his experiment was justified by its success.

Charlotte and Emily, with one other girl and the *governante* of Madame Héger's children, were the only exceptions to the Catholicism of the house, and the Brontës found that this difference cut them off in sympathy from the rest of the inhabitants. 'We are completely isolated in the midst of numbers,' says Charlotte; but she adds, 'I think I am never unhappy; my present life is so delightful, so congenial to my own nature, compared with that of a governess. My time, constantly occupied, passes too rapidly.' We do not find that news from home gave her trouble, nor that she was particularly uneasy in her absence. 'I don't deny,' she says later, 'that I have brief attacks of home-sickness; but, on the whole, I have borne a very valiant heart so far; and I have been happy in Brussels, because I have always been fully occupied with the employments that I like.'

Charlotte's happiness at this time was in herself. She lived in bright anticipation of the time when it should be possible to the sisters to open a school, which was to be the reward of their arduous studies, and of that love for work and that perseverance of which Monsieur Héger spoke in his letter to Mr. Brontë, written when Charlotte and Emily were called to Haworth. Lucy Snowe in 'Villette' tells of such hopes; of the tenement which she shall take, with its one large room and two or three smaller ones; of the few benches and desks, the black tableau, and the *estrade*, with its chair, tables, chalks, and sponge, where she shall teach the day-scholars. 'Madame Beck's commencement was — as I have often heard her say — from no higher starting-point, and where is she now?' This was the hope which Lucy Snowe repeated to Monsieur Paul, and it pleased him, though he called it 'an Alnaschar dream.' But it was the salt of Charlotte's life during the first months of her residence in Brussels.

Brussels was liked by Charlotte, and she calls it a beautiful city; and she liked the country about it, though it differed so much from her own hilly Haworth. But she did not like its inhabitants; the Belgians were to her people of a lower order; she could not enter into their pleasures, and she did not understand them. Charlotte, with her restricted views of life, came into the midst of strangers; she found them different from her ideal, and she was repulsed by them. The two books in which she has recorded her impressions of the Belgians are occupied with a frequent contrast of 'the daughter of Albion and nursling of Protestantism' with 'the foster-child of Rome, the protegée of Jesuitry,' always to the disadvantage of the latter. Mesdemoiselles Eulalie, Hortense, and Caroline in 'The Professor,' and Mesdemoiselles Blanche, Virginie, and Angélique in 'Villette,' are Charlotte's types of the Belgian female — heavy, stolid, unimpressionable to good, sensual, gross, and unintellectual. The Labasse-couriennes were 'a swinish multitude,' not to be driven by force; 'whenever a lie was necessary for their occasions, they brought it out with a careless ease and breadth, altogether untroubled by any rebuke of conscience;' and they were cold, animal, and selfish. Nevertheless, occupied in her duties, Charlotte was happy, even with these companions. We have no actual means of knowing what Emily thought of them, for her life amongst them was never reproduced in her writings, and it made but little permanent impression upon her. Charlotte said that her sister worked 'like a horse,' and that she did not get on well with Monsieur Héger.

The two sisters had now friends in Brussels, for they sometimes saw Mary and Martha T — — who were staying there at the Château de Kokleberg, and these young ladies had cousins in the city, whose house was often a pleasant meeting-place. But Emily made little progress with these friendships.

The *grandes vacances* began in September, but Charlotte and Emily did not return home then as had been intended; all was well at Haworth, and there was no reason why they should. Madame Héger made a proposal that they should remain six months more, Charlotte as English teacher, and Emily to instruct some pupils in music; and they were to continue their studies and have board without payment, but they were offered no salary. These terms were at last accepted, and the sisters remained through the long *vacances* with a few boarders who were also there, and Charlotte, at least, was happy.

But a year later, when the rooms of the *pensionnat* were once more deserted, and Emily far away in the parsonage at Haworth, there can be no doubt that she became again subject to that melancholia which had previously been remarked in her when she was at Miss Wooler's. The excitement of her first sojourn at Brussels wore off, she found no novelty in the things she saw, and she was left to solitary reflection a great deal. But her melancholy began with herself. 'My youth is leaving me,' she said to Mary; 'I can never do better than I have done, and I have done nothing yet,' and she seemed at such times, according to this friend, 'to think that most human beings were destined by the pressure of worldly interests to lose one faculty and feeling after another, till they went dead altogether. I hope I shall be put in my grave as soon as I'm dead; I don't want to walk about so,' she added. Mary advised her to go home or elsewhere, when she was in this state, for the sake of change, and Charlotte thanked her for the advice, but did not take it.

'That vacation! Shall I ever forget it? I think not,' says Lucy Snowe.... 'My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its cords. How long were the September days! How silent, how lifeless! How vast and void seemed the desolate premises! How gloomy the forsaken garden, — grey now with the dust of a town summer departed!' To Lucy Snowe the future gave no promise of comfort; and a sorrowful indifference to existence often pressed upon her, — a 'despairing resignation to reach betimes the end of all things earthly.' She found the future but a hopeless desert: 'tawny sands, with no green fields, no palm-tree, no well in view.' And these were the thoughts, too, that oppressed Charlotte Brontë in Brussels and sorely weighed her down. It was in one of these fits of depression, overcome with melancholy, that she found consolation in the confessional, when she poured her tale of solitary sorrow into the ear of a priest — a Père Silas, like him in 'Villette,' who spoke of peace and hope to Lucy Snowe.

Troubles of another kind had, however, broken in sadly enough on the close of Charlotte's first *vacances* in Brussels in 1842, when she and Emily were greatly shocked by the death of Martha T — — at the Château de Kokleberg, after a very short illness. This was a great grief to the little circle in Brussels, for the dead girl had been a bright and affectionate companion, — bewailed under the name of Jessie in 'Shirley,' — and she was deeply lamented. But another grief awaited the Brontë sisters; they heard that their aunt Branwell was ill, — was dead; they were wanted at home; and at once, after very hasty preparation, they left Brussels, Emily not to return. They came back to the parsonage at Haworth, to find the funeral over, and the house deprived of one who had been its support and guardian for years.

Thus their stay in Brussels was suddenly cut short, and their studies were interrupted; but they had learned a good deal during their stay there. Monsieur Héger wrote to console Mr. Brontë on his loss; and said that in another year the two girls would have been secured against the eventualities of the future. They were being instructed, and, at the same time, were acquiring the art of instruction: Emily was learning the piano, and receiving lessons from the best Belgian professors; and she had little pupils herself. ‘Elle perdait donc à la fois un reste d’ignorance et un reste plus gênant encore de timidité.’ Charlotte was beginning to give French lessons, and to gain ‘cette assurance, cet aplomb si nécessaire dans l’enseignement.’ It was this kind letter from Monsieur Héger that afterwards induced Mr. Brontë to allow Charlotte to return to Brussels.

CHAPTER II.

OTHER POEMS.

Branwell at the Parsonage: his Loneliness — 'The Epicurean's Song' — 'Song' — Northangerland — 'Noah's Warning over Methusaleh's Grave' — Letter to Mr. Grundy — Miss Branwell's Death — Her Will — Her Nephew Remembered — Injustice done to Him in this Matter by the Biographers of his Sisters.

During the absence of his sisters Charlotte and Emily in Brussels, and while Anne was away as a governess, Branwell no doubt felt lonely at the parsonage at Haworth; but he appears to have sought consolation from his troubles in the soothing influences of music and poetry. He knew that these employments softened many of the difficulties that beset the road of human life, and that they introduced men into a purer and nobler sphere than that which is called reality. He felt that they led 'the spirit on, in an ecstasy of admiration, of sweet sorrow, or of unearthly joy, to the music of harmonious, and not wholly intelligible words, raising in the mind beauteous and transcendent images.' Whatever may have been said as to Branwell's proneness to self-indulgence, and his enjoyment of society, even that of 'The Bull,' and of the corrupt of Haworth, none of his alleged depravity and coarseness of disposition disfigured his verses, however deficient his early effusions may have been in the higher excellencies of the Muse. From the general tenor of his writings, which is religious and sometimes philosophical, he seems, under his misfortunes, which were ever with him in one shape or another, to have sought consolation in the shadowed paths of poetry and reflection.

Some lights now and then diversify the general gloom of his stanzas; but, even then, an air of sadness still pervades them. More I shall find to say on the special features of Branwell's poems in the later pages of the present work.

He wrote the following verses in 1842:

THE EPICUREAN'S SONG.
'The visits of Sorrow
Say, why should we mourn?
Since the sun of to-morrow
May shine on its urn;
And all that we think such pain
Will have departed, — then
Bear for a moment what cannot return;

‘For past time has taken
Each hour that it gave,
And they never awaken
From yesterday’s grave;
So surely we may defy
Shadows, like memory,
Feeble and fleeting as midsummer wave.
‘From the depths where they’re falling
Nor pleasure, nor pain,
Despite our recalling,
Can reach us again;
Though we brood over them,
Nought can recover them,
Where they are laid, they must ever remain.
‘So seize we the present,
And gather its flowers,
For, — mournful or pleasant, —
‘Tis all that is ours;
While daylight we’re wasting,
The evening is hasting,
And night follows fast on vanishing hours.
‘Yes, — and we, when night comes,
Whatever betide,
Must die as our fate dooms,
And sleep by their side;
For *change* is the only thing
Always continuing;
And it sweeps creation away with its tide.’

Here Branwell, writing, contrary to his custom, in a gay mood, forgets the failures of the past, diverting his mind from them by seeking serenity in the diversions which now and then lighten his path. He is perfectly conscious of the fleeting nature of earthly things; and, with that natural and felicitous faculty of versification with which his images and figures are invariably described, he invests the Epicurean with the hopes of the Optimist, or with the indifference of the Stoic to the shadows which ever and anon dim the pleasures of human existence. There is nothing assuredly in this lyric of the ‘pulpit twang,’ to which Miss Robinson refers, nor is it a ‘weak and characterless effusion.’

To the year 1842 belongs the following song which in feeling reminds one of Burns’ ‘Auld Lang Syne.’ The subject, however, is distinct, and is pervaded by a profound sentiment of enduring affection, and is expressive of the deepest feeling in reference to it.

SONG.

‘Should life’s first feelings be forgot,
As Time leaves years behind?
Should man’s for ever changing lot
Work changes in the mind?
‘Should space, that severs heart from heart,
The heart’s best thoughts destroy?
Should years, that bid our youth depart,
Bid youthful memories die?
‘Oh! say not that these coming years
Will warmer friendships bring;
For friendship’s joys, and hopes, and fears,
From deeper fountains spring.
‘Its feelings to the *heart* belong;
Its sign — the glistening eye,
While new affections on the *tongue*,
Arise and live and die.
‘So, passing crowds may *smiles* awake
The passing hour to cheer;
But only old acquaintance’ sake
Can ever form a tear.’

Leyland was himself a poet, as I have said, and a literary critic of ability and judgment. Branwell submitted some poems to him for opinion, and he advised his friend to publish them with his name appended, rather than under the pseudonym of ‘Northangerland,’ for he considered them creditable to his genius. But Branwell, on July 12th, 1842, writing to Leyland, asking some technical questions, says, in a postscript, ‘Northangerland has so long wrought on in secret and silence that he dare not take your kind encouragement in the light which *vanity* would prompt him to do.’

On August 10th, 1842, he wrote to Leyland in reference to a monument, which that sculptor had recently put up at Haworth, and he concluded by saying:

‘When you see Mr. Constable — to whom I shall write directly, — be kind enough to tell him that — owing to my absence from home when it arrived, and to the carelessness of those who neglected to give it me on my return, — I have only *now* received his note. Its injunctions shall be gladly attended to; but he would better please me by refraining from any slurs on the fair fame of Charles Freeman or Benjamin Caunt, Esquires.’

Branwell did not lose his early interest in the ‘noble science,’ but continued it with a half-serious constancy. Constable and Leyland regarded the pugilistic encounters of the ‘Ring’ as brutal and degrading, but Branwell always professed to defend its champions with energy and zeal; and in this letter he playfully alludes to two of them. Among his literary labours of the year 1842 is the following poem. It is entitled:

NOAH'S WARNING OVER METHUSALEH'S GRAVE.

'Brothers and men! one moment stay
Beside your latest patriarch's grave,
While God's just vengeance yet delay,
While God's blest mercy yet can save.
'Will you compel my tongue to say,
That underneath this nameless sod
Your hands, with mine, have laid to-day
The *last* on earth who walked with God?
'Shall the pale corpse, whose hoary hairs
Are just surrendered to decay,
Dissolve the chain which bound our years
To hundred ages passed away?
'Shall six-score years of warnings dread
Die like a whisper on the wind?
Shall the dark doom above your head,
Its blinded victims darker find?
'Shall storms from heaven *without* the world,
Find wilder storms from hell *within*?
Shall long-stored, late-come wrath be hurled;
Or, — will you, can you turn from sin?
'Have patience, if too plain I speak,
For time, my sons, is hastening by;
Forgive me if my accents break:
Shall *I* be saved and *Nature* die?
'Forgive that pause: — one look to Heaven
Too plainly tells me, he is gone,
Who long with me in vain had striven
For earth and for its peace alone.
'He's gone! — my Father — full of days, —
From life which left no joy for him;
Born in creation's earliest blaze;
Dying — himself, its latest beam.
'But he is gone! and, oh, behold,
Shown in his death, God's latest sign!
Than which more plainly never told
An Angel's presence His design.
'By it, the evening beams withdrawn
Before a starless night descend;
By it, the last blest spirit born
From this beginning of an end;
'By all the strife of civil war
That beams within yon fated town;
By all the heart's worst passions there,

That call so loud for vengeance down;
'By that vast wall of cloudy gloom,
Piled boding round the firmament;
By all its presages of doom,
Children of men — Repent! Repent!'

This poem has also the impress of sadness, but the onward sweep and dignity of its verse are not ruffled by the turbulent undercurrents of Branwell's mood. The idea of the piece is well borne out in majestic and suitable language, though some instances of that incoherence and indefiniteness which, at intervals, distinguish the earlier poems of his sisters, may be noticed in it.

In the latter part of the year 1842 the state of Miss Branwell's health became a cause of anxiety to the Brontë family. Acquainted as they had been, in years gone by, with sickness and death, they sorrowed, in anticipation of the inevitable loss of the lady, who had been for long years as a mother to them. Under the shadow which spread over their home, Branwell wrote to his friend — Mr. Grundy — referring to it, saying that he was attending the death-bed of his aunt who had been for twenty years as his mother. In another letter to Mr. Grundy, of the 29th of October, Branwell thus alludes in affectionate terms to her death:

'I am incoherent, I fear, but I have been waking two nights witnessing such agonizing suffering as I would not wish my worst enemy to endure; and I have now lost the pride and director of all the happy days connected with my childhood. I have suffered such sorrow since I last saw you at Haworth, that I should not now care if I were fighting in India or — — , since, when the mind is depressed, danger is the most effectual cure. But you don't like croaking, I know well, only I request you to understand from my two notes that I have not forgotten *you*, but *myself*.'

Charlotte and Emily hurried home from Brussels on the death of their aunt, as is stated in the last chapter, to find her already interred.

Mrs. Gaskell, alluding to the death of Miss Branwell, has given the following version of that lady's will. She says:

'The small property which she (Miss Branwell) had accumulated, by dint of personal frugality and self-denial, was bequeathed to her nieces. Branwell, her darling, was to have had his share; but his reckless expenditure had distressed the good old lady, and his name was omitted in her will.'

Miss Robinson, implicitly, and without reflection, following this author, says:

'Miss Branwell's will had to be made known. The little property that she had saved out of her frugal income was all left to her three nieces. Branwell had been her darling, the only son, called by her name; but his disgrace had wounded her too deeply. He was not even mentioned in her will.'

Miss Elizabeth Branwell had made her will in the year 1833 (when her nephew was about fifteen years of age), by which she left the following items to the children of Mr. Brontë: —

To Charlotte, an Indian Workbox.

To Emily Jane, a Workbox with China top, and an Ivory Fan.

To Branwell, a Japanese Dressing-case.

To Anne, her Watch, Eye Glass, and Chain.

Amongst these three nieces, her rings, silver spoons, books, clothes, &c., were to be divided as their father should think proper. Her money, arising from various sources, she left in trust for the benefit of her nieces, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, and Elizabeth Jane, the daughter of her sister, Jane Kingston, to be equally divided among them, when the youngest should have attained the age of twenty-one years. But, if these died, all was to go to her niece, Anne Kingston, and if she died, the accumulated money was to be divided between the children of her 'dear brother and sisters.' Had Branwell, who was one of these 'children,' survived his own sisters, and the cousin referred to in the will, he would have been one, if not the sole, recipient of the accumulated money in question. This contingency was present to Miss Branwell's mind when she made the bequest, and it was never either altered or revoked.

It is amazing that so much ignorance should have been displayed on a subject so easily capable of being correctly stated; but it is lamentable that this ignorance should have led the biographers of the Brontës, by erroneous statements, to inflict additional and unmerited injury on Branwell.

CHAPTER III.

A MISPLACED ATTACHMENT.

Christmas, 1842 — Branwell is Cheerful — Charlotte goes to Brussels for another Year — Branwell receives Appointment as Tutor — Branwell visits Halifax, and meets Mr. Grundy there — Charlotte's Mental Depression in Brussels — Mrs. Gaskell attributes it to Branwell's Conduct — Proofs that it was Not so — Charlotte's 'Disappointment' at Brussels — She returns to Haworth — Branwell's Misplaced Attachment — He is sent away to New Scenes.

The death of Miss Branwell had brought Charlotte and Emily home from Brussels; and Anne, from her situation, was present on the sad occasion. When the Christmas holidays came round, the sisters were all at home again. Branwell was with them; which was always a pleasure at that time, and Charlotte's friend, 'E,' came to see her. Having overcome the first pang of grief on the death of their aunt, they enjoyed their Christmas very much together. Branwell was cheerful and even merry; and in Charlotte's next letter, written in a happy mood to her friend, who had just left them, he sent a playful message. 'Branwell wants to know,' says Charlotte, 'why you carefully excluded all mention of him, when you particularly send your regards to every other member of the family. He desires to know in what he has offended you? Or whether it is considered improper for a young lady to mention the gentlemen of a house?' While they were together, plans for the future were talked over with eagerness and hope. Charlotte had accepted the proposal of Monsieur Héger that she should return to Brussels for another year, when she would have completed her knowledge of French and be fully qualified to commence a school on a footing which was yet impossible. Emily was to remain at home now to attend to her father's house, and Anne was to return to her situation as governess.

Branwell also found occupation as tutor in the same family where Anne had been for some time employed. He commenced his duties, in his new position, after the Christmas holidays of the year 1842. On his arrival at the house of his employer, he was introduced to the members of the family; and it is not too much to say that his new friends were more than satisfied with his graceful manners, his wit, and the extent of his information. Here Branwell felt himself happy; for, contrary to his expectation, he had found, to his mind, a pleasant pasture, with comparative ease, where he had only looked for the usual drudgery of a tutor's work. His family were contented that he was thus respectably and hopefully employed. The gentleman, who had engaged

Branwell as tutor to his son, was a man of some literary attainments; he was fond of rural sports, and had an urbane disposition, and quick perceptions. His wife was a lady of lofty bearing, of graceful manners, and kindly condescension; and, although approaching middle age at the time, was possessed of great personal attractions.

If the Brontës were glad at Branwell's appointment, the family he had entered were equally gratified that they had obtained a teacher whose talents they considered to be equalled only by his virtues. The time of his master, who was a clergyman, was often taken up with the duties and engagements of his position, and his lady was generally occupied with the cares of home and the enjoyments of fashionable country life. Branwell was not, therefore, too much harassed in the discharge of his duties; and he found, in the family in which he was placed, none of the rigid formality which might have rendered his position irksome. His occupation was varied by many rambles in the neighbourhood with his pupil; and, in the evening, after the duties of the day were discharged, when he retired to the farmstead where he lived, his time was entirely at his own disposal.

Unlike Anne, Branwell was not troubled with an excess of diffidence. Being naturally of an amiable and sociable disposition, he soon formed acquaintances in the neighbourhood of his sojourn, and among them was Dr. — — , physician to the family in which he was a tutor. Besides, being possessed of a fund of anecdote, combined with an entertaining manner of relating stories, that alone made him excellent company, Branwell was found to be a thorough musician, for he had further cultivated this taste and acquired considerable skill in performance.

Six months soon passed away, and Branwell and Anne once more made the parsonage at Haworth happy with their presence. One of Branwell's first impulses, after his welcome at home, was to visit his friends at Halifax; where, on this occasion, he had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Grundy. On the return of himself and his sister to their duties, there is no doubt that he continued the exertions he had made to conduct himself with such prudent diligence and self-possession as to ingratiate himself into the good favour of the family with whom he resided.

Charlotte was in the Rue d'Isabelle as English teacher; where, having gained a familiarity with the French language, though growing home-sick and not well, she resolved to remain till the end of the year; and, if possible, to acquire a knowledge of German.

It was at the beginning of August, as the *vacances* approached, that Charlotte became dispirited. The prospect of five weeks of loneliness in a deserted house, in a foreign city, was more than she could bear: the last English friend was leaving Brussels: she would have no one to whom she could turn her thoughts. 'I forewarn you, I am in low spirits,' she writes, — 'that earth and heaven are dreary and empty to me at this moment.' For the first time in her life she really dreaded the vacation; 'Alas,' she says, 'I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight at my heart; and I do so wish to go home. Is not this childish?' Yet she was bravely resolved, despite her weakness, to bear up, to stay; but for Charlotte Brontë, as for Lucy Snowe, those September days were days of suffering. Once, a little later, her resolution failed her. She was alone, on some holiday; the other inmates had gone to visit their friends in the city; Charlotte had none there now. She was solitary, and felt herself neglected by Madame Héger; she could bear it no longer, so she went to madame herself and told her she could not stay; but Monsieur Héger, hearing of it, with characteristic vehemence, pronounced his decision that she should not leave, and she remained.

Mrs. Gaskell describes her suffering from depression of mind, arising from ill-health, in her second year at Brussels, in gloomy terms, and this seems, indeed, to be the main point she is aiming to illustrate. She says: 'There were causes for distress and anxiety in the news from home, particularly as regarded Branwell. In the dead of the night, lying awake at the end of the long deserted dormitory, in the vast and silent house, every fear respecting those whom she loved, and who were so far off in another country, became a terrible reality, oppressing her and choking up the very life-blood in her heart. Those nights were times of sick, dreary, wakeful misery, precursors of many such in after years.' Mr. T. Wemyss Reid, in his monograph on Charlotte, has very properly taken exception to the manner in which Mrs. Gaskell has laid stress upon and exaggerated the occasional depression from which Charlotte suffered; and, certainly, there is nothing to show, in any of her letters from Brussels, that there was cause for anxiety on Branwell's account. On the contrary, there is very good evidence that nothing of the kind interfered with his sister's peace. Charlotte left Brussels at the end of the year 1843, and arrived at Haworth on the 2nd of January, 1844. Branwell and Anne were also at home for the Christmas holidays, and Charlotte wrote to her friend 'E' in these words: 'Anne and Branwell have just left us to return to —— ; they are both wonderfully valued in their situations.'

It was known, then, that Branwell had given satisfaction to his employers, and the happiness at this reunion of the family would have been complete had it not been for one circumstance. Charlotte's friends were now expecting that she would commence a school. She desired it, she says, above all things. She had sufficient money for the undertaking, and hoped she had some qualifications for success. Yet she could not then enter upon it. 'You will ask me, why?' she writes. 'It is on papa's account; he is now, as you know, getting old, and it grieves me to tell you that he is losing his sight. I have felt for some months that I ought not to be away from him; and I feel now it would be too selfish to leave him (at least so long as Branwell and Anne are absent) in order to pursue selfish interests of my own.' She appears, from an observation in one of her letters, written some time after the date at which we have arrived, to have regretted having gone to Brussels a second time. She says, 'I returned to Brussels after aunt's death against my conscience, prompted by what then seemed an irresistible impulse. I was punished for my selfish folly by a total withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind.' While Charlotte was still at Brussels she heard that some of her friends thought that the '*époux* of Mademoiselle Brontë' must be on the Continent, since she had declined a situation of £50 a year in England, and accepted one at £16, and returned to Belgium. This she appears, in a letter to one of them, to deny; though, whether with the intention of piquing her friend, or avoiding the question, is not distinct. Mr. Reid believes that, in this second sojourn at Brussels, Charlotte Brontë passed through an experience of the heart which proved the turning-point of her life, and made her what she was; and that it was not the subsequent misfortunes of her brother, as Mrs. Gaskell asks us to believe, that destroyed the happiness of her existence.

In the middle of March, when the sisters had finished 'shirt-making for the absent Branwell,' Charlotte took a holiday to visit her friend, by which her health was improved. On her return she found Mr. Brontë and Emily well, and a letter from Branwell, intimating that he and Anne were pretty well, too.

Branwell visited Halifax on the 4th of July of this year. His health at that time was not so good as formerly, and his sisters noticed that he was excitable. Till within two or three months of his leaving Luddenden Foot, when he had attained his twenty-fifth year, though not strong, he had enjoyed good health, his spirits having almost always been good. In his youth, unlike Charlotte, he had had no experience of severe mental depression, no deep suffering from religious melancholy. It was only when he turned to reflection that he became serious, and that his thoughts were shaded with the sadness evinced in some of his early poems. Now, however, his nerve-force was less certain; and, being more easily excited, that exuberance of spirit and that elasticity of mind which had distinguished him showed symptoms of decay. It was not to be expected that he should retain his more youthful characteristics through life: and Charlotte has told us, about this time, that something within herself, which used to be enthusiasm, was tamed down and broken; she longed for an active stake in life. As she was unable to leave home, she endeavoured to open a School at Haworth Parsonage. Could she have obtained the promise of pupils, she proposed to build a wing to the house; but, after meeting with more or less encouragement, she found that it was quite impossible to induce anyone by preference to send children to a place so much exposed to wind and weather. The sisters were not sorry they had tried; and, it has been unjustifiably suggested, did not regret too much, that they had failed, because they had fears and apprehensions respecting Branwell, and thought that the place that might be his abode could scarcely be fitted for the home of the children of strangers. Branwell and Anne were at home again for the Christmas of 1844, and they returned to their duties early in the following January. In the course of that month Charlotte writes,

'Branwell has been quieter and less irritable, on the whole, than he was in the summer.'

At this time there was no fear of his leaving his employment, and no fear that he would be dismissed from it; but a certain excitability and fitfulness of manner, a disposition to pass suddenly from gaiety to moody disquietude, which Anne had observed in her brother, had attracted, also, as has been seen, the serious attention of the other sisters, who were alarmed by it, and wondered greatly what the cause might be. And, indeed, a change had been coming over Branwell, for six months or more, a change which in the beginning had scarcely been understood by himself. A new feeling had impressed itself upon his heart that he had never experienced before, and against which he strove in vain. Branwell, in fact, who had never yet loved beyond the confines of his own home, had conceived an infatuated admiration for the wife of his employer, which afterwards, with his warm feelings, became a deep affection, and finally developed into a fierce and over-mastering passion. The lady who had dazzled and confused his understanding, as will presently appear, was unaware of the effect she had thus produced on the heart of the tutor, and he began to mistake her kindly, condescending manners for a return of his affection, an illusion which, as the sequel will show, he nursed to the very end of his life. Under this peculiar aberration of his mind, he cherished the hope that, as his employer was in feeble health, he might ere long be in a position to marry the widow, whom he believed to have already bestowed her affections upon him; when, being in easy circumstances, and possessed, as he termed it, of ‘the priceless affluence of enduring peace,’ he should be abler as he often declared, undisturbed by the usual perturbations of literary life, to make sure progress, and win for himself a name among the best authors of the day.

But at this period of his life Branwell is not known to have written much verse, his mind being otherwise occupied. The two following beautiful sonnets, however, are from his pen, dated May, 1845, and are, together, entitled:

THE EMIGRANT.
‘When sink from sight the landmarks of our home,
And, — all the bitterness of farewells o’er, —
We yield our spirit unto ocean’s foam,
And in the new-born life which lies before,
On far Columbian or Australian shore,
Strive to exchange time past for time to come:
How melancholy, then, if morn restore —
(Less welcome than the night’s forgetful gloom)
Old England’s blue hills to our sight again,
When we, our thoughts seemed weaning from her sky, —
That *pang* which wakes the almost silenced pain!
Thus, when the sick man lies, resigned to die,
A well-loved voice, a well-remembered strain,

Lets Time break harshly in upon Eternity.
When, after his long day, consumed in toil,
'Neath the scarce welcome shade of unknown trees,
Upturning thanklessly a foreign soil,
The lonely exile seeks his evening ease, —
'Tis not those tropic woods his spirit sees;
Nor calms, to him, that heaven, this world's turmoil;
Nor cools his burning brow that spicy breeze.
Ah no! the gusty clouds of England's isle
Bring music wafted on their stormy wind,
And on its verdant meads, night's shadows lower,
While "Auld Lang Syne" the darkness calls to mind.
Thus, when the demon Thirst, beneath his power
The wanderer bows, — to feverish sleep consigned,
He hears the rushing rill, and feels the cooling shower.'

While Branwell's mind was rendered bright by the sunny hopes of a happy future, he was enabled to write with pathos, coherency, and beauty, as is shown in the foregoing sonnets. But it was his misfortune that his mind was hung too finely upon the balance, and that, as the phantasy of his affections grew upon him, he became, as will hereafter be demonstrated, the victim of an 'overheated and discursive imagination,' and at last 'betrayed that monomaniac tendency' which Lucy Snowe says she 'has ever thought the most unfortunate with which man or woman can be cursed.' He became, in fact, almost as soon as the new passion had taken full possession of his heart, a miserable victim to that morbid tendency of the mind which, in far lesser degree, characterized his sister Charlotte, and of which she seems to have lived in occasional dread. It may be noted that when Lucy Snowe is seeking wildly the letter, which has been stolen away from her, she accuses herself of monomania. These mental perturbations grew upon Branwell day by day.

Time passed on; and, when he had been with his employer some two years and a half, during the concluding portion of which the control he had exercised over himself was giving way, he began to exhibit the strange irregularities of his disposition, and the irresistible fervour of his long-suppressed and feverish passion. Great patience and forbearance were exercised towards him by the lady of the house; and her sincere regard for the feelings of his family forbade her, on the first blush of the affair, to be the means of his dismissal from his employment. He was not, indeed, dismissed until the step became an absolute necessity. The banishment from his post was not, however, long delayed, for Branwell had lost his former self-control; and his imprudence overcame the reluctance of the lady, who at length made known to her husband, while Branwell was absent at home, on his holiday, in the July of 1845, what his conduct had been. A letter was at once sent to him by his employer, conveying the intimation of his dismissal.

We have been told much in Charlotte Brontë's letters to her friend 'E,' and in the works of Mrs. Gaskell and other writers, concerning this event, which laid prostrate the hopes of Branwell, that requires both comment and correction. We have already seen to what a low state of mind and body Branwell was for a time reduced by his dismissal from Luddenden Foot; but his condition in both was as that of sound health, compared with his utter prostration on his expulsion from his last employment, — a condition which renders any adequate description impossible. He had, indeed, been supremely happy. For him, the sun of prosperity had shone with unsullied splendour, and the rivers of hope had flowed with music richer and deeper than any of earth. The roses that bloomed in the paradise of his fervid imagination, were brighter — and, as he thought, far more lasting — than those, far-famed, of Suristan, and the green pastures of his hopeful aspirations were more fertile and fragrant than he had ever thought possible to him in the years gone by. But, suddenly, the paradise which his poetic and imaginative spirit had created, was changed, without a moment's warning, to a region of sleepless nights and wretched days, — 'eleven continuous nights of sleepless horror' he afterwards speaks of, — where his mind, dismayed and incoherent, reeled and shook in agony intense and ungovernable.

The distress of the Brontë family on this reverse of Branwell's prospects can scarcely be conceived in its entirety. So deeply agonizing was the then state of his affairs, that they could think of nothing else; and, in their sorrow, had no heart to contemplate the future. It was under the immediate influence of this misery that Anne Brontë wrote her pathetic poem, 'Domestic Peace,' in which she deplores the changed conditions of the family. Charlotte had just returned home from a visit to her friend, and found her brother in the condition I have described. Thus she speaks of it, under the date of July the 31st, 1845: 'It was ten o'clock at night when I got home. I found Branwell ill. He is so very often, owing to his own fault. I was not therefore shocked at first. But when Anne informed me of the immediate cause of his present illness I was very greatly shocked. He had last Thursday received a note from Mr. — —, sternly dismissing him…. We have had sad work with him since. He thought of nothing but stunning or drowning his distressed mind. No one in the house could have rest, and at last we have been obliged to send him from home for a week with some one to look after him. He has written to me this morning, and expresses some sense of contrition for his frantic folly. He promises amendment on his return, but so long as he remains at home I scarce dare hope for peace in the house. We must all, I fear, prepare for a season of distress and disquietude. I cannot now ask Miss — — or anyone else.'

Branwell's distress had proved so really acute at the disgrace which had befallen him that Mr. Brontë, becoming alarmed for the consequences, decided to send his son away to new scenes in the hope of diverting his mind from the subject. That this was, to some extent, successful is evident from Branwell's letter to his sister, in which his natural feelings and repentant disposition found expression. Branwell had remembered his former visit to

Liverpool, and selected that place on this occasion, and sailed thence to the coast of Wales. The sad feelings that impressed him on the voyage were afterwards expressed in verse.

CHAPTER IV.

‘BRANWELL’S FALL,’ AS SET FORTH IN THE BIOGRAPHIES OF HIS SISTERS.

Branwell after his Disappointment — Parallel for his State of Mind in that of Lady Byron — Mrs. Gaskell’s Misconceptions — True State of the Case — Charlotte Illustrates it in her Poem of ‘Preference’ — She alludes to Branwell’s Condition in ‘The Professor’ — Mrs. Gaskell Compelled to Omit her Account in the Later Editions of her Work — Branwell’s Prostration and Ill-health at the Time.

After the first shock to his feelings had been sustained, and, by its own intensity, toned down to less oppressive anguish and pain, a strange calm succeeded in Branwell, more agonizing and appalling to his friends than the stormy ebullitions which had preceded it. There is evidence that his family at this time misunderstood the actual state of his mind, and that their very anxiety about him caused them — but more especially Charlotte — to regard his acts, irresponsible though they might be, as inveterate offences and habitual sins. It has indeed been said by some that Charlotte did not afterwards speak to him for the space of two years.

The reproaches of his sister were probably as unwise as they were passionate, unmeasured, and, in outward semblance, unfeeling; yet they were censures pronounced in momentary anger, utterances of the deep affection she had for her brother, and of sincere sorrow for his unhappy, hopeless, and insane passion. But Branwell’s friends and acquaintances saw clearly that on one subject, and one only, his mind had given way; and that was in his conception of the undoubted love which the lady of his heart bore him. They also saw, notwithstanding this morbid perversion of the ordinary powers of his mind in one particular illusion, that he was not affected in his faculty of reasoning correctly and consistently on all other subjects. They knew, if the Brontë family did not, that Branwell’s mind, naturally morbid and depressed, had been unhinged by the sudden and unexpected ruin of his hopes; and that his heart and his intellect had been so far bruised and wounded, that for many of the acts done, and the things said, under the abiding grief which followed it, he was irresponsible. This will shortly appear.

The sisters did not, however, long remain in ignorance of the true state of Branwell’s mind. They became aware that he suffered from monomania touching the object of his sorrow, and the circumstance impressed them exceedingly. In several of their novels they have, indeed, dwelt upon this condition, and have lamented the misery and mental prostration which it entails. Lucy Snowe suffers from it severely, as I have mentioned. But, in ‘The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,’ one of the characters charges Gilbert Markham — whose circumstances are precisely those of Branwell in regard to his love for a married lady — with monomania in this very matter; and, in ‘Wuthering Heights,’ speaking of the events that preceded Heathcliff’s death, Nelly Dean alleges that he suffers from monomania in his love for the wife of Edgar Linton. Branwell’s sisters, however, never took the tragic view of his conduct that impressed Mrs. Gaskell.

For a time Branwell could talk of nothing but of the lady to whom he was attached, and he made statements of circumstances regarding her which had no foundation but in his own heated imagination. The lady, he said, loved him to distraction. She was in a state of inconceivable agony at his loss. Her husband, cruel, brutal, and unfeeling, threatened her with his dire indignation, and deprivation of every comfort. Branwell, indeed, told his friend W — — , by letter, that, in consequence of this persecution, the suffering lady ‘had placed herself under his protection!’ and many other stories, equally unfounded, extravagant, and impossible, were circulated. In a word, he went about among his friends, telling to each, in strict confidence, the woes under which he suffered, and painting in gloomy colours the miseries which the lady of his love had been compelled to undergo. If all other proof were wanting of the unsound state of Branwell’s mind on this one point, it would be enough, in all conscience, that he proclaimed abroad, of the lady he undertook to protect, circumstances that must infallibly redound to her infamy; and which, indeed, in the hands of injudicious persons, gave rise to the public scandal of his life, and ultimately made his name, and that of the lady whom he had loved and traduced in the same breath, of reproach among men.

For Branwell’s state of mind at this time, and for the circumstances that followed upon it, we have an exact parallel in the case of Lady Byron, after her separation from her husband. This unhappy lady, living in retirement with her friends, had maintained, for more than five years after the poet’s death, relations of the most friendly nature with his sister, the Honourable Mrs. Leigh. But, at the end of that period, weakened by misfortunes and by brooding upon particular evils, her mind gave way on one point; and she made, in the full belief of their truth, the most horrible of charges against her dead husband and his sister. These charges were, by some people, believed for a time; but a very little reflection showed that Lady Byron’s mind must have been unhinged, for all the acts of her life went to disprove the statements she made. It was not in the nature of things possible that she could remain on affectionate terms with her sister-in-law, had she known — as in her monomania she asserted she did — the utter depth of that sister-in-law’s imagined infamy. But it is not to be supposed that the unhappy lady was visibly insane; she was, on the contrary, as all remarked, gifted with a clear and accurate observation, with a lucid and logical method of thought, and with an expression more than ordinarily calm and natural.

It was precisely the same with Branwell Brontë; for, when the paroxysm of his grief was over, though he was ordinarily calm and his thoughts always clear and logical, strange impressions and misinterpretations of facts grew upon him, and he made, with all the certainty of belief, statements of circumstances relating to the lady of his dearest affections, redounding to her shame — which, had he been of sound mind, he must not only have known to be false, but would have carried, had they been true, in secrecy to the grave.

Just, too, as Lady Byron whispered the story of her woes in strict faith to many people, so did Branwell Brontë make confidants of several friends, revealing to each the extent of his misfortunes. And, further, just as the story circulated by Lady Byron was confided among others to good, honest, well-meaning Mrs. Beecher Stowe, who, conceiving herself to be the chosen champion of oppressed virtue, rushed into print, in 'Macmillan' of September, 1869, with the literary *bonne-bouche* she had received; so did Mrs. Gaskell, clad in like panoply, with anger far over-riding discretion, publish to the world the scandal she had collected from the busy *gobe-mouches* of Haworth, to the utter undoing of the fair fame of Patrick Branwell Brontë, and of the lady on whom he had fixed his hopeless affection. The scandal which was spread about Lord Byron, through the delusions of his wife, was very soon overthrown; but that with which Branwell was concerned, though thirty-seven years have passed over his grave, has been republished and is still believed — all the biographers of his sisters having, with one accord, consigned his name to obloquy and contempt.

The stories originated by Branwell lost nothing in their circulation, but they gained immensely; and years had made the tales of disappointed love into scandals unfit to be detailed, when Mrs. Gaskell, eager for information, visited Haworth, and collected materials for her work from too-willing hands, who added their own embellishments to the original statements of Branwell.

In order to show how far Mrs. Gaskell deviated from the right direction in her account of these circumstances, it will be better to place before the reader much of what she has said in direct reference to it, so that the whole matter may be made plain; and, before he closes this book, he will probably be convinced that she was wholly misled in her version of the story.

Mrs. Gaskell writes: 'All the disgraceful details came out. Branwell was in no state to conceal his agony of remorse, or, strange to say, his agony of guilty love, from any dread of shame. He gave passionate way to his feelings; he shocked and distressed those loving sisters inexpressibly; the blind father sat stunned, sorely tempted to curse the profligate woman who had tempted his boy — his only son — into the deep disgrace of deadly crime.

'All the variations of spirits and of temper — the reckless gaiety, the moping gloom of many months were now explained. There was a reason deeper than any mere indulgence of appetite, to account for his intemperance; he began his career as an habitual drunkard to drown remorse.

‘The pitiable part, as far as he was concerned, was the yearning love he still bore to the woman who had got so strong a hold upon him. It is true, that she professed equal love; we shall see how her professions held good. There was a strange lingering of conscience, when, meeting her clandestinely by appointment at Harrogate some months after, he refused to consent to the elopement which she proposed; there was some good left in this corrupted, weak young man, even to the very last of his miserable days. The case presents the reverse of the usual features: the man became the victim; the man’s life was blighted, and crushed out of him by suffering, and guilt entailed by guilt; the man’s family were stung by keenest shame. The woman — to think of her father’s pious name — the blood of honourable families mixed in her veins — her early home, underneath whose roof-tree sat those whose names are held saint-like for their good deeds, — she goes flaunting about to this day in respectable society; a showy woman for her age; kept afloat by her reputed wealth. I see her name in county papers, as one of those who patronize the Christmas balls; and I hear of her in London drawing-rooms. Now let us read, not merely of the suffering of her guilty accomplice, but of the misery she caused to innocent victims, whose premature deaths may, in part, be laid at her door.’

Mrs. Gaskell further states: ‘A few months later the invalid husband of the woman with whom he had intrigued, died. Branwell had been looking forward to this event with guilty hope. After her husband’s death, his paramour would be free; strange as it seems, the young man still loved her passionately, and now he imagined the time was come when they might look forward to being married, and live together without reproach or blame. She had offered to elope with him; she had written to him perpetually; she had sent him money — twenty pounds at a time; he remembered the criminal advances she had made; she had braved shame, and her children’s menaced disclosures, for his sake; he thought she must love him; he little knew how bad a depraved woman can be.’

As Mrs. Gaskell had formed no conception of the possible state of Branwell’s mind, she seems to have known no reason for doubting the absolute truth of what she had heard; and, with an overweening confidence, and with no deficient expression of righteous indignation, she deals with the episode in this startling manner.

In support of the charges thus made, Mrs. Gaskell refers to the contents of the will of the lady’s husband, by which, she says, what property he left to his wife was so left on the condition that she never saw Branwell again; and she adds that, on the death of her husband, the lady sent her coachman to Haworth; for, at the very time when the will was being read, she did not know but that Branwell might be on his way to her. Mrs. Gaskell furthers says that, after the interview with the coachman, Branwell was found utterly prostrated by the intimation that he must never again even see the lady whom he thought he might then marry.

The biographer of Charlotte, having obtained her information from the floating rumours of Haworth, formed an inconsiderate, erroneous, and hasty opinion on this affair and its supposed consequences. But she found many circumstances in the proceedings of Branwell and his sisters which failed to corroborate her views, and that were, in fact, at variance with what would naturally have been expected had Branwell's misconduct really been of so deep a dye as she states. In order to bring out fully the force of what she here says, Mrs. Gaskell had, previously, as we have seen, in speaking of Charlotte's stay in Brussels eighteen months before, alluded to intelligence from home calculated to distress Charlotte exceedingly with fears respecting Branwell. Yet, in the January of 1844, shortly after her return from Brussels, Charlotte told her friend 'E' that Anne and Branwell were 'both wonderfully valued in their situations.' And again, writing of the year 1845, Mrs. Gaskell says: 'He was so beguiled by this mature and wicked woman, that he went home for his holidays reluctantly, stayed there as short a time as possible, perplexing and distressing them all by his extraordinary conduct — at one time in the highest spirits; at another, in the deepest depression — accusing himself of blackest guilt and treachery, without specifying what they were; and altogether evincing an irritability of disposition bordering on insanity. Charlotte and her sister suffered acutely from his mysterious behaviour … an indistinct dread was creeping over their minds that he might turn out their deep disgrace.' And it must be added that, when in the expurgated edition the opening of this passage was omitted, Mrs. Gaskell inserted — following where she ascribes to the sisters an 'indistinct dread,' — these words: 'caused partly by his own conduct, partly by expressions of agonizing suspicion in Anne's letters home.' But we know, from Charlotte's letter to her friend, that, when she had returned home and found Branwell ill, which she says he was often, she was not therefore shocked at first, but, when Anne informed her of the immediate cause of his present illness, she was very greatly shocked, showing clearly enough that Branwell's dismissal and its cause were a complete surprise to her when she heard of them. How, then, could Anne's letters home have contained expressions of 'agonizing suspicion'?

Mrs. Gaskell found it necessary to summarize the portion of Charlotte's letter which contained these expressions of surprise, and, in her version, significantly enough, the obvious inconsistency is lost. The succeeding part also has suffered mutilation in Mrs. Gaskell's work, Charlotte's allusion to Branwell's 'frantic folly,' and the sentence, 'He promises amendment on his return,' being entirely omitted. Mr. Wemyss Reid, in publishing this letter, points out the circumstance, and says that 'Mrs. Gaskell could not bring herself to speak of such flagrant sins as those of which young Brontë had been guilty under the name of folly, nor could she conceive that there was any possibility of amendment on the part of one who had fallen so low in vice.' And, if we disregard Mrs. Gaskell's view of 'what *should have been*' Charlotte's feelings, and read the letter with the real state of the case before us, we shall at once see that, as Branwell had not fallen low in vice, the term ‘frantic folly,’ which his sister employed in speaking of his conduct, was precisely that which justly described it.

The simple truth respecting Branwell’s conduct is this: he had been too fond of company and had not escaped its penalty. Doubtless Anne occasionally saw influences upon her brother which she would have wished entirely absent. Moreover he had, as we have seen, become wildly in love. Reluctantly at first, and, from what we know of him, he may, probably, in his latest vacation have accused himself of ‘blackest guilt.’ But there is reason to believe that on this episode, as on others connected with Branwell Brontë, we have been told not a little of what *must have ensued* from a standpoint of initial error.

Of the principal accusations which Mrs. Gaskell brings against Mrs. — — I shall have to speak when I come to consider the consequences to Branwell of the final defeat of his hopes; but it may be said here that it is clear the lady never wrote letters to Branwell at all. She carefully avoided doing anything that might implicate her in the matter of Branwell’s strange passion, and, so far as any provision of the husband’s will, which was dated near the end of the year, is concerned, Branwell Brontë might never have existed. Mrs. Gaskell cannot have seen the document.

If any further evidence of the view Charlotte Brontë took of Branwell’s conduct, and of that of the lady whose character has been so much calumniated be needed, her poem entitled ‘Preference’ is sufficient. We may indeed infer from it that Charlotte herself never believed the stories concerning Mrs. — — which were in circulation at the time, and that she has left, in this production of her pen, her version of how the circumstances truly stood. The lady is represented in the poem as censuring the person who is making advances to her, and who is addressed as a soldier for whom she has a sisterly regard, while she is devotedly attached to one of whom she speaks in the warmest terms.

‘Not in scorn do I reprove thee,
Not in pride thy vows I waive,
But, believe, I could not love thee,
Wert thou prince, and I a slave.’

She then tells him that he is deceiving himself in thinking she has secret affection for him, and that her coldness towards him is assumed. She appeals forcibly to her own personal bearing as proof that she has no love for him.

‘Touch my hand, thou self-deceiver;
Nay — be calm, for I am so;
Does it burn? Does my lip quiver?
Has mine eye a troubled glow?
Canst thou call a moment’s colour
To my forehead — to my cheek?
Canst thou tinge their tranquil pallor

With one flattering, feverish streak?'

Declaring that her goodwill for him is sisterly, she thus continues:

'Rave not, rage not, wrath is fruitless,
Fury cannot change my mind;
I but deem the feeling rootless
Which so whirls in passion's wind.
Can I love? Oh, deeply — truly —
Warmly — fondly — but not thee;
And my love is answered duly,
With an equal energy.'

Then she tells him, if he would see his rival, to draw a curtain aside, when he will observe him, seated in a place shaded by trees, surrounded with books, and employing his 'unresting pen.' Here Charlotte places the 'rival' in an alcove, in the grounds of his mansion, privately employing his leisure in the retirement of his home; and makes the lady show her husband to the soldier who addresses her. She says:

'There he sits — the first of men!
Man of conscience — man of reason;
Stern, perchance, but ever just;
Foe to falsehood, wrong, and treason,
Honour's shield and virtue's trust!
Worker, thinker, firm defender
Of Heaven's truth — man's liberty;
Soul of iron — proof to slander,
Rock where founders tyranny.'

She declares that her faith is given, and therefore the person she addresses need not sue; for, while God reigns in earth and heaven, she will be faithful to the man of her heart, to whom she is immovably devoted; and who is a 'defender of Heaven's truth' — her husband.

No one, perhaps, would be better acquainted than Charlotte with the false and foul calumnies on this head, then circulating through the village; and it is well that she has left, in her poem of 'Preference,' an expression of her feeling as to the affairs which caused so much injurious gossip at the time. Yet, however desirous Charlotte might, be, in this poem, to clear the character of the lady who has been so cruelly aspersed, she appears to have had no mercy on her brother, who had been the principal actor in the drama. The following is the picture of him, in reference to this sad episode, which she puts into the mouth of William Crimsworth in 'The Professor':

'Limited as had yet been my experience of life,' he says, 'I had once had the opportunity of contemplating, near at hand, an example of the results produced by a course of interesting and romantic domestic treachery. No golden halo of fiction was about this example; I saw it bare and real; and it was very loathsome. I saw a mind degraded by the practice of mean subterfuge, by the habit of perfidious deception, and a body depraved by the infectious influence of the vice-polluted soul. I had suffered much from the forced and prolonged view of this spectacle; those sufferings I did not now regret, for their simple recollection acted as a most wholesome antidote to temptation. They had inscribed on my reason the conviction that unlawful pleasure, trenching on another's rights, is delusive and envenomed pleasure — its hollowness disappoints at the time, its poison cruelly tortures afterwards, its effects deprave for ever.' It is probable that Charlotte would not have wished this passage to be applied literally to her brother; but, unfortunately, this, and similar unguarded declarations, have largely biassed almost all who have written on the lives and literature of the sisters.

Mrs. Gaskell, under threat of ulterior proceedings, on the advice of her friends, published the edition of 1860, omitting the charges referred to, as well as those against Mr. Brontë. She did not, however, allow the effect of her first assumption of guilt, or the moral of the tale, to be lost. She inserted a few sentences intended to convey to the reader that something of the kind had gone wrong with Branwell in the place where his sister Anne was governess. Under the circumstances, therefore, I have felt it necessary to deal with the subject at large.

It may be remarked here that the indignation of the injured lady knew no bounds, and that she was only dissuaded from carrying the matter to a trial by the earnest desire of her friends, who represented that Mrs. Gaskell could not substantiate her statements, and that, as the book could not therefore be reprinted as it stood, and its circulation was consequently limited, it were better to let the matter rest, rather than incur the wide-spread reports of the newspaper press when the trial should be before the public; and, moreover, that those who knew her did not believe a word of Mrs. Gaskell's unfounded allegations. This had its effect, and the lady fretfully acquiesced.

In Miss Robinson's 'Emily Brontë,' the stories which Charlotte's biographer was compelled to omit, have been substantially reproduced; and this writer, in supporting similar views to those of Mrs. Gaskell, has found it necessary to quote her version of the letter containing Charlotte's account of Branwell's disgrace, and has also considerably enlarged upon the supposed contents of the letters of Anne. Much diffidence has been felt in dealing with this subject so closely; but, after the discussion of it in the public prints, consequent on the issue of Miss Robinson's book, it is thought the time has come for exposing the groundlessness of the stories. The reader will therefore observe that I have borne this matter in mind throughout the present work.

The distraction that overwhelmed Branwell on his dismissal from his late employment having caused him eleven nights of 'sleepless horror,' his wild attempt to drown his sorrow brought on an attack of delirium tremens. On one of these nights, in all likelihood, suddenly falling asleep, he overturned the candle and set the bedclothes on fire. The smell of burning attracted attention, and the sisters rushed into the room to extinguish the smouldering material. This accident would, doubtless, have been lost sight of, had it not been for the researches of Miss Robinson, to whom the public is indebted for an account of the circumstance, which closely reminds us of the rescue of Mr. Rochester in 'Jane Eyre,' and of the removal of 'Keeper,' by Emily, from the best bed in which he had settled himself. It will be remembered also that, on the night when Mr. Lockwood stayed at Wuthering Heights, a similar accident befel him, through the candle falling against the books he was trying to read.

On his return from Wales Branwell wrote to his friend Leyland, who had to visit Haworth professionally, pressing him to come to the parsonage. Thus he writes in the midst of his distress. The vision of his hopes had become a haunting picture of misery, the prospect of the lady becoming free to marry him had not arisen to his mind in his confusion; he would never see her again, he would be forgotten; he must communicate with her.

'Haworth, August 4, 1845.

'Dear Sir,

'I need hardly say that I shall be most delighted to see you, as God knows I have a tolerably heavy load on my mind just now, and would look to an hour spent with one like yourself, as a means of at least, temporarily, lightening it.

'I returned yesterday from a week's journey to Liverpool and North Wales, but I found during my absence that, wherever I went, a certain woman robed in black, and calling herself "MISERY," walked by my side, and leant on my arm, as affectionately as if she were my legal wife.

'Like some other husbands, I could have spared her presence.

'Yours most sincerely,

'P. B. Brontë.'

There are in one or two of Charlotte Brontë's letters, written during this month, allusions to her brother. She tells us that things are not very bright as regards him, though his health, and consequently his temper, have been somewhat better this last day or two, because he is now '*forced* to abstain.' And again, on the 18th, 'My hopes ebb low indeed about Branwell. I sometimes fear he will never be fit for much. The late blow to his prospects and feelings has quite made him reckless.'

On the 19th, Branwell sends a short note to Leyland, in which he says, 'As to my own affairs, I only wish I could see one gleam of light amid their gloom. You, I hope, are well and cheerful.'

CHAPTER V.

BRANWELL'S PROJECTED NOVEL.

Review of Branwell's past Experiences of Life — He seeks Relief in Literary Occupation — He Proposes to Write a Three-volume Novel — His Letter on the Subject — One Volume Completed — His Capability of Writing a Novel — His Letter to Mr. Grundy on his Disappointment.

Branwell had now attained his twenty-eighth year. The reader has seen in the early part of this work the intellectual promise of his opening career, the evidences of his genius, his versatility, and his mental power, and has marked the paths by which he, who was expected to be the crowning light of that remarkable family, had been brought, step by step, to the very depths of misery.

During the few short years of his life, Branwell Brontë, having tasted the sweets of a noble ambition, and surrendered himself to the influences of love, had suffered the agonies of his disappointment and disgrace, and was now feeling the very bitterness of despair. Such influences as these, shaking the soul with their tempestuous breath, cast their sad glamour on the imagination; and he who has felt the spell is impressed thenceforth more deeply with the wondrous story of life, with the struggle of being, and with the fulness of emotion, and has a far deeper insight into the mysteries of human nature. It was in this way that Byron, when he had passed through his greatest misfortunes, and had abandoned for ever the shores of England, was fired with the gloomy glory of 'Manfred' and of 'Cain.' This storm and stress of the feelings, when the imagination receives a higher consciousness, is as the Eddaic struggle of Sigurd with Fafnir, the drinking of the monster's blood, that taught to the dragon-slayer the mystic language of the birds. The reader will see how these influences told on Branwell Brontë, and how sad the voices of the birds were for him; how his muse was inspired with the note of misery, and his longing was for peace alone. There seemed, indeed, to be no hope in those days.

However, there came at times to Branwell Brontë, as there must come to all men in his circumstances, a reaction from the consuming sorrow of despair, a longing for action, for mental stimulus, to divert his mind from the woe he should never be able to forget. And, with this change in his methods of thought, there grew upon him another feeling, engendered of his broken sympathy with the actions of his kind: he learned to look upon human affairs as a spectator, rather than as one who felt any personal interest in them. It was in this way that his experience seemed to him to have unveiled the hidden springs of the actions of men; and, in recognizing the selfishness of them, he became himself something of a cynic.

Branwell was in this frame of mind when he resolved, soon after a visit to his friend Leyland, — whom he found engaged upon a tomb and recumbent statue of the late Doctor Stephen Beckwith, a benefactor to several public institutions in York, to be erected in the Minster there, — to make an effort to arouse himself. With the desire, then, of finding an absorbing occupation for his mind, by which he might be able to lay the tempest of the heart, the whirlwind of wounded vanity, of injured self-esteem, and of blighted hope, which swept through his mind in hours of reflection, and drove him to distraction or desperation, he turned, with the resolution of a new-born energy, engendered of despair, to literary composition. He proposed to himself to depict, as best he could, in a fictitious form, and as an ordinary novel, which should extend to three volumes, the different feelings that work in the human soul. The necessary labour which this undertaking involved, gave a stimulus to his ambition, which for a time was sustained; and he evidently hoped that he might yet be able to make a place for himself in the busy world of letters. At this time the novels of his sisters were not in existence, and probably had scarcely been dreamed of. Charlotte had not yet lighted on the volume of verse in the handwriting of Emily, and the literary future of the sisters had still to dawn upon them. Yet Branwell, whose behaviour had given them cause enough for disquietude, and whose sorrows were embittering his mind, had now braced himself up for an object which they had not attempted, and to the accomplishment of which he looked forward with something like confidence. In the following letter to his friend Leyland, he discloses his design; and it is probable that in this we have almost all the direct light upon it which can be found: —

‘Haworth, Sept. 10th, 1845.

‘My dear Sir,

‘I was certainly sadly disappointed at not having seen you on the Friday you named for your visit, but the cause you allege for not arriving was justifiable with a vengeance. I should have been as cracked as my cast had I entered a room and seen the labour of weeks or months destroyed (apparently — not, I trust, really) in a moment.

‘That vexation is, I hope, over; and I build upon your renewed promise of a visit; for nothing cheers me so much as the company of one whom I believe to be a *man*, and who has known care well enough to be able to appreciate the discomfort of another who knows it *too* well.

‘Never mind the lines I put into your hands, but come hither with them, and, if they should have been lost out of your pocket on the way, I won’t grumble, provided you are present to apologize for the accident.

‘I have, since I saw you at Halifax, devoted my hours of time, snatched from downright illness, to the composition of a three-volume *novel*, one volume of which is completed, and, along with the two forthcoming ones, has been really the result of half-a-dozen by-past years of thoughts about, and experience in, this crooked path of life.

'I felt that I must rouse myself to attempt something while roasting daily and nightly over a slow fire, to while away my torments; and I knew that, in the present state of the publishing and reading world, a novel is the most saleable article, so that — where ten pounds would be offered for a work, the production of which would require the utmost stretch of a man's intellect — two hundred pounds would be a refused offer for three volumes, whose composition would require the smoking of a cigar and the humming of a tune.

'My novel is the result of years of thought; and, if it gives a vivid picture of human feelings for good and evil, veiled by the cloak of deceit which must enwrap man and woman; if it records, as faithfully as the pages that unveil man's heart in "Hamlet" or "Lear," the conflicting feelings and clashing pursuits in our uncertain path through life, I shall be as much gratified (and as much astonished) as I should be if, in betting that I could jump over the Mersey, I jumped over the Irish Sea. It would not be more pleasant to light on Dublin instead of Birkenhead, than to leap from the present bathos of fictitious literature to the firmly-fixed rock honoured by the foot of a Smollett or a Fielding.

'That jump I expect to take when I can model a rival to your noble Theseus, who haunted my dreams when I slept after seeing him. But, meanwhile, I can try my utmost to rouse myself from almost killing cares, and that alone will be its own reward.

'Tell me when I may hope to see you, and believe me, dear sir,

'Yours,

'P. B. Brontë.'

A spirited sketch in pen-and-ink concludes this letter; it represents a bust of himself thrown down, and the lady of his admiration holding forth her hands towards it with an air of pity, while underneath it is the sentence: 'A cast, cast down, but not cast away!'

We have in this letter an instance of Branwell's general coherency under his disappointment, in which the elegance and freedom of his style of composition are combined with a consequent and logical arrangement of the various parts of his subject; but he cannot help concluding his letter with a direct allusion to the lady, whom he believes, — all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, — to love him with undiminished devotion. Under this fascination he still hopes for the prosperity and happiness of which he had before spoken to his friends.

Moreover it will be seen, from Branwell's letter, that he had seriously undertaken, in the midst of sorrow, suffering, and ill-health, — though, I have reason to believe, that he had sketched some part of it during his tutorship — the production of a novel, one volume of which he had completed. He does not seem to have looked upon it as a great mental effort, but rather as the natural outcome of a painful experience, and the proper alleviation of a present misery. Yet he designed to give a vivid picture of human nature; and, with the strength of experience and the consciousness of power, he evidently hoped that it would be a better work than those productions of the day, of whose composition he speaks so lightly. His experience had, indeed, been such as would well enable one of his quick perception to grasp the character, feelings, and motives of those around him. His knowledge of the country people of the West-Riding was very great; for, sitting, the admired of all observers, in the 'Black Bull,' at Haworth, he had met representatives of all classes of them. By the parlour fire, in the long winter evenings, he had had opportunities enough of entering into the spirit of the people; indeed, his letter to John Brown has shown us how he reviewed some of them. It was not merely for the enjoyment of an hour that he came to their company: he had longed for a glimpse of other life than that lived at the parsonage. And the Yorkshire peasants — whom he nevertheless held at their true value — to those who know their dialect, and can enter into their pursuits, as Branwell did and could, disclose a fund of shrewd observation, a sharp understanding, and a free and natural wit; and they delight in telling the stories of all the country side. But they must be understood before they can be appreciated. Branwell, too, had been a guest at the homesteads of the farmers, in the neighbourhood where he had latterly resided, who were always pleased to see him, when he visited them. But he had had experience of more fiery emotions than those of peasants; he had longed to know something of the deeper life of London, and had found it, at last, in the company of pugilists and their patrons.

When the mood was upon him, all these varied experiences flowed with voluble eloquence from his lips; and the brightness of his wit and the brilliance of his imagination made him, at such times, a most enjoyable companion. But he delighted above all things, as has been seen, to spend his evenings, when possible, with the little band of literati which, in those times, characterized that district; and, in the society of Storey the poet of Wharfe, James the historian of Bradford, George Searle Phillips, Leyland the sculptor, and others, he found emulation and stimulus to better things. But the uses to which, under such influences, he put his experiences of life, and the colour that was given to them through his maddening misfortunes — so far as his novel is concerned — can probably never be told. His experience in 'this crooked path of life,' during his last half-dozen years, had been sufficiently varied; and an instructive story he could doubtless have based upon it. But, what became of the volume he wrote, possibly no one can tell; and his intention of writing two more was probably not carried out.

From the following letter which Branwell wrote to Mr. Grundy in the October of 1845, we learn something of the condition of mind under which he must have written; and, from an allusion which it contains, we may, probably, infer that he had abandoned his intention of writing the two other volumes of his novel. He says:

‘I fear you will burn my present letter on recognising the handwriting; but if you will read it through, you will perhaps rather pity than spurn the distress of mind which could prompt my communication, after a silence of nearly three (to me) eventful years. While very ill and confined to my room, I wrote to you two months ago, hearing you were resident engineer of the Skipton Railway, to the inn at Skipton. I never received any reply, and as my letter asked only for one day of your society, to ease a very weary mind in the company of a friend who *always* had what I always wanted, but most want now, *cheerfulness*, I am sure you never received my letter, or your heart would have prompted an answer.

‘Since I last shook hands with you in Halifax, two summers ago, my life, till lately, has been one of apparent happiness and indulgence. You will ask, “Why does he complain, then?” I can only reply by showing the under-current of distress which bore my bark to a whirlpool, despite the surface waves of life that seemed floating me to peace. In a letter begun in the spring of 1845 and never finished, owing to incessant attacks of illness, I tried to tell you that I was tutor to the son of — — , a wealthy gentleman whose wife is sister to the wife of — — , M.P. for the county of — — , and the cousin of Lord — — . This lady (though her husband detested me) showed me a degree of kindness which, when I was deeply grieved one day at her husband’s conduct, ripened into declarations of more than ordinary feeling. My admiration of her mental and personal attractions, my knowledge of her unselfish sincerity, her sweet temper, and unwearied care for others, with but unrequited return where most should have been given … although she is seventeen years my senior, all combined to an attachment on my part, and led to reciprocations which I had little looked for. During nearly three years I had daily “troubled pleasure, soon chastised by fear.” Three months since I received a furious letter from my employer, threatening to shoot me if I returned from my vacation, which I was passing at home; and letters from her lady’s-maid and physician informed me of the outbreak, only checked by her firm courage and resolution that whatever harm came to her, none should come to me…. I have lain during nine long weeks, utterly shattered in body and broken down in mind. The probability of her becoming free to give me herself and estate never rose to drive away the prospect of her decline under her present grief. I dreaded, too, the wreck of my mind and body, which, God knows! during a short life have been severely tried. Eleven continuous nights of sleepless horror reduced me to almost blindness; and, being taken into Wales to recover, the sweet scenery, the sea, the sound of music caused me fits of unspeakable distress. You will say, “What a fool!” but if you knew the many causes I have for sorrow, which I cannot even hint at here, you would perhaps pity as well as blame. At the kind request of Mr. Macaulay and Mr. Baines, I have striven to arouse my mind by writing something worthy of being read, but I really cannot do so. Of course you will despise the writer of all this. I can only answer that the writer does the same, and would not wish to live if he did not hope that work and change may yet restore him.

‘Apologizing sincerely for what seems like whining egotism, and hardly daring to hint about the days when, in your company, I could sometimes sink the thoughts which “remind me of departed days,” I fear departed never to return, — I remain, etc.’

In this letter we see that Branwell details to Mr. Grundy the story about Mrs. — —, which he was publishing whenever he could obtain a hearing. He speaks, too, of his ill-health, the shattering of body and the breaking down of mind, which at the time prostrated him. Charlotte seems scarcely to have credited Branwell’s representations of the bodily condition into which he had fallen; for she says, in one of her letters, a little later, ‘Branwell offers no prospect of hope: he professes to be too ill to think of seeking employment.’ There are passages of a like tendency in others of Charlotte’s letters about this time; but we shall see presently that, whatever might be his condition of health, he was by no means so unsolicitous for employment, or so heedless of the future, as she supposed.

CHAPTER VI.

‘REAL REST.’ — ‘PENMAENMAWR.’

‘Real Rest’ — Comments — Spirit of Branwell and Emily Identical — Letter to Leyland — Branwell Broods on his Sorrows — ’Penmaenmawr’ — Comments — He still Searches and Hopes for Employment — Charlotte’s somewhat Overdrawn Expressions — The Alleged Elopement Proposal — Probable Origin of the Story.

Though Branwell Brontë was so feeble in health that, despite his wishes, he found physical labour impossible, and though the reaction from utter despair — through whose impetus he completed one volume of his novel — had been followed by a condition which led him to think worthy literary work beyond his power, we find him, almost at the same time, writing two of the finest poems which remain from his hand. It has been seen, in the letter addressed to Mr. Grundy, how he declares that, owing to the state of his mind, he is unable to undertake any literary work worth reading. But we have certain knowledge of an immediate movement of his genius, and that it found expression in verse, which gave a free course to his feelings. In the following poem we have perhaps the most powerful and weird expression of inconsolable sorrow ever penned. A strange calm had now succeeded the storms of feeling its author had passed through.

REAL REST.
‘I see a corpse upon the waters lie,
With eyes turned, swelled and sightless, to the sky,
And arms outstretched to move, as wave on wave
Upbears it in its boundless billowy grave.
Not time, but ocean, thins its flowing hair;
Decay, not sorrow, lays its forehead bare;
Its members move, but not in thankless toil,
For seas are milder than this world’s turmoil;
Corruption robs its lips and cheeks of red,
But wounded vanity grieves not the dead;
And, though those members hasten to decay,
No pang of suffering takes their strength away.
With untormented eye, and heart, and brain,
Through calm and storm it floats across the main;
Though love and joy have perished long ago,
Its bosom suffers not one pang of woe;

Though weeds and worms its cherished beauty hide,
It feels not wounded vanity nor pride;
Though journeying towards some far off shore,
It needs no care nor gold to float it o'er;
Though launched in voyage for eternity,
It need not think upon what is *to be*;
Though naked, helpless, and companionless,
It feels not poverty, nor knows distress.
'Ah, corpse! if thou couldst tell my aching mind
What scenes of sorrow thou hast left behind,
How sad the life which, breathing, thou hast led,
How free from strife thy sojourn with the dead;
I would assume thy place — would long to be
A world-wide wanderer o'er the waves with thee!
I have a misery, where thou hast none;
My heart beats, bursting, whilst thine lies like stone;
My veins throb wild, whilst thine are dead and dry;
And woes, not waters, dim my restless eye;
Thou longest not with one well loved to be,
And absence does not break a chain with thee;
No sudden agonies dart through thy breast;
Thou hast what all men covet, — Real Rest.
I have an outward frame, unlike to thine,
Warm with young life — not cold in death's decline;
An eye that sees the sunny light of Heaven, —
A heart by pleasure thrilled, by anguish riven —
But, in exchange for thy untroubled calm,
Thy gift of cold oblivion's healing balm,
I'd give my youth, my health, my life to come,
And share thy slumbers in thy ocean tomb.'

Here the poet, his soul longing for freedom from mortality, his crushed and wounded spirit hovering above the salt and restless wave, contemplates the pale and ghastly body that floats thereon, and, holding communion with it, touches in melancholy and beautiful words its isolation and oblivion. Accompanying the dead in its watery wanderings, he sees, with keen sympathy, its utter disseverance from the world it has left, and contrasts with its condition the hopeless sorrow of his own disappointed youth. He delineates, in words of singular power and felicity, this weird and lonely picture; and, as an artist and a poet, paints wildly, but beautifully, the decay of the drowned in the ocean, and of the living, through the effects of long-continued woe. Branwell had loved, indeed, however unfortunately; and the misery of his passion caused him to turn his reflections within upon himself. As with the 'Wandering Jew,' who sees in every rock, in every bush, in every cloud, without hope of alleviation from his abiding woe, the *via crucis* of his suffering Lord — every thought of Branwell's gifted mind, every conception of his fertile brain, every aspect, to him, of ocean, earth, and sky, — was, in one way or other, instinct with his own initial and irrepressible affection. Apart, however, from the illusions respecting the lady of his heart, under which he laboured, and which drove him to madness, there was a tendency to gloom and despondency implanted in his very nature, a disposition of mind in which his sister Emily largely resembled him. To such an extent was this the case that, in her poem of 'The Philosopher,' written in the October of 1845, she not only gives expression to similar weird thoughts and desires, but one might think there had been some interchange of ideas between the two, — that, perhaps, she had read his 'Real Rest,' and wrote the following words in half-censure of its tendency. She is speaking of an enlightening spirit:

'Had I but seen his glorious eye
Once light the clouds that wilder me;
I ne'er had raised this coward cry
To cease to think, and cease to be;
I ne'er had called oblivion blest,
Nor stretching eager hands to death,
Implored to change for senseless rest
This sentient soul, this living breath —
Oh, let me die — that power and will
Their cruel strife may close;
And conquered good and conquering ill
Be lost in one repose!'

It is noteworthy that Charlotte, also, in the second part of her poem 'Gilbert,' has used the incident of a corpse floating upon the waters, which is seen by the unhappy man in his vision, not, indeed, to give him the calm of oblivion, but rather, in contrast to Branwell's poem, to wake in him the pains of sorrow and remorse.

Again, on the 25th of November, 1845, Branwell wrote to Leyland. He could not free himself from the unfortunate ideas which had perverted his understanding, but on every other subject he wrote justly.

'Haworth,
'Bradford, Yorks.

'My dear Sir,

'I send you the enclosed, — and I ought to tell you why I wished anything of so personal a nature to appear in print.

'I have no other way, not pregnant with danger, of communicating with one whom I cannot help loving. Printed lines, with my usual signature, "Northangerland," could excite no suspicion — as my late unhappy employer shrank from the bare idea of my being able to write anything, and had a day's sickness after hearing that Macaulay had sent me a complimentary letter; so *he* won't know the name.

'I sent through a private channel one letter of comfort in her great and agonizing present afflictions, but I recalled it through dread of the consequences of a discovery.

‘These lines have only one merit, — that of really expressing my feelings, while sailing under the Welsh mountain, when the band on board the steamer struck up, “Ye banks and braes!” God knows that, for many different reasons, those feelings were far enough from pleasure.

‘I suffer very much from that mental exhaustion which arises from brooding on matters useless at present to think of, — and active employment would be my greatest cure and blessing, — for really, after hours of thoughts which business would have hushed, I have felt as if I could not live, and, if long-continued, such a state will bring on permanent affection of the heart, which is already bothered with most uneasy palpitations.

‘I should like extremely to have an hour’s sitting with you, and, if I had the chance, I would promise to try not to look gloomy. You said you would be at Haworth ere long, but that “ere” has doubtless changed to “ne’er;” so I must wish to get to Halifax some time to see you.

‘I saw Murray’s monument praised in the papers, and I trust you are getting on well with Beckwith’s, as well as with your own personal statue of living flesh and blood.

‘Mine, like your Theseus, has lost its hands and feet, and I fear its head also, for it can neither move, write, nor think as it once could.

‘I hope I shall hear from you on John Brown’s return from Halifax, whither he has gone.

‘I remain, &c.,

‘P. B. Brontë.’

The poem enclosed was entitled:

PENMAENMAWR.

‘These winds, these clouds, this chill November storm
Bring back again thy tempest-beaten form
To eyes that look upon yon dreary sky
As late they looked on thy sublimity;
When I, more troubled than thy restless sea,
Found, in its waves, companionship with thee.
‘Mid mists thou frownedst over Arvon’s shore,
‘Mid tears I watched thee over ocean’s roar,
And thy blue front, by thousand storms laid bare,
Claimed kindred with a heart worn down by care.
No smile had’st thou, o’er smiling fields aspiring,
And none had I, from smiling fields retiring;
Blackness, ‘mid sunlight, tinged thy slaty brow,
I, ‘mid sweet music, looked as dark as thou;
Old Scotland’s song, o’er murmuring surges borne,
Of “times departed, — never to return,”

Was echoed back in mournful tones from thee,
And found an echo, quite as sad, in me;
Waves, clouds, and shadows moved in restless change,
Around, above, and on thy rocky range,
But seldom saw that sovereign front of thine
Changes more quick than those which passed o’er mine.
And as wild winds and human hands, at length,
Have turned to scattered stones the mighty strength
Of that old fort, whose belt of boulders grey
Roman or Saxon legions held at bay;
So had, methought, the young, unshaken nerve —
That, when WILL wished, no doubt could cause to swerve,
That on its vigour ever placed reliance,
That to its sorrows sometimes bade defiance —
Now left my spirit, like thyself, old hill,
With head defenceless against human ill;
And, as thou long hast looked upon the wave
That takes, but gives not, like a churchyard grave,
I, like life’s course, through ether’s weary range,
Never know rest from ceaseless strife and change.
‘But, Penmaenmawr! a better fate was thine,
Through all its shades, than that which darkened mine;
No quick thoughts thrilled through thy gigantic mass
Of woe for what might be, or is, or was;
Thou hadst no memory of the glorious hour
When Britain rested on thy giant power;
Thou hadst no feeling for the verdant slope
That leant on thee as man’s heart leads on hope;
The pastures, chequered o’er with cot and tree,
Though thou wert guardian, got no smile from thee;
Old ocean’s wrath their charms might overwhelm,
But thou could’st still keep thy unshaken realm —
While I felt flashes of an inward feeling
As fierce as those thy craggy form revealing
In nights of blinding gleams, when deafening roar
Hurls back thy echo to old Mona’s shore.
I knew a flower, whose leaves were meant to bloom
Till Death should snatch it to adorn a tomb,
Now, blanching ‘neath the blight of hopeless grief,
With never blooming, and yet living leaf;
A flower on which my mind would wish to shine,
If but one beam could break from mind like mine.
I had an ear which could on accents dwell
That might as well say “perish!” as “farewell!”

An eye which saw, far off, a tender form,
Beaten, unsheltered, by affliction's storm;
An arm — a lip — that trembled to embrace
My angel's gentle breast and sorrowing face,
A mind that clung to Ouse's fertile side
While tossing — objectless — on Menai's tide!
'Oh, Soul! that draw'st yon mighty hill and me
Into communion of vague unity,
Tell me, can I obtain the stony brow
That fronts the storm, as much unbroken now
As when it once upheld the fortress proud,
Now gone, like its own morning cap of cloud?
Its breast is stone. Can I have one of steel,
To endure — inflict — defend — yet never feel?
It stood as firm when haughty Edward's word
Gave hill and dale to England's fire and sword,
As when white sails and steam-smoke tracked the sea,
And all the world breathed peace, but waves and me.
'Let me, like it, arise o'er mortal care,
All woes sustain, yet never know despair;
Unshrinking face the grief I now deplore,
And stand, through storm and shine, like moveless Penmaenmawr!'

These lines are shadowed, like all his other writings, with the grief that day and night oppressed him. Throughout the theme, his eager yearning for mental quiet is finely expressed; and in it he contrasts the strength and calm of the everlasting hill in its chequered history, and in the ceaseless changes, and the lights and shadows that fall upon it, with his own wild and stormy existence; the lady, whose charms have bewildered his imagination, supplying him with a subject for sorrowful recollections. The giant hill is the mighty image with which his perturbed soul communes, and he implores for strength to enable him to rise superior to his misfortunes, and to face, like 'moveless Penmaenmawr,' the storm, adversity, and ruin that threaten him. But there was little likelihood of the lady seeing these lines.

We find Branwell, at the time, making efforts to obtain some employment that would divert him from useless brooding upon the unfortunate circumstances that destroyed his peace. Scarcely, also, was he less anxious to be away from home, for his presence there had been his greatest humiliation when his family knew of his disgrace; yet, with a method of which he was master, he appears to have kept silence there on the subject his madness made him so ready to repeat to others. However his sisters Emily and Anne might regard him, Charlotte, at least, looked upon him as one of the fallen. She thus writes to her friend concerning him on the 4th of November, 1845: 'I hoped to be able to ask you to come to Haworth. It almost seemed as if Branwell had a chance of getting employment, and I waited to know the result of his efforts in order to say, dear — — , come and see us. But the place (a secretaryship to a railway committee) is given to another person. Branwell still remains at home; and while *he* is here, *you* shall not come. I am more confirmed in that resolution the more I see of him. I wish I could say one word to you in his favour, but I cannot. I will hold my tongue. We are all obliged to you for your kind suggestion about Leeds; but I think our school schemes are, for the present, at rest.' Again, she says on December 31st of the same year: 'You say well, in speaking of — — , that no sufferings are so awful as those brought on by dissipation; alas! I see the truth of this observation daily proved. — — and — — must have as weary and burdensome a life of it in waiting upon their unhappy brother. It seems grievous, indeed, that those who have not sinned should suffer so largely.' Charlotte also, writing to Nancy Garrs, who at times assisted at the parsonage, complained of the conduct of her brother; but, later, requested that the letter should be destroyed. Her wish was complied with.

It is, indeed, an almost impossible task to convey to the reader, in the pages of a biography, an idea which will, in an adequate degree, approach the intimate acquaintance which those who lived, saw, and spoke with its subject possessed. And, yet, how necessary is such knowledge to the right understanding of anyone's letters! But with what chance of a true insight, then, shall we read the letters of Branwell Brontë and his sister, if we have an incorrect view of his character?

Miss Robinson has confidently concluded, from certain depreciatory references to himself, in his letters to Mr. Grundy, that, at this period, 'he was manifestly, and by his own confession, too physically prostrate for any literary effort,' with how much accuracy the reader has seen and will further see. And Mr. Wemyss Reid, with respect to the character of Mr. Brontë, adopting much of Mrs. Gaskell's view of him, and relying upon his children's letters, has produced a portrait of him to which, as he allows, 'some of those who knew him in his later years, including one who is above all others entitled to an opinion on the subject, have objected as being over-coloured.' We must not read, then, too literally all that we find in the letters. It would be folly to take word for word Charlotte's account of her father's anger when she announced to him a proposal of marriage which had been made to her, and which did not accord with his wish; or to believe that 'compassion or relenting is no more to be looked for from papa than sap from firewood,' when we know that he afterwards voluntarily gave way, and sacrificed his own opinion. Nor would it be right to accept any exaggerated confession of Charlotte about herself, in a literal sense. And thus it does not sound well in Mrs. Gaskell, after completing her account of the outward events of Branwell's life, to say, 'All that is to be said more about Branwell Brontë shall be said by Charlotte herself, not by me;' and then to proceed to extract such portions of the sister's letters as condemned him, and to summarize or repress anything favourable. But Miss Robinson has gone further. She, by extracting a few censures from various letters, apart in date, and leaving out all mention of the chance of the secretaryship in the letter of November the 4th, and the words 'to him' in another, has left her reader under the impression that, after his dismissal, Branwell would not seek employment. 'Such was not his intention,' she says. But Branwell's efforts to obtain the secretaryship, to which Charlotte alludes, are sufficient evidence of a contrary disposition in him; and we shall find that he exerted himself in other directions also.

The failure of the school-keeping has likewise been duly laid to his charge, although, as we have seen, Mr. Brontë's oncoming blindness, in the first place, and the difficulty of procuring pupils at Haworth, were the causes of its failure. To the reason why no attempt was made to open a school elsewhere, I shall have further to allude.

We have been told by Mrs. Gaskell that, some months after Branwell's dismissal, he met the wife of his former employer clandestinely by appointment. 'There was,' she says, 'a strange lingering of conscience, when … he refused to consent to the elopement which she proposed.' Miss Robinson, who adopts this report, thinks that the phrase 'herself and estate,' in the letter he sent to Mr. Grundy, throws quite a new light upon Mrs. Gaskell's opinion that there were any remains of conscience left in Branwell Brontë. She says he counselled 'a little longer waiting,' — that he might become possessed of the property, on the death of the lady's husband. But if this incident of the proposed elopement had actually taken place, the delay suggested by Branwell should surely be held as proof that anything positively dishonourable was repulsive to him. The lady, too, had an ample fortune of her own, of which, had she proposed an elopement, she would have informed him. But, if we consider the possible sources from which such a story as this could arise, we may surmise that Mrs. Gaskell, — who first gave it to the public, and on whose authority it alone remains, — obtained it, with the many other incidents she has published, from the current scandal of Haworth, — where else could she have heard it? — and when we remember that the rumours of the village, though magnified a hundred-fold, had their origin in the infatuated belief and wild statements of Branwell himself, possibly we shall not be wrong if we conclude that it had no foundation whatever in fact. Certainly there is no sufficient evidence for it. And the story is in itself inherently improbable, for it alleges that the lady had been not only regardless of her reputation, but had cast to the winds all thoughts of those pecuniary considerations which, a little later, upon the death of her husband, are stated to have prevented her from marrying in honour the supposed object of her affections.

I have, earlier in this work, spoken of a poem on one of the traditions of Lancashire, by Mr. Peters, entitled: 'Leyland's Daughter,' which is the story of a romantic elopement. Branwell, early in 1846, proposed to write a poem on Morley Hall, in the parish of Leigh, where the elopement took place in the reign of Edward VI., in which he also would touch upon the incident.

This tradition, and Branwell's intended work on the subject, became often a topic of conversation both at Haworth and Halifax: and, it is not improbable that, some ten years afterwards, when Mrs. Gaskell was searching at the former place for materials for her work, the story of this ancient elopement had become mixed with the stories of the village respecting Branwell and the lady of his late employer, and thus, with them, was ready for Mrs. Gaskell's hand, additions having been made as to time and place.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SISTERS' POEMS AND NOVELS. — BRANWELL'S LITERARY OCCUPATIONS.

The Sisters as Writers of Poetry — They Decide to Publish — Each begins a Novel — The Spirit under which the Work was Undertaken — 'The Professor' — 'Agnes Grey' — 'Wuthering Heights' — Branwell's Condition — A Touching Incident — 'Epistle from a Father to a Child in her Grave' — Letter with Sonnet — Publication of the Sisters' Poems.

If Branwell Brontë had devoted himself to literature under the impulse of his misfortune, his sisters were not long unoccupied ere they also entered upon its pursuit. 'One day, in the autumn of 1845,' says Charlotte, 'I accidentally lighted on a MS. volume of verse in my sister Emily's handwriting.' The elder sister was not surprised, knowing that the younger could and did write verse; but she thought these were no common effusions. 'To my ear,' she says, 'they had also a peculiar music — wild, melancholy, and elevating. My sister Emily was not a person of demonstrative character, nor one on the recesses of whose mind and feelings even those nearest and dearest to her could, with impunity, intrude unlicensed; it took hours to reconcile her to the discovery I had made, and days to persuade her that such poems merited publication.' Charlotte Brontë here grasped, with unfailing precision, the very secret spell which we find in Emily's poetry; the strange, wild, weird voice, with which it speaks to us, spoke first of all to her, and she felt the heather-scented breath, even as we do, of the moorland air on which its music was borne. Anne also produced verses, which had 'a sweet, sincere pathos of their own;' and the three sisters, believing, after anxious deliberation, that they might get their respective productions accepted for publication in one volume, set on foot inquiries on the subject, and now adopted the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, which were afterwards to become so famous. It was not, however, to be expected that the effusions of inexperienced and unknown writers would be of such value as to induce any publisher to take them on his own risk. Indeed, Miss Brontë says 'the great puzzle lay in the difficulty of getting answers of any kind from the publishers to whom we applied.' She wrote to Messrs. Chambers, of Edinburgh, asking advice, and received a brief and business-like reply, upon which the sisters acted, and at last made way.

On the 28th of January, 1846, Charlotte, as we have been informed, wrote to Messrs. Aylott and Jones, asking if they would publish a one-volume, octavo, of poems; if not at their own risk, on the authors' account. Messrs.

Aylott and Jones did not hesitate to accept the latter proposal.

It must have been when the sisters became aware that publishers would not accept the poetry of unknown writers on any other terms, that they turned their thoughts to prose composition. Branwell, in his dire distress, had fixed his attention on the writing of a three-volume novel, principally as a refuge from mental disquiet; but his sisters, now, with very different feelings, each set to work on a one-volume tale. It had occurred to them, we are told, that by novel writing money was to be made. They were, in fact, influenced by precisely the view of the profit to be derived from fiction which Branwell had propounded in his remarkable letter to his friend Leyland. 'Ill-success,' says Charlotte, 'failed to crush us: the mere effort to succeed had given a wonderful zest to existence; it must be pursued. We each set to work on a prose tale: Ellis Bell produced "Wuthering Heights," Acton Bell, "Agnes Grey," and Currer Bell also wrote a narrative in one volume.'

The business-like way in which the sisters went about their novel writing, forbids us to believe that they brooded very much on the conduct of their brother when the literary fervour was upon them; but Miss Robinson leads her readers to think that his character and failings had much to do with the tone which their works assumed. Writing under this belief, and with this intention, — as might have been expected, — she has found it necessary to paint every circumstance relating to him, and the inmates of the parsonage, in the darkest colours, and often has arrived at conclusions widely different from the actual facts. Moreover this writer, in supporting her views, has fallen into the serious error of placing the event which completed Branwell's disappointment, and its consequences to him, four months earlier than they occurred.

The novels which the sisters wrote under the influence of these troubles do not, indeed, bear any marked traces of them. 'The Professor,' Charlotte's story, which was not published until long after, is the direct outcome of her personal experiences in Brussels, and the few shadows that one finds in it are the record of such troubles as she had there. In this book, Currer Bell describes the life of endeavour, which seemed to her the most honourable, the treading of those paths in the outer world whose pleasures and pains she had found so keen. Already, in the March of 1845, she had written to a friend telling her that she was no longer happy at Haworth, though it was her duty to remain there. 'There was a time when Haworth was a very pleasant place to me; it is not so now. I feel as if we were all buried here. I long to travel; to work; to live a life of action.' Thus 'The Professor' is the story of the work and of the life of action for which the author herself was pining. William Crimsworth, neglected by his rich relations, cut off by his brutal brother, seeks his fortune in Brussels, and obtains a place as professor of English in a school there. He leads a life that Charlotte knows well; he is in the place she has learned to love; and he describes, with close observation, the character and the routine to which she is so well accustomed. Pelet, his master, is an original, as Paul Emanuel is, and Zoraïde Reuter is the prototype of Madame Beck. These characters are forcibly conceived, as is that of Mademoiselle Henri; but the book bears the traces of a novice's hand. Thus, how unnatural does the proposal which Crimsworth makes to Frances read to us, where, while asking her to be his wife, demanding of her what regard she has for him, he says not a word of his own devotion to her; and where, even when she grants him all he has been hoping for so long, his sole remark is, 'Very well, Frances!' But a stronger point of interest for us in the book is the spirit which moves Crimsworth in his endeavours, where he struggles with might and main, just as Charlotte herself wished to do, for a competency; and there is the school, too, which his wife designs and establishes, the very pattern of that which was in Charlotte's own mind. It is instructive and singular that in this book we find Crimsworth suffering from the hypochondria which beset its author, and that, too, at the time when he should have been happiest.

'Man,' he says, 'is ever clogged with his mortality, and it was my mortal nature which now faltered and plained; my nerves, which jarred and gave a false sound, because the soul, of late rushing headlong to an aim, had overstrained the body's comparative weakness. A horror of great darkness fell upon me; I felt my chamber invaded by one I had known formerly, but had thought for ever departed. I was temporarily a prey to hypochondria. She had been my acquaintance, nay, my guest, once before in boyhood; I had entertained her at bed and board for a year; for that space of time I had her to myself in secret; she lay with me, she ate with me, she walked out with me, showing me nooks in woods, hollows in hills, where we could sit together, and where she could drop her drear veil over me, and so hide sky and sun, grass and green tree; taking me entirely to her death-cold bosom, and holding me with arms of bone.' This was the phantom that visited Charlotte also. Of the effect of her brother's conduct on her I have found but two passages in 'The Professor,' — that which I have quoted respecting the youth of Victor Crimsworth earlier in this volume, and that, in Chapter xx., where William Crimsworth leaves Pelet's house lest a 'practical modern French novel' should be in process beneath its roof. It was Charlotte's design, in writing 'The Professor,' to lend it no charm of romance. Her hero was to work his way through life, and to find no sudden turn to endow him with wealth, for he was to earn every shilling he possessed, and he was not even to marry a beautiful girl or a lady of rank in the end. 'In the sequel, however,' says Charlotte, 'I find that publishers in general scarcely approved of this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical;' and for this reason, probably, the book did not find a publisher so soon as 'Agnes Grey,' and 'Wuthering Heights,' which were sent from the parsonage with it.

'Agnes Grey,' Anne Brontë's story, like 'The Professor,' is the picture of things its author had known, painted almost as she saw them. Anne's experience as a governess had made her acquainted with certain phases of life, which she could not but reproduce. Hence Agnes Grey is thrown into the sphere of the careless and selfish family of the Bloomfields; and afterwards, with the Murrays at Horton Lodge, she sees a kind of personal character and social life which, on account of its coldness and worldliness, greatly repelled Anne Brontë, with her warm and sympathetic nature. She teaches the same lesson of the folly of *mariages de convenance*, and of the wrong of subjecting the affections, and bartering happiness for the sake of worldly position, which she afterwards dwells upon more strongly in 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.' It is in this fictitious parallel of Anne Brontë's own experience, if anywhere in her writings, that we might expect to find some reflection of the recent history of her brother's fall. Mr. Reid has asserted that this formed the dark turning-point in her life, for 'living under the same roof with him when he went astray,' she 'was compelled to be a closer and more constant witness of his sins and his sufferings than either Charlotte or Emily.' Her letters home, it has been stated, conveyed the news of her dark forebodings. But, all the same, the story she wrote, almost under the shadow of her brother's disgrace, is the simple, straightforward, humorous narrative of the gentle and pious Anne Brontë, revealing not so much as a suspicion of vice or thought of evil; and, in this respect, it presents a contrast to her second work. There is evidence that when the sisters wrote their novels they had already attributed monomania to Branwell, and could thus explain his history for themselves. It was not in the nature of 'Agnes Grey' to be successful as a novel, but we find in it that Anne possessed a faculty which scarcely appears in Charlotte's writings, — that of humour. Look, for instance, at the way in which she sketches so forcibly, and with such droll perception, the character of the youthful Bloomfields, and, afterwards, of Miss Matilda Murray, with her equine propensities and masculine tastes.

'Wuthering Heights,' the work which Emily Brontë sent from the parsonage at the same time, incomparably finer in its powers than either 'The Professor' or 'Agnes Grey,' is a dramatic story of passion and tragic energy that astonished the world, — and with which it has been said Branwell's life in those days had much concern. Inferentially, it is contended that, without the darkening effect on her understanding of Branwell's misfortunes, without the neighbourhood of the 'brother of set purpose drinking himself to death out of furious thwarted passion for a mistress he might not marry,' Emily Brontë could not have conceived it. It will, then, perhaps be better to defer the study of Emily's production till something more has been said of the period in which it was written; and until some new light has been thrown upon Branwell's character and career, and upon the anachronistic improprieties of previous writers.

Mrs. Gaskell passes over the period in which the sisters betook themselves to novel writing with little comment. But she keeps in remembrance the presence of Branwell while their literary labours continued, — 'the black shadow of remorse lying over one in their home.' What it was that the biographer of Charlotte supposed stung Branwell's conscience is well-known; but, if there had been this cause for it in one of a naturally remorseful disposition, as his was, we must have met with some expression of it in his letters or poems, for

‘The Mind, that broods o’er guilty woes,
Is like the Scorpion girt by fire.’

Yet, perhaps, one of the most significant points to be observed in Branwell’s writings, and in studying his conduct, is the absence of any such remorse. He encouraged himself — after the first shock of his disappointment — with the hope that time would bring him the happiness he wished; and, as some believe, with good and sufficient reason. He was unhappy when he thought of the supposed ill-health and sufferings of the lady.

It is noteworthy that something inconsequent, in putting down Branwell’s conduct entirely to remorse in this way, was the feature of Mrs. Gaskell’s work, to which so great an analyzer of motives as George Eliot, as shown by her letters published quite recently, took exception, and regretted.

If we believe Branwell to have been subject to hallucination, we may then, perhaps, gain an idea of the true cause of the wretchedness he endured when he fell back on his own reflections. His life had been one of severe disappointment. Those early aims in art, for which he had spent so much preparation, and from which he hoped so much, had fallen away before him; his first efforts as usher and tutor had come to nothing; then followed the lapse which ended his stay with the railway company; and, lastly, the infatuation which had seized him in his late employment, with its vision of future opulence, and rest from all former change and trouble, ending in dismissal, distraction, and disgrace. All these things, rushing back upon his mind in moments of reflection, were more than he could bear, and he sought, in various ways, some honourable to him, to divert himself from the subject, but sometimes in a manner that gave cause for complaint at home, and resulted in moodiness and irritability of temper. On the other hand, he seems to have felt himself aggrieved by a want of sympathy on the part of his family in sufferings they did not comprehend.

Mr. George Searle Phillips, with whom Branwell became acquainted at Bradford, and who visited him at Haworth, says that he complained sometimes of the way in which he was treated at home; and, as an instance, relates the following:

‘One of the Sunday-school girls, in whom he and all his house took much interest, fell very sick, and they were afraid she would not live. “I went to see the poor little thing,” he said; “sat with her half-an-hour, and read a psalm to her, and a hymn at her request. I felt very like praying with her too,” he added, his voice trembling with emotion; “but, you see, I was not good enough. How dare I pray for another, who had almost forgotten how to pray for myself! I came away with a heavy heart, for I felt sure she would die, and went straight home, where I fell into melancholy musings. I wanted somebody to cheer me. I often do, but no kind word finds its way even to my ears, much less to my heart. Charlotte observed my depression, and asked what ailed me. So I told her. She looked at me with a look I shall never forget — if I live to be a hundred years old — which I never shall. It was not like her at all. It wounded me as if some one had struck me a blow in the mouth. It involved ever so many things in it. It was a dubious look. It ran over me, questioning, and examining, as if I had been a wild beast. It said, 'Did my ears deceive me, or did I hear aright?' And then came the painful, baffled expression, which was worse than all. It said, 'I wonder if that's true?' But, as she left the room, she seemed to accuse herself of having wronged me, and smiled kindly upon me, and said, 'She is my little scholar, and I will go and see her.' I replied not a word. I was too much cut up. When she was gone, I came over here to the 'Black Bull,' and made a note of it in sheer disgust and desperation. Why could they not give me some credit when I was trying to be good?"'

At the beginning of March, Charlotte returned from a visit to a friend, and we hear that she found it very forced work to address her brother when she went into the room where he was; but he took no notice, and made no reply; he was stupefied; she had heard that he had got a sovereign while she was away, on pretence of paying a pressing debt, and had changed it, at a public-house, with the expected result.

Again Charlotte says, on March 31st, 1846: 'I am thankful papa continues pretty well, though often made very miserable by Branwell's wretched conduct. *There* — there is no change but for the worse.'

At this time Branwell wrote the following beautiful ode, somewhat incomplete in its expression, yet characteristic of his genius, which seems to have been inspired by the outcast feelings of which he spoke to Mr. Phillips, and to contain some reproach to those who thought him deficient in natural affection. It bears date April 3rd, 1846:

EPISTLE FROM A FATHER TO A CHILD IN HER GRAVE.
'From Earth, — whose life-reviving April showers
Hide withered grass 'neath Springtide's herald flowers,
And give, in each soft wind that drives her rain,
Promise of fields and forests rich again, —
I write to thee, the aspect of whose face
Can never change with altered time or place;
Whose eyes could look on India's fiercest wars
Less shrinking than the boldest son of Mars;
Whose lips, more firm that Stoic's long ago,
Would neither smile with joy nor blanch with woe;
Whose limbs could sufferings far more firmly bear
Than mightiest heroes in the storms of war;
Whose frame, nor wishes good, nor shrinks from ill,
Nor feels distraction's throb, nor pleasure's thrill.
'I write to thee what thou wilt never read,
For heed me thou *wilt not*, howe'er may bleed

The heart that many think a worthless stone,
But which oft aches for some belovéd one;
Nor, if that life, mysterious, from on high,
Once more gave feeling to thy stony eye,
Could'st thou thy father know, or feel that he
Gave life and lineaments and thoughts to thee;
For when thou died'st, thy day was in its dawn,
And night still struggled with Life's opening morn;
The twilight star of childhood, thy young days
Alone illumined, with its twinkling rays,
So sweet, yet feeble, given from those dusk skies,
Whose kindling, coming noontide prophesies,
But tells us not that Summer's noon can shroud
Our sunshine with a veil of thunder-cloud.
'If, when thou freely gave the life, that ne'er
To thee had given either hope or fear,
But quietly had shone; nor asked if joy
Thy future course should cheer, or grief annoy;
'If then thoud'st seen, upon a summer sea,
One, once in features, as in blood, like thee,
On skies of azure blue and waters green,
Melting to mist amid the summer sheen,
In trouble gazing — ever hesitating
'Twixt miseries each hour new dread creating,
And joys — whate'er they cost — still doubly dear,
Those "troubled pleasures soon chastised by fear;"
If thou *had'st* seen him, thou would'st ne'er believe
That thou had'st yet known what it was to live!
'Thine eyes could only see thy mother's breast;
Thy feelings only wished on that to rest;
That was thy world; — thy food and sleep it gave,
And slight the change 'twixt it and childhood's grave.
Thou saw'st this world like one who, prone, reposes,
Upon a plain, and in a bed of roses,
With nought in sight save marbled skies above,
Nought heard but breezes whispering in the grove:
I — thy life's source — was like a wanderer breasting
Keen mountain winds, and on a summit resting,
Whose rough rocks rose above the grassy mead,
With sleet and north winds howling overhead,
And Nature, like a map, beneath him spread;
Far winding river, tree, and tower, and town,
Shadow and sunlight, 'neath his gaze marked down
By that mysterious hand which graves the plan

Of that drear country called "The Life of Man."
'If seen, men's eyes would loathing shrink from thee,
And turn, perhaps, with no disgust to me;
Yet thou had'st beauty, innocence, and smiles,
And now hast rest from this world's woes and wiles,
While I have restlessness and worrying care,
So sure, thy lot is brighter, happier far.
'So let it be; and though thy ears may never
Hear these lines read beyond Death's darksome river,
Not vainly from the borders of despair
May rise a sound of joy that thou art freed from care!'

On the 6th of April of this year, Charlotte wrote to Messrs. Aylott & Jones, informing them that 'the Messrs. Bell' were preparing for the press a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales, which might be published either together, as a work of three volumes of the ordinary novel size, or separately, as single volumes. It was not their intention to publish these at their own expense, and they wished to know if Messrs. Aylott would be likely to undertake the work, if approved.

The novels must have been well on towards completion before the sisters ventured on these inquiries. The firm thus addressed kindly offered advice, of which Charlotte gladly availed herself to ask some questions. These were respecting the difficulty which unknown authors find in obtaining assistance from publishers; and Charlotte has indeed informed us that the three tales were going about among them 'for the space of a year and a half.' But 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey' at last found acceptance in the early summer of 1847.

A friendly compact had been made between Branwell and Leyland that the latter should model a medallion of his friend, and that Branwell should write the poem 'Morley Hall,' — to which I have had occasion above to allude — a subject in which the sculptor was much interested. Shortly after his sister made the inquiries from Messrs. Aylott, Branwell visited Halifax to sit for his medallion; and, on the 28th of April, he wrote the following letter to his friend: —

'Haworth, Bradford,
'Yorks.

'My dear Sir,

'As I am anxious — though my return for your kindness will be like giving a sixpence for a sovereign lent — to do my best in my intended lines on Morley, I want answers to the following questions…. If I learn these facts, I'll do my best, but in all I try to write I desire to stick to probabilities and local characteristics.

'I cannot, without a smile at myself, think of my stay for three days in Halifax on a business which need not have occupied three hours; but, in truth, when I fall back *on* myself, I suffer so much wretchedness that I cannot withstand any temptation to get *out* of myself — and for that reason, I am prosecuting enquiries about situations suitable to me, whereby I could have a voyage abroad. The quietude of home, and the inability to make my family aware of the nature of most of my sufferings, makes me write:

'Home thoughts are not with me,
Bright, as of yore;
Joys are forgot by me,
Taught to deplore!
My home has taken rest
In an afflicted breast,
Which I have often pressed,
But may no more.

'Troubles never come alone — and I have some little troubles astride the shoulders of the big one.

'Literary exertion would seem a resource; but the depression attendant on it, and the almost hopelessness of bursting through the barriers of literary circles, and getting a hearing among publishers, make me disheartened and indifferent, for I cannot write what would be thrown unread into a library fire. Otherwise, I have the materials for a respectably sized volume, and, if I were in London personally, I might, perhaps, try — — — —, a patronizer of the sons of rhyme; though I daresay the poor man often smarts for his liberality in publishing hideous trash. As I know that, while here, I might send a manuscript to London, and say good-bye to it, I feel it folly to feed the flames of a printer's fire. So much for egotism!

'I enclose a horribly ill-drawn daub done to while away the time this morning. I meant it to represent a very rough figure in stone.

'When all our cheerful hours seem gone for ever,
All lost that caused the body or the mind
To nourish love or friendship for our kind,
And Charon's boat, prepared, o'er Lethe's river
Our souls to waft, and all our thoughts to sever
From what was once life's Light; still there may be
Some well-loved bosom to whose pillow we
Could heartily our utter self deliver;
And if, toward her grave — Death's dreary road —
Our Darling's feet should tread, each step by her
Would draw our own steps to the same abode,
And make a festival of sepulture;
For what gave joy, and joy to us had owed,
Should death affright us from, when he would her restore?

'Yours most sincerely,
'P. B. Brontë.'

The sketch, referred to in this letter, is in Indian-ink, and is of a female figure, with clasped hands, streaming hair, and averted face. We need not entertain a doubt as to whom it is intended to represent. It is inscribed, in Spanish, 'Nuestra Señora de la Pena' — Our Lady of Grief — which also appears on a headstone in the sketch.

The sonnet, which concludes this letter to Leyland, is beautiful as it is sad, and not only possesses the musical cadences, and completeness of theme, so essential in this mode of expression, but exhibits the high culture of Branwell's mind, and the direction in which the irrepressible emotions of his heart are moved.

Branwell, in this communication, makes no further mention of his novel. Yet the experience of his sisters with their poems had only confirmed the judgment he expressed six months before, that no pecuniary advantage was to be obtained by publishing verse. The sisters had expended, on their little volume, over thirty pounds; but they valued it rightly as an effort to succeed. It was issued from the press early in May.

Charlotte had conducted the negotiations with the publishers in a very business-like way. She had directed them as to the copies to be sent for review, and as to the advertisements, on which she wished to expend little. The book appeared, and the world took little note of it: it was scarcely mentioned anywhere; but the sisters at Haworth waited patiently, and they were not dismayed that they waited in vain; for they had new-born hope in their other literary venture of the three prose stories. 'The book,' says Charlotte of the Poems, 'was printed: it is scarcely known, and all of it that merits to be known are the poems of Ellis Bell. The fixed conviction I held, and hold, of the worth of these poems has not indeed received the confirmation of much favourable criticism; but I must retain it notwithstanding.'

In his letter Branwell expresses himself as still anxious for employment; and wise in the direction in which he seeks it. A total change of scene and circumstance would have been, at this time, his best cure and greatest blessing. Unhappily, he failed in the attempt; and we find him again writing to Mr. Grundy, inquiring for some kind of occupation.

CHAPTER VIII.

DESPONDENCY. — BRANWELL'S LETTERS.

Death of Branwell's late Employer — Branwell's Disappointment — His Letters — His Delusion — Leyland's Medallion of Him — Mr. Brontë's Blindness — Branwell's Statement to Mr. Grundy in Reference to 'Wuthering Heights' — The Sisters Relinquish the Intention of Opening a School.

An event occurred, in the early summer of 1846, which plunged Branwell into a despair, wilder, and more distracting than the one from which he had partially recovered. This resulted from the death of his late employer. No doubt, during the interval which had elapsed between his dismissal from his tutorship, and the event last named, he had encouraged himself, it might be unconsciously for the most part, with the hope that, on the death of her husband, the lady on whom he doted would marry him. In this frame of mind, when his illusion was intensified by the clearance of the path before him, and his self-control unbridled, it may not be a subject of wonder, if he became troublesome to the inmates of the dwelling afflicted by death.

The following story, with variations, has been told as having reference to some actual or intended act of indiscretion of Branwell's at the time. It has been said that, at this juncture, a messenger was sent over to Haworth by Mrs. — — , forbidding Branwell 'ever to see her again, as, if he did, she would forfeit her fortune.' It will be seen shortly that no such provision was made in her husband's will, and that the fortune she had secured to her could not be forfeited by any such act of Branwell's. The whole story, therefore, to which Mrs. Gaskell and Miss Robinson have devoted so much space may well be discredited. But Mrs. Gaskell says absolutely that Mrs. — — 'despatched *a* servant in hot haste to Haworth. He stopped at the "Black Bull," and a messenger was sent up to the parsonage for Branwell. He came down, &c.' Miss Robinson, twenty-five years later, amplifies the story. She says: '*two* men came riding to the village post haste. They sent for Branwell, and when he arrived, in a great state of excitement, one of the riders dismounted and went with him into the "Black Bull."' Without inquiring into Branwell's excitement, or into the variations in the two accounts — for there is but one point in the story on which the two authors are perfectly agreed, *viz.*, that Branwell, on the occasion, 'bleated like a calf!' — there can be little doubt that this case, on such evidence, could not get upon its legs before any country jury impanelled to try petty causes. But Branwell himself, in his letter to Mr. Grundy, given below, says the coachman *came* to *see* him, not that the lady *sent* him; and we may justly infer — if ever he came at all — that he come on his own account, having been personally acquainted with Branwell when he was tutor at — — . But, can it be believed that, supposing Mrs. — — to have been enamoured of Branwell, as asserted, she could find no other confidant than her ‘coachman,’ as a means of communicating her sorrows and lamentations to the distracted object of her devotion? There is, in this story, the inconsistency of madness. And it must be borne in mind that the other stories, relating to Branwell at the time of his tutorship at — — , which appear to have so much interested the biographers of Charlotte and Emily, have their paternity at Haworth, and are not the more trustworthy on that account.

I regret to trouble the reader still further with the errors of fact, and the exaggerated statements into which Mrs. Gaskell has fallen respecting this event. She says of Mrs. — — : ‘*Her husband had made a will, in which what property he left her was bequeathed solely on the condition that she should never see Branwell Brontë again.*’ (The Italics are my own.) Mrs. Gaskell’s postulations concerning this will are quite as erroneous as that she made in reference to Miss Branwell’s, so far as it related to her nephew. Indeed, like her other allegations respecting this most painful epoch of Branwell’s life, she derived the information on which they were based, more from hearsay than from respectable or documentary evidence. It is clear she never saw the wills about which she speaks with so much assurance.

Mrs. — — , by virtue of an indenture and a certain marriage settlement, was put into possession of an income that would, after her husband’s death, have enabled her to live for the term of her life with Branwell in comparative plenty. To his wife, Mr. — — , in addition to this, left the interest arising from his real and personal estate. She was also principal trustee, executor, and guardian of his children. Moreover, he enjoined upon her co-trustees always to regard the wishes and interests of his wife, and to do nothing without consulting her about the administering of his affairs. But all this — and it is quite usual — was to continue only during her widowhood; and this common arrangement, let it be borne in mind, was no more directed against Branwell than anyone else. What then, it may well be asked, becomes of Mrs. Gaskell’s assertion that the property left to Mrs. — — was bequeathed solely on the condition that ‘she should never see Branwell Brontë again’? Whatever Mrs. Gaskell and her followers may have asserted respecting Mr. — — ‘s will, it was made without the slightest reference to Branwell, who himself misconceived its character, and whose very existence is unknown to it, its provisions being made without the most distant allusion to the affair that worried the unfortunate tutor day and night.

If the widow’s love for Branwell had not been a mere figment of his wounded humanity, but the real affection which he fervently believed it to be, she had now the opportunity, with a sufficient income for the residue of her days, of enjoying with him an honourable and peaceful life. But the affection that makes sacrifices light, where they present themselves, was not there to call for them on behalf of Branwell, even had they now been needed. Moreover, there is no evidence worth the name that Mrs. — — ever committed the acts in relation to him attributed to her; on the contrary, the sincere affection and touching reliance on his wife, manifested throughout his will, is proof enough that her husband had had no cause to call her fidelity in question. It is, indeed, true that, while the lady's reputation was unblemished in the wide circle of her friends in the neighbourhood of her residence, she was being traduced, misrepresented, and belied at Haworth and its vicinity alone. This was all known to Charlotte Brontë when she wrote her poem of 'Preference.'

The state of Branwell's mind, and the extent of his hallucinations under their last phase, may be observed in the following letters, written in the month of June, 1846, the first being to Mr. Grundy.

'Haworth, Bradford,
'York.

'Dear Sir,

'I must again trouble you with — ' (Here comes another prayer for employment, with, at the same time, a confession that his health alone renders the wish all but hopeless.) Subsequently he says, 'The gentleman with whom I have been is dead. His property is left in trust for the family, provided I do not see the widow; and if I do, it reverts to the executing trustees, with ruin to her. She is now distracted with sorrows and agonies; and the statement of her case, as given by her coachman, who has come to see me at Haworth, fills me with inexpressible grief. Her mind is distracted to the verge of insanity, and mine is so wearied that I wish I were in my grave.

'Yours very sincerely,
'P. B. Brontë.'

He also wrote to Leyland in great distraction.

'I should have sent you "Morley Hall" ere now, but I am unable to finish it at present, from agony to which the grave would be far preferable. Mr. — — is *dead*, and he has left his widow in a dreadful state of health…. Through the will, she is left quite powerless. The executing trustees' (the principal one of whom, as we have seen, was the very lady whose hopeless love for him he was deploring) 'detest me, and one declares that, if he sees me, he will shoot me.

'These things I do not care about, but I do care for the life of the one who suffers even more than I do….

'You, though not much older than myself, have known life. I now know it, with a vengeance — for four nights I have not slept — for three days I have not tasted food — and, when I think of the state of her I love best on earth, I could wish that my head was as cold and stupid as the medallion which lies in your studio.

'I write very egotistically, but it is because my mind is crowded with one set of thoughts, and I long for one sentence from a friend.

‘What shall I *do*? I know not — I am too hard to die, and too wretched to live. My wretchedness is not about castles in the air, but about stern realities; my hardihood lies in bodily vigour; but, dear sir, my mind sees only a dreary future, which I as little wish to enter on as could a martyr to be bound to a stake.

‘I sincerely trust that you are quite well, and hope that this wretched scrawl will not make me appear to you a worthless fool, or a thorough bore.

‘Believe me, yours most sincerely,

‘P. B. Brontë.’

With this letter was enclosed a pen-and-ink sketch of Branwell bound to the stake, his wrists chained together, and surrounded by flames and smoke. The rigidity of the muscles, the fixed expression of the face, and the manifest beginning of pain are well portrayed. Underneath the drawing, in a constrained hand, is written, ‘Myself.’

Again he writes to Leyland a letter in which he dwells on his unavailing grief, and vividly points out its effects upon him. He says, alluding to the lady of his distracted thoughts, ‘Well, my dear sir, I have got my finishing stroke at last, and I feel stunned into marble by the blow.

‘I have this morning received a long, kind, and faithful letter from the medical gentleman who attended — — in his last illness, and who has since had an interview with one whom I can never forget.

‘He knows me *well*, and pities my case most sincerely.... It’s hard work for me, dear sir; I would bear it, but my health is so bad that the body seems as if it could not bear the mental shock.... My appetite is lost, my nights are dreadful, and having nothing to do makes me dwell on past scenes, — on her own self — her own voice — her person — her thoughts — till I could be glad if God would take me. In the next world I could not be worse than I am in this.’

On June the 17th, Charlotte writes:

‘Branwell declares that he neither can nor will do anything for himself; good situations have been offered him, for which, by a fortnight’s work, he might have qualified himself, but he will do nothing except drink and make us all wretched.’

It would seem that the sisters were unaware of the depth of his present misery, and in part misunderstood the disturbed condition of their brother’s mind at this juncture. But Branwell, although suffering great mental prostration under the infliction of any sudden and unexpected disappointment, was possessed of considerable recuperative power; and, after a period of brooding melancholy over his woes, he appeared to take renewed interest in the events that were passing around him. This seems to have been the case even under his late circumstances; there was, in the depth of his own heart, a woe from which he endeavoured to escape by engaging in the pursuits and pleasures of his friends.

On the 3rd of July, having, to all appearance, somewhat recovered from this disappointment, Branwell wrote to his friend the sculptor:

‘Dear Sir,

‘John Brown told me that you had a relievo of my very wretched self, framed in your studio.

‘If it be a *duplicate*, I should like the carrier to bring it to Haworth; not that I care a fig for it, save from regard for its maker, — but my sisters ask me to try to obtain it; and I write in obedience to them.

‘I earnestly trust that you are heartier than I am, and I promise to send you “Morley Hall” as soon as dreary days and nights will give me leave to do so.

‘Believe me,

‘Yours most sincerely,

‘P. B. Brontë.’

This was a life-size medallion of him, head and shoulders, which Leyland had modelled. The work was in very high relief, and the likeness was perfect. It was inserted in a deep oval recess, lined with crimson velvet, and this was fixed in a massive oak frame, glazed. It projected, when hung up in the drawing-room of the parsonage at Haworth, some eight inches from the wall; this was the one Mrs. Gaskell saw, of which she says: — ‘I have seen Branwell’s profile; it is what would be generally esteemed very handsome; the forehead is massive, the eye well set, and the expression of it fine and intellectual; the nose, too, is good; but there are coarse lines about the mouth, and the lips, though of handsome shape, are loose and thick, indicating self-indulgence, while the slightly retreating chin conveys an idea of weakness of will.’ Mrs. Gaskell had only an imperfect view of the work she describes, for it was hung on the wall directly *opposite* to the windows, so that it was destitute of any side-light.

Again Branwell writes to Leyland, on the 16th of July, now more himself, and anxious to see his friends:

‘I enclose the accompanying bill to tempt you to Haworth next Monday….

‘For myself, after a fit of horror inexpressible, and violent palpitation of the heart, I have taken care of myself bodily, but to what good? The best health will not kill *acute*, and *not ideal*, mental agony.

‘Cheerful company does me good till some bitter truth blazes through my brain, and then the present of a bullet would be received with thanks.

‘I wish I could flee to writing as a refuge, but I cannot; and, as to *slumber*, my mind, whether awake or asleep, has been in incessant action for seven weeks.’

Branwell wrote also to Mr. Grundy.

‘Since I saw Mr. George Gooch, I have suffered much from the accounts of the declining health of her whom I must love most in the world, and who, for my fault, suffers sorrows which surely were never her due. My father, too, is now quite blind, and from such causes literary pursuits have become matters I have no heart to wield. If I could see you it would be a sincere pleasure, but…. Perhaps your memory of me may be dimmed, for you have known little in me worth remembering; but I still think often with pleasure of yourself, though so different from me in head and mind.'

'I invited him,' says Mr. Grundy, 'to come to me at the Devonshire Hotel, Skipton, a distance of some seventeen miles, and in reply received the last letter he ever wrote.' Branwell says,

'If I have strength enough for the journey, and the weather be tolerable, I shall feel happy in visiting you at the Devonshire on Friday, the 31st of this month. The sight of a face I have been accustomed to see and like when I was happier and stronger, now proves my best medicine.'

Mr. Grundy, supposing these letters to have been written in the year 1848, is in error in stating this to have been the last Branwell ever wrote. The Friday Branwell mentions must have been the one that fell on the 31st of July, 1846. About the close of that month, Charlotte and Emily went to Manchester to consult Mr. Wilson, the oculist, who, later, removed the cataract from Mr. Brontë's eyes. Under these circumstances, Branwell failed in his intended journey to Skipton.

The cataract had slowly increased as the summer advanced, till at last Mr. Brontë was quite blind. This gradual disappearance from his vision of the things he knew had necessarily a very depressing effect upon him. The thought would sometimes come to him that, if his sight were permanently lost, he would be nothing in his parish; but he supported himself, for the most part, under his affliction with his accustomed stoicism of endurance. His great trouble was that, when his sight became so dim that he could barely recognize his children's faces, and when he was debarred from using his eyes in reading, he was shut off from the solace of his books, and from the sources — the periodical press — of his knowledge of the current affairs of the outside world, wherein he took such intense interest. He was, then, left dependent on the information of others, or on his children, who read to him in such time as they could spare from literary and household occupations. Yet there was hope — hope of an ultimate restoration of sight, and Mr. Brontë was still able to preach, even when he could not see those to whom he spoke. It was remarked that even then his sermons occupied exactly half-an-hour in delivery. This was the length of time he, with his ready use of words, had always found sufficient, and he did not exceed it now.

Every inquiry had been made from private friends that might throw light upon the chances of success in any possible operation, and it was in view of this object that the sisters visited Manchester. There they met with Mr. Wilson, who was, however, unable to say positively from description whether the eyes were ready for an operation or not. He proposed to extract the cataract, and it was accordingly arranged that Mr. Brontë should meet him.

Charlotte took her father to Manchester on the 16th of August, and, writing a few days later, she says to her friend, 'I just scribble a line to you to let you know where I am, in order that you may write to me here, for it seems to me that a letter from you would relieve me from the feeling of strangeness I have in this big town. Papa and I came here on Wednesday; we saw Mr. Wilson, the oculist, the same day; he pronounced papa’s eyes quite ready for an operation, and has fixed next Monday for the performance of it. Think of us on that day! We got into our lodgings yesterday. I think we shall be comfortable; at least, our rooms are very good…. Mr. Wilson says we shall have to stay here for a month at least. I wonder how Emily and Anne will get on at home with Branwell. They, too, will have their troubles. What would I not give to have you here! One is forced, step by step, to get experience in the world; but the learning is so disagreeable. One cheerful feature in the business is that Mr. Wilson thinks most favourably of the case.’

Charlotte’s fears respecting her brother happily proved to be unfounded; he was himself anxious about his father’s recovery; and, on her return, Charlotte, says Mrs. Gaskell, expressed herself thankful for the good ensured, and the evil spared during her absence.

From Charlotte’s next letter we learn that the operation was over. ‘Mr. Wilson performed it; two other surgeons assisted. Mr. Wilson says he considers it quite successful; but papa cannot yet see anything. The affair lasted precisely a quarter-of-an-hour; it was not the simple operation of couching, Mr. C. described, but the more complicated one of extracting the cataract. Mr. Wilson entirely disapproves of couching. Papa displayed extraordinary patience and firmness; the surgeons seemed surprised. I was in the room all the time, as it was his wish that I should be there; of course, I neither spoke nor moved till the thing was done, and then I felt that the less I said, either to papa or the surgeons, the better. Papa is now confined to his bed in a dark room, and is not to be stirred for four days; he is to speak and be spoken to as little as possible.’ No inflammation ensued, yet the greatest care, perfect quiet, and utter privation of light were still necessary to complete the success of the operation; and Mr. Brontë remained in his darkened room with his eyes bandaged. Charlotte thus speaks of her father under these trying circumstances. ‘He is very patient, but, of course, depressed and weary. He was allowed to try his sight for the first time yesterday. He could see dimly. Mr. Wilson seemed perfectly satisfied, and said all was right. I have had bad nights from the toothache since I came to Manchester.’ But, when the danger was over, daily progress was made, and Mr. Brontë and his helpful daughter were able to return to Haworth at the end of September, when he was fast regaining his sight.

It was probably during the six weeks when Mr. Brontë and Charlotte were absent in Manchester that Mr. Grundy resolved to visit Branwell. He says: ‘As he never came to see me, I shortly made up my mind to visit him at Haworth, and was shocked at the wrecked and wretched appearance he presented. Yet he still craved for an appointment of any kind, in order that he might try the excitement of change; of course uselessly.’

It must, it seems, have been on this occasion, in the course of conversation at the parsonage, that Branwell made a statement, respecting his novel, to Mr. Grundy, which has acquired considerable interest. I give it in the words in which Mr. Grundy recalls the incident. ‘Patrick Brontë declared to me, and what his sister said bore out the assertion, that he wrote a great portion of “Wuthering Heights” himself.’ It should be remembered, in connection with this occurrence, that, when Mr. Grundy talked with Branwell and Emily at Haworth, the three novels which the sisters had completed a few months before, had met only with repeated rejection, and, perhaps, they felt little confidence in the ultimate publication of them. ‘The Professor,’ indeed, had come back to Charlotte’s hands, curtly rejected, on the very day of the operation. Doubtful of ever finding a publisher willing to take this tale, or, at any rate, undaunted, she had commenced, while her father was confined to his darkened room at Manchester, the three-volume story which was afterwards to become famous as ‘Jane Eyre;’ Anne, too, since she had finished ‘Agnes Grey,’ had been busily writing ‘The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,’ also meant to be a three-volume story. So absorbed had the sisters become in novel writing, that a suggestion made by a friend, at this period, of a suitable place for opening a school, met only with an evasive answer.

‘Leave home!’ exclaims Charlotte, in her reply. ‘I shall neither be able to find place nor employment; perhaps, too, I shall be quite past the prime of life, my faculties will be rusted, and my few acquirements in a great measure forgotten. These ideas sting me keenly sometimes; but, whenever I consult my conscience, it affirms that I am doing right in staying at home, and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release. I could hardly expect success if I were to err against such warnings. I should like to hear from you again soon. Bring — — to the point, and make him give you a clear, not a vague, account of what pupils he really could promise; people often think they can do great things in that way till they have tried; but getting pupils is unlike getting any other sort of goods.’

CHAPTER IX.

BRANWELL'S LETTERS AND LAST INTERVIEW WITH MR. GRUNDY.

Branwell's Sardonic Humour — Mr. Grundy's Visit to him at Haworth — Errors regarding the Period of it — Tragic Description — Probable Ruse of Branwell — Correspondence between him and Mr. Grundy ceases — Writes to Leyland — A Plaintive Verse — Another Letter.

Branwell, having shared the family anxiety, as the time drew near for the operation which restored his father's sight, experienced a sense of deep relief when all went well; moreover, the keenness of his disappointment had had time to soften, and now a grim and sardonic humour began to characterize his proceedings and his correspondence. In this frame of mind he wrote to Leyland, early in October, 1846, a letter illustrated by some of his most spirited pen-and-ink sketches, in black and outline. It was headed by a drawing of John Brown, who had been engaged in lettering a monument, and who was represented under two different aspects. These are in one sketch, divided in the middle by a pole, on which is placed a skull. In the first compartment, the sexton is exhibited in a state of glorious exultation, kicking over the table and stools, while the chair he occupies is falling backwards. He holds a tumbler in his right hand, and swears, in his Yorkshire dialect, that he is 'King and a hauf!' under this, the word 'PARADISE' is inscribed. The second tableau represents John Brown commencing his work. On a table-tomb, the sexton's maul and chisels are placed. Being in uncertainty as to how, or where, to begin, he exclaims, 'Whativver mun I do?' In the corner, is a drawing of the western elevation of Haworth Church, and, near to Brown, a head-stone, with skull and crossbones, inscribed, 'Here lieth the Poor.' Underneath the subject is the word 'PURGATORY.' The following is the letter:

'My dear Sir,

'Mr. John Brown wishes me to tell you that, if, by return of post, you can tell him the nature of his intended work, and the time it will probably occupy in execution, either himself or his brother, or both, will wait on you *early* next week.

'He has only delayed answering your communication from his unavoidable absence in a pilgrimage from Rochdale-on-the-Rhine to the Land of Ham, and from thence to Gehenna, Tophet, Golgotha, Erebus, the Styx, and to the place he now occupies, called Tartarus, where he, along with Sisyphus, Tantalus, Theseus, and Ixion, lodge and board together.

'However, I hope that, when he meets you, he will join the company of Moses, Elias, and the prophets, "singing psalms, sitting on a wet cloud," as an acquaintance of mine described the occupation of the Blest.

'"Morley Hall" is in the eighth month of her pregnancy, and expects ere long to be delivered of a fine thumping boy, whom his father means to christen *Homer*, at least, though the mother suggests that "Poetaster" would be more suitable; but that sounds too aristocratic.

'Is the medallion cracked that Thorwaldsen executed of Augustus Cæsar?' To this question is appended a drawing of a coin, about the size of an ordinary penny, with the head of Branwell — an excellent likeness — around which the name of the emperor is placed. He continues:

'I wish I could see you; and, as Haworth fair is held on Monday after the ensuing one, your presence there would gratify one of the FALLEN.' Here he represents himself as plunging head foremost into a gulf.

'In my own register of transactions during my nights and days, I find no matter worthy of extraction for your perusal. All is yet with me clouds and darkness. I hope you have, at least, blue sky and sunshine.

'Constant and unavoidable depression of mind and body sadly shackle me in even trying to go on with any mental effort, which might rescue me from the fate of a dry toast, soaked six hours in a glass of cold water, and intended to be given to an old maid's squeamish cat.'

Here is a sketch of the cat, distracted between a tumbler on each side held by an attenuated hand.

'Is there really such a thing as the *Risus Sardonicus* — the sardonic laugh? Did a man ever laugh the morning he was to be hanged?'

The tail-piece to this letter is a drawing of a gallows, a hand holding forth the halter to the culprit, who is John Brown, and an excellent portrait, grinning at the rope that is to terminate his existence!

Mr. Grundy — 'very soon' — visited Haworth again. But I must premise, to the account of his visit which Mr. Grundy has published, some observations respecting the period at which it occurred. Mr. Grundy, having attributed the later letters, which Branwell Brontë addressed to him, to the year 1848 — though they really belong to 1846 — has, with some appearance of consistency, produced the following picture of his friend, under the impression that 'a few days afterwards he died.' But the circumstances that Mr. Grundy's journey to Haworth arose out of the wish to see him, which Branwell had expressed in a letter written at the time when his father was 'quite blind,' and that, as Mr. Grundy says his visits followed shortly after Branwell had failed to go to Skipton, are themselves sufficient evidence as to the question of date.

Mr. Grundy says of his final interview: 'Very soon I went to Haworth again to see him, for the last time. From the little inn I sent for him to the great, square, cold-looking Rectory. I had ordered a dinner for two, and the room looked cosy and warm, the bright glass and silver pleasantly reflecting the sparkling fire-light, deeply toned by the red curtains. Whilst I waited his appearance, his father was shown in. Much of the Rector's old stiffness of manner was gone. He spoke of Branwell with more affection than I had ever heretofore heard him express, but he also spoke almost hopelessly. He said that when my message came, Branwell was in bed, and had been almost too weak for the last few days to leave it; nevertheless, he had insisted upon coming, and would be there immediately. We parted, and I never saw him again.

'Presently the door opened cautiously, and a head appeared. It was a mass of red, unkempt, uncut hair, wildly floating round a great, gaunt forehead; the cheeks yellow and hollow, the mouth fallen, the thin white lips not trembling but shaking, the sunken eyes, once small, now glaring with the light of madness — all told the sad tale but too surely. I hastened to my friend, greeted him in the gayest manner, as I knew he best liked, drew him quickly into the room, and forced upon him a stiff glass of hot brandy. Under its influence, and that of the bright, cheerful surroundings, he looked frightened — frightened of himself. He glanced at me a moment, and muttered something about leaving a warm bed to come out into the cold night. Another glass of brandy, and returning warmth, gradually brought him back to something like the Brontë of old. He even ate some dinner, a thing which he said he had not done for long; so our last interview was pleasant, though grave. I never knew his intellect clearer. He described himself as waiting anxiously for death — indeed, longing for it, and happy, in these his sane moments, to think that it was so near. He once again declared that that death would be due to the story I knew, and to nothing else.

'When at last I was compelled to leave, he quietly drew from his coat sleeve a carving-knife, placed it on the table, and holding me by both hands, said that, having given up all thoughts of ever seeing me again, he imagined when my message came that it was a call from Satan. Dressing himself, he took the knife, which he had long had secreted, and came to the inn, with a full determination to rush into the room and stab the occupant. In the excited state of his mind he did not recognise me when he opened the door, but my voice and manner conquered him, and "brought him home to himself," as he expressed it. I left him standing bareheaded in the road, with bowed form and dropping tears. A few days afterwards he died…. His age was twenty-eight.'[5]

Mr. Grundy's account of this interview is inconsistent in itself. Of course, if his friend had really been so far gone as he represents, it is incredible that Mr. Brontë would have been privy to his son's visit to the inn. It is quite clear that Mr. Grundy's recollection of the interview, and of Branwell's appearance, at this distance of time, with Mrs. Gaskell's account before him, has received a new significance. I incline to the belief that the truth of the matter is this: that, in the spirit of his letters to Leyland, Branwell acted a part, and imposed this ruse upon his friend to gratify the peculiar humour that was then upon him, an episode which the latter, with his erroneous impression as to the date, has been led to depict in somewhat lurid colours. It is most probable, indeed, that, like Hamlet, he 'put an antic disposition on.' Something confirmatory of this view will appear in the next chapter. Among his friends, as I know, Branwell would now and then assume an indignant, and sometimes a furious mood, and put on airs of wild abstraction from which he suddenly recovered, and was again calm and natural, smiling, indeed, at his successful impersonation of passions he scarcely felt at the time. The absence of further correspondence between Branwell and Mr. Grundy, and the fact that the Skipton and Bradford railway, for which that gentleman was resident engineer, was fully opened more than a year before Branwell's death, seem to indicate that further intercourse ceased between the two at this date. It would not, perhaps, have been necessary to trouble the reader with these explanations, had not Mr. Grundy's narrative of his last evening with Branwell appeared to receive some sort of confirmation through its republication by Miss Robinson, in her picture of the brother of Emily Brontë shortly before his end.

Again Branwell wrote to Leyland:

'Dear Sir,

'I had a letter written, and intended to have been forwarded to you a few days after I last left the ensnaring town of Halifax.

'That letter, from being kept so long in my pocket-book, has gone out of date, so I have burnt it, and now send a short note as a precursor to an awfully lengthy one.

'I have much to say to you with which you would probably be sadly bored; but, as it will be only asking for advice, I hope you will feel as a cat does when her hair is stroked down towards her tail. She *purrs* then; but she *spits* when it is stroked upwards.

'I wish Mr. — — of — — would send me my bill of what I owe him, and the moment that I receive my outlaid cash, or any sum that may fall into my hands, I shall settle it.

'That settlement, I have some reason to hope, will be shortly.

'But can a few pounds make a fellow's soul like a calm bowl of creamed milk?

'If it can, I should like to drink that bowl dry.

'I shall write more at length (Deo Volente) on matters of much importance to me, but of little to yourself.

'Yours in the bonds,

'Sanctus Patricius Branwellius Brontëio.'

With the foregoing letter, Branwell enclosed a page containing three spirited sketches. The first is a scene in which the sculptor and Branwell are the principal actors. They are seated on stools, facing one another, each holding a wine glass, and, between them on the ground, is a decanter. Behind the sculptor is placed the mutilated statue of Theseus. A copy of Cowper's 'Anatomy' is open at the title-page; and, leaning over it, is a figure of Admodeus, Setebos, or some other winged imp, taking sight at the two. The second sketch is of Branwell himself, represented as a recumbent statue, resting on a slab, under which are the following mournful lines: —

'Thy soul is flown,
And clay alone
Has nought to do with joy or care;
So if the light of light be gone,
There come no sorrows crowding on,
And powerless lies DESPAIR.'

The third drawing is a landscape, having in the foreground a head-stone, with a skull and crossbones in the semi-circular head. On the stone are carved the words, HIC JACET. Distant peaked hills bound the view. Two pines are to the right of the picture, and the crescent moon, which represents a human profile, is accommodated with a pipe. Underneath it is inscribed the sentence:

'MARTINI LUIGI IMPLORA ETERNA QUIETE!'

The following letter, written to Leyland a little later, shows again the stormy perturbations of Branwell's mind. He still clings to the fond imagination that he is the object of the lady's unwavering devotion; and, with the incoherency of the monomania with which he continues to be afflicted, he solemnly declares to the sculptor that he had said to no one what he is then saying to him; while, in truth, he was telling the story of his disappointed hopes to all who would hear the recital. The theme is that of a wild, eager, and unavailing love — whose joys and sorrows he tells in vivid words — which he believes to be returned with equal energy and passion.

'My dear Sir,

'I am going to write a scrawl, for the querulous egotism of which I must entreat your mercy; but, when I look *upon* my past, present, and future, and then *into* my own self, I find much, however unpleasant, that yearns for utterance.

'This last week an honest and kindly friend has warned me that concealed hopes about one lady should be given up, let the effort to do so cost what it may. He is the — —, and was commanded by — —, M.P. for — —, to return me, unopened, a letter which I addressed to — —, and which the Lady was not permitted to see. She too, surrounded by powerful persons who hate me like Hell, has sunk into religious melancholy, believes that her weight of sorrow is God's punishment, and hopelessly resigns herself to her doom. God only knows what it does cost, and will, hereafter, cost me, to tear from my heart and remembrance the thousand recollections that rush upon me at the thought of four years gone by. Like ideas of sunlight to a man who has lost his sight, they must be bright phantoms not to be realized again.

'I had reason to hope that ere very long I should be the husband of a Lady whom I loved best in the world, and with whom, in more than competence, I might live at leisure to try to make myself a name in the world of posterity, without being pestered by the small but countless botherments, which, like mosquitoes, sting us in the world of work-day toil. That hope and herself are *gone* — *she* to wither into patiently pining decline, — *it* to make room for drudgery, falling on one now ill-fitted to bear it. That ill-fittedness rises from causes which I should find myself able partially to overcome, had I bodily strength; but, with the want of that, and with the presence of daily lacerated nerves, the task is not easy. I have been, in truth, too much petted through life, and, in my last situation, I was so much master, and gave myself so much up to enjoyment, that now, when the cloud of ill-health and adversity has come upon me, it will be a disheartening job to work myself up again, through a new life's battle, from the position of five years ago, to that from which I have been compelled to retreat with heavy loss and no gain. My army stands now where it did then, but mourning the slaughter of Youth, Health, Hope, and both mental and physical elasticity.

'The last two losses are, indeed, important to one who once built his hopes of rising in the world on the possession of them. Noble writings, works of art, music, or poetry, now, instead of rousing my imagination, cause a whirlwind of blighting sorrow that sweeps over my mind with unspeakable dreariness; and, if I sit down and try to write, all ideas that used to come, clothed in sunlight, now press round me in funereal black; for really every pleasurable excitement that I used to know has changed to insipidity or pain.

'I shall never be able to realize the too sanguine hopes of my friends, for at twenty-nine I am a thoroughly *old man*, mentally and bodily — far more, indeed, than I am willing to express. God knows I do not scribble like a poetaster when I quote Byron's terribly truthful words —

'"No more — no more — oh! never more on me
The freshness of the heart shall fall like dew,
Which, out of all the lovely things we see,
Extracts emotions beautiful and new!"

'I used to think that if I could have, for a week, the free range of the British Museum — the library included — I could feel as though I were placed for seven days in Paradise; but now, really, dear sir, my eyes would rest upon the Elgin marbles, the Egyptian saloon, and the most treasured columns, like the eyes of a dead cod-fish.

'My rude, rough acquaintances here ascribe my unhappiness solely to causes produced by my sometimes irregular life, because they have known no other pains than those resulting from excess or want of ready cash. They do not know that I would rather want a shirt than want a springy mind, and that my total want of happiness, were I to step into York Minster now, would be far, far worse than their want of a hundred pounds when they might happen to need it; and that, if a dozen glasses, or a bottle of wine, drives off their cares, such cures only make me outwardly passable in company, but *never* drive off mine.

‘I know only that it is time for me to be something, when I am nothing, that my father cannot have long to live, and that, when he dies, my evening, which is already twilight, will become night; that I shall then have a constitution still so strong that it will keep me years in torture and despair, when I should every hour pray that I might die.

‘I know that I am avoiding, while I write, one greatest cause of my utter despair; but, by G — — , sir, it is nearly too bitter for me to allude to it!’ Here follow a number of references to the subject, with which the reader is already familiar, and therefore it is unnecessary to repeat them here. Then Branwell continues:

‘To no one living have I said what I now say to you, and I should not bother yourself with my incoherent account, did I not believe that you would be able to understand somewhat of what I meant — though *not all*, sir; for he who is without hope, and knows that his clock is at twelve at night, cannot communicate his feelings to one who finds *his* at twelve at noon.’

CHAPTER X.

BRANWELL BRONTË AND ‘WUTHERING HEIGHTS.’

‘Wuthering Heights’ — Reception of the Book by the Public — It is Misunderstood — Its Authorship — Mr. Dearden’s Account — Statements of Mr. Edward Sloane and Mr. Grundy — Remarks by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid — Correspondences between ‘Wuthering Heights’ and Branwell’s Letters — The ‘Carving-knife Episode’ — Further Correspondences — Resemblances of Thought in Branwell and Emily.

We have now become acquainted with the principal features of Branwell’s career, have obtained some insight into his character, and learned much respecting his genius. We have gained also some knowledge of the history of the Brontë sisters in that most crucial period of their lives, when they returned again to literature with the new earnest which led them to fame.

We have seen that it was Branwell who first seriously undertook the production of a novel, and we have noticed Mr. Grundy’s statement concerning the authorship of ‘Wuthering Heights.’ Here, then, is the proper place in which to say something on this question; for there have not been wanting others also to assert that Branwell was, in great part, the writer of it. Miss Robinson, in her ‘Emily Brontë,’ dismisses the assertion as altogether untrue; but she rightly says, as all will agree, that ‘in the contemptuous silence of those who know their falsity, such slanders live and thrive like unclean insects under fallen stones.’ It cannot, therefore, be inappropriate, in such a work as the present, to record, as clearly and succinctly as may be, what has been said on the subject, and to make a suggestion — for it is nothing more — as to what is the truth of the matter.

When ‘Wuthering Heights,’ after its slow progress through the press, was given to the world in the December of 1847, neither the critics nor the public were very well able to grasp its meaning. Reviewers, to quote Charlotte Brontë, ‘too often remind us of the mob of Astrologers, Chaldeans, and Soothsayers gathered before the “writing on the wall,” and unable to read the characters or make known the interpretation.’ In ‘Wuthering Heights’ they found the subject disagreeable, the characters brutal, the conception crude, and the object of the work wholly unintelligible. The most that could be made of it, was that some rude soul in the north of England, burning with spite against his species, had set himself, with intent little short of diabolical, to lay open the most vicious depths of selfishness and crime, which he had embodied in the actions of characters so lost and revolting, that the mind recoiled with a shudder from the perusal of the monstrosity he had created. One critic, who dwelt at some length on the want of 'tone' and polish in the book, surmised that the writer of it had suffered, 'not disappointment in love, but some great mortification of pride,' which had so embittered his spirit that he had prepared this stinging story in vengeance on his species, and had flung it, crying, 'There, take that!' with cynical pleasure, in the very teeth of humankind.

This writer even felt it his duty to caution young people against the book. 'It ought to be banished from refined society,' he says. 'The whole tone of the book smacks of lowness.' — 'A person may be ill-mannered from want of delicacy of perception or cultivation, or ill-mannered intentionally; the author of "Wuthering Heights" is both.' — 'But the taint of vulgarity in our author extends deeper than mere snobbishness; he is rude, because he prefers to be so.' I quote these remarks, as an extreme instance, to show that a critic, who could recognize the great imaginative power, the subtlety, the keen insight, and the fine dramatic character of 'Wuthering Heights,' yet felt such a strong repugnance to its unknown author that he thought him unfit to associate with his fellow-men. It never crossed the minds of the critics in those times that the book could be by any but a man of strong personal character, and one with a wide experience of the dark side of human nature.

However, a feeling speedily grew up that 'Wuthering Heights' was an earlier and immature production, attempted to be palmed off upon the public, of the author of 'Jane Eyre,' against whom a charge of bad faith was thereby virtually made; and even Sydney Dobell (in the 'Palladium' of September, 1850), the first critic who had sympathy enough with genius to discern the nature and comprehend the significance of the book, did not escape this error. It is not necessary here to repeat the unfortunate consequences of this misunderstanding, which caused Charlotte eventually to throw off the disguise, and declare openly that 'Wuthering Heights' was the work of her sister Emily. 'Unjust and grievous error!' says Charlotte. 'We laughed at it at first, but I deeply lament it now.' In the face of her statement, further remark on the authorship was naturally silenced; but, from time to time, when the book was discussed, much astonishment was manifested that a simple and inexperienced girl, like Emily Brontë, had been able to draw, with such nervous and morbid analysis, so sombre a picture of the workings of passions which she could never have actually known, and of natures 'so relentless and implacable, of spirits so lost and fallen,' as those of Heathcliff and Hindley Earnshaw.

A writer in the 'Cornhill Magazine' who attributes to Emily Brontë the distinction that she has written a book 'which stands as completely alone in the language as does "Paradise Lost," or the "Pilgrim's Progress,"' thus speaks of it: 'Its power,' he says, 'is absolutely Titanic; from the first page to the last it reads like the intellectual throes of a giant. It is fearful, it is true, and perhaps one of the most unpleasant books ever written: but we stand in amaze at the almost incredible fact that it was written by a slim country girl, who would have passed in a crowd as an insignificant person, and who had had little or no experience of the ways of the world. In Heathcliff, Emily Brontë has drawn the greatest villain extant, after Iago. He has no match out of Shakespeare. The Mephistopheles of Goethe's "Faust" is a person of gentlemanly proclivities compared with Heathcliff…. But "Wuthering Heights" is a marvellous curiosity in literature. We challenge the world to produce another work in which the whole atmosphere seems so surcharged with suppressed electricity, and bound in with the blackness of tempest and desolation.'

Perhaps this same grim and Titanic power of 'Wuthering Heights' is one reason why many readers do not understand it fully. 'It is possible,' Mr. Swinburne says, 'that, to take full delight in Emily Brontë's book, one must have something by natural inheritance of her instinct, and something by earlier association of her love of the special points of earth — the same lights, and sounds, and colours, and odours, and sights, and shapes of the same fierce, free landscape of tenantless, and fruitless, and fenceless moor.'

But the composition of 'Wuthering Heights' was in great part incomprehensible to Charlotte herself, though she endeavours to account for it by a consideration of her sister's character and circumstances. For, as we have seen, she says, 'I am bound to avow that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst whom she lived, than a nun has of the country people who sometimes pass her convent gates.'

'"Wuthering Heights,"' to quote Charlotte Brontë's Preface to the new edition of it, 'was hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials. The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor; gazing thereon, he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister; a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur — power. He wrought with a rude chisel, from no model but the vision of his meditations. With time and labour, the crag took human shape; and there it stands colossal, dark, and frowning, half statue, half rock: in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey, and moorland moss clothes it; and heath, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance, grows faithfully close to the giant's foot.'

Many years ago, a writer in the 'People's Magazine,' speaking of the authorship of 'Wuthering Heights,' said: 'Who would suppose that Heathcliff, a man who never swerved from his arrow-straight course to perdition from his cradle to his grave, … had been conceived by a timid and retiring female? But this was the case.' The perusal of this sentence led Mr. William Dearden — author of the 'Star Seer' and the 'Maid of Caldene' — who was acquainted with Branwell Brontë, to communicate to the 'Halifax Guardian,' in June, 1867, some facts, within his personal knowledge, touching the question, which he extracted from the MS. preface to his poem entitled, 'The Demon

Queen,’ not then published.

It appears, from this account, that Branwell and Mr. Dearden had entered into a friendly poetic contest. Each was to write a poem in which the principal character was to have a real or imaginary existence before the Deluge. They met, on the occasion, at the ‘Cross Roads,’ a hostel a little more than a mile from Haworth on the road to Keighley, where an evening was spent in the reading of their respective productions. Leyland was to decide upon the merits of the poems. In reference to this meeting Mr. Dearden says,

‘We met at the time and place appointed … I read the first act of the “Demon Queen;” but, when Branwell dived into his hat — the usual receptacle of his fugitive scraps — where he supposed he had deposited his MS. poem, he found he had by mistake placed there a number of stray leaves of a novel on which he had been trying his “prentice hand.” Chagrined at the disappointment he had caused, he was about to return the papers to his hat, when both friends earnestly pressed him to read them, as they felt a curiosity to see how he could wield the pen of a novelist. After some hesitation, he complied with the request, and riveted our attention for about an hour, dropping each sheet, when read, into his hat. The story broke off abruptly in the middle of a sentence, and he gave us the sequel, *vivâ voce*, together with the real names of the prototypes of his characters; but, as some of these personages are still living, I refrain from pointing them out to the public. He said he had not yet fixed upon a title for his production, and was afraid he should never be able to meet with a publisher who would have the hardihood to usher it into the world. The scene of the fragment which Branwell read, and the characters introduced in it — so far as then developed — were the same as those in “Wuthering Heights,” which Charlotte Brontë confidently asserts was the production of her sister Emily.’

Another friend of Branwell Brontë also, Mr. Edward Sloane of Halifax, author of a work entitled, ‘Essays, Tales, and Sketches,’ (1849) declared to Mr. Dearden that Branwell had read to him, portion by portion, the novel as it was produced, at the time, insomuch that he no sooner began the perusal of ‘Wuthering Heights,’ when published, than he was able to anticipate the characters and incidents to be disclosed. Thus Mr. Dearden and the late Mr. Sloane claimed to have knowledge of ‘Wuthering Heights’ as the work of Branwell, before it was issued from the press; and we have seen that Mr. Grundy declares Branwell to have said, with the consent of his sister, that he had written ‘a great portion of “Wuthering Heights” himself,’ a statement which, remembering the ‘weird fancies of diseased genius’ with which Branwell had entertained him at Luddenden Foot, inclined Mr. Grundy to believe ‘that the very plot was his invention rather than his sister’s.’

The evidence for the original ascription of authorship is simple in the extreme. Charlotte Brontë has told us in the Biographical Notice, as well as in the Preface, which she has prefixed to ‘Wuthering Heights,’ that the book was the work of Ellis Bell; and clearly no shadow of doubt was on her mind at the time as to the accuracy of this statement; nor had the publisher of the book any uncertainty as to the matter. Moreover, the servant Martha is said to have seen Emily Brontë writing it. We are told, also, that it is impossible that the upright spirit of the gentle Emily could resort to the miserable fraud of appropriating a work which was not her own. And, lastly, modern critics have not found it difficult to believe that a woman might be the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' They see nothing incongruous or impossible in the possession, by a feminine intellect, of such a searching knowledge of sinister propensities as are developed in that book, nor of its descending to those chaotic depths of black moral distortion, where it is possible for Hindley Earnshaw, with hideous blasphemy, to drink damnation to his soul, that he may be able to 'punish its Maker,' and where the life-long vengeance of Heathcliff is drawn out, with wondrous power, to its ghastly and impotent end.

How far Charlotte's statement is weakened by the fact that, up to the time when she discovered the volume of verse, and the three sisters commenced their novels — at which period it will be remembered one volume of Branwell's work was written — they had made no communication to one another of the literary work which each had in progress, is, perhaps, a matter for personal opinion. The declaration of Martha would probably be of little value, unless we knew that what Emily was writing was entirely independent of Branwell's work. And, again, those who have sought to defend Ellis Bell from the charge of fraud, have perhaps been over hasty; for, so far as I know, that charge has never been either made or implied.

As to the capability of Branwell to write 'Wuthering Heights,' not much need be said here. Those who read this book will see that, despite his weaknesses and his follies, Branwell was, indeed, unfortunate in having to bear the penalty, in ceaseless open discussion, of 'une fanfaronnade des vices qu'il n'avait pas,' and that, moreover, his memory has been darkened, and his acts misconstrued, by sundry writers, who have endeavoured to find in his character the source of the darkest passages in the works of his sisters.

Far from being hopelessly a 'miserable fellow,' an 'unprincipled dreamer,' an 'unnerved and garrulous prodigal,' as we have been told he was, he had, in fact, within him, an abundance of worthy ambition, a modest confidence in his own ability, which he was never known to vaunt, and a just pride in the celebrity of his family, which, it may be trusted, will remove from him, at any rate, the imputation of a lack of moral power to do anything good or forcible at all.

Those who have heard fall from the lips of Branwell Brontë — and they are few now — all those weird stories, strange imaginings, and vivid and brilliant disquisitions on the life of the people of the West-Riding, will recognize that there was at least no opposition, but rather an affinity, between the tendency of his thoughts and those of the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' And, as to special points in the story, it may be said that Branwell Brontë had tasted most of the passions, weaknesses, and emotions there depicted; had loved, in frenzied delusion, as fiercely as Heathcliff loved; as with Hindley Earnshaw, too, in the pain of loss, 'when his ship struck; the captain abandoned his post; and the crew, instead of trying to save her, rushed into riot and confusion, leaving no hope for their luckless vessel.' He had, too, indeed, manifested much of the doating folly of the unhappy master of the 'Heights'; and, finally, there is no doubt that he possessed, nevertheless, almost as much force of character, determination, and energy as Heathcliff himself.

The following extract from a lecture by Mr. T. Wemyss Reid, will show the opinion of that gentleman — which he applies to prove that Branwell was in part the subject of his sister's work — that there is a distinct correspondence in the feelings and utterances of Heathcliff and Branwell in this book, which, as he observes, critics have again and again declared to be like the dream of an opium-eater, which we have seen that Branwell was. Mr. Reid states: 'I said that, perhaps, the most striking part of "Wuthering Heights" was that which deals with the relations of Heathcliff and Catherine, after she had become the wife of another. Whole pages of the story are filled with the ravings and ragings of the villain against the man whose life stands between him and the woman he loves. Similar ravings are to be found in all the letters of Branwell Brontë written at this period of his career; and we may be sure that similar ravings were always on his lips, as, moody and more than half mad, he wandered about the rooms of the parsonage at Haworth. Nay, I have found some striking verbal coincidences between Branwell's own language and passages in "Wuthering Heights." In one of his own letters there are these words in reference to the object of his passion: "My own life without her will be hell. What can the so-called love of her wretched, sickly husband be to her compared with mine?" Now, turn to "Wuthering Heights," and you will read these words: "Two words would comprehend my future — *death* and *hell*: existence, after losing her, would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton's attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day."'

If Mr. Reid had quoted the beginning of this paragraph, another point of correspondence would have been perceived between the feelings manifested in it and those which had actuated Branwell Brontë. Heathcliff is speaking: '"You suppose she has nearly forgotten me?" he said. "Oh, Nelly! you know she has not! You know as well as I do, that for every thought she spends on Linton, she spends a thousand on me! At a most miserable period of my life, I had a notion of the kind: it haunted me on my return to the neighbourhood last summer; but only her own assurance could make me admit the horrible idea again. And then, Linton would be nothing, nor Hindley, nor all the dreams that ever I dreamt!"'

We have seen that, in the summer of 1845, Branwell lost his employment, and returned to the neighbourhood of Haworth, and that he, too, at that most miserable period of *his* life, when he wrote his novel, and ‘Real Rest,’ and ‘Penmaenmawr,’ had had a notion that the lady of his affections had nearly forgotten him.

It may be observed that Catherine Earnshaw, in an earlier part of the book, uses a like antithesis to that quoted by Mr. Reid. ‘Whatever our souls are made of,’ says she, speaking of Heathcliff and herself, ‘his and mine are the same; and Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.’ Though it is not strictly accurate that in *all* Branwell’s letters at this period there are similar ravings, or that such were always on his lips, there are, at all events, other coincidences of thought and expression to be found in his letters and poems with certain features and passages in ‘Wuthering Heights,’ which are not less striking. A few instances will illustrate much in that work which it is not easy to believe could have been transcribed by the writer from the utterances of another. Even so early as his letter to John Brown, we have seen with what force Branwell could express himself when he chose. He speaks in that letter of one who ‘will be used as the tongs of hell,’ and of another ‘out of whose eyes Satan looks as from windows.’ Let us turn to where Heathcliff’s eyes are described, in Chapter vii. of the novel, as ‘that couple of black fiends, so deeply buried, who never open their windows boldly, but lurk glinting under them, like devil’s spies;’ and, in Chapter xvii., where Isabella Heathcliff says of them: ‘The clouded windows of hell flashed a moment towards me; the fiend which usually looked out, however, was so dimmed and drowned that I did not fear to hazard another sound of derision.’

We have noticed how Branwell plays upon the word *castaway* at the close of his letter on his novel. Charlotte has said they all had a leaning to Cowper’s poem, ‘The Castaway,’ and appropriated it in one way or another; she told Mrs. Gaskell that Branwell had done so. The word is used twice in ‘Wuthering Heights.’ Heathcliff is described as having been a ‘little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway,’ and the younger Catherine addresses pious Joseph, oddly enough, and by a coincidence singular enough, remembering Branwell’s allusion in his letter, in these words: ‘No, reprobate! you are a castaway — be off, or I’ll hurt you seriously! I’ll have you all modelled in wax and clay.’

Mention may also be made here, with reference to the occurrence of the names ‘Linton’ and ‘Hareton’ in ‘Wuthering Heights,’ that, somewhat before the time of the writing of his novel, Branwell was accustomed frequently to visit a place of the former designation, and that he had, as we have seen, when he was in Broughton-in-Furness, a friend of the name of Ayrton.

In the above letter on his novel it will be remembered, in speaking of the character of his work, that Branwell says he hopes to leap from the present bathos of fictitious literature to the firmly-fixed rock honoured by the foot of a Smollett or a Fielding, and speaks of revealing man’s heart as faithfully as in the pages of ‘Hamlet’ or ‘Lear.’ In the first four chapters of ‘Wuthering

Heights,' which serve as prelude to the darker portions of the story, we are introduced to the inmates of the farm that gives its name to the novel. Mr. Lockwood, who has rented Thrushcross Grange of Heathcliff, and has come to reside there, relates his experience of two visits he pays to his landlord at the 'Heights.' In the excellent humour of this portion of the story we are certainly reminded of Branwell Brontë, and perhaps of Smollett and Fielding too. The succeeding chapters are related in a manner more subdued, proper to the narration of the housekeeper. There is just one mention of 'King Lear' in 'Wuthering Heights,' on the second of these visits, when, at last, Mr. Lockwood, after he has been knocked down by the dogs, addresses the inmates of the 'Heights,' 'with several incoherent threats of retaliation, that, in their infinite depth of virulency, smacked of "King Lear."' More than once have this story and Shakspeare's great tragedy been named in kinship, and Miss Robinson, unaware of Branwell's observation on his own prose tale, gives a second place, with 'King Lear,' to 'Wuthering Heights.'

It is impossible to read 'Wuthering Heights' without being struck with the part which consumption and death are made to play in the progress of the story. Scarcely a character is there depicted in whom we do not recognize some trait, some weakness, remotely or more closely, indicating deep-seated phthisis; and evidences of a true and certain observation, in the writer, are to be found in the pictures of its power there delineated. In Branwell's poem on 'Caroline,' we have already seen with what certain touch he depicts her death from that disease; and how deeply, and almost morbidly, he broods on its ravages; and, in one of his later poems, we have a second and more striking picture of decline. In Emily's verse anything of the kind is entirely wanting; and, indeed, it is what we miss in her poems, even more than what we find in Branwell's, that must ever surprise us when we look for the author of 'Wuthering Heights.' Branwell, in his writings, is often engaged with subjects of real and personal interest, and the scheme of his work is apparent. Several of his poems, indeed, when once read, leave an impress on the memory which is evidence enough of the power and originality by which they are inspired. For the most part, Emily's poems are impersonal, imaginative, and ideal.

It will be remembered that Mr. Grundy, in his 'Pictures of the Past,' has given an account of his last interview with Branwell, which he declares took place but a few days before Branwell died. I have shown conclusively that the interview is ascribed by Mr. Grundy, and by Miss Robinson following him, to a wrong date, and that it took place, in fact, in 1846, when the manuscript was still in the author's hands, perhaps, indeed, undergoing revision at the time. Branwell, according to his friend, had concealed in his coat sleeve, on this occasion, a carving-knife, with which, in his frenzy, he designed to kill the devil, whose call, he supposed, had summoned him to the inn; and he was surprised to find Mr. Grundy there instead. I have surmised that, when this grotesque episode occurred, Branwell was but jesting with his friend, who, in his surprise, took him altogether *au sérieux*; and, remembering that Mr.

Grundy says Branwell had declared to him before that ‘Wuthering Heights’ was in great part his own work, it will be seen that there are passages in the novel which seem to lend probability both to this surmise as to Branwell’s intention, and also to Mr. Grundy’s statement. Thus, in Chapter ix., Hindley Earnshaw returns to the house in a state of frenzied intoxication, and, finding Nelly Dean stowing away his son in a cupboard, he flies at her with a madman’s rage, crying: ‘By heaven and hell, you’ve sworn between you to murder that child! I know how it is, now, that he is always out of my way. But, with the help of Satan, I shall make you swallow the carving-knife, Nelly! You needn’t laugh; for I’ve just crammed Kenneth, head-downmost, in the Blackhorse marsh; two is the same as one — and I want to kill some of you: I shall have no rest till I do!’ To which Nelly Dean replies, ‘But I don’t like the carving-knife, Mr. Hindley; it has been cutting red herrings. I’d rather be shot, if you please.’ Again, in Chapter xvii., when Isabella’s taunts have stung Heathcliff to retaliation, he snatches up a dinner-knife and flings it at her head; and she is struck beneath the ear. We may believe, then, that when Branwell appeared in this strange guise before his friend, he was but jestingly rehearsing in act, with an ‘antic disposition’ such incidents as he had recently described in the volume he had mentioned to Mr. Grundy.

Miss Robinson, in her ‘Emily Brontë’ (p. 95), has some sarcastic remarks about Branwell’s pride in his family name. ‘Proud of his name!’ she writes: ‘He wrote a poem on it, “Brontë,” an eulogy of Nelson, which won the patronizing approbation of Leigh Hunt, Miss Martineau, and others, to whom, at his special request, it was submitted. Had he ever heard of his dozen aunts and uncles, the Pruntys of Ahaderg? Or if not, with what sensations must the Vicar (*sic*) of Haworth have listened to this blazoning forth and triumphing over the glories of his ancient name?’ Branwell’s pride in the name of Brontë would have been foolish enough if it had been of the nature Miss Robinson supposes; but perhaps it had another meaning. At any rate Nelly Dean puts pride of birth in quite a different light in ‘Wuthering Heights,’ where she gives good advice to Heathcliff. ‘You’re fit for a prince in disguise,’ she says even to the ‘little Lascar,’ the ‘American or Spanish castaway.’ ‘Who knows but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week’s income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England. Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!’ This was exactly what Branwell Brontë did.

There are two other points in which I will indicate correspondences between the phraseology and ideas of ‘Wuthering Heights’ and those of Branwell Brontë. In one of his letters here published, Branwell, sketching a criminal grinning with the halter round his neck, asks the question: ‘Is there really such a thing as the *Risus Sardonicus*? Did a man ever laugh the morning he was to be hanged?' Now, in the novel, Isabella Heathcliff says: 'I was in the condition of mind to be shocked at nothing: in fact, I was as reckless as some malefactors show themselves at the foot of the gallows.' Lastly, Heathcliff declares, speaking of Hindley Earnshaw: 'Correctly, that fool's body should be buried at the cross-roads, without ceremony of any kind.' Now Branwell was not only familiar with the traditions of suicides buried at the cross-roads near Haworth, as well as at similar cross-roads, but he was accustomed, in his perambulations through the district, when in this direction, to visit the ancient hostel at that place: and, indeed, it was this house he fixed upon for the reading of the poem he had written, and where he read, as we have seen, in lieu of it, the portion, of his novel, surmised to be 'Wuthering Heights,' to Mr. Dearden and his other friend. It would be tedious to indicate all the minor similarities of expression in the novel to those in Branwell's letters.

Yet there are two or three points noticeable in 'Wuthering Heights,' which are marked in Emily's verse. Emily's love of Nature, of the moors; her deep brooding on the mystery of being, which led her to look on the calm of death as an assurance of future rest for all, are to be found in her poetry; and, in a lesser degree, also in 'Wuthering Heights.' Thus we read, in Chapter xvi. of the story, of Linton and his dead wife: 'Next morning — bright and cheerful out of doors — stole softened in through the blinds of the silent room, and suffused the couch and its occupant with a mellow, tender glow. Edgar Linton had his head laid on the pillow, and his eyes shut. His young and fair features were almost as death-like as those of the form beside him, and almost as fixed: but *his* was the hush of exhausted anguish, and *hers* of perfect peace. Her brow smooth, her lids closed, her lips wearing the expression of a smile; no angel in heaven could be more beautiful than she appeared. And I partook of the infinite calm in which she lay: my mind was never in a holier frame than while I gazed on that untroubled image of Divine rest. I instinctively echoed the words she had uttered a few hours before: "Incomparably beyond and above us all! Whether still on earth or now in heaven, her spirit is at home with God!"'

The reflections suggested to Nelly Dean by the spectacle of repose presented by the dead Catherine seem to Mr. Reid to be characteristic of Emily, speaking 'out of the fulness of her heart.' 'I don't know if it be a peculiarity in me,' says the narrator in the story, 'but I am seldom otherwise than happy while watching in the chamber of death, should no frenzied or despairing mourner share the duty with me. I see a repose that neither earth nor hell can break, and I feel an assurance of the endless and shadowless hereafter — the Eternity they have entered — where life is boundless in its duration, and love in its sympathy, and joy in its fulness. I noticed on that occasion how much selfishness there is even in a love like Mr. Linton's, when he so regretted Catherine's blessed release! To be sure, one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. One might doubt in seasons of cold reflection; but not then, in the presence of her corpse. It asserted its own tranquillity, which seemed a pledge of equal quiet to its former inhabitants.' But Mr. Lockwood is made to say, speaking of the housekeeper's anxiety to know if he thinks such people are happy in the other world, 'I declined answering Mrs. Dean's question, which struck me as something heterodox.' The story also concludes, speaking of the head-stones of Edgar Linton, Heathcliff, and Catherine: 'I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.' But there is in these very points a remarkable coincidence of feeling between Branwell and Emily also. Indeed, in the expression of these thoughts, Branwell's verse is well-nigh more powerful than Emily's. We have known his desire for the oblivious peace of 'Real Rest'; and, in his letters, he has sketched many head-stones, on one of which are the words: 'I implore for rest'; and, in the 'Epistle to a Child in her Grave,' he has told us of the freedom from ill of that quiet and painless sepulchre. Here are a few stray lines of Branwell's, which will serve as illustration of this coincidence:

'Think not that Life is happiness,
But deem it *duty* joined with *care*;
Implore for *hope* in your distress,
And for your answers, get *despair*;
Yet travel on, for Life's rough road
May end, at last, in rest with *God*!'

Again we may ask: did Branwell Brontë write 'Wuthering Heights,' or any part of it? The evidence that he did so is, probably, insufficient. But let it be remembered that, as stated in his letter to Leyland, he had clearly undertaken a three-volume novel, and, in one way or other, had written a volume of his story. The charge of falsehood brought against Branwell in his statement to Mr. Grundy will not now probably be renewed; but there may not be wanting some to say that Mr. Grundy is in error in connecting what his friend said to him about his own novel with some allusion of his sister's to 'Wuthering Heights,' and that those gentlemen who believe the novel Branwell read to them to be the same as that attributed to Emily are in error also. It has been said that, on the rare occasions on which the father or brother entered the room where the sisters were writing their novels, nothing was said of the work in progress. But it must be confessed that these views meet with little encouragement from what we know of the history of that period.

We have seen that, prior to the autumn of 1845, Branwell had been employed in writing his novel; a little later, we have reason to suspect that he is not going on with it, and we find him writing a poem with the same theme as a contemporary one of Emily's. We then find the sisters taking up novel writing with precisely Branwell's views of the profit to be derived from it.

When he writes to Leyland on the 28th of April, 1846, shortly before the poems of his sisters were published, and while they are finishing their novels, Branwell has ceased to speak of his, but says that, if he were in London personally, he would try a certain publisher with his poems. Now it was an edition of Wordsworth by this same publisher that Charlotte had, four months earlier, fixed upon as a model for the sisters' own volume of poems. Branwell, then, however strained his relations with his sister Charlotte might be at this late date, must have known that his sisters were writing their tales. Why, then, the change in his aims? Why is he, who had propounded that view of the superior advantages of prose over poetic writing, which afterwards determined the sisters to write novels, silent about his own, and thinking of publishing his poems? and never again do we hear of any attempt on his part to finish his novel, though he lived a year after his sisters' works were published. What had become of his novel in the interim?

Perhaps there is evidence, then, to warrant us in throwing out a suggestion that there may have been some measure of collaboration between Branwell and his sister, that he originated the idea, moulded the characters, and wrote the earlier portion of the work, which she, taking, revised, amended, completed, and imbued with enough of an individual spirit to give unity to the whole. In support of this view, it may be noted that, though there is no break in the style of 'Wuthering Heights,' yet all the interests of the original story are, in a manner, completed in the seventeenth chapter — that is, something more than half-way through the book. In that first portion of it we trace the vehement passion of Heathcliff for Catherine up to her death. We see his enmity to Edgar Linton, which is satisfied by his possession of Linton's sister, whom he hates and despises, but who is the mother of a child to be heir to Thrushcross Grange, and we see the death of this unhappy wife. In this first portion of the novel is unrolled also the gradual growth of Heathcliff's hatred of Earnshaw, from the time when he says: 'I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do,' up to the death of that miserable character, whose son remains an ignorant dependent, because his drunken father has been lured to make away with his wealth at the gaming-table to his Mephistophelian pursuer. Here is depicted that dark and malevolent spirit which ranks Heathcliff with the demons, as where he says: 'I have no pity — I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails. It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain.'

In the second part of the story, opening with the eighteenth chapter, we are occupied with the fates of the children of Linton, Earnshaw, and Heathcliff. We learn how the latter trains up his miserable, puling son for the purpose of marrying the daughter of Linton, which he forcibly brings about, and thus completes his possession of the Grange; how he endeavours to pervert the youthful Hareton Earnshaw, to 'see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another with the same wind to twist it;' and in the end how his vengeance is completely thwarted. Thus there are two distinct parts in 'Wuthering Heights,' one being the completion and complement of the other.

As some evidence for the view here thrown out, I may mention that, in reading 'Wuthering Heights' in order to discover what correspondences there might exist between it and Branwell's writings, in letters, etc., I was very much struck with the fact that, for every five of such correspondences which I discovered in the first part of the novel, I could find only one in the latter. We need not, therefore, be surprised if, in the concluding half of 'Wuthering Heights,' Branwell has stood to the author as model for some details of character, though these can be very few. Yet Nelly Dean does say of Heathcliff's love for Catherine: 'He might have had a monomania on the subject of his departed idol; but on every other point his wits were as sound as mine.'

The collaboration which I have mentioned would by no means imply unfair action on the part of Emily Brontë: she was ever a kind, gentle, and faithful friend to Branwell, and had looked forward, perhaps more anxiously than her sisters, to his success in the world. There would be nothing extraordinary, then, in Branwell handing over to his favourite sister, to whom he was always grateful for her abiding affection, the work which he had begun, and which he, perhaps, felt himself dissatisfied with, or unable to complete, or in his supplying her with a plot, and assisting her with his experience in the delineation of the characters in any story she might wish to produce. To have done so would be quite consistent with what we know of him; and he never claimed the authorship, so far as I know, after the occasion of Mr. Grundy's visit to the parsonage twelve months before the publication of the novel; and he read it to two or three personal friends only, and to these, if my supposition be correct, perhaps before his sister had taken up the work.

One other circumstance, besides the disappearance of Branwell's novel, finds explanation in this view of the matter: that Emily, who never undertook a second novel, produced, not only the most original and powerful of the contemporary tales of the sisters, but one that is also a much longer story than 'The Professor,' by Charlotte, and half as long again as 'Agnes Grey,' by Anne. Here, then, must probably remain the question of the origin of 'Wuthering Heights.'

CHAPTER XI.

BRANWELL BRONTË AND ‘THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL.’

Statement of Charlotte that her Sister Anne wrote the Book in consequence of her Brother’s Conduct — Supposition of Some that Branwell was the Prototype of Huntingdon — The Characters are Entirely Distinct — Real Sources of the Story — Anne Brontë at Pains to Avoid a Suspicion that Huntingdon was a Portrait of Branwell.

Charlotte Brontë, who never dreamed of attributing the production of so dire a story as ‘Wuthering Heights,’ by her sister Emily, to brooding on Branwell’s misfortunes, has, however, in her remarks on Anne Brontë’s second novel, ‘The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,’ — meant by its author as a tale of warning against the evils of intemperance, — intimated that it was carried out as a duty by Anne, in consequence of the impression made upon her by her brother’s conduct; and certain writers, questioning the statement of Charlotte that the characters are fictitious, have concluded that, in Arthur Huntingdon, we have ‘a picture’ and a ‘portrait’ of Branwell Brontë. It seems to me, rightly considered, a cruel thing to Anne Brontë to believe that she has given us a portrait of her brother in the character of the perfidious Huntingdon. Had her brother been thus vile, she could not have borne to write over the details of his character; were he not like Huntingdon, she could not have libelled him so.

As none of the biographers of the Brontë sisters ever knew Branwell, it is probable that the Branwell Brontë of the biographies owes more to the supposed Branwell of the novels, than the characters in the novels do to the brother of the Brontës. It is Huntingdon’s wit, superficial as it is, that has connected him with the ideal of Branwell Brontë. A few traits of his, indeed, there may be in Huntingdon, but they are not the worst of those depicted in that character. The contempt for gambling which Huntingdon expresses may be taken as an instance.

We shall, however, look in vain for any true resemblance between the characters of Arthur Huntingdon and Branwell Brontë, and, certainly, in almost every respect, one is a direct contrast to the other. The biographer of Emily Brontë says, indeed, that Branwell ‘sat to Anne sorrily enough for the portrait of Henry (*sic*) Huntingdon;’ but I would ask where that portraiture lies? Huntingdon, be it marked, is not only a drunkard, but he is a libertine, a man who has even the callous brutality to recount to his trusting wife, as she sits by him on the sofa, endeavouring to amuse him, the ‘stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl, or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation,' she says, 'he lays it to the charge of jealousy, and laughs till the tears run down his cheeks.' But it was different with Branwell, against whom it has never been charged that he sank to these low depths of criminal debauchery, indulgence, and treachery; and even those who have recounted the story of his passion for the wife of his employer, are compelled to say that he remained pure, and shrank in horror from the advances which they suppose she made. Huntingdon's vicious disposition, too, is so sunk in selfishness, and there is in him such a cold brutality, — as where on many an occasion he triumphs over his powerless wife, — that he is placed in absolute contrast to Branwell, with his confiding, considerate, open-hearted, and generous nature.

It is but necessary to allude to Huntingdon's hypocrisy to establish a further difference between his character and Branwell's; and it is, moreover, very distinctive of Huntingdon's mind that he is, throughout, utterly irreverent and irreligious, to such an extent that he jests at sacred things, and declares that his wife's piety is enough to make him jealous of his Maker. Again he says, when he places her hand on the top of his head, and it sinks in a bed of curls, 'rather alarmingly low, especially in the middle;' 'if God meant me to be religious, why didn't He give me a proper organ of veneration?' This irreverence he carries with him into domestic life, and he invades the sanctity of human affection, and the places the heart keeps holy, with his gross and insensate brutality. How different is this from Branwell Brontë, in whose character reverence and affection, above all things, were strong! Can we imagine Huntingdon dwelling so fondly in the affection of the long departed, as Branwell does in his poems of 'Caroline;' can we imagine him venerating as a precious possession to his dying day the sacred memories of his early years, as his supposed prototype did? What 'swell of thought,' seeming to fill 'the bursting heart, the gushing eye' with the memories of bygone years, could flood the shallow brain of the selfish and unfeeling Huntingdon? And Huntingdon, too, is afflicted with that well-known complaint of the continual drinker; he loses all interest in the affairs of life, and exists in perpetual levity. 'There is always a "but" in this imperfect world,' says his wife, 'and I do wish he would sometimes be serious. I cannot get him to write or speak in real, solid earnest. I don't much mind it now, but if it be always so what shall I do with the serious part of myself?' I would ask when Branwell Brontë displayed this unseemly levity? if he did not always write and speak in solid earnest; if, indeed, he did not live in the very midst of that storm and stress of acute feeling which Huntingdon's wretched nature was incapable of experiencing at all?

Lastly, Helen Huntingdon tells us that her husband is impenetrable to good and lofty thoughts, that he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines, that she wishes he would take up some literary study, or learn to draw or play; and that, when deprived of his friends, his condition is comfortless, unalleviated as it is by the consolations of intellectual resources, and the answer of a good conscience towards God. What, then, were Branwell's mental resources? His thoughts, on the contrary, were good and lofty enough; he was a student of literature, and especially a reader of the great poets; he had, indeed, taken up literary work; and he could and did both draw, and play on the organ; and when he was deprived of society, or cast into trouble, he found his consolation in his literary labours, and we have seen that, for the very purpose of obtaining alleviation in distress, he had written a volume of his novel. In short, he was, as far as his intellectual character and habits were concerned, exactly what Helen Huntingdon wished her husband might be.

If, then, there is no resemblance between Branwell Brontë's disposition, character, and capabilities and those of Huntingdon in the novel, we might, after what has been said, surely expect to find that, in the unique point in which there is a correspondence of fact — their indulgence in drink — there would be some similar traits. But here, again, the resemblance is of the faintest, while the differences are radical. Huntingdon, for instance, is a continual and inveterate drinker; Branwell drank but occasionally, and had long periods of temperance: Huntingdon drinks for the love of drink; Branwell drank in order to drown his sorrows. It is, moreover, made a special point by the Brontë biographers that part of Branwell's intemperance was in taking opium, but this feature does not exist in Huntingdon, though Anne was clearly acquainted with the practice, for she mentions in the novel that Lord Lowborough at one time took it.

But, for the character of Huntingdon, we must look elsewhere. The account Charlotte gave of one whom the Brontës had known well, will show from what sources Anne drew her plot.

'You remember Mr. and Mrs. — — ? Mrs. — — came here the other day, with a most melancholy tale of her wretched husband's drunken, extravagant, profligate habits. She asked papa's advice; there was nothing, she said, but ruin before them. They owed debts which they could never pay. She expected Mr. — — 's instant dismissal from his curacy; she knew, from bitter experience, that his vices were utterly hopeless. He treated her and her child savagely; with much more to the same effect. Papa advised her to leave him for ever, and go home, if she had a home to go to. She said this was what she had long resolved to do; and she would leave him directly, as soon as Mr. B — — dismissed him. She expressed great disgust and contempt towards him, and did not affect to have the shadow of regard in any way. I do not wonder at this, but I do wonder she should ever marry a man towards whom her feelings must always have been pretty much the same as they are now. I am morally certain no decent woman could experience anything but aversion towards such a man as Mr. — — . Before I knew, or suspected his character, and when I rather wondered at his versatile talents, I felt it in an uncontrollable degree. I hated to talk with him — hated to look at him;

though, as I was not certain that there was substantial reason for such a dislike, and thought it absurd to trust to mere instinct, I both concealed and repressed the feeling as much as I could; and, on all occasions, treated him with as much civility as I was mistress of. I was struck with Mary's expression of a similar feeling at first sight; she said, when we left him, "That is a hideous man, Charlotte!" I thought, "He is indeed."'

And here is another case known to the Brontës. 'Do you remember my telling you — or did I ever tell you — about that wretched and most criminal Mr. — — ? After running an infamous career of vice, both in England and France, abandoning his wife to disease and total destitution in Manchester, with two children and without a farthing, in a strange lodging-house? Yesterday evening Martha came upstairs to say that a woman — "rather lady-like," as she said — wished to speak to me in the kitchen. I went down. There stood Mrs. — — , pale and worn, but still interesting-looking and cleanly and neatly dressed, as was her little girl who was with her. I kissed her heartily. I could almost have cried to see her, for I had pitied her with my whole soul when I heard of her undeserved sufferings, agonies, and physical degradation. She took tea with us, stayed about two hours, and frankly entered into a narrative of her appalling distresses.... She does not know where Mr. — — is, and of course can never more endure to see him. She is now staying a few days at E — — with the — — s, who, I believe, have been all along very kind to her, and the circumstance is greatly to their credit.'

It was with cases like these before them that the Brontës wrought the infelicity of Heathcliff and Isabella, of Huntingdon and Helen. They felt themselves compelled to represent life as it appeared to them, they said.

Consumption and intemperance, the curses of our island and our climate, are found not the less in the West-Riding of Yorkshire. A cold and humid atmosphere, like poverty and want, begets a recourse to stimulants, and, with some natures, the bounds of moderation are soon passed. The prevalence of the latter evil had entered deeply into Anne's thoughts. Her brother's occasional indulgence had made it familiar to her; but we should clearly commit an error, as well as a great injustice to her, in supposing that, in the character of Huntingdon, she wished to present his failings to the public.

A careful study of the question has, indeed, convinced me, not only that Huntingdon is no portrait of Branwell Brontë, but that he is distinctly and designedly his very antitype. The author of 'Wildfell Hall' could scarcely have created a character so completely different from Branwell, unless she intended to do so; for, otherwise, writing under the influence of circumstances, and the inspiration of the moment, something of his strong personality must surely have found its way into the book. It is pleasant to be thus able to record, as an act of justice to Anne Brontë, that, though she had been compelled to witness the results of intemperance both in Branwell and in others, she purposely conveyed her lesson of these evils in the acts and thoughts of a character utterly distinct from her brother. Indeed, she was at considerable pains — which have unfortunately availed little — to prevent even a suspicion that her brother was the prototype of Huntingdon; for, to remove that impression, she has placed the hero of the story, Gilbert Markham, to a considerable extent, in Branwell's very circumstances. There is no resemblance between Markham's character and Branwell's, beyond that of an ardent and generous temperament; but it should be observed that — exactly as with Branwell — Markham is enamoured of a married woman, the death of whose husband he anxiously awaits; that this passion is attributed to him as a monomania — 'A monomania,' says his brother Fergus, 'but don't mention it; all right but that;' and, lastly, that Markham, too, thinks, as Branwell did, that the deceased husband of the lady 'might have so constructed his will as to place restrictions upon her marrying again.'

It should likewise be observed that 'Wildfell Hall' is just as much a protest against *mariages de convenance*, as it is against intemperance; but what had this to do with the family circumstances of the Brontës? It had far more to do with such instances as that of 'Mr. and Mrs. — — ,' quoted above from Charlotte's letter, where infelicity was combined with intemperance, as it is in the case of Arthur and Helen Huntingdon.

CHAPTER XII.

BRANWELL'S FAILINGS. — PUBLICATION OF 'JANE EYRE.'

Novel-writing — The Sisters' Method of Work — Branwell's Failing Health and Irregularities — 'Jane Eyre' — Its Reception and Character — It was not Influenced by Branwell — Letter and Sketches of Branwell, 1848.

But, at this time, neither 'Wuthering Heights' nor 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' was before the public. It was not, indeed, till the summer of 1847 that the former, with 'Agnes Grey,' was accepted for publication. Meanwhile Anne was toiling away at her second book, and Charlotte was writing 'Jane Eyre,' under spells of inspiration.

Mrs. Gaskell has told us that the sisters were wont to put away their work at nine o'clock, and to walk about the sitting-room, talking over the plots of their stories, and discussing the incidents of them. Once or twice a week each was accustomed to read to the others what she had written, and hear the opinions they passed upon it. Mr. Brontë retired early to rest, and was in ignorance of the nature of the work going on, for his daughters never spoke to him of it, any more than they did to their friends. The writing of the sisters was, in fact, a secret shared only by their brother Branwell, who unquestionably gave his advice upon it, and instructed them on many points, besides, of practical value in their dealings with publishers and literary men, which their small knowledge of the world caused them to overlook.

But, at the time, Branwell's health was visibly failing, and it became evident that, though naturally stronger than his sisters, he was not exempt from the consumptive tendency of his family. All his endeavours to obtain employment had proved futile. His physical health had long been giving way, and this soon rendered him incapable of sustained exertion. Much of his strange conduct arose probably from the reaction of this weakness on a mind endowed with so much intellectual power.

In most winters on these Yorkshire hills there are spells of severe frost and cold, and these were always times of suffering to the Brontës. Influenza would become epidemic at Haworth, and seldom neglected the inmates of the parsonage, close by the churchyard as the house was. Mr. Brontë had struggled hard to have proper drainage introduced into the village, but in vain. There was, indeed, 'such a series of North-pole days' in the December of 1846, as Charlotte did not remember; the sky looked like ice, and the wind was as keen as a two-edged blade. The consequence was that all the house was laid up with coughs and colds. Anne suffered from asthma; Mr. Brontë and Branwell had influenza and cough. Anxiously must they have watched every indication of change in the wind, and longed for the southwest breezes that, even in winter, sometimes came over the moors with all the softness of spring; and, on this occasion, they were not long disappointed, and Anne became much better. The novel writing went on as before. Branwell's weakness and failings sometimes broke in upon this employment, but we do not find that, during the year 1847, he gave such trouble as would be likely to influence his sisters' work. Of course he had little or no money at hand, and we know that he had contracted some small obligations during the period of distraction of the previous year. The result of this was that a sheriff's-officer arrived at Haworth, and Branwell's debts had to be paid, whereat his sister Charlotte seems to have been very angry, for she appears afterwards to accuse herself of being 'too demonstrative and vehement.' About three months later Charlotte was again in doubt about Branwell; she says his behaviour was 'extravagant,' and that he dropped 'mysterious hints,' which led her to believe that he had contracted further debts. In this, however, she was mistaken.

In the May of 1847, Charlotte invited 'E.' to visit her, and said that Branwell was quieter, for the good reason that he had got to the end of a considerable sum of money he became possessed of in the spring, and was obliged to restrict himself in some degree. 'You must,' she continues, 'expect to find him weaker in mind, and the complete rake in appearance. I have no apprehension of his being uncivil to you; on the contrary, he will be as smooth as oil.' It would appear that he had had some sum laid out, which he then recovered; but, as we have seen, he had got into debt before, and, in his alarm at the prospect of imprisonment in York Castle, it is said, told his friends, in the neighbourhood where he had been tutor, of his straits; upon which the widow of his late employer sent him money in kindness of heart, through a third person. At this period he expended much of his time at home in reading, and he wrote several poems.

At the end of July, Charlotte, as we have been told, consulted her brother as to the reason why Messrs. Smith and Elder, to whom she had sent 'The Professor,' did not reply. He at once set it down to her not having enclosed a postage stamp. On the 2nd of August, she wrote again, and promptly received the considerate answer which encouraged her to send to them, on the twenty-fourth of the same month, her three-volume work, 'Jane Eyre.' This was accepted, and given to the world in the following October. Meanwhile, in the beginning of August, 'E.' had paid her visit to the parsonage, and the friends had enjoyed the glorious weather in walking on the moors. Charlotte had returned the visit almost immediately, and the proofs of 'Jane Eyre' were corrected by her during her absence, sitting even at the same table with her friend, to whom, curiously enough, she said not a word about the work in hand. Upon her return to Haworth, she wrote: 'I reached home, and found all well. Thank God for it.' 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey' still lingered in the hands of the publisher, from whom the authors had obtained but impoverishing terms; ‘a bargain,’ says Mrs. Gaskell, in mentioning the circumstance, ‘to be alluded to further.’ Nothing more, however, appears in the ‘Life of Charlotte’ on the subject; and we may hope that the celebrity which the novels of the ‘Messrs. Bell’ soon acquired, made a substantial difference in the first terms of the agreement. During the next three months, Charlotte was in correspondence with Messrs. Smith and Elder, Mr. G. H. Lewes, and Mr. W. S. Williams, in respect of the reviews of ‘Jane Eyre,’ which were then appearing.

‘Jane Eyre’ came upon the reading world of 1847 as a veritable revelation. It was a tragic story of the feelings, so different in character from the trite affectations of the commonplace novel of the day; it was informed with such a passionate energy, and filled with such soul-absorbing interests, that it was received at once as a monument of great and undoubted genius. Reading the book to-day, we can easily understand why Charlotte Brontë gained such a mastery over the spirits of her time, and earned for herself an imperishable renown. She would do the same now. The strange, lonely, unfriended childhood of Jane Eyre, the experiences she undergoes at Gateshead, and at the Lowood School, and her confidence and self-reliance through them all, mark the story as vitally true; but, when this plain little personage manifests the depths of her feelings, and calls forth our human sympathies in her hopes and her sorrows; when we read the terrific tragedy of her relationship with Rochester, and are shaken with the storm and stress of the feelings that move her; when, above all, we see her come out from the shadow, with her nobility and purity unsullied, though once more she is friendless and alone, we are carried beyond ourselves in admiration of the genius who has painted a picture at once so truly human and so very strange.

‘Jane Eyre,’ the book, was the natural and unforced outcome of its author’s personality, and, though Jane Eyre, the character, is not Charlotte Brontë in the sense in which Lucy Snowe is, yet in Charlotte Brontë were all the powers and capabilities that moved Jane Eyre. This book, then, came upon people in 1847 as a revelation; they felt themselves in the hands of a very Titan, and were carried on by an uncontrollable stream. But there were some amongst them who struggled against its influence, when they found that the shallow bounds of conventionality had been far overpassed, and when they saw that its author was little skilled in the ways of the world. These revolted against the power that made them, perforce, interested in a character, in Rochester, who had fallen away from the high Christian ideal. Hence arose that outcry against what was termed the ‘immorality’ of the book, against its ‘coarseness,’ its ‘laxity of tone,’ and the ‘heathenish doctrine of religion’ that filled it, which gave such pain, in the parsonage at Haworth, to the simple-minded girl, its author, against whom the dictum of the ‘Quarterly Review’ was written: ‘If we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has for some sufficient reason long forfeited the society of her own sex.'

But such critics as these forgot that the people whom we love most in life, are not those who are supremely noble, absolutely perfect, superhuman, and angelic; but those who are beautiful and true in spite of their failings, and though clogged with all the faults with which our humanity has laden them; those who, like the child in Wordsworth's ode, live 'trailing clouds of glory' with them from divinity, in the midst of the shame and sin of the world. These are the lights which illumine 'Jane Eyre,' with a loveliness that is truly and perfectly human. So the book made its way, after the wild fervour of its first reception, to a pinnacle in English literature where it must ever remain, as the work of a great and original genius, and, as we now know, of a true and noble woman.

Small need was there, then, that Mrs. Gaskell should seek to explain those features of Charlotte's genius, which brought down upon 'Jane Eyre' and its author such expressions of blame as these, by references to her brother's character and history, as she understood them. Whatever may have been the case with the novels of Emily and Anne, those of Charlotte were clearly the outcome of her own nature and of her own experience, and were uninfluenced in one way or other by her brother. If she takes a suggestion from his affairs at all, she deals with it coldly or sternly. Take for instance that passage I have quoted from 'The Professor,' where William Crimsworth speaks of his recollection of an instance of domestic treachery.

In December, 1847, appeared the works of Ellis and Acton Bell. The Christmas of that year found the three sisters noted in the world of authors — Currer Bell, famous. Not often can so much be recorded of a family. Branwell seems to have been considerably elated by their success, and the festivities of the season were indulged in by him to his injury. His feeble health was soon affected by things that would have had little influence upon ordinarily strong men, and he suffered the consequences. On the 11th of January, 1848, Charlotte writes: — 'We have not been very comfortable here at home lately. Branwell has, by some means, continued to get more money from the old quarter, and has led us a sad life.... Papa is harassed day and night; we have little peace; he is always sick; has two or three times fallen down in fits; what will be the ultimate end, God knows. But who is without their drawback, their scourge, their skeleton behind the curtain? It remains only to do one's best, and endure with patience what God sends.' In this month the second edition of 'Jane Eyre' appeared.

It must have been in reference to this period that Mrs. Gaskell has said it might well have happened that Branwell had shot his father. But the statement is an exaggeration; and, indeed, I have been told, both by Martha Brown and Nancy Wainwright, that Branwell was not nearly so bad as Mrs. Gaskell has made him appear. 'If he had wanted to shoot his father,' says my informant, 'he could easily have done it, for there were loaded guns and pistols hung over the bed-room door constantly.' She relates that, on one occasion, she was occupied in tidying up the bed-room, and had just taken down the fire-arms to dust, when Mr. Brontë entered the room in great consternation, forbidding her, at any time thenceforth, on any account whatever, to meddle with them, for they were loaded even then, and might have been accidentally discharged to her own danger. He again hung up the arms himself. Mr. Brontë carried on this singular practice, and could not be induced to discontinue it; and, as the reader is aware, Branwell and his father occupied this bed-room.

Branwell himself was very conscious of his failings at this time, and somewhat ashamed of them. He writes to Leyland during the January of 1848: ‘I was *really* far enough from well when I saw you last week at Halifax; and, if you should happen to see Mrs. — — of — — , you would greatly oblige me by telling her that I consider her conduct towards me as most kind and motherly, and that, if I did anything during temporary illness, to offend her, I deeply regret it, and beg her to take my regret as my apology till I see her again; which I trust will be ere long.’ He continues, speaking in general terms of his literary work, and his poems, mentioning especially the poem of ‘Caroline,’ which he had written a long time before, and concludes by promising a longer letter later on.

There is prefixed to this letter a drawing, one of the strangest that Branwell ever made, — which he advises his friend to destroy, — a portrait of himself, head and shoulders, vigorously executed with the pen, and an admirable likeness too, in profile, grave and thoughtful, wearing his spectacles, but a portrait of Branwell in what a plight! For, just as the martyrs of old are represented with the knife planted in their breast, and the rope placed round their neck, so has Branwell pictured himself, with the halter about his throat, in the morbid martyrdom of his feverish imagination.

CHAPTER XIII.

BRANWELL'S LATER POETICAL WORKS.

Branwell's Poetical Work — Sketch of the Materials which he intended to use in the Poem of 'Morley Hall' — The Poem — The Subject left Incomplete — Branwell's Poem, 'The End of All' — His Letter to Leyland asking an Opinion on his Poem, 'Percy Hall' — Observations — The Poem.

Branwell's poetical work in this period, when his health was failing, is incomplete, for there remain two pieces from his hand, both of which are fragments only. The first of these is 'Morley Hall,' which he was writing for his friend Leyland, but which he never lived to finish. He designed it to be an epic, in several cantos, dealing with a succession of romantic episodes, of which an elopement that actually took place, as I have previously had occasion to mention, was the chief feature. The part he completed was the introductory canto, or rather a portion of it, which is given below; but, since this was a work into which he entered with much spirit, and which would have been a long and important one, had it been completed, it may not be amiss here to sketch briefly the materials with which he proposed to work.

Morley Hall, or all that remains of it, is situated in the parish of Leigh, in the county of Lancaster; and was the residence of two families in succession, which became allied by marriage, and attained some celebrity. The first family was that of Leyland, originally of the place of that name in Lancashire, and afterwards, for many generations preceding the reign of King Henry VIII., residing at Morley Hall.

In Henry VIII.'s time the mansion was owned by Sir William Leyland, or Leland, whose family consisted of Thomas, his son and heir, and his daughters Anne and Elizabeth, by his marriage with Anne, daughter and heiress of Allan Syngleton of Whitgill, in Craven, Esq. Living in great opulence at Morley, Sir William was visited by the learned antiquary, his friend, and probably his relative, John Leland. This writer says of his visit: 'Cumming from Manchestre towards Morle, Syr William Lelande's howse, I passid by enclosid grounde, … leving on the left hand a mile and more of, a fair place of Mr. Langforde's caulled Agecroft…. Morle, Mr. Lelande's Place, is buildid, saving the Fundation, of stone squarid that risith within a great Moote a vi foot above the water, al of tymbre, after the commune sort of building of Houses of the Gentilmen for most of Lancastreshire. Ther is as much Plesur of Orchardes, of great Varite of Frute and fair made Walkes and Gardines as ther is in any Place of Lancastreshire.'

Sir William was succeeded by Thomas, his son, who had married Anne, daughter of Sir John Atherton, and had issue Robert, his son and heir, and two daughters, Anne and Alice. Anne married Edward Tyldesley, of Tyldesley, with whom the legend, versified by Mr. Peters, and on which Branwell intended to write at greater length, alleges that she eloped. The tradition of this event still lingers at Morley Hall. It is said that when the attachment sprang up between Anne, the eldest daughter of Thomas Leyland, and Edward Tyldesley, the connection was forbidden by the lady's father. It is further said that, regardless of this prohibition, a night was fixed upon for an elopement, and that, when the inmates of the house were buried in sleep, it was arranged she should tie a rope round her waist, the loose end of which she should throw across the moat to Tyldesley, who was to be in waiting, and, with another, should lower herself into the water, and be drawn to the land by him. The legend says this was successfully accomplished, and that the marriage was celebrated before the elopement was known to the family.

It is remarkable that, while Thomas Leyland had a legitimate son and heir in Robert Leyland, the manor-house of Morley and its demesnes passed into the family of Tyldesley by marriage alone, as if there had been no such person.

There are other stories relating to this family, of wild and weird interest, with which Branwell was acquainted; but this passing allusion is all that the scope of the present work will allow.

Of the family of Tyldesley of Morley was the brave Sir Thomas, a major-general in the royal army, who was slain at Wigan on the 25th of August, 1651. To this circumstance Branwell alludes in his poem. The fragment is as follows: —

MORLEY HALL,
LEIGH — LANCASHIRE.
'When Life's youth, overcast by gathering clouds
Of cares that come like funeral-following crowds,
Wearying of that which is, and cannot see
A sunbeam burst upon futurity,
It tries to cast away the woes that are
And borrow brighter joys from times afar.
For what our feet tread may have been a road
By horses' hoofs pressed 'neath a camel's load;
But what we ran across in childhood's hours
Were fields, presenting June with May-tide flowers:
So what was done and borne, if long ago,
Will satisfy our heart, though stained by tears of woe.
'When present sorrows every thought employ,
Our father's woes may take the garb of joy,
And, knowing what our sires have undergone,
Ourselves can smile, though weary, wandering on.

For if our youth a thunder-cloud o'ershadows,
Changing to barren swamps Life's flowering meadows,
We know that fiery flash and bursting peal
Others, like us, were forced to hear and feel;
And while they moulder in a quiet grave,
Robbed of all havings — worthless all they have —
We still, with face erect, behold the sun —
Have bright examples in what has been done
By head or hand — and, in the times to come,
May tread bright pathways to our gate of doom.
'So, if we gaze from our snug villa's door,
By vines or honeysuckles covered o'er,
Though we have saddening thoughts, we still can smile
In thinking our hut supersedes the pile
Whose turrets totter 'mid the woods before us,
And whose proud owners used to trample o'er us;
All now by weeds and ivy overgrown,
And touched by Time, that hurls down stone from stone.
We gaze with scorn on what is worn away,
And never dream about our own decay.
Thus, while this May-day cheers each flower and tree,
Enlivening earth and almost cheering me,
I half forget the mouldering moats of Leigh.
'Wide Lancashire has changed its babyhood,
As Time makes saplings spring to timber wood;
But as grown men their childhood still remember,
And think of Summer in their dark December,
So Manchester and Liverpool may wonder,
And bow to old halls over which they ponder,
Unknowing that man's spirit yearns to all
Which — once lost — prayers can never more recall.
The storied piles of mortar, brick, and stone,
Where trade bids noise and gain to struggle on,
Competing for the prize that Mammon gives —
Youth killed by toil and profits bought with lives —
Will not prevent the quiet, thinking mind
From looking back to years when Summer wind
Sang, not o'er mills, but round ancestral halls,
And, 'stead of engine's steam, gave dews from waterfalls.
'He who by brick-built houses closely pent,
That show nought beautiful to sight or scent,
Pines for green fields, will cherish in his room
Some pining plant bereft of natural bloom;
And, like the crowds which yonder factories hold,

Withering ‘mid warmth, and in their spring-tide old,
So Lancashire may fondly look upon
Her wrecks fast vanishing of ages gone,
And while encroaching railroad, street, and mill
On every side the smoky prospect fill,
She yet may smile to see some tottering wall
Bring old times back, like ancient Morley Hall.
But towers that Leland saw in times of yore
Are now, like Leland’s works, almost no more —
The antiquarian’s pages, cobweb-bound,
The antique mansion, levelled with the ground.
‘When all is gone that once gave food to pride,
Man little cares for what Time leaves beside;
And when an orchard and a moat, half dry,
Remain, sole relics of a power passed by,
Should we not think of what ourselves shall be,
And view our coffins in the stones of Leigh.
For what within yon space was once the abode
Of peace or war to man, and fear of God,
Is now the daily sport of shower or wind,
And no acquaintance holds with human kind.
Some who can be loved, and love can give,
While brain thinks, pulses beat, and bodies live,
Must, in death’s helplessness, lie down with those
Who find, like us, the grave their last repose,
When Death draws down the veil and Night bids Evening close.
‘King Charles, who, fortune falling, would not fall,
Might glance with saddened eyes on Morley Hall,
And, while his throne escaped misfortune’s wave,
Remember Tyldesley died that throne to save.’

Branwell’s next poem of this period is entitled the ‘End of All,’ which is complete, and is one of the most pathetic he ever wrote. It constitutes a true picture of his mood, and illustrates, at this time, the sombre and troubled nature of his thoughts. He pourtrays, in shades of great depth, his reflections on the death of one dear to him, whose loss leaves his soul a blank and desolate void, an evil which nothing can alleviate or remove. But he dreams for a moment that a life of peril in far-off lands, and in battle, strife, and danger, that the ‘stony joys’ of solitary ambition, may shrine the memory of sorrows which cannot be destroyed. Yet, even from this cold dream, this cruel opiate of the heart, he is recalled by the groans of her who is dying, to the consciousness that, with her departure, all will go. The bereaved is Branwell himself, and his ‘Mary’ is doubtless the lady of his misplaced affection, over whose loss he still broods in melancholy and afflicted language, each pathetic chord vibrating with intense mental anguish, as he contemplates the future years of desolation in which he is left to wander tombward unaided and alone. Here, as in his other poems, the rhythmic sweetness of Branwell's verse flows on in words well chosen to express the idea he intends to convey, which itself is worked out with great suggestiveness of power.

THE END OF ALL.

'In that unpitying Winter's night,
When my own wife — my Mary — died,
I, by my fire's declining light,
Sat comfortless, and silent sighed,
While burst unchecked grief's bitter tide,
As I, methought, when she was gone,
Not hours, but years, like this must bide,
And wake, and weep, and watch alone.
'All earthly hope had passed away,
And each clock-stroke brought Death more nigh
To the still-chamber where she lay,
With soul and body calmed to die;
But *mine* was not her heavenward eye
When hot tears scorched me, as her doom
Made my sick heart throb heavily
To give impatient anguish room.
'"Oh now," methought, "a little while,
And this great house will hold no more
Her whose fond love the gloom could while
Of many a long night gone before!"
Oh! all those happy hours were o'er
When, seated by our own fireside,
I'd smile to hear the wild winds roar,
And turn to clasp my beauteous bride.
'I could not bear the thoughts which rose
Of what *had* been, and what *must* be,
And still the dark night would disclose
Its sorrow-pictured prophecy;
Still saw I — miserable me —
Long, long nights else, in lonely gloom,
With time-bleached locks and trembling knee —
Walk aidless, hopeless, to my tomb.
'Still, still that tomb's eternal shade
Oppressed my heart with sickening fear,
When I could see its shadow spread
Over each dreary future year,
Whose vale of tears woke such despair
That, with the sweat-drops on my brow,

I wildly raised my hands in prayer
That Death would come and take me now;
‘Then stopped to hear an answer given —
So much had madness warped my mind —
When, sudden, through the midnight heaven,
With long howl woke the Winter’s wind;
And roused in me, though undefined,
A rushing thought of tumbling seas
Whose wild waves wandered unconfined,
And, far-off, surging, whispered, “Peace.”
‘I cannot speak the feeling strange,
Which showed that vast December sea,
Nor tell whence came that sudden change
From aidless, hopeless misery;
But somehow it revealed to me
A life — when things I loved were gone —
Whose solitary liberty
Might suit me wandering tombward on.
‘‘Twas not that I forgot my love —
That night departing evermore —
‘Twas hopeless grief for her that drove
My soul from all it prized before;
That misery called me to explore
A new-born life, whose stony joy
Might calm the pangs of sorrow o’er,
Might *shrine* their memory, not destroy.
‘I rose, and drew the curtains back
To gaze upon the starless waste,
And image on that midnight wrack
The path on which I longed to haste,
From storm to storm continual cast,
And not one moment given to view;
O’er mind’s wild winds the memories passed
Of hearts I loved — of scenes I knew.
‘My mind anticipated all
The things my eyes have seen since then;
I heard the trumpet’s battle-call,
I rode o’er ranks of bleeding men,
I swept the waves of Norway’s main,
I tracked the sands of Syria’s shore,
I felt that such strange strife and pain
Might me from living death restore.
‘Ambition I would make my bride,
And joy to see her robed in red,

For none through blood so wildly ride
As those whose hearts before have bled;
Yes, even though *thou* should'st long have laid
Pressed coldly down by churchyard clay,
And though I knew thee thus decayed,
I *might* smile grimly when away;
'Might give an opiate to my breast,
Might dream: — but oh! that heart-wrung groan
Forced from me with the thought confessed
That all would go if *she* were gone;
I turned, and wept, and wandered on
All restlessly — from room to room —
To that still chamber, where alone
A sick-light glimmered through the gloom.
'The all-unnoticed time flew o'er me,
While my breast bent above her bed,
And that drear life which loomed before me
Choked up my voice — bowed down my head.
Sweet holy words to me she said,
Of that bright heaven which shone so near,
And oft and fervently she prayed
That I might some time meet her there;
'But, soon enough, all words were over,
When this world passed, and Paradise,
Through deadly darkness, seemed to hover
O'er her half-dull, half-brightening eyes;
One last dear glance she gives her lover,
One last embrace before she dies;
And then, while he seems bowed above her,
His *Mary* sees him from the skies.'

Another poem of Branwell's of this date, the last he ever wrote, is entitled 'Percy Hall,' which he did not live to complete. The first draft was sent for Leyland's opinion, with the following letter:

'Haworth, Bradford,
'Yorks.

'My dear Sir,

'I enclose the accompanying fragment, which is so soiled that I would have transcribed it, if I had had the heart to exert myself, only in order to get from you an opinion as to whether, when finished, it would be worth sending to some respectable periodical, like "Blackwood's Magazine."

'I trust you got safely home from rough Haworth, and am,

'Dear Sir,

'Your most sincerely,

'P. B. Brontë.'

At the foot of the page on which the letter is written, is drawn, in pen-and-ink, a low, massive, stone cross, inscribed with the word, 'POBRE!' standing on the top of a bleak hill, with a wild sky behind; and Branwell says of it below: 'The best epitaph ever written. It is carved on a rude cross in Spain, over a murdered traveller, and simply means "Poor fellow!"' It will be remembered, in connection with this idea of Branwell's, that Lord Byron, in one of his letters, describes the impression produced upon him by seeing the inscription, 'Implora pace!' upon a tomb at Bologna. The poet says: 'When I die, I should wish that some friend would see these words, and no other, placed above my grave — "Implora pace!"' The perusal of this remark induced Mrs. Hemans to write her pathetic little poem which has the Italian epitaph for its title.

This letter of Branwell's is particularly interesting, because it shows us that, even in the last year of his life, and when dealing with the last uncompleted poem he ever wrote, he preserved the ambition of appearing in the literary world as a poet; and because he again speaks of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' whose value, it will be remembered, had impressed itself upon the youthful minds of himself and his sisters.

The fragment, 'Percy Hall,' which was enclosed with the letter to Leyland, though still morbid, is one of the most exquisite its author wrote. Here, by a strange and beautiful coincidence — if coincidence it be — we find Branwell, in his latest work, as in his youthful ones, given in the earlier part of this work, occupied with the dread study of a consumptive decline; we find him, in short, tinctured with the shadows of his later career, telling again of the death of that sister, whose memory he cherished with a life-long affection; and perhaps, too, with a deeper insight than the other members of his family possessed, he foretells the end that awaited his sisters Emily and Anne, from that disease, whose poison was working in his own slender frame. The treatment of the subject, indeed, is truly characteristic of Branwell's feelings at the time, and of his impressions engendered by the mournful malady with which his family was afflicted. This poem, like some of those already noticed in the former pages of the present work, is distinguished by images, scenes, and conceptions, almost invariably animated by the instinctive power and originality of genius. His descriptions of the condition of the lady, of the way in which weakness has schooled her to regard the future — the natural expression doubtless of Branwell at the time — of the influences that 'forbade her heart to throb, her spirit to despond,' and of the agonized feelings of the survivor, are all instinct with the living breath of reality; they have the sublime dignity of truth, springing, as they do, from a knowledge far too intimate with the sorrows which inspired the poem. Perhaps, in the gaiety of the affectionate Percy, Branwell depicts, in some sort, his own disposition, though it has never been charged against him that he was beguiled by 'syren smiles,' or seduced by the delights of 'play.' It seems to me that Branwell's poetical genius is as much higher than that of his sister Emily as hers was superior to the talents of Charlotte and Anne, in their versified productions. Beautiful, wild, and touching, like strains from the harp of Æolus, as are the emanations of Emily's poetical inspiration, they lack the force, depth, and breadth of Branwell's more expansive power of imagination, as displayed in his best productions; though even Branwell's poetical remains contain rather the evidence of power than the full expression of it.

PERCY HALL.
'The westering sunbeams smiled on Percy Hall,
And green leaves glittered o'er the ancient wall
Where Mary sat, to feel the summer breeze,
And hear its music mingling 'mid the trees.
There she had rested in her quiet bower
Through June's long afternoon, while hour on hour
Stole, sweetly shining past her, till the shades,
Scarce noticed, lengthened o'er the grassy glades;
But yet she sat, as if she knew not how
Her time wore on, with Heaven-directed brow,
And eyes that only seemed awake, whene'er
Her face was fanned by summer evening's air.
All day her limbs a weariness would feel,
As if a slumber o'er her frame would steal;
Nor could she wake her drowsy thoughts to care
For day, or hour, or what she was, or where:
Thus — lost in dreams, although debarred from sleep,
While through her limbs a feverish heat would creep,
A weariness, a listlessness, that hung
About her vigour, and Life's powers unstrung —
She did not feel the iron gripe of pain,
But *thought* felt irksome to her heated brain;
Sometimes the stately woods would float before her,
Commingled with the cloud-piles brightening o'er her,
Then change to scenes for ever lost to view,
Or mock with phantoms which she never knew:
Sometimes her soul seemed brooding on to-day,
And then it wildly wandered far away,
Snatching short glimpses of her infancy,
Or lost in day-dreams of what yet might be.
'Yes — through the labyrinth-like course of thought —
Whate'er might be remembered or forgot,
Howe'er diseased the dream might be, or dim,
Still seemed the *Future* through each change to swim,
All indefinable, but pointing on
To what should welcome her when Life was gone;

She felt as if — to all she knew so well —
Its voice was whispering her to say "farewell;"
Was bidding her forget her happy home;
Was farther fleeting still — still beckoning her to come.
'She felt as one might feel who, laid at rest,
With cold hands folded on a panting breast,
Has just received a husband's last embrace,
Has kissed a child, and turned a pallid face
From this world — with its feelings all laid by —
To one unknown, yet hovering — oh! how nigh!
'And yet — unlike that image of decay —
There hovered round her, as she silent lay,
A holy sunlight, an angelic bloom,
That brightened up the terrors of the tomb,
And, as it showed Heaven's glorious world beyond,
Forbade her heart to throb, her spirit to despond.
'But, who steps forward, o'er the glowing green,
With silent tread, these stately groves between?
To watch his fragile flower, who sees him not,
Yet keeps his image blended with each thought,
Since but for *him* stole down that single tear
From her blue eyes, to think how very near
Their farewell hour might be!
'With silent tread
Percy bent o'er his wife his golden head;
And, while he smiled to see how calm she slept,
A gentle feeling o'er his spirit crept,
Which made him turn toward the shining sky
With heart expanding to its majesty,
While he bethought him how more blest *its* glow
Than *that* he left one single hour ago,
Where proud rooms, heated by a feverish light,
Forced vice and villainy upon his sight;
Where snared himself, or snaring into crime,
His soul had drowned its hour, and lost its count of time.
'The syren-sighs and smiles were banished now,
The cares of "play" had vanished from his brow;
He took his Mary's hot hand in his own,
She raised her eyes, and — oh, how soft they shone!
Kindling to fondness through their mist of tears,
Wakening afresh the light of fading years! —
He knew not why she turned those shining eyes
With such a mute submission to the skies;
He knew not why her arm embraced him so,

As if she *must* depart, yet *could not* let him go!
‘With death-like voice, but angel-smile, she said,
“My love, they need not care, when I am dead,
To deck with flowers my capped and coffined head;
For all the flowers which I should love to see
Are blooming now, and will have died with me:
The same sun bids us all revive to-day,
And the same winds will bid us to decay;
When Winter comes we all shall be no more —
Departed into dust — next, covered o’er
By Spring’s reviving green. See, Percy, now
How red my cheek — how red my roses blow!
But come again when blasts of Autumn come;
Then mark their changing leaves, their blighted bloom;
Then come to my bedside, then look at *me*,
How changed in all — *except my love for thee*!”
‘She spoke, and laid her hot hand on his own;
But he nought answered, save a heart-wrung groan;
For oh! too sure, her voice prophetic sounded
Too clear the proofs that in her face abounded
Of swift Consumption’s power! Although each day
He’d seen her airy lightness fail away,
And gleams unnatural glisten in her eye;
He had not dared to dream that she could die,
But only fancied his a causeless fear
Of losing something which he held so dear;
Yet — now — when, startled at her prophet-cries,
To hers he turned his stricken, stone-like eyes,
And o’er her cheek declined his blighted head.
He saw Death write on it the *fatal red* —
He saw, and straightway sank his spirit’s light
Into the sunless twilight of the starless night!
‘While he sat, shaken by his sudden shock,
Again — and with an earnestness — she spoke,
As if the world of her Creator shone
Through all the cloudy shadows of her own:
“Come grieve not — darling — o’er my early doom;
‘Tis well that Death no drearier shape assume
Than this he comes in — well that widowed age
Will not extend my friendless pilgrimage
Through Life’s dim vale of tears — ‘tis well that Pain
Wields not its lash nor binds its burning chain,
But leaves my death-bed to a mild decline,
Soothed and supported by a love like thine!”‘

My copy of the poem is illustrated with a portrait, by J. B. Leyland, in pen-and-ink, of the ideal Percy. The drawing is bold and effective; and, though not intended for an exact portrait of Branwell, bears some resemblance to him in general character. The sketch is signed, ‘Northangerland,’ at the top; and, at the bottom, ‘Alexander Percy, Esq.;’ while the artist’s name is discerned among the shadows which fall from the figure of Percy.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAME AT HAWORTH.

Charlotte Corresponds on Literary Subjects — Novels — Confession of Authorship — Branwell's Failing Health — He Writes to Leyland — Branwell and Mr. George Searle Phillips — Branwell's Intellect Retains its Power — His Description of 'Professor Leonidas Lyon' — The latter Gentleman's Account of his Reading of 'Jane Eyre' — Branwell's Remarks on Charlotte and the Work.

The early months of the year 1848 proved a severe trial for the Brontë family, as they did to the whole of the Haworth villagers. Influenza and other ailments were prevalent, and the sisters did not escape the former: Anne, indeed, suffered from a severe cough, with some fever, and her friends became alarmed. The position of the parsonage in relation to the churchyard rendered it unhealthy; but, at the instance of Mr. Brontë, a new grave-yard was opened in another place. He did not, however, succeed in his attempt to get a good supply of water laid on to each house.

Charlotte, at the time, was still in correspondence with Mr. Lewes and Mr. Williams, about the review of 'Jane Eyre' in 'Fraser's Magazine,' and about other literary subjects. She was still keeping the secret of the authorship of her book from her friends, putting off 'E.' with evasive letters, and wishing her to 'laugh or scold A — — out of the publishing notion.' 'Wuthering Heights' had not been received by the public with much favour, and we do not hear of any further literary work by Emily. But Charlotte was writing 'Shirley,' and Anne was going on with 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' despite a consumptive listlessness that was upon her, such as Branwell describes in the wife of 'Percy;' and, in her letter written in January, Anne told 'E.' that they had done nothing 'to speak of' since she was at Haworth; yet they contrived to be busy from morning till night. In the spring, however, when this friend visited the Brontës again, full confession of authorship was made, and the poems and novels were shown to her. The identity of Mr. Brontë's daughters with the 'Messrs. Bell,' had, however, been known to some, in connection with the poems, at an earlier date, and was occasionally spoken of, though the fact was not made public. Branwell himself was at home, quieter, but still failing in health and strength, for the constitutional taint, aided by his low spirits, and a bronchitis which had become chronic, was telling upon him.

'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' was submitted to the publisher of 'Wuthering Heights' and 'Agnes Grey,' and accepted by him in the June of this year. If the first works of Ellis and Acton Bell were undervalued because they were believed to be the earlier productions of the author of 'Jane Eyre,' Acton's new volume derived enhanced importance from being thought to be a production of the same hand. 'Jane Eyre' had had a great run in America, and a publisher there had offered Messrs. Smith and Elder a high price for early sheets of the next work of its author, which they accepted. But the publishers of 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,' believing that Acton Bell was but a second name assumed by Currer Bell, made a similar offer to another American house. This circumstance led to questions and explanations; and Charlotte and Anne determined to visit London, in order to assure Messrs. Smith and Elder that they were indeed distinct persons. The publishers were very much astonished to see the two delicate ladies, and they made them very welcome. Charlotte and Anne went to the Opera, they went to the Royal Academy and the National Gallery, and they visited Mr. Smith and Mr. Williams before returning to Haworth.

They found Branwell at home, physically the same as when they left him, gradually failing from the chronic bronchitis which had lasted through the summer, and with the perceptible wasting away of decline. Writing to his friend Leyland on July 22nd, he speaks of 'five months of utter sleeplessness, violent cough, and frightful agony of mind.' 'Long have I resolved,' he continues, 'to write to you a letter of five or six pages, but intolerable mental wretchedness and corporeal weakness have utterly prevented me.' The letter is signed, 'Yours sincerely, but nearly worn out, P. B. Brontë.' Charlotte attributed his illness to indulgence solely, and she had no suspicion that the end was but two months away. She writes on July 28th: 'Branwell is the same in conduct as ever. His constitution seems much shattered. Papa, and sometimes all of us, have sad nights with him. He sleeps most of the day, and consequently will lie awake at night. But has not every house its trial?' But Branwell's condition of health was not such as to keep him within doors, and there were revivals, as in Anne's case also, which permitted him to visit his friends. I spoke to him once in Halifax at the time, and he was often seen in the village of Haworth.

An interesting episode occurred in August or September, for an account of which we are indebted to Mr. George Searle Phillips. We learn from it that, in the midst of physical decay and mental distress, Branwell's intellect retained its power to the last; and we learn also what pride he took in the works of his sisters, and in the reputation they had made. I can myself, from personal knowledge, endorse all that Mr. Phillips says as to Branwell's brilliancy of intellect at this time. When Charlotte and Anne went to London, they had assumed the name of Brown; but their real name and the place of their residence were communicated to some people, and it was not long before it became quietly known. Then began the stream of pilgrims to the shrine of genius at Haworth, which has continued from that day to this, and will for many more. One gentleman, indeed, at the time, stayed three days at Haworth, maintaining a close intimacy with Branwell, and we know, from Mr. Phillips' narrative, in what light Branwell looked upon the first-comers.

'Branwell,' says his friend, 'during the latter part of my acquaintance with him, was much altered for the worse, in his personal appearance; but if he had altered in the same direction mentally, as his biographer says he had, then he must have been a man of immense and brilliant intellect. For I have rarely heard more eloquent and thoughtful discourse, flashing so brightly with random jewels of wit, and made more sunny and musical with poetry, than that which flowed from his lips during the evenings I passed with him at the "Black Bull," in the village of Haworth. His figure was very slight, and he had, like his sister Charlotte, a superb forehead. But, even when pretty deep in his cups, he had not the slightest appearance of the sot that Mrs. Gaskell says he was. "His great tawny mane" — meaning thereby the hair of his head — was, it is true, somewhat dishevelled; but, apart from this, he gave no sign of intoxication. His eye was as bright, and his features were as animated, as they very well could be; and, moreover, his whole manner gave indications of intense enjoyment.'

Branwell described some of the characters in the novels, and talked much about his sisters, and especially about Charlotte, whose celebrity, he said, had already attracted more strangers to the village than had been known before; and Mr. Phillips gives the following account of the visit of one gentleman, an enthusiastic admirer of 'Jane Eyre,' whose somewhat eccentric personality he has veiled under the style and title of 'Leonidas Lyon, Professor of Greek in the London University': —

'One evening, as we sat together in the little parlour of the Inn, the landlord entered, and asked Branwell if he would see a gentleman who wanted to make his acquaintance.

'"He's a funny fellow," said the landlord; "and is somebody, I dare swear, with lots of money."

'As the landlord spoke, a squat little dapper fellow, with a white fur hat on his head, an umbrella under his arm, and a pair of blue spectacles on his nose, strutted into the room *sans cérémonie*. He approached the table in a very fussy and excited manner, exclaiming:

'"Landlord, bring us some brandy. I must have the pleasure of drinking a glass with the brother of that distinguished lady, who wrote the great book that made London blaze. Three glasses, — landlord — do you hear? And you, sir, are the great lady's brother, I presume? Professor Leonidas Lyon, sir, has the honour of introducing himself to your distinguished notice."

'Branwell responded, gravely:

'"Patrick Branwell Brontë, sir, has the honour of welcoming you to Haworth, and begging you to be seated."

'Whereupon the little man bowed and scraped, and laughed a good-humoured laugh all over his good, round face, and said it was an honour he could not have hoped for, to sit as a guest at the same board, as he might say, "with the brother, the very flesh and blood, of the great lady who wrote the book.”

‘Here the brandy and water came in, and the little man grew merrier still, and more communicative. He was a Professor of Greek at the London University, and, chancing to be at Smith’s, the London publisher’s, whose friend Williams was a “wonderful man of letters — a very wonderful man indeed!” — Williams asked the Professor if he had seen the book of the season — “the immense book,” he called it — which was going to make one good reputation, and half a dozen fortunes. Mr. Williams praised it so highly that he (the Professor) grew wild about it, and asked where it could be got. Upon this, he threw a sovereign to pay for it, and ran home without his change, to read it. “It was prodigious, sir,” he exclaimed.’

The Professor went on in high praise of ‘Jane Eyre,’ and told Branwell and Mr. Phillips that his bed-time was ten o’clock, but that, when reading the book, he had sat on, completely absorbed, until six o’clock in the morning, when the housemaid came. Then he had retired to his own room, but, instead of going to bed, had sat on the edge of it, until he finished the story at ten A.M. Branwell said this history of a Professor’s reading of ‘Jane Eyre’ made him laugh ‘as if he would split his sides.’ And when he told Charlotte about it the next day, she laughed heartily, too, as did the other sisters, when she went up stairs to tell them, and their laughter moved Branwell to renewed merriment.

‘When the Professor’s story was ended,’ continues Mr. Phillips, ‘he tried to cajole Branwell into introducing him to the “great lady” who wrote the book. He was dying to see her, he said, and had come all the way down into Yorkshire, from London, in the fond hope of getting a glimpse of her, and perhaps of touching the hem of her garment. When he found that Branwell fought shy of the proposition he actually offered him a large sum of money, and then, taking from his fob a valuable gold watch, laid it on the table, and said he would throw that in to boot, if he would only let him see her and shake hands with her….

‘Poor Branwell spoke of his sister in most affectionate terms, such as none but a man of deep feeling could utter. He knew her power, and what tremendous depths of passion and pathos lay hid in her great surging heart, long before she gave expression to them in “Jane Eyre.” When she wrote the first chapters of her Richardsonian novel, he condemned the work as in opposition to her genius — which is good proof of his discrimination and critical judgment. But when “The Professor” was written, he said that was better, but that she could do better still; and, although it is not equal to “Jane Eyre,” yet it is a work of great originality and dramatic interest.

‘“I know,” said Branwell, after speaking of Charlotte’s talents, “that I also had stuff enough in me to make popular stories; but the failure of the Academy plan ruined me. I was felled, like a tree in the forest, by a sudden and strong wind, to rise no more. Fancy me, with my education, and those early dreams, which had almost ripened into realities, turning counter-jumper, or a clerk in a railway-office, which last was, you know, my occupation for some time. It simply degraded me in my own eyes, and broke my heart."

'It was useless,' says Mr. Phillips, 'to remonstrate with him, and yet I could not help it, and did my best to rouse the sleeping energies within him to noble action once more.

'"It is too late," he said; "and you would say so, too, if you knew all." He used to be the oracle of the secluded household in earlier days — before the love of drink mastered him. His opinion was invariably sought for upon the literary performances of his sisters; but at the time I am now speaking of, he was a cipher in the house.'

Such is the account given by Mr. Phillips of his friend; so different in its character from that which Mr. Grundy, and, following him, Miss Robinson, offer, in the incredible episode of the carving-knife and the slaying of the devil, unless we believe the incident — which that gentleman states to have taken place at this period, how erroneously we have seen — to have been acted, as is most probable, in grotesque humour.

During the last two months of his life, Branwell became the object of much interest and received some homage; for, his sisters living secluded lives, he was generally the only member of the family accessible to the public. When he met with strangers, he invariably comported himself with becoming dignity, and did not lay himself open to the effects of their curiosity. Those who made his acquaintance were impressed, as Mr. Phillips was, with his great mental calibre, and with the grace and wit of his conversation. One gentleman — himself at the present time in the first place in one of the professions — who knew Branwell intimately, declares to me that he always believed the abilities of Charlotte's brother were such as might have placed him in the very front rank of literature.

CHAPTER XV.

DEATH OF BRANWELL.

Branwell's failing Health — Chronic Bronchitis and Marasmus — His Death — Charlotte's allusions to it — Correction of some Statements relating to it — Summary of the subsequent History of the Brontë Family.

The spring and summer of the year 1848 were wild, wet, and unfavourable, and the fine weather in August was of little benefit to Branwell. His appetite was diminished, and he was weaker. He was suffering, in addition to his chronic bronchitis, from marasmus, a consumptive wasting away, arising from hereditary tendency, as well as from mental agony and the effects of irregular life. However, neither himself nor his family, nor his medical attendants had any anticipation of immediate danger.

He was not, indeed, altogether confined to the house, and he was in the village only two days before his death; but, on that occasion, his strength failed before he reached his home. William Brown, the sexton's brother, found him in the lane which leads up to the parsonage, quite exhausted, panting for breath, and unable to proceed. He was helped to the house, which he never again left alive.

In the last few days of his life, Branwell was more reconciled, more subdued, and better feelings filled his mind. The affection of his family returned undiminished, and they watched with intense anxiety the end of their cherished brother. The strange madness that had clouded his mind for so many months, left him now, and the simple thoughts and feelings of his early years came back to him again. He died on the morning of Sunday, September the 24th. He had talked through the night of his mis-spent life, his wasted youth, and his shame, with compunction. He was also filled with the

'Sense of past youth and manhood come in vain,
Of genius given, and knowledge won in vain.'

His natural love likewise came out in beautiful and touching words, that consoled and satisfied those he was about to leave for ever.

Some time before the end, John Brown entered Branwell's room, and they were alone. The young man, though faint and dying, spoke of the life they had led together. He took a short retrospect of his past excesses, in which the grave-digger had often partaken; but in it he made no mention of the lady whose image had distracted his brain. He appeared, in the calmness of approaching death, and the self-possession that preceded it, to be unconscious that he had ever loved any but the members of his family, for the depth and tenderness of which affection he could find no language to express. But, presently, seizing Brown's hand, he uttered the words: 'Oh, John, I am dying!' then, turning, as if within himself, he murmured: 'In all my past life I have done nothing either great or good.' Conscious that the last moment was near, the sexton summoned the household; and retreated to the belfry. It was about nine in the morning when the agony began. Branwell's struggles and convulsions were great, and continued for some time: in the last gasp, he started convulsively, almost to his feet, and fell dead into his father's arms.

Mrs. Gaskell says, of this event: 'I have heard, from one who attended Branwell in his last illness, that he resolved on standing up to die. He had repeatedly said, that as long as there was life, there was strength of will to do what it chose; and, when the last agony began, he insisted on assuming the position just mentioned.' This account does not accord with that given to me by the Browns, and, perhaps, it arose from some exaggeration of what actually took place.

On October the 9th, Charlotte writes thus of her brother's end: 'The past three weeks have been a dark interval in our humble home. Branwell's constitution has been failing fast all the summer; but still neither the doctors nor himself thought him so near his end as he was. He was entirely confined to his bed but for one single day, and was in the village two days before his death. He died, after twenty minutes' struggle, on Sunday morning, September 24th. He was perfectly conscious till the last agony came on. His mind had undergone the peculiar change which frequently precedes death, two days previously; the calm of better feelings filled it; a return of natural affection marked his last moments. He is in God's hands now; and the All-Powerful is likewise the All-Merciful. A deep conviction that he rests at last — rests well after his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life — fills and quiets my mind now. The final separation, the spectacle of his pale corpse, gave me more acute, bitter pain than I could have imagined. Till the last hour comes, we never know how much we can forgive, pity, regret a near relative. All his vices were and are nothing now. We remember only his woes. Papa was acutely distressed at first, but, on the whole, has borne the event well.

A few days later she wrote to another friend, speaking of her brother's death. 'The event to which you allude came upon us indeed with startling suddenness, and was a severe shock to us all…. I thank you for your kind sympathy. Many, under the circumstances, would think our loss rather a relief than otherwise; in truth, we must acknowledge, in all humility and gratitude, that God has greatly tempered judgment with mercy; but, yet, as you doubtless know from experience, the last earthly separation cannot take place between near relations without the keenest pangs on the part of the survivors. Every wrong and sin is forgotten then; pity and grief share the hearts and the memory between them. Yet we are not without comfort in our affliction. A most propitious change marked the last few days of poor Branwell's life … and this change could not be owing to the fear of death, for within half-an-hour of his decease he seemed unconscious of danger.'

Charlotte concludes by referring to her own health, which had given way under the strain.

Branwell was buried in the grave in which the remains of his sisters Maria and Elizabeth lay, and his name is placed next after theirs on the tablet. Thus, after twenty-three years, he joined in the dust those from whom in life he had never been separated in affection.

It would have been well if, when the grave closed over his mortal remains, it had buried in oblivion the memory of his failings and his sorrows. Charlotte, as we have seen, when her brother was gone, remembered nothing but his woes; and, if the biographers of herself and her sister Emily had consulted the feelings of those on whom they wrote — which have been so touchingly and tearfully expressed by Charlotte — they would have drawn the veil over whatever offences Branwell, as mortal, might have committed. But, amongst Mrs. Gaskell's other statements regarding him, there is one, relating even to his death, which cannot be passed over in silence here, since, though she had been compelled to omit it, with her other charges, from the second edition of her work, Miss Robinson has reproduced it recently in her 'Emily Brontë.' The statement was to the effect that, when Branwell died, his pockets were filled with the letters of the lady whom he had admired. To this bold statement Martha Brown gave to me a flat contradiction, declaring that she was employed in the sick-room at the time, and had personal knowledge that not one letter, nor a vestige of one, from the lady in question was so found. The letters were mostly from a gentleman of Branwell's acquaintance, then living near the place of his former employment. Martha was indignant at the misrepresentation.

It may not be amiss here, in the briefest possible way, to give an outline of the subsequent history of the Brontë family. Emily's health began rapidly to fail after Branwell's death, which was a great shock to her, and she never left the house alive after the Sunday succeeding it. Her cough was very obstinate, and she was troubled with shortness of breath. Charlotte saw the danger, but could do nothing to ward it off, for Emily was silent and reserved, gave no answers to questions, and took no remedies that were prescribed. She grew weaker daily, and the end came on Tuesday, December the 19th. At the same time Anne was slowly failing, but she lingered longer. 'Anne's decline,' said Charlotte, 'is gradual and fluctuating; but its nature is not doubtful.' Unlike Emily, she looked for sympathy, took medicines, and did her best to get well. It was arranged at last that Charlotte and she should go to Scarborough, hoping the change of air might invigorate her, and they left the parsonage on May the 24th, 1849. But the change had no beneficial effect, and Anne died on May the 28th, at Scarborough, where she was buried.

After this the more purely literary portion of Charlotte's life commenced. She completed 'Shirley' early in September, 1849, and it was published on October the 26th. Her real name, and the neighbourhood in which she resided, became now generally known. The reviews showered rapidly; but Charlotte thought that one the best by Eugène Forçade, in the ‘Revue des deux Mondes.’ The cloud now passed away from her, and she visited London, made the acquaintance of Thackeray, Miss Martineau, and others, and entered eagerly into the occupations of literary life. ‘Villette’ was completed in November, 1852. Charlotte married the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, who had long been her father’s curate, on June the 29th, 1854, and she died on Saturday, March the 31st, 1855. The Rev. Patrick Brontë, whom I knew, a fine, tall, grey-haired, and venerable old man, survived all his children, and died at Haworth on January 7th, 1861.

CHAPTER XVI.

BRANWELL'S CHARACTER.

Branwell's Character in his Poetry — The Pious and Tender Tone of Mind which it Displays — Branwell's Tendency to Dwell on the Past rather than on the Future — Illustrated — The Sad Tone of his Mind — He is Inclined to be Morbid — The Way in which Branwell regarded Nature — Observations on the Character Displayed in his Works.

It has often been observed that the life of a poet may best be learned from the works he has left behind him. We may fall into error in dealing with the circumstances of his external life, and may make mistakes as to chronology or facts, and, in this way, may be led often to form a false estimate of his character; but, if we discover the personality concealed in his writings, if we can grasp the hidden spirit by which they are informed, we shall be enabled to follow his heart in its cherished affections, to understand the characteristic tendency of his thoughts, and to comprehend even the very psychology of his soul. This enquiry, it is true, is often difficult in the extreme; one cannot always unravel the tangled mysteries in which natural expression is wrapped up, nor fully pierce the cloudy medium of conventionality or affectation through which it may be dimly revealed; it is especially difficult, also, to follow it in the works of a writer of a school like that of the Euphuists, or of Pope, where the medium is one of exaggerated refinement, or of classical and formal preciseness.

But, with the writings of Branwell Brontë, the case is entirely different; and for a very simple reason, viz., that everything he wrote proceeded from a personal inspiration, and was the direct expression of the fulness of emotion, and of vivid thoughts or feelings which could scarcely be hidden; because, in short, he wrote in the true artistic spirit of having something to say.

If Branwell's affectionate nature led him to dwell upon the memories of his earlier years, and upon the thoughts of those dead sisters whom he had loved so much, he spoke in the voice of Harriet weeping for the departed Caroline; it needed but his remembrance of the fell disease that had deprived him of his sisters, and the fearful havoc which it was yet to work in his family, to inspire him with the sad fancy of his 'Percy Hall.' If he sank into the depths of morbid melancholy, and was filled with a consciousness of the worthlessness of ambition, the folly of pride, and the universality of sorrow, his sonnets were a natural expression, in which he found both relief and consolation.

In his case it requires no Pheidian hand to bring out the statue from the marble, but only a sympathetic spirit, a heart filled with the affections of humanity, and a mind attuned to thoughts somewhat sad, to enable one to enter into every mood in which Branwell wrote, and to understand the moral and tender pathos that fills his works. It is because Branwell's poems are so fully expressive of his feelings at the time when they were written that they are so separately placed in this work. But, before we conclude it, it will be well to sum up, in a slight sketch, a few of the most characteristic features of his writings, and, in so doing, we shall arrive at a correct estimate of his disposition and of his poetry together.

The first thing, then, that strikes one in Branwell's verse, beginning at its youthful period, is the tone of piety that distinguishes it. The simple stanzas which he sent to Wordsworth, even, however worthless as poetry, are valuable, because they show us the early bent of his mind; and the beautiful lines which he wrote a year later, in 1838, where he first manifests that consciousness of the vanity of earthly things, which his sister Anne also versified, tell us of the hope of a heavenly future, which is contrasted, in its serenity, with the evils of mortal life. The poem entitled 'Caroline's Prayer,' and the one 'On Caroline' also, simple though they are, are evidence of a devotional turn of mind; and mark again, in the longer poem of 'Caroline,' how Harriet finds divine consolation in the calm of Nature:

'Quiet airs of sacred gladness
Breathing through these woodlands wild,
O'er the whirl of mortal madness
Spread the slumbers of a child;'

and how tenderly she remembers the pious lessons which her dead sister had drawn from the sufferings of the Saviour of man, a recollection, let it be remembered, which Branwell himself preserved. A little later, we find Branwell occupied upon a long poem, of which we possess only a fragment, wholly sacred in its character, and moral in its purpose, — 'Noah's Warning over Methusaleh's Grave.' Here Noah, before the universal Deluge, in the presence even of the cloudy wall 'piled boding round the firmament,' harangues the people, bidding them withdraw from sin, ere it be too late. It is true, however, that in the later poems, when Branwell's mind is cast into its deepest gloom, this disposition is not so prominent, and, perhaps, can be gathered only from an abundance of tender touches, which could proceed from nothing but a devotional spirit; and thus we may infer that, though he might have lost some of his early piety, he never lost the effect of it. There is, besides, throughout Branwell's work, the evidence of a justly balanced morality, in that he nowhere exalts depraved passions, or manifests impiety, or, more than all, corrupts his readers with the painting of sensuous ideas, or the description of sensuous incidents. And I would ask the reader, in connection with this admirable characteristic of his poetry, to remember that he has never been charged with indulgence of the kind that has lured away too many men of genius and mental power.

The next thing that strikes me in Branwell's poetry is the strong love that he manifests for the past, which he seems to value more than the present, and whose pleasures he deems sweeter and purer than any the future can have in store. This tone of thought could be very well understood if we had regard to circumstances of the later period of his life, when despair had cut off hope; but it is just as prominent in the earliest poems he wrote. It would seem that, to the pensive mind of Branwell, all the thoughts of childhood, all the joys of youth and its affections, became, as years passed on, hallowed and exalted in the golden halo of recollection. There were places in the sanctity of the past where the roses of Bendemeer grew, unchanging ever; places to which he turned for the joys of memory, when solitude inclined him to reflection. These pleasures of memory were often of a pensive order, for they were connected with sorrowful events, or they were joys turned sorrowful, as joys will turn, when they have been long enough departed. In Branwell's letter to Wordsworth, and in his other letters, he expresses plenty of honest ambition, and talks bravely of work in the future; and he spoke in the same way also. But I have received from his poems the impression that this ambition grew from the requirements of circumstances, and from literary emulation; that, in fact, the constitution of Branwell's mind was of the gentle reflective nature to which the pleasures of ambition appear hollow and insufficient in themselves. At least it is clear that he dwelt with more satisfaction on the past than on the future. So far, indeed, as his poetry is concerned, we saw, in 'The End of All,' that it was only when loss made the past too painful for thought, that he turned to the stony joys of solitary ambition and personal fame. This seems to me to be a very tender trait in his character, however little it might fit him to fight the battle of life with those who looked for the joys of the future, rather than turned to pleasures they could actually taste no more.

In Branwell's thoughtful moods, it required but the woodland sunshine, perhaps, or the sound of the distant bells, to bring back memories to him, as they brought back to Harriet, in the poem of 'Caroline,' many a scene of bygone days, opening the fount of tears, and waking memory to the thought

'Of visions sleeping — not forgot.'

Thus, under the pensive influence, there passed over her

'That swell of thought, which seems to fill
The bursting heart, the gushing eye,
While fades all *present* good or ill
Before the shades of things gone by.'

It called up in her, also, the hours when Caroline, too, listening to the wild storms of winter, had filled the nights with pictures and feelings

'From far-off memories brought.'

These treasures of memory, to which Branwell refers in many of his poems, were to him of a sacred nature, and might not be profaned. He tells us, indeed, in one of his sonnets, that the tears of affection are dried up by the growth of honours, and by the interests and pursuits of life, which

'Dim or destroy those holy thoughts which cling
Round where the forms we loved lie slumbering.'

For the past was thus hallowed by Branwell, because in it lay his earliest affections, and his most poignant sorrows. I have had occasion, in speaking of several of the poems in this volume, to point out the love which he shows for his dead sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, and how he mourned them up to the last year of his life. For his disposition was of a deeply affectionate order. He has, indeed, painted for us too vividly, in both the poems of 'Caroline' and 'Percy Hall,' the pangs of separation, and the cheerless void that remains when the loved one has departed, to leave us any doubt as to the sensitiveness of his nature.

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that Branwell's muse sings often morbidly enough, and that, — like some spirit that cannot forsake the scene of its mortal sorrows, and haunts the place of its affliction — he dwells frequently upon details of a painful kind, that others would gladly have relegated to oblivion. In the poem of 'Caroline,' the picture of his mother, clad in black, is still before his eyes; he remembers even the grave-clothes of his sister in her coffin, and

'Her *too* bright cheek all faded now;'

the closing of the coffin lid, and the lowering of it into its narrow bed are yet before his eyes; and painfully he remembers his feeling at the grave-side:

'And wild my sob, when hollow rung
The first cold clod above her flung.'

Later, though he was occupied with different subjects, Branwell could not entirely free himself from a morbid and painful analysis of the physical effects of the disease he dreaded so much; and very beautifully does he suggest the picture of consumptive decline and early decay.

This tone of thought, and the many misfortunes and gloomy forebodings that attended Branwell's later years, had a natural effect in giving a mournful cast to almost every emanation of his muse; and we find, in effect, throughout the poems here collected, that, save in one instance — 'The Epicurean's Song' — which we feel to be the production of a moment of elation, there is scarcely a line that does not breathe a consciousness of sad regret, or of cruel and bitter sorrow.

He was filled with the sense of the futility of human joy, and the abiding presence of woe:

'No! joy *itself* is but a shade,
So well may its remembrance die,
But cares, Life's conquerors, never fade,
So strong is their reality.'

These sorrows, as years went by, grew so terrible in their crushing weight, that the mind could barely withstand them, and Branwell felt, in that period when his cry was for peace in death, that, when the light of life is gone,

'There come no sorrows crowding on,

And powerless lies Despair.’

With Branwell, indeed, as with Mary in his poem of ‘Percy Hall,’ ‘thought felt irksome to the heated brain.’

It was then that oblivion became to him a coveted relief from immediate woe, and that he envied the dreamless head of the wandering, water-borne corpse, whose rolling bed seemed calmer than the turmoil of the world.

This figure of the body rocked by the waves of ocean, brings me to a consideration of the way in which Branwell regarded Nature, which had something very noteworthy in it. It was always remarked by his friends that the young poet was a great observer, and took an especial pleasure in the works of Nature. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising, at first sight, that, in his poems, he does not dwell upon them descriptively or in a marked manner, and that we have to infer, from certain suggestive touches and pictures — which do, indeed, speak more plainly than words could — that he observed them at all. But we learn that the works of Nature had for Branwell a deeper significance than for most people, that he conceived they had some mysterious sympathy or unspeakable connection with human affections, and were, in a manner, the expression or immediate reflection of the Deity. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge had already looked upon Nature somewhat in this wise; but it would be a mistake to suppose that Branwell imitated them: his thoughts flow too swiftly and impetuously to admit of such a conclusion. It is possible that, if his life had passed calmly, he might have dwelt upon the simple beauties of Nature, and found in them a homely harmony with familiar ideas; Charlotte and Anne in their poetry scarcely get beyond this; but it was different with Emily and Branwell. Emily, with her reserved, passionate nature, had a sympathetic spell in the solitary moorland; and Branwell, labouring with his sorrows, found, in the wildest storms, a being with whom he must battle, or saw, in the mighty mountains, an image of unbroken strength and everlasting fortitude, such a power as he must strive after and make his own. But, in Branwell’s earlier poems, this influence is not so marked, and his muse is simply attuned to the saddened thoughts in which Nature participates. Thus Wordsworth had sung:

‘Fancy, who leads the pastimes of the glad,
Full oft is pleased a wayward dart to throw;
Sending sad shadows after things not sad,
Peopling the harmless fields with signs of woe:
Beneath her sway, a simple forest cry
Becomes an echo of man’s misery.’

And thus we see, in Branwell’s ‘Caroline,’ how, even in its calmness, the beautifully suggested picture of eve — when the sunlight slants, and the waters cease their motion, and the calm and hush tell of rest from labour — is made to harmonize with the plaintive thoughts of Harriet. But then comes the more significant question:

'Why is such a silence given
To this summer day's decay,
Does our earth feel aught of Heaven,
Can the voice of Nature pray?'

What, in short, is the harmonious and sympathetic spell that breathes through Nature?

The wild places of the earth, mountains and moorlands, where the storms raged, and the great winds blew, were nearest akin to the Titanic genius of Branwell and Emily. Thus, in the sonnet, the everlasting majesty of Black Comb was held up by Branwell as an example to man, and as a contrast to human feebleness; and later, when his woe was most acute, he was drawn into a 'communion of vague unity' with Penmaenmawr, comparing the living, beating heart of man with the stony hill, and begging,

'Let me, like it, arise o'er mortal care,
All woes sustain, yet never know despair,
Unshrinking face the griefs I now deplore,
And stand through storm and shine like moveless Penmaenmawr.'

And, lastly, in the 'Epistle from a Father to a Child in her Grave,' we find him comparing himself with one in the midst of wild mountains:

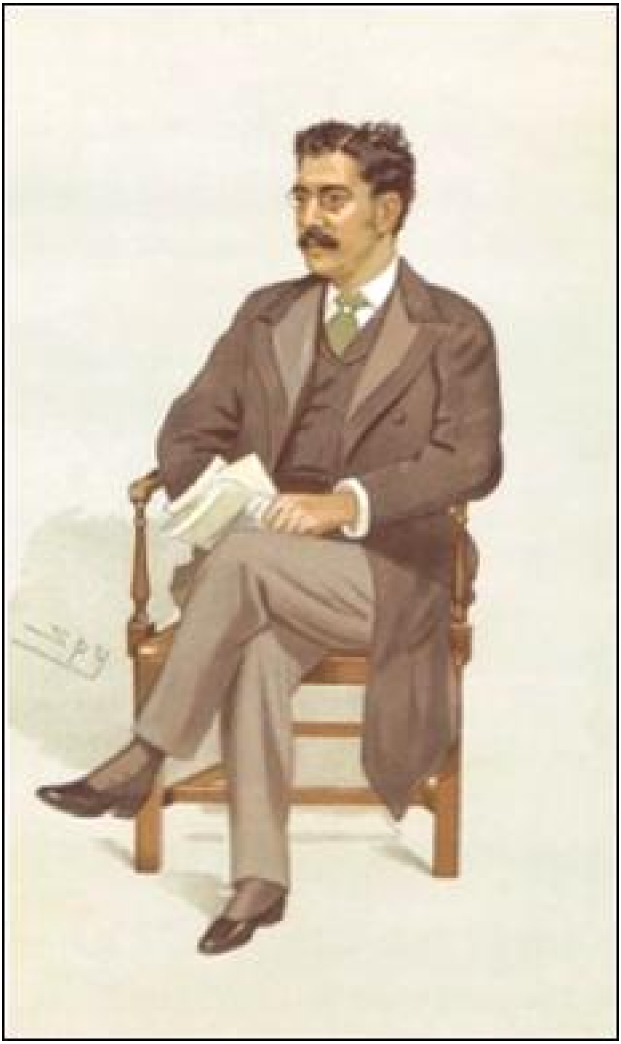
'I, thy life's source, was like a wanderer breasting
Keen mountain winds, and on a summit resting,
Whose rough rocks rise above the grassy mead,
With sleet and north winds howling overhead.'

It will be seen from this short inquiry that the poetry of Branwell Brontë was entirely introspective, having, almost to the last line, some direct reference to his own thoughts or feelings; and that it may thus be read as an actual part of the story of his life. The disposition it reveals, though often hidden, as the readers of this book know, through the effects of folly and indulgence, was one of a singularly gentle, affectionate, and sympathetic character; passionate and unstable, it is true, but a disposition, nevertheless, that has been frequently misunderstood, and not seldom wronged. One of the aims of this book has been to set Patrick Branwell Brontë right with the public; an attempt, not to clear him from follies and weaknesses that really were his — which the public, but for the mistakes of biographers, would never have known — but to show that, at any rate, his nature was one rather to be admired than condemned. It has aimed also, by the publication of his poetical writings, to demonstrate that his genius is not unworthy to be ranked with that which made his sisters famous. Yet it may, perhaps, be held that the poems here published contain more of rich promise than of real fulfilment, rather the earnest of literary success than the actual accomplishment of it. But, in reading the poetry of Branwell Brontë, which is so uniformly sad, it may be well to remember what Mr. Swinburne has said, in speaking of Mr. Browning, that ‘to do justice to any book which deserves any other sort of justice than that of the fire or waste-paper basket, it is necessary to read it in a fit frame of mind.’

THE END.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND HER CIRCLE by Clement King Shorter

Clement King Shorter (1857–1926) was a British journalist and literary critic. As well as an author and critic, he was remarkable for his hobby of collecting manuscripts, books, and other materials related to his favourite authors. He was an avid collector, particularly focusing on the works of the Brontë sisters. This collecting and research eventually led to some of his most well-known works, including this biography, first published in 1896. Additionally, he edited Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë,* which also appears in this Delphi collection, in 1899.



Portrayal of Shorter in the publication ‘Vanity Fair’, 1894

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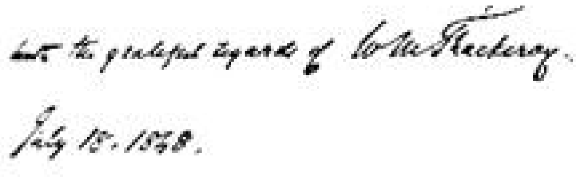
PREFACE

It is claimed for the following book of some five hundred pages that the larger part of it is an addition of entirely new material to the romantic story of the Brontës. For this result, but very small credit is due to me; and my very hearty acknowledgments must be made, in the first place, to the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, for whose generous surrender of personal inclination I must ever be grateful. It has been with extreme unwillingness that Mr. Nicholls has broken the silence of forty years, and he would not even now have consented to the publication of certain letters concerning his marriage, had he not been aware that these letters were already privately printed and in the hands of not less than eight or ten people. To Miss Ellen Nussey of Gomersall, I have also to render thanks p. vifor having placed the many letters in her possession at my disposal, and for having furnished a great deal of interesting information. Without the letters from Charlotte Brontë to Mr. W. S. Williams, which were kindly lent to me by his son and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton Williams, my book would have been the poorer. Sir Wemyss Reid, Mr. J. J. Stead, of Heckmondwike, Mr. Butler Wood, of Bradford, Mr. W. W. Yates, of Dewsbury, Mr. Erskine Stuart, Mr. Buxton Forman, and Mr. Thomas J. Wise are among the many Brontë specialists who have helped me with advice or with the loan of material. Mr. Wise, in particular, has lent me many valuable manuscripts. Finally, I have to thank my friend Dr. Robertson Nicoll for the kindly pressure which has practically compelled me to prepare this little volume amid a multitude of journalistic duties.

CLEMENT K. SHORTER.
198 Strand, London,
September 1*st*, 1896.

PRELIMINARY: MRS. GASKELL

In the whole of English biographical literature there is no book that can compare in widespread interest with the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* by Mrs. Gaskell. It has held a position of singular popularity for forty years; and while biography after biography has come and gone, it still commands a place side by side with Boswell's *Johnson* and Lockhart's *Scott*. As far as mere readers are concerned, it may indeed claim its hundreds as against the tens of intrinsically more important rivals. There are obvious reasons for this success. Mrs. Gaskell was herself a popular novelist, who commanded a very wide audience, and *Cranford*, at least, has taken a place among the classics of our literature. She brought to bear upon the biography of Charlotte Brontë all those literary gifts which had made the charm of her seven volumes of romance. And these gifts were employed upon a romance of real life, not less fascinating than anything which imagination could have furnished. Charlotte Brontë's success as an author turned the eyes of the world upon her. Thackeray had sent her his *Vanity Fair* before he knew her name or sex. The precious volume lies before me —



with the grateful regards of W M Thackeray.

July 18. 1848.

And Thackeray did not send many inscribed copies of his books even to successful authors. Speculation concerning the author of *Jane Eyre* was sufficiently rife during those seven sad years of literary renown to make a biography imperative when death came to Charlotte Brontë in 1855. All the world had heard something of the three marvellous sisters, daughters of a poor parson in Yorkshire, going one after another to their death with such melancholy swiftness, but leaving — two of them, at least — imperishable work behind them. The old blind father and the bereaved husband read the confused eulogy and criticism, sometimes with a sad pleasure at the praise, oftener with a sadder pain at the grotesque inaccuracy. Small wonder that it became impressed upon Mr. Brontë's mind that an authoritative biography was desirable. His son-in-law, Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls, who lived with him in the Haworth parsonage during the six weary years which succeeded Mrs. Nicholls's death, was not so readily won to the unveiling of his wife's inner life; and although we, who read Mrs. Gaskell's *Memoir*, have every reason to be thankful for Mr. Brontë's decision, peace of mind would undoubtedly have been more assured to Charlotte Brontë's surviving relatives had the most rigid silence been maintained. The book, when it appeared in 1857, gave infinite pain to a number of people, including Mr. Brontë and Mr. Nicholls; and Mrs. Gaskell's subsequent experiences had the effect of persuading her that all biographical literature was intolerable and undesirable. She would seem to have given instructions that no biography of herself should be written; and now that thirty years have passed since her death we have no substantial record of one of the most fascinating women of her age. The loss to literature has been forcibly brought home to the present writer, who has in his possession a bundle of letters written by Mrs. Gaskell to numerous friends of Charlotte Brontë during the progress of the biography. They serve, all of them, to impress one with the singular charm of the woman, her humanity and breadth of sympathy. They make us think better of Mrs. Gaskell, as Thackeray's letters to Mrs. Brookfield make us think better of the author of *Vanity Fair*.

Apart from these letters, a journey in the footsteps, as it were, of Mrs. Gaskell reveals to us the remarkable conscientiousness with which she set about her task. It would have been possible, with so much fame behind her, to have secured an equal success, and certainly an equal pecuniary reward, had she merely written a brief monograph with such material as was voluntarily placed in her hands. Mrs. Gaskell possessed a higher ideal of a biographer's duties. She spared no pains to find out the facts; she visited every spot associated with the name of Charlotte Brontë — Thornton, Haworth, Cowan Bridge, Birstall, Brussels — and she wrote countless letters to the friends of Charlotte Brontë's earlier days.

But why, it may be asked, was Mrs. Gaskell selected as biographer? The choice was made by Mr. Brontë, and not, as has been suggested, by some outside influence. When Mr. Brontë had once decided that there should be an authoritative biography — and he alone was active in the matter — there could be but little doubt upon whom the task would fall. Among all the friends whom fame had brought to Charlotte, Mrs. Gaskell stood prominent for her literary gifts and her large-hearted sympathy. She had made the acquaintance of Miss Brontë when the latter was on a visit to Sir James Kay Shuttleworth, in 1850; and a letter from Charlotte to her father, and others to Mr. W. S. Williams, indicate the beginning of a friendship which was to leave so permanent a record in literary history: —

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'20*th November*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — You said that if I wished for any copies of *Shirley* to be sent to individuals I was to name the parties. I have thought of one person to whom I should much like a copy to be offered — Harriet Martineau. For her character — as revealed in her works — I have a lively admiration, a deep esteem. Will you inclose with the volume the accompanying note?

'The letter you forwarded this morning was from Mrs. Gaskell, authoress of *Mary Barton*; she said I was not to answer it, but I cannot help doing so.

The note brought the tears to my eyes. She is a good, she is a great woman. Proud am I that I can touch a chord of sympathy in souls so noble. In Mrs. Gaskell's nature it mournfully pleases me to fancy a remote affinity to my sister Emily. In Miss Martineau's mind I have always felt the same, though there are wide differences. Both these ladies are above me — certainly far my superiors in attainments and experience. I think I could look up to them if I knew them. — I am, dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*November* 29*th*, 1849.

'Dear Sir, — I inclose two notes for postage. The note you sent yesterday was from Harriet Martineau; its contents were more than gratifying. I ought to be thankful, and I trust I am, for such testimonies of sympathy from the first order of minds. When Mrs. Gaskell tells me she shall keep my works as a treasure for her daughters, and when Harriet Martineau testifies affectionate approbation, I feel the sting taken from the strictures of another class of critics. My resolution of seclusion withholds me from communicating further with these ladies at present, but I now know how they are inclined to me — I know how my writings have affected their wise and pure minds. The knowledge is present support and, perhaps, may be future armour.

'I trust Mrs. Williams's health and, consequently, your spirits are by this time quite restored. If all be well, perhaps I shall see you next week. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*January* 1*st*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — May I beg that a copy of *Wuthering Heights* may be sent to Mrs. Gaskell; her present address is 3 Sussex Place, Regent's Park. She has just sent me the *Moorland Cottage*. I felt disappointed about the publication of that book, having hoped it would be offered to Smith, Elder & Co.; but it seems she had no alternative, as it was Mr. Chapman himself who asked her to write a Christmas book. On my return home yesterday I found two packets from Cornhill directed in two well-known hands waiting for me. You are all very very good.

'I trust to have derived benefit from my visit to Miss Martineau. A visit more interesting I certainly never paid. If self-sustaining strength can be acquired from example, I ought to have got good. But my nature is not hers; I could not make it so though I were to submit it seventy times seven to the furnace of affliction, and discipline it for an age under the hammer and anvil of toil and self-sacrifice. Perhaps if I was like her I should not admire her so much as I do. She is somewhat absolute, though quite unconsciously so; but she is likewise kind, with an affection at once abrupt and constant, whose sincerity you cannot doubt. It was delightful to sit near her in the evenings and hear her converse, myself mute. She speaks with what seems to me a wonderful fluency and eloquence. Her animal spirits are as unflagging as her intellectual powers. I was glad to find her health excellent. I believe neither solitude nor loss of friends would break her down. I saw some faults in her, but somehow I liked them for the sake of her good points. It gave me no pain to feel insignificant, mentally and corporeally, in comparison with her.

'Trusting that you and yours are well, and sincerely wishing you all a happy new year, — I am, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'The Briery, Windermere,
'*August* 10*th*, 1850.

'Dear Papa, — I reached this place yesterday evening at eight o'clock, after a safe though rather tedious journey. I had to change carriages three times and to wait an hour and a half at Lancaster. Sir James came to meet me at the station; both he and Lady Shuttleworth gave me a very kind reception. This place is exquisitely beautiful, though the weather is cloudy, misty, and stormy; but the sun bursts out occasionally and shows the hills and the lake. Mrs. Gaskell is coming here this evening, and one or two other people. Miss Martineau, I am sorry to say, I shall not see, as she is already gone from home for the autumn.

'Be kind enough to write by return of post and tell me how you are getting on and how you are. Give my kind regards to Tabby and Martha, and — Believe me, dear papa, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

And this is how she writes to a friend from Haworth, on her return, after that first meeting: —

'Lady Shuttleworth never got out, being confined to the house with a cold; but fortunately there was Mrs. Gaskell, the authoress of *Mary Barton*, who came to the Briery the day after me. I was truly glad of her companionship. She is a woman of the most genuine talent, of cheerful, pleasing, and cordial manners, and, I believe, of a kind and good heart.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*September* 20*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I herewith send you a very roughly written copy of what I have to say about my sisters. When you have read it you can better judge whether the word "Notice" or "Memoir" is the most appropriate. I think the former. Memoir seems to me to express a more circumstantial and different sort of account. My aim is to give a just idea of their identity, not to write any narration of their simple, uneventful lives. I depend on you for faithfully pointing out whatever may strike you as faulty. I could not write it in the conventional form — *that* I found impossible.

'It gives me real pleasure to hear of your son's success. I trust he may persevere and go on improving, and give his parents cause for satisfaction and honest pride.

‘I am truly pleased, too, to learn that Miss Kavanagh has managed so well with Mr. Colburn. Her position seems to me one deserving of all sympathy. I often think of her. Will her novel soon be published? Somehow I expect it to be interesting.

‘I certainly did hope that Mrs. Gaskell would offer her next work to Smith & Elder. She and I had some conversation about publishers — a comparison of our literary experiences was made. She seemed much struck with the differences between hers and mine, though I did not enter into details or tell her all. Unless I greatly mistake, she and you and Mr. Smith would get on well together; but one does not know what causes there may be to prevent her from doing as she would wish in such a case. I think Mr. Smith will not object to my occasionally sending her any of the Cornhill books that she may like to see. I have already taken the liberty of lending her Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, as she was saying how much she wished to have the opportunity of reading it.

‘I do not tack remembrances to Mrs. Williams and your daughters and Miss Kavanagh to all my letters, because that makes an empty form of what should be a sincere wish, but I trust this mark of courtesy and regard, though rarely expressed, is always understood. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

Miss Brontë twice visited Mrs. Gaskell in her Manchester home, first in 1851 and afterwards in 1853, and concerning this latter visit we have the following letter: —

TO MRS. GASKELL, Manchester

‘Haworth, *April* 14*th*, 1853.

‘My dear Mrs. Gaskell, — Would it suit you if I were to come next Thursday, the 21st?

‘If that day tallies with your convenience, and if my father continues as well as he is now, I know of no engagement on my part which need compel me longer to defer the pleasure of seeing you.

‘I should arrive by the train which reaches Manchester at 7 o’clock p.m. That, I think, would be about your tea-time, and, of course, I should dine before leaving home. I always like evening for an arrival; it seems more cosy and pleasant than coming in about the busy middle of the day. I think if I stay a week that will be a very long visit; it will give you time to get well tired of me.

‘Remember me very kindly to Mr. Gaskell and Marianna. As to Mesdames Flossy and Julia, those venerable ladies are requested beforehand to make due allowance for the awe with which they will be sure to impress a diffident admirer. I am sorry I shall not see Meta. — Believe me, my dear Mrs. Gaskell, yours affectionately and sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

In the autumn of 1853 Mrs. Gaskell returned Charlotte Brontë’s visit at Haworth. She was not, however, at Charlotte’s wedding in Haworth Church.

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *September* 8*th*.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — Your letter was truly kind, and made me warmly wish to join you. My prospects, however, of being able to leave home continue very unsettled. I am expecting Mrs. Gaskell next week or the week after, the day being yet undetermined. She was to have come in June, but then my severe attack of influenza rendered it impossible that I should receive or entertain her. Since that time she has been absent on the Continent with her husband and two eldest girls; and just before I received yours I had a letter from her volunteering a visit at a vague date, which I requested her to fix as soon as possible. My father has been much better during the last three or four days.

'When I know anything certain I will write to you again. — Believe me, my dear Miss Wooler, yours respectfully and affectionately,

'C. Brontë.'

But the friendship, which commenced so late in Charlotte Brontë's life, never reached the stage of downright intimacy. Of this there is abundant evidence in the biography; and Mrs. Gaskell was forced to rely upon the correspondence of older friends of Charlotte's. Mr. George Smith, the head of the firm of Smith and Elder, furnished some twenty letters. Mr. W. S. Williams, to whom is due the credit of 'discovering' the author of *Jane Eyre*, lent others; and another member of Messrs. Smith and Elder's staff, Mr. James Taylor, furnished half-a-dozen more; but the best help came from another quarter.

Of the two schoolfellows with whom Charlotte Brontë regularly corresponded from childhood till death, Mary Taylor and Ellen Nussey, the former had destroyed every letter; and thus it came about that by far the larger part of the correspondence in Mrs. Gaskell's biography was addressed to Miss Ellen Nussey, now as 'My dearest Nell,' now simply as 'E.' The unpublished correspondence in my hands, which refers to the biography, opens with a letter from Mrs. Gaskell to Miss Nussey, dated July 6th, 1855. It relates how, in accordance with a request from Mr. Brontë, she had undertaken to write the work, and had been over to Haworth. There she had made the acquaintance of Mr. Nicholls for the first time. She told Mr. Brontë how much she felt the difficulty of the task she had undertaken. Nevertheless, she sincerely desired to make his daughter's character known to all who took deep interest in her writings. Both Mr. Brontë and Mr. Nicholls agreed to help to the utmost, although Mrs. Gaskell was struck by the fact that it was Mr. Nicholls, and not Mr. Brontë, who was more intellectually alive to the attraction which such a book would have for the public. His feelings were opposed to any biography at all; but he had yielded to Mr. Brontë's 'impetuous wish,' and he brought down all the materials he could find, in the shape of about a dozen letters. Mr. Nicholls, moreover, told Mrs. Gaskell that Miss Nussey was the person of all others to apply to; that she had been the friend of his wife ever since

Charlotte was fifteen, and that he was writing to Miss Nussey to beg her to let Mrs. Gaskell see some of the correspondence.

But here is Mr. Nicholls's actual letter, unearthed after forty years, as well as earlier letters from and to Miss Nussey, which would seem to indicate a suggestion upon the part of 'E' that some attempt should be made to furnish a biography of her friend — if only to set at rest, once and for all, the speculations of the gossiping community with whom Charlotte Brontë's personality was still shrouded in mystery; and indeed it is clear from these letters that it is to Miss Nussey that we really owe Mrs. Gaskell's participation in the matter: —

TO REV. A. B. NICHOLLS

'Brookroyd, *June* 6*th*, 1855.

'Dear Mr. Nicholls, — I have been much hurt and pained by the perusal of an article in *Sharpe* for this month, entitled "A Few Words about *Jane Eyre*." You will be certain to see the article, and I am sure both you and Mr. Brontë will feel acutely the misrepresentations and the malignant spirit which characterises it. Will you suffer the article to pass current without any refutations? The writer merits the contempt of silence, but there will be readers and believers. Shall such be left to imbibe a tissue of malignant falsehoods, or shall an attempt be made to do justice to one who so highly deserved justice, whose very name those who best knew her but speak with reverence and affection? Should not her aged father be defended from the reproach the writer coarsely attempts to bring upon him?

'I wish Mrs. Gaskell, who is every way capable, would undertake a reply, and would give a sound castigation to the writer. Her personal acquaintance with Haworth, the Parsonage, and its inmates, fits her for the task, and if on other subjects she lacked information I would gladly supply her with facts sufficient to set aside much that is asserted, if you yourself are not provided with all the information that is needed on the subjects produced. Will you ask Mrs. Gaskell to undertake this just and honourable defence? I think she would do it gladly. She valued dear Charlotte, and such an act of friendship, performed with her ability and power, could only add to the laurels she has already won. I hope you and Mr. Brontë are well. My kind regards to both. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'E. Nussey.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *June* 11*th*, 1855.

'Dear Miss Nussey, — We had not seen the article in *Sharpe*, and very possibly should not, if you had not directed our attention to it. We ordered a copy, and have now read the "Few Words about *Jane Eyre*." The writer has certainly made many mistakes, but apparently not from any unkind motive, as he professes to be an admirer of Charlotte's works, pays a just tribute to her genius, and in common with thousands deplores her untimely death. His design seems rather to be to gratify the curiosity of the multitude in reference to one who had made such a sensation in the literary world. But even if the article had been of a less harmless character, we should not have felt inclined to take any notice of it, as by doing so we should have given it an importance which it would not otherwise have obtained. Charlotte herself would have acted thus; and her character stands too high to be injured by the statements in a magazine of small circulation and little influence — statements which the writer prefaces with the remark that he does not vouch for their accuracy. The many laudatory notices of Charlotte and her works which appeared since her death may well make us indifferent to the detractions of a few envious or malignant persons, as there ever will be such.

'The remarks respecting Mr. Brontë excited in him only amusement — indeed, I have not seen him laugh as much for some months as he did while I was reading the article to him. We are both well in health, but lonely and desolate.

'Mr. Brontë unites with me in kind regards. — Yours sincerely,

'A. B. Nicholls.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *July* 24*th*, 1855.

'Dear Miss Nussey, — Some other erroneous notices of Charlotte having appeared, Mr. Brontë has deemed it advisable that some authentic statement should be put forth. He has therefore adopted your suggestion and applied to Mrs. Gaskell, who has undertaken to write a life of Charlotte. Mrs. Gaskell came over yesterday and spent a few hours with us. The greatest difficulty seems to be in obtaining materials to show the development of Charlotte's character. For this reason Mrs. Gaskell is anxious to see her letters, especially those of any early date. I think I understood you to say that you had some; if so, we should feel obliged by your letting us have any that you may think proper, not for publication, but merely to give the writer an insight into her mode of thought. Of course they will be returned after a little time.

'I confess that the course most consonant with my own feelings would be to take no steps in the matter, but I do not think it right to offer any opposition to Mr. Brontë's wishes.

'We have the same object in view, but should differ in our mode of proceeding. Mr. Brontë has not been very well. Excitement on Sunday (our Rush-bearing) and Mrs. Gaskell's visit yesterday have been rather much for him. — Believe me, sincerely yours,

'A. B. Nicholls.'

Mrs. Gaskell, however, wanted to make Miss Nussey's acquaintance, and asked if she might visit her; and added that she would also like to see Miss Wooler, Charlotte's schoolmistress, if that lady were still alive. To this letter Miss Nussey made the following reply: —

TO MRS. GASKELL, Manchester

'Ilkley, *July* 26*th*, 1855.

'My dear Madam, — Owing to my absence from home your letter has only just reached me. I had not heard of Mr. Brontë's request, but I am most heartily glad that he has made it. A letter from Mr. Nicholls was forwarded along with yours, which I opened first, and was thus prepared for your communication, the subject of which is of the deepest interest to me. I will do everything in my power to aid the righteous work you have undertaken, but I feel my powers very limited, and apprehend that you may experience some disappointment that I cannot contribute more largely the information which you desire. I possess a great many letters (for I have destroyed but a small portion of the correspondence), but I fear the early letters are not such as to unfold the character of the writer except in a few points. You perhaps may discover more than is apparent to me. You will read them with a purpose — I perused them only with interests of affection. I will immediately look over the correspondence, and I promise to let you see all that I can confide to your friendly custody. I regret that my absence from home should have made it impossible for me to have the pleasure of seeing you at Brookroyd at the time you propose. I am engaged to stay here till Monday week, and shall be happy to see you any day you name after that date, or, if more convenient to you to come Friday or Saturday in next week, I will gladly return in time to give you the meeting. I am staying with our schoolmistress, Miss Wooler, in this place. I wish her very much to give me leave to ask you here, but she does not yield to my wishes; it would have been pleasanter to me to talk with you among these hills than sitting in my home and thinking of one who had so often been present there. — I am, my dear madam, yours sincerely,

'Ellen Nussey.'

Mrs. Gaskell and Miss Nussey met, and the friendship which ensued was closed only by death; and indeed one of the most beautiful letters in the collection in my hands is one signed 'Meta Gaskell,' and dated January 22, 1866. It tells in detail, with infinite tenderness and pathos, of her mother's last moments. That, however, was ten years later than the period with which we are concerned. In 1856 Mrs. Gaskell was energetically engaged upon a biography of her friend which should lack nothing of thoroughness, as she hoped. She claimed to have visited the scenes of all the incidents in Charlotte's life, 'the two little pieces of private governess-ship excepted.' She went one day with Mr. Smith to the Chapter Coffee House, where the sisters first stayed in London. Another day she is in Yorkshire, where she makes the acquaintance of Miss Wooler, which permitted, as she said, 'a more friendly manner of writing towards Charlotte Brontë's old schoolmistress.' Again she is in Brussels, where Madame Héger refused to see her, although M. Héger was kind and communicative, 'and very much indeed I both like and respect him.' Her countless questions were exceedingly interesting. They covered many pages of note-paper. Did Branwell Brontë know of the publication of *Jane Eyre*,' she asks, 'and how did he receive the news?' Mrs. Gaskell was persuaded in her own mind that he had never known of its publication, and we shall presently see that she was right. Charlotte had distinctly informed her, she said, that Branwell was not in a fit condition at the time to be told. 'Where did the girls get the books which they read so continually? Did Emily accompany Charlotte as a pupil when the latter went as a teacher to Roe Head? Why did not Branwell go to the Royal Academy in London to learn painting? Did Emily ever go out as a governess? What were Emily's religious opinions? Did *she* ever make friends?' Such were the questions which came quick and fast to Miss Nussey, and Miss Nussey fortunately kept her replies.

TO MRS. GASKELL, Manchester

'Brookroyd, *October* 22*nd*, 1856.

'My dear Mrs. Gaskell, — If you go to London pray try what may be done with regard to a portrait of dear Charlotte. It would greatly enhance the value and interest of the memoir, and be such a satisfaction to people to see something that would settle their ideas of the personal appearance of the dear departed one. It has been a surprise to every stranger, I think, that she was so gentle and lady-like to look upon.

'Emily Brontë went to Roe Head as pupil when Charlotte went as teacher; she stayed there but two months; she never settled, and was ill from nothing but home-sickness. Anne took her place and remained about two years. Emily was a teacher for one six months in a ladies' school in Halifax or the neighbourhood. I do not know whether it was conduct or want of finances that prevented Branwell from going to the Royal Academy. Probably there were impediments of both kinds.

'I am afraid if you give me my name I shall feel a prominence in the book that I altogether shrink from. My very last wish would be to appear in the book more than is absolutely necessary. If it were possible, I would choose not to be known at all. It is my friend only that I care to see and recognise, though your framing and setting of the picture will very greatly enhance its value. — I am, my dear Mrs. Gaskell, yours very sincerely,

'Ellen Nussey.'

The book was published in two volumes, under the title of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, in the spring of 1857. At first all was well. Mr. Brontë's earliest acknowledgment of the book was one of approbation. Sir James Shuttleworth expressed the hope that Mr. Nicholls would 'rejoice that his wife would be known as a Christian heroine who could bear her cross with the firmness of a martyr saint.' Canon Kingsley wrote a charming letter to Mrs. Gaskell, published in his *Life*, and more than once reprinted since.

'Let me renew our long interrupted acquaintance,' he writes from St. Leonards, under date May 14th, 1857, 'by complimenting you on poor Miss Brontë's *Life*. You have had a delicate and a great work to do, and you have done it admirably. Be sure that the book will do good. It will shame literary people into some stronger belief that a simple, virtuous, practical home life is consistent with high imaginative genius; and it will shame, too, the prudery of a not over cleanly though carefully white-washed age, into believing that purity is now (as in all ages till now) quite compatible with the knowledge of evil. I confess that the book has made me ashamed of myself. *Jane Eyre* I hardly looked into, very seldom reading a work of fiction — yours, indeed, and Thackeray's, are the only ones I care to open. *Shirley* disgusted me at the opening, and I gave up the writer and her books with a notion that she was a person who liked coarseness. How I misjudged her! and how thankful I am that I never put a word of my misconceptions into print, or recorded my misjudgments of one who is a whole heaven above me.

'Well have you done your work, and given us the picture of a valiant woman made perfect by suffering. I shall now read carefully and lovingly every word she has written, especially those poems, which ought not to have fallen dead as they did, and which seem to be (from a review in the current *Fraser*) of remarkable strength and purity.'

It was a short-lived triumph, however, and Mrs. Gaskell soon found herself, as she expressed it, 'in a veritable hornet's nest.' Mr. Brontë, to begin with, did not care for the references to himself and the suggestion that he had treated his wife unkindly. Mrs. Gaskell had associated him with numerous eccentricities and ebullitions of temper, which during his later years he always asserted, and undoubtedly with perfect truth, were, at the best, the fabrications of a dismissed servant. Mr. Nicholls had also his grievance. There was just a suspicion implied that he had not been quite the most sympathetic of husbands. The suspicion was absolutely ill-founded, and arose from Mr. Nicholls's intense shyness. But neither Mr. Brontë nor Mr. Nicholls gave Mrs. Gaskell much trouble. They, at any rate, were silent. Trouble, however, came from many quarters. Yorkshire people resented the air of patronage with which, as it seemed to them, a good Lancashire lady had taken their county in hand. They were not quite the backward savages, they retorted, which some of Mrs. Gaskell's descriptions in the beginning of her book would seem to suggest. Between Lancashire and Yorkshire there is always a suspicion of jealousy. It was intensified for the moment by these sombre pictures of 'this lawless, yet not unkindly population.' A son-in-law of Mr. Redhead wrote to deny the account of that clergyman's association with Haworth. 'He gives another as true, in which I don't see any great difference.' Miss Martineau wrote sheet after sheet explanatory of her relations with Charlotte Brontë. 'Two separate householders in London *each* declares that the first interview between Miss Brontë and Miss Martineau took place at *her* house.' In one passage Mrs. Gaskell had spoken of wasteful young servants, and the young servants in question came upon Mr. Brontë for the following testimonial: —

'Haworth, *August* 17*th*, 1857.

'I beg leave to state to all whom it may concern, that Nancy and Sarah Garrs, during the time they were in my service, were kind to my children, and honest, and not wasteful, but sufficiently careful in regard to food, and all other articles committed to their charge.

P. Brontë, A.B.,
'*Incumbent of Haworth, Yorkshire*.'

Three whole pages were devoted to the dramatic recital of a scandal at Haworth, and this entirely disappears from the third edition. A casual reference to a girl who had been seduced, and had found a friend in Miss Brontë, gave further trouble. 'I have altered the word "seduced" to "betrayed,"' writes Mrs. Gaskell to Martha Brown, 'and I hope that this will satisfy the unhappy girl's friends.' But all these were small matters compared with the Cowan Bridge controversy and the threatened legal proceedings over Branwell Brontë's suggested love affairs. Mrs. Gaskell defended the description in *Jane Eyre* of Cowan Bridge with peculiar vigour. Mr. Carus Wilson, the Brocklehurst of *Jane Eyre*, and his friends were furious. They threatened an action. There were letters in the *Times* and letters in the *Daily News*. Mr. Nicholls broke silence — the only time in the forty years that he has done so — with two admirable letters to the *Halifax Guardian*. The Cowan Bridge controversy was a drawn battle, in spite of numerous and glowing testimonials to the virtues of Mr. Carus Wilson. Most people who know anything of the average private schools of half a century ago are satisfied that Charlotte Brontë's description was substantially correct. 'I want to show you many letters,' writes Mrs. Gaskell, 'most of them praising the character of our dear friend as she deserves, and from people whose opinion she would have cared for, such as the Duke of Argyll, Kingsley, Greig, etc. Many abusing me. I should think seven or eight of this kind from the Carus Wilson clique.'

The Branwell matter was more serious. Here Mrs. Gaskell had, indeed, shown a singular recklessness. The lady referred to by Branwell was Mrs. Robinson, the wife of the Rev. Edmund Robinson of Thorp Green, and afterwards Lady Scott. Anne Brontë was governess in her family for two years, and Branwell tutor to the son for a few months. Branwell, under the influence of opium, made certain statements about his relations with Mrs. Robinson which have been effectually disproved, although they were implicitly believed by the Brontë girls, who, womanlike, were naturally ready to regard a woman as the ruin of a beloved brother. The recklessness of Mrs. Gaskell in accepting such inadequate testimony can be explained only on the assumption that she had a novelist's satisfaction in the romance which the 'bad woman' theory supplied. She wasted a considerable amount of rhetoric upon it. 'When the fatal attack came on,' she says, 'his pockets were found filled with old letters from the woman to whom he was attached. He died! she lives still — in May Fair. I see her name in county papers, as one of those who patronise the Christmas balls; and I hear of her in London drawing-rooms' — and so on. There were no love-letters found in Branwell Brontë's pockets. When Mrs. Gaskell's husband came post-haste to Haworth to ask for proofs of Mrs. Robinson's complicity in Branwell's downfall, none were obtainable. I am assured by Mr. Leslie Stephen that his father, Sir James

Stephen, was employed at the time to make careful inquiry, and that he and other eminent lawyers came to the conclusion that it was one long tissue of lies or hallucinations. The subject is sufficiently sordid, and indeed almost redundant in any biography of the Brontës; but it is of moment, because Charlotte Brontë and her sisters were so thoroughly persuaded that a woman was at the bottom of their brother's ruin; and this belief Charlotte impressed upon all the friends who were nearest and dearest to her. Her letters at the time of her brother's death are full of censure of the supposed wickedness of another. It was a cruel infamy that the word of this wretched boy should have been so powerful for mischief. Here, at any rate, Mrs. Gaskell did not show the caution which a masculine biographer, less prone to take literally a man's accounts of his amours, would undoubtedly have displayed.

Yet, when all is said, Mrs. Gaskell had done her work thoroughly and well. Lockhart's *Scott* and Froude's *Carlyle* are examples of great biographies which called for abundant censure upon their publication; yet both these books will live as classics of their kind. To be interesting, it is perhaps indispensable that the biographer should be indiscreet, and certainly the Branwell incident — a matter of two or three pages — is the only part of Mrs. Gaskell's biography in which indiscretion becomes indefensible. And for this she suffered cruelly. 'I did so try to tell the truth,' she said to a friend, 'and I believe *now* I hit as near to the truth as any one could do.' 'I weighed every line with my whole power and heart,' she said on another occasion, 'so that every line should go to its great purpose of making *her* known and valued, as one who had gone through such a terrible life with a brave and faithful heart.' And that clearly Mrs. Gaskell succeeded in doing. It is quite certain that Charlotte Brontë would not stand on so splendid a pedestal to-day but for the single-minded devotion of her accomplished biographer.

It has sometimes been implied that the portrait drawn by Mrs. Gaskell was far too sombre, that there are passages in Charlotte's letters which show that ofttimes her heart was merry and her life sufficiently cheerful. That there were long periods of gaiety for all the three sisters, surely no one ever doubted. To few people, fortunately, is it given to have lives wholly without happiness. And yet, when this is acknowledged, how can one say that the picture was too gloomy? Taken as a whole, the life of Charlotte Brontë was among the saddest in literature. At a miserable school, where she herself was unhappy, she saw her two elder sisters stricken down and carried home to die. In her home was the narrowest poverty. She had, in the years when that was most essential, no mother's care; and perhaps there was a somewhat too rigid disciplinarian in the aunt who took the mother's place. Her second school brought her, indeed, two kind friends; but her shyness made that school-life in itself a prolonged tragedy. Of the two experiences as a private governess I shall have more to say. They were periods of torture to her sensitive nature. The ambition of the three girls to start a school on their own account failed ignominiously. The suppressed vitality of childhood and early womanhood made Charlotte unable to enter with sympathy and toleration into the life of a foreign city, and Brussels was for her a further disaster. Then within two years, just as literary fame was bringing its consolation for the trials of the past, she saw her two beloved sisters taken from her. And, finally, when at last a good man won her love, there were left to her only nine months of happy married life. 'I am not going to die. We have been so happy.' These words to her husband on her death-bed are not the least piteously sad in her tragic story. That her life was a tragedy, was the opinion of the woman friend with whom on the intellectual side she had most in common. Miss Mary Taylor wrote to Mrs. Gaskell the following letter from New Zealand upon receipt of the *Life*: —

'Wellington, 30*th July* 1857.

'My dear Mrs. Gaskell, — I am unaccountably in receipt by post of two vols. containing the Life of C. Brontë. I have pleasure in attributing this compliment to you; I beg, therefore, to thank you for them. The book is a perfect success, in giving a true picture of a melancholy life, and you have practically answered my puzzle as to how you would give an account of her, not being at liberty to give a true description of those around. Though not so gloomy as the truth, it is perhaps as much so as people will accept without calling it exaggerated, and feeling the desire to doubt and contradict it. I have seen two reviews of it. One of them sums it up as "a life of poverty and self-suppression," the other has nothing to the purpose at all. Neither of them seems to think it a strange or wrong state of things that a woman of first-rate talents, industry, and integrity should live all her life in a walking nightmare of "poverty and self-suppression." I doubt whether any of them will.

'It must upset most people's notions of beauty to be told that the portrait at the beginning is that of an ugly woman. I do not altogether like the idea of publishing a flattered likeness. I had rather the mouth and eyes had been nearer together, and shown the veritable square face and large disproportionate nose.

'I had the impression that Cartwright's mill was burnt in 1820 not in 1812. You give much too favourable an account of the black-coated and Tory savages that kept the people down, and provoked excesses in those days. Old Robertson said he "would wade to the knees in blood rather than the then state of things should be altered," — a state including Corn law, Test law, and a host of other oppressions.

'Once more I thank you for the book — the first copy, I believe, that arrived in New Zealand. — Sincerely yours,

'Mary Taylor.'

And in another letter, written a little later (28th January 1858), Miss Mary Taylor writes to Miss Ellen Nussey in similar strain: —

'Your account of Mrs. Gaskell's book was very interesting,' she says. 'She seems a hasty, impulsive person, and the needful drawing back after her warmth gives her an inconsistent look. Yet I doubt not her book will be of great use. You must be aware that many strange notions as to the kind of person Charlotte really was will be done away with by a knowledge of the true facts of her life. I have heard imperfectly of farther printing on the subject. As to the mutilated edition that is to come, I am sorry for it. Libellous or not, the first edition was all true, and except the declamation all, in my opinion, useful to be published. Of course I don't know how far necessity may make Mrs. Gaskell give them up. You know one dare not always say the world moves.'

We who do know the whole story in fullest detail will understand that it was desirable to 'mutilate' the book, and that, indeed, truth did in some measure require it. But with these letters of Mary Taylor's before us, let us not hear again that the story of Charlotte Brontë's life was not, in its main features, accurately and adequately told by her gifted biographer.

Why then, I am naturally asked, add one further book to the Brontë biographical literature? The reply is, I hope, sufficient. Forty years have gone by, and they have been years of growing interest in the subject. In the year 1895 ten thousand people visited the Brontë Museum at Haworth. Interesting books have been written, notably Sir Wemyss Reid's *Monograph* and Mr. Leyland's *Brontë Family*, but they have gone out of print. Many new facts have come to light, and many details, moreover, which were too trivial in 1857 are of sufficient importance to-day; and many facts which were rightly suppressed then may honestly and honourably be given to the public at an interval of nearly half a century. Added to all this, fortune has been kind to me.

Some three or four years ago Miss Ellen Nussey placed in my hands a printed volume of some 400 pages, which bore no publisher's name, but contained upon its title-page the statement that it was *The Story of Charlotte Brontë's Life, as told through her Letters*. These are the Letters — 370 in number — which Miss Nussey had lent to Mrs. Gaskell and to Sir Wemyss Reid. Of these letters Mrs. Gaskell published about 100, and Sir Wemyss Reid added as many more as he considered circumstances justified twenty years back.

It was explained to me that the volume had been privately printed under a misconception, and that only some dozen copies were extant. Miss Nussey asked me if I would write something around what might remain of the unpublished letters, and if I saw my way to do anything which would add to the public appreciation of the friend who from early childhood until now has been the most absorbing interest of her life. A careful study of the volume made it perfectly clear that there were still some letters which might with advantage be added to the Brontë story. At the same time arose the possibility of a veto being placed upon their publication. An examination of Charlotte Brontë's will, which was proved at York by her husband in 1855, suggested an easy way out of the difficulty. I made up my mind to try and see Mr. Nicholls. I had heard of his disinclination to be in any way associated with the controversy which had gathered round his wife for all these years; but I wrote to him nevertheless, and received a cordial invitation to visit him in his Irish home.

It was exactly forty years to a day after Charlotte died — March 31st, 1895 — when I alighted at the station in a quiet little town in the centre of Ireland, to receive the cordial handclasp of the man into whose keeping Charlotte Brontë had given her life. It was one of many visits, and the beginning of an interesting correspondence. Mr. Nicholls placed all the papers in his possession in my hands. They were more varied and more abundant than I could possibly have anticipated. They included MSS. of childhood, of which so much has been said, and stories of adult life, one fragment indeed being later than the *Emma* which appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* for 1856, with a note by Thackeray. Here were the letters Charlotte Brontë had written to her brother and to her sisters during her second sojourn in Brussels — to 'Dear Branwell' and 'Dear E. J.,' as she calls Emily — letters even to handle will give a thrill to the Brontë enthusiast. Here also were the love-letters of Maria Branwell to her lover Patrick Brontë, which are referred to in Mrs. Gaskell's biography, but have never hitherto been printed.

'The four small scraps of Emily and Anne's manuscript,' writes Mr. Nicholls, 'I found in the small box I send you; the others I found in the bottom of a cupboard tied up in a newspaper, where they had lain for nearly thirty years, and where, had it not been for your visit, they must have remained during my lifetime, and most likely afterwards have been destroyed.'

Some slight extracts from Brontë letters in *Macmillan's Magazine*, signed 'E. Balmer Williams,' brought me into communication with a gifted daughter of Mr. W. S. Williams. Mrs. Williams and her husband generously placed the whole series of these letters of Charlotte Brontë to their father at my disposal. It was of some of these letters that Mrs. Gaskell wrote in enthusiastic terms when she had read them, and she was only permitted to see a few. Then I have to thank Mr. Joshua Taylor, the nephew of Miss Mary Taylor, for permission to publish his aunt's letters. Mr. James Taylor, again, who wanted to marry Charlotte Brontë, and who died twenty years afterwards in Bombay, left behind him a bundle of letters which I found in the possession of a relative in the north of London. I discovered through a letter addressed to Miss Nussey that the 'Brussels friend' referred to by Mrs. Gaskell was a Miss Lætitia Wheelwright, and I determined to write to all the Wheelwrights in the London Directory. My first effort succeeded, and *the* Miss Wheelwright kindly lent me all the letters that she had preserved. It is scarcely possible that time will reveal many more unpublished letters from the author of *Jane Eyre*. Several of those already in print are forgeries, and I have actually seen a letter addressed from Paris, a city which Miss Brontë never visited. I have the assurance of Dr. Héger of Brussels that Miss Brontë's correspondence with his father no longer exists. In any case one may safely send forth this little book with the certainty that it is a fairly complete collection of Charlotte

Brontë's correspondence, and that it is altogether a valuable revelation of a singularly interesting personality. Steps will be taken henceforth, it may be added, to vindicate Mr. Nicholls's rights in whatever may still remain of his wife's unpublished correspondence.

CHAPTER I: PATRICK BRONTË AND MARIA HIS WIFE

It would seem quite clear to any careful investigator that the Reverend Patrick Brontë, Incumbent of Haworth, and the father of three famous daughters, was a much maligned man. We talk of the fierce light which beats upon a throne, but what is that compared to the fierce light which beats upon any man of some measure of individuality who is destined to live out his life in the quiet of a country village — in the very centre, as it were, of 'personal talk' and gossip not always kindly to the stranger within the gate? The view of Mr. Brontë, presented by Mrs. Gaskell in the early editions of her biography of Charlotte Brontë, is that of a severe, ill-tempered, and distinctly disagreeable character. It is the picture of a man who disliked the vanities of life so intensely, that the new shoes of his children and the silk dress of his wife were not spared by him in sudden gusts of passion. A stern old ruffian, one is inclined to consider him. His pistol-shooting rings picturesquely, but not agreeably, through Mrs. Gaskell's memoirs. It has been already explained in more than one quarter that this was not the real Patrick Brontë, and that much of the unfavourable gossip was due to the chatter of a dismissed servant, retailed to Mrs. Gaskell on one of her missions of inquiry in the neighbourhood. The stories of the burnt shoes and the mutilated dress have been relegated to the realm of myth, and the pistol-shooting may now be acknowledged as a harmless pastime not more iniquitous than the golfing or angling of a latter-day clergyman. It is certain, were the matter of much interest to-day, that Mr. Brontë was fond of the use of firearms. The present Incumbent of Haworth will point out to you, on the old tower of Haworth Church, the marks of pistol bullets, which he is assured were made by Mr. Brontë. I have myself handled both the gun and the pistol — this latter a very ornamental weapon, by the way, manufactured at Bradford — which Mr. Brontë possessed during the later years of his life. From both he had obtained much innocent amusement; but his son-in-law, Mr. Nicholls, who, at the distance of forty years still cherishes a reverent and enthusiastic affection for old Mr. Brontë, informs me that the bullet marks upon Haworth Church were the irresponsible frolic of a rather juvenile curate — Mr. Smith. All this is trivial enough in any case, and one turns very readily to more important factors in the life of the father of the Brontës. Patrick Brontë was born at Ahaderg, County Down, in Ireland, on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1777. He was one of the ten children of Hugh Brunty, farmer, and his nine brothers and sisters seem all of them to have spent their lives in their Irish home, to have married and been given in marriage, and to have gone to their graves in peace. Patrick alone had ambition, and, one must add, the opportune friend, without whom ambition counts for little in the great struggle of life. At sixteen he was a kind of village schoolmaster, or assistant schoolmaster, and at twenty-five, stirred thereto by the vicar of his parish, Mr. Tighe, he was on his way from Ireland to St. John's College, Cambridge. It was in 1802 that Patrick Brontë went to Cambridge, and entered his name in the college books. There, indeed, we find the name, not of Patrick Brontë, but of Patrick Branty, and this brings us to an interesting point as to the origin of the name. In the register of his birth his name is entered, as are the births of his brothers and sisters, as 'Brunty' and 'Bruntee'; and it can scarcely be doubted that, as Dr. Douglas Hyde has pointed out, the original name was O'Prunty. The Irish, at the beginning of the century, were well-nigh as primitive in some matters as were the English of a century earlier; and one is not surprised to see variations in the spelling of the Brontë name — it being in the case of his brothers and sisters occasionally spelt 'Brontee.' To me it is perfectly clear that for the change of name Lord Nelson was responsible, and that the dukedom of Brontë, which was conferred upon the great sailor in 1799, suggested the more ornamental surname. There were no Irish Brontës in existence before Nelson became Duke of Brontë; but all Patrick's brothers and sisters, with whom, it must be remembered, he was on terms of correspondence his whole life long, gradually, with a true Celtic sense of the picturesqueness of the thing, seized upon the more attractive surname. For this theory there is, of course, not one scrap of evidence; we only know that the register of Patrick's native parish gives us Brunty, and that his signature through his successive curacies is Brontë.

From Cambridge, after taking orders in 1806, Mr. Brontë moved to a curacy at Weatherfield in Essex; and Mr. Augustine Birrell has told us, with that singular literary charm of his, how the good-looking Irish curate made successful love to a young parishioner — Miss Mary Burder. Mary Burder would have married him, it seems, but for an obdurate uncle and guardian. She was spirited away from the neighbourhood, and the lovers never met again. There are doubtful points in Mr. Birrell's story. Mary Burder, as the wife of a Nonconformist minister, died in 1866, in her seventy-seventh year. This lady, from whom doubtless either directly or indirectly the tradition was obtained, may have amplified and exaggerated a very innocent flirtation. One would like further evidence for the statement that when Mr. Brontë lost his wife in 1821 he asked his old sweetheart, Mary Burder, to become the mother of his six children, and that she answered 'no'. In any case, Mr. Brontë left Weatherfield in 1809 for a curacy at Dewsbury, and Dewsbury gossip also had much to say concerning the flirtations of its Irish curate. His next curacy, however, which was obtained in 1811, by a removal to Hartshead, near Huddersfield, brought flirtation for Mr. Brontë to a speedy end. In 1812, when thirty-three years of age, he married Miss Maria Branwell, of Penzance. Miss Branwell had only a few months before left her Cornish home for a visit to an uncle in Yorkshire. This uncle was a Mr. John Fennell, a clergyman of the Church of England, who had been a Methodist minister. To Methodism, indeed, the Cornish Branwells would seem to have been devoted at one time or another, for I have seen a copy of the *Imitation* inscribed 'M. Branwell, July 1807,' with the following title-page: —

an extract of the christian's pattern: or, a treatise on the imitation of christ. written in latin by thomas à kempis. abridged and published in english by john wesley, m.a., london. printed at the conference office, north green, finsbury square. g. story, agent. sold by g. whitfield, city road. 1803. price bound 1s.

The book was evidently brought by Mrs. Brontë from Penzance, and given by her to her husband or left among her effects. The poor little woman had been in her grave for five or six years when it came into the hands of one of her daughters, as we learn from Charlotte's hand-writing on the fly-leaf: —

'*C. Brontë's book. This book was given to me in July 1826. It is not certainly known who is the author, but it is generally supposed that Thomas à Kempis is. I saw a reward of* £10,000 *offered in the Leeds Mercury to any one who could find out for a certainty who is the author.*'

The conjunction of the names of John Wesley, Maria Branwell, and Charlotte Brontë surely gives this little volume, 'price bound 1s.,' a singular interest!

But here I must refer to the letters which Maria Branwell wrote to her lover during the brief courtship. Mrs. Gaskell, it will be remembered, makes but one extract from this correspondence, which was handed to her by Mr. Brontë as part of the material for her memoir. Long years before, the little packet had been taken from Mr. Brontë's desk, for we find Charlotte writing to a friend on February 16th, 1850: —

'A few days since, a little incident happened which curiously touched me. Papa put into my hands a little packet of letters and papers, telling me that they were mamma's, and that I might read them. I did read them, in a frame of mind I cannot describe. The papers were yellow with time, all having been written before I was born. It was strange now to peruse, for the first time, the records of a mind whence my own sprang; and most strange, and at once sad and sweet, to find that mind of a truly fine, pure, and elevated order. They were written to papa before they were married. There is a rectitude, a refinement, a constancy, a modesty, a sense, a gentleness about them indescribable. I wish she had lived, and that I had known her.'

Yet another forty years or so and the little packet is in my possession. Handling, with a full sense of their sacredness, these letters, written more than eighty years ago by a good woman to her lover, one is tempted to hope that there is no breach of the privacy which should, even in our day, guide certain sides of life, in publishing the correspondence in its completeness. With the letters I find a little MS., which is also of pathetic interest. It is entitled 'The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns,' and it is endorsed in the handwriting of Mr. Brontë, written, doubtless, many years afterwards: —

‘*The above was written by my dear wife*, *and is for insertion in one of the periodical publications*. *Keep it as a memorial of her*.’

There is no reason to suppose that the MS. was ever published; there is no reason why any editor should have wished to publish it. It abounds in the obvious. At the same time, one notes that from both father and mother alike Charlotte Brontë and her sisters inherited some measure of the literary faculty. It is nothing to say that not one line of the father’s or mother’s would have been preserved had it not been for their gifted children. It is sufficient that the zest for writing was there, and that the intense passion for handling a pen, which seems to have been singularly strong in Charlotte Brontë, must have come to a great extent from a similar passion alike in father and mother. Mr. Brontë, indeed, may be counted a prolific author. He published, in all, four books, three pamphlets, and two sermons. Of his books, two were in verse and two in prose. *Cottage Poems* was published in 1811; *The Rural Minstrel* in 1812, the year of his marriage; *The Cottage in the Wood* in 1815; and *The Maid of Killarney* in 1818. After his wife’s death he published no more books. Reading over these old-fashioned volumes now, one admits that they possess but little distinction. It has been pointed out, indeed, that one of the strongest lines in *Jane Eyre* — ‘To the finest fibre of my nature, sir.’ — is culled from Mr. Brontë’s verse. It is the one line of his that will live. Like his daughter Charlotte, Mr. Brontë is more interesting in his prose than in his poetry. *The Cottage in the Wood*; *or*, *the Art of Becoming Rich and Happy*, is a kind of religious novel — a spiritual *Pamela*, in which the reprobate pursuer of an innocent girl ultimately becomes converted and marries her. *The Maid of Killarney*; *or*, *Albion and Flora* is more interesting. Under the guise of a story it has something to say on many questions of importance. We know now why Charlotte never learnt to dance until she went to Brussels, and why children’s games were unknown to her, for here are many mild diatribes against dancing and card-playing. The British Constitution and the British and Foreign Bible Society receive a considerable amount of criticism. But in spite of this didactic weakness there are one or two pieces of really picturesque writing, notably a description of an Irish wake, and a forcible account of the defence of a house against some Whiteboys. It is true enough that the books are merely of interest to collectors and that they live only by virtue of Patrick Brontë’s remarkable children. But many a prolific writer of the day passes muster as a genius among his contemporaries upon as small a talent; and Mr. Brontë does not seem to have given himself any airs as an author. Thirty years were to elapse before there were to be any more books from this family of writers; but *Jane Eyre* owes something, we may be sure, to *The Maid of Killarney*.

Mr. Brontë, as I have said, married Maria Branwell in 1812. She was in her twenty-ninth year, and was one of five children — one son and four daughters — the father of whom, Mr. Thomas Branwell, had died in 1809. By a curious coincidence, another sister, Charlotte, was married in Penzance on the same day — the 18th of December 1812. Before me are a bundle of samplers, worked by three of these Branwell sisters. Maria Branwell 'ended her sampler' April the 15th, 1791, and it is inscribed with the text, *Flee from sin as from a serpent*, *for if thou comest too near to it*, *it will bite thee*. *The teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion to slay the souls of men*. Another sampler is by Elizabeth Branwell; another by Margaret, and another by Anne. These, some miniatures, and the book and papers to which I have referred, are all that remain to us as a memento of Mrs. Brontë, apart from the children that she bore to her husband. The miniatures, which are in the possession of Miss Branwell, of Penzance, are of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Branwell — Charlotte Brontë's maternal grandfather and grandmother — and of Mrs. Brontë and her sister Elizabeth Branwell as children.

To return, however, to our bundle of love-letters. Comment is needless, if indeed comment or elucidation were possible at this distance of time.

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A.B., Hartshead

'Wood House Grove, *August* 26*th*, 1812.

'My dear Friend, — This address is sufficient to convince you that I not only permit, but approve of yours to me — I do indeed consider you as my *friend*; yet, when I consider how short a time I have had the pleasure of knowing you, I start at my own rashness, my heart fails, and did I not think that you would be disappointed and grieved at it, I believe I should be ready to spare myself the task of writing. Do not think that I am so wavering as to repent of what I have already said. No, believe me, this will never be the case, unless you give me cause for it. You need not fear that you have been mistaken in my character. If I know anything of myself, I am incapable of making an ungenerous return to the smallest degree of kindness, much less to you whose attentions and conduct have been so particularly obliging. I will frankly confess that your behaviour and what I have seen and heard of your character has excited my warmest esteem and regard, and be assured you shall never have cause to repent of any confidence you may think proper to place in me, and that it will always be my endeavour to deserve the good opinion which you have formed, although human weakness may in some instances cause me to fall short. In giving you these assurances I do not depend upon my own strength, but I look to Him who has been my unerring guide through life, and in whose continued protection and assistance I confidently trust.

'I thought on you much on Sunday, and feared you would not escape the rain. I hope you do not feel any bad effects from it? My cousin wrote you on Monday and expects this afternoon to be favoured with an answer. Your letter has caused me some foolish embarrassment, tho' in pity to my feelings they have been very sparing of their raillery.

'I will now candidly answer your questions. The *politeness of others* can never make me forget your kind attentions, neither can I *walk our accustomed rounds* without thinking on you, and, why should I be ashamed to add, wishing for your presence. If you knew what were my feelings whilst writing this you would pity me. I wish to write the truth and give you satisfaction, yet fear to go too far, and exceed the bounds of propriety. But whatever I may say or write I will *never deceive* you, or *exceed the truth*. If you think I have not placed the *utmost confidence* in you, consider my situation, and ask yourself if I have not confided in you sufficiently, perhaps too much. I am very sorry that you will not have this till after to-morrow, but it was out of my power to write sooner. I rely on your goodness to pardon everything in this which may appear either too free or too stiff; and beg that you will consider me as a warm and faithful friend.

'My uncle, aunt, and cousin unite in kind regards.

'I must now conclude with again declaring myself to be yours sincerely,

'Maria Branwell.'

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A.B, Hartshead

'Wood House Grove, *September 5th*, 1812.

My dearest Friend, — I have just received your affectionate and very welcome letter, and although I shall not be able to send this until Monday, yet I cannot deny myself the pleasure of writing a few lines this evening, no longer considering it a task, but a pleasure, next to that of reading yours. I had the pleasure of hearing from Mr. Fennell, who was at Bradford on Thursday afternoon, that you had rested there all night. Had you proceeded, I am sure the walk would have been too much for you; such excessive fatigue, often repeated, must injure the strongest constitution. I am rejoiced to find that our forebodings were without cause. I had yesterday a letter from a very dear friend of mine, and had the satisfaction to learn by it that all at home are well. I feel with you the unspeakable obligations I am under to a merciful Providence — my heart swells with gratitude, and I feel an earnest desire that I may be enabled to make some suitable return to the Author of all my blessings. In general, I think I am enabled to cast my care upon Him, and then I experience a calm and peaceful serenity of mind which few things can destroy. In all my addresses to the throne of grace I never ask a blessing for myself but I beg the same for you, and considering the important station which you are called to fill, my prayers are proportionately fervent that you may be favoured with all the gifts and graces requisite for such calling. O my dear friend, let us pray much that we may live lives holy and useful to each other and all around us!

'*Monday morn*. — My cousin and I were yesterday at Coverley church, where we heard Mr. Watman preach a very excellent sermon from "learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart." He displayed the character of our Saviour in a most affecting and amiable light. I scarcely ever felt more charmed with his excellencies, more grateful for his condescension, or more abased at my own unworthiness; but I lament that my heart is so little retentive of those pleasing and profitable impressions.

'I pitied you in your solitude, and felt sorry that it was not in my power to enliven it. Have you not been too hasty in informing your friends of a certain event? Why did you not leave them to guess a little longer? I shrink from the idea of its being known to every body. I do, indeed, *sometimes* think of you, but I will not say how often, lest I raise your vanity; and we sometimes talk of you and the doctor. But I believe I should seldom mention your name myself were it not now and then introduced by my cousin. I have never mentioned a word of what is past to any body. Had I thought this necessary I should have requested you to do it. But I think there is no need, as by some means or other they seem to have a pretty correct notion how matters stand betwixt us; and as their hints, etc., meet with no contradiction from me, my silence passes for confirmation. Mr. Fennell has not neglected to give me some serious and encouraging advice, and my aunt takes frequent opportunities of dropping little sentences which I may turn to some advantage. I have long had reason to know that the present state of things would give pleasure to all parties. Your ludicrous account of the scene at the Hermitage was highly diverting, we laughed heartily at it; but I fear it will not produce all that compassion in Miss Fennell's breast which you seem to wish. I will now tell you what I was thinking about and doing at the time you mention. I was then toiling up the hill with Jane and Mrs. Clapham to take our tea at Mr. Tatham's, thinking on the evening when I first took the same walk with you, and on the change which had taken place in my circumstances and views since then — not wholly without a wish that I had your arm to assist me, and your conversation to shorten the walk. Indeed, all our walks have now an insipidity in them which I never thought they would have possessed. When I work, if I wish to get *forward* I may be glad that you are at a distance. Jane begs me to assure you of her kind regards. Mr. Morgan is expected to be here this evening. I must assume a bold and steady countenance to meet his attacks!

'I have now written a pretty long letter without reserve or caution, and if all the sentiments of my heart are not laid open to you, believe me it is not because I wish them to be concealed, for I hope there is nothing there that would give you pain or displeasure. My most sincere and earnest wishes are for your happiness and welfare, for this includes my own. Pray much for me that I may be made a blessing and not a hindrance to you. Let me not interrupt your studies nor intrude on that time which ought to be dedicated to better purposes. Forgive my freedom, my dearest friend, and rest assured that you are and ever will be dear to

Maria Branwell.

'Write very soon.'

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A.B., Hartshead

'Wood House Grove, *September* 11*th*, 1812.

'My dearest Friend, — Having spent the day yesterday at Miry Shay, a place near Bradford, I had not got your letter till my return in the evening, and consequently have only a short time this morning to write if I send it by this post. You surely do not think you *trouble* me by writing? No, I think I may venture to say if such were your opinion you would *trouble* me no more. Be assured, your letters are and I hope always will be received with extreme pleasure and read with delight. May our Gracious Father mercifully grant the fulfilment of your prayers! Whilst we depend entirely on Him for happiness, and receive each other and all our blessings as from His hands, what can harm us or make us miserable? Nothing temporal or spiritual.

'Jane had a note from Mr. Morgan last evening, and she desires me to tell you that the Methodists' service in church hours is to commence next Sunday week. You may expect frowns and hard words from her when you make your appearance here again, for, if you recollect, she gave you a note to carry to the Doctor, and he has never received it. What have you done with it? If you can give a good account of it you may come to see us as soon as you please and be sure of a hearty welcome from all parties. Next Wednesday we have some thoughts, if the weather be fine, of going to Kirkstall Abbey once more, and I suppose your presence will not make the walk less agreeable to any of us.

'The old man is come and waits for my letter. In expectation of seeing you on Monday or Tuesday next, — I remain, yours faithfully and affectionately,

'M. B.'

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A.B., Hartshead

'Wood House Grove, *September* 18*th*, 1812.

'How readily do I comply with my dear Mr. B's request! You see, you have only to express your wishes and as far as my power extends I hesitate not to fulfil them. My heart tells me that it will always be my pride and pleasure to contribute to your happiness, nor do I fear that this will ever be inconsistent with my duty as a Christian. My esteem for you and my confidence in you is so great, that I firmly believe you will never exact anything from me which I could not conscientiously perform. I shall in future look to you for assistance and instruction whenever I may need them, and hope you will never withhold from me any advice or caution you may see necessary.

['For some years I have been perfectly my own mistress, subject to no *control* whatever — so far from it, that my sisters who are many years older than myself, and even my dear mother, used to consult me in every case of importance, and scarcely ever doubted the propriety of my opinions and actions. Perhaps you will be ready to accuse me of vanity in mentioning this, but you must consider that I do not *boast* of it, I have many times felt it a disadvantage; and although, I thank God, it never led me into error, yet in circumstances of perplexity and doubt, I have deeply felt the want of a guide and instructor.]

'At such times I have seen and felt the necessity of supernatural aid, and by fervent applications to a throne of grace I have experienced that my heavenly Father is able and willing to supply the place of every earthly friend. I shall now no longer feel this want, this sense of helpless weakness, for I believe a kind Providence has intended that I shall find in you every earthly friend united; nor do I fear to trust myself under your protection, or shrink from your control. It is pleasant to be subject to those we love, especially when they never exert their authority but for the good of the subject. How few would write in this way! But I do not fear that *you* will make a bad use of it. You tell me to write my thoughts, and thus as they occur I freely let my pen run away with them.

'*Sat. morn.* — I do not know whether you dare show your face here again or not after the blunder you have committed. When we got to the house on Thursday evening, even before we were within the doors, we found that Mr. and Mrs. Bedford had been there, and that they had requested you to mention their intention of coming — a single hint of which you never gave! Poor I too came in for a share in the hard words which were bestowed upon you, for they all agreed that I was the cause of it. Mr. Fennell said you were certainly *mazed*, and talked of sending you to York, etc. And even I begin to think that *this*, together with the *note*, bears some marks of *insanity*! However, I shall suspend my judgment until I hear what excuse you can make for yourself, I suppose you will be quite ready to make one of some kind or another.

'Yesterday I performed a difficult and yet a pleasing task in writing to my sisters. I thought I never should accomplish the end for which the letter was designed; but after a good deal of perambulation I gave them to understand the nature of my engagement with you, with the motives and inducements which led me to form such an engagement, and that in consequence of it I should not see them again so soon as I had intended. I concluded by expressing a hope that they would not be less pleased with the information than were my friends here. I think they will not suspect me to have made a wrong step, their partiality for me is so great. And their affection for me will lead them to rejoice in my welfare, even though it should diminish somewhat of their own. I shall think the time tedious till I hear from you, and must beg you will write as soon as possible. Pardon me, my dear friend, if I again caution you against giving way to a weakness of which I have heard you complain. When you find your heart oppressed and your thoughts too much engrossed by one subject, let prayer be your refuge — this you no doubt know by experience to be a sure remedy, and a relief from every care and error. Oh, that we had more of the spirit of prayer! I feel that I need it much.

'Breakfast-time is near, I must bid you farewell for the time, but rest assured you will always share in the prayers and heart of your own

Maria.

'Mr. Fennell has crossed my letter to my sisters. With his usual goodness he has supplied my *deficiencies*, and spoken of me in terms of commendation of which I wish I were more worthy. Your character he has likewise displayed in the most favourable light; and I am sure they will not fail to love and esteem you though unknown.

'All here unite in kind regards. Adieu.'

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË A.B., Hartshead

'Wood House Grove, *September* 23*rd*, 1812.

'My dearest Friend, — Accept of my warmest thanks for your kind affectionate letter, in which you have rated mine so highly that I really blush to read my own praises. Pray that God would enable me to deserve all the kindness you manifest towards me, and to act consistently with the good opinion you entertain of me — then I shall indeed be a helpmeet for you, and to be this shall at all times be the care and study of my future life. We have had to-day a large party of the Bradford folks — the Rands, Fawcets, Dobsons, etc. My thoughts often strayed from the company, and I would have gladly left them to follow my present employment. To write to and receive letters from my friends were always among my chief enjoyments, but none ever gave me so much pleasure as those which I receive from and write to my newly adopted friend. I am by no means sorry you have given up all thought of the house you mentioned. With my cousin's help I have made known your plans to my uncle and aunt. Mr. Fennell immediately coincided with that which respects your present abode, and observed that it had occurred to him before, but that he had not had an opportunity of mentioning it to you. My aunt did not fall in with it so readily, but her objections did not appear to me to be very weighty. For my own part, I feel all the force of your arguments in favour of it, and the objections are so trifling that they can scarcely be called objections. My cousin is of the same opinion. Indeed, you have such a method of considering and digesting a plan before you make it known to your friends, that you run very little risque of incurring their disapprobations, or of having your schemes frustrated. I greatly admire your talents this way — may they never be perverted by being used in a bad cause! And whilst they are exerted for good purposes, may they prove irresistible! If I may judge from your letter, this middle scheme is what would please you best, so that if there should arise no new objection to it, perhaps it will prove the best you can adopt. However, there is yet sufficient time to consider it further. I trust in this and every other circumstance you will be guided by the wisdom that cometh from above — a portion of which I doubt not has guided you hitherto. A belief of this, added to the complete satisfaction with which I read your reasonings on the subject, made me a ready convert to your opinions. I hope nothing will occur to induce you to change your intention of spending the next week at Bradford. Depend on it you shall have letter for letter; but may we not hope to see you here during that time, surely you will not think the way more tedious than usual? I have not heard any particulars respecting the church since you were at Bradford. Mr. Rawson is now there, but Mr. Hardy and his brother are absent, and I understand nothing decisive can be accomplished without them. Jane expects to hear something more to-morrow. Perhaps ere this reaches you, you will have received some intelligence respecting it from Mr. Morgan. If you have no other apology to make for your blunders than that which you have given me, you must not expect to be excused, for I have not mentioned it to any one, so that however it may clear your character in my opinion it is not likely to influence any other person. Little, very little, will induce me to cover your faults with a veil of charity. I already feel a kind of participation in all that concerns you. All praises and censures bestowed on you must equally affect me. Your joys and sorrows must be mine. Thus shall the one be increased and the other diminished. While this is the case we shall, I hope, always find "life's cares" to be "comforts." And may we feel every trial and distress, for such must be our lot at times, bind us nearer to God and to each other! My heart earnestly joins in your comprehensive prayers. I trust they will unitedly ascend to a throne of grace, and through the Redeemer's merits procure for us peace and happiness here and a life of eternal felicity hereafter. Oh, what sacred pleasure there is in the idea of spending an eternity together in perfect and uninterrupted bliss! This should encourage us to the utmost exertion and fortitude. But whilst I write, my own words condemn me — I am ashamed of my own indolence and backwardness to duty. May I be more careful, watchful, and active than I have ever yet been!

'My uncle, aunt, and Jane request me to send their kind regards, and they will be happy to see you any time next week whenever you can conveniently come down from Bradford. Let me hear from you soon — I shall expect a letter on Monday. Farewell, my dearest friend. That you may be happy in yourself and very useful to all around you is the daily earnest prayer of yours truly,

'Maria Branwell.'

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A.B., Hartshead

'Wood House Grove, *October* 3*rd*, 1812.

'How could my dear friend so cruelly disappoint me? Had he known how much I had set my heart on having a letter this afternoon, and how greatly I felt the disappointment when the bag arrived and I found there was nothing for me, I am sure he would not have permitted a little matter to hinder him. But whatever was the reason of your not writing, I cannot believe it to have been neglect or unkindness, therefore I do not in the least blame you, I only beg that in future you will judge of my feelings by your own, and if possible never let me expect a letter without receiving one. You know in my last which I sent you at Bradford I said it would not be in my power to write the next day, but begged I might be favoured with hearing from you on Saturday, and you will not wonder that I hoped you would have complied with this request. It has just occurred to my mind that it is possible this note was not received; if so, you have felt disappointed likewise; but I think this is not very probable, as the old man is particularly careful, and I never heard of his losing anything committed to his care. The note which I allude to was written on Thursday morning, and you should have received it before you left Bradford. I forget what its contents were, but I know it was written in haste and concluded abruptly. Mr. Fennell talks of visiting Mr. Morgan to-morrow. I cannot lose the opportunity of sending this to the office by him as you will then have it a day sooner, and if you have been daily expecting to hear from me, twenty-four hours are of some importance. I really am concerned to find that this, what many would deem trifling incident, has so much disturbed my mind. I fear I should not have slept in peace to-night if I had been deprived of this opportunity of relieving my mind by scribbling to you, and now I lament that you cannot possibly receive this till Monday. May I hope that there is now some intelligence on the way to me? or must my patience be tried till I see you on Wednesday? But what nonsense am I writing? Surely after this you can have no doubt that you possess all my heart. Two months ago I could not possibly have believed that you would ever engross so much of my thoughts and affections, and far less could I have thought that I should be so forward as to tell you so. I believe I must forbid you to come here again unless you can assure me that you will not steal any more of my regard. Enough of this; I must bring my pen to order, for if I were to suffer myself to revise what I have written I should be tempted to throw it in the fire, but I have determined that you shall see my whole heart. I have not yet informed you that I received your serio-comic note on Thursday afternoon, for which accept my thanks.

'My cousin desires me to say that she expects a long poem on her birthday, when she attains the important age of twenty-one. Mr. Fennell joins with us in requesting that you will not fail to be here on Wednesday, as it is decided that on Thursday we are to go to the Abbey if the weather, etc., permits.

'*Sunday morning*. — I am not sure if I do right in adding a few lines to-day, but knowing that it will give you pleasure I wish to finish that you may have it to-morrow. I will just say that if my feeble prayers can aught avail, you will find your labours this day both pleasant and profitable, as they concern your own soul and the souls of those to whom you preach. I trust in your hours of retirement you will not forget to pray for me. I assure you I need every assistance to help me forward; I feel that my heart is more ready to attach itself to earth than heaven. I sometimes think there never was a mind so dull and inactive as mine is with regard to spiritual things.

'I must not forget to thank you for the pamphlets and tracts which you sent us from Bradford. I hope we shall make good use of them. I must now take my leave. I believe I need scarcely assure you that I am yours truly and very affectionately,

'Maria Branwell.'

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A.B., Hartshead

'Wood House Grove, *October* 21*st* 1812.

'With the sincerest pleasure do I retire from company to converse with him whom I love beyond all others. Could my beloved friend see my heart he would then be convinced that the affection I bear him is not at all inferior to that which he feels for me — indeed I sometimes think that in truth and constancy it excels. But do not think from this that I entertain any suspicions of your sincerity — no, I firmly believe you to be sincere and generous, and doubt not in the least that you feel all you express. In return, I entreat that you will do me the justice to believe that you have not only a *very large portion* of my *affection* and *esteem*, but *all* that I am capable of feeling, and from henceforth measure my feelings by your own. Unless my love for you were very great how could I so contentedly give up my home and all my friends — a home I loved so much that I have often thought nothing could bribe me to renounce it for any great length of time together, and friends with whom I have been so long accustomed to share all the vicissitudes of joy and sorrow? Yet these have lost their weight, and though I cannot always think of them without a sigh, yet the anticipation of sharing with you all the pleasures and pains, the cares and anxieties of life, of contributing to your comfort and becoming the companion of your pilgrimage, is more delightful to me than any other prospect which this world can possibly present. I expected to have heard from you on Saturday last, and can scarcely refrain from thinking you unkind to keep me in suspense two whole days longer than was necessary, but it is well that my patience should be sometimes tried, or I might entirely lose it, and this would be a loss indeed! Lately I have experienced a considerable increase of hopes and fears, which tend to destroy the calm uniformity of my life. These are not unwelcome, as they enable me to discover more of the evils and errors of my heart, and discovering them I hope through grace to be enabled to correct and amend them. I am sorry to say that my cousin has had a very serious cold, but to-day I think she is better; her cough seems less, and I hope we shall be able to come to Bradford on Saturday afternoon, where we intend to stop till Tuesday. You may be sure we shall not soon think of taking such another journey as the last. I look forward with pleasure to Monday, when I hope to meet with you, for as we are no *longer twain* separation is painful, and to meet must ever be attended with joy.

'*Thursday morning*. — I intended to have finished this before breakfast, but unfortunately slept an hour too long. I am every moment in expectation of the old man's arrival. I hope my cousin is still better to-day; she requests me to say that she is much obliged to you for your kind inquiries and the concern you express for her recovery. I take all possible care of her, but yesterday she was naughty enough to venture into the yard without her bonnet! As you do not say anything of going to Leeds I conclude you have not been. We shall most probably hear from the Dr. this afternoon. I am much pleased to hear of his success at Bierly! O that you may both be zealous and successful in your efforts for the salvation of souls, and may your own lives be holy, and your hearts greatly blessed while you are engaged in administering to the good of others! I should have been very glad to have had it in my power to lessen your fatigue and cheer your spirits by my exertions on Monday last. I will hope that this pleasure is still reserved for me. In general, I feel a calm confidence in the providential care and continued mercy of God, and when I consider his past deliverances and past favours I am led to wonder and adore. A sense of my small returns of love and gratitude to him often abases me and makes me think I am little better than those who profess no religion. Pray for me, my dear friend, and rest assured that you possess a very very large portion of the prayers, thoughts, and heart of yours truly,

'M. Branwell.

'Mr. Fennell requests Mr. Bedford to call on the man who has had orders to make blankets for the Grove and desire him to send them as soon as possible. Mr. Fennell will be greatly obliged to Mr. Bedford if he will take this trouble.'

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A.B., Hartshead

'Wood House Grove, *November* 18*th*, 1812.

'My dear saucy Pat, — Now don't you think you deserve this epithet far more than I do that which you have given me? I really know not what to make of the beginning of your last; the winds, waves, and rocks almost stunned me. I thought you were giving me the account of some terrible dream, or that you had had a presentiment of the fate of my poor box, having no idea that your lively imagination could make so much of the slight reproof conveyed in my last. What will you say when you get a *real*, *downright scolding*? Since you show such a readiness to atone for your offences after receiving a mild rebuke, I am inclined to hope you will seldom deserve a severe one. I accept with pleasure your atonement, and send you a free and full forgiveness. But I cannot allow that your affection is more deeply rooted than mine. However, we will dispute no more about this, but rather embrace every opportunity to prove its sincerity and strength by acting in every respect as friends and fellow-pilgrims travelling the same road, actuated by the same motives, and having in view the same end. I think if our lives are spared twenty years hence I shall then pray for you with the same, if not greater, fervour and delight that I do now. I am pleased that you are so fully convinced of my candour, for to know that you suspected me of a deficiency in this virtue would grieve and mortify me beyond expression. I do not derive any merit from the possession of it, for in me it is constitutional. Yet I think where it is possessed it will rarely exist alone, and where it is wanted there is reason to doubt the existence of almost every other virtue. As to the other qualities which your partiality attributes to me, although I rejoice to know that I stand so high in your good opinion, yet I blush to think in how small a degree I possess them. But it shall be the pleasing study of my future life to gain such an increase of grace and wisdom as shall enable me to act up to your highest expectations and prove to you a helpmeet. I firmly believe the Almighty has set us apart for each other; may we, by earnest, frequent prayer, and every possible exertion, endeavour to fulfil His will in all things! I do not, cannot, doubt your love, and here I freely declare I love you above all the world besides. I feel very, very grateful to the great Author of all our mercies for His unspeakable love and condescension towards us, and desire "to show forth my gratitude not only with my lips, but by my life and conversation.” I indulge a hope that our mutual prayers will be answered, and that our intimacy will tend much to promote our temporal and eternal interest.

[‘I suppose you never expected to be much the richer for me, but I am sorry to inform you that I am still poorer than I thought myself. I mentioned having sent for my books, clothes, etc. On Saturday evening about the time you were writing the description of your imaginary shipwreck, I was reading and feeling the effects of a real one, having then received a letter from my sister giving me an account of the vessel in which she had sent my box being stranded on the coast of Devonshire, in consequence of which the box was dashed to pieces with the violence of the sea, and all my little property, with the exception of a very few articles, swallowed up in the mighty deep. If this should not prove the prelude to something worse, I shall think little of it, as it is the first disastrous circumstance which has occurred since I left my home], and having been so highly favoured it would be highly ungrateful in me were I to suffer this to dwell much on my mind.

‘Mr. Morgan was here yesterday, indeed he only left this morning. He mentioned having written to invite you to Bierly on Sunday next, and if you complied with his request it is likely that we shall see you both here on Sunday evening. As we intend going to Leeds next week, we should be happy if you would accompany us on Monday or Tuesday. I mention this by desire of Miss Fennell, who begs to be remembered affectionately to you. Notwithstanding Mr. Fennell’s complaints and threats, I doubt not but he will give you a cordial reception whenever you think fit to make your appearance at the Grove. Which you may likewise be assured of receiving from your ever truly affectionate,

Maria.

‘Both the doctor and his lady very much wish to know what kind of address we make use of in our letters to each other. I think they would scarcely hit on *this*!!’

TO REV. PATRICK BRONTË, A.B., Hartshead

‘Wood House Grove, *December* 5*th*, 1812.

‘My dearest Friend, — So you *thought* that *perhaps* I *might* expect to hear from you. As the case was so doubtful, and you were in such great haste, you might as well have deferred writing a few days longer, for you seem to suppose it is a matter of perfect indifference to me whether I hear from you or not. I believe I once requested you to judge of my feelings by your own — am I to think that *you* are thus indifferent? I feel very unwilling to entertain such an opinion, and am grieved that you should suspect me of such a cold, heartless, attachment. But I am too serious on the subject; I only meant to rally you a little on the beginning of your last, and to tell you that I fancied there was a coolness in it which none of your former letters had contained. If this fancy was groundless, forgive me for having indulged it, and let it serve to convince you of the sincerity and warmth of my affection. Real love is ever apt to suspect that it meets not with an equal return; you must not wonder then that my fears are sometimes excited. My pride cannot bear the idea of a diminution of your attachment, or to think that it is stronger on my side than on yours. But I must not permit my pen so fully to disclose the feelings of my heart, nor will I tell you whether I am pleased or not at the thought of seeing you on the appointed day.

‘Miss Fennell desires her kind regards, and, with her father, is extremely obliged to you for the trouble you have taken about the carpet, and has no doubt but it will give full satisfaction. They think there will be no occasion for the green cloth.

‘We intend to set about making the cakes here next week, but as the fifteen or twenty persons whom you mention live probably somewhere in your neighbourhood, I think it will be most convenient for Mrs. B. to make a small one for the purpose of distributing there, which will save us the difficulty of sending so far.

‘You may depend on my learning my lessons as rapidly as they are given me. I am already tolerably perfect in the A B C, etc. I am much obliged to you for the pretty little hymn which I have already got by heart, but cannot promise to sing it scientifically, though I will endeavour to gain a little more assurance.

‘Since I began this Jane put into my hands Lord Lyttelton’s *Advice to a Lady*. When I read those lines, “Be never cool reserve with passion joined, with caution choose, but then be fondly kind, etc.” my heart smote me for having in some cases used too much reserve towards you. Do you think you have any cause to complain of me? If you do, let me know it. For were it in my power to prevent it, I would in no instance occasion you the least pain or uneasiness. I am certain no one ever loved you with an affection more pure, constant, tender, and ardent than that which I feel. Surely this is not saying too much; it is the truth, and I trust you are worthy to know it. I long to improve in every religious and moral quality, that I may be a help, and if possible an ornament to you. Oh let us pray much for wisdom and grace to fill our appointed stations with propriety, that we may enjoy satisfaction in our own souls, edify others, and bring glory to the name of Him who has so wonderfully preserved, blessed, and brought us together.

‘If there is anything in the commencement of this which looks like pettishness, forgive it; my mind is now completely divested of every feeling of the kind, although I own I am sometimes too apt to be overcome by this disposition.

‘Let me have the pleasure of hearing from you again as soon as convenient. This writing is uncommonly bad, but I too am in haste.

‘Adieu, my dearest. — I am your affectionate and sincere

‘Maria.’

Mr. Brontë was at Hartshead, where he married, for five years, and there his two eldest children, Maria and Elizabeth, were born. He then moved to

Thornton, near Bradford, where Charlotte was born on the 21st of April 1816, Branwell in 1817, Emily in 1818, and Anne in 1819. In 1820 the family removed to the parsonage of Haworth, and in 1821 the poor mother was dead. A year or two later Miss Elizabeth Branwell came from Penzance to act as a mother to her orphaned nephew and nieces. There is no reason to accept the theory that Miss Branwell was quite as formidable or offensive a personage as the Mrs. Read in *Jane Eyre*. That she was a somewhat rigid and not over demonstrative woman, we may take for granted. The one letter to her of any importance that I have seen — it is printed in Mrs. Gaskell's life — was the attempt of Charlotte to obtain her co-operation in the projected visit to a Brussels school. Miss Branwell provided the money readily enough it would seem, and one cannot doubt that in her later years she was on the best of terms with her nieces. There may have been too much discipline in childhood, but discipline which would now be considered too severe was common enough at the beginning of the century. The children, we may be sure, were left abundantly alone. The writing they accomplished in their early years would sufficiently demonstrate that. Miss Branwell died in 1842; and from her will, which I give elsewhere, it will be seen that she behaved very justly to her three nieces.

The reception by Mr. Brontë of his children's literary successes has been very pleasantly recorded by Charlotte. He was proud of his daughters, and delighted with their fame. He seems to have had no small share of their affection. Charlotte loved and esteemed him. There are hundreds of her letters, in many of which are severe and indeed unprintable things about this or that individual; but of her father these letters contain not one single harsh word. She wrote to him regularly when absent. Not only did he secure the affection of his daughter, but the people most intimately associated with him next to his own children gave him a lifelong affection and regard. Martha Brown, the servant who lived with him until his death, always insisted that her old master had been grievously wronged, and that a kinder, more generous, and in every way more worthy man had never lived. Nancy Garrs, another servant, always spoke of Mr. Brontë as 'the kindest man who ever drew breath,' and as a good and affectionate father. Forty years have gone by since Charlotte Brontë died; and thirty-six years have flown since Mr. Nicholls left the deathbed of his wife's father; but through all that period he has retained the most kindly memories of one with whom his life was intimately associated for sixteen years, with whom at one crisis of his life, as we shall see, he had a serious difference, but whom he ever believed to have been an entirely honourable and upright man.

A lady visitor to Haworth in December 1860 did not, it is true, carry away quite so friendly an impression. 'I have been to see old Mr. Brontë,' she writes, 'and have spent about an hour with him. He is completely confined to his bed, but talks hopefully of leaving it again when the summer comes round. I am afraid that it will not be leaving it as he plans, poor old man! He is touchingly softened by illness; but still talks in his pompous way, and mingles moral remarks and somewhat stale sentiments with his conversation on ordinary subjects.' This is severe, but after all it was a literary woman who wrote it. On the whole we may safely assume, with the evidence before us, that Mr. Brontë was a thoroughly upright and honourable man who came manfully through a somewhat severe life battle. That is how his daughters thought of him, and we cannot do better than think with them.

Mr. Brontë died on June 7, 1861, and his funeral in Haworth Church is described in the *Bradford Review* of the following week: —

'Great numbers of people had collected in the churchyard, and a few minutes before noon the corpse was brought out through the eastern gate of the garden leading into the churchyard. The Rev. Dr. Burnet, Vicar of Bradford, read the funeral service, and led the way into the church, and the following clergymen were the bearers of the coffin: The Rev. Dr. Cartman of Skipton; Rev. Mr. Sowden of Hebden Bridge; the Incumbents of Cullingworth, Oakworth, Morton, Oxenhope, and St. John's Ingrow. The chief mourners were the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, son-in-law of the deceased; Martha Brown, the housekeeper; and her sister; Mrs. Brown, and Mrs. Wainwright. There were several gentlemen followed the corpse whom we did not know. All the shops in Haworth were closed, and the people filled every pew, and the aisles in the church, and many shed tears during the impressive reading of the service for the burial of the dead, by the vicar. The body of Mr. Brontë was laid within the altar rails, by the side of his daughter Charlotte. He is the last that can be interred inside of Haworth Church. On the coffin was this inscription: "Patrick Brontë, died June 7th, 1861, aged 84 years."'

His will, which was proved at Wakefield, left the bulk of his property, as was natural, to the son-in-law who had faithfully served and tended him for the six years which succeeded Charlotte Brontë's death.

Extracted from the Principal Registry of the Probate Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court of Justice.

Being of sound mind and judgment, in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I, Patrick Brontë, B.A., *Incumbent of Haworth, in the Parish of Bradford and county of York, make this my last Will and Testament: I leave forty pounds to be equally divided amongst all my brothers and sisters to whom I gave considerable sums in times past; And I direct the same sum of forty pounds to be sent for distribution to Mr. Hugh Brontë, Ballinasceaugh, near Loughbrickland, Ireland; I leave thirty pounds to my servant, Martha Brown, as a token of regard for long and faithful services to me and my children; To my beloved and esteemed son-in-law, the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls,* B.A., *I leave and bequeath the residue of my personal estate of every description which I shall be possessed of at my death for his own absolute benefit; And I make him my sole executor; And I revoke all former and other Wills, in witness whereof I, the said* Patrick Brontë, *have to this my* *last Will, contained in this sheet of paper, set my hand this twentieth day of June, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-five.*

Patrick Brontë. — *Signed and acknowledged by the said* Patrick Brontë *as his Will in the presence of us present at the same time, and who in his presence and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses*: Joseph Redman, Eliza Brown.

The Irish relatives are not forgotten, and indeed this will gives the most direct evidence of the fact that for the sixty years that he had been absent from his native land he had always kept his own country, or at least his relatives in County Down, sufficiently in mind.

CHAPTER II: CHILDHOOD

Eighty years have passed over Thornton since that village had the honour of becoming the birthplace of Charlotte Brontë. The visitor of to-day will find the Bell Chapel, in which Mr. Brontë officiated, a mere ruin, and the font in which his children were baptized ruthlessly exposed to the winds of heaven. The house in which Patrick Brontë resided is now a butcher's shop, and indeed little, one imagines, remains the same. But within the new church one may still overhaul the registers, and find, with but little trouble, a record of the baptism of the Brontë children. There, amid the names of the rough and rude peasantry of the neighbourhood, we find the accompanying entries, differing from their neighbours only by the fact that Mr. Morgan or Mr. Fennell came to the help of their relatives and officiated in place of Mr. Brontë. Mr. Brontë, it will be observed, had already received his appointment to Haworth when Anne was baptized.

There were, it is well known, two elder children, Maria and Elizabeth, born at Hartshead, and doomed to die speedily at Haworth. A vague memory of Maria lives in the Helen Burns of *Jane Eyre*, but the only tangible records of the pair, as far as I am able to ascertain, are a couple of samplers, of the kind which Mrs. Brontë and her sisters had worked at Penzance a generation earlier.

Maria Brontë finished this Sampler on the 16th of May at the age of eight years

one of them tells us, and the other:

Elizabeth Brontë finished this Sampler the 27th of July at the age of seven years.

Maria died at the age of twelve in May 1825, and Elizabeth in June of the same year, at the age of eleven. It is, however, with their three sisters that we have most concern, although all the six children accompanied their parents to Haworth in 1820.

Haworth, we are told, has been over-described; and yet it may not be amiss to discover from the easily available directories what manner of place it was during the Brontë residence there. Pigot's Yorkshire Directory of 1828 gives the census during the first year of Mr. Brontë's incumbency thus: —

Haworth, *a populous manufacturing village*, *in the honour of Pontefract*, *Morley wapentake*, *and in the parish of Bradford*, *is four miles south of Keighley*, *containing*, *by the census of* 1821, 4668 *inhabitants*.

Gentry and Clergy: *Brontë*, *Rev. Patrick*, *Haworth*; *Heaton*, *Robert*, *gent.*, *Ponden Hall*; *Miles*, *Rev. Oddy*, *Haworth*; *Saunders*, *Rev. Moses*, *Haworth*.

From the same source twenty years later we obtain more explicit detail, which is not without interest to-day.

Haworth *is a chapelry, comprising the hamlets of Haworth, Stanbury, and Near and Far Oxenhope, in the parish of Bradford, and wapentake of Morley, West Riding — Haworth being ten miles from Bradford, about the same distance from Halifax, Colne, and Skipton, three and a half miles S. from Keighley, and eight from Hebden Bridge, at which latter place is a station on the Leeds and Manchester railway. Haworth is situated on the side of a hill, and consists of one irregularly built street — the habitations in that part called Oxenhope being yet more scattered, and Stanbury still farther distant; the entire chapelry occupying a wide space. The spinning of worsted, and the manufacture of stuffs, are branches which here prevail extensively.*

The Church or rather chapel (subject to Bradford), dedicated to St. Michael, was rebuilt in 1757: *the living is a perpetual curacy, in the presentation of the vicar of Bradford and certain trustees; the present curate is the Rev. Patrick Brontë. The other places of worship are two chapels for baptists, one each for primitive and Wesleyan methodists, and another at Oxenhope for the latter denomination. There are two excellent free schools — one at Stanbury, the other, called the Free Grammar School, near Oxenhope; besides which there are several neat edifices erected for Sunday teaching. There are three annual fairs: they are held on Easter-Monday, the second Monday after St. Peter's day (old style), and the first Monday after Old Michaelmas day. The chapelry of Haworth, and its dependent hamlets, contained by the returns for* 1831, 5835 *inhabitants; and by the census taken in June,* 1841, *the population amounted to* 6301.

Haworth needs even to-day no further description, but the house in which Mr. Brontë resided, from 1820 till his death in 1861, has not been over-described, perhaps because Mr. Brontë's successor has not been too well disposed to receive the casual visitor to Haworth under his roof.

Many changes have been made since Mr. Brontë died, but the house still retains its essentially interesting features. In the time of the Brontës, it is true, the front outlook was as desolate as to-day it is attractive. Then there was a little piece of barren ground running down to the walls of the churchyard, with here and there a currant-bush as the sole adornment. Now we see an abundance of trees and a well-kept lawn. Miss Ellen Nussey well remembers seeing Emily and Anne, on a fine summer afternoon, sitting on stools in this bit of garden plucking currants from the poor insignificant bushes. There was no premonition of the time, not so far distant, when the rough doorway separating the churchyard from the garden, which was opened for their mother when they were little children, should be opened again time after time in rapid succession for their own biers to be carried through. This gateway is now effectively bricked up. In the days of the Brontës it was reserved for the passage of the dead — a grim arrangement, which, strange to say, finds no place in any one of the sisters' stories. We enter the house, and the door on the right leads into Mr. Brontë's study, always called the parlour; that on the left into the dining-room, where the children spent a great portion of their lives. From childhood to womanhood, indeed, the three girls regularly breakfasted with their father in his study. In the dining-room — a square and simple room of a kind common enough in the houses of the poorer middle-classes — they ate their mid-day dinner, their tea and supper. Mr. Brontë joined them at tea, although he always dined alone in his study. The children's dinner-table has been described to me by a visitor to the house. At one end sat Miss Branwell, at the other, Charlotte, with Emily and Anne on either side. Branwell was then absent. The living was of the simplest. A single joint, followed invariably by one kind or another of milk-pudding. Pastry was unknown in the Brontë household. Milk-puddings, or food composed of milk and rice, would seem to have made the principal diet of Emily and Anne Brontë, and to this they added a breakfast of Scotch porridge, which they shared with their dogs. It is more interesting, perhaps, to think of all the daydreams in that room, of the mass of writing which was achieved there, of the conversations and speculation as to the future. Miss Nussey has given a pleasant picture of twilight when Charlotte and she walked with arms encircling one another round and round the table, and Emily and Anne followed in similar fashion. There was no lack of cheerfulness and of hope at that period. Behind Mr. Brontë's studio was the kitchen; and there we may easily picture the Brontë children telling stories to Tabby or Martha, or to whatever servant reigned at the time, and learning, as all of them did, to become thoroughly domesticated — Emily most of all. Behind the dining-room was a peat-room, which, when Charlotte was married in 1854, was cleared out and converted into a little study for Mr. Nicholls. The staircase with its solid banister remains as it did half a century ago; and at its foot one is still shown the corner which tradition assigns as the scene of Emily's conflict with her dog Keeper. On the right, at the back, as you mount the staircase, was a small room allotted to Branwell as a studio. On the other side of this staircase, also at the back, was the servants' room. In the front of the house, immediately over the dining-room, was Miss Branwell's room, afterwards the spare bedroom until Charlotte Brontë married. In that room she died. On the left, over Mr. Brontë's study, was Mr. Brontë's bedroom. It was the room which, for many years, he shared with Branwell, and it was in that room that Branwell and his father died at an interval of twenty years. On the staircase, half-way up, was a grandfather's clock, which Mr. Brontë used to wind up every night on his way to bed. He always went to bed at nine o'clock, and Miss Nussey well remembers his stentorian tones as he called out as he left his study and passed the dining-room door — 'Don't be up late, children' — which they usually were. Between these two front rooms upstairs, and immediately over the passage, with a door facing the staircase, was a box room; but this was the children's nursery, where for many years the children slept, where the bulk of their little books were compiled, and where, it is more than probable, *The Professor* and *Jane Eyre* were composed.

Of the work of the Brontë children in these early years, a great deal might be written. Mrs. Gaskell gives a list of some eighteen booklets, but at least eighteen more from the pen of Charlotte are in existence. Branwell was equally prolific; and of him, also, there remains an immense mass of childish effort. That Emily and Anne were industrious in a like measure there is abundant reason to believe; but scarcely one of their juvenile efforts remains to us, nor even the unpublished fragments of later years, to which reference will be made a little later. Whether Emily and Anne on the eve of their death deliberately destroyed all their treasures, or whether they were destroyed by Charlotte in the days of her mourning, will never be known. Meanwhile one turns with interest to the efforts of Charlotte and Branwell. Charlotte's little stories commence in her thirteenth year, and go on until she is twenty-three. From thirteen to eighteen she would seem to have had one absorbing hero. It was the Duke of Wellington; and her hero-worship extended to the children of the Duke, who, indeed, would seem even more than their father to have absorbed her childish affections. Whether the stories are fairy tales or dramas of modern life, they all alike introduce the Marquis of Douro, who afterwards became the second Duke of Wellington, and Lord Charles Wellesley, whose son is now the third Duke of Wellington. The length of some of these fragments is indeed incredible. They fill but a few sheets of notepaper in that tiny handwriting; but when copied by zealous admirers, it is seen that more than one of them is twenty thousand words in length.

The Foundling, by Captain Tree, written in 1833, is a story of thirty-five thousand words, though the manuscript has only eighteen pages. *The Green Dwarf*, written in the same year, is even longer, and indeed after her return from Roe Head in 1833, Charlotte must have devoted herself to continuous writing. *The Adventures of Ernest Alembert* is a booklet of this date, and *Arthuriana, or Odds and Ends*: *being a Miscellaneous Collection of Pieces in Prose and Verse*, by Lord Charles Wellesley, is yet another.

The son of the Iron Duke is made to talk, in these little books, in a way which would have gladdened the heart of a modern interviewer:

'Lord Charles,' said Mr. Rundle to me one afternoon lately, 'I have an engagement to drink tea with an old college chum this evening, so I shall give you sixty lines of the *Æneid* to get ready during my absence. If it is not ready by the time I come back you know the consequences.' 'Very well, Sir,' said I, bringing out the books with a prodigious bustle, and making a show as if I intended to learn a whole book instead of sixty lines of the *Æneid*. This appearance of industry, however, lasted no longer than until the old gentleman's back was turned. No sooner had he fairly quitted the room than I flung aside the musty tomes, took my cap, and speeding through chamber, hall, and gallery, was soon outside the gates of Waterloo Palace.'

The Secret, another story, of which Mrs. Gaskell gave a facsimile of the first page, was also written in 1833, and indeed in this, her seventeenth year, Charlotte Brontë must have written as much as in any year of her life. When at Roe Head, 1832-3, she would seem to have worked at her studies, and particularly her drawing; but in the interval between Cowan Bridge and Roe Head she wrote a great deal. The earliest manuscripts in my possession bear date 1829 — that is to say, in Charlotte's thirteenth year. They are her *Tales of the Islanders*, which extend to four little volumes in brown paper covers neatly inscribed 'First Volume,' 'Second Volume,' and so on. The Duke is of absorbing importance in these 'Tales.' 'One evening the Duke of Wellington was writing in his room in Downing Street. He was reposing at his ease in a simple easy chair, smoking a homely tobacco-pipe, for he disdained all the modern frippery of cigars . . . ' and so on in an abundance of childish imaginings. *The Search after Happiness* and *Characters of Great Men of the Present Time* were also written in 1829. Perhaps the only juvenile fragment which is worth anything is also the only one in which she escapes from the Wellington enthusiasm. It has an interest also in indicating that Charlotte in her girlhood heard something of her father's native land. It is called —

AN ADVENTURE IN IRELAND

During my travels in the south of Ireland the following adventure happened to me. One evening in the month of August, after a long walk, I was ascending the mountain which overlooks the village of Cahill, when I suddenly came in sight of a fine old castle. It was built upon a rock, and behind it was a large wood and before it was a river. Over the river there was a bridge, which formed the approach to the castle. When I arrived at the bridge I stood still awhile to enjoy the prospect around me: far below was the wide sheet of still water in which the reflection of the pale moon was not disturbed by the smallest wave; in the valley was the cluster of cabins which is known by the appellation of Cahin, and beyond these were the mountains of Killala. Over all, the grey robe of twilight was now stealing with silent and scarcely perceptible advances. No sound except the hum of the distant village and the sweet song of the nightingale in the wood behind me broke upon the stillness of the scene. While I was contemplating this beautiful prospect, a gentleman, whom I had not before observed, accosted me with 'Good evening, sir; are you a stranger in these parts?' I replied that I was. He then asked me where I was going to stop for the night; I answered that I intended to sleep somewhere in the village. 'I am afraid you will find very bad accommodation there,' said the gentleman; 'but if you will take up your quarters with me at the castle, you are welcome.' I thanked him for his kind offer, and accepted it.

When we arrived at the castle I was shown into a large parlour, in which was an old lady sitting in an arm-chair by the fireside, knitting. On the rug lay a very pretty tortoise-shell cat. As soon as mentioned, the old lady rose; and when Mr. O'Callaghan (for that, I learned, was his name) told her who I was, she said in the most cordial tone that I was welcome, and asked me to sit down. In the course of conversation I learned that she was Mr. O'Callaghan's mother, and that his father had been dead about a year. We had sat about an hour, when supper was announced, and after supper Mr. O'Callaghan asked me if I should like to retire for the night. I answered in the affirmative, and a little boy was commissioned to show me to my apartment. It was a snug, clean, and comfortable little old-fashioned room at the top of the castle. As soon as we had entered, the boy, who appeared to be a shrewd, good-tempered little fellow, said with a shrug of the shoulder, 'If it was going to bed I was, it shouldn't be here that you'd catch me.' 'Why?' said I. 'Because,' replied the boy, 'they say that the ould masther's ghost has been seen sitting on that there chair.' 'And have you seen him?' 'No; but I've heard him washing his hands in that basin often and often.' 'What is your name, my little fellow?' 'Dennis Mulready, please your honour.' 'Well, good-night to you.' 'Good-night, masther; and may the saints keep you from all fairies and brownies,' said Dennis as he left the room.

As soon as I had laid down I began to think of what the boy had been telling me, and I confess I felt a strange kind of fear, and once or twice I even thought I could discern something white through the darkness which surrounded me. At length, by the help of reason, I succeeded in mastering these, what some would call idle fancies, and fell asleep. I had slept about an hour when a strange sound awoke me, and I saw looking through my curtains a skeleton wrapped in a white sheet. I was overcome with terror and tried to scream, but my tongue was paralysed and my whole frame shook with fear. In a deep hollow voice it said to me, 'Arise, that I may show thee this world's wonders,' and in an instant I found myself encompassed with clouds and darkness. But soon the roar of mighty waters fell upon my ear, and I saw some clouds of spray arising from high falls that rolled in awful majesty down tremendous precipices, and then foamed and thundered in the gulf beneath as if they had taken up their unquiet abode in some giant's cauldron. But soon the scene changed, and I found myself in the mines of Cracone. There were high pillars and stately arches, whose glittering splendour was never excelled by the brightest fairy palaces. There were not many lamps, only those of a few poor miners, whose rough visages formed a striking contrast to the dazzling figures and grandeur which surrounded them. But in the midst of all this magnificence I felt an indescribable sense of fear and terror, for the sea raged above us, and by the awful and tumultuous noises of roaring winds and dashing waves, it seemed as if the storm was violent. And now the mossy pillars groaned beneath the pressure of the ocean, and the glittering arches seemed about to be overwhelmed. When I heard the rushing waters and saw a mighty flood rolling towards me I gave a loud shriek of terror. The scene vanished, and I found myself in a wide desert full of barren rocks and high mountains. As I was approaching one of the rocks, in which there was a large cave, my foot stumbled and I fell. Just then I heard a deep growl, and saw by the unearthly light of his own fiery eyes a royal lion rousing himself from his kingly slumbers. His terrible eye was fixed upon me, and the desert rang and the rocks echoed with the tremendous roar of fierce delight which he uttered as he sprang towards me. 'Well, masther, it's been a windy night, though it's fine now,' said Dennis, as he drew the window-curtain and let the bright rays of the morning sun into the little old-fashioned room at the top of O'Callaghan Castle.

C. Brontë.

April the 28*th*, 1829.

Six numbers of *The Young Men's Magazine* were written in 1829; a very juvenile poem, *The Evening Walk*, by the Marquis of Douro, in 1830; and another, of greater literary value, *The Violet*, in the same year. In 1831 we have an unfinished poem, *The Trumpet Hath Sounded*; and in 1832 a very long poem called *The Bridal*. Some of them, as for example a poem called *Richard Coeur de Lion and Blondel*, are written in penny and twopenny notebooks of the kind used by laundresses. Occasionally her father has purchased a sixpenny book and has written within the cover —

All that is written in this book must be in a good, *plain*, *and legible hand*. — P. B.

While upon this topic, I may as well carry the record up to the date of publication of Currer Bell's poems. *A Leaf from an Unopened Volume* was written in 1834, as were also *The Death of Darius*, and *Corner Dishes*. *Saul*: *a Poem*, was written in 1835, and a number of other still unpublished verses. There is a story called *Lord Douro*, bearing date 1837, and a manuscript book of verses of 1838, but that pretty well exhausts the manuscripts before me previous to the days of serious literary activity. During the years as private governess (1839-1841) and the Brussels experiences (1842-1844), Charlotte would seem to have put all literary effort on one side.

There is only one letter of Charlotte Brontë's childhood. It is indorsed by Mr. Brontë on the cover *Charlotte's First Letter*, possibly for the guidance of Mrs. Gaskell, who may perhaps have thought it of insufficient importance. That can scarcely be the opinion of any one to-day. Charlotte, aged thirteen, is staying with the Fennells, her mother's friends of those early love-letters.

TO THE REV. P. BRONTË

'Parsonage House, Crosstone,

September 23*rd*, 1829.

'My dear Papa, — At Aunt's request I write these lines to inform you that "if all be well" we shall be at home on Friday by dinner-time, when we hope to find you in good health. On account of the bad weather we have not been out much, but notwithstanding we have spent our time very pleasantly, between reading, working, and learning our lessons, which Uncle Fennell has been so kind as to teach us every day. Branwell has taken two sketches from nature, and Emily, Anne, and myself have likewise each of us drawn a piece from some views of the lakes which Mr. Fennell brought with him from Westmoreland. The whole of these he intends keeping. Mr. Fennell is sorry he cannot accompany us to Haworth on Friday, for want of room, but hopes to have the pleasure of seeing you soon. All unite in sending their kind love with your affectionate daughter, ‘Charlotte Brontë.’

The following list includes the whole of the early Brontë Manuscripts known to me, or of which I can find any record: —

UNPUBLISHED BRONTË LITERATURE.

BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË

The Young Men’s Magazines. In Six Numbers

[Only four out of these six numbers appear to have been preserved.] 1829

The Search after Happiness: A Tale. By Charlotte Brontë 1829

Two Romantic Tales; viz. The Twelve Adventures, and An Adventure in Ireland 1829

Characters of Great Men of the Present Age, Dec. 17th 1829

Tales of the Islanders. By Charlotte Brontë: —

Vol. i. dated June 31, 1829
Vol. ii. dated December 2, 1829
Vol. iii. dated May 8, 1830
Vol. iv. dated July 30, 1830

[Accompanying these volumes is a one-page document detailing ‘The Origin of the Islanders.’ Dated March 12, 1829.]

The Evening Walk: A Poem. By the Marquis Douro 1830

A Translation into English Verse of the First Book of Voltaire’s Henriade. By Charlotte Brontë 1830

Albion and Marina: A Tale. By Lord Wellesley 1830

The Adventures of Ernest Alembert: A Fairy Tale. By Charlotte Brontë 1830

The Violet: A Poem. With several smaller Pieces. By the Marquess of Douro. Published by Seargeant Tree. Glasstown, 1830 1830

The Bridal. By C. Brontë 1832

Arthuriana; or, Odds and Ends: Being a Miscellaneous Collection of Pieces in Prose and Verse. By Lord Charles A. F. Wellesley 1833

Something about Arthur. Written by Charles Albert Florian Wellesley 1833

The Vision. By Charlotte Brontë 1833

The Secret and Lily Hart: Two Tales. By Lord Charles Wellesley

[The first page of this book is given in facsimile in vol. i. of Mrs. Gaskell’s Life of Charlotte Brontë.] 1833

Visits in Verdopolis. By the Honourable Charles Albert Florian Wellesley. Two vols. 1833

The Green Dwarf: A Tale of the Perfect Tense. By Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley. Charlotte Brontë. 1833

The Foundling: A Tale of our own Times. By Captain Tree 1833

Richard Cœur de Lion and Blondel. By Charlotte Brontë, 8vo, p . Signed in full Charlotte Brontë, and dated Haworth, near Bradford, Dec. 27th, 1833 1833

My Angria and the Angrians. By Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley 1834

A Leaf from an Unopened Volume; or, The Manuscript of an Unfortunate Author. Edited by Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley 1834

Corner Dishes: Being a small Collection of . . . Trifles in Prose and Verse. By Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley 1834

The Spell: An Extravaganza. By Lord Charles Albert Florian Wellesley. Signed Charlotte Brontë, June 21st, 1834. The contents include: 1. Preface, half page; 2. The Spell, 26 pages; 3. High Life in Verdopolis: or The Difficulties of Annexing a Suitable Title to a Work Practically Illustrated in Six Chapters. By Lord C. A. F. Wellesley, March 20, 1834, 22 pages; 4. The Scrap-Book: A Mingling of Many Things. Compiled by Lord C. A. F. Wellesley. C. Brontë, March 17th, 1835, 31 pages.

[This volume is in the British Museum.]

Death of Darius Cadomanus: A Poem. By Charlotte Brontë. P . Signed in full, and dated 1835

Saul and Memory: Two Poems. By C. Brontë. P 1835

Passing Events 1836

‘We Wove a Web in Childhood’: A poem (pp. vi.), signed C. Brontë, Haworth, Dec’br. 19th, 1835 1835

The Wounded Stag, and other Poems. Signed C. Brontë. Jan’y. 19, 1836. P 1836

Lord Douro: A Story. Signed C. Brontë. July 21st, 1837 1837

Poems. By C. Brontë. P 1838

Lettre d’Invitation à un Ecclésiastique. Signed Charlotte Brontë. Le 21 Juillet, 1842. Large 8vo, p . A French exercise written at Brussels 1842

John Henry. By Charlotte Brontë, Crown 8vo, p , written in pencil circa 1852

Willie Ellin. By Charlotte Brontë. Crown 8vo, p May and June 1853

The following, included in Charlotte’s ‘Catalogue of my Books’ printed by Mrs. Gaskell, are not now forthcoming:

Leisure Hours: A Tale, and two Fragments July 6th, 1829

The Adventures of Edward de Crak: A Tale Feb. 2nd, 1830

An Interesting Incident in the Lives of some of the most eminent Persons of the Age: A Tale June 10th, 1830

The Poetaster: A Drama. In two volumes, July 12th, 1830

A Book of Rhymes, finished December 17th, 1829

Miscellaneous Poems, finished

[These Miscellaneous Poems are probably poems written upon separate sheets, and not forming a complete book — indeed, some half dozen such separate poems are still extant. The last item given in Charlotte’s list of these Miscellaneous Poems is The Evening Walk, 1820; this is a separate book, and is included in the list above.] May 3rd, 1830

BY EMILY BRONTË

A volume of Poems, 8vo, p ; signed (at the top of the first page) E. J. B. Transcribed February 1814. Each poem is headed with the date of its composition. Of the poems included in this book four are still unprinted, the remainder were published in the Poems of 1846. The whole are written in microscopic characters 1844

A volume of Poems, square 8vo, p . Each poem is dated, and the first is signed E. J. Brontë, August 19th, 1837. Written in an ordinary, and not a minute, handwriting. All unpublished 1837-1839

A series of poems written in a minute hand upon both sides of fourteen or fifteen small slips of paper of various sizes. All unpublished 1833-1839

Lettre and Réponse. An exercise in French. Large 8vo, p . Signed E. J. Brontë, and dated 16 Juillet 1842

L'Amour Filial. An exercise in French. Small quarto, p . Signed in full Emily J. Brontë, and dated 5 Aout 1842

BY ANNE BRONTË.

Verses by Lady Geralda, and other poems. A crown 8vo volume of 28 pages. Each poem is signed (or initialled) and dated, the dates extending from 1836 to 1837. The poems are all unpublished 1836-1837

The North Wind, and other poems. A crown 8vo volume of 26 pages. Each poem is signed (or initialled) and dated, some having in addition to her own name the nom-de-guerre Alexandrina Zenobia or Olivia Vernon. The dates extend from 1838 to 1840. The poems are all unpublished 1838-1840

To Cowper, and other poems. 8vo, p . Of the nine poems contained in this volume three are signed Anne Brontë, four are signed A. Brontë, and two are initialled 'A. B.' All are dated. Part of these Poems are unpublished, the remainder appeared in the Poems of 1846 1842-1845

A thin 8vo volume of poems (mostly dated 1845), p , each being signed A. Brontë, or simply 'A. B.' — some having in addition to, or instead of, her own name the nom-de-guerre Zerona. A few of these poems are unprinted; the remainder are a portion of Anne's contribution to the Poems of 1846 circa 1845

Song: 'Should Life's first feelings be forgot' (one octavo leaf)

[A fair copy (2 p vo) of a poem by Branwell Brontë, in the hand-writing of Anne Brontë.] 1845

The Power of Love, and other poems. Post octavo, p . Each poem is signed (or initialled) and dated 1845-1846

Self Communion, a Poem. 8vo, p . Signed 'A. B.' and dated April 17th, 1848 1848

BY BRANWELL BRONTË.

The Battle of Washington. By P. B. Brontë. With full-page coloured illustrations

[An exceedingly childish production, and the earliest of all the Brontë manuscripts.] 1827

History of the Rebellion in my Army 1828

The Travels of Rolando Segur: Comprising his Adventures throughout the Voyage, and in America, Europe, the South Pole, etc. By Patrick Branwell Brontë. In two volumes 1829

A Collection of Poems. By Young Soult the Rhymer. Illustrated with Notes and Commentaries by Monsieur Chateaubriand. In two volumes 1829

The Liar Detected. By Captain Bud 1830

Caractacus: A Dramatic Poem. By Young Soult 1830

The Revenge: A Tragedy, in three Acts. By Young Soult. P. B. Brontë. In two volumes. Glasstown

[Although the title page reads ‘in two volumes,’ the book is complete in one volume only.] 1830

The History of the Young Men. By John Bud 1831

Letters from an Englishman. By Captain John Flower. In six volumes 1830-1832

The Monthly Intelligencer. No. 1

[The only number produced of a projected manuscript newspaper, by Branwell Brontë. The MS. consists of 4 p to, arranged in columns, precisely after the manner of an ordinary journal.] March 27, 1833

Real Life in Verdopolis: A Tale. By Captain John Flower, M.P. In two volumes. P. B. Brontë 1833

The Politics of Verdopolis: A Tale. By Captain John Flower. P. B. Brontë 1833

The Pirate: A Tale. By Captain John Flower

[The most pretentious of Branwell’s prose stories.] 1833

Thermopylae: A Poem. By P. B. Brontë. 8vo, p 1834

And the Weary are at Rest: A Tale. By P. B. Brontë 1834

The Wool is Rising: An Angrian Adventure. By the Right Honourable John Baron Flower 1834

Ode to the Polar Star, and other Poems. By P. B. Brontë. Quarto, p 1834

The Life of Field Marshal the Right Honourable Alexander Percy, Earl of Northangerland. In two volumes. By John Bud. P. B. Brontë 1835

The Rising of the Angrians: A Tale. By P. B. Brontë 1836

A Narrative of the First War. By P. B. Brontë 1836

The Angrian Welcome: A Tale. By P. B. Brontë 1836

Percy: A Story. By P. B. Brontë

A packet containing four small groups of Poems, of about six or eight pages each, mostly without titles, but all either signed or initialled, and dated from 1836 to 1838 1837

Love and Warfare: A Story. By P. B. Brontë 1839

Lord Nelson, and other Poems. By P. B. Brontë. Written in pencil.

Small 8vo, p

[This book contains a full-page pencil portrait of Branwell Brontë, drawn by himself, as well as four carefully finished heads. These give an excellent idea of the extent of Branwell's artistic skill.] 1844

CHAPTER III: SCHOOL AND GOVERNESS LIFE

In seeking for fresh light upon the development of Charlotte Brontë, it is not necessary to discuss further her childhood's years at Cowan Bridge. She left the school at nine years of age, and what memories of it were carried into womanhood were, with more or less of picturesque colouring, embodied in Jane Eyre. From 1825 to 1831 Charlotte was at home with her sisters, reading and writing as we have seen, but learning nothing very systematically. In 1831-32 she was a boarder at Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, some twenty miles from Haworth. Miss Wooler lived to a green old age, dying in the year 1885. She would seem to have been very proud of her famous pupil, and could not have been blind to her capacity in the earlier years. Charlotte was with her as governess at Roe Head, and later at Dewsbury Moor. It is quite clear that Miss Brontë was head of the school in all intellectual pursuits, and she made two firm friends — Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor. A very fair measure of French and some skill in drawing appear to have been the most striking accomplishments which Charlotte carried back from Roe Head to Haworth. There are some twenty drawings of about this date, and a translation into English verse of the first book of Voltaire's *Henriade*. With Ellen Nussey commenced a friendship which terminated only with the pencilled notes written from Charlotte Brontë's deathbed. The first suggestion of a regular correspondence is contained in the following letter.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *July* 21*st*, 1832.

'My dearest Ellen, — Your kind and interesting letter gave me the sincerest pleasure. I have been expecting to hear from you almost every day since my arrival at home, and I at length began to despair of receiving the wished-for letter. You ask me to give you a description of the manner in which I have passed every day since I left school. This is soon done, as an account of one day is an account of all. In the mornings, from nine o'clock to half-past twelve, I instruct my sisters and draw, then we walk till dinner; after dinner I sew till tea-time, and after tea I either read, write, do a little fancy-work, or draw, as I please. Thus in one delightful, though somewhat monotonous course, my life is passed. I have only been out to tea twice since I came home. We are expecting company this afternoon, and on Tuesday next we shall have all the female teachers of the Sunday school to tea. I do hope, my dearest Ellen, that you will return to school again for your own sake, though for mine I would rather that you would remain at home, as we shall then have more frequent opportunities of correspondence with each other. Should your friends decide against your returning to school, I know you have too much good-sense and right feeling not to strive earnestly for your own improvement. Your natural abilities are excellent, and under the direction of a judicious and able friend (and I know you have many such), you might acquire a decided taste for elegant literature, and even poetry, which, indeed, is included under that general term. I was very much disappointed by your not sending the hair; you may be sure, my dearest Ellen, that I would not grudge double postage to obtain it, but I must offer the same excuse for not sending you any. My aunt and sisters desire their love to you. Remember me kindly to your mother and sisters, and accept all the fondest expressions of genuine attachment, from your real friend

'Charlotte Brontë.

'*P.S.* — Remember the mutual promise we made of a regular correspondence with each other. Excuse all faults in this wretched scrawl. Give my love to the Miss Taylors when you see them. Farewell, my *dear*, *dear*, *dear* Ellen.'

Reading, writing, and as thorough a domestic training as the little parsonage could afford, made up the next few years. Then came the determination to be a governess — a not unnatural resolution when the size of the family and the modest stipend of its head are considered. Far more prosperous parents are content in our day that their daughters should earn their living in this manner. In 1835 Charlotte went back to Roe Head as governess, and she continued in that position when Miss Wooler removed her school to Dewsbury Moor in 1836.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Dewsbury Moor, *August* 24*th*, 1837.

'My dear Ellen, — I have determined to write lest you should begin to think I have forgotten you, and in revenge resolve to forget me. As you will perceive by the date of this letter, I am again engaged in the old business — teach, teach, teach. Miss and Mrs. Wooler are coming here next Christmas. Miss Wooler will then relinquish the school in favour of her sister Eliza, but I am happy to say worthy Miss Wooler will continue to reside in the house. I should be sorry indeed to part with her. When will you come *home*? Make haste, you have been at Bath long enough for all purposes. By this time you have acquired polish enough, I am sure. If the varnish is laid on much thicker, I am afraid the good wood underneath will be quite concealed, and your old Yorkshire friends won't stand that. Come, come, I am getting really tired of your absence. Saturday after Saturday comes round, and I can have no hope of hearing your knock at the door and then being told that "Miss E. N. is come." Oh dear! in this monotonous life of mine that was a pleasant event. I wish it would recur again, but it will take two or three interviews before the stiffness, the estrangement of this long separation will quite wear away. I have nothing at all to tell you now but that Mary Taylor is better, and that she and Martha are gone to take a tour in Wales. Patty came on her pony about a fortnight since to inform me that this important event was in contemplation.

She actually began to fret about your long absence, and to express the most eager wishes for your return. My own dear Ellen, good-bye. If we are all spared I hope soon to see you again. God bless you.

'C. Brontë.'

Things were not always going on quite so smoothly, as the following letter indicates.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Dewsbury Moor, *January* 4*th*, 1838.

'Your letter, Ellen, was a welcome surprise, though it contained something like a reprimand. I had not, however, forgotten our agreement. You were right in your conjectures respecting the cause of my sudden departure. Anne continued wretchedly ill, neither the pain nor the difficulty of breathing left her, and how could I feel otherwise than very miserable. I looked on her case in a different light to what I could wish or expect any uninterested person to view it in. Miss Wooler thought me a fool, and by way of proving her opinion treated me with marked coldness. We came to a little éclaircissement one evening. I told her one or two rather plain truths, which set her a-crying; and the next day, unknown to me, she wrote papa, telling him that I had reproached her bitterly, taken her severely to task, etc. Papa sent for us the day after he had received her letter. Meantime I had formed a firm resolution to quit Miss Wooler and her concerns for ever; but just before I went away, she took me to her room, and giving way to her feelings, which in general she restrains far too rigidly, gave me to understand that in spite of her cold, repulsive manners, she had a considerable regard for me, and would be very sorry to part with me. If any body likes me, I cannot help liking them; and remembering that she had in general been very kind to me, I gave in and said I would come back if she wished me. So we are settled again for the present, but I am not satisfied. I should have respected her far more if she had turned me out of doors, instead of crying for two days and two nights together. I was in a regular passion; my "*warm* temper" quite got the better of me, of which I don't boast, for it was a weakness; nor am I ashamed of it, for I had reason to be angry.

'Anne is now much better, though she still requires a great deal of care. However, I am relieved from my worst fears respecting her. I approve highly of the plan you mention, except as it regards committing a verse of the Psalms to memory. I do not see the direct advantage to be derived from that. We have entered on a new year. Will it be stained as darkly as the last with all our sins, follies, secret vanities, and uncontrolled passions and propensities? I trust not; but I feel in nothing better, neither humbler nor purer. It will want three weeks next Monday to the termination of the holidays. Come to see me, my dear Ellen, as soon as you can; however bitterly I sometimes feel towards other people, the recollection of your mild, steady friendship consoles and softens me. I am glad you are not such a passionate fool as myself. Give my best love to your mother and sisters. Excuse the most hideous scrawl that ever was penned, and — Believe me always tenderly yours,

‘C. Brontë.’

Dewsbury Moor, however, did not agree with Charlotte. That was probably the core of the matter. She returned to Haworth, but only to look around for another ‘situation.’ This time she accepted the position of private governess in the family of a Mr. Sidgwick, at Stonegappe, in the same county. Her letters from his house require no comment. A sentence from the first was quoted by Mrs. Gaskell.

TO MISS EMILY J. BRONTË

‘Stonegappe, *June* 8*th*, 1839.

‘Dearest Lavinia, — I am most exceedingly obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in seeking up my things and sending them all right. The box and its contents were most acceptable. I only wish I had asked you to send me some letter-paper. This is my last sheet but two. When you can send the other articles of raiment now manufacturing, I shall be right down glad of them.

‘I have striven hard to be pleased with my new situation. The country, the house, and the grounds are, as I have said, divine. But, alack-a-day! there is such a thing as seeing all beautiful around you — pleasant woods, winding white paths, green lawns, and blue sunshiny sky — and not having a free moment or a free thought left to enjoy them in. The children are constantly with me, and more riotous, perverse, unmanageable cubs never grew. As for correcting them, I soon quickly found that was entirely out of the question: they are to do as they like. A complaint to Mrs. Sidgwick brings only black looks upon oneself, and unjust, partial excuses to screen the children. I have tried that plan once. It succeeded so notably that I shall try it no more. I said in my last letter that Mrs. Sidgwick did not know me. I now begin to find that she does not intend to know me, that she cares nothing in the world about me except to contrive how the greatest possible quantity of labour may be squeezed out of me, and to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needlework, yards of cambric to hem, muslin night-caps to make, and, above all things, dolls to dress. I do not think she likes me at all, because I can’t help being shy in such an entirely novel scene, surrounded as I have hitherto been by strange and constantly changing faces. I see now more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil. While she is teaching the children, working for them, amusing them, it is all right. If she steals a moment for herself she is a nuisance. Nevertheless, Mrs. Sidgwick is universally considered an amiable woman. Her manners are fussily affable. She talks a great deal, but as it seems to me not much to the purpose. Perhaps I may like her better after a while. At present I have no call to her. Mr. Sidgwick is in my opinion a hundred times better — less profession, less bustling condescension, but a far kinder heart. It is very seldom that he speaks to me, but when he does I always feel happier and more settled for some minutes after. He never asks me to wipe the children's smutty noses or tie their shoes or fetch their pinafores or set them a chair. One of the pleasantest afternoons I have spent here — indeed, the only one at all pleasant — was when Mr. Sidgwick walked out with his children, and I had orders to follow a little behind. As he strolled on through his fields with his magnificent Newfoundland dog at his side, he looked very like what a frank, wealthy, Conservative gentleman ought to be. He spoke freely and unaffectedly to the people he met, and though he indulged his children and allowed them to tease himself far too much, he would not suffer them grossly to insult others.

'I am getting quite to have a regard for the Carter family. At home I should not care for them, but here they are friends. Mr. Carter was at Mirfield yesterday and saw Anne. He says she was looking uncommonly well. Poor girl, *she* must indeed wish to be at home. As to Mrs. Collins' report that Mrs. Sidgwick intended to keep me permanently, I do not think that such was ever her design. Moreover, I would not stay without some alterations. For instance, this burden of sewing would have to be removed. It is too bad for anything. I never in my whole life had my time so fully taken up. Next week we are going to Swarcliffe, Mr. Greenwood's place near Harrogate, to stay three weeks or a month. After that time I hope Miss Hoby will return. Don't show this letter to papa or aunt, only to Branwell. They will think I am never satisfied wherever I am. I complain to you because it is a relief, and really I have had some unexpected mortifications to put up with. However, things may mend, but Mrs. Sidgwick expects me to do things that I cannot do — to love her children and be entirely devoted to them. I am really very well. I am so sleepy that I can write no more. I must leave off. Love to all. — Good-bye.

'Direct your next dispatch — J. Greenwood, Esq., Swarcliffe, near Harrogate.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Swarcliffe, *June* 15*th*, 1839.

'My dearest Ellen, — I am writing a letter to you with pencil because I cannot just now procure ink without going into the drawing-room, where I do not wish to go. I only received your letter yesterday, for we are not now residing at Stonegappe but at Swarcliffe, a summer residence of Mr. Greenwood's, Mrs. Sidgwick's father; it is near Harrogate and Ripon. I should have written to you long since, and told you every detail of the utterly new scene into which I have lately been cast, had I not been daily expecting a letter from yourself, and wondering and lamenting that you did not write, for you will remember it was your turn. I must not bother you too much with my sorrows, of which, I fear, you have heard an exaggerated account. If you were near me, perhaps I might be tempted to tell you all, to grow egotistical, and pour out the long history of a private governess's trials and crosses in her first situation. As it is, I will only ask you to imagine the miseries of a reserved wretch like me thrown at once into the midst of a large family, proud as peacocks and wealthy as Jews, at a time when they were particularly gay, when the house was filled with company — all strangers: people whose faces I had never seen before. In this state I had a charge given of a set of horrid children, whom I was expected constantly to amuse, as well as instruct. I soon found that the constant demand on my stock of animal spirits reduced them to the lowest state of exhaustion; at times I felt — and, I suppose seemed — depressed. To my astonishment, I was taken to task on the subject by Mrs. Sidgwick, with a sternness of manner and a harshness of language scarcely credible. Like a fool, I cried most bitterly. I could not help it; my spirits quite failed me at first. I thought I had done my best, strained every nerve to please her; and to be treated in that way, merely because I was shy and sometimes melancholy, was too bad. At first I was for giving all up and going home. But after a little reflection, I determined to summon what energy I had, and to weather the storm. I said to myself, "I had never yet quitted a place without gaining a friend; adversity is a good school; the poor are born to labour, and the dependent to endure." I resolved to be patient, to command my feelings, and to take what came; the ordeal, I reflected, would not last many weeks, and I trusted it would do me good. I recollected the fable of the willow and the oak; I bent quietly, and now I trust the storm is blowing over. Mrs. Sidgwick is generally considered an agreeable woman; so she is, I doubt not, in general society. Her health is sound, her animal spirits good, consequently she is cheerful in company. But oh! does this compensate for the absence of every fine feeling, of every gentle and delicate sentiment? She behaves somewhat more civilly to me now than she did at first, and the children are a little more manageable; but she does not know my character, and she does not wish to know it. I have never had five minutes conversation with her since I came, except when she was scolding me. I have no wish to be pitied, except by yourself. If I were talking to you I could tell you much more. Good-bye, dear, dear Ellen. Write to me again very soon, and tell me how you are.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *July* 26*th*, 1839.

'Dear Ellen, — I left Swarcliffe a week since. I never was so glad to get out of a house in my life; but I'll trouble you with no complaints at present. Write to me directly; explain your plans more fully. Say when you go, and I shall be able in my answer to say decidedly whether I can accompany you or not. I must, I will, I'm set upon it — I'll be obstinate and bear down all opposition. — Good-bye, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

That experience with the Sidgwicks rankled for many a day, and we find Charlotte Brontë referring to it in her letters from Brussels. At the same time it is not necessary to assume any very serious inhumanity on the part of the

Sidgwicks or their successors the Whites, to whom Charlotte was indebted for her second term as private governess. Hers was hardly a temperament adapted for that docile part, and one thinks of the author of *Villette*, and the possessor of one of the most vigorous prose styles in our language, condemned to a perpetual manufacture of night-caps, with something like a shudder. And at the same time it may be urged that Charlotte Brontë did not suffer in vain, and that through her the calling of a nursery governess may have received some added measure of dignity and consideration on the part of sister-women.

A month or two later we find Charlotte dealing with the subject in a letter to Ellen Nussey.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *January* 24*th*, 1840.

'My dear Ellen, — You could never live in an unruly, violent family of modern children, such for instance as those at Blake Hall. Anne is not to return. Mrs. Ingham is a placid, mild woman; but as for the children, it was one struggle of life-wearing exertion to keep them in anything like decent order. I am miserable when I allow myself to dwell on the necessity of spending my life as a governess. The chief requisite for that station seems to me to be the power of taking things easily as they come, and of making oneself comfortable and at home wherever we may chance to be — qualities in which all our family are singularly deficient. I know I cannot live with a person like Mrs. Sidgwick, but I hope all women are not like her, and my motto is "try again." Mary Taylor, I am sorry to hear, is ill — have you seen her or heard anything of her lately? Sickness seems very general, and death too, at least in this neighbourhood. — Ever yours,

'C. B.'

She 'tried again' but with just as little success. In March 1841 she entered the family of a Mr. White of Upperwood House, Rawdon.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Upperwood House, *April* 1*st*, 1841.

'My dear Nell, — It is twelve o'clock at night, but I must just write to you a word before I go to bed. If you think I am going to refuse your invitation, or if you sent it me with that idea, you're mistaken. As soon as I read your shabby little note, I gathered up my spirits directly, walked on the impulse of the moment into Mrs. White's presence, popped the question, and for two minutes received no answer. Will she refuse me when I work so hard for her? thought I. "Ye-e-es" was said in a reluctant, cold tone. "Thank you, m'am," said I, with extreme cordiality, and was marching from the room when she recalled me with: "You'd better go on Saturday afternoon then, when the children have holiday, and if you return in time for them to have all their lessons on Monday morning, I don't see that much will be lost." You *are* a genuine Turk, thought I, but again I assented. Saturday after next, then, is the day appointed — *not next Saturday*, *mind*. I do not quite know whether the offer about the gig is not entirely out of your own head or if George has given his consent to it — whether that consent has not been wrung from him by the most persevering and irresistible teasing on the part of a certain young person of my acquaintance. I make no manner of doubt that if he does send the conveyance (as Miss Wooler used to denominate all wheeled vehicles) it will be to his own extreme detriment and inconvenience, but for once in my life I'll not mind this, or bother my head about it. I'll come — God knows with a thankful and joyful heart — glad of a day's reprieve from labour. If you don't send the gig I'll walk. Now mind, I am not coming to Brookroyd with the idea of dissuading Mary Taylor from going to New Zealand. I've said everything I mean to say on that subject, and she has a perfect right to decide for herself. I am coming to taste the pleasure of liberty, a bit of pleasant congenial talk, and a sight of two or three faces I like. God bless you. I want to see you again. Huzza for Saturday afternoon after next! Good-night, my lass.

'C. Brontë.

'Have you lit your pipe with Mr. Weightman's valentine?'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Upperwood House, *May* 4*th*, 1841.

'Dear Nell, — I have been a long time without writing to you; but I think, knowing as you do how I am situated in the matter of time, you will not be angry with me. Your brother George will have told you that he did not go into the house when we arrived at Rawdon, for which omission of his Mrs. White was very near blowing me up. She went quite red in the face with vexation when she heard that the gentleman had just driven within the gates and then back again, for she is very touchy in the matter of opinion. Mr. White also seemed to regret the circumstance from more hospitable and kindly motives. I assure you, if you were to come and see me you would have quite a fuss made over you. During the last three weeks that hideous operation called "a thorough clean" has been going on in the house. It is now nearly completed, for which I thank my stars, as during its progress I have fulfilled the twofold character of nurse and governess, while the nurse has been transmuted into cook and housemaid. That nurse, by-the-bye, is the prettiest lass you ever saw, and when dressed has much more the air of a lady than her mistress. Well can I believe that Mrs. White has been an exciseman's daughter, and I am convinced also that Mr. White's extraction is very low. Yet Mrs. White talks in an amusing strain of pomposity about his and her family and connections, and affects to look down with wondrous hauteur on the whole race of tradesfolk, as she terms men of business. I was beginning to think Mrs. White a good sort of body in spite of all her bouncing and boasting, her bad grammar and worse orthography, but I have had experience of one little trait in her character which condemns her a long way with me. After treating a person in the most familiar terms of equality for a long time, if any little thing goes wrong she does not scruple to give way to anger in a very coarse, unladylike manner. I think passion is the true test of vulgarity or refinement.

'This place looks exquisitely beautiful just now. The grounds are certainly lovely, and all is as green as an emerald. I wish you would just come and look at it. Mrs. White would be as proud as Punch to show it you. Mr. White has been writing an urgent invitation to papa, entreating him to come and spend a week here. I don't at all wish papa to come, it would be like incurring an obligation. Somehow, I have managed to get a good deal more control over the children lately — this makes my life a good deal easier; also, by dint of nursing the fat baby, it has got to know me and be fond of me. I suspect myself of growing rather fond of it. Exertion of any kind is always beneficial. Come and see me if you can in any way get, I *want* to see you. It seems Martha Taylor is fairly gone. Good-bye, my lassie. — Yours insufferably,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. HENRY NUSSEY, Earnley Rectory

'Upperwood House, Rawdon,
'*May* 9*th*, 1841.

'Dear Sir, — I am about to employ part of a Sunday evening in answering your last letter. You will perhaps think this hardly right, and yet I do not feel that I am doing wrong. Sunday evening is almost my only time of leisure. No one would blame me if I were to spend this spare hour in a pleasant chat with a friend — is it worse to spend it in a friendly letter?

'I have just seen my little noisy charges deposited snugly in their cribs, and I am sitting alone in the school-room with the quiet of a Sunday evening pervading the grounds and gardens outside my window. I owe you a letter — can I choose a better time than the present for paying my debt? Now, Mr. Nussey, you need not expect any gossip or news, I have none to tell you — even if I had I am not at present in the mood to communicate them. You will excuse an unconnected letter. If I had thought you critical or captious I would have declined the task of corresponding with you. When I reflect, indeed, it seems strange that I should sit down to write without a feeling of formality and restraint to an individual with whom I am personally so little acquainted as I am with yourself; but the fact is, I cannot be formal in a letter — if I write at all I must write as I think. It seems Ellen has told you that I am become a governess again. As you say, it is indeed a hard thing for flesh and blood to leave home, especially a *good* home — not a wealthy or splendid one. My home is humble and unattractive to strangers, but to me it contains what I shall find nowhere else in the world — the profound, the intense affection which brothers and sisters feel for each other when their minds are cast in the same mould, their ideas drawn from the same source — when they have clung to each other from childhood, and when disputes have never sprung up to divide them.

'We are all separated now, and winning our bread amongst strangers as we can — my sister Anne is near York, my brother in a situation near Halifax, I am here. Emily is the only one left at home, where her usefulness and willingness make her indispensable. Under these circumstances should we repine? I think not — our mutual affection ought to comfort us under all difficulties. If the God on whom we must all depend will but vouchsafe us health and the power to continue in the strict line of duty, so as never under any temptation to swerve from it an inch, we shall have ample reason to be grateful and contented.

'I do not pretend to say that I am always contented. A governess must often submit to have the heartache. My employers, Mr. and Mrs. White, are kind worthy people in their way, but the children are indulged. I have great difficulties to contend with sometimes. Perseverance will perhaps conquer them. And it has gratified me much to find that the parents are well satisfied with their children's improvement in learning since I came. But I am dwelling too much upon my own concerns and feelings. It is true they are interesting to me, but it is wholly impossible they should be so to you, and, therefore, I hope you will skip the last page, for I repent having written it.

'A fortnight since I had a letter from Ellen urging me to go to Brookroyd for a single day. I felt such a longing to have a respite from labour, and to get once more amongst "old familiar faces," that I conquered diffidence and asked Mrs. White to let me go. She complied, and I went accordingly, and had a most delightful holiday. I saw your mother, your sisters Mercy, Ellen, and poor Sarah, and your brothers Richard and George — all were well. Ellen talked of endeavouring to get a situation somewhere. I did not encourage the idea much. I advised her rather to go to Earnley for a while. I think she wants a change, and I dare say you would be glad to have her as a companion for a few months. — I remain, yours respectfully,

'C. Brontë.'

The above letter was written to Miss Nussey's brother, whose attachment to Charlotte Brontë has already more than once been mentioned in the current biographies. The following letter to Miss Nussey is peculiarly interesting because of the reference to Ireland. It would have been strange if Charlotte Brontë had returned as a governess to her father's native land. Speculation thereon is sufficiently foolish, and yet one is tempted to ask if Ireland might not have gained some of that local literary colour — one of its greatest needs — which always makes Scotland dear to the readers of *Waverley*, and Yorkshire classic ground to the admirers of *Shirley*.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Upperwood House, *June* 10*th*, 1841.

'Dear Nell, — If I don't scrawl you a line of some sort I know you will begin to fancy that I neglect you, in spite of all I said last time we met. You can hardly fancy it possible, I dare say, that I cannot find a quarter of an hour to scribble a note in; but when a note is written it is to be carried a mile to the post, and consumes nearly an hour, which is a large portion of the day. Mr.

and Mrs. White have been gone a week. I heard from them this morning; they are now at Hexham. No time is fixed for their return, but I hope it will not be delayed long, or I shall miss the chance of seeing Anne this vacation. She came home, I understand, last Wednesday, and is only to be allowed three weeks' holidays, because the family she is with are going to Scarborough. I should like to see her to judge for myself of the state of her health. I cannot trust any other person's report, no one seems minute enough in their observations. I should also very much have liked you to see her.

'I have got on very well with the servants and children so far, yet it is dreary, solitary work. You can tell as well as me the lonely feeling of being without a companion. I offered the Irish concern to Mary Taylor, but she is so circumstanced that she cannot accept it. Her brothers have a feeling of pride that revolts at the thought of their sister "going out." I hardly knew that it was such a degradation till lately.

'Your visit did me much good. I wish Mary Taylor would come, and yet I hardly know how to find time to be with her. Good-bye. God bless you.

'C. Brontë.

'I am very well, and I continue to get to bed before twelve o'clock p.m. I don't tell people that I am dissatisfied with my situation. I can drive on; there is no use in complaining. I have lost my chance of going to Ireland.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *July* 1*st*, 1841.

'Dear Nell, — I was not at home when I got your letter, but I am at home now, and it feels like paradise. I came last night. When I asked for a vacation, Mrs. White offered me a week or ten days, but I demanded three weeks, and stood to my tackle with a tenacity worthy of yourself, lassie. I gained the point, but I don't like such victories. I have gained another point. You are unanimously requested to come here next Tuesday and stay as long as you can. Aunt is in high good-humour. I need not write a long letter. — Good-bye, dear Nell.

'C. B.

'*P.S.* — I have lost the chance of seeing Anne. She is gone back to "The land of Egypt and the house of bondage." Also, little black Tom is dead. Every cup, however sweet, has its drop of bitterness in it. Probably you will be at a loss to ascertain the identity of black Tom, but don't fret about it, I'll tell you when you come. Keeper is as well, big, and grim as ever. I'm too happy to write. Come, come, lassie.'

It must have been during this holiday that the resolution concerning a school of their own assumed definite shape. Miss Wooler talked of giving up Dewsbury Moor — should Charlotte and Emily take it? Charlotte's recollections of her illness there settled the question in the negative, and Brussels was coming to the front.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Upperwood House, *October* 17*th*, 1841.

‘Dear Nell, — It is a cruel thing of you to be always upbraiding me when I am a trifle remiss or so in writing a letter. I see I can’t make you comprehend that I have not quite as much time on my hands as Miss Harris or Mrs. Mills. I never neglect you on purpose. I could not *do* it, you little teazing, faithless wretch.

‘The humour I am in is worse than words can describe. I have had a hideous dinner of some abominable spiced-up indescribable mess and it has exasperated me against the world at large. So you are coming home, are you? Then don’t expect me to write a long letter. I am not going to Dewsbury Moor, as far as I can see at present. It was a decent friendly proposal on Miss Wooler’s part, and cancels all or most of her little foibles, in my estimation; but Dewsbury Moor is a poisoned place to me; besides, I burn to go somewhere else. I think, Nell, I see a chance of getting to Brussels. Mary Taylor advises me to this step. My own mind and feelings urge me. I can’t write a word more.

‘C. B.’

TO MISS EMILY J. BRONTË

‘Upperwood House, Rawdon,
‘*Nov*. 7*th*, 1841.

‘Dear E. J., — You are not to suppose that this note is written with a view of communicating any information on the subject we both have considerably at heart: I have written letters but I have received no letters in reply yet. Belgium is a long way off, and people are everywhere hard to spur up to the proper speed. Mary Taylor says we can scarcely expect to get off before January. I have wished and intended to write to both Anne and Branwell, but really I have not had time.

‘Mr. Jenkins I find was mistakenly termed the British Consul at Brussels; he is in fact the English Episcopal clergyman.

‘I think perhaps we shall find that the best plan will be for papa to write a letter to him by and bye, but not yet. I will give an intimation when this should be done, and also some idea of what had best be said. Grieve not over Dewsbury Moor. You were cut out there to all intents and purposes, so in fact was Anne, Miss Wooler would hear of neither for the first half year.

‘Anne seems omitted in the present plan, but if all goes right I trust she will derive her full share of benefit from it in the end. I exhort all to hope. I believe in my heart this is acting for the best, my only fear is lest others should doubt and be dismayed. Before our half year in Brussels is completed, you and I will have to seek employment abroad. It is not my intention to retrace my steps home till twelve months, if all continues well and we and those at home retain good health.

‘I shall probably take my leave of Upperwood about the 15th or 17th of December. When does Anne talk of returning? How is she? What does W. W. say to these matters? How are papa and aunt, do they flag? How will Anne get on with Martha? Has W. W. been seen or heard of lately? Love to all. Write quickly. — Good-bye.

‘C. Brontë.

‘I am well.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘Rawdon, *December* 10*th*, 1841.

‘My dear Ellen, — I hear from Mary Taylor that you are come home, and also that you have been ill. If you are able to write comfortably, let me know the feelings that preceded your illness, and also its effects. I wish to see you. Mary Taylor reports that your looks are much as usual. I expect to get back to Haworth in the course of a fortnight or three weeks. I hope I shall then see you. I would rather you came to Haworth than I went to Brookroyd. My plans advance slowly and I am not yet certain where I shall go, or what I shall do when I leave Upperwood House. Brussels is still my promised land, but there is still the wilderness of time and space to cross before I reach it. I am not likely, I think, to go to the Château de Kockleberg. I have heard of a less expensive establishment. So far I had written when I received your letter. I was glad to get it. Why don’t you mention your illness. I had intended to have got this note off two or three days past, but I am more straitened for time than ever just now. We have gone to bed at twelve or one o’clock during the last three nights. I must get this scrawl off to-day or you will think me negligent. The new governess, that is to be, has been to see my plans, etc. My dear Ellen, Good-bye. — Believe me, in heart and soul, your sincere friend,

‘C. B.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*December* 17*th*, 1841.

‘My dear Ellen, — I am yet uncertain when I shall leave Upperwood, but of one thing I am very certain, when I do leave I must go straight home. It is absolutely necessary that some definite arrangement should be commenced for our future plans before I go visiting anywhere. That I wish to see you I know, that I intend and *hope* to see you before long I also know, that you will at the first impulse accuse me of neglect, I fear, that upon consideration you will acquit me, I devoutly trust. Dear Ellen, come to Haworth if you can, if you cannot I will endeavour to come for a day at least to Brookroyd, but do not depend on this — come to Haworth. I thank you for Mr. Jenkins’ address. You always think of other people’s convenience, however ill and affected you are yourself. How very much I wish to see you, you do not know; but if I were to go to Brookroyd now, it would deeply disappoint those at home. I have some hopes of seeing Branwell at Xmas, and when I shall be able to see him afterwards I cannot tell. He has never been at home for the last five months. — Good-night, dear Ellen,

‘C. B.’

TO MISS MERCY NUSSEY

‘Rawdon, *December* 17*th*.

‘My dear Miss Mercy, — Though I am very much engaged I must find time to thank you for the kind and polite contents of your note. I should act in the manner most consonant with my own feelings if I at once, and without qualification, accepted your invitation. I do not however consider it advisable to indulge myself so far at present. When I leave Upperwood I must go straight home. Whether I shall afterwards have time to pay a short visit to Brookroyd I do not yet know — circumstances must determine that. I would fain see Ellen at Haworth instead; our visitations are not shared with any show of justice. It shocked me very much to hear of her illness — may it be the first and last time she ever experiences such an attack! Ellen, I fear, has thought I neglected her, in not writing sufficiently long or frequent letters. It is a painful idea to me that she has had this feeling — it could not be more groundless. I know her value, and I would not lose her affection for any probable compensation I can imagine. Remember me to your mother. I trust she will soon regain her health. — Believe me, my dear Miss Mercy, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘Haworth, *January* 10*th*, 1842.

‘My dear Ellen, — Will you write as soon as you get this and fix your own day for coming to Haworth? I got home on Christmas Eve. The parting scene between me and my late employers was such as to efface the memory of much that annoyed me while I was there, but indeed, during the whole of the last six months they only made too much of me. Anne has rendered herself so valuable in her difficult situation that they have entreated her to return to them, if it be but for a short time. I almost think she will go back, if we can get a good servant who will do all our work. We want one about forty or fifty years old, good-tempered, clean, and honest. You shall hear all about Brussels, etc., when you come. Mr. Weightman is still here, just the same as ever. I have a curiosity to see a meeting between you and him. He will be again desperately in love, I am convinced. *Come*.

‘C. B.’

CHAPTER IV: THE PENSIONNAT HÉGER, BRUSSELS

Had not the impulse come to Charlotte Brontë to add somewhat to her scholastic accomplishments by a sojourn in Brussels, our literature would have lost that powerful novel *Villette*, and the singularly charming *Professor*. The impulse came from the persuasion that without 'languages' the school project was an entirely hopeless one. Mary and Martha Taylor were at Brussels, staying with friends, and thence they had sent kindly presents to Charlotte, at this time raging under the yoke of governess at Upperwood House. Charlotte wrote the diplomatic letter to her aunt which ended so satisfactorily. The good lady — Miss Branwell was then about sixty years of age — behaved handsomely by her nieces, and it was agreed that Charlotte and Emily were to go to the Continent, Anne retaining her post of governess with Mrs. Robinson at Thorp Green. But Brussels schools did not seem at the first blush to be very satisfactory. Something better promised at Lille.

Here is a letter written at this period of hesitation and doubt. A portion of it only was printed by Mrs. Gaskell.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 20*th*, 1842.

'Dear Ellen, — I cannot quite enter into your friends' reasons for not permitting you to come to Haworth; but as it is at present, and in all human probability will be for an indefinite time to come, impossible for me to get to Brookroyd, the balance of accounts is not so unequal as it might otherwise be. We expect to leave England in less than three weeks, but we are not yet certain of the day, as it will depend upon the convenience of a French lady now in London, Madame Marzials, under whose escort we are to sail. Our place of destination is changed. Papa received an unfavourable account from Mr. or rather Mrs. Jenkins of the French schools in Brussels, and on further inquiry, an Institution in Lille, in the North of France, was recommended by Baptist Noel and other clergymen, and to that place it is decided that we are to go. The terms are fifty pounds for each pupil for board and French alone.

'I considered it kind in aunt to consent to an extra sum for a separate room. We shall find it a great privilege in many ways. I regret the change from Brussels to Lille on many accounts, chiefly that I shall not see Martha Taylor. Mary has been indefatigably kind in providing me with information. She has grudged no labour, and scarcely any expense, to that end. Mary's price is above rubies. I have, in fact, two friends — you and her — staunch and true, in whose faith and sincerity I have as strong a belief as I have in the Bible. I have bothered you both, you especially; but you always get the tongs and heap coals of fire upon my head. I have had letters to write lately to

Brussels, to Lille, and to London. I have lots of chemises, night-gowns, pocket-handkerchiefs, and pockets to make, besides clothes to repair. I have been, every week since I came home, expecting to see Branwell, and he has never been able to get over yet. We fully expect him, however, next Saturday. Under these circumstances how can I go visiting? You tantalise me to death with talking of conversations by the fireside. Depend upon it, we are not to have any such for many a long month to come. I get an interesting impression of old age upon my face, and when you see me next I shall certainly wear caps and spectacles. — Yours affectionately,

'C. B.'

This Mr. Jenkins was chaplain to the British Embassy at Brussels, and not Consul, as Charlotte at first supposed. The brother of his wife was a clergyman living in the neighbourhood of Haworth. Mr. Jenkins, whose English Episcopal chapel Charlotte attended during her stay in Brussels, finally recommended the Pensionnat Héger in the Rue d'Isabelle. Madame Héger wrote, accepting the two girls as pupils, and to Brussels their father escorted them in February 1842, staying one night at the house of Mr. Jenkins and then returning to Haworth.

The life of Charlotte Brontë at Brussels has been mirrored for us with absolute accuracy in *Villette* and *The Professor*. That, indeed, from the point of view of local colour, is made sufficiently plain to the casual visitor of to-day who calls in the Rue d'Isabelle. The house, it is true, is dismantled with a view to its incorporation into some city buildings in the background, but one may still eat pears from the 'old and huge fruit-trees' which flourished when Charlotte and Emily walked under them half a century ago; one may still wander through the school-rooms, the long dormitories, and into the 'vine-draped *berceau*' — little enough is changed within and without. Here is the dormitory with its twenty beds, the two end ones being occupied by Emily and Charlotte, they alone securing the privilege of age or English eccentricity to curtain off their beds from the gaze of the eighteen girls who shared the room with them. The crucifix, indeed, has been removed from the niche in the *Oratoire* where the children offered up prayer every morning; but with a copy of *Villette* in hand it is possible to restore every feature of the place, not excluding the adjoining Athenée with its small window overlooking the garden of the Pensionnat and the *allée défendu*. It was from this window that Mr. Crimsworth of *The Professor* looked down upon the girls at play. It was here, indeed, at the Royal Athenée, that M. Héger was Professor of Latin. Externally, then, the Pensionnat Héger remains practically the same as it appeared to Charlotte and Emily Brontë in February 1842, when they made their first appearance in Brussels. The Rue Fossette of *Villette*, the Rue d'Isabelle of *The Professor*, is the veritable Rue d'Isabelle of Currer Bell's experience.

What, however, shall we say of the people who wandered through these rooms and gardens — the hundred or more children, the three or four governesses, the professor and his wife? Here there has been much speculation and not a little misreading of the actual facts. Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels to learn. They did learn with energy. It was their first experience of foreign travel, and it came too late in life for them to enter into it with that breadth of mind and tolerance of the customs of other lands, lacking which the Englishman abroad is always an offence. Charlotte and Emily hated the land and people. They had been brought up ultra-Protestants. Their father was an Ulster man, and his one venture into the polemics of his age was to attack the proposals for Catholic emancipation. With this inheritance of intolerance, how could Charlotte and Emily face with kindliness the Romanism which they saw around them? How heartily they disapproved of it many a picture in *Villette* has made plain to us.

Charlotte had been in Brussels three months when she made the friendship to which I am indebted for anything that there may be to add to this episode in her life. Miss Lætitia Wheelwright was one of five sisters, the daughters of a doctor in Lower Phillimore Place, Kensington. Dr. Wheelwright went to Brussels for his health and for his children's education. The girls were day boarders at the Pensionnat, but they lived in the house for a full month or more at a time when their father and mother were on a trip up the Rhine. Otherwise their abode was a flat in the Hotel Clusyenaar in the Rue Royale, and there during her later stay in Brussels Charlotte frequently paid them visits. In this earlier period Charlotte and Emily were too busy with their books to think of 'calls' and the like frivolities, and it must be confessed also that at this stage Lætitia Wheelwright would have thought it too high a price for a visit from Charlotte to receive as a fellow-guest the apparently unamiable Emily. Miss Wheelwright, who was herself fourteen years of age when she entered the Pensionnat Héger, recalls the two sisters, thin and sallow-looking, pacing up and down the garden, friendless and alone. It was the sight of Lætitia standing up in the class-room and glancing round with a semi-contemptuous air at all these Belgian girls which attracted Charlotte Brontë to her. 'It was so very English,' Miss Brontë laughingly remarked at a later period to her friend. There was one other English girl at this time of sufficient age to be companionable; but with Miss Maria Miller, whom Charlotte Brontë has depicted under the guise of Ginevra Fanshawe, she had less in common. In later years Miss Miller became Mrs. Robertson, the wife of an author in one form or another.

To Miss Wheelwright, and those of her sisters who are still living, the descriptions of the Pensionnat Héger which are given in *Villette* and *The Professor* are perfectly accurate. M. Héger, with his heavy black moustache and his black hair, entering the class-room of an evening to read to his pupils was a sufficiently familiar object, and his keen intelligence amounting almost to genius had affected the Wheelwright girls as forcibly as it had done the Brontës. Mme. Héger, again, for ever peeping from behind doors and through the plate-glass partitions which separate the passages from the school-rooms, was a constant source of irritation to all the English pupils. This prying and spying is, it is possible, more of a fine art with the school-mistresses of the Continent than with those of our own land. In any case, Mme. Héger was an accomplished spy, and in the midst of the most innocent work or recreation the pupils would suddenly see a pair of eyes pierce the dusk and disappear. This, and a hundred similar trifles, went to build up an antipathy on both sides, which had, however, scarcely begun when Charlotte and Emily were suddenly called home by their aunt's death in October. A letter to Miss Nussey on her return sufficiently explains the situation.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *November* 10*th*, 1842.

'My dear Ellen, — I was not yet returned to England when your letter arrived. We received the first news of aunt's illness, Wednesday, Nov. 2nd. We decided to come home directly. Next morning a second letter informed us of her death. We sailed from Antwerp on Sunday; we travelled day and night and got home on Tuesday morning — and of course the funeral and all was over. We shall see her no more. Papa is pretty well. We found Anne at home; she is pretty well also. You say you have had no letter from me for a long time. I wrote to you three weeks ago. When you answer this note, I will write to you more in detail. Aunt, Martha Taylor, and Mr. Weightman are now all gone; how dreary and void everything seems. Mr. Weightman's illness was exactly what Martha's was — he was ill the same length of time and died in the same manner. Aunt's disease was internal obstruction; she also was ill a fortnight.

'Good-bye, my dear Ellen.

'C. Brontë.'

The aunt whose sudden death brought Charlotte and Emily Brontë thus hastily from Brussels to Haworth must have been a very sensible woman in the main. She left her money to those of her nieces who most needed it. A perusal of her will is not without interest, and indeed it will be seen that it clears up one or two errors into which Mrs. Gaskell and subsequent biographers have rashly fallen through failing to expend the necessary half-guinea upon a copy. This is it: —

Extracted from the District Probate Registry at York attached to Her Majesty's High Court of Justice.

Depending on the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for peace here, and glory and bliss forever hereafter, I leave this my last Will and Testament: Should I die at Haworth, I request that my remains may be deposited in the church in that place as near as convenient to the remains of my dear sister; I moreover will that all my just debts and funeral expenses be paid out of my property, and that my funeral shall be conducted in a moderate and decent manner. My Indian workbox I leave to my niece, Charlotte Brontë; my workbox with a china top I leave to my niece, Emily Jane Brontë, together with my ivory fan; my Japan dressing-box I leave to my nephew, Patrick Branwell Brontë; to my *niece Anne Brontë, I leave my watch with all that belongs to it; as also my eye-glass and its chain, my rings, silver-spoons, books, clothes, etc., etc., I leave to be divided between my above-named three nieces, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Jane Brontë, and Anne Brontë, according as their father shall think proper. And I will that all the money that shall remain, including twenty-five pounds sterling, being the part of the proceeds of the sale of my goods which belong to me in consequence of my having advanced to my sister Kingston the sum of twenty-five pounds in lieu of her share of the proceeds of my goods aforesaid, and deposited in the bank of Bolitho Sons and Co., Esqrs., of Chiandower, near Penzance, after the aforesaid sums and articles shall have been paid and deducted, shall be put into some safe bank or lent on good landed security, and there left to accumulate for the sole benefit of my four nieces, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Jane Brontë, Anne Brontë, and Elizabeth Jane Kingston; and this sum or sums, and whatever other property I may have, shall be equally divided between them when the youngest of them then living shall have arrived at the age of twenty-one years. And should any one or more of these my four nieces die, her or their part or parts shall be equally divided amongst the survivors; and if but one is left, all shall go to that one: And should they all die before the age of twenty-one years, all their parts shall be given to my sister, Anne Kingston; and should she die before that time specified, I will that all that was to have been hers shall be equally divided between all the surviving children of my dear brother and sisters. I appoint my brother-in-law, the Rev. P. Brontë,* A.B., *now Incumbent of Haworth, Yorkshire; the Rev. John Fennell, now Incumbent of Cross Stone, near Halifax; the Rev. Theodore Dury, Rector of Keighley, Yorkshire; and Mr. George Taylor of Stanbury, in the chapelry of Haworth aforesaid, my executors. Written by me,* Elizabeth Branwell, *and signed, sealed, and delivered on the* 30*th of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-three,* Elizabeth Branwell. *Witnesses present, William Brown, John Tootill, William Brown, Junr.*

The twenty-eighth day of December, 1842, *the Will of* Elizabeth Branwell, *late of Haworth, in the parish of Bradford, in the county of York, spinster (having bona notabilia within the province of York). Deceased was proved in the prerogative court of York by the oaths of the Reverend Patrick Brontë, clerk, brother-in-law; and George Taylor, two of the executors to whom administration was granted (the Reverend Theodore Dury, another of the executors, having renounced), they having been first sworn duly to administer.*

Effects sworn under £1500.

Testatrix died 29th October 1842.

Now hear Mrs. Gaskell: —

The small property, which she had accumulated by dint of personal frugality and self-denial, was bequeathed to her nieces. Branwell, her darling, was to have had his share, but his reckless expenditure had distressed the good old lady, and his name was omitted in her will.

A perusal of the will in question indicates that it was made in 1833, before Branwell had paid his first visit to London, and when, as all his family supposed, he was on the high road to fame and fortune as an artist. The old lady doubtless thought that the boy would be able to take good care of himself. She had, indeed, other nieces down in Cornwall, but with the general sympathy of her friends and relatives in Penzance, Elizabeth Jane Kingston, who it was thought would want it most, was to have a share. Had the Kingston girl, her mother, and the Brontë girls all died before him, the boy Branwell, it will be seen, would have shared the property with his Branwell cousins in Penzance, of whom two are still alive. In any case, Branwell's name was mentioned, and he received 'my Japan dressing-box,' whatever that may have been worth.

Three or four letters, above and beyond these already published, were written by Charlotte to her friend in the interval between Miss Branwell's death and her return to Brussels; and she paid a visit to Miss Nussey at Brookroyd, and it was returned.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *November* 20*th*, 1842.

'Dear Ellen, — I hope your brother is sufficiently recovered now to dispense with your constant attendance. Papa desires his compliments to you, and says he should be very glad if you could give us your company at Haworth a little while. Can you come on Friday next? I mention so early a day because Anne leaves us to return to York on Monday, and she wishes very much to see you before her departure. I think your brother is too good-natured to object to your coming. There is little enough pleasure in this world, and it would be truly unkind to deny to you and me that of meeting again after so long a separation. Do not fear to find us melancholy or depressed. We are all much as usual. You will see no difference from our former demeanour. Send an immediate answer.

'My love and best wishes to your sister and mother.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *November* 25*th*, 1842.

'My dear Ellen, — I hope that invitation of yours was given in real earnest, for I intend to accept it. I wish to see you, and as in a few weeks I shall probably again leave England, I will not be too delicate and ceremonious and so let the present opportunity pass. Something says to me that it will not be too convenient to have a guest at Brookroyd while there is an invalid there — however, I listen to no such suggestions. Anne leaves Haworth on Tuesday at 6 o'clock in the morning, and we should reach Bradford at half-past eight. There are many reasons why I should have preferred your coming to Haworth, but as it appears there are always obstacles which prevent that, I'll break through ceremony, or pride, or whatever it is, and, like Mahomet, go to the mountain which won't or can't come to me. The coach stops at the

Bowling Green Inn, in Bradford. Give my love to your sister and mother.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *January* 10*th*, 1843.

'Dear Nell, — It is a singular state of things to be obliged to write and have nothing worth reading to say. I am glad you got home safe. You are an excellent good girl for writing to me two letters, especially as they were such long ones. Branwell wants to know why you carefully exclude all mention of him when you particularly send your regards to every other member of the family. He desires to know whether and in what he has offended you, or whether it is considered improper for a young lady to mention the gentlemen of a house. We have been one walk on the moors since you left. We have been to Keighley, where we met a person of our acquaintance, who uttered an interjection of astonishment on meeting us, and when he could get his breath, informed us that he had heard I was dead and buried.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *January* 15*th*, 1843.

'Dear Nell, — I am much obliged to you for transferring the roll of muslin. Last Saturday I found the other gift, for which you deserve smothering. I will deliver Branwell your message. You have left your Bible — how can I send it? I cannot tell precisely what day I leave home, but it will be the last week in this month. Are you going with me? I admire exceedingly the costume you have chosen to appear in at the Birstall rout. I think you say pink petticoat, black jacket, and a wreath of roses — beautiful! For a change I would advise a black coat, velvet stock and waistcoat, white pantaloons, and smart boots. Address Rue d'Isabelle. Write to me again, that's a good girl, very soon. Respectful remembrances to your mother and sister.

'C. Brontë.'

Then she is in Brussels again, as the following letter indicates.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Brussels, *January* 30*th*, 1843.

'Dear Ellen, — I left Leeds for London last Friday at nine o'clock; owing to delay we did not reach London till ten at night — two hours after time. I took a cab the moment I arrived at Euston Square, and went forthwith to London Bridge Wharf. The packet lay off that wharf, and I went on board the same night. Next morning we sailed. We had a prosperous and speedy voyage, and landed at Ostend at seven o'clock next morning. I took the train at twelve and reached Rue d'Isabelle at seven in the evening. Madame Héger received me with great kindness. I am still tired with the continued excitement of three days' travelling. I had no accident, but of course some anxiety. Miss Dixon called this afternoon. Mary Taylor had told her I should be in Brussels the last week in January. I am going there on Sunday, D.V. Address — Miss Brontë, Chez Mme. Héger, 32 Rue d'Isabelle, Bruxelles. — Good-bye, dear.

‘C. B.’

This second visit of Charlotte Brontë to Brussels has given rise to much speculation, some of it of not the pleasantest kind. It is well to face the point bluntly, for it has been more than once implied that Charlotte Brontë was in love with M. Héger, as her prototype Lucy Snowe was in love with Paul Emanuel. The assumption, which is absolutely groundless, has had certain plausible points in its favour, not the least obvious, of course, being the inclination to read autobiography into every line of Charlotte Brontë’s writings. Then there is a passage in a printed letter to Miss Nussey which has been quoted as if to bear out this suggestion: ‘I returned to Brussels after aunt’s death,’ she writes, ‘against my conscience, prompted by what then seemed an irresistible impulse. I was punished for my selfish folly by a total withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind.’

It is perfectly excusable for a man of the world, unacquainted with qualifying facts, to assume that for these two years Charlotte Brontë’s heart was consumed with an unquenchable love for her professor — held in restraint, no doubt, as the most censorious admit, but sufficiently marked to secure the jealousy and ill-will of Madame Héger. Madame Héger and her family, it must be admitted, have kept this impression afloat. Madame Héger refused to see Mrs. Gaskell when she called upon her in the Rue d’Isabelle; and her daughters will tell you that their father broke off his correspondence with Miss Brontë because his favourite English pupil showed an undue extravagance of devotion. ‘Her attachment after her return to Yorkshire,’ to quote a recent essay on the subject, ‘was expressed in her frequent letters in a tone that her Brussels friends considered it not only prudent but kind to check. She was warned by them that the exaltation these letters betrayed needed to be toned down and replaced by what was reasonable. She was further advised to write only once in six months, and then to limit the subject of her letters to her own health and that of her family, and to a plain account of her circumstances and occupations.’ Now to all this I do not hesitate to give an emphatic contradiction, a contradiction based upon the only independent authority available. Miss Lætitia Wheelwright and her sisters saw much of Charlotte Brontë during this second sojourn in Brussels, and they have a quite different tale to tell. That misgiving of Charlotte, by the way, which weighed so heavily upon her mind afterwards, was due to the fact that she had left her father practically unprotected from the enticing company of a too festive curate. He gave himself up at this time to a very copious whisky drinking, from which Charlotte’s home-coming speedily rescued him.

Madame Héger did indeed hate Charlotte Brontë in her later years. This is not unnatural when we remember how that unfortunate woman has been gibbeted for all time in the characters of Mlle. Zoraïde Reuter and Madame Beck. But in justice to the creator of these scathing portraits, it may be mentioned that Charlotte Brontë took every precaution to prevent *Villette* from obtaining currency in the city which inspired it. She told Miss Wheelwright, with whom naturally, on her visits to London, she often discussed the Brussels life, that she had received a promise that there should be no translation, and that the book would never appear in the French language. One cannot therefore fix upon Charlotte Brontë any responsibility for the circumstance that immediately after her death the novel appeared in the only tongue understood by Madame Héger.

Miss Wheelwright informs me that Charlotte Brontë did certainly admire M. Héger, as did all his pupils, very heartily. Charlotte's first impression, indeed, was not flattering: 'He is professor of rhetoric, a man of power as to mind, but very choleric and irritable in temperament; a little black being, with a face that varies in expression. Sometimes he borrows the lineaments of an insane tom-cat, sometimes those of a delirious hyena; occasionally, but very seldom, he discards these perilous attractions and assumes an air not above 100 degrees removed from mild and gentleman-like.' But he was particularly attentive to Charlotte; and as he was the first really intelligent man she had met, the first man, that is to say, with intellectual interests — for we know how much she despised the curates of her neighbourhood — she rejoiced at every opportunity of doing verbal battle with him, for Charlotte inherited, it may be said, the Irish love of debate. Some time after Charlotte had returned to England, and when in the height of her fame, she met her Brussels school-fellow in London. Miss Wheelwright asked her whether she still corresponded with M. Héger. Charlotte replied that she had discontinued to do so. M. Héger had mentioned in one letter that his wife did not like the correspondence, and he asked her therefore to address her letters to the Royal Athenée, where, as I have mentioned, he gave lessons to the boys. 'I stopped writing at once,' Charlotte told her friend. 'I would not have dreamt of writing to him when I found it was disagreeable to his wife; certainly I would not write unknown to her.' 'She said this,' Miss Wheelwright adds, 'with the sincerity of manner which characterised her every utterance, and I would sooner have doubted myself than her.' Let, then, this silly and offensive imputation be now and for ever dismissed from the minds of Charlotte Brontë's admirers, if indeed it had ever lodged there.

Charlotte had not visited the Wheelwrights in the Rue Royale during her first visit to Brussels. She had found the companionship of Emily all-sufficing, and Emily was not sufficiently popular with the Wheelwrights to have made her a welcome guest. They admitted her cleverness, but they considered her hard, unsympathetic, and abrupt in manner. We know that she was self-contained and homesick, pining for her native moors. This was not evident to a girl of ten, the youngest of the Wheelwright children, who was compelled to receive daily a music lesson from Emily in her play-hours. When, however, Charlotte came back to Brussels alone she was heartily welcomed into two or three English families, including those of Mr. Dixon, of the Rev. Mr. Jenkins, and of Dr. Wheelwright. With the Wheelwright children she sometimes spent the Sunday, and with them she occasionally visited the English Episcopal church which the Wheelwrights attended, and of which the clergyman was a Mr. Drury. When Dr. Wheelwright took his wife for a Rhine trip in May he left his four children — one little girl had died at Brussels, aged seven, in the preceding November — in the care of Madame Héger at the Pensionnat, and under the immediate supervision of Charlotte.

At this period there was plenty of cheerfulness in her life. She was learning German. She was giving English lessons to M. Héger and to his brother-in-law, M. Chappelle. She went to the Carnival, and described it 'animating to see the immense crowds and the general gaiety.' 'Whenever I turn back,' she writes, 'to compare what I am with what I was, my place here with my place at Mrs. Sidgwick's or Mrs. White's, I am thankful.'

In a letter to her brother, however, we find the darker side of the picture. It reveals many things apart from what is actually written down. In this, the only letter to Branwell that I have been able to discover, apart from one written in childhood, it appears that the brother and sister are upon very confidential terms. Up to this time, at any rate, Branwell's conduct had not excited any apprehension as to his future, and the absence of any substantial place in his aunt's will was clearly not due to misconduct. Branwell was now under the same roof as his sister Anne, having obtained an appointment as tutor to young Edmund Robinson at Thorp Green, near York, where Anne was governess. The letter is unsigned, concluding playfully with 'yourn; and the initials follow a closing message to Anne on the same sheet of paper.

TO BRANWELL BRONTË

'Brussels, *May* 1*st*, 1843.

'Dear Branwell, — I hear you have written a letter to me. This letter, however, as usual, I have never received, which I am exceedingly sorry for, as I have wished very much to hear from you. Are you sure that you put the right address and that you paid the English postage, 1s. 6d.? Without that, letters are never forwarded. I heard from papa a day or two since. All appears to be going on reasonably well at home. I grieve only that Emily is so solitary; but, however, you and Anne will soon be returning for the holidays, which will cheer the house for a time. Are you in better health and spirits, and does Anne continue to be pretty well? I understand papa has been to see you. Did he seem cheerful and well? Mind when you write to me you answer these questions, as I wish to know. Also give me a detailed account as to how you get on with your pupil and the rest of the family. I have received a general assurance that you do well and are in good odour, but I want to know particulars.

'As for me, I am very well and wag on as usual. I perceive, however, that I grow exceedingly misanthropic and sour. You will say that this is no news, and that you never knew me possessed of the contrary qualities — philanthropy and sugariness. *Das ist wahr* (which being translated means, that is true); but the fact is, the people here are no go whatsoever. Amongst 120 persons which compose the daily population of this house, I can discern only one or two who deserve anything like regard. This is not owing to foolish fastidiousness on my part, but to the absence of decent qualities on theirs. They have not intellect or politeness or good-nature or good-feeling. They are nothing. I don't hate them — hatred would be too warm a feeling. They have no sensations themselves and they excite none. But one wearies from day to day of caring nothing, fearing nothing, liking nothing, hating nothing, being nothing, doing nothing — yes, I teach and sometimes get red in the face with impatience at their stupidity. But don't think I ever scold or fly into a passion. If I spoke warmly, as warmly as I sometimes used to do at Roe-Head, they would think me mad. Nobody ever gets into a passion here. Such a thing is not known. The phlegm that thickens their blood is too gluey to boil. They are very false in their relations with each other, but they rarely quarrel, and friendship is a folly they are unacquainted with. The black Swan, M. Héger, is the only sole veritable exception to this rule (for Madame, always cool and always reasoning, is not quite an exception). But I rarely speak to Monsieur now, for not being a pupil I have little or nothing to do with him. From time to time he shows his kind-heartedness by loading me with books, so that I am still indebted to him for all the pleasure or amusement I have. Except for the total want of companionship I have nothing to complain of. I have not too much to do, sufficient liberty, and I am rarely interfered with. I lead an easeful, stagnant, silent life, for which, when I think of Mrs. Sidgwick, I ought to be very thankful. Be sure you write to me soon, and beg of Anne to inclose a small billet in the same letter; it will be a real charity to do me this kindness. Tell me everything you can think of.

'It is a curious metaphysical fact that always in the evening when I am in the great dormitory alone, having no other company than a number of beds with white curtains, I always recur as fanatically as ever to the old ideas, the old faces, and the old scenes in the world below.

'Give my love to Anne. — And believe me, yourn

'Dear Anne, — Write to me. — Your affectionate Schwester,

'C. B.

'Mr. Héger has just been in and given me a little German Testament as a present. I was surprised, for since a good many days he has hardly spoken to me.'

A little later she writes to Emily in similar strain.

TO MISS EMILY J. BRONTË

'Brussels, *May* 29*th*, 1843.

'Dear E. J., — The reason of the unconscionable demand for money is explained in my letter to papa. Would you believe it, Mdlle. Mühl demands as much for one pupil as for two, namely, 10 francs per month. This, with the 5 francs per month to the Blanchisseuse, makes havoc in £16 per annum. You will perceive I have begun again to take German lessons. Things wag on much as usual here. Only Mdlle. Blanche and Mdlle. Haussé are at present on a system of war without quarter. They hate each other like two cats. Mdlle. Blanche frightens Mdlle. Haussé by her white passions (for they quarrel venomously). Mdlle. Haussé complains that when Mdlle. Blanche is in fury, "*elle n'a pas de levres*." I find also that Mdlle. Sophie dislikes Mdlle. Blanche extremely. She says she is heartless, insincere, and vindictive, which epithets, I assure you, are richly deserved. Also I find she is the regular spy of Mme. Héger, to whom she reports everything. Also she invents — which I should not have thought. I have now the entire charge of the English lessons. I have given two lessons to the first class. Hortense Jannoy was a picture on these occasions, her face was black as a "blue-piled thunder-loft," and her two ears were red as raw beef. To all questions asked her reply was, "*je ne sais pas*." It is a pity but her friends could meet with a person qualified to cast out a devil. I am richly off for companionship in these parts. Of late days, M. and Mde. Héger rarely speak to me, and I really don't pretend to care a fig for any body else in the establishment. You are not to suppose by that expression that I am under the influence of *warm* affection for Mde. Héger. I am convinced she does not like me — why, I can't tell, nor do I think she herself has any definite reason for the aversion; but for one thing, she cannot comprehend why I do not make intimate friends of Mesdames Blanche, Sophie, and Haussé. M. Héger is wonderously influenced by Madame, and I should not wonder if he disapproves very much of my unamiable want of sociability. He has already given me a brief lecture on universal *bienveillance*, and, perceiving that I don't improve in consequence, I fancy he has taken to considering me as a person to be let alone — left to the error of her ways; and consequently he has in a great measure withdrawn the light of his countenance, and I get on from day to day in a Robinson-Crusoe-like condition — very lonely. That does not signify. In other respects I have nothing substantial to complain of, nor is even this a cause for complaint. Except the loss of M. Héger's goodwill (if I have lost it) I care for none of 'em. I hope you are well and hearty. Walk out often on the moors. Sorry am I to hear that Hannah is gone, and that she has left you burdened with the charge of the little girl, her sister. I hope Tabby will continue to stay with you — give my love to her. Regards to the fighting gentry, and to old asthma. — Your

'C. B.

'I have written to Branwell, though I never got a letter from him.'

In August she is still more dissatisfied, but 'I will continue to stay some months longer, till I have acquired German, and then I hope to see all your faces again.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Brussels, *August* 6*th*, 1843.

'Dear Ellen, — You never answered my last letter; but, however, forgiveness is a part of the Christian Creed, and so having an opportunity to send a letter to England, I forgive you and write to you again. Last Sunday afternoon, being at the Chapel Royal, in Brussels, I was surprised to hear a voice proceed from the pulpit which instantly brought all Birstall and Batley before my mind's eye. I could see nothing, but certainly thought that that unclerical little Welsh pony, Jenkins, was there. I buoyed up my mind with the expectation of receiving a letter from you, but as, however, I have got none, I suppose I must have been mistaken.

'C. B.

'Mr. Jenkins has called. He brought no letter from you, but said you were at Harrogate, and that they could not find the letter you had intended to send. He informed me of the death of your sister. Poor Sarah, when I last bid her good-bye I little thought I should never see her more. Certainly, however, she is happy where she is gone — far happier than she was here. When the first days of mourning are past, you will see that you have reason rather to rejoice at her removal than to grieve for it. Your mother will have felt her death much — and you also. I fear from the circumstance of your being at Harrogate that you are yourself ill. Write to me soon.'

It was in September that the incident occurred which has found so dramatic a setting in *Villette* — the confession to a priest of the Roman Catholic Church of a daughter of the most militant type of Protestantism; and not the least valuable of my newly-discovered Brontë treasures is the letter which Charlotte wrote to Emily giving an unembellished account of the incident.

TO MISS EMILY J. BRONTË

'Brussels, *September* 2*nd*, 1843.

'Dear E. J., — Another opportunity of writing to you coming to pass, I shall improve it by scribbling a few lines. More than half the holidays are now past, and rather better than I expected. The weather has been exceedingly fine during the last fortnight, and yet not so Asiatically hot as it was last year at this time. Consequently I have tramped about a great deal and tried to get a clearer acquaintance with the streets of Bruxelles. This week, as no teacher is here except Mdlle. Blanche, who is returned from Paris, I am always alone except at meal-times, for Mdlle. Blanche's character is so false and so contemptible I can't force myself to associate with her. She perceives my utter dislike and never now speaks to me — a great relief.

'However, I should inevitably fall into the gulf of low spirits if I stayed always by myself here without a human being to speak to, so I go out and traverse the Boulevards and streets of Bruxelles sometimes for hours together. Yesterday I went on a pilgrimage to the cemetery, and far beyond it on to a hill where there was nothing but fields as far as the horizon. When I came back it was evening; but I had such a repugnance to return to the house, which contained nothing that I cared for, I still kept threading the streets in the neighbourhood of the Rue d'Isabelle and avoiding it. I found myself opposite to Ste. Gudule, and the bell, whose voice you know, began to toll for evening salut. I went in, quite alone (which procedure you will say is not much like me), wandered about the aisles where a few old women were saying their prayers, till vespers begun. I stayed till they were over. Still I could not leave the church or force myself to go home — to school I mean. An odd whim came into my head. In a solitary part of the Cathedral six or seven people still remained kneeling by the confessionals. In two confessionals I saw a priest. I felt as if I did not care what I did, provided it was not absolutely wrong, and that it served to vary my life and yield a moment's interest. I took a fancy to change myself into a Catholic and go and make a real confession to see what it was like. Knowing me as you do, you will think this odd, but when people are by themselves they have singular fancies. A penitent was occupied in confessing. They do not go into the sort of pew or cloister which the priest occupies, but kneel down on the steps and confess through a grating. Both the confessor and the penitent whisper very low, you can hardly hear their voices. After I had watched two or three penitents go and return I approached at last and knelt down in a niche which was just vacated. I had to kneel there ten minutes waiting, for on the other side was another penitent invisible to me. At last that went away and a little wooden door inside the grating opened, and I saw the priest leaning his ear towards me. I was obliged to begin, and yet I did not know a word of the formula with which they always commence their confessions. It was a funny position. I felt precisely as I did when alone on the Thames at midnight. I commenced with saying I was a foreigner and had been brought up a Protestant. The priest asked if I was a Protestant then. I somehow could not tell a lie and said "yes." He replied that in that case I could not "*jouir du bonheur de la confesse*"; but I was determined to confess, and at last he said he would allow me because it might be the first step towards returning to the true church. I actually did confess — a real confession. When I had done he told me his address, and said that every morning I was to go to the rue du Parc — to his house — and he would reason with me and try to convince me of the error and enormity of being a Protestant!!! I promised faithfully to go. Of course, however, the adventure stops there, and I hope I shall never see the priest again. I think you had better not tell papa of this. He will not understand that it was only a freak, and will perhaps think I am going to turn Catholic. Trusting that you and papa are well, and also Tabby and the Holyes, and hoping you will write to me immediately, — I am, yours,

'C. B.'

'The Holyes,' it is perhaps hardly necessary to add, is Charlotte's irreverent appellation for the curates — Mr. Smith and Mr. Grant.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Brussels, *October* 13*th*, 1843.

'Dear Ellen, — I was glad to receive your last letter; but when I read it, its contents gave me some pain. It was melancholy indeed that so soon after the death of a sister you should be called from a distant county by the news of the severe illness of a brother, and, after your return home, your sister Ann should fall ill too. Mary Dixon informs me your brother is scarcely expected to recover — is this true? I hope not, for his sake and yours. His loss would indeed be a blow — a blow which I hope Providence may avert. Do not, my dear Ellen, fail to write to me soon of affairs at Brookroyd. I cannot fail to be anxious on the subject, your family being amongst the oldest and kindest friends I have. I trust this season of affliction will soon pass. It has been a long one.

'C. B.'

TO MISS EMILY J. BRONTË

'Brussels, *December* 19*th*, 1843.

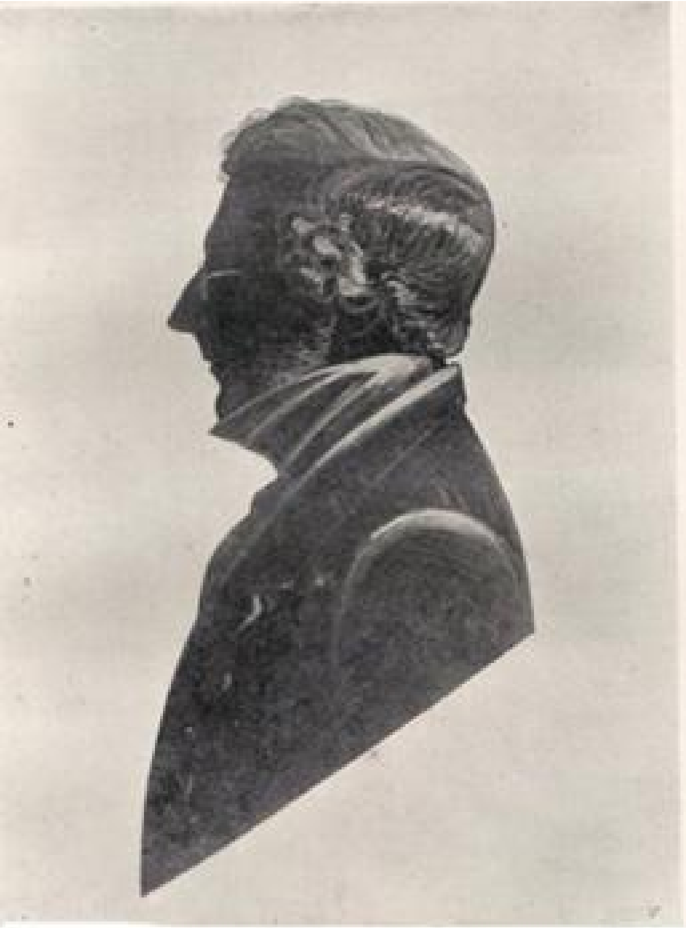
'Dear E. J., — I have taken my determination. I hope to be at home the day after New Year's Day. I have told Mme. Héger. But in order to come home I shall be obliged to draw on my cash for another £5. I have only £3 at present, and as there are several little things I should like to buy before I leave Brussels — which you know cannot be got as well in England — £3 would not suffice. Low spirits have afflicted me much lately, but I hope all will be well when I get home — above all, if I find papa and you and B. and A. well. I am not ill in body. It is only the mind which is a trifle shaken — for want of comfort.

'I shall try to cheer up now. — Good-bye.

'C. B.'

CHAPTER V: PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË

The younger Patrick Brontë was always known by his mother's family name of Branwell. The name derived from the patron Saint of Ireland, with which the enthusiastic Celt, Romanist and Protestant alike, delights to disfigure his male child, was speedily banished from the Yorkshire Parsonage. Branwell was a year younger than Charlotte, and it is clear that she and her brother were 'chums,' in the same way as Emily and Anne were 'chums,' in the earlier years, before Charlotte made other friends. Even until two or three years from Branwell's death, we find Charlotte writing to him with genuine sisterly affection, and, indeed, the only two family letters addressed to Branwell which are extant are from her. One of them, written from Brussels, I have printed elsewhere. The other, written from Roe Head, when Charlotte, aged sixteen, was at school there, was partly published by Mrs. Gaskell, but may as well be given here, copied direct from the original.



PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË

From a Silhouette in the possession of Mr. A. B. Nicholls

TO BRANWELL BRONTË

'Roe Head, *May* 17*th*, 1832.

'Dear Branwell, — As usual I address my weekly letter to you, because to you I find the most to say. I feel exceedingly anxious to know how and in what state you arrived at home after your long and (I should think) very fatiguing journey. I could perceive when you arrived at Roe Head that you were very much tired, though you refused to acknowledge it. After you were gone, many questions and subjects of conversation recurred to me which I had intended to mention to you, but quite forgot them in the agitation which I felt at the totally unexpected pleasure of seeing you. Lately I had begun to think that I had lost all the interest which I used formerly to take in politics, but the extreme pleasure I felt at the news of the Reform Bill's being thrown out by the House of Lords, and of the expulsion or resignation of Earl Grey, etc., etc., convinced me that I have not as yet lost *all* my penchant for politics. I am extremely glad that aunt has consented to take in *Fraser's Magazine*, for though I know from your description of its general contents it will be rather uninteresting when compared with *Blackwood*, still it will be better than remaining the whole year without being able to obtain a sight of any periodical publication whatever; and such would assuredly be our case, as in the little wild, moorland village where we reside, there would be no possibility of borrowing or obtaining a work of that description from a circulating library. I hope with you that the present delightful weather may contribute to the perfect restoration of our dear papa's health, and that it may give aunt pleasant reminiscences of the salubrious climate of her native place.

'With love to all, — Believe me, dear Branwell, to remain your affectionate sister,

Charlotte.'

'As to you I find the most to say' is significant. And to Branwell, Charlotte refers again and again in most affectionate terms in many a later letter. It is to her enthusiasm, indeed that we largely owe the extravagant estimate of Branwell's ability which has found so abundant expression in books on the Brontës.

Branwell has himself been made the hero of at least three biographies. Mr. Francis Grundy has no importance for our day other than that he prints certain letters from Branwell in his autobiography. Miss Mary F. Robinson, whatever distinction may pertain to her verse, should never have attempted a biography of Emily Brontë. Her book is mainly of significance because, appearing in a series of *Eminent Women*, it served to emphasise the growing opinion that Emily, as well as Charlotte, had a place among the great writers of her day. Miss Robinson added nothing to our knowledge of Emily Brontë, and her book devoted inordinate space to the shortcomings of Branwell, concerning which she had no new information.

Mr. Leyland's book is professedly a biography of Branwell, and is, indeed, a valuable storehouse of facts. It might have had more success had it been written with greater brightness and verve. As it stands, it is a dull book, readable only by the Brontë enthusiast. Mr. Leyland has no literary perception, and in his eagerness to show that Branwell was a genius, prints numerous letters and poems which sufficiently demonstrate that he was not.

Charlotte never hesitated in the earlier years to praise her brother as the genius of the family. We all know how eagerly the girls in any home circle are ready to acknowledge and accept as signs of original power the most impudent witticisms of a fairly clever brother. The Brontë household was not exceptionally constituted in this respect. It is evident that the boy grew up with talent of a kind. He could certainly draw with more idea of perspective than his sisters, and one or two portraits by him are not wanting in merit. But there is no evidence of any special writing faculty, and the words 'genius' and 'brilliant' which have been freely applied to him are entirely misplaced. Branwell was thirty-one years of age when he died, and it was only during the last year or two of his life that opium and alcohol had made him intellectually hopeless. Yet, unless we accept the preposterous statement that he wrote *Wuthering Heights*, he would seem to have composed nothing which gives him the slightest claim to the most inconsiderable niche in the temple of literature.

Branwell appears to have worked side by side with his sisters in the early years, and innumerable volumes of the 'little writing' bearing his signature have come into my hands. Verdopolis, the imaginary city of his sisters' early stories, plays a considerable part in Branwell's. *Real Life in Verdopolis* bears date 1833. *The Battle of Washington* is evidently a still more childish effusion. *Caractacus* is dated 1830, and the poems and tiny romances continue steadily on through the years until they finally stop short in 1837 — when Branwell is twenty years old — with a story entitled *Percy*. By the light of subsequent events it is interesting to note that a manuscript of 1830 bears the title of *The Liar Detected*.

It would be unfair to take these crude productions of Branwell Brontë's boyhood as implying that he had no possibilities in him of anything better, but judging from the fact that his letters, as a man of eight and twenty, are as undistinguished as his sister's are noteworthy at a like age, we might well dismiss Branwell Brontë once and for all, were not some epitome of his life indispensable in an account of the Brontë circle.

Branwell was born at Thornton in 1817. When the family removed to Haworth he studied at the Grammar School, although, doubtless, he owed most of his earlier tuition to his father. When school days were over it was decided that he should be an artist. To a certain William Robinson, of Leeds, he was indebted for his first lessons. Mrs. Gaskell describes a life-size drawing of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne which Branwell painted about this period. The huge canvas stood for many years at the top of the staircase at the parsonage. In 1835 Branwell went up to London with a view to becoming a pupil at the Royal Academy Art Schools. The reason for his almost immediate reappearance at Haworth has never been explained. Probably he wasted his money and his father refused supplies. He had certainly been sufficiently in earnest at the start, judging from this letter, of which I find a draft among his papers.

TO THE SECRETARY, ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS

'Sir, — Having an earnest desire to enter as probationary student in the Royal Academy, but not being possessed of information as to the means of obtaining my desire, I presume to request from you, as Secretary to the Institution, an answer to the questions —

'Where am I to present my drawings?

'At what time?

and especially,

'Can I do it in August or September?

— Your obedient servant,

Branwell Brontë.'

In 1836 we find him as ‘brother’ of the ‘Lodge of the Three Graces’ at Haworth. In the following year he is practising as an artist in Bradford, and painting a number of portraits of the townsfolk. At this same period he wrote to Wordsworth, sending verses, which he was at the time producing with due regularity. In January 1840 Branwell became tutor in the family of Mr. Postlethwaite at Broughton-in-Furness. It was from that place that he wrote the incoherent and silly letter which has been more than once printed, and which merely serves to show that then, as always, he had an ill-regulated mind. It was from Broughton-in-Furness also that he addresses Hartley Coleridge, and the letters are worth printing if only on account of the similar destiny of the two men.

TO HARTLEY COLERIDGE

‘Broughton-in-Furness,
‘Lancashire, *April* 20*th*, 1840.

‘Sir, — It is with much reluctance that I venture to request, for the perusal of the following lines, a portion of the time of one upon whom I can have no claim, and should not dare to intrude, but I do not, personally, know a man on whom to rely for an answer to the questions I shall put, and I could not resist my longing to ask a man from whose judgment there would be little hope of appeal.

‘Since my childhood I have been wont to devote the hours I could spare from other and very different employments to efforts at literary composition, always keeping the results to myself, nor have they in more than two or three instances been seen by any other. But I am about to enter active life, and prudence tells me not to waste the time which must make my independence; yet, sir, I like writing too well to fling aside the practice of it without an effort to ascertain whether I could turn it to account, not in *wholly* maintaining myself, but in aiding my maintenance, for I do not sigh after fame, and am not ignorant of the folly or the fate of those who, without ability, would depend for their lives upon their pens; but I seek to know, and venture, though with shame, to ask from one whose word I must respect: whether, by periodical or other writing, I could please myself with writing, and make it subservient to living.

‘I would not, with this view, have troubled you with a composition in verse, but any piece I have in prose would too greatly trespass upon your patience, which, I fear, if you look over the verse, will be more than sufficiently tried.

‘I feel the egotism of my language, but I have none, sir, in my heart, for I feel beyond all encouragement from myself, and I hope for none from you.

‘Should you give any opinion upon what I send, it will, however condemnatory, be most gratefully received by, — Sir, your most humble servant,

‘P. B. Brontë.

‘*P.S.* — The first piece is only the sequel of one striving to depict the fall from unguided passion into neglect, despair, and death. It ought to show an hour too near those of pleasure for repentance, and too near death for hope. The translations are two out of many made from Horace, and given to assist an answer to the question — would it be possible to obtain remuneration for translations for such as those from that or any other classic author?'

Branwell would appear to have gone over to Ambleside to see Hartley Coleridge, if we may judge by that next letter, written from Haworth upon his return.

TO HARTLEY COLERIDGE

'Haworth, *June* 27*th*, 1840.

'Sir, — You will, perhaps, have forgotten me, but it will be long before I forget my first conversation with a man of real intellect, in my first visit to the classic lakes of Westmoreland.

'During the delightful day which I had the honour of spending with you at Ambleside, I received permission to transmit to you, as soon as finished, the first book of a translation of Horace, in order that, after a glance over it, you might tell me whether it was worth further notice or better fit for the fire.

'I have — I fear most negligently, and amid other very different employments — striven to translate two books, the first of which I have presumed to send to you. And will you, sir, stretch your past kindness by telling me whether I should amend and pursue the work or let it rest in peace?

'Great corrections I feel it wants, but till I feel that the work might benefit me, I have no heart to make them; yet if your judgment prove in any way favourable, I will re-write the whole, without sparing labour to reach perfection.

'I dared not have attempted Horace but that I saw the utter worthlessness of all former translations, and thought that a better one, by whomsoever executed, might meet with some little encouragement. I long to clear up my doubts by the judgment of one whose opinion I should revere, and — but I suppose I am dreaming — one to whom I should be proud indeed to inscribe anything of mine which any publisher would look at, unless, as is likely enough, the work would disgrace the name as much as the name would honour the work.

'Amount of remuneration I should not look to — as anything would be everything — and whatever it might be, let me say that my bones would have no rest unless by written agreement a division should be made of the profits (little or much) between myself and him through whom alone I could hope to obtain a hearing with that formidable personage, a London bookseller.

'Excuse my unintelligibility, haste, and appearance of presumption, and — Believe me to be, sir, your most humble and grateful servant,

'P. B. Brontë.

'If anything in this note should displease you, lay it, sir, to the account of inexperience and *not* impudence.'

In October 1840, we find Branwell clerk-in-charge at the Station of

Sowerby Bridge on the Leeds and Manchester Railway, and the following year at Luddenden Foot, where Mr. Grundy, the railway engineer, became acquainted with him, and commenced the correspondence contained in *Pictures of the Past*.

I have in my possession a small memorandum book, evidently used by Branwell when engaged as a railway clerk. There are notes in it upon the then existing railways, demonstrating that he was trying to prime himself with the requisite facts and statistics for a career of that kind. But side by side with these are verses upon 'Lord Nelson,' 'Robert Burns,' and kindred themes, with such estimable sentiments as this: —

'Then England's love and England's tongue
And England's heart shall reverence long
The wisdom deep, the courage strong,
Of English Johnson's name.'

Altogether a literary atmosphere had been kindled for the boy had he had the slightest strength of character to go with it. The railway company, however, were soon tired of his vagaries, and in the beginning of 1842 he returns to the Haworth parsonage. The following letter to his friend Mr. Grundy is of biographical interest.

TO FRANCIS H. GRUNDY

'*October* 25*th*, 1842.

'My dear Sir, — There is no misunderstanding. I have had a long attendance at the death-bed of the Rev. Mr. Weightman, one of my dearest friends, and now I am attending at the deathbed of my aunt, who has been for twenty years as my mother. I expect her to die in a few hours.

'As my sisters are far from home, I have had much on my mind, and these things must serve as an apology for what was never intended as neglect of your friendship to us.

'I had meant not only to have written to you, but to the Rev. James Martineau, gratefully and sincerely acknowledging the receipt of his most kindly and truthful criticism — at least in advice, though too generous far in praise; but one sad ceremony must, I fear, be gone through first. Give my most sincere respects to Mr. Stephenson, and excuse this scrawl — my eyes are too dim with sorrow to see well. — Believe me, your not very happy but obliged friend and servant,

'P. B. Brontë.'

A week later he writes to the same friend: —

'I am incoherent, I fear, but I have been waking two nights witnessing such agonising suffering as I would not wish my worst enemy to endure; and I have now lost the guide and director of all the happy days connected with my childhood. I have suffered much sorrow since I last saw you at Haworth.'

Charlotte and Anne, it will be remembered, were at this time on their way home from Brussels, and Anne had to seek relief from her governess bonds at Mrs. Robinson's. Branwell would seem to have returned with Anne to Thorp

Green, as tutor to Mr. Robinson's son. He commenced his duties in December 1842.

It would not be rash to assume — although it is only an assumption — that Branwell took to opium soon after he entered upon his duties at Thorp Green. I have already said something of the trouble which befel Mrs. Gaskell in accepting the statements of Charlotte Brontë, and — after Charlotte's death — of her friends, to the effect that Branwell became the prey of a designing woman, who promised to marry him when her husband — a venerable clergyman — should be dead. The story has been told too often. Branwell was dismissed, and returned to the parsonage to rave about his wrongs. If Mr. Robinson should die, the widow had promised to marry him, he assured his friends. Mr. Robinson did die (May 26, 1846), and then Branwell insisted that by his will he had prohibited his wife from marrying, under penalties of forfeiting the estate. A copy of the document is in my possession:

The eleventh day of September 1846 *the Will of the Reverend Edmund Robinson*, *late of Thorp Green*, *in the Parish of Little Ouseburn*, *in the County of York*, *Clerk*, *deceased*, *was proved in the Prerogative Court of York by the oaths of Lydia Robinson*, *Widow*, *his Relict*; *the Venerable Charles Thorp and Henry Newton*, *the Executors*, *to whom administration was granted.*

Needless to say, the will, a lengthy document, put no restraint whatever upon the actions of Mrs. Robinson. Upon the publication of Mrs. Gaskell's Life she was eager to clear her character in the law-courts, but was dissuaded therefrom by friends, who pointed out that a withdrawal of the obnoxious paragraphs in succeeding editions of the Memoir, and the publication of a letter in the *Times*, would sufficiently meet the case.

Here is the letter from the advertisement pages of the Times.

'8 Bedford Row,
'London, *May* 26*th*, 1857.

'Dear Sirs, — As solicitor for and on behalf of the Rev. W. Gaskell and of Mrs. Gaskell, his wife, the latter of whom is authoress of the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, I am instructed to retract every statement contained in that work which imputes to a widowed lady, referred to, but not named therein, any breach of her conjugal, of her maternal, or of her social duties, and more especially of the statement contained in chapter 13 of the first volume, and in chapter 2 of the second volume, which imputes to the lady in question a guilty intercourse with the late Branwell Brontë. All those statements were made upon information which at the time Mrs. Gaskell believed to be well founded, but which, upon investigation, with the additional evidence furnished to me by you, I have ascertained not to be trustworthy. I am therefore authorised not only to retract the statements in question, but to express the deep regret of Mrs. Gaskell that she should have been led to make them. — I am, dear sirs, yours truly,

'William Shaen.

'Messrs. Newton & Robinson, Solicitors, York.'

A certain 'Note' in the *Athenæum* a few days later is not without interest now.

'We are sorry to be called upon to return to Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, but we must do so, since the book has gone forth with our recommendation. Praise, it is needless to point out, implied trust in the biographer as an accurate collector of facts. This, we regret to state, Mrs. Gaskell proves not to have been. To the gossip which for weeks past has been seething and circulating in the London *coteries*, we gave small heed; but the *Times* advertises a legal apology, made on behalf of Mrs. Gaskell, withdrawing the statements put forth in her book respecting the cause of Mr. Branwell Brontë's wreck and ruin. These Mrs. Gaskell's lawyer is now fain to confess his client advanced on insufficient testimony. The telling of an episodical and gratuitous tale so dismal as concerns the dead, so damaging to the living, could only be excused by the story of sin being severely, strictly true; and every one will have cause to regret that due caution was not used to test representations not, it seems, to be justified. It is in the interest of Letters that biographers should be deterred from rushing into print with mere impressions in place of proofs, however eager and sincere those impressions may be. They *may be* slanders, and as such they may sting cruelly. Meanwhile the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* must undergo modification ere it can be further circulated.'

Meanwhile let us return to Branwell Brontë's life as it is contained in his sister's correspondence.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 3*rd*, 1846.

'Dear Ellen, — I must write to you to-day whether I have anything to say or not, or else you will begin to think that I have forgotten you; whereas, never a day passes, seldom an hour, that I do not think of you, *and the scene of trial* in which you live, move, and have your being. Mary Taylor's letter was deeply interesting and strongly characteristic. I have no news whatever to communicate. No changes take place here. Branwell offers no prospect of hope; he professes to be too ill to think of seeking for employment; he makes comfort scant at home. I hold to my intention of going to Brookroyd as soon as I can — that is, provided you will have me.

'Give my best love to your mother and sisters. — Yours, dear Nell, always faithful,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 13*th*, 1845.

'My dear Ellen, — I have often said and thought that you have had many and heavy trials to bear in your still short life. You have always borne them with great firmness and calm so far — I hope fervently you will still be enabled to do so. Yet there is something in your letter that makes me fear the present is the greatest trial of all, and the most severely felt by you. I hope it will soon pass over and leave no shadow behind it. I do earnestly desire to be with you, to talk to you, to give you what comfort I can. Branwell and Anne leave us on Saturday. Branwell has been quieter and less irritable on the whole this time than he was in summer. Anne is as usual — always good, mild, and patient. I think she too is a little stronger than she was. — Good-bye, dear Ellen,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*December* 31*st*, 1845.

'Dear Ellen, — I don't know whether most to thank you for the very pretty slippers you have sent me or to scold you for occasioning yourself, in the slightest degree, trouble or expense on my account. I will have them made up and bring them with me, if all be well, when I come to Brookroyd.

'Never doubt that I shall come to Brookroyd as soon as I can, Nell. I dare say my wish to see you is equal to your wish to see me.

'I had a note on Saturday from Ellen Taylor, informing me that letters have been received from Mary in New Zealand, and that she was well and in good spirits. I suppose you have not yet seen them, as you do not mention them; but you will probably have them in your possession before you get this note.

'You say well in speaking of Branwell that no sufferings are so awful as those brought on by dissipation. Alas! I see the truth of this observation daily proved.

'Your friends must have a weary and burdensome life of it in waiting upon *their* unhappy brother. It seems grievous, indeed, that those who have not sinned should suffer so largely.

'Write to me a little oftener, Ellen — I am very glad to get your notes. Remember me kindly to your mother and sisters. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'*January* 30*th*, 1846.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — I have not yet paid my usual visit to Brookroyd, but I frequently hear from Ellen, and she did not fail to tell me that you were gone into Worcestershire. She was unable, however, to give me your address; had I known it I should have written to you long since.

'I thought you would wonder how we were getting on when you heard of the Railway Panic, and you may be sure I am very glad to be able to answer your kind inquiries by an assurance that our small capital is as yet undiminished. The "York and Midland" is, as you say, a very good line, yet I confess to you I should wish, for my part, to be wise in time. I cannot think that even the very best lines will continue for many years at their present premiums, and I have been most anxious for us to sell our shares ere it be too late, and to secure the proceeds in some safer, if, for the present, less profitable investment. I cannot, however, persuade my sisters to regard the affair precisely from my point of view, and I feel as if I would rather run the risk of loss than hurt Emily's feelings by acting in direct opposition to her opinion. She managed in a most handsome and able manner for me when I was at Brussels, and prevented by distance from looking after my own interests; therefore, I will let her manage still, and take the consequences. Disinterested and energetic she certainly is, and if she be not quite so tractable or open to conviction as I could wish, I must remember perfection is not the lot of humanity. And as long as we can regard those we love, and to whom we are closely allied, with profound and very unshaken esteem, it is a small thing that they should vex us occasionally by, what appear to us, unreasonable and headstrong notions. You, my dear Miss Wooler, know full as well as I do the value of sisters' affection to each other; there is nothing like it in this world, I believe, when they are nearly equal in age, and similar in education, tastes, and sentiments.

'You ask about Branwell. He never thinks of seeking employment, and I begin to fear he has rendered himself incapable of filling any respectable station in life; besides, if money were at his disposal he would use it only to his own injury; the faculty of self-government is, I fear, almost destroyed in him. You ask me if I do not think men are strange beings. I do, indeed — I have often thought so; and I think too that the mode of bringing them up is strange, they are not half sufficiently guarded from temptations. Girls are protected as if they were something very frail and silly indeed, while boys are turned loose on the world as if they, of all beings in existence, were the wisest and the least liable to be led astray.

'I am glad you like Bromsgrove. I always feel a peculiar satisfaction when I hear of your enjoying yourself, because it proves to me that there is really such a thing as retributive justice even in this life; now you are free, and that while you have still, I hope, many years of vigour and health in which you can enjoy freedom. Besides, I have another and very egotistical motive for being pleased: it seems that even "a lone woman" can be happy, as well as cherished wives and proud mothers. I am glad of that — I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be married woman now-a-days, and I have already got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly, without support of husband or mother, and who, having attained the age of forty-five or upwards, retains in her possession a well-regulated mind, a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures, fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve want as far as her means extend. I wish to send this letter off by to-day's post, I must therefore conclude in haste. — Believe me, my dear Miss Wooler, yours, most affectionately,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*November* 4*th*, 1845.

‘Dear Ellen, — You do not reproach me in your last, but I fear you must have thought me unkind in being so long without answering you. The fact is, I had hoped to be able to ask you to come to Haworth. Branwell seemed to have a prospect of getting employment, and I waited to know the result of his efforts in order to say, “Dear Ellen, come and see us”; but the place (a secretaryship to a Railroad Committee) is given to another person. Branwell still remains at home, and while he is here you shall not come. I am more confirmed in that resolution the more I know of him. I wish I could say one word to you in his favour, but I cannot, therefore I will hold my tongue.

‘Emily and Anne wish me to tell you that they think it very unlikely for little Flossy to be expected to rear so numerous a family; they think you are quite right in protesting against all the pups being preserved, for, if kept, they will pull their poor little mother to pieces. — Yours faithfully,

‘C. B.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*April* 14*th*, 1846.

‘Dear Ellen, — I assure you I was very glad indeed to get your last note; for when three or four days elapsed after my second despatch to you and I got no answer, I scarcely doubted something was wrong. It relieved me much to find my apprehensions unfounded. I return you Miss Ringrose’s notes with thanks. I always like to read them, they appear to me so true an index of an amiable mind, and one not too conscious of its own worth; beware of awakening in her this consciousness by undue praise. It is the privilege of simple-hearted, sensible, but not brilliant people, that they can *be* and *do* good without comparing their own thoughts and actions too closely with those of other people, and thence drawing strong food for self-appreciation. Talented people almost always know full well the excellence that is in them. I wish I could say anything favourable, but how can we be more comfortable so long as Branwell stays at home, and degenerates instead of improving? It has been lately intimated to him, that he would be received again on the railroad where he was formerly stationed if he would behave more steadily, but he refuses to make an effort; he will not work; and at home he is a drain on every resource — an impediment to all happiness. But there is no use in complaining.

‘My love to all. Write again soon.

‘C. B.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*June* 17*th*, 1846.

‘Dear Ellen, — I was glad to perceive, by the tone of your last letter, that you are beginning to be a little more settled. We, I am sorry to say, have been somewhat more harassed than usual lately. The death of Mr. Robinson, which took place about three weeks or a month ago, served Branwell for a pretext to throw all about him into hubbub and confusion with his emotions, etc., etc. Shortly after came news from all hands that Mr. Robinson had altered his will before he died, and effectually prevented all chance of a marriage between his widow and Branwell, by stipulating that she should not have a shilling if she ever ventured to re-open any communication with him. Of course he then became intolerable. To papa he allows rest neither day nor night, and he is continually screwing money out of him, sometimes threatening that he will kill himself if it is withheld from him. He says Mrs. Robinson is now insane; that her mind is a complete wreck owing to remorse for her conduct towards Mr. Robinson (whose end it appears was hastened by distress of mind) and grief for having lost him. I do not know how much to believe of what he says, but I fear she is very ill. Branwell declares that he neither can nor will do anything for himself. Good situations have been offered him more than once, for which, by a fortnight's work, he might have qualified himself, but he will do nothing, except drink and make us all wretched. I had a note from Ellen Taylor a week ago, in which she remarks that letters were received from New Zealand a month since, and that all was well. I should like to hear from you again soon. I hope one day to see Brookroyd again, though I think it will not be yet — these are not times of amusement. Love to all.

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *March* 1*st*, 1847.

'Dear Ellen, — Branwell has been conducting himself very badly lately. I expect from the extravagance of his behaviour, and from mysterious hints he drops (for he never will speak out plainly), that we shall be hearing news of fresh debts contracted by him soon. The Misses Robinson, who had entirely ceased their correspondence with Anne for half a year after their father's death, have lately recommenced it. For a fortnight they sent her a letter almost every day, crammed with warm protestations of endless esteem and gratitude. They speak with great affection too of their mother, and never make any allusion intimating acquaintance with her errors. We take special care that Branwell does not know of their writing to Anne. My health is better: I lay the blame of its feebleness on the cold weather more than on an uneasy mind, for, after all, I have many things to be thankful for. Write again soon.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 12*th*, 1847.

'Dear Ellen, — We shall all be glad to see you on the Thursday or Friday of next week, whichever day will suit you best. About what time will you be likely to get here, and how will you come? By coach to Keighley, or by a gig all the way to Haworth? There must be no impediments now? I cannot do with them, I want very much to see you. I hope you will be decently comfortable while you stay.

'Branwell is quieter now, and for a good reason: he has got to the end of a considerable sum of money, and consequently is obliged to restrict himself in some degree. You must expect to find him weaker in mind, and a complete rake in appearance. I have no apprehension of his being at all uncivil to you; on the contrary, he will be as smooth as oil. I pray for fine weather that we may be able to get out while you stay. Goodbye for the present. Prepare for much dulness and monotony. Give my love to all at Brookroyd.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*July* 28*th*, 1848.

'Dear Ellen, — Branwell is the same in conduct as ever. His constitution seems much shattered. Papa, and sometimes all of us, have sad nights with him: he sleeps most of the day, and consequently will lie awake at night. But has not every house its trial?

'Write to me very soon, dear Nell, and — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

Branwell Brontë died on Sunday, September the 24th, 1848, and the two following letters from Charlotte to her friend Mr. Williams are peculiarly interesting.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*October* 2*nd*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — "We have hurried our dead out of our sight." A lull begins to succeed the gloomy tumult of last week. It is not permitted us to grieve for him who is gone as others grieve for those they lose. The removal of our only brother must necessarily be regarded by us rather in the light of a mercy than a chastisement. Branwell was his father's and his sisters' pride and hope in boyhood, but since manhood the case has been otherwise. It has been our lot to see him take a wrong bent; to hope, expect, wait his return to the right path; to know the sickness of hope deferred, the dismay of prayer baffled; to experience despair at last — and now to behold the sudden early obscure close of what might have been a noble career.

'I do not weep from a sense of bereavement — there is no prop withdrawn, no consolation torn away, no dear companion lost — but for the wreck of talent, the ruin of promise, the untimely dreary extinction of what might have been a burning and a shining light. My brother was a year my junior. I had aspirations and ambitions for him once, long ago — they have perished mournfully. Nothing remains of him but a memory of errors and sufferings. There is such a bitterness of pity for his life and death, such a yearning for the emptiness of his whole existence as I cannot describe. I trust time will allay these feelings.

'My poor father naturally thought more of his *only* son than of his daughters, and, much and long as he had suffered on his account, he cried out for his loss like David for that of Absalom — my son my son! — and refused at first to be comforted. And then when I ought to have been able to collect my strength and be at hand to support him, I fell ill with an illness whose approaches I had felt for some time previously, and of which the crisis was hastened by the awe and trouble of the death-scene — the first I had ever witnessed. The past has seemed to me a strange week. Thank God, for my father's sake, I am better now, though still feeble. I wish indeed I had more general physical strength — the want of it is sadly in my way. I cannot do what I would do for want of sustained animal spirits and efficient bodily vigour.

'My unhappy brother never knew what his sisters had done in literature — he was not aware that they had ever published a line. We could not tell him of our efforts for fear of causing him too deep a pang of remorse for his own time mis-spent, and talents misapplied. Now he will *never* know. I cannot dwell longer on the subject at present — it is too painful.

'I thank you for your kind sympathy, and pray earnestly that your sons may all do well, and that you may be spared the sufferings my father has gone through. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *October* 6*th*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — I thank you for your last truly friendly letter, and for the number of *Blackwood* which accompanied it. Both arrived at a time when a relapse of illness had depressed me much. Both did me good, especially the letter. I have only one fault to find with your expressions of friendship: they make me ashamed, because they seem to imply that you think better of me than I merit. I believe you are prone to think too highly of your fellow-creatures in general — to see too exclusively the good points of those for whom you have a regard. Disappointment must be the inevitable result of this habit. Believe all men, and women too, to be dust and ashes — a spark of the divinity now and then kindling in the dull heap — that is all. When I looked on the noble face and forehead of my dead brother (nature had favoured him with a fairer outside, as well as a finer constitution, than his sisters) and asked myself what had made him go ever wrong, tend ever downwards, when he had so many gifts to induce to, and aid in, an upward course, I seemed to receive an oppressive revelation of the feebleness of humanity — of the inadequacy of even genius to lead to true greatness if unaided by religion and principle. In the value, or even the reality, of these two things he would never believe till within a few days of his end; and then all at once he seemed to open his heart to a conviction of their existence and worth. The remembrance of this strange change now comforts my poor father greatly. I myself, with painful, mournful joy, heard him praying softly in his dying moments; and to the last prayer which my father offered up at his bedside he added, "Amen." How unusual that word appeared from his lips, of course you, who did not know him, cannot conceive. Akin to this alteration was that in his feelings towards his relations — all the bitterness seemed gone.

'When the struggle was over, and a marble calm began to succeed the last dread agony, I felt, as I had never felt before, that there was peace and forgiveness for him in Heaven. All his errors — to speak plainly, all his vices

— seemed nothing to me in that moment: every wrong he had done, every pain he had caused, vanished; his sufferings only were remembered; the wrench to the natural affections only was left. If man can thus experience total oblivion of his fellow's imperfections, how much more can the Eternal Being, who made man, forgive His creature?

'Had his sins been scarlet in their dye, I believe now they are white as wool. He is at rest, and that comforts us all. Long before he quitted this world, life had no happiness for him.

'*Blackwood's* mention of *Jane Eyre* gratified me much, and will gratify me more, I dare say, when the ferment of other feelings than that of literary ambition shall have a little subsided in my mind.

'The doctor has told me I must not expect too rapid a restoration to health; but to-day I certainly feel better. I am thankful to say my father has hitherto stood the storm well; and so have my *dear* sisters, to whose untiring care and kindness I am chiefly indebted for my present state of convalescence. — Believe me, my dear sir, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

The last letter in order of date that I have concerning Branwell is addressed to Ellen Nussey's sister: —

TO MISS MERCY NUSSEY

'Haworth, *October* 25*th*, 1848.

'My dear Miss Nussey, — Accept my sincere thanks for your kind letter. The event to which you allude came upon us with startling suddenness, and was a severe shock to us all. My poor brother has long had a shaken constitution, and during the summer his appetite had been diminished, and he had seemed weaker, but neither we, nor himself, nor any medical man who was consulted on the case, thought it one of immediate danger. He was out of doors two days before death, and was only confined to bed one single day.

'I thank you for your kind sympathy. Many, under the circumstances, would think our loss rather a relief than otherwise; in truth, we must acknowledge, in all humility and gratitude, that God has greatly tempered judgment with mercy. But yet, as you doubtless know from experience, the last earthly separation cannot take place between near relatives without the keenest pangs on the part of the survivors. Every wrong and sin is forgotten then, pity and grief share the heart and the memory between them. Yet we are not without comfort in our affliction. A most propitious change marked the few last days of poor Branwell's life: his demeanour, his language, his sentiments were all singularly altered and softened. This change could not be owing to the fear of death, for till within half-an-hour of his decease he seemed unconscious of danger. In God's hands we leave him: He sees not as man sees.

'Papa, I am thankful to say, has borne the event pretty well. His distress was great at first — to lose an only son is no ordinary trial, but his physical strength has not hitherto failed him, and he has now in a great measure recovered his mental composure; my dear sisters are pretty well also. Unfortunately, illness attacked me at the crisis when strength was most needed. I bore up for a day or two, hoping to be better, but got worse. Fever, sickness, total loss of appetite, and internal pain were the symptoms. The doctor pronounced it to be bilious fever, but I think it must have been in a mitigated form; it yielded to medicine and care in a few days. I was only confined to my bed a week, and am, I trust, nearly well now. I felt it a grievous thing to be incapacitated from action and effort at a time when action and effort were most called for. The past month seems an overclouded period in my life.

'Give my best love to Mrs. Nussey and your sister, and — Believe me, my dear Miss Nussey, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

My unhappy brother never knew what his sisters had done in literature — he was not aware that they had ever published a line.

Who that reads these words addressed to Mr. Williams can for a moment imagine that Charlotte is speaking other than the truth? And yet we have Mr. Grundy writing:

Patrick Brontë declared to me that he wrote a great portion of '*Wuthering Heights*' *himself.*

And Mr. George Searle Phillips, with more vivid imagination, describes Branwell holding forth to his friends in the parlour of the Black Bull at Haworth, upon the genius of his sisters, and upon the respective merits of *Jane Eyre* and other works. Mr. Leyland is even so foolish as to compare Branwell's poetry with Emily's, to the advantage of the former — which makes further comment impossible. 'My unhappy brother never knew what his sisters had done in literature' — these words of Charlotte's may be taken as final for all who had any doubts concerning the authorship of *Wuthering Heights*.

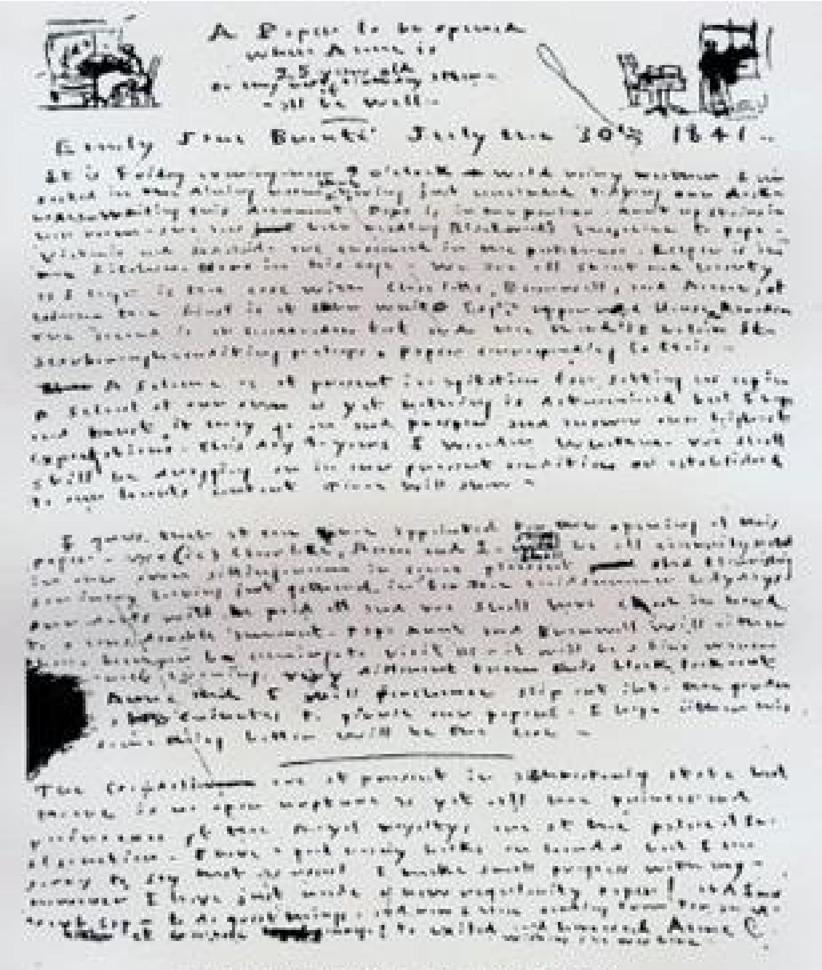
CHAPTER VI: EMILY JANE BRONTË

Emily Brontë is the sphinx of our modern literature. She came into being in the family of an obscure clergyman, and she went out of it at twenty-nine years of age without leaving behind her one single significant record which was any key to her character or to her mode of thought, save only the one famous novel, *Wuthering Heights*, and a few poems — some three or four of which will live in our poetic anthologies for ever. And she made no single friend other than her sister Anne. With Anne she must have corresponded during the two or three periods of her life when she was separated from that much loved sister; and we may be sure that the correspondence was of a singularly affectionate character. Charlotte, who never came very near to her in thought or sympathy, although she loved her younger sister so deeply, addressed her in one letter 'mine own bonnie love'; and it is certain that her own letters to her two sisters, and particularly to Anne, must have been peculiarly tender and in no way lacking in abundant self-revelation. When Emily and Anne had both gone to the grave, Charlotte, it is probable, carefully destroyed every scrap of their correspondence, and, indeed, of their literary effects; and thus it is that, apart from her books and literary fragments, we know Emily only by two formal letters to her sister's friend. Beyond these there is not one scrap of information as to Emily's outlook upon life. In infancy she went with Charlotte to Cowan Bridge, and was described by the governess as 'a pretty little thing.' In girlhood she went to Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head; but there, unlike Charlotte, she made no friends. She and Anne were inseparable when at home, but of what they said to one another there is no record. The sisters must have differed in many ways. Anne, gentle and persuasive, grew up like Charlotte, devoted to the Christianity of her father and mother, and entirely in harmony with all the conditions of a parsonage. It is impossible to think that the author of 'The Old Stoic' and 'Last Lines' was equally attached to the creeds of the churches; but what Emily thought on religious subjects the world will never know. Mrs. Gaskell put to Miss Nussey this very question: 'What was Emily's religion?' But Emily was the last person in the world to have spoken to the most friendly of visitors about so sacred a theme. For a short time, as we know, Emily was in a school at Law Hill near Halifax — a Miss Patchet's. She was, for a still longer period, at the Héger Pensionnat at Brussels. Mrs. Gaskell's business was to write the life of Charlotte Brontë and not of her sister Emily; and as a result there is little enough of Emily in Mrs. Gaskell's book — no record of the Halifax and Brussels life as seen through Emily's eyes. Time, however, has brought its revenge. The cult which started with Mr. Sydney Dobell, and found poetic expression in Mr. Matthew Arnold's fine lines on her,

'Whose soul
Knew no fellow for might,
Passion, vehemence, grief,
Daring, since Byron died,'

culminated in an enthusiastic eulogy by Mr. Swinburne, who placed her in the very forefront of English women of genius.

We have said that Emily Brontë is a sphinx whose riddle no amount of research will enable us to read; and this chapter, it may be admitted, adds but little to the longed-for knowledge of an interesting personality. One scrap of Emily's handwriting, of a personal character, has indeed come to me — overlooked, I doubt not, by Charlotte when she burnt her sister's effects. I have before me a little tin box about two inches long, which one day last year Mr. Nicholls turned out from the bottom of a desk. It is of a kind in which one might keep pins or beads, certainly of no value whatever apart from its associations. Within were four little pieces of paper neatly folded to the size of a sixpence. These papers were covered with handwriting, two of them by Emily, and two by Anne Brontë. They revealed a pleasant if eccentric arrangement on the part of the sisters, which appears to have been settled upon even after they had passed their twentieth year. They had agreed to write a kind of reminiscence every four years, to be opened by Emily on her birthday. The papers, however, tell their own story, and I give first the two which were written in 1841. Emily writes at Haworth, and Anne from her situation as governess to Mr. Robinson's children at Thorp Green. At this time, at any rate, Emily was fairly happy and in excellent health; and although it is five years from the publication of the volume of poems, she is full of literary projects, as is also her sister Anne. The *Gondaland Chronicles*, to which reference is made, must remain a mystery for us. They were doubtless destroyed, with abundant other memorials of Emily, by the heart-broken sister who survived her. We have plentiful material in the way of childish effort by Charlotte and by Branwell, but there is hardly a scrap in the early handwriting of Emily and Anne. This chapter would have been more interesting if only one possessed *Solala Vernon's Life* by Anne Brontë, or the *Gondaland Chronicles* by Emily!



FACSIMILE OF PAGE OF EMILY BRONTË'S DIARY

A PAPER to be opened
when Anne is
25 *years old,*
or my next birthday after
if
all be well.

Emily Jane Brontë. July the 30*th*, 1841.

It is Friday evening, near 9 o'clock — wild rainy weather. I am seated in the dining-room, having just concluded tidying our desk boxes, writing this document. Papa is in the parlour — aunt upstairs in her room. She has been reading Blackwood's Magazine to papa. Victoria and Adelaide are ensconced in the peat-house. Keeper is in the kitchen — Hero in his cage. We are all stout and hearty, as I hope is the case with Charlotte, Branwell, and Anne, of whom the first is at John White, Esq., Upperwood House, Rawdon; the second is at Luddenden Foot; and the third is, I believe, at

Scarborough, enditing perhaps a paper corresponding to this.

A scheme is at present in agitation for setting us up in a school of our own; as yet nothing is determined, but I hope and trust it may go on and prosper and answer our highest expectations. This day four years I wonder whether we shall still be dragging on in our present condition or established to our hearts' content. Time will show.

I guess that at the time appointed for the opening of this paper we, i.e. *Charlotte, Anne, and I, shall be all merrily seated in our own sitting-room in some pleasant and flourishing seminary, having just gathered in for the midsummer ladyday. Our debts will be paid off, and we shall have cash in hand to a considerable amount. Papa, aunt, and Branwell will either have been or be coming to visit us. It will be a fine warm, summer evening, very different from this bleak look-out, and Anne and I will perchance slip out into the garden for a few minutes to peruse our papers. I hope either this or something better will be the case.*

The Gondaliand *are at present in a threatening state, but there is no open rupture as yet. All the princes and princesses of the Royalty are at the Palace of Instruction. I have a good many books on hand, but I am sorry to say that as usual I make small progress with any. However, I have just made a new regularity paper! and I must verb sap to do great things. And now I close, sending from far an exhortation of courage, boys! courage, to exiled and harassed Anne, wishing she was here.*

Anne, as I have said, writes from Thorp Green.

July the 30*th*, A.D. 1841.

This is Emily's birthday. She has now completed her 23*rd year, and is, I believe, at home. Charlotte is a governess in the family of Mr. White. Branwell is a clerk in the railroad station at Luddenden Foot, and I am a governess in the family of Mr. Robinson. I dislike the situation and wish to change it for another. I am now at Scarborough. My pupils are gone to bed and I am hastening to finish this before I follow them.*

We are thinking of setting up a school of our own, but nothing definite is settled about it yet, and we do not know whether we shall be able to or not. I hope we shall. And I wonder what will be our condition and how or where we shall all be on this day four years hence; at which time, all be well, I shall be 25 *years and* 6 *months old, Emily will be* 27 *years old, Branwell* 28 *years and* 1 *month, and Charlotte* 29 *years and a quarter. We are now all separate and not likely to meet again for many a weary week, but we are none of us ill that I know of and all are doing something for our own livelihood except Emily, who, however, is as busy as any of us, and in reality earns her food and raiment as much as we do.*

How little know we what we are
How less what we may be!

Four years ago I was at school. Since then I have been a governess at Blake Hall, left it, come to Thorp Green, and seen the sea and York Minster.

Emily has been a teacher at Miss Patchet's school, and left it. Charlotte has left Miss Wooler's, been a governess at Mrs. Sidgwick's, left her, and gone to Mrs. White's. Branwell has given up painting, been a tutor in Cumberland, left it, and become a clerk on the railroad. Tabby has left us, Martha Brown has come in her place. We have got Keeper, got a sweet little cat and lost it, and also got a hawk. Got a wild goose which has flown away, and three tame ones, one of which has been killed. All these diversities, with many others, are things we did not expect or foresee in the July of 1837. *What will the next four years bring forth? Providence only knows. But we ourselves have sustained very little alteration since that time. I have the same faults that I had then, only I have more wisdom and experience, and a little more self-possession than I then enjoyed. How will it be when we open this paper and the one Emily has written? I wonder whether the Gondaliand will still be flourishing, and what will be their condition. I am now engaged in writing the fourth volume of Solala Vernon's Life.*

For some time I have looked upon 25 *as a sort of era in my existence. It may prove a true presentiment, or it may be only a superstitious fancy; the latter seems most likely, but time will show.*

Anne Brontë.

Let us next take up the other two little scraps of paper. They are dated July the 30th, 1845, or Emily's twenty-seventh birthday. Many things have happened, as she says. She has been to Brussels, and she has settled definitely at home again. They are still keenly interested in literature, and we still hear of the Gondals. There is wonderfully little difference in the tone or spirit of the journals. The concluding 'best wishes for this whole house till July the 30th, 1848, and as much longer as may be,' contain no premonition of coming disaster. Yet July 1848 was to find Branwell Brontë on the verge of the grave, and Emily on her deathbed. She died on the 14th of December of that year.

Haworth, Thursday, July 30*th*, 1845.

My birthday — showery, breezy, cool. I am twenty-seven years old to-day. This morning Anne and I opened the papers we wrote four years since, on my twenty-third birthday. This paper we intend, if all be well, to open on my thirtieth — three years hence, in 1848. *Since the* 1841 *paper the following events have taken place. Our school scheme has been abandoned, and instead Charlotte and I went to Brussels on the* 8*th of February* 1842.

Branwell left his place at Luddenden Foot. C. and I returned from Brussels, November 8*th* 1842, *in consequence of aunt's death.*

Branwell went to Thorp Green as a tutor, where Anne still continued, January 1843.

Charlotte returned to Brussels the same month, and, after staying a year, came back again on New Year's Day 1844.

Anne left her situation at Thorp Green of her own accord, June 1845.

Anne and I went our first long journey by ourselves together, leaving *home on the* 30*th of June, Monday, sleeping at York, returning to Keighley Tuesday evening, sleeping there and walking home on Wednesday morning. Though the weather was broken we enjoyed ourselves very much, except during a few hours at Bradford. And during our excursion we were, Ronald Macalgin, Henry Angora, Juliet Augusteena, Rosabella Esmaldan, Ella and Julian Egremont, Catharine Navarre, and Cordelia Fitzaphnold, escaping from the palaces of instruction to join the Royalists who are hard driven at present by the victorious Republicans. The Gondals still flourish bright as ever. I am at present writing a work on the First War. Anne has been writing some articles on this, and a book by Henry Sophona. We intend sticking firm by the rascals as long as they delight us, which I am glad to say they do at present. I should have mentioned that last summer the school scheme was revived in full vigour. We had prospectuses printed, despatched letters to all acquaintances imparting our plans, and did our little all; but it was found no go. Now I don't desire a school at all, and none of us have any great longing for it. We have cash enough for our present wants, with a prospect of accumulation. We are all in decent health, only that papa has a complaint in his eyes, and with the exception of B., who, I hope, will be better and do better hereafter. I am quite contented for myself: not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty, and having learnt to make the most of the present and long for the future with the fidgetiness that I cannot do all I wish; seldom or ever troubled with nothing to do, and merely desiring that everybody could be as comfortable as myself and as undesponding, and then we should have a very tolerable world of it.*

By mistake I find we have opened the paper on the 31*st instead of the* 30*th. Yesterday was much such a day as this, but the morning was divine.*

Tabby, who was gone in our last paper, is come back, and has lived with us two years and a half; and is in good health. Martha, who also departed, is here too. We have got Flossy; got and lost Tiger; lost the hawk Hero, which, with the geese, was given away, and is doubtless dead, for when I came back from Brussels I inquired on all hands and could hear nothing of him. Tiger died early last year. Keeper and Flossy are well, also the canary acquired four years since. We are now all at home, and likely to be there some time. Branwell went to Liverpool on Tuesday to stay a week. Tabby has just been teasing me to turn as formerly to 'Pilloputate.' Anne and I should have picked the black currants if it had been fine and sunshiny. I must hurry off now to my turning and ironing. I have plenty of work on hands, and writing, and am altogether full of business. With best wishes for the whole house till 1848, *July* 30*th, and as much longer as may be, — I conclude.*

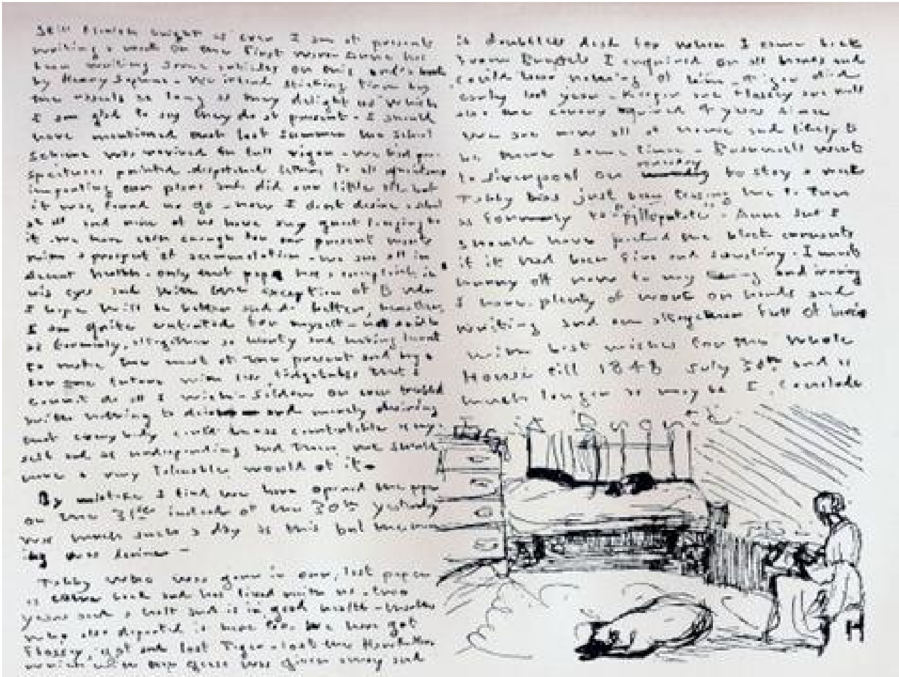
Emily Brontë.

Finally, I give Anne's last fragment, concerning which silence is essential. Interpretation of most of the references would be mere guess-work.

Thursday, July the 31*st*, 1845. *Yesterday was Emily's birthday, and the time when we should have opened our* 1845 *paper, but by mistake we opened* *it to-day instead. How many things have happened since it was written — some pleasant, some far otherwise. Yet I was then at Thorp Green, and now I am only just escaped from it. I was wishing to leave it then, and if I had known that I had four years longer to stay how wretched I should have been; but during my stay I have had some very unpleasant and undreamt-of experience of human nature. Others have seen more changes. Charlotte has left Mr. White's and been twice to Brussels, where she stayed each time nearly a year. Emily has been there too, and stayed nearly a year. Branwell has left Luddenden Foot, and been a tutor at Thorp Green, and had much tribulation and ill health. He was very ill on Thursday, but he went with John Brown to Liverpool, where he now is, I suppose; and we hope he will be better and do better in future. This is a dismal, cloudy, wet evening. We have had so far a very cold wet summer. Charlotte has lately been to Hathersage, in Derbyshire, on a visit of three weeks to Ellen Nussey. She is now sitting sewing in the dining-room. Emily is ironing upstairs. I am sitting in the dining-room in the rocking-chair before the fire with my feet on the fender. Papa is in the parlour. Tabby and Martha are, I think, in the kitchen. Keeper and Flossy are, I do not know where. Little Dick is hopping in his cage. When the last paper was written we were thinking of setting up a school. The scheme has been dropt, and long after taken up again and dropt again because we could not get pupils. Charlotte is thinking about getting another situation. She wishes to go to Paris. Will she go? She has let Flossy in, by-the-by, and he is now lying on the sofa. Emily is engaged in writing the Emperor Julius's life. She has read some of it, and I want very much to hear the rest. She is writing some poetry, too. I wonder what it is about? I have begun the third volume of Passages in the Life of an Individual. I wish I had finished it. This afternoon I began to set about making my grey figured silk frock that was dyed at Keighley. What sort of a hand shall I make of it? E. and I have a great deal of work to do. When shall we sensibly diminish it? I want to get a habit of early rising. Shall I succeed? We have not yet finished our Gondal Chronicles that we began three years and a half ago. When will they be done? The Gondals are at present in a sad state. The Republicans are uppermost, but the Royalists are not quite overcome. The young sovereigns, with their brothers and sisters, are still at the Palace of Instruction. The Unique Society, above half a year ago, were wrecked on a desert island as they were returning from Gaul. They are still there, but we have not played at them much yet. The Gondals in general are not in first-rate playing condition. Will they improve? I wonder how we shall all be and where and how situated on the thirtieth of July* 1848, *when, if we are all alive, Emily will be just* 30. *I shall be in my* 29th *year, Charlotte in her* 33rd, *and Branwell in his* 32nd; *and what changes shall we have seen and known; and shall we be much changed ourselves? I hope not, for the worse at least. I for my part cannot well be flatter or older in mind than I am now. Hoping for the best, I conclude.*

Anne Brontë.

Exactly fifty years were to elapse before these pieces of writing saw the light. The interest which must always centre in Emily Brontë amply justifies my publishing a fragment in facsimile; and it has the greater moment on account of the rough drawing which Emily has made of herself and of her dog Keeper. Emily's taste for drawing is a pathetic element in her always pathetic life. I have seen a number of her sketches. There is one in the possession of Mr. Nicholls of Keeper and Flossy, the former the bull-dog which followed her to the grave, the latter a little King Charlie which one of the Miss Robinsons gave to Anne. The sketch, however, like most of Emily's drawings, is technically full of errors. She was not a born artist, and possibly she had not the best opportunities of becoming one by hard work. Another drawing before me is of the hawk mentioned in the above fragment; and yet another is of the dog Growler, a predecessor of Keeper, which is not, however, mentioned in the correspondence. Upon Emily Brontë, the poet, I do not propose to write here. She left behind her, and Charlotte preserved, a manuscript volume containing the whole of the poems in the two collections of her verse, and there are other poems not yet published. Here, for example, are some verses in which the Gondals make a slight reappearance.



FACSIMILE OF TWO PAGES OF EMILY BRONTË'S DIARY

'*May* 21*st*, 1838.

GLENEDEN'S DREAM.

'Tell me, whether is it winter?
Say how long my sleep has been.
Have the woods I left so lovely

Lost their robes of tender green?
‘Is the morning slow in coming?
Is the night time loth to go?
Tell me, are the dreary mountains
Drearier still with drifted snow?
‘“Captive, since thou sawest the forest,
All its leaves have died away,
And another March has woven
Garlands for another May.
‘“Ice has barred the Arctic waters;
Soft Southern winds have set it free;
And once more to deep green valley
Golden flowers might welcome thee.”
‘Watcher in this lonely prison,
Shut from joy and kindly air,
Heaven descending in a vision
Taught my soul to do and bear.
‘It was night, a night of winter,
I lay on the dungeon floor,
And all other sounds were silent —
All, except the river’s roar.
‘Over Death and Desolation,
Fireless hearths, and lifeless homes;
Over orphans’ heartsick sorrows,
Patriot fathers’ bloody tombs;
‘Over friends, that my arms never
Might embrace in love again;
Memory ponderous until madness
Struck its poniard in my brain.
‘Deepest slumbers followed raving,
Yet, methought, I brooded still;
Still I saw my country bleeding,
Dying for a Tyrant’s will.
‘Not because my bliss was blasted,
Burned within the avenging flame;
Not because my scattered kindred
Died in woe or lived in shame.
‘God doth know I would have given
Every bosom dear to me,
Could that sacrifice have purchased
Tortured Gondal’s liberty!
‘But that at Ambition’s bidding
All her cherished hopes should wane,
That her noblest sons should muster,

Strive and fight and fall in vain.
'Hut and castle, hall and cottage,
Roofless, crumbling to the ground,
Mighty Heaven, a glad Avenger
Thy eternal Justice found.
'Yes, the arm that once would shudder
Even to grieve a wounded deer,
I beheld it, unrelenting,
Clothe in blood its sovereign's prayer.
'Glorious Dream! I saw the city
Blazing in Imperial shine,
And among adoring thousands
Stood a man of form divine.
'None need point the princely victim —
Now he smiles with royal pride!
Now his glance is bright as lightning,
Now the knife is in his side!
'Ah! I saw how death could darken,
Darken that triumphant eye!
His red heart's blood drenched my dagger;
My ear drank his dying sigh!
'Shadows come! what means this midnight?
O my God, I know it all!
Know the fever dream is over,
Unavenged, the Avengers fall!'

There are, indeed, a few fragments, all written in that tiny handwriting which the girls affected, and bearing various dates from 1833 to 1840. A new edition of Emily's poems, will, by virtue of these verses, have a singular interest for her admirers. With all her gifts as a poet, however, it is by *Wuthering Heights* that Emily Brontë is best known to the world; and the weirdness and force of that book suggest an inquiry concerning the influences which produced it. Dr. Wright, in his entertaining book, *The Brontës in Ireland*, recounts the story of Patrick Brontë's origin, and insists that it was in listening to her father's anecdotes of his own Irish experiences that Emily obtained the weird material of *Wuthering Heights*. It is not, of course, enough to point out that Dr. Wright's story of the Irish Brontës is full of contradictions. A number of tales picked up at random from an illiterate peasantry might very well abound in inconsistencies, and yet contain some measure of truth. But nothing in Dr. Wright's narrative is confirmed, save only the fact that Patrick Brontë continued throughout his life in some slight measure of correspondence with his brothers and sisters — a fact rendered sufficiently evident by a perusal of his will. Dr. Wright tells of many visits to Ireland in order to trace the Brontë traditions to their source; and yet he had not — in his first edition — marked the elementary fact that the registry of births in County Down records the existence of innumerable Bruntys and of not a single Brontë. Dr. Wright probably made his inquiries with the stories of Emily and Charlotte well in mind. He sought for similar traditions, and the quick-witted Irish peasantry gave him all that he wanted. They served up and embellished the current traditions of the neighbourhood for his benefit, as the peasantry do everywhere for folklore enthusiasts. Charlotte Brontë's uncle Hugh, we are told, read the *Quarterly Review* article upon *Jane Eyre*, and, armed with a shillelagh, came to England, in order to wreak vengeance upon the writer of the bitter attack. He landed at Liverpool, walked from Liverpool to Haworth, saw his nieces, who 'gathered round him,' and listened to his account of his mission. He then went to London and made abundant inquiries — but why pursue this ludicrous story further? In the first place, the *Quarterly Review* article was published in December 1848 — after Emily was dead, and while Anne was dying. Very soon after the review appeared Charlotte was informed of its authorship, and references to Miss Rigby and the *Quarterly* are found more than once in her correspondence with Mr. Williams.

This is a lengthy digression from the story of Emily's life, but it is of moment to discover whether there is any evidence of influences other than those which her Yorkshire home afforded. I have discussed the matter with Miss Ellen Nussey, and with Mr. Nicholls. Miss Nussey never, in all her visits to Haworth, heard a single reference to the Irish legends related by Dr. Wright, and firmly believes them to be mythical. Mr. Nicholls, during the six years that he lived alone at the parsonage with his father-in-law, never heard one single word from Mr. Brontë — who was by no means disposed to reticence — about these stories, and is also of opinion that they are purely legendary.

It has been suggested that Emily would have been guilty almost of a crime to have based the more sordid part of her narrative upon her brother's transgressions. This is sheer nonsense. She wrote *Wuthering Heights* because she was impelled thereto, and the book, with all its morbid force and fire, will remain, for all time, as a monument of the most striking genius that nineteenth century womanhood has given us. It was partly her life in Yorkshire — the local colour was mainly derived from her brief experience as a governess at Halifax — but it was partly, also, the German fiction which she had devoured during the Brussels period, that inspired *Wuthering Heights*.

Here, however, are glimpses of Emily Brontë on a more human side.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*March* 25*th*, 1844.

'Dear Nell, — I got home safely, and was not too much tired on arriving at Haworth. I feel rather better to-day than I have been, and in time I hope to regain more strength. I found Emily and Papa well, and a letter from Branwell intimating that he and Anne are pretty well too. Emily is much obliged to you for the flower seeds. She wishes to know if the Sicilian pea and crimson corn-flower are hardy flowers, or if they are delicate, and should be sown in warm and sheltered situations? Tell me also if you went to Mrs. John Swain's on Friday, and if you enjoyed yourself; talk to me, in short, as you would do if we were together. Good-morning, dear Nell; I shall say no more to you at present.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*April* 5*th*, 1844.

'Dear Nell, — We were all very glad to get your letter this morning. *We*, I say, as both Papa and Emily were anxious to hear of the safe arrival of yourself and the little *varmint*. As you conjecture, Emily and I set-to to shirt-making the very day after you left, and we have stuck to it pretty closely ever since. We miss your society at least as much as you miss ours, depend upon it; would that you were within calling distance. Be sure you write to me. I shall expect another letter on Thursday — don't disappoint me. Best regards to your mother and sisters. — Yours, somewhat irritated,

'C. Brontë.'

Earlier than this Emily had herself addressed a letter to Miss Nussey, and, indeed, the two letters from Emily Brontë to Ellen Nussey which I print here are, I imagine, the only letters of Emily's in existence. Mr. Nicholls informs me that he has never seen a letter in Emily's handwriting. The following letter is written during Charlotte's second stay in Brussels, and at a time when Ellen Nussey contemplated joining her there — a project never carried out.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 12, 1843.

'Dear Miss Nussey, — I should be wanting in common civility if I did not thank you for your kindness in letting me know of an opportunity to send postage free.

'I have written as you directed, though if next Tuesday means to-morrow I fear it will be too late. Charlotte has never mentioned a word about coming home. If you would go over for half-a-year, perhaps you might be able to bring her back with you — otherwise, she might vegetate there till the age of Methuselah for mere lack of courage to face the voyage.

'All here are in good health; so was Anne according to her last account. The holidays will be here in a week or two, and then, if she be willing, I will get her to write you a proper letter, a feat that I have never performed. — With love and good wishes,

'Emily J. Brontë.'

The next letter is written at the time that Charlotte is staying with her friend at Mr. Henry Nussey's house at Hathersage in Derbyshire.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *February* 9*th*, 1846.

'Dear Miss Nussey, — I fancy this note will be too late to decide one way or other with respect to Charlotte's stay. Yours only came this morning

(Wednesday), and unless mine travels faster you will not receive it till Friday. Papa, of course, misses Charlotte, and will be glad to have her back. Anne and I ditto; but as she goes from home so seldom, you may keep her a day or two longer, if your eloquence is equal to the task of persuading her — that is, if she still be with you when you get this permission. Love from Anne. — Yours truly,

'Emily J. Brontë.'

Wuthering Heights and *Agnes Grey*, 'by Ellis and Acton Bell,' were published together in three volumes in 1847. The former novel occupied two volumes, and the latter one. By a strange freak of publishing, the book was issued as *Wuthering Heights*, vol. I. and II., and *Agnes Grey*, vol. III., in deference, it must be supposed, to the passion for the three volume novel. Charlotte refers to the publication in the next letter, which contained as inclosure the second preface to *Jane Eyre* — the preface actually published. An earlier preface, entitled 'A Word to the *Quarterly*,' was cancelled.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*December* 21*st*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — I am, for my own part, dissatisfied with the preface I sent — I fear it savours of flippancy. If you see no objection I should prefer substituting the inclosed. It is rather more lengthy, but it expresses something I have long wished to express.

'Mr. Smith is kind indeed to think of sending me *The Jar of Honey*. When I receive the book I will write to him. I cannot thank you sufficiently for your letters, and I can give you but a faint idea of the pleasure they afford me; they seem to introduce such light and life to the torpid retirement where we live like dormice. But, understand this distinctly, you must never write to me except when you have both leisure and inclination. I know your time is too fully occupied and too valuable to be often at the service of any one individual.

'You are not far wrong in your judgment respecting *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. Ellis has a strong, original mind, full of strange though sombre power. When he writes poetry that power speaks in language at once condensed, elaborated, and refined, but in prose it breaks forth in scenes which shock more than they attract. Ellis will improve, however, because he knows his defects. *Agnes Grey* is the mirror of the mind of the writer. The orthography and punctuation of the books are mortifying to a degree: almost all the errors that were corrected in the proof-sheets appear intact in what should have been the fair copies. If Mr. Newby always does business in this way, few authors would like to have him for their publisher a second time. — Believe me, dear sir, yours respectfully,

'C. Bell.'

When *Jane Eyre* was performed at a London theatre — and it has been more than once adapted for the stage, and performed many hundreds of times in England and America — Charlotte Brontë wrote to her friend Mr. Williams as follows: —

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*February* 5*th*, 1848.

'Dear Sir, — A representation of *Jane Eyre* at a minor theatre would no doubt be a rather afflicting spectacle to the author of that work. I suppose all would be wofully exaggerated and painfully vulgarised by the actors and actresses on such a stage. What, I cannot help asking myself, would they make of Mr. Rochester? And the picture my fancy conjures up by way of reply is a somewhat humiliating one. What would they make of Jane Eyre? I see something very pert and very affected as an answer to that query.

'Still, were it in my power, I should certainly make a point of being myself a witness of the exhibition. Could I go quietly and alone, I undoubtedly should go; I should endeavour to endure both rant and whine, strut and grimace, for the sake of the useful observations to be collected in such a scene.

'As to whether I wish *you* to go, that is another question. I am afraid I have hardly fortitude enough really to wish it. One can endure being disgusted with one's own work, but that a friend should share the repugnance is unpleasant. Still, I know it would interest me to hear both your account of the exhibition and any ideas which the effect of the various parts on the spectators might suggest to you. In short, I should like to know what you would think, and to hear what you would say on the subject. But you must not go merely to satisfy my curiosity; you must do as you think proper. Whatever you decide on will content me: if you do not go, you will be spared a vulgarising impression of the book; if you *do* go, I shall perhaps gain a little information — either alternative has its advantage.

'I am glad to hear that the second edition is selling, for the sake of Messrs. Smith & Elder. I rather feared it would remain on hand, and occasion loss. *Wuthering Heights* it appears is selling too, and consequently Mr. Newby is getting into marvellously good tune with his authors. — I remain, my dear sir, yours faithfully,

'Currer Bell.'

I print the above letter here because of its sequel, which has something to say of Ellis — of Emily Brontë.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*February* 15*th*, 1848.

'Dear Sir, — Your letter, as you may fancy, has given me something to think about. It has presented to my mind a curious picture, for the description you give is so vivid, I seem to realise it all. I wanted information and I have got it. You have raised the veil from a corner of your great world — your London — and have shown me a glimpse of what I might call loathsome, but which I prefer calling *strange*. Such, then, is a sample of what amuses the metropolitan populace! Such is a view of one of their haunts!

'Did I not say that I would have gone to this theatre and witnessed this exhibition if it had been in my power? What absurdities people utter when they speak of they know not what!

'You must try now to forget entirely what you saw.

'As to my next book, I suppose it will grow to maturity in time, as grass grows or corn ripens; but I cannot force it. It makes slow progress thus far: it is not every day, nor even every week that I can write what is worth reading; but I shall (if not hindered by other matters) be industrious when the humour comes, and in due time I hope to see such a result as I shall not be ashamed to offer you, my publishers, and the public.

'Have you not two classes of writers — the author and the bookmaker? And is not the latter more prolific than the former? Is he not, indeed, wonderfully fertile; but does the public, or the publisher even, make much account of his productions? Do not both tire of him in time?

'Is it not because authors aim at a style of living better suited to merchants, professed gain-seekers, that they are often compelled to degenerate to mere bookmakers, and to find the great stimulus of their pen in the necessity of earning money? If they were not ashamed to be frugal, might they not be more independent?

'I should much — very much — like to take that quiet view of the "great world" you allude to, but I have as yet won no right to give myself such a treat: it must be for some future day — when, I don't know. Ellis, I imagine, would soon turn aside from the spectacle in disgust. I do not think he admits it as his creed that "the proper study of mankind is man" — at least not the artificial man of cities. In some points I consider Ellis somewhat of a theorist: now and then he broaches ideas which strike my sense as much more daring and original than practical; his reason may be in advance of mine, but certainly it often travels a different road. I should say Ellis will not be seen in his full strength till he is seen as an essayist.

'I return to you the note inclosed under your cover, it is from the editor of the *Berwick Warder*; he wants a copy of *Jane Eyre* to review.

'With renewed thanks for your continued goodness to me, — I remain, my dear sir, yours faithfully,

'Currer Bell.'

A short time afterwards the illness came to Emily from which she died the same year. Branwell died in September 1848, and a month later Charlotte writes with a heart full of misgivings: —

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*October* 29*th*, 1848.

'Dear Ellen, — I am sorry you should have been uneasy at my not writing to you ere this, but you must remember it is scarcely a week since I received your last, and my life is not so varied that in the interim much should have occurred worthy of mention. You insist that I should write about myself; this puts me in straits, for I really have nothing interesting to say about myself. I think I have now nearly got over the effects of my late illness, and am almost restored to my normal condition of health. I sometimes wish that it was a little higher, but we ought to be content with such blessings as we have, and not pine after those that are out of our reach. I feel much more uneasy about my sisters than myself just now. Emily's cold and cough are very obstinate. I fear she has pain in the chest, and I sometimes catch a shortness in her breathing, when she has moved at all quickly. She looks very, very thin and pale. Her reserved nature occasions me great uneasiness of mind. It is useless to question her — you get no answers. It is still more useless to recommend remedies — they are never adopted. Nor can I shut my eyes to the fact of Anne's great delicacy of constitution. The late sad event has, I feel, made me more apprehensive than common. I cannot help feeling much depressed sometimes. I try to leave all in God's hands; to trust in His goodness; but faith and resignation are difficult to practise under some circumstances. The weather has been most unfavourable for invalids of late: sudden changes of temperature, and cold penetrating winds have been frequent here. Should the atmosphere become settled, perhaps a favourable effect might be produced on the general health, and those harassing coughs and colds be removed. Papa has not quite escaped, but he has, so far, stood it out better than any of us. You must not mention my going to Brookroyd this winter. I could not, and would not, leave home on any account. I am truly sorry to hear of Miss Heald's serious illness, it seems to me she has been for some years out of health now. These things make one *feel* as well as *know*, that this world is not our abiding-place. We should not knit human ties too close, or clasp human affections too fondly. They must leave us, or we must leave them, one day. Good-bye for the present. God restore health and strength to you and to all who need it. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*November* 2*nd*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — I have received, since I last wrote to you, two papers, the *Standard of Freedom* and the *Morning Herald*, both containing notices of the Poems; which notices, I hope, will at least serve a useful purpose to Mr. Smith in attracting public attention to the volume. As critiques, I should have thought more of them had they more fully recognised Ellis Bell's merits; but the lovers of abstract poetry are few in number.

'Your last letter was very welcome, it was written with so kind an intention: you made it so interesting in order to divert my mind. I should have thanked you for it before now, only that I kept waiting for a cheerful day and mood in which to address you, and I grieve to say the shadow which has fallen on our quiet home still lingers round it. I am better, but others are ill now. Papa is not well, my sister Emily has something like slow inflammation of the lungs, and even our old servant, who lived with us nearly a quarter of a century, is suffering under serious indisposition.

'I would fain hope that Emily is a little better this evening, but it is difficult to ascertain this. She is a real stoic in illness: she neither seeks nor will accept sympathy. To put any questions, to offer any aid, is to annoy; she will not yield a step before pain or sickness till forced; not one of her ordinary avocations will she voluntarily renounce. You must look on and see her do what she is unfit to do, and not dare to say a word — a painful necessity for those to whom her health and existence are as precious as the life in their veins. When she is ill there seems to be no sunshine in the world for me. The tie of sister is near and dear indeed, and I think a certain harshness in her powerful and peculiar character only makes me cling to her more. But this is all family egotism (so to speak) — excuse it, and, above all, never allude to it, or to the name Emily, when you write to me. I do not always show your letters, but I never withhold them when they are inquired after.

'I am sorry I cannot claim for the name Brontë the honour of being connected with the notice in the *Bradford Observer*. That paper is in the hands of dissenters, and I should think the best articles are usually written by one or two intelligent dissenting ministers in the town. Alexander Harris is fortunate in your encouragement, as Currer Bell once was. He has not forgotten the first letter he received from you, declining indeed his MS. of *The Professor*, but in terms so different from those in which the rejections of the other publishers had been expressed — with so much more sense and kind feeling, it took away the sting of disappointment and kindled new hope in his mind.

'Currer Bell might expostulate with you again about thinking too well of him, but he refrains; he prefers acknowledging that the expression of a fellow creature's regard — even if more than he deserves — does him good: it gives him a sense of content. Whatever portion of the tribute is unmerited on his part, would, he is aware, if exposed to the test of daily acquaintance, disperse like a broken bubble, but he has confidence that a portion, however minute, of solid friendship would remain behind, and that portion he reckons amongst his treasures.

'I am glad, by-the-bye, to hear that *Madeline* is come out at last, and was happy to see a favourable notice of that work and of *The Three Paths* in the *Morning Herald*. I wish Miss Kavanagh all success.

'Trusting that Mrs. Williams's health continues strong, and that your own and that of all your children is satisfactory, for without health there is little comfort, — I am, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

The next letter gives perhaps the most interesting glimpse of Emily that has been afforded us.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*November* 22*nd*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — I put your most friendly letter into Emily's hands as soon as I had myself perused it, taking care, however, not to say a word in favour of homœopathy — that would not have answered. It is best usually to leave her to form her own judgment, and *especially* not to advocate the side you wish her to favour; if you do, she is sure to lean in the opposite direction, and ten to one will argue herself into non-compliance. Hitherto she has refused medicine, rejected medical advice; no reasoning, no entreaty, has availed to induce her to see a physician. After reading your letter she said, "Mr. Williams's intention was kind and good, but he was under a delusion: Homœopathy was only another form of quackery." Yet she may reconsider this opinion and come to a different conclusion; her second thoughts are often the best.

'The *North American Review* is worth reading; there is no mincing the matter there. What a bad set the Bells must be! What appalling books they write! To-day, as Emily appeared a little easier, I thought the *Review* would amuse her, so I read it aloud to her and Anne. As I sat between them at our quiet but now somewhat melancholy fireside, I studied the two ferocious authors. Ellis, the "man of uncommon talents, but dogged, brutal, and morose," sat leaning back in his easy chair drawing his impeded breath as he best could, and looking, alas! piteously pale and wasted; it is not his wont to laugh, but he smiled half-amused and half in scorn as he listened. Acton was sewing, no emotion ever stirs him to loquacity, so he only smiled too, dropping at the same time a single word of calm amazement to hear his character so darkly portrayed. I wonder what the reviewer would have thought of his own sagacity could he have beheld the pair as I did. Vainly, too, might he have looked round for the masculine partner in the firm of "Bell & Co." How I laugh in my sleeve when I read the solemn assertions that *Jane Eyre* was written in partnership, and that it "bears the marks of more than one mind and one sex."

'The wise critics would certainly sink a degree in their own estimation if they knew that yours or Mr. Smith's was the first masculine hand that touched the MS. of *Jane Eyre*, and that till you or he read it no masculine eye had scanned a line of its contents, no masculine ear heard a phrase from its pages. However, the view they take of the matter rather pleases me than otherwise. If they like, I am not unwilling they should think a dozen ladies and gentlemen aided at the compilation of the book. Strange patchwork it must seem to them — this chapter being penned by Mr., and that by Miss or Mrs. Bell; that character or scene being delineated by the husband, that other by the wife! The gentleman, of course, doing the rough work, the lady getting up the finer parts. I admire the idea vastly.

'I have read *Madeline*. It is a fine pearl in simple setting. Julia Kavanagh has my esteem; I would rather know her than many far more brilliant personages. Somehow my heart leans more to her than to Eliza Lynn, for instance. Not that I have read either *Amymone* or *Azeth*, but I have seen extracts from them which I found it literally impossible to digest. They presented to my imagination Lytton Bulwer in petticoats — an overwhelming vision. By-the-bye, the American critic talks admirable sense about Bulwer

— candour obliges me to confess that.

'I must abruptly bid you good-bye for the present. — Yours sincerely,

'Currer Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*December 7th*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — I duly received Dr. Curie's work on Homœopathy, and ought to apologise for having forgotten to thank you for it. I will return it when I have given it a more attentive perusal than I have yet had leisure to do. My sister has read it, but as yet she remains unshaken in her former opinion: she will not admit there can be efficacy in such a system. Were I in her place, it appears to me that I should be glad to give it a trial, confident that it can scarcely do harm and might do good.

'I can give no favourable report of Emily's state. My father is very despondent about her. Anne and I cherish hope as well as we can, but her appearance and her symptoms tend to crush that feeling. Yet I argue that the present emaciation, cough, weakness, shortness of breath are the results of inflammation, now, I trust, subsided, and that with time these ailments will gradually leave her. But my father shakes his head and speaks of others of our family once similarly afflicted, for whom he likewise persisted in hoping against hope, and who are now removed where hope and fear fluctuate no more. There were, however, differences between their case and hers — important differences I think. I must cling to the expectation of her recovery, I cannot renounce it.

'Much would I give to have the opinion of a skilful professional man. It is easy, my dear sir, to say there is nothing in medicine, and that physicians are useless, but we naturally wish to procure aid for those we love when we see them suffer; most painful is it to sit still, look on, and do nothing. Would that my sister added to her many great qualities the humble one of tractability! I have again and again incurred her displeasure by urging the necessity of seeking advice, and I fear I must yet incur it again and again. Let me leave the subject; I have no right thus to make you a sharer in our sorrow.

'I am indeed surprised that Mr. Newby should say that he is to publish another work by Ellis and Acton Bell. Acton has had quite enough of him. I think I *have* before intimated that that author never more intends to have Mr. Newby for a publisher. Not only does he seem to forget that engagements made should be fulfilled, but by a system of petty and contemptible manœuvring he throws an air of charlatanry over the works of which he has the management. This does not suit the "Bells": they have their own rude north-country ideas of what is delicate, honourable, and gentlemanlike.

'Newby's conduct in no sort corresponds with these notions; they have found him — I will not say what they have found him. Two words that would exactly suit him are at my pen point, but I shall not take the trouble to employ them.

'Ellis Bell is at present in no condition to trouble himself with thoughts either of writing or publishing. Should it please Heaven to restore his health and strength, he reserves to himself the right of deciding whether or not Mr. Newby has forfeited every claim to his second work.

'I have not yet read the second number of *Pendennis*. The first I thought rich in indication of ease, resource, promise; but it is not Thackeray's way to develop his full power all at once. *Vanity Fair* began very quietly — it was quiet all through, but the stream as it rolled gathered a resistless volume and force. Such, I doubt not, will be the case with *Pendennis*.

'You must forget what I said about Eliza Lynn. She may be the best of human beings, and I am but a narrow-minded fool to express prejudice against a person I have never seen.

'Believe me, my dear sir, in haste, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

The next four letters speak for themselves.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*December* 9*th*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — Your letter seems to relieve me from a difficulty and to open my way. I know it would be useless to consult Drs. Elliotson or Forbes: my sister would not see the most skilful physician in England if he were brought to her just now, nor would she follow his prescription. With regard to Homœopathy, she has at least admitted that it cannot do much harm; perhaps if I get the medicines she may consent to try them; at any rate, the experiment shall be made.

'Not knowing Dr. Epps's address, I send the inclosed statement of her case through your hands.

'I deeply feel both your kindness and Mr. Smith's in thus interesting yourselves in what touches me so nearly. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*December* 15*th*, 1848.

'My dear Ellen, — I mentioned your coming here to Emily as a mere suggestion, with the faint hope that the prospect might cheer her, as she really esteems you perhaps more than any other person out of this house. I found, however, it would not do; any, the slightest excitement or putting out of the way is not to be thought of, and indeed I do not think the journey in this unsettled weather, with the walk from Keighley and walk back, at all advisable for yourself. Yet I should have liked to see you, and so would Anne. Emily continues much the same; yesterday I thought her a little better, but to-day she is not so well. I hope still, for I *must* hope — she is dear to me as life. If I let the faintness of despair reach my heart I shall become worthless. The attack was, I believe, in the first place, inflammation of the lungs; it ought to have been met promptly in time. She is too intractable. I *do* wish I knew her state and feelings more clearly. The fever is not so high as it was, but the pain in the side, the cough, the emaciation are there still.

‘Remember me kindly to all at Brookroyd, and believe me, yours faithfully,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*December* 21*st*, 1848.

‘My dear Ellen, — Emily suffers no more from pain or weakness now. She will never suffer more in this world. She is gone, after a hard, short conflict. She died on *Tuesday*, the very day I wrote to you. I thought it very possible she might be with us still for weeks, and a few hours afterwards she was in eternity. Yes, there is no Emily in time or on earth now. Yesterday we put her poor, wasted, mortal frame quietly under the church pavement. We are very calm at present. Why should we be otherwise? The anguish of seeing her suffer is over; the spectacle of the pains of death is gone by; the funeral day is past. We feel she is at peace. No need now to tremble for the hard frost and the keen wind. Emily does not feel them. She died in a time of promise. We saw her taken from life in its prime. But it is God’s will, and the place where she is gone is better than she has left.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*December* 25*th*, 1848.

‘My dear Sir, — I will write to you more at length when my heart can find a little rest — now I can only thank you very briefly for your letter, which seemed to me eloquent in its sincerity.

‘Emily is nowhere here now, her wasted mortal remains are taken out of the house. We have laid her cherished head under the church aisle beside my mother’s, my two sisters’ — dead long ago — and my poor, hapless brother’s. But a small remnant of the race is left — so my poor father thinks.

‘Well, the loss is ours, not hers, and some sad comfort I take, as I hear the wind blow and feel the cutting keenness of the frost, in knowing that the elements bring her no more suffering; their severity cannot reach her grave; her fever is quieted, her restlessness soothed, her deep, hollow cough is hushed for ever; we do not hear it in the night nor listen for it in the morning; we have not the conflict of the strangely strong spirit and the fragile frame before us — relentless conflict — once seen, never to be forgotten. A dreary calm reigns round us, in the midst of which we seek resignation.

‘My father and my sister Anne are far from well. As for me, God has hitherto most graciously sustained me; so far I have felt adequate to bear my own burden and even to offer a little help to others. I am not ill; I can get through daily duties, and do something towards keeping hope and energy alive in our mourning household. My father says to me almost hourly, “Charlotte, you must bear up, I shall sink if you fail me”; these words, you can conceive, are a stimulus to nature. The sight, too, of my sister Anne’s very still but deep sorrow wakens in me such fear for her that I dare not falter. Somebody *must* cheer the rest.

‘So I will not now ask why Emily was torn from us in the fulness of our attachment, rooted up in the prime of her own days, in the promise of her powers; why her existence now lies like a field of green corn trodden down, like a tree in full bearing struck at the root. I will only say, sweet is rest after labour and calm after tempest, and repeat again and again that Emily knows that now. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

And then there are these last pathetic references to the beloved sister.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*January* 2*nd*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — Untoward circumstances come to me, I think, less painfully than pleasant ones would just now. The lash of the *Quarterly*, however severely applied, cannot sting — as its praise probably would not elate me. Currer Bell feels a sorrowful independence of reviews and reviewers; their approbation might indeed fall like an additional weight on his heart, but their censure has no bitterness for him.

'My sister Anne sends the accompanying answer to the letter received through you the other day; will you be kind enough to post it? She is not well yet, nor is papa, both are suffering under severe influenza colds. My letters had better be brief at present — they cannot be cheerful. I am, however, still sustained. While looking with dismay on the desolation sickness and death have wrought in our home, I can combine with awe of God's judgments a sense of gratitude for his mercies. Yet life has become very void, and hope has proved a strange traitor; when I shall again be able to put confidence in her suggestions, I know not: she kept whispering that Emily would not, *could* not die, and where is she now? Out of my reach, out of my world — torn from me. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

'*March* 3*rd*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — Hitherto, I have always forgotten to acknowledge the receipt of the parcel from Cornhill. It came at a time when I could not open it nor think of it; its contents are still a mystery. I will not taste, till I can enjoy them. I looked at it the other day. It reminded me too sharply of the time when the first parcel arrived last October: Emily was then beginning to be ill — the opening of the parcel and examination of the books cheered her; their perusal occupied her for many a weary day. The very evening before her last morning dawned I read to her one of Emerson's essays. I read on, till I found she was not listening — I thought to recommence next day. Next day, the first glance at her face told me what would happen before night-fall.

'C. Brontë.'

'*November* 19*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I am very sorry to hear that Mr. Taylor's illness has proved so much more serious than was anticipated, but I do hope he is now better. That he should be quite well cannot be as yet expected, for I believe rheumatic fever is a complaint slow to leave the system it has invaded.

‘Now that I have almost formed the resolution of coming to London, the thought begins to present itself to me under a pleasant aspect. At first it was sad; it recalled the last time I went and with whom, and to whom I came home, and in what dear companionship I again and again narrated all that had been seen, heard, and uttered in that visit. Emily would never go into any sort of society herself, and whenever I went I could on my return communicate to her a pleasure that suited her, by giving the distinct faithful impression of each scene I had witnessed. When pressed to go, she would sometimes say, “What is the use? Charlotte will bring it all home to me.” And indeed I delighted to please her thus. My occupation is gone now.

‘I shall come to be lectured. I perceive you are ready with animadversion; you are not at all well satisfied on some points, so I will open my ears to hear, nor will I close my heart against conviction; but I forewarn you, I have my own doctrines, not acquired, but innate, some that I fear cannot be rooted up without tearing away all the soil from which they spring, and leaving only unproductive rock for new seed.

‘I have read the *Caxtons*, I have looked at *Fanny Hervey*. I think I will not write what I think of either — should I see you I will speak it.

‘Take a hundred, take a thousand of such works and weigh them in the balance against a page of Thackeray. I hope Mr. Thackeray is recovered.

‘The *Sun*, the *Morning Herald*, and the *Critic* came this morning. None of them express disappointment from *Shirley*, or on the whole compare her disadvantageously with *Jane*. It strikes me that those worthies — the *Athenæum*, *Spectator*, *Economist*, made haste to be first with their notices that they might give the tone; if so, their manœuvre has not yet quite succeeded.

‘The *Critic*, our old friend, is a friend still. Why does the pulse of pain beat in every pleasure? Ellis and Acton Bell are referred to, and where are they? I will not repine. Faith whispers they are not in those graves to which imagination turns — the feeling, thinking, the inspired natures are beyond earth, in a region more glorious. I believe them blessed. I think, I *will* think, my loss has been *their* gain. Does it weary you that I refer to them? If so, forgive me. — Yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.

‘Before closing this I glanced over the letter inclosed under your cover. Did you read it? It is from a lady, not quite an old maid, but nearly one, she says; no signature or date; a queer, but good-natured production, it made me half cry, half laugh. I am sure *Shirley* has been exciting enough for her, and too exciting. I cannot well reply to the letter since it bears no address, and I am glad — I should not know what to say. She is not sure whether I am a gentleman or not, but I fancy she thinks so. Have you any idea who she is? If I were a gentleman and like my heroes, she suspects she should fall in love with me. She had better not. It would be a pity to cause such a waste of sensibility. You and Mr. Smith would not let me announce myself as a single gentleman of mature age in my preface, but if you had permitted it, a great many elderly spinsters would have been pleased.’

The last words that I have to say concerning Emily are contained in a letter to me from Miss Ellen Nussey.

‘So very little is known of Emily Brontë,’ she writes, ‘that every little detail awakens an interest. Her extreme reserve seemed impenetrable, yet she was intensely lovable; she invited confidence in her moral power. Few people have the gift of looking and smiling as she could look and smile. One of her rare expressive looks was something to remember through life, there was such a depth of soul and feeling, and yet a shyness of revealing herself — a strength of self-containment seen in no other. She was in the strictest sense a law unto herself, and a heroine in keeping to her law. She and gentle Anne were to be seen twined together as united statues of power and humility. They were to be seen with their arms lacing each other in their younger days whenever their occupations permitted their union. On the top of a moor or in a deep glen Emily was a child in spirit for glee and enjoyment; or when thrown entirely on her own resources to do a kindness, she could be vivacious in conversation and enjoy giving pleasure. A spell of mischief also lurked in her on occasions when out on the moors. She enjoyed leading Charlotte where she would not dare to go of her own free-will. Charlotte had a mortal dread of unknown animals, and it was Emily’s pleasure to lead her into close vicinity, and then to tell her of how and of what she had done, laughing at her horror with great amusement. If Emily wanted a book she might have left in the sitting-room she would dart in again without looking at any one, especially if any guest were present. Among the curates, Mr. Weightman was her only exception for any conventional courtesy. The ability with which she took up music was amazing; the style, the touch, and the expression was that of a professor absorbed heart and soul in his theme. The two dogs, Keeper and Flossy, were always in quiet waiting by the side of Emily and Anne during their breakfast of Scotch oatmeal and milk, and always had a share handed down to them at the close of the meal. Poor old Keeper, Emily’s faithful friend and worshipper, seemed to understand her like a human being. One evening, when the four friends were sitting closely round the fire in the sitting-room, Keeper forced himself in between Charlotte and Emily and mounted himself on Emily’s lap; finding the space too limited for his comfort he pressed himself forward on to the guest’s knees, making himself quite comfortable. Emily’s heart was won by the unresisting endurance of the visitor, little guessing that she herself, being in close contact, was the inspiring cause of submission to Keeper’s preference. Sometimes Emily would delight in showing off Keeper — make him frantic in action, and roar with the voice of a lion. It was a terrifying exhibition within the walls of an ordinary sitting-room. Keeper was a solemn mourner at Emily’s funeral and never recovered his cheerfulness.’

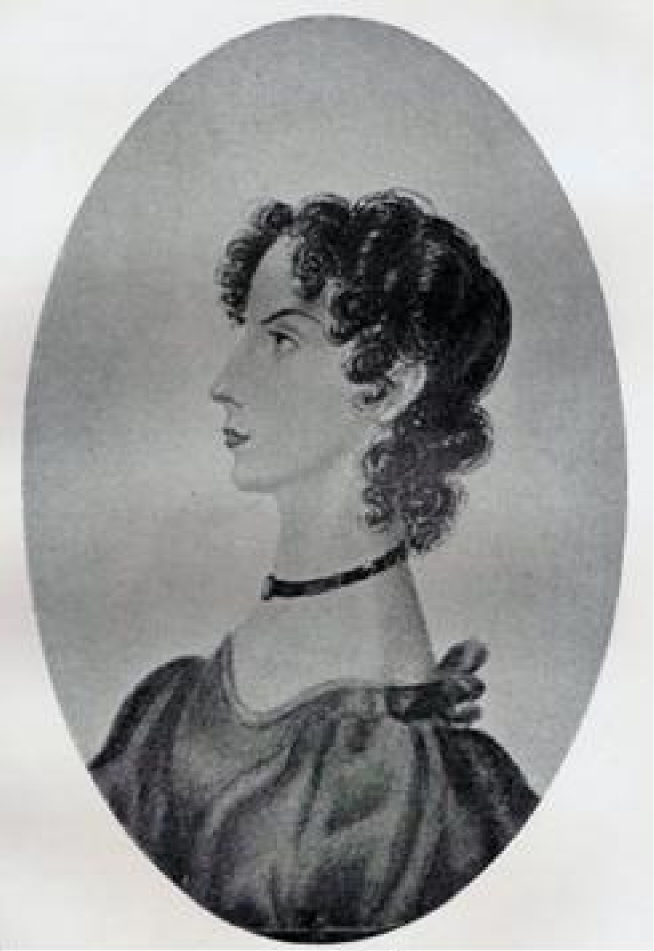
CHAPTER VII: ANNE BRONTË

It can scarcely be doubted that Anne Brontë's two novels, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, would have long since fallen into oblivion but for the inevitable association with the romances of her two greater sisters. While this may he taken for granted, it is impossible not to feel, even at the distance of half a century, a sense of Anne's personal charm. Gentleness is a word always associated with her by those who knew her. When Mr. Nicholls saw what professed to be a portrait of Anne in a magazine article, he wrote: 'What an awful caricature of the dear, gentle Anne Brontë!' Mr. Nicholls has a portrait of Anne in his possession, drawn by Charlotte, which he pronounces to be an admirable likeness, and this does convey the impression of a sweet and gentle nature.

Anne, as we have seen, was taken in long clothes from Thornton to Haworth. Her godmother was a Miss Outhwaite, a fact I learn from an inscription in Anne's *Book of Common Prayer*. '*Miss Outhwaite to her goddaughter*, *Anne Brontë*, *July* 13*th*, 1827.' Miss Outhwaite was not forgetful of her goddaughter, for by her will she left Anne £200.

There is a sampler worked by Anne, bearing date January 23rd, 1830, and there is a later book than the Prayer Book, with Anne's name in it, and, as might be expected, it is a good-conduct prize. *Prize for good conduct presented to Miss A. Brontë with Miss Wooler's kind love*, *Roe Head*, *Dec.* 14*th*, 1836, is the inscription in a copy of Watt *On the Improvement of the Mind*.

Apart from the correspondence we know little more than this — that Anne was the least assertive of the three sisters, and that she was more distinctly a general favourite. We have Charlotte's own word for it that even the curates ventured upon 'sheep's eyes' at Anne. We know all too little of her two experiences as governess, first at Blake Hall with Mrs. Ingham, and later at Thorp Green with Mrs. Robinson. The painful episode of Branwell's madness came to disturb her sojourn at the latter place, but long afterwards her old pupils, the Misses Robinson, called to see her at Haworth; and one of them, who became a Mrs. Clapham of Keighley, always retained the most kindly memories of her gentle governess.



ANNE BRONTË

From a Drawing by Charlotte in the possession of Mr. Nicholls

With the exception of these two uncomfortable episodes as governess, Anne would seem to have had no experience of the larger world. Even before Anne's death, Charlotte had visited Brussels, London, and Hathersage (in Derbyshire). Anne never, I think, set foot out of her native county, although she was the only one of her family to die away from home. Of her correspondence I have only the two following letters: —

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *October* 4*th*, 1847.

'My dear Miss Nussey, — Many thanks to you for your unexpected and welcome epistle. Charlotte is well, and meditates writing to you. Happily for all parties the east wind no longer prevails. During its continuance she complained of its influence as usual. I too suffered from it in some degree, as I always do, more or less; but this time, it brought me no reinforcement of colds and coughs, which is what I dread the most. Emily considers it a very uninteresting wind, but it does not affect her nervous system. Charlotte agrees with me in thinking the — - a very provoking affair. You are quite mistaken about her parasol; she affirms she brought it back, and I can bear witness to the fact, having seen it yesterday in her possession. As for my book, I have no wish to see it again till I see you along with it, and then it will be welcome enough for the sake of the bearer. We are all here much as you left us. I have no news to tell you, except that Mr. Nicholls begged a holiday and went to Ireland three or four weeks ago, and is not expected back till Saturday; but that, I dare say, is no news at all. We were all and severally pleased and gratified for your kind and judiciously selected presents, from papa down to Tabby, or down to myself, perhaps I ought rather to say. The crab-cheese is excellent, and likely to be very useful, but I don't intend to need it. It is not choice but necessity has induced me to choose such a tiny sheet of paper for my letter, having none more suitable at hand; but perhaps it will contain as much as you need wish to read, and I to write, for I find I have nothing more to say, except that your little Tabby must be a charming little creature. That is all, for as Charlotte is writing, or about to write to you herself, I need not send any messages from her. Therefore accept my best love. I must not omit the Major's compliments. And — Believe me to be your affectionate friend,

'Anne Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *January* 4*th*, 1848.

'My dear Miss Nussey, — I am not going to give you a "nice *long* letter" — on the contrary, I mean to content myself with a shabby little note, to be ingulfed in a letter of Charlotte's, which will, of course, be infinitely more acceptable to you than any production of mine, though I do not question your friendly regard for me, or the indulgent welcome you would accord to a missive of mine, even without a more agreeable companion to back it; but you must know there is a lamentable deficiency in my organ of language, which makes me almost as bad a hand at writing as talking, unless I have something particular to say. I have now, however, to thank you and your friend for your kind letter and her pretty watch-guards, which I am sure we shall all of us value the more for being the work of her own hands. You do not tell us how *you* bear the present unfavourable weather. We are all cut up by this cruel east wind. Most of us, i.e. Charlotte, Emily, and I have had the influenza, or a bad cold instead, twice over within the space of a few weeks. Papa has had it once. Tabby has escaped it altogether. I have no news to tell you, for we have been nowhere, seen no one, and done nothing (to speak of) since you were here — and yet we contrive to be busy from morning till night. Flossy is fatter than ever, but still active enough to relish a sheep-hunt. I hope you and your circle have been more fortunate in the matter of colds than we have.

'With kind regards to all, — I remain, dear Miss Nussey, yours ever affectionately, ‘Anne Brontë.’

Agnes Grey, as we have noted, was published by Newby, in one volume, in 1847. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was issued by the same publisher, in three volumes, in 1848. It is not generally known that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* went into a second edition the same year; and I should have pronounced it incredible, were not a copy of the later issue in my possession, that Anne Brontë had actually written a preface to this edition. The fact is entirely ignored in the correspondence. The preface in question makes it quite clear, if any evidence of that were necessary, that Anne had her brother in mind in writing the book. ‘I could not be understood to suppose,’ she says, ‘that the proceedings of the unhappy scapegrace, with his few profligate companions I have here introduced, are a specimen of the common practices of society: the case is an extreme one, as I trusted none would fail to perceive; but I knew that such characters do exist, and if I have warned one rash youth from following in their steps, or prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain.’ ‘One word more and I have done,’ she continues. ‘Respecting the author’s identity, I would have it to be distinctly understood that Acton Bell is neither Currer nor Ellis Bell, and, therefore, let not his faults be attributed to them. As to whether the name is real or fictitious, it cannot greatly signify to those who know him only by his works.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*January* 18*th*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — In sitting down to write to you I feel as if I were doing a wrong and a selfish thing. I believe I ought to discontinue my correspondence with you till times change, and the tide of calamity which of late days has set so strongly in against us takes a turn. But the fact is, sometimes I feel it absolutely necessary to unburden my mind. To papa I must only speak cheeringly, to Anne only encouragingly — to you I may give some hint of the dreary truth.

‘Anne and I sit alone and in seclusion as you fancy us, but we do not study. Anne cannot study now, she can scarcely read; she occupies Emily’s chair; she does not get well. A week ago we sent for a medical man of skill and experience from Leeds to see her. He examined her with the stethoscope. His report I forbear to dwell on for the present — even skilful physicians have often been mistaken in their conjectures.

‘My first impulse was to hasten her away to a warmer climate, but this was forbidden: she must not travel; she is not to stir from the house this winter; the temperature of her room is to be kept constantly equal.

‘Had leave been given to try change of air and scene, I should hardly have known how to act. I could not possibly leave papa; and when I mentioned his accompanying us, the bare thought distressed him too much to be dwelt upon. Papa is now upwards of seventy years of age; his habits for nearly thirty years have been those of absolute retirement; any change in them is most repugnant to him, and probably could not, at this time especially when the hand of God is so heavy upon his old age, be ventured upon without danger.

'When we lost Emily I thought we had drained the very dregs of our cup of trial, but now when I hear Anne cough as Emily coughed, I tremble lest there should be exquisite bitterness yet to taste. However, I must not look forwards, nor must I look backwards. Too often I feel like one crossing an abyss on a narrow plank — a glance round might quite unnerve.

'So circumstanced, my dear sir, what claim have I on your friendship, what right to the comfort of your letters? My literary character is effaced for the time, and it is by that only you know me. Care of papa and Anne is necessarily my chief present object in life, to the exclusion of all that could give me interest with my publishers or their connections. Should Anne get better, I think I could rally and become Currer Bell once more, but if otherwise, I look no farther: sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.

'Anne is very patient in her illness, as patient as Emily was unflinching. I recall one sister and look at the other with a sort of reverence as well as affection — under the test of suffering neither has faltered.

'All the days of this winter have gone by darkly and heavily like a funeral train. Since September, sickness has not quitted the house. It is strange it did not use to be so, but I suspect now all this has been coming on for years. Unused, any of us, to the possession of robust health, we have not noticed the gradual approaches of decay; we did not know its symptoms: the little cough, the small appetite, the tendency to take cold at every variation of atmosphere have been regarded as things of course. I see them in another light now.

'If you answer this, write to me as you would to a person in an average state of tranquillity and happiness. I want to keep myself as firm and calm as I can. While papa and Anne want me, I hope, I pray, never to fail them. Were I to see you I should endeavour to converse on ordinary topics, and I should wish to write on the same — besides, it will be less harassing to yourself to address me as usual.

'May God long preserve to you the domestic treasures you value; and when bereavement at last comes, may He give you strength to bear it. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*February* 1*st*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — Anne seems so tranquil this morning, so free from pain and fever, and looks and speaks so like herself in health, that I too feel relieved, and I take advantage of the respite to write to you, hoping that my letter may reflect something of the comparative peace I feel.

'Whether my hopes are quite fallacious or not, I do not know; but sometimes I fancy that the remedies prescribed by Mr. Teale, and approved — as I was glad to learn — by Dr. Forbes, are working a good result. Consumption, I am aware, is a flattering malady, but certainly Anne's illness has of late assumed a less alarming character than it had in the beginning: the hectic is allayed; the cough gives a more frequent reprieve. Could I but believe she would live two years — a year longer, I should be thankful: I dreaded the terrors of the swift messenger which snatched Emily from us, as it seemed, in a few days.

'The parcel came yesterday. You and Mr. Smith do nothing by halves. Neither of you care for being thanked, so I will keep my gratitude in my own mind. The choice of books is perfect. Papa is at this moment reading Macaulay's *History*, which he had wished to see. Anne is engaged with one of Frederika Bremer's tales.

'I wish I could send a parcel in return; I had hoped to have had one by this time ready to despatch. When I saw you and Mr. Smith in London, I little thought of all that was to come between July and Spring: how my thoughts were to be caught away from imagination, enlisted and absorbed in realities the most cruel.

'I will tell you what I want to do; it is to show you the first volume of my MS., which I have copied. In reading Mary Barton (a clever though painful tale) I was a little dismayed to find myself in some measure anticipated both in subject and incident. I should like to have your opinion on this point, and to know whether the resemblance appears as considerable to a stranger as it does to myself. I should wish also to have the benefit of such general strictures and advice as you choose to give. Shall I therefore send the MS. when I return the first batch of books?

'But remember, if I show it to you it is on two conditions: the first, that you give me a faithful opinion — I do not promise to be swayed by it, but I should like to have it; the second, that you show it and speak of it to *none* but Mr. Smith. I have always a great horror of premature announcements — they may do harm and can never do good. Mr. Smith must be so kind as not to mention it yet in his quarterly circulars. All human affairs are so uncertain, and my position especially is at present so peculiar, that I cannot count on the time, and would rather that no allusion should be made to a work of which great part is yet to create.

'There are two volumes in the first parcel which, having seen, I cannot bring myself to part with, and must beg Mr. Smith's permission to retain: Mr. Thackeray's *Journey from Cornhill*, *etc*. and *The testimony to the Truth*. That last is indeed a book after my own heart. I *do* like the mind it discloses — it is of a fine and high order. Alexander Harris may be a clown by birth, but he is a nobleman by nature. When I could read no other book, I read his and derived comfort from it. No matter whether or not I can agree in all his views, it is the principles, the feelings, the heart of the man I admire.

'Write soon and tell me whether you think it advisable that I should send the MS. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘Haworth, *February* 4*th*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — I send the parcel up without delay, according to your request. The manuscript has all its errors upon it, not having been read through since copying. I have kept *Madeline*, along with the two other books I mentioned; I shall consider it the gift of Miss Kavanagh, and shall value it both for its literary excellence and for the modest merit of the giver. We already possess Tennyson’s *Poems* and *Our Street*. Emerson’s *Essays* I read with much interest, and often with admiration, but they are of mixed gold and clay — deep and invigorating truth, dreary and depressing fallacy seem to me combined therein. In George Borrow’s works I found a wild fascination, a vivid graphic power of description, a fresh originality, an athletic simplicity (so to speak), which give them a stamp of their own. After reading his *Bible in Spain* I felt as if I had actually travelled at his side, and seen the “wild Sil” rush from its mountain cradle; wandered in the hilly wilderness of the Sierras; encountered and conversed with Manehegan, Castillian, Andalusian, Arragonese, and, above all, with the savage Gitanos.

‘Your mention of Mr. Taylor suggests to me that possibly you and Mr. Smith might wish him to share the little secret of the MS. — that exclusion might seem invidious, that it might make your mutual evening chat less pleasant. If so, admit him to the confidence by all means. He is attached to the firm, and will no doubt keep its secrets. I shall be glad of another censor, and if a severe one, so much the better, provided he is also just. I court the keenest criticism. Far rather would I never publish more, than publish anything inferior to my first effort. Be honest, therefore, all three of you. If you think this book promises less favourably than *Jane Eyre*, say so; it is but trying again, *i.e.*, if life and health be spared.

‘Anne continues a little better — the mild weather suits her. At times I hear the renewal of hope’s whisper, but I dare not listen too fondly; she deceived me cruelly before. A sudden change to cold would be the test. I dread such change, but must not anticipate. Spring lies before us, and then summer — surely we may hope a little!

‘Anne expresses a wish to see the notices of the poems. You had better, therefore, send them. We shall expect to find painful allusions to one now above blame and beyond praise; but these must be borne. For ourselves, we are almost indifferent to censure. I read the *Quarterly* without a pang, except that I thought there were some sentences disgraceful to the critic. He seems anxious to let it be understood that he is a person well acquainted with the habits of the upper classes. Be this as it may, I am afraid he is no gentleman; and moreover, that no training could make him such. Many a poor man, born and bred to labour, would disdain that reviewer’s cast of feeling. — Yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*March* 2*nd*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — My sister still continues better: she has less languor and weakness; her spirits are improved. This change gives cause, I think, both for gratitude and hope.

‘I am glad that you and Mr. Smith like the commencement of my present work. I wish it were *more than a commencement*; for how it will be reunited after the long break, or how it can gather force of flow when the current has been checked or rather drawn off so long, I know not.

‘I sincerely thank you both for the candid expression of your objections. What you say with reference to the first chapter shall be duly weighed. At present I feel reluctant to withdraw it, because, as I formerly said of the Lowood part of *Jane Eyre*, *it is true*. The curates and their ongoings are merely photographed from the life. I should like you to explain to me more fully the ground of your objections. Is it because you think this chapter will render the work liable to severe handling by the press? Is it because knowing as you now do the identity of “Currer Bell,” this scene strikes you as unfeminine? Is it because it is intrinsically defective and inferior? I am afraid the two first reasons would not weigh with me — the last would.

‘Anne and I thought it very kind in you to preserve all the notices of the Poems so carefully for us. Some of them, as you said, were well worth reading. We were glad to find that our old friend the *Critic* has again a kind word for us. I was struck with one curious fact, viz., that four of the notices are fac-similes of each other. How does this happen? I suppose they copy.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*March* 8*th*, 1849.

‘Dear Ellen, — Anne’s state has apparently varied very little during the last fortnight or three weeks. I wish I could say she gains either flesh, strength, or appetite; but there is no progress on these points, nor I hope, as far as regards the two last at least, any falling off; she is piteously thin. Her cough, and the pain in her side continue the same.

‘I write these few lines that you may not think my continued silence strange; anything like frequent correspondence I cannot keep up, and you must excuse me. I trust you and all at Brookroyd are happy and well. Give my love to your mother and all the rest, and — Believe me, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*March* 11*th*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — My sister has been something worse since I wrote last. We have had nearly a week of frost, and the change has tried her, as I feared it would do, though not so severely as former experience had led me to apprehend. I am thankful to say she is now again a little better. Her state of mind is usually placid, and her chief sufferings consist in the harassing cough and a sense of languor.

‘I ought to have acknowledged the safe arrival of the parcel before now, but I put it off from day to day, fearing I should write a sorrowful letter. A similar apprehension induces me to abridge this note.

'Believe me, whether in happiness or the contrary, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS LÆTITIA WHEELWRIGHT

'Haworth, *March* 15*th*, 1849.

'Dear Lætitia, — I have not quite forgotten you through the winter, but I have remembered you only like some pleasant waking idea struggling through a dreadful dream. You say my last letter was dated September 14th. You ask how I have passed the time since. What has happened to me? Why have I been silent?

'It is soon told.

'On the 24th of September my only brother, after being long in weak health, and latterly consumptive — though we were far from apprehending immediate danger — died, quite suddenly as it seemed to us. He had been out two days before. The shock was great. Ere he could be interred I fell ill. A low nervous fever left me very weak. As I was slowly recovering, my sister Emily, whom you knew, was seized with inflammation of the lungs; suppuration took place; two agonising months of hopes and fears followed, and on the 19th of December *she died.*

'She was scarcely cold in her grave when Anne, my youngest and last sister, who has been delicate all her life, exhibited symptoms that struck us with acute alarm. We sent for the first advice that could be procured. She was examined with the stethoscope, and the dreadful fact was announced that her lungs too were affected, and that tubercular consumption had already made considerable progress. A system of treatment was prescribed, which has since been ratified by the opinion of Dr. Forbes, whom your papa will, I dare say, know. I hope it has somewhat delayed disease. She is now a patient invalid, and I am her nurse. God has hitherto supported me in some sort through all these bitter calamities, and my father, I am thankful to say, has been wonderfully sustained; but there have been hours, days, weeks of inexpressible anguish to undergo, and the cloud of impending distress still lowers dark and sullen above us. I cannot write much. I can only pray Providence to preserve you and yours from such affliction as He has seen good to accumulate on me and mine.

'With best regards to your dear mamma and all your circle, — Believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *March* 24*th*, 1849.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — I have delayed answering your letter in the faint hope that I might be able to reply favourably to your inquiries after my sister's health. This, however, is not permitted me to do. Her decline is gradual and fluctuating, but its nature is not doubtful. The symptoms of cough, pain in the side and chest, wasting of flesh, strength, and appetite, after the sad experience we have had, cannot but be regarded by us as equivocal.

‘In spirit she is resigned; at heart she is, I believe, a true Christian. She looks beyond this life, and regards her home and rest as elsewhere than on earth. May God support her and all of us through the trial of lingering sickness, and aid her in the last hour when the struggle which separates soul from body must be gone through!

‘We saw Emily torn from the midst of us when our hearts clung to her with intense attachment, and when, loving each other as we did — well, it seemed as if (might we but have been spared to each other) we could have found complete happiness in our mutual society and affection. She was scarcely buried when Anne’s health failed, and we were warned that consumption had found another victim in her, and that it would be vain to reckon on her life.

‘These things would be too much if Reason, unsupported by Religion, were condemned to bear them alone. I have cause to be most thankful for the strength which has hitherto been vouchsafed both to my father and myself. God, I think, is specially merciful to old age; and for my own part, trials which in prospective would have seemed to me quite intolerable, when they actually came, I endured without prostration. Yet, I must confess, that in the time which has elapsed since Emily’s death, there have been moments of solitary, deep, inert affliction, far harder to bear than those which immediately followed our loss. The crisis of bereavement has an acute pang which goads to exertion, the desolate after-feeling sometimes paralyses.

‘I have learned that we are not to find solace in our own strength: we must seek it in God’s omnipotence. Fortitude is good, but fortitude itself must be shaken under us to teach us how weak we are.

‘With best wishes to yourself and all dear to you, and sincere thanks for the interest you so kindly continue to take in me and my sister, — Believe me, my dear Miss Wooler, yours faithfully,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*April* 16*th*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — Your kind advice on the subject of Homœopathy deserves and has our best thanks. We find ourselves, however, urged from more than one quarter to try different systems and medicines, and I fear we have already given offence by not listening to all. The fact is, were we in every instance compliant, my dear sister would be harassed by continual changes. Cod-liver oil and carbonate of iron were first strongly recommended. Anne took them as long as she could, but at last she was obliged to give them up: the oil yielded her no nutriment, it did not arrest the progress of emaciation, and as it kept her always sick, she was prevented from taking food of any sort. Hydropathy was then strongly advised. She is now trying Gobold’s Vegetable Balsam; she thinks it does her some good; and as it is the first medicine which has had that effect, she would wish to persevere with it for a time. She is also looking hopefully forward to deriving benefit from change of air. We have obtained Mr. Teale's permission to go to the seaside in the course of six or eight weeks. At first I felt torn between two duties — that of staying with papa and going with Anne; but as it is papa's own most kindly expressed wish that I should adopt the latter plan, and as, besides, he is now, thank God! in tolerable health, I hope to be spared the pain of resigning the care of my sister to other hands, however friendly. We wish to keep together as long as we can. I hope, too, to derive from the change some renewal of physical strength and mental composure (in neither of which points am I what I ought or wish to be) to make me a better and more cheery nurse.

'I fear I must have seemed to you hard in my observations about *The Emigrant Family*. The fact was, I compared Alexander Harris with himself only. It is not equal to the *Testimony to the Truth*, but, tried by the standard of other and very popular books too, it is very clever and original. Both subject and the manner of treating it are unhackneyed: he gives new views of new scenes and furnishes interesting information on interesting topics. Considering the increasing necessity for and tendency to emigration, I should think it has a fair chance of securing the success it merits.

'I took up Leigh Hunt's book *The Town* with the impression that it would be interesting only to Londoners, and I was surprised, ere I had read many pages, to find myself enchained by his pleasant, graceful, easy style, varied knowledge, just views, and kindly spirit. There is something peculiarly anti-melancholic in Leigh Hunt's writings, and yet they are never boisterous. They resemble sunshine, being at once bright and tranquil.

'I like Carlyle better and better. His style I do not like, nor do I always concur in his opinions, nor quite fall in with his hero worship; but there is a manly love of truth, an honest recognition and fearless vindication of intrinsic greatness, of intellectual and moral worth, considered apart from birth, rank, or wealth, which commands my sincere admiration. Carlyle would never do for a contributor to the *Quarterly*. I have not read his *French Revolution*.

'I congratulate you on the approaching publication of Mr. Ruskin's new work. If the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* resemble their predecessor, *Modern Painters*, they will be no lamps at all, but a new constellation — seven bright stars, for whose rising the reading world ought to be anxiously agaze.

'Do not ask me to mention what books I should like to read. Half the pleasure of receiving a parcel from Cornhill consists in having its contents chosen for us. We like to discover, too, by the leaves cut here and there, that the ground has been travelled before us. I may however say, with reference to works of fiction, that I should much like to see one of Godwin's works, never having hitherto had that pleasure — *Caleb Williams* or *Fleetwood*, or which you thought best worth reading.

'But it is yet much too soon to talk of sending more books; our present stock is scarcely half exhausted. You will perhaps think I am a slow reader, but remember, Currer Bell is a country housewife, and has sundry little matters connected with the needle and kitchen to attend to which take up half his day, especially now when, alas! there is but one pair of hands where once there were three. I did not mean to touch that chord, its sound is too sad.

'I try to write now and then. The effort was a hard one at first. It renewed the terrible loss of last December strangely. Worse than useless did it seem to attempt to write what there no longer lived an "Ellis Bell" to read; the whole book, with every hope founded on it, faded to vanity and vexation of spirit.

'One inducement to persevere and do my best I still have, however, and I am thankful for it: I should like to please my kind friends at Cornhill. To that end I wish my powers would come back; and if it would please Providence to restore my remaining sister, I think they would.

'Do not forget to tell me how you are when you write again. I trust your indisposition is quite gone by this time. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 1*st*, 1849.

'Dear Ellen, — I returned Mary Taylor's letter to Hunsworth as soon as I had read it. Thank God she was safe up to that time, but I do not think the earthquake was then over. I shall long to hear tidings of her again.

'Anne was worse during the warm weather we had about a week ago. She grew weaker, and both the pain in her side and her cough were worse; strange to say, since it is colder, she has appeared rather to revive than sink. I still hope that if she gets over May she may last a long time.

'We have engaged lodgings at Scarbro'. We stipulated for a good-sized sitting-room and an airy double-bedded lodging room, with a sea view, and if not deceived, have obtained these desiderata at No. 2 Cliff. Anne says it is one of the best situations in the place. It would not have done to have taken lodgings either in the town or on the bleak steep coast, where Miss Wooler's house is situated. If Anne is to get any good she must have every advantage. Miss Outhwaite [her godmother] left her in her will a legacy of £200, and she cannot employ her money better than in obtaining what may prolong existence, if it does not restore health. We hope to leave home on the 23rd, and I think it will be advisable to rest at York, and stay all night there. I hope this arrangement will suit you. We reckon on your society, dear Ellen, as a real privilege and pleasure. We shall take little luggage, and shall have to buy bonnets and dresses and several other things either at York or Scarbro'; which place do you think would be best? Oh, if it would please God to strengthen and revive Anne, how happy we might be together! His will, however, must be done, and if she is not to recover, it remains to pray for strength and patience.

'C. B.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*May* 8*th*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — I hasten to acknowledge the two kind letters for which I am indebted to you. That fine spring weather of which you speak did not bring such happiness to us in its sunshine as I trust it did to you and thousands besides — the change proved trying to my sister. For a week or ten days I did not know what to think, she became so weak, and suffered so much from increased pain in the side, and aggravated cough. The last few days have been much colder, yet, strange to say, during their continuance she has appeared rather to revive than sink. She not unfrequently shows the very same symptoms which were apparent in Emily only a few days before she died — fever in the evenings, sleepless nights, and a sort of lethargy in the morning hours; this creates acute anxiety — then comes an improvement, which reassures. In about three weeks, should the weather be genial and her strength continue at all equal to the journey, we hope to go to Scarboro’. It is not without misgiving that I contemplate a departure from home under such circumstances; but since she herself earnestly wishes the experiment to be tried, I think it ought not to be neglected. We are in God’s hands, and must trust the results to Him. An old school-fellow of mine, a tried and faithful friend, has volunteered to accompany us. I shall have the satisfaction of leaving papa to the attentions of two servants equally tried and faithful. One of them is indeed now old and infirm, and unfit to stir much from her chair by the kitchen fireside; but the other is young and active, and even she has lived with us seven years. I have reason, therefore, you see, to be thankful amidst sorrow, especially as papa still possesses every faculty unimpaired, and though not robust, has good general health — a sort of chronic cough is his sole complaint.

‘I hope Mr. Smith will not risk a cheap edition of *Jane Eyre* yet, he had better wait awhile — the public will be sick of the name of that one book. I can make no promise as to when another will be ready — neither my time nor my efforts are my own. That absorption in my employment to which I gave myself up without fear of doing wrong when I wrote *Jane Eyre*, would now be alike impossible and blamable; but I do what I can, and have made some little progress. We must all be patient.

‘Meantime, I should say, let the public forget at their ease, and let us not be nervous about it. And as to the critics, if the Bells possess real merit, I do not fear impartial justice being rendered them one day. I have a very short mental as well as physical sight in some matters, and am far less uneasy at the idea of public impatience, misconstruction, censure, etc., than I am at the thought of the anxiety of those two or three friends in Cornhill to whom I owe much kindness, and whose expectations I would earnestly wish not to disappoint. If they can make up their minds to wait tranquilly, and put some confidence in my goodwill, if not my power, to get on as well as may be, I shall not repine; but I verily believe that the “nobler sex” find it more difficult to wait, to plod, to work out their destiny inch by inch, than their sisters do. They are always for walking so fast and taking such long steps, one cannot keep up with them. One should never tell a gentleman that one has commenced a task till it is nearly achieved. Currer Bell, even if he had no let or hindrance, and if his path were quite smooth, could never march with the tread of a Scott, a Bulwer, a Thackeray, or a Dickens. I want you and Mr. Smith clearly to understand this. I have always wished to guard you against exaggerated anticipations — calculate low when you calculate on me. An honest man — and woman too — would always rather rise above expectation than fall below it.

'Have I lectured enough? and am I understood?

'Give my sympathising respects to Mrs. Williams. I hope her little daughter is by this time restored to perfect health. It pleased me to see with what satisfaction you speak of your son. I was glad, too, to hear of the progress and welfare of Miss Kavanagh. The notices of Mr. Harris's works are encouraging and just — may they contribute to his success!

'Should Mr. Thackeray again ask after Currer Bell, say the secret is and will be well kept because it is not worth disclosure. This fact his own sagacity will have already led him to divine. In the hope that it may not be long ere I hear from you again, — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *May* 16*th*, 1849.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — I will lose no time in thanking you for your letter and kind offer of assistance. We have, however, already engaged lodgings. I am not myself acquainted with Scarbro', but Anne knows it well, having been there three or four times. She had a particular preference for the situation of some lodgings (No. 2 Cliff). We wrote about them, and finding them disengaged, took them. Your information is, notwithstanding, valuable, should we find this place in any way ineligible. It is a satisfaction to be provided with directions for future use.

'Next Wednesday is the day fixed for our departure. Ellen Nussey accompanies us (by Anne's expressed wish). I could not refuse her society, but I dared not urge her to go, for I have little hope that the excursion will be one of pleasure or benefit to those engaged in it. Anne is extremely weak. She herself has a fixed impression that the sea air will give her a chance of regaining strength; that chance, therefore, we must have. Having resolved to try the experiment, misgivings are useless; and yet, when I look at her, misgivings will rise. She is more emaciated than Emily was at the very last; her breath scarcely serves her to mount the stairs, however slowly. She sleeps very little at night, and often passes most of the forenoon in a semi-lethargic state. Still, she is up all day, and even goes out a little when it is fine. Fresh air usually acts as a stimulus, but its reviving power diminishes.

'With best wishes for your own health and welfare, — Believe me, my dear Miss Wooler, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'No. 2 Cliff, Scarboro', *May* 27*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — The date above will inform you why I have not answered your last letter more promptly. I have been busy with preparations for departure and with the journey. I am thankful to say we reached our destination safely, having rested one night at York. We found assistance wherever we needed it; there was always an arm ready to do for my sister what I was not quite strong enough to do: lift her in and out of the carriages, carry her across the line, etc.

'It made her happy to see both York and its Minster, and Scarboro' and its bay once more. There is yet no revival of bodily strength — I fear indeed the slow ebb continues. People who see her tell me I must not expect her to last long — but it is something to cheer her mind.

'Our lodgings are pleasant. As Anne sits at the window she can look down on the sea, which this morning is calm as glass. She says if she could breathe more freely she would be comfortable at this moment — but she cannot breathe freely.

'My friend Ellen is with us. I find her presence a solace. She is a calm, steady girl — not brilliant, but good and true. She suits and has always suited me well. I like her, with her phlegm, repose, sense, and sincerity, better than I should like the most talented without these qualifications.

'If ever I see you again I should have pleasure in talking over with you the topics you allude to in your last — or rather, in hearing *you* talk them over. We see these things through a glass darkly — or at least I see them thus. So far from objecting to speculation on, or discussion of, the subject, I should wish to hear what others have to say. By *others*, I mean only the serious and reflective — levity in such matters shocks as much as hypocrisy.

'Write to me. In this strange place your letters will come like the visits of a friend. Fearing to lose the post, I will add no more at present. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*May* 30*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — My poor sister is taken quietly home at last. She died on Monday. With almost her last breath she said she was happy, and thanked God that death was come, and come so gently. I did not think it would be so soon.

'You will not expect me to add more at present. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*June* 25*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I am now again at home, where I returned last Thursday. I call it *home* still — much as London would be called London if an earthquake should shake its streets to ruins. But let me not be ungrateful:

Haworth parsonage is still a home for me, and not quite a ruined or desolate home either. Papa is there, and two most affectionate and faithful servants, and two old dogs, in their way as faithful and affectionate — Emily's large house-dog which lay at the side of her dying bed, and followed her funeral to the vault, lying in the pew couched at our feet while the burial service was being read — and Anne's little spaniel. The ecstasy of these poor animals when I came in was something singular. At former returns from brief absences they always welcomed me warmly — but not in that strange, heart-touching way. I am certain they thought that, as I was returned, my sisters were not far behind. But here my sisters will come no more. Keeper may visit Emily's little bed-room — as he still does day by day — and Flossy may look wistfully round for Anne, they will never see them again — nor shall I — at least the human part of me. I must not write so sadly, but how can I help thinking and feeling sadly? In the daytime effort and occupation aid me, but when evening darkens, something in my heart revolts against the burden of solitude — the sense of loss and want grows almost too much for me. I am not good or amiable in such moments, I am rebellious, and it is only the thought of my dear father in the next room, or of the kind servants in the kitchen, or some caress from the poor dogs, which restores me to softer sentiments and more rational views. As to the night — could I do without bed, I would never seek it. Waking, I think, sleeping, I dream of them; and I cannot recall them as they were in health, still they appear to me in sickness and suffering. Still, my nights were worse after the first shock of Branwell's death — they were terrible then; and the impressions experienced on waking were at that time such as we do not put into language. Worse seemed at hand than was yet endured — in truth, worse awaited us.

'All this bitterness must be tasted. Perhaps the palate will grow used to the draught in time, and find its flavour less acrid. This pain must be undergone; its poignancy, I trust, will be blunted one day. Ellen would have come back with me but I would not let her. I knew it would be better to face the desolation at once — later or sooner the sharp pang must be experienced.

'Labour must be the cure, not sympathy. Labour is the only radical cure for rooted sorrow. The society of a calm, serenely cheerful companion — such as Ellen — soothes pain like a soft opiate, but I find it does not probe or heal the wound; sharper, more severe means, are necessary to make a remedy. Total change might do much; where that cannot be obtained, work is the best substitute.

'I by no means ask Miss Kavanagh to write to me. Why should she trouble herself to do it? What claim have I on her? She does not know me — she cannot care for me except vaguely and on hearsay. I have got used to your friendly sympathy, and it comforts me. I have tried and trust the fidelity of one or two other friends, and I lean upon it. The natural affection of my father and the attachment and solicitude of our two servants are precious and consolatory to me, but I do not look round for general pity; conventional condolence I do not want, either from man or woman.

‘The letter you inclosed in your last bore the signature H. S. Mayers — the address, Sheepscombe, Stroud, Gloucestershire; can you give me any information respecting the writer? It is my intention to acknowledge it one day. I am truly glad to hear that your little invalid is restored to health, and that the rest of your family continue well. Mrs. Williams should spare herself for her husband’s and children’s sake. Her life and health are too valuable to those round her to be lavished — she should be careful of them. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

It is not necessary to tell over again the story of Anne’s death. Miss Ellen Nussey, who was an eye witness, has related it once for all in Mrs. Gaskell’s Memoir. The tomb at Scarborough hears the following inscription: —

here lie the remains of
ANNE BRONTË
DAUGHTER OF THE REV. P. BRONTË
incumbent of haworth, yorkshire
She Died, *Aged* 28, *May* 28*th*, 1849

CHAPTER VIII: ELLEN NUSSEY

If to be known by one's friends is the index to character that it is frequently assumed to be, Charlotte Brontë comes well out of that ordeal. She was discriminating in friendship and leal to the heart's core. With what gratitude she thought of the publisher who gave her the 'first chance' we know by recognising that the manly Dr. John of *Villette* was Mr. George Smith of Smith & Elder. Mr. W. S. Williams, again, would seem to have been a singularly gifted and amiable man. To her three girl friends, Ellen Nussey, Mary Taylor, and Lætitia Wheelwright, she was loyal to her dying day, and pencilled letters to the two of them who were in England were written in her last illness. Of all her friends, Ellen Nussey must always have the foremost place in our esteem. Like Mary Taylor, she made Charlotte's acquaintance when, at fifteen years of age, she first went to Roe Head School. Mrs. Gaskell has sufficiently described the beginnings of that friendship which death was not to break. Ellen Nussey and Charlotte Brontë corresponded with a regularity which one imagines would be impossible had they both been born half a century later. The two girls loved one another profoundly. They wrote at times almost daily. They quarrelled occasionally over trifles, as friends will, but Charlotte was always full of contrition when a few hours had passed. Towards the end of her life she wrote to Mr. Williams a letter concerning Miss Nussey which may well be printed here.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*January* 3*rd*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I have to acknowledge the receipt of the *Morning Chronicle* with a good review, and of the *Church of England Quarterly* and the *Westminster* with bad ones. I have also to thank you for your letter, which would have been answered sooner had I been alone; but just now I am enjoying the treat of my friend Ellen's society, and she makes me indolent and negligent — I am too busy talking to her all day to do anything else. You allude to the subject of female friendships, and express wonder at the infrequency of sincere attachments amongst women. As to married women, I can well understand that they should be absorbed in their husbands and children — but single women often like each other much, and derive great solace from their mutual regard. Friendship, however, is a plant which cannot be forced. True friendship is no gourd, springing in a night and withering in a day. When I first saw Ellen I did not care for her; we were school-fellows. In course of time we learnt each other's faults and good points. We were contrasts — still, we suited. Affection was first a germ, then a sapling, then a strong tree — now, no new friend, however lofty or profound in intellect — not even Miss Martineau herself — could be to me what Ellen is; yet she is no more than a conscientious, observant, calm, well-bred Yorkshire girl. She is without romance. If she attempts to read poetry, or poetic prose, aloud, I am irritated and deprive her of the book — if she talks of it, I stop my ears; but she is good; she is true; she is faithful, and I love her.

'Since I came home, Miss Martineau has written me a long and truly kindly letter. She invites me to visit her at Ambleside. I like the idea. Whether I can realise it or not, it is pleasant to have in prospect.

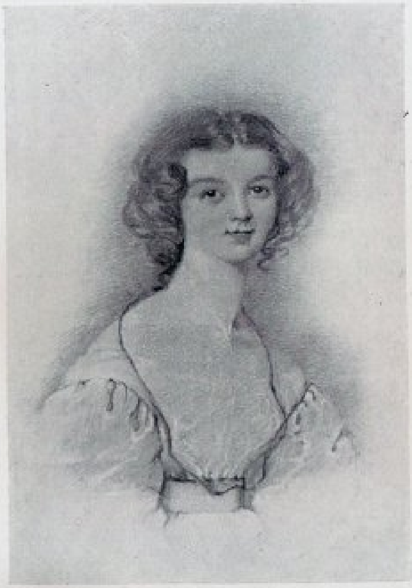
'You ask me to write to Mrs. Williams. I would rather she wrote to me first; and let her send any kind of letter she likes, without studying mood or manner. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

Good, True, Faithful — friendship has no sweeter words than these; and it was this loyalty in Miss Nussey which has marked her out in our day as a fine type of sweet womanliness, and will secure to her a lasting name as the friend of Charlotte Brontë.

Miss Ellen Nussey was one of a large family of children, all of whom she survives. Her home during the years of her first friendship with Charlotte Brontë was at the Rydings, at that time the property of an uncle, Reuben Walker, a distinguished court physician. The family in that generation and in this has given many of its members to high public service in various professions. Two Nusseys, indeed, and two Walkers, were court physicians in their day. When Earl Fitzwilliam was canvassing for the county in 1809, he was a guest at the Rydings for two weeks, and on his election was chaired by the tenantry. Reuben Walker, this uncle of Miss Nussey's, was the only Justice of the Peace for the district which included Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, and Halifax, during the Luddite riots — a significant reminder of the growth of population since that day. Ellen Nussey's home was at the Rydings, then tenanted by her brother John, until 1837, and she then removed to Brookroyd, where she lived until long after Charlotte Brontë died.

The first letter to Ellen Nussey is dated May 31, 1831, Charlotte having become her school-fellow in the previous January. It would seem to have been a mere play exercise across the school-room, as the girls were then together at Roe Head.



MISS ELLEN NUSSEY AS A SCHOOL-GIRL
From a Painting

MISS ELLEN NUSSEY TO-DAY
From a Photograph

'Dear Miss Nussey, — I take advantage of the earliest opportunity to thank you for the letter you favoured me with last week, and to apologise for having so long neglected to write to you; indeed, I believe this will be the first letter or note I have ever addressed to you. I am extremely obliged to Mary for her kind invitation, and I assure you that I should very much have liked to hear the Lectures on Galvanism, as they would doubtless have been amusing and instructive. But we are often compelled to bend our inclination to our duty (as Miss Wooler observed the other day), and since there are so many holidays this half-year, it would have appeared almost unreasonable to ask for an extra holiday; besides, we should perhaps have got behindhand with our lessons, so that, everything considered, it is perhaps as well that circumstances have deprived us of this pleasure. — Believe me to remain, your affectionate friend,

'C. Brontë.'

But by the Christmas holidays, 'Dear Miss Nussey' has become 'Dear Ellen,' and the friendship has already well commenced.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *January* 13*th*, 1832.

'Dear Ellen, — The receipt of your letter gave me an agreeable surprise, for notwithstanding your faithful promises, you must excuse me if I say that I had little confidence in their fulfilment, knowing that when school girls once get home they willingly abandon every recollection which tends to remind them of school, and indeed they find such an infinite variety of circumstances to engage their attention and employ their leisure hours, that they are easily persuaded that they have no time to fulfil promises made at school. It gave me great pleasure, however, to find that you and Miss Taylor are exceptions to the general rule. The cholera still seems slowly advancing, but let us yet hope, knowing that all things are under the guidance of a merciful Providence. England has hitherto been highly favoured, for the disease has neither raged with the astounding violence, nor extended itself with the frightful rapidity which marked its progress in many of the continental countries. — From your affectionate friend,

'Charlotte Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *January* 1*st*, 1833.

'Dear Ellen, — I believe we agreed to correspond once a month. That space of time has now elapsed since I received your last interesting letter, and I now therefore hasten to reply. Accept my congratulations on the arrival of the New Year, every succeeding day of which will, I trust, find you *wiser* and *better* in the true sense of those much-used words. The first day of January always presents to my mind a train of very solemn and important reflections, and a question more easily asked than answered frequently occurs, viz. — How have I improved the past year, and with what good intentions do I view the dawn of its successor? These, my dearest Ellen, are weighty considerations which (young as we are) neither you nor I can too deeply or too seriously ponder. I am sorry your too great diffidence, arising, I think, from the want of sufficient confidence in your own capabilities, prevented you from writing to me in French, as I think the attempt would have materially contributed to your improvement in that language. You very kindly caution me against being tempted by the fondness of my sisters to consider myself of too much importance, and then in a parenthesis you beg me not to be offended. O Ellen, do you think I could be offended by any good advice you may give me? No, I thank you heartily, and love you, if possible, better for it. I am glad you like *Kenilworth.* It is certainly a splendid production, more resembling a romance than a novel, and, in my opinion, one of the most interesting works that ever emanated from the great Sir Walter's pen. I was exceedingly amused at the characteristic and naive manner in which you expressed your detestation of Varney's character — so much so, indeed, that I could not forbear laughing aloud when I perused that part of your letter. He is certainly the personification of consummate villainy; and in the delineation of his dark and profoundly artful mind, Scott exhibits a wonderful knowledge of human nature as well as surprising skill in embodying his perceptions so as to enable others to become participators in that knowledge. Excuse the want of news in this very barren epistle, for I really have none to communicate. Emily and Anne beg to be kindly remembered to you. Give my best love to your mother and sisters, and as it is very late permit me to conclude with the assurance of my unchanged, unchanging, and unchangeable affection for you. — Adieu, my sweetest Ellen, I am ever yours,

'Charlotte.'

Here is a pleasant testimony to Miss Nussey's attractions from Emily and Anne.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *September* 11*th*, 1833.

'Dear Ellen, — I have hitherto delayed answering your last letter because from what you said I imagined you might be from home. Since you were here Emily has been very ill. Her ailment was erysipelas in the arm, accompanied by severe bilious attacks, and great general debility. Her arm was obliged to be cut in order to relieve it. It is now, I am happy to say, nearly healed — her health is, in fact, almost perfectly re-established. The sickness still continues to recur at intervals. Were I to tell you of the impression you have made on every one here you would accuse me of flattery. Papa and aunt are continually adducing you as an example for me to shape my actions and behaviour by. Emily and Anne say "they never saw any one they liked so well as Miss Nussey," and Tabby talks a great deal more nonsense about you than I choose to report. You must read this letter, dear Ellen, without thinking of the writing, for I have indited it almost all in the twilight. It is now so dark that, notwithstanding the singular property of "seeing in the night-time" which the young ladies at Roe Head used to attribute to me, I can scribble no longer. All the family unite with me in wishes for your welfare. Remember me respectfully to your mother and sisters, and supply all those expressions of warm and genuine regard which the increasing darkness will not permit me to insert.

'Charlotte Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *February* 11*th*, 1834.

'Dear Ellen, — My letters are scarcely worth the postage, and therefore I have, till now, delayed answering your last communication; but upwards of two months having elapsed since I received it, I have at length determined to take up my pen in reply lest your anger should be roused by my apparent negligence. It grieved me extremely to hear of your precarious state of health. I trust sincerely that your medical adviser is mistaken in supposing you have any tendency to a pulmonary affection. Dear Ellen, that would indeed be a calamity. I have seen enough of consumption to dread it as one of the most insidious and fatal diseases incident to humanity. But I repeat it, I *hope*, nay *pray*, that your alarm is groundless. If you remember, I used frequently to tell you at school that you were constitutionally nervous — guard against the gloomy impressions which such a state of mind naturally produces. Take constant and regular exercise, and all, I doubt not, will yet be well. What a remarkable winter we have had! Rain and wind continually, but an almost total absence of frost and snow. Has *general* ill health been the consequence of wet weather at Birstall or not? With us an unusual number of deaths have lately taken place. According to custom I have no news to communicate, indeed I do not write either to retail gossip or to impart solid information; my motives for maintaining our mutual correspondence are, in the first place, to get intelligence from you, and in the second that we may remind each other of our separate existences; without some such medium of reciprocal converse, according to the nature of things, *you*, who are surrounded by society and friends, would soon forget that such an insignificant being as myself ever lived. *I*, however, in the solitude of our wild little hill village, think of my only unrelated friend, my dear ci-devant school companion daily — nay, almost hourly. Now Ellen, don't you think I have very cleverly contrived to make up a letter out of nothing? Goodbye, dearest. That God may bless you is the earnest prayer of your ever faithful friend,

'Charlotte Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *November* 10*th*, 1834.

'Dear Ellen, — I have been a long while, a very long while without writing to you. A letter I received from Mary Taylor this morning reminded me of my neglect, and made me instantly sit down to atone for it, if possible. She tells me your aunt, of Brookroyd, is dead, and that Sarah is very ill; for this I am truly sorry, but I hope her case is not yet without hope. You should however remember that death, should it happen, will undoubtedly be great gain to her. In your last, dear Ellen, you ask my opinion respecting the amusement of dancing, and whether I thought it objectionable when indulged in for an hour or two in parties of boys and girls. I should hesitate to express a difference of opinion from Mr. Atkinson, but really the matter seems to me to stand thus: It is allowed on all hands that the sin of dancing consists not in the mere action of shaking the shanks (as the Scotch say), but in the consequences that usually attend it — namely, frivolity and waste of time; when it is used only, as in the case you state, for the exercise and amusement of an hour among young people (who surely may without any breach of God's commandments be allowed a little light-heartedness), these consequences cannot follow. Ergo (according to my manner of arguing), the amusement is at such times perfectly innocent. Having nothing more to say, I will conclude with the expression of my sincere and earnest attachment for, Ellen, your own dear self.

'Charlotte Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *January* 12*th*, 1835.

'Dearest Ellen, — I thought it better not to answer your kind letter too soon, lest I should (in the present fully occupied state of your time) appear intrusive. I am happy to inform you papa has given me permission to accept the invitation it conveyed, and ere long I hope once more to have the pleasure of seeing *almost* the *only* and certainly the *dearest* friend I possess (out of our own family). I leave it to you to fix the time, only requesting you not to appoint too early a day; let it be a fortnight or three weeks at least from the date of the present letter. I am greatly obliged to you for your kind offer of meeting me at Bradford, but papa thinks that such a plan would involve uncertainty, and be productive of trouble to you. He recommends that I should go direct in a gig from Haworth at the time you shall determine, or, if that day should prove unfavourable, the first subsequent fine one. Such an arrangement would leave us both free, and if it meets with your approbation would perhaps be the best we could finally resolve upon. Excuse the brevity of this epistle, dear Ellen, for I am in a great hurry, and we shall, I trust, soon see each other face to face, which will be better than a hundred letters. Give my respectful love to your mother and sisters, accept the kind remembrances of all our family, and — Believe me in particular to be, your firm and faithful friend,

'Charlotte Brontë.

'*P.S.* — You ask me to stay a month when I come, but as I do not wish to tire you with my company, and as, besides, papa and aunt both think a fortnight amply sufficient, I shall not exceed that period. Farewell, *dearest*, *dearest*.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Roe Head, *September* 10*th*, 1835.

'My dear Ellen, — You are far too kind and frequent in your invitations. You puzzle me: I hardly know how to refuse, and it is still more embarrassing to accept. At any rate, I cannot come this week, for we are in the very thickest *mêlée* of the repetitions; I was hearing the terrible fifth section when your note arrived. But Miss Wooler says I must go to Gomersall next Friday as she promised for me on Whitsunday; and on Sunday morning I will join you at church, if it be convenient, and stay at Rydings till Monday morning. There's a free and easy proposal! Miss Wooler has driven me to it — she says her character is implicated! I am very sorry to hear that your mother has been ill. I do hope she is better now, and that all the rest of the family are well. Will you be so kind as to deliver the accompanying note to Miss Taylor when you see her at church on Sunday? Dear Ellen, excuse the most horrid scrawl ever penned by mortal hands. Remember me to your mother and sisters, and — Believe me, E. Nussey's friend,

'Charlotte.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*February* 20*th*, 1837.

'I read your letter with dismay, Ellen — what shall I do without you? Why are we so to be denied each other's society? It is an inscrutable fatality. I long to be with you because it seems as if two or three days or weeks spent in your company would beyond measure strengthen me in the enjoyment of those feelings which I have so lately begun to cherish. You first pointed out to me that way in which I am so feebly endeavouring to travel, and now I cannot keep you by my side, I must proceed sorrowfully alone.

'Why are we to be divided? Surely, Ellen, it must be because we are in danger of loving each other too well — of losing sight of the *Creator* in idolatry of the *creature*. At first I could not say, "Thy will be done." I felt rebellious; but I know it was wrong to feel so. Being left a moment alone this morning I prayed fervently to be enabled to resign myself to *every* decree of God's will — though it should be dealt forth with a far severer hand than the present disappointment. Since then, I have felt calmer and humbler — and consequently happier. Last Sunday I took up my Bible in a gloomy frame of mind; I began to read; a feeling stole over me such as I have not known for many long years — a sweet placid sensation like those that I remember used to visit me when I was a little child, and on Sunday evenings in summer stood by the open window reading the life of a certain French nobleman who attained a purer and higher degree of sanctity than has been known since the days of the early Martyrs. I thought of my own Ellen — I wished she had been near me that I might have told her how happy I was, how bright and glorious the pages of God's holy word seemed to me. But the "foretaste" passed away, and earth and sin returned. I must see you before you go, Ellen; if you cannot come to Roe Head I will contrive to walk over to Brookroyd, provided you will let me know the time of your departure. Should you not be at home at Easter I dare not promise to accept your mother's and sisters' invitation. I should be miserable at Brookroyd without you, yet I would contrive to visit them for a few hours if I could not for a few days. I love them for your sake. I have written this note at a venture. When it will reach you I know not, but I was determined not to let slip an opportunity for want of being prepared to embrace it. Farewell, may God bestow on you all His blessings. My darling — Farewell. Perhaps you may return before midsummer — do you think you possibly can? I wish your brother John knew how unhappy I am; he would almost pity me.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*June* 8*th*, 1837.

'My dearest Ellen, — The inclosed, as you will perceive, was written before I received your last. I had intended to send it by this, but what you said altered my intention. I scarce dare build a hope on the foundation your letter lays — we have been disappointed so often, and I fear I shall not be able to prevail on them to part with you; but I will try my utmost, and at any rate there is a chance of our meeting soon; with that thought I will comfort myself. You do not know how selfishly *glad* I am that you still continue to dislike London and the Londoners — it seems to afford a sort of proof that your affections are not changed. Shall we really stand once again together on the moors of Haworth? I *dare* not flatter myself with too sanguine an expectation. I see many doubts and difficulties. But with Miss Wooler's leave, which I have asked and in part obtained, I will go to-morrow and try to remove them. — Believe me, my own Ellen, yours always truly,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 12*th*, 1839.

'My *dear kind* Ellen, — I can hardly help laughing when I reckon up the number of urgent invitations I have received from you during the last three months. Had I accepted all or even half of them, the Birstallians would certainly have concluded that I had come to make Brookroyd my permanent residence. When you set your mind upon it, you have a peculiar way of edging one in with a circle of dilemmas, so that they hardly know how to refuse you; however, I shall take a running leap and clear them all. Frankly, my dear Ellen, I *cannot come*. Reflect for yourself a moment. Do you see nothing absurd in the idea of a person coming again into a neighbourhood within a month after they have taken a solemn and formal leave of all their acquaintance? However, I thank both you and your mother for the invitation, which was most kindly expressed. You give no answer to my proposal that you should come to Haworth with the Taylors. I still think it would be your best plan. I wish you and the Taylors were safely here; there is no pleasure to be had without toiling for it. You must invite me no more, my dear Ellen, until next Midsummer at the nearest. All here desire to be remembered to you, aunt particularly. Angry though you are, I will venture to sign myself as usual (no, not as usual, but as suits circumstances). — Yours, under a cloud,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 5*th*, 1838.

'My dearest Ellen, — Yesterday I heard that you were ill. Mr. and Miss Heald were at Dewsbury Moor, and it was from them I obtained the information. This morning I set off to Brookroyd to learn further particulars, from whence I am but just returned. Your mother is in great distress about you, she can hardly mention your name without tears; and both she and Mercy wish very much to see you at home again. Poor girl, you have been a fortnight confined to your bed; and while I was blaming you in my own mind for not writing, you were suffering in sickness without one kind *female* friend to watch over you. I should have heard all this before and have hastened to express my sympathy with you in this crisis had I been able to visit Brookroyd in the Easter holidays, but an unexpected summons back to Dewsbury Moor, in consequence of the illness and death of Mr. Wooler, prevented it. Since that time I have been a fortnight and two days quite alone, Miss Wooler being detained in the interim at Rouse Mill. You will now see, Ellen, that it was not neglect or failure of affection which has occasioned my silence, though I fear you will long ago have attributed it to those causes. If you are well enough, do write to me just two lines — just to assure me of your convalescence; not a word, however, if it would harm you — not a syllable. They value you at home. Sickness and absence call forth expressions of attachment which might have remained long enough unspoken if their object had been present and well. I wish your *friends* (I include myself in that word) may soon cease to have cause for so painful an excitement of their regard. As yet I have but an imperfect idea of the nature of your illness — of its extent — or of the degree in which it may now have subsided. When you can let me know all, no particular, however minute, will be uninteresting to me. How have your spirits been? I trust not much overclouded, for that is the most melancholy result of illness. You are not, I understand, going to Bath at present; they seem to have arranged matters strangely. When I parted from you near White-lee Bar, I had a more sorrowful feeling than ever I experienced before in our temporary separations. It is foolish to dwell too much on the idea of presentiments, but I certainly had a feeling that the time of our reunion had never been so indefinite or so distant as then. I doubt not, my dear Ellen, that amidst your many trials, amidst the sufferings that you have of late felt in yourself, and seen in several of your relations, you have still been able to look up and find support in trial, consolation in affliction, and repose in tumult, where human interference can make no change. I think you know in the right spirit how to withdraw yourself from the vexation, the care, the meanness of life, and to derive comfort from purer sources than this world can afford. You know how to do it silently, unknown to others, and can avail yourself of that hallowed communion the Bible gives us with God. I am charged to transmit your mother's and sister's love. Receive mine in the same parcel, I think it will scarcely be the smallest share. Farewell, my dear Ellen.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 15*th*, 1840.

'My dear Ellen, — I read your last letter with a great deal of interest. Perhaps it is not always well to tell people when we approve of their actions, and yet it is very pleasant to do so; and as, if you had done wrongly, I hope I should have had honesty enough to tell you so, so now, as you have done rightly, I shall gratify myself by telling you what I think.

'If I made you my father confessor I could reveal weaknesses which you do not dream of. I do not mean to intimate that I attach a *high value* to empty compliments, but a word of panegyric has often made me feel a sense of confused pleasure which it required my strongest effort to conceal — and on the other hand, a hasty expression which I could construe into neglect or disapprobation has tortured me till I have lost half a night's rest from its rankling pangs.

'C. Brontë.

'*P.S.* — Don't talk any more of sending for me — when I come I will *send* myself. All send their love to you. I have no prospect of a situation any more than of going to the moon. Write to me again as soon as you can.'

Here is the only glimpse that we find of her Penzance relatives in these later years. They would seem to have visited Haworth when Charlotte was twenty-four years of age. The impression they left was not a kindly one.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*August* 14*th*, 1840.

‘My dear Ellen, — As you only sent me a note, I shall only send you one, and that not out of revenge, but because like you I have but little to say. The freshest news in our house is that we had, a fortnight ago, a visit from some of our South of England relations, John Branwell and his wife and daughter. They have been staying above a month with Uncle Fennell at Crosstone. They reckon to be very grand folks indeed, and talk largely — I thought assumingly. I cannot say I much admired them. To my eyes there seemed to be an attempt to play the great Mogul down in Yorkshire. Mr. Branwell was much less assuming than the womenites; he seemed a frank, sagacious kind of man, very tall and vigorous, with a keen active look. The moment he saw me he exclaimed that I was the very image of my aunt Charlotte. Mrs. Branwell sets up for being a woman of great talent, tact, and accomplishment. I thought there was much more noise than work. My cousin Eliza is a young lady intended by nature to be a bouncing, good-looking girl — art has trained her to be a languishing, affected piece of goods. I would have been friendly with her, but I could get no talk except about the Low Church, Evangelical clergy, the Millennium, Baptist Noel, botany, and her own conversion. A mistaken education has utterly spoiled the lass. Her face tells that she is naturally good-natured, though perhaps indolent. Her affectations were so utterly out of keeping with her round rosy face and tall bouncing figure, I could hardly refrain from laughing as I watched her. Write a long letter next time and I’ll write you ditto. Good-bye.’

We have already read the letters which were written to Miss Nussey during the governess period, and from Brussels. On her final return from Brussels, Charlotte implores a letter.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘Haworth, *February* 10*th*, 1844.

‘Dear Ellen, — I cannot tell what occupies your thoughts and time. Are you ill? Is some one of your family ill? Are you married? Are you dead? If it be so, you may as well write a word and let me know — for my part, I am again in old England. I shall tell you nothing further till you write to me.

‘C. Brontë.

‘Write to me directly, that is a good girl; I feel really anxious, and have felt so for a long time to hear from you.’

She visits Miss Nussey soon afterwards at Brookroyd, and a little later writes as follows:

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*April* 7*th*, 1844.

‘Dear Nell, — I have received your note. It communicated a piece of good news which I certainly did not expect to hear. I want, however, further enlightenment on the subject. Can you tell me what has caused the change in Mary’s plans, and brought her so suddenly back to England? Is it on account of Mary Dixon? Is it the wish of her brother, or is it her own determination?

I hope, whatever the reason be, it is nothing which can give her uneasiness or do her harm. Do you know how long she is likely to stay in England? or when she arrives at Hunsworth?

'You ask how I am. I really have felt much better the last week — I think my visit to Brookroyd did me good. What delightful weather we have had lately. I wish we had had such while I was with you. Emily and I walk out a good deal on the moors, to the great damage of our shoes, but I hope to the benefit of our health.

'Good-bye, dear Ellen. Send me another of your little notes soon. Kindest regards to all,

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*June* 9*th*, 1844.

'My dear Ellen, — Anne and Branwell are now at home, and they and Emily add their request to mine, that you will join us at the beginning of next week. Write and let us know what day you will come, and how — if by coach, we will meet you at Keighley. Do not let your visit be later than the beginning of next week, or you will see little of Anne and Branwell as their holidays are very short. They will soon have to join the family at Scarborough. Remember me kindly to your mother and sisters. I hope they are all well.

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*November* 14*th*, 1844.

'Dear Ellen, — Your letter came very apropos, as, indeed, your letters always do; but this morning I had something of a headache, and was consequently rather out of spirits, and the epistle (scarcely legible though it be — excuse a rub) cheered me. In order to evince my gratitude, as well as to please my own inclination, I sit down to answer it immediately. I am glad, in the first place, to hear that your brother is going to be married, and still more so to learn that his wife-elect has a handsome fortune — not that I advocate marrying for money in general, but I think in many cases (and this is one) money is a very desirable contingent of matrimony.

'I wonder when Mary Taylor is expected in England. I trust you will be at home while she is at Hunsworth, and that you, she, and I, may meet again somewhere under the canopy of heaven. I cannot, dear Ellen, make any promise about myself and Anne going to Brookroyd at Christmas; her vacations are so short she would grudge spending any part of them from home.

'The catastrophe, which you related so calmly, about your book-muslin dress, lace bertha, etc., convulsed me with cold shudderings of horror. You have reason to curse the day when so fatal a present was offered you as that infamous little "varmint." The perfect serenity with which you endured the disaster proves most fully to me that you would make the best wife, mother, and mistress in the world. You and Anne are a pair for marvellous philosophical powers of endurance; no spoilt dinners, scorched linen, dirtied carpets, torn sofa-covers, squealing brats, cross husbands, would ever discompose either of you. You ought never to marry a good-tempered man, it would be mingling honey with sugar, like sticking white roses upon a black-thorn cudgel. With this very picturesque metaphor I close my letter. Good-bye, and write very soon.

'C. Brontë.'

Much has been said concerning Charlotte Brontë's visit to Hathersage in Derbyshire, and it is interesting because of the fact that Miss Brontë obtained the name of 'Eyre' from a family in that neighbourhood, and Morton in *Jane Eyre* may obviously be identified with Hathersage. Miss Ellen Nussey's brother Henry became Vicar of Hathersage, and he married shortly afterwards. While he was on his honeymoon his sister went to Hathersage to keep house for him, and she invited her friend Charlotte Brontë to stay with her. The visit lasted three weeks. This was the only occasion that Charlotte visited Hathersage. Here are two or three short notes referring to that visit.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*June* 10*th*, 1845.

'Dear Ellen, — It is very vexatious for you to have had to go to Sheffield in vain. I am glad to hear that there is an omnibus on Thursday, and I have told Emily and Anne I will try to come on that day. The opening of the railroad is now postponed till July 7th. I should not like to put you off again, and for that and some other reasons they have decided to give up the idea of going to Scarbro', and instead, to make a little excursion next Monday and Tuesday, to Ilkley or elsewhere. I hope no other obstacle will arise to prevent my going to Hathersage. I do long to be with you, and I feel nervously afraid of being prevented, or put off in some way. Branwell only stayed a week with us, but he is to come home again when the family go to Scarboro'. I will write to Brookroyd directly. Yesterday I had a little note from Henry inviting me to go to see you. This is one of your contrivances, for which you deserve smothering. You have written to Henry to tell him to write to me. Do you think I stood on ceremony about the matter?

'The French papers have ceased to come. Good-bye for the present.

'C. B.'

TO MRS. NUSSEY

'*July* 23*rd*, 1845.

'My dear Mrs. Nussey, — I lose no time after my return home in writing to you and offering you my sincere thanks for the kindness with which you have repeatedly invited me to go and stay a few days at Brookroyd. It would have given me great pleasure to have gone, had it been only for a day, just to have seen you and Miss Mercy (Miss Nussey I suppose is not at home) and to have been introduced to Mrs. Henry, but I have stayed so long with Ellen at Hathersage that I could not possibly now go to Brookroyd. I was expected at home; and after all *home* should always have the first claim on our attention. When I reached home (at ten o'clock on Saturday night) I found papa, I am thankful to say, pretty well, but he thought I had been a long time away.

'I left Ellen well, and she had generally good health while I stayed with her, but she is very anxious about matters of business, and apprehensive lest things should not be comfortable against the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Henry — she is so desirous that the day of their arrival at Hathersage should be a happy one to both.

'I hope, my dear Mrs. Nussey, you are well; and I should be very happy to receive a little note either from you or from Miss Mercy to assure me of this. — Believe me, yours affectionately and sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*July* 24*th*, 1845.

'Dear Ellen, — A series of toothaches, prolonged and severe, bothering me both day and night, have kept me very stupid of late, and prevented me from writing to you. More than once I have sat down and opened my desk, but have not been able to get up to par. To-day, after a night of fierce pain, I am better — much better, and I take advantage of the interval of ease to discharge my debt. I wish I had £50 to spare at present, and that you, Emily, Anne, and I were all at liberty to leave home without our absence being detrimental to any body. How pleasant to set off *en masse* to the seaside, and stay there a few weeks, taking in a stock of health and strength. — We could all do with recreation. Adversity agrees with you, Ellen. Your good qualities are never so obvious as when under the pressure of affliction. Continued prosperity might develope too much a certain germ of ambition latent in your character. I saw this little germ putting out green shoots when I was staying with you at Hathersage. It was not then obtrusive, and perhaps might never become so. Your good sense, firm principle, and kind feeling might keep it down. Holding down my head does not suit my toothache. Give my love to your mother and sisters. Write again as soon as may be. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*August* 18*th*, 1845.

'Dear Ellen, — I am writing to you, not because I have anything to tell you, but because I want you to write to me. I am glad to see that you were pleased with your new sister. When I was at Hathersage you were talking of writing to Mary Taylor. I have lately written to her a brief, shabby epistle of which I am ashamed, but I found when I began to write I had really very little to say. I sent the letter to Hunsworth, and I suppose it will go sometime. You must write to me soon, a long letter. Remember me respectfully to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Nussey. Give my love to Miss R. — Yours,

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*December* 14*th*, 1845.

‘Dear Ellen, — I was glad to get your last note, though it was so short and crusty. Three weeks had elapsed without my having heard a word from you, and I began to fear some new misfortune had occurred. I was relieved to find such was not the case. Anne is obliged by the kind regret you express at not being able to ask her to Brookroyd. She wishes you could come to Haworth. Do you scold me out of habit, or are you really angry? In either case it is all nonsense. You know as well as I do that to go to Brookroyd is always a pleasure to me, and that to one who has so little change, and so few friends as I have, it must be a *great pleasure*, but I am not at all times in the mood or circumstances to take my pleasure. I wish so much to see you, that I shall certainly sometime after New Year’s Day, if all be well, be going over to Birstall. Now I could *not go* if I *would*. If you think I stand upon ceremony in this matter, you miscalculate sadly. I have known you, and your mother and sisters, too long to be ceremonious with any of you. Invite me no more now, till I invite myself — be too proud to trouble yourself; and if, when at last I mention coming (for I shall give you warning), it does not happen to suit you, tell me so, with quiet hauteur. I should like a long letter next time. No more lovers’ quarrels.

‘Good-bye. Best love to your mother and sisters.

‘C. B.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*January* 28*th*, 1847.

‘Dear Ellen, — Long may you look young and handsome enough to dress in white, dear, and long may you have a right to feel the consciousness that you look agreeable. I know you have too much judgment to let an overdose of vanity spoil the blessing and turn it into a misfortune. After all though, age will come on, and it is well you have something better than a nice face for friends to turn to when that is changed. I hope this excessively cold weather has not harmed you or yours much. It has nipped me severely, taken away my appetite for a while and given me toothache; in short, put me in the ailing condition, in which I have more than once had the honour of making myself such a nuisance both at Brookroyd and Hunsworth. The consequence is that at this present speaking I look almost old enough to be your mother — grey, sunk, and withered. To-day, however, it is milder, and I hope soon to feel better; indeed I am not *ill* now, and my toothache is now subsided, but I experience a loss of strength and a deficiency of spirit which would make me a sorry companion to you or any one else. I would not be on a visit now for a large sum of money.

‘Write soon. Give my best love to your mother and sisters. — Good-bye, dear Nell,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*April* 21*st*, 1847.

‘Dear Nell, — I am very much obliged to you for your gift, which you must not undervalue, for I like the articles; they look extremely pretty and light. They are for wrist frills, are they not? Will you condescend to accept a yard of lace made up into nothing? I thought I would not offer to spoil it by stitching it into any shape. Your creative fingers will turn it to better account than my destructive ones. I hope, such as it is, they will not peck it out of the envelope at the Bradford Post-office, where they generally take the liberty of opening letters when they feel soft as if they contained articles. I had forgotten all about your birthday and mine, till your letter arrived to remind me of it. I wish you many happy returns of yours. Of course your visit to Haworth must be regulated by Miss Ringrose’s movements. I was rather amused at your fearing I should be jealous. I never thought of it. She and I could not be rivals in your affections. You allot her, I know, a different set of feelings to what you allot me. She is amiable and estimable, I am not amiable, but still we shall stick to the last I don’t doubt. In short, I should as soon think of being jealous of Emily and Anne in these days as of you. If Miss Ringrose does not come to Brookroyd about Whitsuntide, I should like you to come. I shall feel a good deal disappointed if the visit is put off — I would rather Miss Ringrose fixed her time in summer, and then I would come to see you (D.V.) in the autumn. I don’t think it will be at all a good plan to go back with you. We see each other so seldom, that I would far rather divide the visits. Remember me to all. — Yours faithfully,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*May* 25*th*, 1847.

‘Dear Nell, — I have a small present for Mercy. You must fetch it, for I repeat you shall *come to Haworth before I go to Brookroyd.*

‘I do not say this from pique or anger — I am not angry now — but because my leaving home at present would from solid reasons be difficult to manage. If all be well I will visit you in the autumn, at present I *cannot* come. Be assured that if I could come I should, after your last letter, put scruples and pride away and “go over into Macedonia” at once. I never could manage to help you yet. You have always found me something like a new servant, who requires to be told where everything is, and shown how everything is to be done.

‘My sincere love to your mother and Mercy. — Yours,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*May* 29*th*, 1847.

‘Dear Ellen, — Your letter and its contents were most welcome. You must direct your luggage to Mr. Brontë’s, and we will tell the carrier to inquire for it. The railroad has been opened some time, but it only comes as far as Keighley. If you arrive about 4 o’clock in the afternoon, Emily, Anne, and I will all meet you at the station. We can take tea jovially together at the

Devonshire Arms, and walk home in the cool of the evening. This arrangement will be much better than fagging through four miles in the heat of noon. Write by return of post if you can, and say if this plan suits you. — Yours,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*November* 10*th*, 1847.

‘Dear Ellen, — The old pang of fearing you should fancy I forget you drives me to write to you, though heaven knows I have precious little to say, and if it were not that I wish to hear from you, and hate to appear disregardful when I am not so, I might let another week or perhaps two slip away without writing. There is much in Ruth’s letter that I thought very melancholy. Poor girls! theirs, I fear, must be a very unhappy home. Yours and mine, with all disadvantages, all absences of luxury and wealth and style, are, I doubt not, happier. I wish to goodness you were rich, that you might give her a temporary asylum, and a relief from uneasiness, suffering, and gloom. What you say about the effects of ether on your sister rather startled me. I had always consoled myself with the idea of having some teeth extracted some day under its soothing influence, but now I should think twice before I consented to inhale it; one would not like to make a fool of one’s self. — I am, yours faithfully,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*March* 11*th*, 1848.

‘Dear Ellen, — There is a great deal of good-sense in your last letter. Be thankful that God gave you sense, for what are beauty, wealth, or even health without it? I had a note from Miss Ringrose the other day. I do not think I shall write again, for the reasons I before mentioned to you; but the note moved me much, it was almost all about her dear Ellen, a kind of gentle enthusiasm of affection, enough to make one smile and weep — her feelings are half truth, half illusion. No human being could be altogether what she supposes you to be, yet your kindness must have been very great. If one were only rich, how delightful it would be to travel and spend the winter in climates where there are no winters. Give my love to your mother and sisters. — Believe me, faithfully yours,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*April* 22*nd*, 1848.

‘Dear Ellen, — I have just received your little parcel, and beg to thank you in all our names for its contents, and also for your letter, of the arrival of which I was, to speak truth, getting rather impatient.

‘The housewife’s travelling companion is a most commodious thing — just the sort of article which suits one to a T, and which yet I should never have the courage or industry to sit down and make for myself. I shall keep it for occasions of going from home, it will save me a world of trouble. It must have required some thought to arrange the various compartments and their contents so aptly. I had quite forgotten till your letter reminded me that it was the anniversary of your birthday and mine. I am now thirty-two. Youth is gone — gone — and will never come back; can't help it. I wish you many returns of your birthday and increase of happiness with increase of years. It seems to me that sorrow must come sometime to every body, and those who scarcely taste it in their youth often have a more brimming and bitter cup to drain in after-life; whereas, those who exhaust the dregs early, who drink the lees before the wine, may reasonably expect a purer and more palatable draught to succeed. So, at least, one fain would hope. It touched me at first a little painfully to hear of your purposed governessing, but on second thoughts I discovered this to be quite a foolish feeling. You are doing right even though you should not gain much. The effort will do you good; no one ever does regret a step towards self-help; it is so much gained in independence.

'Give my love to your mother and sisters. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 24*th*, 1848.

'Dear Ellen, — I shall begin by telling you that you have no right to be angry at the length of time I have suffered to slip by since receiving your last, without answering it, because you have often kept me waiting much longer; and having made this gracious speech, thereby obviating reproaches, I will add that I think it a great shame when you receive a long and thoroughly interesting letter, full of the sort of details you fully relish, to read the same with selfish pleasure and not even have the manners to thank your correspondent, and express how much you enjoyed the narrative. I *did* enjoy the narrative in your last very keenly; the exquisitely characteristic traits concerning the Bakers were worth gold; just like not only them but all their class — respectable, well-meaning people enough, but with all that petty assumption of dignity, that small jealousy of senseless formalities, which to such people seems to form a second religion. Your position amongst them was detestable. I admire the philosophy with which you bore it. Their taking offence because you stayed all night at their aunt's is rich. It is right not to think much of casual attentions; it is quite justifiable also to derive from them temporary gratification, insomuch as they prove that their object has the power of pleasing. Let them be as ephemera — to last an hour, and not be regretted when gone.

'Write to me again soon and — Believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*August* 3, 1849.

'Dear Ellen, — I have received the furs safely. I like the sables very much, and shall keep them; and 'to save them' shall keep the squirrel, as you prudently suggested. I hope it is not too much like the steel poker to save the brass one. I return Mary's letter. It is another page from the volume of life, and at the bottom is written "Finis" — mournful word. Macaulay's *History* was only *lent* to myself — all the books I have from London I accept only as a loan, except in peculiar cases, where it is the author's wish I should possess his work.

'Do you think in a few weeks it will be possible for you to come to see me? I am only waiting to get my labour off my hands to permit myself the pleasure of asking you. At our house you can read as much as you please.

'I have been much better, very free from oppression or irritation of the chest, during the last fortnight or ten days. Love to all. — Good-bye, dear Nell.

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*August* 23*rd*, 1849.

'Dear Ellen, — Papa has not been well at all lately — he has had another attack of bronchitis. I felt very uneasy about him for some days, more wretched indeed than I care to tell you. After what has happened, one trembles at any appearance of sickness, and when anything ails papa I feel too keenly that he is the *last*, the *only* near and dear relation I have in the world. Yesterday and to-day he has seemed much better, for which I am truly thankful.

'For myself, I should be pretty well but for a continually recurring feeling of slight cold, slight soreness in the throat and chest, of which, do what I will, I cannot quite get rid. Has your cough entirely left you? I wish the atmosphere would return to a salubrious condition, for I really think it is not healthy. English cholera has been very prevalent here.

'I *do* wish to see you.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*August* 16, 1850.

'Dear Nell, — I am going on Monday (D.V.) a journey, whereof the prospect cheers me not at all, to Windermere, in Westmoreland, to spend a few days with Sir J. K. S., who has taken a house there for the autumn and winter. I consented to go with reluctance, chiefly to please papa, whom a refusal on my part would have much annoyed; but I dislike to leave him. I trust he is not worse, but his complaint is still weakness. It is not right to anticipate evil, and to be always looking forward in an apprehensive spirit; but I think grief is a two-edged sword — it cuts both ways: the memory of one loss is the anticipation of another. Take moderate exercise and be careful, dear Nell, and — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 10*th*, 1851.

'DEAR NELL, — Poor little Flossy! I have not yet screwed up nerve to tell papa about her fate, it seems to me so piteous. However, she had a happy life with a kind mistress, whatever her death has been. Little hapless plague! She had more goodness and patience shown her than she deserved, I fear.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *July* 26*th*, 1852.

'Dear Ellen, — I should not have written to you to-day by choice. Lately I have again been harassed with headache — the heavy electric atmosphere oppresses me much, yet I am less miserable just now than I was a little while ago. A severe shock came upon me about papa. He was suddenly attacked with acute inflammation of the eye. Mr. Ruddock was sent for; and after he had examined him, he called me into another room, and said papa's pulse was bounding at 150 per minute, that there was a strong pressure of blood upon the brain, that, in short, the symptoms were decidedly apoplectic.

'Active measures were immediately taken. By the next day the pulse was reduced to ninety. Thank God he is now better, though not well. The eye is a good deal inflamed. He does not know his state. To tell him he had been in danger of apoplexy would almost be to kill him at once — it would increase the rush to the brain and perhaps bring about rupture. He is kept very quiet.

'Dear Nell, you will excuse a short note. Write again soon. Tell me all concerning yourself that can relieve you. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*August* 3*rd*, 1852.

'Dear Ellen, — I write a line to say that papa is now considered out of danger. His progress to health is not without relapse, but I think he gains ground, if slowly, surely. Mr. Ruddock says the seizure was quite of an apoplectic character; there was a partial paralysis for two days, but the mind remained clear, in spite of a high degree of nervous irritation. One eye still remains inflamed, and papa is weak, but all muscular affection is gone, and the pulse is accurate. One cannot be too thankful that papa's sight is yet spared — it was the fear of losing that which chiefly distressed him.

'With best wishes for yourself, dear Ellen, — I am, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.

'My headaches are better. I have needed no help, but I thank you sincerely for your kind offers.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *August* 12*th*, 1852.

'Dear Ellen, — Papa has varied occasionally since I wrote to you last. Monday was a very bad day, his spirits sunk painfully. Tuesday and yesterday, however, were much better, and to-day he seems wonderfully well. The prostration of spirits which accompanies anything like a relapse is almost the most difficult point to manage. Dear Nell, you are tenderly kind in offering your society; but rest very tranquil where you are; be fully assured that it is not now, nor under present circumstances, that I feel the lack either of society or occupation; my time is pretty well filled up, and my thoughts appropriated.

'Mr. Ruddock now seems quite satisfied there is no present danger whatever; he says papa has an excellent constitution and may live many years yet. The true balance is not yet restored to the circulation, but I believe that impetuous and dangerous termination to the head is quite obviated. I cannot permit myself to comment much on the chief contents of your last; advice is not necessary. As far as I can judge, you seem hitherto enabled to take these trials in a good and wise spirit. I can only pray that such combined strength and resignation may be continued to you. Submission, courage, exertion, when practicable — these seem to be the weapons with which we must fight life's long battle. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

To Miss Nussey we owe many other letters than those here printed — indeed, they must needs play an important part in Charlotte Brontë's biography. They do not deal with the intellectual interests which are so marked in the letters to W. S. Williams, and which, doubtless, characterised the letters to Miss Mary Taylor. 'I ought to have written this letter to Mary,' Charlotte says, when on one occasion she dropped into literature to her friend; but the friendship was as precious as most intellectual friendships, because it was based upon a common esteem and an unselfish devotion. Ellen Nussey, as we have seen, accompanied Anne Brontë to Scarborough, and was at her death-bed. She attended Charlotte's wedding, and lived to mourn over her tomb. For forty years she has been the untiring advocate and staunch champion, hating to hear a word in her great friend's dispraise, loving to note the glorious recognition, of which there has been so rich and so full a harvest. That she still lives to receive our reverent gratitude for preserving so many interesting traits of the Brontës, is matter for full and cordial congratulation, wherever the names of the authors of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are held in just and wise esteem.

CHAPTER IX: MARY TAYLOR

Mary Taylor, the 'M — -' of Mrs. Gaskell's biography, and the 'Rose Yorke' of *Shirley*, will always have a peculiar interest to those who care for the Brontës. She shrank from publicity, and her name has been less mentioned than that of any other member of the circle. And yet hers was a personality singularly strenuous and strong. She wrote two books 'with a purpose,' and, as we shall see, vigorously embodied her teaching in her life. It will be remembered that Charlotte Brontë, Ellen Nussey, and Mary Taylor first met at Roe Head School, when Charlotte and Mary were fifteen and her friend about fourteen years of age. Here are Miss Nussey's impressions —

'She was pretty, and very childish-looking, dressed in a red-coloured frock with short sleeves and low neck, as then worn by young girls. Miss Wooler in later years used to say that when Mary went to her as a pupil she thought her too pretty to live. She was not talkative at school, but industrious, and always ready with lessons. She was always at the top in class lessons, with Charlotte Brontë and the writer; seldom a change was made, and then only with the three — one move. Charlotte and she were great friends for a time, but there was no withdrawing from me on either side, and Charlotte never quite knew how an estrangement arose with Mary, but it lasted a long time. Then a time came that both Charlotte and Mary were so proficient in schoolroom attainments there was no more for them to learn, and Miss Wooler set them Blair's *Belles Lettres* to commit to memory. We all laughed at their studies. Charlotte persevered, but Mary took her own line, flatly refused, and accepted the penalty of disobedience, going supper-less to bed for about a month before she left school. When it was moonlight, we always found her engaged in drawing on the chest of drawers, which stood in the bay window, quite happy and cheerful. Her rebellion was never outspoken. She was always quiet in demeanour. Her sister Martha, on the contrary, spoke out vigorously, daring Miss Wooler so much, face to face, that she sometimes received a box on the ear, which hardly any saint could have withheld. Then Martha would expatiate on the danger of boxing ears, quoting a reverend brother of Miss Wooler's. Among her school companions, Martha was called "Miss Boisterous," but was always a favourite, so piquant and fascinating were her ways. She was not in the least pretty, but something much better, full of change and variety, rudely outspoken, lively, and original, producing laughter with her own good-humour and affection. She was her father's pet child. He delighted in hearing her sing, telling her to go to the piano, with his affectionate "Patty lass."

'Mary never had the impromptu vivacity of her sister, but was lively in games that engaged her mind. Her music was very correct, but entirely cultivated by practice and perseverance. Anything underhand was detestable to both Mary and Martha; they had no mean pride towards others, but accepted the incidents of life with imperturbable good-sense and insight. They were not dressed as well as other pupils, for economy at that time was the rule of their household. The girls had to stitch all over their new gloves before wearing them, by order of their mother, to make them wear longer. Their dark blue cloth coats were worn when *too short*, and black beaver bonnets quite plainly trimmed, with the ease and contentment of a fashionable costume. Mr. Taylor was a banker as well as a monopolist of army cloth manufacture in the district. He lost money, and gave up banking. He set his mind on paying all creditors, and effected this during his lifetime as far as possible, willing that his sons were to do the remainder, which two of his sons carried out, as was understood, during their lifetime — Mark and Martin of *Shirley*.'

Let us now read Charlotte's description in *Shirley*, and I think we have a tolerably fair estimate of the sisters.

'The two next are girls, Rose and Jessie; they are both now at their father's knee; they seldom go near their mother, except when obliged to do so. Rose, the elder, is twelve years old; she is like her father — the most like him of the whole group — but it is a granite head copied in ivory; all is softened in colour and line. Yorke himself has a harsh face; his daughter's is not harsh, neither is it quite pretty; it is simple — childlike in feature; the round cheeks bloom; as to the grey eyes, they are otherwise than childlike — a serious soul lights them — a young soul yet, but it will mature, if the body lives; and neither father nor mother has a spirit to compare with it. Partaking of the essence of each, it will one day be better than either — stronger, much purer, more aspiring. Rose is a still, and sometimes a stubborn girl now; her mother wants to make of her such a woman as she is herself — a woman of dark and dreary duties; and Rose has a mind full-set, thick-sown with the germs of ideas her mother never knew. It is agony to her often to have these ideas trampled on and repressed. She has never rebelled yet; but if hard driven, she will rebel one day, and then it will be once for all. Rose loves her father; her father does not rule her with a rod of iron; he is good to her. He sometimes fears she will not live, so bright are the sparks of intelligence which, at moments, flash from her glance and gleam in her language. This idea makes him often sadly tender to her.

'He has no idea that little Jessie will die young, she is so gay and chattering, arch — original even now; passionate when provoked, but most affectionate if caressed; by turns gentle and rattling; exacting yet generous; fearless — of her mother, for instance, whose irrationally hard and strict rule she has often defied — yet reliant on any who will help her. Jessie, with her little piquant face, engaging prattle, and winning ways, is made to be a pet; and her father's pet she accordingly is.'

Mary Taylor was called 'Pag' by her friends, and the first important reference to her that I find is contained in a letter written by Charlotte to Ellen Nussey, when she was seventeen years of age.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *June* 20*th*, 1833.

'Dear Ellen, — I know you will be very angry because I have not written sooner; my reason, or rather my motive for this apparent neglect was, that I had determined not to write until I could ask you to pay us your long-promised visit. Aunt thought it would be better to defer it until about the middle of summer, as the winter and even the spring seasons are remarkably cold and bleak among our mountains. Papa now desires me to present his respects to your mother, and say that he should feel greatly obliged if she would allow us the pleasure of your company for a few weeks at Haworth. I will leave it to you to fix whatever day may be most convenient, but let it be an early one. I received a letter from Pag Taylor yesterday; she was in high dudgeon at my inattention in not promptly answering her last epistle. I however sat down immediately and wrote a very humble reply, candidly confessing my faults and soliciting forgiveness; I hope it has proved successful. Have you suffered much from that troublesome though not (I am happy to hear) generally fatal disease, the influenza? We have so far steered clear of it, but I know not how long we may continue to escape. Your last letter revealed a state of mind which seemed to promise much. As I read it I could not help wishing that my own feelings more resembled yours; but unhappily all the good thoughts that enter *my mind* evaporate almost before I have had time to ascertain their existence; every right resolution which I form is so transient, so fragile, and so easily broken, that I sometimes fear I shall never be what I ought. Earnestly hoping that this may not be your case, that you may continue steadfast till the end, — I remain, dearest Ellen, your ever faithful friend,

'Charlotte Brontë.'

The next letter refers to Mr. Taylor's death. Mr. Taylor, it is scarcely necessary to add, is the Mr. Yorke of Briarmains, who figures so largely in *Shirley*. I have visited the substantial red-brick house near the high-road at Gomersall, but descriptions of the Brontë country do not come within the scope of this volume.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 3*rd*, 1841.

'My dear Ellen, — I received the news in your last with no surprise, and with the feeling that this removal must be a relief to Mr. Taylor himself and even to his family. The bitterness of death was past a year ago, when it was first discovered that his illness must terminate fatally; all between has been lingering suspense. This is at an end now, and the present certainty, however sad, is better than the former doubt. What will be the consequence of his death is another question; for my own part, I look forward to a dissolution and dispersion of the family, perhaps not immediately, but in the course of a year or two. It is true, causes may arise to keep them together awhile longer, but they are restless, active spirits, and will not be restrained always. Mary alone has more energy and power in her nature than any ten men you can pick out in the united parishes of Birstall and Haworth. It is vain to limit a character like hers within ordinary boundaries — she will overstep them. I am morally certain Mary will establish her own landmarks, so will the rest of them.

'C. Brontë.'

Soon after her father's death Mary Taylor turned her eyes towards New Zealand, where she had friends, but two years were to go by before anything came of the idea.

TO MISS EMILY J. BRONTË

'Upperwood House, *April* 2*nd*, 1841.

'Dear E. J., — I received your last letter with delight as usual. I must write a line to thank you for it and the inclosure, which however is too bad — you ought not to have sent me those packets. I had a letter from Anne yesterday; she says she is well. I hope she speaks absolute truth. I had written to her and Branwell a few days before. I have not heard from Branwell yet. It is to be hoped that his removal to another station will turn out for the best. As you say, it *looks* like getting on at any rate.

'I have got up my courage so far as to ask Mrs. White to grant me a day's holiday to go to Birstall to see Ellen Nussey, who has offered to send a gig for me. My request was granted, but so coldly and slowly. However, I stuck to my point in a very exemplary and remarkable manner. I hope to go next Saturday. Matters are progressing very strangely at Gomersall. Mary Taylor and Waring have come to a singular determination, but I almost think under the peculiar circumstances a defensible one, though it sounds outrageously odd at first. They are going to emigrate — to quit the country altogether. Their destination unless they change is Port Nicholson, in the northern island of New Zealand!!! Mary has made up her mind she can not and will not be a governess, a teacher, a milliner, a bonnet-maker nor housemaid. She sees no means of obtaining employment she would like in England, so she is leaving it. I counselled her to go to France likewise and stay there a year before she decided on this strange unlikely-sounding plan of going to New Zealand, but she is quite resolved. I cannot sufficiently comprehend what her views and those of her brothers may be on the subject, or what is the extent of their information regarding Port Nicholson, to say whether this is rational enterprise or absolute madness. With love to papa, aunt, Tabby, etc. — Good-bye.

'C. B.

'*P.S.* — I am very well; I hope you are. Write again soon.'

Soon after this Mary went on a long visit to Brussels, which, as we have seen, was the direct cause of Charlotte and Emily establishing themselves at the Pensionnat Héger. In Brussels Martha Taylor found a grave. Here is one of her letters.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY.

'Brussels, *Sept*. 9*th*, 1841.

'My dear Ellen, — I received your letter from Mary, and you say I am to write though I have nothing to say. My sister will tell you all about me, for she has more time to write than I have.

'Whilst Mary and John have been with me, we have been to Liege and Spa, where we stayed eight days. I found my little knowledge of French very useful in our travels. I am going to begin working again very hard, now that John and Mary are going away. I intend beginning German directly. I would write some more but this pen of Mary's won't write; you must scold her for it, and tell her to write you a long account of my proceedings. You must write to me sometimes. George Dixon is coming here the last week in September, and you must send a letter for me to Mary to be forwarded by him. Good-bye. May you be happy.

'Martha Taylor.'

It was while Charlotte was making her second stay in Brussels that she heard of Mary's determination to go with her brother Waring to New Zealand, with a view to earning her own living in any reasonable manner that might offer.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Brussels, *April* 1*st*, 1843.

'Dear Ellen, — That last letter of yours merits a good dose of panegyric — it was both long and interesting; send me quickly such another, longer still if possible. You will have heard of Mary Taylor's resolute and intrepid proceedings. Her public letters will have put you in possession of all details — nothing is left for me to say except perhaps to express my opinion upon it. I have turned the matter over on all sides and really I cannot consider it otherwise than as very rational. Mind, I did not jump to this opinion at once, but was several days before I formed it conclusively.

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*Sunday Evening*, *June* 1*st*, 1845.

'Dear Ellen, — You probably know that another letter has been received from Mary Taylor. It is, however, possible that your absence from home will have prevented your seeing it, so I will give you a sketch of its contents. It was written at about 4° N. of the Equator. The first part of the letter contained an account of their landing at Santiago. Her health at that time was very good, and her spirits seemed excellent. They had had contrary winds at first setting out, but their voyage was then prosperous. In the latter portion of the letter she complains of the excessive heat, and says she lives chiefly on oranges; but still she was well, and freer from headache and other ailments than any other person on board. The receipt of this letter will have relieved all her friends from a weight of anxiety. I am uneasy about what you say respecting the French newspapers — do you mean to intimate that you have received none? I have despatched them regularly. Emily and I keep them usually three days, sometimes only two, and then send them forward to you. I see by the cards you sent, and also by the newspaper, that Henry is at last married. How did you like your office of bridesmaid? and how do you like your new sister and her family? You must write to me as soon as you can, and give me an *observant* account of everything.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Manchester, *September* 13*th*, 1846.

'Dear Ellen, — Papa thinks his own progress rather slow, but the doctor affirms he is getting on very well. He complains of extreme weakness and soreness in the eye, but I suppose that is to be expected for some time to come. He is still kept in the dark, but now sits up the greater part of the day, and is allowed a little fire in the room, from the light of which he is carefully screened.

'By this time you will have got Mary's letters; most interesting they are, and she is in her element because she is where she has a toilsome task to perform, an important improvement to effect, a weak vessel to strengthen. You ask if I had any enjoyment here; in truth, I can't say I have, and I long to get home, though, unhappily, home is not now a place of complete rest. It is sad to think how it is disquieted by a constant phantom, or rather two — sin and suffering; they seem to obscure the cheerfulness of day, and to disturb the comfort of evening.

'Give my love to all at Brookroyd, and believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*June* 5*th*, 1847.

'Dear Ellen, — I return you Mary Taylor's letter; it made me somewhat sad to read it, for I fear she is not quite content with her existence in New Zealand. She finds it too barren. I believe she is more home-sick than she will confess. Her gloomy ideas respecting you and me prove a state of mind far from gay. I have also received a letter; its tone is similar to your own, and its contents too.

'What brilliant weather we have had. Oh! I do indeed regret you could not come to Haworth at the time fixed, these warm sunny days would have suited us exactly; but it is not to be helped. Give my best love to your mother and Mercy. — Yours faithfully,

'C. BRONTË.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *June* 26*th*, 1848.

'Dear Ellen, — I should have answered your last long ago if I had known your address, but you omitted to give it me, and I have been waiting in the hope that you would perhaps write again and repair the omission. Finding myself deceived in this expectation however, I have at last hit on the plan of sending the letter to Brookroyd to be directed; be sure to give me your address when you reply to this.

'I was glad to hear that you were well received at London, and that you got safe to the end of your journey. Your *naïveté* in gravely inquiring my opinion of the "last new novel" amuses me. We do not subscribe to a circulating library at Haworth, and consequently "new novels" rarely indeed come in our way, and consequently, again, we are not qualified to give opinions thereon.

'About three weeks ago, I received a brief note from Hunsworth, to the effect that Mr. Joe Taylor and his cousin Henry would make some inquiries respecting Mme. Héger's school on account of Ellen Taylor, and that if I had no objection, they would ride over to Haworth in a day or two. I said they might come if they would. They came, accompanied by Miss Mossman, of Bradford, whom I had never seen, only heard of occasionally. It was a pouring wet and windy day; we had quite ceased to expect them. Miss Mossman was quite wet, and we had to make her change her things, and dress her out in ours as well as we could. I do not know if you are acquainted with her; I thought her unaffected and rather agreeable-looking, though she has very red hair. Henry Taylor does indeed resemble John most strongly. Joe looked thin; he was in good spirits, and I think in tolerable good-humour. I would have given much for you to have been there. I had not been very well for some days before, and had some difficulty in keeping up the talk, but I managed on the whole better than I expected. I was glad Miss Mossman came, for she helped. Nothing new was communicated respecting Mary. Nothing of importance in any way was said the whole time; it was all rattle, rattle, of which I should have great difficulty now in recalling the substance. They left almost immediately after tea. I have not heard a word respecting them since, but I suppose they got home all right. The visit strikes me as an odd whim. I consider it quite a caprice, prompted probably by curiosity.

'Joe Taylor mentioned that he had called at Brookroyd, and that Anne had told him you were ill, and going into the South for change of air.

'I hope you will soon write to me again and tell me particularly how your health is, and how you get on. Give my regards to Mary Gorham, for really I have a sort of regard for her by hearsay, and — Believe me, dear Nell, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

The Ellen Taylor mentioned in the above letter did not go to Brussels. She joined her cousin Mary in New Zealand instead.

TO MISS CHARLOTTE BRONTË

'Wellington, *April* 10*th*, 1849.

'Dear Charlotte, — I've been delighted to receive a very interesting letter from you with an account of your visit to London, etc. I believe I have tacked this acknowledgment to the tail of my last letter to you, but since then it has dawned on my comprehension that you are becoming a very important personage in this little world, and therefore, d'ye see? I must write again to you. I wish you would give me some account of Newby, and what the man said when confronted with the real Ellis Bell. By the way, having got your secret, will he keep it? And how do you contrive to get your letters under the address of Mr. Bell? The whole scheme must be particularly interesting to hear about, if I could only talk to you for half a day. When do you intend to tell the good people about you?

'I am now hard at work expecting Ellen Taylor. She may possibly be here in two months. I once thought of writing you some of the dozens of schemes I have for Ellen Taylor, but as the choice depends on her I may as well wait and tell you the one she chooses. The two most reasonable are keeping a school and keeping a shop. The last is evidently the most healthy, but the most difficult of accomplishment. I have written an account of the earthquakes for *Chambers*, and intend (now don't remind me of this a year hence, because *la femme propose*) to write some more. What else I shall do I don't know. I find the writing faculty does not in the least depend on the leisure I have, but much more on the *active* work I have to do. I write at my novel a little and think of my other book. What this will turn out, God only knows. It is not, and never can be forgotten. It is my child, my baby, and *I assure you* such a wonder as never was. I intend him when full grown to revolutionise society and *faire époque* in history.

'In the meantime I'm doing a collar in crochet work.

'Pag.'

TO MISS CHARLOTTE BRONTË

'Wellington, New Zealand,
'*July* 24*th*, 1849.

'Dear Charlotte, — About a month since I received and read *Jane Eyre*. It seemed to me incredible that you had actually written a book. Such events did not happen while I was in England. I begin to believe in your existence much as I do in Mr. Rochester's. In a believing mood I don't doubt either of them. After I had read it I went on to the top of Mount Victoria and looked for a ship to carry a letter to you. There was a little thing with one mast, and also H.M.S. *Fly*, and nothing else. If a cattle vessel came from Sydney she would probably return in a few days, and would take a mail, but we have had east wind for a month and nothing can come in.

'*Aug*. 1. — The *Harlequin* has just come from Otago, and is to sail for Singapore *when the wind changes*, and by that route (which I hope to take myself sometime) I send you this. Much good may it do you. Your novel surprised me by being so perfect as a work of art. I expected something more changeable and unfinished. You have polished to some purpose. If I were to do so I should get tired, and weary every one else in about two pages. No sign of this weariness in your book — you must have had abundance, having kept it all to yourself!

'You are very different from me in having no doctrine to preach. It is impossible to squeeze a moral out of your production. Has the world gone so well with you that you have no protest to make against its absurdities? Did you never sneer or declaim in your first sketches? I will scold you well when I see you. I do not believe in Mr. Rivers. There are no *good* men of the Brocklehurst species. A missionary either goes into his office for a piece of bread, or he goes from enthusiasm, and that is both too good and too bad a quality for St. John. It's a bit of your absurd charity to believe in such a man. You have done wisely in choosing to imagine a high class of readers. You never stop to explain or defend anything, and never seem bothered with the idea. If Mrs. Fairfax or any other well-intentioned fool gets hold of this what will she think? And yet, you know, the world is made up of such, and worse. Once more, how have you written through three volumes without declaring war to the knife against a few dozen absurd doctrines, each of which is supported by "a large and respectable class of readers"? Emily seems to have had such a class in her eye when she wrote that strange thing *Wuthering Heights*. Anne, too, stops repeatedly to preach commonplace truths. She has had a still lower class in her mind's eye. Emily seems to have followed the bookseller's advice. As to the price you got, it was certainly Jewish. But what could the people do? If they had asked you to fix it, do you know yourself how many ciphers your sum would have had? And how should they know better? And if they did, that's the knowledge they get their living by. If I were in your place, the idea of being bound in the sale of two more would prevent me from ever writing again. Yet you are probably now busy with another. It is curious for me to see among the old letters one from Anne sending *a copy of a whole article* on the currency question written by Fonblanque! I exceedingly regret having burnt your letters in a fit of caution, and I've forgotten all the names. Was the reader Albert Smith? What do they all think of you?

'I mention the book to no one and hear no opinions. I lend it a good deal because it's a novel, and *it's as good as another*! They say "it makes them cry." They are not literary enough to give an opinion. If ever I hear one I'll embalm it for you. As to my own affair, I have written 100 pages, and lately 50 more. It's no use writing faster. I get so disgusted, I can do nothing.

'If I could command sufficient money for a twelve-month, I would go home by way of India and write my travels, which would prepare the way for my novel. With the benefit of your experience I should perhaps make a better bargain than you. I am most afraid of my health. Not that I should die, but perhaps sink into a state of betweenity, neither well nor ill, in which I should observe nothing, and be very miserable besides. My life here is not disagreeable. I have a great resource in the piano, and a little employment in teaching.

'It's a pity you don't live in this world, that I might entertain you about the price of meat. Do you know, I bought six heifers the other day for £23, and now it is turned so cold I expect to hear one-half of them are dead. One man bought twenty sheep for £8, and they are all dead but one. Another bought 150 and has 40 left.

'I have now told you everything I can think of except that the cat's on the table and that I'm going to borrow a new book to read — no less than an account of all the systems of philosophy of modern Europe. I have lately met with a wonder, a man who thinks Jane Eyre would have done better to marry Mr. Rivers! He gives no reason — such people never do.

'Mary Taylor.'

TO MISS CHARLOTTE BRONTË

'Wellington, New Zealand.

'Dear Charlotte, — I have set up shop! I am delighted with it as a whole — that is, it is as pleasant or as little disagreeable as you can expect an employment to be that you earn your living by. The best of it is that your labour has some return, and you are not forced to work on hopelessly without result. *Du reste*, it is very odd. I keep looking at myself with one eye while I'm using the other, and I sometimes find myself in very queer positions. Yesterday I went along the shore past the wharfes and several warehouses on a street where I had never been before during all the five years I have been in Wellington. I opened the door of a long place filled with packages, with passages up the middle, and a row of high windows on one side. At the far end of the room a man was writing at a desk beneath a window. I walked all the length of the room very slowly, for what I had come for had completely gone out of my head. Fortunately the man never heard me until I had recollected it. Then he got up, and I asked him for some stone-blue, saltpetre, tea, pickles, salt, etc. He was very civil. I bought some things and asked for a note of them. He went to his desk again; I looked at some newspapers lying near. On the top was a circular from Smith & Elder containing notices of the most important new works. The first and longest was given to *Shirley*, a book I had seen mentioned in the *Manchester Examiner* as written by Currer Bell. I blushed all over. The man got up, folding the note. I pulled it out of his hand and set off to the door, looking odder than ever, for a partner had come in and was watching. The clerk said something about sending them, and I said something too — I hope it was not very silly — and took my departure.

'I have seen some extracts from *Shirley* in which you talk of women working. And this first duty, this great necessity, you seem to think that some women may indulge in, if they give up marriage, and don't make themselves too disagreeable to the other sex. You are a coward and a traitor. A woman who works is by that alone better than one who does not; and a woman who does not happen to be rich and who *still* earns no money and does not wish to do so, is guilty of a great fault, almost a crime — a dereliction of duty which leads rapidly and almost certainly to all manner of degradation. It is very wrong of you to *plead* for toleration for workers on the ground of their being in peculiar circumstances, and few in number or singular in disposition. Work or degradation is the lot of all except the very small number born to wealth.

‘Ellen is with me, or I with her. I cannot tell how our shop will turn out, but I am as sanguine as ever. Meantime we certainly amuse ourselves better than if we had nothing to do. We *like* it, and that’s the truth. By the *Cornelia* we are going to send our sketches and fern leaves. You must look at them, and it will need all your eyes to understand them, for they are a mass of confusion. They are all within two miles of Wellington, and some of them rather like — Ellen’s sketch of me especially. During the last six months I have seen more “society” than in all the last four years. Ellen is half the reason of my being invited, and my improved circumstances besides. There is no one worth mentioning particularly. The women are all ignorant and narrow, and the men selfish. They are of a decent, honest kind, and some intelligent and able. A Mr. Woodward is the only *literary* man we know, and he seems to have fair sense. This was the clerk I bought the stone-blue of. We have just got a mechanic’s institute, and weekly lectures delivered there. It is amusing to see people trying to find out whether or not it is fashionable and proper to patronise it. Somehow it seems it is. I think I have told you all this before, which shows I have got to the end of my news. Your next letter to me ought to bring me good news, more cheerful than the last. You will somehow get drawn out of your hole and find interests among your fellow-creatures. Do you know that living among people with whom you have not the slightest interest in common is just like living alone, or worse? Ellen Nussey is the only one you can talk to, that I know of at least. Give my love to her and to Miss Wooler, if you have the opportunity. I am writing this on just such a night as you will likely read it — rain and storm, coming winter, and a glowing fire. Ours is on the ground, wood, no fender or irons; no matter, we are very comfortable.

‘Pag.’

TO MISS CHARLOTTE BRONTË

‘Wellington, N. Z., *April* 3*rd*, 1850.

‘Dear Charlotte, — About a week since I received your last melancholy letter with the account of Anne’s death and your utter indifference to everything, even to the success of your last book. Though you do not say this, it is pretty plain to be seen from the style of your letter. It seems to me hard indeed that you who would succeed, better than any one, in making friends and keeping them, should be condemned to solitude from your poverty. To no one would money bring more happiness, for no one would use it better than you would. For me, with my headlong self-indulgent habits, I am perhaps better without it, but I am convinced it would give you great and noble pleasures. Look out then for success in writing; you ought to care as much for that as you do for going to Heaven. Though the advantages of being employed appear to you now the best part of the business, you will soon, please God, have other enjoyments from your success. Railway shares will rise, your books will sell, and you will acquire influence and power; and then most certainly you will find something to use it in which will interest you and make you exert yourself.

'I have got into a heap of social trickery since Ellen came, never having troubled my head before about the comparative numbers of young ladies and young gentlemen. To Ellen it is quite new to be of such importance by the mere fact of her femininity. She thought she was coming wofully down in the world when she came out, and finds herself better received than ever she was in her life before. And the class are not *in education* inferior, though they are in money. They are decent well-to-do people: six grocers, one draper, two parsons, two clerks, two lawyers, and three or four nondescripts. All these but one have families to "take tea with," and there are a lot more single men to flirt with. For the last three months we have been out every Sunday sketching. We seldom succeed in making the slightest resemblance to the thing we sit down to, but it is wonderfully interesting. Next year we hope to send a lot home. With all this my novel stands still; it might have done so if I had had nothing to do, for it is not want of time but want of freedom of mind that makes me unable to direct my attention to it. Meantime it grows in my head, for I never give up the idea. I have written about a volume I suppose. Read this letter to Ellen Nussey.

'Mary Taylor.'

TO MISS CHARLOTTE BRONTË

'Wellington, *August* 13*th*, 1850.

'Dear Charlotte, — After waiting about six months we have just got *Shirley*. It was landed from the *Constantinople* on Monday afternoon, just in the thick of our preparations for a "small party" for the next day. We stopped spreading red blankets over everything (New Zealand way of arranging the room) and opened the box and read all the letters. Soyer's *Housewife* and *Shirley* were there all right, but Miss Martineau's book was not. In its place was a silly child's tale called *Edward Orland*. On Tuesday we stayed up dancing till three or four o'clock, what for I can't imagine. However, it was a piece of business done. On Wednesday I began *Shirley* and continued in a curious confusion of mind till now, principally at the handsome foreigner who was nursed in our house when I was a little girl. By the way, you've put him in the servant's bedroom. You make us all talk much as I think we should have done if we'd ventured to speak at all. What a little lump of perfection you've made me! There is a strange feeling in reading it of hearing us all talking. I have not seen the matted hall and painted parlour windows so plain these five years. But my father is not like. He hates well enough and perhaps loves too, but he is not honest enough. It was from my father I learnt not to marry for money nor to tolerate any one who did, and he never would advise any one to do so, or fail to speak with contempt of those who did. Shirley is much more interesting than Jane Eyre, who never interests you at all until she has something to suffer. All through this last novel there is so much more life and stir that it leaves you far more to remember than the other. Did you go to London about this too? What for? I see by a letter of yours to Mr. Dixon that you *have* been. I wanted to contradict some of your opinions, now I can't. As to when I'm coming home, you may well ask. I have wished for fifteen years to begin to earn my own living; last April I began to try — it is too soon to say yet with what success. I am woefully ignorant, terribly wanting in tact, and obstinately lazy, and almost too old to mend. Luckily there is no other dance for me, so I must work. Ellen takes to it kindly, it gratifies a deep ardent *wish* of hers as of mine, and she is habitually industrious. For *her*, ten years younger, our shop will be a blessing. She may possibly secure an independence, and skill to keep it and use it, before the prime of life is past. As to my writings, you may as well ask the Fates about that too. I can give you no information. I write a page now and then. I never forget or get strange to what I have written. When I read it over it looks very interesting.

'Mary Taylor.'

The Ellen Taylor referred to so frequently was, as I have said, a cousin of Mary's. Her early death in New Zealand gives the single letter I have of hers a more pathetic interest.

TO MISS CHARLOTTE BRONTË

'Wellington, N. Z.

'My dear Miss Brontë, — I shall tell you everything I can think of, since you said in one of your letters to Pag that you wished me to write to you. I have been here a year. It seems a much shorter time, and yet I have thought more and done more than I ever did in my life before. When we arrived, Henry and I were in such a hurry to leave the ship that we didn't wait to be fetched, but got into the first boat that came alongside. When we landed we inquired where Waring lived, but hadn't walked far before we met him. I had never seen him before, but he guessed we were the cousins he expected, so caught us and took us along with him. Mary soon joined us, and we went home together. At first I thought Mary was not the least altered, but when I had seen her for about a week I thought she looked rather older. The first night Mary and I sat up till 2 a.m. talking. Mary and I settled we would do something together, and we talked for a fortnight before we decided whether we would have a school or shop; it ended in favour of the shop. Waring thought we had better be quiet, and I believe he still thinks we are doing it for amusement; but he never refuses to help us. He is teaching us book-keeping, and he buys things for us now and then. Mary gets as fierce as a dragon and goes to all the wholesale stores and looks at things, gets patterns, samples, etc., and asks prices, and then comes home, and we talk it over; and then she goes again and buys what we want. She says the people are always civil to her. Our keeping shop astonishes every body here; I believe they think we do it for fun. Some think we shall make nothing of it, or that we shall get tired; and all laugh at us. Before I left home I used to be afraid of being laughed at, but now it has very little effect upon me.

'Mary and I are settled together now: I can't do without Mary and she couldn't get on by herself. I built the house we live in, and we made the plan ourselves, so it suits us. We take it in turns to serve in the shop, and keep the accounts, and do the housework — I mean, Mary takes the shop for a week and I the kitchen, and then we change. I think we shall do very well if no more severe earthquakes come, and if we can prevent fire. When a wooden house takes fire it doesn't stop; and we have got an oil cask about as high as I am, that would help it. If some sparks go out at the chimney-top the shingles are in danger. The last earthquake but one about a fortnight ago threw down two medicine bottles that were standing on the table and made other things jingle, but did no damage. If we have nothing worse than that I don't care, but I don't want the chimney to come down — it would cost £10 to build it up again. Mary is making me stop because it is nearly 9 p.m. and we are going to Waring's to supper. Good-bye. — Yours truly,

'Ellen Taylor.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *July* 4*th*, 1849.

'I get on as well as I can. Home is not the home it used to be — that you may well conceive; but so far, I get on.

'I cannot boast of vast benefits derived from change of air yet; but unfortunately I brought back the seeds of a cold with me from that dismal Easton, and I have not got rid of it yet. Still I think I look better than I did before I went. How are you? You have never told me.

'Mr. Williams has written to me twice since my return, chiefly on the subject of his third daughter, who wishes to be a governess, and has some chances of a presentation to Queen's College, an establishment connected with the Governess Institution; this will secure her four years of instruction. He says Mr. George Smith is kindly using his influence to obtain votes, but there are so many candidates he is not sanguine of success.

'I had a long letter from Mary Taylor — interesting but sad, because it contained many allusions to those who are in this world no more. She mentioned you, and seemed impressed with an idea of the lamentable nature of your unoccupied life. She spoke of her own health as being excellent.

'Give my love to your mother and sisters, and, — Believe me, yours,

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *May* 18*th*.

'Dear Ellen, — I inclose Mary Taylor's letter announcing Ellen's death, and two last letters — sorrowful documents, all of them. I received them this morning from Hunsworth without any note or directions where to send them, but I think, if I mistake not, Amelia in a previous note told me to transmit them to you. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

TO MISS CHARLOTTE BRONTË

'Wellington, N. Z.

'Dear Charlotte, — I began a letter to you one bitter cold evening last week, but it turned out such a sad one that I have left it and begun again. I am sitting all alone in my own house, or rather what is to be mine when I've paid for it. I bought it of Henry when Ellen died — shop and all, and carry on by myself. I have made up my mind not to get any assistance. I have not too much work, and the annoyance of having an unsuitable companion was too great to put up with without necessity. I find now that it was Ellen that made me so busy, and without her to nurse I have plenty of time. I have begun to keep the house very tidy; it makes it less desolate. I take great interest in my trade — as much as I could do in anything that was not *all* pleasure. But the best part of my life is the excitement of arrivals from England. Reading all the news, written and printed, is like living another life quite separate from this one. The old letters are strange — very, when I begin to read them, but quite familiar notwithstanding. So are all the books and newspapers, though I never see a human being to whom it would ever occur to me to mention anything I read in them. I see your *nom de guerre* in them sometimes. I saw a criticism on the preface to the second edition of *Wuthering Heights*. I saw it among the notables who attended Thackeray's lectures. I have seen it somehow connected with Sir J. K. Shuttleworth. Did he want to marry you, or only to lionise you? *or was it somebody else*?

'Your life in London is a "new country" to me, which I cannot even picture to myself. You seem to like it — at least some things in it, and yet your late letters to Mrs. J. Taylor talk of low spirits and illness. "What's the matter with you now?" as my mother used to say, as if it were the twentieth time in a fortnight. It is really melancholy that now, in the prime of life, in the flush of your hard-earned prosperity, you can't be well. Did not Miss Martineau improve you? If she did, why not try her and her plan again? But I suppose if you had hope and energy to try, you would be well. Well, it's nearly dark and you will surely be well when you read this, so what's the use of writing? I should like well to have some details of your life, but how can I hope for it? I have often tried to give you a picture of mine, but I have not the skill. I get a heap of details, mostly paltry in themselves, and not enough to give you an idea of the whole. Oh, for one hour's talk! You are getting too far off and beginning to look strange to me. Do you look as you used to do, I wonder? What do you and Ellen Nussey talk about when you meet? There! it's dark.

'*Sunday night*. — I have let the vessel go that was to take this. As there were others going soon I did not much care. I am in the height of cogitation whether to send for some worsted stockings, etc. They will come next year at this time, and who can tell what I shall want then, or shall be doing? Yet hitherto we have sent such orders, and have guessed or known pretty well what we should want. I have just been looking over a list of four pages long in Ellen's handwriting. These things ought to come by the next vessel, or part of them at least. When tired of that I began to read some pages of "my book" intending to write some more, but went on reading for pleasure. I often do this, and find it very interesting indeed. It does not get on fast, though I have written about one volume and a half. It's full of music, poverty, disputing, politics, and original views of life. I can't for the life of me bring the lover into it, nor tell what he's to do when he comes. Of the men generally I can never tell what they'll do next. The women I understand pretty well, and rare *tracasserie* there is among them — they are perfectly *feminine* in that respect at least.

'I am just now in a state of famine. No books and no news from England for this two months. I am thinking of visiting a circulating library from sheer dulness. If I had more time I should get melancholy. No one can prize activity more than I do. I never am long without it than a gloom comes over me. The cloud seems to be always there behind me, and never quite out of sight but when I keep on at a good rate. Fortunately, the more I work the better I like it. I shall take to scrubbing the floor before it's dirty and polishing pans on the outside in my old age. It is the only thing that gives me an appetite for dinner.

'Pag.

'Give my love to Ellen Nussey.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Wellington, N. Z., 8*th Jan*. 1857.

'Dear Ellen, — A few days ago I got a letter from you, dated 2nd May 1856, along with some patterns and fashion-book. They seem to have been lost somehow, as the box ought to have come by the *Hastings*, and only now makes its appearance by the *Philip Lang*. It has come very *apropos* for a new year's gift, and the patterns were not opened twenty-four hours before a silk cape was cut out by one of them. I think I made a very impertinent request when I asked you to give yourself so much trouble. The poor woman for whom I wanted them is now a first-rate dressmaker — her drunken husband, who was her main misfortune, having taken himself off and not been heard of lately.

'I am glad to hear that Mrs. Gaskell is progressing with the *Life*.

'I wish I had kept Charlotte's letters now, though I never felt it safe to do so until latterly that I have had a home of my own. They would have been much better evidence than my imperfect recollection, and infinitely more interesting. A settled opinion is very likely to look absurd unless you give the grounds for it, and even if I could remember them it might look as if there might be other facts which I have neglected which ought to have altered it. Your news of the "neighbours" is very interesting, especially of Miss Wooler and my old schoolfellows. I wish I knew how to give you some account of my ways here and the effect of my position on me. First of all, it agrees with me. I am in better health than at any time since I left school. My life now is not overburdened with work, and what I do has interest and attraction in it. I think it is that part that I shall think most agreeable when I look back on my death-bed — a number of small pleasures scattered over my way, that, when seen from a distance, will seem to cover it thick. They don't cover it by any means, but I never had so many.

'I look after my shopwoman, make out bills, decide who shall have "trust" and who not. Then I go a-buying, not near such an anxious piece of business now that I understand my trade, and have, moreover, a good "credit." I read a good deal, sometimes on the sofa, a vice I am much given to in hot weather. Then I have some friends — not many, and no geniuses, which fact pray keep strictly to yourself, for how the doings and sayings of Wellington people in England always come out again to New Zealand! They are not very interesting any way. This is my fault in part, for I can't take interest in their concerns. A book is worth any of them, and a good book worth them all put together.

'*Our* east winds are much the pleasantest and healthiest we have. The soft moist north-west brings headache and depression — it even blights the trees. — Yours affectionately,

'Mary Taylor.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Wellington, 4*th June* 1858.

'Dear Ellen, — I have lately heard that you are leaving Brookroyd. I shall not even see Brookroyd again, and one of the people who lived there; and *one* whom I used to see there I shall never see more. Keep yourself well, dear Ellen, and gather round you as much happiness and interest as you can, and let me find you cheery and thriving when I come. When that will be I don't yet know; but one thing is sure, I have given over ordering goods from England, so that I must sometime give over for want of anything to sell. The last things ordered I expect to arrive about the beginning of the year 1859. In the course of that year, therefore, I shall be left without anything to do or motive for staying. Possibly this time twelve months I may be leaving Wellington.

'We are here in the height of a political crisis. The election for the highest office in the province (Superintendent) comes off in about a fortnight. There is altogether a small storm going on in our teacup, quite brisk enough to stir everything in it. My principal interest therein is the sale of election ribbons, though I am afraid, owing to the bad weather, there will be little display. Besides the elections, there is nothing interesting. We all go on pretty well. I have got a pony about four feet high, that carries me about ten miles from Wellington, which is much more than walking distance, to which I have been confined for the last ten years. I have given over most of the work to Miss Smith, who will finally take the business, and if we had fine weather I think I should enjoy myself. My main want here is for books enough to fill up my idle time. It seems to me that when I get home I will spend half my income on books, and sell them when I have read them to make it go further. I know this is absurd, but people with an unsatisfied appetite think they can eat enormously.

‘Remember me kindly to Miss Wooler, and tell me all about her in your next. — Yours affectionately,

‘Mary Taylor.’

Miss Taylor wrote one or two useful letters to Mrs. Gaskell, while the latter was preparing her Memoir of Charlotte Brontë, and her favourable estimate of the book we have already seen. About 1859 or 1860 she returned to England and lived out the remainder of her days in complete seclusion in a Yorkshire home that she built for herself. The novel to which she refers in a letter to her friend never seems to have got itself written, or at least published, for it was not until 1890 that Miss Mary Taylor produced a work of fiction — *Miss Miles*. This novel strives to inculcate the advantages as well as the duty of women learning to make themselves independent of men. It is well, though not brilliantly written, and might, had the author possessed any of the latter-day gifts of self-advertisement, have attracted the public, if only by the mere fact that its author was a friend of Currer Bell’s. But Miss Taylor, it is clear, hated advertisement, and severely refused to be lionised by Brontë worshippers. Twenty years earlier than *Miss Miles*, I may add, she had preached the same gospel in less attractive guise. A series of papers in the *Victorian Magazine* were reprinted under the title of *The First Duty of Women*. ‘To inculcate the duty of earning money,’ she declares, ‘is the principal point in these articles.’ ‘It is to the feminine half of the world that the commonplace duty of providing for themselves is recommended,’ and she enforces her doctrine with considerable point, and by means of arguments much more accepted in our day than in hers. Miss Taylor died in March 1893, at High Royd, in Yorkshire, at the age of seventy-six. She will always occupy an honourable place in the Brontë story.

CHAPTER X: MARGARET WOOLER

The kindly, placid woman who will ever be remembered as Charlotte Brontë's schoolmistress, had, it may be safely said, no history. She was a good-hearted woman, who did her work and went to her rest with no possible claim to a place in biography, save only that she assisted in the education of two great women. For that reason her brief story is worth setting forth here.

'I am afraid we cannot give you very much information about our aunt, Miss Wooler,' writes one of her kindred. 'She was the eldest of a large family, born June 10th, 1792. She was extremely intelligent and highly educated, and throughout her long life, which lasted till within a week of completing her ninety-third year, she took the greatest interest in religious, political, and every charitable work, being a life governor to many institutions. Part of her early life was spent in the Isle of Wight with relations, where she was very intimate with the Sewell family, one of whom was the author of *Amy Herbert*. By her own family, she was ever looked up to with the greatest respect, being always called "Sister" by her brothers and sisters all her life. After she retired from her school at Roe Head, and afterwards Dewsbury Moor, she used sometimes to make her home for months together with my father and mother at Heckmondwike Vicarage; then she would go away for a few months to the sea-side, either alone or with one of her sisters. The last ten or twelve years of her life were spent at Gomersall, along with two of her sisters and a niece. The three sisters all died within a year, the youngest going first and the eldest last. They are buried in Birstall Churchyard, close to my parents and sister.

'Miss Brontë was her pupil when at Roe Head; the late Miss Taylor and Miss E. Nussey were also her pupils at the same time. Afterwards Miss Brontë stayed on as governess. My father prepared Miss Brontë for confirmation when he was curate-in-charge at Mirfield Parish Church. When Miss Brontë was married, Miss Wooler was one of the guests. Mr. Brontë, not feeling well enough to go to Church that morning, my aunt gave her away, as she had no other relative there to do it.

'Miss Wooler kept up a warm friendship with her former pupil, up to the time of her death.

'My aunt was a most loyal subject, and devotedly attached to the Church. She made a point of reading the Bible steadily through every year, and a chapter out of her Italian Testament each day, for she used to say "she never liked to lose anything she had learnt." It was always a pleasure, too, if she met with any one who could converse with her in French.

'I fear these few items will not be of much use, but it is difficult to record anything of one who led such a quiet and retiring, but useful life.'

‘My recollections of Miss Wooler,’ writes Miss Nussey, ‘are, that she was short and stout, but graceful in her movements, very fluent in conversation and with a very sweet voice. She had Charlotte and myself to stay with her sometimes after we left school. We had delightful sitting-up times with her when the pupils had gone to bed. She would treat us so confidentially, relating her six years’ residence in the Isle of Wight with an uncle and aunt — Dr. More and his wife. Dr. More was on the military staff, and the society of the island had claims upon him. Mrs. More was a fine woman and very benevolent. Personally, Miss Wooler was like a lady abbess. She wore white, well-fitting dresses embroidered. Her long hair plaited, formed a coronet, and long large ringlets fell from her head to shoulders. She was not pretty or handsome, but her quiet dignity made her presence imposing. She was nobly scrupulous and conscientious — a woman of the greatest self-denial. Her income was small. She lived on half of it, and gave the remainder to charitable objects.’

It is clear that Charlotte was very fond of her schoolmistress, although they had one serious difference during the brief period of her stay at Dewsbury Moor with Anne. Anne was home-sick and ill, and Miss Wooler, with her own robust constitution, found it difficult to understand Anne’s illness. Charlotte, in arms for her sister, spoke out with vehemence, and both the sisters went home soon afterwards. Here are a bundle of letters addressed to Miss Wooler.

TO MISS WOOLER

‘Haworth, *August* 28*th*, 1848.

‘My dear Miss Wooler, — Since you wish to hear from me while you are from home, I will write without further delay. It often happens that when we linger at first in answering a friend’s letter, obstacles occur to retard us to an inexcusably late period.

‘In my last I forgot to answer a question you asked me, and was sorry afterwards for the omission; I will begin, therefore, by replying to it, though I fear what I can give will now come a little late. You said Mrs. Chapham had some thoughts of sending her daughter to school, and wished to know whether the Clergy Daughters’ School at Casterton was an eligible place.

‘My personal knowledge of that institution is very much out of date, being derived from the experience of twenty years ago; the establishment was at that time in its infancy, and a sad rickety infancy it was. Typhus fever decimated the school periodically, and consumption and scrofula in every variety of form, which bad air and water, and bad, insufficient diet can generate, preyed on the ill-fated pupils. It would not then have been a fit place for any of Mrs. Chapham’s children. But, I understand, it is very much altered for the better since those days. The school is removed from Cowan Bridge (a situation as unhealthy as it was picturesque — low, damp, beautiful with wood and water) to Casterton; the accommodation, the diet, the discipline, the system of tuition, all are, I believe, entirely altered and greatly improved. I was told that such pupils as behaved well and remained at school till their educations were finished were provided with situations as governesses if they wish to adopt that vocation, and that much care was exercised in the selection; it was added they were also furnished with an excellent wardrobe on quitting Casterton.

'If I have the opportunity of reading *The Life of Dr. Arnold*, I shall not fail to profit thereby; your recommendation makes me desirous to see it. Do you remember once speaking with approbation of a book called *Mrs. Leicester's School*, which you said you had met with, and you wondered by whom it was written? I was reading the other day a lately published collection of the *Letters of Charles Lamb*, edited by Serjeant Talfourd, where I found it mentioned that *Mrs. Leicester's School* was the first production of Lamb and his sister. These letters are themselves singularly interesting; they have hitherto been suppressed in all previous collections of Lamb's works and relics, on account of the frequent allusions they contain to the unhappy malady of Miss Lamb, and a frightful incident which darkened her earlier years. She was, it appears, a woman of the sweetest disposition, and, in her normal state, of the highest and clearest intellect, but afflicted with periodical insanity which came on once a year, or oftener. To her parents she was a most tender and dutiful daughter, nursing them in their old age, when one was physically and the other mentally infirm, with unremitting care, and at the same time toiling to add something by needlework to the slender resources of the family. A succession of laborious days and sleepless nights brought on a frenzy fit, in which she had the miserable misfortune to kill her own mother. She was afterwards placed in a madhouse, where she would have been detained for life, had not her brother Charles promised to devote himself to her and take her under his care — and for her sake renounce a project of marriage he then entertained. An instance of abnegation of self scarcely, I think, to be paralleled in the annals of the "coarser sex." They passed their subsequent lives together — models of fraternal affection, and would have been very happy but for the dread visitation to which Mary Lamb continued liable all her life. I thought it both a sad and edifying history. Your account of your little niece's naïve delight in beholding the morning sea for the first time amused and pleased me; it proves she has some sensations — a refreshing circumstance in a day and generation when the natural phenomenon of children wholly destitute of all pretension to the same is by no means an unusual occurrence.

'I have written a long letter as you requested me, but I fear you will not find it very amusing. With love to your little companion, — Believe me, my dear Miss Wooler, yours affectionately and respectfully,

'C. Brontë.

'Papa, I am most thankful to say, continues in very good health, considering his age. My sisters likewise are pretty well.'

TO MISS WOOLER

‘Haworth, *March* 31*st*, 1848.

‘My dear Miss Wooler, — I had been wishing to hear from you for some time before I received your last. There has been so much sickness during the last winter, and the influenza especially has been so severe and so generally prevalent, that the sight of suffering around us has frequently suggested fears for absent friends. Ellen Nussey told me, indeed, that neither you nor Miss C. Wooler had escaped the influenza, but, since your letter contains no allusion to your own health or hers, I trust you are completely recovered. I am most thankful to say that papa has hitherto been exempted from any attack. My sister and myself have each had a visit from it, but Anne is the only one with whom it stayed long or did much mischief; in her case it was attended with distressing cough and fever; but she is now better, though it has left her chest weak.

‘I remember well wishing my lot had been cast in the troubled times of the late war, and seeing in its exciting incidents a kind of stimulating charm which it made my pulse beat fast only to think of — I remember even, I think, being a little impatient that you would not fully sympathise with my feelings on this subject, that you heard my aspirations and speculations very tranquilly, and by no means seemed to think the flaming sword could be any pleasant addition to the joys of paradise. I have now outlived youth; and, though I dare not say that I have outlived all its illusions, that the romance is quite gone from life, the veil fallen from truth, and that I see both in naked reality, yet, certainly, many things are not to me what they were ten years ago; and amongst the rest, “the pomp and circumstance of war” have quite lost in my eyes their factitious glitter. I have still no doubt that the shock of moral earthquakes wakens a vivid sense of life both in nations and individuals; that the fear of dangers on a broad national scale diverts men’s minds momentarily from brooding over small private perils, and, for the time, gives them something like largeness of views; but, as little doubt have I that convulsive revolutions put back the world in all that is good, check civilisation, bring the dregs of society to its surface — in short, it appears to me that insurrections and battles are the acute diseases of nations, and that their tendency is to exhaust by their violence the vital energies of the countries where they occur. That England may be spared the spasms, cramps, and frenzy-fits now contorting the Continent and threatening Ireland, I earnestly pray!

‘With the French and Irish I have no sympathy. With the Germans and Italians I think the case is different — as different as the love of freedom is from the lust of license.’

TO MISS WOOLER

‘Haworth, *September* 27*th*, 1850.

‘My dear Miss Wooler, — When I tell you that I have already been to the Lakes this season, and that it is scarcely more than a month since I returned, you will understand that it is no longer within my power to accept your kind invitation.

‘I wish I could have gone to you. I wish your invitation had come first; to speak the truth, it would have suited me better than the one by which I profited. It would have been pleasant, soothing, in many ways beneficial, to have spent two weeks with you in your cottage-lodgings. But these reflections are vain. I have already had my excursion, and there is an end of it. Sir J. K. Shuttleworth is residing near Windermere, at a house called “The Briary,” and it was there I was staying for a little while in August. He very kindly showed me the scenery — *as it can be seen from a carriage* — and I discerned that the “Lake Country” is a glorious region, of which I had only seen the similitude in dream — waking or sleeping. But, my dear Miss Wooler, I only half enjoyed it, because I was only half at my ease. Decidedly I find it does not agree with me to prosecute the search of the picturesque in a carriage; a waggon, a spring-cart, even a post-chaise might do, but the carriage upsets everything. I longed to slip out unseen, and to run away by myself in amongst the hills and dales. Erratic and vagrant instincts tormented me, and these I was obliged to control, or rather, suppress, for fear of growing in any degree enthusiastic, and thus drawing attention to the “lioness,” the authoress, the artist. Sir J. K. Shuttleworth is a man of ability and intellect, but not a man in whose presence one willingly unbends.

‘You say you suspect I have found a large circle of acquaintance by this time. No, I cannot say that I have. I doubt whether I possess either the wish or the power to do so. A few friends I should like to know well; if such knowledge brought proportionate regard I could not help concentrating my feelings. Dissipation, I think, appears synonymous with dilution. However, I have as yet scarcely been tried. During the month I spent in London in the spring, I kept very quiet, having the fear of “lionising” before my eyes. I only went out once to dinner, and was once present at an evening party; and the only visits I have paid have been to Sir J. K. Shuttleworth and my publishers. From this system I should not like to depart. As far as I can see, indiscriminate visiting tends only to a waste of time and a vulgarising of character. Besides, it would be wrong to leave papa often; he is now in his 75th year, the infirmities of age begin to creep upon him. During the summer he has been much harassed by chronic bronchitis, but, I am thankful to say, he is now somewhat better. I think my own health has derived benefit from change and exercise.

‘You ask after Ellen Nussey. When I saw Ellen, about two months ago, she looked remarkably well. I sometimes hear small fragments of gossip which amuse me. Somebody professes to have authority for saying that “When Miss Brontë was in London she neglected to attend divine service on the Sabbath, and in the week spent her time in going about to balls, theatres, and operas.” On the other hand, the London quidnuncs make my seclusion a matter of wonder, and devise twenty romantic fictions to account for it. Formerly I used to listen to report with interest and a certain credulity; I am now grown deaf and sceptical. Experience has taught me how absolutely devoid of foundations her stories may be.

'With the sincere hope that your own health is better, and kind remembrances to all old friends whenever you see them or write to them (and whether or not their feeling to me has ceased to be friendly, which I fear is the case in some instances), — I am, my dear Miss Wooler, always yours, affectionately and respectfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *July* 14*th*, 1851.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — My first feeling on receiving your note was one of disappointment; but a little consideration sufficed to show me that "all was for the best." In truth, it was a great piece of extravagance on my part to ask you and Ellen together; it is much better to divide such good things. To have your visit in *prospect* will console me when hers is in *retrospect*. Not that I mean to yield to the weakness of clinging dependently to the society of friends, however dear, but still as an occasional treat I must value and even seek such society as a necessary of life. Let me know, then, whenever it suits your convenience to come to Haworth, and, unless some change I cannot now foresee occurs, a ready and warm welcome will await you. Should there be any cause rendering it desirable to defer the visit, I will tell you frankly.

'The pleasures of society I cannot offer you, nor those of fine scenery, but I place very much at your command the moors, some books, a series of "curling-hair times," and an old pupil into the bargain. Ellen may have told you that I have spent a month in London this summer. When you come you shall ask what questions you like on that point, and I will answer to the best of my stammering ability. Do not press me much on the subject of the "Crystal Palace." I went there five times, and certainly saw some interesting things, and the *coup d'oeil* is striking and bewildering enough, but I never was able to get up any raptures on the subject, and each renewed visit was made under coercion rather than my own free-will. It is an excessively bustling place; and, after all, it's wonders appeal too exclusively to the eye and rarely touch the heart or head. I make an exception to the last assertion in favour of those who possess a large range of scientific knowledge. Once I went with Sir David Brewster, and perceived that he looked on objects with other eyes than mine.

'Ellen I find is writing, and will therefore deliver her own messages of regard. If papa were in the room he would, I know, desire his respects; and you must take both respects and a good bundle of something more cordial from yours very faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *September* 22*nd*, 1851.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — Our visitor (a relative from Cornwall) having left us, the coast is now clear, so that whenever you feel inclined to come, papa and I will be truly glad to see you. I *do* wish the splendid weather we have had and are having may accompany you here. I fear I have somewhat grudged the fine days, fearing a change before you come. — Believe me, with papa's regards, yours respectfully and affectionately,

'C. Brontë.

'Come soon; if you can, on Wednesday.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*October* 3*rd*, 1851.

'Dear Nell, — Do not think I have forgotten you because I have not written since your last. Every day I have had you more or less in my thoughts, and wondered how your mother was getting on; let me have a line of information as soon as possible. I have been busy, first with a somewhat unexpected visitor, a cousin from Cornwall, who has been spending a few days with us, and now with Miss Wooler, who came on Monday. The former personage we can discuss any time when we meet. Miss Wooler is and has been very pleasant. She is like good wine: I think time improves her; and really whatever she may be in person, in mind she is younger than when at Roe Head. Papa and she get on extremely well. I have just heard papa walk into the dining-room and pay her a round compliment on her good-sense. I think so far she has been pretty comfortable and likes Haworth, but as she only brought a small hand-basket of luggage with her she cannot stay long.

'How are *you*? Write directly. With my love to your mother, etc., good-bye, dear Nell. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.

TO MISS WOOLER

'*February* 6*th*, 1852.

'Ellen Nussey, it seems, told you I spent a fortnight in London last December; they wished me very much to stay a month, alleging that I should in that time be able to secure a complete circle of acquaintance, but I found a fortnight of such excitement quite enough. The whole day was usually spent in sight-seeing, and often the evening was spent in society; it was more than I could bear for a length of time. On one occasion I met a party of my critics — seven of them; some of them had been very bitter foes in print, but they were prodigiously civil face to face. These gentlemen seemed infinitely grander, more pompous, dashing, showy, than the few authors I saw. Mr. Thackeray, for instance, is a man of quiet, simple demeanour; he is however looked upon with some awe and even distrust. His conversation is very peculiar, too perverse to be pleasant. It was proposed to me to see Charles Dickens, Lady Morgan, Mesdames Trollope, Gore, and some others, but I was aware these introductions would bring a degree of notoriety I was not disposed to encounter; I declined, therefore, with thanks.

'Nothing charmed me more during my stay in town than the pictures I saw. One or two private collections of Turner's best water-colour drawings were indeed a treat; his later oil-paintings are strange things — things that baffle description.

'I twice saw Macready act — once in *Macbeth* and once in *Othello*. I astonished a dinner-party by honestly saying I did not like him. It is the fashion to rave about his splendid acting. Anything more false and artificial, less genuinely impressive than his whole style I could scarcely have imagined. The fact is, the stage-system altogether is hollow nonsense. They act farces well enough: the actors comprehend their parts and do them justice. They comprehend nothing about tragedy or Shakespeare, and it is a failure. I said so; and by so saying produced a blank silence — a mute consternation. I was, indeed, obliged to dissent on many occasions, and to offend by dissenting. It seems now very much the custom to admire a certain wordy, intricate, obscure style of poetry, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes. Some pieces were referred to about which Currer Bell was expected to be very rapturous, and failing in this, he disappointed.

'London people strike a provincial as being very much taken up with little matters about which no one out of particular town-circles cares much; they talk, too, of persons — literary men and women — whose names are scarcely heard in the country, and in whom you cannot get up an interest. I think I should scarcely like to live in London, and were I obliged to live there, I should certainly go little into company, especially I should eschew the literary coteries.

'You told me, my dear Miss Wooler, to write a long letter. I have obeyed you. — Believe me now, yours affectionately and respectfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *March* 12*th*, 1852.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — Your kind note holds out a strong temptation, but one that *must be resisted*. From home I must not go unless health or some cause equally imperative render a change necessary. For nearly four months now (*i.e.* since I became ill) I have not put pen to paper. My work has been lying untouched, and my faculties have been rusting for want of exercise. Further relaxation is out of the question, and I *will not permit myself to think of it*. My publisher groans over my long delays; I am sometimes provoked to check the expression of his impatience with short and crusty answers.

'Yet the pleasure I now deny myself I would fain regard as only deferred. I heard something about your proposing to visit Scarbro' in the course of the summer, and could I by the close of July or August bring my task to a certain point, how glad should I be to join you there for awhile!

'Ellen will probably go to the south about May to make a stay of two or three months; she has formed a plan for my accompanying her and taking lodgings on the Sussex Coast; but the scheme seems to me impracticable for many reasons, and, moreover, my medical man doubts the advisability of my going southward in summer, he says it might prove very enervating, whereas Scarbro' or Burlington would brace and strengthen. However, I dare not lay plans at this distance of time. For me so much must depend, first on papa's health (which throughout the winter has been, I am thankful to say, really excellent), and second, on the progress of work, a matter not wholly contingent on wish or will, but lying in a great measure beyond the reach of effort and out of the pale of calculation.

'I will not write more at present, as I wish to save this post. All in the house would join in kind remembrances to you if they knew I was writing. Tabby and Martha both frequently inquire after Miss Wooler, and desire their respects when an opportunity offers of presenting the same. — Believe me, yours always affectionately and respectfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *September* 2*nd*, 1852.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — I have delayed answering your very kind letter till I could speak decidedly respecting papa's health. For some weeks after the attack there were frequent variations, and once a threatening of a relapse, but I trust his convalescence may now be regarded as confirmed. The acute inflammation of the eye, which distressed papa so much as threatening loss of sight, but which I suppose was merely symptomatic of the rush of blood to the brain, is now quite subsided; the partial paralysis has also disappeared; the appetite is better; weakness with occasional slight giddiness seem now the only lingering traces of disease. I am assured that with papa's excellent constitution, there is every prospect of his still being spared to me for many years.

'For two things I have reason to be most thankful, viz., that the mental faculties have remained quite untouched, and also that my own health and strength have been found sufficient for the occasion. Solitary as I certainly was at Filey, I yet derived great benefit from the change.

'It would be pleasant at the sea-side this fine warm weather, and I should dearly like to be there with you; to such a treat, however, I do not now look forward at all. You will fully understand the impossibility of my enjoying peace of mind during absence from papa under present circumstances; his strength must be very much more fully restored before I can think of leaving home.

'My dear Miss Wooler, in case you should go to Scarbro' this season, may I request you to pay one visit to the churchyard and see if the inscription on the stone has been altered as I directed. We have heard nothing since on the subject, and I fear the alteration may have been neglected.

'Ellen has made a long stay in the south, but I believe she will soon return now, and I am looking forward to the pleasure of having her company in the autumn.

'With kind regards to all old friends, and sincere love to yourself, — I am, my dear Miss Wooler, yours affectionately and respectfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *September* 21*st*, 1852.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — I was truly sorry to hear that when Ellen called at the Parsonage you were suffering from influenza. I know that an attack of this debilitating complaint is no trifle in your case, as its effects linger with you long. It has been very prevalent in this neighbourhood. I did not escape, but the sickness and fever only lasted a few days and the cough was not severe. Papa, I am thankful to say, continues pretty well; Ellen thinks him little, if at all altered.

'And now for your kind present. The book will be precious to me — chiefly, perhaps, for the sake of the giver, but also for its own sake, for it is a good book; and I wish I may be enabled to read it with some approach to the spirit you would desire. Its perusal came recommended in such a manner as to obviate danger of neglect; its place shall always be on my dressing-table.

'As to the other part of the present, it arrived under these circumstances:

'For a month past an urgent necessity to buy and make some things for winter-wear had been importuning my conscience; the *buying* might be soon effected, but the *making* was a more serious consideration. At this juncture Ellen arrives with a good-sized parcel, which, when opened, discloses the things I required, perfectly made and of capital useful fabric; adorned too — which seemly decoration it is but too probable I might myself have foregone as an augmentation of trouble not to be lightly incurred. I felt strong doubts as to my right to profit by this sort of fairy gift, so unlooked for and so curiously opportune; on reading the note accompanying the garments, I am told that to accept will be to confer a favour(!) The doctrine is too palatable to be rejected; I even waive all nice scrutiny of its soundness — in short, I submit with as good a grace as may be.

'Ellen has only been my companion one little week. I would not have her any longer, for I am disgusted with myself and my delays, and consider it was a weak yielding to temptation in me to send for her at all; but, in truth, my spirits were getting low — prostrate sometimes, and she has done me inexpressible good. I wonder when I shall see you at Haworth again. Both my father and the servants have again and again insinuated a distinct wish that you should be requested to come in the course of the summer and autumn, but I always turned a deaf ear: "Not yet," was my thought, "I want first to be free — work first, then pleasure."

'I venture to send by Ellen a book which may amuse an hour: a Scotch tale by a minister's wife. It seems to me well told, and may serve to remind you of characters and manners you have seen in Scotland. When you have time to write a line, I shall feel anxious to hear how you are. With kind regards to all old friends, and truest affection to yourself; in which Ellen joins me, — I am, my dear Miss Wooler, yours gratefully and respectfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

‘Haworth, *October* 8*th*, 1852.

‘My dear Miss Wooler, — I wished much to write to you immediately on my return home, but I found several little matters demanding attention, and have been kept busy till now.

‘I reached home about five o’clock in the afternoon, and the anxiety which is inseparable from a return after absence was pleasantly relieved by finding papa well and cheerful. He inquired after you with interest. I gave him your kind regards, and he specially charged me whenever I wrote to present his in return, and to say also that he hoped to see you at Haworth at the earliest date which shall be convenient to you.

‘The week I spent at Hornsea was a happy and pleasant week. Thank you, my dear Miss Wooler, for the true kindness which gave it its chief charm. I shall think of you often, especially when I walk out, and during the long evenings. I believe the weather has at length taken a turn: to-day is beautifully fine. I wish I were at Hornsea and just now preparing to go out with you to walk on the sands or along the lake.

I would not have you to fatigue yourself with writing to me when you are not inclined, but yet I should be glad to hear from you some day ere long. When you *do* write, tell me how you liked *The Experience of Life*, and whether you have read *Esmond*, and what you think of it. — Believe me always yours, with true affection and respect,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS WOOLER

‘Brookroyd, *December* 7*th*, 1852.

‘My dear Miss Wooler, — Since you were so kind as to take some interest in my small tribulation of Saturday, I write a line to tell you that on Sunday morning a letter came which put me out of pain and obviated the necessity of an impromptu journey to London.

‘The *money transaction*, of course, remains the same, and perhaps is not quite equitable; but when an author finds that his work is cordially approved, he can pardon the rest — indeed, my chief regret now lies in the conviction that papa will be disappointed: he expected me to earn £500, nor did I myself anticipate that a lower sum would be offered; however, £250 is not to be despised.

‘Your sudden departure from Brookroyd left a legacy of consternation to the bereaved breakfast-table. Ellen was not easily to be soothed, though I diligently represented to her that you had quitted Haworth with the same inexorable haste. I am commissioned to tell you, first, that she has decided not to go to Yarmouth till after Christmas, her mother’s health having within the last few days betrayed some symptoms not unlike those which preceded her former illness; and though it is to be hoped that those may pass without any untoward result, yet they naturally increase Ellen’s reluctance to leave home for the present.

‘Secondly, I am to say, that when the present you left came to be examined, the costliness and beauty of it inspired some concern. Ellen thinks you are too kind, as I also think every morning, for I am now benefiting by your kind gift.

'With sincere regards to all at the Parsonage, — I am, my dear Miss Wooler, yours respectfully and affectionately,

'C. Brontë.

'*P.S.* — I shall direct that *Esmond* (Mr. Thackeray's work) shall be sent on to you as soon as the Hunsworth party have read it. It has already reached a second edition.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'Haworth, *January* 20*th*, 1853.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — Your last kind note would not have remained so long unanswered if I had been in better health. While Ellen was with me, I seemed to revive wonderfully, but began to grow worse again the day she left; and this falling off proved symptomatic of a relapse. My doctor called the next day; he said the headache from which I was suffering arose from inertness in the liver.

'Thank God, I now feel better; and very grateful am I for the improvement — grateful no less for my dear father's sake than for my own.

'Most fully can I sympathise with you in the anxiety you express about your friend. The thought of his leaving England and going out alone to a strange country, with all his natural sensitiveness and retiring diffidence, is indeed painful; still, my dear Miss Wooler, should he actually go to America, I can but then suggest to you the same source of comfort and support you have suggested to me, and of which indeed I know you never lose sight — namely, reliance on Providence. "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," and He will doubtless care for a good, though afflicted man, amidst whatever difficulties he may be thrown. When you write again, I should be glad to know whether your anxiety on this subject is relieved. I was truly glad to learn through Ellen that Ilkley still continued to agree with your health. Earnestly trusting that the New Year may prove to you a happy and tranquil time, — I am, my dear Miss Wooler, sincerely and affectionately yours,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS WOOLER

'*January* 27*th*, 1853.

'My dear Miss Wooler, — I received your letter here in London where I have been staying about three weeks, and shall probably remain a few days longer. *Villette* is to be published to-morrow. Its appearance has been purposely delayed hitherto, to avoid discourteous clashing with Mrs. Gaskell's new work. Your name was one of the first on the list of presentees, and directed to the Parsonage, where I shall also send this letter, as you mention that you are to leave Halifax at the close of this week. I will bear in mind what you say about Mrs. Morgan; and should I ever have an opportunity of serving her, will not omit to do so. I only wish my chance of being useful were greater. Schools seem to be considered almost obsolete in London. Ladies' colleges, with professors for every branch of instruction, are superseding the old-fashioned seminary. How the system will work I can't tell. I think the college classes might be very useful for finishing the education of ladies intended to go out as governesses, but what progress little girls will make in them seems to me another question.

'My dear Miss Wooler, I read attentively all you say about Miss Martineau; the sincerity and constancy of your solicitude touches me very much. I should grieve to neglect or oppose your advice, and yet I do not feel that it would be right to give Miss Martineau up entirely. There is in her nature much that is very noble. Hundreds have forsaken her, more, I fear, in the apprehension that their fair names may suffer if seen in connection with hers, than from any pure convictions, such as you suggest, of harm consequent on her fatal tenets. With these fair-weather friends I cannot bear to rank. And for her sin, is it not one of those which God and not man must judge?

'To speak the truth, my dear Miss Wooler, I believe if you were in my place, and knew Miss Martineau as I do — if you had shared with me the proofs of her rough but genuine kindliness, and had seen how she secretly suffers from abandonment, you would be the last to give her up; you would separate the sinner from the sin, and feel as if the right lay rather in quietly adhering to her in her strait, while that adherence is unfashionable and unpopular, than in turning on her your back when the world sets the example. I believe she is one of those whom opposition and desertion make obstinate in error, while patience and tolerance touch her deeply and keenly, and incline her to ask of her own heart whether the course she has been pursuing may not possibly be a faulty course. However, I have time to think of this subject, and I shall think of it seriously.

'As to what I have seen in London during my present visit, I hope one day to tell you all about it by our fireside at home. When you write again will you name a time when it would suit you to come and see me; everybody in the house would be glad of your presence; your last visit is pleasantly remembered by all.

'With kindest regards, — I am always, affectionately and respectfully yours,

'C. Brontë.'

A note to Miss Nussey written after Charlotte's death indicates a fairly shrewd view on the part of Miss Wooler as regards the popularity of her friend.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'My dear Miss Ellen, — The third edition of Charlotte's Life has at length ventured out. Our curate tells me he is assured it is quite inferior to the former ones. So you see Mrs. Gaskell displayed worldly wisdom in going out of her way to furnish gossip for the discerning public. Did I mention to you that Mrs. Gibson knows two or three young ladies in Hull who finished their education at Mme. Héger's pension? Mrs. G. said they read *Villette* with keen interest — of course they would. I had a nice walk with a Suffolk lady, who was evidently delighted to meet with one who had personally known our dear C. B., and would not soon have wearied of a conversation in which she was the topic. — Love to yourself and sisters, from — Your affectionate,

'M. Wooler.'

CHAPTER XI: THE CURATES AT HAWORTH

Something has already been said concerning the growth of the population of Haworth during the period of Mr. Brontë's Incumbency. It was 4668 in 1821, and 6301 in 1841. This makes it natural that Mr. Brontë should have applied to his Bishop for assistance in his pastoral duty, and such aid was permanently granted him in 1838, when Mr. William Weightman became his first curate. Mr. Weightman would appear to have been a favourite. He many times put in an appearance at the parsonage, although I do not recognise him in any one of Charlotte's novels, and he certainly has no place among the three famous curates of *Shirley*. He would seem to have been the only man, other than her father and brother, whom Emily was known to tolerate. We know that the girls considered him effeminate, and they called him 'Celia Amelia,' under which name he frequently appears in Charlotte's letters to Ellen Nussey. That he was good-natured seems to be indisputable. There is one story of his walking to Bradford to post valentines to the incumbent's daughters, when he found they had never received any. There is another story of a trip to Keighley to hear him lecture. He was a bit of a poet, it seems, and Ellen Nussey was the heroine of some of his verses when she visited at Haworth. Here is a letter which throws some light upon Charlotte's estimate of the young man — he was twenty-three years of age at this time.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*March* 17*th*, 1840.

'My dear Mrs. Eleanor, — I wish to scold you with a forty-horse power for having told Mary Taylor that I had requested you not to tell her everything, which piece of information has thrown her into tremendous ill-humour, besides setting the teeth of her curiosity on edge. Tell her forthwith every individual occurrence, including valentines, "Fair E — -, Fair E — -," etc.; "Away fond love," etc.; "Soul divine," and all; likewise the painting of Miss Celia Amelia Weightman's portrait, and that *young lady's* frequent and agreeable visits. By-the-bye, I inquired into the opinion of that intelligent and interesting young person respecting you. It was a favourable one. "She" thought you a fine-looking girl, and a very good girl into the bargain. Have you received the newspaper which has been despatched, containing a notice of "her" lecture at Keighley? Mr. Morgan came and stayed three days. By Miss Weightman's aid, we got on pretty well. It was amazing to see with what patience and good-temper the innocent creature endured that fat Welshman's prosing, though she confessed afterwards that she was almost done up by his long stories. We feel very dull without you. I wish those three weeks were to come over again. Aunt has been at times precious cross since you went — however, she is rather better now. I had a bad cold on Sunday and stayed at home most of the day. Anne's cold is better, but I don't consider her strong yet. What did your sister Anne say about my omitting to send a drawing for the Jew basket? I hope she was too much occupied with the thoughts of going to Earnley to think of it. I am obliged to cut short my letter. Everybody in the house unites in sending their love to you. Miss Celia Amelia Weightman also desires to be remembered. Write soon again and — Believe me, yours unalterably,

'Charivari.'

He would seem to have been a much teased curate. Now it is Miss Ellen Nussey, now a Miss Agnes Walton, who is supposed to be the object of his devotion.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*April* 9*th*, 1840.

'My dear Mrs. Menelaus, — I think I am exceedingly good to write to you so soon, indeed I am quite afraid you will begin to consider me intrusive with my frequent letters. I ought by right to let an interval of a quarter of a year elapse between each communication, and I will, in time; never fear me. I shall improve in procrastination as I get older.

'My hand is trembling like that of an old man, so I don't expect you will be able to read my writing; never mind, put the letter by and I'll read it to you the next time I see you.

'I have been painting a portrait of Agnes Walton for our friend Miss Celia Amelia. You would laugh to see how his eyes sparkle with delight when he looks at it, like a pretty child pleased with a new plaything. Good-bye to you. Let me have no more of your humbug about Cupid, etc. You know as well as I do it is all groundless trash.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*August* 20*th*, 1840.

'Dear Mrs. Ellen, — I was very well pleased with your capital long letter. A better farce than the whole affair of that letter-opening (ducks and Mr. Weightman included) was never imagined. By-the-bye, speaking of Mr. W., I told you he was gone to pass his examination at Ripon six weeks ago. He is not come back yet, and what has become of him we don't know. Branwell has received one letter since he went, speaking rapturously of Agnes Walton, describing certain balls at which he had figured, and announcing that he had been twice over head and ears desperately in love. It is my devout belief that his reverence left Haworth with the fixed intention of never returning. If he does return, it will be because he has not been able to get a "living." Haworth is not the place for him. He requires novelty, a change of faces, difficulties to be overcome. He pleases so easily that he soon gets weary of pleasing at all. He ought not to have been a parson; certainly he ought not. Our *august* relations, as you choose to call them, are gone back to London. They never stayed with us, they only spent one day at our house.

Have you seen anything of the Miss Woolers lately? I wish they, or somebody else, would get me a situation. I have answered advertisements without number, but my applications have met with no success.

'Caliban.'

One wonders if a single letter by Charlotte Brontë applying for a 'situation' has been preserved! I have not seen one.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*September* 29*th*, 1840.

'I know Mrs. Ellen is burning with eagerness to hear something about William Weightman. I think I'll plague her by not telling her a word. To speak heaven's truth, I have precious little to say, inasmuch as I seldom see him, except on a Sunday, when he looks as handsome, cheery, and good-tempered as usual. I have indeed had the advantage of one long conversation since his return from Westmorland, when he poured out his whole warm fickle soul in fondness and admiration of Agnes Walton. Whether he is in love with her or not I can't say; I can only observe that it sounds very like it. He sent us a prodigious quantity of game while he was away — a brace of wild ducks, a brace of black grouse, a brace of partridges, ditto of snipes, ditto of curlews, and a large salmon. If you were to ask Mr. Weightman's opinion of my character just now, he would say that at first he thought me a cheerful chatty kind of body, but that on farther acquaintance he found me of a capricious changeful temper, never to be reckoned on. He does not know that I have regulated my manner by his — that I was cheerful and chatty so long as he was respectful, and that when he grew almost contemptuously familiar I found it necessary to adopt a degree of reserve which was not natural, and therefore was very painful to me. I find this reserve very convenient, and consequently I intend to keep it up.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*November* 12*th*, 1840.

'My dear Nell, — You will excuse this scrawled sheet of paper, inasmuch as I happen to be out of that article, this being the only available sheet I can find in my desk. I have effaced one of the delectable portraitures, but have spared the others — lead pencil sketches of horse's head, and man's head — being moved to that act of clemency by the recollection that they are not the work of my hand, but of the sacred fingers of his reverence William Weightman. You will discern that the eye is a little too elevated in the horse's head, otherwise I can assure you it is no such bad attempt. It shows taste and something of an artist's eye. The fellow had no copy for it. He sketched it, and one or two other little things, when he happened to be here one evening, but you should have seen the vanity with which he afterwards regarded his productions. One of them represented the flying figure of Fame inscribing his own name on the clouds.

'Mrs. Brook and I have interchanged letters. She expressed herself pleased with the style of my application — with its candour, etc. (I took care to tell her that if she wanted a showy, elegant, fashionable personage, I was not the man for her), but she wants music and singing. I can't give her music and singing, so of course the negotiation is null and void. Being once up, however, I don't mean to sit down till I have got what I want; but there is no sense in talking about unfinished projects, so we'll drop the subject. Consider this last sentence a hint from me to be applied practically. It seems Miss Wooler's school is in a consumptive state of health. I have been endeavouring to obtain a reinforcement of pupils for her, but I cannot succeed, because Mrs. Heap is opening a new school in Bradford.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 10*th*, 1841.

'My dear Ellen, — I promised to write to you, and therefore I must keep my promise, though I have neither much to say nor much time to say it in.

'Mary Taylor's visit has been a very pleasant one to us, and I believe to herself also. She and Mr. Weightman have had several games at chess, which generally terminated in a species of mock hostility. Mr. Weightman is better in health; but don't set your heart on him, I'm afraid he is very fickle — not to you in particular, but to half a dozen other ladies. He has just cut his *inamorata* at Swansea, and sent her back all her letters. His present object of devotion is Caroline Dury, to whom he has just despatched a most passionate copy of verses. Poor lad, his sanguine temperament bothers him grievously.

'That Swansea affair seems to me somewhat heartless as far as I can understand it, though I have not heard a very clear explanation. He sighs as much as ever. I have not mentioned your name to him yet, nor do I mean to do so until I have a fair opportunity of gathering his real mind. Perhaps I may never mention it at all, but on the contrary carefully avoid all allusion to you. It will just depend upon the further opinion I may form of his character. I am not pleased to find that he was carrying on a regular correspondence with this lady at Swansea all the time he was paying such pointed attention to you; and now the abrupt way in which he has cut her off, and the evident wandering instability of his mind is no favourable symptom at all. I shall not have many opportunities of observing him for a month to come. As for the next fortnight, he will be sedulously engaged in preparing for his ordination, and the fortnight after he will spend at Appleby and Crackenthorp with Mr. and Miss Walton. Don't think about him; I am not afraid you will break your heart, but don't think about him.

'Give my love to Mercy and your mother, and, — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'Ça'ira.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Rawdon, *March* 3*rd*, 1841.

'My dear Ellen, — I dare say you have received a valentine this year from our bonny-faced friend the curate of Haworth. I got a precious specimen a few days before I left home, but I knew better how to treat it than I did those we received a year ago. I am up to the dodges and artifices of his lordship's character. He knows I know him, and you cannot conceive how quiet and respectful he has long been. Mind I am not writing against him — I never *will* do that. I like him very much. I honour and admire his generous, open disposition, and sweet temper — but for all the tricks, wiles, and insincerities of love, the gentleman has not his match for twenty miles round. He would fain persuade every woman under thirty whom he sees that he is desperately in love with her. I have a great deal more to say, but I have not a moment's time to write it in. My dear Ellen, *do* write to me soon, don't forget. — Good-bye.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*March* 21*st*, 1841.

'My dearest Ellen, — I do not know how to wear your pretty little handcuffs. When you come you shall explain the mystery. I send you the precious valentine. Make much of it. Remember the writer's blue eyes, auburn hair, and rosy cheeks. You may consider the concern addressed to yourself, for I have no doubt he intended it to suit anybody.

'Fare-thee-well.

'C. B.'

Then there are these slighter inferences, that concerning Anne being particularly interesting.

'Write long letters to me, and tell me everything you can think of, and about everybody. "His young reverence," as you tenderly call him, is looking delicate and pale; poor thing, don't you pity him? I do from my heart! When he is well, and fat, and jovial, I never think of him, but when anything ails him I am always sorry. He sits opposite to Anne at church, sighing softly, and looking out of the corners of his eyes to win her attention, and Anne is so quiet, her look so downcast, they are a picture.'

'*July* 19*th*, 1841.

'Our revered friend, W. W., is quite as bonny, pleasant, lighthearted, good-tempered, generous, careless, fickle, and unclerical as ever. He keeps up his correspondence with Agnes Walton. During the last spring he went to Appleby, and stayed upwards of a month.'

During the governess and Brussels episodes in Charlotte's life we lose sight of Mr. Weightman, and the next record is of his death, which took place in September 1842, while Charlotte and Emily were in Brussels. Mr. Brontë preached the funeral sermon, stating by way of introduction that for the twenty years and more that he had been in Haworth he had never before read his sermon. 'This is owing to a conviction in my mind,' he says, 'that in general, for the ordinary run of hearers, extempore preaching, though accompanied with some peculiar disadvantages, is more likely to be of a colloquial nature, and better adapted, on the whole, to the majority.' His departure from the practice on this occasion, he explains, is due to the request that his sermon should be printed.

Mr. Weightman, he told his hearers, was a native of Westmoreland, educated at the University of Durham. ‘While he was there,’ continued Mr. Brontë, ‘I applied to the justly venerated Apostolical Bishop of this diocese, requesting his Lordship to send me a curate adequate to the wants and wishes of the parishioners. This application was not in vain. Our Diocesan, in the scriptural character of the Overlooker and Head of his clergy, made an admirable choice, which more than answered my expectations, and probably yours. The Church Pastoral Aid Society, in their pious liberality, lent their pecuniary aid, without which all efforts must have failed.’ ‘He had classical attainments of the first order, and, above all, his religious principles were sound and orthodox,’ concludes Mr. Brontë. Mr. Weightman was twenty-six years of age when he died. His successor was Mr. Peter Augustus Smith, whom Charlotte Brontë has made famous in *Shirley* as Mr. Malone, curate of Briarfield. Mr. Smith was Mr. A. B. Nicholls’s predecessor at Haworth. Here is Charlotte Brontë’s vigorous treatment of him in a letter to her friend.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*January* 26*th*, 1844.

‘Dear Nell, — We were all very glad to get your letter this morning. *We*, I say, as both papa and Emily were anxious to hear of the safe arrival of yourself and the little *varmint*.

‘As you conjecture, Emily and I set to shirt-making the very day after you left, and we have stuck to it pretty closely ever since. We miss your society at least as much as you miss ours, depend upon it. Would that you were within calling distance, that you could as you say burst in upon us in an afternoon, and, being despoiled of your bonnet and shawl, be fixed in the rocking-chair for the evening once or twice every week. I certainly cherished a dream during your stay that such might one day be the case, but the dream is somewhat dissipating. I allude of course to Mr. Smith, to whom you do not allude in your letter, and I think you foolish for the omission. I say the dream is dissipating, because Mr. Smith has not mentioned your name since you left, except once when papa said you were a nice girl, he said, “Yes, she is a nice girl — rather quiet. I suppose she has money,” and that is all. I think the words speak volumes; they do not prejudice one in favour of Mr. Smith. I can well believe what papa has often affirmed, and continues to affirm, *i.e.*, that Mr. Smith is a very fickle man, that if he marries he will soon get tired of his wife, and consider her as a burden, also that money will be a principal consideration with him in marrying.

‘Papa has two or three times expressed a fear that since Mr. Smith paid you so much attention he will perhaps have made an impression on your mind which will interfere with your comfort. I tell him I think not, as I believe you to be mistress of yourself in those matters. Still, he keeps saying that I am to write to you and dissuade you from thinking of him. I never saw papa make himself so uneasy about a thing of the kind before; he is usually very sarcastic on such subjects.

‘Mr. Smith be hanged! I never thought very well of him, and I am much disposed to think very ill of him at this blessed minute. I have discussed the subject fully, for where is the use of being mysterious and constrained? — it is not worth while.

‘Be sure you write to me and immediately, and tell me whether you have given up eating and drinking altogether. I am not surprised at people thinking you looked pale and thin. I shall expect another letter on Thursday — don’t disappoint me.

‘My best regards to your mother and sisters. — Yours, somewhat irritated,

‘C. B.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘Dear Nell, — I did not “swear at the postman” when I saw another letter from you. And I hope you will not “swear” at me when I tell you that I cannot think of leaving home at present, even to have the pleasure of joining you at Harrogate, but I am obliged to you for thinking of me. I have nothing new about Rev. Lothario Smith. I think I like him a little bit less every day. Mr. Weightman was worth 200 Mr. Smiths tied in a bunch. Good-bye. I fear by what you say, “Flossy jun.” behaves discreditably, and gets his mistress into scrapes.

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*March* 16*th*, 1844.

‘Dear Ellen, — I received your kind note last Saturday, and should have answered it immediately, but in the meantime I had a letter from Mary Taylor, and had to reply to her, and to write sundry letters to Brussels to send by opportunity. My sight will not allow me to write several letters per day, so I was obliged to do it gradually.

‘I send you two more circulars because you ask for them, not because I hope their distribution will produce any result. I hope that if a time should come when Emily, Anne, or I shall be able to serve you, we shall not forget that you have done your best to serve us.

‘Mr. Smith is gone hence. He is in Ireland at present, and will stay there six weeks. He has left neither a bad nor a good character behind him. Nobody regrets him, because nobody could attach themselves to one who could attach himself to nobody. I thought once he had a regard for you, but I do not think so now. He has never asked after you since you left, nor even mentioned you in my hearing, except to say once when I purposely alluded to you, that you were “not very locomotive.” The meaning of the observation I leave you to divine.

‘Yet the man is not without points that will be most useful to himself in getting through life. His good qualities, however, are all of the selfish order, but they will make him respected where better and more generous natures would be despised, or at least neglected.

'Mr. Grant fills his shoes at present decently enough — but one cares naught about these sort of individuals, so drop them.

'Mary Taylor is going to leave our hemisphere. To me it is something as if a great planet fell out of the sky. Yet, unless she marries in New Zealand, she will not stay there long.

'Write to me again soon and I promise to write you a regular long letter next time.

'C. Brontë.'

The Mr. Grant here described had come to Haworth as master of the small grammar school in which Branwell had received some portion of his education. He is the Mr. Donne, curate of Whinbury, in *Shirley*. Whinbury is Oxenhope, of which village and district Mr. Grant after a time became incumbent. The district was taken out of Haworth Chapelry, and Mr. Grant collected the funds to build a church, schoolhouse, and parsonage. He died at Oxenhope, many years ago, greatly respected by his parishioners. He seems to have endured good-naturedly much chaff from Mr. Brontë and others, who always called him Mr. Donne. It was the opinion of many of his acquaintances that the satire of *Shirley* had improved his disposition.

Mr. Smith left Haworth in 1844, to become curate of the parish church of Keighley. He became, at a later date, incumbent of a district church, but, his health failing, he returned to his native country, where he died.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*October* 15*th*, 1844.

'Dear Nell, — I send you two additional circulars, and will send you two more, if you desire it, when I write again. I have no news to give you. Mr. Smith leaves in the course of a fortnight. He will spend a few weeks in Ireland previously to settling at Keighley. He continues just the same: often anxious and bad-tempered, sometimes rather tolerable — just supportable. How did your party go off? How are you? Write soon, and at length, for your letters are a great comfort to me. We are all pretty well. Remember me kindly to each member of the household at Brookroyd. — Yours,

'C. B.'

The third curate of *Shirley*, Mr. Sweeting of Nunnely, was Mr. Richard Bradley, curate of Oakworth, an outlying district of Keighley parish. He is at this present time vicar of Haxby, Yorkshire, but far too aged and infirm to have any memories of those old Haworth days.

Mr. Brontë's one other curate was Mr. De Renzi, who occupied the position for a little more than a year, — during the period, in fact, of Mr. Brontë's quarrel with Mr. Nicholls for aspiring to become his son-in-law. After he left Haworth, Mr. De Renzi became a curate at Bradford. He has been dead for some years. The story of Mr. Nicholls's curacy belongs to another chapter. It is sufficient testimony to his worth, however, that he was able to win Charlotte Brontë in spite of the fact that his predecessors had inspired in her such hearty contempt. ‘I think he must be like all the curates I have seen,’ she writes of one; ‘they seem to me a self-seeking, vain, empty race.’

CHAPTER XII: CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S LOVERS

Charlotte Brontë was not beautiful, but she must have been singularly fascinating. That she was not beautiful there is abundant evidence. When, as a girl of fifteen, she became a pupil at Roe Head, Mary Taylor once told her to her face that she was ugly. Ugly she was not in later years. All her friends emphasise the soft silky hair, and the beautiful grey eyes which in moments of excitement seemed to glisten with remarkable brilliancy. But she had a sallow complexion, and a large nose slightly on one side. She was small in stature, and, in fact, the casual observer would have thought her a quaint, unobtrusive little body. Mr. Grundy's memory was very defective when he wrote about the Brontës; but, with the exception of the reference to red hair — and all the girls had brown hair — it would seem that he was not very wide of the mark when he wrote of 'the daughters — distant and distrait, large of nose, small of figure, red of hair, prominent of spectacles, showing great intellectual development, but with eyes constantly cast down, very silent, painfully retiring.'

Charlotte was indeed painfully shy. Miss Wheelwright, who saw much of her during her visits to London in the years of her literary success, says that she would never enter a room without sheltering herself under the wing of some taller friend. A resident of Haworth, still alive, remembers the girls passing him frequently on the way down to the shops, and their hands would involuntarily be lifted to the face on the side nearest to him, with a view to avoid observation. This was not affectation; it was absolute timidity. Miss Wheelwright always thought George Richmond's portrait — for which Charlotte sat during a stay at Dr. Wheelwright's in Phillimore Place — entirely flattering. Many of Charlotte's friends were pleased that it should be so, but there can be no doubt that the magnificent expanse of forehead was an exaggeration. Charlotte's forehead was high, but very narrow.

All this is comparatively unimportant. Charlotte certainly was under no illusion; and we who revere her to-day as one of the greatest of Englishwomen need have no illusions. It is sufficient that, if not beautiful, Charlotte possessed a singular charm of manner, and, when interested, an exhilarating flow of conversation which carried intelligent men off their feet. She had at least four offers of marriage. The three lovers she refused have long since gone to their graves, and there can be no harm now in referring to the actual facts as they present themselves in Charlotte's letters. Two of these offers of marriage were made in one year, when she was twenty-three years of age. Her first proposal came from the brother of her friend Ellen Nussey. Henry Nussey was a curate at Donnington when he asked Charlotte Brontë to be his wife. Two letters on the subject, one of which is partly printed in a mangled form in Mrs. Gaskell's Memoir, speak for themselves.

TO REV. HENRY NUSSEY

'Haworth, *March* 5*th*, 1839.

'My dear Sir, — Before answering your letter I might have spent a long time in consideration of its subject; but as from the first moment of its reception and perusal I determined on what course to pursue, it seemed to me that delay was wholly unnecessary. You are aware that I have many reasons to feel grateful to your family, that I have peculiar reasons for affection towards one at least of your sisters, and also that I highly esteem yourself — do not therefore accuse me of wrong motives when I say that my answer to your proposal must be a *decided negative*. In forming this decision, I trust I have listened to the dictates of conscience more than to those of inclination. I have no personal repugnance to the idea of a union with you, but I feel convinced that mine is not the sort of disposition calculated to form the happiness of a man like you. It has always been my habit to study the characters of those amongst whom I chance to be thrown, and I think I know yours and can imagine what description of woman would suit you for a wife. The character should not be too marked, ardent, and original, her temper should be mild, her piety undoubted, her spirits even and cheerful, and her *personal attractions* sufficient to please your eyes and gratify your just pride. As for me, you do not know me; I am not the serious, grave, cool-headed individual you suppose; you would think me romantic and eccentric; you would say I was satirical and severe. However, I scorn deceit, and I will never, for the sake of attaining the distinction of matrimony and escaping the stigma of an old maid, take a worthy man whom I am conscious I cannot render happy. Before I conclude, let me thank you warmly for your other proposal regarding the school near Donnington. It is kind in you to take so much interest about me; but the fact is, I could not at present enter upon such a project because I have not the capital necessary to insure success. It is a pleasure to me to hear that you are so comfortably settled and that your health is so much improved. I trust God will continue His kindness towards you. Let me say also that I admire the good-sense and absence of flattery and cant which your letter displayed. Farewell. I shall always be glad to hear from you as a *friend*. — Believe me, yours truly,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *March* 12*th*, 1839.

'My dearest Ellen, — When your letter was put into my hands, I said, "She is coming at last, I hope," but when I opened it and found what the contents were, I was vexed to the heart. You need not ask me to go to Brookroyd any more. Once for all, and at the hazard of being called the most stupid little wretch that ever existed, I *won't* go till you have been to Haworth. I don't blame *you*, I believe you would come if you might; perhaps

I ought not to blame others, but I am grieved.

'Anne goes to Blake Hall on the 8th of April, unless some further unseen cause of delay should occur. I've heard nothing more from Mrs. Thos. Brook as yet. Papa wishes me to remain at home a little longer, but I begin to be anxious to set to work again; and yet it will be *hard work* after the indulgence of so many weeks, to return to that dreary "gin-horse" round.

'You ask me, my dear Ellen, whether I have received a letter from Henry. I have, about a week since. The contents, I confess, did a little surprise me, but I kept them to myself, and unless you had questioned me on the subject, I would never have adverted to it. Henry says he is comfortably settled at Donnington, that his health is much improved, and that it is his intention to take pupils after Easter. He then intimates that in due time he should want a wife to take care of his pupils, and frankly asks me to be that wife. Altogether the letter is written without cant or flattery, and in a common-sense style, which does credit to his judgment.

'Now, my dear Ellen, there were in this proposal some things which might have proved a strong temptation. I thought if I were to marry Henry Nussey, his sister could live with me, and how happy I should be. But again I asked myself two questions: Do I love him as much as a woman ought to love the man she marries? Am I the person best qualified to make him happy? Alas! Ellen, my conscience answered *no* to both these questions. I felt that though I esteemed, though I had a kindly leaning towards him, because he is an amiable and well-disposed man, yet I had not, and could not have, that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for him; and, if ever I marry, it must be in that light of adoration that I will regard my husband. Ten to one I shall never have the chance again; but *n'importe*. Moreover, I was aware that Henry knew so little of me he could hardly be conscious to whom he was writing. Why, it would startle him to see me in my natural home character; he would think I was a wild, romantic enthusiast indeed. I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband. I would laugh, and satirise, and say whatever came into my head first. And if he were a clever man, and loved me, the whole world weighed in the balance against his smallest wish should be light as air. Could I, knowing my mind to be such as that, conscientiously say that I would take a grave, quiet, young man like Henry? No, it would have been deceiving him, and deception of that sort is beneath me. So I wrote a long letter back, in which I expressed my refusal as gently as I could, and also candidly avowed my reasons for that refusal. I described to him, too, the sort of character that would suit him for a wife. — Good-bye, my dear Ellen.

'C. Brontë.'

Mr. Nussey was a very good man, with a capacity for making himself generally esteemed, becoming in turn vicar of Earnley, near Chichester, and afterwards of Hathersage, in Derbyshire. It was honourable to his judgment that he had aspired to marry Charlotte Brontë, who, as we know, had neither money nor much personal attraction, and at the time no possible prospect of literary fame. Her common-sense letter in reply to his proposal had the desired effect. He speedily took the proffered advice, and six months later we find her sending him a letter of congratulation upon his engagement to be married.

TO REV. HENRY NUSSEY

'Haworth, *October* 28*th*, 1839.

'Dear Sir, — I have delayed answering your last communication in the hopes of receiving a letter from Ellen, that I might be able to transmit to you the latest news from Brookroyd; however, as she does not write, I think I ought to put off my reply no longer lest you should begin to think me negligent. As you rightly conjecture, I had heard a little hint of what you allude to before, and the account gave me pleasure, coupled as it was with the assurance that the object of your regard is a worthy and estimable woman. The step no doubt will by many of your friends be considered scarcely as a prudent one, *since* fortune is not amongst the number of the young lady's advantages. For my own part, I must confess that I esteem you the more for not hunting after wealth if there be strength of mind, firmness of principle, and sweetness of temper to compensate for the absence of that usually all-powerful attraction. The wife who brings riches to her husband sometimes also brings an idea of her own importance and a tenacity about what she conceives to be her rights, little calculated to produce happiness in the married state. Most probably she will wish to control when nature and affection bind her to submit — in this case there cannot, I should think, be much comfort.

'On the other hand, it must be considered that when two persons marry without money, there ought to be moral courage and physical exertion to atone for the deficiency — there should be spirit to scorn dependence, patience to endure privation, and energy to labour for a livelihood. If there be these qualities, I think, with the blessing of God, those who join heart and hand have a right to expect success and a moderate share of happiness, even though they may have departed a step or two from the stern maxims of worldly prudence. The bread earned by honourable toil is sweeter than the bread of idleness; and mutual love and domestic calm are treasures far preferable to the possessions rust can corrupt and moths consume away.

'I enjoyed my late excursion with Ellen with the greater zest because such pleasures have not often chanced to fall in my way. I will not tell you what I thought of the sea, because I should fall into my besetting sin of enthusiasm. I may, however, say that its glories, changes, its ebbs and flow, the sound of its restless waves, formed a subject for contemplation that never wearied either the eye, the ear, or the mind. Our visit at Easton was extremely pleasant; I shall always feel grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Hudson for their kindness. We saw Agnes Burton, during our stay, and called on two of your former parishioners — Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Dalton. I was pleased to hear your name mentioned by them in terms of encomium and sincere regard. Ellen will have detailed to you all the minutia of our excursion; a recapitulation from me would therefore be tedious. I am happy to say that her health appeared to be greatly improved by the change of air and regular exercise. I am still at home, as I have not yet heard of any situation which meets with the approbation of my friends. I begin, however, to grow exceedingly impatient of a prolonged period of inaction. I feel I ought to be doing something for myself, for my health is now so perfectly re-established by this long rest that it affords me no further pretext for indolence. With every wish for your future welfare, and with the hope that whenever your proposed union takes place it may contribute in the highest sense to your good and happiness, — Believe me, your sincere friend,

'C. Brontë.

'*P.S.* — Remember me to your sister Mercy, who, I understand, is for the present your companion and housekeeper.'

The correspondence did not end here. Indeed, Charlotte was so excellent a letter-writer, that it must have been hard indeed for any one who had had any experience of her in that capacity to readily forgo its continuance.

TO REV. HENRY NUSSEY

'Haworth, *May* 26*th*, 1840.

'Dear Sir, — In looking over my papers this morning I found a letter from you of the date of last February with the mark upon it unanswered. Your sister Ellen often accuses me of want of punctuality in answering letters, and I think her accusation is here justified. However, I give you credit for as much considerateness as will induce you to excuse a greater fault than this, especially as I shall hasten directly to repair it.

'The fact is, when the letter came Ellen was staying with me, and I was so fully occupied in talking to her that I had no time to think of writing to others. This is no great compliment, but it is no insult either. You know Ellen's worth, you know how seldom I see her, you partly know my regard for her; and from these premises you may easily draw the inference that her company, when once obtained, is too valuable to be wasted for a moment. One woman can appreciate the value of another better than a man can do. Men very often only see the outside gloss which dazzles in prosperity, women have opportunities for closer observation, and they learn to value those qualities which are useful in adversity.

'There is much, too, in that mild even temper and that placid equanimity which keep the domestic hearth always bright and peaceful — this is better than the ardent nature that changes twenty times in a day. I have studied Ellen and I think she would make a good wife — that is, if she had a good husband. If she married a fool or a tyrant there is spirit enough in her composition to withstand the dictates of either insolence or weakness, though even then I doubt not her sense would teach her to make the best of a bad bargain.

'You will see my letters are all didactic. They contain no news, because I know of none which I think it would interest you to hear repeated. I am still at home, in very good health and spirits, and uneasy only because I cannot yet hear of a situation.

‘I shall always be glad to have a letter from you, and I promise when you write again to be less dilatory in answering. I trust your prospects of happiness still continue fair; and from what you say of your future partner I doubt not she will be one who will help you to get cheerfully through the difficulties of this world and to obtain a permanent rest in the next; at least I hope such may be the case. You do right to conduct the matter with due deliberation, for on the step you are about to take depends the happiness of your whole lifetime.

‘You must not again ask me to write in a regular literary way to you on some particular topic. I cannot do it at all. Do you think I am a blue-stocking? I feel half inclined to laugh at you for the idea, but perhaps you would be angry. What was the topic to be? Chemistry? or astronomy? or mechanics? or conchology? or entomology? or what other ology? I know nothing at all about any of these. I am not scientific; I am not a linguist. You think me far more learned than I am. If I told you all my ignorance, I am afraid you would be shocked; however, as I wish still to retain a little corner in your good opinion, I will hold my tongue. — Believe me, yours respectfully,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO REV. HENRY NUSSEY

‘*January* 11th, 1841.

‘Dear Sir, — It is time I should reply to your last, as I shall fail in fulfilling my promise of not being so dilatory as on a former occasion.

‘I shall be glad to receive the poetry which you offer to send me. You ask me to return the gift in kind. How do you know that I have it in my power to comply with that request? Once indeed I was very poetical, when I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen years old, but I am now twenty-four, approaching twenty-five, and the intermediate years are those which begin to rob life of some of its superfluous colouring. At this age it is time that the imagination should be pruned and trimmed, that the judgment should be cultivated, and a few, at least, of the countless illusions of early youth should be cleared away. I have not written poetry for a long while.

‘You will excuse the dulness, morality, and monotony of this epistle, and — Believe me, with all good wishes for your welfare here and hereafter, your sincere friend,

‘C. Brontë.’

This letter closes the correspondence; but, as we have seen, Charlotte spent three pleasant weeks in Mr. Nussey’s home with his sister Ellen when that gentleman became vicar of Hathersage, in Derbyshire. She thus congratulates her friend when Mr. Nussey is appointed to the latter living.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*July* 29*th*, 1844.

‘Dear Nell, — I am very glad to hear of Henry’s good fortune. It proves to me what an excellent thing perseverance is for getting on in the world. Calm self-confidence (not impudence, for that is vulgar and repulsive) is an admirable quality; but how are those not naturally gifted with it to attain it? We all here get on much as usual. Papa wishes he could hear of a curate, that Mr. Smith may be at liberty to go. Good-bye, dear Ellen. I wish to you and yours happiness, health, and prosperity.

'Write again before you go to Burlington. My best love to Mary.

'C. Brontë.'

Meanwhile, as I have said, a second lover appeared on the field in this same year, 1839, and the quickness of his wooing is a remarkable testimony to the peculiar fascination which Miss Brontë must have exercised.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*August* 4*th*, 1839.

'My dearest Ellen, — I have an odd circumstance to relate to you — prepare for a hearty laugh! The other day Mr. Hodgson, papa's former curate, now a vicar, came over to spend the day with us, bringing with him his own curate. The latter gentleman, by name Mr. Price, is a young Irish clergyman, fresh from Dublin University. It was the first time we had any of us seen him, but, however, after the manner of his countrymen, he soon made himself at home. His character quickly appeared in his conversation: witty, lively, ardent, clever too, but deficient in the dignity and discretion of an Englishman. At home, you know, Ellen, I talk with ease, and am never shy, never weighed down and oppressed by that miserable *mauvaise honte* which torments and constrains me elsewhere. So I conversed with this Irishman and laughed at his jests, and though I saw faults in his character, excused them because of the amusement his originality afforded. I cooled a little, indeed, and drew in towards the latter part of the evening, because he began to season his conversation with something of Hibernian flattery, which I did not quite relish. However, they went away, and no more was thought about them. A few days after I got a letter, the direction of which puzzled me, it being in a hand I was not accustomed to see. Evidently, it was neither from you nor Mary Taylor, my only correspondents. Having opened and read it, it proved to be a declaration of attachment and proposal of matrimony, expressed in the ardent language of the sapient young Irishman! Well! thought I, I have heard of love at first sight, but this beats all. I leave you to guess what my answer would be, convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong. When we meet I'll show you the letter. I hope you are laughing heartily. This is not like one of my adventures, is it? It more nearly resembles Martha Taylor's. I am certainly doomed to be an old maid. Never mind, I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old. Write soon.

'C. Brontë.'

It was not many months after this that we hear the last of poor Mr. Price.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 24*th*, 1840.

'My dear Ellen, — Mr. Price is dead. He had fallen into a state of delicate health for some time, and the rupture of a blood-vessel carried him off. He was a strong, athletic-looking man when I saw him, and that is scarcely six months ago. Though I knew so little of him, and of course could not be deeply or permanently interested in what concerned him, I confess, when I suddenly heard he was dead, I felt both shocked and saddened: it was no shame to feel so, was it? I scold you, Ellen, for writing illegibly and badly, but I think you may repay the compliment with cent per cent interest. I am not in the humour for writing a long letter, so good-bye. God bless you.

'C. B.'

There are many thoughts on marriage scattered through Charlotte's correspondence. It was a subject upon which she never wearied of asking questions, and of finding her own answers. 'I believe it is better to marry *to* love than to marry *for* love,' she says on one occasion. And in reference to the somewhat uncertain attitude of the admirer of one of her friends, she thus expresses herself to Miss Nussey:

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*November* 20*th*, 1840.

'My dearest Nell, — That last letter of thine treated of matters so high and important I cannot delay answering it for a day. Now I am about to write thee a discourse, and a piece of advice which thou must take as if it came from thy grandmother. But in the first place, before I begin with thee, I have a word to whisper in the ear of Mr. Vincent, and I wish it could reach him. In the name of St. Chrysostom, St. Simon, and St. Jude, why does not that amiable young gentleman come forward like a man and say all that he has to say personally, instead of trifling with kinsmen and kinswomen. "Mr. Vincent," I say, "go personally, and say: 'Miss — -, I want to speak to you.' Miss — - will of course civilly answer: 'I am at your service, Mr. Vincent.' And then, when the room is cleared of all but yourself and herself, just take a chair nearer. Insist upon her laying down that silly . . . work, and listening to you. Then begin, in a clear, distinct, deferential, but determined voice: 'Miss — -, I have a question to put to you — a very important question: "Will you take me as your husband, for better, for worse. I am not a rich man, but I have sufficient to support us. I am not a great man, but I love you honestly and truly. Miss — -, if you knew the world better you would see that this is an offer not to be despised — a kind attached heart and a moderate competency." Do this, Mr. Vincent, and you may succeed. Go on writing sentimental and love-sick letters to — -, and I would not give sixpence for your suit." So much for Mr. Vincent. Now Miss — -'s turn comes to swallow the black bolus, called a friend's advice. Say to her: "Is the man a fool? is he a knave? a humbug, a hypocrite, a ninny, a noodle? If he is any or all of these, of course there is no sense in trifling with him. Cut him short at once — blast his hopes with lightning rapidity and keenness. Is he something better than this? has he at least common sense, a good disposition, a manageable temper? Then consider the matter.” Say further: “You feel a disgust towards him now — an utter repugnance. Very likely, but be so good as to remember you don’t know him; you have only had three or four days’ acquaintance with him. Longer and closer intimacy might reconcile you to a wonderful extent. And now I’ll tell you a word of truth, at which you may be offended or not as you like.” Say to her: “From what I know of your character, and I think I know it pretty well, I should say you will never love before marriage. After that ceremony is over, and after you have had some months to settle down, and to get accustomed to the creature you have taken for your worse half, you will probably make a most affectionate and happy wife; even if the individual should not prove all you could wish, you will be indulgent towards his little follies and foibles, and will not feel much annoyance at them. This will especially be the case if he should have sense sufficient to allow you to guide him in important matters.” Say also: “I hope you will not have the romantic folly to wait for what the French call ‘une grande passion.’ My good girl, ‘une grande passion’ is ‘une grande folie.’ Mediocrity in all things is wisdom; mediocrity in the sensations is superlative wisdom.” Say to her: “When you are as old as I am (I am sixty at least, being your grandmother), you will find that the majority of those worldly precepts, whose seeming coldness shocks and repels us in youth, are founded in wisdom.”

‘No girl should fall in love till the offer is actually made. This maxim is just. I will even extend and confirm it: No young lady should fall in love till the offer has been made, accepted, the marriage ceremony performed, and the first half-year of wedded life has passed away. A woman may then begin to love, but with great precaution, very coolly, very moderately, very rationally. If she ever loves so much that a harsh word or a cold look cuts her to the heart she is a fool. If she ever loves so much that her husband’s will is her law, and that she has got into a habit of watching his looks in order that she may anticipate his wishes, she will soon be a neglected fool.

‘I have two studies: you are my study for the success, the credit, and the respectability of a quiet, tranquil character; Mary is my study for the contempt, the remorse, the misconstruction which follow the development of feelings in themselves noble, warm, generous, devoted, and profound, but which, being too freely revealed, too frankly bestowed, are not estimated at their real value. I never hope to see in this world a character more truly noble. She would die willingly for one she loved. Her intellect and her attainments are of the very highest standard. Yet I doubt whether Mary will ever marry. Mr. Weightman expresses himself very strongly on young ladies saying “No,” when they mean “Yes.” He assures me he means nothing personal. I hope not. Assuredly I quite agree with him in his disapprobation of such a senseless course. It is folly indeed for the tongue to stammer a negative when the heart is proclaiming an affirmative. Or rather, it is an act of heroic self-denial, of which *I* for one confess myself wholly incapable. *I* *would not tell such a lie* to gain a thousand pounds. Write to me again soon. What made you say I admired Hippocrates? It is a confounded "fib." I tried to find something admirable in him, and failed.'

'He is perhaps only like the majority of men' (she says of an acquaintance). 'Certainly those men who lead a gay life in their youth, and arrive at middle-age with feelings blunted and passions exhausted, can have but one aim in marriage — the selfish advancement of their interest. Hard to think that such men take as wives — as second-selves — women young, modest, sincere, pure in heart and life, with feelings all fresh and emotions all unworn, and bind such virtue and vitality to their own withered existence, such sincerity to their own hollowness, such disinterestedness to their own haggard avarice — to think this, troubles the soul to its inmost depths. Nature and justice forbid the banns of such wedlock.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*August* 9*th*, 1846.

'Dear Nell, — Anne and I both thank you for your kind invitation. And our thanks are not mere words of course — they are very sincere, both as addressed to yourself and your mother and sisters. But we cannot accept it; and I *think* even *you* will consider our motives for declining valid this time.

'In a fortnight I hope to go with papa to Manchester to have his eyes couched. Emily and I made a pilgrimage there a week ago to search out an operator, and we found one in the person of Mr. Wilson. He could not tell from the description whether the eyes were ready for an operation. Papa must therefore necessarily take a journey to Manchester to consult him. If he judges the cataract ripe, we shall remain; if, on the contrary, he thinks it not yet sufficiently hardened, we shall have to return — and Papa must remain in darkness a while longer.

'There is a defect in your reasoning about the feelings a wife ought to experience. Who holds the purse will wish to be master, Ellen, depend on it, whether man or woman. Who provided the cash will now and then value himself, or herself, upon it, and, even in the case of ordinary minds, reproach the less wealthy partner. Besides, no husband ought to be an object of charity to his wife, as no wife to her husband. No, dear Ellen; it is doubtless pleasant to marry *well*, as they say, but with all pleasures are mixed bitters. I do not wish for my friend a very rich husband. I should not like her to be regarded by any man ever as "a sweet object of charity." Give my sincere love to all. — Yours,

'C. Brontë.'

Many years were to elapse before Charlotte Brontë received her third offer of marriage. These were the years of Brussels life, and the year during which she lost her sisters. It came in the period of her early literary fame, and indeed was the outcome of it. Mr. James Taylor was in the employment of Smith & Elder. He was associated with the literary department, and next in command to Mr. W. S. Williams as adviser to the firm. Mr. Williams appears to have written to Miss Brontë suggesting that Mr. Taylor should come to Haworth in person for the manuscript of her new novel, *Shirley*, and here is Charlotte's reply.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*August* 24*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I think the best title for the book would be *Shirley*, without any explanation or addition — the simpler and briefer, the better.

'If Mr. Taylor calls here on his return to town he might take charge of the Ms.; I would rather intrust it to him than send it by the ordinary conveyance. Did I see Mr. Taylor when I was in London? I cannot remember him.

'I would with pleasure offer him the homely hospitalities of the Parsonage for a few days, if I could at the same time offer him the company of a brother, or if my father were young enough and strong enough to walk with him on the moors and show him the neighbourhood, or if the peculiar retirement of papa's habits were not such as to render it irksome to him to give much of his society to a stranger, even in the house. Without being in the least misanthropical or sour-natured, papa habitually prefers solitude to society, and custom is a tyrant whose fetters it would now be impossible for him to break. Were it not for difficulties of this sort, I believe I should ere this have asked you to come down to Yorkshire. Papa, I know, would receive any friend of Mr. Smith's with perfect kindness and goodwill, but I likewise know that, unless greatly put out of his way, he could not give a guest much of his company, and that, consequently, his entertainment would be but dull.

'You will see the force of these considerations, and understand why I only ask Mr. Taylor to come for a day instead of requesting the pleasure of his company for a longer period; you will believe me also, and so will he, when I say I shall be most happy to see him. He will find Haworth a strange uncivilised little place, such as, I daresay, he never saw before. It is twenty miles distant from Leeds; he will have to come by rail to Keighley (there are trains every two hours I believe). He must remember that at a station called Shipley the carriages are changed, otherwise they will take him on to Skipton or Colne, or I know not where. When he reaches Keighley, he will yet have four miles to travel; a conveyance may be hired at the Devonshire Arms — there is no coach or other regular communication.

'I should like to hear from him before he comes, and to know on what day to expect him, that I may have the MS. ready; if it is not quite finished I might send the concluding chapter or two by post.

'I advise you to send this letter to Mr. Taylor — it will save you the trouble of much explanation, and will serve to apprise him of what lies before him; he can then weigh well with himself whether it would suit him to take so much trouble for so slight an end. — Believe me, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO JAMES TAYLOR, CORNHILL.

'*September* 3*rd*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — It will be quite convenient to my father and myself to secure your visit on Saturday the 8th inst.

‘The MS. is now complete, and ready for you.

‘Trusting that you have enjoyed your holiday and derived from your excursion both pleasure and profit, — I am, dear sir, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

Mr. Taylor was small and red-haired. There are two portraits of him before me. They indicate a determined, capable man, thick-set, well bearded: on the whole a vigorous and interesting personality. In any case, Mr. Taylor lost his heart to Charlotte, and was much more persistent than earlier lovers. He had also the advantage of Mr. Brontë’s goodwill. This is all there is to add to the letters themselves.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*September* 14*th*, 1850.

‘Dear Ellen, — I found after sealing my last note to you that I had forgotten after all to inclose Amelia’s letter; however, it appears it does not signify. While I think of it I must refer to an act of petty larceny committed by me when I was last at Brookroyd. Do you remember lending me a parasol, which I should have left with you when we parted at Leeds? I unconsciously carried it away in my hand. You shall have it when you next come to Haworth.

‘I wish, dear Ellen, you would tell me what is the “twaddle about my marrying, etc.,” which you hear. If I knew the details I should have a better chance of guessing the quarter from which such gossip comes — as it is, I am quite at a loss. Whom am I to marry? I think I have scarcely seen a single man with whom such a union would be possible since I left London. Doubtless there are men whom, if I chose to encourage, I might marry; but no matrimonial lot is even remotely offered me which seems to me truly desirable. And even if that were the case, there would be many obstacles. The least allusion to such a thing is most offensive to papa.

‘An article entitled *Currer Bell* has lately appeared in the *Palladium*, a new periodical published in Edinburgh. It is an eloquent production, and one of such warm sympathy and high appreciation as I had never expected to see. It makes mistakes about authorships, etc., but these I hope one day to set right. Mr. Taylor (the little man) first informed me of this article. I was somewhat surprised to receive his letter, having concluded nine months ago that there would be no more correspondence from that quarter. I inclose you a note from him received subsequently, in answer to my acknowledgment. Read it and tell me exactly how it impresses you regarding the writer’s character, etc. His little newspaper disappeared for some weeks, and I thought it was gone to the tomb of the Capulets; however, it has reappeared, with an explanation that he had feared its regular transmission might rather annoy than gratify. I told him this was a mistake — that I was well enough pleased to receive it, but hoped he would not make a task of sending it. For the rest, I cannot consider myself placed under any personal obligation by accepting this newspaper, for it belongs to the establishment of Smith & Elder. This little Taylor is deficient neither in spirit nor sense.

'The report about my having published again is, of course, an arrant lie.

'Give my kind regards to all, and — Believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

Her friend's reference to *Jupiter* is to another suggested lover, and the kindly allusion to the 'little man' may be taken to imply that had he persevered, or not gone off to India, whither he was sent to open a branch establishment in Bombay for Smith & Elder, Mr. Taylor might possibly have been successful in the long run.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 30*th*, 1851.

'Dear Nell, — I am very sorry to hear that Amelia is again far from well; but I think both she and I should try and not be too anxious. Even if matters do not prosper this time, all may go as well some future day. I think it is not these *early* mishaps that break the constitution, but those which occur in a much later stage. She must take heart — there may yet be a round dozen of little Joe Taylors to look after — run after — to sort and switch and train up in the way they should go — that is, with a generous use of pickled birch. From whom do you think I have received a couple of notes lately? From Alice. They are returned from the Continent, it seems, and are now at Torquay. The first note touched me a little by what I thought its subdued tone; I trusted her character might be greatly improved. There were, indeed, traces of the "old Adam," but such as I was willing to overlook. I answered her soon and kindly. In reply I received to-day a longish letter, full of clap-trap sentiment and humbugging attempts at fine writing. In each production the old trading spirit peeps out; she asks for autographs. It seems she had read in some paper that I was staying with Miss Martineau; thereupon she applies for specimens of her handwriting, and Wordsworth's, and Southey's, and my own. The account of her health, if given by any one else, would grieve and alarm me. She talks of fearing that her constitution is almost broken by repeated trials, and intimates a doubt as to whether she shall live long: but, remembering her of old, I have good hopes that this may be a mistake. Her "beloved papa and mama" and her "precious sister," she says, are living, and "gradely." (That last is my word. I don't know whether they use it in Birstall as they do here — it means in a middling way.)

'You are to say no more about "Jupiter" and "Venus" — what do you mean by such heathen trash? The fact is, no fallacy can be wilder, and I won't have it hinted at even in jest, because my common sense laughs it to scorn. The idea of the "little man" shocks me less — it would be a more likely match if "matches" were at all in question, which *they are not*. He still sends his little newspaper; and the other day there came a letter of a bulk, volume, pith, judgment, and knowledge, worthy to have been the product of a giant. You may laugh as much and as wickedly as you please; but the fact is, there is a quiet constancy about this, my diminutive and red-haired friend, which adds a foot to his stature, turns his sandy locks dark, and altogether dignifies him a good deal in my estimation. However, I am not bothered by much vehement ardour — there is the nicest distance and respect preserved now, which makes matters very comfortable.

'This is all nonsense, Nell, and so you will understand it. — Yours very faithfully,

'C. B.

'The name of Miss Martineau's coadjutor is Atkinson. She often writes to me with exceeding cordiality.'

TO JAMES TAYLOR, CORNHILL

'*March* 22*nd*, 1851.

'My dear Sir, — Yesterday I despatched a box of books to Cornhill, including the number of the *North British Review* which you kindly lent me. The article to which you particularly directed my attention was read with pleasure and interest, and if I do not now discuss it more at length, it is because I am well aware how completely your attention must be at present engrossed, since, if I rightly understood a brief paragraph in Mr. Smith's last note, you are now on the eve of quitting England for India.

'I will limit myself, then, to the expression of a sincere wish for your welfare and prosperity in this undertaking, and to the hope that the great change of climate will bring with it no corresponding risk to health. I should think you will be missed in Cornhill, but doubtless "business" is a Moloch which demands such sacrifices.

'I do not know when you go, nor whether your absence is likely to be permanent or only for a time; whichever it be, accept my best wishes for your happiness, and my farewell, if I should not again have the opportunity of addressing you. — Believe me, sincerely yours,

'C. Brontë.'

TO JAMES TAYLOR, CORNHILL

'*March* 24*th*, 1851.

'My dear Sir, — I had written briefly to you before I received yours, but I fear the note would not reach you in time. I will now only say that both my father and myself will have pleasure in seeing you on your return from Scotland — a pleasure tinged with sadness certainly, as all partings are, but still a pleasure.

'I do most entirely agree with you in what you say about Miss Martineau's and Mr. Atkinson's book. I deeply regret its publication for the lady's sake; it gives a death-blow to her future usefulness. Who can trust the word, or rely on the judgment, of an avowed atheist?

'May your decision in the crisis through which you have gone result in the best effect on your happiness and welfare; and indeed, guided as you are by the wish to do right and a high sense of duty, I trust it cannot be otherwise.

The change of climate is all I fear; but Providence will over-rule this too for the best — in Him you can believe and on Him rely. You will want, therefore, neither solace nor support, though your lot be cast as a stranger in a strange land. — I am, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.

'When you shall have definitely fixed the time of your return southward, write me a line to say on what day I may expect you at Haworth.

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*April* 5*th*, 1851.

'Dear Ellen, — Mr. Taylor has been and is gone; things are just as they were. I only know in addition to the slight information I possessed before, that this Indian undertaking is necessary to the continued prosperity of the firm of Smith, Elder, & Co., and that he, Taylor, alone was pronounced to possess the power and means to carry it out successfully — that mercantile honour, combined with his own sense of duty, obliged him to accept the post of honour and of danger to which he has been appointed, that he goes with great personal reluctance, and that he contemplates an absence of five years.

'He looked much thinner and older. I saw him very near, and once through my glass; the resemblance to Branwell struck me forcibly — it is marked. He is not ugly, but very peculiar; the lines in his face show an inflexibility, and, I must add, a hardness of character which do not attract. As he stood near me, as he looked at me in his keen way, it was all I could do to stand my ground tranquilly and steadily, and not to recoil as before. It is no use saying anything if I am not candid. I avow then, that on this occasion, predisposed as I was to regard him very favourably, his manners and his personal presence scarcely pleased me more than at the first interview. He gave me a book at parting, requesting in his brief way that I would keep it for his sake, and adding hastily, "I shall hope to hear from you in India — your letters *have* been and *will* be a greater refreshment than you can think or I can tell."

'And so he is gone; and stern and abrupt little man as he is — too often jarring as are his manners — his absence and the exclusion of his idea from my mind leave me certainly with less support and in deeper solitude than before.

'You see, dear Nell, though we are still precisely on the same level — *you* are not isolated. I feel that there is a certain mystery about this transaction yet, and whether it will ever be cleared up to me I do not know; however, my plain duty is to wean my mind from the subject, and if possible to avoid pondering over it. In his conversation he seemed studiously to avoid reference to Mr. Smith individually, speaking always of the "house" — the "firm." He seemed throughout quite as excited and nervous as when I first saw him. I feel that in his way he has a regard for me — a regard which I cannot bring myself entirely to reciprocate in kind, and yet its withdrawal leaves a painful blank.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*April* 9*th*, 1851.

'Dear Nell, — Thank you for your kind note; it was just like you to write it *though* it was your school-day. I never knew you to let a slight impediment stand in the way of a friendly action.

'Certainly I shall not soon forget last Friday, and *never*, I think, the evening and night succeeding that morning and afternoon. Evils seldom come singly. And soon after Mr. Taylor was gone, papa, who had been better, grew much worse. He went to bed early, and was very sick and ill for an hour; and when at last he began to doze, and I left him, I came down to the dining-room with a sense of weight, fear, and desolation hard to express and harder to endure. A wish that you were with me *did* cross my mind, but I repulsed it as a most selfish wish; indeed, it was only short-lived: my natural tendency in moments of this sort is to get through the struggle alone — to think that one is burdening and racking others makes all worse.

'You speak to me in soft consolating accents, but I hold far sterner language to myself, dear Nell.

'An absence of five years — a dividing expanse of three oceans — the wide difference between a man's active career and a woman's passive existence — these things are almost equivalent to an eternal separation. But there is another thing which forms a barrier more difficult to pass than any of these. Would Mr. Taylor and I ever suit? Could I ever feel for him enough love to accept him as a husband? Friendship — gratitude — esteem I have, but each moment he came near me, and that I could see his eyes fastened on me, my veins ran ice. Now that he is away I feel far more gently towards him; it is only close by that I grow rigid — stiffening with a strange mixture of apprehension and anger, which nothing softens but his retreat and a perfect subduing of his manner. I did not want to be proud, nor intend to be proud, but I was forced to be so.

'Most true is it that we are over-ruled by one above us — that in his hands our very will is as clay in the hands of the potter.

'Papa continues very far from well, though yesterday, and I hope this morning, he is a little better. How is your mother? Give my love to her and your sister. How are you? Have you suffered from tic since you returned home? Did they think you improved in looks?

'Write again soon. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*April* 23*rd*, 1851.

'My dear Ellen, — I have heard from Mr. Taylor to-day — a quiet little note. He returned to London a week since on Saturday; he has since kindly chosen and sent me a parcel of books. He leaves England May 20th. His note concludes with asking whether he has any chance of seeing me in London before that time. I must tell him that I have already fixed June for my visit, and therefore, in all human probability, we shall see each other no more.

'There is still a want of plain mutual understanding in this business, and there is sadness and pain in more ways than one. My conscience, I can truly say, does not *now* accuse me of having treated Mr. Taylor with injustice or unkindness. What I once did wrong in this way, I have endeavoured to remedy both to himself and in speaking of him to others — Mr. Smith to wit, though I more than doubt whether that last opinion will ever reach him. I am sure he has estimable and sterling qualities; but with every disposition and with every wish, with every intention even to look on him in the most favourable point of view at his last visit, it was impossible to me in my inward heart to think of him as one that might one day be acceptable as a husband. It would sound harsh were I to tell even *you* of the estimate I felt compelled to form respecting him. Dear Nell, I looked for something of the gentleman — something I mean of the *natural* gentleman; you know I can dispense with acquired polish, and for looks, I know myself too well to think that I have any right to be exacting on that point. I could not find one gleam, I could not see one passing glimpse of true good-breeding. It is hard to say, but it is true. In mind too, though clever, he is second-rate — thoroughly second-rate. One does not like to say these things, but one had better be honest. Were I to marry him my heart would bleed in pain and humiliation; I could not, *could not* look up to him. No; if Mr. Taylor be the only husband fate offers to me, single I must always remain. But yet, at times I grieve for him, and perhaps it is superfluous, for I cannot think he will suffer much: a hard nature, occupation, and change of scene will befriend him.

'With kind regards to all, — I am, dear Nell, your middle-aged friend,

'C. Brontë.

'Write soon.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 5*th*, 1851.

'My dear Ellen, — I have had a long kind letter from Miss Martineau lately. She says she is well and happy. Also, I have had a very long letter from Mr. Williams. He speaks with much respect of Mr. Taylor. I discover with some surprise, papa has taken a decided liking to Mr. Taylor. The marked kindness of his manner when he bid him good-bye, exhorting him to be "true to himself, his country, and his God," and wishing him all good wishes, struck me with some astonishment. Whenever he has alluded to him since, it has been with significant eulogy. When I alluded that he was no gentleman, he seemed out of patience with me for the objection. You say papa has penetration. On this subject I believe he has indeed. I have told him nothing, yet he seems to be *au fait* to the whole business. I could think at some moments his guesses go farther than mine. I believe he thinks a prospective union, deferred for five years, with such a decorous reliable personage, would be a very proper and advisable affair.

'How has your tic been lately? I had one fiery night when this same dragon "tic" held me for some hours with pestilent violence. It still comes at intervals with abated fury. Owing to this and broken sleep, I am looking singularly charming, one of my true London looks — starved out and worn down. Write soon, dear Nell. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'112 Gloucester Place,
'Hyde Park, *June* 2*nd*, 1851.

'Dear Ellen, — Mr. Taylor has gone some weeks since. I hear more open complaints now about his temper. Of Mr. Williams' society I have enjoyed one evening's allowance, and liked it and him as usual. On such occasions his good qualities of ease, kindliness, and intelligence are seen, and his little faults and foibles hidden. Mr. Smith is somewhat changed in appearance. He looks a little older, darker, and more careworn; his ordinary manner is graver, but in the evening his spirits flow back to him. Things and circumstances seem here to be as usual, but I fancy there has been some crisis in which his energy and filial affection have sustained them all. This I judge from the fact that his mother and sisters are more peculiarly bound to him than ever, and that his slightest wish is an unquestioned law. — Faithfully yours,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'November 4*th*, 1851.

'Dear Ellen, — Papa, Tabby, and Martha are at present all better, yet none of them well. Martha at present looks feeble. I wish she had a better constitution. As it is, one is always afraid of giving her too much to do; and yet there are many things I cannot undertake myself, and we do not like to change when we have had her so long. How are you getting on in the matter of servants? The other day I received a long letter from Mr. Taylor. I told you I did not expect to hear thence, nor did I. The letter is long, but it is worth your while to read it. In its way it has merit, that cannot be denied; abundance of information, talent of a certain kind, alloyed (I think) here and there with errors of taste. He might have spared many of the details of the bath scene, which, for the rest, tallies exactly with Mr. Thackeray's account of the same process. This little man with all his long letters remains as much a conundrum to me as ever. Your account of the domestic joys at Hunsworth amused me much. The good folks seem very happy — long may they continue so! It somewhat cheers me to know that such happiness *does* exist on the earth. Return Mr. Taylor's letter when you have read it. With love to your mother, — I am, dear Nell, sincerely yours,

'C. B.'

TO JAMES TAYLOR, BOMBAY

'Haworth, *November* 15*th*, 1851.

'My dear Sir, — Both your communications reached me safely — the note of the 17th September and the letter of the 2nd October. You do yourself less than justice when you stigmatise the latter as "ill-written." I found it quite legible, nor did I lose a word, though the lines and letters were so close. I should have been sorry if such had not been the case, as it appeared to me throughout highly interesting. It is observable that the very same information which we have previously collected, perhaps with rather languid attention, from printed books, when placed before us in familiar manuscript, and comprising the actual experience of a person with whom we are acquainted, acquires a new and vital interest: when we know the narrator we seem to realise the tale.

'The bath scene amused me much. Your account of that operation tallies in every point with Mr. Thackeray's description in the *Journey from Cornhill to Grand Cairo*. The usage seems a little rough, and I cannot help thinking that equal benefit might be obtained through less violent means; but I suppose without the previous fatigue the after-sensation would not be so enjoyable, and no doubt it is that indolent after-sensation which the self-indulgent Mahometans chiefly cultivate. I think you did right to disdain it.

'It would seem to me a matter of great regret that the society at Bombay should be so deficient in all intellectual attraction. Perhaps, however, your occupations will so far absorb your thoughts as to prevent them from dwelling painfully on this circumstance. No doubt there will be moments when you will look back to London and Scotland, and the friends you have left there, with some yearning; but I suppose business has its own excitement. The new country, the new scenes too, must have their interest; and as you will not lack books to fill your leisure, you will probably soon become reconciled to a change which, for some minds, would too closely resemble exile.

'I fear the climate — such as you describe it — must be very trying to an European constitution. In your first letter, you mentioned October as the month of danger; it is now over. Whether you have passed its ordeal safely, must yet for some weeks remain unknown to your friends in England — they can but *wish* that such may be the case. You will not expect me to write a letter that shall form a parallel with your own either in quantity or quality; what I write must be brief, and what I communicate must be commonplace and of trivial interest.

'My father, I am thankful to say, continues in pretty good health. I read portions of your letter to him and he was interested in hearing them. He charged me when I wrote to convey his very kind remembrances.

'I had myself ceased to expect a letter from you. On taking leave at Haworth you said something about writing from India, but I doubted at the time whether it was not one of those forms of speech which politeness dictates; and as time passed, and I did not hear from you, I became confirmed in this view of the subject. With every good wish for your welfare, — I am, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*November* 19*th*, 1851.

'Dear Ellen, — All here is much as usual, and I was thinking of writing to you this morning when I received your note. I am glad to hear your mother bears this severe weather tolerably, as papa does also. I had a cold, chiefly in the throat and chest, but I applied cold water, which relieved me, I think, far better than hot applications would have done. The only events in my life consist in that little change occasional letters bring. I have had two from Miss Wooler since she left Haworth which touched me much. She seems to think so much of a little congenial company. She says she has not for many days known such enjoyment as she experienced during the ten days she stayed here. Yet you know what Haworth is — dull enough.

'How could you imagine your last letter offended me? I only disagreed with you on *one point*. The little man's disdain of the sensual pleasure of a Turkish bath had, I must own, my approval. Before answering his epistle I got up my courage to write to Mr. Williams, through whose hands or those of Mr. Smith I knew the Indian letter had come, and beg him to give me an impartial judgment of Mr. Taylor's character and disposition, owning that I was very much in the dark. I did not like to continue correspondence without further information. I got the answer, which I inclose. You say nothing about the Hunsworth Turtle-doves — how are they? and how is the branch of promise? I hope doing well. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*January* 1*st*, 1852.

'My dear Sir, — I am glad of the opportunity of writing to you, for I have long wished to send you a little note, and was only deterred from doing so by the conviction that the period preceding Christmas must be a very busy one to you.

'I have wished to thank you for your last, which gave me very genuine pleasure. You ascribe to Mr. Taylor an excellent character; such a man's friendship, at any rate, should not be disregarded; and if the principles and disposition be what you say, faults of manner and even of temper ought to weigh light in the balance. I always believed in his judgment and good-sense, but what I doubted was his kindness — he seemed to me a little too harsh, rigid, and unsympathising. Now, judgment, sense, principle are invaluable and quite indispensable points, but one would be thankful for a *little* feeling, a *little* indulgence in addition — without these, poor fallible human nature shrinks under the domination of the sterner qualities. I answered Mr. Taylor's letter by the mail of the 19th November, sending it direct, for, on reflection, I did not see why I should trouble you with it.

'Did your son Frank call on Mrs. Gaskell? and how did he like her?

'My health has not been very satisfactory lately, but I think, though I vary almost daily, I am much better than I was a fortnight ago. All the winter the fact of my never being able to stoop over a desk without bringing on pain and oppression in the chest has been a great affliction to me, and the want of tranquil rest at night has tried me much, but I hope for the better times. The doctors say that there is no organic mischief.

'Wishing a happy New Year to you,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*March 7th*, 1852.

'Dear Ellen, — I hope both your mother's cold and yours are quite well ere this. Papa has got something of his spring attack of bronchitis, but so far it is in a greatly ameliorated form, very different to what it has been for three years past. I do trust it may pass off thus mildly. I continue better.

'Dear Nell, I told you from the beginning that my going to Sussex was a most improbable event; I tell you now that unless want of health should absolutely compel me to give up work and leave home (which I trust and hope will not be the case) I *certainly shall not think of going*. It is better to be decided, and decided I must be. You can never want me less than when in Sussex surrounded by amusement and friends. I do not know that I shall go to Scarbro', but it might be possible to spare a fortnight to go there (for the sake of a sad duty rather than pleasure), when I could not give a month to a longer excursion. I have not a word of news to tell you. Many mails have come from India since I was at Brookroyd. Expectation would at times be on the alert, but disappointment knocked her down. I have not heard a syllable, and cannot think of making inquiries at Cornhill. Well, long suspense in any matter usually proves somewhat cankering, but God orders all things for us, and to His Will we must submit. Be sure to keep a calm mind; expect nothing. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

When Mr. Taylor returned to England in 1856 Charlotte Brontë was dead. His after-life was more successful than happy. He did not, it is true, succeed in Bombay with the firm of Smith, Taylor & Co. That would seem to have collapsed. But he made friends in Bombay and returned there in 1863 as editor of the *Bombay Gazette* and the *Bombay Quarterly Review*. A little later he became editor of the *Bombay Saturday Review*, which had not, however, a long career. Mr. Taylor's successes were not journalistic but mercantile. As Secretary of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, which appointment he obtained in 1865, he obtained much real distinction. To this post he added that of Registrar of the University of Bombay and many other offices. He was elected Sheriff in 1874, in which year he died. An imposing funeral ceremony took place in the Cathedral, and he was buried in the Bombay cemetery, where his tomb may be found to the left of the entrance gates, inscribed —

JAMES TAYLOR. DIED APRIL 29, 1874, AGED 57.

He married during his visit to England, but the marriage was not a happy one. That does not belong to the present story. Here, however, is a cutting from the *Times* marriage record in 1863: —

‘On the 23rd inst., at the Church of St. John the Evangelist, St. Pancras, by the Rev. James Moorhouse, M.A., James Taylor, Esq., of Furnival’s-inn, and Bombay, to Annie, widow of Adolph Ritter, of Vienna, and stepdaughter of Thos. Harrison, Esq., of Birchanger Place, Essex.’

CHAPTER XIII: LITERARY AMBITIONS

We have seen how Charlotte Brontë and her sisters wrote from their earliest years those little books which embodied their vague aspirations after literary fame. Now and again the effort is admirable, notably in *The Adventures of Ernest Alembert*, but on the whole it amounts to as little as did the juvenile productions of Shelley. That poet, it will be remembered, wrote *Zastrozzi* at nineteen, and much else that was bad, some of which he printed. Charlotte Brontë was mercifully restrained by a well-nigh empty purse from this ill-considered rashness. It was not till the death of their aunt had added to their slender resources that the Brontë girls conceived the idea of actually publishing a book at their own expense. They communicated with the now extinct firm of Aylott & Jones of Paternoster Row, and Charlotte appears to have written many letters to the firm, only two or three of which are printed by Mrs. Gaskell. The correspondence is comparatively insignificant, but as the practical beginning of Charlotte's literary career, the hitherto unpublished letters which have been preserved are perhaps worth reproducing here.

TO AYLOTT & JONES

'*January* 28*th*, 1846.

'Gentlemen, — May I request to be informed whether you would undertake the publication of a collection of short poems in one volume, 8vo.

'If you object to publishing the work at your own risk, would you undertake it on the author's account? — I am, gentlemen, your obedient humble servant,

'C. Brontë.

'Address — Rev. P. Brontë, Haworth, Bradford, Yorkshire.'

TO AYLOTT & JONES

'*March* 3*rd*, 1846.

'Gentlemen, — I send a draft for £31, 10s., being the amount of your estimate.

'I suppose there is nothing now to prevent your immediately commencing the printing of the work.

'When you acknowledge the receipt of the draft, will you state how soon it will be completed? — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

'C. Brontë.'

TO AYLOTT & JONES

'*March* 11*th*, 1846.

'Gentlemen, — I have received the proof-sheet, and return it corrected. If there is any doubt at all about the printer's competency to correct errors, I would prefer submitting each sheet to the inspection of the authors, because such a mistake, for instance, as *tumbling* stars, instead of *trembling*, would suffice to throw an air of absurdity over a whole poem; but if you know from experience that he is to be relied on, I would trust to your assurance on the subject, and leave the task of correction to him, as I know that a considerable saving both of time and trouble would be thus effected.

'The printing and paper appear to me satisfactory. Of course I wish to have the work out as soon as possible, but I am still more anxious that it should be got up in a manner creditable to the publishers and agreeable to the authors. — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

'C. Brontë.'

TO AYLOTT & JONES

'*March* 13*th*, 1846.

'Gentlemen, — I return you the second proof. The authors have finally decided that they would prefer having all the proofs sent to them in turn, but you need not inclose the Ms., as they can correct the errors from memory. — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

'C. Brontë.'

TO AYLOTT & JONES

'*March* 23*rd*, 1846.

'Gentlemen, — As the proofs have hitherto come safe to hand under the direction of C. Brontë, *Esq*., I have not thought it necessary to request you to change it, but a little mistake having occurred yesterday, I think it will be better to send them to me in future under my real address, which is Miss Brontë, Rev. P. Brontë, etc. — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

'C. Brontë.'

TO AYLOTT & JONES

'*April* 6*th*, 1846.

'Gentlemen, — C., E., and A. Bell are now preparing for the press a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales, which may be published either together, as a work of three volumes, of the ordinary novel size, or separately as single volumes, as shall be deemed most advisable.

'It is not their intention to publish these tales on their own account. They direct me to ask you whether you would be disposed to undertake the work, after having, of course, by due inspection of the Ms., ascertained that its contents are such as to warrant an expectation of success.

'An early answer will oblige, as, in case of your negativing the proposal, inquiry must be made of other publishers. — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

'C. Brontë.'

TO AYLOTT & JONES

'*April* 15*th*, 1846.

'Gentlemen, — I have to thank you for your obliging answer to my last. The information you give is of value to us, and when the MS. is completed your suggestions shall be acted on.

'There will be no preface to the poems. The blank leaf may be filled up by a table of contents, which I suppose the printer will prepare. It appears the volume will be a thinner one than was calculated on. — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO AYLOTT & JONES

‘*May* 11*th*, 1846.

‘Gentlemen, — The books may be done up in the style of Moxon’s duodecimo edition of Wordsworth.

‘The price may be fixed at 5s., or if you think that too much for the size of the volume, say 4s.

‘I think the periodicals I mentioned in my last will be sufficient for advertising in at present, and I should not wish you to lay out a larger sum than £2, especially as the estimate is increased by nearly £5, in consequence, it appears, of a mistake. I should think the success of a work depends more on the notice it receives from periodicals, than on the quantity of advertisements.

‘If you do not object, the additional amount of the estimate can be remitted when you send in your account at the end of the first six months.

‘I should be obliged to you if you could let me know how soon copies can be sent to the editors of the magazines and newspapers specified. — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO AYLOTT & JONES

‘*May* 25*th*, 1846.

‘Gentlemen, — I received yours of the 22nd this morning. I now transmit £5, being the additional sum necessary to defray the entire expense of paper and printing. It will leave a small surplus of 11s. 9d., which you can place to my account.

‘I am glad you have sent copies to the newspapers you mention, and in case of a notice favourable or otherwise appearing in them, or in any of the other periodicals to which copies have been sent, I should be obliged to you if you would send me down the numbers; otherwise, I have not the opportunity of seeing these publications regularly. I might miss it, and should the poems be remarked upon favourably, it is my intention to appropriate a further sum to advertisements. If, on the other hand, they should pass unnoticed or be condemned, I consider it would be quite useless to advertise, as there is nothing, either in the title of the work or the names of the authors, to attract attention from a single individual. — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO AYLOTT & JONES

‘*July* 10*th*, 1846.

‘Gentlemen, — I am directed by the Messrs. Bell to acknowledge the receipt of the *Critic* and the *Athenæum* containing notices of the poems.

‘They now think that a further sum of £10 may be devoted to advertisements, leaving it to you to select such channels as you deem most advisable.

‘They would wish the following extract from the *Critic* to be appended to each advertisement: —

‘“They in whose hearts are chords strung by Nature to sympathise with the beautiful and the true, will recognise in these compositions the presence of more genius than it was supposed this utilitarian age had devoted to the loftier exercises of the intellect.”

‘They likewise request you to send copies of the poems to *Fraser’s Magazine*, *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal*, the Globe, and *Examiner*. — I am, gentlemen, yours truly,

‘C. Brontë.’

To an appreciative editor Currer Bell wrote as follows: —

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ‘DUBLIN UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE.’

‘*October* 6*th*, 1846.

‘Sirs, — I thank you in my own name and that of my brothers, Ellis and Acton, for the indulgent notice that appeared in your last number of our first humble efforts in literature; but I thank you far more for the essay on modern poetry which preceded that notice — an essay in which seems to me to be condensed the very spirit of truth and beauty. If all or half your other readers shall have derived from its perusal the delight it afforded to myself and my brothers, your labours have produced a rich result.

‘After such criticism an author may indeed be smitten at first by a sense of his own insignificance — as we were — but on a second and a third perusal he finds a power and beauty therein which stirs him to a desire to do more and better things. It fulfils the right end of criticism: without absolutely crushing, it corrects and rouses. I again thank you heartily, and beg to subscribe myself, — Your constant and grateful reader,

‘Currer Bell.’

The reception which it met with from the public may be gathered from the following letter which accompanied De Quincey’s copy.

TO THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

‘*June* 16*th*, 1847.

‘Sirs, — My relatives, Ellis and Acton Bell, and myself, heedless of the repeated warnings of various respectable publishers, have committed the rash act of printing a volume of poems.

‘The consequences predicted have, of course, overtaken us: our book is found to be a drug; no man needs it or heeds it. In the space of a year our publisher has disposed but of two copies, and by what painful efforts he succeeded in getting rid of these two, himself only knows.

‘Before transferring the edition to the trunkmakers, we have decided on distributing as presents a few copies of what we cannot sell; and we beg to offer you one in acknowledgment of the pleasure and profit we have often and long derived from your works. — I am, sir, yours very respectfully,

‘Currer Bell.’

Charlotte Brontë could not have carried out the project of distribution to any appreciable extent, as a considerable 'remainder' appear to have been bound up with a new title-page by Smith & Elder. With this Smith & Elder title-page, the book is not uncommon, whereas, with the Aylott & Jones title-page it is exceedingly rare. Perhaps there were a dozen review copies and a dozen presentation copies, in addition to the two that were sold, but only three or four seem to have survived for the pleasure of the latter-day bibliophile.

Here is the title-page in question:

POEMS
by
CURRER, ELLIS
and
ACTON BELL
london
Aylott & Jones, 8 Paternoster Row
1846

We see by the letter to Aylott & Jones the first announcement of *Wuthering Heights*, *Agnes Grey*, and *The Professor*. It would not seem that there was much, or indeed any, difficulty in disposing of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. They bear the imprint of Newby of Mortimer Street, and they appeared in three uniform volumes, the two first being taken up by *Wuthering Heights*, and the third by *Agnes Grey*, which is quaintly marked as if it were a three-volumed novel in itself, having 'Volume III' on title-page and binding. I have said that there were no travels before the manuscripts of Emily and Anne. That is not quite certain. Mrs. Gaskell implies that there were; but, at any rate, there is no definite information on the subject. Newby, it is clear, did not publish them until all the world was discussing *Jane Eyre*. *The Professor*, by Currer Bell, had, however, travel enough! It was offered to six publishers in succession before it came into the hands of Mr. W. S. Williams, the 'reader' for Smith & Elder. The circumstance of its courteous refusal by that firm, and the suggestion that a three-volumed novel would be gladly considered, are within the knowledge of all Charlotte Brontë's admirers.

One cannot but admire the fearless and uncompromising honesty with which Charlotte Brontë sent the MSS. round with all its previous journeys frankly indicated.

It is not easy at this time of day to understand why Mr. Williams refused *The Professor*. The story is incomparably superior to the average novel, and, indeed, contains touches which are equal to anything that Currer Bell ever wrote. It seems to me possible that Charlotte Brontë rewrote the story after its rejection, but the manuscript does not bear out that impression.

Charlotte Brontë's method of writing was to take a piece of cardboard — the broken cover of a book, in fact — and a few sheets of note-paper, and write her first form of a story upon these sheets in a tiny handwriting in pencil. She would afterwards copy the whole out upon quarto paper very neatly in ink. None of the original pencilled MSS. of her greater novels have been preserved. The extant manuscripts of *Jane Eyre* and *The Professor* are in ink.

Jane Eyre was written, then, under Mr. Williams's kind encouragement, and immediately accepted. It was published in the first week of October 1847.

The following letters were received by Mr. Williams while the book was beginning its course.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*October* 4*th*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — I thank you sincerely for your last letter. It is valuable to me because it furnishes me with a sound opinion on points respecting which I desired to be advised; be assured I shall do what I can to profit by your wise and good counsel.

'Permit me, however, sir, to caution you against forming too favourable an idea of my powers, or too sanguine an expectation of what they can achieve. I am myself sensible both of deficiencies of capacity and disadvantages of circumstance which will, I fear, render it somewhat difficult for me to attain popularity as an author. The eminent writers you mention — Mr. Thackeray, Mr. Dickens, Mrs. Marsh, etc., doubtless enjoyed facilities for observation such as I have not; certainly they possess a knowledge of the world, whether intuitive or acquired, such as I can lay no claim to, and this gives their writings an importance and a variety greatly beyond what I can offer the public.

'Still, if health be spared and time vouchsafed me, I mean to do my best; and should a moderate success crown my efforts, its value will be greatly enhanced by the proof it will seem to give that your kind counsel and encouragement have not been bestowed on one quite unworthy. — Yours respectfully,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*October* 9*th*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — I do not know whether the *Dublin University Magazine* is included in the list of periodicals to which Messrs. Smith & Elder are accustomed to send copies of new publications, but as a former work, the joint production of myself and my two relatives, Ellis and Acton Bell, received a somewhat favourable notice in that magazine, it appears to me that if the editor's attention were drawn to *Jane Eyre* he might possibly bestow on it also a few words of remark.

'The *Critic* and the *Athenæum* also gave comments on the work I allude to. The review in the first-mentioned paper was unexpectedly and generously eulogistic, that in the *Athenæum* more qualified, but still not discouraging. I mention these circumstances and leave it to you to judge whether any advantage is derivable from them.

'You dispensed me from the duty of answering your last letter, but my sense of the justness of the views it expresses will not permit me to neglect this opportunity both of acknowledging it and thanking you for it. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *December* 13*th*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — Your advice merits and shall have my most serious attention. I feel the force of your reasoning. It is my wish to do my best in the career on which I have entered. So I shall study and strive; and by dint of time, thought, and effort, I hope yet to deserve in part the encouragement you and others have so generously accorded me. But time will be necessary — that I feel more than ever. In case of *Jane Eyre* reaching a second edition, I should wish some few corrections to be made, and will prepare an errata. How would the accompanying preface do? I thought it better to be brief.

'The *Observer* has just reached me. I always compel myself to read the analysis in every newspaper-notice. It is a just punishment, a due though severe humiliation for faults of plan and construction. I wonder if the analysis of other fictions read as absurdly as that of *Jane Eyre* always does. — I am, dear sir, yours respectfully,

'C. Bell.'

The following letter is interesting because it discusses the rejected novel, and refers to the project of recasting it, which ended in the writing of *Villette*.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*December* 14*th*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — I have just received your kind and welcome letter of the 11th. I shall proceed at once to discuss the principal subject of it.

'Of course a second work has occupied my thoughts much. I think it would be premature in me to undertake a serial now — I am not yet qualified for the task: I have neither gained a sufficiently firm footing with the public, nor do I possess sufficient confidence in myself, nor can I boast those unflagging animal spirits, that even command of the faculty of composition, which as you say, and, I am persuaded, most justly, is an indispensable requisite to success in serial literature. I decidedly feel that ere I change my ground I had better make another venture in the three volume novel form.

'Respecting the plan of such a work, I have pondered it, but as yet with very unsatisfactory results. Three commencements have I essayed, but all three displease me. A few days since I looked over *The Professor*. I found the beginning very feeble, the whole narrative deficient in incident and in general attractiveness. Yet the middle and latter portion of the work, all that relates to Brussels, the Belgian school, etc., is as good as I can write: it contains more pith, more substance, more reality, in my judgment, than much of *Jane Eyre*. It gives, I think, a new view of a grade, an occupation, and a class of characters — all very commonplace, very insignificant in themselves, but not more so than the materials composing that portion of *Jane Eyre* which seems to please most generally.

'My wish is to recast *The Professor*, add as well as I can what is deficient, retrench some parts, develop others, and make of it a three volume work — no easy task, I know, yet I trust not an impracticable one.

'I have not forgotten that *The Professor* was set aside in my agreement with Messrs. Smith & Elder; therefore before I take any step to execute the plan I have sketched, I should wish to have your judgment on its wisdom. You read or looked over the Ms. — what impression have you now respecting its worth? and what confidence have you that I can make it better than it is?

'Feeling certain that from business reasons as well as from natural integrity you will be quite candid with me, I esteem it a privilege to be able thus to consult you. — Believe me, dear sir, yours respectfully,

'C. Bell.

'*Wuthering Heights* is, I suppose, at length published, at least Mr. Newby has sent the authors their six copies. I wonder how it will be received. I should say it merits the epithets of "vigorous" and "original" much more decidedly than *Jane Eyre* did. *Agnes Grey* should please such critics as Mr. Lewes, for it is "true" and "unexaggerated" enough. The books are not well got up — they abound in errors of the press. On a former occasion I expressed myself with perhaps too little reserve regarding Mr. Newby, yet I cannot but feel, and feel painfully, that Ellis and Acton have not had the justice at his hands that I have had at those of Messrs. Smith & Elder.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*December* 31*st*, 1847.

'Dear Sirs, — I think, for the reasons you mention, it is better to substitute *author* for *editor*. I should not be ashamed to be considered the author of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, but, possessing no real claim to that honour, I would rather not have it attributed to me, thereby depriving the true authors of their just meed.

'You do very rightly and very kindly to tell me the objections made against *Jane Eyre* — they are more essential than the praises. I feel a sort of heart-ache when I hear the book called "godless" and "pernicious" by good and earnest-minded men; but I know that heart-ache will be salutary — at least I trust so.

'What is meant by the charges of *trickery* and *artifice* I have yet to comprehend. It was no art in me to write a tale — it was no trick in Messrs. Smith & Elder to publish it. Where do the trickery and artifice lie?

'I have received the *Scotsman*, and was greatly amused to see Jane Eyre likened to Rebecca Sharp — the resemblance would hardly have occurred to me.

'I wish to send this note by to-day's post, and must therefore conclude in haste. — I am, dear sir, yours respectfully,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *January* 4*th*, 1848.

'Dear Sir, — Your letter made me ashamed of myself that I should ever have uttered a murmur, or expressed by any sign that I was sensible of pain from the unfavourable opinions of some misjudging but well-meaning people. But, indeed, let me assure you, I am not ungrateful for the kindness which has been given me in such abundant measure. I can discriminate the proportions in which blame and praise have been awarded to my efforts: I see well that I have had less of the former and more of the latter than I merit. I am not therefore crushed, though I may be momentarily saddened by the frown, even of the good.

'It would take a great deal to crush me, because I know, in the first place, that my own intentions were correct, that I feel in my heart a deep reverence for religion, that impiety is very abhorrent to me; and in the second, I place firm reliance on the judgment of some who have encouraged me. You and Mr. Lewes are quite as good authorities, in my estimation, as Mr. Dilke or the editor of the *Spectator*, and I would not under any circumstances, or for any opprobrium, regard with shame what my friends had approved — none but a coward would let the detraction of an enemy outweigh the encouragement of a friend. You must not, therefore, fulfil your threat of being less communicative in future; you must kindly tell me all.

'Miss Kavanagh's view of the maniac coincides with Leigh Hunt's. I agree with them that the character is shocking, but I know that it is but too natural. There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or even human seems to disappear from the mind, and a fiend-nature replaces it. The sole aim and desire of the being thus possessed is to exasperate, to molest, to destroy, and preternatural ingenuity and energy are often exercised to that dreadful end. The aspect, in such cases, assimilates with the disposition — all seem demonized. It is true that profound pity ought to be the only sentiment elicited by the view of such degradation, and equally true is it that I have not sufficiently dwelt on that feeling: I have erred in making *horror* too predominant. Mrs. Rochester, indeed, lived a sinful life before she was insane, but sin is itself a species of insanity — the truly good behold and compassionate it as such.

'*Jane Eyre* has got down into Yorkshire, a copy has even penetrated into this neighbourhood. I saw an elderly clergyman reading it the other day, and had the satisfaction of hearing him exclaim, "Why, they have got — - School, and Mr. — - here, I declare! and Miss — -" (naming the originals of Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst and Miss Temple). He had known them all. I wondered whether he would recognise the portraits, and was gratified to find that he did, and that, moreover, he pronounced them faithful and just. He said, too, that Mr. — - (Brocklehurst) "deserved the chastisement he had got."

'He did not recognise Currer Bell. What author would be without the advantage of being able to walk invisible? One is thereby enabled to keep such a quiet mind. I make this small observation in confidence.

'What makes you say that the notice in the *Westminster Review* is not by Mr. Lewes? It expresses precisely his opinions, and he said he would perhaps insert a few lines in that periodical.

'I have sometimes thought that I ought to have written to Mr. Lewes to thank him for his review in *Fraser*; and, indeed, I did write a note, but then it occurred to me that he did not require the author's thanks, and I feared it would be superfluous to send it, therefore I refrained; however, though I have not *expressed* gratitude I have *felt* it.

'I wish you, too, *many many* happy new years, and prosperity and success to you and yours. — Believe me, etc.,

'Currer Bell.

'I have received the *Courier* and the *Oxford Chronicle*.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*January* 22*nd*, 1848.

'Dear Sir, — I have received the *Morning Herald*, and was much pleased with the notice, chiefly on account of the reference made to that portion of the preface which concerns Messrs. Smith & Elder. If my tribute of thanks can benefit my publishers, it is desirable that it should have as much publicity as possible.

'I do not know if the part which relates to Mr. Thackeray is likely to be as well received; but whether generally approved of and understood or not, I shall not regret having written it, for I am convinced of its truth.

'I see I was mistaken in my idea that the *Athenæum* and others wished to ascribe the authorship of *Wuthering Heights* to Currer Bell; the contrary is the case, *Jane Eyre* is given to Ellis Bell; and Mr. Newby, it appears, thinks it expedient so to frame his advertisements as to favour the misapprehension. If Mr. Newby had much sagacity he would see that Ellis Bell is strong enough to stand without being propped by Currer Bell, and would have disdained what Ellis himself of all things disdains — recourse to trickery. However, Ellis, Acton, and Currer care nothing for the matter personally; the public and the critics are welcome to confuse our identities as much as they choose; my only fear is lest Messrs. Smith & Elder should in some way be annoyed by it.

'I was much interested in your account of Miss Kavanagh. The character you sketch belongs to a class I peculiarly esteem: one in which endurance combines with exertion, talent with goodness; where genius is found unmarred by extravagance, self-reliance unalloyed by self-complacency. It is a character which is, I believe, rarely found except where there has been toil to undergo and adversity to struggle against: it will only grow to perfection in a poor soil and in the shade; if the soil be too indigent, the shade too dank and thick, of course it dies where it sprung. But I trust this will not be the case with Miss Kavanagh. I trust she will struggle ere long into the sunshine. In you she has a kind friend to direct her, and I hope her mother will live to see the daughter, who yields to her such childlike duty, both happy and successful.

'You asked me if I should like any copies of the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, and I said — no. It is true I do not want any for myself or my acquaintances, but if the request be not unusual, I should much like one to be given to Miss Kavanagh. If you would have the goodness, you might write on the fly-leaf that the book is presented with the author's best wishes for her welfare here and hereafter. My reason for wishing that she should have a copy is because she said the book had been to her a *suggestive* one, and I know that suggestive books are valuable to authors.

'I am truly sorry to hear that Mr. Smith has had an attack of the prevalent complaint, but I trust his recovery is by this time complete. I cannot boast entire exemption from its ravages, as I now write under its depressing influence. Hoping that you have been more fortunate, — I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*March* 3*rd*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — I have received the *Christian Remembrancer*, and read the review. It is written with some ability; but to do justice was evidently not the critic's main object, therefore he excuses himself from performing that duty.

'I daresay the reviewer imagines that Currer Bell ought to be extremely afflicted, very much cut up, by some smart things he says — this however is not the case. C. Bell is on the whole rather encouraged than dispirited by the review: the hard-wrung praise extorted reluctantly from a foe is the most precious praise of all — you are sure that this, at least, has no admixture of flattery. I fear he has too high an opinion of my abilities and of what I can do; but that is his own fault. In other respects, he aims his shafts in the dark, and the success, or, rather, ill-success of his hits makes me laugh rather than cry. His shafts of sarcasm are nicely polished, keenly pointed; he should not have wasted them in shooting at a mark he cannot see.

'I hope such reviews will not make much difference with me, and that if the spirit moves me in future to say anything about priests, etc., I shall say it with the same freedom as heretofore. I hope also that their anger will not make *me* angry. As a body, I had no ill-will against them to begin with, and I feel it would be an error to let opposition engender such ill-will. A few individuals may possibly be called upon to sit for their portraits some time; if their brethren in general dislike the resemblance and abuse the artist — *tant pis*! — Believe me, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Bell.'

It seems that Mr. Williams had hinted that Charlotte might like to emulate Thackeray by illustrating her own books.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*March* 11*th*, 1848.

‘Dear Sir, — I have just received the copy of the second edition, and will look over it, and send the corrections as soon as possible; I will also, since you think it advisable, avail myself of the opportunity of a third edition to correct the mistake respecting the authorship of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*.

‘As to your second suggestion, it is, one can see at a glance, a very judicious and happy one; but I cannot adopt it, because I have not the skill you attribute to me. It is not enough to have the artist’s eye, one must also have the artist’s hand to turn the first gift to practical account. I have, in my day, wasted a certain quantity of Bristol board and drawing-paper, crayons and cakes of colour, but when I examine the contents of my portfolio now, it seems as if during the years it has been lying closed some fairy had changed what I once thought sterling coin into dry leaves, and I feel much inclined to consign the whole collection of drawings to the fire; I see they have no value. If, then, *Jane Eyre* is ever to be illustrated, it must be by some other hand than that of its author. But I hope no one will be at the trouble to make portraits of my characters. Bulwer and Byron heroes and heroines are very well, they are all of them handsome; but my personages are mostly unattractive in look, and therefore ill-adapted to figure in ideal portraits. At the best, I have always thought such representations futile. You will not easily find a second Thackeray. How he can render, with a few black lines and dots, shades of expression so fine, so real; traits of character so minute, so subtle, so difficult to seize and fix, I cannot tell — I can only wonder and admire. Thackeray may not be a painter, but he is a wizard of a draughtsman; touched with his pencil, paper lives. And then his drawing is so refreshing; after the wooden limbs one is accustomed to see pourtrayed by commonplace illustrators, his shapes of bone and muscle clothed with flesh, correct in proportion and anatomy, are a real relief. All is true in Thackeray. If Truth were again a goddess, Thackeray should be her high priest.

‘I read my preface over with some pain — I did not like it. I wrote it when I was a little enthusiastic, like you, about the French Revolution. I wish I had written it in a cool moment; I should have said the same things, but in a different manner. One may be as enthusiastic as one likes about an author who has been dead a century or two, but I see it is a fault to bore the public with enthusiasm about a living author. I promise myself to take better care in future. *Still* I will *think* as I please.

‘Are the London republicans, and *you* amongst the number, cooled down yet? I suppose not, because your French brethren are acting very nobly. The abolition of slavery and of the punishment of death for political offences are two glorious deeds, but how will they get over the question of the organisation of labour! Such theories will be the sand-bank on which their vessel will run aground if they don’t mind. Lamartine, there is not doubt, would make an excellent legislator for a nation of Lamartines — but where is that nation? I hope these observations are sceptical and cool enough. — Believe me, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*November* 16*th*, 1848.

'My dear Sirs, — I have already acknowledged in a note to Mr. Smith the receipt of the parcel of books, and in my thanks for this well-timed attention I am sure I ought to include you; your taste, I thought, was recognisable in the choice of some of the volumes, and a better selection it would have been difficult to make.

'To-day I have received the *Spectator* and the *Revue des deux Mondes*. The *Spectator* consistently maintains the tone it first assumed regarding the Bells. I have little to object to its opinion as far as Currer Bell's portion of the volume is concerned. It is true the critic sees only the faults, but for these his perception is tolerably accurate. Blind is he as any bat, insensate as any stone, to the merits of Ellis. He cannot feel or will not acknowledge that the very finish and *labor limæ* which Currer wants, Ellis has; he is not aware that the "true essence of poetry" pervades his compositions. Because Ellis's poems are short and abstract, the critics think them comparatively insignificant and dull. They are mistaken.

'The notice in the *Revue des deux Mondes* is one of the most able, the most acceptable to the author, of any that has yet appeared. Eugène Forçade understood and enjoyed *Jane Eyre*. I cannot say that of all who have professed to criticise it. The censures are as well-founded as the commendations. The specimens of the translation given are on the whole good; now and then the meaning of the original has been misapprehended, but generally it is well rendered.

'Every cup given us to taste in this life is mixed. Once it would have seemed to me that an evidence of success like that contained in the *Revue* would have excited an almost exultant feeling in my mind. It comes, however, at a time when counteracting circumstances keep the balance of the emotions even — when my sister's continued illness darkens the present and dims the future. That will seem to me a happy day when I can announce to you that Emily is better. Her symptoms continue to be those of slow inflammation of the lungs, tight cough, difficulty of breathing, pain in the chest, and fever. We watch anxiously for a change for the better — may it soon come. — I am, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.

'As I was about to seal this I received your kind letter. Truly glad am I to hear that Fanny is taking the path which pleases her parents. I trust she may persevere in it. She may be sure that a contrary one will never lead to happiness; and I should think that the reward of seeing you and her mother pleased must be so sweet that she will be careful not to run the risk of forfeiting it.

'It is somewhat singular that I had already observed to my sisters, I did not doubt it was Mr. Lewes who had shown you the *Revue*.'

The many other letters referring to Emily's last illness have already been printed. When the following letters were written, Emily and Anne were both in their graves.

TO JAMES TAYLOR, CORNHILL

'*March* 1*st*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — The parcel arrived on Saturday evening. Permit me to express my sense of the judgment and kindness which have dictated the selection of its contents. They appear to be all good books, and good books are, we know, the best substitute for good society; if circumstances debar me from the latter privilege, the kind attentions of my friends supply me with ample measure of the former.

'Thank you for your remarks on *Shirley*. Some of your strictures tally with some by Mr. Williams. You both complain of the want of distinctness and impressiveness in my heroes. Probably you are right. In delineating male character I labour under disadvantages: intuition and theory will not always adequately supply the place of observation and experience. When I write about women I am sure of my ground — in the other case, I am not so sure.

'Here, then, each of you has laid the critical finger on a point that by its shrinking confesses its vulnerability; whether the disapprobation you intimate respecting the Briarchapel scenes, the curates, etc., be equally merited, time will show. I am well aware what will be the author's present meed for these passages: I anticipate general blame and no praise. And were my motive-principle in writing a thirst for popularity, or were the chief check on my pen a dread of censure, I should withdraw these scenes — or rather, I should never have written them. I will not say whether the considerations that really govern me are sound, or whether my convictions are just; but such as they are, to their influence I must yield submission. They forbid me to sacrifice truth to the fear of blame. I accept their prohibition.

'With the sincere expression of my esteem for the candour by which your critique is distinguished, — I am, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*August* 16*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — Since I last wrote to you I have been getting on with my book as well as I can, and I think I may now venture to say that in a few weeks I hope to have the pleasure of placing the MS. in the hands of Mr. Smith.

'The *North British Review* duly reached me. I read attentively all it says about *E. Wyndham*, *Jane Eyre*, and *F. Hervey*. Much of the article is clever, and yet there are remarks which — for me — rob it of importance.

'To value praise or stand in awe of blame we must respect the source whence the praise and blame proceed, and I do not respect an inconsistent critic. He says, "if *Jane Eyre* be the production of a woman, she must be a woman unsexed."

'In that case the book is an unredeemed error and should be unreservedly condemned. *Jane Eyre* is a woman's autobiography, by a woman it is professedly written. If it is written as no woman would write, condemn it with spirit and decision — say it is bad, but do not eulogise and then detract. I am reminded of the *Economist*. The literary critic of that paper praised the book if written by a man, and pronounced it "odious" if the work of a woman.

'To such critics I would say, "To you I am neither man nor woman — I come before you as an author only. It is the sole standard by which you have a right to judge me — the sole ground on which I accept your judgment."

'There is a weak comment, having no pretence either to justice or discrimination, on the works of Ellis and Acton Bell. The critic did not know that those writers had passed from time and life. I have read no review since either of my sisters died which I could have wished *them* to read — none even which did not render the thought of their departure more tolerable to me. To hear myself praised beyond them was cruel, to hear qualities ascribed to them so strangely the reverse of their real characteristics was scarce supportable. It is sad even now; but they are so remote from earth, so safe from its turmoils, I can bear it better.

'But on one point do I now feel vulnerable: I should grieve to see my father's peace of mind perturbed on my account; for which reason I keep my author's existence as much as possible out of his way. I have always given him a carefully diluted and modified account of the success of *Jane Eyre* — just what would please without startling him. The book is not mentioned between us once a month. The *Quarterly* I kept to myself — it would have worried papa. To that same *Quarterly* I must speak in the introduction to my present work — just one little word. You once, I remember, said that review was written by a lady — Miss Rigby. Are you sure of this?

'Give no hint of my intention of discoursing a little with the *Quarterly*. It would look too important to speak of it beforehand. All plans are best conceived and executed without noise. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. B.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*August* 21*st*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I can only write very briefly at present — first to thank you for your interesting letter and the graphic description it contained of the neighbourhood where you have been staying, and then to decide about the title of the book.

'If I remember rightly, my Cornhill critics objected to *Hollow's Mill*, nor do I now find it appropriate. It might rather be called *Fieldhead*, though I think *Shirley* would perhaps be the best title. Shirley, I fancy, has turned out the most prominent and peculiar character in the work.

'Cornhill may decide between *Fieldhead* and *Shirley*. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

The famous *Quarterly Review* article by Miss Rigby, afterwards Lady Eastlake, appeared in December 1848, under the title of '*Vanity Fair*, *Jane Eyre*, and Governesses.' It was a review of two novels and a treatise on schools, and but for one or two offensive passages might have been pronounced fairly complimentary. To have coupled *Jane Eyre* with Thackeray's great book, at a time when Thackeray had already reached to heroic proportions in the literary world, was in itself a compliment. It is small wonder that the speculation was hazarded that J. G. Lockhart, the editor of the *Quarterly*, had himself supplied the venom. He could display it on occasion. It is quite clear now, however, that that was not the case. Miss Rigby was the reviewer who thought it within a critic's province to suggest that the writer might be a woman 'who had forfeited the society of her sex.' Lockhart must have read the review hastily, as editors will on occasion. He writes to his contributor on November 13, 1848, before the article had appeared: —

'About three years ago I received a small volume of 'Poems by Currer, Acton, and Ellis Bell,' and a queer little note by Currer, who said the book had been published a year, and just two copies sold, so they were to burn the rest, but distributed a few copies, mine being one. I find what seems rather a fair review of that tiny tome in the *Spectator* of this week; pray look at it.

'I think the poems of Currer much better than those of Acton and Ellis, and believe his novel is vastly better than those which they have more recently put forth.

'I know nothing of the writers, but the common rumour is that they are brothers of the weaving order in some Lancashire town. At first it was generally said Currer was a lady, and Mayfair circumstantialised by making her the *chère amie* of Mr. Thackeray. But your skill in "dress" settles the question of sex. I think, however, some woman must have assisted in the school scenes of *Jane Eyre*, which have a striking air of truthfulness to me — an ignoramus, I allow, on such points.

'I should say you might as well glance at the novels by Acton and Ellis Bell — *Wuthering Heights* is one of them. If you have any friend about Manchester, it would, I suppose, be easy to learn accurately as to the position of these men.'

This was written in November, and it was not till December that the article appeared. Apart from the offensive imputations upon the morals of the author of *Jane Eyre*, which reduces itself to smart impertinence when it is understood that Miss Rigby fully believed that the author was a man, the review is not without its compensations for a new writer. The 'equal popularity' of *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* is referred to. 'A very remarkable book,' the reviewer continues; 'we have no remembrance of another containing such undoubted power with such horrid taste.' There is droll irony, when Charlotte Brontë's strong conservative sentiments and church environment are considered, in the following: —

‘We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority, and violated every code, human and divine, abroad, and fostered chartism and rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre*.’

In another passage Miss Rigby, musing upon the masculinity of the author, finally clinches her arguments by proofs of a kind.

‘No woman *trusses game*, and garnishes dessert dishes with the same hands, or talks of so doing in the same breath. Above all, no woman attires another in such fancy dresses as Jane’s ladies assume. Miss Ingram coming down irresistible in a *morning* robe of sky-blue crape, a gauze azure scarf twisted in her hair!! No lady, we understand, when suddenly roused in the night, would think of hurrying on “a frock.” They have garments more convenient for such occasions, and more becoming too.’

Wuthering Heights is described as ‘too odiously and abominably pagan to be palatable to the most vitiated class of English readers.’ This no doubt was Miss Rigby’s interpolation in the proofs in reply to her editor’s suggestion that she should ‘glance at the novels by Acton and Ellis Bell.’ It is a little difficult to understand the *Quarterly* editor’s method, or, indeed, the letter to Miss Rigby which I have quoted, as he had formed a very different estimate of the book many months before. ‘I have finished the adventures of Miss Jane Eyre,’ he writes to Mrs. Hope (Dec. 29th, 1847), ‘and think her far the cleverest that has written since Austen and Edgeworth were in their prime, worth fifty Trollopes and Martineaus rolled into one counterpane, with fifty Dickenses and Bulwers to keep them company — but rather a brazen Miss.’

When the *Quarterly Review* appeared, Charlotte Brontë, as we have seen, was in dire domestic distress, and it was not till many months later, when a new edition of *Jane Eyre* was projected, that she discussed with her publishers the desirability of an effective reply, which was not however to disclose her sex and environment. A first preface called ‘A Word to the *Quarterly*’ was cancelled, and after some debate, the preface which we now have took its place. The ‘book’ is of course *Shirley*.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*August* 29*th*, 1849.

‘Dear Sir, — The book is now finished (thank God) and ready for Mr. Taylor, but I have not yet heard from him. I thought I should be able to tell whether it was equal to *Jane Eyre* or not, but I find I cannot — it may be better, it may be worse. I shall be curious to hear your opinion, my own is of no value. I send the Preface or “Word to the *Quarterly*” for your perusal.

‘Whatever now becomes of the work, the occupation of writing it has been a boon to me. It took me out of dark and desolate reality into an unreal but happier region. The worst of it is, my eyes are grown somewhat weak and my head somewhat weary and prone to ache with close work. You can write nothing of value unless you give yourself wholly to the theme, and when you so give yourself, you lose appetite and sleep — it cannot be helped.

‘At what time does Mr. Smith intend to bring the book out? It is his now. I hand it and all the trouble and care and anxiety over to him — a good riddance, only I wish he fairly had it. — Yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*August* 31*st*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — I cannot change my preface. I can shed no tears before the public, nor utter any groan in the public ear. The deep, real tragedy of our domestic experience is yet terribly fresh in my mind and memory. It is not a time to be talked about to the indifferent; it is not a topic for allusion to in print.

‘No righteous indignation can I lavish on the *Quarterly.* I can condescend but to touch it with the lightest satire. Believe me, my dear sir, “C. Brontë” must not here appear; what she feels or has felt is not the question — it is “Currer Bell” who was insulted — he must reply. Let Mr. Smith fearlessly print the preface I have sent — let him depend upon me this once; even if I prove a broken reed, his fall cannot be dangerous: a preface is a short distance, it is not three volumes.

‘I have always felt certain that it is a deplorable error in an author to assume the tragic tone in addressing the public about his own wrongs or griefs. What does the public care about him as an individual? His wrongs are its sport; his griefs would be a bore. What we deeply feel is our own — we must keep it to ourselves. Ellis and Acton Bell were, for me, Emily and Anne; my sisters — to me intimately near, tenderly dear — to the public they were nothing — worse than nothing — beings speculated upon, misunderstood, misrepresented. If I live, the hour may come when the spirit will move me to speak of them, but it is not come yet. — I am, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*September* 17, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — Your letter gave me great pleasure. An author who has showed his book to none, held no consultation about plan, subject, characters, or incidents, asked and had no opinion from one living being, but fabricated it darkly in the silent workshop of his own brain — such an author awaits with a singular feeling the report of the first impression produced by his creation in a quarter where he places confidence, and truly glad he is when that report proves favourable.

‘Do you think this book will tend to strengthen the idea that Currer Bell is a woman, or will it favour a contrary opinion?

‘I return the proof-sheets. Will they print all the French phrases in italics? I hope not, it makes them look somehow obtrusively conspicuous.

‘I have no time to add more lest I should be too late for the post. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*September* 10*th*, 1849.

'Dear Sir, — Your advice is very good, and yet I cannot follow it: I *cannot* alter now. It sounds absurd, but so it is.

'The circumstances of Shirley's being nervous on such a matter may appear incongruous because I fear it is not well managed; otherwise it is perfectly natural. In such minds, such odd points, such queer unexpected inconsistent weaknesses *are* found — perhaps there never was an ardent poetic temperament, however healthy, quite without them; but they never communicate them unless forced, they have a suspicion that the terror is absurd, and keep it hidden. Still the thing is badly managed, and I bend my head and expect in resignation what, *here*, I know I deserve — the lash of criticism. I shall wince when it falls, but not scream.

'You are right about Goth, you are very right — he is clear, deep, but very cold. I acknowledge him great, but cannot feel him genial.

'You mention the literary coteries. To speak the truth, I recoil from them, though I long to see some of the truly great literary characters. However, this is not to be yet — I cannot sacrifice my incognito. And let me be content with seclusion — it has its advantages. In general, indeed, I am tranquil, it is only now and then that a struggle disturbs me — that I wish for a wider world than Haworth. When it is past, Reason tells me how unfit I am for anything very different. Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*September* 15*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — You observed that the French of *Shirley* might be cavilled at. There is a long paragraph written in the French language in that chapter entitled "*Le coeval damped*." I forget the number. I fear it will have a pretentious air. If you deem it advisable, and will return the chapter, I will efface, and substitute something else in English. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO JAMES TAYLOR, CORNHILL

'*September* 20*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — It is time I answered the note which I received from you last Thursday; I should have replied to it before had I not been kept more than usually engaged by the presence of a clergyman in the house, and the indisposition of one of our servants.

'As you may conjecture, it cheered and pleased me much to learn that the opinion of my friends in Cornhill was favourable to *Shirley* — that, on the whole, it was considered no falling off from *Jane Eyre*. I am trying, however, not to encourage too sanguine an expectation of a favourable reception by the public: the seeds of prejudice have been sown, and I suppose the produce will have to be reaped — but we shall see.

‘I read with pleasure *Friends in Council*, and with very great pleasure *The Thoughts and Opinions of a Statesman*. It is the record of what may with truth be termed a beautiful mind — serene, harmonious, elevated, and pure; it bespeaks, too, a heart full of kindness and sympathy. I like it much.

‘Papa has been pretty well during the past week, he begs to join me in kind remembrances to yourself. — Believe me, my dear sir, yours very sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*September* 29*th*, 1849.

‘Dear Sir, — I have made the alteration; but I have made it to please Cornhill, not the public nor the critics.

‘I am sorry to say Newby does know my real name. I wish he did not, but that cannot be helped. Meantime, though I earnestly wish to preserve my incognito, I live under no slavish fear of discovery. I am ashamed of nothing I have written — not a line.

‘The envelope containing the first proof and your letter had been received open at the General Post Office and resealed there. Perhaps it was accident, but I think it better to inform you of the circumstance. — Yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*October* 1*st*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — I am chagrined about the envelope being opened: I see it is the work of prying curiosity, and now it would be useless to make a stir — what mischief is to be apprehended is already done. It was not done at Haworth. I know the people of the post-office there, and am sure they would not venture on such a step; besides, the Haworth people have long since set me down as bookish and quiet, and trouble themselves no farther about me. But the gossiping inquisitiveness of small towns is rife at Keighley; there they are sadly puzzled to guess why I never visit, encourage no overtures to acquaintance, and always stay at home. Those packets passing backwards and forwards by the post have doubtless aggravated their curiosity. Well, I am sorry, but I shall try to wait patiently and not vex myself too much, come what will.

‘I am glad you like the English substitute for the French *devour*.

‘The parcel of books came on Saturday. I write to Mr. Taylor by this post to acknowledge its receipt. His opinion of *Shirley* seems in a great measure to coincide with yours, only he expresses it rather differently to you, owing to the difference in your casts of mind. Are you not different on some points? — Yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*November* 1*st*, 1849

‘My dear Sir, — I reached home yesterday, and found your letter and one from Mr. Lewes, and one from the Peace Congress Committee, awaiting my arrival. The last document it is now too late to answer, for it was an invitation to Currer Bell to appear on the platform at their meeting at Exeter Hall last Tuesday! A wonderful figure Mr. Currer Bell would have cut under such circumstances! Should the "Peace Congress" chance to read *Shirley* they will wash their hands of its author.

'I am glad to hear that Mr. Thackeray is better, but I did not know he had been seriously ill, I thought it was only a literary indisposition. You must tell me what he thinks of *Shirley* if he gives you any opinion on the subject.

'I am also glad to hear that Mr. Smith is pleased with the commercial prospects of the work. I try not to be anxious about its literary fate; and if I cannot be quite stoical, I think I am still tolerably resigned.

'Mr. Lewes does not like the opening chapter, wherein he resembles you.

'I have permitted myself the treat of spending the last week with my friend Ellen. Her residence is in a far more populous and stirring neighbourhood than this. Whenever I go there I am unavoidably forced into society — clerical society chiefly.

'During my late visit I have too often had reason, sometimes in a pleasant, sometimes in a painful form, to fear that I no longer walk invisible. *Jane Eyre*, it appears, has been read all over the district — a fact of which I never dreamt — a circumstance of which the possibility never occurred to me. I met sometimes with new deference, with augmented kindness: old schoolfellows and old teachers, too, greeted me with generous warmth. And again, ecclesiastical brows lowered thunder at me. When I confronted one or two large-made priests, I longed for the battle to come on. I wish they would speak out plainly. You must not understand that my schoolfellows and teachers were of the Clergy Daughters School — in fact, I was never there but for one little year as a very little girl. I am certain I have long been forgotten; though for myself, I remember all and everything clearly: early impressions are ineffaceable.

'I have just received the *Daily News*. Let me speak the truth — when I read it my heart sickened over it. It is not a good review, it is unutterably false. If *Shirley* strikes all readers as it has struck that one, but — I shall not say what follows.

'On the whole I am glad a decidedly bad notice has come first — a notice whose inexpressible ignorance first stuns and then stirs me. Are there no such men as the Helstones and Yorkes?

'Yes, there are.

'Is the first chapter disgusting or vulgar?

'*It is not, it is real.*

'As for the praise of such a critic, I find it silly and nauseous, and I scorn it.

'Were my sisters now alive they and I would laugh over this notice; but they sleep, they will wake no more for me, and I am a fool to be so moved by what is not worth a sigh. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. B.

'You must spare me if I seem hasty, I fear I really am not so firm as I used to be, nor so patient. Whenever any shock comes, I feel that almost all supports have been withdrawn.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*November* 5*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I did not receive the parcel of copies till Saturday evening. Everything sent by Bradford is long in reaching me. It is, I think, better to direct: Keighley. I was very much pleased with the appearance and getting up of the book; it looks well.

'I have got the *Examiner* and your letter. You are very good not to be angry with me, for I wrote in indignation and grief. The critic of the *Daily News* struck me as to the last degree incompetent, ignorant, and flippant. A thrill of mutiny went all through me when I read his small effusion. To be judged by such a one revolted me. I ought, however, to have controlled myself, and I did not. I am willing to be judged by the *Examiner* — I like the *Examiner*. Fonblanque has power, he has discernment — I bend to his censorship, I am grateful for his praise; his blame deserves consideration; when he approves, I permit myself a moderate emotion of pride. Am I wrong in supposing that critique to be written by Mr. Fonblanque? But whether it is by him or Forster, I am thankful.

'In reading the critiques of the other papers — when I get them — I will try to follow your advice and preserve my equanimity. But I cannot be sure of doing this, for I had good resolutions and intentions before, and, you see, I failed.

'You ask me if I am related to Nelson. No, I never heard that I was. The rumour must have originated in our name resembling his title. I wonder who that former schoolfellow of mine was that told Mr. Lewes, or how she had been enabled to identify Currer Bell with C. Brontë. She could not have been a Cowan Bridge girl, none of them can possibly remember me. They might remember my eldest sister, Maria; her prematurely-developed and remarkable intellect, as well as the mildness, wisdom, and fortitude of her character might have left an indelible impression on some observant mind amongst her companions. My second sister, Elizabeth, too, may perhaps be remembered, but I cannot conceive that I left a trace behind me. My career was a very quiet one. I was plodding and industrious, perhaps I was very grave, for I suffered to see my sisters perishing, but I think I was remarkable for nothing. — Believe me, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*November* 15*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I have received since I wrote last the Globe, Standard of Freedom, Britannia, Economist, and Weekly Chronicle.

'How is *Shirley* getting on, and what is now the general feeling respecting the work?

'As far as I can judge from the tone of the newspapers, it seems that those who were most charmed with *Jane Eyre* are the least pleased with *Shirley*; they are disappointed at not finding the same excitement, interest, stimulus; while those who spoke disparagingly of *Jane Eyre* like *Shirley* a little better than her predecessor. I suppose its dryer matter suits their dryer minds. But I feel that the fiat for which I wait does not depend on newspapers, except, indeed, such newspapers as the *Examiner*. The monthlies and quarterlies will pronounce it, I suppose. Mere novel-readers, it is evident, think *Shirley* something of a failure. Still, the majority of the notices have on the whole been favourable. That in the *Standard of Freedom* was very kindly expressed; and coming from a dissenter, William Howitt, I wonder thereat.

'Are you satisfied at Cornhill, or the contrary? I have read part of *The Caxtons*, and, when I have finished, will tell you what I think of it; meantime, I should very much like to hear your opinion. Perhaps I shall keep mine till I see you, whenever that may be.

'I am trying by degrees to inure myself to the thought of some day stepping over to Keighley, taking the train to Leeds, thence to London, and once more venturing to set foot in the strange, busy whirl of the Strand and Cornhill. I want to talk to you a little and to hear by word of mouth how matters are progressing. Whenever I come, I must come quietly and but for a short time — I should be unhappy to leave papa longer than a fortnight. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*November* 22*nd*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — If it is discouraging to an author to see his work mouthed over by the entirely ignorant and incompetent, it is equally reviving to hear what you have written discussed and analysed by a critic who is master of his subject — by one whose heart feels, whose powers grasp the matter he undertakes to handle. Such refreshment Eugène Forçade has given me. Were I to see that man, my impulse would be to say, "Monsieur, you know me, I shall deem it an honour to know you."

'I do not find that Forçade detects any coarseness in the work — it is for the smaller critics to find that out. The master in the art — the subtle-thoughted, keen-eyed, quick-feeling Frenchman, knows the true nature of the ingredients which went to the composition of the creation he analyses — he knows the true nature of things, and he gives them their right name.

'Yours of yesterday has just reached me. Let me, in the first place, express my sincere sympathy with your anxiety on Mrs. Williams's account. I know how sad it is when pain and suffering attack those we love, when that mournful guest sickness comes and takes a place in the household circle. That the shadow may soon leave your home is my earnest hope.

‘Thank you for Sir J. Herschel’s note. I am happy to hear Mr. Taylor is convalescent. It may, perhaps, be some weeks yet before his hand is well, but that his general health is in the way of re-establishment is a matter of thankfulness.

‘One of the letters you sent to-day addressed “Currer Bell” has almost startled me. The writer first describes his family, and then proceeds to give a particular account of himself in colours the most candid, if not, to my ideas, the most attractive. He runs on in a strain of wild enthusiasm about *Shirley*, and concludes by announcing a fixed, deliberate resolution to institute a search after Currer Bell, and sooner or later to find him out. There is power in the letter — talent; it is at times eloquently expressed. The writer somewhat boastfully intimates that he is acknowledged the possessor of high intellectual attainments, but, if I mistake not, he betrays a temper to be shunned, habits to be mistrusted. While laying claim to the character of being affectionate, warm-hearted, and adhesive, there is but a single member of his own family of whom he speaks with kindness. He confesses himself indolent and wilful, but asserts that he is studious and, to some influences, docile. This letter would have struck me no more than the others rather like it have done, but for its rash power, and the disagreeable resolve it announces to seek and find Currer Bell. It almost makes me feel like a wizard who has raised a spirit he may find it difficult to lay. But I shall not think about it. This sort of fervour often foams itself away in words.

‘Trusting that the serenity of your home is by this time restored with your wife’s health, — I am, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*February* 16*th*, 1850.

‘Dear Nell, — Yesterday, just after dinner, I heard a loud bustling voice in the kitchen demanding to see Mr. Brontë. Somebody was shown into the parlour. Shortly after, wine was rung for. “Who is it, Martha?” I asked. “Some mak of a tradesman,” said she. “He’s not a gentleman, I’m sure.” The personage stayed about an hour, talking in a loud vulgar key all the time. At tea-time I asked papa who it was. “Why,” said he, “no other than the vicar of B — -!” Papa had invited him to take some refreshment, but the creature had ordered his dinner at the Black Bull, and was quite urgent with papa to go down there and join him, offering by way of inducement a bottle, or, if papa liked, “two or three bottles of the best wine Haworth could afford!” He said he was come from Bradford just to look at the place, and reckoned to be in raptures with the wild scenery! He warmly pressed papa to come and see him, and to bring his daughter with him!!! Does he know anything about the books, do you think; he made no allusion to them. I did not see him, not so much as the tail of his coat. Martha said he looked no more like a parson than she did. Papa described him as rather shabby-looking, but said he was wondrous cordial and friendly. Papa, in his usual fashion, put him through a regular catechism of questions: what his living was worth, etc., etc. In answer to inquiries respecting his age he affirmed himself to be thirty-seven — is not this a lie? He must be more. Papa asked him if he were married. He said no, he had no thoughts of being married, he did not like the trouble of a wife. He described himself as "living in style, and keeping a very hospitable house."

'Dear Nell, I have written you a long letter; write me a long one in answer.

'C. B.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*April 3rd*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I have received the *Dublin Review*, and your letter inclosing the Indian Notices. I hope these reviews will do good; they are all favourable, and one of them (the *Dublin*) is very able. I have read no critique so discriminating since that in the *Revue des deux Mondes*. It offers a curious contrast to Lewes's in the *Edinburgh*, where forced praise, given by jerks, and obviously without real and cordial liking, and censure, crude, conceited, and ignorant, were mixed in random lumps — forming a very loose and inconsistent whole.

'Are you aware whether there are any grounds for that conjecture in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, that the critique in the *Times* was from the pen of Mr. Thackeray? I should much like to know this. If such were the case (and I feel as if it were by no means impossible), the circumstance would open a most curious and novel glimpse of a very peculiar disposition. Do you think it likely to be true?

'The account you give of Mrs. Williams's health is not cheering, but I should think her indisposition is partly owing to the variable weather; at least, if you have had the same keen frost and cold east winds in London, from which we have lately suffered in Yorkshire. I trust the milder temperature we are now enjoying may quickly confirm her convalescence. With kind regards to Mrs. Williams, — Believe me, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*April 25th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I cannot let the post go without thanking Mr. Smith through you for the kind reply to Greenwood's application; and, I am sure, both you and he would feel true pleasure could you see the delight and hope with which these liberal terms have inspired a good and intelligent though poor man. He thinks he now sees a prospect of getting his livelihood by a method which will suit him better than wool-combing work has hitherto done, exercising more of his faculties and sparing his health. He will do his best, I am sure, to extend the sale of the cheap edition of *Jane Eyre*; and whatever twinges I may still feel at the thought of that work being in the possession of all the worthy folk of Haworth and Keighley, such scruples are more than counterbalanced by the attendant good; — I mean, by the assistance it will give a man who deserves assistance. I wish he could permanently establish a little bookselling business in Haworth: it would benefit the place as well as himself.

'Thank you for the *Leader*, which I read with pleasure. The notice of Newman's work in a late number was very good. — Believe me, my dear sir, in haste, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*May* 6*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I have received the copy of *Jane Eyre*. To me the printing and paper seem very tolerable. Will not the public in general be of the same opinion? And are you not making yourselves causelessly uneasy on the subject?

'I imagine few will discover the defects of typography unless they are pointed out. There are, no doubt, technical faults and perfections in the art of printing to which printers and publishers ascribe a greater importance than the majority of readers.

'I will mention Mr. Smith's proposal respecting the cheap publications to Greenwood. I believe him to be a man on whom encouragement is not likely to be thrown away, and who, if fortune should not prove quite adverse, will contrive to effect something by dint of intelligence and perseverance.

'I am sorry to say my father has been far from well lately — the cold weather has tried him severely; and, till I see him better, my intended journey to town must be deferred. With sincere regards to yourself and other Cornhill friends, — I am, my dear sir, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*September* 5*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I trust your suggestion for Miss Kavanagh's benefit will have all success. It seems to me truly felicitous and excellent, and, I doubt not, she will think so too. The last class of female character will be difficult to manage: there will be nice points in it — yet, well-managed, both an attractive and instructive book might result therefrom. One thing may be depended upon in the execution of this plan. Miss Kavanagh will commit no error, either of taste, judgment, or principle; and even when she deals with the feelings, I would rather follow the calm course of her quiet pen than the flourishes of a more redundant one where there is not strength to restrain as well as ardour to impel.

'I fear I seemed to you to speak coolly of the beauty of the Lake scenery. The truth is, it was, as scenery, exquisite — far beyond anything I saw in Scotland; but it did not give me half so much pleasure, because I saw it under less congenial auspices. Mr. Smith and Sir J. K. Shuttleworth are two different people with whom to travel. I need say nothing of the former — you know him. The latter offers me his friendship, and I do my best to be grateful for the gift; but his is a nature with which it is difficult to assimilate — and where there is no assimilation, how can there be real regard? Nine parts out of ten in him are utilitarian — the tenth is artistic. This tithe of his nature seems to me at war with all the rest — it is just enough to incline him restlessly towards the artist class, and far too little to make him one of them. The consequent inability to *do* things which he *admires*, embitters him I think — it makes him doubt perfections and dwell on faults. Then his notice or presence scarcely tend to set one at ease or make one happy: he is worldly and formal. But I must stop — have I already said too much? I think not, for you will feel it is said in confidence and will not repeat it.

'The article in the *Palladium* is indeed such as to atone for a hundred unfavourable or imbecile reviews. I have expressed what I think of it to Mr. Taylor, who kindly wrote me a letter on the subject. I thank you also for the newspaper notices, and for some you sent me a few weeks ago.

'I should much like to carry out your suggestions respecting a reprint of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* in one volume, with a prefatory and explanatory notice of the authors; but the question occurs, Would Newby claim it? I could not bear to commit it to any other hands than those of Mr. Smith. *Wildfell Hall*, it hardly appears to me desirable to preserve. The choice of subject in that work is a mistake: it was too little consonant with the character, tastes, and ideas of the gentle, retiring, inexperienced writer. She wrote it under a strange, conscientious, half-ascetic notion of accomplishing a painful penance and a severe duty. Blameless in deed and almost in thought, there was from her very childhood a tinge of religious melancholy in her mind. This I ever suspected, and I have found amongst her papers mournful proofs that such was the case. As to additional compositions, I think there would be none, as I would not offer a line to the publication of which my sisters themselves would have objected.

'I must conclude or I shall be too late for the post. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*September* 13*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — Mr. Newby undertook first to print 350 copies of *Wuthering Heights*, but he afterwards declared he had only printed 250. I doubt whether he could be induced to return the £50 without a good deal of trouble — much more than I should feel justified in delegating to Mr. Smith. For my own part, the conclusion I drew from the whole of Mr. Newby's conduct to my sisters was that he is a man with whom it is desirable to have little to do. I think he must be needy as well as tricky — and if he is, one would not distress him, even for one's rights.

'If Mr. Smith thinks right to reprint *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, I would prepare a preface comprising a brief and simple notice of the authors, such as might set at rest all erroneous conjectures respecting their identity —

and adding a few poetical remains of each.

'In case this arrangement is approved, you will kindly let me know, and I will commence the task (a sad, but, I believe, a necessary one), and send it when finished. — I am, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*October* 16*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — On the whole it is perhaps as well that the last paragraph of the Preface should be omitted, for I believe it was not expressed with the best grace in the world. You must not, however, apologise for your suggestion — it was kindly meant and, believe me, kindly taken; it was not *you* I misunderstood — not for a moment, I never misunderstand you — I was thinking of the critics and the public, who are always crying for a moral like the Pharisees for a sign. Does this assurance quite satisfy you?

'I forgot to say that I had already heard, first from Miss Martineau, and subsequently through an intimate friend of Sydney Yendys (whose real name is Mr. Dobell) that it was to the author of the *Roman* we are indebted for that eloquent article in the *Palladium*. I am glad you are going to send his poem, for I much wished to see it.

'May I trouble you to look at a sentence in the Preface which I have erased, because on reading it over I was not quite sure about the scientific correctness of the expressions used. Metal, I know, will burn in vivid-coloured flame, exposed to galvanic action, but whether it is consumed, I am not sure. Perhaps you or Mr. Taylor can tell me whether there is any blunder in the term employed — if not, it might stand. — I am, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

Miss Brontë would seem to have corresponded with Mr. George Smith, and not with Mr. Williams, over her third novel, *Villette*, and that correspondence is to be found in Mrs. Gaskell's biography.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*February* 1*st*, 1851.

'My dear Sir, — I cannot lose any time in telling you that your letter, after all, gave me heart-felt satisfaction, and such a feeling of relief as it would be difficult to express in words. The fact is, what goads and tortures me is not any anxiety of my own to publish another book, to have my name before the public, to get cash, etc., but a haunting fear that my dilatoriness disappoints others. Now the "others" whose wish on the subject I really care for, reduces itself to my father and Cornhill, and since Cornhill ungrudgingly counsels me to take my own time, I think I can pacify such impatience as my dear father naturally feels. Indeed, your kind and friendly letter will greatly help me.

'Since writing the above, I have read your letter to papa. Your arguments had weight with him: he approves, and I am content. I now only regret the necessity of disappointing the *Palladium*, but that cannot be helped. — Good-bye, my dear sir, yours very sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*Tuesday Morning*.

‘Dear Ellen, — The rather dark view you seem inclined to take of the general opinion about *Villette* surprises me the less, dear Nell, as only the more unfavourable reviews seem to have come in your way. Some reports reach me of a different tendency; but no matter, time will shew. As to the character of Lucy Snow, my intention from the first was that she should not occupy the pedestal to which Jane Eyre was raised by some injudicious admirers. She is where I meant her to be, and where no charge of self-laudation can touch her.

‘I cannot accept your kind invitation. I must be at home at Easter, on two or three accounts connected with sermons to be preached, parsons to be entertained, Mechanics’ Institute meetings and tea-drinkings to be solemnised, and ere long I have promised to go and see Mrs. Gaskell; but till this wintry weather is passed, I would rather eschew visiting anywhere. I trust that bad cold of yours is *quite* well, and that you will take good care of yourself in future. That night work is always perilous. — Yours faithfully,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS WOOLER

‘Haworth, *April* 13*th*, 1851.

‘My dear Miss Wooler, — Your last kind letter ought to have been answered long since, and would have been, did I find it practicable to proportion the promptitude of the response to the value I place upon my correspondents and their communications. You will easily understand, however, that the contrary rule often holds good, and that the epistle which importunes often takes precedence of that which interests.

‘My publishers express entire satisfaction with the reception which has been accorded to *Villette*, and indeed the majority of the reviews has been favourable enough; you will be aware, however, that there is a minority, small in number but influential in character, which views the work with no favourable eye. Currer Bell’s remarks on Romanism have drawn down on him the condign displeasure of the High Church party, which displeasure has been unequivocally expressed through their principal organs — the *Guardian*, the *English Churchman*, and the *Christian Remembrancer*. I can well understand that some of the charges launched against me by those publications will tell heavily to my prejudice in the minds of most readers — but this must be borne; and for my part, I can suffer no accusation to oppress me much which is not supported by the inward evidence of conscience and reason.

‘“Extremes meet,” says the proverb; in proof whereof I would mention that Miss Martineau finds with *Villette* nearly the same fault as the Puseyites. She accuses me with attacking popery “with virulence,” of going out of my way to assault it “passionately.” In other respects she has shown with reference to the work a spirit so strangely and unexpectedly acrimonious, that I have gathered courage to tell her that the gulf of mutual difference between her and me is so wide and deep, the bridge of union so slight and uncertain, I have come to the conclusion that frequent intercourse would be most perilous and unadvisable, and have begged to adjourn *sine die* my long projected visit to her. Of course she is now very angry, and I know her bitterness will not be short-lived — but it cannot be helped.

‘Two or three weeks since I received a long and kind letter from Mr. White, which I answered a short time ago. I believe Mr. White thinks me a much hotter advocate for *change* and what is called “political progress” than I am. However, in my reply, I did not touch on these subjects. He intimated a wish to publish some of his own MSS. I fear he would hardly like the somewhat dissuasive tendency of my answer; but really, in these days of headlong competition, it is a great risk to publish. If all be well, I purpose going to Manchester next week to spend a few days with Mrs. Gaskell. Ellen’s visit to Yarmouth seems for the present given up; and really, all things considered, I think the circumstance is scarcely to be regretted.

‘Do you not think, my dear Miss Wooler, that you could come to Haworth before you go to the coast? I am afraid that when you once get settled at the sea-side your stay will not be brief. I must repeat that a visit from you would be anticipated with pleasure, not only by me, but by every inmate of Haworth Parsonage. Papa has given me a general commission to send his respects to you whenever I write — accept them, therefore, and — Believe me, yours affectionately and sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

CHAPTER XIV: WILLIAM SMITH WILLIAMS

In picturing the circle which surrounded Charlotte Brontë through her brief career, it is of the utmost importance that a word of recognition should be given, and that in no half-hearted manner, to Mr. William Smith Williams, who, in her later years, was Charlotte Brontë's most intimate correspondent. The letters to Mr. Williams are far and away the best that Charlotte wrote, at least of those which have been preserved. They are full of literary enthusiasm and of intellectual interest. They show Charlotte Brontë's sound judgment and good heart more effectually than any other material which has been placed at the disposal of biographers. They are an honour both to writer and receiver, and, in fact, reflect the mind of the one as much as the mind of the other. Charlotte has emphasised the fact that she adapted herself to her correspondents, and in her letters to Mr. Williams we have her at her very best. Mr. Williams occupied for many years the post of 'reader' in the firm of Smith & Elder. That is a position scarcely less honourable and important than authorship itself. In our own days Mr. George Meredith and Mr. John Morley have been 'readers,' and Mr. James Payn has held the same post in the firm which published the Brontë novels.

Mr. Williams, who was born in 1800, and died in 1875, had an interesting career even before he became associated with Smith & Elder. In his younger days he was apprenticed to Taylor & Hessey of Fleet Street; and he used to relate how his boyish ideals of Coleridge were shattered on beholding, for the first time, the bulky and ponderous figure of the great talker. When Keats left England, for an early grave in Rome, it was Mr. Williams who saw him off. Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and many other well-known men of letters were friendly with Mr. Williams from his earliest days, and he had for brother-in-law, Wells, the author of *Joseph and his Brethren*. In his association with Smith & Elder he secured the friendship of Thackeray, of Mrs. Gaskell, and of many other writers. He attracted the notice of Ruskin by a keen enthusiasm for the work of Turner. It was he, in fact, who compiled that most interesting volume of *Selections from the writings of John Ruskin*, which has long gone out of print in its first form, but is still greatly sought for by the curious. In connection with this volume I may print here a letter written by John Ruskin's father to Mr. Williams, and I do so the more readily, as Mr. Williams's name was withheld from the title-page of the *Selections*.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

Denmark Hill, 25*th November*, 1861.

'My dear Sir, — I am requested by Mrs. Ruskin to return her very sincere and grateful thanks for your kind consideration in presenting her with so beautifully bound a copy of the *Selections* from her son's writings; and which she will have great pleasure in seeing by the side of the very magnificent volumes which the liberality of the gentlemen of your house has already enriched our library with.

‘Mrs. Ruskin joins me in offering congratulations on the great judgment you have displayed in your *Selections*, and, sending my own thanks and those of my son for the handsome gift to Mrs. Ruskin, — I am, my dear sir, yours very truly,

‘John James Ruskin.’

What Charlotte Brontë thought of Mr. Williams is sufficiently revealed by the multitude of letters which I have the good fortune to print, and that she had a reason to be grateful to him is obvious when we recollect that to him, and to him alone, was due her first recognition. The parcel containing *The Professor* had wandered from publisher to publisher before it came into the hands of Mr. Williams. It was he who recognised what all of us recognise now, that in spite of faults it is really a most considerable book. I am inclined to think that it was refused by Smith & Elder rather on account of its insufficient length than for any other cause. At any rate it was the length which was assigned to her as a reason for non-acceptance. She was told that another book, which would make the accredited three volume novel, might receive more favourable consideration.

Charlotte Brontë took Mr. Williams’s advice. She wrote *Jane Eyre*, and despatched it quickly to Smith & Elder’s house in Cornhill. It was read by Mr. Williams, and read afterwards by Mr. George Smith; and it was published with the success that we know. Charlotte awoke to find herself famous. She became a regular correspondent with Mr. Williams, and not less than a hundred letters were sent to him, most of them treating of interesting literary matters.

One of Mr. Williams’s daughters, I may add, married Mr. Lowes Dickenson the portrait painter; his youngest child, a baby when Miss Brontë was alive, is famous in the musical world as Miss Anna Williams. The family has an abundance of literary and artistic association, but the father we know as the friend and correspondent of Charlotte Brontë. He still lives also in the memory of a large circle as a kindly and attractive — a singularly good and upright man.

Comment upon the following letters is in well-nigh every case superfluous.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*February* 25*th* 1848.

‘My dear Sir, — I thank you for your note; its contents moved me much, though not to unmingled feelings of exultation. Louis Philippe (unhappy and sordid old man!) and M. Guizot doubtless merit the sharp lesson they are now being taught, because they have both proved themselves men of dishonest hearts. And every struggle any nation makes in the cause of Freedom and Truth has something noble in it — something that makes me wish it success;

but I cannot believe that France — or at least Paris — will ever be the battle-ground of true Liberty, or the scene of its real triumphs. I fear she does not know "how genuine glory is put on." Is that strength to be found in her which will not bend "but in magnanimous meekness"? Have not her "unceasing changes" as yet always brought "perpetual emptiness"? Has Paris the materials within her for thorough reform? Mean, dishonest Guizot being discarded, will any better successor be found for him than brilliant, unprincipled Thiers?

'But I damp your enthusiasm, which I would not wish to do, for true enthusiasm is a fine feeling whose flash I admire wherever I see it.

'The little note inclosed in yours is from a French lady, who asks my consent to the translation of *Jane Eyre* into the French language. I thought it better to consult you before I replied. I suppose she is competent to produce a decent translation, though one or two errors of orthography in her note rather afflict the eye; but I know that it is not unusual for what are considered well-educated French women to fail in the point of writing their mother tongue correctly. But whether competent or not, I presume she has a right to translate the book with or without my consent. She gives her address: Mdlle B — -
W. Cumming, Esq., 23 North Bank, Regent's Park.

'Shall I reply to her note in the affirmative?

'Waiting your opinion and answer, — I remain, dear sir, yours faithfully,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*February* 28*th*, 1848.

'Dear Sir, — I have done as you advised me respecting Mdlle B — -, thanked her for her courtesy, and explained that I do not wish my consent to be regarded in the light of a formal sanction of the translation.

'From the papers of Saturday I had learnt the abdication of Louis Philippe, the flight of the royal family, and the proclamation of a republic in France. Rapid movements these, and some of them difficult of comprehension to a remote spectator. What sort of spell has withered Louis Philippe's strength? Why, after having so long infatuatedly clung to Guizot, did he at once ignobly relinquish him? Was it panic that made him so suddenly quit his throne and abandon his adherents without a struggle to retain one or aid the other?

'Perhaps it might have been partly fear, but I daresay it was still more long-gathering weariness of the dangers and toils of royalty. Few will pity the old monarch in his flight, yet I own he seems to me an object of pity. His sister's death shook him; years are heavy on him; the sword of Damocles has long been hanging over his head. One cannot forget that monarchs and ministers are only human, and have only human energies to sustain them; and often they are sore beset. Party spirit has no mercy; indignant Freedom seldom shows forbearance in her hour of revolt. I wish you *could* see the aged gentleman trudging down Cornhill with his umbrella and carpet-bag, in good earnest; he would be safe in England: John Bull might laugh at him but he would do him no harm.

‘How strange it appears to see literary and scientific names figuring in the list of members of a Provisional Government! How would it sound if Carlyle and Sir John Herschel and Tennyson and Mr. Thackeray and Douglas Jerrold were selected to manufacture a new constitution for England? Whether do such men sway the public mind most effectually from their quiet studies or from a council-chamber?

‘And Thiers is set aside for a time; but won’t they be glad of him by-and-by? Can they set aside entirely anything so clever, so subtle, so accomplished, so aspiring — in a word, so thoroughly French, as he is? Is he not the man to bide his time — to watch while unskilful theorists try their hand at administration and fail; and then to step out and show them how it should be done?

‘One would have thought political disturbance the natural element of a mind like Thiers’; but I know nothing of him except from his writings, and I always think he writes as if the shade of Bonaparte were walking to and fro in the room behind him and dictating every line he pens, sometimes approaching and bending over his shoulder, *pour voir de ses yeux* that such an action or event is represented or misrepresented (as the case may be) exactly as he wishes it. Thiers seems to have contemplated Napoleon’s character till he has imbibed some of its nature. Surely he must be an ambitious man, and, if so, surely he will at this juncture struggle to rise.

‘You should not apologise for what you call your “crudities.” You know I like to hear your opinions and views on whatever subject it interests you to discuss.

‘From the little inscription outside your note I conclude you sent me the *Examiner*. I thank you therefore for your kind intention and am sorry some unscrupulous person at the Post Office frustrated it, as no paper has reached my hands. I suppose one ought to be thankful that letters are respected, as newspapers are by no means sure of safe conveyance. — I remain, dear sir, yours sincerely,

‘C. Bell.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*May* 12*th*, 1848.

‘My dear Sir, — I take a large sheet of paper, because I foresee that I am about to write another long letter, and for the same reason as before, viz., that yours interested me.

‘I have received the *Morning Chronicle*, and was both surprised and pleased to see the passage you speak of in one of its leading articles. An allusion of that sort seems to say more than a regular notice. I *do* trust I may have the power so to write in future as not to disappoint those who have been kind enough to think and speak well of *Jane Eyre*; at any rate, I will take pains. But still, whenever I hear my one book praised, the pleasure I feel is chastened by a mixture of doubt and fear; and, in truth, I hardly wish it to be otherwise: it is much too early for me to feel safe, or to take as my due the commendation bestowed.

'Some remarks in your last letter on teaching commanded my attention. I suppose you never were engaged in tuition yourself; but if you had been, you could not have more exactly hit on the great qualification — I had almost said the *one* great qualification — necessary to the task: the faculty, not merely of acquiring but of imparting knowledge — the power of influencing young minds — that natural fondness for, that innate sympathy with, children, which, you say, Mrs. Williams is so happy as to possess. He or she who possesses this faculty, this sympathy — though perhaps not otherwise highly accomplished — need never fear failure in the career of instruction. Children will be docile with them, will improve under them; parents will consequently repose in them confidence. Their task will be comparatively light, their path comparatively smooth. If the faculty be absent, the life of a teacher will be a struggle from beginning to end. No matter how amiable the disposition, how strong the sense of duty, how active the desire to please; no matter how brilliant and varied the accomplishments; if the governess has not the power to win her young charge, the secret to instil gently and surely her own knowledge into the growing mind intrusted to her, she will have a wearing, wasting existence of it. To *educate* a child, as I daresay Mrs. Williams has educated her children, probably with as much pleasure to herself as profit to them, will indeed be impossible to the teacher who lacks this qualification. But, I conceive, should circumstances — as in the case of your daughters — compel a young girl notwithstanding to adopt a governess's profession, she may contrive to *instruct* and even to instruct well. That is, though she cannot form the child's mind, mould its character, influence its disposition, and guide its conduct as she would wish, she may give lessons — even good, clear, clever lessons in the various branches of knowledge. She may earn and doubly earn her scanty salary as a daily governess. As a school-teacher she may succeed; but as a resident governess she will never (except under peculiar and exceptional circumstances) be happy. Her deficiency will harass her not so much in school-time as in play-hours; the moments that would be rest and recreation to the governess who understood and could adapt herself to children, will be almost torture to her who has not that power. Many a time, when her charge turns unruly on her hands, when the responsibility which she would wish to discharge faithfully and perfectly, becomes unmanageable to her, she will wish herself a housemaid or kitchen girl, rather than a baited, trampled, desolate, distracted governess.

'The Governesses' Institution may be an excellent thing in some points of view, but it is both absurd and cruel to attempt to raise still higher the standard of acquirements. Already governesses are not half nor a quarter paid for what they teach, nor in most instances is half or a quarter of their attainments required by their pupils. The young teacher's chief anxiety, when she sets out in life, always is to know a great deal; her chief fear that she should not know enough. Brief experience will, in most instances, show her that this anxiety has been misdirected. She will rarely be found too ignorant for her pupils; the demand on her knowledge will not often be larger than she can answer. But on her patience — on her self-control, the requirement will be enormous; on her animal spirits (and woe be to her if these fail!) the pressure will be immense.

'I have seen an ignorant nursery-maid who could scarcely read or write, by dint of an excellent, serviceable, sanguine, phlegmatic temperament, which made her at once cheerful and unmoveable; of a robust constitution and steady, unimpassionable nerves, which kept her firm under shocks and unharassed under annoyances — manage with comparative ease a large family of spoilt children, while their governess lived amongst them a life of inexpressible misery: tyrannised over, finding her efforts to please and teach utterly vain, chagrined, distressed, worried — so badgered, so trodden on, that she ceased almost at last to know herself, and wondered in what despicable, trembling frame her oppressed mind was prisoned, and could not realise the idea of ever more being treated with respect and regarded with affection — till she finally resigned her situation and went away quite broken in spirit and reduced to the verge of decline in health.

'Those who would urge on governesses more acquirements, do not know the origin of their chief sufferings. It is more physical and mental strength, denser moral impassibility that they require, rather than additional skill in arts or sciences. As to the forcing system, whether applied to teachers or taught, I hold it to be a cruel system.

'It is true the world demands a brilliant list of accomplishments. For £20 per annum, it expects in one woman the attainments of several professors — but the demand is insensate, and I think should rather be resisted than complied with. If I might plead with you in behalf of your daughters, I should say, "Do not let them waste their young lives in trying to attain manifold accomplishments. Let them try rather to possess thoroughly, fully, one or two talents; then let them endeavour to lay in a stock of health, strength, cheerfulness. Let them labour to attain self-control, endurance, fortitude, firmness; if possible, let them learn from their mother something of the precious art she possesses — these things, together with sound principles, will be their best supports, their best aids through a governess's life.

'As for that one who, you say, has a nervous horror of exhibition, I need not beg you to be gentle with her; I am sure you will not be harsh, but she must be firm with herself, or she will repent it in after life. She should begin by degrees to endeavour to overcome her diffidence. Were she destined to enjoy an independent, easy existence, she might respect her natural disposition to seek retirement, and even cherish it as a shade-loving virtue; but since that is not her lot, since she is fated to make her way in the crowd, and to depend on herself, she should say: I will try and learn the art of self-possession, not that I may display my accomplishments, but that I may have the satisfaction of feeling that I am my own mistress, and can move and speak undaunted by the fear of man. While, however, I pen this piece of advice, I confess that it is much easier to give than to follow. What the sensations of the nervous are under the gaze of publicity none but the nervous know; and how powerless reason and resolution are to control them would sound incredible except to the actual sufferers.

'The rumours you mention respecting the authorship of *Jane Eyre* amused me inexpressibly. The gossips are, on this subject, just where I should wish them to be, *i.e.*, as far from the truth as possible; and as they have not a grain of fact to found their fictions upon, they fabricate pure inventions. Judge Erle must, I think, have made up his story expressly for a hoax; the other *fib* is amazing — so circumstantial! called on the author, forsooth! Where did he live, I wonder? In what purlieu of Cockayne? Here I must stop, lest if I run on further I should fill another sheet. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'Currer Bell.

'*P.S.* — I must, after all, add a morsel of paper, for I find, on glancing over yours, that I have forgotten to answer a question you ask respecting my next work. I have not therein so far treated of governesses, as I do not wish it to resemble its predecessor. I often wish to say something about the "condition of women" question, but it is one respecting which so much "cant" has been talked, that one feels a sort of repugnance to approach it. It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked, but where or how could another be opened? Many say that the professions now filled only by men should be open to women also; but are not their present occupants and candidates more than numerous enough to answer every demand? Is there any room for female lawyers, female doctors, female engravers, for more female artists, more authoresses? One can see where the evil lies, but who can point out the remedy? When a woman has a little family to rear and educate and a household to conduct, her hands are full, her vocation is evident; when her destiny isolates her, I suppose she must do what she can, live as she can, complain as little, bear as much, work as well as possible. This is not high theory, but I believe it is sound practice, good to put into execution while philosophers and legislators ponder over the better ordering of the social system. At the same time, I conceive that when patience has done its utmost and industry its best, whether in the case of women or operatives, and when both are baffled, and pain and want triumph, the sufferer is free, is entitled, at last to send up to Heaven any piercing cry for relief, if by that cry he can hope to obtain succour.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*June* 2, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — I snatch a moment to write a hasty line to you, for it makes me uneasy to think that your last kind letter should have remained so long unanswered. A succession of little engagements, much more importunate than important, have quite engrossed my time lately, to the exclusion of more momentous and interesting occupations. Interruption is a sad bore, and I believe there is hardly a spot on earth, certainly not in England, quite secure from its intrusion. The fact is, you cannot live in this world entirely for one aim; you must take along with some single serious purpose a hundred little minor duties, cares, distractions; in short, you must take life as it is, and make the best of it. Summer is decidedly a bad season for application, especially in the country; for the sunshine seems to set all your acquaintances astir, and, once bent on amusement, they will come to the ends of the earth in search thereof. I was obliged to you for your suggestion about writing a letter to the *Morning Chronicle*, but I did not follow it up. I think I would rather not venture on such a step at present. Opinions I would not hesitate to express to you — because you are indulgent — are not mature or cool enough for the public; Currer Bell is not Carlyle, and must not imitate him.

'Whenever you can write to me without encroaching too much on your valuable time, remember I shall always be glad to hear from you. Your last letter interested me fully as much as its two predecessors; what you said about your family pleased me; I think details of character always have a charm even when they relate to people we have never seen, nor expect to see. With eight children you must have a busy life; but, from the manner in which you allude to your two eldest daughters, it is evident that they at least are a source of satisfaction to their parents; I hope this will be the case with the whole number, and then you will never feel as if you had too many. A dozen children with sense and good conduct may be less burdensome than one who lacks these qualities. It seems a long time since I heard from you. I shall be glad to hear from you again. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *June* 15*th*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — Thank you for your two last letters. In reading the first I quite realised your May holiday; I enjoyed it with you. I saw the pretty south-of-England village, so different from our northern congregations of smoke-dark houses clustered round their soot-vomiting mills. I saw in your description, fertile, flowery Essex — a contrast indeed to the rough and rude, the mute and sombre yet well-beloved moors over-spreading this corner of Yorkshire. I saw the white schoolhouse, the venerable school-master — I even thought I saw you and your daughters; and in your second letter I see you all distinctly, for, in describing your children, you unconsciously describe yourself.

'I may well say that your letters are of value to me, for I seldom receive one but I find something in it which makes me reflect, and reflect on new themes. Your town life is somewhat different from any I have known, and your allusions to its advantages, troubles, pleasures, and struggles are often full of significance to me.

‘I have always been accustomed to think that the necessity of earning one’s subsistence is not in itself an evil, but I feel it may become a heavy evil if health fails, if employment lacks, if the demand upon our efforts made by the weakness of others dependent upon us becomes greater than our strength suffices to answer. In such a case I can imagine that the married man may wish himself single again, and that the married woman, when she sees her husband over-exerting himself to maintain her and her children, may almost wish — out of the very force of her affection for him — that it had never been her lot to add to the weight of his responsibilities. Most desirable then is it that all, both men and women, should have the power and the will to work for themselves — most advisable that both sons and daughters should early be inured to habits of independence and industry. Birds teach their nestlings to fly as soon as their wings are strong enough, they even oblige them to quit the nest if they seem too unwilling to trust their pinions of their own accord. Do not the swallow and the starling thus give a lesson by which man might profit?

‘It seems to me that your kind heart is pained by the thought of what your daughter may suffer if transplanted from a free and indulged home existence to a life of constraint and labour amongst strangers. Suffer she probably will; but take both comfort and courage, my dear sir, try to soothe your anxiety by this thought, which is not a fallacious one. Hers will not be a barren suffering; she will gain by it largely; she will “sow in tears to reap in joy.” A governess’s experience is frequently indeed bitter, but its results are precious: the mind, feeling, temper are there subjected to a discipline equally painful and priceless. I have known many who were unhappy as governesses, but not one who regretted having undergone the ordeal, and scarcely one whose character was not improved — at once strengthened and purified, fortified and softened, made more enduring for her own afflictions, more considerate for the afflictions of others, by passing through it.

‘Should your daughter, however, go out as governess, she should first take a firm resolution not to be too soon daunted by difficulties, too soon disgusted by disagreeables; and if she has a high spirit, sensitive feelings, she should tutor the one to submit, the other to endure, *for the sake of those at home*. That is the governess’s best talisman of patience, it is the best balm for wounded susceptibility. When tried hard she must say, “I will be patient, not out of servility, but because I love my parents, and wish through my perseverance, diligence, and success, to repay their anxieties and tenderness for me.” With this aid the least-deserved insult may often be swallowed quite calmly, like a bitter pill with a draught of fair water.

‘I think you speak excellent sense when you say that girls without fortune should be brought up and accustomed to support themselves; and that if they marry poor men, it should be with a prospect of being able to help their partners. If all parents thought so, girls would not be reared on speculation with a view to their making mercenary marriages; and, consequently, women would not be so piteously degraded as they now too often are.

'Fortuneless people may certainly marry, provided they previously resolve never to let the consequences of their marriage throw them as burdens on the hands of their relatives. But as life is full of unforeseen contingencies, and as a woman may be so placed that she cannot possibly both "guide the house" and earn her livelihood (what leisure, for instance, could Mrs. Williams have with her eight children?), young artists and young governesses should think twice before they unite their destinies.

'You speak sense again when you express a wish that Fanny were placed in a position where active duties would engage her attention, where her faculties would be exercised and her mind occupied, and where, I will add, not doubting that my addition merely completes your half-approved idea, the image of the young artist would for the present recede into the background and remain for a few years to come in modest perspective, the finishing point of a vista stretching a considerable distance into futurity. Fanny may feel sure of this: if she intends to be an artist's wife she had better try an apprenticeship with Fortune as a governess first; she cannot undergo a better preparation for that honourable (honourable if rightly considered) but certainly not luxurious destiny.

'I should say then — judging as well as I can from the materials for forming an opinion your letter affords, and from what I can thence conjecture of Fanny's actual and prospective position — that you would do well and wisely to put your daughter out. The experiment might do good and could not do harm, because even if she failed at the first trial (which is not unlikely) she would still be in some measure benefited by the effort.

'I duly received *Mirabeau* from Mr. Smith. I must repeat, it is really *too* kind. When I have read the book, I will tell you what I think of it — its subject is interesting. One thing a little annoyed me — as I glanced over the pages I fancied I detected a savour of Carlyle's peculiarities of style. Now Carlyle is a great man, but I always wish he would write plain English; and to imitate his Germanisms is, I think, to imitate his faults. Is the author of this work a Manchester man? I must not ask his name, I suppose. — Believe me, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'Currer Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*June* 22*nd*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — After reading a book which has both interested and informed you, you like to be able, on laying it down, to speak of it with unqualified approbation — to praise it cordially; you do not like to stint your panegyric, to counteract its effect with blame.

'For this reason I feel a little difficulty in telling you what I think of *The Life of Mirabeau*. It has interested me much, and I have derived from it additional information. In the course of reading it, I have often felt called upon to approve the ability and tact of the writer, to admire the skill with which he conducts the narrative, enchains the reader's attention, and keeps it fixed upon his hero; but I have also been moved frequently to disapprobation. It is not the political principles of the writer with which I find fault, nor is it his talents I feel inclined to disparage; to speak truth, it is his manner of treating Mirabeau's errors that offends — then, I think, he is neither wise nor right — there, I think, he betrays a little of crudeness, a little of presumption, not a little of indiscretion.

'Could you with confidence put this work into the hands of your son, secure that its perusal would not harm him, that it would not leave on his mind some vague impression that there is a grandeur in vice committed on a colossal scale? Whereas, the fact is, that in vice there is no grandeur, that it is, on whichever side you view it, and in whatever accumulation, only a foul, sordid, and degrading thing. The fact is, that this great Mirabeau was a mixture of divinity and dirt; that there was no divinity whatever in his errors, they were all sullying dirt; that they ruined him, brought down his genius to the kennel, deadened his fine nature and generous sentiments, made all his greatness as nothing; that they cut him off in his prime, obviated all his aims, and struck him dead in the hour when France most needed him.

'Mirabeau's life and fate teach, to my perception, the most depressing lesson I have read for years. One would fain have hoped that so many noble qualities must have made a noble character and achieved noble ends. No — the mighty genius lived a miserable and degraded life, and died a dog's death, for want of self-control, for want of morality, for lack of religion. One's heart is wrung for Mirabeau after reading his life; and it is not of his greatness we think, when we close the volume, so much as of his hopeless recklessness, and of the sufferings, degradation, and untimely end in which it issued. It appears to me that the biographer errs also in being too solicitous to present his hero always in a striking point of view — too negligent of the exact truth. He eulogises him too much; he subdues all the other characters mentioned and keeps them in the shade that Mirabeau may stand out more conspicuously. This, no doubt, is right in art, and admissible in fiction; but in history (and biography is the history of an individual) it tends to weaken the force of a narrative by weakening your faith in its accuracy.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

Chapter Coffee-House, Ivy Lane,
'*July* 8*th*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — Your invitation is too welcome not to be at once accepted. I should much like to see Mrs. Williams and her children, and very much like to have a quiet chat with yourself. Would it suit you if we came to-morrow, after dinner — say about seven o'clock, and spent Sunday evening with you?

'We shall be truly glad to see you whenever it is convenient to you to call. — I am, my dear sir, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *July* 13*th*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — We reached home safely yesterday, and in a day or two I doubt not we shall get the better of the fatigues of our journey.

'It was a somewhat hasty step to hurry up to town as we did, but I do not regret having taken it. In the first place, mystery is irksome, and I was glad to shake it off with you and Mr. Smith, and to show myself to you for what I am, neither more nor less — thus removing any false expectations that may have arisen under the idea that Currer Bell had a just claim to the masculine cognomen he, perhaps somewhat presumptuously, adopted — that he was, in short, of the nobler sex.

'I was glad also to see you and Mr. Smith, and am very happy now to have such pleasant recollections of you both, and of your respective families. My satisfaction would have been complete could I have seen Mrs. Williams. The appearance of your children tallied on the whole accurately with the description you had given of them. Fanny was the one I saw least distinctly; I tried to get a clear view of her countenance, but her position in the room did not favour my efforts.

'I had just read your article in the *John Bull*; it very clearly and fully explains the cause of the difference obvious between ancient and modern paintings. I wish you had been with us when we went over the Exhibition and the National Gallery; a little explanation from a judge of art would doubtless have enabled us to understand better what we saw; perhaps, one day, we may have this pleasure.

'Accept my own thanks and my sister's for your kind attention to us while in town, and — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'Charlotte Brontë.

'I trust Mrs. Williams is quite recovered from her indisposition.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *July* 31*st*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — I have lately been reading *Modern Painters*, and I have derived from the work much genuine pleasure and, I hope, some edification; at any rate, it made me feel how ignorant I had previously been on the subject which it treats. Hitherto I have only had instinct to guide me in judging of art; I feel more as if I had been walking blindfold — this book seems to give me eyes. I *do* wish I had pictures within reach by which to test the new sense. Who can read these glowing descriptions of Turner's works without longing to see them? However eloquent and convincing the language in which another's opinion is placed before you, you still wish to judge for yourself. I like this author's style much: there is both energy and beauty in it; I like himself too, because he is such a hearty admirer. He does not give Turner half-measure of praise or veneration, he eulogises, he reverences him (or rather his genius) with his whole soul. One can sympathise with that sort of devout, serious admiration (for he is no rhapsodist) — one can respect it; and yet possibly many people would laugh at it. I am truly obliged to Mr. Smith for giving me this book, not having often met with one that has pleased me more.

'You will have seen some of the notices of *Wildfell Hall*. I wish my sister felt the unfavourable ones less keenly. She does not *say* much, for she is of a remarkably taciturn, still, thoughtful nature, reserved even with her nearest of kin, but I cannot avoid seeing that her spirits are depressed sometimes. The fact is, neither she nor any of us expected that view to be taken of the book which has been taken by some critics. That it had faults of execution, faults of art, was obvious, but faults of intention or feeling could be suspected by none who knew the writer. For my own part, I consider the subject unfortunately chosen — it was one the author was not qualified to handle at once vigorously and truthfully. The simple and natural — quiet description and simple pathos are, I think, Acton Bell's forte. I liked *Agnes Grey* better than the present work.

'Permit me to caution you not to speak of my sisters when you write to me. I mean, do not use the word in the plural. Ellis Bell will not endure to be alluded to under any other appellation than the *nom de plume*. I committed a grand error in betraying his identity to you and Mr. Smith. It was inadvertent — the words, "we are three sisters" escaped me before I was aware. I regretted the avowal the moment I had made it; I regret it bitterly now, for I find it is against every feeling and intention of Ellis Bell.

'I was greatly amused to see in the *Examiner* of this week one of Newby's little cobwebs neatly swept away by some dexterous brush. If Newby is not too old to profit by experience, such an exposure ought to teach him that "Honesty is indeed the best policy."

'Your letter has just been brought to me. I must not pause to thank you, I should say too much. Our life is, and always has been, one of few pleasures, as you seem in part to guess, and for that reason we feel what passages of enjoyment come in our way very keenly; and I think if you knew *how* pleased I am to get a long letter from you, you would laugh at me.

'In return, however, I smile at you for the earnestness with which you urge on us the propriety of seeing something of London society. There would be an advantage in it — a great advantage; yet it is one that no power on earth could induce Ellis Bell, for instance, to avail himself of. And even for Acton and Currer, the experiment of an introduction to society would be more formidable than you, probably, can well imagine. An existence of absolute seclusion and unvarying monotony, such as we have long — I may say, indeed, ever — been habituated to, tends, I fear, to unfit the mind for lively and exciting scenes, to destroy the capacity for social enjoyment.

'The only glimpses of society I have ever had were obtained in my vocation of governess, and some of the most miserable moments I can recall were passed in drawing-rooms full of strange faces. At such times, my animal spirits would ebb gradually till they sank quite away, and when I could endure the sense of exhaustion and solitude no longer, I used to steal off, too glad to find any corner where I could really be alone. Still, I know very well, that though that experiment of seeing the world might give acute pain for the time, it would do good afterwards; and as I have never, that I remember, gained any important good without incurring proportionate suffering, I mean to try to take your advice some day, in part at least — to put off, if possible, that troublesome egotism which is always judging and blaming itself, and to try, country spinster as I am, to get a view of some sphere where civilised humanity is to be contemplated.

'I smile at you again for supposing that I could be annoyed by what you say respecting your religious and philosophical views; that I could blame you for not being able, when you look amongst sects and creeds, to discover any one which you can exclusively and implicitly adopt as yours. I perceive myself that some light falls on earth from Heaven — that some rays from the shrine of truth pierce the darkness of this life and world; but they are few, faint, and scattered, and who without presumption can assert that he has found the *only* true path upwards?

'Yet ignorance, weakness, or indiscretion, must have their creeds and forms; they must have their props — they cannot walk alone. Let them hold by what is purest in doctrine and simplest in ritual; *something*, they *must* have.

'I never read Emerson; but the book which has had so healing an effect on your mind must be a good one. Very enviable is the writer whose words have fallen like a gentle rain on a soil that so needed and merited refreshment, whose influence has come like a genial breeze to lift a spirit which circumstances seem so harshly to have trampled. Emerson, if he has cheered you, has not written in vain.

'May this feeling of self-reconcilement, of inward peace and strength, continue! May you still be lenient with, be just to, yourself! I will not praise nor flatter you, I should hate to pay those enervating compliments which tend to check the exertions of a mind that aspires after excellence; but I must permit myself to remark that if you had not something good and superior in you, something better, whether more *showy* or not, than is often met with, the assurance of your friendship would not make one so happy as it does; nor would the advantage of your correspondence be felt as such a privilege.

'I hope Mrs. Williams's state of health may soon improve and her anxieties lessen. Blameable indeed are those who sow division where there ought to be peace, and especially deserving of the ban of society.

'I thank both you and your family for keeping our secret. It will indeed be a kindness to us to persevere in doing so; and I own I have a certain confidence in the honourable discretion of a household of which you are the head. — Believe me, yours very sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*October* 18*th*, 1848.

‘My dear Sir, — Not feeling competent this evening either for study or serious composition, I will console myself with writing to you. My malady, which the doctors call a bilious fever, lingers, or rather it returns with each sudden change of weather, though I am thankful to say that the relapses have hitherto been much milder than the first attack; but they keep me weak and reduced, especially as I am obliged to observe a very low spare diet.

‘My book, alas! is laid aside for the present; both head and hand seem to have lost their cunning; imagination is pale, stagnant, mute. This incapacity chagrins me; sometimes I have a feeling of cankering care on the subject, but I combat it as well as I can; it does no good.

‘I am afraid I shall not write a cheerful letter to you. A letter, however, of some kind I am determined to write, for I should be sorry to appear a neglectful correspondent to one from whose communications I have derived, and still derive, so much pleasure. Do not talk about not being on a level with Currer Bell, or regard him as “an awful person”; if you saw him now, sitting muffled at the fireside, shrinking before the east wind (which for some days has been blowing wild and keen over our cold hills), and incapable of lifting a pen for any less formidable task than that of writing a few lines to an indulgent friend, you would be sorry not to deem yourself greatly his superior, for you would feel him to be a poor creature.

‘You may be sure I read your views on the providence of God and the nature of man with interest. You are already aware that in much of what you say my opinions coincide with those you express, and where they differ I shall not attempt to bias you. Thought and conscience are, or ought to be, free; and, at any rate, if your views were universally adopted there would be no persecution, no bigotry. But never try to proselytise, the world is not yet fit to receive what you and Emerson say: man, as he now is, can no more do without creeds and forms in religion than he can do without laws and rules in social intercourse. You and Emerson judge others by yourselves; all mankind are not like you, any more than every Israelite was like Nathaniel.

‘“Is there a human being,” you ask, “so depraved that an act of kindness will not touch — nay, a word melt him?” There are hundreds of human beings who trample on acts of kindness and mock at words of affection. I know this though I have seen but little of the world. I suppose I have something harsher in my nature than you have, something which every now and then tells me dreary secrets about my race, and I cannot believe the voice of the Optimist, charm he never so wisely. On the other hand, I feel forced to listen when a Thackeray speaks. I know truth is delivering her oracles by his lips.

‘As to the great, good, magnanimous acts which have been performed by some men, we trace them up to motives and then estimate their value; a few, perhaps, would gain and many lose by this test. The study of motives is a strange one, not to be pursued too far by one fallible human being in reference to his fellows.

‘Do not condemn me as uncharitable. I have no wish to urge my convictions on you, but I know that while there are many good, sincere, gentle people in the world, with whom kindness is all-powerful, there are also not a few like that false friend (I had almost written *fiend*) whom you so well and vividly described in one of your late letters, and who, in acting out his part of domestic traitor, must often have turned benefits into weapons wherewith to wound his benefactors. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*April* 2*nd*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — My critics truly deserve and have my genuine thanks for the friendly candour with which they have declared their opinions on my book. Both Mr. Williams and Mr. Taylor express and support their opinions in a manner calculated to command careful consideration. In my turn I have a word to say. You both of you dwell too much on what you regard as the *artistic* treatment of a subject. Say what you will, gentlemen — say it as ably as you will — truth is better than art. Burns’ Songs are better than Bulwer’s Epics. Thackeray’s rude, careless sketches are preferable to thousands of carefully finished paintings. Ignorant as I am, I dare to hold and maintain that doctrine.

‘You must not expect me to give up Malone and Donne too suddenly — the pair are favourites with me; they shine with a chastened and pleasing lustre in that first chapter, and it is a pity you do not take pleasure in their modest twinkle. Neither is that opening scene irrelevant to the rest of the book, there are other touches in store which will harmonise with it.

‘No doubt this handling of the surplice will stir up such publications as the *Christian Remembrancer* and the *Quarterly* — those heavy Goliaths of the periodical press; and if I alone were concerned, this possibility would not trouble me a second. Full welcome would the giants be to stand in their greaves of brass, poising their ponderous spears, cursing their prey by their gods, and thundering invitations to the intended victim to “come forth” and have his flesh given to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field. Currer Bell, without pretending to be a David, feels no awe of the unwieldy Anakim; but — comprehend me rightly, gentlemen — it would grieve him to involve others in blame: any censure that would really injure and annoy his publishers would wound himself. Therefore believe that he will not act rashly — trust his discretion.

‘Mr. Taylor is right about the bad taste of the opening apostrophe — that I had already condemned in my own mind. Enough said of a work in embryo. Permit me to request in conclusion that the MS. may now be returned as soon as convenient.

‘The letter you inclosed is from Mary Howitt. It contained a proposal for an engagement as contributor to an American periodical. Of course I have negatived it. When I *can* write, the book I have in hand must claim all my attention. Oh! if Anne were well, if the void Death has left were a little closed up, if the dreary word *nevermore* would cease sounding in my ears, I think I could yet do something.

‘It is a long time since you mentioned your own family affairs. I trust Mrs. Williams continues well, and that Fanny and your other children prosper. — Yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*July* 3*rd*, 1849.

‘My dear Sir, — You do right to address me on subjects which compel me, in order to give a coherent answer, to quit for a moment my habitual train of thought. The mention of your healthy-living daughters reminds me of the world where other people live — where I lived once. Theirs are cheerful images as you present them — I have no wish to shut them out.

‘From all you say of Ellen, the eldest, I am inclined to respect her much. I like practical sense which works to the good of others. I esteem a dutiful daughter who makes her parents happy.

‘Fanny’s character I would take on second hand from nobody, least of all from her kind father, whose estimate of human nature in general inclines rather to what *ought* to be than to what *is*. Of Fanny I would judge for myself, and that not hastily nor on first impressions.

‘I am glad to hear that Louisa has a chance of a presentation to Queen’s College. I hope she will succeed. Do not, my dear sir, be indifferent — be earnest about it. Come what may afterwards, an education secured is an advantage gained — a priceless advantage. Come what may, it is a step towards independency, and one great curse of a single female life is its dependency. It does credit both to Louisa’s heart and head that she herself wishes to get this presentation. Encourage her in the wish. Your daughters — no more than your sons — should be a burden on your hands. Your daughters — as much as your sons — should aim at making their way honourably through life. Do not wish to keep them at home. Believe me, teachers may be hard-worked, ill-paid, and despised, but the girl who stays at home doing nothing is worse off than the hardest-wrought and worst-paid drudge of a school. Whenever I have seen, not merely in humble, but in affluent homes, families of daughters sitting waiting to be married, I have pitied them from my heart. It is doubtless well — very well — if Fate decrees them a happy marriage; but, if otherwise, give their existence some object, their time some occupation, or the peevishness of disappointment and the listlessness of idleness will infallibly degrade their nature.

‘Should Louisa eventually go out as a governess, do not be uneasy respecting her lot. The sketch you give of her character leads me to think she has a better chance of happiness than one in a hundred of her sisterhood. Of pleasing exterior (that is always an advantage — children like it), good sense, obliging disposition, cheerful, healthy, possessing a good average capacity, but no prominent master talent to make her miserable by its cravings for exercise, by its mutiny under restraint — Louisa thus endowed will find the post of governess comparatively easy. If she be like her mother — as you say she is — and if, consequently, she is fond of children, and possesses tact for managing them, their care is her natural vocation — she ought to be a governess.

'Your sketch of Braxborne, as it is and as it was, is sadly pleasing. I remember your first picture of it in a letter written a year ago — only a year ago. I was in this room — where I now am — when I received it. I was not alone then. In those days your letters often served as a text for comment — a theme for talk; now, I read them, return them to their covers and put them away. Johnson, I think, makes mournful mention somewhere of the pleasure that accrues when we are "solitary and cannot impart it." Thoughts, under such circumstances, cannot grow to words, impulses fail to ripen to actions.

'Lonely as I am, how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career — perseverance to plead through two long, weary years with publishers till they admitted me? How should I be with youth past, sisters lost, a resident in a moorland parish where there is not a single educated family? In that case I should have no world at all: the raven, weary of surveying the deluge, and without an ark to return to, would be my type. As it is, something like a hope and motive sustains me still. I wish all your daughters — I wish every woman in England, had also a hope and motive. Alas! there are many old maids who have neither. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*July* 26*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I must rouse myself to write a line to you, lest a more protracted silence should seem strange.

'Truly glad was I to hear of your daughter's success. I trust its results may conduce to the permanent advantage both of herself and her parents.

'Of still more importance than your children's education is your wife's health, and therefore it is still more gratifying to learn that your anxiety on that account is likely to be alleviated. For her own sake, no less than for that of others, it is to be hoped that she is now secured from a recurrence of her painful and dangerous attacks. It was pleasing, too, to hear of good qualities being developed in the daughters by the mother's danger. May your girls always so act as to justify their father's kind estimate of their characters; may they never do what might disappoint or grieve him.

'Your suggestion relative to myself is a good one in some respects, but there are two persons whom it would not suit; and not the least incommoded of these would be the young person whom I might request to come and bury herself in the hills of Haworth, to take a church and stony churchyard for her prospect, the dead silence of a village parsonage — in which the tick of the clock is heard all day long — for her atmosphere, and a grave, silent spinster for her companion. I should not like to see youth thus immured. The hush and gloom of our house would be more oppressive to a buoyant than to a subdued spirit. The fact is, my work is my best companion; hereafter I look for no great earthly comfort except what congenial occupation can give. For society, long seclusion has in a great measure unfitted me, I doubt whether I should enjoy it if I might have it. Sometimes I think I should, and I thirst for it; but at other times I doubt my capability of pleasing or deriving pleasure. The prisoner in solitary confinement, the toad in the block of marble, all in time shape themselves to their lot. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*September* 13*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I want to know your opinion of the subject of this proof-sheet. Mr. Taylor censured it; he considers as defective all that portion which relates to Shirley's nervousness — the bite of the dog, etc. How did it strike you on reading it?

'I ask this though I well know it cannot now be altered. I can work indefatigably at the correction of a work before it leaves my hands, but when once I have looked on it as completed and submitted to the inspection of others, it becomes next to impossible to alter or amend. With the heavy suspicion on my mind that all may not be right, I yet feel forced to put up with the inevitably wrong.

'Reading has, of late, been my great solace and recreation. I have read J. C. Hare's *Guesses at Truth*, a book containing things that in depth and far-sought wisdom sometimes recall the *Thoughts* of Pascal, only it is as the light of the moon recalls that of the sun.

'I have read with pleasure a little book on *English Social Life* by the wife of Archbishop Whately. Good and intelligent women write well on such subjects. This lady speaks of governesses. I was struck by the contrast offered in her manner of treating the topic to that of Miss Rigby in the *Quarterly*. How much finer the feeling — how much truer the feeling — how much more delicate the mind here revealed!

'I have read *David Copperfield*; it seems to me very good — admirable in some parts. You said it had affinity to *Jane Eyre*. It has, now and then — only what an advantage has Dickens in his varied knowledge of men and things! I am beginning to read Eckermann's *Goethe* — it promises to be a most interesting work. Honest, simple, single-minded Eckermann! Great, powerful, giant-souled, but also profoundly egotistical, old Johann Wolfgang von Goethe! He *was* a mighty egotist — I see he was: he thought no more of swallowing up poor Eckermann's existence in his own than the whale thought of swallowing Jonah.

'The worst of reading graphic accounts of such men, of seeing graphic pictures of the scenes, the society, in which they moved, is that it excites a too tormenting longing to look on the reality. But does such reality now exist? Amidst all the troubled waters of European society does such a vast, strong, selfish, old Leviathan now roll ponderous! I suppose not. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*March* 19*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — The books came yesterday evening just as I was wishing for them very much. There is much interest for me in opening the Cornhill parcel. I wish there was not pain too — but so it is. As I untie the cords and take out the volumes, I am reminded of those who once on similar occasions looked on eagerly; I miss familiar voices commenting mirthfully and pleasantly; the room seems very still, very empty; but yet there is consolation in remembering that papa will take pleasure in some of the books. Happiness quite unshared can scarcely be called happiness — it has no taste.

'I hope Mrs. Williams continues well, and that she is beginning to regain composure after the shock of her recent bereavement. She has indeed sustained a loss for which there is no substitute. But rich as she still is in objects for her best affections, I trust the void will not be long or severely felt. She must think, not of what she has lost, but of what she possesses. With eight fine children, how can she ever be poor or solitary! — Believe me, dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*April* 12*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I own I was glad to receive your assurance that the Calcutta paper's surmise was unfounded. It is said that when we *wish* a thing to be true, we are prone to believe it true; but I think (judging from myself) we adopt with a still prompter credulity the rumour which shocks.

'It is very kind in Dr. Forbes to give me his book. I hope Mr. Smith will have the goodness to convey my thanks for the present. You can keep it to send with the next parcel, or perhaps I may be in London myself before May is over. That invitation I mentioned in a previous letter is still urged upon me, and well as I know what penance its acceptance would entail in some points, I also know the advantage it would bring in others. My conscience tells me it would be the act of a moral poltroon to let the fear of suffering stand in the way of improvement. But suffer I shall. No matter.

'The perusal of *Southey's Life* has lately afforded me much pleasure. The autobiography with which it commences is deeply interesting, and the letters which follow are scarcely less so, disclosing as they do a character most estimable in its integrity and a nature most amiable in its benevolence, as well as a mind admirable in its talent. Some people assert that genius is inconsistent with domestic happiness, and yet Southey was happy at home and made his home happy; he not only loved his wife and children *though* he was a poet, but he loved them the better *because* he was a poet. He seems to have been without taint of worldliness. London with its pomps and vanities, learned coteries with their dry pedantry, rather scared than attracted him. He found his prime glory in his genius, and his chief felicity in home affections. I like Southey.

'I have likewise read one of Miss Austen's works — *Emma* — read it with interest and with just the degree of admiration which Miss Austen herself would have thought sensible and suitable. Anything like warmth or enthusiasm — anything energetic, poignant, heart-felt is utterly out of place in commending these works: all such demonstration the authoress would have met with a well-bred sneer, would have calmly scorned as *outré* and extravagant. She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well. There is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the painting. She ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. Even to the feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition — too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth elegance of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study; but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death — this Miss Austen ignores. She no more, with her mind's eye, beholds the heart of her race than each man, with bodily vision, sees the heart in his heaving breast. Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete and rather insensible (*not senseless*) woman. If this is heresy, I cannot help it. If I said it to some people (Lewes for instance) they would directly accuse me of advocating exaggerated heroics, but I am not afraid of your falling into any such vulgar error. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*November* 9*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I have read Lord John Russell's letter with very great zest and relish, and think him a spirited sensible little man for writing it. He makes no old-womanish outcry of alarm and expresses no exaggerated wrath. One of the best paragraphs is that which refers to the Bishop of London and the Puseyites. Oh! I wish Dr. Arnold were yet living, or that a second Dr. Arnold could be found! Were there but ten such men amongst the hierarchs of the Church of England she might bid defiance to all the scarlet hats and stockings in the Pope's gift. Her sanctuaries would be purified, her rites reformed, her withered veins would swell again with vital sap; but it is not so.

'It is well that *truth* is *indestructible* — that ruin cannot crush nor fire annihilate her divine essence. While forms change and institutions perish, "*truth* is great and shall prevail."

'I am truly glad to hear that Miss Kavanagh's health is improved. You can send her book whenever it is most convenient. I received from Cornhill the other day a periodical containing a portrait of Jenny Lind — a sweet, natural, innocent peasant-girl face, curiously contrasted with an artificial fine-lady dress. I *do* like and esteem Jenny's character. Yet not long since I heard her torn to pieces by the tongue of detraction — scarcely a virtue left — twenty odious defects imputed.

'There was likewise a most faithful portrait of R. H. Home, with his imaginative forehead and somewhat foolish-looking mouth and chin, indicating that mixed character which I should think he owns. Mr. Home writes well. That tragedy on the *Death of Marlowe* reminds me of some of the best of Dumas' dramatic pieces. — Yours very sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January*, 1851.

'Dear Ellen, — I sent yesterday the *Leader* newspaper, which you must always send to Hunsworth as soon as you have done with it. I will continue to forward it as long as I get it.

'I am trying a little Hydropathic treatment; I like it, and I think it has done me good. Inclosed is a letter received a few days since. I wish you to read it because it gives a very fair notion both of the disposition and mind; read, return, and tell me what you think of it.

'Thackeray has given dreadful trouble by his want of punctuality. Mr. Williams says if he had not been helped out with the vigour, energy, and method of Mr. Smith, he must have sunk under the day and night labour of the last few weeks.

'Write soon.

'C. B.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*July* 21*st*, 1851.

'My dear Sir, — I delayed answering your very interesting letter until the box should have reached me; and now that it is come I can only acknowledge its arrival: I cannot say at all what I felt as I unpacked its contents. These Cornhill parcels have something of the magic charm of a fairy gift about them, as well as of the less poetical but more substantial pleasure of a box from home received at school. You have sent me this time even more books than usual, and all good.

'What shall I say about the twenty numbers of splendid engravings laid cozily at the bottom? The whole Vernon Gallery brought to one's fireside! Indeed, indeed I can say nothing, except that I will take care, and keep them clean, and send them back uninjured. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*November* 6*th*, 1851.

‘My dear Sir, — I have true pleasure in inclosing for your son Frank a letter of introduction to Mrs. Gaskell, and earnestly do I trust the acquaintance may tend to his good. To make all sure — for I dislike to go on doubtful grounds — I wrote to ask her if she would permit the introduction. Her frank, kind answer pleased me greatly.

‘I have received the books. I hope to write again when I have read *The Fair Carew*. The very title augurs well — it has no hackneyed sound. — Believe me, sincerely yours,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘Haworth, *May* 28*th*, 1853.

‘My dear Sir, — The box of books arrived safely yesterday evening, and I feel especially obliged for the selection, as it includes several that will be acceptable and interesting to my father.

‘I despatch to-day a box of return books. Among them will be found two or three of those just sent, being such as I had read before — *i.e.*, Moore’s *Life and Correspondence*, 1st and 2nd vols.; Lamartine’s *Restoration of the Monarchy*, etc. I have thought of you more than once during the late bright weather, knowing how genial you find warmth and sunshine. I trust it has brought this season its usual cheering and beneficial effect. Remember me kindly to Mrs. Williams and her daughters, and, — Believe me, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*December* 6*th*, 1853.

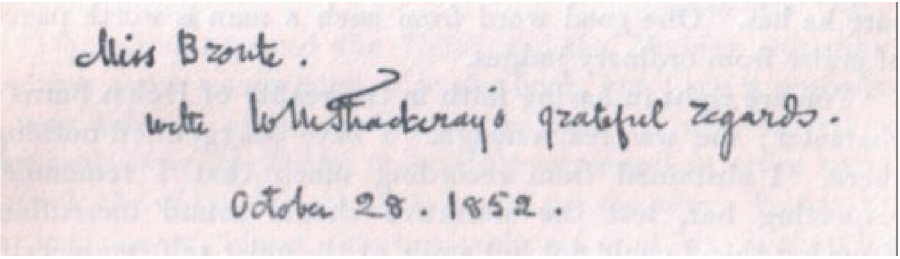
‘My dear Sir, — I forwarded last week a box of return books to Cornhill, which I trust arrived safely. To-day I received the *Edinburgh Guardian*, for which I thank you.

‘Do not trouble yourself to select or send any more books. These courtesies must cease some day, and I would rather give them up than wear them out. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

CHAPTER XV: WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

The devotion of Charlotte Brontë to Thackeray, or rather to Thackeray's genius, is a pleasant episode in literary history. In 1848 he sent Miss Brontë, as we have seen, a copy of *Vanity Fair*. In 1852 he sent her a copy of *Esmond*, with the more cordial inscription which came of friendship.



Miss Bronte.

with W. M. Thackeray's grateful regards.

October 28. 1852.

The second edition of *Jane Eyre* was dedicated to him as possessed of 'an intellect profounder and more unique than his contemporaries have yet recognised,' and as 'the first social regenerator of the day.' And when Currer Bell was dead, it was Thackeray who wrote by far the most eloquent tribute to her memory. When a copy of Lawrence's portrait of Thackeray was sent to Haworth by Mr. George Smith, Charlotte Brontë stood in front of it and, half playfully, half seriously, shook her fist, apostrophising its original as 'Thou Titan!'

With all this hero-worship, it may be imagined that no favourable criticism gave her more unqualified pleasure than that which came from her 'master,' as she was not indisposed to consider one who was only seven years her senior, and whose best books were practically contemporaneous with her own.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *October* 28*th*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — Your last letter was very pleasant to me to read, and is very cheering to reflect on. I feel honoured in being approved by Mr. Thackeray, because I approve Mr. Thackeray. This may sound presumptuous perhaps, but I mean that I have long recognised in his writings genuine talent, such as I admired, such as I wondered at and delighted in. No author seems to distinguish so exquisitely as he does dross from ore, the real from the counterfeit. I believed too he had deep and true feelings under his seeming sternness. Now I am sure he has. One good word from such a man is worth pages of praise from ordinary judges.

'You are right in having faith in the reality of Helen Burns's character; she was real enough. I have exaggerated nothing there. I abstained from recording much that I remember respecting her, lest the narrative should sound incredible. Knowing this, I could not but smile at the quiet self-complacent dogmatism with which one of the journals lays it down that “such creations as Helen Burns are very beautiful but very untrue.”

‘The plot of *Jane Eyre* may be a hackneyed one. Mr. Thackeray remarks that it is familiar to him. But having read comparatively few novels, I never chanced to meet with it, and I thought it original. The work referred to by the critic of the *Athenæum*, I had not had the good fortune to hear of.

‘The *Weekly Chronicle* seems inclined to identify me with Mrs. Marsh. I never had the pleasure of perusing a line of Mrs. Marsh’s in my life, but I wish very much to read her works, and shall profit by the first opportunity of doing so. I hope I shall not find I have been an unconscious imitator.

‘I would still endeavour to keep my expectations low respecting the ultimate success of *Jane Eyre*. But my desire that it should succeed augments, for you have taken much trouble about the work, and it would grieve me seriously if your active efforts should be baffled and your sanguine hopes disappointed. Excuse me if I again remark that I fear they are rather *too* sanguine; it would be better to moderate them. What will the critics of the monthly reviews and magazines be likely to see in *Jane Eyre* (if indeed they deign to read it), which will win from them even a stinted modicum of approbation? It has no learning, no research, it discusses no subject of public interest. A mere domestic novel will, I fear, seem trivial to men of large views and solid attainments.

‘Still, efforts so energetic and indefatigable as yours ought to realise a result in some degree favourable, and I trust they will. — I remain, dear sir, yours respectfully,

‘C. Bell.

‘*October* 28*th*, 1847.

‘I have just received the *Tablet* and the *Morning Advertiser*. Neither paper seems inimical to the book, but I see it produces a very different effect on different natures. I was amused at the analysis in the *Tablet*, it is oddly expressed in some parts. I think the critic did not always seize my meaning; he speaks, for instance, of “Jane’s inconceivable alarm at Mr. Rochester’s repelling manner.” I do not remember that.’

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*December* 11*th*, 1847.

‘Dear Sir, — I have delayed writing to you in the hope that the parcel you sent would reach me; but after making due inquiries at the Keighley, Bradford, and Leeds Stations and obtaining no news of it, I must conclude that it has been lost.

‘However, I have contrived to get a sight of *Fraser’s Magazine* from another quarter, so that I have only to regret Mr. Home’s kind present. Will you thank that gentleman for me when you see him, and tell him that the railroad is to blame for my not having acknowledged his courtesy before?

‘Mr. Lewes is very lenient: I anticipated a degree of severity which he has spared me. This notice differs from all the other notices. He must be a man of no ordinary mind: there is a strange sagacity evinced in some of his remarks; yet he is not always right. I am afraid if he knew how much I write from intuition, how little from actual knowledge, he would think me presumptuous ever to have written at all. I am sure such would be his opinion if he knew the narrow bounds of my attainments, the limited scope of my reading.

'There are moments when I can hardly credit that anything I have done should be found worthy to give even transitory pleasure to such men as Mr. Thackeray, Sir John Herschel, Mr. Fonblanque, Leigh Hunt, and Mr. Lewes — that my humble efforts should have had such a result is a noble reward.

'I was glad and proud to get the bank bill Mr. Smith sent me yesterday, but I hardly ever felt delight equal to that which cheered me when I received your letter containing an extract from a note by Mr. Thackeray, in which he expressed himself gratified with the perusal of *Jane Eyre*. Mr. Thackeray is a keen ruthless satirist. I had never perused his writings but with blended feelings of admiration and indignation. Critics, it appears to me, do not know what an intellectual boa-constrictor he is. They call him "humorous," "brilliant" — his is a most scalping humour, a most deadly brilliancy: he does not play with his prey, he coils round it and crushes it in his rings. He seems terribly in earnest in his war against the falsehood and follies of "the world." I often wonder what that "world" thinks of him. I should think the faults of such a man would be distrust of anything good in human nature — galling suspicion of bad motives lurking behind good actions. Are these his failings?

'They are, at any rate, the failings of his written sentiments, for he cannot find in his heart to represent either man or woman as at once good and wise. Does he not too much confound benevolence with weakness and wisdom with mere craft?

'But I must not intrude on your time by too long a letter. — Believe me, yours respectfully,

'C. Bell.

'I have received the *Sheffield Iris*, the *Bradford Observer*, the *Guardian*, the *Newcastle Guardian*, and the *Sunday Times* since you wrote. The contrast between the notices in the two last named papers made me smile. The *Sunday Times* almost denounces *Jane Eyre* as something very reprehensible and obnoxious, whereas the *Newcastle Guardian* seems to think it a mild potion which may be "safely administered to the most delicate invalid." I suppose the public must decide when critics disagree.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *December* 23*rd*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — I am glad that you and Messrs. Smith & Elder approve the second preface.

'I send an errata of the first volume, and part of the second. I will send the rest of the corrections as soon as possible.

‘Will the inclosed dedication suffice? I have made it brief, because I wished to avoid any appearance of pomposity or pretension.

‘The notice in the *Church of England Journal* gratified me much, and chiefly because it *was* the *Church of England Journal*. Whatever such critics as he of the *Mirror* may say, I love the Church of England. Her ministers, indeed, I do not regard as infallible personages, I have seen too much of them for that, but to the Establishment, with all her faults — the profane Athanasian creed *ex*cluded — I am sincerely attached.

‘Is the forthcoming critique on Mr. Thackeray’s writings in the *Edinburgh Review* written by Mr. Lewes? I hope it is. Mr. Lewes, with his penetrating sagacity and fine acumen, ought to be able to do the author of *Vanity Fair* justice. Only he must not bring him down to the level of Fielding — he is far, far above Fielding. It appears to me that Fielding’s style is arid, and his views of life and human nature coarse, compared with Thackeray’s.

‘With many thanks for your kind wishes, and a cordial reciprocation of them, — I remain, dear sir, yours respectfully,

‘C. Bell.

‘On glancing over this scrawl, I find it so illegibly written that I fear you will hardly be able to decipher it; but the cold is partly to blame for this — my fingers are numb.’

The dedication here referred to is that to Thackeray. People had been already suggesting that the book might have been written by Thackeray under a pseudonym; others had implied, knowing that there was ‘something about a woman’ in Thackeray’s life, that it was written by a mistress of the great novelist. Indeed, the *Quarterly* had half hinted as much. Currer Bell, knowing nothing of the gossip of London, had dedicated her book in single-minded enthusiasm. Her distress was keen when it was revealed to her that the wife of Mr. Thackeray, like the wife of Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, was of unsound mind. However, a correspondence with him would seem to have ended amicably enough.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘Haworth, *January* 28*th*, 1848.

‘Dear Sir, — I need not tell you that when I saw Mr. Thackeray’s letter inclosed under your cover, the sight made me very happy. It was some time before I dared open it, lest my pleasure in receiving it should be mixed with pain on learning its contents — lest, in short, the dedication should have been, in some way, unacceptable to him.

‘And, to tell you the truth, I fear this must have been the case; he does not say so, his letter is most friendly in its noble simplicity, but he apprises me, at the commencement, of a circumstance which both surprised and dismayed me.

‘I suppose it is no indiscretion to tell you this circumstance, for you doubtless know it already. It appears that his private position is in some points similar to that I have ascribed to Mr. Rochester; that thence arose a report that *Jane Eyre* had been written by a governess in his family, and that the dedication coming now has confirmed everybody in the surmise.

'Well may it be said that fact is often stranger than fiction! The coincidence struck me as equally unfortunate and extraordinary. Of course I knew nothing whatever of Mr. Thackeray's domestic concerns, he existed for me only as an author. Of all regarding his personality, station, connections, private history, I was, and am still in a great measure, totally in the dark; but I am *very very* sorry that my inadvertent blunder should have made his name and affairs a subject for common gossip.

'The very fact of his not complaining at all and addressing me with such kindness, notwithstanding the pain and annoyance I must have caused him, increases my chagrin. I could not half express my regret to him in my answer, for I was restrained by the consciousness that that regret was just worth nothing at all — quite valueless for healing the mischief I had done.

'Can you tell me anything more on this subject? or can you guess in what degree the unlucky coincidence would affect him — whether it would pain him much and deeply; for he says so little himself on the topic, I am at a loss to divine the exact truth — but I fear.

'Do not think, my dear sir, from my silence respecting the advice you have, at different times, given me for my future literary guidance, that I am heedless of, or indifferent to, your kindness. I keep your letters and not unfrequently refer to them. Circumstances may render it impracticable for me to act up to the letter of what you counsel, but I think I comprehend the spirit of your precepts, and trust I shall be able to profit thereby. Details, situations which I do not understand and cannot personally inspect, I would not for the world meddle with, lest I should make even a more ridiculous mess of the matter than Mrs. Trollope did in her *Factory Boy*. Besides, not one feeling on any subject, public or private, will I ever affect that I do not really experience. Yet though I must limit my sympathies; though my observation cannot penetrate where the very deepest political and social truths are to be learnt; though many doors of knowledge which are open for you are for ever shut for me; though I must guess and calculate and grope my way in the dark, and come to uncertain conclusions unaided and alone where such writers as Dickens and Thackeray, having access to the shrine and image of Truth, have only to go into the temple, lift the veil a moment, and come out and say what they have seen — yet with every disadvantage, I mean still, in my own contracted way, to do my best. Imperfect my best will be, and poor, and compared with the works of the true masters — of that greatest modern master Thackeray in especial (for it is him I at heart reverence with all my strength) — it will be trifling, but I trust not affected or counterfeit. — Believe me, my dear sir, yours with regard and respect,

'Currer Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*March* 29*th*, 1848.

‘My dear Sir, — The notice from the *Church of England Quarterly Review* is not on the whole a bad one. True, it condemns the tendency of *Jane Eyre*, and seems to think Mr. Rochester should have been represented as going through the mystic process of “regeneration” before any respectable person could have consented to believe his contrition for his past errors sincere; true, also, that it casts a doubt on Jane’s creed, and leaves it doubtful whether she was Hindoo, Mahommedan, or infidel. But notwithstanding these eccentricities, it is a conscientious notice, very unlike that in the *Mirror*, for instance, which seemed the result of a feeble sort of spite, whereas this is the critic’s real opinion: some of the ethical and theological notions are not according to his system, and he disapproves of them.

‘I am glad to hear that Mr. Lewes’s new work is soon to appear, and pleased also to learn that Messrs. Smith & Elder are the publishers. Mr. Lewes mentioned in the last note I received from him that he had just finished writing his new novel, and I have been on the look out for the advertisement of its appearance ever since. I shall long to read it, if it were only to get a further insight into the author’s character. I read *Ranthorpe* with lively interest — there was much true talent in its pages. Two thirds of it I thought excellent, the latter part seemed more hastily and sketchily written.

‘I trust Miss Kavanagh’s work will meet with the success that, from your account, I am certain she and it deserve. I think I have met with an outline of the facts on which her tale is founded in some periodical, *Chambers’ Journal* I believe. No critic, however rigid, will find fault with “the tendency” of her work, I should think.

‘I will tell you why you cannot fully sympathise with the French, or feel any firm confidence in their future movements: because too few of them are Lamartines, too many Ledru Rollins. That, at least, is my reason for watching their proceedings with more dread than hope. With the Germans it is different: to their rational and justifiable efforts for liberty one can heartily wish well.

‘It seems, as you say, as if change drew near England too. She is divided by the sea from the lands where it is making thrones rock, but earthquakes roll lower than the ocean, and we know neither the day nor the hour when the tremor and heat, passing beneath our island, may unsettle and dissolve its foundations. Meantime, one thing is certain, all will in the end work together for good.

‘You mention Thackeray and the last number of *Vanity Fair*. The more I read Thackeray’s works the more certain I am that he stands alone — alone in his sagacity, alone in his truth, alone in his feeling (his feeling, though he makes no noise about it, is about the most genuine that ever lived on a printed page), alone in his power, alone in his simplicity, alone in his self-control. Thackeray is a Titan, so strong that he can afford to perform with calm the most herculean feats; there is the charm and majesty of repose in his greatest efforts; *he* borrows nothing from fever, his is never the energy of delirium —

his energy is sane energy, deliberate energy, thoughtful energy. The last number of *Vanity Fair* proves this peculiarly. Forcible, exciting in its force, still more impressive than exciting, carrying on the interest of the narrative in a flow, deep, full, resistless, it is still quiet — as quiet as reflection, as quiet as memory; and to me there are parts of it that sound as solemn as an oracle. Thackeray is never borne away by his own ardour — he has it under control. His genius obeys him — it is his servant, it works no fantastic changes at its own wild will, it must still achieve the task which reason and sense assign it, and none other. Thackeray is unique. I *can* say no more, I *will* say no less. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*March* 2*nd*, 1849.

'Your generous indignation against the *Quarterly* touched me. But do not trouble yourself to be angry on Currer Bell's account; except where the May-Fair gossip and Mr. Thackeray's name were brought in he was never stung at all, but he certainly thought that passage and one or two others quite unwarrantable. However, slander without a germ of truth is seldom injurious: it resembles a rootless plant and must soon wither away.

'The critic would certainly be a little ashamed of herself if she knew what foolish blunders she had committed, if she were aware how completely Mr. Thackeray and Currer Bell are strangers to each other, that *Jane Eyre* was written before the author had seen one line of *Vanity Fair*, or that if C. Bell had known that there existed in Mr. Thackeray's private circumstances the shadow of a reason for fancying personal allusion, so far from dedicating the book to that gentleman, he would have regarded such a step as ill-judged, insolent, and indefensible, and would have shunned it accordingly. — Believe me, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*August* 14*th*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — My sister Anne thanks you, as well as myself, for your just critique on *Wildfell Hall*. It appears to me that your observations exactly hit both the strong and weak points of the book, and the advice which accompanies them is worthy of, and shall receive, our most careful attention.

'The first duty of an author is, I conceive, a faithful allegiance to Truth and Nature; his second, such a conscientious study of Art as shall enable him to interpret eloquently and effectively the oracles delivered by those two great deities. The Bells are very sincere in their worship of Truth, and they hope to apply themselves to the consideration of Art, so as to attain one day the power of speaking the language of conviction in the accents of persuasion; though they rather apprehend that whatever pains they take to modify and soften, an abrupt word or vehement tone will now and then occur to startle ears polite, whenever the subject shall chance to be such as moves their spirits within them.

‘I have already told you, I believe, that I regard Mr. Thackeray as the first of modern masters, and as the legitimate high priest of Truth; I study him accordingly with reverence. He, I see, keeps the mermaid’s tail below water, and only hints at the dead men’s bones and noxious slime amidst which it wriggles; *but*, his hint is more vivid than other men’s elaborate explanations, and never is his satire whetted to so keen an edge as when with quiet mocking irony he modestly recommends to the approbation of the public his own exemplary discretion and forbearance. The world begins to know Thackeray rather better than it did two years or even a year ago, but as yet it only half knows him. His mind seems to me a fabric as simple and unpretending as it is deep-founded and enduring — there is no meretricious ornament to attract or fix a superficial glance; his great distinction of the genuine is one that can only be fully appreciated with time. There is something, a sort of “still profound,” revealed in the concluding part of *Vanity Fair* which the discernment of one generation will not suffice to fathom. A hundred years hence, if he only lives to do justice to himself, he will be better known than he is now. A hundred years hence, some thoughtful critic, standing and looking down on the deep waters, will see shining through them the pearl without price of a purely original mind — such a mind as the Bulwers, etc., his contemporaries have *not*, — not acquirements gained from study, but the thing that came into the world with him — his inherent genius: the thing that made him, I doubt not, different as a child from other children, that caused him, perhaps, peculiar griefs and struggles in life, and that now makes him as a writer unlike other writers. Excuse me for recurring to this theme, I do not wish to bore you.

‘You say Mr. Huntingdon reminds you of Mr. Rochester. Does he? Yet there is no likeness between the two; the foundation of each character is entirely different. Huntingdon is a specimen of the naturally selfish, sensual, superficial man, whose one merit of a joyous temperament only avails him while he is young and healthy, whose best days are his earliest, who never profits by experience, who is sure to grow worse the older he grows. Mr. Rochester has a thoughtful nature and a very feeling heart; he is neither selfish nor self-indulgent; he is ill-educated, misguided; errs, when he does err, through rashness and inexperience: he lives for a time as too many other men live, but being radically better than most men, he does not like that degraded life, and is never happy in it. He is taught the severe lessons of experience and has sense to learn wisdom from them. Years improve him; the effervescence of youth foamed away, what is really good in him still remains. His nature is like wine of a good vintage: time cannot sour, but only mellows him. Such at least was the character I meant to pourtray.

‘Heathcliffe, again, of *Wuthering Heights* is quite another creation. He exemplifies the effects which a life of continued injustice and hard usage may produce on a naturally perverse, vindictive, and inexorable disposition. Carefully trained and kindly treated, the black gipsy-cub might possibly have been reared into a human being, but tyranny and ignorance made of him a mere demon. The worst of it is, some of his spirit seems breathed through the whole narrative in which he figures: it haunts every moor and glen, and beckons in every fir-tree of the Heights.

'I must not forget to thank you for the *Examiner* and *Atlas* newspapers. Poor Mr. Newby! It is not enough that the *Examiner* nails him by both ears to the pillory, but the *Atlas* brands a token of disgrace on his forehead. This is a deplorable plight, and he makes all matters worse by his foolish little answers to his assailants. It is a pity that he has no kind friend to suggest to him that he had better not bandy words with the *Examiner*. His plea about the "printer" was too ludicrous, and his second note is pitiable. I only regret that the names of Ellis and Acton Bell should perforce be mixed up with his proceedings. My sister Anne wishes me to say that should she ever write another work, Mr. Smith will certainly have the first offer of the copyright.

'I hope Mrs. Williams's health is more satisfactory than when you last wrote. With every good wish to yourself and your family, — Believe me, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*October* 19*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I am again at home; and after the first sensations consequent on returning to a place more dumb and vacant than it once was, I am beginning to feel settled. I think the contrast with London does not make Haworth more desolate; on the contrary, I have gleaned ideas, images, pleasant feelings, such as may perhaps cheer many a long winter evening.

'You ask my opinion of your daughters. I wish I could give you one worth acceptance. A single evening's acquaintance does not suffice with me to form an *opinion*, it only leaves on my mind an *impression*. They impressed me, then, as pleasing in manners and appearance: Ellen's is a character to which I could soon attach myself, and Fanny and Louisa have each their separate advantages. I can, however, read more in a face like Mrs. Williams's than in the smooth young features of her daughters — time, trial, and exertion write a distinct hand, more legible than smile or dimple. I was told you had once some thoughts of bringing out Fanny as a professional singer, and it was added Fanny did not like the project. I thought to myself, if she does not like it, it can never be successfully executed. It seems to me that to achieve triumph in a career so arduous, the artist's own bent to the course must be inborn, decided, resistless. There should be no urging, no goading; native genius and vigorous will should lend their wings to the aspirant — nothing less can lift her to real fame, and who would rise feebly only to fall ignobly? An inferior artist, I am sure, you would not wish your daughter to be, and if she is to stand in the foremost rank, only her own courage and resolve can place her there; so, at least, the case appears to me. Fanny probably looks on publicity as degrading, and I believe that for a woman it is degrading if it is not glorious. If I could not be a Lind, I would not be a singer.

'Brief as my visit to London was, it must for me be memorable. I sometimes fancied myself in a dream — I could scarcely credit the reality of what passed. For instance, when I walked into the room and put my hand into Miss Martineau's, the action of saluting her and the fact of her presence seemed visionary. Again, when Mr. Thackeray was announced, and I saw him enter, looked up at his tall figure, heard his voice, the whole incident was truly dream-like, I was only certain it was true because I became miserably destitute of self-possession. Amour propre suffers terribly under such circumstances: woe to him that thinks of himself in the presence of intellectual greatness! Had I not been obliged to speak, I could have managed well, but it behoved me to answer when addressed, and the effort was torture — I spoke stupidly.

'As to the band of critics, I cannot say they overawed me much; I enjoyed the spectacle of them greatly. The two contrasts, Forster and Chorley, have each a certain edifying carriage and conversation good to contemplate. I by no means dislike Mr. Forster — quite the contrary, but the distance from his loud swagger to Thackeray's simple port is as the distance from Shakespeare's writing to Macready's acting.

'Mr. Chorley tantalised me. He is a peculiar specimen — one whom you could set yourself to examine, uncertain whether, when you had probed all the small recesses of his character, the result would be utter contempt and aversion, or whether for the sake of latent good you would forgive obvious evil. One could well pardon his unpleasant features, his strange voice, even his very foppery and grimace, if one found these disadvantages connected with living talent and any spark of genuine goodness. If there is nothing more than acquirement, smartness, and the affectation of philanthropy, Chorley is a fine creature.

'Remember me kindly to your wife and daughters, and — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *December* 19*th*, 1849.

'Dear Ellen, — Here I am at Haworth once more. I feel as if I had come out of an exciting whirl. Not that the hurry or stimulus would have seemed much to one accustomed to society and change, but to me they were very marked. My strength and spirits too often proved quite insufficient for the demand on their exertions. I used to bear up as well and as long as I possibly could, for, whenever I flagged, I could see Mr. Smith became disturbed; he always thought that something had been said or done to annoy me, which never once happened, for I met with perfect good breeding even from antagonists — men who had done their best or worst to write me down. I explained to him, over and over again, that my occasional silence was only failure of the power to talk, never of the will, but still he always seemed to fear there was another cause underneath.

'Mrs. Smith is rather stern, but she has sense and discrimination; she watched me very narrowly. When surrounded by gentlemen she never took her eye from me. I liked the surveillance, both when it kept guard over me amongst many, or only with her cherished one. She soon, I am convinced, saw in what light I received all, Thackeray included. Her "George" is a very fine specimen of a young English man of business; so I regard him, and I am proud to be one of his props.

'Thackeray is a Titan of mind. His presence and powers impress me deeply in an intellectual sense; I do not see him or know him as a man. All the others are subordinate to these. I have esteem for some, and, I trust, courtesy for all. I do not, of course, know what they thought of me, but I believe most of them expected me to come out in a more marked eccentric, striking light. I believe they desired more to admire and more to blame. I felt sufficiently at my ease with all except Thackeray, and with him I was painfully stupid.

'Now, dear Nell, when can you come to Haworth? Settle, and let me know as soon as you can. Give my best love to all. — Yours,

'C. B.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*January* 10*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — Mrs. Ellis has made her "morning call." I rather relished her chat about *Shirley* and *Jane Eyre*. She praises reluctantly and blames too often affectedly. But whenever a reviewer betrays that he has been thoroughly influenced and stirred by the work he criticises, it is easy to forgive the rest — hate and personality excepted.

'I have received and perused the *Edinburgh Review* — it is very brutal and savage. I am not angry with Lewes, but I wish in future he would let me alone, and not write again what makes me feel so cold and sick as I am feeling just now.

'Thackeray's Christmas Book at once grieved and pleased me, as most of his writings do. I have come to the conclusion that whenever he writes, Mephistopheles stands on his right hand and Raphael on his left; the great doubter and sneerer usually guides the pen, the Angel, noble and gentle, interlines letters of light here and there. Alas! Thackeray, I wish your strong wings would lift you oftener above the smoke of cities into the pure region nearer heaven!

'Good-bye for the present. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 25*th*, 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — Your indisposition was, I have no doubt, in a great measure owing to the change in the weather from frost to thaw. I had one sick-headachy day; but, for me, only a slight attack. You must be careful of cold. I have just written to Amelia a brief note thanking her for the cuffs, etc. It was a burning shame I did not write sooner. Herewith are inclosed three letters for your perusal, the first from Mary Taylor. There is also one from Lewes and one from Sir J. K. Shuttleworth, both which peruse and return. I have also, since you went, had a remarkable epistle from Thackeray, long, interesting, characteristic, but it unfortunately concludes with the strict injunction, *show this letter to no one*, adding that if he thought his letters were seen by others, he should either cease to write or write only what was conventional; but for this circumstance I should have sent it with the others. I answered it at length. Whether my reply will give satisfaction or displeasure remains yet to be ascertained. Thackeray's feelings are not such as can be gauged by ordinary calculation: variable weather is what I should ever expect from that quarter, yet in correspondence as in verbal intercourse, this would torment me. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'76 Gloucester Terrace, Hyde Park,
'London, *Thursday Morning*.

'Dear Papa, — I write one hasty line just to tell you that I got here quite safely at ten o'clock last night without any damage or smash in tunnels or cuttings. Mr. and Mrs. Smith met me at the station and gave me a kind and cordial welcome. The weather was beautiful the whole way, and warm; it is the same to-day. I have not yet been out, but this afternoon, if all be well, I shall go to Mr. Thackeray's lecture. I don't know when I shall see the Exhibition, but when I do, I shall write and tell you all about it. I hope you are well, and will continue well and cheerful. Give my kind regards to Tabby and Martha, and — Believe me, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

It cannot be said that Charlotte Brontë and Thackeray gained by personal contact. 'With him I was painfully stupid,' she says. It was the case of Heine and Goethe over again. Heine in the presence of the king of German literature could talk only of the plums in the garden. Charlotte Brontë in the presence of her hero Thackeray could not express herself with the vigour and intelligence which belonged to her correspondence with Mr. Williams. Miss Brontë, again, was hyper-critical of the smaller vanities of men, and, as has been pointed out, she emphasised in *Villette* a trivial piece of not unpleasant egotism on Thackeray's part after a lecture — his asking her if she had liked it. This question, which nine men out of ten would be prone to ask of a woman friend, was 'over-eagerness' and '*naïveté*' in her eyes. Thackeray, on his side, found conversation difficult, if we may judge by a reminiscence by his daughter Mrs. Ritchie: —

'One of the most notable persons who ever came into our bow-windowed drawing-room in Young Street is a guest never to be forgotten by me — a tiny, delicate, little person, whose small hand nevertheless grasped a mighty lever which set all the literary world of that day vibrating. I can still see the scene quite plainly — the hot summer evening, the open windows, the carriage driving to the door as we all sat silent and expectant; my father, who rarely waited, waiting with us; our governess and my sister and I all in a row, and prepared for the great event. We saw the carriage stop, and out of it sprang the active well-knit figure of Mr. George Smith, who was bringing Miss Brontë to see our father. My father, who had been walking up and down the room, goes out into the hall to meet his guests, and then, after a moment's delay, the door opens wide, and the two gentlemen come in, leading a tiny, delicate, serious, little lady, pale, with fair straight hair, and steady eyes. She may be a little over thirty; she is dressed in a little *barège* dress, with a pattern of faint green moss. She enters in mittens, in silence, in seriousness; our hearts are beating with wild excitement. This, then, is the authoress, the unknown power whose books have set all London talking, reading, speculating; some people even say our father wrote the books — the wonderful books. To say that we little girls had been given *Jane Eyre* to read scarcely represents the facts of the case; to say that we had taken it without leave, read bits here and read bits there, been carried away by an undreamed-of and hitherto unimagined whirlwind into things, times, places, all utterly absorbing, and at the same time absolutely unintelligible to us, would more accurately describe our state of mind on that summer's evening as we look at Jane Eyre — the great Jane Eyre — the tiny little lady. The moment is so breathless that dinner comes as a relief to the solemnity of the occasion, and we all smile as my father stoops to offer his arm; for, though genius she may be, Miss Brontë can barely reach his elbow. My own personal impressions are that she is somewhat grave and stern, especially to forward little girls who wish to chatter. Mr. George Smith has since told me how she afterwards remarked upon my father's wonderful forbearance and gentleness with our uncalled-for incursions into the conversation. She sat gazing at him with kindling eyes of interest, lighting up with a sort of illumination every now and then as she answered him. I can see her bending forward over the table, not eating, but listening to what he said as he carved the dish before him.

'I think it must have been on this very occasion that my father invited some of his friends in the evening to meet Miss Brontë — for everybody was interested and anxious to see her. Mrs. Crowe, the reciter of ghost-stories, was there. Mrs. Brookfield, Mrs. Carlyle, Mr. Carlyle himself was present, so I am told, railing at the appearance of cockneys upon Scotch mountain sides; there were also too many Americans for his taste, "but the Americans were as gods compared to the cockneys," says the philosopher. Besides the Carlyles, there were Mrs. Elliott and Miss Perry, Mrs. Procter and her daughter, most of my father's habitual friends and companions. In the recent life of Lord Houghton I was amused to see a note quoted in which Lord Houghton also was convened. Would that he had been present — perhaps the party would have gone off better. It was a gloomy and a silent evening. Every one waited for the brilliant conversation which never began at all. Miss Brontë retired to the sofa in the study, and murmured a low word now and then to our kind governess, Miss Truelock. The room looked very dark, the lamp began to smoke a little, the conversation grew dimmer and more dim, the ladies sat round still expectant, my father was too much perturbed by the gloom and the silence to be able to cope with it at all. Mrs. Brookfield, who was in the doorway by the study, near the corner in which Miss Brontë was sitting, leant forward with a little commonplace, since brilliance was not to be the order of the evening. "Do you like London, Miss Brontë?" she said; another silence, a pause, then Miss Brontë answers, "Yes and No," very gravely. Mrs. Brookfield has herself reported the conversation. My sister and I were much too young to be bored in those days; alarmed, impressed we might be, but not yet bored. A party was a party, a lioness was a lioness; and — shall I confess it? — at that time an extra dish of biscuits was enough to mark the evening. We felt all the importance of the occasion: tea spread in the dining-room, ladies in the drawing-room. We roamed about inconveniently, no doubt, and excitedly, and in one of my incursions crossing the hall, after Miss Brontë had left, I was surprised to see my father opening the front door with his hat on. He put his fingers to his lips, walked out into the darkness, and shut the door quietly behind him. When I went back to the drawing-room again, the ladies asked me where he was. I vaguely answered that I thought he was coming back. I was puzzled at the time, nor was it all made clear to me till long years afterwards, when one day Mrs. Procter asked me if I knew what had happened once when my father had invited a party to meet Jane Eyre at his house. It was one of the dullest evenings she had ever spent in her life, she said. And then with a good deal of humour she described the situation — the ladies who had all come expecting so much delightful conversation, and the gloom and the constraint, and how, finally, overwhelmed by the situation, my father had quietly left the room, left the house, and gone off to his club. The ladies waited, wondered, and finally departed also; and as we were going up to bed with our candles after everybody was gone, I remember two pretty Miss L — -s, in shiny silk dresses, arriving, full of expectation. . . . We still said we thought our father would soon be back, but the Miss L — -s declined to wait upon the chance, laughed, and drove away again almost immediately.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'*May* 28*th*, 1851.

'Dear Papa, — I must write another line to you to tell you how I am getting on. I have seen a great many things since I left home about which I hope to talk to you at future tea-times at home. I have been to the theatre and seen Macready in Macbeth. I have seen the pictures in the National Gallery. I have seen a beautiful exhibition of Turner's paintings, and yesterday I saw Mr. Thackeray. He dined here with some other gentlemen. He is a very tall man — above six feet high, with a peculiar face — not handsome, very ugly indeed, generally somewhat stern and satirical in expression, but capable also of a kind look. He was not told who I was, he was not introduced to me, but I soon saw him looking at me through his spectacles; and when we all rose to go down to dinner he just stepped quietly up and said, "Shake hands"; so I shook hands. He spoke very few words to me, but when he went away he shook hands again in a very kind way. It is better, I should think, to have him for a friend than an enemy, for he is a most formidable-looking personage. I listened to him as he conversed with the other gentlemen. All he says is most simple, but often cynical, harsh, and contradictory. I get on quietly. Most people know me I think, but they are far too well bred to show that they know me, so that there is none of that bustle or that sense of publicity I dislike.

'I hope you continue pretty well; be sure to take care of yourself. The weather here is exceedingly changeful, and often damp and misty, so that it is necessary to guard against taking cold. I do not mean to stay in London above a week longer, but I shall write again two or three days before I return. You need not give yourself the trouble of answering this letter unless you have something particular to say. Remember me to Tabby and Martha. — I remain, dear papa, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'76 Gloucester Terrace,
'Hyde Park, London, *May* 30*th*, 1851.

'Dear Papa, — I have now heard one of Mr. Thackeray's lectures and seen the great Exhibition. On Thursday afternoon I went to hear the lecture. It was delivered in a large and splendid kind of saloon — that in which the great balls of Almacks are given. The walls were all painted and gilded, the benches were sofas stuffed and cushioned and covered with blue damask. The audience was composed of the *élite* of London society. Duchesses were there by the score, and amongst them the great and beautiful Duchess of Sutherland, the Queen's Mistress of the Robes. Amidst all this Thackeray just got up and spoke with as much simplicity and ease as if he had been speaking to a few friends by his own fireside. The lecture was truly good: he has taken pains with the composition. It was finished without being in the least studied; a quiet humour and graphic force enlivened it throughout. He saw me as I entered the room, and came straight up and spoke very kindly. He then took me to his mother, a fine, handsome old lady, and introduced me to her. After the lecture somebody came behind me, leaned over the bench, and said, "Will you permit me, as a Yorkshireman, to introduce myself to you?" I turned round, was puzzled at first by the strange face I met, but in a minute I recognised the features. "You are the Earl of Carlisle," I said. He smiled and assented. He went on to talk for some time in a courteous, kind fashion. He asked after you, recalled the platform electioneering scene at Haworth, and begged to be remembered to you. Dr. Forbes came up afterwards, and Mr. Monckton Milnes, a Yorkshire Member of Parliament, who introduced himself on the same plea as Lord Carlisle.

'Yesterday we went to the Crystal Palace. The exterior has a strange and elegant but somewhat unsubstantial effect. The interior is like a mighty Vanity Fair. The brightest colours blaze on all sides; and ware of all kinds, from diamonds to spinning jennies and printing presses, are there to be seen. It was very fine, gorgeous, animated, bewildering, but I liked Thackeray's lecture better.

'I hope, dear papa, that you are keeping well. With kind regards to Tabby and Martha, and hopes that they are well too, — I am, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'112 Gloucester Terrace,
'Hyde Park, *June 7th*, 1851.

'Dear Papa, — I was very glad to hear that you continued in pretty good health, and that Mr. Cartman came to help you on Sunday. I fear you will not have had a very comfortable week in the dining-room; but by this time I suppose the parlour reformation will be nearly completed, and you will soon be able to return to your old quarters. The letter you sent me this morning was from Mary Taylor. She continues well and happy in New Zealand, and her shop seems to answer well. The French newspaper duly arrived. Yesterday I went for the second time to the Crystal Palace. We remained in it about three hours, and I must say I was more struck with it on this occasion than at my first visit. It is a wonderful place — vast, strange, new, and impossible to describe. Its grandeur does not consist in *one* thing, but in the unique assemblage of *all* things. Whatever human industry has created, you find there, from the great compartments filled with railway engines and boilers, with mill-machinery in full work, with splendid carriages of all kinds, with harness of every description — to the glass-covered and velvet-spread stands loaded with the most gorgeous work of the goldsmith and silversmith, and the carefully guarded caskets full of real diamonds and pearls worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. It may be called a bazaar or a fair, but it is such a bazaar or fair as Eastern genii might have created. It seems as if magic only could have gathered this mass of wealth from all the ends of the earth — as if none but supernatural hands could have arranged it thus, with such a blaze and contrast of colours and marvellous power of effect. The multitude filling the great aisles seems ruled and subdued by some invisible influence. Amongst the thirty thousand souls that peopled it the day I was there, not one loud noise was to be heard, not one irregular movement seen — the living tide rolls on quietly, with a deep hum like the sea heard from the distance.

'Mr. Thackeray is in high spirits about the success of his lectures. It is likely to add largely both to his fame and purse. He has, however, deferred this week's lecture till next Thursday, at the earnest petition of the duchesses and marchionesses, who, on the day it should have been delivered, were necessitated to go down with the Queen and Court to Ascot Races. I told him

I thought he did wrong to put it off on their account — and I think so still. The amateur performance of Bulwer's play for the Guild of Literature has likewise been deferred on account of the races. I hope, dear papa, that you, Mr. Nicholls, and all at home continue well. Tell Martha to take her scrubbing and cleaning in moderation and not overwork herself. With kind regards to her and Tabby, — I am, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'112 Gloucester Terrace,
'Hyde Park, *June* 14*th*, 1851.

'Dear Papa, — If all be well, and if Martha can get the cleaning, etc., done by that time, I think I shall be coming home about the end of next week or the beginning of the week after. I have been pretty well in London, only somewhat troubled with headaches, owing, I suppose, to the closeness and oppression of the air. The weather has not been so favourable as when I was last here, and in wet and dark days this great Babylon is not so cheerful. All the other sights seem to give way to the great Exhibition, into which thousands and tens of thousands continue to pour every day. I was in it again yesterday afternoon, and saw the ex-royal family of France — the old Queen, the Duchess of Orleans, and her two sons, etc., pass down the transept. I almost wonder the Londoners don't tire a little of this vast Vanity Fair — and, indeed, a new toy has somewhat diverted the attention of the grandees lately, viz., a fancy ball given last night by the Queen. The great lords and ladies have been quite wrapt up in preparations for this momentous event. Their pet and darling, Mr. Thackeray, of course sympathises with them. He was here yesterday to dinner, and left very early in the evening in order that he might visit respectively the Duchess of Norfolk, the Marchioness of Londonderry, Ladies Chesterfield and Clanricarde, and see them all in their fancy costumes of the reign of Charles II. before they set out for the Palace! His lectures, it appears, are a triumphant success. He says they will enable him to make a provision for his daughters; and Mr. Smith believes he will not get less than four thousand pounds by them. He is going to give two courses, and then go to Edinburgh and perhaps America, but *not* under the auspices of Barnum. Amongst others, the Lord Chancellor attended his last lecture, and Mr. Thackeray says he expects a place from him; but in this I think he was joking. Of course Mr. T. is a good deal spoiled by all this, and indeed it cannot be otherwise. He has offered two or three times to introduce me to some of his great friends, and says he knows many great ladies who would receive me with open arms if I would go to their houses; but, seriously, I cannot see that this sort of society produces so good an effect on him as to tempt me in the least to try the same experiment, so I remain obscure.

'Hoping you are well, dear papa, and with kind regards to Mr. Nicholls, Tabby, and Martha, also poor old Keeper and Flossy, — I am, your affectionate daughter, ‘C. Brontë.

‘*P.S.* — I am glad the parlour is done and that you have got safely settled, but am quite shocked to hear of the piano being dragged up into the bedroom — there it must necessarily be absurd, and in the parlour it looked so well, besides being convenient for your books. I wonder why you don’t like it.’

There are many pleasant references to Thackeray to be found in Mrs. Gaskell’s book, including a letter to Mr. George Smith, thanking him for the gift of the novelist’s portrait. ‘He looks superb in his beautiful, tasteful, gilded gibbet,’ she says. A few years later, and Thackeray was to write the eloquent tribute to his admirer, which is familiar to his readers: ‘I fancied an austere little Joan of Arc marching in upon us and rebuking our easy lives, our easy morals.’ ‘She gave me,’ he tells us, ‘the impression of being a very pure, and lofty, and high-minded person. A great and holy reverence of right and truth seemed to be with her always. Who that has known her books has not admired the artist’s noble English, the burning love of truth, the bravery, the simplicity, the indignation at wrong, the eager sympathy, the pious love and reverence, the passionate honour, so to speak, of the woman? What a story is that of the family of poets in their solitude yonder on the gloomy Yorkshire moors!’

CHAPTER XVI: LITERARY FRIENDSHIPS

There is a letter, printed by Mrs. Gaskell, from Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, in which Miss Brontë, when a girl of seventeen, discusses the best books to read, and expresses a particular devotion to Sir Walter Scott. During those early years she was an indefatigable student of literature. She read all that her father's study and the Keighley library could provide. When the years brought literary fame and its accompanying friendships, she was able to hold her own with the many men and women of letters whom she was destined to meet. Her staunchest friend was undoubtedly Mr. Williams, who sent her, as we have seen, all the newest books from London, and who appears to have discussed them with her as well. Next to Mr. Williams we must place his chief at Cornhill, Mr. George Smith, and Mr. Smith's mother. Mr. Smith happily still lives to reign over the famous house which introduced Thackeray, John Ruskin, and Charlotte Brontë to the world. What Charlotte thought of him may be gathered from her frank acknowledgment that he was the original of Dr. John in *Villette*, as his mother was the original of Mrs. Bretton — perhaps the two most entirely charming characters in Charlotte Brontë's novels. Mrs. Smith and her son lived, at the beginning of the friendship, at Westbourne Place, but afterwards removed to Gloucester Terrace, and Charlotte stayed with them at both houses. It was from the former that this first letter was addressed.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'4 Westbourne Place,
'Bishop's Road, London.

'Dear Ellen, — I have just remembered that as you do not know my address you cannot write to me till you get it; it is as above. I came to this big Babylon last Thursday, and have been in what seems to me a sort of whirl ever since; for changes, scenes, and stimulus which would be a trifle to others, are much to me. I found when I mentioned to Mr. Smith my plan of going to Dr. Wheelwright's it would not do at all — he would have been seriously hurt. He made his mother write to me, and thus I was persuaded to make my principal stay at his house. I have found no reason to regret this decision. Mrs. Smith received me at first like one who had received the strictest orders to be scrupulously attentive. I had fires in my bed-room evening and morning, wax candles, etc., etc. Mrs. Smith and her daughters seemed to look upon me with a mixture of respect and alarm. But all this is changed — that is to say, the attention and politeness continues as great as ever, but the alarm and estrangement are quite gone. She treats me as if she liked me, and I begin to like her much; kindness is a potent heart-winner. I had not judged too favourably of her son on a first impression; he pleases me much. I like him better even as a son and brother than as a man of business. Mr. Williams, too, is really most gentlemanly and well-informed. His weak points he certainly has, but these are not seen in society. Mr. Taylor — the little man — has again shown his parts; in fact, I suspect he is of the Helstone order of men — rigid, despotic, and self-willed. He tries to be very kind and even to express sympathy sometimes, but he does not manage it. He has a determined, dreadful nose in the middle of his face, which, when poked into my countenance, cuts into my soul like iron. Still, he is horribly intelligent, quick, searching, sagacious, and with a memory of relentless tenacity. To turn to Mr. Williams after him, or to Mr. Smith himself, is to turn from granite to easy down or warm fur. I have seen Thackeray.

'C. Brontë.'

TO JAMES TAYLOR, CORNHILL

'*November* 6*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — I am afraid Mr. Williams told you I was sadly "put out" about the *Daily News*, and I believe it is to that circumstance I owe your letters. But I have now made good resolutions, which were tried this morning by another notice in the same style in the *Observer*. The praise of such critics mortifies more than their blame; an author who becomes the object of it cannot help momentarily wishing he had never written. And to speak of the press being still ignorant of my being a woman! Why can they not be content to take Currer Bell for a man?

'I imagined, mistakenly it now appears, that *Shirley* bore fewer traces of a female hand than *Jane Eyre*; that I have misjudged disappoints me a little, though I cannot exactly see where the error lies. You keep to your point about the curates. Since you think me to blame, you do right to tell me so. I rather fancy I shall be left in a minority of one on that subject.

'I was indeed very much interested in the books you sent. Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*, *Guesses at Truth*, *Friends in Council*, and the little work on English social life pleased me particularly, and the last not least. We sometimes take a partiality to books as to characters, not on account of any brilliant intellect or striking peculiarity they boast, but for the sake of something good, delicate, and genuine. I thought that small book the production of a lady, and an amiable, sensible woman, and I like it.

'You must not think of selecting any more works for me yet, my stock is still far from exhausted.

'I accept your offer respecting the *Athenæum*; it is a paper I should like much to see, providing you can send it without trouble. It shall be punctually returned.

'Papa's health has, I am thankful to say, been very satisfactory of late. The other day he walked to Keighley and back, and was very little fatigued. I am myself pretty well.

'With thanks for your kind letter and good wishes, — Believe me, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

Mrs. Gaskell has much to say of Miss Brontë’s relations with George Henry Lewes. He was a critic with whom she had much correspondence and not a few differences. It will be remembered that Charlotte describes him as bearing a resemblance to Emily — a curious circumstance by the light of the fact that Lewes was always adjudged among his acquaintances as a peculiarly ugly man. Here is a portion of a letter upon which Mrs. Gaskell practised considerable excisions, and of which she prints the remainder: —

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*June* 12*th*, 1850.

‘I have seen Lewes. He is a man with both weakness and sins, but unless I err greatly, the foundation of his nature is not bad; and were he almost a fiend in character I could not feel otherwise to him than half-sadly, half-tenderly. A queer word that last, but I use it because the aspect of Lewes’s face almost moves me to tears, it is so wonderfully like Emily — her eyes, her features, the very nose, the somewhat prominent mouth, the forehead — even, at moments, the expression. Whatever Lewes does or says, I believe I cannot hate him. Another likeness I have seen, too, that touched me sorrowfully. You remember my speaking of a Miss Kavanagh, a young authoress, who supported her mother by her writings. Hearing from Mr. Williams that she had a longing to see me, I called on her yesterday. I found a little, almost dwarfish figure, to which even I had to look down; not deformed — that is, not hunch-backed, but long-armed and with a large head, and (at first sight) a strange face. She met me half-frankly, half-tremblingly; we sat down together, and when I had talked with her five minutes, her face was no longer strange, but mournfully familiar — it was Martha Taylor on every lineament. I shall try to find a moment to see her again. She lives in a poor but clean and neat little lodging. Her mother seems a somewhat weak-minded woman, who can be no companion to her. Her father has quite deserted his wife and child, and this poor little, feeble, intelligent, cordial thing wastes her brains to gain a living. She is twenty-five years old. I do not intend to stay here, at the furthest, more than a week longer; but at the end of that time I cannot go home, for the house at Haworth is just now unroofed; repairs were become necessary.

‘I should like to go for a week or two to the sea-side, in which case I wonder whether it would be possible for you to join me. Meantime, with regards to all — Believe me, yours faithfully,

‘C. B.’

But her acquaintance with Lewes had apparently begun three years earlier.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

‘*November* 6*th*, 1847.

‘Dear Sir, — I should be obliged to you if you will direct the inclosed to be posted in London as I wish to avoid giving any clue to my place of residence, publicity not being my ambition.

'It is an answer to the letter I received yesterday, favoured by you. This letter bore the signature G. H. Lewes, and the writer informs me that it is his intention to write a critique on *Jane Eyre* for the December number of *Fraser's Magazine*, and possibly also, he intimates, a brief notice to the *Westminster Review*. Upon the whole he seems favourably inclined to the work, though he hints disapprobation of the melodramatic portions.

'Can you give me any information respecting Mr. Lewes? what station he occupies in the literary world and what works he has written? He styles himself "a fellow novelist." There is something in the candid tone of his letter which inclines me to think well of him.

'I duly received your letter containing the notices from the *Critic*, and the two magazines, and also the *Morning Post*. I hope all these notices will work together for good; they must at any rate give the book a certain publicity. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

Mr. R. H. Horne sent her his *Orion*.

TO R. H. HORNE

'*December* 15*th*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — You will have thought me strangely tardy in acknowledging your courteous present, but the fact is it never reached me till yesterday; the parcel containing it was missent — consequently it lingered a fortnight on its route.

'I have to thank you, not merely for the gift of a little book of 137 pages, but for that of a *poem*. Very real, very sweet is the poetry of *Orion*; there are passages I shall recur to again and yet again — passages instinct both with power and beauty. All through it is genuine — pure from one flaw of affectation, rich in noble imagery. How far the applause of critics has rewarded the author of *Orion* I do not know, but I think the pleasure he enjoyed in its composition must have been a bounteous meed in itself. You could not, I imagine, have written that epic without at times deriving deep happiness from your work.

'With sincere thanks for the pleasure its perusal has afforded me, — I remain, dear sir, yours faithfully,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'Haworth, *December* 15*th*, 1847.

'Dear Sir, — I write a line in haste to apprise you that I have got the parcel. It was sent, through the carelessness of the railroad people, to Bingley, where it lay a fortnight, till a Haworth carrier happening to pass that way brought it on to me.

'I was much pleased to find that you had been kind enough to forward the *Mirror* along with *Fraser*. The article on "the last new novel" is in substance similar to the notice in the *Sunday Times*. One passage only excited much interest in me; it was that where allusion is made to some former work which the author of *Jane Eyre* is supposed to have published — there, I own, my curiosity was a little stimulated. The reviewer cannot mean the little book of rhymes to which Currer Bell contributed a third; but as that, and *Jane Eyre*, and a brief translation of some French verses sent anonymously to a magazine, are the sole productions of mine that have ever appeared in print, I am puzzled to know to what else he can refer.

'The reviewer is mistaken, as he is in perverting my meaning, in attributing to me designs I know not, principles I disown.

'I have been greatly pleased with Mr. R. H. Horne's poem of *Orion*. Will you have the kindness to forward to him the inclosed note, and to correct the address if it is not accurate? — Believe me, dear sir, yours respectfully,

'C. Bell.'

The following elaborate criticism of one of Mr. Lewes's now forgotten novels is almost pathetic; it may give a modern critic pause in his serious treatment of the abundant literary ephemera of which we hear so much from day to day.

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*May* 1*st*, 1848.

'My dear Sir, — I am glad you sent me your letter just as you had written it — without revisal, without retrenching or softening touch, because I cannot doubt that I am a gainer by the omission.

'It would be useless to attempt opposition to your opinions, since, in fact, to read them was to recognise, almost point for point, a clear definition of objections I had already felt, but had found neither the power nor the will to express. Not the power, because I find it very difficult to analyse closely, or to criticise in appropriate words; and not the will, because I was afraid of doing Mr. Lewes injustice. I preferred overrating to underrating the merits of his work.

'Mr. Lewes's sincerity, energy, and talent assuredly command the reader's respect, but on what points he depends to win his attachment I know not. I do not think he cares to excite the pleasant feelings which incline the taught to the teacher as much in friendship as in reverence. The display of his acquirements, to which almost every page bears testimony — citations from Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, and German authors covering as with embroidery the texture of his English — awes and astonishes the plain reader; but if, in addition, you permit yourself to require the refining charm of delicacy, the elevating one of imagination — if you permit yourself to be as fastidious and exacting in these matters as, by your own confession, it appears *you* are, then Mr. Lewes must necessarily inform you that he does not deal in the article; probably he will add that *therefore* it must be non-essential. I should fear he might even stigmatise imagination as a figment, and delicacy as an affectation.

'An honest rough heartiness Mr. Lewes will give you; yet in case you have the misfortune to remark that the heartiness might be quite as honest if it were less rough, would you not run the risk of being termed a sentimentalist or a dreamer?

‘Were I privileged to address Mr. Lewes, and were it wise or becoming to say to him exactly what one thinks, I should utter words to this effect —

‘“You have a sound, clear judgment as far as it goes, but I conceive it to be limited; your standard of talent is high, but I cannot acknowledge it to be the highest; you are deserving of all attention when you lay down the law on principles, but you are to be resisted when you dogmatise on feelings.

‘“To a certain point, Mr. Lewes, you can go, but no farther. Be as sceptical as you please on whatever lies beyond a certain intellectual limit; the mystery will never be cleared up to you, for that limit you will never overpass. Not all your learning, not all your reading, not all your sagacity, not all your perseverance can help you over one viewless line — one boundary as impassable as it is invisible. To enter that sphere a man must be born within it; and untaught peasants have there drawn their first breath, while learned philosophers have striven hard till old age to reach it, and have never succeeded.” I should not dare, nor would it be right, to say this to Mr. Lewes, but I cannot help thinking it both of him and many others who have a great name in the world.

‘Hester Mason’s character, career, and fate appeared to me so strange, grovelling, and miserable, that I never for a moment doubted the whole dreary picture was from the life. I thought in describing the “rustic poetess,” in giving the details of her vulgar provincial and disreputable metropolitan notoriety, and especially in touching on the ghastly catastrophe of her fate, he was faithfully recording facts — thus, however repulsively, yet conscientiously “pointing a moral,” if not “adorning a tale”; but if Hester be the daughter of Lewes’s imagination, and if her experience and her doom be inventions of his fancy, I wish him better, and higher, and truer taste next time he writes a novel.

‘Julius’s exploit with the side of bacon is not defensible; he might certainly, for the fee of a shilling or sixpence, have got a boy to carry it for him.

‘Captain Heath, too, must have cut a deplorable figure behind the post-chaise.

‘Mrs. Vyner strikes one as a portrait from the life; and it equally strikes one that the artist hated his original model with a personal hatred. She is made so bad that one cannot in the least degree sympathise with any of those who love her; one can only despise them. She is a fiend, and therefore not like Mr. Thackeray’s Rebecca, where neither vanity, heartlessness, nor falsehood have been spared by the vigorous and skilful hand which portrays them, but where the human being has been preserved nevertheless, and where, consequently, the lesson given is infinitely more impressive. We can learn little from the strange fantasies of demons — we are not of their kind; but the vices of the deceitful, selfish man or woman humble and warn us. In your remarks on the good girls I concur to the letter; and I must add that I think Blanche, amiable as she is represented, could never have loved her husband after she had discovered that he was utterly despicable. Love is stronger than Cruelty, stronger than Death, but perishes under Meanness; Pity may take its place, but Pity is not Love.

'So far, then, I not only agree with you, but I marvel at the nice perception with which you have discriminated, and at the accuracy with which you have marked each coarse, cold, improbable, unseemly defect. But now I am going to take another side: I am going to differ from you, and it is about Cecil Chamberlayne.

'You say that no man who had intellect enough to paint a picture, or write a comic opera, could act as he did; you say that men of genius and talent may have egregious faults, but they cannot descend to brutality or meanness. Would that the case were so! Would that intellect could preserve from low vice! But, alas! it cannot. No, the whole character of Cecil is painted with but too faithful a hand; it is very masterly, because it is very true. Lewes is nobly right when he says that intellect is *not* the highest faculty of man, though it may be the most brilliant; when he declares that the *moral* nature of his kind is more sacred than the *intellectual* nature; when he prefers "goodness, lovingness, and quiet self-sacrifice to all the talents in the world."

'There is something divine in the thought that genius preserves from degradation, were it but true; but Savage tells us it was not true for him; Sheridan confirms the avowal, and Byron seals it with terrible proof.

'You never probably knew a Cecil Chamberlayne. If you had known such a one you would feel that Lewes has rather subdued the picture than overcharged it; you would know that mental gifts without moral firmness, without a clear sense of right and wrong, without the honourable principle which makes a man rather proud than ashamed of honest labour, are no guarantee from even deepest baseness.

'I have received the *Dublin University Magazine*. The notice is more favourable than I had anticipated; indeed, I had for a long time ceased to anticipate any from that quarter; but the critic does not strike one as too bright. Poor Mr. James is severely handled; *you*, likewise, are hard upon him. He always strikes me as a miracle of productiveness.

'I must conclude by thanking you for your last letter, which both pleased and instructed me. You are quite right in thinking it exhibits the writer's character. Yes, it exhibits it *unmistakeably* (as Lewes would say). And whenever it shall be my lot to submit another MS. to your inspection, I shall crave the full benefit of certain points in that character: I shall ever entreat my *first critic* to be as impartial as he is friendly; what he feels to be out of taste in my writings, I hope he will unsparingly condemn. In the excitement of composition, one is apt to fall into errors that one regrets afterwards, and we never feel our own faults so keenly as when we see them exaggerated in others.

'I conclude in haste, for I have written too long a letter; but it is because there was much to answer in yours. It interested me. I could not help wishing to tell you how nearly I agreed with you. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Bell.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*April* 5*th*, 1849.

'My dear Sir, — Your note was very welcome. I purposely impose on myself the restraint of writing to you seldom now, because I know but too well my letters cannot be cheering. Yet I confess I am glad when the post brings me a letter: it reminds me that if the sun of action and life does not shine on us, it yet beams full on other parts of the world — and I like the recollection.

'I am not going to complain. Anne has indeed suffered much at intervals since I last wrote to you — frost and east wind have had their effect. She has passed nights of sleeplessness and pain, and days of depression and languor which nothing could cheer — but still, with the return of genial weather she revives. I cannot perceive that she is feebler now than she was a month ago, though that is not saying much. It proves, however, that no rapid process of destruction is going on in her frame, and keeps alive a hope that with the renovating aid of summer she may yet be spared a long time.

'What you tell me of Mr. Lewes seems to me highly characteristic. How sanguine, versatile, and self-confident must that man be who can with ease exchange the quiet sphere of the author for the bustling one of the actor! I heartily wish him success; and, in happier times, there are few things I should have relished more than an opportunity of seeing him in his new character.

'The Cornhill books are still our welcome and congenial resource when Anne is well enough to enjoy reading. Carlyle's *Miscellanies* interest me greatly. We have read *The Emigrant Family*. The characters in the work are good, full of quiet truth and nature, and the local colouring is excellent; yet I can hardly call it a good novel. Reflective, truth-loving, and even elevated as is Alexander Harris's mind, I should say he scarcely possesses the creative faculty in sufficient vigour to excel as a writer of fiction. He *creates* nothing — he only copies. His characters are portraits — servilely accurate; whatever is at all ideal is not original. *The Testimony to the Truth* is a better book than any tale he can write will ever be. Am I too dogmatical in saying this?

'Anne thanks you sincerely for the kind interest you take in her welfare, and both she and I beg to express our sense of Mrs. Williams's good wishes, which you mentioned in a former letter. We are grateful, too, to Mr. Smith and to all who offer us the sympathy of friendship.

'Whenever you can write with pleasure to yourself, remember Currer Bell is glad to hear from you, and he will make his letters as little dreary as he can in reply. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

It was always a great trouble to Miss Wheelwright, whose friendship, it will be remembered, she had made in Brussels, that Charlotte was monopolised by the Smiths on her rare visits to London, but she frequently came to call at Lower Phillimore Place.

TO MISS LÆTITIA WHEELWRIGHT

'Haworth, Keighley, *December* 17*th*, 1849.

'My dear Lætitia, — I have just time to save the post by writing a brief note. I reached home safely on Saturday afternoon, and, I am thankful to say, found papa quite well.

'The evening after I left you passed better than I expected. Thanks to my substantial lunch and cheering cup of coffee, I was able to wait the eight o'clock dinner with complete resignation, and to endure its length quite courageously, nor was I too much exhausted to converse; and of this I was glad, for otherwise I know my kind host and hostess would have been much disappointed. There were only seven gentlemen at dinner besides Mr. Smith, but of these, five were critics — a formidable band, including the literary Rhadamanthi of the *Times*, the *Athenæum*, the *Examiner*, the *Spectator*, and the *Atlas*: men more dreaded in the world of letters than you can conceive. I did not know how much their presence and conversation had excited me till they were gone, and then reaction commenced. When I had retired for the night I wished to sleep; the effort to do so was vain — I could not close my eyes. Night passed, morning came, and I rose without having known a moment's slumber. So utterly worn out was I when I got to Derby, that I was obliged to stay there all night.

'The post is going. Give my affectionate love to your mamma, Emily, Fanny, and Sarah Anne. Remember me respectfully to your papa, and — Believe me, dear Lætitia, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

Miss Wheelwright's other sisters well remember certain episodes in connection with these London visits. They recall Charlotte's anxiety and trepidation at the prospect of meeting Thackeray. They recollect her simple, dainty dress, her shy demeanour, her absolutely unspoiled character. They tell me it was in the *Illustrated London News*, about the time of the publication of *Shirley*, that they first learnt that Currer Bell and Charlotte Brontë were one. They would, however, have known that *Shirley* was by a Brussels pupil, they declared, from the absolute resemblance of Hortense Moore to one of their governesses — Mlle. Hausse.

At the end of 1849 Miss Brontë and Miss Martineau became acquainted. Charlotte's admiration for her more strong-minded sister writer was at first profound.

TO JAMES TAYLOR

'*January* 1*st*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I am sorry there should have occurred an irregularity in the transmission of the papers; it has been owing to my absence from home. I trust the interruption has occasioned no inconvenience. Your last letter evinced such a sincere and discriminating admiration for Dr. Arnold, that perhaps you will not be wholly uninterested in hearing that during my late visit to Miss Martineau I saw much more of Fox How and its inmates, and daily admired, in the widow and children of one of the greatest and best men of his time, the possession of qualities the most estimable and endearing. Of my kind hostess herself I cannot speak in terms too high. Without being able to share all her opinions, philosophical, political, or religious, without adopting her theories, I yet find a worth and greatness in herself, and a consistency, benevolence, perseverance in her practice such as wins the sincerest esteem and affection. She is not a person to be judged by her writings alone, but rather by her own deeds and life — than which nothing can be more exemplary or nobler. She seems to me the benefactress of Ambleside, yet takes no sort of credit to herself for her active and indefatigable philanthropy. The government of her household is admirably administered; all she does is well done, from the writing of a history down to the quietest female occupation. No sort of carelessness or neglect is allowed under her rule, and yet she is not over strict nor too rigidly exacting; her servants and her poor neighbours love as well as respect her.

'I must not, however, fall into the error of talking too much about her, merely because my own mind is just now deeply impressed with what I have seen of her intellectual power and moral worth. Faults she has, but to me they appear very trivial weighed in the balance against her excellencies.

'With every good wish of the season, — I am, my dear sir, yours very sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

Meanwhile the excitement which *Shirley* was exciting in Currer Bell's home circle was not confined to the curates. Here is a letter which Canon Heald (Cyril Hall) wrote at this time: —

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Birstall, near Leeds,
'8*th January* 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — Fame says you are on a visit with the renowned Currer Bell, the "great unknown" of the present day. The celebrated *Shirley* has just found its way hither. And as one always reads a book with more interest when one has a correct insight into the writer's designs, I write to ask a favour, which I ought not to be regarded presumptuous in saying that I think I have a species of claim to ask, on the ground of a sort of "poetical justice." The interpretation of this enigma is, that the story goes that either I or my father, I do not exactly know which, are part of "Currer Bell's" stock-in-trade, under the title of Mr. Hall, in that Mr. Hall is represented as black, bilious, and of dismal aspect, stooping a trifle, and indulging a little now and then in the indigenous dialect. This seems to sit very well on your humble servant — other traits do better for my good father than myself. However, though I had no idea that I should be made a means to amuse the public, Currer Bell is perfectly welcome to what she can make of so unpromising a subject. But I think *I have a fair claim in return to be let into the secret of the company I have got into*. Some of them are good enough to tell, and need no Œdipus to solve the riddle. I can tabulate, for instance, the Yorke family for the Taylors, Mr. Moore — Mr. Cartwright, and Mr. Helstone is clearly meant for Mr. Robertson, though the authoress has evidently got her idea of his character through an unfavourable medium, and does not understand the full value of one of the most admirable characters I ever knew or expect to know. May thinks she descries Cecilia Crowther and Miss Johnston (afterwards Mrs. Westerman) in two old maids.

'Now pray get us a full light on all other names and localities that are adumbrated in this said *Shirley*. When some of the prominent characters will be recognised by every one who knows our quarters, there can be no harm in letting one know who may be intended by the rest. And, if necessary, I will bear Currer Bell harmless, and not let the world know that I have my intelligence from head-quarters. As I said before, I repeat now, that as I or mine are part of the stock-in-trade, I think I have an equitable claim to this intelligence, by way of my dividend. Mary and Harriet wish also to get at this information; and the latter at all events seems to have her own peculiar claim, as fame says she is "in the book" too. One had need "walk . . . warily in these dangerous days," when, as Burns (is it not he?) says —

'A chield's among you taking notes,
And faith he'll prent it.' —

'Yours sincerely,

'W. M. Heald.

'Mary and Harriet unite with me in the best wishes of the season to you and C — - B — -. Pray give my best respects to Mr. Brontë also, who may have some slight remembrance of me as a child. I just remember him when at Hartshead.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*February* 2*nd*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I have despatched to-day a parcel containing *The Caxtons*, Macaulay's *Essays*, *Humboldt's Letters*, and such other of the books as I have read, packed with a picturesque irregularity well calculated to excite the envy and admiration of your skilful functionary in Cornhill. By-the-bye, he ought to be careful of the few pins stuck in here and there, as he might find them useful at a future day, in case of having more bonnets to pack for the East Indies. Whenever you send me a new supply of books, may I request that you will have the goodness to include one or two of Miss Austen's. I am often asked whether I have read them, and I excite amazement by replying in the negative. I have read none except *Pride and Prejudice*. Miss Martineau mentioned *Persuasion* as the best.

'Thank you for your account of the *First Performance*. It was cheering and pleasant to read it, for in your animated description I seemed to realise the scene; your criticism also enables me to form some idea of the play. Lewes is a strange being. I always regret that I did not see him when in London. He seems to me clever, sharp, and coarse; I used to think him sagacious, but I believe now he is no more than shrewd, for I have observed once or twice that he brings forward as grand discoveries of his own, information he has casually received from others — true sagacity disdains little tricks of this sort. But though Lewes has many smart and some deserving points about him, he has nothing truly great; and nothing truly great, I should think, will he ever produce. Yet he merits just such successes as the one you describe — triumphs public, brief, and noisy. Notoriety suits Lewes. Fame — were it possible that he could achieve her — would be a thing uncongenial to him: he could not wait for the solemn blast of her trumpet, sounding long, and slowly waxing louder.

'I always like your way of mentioning Mr. Smith, because my own opinion of him concurs with yours; and it is as pleasant to have a favourable impression of character confirmed, as it is painful to see it dispelled. I am sure he possesses a fine nature, and I trust the selfishness of the world and the hard habits of business, though they may and must modify him disposition, will never quite spoil it.

'Can you give me any information respecting Sheridan Knowles? A few lines received from him lately, and a present of his *George Lovel*, induce me to ask the question. Of course I am aware that he is a dramatic writer of eminence, but do you know anything about him as a man?

'I believe both *Shirley* and *Jane Eyre* are being a good deal read in the North just now; but I only hear fitful rumours from time to time. I ask nothing, and my life of anchorite seclusion shuts out all bearers of tidings. One or two curiosity-hunter have made their way to Haworth Parsonage, but our rude hill and rugged neighbourhood will, I doubt not, form a sufficient barrier to the frequent repetition of such visits. — Believe me, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

The most permanent friend among the curiosity-hunters, was Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, who came a month later to Haworth.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*March* 1*st*, 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — I scribble you a line in haste to tell you of my proceedings. Various folks are beginning to come boring to Haworth, on the wise errand of seeing the scenery described in *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley*; amongst others, Sir J. K. Shuttleworth and Lady S. have persisted in coming; they were here on Friday. The baronet looks in vigorous health; he scarcely appears more than thirty-five, but he says he is forty-four. Lady Shuttleworth is rather handsome, and still young. They were both quite unpretending. When here they again urged me to visit them. Papa took their side at once — would not hear of my refusing. I must go — this left me without plea or defence. I consented to go for three days. They wanted me to return with them in the carriage, but I pleaded off till to-morrow. I wish it was well over.

'If all be well I shall be able to write more about them when I come back. Sir J. is very courtly — fine-looking; I wish he may be as sincere as he is polished. — In haste, yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*March* 16*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I found your letter with several others awaiting me on my return home from a brief stay in Lancashire. The mourning border alarmed me much. I feared that dread visitant, before whose coming every household trembles, had invaded your hearth and taken from you perhaps a child, perhaps something dearer still. The loss you have actually sustained is painful, but so much *less* painful than what I had anticipated, that to read your letter was to be greatly relieved. Still, I know what Mrs. Williams will feel. We can have but one father, but one mother, and when either is gone, we have lost what can never be replaced. Offer her, under this affliction, my sincere sympathy. I can well imagine the cloud these sad tidings would cast over your young cheerful family. Poor little Dick's exclamation and burst of grief are most naïve and natural; he felt the sorrow of a child — a keen, but, happily, a transient pang. Time will, I trust, ere long restore your own and your wife's serenity and your children's cheerfulness.

'I mentioned, I think, that we had one or two visitors at Haworth lately; amongst them were Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth and his lady. Before departing they exacted a promise that I would visit them at Gawthorpe Hall, their residence on the borders of East Lancashire. I went reluctantly, for it is always a difficult and painful thing to me to meet the advances of people whose kindness I am in no position to repay. Sir James is a man of polished manners, with clear intellect and highly cultivated mind. On the whole, I got on very well with him.

'His health is just now somewhat broken by his severe official labours; and the quiet drives to old ruins and old halls situate amongst older hills and woods, the dialogues (perhaps I should rather say monologues, for I listened far more than I talked) by the fireside in his antique oak-panelled drawing-room, while they suited him, did not too much oppress and exhaust me. The house, too, is very much to my taste, near three centuries old, grey, stately, and picturesque. On the whole, now that the visit is over, I do not regret having paid it. The worst of it is that there is now some menace hanging over my head of an invitation to go to them in London during the season — this, which would doubtless be a great enjoyment to some people, is a perfect terror to me. I should highly prize the advantages to be gained in an extended range of observation, but I tremble at the thought of the price I must necessarily pay in mental distress and physical wear and tear. But you shall have no more of my confessions — to you they will appear folly. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*March* 19*th*, 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — I have got home again, and now that the visit is over, I am, as usual, glad I have been; not that I could have endured to prolong it: a few days at once, in an utterly strange place, amongst utterly strange faces, is quite enough for me.

'When the train stopped at Burnley, I found Sir James waiting for me. A drive of about three miles brought us to the gates of Gawthorpe, and after passing up a somewhat desolate avenue, there towered the hall — grey, antique, castellated, and stately — before me. It is 250 years old, and, within as without, is a model of old English architecture. The arms and the strange crest of the Shuttleworths are carved on the oak pannelling of each room. They are not a parvenue family, but date from the days of Richard III. This part of Lancashire seems rather remarkable for its houses of ancient race. The Townleys, who live near, go back to the Conquest.

'The people, however, were of still more interest to me than the house. Lady Shuttleworth is a little woman, thirty-two years old, with a pretty, smooth, lively face. Of pretension to aristocratic airs she may be entirely acquitted; of frankness, good-humour, and activity she has enough; truth obliges me to add, that, as it seems to me, grace, dignity, fine feeling were not in the inventory of her qualities. These last are precisely what her husband possesses. In manner he can be gracious and dignified; his tastes and feelings are capable of elevation; frank he is not, but, on the contrary, politic; he calls himself a man of the world and knows the world's ways; courtly and affable in some points of view, he is strict and rigorous in others. In him high mental cultivation is combined with an extended range of observation, and thoroughly practical views and habits. His nerves are naturally acutely sensitive, and the present very critical state of his health has exaggerated sensitiveness into irritability. His wife is of a temperament precisely suited to nurse him and wait on him; if her sensations were more delicate and acute she would not do half so well. They get on perfectly together. The children — there are four of them — are all fine children in their way. They have a young German lady as governess — a quiet, well-instructed, interesting girl, whom I took to at once, and, in my heart, liked better than anything else in the house. She also instinctively took to me. She is very well treated for a governess, but wore the usual pale, despondent look of her class. She told me she was home-sick, and she looked so.

'I have received the parcel containing the cushion and all the etcetera, for which I thank you very much. I suppose I must begin with the group of flowers; I don't know how I shall manage it, but I shall try. I have a good number of letters to answer — from Mr. Smith, from Mr. Williams, from

Thornton Hunt, Lætitia Wheelwright, Harriet Dyson — and so I must bid you good-bye for the present. Write to me soon. The brief absence from home, though in some respects trying and painful in itself, has, I think, given me a little better tone of spirit. All through this month of February I have had a crushing time of it. I could not escape from or rise above certain most mournful recollections — the last few days, the sufferings, the remembered words, most sorrowful to me, of those who, Faith assures me, are now happy. At evening and bed-time such thoughts would haunt me, bringing a weary heartache. Good-bye, dear Nell. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 21*st*, 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — My visit is again postponed. Sir James Shuttleworth, I am sorry to say, is most seriously ill. Two physicians are in attendance twice a day, and company and conversation, even with his own relatives, are prohibited as too exciting. Notwithstanding this, he has written two notes to me himself, claiming a promise that I will wait till he is better, and not allow any one else "to introduce me" as he says, "into the Oceanic life of London." Sincerely sorry as I was for him, I could not help smiling at this sentence. But I shall willingly promise. I know something of him, and like part, at least, of what I do know. I do not feel in the least tempted to change him for another. His sufferings are very great. I trust and hope God will be pleased to spare his mind. I have just got a note informing me that he is something better; but, of course, he will vary. Lady Shuttleworth is much, much to be pitied too; his nights, it seems, are most distressing. — Good-bye, dear Nell. Write soon to

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'76 Gloucester Terrace,
'Hyde Park Gardens, *June* 3*rd*, 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — I came to London last Thursday. I am staying at Mrs. Smith's, who has changed her residence, as the address will show. A good deal of writing backwards and forwards, persuasion, etc., took place before this step was resolved on; but at last I explained to Sir James that I had some little matters of business to transact, and that I should stay quietly at my publisher's. He has called twice, and Lady Shuttleworth once; each of them alone. He is in a fearfully nervous state. To my great horror he talks of my going with them to Hampton Court, Windsor, etc. God knows how I shall get on. I perfectly dread it.

'Here I feel very comfortable. Mrs. Smith treats me with a serene, equable kindness which just suits me. Her son is, as before, genial and kindly. I have seen very few persons, and am not likely to see many, as the agreement was that I was to be very quiet. We have been to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, to the Opera, and the Zoological Gardens. The weather is splendid. I shall not stay longer than a fortnight in London. The feverishness and exhaustion beset me somewhat, but not quite so badly as before, as indeed I have not yet been so much tried. I hope you will write soon and tell me how you are getting on. Give my regards to all. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'76 Gloucester Terrace,
'Hyde Park Gardens, *June* 4*th*, 1850.

'Dear Papa, — I was very glad to get your letter this morning, and still more glad to learn that your health continues in some degree to improve. I fear you will feel the present weather somewhat debilitating, at least if it is as warm in Yorkshire as in London. I cannot help grudging these fine days on account of the roofing of the house. It is a great pity the workmen were not prepared to begin a week ago.

'Since I wrote I have been to the Opera; to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, where there were some fine paintings, especially a large one by Landseer of the Duke of Wellington on the field of Waterloo, and a grand, wonderful picture of Martin's from Campbell's poem of the "Last Man," showing the red sun fading out of the sky, and all the soil of the foreground made up of bones and skulls. The secretary of the Zoological Society also sent me an honorary ticket of admission to their gardens, which I wish you could see. There are animals from all parts of the world inclosed in great cages in the open air amongst trees and shrubs — lions, tigers, leopards, elephants, numberless monkies, camels, five or six cameleopards, a young hippopotamus with an Egyptian for its keeper; birds of all kinds — eagles, ostriches, a pair of great condors from the Andes, strange ducks and water-fowl which seem very happy and comfortable, and build their nests amongst the reeds and sedges of the lakes where they are kept. Some of the American birds make inexpressible noises.

'There are also all sorts of living snakes and lizards in cages, some great Ceylon toads not much smaller than Flossy, some large foreign rats nearly as large and fierce as little bull-dogs. The most ferocious and deadly-looking things in the place were these rats, a laughing hyena (which every now and then uttered a hideous peal of laughter such as a score of maniacs might produce) and a cobra di capello snake. I think this snake was the worst of all: it had the eyes and face of a fiend, and darted out its barbed tongue sharply and incessantly.

'I am glad to hear that Tabby and Martha are pretty well. Remember me to them, and — Believe me, dear papa, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.

'I hope you don't care for the notice in *Sharpe's Magazine*; it does not disturb me in the least. Mr. Smith says it is of no consequence whatever in a literary sense. Sharpe, the proprietor, was an apprentice of Mr. Smith's father.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'76 Gloucester Terrace,
'Hyde Park Gardens, *June* 21*st*, 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — I am leaving London, if all be well, on Tuesday, and shall be very glad to come to you for a few days, if that arrangement still remains convenient to you. I intend to start at nine o'clock a.m. by the express train, which arrives in Leeds thirty-five minutes past two. I should then be at Batley about four in the afternoon. Would that suit?

'My London visit has much surpassed my expectations this time; I have suffered less and enjoyed more than before. Rather a trying termination yet remains to me. Mrs. Smith's youngest son is at school in Scotland, and George, her eldest, is going to fetch him home for the vacation. The other evening he announced his intention of taking one of his sisters with him, and proposed that Miss Brontë should go down to Edinburgh and join them there, and see that city and its suburbs. I concluded he was joking, laughed and declined; however, it seems he was in earnest. The thing appearing to me perfectly out of the question, I still refused. Mrs. Smith did not favour it; you may easily fancy how she helped me to sustain my opposition, but her worthy son only waxed more determined. His mother is master of the house, but he is master of his mother. This morning she came and entreated me to go. "George wished it so much"; he had begged her to use her influence, etc., etc. Now I believe that George and I understand each other very well, and respect each other very sincerely. We both know the wide breach time has made between us; we do not embarrass each other, or very rarely; my six or eight years of seniority, to say nothing of lack of all pretension to beauty, etc., are a perfect safeguard. I should not in the least fear to go with him to China. I like to see him pleased, I greatly *dis*like to ruffle and disappoint him, so he shall have his mind; and if all be well, I mean to join him in Edinburgh after I shall have spent a few days with you. With his buoyant animal spirits and youthful vigour he will make severe demands on my muscles and nerves, but I daresay I shall get through somehow, and then perhaps come back to rest a few days with you before I go home. With kind regards to all at Brookroyd, your guests included, — I am, dear Ellen, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.

'Write by return of post.'

TO MISS LÆTITIA WHEELWRIGHT

'Haworth, *July* 30*th*, 1850.

'My dear Lætitia, — I promised to write to you when I should have returned home. Returned home I am, but you may conceive that many, many matters solicit attention and demand arrangement in a house which has lately been turned topsy-turvy in the operation of unroofing. Drawers and cupboards must wait a moment, however, while I fulfil my promise, though it is imperatively necessary that this fulfilment should be achieved with brevity.

'My stay in Scotland was short, and what I saw was chiefly comprised in

Edinburgh and the neighbourhood, in Abbotsford and Melrose, for I was obliged to relinquish my first intention of going from Glasgow to Oban and thence through a portion of the Highlands. But though the time was brief, and the view of objects limited, I found such a charm of situation, association, and circumstances that I think the enjoyment experienced in that little space equalled in degree and excelled in kind all which London yielded during a month's sojourn. Edinburgh compared to London is like a vivid page of history compared to a huge dull treatise on political economy; and as to Melrose and Abbotsford, the very names possess music and magic.

'I am thankful to say that on my return home I found papa pretty well. Full often had I thought of him when I was far away; and deeply sad as it is on many accounts to come back to this old house, yet I was glad to be with him once more.

'You were proposing, I remember, to go into the country; I trust you are there now and enjoying this fine day in some scene where the air will not be tainted, nor the sunshine dimmed, by London smoke. If your papa, mamma, or any of your sisters are within reach, give them my kindest remembrances — if not, save such remembrances till you see them. — Believe me, my dear Lætitia, yours hurriedly but faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'Ambleside, *August* 15*th*, 1850.

'Dear Papa, — I think I shall not come home till Thursday. If all be well I shall leave here on Monday and spend a day or two with Ellen Nussey. I have enjoyed my visit exceedingly. Sir J. K. Shuttleworth has called several times and taken me out in his carriage. He seems very truly friendly; but, I am sorry to say, he looks pale and very much wasted. I greatly fear he will not live very long unless some change for the better soon takes place. Lady S. is ill too, and cannot go out. I have seen a good deal of Dr. Arnold's family, and like them much. As to Miss Martineau, I admire her and wonder at her more than I can say. Her powers of labour, of exercise, and social cheerfulness are beyond my comprehension. In spite of the unceasing activity of her colossal intellect she enjoys robust health. She is a taller, larger, and more strongly made woman than I had imagined from that first interview with her. She is very kind to me, though she must think I am a very insignificant person compared to herself. She has just been into the room to show me a chapter of her history which she is now writing, relating to the Duke of Wellington's character and his proceedings in the Peninsula. She wanted an opinion on it, and I was happy to be able to give a very approving one. She seems to understand and do him justice.

'You must not direct any more letters here as they will not reach me after to-day. Hoping, dear papa, that you are well, and with kind regards to Tabby and Martha, — I am, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

TO W. S. WILLIAMS

'*October* 2*nd*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — I have to thank you for the care and kindness with which you have assisted me throughout in correcting these *Remains*.

'Whether, when they are published, they will appear to others as they do to me, I cannot tell. I hope not. And indeed I suppose what to me is bitter pain will only be soft pathos to the general public.

'Miss Martineau has several times lately asked me to go and see her; and though this is a dreary season for travelling northward, I think if papa continues pretty well I shall go in a week or two. I feel to my deep sorrow, to my humiliation, that it is not in my power to bear the canker of constant solitude. I had calculated that when shut out from every enjoyment, from every stimulus but what could be derived from intellectual exertion, my mind would rouse itself perforce. It is not so. Even intellect, even imagination, will not dispense with the ray of domestic cheerfulness, with the gentle spur of family discussion. Late in the evenings, and all through the nights, I fall into a condition of mind which turns entirely to the past — to memory; and memory is both sad and relentless. This will never do, and will produce no good. I tell you this that you may check false anticipations. You cannot help me, and must not trouble yourself in any shape to sympathise with me. It is my cup, and I must drink it, as others drink theirs. — Yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

Among Miss Brontë's papers I find the following letter to Miss Martineau, written with a not unnatural resentment after the publication of a severe critique of *Shirley*.

TO MISS HARRIET MARTINEAU.

'My dear Miss Martineau, — I think I best show my sense of the tone and feeling of your last, by immediate compliance with the wish you express that I should send your letter. I inclose it, and have marked with red ink the passage which struck me dumb. All the rest is fair, right, worthy of you, but I protest against this passage; and were I brought up before the bar of all the critics in England, to such a charge I should respond, "Not guilty."

'I know what *love* is as I understand it; and if man or woman should be ashamed of feeling such love, then is there nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful, unselfish in this earth, as I comprehend rectitude, nobleness, fidelity, truth, and disinterestedness. — Yours sincerely,

'C. B.

'To differ from you gives me keen pain.'

TO JAMES TAYLOR, CORNHILL

'*November* 6*th*, 1850.

'My dear Sir, — Mrs. Arnold seemed an amiable, and must once have been a very pretty, woman; her daughter I liked much. There was present also a son of Chevalier Bunsen, with his wife, or rather bride. I had not then read Dr. Arnold's Life — otherwise, the visit would have interested me even more than it actually did.

'Mr. Williams told me (if I mistake not) that you had recently visited the Lake Country. I trust you enjoyed your excursion, and that our English Lakes did not suffer too much by comparison in your memory with the Scottish Lochs. — I am, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Ambleside, *December* 21*st*, 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — I have managed to get off going to Sir J. K. Shuttleworth's by a promise to come some other time. I thought I really should like to spend two or three days with you before going home; therefore, if it is not inconvenient for you, I will come on Monday and stay till Thursday. I shall be at Bradford (D.V.) at ten minutes past two, Monday afternoon, and can take a cab at the station forward to Birstall. I have truly enjoyed my visit. I have seen a good many people, and all have been so marvellously kind; not the least so the family of Dr. Arnold. Miss Martineau I relish inexpressibly. Sir James has been almost every day to take me a drive. I begin to admit in my own mind that he is sincerely benignant to me. I grieve to say he looks to me as if wasting away. Lady Shuttleworth is ill. She cannot go out, and I have not seen her. Till we meet, good-bye.

'C. Brontë.'

It was during this visit to Ambleside that Charlotte Brontë and Matthew Arnold met.

'At seven,' writes Mr. Arnold from Fox How (December 21, 1850), 'came Miss Martineau and Miss Brontë (Jane Eyre); talked to Miss Martineau (who blasphemes frightfully) about the prospects of the Church of England, and, wretched man that I am, promised to go and see her cow-keeping miracles to-morrow — I, who hardly know a cow from a sheep. I talked to Miss Brontë (past thirty and plain, with expressive grey eyes, though) of her curates, of French novels, and her education in a school at Brussels, and sent the lions roaring to their dens at half-past nine, and came to talk to you.'

By the light of this 'impression,' it is not a little interesting to see what Miss Brontë, 'past thirty and plain,' thought of Mr. Matthew Arnold!

TO JAMES TAYLOR, CORNHILL,

'*January* 15*th*, 1851.

'My dear Sir, — I fancy the imperfect way in which my last note was expressed must have led you into an error, and that you must have applied to Mrs. Arnold the remarks I intended for Miss Martineau. I remember whilst writing about "my hostess" I was sensible to some obscurity in the term; permit me now to explain that it referred to Miss Martineau.

'Mrs. Arnold is, indeed, as I judge from my own observations no less than from the unanimous testimony of all who really know her, a good and amiable woman, but the intellectual is not her forte, and she has no pretensions to power or completeness of character. The same remark, I think, applies to her daughters. You admire in them the kindliest feeling towards each other and their fellow-creatures, and they offer in their home circle a beautiful example of family unity, and of that refinement which is sure to spring thence; but when the conversation turns on literature or any subject that offers a test for the intellect, you usually felt that their opinions were rather imitative than original, rather sentimental than sound. Those who have only seen Mrs. Arnold once will necessarily, I think, judge of her unfavourably; her manner on introduction disappointed me sensibly, as lacking that genuineness and simplicity one seemed to have a right to expect in the chosen life-companion of Dr. Arnold. On my remarking as much to Mrs. Gaskell and Sir J. K. Shuttleworth, I was told for my consolation it was a "conventional manner," but that it vanished on closer acquaintance; fortunately this last assurance proved true. It is observable that Matthew Arnold, the eldest son, and the author of the volume of poems to which you allude, inherits his mother's defect. Striking and prepossessing in appearance, his manner displeases from its seeming foppery. I own it caused me at first to regard him with regretful surprise; the shade of Dr. Arnold seemed to me to frown on his young representative. I was told, however, that "Mr. Arnold improved upon acquaintance." So it was: ere long a real modesty appeared under his assumed conceit, and some genuine intellectual aspirations, as well as high educational acquirements, displaced superficial affectations. I was given to understand that his theological opinions were very vague and unsettled, and indeed he betrayed as much in the course of conversation. Most unfortunate for him, doubtless, has been the untimely loss of his father.

'My visit to Westmoreland has certainly done me good. Physically, I was not ill before I went there, but my mind had undergone some painful laceration. In the course of looking over my sister's papers, mementos, and memoranda, that would have been nothing to others, conveyed for me so keen a sting. Near at hand there was no means of lightening or effacing the sad impression by refreshing social intercourse; from my father, of course, my sole care was to conceal it — age demanding the same forbearance as infancy in the communication of grief. Continuous solitude grew more than I could bear, and, to speak truth, I was glad of a change. You will say that we ought to have power in ourselves either to bear circumstances or to bend them. True, we should do our best to this end, but sometimes our best is unavailing. However, I am better now, and most thankful for the respite.

'The interest you so kindly express in my sister's works touches me home. Thank you for it, especially as I do not believe you would speak otherwise than sincerely. The only notices that I have seen of the new edition of *Wuthering Heights* were those in the *Examiner*, the *Leader*, and the *Athenæum*. That in the *Athenæum* somehow gave me pleasure: it is quiet but respectful — so I thought, at least.

'You asked whether Miss Martineau made me a convert to mesmerism? Scarcely; yet I heard miracles of its efficacy and could hardly discredit the whole of what was told me. I even underwent a personal experiment; and though the result was not absolutely clear, it was inferred that in time I should prove an excellent subject.

'The question of mesmerism will be discussed with little reserve, I believe, in a forthcoming work of Miss Martineau's, and I have some painful anticipations of the manner in which other subjects, offering less legitimate ground for speculation, will be handled.

'You mention the *Leader*; what do you think of it? I have been asked to contribute; but though I respect the spirit of fairness and courtesy in which it is on the whole conducted, its principles on some points are such that I have hitherto shrunk from the thought of seeing my name in its columns.

'Thanking you for your good wishes, — I am, my dear sir, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS LÆTITIA WHEELWRIGHT

'Haworth, *January* 12*th*, 1851.

'Dear Lætitia, — A spare moment must and shall be made for you, no matter how many letters I have to write (and just now there is an influx). In reply to your kind inquiries, I have to say that my stay in London and excursion to Scotland did me good — much good at the time; but my health was again somewhat sharply tried at the close of autumn, and I lost in some days of indisposition the additional flesh and strength I had previously gained. This resulted from the painful task of looking over letters and papers belonging to my sisters. Many little mementos and memoranda conspired to make an impression inexpressibly sad, which solitude deepened and fostered till I grew ill. A brief trip to Westmoreland has, however, I am thankful to say, revived me again, and the circumstance of papa being just now in good health and spirits gives me many causes for gratitude. When we have but one precious thing left we think much of it.

'I have been staying a short time with Miss Martineau. As you may imagine, the visit proved one of no common interest. She is certainly a woman of wonderful endowments, both intellectual and physical, and though I share few of her opinions, and regard her as fallible on certain points of judgment, I must still accord her my sincerest esteem. The manner in which she combines the highest mental culture with the nicest discharge of feminine duties filled me with admiration, while her affectionate kindness earned my gratitude.

'Your description of the magician Paxton's crystal palace is quite graphic. Whether I shall see it or not I don't know. London will be so dreadfully crowded and busy this season, I feel a dread of going there.

'Compelled to break off, I have only time to offer my kindest remembrances to your whole circle, and my love to yourself. — Yours ever,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË

'112 Gloucester Terrace, Hyde Park,
'London, *June* 17*th*, 1851.

'Dear Papa, — I write a line in haste to tell you that I find they will not let me leave London till next Tuesday; and as I have promised to spend a day or two with Mrs. Gaskell on my way home, it will probably be Friday or Saturday in next week before I return to Haworth. Martha will thus have a few days more time, and must not hurry or overwork herself. Yesterday I saw Cardinal Wiseman and heard him speak. It was at a meeting for the Roman Catholic Society of St. Vincent de Paul; the Cardinal presided. He is a big portly man something of the shape of Mr. Morgan; he has not merely a double but a treble and quadruple chin; he has a very large mouth with oily lips, and looks as if he would relish a good dinner with a bottle of wine after it. He came swimming into the room smiling, simpering, and bowing like a fat old lady, and sat down very demure in his chair and looked the picture of a sleek hypocrite. He was dressed in black like a bishop or dean in plain clothes, but wore scarlet gloves and a brilliant scarlet waistcoat. A bevy of inferior priests surrounded him, many of them very dark-looking and sinister men. The Cardinal spoke in a smooth whining manner, just like a canting Methodist preacher. The audience seemed to look up to him as to a god. A spirit of the hottest zeal pervaded the whole meeting. I was told afterwards that except myself and the person who accompanied me there was not a single Protestant present. All the speeches turned on the necessity of straining every nerve to make converts to popery. It is in such a scene that one feels what the Catholics are doing. Most persevering and enthusiastic are they in their work! Let Protestants look to it. It cheered me much to hear that you continue pretty well. Take every care of yourself. Remember me kindly to Tabby and Martha, also to Mr. Nicholls, and — Believe me, dear papa, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*June* 19*th*, 1851.

'Dear Ellen, — I shall have to stay in London a few days longer than I intended. Sir J. K. Shuttleworth has found out that I am here. I have some trouble in warding off his wish that I should go directly to his house and take up my quarters there, but Mrs. Smith helped me, and I got off with promising to spend a day. I am engaged to spend a day or two with Mrs. Gaskell on my way home, and could not put her off, as she is going away for a portion of the summer. Lady Shuttleworth looks very delicate. Papa is now very desirous I should come home; and when I have as quickly as possible paid my debts of engagements, home I must go. Next Tuesday I go to Manchester for two days.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'112 Gloucester Terrace,

'Hyde Park, *June* 24*th*, 1851.

'Dear Ellen, — I cannot now leave London till Friday. To-morrow is Mr. Smith's only holiday. Mr. Taylor's departure leaves him loaded with work. More than once since I came he has been kept in the city till three in the morning. He wants to take us all to Richmond, and I promised last week I would stay and go with him, his mother, and sisters. I go to Mrs. Gaskell's on Friday. — Believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË, Haworth, Yorks

'112 Gloucester Terrace,
'*June* 26*th*, 1851.

'Dear Papa, — I have not yet been able to get away from London, but if all be well I shall go to-morrow, stay two days with Mrs. Gaskell at Manchester, and return home on Monday 30th *without fail*. During this last week or ten days I have seen many things, some of them very interesting, and have also been in much better health than I was during the first fortnight of my stay in London. Sir James and Lady Shuttleworth have really been very kind, and most scrupulously attentive. They desire their regards to you, and send all manner of civil messages. The Marquis of Westminster and the Earl of Ellesmere each sent me an order to see their private collection of pictures, which I enjoyed very much. Mr. Rogers, the patriarch-poet, now eighty-seven years old, invited me to breakfast with him. His breakfasts, you must understand, are celebrated throughout Europe for their peculiar refinement and taste. He never admits at that meal more than four persons to his table: himself and three guests. The morning I was there I met Lord Glenelg and Mrs. Davenport, a relation of Lady Shuttleworth's, and a very beautiful and fashionable woman. The visit was very interesting; I was glad that I had paid it after it was over. An attention that pleased and surprised me more I think than any other was the circumstance of Sir David Brewster, who is one of the first scientific men of his day, coming to take me over the Crystal Palace and pointing out and explaining the most remarkable curiosities. You will know, dear papa, that I do not mention those things to boast of them, but merely because I think they will give you pleasure. Nobody, I find, thinks the worse of me for avoiding publicity and declining to go to large parties, and everybody seems truly courteous and respectful, a mode of behaviour which makes me grateful, as it ought to do. Good-bye till Monday. Give my best regards to Mr. Nicholls, Tabby, and Martha, and — Believe me your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

CHAPTER XVII: THE REV. ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS

Without the kindly assistance of Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls, this book could not have been written, and I might therefore be supposed to guide my pen with appalling discretion in treating of the married life of Charlotte Brontë. There are, however, no painful secrets to reveal, no skeletons to lay bare. Mr. Nicholls's story is a very simple one; and that it is entirely creditable to him, there is abundant evidence. Amid the full discussion to which the lives of the Brontës have necessarily been subjected through their ever-continuous fame, it was perhaps inevitable that a contrary opinion should gain ground. Many of Mr. Nicholls's relatives in his own country have frequently sighed over the perverted statements which have obtained currency. 'It is cruel that your uncle Arthur, the best of men, as we know, should be thus treated,' was the comment of Mr. Nicholls's brother to his daughter after reading an unfriendly article concerning Charlotte's husband. Yet it was not unnatural that such an estimate should get abroad; and I may frankly admit that until I met Mr. Nicholls I believed that Charlotte Brontë's marriage had been an unhappy one — an opinion gathered partly from Mrs. Gaskell, partly from current tradition in Yorkshire. Mrs. Gaskell, in fact, did not like Mr. Nicholls, and there were those with whom she came in contact while writing Miss Brontë's Life who were eager to fan that feeling in the usually kindly biographer. Mr. Nicholls himself did not work in the direction of conciliation. He was, as we shall see, a Scotchman, and Scottish taciturnity brought to bear upon the genial and jovial Yorkshire folk did not make for friendliness. Further, he would not let Mrs. Gaskell 'edit' and change *The Professor*, and here also he did wisely and well. He hated publicity, and above all things viewed the attempt to pierce the veil of his married life with almost morbid detestation. Who shall say that he was not right, and that his retirement for more than forty years from the whole region of controversy has not abundantly justified itself? One at least of Miss Brontë's friends has been known in our day to complain bitterly of all the trouble to which she has been subjected by the ill-considered zeal of Brontë enthusiasts. Mr. Nicholls has escaped all this by a judicious silence. Now that forty years and more have passed since his wife's death, it cannot be inopportune to tell the public all that they can fairly ask to know.

Mr. Nicholls was born in Co. Antrim in 1817, but of Scottish parents on both sides. He was left at the age of seven to the charge of an uncle — the Rev. Alan Bell — who was headmaster of the Royal School at Banagher, in King's Co. Mr. Nicholls afterwards entered Trinity College, Dublin, and it was thence that he went to Haworth, his first curacy. He succeeded a fellow countryman, Mr. Peter Augustus Smith, in 1844. The first impression we have of the new curate in Charlotte's letters is scarcely more favourable than that of his predecessors.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*October* 9*th*, 1844.

'Dear Ellen, — We are getting on here the same as usual, only that Branwell has been more than ordinarily troublesome and annoying of late; he leads papa a wretched life. Mr. Nicholls is returned just the same. I cannot for my life see those interesting germs of goodness in him you discovered; his narrowness of mind always strikes me chiefly. I fear he is indebted to your imagination for his hidden treasure. — Yours,

'C. B.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*July* 10*th*, 1846.

'Dear Ellen, — Who gravely asked you whether Miss Brontë was not going to be married to her papa's curate? I scarcely need say that never was rumour more unfounded. A cold faraway sort of civility are the only terms on which I have ever been with Mr. Nicholls. I could by no means think of mentioning such a rumour to him even as a joke. It would make me the laughing-stock of himself and his fellow curates for half a year to come. They regard me as an old maid, and I regard them, one and all, as highly uninteresting, narrow, and unattractive specimens of the coarser sex.

'Write to me again soon, whether you have anything particular to say or not. Give my sincere love to your mother and sisters.

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*November* 17*th*, 1846.

'Dear Ellen, — I will just write a brief despatch to say that I received yours and that I was very glad to get it. I do not know when you have been so long without writing to me before. I had begun to imagine you were gone to your brother Joshua's.

'Papa continues to do very well. He read prayers twice in the church last Sunday. Next Sunday he will have to take the whole duty of the three services himself, as Mr. Nicholls is in Ireland. Remember me to your mother and sisters. Write as soon as you possibly can after you get to Oundle. Good luck go with you.

'C. Brontë.'

That Scotch reticence held sway, and told against Mr. Nicholls for many a day to come.

THE REV. ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS

From a Portrait taken during his Curacy at Haworth

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*October* 7*th*, 1847.

‘Dear Ellen, — I have been expecting you to write to me; but as you don’t do it, and as, moreover, you may possibly think it is my turn, and not yours, though on that point I am far from clear, I shall just send you one of my scrubby notes for the express purpose of eliciting a reply. Anne was very much pleased with your letter; I presume she has answered it before now. I would fain hope that her health is a little stronger than it was, and her spirits a little better, but she leads much too sedentary a life, and is continually sitting stooping either over a book or over her desk. It is with difficulty we can prevail upon her to take a walk or induce her to converse. I look forward to next summer with the confident intention that she shall, if possible, make at least a brief sojourn at the sea-side.

‘I am sorry I inoculated you with fears about the east wind; I did not feel the last blast so severely as I have often done. My sympathies were much awakened by the touching anecdote. Did you salute your boy-messenger with a box on the ear the next time he came across you? I think I should have been strongly tempted to have done as much. Mr. Nicholls is not yet returned. I am sorry to say that many of the parishioners express a desire that he should not trouble himself to recross the Channel. This is not the feeling that ought to exist between shepherd and flock. It is not such as is prevalent at Birstall. It is not such as poor Mr. Weightman excited.

'Give my best love to all of them, and — Believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

The next glimpse is more kindly.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 28*th*, 1850.

'Dear Ellen, — I cannot but be concerned to hear of your mother's illness; write again soon, if it be but a line, to tell me how she gets on. This shadow will, I trust and believe, be but a passing one, but it is a foretaste and warning of what *must come* one day. Let it prepare your mind, dear Ellen, for that great trial which, if you live, it *must* in the course of a few years be your lot to undergo. That cutting asunder of the ties of nature is the pain we most dread and which we are most certain to experience. Lewes's letter made me laugh; I cannot respect him more for it. Sir J. K. Shuttleworth's letter did not make me laugh; he has written again since. I have received to-day a note from Miss Alexander, daughter, she says, of Dr. Alexander. Do you know anything of her? Mary Taylor seems in good health and spirits, and in the way of doing well. I shall feel anxious to hear again soon.

'C. B.

'*P.S.* — Mr. Nicholls has finished reading *Shirley*; he is delighted with it. John Brown's wife seriously thought he had gone wrong in the head as she heard him giving vent to roars of laughter as he sat alone, clapping his hands and stamping on the floor. He would read all the scenes about the curates aloud to Papa. He triumphed in his own character. What Mr. Grant will say is another thing. No matter.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *July* 27*th*, 1851.

'Dear Nell, — I hope you have taken no cold from your wretched journey home; you see you should have taken my advice and stayed till Saturday. Didn't I tell you I had a "presentiment" it would be better for you to do so?

'I am glad you found your mother pretty well. Is she disposed to excuse the wretched petrified condition of the bilberry preserve, in consideration of the intent of the donor? It seems they had high company while you were away. You see what you lose by coming to Haworth. No events here since your departure except a long letter from Miss Martineau. (She did not write the article on "Woman" in the *Westminster*; by the way, it is the production of a man, and one of the first philosophers and political economists and metaphysicians of the day.) Item, the departure of Mr. Nicholls for Ireland,

and his inviting himself on the eve thereof to come and take a farewell tea; good, mild, uncontentious. Item, a note from the stiff-like chap who called about the epitaph for his cousin. I inclose this — a finer gem in its way it would be difficult to conceive. You need not, however, be at the trouble of returning it. How are they at Hunsworth yet? It is no use saying whether I am solitary or not; I drive on very well, and papa continues pretty well. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

I print the next letter here because, although it contains no reference to Mr. Nicholls, it has a bearing upon the letter following it. Dr. Wheelwright shared Mr. Brontë's infirmity of defective eyesight.

TO MISS LÆTITIA WHEELWRIGHT

'Haworth, *April* 12*th*, 1852.

'Dear Lætitia, — Your last letter gave me much concern. I had hoped you were long ere this restored to your usual health, and it both pained and surprised me to hear that you still suffer so much from debility. I cannot help thinking your constitution is naturally sound and healthy. Can it be the air of London which disagrees with you? For myself, I struggled through the winter and the early part of spring often with great difficulty. My friend stayed with me a few days in the early part of January — she could not be spared longer. I was better during her visit, but had a relapse soon after she left me, which reduced my strength very much. It cannot be denied that the solitude of my position fearfully aggravated its other evils. Some long, stormy days and nights there were when I felt such a craving for support and companionship as I cannot express. Sleepless, I lay awake night after night; weak and unable to occupy myself, I sat in my chair day after day, the saddest memories my only company. It was a time I shall never forget, but God sent it and it must have been for the best.

'I am better now, and very grateful do I feel for the restoration of tolerable health; but, as if there was always to be some affliction, papa, who enjoyed wonderful health during the whole winter, is ailing with his spring attack of bronchitis. I earnestly trust it may pass over in the comparatively ameliorated form in which it has hitherto shown itself.

'Let me not forget to answer your question about the cataract. Tell your papa my father was seventy at the time he underwent an operation; he was most reluctant to try the experiment — could not believe that at his age and with his want of robust strength it would succeed. I was obliged to be very decided in the matter and to act entirely on my own responsibility. Nearly six years have now elapsed since the cataract was extracted (it was not merely depressed). He has never once, during that time, regretted the step, and a day seldom passes that he does not express gratitude and pleasure at the restoration of that inestimable privilege of vision whose loss he once knew.

'I hope the next tidings you hear of your brother Charles will be satisfactory for his parents' and sisters' sake as well as his own. Your poor mamma has had many successive trials, and her uncomplaining resignation seems to offer us all an example worthy to be followed. Remember me kindly to her, to your papa, and all your circle, and — Believe me, with best wishes to yourself, yours sincerely,

'C. Brontë.'

TO REV. P. BRONTË, HAWORTH, YORKS

'Cliff House, Filey, *June* 2*nd*, 1852.

'Dear Papa, — Thank you for your letter, which I was so glad to get that I think I must answer it by return of post. I had expected one yesterday, and was perhaps a little unreasonably anxious when disappointed, but the weather has been so very cold that I feared either you were ill or Martha worse. I hope Martha will take care of herself. I cannot help feeling a little uneasy about her.

'On the whole I get on very well here, but I have not bathed yet as I am told it is much too cold and too early in the season. The sea is very grand. Yesterday it was a somewhat unusually high tide, and I stood about an hour on the cliffs yesterday afternoon watching the tumbling in of great tawny turbid waves, that made the whole shore white with foam and filled the air with a sound hollower and deeper than thunder. There are so very few visitors at Filey yet that I and a few sea-birds and fishing-boats have often the whole expanse of sea, shore, and cliff to ourselves. When the tide is out the sands are wide, long, and smooth, and very pleasant to walk on. When the high tides are in, not a vestige of sand remains. I saw a great dog rush into the sea yesterday, and swim and bear up against the waves like a seal. I wonder what Flossy would say to that.

'On Sunday afternoon I went to a church which I should like Mr. Nicholls to see. It was certainly not more than thrice the length and breadth of our passage, floored with brick, the walls green with mould, the pews painted white, but the paint almost all worn off with time and decay. At one end there is a little gallery for the singers, and when these personages stood up to perform they all turned their backs upon the congregation, and the congregation turned *their* backs on the pulpit and parson. The effect of this manœuvre was so ludicrous, I could hardly help laughing; had Mr. Nicholls been there he certainly would have laughed out. Looking up at the gallery and seeing only the broad backs of the singers presented to their audience was excessively grotesque. There is a well-meaning but utterly inactive clergyman at Filey, and Methodists flourish.

'I cannot help enjoying Mr. Butterfield's defeat; and yet in one sense this is a bad state of things, calculated to make working people both discontented and insubordinate. Give my kind regards, dear papa, to Mr. Nicholls, Tabby, and Martha. Charge Martha to beware of draughts, and to get such help in her cleaning as she shall need. I hope you will continue well. — Believe me, your affectionate daughter,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*December* 15*th*, 1852.

'Dear Ellen, — I return the note, which is highly characteristic, and not, I fear, of good omen for the comfort of your visit. There must be something wrong in herself as well as in her servants. I inclose another note which, taken in conjunction with the incident immediately preceding it, and with a long series of indications whose meaning I scarce ventured hitherto to interpret to myself, much less hint to any other, has left on my mind a feeling of deep concern. This note you will see is from Mr. Nicholls.

'I know not whether you have ever observed him specially when staying here. Your perception is generally quick enough — *too* quick, I have sometimes thought; yet as you never said anything, I restrained my own dim misgivings, which could not claim the sure guide of vision. What papa has seen or guessed I will not inquire, though I may conjecture. He has minutely noticed all Mr. Nicholls's low spirits, all his threats of expatriation, all his symptoms of impaired health — noticed them with little sympathy and much indirect sarcasm. On Monday evening Mr. Nicholls was here to tea. I vaguely felt without clearly seeing, as without seeing I have felt for some time, the meaning of his constant looks, and strange, feverish restraint. After tea I withdrew to the dining-room as usual. As usual, Mr. Nicholls sat with papa till between eight and nine o'clock; I then heard him open the parlour door as if going. I expected the clash of the front door. He stopped in the passage; he tapped; like lightning it flashed on me what was coming. He entered; he stood before me. What his words were you can guess; his manner you can hardly realise, nor can I forget it. Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale, speaking low, vehemently, yet with difficulty, he made me for the first time feel what it costs a man to declare affection where he doubts response.

'The spectacle of one ordinarily so statue-like thus trembling, stirred, and overcome, gave me a kind of strange shock. He spoke of sufferings he had borne for months, of sufferings he could endure no longer, and craved leave for some hope. I could only entreat him to leave me then and promise a reply on the morrow. I asked him if he had spoken to papa. He said he dared not. I think I half led, half put him out of the room. When he was gone I immediately went to papa, and told him what had taken place. Agitation and anger disproportionate to the occasion ensued; if I had *loved* Mr. Nicholls, and had heard such epithets applied to him as were used, it would have transported me past my patience; as it was, my blood boiled with a sense of injustice. But papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with: the veins on his temples started up like whip-cord, and his eyes became suddenly bloodshot. I made haste to promise that Mr. Nicholls should on the morrow have a distinct refusal.

'I wrote yesterday and got this note. There is no need to add to this statement any comment. Papa's vehement antipathy to the bare thought of any one thinking of me as a wife, and Mr. Nicholls's distress, both give me pain. Attachment to Mr. Nicholls you are aware I never entertained, but the poignant pity inspired by his state on Monday evening, by the hurried revelation of his sufferings for many months, is something galling and irksome. That he cared something for me, and wanted me to care for him, I have long suspected, but I did not know the degree or strength of his feelings. Dear Nell, good-bye. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.

'I have letters from Sir J. K. Shuttleworth and Miss Martineau, but I cannot talk of them now.'

With this letter we see the tragedy beginning. Mr. Brontë, with his daughter's fame ringing in his ears, thought she should do better than marry a curate with a hundred pounds per annum. For once, and for the only time in his life there is reason to believe, his passions were thoroughly aroused. It is to the honour of Mr. Nicholls, and says much for his magnanimity, that he has always maintained that Mr. Brontë was perfectly justified in the attitude he adopted. His present feeling for Mr. Brontë is one of unbounded respect and reverence, and the occasional unfriendly references to his father-in-law have pained him perhaps even more than when he has been himself the victim.

'Attachment to Mr. Nicholls you are aware I never entertained.' A good deal has been made of this and other casual references of Charlotte Brontë to her slight affection for her future husband. Martha Brown, the servant, used in her latter days to say that Charlotte would come into the kitchen and ask her if it was right to marry a man one did not entirely love — and Martha Brown's esteem for Mr. Nicholls was very great. But it is possible to make too much of all this. It is a commonplace of psychology to say that a woman's love is of slow growth. It is quite certain that Charlotte Brontë suffered much during this period of alienation and separation; that she alone secured Mr. Nicholls's return to Haworth, after his temporary estrangement from Mr. Brontë; and finally, that the months of her married life, prior to her last illness, were the happiest she was destined to know.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *December* 18*th*, 1852.

'Dear Nell, — You may well ask, how is it? for I am sure I don't know. This business would seem to me like a dream, did not my reason tell me it has long been brewing. It puzzles me to comprehend how and whence comes this turbulence of feeling.

'You ask how papa demeans himself to Mr. Nicholls. I only wish you were here to see papa in his present mood: you would know something of him. He just treats him with a hardness not to be bent, and a contempt not to be propitiated. The two have had no interview as yet; all has been done by letter. Papa wrote, I must say, a most cruel note to Mr. Nicholls on Wednesday. In his state of mind and health (for the poor man is horrifying his landlady, Martha's mother, by entirely rejecting his meals) I felt that the blow must be parried, and I thought it right to accompany the pitiless despatch by a line to the effect that, while Mr. Nicholls must never expect me to reciprocate the feeling he had expressed, yet, at the same time, I wished to disclaim participation in sentiments calculated to give him pain; and I exhorted him to maintain his courage and spirits. On receiving the two letters, he set off from home. Yesterday came the inclosed brief epistle.

'You must understand that a good share of papa's anger arises from the idea, not altogether groundless, that Mr. Nicholls has behaved with disingenuousness in so long concealing his aim. I am afraid also that papa thinks a little too much about his want of money; he says the match would be a degradation, that I should be throwing myself away, that he expects me, if I marry at all, to do very differently; in short, his manner of viewing the subject is on the whole far from being one in which I can sympathise. My own objections arise from a sense of incongruity and uncongeniality in feelings, tastes, principles.

'How are you getting on, dear Nell, and how are all at Brookroyd? Remember me kindly to everybody. — Yours, wishing devoutly that papa would resume his tranquillity, and Mr. Nicholls his beef and pudding,

'C. Brontë.

'I am glad to say that the incipient inflammation in papa's eye is disappearing.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*January* 2*nd*, 1853.

'Dear Nell, — I thought of you on New Year's night, and hope you got well over your formidable tea-making. I trust that Tuesday and Wednesday will also pass pleasantly. I am busy too in my little way preparing to go to London this week, a matter which necessitates some little application to the needle. I find it is quite necessary I should go to superintend the press, as Mr. Smith seems quite determined not to let the printing get on till I come. I have actually only received three proof-sheets since I was at Brookroyd. Papa wants me to go too, to be out of the way, I suppose; but I am sorry for one other person whom nobody pities but me. Martha is bitter against him; John Brown says "he should like to shoot him." They don't understand the nature of his feelings, but I see now what they are. He is one of those who attach themselves to very few, whose sensations are close and deep, like an underground stream, running strong, but in a narrow channel. He continues restless and ill; he carefully performs the occasional duty, but does not come near the church, procuring a substitute every Sunday. A few days since he wrote to papa requesting permission to withdraw his resignation. Papa answered that he should only do so on condition of giving his written promise never again to broach the obnoxious subject either to him or to me. This he has evaded doing, so the matter remains unsettled. I feel persuaded the termination will be his departure for Australia. Dear Nell, without loving him, I don't like to think of him suffering in solitude, and wish him anywhere so that he were happier. He and papa have never met or spoken yet. I am very glad to learn that your mother is pretty well, and also that the piece of challenged work is progressing. I hope you will not be called away to Norfolk before I come home: I should like you to pay a visit to Haworth first. Write again soon. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*March* 4*th*, 1853.

'Dear Ellen, — We had the parsons to supper as well as to tea. Mr. N. demeaned himself not quite pleasantly. I thought he made no effort to struggle with his dejection but gave way to it in a manner to draw notice; the Bishop was obviously puzzled by it. Mr. Nicholls also showed temper once or twice in speaking to papa. Martha was beginning to tell me of certain "flaysome" looks also, but I desired not to hear of them. The fact is, I shall be most thankful when he is well away. I pity him, but I don't like that dark gloom of his. He dogged me up the lane after the evening service in no pleasant manner. He stopped also in the passage after the Bishop and the other clergy were gone into the room, and it was because I drew away and went upstairs that he gave that look which filled Martha's soul with horror. She, it seems, meantime, was making it her business to watch him from the kitchen door. If Mr. Nicholls be a good man at bottom, it is a sad thing that nature has not given him the faculty to put goodness into a more attractive form. Into the bargain of all the rest he managed to get up a most pertinacious and needless dispute with the Inspector, in listening to which all my old unfavourable impressions revived so strongly, I fear my countenance could not but shew them.

'Dear Nell, I consider that on the whole it is a mercy you have been at home and not at Norfolk during the late cold weather. Love to all at Brookroyd. — Yours faithfully,

'c. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*March* 9*th*, 1853.

'Dear Ellen, — I am sure Miss Wooler would enjoy her visit to you, as much as you her company. Dear Nell, I thank you sincerely for your discreet and friendly silence on the point alluded to. I had feared it would be discussed between you two, and had an inexpressible shrinking at the thought; now less than ever does it seem a matter open to discussion. I hear nothing, and you must quite understand that if I feel any uneasiness it is not that of confirmed and fixed regard, but that anxiety which is inseparable from a state of absolute uncertainty about a somewhat momentous matter. I do not know, I am not sure myself, that any other termination would be better than lasting estrangement and unbroken silence. Yet a good deal of pain has been and must be gone through in that case. However, to each his burden.

'I have not yet read the papers; D.V. I will send them to-morrow. —

Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.

'Understand that in whatever I have said above, it was not for pity or sympathy. I hardly pity myself. Only I wish that in all matters in this world there was fair and open dealing, and no underhand work.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *April* 6*th*, 1853.

'Dear Ellen, — My visit to Manchester is for the present put off by Mr. Morgan having written to say that since papa will not go to Buckingham to see him he will come to Yorkshire to see papa; when, I don't yet know, and I trust in goodness he will not stay long, as papa really cannot bear putting out of his way. I must wait, however, till the infliction is over.

'You ask about Mr. Nicholls. I hear he has got a curacy, but do not yet know where. I trust the news is true. He and papa never speak. He seems to pass a desolate life. He has allowed late circumstances so to act on him as to freeze up his manner and overcast his countenance not only to those immediately concerned but to every one. He sits drearily in his rooms. If Mr. Grant or any other clergyman calls to see, and as they think, to cheer him, he scarcely speaks. I find he tells them nothing, seeks no confidant, rebuffs all attempts to penetrate his mind. I own I respect him for this. He still lets Flossy go to his rooms, and takes him to walk. He still goes over to see Mr. Sowden sometimes, and, poor fellow, that is all. He looks ill and miserable. I think and trust in Heaven that he will be better as soon as he fairly gets away from Haworth. I pity him inexpressibly. We never meet nor speak, nor dare I look at him; silent pity is just all that I can give him, and as he knows nothing about that, it does not comfort. He is now grown so gloomy and reserved that nobody seems to like him. His fellow-curates shun trouble in that shape; the lower orders dislike it. Papa has a perfect antipathy to him, and he, I fear, to papa. Martha hates him. I think he might almost be *dying* and they would not speak a friendly word to or of him. How much of all this he deserves I can't tell; certainly he never was agreeable or amiable, and is less so now than ever, and alas! I do not know him well enough to be sure that there is truth and true affection, or only rancour and corroding disappointment at the bottom of his chagrin. In this state of things I must be, and I am, *entirely passive*. I may be losing the purest gem, and to me far the most precious, life can give — genuine attachment — or I may be escaping the yoke of a morose temper. In this doubt conscience will not suffer me to take one step in opposition to papa's will, blended as that will is with the most bitter and unreasonable prejudices. So I just leave the matter where we must leave all important matters.

'Remember me kindly to all at Brookroyd, and — Believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*May* 16th, 1853.

‘Dear Ellen, — The east winds about which you inquire have spared me wonderfully till to-day, when I feel somewhat sick physically, and not very blithe mentally. I am not sure that the east winds are entirely to blame for this ailment. Yesterday was a strange sort of a day at church. It seems as if I were to be punished for my doubts about the nature and truth of poor Mr. Nicholls’s regard. Having ventured on Whit Sunday to stop the sacrament, I got a lesson not to be repeated. He struggled, faltered, then lost command over himself — stood before my eyes and in the sight of all the communicants white, shaking, voiceless. Papa was not there, thank God! Joseph Redman spoke some words to him. He made a great effort, but could only with difficulty whisper and falter through the service. I suppose he thought this would be the last time; he goes either this week or the next. I heard the women sobbing round, and I could not quite check my own tears. What had happened was reported to papa either by Joseph Redman or John Brown; it excited only anger, and such expressions as “unmanly driveller.” Compassion or relenting is no more to be looked for than sap from firewood.

‘I never saw a battle more sternly fought with the feelings than Mr. Nicholls fights with his, and when he yields momentarily, you are almost sickened by the sense of the strain upon him. However, he is to go, and I cannot speak to him or look at him or comfort him a whit, and I must submit. Providence is over all, that is the only consolation. — Yours faithfully,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*May* 19*th*, 1853.

‘Dear Ellen, — I cannot help feeling a certain satisfaction in finding that the people here are getting up a subscription to offer a testimonial of respect to Mr. Nicholls on his leaving the place. Many are expressing both their commiseration and esteem for him. The Churchwardens recently put the question to him plainly: Why was he going? Was it Mr. Brontë’s fault or his own? “His own,” he answered. Did he blame Mr. Brontë? “No! he did not: if anybody was wrong it was himself.” Was he willing to go? “No! it gave him great pain.” Yet he is not always right. I must be just. He shows a curious mixture of honour and obstinacy — feeling and sullenness. Papa addressed him at the school tea-drinking, with *constrained* civility, but still with *civility*. He did not reply civilly; he cut short further words. This sort of treatment offered in public is what papa never will forget or forgive, it inspires him with a silent bitterness not to be expressed. I am afraid both are unchristian in their mutual feelings. Nor do I know which of them is least accessible to reason or least likely to forgive. It is a dismal state of things.

‘The weather is fine now, dear Nell. We will take these sunny days as a good omen for your visit to Yarmouth. With kind regards to all at Brookroyd, and best wishes to yourself, — I am, yours sincerely,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *May* 27*th*, 1853.

'Dear Ellen, — You will want to know about the leave-taking? The whole matter is but a painful subject, but I must treat it briefly. The testimonial was presented in a public meeting. Mr. Taylor and Mr. Grant were there. Papa was not very well and I advised him to stay away, which he did. As to the last Sunday, it was a cruel struggle. Mr. Nicholls ought not to have had to take any duty.

'He left Haworth this morning at six o'clock. Yesterday evening he called to render into papa's hands the deeds of the National School, and to say good-bye. They were busy cleaning — washing the paint, etc., in the dining-room, so he did not find me there. I would not go into the parlour to speak to him in papa's presence. He went out, thinking he was not to see me; and indeed, till the very last moment, I thought it best not. But perceiving that he stayed long before going out at the gate, and remembering his long grief, I took courage and went out, trembling and miserable. I found him leaning against the garden door in a paroxysm of anguish, sobbing as women never sob. Of course I went straight to him. Very few words were interchanged, those few barely articulate. Several things I should have liked to ask him were swept entirely from my memory. Poor fellow! But he wanted such hope and such encouragement as I could not give him. Still, I trust he must know now that I am not cruelly blind and indifferent to his constancy and grief. For a few weeks he goes to the south of England, afterwards he takes a curacy somewhere in Yorkshire, but I don't know where.

'Papa has been far from strong lately. I dare not mention Mr. Nicholls's name to him. He speaks of him quietly and without opprobrium to others, but to me he is implacable on the matter. However, he is gone — gone, and there's an end of it. I see no chance of hearing a word about him in future, unless some stray shred of intelligence comes through Mr. Sowden or some other second-hand source. In all this it is not I who am to be pitied at all, and of course nobody pities me. They all think in Haworth that I have disdainfully refused him. If pity would do Mr. Nicholls any good, he ought to have, and I believe has it. They may abuse me if they will; whether they do or not I can't tell.

'Write soon and say how your prospects proceed. I trust they will daily brighten. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS LÆTITIA WHEELWRIGHT

'Haworth, *March* 18*th*, 1854.

'My dear Lætitia, — I was very glad to see your handwriting again; it is, I believe, a year since I heard from you. Again and again you have recurred to my thoughts lately, and I was beginning to have some sad presages as to the cause of your silence. Your letter happily does away with all these; it brings, on the whole, good tidings both of your papa, mamma, your sister, and, last but not least, your dear respected English self.

‘My dear father has borne the severe winter very well, a circumstance for which I feel the more thankful, as he had many weeks of very precarious health last summer, following an attack from which he suffered last June, and which for a few hours deprived him totally of sight, though neither his mind, speech, nor even his powers of motion were in the least affected. I can hardly tell you how thankful I was, dear Lætitia, when, after that dreary and almost despairing interval of utter darkness, some gleam of daylight became visible to him once more. I had feared that paralysis had seized the optic nerve. A sort of mist remained for a long time, and indeed his vision is not yet perfectly clear, but he can read, write, and walk about, and he preaches *twice* every Sunday, the curate only reading the prayers. *You* can well understand how earnestly I pray that sight may be spared him to the end; he so dreads the privation of blindness. His mind is just as strong and active as ever, and politics interest him as they do *your* papa. The Czar, the war, the alliance between France and England — into all these things he throws himself heart and soul. They seem to carry him back to his comparatively young days, and to renew the excitement of the last great European struggle. Of course, my father’s sympathies, and mine too, are all with justice and Europe against tyranny and Russia.

‘Circumstanced as I have been, you will comprehend that I had neither the leisure nor inclination to go from home much during the past year. I spent a week with Mrs. Gaskell in the spring, and a fortnight with some other friends more recently, and that includes the whole of my visiting since I saw you last. My life is indeed very uniform and retired, more so than is quite healthful either for mind or body; yet I feel reason for often renewed feelings of gratitude in the sort of support which still comes and cheers me from time to time. My health, though not unbroken, is, I sometimes fancy, rather stronger on the whole than it was three years ago; headache and dyspepsia are my worst ailments. Whether I shall come up to town this season for a few days I do not yet know; but if I do I shall hope to call in Phillimore Place. With kindest remembrances to your papa, mamma, and sisters, — I am, dear Lætitia, affectionately yours,

‘C. Brontë.’

Mr. Nicholls’s successor did not prove acceptable to Mr. Brontë. He complained again and again, and one day Charlotte turned upon her father and told him pretty frankly that he was alone to blame — that he had only to let her marry Mr. Nicholls, with whom she corresponded and whom she really loved, and all would be well. A little arrangement, the transfer of Mr. Nicholls’s successor, Mr. De Renzi, to a Bradford church, and Mr. Nicholls left his curacy at Kirk-Smeaton and returned once more to Haworth as an accepted lover.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘Haworth, *March* 28*th*, 1854.

‘My dear Ellen, — The inclosure in yours of yesterday puzzled me at first, for I did not immediately recognise my own hand-writing; when I did, the sensation was one of consternation and vexation, as the letter ought by all means to have gone on Friday. It was intended to relieve him of great anxiety. However, I trust he will get it to-day; and on the whole, when I think it over, I can only be thankful that the mistake was no worse, and did not throw the letter into the hands of some indifferent and unscrupulous person. I wrote it after some days of indisposition and uneasiness, and when I felt weak and unfit to write. While writing to him, I was at the same time intending to answer your note, which I suppose accounts for the confusion of ideas, shown in the mixed and blundering address.

‘I wish you could come about Easter rather than at another time, for this reason: Mr. Nicholls, if not prevented, proposes coming over then. I suppose he will stay at Mr. Grant’s, as he has done two or three times before, but he will be frequently coming here, which would enliven your visit a little. Perhaps, too, he might take a walk with us occasionally. Altogether it would be a little change, such as, you know, I could not always offer.

‘If all be well he will come under different circumstances to any that have attended his visits before; were it otherwise, I should not ask you to meet him, for when aspects are gloomy and unpropitious, the fewer there are to suffer from the cloud the better.

‘He was here in January and was then received, but not pleasantly. I trust it will be a little different now.

‘Papa breakfasts in bed and has not yet risen; his bronchitis is still troublesome. I had a bad week last week, but am greatly better now, for my mind is a little relieved, though very sedate, and rising only to expectations the most moderate.

‘Sometime, perhaps in May, I may hope to come to Brookroyd, but, as you will understand from what I have now stated, I could not come before.

‘Think it over, dear Nell, and come to Haworth if you can. Write as soon as you can decide. — Yours affectionately,

‘C. Brontë.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘*April* 1*st*, 1854.

‘My dear Ellen, — You certainly were right in your second interpretation of my note. I am too well aware of the dulness of Haworth for any visitor, not to be glad to avail myself of the chance of offering even a slight change. But this morning my little plans have been disarranged by an intimation that Mr. Nicholls is coming on Monday. I thought to put him off, but have not succeeded. As Easter now consequently seems an unfavourable period both from your point of view and mine, we will adjourn it till a better opportunity offers. Meantime, I thank you, dear Ellen, for your kind offer to come in case I wanted you. Papa is still very far from well: his cough very troublesome, and a good deal of inflammatory action in the chest. To-day he seems somewhat better than yesterday, and I earnestly hope the improvement may continue.

'With kind regards to your mother and all at Brookroyd, — I am, dear Ellen, yours affectionately,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *April* 11*th*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — Thank you for the collar; it is very pretty, and I will wear it for the sake of her who made and gave it.

'Mr. Nicholls came on Monday, and was here all last week. Matters have progressed thus since July. He renewed his visit in September, but then matters so fell out that I saw little of him. He continued to write. The correspondence pressed on my mind. I grew very miserable in keeping it from papa. At last sheer pain made me gather courage to break it. I told all. It was very hard and rough work at the time, but the issue after a few days was that I obtained leave to continue the communication. Mr. Nicholls came in January; he was ten days in the neighbourhood. I saw much of him. I had stipulated with papa for opportunity to become better acquainted. I had it, and all I learnt inclined me to esteem and affection. Still papa was very, very hostile, bitterly unjust.

'I told Mr. Nicholls the great obstacle that lay in his way. He has persevered. The result of this, his last visit, is, that papa's consent is gained, that his respect, I believe, is won, for Mr. Nicholls has in all things proved himself disinterested and forbearing. Certainly, I must respect him, nor can I withhold from him more than mere cool respect. In fact, dear Ellen, I am engaged.

'Mr. Nicholls, in the course of a few months, will return to the curacy of Haworth. I stipulated that I would not leave papa; and to papa himself I proposed a plan of residence which should maintain his seclusion and convenience uninvaded, and in a pecuniary sense bring him gain instead of loss. What seemed at one time impossible is now arranged, and papa begins really to take a pleasure in the prospect.

'For myself, dear Ellen, while thankful to One who seems to have guided me through much difficulty, much and deep distress and perplexity of mind, I am still very calm, very inexpectant. What I taste of happiness is of the soberest order. I trust to love my husband. I am grateful for his tender love to me. I believe him to be an affectionate, a conscientious, a high-principled man; and if, with all this, I should yield to regrets that fine talents, congenial tastes and thoughts are not added, it seems to me I should be most presumptuous and thankless.

'Providence offers me this destiny. Doubtless, then, it is the best for me. Nor do I shrink from wishing those dear to me one not less happy.

'It is possible that our marriage may take place in the course of the summer. Mr. Nicholls wishes it to be in July. He spoke of you with great kindness, and said he hoped you would be at our wedding. I said I thought of having no other bridesmaid. Did I say rightly? I mean the marriage to be literally as quiet as possible.

'Do not mention these things just yet. I mean to write to Miss Wooler shortly. Good-bye. There is a strange half-sad feeling in making these announcements. The whole thing is something other than imagination paints it beforehand; cares, fears, come mixed inextricably with hopes. I trust yet to talk the matter over with you. Often last week I wished for your presence and said so to Mr. Nicholls — Arthur, as I now call him, but he said it was the only time and place when he could not have wished to see you. Good-bye. — Yours affectionately,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*April* 15*th*, 1854.

'My own dear Nell, — I hope to see you somewhere about the second week in May.

'The Manchester visit is still hanging over my head. I have deferred it, and deferred it, but have finally promised to go about the beginning of next month. I shall only stay three days, then I spend two or three days at Hunsworth, then come to Brookroyd. The three visits must be compressed into the space of a fortnight, if possible.

'I suppose I shall have to go to Leeds. My purchases cannot be either expensive or extensive. You must just resolve in your head the bonnets and dresses; something that can be turned to decent use and worn after the wedding-day will be best, I think.

'I wrote immediately to Miss Wooler and received a truly kind letter from her this morning. If you think she would like to come to the marriage I will not fail to ask her.

'Papa's mind seems wholly changed about the matter, and he has said both to me and when I was not there, how much happier he feels since he allowed all to be settled. It is a wonderful relief for me to hear him treat the thing rationally, to talk over with him themes on which once I dared not touch. He is rather anxious things should get forward now, and takes quite an interest in the arrangement of preliminaries. His health improves daily, though this east wind still keeps up a slight irritation in the throat and chest.

'The feeling which had been disappointed in papa was ambition, paternal pride — ever a restless feeling, as we all know. Now that this unquiet spirit is exorcised, justice, which was once quite forgotten, is once more listened to, and affection, I hope, resumes some power.

'My hope is that in the end this arrangement will turn out more truly to papa's advantage than any other it was in my power to achieve. Mr. Nicholls in his last letter refers touchingly to his earnest desire to prove his gratitude to papa, by offering support and consolation to his declining age. This will not be mere talk with him — he is no talker, no dealer in professions. — Yours affectionately,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*April* 28*th*, 1854.

'My dear Ellen, — I have delayed writing till I could give you some clear notion of my movements. If all be well, I go to Manchester on the 1st of May. Thence, on Thursday, to Hunsworth till Monday, when (D.V.) I come to Brookroyd. I must be at home by the close of the week. Papa, thank God! continues to improve much. He preached twice on Sunday and again on Wednesday, and was not tired; his mind and mood are different to what they were, so much more cheerful and quiet. I trust the illusions of ambition are quite dissipated, and that he really sees it is better to relieve a suffering and faithful heart, to secure its fidelity, a solid good, than unfeelingly to abandon one who is truly attached to his interest as well as mine, and pursue some vain empty shadow.

'I thank you, dear Ellen, for your kind invitation to Mr. Nicholls. He was asked likewise to Manchester and Hunsworth. I would not have opposed his coming had there been no real obstacle to the arrangement — certain little awkwardnesses of feeling I would have tried to get over for the sake of introducing him to old friends; but it so happens that he cannot leave on account of his rector's absence. Mr. C. will be in town with his family till June, and he always stipulates that his curate shall remain at Kirk-Smeaton while he is away.

'How did you get on at the Oratorio? And what did Miss Wooler say to the proposal of being at the wedding? I have many points to discuss when I see you. I hope your mother and all are well. With kind remembrances to them, and true love to you, — I am, dear Nell, faithfully yours,

'C. Brontë.

'When you write, address me at Mrs. Gaskell's, Plymouth Grove, Manchester.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*May* 22*nd*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — I wonder how you are, and whether that harassing cough is better. Be scrupulously cautious about undue exposure. Just now, dear Ellen, an hour's inadvertence might cause you to be really ill. So once again, take care. Since I came home I have been very busy stitching. The little new room is got into order, and the green and white curtains are up; they exactly suit the papering, and look neat and clean enough. I had a letter a day or two since announcing that Mr. Nicholls comes to-morrow. I feel anxious about him, more anxious on one point than I dare quite express to myself. It seems he has again been suffering sharply from his rheumatic affection. I hear this not from himself, but from another quarter. He was ill while I was at Manchester and Brookroyd. He uttered no complaint to me, dropped no hint on the subject. Alas! he was hoping he had got the better of it, and I know how this contradiction of his hopes will sadden him. For unselfish reasons he did so earnestly wish this complaint might not become chronic. I fear, I fear. But, however, I mean to stand by him now, whether in weal or woe. This liability to rheumatic pain was one of the strong arguments used against the marriage. It did not weigh somehow. If he is doomed to suffer, it seems that so much the more will he need care and help. And yet the ultimate possibilities of such a case are appalling. You remember your aunt. Well, come what may, God help and strengthen both him and me. I look forward to to-morrow with a mixture of impatience and anxiety. Poor fellow! I want to see with my own eyes how he is.

'It is getting late and dark. Write soon, dear Ellen. Goodnight and God bless you. — Yours affectionately,

'C. Brontë.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *May* 27*th*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — Your letter was very welcome, and I am glad and thankful to learn you are better. Still, beware of presuming on the improvement — don't let it make you careless. Mr. Nicholls has just left me. Your hopes were not ill-founded about his illness. At first I was thoroughly frightened. However, inquiring gradually relieved me. In short, I soon discovered that my business was, instead of sympathy, to rate soundly. The patient had wholesome treatment while he was at Haworth, and went away singularly better; perfectly unreasonable, however, on some points, as his fallible sex are not ashamed to be.

'Man is, indeed, an amazing piece of mechanism when you see, so to speak, the full weakness of what he calls his strength. There is not a female child above the age of eight but might rebuke him for spoilt petulance of his wilful nonsense. I bought a border for the table-cloth and have put it on.

'Good-bye, dear Ellen. Write again soon, and mind and give a bulletin. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*June* 12*th*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — Papa preached twice to-day as well and as strongly as ever. It is strange how he varies, how soon he is depressed and how soon revived. It makes me feel so thankful when he is better. I am thankful too that you are stronger, dear Nell. My worthy acquaintance at Kirk-Smeaton refuses to acknowledge himself better yet. I am uneasy about not writing to Miss Wooler. I fear she will think me negligent, while I am only busy and bothered. I want to clear up my needlework a little, and have been sewing against time since I was at Brookroyd. Mr. Nicholls hindered me for a full week.

'I like the card very well, but not the envelope. I should like a perfectly plain envelope with a silver initial.

'I got my dresses from Halifax a day or two since, but have not had time to have them unpacked, so I don't know what they are like.

'Next time I write, I hope to be able to give you clear information, and to beg you to come here without further delay. Good-bye, dear Nell. — Yours faithfully,

'C. Brontë.

'I had almost forgotten to mention about the envelopes. Mr. Nicholls says I have ordered far too few; he thinks sixty will be wanted. Is it too late to remedy this error? There is no end to his string of parson friends. My own list I have not made out.'

Charlotte Brontë's list of friends, to whom wedding-cards were to be sent, is in her own handwriting, and is not without interest: —

SEND CARDS TO

The Rev. W. Morgan, Rectory, Hulcott, Aylesbury, Bucks. Joseph Branwell, Esq., Thamar Terrace, Launceston. Cornwall.
Dr. Wheelwright, 29 Phillimore Place, Kensington, London.
George Smith, Esq., 65 Cornhill, London.
Mrs. and Misses Smith, 65 Cornhill, London.
W. S. Williams, Esq., 65 Cornhill, London.
R. Monckton Milnes, Esq.
Mrs. Gaskell, Plymouth Grove, Manchester.
Francis Bennoch, Esq., Park, Blackheath, London.
George Taylor, Esq., Stanbury.
Mrs. and Miss Taylor.
H. Merrall, Esq., Lea Sykes, Haworth.
E. Merrall, Esq., Ebor House, Haworth.
R. Butterfield, Esq., Woodlands, Haworth.
R. Thomas, Esq., Haworth.
J. Pickles, Esq., Brow Top, Haworth.
Wooler Family.
Brookroyd.

The following was written on her wedding day, June 29th, 1854.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'*Thursday Evening*.

'Dear Ellen, — I scribble one hasty line just to say that after a pleasant enough journey we have got safely to Conway; the evening is wet and wild, though the day was fair chiefly, with some gleams of sunshine. However, we are sheltered in a comfortable inn. My cold is not worse. If you get this scrawl to-morrow and write by return, direct to me at the post-office, Bangor, and I may get it on Monday. Say how you and Miss Wooler got home. Give my kindest and most grateful love to Miss Wooler whenever you write. On Monday, I think, we cross the Channel. No more at present. — Yours faithfully and lovingly,

'C. B. N.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *August* 9*th*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — I earnestly hope you are by yourself now, and relieved from the fag of entertaining guests. You do not complain, but I am afraid you have had too much of it.

'Since I came home I have not had an unemployed moment. My life is changed indeed: to be wanted continually, to be constantly called for and occupied seems so strange; yet it is a marvellously good thing. As yet I don't quite understand how some wives grow so selfish. As far as my experience of matrimony goes, I think it tends to draw you out of, and away from yourself.

'We have had sundry callers this week. Yesterday Mr. Sowden and another gentleman dined here, and Mr. and Mrs. Grant joined them at tea.

'I do not think we shall go to Brookroyd soon, on papa's account. I do not wish again to leave home for a time, but I trust you will ere long come here.

'I really like Mr. Sowden very well. He asked after you. Mr. Nicholls told him we expected you would be coming to stay with us in the course of three or four weeks, and that he should then invite him over again as he wished us to take sundry rather long walks, and as he should have his wife to look after, and she was trouble enough, it would be quite necessary to have a guardian for the other lady. Mr. Sowden seemed perfectly acquiescent.

'Dear Nell, during the last six weeks, the colour of my thoughts is a good deal changed: I know more of the realities of life than I once did. I think many false ideas are propagated, perhaps unintentionally. I think those married women who indiscriminately urge their acquaintance to marry, much to blame. For my part, I can only say with deeper sincerity and fuller significance what I always said in theory, "Wait God's will." Indeed, indeed, Nell, it is a solemn and strange and perilous thing for a woman to become a wife. Man's lot is far, far different. Tell me when you think you can come. Papa is better, but not well. How is your mother? give my love to her. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B. Nicholls.

'Have I told you how much better Mr. Nicholls is? He looks quite strong and hale; he gained 12 lbs. during the four weeks we were in Ireland. To see this improvement in him has been a main source of happiness to me, and to speak truth, a subject of wonder too.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *August* 29*th*.

'Dear Ellen, — Can you come here on Wednesday week (Sept. 6th)? Try to arrange matters to do so if possible, for it will be better than to delay your visit till the days grow cold and short. I want to see you again, dear Nell, and my husband too will receive you with pleasure; and he is not diffuse of his courtesies or partialities, I can assure you. One friendly word from him means as much as twenty from most people.

‘We have been busy lately giving a supper and tea-drinking to the singers, ringers, Sunday-school teachers, and all the scholars of the Sunday and National Schools, amounting in all to some 500 souls. It gave satisfaction and went off well.

‘Papa, I am thankful to say, is much better; he preached last Sunday. How does your mother bear this hot weather? Write soon, dear Nell, and say you will come. — Yours faithfully,

‘C. B. N.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘Haworth, *September 7th*, 1854.

‘Dear Ellen, — I send a French paper to-day. You would almost think I had given them up, it is so long since one was despatched. The fact is, they had accumulated to quite a pile during my absence. I wished to look them over before sending them off, and as yet I have scarcely found time. That same Time is an article of which I once had a large stock always on hand; where it is all gone now it would be difficult to say, but my moments are very fully occupied. Take warning, Ellen, the married woman can call but a very small portion of each day her own. Not that I complain of this sort of monopoly as yet, and I hope I never shall incline to regard it as a misfortune, but it certainly exists. We were both disappointed that you could not come on the day I mentioned. I have grudged this splendid weather very much. The moors are in glory, I never saw them fuller of purple bloom. I wanted you to see them at their best; they are just turning now, and in another week, I fear, will be faded and sere. As soon as ever you can leave home, be sure to write and let me know.

‘Papa continues greatly better. My husband flourishes; he begins indeed to express some slight alarm at the growing improvement in his condition. I think I am decent, better certainly than I was two months ago, but people don’t compliment me as they do Arthur — excuse the name, it has grown natural to use it now. I trust, dear Nell, that you are all well at Brookroyd, and that your visiting stirs are pretty nearly over. I compassionate you from my heart for all the trouble to which you must be put, and I am rather ashamed of people coming sponging in that fashion one after another; get away from them and come here. — Yours faithfully,

‘C. B. Nicholls.’

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

‘Haworth, *November 7th*, 1854.

‘Dear Ellen, — Arthur wishes you would burn my letters. He was out when I commenced this letter, but he has just come in. It is not “old friends” he mistrusts, he says, but the chances of war — the accidental passing of letters into hands and under eyes for which they were never written.

‘All this seems mighty amusing to me; it is a man’s mode of viewing correspondence. Men’s letters are proverbially uninteresting and uncommunicative. I never quite knew before why they made them so. They may be right in a sense: strange chances do fall out certainly. As to my own notes, I never thought of attaching importance to them or considering their fate, till Arthur seemed to reflect on both so seriously.

'I will write again next week if all be well to name a day for coming to see you. I am sure you want, or at least ought to have, a little rest before you are bothered with more company; but whenever I come, I suppose, dear Nell, under present circumstances, it will be a quiet visit, and that I shall not need to bring more than a plain dress or two. Tell me this when you write. — Believe me faithfully yours,

'C. B. Nicholls.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *November* 14*th*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — I am only just at liberty to write to you; guests have kept me very busy during the last two or three days. Sir J. Kay-Shuttleworth and a friend of his came here on Saturday afternoon and stayed till after dinner on Monday.

'When I go to Brookroyd, Arthur will take me there and stay one night, but I cannot yet fix the time of my visit. Good-bye for the present, dear Nell. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B. Nicholls.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *November* 21*st*, 1854,

'Dear Ellen, — You ask about Mr. Sowden's matter. He walked over here on a wild rainy day. We talked it over. He is quite disposed to entertain the proposal, but of course there must be close inquiry and ripe consideration before either he or the patron decide. Meantime Mr. Sowden is most anxious that the affairs be kept absolutely quiet; in the event of disappointment it would be both painful and injurious to him if it should be rumoured at Hebden Bridge that he has had thoughts of leaving. Arthur says if a whisper gets out these things fly from parson to parson like wildfire. I cannot help somehow wishing that the matter should be arranged, if all on examination is found tolerably satisfactory.

'Papa continues pretty well, I am thankful to say; his deafness is wonderfully relieved. Winter seems to suit him better than summer; besides, he is settled and content, as I perceive with gratitude to God.

'Dear Ellen, I wish you well through every trouble. Arthur is not in just now or he would send a kind message. — Believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. B. Nicholls.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *November* 29*th*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — Arthur somewhat demurs about my going to Brookroyd as yet; fever, you know, is a formidable word. I cannot say I entertain any apprehensions myself further than this, that I should be terribly bothered at the idea of being taken ill from home and causing trouble; and strangers are sometimes more liable to infection than persons living in the house.

'Mr. Sowden has seen Sir J. K. Shuttleworth, but I fancy the matter is very uncertain as yet. It seems the Bishop of Manchester stipulates that the clergyman chosen should, if possible, be from his own diocese, and this, Arthur says, is quite right and just. An exception would have been made in Arthur's favour, but the case is not so clear with Mr. Sowden. However, no harm will have been done if the matter does not take wind, as I trust it will not. Write very soon, dear Nell, and, — Believe me, yours faithfully,

'C. B. Nicholls.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *December* 7*th*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — I shall not get leave to go to Brookroyd before Christmas now, so do not expect me. For my own part I really should have no fear, and if it just depended on me I should come. But these matters are not quite in my power now: another must be consulted; and where his wish and judgment have a decided bias to a particular course, I make no stir, but just adopt it. Arthur is sorry to disappoint both you and me, but it is his fixed wish that a few weeks should be allowed yet to elapse before we meet. Probably he is confirmed in this desire by my having a cold at present. I did not achieve the walk to the waterfall with impunity. Though I changed my wet things immediately on returning home, yet I felt a chill afterwards, and the same night had sore throat and cold; however, I am better now, but not quite well.

'Did I tell you that our poor little Flossy is dead? He drooped for a single day, and died quietly in the night without pain. The loss even of a dog was very saddening, yet perhaps no dog ever had a happier life or an easier death.

'Papa continues pretty well, I am happy to say, and my dear boy flourishes. I do not mean that he continues to grow stouter, which one would not desire, but he keeps in excellent condition.

'You would wonder, I dare say, at the long disappearance of the French paper. I had got such an accumulation of them unread that I thought I would not wait to send the old ones; now you will receive them regularly. I am writing in haste. It is almost inexplicable to me that I seem so often hurried now; but the fact is, whenever Arthur is in I must have occupations in which he can share, or which will not at least divert my attention from him — thus a multitude of little matters get put off till he goes out, and then I am quite busy. Goodbye, dear Ellen, I hope we shall meet soon. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B. Nicholls.'

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *December* 26*th*, 1854.

'Dear Ellen, — I return the letter. It is, as you say, very genuine, truthful, affectionate, maternal — without a taint of sham or exaggeration. Mary will love her child without spoiling it, I think. She does not make an uproar about her happiness either. The longer I live the more I suspect exaggerations. I fancy it is sometimes a sort of fashion for each to vie with the other in protestations about their wonderful felicity, and sometimes they — FIB. I am truly glad to hear you are all better at Brookroyd. In the course of three or four weeks more I expect to get leave to come to you. I certainly long to see you again. One circumstance reconciles me to this delay — the weather. I do not know whether it has been as bad with you as with us, but here for three weeks we have had little else than a succession of hurricanes.

'In your last you asked about Mr. Sowden and Sir James. I fear Mr. Sowden has little chance of the living; he had heard nothing more of it the last time he wrote to Arthur, and in a note he had from Sir James yesterday the subject is not mentioned.

'You inquire too after Mrs. Gaskell. She has not been here, and I think I should not like her to come now till summer. She is very busy with her story of *North and South*.

'I must make this note short that it may not be overweight. Arthur joins me in sincere good wishes for a happy Christmas, and many of them to you and yours. He is well, thank God, and so am I, and he is "my dear boy," certainly dearer now than he was six months ago. In three days we shall actually have been married that length of time! Good-bye, dear Nell. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B. Nicholls.'

At the beginning of 1855 Mr. and Mrs. Nicholls visited Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth at Gawthorpe. I know of only four letters by her, written in this year.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'Haworth, *January* 19*th*, 1855.

'Dear Ellen, — Since our return from Gawthorpe we have had a Mr. Bell, one of Arthur's cousins, staying with us. It was a great pleasure. I wish you could have seen him and made his acquaintance; a true gentleman by nature and cultivation is not after all an everyday thing.

'As to the living of Habergham or Padiham, it appears the chance is doubtful at present for anybody. The present incumbent wishes to retract his resignation, and declares his intention of appointing a curate for two years. I fear Mr. Sowden hardly produced a favourable impression; a strong wish was expressed that Arthur could come, but that is out of the question.

'I very much wish to come to Brookroyd, and I hope to be able to write with certainty and fix Wednesday, the 31st January, as the day; but the fact is I am not sure whether I shall be well enough to leave home. At present I should be a most tedious visitor. My health has been really very good since my return from Ireland till about ten days ago, when the stomach seemed quite suddenly to lose its tone; indigestion and continual faint sickness have been my portion ever since. Don't conjecture, dear Nell, for it is too soon yet, though I certainly never before felt as I have done lately. But keep the matter wholly to yourself, for I can come to no decided opinion at present. I am rather mortified to lose my good looks and grow thin as I am doing just when

I thought of going to Brookroyd. Dear Ellen, I want to see you, and I hope I shall see you well. My love to all. — Yours faithfully,

'C. B. Nicholls.'

There were three more letters, but they were written in pencil from her deathbed. Two of them are printed by Mrs. Gaskell — one to Miss Nussey, the other to Miss Wheelwright. Here is the third and last of all.

TO MISS ELLEN NUSSEY

'My dear Ellen, — Thank you very much for Mrs. Hewitt's sensible clear letter. Thank her too. In much her case was wonderfully like mine, but I am reduced to greater weakness; the skeleton emaciation is the same. I cannot talk. Even to my dear, patient, constant Arthur I can say but few words at once.

'These last two days I have been somewhat better, and have taken some beef-tea, a spoonful of wine and water, a mouthful of light pudding at different times.

'Dear Ellen, I realise full well what you have gone through and will have to go through with poor Mercy. Oh, may you continue to be supported and not sink. Sickness here has been terribly rife. Kindest regards to Mr. and Mrs. Clapham, your mother, Mercy. Write when you can. — Yours,

'C. B. Nicholls.'

Little remains to be said. This is not a biography but a bundle of correspondence, and I have only to state that Mrs. Nicholls died of an illness incidental to childbirth on March 31st 1855, and was buried in the Brontë tomb in Haworth church. Her will runs as follows: —

Extracted from the District Probate Registry at York attached to Her Majesty's High Court of Justice.

In the name of God. Amen. I, Charlotte Nicholls, *of Haworth in the parish of Bradford and county of York*, *being of sound and disposing mind*, *memory*, *and understanding*, *but mindful of my own mortality*, *do this seventeenth day of February*, *in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty-five*, *make this my last Will and Testament in manner and form following*, *that is to say*: *In case I die without issue I give and bequeath to my husband all my property to be his absolutely and entirely*, *but*, *In case I leave issue I bequeath to my husband the interest of my property during his lifetime*, *and at his death I desire that the principal should go to my surviving child or children*; *should there be more than one child*, *share and share alike. And I do hereby make and appoint my said husband*, *Arthur Bell Nicholls*, *clerk*, *sole executor of this my last Will and Testament*; *In witness whereof I have to this my last Will and Testament subscribed my hand*, *the day and year first above written* — Charlotte Nicholls. *Signed and acknowledged by the said testatrix* Charlotte Nicholls, *as and for her last Will and Testament in the presence of us*, *who*, *at her request*, *in her presence and in presence of each other*, *have at the same time hereunto subscribed our names as witnesses thereto*: *Patrick Brontë*, B.A. *Incumbent of Haworth*, *Yorkshire*; *Martha*

Brown.

The eighteenth day of April 1855, *the Will of* Charlotte Nicholls, *late of Haworth in the parish of Bradford in the county of York* (*wife of the Reverend Arthur Bell Nicholls*, *Clerk in Holy Orders*) (*having bona notabilia within the province of York*). *Deceased was proved in the prerogative court of York by the oath of the said Arthur Bell Nicholls* (*the husband*), *the sole executor to whom administration was granted*, *he having been first sworn duly to administer*.

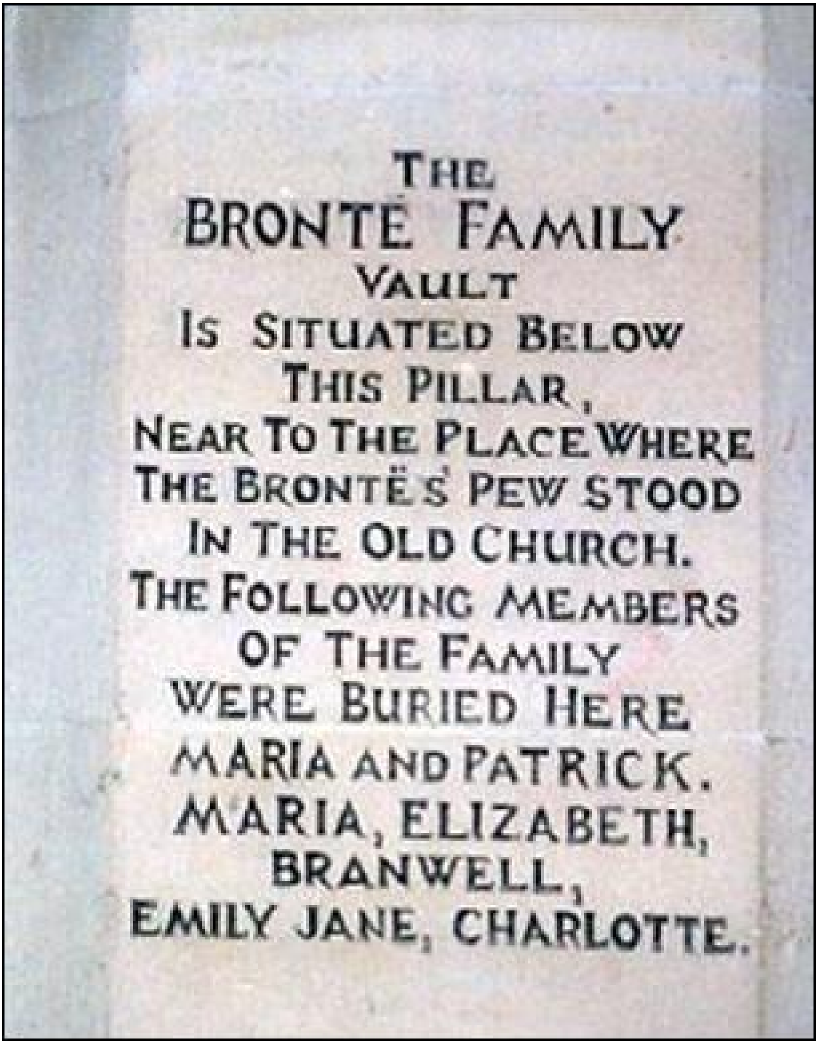
Testatrix died 31st March 1855.

It is easy as fruitless to mourn over 'unfulfilled renown,' but it is not easy to believe that the future had any great things in store. Miss Brontë's four novels will remain for all time imperishable monuments of her power. She had touched with effect in two of them all that she knew of her home surroundings, and in two others all that was revealed to her of a wider life. More she could not have done with equal effect had she lived to be eighty. Hers was, it is true, a sad life, but such gifts as these rarely bring happiness with them. It was surely something to have tasted the sweets of fame, and a fame so indisputably lasting.

Mr. Nicholls stayed on at Haworth for the six years that followed his wife's death. When Mr. Brontë died he returned to Ireland. Some years later he married again — a cousin, Miss Bell by name. That second marriage has been one of unmixed blessedness. I found him in a home of supreme simplicity and charm, esteemed by all who knew him and idolised in his own household. It was not difficult to understand that Charlotte Brontë had loved him and had fought down parental opposition in his behalf. The qualities of gentleness, sincerity, unaffected piety, and delicacy of mind are his; and he is beautifully jealous, not only for the fair fame of Currer Bell, but — what she would equally have loved — for her father, who also has had much undue detraction in the years that are past. That Mr. Nicholls may long continue to enjoy the kindly calm of his Irish home will be the wish of all who have read of his own continuous devotion to a wife who must ever rank among the greatest of her sex.

Anne Brontë’s grave at Scarborough, Yorkshire

St Michael and All Angels Churchyard, Haworth — the final resting place of the Brontë family, except for Anne



THE
BRONTË FAMILY
VAULT
IS SITUATED BELOW
THIS PILLAR,
NEAR TO THE PLACE WHERE
THE BRONTËS' PEW STOOD
IN THE OLD CHURCH.
THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS
OF THE FAMILY
WERE BURIED HERE
MARIA AND PATRICK.
MARIA, ELIZABETH,
BRANWELL,
EMILY JANE, CHARLOTTE.

The tomb at St Michael and All Angels churchyard, Haworth